

Henry IV Part Two

The Whole Story (Unabridged synopsis)

Rumor, spreader of gossip, tells of how lies and half-truths are spreading through England of Henry's supposed defeat by Hotspur and his rebels. Rumor speaks of the "blunt monster, with uncounted head, the still-wavering multitude" that will believe anything they are told.

Lord Bardolph and Travers both bring Northumberland conflicting stories of Hotspur's fate at Shrewsbury. Morton arrives from Shrewsbury and confirms Hotspur's death. They tell Northumberland how the Archbishop of York is raising forces and using the legitimacy of religion to back the rebel efforts.

Falstaff complains to his page and is troubled by the Chief Justice's questions regarding the robbery that he was accused of committing, but Falstaff ignores him. The Chief Justice says that the king has separated Falstaff from Hal by sending him with Prince John of Lancaster's troops to fight the Archbishop of York and Northumberland.

The Archbishop of York strategizes with the leaders of his army regarding whether their forces are strong enough to fight the King without Northumberland's help. They discuss how Henry must divide his army into three parts to fight them, the French and Glendower. They resolve to move on against the king and the Archbishop reminds us how the common people who overthrew Richard and promoted Henry now have turned against Henry and are speaking fondly of Richard. He says, "They, that when Richard lived would have him die, are now enamored on his grave."

Back at the Boar's Head Tavern Mistress Quickly asks that Falstaff be arrested for what he owes her as well as not making good on his promise to marry her. The Chief Justice tries to get Falstaff to pay her and apologize so Falstaff promises to pay her when he comes to dinner. They get news that the king and Prince Hal are near-with their army.

Hal tells Poins how he misses "small beer" and the everyday life that he is not allowed to have because of his high stature. Hal reveals his worry for his now-ill father, and tells Poins that he is very sad but that he must not act so, because

people will think him a hypocrite. The prince receives a letter from Falstaff telling him that Poins is spreading rumors that Hal is to marry Poins' sister so Hal and Poins plan to disguise themselves as drawers at Falstaff's dinner with the hostess and the whore, Doll Tearsheet.

Northumberland's wife and Lady Percy (Hotspur's widow) plead with him not to go to war, as he did not go to Hotspur's aid at Shrewsbury. Lady Percy advises him that if he does go, he should first see if the Archbishop's forces are winning. He resolves to go to Scotland until he can gauge how the Archbishop is doing.

At the Boar's Head Tavern, Doll Tearsheet, Falstaff and Mistress Quickly are having dinner. Pistol arrives and argues with Doll. She accuses him of "Swaggering", which was a big, fancy new word in Shakespeare's time. A brawl starts and eventually, Pistol is "Thrust downstairs." Doll makes a fuss over Falstaff as Hal and Poins enter, disguised. Falstaff calls the prince shallow and Poins a baboon. When the two reveals themselves, Falstaff claims to have lied about them to wicked people, so that such people would not love them. Messengers arrive to summon Hal and Falstaff to the court.

King Henry complains that he cannot sleep while so many common people, without his cares, can. He summons Warwick, Surrey and Blunt and woefully tells of the discontent in the land and how Richard had foretold of the falling out between Henry and Northumberland, who was helping Henry to the crown at the time. Warwick tells Henry that his forces are doing well and that the Welshman Glendower is dead. Henry again wishes he could just go to Jerusalem, and redeem himself in Holy Pilgrimage.

Justice Shallow reminisces about his younger days with John Falstaff, who is to meet Shallow to get soldiers from him. Falstaff arrives and picks soldiers from Shallow. They are all very poor men and Falstaff chooses the leanest among them. Shallow acts as if he and Falstaff were great friends in their wild, younger days but when Falstaff is alone he tells of how Shallow is duplicitous and fawning.

The Archbishop of York and his army receive word that Northumberland could not raise the

forces needed to join them. Westmoreland arrives from the King's forces to question and chastise the rebels. The Archbishop relates how they are avenging the wrongful death of Richard. Westmoreland offers them an audience with Prince John, the General of the king's army, to air their grievances and tells them that they will be forgiven if the grievances are just. Mowbray replies that the offer comes out of fear and is not genuine. Westmoreland states that the offer comes out of mercy, as the king's forces outnumber theirs. The Archbishop gives him a list of grievances, which Prince John is authorized to address.

When Westmoreland leaves, Mowbray argues that the king will never really forgive them. The Archbishop states that the king is sick and has lost his power. He may genuinely want to quell the rebellion by forgiving them. Westmoreland returns and tells the rebels that Prince John will meet with them.

The rebels meet with Prince John of Lancaster and Westmoreland in a part of the forest away from their troops. Lancaster promises to redress all their grievances and both sides agree to disburse their armies. Both sides congratulate each other on achieving peace and drink a toast. As soon as the rebel army is disbanded, Lancaster arrests the Archbishop, Hastings and Mowbray. He states that he promised to redress their grievances but not pardon their treason. He sentences them to death and sends forces to pursue the scattered rebel army.

Falstaff meets one of the traitors, Coleville, who demands that Falstaff yield to him. But, Lancaster arrives and Falstaff claims to have captured Coleville. Lancaster orders that he be executed. After everyone leaves, Falstaff expounds on the virtues of drink.

At court, the sickly King Henry councils his other sons to support Hal once he is King. They learn that Hal is in London and up to his old habits but the Prince of Warwick defends Hal, stating that

he is consorting with his current friends to study them. Westmoreland and messengers tell the king that the rebels have been defeated. Although relieved, Henry becomes very ill and suffers a fit.

While the King is asleep, Hal visits him and thinking him dead, he takes up the crown. The king awakes and accuses Hal of wishing him dead. Hal tearfully tells his father that he will show his true nobleness when he is king and explains that he took up the crown, accusing it of stealing his father's life. King Henry advises Hal, telling him that Henry took the crown in crooked ways, but that it will pass rightly to Hal. Henry advises him to make friends of the people that Henry cut off and to make war in foreign lands so that the English can forget their civil quarrels.

Shallow insists that Falstaff stay at his house. Falstaff agrees but when Shallow leaves, Falstaff tells how he will use him to make Hal laugh.

King Henry IV has died and everyone expects that the Lord Chief Justice is going to be punished for his firm hand against Prince Hal. Hal (now Henry V) arrives and states that he will prove his nobility contrary to expectations. He surprises everyone by thanking the Lord Chief Justice for his firm hand and hopes he will continue to exercise such impartial justice.

Falstaff is drinking with Shallow and Bardolph when Pistol arrives and announces that Hal has been crowned Henry V. They rush to court immediately because he is sure that Hal misses him. Doll Tearsheet is arrested on suspicion of murder, along with Mistress Quickly, and hauled off to jail, claiming she is pregnant.

Falstaff arrives in front of Westminster Abbey and tells Shallow that the king will greet him warmly. King Henry V enters but when Falstaff greets him as "my royal Hal" the king replies, "I know thee not old man." Falstaff is banished from the King's presence. Prince John speculates that within one year King Henry V will invade France.