

Scene from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

The Merry Wives of Windsor is filled with trickery. At the beginning of the play, the main character, Falstaff, tries to woo not one, but two women—both of whom already have husbands! So the two women— Mistress Page and Mistress Ford—decide to teach Falstaff a lesson. First, they hide him in dirty laundry; then, they make him dress like a woman. Act out their third and final trick here.

Before you begin, make a few (safe) tapers, or candles, by stapling red, orange, and yellow ribbon to the end of a drinking straw. You'll need this prop for the end of the skit. Now, practice stage pinching. How do you act out a pinch (without hurting the actors)? How does the actor being “pinched” respond?

As you perform this skit, pay particular attention to Anne's second speech: “Search Windsor Castle, elves, within and out. Strew good luck, oushs, on every sacred room...” It's quite a tribute to Queen Elizabeth I! How does Shakespeare honor his Queen in these lines?

Characters:

Anne Page
Sir Hugh Evans
Pistol
Falstaff
Others, as Fairies

Act 5, scene 5 (cut)

[Falstaff is hiding on stage.]

Enter Sir Hugh Evans, disguised; Pistol, as Hobgoblin; Anne Page, as Fairy Queen; and others as Fairies, with tapers.

Anne:

Fairies, black, gray, green, and white,
You moonshine revelers and shades of night,
You orphan heirs of fixed destiny,
Attend your office and your quality.
Crier Hobgoblin, make the fairy oyes.

Pistol:

Elves, list your names.
Silence, you airy toys.
Cricket, to Windsor chimneys shalt thou leap.
Where fires thou findst unraked and hearths unswept,
There pinch the maids as blue as bilberry:

Anne:

About, about!
Search Windsor Castle, elves, within and out.
Strew good luck, aups, on every sacred room,
That it may stand till the perpetual doom
In state as wholesome as in state 'tis fit,
Worthy the owner, and the owner it.
The several chairs of order look you scour
With juice of balm and every precious flower.
Each fair installment, coat, and sev'ral crest,
With loyal blazon, evermore be blest!
Away, disperse! But till 'tis one o'clock,
Our dance of custom round about the oak
Of Herne the Hunter let us not forget.

Evans:

Pray you, lock hand in hand; yourselves in order set;
And twenty glowworms shall our lanterns be,
To guide our measure round about the tree.
But, stay! I smell a man of middle-earth.

Falstaff:

Heavens defend me from that Welsh
fairy, lest he transform me to a piece of cheese!

Pistol:

Vile worm, thou wast o'erlooked even in thy birth.

Anne:

With trial fire touch me his finger end.
If he be chaste, the flame will back descend
And turn him to no pain; but if he start,
It is the flesh of a corrupted heart.

Pistol:

A trial, come!

Evans:

Come, will this wood take fire?
[They burn him with their tapers.]

Falstaff:

O, O, O!

Anne:

Corrupt, corrupt, and tainted in desire!
About him, fairies. Sing a scornful rhyme,
And, as you trip, still pinch him to your time.

The Song:

Fie on sinful fantasy!
Fie on lust and luxury!
Lust is but a bloody fire,
Kindled with unchaste desire,
Fed in heart, whose flames aspire,
As thoughts do blow them, higher and higher.
Pinch him, fairies, mutually;
Pinch him for his villainy;
Pinch him, and burn him, and turn him about,
Till candles and starlight and moonshine be out.