

A Midsummer Night's Dream Characters

Theseus, Duke of Athens

Theseus, the Duke of Athens, has recently won a war against the Amazons, and to reward himself for his victory is going to marry their queen Hippolyta, whether she likes it or not.

This is not the first time he has ravished a woman, and he has also at times loved and then abandoned others. Though he is reasonably sympathetic to Hermia's conundrum, he insists on upholding the law as he knows it rather than making any exceptions. He nevertheless does not fully approve of how Egeus and Demetrius act. He enjoys hunting and has a taste for listening to his hounds bark to the echo. He is not above teasing young folks found sleeping in the wood, and uses his authority against Egeus once Demetrius renounces his claim on Hermia. He is not imaginative, or at least he is enough of a rationalist to disbelieve the truth of strange tales. He has an affection for his more simple subjects and their unpracticed efforts to please him. What happens on the morning of his wedding to Hippolyta can be discovered in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

Egeus

Egeus is a courtier at Theseus's court.

A sterling defender of old-fashioned patriarchy, he intends either to have his daughter Hermia marry the man he choose or to execute her. He has no fondness at all for Lysander, who shows him scant respect, and calls for him to be prosecuted when he finds Hermia with him in the woods, but he must accept Theseus's decision to the contrary. He presents the various entertainment options for the evening of the wedding, discouraging as best he can the Duke from choosing the Mechanicals' play.

Lysander

Lysander is a young man of Athens, of good family and fortune.

He has a mocking tongue on him. In love with Hermia, he convinces her to flee with him to the house of his aunt, who dotes on him, and who lives outside the reach of Athenian law. He gets them lost in the woods on their way, to the extent that they need to sleep. He rather hopes to cuddle up with Hermia, but she will have none of it and sends him to sleep on his own. Awakening with Puck's love juice in his eyes just in time to see Helena, he begins to make extravagant love to her. He enters a bitter rivalry with Demetrius over her, insults Hermia, and rushes off to fight a duel with the other man. Once Puck makes all well, he can scarcely tell just what has happened to him.

Demetrius

Demetrius is not the most admirable of young men. Having wooed Helena and won her heart, he shifts his attentions to Hermia, who will have none of him, but whose father favors him.

Told by Helena of Hermia and Lysander's flight, he follows them to the woods, though deeply irritated by his inability to shake Helena from his coattails. He threatens her with abandonment and possibly molestation, but to no avail. His attempts to woo Hermia as she distraughtly seeks Lysander are no more successful. When Puck's love juice makes him fall in love with Helena, he is as extravagant as Lysander in his praises of her, and runs off to fight a duel with the other man for her sake. When the lovers wake with their senses restored, he admits to Theseus that he is in love with Helena, and that he was contracted to her before he ever tried to make a match with Hermia.

Philostrate

Philostrate is Theseus's Master of the Revels. The Duke sends him to encourage everybody in Athens to celebrate his wedding and have a festive time during the four days leading up to the ceremony.

He brings Theseus the list of possible entertainments. Unimpressed by the Mechanicals' play, he unsuccessfully attempts to dissuade Theseus from choosing it.

Quince

Peter Quince is a carpenter with literary pretensions who organizes some fellow workers into preparing a play he has written to present to Theseus and Hippolyta on their wedding day (in which he presents the Prologue).

He is well-respected by his fellows, and Bottom sets great store by his writing abilities. He is able to keep Bottom under at least some control.

Bottom

Bottom the weaver is a take-charge sort of fellow, and a great stage ham who wishes to play all the parts he can in Quince's play.

In the end, he agrees to stick to Pyramus only. Beyond this, he finds some problems in the script and suggests the way to mend them. Given an ass's head by Puck, he does not realize it in the faintest. Despite his stagey pretensions, he is an honest, down-to-earth man, and though confused by Titania's intention is perfectly courteous and friendly to the fairies she set to serve him. He talks enough that Titania has the fairies render him dumb. He is more interested in having a good meal, listening to rural music, conversing with the fairies and having a nap than sleeping with Titania. Waking back in his normal form, he recalls his night as a dream of such intensity that he wishes to have Quince turn it to a ballad. He is beloved by his fellows.

Flute

Flute is a bellows-mender, a young man whose facial hair is only just beginning to grow. His voice may be unbroken.

He accepts to play Thisbe in Quince's play despite not wishing to play a woman.

Snout

Snout is a tinker cast as Pyramus's father and the Wall in Quince's play.

He is cautious about the possibility of displeasing his social betters, and finds several grounds on which to tinker with the play

Snug

Snug the joiner is not the most quick-witted of fellows, and is therefore cast as the lion to avoid his having to learn lines.

To satisfy Snout and Bottom's concerns of frightening the ladies of the court, however, he is given eight lines to reassure them that he is not, in fact, a lion.

Starveling

Starveling the tailor portrays Moonshine in Quince's play.

He is interrupted by the courtiers' comments, and in the end merely summarizes his speech rather than giving it.

Hippolyta

Hippolyta is Queen of the Amazons. Having been defeated in battle by Theseus, she is now betrothed to him.

Being an Amazon, it is to be expected that she is a great huntress, and that she will enjoy the sound of the baying of Theseus's hounds, which he intends to have her hear during the hunt. She warns him that her standards for such concerts are high. She is more convinced by the lovers' tale than Theseus is, pointing to the evidence of their change of heart. She has no taste for the humiliation of her inferiors, but she is also blunt and unable to hide her opinion of the Mechanicals' play. She reappears in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

Hermia

Hermia is Egeus's daughter. In love with Lysander, she refuses to marry Demetrius despite the threat of death for her refusal.

She speaks up to praise Lysander to the Duke, and swears to live a nun rather than marry Demetrius. She agrees to run away with her lover to his aunt's, beyond the reach of Athenian law. Lost in the forest on the way, she is demure and insists that Lysander not sleep next to her, which ends up causing no end of trouble. Waking to find him gone, she is frightened that Demetrius may have killed him, and rants at him in fine fashion. She has always had a fierce temper. She is darkish of skin, short, and has bright eyes. She and Helena were inseparable friends as children, and it is only the misfortune of Demetrius's misplaced love that has separated them; this leads her to believe that Helena is part of a prank being pulled on her by all three of the others when Puck makes a mess of this.

Helena

Helena is a young lady of Athens. She was wooed by Demetrius and remains obsessively, even masochistically in love with him.

Fair-skinned and tall, she feels very put-upon and mopes a great deal, but not without good reason. When Hermia and Lysander tell her of their plan to run away, she decides to betray them to Demetrius simply because this will give her a chance to see him again. Despite her deep childhood friendship with Hermia, she is willing to believe the worst of her when she thinks herself mocked. She runs away from the others to return to Athens, but needs to rest on the way. Come morning, Demetrius is in love with her again, and all is well.

Oberon

Oberon is King of Fairies. Proud, angry, and vengeful, he quarrels with Titania for the sake of a changeling boy, and on being refused decides to humiliate her into obedience.

He is interested enough in mortals to decide to make happy a lovelorn girl passing by at the time that he hits on this idea for forging a reconciliation with his Queen. He is fond of Puck, but not blind to his anarchic tendencies, and suspects him of causing the lovers' confusion willfully. He drugs Titania in her sleep to make her fall in love with some monstrous creature, and uses her infatuation to take the changeling boy from her. Having done so, he removes his spell and reconciles himself with her. They then go to bless Theseus's house on his wedding night, promising good fortune to all the wedded couples.

Titania

Titania is Queen of Fairies. Her quarrel with Oberon disturbs nature, but in memory of her votaress she still refuses to give up the boy who is at the quarrel's root.

Charmed by Oberon, she is entranced by Bottom in his transformed shape, she promises him the world to have him stay by her, though she has him charmed dumb when he spends too much time chatting to the attendants she gives him. She is so besotted that when Oberon asks her for the changeling boy again, she gives him up without a second thought. With the charm taken off her, she is reconciled with Oberon, and goes with him to bless Theseus's house on his wedding night. She is proud, obstinate, and careful of her duties, and faithful to the memory of a dead mortal friend.

Puck

Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, is an amoral prankster of a spirit. Oberon's jester, he delights in practical jokes, transforming Bottom for a lark and making him the object of Titania's love.

When he makes a mistake in carrying out Oberon's commands, he is not repentant, and merely enjoys the greater chaos he has caused. He can counterfeit the voices of humans to perfection, can blacken the night, and is occasionally used by Oberon as a janitor.

Peaseblossom

Peaseblossom is a fairy of Titania's court. Commanded by Titania, it is one of the ones to attend on Bottom.

Cobweb

Cobweb is a fairy of Titania's court. Commanded by Titania, it is one of the ones to attend on Bottom.

Moth

Moth is a fairy of Titania's court. Commanded by Titania, it is one of the ones to attend on Bottom.

Mustardseed

Mustardseed is a fairy of Titania's court. Commanded by Titania, it is one of the ones to attend on Bottom.

A Fairy

A **Fairy** is one of Titania's servants, charged with spreading the dew. She recognizes Puck, and is not fond of Oberon.

First Fairy

The **First Fairy** sings a charm to keep Titania's sleeping place safe.

The First and Second Fairies may be part of the quartet that later attend on Bottom.

Second Fairy

The **Second Fairy** sings a charm to keep Titania's sleeping place safe.

The First and Second Fairies may be part of the quartet that later attend on Bottom.

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