



THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

A Musical Comedy in Two Acts



Adapted from William Shakespeare
by **THE SHAKESPEARE CULTURAL AND EDUCATION TRUST**

Book & lyrics adapted by the Trust · Music: to be composed / arranged by the company
An SCET Volunteer Production, 2026



Characters

Sir John FALSTAFF — a fat, boastful, penniless knight, always scheming

Mistress Alice FORD — clever and quick-witted, married to Ford

Mistress Margaret PAGE — clever and quick-witted, married to Page, Alice's closest friend

Master Frank FORD — Alice's husband — wildly, comically jealous

Master George PAGE — Margaret's husband — easy-going and trusting

Anne PAGE — the Pages' daughter, in love with Fenton

FENTON — a young gentleman, once a spendthrift, now sincerely in love with Anne

SLENDER — a foolish, tongue-tied young suitor for Anne, favoured by Master Page

DOCTOR CAIUS — a hot-tempered French physician, another suitor for Anne, favoured by Mistress Page

Mistress QUICKLY — housekeeper, go-between, incorrigible gossip

Sir Hugh EVANS — a Welsh parson, friend to the Pages

HOST — of the Garter Inn, where Falstaff lodges

BARDOLPH, PISTOL, NYM — Falstaff's disreputable, unpaid followers

ROBIN — Falstaff's sharp-tongued young page

ENSEMBLE — townsfolk of Windsor; fairies in Act Two



Musical Numbers

Act One

1. Welcome to Windsor — Company
2. A Knight of Some Renown — Falstaff
3. Dear Lady (Two of a Kind) — Mistress Ford, Mistress Page
4. Master Brook's Question — Ford
5. Into the Basket We Go! — Mistress Ford, Mistress Page, Ensemble
6. Three Suitors for Anne — Anne, Slender, Doctor Caius, Fenton

Act Two

7. The Old Woman of Brentford — Falstaff, Ford, Ensemble
8. Best Laid Plans — Mistress Ford, Mistress Page, Ford, Page
9. Herne's Oak — Company (Finale)
10. All's Well in Windsor — Full Company (Curtain Call)



ACT ONE



Scene 1 — A Street in Windsor

(The town square. Townsfolk cross to and fro – a market day. MASTER PAGE, MISTRESS PAGE, MASTER FORD, MISTRESS FORD, ANNE PAGE, SIR HUGH EVANS, and SLENDER are among them.)

♪ Welcome to Windsor ♪

COMPANY

*Come one, come all, to Windsor town,
Where the Thames rolls green and the steeple looks down,
Where the gossip runs faster than the river below –
Everybody's business, everybody knows!*

*There goes Ford, as jealous as a cat,
There goes Page, good-natured, tipping his hat,
There's Mistress Ford and Mistress Page, arm in arm as always –
The cleverest two wives in all of Windsor's byways!*

(SLENDER, awkward, tries to speak to ANNE. She is polite but unmoved.)

SLENDER: Mistress Anne – I – that is – the weather has been – has it not been – fine, this week?

ANNE PAGE: (gently) It has, Master Slender.

SLENDER: Yes. Fine. I thought so too. I have thought so all week.

(SIR HUGH EVANS beams at this exchange, delighted, misreading it entirely as a great romance.)

EVANS: Look you now, is that not a pretty match? Master Slender has seven hundred pounds a year!

MISTRESS PAGE: (aside, to Mistress Ford) Seven hundred pounds and not one complete sentence between them.

MISTRESS FORD: (laughing) Hush – here comes trouble.

(Enter FALSTAFF, grand and ridiculous, trailed by BARDOLPH, PISTOL, and NYM, and his page ROBIN.)



Scene 2 — Outside the Garter Inn

(FALSTAFF counts empty pockets. ROBIN watches, unimpressed.)

FALSTAFF: Robin, I tell thee, a knight of my quality was not made to be poor.

ROBIN: A knight of your quality has not paid the Host in three weeks, sir.

FALSTAFF: Details, Robin. Details.

♪ *A Knight of Some Renown* ♪

FALSTAFF

*I have dined with dukes and I've fenced with kings,
I've a coat of arms and a dozen rings,
And if the rings are pawned and the coat's a bit worn –
Well, a knight of renown was a knight still born!*

*Now Windsor has two wives, both handsome, both rich,
Both married to fools who don't know which is which –
I'll write them each a letter, the very same line,
And one of the two is certain to be mine!*

(FALSTAFF produces two identical letters, seals them with a flourish, and hands them to PISTOL and NYM to deliver.)

PISTOL: I'll carry no love-letter, Sir John! I have my honour!

NYM: I like not the humour of it.

FALSTAFF: Then I'll deliver them myself, and keep both your wages for my trouble.

(PISTOL and NYM exchange a look and stalk off in a huff – straight to find FORD and PAGE, to warn them out of spite.)



Scene 3 — A Garden

(MISTRESS PAGE reads a letter, delighted and appalled. MISTRESS FORD enters, holding an identical letter.)

MISTRESS PAGE: Mistress Ford! You will not believe what I hold in my hand.

MISTRESS FORD: A love letter, signed Sir John Falstaff, asking you to meet him in secret?

MISTRESS PAGE: (stunned) How did you know that?!

MISTRESS FORD: (holding up her own letter) Because I am holding the very same one.

(They compare the letters, word for word. A beat. Then they burst out laughing.)

MISTRESS PAGE: The exact same words! He did not even change my name!

MISTRESS FORD: He is too fat to write two letters, so he copied one twice.

♪ Dear Lady (Two of a Kind) ♪

MISTRESS PAGE

"Dear Lady, your eyes are like stars in the night—"

MISTRESS FORD

He wrote the same line, word for word, left and right!

BOTH

Two of a kind, we're two of a kind,

One fat old fool and two very sharp minds.

He thinks he's a fox, but we've caught him instead,

Now let's teach Sir John a lesson – go on, dear, ahead!

MISTRESS FORD: Well then. Since he has invited us both... let us both accept.

MISTRESS PAGE: And give the fat knight exactly the welcome he deserves.

(They exit arm in arm, laughing – unaware that PISTOL and NYM have already told their husbands everything.)



Scene 4 — Master Ford's House

(FORD paces, working himself into a jealous frenzy. PAGE, calmer, tries to reason with him.)

PAGE: Ford, it is a jest – a fat old knight's foolishness. My wife laughed it off entirely.

FORD: Laughed it off! Page, you trust too easily. I shall not sit idle while Falstaff courts my Alice.

PAGE: What will you do, disguise yourself and spy on your own wife?

FORD: (a dangerous pause) ...That is not a bad idea.

♪ Master Brook's Question ♪

FORD

*They call me a fool for the love that I bear her,
But a jealous man's instinct is never mistaken –
I'll pay this fat knight to confess his own plan,
As "Master Brook," a poor lovesick man!*

*Oh, tell me, Sir Knight, of the wife I adore,
Does she welcome your letters? I must know, be sure!
I'll pay you in gold just to hear how it's done –
And catch my own wife, and catch everyone!*

(FORD dons a cloak and false beard – a laughably unconvincing disguise – and hurries off toward the Garter Inn.)



Scene 5 — Mistress Ford's House

(FALSTAFF, delighted with himself, is mid-visit. MISTRESS FORD plays along, barely hiding her amusement.)

FALSTAFF: Sweet Mistress Ford, your husband is a fool, and I – I am the finest lover in all of Windsor!

MISTRESS FORD: (aside) And the vainest. (aloud) Oh, Sir John, you flatter me so—

(A loud knock. MISTRESS PAGE bursts in, breathless.)

MISTRESS PAGE: Mistress Ford! Your husband is coming – and he is furious!

FALSTAFF: (panicking) Furious? At me? But he does not even know I'm here!

MISTRESS FORD: He suspects everything, Sir John, every single day. Quick – into the basket!

FALSTAFF: The – the laundry basket?!

MISTRESS PAGE: Unless you would rather explain yourself to Master Ford's sword.

(FALSTAFF dives into the basket. The SERVANTS enter.)

♪ Into the Basket We Go! ♪

MISTRESS FORD & MISTRESS PAGE

*Oh, into the basket, Sir John, in you go,
Under the stockings and shirts, down below!
A great man of London, so clever, so bold,
Now folded up small like a shirt in the cold!*

FALSTAFF (muffled, from inside)

This is beneath a man of my station!

MISTRESS FORD

Then hold your breath and your reputation!

SERVANTS (hoisting the basket)

*Heave it, heave it, out through the door,
Down to the river, and nothing more!*

(The SERVANTS carry the basket out – straight into the Thames – just as FORD storms in a moment too late, sword drawn, searching wildly. The wives struggle not to laugh.)

FORD: Where is he?! I know he is here – I paid a knight in gold to tell me so himself!

MISTRESS FORD: (innocently) Here, husband? There is no one here but the laundry – which, I notice, has just gone for a swim.

(A distant, enormous SPLASH is heard offstage. FORD looks baffled. The wives collapse laughing.)



Scene 6 — The Page Family Garden

(ANNE PAGE sits alone. SLENDER and DOCTOR CAIUS each attempt, separately and badly, to court her – pushed forward by EVANS and MISTRESS QUICKLY, who are running the whole scheme for their own amusement.)

MISTRESS QUICKLY: (to Anne) Now, sweetheart, Doctor Caius is a man of property – and Master Slender, seven hundred a year, don't forget!

ANNE PAGE: Nurse, I care nothing for the seven hundred, if the heart that comes with it is elsewhere.

(Enter FENTON, quietly, hanging back – clearly the one Anne is truly watching.)

FENTON: Anne – I know your father favours Slender, and your mother favours the Doctor. I have neither's fortune. I offer only –

ANNE PAGE: (finishing, warmly) – yourself. Which is rather the point, Master Fenton.

♪ Three Suitors for Anne ♪

SLENDER

Seven hundred a year and I still can't speak–

DOCTOR CAIUS

Zis Slender, zis fool, 'e is weak, weak, weak!

ANNE & FENTON

While the fortune-hunters posture and preen and compete,

Two quiet hearts have already found their own beat –

Let them squabble for money, for land, for a name,

Love was never a contest, and never a game.

(ANNE and FENTON slip away together, unnoticed by anyone but the audience.)



End of Act One



ACT TWO



Scene 7 — Mistress Ford's House

(FALSTAFF, dripping and furious, has nonetheless returned – his pride will not let him admit defeat. MISTRESS FORD and MISTRESS PAGE have a new plan.)

FALSTAFF: I have been dumped in the Thames like week-old fish, and STILL I say – Mistress Ford, you are worth the swim.

MISTRESS FORD: Then you'll be glad to hear my husband is due again shortly, Sir John. Quickly – you must disguise yourself.

MISTRESS PAGE: (producing an enormous dress and bonnet) As... the old woman of Brentford.

FALSTAFF: (horrified) The witch my husband – your husband – despises above all women in Windsor?

MISTRESS FORD: The very same.

♪ *The Old Woman of Brentford* ♪

FALSTAFF *(in disguise, falsetto, terrible at it)*

I am a poor old woman, bent and grey and small,

I've never worn a corset quite this tight at all!

(FORD storms in, sees the 'old woman,' and – remembering his fury at the real witch of Brentford – begins beating FALSTAFF with a stick and chasing him from the house. FALSTAFF flees, wailing, out into the street, to the delight of the gathering townsfolk.)

FORD: Out, hag, out! Never let me see your face in Windsor again!

MISTRESS PAGE: (to Mistress Ford, wiping tears of laughter) I almost feel sorry for him.

MISTRESS FORD: Almost.



Scene 8 — Master Page's House

(The husbands have finally been let in on the joke – Ford, mortified at his own jealousy, and Page, delighted, agree to help the wives with one final plan. Meanwhile, in the corner, Anne and Fenton continue their own quiet plotting.)

PAGE: So, Ford. All this while, it was never Falstaff you should have doubted.

FORD: (sheepish) I confess it freely. I have been the greatest fool in Windsor.

MISTRESS FORD: (kindly) Only for a season, husband. We forgive fools who learn.

♪ *Best Laid Plans* ♪

MISTRESS FORD, MISTRESS PAGE, FORD & PAGE

*One more trick, one more night, and then we are through –
Herne's Oak at midnight, the old story is true:
A ghost with great antlers still walks in that place,
And Sir John shall wear them, and meet it face to face!*

(As the plan is laid out – Falstaff to come disguised as Herne the Hunter, and the whole town to descend on him as 'fairies' – ANNE and FENTON exchange a private, hopeful glance. They have their own plan for the same chaotic night.)



Scene 9 — Herne's Oak, in the forest, at midnight

(FALSTAFF arrives, wearing a great pair of antlers, thoroughly pleased with his own boldness. MISTRESS FORD and MISTRESS PAGE meet him – then, at a signal, the whole ENSEMBLE floods in, dressed as fairies, lanterns glowing, surrounding him.)

FALSTAFF: Two wives, two fortunes, and horns upon my head – I have never felt more the stag of Windsor!

MISTRESS FORD: Sir John – I believe you're about to meet the fairies of this wood.

♪ Herne's Oak ♪

ENSEMBLE (as fairies, swirling around Falstaff)

Pinch him, pinch him, fairies all,
For the fat man dared to come to our hall!
Pinch him for his boasting, pinch him for his pride,
Pinch him till his secrets can no longer hide!

(The 'fairies' pinch and torment FALSTAFF, who yelps and finally collapses, thoroughly humbled – and, in the confusion and lantern-light, ANNE and FENTON slip away together to be married by SIR HUGH EVANS, unnoticed by Anne's parents until it is already done.)

FALSTAFF: Enough! Enough! I yield – I am undone, I am unmasked, I am – utterly ridiculous.

MISTRESS PAGE: (removing her fairy mask) As you have been from the very first letter, Sir John.

(FALSTAFF, to his credit, begins to laugh at himself. The whole company gathers around him. Then – ANNE and FENTON step forward, hand in hand.)

ANNE PAGE: Mother. Father. Forgive us – but while you were all busy with fairies and antlers, Sir Hugh married us in the chapel.

PAGE: (stunned, then breaking into a smile) Well. It seems Windsor has room for one more surprise tonight.

MISTRESS PAGE: (embracing Anne) And a far better one than a fat knight in the moonlight.

(FALSTAFF, antlers and all, is welcomed back into the circle – laughed at, forgiven, and, as always, utterly unrepentant.)

♪ All's Well in Windsor ♪

FULL COMPANY

Every fool in this story got caught in the end,
But every fool in this story walks home as a friend –
The wives were the cleverest, the husbands soon knew it,
And love, in the end, always finds how to do it!

So here's to Windsor, and here's to the game,
Where nobody's honour comes out of it the same,
But everybody's laughing, and everybody's fed –
Come, all of you, this way – the feast is ahead!

(The whole company dances. Curtain.)



END



A Note for the Company

- This adaptation is written for a volunteer cast learning to work together for the first time — it is shorter than the original play, the language is simplified, and the songs are written with simple, repeating lines so they are easy to learn regardless of singing experience or first language.
- Music has not yet been composed or chosen. This can be original tunes written by volunteers with a musical background, or the lyrics can be set to existing simple melodies the company already knows — either works.
- The 'fairies' in Act Two, Scene 9 can be played by the whole ensemble, including anyone who does not have a speaking role elsewhere — it is designed to be a big, joyful group scene.
- Roles can be doubled where useful: Bardolph, Pistol and Nym are small parts and can be played by ensemble members who also appear as townsfolk or fairies.
- This is a first draft for the company to read together, laugh at, and mark up. Nothing here is fixed — cut, extend or rewrite any scene once the cast is chosen and rehearsals begin.