Helena & Hermia

A Romantic Reimagining

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Helena & Hermia

You wake up one morning to realize you've fallen in love with your best friend. She loves you back, but there's only one problem: you're both getting married…to men. A reimagining of Shakespeare's most-performed play, which brings together the true soulmates of the piece, and gives the women the voice in Act V that the original text neglects.

The Characters:

Helena - a lover
Hermia - her soulmate
The Duke - the guy in charge
Hippolyta - his much smarter wife
Lysander - the fiancé
Demetrius - another fiancé
Servant - just doing his best
The Players - here to perform the worst play you've ever seen

These characters can and should be played by anyone because soulmates aren't bound to social constructs like gender, race, or age.

The Scenes

Act IV - the morning after a bizarre trip
Act V - that evening at a wedding banquet
Act V ½ - later the same evening, in a liminal space where anything can happen

Act IV

Four figures lay sleeping across the stage. A loud trumpet sounds. ***HELENA*** *and* ***HERMIA*** *sit up with a start, immediately making eye contact. Their companions sit up slower, rubbing sleep from their eyes. Footsteps are heard approaching, followed by another trumpet. The girls scramble to their feet and make their way across the stage. Hermia cannot take her eyes off Helena. They almost meet center stage when the company enters.*

HERMIA
Helena –

HELENA (overlapping)
Hermia –

DUKE, HIPPOLYTA, and hunters enter. The girls are pulled away from each other by their respective partners and all four rush to kneel before the Duke.

DUKE
Good morrow, friends. I pray you all, stand up. (*They do. He glances between LYSANDER and DEMETRIUS*) I know you two are rival enemies. How comes this gentle concord in the world?

LYSANDER
My lord, I shall reply amazedly –

At this, the voices of the men are drowned out, or blurred, though the conversation continues. The lights focus in on the women, entirely forgotten by the others onstage. While Helena stands slightly back from Demetrius, Hermia stands outside the group, her piercing gaze never leaving Helena.

HERMIA
Fair Helena…

Helena's head snaps up as the dialogue comes back into focus for Demetrius' speech.

DEMETRIUS
To Helena, my lord, was I betrothed ere I saw Hermia.
But like a sickness did I loathe this food. But, as in health, come to my natural taste,
Now I do wish it, love it, long for it, and will forevermore be true to it.

The men laugh uproariously. Hippolyta moves to Helena, unamused.

THESEUS
Fair lovers, you are fortunately met. Of this discourse we more will hear anon.

For in the temple by and by, with us, these couples shall eternally be knit.
Away with us to Athens. Come, Hippolyta. *The men exit.*

HIPPOLYTA
Come, ride with me. All will be well. *Hippolyta moves to leave and Hermia follows.*

HELENA (*to herself*)
Mine own and not mine own.

Hermia pauses when she sees Helena unmoved. She waits uncertainly, then holds out her hand.

HERMIA
Helen?

Helena finally meets Hermia's gaze and grabs her hand, maybe for dear life. Hermia presses a tender kiss to the back of Helena's hand. They exit.

Act V

The stage is set for the Duke's wedding banquet. The Duke has called for entertainment and a group of players has taken over upstage. The couples will sit on SL: Duke, Lysander, and Demetrius on the front row, and Hippolyta, Hermia, and Helena behind them.

DUKE
Joy, gentle friends! Joy and fresh days of love accompany your hearts!

He pops champagne and gives everyone a generous pour. Hermia downs hers in one go then tugs Helena's sleeve, bringing her to the other side of the stage.

HELENA
We should not be here, our presence will be missed.

HERMIA
Helen, please, hear me!

HELENA
Hear what?

HERMIA
Am I to believe that my feelings are mine alone?

HELENA
Hermia, this jest is cruel.

HERMIA
Who is jesting? Helena, I love–

HELENA
Good Hermia, do not be so bitter with me.
I evermore did love you, Hermia.

HERMIA
And I, you!

HELENA
But –

It's been long enough, Hermia grabs Helena and gives her the kiss of her life. Hippolyta notices and lets out a loud, distracting laugh, keeping the men from noticing the girls downstage.

HELENA
I understand you not.

HERMIA
My love, my life, my soul, fair Helena.

HELENA
You speak not as you think, it cannot be

HERMIA
Dear Helena, there is no conspiracy.

Hermia is swept into Helena's arms before she can finish, stealing another kiss when she lands. Hippolyta has crossed over to them, unfortunately needing to burst their bubble.

HIPPOLYTA
The Duke has called for places, the show begins anon.

They begrudgingly return to their seats, but a new glow envelops the pair.

The Duke places a chaste kiss on Hippoltya's hand, while Demetrius slings a heavy arm across Helena's shoulders, and Lysander swoops in for a messy kiss, which Hermia dodges just in time. The SERVANT enters, followed by the PROLOGUE, haphazardly dressed.

SERVANT
So please your Grace, the Prologue is addressed.

DUKE
Let him approach.

The Servant then circles the group with fresh drinks, and the men oblige. Hermia slowly scoots closer to Helena over the following speech.

PROLOGUE
If we offend, it is with our goodwill.
That you should think we come not to offend,
But with goodwill. To show our simple skill,
That is the true beginning of our end.
Consider, then, we come but in despite.
We do not come, as minding to content you,
Our true intent is. All for your delight
We are not here. That you should here repent you,
The actors are at hand, and, by their show,
You shall know all that you are like to know. *Prologue exits as the men burst into laughter.*

DUKE
Surely he's in jest?

LYSANDER
Perhaps a comedy's in store!

DUKE
Who is next? *WALL trots out, nervously, aided by LION and MOON*

DEMETRIUS
I wonder if the lion be to speak?

He gestures wildly to the stage, spilling his drink across the lap of his fiancée.

HIPPOLYTA (*testily*)
No wonder, my lord. One lion may when many *asses* do.

Hippolyta gently leads Helena off to clean the alcohol off her skirt. Hermia trails behind, eager to take the opportunity to escape their present company. In a perfect world, the set will turn as Helena and Hermia cross downstage, leaving them onstage and the others just out of view. The door onto the playing stage becomes the door to the bathroom, where they attempt to clean off Helena's skirt. The play continues on the other side of the wall, while we stay with the girls for:

ACT V ½

HERMIA
Stupid, clumsy man, lost in his drink. The Duke must cut him off.

HELENA
What, and cease their merriment? The more they drink, the less they see of us.
The better for me, I think.

HERMIA
Imagine you being near and going unnoticed.

HELENA
It happens quite often.

HERMIA
Not for me. I always notice you.

HELENA
You don't have to –

HERMIA
I speak the truth, having only just found the words to –

She makes a move to Helena, who steps back

HELENA
What HAPPENED in those woods?

HERMIA
I – ?

HELENA
One day it's good-bye forever, the next day we wake and your heart has changed completely?

HERMIA
Heavens, no. The keeper of my heart was always you.

HELENA
How can this be?

HERMIA
I am fond of Lysander, it's true. And I liked him all the better for Demetrius. But why should my choices end there? Yes, I like Lysander, but I *love* you.

HELENA (*hissing*)
You cannot say these things, what if someone hears?

HERMIA (*growing louder*)
Then let them hear! You heard the Duke at dinner. My father cannot touch me now.

HELENA
Will the Duke still feel so kindly when he hears you won't be married?

HERMIA
Helen, please –

The door to the bathroom swings open as Hippolyta rushes in, looking nervous. As the door swings open and shut, we hear the men critiquing the performance once again:

DEMETRIUS (off-stage)
It is the wittiest partition that ever I heard discourse, my lord.

THESEUS (off-stage)
Pyramus draws near the wall. Silence.

HIPPOLYTA
I stalled them long as I was able, but your absence has been noticed.

Helena and Hermia hurry back onto the stage as it begins to face the audience once more. Demetrius gives Helena a quick peck on the cheek, neither fiancé seeming bothered by the absence. Unaware of what has just transpired, we find ourselves back in…

ACT V

DUKE
The blushing brides return once more!

Helena laughs a little too loudly as a final performer hesitantly waits onstage. Hermia has moved as far away as possible from Lysander, but it's still not enough.

THISBE
Tongue, not a word.
Come, trusty sword (*Thisbe stabs herself.*)
Farewell, friends.
Thus Thisbe ends.
Adieu, adieu, adieu. *There is an uncertain silence, then the men burst into applause.*

HIPPOLYTA
This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard. *A clock begins to toll midnight.*

DUKE
The iron tongue of midnight hath told twelve.
Lovers, to bed! 'Tis almost fairy time.

HERMIA (*quietly to Helena*)
We must speak.

Hermia stands and boldly takes the stage as Helena tries in vain to hold her back.

HELENA (*hissing*)
Hermia, wait!

Hippolyta reaches the Duke first and intervenes. Hermia slightly relieved for the distraction.

HIPPOLYTA
My lord, perhaps we first honor these players with a word from your Grace, and a toast to their good health.

DUKE
The kinder we, to give them thanks for nothing. Lead the way, fair Hippolyta.

The party moves to toast the players upstage, leaving Hermia and Helen alone in their seats. Their eyes meet again. This is their chance.

HERMIA (*tenderly*)
For aught that I could ever read, could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth.

HELENA
My love, my soul

HERMIA
Fair, fair Helena.

HELENA
Teach me how you look and with what art you sway the motion of my tender heart!

They share a quick kiss, aware the men are still nearby.

HERMIA
Before the time I did you Helen see, seemed Athens as a paradise to me.
O, then, what graces in my love do dwell that she hath turned a heaven unto a hell!

HELENA
Now I fear we must take flight, to save ourselves from this marriage plight.
Dear Hermia, hear my appeal: through Athens' gates we must devise to steal.

HERMIA
Aye, and thence from Athens turn away our eyes, to seek new friends and stranger companies

HELENA
And in the wood a league without the town, there, gentle Hermia, may I marry thee;
And to that place the sharp Athenian law cannot pursue us. If thou lovest me, say aye.

HERMIA
Aye, my love, aye.

They share a final, deep kiss, then break apart. They look mischievously at the Duke and his party, and being satisfied they're still occupied, join hands, exiting in merriment.