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Dramatic Publishing



A Midsummer Night's Dream

By William Shakespeare
Adapted by Aurand Harris

“What fools these mortals be.”

—Puck

A Midsummer Night's Dream

A superb adaptation for one-act play contests,
classroom studies, and mini-productions.

Comedy. Adapted by Aurand Harris. From the play by William Shakespeare. Cast: 9m., 2w., 4 either gender, extras optional. Cross-gender casting permitted. The lyrical fantasy of a fairy kingdom, the slapstick farce of Bottom and his fellow weavers, and the wit and splendor of the duke's court all make this short adaptation a triple treat of Shakespeare merrymaking. The plot and characters delightfully illustrated in Puck's words, "What fools these mortals be." *Simple woodland setting. Elizabethan or fanciful costumes.*

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A Midsummer Night's Dream
(Harris)



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Comedy

by

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Adapted by

AURAND HARRIS



Dramatic Publishing

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(A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM)

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Introduction

A Midsummer Night's Dream, Shakespeare's lyrical gift to theatre, has been called that "little drama born of a smile." Combining fantasy, slapstick farce, folklore and romantic comedy with lyrical poetry, he raised one entertainment form of dramatic art to perfection.

Shakespeare lived in the "Golden Age" of England. It was a time of zestful creativity and exploration. Thomas Kyd wrote his "mighty line"; Christopher Marlowe brought blank verse to dramatic plots; Robert Greene wrote idyllic romances; then came Shakespeare, an "upstart crow" from Stratford.

In 1576 the first permanent theatre was built in England. Modeled after the open bear-baiting pits and the semi-circular courtyards with several galleries, it was called The Theatre. Other theatres followed, including The Curtain, The Rose, The Swan. After a fire, The Theatre was rebuilt and renamed. It became the most famous playhouse in English theatrical history – The Globe, home of England's greatest playwright, William Shakespeare. Here he was busy as an actor and playwright. His life was contained in the theatre where his "friends and fellows" called him "our Shakespeare."

Shakespeare is generally believed to have written *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1595–96. Some critics think the plot of the four lovers (omitted in this short version) was written earlier and later combined with the poetic fairy scenes. All agree the play, as we know it, was first performed at a great wedding of some nobleman – then performed at The Globe. It was first published, from the prompt book used at The Globe, in 1600 and is known as *The Fisher Quarto*.

There has been much speculation as to the sources of the three threads of the plot. The Court of Theseus and the four lovers may have been inspired by Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* and North's Plutarch's *Life of Theseus*. The comic adventures of Bottom and his fellows may come from Ovid's 4th Book of *Metamorphoses*, which includes the story of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. The fairy element may have sprung from Shakespeare's memory of the fairy and nursery legends he heard as a boy in Warwickshire.

There is no doubt that by the time Shakespeare wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream* he had become master of his craft. Max Beerbohm wrote of a later production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, "Here we have the Master, confident in his art, at ease with it as a man in his dressing gown, kicking up a loose slipper and catching it on his toe."

Since its first performance, the play has been performed continuously. It has been cut, re-shaped, made into operas, ballets, etc., and an all-star motion picture.

In a magical world of a moonlit forest, mixed with the world of reality and reason, the play sings with poetry. The plot and characters delightfully demonstrate, in Puck's words, "What fools these mortals be."

CAST

PETER QUINCE, *a carpenter*
NICK BOTTOM, *a weaver*
FRANCIS FLUTE, *a bellows-mender*
TOM SNOOT, *a tinker*
ROBIN STARVELING, *a tailor*
SNUG, *a joiner*
OBERON, *King of the Fairies*
TITANIA, *Queen of the Fairies*
ROBIN GOODFELLOW, *the Puck*
FAIRIES
DUKE
DUCHESS
ATTENDANTS OF THE COURT

SCENE: *A wood near Athens.*

A Midsummer Night's Dream

(In front of the curtain. Comic music. The Tradesmen of Athens enter. They are an assorted and comical looking group of laborers. QUINCE enters first. He is the temperamental "director" of the group. FLUTE follows him. Flute is young, nervous and eager to please. Next BOTTOM enters. He swaggers with importance, knowing he is the "star." STARVELING follows, a happy soul who has a toothless grin. Close behind him is SNUG, shy, not-too-bright, and has a bumpkin laugh. Last is SNOUT, feeble, with a beard and a cane. They stand facing the audience—a picture of low comedians.)

QUINCE: Is all our company here?

BOTTOM: You were best to call them generally, man by man, according to the script.

QUINCE: Here is the scroll of every man's name which is thought fit through all Athens to play our interlude before the Duke and Duchess.

BOTTOM: First, good Peter Quince, say what the play treats on, then read the names of the actors, and so grow to a point.

QUINCE: Marry! Our play is—The most lamentable comedy, and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisby.

BOTTOM: A very good piece of work, I assure you, and a merry one. Now, good Peter Quince, call forth your actors by the scroll. Masters, spread yourselves.

QUINCE: Answer as I call you. Nick Bottom, the weaver.

BOTTOM: *(Steps forward.)* Ready. Name the part I am for, and proceed.

QUINCE: You, Nick Bottom, are set down for Pyramus.

BOTTOM: What is Pyramus? A lover—or a tyrant?

QUINCE: A lover, that kills himself most gallant for love.

BOTTOM: That will ask some tears in the true performing of it; if I do it, let the ladies look to their eyes; I will move storms. I could play Eracles rarely!

(Dramatically.)

The raging rocks
And shivering shocks
Shall break the locks
Of prison gates;
And Phibbus' car
Shall shine from far
And make and mar
The foolish Fates.

This was lofty! Now name the rest of the players.

QUINCE: Francis Flute, the bellows-mender.

FLUTE: *(Eagerly and anxiously steps forward.)* Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE: Flute, you must take Thisby on you.

FLUTE: What is Thisby? A wandering knight?

QUINCE: It is the lady that Pyramus must love.

FLUTE: Nay, faith let not me play a woman; I have a beard—coming.

QUINCE: That's all one. You may speak as small as you will.

BOTTOM: Let me play Thisby, too. I'll speak in a monstrous little voice—

QUINCE: No, no, you must play Pyramus. And Flute, you Thisby.

BOTTOM: Well, proceed.

QUINCE: Robin Starveling, the tailor.

STARVELING: *(Steps forward and grins.)* Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE: Robin Starveling, you must play Thisby's mother.

(Starveling grins and steps back.)

Tom Snout, the tinker.

(Goes to Snout who is standing and asleep.)

Tom Snout!

SNOUT: *(Wakes with a start. Speaks in a feeble voice.)*

Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE: You, Pyramus's father; myself Thisby's father.

Snug, the joiner—

(Snug shakes with sudden fear.)

you, the lion's part; and I hope here's a play well fitted.

SNUG: Have you the lion's part written? Pray you, if it be, give it to me, for I am slow of study.

QUINCE: You may do it extempore—for it is nothing but roaring.

(SNUG roars.)

BOTTOM: Let me play the lion, too. I will roar, that I will do any man's heart good to hear me. I will roar, that I will make the ladies say "Let him roar again, let him roar again."

QUINCE: And you should do it too terribly, you would fright the Duchess and the ladies, that they would shriek, and that were enough to hang us all.

BOTTOM: I grant you, friends, if that you should fright the ladies out of their wits, they would have no more wit but to hang us; but I will aggravate my voice so that I will roar as gently as any sucking dove—I will roar as 'twere any nightingale.

QUINCE: You can play no part but Pyramus! For Pyramus is a sweet-faced man; a proper man, as one shall see in a summer's day; a most lovely gentleman-like man; therefore you must needs play Pyramus.

BOTTOM: Well, I will undertake it.

QUINCE: *(QUINCE takes small scrolls from inside his hat.)*

Masters, here are your parts;

(Gives scroll to FLUTE.)

and I entreat you,
(*Gives scroll to STARVELING.*)
request you,
(*Gives scroll to SNUG.*)
and desire you,
(*Gives scroll to SNOOT.*)
to con them by tomorrow night –

SNOOT: (*Cups hand to ear.*) Aye?

QUINCE: To con them by tomorrow night! And meet me in the palace wood, a mile without the town, by moonlight; there we will rehearse, for if we meet in the city, we shall be dogged with company, and our devices known. In the meantime I will draw a bill of properties, such as our play wants. I pray you, fail me not.

BOTTOM: (*Taking the lead; all follow.*)
We will meet; and there we may rehearse most obscenely and courageously. Take pains. Be perfect. Adieu.

(*He exits. Others follow.*)

QUINCE: (*Last.*) At the Duke's oak we meet!

(*He exits. Fairy music. Curtains open. Scene is the woods. FAIRIES enter and dance. NOTE: As many Fairies as desired may be used, or only two. The dialogue has been broken up for several, but can be alternated between two. Fairies' names are Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, Mustardseed.*)

FAIRIES: Over hill,
Over dale,
Through bush,
Through brier,
Over parks,
Over pale,
Through flood, through fire.
We do wander everywhere
Swifter than the moon's sphere;
And we serve the Fairy Queen,
To dew her orbs upon the green.

PUCK: (*Enters.*) How now, spirits! Whither wander you?

FAIRIES: I must go seek some dewdrops here
And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.
Farewell, thou lob of spirits. Be gone!
Our queen and all her elves come here anon.

PUCK: The king doth keep his revels here tonight;
Take heed that queen come not within his sight;
For Oberon is passing full of wrath
Because that she as her attendant hath
A lovely boy stolen from an Indian King,
And jealous Oberon would have the child;
And now never Oberon and she meet in grove or green,
By fountain clear, or spangled starlight sheen,
But they do square, that all her elves for fear
Creep into acorn-cups and hide them there!

FAIRY: (*All FAIRIES exit, except one.*)
Either I mistake your shape and making quite,
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite
Called Robin Goodfellow: are not you he?

PUCK: Thou speak'st aright.
I am that merry wanderer of the night.
I jest to Oberon and make him smile
When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,
Neighing in likeness of a filly foal:
And sometimes lurk I in a gossip's bowl,
In very likeness of a roasted crab,
And when she drinks, against her lips I bob
And on her wither'd dewlap pour the ale.
The wisest lady, telling the saddest tale,
Sometimes for the three-foot stool mistaketh me;
Then slip I from her bum, down topples she,
And "tailor" cries, and falls into a cough;
And then the whole quire hold their hips and laugh,
And waxen in their mirth and sneeze and swear
A merrier hour was never wasted there.

FAIRY: Sh! My fairy Queen.

PUCK: Sh! My fairy King!

(Fairy music as TITANIA enters from L. If many fairies are used it can be a beautiful procession, with fairy musicians, train-bearers, royal

leaf-umbrella holder, etc. QUEEN and FAIRIES circle and stand at L. PUCK, with great to-do, bows, and with sweeping gesture points R. OBERON enters R. Music stops.)

OBERON: Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania.

TITANIA: What, jealous Oberon! Fairies, skip hence:
I have forsworn his bed and company.

OBERON: Tarry, rash wanton: am not I thy lord?

TITANIA: (*Curtsies in playful mockery.*)
Then I must be thy lady.

OBERON: Why should Titania cross her Oberon?

TITANIA: Never since the middle summer's spring,
Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead,
To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,
But with thy brawls thou hast disturb'd our sport.

OBERON: I do but beg a little changeling boy
To be my page.

TITANIA: Set your heart at rest!
The fairy kingdom buys not the child from me!

OBERON: How long within this wood intend you stay?

TITANIA: If you join in our dance in our round,
And see our moonlight revels, go with us:
If not, shun me, and I will spare your haunts.

OBERON: Give me the boy and I will go with thee.

TITANIA: Not for thy fairy kingdom! Fairies away!
We shall chide downright, if I longer stay.

(Music as TITANIA and FAIRIES exit.)

OBERON: Go thy way: thou shalt not from this grove
Till I torment thee for this injury.
My gentle Puck, come hither. Thou remembrest

Since once I sat upon a promontory
And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath
That the rude sea grew civil at her song
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres,
To hear the sea-maid's music.

PUCK: I remember.

OBERON: That very time I saw, but thou couldst not,
Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
Cupid all arm'd: a certain aim he took,
And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow,
As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts;
Ah, I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
Quench'd in the chaste heart of my fairy queen.
Yet mark'd I where the bolt of Cupid fell:
It fell upon a little western flower,
Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound,
And maidens call it Love-in-idleness.
Fetch me that flower; the herb I show'd thee once:
The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid
Will make or man or woman madly dote
Upon the next live creature that it sees.
Fetch me this herb; and be thou here again
Ere the leviathan can swim a league.

PUCK: I'll put a girdle round about the earth
In forty minutes. (*Exits.*)

OBERON: Having once this juice,
I'll watch Titania when she is asleep,
And drop the liquor of it in her eyes.
The next thing then she waking looks upon,
Be it on lion, bear, or wolf, or bull,
Or meddling monkey, or on busy ape,
She shall pursue it with the soul of love!
And ere I take this charm from off her sight,
I'll make her render up the child to me.
My page he will be!
(*PUCK enters.*)
Welcome, wanderer. Hast thou the flower there?

PUCK: Ay, there it is.

OBERON: I pray thee, give it me.
I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,
Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight;
And with the juice of this I'll streak her eyes,
And make her full of hateful fantasies.
Meet me ere the first cock crow!

(OBERON exits.)

PUCK: Fear not, your servant shall do so!

(Exits.)

TITANIA: *(Fairy music. TITANIA and her FAIRIES enter.)*
Come, on this bank we will rest our flight,
And sleep until again it be night.
Sweet sleep—over-canopied with lush woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine.
Sleep, and keep this night of dreams.

(One by one she dismisses the Fairies. One FAIRY GUARD remains. He lifts the golden cobweb at center back. Behind is a green bank. TITANIA sits and gracefully lies on it—asleep. GUARD lets web down, and standing at attention, goes to sleep.)

PUCK enters. Motions to OBERON, who enters. PUCK lifts the web. OBERON moves the flower over her eyes, then comes downstage and says the magic words.)

OBERON: What thou seest when thou dost wake,
Do it for thy true-love take.
Love and languish for his sake;
Be it ounce, or cat, or bear,
Pard, or boar with bristled hair,
In thy eye that shall appear
When thou wakest, it is thy dear;
Wake when some vile thing is near.

(OBERON exits. PUCK lets web down and exits. GUARD exits. Dream music dims out. Lights come up bright. Comic music, as the tradesmen enter.)

BOTTOM: Are we all met?

QUINCE: Pat, pat; and here's a marvelous convenient place for our rehearsal. This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn-brake our tiring-house; and we will do it in action as we will do it before the Duke.

BOTTOM: Peter Quince.

QUINCE: What sayest thou, bully Bottom?

BOTTOM: There are things in this comedy of Pyramus and Thisby that will never please. First, Pyramus must draw a sword to kill himself; which the ladies cannot abide. How answer you that?

SNOUT: By'r lakin, a parlous fear.

STARVELING: I believe we must leave the killing out, when all is done. (*Grins happily.*)

BOTTOM: Not a whit. I have a device to make all well. Write me a prologue; and let the prologue seem to say, we will do no harm with our swords and that Pyramus is not killed; that I Pyramus am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver; this will put them out of fear.

QUINCE: Well, we will have such a prologue.

SNOUT: Will not the ladies be afeard of the lion?

STARVELING: I fear it, I promise you. (*Grins.*)

BOTTOM: Masters, you ought to consider with yourselves: to bring in—God shield us!—a lion among ladies is a most dreadful thing; for there is not a more fearful wild-fowl than your lion living.

(*SNUG roars.*)

SNOUT: Therefore another prologue must tell he is not a lion.

BOTTOM: Nay, you must name his name, and half his face must be seen through the lion's neck: and he himself must speak, saying, "Ladies, I would wish you not to fear, I come not as a lion—"
(*SNUG roars.*)

I am a man, Snug the joiner — not a lion.

(SNUG roars.)

QUINCE: Well, it shall be so. But there is two hard things yet: to bring in moonlight by the wall; for, you know, Pyramus and Thisby meet by moonlight.

BOTTOM: Someone must come in with a bush or lantern, and say he comes to disfigure, or to present, the person of Moonshine.

QUINCE: Then, there is another thing: we must have a wall, for Pyramus and Thisby, says the story, did talk through the chink of a wall.

SNOUT: You can never bring in a wall. What say you, Bottom?

BOTTOM: Some man or other must present Wall; and let him hold his fingers thus, and through that cranny shall Pyramus and Thisby whisper.

QUINCE: If that may be, then all is well. Come, every mother's son, and rehearse your parts. Pyramus, you begin; when you have spoken your speech, enter into that brake, and so every one according to his cue.

(STARVELING, SNOUT and QUINCE exit talking. SNUG, realizing he should follow, roars and exits. BOTTOM is left alone and starts pantomiming his part. PUCK enters, puzzled by Bottom's strange actions. He makes a circle of inspection.)

PUCK: What hempen home-spuns have we swaggering here,
So near the cradle of the Fairy queen?
What a play! Ah! I'll be an auditor;
An actor too perhaps, if I see cause.

QUINCE: *(Enters.)* Speak, Pyramus. Thisby stand forth.

(FLUTE enters, stands frightened. BOTTOM kneels to him.)

BOTTOM: Thisby, the flower of odious savours sweet —

QUINCE: Odorous, odorous!

BOTTOM: — odours savours sweet;
So hath thy breath, my dearest Thisby dear.
But hark, a voice! Stay, I pray, but a while,
And by and by I will come to thee here.

(Exits.)

PUCK: And he will be a stranger Pyramus when he reappears!

(Exits after Bottom.)

FLUTE: Must I speak now?

QUINCE: Ay, merry, must you; for you must understand he goes but to see a noise that he heard, and is to come again.

FLUTE: Most radiant Pyramus, most lily-white of hue,
Of colour like the red rose on triumphant brier,
Most briskly juvenal and eke most lovely Jew,
As true as truest horse, that yet would never tire.
I'll meet thee, Pyramus, at Ninny's tomb.

QUINCE: "Ninus' tomb," man: why you must not speak that yet, that you answer to Pyramus. You speak all your part at once, cues and all. Pyramus enter: your cue is past: it is "never tire."

FLUTE: As true as truest horse, that yet would never tire.

BOTTOM: *(Enters with ass's head covering his own head.)*
If I were fair, Thisby, I were only thine.

QUINCE: O monstrous! O strange! We are haunted. Pray, master! Fly, master!

FLUTE: Help!

(Exits.)

QUINCE: Save us!

(Exits.)

PUCK: *(Enters and teases Bottom.)*
I'll follow you, I'll lead you about a round,
Through bog, through bush, through brake, through brier;
Sometimes a horse I'll be, sometimes a hound,
A hog, a headless bear, sometimes a fire!
And neigh, and bark and grunt and roar and burn,