

ACT 1

Scene 1

Enter Theseus, Hippolyta, and Philostrate, with others.

THESEUS

Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
Draws on apace. Four happy days bring in
Another moon. But, O, methinks how slow
This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires

HIPPOLYTA

Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;
Four nights will quickly dream away the time;
And then the moon, like to a silver bow
New-bent in heaven, shall behold the night
Of our solemnities.

THESEUS

Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword
And won thy love doing thee injuries,
But I will wed thee in another key,
With pomp, with triumph, and with reveling.

*Enter Egeus and his daughter Hermia, and Lysander
and Demetrius.*

EGEUS

Happy be Theseus, our renowned duke?!

THESEUS

Thanks, good Egeus. What's the news with thee?

EGEUS

Full of vexation come I, with complaint
Against my child, my daughter Hermia.—
Stand forth, Demetrius.—My noble lord,
This man hath my consent to marry her.—
Stand forth, Lysander.—And, my gracious duke,
This man hath bewitched the bosom of my child.—
Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes
And interchanged love tokens with my child.
Thou hast by moonlight at her window sung
With feigning voice verses of feigning love
And stol'n the impression of her fantasy
With bracelets of thy hair, rings, gauds, conceits,
Knacks, trifles, nosegays, sweetmeats—messengers
Of strong prevailment in unhardened youth.
With cunning hast thou filched my daughter's heart,
Turned her obedience (which is due to me)
To stubborn harshness.—And, my gracious duke,

Be it so she will not here before your Grace
Consent to marry with Demetrius,
Or to her death, according to our law
Immediately provided in that case.

THESEUS

What say you, Hermia? Be advised, fair maid.
To you, your father should be as a god,
One that composed your beauties.
Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

HERMIA

So is Lysander.

THESEUS

In himself he is,
But in this kind, wanting your father's voice,
The other must be held the worthier.

HERMIA

I would my father looked but with my eyes.

THESEUS

Rather your eyes must with his judgment look.

HERMIA

I do entreat your Grace to pardon me.
I know not by what power I am made bold,
Nor how it may concern my modesty
In such a presence here to plead my thoughts;
But I beseech your Grace that I may know
The worst that may befall me in this case
If I refuse to wed Demetrius.

THESEUS

Either to die the death or to abjure
Forever the society of men.
Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires,
Know of your youth, examine well your blood,
Whether (if you yield not to your father's choice)
You can endure the livery of a nun,
Thrice-blessèd they that master so their blood
To undergo such maiden pilgrimage,
But earthlier happy is the rose distilled
Than that which, withering on the virgin thorn,
Grows, lives, and dies in single blessedness.

HERMIA

So will I grow, so live, so die, my lord,
Ere I will yield my virgin patent up
Unto his Lordship whose unwishèd yoke
My soul consents not to give sovereignty.

DEMETRIUS

Relent, sweet Hermia, and, Lysander, yield
Thy crazèd title to my certain right.

LYSANDER

You have her father's love, Demetrius.
Let me have Hermia's. Do you marry him.

EGEUS

Scornful Lysander, true, he hath my love;
And what is mine my love shall render him.
And she is mine, and all my right of her
I do estate unto Demetrius.

LYSANDER, *to Theseus*

My lord, my love is more than his;
My fortunes every way as fairly ranked
(If not with vantage) as Demetrius';
And (which is more than all these boasts can be)
I am beloved of beauteous Hermia.
Why should not I then prosecute my right?
Demetrius, I'll avouch it to his head,
Made love to Nedar's daughter, Helena,
And won her soul; and she, sweet lady, dotes,
Devoutly dotes, dotes in idolatry,
Upon this spotted and inconstant man.

THESEUS

I must confess that I have heard so much,
And with Demetrius thought to have spoke thereof;
But, being overfull of self-affairs,
My mind did lose it.—But, Demetrius, come,
And come, Egeus; you shall go with me.
I have some private schooling for you both.—
For you, fair Hermia, look you arm yourself
To fit your fancies to your father's will,
Come, my Hippolyta. What cheer, my love?—
Demetrius and Egeus, go along.
I must employ you in some business
Against our nuptial and confer with you
Of something nearly that concerns yourselves

EGEUS

With duty and desire we follow you.

All but Hermia and Lysander exit.

LYSANDER

How now, my love? Why is your cheek so pale?
How chance the roses there do fade so fast?

HERMIA

Belike for want of rain, which I could well
Beteem them from the tempest of my eyes.

LYSANDER

Ay me! For aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,

The course of true love never did run smooth.
But either it was different in blood—

HERMIA

O cross! Too high to be enthralled to low.

LYSANDER

Or else it stood upon the choice of friends—

HERMIA

O hell, to choose love by another's eyes!
If then true lovers have been ever crossed,
It stands as an edict in destiny.
Then let us teach our trial patience
Because it is a customary cross,
As due to love as thoughts and dreams and sighs,
Wishes and tears, poor fancy's followers.

LYSANDER

A good persuasion. Therefore, hear me, Hermia:
I have a widow aunt, a dowager
Of great revenue, and she hath no child.
And she respects me as her only son.
There, gentle Hermia, may I marry thee;
If thou lovest me, then
Steal forth thy father's house tomorrow night,
And in the wood a league without the town
(Where I did meet thee once with Helena
To do observance to a morn of May),
There will I stay for thee.

HERMIA

My good Lysander,
I swear to thee by Cupid's strongest bow,
In that same place thou hast appointed me,
Tomorrow truly will I meet with thee.

LYSANDER

Keep promise, love. Look, here comes Helena.

Enter Helena.

HERMIA

Godspeed, fair Helena. Whither away?

HELENA

Call you me "fair"? That "fair" again unsay.
Demetrius loves your fair. O happy fair!
Your eyes are lodestars and your tongue's sweet air
More tunable than lark to shepherd's ear
When wheat is green, when hawthorn buds appear.
Sickness is catching. O, were favor so!
Yours would I catch, fair Hermia, ere I go.

O, teach me how you look and with what art
You sway the motion of Demetrius' heart!

HERMIA

I frown upon him, yet he loves me still.

HELENA

O, that your frowns would teach my smiles such skill!

HERMIA

I give him curses, yet he gives me love.

HELENA

O, that my prayers could such affection move

HERMIA

The more I hate, the more he follows me.

HELENA

The more I love, the more he hateth me.

HERMIA

His folly, Helena, is no fault of mine.

HELENA

None but your beauty. Would that fault were mine!

HERMIA

Take comfort: he no more shall see my face.
Lysander and myself will fly this place.

LYSANDER

Helen, to you our minds we will unfold.
Tomorrow night when Phoebe doth behold
Her silver visage in the wat'ry glass,
Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass
(A time that lovers' flights doth still conceal),
Through Londons' gates have we devised to steal.

HERMIA

And in the wood where often you and I
Upon faint primrose beds were wont to lie,
Emptying our bosoms of their counsel sweet,
There my Lysander and myself shall meet
Farewell, sweet playfellow. Pray thou for us,
And good luck grant thee thy Demetrius.—
Keep word, Lysander. We must starve our sight
From lovers' food till morrow deep midnight.

LYSANDER

I will, my Hermia.
Helena, adieu.
As you on him, Demetrius dote on you!

Hermia exits.

Lysander exits.

HELENA