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Dramatic Publishing

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
or
The Night They Missed the Forest for
the Trees

Adapted from Shakespeare's Play
by
NANCY LINEHAN CHARLES



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM or
The Night They Missed the Forest for the Trees)

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A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
or
**The Night They Missed the Forest for
the Trees**

A Full-length Play
For 4 Men and 6 Women, 9 either, extras

Three Storytellers:

Jessie/Theseus
Kaytlin/Hippolyta
Anna/Egeus

Four Teenagers:

Hermia
Lysander
Helena
Demetrius

Six Rude Mechanicals:

Peter Quince
Nick Bottom, the weaver
Francis Flute, the bellows mender
Tom Snout, the tinker
Snug, the joiner
Robin Starveling, the tailor

Forest Folk:

Oberon, King of the Fairies
Titania, Queen of the Fairies
Robin Goodfellow (Puck), mischievous servant to Oberon
Fairies attending on Titania:
Peaseblossom
Cobweb
Mustardseed
Mote

Many forest fairies who can also double as lords and ladies in the court of Theseus.

NOTE: The three storytellers must be girls, the four teens are gender-specific, as are Titania (f) and Oberon (m). Bottom needs to be male. All other roles will accommodate either gender.

Set requirements: Bare stage with set pieces moved on for palace plants or ropes for trees in the forest.

Approximate running time: 1 hour

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
or
The Night They Missed the
Forest for the Trees

SCENE: A dark stage. Ideally, ropes hang from the grid, down to a foot or two above the floor. They have ivy wound around them. At various intervals, there are also strips of green material, hanging between the ropes. This is the forest where most of the action takes place. Trees in pots can fill in the space. This would be nice, but depending on your budget, and your grid...use your imagination.

AT RISE: Lights pop up on fifteen to twenty kids, in various positions with books in front of them on the floor. All are snoozing. This is study hall.

V.O. (JESSIE)
Teenagers.

(The STORYTELLER walks into the light.)

JESSIE
Ya can't live with 'em; ya can't live without 'em.
But sometimes ... they're like a bad dream

(One of the boys wakes up, runs his hand over his mouth...raises his shirt slowly to wipe his face ...revealing a large, hideous tattoo.)

JESSIE

See what I mean?

KAYTLIN

It gets tedious, doesn't it? Adult says no ... kid says ...

ALL KIDS *(waking suddenly, defiantly slapping the floor in unison)*

YES!!!

KAYTLIN

Never mind the subject.

JESSIE

You've planted a radish, and suddenly, around thirteen, you've got a kumquat ... an ORNERY kumquat ...

ANNA

And this is nothing new. It's been going on for hundreds and hundreds of years.

KAYTLIN

William Shakespeare knew all about teenagers...*and* their dreams.

JESSIE

Some things never change. *(She looks around.)* Now ...this is study hall.

(And one by one ...in very quick succession...heads flop forward onto the floor ... with a nice, loud THWACK...and

they are all asleep. JESSIE walks slowly around, looking at these drowsy sluggards.)

JESSIE

I mean, look at 'em. They have a test tomorrow on the very play Will Shakespeare wrote about them: *Midsummer Night's Dream*. And what are they doing? Dreaming!

(She clears her throat loudly. The teens wake up and, thinking perhaps an adult is present, they pretend they're busy. They sit up straight. They each are reading a book which they mime in front of them. Slowly they all sink into the following positions: One or two go back to sleep and drool on their books. One boy throws paper airplanes across the room at a girl. Two are in a very close and seemingly intimate conversation. JESSIE and two other girls, ANNA and KAYTLIN, sit in a circle gossiping. Another boy, DEMETRIUS, stares longingly at HERMIA talking intimately to LYSANDER. And another girl, HELENA, stares at DEMETRIUS. Six well-meaning—but maybe “not-playing-with-all-jets-on-burn”—boys sit toward the back, looking innocent and expectant, with slide rules and such hanging off their belts—the RUDE MECHANICALS. The captain of the football team and the head cheerleader, OBERON and TITANIA, have their backs to each other, arms folded across their chests in a seething, argumentative position. And the arty crowd—berets and leather—sits looking bored [FAIRIES]. The class clown, PUCK, juggles at his desk... or perhaps launches a pea-shooter assault.)

JESSIE

Look, I know I'm bossy ...

ALL STUDENTS (*turning ... in perfect unison*)

Nah, not you, Jessie.

(JESSIE whips her head around to glare at them ... and they return to their positions.)

JESSIE (*continuing her thread*)

...but the idea just seemed obvious. I knew the play.

And I knew I was probably the only one who DID!!!

(A groan from the kids.)

So I could run the whole show. An idea close to my heart. I mean, we had all the characters: Ever see four more obvious teenagers than these?

(She indicates LYSANDER and HERMIA, smitten with each other; then DEMETRIUS, looking ga-ga over HERMIA, and HELENA weeping over DEMETRIUS.)

JESSIE (*turning to another storyteller*)

Am I right?

ANNA

Always, Jessie, always.

And the Rude Mechanicals—those are the sorta dopey crew in *Midsummer Night's Dream*—tailors and tinkers and so forth—who want to do a play for Duke Theseus' wedding. How 'bout ... these guys?

(She indicates six kids, looking like they haven't a clue.)

KAYTLIN

Perfect!!! Well-meaning and goofy. That's a compliment, guys.

(The RUDE MECHANICALS smile appreciatively...but with low wattage.)

ANNA

And the King and Queen of the Forest where the Dream takes place—Oberon and Titania. Well, who else but the oh-so-popular football captain and the head cheerleader???

JESSIE

Now you're cookin'. And then there's a character named Puck. Plays practical jokes on people. Sorta the class clown.

(She grabs PUCK up by the shirt. He points to her waist.)

PUCK

Hey, Jess. What's that?

(JESSIE looks down. He brings his hand up and flicks her in the nose. She rolls her eyes.)

JESSIE *(to the audience)*

Am I right or am I right?
Sit down, clown.

(PUCK sits, chortling to himself, à la Jimmy Durante.)

PUCK

I got a million of 'em.

KAYTLIN

And we've seen 'em all, buddy.

Puck is joined in the forest
by a zillion spirits—fairies and wood sprites—who hang
with Titania, the Queen of the Forest. That could be
these guys.

(She points to the arty crowd.)

ARTY GUY (MUSTARDSEED)

Do we have lines?

KAYTLIN

A few.

ARTY GIRL (COBWEB)

We're artists, ya know.

KAYTLIN *(to JESSIE, as though things are unraveling)*

The actors are counting their lines.

ANOTHER ARTY GUY (PEASEBLOSSOM)

(sullenly aggressive)

Do we deliver the social and moral message of the piece?

JESSIE

You get to wear beautiful painted costumes.

ARTY GUY (MUSTARDSEED)

Cool.

ARTY GIRL (COBWEB)

Okay.

ANOTHER ARTY GUY (PEASEBLOSSOM)

Deal.

JESSIE (*to the audience*)

Ya can't just be a producer anymore.

Ya gotta be a diplomat.

(*looking at ANNA and KAYTLIN*)

So what's left?

KAYTLIN & ANNA

The grownups.

ALL THREE STORYTELLERS

Ooooooooooooo.

JESSIE

Tell ya what. Let's us play them. (*To the audience.*)

'Cause, ya see...there are basically three grownups in this play. And basically three of us. Fits like a glove.

KAYTLIN

Yeah, there's Egeus, father of this teenager, Hermia.

You do that, Anna.

ANNA

I'm a girl.

JESSIE & KAYTLIN (*staring at her*)

Duuuhhh!!!

JESSIE

Loosen up, will ya. It's the millennium cross-gender thing.

ANNA

Oh.

JESSIE

Just talk in a deep voice like a father. And act like you have a lot of opinions but are essentially clueless.

ANNA

Yeah, I got that.

JESSIE (*to the audience*)

There aren't any mothers in this play or we'd make one of you Dads play it. We take no prisoners.

KAYTLIN

So, Jess. You and I will play Duke Theseus and his about-to-be wife Hippolyta, right?

JESSIE

Right. I'll do the girl.

ANNA

What happened to the millennium cross-gender thing?

JESSIE

Alright, alright. I'll play Duke Theseus. (*emphatically*) And I'll play him *well*.

KAYTLIN

Are we ready?

JESSIE

Yep. Places, everyone!!!

(JESSIE and KAYTLIN, as THESEUS and HIPPOLYTA, sit facing the audience. All the other players sit around the edge.)

JESSIE

Alright, I'm about to become Theseus now: Duke of Athens. And Kaytlin here is my fiancée, Hippolyta. We'll change hats ... so you'll know.

(KAYTLIN turns her storyteller hat to her HIPPOLYTA hat.)

JESSIE

And just as we're getting ready to celebrate and get married, in comes this annoying father, dragging his teenage daughter behind him. You remember about teenagers, don't'cha? Mind of their own?

(JESSIE turns her storyteller hat to her THESEUS hat.)

ANNA *(as 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.
This man hath bewitched my child
by moonlight, with rings, trifles, sweetmeats.
Turned her obedience
To stubborn harshness.
If 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 ...
(*He points to DEMETRIUS.*)
... Or to her death according to our law.

(*JESSIE turns the THESEUS hat around to her storyteller hat.*)

JESSIE

Now that's harsh!!!! Do you believe that? If you disobeyed your dad, you could be killed ... legally!!!!

(*She turns THESEUS hat back around.*)

JESSIE (*as THESEUS*)

What say you, Hermia?

Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

HERMIA

So is Lysander.

I would my father looked but with my eyes.

I do entreat your Grace to pardon me.

But what is the worst that may befall me

If I refuse to wed Demetrius.

JESSIE (*as THESEUS*)

Either to die the death, or to abjure

Forever the society of men.

Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires.

HERMIA

So will I die, my lord.

JESSIE (*as THESEUS*)

Take time to pause, and by the next new moon,
Upon that day either prepare to die
For disobedience to your father's will,
Or else to wed Demetrius.

DEMETRIUS

Relent, sweet Hermia, and, Lysander, yield
Thy craz-ed title to my certain right.

LYSANDER

You have her father's love, Demetrius.
Marry him.

I am beloved of beauteous Hermia.

(*To THESEUS.*)

Demetrius made love to Helena
And won her soul; and she, sweet lady, dotes ...

(From the side, HELENA lurches forward ... SOOO EMBARRASSED ... she can only look at all assembled ... and collapse in a terrible wail ...)

HELENA

Oooooooooooooooooohhhhhh!!!!!!!

LYSANDER

... Upon this spotted and inconstant man.

JESSIE (*as THESEUS, with finality*)

I have heard so much.

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
To death or to a vow of single life.

(The COURT leaves, and the STORYTELLERS turn their hats to the storytelling side.)

JESSIE

Well, that'd curl your hair, wouldn't it?
What a bunch'a choices: marry a guy who makes
you want to swallow glass ... become a nun ... or die.
Hot diggety!!!!!!

ANNA

Still ... teenagers can squirm out of almost anything. Watch.

LYSANDER

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

(HERMIA has a severe pout-on.)

LYSANDER

Ay me! The course of true love never did run smooth.

HERMIA *(stamps her foot)*

Oh hell! To choose love by another's eyes!

KAYTLIN

Watch your language, kid. We wanna keep a G-rating.

LYSANDER *(suddenly has an idea, excitedly)*

I have a widow aunt from Athens—her house remote
seven leagues.