

Romeo and Juliet: Act I, scene iv

“I Dreamt A Dream Tonight”

Directions for today:

1. Have two people in class **READ** aloud the two different summaries of scene 4 given below.
2. Pay attention as you **WATCH** scene 4 in the 1968 movie.
3. Working on your own or with someone, **COMPLETE** the questions and activity on the back of this paper. This will be a graded assignment.
4. For homework, complete the questions for scene 4 that are in your study packet:

Summary of scene iv (from the *No Fear Shakespeare* website):

Romeo, Benvolio, and their friend Mercutio, all wearing masks, have gathered with a group of mask-wearing guests on their way to the Capulets' feast. Still feeling depressed and gloomy, Romeo wonders how they will get into the Capulets' feast, since they themselves are Montagues. When that concern is brushed aside, he states that he will not dance at the feast. Mercutio begins to gently mock Romeo and tries to get him into a more playful, fun-loving mood, but Romeo refuses to engage in this banter, explaining that in a dream he learned that going to the feast was a bad idea. Mercutio responds with a long speech about Queen Mab of the fairies, who visits peoples' dreams. Benvolio refocuses their attention on actually getting to the feast. Romeo voices one last concern: he has a feeling that the night's activities will set in motion the action of fate, resulting in untimely death. But, putting himself in the hands of "he who hath the steerage of my course," Romeo's spirits rise, and he continues with his friends toward the feast.

Summary of scene iv (from the *Shmoop* and *Shakespeare Navigator* websites):

Romeo and his posse (i.e., Benvolio and Mercutio) are getting ready to sneak into the Capulets' party by wearing masks. Mercutio was actually on the invitation list because he's related to the Prince, but he feels the need to wear a mask anyway. Mercutio tries to persuade Romeo to dance at Capulet's feast, but Romeo insists that he is too sad to do anything but hold a torch. Romeo and Mercutio trade insults and there's some naughty talk about love. Romeo continues to boo-hoo about the unavailable Rosaline and then he announces that he had a dream the night before. Before he can go into the details, Mercutio interrupts and mocks Romeo's belief in dreams by giving a long, crazy speech about "Queen Mab," a tiny fairy who visits people in their dreams. Romeo says Mercutio is talking nonsense and Mercutio, responds that dreams are for idiots. Before entering the party, Romeo says he has a feeling that "fate" may have something bad in store for him.

Original Text

MERCUTIO

Oh, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you.

BENVOLIO

Queen Mab, what's she

MERCUTIO

She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes
In shape no bigger than an agate stone
On the forefinger of an alderman,
Drawn with a team of little atoms
Over men's noses as they lie asleep.
Her wagon spokes made of long spinners' legs,
The cover of the wings of grasshoppers,
Her traces of the smallest spider's web,
Her collars of the moonshine's watery beams,
Her whip of cricket's bone, the lash of film,
Her wagoner a small gray-coated gnat,
Not half so big as a round little worm
Pricked from the lazy finger of a maid.

Her chariot is an empty hazelnut
Made by the joiner squirrel or old grub,
Time out o' mind the fairies' coachmakers.
And in this state she gallops night by night
Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love;
On courtiers' knees, that dream on curtsies straight;
O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees;
O'er ladies' lips, who straight on kisses dream,
Which oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues,
Because their breaths with sweetmeats tainted are.
Sometime she gallops o'er a courtier's nose,
And then dreams he of smelling out a suit.
And sometime comes she with a tithe-pig's tail
Tickling a parson's nose as he lies asleep,
Then he dreams of another benefice.
Sometime she driveth o'er a soldier's neck,
And then dreams he of cutting foreign throats,
Of breaches, ambuscadoes, Spanish blades,
Of healths five fathom deep, and then anon
Drums in his ear, at which he starts and wakes,
And being thus frightened swears a prayer or two
And sleeps again. This is that very Mab
That plaits the manes of horses in the night
And bakes the elflocks in foul sluttish hairs,
Which once untangled, much misfortune bodes.
This is the hag, when maids lie on their backs,
That presses them and learns them first to bear,
Making them women of good carriage.
This is she—

ROMEO

Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace!
Thou talk'st of nothing.

MERCUTIO

True, I talk of dreams,
Which are the children of an idle brain,
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy,
Which is as thin of substance as the air
And more inconstant than the wind, who woos
Even now the frozen bosom of the north,
And, being angered, puffs away from thence,
Turning his face to the dew-dropping south.

Modern Text

MERCUTIO

Oh, then I see you've been with Queen Mab.

BENVOLIO

Who's Queen Mab?

MERCUTIO

She's the fairies' midwife. She's no bigger than the stone on a city councilman's ring. She rides around in a wagon drawn by tiny little atoms, and she rides over men's noses as they lie sleeping. The spokes of her wagon are made of spiders' legs. The cover of her wagon is made of grasshoppers' wings. The harnesses are made of the smallest spiderwebs. The collars are made out of moonbeams. Her whip is a thread attached to a cricket's bone. Her wagon driver is a tiny bug in a gray coat; he's not half the size of a little round worm that comes from the finger of a lazy young girl.

Her chariot is a hazelnut shell. It was made by a carpenter squirrel or an old grubworm; they've made wagons for the fairies as long as anyone can remember. In this royal wagon, she rides every night through the brains of lovers and makes them dream about love. She rides over courtiers' knees, and they dream about curtsying. She rides over lawyers' fingers, and right away, they dream about their fees. She rides over ladies' lips, and they immediately dream of kisses. Queen Mab often puts blisters on their lips because their breath smells like candy, which makes her mad. Sometimes she rides over a courtier's lips, and he dreams of making money off of someone. Sometimes she tickles a priest's nose with a tithe-pig's tail, and he dreams of a large donation. Sometimes she rides over a soldier's neck, and he dreams of cutting the throats of foreign enemies, of breaking down walls, of ambushes, of Spanish swords, and of enormous cups of liquor. And then, drums beat in his ear and he wakes up. He's frightened, so he says a couple of prayers and goes back to sleep. She is the same Mab who tangles the hair in horses' manes at night and makes the tangles hard in the dirty hairs, which bring bad luck if they're untangled. Mab is the old hag who gives false sex dreams to virgins and teaches them how to hold a lover and bear a child. She's the one—

ROMEO

Enough, enough! Mercutio, be quiet. You're talking nonsense.

MERCUTIO

True. I'm talking about dreams, which are the products of a brain that's doing nothing. Dreams are nothing but silly imagination, as thin as air, and less predictable than the wind, which sometimes blows on the frozen north and then gets angry and blows south.

