

SCENE 4 *A street near the Capulet house.*

It is the evening of the Capulet masque, or costume ball. Imagine the guests proceeding through the darkened streets with torches to light the way.

Romeo and his two friends, Mercutio and Benvolio, join the procession. Their masks will prevent them from being recognized as Montagues. Mercutio and Benvolio are in a playful, partying mood, but Romeo is still depressed by his unanswered love for Rosaline. Romeo has also had a dream that warned him of the harmful consequences of this party. He senses trouble.

[Enter Romeo, Mercutio, Benvolio, with five or six other Maskers; Torchbearers.]

Romeo. What, shall this speech be spoke for our excuse?
Or shall we on without apology?

Benvolio. The date is out of such prolixity.
We'll have no Cupid hoodwinked with a scarf,
Bearing a Tartar's painted bow of lath,
Scaring the ladies like a crowkeeper;
Nor no without-book prologue, faintly spoke
After the prompter, for our entrance;
But let them measure us by what they will,
We'll measure them a measure, and be gone.

Romeo. Give me a torch. I am not for this ambling;
Being but heavy, I will bear the light.

Mercutio. Nay, gentle Romeo, we must have you dance.

Romeo. Not I, believe me. You have dancing shoes
With nimble soles; I have a soul of lead
So stakes me to the ground I cannot move.

Mercutio. You are a lover. Borrow Cupid's wings
And soar with them above a common bound.

Romeo. I am too sore enpierced with his shaft
To soar with his light feathers, and so bound
I cannot bound a pitch above dull woe.
Under love's heavy burden do I sink.

Mercutio. And, to sink in it, should you burden love—
Too great oppression for a tender thing.

Romeo. Is love a tender thing? It is too rough,
Too rude, too boist'rous, and it pricks like thorn.

Mercutio. If love be rough with you, be rough with love.
Prick love for pricking, and you beat love down.

1–10 shall this . . . be gone: Romeo asks whether they should send a messenger announcing their arrival at the party. Benvolio replies that this custom is out of date. He then lists all the things they won't use to make such an announcement. For example, **We'll have . . . crowkeeper:** We won't send someone dressed as a blindfolded Cupid, carrying a bow and looking like a scarecrow. Let them think what they want. We'll **measure them a measure** (dance one dance with them) and go.

12 heavy: sad. In spite of his mood, Romeo makes a joke based on the meanings of **heavy** and **light**.

13–32 As you read these lines, try to visualize each man. Romeo is overcome with sadness because of his lovestruck condition. Mercutio is determined to cheer him up. He is making fun of Romeo, but he is doing it in a friendly way.



Give me a case to put my visage in.
 30 A visor for a visor! What care I
 What curious eye doth quote deformities?
 Here are the beetle brows shall blush for me.

Benvolio. Come, knock and enter, and no sooner in
 But every man betake him to his legs.

35 **Romeo.** A torch for me! Let wantons light of heart
 Tickle the senseless rushes with their heels;
 For I am proverbied with a grandsire phrase,
 I'll be a candle-holder and look on;
 The game was ne'er so fair, and I am done.

40 **Mercutio.** Tut, dun's the mouse, the constable's own
 word!
 If thou art Dun, we'll draw thee from the mire
 Of, save your reverence, love, wherein thou stickst
 Up to the ears. Come, we burn daylight, ho!

45 **Romeo.** Nay, that's not so.
Mercutio. I mean, sir, in delay
 We waste our lights in vain, like lamps by day.
 Take our good meaning, for our judgment sits
 Five times in that ere once in our five wits.

50 **Romeo.** And we mean well in going to this masque;
 But 'tis no wit to go.
Mercutio. Why, may one ask?
Romeo. I dreamt a dream tonight.
Mercutio. And so did I.

55 **Romeo.** Well, what was yours?
Mercutio. That dreamers often lie.
Romeo. In bed asleep, while they do dream things true.
Mercutio. O, then I see Queen Mab hath been with you.
 She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes
 60 In shape no bigger than an agate stone
 On the forefinger of an alderman,
 Drawn with a team of little atomies
 Athwart men's noses as they lie asleep;
 Her wagon spokes made of long spinners' legs,
 65 The cover, of the wings of grasshoppers;
 Her traces, of the smallest spider's web;
 Her collars, of the moonshine's wat'ry beams;
 Her whip, of cricket's bone; the lash, of film;
 Her wagoner, a small grey-coated gnat,

29–32 Give . . . for me: Give me a mask for an ugly face. I don't care if people notice my ugliness. Here, look at my heavy eyebrows.

34 betake . . . legs: dance.

35–38 Let . . . look on: Let playful people tickle the grass (**rushes**) on the floor with their dancing. I'll stick with the old saying (**grandsire phrase**) and hold a candle and watch the dancers.

40–44 Tut . . . daylight: Mercutio jokes, using various meanings of the word **dun**, which sounds like Romeo's last word, **done**. He concludes by saying they should not waste time (**burn daylight**).

58–100 In this famous speech Mercutio tries to cheer up Romeo by spinning a tale about how Queen Mab brings dreams to people. Queen Mab, queen of the fairies, was a folktale character well known to Shakespeare's audience. Mercutio is a born storyteller. He dominates the stage with his vivid descriptions, puns, and satires of people and professions. Don't worry about understanding everything in the speech. Read it instead for the language Mercutio uses and the dreamlike scene he creates.

60 agate stone: jewel for a ring.

62 atomies: tiny creatures. Note the description of Mab's tiny and delicate carriage.

64 spinners' legs: spiders' legs.

66 traces: harness.

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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;
O'er 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 'a lies asleep,
Then dreams he 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 talkst 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.

Benvolio. This wind you talk of blows us from
ourselves.

73 **joiner:** carpenter.

78-80 What does Mab make lawyers and ladies dream of?

82-83 **Sometime she . . . suit:**
Sometimes Mab makes a member of the king's court dream of receiving the king's special favors.

86 **benefice:** well-paying position for a church parson.

89 **ambuscadoes:** ambushes; **Spanish blades:** high-quality Spanish swords.

94 **plaits:** braids.

103-110 **True . . . South:** Mercutio is trying to keep Romeo from taking his dreams too seriously.

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Supper is done, and we shall come too late.

Romeo. I fear, too early; for my mind misgives
115 Some consequence, yet hanging in the stars,
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels and expire the term
Of a despised life, closed in my breast,
By some vile forfeit of untimely death.
120 But he that hath the steerage of my course
Direct my sail! On, lusty gentlemen!

Benvolio. Strike, drum.

[*Exeunt.*]

114-119 *my mind . . . death*: Romeo will not be cheered. He fears that some terrible event, caused by the stars, will begin at the party. Remember the phrase "star-crossed lovers" from the prologue of this act.