

MACMILLAN READERS

PRE-INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Retold by Rachel Bladon



MACMILLAN

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Act 1, Scene 1

[Near the Duke's palace⁷ in Athens. Enter the Duke Theseus, with Hippolyta]

Theseus: It is only four days until our wedding, fair⁸ Hippolyta. But each day goes so slowly.

Hippolyta: Those four days will quickly turn into nights. And we will quickly dream away those nights. And then it will be time for our wedding.

Theseus: I want Athens to be full of happiness on our wedding day. We shall have dancing, singing and great celebrations!

[Enter Egeus and his daughter Hermia with Lysander and Demetrius]

Egeus: *[to Theseus]* Good day, my lord⁹. I hope you are well.

Theseus: I am very well, thank you, Egeus. What is your news?

Egeus: My lord, I am very angry with my daughter, Hermia. Demetrius, step forward!

[Demetrius comes forward]

This is Demetrius. I have told Demetrius that he can marry my daughter. But now she has fallen in love with another man. Lysander, come here!

[Lysander comes forward]

Lysander, you have made Hermia fall in love with you. You have sung love songs outside her window at night. You have given her presents. You have pretended¹⁰ that you are in love with her. You have stolen her heart and now she will not obey me. Theseus, my lord, I want to give Hermia a warning. This is my warning: she must marry Demetrius, or she must die. That is the law of Athens.

Act 1, Scene 1

Theseus: Hermia, you should always obey your father. Your father wants you to marry Demetrius. And Demetrius is a good man. Why won't you marry him?

Hermia: I want to choose my own husband. I love Lysander, and I want to marry him. I wish my father would see things through my eyes.

Theseus: No, you must look through your father's eyes when you choose your husband. And your father has chosen Demetrius. You must marry him.

Hermia: I am sorry, my lord. You are our duke, and I should not talk like this to you. But please can you tell me one thing? What will happen to me if I will not marry Demetrius?



Theseus: You must die, or become a nun¹¹. And if you become a nun, you can never be with a man again. So, think carefully, Hermia. Do you want to spend your life shut away inside, praying¹² to the cold moon?

Hermia: I will live, grow old and die as a nun if I have to. But I will not marry Demetrius. I do not love him.

Theseus: Please think about this for a few days, Hermia. In four days, it is your wedding. On that day, you must promise to marry Demetrius. This is what your father wants. If you won't obey your father, you must become a nun, or die.

Demetrius: Do what your father says, sweet Hermia. *[to Lysander]* Hermia is mine. Don't try to take her from me.

Lysander: Hermia's father loves you, Demetrius! Why don't you marry him? And let me marry Hermia: *[to Egeus]* My lord, I would be a good husband to Hermia. I come from a good family, like Demetrius. And I have plenty of money. In every way, I am as good as him. But most importantly, I love Hermia. And I will say this in front of Demetrius. Demetrius was in love with Helena before he met Hermia. And poor Helena is still in love with him! You cannot trust Demetrius. He is always changing his mind.

Theseus: Yes, I also heard this about Demetrius and Helena. I wanted to talk about it with Demetrius, but I have been too busy. Demetrius and Egeus, come with me. I want to talk to you both alone. Fair Hermia, your father has chosen a husband for you. You must try to love him, or you must die, or become a nun. That is the law of Athens. *[Hippolyta looks upset]* Don't worry, Hippolyta, my love. Demetrius! Egeus! Let's go and talk about this together. Also, I need you to help me get some things ready for our wedding.

Egeus: We will follow you, my lord.

[Exit Theseus, Hippolyta, Demetrius and Egeus]

Lysander: Hermia, my love, you look so pale. Your cheeks were once like roses. But now those roses are dying.

Hermia: I want to cry, and my tears would be like rain.

Lysander: In every story about true love¹³ that I have ever heard, there have always been problems. Sometimes the two lovers come from very different families. Sometimes one of the lovers is much older than the other. And sometimes the lovers' friends do not like their choice. But even when there are none of these problems, other things can happen. War, death or illness can destroy love. And then love is as short as a dream, and as quick as lightning.



Lysander: *The course of true love never did run smooth.*

course = the way that things happen

Hermia: If all true lovers have problems like these, then we can face our problems too. Love brings dreams, and thoughts, but tears as well.

Lysander: That is a good way to think. Listen, Hermia. I have a very rich aunt who lives far from Athens. She doesn't have any children, and I am like a son to her. Let's run away and stay with her. The law of Athens is not important there, so we can get married. If you love me, run away from your father's house tomorrow night. I will wait for you in the palace wood outside Athens. Do you remember that wood? I met you there with Helena one May morning.

Hermia: Lysander, I promise that I will meet you there.

Lysander: Don't break your promise. *[Sees Helena]* Look, here comes Helena.

[Enter Helena, in a hurry]