

# The Merry Wives of Windsor

## 2.1

*Enter Mistress Page, with a letter*

**MISTRESS PAGE** What, have I scaped love-letters in the holiday time of my beauty, and am I now a subject for them? Let me see.

*She reads*

`Ask me no reason why I love you, for though Love use Reason for his precision, he admits him not for his counsellor. You are not young; no more am I. Go to, then, there's sympathy. You are merry; so am I. Ha, ha, then, there's more sympathy. You love sack, and so do I. Would you desire better sympathy? Let it suffice thee, Mistress Page, at the least if the love of soldier 10 can suffice, that I love thee. I will not say <sup>a</sup>pity me<sup>o±±</sup> 'tis not a soldier-like phrase<sup>±±</sup> but I say <sup>a</sup>love me<sup>o</sup>.

By me, thine own true knight,

By day or night

Or any kind of light, 15

With all his might

For thee to fight,

John Falstaff.'

What a Herod of Jewry is this! O, wicked, wicked world! One that is well-nigh worn to pieces with age, 20 to show himself a young gallant! What an unweighed behaviour hath this Flemish drunkard picked, i'th' devil's name, out of my conversation, that he dares in this manner assay me? Why, he hath not been thrice in my company. What should I say to him? I was then frugal of my mirth, heaven forgive me. Why, I'll exhibit 25 a bill in the Parliament for the putting down of men. O God, that I knew how to be revenged on him! For revenged I will be, as sure as his guts are made of puddings. 30

*Enter Mistress Ford*

**MISTRESS FORD** Mistress Page! By my faith, I was going to your house.

**MISTRESS PAGE** And by my faith, I was coming to you.

You look very ill.

**MISTRESS FORD** Nay, I'll ne'er believe that: I have to show 35  
to the contrary.

**MISTRESS PAGE** Faith, but you do, in my mind.

**MISTRESS FORD** Well, I do, then. Yet I say I could show  
you to the contrary. O Mistress Page, give me some  
counsel. 40

**MISTRESS PAGE** What's the matter, woman?

**MISTRESS FORD** O woman, if it were not for one trifling  
respect, I could come to such honour!

**MISTRESS PAGE** Hang the trifle, woman; take the honour.  
What is it? Dispense with trifles. What is it? 45

**MISTRESS FORD** If I would but go to hell for an eternal  
moment or so, I could be knighted.

**MISTRESS PAGE** What? Thou liest! Sir Alice Ford? These  
knights will hack, and so thou shouldst not alter the  
article of thy gentry. 50

**MISTRESS FORD** We burn daylight. Here: read, read.

*She gives Mistress Page a letter*

Perceive how I might be knighted.

*Mistress Page reads*

I shall think the worse of fat men as long as I have an  
eye to make difference of men's liking. And yet he  
would not swear, praised women's modesty, and gave 55  
such orderly and well-behaved reproof to all

uncomeliness that I would have sworn his disposition  
would have gone to the truth of his words. But they  
do no more adhere and keep place together than the  
hundred and fifty psalms to the tune of 'Greensleeves'. 60

What tempest, I trow, threw this whale, with so many  
tuns of oil in his belly, ashore at Windsor? How shall  
I be revenged on him? I think the best way were to  
entertain him with hope, till the wicked fire of lust  
have melted him in his own grease. Did you ever hear 65  
the like?

**MISTRESS PAGE** Letter for letter, but that the name of Page  
and Ford differs.

*She gives Mistress Ford her letter*

To thy great comfort in this mystery of ill opinions,  
here's the twin brother of thy letter. But let thine 70

inherit first, for I protest mine never shall. I warrant  
he hath a thousand of these letters, writ with blank  
space for different names±±sure, more, and these are  
of the second edition. He will print them, out of doubt±±  
for he cares not what he puts into the press when he 75  
would put us two. I had rather be a giantess, and lie  
under Mount Pelion. Well, I will find you twenty  
lascivious turtles ere one chaste man.

**MISTRESS FORD** Why, this is the very same: the very hand,  
the very words. What doth he think of us? 80

**MISTRESS PAGE** Nay, I know not. It makes me almost ready  
to wrangle with mine own honesty. I'll entertain myself  
like one that I am not acquainted withal; for, sure,  
unless he know some strain in me that I know not  
myself, he would never have boarded me in this fury. 85

**MISTRESS FORD** `Boarding' call you it? I'll be sure to keep  
him above deck.

**MISTRESS PAGE** So will I. If he come under my hatches,  
I'll never to sea again. Let's be revenged on him. Let's  
appoint him a meeting, give him a show of comfort in 90  
his suit, and lead him on with a fine baited delay till  
he hath pawned his horses to mine Host of the Garter.

**MISTRESS FORD** Nay, I will consent to act any villainy  
against him that may not sully the chariness of our  
honesty. O that my husband saw this letter! It would 95  
give eternal food to his jealousy.

*Enter Master Ford with Pistol, and Master Page  
with Nim*

**MISTRESS PAGE** Why, look where he comes, and my  
goodman too. He's as far from jealousy as I am from  
giving him cause; and that, I hope, is an unmeasurable  
distance. 100

**MISTRESS FORD** You are the happier woman.

**MISTRESS PAGE** Let's consult together against this greasy  
knight. Come hither.

*They withdraw.*

**FORD** Well, I hope it be not so.

**PISTOL**

Hope is a curtal dog in some affairs. 105  
Sir John affects thy wife.

**FORD** Why, sir, my wife is not young.

**PISTOL**

He woos both high and low, both rich and poor,  
Both young and old, one with another, Ford.  
He loves the gallimaufry, Ford. Perpend. 110

**FORD** Love my wife?

**PISTOL**

With liver burning hot. Prevent,  
Or go thou like Sir Actaeon, he,  
With Ringwood at thy heels.  
O, odious is the name! 115

**FORD** What name, sir?

**PISTOL** The horn, I say. Farewell.

Take heed; have open eye; for thieves do foot by night.  
Take heed ere summer comes, or cuckoo-birds do  
sing.±±  
Away, Sir Corporal Nim!±±Believe it, Page; he speaks  
sense. 120

*Exit*

**FORD** (*aside*) I will be patient. I will find out this.

**NIM** (*to Page*) And this is true. I like not the humour of  
lying. He hath wronged me in some humours. I should  
have borne the humoured letter to her; but I have a  
sword, and it shall bite upon my necessity. He loves 125  
your wife. There's the short and the long.  
My name is Corporal Nim. I speak and I avouch 'tis  
true.

My name is Nim, and Falstaff loves your wife. Adieu.  
I love not the humour of bread and cheese. Adieu.

*Exit*

**PAGE** (*aside*) The humour of it, quoth a? Here's a fellow 130  
frights English out of his wits.

**FORD** (*aside*) I will seek out Falstaff.

**PAGE** (*aside*) I never heard such a drawling, affecting  
rogue.

**FORD** (*aside*) If I do find it±±well. 135

**PAGE** (*aside*) I will not believe such a Cathayan though  
the priest o'th' town commended him for a true man.

**FORD** (*aside*) 'Twas a good, sensible fellow. Well.

*Mistress Page and Mistress Ford come forward*

**PAGE** How now, Meg?

**MISTRESS PAGE** Whither go you, George? Hark you. 140

*They talk apart*

**MISTRESS FORD** How now, sweet Frank? Why art thou melancholy?

**FORD** I melancholy? I am not melancholy. Get you home, go.

**MISTRESS FORD** Faith, thou hast some crotchets in thy head now. Will you go, Mistress Page? 145

**MISTRESS PAGE** Have with you.±±You'll come to dinner, George?

*Enter Mistress Quickly*

*(Aside to Mistress Ford)* Look who comes yonder. She shall be our messenger to this paltry knight. 150

**MISTRESS FORD** *(aside to Mistress Page)* Trust me, I thought on her. She'll fit it.

**MISTRESS PAGE** *(to Mistress Quickly)* You are come to see my daughter Anne?

**MISTRESS QUICKLY** Ay, forsooth; and I pray how does good Mistress Anne? 155

**MISTRESS PAGE** Go in with us and see. We have an hour's talk with you.

*Exeunt Mistress Page, Mistress Ford, and Mistress Quickly*

**PAGE** How now, Master Ford?

**FORD** You heard what this knave told me, did you not? 160

**PAGE** Yes, and you heard what the other told me?

**FORD** Do you think there is truth in them?

**PAGE** Hang 'em, slaves! I do not think the knight would offer it. But these that accuse him in his intent towards our wives are a yoke of his discarded men±±very rogues, 165 now they be out of service.

**FORD** Were they his men?

**PAGE** Marry, were they.

**FORD** I like it never the better for that. Does he lie at the Garter? 170

**PAGE** Ay, marry, does he. If he should intend this voyage toward my wife, I would turn her loose to him; and what he gets more of her than sharp words, let it lie on my head.

**FORD** I do not misdoubt my wife, but I would be loath to 175  
turn them together. A man may be too confident. I  
would have nothing lie on my head. I cannot be thus  
satisfied.

*Enter the Host of the Garter*

**PAGE** Look where my ranting Host of the Garter comes.  
There is either liquor in his pate or money in his purse 180  
when he looks so merrily.±±How now, mine Host?

**HOST** God bless you, bully rook, God bless you! Thou'rt  
a gentleman.

*Enter Shallow*

Cavaliero Justice, I say!

**SHALLOW** I follow, mine Host, I follow.±±Good even and 185  
twenty, good Master Page. Master Page, will you go  
with us? We have sport in hand.

**HOST** Tell him, Cavaliero Justice, tell him, bully rook.

**SHALLOW** Sir, there is a fray to be fought between Sir  
Hugh, the Welsh priest, and Caius, the French doctor. 190

**FORD** Good mine Host o'th' Garter, a word with you.

**HOST** What sayst thou, my bully rook?

*They talk apart*

**SHALLOW** (to Page) Will you go with us to behold it? My  
merry Host hath had the measuring of their weapons,  
and, I think, hath appointed them contrary places. For, 195  
believe me, I hear the parson is no jester. Hark, I will  
tell you what our sport shall be.

*They talk apart*

**HOST** (to Ford) Hast thou no suit against my knight, my  
guest cavaliero?

**[FORD]** None, I protest. But I'll give you a pottle of burnt 200  
sack to give me recourse to him and tell him my name  
is Brooke±±only for a jest.

**HOST** My hand, bully. Thou shalt have egress and  
regress±±said I well?±±and thy name shall be Brooke.  
It is a merry knight. (To Shallow and Page) Will you go, 205  
mijn'heers?

**SHALLOW** Have with you, mine Host.

**PAGE** I have heard the Frenchman hath good skill in his  
rapier.

**SHALLOW** Tut, sir, I could have told you more. In these 210

times you stand on distance±±your passes, stoccados,  
and I know not what. 'Tis the heart, Master Page;  
[showing his rapier-passes] 'tis here, 'tis here. I have  
seen the time with my long sword I would have made  
you four tall fellows skip like rats. 215

**HOST** Here, boys; here, here! Shall we wag?

**PAGE** Have with you. I had rather hear them scold than  
fight.

*Exeunt Host, Shallow, and Page*

**FORD** Though Page be a secure fool and stands so firmly  
on his wife's frailty, yet I cannot put off my opinion so 220  
easily. She was in his company at Page's house, and  
what they made there I know not. Well, I will look  
further into't; and I have a disguise to sound Falstaff.  
If I find her honest, I lose not my labour. If she be  
otherwise, 'tis labour well bestowed. 225

*Exit*