

Plump Jack

Act One

Scene 1: "The Warrant"

Hostess Nell Quickly has summoned Constables Fang and Snare to arrest Falstaff for nonpayment of debt. They do so as he arrives with his entourage, including Pistol, Bardolph and Boy. The Falstaffians fight the constables. The Chief Justice and his men arrive to restore order. Meanwhile a crowd gathers. The Chief Justice chides Falstaff for draft-dodging the current war with the Scots and Welsh. Hostess explains her grievances to the Chief Justice. Falstaff promises to pay, but inveigles her into dropping the lawsuit and lending him another ten pounds. All leave but Falstaff.

Prince Hal has been watching Falstaff's performance from the crowd, and now comes forward to applaud his audacity. Boy reappears, and reports that pilgrims with fat purses will be crossing Gad's Hill the following morning before daylight. Falstaff plans a robbery and invites Hal to take part. Hal refuses. Boy offers to persuade Hal in private. Falstaff exits. Boy tells Hal of his plot to rob the Falstaffians after they rob the pilgrims. Hal accepts. Boy exits.

Scene 2: "Hal's Memory"

Hal is alone with his memories. He recalls a chiding by his father, King Henry IV, warning him against his life of indolence and folly. He is touched to the heart, and promises to reform.

Scene 3: "Gad's Hill"

We are at Gad's Hill. It is pitch dark. Falstaff cannot find Hal or Boy or his horse, and rails against the ingratitude of man. The others appear and report that the rich pilgrims are about to arrive. All hide. The pilgrims enter. Falstaff, Pistol and Bardolph attack them and follow them offstage. They reappear with the pilgrims bound and Falstaff holding the loot. Disguised, Hal and Boy enter, drive them off, and give the money back to the pilgrims. Falstaff roars in the distance as Boy and Hal make merry.

Scene 4: "Clarence"

Henry IV and the Chief Justice are discussing the wars at Windsor Palace. Enter Hal's younger brother Thomas of Clarence. Henry IV advises him to stay close to Hal as a moderating influence, and to bear his humors with patience. He learns that Hal is dining with Falstaff, and laments the fate of his kingdom under the madcap reign to come: "O thou wilt be a wilderness again, / Peopled with wolves, thy old inhabitants."

Scene 5: "Boar's Head Inn"

We are at the Boar's Head Inn. Hal relaxes at his ease. Boy and Hostess Quickly serve him. Falstaff, Pistol and Bardolph enter, flummoxed and bedraggled. Falstaff denounces Hal for his nonappearance at the robbery. He reports his heroic defense against troops of assailants, the number increasing with each breath. Pistol and Bardolph swear to every word. Hal produces his mask and disguise and the empty moneybag. Falstaff swears that he saw through the trick from the start, and spared Hal's life out of civic duty. Changing the subject, Falstaff invites Hal to rehearse the defense of his playboy lifestyle that he will present to his father. Hal agrees.

The Falstaffians put a stool on the table and heave Falstaff onto it. Playing Henry IV, he denounces Hal and vilifies all his companions save for that single paragon Falstaff. Then the two switch places as Hal plays the father and Falstaff the son. This time the son is flayed for consorting with Falstaff, "that old white-bearded Satan." Falstaff, still playing Hal, answers "No, my good lord. Banish Pistol, banish Bardolph, banish Boy, banish Nell, but for good Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, sweet Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant, being, as he is, old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry's company, banish not him thy Harry's company. Banish Plump Jack, and banish all the world." Hal answers softly, "I do, I will."

Constables bang at the door, demanding that Falstaff join in the wars. All exit but Falstaff and Hostess. These two have known each other "some twenty-nine years come peascod-time," through thick and thin, and share a tender moment before he emerges to face down the constables and march off to war.

Act Two

Scene 6: "Shallow's Orchard"

The elderly Justice Shallow is napping in his orchard in Gloucestershire. Falstaff's arrival wakes him. They reminisce about merriment and wenching in times long gone. Shallow leaves to organize dinner for the Falstaffians. Falstaff, alone, lampoons Shallow and declares a plan to swindle him.

Scene 7: "Jerusalem"

Henry IV confers with his council at Westminster. Warwick enters with the news that the rebellion against him has been crushed. In the rejoicing the king falls ill. Hal enters, repents his follies, and is reconciled with his dying father.

Scene 8: "Davy's Ledger"

Shallow, in his sumptuous country drawing room, cannot find the silver and cloth he needs to impress his dinner guests. He climbs to a high cupboard and tumbles head over heels. His snooty and super-efficient steward Davy appears with servants. Without a word Davy restores order, finds the missing tableware in the chest on which Shallow had balanced in his climb, and directs setting of the table. Shallow, sunny and unflusterable, discusses farm

matters with Davy as if nothing had gone amiss. Davy is instructed to treat Falstaff well: "A friend in the court is better than a penny in purse." Falstaff and his men enter and are ushered to the table. Again Falstaff tries to tell us his designs on Shallow. Meanwhile Davy, out of their sight, takes a nip from the wine flask.

Scene 9: "Pistol's News"

At Shallow's table all are four sheets to the wind. Davy, insufferable when sober, is the life of the party when drunk. He sings bawdy songs as he pours, and all join in. As he finally collapses, Pistol is announced with news from London. The news, decoded with effort by Falstaff, is that Hal is now king. All rejoice. Falstaff makes plans to share the spoils and to settle accounts with the Chief Justice.

Scene 10: "Banishment"

A crowd including the Falstaffians and Shallow gathers along the route of Henry V's coronation procession. Falstaff has "borrowed" a thousand pounds from Shallow, supposedly to arrange Shallow's political advancement. The king's train approaches. As all others kneel, Falstaff runs into the road to embrace his old chum. The king stares him down, blisters him and banishes him "not to come near our person by ten mile." The procession continues with Falstaff prostrate. Falstaff pulls himself up and laughs off the tongue-lashing as public relations. Certainly Shallow cannot have his money back, or even half; it will still buy him great office as originally bargained. "Come with me to dinner," commands Falstaff as he leads them off. "I shall be sent for soon at night!" Snow falls on the empty street as monks offstage sing the Agnus Dei.

Scene 11: "Muse of Fire"

Cannon are heard in the darkness. Unseen voices speak the chorus from Henry V describing preparations for war with France. Bardolph's voice tells us that Pistol and Hostess are married. A spotlight finds Boy asking these two to come to Falstaff, who is very sick. "The king hath killed his heart." Blackout and cannon again as the king exhorts the nation to war. Once more the spotlight finds Hostess calling the Falstaffians to their dying master.

Scene 12: "Off to War"

It is just before dawn outside the Boar's Head Inn. Pistol calls out to Bardolph and Boy, and tells them Falstaff is dead. Hostess describes his death. As dawn breaks, the street fills with men to go to war and women to see them off. Recruiting officers, vendors, tumblers, street entertainers and pipers join the scene. Companies march off as others form. The king and his train pass. Finally Pistol, Bardolph and Boy march away. Hostess and the women remain to bid their men farewell.