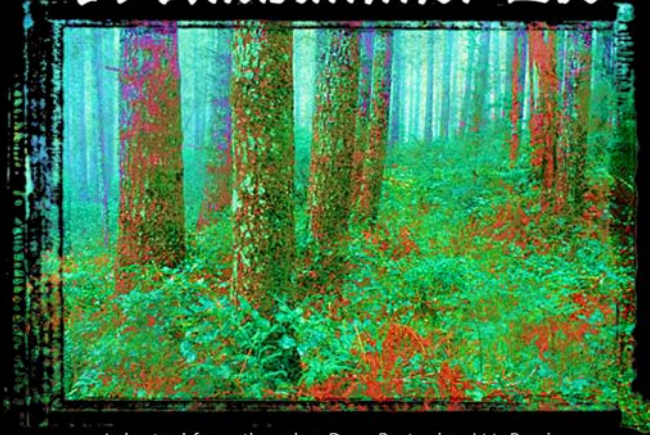


A Midsummer Eve



Adapted from the play *Dear Brutus* by J.M. Barrie

Heather Lynn

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A Midsummer Eve

CLASSIC COMEDY/FANTASY. Adapted from the play *Dear Brutus* by J.M. Barrie. A man of mystery has invited guests to his country home for a Midsummer Eve excursion into the woods. As the guests disappear into the woods, they experience their lives as they might have been if they had made different choices. A butler becomes a wealthy married gentleman. A wife becomes her husband's mistress, and the mistress becomes the husband's wife. A childless painter meets his "daughter." And an elderly man joyously dances through the woods playing a flute. As the guests return from their Midsummer Eve's dream, they are transformed and see themselves and others quite differently.

Performance Time: Approximately 75-90 minutes.



Illustration from the title page of *Robin Goodfellow: His Mad Pranks and Merry Jests* (1629)

About the Story

Thought to be written between 1590 and 1596, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of Shakespeare's most popular works and is described as romantic, dreamlike, farcical, and fantastic. The character of Puck, a mischievous woodland sprite/goblin, was derived from traditional English folklore.

Since the 13th century in England, the summer solstice has been celebrated as Midsummer Eve with people lighting bonfires, feasting, and engaging in general merrymaking. In England, Midsummer Eve is usually celebrated on either June 23 (St. John's Eve) or on June 28 (St. Peter's Eve).

Characters

(4 M, 6 F)

LOB: Mysterious host who has invited eight guests to his home for a Midsummer Eve excursion into the woods; similar to the character of Puck (aka Robin Goodfellow) in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a sprite/goblin with magical powers; small in stature and looks very old; wears evening wear; male.

MATEY: Lob's butler who has stolen rings from the guests; wears a butler's uniform; male.

ALICE DEARTH: A sullen woman who is dissatisfied with her life and regrets not having married a former suitor; she despises her husband from whom she is estranged; young, fair, and tall with a husky voice; wears an evening gown; female.

MR. WILL DEARTH: Had once set out to be a great painter but is now a broken man who is unhappily married to Alice; regrets not having a child; wears evening wear; male.

MARGARET: Mr. Dearth's "daughter" who appears in the woods; her clothes are covered in brambles, her skirt has a tear in it, and she wears boots; female.

MABEL PURDIE: Passive, pleading woman who is aware of her husband's philandering but suffers in silence as a loyal wife; wears an evening gown; female.

JOHN PURDIE: Young barrister who is unhappily married to Mabel and is having an affair with Joanna Trout; dimwitted, shallow romantic who thinks himself a noble man; wears evening wear; male.

JOANNA TROUT: Lively, shallow woman who is blind to reality and is deeply infatuated with John; wears an evening gown; female.

LADY CAROLINE LANEY: Proper, poised unmarried woman who went to a prestigious school and is devoted to

the insignificant trappings of life; has a strange, interesting face; wears an evening gown; female.

MRS. COADE: Nice elderly woman who the others call "Coady"; has a beaming smile and walks with a limp; wears an evening gown; female.

MR. COADE: Sweet old man with a gentle smile who has been married to Mrs. Coade for 25 years; at times has a wistful look and fidgets like he would like to be elsewhere; wears evening wear; male.

Setting

Lob's country home and his magical woods.

Set

Lob's country house, drawing room. Through the French windows at the back of the room Lob's garden can be seen. The windows have curtains that can be opened and closed. There is a door that leads to the adjoining dining room. There is a stone fireplace, a settee, chairs, a small table, and a footstool. On the table is a lamp and cut flowers in a vase.

Magical woods. A backdrop of a somber-looking woods that can be seen through the drawing room window. There is a tree large enough to hide behind.

Synopsis of Scenes

ACT I: Lob's country house, drawing room, 10 p.m.

ACT II: Deep in the woods, later that evening.

ACT III: Lob's country house, the drawing room, early morning the next day.

Props

3 Rings	Flute made from a twig
Hand bell	Knickerbockers, for Mr.
Telegram	Purdie
Women's handkerchief, for Joanna	Cookie
Tray of coffee cups	Vagrant clothing, for Alice
Men's handkerchief, for Mr. Matey	Coin
Motoring attire, for Mr. Matey	Nightgown and bathrobe, for Mrs. Coade
Motoring attire, for Lady Caroline	Muffler
Gala costume, for Mr. Coade	Candle
	Easel
	Paintbrush

Special Effects

Footsteps	Distant blurred light from a window
Nightingale singing	Tapping on the window
Crinkly sound	Joyous flute music

*"They say that in the woods
you get what nearly everybody here
is longing for...
a second chance."*

—Lob

ACT 9

(AT RISE: Lob's country home, drawing room, 10 p.m. The room is dark, but through the French windows at the back of the room, Lob's garden is bathed in moonshine. Lob's Guests begin to enter from the adjoining dining room, where they have just finished the evening meal. Sound of a door opening. The shadows of Mrs. Coade, Alice Dearth, Mabel Purdie, Joanna, and Lady Caroline appear in the lighted doorway. They hesitate, and then their voices are heard as they move forward in the dark.)

ALICE: *(To Mrs. Coade.)* Go on, Coady, lead the way.

MRS. COADE: Oh dear, I don't see why I should go first.

ALICE: *(To Mrs. Coade.)* The nicest always goes first.

MRS. COADE: It is a strange house if I am the nicest.

ALICE: It is a strange house.

JOANNA: Don't close the door. I can't see where the switch is.

MABEL: Over here.

(Someone finds a light switch and lights come up on Lob's drawing room.)

ALICE: We must not waste a second. Our minds are made up, I think?

JOANNA: Now is the time.

MRS. COADE: Yes, now if at all. But should we?

ALICE: Certainly...and before the men come in.

MABEL: You don't think we should wait for the men? They are as much in it as we are.

LADY CAROLINE: Lob would be with them. If the thing is to be done at all, it should be done now.

MRS. COADE: Is it quite fair to Lob? After all, he is our host.

JOANNA: Of course, it isn't fair to him, but let's do it, Coady.

MRS. COADE: Yes, let's do it!

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MABEL: Mrs. Dearth is doing it.

ALICE: (*Writing out a telegram.*) Of course, I am. The men are not coming, are they?

JOANNA: (*Looks.*) No. Your husband is having another glass of port.

ALICE: I am sure he is. One of you ring, please.

(*Joanna rings the bell.*)

MRS. COADE: Poor Matey!

LADY CAROLINE: He richly deserves what he is about to get.

JOANNA: (*Looks.*) He is coming! Don't all stand huddled together like conspirators.

MRS. COADE: It is what we are.

(*Swiftly, the women find seats. Matey, the butler, enters.*)

ALICE: Ah, Matey, I wish this telegram sent.

MATEY: Very good, ma'am. The village post office closed at eight, but if your message is important—

ALICE: It is. And you are so clever, Matey, I am sure that you can persuade them to oblige you.

(*Matey takes the telegram from Alice.*)

MATEY: I will see to it myself, ma'am. You can depend on it going.

ALICE: Thank you. Better read the telegram, Matey, to be sure that you can make it out. (*Matey reads the telegram to himself.*) Read it aloud, Matey.

MATEY: (*Embarrassed.*) Oh, ma'am!

ALICE: (*Sternly.*) Aloud.

MATEY: (*Reads.*) "To Police Station, Great Cumney. Send officer first thing tomorrow morning to arrest Matey, the butler, for theft of rings."

ALICE: Yes, that is quite right.

MATEY: Ma'am! (*Alice is reading a book. To Lady Caroline.*)
My lady!

LADY CAROLINE: (*To Alice, coldly.*) Should we not say how
many rings?

ALICE: Yes, put in the number of rings, Matey.

(*Matey pulls out three rings from his pocket and returns them to
their owners.*)

MATEY: (*Hopeful.*) May I tear up the telegram, ma'am?

ALICE: Certainly not.

LADY CAROLINE: I always said that this man was the culprit.

MATEY: It is deeply regretted.

ALICE: (*Darkly.*) I am sure it is.

JOANNA: (*To Ladies.*) We may as well tell him now that it is
not our rings we are worrying about. They have just been a
means to an end, Matey.

(*Other Ladies agree.*)

ALICE: Precisely. (*To Matey.*) In other words, that telegram
will be sent unless—

(*Matey's head rises.*)

JOANNA: (*To Matey.*) Unless you can tell us instantly what
peculiarity it is that all we ladies have in common.

MABEL: (*To Matey.*) Not only the ladies...all the guests in this
house.

ALICE: (*To Matey.*) We have been here a week. When Lob
invited us, he knew us all so little that we have begun to
wonder why he asked us. And now from words he has let
drop, we know that we were invited because of something
he thinks we have in common.

MABEL: (*To Matey.*) But he won't say what it is.

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LADY CAROLINE: *(To Matey, drawing back indicating Joanna.)*

One knows that no people could be more unlike.

JOANNA: One does.

MRS. COADE: And we can't sleep at night, Matey, for wondering what this something is.

JOANNA: *(To Matey.)* But we are sure you know, and if you don't tell us –

MATEY: *(Uneasy.)* I don't know what you mean, ladies.

ALICE: Oh, yes, you do.

MRS. COADE: *(To Matey.)* You must admit that your master is a very strange person.

MATEY: He is a little odd, ma'am. That is why everyone calls him Lob, not Mr. Lob.

JOANNA: He is so odd that it has got on my nerves that we have been invited here for some sort of horrid experiment. *(Matey shivers.)* You look as if you thought so, too!

MATEY: Oh, no, miss, I...he... *(Slight pause.)* You shouldn't have come, ladies. You shouldn't have come.

LADY CAROLINE: Now, my man, what do you mean by that?

MATEY: Nothing, my lady.

MRS. COADE: Lob is odd but rather lovable.

MATEY: He is, ma'am. He is the most lovable old devil.

JOANNA: I have seen him out there among his flowers, petting them, talking to them, coaxing them till they simply had to grow.

ALICE: It is certainly a divine garden.

MRS. COADE: How lovely it is in the moonlight. Roses, roses, all the way. *(Dreamily.)* It is like a hat I once had when I was young.

ALICE: Lob is such an amazing gardener that I believe he could even grow hats.

LADY CAROLINE: *(To Matey.)* How old is he?

MATEY: *(Nervously shuffling.)* He won't tell, my lady. I think he is frightened that the police would step in if they knew how old he is. They do say in the village that they remember him 70 years ago looking just as he does today.

ALICE: Absurd!

MATEY: Yes, ma'am, but there are his razors.

LADY CAROLINE: Razors?

MATEY: You won't know about razors, my lady, not being married... (*Realizes.*) ...as yet...excuse me. But a married lady can tell a man's age by the number of his razors. (*Scared.*) If you saw his razors, there is a little world of them, from patents of the present day back to implements so horrible you can picture him with them in his hand scraping his way through the ages.

LADY CAROLINE: Was he ever married?

MATEY: He has quite forgotten, my lady. (*Reflecting.*) How long ago is it since Merry England?

LADY CAROLINE: Why do you ask?

MABEL: In Queen Elizabeth's time, wasn't it?

MATEY: He says he is all that is left of Merry England.

MABEL: Lob? I think there is a famous cricketer called Lob.

MRS. COADE: Wasn't there a Lob in Shakespeare? No, of course, I am thinking of Robin Goodfellow.

LADY CAROLINE: The names are so alike.

JOANNA: Robin Goodfellow was Puck.

MRS. COADE: That is what was in my head! Lob was another name for Puck.

JOANNA: Well, he is certainly rather like what Puck might have grown into if he had forgotten to die. And, by the way, I remember now...he calls his flowers by old Elizabethan names.

MATEY: He always calls the Nightingale "Philomel," miss, if that is any help.

ALICE: None whatsoever. (*To Ladies.*) Tell me this: Did he specially ask you all for Midsummer week?

(Other Ladies nod.)

MATEY: He would!

MRS. COADE: What do you mean?

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MATEY: He always likes them to be here on Midsummer night, ma'am.

ALICE: Them?

MATEY: Them who have that in common.

MABEL: What can it be?

MATEY: I don't know.

LADY CAROLINE: I hope we are all nice women. We don't know each other very well. (*Ladies look at each other suspiciously. To Matey.*) Does anything startling happen at those times?

MATEY: I don't know.

JOANNA: (*Realizes.*) Why, I believe this is Midsummer Eve!

MATEY: Yes, miss, it is. The villagers know it. They are all inside their houses tonight...with the doors barred.

LADY CAROLINE: Because of...of him?

MATEY: He frightens them. There are stories...

ALICE: What alarms them? Tell us, or— (*Threateningly brandishes the telegram.*)

MATEY: I know nothing for certain, ma'am. I have never done it myself. He has wanted me to, but I wouldn't.

MABEL: Done what?

MATEY: Oh, ma'am, don't ask me. Be merciful to me, ma'am. I am not bad naturally. It was just going into domestic service that did it to me—the accident of being flung among bad companions. It's touch-and-go how the poor turn out in this world. All depends on your taking the right or the wrong turn.

MRS. COADE: I daresay, that is true.

MATEY: When I was young, ma'am, I was offered a clerkship in the city. If I had taken it, there wouldn't be a more honest man alive today. I would give the world to be able to begin over again. (*Sighs.*)

MRS. COADE: It is very sad, Mrs. Dearth.

ALICE: I am sorry for him, but still—

MATEY: (*To Alice.*) What do you say, my lady?

LADY CAROLINE: If you ask me, I should certainly say jail.

MATEY: *(To Alice, desperately.)* If you will say no more about this, ma'am, I'll give you a tip that is worth it.

ALICE: Ah, now you are talking.

LADY CAROLINE: Don't listen to him.

MATEY: You are the one who is hardest on me.

LADY CAROLINE: Yes—I flatter myself—I am.

MATEY: You might take a wrong turn yourself, my lady.

LADY CAROLINE: *(Insulted.)* I?! How dare you?!

JOANNA: *(To Ladies, near the dining room door.)* The men are coming.

ALICE: *(Hurriedly.)* Very well, Matey, we agree...if the tip is good enough.

LADY CAROLINE: You will regret this.

MATEY: I think not, my lady. *(To Alice.)* It's this: I wouldn't go out tonight if he asks you. Go into the garden if you like. The garden is all right. I wouldn't go farther...not tonight.

MRS. COADE: But he never proposes to us to go farther. Why should he tonight?

MATEY: I don't know, ma'am, but don't any of you go... *(To Lady Caroline, devilishly.)* ...except you, my lady. *(Smiling.)* I should like you to go.

[END OF FREEVIEW]