

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Retold by Helen Street

## Language Comparison

In this language comparison, you can see the Real Reads retelling of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with William Shakespeare's original lines highlighted in bold italic.



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# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

## ACT ONE, SCENE ONE HERMIA'S CHOICE

*Egeus*

Noble duke, a humble servant greets you.

*Duke*

Welcome, Egeus. What brings you here to court?

*Egeus*

My daughter, lord, who will not me obey.

Come here, Demetrius. My noble lord,

This man has my consent to marry her.

Step forward, Lysander. My gracious duke,

Yet this one has bewitched my daughter's heart.

*Duke*

Hermia, what say you? Will you agree

To marry Demetrius? It is your father's wish.

The law is strict on disobedient maids.

*Hermia*

I must obey my heart – what is the law?

*Duke*

To die, or ever leave the world of men.

*Hermia*

Become a nun?

*Duke*

Aye, maid, that is the choice.

Hermia

Sooner a nun than that man's bride!

Duke

Come, come, sweet Hermia,  
A lifetime singing hymns in a lonely cell  
Compares not with the joys of married life.  
Take time to think, and by the next new moon  
Before this court pronounce your choice  
To marry, die, or to become a nun.  
Gentlemen, a word.

Hermia

It is the fate of lovers to be crossed,  
Be thought too poor, too rich, too old, too young,  
Or else not suited to a father's taste!

Lysander

*The course of true love never did run smooth;*

Yet even if all are happy with the choice,  
War, death or sickness still may ruin all,  
Making love momentary as a sound,

*Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,  
Brief as the lightning in the murky night.*

I have a widowed aunt who lives outside  
The city walls, some seven leagues at least,  
Beyond the city and beyond its laws.  
There, gentle Hermia, may I marry thee.  
If you love me, creep from your father's house  
Tomorrow night and meet me in the wood

Where once we met with Helena, your friend.  
I will wait for you there.

*Her*mia

My good Lysander,  
*I swear to thee by Cupid's strongest bow*  
That to that place tomorrow I will go.  
God speed, fair Helena! Don't go so soon.

*He*lena

Don't call me fair! Demetrius thinks not so.  
He stole my heart yet gives his own to you.  
I wish I had your looks, your smile, your voice, So I might  
capture him the way you have.

*Her*mia

I frown upon him, yet he loves me still.  
*The more I hate, the more he follows me.*

*He*lena

*The more I love, the more he hateth me.*

*Her*mia

Take comfort. He no more shall see my face.  
Lysander and myself will leave this place.

*Ly*sander

Helena, our secret we will share with you.  
Tomorrow night, when moon shines full and bright  
We meet in woods outside the city gates,  
And then ...

*Her*mia

Elope! And never will return.

*Farewell, sweet playfellow. Pray thou for us,  
And good luck grant thee thy Demetrius.*

*Helena*

I will tell Demetrius of their plan,  
*Then to the wood will he tomorrow night  
Pursue her. And for this intelligence*

If he gives thanks to me with some brief word  
Then that will be reward enough for me.

## ACT ONE, SCENE TWO THE PLAYERS

Quince

Masters, we shall perform a play to honour the noble Duke of Athens. I have the list of those who will take part. Is all our company here?

Bottom

First, good Peter Quince, say what the play is, then read the names of the actors.

Quince

Our play is 'The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisby'.

Bottom

An excellent play! Now, Peter Quince, call forth your actors. Masters, gather round.

Quince

Nick Bottom the weaver.

Bottom

Present!

Quince

You shall play Pyramus.

Bottom

What is Pyramus? A lover or a tyrant?

Quince

He is a lover who kills himself for love.

Bottom

O, I will have the audience in tears! I'll wail and weep and ...

but I would rather play the tyrant and rant and rave about the stage like this:

*'The raging rocks and shivering shocks  
Shall break the locks of prison gates.*

The blazing sun shall blind and stun  
The hatless guard who stands and waits.'

Quince

Francis Flute, bellows-mender. You must take on Thisby.

Flute

*What is Thisby? A wandering knight?*

Quince

*It is the lady Pyramus must love.*

Flute

Not me! I have a beard coming on.

Quince

Fear not. You will wear a mask to hide your face.

Bottom

Let me play Thisby! I can speak in a woman's voice. 'Ah, Pyramus, my lover dear ...'

Quince

No, no, you must play Pyramus. Robin Starveling, the tailor?

Starveling

Here, Peter Quince.

Quince

You will play Thisby's mother, and Tom Snout the tinker shall play Pyramus's father. Snug the joiner, you will take the part of the lion.

Snug

Can I have my lines now? I am very slow at learning.

Quince

All you have to do is roar.

Bottom

Let me play the lion! I can roar louder than any man.

Quince

Yes, and you would frighten the ladies and then the Duke would have us hung.

Snout

Yes, every one of us!

Bottom

O, but I will roar as gently as a dove – or a nightingale.

Quince

No, you must play Pyramus.

Bottom

Very well. Which beard shall I wear?

Quince

None, you shall play it barefaced, master Bottom. Now, masters. Here are your parts. Learn them and let us meet again tomorrow night in the palace wood. There we can rehearse in secret.

Bottom

Indeed. Let us meet and rehearse in our privates.

## ACT TWO, SCENE ONE THE FAIRY QUARREL

Puck

The fairy king, my lord, comes here tonight.  
'Tis hoped the fairy queen stays out of sight.  
Their quarrelling has mixed the seasons up, and now  
We know not if we'll have sun, or rain or snow.  
And all for a pageboy who doth serve the queen,  
For jealous Oberon would have the child  
To live with him and roam the forest wild.

Oberon

*Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania.*

Titania

'Tis jealous Oberon. I will not stay!

Oberon

Give me the boy and I will go with thee.

Titania

Not for your fairy kingdom!

Oberon

Then go thy way.

But I shall pay thee for this stubbornness.  
Puck, the flower, love-in-idleness, has  
Magic juice that, touched on sleeping eyelids,  
Will make a man or woman madly love  
The first creature they set their eyes upon.  
Fetch me that flower, and be thou here again  
Before the giant whale can swim a league.

Puck

*I'll put a girdle round about the earth  
In forty minutes.*

Oberon

When she is asleep,  
I'll drop the juice in proud Titania's eye.  
But who comes here? I am invisible,  
And I will overhear their conversation.

Demetrius

*I love thee not, therefore pursue me not!*

Helena

*I am your spaniel and, Demetrius,  
The more you beat me I will fawn on you.  
Use me but as your spaniel, spurn me, strike me,  
Neglect me, lose me, only give me leave,  
Unworthy as I am, to follow you.*

Demetrius

I'll run from you and hide in the forest,  
And leave you to the mercy of wild beasts.

Helena

No wild beast could be as cruel as you  
Who tears my heart from me each time we meet.

Oberon

Fear not, sweet maid, before he leaves this wood  
He will come to love you as he should.  
Did you bring the flower?

Puck

Yes, here it is.

Oberon

*I know a bank whereon the wild thyme blows,*

*Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,*

*Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,*

*With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine:*

*There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,*

*Lulled in these flowers with dances and delight;*

And with the juice of this I'll streak her eyes

And make her full of foolish fantasies.

Take some of this and search throughout the wood:

A disrespectful youth has spurned the love

Of some sweet maid who follows him.

Anoint his eyes to make him love her true,

*And look thou meet me ere the first cock crow.*

Puck

*Fear not, my lord; your servant shall do so.*

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO  
PUCK'S MISTAKE

Oberon

When you wake, what first you see  
Your very own true-love will be.

Lysander

Fair love, you're tired from wandering in the wood,  
And I confess I have forgot the way.  
Let's rest here, Hermia, if you think it good,  
And wait until dark night becomes bright day.

Hermia

So be it, Lysander. Go find a bed  
For I upon this bank will lay my head.

Puck

*Through the forest I have gone  
But Athenian found I none  
On whose eyes I might approve  
This flower's force in stirring love.  
Night and silence – who is here?  
Weeds of Athens he doth wear.  
This is he, my master said,  
Despised the Athenian maid.  
And here the maiden, sleeping sound,  
On the dank and dirty ground.  
Pretty soul, she durst not lie  
Near this lack-love, this kill-courtesy.  
Churl, upon thy eyes I throw  
All the power this charm doth owe.*

Helena

*O, I am out of breath in this fond chase,  
And his long legs will help him win this race.  
But who is here? Lysander! On the ground!  
Dead? Or asleep? I see no blood, no wound.  
Lysander, if you live, good sir, awake.*

Lysander

*And run through fire I will, for your sweet sake.  
Vile Demetrius, who spurned you so;  
I will cut out his heart to end your woe!*

Helena

Speak not like that. His heart I do hold dear.  
What matters it if he loves Hermia?  
She loves you still, good friend, then be content.

Lysander

*Content with Hermia? No: I do repent  
The tedious minutes I with her have spent.  
Not Hermia, but Helena I love –  
Who will not change a raven for a dove?*

Helena

Why do you play this cruel joke on me?  
What harm I may have done you I can't see.  
Then, I will say farewell. *I must confess  
I thought you lord of more true gentleness.*

Lysander

O Hermia, sleep on there, do not wake.  
With one last look my marriage pledge I break.

I hate you so. Let us keep far apart,  
For only Helena shall have my heart.

*Her*mia

*Help me, Lysander, help me; do thy best  
To pluck this crawling serpent from my breast.*

O! Just a dream, though now I am awake;  
See thou, Lysander, how my pale hands shake.  
Lysander? Where are you? Lysander! Say!  
I see the place is empty where he lay.  
Did a lion take him or is he lost?  
I must now find my love whate'er the cost.

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE  
BOTTOM'S HEAD

Quince

Here's a good spot for our rehearsal. Let's begin.

Bottom

A moment, master Quince. There are things in this play that will not do.

Quince

Tell, Bottom, what are they?

Bottom

First, Pyramus must draw a sword to kill himself. The ladies will faint at that.

Starveling

True, master Bottom. Then we must leave the killing out.

Bottom

No, I have a plan. Master Quince, you shall write a prologue.

Snug

What log is this?

Quince

A prologue – that is a speech before the play begins.

Bottom

And it shall say that we will do no harm with our swords and that I am not killed, and even that I am not Pyramus who dies, but Bottom the weaver.

Starveling

That will reassure the ladies indeed.

Snout

And will they not be afraid of the lion, too?

Bottom

Good point, master Snout.

Snug

Another log?

Bottom

No, you must show your face and speak directly to the ladies and say, 'Do not fear, gentle ladies. I am not a fierce lion, but only Snug the joiner.'

Flute

What shall we do for moonlight, for in the play Pyramus and Thisby meet by moonshine?

Bottom

Someone must enter with a candle and say he is the moon.

Quince

And what shall we do for a wall? The lovers must talk through a hole in a wall.

Snout

As big a problem as the lion!

Bottom

I have another plan for that. Someone must stand between them with his fingers outstretched like this, and they will speak as if they are the wall, and the space between their fingers the hole.

Quince

Then all is well. Now, masters, let us rehearse our parts.

Bottom, you shall begin as Pyramus. And when you have said your speech, step behind that bush until it is your turn again.

**Puck**

What fools are these so near the Fairy Queen?  
I'll do some mischief from a Puck unseen.

**Bottom**

'Thisby, the flowers smell of perfume sweat ...'

**Quince**

Perfume sweet ... !

**Bottom**

' ... of perfume sweet, so is the smell of your dear feet. But wait for me till I return. My heart for you will ever burn.'

**Quince**

Now, Flute, you must speak your lines as Thisby.

**Flute**

'O, Pyramus, where have you gone?'

**Bottom**

'I am here, sweet Thisby!'

**Quince**

Run, masters, run for your lives! It is a monster!

**Bottom**

*I see their knavery. This is to make an ass out of me, to fright me if they could. But I will not stir from this place, do what they can. I will walk up and down here, and will sing that they shall hear I am not afraid.*

*The ousel cock, so black of hue*

*With orange-tawny bill,*

*The throstle with his note so true,  
The wren with little quill.*

Titania

*What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?*

Bottom

*The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,  
The plain-song cuckoo grey,  
Whose note full many a man doth mark,  
And dares not answer nay.*

Titania

A voice so sweet, and now my eyes  
Look on a face so heavenly  
That all at once I am in love  
With this most strange and hairy god.

Bottom

I thank you, madam, though I am no more handsome than the  
next fellow.

Titania

Not so, for you are beautiful to me,  
And now I think my lover you shall be.  
My fairies'll fetch you jewels from the deep  
And sing, while you on perfumed flowers sleep.  
They'll *pluck the wings from painted butterflies*  
*To fan the moonbeams from your sleeping eyes.*

## ACT THREE, SCENE TWO THE LOVERS' QUARREL

Oberon

Here's my messenger. How now, mad spirit?

Puck

*My mistress with a monster is in love!*

*While she was in her dull and sleeping hour,*

*A crew of patches, rude mechanicals,*

*Were met together to rehearse a play.*

Upon one clumsy oaf I fixed a donkey's head

*And in that moment (so it came to pass)*

*Titania waked and straightway loved an ass.*

Oberon

O, this has turned out better than I hoped.

And have you yet bewitched the Athenian's eyes

With the love-juice as I did bid you do?

Puck

I found him sleeping – that is finished, too.

Oberon

*Stand close; this is the same Athenian.*

Puck

*This is the woman, but not this the man.*

Demetrius

Why are you cruel to one who loves you so,

And speak as if I were a bitter foe?

Hermia

If you have killed Lysander in his sleep,

Then take your sword and plunge it in my heart.  
If he is dead, I do not wish to live.

*Demetrius*

I have not killed him, though if he were here  
I'd take my sword and cut him ear to ear.

*Hermia*

Wicked Demetrius, now I will go.  
See me no more, whether he be dead or no.

*Demetrius*

O, I am weary from this pointless chase.  
I'll lay me down to sleep in this leafy place.

*Oberon*

What mistake is this? Puck, what have you done?  
Some other eyes, some other heart is won.

*About the wood go swifter than the wind*

*And Helena of Athens look thou find.*

*By some illusion see thou bring her here,*

I'll charm his eyes until she does appear.

*Puck*

Helena, I bring to thee  
And the youth mistook by me.

*Oberon*

Stand aside. The noise they make  
Will cause Demetrius to awake.

*Lysander*

Why must you think I play a trick on you?  
Are not these tears the proof my love is true?

Helena

It is not true, for yesterday your heart  
Was pledged to Hermia, is that not so?

Lysander

If I loved her I was not in my mind!

Helena

You have lost it indeed to speak like this.

Lysander

*Demetrius loves her, and he loves not you.*

Demetrius

*O Helena, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine!  
To what, my love, shall I compare thine eyne?  
O princess fair, give me your hand to kiss;  
Send me forever to a place of bliss!*

Helena

*O spite! O hell! I see you are all bent  
To set against me for your merriment.  
To vow, to swear, and superpraise my parts  
When I am sure you hate me with your hearts.*

Lysander

*You are unkind, Demetrius, be not so –  
For you love Hermia, this you know I know,  
And I will give up Hermia's love to thee  
If you will leave sweet Helena to me.*

Demetrius

*Lysander, keep thy Hermia, I will none.  
If e'er I loved her, all that love is gone.*

*Hermia*

Thank the gods I've found you safe and well,  
Your absence from me was a living hell.

*Lysander*

A hell it was if I had stayed with you!

*Hermia*

You do not know what you are saying, dear.

*Helena*

She is a willing part of their cruel game.  
Ungrateful Hermia, have you forgot  
The friendship we have known since we were young?  
Like sisters have we been, loyal and true,  
But now unkindness is your only gift.

*Hermia*

Helena, I am amazed at your words.  
It is not I but you who are unkind.

*Helena*

Then why should these two men who love you, plead  
False love for me but by your own command?

*Hermia*

I understand not what you mean by this.

*Helena*

Continue your pretence. Make faces now  
At me behind my back. Yes, have your fun;  
This maid has had enough. Farewell, false friends!

*Lysander*

Stay gentle Helena, do not go,  
You are my life, my love, my heart, my soul!

Hermia

Lysander, do not tease her – it is cruel.

Demetrius

His love is false; all mine I pledge to you.

Lysander

Then draw your sword and we will see who's true.

Hermia

No, no, my love, I will not let you fight!

Lysander

Let go of me, you hag, and leave my sight.

Hermia

O Helena, what have you done, you thief?  
You have stolen the heart that should be mine!

Helena

I have done nothing wrong, deserve no blame,  
'Tis you, and they, who play this vicious game.

Hermia

Vicious? Why, I will show you vicious, maid!

Helena

Gentlemen, save me, though you mock me still.  
*When she is angry, she is keen and shrewd.*

*She was a vixen when she went to school,  
And though she be but little she is fierce.*

Hermia

Take that back or I will come at thee!

Lysander

Get you gone, you pipsqueak, you vile thing!

Demetrius

Nay, I shall be the one to take her part.

Lysander

Think you so? Then let us fight a duel  
Elsewhere, and you may prove yourself to me!

Demetrius

Agreed! The winner shall have Helena's hand.

Hermia

You, mistress! This is all because of you!

Helena

I will not stay to let you scratch my face,  
But run away from this unhappy place.

Hermia

*I am amazed and know not what to say.*

Oberon

This is your doing, O mischievous sprite!  
Something must be done to put things right.  
Bring down a mist about this wood so thick  
That none shall see their hand before their face.

Puck

With false calls I will lead each man astray,  
So none be harmed on this midsummer's night.

Oberon

When they at last do fall asleep, this herb  
Into Lysander's eye do crush it well.  
Its juice will right the wrong that has been done,  
And when the lovers wake and meet at dawn

It shall be as if they had but dreamt a dream.  
Go, work your magic on these mortals, Puck.  
I'll to the Fairy Queen, demand the boy,  
And lift the love charm from her eyes. Haste!

## ACT FOUR BOTTOM IS RESTORED

Quince

Have you been to Bottom's house? Is he come home yet?

Starveling

He cannot be heard of.

Snug

He has been carried off for sure, masters,  
and we will never see him again!

Flute

But how are we to perform our play?

Quince

It cannot be done without Bottom.

Bottom

What cannot be done? For I, Bottom, am here!

I've had a wondrous adventure, but I shall tell you no more for now. But put on your costumes, tie on your beards and lace up your shoes, for there is a play to be done. Hurry, masters, the lords and ladies are waiting!

Duke

Good day, young friends.

You all seem touched with joy.

Lysander

My lord, we all have had the strangest dream

In which we loved first one fair maid, and then The other  
seemed still fairer yet to us.

Now all is resolved. Demetrius

And Helena have found true love at last.  
And Hermia and I have pledged our hearts.  
And so, my lord, we ask consent to wed.

*Egeus*

*I beg the law! The law upon his head!*

Demetrius shall have my daughter's hand.

*Demetrius*

I only wish for Helena's sweet love.

If she will have me, Duke, I ask your leave  
For us to marry, too.

*Helena*

O, yes, my love!

*Duke*

Egeus, I will override your will.

These happy couples shall this day be wed  
At my command. Come to the palace, all,  
To feast and celebrate the power of love.

## ACT FIVE THE WORKMEN'S PLAY

*Duke*

What entertainment have we for tonight?

*Egeus*

Some workmen, lord, who would perform  
a play.

*Duke*

Then bid them begin.

*Egeus*

I have seen them act.

A worse performance there has never been!

*Duke*

Then we shall have some fun at their expense.

*Shout*

I am Wall and through this gap, the lovers Thisby and Pyramus  
must whisper their love.

*Bottom*

Good sirs and ladies, too. I am Pyramus and now I will speak.

O darkest night! O night so black!

O night, o night! Alack! Alack!

*Duke*

'Tis safe to say it is night!

*Bottom*

Thisby, my love, where are you?

*Flute*

Here, my love, behind this wall that ever keeps our hearts apart!

Bottom

*O kiss me through the hole of this vile wall.*

Flute

*I kiss the wall's hole, not your lips at all.*

Hermia

A more handsome man than Pyramus, I think!

Bottom

Meet me then at Ninny's tomb.

Flute

I go, I fly, I'll be there soon!

Snout

My part now is finished and so Wall bids you farewell.

Snug

Ladies, be not afraid. I am not a real lion but Snug the joiner. I am a gentle soul and mean you no harm.

Starveling

Lords – and ladies – the lovers must have moonlight to meet by. Therefore, this here lantern shall be the moon and I am the man in the moon.

Lysander

Then there is some mistake, for he should be inside the lantern.

Demetrius

He is afraid of being burned!

Flute

*Where is my love?*

Lysander

*Well roared, Lion.*

Helena

*Well run, Thisby.*

Hermia

*Well shone, Moon.*

Demetrius

*And then came Pyramus ...*

Bottom

*Sweet moon, I thank thee for thy sunny beams!*

That light me to the woman of my dreams.

But wait! What is this? My Thisby's cloak all stained with blood?

A vile beast has killed my love! O woe is me! Alack! Alack!

Duke

There is certainly a lack of something here!

Bottom

Come, sword, and stab the heart of Pyramus! I die.

Egeus

I wish he would.

Bottom

*Now am I dead, now am I fled;*

*My soul is in the sky.*

*Tongue, lose they light! Moon, take thy flight!*

*Now die, die, die, die – die!*

Duke

Thanks be for that.

Flute

*Asleep, my love? What, dead, my dove?*

Come, sword, and do your worst.

Duke

Moonshine and Lion are left to bury the dead.

Egeus

They should have buried the play!

Duke

*The iron tongue of midnight hath told twelve!*

*Lovers to bed – 'tis almost fairy time.*

Puck

*Now the hungry lion roars,*

*And the wolf howls the moon;*

*Whilst the heavy ploughman snores,*

*All with weary task fordone.*

Oberon

*Now, until the break of day,*

Through this house each fairy stray.

Titania

*Hand in hand, with fairy grace,*

*Will we sing and bless this place.*

Puck

*If we shadows have offended,*

*Think but this, and all is mended,*

*That you have but slumbered here*

*While these visions did appear,*

*And this weak and idle theme*

*No more yielding but a dream.*