

Synopsis

Falstaff

First Performance: Milan, February 9, 1893

Place: Windsor

Time: The reign of Henry IV

Language: Italian

ACT One Scene1 – The Garter Inn.

Sir John Falstaff, an old fat knight, is drinking with his two cronies, Bardolfo and Pistola. Dr. Caius interrupts and accuses Falstaff of breaking into and robbing his house. Falstaff is able to redirect Dr. Caius' anger, and Dr. Caius soon leaves. Falstaff scolds Bardolfo and Pistola for being inept thieves. He then concocts a new scheme to acquire money - he will woo two wealthy matrons (Alice Ford and Meg Page), and take advantage of their husbands' wealth. He writes two love letters and instructs his cronies to deliver them. They refuse, proclaiming that it is dishonorable to do such a thing. Hearing their irony, Falstaff kicks them out and instructs a page to deliver the letters instead.

ACT Two Scene 2 – The garden outside of Ford's house.

Alice Ford and her daughter, Nannetta, are exchanging stories with Meg Page and Dame Quickly. Alice and Meg discover that Falstaff has sent them each identical love letters. The women decide to teach Falstaff a lesson and design a plan to punish him. Bardolfo and Pistola have told Mr. Ford of Falstaff's intentions. As Ford, Bardolfo, Pistola, and Fenton (an employee of Ford) enter, the women move inside to further discuss their plans. However, Nannetta stays behind to steal a kiss from Fenton. The women plan to arrange a secret rendezvous between Alice and Falstaff, while the men decide that Bardolfo and Pistola will introduce Ford to Falstaff under an assumed name.

ACT Two Scene 1 - The Garter Inn (again).

Bardolfo and Pistola (now secretly employed by Ford), beg for Falstaff's forgiveness. Dame Quickly arrives. She tells Falstaff that both women have accepted his letters, with neither of them aware that he had sent letters to both women. Quickly tells him that Alice has arranged a meeting between two and three o'clock that very day. Ecstatic, Falstaff begins to clean himself up. A disguised Ford arrives and is introduced to Falstaff. He tells Falstaff that he desires Alice, but Falstaff states that he has already won her over and is meeting with her later that day. Ford becomes furious (he is unaware of his wife's plan, and believes her to be cheating on him). Both men leave the inn.

INTERMISSION

ACT Two Scene 2 – Ford's house.

Quickly arrives and tells Alice, Meg, and Nannetta of Falstaff's reaction. Nannetta has learned that her father has promised her to Dr. Caius for marriage. The other women assure her that will never happen. All the women, except for Alice, hide when Falstaff is heard approaching. As she sits in her chair playing the lute, Falstaff begins recounting his past to her, attempting to win over her heart. Quickly suddenly announces Meg's arrival and Falstaff jumps behind a screen to hide. Meg has learned that Ford is on his way over and that he is raging. The women hide Falstaff inside a laundry hamper. Ford enters the house with Fenton, Bardolfo, and Pistola. As the men search the house, Fenton and Nannetta sneak behind the screen. Ford hears kissing from behind the screen. Thinking it is Falstaff, he discovers it is his daughter and Fenton. He throws Fenton out of the house and continues searching for Falstaff. The women, worried that he will find Falstaff, throw the hamper out of the window and Falstaff is able to escape.

ACT Three Scene 1 – Outside the Garter Inn.

Sulking, Falstaff is about to go and drown his sorrows with wine and beer. Quickly arrives and tells him that Alice still loves him and would like to arrange another meeting. She shows him a note from Alice to prove she is telling the truth. Quickly tells Falstaff that the meeting will take place in Windsor Park, even though the park is said to be haunted at night, and that Alice has requested him to dress as the Black Hunter. Fenton and the other women have planned to dress up as spirits to frighten Falstaff senseless. Ford promises to wed Dr. Caius and Nannetta that very night, and is told that she can be recognized in her Fairy Queen costume. Quickly overhears Ford's plan.

ACT Three Scene 2 – Windsor Park at midnight.

Fenton sings of his love for Nannetta. The women arrive and give Fenton a monk costume and tell him that it will spoil Ford's and Dr. Caius' plan. They hide when Falstaff enters wearing his antlered, Black Hunter costume. He addresses Alice when Meg runs in shouting that demons are about to enter the park. Nannetta, dressed as the Fairy Queen, orders the 'spirits' to torment Falstaff. They surround Falstaff and he begs for mercy. Moments later, Falstaff recognizes one of his tormentors as Bardolfo. The joke over, Falstaff admits that it was well deserved. Ford then announces that they will end the day with a wedding. As Ford calls upon Dr. Caius and the Fairy Queen, a second couple approaches asking also to be married. Ford marries both couples before realizing that Bardolfo has changed into the Fairy Queen costume, and the second couple was Fenton and Nannetta. Happy with the outcome, and knowing that he was not the only one tricked, Falstaff proclaims the world is nothing more than a jest and everyone shares a good hearty laugh.