Shakespeare’s
A Midsummer Night’s Dream

Adapted by Dr. Carolyn Harper

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

# of lines

NARRATOR ........................................ our guide 8

ATHENIANS

THESEUS ........................................ duke of Athens 24

HIPPOLYTA ................................. his soon-to-be-bride; queen of the Amazons 7

EGEUS ............................................ father to Hermia 4

HERMIA ........................................... daughter to Egeus; in love with Lysander 16

LYSANDER ....................................... in love with Hermia 21

HELENA ........................................... in love with Demetrius 18

DEMETRIUS ..................................... also in love with Hermia 20

PHILOSTRATE ................................. master of the revels 5

BUMPKINS

QUINCE ......................................... carpenter, directs the play 32

SNUG .............................................. joiner; plays Lion 3

BOTTOM .......................................... weaver; plays Pyramus 43

SNOUT ............................................ tinker; plays Wall 6

FLUTE ............................................. bellows-mender; plays Thisbe 14

STARVELING ................................. tailor; plays Moonshine 6

FAIRIES

OBERON .......................................... king of the fairies 23

TITANIA .......................................... queen of the fairies 18

PUCK (Robin Goodfellow) ......... fairy servant to Oberon 29

PEASEBLOSSOM ............................... fairy servant to Titania 2

MOTH .............................................. another 1

COBWEB ......................................... another 2

MUSTARDSEED ......................... another 3

OTHER FAIRIES ................................ as desired 9
SETTING

The play takes place in Athens and an enchanted forest nearby. It can be performed on a bare stage with two thrones and seating for the play-within-the-play making up Theseus’s court, and some stones and bushes for the forest. As with all of his plays, Shakespeare himself provides setting with allusions to place within the text, eliminating the need for elaborate sets.
SHAKESPEARE’S A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM

NARRATOR: (ENTERS and reads from a scroll.) Once upon a time, in the late 1500s, there lived a man named William Shakespeare, a wordsmith and a maker of plays. We don’t know very much about Shakespeare personally. We do know his birthdate—April 23, 1564—and his death date—April 23, 1616. We know he was married and had children. We know that he went to London a poor man and ended up a very rich man. We know that he and his company of players were sponsored by Queen Elizabeth the First and later by King James the First. But about the man himself, we know very little. As a matter of fact, the only information which we do have about his writing comes from one of his actors who once wrote that whenever William Shakespeare sat down with “quill in hand,” he got sick to his stomach.

About his plays, we know much more, and our play today—A Midsummer Night’s Dream—is one of his most popular. First produced in 1595, it remains one of the most loved of all of Shakespeare’s plays. We hope you enjoy our version of this piece.

And now, good friends, we meet our players. (THESEUS and HIPPOLYTA ENTER.) These be Athenians—Lord Theseus who has conquered the Amazons and has brought back for his bride-to-be, Queen Hippolyta. (LYSANDER, HERMIA, HELENA, and DEMETRIUS ENTER.) And coming here are our young lovers—Lysander and Hermia, Helena and Demetrius. A merry mix-up in misplaced love. (Points from DEMETRIUS to HERMIA.) He loves her, but she loves him not. (Points from HELENA to DEMETRIUS.) She loves him, but he loves her not. And because of these four entangled, blinded lovers, we have today’s play.

(QUINCE, SNUG, BOTTOM, SNOT, FLUTE, and STARVELING ENTER, rowdy and awkward.) Such as they are, these be bumpkins. They are for your sport and laughter.

(We hear MAGIC SOUNDS and FAIRIES giggling OFFSTAGE.) And there be fairies—but not yet, for fairies are creatures of the imagination, very headstrong and willful, and they will not play until the play hath begun. And therefore, with no more ado, let us give our play for you. (ALL EXIT, except THESEUS and HIPPOLYTA, as the scene shifts to Athens and Theseus’s palace.)
THESEUS: Now, fair Hippolyta, our marriage day will soon arrive. Although it is but four days hence, I am most anxious for the time to pass.

HIPPOLYTA: Four days will pass soon enough, my love.

THESEUS: Let the word spread through all Athens... Lord Theseus wishes his marriage to be met with feasting and celebrations! (EGEUS ENTERS.) But see, who comes here? It is my good friend Egeus, and looking so unhappy. What ails thee, friend Egeus?

EGEUS: Theseus, my lord, I come to you to beg that you command my wayward daughter to forget her stupidity and disobedience. Make her do her duty and obey her father's wishes, as a good child ought! Stand forth, Hermia! (HERMIA ENTERS.) Stand forth, Demetrius! (DEMETRIUS ENTERS. To THESEUS.) My lord, this man hath my consent to marry Hermia, but instead she wishes to marry this man—Lysander! (LYSANDER ENTERS.)

THESEUS: Foolish girl, why will you not obey your good father's wishes?

HERMIA: My lord, I love my father, but I love Lysander more, and only him will I wed.

THESEUS: Look, my girl, if you do not wed whom your father chooses, he can lock you up in a convent forever.

LYSANDER: (Turns on DEMETRIUS.) Demetrius! You have her father's love! Leave me Hermia, and you wed her father!

EGEUS: Disrespectful boy!

THESEUS: I am lord here! And I do command that Hermia marry Demetrius! Lysander and Hermia, stay here awhile and say your goodbyes. You shall never see each other again. Come all and let these two disappointed lovebirds shed their tears. Hermia shall marry Demetrius, and that's all there is to that! Come, Demetrius, we shall make plans for your wedding—even as the fair Hippolyta and I make plans for ours. (ALL EXIT, except HERMIA and LYSANDER.)

HERMIA: I shall never marry Demetrius! (To LYSANDER.) It is you alone I love. I'll die first!

LYSANDER: Do not die, love, but live with me. Listen, I have an aunt who lives not far from here in the woods outside of Athens. If we can but escape to her cottage, she will hide us. Then we can find a priest who will marry us. Once married, not even Lord Theseus can harm us, for no man has power to break the sacred bonds of marriage. Tonight you must escape from your father's house and meet me in the forest.

HERMIA: Oh, my love, I will.
LYSANDER: Now hush, my dearest, for here comes Helena, who might give away our plot. (HELENA ENTERS.)

HERMIA: Godspeed, fair Helena! Where goest thou?

HELENA: Call you me fair? Ha! Demetrius loves you and loves not me. It is you he thinks is fair. Not me. I am miserable!

HERMIA: But I don’t love him. I scorn him.

HELENA: It matters not. It is you he loves. Me? He thinks I am a toad!

HERMIA: Take comfort. He no more shall see my face. He’s yours to have, if you will grace.

LYSANDER: Gentle Helena, to you our plan we will unfold. Tonight, under the full moon, we two shall escape to the woods and pledge our love and be married.

HERMIA: (To HELENA.) Therefore, Demetrius will be yours alone. Keep our secret, dearest friend. (To LYSANDER.) And now, come, my love, we will go to the duke and my father and pretend to them that we accept the royal decree. For by seeming to give consent, my father will give me that freedom which will allow me to flee from his house tonight. Adieu. (She and LYSANDER EXIT.)

HELENA: (Waves to them.) Never fear, your secret is safe with me. Oh, spite and spite and triple spite! It was I Demetrius loved until he met Hermia. I was the fairest. I was the sweetest. But now all he can see is she! Oh, unfair love, you are always blind. But wait! If I could get Demetrius to see how much Hermia despises him and how she dotes on Lysander, Demetrius might return to me. I will tell him of the lovers’ plan. He will follow them to the forest, and I will follow him. There let him see how badly she behaves and, turning from her, he will find me true. (EXITS.)

NARRATOR: (ENTERS.) Poor Helena. Love really is blind. She will betray her friends’ confidence in the hope of making Demetrius love her. Oh well, as Shakespeare would say, “That’s the stuff of which good plots are made.” But here come our bumpkins, who are the subplot of this story. These fellows are goodly, but not too bright. They have decided to put together a little play of their own for the duke’s entertainment at the marriage feast. Scholars tell us that with these characters, Shakespeare was really drawing character sketches from the actors in his company. If so, he must have been pretty frustrated. (EXITS. BUMPKINS ENTER.)

QUINCE: Is all our company here?

BOTTOM: Call them according to their roles in the script.

QUINCE: Here is the name of every person thought fit to play in our interlude… before the duke… on his wedding day… at night.

BOTTOM: First, give us the name of the play, and then call the actors.
QUINCE: Marry, our play is called *The Most Lamentable Comedy and Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe*. Now, for the actors—Nick Bottom, the weaver.

BOTTOM: Ready. What part do I have?

QUINCE: You shall play Pyramus.

BOTTOM: What is Pyramus? A lover or a villain?

QUINCE: A lover that kills himself most beautifully for love.

BOTTOM: Oh, that will call for tears. I will create in the audience a flood of tears, a storm of tears... a deluge of tears! Noah shall build another ark for the tears that eyes will shed. A veritable river of tears... a sea of tears... an ocean of tears! *(Wails.)* Oh!... Oh!... Oh!... That was pretty good.

QUINCE: Flute, the bellows-mender.

FLUTE: Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE: You shall play Thisbe.

FLUTE: What is Thisbe? A brave knight?

QUINCE: It is the lady that Pyramus must love.

FLUTE: Oh, don’t make me play a girl.

QUINCE: You can play it in a mask and in a teeny, little voice. No one will know who you are.

BOTTOM: Let me play Thisbe, too. I’ll speak in the tiniest little voice. *(Little voice.)* “Thisbe, Thisbe... ah, Pyramus, my lover, dear.”

QUINCE: No. No! You must play Pyramus, and Flute, you play Thisbe.

BOTTOM: Oh, well... proceed.

QUINCE: Robin Starveling, the tailor.

STARVELING: Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE: You, Pyramus’s father. Myself, Thisbe’s father. Snug, the joiner, you the lion’s part. And that’s the cast.

SNUG: Have you the lion’s part written? Pray you, if it’s written, give it to me, for I am a slow study.

QUINCE: It’s only roaring.

BOTTOM: Let me play the lion, too. I will roar so that it will do men good to hear me. *(Roars.)* Roar! I will roar so that I will make the duke say, “Oh, let him roar again! Let him roar again!”

QUINCE: If you roar too terribly and frighten the ladies, the duke will hang us!

ALL: Hang us?!

BOTTOM: That’s true. But I can roar gently. *(Little roar.)* Roar! And they will say that I am a most sweet lion.
QUINCE: You can play no part but Pyramus, for Pyramus is the most important part in the play.

BOTTOM: Then by all means, I am for Pyramus. And as for the other roles, we shall just have to make do.

QUINCE: Good, that’s settled. ’Twill do us no good to rehearse in the town, for everyone shall know and thereby spoil the surprise. Let us meet in the forest tonight and make a practice of our parts so that all will say, “What clever fellows these, to have performed so brilliantly and with such wit.” Perhaps, too, the duke shall make us some reward for our goodly entertainment. (BUMPKINS EXIT.)

NARRATOR: (ENTERS.) And now we give you fairies. (EXITS. PUCK ENTERS with FAIRIES. The scene shifts to the enchanted forest.)

PUCK: How now, spirits? Whither wander thou?

FAIRY ONE: Over hill, over dale, Through bush, through brier…

FAIRY TWO: Over park, over pale, Through flood, through fire…

FAIRY THREE: We do wander everywhere, Swifter than the moon’s sphere…

FAIRY FOUR: And we serve the fairy queen, To dew her orbs upon the green.

PUCK: Be careful that your fairy queen does not come here tonight. My master, the fairy king, Oberon, is angry with her. For she stole a child away from him that he wished to make his servant. If she does not give back the child, my master will do something terrible.

FAIRY ONE: If your master is Oberon, then you must be that mischievous rascal, Robin Goodfellow.

PUCK: ’Tis true, and others call me Puck. My master’s slave am I and do his bidding to perform all sorts of devilment. But move aside, here comes Oberon now.

FAIRY THREE: And here comes our mistress, too, the fairy queen, Titania. (OBERON and TITANIA ENTER from opposite sides of the stage.)

OBERON: Proud queen, have you come to beg forgiveness of me?

TITANIA: Jealous Oberon, I need nothing from you. Quick, fairies, let us leave this place!

OBERON: Wait, rash Titania! Am I not your husband?

TITANIA: Husband, yes, but master, no. I am not your slave.

OBERON: Give me that child that you stole from me. I would have him for my own and raise him to all the manly arts, to hunt wild game, to raise the lance and shield.
TITANIA: You would raise him to war and killing. I will have none of that. No, he shall sing sweet songs and dance. He shall bring me flowers and play with my sweet elves.

OBERON: A wife who loves, obeys her husband.

TITANIA: Then, methinks, I love you not at all. Fairies, away! (She and FAIRIES EXIT.)

OBERON: Puck, come hither. Go round the world and fetch that flower which is called the “flower-of-love.” Whosoever its juice does touch, they fall in love with that which their eyes first see. I think it time I taught that erring wife of mine a lesson.

PUCK: (Laughs.) I hear my master and obey. (EXITS.)

OBERON: But who comes here? I shall become invisible and attend. (With a magical gesture, he becomes “invisible” to all but the AUDIENCE.)

DEMETRIUS: (ENTERS. To HELENA, who follows him ON.) I love thee not, therefore, pursue me not. Where are Lysander and Hermia? You swore to me that they would be here. When I catch them, I shall slay that dog, Lysander.

HELENA: I love you so.

DEMETRIUS: Why? Don’t I tell you that I don’t love you?

HELENA: Yes, but even so, I love you all the more.

DEMETRIUS: You make me sick when I look on you!

HELENA: I become sick when I cannot look on you!

DEMETRIUS: I run from thee and hide in these woods. (EXITS.)

HELENA: Run where you will and hide, my love will find you no matter where! (EXITS, following him.)

OBERON: Fare thee well, young maiden. It would seem that you could use some help from me. And you shall have it. Before this night is out, your Demetrius shall love only you. (PUCK ENTERS with a flower.) Hast thou the flower there?

PUCK: Yes, here it is. (Hands it to OBERON during the following speech.)

OBERON: Give it to me, and I shall go to where Titania takes her sleep and put its juice upon her eyes so that when she wakes, she shall love the first thing which she sees. (Gives him part of the flower.) Here, you take a piece of this love potion, and in this wood you will find a sweet Athenian lady. She loves a young man, but he loves her not. Put some of this in his eyes while he sleeps so that when he, too, awakens, he will love her instantly.

PUCK: Fear not, my lord, your servant so shall do. (EXITS, followed by OBERON. The scene shifts to another part of the forest.)
TITANIA:  *(ENTERS with her FAIRIES.)* Come now, dance and make a fairy song, a lullaby that's best to bring me to my gentle rest. *(Reclines.)*

FAIRY ONE:

You spotted snakes with double tongue, come not here.

Come not near our fairy queen.

CHORUS:  Lulla, lulla, lullaby.

FAIRY TWO:  Weaving spiders, come not here.

Come not near our fairy queen.

FAIRY FOUR:  Hence away! Now all is well.

Let us leave our fairy queen. *(FAIRIES EXIT.)*

OBERON:  *(ENTERS. Squeezes the flower on TITANIA’S eyelids.)* What thou seest when thou dost wake,

Do it for thy true love take.

Love and languish for his sake.

Be it cat or bear

Or boar with bristled hair,

In thy eye that shall appear

When thou wakest, it is thy dear.

Wake when some vile thing is near. *(EXITS. LYSANDER, HERMIA, and NARRATOR ENTER.)*

NARRATOR:  Now things are about to get really complicated. Oberon has sent Puck off on his task to put the love juice on Demetrius’s eyes so he will fall in love with Helena. But who has just arrived on the scene but Lysander and Hermia? Now Puck is supposed to find a sweet Athenian maid, and he’s going to think that Hermia is the maid of whom Oberon spoke. Now he’s going to put the juice in Lysander’s eyes, and what’s going to happen? Great confusion! Lysander’s going to fall in love with Helena and hate Hermia, and that’s all wrong... or is it that Hermia will fall in love with Demetrius... or is it— ? Oh well, we’ll just leave it to Shakespeare to work out. *(EXITS.)*

LYSANDER:  Oh, sweet Hermia, we are both so tired, and to be truthful, I am lost. Let’s rest here ‘til morning, and in the light, find our way to my aunt’s cottage. *(Reclines.)*

HERMIA:  Sweetest Lysander, you are right. You lie there, and I’ll lie here, and these mossy banks will be our pillows. *(Reclines.)* Sleep well, my gentle love. *(They sleep.)*

PUCK:  *(ENTERS.)* Through the forest have I gone, but Athenian I’ve found none. *(Sees LYSANDER.)* But who is here? He’s dressed like...
an Athenian. This must be the boy of whom my master spoke. (Spies HERMIA.) And look over here! The very maiden that he scorns. She’s so pretty. (To LYSANDER.) You wretch! You beast! How can you be so cruel to such a pretty maid? (Squeezes the flower into LYSANDER’S eyes.) In your eyes, I’ll put this juice so that you may wake and make this maiden happy. Now I’ll away to Oberon. (EXITS. DEMETRIUS and HELENA ENTER, running.)

HELENA: I love you so!

DEMETRIUS: Please, please, please leave me alone!

HELENA: Will you leave me? Do not go!

DEMETRIUS: I go... and go... and go! Pray heaven, woman, leave me alone! (EXITS, running.)

HELENA: (In tears.) I am so out of breath. I can’t run anymore. Demetrius hates me. The more I love him, the more he hates me. I’m so miserable I could just die! (Spies LYSANDER.) But who is here? Lysander! On the ground! Dead or asleep? I see no blood, no wound. (Bends to wake him.) Lysander, if you live, good sir, awake.

LYSANDER: (Awakes from a dream.) ...and run through fire for thy sweet sake... (Sees HELENA,) Beautiful Helena! I adore you! I love you so!

HELENA: What! No, it’s Hermia that you love!

LYSANDER: Hermia’s a toad! It’s you I love!

HELENA: (In tears,) What have I done to deserve this?

LYSANDER: Come, sweet Helena, a kiss.

HELENA: (Runs away.) No, no, no! (Calls.) Demetrius, wait for me! (EXITS.)

LYSANDER: (Moves to the sleeping HERMIA.) Sleep on, you toad. It’s Helena that I love. How could I have ever thought to love you? You? You’re one ugly woman. (Calls into the forest.) Wait, Helena, wait! Here comes your sweet Lysander. Helena? Oh, Helena! (EXITS.)

HERMIA: (Awakes from a nightmare.) Oh, help, Lysander. Help! Help me! Oh, what an awful dream. I dreamt I was a toad. Isn’t that funny, Lysander? (Looks about.) Lysander? Lysander? Where is he? Mayhap some dreadful beast has carried him away. Don’t worry, my darling, I’ll save you. Lysander? Lysander? Answer me, my love. (EXITS.)

NARRATOR: (ENTERS, scroll in hand.) Undoubtedly, you’ve been wondering how all this commotion and shouting could go on without waking Titania. I don’t know. I didn’t write this script. (Reads from the scroll.) There’s a note here that says Titania’s not waking is “an Elizabethan convention that the audience would have accepted.”
Okay, but what about nobody seeing Titania lying right here on stage?! (Reads.) “Elizabethans understood that fairies were always invisible to mere mortals... and that’s enough explanation, smarty pants. Get on with the show.” (EXITS. BUMPKINS ENTER, all with a script in hand, except SNUG.)

BOTTOM: Are we all here?
QUINCE: Yes, and this appears an excellent spot for our rehearsal. Let us begin.
BOTTOM: Peter Quince?
QUINCE: Yes?
BOTTOM: The script says here that in this comedy of Pyramus and Thisbe, Pyramus must draw his sword and kill himself. That will never do. It will scare the ladies and make them cry.
STARVELING: Yes, we must leave the killing out.
BOTTOM: Not a whit! I have a plan. Write a prologue for this play, which tells the ladies that we will do them no harm—that these are only play swords, and Pyramus doesn’t really get killed. Better yet, write, too, that I’m not Pyramus but only Bottom, the weaver.
SNOUT: Won’t the ladies be afraid of the lion?
BOTTOM: Yes, yes! So write this as well. He is only Snout, the tinker. And let part of his face be shown. And write, “Ladies”—or “Fair ladies”—“I would wish you” or “I would request you” or “I would entreat you... to fear not... to tremble not...”
QUINCE: So shall I write. But here’s two problems of which we had not thought. One is moonlight, for Pyramus and Thisbe meet in moonlight.
BOTTOM: Well, then someone must come in with a lantern and say he comes to present the person of moonshine.
QUINCE: All right, there is one other thing. We must have a wall in the play, for Pyramus and Thisbe, says the story, did talk through a chink in the wall.
SNOUT: We can’t bring in a wall.
BOTTOM: Some man or other must present a wall. And let him have upon him some piece of plaster to signify a wall. And let him hold his fingers thus— (Makes a “V” with his fingers.) —and through that cranny shall Pyramus and Thisbe whisper.
QUINCE: Then all is well, and now, let us please rehearse.
PUCK: (ENTERS.) What a bunch of homespun bumpkins have we here, and so near our fairy queen’s resting place. What? A play. I’ll listen and may chance become an actor, too.
PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES ONSTAGE
Theseus’s Palace: Thrones, seating for play-within-the-play
Enchanted Forest: Large rock, optional bushes

PROPERTIES BROUGHT ON
Scroll (NARRATOR)
Flower (PUCK)
Scripts (BUMPKINS)
Short sword (BOTTOM)
Dagger, scarf (FLUTE)
Lantern (STARVELING)

SOUND
Magic sounds, music, hunting horns, barking hounds, bell toll.

FLEXIBLE CASTING
The FAIRIES may be represented by as few as four actors or expanded to as many as desired, with lines distributed as desired. Many of the parts can be either male or female, such as EGEUS (father/mother), PHILOSTRATE, NARRATOR, SNUG, SNOUT, STARVELING, and FAIRIES.

COSTUME SUGGESTIONS
ATHENIANS should be dressed in bright colors with some suggestion of fifth century BC Greece. DEMETRIUS and LYSANDER wear swords as part of their costume. HERMIA’S costume becomes torn or dirty later as she makes her way through the forest. For the play-within-the-play, the three couples are dressed in wedding clothes.

FAIRIES may be costumed in many ways. At the University of Arkansas in the 1970s, the famous scholar George Kernodle did a production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream in which all the fairies were represented in costume by insects and bugs of various sorts. In other productions, the fairies are presented as very exotic creatures with gossamer wings. Fairies can be—perhaps should be—thought of as “natural” denizens of the forest, dressed in earth tones and incorporating natural elements.

Regarding fairies, TITANIA is elegant, both in character and disposition. To be quite frank, she is a middle-aged lady in love. She would, by nature, present herself at her most beautiful always. Certainly, she is traditionally represented as the most elegantly adorned creature in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, often dressed in sequins and gossamer.
The BUMPKINS are dressed in simple tights and tunics of commoners and workers, possibly with oil and grease stains. Shakespeare called these his “mechanicals,” mechanics in the sense that they work with their hands and not with their brains. Since they have very little money for their play, their costumes for the play-within-the-play need not be elaborate. Lion doesn’t need a costume, really. Mostly, he needs to roar. A set of ears and a mane made from scrap material or yarn is plenty. Traditionally, Pyramus wears a Roman helmet and carries a short sword. Thisbe would wear a gown, and of course, her scarf.

BOTTOM’S costuming for when he is transformed into the ass need not be elaborate and should not represent a realistic ass/donkey. Shakespeare intended that BOTTOM already represent the ass, metaphorically and symbolically, even as a human. To do more than suggest BOTTOM as an ass is to pervert Shakespeare’s intent. A simple snout and ears would be plenty to create this suggestion, but a full donkey mask would work as well, so long as it is not fully realized with torso, tail, hooves, etc.
We hope you’ve enjoyed this script sample.

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