

A Midsummer Night's Dream

5.1

Enter Theseus, Hippolyta, [Egeus], and attendant lords

HIPPOLYTA

'Tis strange, my Theseus, that these lovers speak of.

THESEUS

More strange than true. I never may believe
These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.
Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend 5
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold:
That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic, 10
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to
heaven,
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen 15
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination
That if it would but apprehend some joy
It comprehends some bringer of that joy; 20
Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

HIPPOLYTA

But all the story of the night told over,
And all their minds transfigured so together,
More witnesseth than fancy's images, 25
And grows to something of great constancy;
But howsoever, strange and admirable.

*Enter the lovers: Lysander, Demetrius, Hermia,
and Helena*

THESEUS

Here come the lovers, full of joy and mirth.
Joy, gentle friends±±joy and fresh days of love
Accompany your hearts.

LYSANDER More than to us 30
Wait in your royal walks, your board, your bed.

THESEUS
Come now, what masques, what dances shall we have
To wear away this long age of three hours
Between our after-supper and bed-time?
Where is our usual manager of mirth? 35
What revels are in hand? Is there no play
To ease the anguish of a torturing hour?
Call Egeus.

[EGEUS] Here, mighty Theseus.

THESEUS
Say, what abridgement have you for this evening?
What masque, what music? How shall we beguile 40
The lazy time if not with some delight?

[EGEUS]
There is a brief how many sports are ripe.
Make choice of which your highness will see first.

[LYSANDER] (*reads*)
`The battle with the centaurs, to be sung
By an Athenian eunuch to the harp.' 45

THESEUS
We'll none of that. That have I told my love
In glory of my kinsman Hercules.

[LYSANDER] (*reads*)
`The riot of the tipsy bacchanals
Tearing the Thracian singer in their rage.'

THESEUS
That is an old device, and it was played 50
When I from Thebes came last a conqueror.

[LYSANDER] (*reads*)
`The thrice-three muses mourning for the death
Of learning, late deceased in beggary.'

THESEUS
That is some satire, keen and critical,
Not sorting with a nuptial ceremony. 55

[LYSANDER] (*reads*)
`A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus

And his love Thisbe: very tragical mirth.'

THESEUS

`Merry' *and* `tragical'? `Tedious' *and* `brief'?±±
That is, hot ice and wondrous strange black snow.
How shall we find the concord of this discord?

60

[EGEUS]

A play there is, my lord, some ten words long,
Which is as `brief' as I have known a play;
But by ten words, my lord, it is too long,
Which makes it `tedious'; for in all the play
There is not one word apt, one player fitted. 65
And `tragical', my noble lord, it is,
For Pyramus therein doth kill himself;
Which when I saw rehearsed, I must confess,
Made mine eyes water; but more merry tears
The passion of loud laughter never shed. 70

THESEUS What are they that do play it?

[EGEUS]

Hard-handed men that work in Athens here,
Which never laboured in their minds till now,
And now have toiled their unbreathed memories
With this same play against your nuptial. 75

THESEUS

And we will hear it.

[EGEUS]

No, my noble lord,
It is not for you. I have heard it over,
And it is nothing, nothing in the world,
Unless you can find sport in their intents
Extremely stretched, and conned with cruel pain 80
To do you service.

THESEUS

I will hear that play;
For never anything can be amiss
When simpleness and duty tender it.
Go, bring them in; and take your places, ladies.

Exit [Egeus]

HIPPOLYTA

I love not to see wretchedness o'ercharged, 85
And duty in his service perishing.

THESEUS

Why, gentle sweet, you shall see no such thing.

HIPPOLYTA

He says they can do nothing in this kind.

THESEUS

The kinder we, to give them thanks for nothing.
Our sport shall be to take what they mistake, 90
And what poor duty cannot do,
Noble respect takes it in might, not merit.
Where I have come, great clerks have purposeÁd
To greet me with premeditated welcomes,
Where I have seen them shiver and look pale, 95
Make periods in the midst of sentences,
Throttle their practised accent in their fears,
And in conclusion dumbly have broke off,
Not paying me a welcome. Trust me, sweet,
Out of this silence yet I picked a welcome, 100
And in the modesty of fearful duty
I read as much as from the rattling tongue
Of saucy and audacious eloquence.
Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity
In least speak most, to my capacity. 105

Enter [Egeus]

[EGEUS]

So please your grace, the Prologue is addressed.

THESEUS Let him approach.

[Flourish trumpets.] Enter [Quince as] the Prologue

[QUINCE] *(as Prologue)*

If we offend, it is with our good will.
That you should think: we come not to offend
But with good will. To show our simple skill, 110
That is the true beginning of our end.
Consider then we come but in despite.
We do not come as minding to content you,
Our true intent is. All for your delight
We are not here. That you should here repent you 115
The actors are at hand, and by their show
You shall know all that you are like to know.

THESEUS This fellow doth not stand upon points.

LYSANDER He hath rid his prologue like a rough colt: he
knows not the stop. A good moral, my lord: it is not 120
enough to speak, but to speak true.

HIPPOLYTA Indeed, he hath played on this prologue like

a child on a recorder±±a sound, but not in government.

THESEUS His speech was like a tangled chain±±nothing
impaired, but all disordered. Who is next? 125

*Enter [with a trumpeter before them] Bottom as
Pyramus, Flute as Thisbe, Snout as Wall, Starveling
as Moonshine, and Snug as Lion, for the dumb show*

[QUINCE] (as Prologue)

Gentles, perchance you wonder at this show,

But wonder on, till truth make all things plain.

This man is Pyramus, if you would know;

This beauteous lady Thisbe is, certain.

This man with lime and roughcast doth present 130

Wall, that vile wall which did these lovers sunder;

And through Wall's chink, poor souls, they are content

To whisper; at the which let no man wonder.

This man, with lantern, dog, and bush of thorn,

Presenteth Moonshine. For if you will know, 135

By moonshine did these lovers think no scorn

To meet at Ninus' tomb, there, there to woo.

This grizzly beast, which `Lion' hight by name,

The trusty Thisbe coming first by night

Did scare away, or rather did affright; 140

And as she fled, her mantle she did fall,

Which Lion vile with bloody mouth did stain.

Anon comes Pyramus, sweet youth and tall,

And finds his trusty Thisbe's mantle slain;

Whereat with blade±±with bloody, blameful blade±± 145

He bravely broached his boiling bloody breast;

And Thisbe, tarrying in mulberry shade,

His dagger drew and died. For all the rest,

Let Lion, Moonshine, Wall, and lovers twain

At large discourse, while here they do remain. 150

[Exeunt all the clowns but Snout as Wall]

THESEUS I wonder if the lion be to speak.

DEMETRIUS No wonder, my lord±±one lion may when
many asses do.

[SNOUT] (as Wall)

In this same interlude it doth befall

That I, one Snout by name, present a wall; 155

And such a wall as I would have you think

That had in it a crannied hole or chink,
Through which the lovers Pyramus and Thisbe
Did whisper often, very secretly.
This loam, this roughcast, and this stone doth show 160
That I am that same wall; the truth is so.
And this the cranny is, right and sinister,
Through which the fearful lovers are to whisper.

THESEUS Would you desire lime and hair to speak better?

DEMETRIUS It is the wittiest partition that ever I heard 165
discourse, my lord.

Enter Bottom as Pyramus

THESEUS Pyramus draws near the wall. Silence.

BOTTOM (*as Pyramus*)

O grim-looking night, O night with hue so black,
O night which ever art when day is not;
O night, O night, alack, alack, alack, 170
I fear my Thisbe's promise is forgot.
And thou, O wall, O sweet O lovely wall,
That stand'st between her father's ground and mine,
Thou wall, O wall, O sweet and lovely wall,
Show me thy chink, to blink through with mine
eyne. 175

Wall shows his chink

Thanks, courteous wall. Jove shield thee well for this.
But what see I? No Thisbe do I see.
O wicked wall, through whom I see no bliss,
Cursed be thy stones for thus deceiving me.

THESEUS The wall methinks, being sensible, should curse 180
again.

BOTTOM (*to Theseus*) No, in truth, sir, he should not.
'Deceiving me' is Thisbe's cue. She is to enter now,
and I am to spy her through the wall. You shall see,
it will fall pat as I told you. 185

Enter Flute as Thisbe

Yonder she comes.

FLUTE (*as Thisbe*)

O wall, full often hast thou heard my moans
For parting my fair Pyramus and me.
My cherry lips have often kissed thy stones,
Thy stones with lime and hair knit up in thee. 190

BOTTOM (as *Pyramus*)

I see a voice. Now will I to the chink
To spy an I can hear my Thisbe's face.
Thisbe?

FLUTE (as *Thisbe*) My love±±thou art my love, I think.

BOTTOM (as *Pyramus*)

Think what thou wilt, I am thy lover's grace,
And like Lemander am I trusty still. 195

FLUTE (as *Thisbe*)

And I like Helen, till the fates me kill.

BOTTOM (as *Pyramus*)

Not Shaphalus to Procrus was so true.

FLUTE (as *Thisbe*)

As Shaphalus to Procrus, I to you.

BOTTOM (as *Pyramus*)

O kiss me through the hole of this vile wall.

FLUTE (as *Thisbe*)

I kiss the wall's hole, not your lips at all. 200

BOTTOM (as *Pyramus*)

Wilt thou at Ninny's tomb meet me straightway?

FLUTE (as *Thisbe*)

Tide life, tide death, I come without delay.

Exeunt Bottom and Flute severally

SNOUT (as *Wall*)

Thus have I, Wall, my part dischargeÁd so;
And being done, thus Wall away doth go.

Exit

THESEUS Now is the wall down between the two 205
neighbours.

DEMETRIUS No remedy, my lord, when walls are so wilful
to hear without warning.

HIPPOLYTA This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard.

THESEUS The best in this kind are but shadows, and the 210
worst are no worse if imagination amend them.

HIPPOLYTA It must be your imagination, then, and not
theirs.

THESEUS If we imagine no worse of them than they of
themselves, they may pass for excellent men. Here 215
come two noble beasts in: a man and a lion.

Enter Snug as Lion, and Starveling as Moonshine

with a lantern, thorn bush, and dog

SNUG (*as Lion*)

You, ladies, you whose gentle hearts do fear
The smallest monstrous mouse that creeps on floor,
May now perchance both quake and tremble here
When lion rough in wildest rage doth roar. 220
Then know that I as Snug the joiner am
A lion fell, nor else no lion's dam.
For if I should as Lion come in strife
Into this place, 'twere pity on my life.

THESEUS A very gentle beast, and of a good conscience. 225

DEMETRIUS The very best at a beast, my lord, that e'er I
saw.

LYSANDER This lion is a very fox for his valour.

THESEUS True, and a goose for his discretion.

DEMETRIUS Not so, my lord, for his valour cannot carry 230
his discretion, and the fox carries the goose.

THESEUS His discretion, I am sure, cannot carry his valour,
for the goose carries not the fox. It is well. Leave it to
his discretion, and let us listen to the moon.

STARVELING (*as Moonshine*)

This lantern doth the horneÁd moon present. 235

DEMETRIUS He should have worn the horns on his head.

THESEUS He is no crescent, and his horns are invisible
within the circumference.

STARVELING (*as Moonshine*)

This lantern doth the horneÁd moon present.

Myself the man i'th' moon do seem to be. 240

THESEUS This is the greatest error of all the rest±±the man
should be put into the lantern. How is it else the man
i'th' moon?

DEMETRIUS He dares not come there for the candle; for
you see it is already in snuff. 245

HIPPOLYTA I am aweary of this moon. Would he would
change.

THESEUS It appears by his small light of discretion that he
is in the wane; but yet in courtesy, in all reason, we
must stay the time. 250

LYSANDER Proceed, Moon.

STARVELING All that I have to say is to tell you that the

lantern is the moon, I the man i'th' moon, this thorn
bush my thorn bush, and this dog my dog.

DEMETRIUS Why, all these should be in the lantern, for 255
all these are in the moon. But silence; here comes
Thisbe.

Enter Flute as Thisbe

FLUTE (as Thisbe)

This is old Ninny's tomb. Where is my love?

SNUG (as Lion) O.

Lion roars. Thisbe drops her mantle and runs off

DEMETRIUS Well roared, Lion. 260

THESEUS Well run, Thisbe.

HIPPOLYTA Well shone, Moon.±±Truly, the moon shines
with a good grace.

Lion worries Thisbe's mantle

THESEUS Well moused, Lion.

DEMETRIUS And then came Pyramus. 265

[Enter Bottom as Pyramus]

LYSANDER And so the lion vanished.

[Exit Lion]

BOTTOM (as Pyramus)

Sweet moon, I thank thee for thy sunny beams.

I thank thee, moon, for shining now so bright;

For by thy gracious, golden, glittering gleams

I trust to take of truest Thisbe sight. 270

But stay, O spite!

But mark, poor knight,

What dreadful dole is here?

Eyes, do you see?

How can it be? 275

O dainty duck, O dear!

Thy mantle good,

What, stained with blood?

Approach, ye furies fell.

O fates, come, come, 280

Cut thread and thrum,

Quail, crush, conclude, and quell.

THESEUS This passion±±and the death of a dear friend±±
would go near to make a man look sad.

HIPPOLYTA Beshrew my heart, but I pity the man. 285

BOTTOM (*as Pyramus*)

O wherefore, nature, didst thou lions frame,
Since lion vile hath here deflowered my dear?±±
Which is±±no, no, which was±±the fairest dame

That lived, that loved, that liked, that looked,
with
cheer.

Come tears, confound; 290
Out sword, and wound
The pap of Pyramus.

Ay, that left pap,
Where heart doth hop.
Thus die I: thus, thus, thus. 295

He stabs himself

Now am I dead,
Now am I fled,
My soul is in the sky.
Tongue, lose thy light;
Moon, take thy flight. 300

[Exit Moonshine]

Now die, die, die, die, die.
He dies

DEMETRIUS No die but an ace for him; for he is but one.

LYSANDER Less than an ace, man; for he is dead; he is
nothing.

THESEUS With the help of a surgeon he might yet recover 305
and prove an ass.

HIPPOLYTA How chance Moonshine is gone before Thisbe
comes back and finds her lover.

THESEUS She will find him by starlight.

[Enter Flute as Thisbe]

Here she comes, and her passion ends the play. 310

HIPPOLYTA Methinks she should not use a long one for
such a Pyramus. I hope she will be brief.

DEMETRIUS A mote will turn the balance which Pyramus,
which Thisbe, is the better±±he for a man, God warrant
us; she for a woman, God bless us. 315

LYSANDER She hath spied him already with those sweet
eyes.

DEMETRIUS And thus she means, videlicet:

FLUTE (*as Thisbe*)

Asleep, my love?

What, dead, my dove?

320

O Pyramus, arise.

Speak, speak. Quite dumb?

Dead, dead? A tomb

Must cover thy sweet eyes.

These lily lips,

325

This cherry nose,

These yellow cowslip cheeks

Are gone, are gone.

Lovers, make moan.

His eyes were green as leeks.

330

O sisters three,

Come, come to me

With hands as pale as milk.

Lay them in gore,

Since you have shore

335

With shears his thread of silk.

Tongue, not a word.

Come, trusty sword,

Come, blade, my breast imbrue.

She stabs herself

And farewell friends,

340

Thus Thisbe ends.

Adieu, adieu, adieu.

She dies

THESEUS Moonshine and Lion are left to bury the dead.

DEMETRIUS Ay, and Wall too.

[BOTTOM] No, I assure you, the wall is down that parted
their fathers. Will it please you to see the epilogue or
to hear a bergamask dance between two of our
company?

THESEUS No epilogue, I pray you; for your play needs no
excuse. Never excuse; for when the players are all dead
there need none to be blamed. Marry, if he that writ
it had played Pyramus and hanged himself in Thisbe's
garter it would have been a fine tragedy; and so it is,
truly, and very notably discharged. But come, your
bergamask. Let your epilogue alone.

350
355

[Bottom and Flute] dance a bergamask, then exeunt

The iron tongue of midnight hath told twelve.

Lovers, to bed; 'tis almost fairy time.

I fear we shall outsleep the coming morn

As much as we this night have overwatched.

This palpable-gross play hath well beguiled

360

The heavy gait of night. Sweet friends, to bed.

A fortnight hold we this solemnity

In nightly revels and new jollity.

Exeunt