



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

A Midsummer Night's Dream (Short Story)

Shakespeare

Hermia and Lysander were in love, but Hermia's father wanted her to marry another man named Demetrius. In Athens, where they lived, there was a cruel law that allowed any girl who refused to marry according to her father's wishes to be put to death. Hermia's father was so angry with her for refusing to do what he wanted that he brought her before the Duke of Athens to ask if she could be put to death if she refused to obey him. The Duke gave her four days to think it over, and if she still refused to marry Demetrius at the end of that time, she would have to die.



Lysander was almost driven mad with grief, and he thought it best for Hermia to run away to his aunt's house in a place beyond the reach of that cruel law, and there he would come to her and marry her. But before she left, she told her friend Helena what she was going to do.

Helena had been Demetrius' girlfriend long before he had even thought of marrying Hermia, and because she was very foolish, like all jealous people, she could not see that it was not poor Hermia's fault that Demetrius wanted to marry her instead of his own girlfriend. She knew that if she told Demetrius that Hermia was going to the forest outside Athens, he would follow her, "and I can follow him, and at least I will see him," she said to herself. So she went to him and betrayed her friend's secret.

The forest where Lysander was to meet Hermia, and where the other two had decided to follow them, was full of fairies, like most forests, if you only had eyes to see them, and in this forest that night, the King and Queen of the fairies, Oberon and Titania, were there. Now fairies are very wise people, but occasionally they can be as foolish as mortal men. Oberon and Titania, who had been as happy as the days were long, had squandered all their joy in a foolish quarrel. They had said unpleasant things to each other, and scolded each other so terribly that all their little fairy followers, out of fear, had crawled into acorn

hats to hide.

So instead of holding one merry court and dancing all night in the moonlight, as fairies do, the King roamed with his attendants through one part of the forest, while the Queen with hers remained in another part. And the cause of all these troubles was a little Indian boy whom Titania had considered one of her followers. Oberon wanted the child to follow him and become one of his fairy knights; but the Queen would not give him up.



That night, the King and Queen of the fairies met on a mossy, moonlit clearing.

"Through unlucky circumstances we meet at moonlight, proud Titania," said the King.

"What! Jealous, Oberon?" replied the Queen. "You spoil everything with your quarrels. Come, fairies, let us go. I am not friends with him now."

"It is up to you to make peace," said the King. "Give me that little Indian boy, and I will be your humble servant and worshipper again."

"Forget it," said the Queen. "Even with all your money, you cannot buy that boy from me. Come, fairies." And she walked away.

"Well, go on," said Oberon. "But I will revenge you before you leave this forest."

Then Oberon called his favorite fairy, Puck, the spirit of mischief. Puck slipped into the dairy farms and took away the cream, stepped into the churn so the butter couldn't be made, made the beer sour, led people the wrong way on dark nights and laughed at them, toppled people's stools from under them when they sat down, and threw their beer over their chin when they went to drink.



"Now," said Oberon to this little fairy, "fetch me the flower called Love-in-idleness. The juice of that little purple flower which on sleeping eyes doth lie, will make them, when they wake, love the first thing they look upon. I'll put some of that juice on my Titania's eyes, and when she wakes up she'll love the first thing she sees, whether it be a lion, a bear, a wolf, or a bull, or a meddling monkey, or a busy ape."

While Puck was away, Demetrius walked through the clearing followed by poor Helena, who told him how she loved him and reminded him of all his promises, and he said to her that he could not love her and that his promises were worth nothing. Oberon took pity on poor Helena, and when Puck returned with the flower, he commanded him to follow Demetrius and put some of the juice on his eyes so that he would love Helena as much as she loved him when he woke up and saw her. So Puck went on his way and wandering through the forest he found not Demetrius but Lysander, on whose eyes he put the juice; but when Lysander woke up, he did not see his own Hermia but Helena, who was walking through the forest looking for the cruel Demetrius; and as soon as he saw her, he loved her and left Hermia, under the spell of the purple flower.

When Hermia woke up, Lysander was gone and she wandered through the forest to find him. Puck went back and told Oberon what he had done, and Oberon soon discovered that he had made a mistake, and went in search of Demetrius, and after finding him, put some of the juice on his eyes. And the first thing Demetrius saw when he woke up was also Helena. So now Demetrius and Lysander both followed her through the forest, and it was Hermia's turn to follow her lover in despair, as Helena had done earlier. Helena and Hermia quarreled, and Demetrius and Lysander fought. Oberon was very sorry to see his kind plan to help these lovers go so wrong. So he said to Puck...



"These two young men are going to fight. You must hang a fog over the night and lead them so astray that one will never find the other. When they are tired, they will fall asleep. Then let this other herb fall on Lysander's eyes. That will give him his old sight and his old love. Then every man will have the lady who loves him, and they will all think that this has been only a midsummer night's dream. When this is done, all will be well with them."

So Puck went and did as he was commanded, and when the two fell asleep without meeting each other, Puck poured the juice into Lysander's eyes and said:

"When you wake, you shall see true delight in the sight of your eye when you behold Hermia: all in all you will be sweet. And so everything will be fine."

Meanwhile, Oberon found Titania sleeping on a bank where wild thyme, violets, and musk-roses grew. There Titania always slept a part of the night, wrapped in

the enamel skin of a snake. Oberon bent over her and laid the juice on her eyes, saying:

"What you see when you wake, is true love."

Now it so happened that when Titania woke, the first thing she saw was a foolish clown, from a group of actors who had come into the forest to rehearse their play. This clown had met Puck, who had put an ass's head on his shoulders so that it seemed to grow there. Immediately upon waking and seeing this terrible monster, Titania said, "What angel is this? Are you as wise as you are beautiful?"

"I am enough wise to find my way out of this forest, and that is enough for me," said the foolish clown.

"Do not desire to go out of the forest," said Titania. The love juice worked well, and the clown seemed to her the most beautiful and sweetest creature on the whole earth. "I love you," she continued. "Come with me, and I will give you fairies to attend you."

So she called four fairies, whose names were Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed. "You must serve this gentleman," said the Queen. "Feed him with apricots and dewberries, purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries. Steal honey-bags for him from the bumblebees, and with the wings of painted butterflies fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes."

"I will do it," said one of the fairies, and the rest followed and said, "We will do it."

"Now sit with me," said the Queen to the clown, "and let me stroke your fair cheeks, put musk-roses in your sleek, smooth hair and kiss your lovely, big ears, my gentle joy."

"Where's Peaseblossom?" asked the clown with the ass's head. He did not much care for the Queen's affection, but he was very proud the fairies served him. "Yes?" said Peaseblossom.

"Scratch my head, Peaseblossom," said the clown. "Where's Cobweb?" "Yes?" said Cobweb.

"Kill for me," said the clown, "the red bumblebee on the top of the thistle yonder, and bring me the honey-bag. Where's Mustardseed?"

"Yes?" said Mustardseed.

"Oh, I want nothing," said the clown. "Help Peaseblossom to scratch. I must go to the barber's, for I think my beard is wonderfully hairy."



"Do you want anything to eat?" said the fairy queen.

"I would like some dry oats," said the clown - for his ass's head made him long for donkey food - "and some hay."

"A few of my fairies can fetch you nuts from the squirrel's house?" said the queen.

"I prefer a handful of good dry peas," said the clown. "But please let none of your people disturb me; I am going to sleep."

"Then," said the queen, "I will rock you in my arms."

And so it was that when Oberon came along, he found his beautiful queen embracing a clown with an ass's head.

Before he released her from the enchantment, he convinced her to give him the little Indian boy whom he had so long desired. But then he took pity on her and poured some juice from the magical flower into her lovely eyes; and in an instant, she saw the clown with the donkey's head whom she had loved, and she knew how foolish she had been.

Oberon took the donkey's head off the clown and let him end his sleep with his own silly head lying on the thyme and violets.

Thus everything was restored to order. Oberon and Titania loved each other more than ever. Demetrius thought of no one but Helena, and Helena had never thought of anyone but Demetrius.

As for Hermia and Lysander, they were a great loving couple.

The four mortal lovers returned to Athens and were married; and the fairy king and queen still live happily together in that same forest to this day.



Stories help us explore cultures, learn moral lessons, connect with nature — or simply have fun. That's why ririro.com offers 3,000+ free stories — fairy tales, fables, bedtime stories, myths and more — for every age, in 13 languages, with free printable PDFs and often audio. Reading should be a right, not a privilege. Share ririro.com and spread the joy of reading.

Instagram: @ririro_reading · Pinterest: pinterest.com/ririrocom