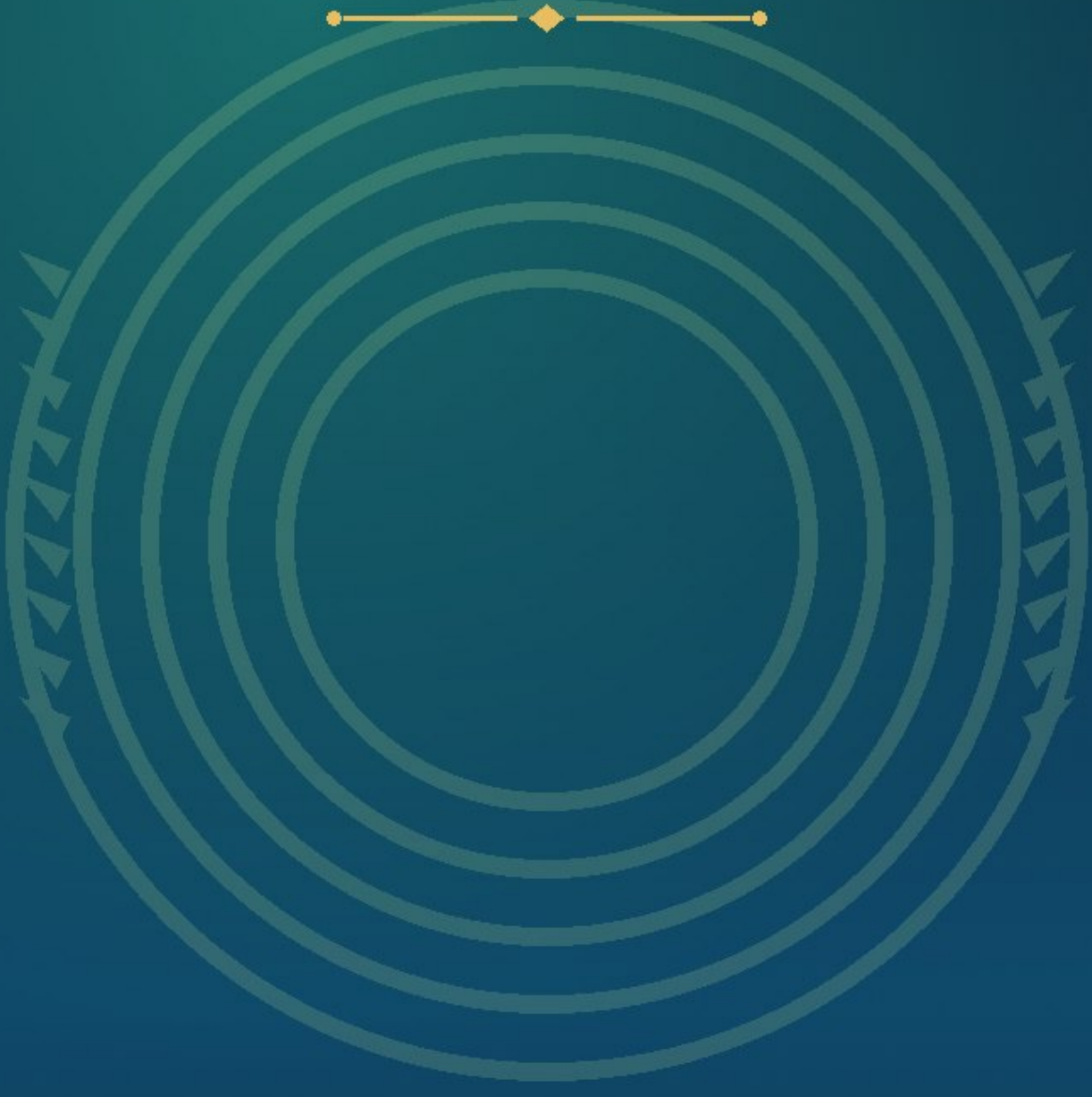
A Midsummer Night's Dream

William Shakespeare



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A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

by William Shakespeare

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Dramatis Personæ

THESEUS, Duke of Athens

HIPPOLYTA, Queen of the Amazons, bethrothed to Theseus

EGEUS, Father to Hermia

HERMIA, daughter to Egeus, in love with Lysander

HELENA, in love with Demetrius

LYSANDER, in love with Hermia

DEMETRIUS, in love with Hermia

PHILOSTRATE, Master of the Revels to Theseus

QUINCE, the Carpenter

SNUG, the Joiner

BOTTOM, the Weaver

FLUTE, the Bellows-mender

SNOUT, the Tinker

STARVELING, the Tailor

OBERON, King of the Fairies

TITANIA, Queen of the Fairies

PUCK, or ROBIN GOODFELLOW, a Fairy

PEASEBLOSSOM, Fairy

COBWEB, Fairy

MOTH, Fairy

MUSTARDSEED, Fairy

PYRAMUS, THISBE, WALL, MOONSHINE, LION; Characters in the Interlude performed by the Clowns

Other Fairies attending their King and Queen Attendants on Theseus and Hippolyta

SCENE: Athens, and a wood not far from it

ACT I

SCENE I. Athens. A room in the Palace of Theseus

Enter Theseus, Hippolyta, Philostrate and Attendants.

THESEUS.
Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
Draws on apace; four happy days bring in
Another moon; but oh, methinks, how slow
This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires,
Like to a step-dame or a dowager,
Long withering out a young man’s revenue.

HIPPOLYTA.
Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;
Four nights will quickly dream away the time;
And then the moon, like to a silver bow
New bent in heaven, shall behold the night
Of our solemnities.

THESEUS.
Go, Philostrate,
Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments;
Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth;
Turn melancholy forth to funerals;

The pale companion is not for our pomp.

[_Exit Philostrate._]

Hippolyta, I woo’d thee with my sword,
And won thy love doing thee injuries;
But I will wed thee in another key,
With pomp, with triumph, and with revelling.

Enter Egeus, Hermia, Lysander and Demetrius.

EGEUS. Happy be Theseus, our renownèd Duke!

THESEUS. Thanks, good Egeus. What’s the news with thee?

EGEUS.
Full of vexation come I, with complaint
Against my child, my daughter Hermia.
Stand forth, Demetrius. My noble lord,
This man hath my consent to marry her.
Stand forth, Lysander. And, my gracious Duke,
This man hath bewitch’d the bosom of my child.
Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes,
And interchang’d love-tokens with my child.
Thou hast by moonlight at her window sung,
With feigning voice, verses of feigning love;
And stol’n the impression of her fantasy
With bracelets of thy hair, rings, gauds, conceits,
Knacks, trifles, nosegays, sweetmeats (messengers
Of strong prevailment in unharden’d youth)
With cunning hast thou filch’d my daughter’s heart,
Turn’d her obedience (which is due to me)

To stubborn harshness. And, my gracious Duke,
Be it so she will not here before your grace
Consent to marry with Demetrius,
I beg the ancient privilege of Athens:
As she is mine I may dispose of her;
Which shall be either to this gentleman
Or to her death, according to our law
Immediately provided in that case.

THESEUS.
What say you, Hermia? Be advis'd, fair maid.
To you your father should be as a god;
One that compos'd your beauties, yea, and one
To whom you are but as a form in wax
By him imprinted, and within his power
To leave the figure, or disfigure it.
Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

HERMIA. So is Lysander.

THESEUS.
In himself he is.
But in this kind, wanting your father's voice,
The other must be held the worthier.

HERMIA. I would my father look'd but with my eyes.

THESEUS. Rather your eyes must with his judgment look.

HERMIA.
I do entreat your Grace to pardon me.
I know not by what power I am made bold,

Nor how it may concern my modesty
In such a presence here to plead my thoughts:
But I beseech your Grace that I may know
The worst that may befall me in this case,
If I refuse to wed Demetrius.

THESEUS.
Either to die the death, or to abjure
For ever the society of men.
Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires,
Know of your youth, examine well your blood,
Whether, if you yield not to your father's choice,
You can endure the livery of a nun,
For aye to be in shady cloister mew'd,
To live a barren sister all your life,
Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.
Thrice-blessèd they that master so their blood
To undergo such maiden pilgrimage,
But earthlier happy is the rose distill'd
Than that which, withering on the virgin thorn,
Grows, lives, and dies, in single blessedness.

HERMIA.
So will I grow, so live, so die, my lord,
Ere I will yield my virgin patent up
Unto his lordship, whose unwishèd yoke
My soul consents not to give sovereignty.

THESEUS.
Take time to pause; and by the next new moon

The sealing-day betwixt my love and me
For everlasting bond of fellowship,
Upon that day either prepare to die
For disobedience to your father's will,
Or else to wed Demetrius, as he would,
Or on Diana's altar to protest
For aye austerity and single life.

DEMETRIUS.
Relent, sweet Hermia; and, Lysander, yield
Thy crazèd title to my certain right.

LYSANDER.
You have her father's love, Demetrius.
Let me have Hermia's. Do you marry him.

EGEUS.
Scornful Lysander, true, he hath my love;
And what is mine my love shall render him;
And she is mine, and all my right of her
I do estate unto Demetrius.

LYSANDER.
I am, my lord, as well deriv'd as he,
As well possess'd; my love is more than his;
My fortunes every way as fairly rank'd,
If not with vantage, as Demetrius';
And, which is more than all these boasts can be,
I am belov'd of beauteous Hermia.
Why should not I then prosecute my right?

Demetrius, I'll avouch it to his head,
Made love to Nedar's daughter, Helena,
And won her soul; and she, sweet lady, dotes,
Devoutly dotes, dotes in idolatry,
Upon this spotted and inconstant man.

THESEUS.
I must confess that I have heard so much,
And with Demetrius thought to have spoke thereof;
But, being over-full of self-affairs,
My mind did lose it.—But, Demetrius, come,
And come, Egeus; you shall go with me.
I have some private schooling for you both.—
For you, fair Hermia, look you arm yourself
To fit your fancies to your father's will,
Or else the law of Athens yields you up
(Which by no means we may extenuate)
To death, or to a vow of single life.
Come, my Hippolyta. What cheer, my love?
Demetrius and Egeus, go along;
I must employ you in some business
Against our nuptial, and confer with you
Of something nearly that concerns yourselves.

EGEUS. With duty and desire we follow you.

[_Exeunt all but Lysander and Hermia._]

LYSANDER.
How now, my love? Why is your cheek so pale?

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