

# The Merry Wives of Windsor

## 3.3

*Enter Mistress Ford and Mistress Page*

**MISTRESS FORD** What, John! What, Robert!

**MISTRESS PAGE** Quickly, quickly! Is the buck-basket±±

**MISTRESS FORD** I warrant.±±What, Robert, I say!

**MISTRESS PAGE** Come, come, come!

*Enter John and Robert, with a buck-basket*

**MISTRESS FORD** Here, set it down. 5

**MISTRESS PAGE** Give your men the charge. We must be brief.

**MISTRESS FORD** Marry, as I told you before, John and Robert, be ready here hard by in the brew-house; and when I suddenly call you, come forth, and without any pause or staggering take this basket on your shoulders. That done, trudge with it in all haste, and carry it among the whitsters in Datchet Mead, and there empty it in the muddy ditch close by the Thames' side. 10

**MISTRESS PAGE** *(to John and Robert)* You will do it? 15

**MISTRESS FORD** I ha' told them over and over; they lack no direction.±±Be gone, and come when you are called.

*Exeunt John and Robert*

*Enter Robin*

**MISTRESS PAGE** Here comes little Robin.

**MISTRESS FORD** How now, my eyas-musket, what news with you? 20

**ROBIN** My master Sir John is come in at your back door, Mistress Ford, and requests your company.

**MISTRESS PAGE** You little Jack-a-Lent, have you been true to us?

**ROBIN** Ay, I'll be sworn. My master knows not of your being here, and hath threatened to put me into everlasting liberty if I tell you of it; for he swears he'll turn me away. 25

**MISTRESS PAGE** Thou'rt a good boy. This secrecy of thine shall be a tailor to thee, and shall make thee a new doublet and hose.±±I'll go hide me. 30

**MISTRESS FORD** Do so. *(To Robin)* Go tell thy master I am

alone.

*Exit Robin*

Mistress Page, remember you your cue.

**MISTRESS PAGE** I warrant thee. If I do not act it, hiss me. 35

**MISTRESS FORD** Go to, then.

*[Exit Mistress Page]*

We'll use this unwholesome humidity, this gross watery pumpkin. We'll teach him to know turtles from jays.

*Enter Sir John Falstaff*

**SIR JOHN** Have I caught thee, my heavenly jewel? Why, now let me die, for I have lived long enough. This is 40 the period of my ambition. O, this blessed hour!

**MISTRESS FORD** O sweet Sir John!

**SIR JOHN** Mistress Ford, I cannot cog; I cannot prate, Mistress Ford. Now shall I sin in my wish: I would thy husband were dead. I'll speak it before the best lord. I 45 would make thee my lady.

**MISTRESS FORD** I your lady, Sir John? Alas, I should be a pitiful lady.

**SIR JOHN** Let the court of France show me such another. I see how thine eye would emulate the diamond. Thou 50 hast the right arched beauty of the brow that becomes the ship-tire, the tire-valiant, or any tire of Venetian admittance.

**MISTRESS FORD** A plain kerchief, Sir John±±my brows become nothing else, nor that well neither. 55

**SIR JOHN** By the Lord, thou art a tyrant to say so. Thou wouldst make an absolute courtier, and the firm fixture of thy foot would give an excellent motion to thy gait in a semicircled farthingale. I see what thou wert if fortune, thy foe, were, with nature, thy friend. Come, 60 thou canst not hide it.

**MISTRESS FORD** Believe me, there's no such thing in me.

**SIR JOHN** What made me love thee? Let that persuade thee there's something extraordinary in thee. Come, I cannot cog and say thou art this and that, like a-many 65 of these lispings hawthorn-buds that come like women in men's apparel and smell like Bucklersbury in simple time; I cannot. But I love thee, none but thee; and thou deservest it.

**MISTRESS FORD** Do not betray me, sir. I fear you love 70  
Mistress Page.

**SIR JOHN** Thou mightst as well say I love to walk by the  
Counter gate, which is as hateful to me as the reek of  
a lime-kiln.

**MISTRESS FORD** Well, heaven knows how I love you; and 75  
you shall one day find it.

**SIR JOHN** Keep in that mind. I'll deserve it.

**MISTRESS FORD** Nay, I must tell you, so you do; or else I  
could not be in that mind.

*Enter Robin*

**ROBIN** Mistress Ford, Mistress Ford! Here's Mistress Page 80  
at the door, sweating and blowing, and looking wildly,  
and would needs speak with you presently.

**SIR JOHN** She shall not see me. I will ensconce me behind  
the arras.

**MISTRESS FORD** Pray you do so; she's a very tattling 85  
woman.

*Sir John hides behind the arras.*

*Enter Mistress Page*

What's the matter? How now?

**MISTRESS PAGE** O Mistress Ford, what have you done?  
You're shamed, you're overthrown, you're undone for  
ever. 90

**MISTRESS FORD** What's the matter, good Mistress Page?

**MISTRESS PAGE** O well-a-day, Mistress Ford! Having an  
honest man to your husband, to give him such cause  
of suspicion!

**MISTRESS FORD** What cause of suspicion? 95

**MISTRESS PAGE** What cause of suspicion? Out upon you!  
How am I mistook in you!

**MISTRESS FORD** Why, alas, what's the matter?

**MISTRESS PAGE** Your husband's coming hither, woman,  
with all the officers in Windsor, to search for a 100  
gentleman that he says is here now in the house, by  
your consent, to take an ill advantage of his absence.  
You are undone.

**MISTRESS FORD** 'Tis not so, I hope.

**MISTRESS PAGE** Pray heaven it be not so that you have 105  
such a man here! But 'tis most certain your husband's

coming, with half Windsor at his heels, to search for such a one. I come before to tell you. If you know yourself clear, why, I am glad of it; but if you have a friend here, convey, convey him out. Be not amazed. 110  
Call all your senses to you. Defend your reputation, or bid farewell to your good life for ever.

**MISTRESS FORD** What shall I do? There is a gentleman, my dear friend; and I fear not mine own shame so much as his peril. I had rather than a thousand pound he were out of the house. 115

**MISTRESS PAGE** For shame, never stand `you had rather' and `you had rather'. Your husband's here at hand. Bethink you of some conveyance: in the house you cannot hide him. O, how have you deceived me! Look, 120  
here is a basket. If he be of any reasonable stature, he may creep in here; and throw foul linen upon him as if it were going to bucking. Or±±it is whiting time±± send him by your two men to Datchet Mead.

**MISTRESS FORD** He's too big to go in there. What shall I 125  
do?

**SIR JOHN** (*coming forward*) Let me see't, let me see't, O let me see't! I'll in, I'll in. Follow your friend's counsel; I'll in.

**MISTRESS PAGE** What, Sir John Falstaff! (*Aside to him*) Are 130  
these your letters, knight?

**SIR JOHN** (*aside to Mistress Page*) I love thee. Help me away. Let me creep in here.

*He goes into the basket*

I'll never±±

*Mistress Page and Mistress Ford put foul clothes over him*

**MISTRESS PAGE** (*to Robin*) Help to cover your master, boy.±± 135  
Call your men, Mistress Ford. [*Aside to Sir John*] You dissembling knight!

**MISTRESS FORD** What, John! Robert, John!

*Enter John and Robert*

Go take up these clothes here quickly. Where's the cowl-staff? 140

*John and Robert fit the cowl-staff*

Look how you drumble! Carry them to the laundress

in Datchet Mead. Quickly, come!

*They lift the basket and start to leave.*

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

**FORD** *(to Page, Caius, and Evans)* Pray you come near. If I suspect without cause, why then, make sport at me; then let me be your jest— I deserve it. *(To John and Robert)* How now? Whither bear you this? 145

**[JOHN]** To the laundress, forsooth.

**MISTRESS FORD** Why, what have you to do whither they bear it? You were best meddle with buck-washing!

**FORD** Buck? I would I could wash myself of the buck! 150  
Buck, buck, buck? Ay, buck, I warrant you, buck. And of the season too, it shall appear.

*[Exeunt John and Robert, with the basket]*

Gentlemen, I have dreamt tonight. I'll tell you my dream. Here, here, here be my keys. Ascend my chambers, search, seek, find out. I'll warrant we'll 155  
unkennel the fox. Let me stop this way first.

*He locks the door*

So, now, uncoop.

**PAGE** Good Master Ford, be contented. You wrong yourself too much.

**FORD** True, Master Page. — Up, gentlemen! You shall see 160  
sport anon. Follow me, gentlemen.

*Exit*

**EVANS** This is fery fantastical humours and jealousies.

**CAIUS** By Gar, 'tis no the fashion of France; it is not  
jealous in France.

**PAGE** Nay, follow him, gentlemen. See the issue of his 165  
search.

*Exeunt Caius, Evans, and Page*

**MISTRESS PAGE** Is there not a double excellency in this?

**MISTRESS FORD** I know not which pleases me better: that  
my husband is deceived, or Sir John.

**MISTRESS PAGE** What a taking was he in when your 170  
husband asked what was in the basket!

**MISTRESS FORD** I am half afraid he will have need of  
washing, so throwing him into the water will do him  
a benefit.

**MISTRESS PAGE** Hang him, dishonest rascal! I would all of 175  
the same strain were in the same distress.

**MISTRESS FORD** I think my husband hath some special  
suspicion of Falstaff's being here, for I never saw him  
so gross in his jealousy till now.

**MISTRESS PAGE** I will lay a plot to try that, and we will 180  
yet have more tricks with Falstaff. His dissolute disease  
will scarce obey this medicine.

**MISTRESS FORD** Shall we send that foolish carrion Mistress  
Quickly to him, and excuse his throwing into the water,  
and give him another hope, to betray him to another 185  
punishment?

**MISTRESS PAGE** We will do it. Let him be sent for tomorrow  
eight o'clock, to have amends.

*Enter Ford, Page, Caius, and Evans*

**FORD** I cannot find him. Maybe the knave bragged of that  
he could not compass. 190

**MISTRESS PAGE** (*aside to Mistress Ford*) Heard you that?

**MISTRESS FORD** You use me well, Master Ford, do you?

**FORD** Ay, I do so.

**MISTRESS FORD** Heaven make me better than your  
thoughts! 195

**FORD** Amen.

**MISTRESS PAGE** You do yourself mighty wrong, Master  
Ford.

**FORD** Ay, ay, I must bear it.

**EVANS** If there be anypody in the house, and in the 200  
chambers, and in the coffers, and in the presses, heaven  
forgive my sins at the day of judgement!

**CAIUS** Be Gar, nor I too. There is nobodies.

**PAGE** Fie, fie, Master Ford, are you not ashamed? What  
spirit, what devil suggests this imagination? I would 205  
not ha' your distemper in this kind for the wealth of  
Windsor Castle.

**FORD** 'Tis my fault, Master Page. I suffer for it.

**EVANS** You suffer for a pad conscience. Your wife is as  
honest a 'omans as I will desires among five thousand, 210  
and five hundred too.

**CAIUS** By Gar, I see 'tis an honest woman.

**FORD** Well, I promised you a dinner. Come, come, walk

in the park. I pray you pardon me. I will hereafter  
make known to you why I have done this.±±Come, 215  
wife; come, Mistress Page. I pray you pardon me. Pray  
heartily pardon me.

**PAGE** *(to Caius and Evans)* Let's go in, gentlemen. *(Aside*  
*to them)* But trust me, we'll mock him. *(To Ford, Caius,*  
*and Evans)* I do invite you tomorrow morning to my 220  
house to breakfast. After, we'll a-birding together. I  
have a fine hawk for the bush. Shall it be so?

**FORD** Anything.

**EVANS** If there is one, I shall make two in the company.

**CAIUS** If there be one or two, I shall make-a the turd. 225

**FORD** Pray you go, Master Page.

*Exeunt [all but Evans and Caius]*

**EVANS** I pray you now, remembrance tomorrow on the  
lousy knave mine Host.

**CAIUS** Dat is good, by Gar; with all my heart.

**EVANS** A lousy knave, to have his gibes and his mockeries. 230  
*Exeunt*