

SHAKESPEARE IN 30 MINUTES: A MIDSUMMER'S NIGHT DREAM

Adapted By Mike Willis

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ISBN: 978-1-61588-345-5

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SETTING

There is a raised platform up center stage with steps or ramps leading up from each side and from backstage up center. Two throne-like chairs are on the platform. There is a stump or rustic stool down left and another down right on the stage floor. The platform and chairs are adorned with greenery and flowers giving the entire stage a woods-like atmosphere.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

“Shakespeare in 30 Minutes” is available as an anthology of four award-winning adaptations by Mike Willis, or each adaptation separately. Mr. Willis is a high school drama director who spent twelve seasons with the Wisconsin Shakespeare Festival Acting Company. He used his Shakespearean experience to fashion four 30-minute adaptations were entered in the Wisconsin High School Forensic Association’s Fall Play Festival Competition. In order to be selected as an “all-state” play and given the opportunity to perform at the state festival, a production is required to participate at sub-district, district, and sectional levels and be awarded advance recommendations from two of three adjudicators. Each of the four adaptations in this collection received all-state recognition and were performed at the Wisconsin High School Forensic Association’s State Theatre Festival. Along with their all-state selection, these plays were also accorded several other awards, including: ten student outstanding acting awards, four state outstanding director’s awards, and “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” was chosen to receive the Critic’s Choice Award at the 1993 state festival. These adaptations are easily staged and unlike some adaptations of Shakespeare, they keep the poetry of the dialogue intact. Each adaptation is ideal for one act play competitions and school productions where resources do not allow for a full-length Shakespearean production.

PROLOGUE

AT RISE: *The stage is dimly lighted as Puck enters cat-like up center and crouches on the platform. Lively music played by a flute-like instrument can be heard as the three fairies enter on the mainstage floor from different directions. The three fairies perform a dance to the music as Puck observes unnoticed from the platform. As the music nears an end, Puck speaks, startling the fairies. The fairies scatter, hiding behind the stumps and the edge of the platform.*

PUCK: How now, spirits! Whither wander you?

1st FAIRY: *(Slowly coming out of hiding.)*

Over hill, over dale,
Thorough bush, thorough brier.

2nd FAIRY: *(Emerging from hiding.)*

Over park, over pale,
Thorough flood, thorough fire.

3rd FAIRY: *(Joining the others.)*

We do wander everywhere
Swifter than the moon's sphere;

1st FAIRY: Either I mistake your shape and making quite,

Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite
Called Robin Goodfellow. Are not you he
That frights the maidens of the villagery?

PUCK: *(Addressing the audience.)*

They speakest aright;
I am that merry wanderer of the night.
(To the fairies.)

Hence, away! Now all is well.
I'll, aloof stand sentinel. *(Fairies exit.)*

Puck crosses to and addresses the audience.

PUCK: And weave you all, through a world of dreams;

A Midsummer Night's Dreams. *(Puck crosses up on the platform where he crouches off to the side and watches the action on the stage.)*

SCENE 1

A trumpet flourish sounds, Theseus, Hippolyta and Philostrate enter from stage right and cross up onto the platform. They are dressed as royalty and wear flowing robes and sandals.

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!

HIPPOLYTA: Four days will quickly steep themselves in night,
Four nights will quickly dream away the time.

THESEUS: *(To PHILOSTRATE.)* Go, Philostrate,
Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments,
Find us a delightful play,
Which we may view;
Upon our wedding day.

PHILOSTRATE exits up center.

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.
(They kiss and exit up center.)

SCENE 2

PUCK: *(Crossing from his hiding place at the edge of the platform to the center of the platform where he addresses the audience.)*
Hark! A wedding toward? A Play? *(Offstage noise.)* But, what comes here?

THE MECHANICALS enter from different areas in the wings and meet center stage where they surround QUINCE who is carrying a number of scrolls. They are dressed as working men of Athens.

QUINCE: Is all our company here?

BOTTOM: You were best to call them generally, man by man, according to the script.

QUINCE: (*Holding up a scroll.*) Here is the scroll of every man's name, which is thought fit, through all Athens, to play in our interlude before the Duke and Duchess, on his wedding day at night.

BOTTOM: First, good Peter Quince, say what the play treats on; then read the names of the actors; and so grow to a point.

QUINCE: Marry, our play is, "The most lamentable comedy, and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisby."

BOTTOM: A very good piece of work, I assure you, and a merry. Now, good Peter Quince, call forth your actors by the scroll. Masters, spread yourselves.

SNUG, SNOUT, FLUTE and STARVELING take up positions seated on the floor forming a semi-circle. BOTTOM and QUINCE are left standing center stage.

QUINCE: Answer as I call you. Nick Bottom, the weaver.

BOTTOM: Ready. Name what part I am for, and proceed.

QUINCE: You, Nick Bottom are set down for Pyramus.

BOTTOM: What is Pyramus? A lover, or a tyrant?

QUINCE: A lover that kills himself, most gallant, for love.

BOTTOM: (*Center stage.*) That will ask for some tears in the true performing of it: if I do it, let the audience look to their eyes. I will move storms, I will condole in some measure. To the rest: yet my chief humor is for a tyrant. I could play Ercles rarely, or a part to tear a cat in, to make all split.

(Very melodramatic.)

The raging rocks
And shivering shocks
Shall break the locks
Of prison gates;
And Phibbus' car
Shall shine from far,
And make and mar
The foolish Fates.

This was lofty! Now name the rest of the players. This is Ercles' vein, a tyrant's vein. A lover is more condoling. (*Crosses left and sits.*)

QUINCE: Francis Flute, the bellows mender.

FLUTE: (*Rising.*) Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE: Flute, you must take Thisby on you.

FLUTE: (*Excited.*) What is Thisby? A wand'ring knight?

QUINCE: It is the lady that Pyramus must love.

FLUTE: (*Disappointed.*) Nay, faith, let not me play a woman. I have a beard coming.

QUINCE: That's all one. You shall play it in a mask, and you may speak as small as you will.

BOTTOM: (*Rising and crossing to QUINCE.*) An I may hide my face, let me play Thisby too, I'll speak in a monstrous little voice. "Thisne, Thisne!" (*Falsetto.*) "Ah Pyramus, my lover dear! Thy Thisby dear, and lady dear!"

QUINCE: No, no; you must play Pyramus: and, Flute, you Thisby. (*BOTTOM and FLUTE, disappointedly return to their seated positions on stage.*)

BOTTOM: Well, proceed.

QUINCE: Robin Starveling, the tailor.

STARVELING: Here, Peter Quince.

STARVELING is quite old as he struggles to rise, QUINCE crosses to him and hands him his script.

QUINCE: Robin Starveling, you must play Thisby's mother. Tom Snout, the tinker.

SNOUT: Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE: (*Crossing to SNOUT with script.*) You, Pyramus' father: myself, Thisby's father: Snug, the joiner; you, the lion's part. And I hope here is a play fitted.

SNUG: (*Crossing to QUINCE.*) Have you the lion's part written? Pray you, if it be, give it me, for I am slow of study.

QUINCE: You may do it extempore, for it is nothing but roaring.

BOTTOM: (*Crossing center stage and pushing SNUG to the side.*)

Let me play the lion too. I will roar,
that I will do any man's heart good to hear me. I will roar, that I will
make the Duke say, "Let him roar again, let him roar again."
(*BOTTOM roars, scaring the others.*)

QUINCE: An you should do it too terribly, you would fright the
Duchess and the ladies, that they would shriek; and that were
enough to hang us all.

ALL: That would hang us, every mother's son.

BOTTOM: I grant you, friends, if you should fright the ladies out of
their wits, they would have no more
discretion but to hang us: but I will aggravate
my voice so that I will roar you as gently as any sucking dove; I will
roar you an 'twere any nightingale. (*BOTTOM roars softly.*)

QUINCE: (*Loosing his patience.*) You can play no part but Pyramus;
for Pyramus is a sweet-faced man; a proper man as one shall see
in a summer's day; a most lovely, gentlemanlike man: therefore
you must needs play Pyramus.

BOTTOM: (*Thinking.*) Well, I will undertake it. (*Others cheer.*)

QUINCE: In the meantime I will draw a bill of properties, such as our
play wants. I pray you, fail me not. (*They all rise and huddle
center stage.*)

BOTTOM: We will meet; and there may we rehearse most obscenely
and courageously. Take pains; be perfite: adieu.

QUINCE: At the Duke's Oak we meet.

BOTTOM: Enough; hold or cut bowstrings.

THE MECHANICALS all exit separately as they had entered.

PUCK: (*Crossing down off the platform to speak to the audience.*)

At the Duke's Oak, they plan to meet.
So there I'll fly, on nimble feet.
To watch the play, which they intend;
And maybe Robin, can amend. (*PUCK exits off stage right.*)

SCENE 3

It is a nighttime and the air is filled with the sounds of the woods (crickets, owls, etc.). THE MECHANICALS enter cautiously from different directions carrying candles or lanterns and their scripts. They meet center stage.

BOTTOM: Are we all met?

QUINCE: Pat, pat; and here's a marvail's convenient place for our rehearsal. (*Pointing to positions on the stage.*) 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.

All but BOTTOM and QUINCE spread out and sit.

BOTTOM: Peter Quince?

QUINCE: What sayest thou, bully Bottom?

BOTTOM: There are things in this comedy of Pyramus and Thisby 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 that will make all 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.

SNOUT: Will not the ladies be afeared 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 wild fowl than your lion living; and we ought to look to't.

SNOUT: Therefore another prologue must tell he is not a lion.

BOTTOM: (*Crossing to SNUG who looks confused.*) 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 to tremble: my life for yours. If you think I come hither as a lion, it were pity of my life. No, I am no such thing. I am a man as other men are." (*Pointing to SNUG who is very confused.*) And there indeed let him name his name, and tell them plainly, he is Snug the joiner.

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 Thisby meet by moonlight.

SNUG: Doth the moon shine the night we play our play?

BOTTOM: A calendar, a calendar! Look in the almanac; find out moonshine, find out moonshine.

QUINCE: (*Pulling a calendar from one of his pockets.*) 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, (*Indicating STARVELING.*) 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 Thisby, says the story, did talk through the chink of a wall.

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

BOTTOM: (*Crossing to SNOUT.*) Some man or other must present Wall: (*Indicating SNOUT'S chest.*) and let him have some plaster, or some loam, or some roughcast about him, to signify Wall: and let him hold his fingers thus, (*Bottom spreads SNOUT'S index and middle fingers forming a "V."*) and through that cranny shall Pyramus and Thisby whisper.

QUINCE: If that may be, then all is well. Come, sit down, every mother's son, and rehearse your parts. (*All sit and look over their scripts.*) Pyramus, you begin. When you have spoken your speech, enter into that brake; and so everyone according to his cue.

As they all look at their scripts, PUCK enters up center on the platform and tosses glittering fairy dust on the MECHANICALS causing them to freeze in place. PUCK moves among the frozen MECHANICALS ending up down stage where he speaks his aside to the audience.

PUCK: What hempen homespuns have we swagg'ring here,
What, a play toward! I'll be an auditor;
An actor too perhaps, if I see cause.

Puck returns to the platform and snaps his fingers waking the Mechanicals.

QUINCE: (*To BOTTOM.*) Speak, Pyramus. Thisby, stand forth.

BOTTOM: (*As PYRAMUS.*) Thisby, the flowers of odious savors
sweet . . .

QUINCE: Odors, odors.

BOTTOM: (*As PYRAMUS.*) . . . odors savors sweet:

So hath thy breath, my dearest Thisby dear.

But hark, a voice! Stay thou but here awhile,

And by and by I will to thee appear. (*Bottom exits off right.*)

PUCK: (*Aside.*) A stranger Pyramus than e'er played here! (*PUCK exits after BOTTOM.*)

FLUTE: (*AS THISBY.*) 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 THISBY. Spoken reluctantly in a falsetto.*) 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. (*Calling off stage.*) Pyramus enter. Your cue is past; it is "never tire."

FLUTE: (*AS THISBY.*) O . . . as true as truest horse, that yet would never tire.

BOTTOM enters wearing an ass's head. He is followed by PUCK.

BOTTOM: (*As PYRAMUS.*) If I fair, Thisby, I were only thine.

QUINCE: (*Frightened.*) O monstrous! O strange! We are haunted. Pray, masters! Fly, masters! Help!

THE MECHANICALS all exit frightened leaving BOTTOM on stage with PUCK following him from behind.

BOTTOM: Why do they run away? This is a knavery of them to make me afeared. This is to make an ass of me, to fright me, if they could. But I will not stir from this place, do what they can. I will walk up and down here, and will sing, that they shall hear I am not afraid. (*He sings.*)

The woosel cock so black of hue,
With orange-twany bill,
The throstle with his note so true,
The wren with little quill . . .

PUCK: (*Sprinkling fairy dust on BOTTOM.*) Sleep gentle beast, sleep . . . sleep.

BOTTOM slumps down and sleeps with his head on the stage right stump.

PUCK: (*Aside.*) Alas, what mischief have I done?

I'll fix it thus, and then be gone.

(*Sprinkling fairy dust on the sleeping BOTTOM.*)

Awake, awake, O, foolish one. (*PUCK removes the ass-head from BOTTOM and exits.*)

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