Pyramus and Thisbe lived next door to each other, in the lofty city whose walls of brick are said to have been built by Semiramis. Pyramus was the most handsome of young men, and Thisbe the fairest beauty of the East. Living so near, they came to know one another, and a friendship was begun; in time, love grew up between them, and they would have been married, but their parents forbade it. None the less—for this their parents could not forbid—both their hearts were caught in love's snare, and both burned with equal passion. No one shared their secret: they communicated by nods and
signs, and the more it was concealed, the more their hidden love blazed up.

"There was a crack, a slender chink, that had developed in the party wall between their two houses, when it was being built. This fault had gone unnoticed for long years, and the lovers were the first to find it: nothing can escape a lover’s eyes! They used it as a channel for their voices, and by this means their endearments were safely conveyed to one another, in the gentlest of whispers. Often when Pyramus stood on this side, Thisbe on that, when in turn they felt each other’s breath, they used to exclaim: "Jealous wall, why do you stand in the way of lovers? How little it would be to ask that you should let us embrace or, if that is too much, that you should at least open wide enough for us to exchange kisses! Not that we are ungrateful—we admit that it is thanks to you that we have any way at all by which our words can reach our true love’s ears." So they talked, in vain, on their opposite sides. At nightfall, they said good-bye, and though they could not reach each other with their kisses, they kissed their own side of the wall.

"Next day, when Aurora had put out night’s starry fires and the sun’s rays had dried the frosty grass, they came to their usual meeting place. At first, softly sighing, they lamented their sad lot. Then they determined that, at dead of night, they would try to slip past the watchmen and steal out of doors; once outside their homes, they would make their way out of the city too; and in case they should miss each other, wandering aimlessly in the open country, they agreed to meet at Ninus’ tomb, and to hide in the shade of its tree. For a tree grew there, a tall mulberry, hung thick with snowy fruits; it stood close by a cool spring. They were enraptured with their plan. The daylight seemed slow to depart, but at last the sun plunged into the waters, and from those waters came forth the night. Stealthily Thisbe turned the door on its hinges, and slipped out into the darkness, unseen by any. Her face hidden by her veil, she came to the tomb, and sat down under the appointed tree. Love made her bold. But suddenly a lioness, fresh from the kill, her slavering jaws dripping with the blood of her victims, came to slake her thirst at the neighboring spring. While the animal was still some distance off, Thisbe saw her in the moonlight. Frightened, she fled into the darkness of a cave, and as she ran her veil slipped from her shoulders, and was left behind."
When the savage lioness had drunk her fill, and was returning to the woods, she found the garment, though not the girl, and tore its fine fabric to shreds, ripping it with bloodstained jaws.

Pyramus came out of the city a little later. He saw the prints of the wild beast, clearly outlined in the deep dust, and the colour drained from his face. Worse still, he found the veil, all stained with blood. Then he cried out: "This night will bring about the death of two fond lovers, and of the two she deserved to live far more than I. 'Tis I who am to blame: poor girl, it was I who killed you! I told you to come, by night, to a place that was full of danger, and did not arrive first myself. Come, all you lions who live beneath this cliff, come and tear me limb from limb! With your fierce jaws, devour my guilty person. But it is a coward's trick, only to pray for death!" He picked up Thisbe's veil, and carried it into the shade of the tree where they should have met. Weeping and kissing the garment he knew so well, he said: "Drink deep, now, of my blood too." And as he spoke he took the sword which hung at his waist, and thrust it into his side: then, with a dying effort, pulled it out of the wound. As he lay, fallen back upon the ground, his blood spouted forth, just as when a water pipe bursts, if there is some flaw in the lead, and through the narrow hissing crack a long stream of water shoots out, and beats on the air. The fruits of the tree were sprinkled with his blood, and changed to a dark purple hue. The roots, soaked in his gore, tinged the hanging berries with the same rich colour.

Now, though Thisbe had not yet quite recovered from her fear, she came back; for she was anxious not to disappoint her lover. She looked about for the youth with eager eyes and heart, impatient to tell him of the perils she had escaped. But although she recognized the spot, and the shape of the tree, yet the colour of its fruit had made her uncertain; she was unable to decide whether this was the place or not. As she stood in doubt, she saw the quivering limbs writhing on the bloodstained ground, and started back. Her cheeks grew paler than boxwood, and she trembled as the sea shivers when a soft breeze ripples its surface. After a moment's pause, she recognized her love. Wailing aloud, she beat her innocent arms, tore her hair, and embracing his beloved form, bathed his wound with her tears, mingling the salt drops with his blood, and passionately kissing his cold cheeks.

"Pyramus," she cried. "What mischance has taken you from me?"
Pyramus, speak to me! It is your own dear Thisbe who is calling you! Hear me, and raise your drooping head!" At Thisbe’s name, Pyramus opened his eyes, which were already heavy with death’s stupor; then, with one last look, closed them for ever. Thisbe, when she recognized her veil, and saw the ivory scabbard empty of its sword, exclaimed: “Alas, your own hand and your love have destroyed you. I, too, have a hand resolute for this one deed; my love, as great as yours, will give me strength to deal the wound. I shall follow you in death, and men will speak of me as at once the unhappy cause and the companion of your fate. Only death could separate you from me, but not even death will part us. Most wretched parents, mine and his, I beg this one boon for us both: since our steadfast love and the hour of our death have united us, do not grudge that we be laid together in a single tomb. And you, O tree, already sheltering one hapless body, soon to shelter two, bear for ever the marks of our death: always have fruit of a dark and mournful hue, to make men remember the blood we two have shed!" As she spoke, she placed the sword blade beneath her breast, and fell forward on the steel, which was still warm from Pyramus’ death. Her prayers touched the gods, and they touched the parents also: for the berry of the tree, when ripe, is a dark purple colour, and the remains of the two lovers, gathered from the funeral fires, rest together in a single urn."