Act 1, Scene 1

A misty forest. Hermia appears, trapped in a big Midsommar *flower dress. She looks around with big, frightened eyes.*

Hermia: Hello? 'Tis anyone there?

The red lights of little fairies appear around her. She watches with fear as they begin to sing:

Fairies: Act One, dreamers come undone;
Act Two shall bring much ado;
Act Three, pants will fill with pee;
Act Four, he will kill some more;
Act Five, thou shalt not survive—

Hermia produces a can of bug spray from within the flower dress and douses the fairies. They cough and disperse. She tries to sleep again when a figure - Robby Goodfellow - appears, silhouetted against the fog.

Hermia: Who is here? Lysander?

The figure disappears. She looks around. He reappears, impossibly, elsewhere. He approaches Hermia, chuckling spookily.

Hermia: Hey, don't come any closer… I have bug spray!

Robby steps into the light, wearing striped forest motley and a weird hat that is neither quite fedora nor coxcomb. His face is not scarred per se, but still visually upsetting. He wears a ruff made of knives.

Hermia: How now, spirit… Whither wander you?

Robby: Over hill, over dale,
Thorough bush, thorough brier,
Over park, over pale,
Thorough flood, thorough fire,
I do *murder* everywhere…

A long, spooky laugh. Hermia tries to exit, coolly.

Hermia: Cool, cool.

Robby: The king doth keep his revels here tonight…

Hermia: Okay I shan't keep thee then. Peace be with you.

Robby: Nay nay— I'd rather a piece *of you!!!*

The ruff flashes angrily. Slicing sounds. The entire forest around Hermia seems to come alive, howling with the wrath of a thousand angry fairies. Robby runs at Hermia who screams.
Suddenly— Hermia gasps awake. She's alone in her room. Her father, Egeus, stands over her, shaking her.

Egeus: My daughter Hermia? Are you well?

Hermia: Father! O god, is that fellow here? Did he follow me?

Egeus: Now now now, 'twas but a dream. Go back to sleep. Tomorrow's a big day: you have an arranged wedding to get ready for, or else the Duke and I will kill you.

He kisses her on the head.

Egeus: Sweet dreams, my little chickpea.

He exits. Hermia reflects on her choices. She looks down and notices her sleeping toga is viciously ripped, as though by huge and terrifying claws.

Ideally, title card: MIDSUMMER NIGHTMARE.

Scene 2
Dramatic lighting. A voice:

Announcer: And now, maidens and gentle-dudes… the moment you've all been waiting for… Your charming groom-to-be, the adorable spawn of Poseidon himself, the Grandmaster of all Gladiators… Iiiiiit's Duke Theseus!

An awkward pause.

Theseus: (*Offstage, annoyed:*) No no no! Play that special gladiator music I wrote.

"Entrance of the Gladiators" plays. Theseus enters in his Grecian armour, arms outstretched. In one hand, he grasps a chain, which runs offstage.

Theseus: Good morning, Athens! How do we like this entrance music, eh? I wrote that, 'tis true. In fact, 'tis called "Entrance of the Gladiators." Now, everytime you hear this music, you will think of male politicians like myself! Art thou not entertained??? (*A romantic switch*) Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
Draws on apace; but, O, methinks, how slow
This old moon wanes!

He waits. Nothing. Finally:

Theseus: Hippolyta? Come on out, darling. I'm sure you look fine…

He tugs the chain. Hippolyta staggers onstage, shackled by her arms and legs. He pulls a gag out of her mouth.

Theseus: There, see? You look Hot is what you look like.

Hippolyta: Is all this really necessary?

Theseus: O I should say so.

Hippolyta: Can you at least uncuff my legs?

Theseus: Now, we tried that once and what happened? Hmm? What happened last time?

Hippolyta: I kicked you…

Theseus: (*Prompting*) Kicked me in…

Hippolyta: In the throat.

Theseus: In the throat, exactly. And we can't have that. I need this throat for reciting long speeches. Like this:
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.

Hippolyta: Yea, totally looking forward to it. Love to revel. It's just, I think my legs are falling asleep…

She swoons.

Theseus: Well then we can't have that. I know just the thing.

He muzzles her again.

Theseus: Perfect. I tells you, if only my guidance counselor could see me now: the charming and progressive Duke of Athens - ruggedly handsome, progressive AF, wildly humble, as comfortable on the battlefield as I am in a labyrinth, high as a kite on ground minotaur horn, engaged to the beauteous Hippolyta: queen of the Amazons, a group of female warriors who'd never so much as heard whisper of a man, poor witches. Good thing I saved you from that, eh? Yes, your lonely days are over. Now your super close roommate Louise won't need to worry about you dying a spinster anymore. Remember? Remember how your really intimate colleague Louise who cried as I proclaimed our engagement and then dragged you off behind my horse? Man that was romantic. Like a fucking fairy tale.

Hippolyta collapses.

Theseus: Aww. This must be your way of saying I've charmed you off your feet. But enough flirting. There's work to be done! COME IN!

Egeus enters with Hermia, Lysander, and Demetrius.

Egeus: Happy be Theseus, our renownèd 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.

Theseus: Nice. Groom buddies.

Egeus: Yea, well…
Stand forth, Lysander: and my gracious duke,
This man's bewitched the bosom of my child.
(*To Lysander*) With cunning hast thou filched my daughter's heart,
Turned her obedience, which is due to me,
To stubborn harshness— And if she will not
Consent to marry with Demetrius,
I beg the ancient privilege of Athens: (*producing a giant old book*)
As she is mine, I may dispose of her,
Which shall be either to this gentleman (*Demetrius*)
Or to her death, according to our law
Immediately provided in that case.

Theseus: Alright, old-timer, slow down, let's just pump the spurs for a minute. Don't get thy toga in a twist. Let me see this "book."

Egeus passes it to him. Theseus groans under the weight.

Theseus: Caesar Salad, wudja get a load of this thing. It's almost as old as you! Wow, it must have every weird ancient Greek law there is… Hey, what's this word mean? (*Sounding it out*) Pree-ma-noc-ta?

Egeus: Uh, nothing, just keep reading. Here.

Theseus: (*Whistles*) Yup, there it is alright. Sorry, Hermia. I don't make the laws.

Hermia: No, your father did.

Theseus: Right? So annoying. But what say you, Hermia? Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

Hermia: So is Lysander.

Theseus: In himself he is.

Lysander: (*Clearly offended*) O, um, okay.

Hermia: I would my father looked but with my eyes.

Theseus: (*Reading*) You know, there is a section here that allows fathers to cut out their daughters' eyes and try to look at stuff with them. It's right above this bit about the right to "bear arms"? Ha ha, that's not going to age well. Might as well rip it out right now— (*Catches himself*) No no, Theseus. One thing at a time. Well, Hermia? What say you? Shall we let your daddy rip your eyes out?

Hermia: I do beseech your grace that I may know
The worst that may befall me in this case,
If I refuse to wed Demetrius.

Demetrius: You mean besides losing access to all this?

He gestures to his bod.

Theseus: (*To Demetrius, wearily*) I'm trying to help you, man.

Hippolyta gestures for Hermia to run, best as she can, her arms still shackled.

Theseus: She's right. My hands *are* tied. This whole book is straight up just laws for women.

Hermia: That's not fair! What about men?

Egeus: 'Tis in there. Look in the back, sire.

At length, Theseus finds a little piece of paper clipped to the last page.

Theseus: Ah, yes. Here! See, Hermia? Equality.

Hermia: (*Scanning it)* This is a recipe for brownies.

Theseus: And I adhere to it very closely. No walnuts, people!

Demetrius: NO WALNUTS IN THE BROWNIES.

Theseus turns to Hippolyta:

Theseus: What were we talking about?

Hippolyta: (*Muffled noises.*)

Theseus: Right! Well, Hermia, worry not. I am willing to bend the rules for you just this once. You don't want to marry Demetrius, and you don't want to die… (*he waits*)… Yes?

Hermia: Sorry, yes!

Theseus: Then tell me how this tickleth thee:
If you yield not to your father's choice,
You can endure the livery of a nun!
Hmm? Live a barren sister all your life?
Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon?
That doesn't sound so bad, does it? Dost thou like faint hymns?

Demetrius: O man, she's definitely gonna pick the nun option. Thanks a lot, my liege.

Theseus: Sorry, D. I've got to be fair to her, too. That's what being a feminist means.

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

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

Theseus: HEY! What dost thou say we cool it with the homophobic jokes, eh? I think— O wait, I just got it. Never mind, that's totally hilarious. (*Point at Egeus*) Look how old he is. No one would want to marry him!

Lysander: Let's just take a breath. Hmm? This is Greece: we should be smashing shit on the ground and chatting philosophy and spooning our pageboys, not fighting. Theseus, my duke, you know what it means to be in love.

Theseus: Um, obviously. I've been in love ever since I whooped her sorry butt in battle earlier today. UP TOP!

Lysander: … So you get it.
I am as well derived as Demetrius,
And, which is more than all these boasts can be,
I am beloved of beauteous Hermia.
Demetrius, I'll avouch it to his head,
Made love to Helena—

The crowd reacts loudly.

Demetrius: Whoa whoa whoa! Okay for starters, "made love" means something very different in the 1500s… which is this time we live in. It means "courting," so let's all just be cool. And secondly… 'twas but the tip.

Lysander: Be that as it may…
He won her soul, and sweet Helena dotes,
Devoutly dotes, dotes in idolatry,
Upon this spotted and inconstant man.

Demetrius: "Dote" is a strong word.

Theseus: I must confess that I have heard so much… about Demetrius' "spots."
But, Demetrius, come;
And come, Egeus; you shall go with me.
For you, fair Hermia, look you arm yourself
To fit your fancies to your father's will;
Or else the law of Athens yields you up
To death, or to a vow of single life.
Or we could try the eye thing! No? Cool. Come, my Hippolyta—

He goes to help her up but she turns away, angry at him.

Theseus: What's her problem? Captives, amiright? Guess the honeymoon is over!
Demetrius and Egeus, come along. Hermia and Lysander, you're totally cool to hang out here as long as you want. Just no scheming, 'kay?

He exits. Demetrius and Egeus look at one another uncertainly and then awkwardly carry Hippolyta off.

Lysander: How now, my love! Why is your cheek so pale?
Ay me! For aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth;
But, either it was different in blood—

Hermia: Blood? Wait… I just remembered this dream I had last night…

Lysander: (*Clearly miffed*) That's fine, I was done talking.

Hermia: It was so real… so violent. Medreamt there was this man… This creature in the woods… He spoke of of death… And there was this overused, spooky rhyme thing in the background…

Lysander: Wore he a hat?

Hermia: Yea.

Lysander: And a ruff made all of blades?

Hermia: He did!

Lysander: O Hermia… Methinks Queen Mab hath been with you! She is the fairies' midwife, and she maketh us dream up all sorts of crazy shite.

Hermia: Peace, peace: thou talk'st of nothing.

Lysander: True, I talk of dreams,
Which are the children of an idle brain.

Hermia: Rude. Although, to be fair, I did eat an entire block of feta before bed…
Perchance 'twas nothing.

Lysander: Ay, I mean, sure, *I* dreamt of him too, but all he did was choke me a little.

Hermia: Wait what?

Lysander: Listen, Hermia, one crisis at a time. We've got to figure out how to get out of Athens before these big fat greek laws get us both killed. Oo, I feel like the stakes are getting raised… Better switch to verse.

Hermia: Just… Can't we please just talk normally?

Lysander: NO TIME!
I have a widow aunt who hath no child:
From Athens is her house remote seven leagues;
There, gentle Hermia, may I marry thee;
And to that place the sharp Athenian law
Cannot pursue us.

Hermia: Convenient! But is she a cool aunt or is she a strict aunt? There exists no third type: 'tis but one or the other.

Lysander: Totally, but she's definitely a cool aunt. Owns her own olive farm, smokes dope, owns a goat.

Hermia: Sounds good!

Lysander: If thou lovest me then,
Steal forth thy father's house and in the wood,
Will I there stay for thee.

Hermia: My good Lysander!
In that same place thou hast appointed me,
Tomorrow truly will I meet with thee.
Thou knoweth, 'tis funny. I had that weird nightmare about the forest and now we're going there tonight. What are the odds?

Lysander: Must be a good sign! Look, here comes Helena.

Helena enters, dark circles under her eyes.

Hermia: Godspeed, fair Helena! Whither away?

Helena: Call you me fair, who hath not slept for days?

Hermia: (*To Lysander*) Uh oh, she's rhyming.

Helena: Demetrius loves your fair: O happy fair!
Belike because sweet sleep yet finds rest there (*touches Hermia's face*)
Sickness is catching: O, were slumber so,
Z's would I catch, fair Hermia, ere I go…

Hermia: You're having trouble sleeping?

Helena: Ay, perchance my weeping—

Hermia: Okay, you can stop it with the poetry. It's just us. What's going on?

Helena: Ever since Demetrius scorned me, I have known no respite! And when rest doth me find, my dreams are full of villainy!

Hermia: What sort of villainy?

Helena: A man—

Hermia: Hatted?

Helena: Ay. He tried to drown me in a fountain. Luckily I had to go to the bathroom, else I know not what might have happened.

Hermia: He threatened to chop me into messes too!

Lysander: Come now, that's enough.

Hermia: But Lysander, art thou not at all concerned that the three of us had the same dream?!

Lysander: Peace, 'tis easily explained. In Helen's dream, he drowned her— belike because she cannot stop with her most obnoxious weeping. No offense.

Helena: No no, it's a lot.

Lysander: And Hermia, he tried to cut thee up, thou sayeth? Perchance 'tis thy Sub of Consciousness processing how this patriarchal society doth treat women as meat, chattel, mere goods.

Hermia: Perchance…

Helena: I buy that.

Lysander: And me he choked, but knoweth we all that that is but a thing of mine.

Helena: Well, thy dream-science hath assuaged my worried brain.

Hermia isn't so sure…

Lysander: Helen, to you our minds we will unfold—

Helena: I feel like you've called me "Helen" a couple times now. It's Helen-a, with an "a," Helena.

Lysander: Tomorrow night, Hermia and I have devised to steal into the forest, thence to seek new friends and stranger companies.

Helena: You're leaving?

Hermia: Afraid so; this place sucketh alate. But worry not, sweet playfellow: with me gone, Demetrius will surely return to his senses and fall back in love with you. And if that's not romantic, I don't know what is.

Lysander: Hey ding-dong, let's roll.

He starts to go. Hermia touches her heart.

Hermia: He is so romantic. Helena, adieu. (*Exiting*) As you on him, Demetrius dote on you!

Lysander: (*Exiting*) Bye, Helen!

Helena: How happy some o'er other some can be!

Through Athens I am thought as fair as she.
At least I was 'fore sleep did make me scared:
Now I can't drive without feeling impaired.
But peace, Helena: you're sure to sleep again,
For on that fear did good Lysander mansplain.
Saaaaay… I have-eth an idea…
I'll tell Demetrius of fair Hermia's flight,
Then to the wood will he this very night
Pursue her; and for this intelligence
If I have thanks, it is a dear expense.
It's the perfect plan! I'll ignore everything Hermia said about Demetrius falling back in love with me once she's gone and tell him she's leaving on the off-chance that he says "thank you." It's perfect! (*Calling off as she exits*) O Demetrius—