

The Merry Wives of Windsor

1.1

Enter Justice Shallow, Master Slender, and Sir Hugh Evans

SHALLOW Sir Hugh, persuade me not. I will make a Star Chamber matter of it. If he were twenty Sir John Falstaffs, he shall not abuse Robert Shallow, Esquire.

SLENDER In the county of Gloucester, Justice of Peace and Coram. 5

SHALLOW Ay, cousin Slender, and Custalorum.

SLENDER Ay, and Ratolorum too; and a gentleman born, Master Parson, who writes himself `Armigero' in any bill, warrant, quittance, or obligation: `Armigero'.

SHALLOW Ay, that I do, and have done any time these 10 three hundred years.

SLENDER All his successors gone before him hath done't, and all his ancestors that come after him may. They may give the dozen white luses in their coat.

SHALLOW It is an old coat. 15

EVANS The dozen white louses do become an old coad well. It agrees well passant: it is a familiar beast to man, and signifies love.

SHALLOW The luce is the fresh fish; the salt fish is an old cod. 20

SLENDER I may quarter, coz.

SHALLOW You may, by marrying.

EVANS It is marring indeed if he quarter it.

SHALLOW Not a whit.

EVANS Yes, py'r Lady. If he has a quarter of your coat, 25 there is but three skirts for yourself, in my simple conjectures. But that is all one. If Sir John Falstaff have committed disparagements unto you, I am of the Church, and will be glad to do my benevolence to make atonements and compromises between you. 30

SHALLOW The Council shall hear it; it is a riot.

EVANS It is not meet the Council hear a riot. There is no fear of Got in a riot. The Council, look you, shall desire to hear the fear of Got, and not to hear a riot. Take

your 'visaments in that.

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SHALLOW Ha! O' my life, if I were young again, the sword should end it.

EVANS It is petter that friends is the sword and end it. And there is also another device in my prain, which peradventure prings goot discretions with it. There is Anne Page which is daughter to Master George Page, which is pretty virginity.

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SLENDER Mistress Anne Page? She has brown hair, and speaks small like a woman?

EVANS It is that fery person for all the 'orld, as just as you will desire. And seven hundred pounds of moneys, and gold and silver, is her grandsire upon his death's-bed±±Got deliver to a joyful resurrections±±give, when she is able to overtake seventeen years old. It were a goot motion if we leave our pribbles and prabbles, and desire a marriage between Master Abraham and Mistress Anne Page.

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SLENDER Did her grandsire leave her seven hundred pound?

EVANS Ay, and her father is make her a petter penny.

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[SHALLOW] I know the young gentlewoman. She has good gifts.

EVANS Seven hundred pounds and possibilities is goot gifts.

SHALLOW Well, let us see honest Master Page. Is Falstaff there?

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EVANS Shall I tell you a lie? I do despise a liar as I do despise one that is false, or as I despise one that is not true. The knight Sir John is there, and I beseech you be ruled by your well-willers. I will peat the door for Master Page.

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He knocks on the door

What ho! Got pless your house here!

PAGE *[within]* Who's there?

EVANS Here is Got's plessing and your friend, and Justice Shallow, and here young Master Slender, that peradventures shall tell you another tale if matters grow to your likings.

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[Enter Master Page]

PAGE I am glad to see your worships well. I thank you
for my venison, Master Shallow.

SHALLOW Master Page, I am glad to see you. Much good 75
do it your good heart! I wished your venison better; it
was ill killed.±±How doth good Mistress Page?±±And I
thank you always with my heart, la, with my heart.

PAGE Sir, I thank you.

SHALLOW Sir, I thank you. By yea and no, I do. 80

PAGE I am glad to see you, good Master Slender.

SLENDER How does your fallow greyhound, sir? I heard
say he was outrun on Cotswold.

PAGE It could not be judged, sir.

SLENDER You'll not confess, you'll not confess. 85

SHALLOW That he will not. 'Tis your fault, 'tis your fault.
(To Page) 'Tis a good dog.

PAGE A cur, sir.

SHALLOW Sir, he's a good dog and a fair dog. Can there
be more said? He is good and fair. Is Sir John Falstaff 90
here?

PAGE Sir, he is within; and I would I could do a good
office between you.

EVANS It is spoke as a Christians ought to speak.

SHALLOW He hath wronged me, Master Page. 95

PAGE Sir, he doth in some sort confess it.

SHALLOW If it be confessed, it is not redressed. Is not that
so, Master Page? He hath wronged me; indeed he
hath; at a word, he hath. Believe me, Robert Shallow,
Esquire, saith he is wronged. 100

Enter Sir John Falstaff, Bardolph, Nim, and Pistol

PAGE Here comes Sir John.

SIR JOHN Now, Master Shallow, you'll complain of me to
the King?

SHALLOW Knight, you have beaten my men, killed my
deer, and broke open my lodge. 105

SIR JOHN But not kissed your keeper's daughter?

SHALLOW Tut, a pin. This shall be answered.

SIR JOHN I will answer it straight: I have done all this.
That is now answered.

SHALLOW The Council shall know this. 110

SIR JOHN 'Twere better for you if it were known in counsel.

You'll be laughed at.

EVANS *Pauca verba*, Sir John, good worts.

SIR JOHN Good worts? Good cabbage!±±Slender, I broke
your head. What matter have you against me? 115

SLENDER Marry, sir, I have matter in my head against
you, and against your cony-catching rascals, Bardolph,
Nim, and Pistol.

BARDOLPH You Banbury cheese!

SLENDER Ay, it is no matter. 120

PISTOL How now, Mephistopheles?

SLENDER Ay, it is no matter.

NIM Slice, I say *pauca, pauca*. Slice, that's my humour.

SLENDER (*to Shallow*) Where's Simple, my man? Can you
tell, cousin? 125

EVANS Peace, I pray you. Now let us understand. There
is three umpires in this matter, as I understand: that
is, Master Page, fidelicet Master Page; and there is
myself, fidelicet myself; and the three party is, lastly
and finally, mine Host of the Garter. 130

PAGE We three to hear it, and end it between them.

EVANS Fery goot. I will make a prief of it in my notebook,
and we will afterwards 'ork upon the cause with as
great discreetly as we can.

SIR JOHN Pistol. 135

PISTOL He hears with ears.

EVANS The tevil and his tam! What phrase is this? `He
hears with ear! Why, it is affectations.

SIR JOHN Pistol, did you pick Master Slender's purse?

SLENDER Ay, by these gloves did he±±or I would I might 140
never come in mine own great chamber again else±±
of seven groats in mill-sixpences, and two Edward
shovel-boards that cost me two shilling and twopence
apiece of Ed Miller. By these gloves.

SIR JOHN Is this true, Pistol? 145

EVANS No, it is false, if it is a pickpurse.

PISTOL

Ha, thou mountain-foreigner! Sir John and master
mine,

I combat challenge of this latten bilbo.±±

Word of denial in thy *labras* here,

Word of denial: froth and scum, thou liest. 150

SLENDER (*pointing to Nim*) By these gloves, then, 'twas he.

NIM Be advised, sir, and pass good humours. I will say
 'marry, trap with you' if you run the nuthook's humour
 on me. That is the very note of it.

SLENDER By this hat, then, he in the red face had it. For 155
 though I cannot remember what I did when you made
 me drunk, yet I am not altogether an ass.

SIR JOHN (*to Bardolph*) What say you, Scarlet and John?

BARDOLPH Why, sir, for my part I say the gentleman had
 drunk himself out of his five sentences. 160

EVANS It is 'his five senses'. Fie, what the ignorance is!

BARDOLPH And being fap, sir, was, as they say, cashiered.
 And so conclusions passed the careers.

SLENDER Ay, you spake in Latin then, too. But 'tis no
 matter. I'll ne'er be drunk, whilst I live, again, but in 165
 honest, civil, godly company, for this trick. If I be
 drunk, I'll be drunk with those that have the fear of
 God, and not with drunken knaves.

EVANS So Got 'udge me, that is a virtuous mind.

SIR JOHN You hear all these matters denied, gentlemen, 170
 you hear it.

Enter Anne Page, with wine

PAGE Nay, daughter, carry the wine in; we'll drink
 within.

Exit Anne

SLENDER O heaven, this is Mistress Anne Page!
[Enter at another door Mistress Ford and Mistress Page]

PAGE How now, Mistress Ford? 175

SIR JOHN Mistress Ford, by my troth, you are very well
 met. By your leave, good mistress.
[He kisses her]

PAGE Wife, bid these gentlemen welcome.±±Come, we
 have a hot venison pasty to dinner. Come, gentlemen,
 I hope we shall drink down all unkindness. 180

Exeunt all but Slender

SLENDER I had rather than forty shillings I had my book
 of songs and sonnets here.
Enter Simple

How now, Simple, where have you been? I must wait
on myself, must I? You have not the book of riddles
about you, have you? 185

SIMPLE Book of riddles? Why, did you not lend it to Alice
Shortcake upon Allhallowmas last, a fortnight afore
Michaelmas?

Enter Shallow and Evans

SHALLOW *(to Slender)* Come, coz; come, coz; we stay for
you. *(Aside to him)* A word with you, coz. 190

He draws Slender aside

Marry, this, coz: there is, as 'twere, a tender, a kind
of tender, made afar off by Sir Hugh here. Do you
understand me?

SLENDER Ay, sir, you shall find me reasonable. If it be so,
I shall do that that is reason. 195

SHALLOW Nay, but understand me.

SLENDER So I do, sir.

EVANS Give ear to his motions. Master Slender, I will
description the matter to you, if you be capacity of it.

SLENDER Nay, I will do as my cousin Shallow says. I pray 200
you pardon me. He's a Justice of Peace in his country,
simple though I stand here.

EVANS But that is not the question. The question is
concerning your marriage.

SHALLOW Ay, there's the point, sir. 205

EVANS Marry, is it, the very point of it±±to Mistress Anne
Page.

SLENDER Why, if it be so, I will marry her upon any
reasonable demands.

EVANS But can you affection the 'oman? Let us command 210
to know that of your mouth, or of your lips±±for divers
philosophers hold that the lips is parcel of the mouth.
Therefore, precisely, can you carry your good will to
the maid?

SHALLOW Cousin Abraham Slender, can you love her? 215

SLENDER I hope, sir, I will do as it shall become one that
would do reason.

EVANS Nay, Got's lords and his ladies, you must speak
positable if you can carry her your desires towards her.

SHALLOW That you must. Will you, upon good dowry, 220

marry her?

SLENDER I will do a greater thing than that upon your request, cousin, in any reason.

SHALLOW Nay, conceive me, conceive me, sweet coz. What I do is to pleasure you, coz. Can you love the 225 maid?

SLENDER I will marry her, sir, at your request. But if there be no great love in the beginning, yet heaven may decrease it upon better acquaintance, when we are married and have more occasion to know one another. 230 I hope upon familiarity will grow more contempt. But if you say `marry her', I will marry her. That I am freely dissolved, and dissolutely.

EVANS It is a fery discretion answer, save the faul' is in the 'ord `dissolutely'. The 'ort is, according to our 235 meaning, `resolutely'. His meaning is good.

SHALLOW Ay, I think my cousin meant well.

SLENDER Ay, or else I would I might be hanged, la.

Enter Anne Page

SHALLOW Here comes fair Mistress Anne.±±Would I were young for your sake, Mistress Anne. 240

ANNE The dinner is on the table. My father desires your worships' company.

SHALLOW I will wait on him, fair Mistress Anne.

EVANS 'Od's plessed will, I will not be absence at the grace. 245

Exeunt Shallow and Evans

ANNE (to Slender) Will't please your worship to come in, sir?

SLENDER No, I thank you, forsooth, heartily; I am very well.

ANNE The dinner attends you, sir. 250

SLENDER I am not a-hungry, I thank you, forsooth. (To Simple) Go, sirrah; for all you are my man, go wait upon my cousin Shallow.

Exit Simple

A Justice of Peace sometime may be beholden to his friend for a man. I keep but three men and a boy yet, 255 till my mother be dead. But what though? Yet I live like a poor gentleman born.

ANNE I may not go in without your worship. They will not sit till you come.

SLENDER I'faith, I'll eat nothing. I thank you as much as 260 though I did.

ANNE I pray you, sir, walk in.

[Dogs bark within]

SLENDER I had rather walk here, I thank you. I bruised my shin th'other day, with playing at sword and dagger with a master of fence±±three veneys for a dish of 265 stewed prunes±±and, by my troth, I cannot abide the smell of hot meat since. Why do your dogs bark so? Be there bears i'th' town?

ANNE I think there are, sir. I heard them talked of.

SLENDER I love the sport well±±but I shall as soon quarrel 270 at it as any man in England. You are afraid if you see the bear loose, are you not?

ANNE Ay, indeed, sir.

SLENDER That's meat and drink to me, now. I have seen Sackerson loose twenty times, and have taken him by 275 the chain. But I warrant you, the women have so cried and shrieked at it that it passed. But women, indeed, cannot abide 'em. They are very ill-favoured, rough things.

Enter Page

PAGE Come, gentle Master Slender, come. We stay for 280 you.

SLENDER I'll eat nothing, I thank you, sir.

PAGE By cock and pie, you shall not choose, sir. Come, come.

SLENDER Nay, pray you lead the way. 285

PAGE Come on, sir.

SLENDER Mistress Anne, yourself shall go first.

ANNE Not I, sir. Pray you keep on.

SLENDER Truly, I will not go first, truly, la. I will not do you that wrong. 290

ANNE I pray you, sir.

SLENDER I'll rather be unmannerly than troublesome. You do yourself wrong, indeed, la.

Exeunt [Slender first, the others following]