*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

Act One, Scene One

(1-20) Theseus - the Duke of Athens - and Hippolyta are due to be married in four days. He is very excited and impatient.

(21-46) One of the play’s major conflicts is introduced here. Both Lysander and Demetrius are in love with Hermia. The problem is that she loves Lysander, but her father insists on Demetrius. Egeus, Hermia’s father, is quite angry that Lysander has been attempting to win his daughter’s favour. He takes the argument to the Duke for resolution.

(47-80) Theseus sides with the father. Lysander, he believes, is a decent man, but her father has the final say. If she disobeys her father, she will break the law of Athens. The punishment would be death or banishment to a convent, where she would have to remain celibate for the rest of her life.

(80-129) Lysander claims Demetrius has been intimate with another young woman, Helena (a close friend of Hermia).

(130-180) Alone, Lysander and Hermia plan to elope. They understand that true love is never easy - “The course of true love never did run smooth.”

(184-254) Helena is very upset, because Demetrius doesn’t love her. She learns of Hermia’s plan to elope, and decides to tell Demetrius, thinking he will be grateful to her for the news.

Act I, Scene 2

* The Mechanicals (Workmen/Tradesmen) are introduced. They plan to perform a play in honour of the Duke’s upcoming wedding.
* The play is to be Pyramus and Thisbe, which is based on an old myth that would have been familiar to Shakespeare’s audience. It is a tragic tale of love and loss.
* There is a contrast between the dramatic seriousness of the play’s subject matter, and the efforts of the Mechanicals. They have good intentions, and desperately want to do a good job, but they aren’t very good. A lot of humour comes from their efforts.
* Nick Bottom is particularly enthusiastic, wanting to play different parts simultaneously.
* They plan to meet in the forest and practice the following night.