A Midsummer Night's Dream

Translated

William Shakespeare

translated by

SJ Hills

Faithfully Translated
into Performable Modern English
Side by Side with Original Text

Includes Stage Directions

A COMEDY

Book 12 in a series of 42

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Dedicated to my four little terrors;
Melody
Eve
James
Hamilton

"From an ardent love of literature, a profound admiration of the men who have left us legacies of thought and beauty, and, I suppose, from that feature in man that induces us to strive to follow those we most admire, and looking upon the pursuit of literature as one of the noblest in which no labour should be deemed too great, I have sought to add a few thoughts to the store already bequeathed to the world. If they are approved, I shall have gained my desire; if not, I shall hope to receive any hints in the spirit of one who loves his work and desires to progress."

R. Hilton. 1869

PREFACE

When we studied Shakespeare at school we had to flick back and forth to the notes at the back of the book to understand a confusing line, words we were not familiar with, expressions lost in time, or even current or political references of Shakespeare's time.

What if the text was rewritten to make each line clear without looking up anything?

There are plenty of modern translations just for this. But they are cumbersome to read, no flow, matter of fact translations (and most this author has found are of varying inaccuracy, despite being approved by exam boards).

As a writer and producer of drama, I wanted not only to translate the play faithfully line by line, but also to include the innuendos, the political satire, the puns and the bawdy humour in a way which would flow and bring the work to life for students, actors prepping for a performance or lovers of the work to enjoy today, faithful to the feel and meaning of the original script and language without going into lengthy explanations for a modern day audience.

A faithful line-by-line translation into modern phrasing that flows, along with additional staging directions making the play interesting to read, easy to understand, and very importantly, an invaluable study aid.

For me it all started at about eight or nine years of age. I was reading a comic which contained the story of Macbeth serialized in simple comic strip form. I could not wait to see what happened next so I rushed out to the public library to get a copy of the book. Of course, when I got it home I didn't even recognise it as being the same story. It made no sense to me, being written in 'Olde English' and often using 'flowery' language. I remember thinking at the time that one day I should write my version of the story for others to understand.

Years went by and I had pretty much forgotten my idea. Then quite by chance I was approached by Encyclopaedia Britannica to produce a series of dramatised classic dramas as educational aids for children learning English as a second language. Included in the selection was Romeo And Juliet which I was to condense down to fifty minutes using modern English.

This brought flooding back the memories of being eight years old again, reading my comic and planning my modern version of Shakespeare. In turn it also led me to the realisation that even if a reader could understand English well, this did not mean they could fully understand and enjoy Shakespeare. I could understand English, yet I did not fully understand some of Shakespeare's text without serious research. So what hope did a person whose first language was not English have?

After some investigation, I discovered there was a great desire around the world to understand the text fully without the inconvenience of referring to footnotes or sidelines, or worse still, the internet. How can one enjoy the wonderful drama with constant interruption? I was also surprised to discover the desire was equally as great in English speaking countries as ones whose first language was not English.

The final kick to get me started was meeting fans of Shakespeare's works who knew scripts off by heart but secretly admitted to me that they did have trouble fully understanding the meaning of some lines. Although they knew the storyline well they could miss some of the subtlety and innuendo Shakespeare was renowned for. It is hardly surprising in this day and age as many of the influences, trends, rumours, beliefs and current affairs of Shakespeare's time are not valid today.

I do not pretend my work is any match for the great master, but I do believe in the greater enjoyment for all. These great works deserve to be understood by all, Shakespeare himself wrote for all levels of audience, he would even aim his work to suit a particular audience at times – for example changing historical facts if he knew a member of royalty would be seeing his play and it would cause them any embarrassment, or of course to curry favour with a monarch by the use of flattery.

I have been as faithful as possible with my version, but the original, iambic pentameter, (the tempo and pace the lines were written for), and other Elizabethan tricks of the trade that Shakespeare was so brilliant at are not included unless vital to the text and meaning. For example, rhyming couplets to signify the end of a scene, for in Shakespeare's day there were no curtains, no lights and mostly static scenery, so scene changes were not so obvious, these couplets, though not strictly necessary, are included to maintain the feel of the original.

This makes for a play that sounds fresh to today's listening audience. It is also a valuable educational tool; English Literature courses often include a section on translating Shakespeare. I am often asked the meaning of a particular line, sometimes scholars argue over the meaning of particular lines. I have taken the most widely agreed version and the one which flows best with the story line where there is dispute, and if you read this translation before reading the original work or going to see a stage version, you will find the play takes on a whole new meaning, making it infinitely more enjoyable.

SJ Hills. London. 2018

Author's Note: This version contains stage directions. These are included purely as a guide to help understand the script better. Any director staging the play would have their own interpretation of the play and decide their own directions. These directions are my own personal interpretation and not those of Shakespeare. You may change these directions to your own choosing or ignore them completely. For exam purposes these should be only regarded as guidance to the dialogue and for accuracy should not be quoted in any studies or examinations.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a comedy. Not in the same way we now know comedy, but because it focuses on the physical relationships of lovers more so than their emotional relationships and includes a happy conclusion. Farcical elements such as the transformation of one character into an ass and mistaken identity along with surreal or supernatural elements make it a light hearted romp, unlike the histories or tragedies. Other notable comedies were *The Taming Of The Shrew*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Tempest.*

To aid in understanding speeches and for learning lines, where possible, speeches by any character are not broken over two pages unless they have a natural break. As a result of this, gaps will be noticeable at the bottom of pages where the next speech will not fully fit onto the page. This was intentional. A speech can not be fully appreciated if one has to turn the page back and forth when studying or learning lines.

Coming soon, *A Midsummer Night's Dream For All Ages* by SJ Hills, which includes the script in modern English with study note stickies, illustrations and simplified text running alongside the main text for younger readers to share with students, actors and fans of the great work.

And available soon, a wonderful, innovative app, a huge undertaking and the very first of its kind, which will include full, new interactive filmed versions of Shakespeare's plays in both original and modern English.

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Historical Notes

Normally, Shakespeare's sources for his plays were printed stories, plays, poems or history books, but for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, there is no known single source for the plot. The component parts he used appear to have come from a variety of sources and from his own knowledge and imagination.

A Midsummer Night's Dream sources include *Chaucer's 'Knight's Tale'* from the '*Canterbury Tales'* which tells the story of *Theseus* conquering the Amazons and bringing *Hippolyta* home to be his queen and their subsequent wedding, with *Hippolyta's* sister performing a rite of May and *Theseus* and *Hippolyta* hunting with their hounds early on a May morning.

The story of *Pyramus* and *Thisbe* can be found in *Ovid's 'Metamorphoses'*, as well as *Chaucer's 'Legend of Good Women'*. The fairy folk were from tradition and from literature, *Edmund Spencer* calls the king of the fairies *Oberon* in his epic poem, '*Faerie Queene'* as do other sources. *Titania* can also be found in *'Metamorphoses'*, and the devilish sprite *Puck*, or *Robin Goodfellow*, was named in the ballad '*The Merry Puck, Or Robin Goodefellow'* which was known to predate this play. For the clowns, Shakespeare may simply have based them on tradesmen he knew, except for the comically named *Bottom*, who can be linked to '*St Paul's letter to the Corinthians'* in the bible for his vision, and '*The Discoverie of Witchcraft'* for transformations of humans into animals and again the troublesome sprite *Robin Goodfellow*.

Everything else probably came from the bard's own imagination and extensive knowledge of folklore. Shakespeare's use of pre-existing material was not considered a lack of originality. In Elizabethan times copyright law did not exist, copying whole passages of text was frequently practiced and not considered theft as it is today. Nowadays, stage and movie productions are frequently 'adaptations' from other sources, the only difference being the need to obtain permission or rights to do so, unless the work is out of copyright.

The real skill Shakespeare displays is in how he adapts his sources in new ways, displaying a remarkable understanding of human psyche and emotion, and including a talent at building characters, adding characters for effect, dramatic pacing, tension building, interspersed by short bouts of relief before building the tension even further, and above all of course, his extraordinary ability to use and miss-use language to his and dramatic, bawdy or playful advantage.

It has been said Shakespeare almost wrote screenplays, predating modern cinema by over 400 years, however you view it, he wrote a powerful story and understood how to play on human emotions and weaknesses.

This play was written during the reign of Elizabeth I. As Shakespeare often referred to the reigning monarch in his plays indirectly and often performed his plays before the monarch this is useful to know.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

THESEUS,	Duke of Athens.	
HIPPOLYTA,	Queen of the Amazons, betrothed to Theseus.	
EGEUS,	Father to Hermia.	
HERMIA,	Daughter to Egeus, in love with Lysander.	
HELENA,	in love with Demetrius.	
LYSANDER,	loved by Hermia	
DEMETRIUS,	in love with Hermia.	
PHILOSTRATE,	Theseus' Master of the Revels.	
PETER QUINCE,	a Carpenter, }	
SNUG,	a Joiner, }	
NICK BOTTOM,	a Weaver, }	
FRANCIS FLUTE,	a Bellows-mender, }	Players in the Interlude.
TOM SNOUT,	a Tinker, }	
ROBIN STARVELING,	a Tailor, }	
OBERON,	King of the Fairies.	
TITANIA,	Queen of the Fairies.	
PUCK,	or Robin Goodfellow, a troublesome hobgoblin.	
PEASEBLOSSOM,	}	
COBWEB,	} Fairies	
MOTH,	}	
MUSTARDSEED,	}	

A TRUMPETER.

Other Fairies attending on Oberon and Titania.
Lords attending on Theseus and Hippolyta.

CONTENTS

ACT I

ATHENS

AND A WOOD NEAR IT
WHERE OUR TALE IS SET

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE NEVER DID RUN SMOOTH

ACT I

ACT I SCENE I

ATHENS. THE PALACE OF THESEUS.

Note: In Greek mythology, Theseus (son of either Poseidon or Aegeus, king of Athens – stories differ) was the legendary hero of Attica,. He slew the Cretan Minotaur with the help of Ariadne, and captured Antiope, queen of the Amazons. In revenge Hippolyte invaded Attica to rescue Antiope. Theseus won and married Hippolyte, the woman he had defeated in battle.

To show characters are comedic or to vary the overall structure of the play, Shakespeare sometimes writes lines in prose rather than the usual blank verse (a form of poetry which doesn't rhyme except for dramatic effect). He moves between prose and verse to give his characters more depth and variety by breaking the rhythm.

Deliberate bawdy use of words is underlined, rhymed lines are in italics. Midsummer Night's Dream has the second highest percentage of rhyming lines of Shakespeare's plays at almost half of all lines.

THE PLAY STARTS WITH THESEUS (A GRECIAN DUKE), HIPPOLYTA (HIS WIFE TO BE), PHILOSTRATE (ENTERTAINMENT MANAGER), AND ATTENDANTS.

THESEUS

Now, lovely Hippolyta, the hour of our wedding is fast approaching. In four happy days there'll be a new moon – but oh, to me how slow the old moon wanes! It delays access to my desire, like a step-mother or a widower long living out a young son's inheritance.

HIPPOLYTA

Four days will quickly plunge into night, four nights will quickly pass in dreaming, then the new crescent moon, like a silver bow newly made in heaven, shall overlook the night of our wedding ceremony.

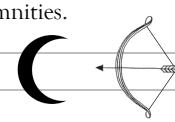
THESEUS

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,
Like to a stepdame or a dowager
Long withering out a young man's revenue.

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.

Note: The crescent moon looks like an archer's bow.



THESEUS
Go, Philostrate, rouse the Athenian youths in merriment. Awake their young, nimble, high spirits. Divert gloom away towards funerals. Such a pale faced companion is not for our celebrations.

THESEUS
Go, Philostrate,
Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments;
Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth;
Turn melancholy forth to funerals.
The pale companion is not for our pomp.

EXIT PHILOSTRATE, THE ENTERTAINMENT MANAGER.

THESEUS (CONT'D)
Hippolyta, I seduced you with my sword, and won your love by defeating you in battle, but I will wed you to a different song, with splendour, with ceremony and with much celebration.

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 revelling.

ENTER EGEUS WITH HIS DAUGHTER HERMIA, FOLLOWED BY LYSANDER, AND DEMETRIUS.

Note: Hermia and Lysander are in love. Demetrius has a crush on Hermia, but she has no feelings for him. Helena is in love with Demetrius, but he does not love her Write this down on a piece of paper now and keep it handy. Egeus has three syllables.

EGEUS
Happiness to Theseus, our esteemed duke.

THESEUS
Thank you, good Eugeus. What news about yourself?

EGEUS
I come full of troubles, I have problems with my child, my daughter Hermia.
(*to Demetrius*) Step forward, Demetrius.
(*to Theseus*) My noble lord, this man has my consent to marry her. (*indicates Demetrius*)
(*to Lysander*) Step forward, Lysander.
(*to Theseus*) But, my gracious Duke, this man has bewitched the heart of my child.
(*he indicates Lysander*)

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 bewitch'd the bosom of my child.

Note: There is one syllable too many in the last line. Early quarto texts included the word "man", but it may be that the word "man" was copied over from the line two lines above during early printing. Later folio texts omitted the word "man". It was later put back in with "bewitched" changed to "bewitch'd".

EGEUS (CONT'D)

(*to Lysander*) You, you, Lysander, you have written her poems, and swapped love tokens with my child. You have sung verses of false love with a false voice at her window by moonlight. And you've given her false impressions of love with lockets of your hair, rings, baubles, ornaments, fancy presents, knick-knacks, curiosities, perfumes, confectionary - all persuasive temptations to a young, innocent lady. With deceptive cunning you have stolen my daughter's heart, and turned her obedience, which is rightfully mine, to stubborn obstinacy.

(*to Theseus*) And, my gracious duke, if she will not here and now, before your grace, consent to marry Demetrius, I beg the time honoured privilege of Athens that, as she is mine, I may be rid of her as I please, which shall be either to this gentleman, or to her death, in accordance with the law in such a case.

EGEUS

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,
I beg the ancient privilege of Athens:
As she is mine I may dispose of her;
Which shall be either to this gentleman
Or to her death, according to our law
Immediately provided in that case.

Note: According to the law of Solon, parents in Athens had absolute power of life and death over their own children.

In Shakespeare's time in England a daughter was considered the possession of her father until she married, then her ownership passed to her husband. Hence the father giving away the bride in the marriage ceremony. Women had no rights then.

'Bracelets of thy hair' – a common love token was a bracelet made from the giver's woven or braided hair.

THESEUS

What do you say, Hermia? Be advised, dear maiden, your father should be as a god to you. The one who gave you your beauty, yes, and the one to whom you are no more than a waxwork figure, shaped by him, and within his power to leave the figure untouched or to disfigure it. Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

HERMIA

So is Lysander.

THESEUS

What say you, Hermia? Be advised fair maid.
To you your father should be as a god;
One that composed your beauties, yea, and one
To whom you are but as a form in wax
By him imprinted, and within his power
To leave the figure or disfigure it.
Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

HERMIA

So is Lysander.

THESEUS
In himself he is, but in this case, lacking your father's approval, the other man must be considered more worthy.

HERMIA
I wish my father could see it with my eyes.

THESEUS
Or rather, your eyes should see with his judgement in mind.

HERMIA
I do beg your grace's pardon. I don't know by what power I am so emboldened, nor how appropriate it is to my modesty in such high presence here to plead my thoughts, but I beg that your grace tell me the worst that may befall me in this matter, if I refuse to marry Demetrius.

THESEUS
Either to die a death, or to abstain forever from the company of men. Therefore, pretty Hermia, question your desires, consider how young you are, examine fully your hot bloodedness, and whether, if you do not give in to your father's wishes, you can endure the outfit of a nun, forever to be caged in a dark cloister to live as a childless sister all your life, chanting dull hymns to the cold barren moon.

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 judgement 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
For ever 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,
For aye to be in shady cloister mewed,
To live a barren sister all your life,
Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.

Note: The moon was associated with Diana, goddess of women and chastity, suggesting a sexless life with no children.

'Cloister mewed' has nothing to do with cats, it is a hawking term. Shakespeare was fond of inserting falconry references. A mew is a place or a cage where a trained hawk is placed alone to moult (mew) its feathers. From this we get the term 'mews' for a row of converted dwellings designed for stabling horses. The first mews in this sense was the Hawk Mews royal stables at Charing Cross in London.

'Cloister' – a convent, named after the arched walkways they contained. Nuns, known as sisters, were locked away in cloister where they wore rough heavy clothing which exposed only their face, and were banished to a life of prayer away from any relationships with men.

THESEUS (CONT'D)
Triple blessed are they who can forgo their passions and endure such a chaste life. But happier on earth is the rose that is picked and enjoyed, than the one withering on the virgin thorny stem, left to grow, live, and die single but blessed in heaven.

THESEUS
Thrice blessed 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.

Note: 'Blessedness' – divine blessing which comes to those who live life celibate, as nuns do.

HERMIA
And that's how I will grow, and live, and die, my lord, before I give up my virginity to his lordship, whose undesired clutches my soul does not wish to give ownership.

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

Note: 'Yoke' - the wooden bar attached to a working ox.

THESEUS
Take time to think on the matter, and by the next new moon – the day that seals the everlasting bond of fellowship between my love and I – upon that day either prepare to die for disobedience of your father's orders, or else marry Demetrius as he wishes, or on the altar of Diana, goddess of chastity, make solemn vows to austerity and a single life.

THESEUS
Take time to pause; and by the next new moon -
The sealing-day betwixt my love and me
For everlasting bond of fellowship -
Upon that day either prepare to die
For disobedience to your father's will,
Or else to wed Demetrius, as he would;
Or on Diana's altar to protest
For aye austerity and single life.

Note: 'Protest' meant to make a vow, before it meant disapproval as it does now.

'Austerity' was a clever choice of word, having three different meanings all relevant here. 1) stern/severe. ii) Plain/simple. 111) Impoverished.

Trivia: The last line is an example of a 'hendiady'. Two words connected with 'and' when they can exist together without it. 'Austerity and single life', when 'austere single life' would suffice. Shakespeare uses the 'and' to keep the iambic pentameter. (Ten alternate syllables, five short, five long).

DEMETRIUS
Give up, sweet Hermia, and, Lysander, give up your hopeless claim to my assured right.

LYSANDER
You have her father's love, Demetrius, let me have Hermia's, you can marry him.

DEMETRIUS
Relent, sweet Hermia; and, Lysander, yield
Thy crazed title to my certain right.

LYSANDER
You have her father's love, Demetrius;
Let me have Hermia's: do you marry him.

EGEUS

Sneering Lysander! It's true, he has my love, and I shall offer him what is also mine to love. She is mine, and all my rights of claim to her I do bestow upon Demetrius.

LYSANDER

(*to Theseus*) I am, my lord, from as noble descent as him and as wealthy. My love is greater than his, my prospects in every way of equal level, if not better than Demetrius. And what is more than all these boasts together, I am loved by the beautiful Hermia. Why should I not pursue my right of claim? I'll say it to his face, Demetrius pursued love with Nedar's daughter, Helena, and won her love, and she, sweet lady that she is, dotes on him, dotes in foolish love on this immoral and inconsistent man.

THESEUS

I must confess that I have heard the same, and I had been meaning to speak with Demetrius about it. But, being overrun with personal affairs, it had slipped my mind. But, Demetrius, come, and you, Egeus, you shall come with me too. I have some private words of advice for you both. As for you, beautiful Hermia, look to ready yourself to fit your thoughts around your father's wishes, or else the law of Athens, which I can in no way overturn, demands death or a vow of chastity.

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

I am, my lord, as well derived as he,
As well possessed; 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 to arm yourself
To fit your fancies to your father's will,
Or else the law of Athens yields you up -
Which by no means we may extenuate -
To death or to a vow of single life.

THESEUS STANDS TO LEAVE.

HIPPOLYTA LOOKS CONCERNED.

THESEUS (CONT'D)

Come, my dear Hippolyta. Are you all right, my love?
- Demetrius and Egeus, come with us, I have some tasks for you in connection with our wedding, and I wish to discuss with you something closely concerning you both.

THESEUS

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 dutiful eagerness we follow you.

EGEUS
With duty and desire we follow you.

EXEUNT ALL BUT LYSANDER AND HERMIA.

LYSANDER NOTICES HOW UPSET HERMIA LOOKS.

LYSANDER
What now, my love! Why are your cheeks so pale? What makes the rosiness in them fade so fast?

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

HERMIA
(*sad and moody*) Probably a lack of rain, which I could well provide them with from the storm in my eyes.

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

LYSANDER TRIES TO CONSOLE HERMIA, BUT HE IS NOT VERY GOOD AT IT.

LYSANDER
Alas, that everything I have ever read or heard told in stories or history proves that the course of true love never runs smoothly. Or it was because of a class difference…

LYSANDER
Ay me; for aught that ever 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 -

Note: "The course of true love never did run smooth" - the famous quote of the play.

HERMIA IS NOT TO BE CONSOLED. SHE LOVES LYSANDER BUT MUST MARRY DEMETRIUS.

HERMIA
(*interrupting*) What a cross to bear! Too high class to be in love with a commoner.

HERMIA
O cross! - too high to be enthralled to low.

Note: 'Cross' – the cross Jesus was crucified on, which he had to carry to the site of the crucifixion. "A cross to bear" is a saying still in use today, meaning a burden or trial that has to be endured.

LYSANDER
Or there was a mismatch in age…

LYSANDER
Or else misgraffed in respect of years -

HERMIA
(*interrupting*) So unfair! Too old to be engaged to a young one.

HERMIA
O spite! - too old to be engaged to young.

LYSANDER

Or else it was down to the choice of your friends and relatives…

HERMIA

(*interrupting*) Oh hell! To choose love through another's eyes!

LYSANDER

Or, even if all parties were happy with the choice, then war, death, or sickness could confound it, making it as short lived as a sound, swift as a shadow, fleeting as a dream, brief as the lightning in the black night which, in a fit of anger, reveals both heaven and earth, and before a man has time to say 'look!' the jaws of darkness have devoured it. That's how quickly bright hopes can be destroyed.

LYSANDER

Or else it stood upon the choice of friends -

HERMIA

O hell! - to choose love by another's eyes.

LYSANDER

Or, if there were a sympathy in choice,
War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it,
Making it momentary as a sound,
Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,
Brief as the lightning in the collied night
That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and earth,
And ere a man hath power to say `Behold!'
The jaws of darkness do devour it up.
So quick bright things come to confusion.

Note: 'Spleen' – used in the context of 'venting his spleen'. It was once believed that the spleen was the source of a bad temper.

'Confusion' – Shakespeare often uses the word to mean 'ruin'.

HERMIA

Then if true lovers have always been thwarted, it must be a rule of fate. In which case, let us learn patience at such trials, because it is an expected cross to bear, as much a part of love as thoughts and dreams and sighs, hopes and tears, love's poor companions.

HERMIA

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.

Note: 'Cross' – the heavy wooden cross Christ had to carry to be crucified on.

LYSANDER

A good outlook. Therefore, hear me out, Hermia. I have a widowed aunt, with an inheritance of great income. She is childless and she regards me as her only son. Her house is twenty miles away from Athens, and there, sweet Hermia, I can marry you, out of the jurisdiction of cruel Athenian law. If you love me, slip out of your father's house tomorrow night, and in the wood three miles outside town, where I met you and Helena to perform May Day rites one morning, I will be waiting for you there.

LYSANDER

A good persuasion. Therefore hear me, Hermia:
I have a widow aunt, a dowager
Of great revenue, and she hath no child -
From Athens is her house remote seven leagues -
And she respects me as her only son.
There, gentle Hermia, may I marry thee,
And to that place the sharp Athenian law
Cannot pursue us. If thou lov'st 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.

Note: A league is roughly three miles or five kilometres. Twenty miles is roughly thirty-two kilometres.

May Day rites are performed early on the first day of May. They celebrate the oncoming spring and are performed to bring on a good harvest.

HERMIA

My dear Lysander, I swear to you by Cupid's strongest bow, by his best gold tipped arrow,
By the innocence of Venus' doves,
By that which unites souls and furthers loves,
And by the fire which burned the Carthage queen,
When the false Trojan under sail was seen.
By all the vows that men have ever broke –
In number more than women ever spoke –
In that same place you have instructed me,
Tomorrow truly I will meet with thee.

HERMIA

My good Lysander,
I swear to thee by Cupid's strongest bow,
By his best arrow with the golden head,
By the simplicity of Venus' doves,
By that which knitteth souls and prospers loves,
And by that fire which burned the Carthage queen
When the false Trojan under sail was seen;
By all the vows that ever men have broke -
In number more than ever women spoke -
In that same place thou hast appointed me,
Tomorrow truly I will meet with thee.

Note: In Ovid's 'Metamorphoses', Cupid's gold tipped arrow created lovers, his lead tipped one had the opposite effect.

Aphrodite and Venus, the goddesses of love, were depicted with sweet doves flying around them or perched on them.

The 'Carthage queen' was Dido who fell in love with Aeneas (the false Trojan). She stabbed herself and was burned on a pyre when he deserted her by sailing away.

Trivia: In the case of Venus' dropping the extra 's, i.e. Venus's, the extra 's is dropped for classical names but not ordinary names. Tennis player Venus's tennis serve, is correct for example, but not for the Venus of mythology. It is pronounced 'venus-ses' in both cases.

LYSANDER
Keep your promise, my love. Look, here comes Helena.

LYSANDER
Keep promise, love. Look, here comes Helena.

ENTER HELENA IN A HURRY.

HERMIA
God speed, fair Helena! Going away?

HERMIA
God speed, fair Helena! Whither away?

Note: For the wordplay on 'fair', consider its meaning as 'beauty' or 'beautiful'.

HELENA
You call me fair? That 'fair' you must unsay.
Demetrius loves your fair – Oh, happy fair!
Your eyes are magnets, and your tongue's sweet air
More tuneful than the lark's to shepherd's ear
When wheat is green and Hawthorn buds appear.
Sickness is catching, oh, that looks were too,
Yours I'd catch, fair Hermia, to be like you!
My ear would catch your voice, my eye your eye,
My tongue would catch your tongue's sweet melody.
If the world were mine, Demetrius excepted,
The rest I'd give to be you incarnated.
Oh, teach me how you look, and with what art,
You capture the beat of Demetrius' heart.

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 tuneable than lark to shepherd's ear
When wheat is green, when Hawthorn buds appear.
Sickness is catching; O, were favour so,
Yours would I catch, fair Hermia, ere I go!
My ear should catch your voice, my eye your eye,
My tongue should catch your tongue's sweet melody.
Were the world mine, Demetrius being bated,
The rest I'd give to be to you translated.
O, teach me how you look, and with what art
You sway the motion of Demetrius' heart.

Note: The lark was the herald of the morning, the first bird to sing at dawn. In Romeo and Juliet it sadly announced the parting of the lovers.

Shakespeare often rhymes 'love' with 'move' or 'prove', and here he rhymes 'eye' with melody' – words which don't rhyme when spoken in modern English. The vowel sounds have changed over the centuries, and regional variations are very marked, add to that the poetic pronunciation of some words and it all gets lost today. For a more detailed explanation see the note on page 71.

HERMIA
I frown upon him, yet he loves me still.

HELENA
Oh, that your frowns could teach my smiles such skill.

HERMIA
I give him curses, yet he gives me love.

HELENA
Oh, that my prayers could such affection move.

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 does chase me.

HELENA
The more I love, the more he does hate me.

HERMIA
His folly, Helena, is no fault of mine.

HELENA
Only your beauty – wish that fault was mine!

HERMIA
Take comfort, he shall no more see my face.
Lysander and myself will flee this place.
Before the day Lysander and I met,
Athens it seemed was in paradise set.
Oh then, what power in my love does dwell,
That has turned this heaven into a hell?

LYSANDER
Helen, to you our plans we won't conceal.
Tomorrow night, when the moon does reveal
Its silvery face in the wat'ry glass,
Coating with liquid pearls the blades of grass –
A time lovers' flight is hid from the eye –
Through Athens' gates we are planning to fly.

HERMIA
And in the wood where often you and I
Upon pale primrose beds would go to lie,
To share our problems with company sweet,
There my Lysander and myself will meet.
Away from Athens we'll avert our eye
To seek new friendships in new company.
Farewell, sweet playfellow. Do pray for us.
And good luck to you and Demetrius.
(to Lysander)
Be true, Lysander, we must starve our sight
Till we see each other, tomorrow midnight.

LYSANDER
I will, my Hermia.

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.
Before the time I did Lysander see,
Seemed Athens as a paradise to me.
O then, what graces in my love do dwell,
That he hath turned a heaven unto a hell?

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 Athens' 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;
And thence from Athens turn away our eyes
To seek new friends and stranger companies.
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.

EXIT HERMIA.

LYSANDER (CONT'D)

Helena, adieu.
As you do him, may Demetrius love you!

LYSANDER

Helena, adieu.
As you on him, Demetrius dote on you!

EXIT LYSANDER, LEAVING ONLY HELENA.

HELENA

How much happier some others can be!
Through Athens I'm thought of as fair as she.
But so what? Demetrius does not think so.
He will not accept what all but him know.
And just as he's wrong, loving Hermia's eyes,
Then so am I, liking his qualities.
Things gross and vile, holding no quality,
Love can transpose in looks and dignity.
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,
That is why Cupid is always shown blind.
And Cupid's mind has no judgement or taste.
Wings and no eyes suggest unheeded haste,
Hence, 'Cupid's a child', has often been said,
'Cause in his choice he is so oft misled.
Like rogue boys in sport who do falsely swear,
The young boy, Cupid, is tricked everywhere.
Before Demetrius spotted Hermia's eyne,
He hailed down oaths that he was solely mine.
But then when this hail, Hermia's heat it felt,
It thawed and all the showers of oaths did melt.
I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight.
Then to the wood he'll go tomorrow night.
He'll find her, and for this intelligence
If he thanks me, it'll be grudging expense.
Though by these means I will increase my pain,
We will at least see each other again.

HELENA

How happy some o'er other some can be!
Through Athens I am thought as fair as she.
But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so;
He will not know what all but he do know;
And as he errs, doting on Hermia's eyes,
So I, admiring of his qualities.
Things base and vile, holding no quantity,
Love can transpose to form and dignity.
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,
And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.
Nor hath Love's mind of any judgement taste;
Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste;
And therefore is Love said to be a child,
Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.
As waggish boys in game themselves forswear,
So the boy Love is perjured everywhere;
For ere Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyne,
He hailed down oaths that he was only mine;
And when this hail some heat from Hermia felt,
So he dissolved, and showers of oaths did melt.
I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight.
Then to the wood will he tomorrow night
Pursue her; and for this intelligence
If I have thanks, it is a dear expense.
But herein mean I to enrich my pain,
To have his sight thither and back again.

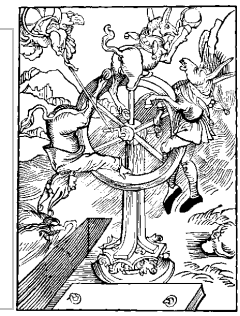
Note: 'Eyne' – an obsolete word for the plural of eye (eyes). Used now only in poetry, hence it being included in the translation for the rhyme with 'mine'.

ACT I SCENE II

ATHENS. A ROOM IN QUINCE'S HOUSE.

ENTER QUINCE THE CARPENTER, SNUG THE JOINER, BOTTOM THE WEAVER, FLUTE THE BELLOWS MENDER, SNOUT THE TINKER (TRAVELLING METAL REPAIRER) AND STARVELING THE TAILOR. NONE OF THEM ARE VERY BRIGHT. THEY ARE COMMONLY REFERRED TO AS CLOWNS OR COMEDIANS.

Note: This 'company of actors' are all tradesmen and of limited education. The scene is possibly related to 'The Ship of Fools' from Plato's 'Republic', where the captain has poor hearing, poor sight, and poor navigational skills. The crew rebel, all insisting they should steer the ship, though none of them are trained. They remove the captain and any dissenters and, after breaking open the stores of drink and food, fight to steer the ship with obvious disastrous and tragically comedic consequences. In this scene, Quince has been appointed the director, though he has no experience, and Bottom, who also has no experience but plenty of self-confidence, wants to take over every role in the company.



QUINCE
Is all our company here?

BOTTOM
You'd best call them out *generally,* (individually) *man* by *man* (one by one) from the *scrip* (script).

QUINCE
Is all our company here?

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

Note: 'Scrip' - Bottom means 'script'. This group of men often get words slightly wrong, or use words that sound like the one they should have used, but have a completely different meaning. Words they get wrong will be italicised and the correct word will be shown next to it. Miswording here is known as a 'blunder'.

The groups of actors of the time were known collectively as 'playing companies'.

HE INDICATES THE PAPER QUINCE IS HOLDING.

QUINCE
Here is the list of every man's name from all of Athens *which* (who) is thought fit to play in our *interlude* in front of the duke and the duchess on the night of their wedding day.

QUINCE
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 the duchess on his wedding day at night

Note: An interlude is typically a pause in the middle of a play, not the play itself.

BOTTOM

First, good Peter Quince, say what the play *treats* (treads) on, then read the names of the actors to *grow to your point.* (get to the point)

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

Indeed, our play is 'The Most Lamentable *Comedy* (tragedy) And Most Cruel Death Of Pyramus And Thisbe'.

QUINCE

Marry, our play is ` The most Lamentable Comedy and most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe'.

Note: The play is of course a tragedy, not a comedy, though the speech is comedic.

Literary Note: In mythology, Thisbe, a beautiful young Babylonian woman, was loved by Pyramus. Their parents objected to them marrying so the lovers had to meet secretly. One day they agreed to meet at the tomb of Ninus. Thisbe arrived first and saw a lioness which had just killed an ox, so she ran away. As she ran she dropped an item of clothing which the lion seized and stained with blood. Pyramus found it and thinking Thisbe had been killed, he killed himself. Thisbe, on returning to the spot, found Pyramus' dead body and killed herself.

Their story is from Ovid's 'Metamorphoses' and bears some resemblance to Romeo and Juliet.

BOTTOM

A very fine piece of work, I assure you, and a *merry*. Now, good Peter Quince, call out your actors *by* (from) the list. Men, *spread yourselves.* (line up).

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.

Note: A merry – this doesn't make proper sense, he probably means, entertaining, or a comedy, or even a merry one, which of course it isn't, it is a tragic tale.

QUINCE

Answer as I call you.
(*calls*) Nick Bottom, the weaver?

QUINCE

Answer as I call you. Nick Bottom, the weaver?

BOTTOM

Ready. Name the part I'm down for, then proceed.

BOTTOM

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

QUINCE

You, Nick Bottom, are *set* (put) down for Pyramus.

QUINCE

You, Nick Bottom, are set down for Pyramus.

BOTTOM

What is Pyramus? A lover or a *tyrant*? (hero)

BOTTOM

What is Pyramus? A lover, or a tyrant?

QUINCE

A lover, who kills himself most *gallant* (gallantly) for love.

BOTTOM

That will cause tears if performed properly. If I do it, let the audience look out for their eyes. I will make storms of tears, I will *condole* (be sympathetic) with the character *in some measure* (in depth). Now list the others.

QUINCE

A lover, that kills himself most gallant for love.

BOTTOM

That will ask some tears in 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.

BOTTOM CONTINUES, NOT ALLOWING QUINCE TO LIST THE OTHERS.

BOTTOM (CONT'D)

– Yet my real passion is playing a *tyrant* (hero). I could play *Ercles* (Hercules) *rarely* (very well), or someone who rants and rages and upsets everyone.

BOTTOM

- Yet my chief humour is for a tyrant. I could play Ercles rarely, or a part to tear a cat in, to make all split.

Note: Hercules kills a lion in his twelve labours and famously goes into a mad rage killing all his family in the Roman tragedy by Seneca, 'Hercules Furens' (The Mad Hercules).

'Tear a cat' – to rant loudly. 'Make all split' – Cause a stir amongst everyone.

HE DEMONSTRATES, RECITING VERSE IN A THEATRICAL RAGE.

BOTTOM (CONT'D)

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

BOTTOM

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.

Note: Bottom says this rhyme is 'lofty'. Whatever it is it makes almost no sense.

"Phibbus' car" – the chariot of the sun god Phoebus, which drove the sun around the earth daily.

The 'Fates' were three goddesses who determined a human's destiny, or fate, as we also call it. One spun (made) the thread of life, one decided its length, and one cut it.

BOTTOM (CONT'D)
(*about his theatrical performance*) That was *lofty* (high-brow) stuff.
(*to Quince*) Now name the rest of the players.
(*again about his performance*) - That was in *Ercles* (Hercules) style, that of a *tyrant* (hero), a lover would be more *condoling.* (pathetic)

BOTTOM
This was lofty. Now name the rest of the players.
- This is Ercles' vein, a tyrant's vein; a lover is more condoling.

QUINCE
Francis Flute, the bellows mender?

QUINCE
Francis Flute, the bellows-mender?

FLUTE
Here, Peter Quince.

FLUTE
Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE
Flute, you must *take on* Thisbe.

QUINCE
Flute, you must take Thisbe on you.

FLUTE
What is Thisbe? – A wandering knight?

FLUTE
What is Thisbe? - a wand'ring knight?

Note: Quince means play the part of Thisbe, Flute assumes it is 'take on in a fight'.

QUINCE
She is the lady that Pyramus must love.

QUINCE
It is the lady that Pyramus must love.

FLUTE
No, indeed, don't let me play a woman. I'm growing a beard.

FLUTE
Nay, faith, let me not play a woman; I have a beard coming.

Note: In Shakespeare's times, young men played the female parts in a play. It was illegal for women to act.

QUINCE
That doesn't matter, you can wear a mask, and you can speak as small (in as tiny a voice) as you wish.

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

BOTTOM
If I hide my face, let me play Thisbe too. I'll speak in a monstrous little (extremely small) voice.

BOTTOM
An I may hide my face, let me play Thisbe too. I'll speak in a monstrous little voice:

HE DEMONSTRATES USING A LOUD LOW VOICE AND THEN A HIGH SQUEAKY VOICE DELIBERATELY MISPRONOUNCING THISBE'S NAME WITH A FALSE LISP.

BOTTOM (CONT'D)
(*male voice*) 'Thisne, Thisne!'
(*poor female high pitched voice*) 'Ah, Pyramus, my lover dear. I am your dear Thisbe, and dear lady!'

BOTTOM
`Thisne, Thisne!'
`Ah, Pyramus, my lover dear; thy Thisbe dear, and lady dear!'

Note: There are several theories put forward as to why Bottom should pronounce the name 'Thisne' when playing a hero. From being a pet name for his love, to showing how he would mix up his words from one character to the next, to playing a buffoon type character, or possibly it was a dig at another heroic actor who spoke badly.

QUINCE
No, no. You must play Pyramus - and Flute, you will play Thisbe.

QUINCE
No, no; you must play Pyramus; and Flute, you Thisbe.

BOTTOM
Very well, proceed.

BOTTOM
Well, proceed.

QUINCE
(*calls*) Robin Starveling, the tailor?

QUINCE
Robin Starveling, the tailor?

STARVELING
Here, Peter Quince.

STARVELING
Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE
Robin Starveling, you must play Thisbe's mother.
(*calls*) Tom Snout, the tinker?

QUINCE
Robin Starveling, you must play Thisbe's mother. Tom Snout, the tinker?

SNOUT
Here, Peter Quince.

SNOUT
Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE
You will play Pyramus' father. I myself shall play Thisbe's father.
- Snug, the joiner, you will play the lion. And I hope that is the play filled (fully cast).

QUINCE
You, Pyramus' father. Myself, Thisbe's father. Snug, the joiner, you the lion's part. And I hope here is a play fitted.

Note: Quince has cast the father and mother of Thisbe and the father of Pyramus, though they do not appear in the play. Later additional characters are added, the Moon played by Starveling, and a Wall played by Snout.

SNUG
Have you the lion's part written down? Please, if you do, give it me, I am slow of learning.

SNUG
Have you the lion's part written? Pray you, if it be, give it me, for I am slow of study.

QUINCE
You may make it up as you go, it is only roaring.

BOTTOM
Let me play the lion too. My roar will make any man's heart glad to hear me. My roar will make the duke say 'Let him roar again, let him roar again.'

QUINCE
If you should do it too *terribly* (terrifyingly), you would frighten the duchess and the ladies so they would scream, and that would be enough to hang us all.

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

BOTTOM
I grant you, friends, if you frighten the ladies out of their wits they would have no discretion (hesitation) in hanging us, but I will *aggravate* (tone down) my voice so my roar will be as gentle as any *suckling dove* (cooing dove). I will roar you as if it were a nightingale.

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

BOTTOM
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.'

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.

Note: A dove doesn't suckle. Bottom probably confused suckling pig, and obviously a nightingale is famed for singing, not roaring.

QUINCE
You can play no part but Pyramus, for Pyramus is a sweet-faced man, a proper man, as any you'll see *in a* (on a) summer's day. A most lovely, gentlemanlike man. Therefore you *must needs* play Pyramus.

QUINCE
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.

Note: 'Must needs' – either word on its own would suffice. i.e. 'must play' or 'need to play'.

BOTTOM
Well, I will undertake it. What beard is it best to play it in?

QUINCE
Why, any you like.

BOTTOM
Well, I will undertake it. What beard were I best to play it in?

QUINCE
Why, what you will.

BOTTOM

I will *discharge* (perform) it in either a straw coloured beard, an orangey-brown beard, a purple-reddish beard, or a French crown coloured beard – a perfect yellow.

BOTTOM

I will discharge it in either your straw-colour beard, your orange-tawny beard, your purple-in-grain beard, or your French-crown-colour beard, your perfect yellow.

Note: 'Grain' – cochineal, a red dye from the dried bodies of insects.

'Crown' - gold coin. In the next speech Quince means 'head' when he says 'crown', an old word for head, as in the rhyme, 'Jack fell down and broke his crown'. It also says that French crowns (heads) have no hair – this was because the pox (syphilis), also know as 'the French disease', caused hair loss.

QUINCE

Some of your French crowns have no hair at all, and then you will play clean shaven. But, men, here are your parts, (*he hands the scripts out*) and I am to beg you, plead with you, and desire you to learn them by tomorrow night, and meet me in the moonlit palace wood a mile outside town. There we will rehearse, for if we meet in the city we shall be dogged with company, and our plans will be known. In the meantime I will draw up a list of props that our play wants. I beg you, do not fail me.

QUINCE

Some of your French crowns have no hair at all, and then you will play barefaced. But, masters, here are your parts; and I am to entreat you, request you, and desire you to con them by tomorrow night, and meet me in the palace wood a mile without the town by moonlight. There will we rehearse, for if we meet in the city we shall be dogged with company, and our devices known. In the meantime I will draw a bill of properties such as our play wants. I pray you, fail me not.

BOTTOM

We will meet, and there we can rehearse most *obscenely* (seemly) and *courageously.* (earnestly) Working hard to be word perfect. Adieu.

BOTTOM

We will meet; and there we may rehearse most obscenely and courageously. Take pains; be perfect. Adieu.

QUINCE

We'll meet at the duke's oak tree.

QUINCE

At the duke's oak we meet.

BOTTOM

That's it then.
(*to all*) Be there, no excuses.

BOTTOM

Enough; hold or cut bow-strings.

Note: There are many arguments among scholars regarding the meaning of the above line. Some say it was a common saying from archery – a man either holds the archery bow or he cuts the bow-strings for it. Others say it is about violin bows. Others that 'hold' means keep your promise or we'll cut your violin bow-strings. Whatever the source, the meaning is - be there whatever happens.

EXEUNT.

Note: Shakespeare often uses rhyming couplets to signify the end of a scene. In Shakespeare's day there were no curtains, no lights and mostly static scenery, so scene changes were not so obvious. Audiences were conditioned to hear the rhyme and knew the significance. The remainder of the play would be mostly written in blank verse, which is unrhymed, so the contrast was apparent.

However, in this play, half of the lines are rhymed so the significance is not so obvious. Often characters rhyme their last two lines as they are due to exit the stage mid scene. The rhyming lines, though not strictly necessary, are included to maintain the feel of the original.

Shakespeare also used rhyme for certain characters, and the type of rhyme (the meter, or how many syllables there are per line) would vary depending on the character who spoke it.

Important Note: The stage directions (between main text in capital letters) are included purely as the author's guide to understand the script better. Any director staging the play would have their own interpretation of the play and decide their own directions. These directions are not those of Shakespeare. You can change these directions to your own choosing or ignore them completely. For exam purposes these should only be regarded as guidance to the dialogue and for accuracy should not be quoted in any studies or examinations.