

# A Midsummer Night's Dream

by William Shakespeare

In the enchanted forest,  
lovers and bumpkins are mixed-up and changed.  
Is it all really only a dream?

## Characters

(main parts in boldface)

### Narrators 1, 2

**Hermia** (HER-mee-uh)—in love with Lysander

Egeus (ee-JEE-uhs)—father of Hermia  
Duke of Athens

**Demetrius** (de-MEE-tree-uhs)—  
promised by Egeus to Hermia

**Lysander** (ligh-SAN-der)—in love with Hermia

**Helena** (HEL-uh-nuh)—Hermia's friend

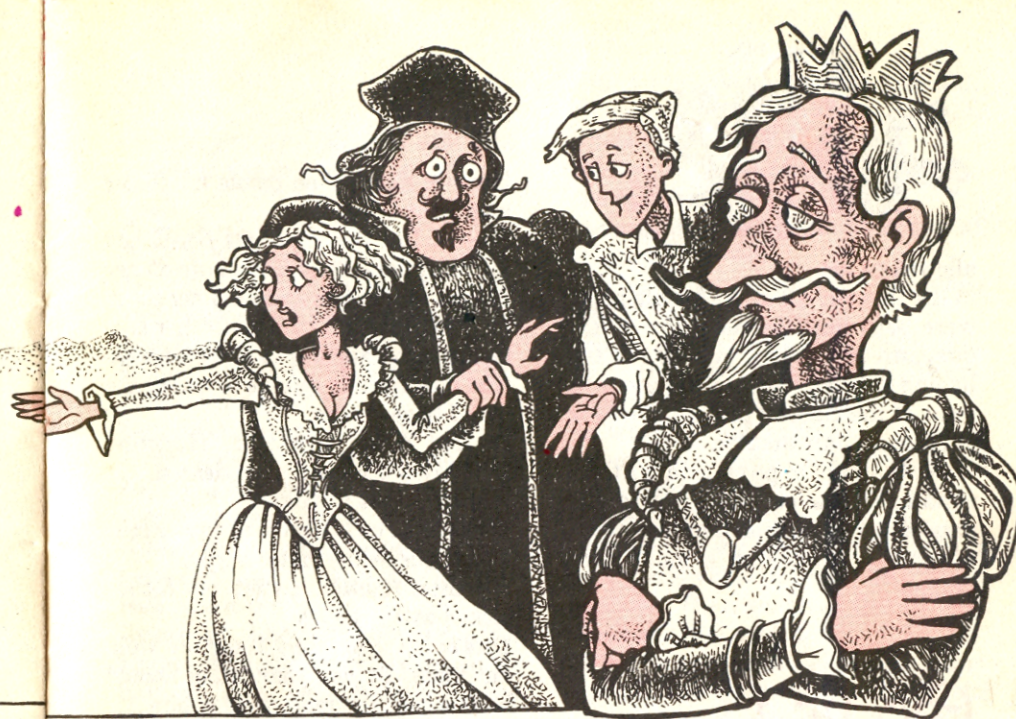
**Oberon** (OH-ber-on)—king of the spirits

**Puck**—impish trickster  
Spirits 1, 2

**Titania** (tigh-TAY-nee-uh)—queen of the spirits

Quince—a carpenter

**Bottom**—a weaver



adapted by Kate Davis

## Love by Different Rules

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written by William Shakespeare in a time when the "game" of love was played by different rules. Women had far fewer rights in the 1500s to 1600s than they do now. And you'll see evidence of this in the opening scene of *Midsummer*. Egeus tries to force his daughter, Hermia, to marry a man she does not love.

Shakespeare's plays were composed in the England of Queen Elizabeth I. Her reign (1558–1603) restored peace and order to the country after a long period of violent political and religious conflict.

Elizabethans believed, therefore, that a strong but just ruler was absolutely necessary to keep the social order. Marriage was a primary part of that order. That's why the Duke of Athens in *Midsummer* feels that he must uphold the law by sending Hermia to a nunnery or putting her to death if she does not obey her father.

However, you'll notice that even in the world Shakespeare presents, a strong-willed young woman like Hermia will try to do as she pleases, fleeing her home to follow her heart.

Another interesting fact about men's and women's roles in Shakespeare's time is that women were not





allowed to act in the theater. All of the female parts were performed by men! For a few guaranteed laughs, you might try having only boys act out one scene in front of the class to get some flavor of Elizabethan theater.

Now grab a part and gather round. Follow our lovers into the magical forest on midsummer's eve—perchance to dream a most rare dream!

## Scene 1

**Narrator 1:** Just outside the Duke of Athens's palace, a love dispute disrupts the peace. Shouting is heard in the courtyard. The duke steps outside.

**Narrator 2:** Egeus has entered the palace grounds, dragging his daughter, Hermia behind him. With them are two young men.

**Narr 1:** Hermia is trying to pull free of her father's hold.

**Hermia:** (*shouting*) You cannot make me!

**Egeus:** (*shouting also*) I am your father. I can do with you as I wish!

**Narr 2:** When they see the duke, both father and daughter stop shouting and smile politely at him.

**Egeus:** Our noble duke! How are you?

**Duke:** What's going on here?

**Egeus:** I have come to complain about my daughter, Hermia.

**Narr 1:** He gestures to Demetrius.

**Egeus:** To this good man, Demetrius, have I given my consent to marry Hermia.

**Narr 2:** Egeus then points his finger angrily at Lysander.

**Egeus:** But this man has bewitched my daughter's heart. He has given her flowers and sweets and sung her songs by moonlight. He has turned her obedience as a daughter to stubbornness. And now Hermia refuses to marry the man I have chosen.

**Duke:** What say you, Hermia? Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

**Hermia:** So is Lysander.

**Duke:** Yes, he is. But your father sees Demetrius as the mate for you.

**Hermia:** (*boldly*) I wish my father looked with my eyes.

**Duke:** (*scolding her*) Hear me well, fair maid. To you, your father should be as a god. You must yield to him.

**Hermia:** And what if I refuse?

**Duke:** Then you must die or take the vow of a nun. I cannot change the laws of Athens. Therefore, Hermia, question your desires carefully.

**Narr 1:** Hermia does not hesitate.

**Hermia:** I would rather die than give myself to a man I do not love! Besides, my good friend Helena loves Demetrius. Let him marry *her*.

**Demetrius:** Helena? (*laughs*) I do not want Helena. I want you.

**Lysander:** I've got an idea, Demetrius. Egeus loves you. Why don't you marry *him*?

**Duke:** Enough!

**Narr 2:** Changing his tone, Lysander appeals to the duke.

**Lysander:** Hear me, my lord. I am every bit as good as Demetrius. My background and fortune match his. But my love for Hermia far exceeds his. Why should I not deserve her?

**Duke:** The law is the law. Hermia, by tomorrow, you must make up your mind. Do as your father wishes or, by

the law, you shall die or be sent away forever to live as a nun.

## Scene 2

**Narr 1:** Everyone leaves, but Hermia and Lysander linger in the palace courtyard. Hermia begins to cry.

**Hermia:** Oh, why must I choose love by another's eyes?

**Lysander:** (*comfortingly*) Why is your cheek so pale? The course of true love never did run smooth. Hear me, gentle Hermia: I have a plan.

**Narr 2:** Hermia stops crying. Lysander looks over his shoulder to be sure no one can hear.

**Lysander:** I have a widow aunt. She has no child and thinks of me as her only son. She lives far from Athens. The law cannot pursue us there.

**Hermia:** (*encouraged*) Go on.

**Lysander:** If you love me, then sneak out of your father's house tonight. I'll wait for you in the woods out of town. We'll go to my aunt and be married. Will you do it?

**Hermia:** (*suddenly very happy*) Oh, Lysander, yes! By all the vows that ever men have broke or ever women spoke, I will be there. I swear it!

## Scene 3

**Narr 1:** As they embrace, Helena enters the courtyard, surprising the two lovers.

**Hermia:** Fair Helena!

**Helena:** You call *me* fair? Demetrius thinks of your eyes as bright stars and your voice a sweet melody. He loves *you*, not me. How do you sway his heart?

**Hermia:** I frown upon him, yet he loves me still.

**Helena:** I

smile upon him, yet he hates me still.

**Hermia:** The more I hate him, the more he follows me.

**Helena:** The more I love him, the more he hates me.

**Lysander:** Tomorrow that may all change.

**Helena:** (*suspiciously*) Why? What then?

**Narr 2:** Hermia knows she should keep their plans a secret, but she cannot contain her excitement.

**Hermia:** Lysander and I are running away. Once I am gone, Demetrius will surely return to you.

**Narr 1:** Hermia hugs her friend.

**Hermia:** Lysander and I shall meet in the woods where you and I often traded secrets. Then we shall flee Athens. Farewell, Helena.

**Narr 2:** Lysander and Hermia hurry away. Helena smiles. Suddenly, she has a plan of her own.

**Helena:** I am as fair as Hermia—fairer—yet Demetrius does not see it. True love looks not with the eyes but with the mind. Maybe I can win his heart by telling him of Hermia's flight. Yes! He'll be so grateful, he'll fall for me.

## Scene 4

**Narr 1:** That night, the enchanted forest in which Hermia will meet Lysander is speckled with fireflies. But sparks of a different sort also fill the air. A quarrel between the king and





queen of the woodland spirits has been brewing.

**Oberon:** (*pacing*) I must have that boy! Titania might have adopted him just for herself, but I long to run with him through the forest!

**Narr 2:** A short way off, pixies and spirits weave their charms over flowers and brambles. Robin Goodfellow, or "Puck," the spirit king's impish messenger, flies in.

**Puck:** What are you up to, spirits?

**Spirit 1:** Over hill and dale, from bush to briar, flood and fire . . .

**Spirit 2:** . . . we wander seeking dew-drops here and place them in a blossom's ear.

**Spirits 1, 2:** Soon our spirit queen comes.

**Puck:** You'd do well to keep your queen away from here. Good King Oberon is in these parts, and he's in a foul mood.

**Spirit 1:** Here she comes now.

**Spirit 2:** And he as well!

**Narr 1:** When they see Oberon, the pixies immediately scatter.

**Oberon:** (*annoyed*) Ill-met by moonlight, Titania.

**Titania:** Ill-met yourself!

**Oberon:** Wait—don't walk away from me! Am I not your lord?

**Titania:** Not when you act so jealously. Your brawling so disturbs my pixies' work, they can no longer keep fog from the land or frost from off the rose. Instead they run to hide in acorn cups. Nature itself is so confused, the world no longer knows which season is which.

**Oberon:** A simple remedy will mend all that, Titania: Give me the child!

**Titania:** Cease your pleading, Oberon. He's mine.

Leave us to our work. My elves and I fly off—away!

**Oberon:** Go if you like. I'll torment you for this stubbornness!

**Narr 2:** Oberon has a devious idea and summons his assistant.

**Oberon:** Come here, Puck. Remember that exotic purple flower I showed you once? A single drop of its juice will make a person fall madly in love with the next creature she sees. Go quickly. Fetch me that herb!

**Puck:** I'll circle the earth in a flash and bring it to you!

**Oberon:** When Titania sleeps, I'll drop this juice onto her eyes. When she awakes, she'll pursue with the soul of love whatever next she looks upon—be it bear or monkey or bull! I'll not remove the charm until she yields the boy to me.

## Scene 5

**Narr 1:** Having heard of Hermia's escape, Demetrius searches through the woods for her. Helena shadows him. They enter Oberon's domain.

**Oberon:** What mortals are these? I'll make myself invisible and eavesdrop.

**Narr 2:** Demetrius stops. Helena, right on his heels, bumps smack into him.

**Demetrius:** Stop following me! You said Lysander and Hermia would be here; now where are they? For the last time, I say: I do *not* love you.

**Narr 1:** Despite his insults, Helena is not daunted in her love quest.

**Helena:** Even though you tell me that,

I love you all the more. You draw me like a magnet, and my heart is true as steel. Use me, neglect me, but let me follow you.

**Demetrius:** What can I say? I am sick when I look on you.

**Helena:** And I am sick when I look *not* on you.

**Demetrius:** (*exasperated*) Listen. A girl like you shouldn't be roaming about at night in a place like this.

**Helena:** It is not night when I see your face.

**Demetrius:** Go back to Athens before I do you some mischief!

**Helena:** You already do my heart mischief. You've broken it. But I would make a heaven of hell, to die upon the hand I love so well.

**Narr 2:** Demetrius runs off, with Helena still trailing him. Oberon feels sorry for her and schemes.

**Oberon:** Fare well, maiden. Before he leaves this grove, it will be *he* who follows *you*, seeking love.

**Narr 1:** Puck, like an eager pup, returns from his whirlwind mission.

**Puck:** My king, here is the purple flower you requested.

**Oberon:** Ah, give it to me. I know a bank where wild thyme blows. There, Titania takes her sleep at night. I shall with this juice cause her to fantasize.

**Narr 2:** Oberon draws Puck closer.

**Oberon:** Listen carefully, Puck. I want you to search the forest for a sweet young woman and an arrogant man who scorns her. Drop this juice into



his eyes so that the next thing he spies is this lady. You will know him by his Athenian clothes.  
**Puck:** Fear not. I am your servant.

## Scene 6

**Narr 1:** In another part of the forest, Titania prepares to rest.

**Titania:** Come now, pixies, spirits, urchins, elves. Sing me asleep.

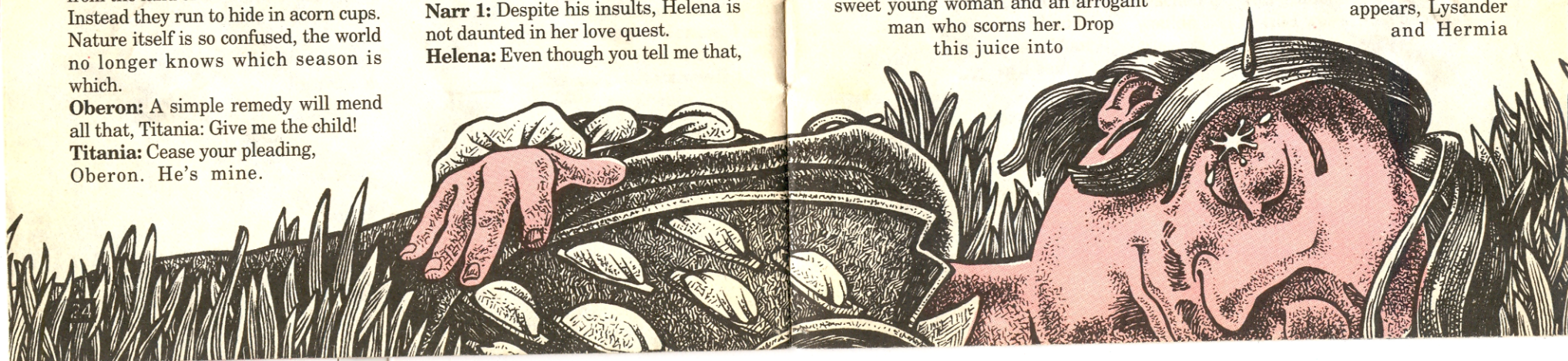
**Spirit 1:** Spotted snakes with double tongue, thorny hedgehogs, be not seen. Newts and blind worms, do no wrong. Come not near our pixie queen.

**Spirits 2:** Away now, all is well.

**Narr 2:** When Titania is sleeping, Oberon tiptoes over and squeezes the juice on her eyes.

**Oberon:** (*whispering in her ear*) What you see when you awake, do for thy own true love take. Be it beast or boar with bristled hair, wake when some vile thing is near.

**Narr 1:** As King Oberon disappears, Lysander and Hermia







stumble into the woodlands nearby.

**Lysander:** We've lost our way from so much wandering. You look faint, love. Let's take a little rest.

**Hermia:** So be it. But out of courtesy, move off a bit and find another bed. On this bank, I'll rest my head.

**Lysander:** (*hoping she'll let him stay*) My heart to yours is knit so that one heart we make of it.

**Hermia:** Still, for virtue's sake, lie over there. Good night, my love.

## Scene 7

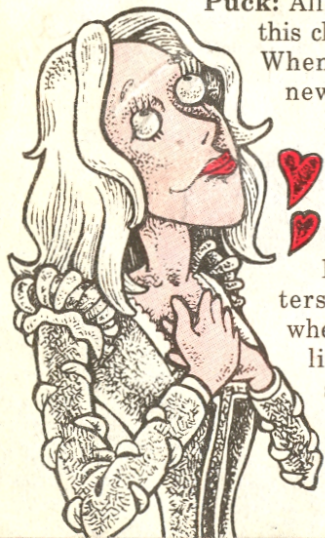
**Narr 2:** No sooner are the two asleep, than Puck wanders by.

**Puck:** Through the forest I have gone, but no Athenian have I found to drop this flower magic on. But wait—who is here? He wears the clothes of Athens; it must be he who scorns the maid, as Oberon described. And here is the pretty rejected soul lying off a bit.

**Narr 1:** Puck drops the potent juice onto Lysander's eyelids.

**Puck:** All the power of this charm I throw. When you awake, new love you'll know.

**Narr 2:** Puck quickly disappears. Soon after, Demetrius enters the area where the lovers lie. Helena is still tagging along behind



him.

**Helena:** Demetrius, wait for me!

**Demetrius:** (*calling back as he runs on*) Get away! Stop haunting me!

**Helena:** (*dragging*) Oh, I'm out of breath. (*She trips*) What's this? Lysander! Wake up, good sir, if you are alive!

**Narr 1:** Lysander sits up and rubs his eyes. Spying Helena, he smiles broadly, then reaches out to pull her passionately to him.

**Lysander:** May my gaze never stray from your eyes! I would run through fire for your sake!

**Helena:** What are you doing? Lysander, how can you say that? What about *Hermia*?

**Lysander:** I regret the wasted time I've spent with her. It is not *Hermia*, but *you* I love. Who would not change a raven for a dove?

**Helena:** Do you mock me? Isn't it enough I can't win one sweet look from Demetrius, yet you should tease me? Farewell, Lysander, for I must confess, I thought you lord of more true gentleness.

**Narr 2:** Helena runs off, hurt, with Lysander following, entranced. Meanwhile, *Hermia* wakes up alone.

**Hermia:** Help! Lysander! Slay the snake that eats away my heart! Oh—was that a dream? Lysander? Where are you? I nearly faint with fear. (*heading off to find him*) Either you or death I'll soon find near.

## Scene 8

**Narr 1:** Having completed his mission for Oberon, Puck spies a few common working men traveling through the woods.

**Puck:** What homespun bumpkins have we here, so near to where the pixie queen sleeps? I think I'll have some fun with them.

**Narr 2:** Rough-cut and unwashed, the simpletons stumble along the dark path.

**Quince:** I thought you knew the way.

**Bottom:** (*scratching his unkempt beard*) In faith, nothing quite looks the same at night.

**Narr 1:** An owl hoots. Bottom's courage does not match his brawn. He dives for cover.

**Quince:** What's that? Some beast?

**Bottom:** (*from behind a log*) I'll stay here; you check it out.

**Quince:** You're the largest—you go.

**Narr 2:** Bottom is pushed off alone.

**Narr 1:** Puck cannot resist the opportunity to play a trick. When Bottom returns to his men, his head is changed into that of a donkey.

**Bottom:** (*braying*) Eee-aw! All clear!

**Quince:** (*horrified*) Oh, monstrous strange! We're haunted! HELP!

**Bottom:** Why do they run from me?

**Narr 2:** The workmen run in circles, hollering. Puck has to cover his mouth so as not to laugh out loud.

**Bottom:** You're trying to scare me!

**Quince:** (*running by, then fleeing*) Bless thee, Bottom; you are transformed.

**Bottom:** What? They just want to make an ass of me. Well, I'll show them. I'll sing loud so they'll hear I'm not afraid. (*singing loudly*) The blackbird with his tawny bill—

**Titania:** (*waking in her bower close at hand*) What angel wakes me from my flower bed? Sing again, gentle mortal.

**Bottom:** (*singing*) The plain-song cuckoo dares not trill. . . .

**Narr 1:** Titania gazes awestruck at Bottom, then whispers sweet nothings in his long furry ears.

**Titania:** My eye is taken with thy shape. Thy beauty moves me at first sight to swear I love thee!

**Bottom:** (*shyly*) Methinks, mistress, you have little reason for that. Though

in truth, reason and love do keep little company together nowadays. (*brays*) Eee-aw! **Titania:** Oh, thou art as wise as thou art beautiful!

**Bottom:** In truth, if I had any wisdom, I'd get out of these woods.

**Titania:** Do not leave! I'll have pixies wait on thee, bring you jewels and sing you to sleep on a bed of flowers. Spirits, come!

**Spirits 1, 2:** What wilt thou, Queen?

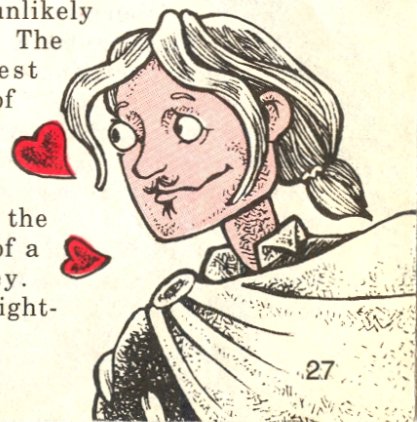
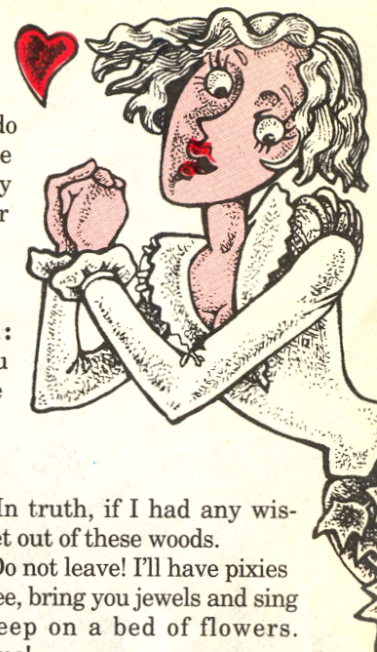
**Titania:** Be kind to this gentleman. Feed him with apricots and dewberries. Fan the moonbeams from his eyes with painted wings of butterflies. Lead him to my bower, sprites.

**Spirits 1, 2:** Hail, mortal!

## Scene 9

**Oberon:** How now, mad spirit Puck? Tell me, has Titania wakened yet? What creature has she fallen for?

**Puck:** My mistress is in love with a monster. Near her resting place, I happened upon a troupe of unlikely fools. The thickest one of all—I fixed upon him the head of a donkey. He fright-





ened the others so, they quit the place. Whereupon Titania waked and straightway loved an ass!

**Oberon:** This falls out better than I could have planned. Now as to the Athenian: Did you do as I said?

**Puck:** I found him sleeping, and the woman nearby. His eyes I touched with purple drops so that as soon as he awoke he

**Hermia:** (*running away*) Never!

**Demetrius:** (*as she leaves*) I can't talk to her when she's so fierce. I'm weary. I'll take a short nap.

**Oberon:** This is the man but not the same woman. Puck, have you made a mistake? He was to love another.

**Puck:** Fate must have meddled with my hand. For these wear Athenian clothes, as you said. Can we mend what is confounded?

**Oberon:** Go find the other woman and, by some magic, bring her here. I'll charm his eyes till she appears.

**Puck:** I go swifter than an arrow.

**Oberon:** (*leaning over Demetrius*) Flower with the purple dye, sink into the apple of his eye. When thou wake, she will be by, then thou shalt love her eye to eye.

## Scene 10

**Narr 1:** Puck returns to Oberon with Helena and Lysander close behind. The king and trickster are not visible to the mortals.

**Puck:** Here she is, my king, with the youth I'd mistaken. Shall we watch? Lord, what fools these mortals be.

**Lysander:** Would I be crying tears of love if I were trying to mock you?

**Helena:** You are so cunning. Do you throw Hermia's vows away?

**Lysander:** I was not in my right mind when I swore to her.

**Helena:** Nor do I think you're in your right mind now to give her up.

**Lysander:** Let her go to Demetrius. He loves her, and he doesn't love you.

**Demetrius:** (*waking up*) Helena, goddess divine! What shall I compare thee to? Let me kiss you, princess!

**Helena:** What? Are you both bent on making fun of me? First you rival each other to love Hermia, now you rival to mock me.

**Lysander:** Demetrius, I yield my part of Hermia to you. Bequeath me Helena, for I love her to death.

**Demetrius:** You can keep Hermia. My feelings for her have vanished. Now my heart is sworn wholly to Helena. Look, here comes Hermia.

**Hermia:** There you are, Lysander! Why did you leave me?

**Lysander:** Why should I stay when love for Helena has called me away?

**Hermia:** What? Say it is not so!

**Helena:** Now even *she* joins them to trick me! Hermia, why are you doing this to me, your friend?

**Hermia:** Who is doing what to whom? It seems that now they both love you. It is *you* who scorns me!

**Helena:** Have you put them up to this?

**Hermia:** What are you talking about?

**Helena:** I suppose you laugh at me behind my back. Well, I'm tired of being made a fool of. I'm leaving!

**Lysander:** Stay, my love, my soul!

**Demetrius:** She will not stay for *you*. But *I* can compel her. I would lose my life for her love.

**Lysander:** Then prove it with your sword!

**Demetrius:** Gladly! Let's go!

**Hermia:** But sweet Lysander. . . ?

**Narr 2:** Desperate, Hermia throws herself at Lysander's legs. He drags her, trying to shake her loose.

**Lysander:** Hang off, thou cat, thou vile thing. I desire never to see thee more. It is Helena I love.

**Hermia:** (*lunging at Helena*) You thief! You have come by night and stolen my love's heart!

**Helena:** Have you no shame? How low would you go that you would tear at me? (*swinging*) You little puppet!

**Hermia:** You would compare our size? I see their high esteem has made you grow even more immense than you already are. Think me not so low that my nails cannot reach your eyes!

**Helena:** Gentlemen, do not let her hurt me! She may be little, but when she's angry, she's a fierce vixen.

**Hermia:** Insults! Let me at her!

**Narr 1:** The men stand before Helena, trying to keep Hermia off. Hermia swipes at Helena.

**Helena:** I swear, I've never wronged you, Hermia. I just told Demetrius you'd fled to these woods. I thought he'd thank me with his devotion. But all he's done is leave me to the wild beasts. I'm going back to Athens.

**Hermia:** Good. Who's stopping you?

**Narr 2:** Lysander and Demetrius wave swords again.

**Lysander:** Come now, Demetrius, if you dare. We'll see who has the right to Helena!

