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William Shakespeare

Excerpt

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## A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM

[I. I.] *The hall in the palace of Duke Theseus. On one side a small platform with two chairs of state; on the other side a hearth; at the back doors to right and left, the wall between them opening out into a lobby*

*THESEUS and HIPPOLYTA enter and take their seats, followed by PHILOSTRATE and attendants*

*Theseus.* Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour  
Draws on apace: four happy days bring in  
Another moon: but O, 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.

10

*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.

*[Philostrate bows and departs]*

Hippolyta, I wooed 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.

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## 4 A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM 1.1.20

*EGEUS enters, haling along his daughter HERMIA by the arm, followed by LYSANDER and DEMETRIUS*

20 *Egeus* [*bows*]. Happy be Theseus, our renowned 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 witched the bosom of my child.  
 Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes,  
 And interchanged love-tokens with my child:  
 30 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, nose-gays, sweetmeats—messengers  
 Of strong prevailment in unhardened youth.  
 With cunning hast thou filched my daughter's heart,  
 Turned her obedience, which is due to me,  
 To stubborn harshness. And, my gracious duke,  
 Be it so she will not here before your grace

40 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 advised,  
 fair maid.

To you your father should be as a god;  
 One that composed your beauties; yea and one  
 To whom you are but as a form in wax

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## 1.1.50 A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM 5

By him imprinted, and within his power 50  
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 looked but with my eyes.

*Theseus.* Rather your eyes must with his judge-  
ment 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 60

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, 70

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 blesséd they that master so their blood,

To undergo such maiden pilgrimage:

But earthlier happy is the rose distilled,

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 80

Unto his lordship, whose unwishéd yoke

My soul consents not to give sovereignty.

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## 6 A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM 1.1.83

*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

90 For aye austerity and single life.

*Demetrius.* Relent, sweet Hermia—and, Lysander, yield  
Thy crazéd 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 derived as he,  
100 As well possessed: my love is more than his:  
My fortunes every way as fairly ranked—  
If not with vantage—as Demetrius':  
And, which is more than all these boasts can be,  
I am beloved 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,  
110 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. [*he rises*] But Demetrius come,  
And come Egeus, you shall go with me:  
I have some private schooling for you both.

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## I.I.II7 A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM 7

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)

120

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.

*[all depart save Hermia and Lysander]*

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

How chance the roses there do fade so fast?

*Hermia.* Belike for want of rain, which I could well 130

Beteem them from the tempest of my eyes.

*Lysander.* Ay me! [*he comforts her*] for aught that I  
could ever read,

Could ever hear by tale or history

The course of true love never did run smooth;

But, either it was different in blood—

*Hermia.* O cross! too high to be enthralled to low.

*Lysander.* Or else misgrafféd in respect of years—

*Hermia.* O spite! too old to be engaged to young.

*Lysander.* Or else it stood upon the choice of friends—

*Hermia.* O hell! to choose love by another's eyes! 140

*Lysander.* Or, if there were a sympathy in choice,

War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it—

Making it momentary as a sound,

Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,

Brief as the lightning in the collied night

That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and earth;

And ere a man hath power to say 'Behold!'

The jaws of darkness do devour it up:

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## 8 A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM 1.1.149

So quick bright things come to confusion.

150 *Hermia.* If then true lovers have been ever crossed,

It stands as an edict in destiny:

Then let us teach our trial patience,

Because it is a customary cross,

As due to love as thoughts and dreams and sighs,

Wishes and tears; poor Fancy's followers.

*Lysander.* A good persuasion: therefore hear me,

*Hermia:*

I have a widow aunt, a dowager

Of great revenue, and she hath no child:

From Athens is her house remote seven leagues:

160 And she respects me as her only son...

There, gentle *Hermia*, may I marry thee:

And to that place the sharp Athenian law

Cannot pursue us. If thou lovest me then,

Steal forth thy father's house to-morrow night;

And in the wood, a league without the town,

Where I did meet thee once with *Helena*,

To do observance to a morn of May,

There will I stay for thee.

*Hermia.* My good *Lysander*,

I swear to thee by Cupid's strongest bow,

170 By his best arrow with the golden head,

By the simplicity of Venus' doves,

By that which knitteth souls and prospers loves,

And by that fire which burned the Carthage queen,

When the false Trojan under sail was seen,

By all the vows that ever men have broke—

In number more than ever women spoke—

In that same place thou hast appointed me,

To-morrow truly will I meet with thee.

*Lysander.* Keep promise, love...Look, here comes

*Helena.*

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## I. I. 180 A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM 9

*HELENA is seen passing through the lobby**Hermia.* God speed, fair Helena: whither away? 180*Helena* [*coming forward into the hall*]. Call you me  
fair? that 'fair' again unsay.

Demetrius loves your fair: O happy fair!

Your eyes are lode-stars, and your tongue's sweet air

More tuneable than lark to shepherd's ear,

When wheat is green, when hawthorn buds appear.

Sickness is catching: O, were favour so,

Yours would I catch, fair Hermia, ere I go!

My ear should catch your voice, my eye your eye,

My tongue should catch your tongue's sweet melody.

Were the world mine, Demetrius being bated, 190

The rest I'd give to be to you translated.

O, teach me how you look, and with what art

You sway the motion of Demetrius' heart.

*Hermia.* I frown upon him; yet he loves me still.*Helena.* O that your frowns would teach my smiles  
such skill.*Hermia.* I give him curses; yet he gives me love.*Helena.* O that my prayers could such affection move.*Hermia.* The more I hate, the more he follows me.*Helena.* The more I love, the more he hateth me.*Hermia.* His folly, Helena, is no fault of mine. 200*Helena.* None, but your beauty; would that fault  
were mine.*Hermia.* Take comfort: he no more shall see my face:

Lysander and myself will fly this place.

Before the time I did Lysander see,

Seemed Athens as a paradise to me:

O then, what graces in my love do dwell,

That he hath turned a heaven unto a hell!

*Lysander.* Helen, to you our minds we will unfold:

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## 10 A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM 1.1.109

- To-morrow night, when Phœbe doth behold  
 210 Her silver visage in the wat'ry glass,  
 Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass—  
 A time that lovers' flights doth still conceal—  
 Through Athens' gates have we devised to steal.  
*Hermia.* And in the wood, where often you and I  
 Upon faint primrose beds were wont to lie,  
 Emptying our bosoms of their counsel sweet,  
 There my Lysander and myself shall meet,  
 And thence from Athens turn away our eyes,  
 To seek new friends and stranger companies.  
 220 Farewell, sweet playfellow: pray thou for us:  
 And good luck grant thee thy Demetrius!  
 Keep word, Lysander: we must starve our sight  
 From lovers' food till morrow deep midnight. [*she goes*  
*Lysander.* I will, my Hermia. Helena, adieu:  
 As you on him, Demetrius dote on you! [*he goes*  
*Helena.* How happy some o'er other some can be!  
 Through Athens I am thought as fair as she,  
 But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so:  
 He will not know what all but he do know.  
 230 And as he errs, doting on Hermia's eyes,  
 So I, admiring of his qualities.  
 Things base and vile, holding no quantity,  
 Love can transpose to form and dignity.  
 Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind:  
 And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.  
 Nor hath Love's mind of any judgement taste:  
 Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste.  
 And therefore is Love said to be a child:  
 Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.  
 240 As waggish boys in game themselves forswear:  
 So the boy Love is perjured every where.  
 For ere Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyne,  
 He hailed down oaths that he was only mine.



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## 1.1.244 A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM 11

And when this hail some heat from Hermia felt,  
 So he dissolved, and show'rs of oaths did melt.  
 I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight:  
 Then to the wood will he to-morrow night  
 Pursue her: and for this intelligence  
 If I have thanks, it is a dear expense:  
 But herein mean I to enrich my pain, 250  
 To have his sight thither and back again. [*she goes*]

[1.2.] *A room in the cottage of Peter Quince*

QUINCE, BOTTOM, SNUG, FLUTE, SNOUT, and  
 STARVELING

*Quince.* Is all our company here?

*Bottom.* You were best to call them generally, man by man, according to the scrip.

*Quince.* Here is the scroll of every man's name, which is thought fit, through all Athens, to play in our interlude before the duke and the duchess, on his wedding-day at night.

*Bottom.* First, good Peter Quince, say what the play treats on: then read the names of the actors: and so grow to a point. 10

*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. 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.* Ready: name what 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. 20

*Bottom.* That will ask some tears in the true performing of it. If I do it, let the audience look to their eyes:

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## 12 A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM 1.2.23

I will move storms: I will condole in some measure.  
To the rest—yet my chief humour is for a tyrant.  
I could play Ercles rarely, or a part to tear a cat in, to  
make all split.

30                   ‘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. This  
is Ercles' vein, a tyrant's vein: a lover is more condoling.

*Quince.* Francis Flute, the bellows-mender.

*Flute.* Here, Peter Quince.

40 *Quince.* Flute, you must take Thisby on you.

*Flute.* What is Thisby? a wand'ring 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 shall play it in a mask: and  
you may speak as small as you will.

*Bottom.* An I may hide my face, let me play Thisby too:  
I'll speak in a monstrous little voice. 'Thisne, Thisne'—  
'Ah, Pyramus, my lover dear, thy Thisby dear, and  
lady dear.'

50 *Quince.* No, no, you must play Pyramus: and Flute,  
you Thisby.

*Bottom.* Well, proceed.

*Quince.* Robin Starveling, the tailor.

*Starveling.* Here, Peter Quince.

*Quince.* Robin Starveling, you must play Thisby's  
mother. Tom Snout, the tinker.

*Snout.* Here, Peter Quince.