

# THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

*Otto Nicolai*

English Version by Donald Pippin

## ACT ONE

The scene is a courtyard enclosed by a picket fence, through which one gets a tiny glimpse of the pleasant, picturesque town of Windsor. On the right is the home of Mrs. Ford; on the left, that of Mrs. Page. Both ladies are soon to meet in the middle, each of them bearing an outlandish letter -- a love letter, no less -- from a most improbable source -- a certain roguish old man who might fairly be described as "larger than life," or in the more robust words of Shakespeare, "a trunk of humors, a swollen parcel of dropsies, a huge bombard of sack, a stuffed cloak bag of guts. His name is Sir John Falstaff, sometimes known as Plump Jack.

*SCENE: A courtyard. (Mrs. Ford comes from her house, holding a letter.)*

**MRS. FORD:**                   The good for nothing bloated sot!  
  Can this be on the level?  
  In love with me, well thanks a lot.  
  A letter full of drivel!

Ah, were he handsome, young and slim,  
My heart might have a flutter,  
But spare me from the likes of him,  
A walking tub of butter.

*(reads)*                        "O fairest one! Our tempers  
  Are suited to a tee.  
  Your torrid eyes, like embers,  
  Have kindled fire in me."

The nerve of this romantic lout!  
That fire I promise I'll put out.

"You're fond of sack, the same as I ---  
A sign of sympathy."  
How can the fool imagine such?  
That stuff I never touch!

**“With might and main, I say again,  
For you I yearn, with love I burn  
And waste away both night and day,  
JOHN FALSTAFF!”**

**O just you wait, for this you’ll suffer;  
With me you dare to play the lover.  
With my good neighbor Mistress Page  
A battle royal I shall wage.  
Sir John in love! What silly twaddle!  
The man mistakes me for a bottle.**

*(Mrs. Page enters from the opposite side, also carrying a letter, at first unaware of her neighbor’s presence,)*

**My neighbor Mistress Ford must see  
The folderol he’s written.  
The author is, I guarantee,  
The biggest boob in Britain.  
*(notices Mrs. Ford)* Well met, Mrs. Ford,  
Do stop a bit.**

**MRS. FORD: Mrs. Page!**

**MRS. PAGE: To your house I was on my way . . .**

**MRS. FORD: And I to yours, with lots to say.**

**MRS. PAGE: A letter I must read to you . . .**

**MRS. FORD: Friend, I received a letter, too.**

**MRS. PAGE: A letter from a local dunce.**

**MRS. FORD: O let me hear!**

**MRS. PAGE: This you must hear.**

**BOTH: O read, and let me hear at once!  
I’ll read and let you hear at once.**

**MRS. PAGE: *(reads)* “O fairest one! Our tempers  
Are suited to a tee.”**

**MRS. FORD: *(spoken)* “Are suited to a tee.”  
The very words!**

**MRS. PAGE:** “Your torrid eyes, like embers, have . . .”

**MRS. FORD:** “Have kindled fire in me.”  
Go on! Go on!

**MRS. PAGE:** “You’re fond of sack the same as I . . .”

**MRS. FORD:** Of sack!

**MRS. PAGE:** “A sign of sympathy.”

**MRS. FORD:** Verbatim! Verbatim!

**BOTH:** “With might and main, I say again,  
For you I yearn, with love I burn  
And waste away both night and day,  
JOHN FALSTAFF!”

What a rascal! What a roué!  
Two letters both as like as eggs!  
Neighbor, we must find a new way  
To avenge our insulted sex.

We’ll expose this fiddle-faddle,  
Force the rogue to show his hand.  
Women, we are game for battle,  
Craft and art at our command.

**MRS. FORD:** Can you suggest a starter?

**MRS. PAGE:** My husband shall be told.

**MRS. FORD:** Let’s think a little harder;  
Your method leaves me cold.  
There’s time for telling after  
We’ve had a bit of laughter.  
No, no, no, no, no, no!  
That simply will not do.  
No, no, it will not do.

**MRS. PAGE:** Have you a plan?

**MRS. FORD:** Does this appeal to you?  
A trap with baited hook we’ll set

That he is bound to fall for.  
And when we've caught him in the net,  
The neighborhood we'll call for.

MRS. PAGE:                   The very thing!  
                                  A trap with baited hook  
                                  That he is bound to fall for.

BOTH:                         We'll find the appetizing bait  
                                  To lure the fellow to his fate.  
                                  Together we shall hatch a plan  
                                  To spring a trap and catch a man.  
                                  Sly old fox! O would-be lover!  
                                  Watch your step, stay on your toes.  
                                  By the time the game is over  
                                  Your presumption we'll expose.

Armed with weapons, craft and cunning,  
Games and gambits we'll perform,  
Send the rascal off and running  
From the fury of the storm.

Call to arms! With craft and cunning  
Watch the merry wives perform,  
Send the rascal off and running  
From the fury of the storm.

MRS. FORD:                 We'll outwit the would-be lover.

MRS. PAGE:                 Make the rascal run for cover.

*(The two ladies run off into Mrs. Ford's house. Mr. Page enters with Squire Slender.)*

While the spunky ladies gleefully plot their revenge on this assault upon their good sense, Mr. Page has three suitors to contend with – suitors, that is to say, for his lovely daughter Anne. There is Squire Slender, owner of property *plus* a tidy income of seven hundred a year, net. The obvious choice of any clear-thinking father. There is Monsieur Cajus, a Frenchman, for unexplained reasons the choice of Mrs. Page, Anne's mother. And then there's young Fenton, who, not that it matters in the least, happens to be Anne's choice.

**FENTON:** (*entering hurriedly*) A moment!) Mr. Page! One word, please!

**PAGE:** (*to Slender*)                   So meanwhile, go inside,  
  Dear future son-in-law,  
  And shortly I shall follow.

**SLENDER:** (*as he leaves*)       Sweet Anne, my angel!

**CAJUS:**                                Son-in-law! Son-in-law!  
  Mort de ma vie! Already come to thees.  
  I murder him, I keel ce Monsieur Slander!  
  Then la Belle Anne I come and take possession.  
  Ze minx I worship with a pession!                   (*exit*)

**PAGE:**                                Oho! The poodle dog from France!  
  And what do you desire of me, young Fenton?

**FENTON:**                             Anne, your daughter!

**PAGE:**                                Anne, my daughter?

**FENTON:**                             Anne, whom I adore with all my heart.

**PAGE:**                                (Has one heard the like of this?  
  Here's a pauper all too eager  
  For my daughter's hand in his.)

**FENTON:**                             True, my fortune's rather meager . . .

**PAGE:**                                Ha, ha! An understatement!

**FENTON:**                             But I'm bright and energetic,  
  And besides, we're both in love.

**PAGE:**                                (Not a chance!)

**FENTON:**                             We are both so much in love.

**PAGE:**                                (Not a chance! He's not the one!)

**FENTON:**                             Sir, my love is strong, yet tender.

**PAGE:**                                (Not a chance! He's not the one!)

**FENTON:**                             Unto death would I defend her.

**PAGE:**                                (Ha! I've settled on young Slender;

He's to be my future son.)

**FENTON:**

O hear me!  
If in your heart you've felt the power  
Of perfect love beyond compare,  
Do but recall that precious hour  
And cast me not to cold despair.

Deny me not celestial treasures  
That I pursue because I must.  
Though poor in books of worldly ledgers,  
Yet am I rich in love and trust.

**PAGE:**

(Yes, he fills the bill precisely;  
Slender's income will do nicely.  
They will make the perfect pair,  
Answer to a father's prayer.

Forty acre farm to rent;  
Capital at ten per cent  
After taxes, he should clear  
Seven hundred net per year.

Revenue from real estate,  
Ten per cent the going rate,  
Shares and dividends to boot ---  
I am not so hard to suit.

Seven hundred in the clear,  
Shares and dividends to boot ---  
I am not so hard to suit.  
Seven hundred net per year!)

**FENTON:**

Am I to have my darling Anne?

**PAGE:**

No, no, no, no! I've picked another man.

**FENTON:**

But I'm the only true contender.

**PAGE:**

Indeed? I vote for Squire Slender.

**FENTON:**

How! Him! A parrot so absurd,  
Preferred to me?

**PAGE:**

Be off! I've nothing more to say.  
Be off! You dare insult my son-in-law.

**FENTON:**           A parrot so absurd! Ha. ha. ha. ha!

**PAGE:**                She's not for you, so stay away.

**FENTON:**            Is that to be your final word?

**PAGE:**                I say again, the word is no!

**FENTON:**            Is that to be your final word?

**PAGE:**                Your humble servant, I must go.

**FENTON:**            Alert! You'd better stay on guard!  
The force of love cannot be barred.  
Be on your guard and stay alert;  
The course of love you'll not divert.  
Of curbs and checks I'm unafraid;  
The course of love cannot be swayed.

Let deadly sword and sabre rattle;  
True love is bound to win the battle.  
To tyranny I'll not resign;  
Your daughter Anne I claim as mine!

**PAGE:**                Calm down, and be it understood:  
For you the girl is far too good.  
Sir, why this futile rant and raving?  
Your breath you might as well be saving.  
There're lots of other girls to woo;  
My daughter wasn't meant for such as you.  
No, no, no, no!

The scene changes to the main room of the Ford house, a living room in the broadest sense. The furniture is all on a rather large scale, heavy yet handsome, typical of the period, yet the eye is caught by a laundry basket of truly epical proportions. Sign of a busy afternoon.

The head of the household we have not yet met, but rumor has it that Mr. Ford is a man easily stirred, an explosive sort whose temper sometimes gets out of hand, a husband all too prone to jealousy. This failing is compounded by the mixed blessing of having a wife who is not only very pretty but merry, too -- a word that to the Elizabethan ear does not have entirely innocent connotations.

Alas, it would now seem that Mr. Ford's worst fears are about to be realized. The lovely, lively Mrs. Ford, so attractive, so charming, is getting ready to receive . . . a lover.



**For shortly after,  
All tears are dried.**

**Tricks are in season  
When sound the reason,  
Always provided  
That love be the guide.**

**For knaves so gallant  
Justice arrives:  
Trust in the talent  
Of us two merry wives.  
Ah, the talent, the talent  
Of Windsor's merry wives.**

The trap is set, the hook is baited, the plot perfected for the two men to receive the lesson that they both so richly deserve -- the flamboyant knight for his foolish presumption, the distrustful husband for his equally foolish jealousy -- a scheme in which Mrs. Page can be counted on to play a crucial role.

**FALSTAFF: (*entering*)** So long you've made me chase you,  
My pearl so fair to see.  
Come close, let me embrace you,  
My lady love to be.  
My plum, my pet, my tasty mincemeat pie.

**MRS. FORD:** O gracious knight! Let me go.

**FALSTAFF:** Can you be cold? You tremble so.  
My radiant, lovely star, O  
Be not reserved and shy.

**MRS. FORD:** You swear, but come tomorrow  
Love and esteem, goodbye!

**FALSTAFF:** By Christ, I'm true as I am sober.

**MRS. FORD:** A rumor I've heard tell . . .

**FALSTAFF:** My vows of love shall win you over.

**MRS. FORD:** My doubt you must assuage:

Do you not court as well  
My neighbor, Mistress Page?

FALSTAFF: Her? Her? That old wrinkled raisin!  
Brr! A well that's long run dry,  
A rocky field to graze in.  
Oh, no such fool am I!

MRS. FORD: You give me hope and courage,  
My brave and handsome knight.

FALSTAFF: My dear, may love now flourish!  
Both place and time are right.

MRS. PAGE: *(knocking vigorously from without)* Mistress Ford!

MRS. FORD: A knock!

MRS. PAGE: Mistress Ford! The door! At once!

MRS. FORD: Oh, dear!

FALSTAFF: My child, what trouble brews?

MRS. PAGE: *(continues knocking)* Mistress Ford! At once!  
You have no time to lose!

FALSTAFF: (God help me!)

MRS. FORD: Right away!  
*(to Falstaff)* You stay in here, my precious.  
*(conceals him behind a screen)* Right away!

MRS. PAGE: The door! The door! At once! *(she enters)*

MRS. FORD: Mistress Page! You knocked?

MRS. PAGE: I did.

MRS. FORD: Why call on me?

MRS. PAGE: Alas! Complete catastrophe!

MRS. FORD: Do tell me all.

MRS. PAGE: Your reputation wave goodbye!

MRS. FORD:            Good neighbor, what do you imply?

MRS. PAGE:            Your husband's mad, he's lost his head.  
Oh, save yourself! His wrath I dread.

MRS. FORD:            (Speak louder.)  
God! How could he know?

MRS. PAGE:            He cries that blood is bound to flow,  
That you conceal a lover here.

MRS. FORD:            Oh, all is lost should he appear!

MRS. PAGE:            O wretched wife! Could this be true?

MRS. FORD:            Ah, yes, too true! Ah, yes, too true!  
(Speak louder yet.)

MRS. PAGE:            Then with his life the wretch will pay.  
Half Windsor's headed now this way,  
And if the man is found, no doubt  
He's good as dead.

MRS. FORD: (*in desperation*) Friend, help me out!

MRS. PAGE:            A laundry basket, ha! A stroke of luck,  
The perfect place to hide him in.

MRS. FORD:            Put him in that?

MRS. PAGE:            The only way to save his skin.

MRS. FORD:            Oh, God! I fear he's far too fat.

FALSTAFF: (*emerging*)        Not so! Not so!  
The basket! Be quick! A husband wild . . .

MRS. PAGE: (*astonished*)        How! Sir John!

FALSTAFF:                Yes, darling child.

MRS. PAGE:            What! You here?  
And you so in love with me?

FALSTAFF: (*struggling to get into the basket*)

I can explain . . . I love you still.  
I'm here of course . . . against my will.  
The basket first! I've got to hide.  
I shall . . . I must . . . inside . . .

MRS. PAGE: Ha ha ha ha! Tuck in . . . like so . . . inside, inside!

MRS. FORD: (*throwing a shirt over him*) Now cover up!

FALSTAFF: (*peeping out*) Dear Mistress Ford!

MRS. PAGE: Be quick, be quick!

FALSTAFF: Dear Mistress Page, my love!

BOTH LADIES: Lie low, lie low, stay mum!  
A fate that comes of courting two.  
So settle down, enjoy the view.

FALSTAFF: (*to Mrs. Page*) Ah, you're the one!

MRS. FORD: Come, servants! (*two servants enter*)  
Today the washing goes,  
So take it where the river flows  
And dump it in without delay.  
This moment!

MRS. PAGE: And dump it in without delay.

BOTH LADIES: Oh, better far an icy bath  
Than face a fiery husband's wrath.

(*The servants are about to remove the basket when Ford, Page, Cajus, Slender and various men and women enter.*)

FORD: This way, this way! Come all this way!  
The quarry we have brought to bay.  
This way, hurry up, come along!  
Collar the rat that does me wrong.  
Hey, servants, stop! What have we here?

MRS. FORD: Fine thing! Merely the wash, my dear.  
Remove it. (*Servants exit with basket.*)

FORD: Ah, traitress!

**MRS. FORD:** So jealous! It leads you far astray.  
Wednesday's always been washing day.

**FORD:** Now I've caught you in the act;  
Here is the proof till now I've lacked.

**MRS. FORD:** My dearest husband!

**FORD:** Hence, away!

**PAGE:** Calm down, my friend.

**CAJUS:** Quel horreur!

**FORD:** Betrayed! Canvass the kitchen,  
Poke in the pantry! Look for the louse!  
He lurks somewhere in the house.

**PAGE:** Good neighbor, take the saner view.

**CAJUS:** Il est jaloux furieusement.

**MRS. FORD:** Ah, husband dear, take the saner view.

**MRS. PAGE:** Good neighbor, good neighbor,  
Do take the saner view.

**FORD:** A wife betrays a husband true:  
Neighbors, take note;  
It could happen to you or to you.  
My friends, this could be you, or you.

All wives are the same,  
And ours the shame!  
Neighbors, take note;  
It could happen to you or to you.

**CHORUS:** Sad case! Sad case!  
So blind and jealous, too.

**SLENDER:** (*from nowhere*) Sweet Anne, my angel!

(*All exit except Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page.*)

**MRS. PAGE:** Go, then!



**MRS. PAGE:** My dear, oh what's the matter?

**MRS. FORD:** I can endure no more . . .

**MRS. PAGE:** (*glowering at Ford*)

See, by hurling charges at her  
You wound her to the core.  
Go hide your head for shame,  
You brute! You brute!

**OTHERS:** You brute! You brute!

**MRS. FORD:** (*rising*) Ah, those days I well remember;  
His eyes were all aglow.  
His touch was ever tender  
Because he loved me so.

But now his temper flashes;  
The gales of fury blow.  
Beneath their angry lashes  
My tears of sorrow flow.

**FORD:** I came to hunt the quarry,  
And yet can find no trace.

**MRS, PAGE:** You'd soon enough be sorry  
Were I but in her place.

**FORD:** With reason am I sorry;  
I've brought my own disgrace.  
Beset by jealous demons,  
I suffer pangs of woe.  
O wives so false and faithless  
That bring a husband low!

**OTHERS:** He came to hunt the quarry,  
And yet can find no trace.  
With reason he is sorry;  
He's brought his own disgrace.

His temper flashes . . .  
Her eyelids overflow . . .  
A man of jealous rage, ah so!  
Himself his mortal foe.

**FORD:** My dear, O please forgive me . . . forgive!  
A note arrived unsigned  
That said with you Sir John I'd find.

**MRS. FORD:** How! What! Barbarian!  
I'll take no more from such a boor.  
Let's reach an understanding:  
The town shall know, you may be sure,  
The daily torment I endure,  
Divorce I'm now demanding!

**OTHERS:** You tyrant, you tyrant!  
You brute, you brute!

**FORD:** Upon that note I place the blame;  
It should have gone unheeded.  
On me has someone played a game,  
But do be quiet all the same.  
Must neighbors know about my shame?  
Alas, oh this is all I needed!

**OTHERS:** Oho! You tyrant! You tyrant!  
The town shall know, you may be sure,  
The daily hell she must endure.  
You brute, she's absolutely right  
To reach an understanding.  
Because you will not see the light,  
Because you choose to foam and fight,  
Divorce she's now demanding.

*(Mrs. Ford falls into a swoon, Mrs. Page and the other ladies standing by.  
The men traipse out, Mr. Ford tearing his hair in despair.)*

**End of Act One**

## **ACT TWO**

From the thoroughly respectable, middle-class home of Mr. and Mrs. Ford, we descend the social ladder, rather precipitously, to the seamier residence of Sir John Falstaff, known to the drinking public as The Garter Inn. Although Sir John is much put out by the mishaps of the previous day -- snatched from the very brink of success by the roaring entrance of a raving husband, crammed into a basket

clearly designed for other purposes, suffocated under a blanket of foul clothes, stewed in his own grease, melted like butter, then frozen by a sudden plunge into the Thames, nonetheless his spirits have been considerably lifted by a note just received from the mortified Mrs. Ford.

Deeply disappointed by the rude interruption to their tender scene, she implores his pardon for the indignities he has suffered and begs him to return this very morning. Her husband, she adds parenthetically, will be out hunting.

In fact, with a few cups of sack already down the hatch, you might say that Sir John is quite himself again.

QuickTime™ and a  
GIF compressor  
are needed to see this picture.

Good sack was my delight and joy,  
For the rain it raineth every day.

Nice Nelly Bly,  
My throat once more is dry,  
So come and fill the tank.

Quench the fire one more time;  
Drinking I hold no crime.  
Bacchus we thank!  
Great Bacchus we thank!

*(speaks)* In position!

Everybody up! Ready with the cup!  
So --- one, two, three! *(all drink)*

CHORUS: Bravo!

FIRST NEIGHBOR: *(speaks)* No more for me!

FALSTAFF: *(speaks)* Passed out? Take him away!  
*(He is put on a bench and carried out.)*

CHORUS: They bear away our friend, passed out.  
Keeled over in the latest bout.  
Great Bacchus, sing sweet lullaby;  
In drowsy slumber let him lie.

FALSTAFF: When later I came to man's estate,  
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,  
'Gainst knaves and fools men shut their gates,  
For the rain it raineth every day.

When you've an empty glass,  
Still worse, an empty purse,  
Then roll the dice.  
Luck is a peevish lad,  
Monday good, Tuesday bad ---  
Seldom here twice.  
Ah, Seldom here twice.

*(speaks)* Back in position!

Everybody up! Ready with the cup!  
So --- one, two, three! *(all drink)*

**CHORUS:** Bravo!

Thoroughly baffled, never dreaming that he was foiled by an innocent looking laundry basket, Mr. Ford is nonetheless by no means ready to cast aside his suspicions and consider the case closed. On the contrary, he is more than ever convinced that he is on to something -- something big -- an intruder on his terrain, a predator ready to pounce, a Casanova on the loose, waiting till the moment his back is turned. And thanks to an unsigned letter that just happened to fall into his hands, he has a startlingly accurate idea of who the scoundrel might be. Mr. Ford is far from what could be termed a merry husband, in any sense of the word, yet even he has a few tricks up his sleeve -- a scheme for confirming his suspicions, for testing his wife's virtue, for trapping the wayward knight, and for catching the lust crazed couple in the very ecstasy of their depraved abandon.

And so, taking advantage of the fact that Falstaff does not know him by sight, and assuming the name of Mr. Brook, he now approaches our unsuspecting gallant with an ingenious offer.

*(Ford enters, disguised as Mr. Brook. He and Falstaff both bow ceremoniously))*

**FORD:** Good day, my friend. A privilege to meet  
The great and excellent knight Sir Falstaff,  
A name well known to all.

**FALSTAFF:** You overwhelm me.  
(What a charming man!)

**FORD:** Forgive me, sir. I took the liberty  
Of ordering a small refresher.

**FALSTAFF:** You read my mind. Exactly what I need.

**FORD:** The pleasure's mine.

**BOTH:** Here's to you, my friend.

**FALSTAFF:** Delicious! So . . . I didn't catch the name.  
What can I do for you?

**FORD:** The name is Brook.

**FALSTAFF:** Brook?

**FORD:** A man of means,  
Who's squandered most of it.

**FALSTAFF:** You ring a bell, Sir Brook.  
The story of my life.

**FORD:** Yet I have still a fair amount left over  
That I would spend upon a matter sweet and urgent,  
And so I come to you for sound advice.

**FALSTAFF:** A love adventure?

**FORD:** That's correct.  
Because your reputation is established  
As a fine gallant the ladies all adore,  
You're just the man I need. So listen well:  
I am in love, I'm wild  
About a certain Mistress Ford,  
And I am bound to have her  
Or die in the endeavor.

**FALSTAFF:** (The plot has thickened.  
Here's a matter of note!  
Upon my turf he's poaching.)  
I know her well, an appetizing tidbit.

**FORD:** (I'll kill the dog!)  
Ah, but the lady has a jealous husband  
Who guards her night and day.  
You know him, too?

**FALSTAFF:** We've not exactly met.  
I know him by repute:  
An obnoxious, knuckle-headed fool,  
But wallowing in wealth.

**FORD:** (I'll hang him by the neck!}  
My trusted friend,  
Because the lady spurns my every move,  
I beg for you to go and try your luck.  
Such polished manners, such poise and finesse ---  
There's not a woman born that can resist.

**FALSTAFF:** I've had some small success . . .

**FORD:** (In vice and villainy!)  
Now it would not do for you to fail for lack of funds.  
I insist that you accept a bag of gold.  
Just say the word if more is needed.

**FALSTAFF:** (I'm dead and flown to paradise!)  
A friend like you I can't refuse.  
And be assured . . .  
She'll fall without a struggle.

**FORD:** What! How so?  
My congratulations . . .

**FALSTAFF:** But granted I make out with her,  
What's in the bag for you?

**FORD:** Sir, very simple . . .  
Now she puts me off, goes on about her virtue.  
If I can demonstrate that it is not intact,  
And prove in fact just the opposite,  
She'll have no more excuse.

**FALSTAFF:** If that is all you want,  
You're talking to the man.

**FORD:** (So help me, I'll explode!)  
How's that? Explain yourself.

**FALSTAFF:** Ha, ha, ha, ha!  
You'll find this most amusing, you'll die!  
You recommend the very lady  
I've wooed and won already.

**FORD:** Oh, the devil!

**FALSTAFF:** What did you say?

**FORD:** I said . . . I said . . . that you're a dashing devil.  
Your story is hilarious! So do continue.

**FALSTAFF:** I paid a visit . . . it was only yesterday . . .  
We'd just begun the tender prologue to our scene;  
There came a knock, a roar ---  
In burst the lady's crazy husband  
And at his side a horde of neighbors.  
How the devil had he got wind of our romantic doings?  
But there he was, alive  
And like a bull that's gone berserk.

**FORD:** While you were present?

**FALSTAFF:** In the flesh!  
By a rare stroke of luck  
A friend had happened by  
Just in time to warn of danger on the way.  
The darling women!  
Their heads were on their shoulders.  
Presto, they hid me in a . . .

**FORD:** Where?

**FALSTAFF:** A wicker laundry basket!

**FORD:** Inside a basket?

**FALSTAFF:** Yes, Sir Brook. A bare escape!  
Me and my majestic shape!  
Stifled under dirty drawers,  
Barely mentionable horrors,  
There I crouch with tortured limbs  
Till I've landed in the Thames.  
Ah, Sir Brook! You realize,  
Me and my majestic size!

**FORD:** What a sorry sight to see!  
Sad the loss of dignity.  
Thank the Lord, you have recovered!  
And to think all this you suffered  
For the charming Mistress Ford!  
She's no doubt as rich reward.

**FALSTAFF:** None richer.

**FORD:** Yes, no doubt as rich reward.  
I daresay the frigid water  
Washed away the lover's ardor.

**FALSTAFF:** Right you are, my love is dead.  
Otherwise, I'd be in her bed.

**FORD:** (Hell's bells! Quiet . . . hold . . .)  
Friend, you make a claim so bold?

**FALSTAFF:** You can count on my succeeding ---  
Put it down to brawn and brain.  
She has sent already, pleading  
That I visit her again.  
Her half-wit husband, fool for trusting,  
Goes to hunt this very day.  
Oh, once a wife has started lusting  
You may be sure she'll find a way.

**FORD:** So you'll bed with her, Sir John?

**FALSTAFF:** Friend, for your sake, count it done.

**FORD:** You are far too good a friend.  
(I'll repay you in the end.)

**FALSTAFF:** Time to go. My turtle dove  
Languishes until I greet her.

**FORD:** May your luck today be sweeter.

**FALSTAFF:** May my luck today be sweeter.

**FORD:** Thus you pave the way for me.

**FALSTAFF:** Thus I pave the way for you.

**BOTH:** How delightful! What a pleasure!  
If her husband only knew!  
If he but knew!

**FALSTAFF:**



An eager, willing wife to share,  
Her husband none the wiser.  
You'll know him well tomorrow morn,  
For he's the chap that wears the horn.

**FORD:** How glad am I, how light as air!  
I fly as high as you, sir.  
(Today's the day I'm bound to snare  
That bottom-heavy boozier.)  
And then he'll get his just reward,  
With compliments of Mr. Ford.)

**BOTH:** What a pleasure! What a revel!  
The time is ripe, the fated hour draws apace.  
Get on the mark  
To start a mad and merry chase.  
Ha, ha, ha, ha! Farewell, friend.

**FORD:** Expect a fit reward.

**FALSTAFF:** One down for Mr. Ford.

**BOTH:** The fated hour draws apace.  
To start a mad and merry chase.

Meanwhile, our other plot, pertaining to Anne Page and her three suitors, has been quietly simmering on the back burner. Yet so far the plot has failed to thicken. Certainly Squire Slender and Monsieur Cajus can congratulate themselves on having won the hearts respectively of Mr. and Mrs. Page, the fact remains that to the would-be lover, this is small change. Father and mother are strictly supporting roles. It's the leading lady that counts -- and it is precisely from this direction that nothing whatever has been forthcoming by way of a nod, a smile, or an encouraging word. In fact, neither one nor the other has succeeded in getting so much as a moment alone with her.

*Perhaps* by stealing into the shady garden spot where Anne frequently comes to brood upon her difficult quandary, and *maybe* by hanging around long enough, they *might* just casually, accidentally run into her . . .

*Scene: the Page garden. Squire Slender timidly enters.*

**SLENDER:**

Aha! The garden spot that she  
Is likely to frequent.  
Perhaps if I wait patiently  
We'll meet by accident.  
Sweet Anne, my angel!

No, I'll put it off no longer!  
I'll storm and sweep her off her feet.  
O courage, Slender! Self-control!  
Heart, beat not like a drum.  
She'll see the pain that sears my soul,  
And then she must succumb.  
Ah, then she must succumb!

I hear her coming . . .  
I'll make her vow . . .  
I love you!  
But not right now!  
Quick, quick! Hush, hush!  
I'll hide behind this handy bush.

**CAJUS:** (*entering*)

Ici ze spot, ze shady spot  
She sit and look distracted.  
I wait right here and like as not  
I meet her unexpected.  
Zen I address her de ma propre bouche.

**SLENDER:**

(He's found the bush! Alas, I'm rooted out!)

**CAJUS:**

I say to her, O sweet Miss Page,  
Your humble worshipper!  
My rival I wiz sword engage,  
O diable! Par honneur!  
Wiz single stroke I kill ze cur,  
Ze mangy cur,  
O diable! Par honneur!

O Mistress Anne, I say agan  
I am ze man,  
O diable! Par honneur!

Par exemple, ce miserable Slender . . . (*draws his sword*)

I quarter heem. I crumble heem . . .  
I scatter heem!

Watch me pluck ze feathers of zat silly gander.  
And zat infernal Fanton . . .  
I force heem to surrender.

**FENTON:** (*offstage*) Hark, the lark I hear in song . . .

**CAJUS:** Ciel! Qu'entends-je?  
Monsieur Fanton I hear speak.  
I had better hide --- and queek!

*(He sheathes his sword and hides opposite to where Slender is hiding. Fenton enters.)*

**FENTON:**

QuickTime™ and a  
PowerPC G4 are  
required to see this picture.

At your window linger long  
As the music fills the grove.  
Lucid is the gentle flow,  
Telling what all lovers know.

**CAJUS:** Tiens! Zees fellow is de trop;  
Wiz my sword I lay heem low.

**FENTON:** Hear the melody that soars,  
Full of sweet and sad desire.  
What the tuneful bird implores  
Lovers never need inquire.  
Lucid is the gentle flow,  
Telling what all lovers know.

**SLENDER:** Even though you warble so,  
Anne loves me and won't say no.

**CAJUS:** Tiens! Zees fellow is de trop;  
Wiz my sword I lay heem low.

*Anne enters from the house. Fenton runs to meet her, while Slender and Cajus remain hidden.*

**ANNE:** Fenton!

**FENTON:** My darling! Why are you in tears?

**ANNE:** I weep because our dream is over.  
My father bids, my mother begs,  
And we must part forever.

**FENTON:** And you?

**ANNE:** My feelings count for nothing.

**FENTON:** What? Give up so easily?  
Ah, me! Ah, me! Ah, me!  
Your love is dead.  
How can I go on living?

**ANNE:** Fenton! My Fenton!  
Can you wonder? Can you question?  
Can you doubt my inner core?  
Need I say again, my darling,  
You're the one that I adore?

Let my mother chide and scold me;  
Let my father rage and roar.  
Close unto your heart enfold me,  
And I'm yours forever, evermore.

**FENTON:** Oh, forgive my disbelieving!  
Every doubt I cast aside.  
With the power and joy of loving  
My resolve is fortified.

**BOTH:** Close unto my heart enfolded,  
I am yours forevermore.  
(You are mine forevermore)  
(And) I am yours, all yours!

**FENTON:** And does that pesky pair of suitors  
Pursue their fierce and hot campaign?

**ANNE:** No fault of mine!

**FENTON:** That featherbrain,  
The Squire Slender,  
With his perpetual "Sweet Anne, my angel!"

**SLENDER:** (*peering out from the bush*) Vicious slander!  
The lies and libel people spread!

**ANNE:** Ah! Father loves him for his fortune;  
Would that he could marry him instead.

**FENTON:** And what about the fiery Frenchman?

**ANNE:** My mother wants him for her son.  
Ha, ha, ha, ha!

**CAJUS:** *(also peering out from his bush)*  
(Who ees zat son? Ah, quelque chose!  
Ma foi, zat son I murder heem, ce traitre!)

**FENTON:** With competition such as that,

**ANNE & FENTON:** Upon the battle you can bet.

**SLENDER:** The lies and libel people spread!

**CAJUS:** Who ees zat son? Ah, quelque chose!  
Heem I murder like a rat!

**ANNE & FENTON:** Look ahead! Never doubt!  
For our lives have barely started.  
Courage up! Never doubt!  
Neither bar nor bolt can keep true lovers parted.  
It will all turn out.  
It will all in time turn out.

**SLENDER:** What a rat! What a lout!  
And for him am I discarded!  
Anne, my angel, can you leave me broken hearted?  
All is inside out.

**CAJUS:** Sacre Dieu! Vot's about?  
Ce monsieur I catch unguarded.  
Sacre Dieu! Sans pardon,  
By likes of heem am I outsmarted.  
I will kill ze lout!

*(Anne hurries off with Fenton. Slender and Cajus also run off, in consternation.)*

Back to the infamous living room in the Ford house, where Falstaff has been invited for a return engagement. This time the amorous scene with Mrs. Ford seems to be going quite nicely, albeit still in the preliminary stages, when the instruments are as it were tuning up. Mrs. Ford, eager to make amends for the

horrors of the previous visit, is sweet, soothing and sympathetic. Sir John is preening himself on his irresistibility. Suddenly, a knock! Again the troublesome Mrs. Page, bursting in with a cry of alarm! Mr. Ford has mysteriously gotten wind of his wife's indiscretion. He is headed toward the house, fire in his eyes, out to kill, loaded gun in hand,. Already too late for escape. Is there no hiding place? A trunk? A drawer? A chimney? None that Mr. Ford will not instantly detect and expose. What is to be done? Aha! Disguise! Though not without problems, this is no time to quibble. Already a rattle at the door, a key in the lock. After quivering like a pudding, shrinking, paling, trying his best to look invisible, Sir John, in desperation, rushes upstairs, followed by Mrs. Page, there to await his inevitable discovery and undoing.

*SCENE: the Ford living room, where Mrs. Ford is entertaining Sir John.*

*(Ford enters stealthily, sword in hand, locks the door behind him and pockets the key.)*

**FORD:** So! The plot I have discovered,  
And the dog's as good as dead.  
Yesterday though outmaneuvered,  
This time . . . this time . . .  
This time I'm a jump ahead.  
Today, yes, I'm a jump ahead.

**MRS, FORD:** But my dear . . .  
Is the bee still in your bonnet?  
Is it buzzing round again?  
How you wrong me! Shame upon it!  
Jealous, self-destructive man!

**FORD:** My turn! My turn!  
Now I'll start the search, my lady.

**MRS. FORD:** Do it over my dead body.  
You shall not ransack the place,

**FORD:** This you tell me to my face.  
Shameless harlot!

**MRS, FORD:** Raving madman!

**FORD:** Bold and shocking!

**MRS. FORD:** Oh, you mongrel!

**You should be chained and whipped for barking.**

- FORD:** Let me by.
- MRS, FORD:** Not a step.
- FORD:** Let me through,  
Or I'll ... I'll ... I'll ... I'll murder you.
- MRS. FORD:** Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!
- FORD:** Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! Laugh at me!
- MRS. FORD:** Certainly!
- FORD:** Woman, you had best beware me!
- MRS, FORD:** Rave and rant, you cannot scare me.
- FORD:** Ridicule! Mockery!
- MRS. FORD:** Certainly! Certainly!  
Childish tantrums should be ignored.  
Far too well do I know you,  
O fierce Mister Ford!
- FORD:** Just you wait and I will show you.  
Wait and see!  
You can take my solemn word.  
Women, women I could choke!  
This has gone beyond a joke.
- MRS. FORD:** Jealousy has turned your brain;  
Poor, poor man, you've gone insane.
- FORD:** Woman, you had best beware me!  
I am not done!  
I will have you under lock.
- MRS. FORD:** Make yourself the laughing stock.  
What a man! Too absurd! Far astray!  
Ha, ha, ha! So far astray.
- FORD:** Laugh at me! Scoff at me!  
Just you wait and I will show you.  
Later on! Wait and see.

Serpent! Vampire!  
Traacherous vampire,  
Your perfidy I shall repay.  
Evil vampire, laugh at me!  
Perfidy I shall repay.  
Comes the day!

*(Servants enter with basket.)*

MRS. FORD: (Superb! They come upon the minute.)

FORD: *(to servants)* Stop, you rascals! Stay right there!  
Set the basket on the floor.  
Stand aside, I'll see what's in it.  
*(to Mrs. Ford)* So! You appear in quite a quand'ry.  
Worried, dear, about the laundry?

MRS. FORD: Of course not!

FORD: That it should come to this!  
Watch! Today I do the wash.  
*(to servants)* Off! What are you waiting for?  
Rascals! Of course, of course!  
'Twas I that locked the door.  
Off! Away with you!  
*(lets out servants and again locks the door)*  
Now I'll send your knight so dashing  
Where he'll receive a goodly splashing.  
Yes, I'll bleach and then I'll starch him.  
*(pounces on the basket)*  
Come out, come out, you cur!  
You cannot hide.

MRS. FORD: Ha, ha, ha, ha! The man is mad. Bizarre, bizarre!  
Go search inside the mustard jar.

FORD: He lurks . . . concealed . . . inside.

MRS. FORD: Bizarre, bizarre! Ha, ha! He's run amok.

FORD: *(drawing sword)* This time you take your final ride.  
Oh, scoundrel! Your hour has struck.  
Die! Die! *(stabs his sword into the basket)*

MRS. FORD: Well done, well done. I'm much impressed.  
You send him to eternal rest.

**FORD:** But he was here, that I could swear!  
Yesterday for sure, inside the basket.  
He's still about! He's hiding! Where?  
I beg of you! Wife!  
Wife, drive me not to madness.  
I'll find the fox wherever hid.  
The entire house I shall ransack.

**MRS. FORD:** I am your wife. This I forbid.

**FORD:** Let me by. Stand back!  
Stand back if you value your life.

Women, women I could choke!  
This has gone beyond a joke.  
Woman, you had best beware me.  
I am not done! I will have you under lock.  
Laugh at me, scoff at me!  
Just you wait and I will show you.  
Serpent! Serpent, come what may.  
Your perfidy I shall repay.  
Comes the day!

**MRS. FORD:** Jealousy has turned your brain;  
Poor, poor man, you've gone insane.  
Make yourself the laughing stock.  
What a man! Too absurd!  
So far astray!

*(knocking at the door)*

**FORD:** Who knocks?

**NEIGHBORS:** Open up, friend Ford!  
We come at your command.

**FORD;** Aha! And welcome! Come in, come in . . .  
Ah, neighbors! The cross that I must bear!  
A wife without a shred of honor!

*(Mrs. Ford calmly sits down.)*

**PAGE;** I take it you have found the scoundrel?

**FORD:** Well, no. That wanton woman bars the way.

**But never mind. The hunt is just beginning.**

**CAJUS:** O ciel! Quelle chose epouvantable!  
Mon Dieu, I naver see a room so turvy-tpsy.

**FORD:** I played the fool here yesterday.  
Today the story's different.  
And my revenge shall be the sweeter.

**MRS. FORD:** All right, if you insist.  
There is no point in my protesting.  
Go, search the house to satisfy a whim.  
You'd best come out, good Mistress Page,  
And bring the old woman with you.  
My husband's on a hunting spree.

**FORD:** What old woman's that?

**MRS. FORD:** Our servant's buxom auntie,  
The giant crone from Brainford.

**FORD:** That evil hag? That ogress?  
I've told the witch that she's not wanted. (*picks up a stick*)

**MRS. FORD:** I beg you, dear, be kind to her.  
Do hold him back, good neighbors.  
My husband mustn't harm that poor dear.

*(Falstaff, led by Mrs. Page, enters disguised as a woman.)*

**MRS. PAGE:** Careful, Mother Prattle . . . my arm.  
Let me help you to the door.

**FORD:** So! Mother Prattle steps abroad. Prattle!

**MRS. FORD:** Bless her!

**FORD:** Plague upon that ancient bawd!  
What brings you here, you wretched thing?  
Tarot cards and fortune telling? Ha?

**FALSTAFF:** Eh, what was that? I'm hard of hearing.

**FORD:** What concoctions are you selling?  
What voodoo have you at hand?

**FALSTAFF:** Ah! Ah! I do not understand.

**FORD:** The witch! She doesn't understand?  
The dragon! She doesn't understand?  
Get out! Get out!  
You dragon! You polecat! Be on your way.  
Hurry up, be off and on your way.  
There! There! There! There!

**MRS. FORD & MRS. PAGE:** Reason takes a holiday!

**MEN:** Off and on your way!  
For your good you'd best obey.

**FORD:** So! Out the door, the dragon has departed.  
Our hunt can now at last get started.  
And if we fail to find the dog,  
Say Mister Ford has slipped a cog.

**MEN:** Eyes alerted, all attention!  
Let us pounce upon the prey.  
Surely a beast of his dimension  
Cannot make a getaway.

**LADIES:** Eyes alerted, all attention!  
Go and pounce upon the prey.  
Purely a beast of your invention,  
He is half a mile away.

**CAJUS:** Oui! Oui! Attention!  
Oui! Oui! Pounce on ze prey.  
Man so mountain in dimension  
Naver make a getaway.

**FORD:** Though with rage and fury blind,  
Such bulk I cannot help but find.

**MEN:** Though with rage and fury blind,  
Such bulk he cannot help but find.

**LADIES:** Your bluster I don't mind,  
For neither hide nor hair you'll find.

**CAJUS:** Jealousie, it drive me mad.  
I start to see zat I been had.

## End of Act Two

### ACT THREE

Two down for Sir John, who has clearly taken on the wrong women. But tradition calls for three strikes. One more to go. This time the wives will be joined by their husbands for a combined effort.

The ladies have confessed all. Mr. Ford, feeling as foolish as he in fact is, promises never, never, NEVER to be jealous again, and Mr. Page, vastly amused by his friend's discomfort, goes so far as to suggest a third rendezvous between the ladies and the plump knight.

Mrs. Page picks up the idea, and sets the time for the witching hour of midnight. In nearby Windsor Forest there is a large oak that enshrines the memory of Herne the Hunter, a known habitat for goblins, fairies, imps and elves, all eager for mischief and ready to be pressed into service.

*Scene: a room in the Page house.*

**FORD:** My angel, can you ever forgive me?

**MRS. FORD:** Do stand up. All is forgiven and forgotten, provided that you cast aside this ridiculous jealousy.

**FORD:** Never again! I would sooner suspect the sun of cold . . .

**PAGE:** Let's not go from one extreme to another. *(to his wife)* And so the old sinner wrote to you as well?

**MRS. PAGE:** The very selfsame letter. I warrant he has a thousand of these letters, with blank space for different names. We decided to take revenge on him and teach Mr. Ford a little lesson along the way.

**PAGE:** Well done, my dear. But now it's our turn. The fellow deserves to be shamed publicly. I think this calls for one more rendezvous.

**MRS. PAGE:** There's an old tale of Herne the Hunter that we might put to use.

**Of Huntsman Herne there's a tale that's told:  
He stalked the woods in days of old.  
Day in, day out, it was his delight  
To hunt the prey from dawn till night.**

**A proud, noble stag with antlers towering high  
He chased through fields with a savage cry.  
The stag beneath a sacred tree  
Sought shelter from his enemy.**

**The hunter, deaf to claims divine,  
Defiled that ancient, hallowed shrine.  
"O Herne, that protected stag you shot;  
To hunt forever shall be your lot."**

**Old Huntsman Herne, so the tale goes round,  
Within these woods can still be found.  
From dusk till dawn with loaded gun  
He stalks the woods till rise of sun.**

**He wears on his brow those antlers towering high,  
And from the dark comes his phantom cry:  
"Beware! Oh, flee from the sacred tree  
Before death takes you in custody."**

**For when the hour of midnight chimes;  
And when the silver moonlight shines,  
Comes Herne with his hounds that bark and bay  
To claim all mortals for his prey.**

Possibly Mr. and Mrs. Page embrace the idea of a midnight rendezvous in the forest because they see it as an opportunity for a bit of skullduggery on their own. The late hour, the dark locale, the throng of people in disguise, the general confusion, will provide a perfect set-up for whisking off their daughter and getting her married according to their own wishes. But at this point their plans diverge.

Mr. Page takes his daughter aside to inform her that she is to come dressed in green, so that Squire Slender can spot her and lead her off to the nearby Chapel in the Woods where the ceremony will be performed.

In like manner, Mrs. Page announces to her daughter that her attire for the evening will be red. Thus Cajus will recognize her and carry her off to the Chapel in the Woods where they can be married.

Unfortunately, both have overlooked the fact that their daughter has a mind of her own. She will go dressed in white.

At last! My mind is quite made up!  
Now comes the test, that calls for care and caution.  
Thou that guard and guide true love,  
O fairy Queen Titania,  
Watch over me as well,  
And lend to me your white and winged gown  
That I may soar on limpid air to my fond goal.

No, not for me a dress of forest green;  
No, nor a robe of crimson hue;  
No, only white for me.  
A veil of white shall crown my head,  
And in my hair a woven garland of lilies.



My dear-est heart, on scent-ed air I fly to you I so a-dore,  
Eternal vows of love to share,  
Entirely yours, evermore.

Deep in the forest there's a place  
In shadow hid that beckons us;  
Along a path by silver moonbeams lighted,  
A chapel waits where we shall be united.

When I am safe in your embrace,  
And you in mine, in shared delight,  
Oh, then may pardon smile with grace  
And bless this happy night.  
Then all may bless this joyful night.

My heart leaps in rapture, a golden trance,  
That turns into sparkle and elfin dance.  
A sky overclouded dissolves into blue,  
And dawn-tinted sunbeams are radiant anew.  
The joy long awaited from heaven comes down  
And love wears a garland, a blossoming crown.

*SCENE: Windsor Forest at night, near the famed oak of Huntsman Herne.*

The scene is Windsor Forest, near the famed oak of Huntsman Herne. The stage is dark; mysterious night sounds emanate from the surrounding shadows. The moon rises slowly, hailed by a spectral choir. In the distance, a clock strikes midnight.

**CHORUS:** *(offstage)*

**O starry night!  
Pale moon's domain,  
Where fears take flight  
And lovers reign.**

*(Falstaff enters, disguised as Herne, with large antlers on his head.)*

**FALSTAFF:**           **The chimes of midnight sound the hour;  
My moment draws apace.  
O Jupiter! You, too, wore horns  
When eager for the chase.  
If such a god became a buck,  
High time Sir John go try his luck.**

**But hush! A rustle in the grove!  
My dainty doe has come to rove.  
My dainty doe comes now to rove.**

*(Mrs. Ford enters, soon followed by Mrs. Page.)*

**MRS. FORD:**           **Pst, pst! Sir John!**

**MRS. PAGE:**           **Pst, pst! Sir John!**

**FALSTAFF:** *(growling)*           **Buh!**

**MRS. FORD:**           **My stalwart stag! Here am I drawn.**

**FALSTAFF:**           **My dainty doe! My frisky fawn!**

**MRS. PAGE:**           **Pst, pst! Sir John!**

**FALSTAFF:** *(to Mrs. Ford)* **Be still, be still, but who comes next?**

**MRS. FORD:**           **Dear Mistress Page, sir, don't be vexed.**

**MRS. PAGE:**           **Who could resist a knight so strong?  
I could not help but tag along.**

**FALSTAFF:**           **Great Jove, send the wild heavens heaving;  
Hurl thunderbolts of brimfire and pitch.  
Here's my nest and I'm not leaving,**

For tonight I've struck it rich.

ALL: *(sighing)*

Ah! Ah! Ah!

LADIES:

But tell us first, o wicked sir,  
Which one of us do you prefer?

FALSTAFF:

Ha! Divide and split me down the middle!  
Dear ladies, to choose I would be loth.  
To each a half, for you can see  
I'm big enough for both.

MRS. FORD:

Ah! Ah! My charming, tender lover!

MRS. PAGE:

Let no one interfere.

FALSTAFF:

Come, hasten undercover  
Where none can overhear.

ALL THREE:

My charming, tender lover!  
Let no one interfere.  
Come, hasten undercover  
Where none can overhear.

FALSTAFF:

Come, O come! We have no time to lose.

LADIES:

Ah, Sir John! What lady could refuse?

*(Confused shouting is heard from offstage)*

LADIES:

O heavens! What a frightful sound!  
Let's run! Let's run! Let's run!

*(They run off, after turning Falstaff around a few times.)*

FALSTAFF:

The fairies gather round.  
Alas, I am undone!

*(He falls to the ground behind the oak, as elves and spirits appear.)*

CHORUS OF ELVES: You fairies black, gray, green and white,  
O moonshine revelers of night,  
Around the forest form a ring  
And send poor mortals scampering.

*(Anne enters dressed as Titania, in white.)*

**ANNE:** All nature sleeps; frail mortals are in bed.  
Upon the scented flowers lightly tread,  
And hear the doleful nightingale's sad song.  
O dearest Oberon, be not so long!

**CHORUS:** All nature sleeps . . .

*(Fenton appears, as Oberon.)*

**FENTON:** Our petty foe can sever us no longer;  
The time is ripe for love to thrive and conquer.  
The stars peer out to gaze on fairyland;  
My own Titania, take my heart and hand.

**CHORUS:** The stars peer out to gaze on fairyland;  
Your own Titania comes to take your heart and hand.

*(Anne and Fenton leave, hand in hand.)*

**CHORUS:** Come, form a ring, you imps and elves,  
Upon the dew disport yourselves.  
Through bush and shrub, through briar and thorn,  
O Huntsman Herne, come blow your horn!  
Blow your horn! Why don't you blow?  
No sound! Why don't you blow?

*(Page has entered as Herne, with other hunters, He tries to blow his horn, but to no avail.)*

**PAGE:** No sound can I produce.  
This means a man is on the loose.

**CHORUS:** A man? A man? We are betrayed!  
Search! Ferret out the renegade.

*(They drag out Falstaff, who falls to his knees before Page.)*

**CHORUS:** We've got him now! A mortal man!  
See Huntsman Herne in masquerade.  
Ha, ha, ha, ha!

**PAGE:** *(sternly)* Rash son of man, you realize  
The heinous crime of your disguise?  
Upon our sport you dare to spy;  
For this misdeed prepare to die.

**Gadflies! Hornets! Goblin choir!  
Prick the fool that plays with fire.  
Torture our unwelcome guest  
Till his motive he's confessed.**

**CHORUS: Gadflies! Hornets! Goblin choir!  
Prick the fool that plays with fire.  
Grant him not a moment's rest  
Till his motive he's confessed.**

**PAGE: Sting!**

**CHORUS: Sting!**

**FALSTAFF: Ow!**

**PAGE & CHORUS: Ha, ha, ha, ha!**

*(Cajus enters as a green elf, Slender as a red elf.)*

**CAJUS: Aha! Ze leetle elf in red  
Be Miss Anne for me to wed.**

**SLENDER: Ah, the darling elf in green  
Must be Anne, my woodland Queen.**

**CAJUS: (*approaching Slender*) We steal away.**

**SLENDER: (*approaching Cajus*) Sweet Anne, my angel!**

**CAJUS: Snip!**

**SLENDER: Snap!**

*(They gleefully depart, also hand in hand.)*

**CHORUS: Sting! Sting on!**

**PAGE: Silent still! The stubborn hound!  
Keep it up, we'll bring him round.  
Onward, spirits! All attack!  
Fall upon the boulder's back.**

**CHORUS: Come, you spirits full of glee!  
We'll punish his audacity.  
Pinch him, punch him, jab and jerk**

**Until the captive goes berserk.**

QuickTime™ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

**Plots and plans tend to burst like a bubble  
When you pursue a spry, merry wife.**

**Rogue and traitor! Fabricator!  
Now your fatal hour has sounded.  
Lechery and treachery,  
Your double dealing's here confounded.**

**Lies and letters to your betters!  
Folly, fraud and bluff compounded!  
Spare your breath, prepare for death  
Unless you mend your ways.**

**Gleeful spirits, round him gather.  
Pinch him, punch him, pelt him!**

Much has happened during the music we have just heard. Anne, dressed in white, has gone off with Fenton, to seek the nearby chapel where by now all has been accomplished.

Squire Slender, dressed in red, has spotted Monsieur Cajus, dressed in green. Each supposing the other to be Anne, they too have surreptitiously departed hand in hand, though we tend to doubt that they will live happily ever after.

The elves, imps and goblins, goaded on by Mr. Page, after scaring Falstaff out of his wits, have now unmasked, and turned out to be -- surprise, surprise! -- nothing more than an assortment of sober, solid citizens of Windsor. The two leading ladies have stepped forward; Sir John has seen the light and recognized his own folly.

The two lovers return, now man and wife, and humbly plead for acceptance and forgiveness. So close to the final curtain, who could resist? Mr. and Mrs. Page forgive the newly weds; then they forgive each other for their attempted duplicity. The two ladies forgive Sir John. Mrs. Ford forgives Mr. Ford.

And so amid this virtual orgy of benevolence, this riot of reconciliation and goodwill, perhaps you, too, will be inclined to follow their example and extend your indulgence, not only to Sir John Falstaff, but to all of those who have brought you the tale of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

**TRIO OF LADIES: The pranks of the night now over and done,  
We bring down the curtain with lovers united.  
Make way for a wedding with feasting and fun.**

To join in the revel all friends are invited.  
Come on, come all for feast and fun.  
You all are all invited.  
Sir John! Sir John!

FALSTAFF: O weh!

LADIES: We're not so hard of heart,  
And we leave you with a pardon.

FALSTAFF: Ladies! Ladies!

LADIES: *(to the others)* Our example do follow.  
*(to the audience)* Ah! Forgive and forget. The time arrives.  
Dear friends, may your hearts turn mellow.  
If you have enjoyed the merry wives,  
You, too, will forgive the fat fellow.

THE END



