

# The Merry Wives of Windsor

## 2.2

*Enter Sir John Falstaff and Pistol*

**SIR JOHN** I will not lend thee a penny.

**PISTOL**

I will retort the sum in equipage.

**SIR JOHN** Not a penny.

**PISTOL** *[drawing his sword]* Why then, the world's mine oyster, which I with sword will open. 5

**SIR JOHN** Not a penny. I have been content, sir, you should lay my countenance to pawn. I have grated upon my good friends for three reprieves for you and your coach-fellow Nim, or else you had looked through the grate like a gemini of baboons. I am damned in 10 hell for swearing to gentlemen my friends you were good soldiers and tall fellows. And when Mistress Bridget lost the handle of her fan, I took't upon mine honour thou hadst it not.

**PISTOL**

Didst not thou share? Hadst thou not fifteen pence? 15

**SIR JOHN** Reason, you rogue, reason. Thinkest thou I'll endanger my soul gratis? At a word, hang no more about me. I am no gibbet for you. Go, a short knife and a throng, to your manor of Pickt-hatch, go. You'll not bear a letter for me, you rogue? You stand upon 20 your honour? Why, thou unconfinable baseness, it is as much as I can do to keep the terms of my honour precise. Ay, ay, I myself sometimes, leaving the fear of God on the left hand, and hiding mine honour in my necessity, am fain to shuffle, to hedge, and to lurch; 25 and yet you, you rogue, will ensconce your rags, your cat-a-mountain looks, your red-lattice phrases, and your bold beating oaths, under the shelter of your honour! You will not do it, you?

**PISTOL** *[sheathing his sword]*

I do relent. What wouldst thou more of man? 30

*Enter Robin*

**ROBIN** Sir, here's a woman would speak with you.

**SIR JOHN** Let her approach.

*Enter Mistress Quickly*

**MISTRESS QUICKLY** Give your worship good morrow.

**SIR JOHN** Good morrow, goodwife.

**MISTRESS QUICKLY** Not so, an't please your worship. 35

**SIR JOHN** Good maid, then.

**MISTRESS QUICKLY** I'll be sworn: as my mother was the  
first hour I was born.

**SIR JOHN** I do believe the swearer. What with me?

**MISTRESS QUICKLY** Shall I vouchsafe your worship a word 40  
or two?

**SIR JOHN** Two thousand, fair woman, and I'll vouchsafe  
thee the hearing.

**MISTRESS QUICKLY** There is one Mistress Ford, sir±±I pray  
come a little nearer this ways. 45

*She draws Sir John aside*

I myself dwell with Master Doctor Caius±±

**SIR JOHN** Well, on. Mistress Ford, you say.

**MISTRESS QUICKLY** Your worship says very true. I pray  
your worship come a little nearer this ways.

**SIR JOHN** I warrant thee nobody hears. Mine own people, 50  
mine own people.

**MISTRESS QUICKLY** Are they so? God bless them and make  
them His servants!

**SIR JOHN** Well, Mistress Ford: what of her?

**MISTRESS QUICKLY** Why, sir, she's a good creature. Lord, 55  
Lord, your worship's a wanton! Well, heaven forgive  
you, and all of us, I pray±±

**SIR JOHN** Mistress Ford; come, Mistress Ford.

**MISTRESS QUICKLY** Marry, this is the short and the long of  
it. You have brought her into such a canaries as 'tis 60  
wonderful. The best courtier of them all, when the  
court lay at Windsor, could never have brought her to  
such a canary. Yet there has been knights, and lords,  
and gentlemen, with their coaches; I warrant you,  
coach after coach, letter after letter, gift after gift, 65  
smelling so sweetly, all musk; and so rustling, I warrant  
you, in silk and gold, and in such aligant terms, and  
in such wine and sugar of the best and the fairest, that  
would have won any woman's heart; and, I warrant

you, they could never get an eye-wink of her. I had 70  
myself twenty angels given me this morning±±but I  
defy all angels, in any such sort, as they say, but in  
the way of honesty. And, I warrant you, they could  
never get her so much as sip on a cup with the proudest  
of them all. And yet there has been earls, nay, which 75  
is more, pensioners. But, I warrant you, all is one with  
her.

**SIR JOHN** But what says she to me? Be brief, my good  
she-Mercury.

**MISTRESS QUICKLY** Marry, she hath received your letter, 80  
for the which she thanks you a thousand times, and  
she gives you to notify that her husband will be absence  
from his house between ten and eleven.

**SIR JOHN** Ten and eleven.

**MISTRESS QUICKLY** Ay, forsooth, and then you may come 85  
and see the picture, she says, that you wot of. Master  
Ford, her husband, will be from home. Alas, the sweet  
woman leads an ill life with him. He's a very jealousy  
man. She leads a very frampold life with him, good  
heart. 90

**SIR JOHN** Ten and eleven. Woman, commend me to her.  
I will not fail her.

**MISTRESS QUICKLY** Why, you say well. But I have another  
messenger to your worship. Mistress Page hath her  
hearty commendations to you too; and, let me tell you 95  
in your ear, she's as fartuous a civil modest wife, and  
one, I tell you, that will not miss you morning nor  
evening prayer, as any is in Windsor, whoe'er be the  
other; and she bade me tell your worship that her  
husband is seldom from home, but she hopes there will 100  
come a time. I never knew a woman so dote upon a  
man. Surely I think you have charms, la; yes, in truth.

**SIR JOHN** Not I, I assure thee. Setting the attraction of my  
good parts aside, I have no other charms.

**MISTRESS QUICKLY** Blessing on your heart for't! 105

**SIR JOHN** But I pray thee tell me this: has Ford's wife and  
Page's wife acquainted each other how they love me?

**MISTRESS QUICKLY** O God no, sir; that were a jest indeed!  
They have not so little grace, I hope. That were a trick

indeed! But Mistress Page would desire you to send her 110  
your little page of all loves. Her husband has a  
marvellous infection to the little page; and, truly,  
Master Page is an honest man. Never a wife in Windsor  
leads a better life than she does. Do what she will; say  
what she will; take all, pay all; go to bed when she 115  
list; rise when she list; all is as she will. And, truly,  
she deserves it, for if there be a kind woman in Windsor,  
she is one. You must send her your page, no remedy.

**SIR JOHN** Why, I will.

**MISTRESS QUICKLY** Nay, but do so, then; and, look you, 120  
he may come and go between you both. And in any  
case have a nay-word, that you may know one  
another's mind, and the boy never need to understand  
anything±±for 'tis not good that children should know  
any wickedness. Old folks, you know, have discretion, 125  
as they say, and know the world.

**SIR JOHN** Fare thee well. Commend me to them both.  
There's my purse; I am yet thy debtor.±±Boy, go along  
with this woman.

*Exeunt Mistress Quickly and Robin*

*(Aside)* This news distracts me. 130

**PISTOL** *(aside)*

This punk is one of Cupid's carriers.  
Clap on more sails! Pursue! Up with your sights!  
Give fire! She is my prize, or ocean whelm them all!

*Exit*

**SIR JOHN** Sayst thou so, old Jack? Go thy ways! I'll make  
more of thy old body than I have done. Will they yet 135  
look after thee? Wilt thou, after the expense of so much  
money, be now a gainer? Good body, I thank thee. Let  
them say 'tis grossly done; so it be fairly done, no  
matter.

*Enter Bardolph, [with sack]*

**BARDOLPH** Sir John, there's one Master Brooke below 140  
would fain speak with you and be acquainted with  
you, and hath sent your worship a morning's draught  
of sack.

**SIR JOHN** Brooke is his name?

**BARDOLPH** Ay, sir.

**SIR JOHN** Call him in. *[Drinking sack]* Such Brookes are welcome to me, that o'erflows such liquor.

*Exit Bardolph*

Aha, Mistress Ford and Mistress Page, have I encompassed you? *[Drinking]* Go to. Via!

*Enter Bardolph, and Master Ford disguised as Brooke*

**FORD** God bless you, sir. 150

**SIR JOHN** And you, sir. Would you speak with me?

**FORD** I make bold to press with so little preparation upon you.

**SIR JOHN** You're welcome. What's your will? *(To Bardolph)*  
Give us leave, drawer. 155

*Exit Bardolph*

**FORD** Sir, I am a gentleman that have spent much. My name is Brooke.

**SIR JOHN** Good Master Brooke, I desire more acquaintance of you.

**FORD** Good Sir John, I sue for yours±±not to charge you, 160  
for I must let you understand I think myself in better plight for a lender than you are; the which hath something emboldened me to this unseasoned intrusion; for they say if money go before, all ways do lie open. 165

**SIR JOHN** Money is a good soldier, sir, and will on.

**FORD** Troth, and I have a bag of money here troubles me.  
If you will help to bear it, Sir John, take half, or all, for easing me of the carriage.

**SIR JOHN** Sir, I know not how I may deserve to be your 170  
porter.

**FORD** I will tell you, sir, if you will give me the hearing.

**SIR JOHN** Speak, good Master Brooke. I shall be glad to be your servant.

**FORD** Sir, I hear you are a scholar±±I will be brief with 175  
you±±and you have been a man long known to me, though I had never so good means as desire to make myself acquainted with you. I shall discover a thing to you wherein I must very much lay open mine own imperfection; but, good Sir John, as you have one eye 180  
upon my follies, as you hear them unfolded, turn

another into the register of your own, that I may pass with a reproof the easier, sith you yourself know how easy it is to be such an offender.

**SIR JOHN** Very well, sir, proceed. 185

**FORD** There is a gentlewoman in this town; her husband's name is Ford.

**SIR JOHN** Well, sir.

**FORD** I have long loved her, and, I protest to you, bestowed much on her, followed her with a doting observance, 190 engrossed opportunities to meet her, fee'd every slight occasion that could but niggardly give me sight of her; not only bought many presents to give her, but have given largely to many to know what she would have given. Briefly, I have pursued her as love hath pursued 195 me, which hath been on the wing of all occasions. But, whatsoever I have merited, either in my mind or in my means, meed I am sure I have received none, unless experience be a jewel. That I have purchased at an infinite rate, and that hath taught me to say this: 200  
'Love like a shadow flies when substance love pursues, Pursuing that that flies, and flying what pursues.'

**SIR JOHN** Have you received no promise of satisfaction at her hands?

**FORD** Never. 205

**SIR JOHN** Have you importuned her to such a purpose?

**FORD** Never.

**SIR JOHN** Of what quality was your love then?

**FORD** Like a fair house built on another man's ground, so that I have lost my edifice by mistaking the place 210 where I erected it.

**SIR JOHN** To what purpose have you unfolded this to me?

**FORD** When I have told you that, I have told you all. Some say that though she appear honest to me, yet in other places she enlargeth her mirth so far that there is shrewd construction made of her. Now, Sir John, here is the heart of my purpose. You are a gentleman of excellent breeding, admirable discourse, of great admittance, authentic in your place and person, generally allowed for your many warlike, court-like, 220 and learned preparations. 215

**SIR JOHN** O sir!

**FORD** Believe it, for you know it. There is money.

*[He offers money]*

Spend it, spend it; spend more; spend all I have; only give me so much of your time in exchange of it as to<sup>225</sup> lay an amiable siege to the honesty of this Ford's wife. Use your art of wooing, win her to consent to you. If any man may, you may as soon as any.

**SIR JOHN** Would it apply well to the vehemency of your affection that I should win what you would enjoy? <sup>230</sup> Methinks you prescribe to yourself very preposterously.

**FORD** O, understand my drift. She dwells so securely on the excellency of her honour that the folly of my soul dares not present itself. She is too bright to be looked against. Now, could I come to her with any detection<sup>235</sup> in my hand, my desires had instance and argument to commend themselves. I could drive her then from the ward of her purity, her reputation, her marriage vow, and a thousand other her defences which now are too too strongly embattled against me. What say you to't, 240 Sir John?

**SIR JOHN** Master Brooke, I will first make bold with your money.

*[He takes the money]*

Next, give me your hand.

*He takes his hand*

And last, as I am a gentleman, you shall, if you will, <sup>245</sup> enjoy Ford's wife.

**FORD** O, good sir!

**SIR JOHN** I say you shall.

**FORD** Want no money, Sir John, you shall want none.

**SIR JOHN** Want no Mistress Ford, Master Brooke, you shall <sup>250</sup> want none. I shall be with her, I may tell you, by her own appointment. Even as you came in to me, her spokesmate, or go-between, parted from me. I say I shall be with her between ten and eleven, for at that time the jealous rascally knave her husband will be <sup>255</sup> forth. Come you to me at night; you shall know how I speed.

**FORD** I am blessed in your acquaintance. Do you know

Ford, sir?

**SIR JOHN** Hang him, poor cuckoldly knave, I know him 260  
not. Yet I wrong him to call him poor. They say the  
jealous wittolly knave hath masses of money, for the  
which his wife seems to me well favoured. I will use  
her as the key of the cuckoldly rogue's coffer, and  
there's my harvest-home. 265

**FORD** I would you knew Ford, sir, that you might avoid  
him if you saw him.

**SIR JOHN** Hang him, mechanical salt-butter rogue! I will  
stare him out of his wits. I will awe him with my  
cudgel; it shall hang like a meteor o'er the cuckold's 270  
horns. Master Brooke, thou shalt know I will  
predominate over the peasant, and thou shalt lie with  
his wife. Come to me soon at night. Ford's a knave,  
and I will aggravate his style: thou, Master Brooke,  
shalt know him for knave and cuckold. Come to me 275  
soon at night.

*Exit*

**FORD** What a damned epicurean rascal is this! My heart  
is ready to crack with impatience. Who says this is  
improvident jealousy? My wife hath sent to him, the 280  
hour is fixed, the match is made. Would any man have  
thought this? See the hell of having a false woman!  
My bed shall be abused, my coffers ransacked, my  
reputation gnawn at, and I shall not only receive this  
villainous wrong, but stand under the adoption of  
abominable terms, and by him that does me this wrong. 285  
Terms! Names! `Amaimon' sounds well, `Lucifer' well,  
`Barbason' well; yet they are devils' additions, the  
names of fiends. But `cuckold', `wittol'! `Cuckold'±±the  
devil himself hath not such a name. Page is an ass, a  
secure ass. He will trust his wife, he will not be jealous. 290  
I will rather trust a Fleming with my butter, Parson  
Hugh the Welshman with my cheese, an Irishman with  
my aqua-vitae bottle, or a thief to walk my ambling  
gelding, than my wife with herself. Then she plots,  
then she ruminates, then she devises; and what they 295  
think in their hearts they may effect, they will break  
their hearts but they will effect. God be praised for my



jealousy! Eleven o'clock the hour. I will prevent this,  
detect my wife, be revenged on Falstaff, and laugh at  
Page. I will about it. Better three hours too soon than  
a minute too late. God's my life: cuckold, cuckold,  
cuckold!

300

*Exit*