

# The Merry Wives of Windsor

## 4.2

*Enter Sir John Falstaff and Mistress Ford*

**SIR JOHN** Mistress Ford, your sorrow hath eaten up my sufferance. I see you are obsequious in your love, and I profess requital to a hair's breadth: not only, Mistress Ford, in the simple office of love, but in all the accoutrement, complement, and ceremony of it. But 5  
are you sure of your husband now?

**MISTRESS FORD** He's a-birding, sweet Sir John.

**MISTRESS PAGE** (*within*) What ho, gossip Ford, what ho!

**MISTRESS FORD** Step into th' chamber, Sir John.

*Sir John steps into the chamber*

*Enter Mistress Page*

**MISTRESS PAGE** How now, sweetheart, who's at home 10  
besides yourself?

**MISTRESS FORD** Why, none but mine own people.

**MISTRESS PAGE** Indeed?

**MISTRESS FORD** No, certainly. (*Aside to her*) Speak louder.

**MISTRESS PAGE** Truly, I am so glad you have nobody here. 15

**MISTRESS FORD** Why?

**MISTRESS PAGE** Why, woman, your husband is in his old lines again. He so takes on yonder with my husband, so rails against all married mankind, so curses all Eve's daughters of what complexion soever, and so buffets 20  
himself on the forehead, crying 'Peer out, peer out!', that any madness I ever yet beheld seemed but tameness, civility, and patience to this his distemper he is in now. I am glad the fat knight is not here.

**MISTRESS FORD** Why, does he talk of him? 25

**MISTRESS PAGE** Of none but him; and swears he was carried out, the last time he searched for him, in a basket, protests to my husband he is now here, and hath drawn him and the rest of their company from their sport to make another experiment of his suspicion. 30  
But I am glad the knight is not here. Now he shall see his own foolery.

**MISTRESS FORD** How near is he, Mistress Page?

**MISTRESS PAGE** Hard by at street end. He will be here anon. 35

**MISTRESS FORD** I am undone: the knight is here.

**MISTRESS PAGE** Why then, you are utterly shamed, and he's but a dead man. What a woman are you! Away with him, away with him! Better shame than murder.

**MISTRESS FORD** Which way should he go? How should I bestow him? Shall I put him into the basket again? 40  
*Sir John comes forth from the chamber*

**SIR JOHN** No, I'll come no more i'th' basket. May I not go out ere he come?

**MISTRESS PAGE** Alas, three of Master Ford's brothers watch the door with pistols, that none shall issue out. 45  
 Otherwise you might slip away ere he came. But what make you here?

**SIR JOHN** What shall I do? I'll creep up into the chimney.

**MISTRESS FORD** There they always use to discharge their birding-pieces. 50

**[MISTRESS PAGE]** Creep into the kiln-hole.

**SIR JOHN** Where is it?

**MISTRESS FORD** He will seek there, on my word. Neither press, coffer, chest, trunk, well, vault, but he hath an abstract for the remembrance of such places, and goes to them by his note. There is no hiding you in the house. 55

**SIR JOHN** I'll go out, then.

**MISTRESS [PAGE]** If you go out in your own semblance, you die, Sir John±±unless you go out disguised. 60

**MISTRESS FORD** How might we disguise him?

**MISTRESS PAGE** Alas the day, I know not. There is no woman's gown big enough for him; otherwise he might put on a hat, a muffler, and a kerchief, and so escape.

**SIR JOHN** Good hearts, devise something. Any extremity rather than a mischief. 65

**MISTRESS FORD** My maid's aunt, the fat woman of Brentford, has a gown above.

**MISTRESS PAGE** On my word, it will serve him; she's as big as he is; and there's her thrummed hat, and her muffler too.±±Run up, Sir John. 70

**MISTRESS FORD** Go, go, sweet Sir John. Mistress Page and

I will look some linen for your head.

**MISTRESS PAGE** Quick, quick! We'll come dress you straight. Put on the gown the while.

75

*Exit Sir John*

**MISTRESS FORD** I would my husband would meet him in this shape. He cannot abide the old woman of Brentford. He swears she's a witch, forbade her my house, and hath threatened to beat her.

**MISTRESS PAGE** Heaven guide him to thy husband's cudgel, and the devil guide his cudgel afterwards! 80

**MISTRESS FORD** But is my husband coming?

**MISTRESS PAGE** Ay, in good sadness is he, and talks of the basket too, howsoever he hath had intelligence.

**MISTRESS FORD** We'll try that, for I'll appoint my men to carry the basket again, to meet him at the door with it as they did last time. 85

**MISTRESS PAGE** Nay, but he'll be here presently. Let's go dress him like the witch of Brentford.

**MISTRESS FORD** I'll first direct my men what they shall do with the basket. Go up; I'll bring linen for him straight. 90

**MISTRESS PAGE** Hang him, dishonest varlet! We cannot misuse him enough.

*[Exit Mistress Ford]*

We'll leave a proof by that which we will do,

Wives may be merry, and yet honest, too.

95

We do not act that often jest and laugh.

'Tis old but true: 'Still swine eats all the draff'.

*Exit*

*Enter [Mistress Ford, with] John and Robert*

**MISTRESS FORD** Go, sirs, take the basket again on your shoulders. Your master is hard at door. If he bid you set it down, obey him. Quickly, dispatch! 100

*Exit*

**[JOHN]** Come, come, take it up.

**[ROBERT]** Pray heaven it be not full of knight again.

**[JOHN]** I hope not; I had as lief bear so much lead.

*They lift the basket.*

*Enter Master Ford, Master Page, Doctor Caius, Sir Hugh Evans, and Justice Shallow*

**FORD** Ay, but if it prove true, Master Page, have you any

way then to unfool me again? *(To John and Robert)* Set 105  
down the basket, villains.

*John and Robert set down the basket*

Somebody call my wife. Youth in a basket! O, you  
panderly rascals! There's a knot, a gang, a pack, a  
conspiracy against me. Now shall the devil be  
shamed.±±What, wife, I say! Come, come forth! Behold 110  
what honest clothes you send forth to bleaching.

**PAGE** Why, this passes, Master Ford. You are not to go  
loose any longer; you must be pinioned.

**EVANS** Why, this is lunatics; this is mad as a mad dog.

**SHALLOW** Indeed, Master Ford, this is not well, indeed. 115

**FORD** So say I too, sir.

*Enter Mistress Ford*

Come hither, Mistress Ford! Mistress Ford, the honest  
woman, the modest wife, the virtuous creature, that  
hath the jealous fool to her husband! I suspect without  
cause, mistress, do I? 120

**MISTRESS FORD** God be my witness you do, if you suspect  
me in any dishonesty.

**FORD** Well said, brazen-face; hold it out.

*He opens the basket and starts to take out clothes*

Come forth, sirrah!

**PAGE** This passes. 125

**MISTRESS FORD** *(to Ford)* Are you not ashamed? Let the  
clothes alone.

**FORD** I shall find you anon.

**EVANS** 'Tis unreasonable: will you take up your wife's  
clothes? Come, away. 130

**FORD** *[to John and Robert]* Empty the basket, I say.

**[PAGE]** Why, man, why?

**FORD** Master Page, as I am a man, there was one conveyed  
out of my house yesterday in this basket. Why may  
not he be there again? In my house I am sure he is. 135  
My intelligence is true, my jealousy is reasonable. *[To  
John and Robert]* Pluck me out all the linen.

*He takes out clothes*

**MISTRESS FORD** If you find a man there, he shall die a  
flea's death.

**PAGE** Here's no man. 140

**SHALLOW** By my fidelity, this is not well, Master Ford.  
This wrongs you.

**EVANS** Master Ford, you must pray, and not follow the  
imaginings of your own heart. This is jealousies.

**FORD** Well, he's not here I seek for. 145

**PAGE** No, nor nowhere else but in your brain.

**FORD** Help to search my house this one time. If I find not  
what I seek, show no colour for my extremity; let me  
for ever be your table-sport; let them say of me, 'As  
jealous as Ford, that searched a hollow walnut for his  
wife's leman'. Satisfy me once more; once more search  
with me. 150

*[Exeunt John and Robert with the basket]*

**MISTRESS FORD** What ho, Mistress Page! Come you and  
the old woman down. My husband will come into the  
chamber. 155

**FORD** Old woman? What old woman's that?

**MISTRESS FORD** Why, it is my maid's Aunt of Brentford.

**FORD** A witch, a quean, an old, cozening quean! Have I  
not forbid her my house? She comes of errands, does  
she? We are simple men; we do not know what's  
brought to pass under the profession of fortune-telling.  
She works by charms, by spells, by th' figure, and such  
daubery as this is, beyond our element. We know  
nothing.±±Come down, you witch, you hag, you! Come  
down, I say! 160 165

*[Enter Mistress Page, and Sir John Falstaff,  
disguised as an old woman.]*

*[Ford makes towards them]*

**MISTRESS FORD** Nay, good sweet husband!±±Good gentle-  
men, let him not strike the old woman.

**MISTRESS PAGE** *(to Sir John)* Come, Mother Prat. Come,  
give me your hand.

**FORD** I'll prat her! 170

*He beats Sir John*

Out of my door, you witch, you rag, you baggage, you  
polecat, you runnion! Out, out! I'll conjure you, I'll  
fortune-tell you!

*Exit Sir John*

**MISTRESS PAGE** Are you not ashamed? I think you have

killed the poor woman.

175

**MISTRESS FORD** Nay, he will do it.±±'Tis a goodly credit  
for you!

**FORD** Hang her, witch!

**EVANS** By Jeshu, I think the 'oman is a witch indeed. I  
like not when a 'oman has a great peard. I spy a great 180  
peard under his muffler.

**FORD** Will you follow, gentlemen? I beseech you, follow.  
See but the issue of my jealousy. If I cry out thus upon  
no trail, never trust me when I open again.

**PAGE** Let's obey his humour a little further. Come, 185  
gentlemen.

*Exeunt the men*

**MISTRESS PAGE** By my troth, he beat him most pitifully.

**MISTRESS FORD** Nay, by th' mass, that he did not±±he beat  
him most unpitifully, methought.

**MISTRESS PAGE** I'll have the cudgel hallowed and hung 190  
o'er the altar. It hath done meritorious service.

**MISTRESS FORD** What think you±±may we, with the  
warrant of womanhood and the witness of a good  
conscience, pursue him with any further revenge?

**MISTRESS PAGE** The spirit of wantonness is sure scared out 195  
of him. If the devil have him not in fee-simple, with  
fine and recovery, he will never, I think, in the way of  
waste attempt us again.

**MISTRESS FORD** Shall we tell our husbands how we have  
served him? 200

**MISTRESS PAGE** Yes, by all means, if it be but to scrape  
the figures out of your husband's brains. If they can  
find in their hearts the poor, unvirtuous, fat knight  
shall be any further afflicted, we two will still be the  
ministers. 205

**MISTRESS FORD** I'll warrant they'll have him publicly  
shamed, and methinks there would be no period to the  
jest should he not be publicly shamed.

**MISTRESS PAGE** Come, to the forge with it, then shape it.  
I would not have things cool. 210

*Exeunt*