

# Henry IV Part One

## The Whole Story (unabridged synopsis)

King Henry (formerly Bolingbroke) announces that England will no longer be divided by civil war and that he will lead a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, as he had planned to do twelve months ago. Westmoreland tells him, however, that Mortimer's forces were beaten and taken prisoner by the Welsh (Mortimer is Hotspur's brother-in-law, who was proclaimed by Richard II to be the heir to the throne). News arrives that Hotspur has beaten the Scots and has taken prisoners that he refuses to turn over to the King. Henry puts off the pilgrimage to deal with this trouble.

Prince Hal jokes in a tavern with his friend, Falstaff, about their life of thievery. Poins tells them of how they can hold up a group of rich pilgrims going to Canterbury. Hal refuses to go and Poins tells him how he plans to play a joke on Falstaff by disappearing when Falstaff holds up the group and then robbing Falstaff. Hal agrees to join him. Hal is aware of what his behavior looks like and speaks about how he is associating with these lowlifes so that the world will be surprised when he reveals his true self; "So, when this loose behavior I throw off and pay the debt I never promised, by how much better than my word I am."

Henry orders Hotspur to turn over his prisoners. Hotspur refuses, telling the King of a fop who angered him on the battlefield. Worcester (Hotspur's uncle) reminds Henry how they helped bring him to power. Hotspur asks that Henry ransom Mortimer and the King calls Mortimer a traitor. This angers Hotspur, and Worcester tells him to return his prisoners to the Scots and to gather a force of Scotsmen. In the meantime, he will get the Archbishop of York, the Welsh and Mortimer on his side, to foment rebellion against Henry.

Gadshill finds out when travelers will be on the road for Falstaff and his crew to rob them. Hal and Poins hide Falstaff's horse while he complains and looks for it. When the travelers arrive, Hal and Poins hide while Falstaff, Gadshill, Peto and Bardolph rob them. Hal and Poins, disguised, then rob Falstaff and his crew. Late at night, Hotspur reads a letter that pokes holes in his plans for rebellion. His wife asks why

he has been so secretive and moody, but he will not tell her what he is planning.

Hal and his friends are at the tavern when Falstaff arrives. He calls Hal and Poins cowards, telling them how he robbed the travelers and was in turn robbed by a hundred men. After much joking and inflated descriptions of a battle, Hal tells Falstaff how it was just he and Poins who robbed them. Falstaff claims that he knew by instinct that it was the prince in disguise and that he would never harm a prince. A messenger of the court comes to the door looking for the Prince. Hal and Falstaff put on a play of how the King will chastise Hal with first Falstaff playing the King and then Hal. The Sheriff arrives looking for Falstaff and accusing him of robbery. Falstaff hides as Hal covers for him. When the Sheriff leaves, Hal and Poins find Falstaff asleep and they pick his pocket, finding only a tavern bill and no money. Hal states how he will get places in the army for Falstaff and his friends and how he will pay back the people that they robbed.

Now in Wales, Hotspur argues with Owen Glendower (a Welshman, now joined with Worcester and Hotspur in rebellion) and Mortimer about how to divide up England once they have defeated the King. When Glendower leaves, Mortimer and Worcester tell Hotspur to stop arguing but Glendower returns with Lady Mortimer (Glendower's daughter and Mortimer's new wife) and Lady Percy. Mortimer's wife sings a song in Welsh, called *Lisa Lan*, about lost love.

Henry chastises Hal for his behavior, telling him that he is acting like Richard by being so common and that the people will tire of him. Henry tells how he made himself into a hero by carefully picking when he was seen, with whom and how he behaved. He also tells Hal that Hotspur is acting as he himself had against Richard but for all that, he is a worthier man than his own son. Hal tells the King that he is mistaken and that one day he will meet with Hotspur in battle and prove his own superiority. Walter Blunt arrives and tells of the rebel forces gathering. Henry directs how he, Hal and John of Lancaster (Hal's brother) will lead forces against the rebels.

Falstaff complains to Bardolph about his life and to the hostess of the tavern, Mistress Quickly,

about having his pocket picked. Hal arrives as Falstaff claims to have lost hundreds of pounds and an expensive ring. Hal berates Falstaff for lying and tells him how he has gotten a position in the army for him.

Hotspur, with Worcester and Douglas, receive a letter saying that Northumberland and his forces will not join them because he is sick. They complain about this, although Hotspur states that there will be more glory for the forces that do fight. Worcester speculates, however, that Northumberland's absence will hurt the rebel forces because it will appear that they are divided. They then learn of the King's three forces, led by the King, Hal and John of Lancaster, which are approaching. They also learn that Glendower's forces will not be ready for two weeks. This news still does not daunt Hotspur.

Falstaff tells of how he has squandered the money given to him to hire soldiers and, as a result, has hired very poor soldiers. Hal arrives and tells him that they must get to Shrewsbury immediately.

In the rebel camp, Hotspur argues that they should attack the King's forces immediately but others disagree and recommend that they wait for additional forces because the King's far outnumber theirs. Blunt arrives as an emissary from the King to ask them their grievances. Hotspur tells them how the King insulted and betrayed the Percy family after they helped bring him to power and how Henry left Mortimer, the rightful heir, as a prisoner with the Scots. Hotspur asks the King to wait till morning when he will send Worcester with a response.

The Archbishop of York sends letters to try to gather up additional rebel forces in case Hotspur fails in his battle against the King at Shrewsbury. Worcester goes to the King's camp and tells the King, Hal, John of Lancaster and Blunt that the rebels feel that Henry has broken promises made to them when they helped him return to England and reclaim his property after being banished by Richard. Worcester claims that they had no idea at the time that he intended to take the crown. Hal praises Hotspur, who is not there, and offers

to fight him in single combat to resolve the dispute. Henry will not let that happen and offers to pardon all of the rebels if they will end the rebellion. After Worcester leaves, Hal and the King speculate that the offer will not be accepted. Falstaff delivers a speech about how he would not die for honor, because honor is just a word and cannot give a man anything tangible.

Worcester plans to not tell Hotspur of the King's offer because he believes that the King would never really forgive them and would find some other means to punish them later, although he might forgive Hotspur, attributing his actions to his hasty temper. Worcester tells Hotspur that the King spurned their grievances and bid them to battle. Worcester tells Hotspur of Hal's offer of single battle. Worcester praises Hal. Hotspur chides him for becoming enamored of the wild youth. Hotspur rouses the troops to battle.

The battle begins and Blunt, dressed as King Henry, meets the Scot, Douglas. He has just killed another bodyguard dressed as Henry, and thinks this is the real King. He slays Blunt, but Hotspur confirms that it is not Henry. Battle continues to rage.

Hal, who is injured, refuses to rest and praises his brother, John of Lancaster, to their father. Douglas arrives and fights with the king, who is saved by Hal. Hotspur enters and Hal turns to fight. Hal triumphs and Hotspur is slain. In the meantime, Falstaff fights with Douglas and feigns death in order to escape. Hal finds Falstaff on the ground and laments his death. After Hal leaves, Falstaff rises and states that "the better part of valor is discretion". Hal arrives with his brother, Lancaster, and Falstaff claims to have killed Hotspur.

Henry claims victory and criticizes Worcester for refusing his offer of pardon. Worcester says that he acted as he did for his safety but Henry sentences Worcester and Vernon to death. Douglas has been taken prisoner and Hal asks that he be let go as a tribute to his valor. The King sends Lancaster to fight Northumberland and the Archbishop of York. He and Hal will tackle Glendower and Mortimer.