



A Midsummer Night's Dream (Extracts from Act 3 Scene 1)

The craftsmen meet in the woods at the appointed time to rehearse their play. Since they will be performing in front of a large group of nobles, Bottom declares that certain elements of the play must be changed. In the same grove, the sleeping Titania wakes. When she sees Bottom, the flower juice on her eyelids works its magic, and she falls deeply and instantly in love with the ass-headed weaver.

Original Text

TITANIA sleeps. Enter the clowns:

BOTTOM, QUINCE, FLUTE, SNUG, SNOUT, and STARVELING

BOTTOM

Are we all met?

QUINCE

Pat, pat. And here's a marvelous convenient place for our rehearsal. This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn-brake our tiring-house, and we will do it in action as we will do it before the duke.

BOTTOM

Peter Quince—

QUINCE

What sayest thou, bully Bottom?

BOTTOM

There are things in this comedy of Pyramus and Thisbe that will never please. First, Pyramus must draw a sword to kill himself, which the ladies cannot abide. How answer you that?

SNOUT

By 'r lakin, a parlous fear.

STARVELING

I believe we must leave the killing out, when all is done.

BOTTOM

Not a whit. I have a device to make all

Modern Text

While **TITANIA** is asleep onstage, the clowns—**BOTTOM, QUINCE, FLUTE, SNUG, SNOUT, and STARVELING**—enter.

BOTTOM

Are we all here?

QUINCE

Right on time. This is the perfect place to rehearse. This clearing will be the stage, and this hawthorn bush will be our dressing room. Let's put on our play exactly as we'll perform it for the duke.

BOTTOM

Peter Quince—

QUINCE

What is it, jolly Bottom?

BOTTOM

There are things in this comedy of Pyramus and Thisbe that will never work. First of all, Pyramus has to take out a sword to kill himself, which the ladies in the audience won't be able to stand. What should we do about that?

SNOUT

By God, that's a real problem, it's true.

STARVELING

I think we'll have to leave out all the killing, come to think of it.

BOTTOM

Not at all! I've got a plan that will fix everything.



well. Write me a prologue, and let the prologue seem to say we will do no harm with our swords, and that Pyramus is not killed indeed. And for the more better assurance, tell them that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver. This will put them out of fear.

QUINCE

Well. We will have such a prologue, and it shall be written in eight and six.

BOTTOM

No, make it two more. Let it be written in eight and eight.

SNOUT

Will not the ladies be afeard of the lion?

STARVELING

I fear it, I promise you.

BOTTOM

Masters, you ought to consider with yourselves. To bring in—God shield us!—a lion among ladies is a most dreadful thing. For there is not a more fearful wildfowl than your lion living. And we ought to look to 't.

SNOUT

Therefore another prologue must tell he is not a lion.

BOTTOM

Nay, you must name his name, and half his face must be seen through the lion's neck. And he himself must speak through, saying thus—or to the same defect—"Ladies," or "Fair ladies," "I would wish you" or "I would request you" or "I would entreat you" "not to fear, not

Write me a prologue that I can recite to the audience before the play starts. I'll tell them that we won't hurt anyone with our swords, and that Pyramus isn't really dead. And to make it even clearer, we can tell them that I'm playing Pyramus but I'm not really Pyramus—really, I'm Bottom the weaver. That'll keep them from being afraid.

QUINCE

All right, we'll have a prologue then. We'll write it in alternating eight- and six-syllable lines, just like in a ballad.

BOTTOM

No, add a couple more syllables. Make it eight and eight.

SNOUT

Won't the ladies be scared of the lion?

STARVELING

I'm really worried about that.

BOTTOM

Sirs, you ought to think to yourself, bringing in—God forbid!—a lion amongst ladies is really terrible. There's no scarier wild bird than the living lion, and we should remember that.

SNOUT

So we need another prologue to tell everyone he's not a real lion.

BOTTOM

No, we can just announce the actor's name, and let his face show through the lion costume, and have him say something himself. He should say the following, or something else to the same defect (Bottom means to say effect)—"Ladies," or "Lovely ladies," "I would like to ask you" or "I would like to request of you" or "I would like



to tremble, my life for yours. If you think I to beg you” “not to be afraid, and not to tremble come hither as a lion, it were pity of my with fear. I value your lives as highly as my own. life. No, I am no such thing. I am a man as If you thought I was a real lion, I would be other men are.” And there indeed let him risking my life. But no, I am not at all a lion. I am name his name, and tell them plainly he is a man, just like other men.” And then he should Snug the joiner. say his name, and tell them plainly that he’s Snug the carpenter.

QUINCE

Well, it shall be so. But there is two hard things: that is, to bring the moonlight into a chamber. For, you know, Pyramus and Thisbe meet by moonlight.

SNOUT

Doth the moon shine that night we play our play?

BOTTOM

A calendar, a calendar! Look in the almanac. Find out moonshine, find out moonshine!

QUINCE

(takes out a book) Yes, it doth shine that night.

BOTTOM

Why then, may you leave a casement of the great chamber window where we play open, and the moon may shine in at the casement.

QUINCE

Ay. Or else one must come in with a bush of thorns and a lantern, and say he comes to disfigure, or to present, the person of Moonshine. Then, there is another thing: we must have a wall in the great chamber. For Pyramus and Thisbe, says the story, did talk through the chink of a wall.

QUINCE

All right, that’s what we’ll do then. But there are two things we still have to figure out. How are we going to bring moonlight into a room? Because, you know, Pyramus and Thisbe meet by moonlight.

SNOUT

Will the moon be shining on the night we’re performing our play?

BOTTOM

We need a calendar! Look in the almanac. Look up moonshine, look up moonshine!

QUINCE

(he takes out a book) Yes, the moon will shine that night.

BOTTOM

Well then, you can leave one of the windows open in the big hall where we’ll be performing, and the moon can shine in through the window.

QUINCE

Yes, or else someone will have to come in carrying a bundle of sticks and a lantern and say he’s come to disfigure (Bottom means “figure”)_or represent, the character of Moonshine, because the man in the moon is supposed to carry sticks and a lantern. But there’s still another problem: we need to have a wall in the big hall, because according to the story, Pyramus and Thisbe talked through a little hole in a wall.



SNOUT

You can never bring in a wall. What say you, Bottom?

BOTTOM

Some man or other must present Wall. And let him have some plaster, or some loam, or some roughcast about him to signify wall. And let him hold his fingers thus, and through that cranny shall Pyramus and Thisbe whisper.

QUINCE

If that may be then all is well. Come, sit down, every mother's son, and rehearse your parts.—Pyramus, you begin. When you have spoken your speech, enter into that brake.—And so everyone according to his cue.

ROBIN enters, unseen by the characters onstage.

ROBIN

(aside) What hempen homespuns have we swaggering here, So near the cradle of the fairy queen? What, a play toward? I'll be an auditor. An actor too, perhaps, if I see cause.

QUINCE

Speak, Pyramus.—Thisbe, stand forth.

BOTTOM

(as PYRAMUS) Thisbe, the flowers of odious savors sweet—

QUINCE

“Odors,” “odors.”

BOTTOM

(as PYRAMUS)
—odors savors sweet,
So hath thy breath, my dearest Thisbe dear.
And by and by I will to thee appear.

SNOUT

You'll never be able to bring in a wall. What do you think, Bottom?

BOTTOM

Someone should play the part of Wall. He can have some plaster or clay or limestone or something on him to show the audience he's a wall. He can hold his fingers in a V-shape like this, and Pyramus and Thisbe can whisper to each other through that little crack.

QUINCE

If we can do that, everything will be all right. Now sit down, everybody, and rehearse your parts—Pyramus, you start. When you have said your lines, go hide in that bush.—Everyone else, go there too when you're not onstage.

ROBIN enters, unseen by the characters onstage.

ROBIN

(to himself) Who are these country bumpkins swaggering around so close to where the fairy queen is sleeping? What? Are they about to put on a play? I'll watch. And I'll act in it, too, if I feel like it.

QUINCE

Speak, Pyramus.—Thisbe, come forward.

BOTTOM

(as PYRAMUS) Thisbe, flowers with sweet odious smells—

QUINCE

“Odors,” “odors.”

BOTTOM

(as PYRAMUS) —odors and smells are like your breath, my dearest Thisbe dear. But what's that, a voice! Wait here a while. I'll be right back!



But hark, a voice!

Stay thou but here awhile,

Exit **BOTTOM**

ROBIN

(aside) A stranger Pyramus than e'er played here.

Exit **ROBIN**

FLUTE

Must I speak now?

QUINCE

Ay, marry, must you. For you must understand he goes but to see a noise that he heard, and is to come again.

FLUTE

(as THISBE) Most radiant Pyramus, most lily-white of hue, Of color like the red rose on triumphant brier, Most brisky juvenal and eke most lovely Jew, As true as truest horse that yet would never tire.

I'll meet thee, Pyramus, at Ninny's tomb.

QUINCE

"Ninus' tomb," man. Why, you must not speak that yet. That you answer to Pyramus. You speak all your part at once, cues and all.—Pyramus, enter. Your cue is past. It is "never tire."

FLUTE

Oh. *(as thisbe)* As true as truest horse that yet would never tire.

Enter **BOTTOM**, with an ass's head, and **ROBIN**

BOTTOM

(as PYRAMUS) If I were fair, Thisbe, I were only thine.

BOTTOM exits.

ROBIN

(to himself) That's the strangest Pyramus I've ever seen.

ROBIN exits.

FLUTE

Am I supposed to talk now?

QUINCE

Yes, you are. You're supposed to show that you understand that Pyramus just went to check on a noise he heard and is coming right back.

FLUTE

(as THISBE) Most radiant Pyramus, you are as white as a lily, and the color of a red rose on a splendid rosebush, a very lively young man and also a lovely Jew. You are as reliable as a horse that never gets tired. I'll meet you, Pyramus, at Ninny's grave.

QUINCE

That's "Ninus's grave," man. And don't say all of that yet. You're supposed to say some of it as a reply to Pyramus. You just said all your lines at once, cues and all.—Pyramus, enter. You missed your cue. It's "never get tired."

FLUTE

Oh! *(as THISBE)* As reliable as a horse that never gets tired.

ROBIN enters with **BOTTOM**, with a donkey's head instead of a human head.

BOTTOM

(as PYRAMUS) If I were handsome, my lovely Thisbe, I would still want only you.



QUINCE

Oh, monstrous! Oh, strange! We are haunted. Pray, masters! Fly, masters! Help!

Exeunt **QUINCE, FLUTE, SNUG, SNOUT,** and **STARVELING**

ROBIN

I'll follow you. I'll lead you about a round **ROBIN**

Through bog, through bush, through brake, through brier.

Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound,

A hog, a headless bear, sometime a fire.

And neigh, and bark, and grunt, and roar, and burn,

Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire, at every turn.

Exit **ROBIN**

BOTTOM

Why do they run away? This is a knavery of them to make me afeard.

Enter **SNOUT**

SNOUT

O Bottom, thou art changed! What do I see on thee?

BOTTOM

What do you see? You see an ass head of your own, do you?

Exit **SNOUT**

Enter **QUINCE**

QUINCE

Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee. Thou art translated.

Exit **QUINCE**

BOTTOM

I see their knavery: this is to make an ass of me, to fright me if they could. But I

QUINCE

Help! It's a monster! We're being haunted. Run, everyone, run!

QUINCE, FLUTE, SNUG, SNOUT, and **STARVELING** exit.

I'll follow you. I'll run you around in circles, through bogs and bushes and woods and thorns.

Sometimes I'll take the shape of a horse, sometimes

I'll take the shape of a hound or a pig or a headless

bear. Sometimes I'll turn into fire! And I'll neigh

like a horse and bark like a hound and grunt like a

pig and roar like a bear and burn like a fire at every

ROBIN exits.

BOTTOM

Why are they running away? This is some joke of theirs to scare me.

SNOUT enters.

SNOUT

Oh, Bottom, you've changed! What have you got on your head?

BOTTOM

What do you think I've got on my head? You're acting like an ass, don't you think?

SNOUT exits.

QUINCE enters.

QUINCE

God bless you, Bottom, God bless you. You've been changed. Reborn.

QUINCE exits.

BOTTOM

I see what they're up to. They want to make an ass of me, to scare me if they can. But I won't leave this



will not stir from this place, do what they can. I will walk up and down here and I will sing, that they shall hear I am not afraid.

(sings)

*The ouzel cock, so black of hue
With orange-tawny bill,
The throstle with his note so true,
The wren with little quill—*

TITANIA

(waking) What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?

BOTTOM

(sings)

*The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,
The plainsong cuckoo gray,
Whose note full many a man doth mark
And dares not answer “Nay”—*

For indeed, who would set his wit to so foolish a bird?

Who would give a bird the lie, though he cry “cuckoo” never so?

TITANIA

I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again.
Mine ear is much enamored of thy note.
So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape.
And thy fair virtue's force perforce doth move me
On the first view to say, to swear, I love thee.

BOTTOM

spot, no matter what they do. I'll walk up and down and sing a song, so they'll know I'm not afraid.

(singing)

*The blackbird with its black feathers
And its orange-and-tan beak,
The thrush with its clear voice,
The wren with its small, piping chirp—*

TITANIA

(waking up) What angel is this who's waking me up from my bed of flowers?

BOTTOM

(singing)

*The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,
The gray cuckoo with his simple song
That many men hear
But they don't dare say no to it—*

Of course they don't say “no”! Who'd waste his time talking to such a stupid bird? Who'd bother to accuse a bird of lying,

[\(Cuckoos symbolize cuckolds \(men whose wives cheat on them\). The cuckoo's song was sometimes imagined as a mocking accusation that the men who hear it are cuckolds.\)](#)

even if the bird were telling him that his wife was cheating on him?

TITANIA

Please sing again, sweet human. I love to listen to your voice, and I love to look at your body. I know this is the first time I've ever seen you, but you're so wonderful that I can't help swearing to you that I love you.

BOTTOM



Methinks, mistress, you should have little reason for that.

And yet, to say the truth, reason and love keep little company together nowadays.

The more the pity that some honest neighbors will not make them friends.

Nay, I can gleek upon occasion.

TITANIA

Thou art as wise as thou art beautiful.

BOTTOM

Not so, neither. But if I had wit enough to get out of this wood, I have enough to serve mine own turn.

TITANIA

Out of this wood do not desire to go.

Thou shalt remain here whether thou wilt or no.

I am a spirit of no common rate.

The summer still doth tend upon my state.

And I do love thee. Therefore go with me.

I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee.

And they shall fetch thee jewels from the deep,

And sing while thou on pressed flowers dost sleep.

And I will purge thy mortal grossness so

That thou shalt like an airy spirit go.—

Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and

Mustardseed!

Four fairies—**PEASEBLOSSOM,**

COBWEB, MOTH, and

MUSTARDSEED—enter.

PEASEBLOSSOM

Ready.

COBWEB

And I.

MOTH

And I.

I don't think you've got much of a reason to love me. But to tell you the truth, reason and love have

very little to do with each other these days. It's too bad some mutual friend of theirs doesn't introduce them. Ha, ha! No, I'm just kidding.

TITANIA

You're as wise as you are beautiful.

BOTTOM

No, that's not true. But if I were smart enough to get out of this forest, I'd be wise enough to satisfy myself.

TITANIA

Don't bother wishing you could leave this forest, because you're going to stay here whether you want to or not. I'm no ordinary fairy. I rule over the summer, and I love you. So come with me. I'll give you fairies as servants, and they'll bring you jewels from the depths of the ocean, and sing to you while you sleep on a bed of flowers. And I'll turn you into a spirit like us, so you won't die as humans do.—Come here, Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed!

Four fairies—**PEASEBLOSSOM, COBWEB,**

MOTH, and **MUSTARDSEED**—enter.

PEASEBLOSSOM

Ready.

COBWEB

Me too.

MOTH

Me too.



MUSTARDSEED

And I.

ALL

Where shall we go?

TITANIA

Be kind and courteous to this gentleman.

Hop in his walks and gambol in his eyes.

Feed him with apricocks and dewberries,

With purple grapes, green figs, and
mulberries.

The honey bags steal from the
humble-bees,

And for night tapers crop their waxen
thighs

And light them at the fiery glowworms'
eyes

To have my love to bed and to arise.

And pluck the wings from painted
butterflies

To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping
eyes.

Nod to him, elves, and do him courtesies.

PEASEBLOSSOM

Hail, mortal.

COBWEB

Hail.

MOTH

Hail.

MUSTARDSEED

Hail.

BOTTOM

I cry your worships' mercy, heartily.—I
beseech your worship's name.

COBWEB

Cobweb.

BOTTOM

I shall desire you of more acquaintance,

MUSTARDSEED

And me too.

ALL

Where should we go?

TITANIA

Be kind and polite to this gentleman. Follow him
around. Leap and dance for him. Feed him apricots
and blackberries, with purple grapes, green figs, and
mulberries. Steal honey from the bumblebees, and
make candles out of the bees' wax. Light them with
the light of glowworms, so my love will have light
when he goes to bed and wakes up. Pluck off colorful
butterfly wings, and use them to fan moonbeams
away from his eyes as he sleeps. Bow to him, fairies,
and curtsy to him.

PEASEBLOSSOM

Hello, mortal!

COBWEB

Hello!

MOTH

Hello!

MUSTARDSEED

Hello!

BOTTOM

I beg your pardon, sirs.—Please tell me your name,
sir?

COBWEB

Cobweb.

BOTTOM

I'd like to get to know you better, Mr. Cobweb. If I



good Master
Cobweb. If I cut my finger, I shall make
bold with you.—

Your name, honest gentleman?

PEASEBLOSSOM

Peaseblossom.

BOTTOM

I pray you, commend me to Mistress
Squash, your mother, and to Master
Peascod, your father. Good Master
Peaseblossom, I shall desire you of more
acquaintance too.— Your name, I beseech
you, sir?

MUSTARDSEED

Mustardseed.

BOTTOM

Good Master Mustardseed, I know your
patience well. That same cowardly,
giantlike ox-beef hath devoured many a
gentleman of your house. I promise you
your kindred hath made my eyes water ere
now. I desire you of more acquaintance,
good Master Mustardseed.

TITANIA

Come, wait upon him. Lead him to my
bower.
The moon methinks looks with a watery
eye.
And when she weeps, weeps every little
flower,
Lamenting some enforced chastity.
Tie up my love's tongue. Bring him
silently.
Exeunt

cut my finger, I'll use you as a bandage to stop the
bleeding.—And your name, sir?

PEASEBLOSSOM

Peaseblossom.

BOTTOM

Please, give my regards to your mother, Mrs. Peapod,
and your father, Mr. Peapod. Good Mr.
Peaseblossom, I'd like to get to know you better
too.—And you, may I ask what your name is, sir?

MUSTARDSEED

Mustardseed.

BOTTOM

Good Mr. Mustardseed, I know you very well. Those
cowardly, gigantic sides of beef have been
responsible for many of your family members getting
eaten as a condiment on beef. I swear to you, many
members of your mustard family have made my eyes
water before. I look forward to getting to know you
better, Mr. Mustardseed.

TITANIA

Take good care of him. Take him to my sleeping
area. The moon looks sad to me. When she cries, all
the little flowers cry too. They're sad because
someone is prevented from having sex—or is having
it against her will. Keep my lover quiet. Bring him to
me in silence.
They all exit.