

The Merry Wives of Windsor

3.5

Enter Sir John Falstaff

SIR JOHN Bardolph, I say!

Enter Bardolph

BARDOLPH Here, sir.

SIR JOHN Go fetch me a quart of sack; put a toast in't.

Exit Bardolph

Have I lived to be carried in a basket like a barrow of
butcher's offal, and to be thrown in the Thames? Well,
if I be served such another trick, I'll have my brains
ta'en out and buttered, and give them to a dog for a
New Year's gift. 'Sblood, the rogues slighted me into
the river with as little remorse as they would have
drowned a blind bitch's puppies, fifteen i'th' litter! And
you may know by my size that I have a kind of alacrity
in sinking. If the bottom were as deep as hell, I should
down. I had been drowned, but that the shore was
shelvy and shallow±±a death that I abhor, for the water
swells a man, and what a thing should I have been
when I had been swelled? By the Lord, a mountain of
mummy!

5

Enter Bardolph, with [two large cups of] sack

BARDOLPH Here's Mistress Quickly, sir, to speak with you.

SIR JOHN Come, let me pour in some sack to the Thames'
water, for my belly's as cold as if I had swallowed
snowballs for pills to cool the reins.

20

He drinks

Call her in.

BARDOLPH Come in, woman!

Enter Mistress Quickly

MISTRESS QUICKLY (to Sir John) By your leave; I cry you
mercy. Give your worship good morrow!

25

SIR JOHN ([drinking, then] speaking to Bardolph) Take away
these chalices. Go brew me a pottle of sack, finely.

BARDOLPH With eggs, sir?

SIR JOHN Simple of itself. I'll no pullet-sperms in my
brewage.

30

Exit Bardolph, [with cups]

How now?

MISTRESS QUICKLY Marry, sir, I come to your worship from Mistress Ford.

SIR JOHN Mistress Ford? I have had ford enough: I was thrown into the ford, I have my belly full of ford. 35

MISTRESS QUICKLY Alas the day, good heart, that was not her fault. She does so take on with her men; they mistook their erection.

SIR JOHN So did I mine, to build upon a foolish woman's promise. 40

MISTRESS QUICKLY Well, she laments, sir, for it, that it would yearn your heart to see it. Her husband goes this morning a-birding. She desires you once more to come to her, between eight and nine. I must carry her word quickly. She'll make you amends, I warrant you. 45

SIR JOHN Well, I will visit her. Tell her so, and bid her think what a man is; let her consider his frailty, and then judge of my merit.

MISTRESS QUICKLY I will tell her.

SIR JOHN Do so. Between nine and ten, sayst thou? 50

MISTRESS QUICKLY Eight and nine, sir.

SIR JOHN Well, be gone. I will not miss her.

MISTRESS QUICKLY Peace be with you, sir.

Exit

SIR JOHN I marvel I hear not of Master Brooke; he sent me word to stay within. I like his money well. 55

Enter Master Ford, disguised as Brooke

By the mass, here he comes.

FORD God bless you, sir.

SIR JOHN Now, Master Brooke, you come to know what hath passed between me and Ford's wife.

FORD That indeed, Sir John, is my business. 60

SIR JOHN Master Brooke, I will not lie to you. I was at her house the hour she appointed me.

FORD And sped you, sir?

SIR JOHN Very ill-favouredly, Master Brooke.

FORD How so, sir? Did she change her determination? 65

SIR JOHN No, Master Brooke, but the peaking cornuto her husband, Master Brooke, dwelling in a continual 'larum

of jealousy, comes me in the instant of our encounter±±
after we had embraced, kissed, protested, and, as it
were, spoke the prologue of our comedy±±and at his 70
heels a rabble of his companions, thither provoked and
instigated by his distemper, and, forsooth, to search his
house for his wife's love.

FORD What, while you were there?

SIR JOHN While I was there. 75

FORD And did he search for you, and could not find you?

SIR JOHN You shall hear. As God would have it, comes
in one Mistress Page, gives intelligence of Ford's
approach, and, by her invention and Ford's wife's
distraction, they conveyed me into a buck-basket±± 80

FORD A buck-basket?

SIR JOHN By the Lord, a buck-basket!±±rammed me in
with foul shirts and smocks, socks, foul stockings,
greasy napkins, that, Master Brooke, there was the
rankest compound of villainous smell that ever offended 85
nostril.

FORD And how long lay you there?

SIR JOHN Nay, you shall hear, Master Brooke, what I have
suffered to bring this woman to evil, for your good.
Being thus crammed in the basket, a couple of Ford's 90
knaves, his hinds, were called forth by their mistress,
to carry me, in the name of foul clothes, to Datchet
Lane. They took me on their shoulders, met the jealous
knave their master in the door, who asked them once
or twice what they had in their basket. I quaked for 95
fear lest the lunatic knave would have searched it, but
fate, ordaining he should be a cuckold, held his hand.
Well, on went he for a search, and away went I for
foul clothes. But mark the sequel, Master Brooke. I
suffered the pangs of three several deaths. First, an 100
intolerable fright, to be detected with a jealous rotten
bell-wether. Next, to be compassed like a good bilbo in
the circumference of a peck, hilt to point, heel to head.
And then, to be stopped in, like a strong distillation,
with stinking clothes that fretted in their own grease. 105
Think of that±±a man of my kidney±±think of that±±
that am as subject to heat as butter, a man of continual

dissolution and thaw. It was a miracle to scape
suffocation. And in the height of this bath, when I was
more than half stewed in grease like a Dutch dish, to 110
be thrown into the Thames and cooled, glowing-hot,
in that surge, like a horseshoe. Think of that±±hissing
hot±±think of that, Master Brooke!

FORD In good sadness, sir, I am sorry that for my sake
you have suffered all this. My suit then is desperate. 115
You'll undertake her no more?

SIR JOHN Master Brooke, I will be thrown into Etna as I
have been into Thames ere I will leave her thus. Her
husband is this morning gone a-birding. I have received
from her another embassy of meeting. 'Twixt eight and 120
nine is the hour, Master Brooke.

FORD 'Tis past eight already, sir.

SIR JOHN Is it? I will then address me to my appointment.
Come to me at your convenient leisure, and you shall
know how I speed; and the conclusion shall be crowned 125
with your enjoying her. Adieu. You shall have her,
Master Brooke; Master Brooke, you shall cuckold Ford.

Exit

FORD Hum! Ha! Is this a vision? Is this a dream? Do I
sleep? Master Ford, awake! Awake, Master Ford!
There's a hole made in your best coat, Master Ford. 130
This 'tis to be married! This 'tis to have linen and
buck-baskets! Well, I will proclaim myself what I am.
I will now take the lecher. He is at my house. He
cannot scape me; 'tis impossible he should. He cannot
creep into a halfpenny purse, nor into a pepperbox. 135
But lest the devil that guides him should aid him, I will
search impossible places. Though what I am I cannot
avoid, yet to be what I would not shall not make me
tame. If I have horns to make one mad, let the proverb
go with me: I'll be horn-mad. 140

Exit