

An Act-by-Act Summary

ACT I

The play takes place in ancient Greece where Theseus, Duke of Athens, is planning his wedding to the Amazon Queen, Hippolyta, whom he has defeated in battle. Egeus, one of his noblemen, appears with his daughter, Hermia, because Egeus wants the Duke to force Hermia to marry Demetrius, her father's choice. But Hermia loves Lysander, and the lovers plot to elope. Unfortunately, they reveal their plan to Hermia's friend, Helena, who is in love with Demetrius who does not return her affection. To win his favor, Helena tells Demetrius of Hermia and Lysander's plan. All four young people enter the forest that night: Hermia and Lysander eloping, Demetrius in pursuit of Hermia, and Helena in pursuit of Demetrius.

In another part of Athens, six working men meet to practice a tragedy they hope to perform at Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding; however, it is comically obvious that they have little dramatic experience. Directed by Peter Quince, a carpenter, two members of their troupe will play the star-crossed lovers Pyramus and Thisbe, another will play a lion, a fourth will play the moon, and the fifth will play a wall. Nick Bottom, the weaver, wants to play all the parts himself.

ACT II

In the forest, Oberon, the fairy king, quarrels with his queen, Titania, over custody of an orphaned boy that he wants for a page. He decides to play a trick on her, so he tells Puck, a mischievous sprite, to put juice from a magic flower on Titania's eyes while she sleeps to make her fall in love with the next living thing she sees.

Demetrius appears looking for Hermia. He is followed by Helena who begs for his love, but he harshly rejects her. Oberon feels sorry for her, so he instructs Puck to put some of the magic flower juice on the eyes of Demetrius to make him fall in love with Helena. Puck follows his order, but he gets the wrong young man—he puts the flower juice in Lysander's eyes, and when Lysander awakes, seeing Helena, he forgets his past love, Hermia, and falls in love with Helena instead.

ACT III

In another part of the forest Bottom and his friends meet to rehearse their play. Puck finds them close to where Titania lies asleep, so he transforms Bottom's head into that of a donkey, scaring all of Bottom's friends away. When Titania wakes, she sees Bottom and falls in love with him.

Puck tells Oberon how well his plan is working, but when Demetrius enters, still in pursuit of Hermia, Oberon realizes Puck's mistake. He tells Puck to find Helena, while he puts the flower juice on Demetrius' eyes himself. The juice works, causing both Demetrius and Lysander to be in love with the previously rejected Helena. When both young men profess their love for her, Helena thinks they are making fun of her. Hermia, now rejected, is stunned and angry causing her to insult Helena. The women bicker and so do the men; everyone is angry and quick to fight. Puck thinks it is all great fun, but Oberon has another flower that will set things right. This he instructs Puck to use on Lysander to make him love Hermia again.

ACT IV

CONTINUED...

An Act-by-Act Summary

CONTINUED

Oberon watches the effects of his trick on Titania as she and her fairy attendants dote on the absurd looking Bottom. Eventually Bottom and Titania fall asleep. When Puck returns, Oberon has him break the spell on Titania, but Puck does not transform Bottom back to a human until Titania sees that she has been fawning over an ass. She and Oberon are reunited, and she agrees to give Oberon the boy to be his page.

As night wanes, Theseus, Hippolyta, and Egeus enter the forest to the baying of Theseus' hounds and discover the four young lovers asleep. When they awake, the four lovers are confused but happy to find that each is in love with someone who loves them back. Egeus is furious to find Hermia and Lysander together and demands a father's vengeance, but Theseus, upon seeing their joy and hearing that Demetrius no longer loves Hermia, declares that the two couples will be married the next day. This pleases Hippolyta whose uncertainty about their forthcoming marriage begins to soften.

Bottom also awakes remembering his fantastic night with the fairy queen, not quite certain if it has all been a dream. His friends find him and rejoice that he is himself again just in time to perform in their play for the Duke and his bride.

ACT V

The newly married couples celebrate at Theseus's palace. Theseus is amused by the four lovers' stories about what has happened and is sure they have dreamed the whole thing. Bottom and his friends perform their tragic play for the Duke and his guests although their performance is so misguided that it becomes comic. When it is over and everyone has gone to bed, the fairies slip into the palace. Oberon and Titania bless the three marriages, but it is Puck who has the last word.

By Lara Stauff and Jill Tammen

PARK SQUARE THEATRE TEACHER ADVISORY BOARD