

*Act 1*

*Scene 1: Before Page's house; July 8 1597*

*7: Falstaff, Shallow, Sir Hugh Evans, Bardolph, Slender, Pistol, Nym*

*[Enter JUSTICE SHALLOW, SLENDER, SIR HUGH EVANS, and PAGE.]*

**PAGE.** I am glad to see your Worships well. I thank you for my venison, Master Shallow.

**SHALLOW.** Master Page, I am glad to see you. How doth good Mistress Page?

**PAGE.** Well, sir; I thank you. I am glad to see you, good Master Slender.

**SLENDER.** How does your fallow<sup>1</sup> greyhound, sir? I heard say he was outrun on Cotsall<sup>2</sup>.

**PAGE.** It could not be judged, sir.

**SLENDER.** You'll not confess, you'll not confess.

**SHALLOW.** Is Sir John Falstaff here? He hath wronged me, Master Page.

**PAGE.** Sir, he doth in some sort confess it.

**SHALLOW.** If it be confessed, it is not redressed<sup>3</sup>. Is not that so, Master Page?

**PAGE.** Here comes Sir John.

*[Enter SIR JOHN FALSTAFF, BARDOLPH, NYM, PISTOL, and  
HOST.]*

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<sup>1</sup> Light brown.

<sup>2</sup> Variant pronunciation of "Cotswald."

<sup>3</sup> Allusion to the proverb, "A fault confessed is half redressed," ie, confession of a fault serves to pardon it.

**FALSTAFF.** Now, Master Shallow, you'll complain of me to the King?

**SHALLOW.** Knight, you have beaten my men, killed my deer, and broke open my lodge.

**FALSTAFF.** But not kissed your keeper's daughter?

**SHALLOW.** Tut, a pin<sup>4</sup>; This shall be answered.

**FALSTAFF.** I will answer it straight: I have done all this. That is now answered.

**SHALLOW.** The Council shall know this.

**FALSTAFF.** 'Twere better for you if it were known in counsel<sup>5</sup>: you'll be laughed at.

**SIR HUGH.** *Pauca verba*<sup>6</sup>; Sir John, good worts.

**FALSTAFF.** Good worts? Good cabbage!—Slender, I broke your head. What matter have you against me?

**SLENDER.** Marry, sir, I have matter in my head against you and against your cony-catching rascals, Bardolph, Nym, and Pistol.

**BARDOLPH.** You Banbury cheese!

**SLENDER.** Ay, it is no matter.

**PISTOL.** How now, Mephostophilus<sup>7</sup>?

**SLENDER.** Ay, it is no matter.

**NYM.** Slice, I say; *Pauca, pauca*. Slice<sup>8</sup>; that's my humor!

**SLENDER.** Where's Simple, my man? Can you tell, cousin?

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<sup>4</sup> Not a big deal; irrelevant.

<sup>5</sup> Secret.

<sup>6</sup> "Few words"

<sup>7</sup> Lucifer's fellow-devil. This also references Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, with which audiences would have been familiar. Pistol habitually quotes and misquotes popular works.

<sup>8</sup> This may be a reference back to "Banbury cheese," suggesting that Slender be sliced up.

**SIR HUGH.** Peace, I pray you. Now let us understand; there is three umpires in this matter, as I understand: that is, Master Page (*fidelicet*<sup>9</sup> Master Page); and there is myself (*fidelicet* myself); and the three party is, (lastly and finally), mine host of the Garter.

**PAGE.** We three to hear it and end it between them.

**SIR HUGH.** Fery goot; I will make a prief of it in my note-book, and we will afterwards 'ork upon the cause with as great discreetly as we can.

**FALSTAFF.** Pistol!

**PISTOL.** He hears with ears.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> A mispronunciation of "videlicet," or "namely."

<sup>10</sup> A Biblical reference, "We have heard with our ears."

*Act 2*

*Scene 1: Before Page's house, July 9*

*1: Mistress Page*

**MISTRESS PAGE.** What, have I 'scaped love letters in the holiday time of my beauty, and am I now a subject for them? Let me see:

‘Ask me no reason why I love you, for though Love use Reason for his precisian, he admits him not for his counselor. You are not young; no more am I. Go to, then, there's sympathy. You are merry, so am I; Ha, ha, then, there's more sympathy. You love sack, and so do I; Would you desire better sympathy? Let it suffice thee, Mistress Page—at the least, if the love of soldier can suffice—that I love thee. I will not say pity me—'tis not a soldier-like phrase—but I say, love me. By me,

Thine own true knight,  
By day or night,  
Or any kind of light,  
With all his might  
For thee to fight,  
John Falstaff.

What a Herod of Jewry is this! O wicked, wicked world; One that is well-nigh worn to pieces with age to show himself a young gallant! What an unweighed behavior hath this Flemish drunkard picked— with the devil's name!—out of my conversation, that he dares in this manner assay me? Why, he hath not been thrice in my company! What should I say to him? I was then frugal of my mirth. Heaven forgive me! Why, I'll exhibit a bill in the Parliament for the putting down of men. How shall I be revenged on him? For revenged I will be, as sure as his guts are made of puddings.

*Act 2*

*Scene 1: Before Page's house, July 9*

*2: Mistress Ford, Mistress Page*

**MISTRESS FORD.** Mistress Page! Trust me, I was going to your house.

**MISTRESS PAGE.** And, trust me, I was coming to you. You look very ill.

**MISTRESS FORD.** Nay, I'll ne'er believe that. I have to show to the contrary.

**MISTRESS PAGE.** Faith, but you do, in my mind.

**MISTRESS FORD.** Well, I do, then; yet, I say, I could show you to the contrary. O Mistress Page, give me some counsel!

**MISTRESS PAGE.** What's the matter, woman?

**MISTRESS FORD.** O woman, if it were not for one trifling respect, I could come to such honor!

**MISTRESS PAGE.** Hang the trifle, woman; take the honor. What is it? Dispense with trifles. What is it?

**MISTRESS FORD.** If I would but go to hell for an eternal moment or so, I could be knighted.

**MISTRESS PAGE.** What, thou liest! Sir Alice Ford? These knights will hack, and so thou shouldst not alter the article of thy gentry.

**MISTRESS FORD.** We burn daylight. Here, read, read; Perceive how I might be knighted. I shall think the worse of fat men as long as I have an eye to make difference of men's liking. And yet he would not swear; praised women's modesty; and gave such orderly and well-behaved reproof to all uncomeliness that I would have sworn his

disposition would have gone to the truth of his words; but they do no more adhere and keep place together than the Hundredth Psalm to the tune of “Greensleeves.” What tempest, I trow, threw this whale, with so many tuns of oil in his belly, ashore at Windsor? How shall I be revenged on him? I think the best way were to entertain him with hope till the wicked fire of lust have melted him in his own grease. Did you ever hear the like?

**MISTRESS PAGE.** Letter for letter, but that the name of Page and Ford differs! To thy great comfort in this mystery of ill opinions, here’s the twin brother of thy letter; but let thine inherit first, for I protest mine never shall. I warrant he hath a thousand of these letters writ with blank space for different names—sure, more—and these are of the second edition. He will print them, out of doubt; for he cares not what he puts into the press, when he would put us two. I had rather be a giantess and lie under Mount Pelion. Well, I will find you twenty lascivious turtles<sup>11</sup> ere one chaste man.

**MISTRESS FORD.** Why, this is the very same: the very hand, the very words. What doth he think of us?

**MISTRESS PAGE.** Nay, I know not. It makes me almost ready to wrangle with mine own honesty. I’ll entertain myself like one that I am not acquainted withal; for, sure, unless he know some strain in me that I know not myself, he would never have boarded me in this fury.

**MISTRESS FORD.** “Boarding” call you it? I’ll be sure to keep him above deck.

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<sup>11</sup> Turtledoves, which are notoriously faithful.

**MISTRESS PAGE.** So will I: If he come under my hatches, I'll never to sea again. Let's be revenged on him: let's appoint him a meeting, give him a show of comfort in his suit, and lead him on with a fine-baited delay till he hath pawned his horses to mine host of the Garter.

**MISTRESS FORD.** Nay, I will consent to act any villainy against him that may not sully the chariness<sup>12</sup> of our honesty. O, that my husband saw this letter! It would give eternal food to his jealousy.

**MISTRESS PAGE.** Why, look where he comes, and my good man too. He's as far from jealousy as I am from giving him cause; and that, I hope, is an unmeasurable distance.

**MISTRESS FORD.** You are the happier woman.

**MISTRESS PAGE.** Let's consult together against this greasy knight. Come hither. [*They stand back.*]

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<sup>12</sup> Scrupulous integrity.

*Act 2*

*Scene 2: A room at the Garter Inn, July 9*

*1: Master Ford*

**FORD.** What a damned epicurean rascal is this! My heart is ready to crack with impatience. Who says this is improvident jealousy? My wife hath sent to him, the hour is fixed, the match is made. Would any man have thought this? See the hell of having a false woman: my bed shall be abused, my coffers ransacked, my reputation gnawn at. And I shall not only receive this villainous wrong but stand under the adoption of abominable terms, and by him that does me this wrong. Terms, names! “Amaimon” sounds well, “Lucifer” well, “Barbason” well; yet they are devils’ additions, the names of fiends. But “Cuckold,” “Wittoll,” “Cuckold”! The devil himself hath not such a name. Page is an ass, a secure ass. He will trust his wife, he will not be jealous. I will rather trust a Fleming with my butter, Parson Hugh the Welshman with my cheese, an Irishman with my aqua-vitae bottle, or a thief to walk my ambling gelding, than my wife with herself. Then she plots, then she ruminates, then she devises; and what they think in their hearts they may effect, they will break their hearts but they will effect. Heaven be praised for my jealousy! Eleven o’clock the hour. I will prevent this, detect my wife, be revenged on Falstaff, and laugh at Page. I will about it. Better three hours too soon than a minute too late. Fie, fie, fie! Cuckold, cuckold, cuckold!

*[FORD exits.]*

*Act 3*

*Scene 3: A room in Ford's house, July 10*

*2: Mistress Ford, Falstaff*

**FALSTAFF.** Have I caught thee, my heavenly jewel? Why, now let me die, for I have lived long enough. This is the period of my ambition. O, this blessed hour!

**MISTRESS FORD.** O, sweet Sir John!

**FALSTAFF.** Mistress Ford, I cannot cog<sup>13</sup>. I cannot prate, Mistress Ford. Now shall I sin in my wish: I would thy husband were dead. I'll speak it before the best lord: I would make thee my lady.

**MISTRESS FORD.** I your lady, Sir John? Alas, I should be a pitiful lady.

**FALSTAFF.** Let the court of France show me such another. I see how thine eye would emulate the diamond. Thou hast the right arched beauty of the brow that becomes the ship-tire<sup>14</sup>, the tire-valiant<sup>15</sup>, or any tire of Venetian admittance.<sup>16</sup>

**MISTRESS FORD.** A plain kerchief, Sir John. My brows become nothing else, nor that well neither.

**FALSTAFF.** Thou art a tyrant to say so. Thou wouldst make an absolute courtier, and the firm fixture of thy foot would give an excellent motion to thy gait in a semicircled farthingale<sup>17</sup>. I see what

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<sup>13</sup> Lie.

<sup>14</sup> Elaborate headdress.

<sup>15</sup> This is the only known use of this word: fanciful (in reference to "ship-tire").

<sup>16</sup> A reference to the elaborate dress worn in Venice.

<sup>17</sup> A kind of petticoat.

thou wert, if Fortune (thy foe) were—not Nature— thy friend.<sup>18</sup> Come, thou canst not hide it.

**MISTRESS FORD.** Believe me, there's no such thing in me.

**FALSTAFF.** What made me love thee? Let that persuade thee. There's something extraordinary in thee. Come, I cannot cog and say thou art this and that like a many of these lipping hawthorn-buds that come like women in men's apparel and smell like Bucklersbury<sup>19</sup> in simple time. I cannot. But I love thee, none but thee; and thou deserv'st it.

**MISTRESS FORD.** Do not betray me, sir. I fear you love Mistress Page.

**FALSTAFF.** Thou mightst as well say I love to walk by the Counter-gate<sup>20</sup>, which is as hateful to me as the reek of a lime-kiln.

**MISTRESS FORD.** Well, heaven knows how I love you, and you shall one day find it.

**FALSTAFF.** Keep in that mind. I'll deserve it.

**MISTRESS FORD.** Nay, I must tell you, so you do, or else I could not be in that mind.

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<sup>18</sup> Basically; she has natural beauty but not the luck of high circumstance, which would further elevate her.

<sup>19</sup> A street in London where herbs were sold.

<sup>20</sup> The gate of the debtor's prison.

*Act 3*

*Scene 4: A room in Page's house, July 10*

*5: Fenton, Anne Page, Shallow, Slender, Mistress Quickly*

**FENTON.** I will confess thy father's wealth  
Was the first motive that I wooed thee, Anne,  
Yet, wooing thee, I found thee of more value  
Than stamps in gold or sums in sealèd bags.  
And 'tis the very riches of thyself  
That now I aim at.

**ANNE.** Gentle Master Fenton,  
Yet seek my father's love, still seek it, sir.  
If opportunity and humblest suit  
Cannot attain it, why then—hark you hither! [*They converse apart.*]

[*Enter SHALLOW, SLENDER and MISTRESS QUICKLY.*]

**SHALLOW.** Break their talk, Mistress Quickly. My kinsman shall speak  
for himself.

**SLENDER.** I'll make a shaft or a bolt on 't<sup>21</sup>. 'Slid<sup>22</sup>, 'tis but venturing.

**SHALLOW.** Be not dismayed.

**SLENDER.** No, she shall not dismay me. I care not for that, but that I am  
afeard.

**MISTRESS QUICKLY.** Hark ye, Master Slender would speak a word  
with you.

**ANNE.** I come to him. [*Aside.*] This is my father's choice.

O, what a world of vile ill-favored faults  
Looks handsome in three hundred pounds a year!

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<sup>21</sup>A reference to a proverb meaning, "I'll do it one way or another."

<sup>22</sup>By God's eyelid.

**MISTRESS QUICKLY.** And how does good Master Fenton? Pray you, a word with you. [*They talk aside.*]

**SHALLOW.** [*To Slender*] She's coming. To her, coz! O boy, thou hadst a father!

**SLENDER.** I had a father, Mistress Anne; my uncle can tell you good jests of him.—Pray you, uncle, tell Mistress Anne the jest how my father stole two geese out of a pen, good uncle.

**SHALLOW.** Mistress Anne, my cousin loves you.

**SLENDER.** Ay, that I do, as well as I love any woman in Gloucestershire.

**SHALLOW.** He will maintain you like a gentlewoman.

**SLENDER.** Ay, that I will, come cut and longtail<sup>23</sup>, under the degree of a squire.

**SHALLOW.** He will make you a hundred and fifty pounds jointure.

**ANNE.** Good Master Shallow, let him woo for himself.

**SHALLOW.** Marry, I thank you for it. I thank you for that good comfort.—She calls you, coz. I'll leave you. [*He steps aside.*]

**ANNE.** Now, Master Slender.

**SLENDER.** Now, good Mistress Anne.

**ANNE.** What is your will?

**SLENDER.** My will? 'Od's heartlings<sup>24</sup>, that's a pretty jest indeed! I ne'er made my will yet, I thank heaven. I am not such a sickly creature, I give heaven praise.

**ANNE.** I mean, Master Slender, what would you with me?

**SLENDER.** Truly, for mine own part, I would little or nothing with you. Your father and my uncle hath made motions. If it be my luck, so; if not, happy man be his dole<sup>25</sup>. They can tell you how things go better than I can. You may ask your father. Here he comes.

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<sup>23</sup> Another proverbial reference, meaning “no matter what happens.”

<sup>24</sup> By God's little heart.

<sup>25</sup> More proverbs: “Good luck to any man who is successful,”

*Act 3*

*Scene 5*

*3: Mistress Quickly, Falstaff, Ford*

**MISTRESS QUICKLY.** Marry, sir, I come to your Worship from Mistress Ford.

**FALSTAFF.** Mistress Ford? I have had ford enough. I was thrown into the ford, I have my belly full of ford.

**MISTRESS QUICKLY.** Alas the day, good heart, that was not her fault. She does so take on with her men; they mistook their erection<sup>26</sup>.

**FALSTAFF.** So did I mine, to build upon a foolish woman's promise.

**MISTRESS QUICKLY.** Well, she laments, sir, for it, that it would yearn your heart to see it. Her husband goes this morning a-birding; she desires you once more to come to her, between eight and nine. I must carry her word quickly. She'll make you amends, I warrant you.

**FALSTAFF.** Well, I will visit her. Tell her so. And bid her think what a man is. Let her consider his frailty, and then judge of my merit.

**MISTRESS QUICKLY.** I will tell her.

**FALSTAFF.** Do so. Between nine and ten, say'st thou?

**MISTRESS QUICKLY.** Eight and nine, sir.

**FALSTAFF.** Well, be gone. I will not miss<sup>27</sup> her.

**MISTRESS QUICKLY.** Peace be with you, sir.

*[MISTRESS QUICKLY exits.]*

**FALSTAFF.** I marvel I hear not of Master Brook. He sent me word to stay within. I like his money well.

*[Enter FORD disguised as BROOK.]*

O, here he comes.

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<sup>26</sup> Direction.

<sup>27</sup> Fail.

*FORD.* God bless you, sir.

*FALSTAFF.* Now, Master Brook, you come to know what hath passed between me and Ford's wife.

*FORD.* That indeed, Sir John, is my business.

*FALSTAFF.* Master Brook, I will not lie to you. I was at her house the hour she appointed me.

*FORD.* And sped you, sir?<sup>28</sup>

*FALSTAFF.* Very ill-favoredly, Master Brook.

*FORD.* How so, sir? Did she change her determination?

*FALSTAFF.* No, Master Brook, but the peaking cornuto<sup>29</sup> her husband, Master Brook, dwelling in a continual larum<sup>30</sup> of jealousy, comes me in the instant of our encounter, after we had embraced, kissed, protested, and, as it were, spoke the prologue of our comedy, and, at his heels, a rabble of his companions, thither provoked and instigated by his distemper, and, forsooth, to search his house for his wife's love.

*FORD.* What, while you were there?

*FALSTAFF.* While I was there.

*FORD.* And did he search for you and could not find you?

*FALSTAFF.* You shall hear. As good luck would have it, comes in one Mistress Page, gives intelligence of Ford's approach, and, in her invention and Ford's wife's distraction, they conveyed me into a buck-basket.

*FORD.* A buck-basket!

*FALSTAFF.* By the Lord, a buck-basket! Rammed me in with foul shirts and smocks, socks, foul stockings, greasy napkins, that, Master Brook, there was the rankest compound of villainous smell that ever offended nostril.

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<sup>28</sup> Did you succeed?

<sup>29</sup> Sneaking cuckold.

<sup>30</sup> Alarm.

*Act 4*

*Scene 4: A room in Ford's house, July 11*

*5: Sir Hugh Evans, Master Page, Mistress Page, Master Ford, Mistress Ford*

**SIR HUGH.** 'Tis one of the best discretions of a 'oman as ever I did look upon.

**PAGE.** And did he send you both these letters at an instant?

**MISTRESS PAGE.** Within a quarter of an hour.

**FORD.** Pardon me, wife. Henceforth do what thou wilt:

I rather will suspect the sun with cold

Than thee with wantonness. Now doth thy honor stand,

In him that was of late an heretic, As firm as faith.

**PAGE.** 'Tis well, 'tis well. No more.

Be not as extreme in submission

As in offense.

But let our plot go forward: let our wives

Yet once again, to make us public sport,

Appoint a meeting with this old fat fellow,

Where we may take him and disgrace him for it.

**FORD.** There is no better way than that they spoke of.

**PAGE.** How, to send him word they'll meet him in the park at midnight?

Fie, fie, he'll never come.

**SIR HUGH.** You say he has been thrown in the rivers and has been grievously peaten as an old 'oman. Methinks there should be terrors in him, that he should not come. Methinks his flesh is punished; he shall have no desires.

**PAGE.** So think I too.

**MISTRESS FORD.** Devise but how you'll use him when he comes,  
And let us two devise to bring him thither.

**MISTRESS PAGE.** There is an old tale goes that Herne the Hunter,  
Sometime a keeper here in Windsor Forest,  
Doth all the wintertime, at still midnight,  
Walk round about an oak, with great ragged horns,  
And there he blasts the tree, and takes the cattle,  
And makes milch-kine yield blood, and shakes a chain<sup>31</sup>  
In a most hideous and dreadful manner.

You have heard of such a spirit, and well you know  
The superstitious idle-headed eld<sup>32</sup>  
Receiv'd and did deliver to our age  
This tale of Herne the Hunter for a truth.

**PAGE.** Why, yet there want not many that do fear  
In deep of night to walk by this Herne's oak.  
But what of this?

**MISTRESS FORD.** Marry, this is our device,  
That Falstaff at that oak shall meet with us.

**PAGE.** Well, let it not be doubted but he'll come;  
And in this shape when you have brought him thither,  
What shall be done with him? What is your plot?

**MISTRESS PAGE.** That likewise have we thought upon, and thus:  
Nan Page, and more, we'll dress like fairies.  
As Falstaff, she, and I are newly met,  
Let them from forth a sawpit rush at once  
With some diffused song. Upon their sight,  
We two in great amazedness will fly.

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<sup>31</sup> A presumed habit of ghosts.

<sup>32</sup> Ancients.

Then let them all encircle him about,  
To pinch the unclean knight, and ask him why,  
In their so sacred paths he dares to tread  
In shape profane.

**FORD.**                   And till he tell the truth,  
Let the supposed fairies pinch him sound.

**MISTRESS PAGE.** The truth being known,  
We'll all present ourselves, dis-horn the spirit,  
And mock him home to Windsor.

**FORD.**                                   The children must  
Be practiced well to this, or they'll ne'er do't.

**SIR HUGH.** I will teach the children their behaviors, and I will be like a  
jack-an-apes<sup>33</sup> also.

**FORD.** That will be excellent. I'll go buy them vizards.<sup>34</sup>

**MISTRESS PAGE.** My Nan shall be the queen of all the fairies, finely  
attirèd in a robe of white.

**PAGE.** That silk will I go buy.— (*Aside.*) And in that time  
Shall Master Slender steal my Nan away,  
And marry her at Eton.—Go, send to Falstaff straight.

**FORD.** Nay, I'll to him again in name of Brook. He'll tell me all his  
purpose. Sure he'll come.

**MISTRESS PAGE.** Fear not you that. Go get us properties And tricking for  
our fairies.

**SIR HUGH.** Let us about it: it is admirable pleasures and fery honest  
knaveries.

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<sup>33</sup> Monkey.

<sup>34</sup> Masks.

*Scene 5: A room at the Garter Inn, July 11*

*1: Falstaff*

*FALSTAFF.* I would all the world might be cozened, for I have been cozened and beaten too. If it should come to the ear of the court how I have been transformed, and how my transformation hath been washed and cudgeled, they would melt me out of my fat drop by drop, and liquor fishermen's boots with me. I warrant they would whip me with their fine wits till I were as crestfallen as a dried pear. I never prospered since I forswore myself at primero<sup>35</sup>. Well, if my wind were but long enough, I would repent.

*[FALSTAFF exits.]*

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<sup>35</sup> Lied about the cards he had during a card game.

*Act 5*

*Scene 5: Windsor Park, July 11*

*6: Slender, Master Page, Mistress Page, Master Ford, Anne, Fenton*

**SLENDER.** Whoa, ho, ho, Father Page!

**PAGE.** Son, how now! How now, son! Have you dispatched?

**SLENDER.** ‘Dispatched’? I’ll make the best in Gloucestershire know on ’t. Would I were hanged, la, else!

**PAGE.** Of what, son?

**SLENDER.** I came yonder at Eton to marry Mistress Anne Page, and she’s a great lubberly boy. If it had not been i’ th’ church, I would have swung him, or he should have swung me. If I did not think it had been Anne Page, would I might never stir! And ’tis a boy.

**PAGE.** Upon my life, then, you took the wrong—

**SLENDER.** What need you tell me that? I think so, when I took a boy for a girl. If I had been married to him, for all he was in woman’s apparel, I would not have had him.

**PAGE.** Why, this is your own folly. Did not I tell you how you should know my daughter by her garments?

**SLENDER.** I went to her in white, and cried “mum,” and she cried “budget,” as Anne and I had appointed, and yet it was not Anne, but a boy.

**MISTRESS PAGE.** Good George, be not angry. I knew of your purpose, turned my daughter into green.

**FORD.** This is strange. Who hath got the right Anne?

**PAGE.** My heart misgives me. Here comes Master Fenton.

*[Enter FENTON, HOST and ANNE PAGE.]*

How now, Master Fenton?

*ANNE.* Pardon, good father; pardon.

*PAGE.* Now, mistress, how chance you went not with Master Slender?

*FENTON.* You do amaze<sup>36</sup> her. Hear the truth of it.

You would have married her most shamefully,

Where there was no proportion held in love.

The truth is, she and I, long since contracted,

Are now so sure that nothing can dissolve us.

Th' offense is holy that she hath committed,

And this deceit loses the name of craft,

Of disobedience, or unduteous title,

Since therein she doth evitate<sup>37</sup> and shun

A thousand irreligious cursèd hours

Which forced marriage would have brought upon her.

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<sup>36</sup> Overwhelm.

<sup>37</sup> Avoid.

*Act 3*

*Scene 2: A street in Windsor, July 10*

*2: Mistress Page, Robin*

*[Enter ROBIN followed by MISTRESS PAGE.]*

**MISTRESS PAGE.** Nay, keep your way, little gallant; you were wont to be a follower, but now you are a leader. Whether had you rather—lead mine eyes, or eye your master's heels?

**ROBIN.** I had rather, forsooth, go before you like a man than follow him like a dwarf.

**MISTRESS PAGE.** O, you are a flattering boy! Now I see you'll be a courtier.

*Act 3*

*Scene 3: A room in Ford's house, July 10*

**MISTRESS PAGE.** How now, my eyas-musket<sup>38</sup>, what news with you?

**ROBIN.** My master, Sir John, is come in at your back door, Mistress Ford, and requests your company.

**MISTRESS PAGE.** You little Jack-a-Lent,<sup>39</sup> have you been true to us?

**ROBIN.** Ay, I'll be sworn. My master knows not of your being here and hath threatened to put me into everlasting liberty if I tell you of it, for he swears he'll turn me away.

**MISTRESS PAGE.** Thou 'rt a good boy. This secrecy of thine shall be a tailor to thee and shall make thee a new doublet and hose.—I'll go hide me.

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<sup>38</sup> Fledgling sparrow hawk: a pet name.

<sup>39</sup> Brightly colored puppet.