FATSOFF

Being the Very Tragical Comical History of the Life of the Real Falstaff, as Told by the Fake One

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Cast of Characters

*Falstaff:	Shakespeare's character; narrator.
Young Jack Fastolfe:	Age 14.
Sir John Fastolfe:	A man in his 40s, Jack's father.
An English Archer:	A man in his 20s or 30s.
Waurin:	Henry's Aide, later Jack's.
A Steward:	Henry's steward, around 40.
*Jack Fastolfe:	A man around 30, aging to his 70s.
Alice Avenel:	A woman in her 20s, Jack's first wife.
Avenel:	A man around 50, Alice's father.
Young Alice:	Age 19, daughter of Jack and Alice.
Millicent Scrope:	Aging 40s-late 60s, Jack's second wife.
Margaret Scrope:	Millicent's older sister, around 50.
John Tibbay:	Margaret's husband's executor.
John Nixander:	Age 40, Margaret's suitor.
Lok:	A bodyguard and thug in his 20s or 30s.
Joan:	Age 19, a warrior and saint.
D'Arc:	A man in his 40s, Joan's father.
Mme. D'Arc:	A woman in her 40s, Joan's mother.
First French Archer:	Any age from 20 to 50.
Second French Archer:	Any age from 20 to 50.
King Charles:	Dauphin of France
Agnes:	The Dauphin's Queen

Dunois:	In his 40s, a French general
Herald:	Age 14, in Joan's service
Page:	Age 14, in Jack's service.
Stephen:	In his 20s, then 40s, Millicent's son.
Cade:	Captain of a rebellion, age 20s or 30s.
Payn:	A man in Jack's service, age 40.

Doublings: Falstolfe (boy)/Herald/Page; Sir John Fastolfe/D'Arc/Dunois; Alice/Joan/Young Alice; English Archer/Lok/Cade; Steward/Nixander/Payn; First French Archer/Stephen; Millicent/Agnes; Margaret/Mme. D'Arc; Avenel/Tibbay/King Charles; Waurin/Second French Archer.

With doublings, the play requires 12 actors playing 28 roles.

*Not doubled

Scene

Various locations around England, France, and the Afterlife.

Time

Late 14th to mid-15th century, plus eternity.

PROLOGUE

Somewhere in the afterlife.
FALSTAFF enters looking around.

FALSTAFF
Not bad. Those centuries in purgatory were no picnic. And who let *him* up here before *me*! War heros get all the glory on earth, and *then* a reward in Heaven? No wonder we have carnage. Boys slaughtering each other before they're half grown. But Fastolf lived. Fa-a-a-a-ssstt-o-o-o-llllffff. I can't pronounce it! Nobody can.

Gore galore, yet he dies in bed. Shake-scene knew what he was doing when he turned that knight in armor into my nights in arms. I risked husbands' blades and plunged mine in doubtful ponds. My own private Hundred Years War. Make love, not war. Oh, let's face it: Fornicate, don't fight.
(Pounds his chest.)
A fat and hairy bloomer who lived to tell the tale. Yet so did he, the skinny son of a— False Oaf? Fast Elf? Fatsoff! So slim you could blink and miss him. Yet here I am in *his* play. *(Mincingly) Once upon a time in an old castle there lived a knight.* Bah.

I am Sir John Falstaff, Knight of the Order of Nothing, Vainglorious Puff, Lord of Misrule, fleer of battles, benefactor of alehouses, whoresman not horseman. I am *grand*. I am excess, upheaval, glut, the very emblem of dissipation. I am life itself! Yes, Bardy invented me and dumped me with the laundry, but at least he never wrote about *that* slim Jim. Who cares? What, you do? Well, enjoy him.

I'll slip in sometimes, though not edgeways, heh-heh. He'll swing that stupid sword at me, but I'm empty air. Sit back and follow him. He lived. He died. It's baked in, like cakes and ale. See you at the bar? No, working tonight. Damn.
(Exit.)

ACT I

Scene 1

Caister-on-Sea, Norfolk. Caister Castle. JACK, age 14, and his father, SIR JOHN, climb into view on a parapet looking out on the North Sea and the English Channel, JOHN's hand on JACK's shoulder.

SIR JOHN

Jack my boy, look that way.
(Points.)
Can you see France?

JACK

No, Father. Nothing but the sea.

SIR JOHN

Close your eyes.

JACK

Now I just see black.

SIR JOHN

Look with your mind, Jack. *Imagine*.

JACK

Still dark, Father. How does France look?

SIR JOHN

It looks like our sworn enemy, Jack. It looks like the graveyard of ten thousand English men.

JACK

Are you sending me to a graveyard?

SIR JOHN

Just Calais. France is too treacherous for a boy. Although I was your size when I first went. My best friend was toyed with by five Frenchmen before my eyes. One had a torch. My friend tried not to scream. When he died they sent me running to the English lines. "Report this your leetle friends."

JACK

So I must fight them. For revenge.

SIR JOHN
Some day. For now you take on goods at Calais.

JACK
And then?

SIR JOHN
Sail north to Prussia, ride overland to Venice, and from there mount ships for the Holy Land. In Jerusalem you will walk the path of Christ and take Him in your heart. Then you will be a man, and a good man, ready for anything.

JACK
Will I see our French enemies?

SIR JOHN
From the nest atop the mainmast when you sail the channel, round Dover toward Dungeness and the sea. The cliffs are stunning, but the sea is beyond beauty, beyond awe, beyond words.

JACK
If I can see them from the nest, they can shoot me.

SIR JOHN
(Laughs heartily)
No son, it's too far. Although you could encounter a ship of theirs.

JACK
They can shoot.

SIR JOHN
(Long pause, gazing out to sea)
They can shoot. I was in a sea battle. They had two hundred galleys, fast in any waters. We had half that, refitted merchant cogs that lumbered while they flew around us, packed with French archers and Genoese mercenaries used to ruling the Channel. Bad day for them though. Our clumsy ships carried far more men. We couldn't chase them but they came to us. The Channel has been ours ever since.

JACK
Must we go there, Father? Must we rule?

SIR JOHN

We go there so they do not come here. They conquered us once. They came across and made us slaves. We half speak their language now. But the tide turned.

JACK
Ireland. France. What is it for?

SIR JOHN
Honor, Jack. Your honor, mine, and England's. God gives it to us to be a light unto the nations, just as he gave it to His people in the Bible. Our way is best for them—our charge from God.

JACK
So I must go to Jerusalem to meet God?

SIR JOHN
You must go to follow Christ.

JACK
Was he not peaceful? Kind? Did he not say the meek inherit?

SIR JOHN
Yes, and, *Blessed are the peacemakers.*
(Crouches down beside Jack)
But he also said, *I bring not peace…*
(Pauses, looking at Jack)

JACK
…but a sword?

SIR JOHN
Good boy. I can not send you off with my long sword, for it outweighs you.
(Takes a a sheathed knife from his belt.)
But this knife my father gave me, and his father before. Feel the sheath.

JACK
It's very soft I think. And that's our family shield, is it not?

SIR JOHN
Carved by a master from the skin of an unborn fawn. Unsheath the blade.

JACK
It shines.

SIR JOHN
Keep it that way. Now run your thumb over the blade.

JACK
Oww!
(Sucks blood from his thumb.)

SIR JOHN
(Laughs.)
Good. Your first blood from a battle blade. Now you will be harder, like hot steel dipped in rivers.

JACK
I am afraid of it.

SIR JOHN
A knife?

JACK
But if I lose it.

SIR JOHN
You will guard it with your life.

JACK
If I am cut, will honor heal me? If I am slain, will I feel honor in death? I think that honor will not nurse or embrace me.

SIR JOHN
Honor is it’s own reward, beyond life itself.

JACK
Must I be in a war soon?

SIR JOHN
No, Jack, unless by accident. You travel with the Prince; three ships await you in the Norfolk port. At dawn you sail the North Sea and then the icy Baltic to Prussia. From there it’s overland down into the southern sun to Venice, jewel of the sea.

JACK
The city where the roads are water?

SIR JOHN
The very one.

JACK
And yet the people do not drown.

SIR JOHN
(Laughs.)
They float about in sturdy little boats, like carriages.

JACK
And the horses?

SIR JOHN
No horses. They are masters of the sea. They hold the line against the infidel, who only grows in power. Yet there is not much danger now for you to sail again from Venice.

JACK
Sail again? To where?

SIR JOHN
To God's Jewel of the East. To where our Savior was brought to the Temple as a babe, and went back as a boy your age to up-end the money-lenders' tables, and yet again returned to sacrifice His life for us. The City of Peace.

JACK
Jerusalem?

SIR JOHN
The same.

JACK
I think I shall not upturn any tables.

SIR JOHN
(Laughs.)
Probably not. But you will visit the place where He was crucified. And you will pray to save yourself and me.

JACK
I shall be frightened there I think.

SIR JOHN
Do not be frightened, He is everywhere, His hand on your shoulder just as mine is now.

JACK
And shall I come back here again? I like it here.

SIR JOHN

You will come back however far you go, for this is home. Look into my eyes, son: you will make us proud.

(SIR JOHN's arm is around JACK's shoulders, both looking out. Exit as FALSTAFF comes out of the shadows.)

FALSTAFF

(Mocking)

Look into my eyes, son; you will make us proud. Nail the boy to the cross of any handy war. Ireland, France, some stupid splash of a bath-water battle on the Turkish sea, or, why not, cross-against-crescent on the Judean hills. And oh how sad he'll be for half a day when the boy is done in. So it has been since Abram fought the heathen kings. Abram nearly sheathed a knife in his boy's ribs. God ordered it. *Dad? The sheep?—God will provide, son.* Isaac looked at Pops a little sideways after that. Me, I'm Isaac. No wars. Quiet. Well, not *his* kind of quiet. I fought my wars above pubs. My two legs ran from battles, but my third stood up for women. No son, that I know of, but I'd give the boy a bottle, not a blade. I'd send him into wenches, not trenches. But forget me. The Elf is on his way.

ACT I

Scene 2

France. A field near Calais. JACK holds a broadbow, while an ARCHER leans over him shaping his hands on the bow, arrow, and string.

JACK
I can’t draw. I’m not strong enough.

ARCHER
Get your stance right. Left foot forward. More. Back straight.
(With his hands over Jack’s, the two draw the string.)
One, two, three…
(They let go at slightly different times.)

JACK
Oh, it’s gone off badly.

ARCHER
(Pointing.)
Never take your eyes off the arrow, boy.
(Startles at a sound.)
God’s bones, boy, you’ve hit the only tree for miles around!

JACK
Sorry, sir.

ARCHER
Don’t “sir” me, sir, I’m not your father, or the Duke. Go, get the arrow. Always retrieve it if you can. And don’t break it, wriggle it gently out of the trunk.

(Jack sprints off, returns with the arrow.)

JACK
I’m sorry, sir. Can you fix it?

ARCHER
This crack in the shaft? This one may be lost. Next time I’ll have to find you an even emptier field.

(WAURIN and the STEWARD enter looking at papers.)

STEWARD

This will cost a king’s ransom.

WAURIN

Bite your tongue. I don’t want to have to ransom Henry.

STEWARD

France has been peaceful lately.

WAURIN

Peace costs more than war. Esquires, valets, three bowmen for every man at arms, a chaplain, six minstrels, a trumpeter, five other musicians, mariners, merchants, workmen, provisioners, clericals, horses and cattle, falconry, and in the kitchen, buttery, pantry, poultry, stores of wine, and beer.

STEWARD

A Crusade must have an army, a Prince his retinue.

WAURIN

I am glad I am not the exchequer.

STEWARD

What is the plan?

WAURIN

Finish the carpentry. Load the ships. Sail to Danzig. Foray into Prussia. Find pagan knights. Kill them. The usual.

STEWARD

I’ll request to be killed later than sooner.

WAURIN

Much good that will do you. If they overrun us, the flames will eat us all. Boy, take this list to the Duke. Did I say dally?

JACK

No, sir!

(Takes a paper, runs off.)

WAURIN

And you. Do you think this is child’s play?

ARCHER
No, sir. I was just thinking the boy might—

WAURIN
(Slapping the other papers.)
You are not paid to think. I see here bowmen are dispensable. The Duke’s page is not your pupil. Mind your place.

ARCHER
Thank you, sir.
(Exits.)

STEWARD
I saw a cook engulfed by flames of battle once. Such agony.

WAURIN
(Looking up)
The wind has been good these last days. It won’t be long.

(Exit WAURIN and STEWARD.)

ACT I

Scene 3

The Wilderness of Grauden, in Prussia. Enter JACK and HENRY.

JACK
Please, Your Highness, I don’t like this game.

HENRY
I think you do like it Jack.

JACK
I like the feelings, then I don’t like the thoughts. I don’t think God likes it.

HENRY
God loves every thing that England’s princes do.

JACK
Please, Sire, may I pray first?

HENRY
Pray after. In Jerusalem. Not in this wilderness.

JACK
Will God forgive me then?

HENRY
God forgives us all. Besides, son, we are on a Crusade. Forgiveness is ensured. Come lie over here and rub my belly where it aches. Then I will rub yours, and you will sigh with pleasure as before. We will both find God’s own oblivion.

(Exit. Enter FALSTAFF.)

FALSTAFF
What can I say? His hero betrayed him, but was still his hero. Both things turned him as he grew, intertwining like the trunks of a strangler fig. Does it justify a vengeful spirit? Decades of slaughter? I don’t think so. Does it explain them? I leave that to you. This much I know: that boy was like the camomile: the harder you tread on it, the more it grows.

(Exit.)

ACT I

Scene 4

A field in Lithuania. Enter HENRY and WAURIN in arms, exhausted.

HENRY
When we forded the Memel, minstrels welcomed us. The Marshall and his knights brought gifts—three prancing coursers, an ox, four sheep, two peacocks. Now I don't hear music.

WAURIN
This was different. Many were killed crossing to Kovno. The Teutons fled and we had to fall back alone. Two hundred saddled horses came into pagan hands, and many weapons.

HENRY
Sir John Loudeham was killed?

WAURIN
Your Highness, it is so, and there is worse.

HENRY
What is worse than losing a friend and valiant knight?

WAURIN
The boy is taken among the prisoners.

HENRY
Not Jack? Rather take my right hand than that English rose. O, I have not felt these wars 'til now. We will fetch him back, and if he be not alive, I will slay their boys in thousands.

WAURIN
He is in Vilna now. With the Teuton armies we may prevail.
(They exit. Enter FALSTAFF.)

FALSTAFF
Vilna was fortified, but English bowmen topped it; fire and slaughter spread wild, but our flag was raised. The young Elf was ransomed. Henry bought some other boys and had them baptized. They spent Christmas and New Year's in Königsberg, wearing furs, playing at hunts and tournaments, getting German gifts of horses, hawks, three bears, a wild bull, an elk.

Minstrels, fiddlers, and other musicians played ceaselessly. And the Elf was there, tormented, although Henry enjoyed him.

(Exit.)

ACT I

Scene 5

A courtyard in Königsberg, before a chapel with a cross. HENRY enters searching. JACK comes out of the chapel. Celebratory music.

HENRY
I thought I would find you here. Don't pray so much, your knees will rot and God will be annoyed with you.

JACK
You said that I could pray in Jerusalem. But we have been here four months having revels. Is that a Crusade?

HENRY
The knights expect it Jack. It's part of their reward.

JACK
But we have not yet met the heathen.

HENRY
Of course we have Jack! The Lithuanians are pagans, and we have defeated them and baptized many.

JACK
So much feasting and song. So many ladies tending to the knights.

HENRY
Do you like them Jack? You know, I can send you one. A knight-to-be should practice. Or better, I can bring one when I visit. Would you like that?

JACK
I don't know, Sire.

HENRY
Do you love me, Jack?

JACK
You are my lord and savior. I— I mean my earthly one. You rescued me and saved my life.

HENRY
I risked hellish fires to do it. I lost many men and horses. Do you love me?

JACK
Yes, Sire, I love you. I am grateful eternally.

HENRY
That is well, because after Richard I may be King, and I will not forget my love for you.

JACK
Sire, I don’t understand.

HENRY
You don’t need to, Jack. Richard is weak. A new time is coming.

JACK
Please My Lord, will we leave for Venice and Jerusalem soon? I want to ride the water-carriages.

HENRY
The women of Venice are prettier than here. And more skilled.

JACK
And Jerusalem. I want to walk in His path. I want to pray where He was crucified for our sins.

HENRY
(A hand on JACK’s shoulder.)
Jack my boy, I’m sorry, but that will be another trip. We won our merit slaughtering the pagans. We have spent our wealth on feasting. We are going home.

JACK
But Sire, you promised. Father promised.

HENRY
Promises are made Jack.
(The music grows louder.)
Come, Jack, don’t waste your life in idle prayer.

JACK
Please tell me My Lord... Which way is Jerusalem?

HENRY

Jack, you are incorrigible.

(HENRY looks at the sun and at the landscape. Pointing)

It's there Jack. Through the cleft between those mountains, and far, far, toward the rising sun. Come now, follow me.

(JACK is rooted to the spot. The music swells.)

Alright then, I will see you tonight. You will like her.

(Exits)

JACK

(Calling after)

Thank you My Lord.

(JACK turn his back on HENRY and the revelers and stares out at the cleft between the mountains. He holds up his two forefingers in the shape of the cleft and drops to his knees, pressing his palms together. He walks on his knees very slowly, speaking a sentence at each step.)

God has not given me a spirit of fear. I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me. God rejoices over me as a bridegroom over his bride. I am quiet in his love. Christ bore my sins in His own body on the cross and I am healed by his stripes. God forgives me all my iniquities and heals my diseases. He saves my life from the pit. He crowns me with compassion. I am brought to the Father by the blood of Christ.

(Exit. Enter FALSTAFF.)

FALSTAFF

He never reached Jerusalem. He walked the path of Christ though, a few more years at least, even as Henry buggered the boy fore and aft. He taught him to spear-fish in doxy wombs too. They took turns together, share and share alike, mingling their sauces in Henry's private stew. But even with Teutonic Doll Tearsheets in the bed, he did not neglect his lad. Oh no, he stuffed him and he raised him up. Was the boy the worse for it? He grew to crush rebellions in Ireland and France, a man's man in spoils as well as war, leaving the one sin he thought of as a sin far behind. He would become a knight, that one man in a thousand. When Henry seized the throne and murdered Richard in the Tower, Jack kept his distance. He did not call in the promise Henry owed him. He built wealth in conquered boroughs

with the King's far-off blessing. His boyhood faith did not die, but it was sorely changed.

(Exit.)

ACT II

Scene 1

Haddon Hall, Bakewell, Derbyshire. Alice Avenel and her father enter their garden talking.

ALICE

But I am yet too young to marry, as I think. Am I not, Father?

AVENEL

You are too young until you are too old. You see that rosebush? Without a fare-thee-well the blush flees the bloom. Your youth fades, and hopes of marriage with it.

ALICE

But father, I do not know him. I do not want him.

AVENEL

You think it is your choice? Your mother and I married as we met. The consequence is you and all you see around you.

ALICE

I wish she were alive.

AVENEL

Her counsel would be one with mine. I construe you as I do my servants and my stock, for this house and lineage. Fastolf is an able fellow, back heroic from the Irish wars. He saved our own lands there. A pilgrim too, who slew and baptized the Heathen. He was the Duke's page, who now is King, and your match will widen our path to the court.

ALICE

As I widen to an intruder.

AVENEL

Be careful daughter. We have joked together, you and I, but do not fancy I am joking now. Your insolence grows perilous to you and to our family.

ALICE

These columbines—the pretty doves—Mother planted them I think, did she not?

AVENEL
Yes, and they are Aphrodite's flower. Look to love.

ALICE
They are also the fool's bloom.
(She picks a blossom, holds it on her head.)
See, I am your jester now. I have a riddle, Sire! How dies a maid who marries blind?

AVENEL
Test me no further, you will long regret it.

ALICE
(gazing at the blossom in her hand)
Is he handsome at all?

AVENEL
What do I know of that? I suppose so.

ALICE
Is he kind?

AVENEL
What? A boy annealed in battle kind? He's barely past fist and knife fights in the square. You don't need a milksop but a champion, to wield his sword and wealth against your enemies and mine. France looms, denying England, impugning our dignity. Your young buck will turn back their resolve.

ALICE
I am afraid of him.
(Sobs)

AVENEL
He is yours, and you are his, at a date certain, soon, of which I will inform you at my whim.

ALICE
I cannot do it, Father.
(Looking up.)
I beg you mother, whisper in his ear. Make him have mercy.

AVENEL

She will whisper no such thing.

ALICE

I fear I will weep and vomit at the altar, before the priest and everyone.

AVENEL

If you do that, it will be the last food of mine you taste, and you will find it bitter. You will scrounge among bony dogs, fighting them for morsels in the trash, until some low-life scoundrels kick you and worse. And as they put you down, one will tell the other through his laughter, this soiled bitch was once a pure branch of Avenel.

ALICE

(after a shocked silence)

You are not my father if you speak such things.

AVENEL

(slaps her face)

Go to your mirror and see whose seed you are. Then in your chamber meditate on that commandment which tells you whom to honor after God. Pray for wisdom; failing that, pray with every fiber for obedience. You marry according to my will.

(Crushing and dropping the blossom, she exits sobbing)

AVENEL

(looking up)

If you were here to counsel me... But you are not, so am father and mother both. The deal is done. May the child live to learn that it was good.

(Exit)

FALSTAFF

Oddly enough, it was good. The False Elf proved a good husband to Alice, if not strictly faithful. He grew in more ways than one on his wedding night, and she widened well enough. She did not tame him but she did charm him back. It was a sea change. But of course, he loved his wars more than he loved her. Unlike other would-be knights, he never took to jousting. He didn’t want to take a chance on getting hurt, he wanted to take a chance on getting killed. Wars and their big purposes were his only tournaments. Slaughter, rape, and die for jolly old England. Poor pitiable Elf, he never learned to play. He never once drank life to the dregs. He only guzzled endlessly the

bitter draughts of war, and those imbibings rotted him from the inside out.

(Exit.)

ACT II

Scene 2

Caister Castle. Dawn. ALICE enters while FALSTAFF is speaking. Alice wears her night clothes. JACK enters dressed for a journey.

ALICE
Where this time? Ireland again?

JACK
France. We must bear no more French insults to the crown.

ALICE
Surely you will not leave so soon after God has joined us. These weeks have changed me. I crave new indulgences. My body welcomes yours. Do not rob me of it so soon. The bed is warm. Come back to it and see what I can do to put this voyage off another day.

JACK
I have dallied long enough. (Holds her waist.) Don't you think I want more? More skin touching skin, first cool, then so warm? The probing? The whispered yeses? Caress after caress according to no plan? Melodic whimpers into moans to cries to sighs that make contentment itself envy us? I wanted it all. We had it all.

ALICE
And now you say, away with it all.

JACK
I say I will return to be enthralled by you again.

ALICE
If you are not run through by a French pike. Please, husband, once more into our bed; I am ready. This may be the time I make your copy grow in me, to be looked on with love for all my days.
(Tow JACK off. Enter FALSTAFF)

FALSTAFF
It was not the last chance; he would not widen for a piercing French tool. Nor was it the time of the copy. They had a few more trysts before one of God's pikes ran Alice through. But she made a copy of herself, not him, and this blameless child

tormented him with the living mirror of her mother all her life. Insult to injury, they even named her Alice.

(Exit.)

ACT II

Scene 3

A field in France. JACK and WAURIN enter winded but laughing.

JACK
All in a day's work, eh my friend? They looked so strange in their wet bleeding twisted shapes, turning the soil red.

WAURIN
Yes sir, like jesters who can't stop posing.

JACK
They live in fear of us; we must keep it that way. Make them flee in their thousands. Let fear grow like fire in the wind.

WAURIN
Fear has surely been our victory. God forbid they find their manhood.

JACK
Where? Between their trembling legs? They only stiffen for girls, not for war. Girls who will feel our manhood now.

WAURIN
Should we give them a few days to grieve?

JACK
They can grieve while our boys enjoy them. It will help them forget. No stealing, though.

WAURIN
Sir?

JACK
No spoils of war except between French thighs. I want the French fed well enough to fend off rebellion. I tax the French. I supply our men. No theft.
(WAURIN bows slightly, exits.)
Ah, the tournament of war! Greatest sport known to man.
(Exit.)

ACT II

Scene 4

Garden of Caister Castle. Evening. ALICE, looking weak, leans on JACK as they enter. He helps her sit.

ALICE
The Bishop said to take them. So I took them.

JACK
It is an outrage. I will reprimand him.

ALICE
Please don't. They gave me comfort. They made me feel ready. I am ready now. For God.

JACK
You are no such thing. You are ready for a bath, a bowl of soup, and a turn around the garden.

ALICE
Perhaps tomorrow, if I am here. Too tired now.

JACK
I beg you do not speak that way. I forbid it.

ALICE
Do you?
(Looking out)
I love that glow in the west. So pure and gold, but not like money-gold. Like the Virgin's halo in that painting in the chapel. Look at that gold some time Jack. Really look Take Alice. See the light of the halo thrown back to you from her big little eyes, matching the yellow of her soft fine hair. You will never see anything more beautiful.

JACK
You will take her yourself, and I will follow. You will show me.

ALICE
Are you right with Him, Jack?

JACK
With who?

ALICE
With God.

JACK
I am not ill.

ALICE
We are all ill with sins. I feel so light, now I have confessed.

JACK
Ridiculous. What would you confess?

ALICE
So many things. No, nothing like that. Polluted thoughts. reveries. Harsh words. Not walking in the path He set for us. Not feeling grateful enough for His sacrifice. Not nearly.

JACK
My sins are more than that I fear.

ALICE
Do you confess before a battle? Do you pray?

JACK
The priest blesses the troops.

ALICE
I mean yourself. Take yourself aside, Jack, alone. Get right with Him, before you tilt with death.

JACK
War does not always allow time.

ALICE
Make time. Promise me. I want to see you *there*.

JACK
I will see you here. Tomorrow, next week, next year, and at Alice’s wedding.

ALICE
Promise me. And this too: Don’t leave her to the servants only. I know you love your wars, but come back as you can, and stay a while with her. Guard yourself, body and soul. Be her father. When you marry—and you should—

JACK
Don’t speak to me this way. Don’t. Don’t.

ALICE
Please pick someone who will not hurt Alice.

JACK
Don’t do this. Do not do this.

ALICE
Promise me. Promise me.

JACK
(sobs)
No. Yes. I promise.

ALICE
I have loved you Jack. I swore I wouldn’t, but I did. I do. If you would love me back, care for our girl all your days.

JACK
I will see you at her wedding.

ALICE
In a way I think you will.
(Looking out)
That glow is gone to purple, soon to black.
(Looking up)
And yet some stars already soften the dark. I love this garden. The layered petals of the roses white and red, each a marvel in its own way. Their fragrance. Take me in, Jack. I shudder a little at the chill.

(He helps her up, they exit.
FALSTAFF enters.)

FALSTAFF
Against his will, he loved her, and she faded so quickly, like a brief-blooming rose. It was his worst loss. But between being Henry’s use of him and Alice’s forsaking he became one more knight, armored inside and out, a thrusting, slashing machine. These knights seized women to impress one another. Notch your belt again and seal the bond of fellowship. I *loved* women—their smell, warmth, fragility, their softness, their opening. To me! The last thing I cared about was what men thought. The Elf had

many, but he didn't really like them or even what he did to them, and after Alice he never loved another. Except one.

(Exit.)

ACT II

Scene 5

Castle Combe, Wiltshire, England. MARGARET strides in, TIBBAY following.

MARGARET

Mr. Tibbay, you have thwarted me twice. I will not have another ruined courtship. I am doubly scorned when you block my suit. I will tear your life tooth and nail as you have torn mine.

TIBBAY

Then I will feel your fangs and claws. But I will not forego my trust, which your late husband won, and which you would gluttonously scavenge on.

MARGARET

My God, man, it has been years.

TIBBAY

Precisely. Ten years since you promised to invest the son you bore him with all your joint estates. And three since on his death bed he named me executor and I made the same promise. You would violate it. I will not.

MARGARET

(Stares at him a long time.)

God made lawyers to be bought. What is your price?

TIBBAY

You mean the price of my honor? Of my love for Roger Scrope? Five times his holdings and yours would not buy away my vow.

MARGARET

You are an obstinate obstruction and a fool.

TIBBAY

Have you no heart for your son, who bears your husband's name and gives you back that noble face as a mirror?

MARGARET

Women beg their fathers for a crust and promise to obey. Then we beg our husbands. Then the son who cracked your body and mewled at your teat grows up to be your “Sir” and “Lord” and so your life runs out in slavery to this one, and this.

TIBBAY

And would you overturn the way of the world? So it has been, so it will ever be.

MARGARET

Women find ways.

TIBBAY

Madam.

(Bows slightly and exits.)

MARGARET

The boy is his father’s son, between whom and me was no great love. This mirror can wait till his majority before he takes my wealth and lands. Meanwhile I will use them, law or no.

(Exit.)

ACT II

Scene 6

Bath, England. A street near the Abbey. Night. NIXANDER and LOK enter whispering.

NIXANDER
Neither the Benedictines' mercy nor the Roman baths' hot springs will wipe away the blot we make tonight.

LOK
Speak for yourself, Sir.
(Louder)
I'll wake, yawn, break my fast with beer and sausage, count your coin again in daylight, and look for another night's work.

NIXANDER
Keep your voice low, man. We will be found out.

LOK
The town is empty this time of night. You draw him in.

(Ducks into shadows, drawing his knife. TIBBAY enters carrying a satchel.)

NIXANDER
Excuse me sir, are you not John Tibbay, the esteemed attorney?

TIBBAY
Not at this hour. Do I know you?

NIXANDER
We have not yet had the pleasure.
(Extends his hand.)
I am Benjamin Whitehall, of the house of—

TIBBAY
You are John Nixander, one of Margaret Scrope's suitors.

NIXANDER
No. I am the only one.

(LOK emerges behind TIBBAY, knife in hand.)

TIBBAY
If you think I will be bribed, your lady—

(LOK clasps TIBBAY in a tight embrace, sinking the knife into his belly.)

NIXANDER
(Nervously)
The time for that is past.

TIBBAY
(Shouting)
Help, murder!
(Staring at NIXANDER)
Have you no fear of God, sir? You will live in flames forever.

LOK
Noisy fellow.
(Brings the knife up through his belly into his chest.)

TIBBAY
(grunts; speaks weakly)
I will see you burn.
(Dies.)

NIXANDER
He is right. God save us.

LOK
Speak for yourself.
(Grabs TIBBAY under his arms.)
Take his feet.

NIXANDER
I can’t touch him.

LOK
Take his feet or I will help you join him.
(NIXANDER lifts TIBBAY’s feet.)
What do you say we toss him in the springs?

NIXANDER

Are you a monster? Are you mad?

LOK
I'd like to see the faces on the bathers.
(NIXANDER drops TIBBAY's feet,
stares at LOK, flees.)
This coward threatens my coin, his mistress, everything.

(Stares after NIXANDER, exits
dragging TIBBAY's corpse.)

ACT II

Scene 7

Garden of Castle Combe. MARGARET and MILLICENT enter.

MARGARET
Because we are rich dowagers. Our husbands' deaths have made us.

MILLICENT
Is that the sum and total of their lives and deaths? And shall I marry before the earth settles on his grave or a cloak of new grass is drawn over it?

MARGARET
Sister, shed your widow's weeds, they don't become you. And your crocodile tears speak more of your devouring his estates than loving him, as that green monster would weeping eat two antelope. A tear for Oxendon. A tear for Castle Combe.

MILLICENT
I loved him in my way. Was fond of him at least. This Fastolf thinks only of land and money.

MARGARET
Trust me, we can handle him. I know what to make of suitors.

MILLICENT
How? What have you done?

MARGARET
I have guarded both our fortunes.

MILLICENT
Then it is true, what I have heard.

MARGARET
Milly, you are forty-one. Your bloom is gone but you retain a hard beauty, and wrinkles have not yet doubled up your face. Look at me and see your future.

(MILLICENT walks to the window and looks out.)

MILLICENT

In Fastolf I see the decades to my grave.
(Pointing)
In me he sees that village, Over Combe, where yeomen keep the culture of the land's rich yield.
(Pointing elsewhere)
And Nether Combe, where night and day men make the cloth that Fastolf wants for Ireland and France to dress his soldiers.

MARGARET
For which the Crown will pay you both a fortune. It's not just here but our seat in Oxfordshire as well. Can you protect it? No. Only a man can guard our wealth from tax men, executors and grasping cousins.

MILLICENT
How fierce this world is to women. We have one fleeting time of grace and power, if we are lucky, the authority of beauty, which brings them to their knees—once. When we say yes, they build on us, against us, to the grave.

MARGARET
Would you rather wed one of those weavers? Have him fall on you drunk in your thatched clay-and-wattle hut? Wake to six urchins screeching and scratching your legs? Neighbor women mimicking his grunts and shouts from the night?

MILLICENT
Margaret, there is no need for such violent talk. I will marry Firsthole. Or was it Fast Oaf?

MARGARET
Olf. Fast-olf. Manage his fortunes and yours behind his back. Do as you please while he stumbles in the mud in Burgundy.

MILLICENT
And wrestles whores. And brings back who knows what pox? Or gets his head cracked by a cannonball, so I can spend my days wiping up a pissing dotard?

MARGARET
Now who is talking violently? Servants will wipe him. The world is not just, it just is. Men own it, and us. We must get ours.

MILLICENT
So you've said since I was three.

MARGARET

Sister, live your life. Be glad if he spends most of his in cannon-land. Enjoy the long respites. Nibble sweetmeats, sip the Burgundy he seizes, walk around your garden.

MILLICENT
Supposedly they are defending us.

MARGARET
Yes. That is their tale.

MILLICENT
What then is yours?

MARGARET
They plot together with their enemies to make these wars, so we may be afraid.

MILLICENT
You are hard, Margaret.

MARGARET
I hope so. I can be robbed and raped yet not be a fool. I can test the confines of my life. Sometimes, I can remake them.

MILLICENT
Nixander?

MARGARET
Useful. Temporary.

MILLICENT
Like Mr. Tibbay?

MARGARET
Temporary. Not useful.

(Millicent steps away from the window and stares at Margaret.)

MILLICENT
His man tells my maid that she visits him in the night.

MARGARET
Who visits him?

MILLICENT
Alice.

MARGARET
Of course she visits, she's his child. Don't let him pamper her.

MILLICENT
He doesn't pamper the child. That's not the Alice.

MARGARET
(astonished)
Come, sister, use your reason.

MILLICENT
The servants watch him. He moves aside in his own bed and pulls the covers back for her to slip in beside him.

MARGARET
For *her*?

MILLICENT
For nothing that the servants can see.

MARGARET
And then?

MILLICENT
He whispers fondnesses. Embraces her. Covers her body with his own. Cries out her name. He… He…

MARGARET
(yet more astonished)
…is mad. Almost a year, and still mad with grief?

MILLICENT
It would seem so. And lust.

MARGARET
You will make him forget. There is power in your face and body.

MILLICENT
I have lost the knack of wielding it.

MARGARET
Recall it. It is our sword and shield, our woman's cannon made of wiles. Know his hungers. Field your weapons well. Attack first. Forestall his night-time ravings. Drive away her ghost.

MILLICENT

Marriage is a battle, I suppose?

MARGARET

Battle, bond, and long swim against the tide. Friendship if you are lucky. If you are very lucky, scattered pulses of love.

MILLICENT

I am not feeling lucky.

MARGARET

Luck is what we make it. Come, raise your shoulders and your head. We have talk to make with cooks, tailors, gardeners, musicians. Your wedding bears down hard upon us.

MILLICENT

If I cannot make a life without a man, I'll hear his vows and use them as I can.

(They exit, MARGARET striding, MILLICENT reluctant but determined.)

ACT II

Scene 8

Castle Combe interior, day.
MARGARET enters; JACK, opposite.

JACK
You summoned me, my lady?

MARGARET
Dear brother, it is well that you come when I call.

JACK
Wise sister, you are my guide in all things.

MARGARET
Millicent has qualities, but wisdom is not one. Neither is strength another.

JACK
She has qualities enough for me.

MARGARET
You speak of Castle Combe, no doubt. And Over Combe. And Nether Combe. And the Ireland estates, where you have put down rebellion. We will govern them together, you and I.

JACK
Sister, I will consult you as I need to.

MARGARET
You will consult me before making any move. On my instruction Milly disinherits her son, as I did mine.

JACK
Very wise, and now I govern, not you. The lands are mine.

MARGARET
You do know that I have resources?

JACK
Sister, do you think that by murdering a lawyer you can frighten me? Kill a thousand lawyers, make England great again.

MARGARET

What an idea! I would never kill anyone. But I can make your life a living hell for all your days. With live lawyers.

JACK
I look forward to our joint enterprise.

MARGARET
See to it that you discharge it with respect.

JACK
You are a formidable partner. I see that in marrying your sister I have found a match in you. Perhaps I chose the wrong sister.

MARGARET
You chose both. This body may not arouse your lust, but I have skills that might assuage it, and keep you coming back.

JACK
Is this your loyalty to Millicent, who followed you from the same womb?

MARGARET
And must follow me unto the grave, hers or mine. I share all her wealth, whether she knows it or not. But you and I know all, and our heads together can satisfy your greed at least.

JACK
And, my gracious sister, yours.

MARGARET
Conquer cleverly in France, and we two will amass England's greatest fortune.

JACK
May it be so, my lady. But now I have my wedding to prepare for.

MARGARET
Look to it. I think we understand each other. You are dismissed.
(He bows and exits.)
This viper has a silver tongue but still a forked one, and each fork sprays a different deadly poison. Our heads will clash together more than bond, and he will feel the hardness of mine. I have not come this far to give up all to such an armored fool, but will reach under his coat of mail to find his center, and he will be mine. My sister has been mine long since and she will give him over. Let the games begin.
(Exit.)

ACT II

Scene 9

Castle Combe interior, night.
MARGARET enters; NIXANDER,
opposite, as if pursued.

MARGARET
What news, my love? You seem unsettled.

NIXANDER
The deed is done.

MARGARET
(Brightens, approaching him)
Oh? What deed is that?

NIXANDER
Tibbay, mistress. You wanted to be rid of him. Lok and I—

(MARGARET covers his mouth
with her hand.)

MARGARET
I know nothing of this, nor wish to know.
(Removes her hand)

NIXANDER
I am afraid.

MARGARET
(Embracing him)
Of what, my boy?

NIXANDER
(Almost sobbing)
Of God’s wrath.

MARGARET
God is on the side of right, and here that side is ours.
(Caresses him.)
Oh, I think your love is harder than your fear.

NIXANDER
(Gasping)

Mistress, my love is great.

MARGARET

Send Lok to me tomorrow morning. I will give him something more to buy his silence. Return to me tomorrow night and I will give you all you dream of.

NIXANDER

Tomorrow night.

MARGARET

Tomorrow night, when Venus lies languid in the Western sky, we will arouse her and pay tribute.

(Kisses him)

Fear not. Our future nestles in her lap. Now go.

NIXANDER

Tomorrow then.

(Turns and walks away.)

MARGARET

(Calling after)

Send Lok!

NIXANDER

Mistress, I will.

(Exit)

MARGARET

Lok was right. You are too feeble for this game. I acted out of will, and act again because I must. Fastolf will suffice now for our family's man. Millicent will bow to me and he will fall in.

(Exit)

FALSTAFF

(Entering from the shadows)

She did act, and her last beau was done, but not her troubles. Tibbay reached her from beyond the grave. His clever instruments and dutiful assistants kept her husband's legacy intact until their son came of age, and then she could not touch it until the young man died. As for Fatsoff, he too proved a worthy adversary, and in the course of time and greed, the fortunes of the Scropes—Margaret, Millicent, their dead husbands, their mothers, their fathers, and their sons—all were his.

(Exit)

ACT II

Scene 10

On the wall of Caister Castle. JACK appears yawning in his nightshirt; WAURIN follows.

JACK
Ah, what a morning! Near this spot my father made me gaze across that sea, and tutored me about our war in France.

WAURIN
You learned your lesson. Did you sleep well, Sir?

JACK
I feel strangely refreshed, as if I had a visit in the night.

WAURIN
(knowing, embarrassed)
Sir.

JACK
Well, my friend, what is the drill today?

WAURIN
Another chat with the head weaver. Some questions from the solicitors about two of your claims in law. Five minutes with Alice's tutor. Dress for your wedding.

JACK
What time is that?

WAURIN
Six, sir.

JACK
I will be ready. I should pray I suppose.

WAURIN
Marriage is a sacrament.

JACK
Well, I will bring a stiff candle to melt on the altar. The lady still has charms.

WAURIN
Shall I schedule ten minutes for prayer after you dress?

JACK
Five will do. God and I are on easy terms.

WAURIN
I am glad to hear it.

JACK
I hope the terms are as easy with the bride.

WAURIN
We must discuss that.

JACK
I know this dowager will not light my taper as before.

WAURIN
I meant the dower sir. Details about the castles and the lands that the sister insists on.

JACK
That bitch, God stop her mouth. She governs Millicent.

WAURIN
At least you haven’t ended like Tibbay and Nixander.

JACK
Not yet. These weird sisters brew plots like witches’ broth, but I am on to them.

WAURIN
The meeting?

JACK
Schedule it.
(Gazing out to sea)
God, I miss the war.

WAURIN
We will be back there soon enough.

JACK
Away from women’s tricks and arguments. Men among men. Knees press horses’ flanks. Hearts thump as one. And then the spoils. The maidens’ protests, so arousing.

WAURIN

A gallant game, for all who win.

JACK

Win? Of course we'll win. We always do.

(Stretches, yawns.)

My word, what a refreshing night of sleep!

(Exit. FALSTAFF appears before the castle wall.)

FALSTAFF

He carried Alice all his days. Lucky for him, God stopped Margaret's mouth with dust, and the living sister lacked the dead one's will. He won it all. Millicent was a sometime ally, sometime foe, but she always thought he was a fool. Alice was for ever. And the bright girl he made with Alice, called Alice, Alice's glass forever, grew up and caught a fatal affection. All in the family.

(Exit.)

ACT II

Scene 11

YOUNG ALICE runs on giggling, followed by STEPHEN limping.

YOUNG ALICE
No no no you won't!

STEPHEN
Copy! Copy! I'll catch you, Copy, cripple that I am!

(She allows him to catch her, turns, accepts his embrace.)

YOUNG ALICE
Nothing weak about your arms, brother.

STEPHEN
Don't call me that. They sold me in wardship and we barely saw each other. We share neither father nor mother.

YOUNG ALICE
Alright then, I will call you Stick.

STEPHEN
Because of my lame limb? That's cruel.

YOUNG ALICE
Not that, silly. Because you stick to me, and I stick to you.

STEPHEN
Are you cross that I still call you Copy?

YOUNG ALICE
I love it. It brings Mother into me, a warming ghost. She comforts me and makes me strong.

STEPHEN
I feel her surging in you.

YOUNG ALICE
Rash boy, will you ravish both of us?

STEPHEN
(relaxing his hold on her)

Oh Copy, I would ravish no one, even if I could.

YOUNG ALICE

What then?

STEPHEN

Why, beg your sweet indulgence, nothing more.

YOUNG ALICE

You know there is no hope for us.

STEPHEN

(Lets go and turns away.)

Say I must be run through by his heavy sword or have my throat laced with red beads by his father's knife. Say I must feel the flames of Hell eternally, but don't say there is no hope for us.

YOUNG ALICE

You knew her. I was so small. I feel her other-worldliness and tender care. In memory I sink my face into the fragrance of her yellow curls. She is vivid and vague. Tell me more, Stick.

STEPHEN

I was eleven when we met, by accident. There was no thought of your father and my mother, of course...although...

YOUNG ALICE

Although...

STEPHEN

Your mother was ill.

YOUNG ALICE

Surely you don't think...

STEPHEN

I would put nothing past him. But he came to see my mother about cloth for troops in France. Yours was with him.

YOUNG ALICE

And...

STEPHEN

Radiant. Ethereal. Not well perhaps. Her skin had a translucency, as if a god had sealed her in it for a journey.

YOUNG ALICE

Did she speak?

STEPHEN
Like fine chimes in the breeze. She asked if he could let someone else transport the cloth to Normandy. He glared at her and answered harshly. That made my mother smile.

YOUNG ALICE
There was a spark between them while my mother lived?

STEPHEN
No, no such thing as that. Or if so it was a spark of greed.

YOUNG ALICE
There was a plot.

STEPHEN
No. He loved your mother far more than he loved mine.

YOUNG ALICE
A position then. To fall back to.

STEPHEN
You might say. A redoubt. For a retreat.

YOUNG ALICE
In case my mother...

STEPHEN
In case your mother fell early in the war of life.

YOUNG ALICE
I think I hear him coming.

STEPHEN
If he suspects us he will drag me off to France.

YOUNG ALICE
Be off then, but for God’s sake never there!

STEPHEN
Copy. My love.
(Exit.)

YOUNG ALICE
Fare you well in Father’s shadow.
(Exit. Enter FALSTAFF.)

FALSTAFF

He did not, nor did she. Jack kept his distance from the girl, because she was too much the mirror of her mother, and he made a fatal distance between these ill-starred lovers. He took her broken beau from her because to him he was her brother, and a weak, unmanly man unworthy of his girl. But Alice the first was the love of his life. And then, in her twisted way, Joan. Joan became the anti-Alice, the girl he could hate as much as he had loved her, a maid in pants with a cold vise for thighs—so said the clerics who probed her—a brain full of violent dreams, talking to what she thought was God, a sport of nature, out of touch with life, incapable of pleasure. She sent herds of men, like rams, galloping against each other to their deaths. But for reasons of her own she let the Elf live.

(Exit.)

ACT III

Scene 1

France, in a farmhouse. MME. D'ARC enters frightened, D'ARC enraged.

D'ARC

First it was leaking light that sprayed her in an eerie glow. I know what that means in a girl with new breasts. Then voices. *Come darling, pray with me*. Male whispers in the hot glow.

MME. D'ARC

Please Jacques. Do not make her out this way.

D'ARC

Make her out? *She* wants to follow the army. Remember I was in it. We had girls fresh as grass and hags who laid down so often they forgot up. The one soon turned into the other. We would circle one and—well. I won't defile your ears.

MME. D'ARC

Or our daughter's reputation. We must hear her. She has a plan.

D'ARC

A plan? Here is a plan. I'll drown her in that brook before she joins a battle-camp. She won't drag my name with her skirts through the mud.

MME. D'ARC

Drown my girl and find your pitchfork in your belly one fine night.

D'ARC

What, does Satan whisper you as well? Do you too tremble in the night in a hot glow? Is this a house of witches these hands built from God's stones?

MME. D'ARC

Husband, has your manhood fled? It is you who tremble at the English glares. Fastolf steals our wheat and grapes and you men kiss his glove. Say this at least of Joan: that she is brave, and wants the English boot off our neck.

(JOAN enters in peasant dress,
regal, out of touch, eyes wide,

mouth open, almost sleepwalking. She puts her hands up on unseen objects, cocks her head.)

JOAN

Yes I will. Yes I will. Even if I had a hundred fathers, even if I were a King's daughter, I would go. I will go. Today rather than tomorrow. Tomorrow rather than later.

D'ARC

She is mad. She will die birthing some soldier's bastard in a battlefield in the night among corpses, and she will not know whose it was.

MME. D'ARC

She doesn't hear you. Joan: Listen to me. I beg you tell us your thoughts.

JOAN

Don't speak above the angel, mother.

MME. D'ARC

Please, Joan…

JOAN

Shh! Shhhh!

(Kneels, her knees thudding on the hard wood floor. Puts her hands together. Mumbles. Stops. Listens. Rocks and keens pitifully.)

D'ARC

We need to call the priest. The exorcist. The apothecary at least. The girl is lost.

MME. D'ARC

Listen to me, Joan, how do you know it is not the Devil's voices?

JOAN

Oh mother, her voice is heavenly sweet.

(Speaks melodically.)

Joan, be good. Be pure and cool as newborn snow. Be good and pray to Him and He will save you.

MME. D'ARC

You see, Jacques? It is a saintly voice, not devilish.

D'ARC
Do you think Satan's tricks cannot twist this girl aside? And make damned fools of us?

JOAN
(Chanting sweetly)
Hail Mary, full of grace, heaven is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, blessed is the fruit of your womb Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour...
(Speaking now, loudly.)
Heaven is with you Joan. Follow the men. Follow the men until they follow you.

(Joan stands and stares at her parents, one after the other, back and forth. She is no longer distracted. She turns and strides out, resolute.)

MME. D'ARC
We must follow *her* Jacques. We must save her.
(Exit)

D'ARC
She is lost and so are we.
(Exit. Enter FALSTAFF.)

FALSTAFF
So a manly-hearted girl, roaming and rambling on a little dirt farm, began to babble God's word, or so she said, brewing the hottest soup of English pain. She was a virgin alright. The surprise was, she stayed that way. I would have liked to...well. I had mine, although not more than once a quarter...hour. Had you there, didn't I? It wasn't easy. Unlike lean Jack the Elf, plump Jack had folds of flesh that got in the way of things. The doxies helped me though, the nimble ones. At times I too felt like I heard voices and spoke to the air, because I couldn't see the person under me! I stood delirious and swaying, that's for sure. Ah but the girls were sweet to bring me along as they did when I got older. Old. Yes. I got old.
(Exit.)

ACT III

Scene 2

A wood near the D'Arc farm. JOAN approaches an ancient oak.

JOAN
Give me your counsel now, old friend. That lady who speaks to me at evening in the garden. She is dazzling royal, infinitely lit, fine beyond dreams. She seizes my heart, my body shudders, my legs throw me on my knees. At night, I ache for her between my thighs in such a way— (Presses her whole length against the tree.) What is it, Spirit, that I feel? And is she Mary, or some slave of Satan made like a queen, to turn me from the light?

OAK'S VOICE
(A hoarse whisper)
She is real.

JOAN
(Entranced now and distraught)
Spirit, please, I cannot say, I cannot hear.

OAK'S VOICE
She is real, Joan. The Queen of Heaven. Real.

JOAN
(Shudders and very slowly separates from the tree.)
She tells me to leave here. To leave you. Who but the Devil tells a waif to go to war?

OAK'S VOICE
You are strong, Joan. You are chosen.

JOAN
To die? I am not prepared to die.
(Weeps.)

OAK'S VOICE
Stop your tears, Joan, put away your trembling. She is with you.

JOAN
Who? How? Will you be there?

OAK'S VOICE
This tree is my home and my prison, but she is everywhere.

JOAN
You are my friend of old, my only friend.

OAK'S VOICE
She is your friend too. Turn and see the light. That glow? Kneel, girl.

JOAN
(Kneeling)
Hail Mary full of grace, Heaven is with Thee—

WOMAN'S VOICE
Hail me not, Joan, but listen. You seek the high bare hills before the dawn, or as now, at dusk, hours when men huddle and shrink away. A solitary bird, you creep forth...

JOAN
Yes, Mother.

WOMAN'S VOICE
...and in the spirit-realm of night hold counsel with the howling wind. You embrace this tree. And has it spoken?

JOAN
Forgive me Mother, I have greatly sinned.

WOMAN'S VOICE
You have not. The Druid here is but a ghost of Nature, which is God. And its uncanny earthly voice has bid you turn to me.

JOAN
(Kneeling, hands in prayer, she looks back.)
But...

OAK'S VOICE
Turn, Joan.

JOAN
(Turning back)
Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of...

WOMAN'S VOICE
I will, Joan. I do. Now you will do what I have said.

JOAN

I do not understand.

WOMAN'S VOICE

You will, Joan. Stand forth and do God's will.

(Joan rises, sobs, and looks longingly at the oak. She covers her face with her hands and shakes her head no.

JOAN

No. Yes. Druid, you are old.
(Stands straight.)

OAK'S VOICE

So old.

JOAN

You have seen our people's greatness, and our freedom, before the aliens.

OAK'S VOICE

I have, and will again.

JOAN

Goodbye Druid. God be with you.
(Exits.)

OAK'S VOICE

And with you.

FALSTAFF

One is torn. Torn! The beauty of the girl and yet the formidable righteousness. So tedious. How do you stoke your fires with the Hail Mary's flying? I feel for her father because he knew the men who would be feeling for her. Yet in truth I never gave a thought to the fathers of the ones I— Tedium, ta dum, ta dum! If she runs toward the drummers I might run into her running the other way. That would be a merry bump! Yet I would bounce back up and keep running. The soul of discretion is disdain, delirious distrust, delicious disillusion, and deliberate dishonor! Cannon-fodder followers, follow Joan, and she will feed you to the yawning maw of war, her true saint, famished for more corpses, ever more, more and more! But as for me... Ta dum, ta dum! Ta dum, ta dum! Ta dum...ta dum...ta dum...

(He walks off repeating this as his voice becomes fainter.)

ACT III

Scene 3

France. Janville, a fortified town between the Seine and the Loire. Enter WAURIN and JACK.

WAURIN
No more than a day to the Dauphin's capital.

JACK
We'll storm that town as we stormed this, and seize the Heir.

WAURIN
Orléans is no Janville. It's a day's march, exposed all the way. Then thirty-four towers, a company in each, cannoneers, gunners, practiced captains, all between the forest and the Loire.

JACK
We'll secure bridgeheads on the river. With our usual Frenchmen.

WAURIN
A stone cannonball out of a *veuglaire* cracked Salisbury's head last week. Devilish fine guns, those. We can't lose any more good generals—certainly not the Commander of the Bastille.

JACK
I have no plan to die here. We are twelve hundred, plus twenty men-at-arms and sixty archers. And logistics? My *forte.* Wine, victuals, bombards, cannon, powder, missiles, more than we need.

WAURIN
Wait for your next convoy from Paris. Hundreds of wagons will bring more of everything, plus the Cinquantaine—fifty heavy-crossbow-men armed with the finest shafts. If *you* went to Paris, you could muster another hundred archers and fifty men-at-arms.

JACK
That will delay us into Lent. We will need tons of herrings.

WAURIN
Plenty of room for them and a sea of barrelled brine in five hundred wagons. The men will praise God and swim in herrings. A quartermaster's paradise.

JACK
Or a general’s nightmare.

WAURIN
Poets love battles; soldiers love logistics. Do what you do best. And one more thing.

JACK
Yes?

WAURIN
Take him back to Paris with you.

JACK
Who? Stephen?

WAURIN
Yes, your son.

JACK
That thing is not my son.

WAURIN
Whatever he is to you, he doesn’t belong here. I know you had your reasons, but he will be killed and get others killed.

JACK
I’ll keep him occupied in Paris. He will not go home.

(Exit both. Enter FALSTAFF)

FALSTAFF
The boy was fairly chained to a warehouse full of herrings. He never saw the girl any more. As for the resupply convoy, it was a paradise for general and quartermaster both. The French fell on Fatsoff’s column near some no-name village. Ah, a bucolic scene it was, hundreds of wagons bouncing behind their mules, exposed and tempting. Yet the outnumbered English and their French-traitor friends did not just hold the royal army off, they routed it. Fatsoff’s biggest win: the Brawl of the Herrings. Cannonballs splashed schools of them in rivers on the grass. I can almost taste them. And the wine I would have lapped from broken-barrel rinds! The Elf missed Agincourt, but he brought the Henry spirit here. Quite the general for a while. Yet Bardy erased him and scrawled *me* into history. Well. These geniuses, who knows their misshapen minds? But something was coming for the Elf, and coming fast.

ACT III

Scene 4

Orléans, France. On the ramparts of the fortified city. TWO ARCHERS survey the field.

FIRST ARCHER
The ranks are thin. And thinner.

SECOND ARCHER
At least we have this respite from the cannon. You know why.

FIRST ARCHER
(Pointing up)
Those towers will be higher than our walls and barely in arrow's reach. Talbot will throw down on us a hail of stone and fire that will seem from Heaven but yet be from Hell.

SECOND ARCHER
We have already lost a thousand houses. Three churches lie in heaps, and Notre Dame herself bows her battered pinnacle as if she might at any breeze nod and fall.

FIRST ARCHER
These towers will undo us. And down below, at night, they sink powder-vaults under the walls, to wake at the kiss of a torch and crash flames up to us.

SECOND ARCHER
Talbot swears our maidens will bear English fruit. That every man of us who fights will be run through with his own sword.

FIRST ARCHER
And elders grabbed by their beards to smash their heads. He has done it in all defiant towns between the sea and here.

SECOND ARCHER
No wonder our men flee the field before these great machines of war. They only hope for mercy.

FIRST ARCHER
Pale fear sweeps through the army like a blast blown by God. Even our heroes fall back like sheep from the wolf's fangs.

SECOND ARCHER

Baudricour, they say, stands firm at Vaucouleurs. But what can one knight with sixteen banners do against their host?

FIRST ARCHER

He will surrender to Burgundy, who joins the English, not our King.

SECOND ARCHER

And yet the King forsakes himself, solving riddles with his fool, grinning at jugglers, sung along by troubadours, as if the world were not about to end. He holds a sporting festival.

FIRST ARCHER

The King's gold is in his pleasures, and our men deprived of pay. All augurs ill.

SECOND ARCHER

Let us walk the wall at least, and shoot down on the villains rolling powder kegs.

FIRST ARCHER

More will come.

SECOND ARCHER

Until we meet again.

FIRST ARCHER

In case we meet again.

(Exit opposite each other.
Enter FALSTAFF.)

FALSTAFF

They say the first age of man is under Venus. Fatsoff the boy was under more than her, but he got out from under Henry's, uh, thumb. After that his own two swords joined forces. Then the Sun rises on the second age and lights the way to honor, that mute and stupid puppet of death. Then Mars takes hold and annihilates all that is good and sweet. But for the Elf the three stars joined together, circling, never converging or colliding, pulling him here and there, governing his joyless life until he had none left. Lust, honor, anger, they were all the same to him. I was created jolly, round, and gay, everything he wasn't, made for laughter, love, and life. But he made history, I'll

give him that. He made that grand, pathetic, mockery called history. It suffocated him and all his world.

(Exit.)

ACT III

Scene 5

France. A field behind the English line at Orléans. Enter WAURIN and FASTOLF, who is chomping on a herring. FASTOLF sits.

JACK

(Muffled)

These are good! I have had a few too many though.

(Belches, tosses the bones.)

Their special flavor is I stole sixty tons from the Parisians.

WAURIN

The French fishing fleets are scrambling to keep up with us. Meanwhile the Paris damsels will keep Lent with groats.

JACK

And the girls of Orléans break it with us. Their bellies will swallow some stiff herrings soon.

WAURIN

Well, the men will need a pastime after this. Are we ready?

JACK

We just arrived. Let them wine and dine and sleep it off a day. The towers will be ready.

WAURIN

You. The towers. Talbot. The town is done.

JACK

That piss-ant king’s as good as bound and bouncing in an English wagon.

WAURIN

God allow, for that night all France sleeps under Henry’s crown.

JACK

Amen. God’s wounds, those herrings made me thirsty.

WAURIN

We'll soon enough be drinking from the Loire. They say the waters are most pure.

JACK

Spoil the daughters, keep the waters pure. Meanwhile, I'll sip at the finest vintages of Anjou.

WAURIN

They are sweet. The best thing about France. Or second best.

JACK

You know I will be fifty soon. I can't just gulp down any swill. But conquest is a delight in itself, it lifts the spirits.

WAURIN

Bonne anniversaire, as the frogs say. Half a century calls for a celebration. Maybe you can plant a tadpole.

JACK

It will be *bonne* when I look down on these fields from those walls. Waurin, where in God's name did you hide my wines?

(Exit both. Enter FALSTAFF.)

FALSTAFF

They surely did spoil many daughters. Wives and mothers too, while their own pined away for them at home. Or made them grow horns with their home games. But the only one they ever truly loved was the goddess of war, she of the blazing eyes. On her altar they poured their own and others' blood and laid burning flesh until the smoke enveloped her in cloud, obscuring her feet, thighs, belly, breast, and in the end her face, so that the flame of rage in her glowering glance was all that they could see. She glared at them until she put them in a trance they never woke from.

(Starts to exit, turns back to the audience, draws his index finger slowly across them.)

Never.

(Exit.)

ACT III

Scene 6

The Dauphin's court at Orléans.
Enter AGNES and KING CHARLES.

AGNES
Must the King then roam in banishment? My King? My dear?

CHARLES
Entreat me not again my love, and weep no more. My heart is set. There is a life beyond the Loire that is still France, a gentler and a happier.

AGNES
But can we do no other? Dunois said—

CHARLES
A traitor who refused my will? Enough! The flag of civil war drips blood on all of life. A man forsakes his plow, his wife her spinning. We burn the bounty of our fields and flames devour towns. Men show no mercy and hope for none. Is this scepter so precious that I must wield it over starving children and dismembered friends? I set it down. The English are crouched with ready claws. We have safe passage and we leave today.

(Enter DUNOIS)

DUNOIS
I have tidings.

CHARLES
You who showed me your back.

AGNES
Husband, it was to save your realm and you.

CHARLES
How many friends are newly dead to save my little crown? How much French blood pollutes the Loire? And how soon do Fastolf and Talbot come to take me?

DUNOIS
The siege is ended. You have won.

CHARLES
Do not mock me Bastard, you have done harm enough.

DUNOIS
The sixteen regiments with Baudricourt descended toward the plain and I with them. Two huge armies flanked us, poised to crush our band of dreamers. Swords, shields and armor shone all around us. The bravest hearts sank, sought counsel, and found none. We bent to lay our weapons down. And then, the miracle.

CHARLES
What, man? God's arm out of the sky?

DUNOIS
Now who mocks? Sire, it was stranger than that.

AGNES
Dear Dunois, tell us what you saw.

DUNOIS
A girl. A maid in shining armor like the goddesses of old, her plumed helmet waving as she strode through a thicket toward our ranks, brushing the thorns aside like leaves. A glow encased her. She took our drooping banner, kissed the Fleurs-de-Lis, raised it high, and stared at us in silence.

AGNES
An apparition! But from God?

DUNOIS
We were agape with wonder. Her stare tormented us until our souls nearly screamed to have the silence broken.

CHARLES
What did you do? What did she say?

DUNOIS
Nothing. We waited. We gazed on her and listened to the drumming in our breasts. Nothing. Nothing. And then she spoke, and such a voice of pride and valor as I never heard from man came out of her coiled body, a soaring call that never sounded shrill, but seemed the voice of Heaven.

(Here JOAN's voice offstage joins his.)

DUNOIS AND JOAN

"Fear not, brave Frenchmen. God is on your side and He has sent a maid to lead you. Find that within you which loves your country. Defend your homes and families for God and France."

AGNES
I almost hear her voice in yours.

CHARLES
An army-follower made such a speech?

DUNOIS
She followed us and now we follow her.

CHARLES
A Devil's minion leads my army? A mad harlot in a man's coat of mail?

DUNOIS
Your army: which you laid aside three days ago, as you prepared to cross the Loire with your flutists and troubadours. It is your army if she keeps it whole, and leads it here, and bends her trousered leg before your throne.

CHARLES
Now you sound treasonous, and in your own voice.

DUNOIS
The Maid is the opposite of treason. She said she would be with you by mid-Lent, if she had to wear her legs down to her knees.

AGNES
Good husband, take the gifts he offers you. Dunois old friend, what happened next?

DUNOIS
Entranced, a young groom handed her a stallion's reins. She mounted, and the horse took on her glow. They reared as if joined, like the Centaur of ancient times, yet not half-man, but half-maid. The horse on its hind legs whinnied bold and true, and a voice rose out of the maiden like a roar.
(JOAN's voice off joins loudly.)

DUNOIS AND JOAN
"Forward for God and France!"

AGNES
It sounds a miracle.

DUNOIS

It was. It is. From when her stallion's forelegs struck the earth she guided the attack. Horse and man we followed her as one, galloping down the rise, sixteen flags touching the sky. Our archers knelt in two ranks and let fly opposing volleys in dark plumes that dove into the English host that flanked us. Each shaft found its mark. But when the girl...

AGNES

Don't stop! When the girl...

DUNOIS

When the girl set her radiant charger on them, when she swung aloft her glowing sword and the English looked upon her face and heard her roar,

(JOAN's voice joins)

"Yield, English, yield to the King of Heaven! God have pity on your souls!"

CHARLES

(looking around)

Yes?

DUNOIS

A thousand pairs of English knees buckled——captains, riders, men——and they fled or fell to die under our horses' hoofs or slashing swords. Their numbers, five times ours, rushed in a flood, blindly plunging in a river where we speared them like fish. Two thousand of the foe were slain or drowned.

CHARLES

And of our friends in arms?

DUNOIS

Not one was lost.

AGNES

Miracle upon miracle.

CHARLES

Most wonderful and strange. Who is she then? This...girl.

DUNOIS

She will reveal herself to no one but the King. But I call her savior of the army and the Crown.

(Trumpets, shouting offstage.)

VOICES
Hail the Maid, God's messenger and our deliverer! Hail the Holy Maid of God!

DUNOIS
She comes.

CHARLES
Good. I will test her. Sit.
(Points to the throne)

DUNOIS
My liege?

CHARLES
Sit. Look regal.

DUNOIS
Put a bastard on the throne?—for such I am and all know it.

CHARLES
Does she know you from the field?

DUNOIS
Like everyone, I was behind her. She only saw the enemy and God.

CHARLES
Sit. I order it.

DUNOIS
(Sitting)
God forgive me.

(JOAN enters, stately, staring forward.)

JOAN
(To her followers)
Stay back! It is the Maid alone. The Maid and the King.

DUNOIS
(Blocking with the scepter)
What are you, perverse maid? And do you dare approach me?

JOAN

Bastard of Orléans, you followed me behind when it suited you. And do you now usurp the throne?

(Looking around, then kneeling to Charles)

I bid you give the King his lawful place.

DUNOIS

(Standing)

My God, do you have eyes in the back of your head?

(Charles takes the scepter and sits, pointing it at Joan.)

CHARLES

Declare your suit, and it had better be a good one, or I will have you seized, bound, and burned for a witch.

AGNES

Good husband, threaten not the messenger of God.

CHARLES

For God’s sake then, declare your suit!

JOAN

We go to Reims, where God will crown you King of all of France.

CHARLES

I too shall follow you?

JOAN

Sire, never. Only follow God.

CHARLES

What are you, then, severe, immodest maid?

JOAN

I am a farm girl and your lowly servant. My father’s fields, my mother’s loom and larder are in Dom Remi. They never tired of teaching me the tales of alien islanders who made us slaves, stole our jewel Paris, and put our precious King off his throne.

CHARLES

And so you singly plan to conquer England?

JOAN

Sire, never, just to follow God.

CHARLES
Or the Devil. How shall I know?

AGNES
Husband, see her Godliness.

JOAN
I kept the sheep. A lamb strayed one day and when I found it, God's Mother stood over it in the wood. This lamb, she said, is France's King. Find him too. Pull him from the thicket and put him in his rightful place in God's hand. Loose your people from their foreign chains.

CHARLES
And did you ask her how you should brave their armies?

JOAN
I did, Sire, and she answered: *As you braved these thorns to save this lamb. With God and love.* A lily in her hand became a sword, and she was gone.

AGNES
God save and free us with this holy girl.

CHARLES
And then?

JOAN
And then three nights I could not sleep but sat by the same tree praying to see Her again. She came. She told me all that I must do. The first part I have done for Her, with Her.

AGNES
A blessèd miracle.

CHARLES
But how?

JOAN
A man came to the farm, to sell a helmet and sword he got from a strange shepherdess. He saw me and gave me them. The price? *No price for you,* he said. I put the helmet on; he stepped back in awe. My mother and father too, because it glowed.

CHARLES
And did your voices teach you how to win a battle?

JOAN
She said, “Daughter of God, I will be your help. Go on, go on, go on.”

CHARLES
Yes. How? How, when they always win?

DUNOIS
They did not win this time.

JOAN
Even if the English hang from the clouds, yet we will have them, for God sends us to punish them. They will all be driven out of France, except those who die here, which will be many.

CHARLES
Dunois, take her to the Archbishop. He will test her.

JOAN
Thank you, Sire. I will pass any test. But know that as time passes, the blood of France is shed. I have one year, a little more. Let the tests be done.

DUNOIS
Your Highness, we are at war. The men are weak without her.

CHARLES
First, the tests.

(Exit DUNOIS and JOAN)

JOAN AND VOICES
(Walking out. Loudly, joined by waiting followers.)
Hail Mary, full of grace, Heaven is with thee...

AGNES
I should have knelt to her, not she to me. Charles, she will take us to Reims. You will put on the royal diadem. With her help, you are France.

CHARLES
We will see. For now I stand and wait. If she is God-sent, we will have the proof.

(AGNES takes his hand as they exit. Enter FALSTAFF.)

FALSTAFF

The bishops probed her with fat fingers to see if

(broadly, holding a finger to his lips, looking around)

—Shhhh!—Satan had ravished her and

(confiding in the audience; stage whisper)

planted demon seed!

(normal voice)

She was as pure as the Virgin who lit up her soul. They asked her, mocking,

(mocking them)

Do your voices speak French? She answered, *They speak better French than you*. They questioned her about the apparitions until another girl would have collapsed, but she answered each one in guileless splendor, eyes aflame. Asked why she refused women's work, she said, *There are plenty of other women to do it.* At the third or fourth repetition of a question, she would say, *Move on*. They made her watch a young witch burn for pagan pleas in forests. Joan stood stony-faced, unflinching at the screams, even the smell of seared flesh. She endured all, answered all. Not a cassocked man of them was half as resolute or credible as the Maid, so they gave her up to Dunois and the fray.

(JOAN comes on in full armor)

She appeared. She stood in silence looking over the French host, her helmet on her arm. The silence deepened to a hush that purified six thousand men.

(stops speaking for a time)

The silence lasted.

(again)

And lasted.

(again; then narrating her moves)

She put her helmet on. She stood erect. The great red plume caught the wind. She shouted,

FALSTAFF and JOAN

Forward for God and France!

(Exit JOAN. Offstage roar and clamor.)

FALSTAFF

The roar of her army shook the earth.

(Exit.)

ACT III

Scene 7

Orléans. A parapet on the city wall. JOAN enters reading.

JOAN

The English Captain calls me strumpet and cow-girl.

(She reads and weeps. DUNOIS enters.)

DUNOIS

Holy maid, do I see tears? Surely their insults do not touch you? God give you strength.

JOAN

No, Bastard, I merely weep for them because they make war on Heaven, an enemy implacable and eternal.

DUNOIS

They know not what they do?

JOAN

They know what they do, but they do not know the punishment. Christ may forgive them, when I bring them down to death. What is your news?

DUNOIS

Sir John Fastolfe, the Champion and Master of the Herrings, approaches with fresh supplies and men for the besiegers.

JOAN

More English men to die and be condemned! I must try to spare them. Herald! Here!

(the HERALD enters)

DUNOIS

They are already holding your last herald prisoner, against the laws of war.

JOAN

If they harm a hair on that boy’s head, they are doomed and damned even more than now. Son of France, you will go to Talbot to demand your comrade back.

HERALD
Sainted Lady, bless me, for I am afraid.

JOAN
(putting a hand on his head)
I feel you shudder. In the name of God, no harm will come to you or your friend. Tell Talbot to arm, and say that I will arm. Let him show himself in front of the city; there we meet. If he takes me, let him burn me. If I discomfit him, let him raise the seige, and let the English get them gone to their own country.

DUNOIS
Say too that English prisoners will answer for harm done to the Maid's heralds.

HERALD
Sacred Maid, I tremble, but I honor you.
(Exit.)

DUNOIS
Lady, you must rest a little.

JOAN
Rest? Rest?

DUNOIS
I only would preserve you in life.

JOAN
I live by God's will, not yours.
(entering one of her trances)
Go down, sir, survey the field, consult your spies. Return to me with news.
(DUNOIS turns to go)
Bastard, bastard! In God's name I command you, as soon as you shall know of this Pascot's coming, you will have me warned of it. For should he pass without my knowing, I promise you that I will have your head cut off.

(DUNOIS nods and exits)

JOAN
(looking up)
My Lady of the clouds, I hear your voice.
(listening)
I well know in the end they will kill me, because they think that when I go, they keep the Kingdom. Even if they had a

hundred thousand more men, they will never have France. But must I be burned to ashes? I would rather have my head chopped off seven times than be burned alive. Yes. I understand. What is decreed is decreed.

(shouting angrily)

I hear you!

JOAN AND VOICE

Daughter of God, go on, go on, go on!

(Exit. Enter FALSTAFF.)

FALSTAFF

There is a splendor in the Maid, I must admit. She is more than just a girl become a man, because she stands alone among men, against men. She does not care for honor, only God and France. If she could fall on her knees and beg Talbot and the Elf to take their armies back across the sea, she would do it in a heartbeat if it would make them leave. Her pleas, like her battle cries, would sound in Heaven. Still I say, Give me life! For though the joys of Heaven last for an eternity, I do not think that they will have the piquant edge and heat of life. Life is the more precious and sweet for all its brevity. It is the grave that makes us live, the taste of dust that reminds us we must love, drink, sing, and be glad. I tell you, do it, as you are a man. And if you are a woman, play along, for you too can revel in the song. Yet you have not come to hear my lullaby, but to see Joan drive us out of France. Or try.

(Exits, but not quite offstage. Holds his brow in one hand, chest in the other, sinks to one knee, then lies on his back. He remains there through the next two scenes.)

ACT III

Scene 8

On the wall of Orléans. JOAN and DUNOIS enter opposite.

JOAN

The heralds?

DUNOIS

Returned safely.

JOAN

My offer?

DUNOIS

Talbot does not want a duel, he wants a war. In war, he has a chance against you.

JOAN

No, he does not, he only offers thousands more to God's sword. But in truth I know not where to wield it. My voices say attack, but should it be against Talbot and these towers, or against that Fascot and his herrings?

DUNOIS

They will soon decide for us I think.

VOICE

(male, shouting)

There is the sorceress!

JOAN

(shouting)

Talbot! Be gone with all your host! Go back across the sea or woe and shame will come upon you. Save your men!

VOICE

Petite putain! Go home and mind your cows! Your men are dogs and fools to follow you!

JOAN

You lie! In spite of you the English will depart or be slain! But as for you, you will not live to see it!

(Noise and clamor below;
looking down; to DUNOIS)
My God! The blood of our people is running on the ground! Why was I not told sooner?

DUNOIS
Maid, leave the wall. Now.

(Enter Herald.)

HERALD
My lady, the attack—

JOAN
Ah naughty boy, not to come and tell me that the blood of France is being shed! Come! Quick! My arms! My horse!

DUNOIS
Lady, get down from the wall!

JOAN
I cannot see French blood but that my hair stands on end and I shake with sacred rage! Yes, descend!
(Exit JOAN and HERALD)

DUNOIS
God protects her but not everyone. Still, at my life’s forfeit, I will follow her. Her voices are my voices, her God my God, even though I promise with my blood. So say all French men who gaze on her, never more to be the way we were.
(Exit.)

ACT III

Scene 9

France. A battlefield.

JACK
Will I be beaten by a girl, again? A false prophetess? A Devil's whore? A limb of the Fiend? A pervert in pants? A sport of nature oozing out of hell? A little squealing sorceress? Talbot is right. Erase her from God's earth or die trying.

WAURIN
The witch's spell puts our men in a trance of dread. After all our losses they believe in her supernal powers, or infernal, and so do I. The priest is frightened even as he blesses them. *Terriculamenta Puellae,* he calls her——terrifying girl.

JACK
Girl! Does he not put strength in them with God's word?

WAURIN
He says he may be struck by a bolt from her quiver all the way from Orléans, but with God's help will stand his ground.

JACK
A superstitious prelate in a Popish frock. The girl needs an hour with me to forget her maidenhood and mad speeches.

WAURIN
Her thighs are cold steel. So say the bishops who tested her.

JACK
Rubbish. Put her in my hands, I'll fuck the living Devil right out of her. Let me talk to the men.

WAURIN
If do or die it is, we die. Our strength's a feather to their iron, halved by slaughter. Men pour from the fields to join the Maid. A few of us sufficed when fear stalked their ranks and we were all passion, but this enchantress strips away our manhood.

JACK
Well, I am not stripped of mine. We will join Talbot's raid. John Fastolf, Knight of the Garter and his father's son, will

not flee before a girl. My armor, Waurin. We will win our reputation back, whether or not we live to hear of it.

(Exit Jack and Waurin.)

ACT III

Scene 10

France. Open plains near Patay. The English camp overlooking the field, before dawn. JACK and the PAGE enter.

JACK

You remind me of myself an age ago, Crusading with the Prince against the heathen, or putting down the wild men of Eire.

(hand on the boy's shoulder)

You must walk across the field with a message.

PAGE

Must I, Master?

JACK

I did it once when I was no more than you. My pants were wet before I reached the other side. The Gaels mocked me in a spectacle of laughter. How fierce they were. And yet we won.

PAGE

But I am not so brave as you.

JACK

A brave man is always frightened. He makes his legs do what his heart tells them not to. You will make your father proud.

PAGE

If you say I must.

JACK

You must. Go to the head of the command. Say, *We will send our three best champions...*

(Exit, JACK's arm around the PAGE. FALSTAFF *bounds* up.)

FALSTAFF

What the Devil? Do you think I'm dead? I'm risen! Big as life and bigger, up for women, sack, and feasting! Soon. But first, the stupid tides of war: It was Saint Joan who didn't want a duel this time. The battle came and went. I can't say I'm sorry I missed it. But my counterpart in knighthood, my fierce False Elf, might say differently. Yes indeed. I think he would!

(Exit.)

ACT III

Scene 11

French field. Enter JACK limping, in armor, looking around.

JACK

No end of flames! An English disgrace. Talbot and his men captured, blaming me. If they had followed my plan. I—

(Enter JOAN in armor.)

JOAN

You are doomed, English knight.
(Her sword pokes his wound.)

JACK

(groaning, doubling over)
God's own pain! That voice. A woman? Not—

JOAN

Kneel. Show me your face, and perhaps I'll show you mine.
(He kneels with difficulty and takes off his helmet.)
It is a good face, handsome for an old man. Like my father's, though it stirs me differently. Declare yourself, doomed man, before I cut your head from your body.

JACK

I am Sir John Fastolfe, Knight of the Garter, Commander of the Bastille, and my father's son.

JOAN

Fastolfe! The Garter did not protect you, for you are struck between it and your manhood.

JACK

To my lasting shame. Do not prolong it, but deliver me your blow. Only let me see you first.

JOAN

Will you not beg God and me for forgiveness?

JACK

God, yes. You, never.

JOAN

Why would God forgive you?

(Removes her helmet.)

For by His grace you are caught in the Maiden's claw, from which no redemption, no deliverance. Were I a shark or crocodile, a lion mother you had robbed of her brood, you might beg pity, but to meet me is certain death.

JACK

The Fiend has made you well. A girl of valor and beauty.

JOAN

The same God made my head as yours, which you will shortly lose. But name me no woman. Beneath this vest of iron beats no heart.

JACK

I believe you. Were you a woman you would sue for motherhood, not war.

JOAN

Do you dare remind me how many mothers of this land you rendered childless? How many children fatherless? How many brides widows? Let England's mothers now be taught despair, and weep like the grieving wives of France.

JACK

I did my duty to the English crown. Your France is ours.

JOAN

No longer. Who called you here to waste our fields, drive farmers from their hearths, and hurl the thunderbolt of war into our cities' hearts? Who taught you to enslave us, to bind France like a barge to your English man-o'-war? It will rot from within while the barge floats free and sets the bravest sails.

JACK

Never. We will never live to see it.

JOAN

I see it now. The day of vengeance. The arms of France hang by the throne of God. You will as well snatch a village from this realm as tear a star from heaven. Once, your rage ploughed across the sacred sea God set between us, and now we corrupt it with your corpses. But the fish will purify it soon enough.

JACK

Your face belies your violence.

JOAN

I am a shepherd maid, accustomed to the crook, not the sword, skipping in fields and woods the livelong day. Yet Heaven snatched me from my girlish games to roam over France, an annihilating angel, spread havoc in the English ranks, and bring you ruin. I make many widows; yours is next.

JACK

Why dally then, my beauty? You are judge and hangman both.

(Pulls his armor from his throat, stretches his neck.)

Execute.

JOAN

I'll grant you this. Your fine head shall not roll down this barren hill, but lie beside your body for your men to find and bury, part and whole. In that wood.

(She gestures. JACK starts to get up, but she presses her swordpoint at his throat.)

Did I order you to stand? Crawl, English knight. I want to see you crawl.

(JACK exits crawling, JOAN follows. Enter FALSTAFF.)

FALSTAFF

His worst fears came true. The Devil's Maid thrashed him, and what she did next laid him lower than the grave. The page? He took a thick cross-bow arrow through his throat. The Elf never forgave himself, and shouldn't. That boy never dipped his wick, downed a cup of sack, or sang drunk and happy through the night. He never lived! God's wounds, if the boy had been my page instead of Fatsoff's. How he would have learned to savor every taste of life! I would have taught him how to live, not die, and he would have loved his life long after I was gone. But he had a different teacher. The False Elf paid, I guess, stripped of the Garter and pissed on by a girl. And she got hers too, cooked to a crisp in Hell-on-earth's flames. The Elf died doddering in his bed, France lost, amid a civil war he helped to bring about, his parched lips cursing the Maid to his last breath.

ACT IV

Scene 1

Caister Castle garden. Night.
Enter MILLICENT and JACK.

MILLICENT
Either you did or you didn’t.

JACK
What?

MILLICENT
Flee.

JACK
Of course I didn’t flee. I saved my men. We were ten times outnumbered. I sent to Talbot to regroup with us on a rise near Patay, where we could wait for reinforcements.

MILLICENT
And he?

JACK
The hothead sacrificed three hundred of his men, plus two thousand captured by that Devil’s slut, including him.

MILLICENT
Good riddance to him then, for he is much to blame and you are blameless. Surely, the young King will see it.

JACK
(Laughs bitterly)
A woman’s logic in a dream world where good and ill are known for what they are.

MILLICENT
What happened, then?

JACK
I was sure he would agree. Sense required it. The men had lost their nerve. Whether she was the Virgin’s angel or the harlot of Beelzebub, she had infernal power over France.

MILLICENT

Beelzebub, then. She got her just reward.

JACK
I like to think of what she felt as the flames rose.

MILLICENT
Feels. Those earthly flames only brought her to eternal ones.

JACK
She said, “Send me back to God, from Whom I came.”

MILLICENT
Her wish was not God’s command. She burned, and burns.

JACK
I was in my own courtroom, full of Garter knights who had been my friends, Talbot’s stiff finger at my head.

MILLICENT
Such friends as those...

JACK
Ten minutes. They decided with a nod of their sage heads. Their chins dropped one by one. Talbot leapt at me, and with a grimace staring in my eyes, ripped the garter off my thigh. He raised it high and gave me the back of his gantlet. I tasted blood.

MILLICENT
A duel then?

JACK
No. No redress for that degradation. To have the slightest chance to get it back, I must never touch a hair of him.

MILLICENT
Law then. Fight for your name and mine, for they are one.

JACK
You don’t think I’m a coward.

MILLICENT
I think no more nor less of you than as I did in Ireland.

JACK
You married me.

MILLICENT

I married you. I disinherited my son for you, as Margaret did hers. Only Margaret made her suitors disappear. I married mine. I gave you everything. Now come to bed.

(Exit.)

JACK

I will get my garter back, or see the Maid in Hell.

(Exit. Enter FALSTAFF.)

FALSTAFF

Or both. He would see her, though not the way he thought. God, I suppose, works in mysterious ways. I spent three days lying there, sullen and afflicted in the smoky air.

(looking up)

But now the light returns. The sun, that wandering knight, is not God I guess, but he is one great seeing eye that gazes on all equally. What are France and England to him? He will just as soon sear the one as crack the other in its turn. France first, a hundred years, then... Well. The Farce Elf did his courtroom tricks, but he was riding for a fall. And the bright girl he made with Alice, called Alice, Alice’s glass forever, grew up and caught a fatal affection. All in the family.

(Exit.)

ACT IV

Scene 2

Parapet of Caister Castle. JACK enters in nightdress shielding a candle, looking around, then at the sea. He kneels holding the candle and tries to put his hands together to pray. JOAN enters in a flowing, clinging, simple dress, blows out the candle. He gasps and turns to watch her as she walks around him, gazing at the sea.

JOAN

Don’t be afraid, Jack. The sea is calm, the night still. The waves slap idly at the stones, against the whisper-wind, the purr of foamy water slipping back. I am a friendly ghost.

JACK

I am not afraid of you. *Terriculamenta Puellae.* Rubbish.

JOAN

Oh? Why do you weep and tremble in the night?

JACK

I fear God. You are nothing. You were nothing.

(With a slight backward wave, she brings his hands to his throat to pull at what is choking him. His distress grows until she pulls her hand in. He can breathe again.)

JOAN

Forgive me, Jack. That was excessive. But you understand.

JACK

What are you? What were you?

JOAN

I? A witch...

JACK

I knew!

JOAN

...of God.

JACK

(Stroking his neck.)

What in Heaven is a witch of God?

JOAN

That is a question.

JACK

Yes?

JOAN

This is where your father first showed you France.

JACK

I lived to make him proud.

JOAN

And you will live to see my sword cut your country. Thorns of roses red and white will bleed all the flower of England's men away, without a French foot on your shore.

JACK

Erase the English nobility? Don't make me laugh.

JOAN

Well, just the males. They will erase themselves.

JACK

What are you babbling about, witch?

JOAN

The future, Jack. Did Alice visit you tonight?

JACK

No. Leave Alice out of this.

JOAN

How long has it been?

JACK

Years. Alice is modest. We disturbed Milly's sleep.

JOAN

You like to fuck Alice, don’t you Jack? Milly not so much.

JACK
How dare you speak so coarsely?

JOAN
Witches of God speak as we will.

JACK
I forbid you speak of Alice and Milly so.

JOAN
Forbid? *Très amusant.*
(JACK clutches his groin,
coughs, catches his breath.)
Alice is of two minds, Jack. She loves you and feels for Milly.

JACK
(coughing)
Millicent is old and cold.

JOAN
You are cold to her.

JACK
Alice is... Alice was...

JOAN
I could encourage her to come again.

JACK
It is none of your concern.

JOAN
Be that as it may.

JACK
What is that supposed to mean?

JOAN
Are you feeling better, Jack? Would you like to fuck *me*?

JACK
I...

JOAN
Yes?

JACK
Yes.

JOAN
Yes what?

JACK
Yes I would like to.

JOAN
You would like to what?

JACK
I—I would like to...fuck you.

JOAN
With conviction please Jack.

JACK
I would like to fuck you. I would like to fuck you!

JOAN
You thought you would, though my sword was at your throat.

JACK
You untied and dropped your pants. You said you loved the lines of my face. I thought...

JOAN
You thought. And then what Jack?

JACK
And then you relieved yourself like a boy and soaked my face and beard.

JOAN
And then?

JACK
And then...you took the sword away. You let me flee.

JOAN
I gave you your life Jack. Your face touched me and I left you your head.

JACK

You laid me lower than the sharpest sword could ever have.

JOAN
And what did you do?

JACK
I...fled.

JOAN
Speak up Jack.

JACK
I fled!

JOAN
Yes. Let me show you something Jack.
(Begins very slowly to unbutton her dress. Jack reaches up. She stops.)
If you want me, you will stay very still.
(Continues until the dress drops away.)

JACK
(in a kind of trance)
Praise God.

JOAN
Indeed. You see, Jack. I am whole.

JACK
The flames...

JOAN
An English soldier carved a cross for me. I held it to my breast, inside my dress.

JACK
Inside your dress. An English soldier?

JOAN
Yes, Jack. But other English raked back the coals to show my charred body, to prove that I had not escaped. They burned it twice more so there would be no relics, and they cast the ashes in the Seine. The executioner greatly feared he would be damned.

JACK

Was he?

JOAN

Not *he.* And as you see...

JACK

The flames...

JOAN

...were very painful, but they did not touch *me.*

JACK

Unspeakable beauty...

JOAN

Milly, Jack? Alice?

JACK

I am nothing but a man.

JOAN

Be that as it may.
(She picks up her dress, puts her arms slowly through the sleeves, and buttons it again from the bottom with painful deliberation. Jack sobs.)
Yes. God be with you Jack.
(Exit.)

JACK

(Stands with difficulty, looks out over the sea.)
Father forgive me. I am nothing.
(Turns slowly, exit. Enter FALSTAFF.)

FALSTAFF

He did not know which Father he meant or what he begged for. At least he didn't go on spitting words at empty air. I said the same often in my time, but to flesh and blood women, not airy apparitions. God I loved them, the piles of flaring petticoats, the plump backs of their knees, their red shoes pointed at the ceiling! The Elf was a cold fish. Slimy. Steeped in bitter brine. The sea soaked his heart in affliction. Still. He had within him that which I had. He just had less fun with it. He suffered more days than not. I lived. Heavens, how I lived!

Well, despite Joan’s secret lesson that night, the Elf was incapable of learning. But she did bring him to the brink of his last act.

(Exit.)

ACT IV

SCENE 3

London. Fastolf Place on the Thames. Enter JACK and WAURIN.

JACK
It can’t be that serious.

WAURIN
They hung the Bishop of Chichester.

JACK
What, in effigy?

WAURIN
In all his living bulk, kicking his fat legs until he was dead. Mutinous sailors chopped off the Duke of Suffolk’s head on the gunwale of a ship at Dover as he fled Cade’s rowdy mobs.

JACK
Cade is a peasant slave and monstrous traitor. He will be put down.

WAURIN
He is a slave who heads an army, and he rouses the rabble to blame you for Normandy?

JACK
Me? I was retired. They cut the supply lines I had long established.

WAURIN
Yes, and the men plundered the French, and the French rallied. Normandy is lost. English refugees and former soldiers swell Cade’s ranks. You cannot stay in London.

JACK
This house is my second home. I will not be driven out by common thieves.

WAURIN
These thieves number many thousands now, and they are at your gates.

JACK
What would you have me do? Flee?

WAURIN
I ordered your most loyal old soldiers to guard this house while we retire for a time.

JACK
To Caister?

WAURIN
That way is blocked.

JACK
What then?

WAURIN
Sire, they have prepared rooms for us in the Tower.

JACK
Humiliation. Abject dishonor.

WAURIN
Just until the rabble is put down. Only the Tower is safe.

JACK
My God. All right. But send Payn to find out what in Hell's name is going on.
(Exit.)

FALSTAFF
So the Fast Oaf sat still in a Tower cell, tapping his richly-booted toes on the worn stone. Tapity-tap. Tap. Quite a step down from Fastolfe Place, not to mention Caister Castle. The London house was huge—a manor house complete with a moat, a wharf, fishponds, and a wide prospect of the Thames—but not so big it couldn't be torn down to build the stews, bear-baiting grounds, and theaters of my time. Yes indeed, I tread the boards—and I do mean tread—
(stomps around dramatically)
less than a stuffed capon's throw from where the Elf's mansion stood, and where he had to run away. Again. At least he could see London Bridge and the Tower, so he knew where to flee to. Meanwhile, a full-scale rebellion broke out, and his man Payn was in for a world of...well. Heh-heh-heh.
(Exit.)

ACT IV

SCENE 4

Blackheath, London. CADE enters followed by a beaten PAYN stumbling between two captors.

CADE
What are you? Who sent you? Why did you send your man away with those fine horses? I could have used them.

(PAYN is thrown down.)

PAYN
Captain, I was afraid.

CADE
Good. You have much to fear.

PAYN
I only came to greet my wife's brothers, who are with your host.

CADE
You lie. I am informed that you are Fastolfe's man. Had he had the courage to face me he would be where you are now.

PAYN
He is my master.

CADE
The greatest traitor in England or in France, Sir John Fastolfe, knight, who wasted all our garrisons in Normandy, Le Mans, and Maine and caused the King to lose his title and inheritance in lands beyond the sea.

PAYN
Captain, he was not there. Those who were went sore against his counsel, which would have saved the King's lands.

CADE
Covetousness like that of your master and his friends fed this treason. Parade him through the camp. In all four corners cry

Oyez and proclaim his treason and his master's. Then bring him to my tent with block and axe, and we will take his head.

(Exit captors with PAYN, CADE separately. Cries of *"Oyez!"* and *"Treason!"* offstage.)

ACT IV

SCENE 5

Fastolfe Place. Enter JACK with a paper, PAYN bandaged, and WAURIN.

JACK

Yet you are here. Amid the spoilage of my house you pledged me to protect.

PAYN

Sire, they brought me to the block four times. Their great rabble would have overrun this house and slaughtered all your household. Your old soldiers were no match for them. There would be nothing left but charred beams and ash.

JACK

So you sent the whole household to the Tower. We were packed there like rats trapped in a hole, while your mob broke open my chest.

(Slaps the paper, reading.)

They took my dearest bonds, my money, a purse with five gold rings, a complete suit of Milan armor, a fine gown of gray woolen cloth furred with fine beaver, and a pair of brigandines covered with blue velvet and gilt nails, with leg armor. This is not protection. How came you by those wounds?

PAYN

Sire, they kept me prisoner until the fight at London Bridge. They forced me on the bridge into the fray. I was in the battle for six hours and could not get out of it, though I was wounded almost mortally.

JACK

All right then, you will make it up to me. Cade is dead and many of his followers hung. All's well that ends well. Waurin, we will go to law. Let us retrieve what we can.

(Exit all. Enter FALSTAFF.)

FALSTAFF

Good old Jack, all about the money. No wonder all his servants hated him. A crowning irony: Cade had him all wrong; he agreed with the mob's demands, though for their methods he would have quartered them with his own claws. The Elf grew confused now. Cade was down, but England's harms had just begun.

(Exit.)

ACT V

SCENE 1

Caister Castle. JACK enters with a cane, an aged WAURIN following.

WAURIN

Are you mad? Look at you. And I am six years farther on. It is a miracle we are even alive. My answer is no, as yours should be.

JACK

Our old band assembles in Norfolk. I can them from the wall. Hundreds flock to them, more every day, armed and ready. They are honor-bound for France and they want me.

WAURIN

How will you lead troops when you can hardly walk?

JACK

I will direct them. The captains will lead. My strategy, not that of the fools who lost France. My logistics. Why do men trust me? Because I never let them go hungry for a day.

WAURIN

And the French? Stronger than ever? With unheard-of advantages in the field?

JACK

The French accept me. I was never as hard on them as Talbot and others. That was how I ruled.

WAURIN

You let your men use their women, Jack. You bragged about it.

JACK

Well. *Me faut faire.* I can't stand here leaning on my cane and do nothing while the world laughs at England.

(MILLICENT enters)

MILLICENT
War games again Jack?

JACK
War is not a game.

MILLICENT
It is at your age, playing in this parlor. Or should be. The Garter Knights were your religion, and you could not even get to the banquet this year. You lacked the strength to go to Windsor.

JACK
Wife, what is your matter?

MILLICENT
You have a visitor.

JACK
Who might that be?

MILLICENT
Richard Plantagenet, the Third Duke of York.

WAURIN
What, York here? Now? Unannounced? Back from exile?

MILLICENT
(Turning to YORK as he enters.)
Here. Now.

JACK
(Passing the cane to WAURIN, stepping firmly forward to grasp YORK's hand.)
Richard, how very good to see you! I thank you for this honor.

MILLICENT
Better hear *his* matter before you thank him.

JACK
I surely will.

MILLICENT
Another lethal mud bath I believe, this time in our gardens.

JACK
Woman, take yourself away.

MILLICENT
Fools, the whole lot of you. War-besotted fools.
(Exit.)

YORK
My matter is a simple one, and urgent. One that appointed me to be my own messenger.

JACK
Speak, my friend. You know my love for you.

YORK
The King’s madness has healed, but his sanity proves worse for the realm. His Lancastrians turn back my reforms. It could not stand. We met their army at Saint Albans; we killed only fifty, but many were lords. Now their sons and brothers want revenge.

JACK
And the King?

YORK
The King is now my prisoner.

JACK
As his grandfather imprisoned another Richard.

YORK
My cousin, a deposed and slaughtered king. I will not return the favor by killing this one. Still, his disorder must not prevail.

JACK
But Cade’s rebellion was put down. London was quiet again.

YORK
London is next.

WAURIN
They say Cade took your part.

YORK
Even a rabble may be right about some things.

JACK
What will you do?

YORK
I will take up residence in the palace. I will march into Parliament, my sword upright before me. I will place my hand on the empty throne.

JACK
And what will the lords do?

YORK
The same as they did for Henry Bolingbroke, this weak king's strong grandsire and your boyhood mentor.

JACK
The great upheaval of my youth. A usurpation. An overthrow.

YORK
Now it returns to haunt them, a great ghost looming over his descendants.

JACK
So you will be King.

YORK
With God's help. But the loyalists are rallying and arming in the north. They seized my seat at York. It cannot stand.

JACK
(Unsteady, grasping WAURIN's arm, taking his cane back)
The White Rose against the Red. The blood of England's best. Her prophecy!

YORK
Whose prophecy? No matter, I don't believe in prophecy, I believe in law and right. In God. When all else fails, in force.

WAURIN
Civil war.

YORK
If so it is, so be it.

JACK
Can it not yet be avoided?

YORK
It is already on.

JACK
Old friend, what do you want from me?

YORK
Your Caister is a jewel for all England, especially in war. I need your wealth, your stores, your troops, and your supply lines. I need your power over Norfolk port. I need your loyalty.

WAURIN
My Lord, you must see Jack as he is. Caister's weapons are old. Our cannons still shoot stone. Our armor is worn and will not stand sword thrusts. Jack is frail.

JACK
Speak for yourself, old man.

YORK
(staring at JACK)
I don't need your body or your rusted mail. I need your word. I need your name. Knights, cross-bowmen, long-bowmen, private soldiers, and all manner of army followers gather in the town below. There will be thousands. Turn them all to our advantage.

WAURIN
They want to go to France. Win back our lands and honor there. Enjoy the fruits of conquest as of old. Not tear England apart and be accused of treason.

YORK
(after staring at WAURIN)
Each will have an honored standing in my realm. You should look to your own standing. Jack?

JACK
(swaying and trembling)
I will see what I can do.
(Walking toward Richard, he stumbles; they catch him.)
I am sorry, Richard, for the weakness of my years. I will speak to the knights. I will see what I can do.

YORK
Gather your strength. Do it today.

(to WAURIN)
Old man, be loyal to your master. He knows his duty. He will rally the knights. Help him down to Norfolk city.

WAURIN
I am loyal, My Lord. I will help him in any way he asks.

YORK
I thank you both and take my leave. I have other calls to make this heavy day.
(Exit.)

JACK
(walking with his cane)
My God. The prophecy. Waurin, I need half an hour's rest. Then we must go down the hill and talk to the knights.
(Exit.)

WAURIN
Madness. Madness.
(Exit. Enter FALSTAFF)

FALSTAFF
Madness or not, The Elf spoke to the knights. He gave a rousing little speech, all things considered. They said, Lead us back to France. I guess they did not see his cane. Or how he leaned on old Waurin. They were themselves torn between the Roses; they wanted no pricks from English thorns, only to win our honor back again beyond the sea. As Waurin helped the Fast Oaf up Caister hill, both slipping and straining on the slope, even the old war-monger had to know that he would not lead these men, neither outward to the fields of France, nor inward to vicious civil war. And war it surely was, England thrashing itself for politics, that dazed clatter of wills. The war in France never drew so much blood. And just as Joan predicted, the very best of the men of England were all killed. The French smiled from afar. *Très amusant*. And for once, in his dotage, The Elf did as I would have done, although with far less joy: He stayed home.
(Exit.)

ACT V

SCENE 2

Caister Castle garden. Enter MILLICENT with pruning shears.

MILLICENT
(snipping rhythmically, as indicated)
Sometimes a woman/ has to force/ the flowers/ by cutting something off./ As with men./ Or else rot and stench/ spoil the fragrance./

(JACK enters.)

JACK
There is news.

MILLICENT
(snipping, speaking dully)
Oh? I am all ears.

JACK
I am brought back. I am whole.

MILLICENT
How very nice, dear. After all these years. Your lawyers finally swayed the knights. Or bribed them enough.

JACK
Resolve, argument, a few deaths of elders, and a small fortune.

MILLICENT
You have long been the richest man in England, so expense is no matter. And now...
(finally looking at him)
...you have your lovely garter back. Why sound so wretched?

JACK
She is too.

MILLICENT
Who is? What? Don’t speak in riddles.

JACK

She. Brought back. The Witch of God. Joan.

MILLICENT
The name you now call at night as often as Alice's.

JACK
I cannot say what God should bring me in my dreams.

MILLICENT
The Devil, rather.

JACK
I am with you.

MILLICENT
Seldom. The tongues of flame ate her whole but yours still savors her.

JACK
They brought her back. They cleared her name.

MILLICENT
Did she get a pretty garter too? Around her charred thigh bone?

JACK
She is loved again in France more than ever. She is known and revered for casting us out.

MILLICENT
Well, you were old enough a girl could have killed you.
(He is stunned at her insight.)
You came home. Part of you. She is at home in France.

JACK
They say she does miracles. Some talk of making her a Saint.

MILLICENT
Saint Joan. How sweet. Perhaps she'll cool off your ravings. Then I'll only have to share you with Alice.

JACK
Will you torment me thus for all my days?

MILLICENT
All mine, in any case. One torment deserves another. Which do you like better, Jack? The white roses or the red?

JACK
What do I know of women’s flowers?

MILLICENT
Just use your eyes, Jack. They are so different. Each ephemeral. Each a beauty in its own way. Each doomed, yet worth embracing while they live.
(She gently cradles one in each hand.)
Look!

JACK
Yes, lovely.

MILLICENT
But which?

JACK
For God’s sake, I don’t know. I like them both the same.

MILLICENT
No need to swear dear.
(He is stifling his next remark with difficulty.)
Come, old garter knight, let us go in to dine. You must fortify yourself against the mortal sin of being humbled.
(She snaps the shears pointedly between herself and him and takes his arm. They exit. Enter FALSTAFF.)

FALSTAFF
Ah poor Elf, snipped at last. She saw through his dissembling to his moist eye, spotted hand, sunk cheek, beard of dirty snow, shrunk shank, and in his ham an ague that struck like a demon’s jaws. The poor boy was blasted with antiquity. And yet, of which of us may it not be said? You too. We are all headed there, if we have luck enough to live. Good luck until it isn’t. How we rush headlong to judgment when we are young in vigor and bold in humours. But the Devil, that grim nurse of our old age, with his ironic ministrations and sly tricks of memory, will have his due, scoffing and grinning, in life or out of it. There was that pain in my chest, and then... My, how he must laugh.
(Exit.)

ACT V

SCENE 3

Caister Castle. STEPHEN enters limping and writing, opposite elderly JACK walking with a cane.

JACK
Scribbling again, my boy? Another missive to me, is it, or back to your old fantasy tale? The King disinherits his children and gets his comeuppance, yes? Doesn't he go mad and kill his wife?

STEPHEN
Father Fastolfe! You *can* read! There is hope for England after all. Now that we've been root and branch torn out of France, our slashers and accountants have time on their hands.

JACK
When we took Paris I bought the Royal Library for 1200 francs.

STEPHEN
I hope you read those books, for you will never see them again.

JACK
I brought some home. What shall I read first?

STEPHEN
Anything about tyrants. You will find a mirror there. Except you have no power now.

JACK
I do what I can.

STEPHEN
Yes. Like me you scratch and scribble all the day. Memoranda. To the government. When you are not scrawling messages to lawyers. Do this in Calais! Do that in Aquitaine! They laugh at you.

(Enter MILLICENT.)

MILLICENT
So bitter. You speak to your father as our French foes would.

STEPHEN

My father died when I was ten, and in a year you wed a hunk of muscle with a vengeful streak, cut me off from my real father's wealth, and sold me as a ward into a house where ill-use and illness marked me forever.

JACK

Your wardship was your education, without which you could not have grown into your noble role.

STEPHEN

Noble? Cripple rather. And when I finally came home, you dragged me off to war, to hobble on the fields of France your slave and the butt of your men's boots.

MILLICENT

He loved you like a father. You paid him back with foul advances upon Alice. Did you think such incest could be borne?

STEPHEN

She was not my sister, and I loved her as I never loved before or since.

MILLICENT

She was your sister, and she pined away for you and died.

JACK

You killed her Stephen. You killed my girl as if you had sunk a knife in her heart. And instead of killing you I paid your way. I still pay your way.

STEPHEN

You killed her, and her death killed me. My God how I loved her! She was the image of her mother, God rest their souls, and she loved me. I lived for three years without a refuge save God.

JACK

You forget I was your refuge. We won then. You were part of it.

STEPHEN

Oh what a man you were! A robust Philistine, forever flexing your muscles, thumping your breast, and thanking heaven you had not a morbid fiber in it. But you did have lust, and greed, and rage. Even lifelong servants call you cruel and vengeful, without pity or mercy.

MILLICENT

He was a man. He *is* a man.

STEPHEN
And I am not. Is that a mother's embrace? But then your arms were ever vise-like and cold to me.

JACK
I am a shadow, soon to be a shade. I marvel that your breast still nurses these old harms.

STEPHEN
You bought and sold me as a beast, against all right and law.

JACK
We tried to make a man of you.

STEPHEN
A man like you?

MILLICENT
And like your first father, famed for his conquests in Ireland as your second father is in France.

STEPHEN
Conquests like fleeing a girl, begging her for his life, and having Talbot rip his garter off like so much wool thread.

MILLICENT
He was reinstated, Stephen. You know that. You are cruel.

STEPHEN
I? I cruel?

JACK
War is a struggle of virtue against fortune. "Hardy" men sacrifice their soldiers for adventure. Real men build their advantage, saving themselves and their troops.

STEPHEN
You could have saved them by not bleeding France. You laid her low and lost her anyway. A flood of desperate Englishmen and our French allies now overrun our shores. You made war for generations and you failed. English blood has fed the vines of France for a century, and what have you to show for it? Nothing.

JACK

We still have Calais and the Channel Islands. If they had listened to me… If they would listen now...

MILLICENT

You know a thousand soldiers clamor in Norfolk town to have your father's leadership.

STEPHEN

Are they the same the French pushed off the Norman beaches? The same who lost your lands in Burgundy? Nothing is left. Your only knighthood now is endless suits in law, and you buy and sell judges just as you did me.

JACK

The loss of France is no fault of mine. I always saw the way. The men knew I would never let them down. I fed them like a wet-nurse and defended them like a lioness. Even the French trusted me. Well. *Me faut faire.*

STEPHEN

Ah yes, the famous motto. You must *do*! You did France and me down to desolation, but she has thrown you off and so will I. (Slaps his papers.) I will write the story.

MILLICENT

You are heavy, Stephen. It is a prison to the soul as sickness to the body—passion for things past and grief for those to come.

STEPHEN

Your weight made me heavy. It sickened me. I carried you both.

JACK

Your gifts could move the stars, but you crawl in ancient mud. The man who does not love himself cannot love others.

STEPHEN

At least I come of noble blood, while you were only dubbed a knight. "My precious son and heir"—so said my real father in his testament. Were you a mother, you would have honored his will.

MILLICENT

Jack thought you would squander all our wealth I agreed. I agree. Come, Jack, before his speeches lay you low.

(She takes JACK's arm.)

STEPHEN

By that marriage only were you made. You wed the right to impale her arms with yours. You display them still. It is the closest you will come to being noble.

MILLICENT

Enough, Stephen, more than enough.

STEPHEN

You were a vulture picking at the corpse of France, but now you cannot even hover over it, and French spies play on Caister beach. Their ships can land soldiers at their whim, but they will not stop us from slaughtering each other.

JACK

May a good God keep you in his governance.

(JACK and MILLICENT slowly exit arm in arm.)

STEPHEN

I will see your deaths. I will bury you. I will have my own.

(Exit. Enter FALSTAFF.)

FALSTAFF

He had his own death of course. As for their wealth, he got that too, and squandered most of it as Jack predicted. He scribbled and scrawled—allegories, fantasies, translations of French versions of the Greeks. His body drove him inward, to live and brood inside his skull—its own *memento mori.* But he didn't write the False Elf's story, Will did. And changed him into me—for the Elf, everlasting humiliation. Milly preceded him into death, poor girl. God might have given her a year without him. In his hour, he stumbled into bed and lay raving about doomsday, tortured by his sins, uncomforted by solemn priests, giving away wealth to nuns, students, and the poor to appease his vengeful God. And haunted by Joan; writhing, grunting, dying with the words "Witch of God" on his lips, uttered with unspeakable love.

(Exit.)

EPILOGUE

A world beyond the grave. Mist. Two low stools six feet apart at center stage. Enter FALSTAFF.

FALSTAFF

Not bad, not bad! Those years in purgatory were no picnic. The Elf, bless his hard heart, got here long before me. I've waited centuries to find him. I think it's centuries. Time plays tricks here. Then again, I haven't seen anyone!

(Enter JACK bewildered, hand on his sword.)

What ho, Knight of the Naked Thigh! Dost draw thy false pole again? You should have made more use of the real one. No. Further down. That's it. Or is nothing there?

JACK

You cur and scoundrel. Draw your own sword and die like a man.

FALSTAFF

Sorry, no can do. Already dead.

(JACK draws his sword and brandishes it. It droops.)

Ah, how the mighty are fallen!

JACK

What is this place? And what are you?

FALSTAFF

I don't know. But it's dull enough it could be heaven.

(Enter JOAN, real-looking, in a radiant green dress.)

JACK

Who is this fine bit of fluff?

FALSTAFF

Her dress is dazzling. Does it blind you? Do you really not know her?

JACK

No, but I would like to. The dress is yours, I'll take the rest.

(Moves on JOAN, strikes an invisible barrier.)

What in Heaven or the Devil's name.

JOAN
Sorry Jack, our love is not to be. Remember when I stood astride you, pressing my sword's point into your groin? You were hard there though softly trembling everywhere. I liked that.

JACK
Who, what are you?

FALSTAFF
Do you not know the Maid of Orléans? The one who took away your manhood? Blood on your pants, no garter on your thigh, no reputation except the name coward?

JACK
(awakening)
My God. Infernal bitch. Where is her armor girding her from nape to knee? Her shield too heavy for a man to carry, emblazoned with the haloed Virgin?

JOAN
Sweet Jack, do you not recall our other visit? On the parapet?

JACK
Bitch of all bitches. Whore of whores. You showed me—

JOAN
Yes. Calm down Jack, we will see each other often. Once a century perhaps. Civility is advisable.

(Two women in white pant suits
roll barrels in and set them
flanking the men.)

FALSTAFF
What in God's name are those?

JOAN
Don't swear John. You get points.

FALSTAFF
Excusez moi! What, if I may know, dear, sainted maiden, is in those barrels?

JOAN
Herrings. You will be very hungry.

JACK
What happens when the barrels run out?

JOAN
They are bottomless. The yield of heaven's sea.

FALSTAFF
Won't we be thirsty?

JOAN
Yes.

JACK
Water?
(JOAN stares at him)
We will die!

JOAN
Not an option.

JACK
Why me?

JOAN
Points also for the *Why-me*. Our guests answer that for themselves. In due time. So much time.

FALSTAFF
But I am nothing but a figment!

JOAN
You came alive on stage, in countless minds. You died for them.

FALSTAFF
So I was fake but my ghost is real?

JOAN
She makes exceptions.

FALSTAFF
Who?

JOAN
She.

JACK
In God's— What kind of Heaven is this?!

(JOAN stares for a long silence.)

FALSTAFF
What? Then it’s the other place?

JACK
Very insightful, you blowhard bowl of blubber.

FALSTAFF
Shut your fast hole, you skinny skein of shit.

JOAN
So many points.
(gathering her patience)
Sit.
(They sit on the stools)
There are many places. Custom-tailored, like both your jerkins.

(They pull their jackets down.)

JACK
Where were we these last centuries?

JOAN
In transit. On a journey.

FALSTAFF
When is the next trip?

JOAN
A couple of eternities. She will decide.

JACK
Who?

JOAN
She.

FALSTAFF
I don’t even like herrings. He ordered them!

JOAN
Be that as it may.

(The women drag in big laundry baskets full of soiled clothes and set them by the barrels.)

FALSTAFF
What are those? They stink more than the herrings.

JOAN
You don't remember?

FALSTAFF
The wives?
(JOAN gazes at him.)
Witches. Withered witches with bed-sores, impervious to wooing.

JOAN
You tried to woo them, but they dumped you.

JACK
You tried to woo other men's wives? It's hard enough to woo one's own.

FALSTAFF
I wouldn't know. I pounded the pub stairs and then pounded the doxies. They liked it.

JOAN
They liked the coins, not you. And when you were spent and stuporous they pilfered more. It helped scratch the itches you left them with.

FALSTAFF
Which itches?

JOAN
Unsatisfied desire. Pox. Aging. Yearning.

FALSTAFF
They loved my swinging sword!

JOAN
Ask them when they come down to visit.
(to JACK)
And the women of France. Remember the mother and daughter your men raped side by side? They held hands.

JACK

No.

JOAN

They will refresh your memory. It’s part of their reward.

FALSTAFF

(looking up)

Down?

JOAN

Their soiled things are in those baskets, with those of the wives and husbands. You will sleep there. The stains will never dry, the odor never fade. It will blossom.

JACK

We chomp on herring and sniff those stinking rags for an eternity?

JOAN

Or two, or three.

JACK

I don’t understand.

JOAN

Yes.

JACK

What do I have to do with his laundry?

FALSTAFF

What do I have to do with his herrings?

JOAN

Be that as it may.

(FALSTAFF rises, walks into an unseen wall, puts his hands on it. He tries another exit. Same. He looks around at JOAN.)

FALSTAFF

So this is the Other Place.

JOAN

One of them.

FALSTAFF

The whores robbed me. The wives beat me. How are they punished?

JOAN
She loves them. They are with her.

FALSTAFF
Who?

JOAN
She.

JACK
(Licks his lips, strokes his beard, grimaces.)
What is this in my beard?

FALSTAFF
And mine.

JOAN
What erupts out of men at their pinnacle of pleasure. Or oozes.

FALSTAFF
But as a penance? It is the source of life.

JOAN
Life, children, legacy. But not as you used it.

JACK
(pawing his beard)
What, harvested from whores?

JOAN
His. Yours from the widows you and your men made and had.

FALSTAFF
But I was not even real.

JOAN
She makes exceptions.

FALSTAFF
Who?

JOAN
She.

JACK and FALSTAFF

I want to be alone!

JOAN

Be that as it may.

JACK and FALSTAFF

Why him?

JOAN

You have so much to discuss.

(Stares for a very long time.)

Do you still not understand?

(Looks from one to the other.)

You are each other’s punishment.

(Exit JOAN. JACK and FALSTAFF stare at each other, both move as if to speak, but fall silent.)

END