

## THE LADY'S NOT FOR BURNING

by Christopher Fry

Richard (19) - Alizon (17)

**The Play:** A rich, poetic and humorous comedy in verse, Fry's *The Lady's Not For Burning* is a magical fantasy set in 15th-century England. Thomas Mendip, a disillusioned soldier recently discharged from service, arrives in a small village and announces to the Mayor that he has killed a man, Matthew Skipps, and that he demands to be hanged for the offense. The Mayor, Hebble Tyson; Margaret, his sister; Tappercoom, the Judge; and the Chaplain will hear none of it, however; they are more interested in punishing witches—namely Jennet Jourdemayne, a beautiful, enchanting creature whom they believe has turned old Skipps into a dog. Jennet denies the charge; she may speak to her dog in French, but she is not a witch. Nevertheless, the Judge sentences her to death. Thomas comes to her defense: why kill a lovely, guiltless woman who does not want to die, and let go free a guilty man who does want to die? Margaret's sons, Humphrey and Nicholas, don't want to see Jennet die either; they are each vying for her attentions. It is Jennet and Thomas who fall in love, however. Along the way, Humphrey's pure fiancée, Alizon, elopes with the man she really loves—the Mayor's equally pure orphaned clerk, Richard. When old Skipps finally turns up, not dead or bewitched but very drunk, a happy ending is ensured.

**The Scene:** Thomas has been speaking to Richard of Jennet's charms, when Alizon arrives and professes her love for the young clerk.

**Special Note:** Try not to fight the graceful rhythms of the verse, which help to communicate the intentions of the characters.

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*(ALIZON enters quickly, shuts door and the sounds cease.)*

ALIZON: *(Just inside door.)* Richard!

RICHARD: Alizon!

ALIZON: I've come to be with you.

RICHARD: Not with me. I'm the to-and-fro-fellow. Tonight. You have to be with Humphrey.

ALIZON: I think I have never met Humphrey. I have met him less and less the more I have seen him.

RICHARD: The crickets are singing well with their legs tonight.

ALIZON: *(Below chair L.)* It sounds as though the night air were riding on a creaking saddle.

RICHARD: You must go back to the others.

ALIZON: Let me stay. I'm not able to love them. Have you forgotten what they mean to do tomorrow?

RICHARD: How could I forget? But there are laws and if someone fails them...

ALIZON: I shall run away from laws if laws can't live in the heart. I shall be gone tomorrow.

RICHARD: *(To her.)* You make the room suddenly cold. Where will you go?

ALIZON: Where will you come to find me?

RICHARD: Look, you've pulled the thread in your sleeve. Is it honest for me to believe you would be unhappy?

ALIZON: When?

RICHARD: If you marry Humphrey?

ALIZON: Humphrey's a winter in my head. But whenever my thoughts are cold and I lay them against Richard's name, they seem to rest on the warm ground where summer sits as golden as a humblebee. So I did very little but think of you until I ran out of the room.

RICHARD: Do you come to me because you can never love the others?

ALIZON: Our father God moved many lives to show you to me. I think that is the way it must have happened. It was complicated, but very kind.

RICHARD: *(Makes slight turn away, then back again.)* If I asked you

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if you could ever love me, I should know for certain that I was no longer rational.

ALIZON: I love you quite as much as I love St. Anthony, and rather more than I love St. John Chrysostom.

RICHARD: But putting haloes on one side, as a man could you love me, Alizon? *(Kneels on her R.)*

ALIZON: I have become a woman, Richard, because I love you. I know I was a child three hours ago. And yet I love you as deeply as many years could make me, but less deeply than many years will make me.

RICHARD: *(Kisses her.)* I think I may never speak steadily again, what have I done or said to make it possible that you should love me?

ALIZON: Everything I loved before has come to one meeting place in you, and you have gone out into everthing I love.

RICHARD: Happiness seems to be weeping in me, as I suppose it should, being newly born.

ALIZON: We must never leave each other now, or else we should perplex the kindness of God.

RICHARD: The kindness of God itself is not a little perplexing. What do we do?

ALIZON: We cleave to each other, Richard. That is what is proper for us to do.

RICHARD: But you were promised to Humphrey, Alizon. *(Crosses to her L.)* And I'm hardly more than a servant here, tied to my own apron-strings. They'll never let us love each other. *(Turns back to her.)*

ALIZON: Then they will have to outwit all that ever went to create us.

RICHARD: *(Taking her hands in his.)* So they will. I believe it. Let them storm. We're lovers in a deep and safe place and never lonely any more... Alizon, shall we make the future, however much it roars, lie down with our happiness? Are you ready to forego custom and escape with me?

ALIZON: Shall we go now, before anyone prevents us?

RICHARD: *(Moves to U.L. door and back to ALIZON.)* I'll take you to the old priest who first found me. He is as near to being my father

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as putting his hand into a poor-box could make him. He'll help us. Oh, Alizon, I so love you. *(Kisses her, takes her R. to below door U.R.)* Let yourself quietly out and wait for me somewhere near the gate but in a shadow. I must fetch my savings. Are you afraid?

ALIZON: In some part of me, not all; and while I wait I can have a word with the saints Theresa and Christopher: They may have some suggestions.

RICHARD: Yes, do that. Now: like a mouse. *(Gives her a quick kiss. ALIZON exits U.R. and off. RICHARD goes to the window.)* Only let me spell no disillusion for her, safety, peace, and a good world, as good as she has made it!