

A Midsummer Night's Dream

*Hermia - Lysander
Helena - Demetrius*

"Marry Demetrius, or ..."

There was once in Greece a law which made young women very unhappy. This law said that a father could choose any man and make his daughter marry him.

One day an old man brought his beautiful daughter Hermia to the Duke of Athens. Athens was the biggest city in Greece, and the duke was a very powerful man. Everyone in Athens obeyed the duke.

"I have come to tell you about my daughter Hermia," said the old man. Then he turned and pointed to two young men who had come with Hermia. One of the young men was called Demetrius and the other was called Lysander. "I have ordered Hermia to marry Demetrius, but she won't do it. She loves Lysander, and she wants to marry him. Please tell her about the old law of Athens."

"Your father should be like a god to you," said the duke. "And you should do as your father wishes. Demetrius is a good man."

"So is Lysander; he is a good man too," said Hermia. Then Lysander spoke to Hermia's father and the duke.

"I am as good and as rich as Demetrius," he said. "I love Hermia and she loves me. Why shouldn't I marry her? There is something else," he added. "Demetrius once loved Hermia's friend, Helena, and Helena loves Demetrius. Let him marry Helena."

The duke was very powerful and kind, but he could not change the laws of Athens.

"You must do what your father tells you to do," he said to Hermia. "Think carefully about this matter. In four days you must marry Demetrius."

Helena

When Lysander and Hermia were alone together later, Lysander said: "Listen to me, Hermia. Let's go away from Athens and get married. Leave your father's house tomorrow night and meet me in the wood outside Athens. I'll be waiting for you there."

"And I'll meet you there," said Hermia. "I promise you!"

"Keep that promise, dear Hermia!" said Lysander. "Look! Here comes Helena!"

"Ah! Beautiful Helena," cried Hermia. "Where are you going?"

"Don't call me beautiful. Demetrius loves you: he loves your eyes, your voice and everything about you. Oh, teach me how you look and how you speak, so that I can win his heart!"

"I don't want Demetrius to love me," said Hermia. "But the more I hate him, the more he follows me."

"The more I love him," said Helena, "the more he hates me!"

"Don't be sad," said Hermia. "He won't see my face again. Tomorrow Lysander and I are going to leave Athens. And then I hope you may have Demetrius."

When Helena was at last alone, she began to think about Hermia and Lysander: "Demetrius doesn't love me because he loves only Hermia. I'll go and tell him about their plan. Then he can follow Hermia. He doesn't love me, but he will at least thank me for telling him; and I shall be able to go there and come back with him."

Titania and Oberon

The next evening there were a great many people in the wood where Lysander had arranged to meet Hermia. But these people were not like other people: they were fairies. Oberon and Titania, the king and queen of the fairies, were holding their evening dances in the wood.

But only a short time before this, the fairy king and queen had quarrelled. Titania had a little boy who was her servant. Titania did not want to give the little boy to Oberon, so Oberon became very angry.

On that evening Titania was walking through the wood with all her fairy servants when she met Oberon.

"This is a bad meeting on such a beautiful night," said Oberon. "I am your master. Why do you quarrel with me? I only ask you to give me your little boy."

"Don't ask me for him any more!" said Titania. "All your fairy money won't buy this child from me. The boy's mother is dead. She was one of my favourite servants. Come, fairies! We shall get angry if we stay."

Titania and her fairy servants danced away under the bright light of the moon.

"Well! Go!" cried Oberon, "but before you leave this wood, I'll make you sad and sorry for what you have said."

Puck

Then Oberon called Puck, his chief servant. Puck was able to fly very quickly to any place. He loved to do things to people which would make them angry or cause other people to laugh at them. He went in front of people who were travelling by night and led them into strange places.

"Come here, Puck," called Oberon. "Bring me the flower that young girls call Love-in-Idleness. When the liquid from it is poured on the eyes of someone who is

sleeping, it will make that man or woman fall in love with the next person he sees. Bring the flower to me as quickly as you can."

"I'll fly round the earth in forty minutes," said Puck, and he flew away.

"I'll find Titania when she's sleeping," said Oberon. "Then I'll drop some of the liquid from the flower on her eyes. When she opens her eyes, she'll fall in love with the first thing she sees, even if it's a bear, a wolf, a monkey, or any other beast. I'll make her give her little boy to me before I take this magic liquid away from her eyes."

Helena and Demetrius

While Puck was looking for the magic flower, Demetrius and Helena passed through the wood near Oberon. Demetrius was of course following Hermia and Lysander, but he did not want Helena to go with him.

"I can never love you, Helena," he said. "So don't follow me."

"But I love you," said Helena. "I only ask you to treat me like your dog and let me follow you."

Oberon was watching them. They could not see the fairy king, but he saw and heard everything they did. He felt sad when he heard Demetrius telling Helena that he did not love her. And he felt even sadder when he listened to Helena's gentle replies.

Soon Puck returned with the magic flower and Oberon took part of it to put on Titania's eyes. Then he remembered poor Helena and wanted to help her.

"Take some of this flower and go through the wood," he commanded Puck. "A sweet lady from Athens is in love with a young man who doesn't love her. Put some of the liquid from the magic flower on his eyes when he is

sleeping, but be certain that the lady is near him. Meet me here before the morning comes."

So Puck flew away to carry out Oberon's orders.

The magic liquid

Oberon said, "I know a bank that is covered with sweet-smelling flowers. That is where Titania sleeps."

He found Titania giving orders to her fairy servants before she went to bed. Then she said, "First sing me to sleep, and then go and do your work."

As soon as Titania fell asleep, the fairies left to do the things that their queen had ordered. Then Oberon came and poured the magic liquid on her eyes.

"You will fall in love with the first thing you see when you awaken," he cried. "Open your eyes when something ugly is near."

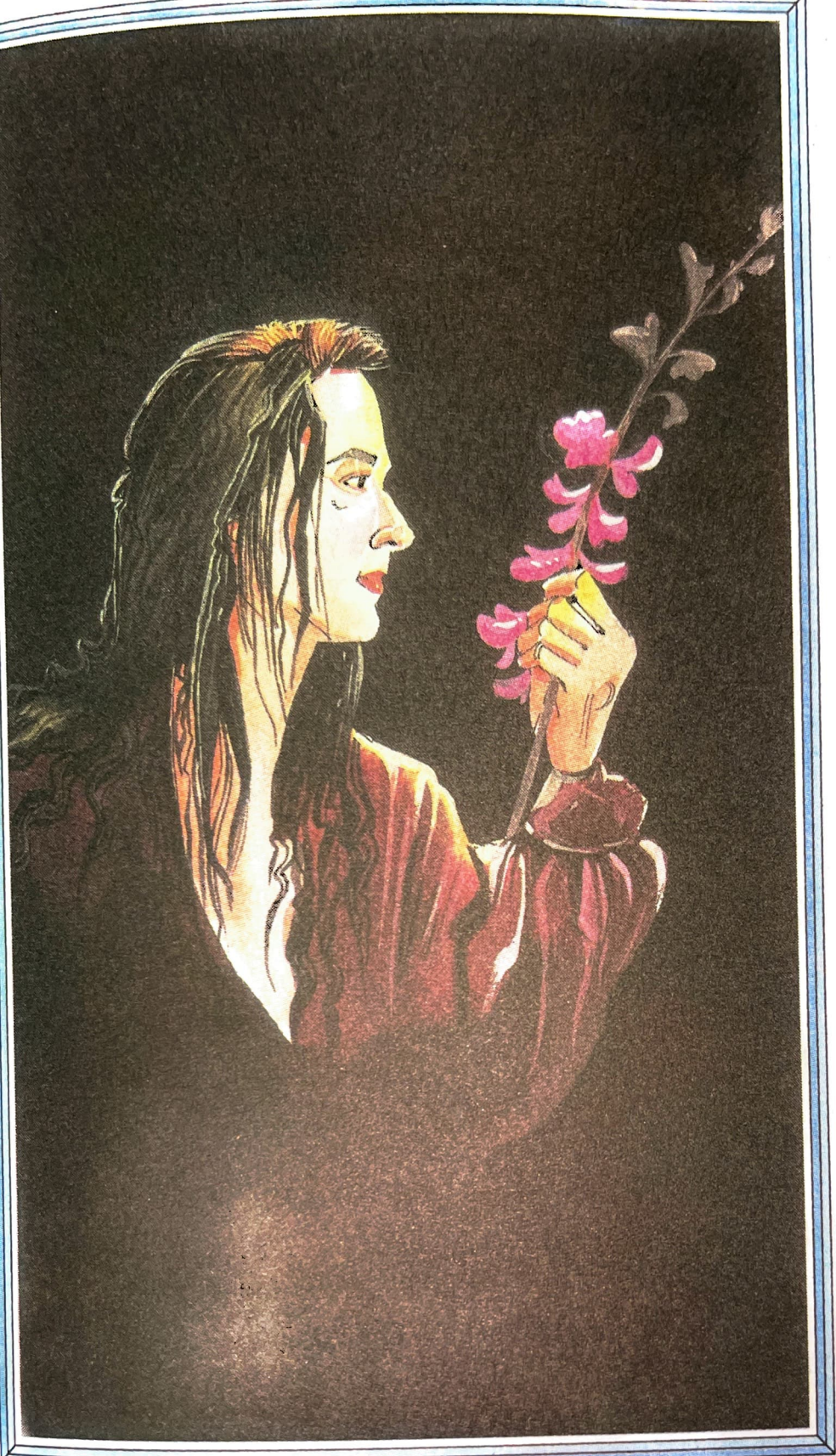
Bottom and the donkey's head

While Oberon was pouring the magic liquid over Titania's eyes, Puck was looking everywhere for Demetrius. On his way through the big wood, Puck saw some workmen from Athens. These workmen were simple people and were preparing to act in a play. They were going to give the play at the marriage of the Duke of Athens.

Puck thought that these players were very foolish. The most foolish of them was called Bottom. When Bottom left the others, Puck followed him and changed his head into a donkey's head.

Bottom did not know that his head had been changed. He came back to his friends when it was time for him to speak in the play. When the other workmen saw Bottom with a donkey's head, they ran away.

"Why have they run away?" Bottom wondered.



Oberon with the magic flower

"They're trying to make me afraid. But I'm not afraid! I'll sing, and then they'll hear that I'm not afraid."

So he began to sing loudly – with his donkey's voice.

Titania was sleeping not far away. She suddenly woke up when she heard the loud noise. She opened her eyes and of course the first person she saw was Bottom. The liquid from the magic flower began to work, and she fell in love with the big, ugly Bottom.

"What beautiful fairy awakens me from my sleep?" she said. "Please sing again. I love to hear your voice and see you. You must stay here. I love you. Come with me and I shall give you fairies to serve you. They will give you jewels and sing for you."

Bottom among the fairies

Titania called for four of her fairy servants.

"Be kind to this sweet gentleman," she said. "Dance round him when he walks. Play in his sight. Feed him with fruit, and steal food from the bees for him."

Although Titania was deeply in love with the foolish Bottom, even she soon grew tired of hearing him talk.

"Bring him to my fairy garden and tie up his tongue," she ordered.

When they reached this beautiful part of the wood, Titania spoke again to Bottom.

"Come, sit with me upon this bed of flowers," she said. "Let me gently touch the hair on your face. Then I'll put roses on your head and kiss your beautiful big ears."

Bottom felt very proud of himself and he loved to have fairy servants.

"Rub my head, Peas-blossom," ordered Bottom.

Then Bottom asked for another fairy, called Cobweb.

"I want some honey – the sweet liquid of the bees.

Where's Mustard-seed?"

"Ready," said Mustard-seed. "What do you want?"

"Nothing," answered Bottom. Then he thought again. "Help Peas-blossom to rub my head. I must ask someone to cut my hair. I think my face is very hairy."

"What do you want to eat, my sweet love?" Titania asked.

"I want some dried grass," answered Bottom. "But don't let anyone wake me. I think I'll go to sleep."

"Sleep in my arms, then," said Titania. "I love you so much!"

Hermia and Lysander

After Puck had given Bottom the donkey's head, he went to look for Demetrius. At last, he saw a young man from Athens asleep in the wood. A beautiful lady was asleep not far away.

Puck made certain that the beautiful lady was quite near the young man. Then he poured some of the magic liquid on the eyes of the man.

"Now he'll see her when he wakes, and he'll fall in love with her." Puck laughed as he flew off to tell Oberon what he had done.

But Puck did not know that the young man he had seen was Lysander, and not Demetrius. The beautiful lady sleeping not far away was Hermia, of course. Things would have been all right if Lysander had woken and seen Hermia. But that did not happen.

Helena had grown tired of running after Demetrius. She could not follow him any further and she wandered sadly through the wood. Soon she arrived at the place where Lysander was sleeping.

When she saw Lysander, Helena wondered whether he



Bottom and Titania

was dead or asleep. She did not see any blood or a wound, so she woke him.

Lysander opened his eyes; the magic liquid did its work, and he fell in love with Helena – the first person he saw.

"Oh, Helena!" he cried. "You are so beautiful! I would run through fire for you. I wish I had never loved Hermia, for now I love nobody but you. You're much more beautiful than Hermia. Demetrius has been cruel to you: I shall kill Demetrius."

"Don't say these things," said Helena. "Demetrius loves your Hermia; but she loves you and you love her."

"No! I don't. I don't love Hermia. I love you, Helena."

"Why are you so unkind to me? Why are you making fun of me?"

She went sadly away into the wood again. But Lysander was not pretending; he really was in love with Helena now. So he left Hermia alone in the wood and ran after Helena.

Soon after Lysander had left her, Hermia woke up. She cried out with fear because she had had a bad dream. She called out to Lysander, but he was not near her. She was alone and afraid.

Hermia and Demetrius

Hermia went to look for Lysander, whom she had always loved; but she met Demetrius.

"Where is Lysander?" she cried angrily.

"Why are you angry with me, when I love you so much?"

"I'm angry," said Hermia, "because I believe that you have killed Lysander. If you have killed him, kill me, too! Or tell me where he is."

"I don't know where he is."

Hermia ran away.

"It's useless to follow her when she's like this!" said Demetrius. "I'll stay here and get some sleep."

Oberon and Puck had been watching Demetrius and Hermia, and they had heard every word they said.

"What have you done?" said Oberon to Puck. "You have put the liquid on the eyes of the wrong man! I'll put it in this man's eyes. He must wake and love Helena. Go! Go quickly and bring Helena here before he wakes."

The mixed-up lovers

So Puck led Helena to the place where Demetrius was sleeping. She was followed by Lysander, who was still talking about his love for her.

"Why are you making fun of me?" said Helena.

"I love you!"

"Tell that to Hermia!"

The sound of their voices woke Demetrius. Helena was the first woman he saw, so he fell in love with her.

"Oh, Helena!" he cried. "Beautiful Helena! Your eyes are like jewels. Oh, let me kiss you, my princess!"

"I see that you both want to make fun of me! Hate me, as I know you do, but don't join together to hurt me."

"You are unkind, Demetrius," said Lysander. "You love Hermia; I know you do. I give you Hermia, but let me love Helena. I love her and will love her till I die."

"Lysander, keep your Hermia!" cried Demetrius. "All my love for her has gone."

So both Lysander and Demetrius shouted that they loved Helena.

Then Hermia came, and saw Lysander.

"Why did you leave me alone in the wood?" she asked.

"I left you because I love Helena now."

Hermia did not believe him. Helena now thought that all three had made a plan to hurt her.

"Why have you joined in this plan to make a fool of me?" she asked Hermia angrily. "You are very unkind to laugh at me. I'll go back to Athens and not follow you any more. I leave my foolish heart behind."

Lysander cried, "Helena, I love you!"

"I love you more than he does," shouted Demetrius.

The two men were growing angrier and angrier. They walked away to another part of the wood to fight each other for Helena's love.

Oberon gives orders

"Demetrius and Lysander have gone to look for a good place to fight," said Oberon to Puck. "Fill the night with a thick, black cloud. Then lead the two men far from each other. When they are tired of looking for each other, they'll lie down and fall asleep. Pour this magic liquid on Lysander's eyes. It will make his old love for Hermia come back to him when he wakes. Then everyone will be happy. They'll think that all this has been only a dream. While you do that, I'll go to Titania. I'll take the little boy from her. Then I'll set her free and she will stop loving the foolish man with the donkey's head."

Music!

When Oberon found Titania, she was asleep. She had put beautiful flowers round Bottom's donkey's head. Oberon found it easy to take the little boy from her while she was sleeping. Then he was ready to take away the magic liquid from her eyes. He touched her eyes with another flower and gently woke her.

"My Oberon!" Titania cried. "What dreams I have had! I thought I was in love with a donkey."

"There he is," replied Oberon, pointing to Bottom, asleep near Titania.

"How did this happen?" asked Titania. "I can't bear the sight of him now."

Puck came back after doing as Oberon had ordered. Oberon turned to him and said:

"Take off the donkey's head, and make all these five – Bottom, Demetrius, Lysander, Helena, and Hermia – fall into a deep sleep and forget what has happened."

"Music!" cried Titania.

"Music!" cried Oberon. "Come, my queen, take hands with me and dance – dance round the world faster than the wandering moon."

To Athens

Early that morning, the Duke of Athens and Hermia's father entered the forest. They came with a great many friends and servants. They reached the place where Hermia, Helena, Lysander, and Demetrius were sleeping. The four young people were woken by the voices of the duke and his friends.

Lysander now loved only Hermia, and Demetrius loved only Helena.

The wise duke knew that this was a good ending. He did not want to make Hermia marry Demetrius now. And Hermia's father knew that he could never order the marriage between his daughter and Demetrius.

"Lysander shall marry Hermia," said the duke, "and Demetrius shall marry Helena. Come with us to Athens, where I, too, am to be married. Let's go to Athens at once. There we'll all be married."