



Heather Lynn

Adapted from a medieval French farce
Translated from Old French by
Colin C. Clements and John M. Saunders

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Love in a Kitchen in the Middle Ages

FARCE. Adapted from a medieval French farce. Jack, a henpecked husband, laments the day he married his overbearing wife, who nags him morning, noon, and night. One morning, Jack's wife forces him to write down a long list of chores so that she doesn't have to nag him all the time. But when Jack's wife falls backward, gets stuck in a washtub, and demands that Jack free her, he proudly shows her that it is not on his list!

Performance time: Approximately 15-20 minutes.

Characters

(1 M, 2 F)

JACK: Submissive, henpecked husband who yearns to be the master of his home; short, thin man who is physically smaller than his wife; has big sleepy eyes that give him the appearance of an owl and his hair is disheveled and sticks out from under his red cap; wears wooden clogs; male.

WIFE: Jack's overbearing, demanding wife whose voice has a harsh tone; much larger in stature than Jack; female.

MOTHER-IN-LAW: Jack's elderly mother-in-law who agrees with everything his wife says; has shaggy features and uses a cane; female.

Setting

A kitchen, the Middle Ages.

Set

Medieval kitchen. At the back is a large fireplace. On the mantle are copper and pewter pans. Against the SR wall is a cupboard filled with crockery. Near it is a door leading to outside. At SL, up several steps, is a low door leading to some other part of the house. A table, several chairs, and a churn stand near the center of the room.

Props

Candle or lantern

Jug

Cane

Kettle

Piece of charcoal

Wood board

Wash tub, large enough for Wife to sit in

Several blankets or quilts

Dishes

*“I will be master
of my own house!”*

—Jack

Love in a Kitchen in the Middle Ages

(AT RISE: A kitchen, the Middle Ages, early morning. Jack enters from the door SL, carrying a lit candle or lantern. His hair is matted and disheveled and sticking out from under a little red cap. His big sleepy eyes give him the appearance of an owl. He pauses on the landing, looks about, and clumsily descends the stairs. He moves toward the table, his big wooden clogs clomp loudly as he drags his weary feet over the stone floor. He blows out the candle and places the candlestick or lantern on the table. He goes to the door SL and throws it open.)

JACK: *(To himself.)* The old devil led me well when I stepped into matrimony. *(Goes to the table, picks up the candlestick and places it on a shelf in the cupboard.)* It has been nothing but storm and tempest, care and sorrow...my wife always bustling about arranging things and then her mother disarranging them. *(Looks slightly toward the door SL. Satisfied that no one is coming, he surreptitiously removes a jug from the bottom shelf of the cupboard and takes a long drink, wipes his mouth with the back of his sleeve, and replaces the jug.)* I have no rest. No time. No peace. One of them cries and the other grumbles. One of them curses and the other storms. Whether it is a weekday or a holiday...makes no difference. I am in the midst of discontent. *(Bringing his fist down on the table with a bang.)* I'm tired of all this! I will be master of my own house! I will be mas— *(Sees a light but it quickly fades. His voice trails off into doubt. He removes his cap and scratches his head. Pause. Slowly shaking his head.)* No...no...I've been saying that every morning for 20 years now. It's no use. *(Hopefully.)* But my chance might come sometime. *(Looks out dreamily.)* Sometime...

(Wife appears on the landing SL. Rolling up her sleeves, she descends the stairs. With the aid of a cane, Mother-in-Law follows

Wife down the stairs and slowly and painfully sits down on the last step of the landing.)

WIFE: *(To Jack.)* What are you complaining about? If you are wise, you will be quiet.

JACK: What is the matter now?

WIFE: What? And how should I know? You're always complaining. I have matters of my own to attend. You keep me ever picking up after you. I always have to do over what you have done. I have to see to all the business, or we would starve. I have to do all the work in the house and outside while you do nothing.

MOTHER-IN-LAW: *(Pounding the end of her cane on the floor.)* That is not right! Like a good husband, he should obey his wife!

JACK: But if she—

MOTHER-IN-LAW: If she nags you now and then, it is because it is necessary.

JACK: No! No! Must I suffer all my life? No!

MOTHER-IN-LAW: No? Why? Do you think if your wife chastises you and corrects you from time to time that is bad? Do you call that *suffering*! No! *(Sweetly.)* It is only a sign of love.

JACK: It sounds better than it feels.

WIFE: Come, come, stop this haggling and get the table set for breakfast. *(Jack reluctantly begins to set the dishes on the table.)* You're a much improved man since I married you. *(Goes to the fireplace and sets a small kettle on the "fire.")*

JACK: Improved?! I should improve more if my throat were cut. Improved! *(Lifting his eyes heavenward.)*

MOTHER-IN-LAW: You should always agree with your wife. You should do as she commands.

JACK: Agree? I always do. I wish I dared not to agree with her...just once. Ha! She commands too much. I can't keep track of half she commands me to do.

MOTHER-IN-LAW: In order to remember better, you should write down all she commands you to do.

WIFE: That's an idea! (*Wife approaches Jack. To Jack.*) You shall write it down so you can read and remember all my commands. It will save me a great deal of useless talking.

JACK: I will do nothing of the sort.

WIFE: Go to the fire and bring me a piece of charcoal. (*Jack hesitates.*) Do you hear me?! (*Commandingly points toward the fireplace.*) Go! Bring a large piece. (*Jack cringes but stumbles off to do her bidding. She goes to the cupboard, gets a slab of clean white board and lays it on the table. Jack returns with the charcoal and stands awkwardly holding it out to his Wife. Questioningly, he looks at the board and then at her.*) This board will do. Write what I tell you. It will take lots of room. (*Stands like Napoleon with her chest arched like a pigeon.*)

[END OF FREEVIEW]