

Original Text

Modern Text

Act 1, Scene 1

Enter **THESEUS**, **HIPPOLYTA**, and **PHILOSTRATE**,
with others

THESEUS and **HIPPOLYTA** enter
with **PHILOSTRATE** and others.

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,
5 Like to a stepdame or a dowager
Long withering out a young man's revenue.

THESEUS

Our wedding day is almost here, my beautiful Hippolyta. We'll be getting married in four days, on the day of the new moon. But it seems to me that the days are passing too slowly—the old moon is taking too long to fade away! That old, slow moon is keeping me from getting what I want, just like an old widow makes her stepson wait to get his inheritance.

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
10 New bent in heaven, shall behold the night
Of our solemnities.

HIPPOLYTA

No, you'll see, four days will quickly turn into four nights. And since we dream at night, time passes quickly then. Finally the new moon, curved like a silver bow in the sky, will look down on our wedding celebration.

THESEUS

Go, Philostrate,
Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments.
Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth.
Turn melancholy forth to funerals.
15 The pale companion is not for our pomp.

THESEUS

Go, Philostrate, get the young people of Athens ready to celebrate and have a good time. Sadness is only appropriate for funerals. We don't want it at our festivities.

Exit **PHILOSTRATE**

PHILOSTRATE exits.

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 reveling.

Hippolyta, I wooed you with violence, using my sword, and got you to fall in love with me by injuring you. But I'll marry you under different circumstances—with extravagant festivals, public festivities, and celebration.

Enter **EGEUS** and his daughter **HERMIA**,
and **LYSANDER** and **DEMETRIUS**

EGEUS enters with his daughter **HERMIA**,
and **LYSANDER** and **DEMETRIUS**.

EGEUS

20 Happy be Theseus, our renowned duke.

EGEUS

Long live Theseus, our famous and respected duke!

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 2

THESEUS

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

THESEUS

Thanks, good Egeus. What's new with you?

EGEUS

Full of vexation come I with complaint
Against my child, my daughter Hermia.—
Stand forth, Demetrius.—My noble lord,
25 This man hath my consent to marry her.—
Stand forth, Lysander.—And my gracious duke,
This man hath bewitched 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,

EGEUS

I'm here, full of anger, to complain about my daughter Hermia.—Step forward, Demetrius.—My lord, this man, Demetrius, has my permission to marry her.—Step forward, Lysander.—But this other man, Lysander, has cast a magic spell over my child's heart.—You, you, Lysander, you've given her poems, and exchanged tokens of love with my daughter. You've pretended to be in love with her, singing fake love songs softly at her window by moonlight, and you've captured her imagination by giving her locks of your hair, rings, toys, trinkets, knickknacks, little presents, flowers,

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- Knacks, trifles, nosegays, sweetmeats—messengers
 35 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
 45 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,
 50 By him imprinted and within his power
 To leave the figure or disfigure it.
 Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 3**HERMIA**

So is Lysander.

THESEUS

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

HERMIA

I would my father looked 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
 60 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

- 65 Either to die the death or to abjure
 Forever 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,
 70 You can endure the livery of a nun,
 For aye to be in shady cloister mewed,
 To live a barren sister all your life,
 Chanting faint hymns to the cold, fruitless moon.
 Thrice-blessèd they that master so their blood
 75 To undergo such maiden pilgrimage.
 But earthlier happy is the rose distilled

Modern Text

and candies—things that can really influence an impressionable young person. You've connived to steal my daughter's heart, making her stubborn and harsh instead of obedient (like she should be).—And, my gracious duke, if she won't agree to marry Demetrius right now, I ask you to let me exercise the right that all fathers have in Athens. Since she belongs to me, I can do what I want with her—as the law says: I can either make her marry Demetrius—or have her killed.

THESEUS

What do you have to say for yourself, Hermia? Think carefully, pretty girl. You should think of your father as a god, since he's the one who gave you your beauty. To him, you're like a figure that he's sculpted out of wax, and he has the power to keep that figure intact or to disfigure it. Demetrius is an admirable man.

HERMIA

So is Lysander.

THESEUS

You're right, Lysander's admirable too. But since your father doesn't want him to marry you, you have to consider Demetrius to be the better man.

HERMIA

I wish my father could see them with my eyes.

THESEUS

No, you must see them as your father sees them.

HERMIA

Your grace, please forgive me. I don't know what makes me think I can say this, and I don't know if speaking my mind to such a powerful and noble person as yourself will damage my reputation for modesty. But please, tell me the worst thing that could happen to me if I refuse to marry Demetrius.

THESEUS

You'll either be executed or you'll never see another man again. So think carefully about what you want, beautiful Hermia. Consider how young you are, and question your feelings. Then decide whether you could stand to be a nun, wearing a priestess's habit and caged up in a cloister forever, living your entire life without a husband or children, weakly chanting hymns to the cold and virginal goddess of the moon. People who can restrain their passions and stay virgins forever are holy. But although a virgin priestess might be rewarded in heaven, a married woman is happier

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Than that which, withering on the virgin thorn,
Grows, lives, and dies in single blessedness.

Modern Text

on Earth. A married woman is like a rose who is
picked and made into a beautiful perfume, while a
priestess just withers away on the stem.

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 4**HERMIA**

So will I grow, so live, so die, my lord,
80 Ere I will 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
85 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 crazèd title to my certain right.

LYSANDER

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

EGEUS

95 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

(to THESEUS) 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.
105 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.

HERMIA

I'd rather wither away than give up my virginity to
someone I don't love.

THESEUS

Take some time to think about this. By the time
of the next new moon—the day when Hippolyta
and I will be married—be ready either to be
executed for disobeying your father, to marry
Demetrius as your father wishes, or to take a
vow to spend the rest of your life as a virgin
priestess of the moon goddess.

DEMETRIUS

Please give in, sweet Hermia.—And Lysander,
stop acting like she's yours. I've got more of a
right to her than you do.

LYSANDER

Her father loves you, Demetrius. So why don't
you marry him and let me have Hermia?

EGEUS

It's true, rude Lysander, I do love him. That's why
I'm giving him my daughter. She's mine, and I'm
giving her to Demetrius.

LYSANDER

(to THESEUS) My lord, I'm just as noble and rich
as he is. I love Hermia more than he does. My
prospects are as good as his, if not better. And
beautiful Hermia loves me—which is more
important than all those other things I'm bragging
about. Why shouldn't I be able to marry her?
Demetrius—and I'll say this to his face—courted
Nedar's daughter, Helena, and made her fall in
love with him. That sweet lady, Helena, loves
devoutly. She adores this horrible and unfaithful
man.

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 5**THESEUS**

I must confess that I have heard so much
And with Demetrius thought to have spoke thereof,
But being overfull of self-affairs,
My mind did lose it.—But, Demetrius, come.
115 And come, Egeus. You shall go with me.

THESEUS

I have to admit I've heard something about that,
and meant to ask Demetrius about it, but I was
too busy with personal matters and it slipped my
mind.—Anyway, Demetrius and Egeus, both of
you, come with me. I want to say a few things to

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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
 120 (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
 125 Against our nuptial and confer with you
 Of something nearly that concerns yourselves.

EGEUS

With duty and desire we follow you.

Exeunt. Manent LYSANDER and HERMIA

LYSANDER

How now, my love? Why is your cheek so pale?
 How chance the roses there do fade so fast?

HERMIA

130 Belike for want of rain, which I could well
 Beteem them from the tempest of my eyes.

LYSANDER

Ay me! For aught that I could ever read,
 Could ever hear by tale or history,
 The course of true love never did run smooth.
 135 But either it was different in blood—

Modern Text

you in private.—As for you, beautiful Hermia, get ready to do what your father wants, because otherwise the law says that you must die or become a nun, and there's nothing I can do about that.—Come with me, Hippolyta. How are you, my love?—Demetrius and Egeus, come with us. I want you to do some things for our wedding, and I also want to discuss something that concerns you both.

EGEUS

We're following you not only because it is our duty, but also because we want to.

They all exit except LYSANDER and HERMIA.

LYSANDER

What's going on, my love? Why are you so pale?
 Why have your rosy cheeks faded so quickly?

HERMIA

Probably because my cheeks' roses needed rain, which I could easily give them with all the tears in my eyes.

LYSANDER

Oh, honey! Listen, in books they say that true love always faces obstacles. Either the lovers have different social standings—

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 6

HERMIA

O cross! Too high to be enthralled to low.

LYSANDER

Or else misgraffed 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

140 O hell, to choose love by another's eyes!

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,
 145 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.

HERMIA

Oh, what an obstacle that would be! Imagine being too high on the social ladder, and falling in love with someone beneath you.

LYSANDER

Or else they were very different ages—

HERMIA

How awful! Being too old to marry someone young.

LYSANDER

Or else their guardians and advisors said no—

HERMIA

What hell, to have your love life determined by someone else!

LYSANDER

Or, even if the lovers are a good match, their love might be ruined by war, death, or sickness, so that the affair only lasts an instant. Their time together might be as fleeting as a shadow or as short as a dream, lasting only as long as it takes a lightning bolt to flash across the sky. Before you can say "look," it's gone. That's how intense things like love are quickly destroyed.

Original Text

So quick bright things come to confusion.

HERMIA

- 150 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,
155 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 tomorrow night.
165 And in the wood, a league without the town—

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 7

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,
175 By all the vows that ever men have broke
(In number more than ever women spoke),
In that same place thou hast appointed me,
Tomorrow truly will I meet with thee.

LYSANDER

Keep promise, love. Look, here comes Helena.

Enter HELENA

HERMIA

- 180 Godspeed, fair Helena! Whither away?

HELENA

- Call you me "fair"? That "fair" again unsay.
Demetrius loves your fair. O happy fair!
Your eyes are lodestars, and your tongue's sweet air
More tunable than lark to shepherd's ear
185 When wheat is green, when hawthorn buds appear.
Sickness is catching. Oh, were favor 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
190 melody.

Modern Text**HERMIA**

If true lovers are always thwarted, then it must be a rule of fate. So let's try to be patient as we deal with our problem. It's as normal a part of love as dreams, sighs, wishes, and tears.

LYSANDER

That's the right attitude. So, listen, Hermia. I have an aunt who is a widow, who's very rich and doesn't have any children. She lives about twenty miles from Athens, and she thinks of me as a son. I could marry you there, gentle Hermia, where the strict laws of Athens can't touch us. So here's the plan. If you love me, sneak out of your father's house tomorrow night and meet me in the forest a few miles outside of town.

You remember the place—I met you there once with Helena to celebrate May Day.—I'll wait for you there.

HERMIA

Oh, Lysander, I swear I'll be there tomorrow. I swear by Cupid's strongest bow and his best gold-tipped arrow, by the Goddess of Love's innocent doves, by everything that ties lovers together, by the bonfire where Queen Dido burned herself to death when her lover Aeneas jilted her, and by all the promises that men have broken (and men have broken more promises than women have ever made). I give you my word, I will meet you at that spot tomorrow.

LYSANDER

Keep your promise, my love. Look, here comes Helena.

HELENA enters.

HERMIA

Hello, beautiful Helena! Where are you going?

HELENA

Did you just call me "beautiful"? Take it back. You're the beautiful one as far as Demetrius is concerned. Oh, you're so lucky! Your eyes are like stars, and your voice is more musical than a lark's song is to a shepherd in the springtime. Sickness is contagious—I wish beauty were contagious too! I would catch your good looks before I left. My ear would be infected by your voice, my eye by your eye, and my tongue would come down with a bad case of your melodious

Original Text

Were the world mine, Demetrius being bated,
The rest I'd give to be to you translated.

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 8

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

195 Oh, that your frowns would teach my smiles such skill!

HERMIA

I give him curses, yet he gives me love.

HELENA

Oh, 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

200 His folly, Helena, is no fault of mine.

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
205 Seemed Athens as a paradise to me.
Oh, 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.
Tomorrow night when Phoebe doth behold
210 Her silver visage in the watery 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

(to HELENA) And in the wood where often you and I
215 Upon faint primrose beds were wont to lie,
Emptying our bosoms of their counsel sweet,

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speech. If the world were mine, I'd give it all up—
everything except Demetrius—to be you.

Oh, teach me how you look the way you do, and
which tricks you used to make Demetrius fall in
love with you.

HERMIA

I frown at him, but he still loves me.

HELENA

Oh, if only my smiles could inspire love as
effectively as your frowns!

HERMIA

I curse him, but he loves me.

HELENA

If only my prayers could inspire that kind of
affection!

HERMIA

The more I hate him, the more he follows me
around.

HELENA

The more I love him, the more he hates me.

HERMIA

It's not my fault he acts like that, Helena.

HELENA

That's true, it's your beauty's fault. I wish I had a
fault like that!

HERMIA

Don't worry. He won't see my face ever again.
Lysander and I are running away from here.
Before I saw Lysander, Athens seemed like
paradise to me. But Lysander's so attractive that
he's turned heaven into hell!

LYSANDER

Helena, we'll tell you about our secret plan.
Tomorrow night, when the moon shines on the
water and decorates the grass with tiny beads of
pearly light (the time of night that always hides
runaway lovers), we plan to sneak out of Athens.

HERMIA

(to HELENA) In the woods where you and I used
to lounge around on the pale primroses, telling
each other sweet secrets—that's where
Lysander and I will meet.

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 9

There my Lysander and myself shall meet.
And thence from Athens turn away our eyes

From then on we'll turn our backs on Athens.
We'll look for new friends and keep the company

Original Text

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.

LYSANDER

I will, my Hermia.

Exit HERMIA

Helena, adieu.

225 As you on him, Demetrius dote on you!

Exit LYSANDER

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.
 235 And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.
 Nor hath Love's mind of any judgment 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 everywhere.
 For ere Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyne,
 He hailed down oaths that he was only mine.

Modern Text

of strangers. Goodbye, old friend. Pray for us,
 and I hope you win over Demetrius!—Keep your
 promise, Lysander. We need to stay away from
 each other until midnight tomorrow.

LYSANDER

I will, my Hermia.

HERMIA exits.

Goodbye, Helena. I hope Demetrius comes to
 love you as much as you love him!

LYSANDER exits.

HELENA

It's amazing how much happier some people are
 than others! People throughout Athens think I'm
 as beautiful as Hermia. But so what? Demetrius
 doesn't think so, and that's all that matters. He
 refuses to admit what everyone else knows. But
 even though he's making a mistake by obsessing
 over Hermia so much, I'm also making a mistake,
 since I obsess over him. Love can make
 worthless things beautiful. When we're in love,
 we don't see with our eyes but with our minds.
 That's why paintings of Cupid, the god of love,
 always show him as blind. And love doesn't have
 good judgment either—Cupid, has wings and no
 eyes, so he's bound to be reckless and hasty.
 That's why they say love is a child. because it
 makes such bad choices. Just as boys like to
 play games by telling lies, Cupid breaks his
 promises all the time. Before Demetrius ever saw
 Hermia, he showered me with promises and
 swore he'd be mine forever.

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 10

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

Exit

But when he got all hot and bothered over
 Hermia, his promises melted away. I'll go tell
 Demetrius that Hermia is running away tomorrow
 night. He'll run after her. If he's grateful to me for
 this information, it'll be worth my pain in helping
 him pursue my rival Hermia. At least I'll get to
 see him when he goes, and then again when he
 comes back.

HERMIA exits.