Act 1, Scene 4

* In this scene, Mercutio transforms Romeo’s statements about love into blatantly sexual metaphors.
* Romeo voices concern that the night’s activities will set into motion the action of fact that will result in an untimely death.
* This scene helps the audience feel fate take a tighter grip on Romeo.
* Mercutio is introduced as a friend that can tease Romeo.
* Mercutio is quick-witted and provides bawdy humour with double meanings.
* Mercutio’s *Queen Mab speech* is a dichotomy (division into two mutually exclusive, opposed, or contradictory groups: a dichotomy between thought and action).
* “Queen” and “Mab” were references to whores in Elizabethan England.
* Mercuito’s *Queen Mab* speech offers a dark side alternate view of reality.
* By the end of the speech, Queen Mab is the *hag* who teaches maids to have sex.

Queen Mab Speech

According to Mercutio's vivid description, Queen Mab is a tiny fairy that rides around in a coach made out of an "empty hazelnut" with spider's "legs" for wheel spokes (1.4.11). The coach is driven by an even tinier "grey-coated gnat" and drawn by a "team of little atomi" (tiny atoms).

Queen Mab spends her time galloping over the noses and lips of sleepers, filling their dreams with wild fantasies (lovers dream of love, soldiers dream of slitting throats, lawyers dream of winning lawsuits, etc.). Mab (whose name is also a slang word for "whore") is also kind of scary. When she's in a bad mood, she plagues women who dream of "kisses" with nasty sores ("blisters") that might just be cold sores but might also be nastier things, like pox from syphilis, and she's fond of making young, virginal girls have naughty dreams.

So, why is everything about Queen Mab so tiny and sexual?

Fed up with Romeo's lovesick moping for Rosaline and his claim that he had a steamy "dream" the night before, Mercutio taunts his buddy by saying that Queen Mab must have paid him a visit. Mercutio also informs Romeo that dreams "are the children of an idle brain," which is another way of saying that Romeo is an idiot and his dreams about Rosaline are ridiculous (1.4.12).

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VsRQSazjl4U> - 1968 Zeffirelli's Romeo & Juliet