

The First Part of the Contention

3.1

Sound a sennet. Enter to the parliament: enter two heralds before, then the Dukes of Buckingham and Suffolk, and then the Duke of York and Cardinal Beaufort, and then King Henry and Queen Margaret, and then the Earls of Salisbury and Warwick, [with attendants]

KING HENRY

I muse my lord of Gloucester is not come.
'Tis not his wont to be the hindmost man,
Whate'er occasion keeps him from us now.

QUEEN MARGARET

Can you not see, or will ye not observe,
The strangeness of his altered countenance? 5
With what a majesty he bears himself?
How insolent of late he is become?
How proud, how peremptory, and unlike himself?
We know the time since he was mild and affable,
And if we did but glance a far-off look, 10
Immediately he was upon his knee,
That all the court admired him for submission.
But meet him now, and be it in the morn
When everyone will give the time of day,
He knits his brow, and shows an angry eye, 15
And passeth by with stiff unbowed knee,
Disdaining duty that to us belongs.
Small curs are not regarded when they grin,
But great men tremble when the lion roars±±
And Humphrey is no little man in England. 20
First, note that he is near you in descent,
And, should you fall, he is the next will mount.
Meseemeth then it is no policy,
Respecting what a rancorous mind he bears
And his advantage following your decease, 25
That he should come about your royal person,
Or be admitted to your highness' Council.
By flattery hath he won the commons' hearts,

And when he please to make commotion,
'Tis to be feared they all will follow him. 30
Now 'tis the spring, and weeds are shallow-rooted;
Suffer them now, and they'll o'ergrow the garden,
And choke the herbs for want of husbandry.
The reverent care I bear unto my lord
Made me collect these dangers in the Duke. 35
If it be fond, call it a woman's fear;
Which fear, if better reasons can supplant,
I will subscribe and say I wronged the Duke.
My lord of Suffolk, Buckingham, and York,
Reprove my allegation if you can, 40
Or else conclude my words effectual.

SUFFOLK

Well hath your highness seen into this Duke,
And had I first been put to speak my mind,
I think I should have told your grace's tale.
The Duchess by his subornation, 45
Upon my life, began her devilish practices;
Or if he were not privy to those faults,
Yet by reputing of his high descent,
As next the King he was successive heir,
And such high vaunts of his nobility, 50
Did instigate the bedlam brainsick Duchess
By wicked means to frame our sovereign's fall.
Smooth runs the water where the brook is deep,
And in his simple show he harbours treason.
The fox barks not when he would steal the lamb. 55
(*To King Henry*)
No, no, my sovereign, Gloucester is a man
Unsounded yet, and full of deep deceit.

CARDINAL BEAUFORT (*to King Henry*)

Did he not, contrary to form of law,
Devise strange deaths for small offences done?

YORK (*to King Henry*)

And did he not, in his Protectorship, 60
Levy great sums of money through the realm
For soldiers' pay in France, and never sent it,
By means whereof the towns each day revolted?

BUCKINGHAM (*to King Henry*)

Tut, these are petty faults to faults unknown,
Which time will bring to light in smooth Duke
Humphrey.

65

KING HENRY

My lords, at once: the care you have of us
To mow down thorns that would annoy our foot
Is worthy praise, but shall I speak my conscience?
Our kinsman Gloucester is as innocent
From meaning treason to our royal person 70
As is the sucking lamb or harmless dove.
The Duke is virtuous, mild, and too well given
To dream on evil or to work my downfall.

QUEEN MARGARET

Ah, what's more dangerous than this fond affiance?
Seems he a dove? His feathers are but borrowed, 75
For he's disposed as the hateful raven.
Is he a lamb? His skin is surely lent him,
For he's inclined as is the ravenous wolf.
Who cannot steal a shape that means deceit?
Take heed, my lord, the welfare of us all 80
Hangs on the cutting short that fraudulent man.

Enter the Duke of Somerset

SOMERSET *[kneeling before King Henry]*

All health unto my gracious sovereign.

KING HENRY

Welcome, Lord Somerset. What news from France?

SOMERSET

That all your interest in those territories
Is utterly bereft you—~~all~~ all is lost. 85

KING HENRY

Cold news, Lord Somerset; but God's will be done.

[Somerset rises]

YORK *(aside)*

Cold news for me, for I had hope of France,
As firmly as I hope for fertile England.
Thus are my blossoms blasted in the bud,
And caterpillars eat my leaves away. 90
But I will remedy this gear ere long,
Or sell my title for a glorious grave.

Enter Duke Humphrey of Gloucester

GLOUCESTER *[kneeling before King Henry]*

All happiness unto my lord the King.

Pardon, my liege, that I have stayed so long.

SUFFOLK

Nay, Gloucester, know that thou art come too soon 95

Unless thou wert more loyal than thou art.

I do arrest thee of high treason here.

GLOUCESTER *[rising]*

Well, Suffolk's Duke, thou shalt not see me blush,

Nor change my countenance for this arrest.

A heart unspotted is not easily daunted. 100

The purest spring is not so free from mud

As I am clear from treason to my sovereign.

Who can accuse me? Wherein am I guilty?

YORK

'Tis thought, my lord, that you took bribes of France,

And, being Protector, stayed the soldiers' pay, 105

By means whereof his highness hath lost France.

GLOUCESTER

Is it but thought so? What are they that think it?

I never robbed the soldiers of their pay,

Nor ever had one penny bribe from France.

So help me God, as I have watched the night, 110

Ay, night by night, in studying good for England,

That do it that e'er I wrested from the King,

Or any groat I hoarded to my use,

Be brought against me at my trial day!

No: many a pound of mine own proper store, 115

Because I would not tax the needy commons,

Have I dispurse'd to the garrisons,

And never asked for restitution.

CARDINAL BEAUFORT

It serves you well, my lord, to say so much.

GLOUCESTER

I say no more than truth, so help me God. 120

YORK

In your Protectorship you did devise

Strange tortures for offenders, never heard of,

That England was defamed by tyranny.

GLOUCESTER

Why, 'tis well known that whiles I was Protector

Pity was all the fault that was in me, 125
For I should melt at an offender's tears,
And lowly words were ransom for their fault.
Unless it were a bloody murderer,
Or foul felonious thief that fleeced poor passengers,
I never gave them condign punishment. 130
Murder, indeed±±that bloody sin±±I tortured
Above the felon or what trespass else.

SUFFOLK

My lord, these faults are easy, quickly answered,
But mightier crimes are laid unto your charge
Whereof you cannot easily purge yourself. 135
I do arrest you in his highness' name,
And here commit you to my good lord Cardinal
To keep until your further time of trial.

KING HENRY

My lord of Gloucester, 'tis my special hope
That you will clear yourself from all suspense. 140
My conscience tells me you are innocent.

GLOUCESTER

Ah, gracious lord, these days are dangerous.
Virtue is choked with foul ambition,
And charity chased hence by rancour's hand.
Foul subornation is predominant, 145
And equity exiled your highness' land.
I know their complot is to have my life,
And if my death might make this island happy
And prove the period of their tyranny,
I would expend it with all willingness. 150
But mine is made the prologue to their play,
For thousands more that yet suspect no peril
Will not conclude their plotted tragedy.
Beaufort's red sparkling eyes blab his heart's malice,
And Suffolk's cloudy brow his stormy hate; 155
Sharp Buckingham unburdens with his tongue
The envious load that lies upon his heart;
And doggeÁd York that reaches at the moon,
Whose overweening arm I have plucked back,
By false accuse doth level at my life. 160
(To Queen Margaret)

And you, my sovereign lady, with the rest,
Causeless have laid disgraces on my head,
And with your best endeavour have stirred up
My liefest liege to be mine enemy.
Ay, all of you have laid your heads together±± 165
Myself had notice of your conventicles±±
And all to make away my guiltless life.
I shall not want false witness to condemn me,
Nor store of treasons to augment my guilt.
The ancient proverb will be well effected: 170
'A staff is quickly found to beat a dog'.

CARDINAL BEAUFORT *(to King Henry)*

My liege, his railing is intolerable.
If those that care to keep your royal person
From treason's secret knife and traitor's rage
Be thus upbraided, chid, and rated at, 175
And the offender granted scope of speech,
'Twill make them cool in zeal unto your grace.

SUFFOLK *(to King Henry)*

Hath he not twit our sovereign lady here
With ignominious words, though clerkly couched,
As if she had suborneÁd some to swear 180
False allegations to o'erthrow his state?

QUEEN MARGARET

But I can give the loser leave to chide.

GLOUCESTER

Far truer spoke than meant. I lose indeed;
Beshrew the winners, for they played me false!
And well such losers may have leave to speak. 185

BUCKINGHAM *(to King Henry)*

He'll wrest the sense, and hold us here all day.
Lord Cardinal, he is your prisoner.

CARDINAL BEAUFORT *(to some of his attendants)*

Sirs, take away the Duke and guard him sure.

GLOUCESTER

Ah, thus King Henry throws away his crutch
Before his legs be firm to bear his body. 190
Thus is the shepherd beaten from thy side,
And wolves are gnawing who shall gnaw thee first.
Ah, that my fear were false; ah, that it were!

For, good King Henry, thy decay I fear.

Exit Gloucester, guarded by the Cardinal's men

KING HENRY

My lords, what to your wisdoms seemeth best 195
Do or undo, as if ourself were here.

QUEEN MARGARET

What, will your highness leave the Parliament?

KING HENRY

Ay, Margaret, my heart is drowned with grief,
Whose flood begins to flow within mine eyes,
My body round engirt with misery; 200
For what's more miserable than discontent?
Ah, uncle Humphrey, in thy face I see
The map of honour, truth, and loyalty;
And yet, good Humphrey, is the hour to come
That e'er I proved thee false, or feared thy faith. 205
What luring star now envies thy estate,
That these great lords and Margaret our Queen
Do seek subversion of thy harmless life?
Thou never didst them wrong, nor no man wrong.
And as the butcher takes away the calf, 210
And binds the wretch, and beats it when it strains,
Bearing it to the bloody slaughterhouse,
Even so remorseless have they borne him hence;
And as the dam runs lowing up and down,
Looking the way her harmless young one went, 215
And can do naught but wail her darling's loss;
Even so myself bewails good Gloucester's case
With sad unhelpful tears, and with dimmed eyes
Look after him, and cannot do him good,
So mighty are his voweÁd enemies. 220
His fortunes I will weep, and 'twixt each groan,
Say `Who's a traitor? Gloucester, he is none'.

Exit [with Salisbury and Warwick]

QUEEN MARGARET

Free lords, cold snow melts with the sun's hot beams.
Henry my lord is cold in great affairs,
Too full of foolish pity; and Gloucester's show 225
Beguiles him as the mournful crocodile
With sorrow snares relenting passengers,

Or as the snake rolled in a flow'ring bank
With shining chequered slough doth sting a child
That for the beauty thinks it excellent. 230
Believe me, lords, were none more wise than I±±
And yet herein I judge mine own wit good±±
This Gloucester should be quickly rid the world
To rid us from the fear we have of him.

CARDINAL BEAUFORT

That he should die is worthy policy; 235
But yet we want a colour for his death.
'Tis meet he be condemned by course of law.

SUFFOLK

But, in my mind, that were no policy.
The King will labour still to save his life,
The commons haply rise to save his life; 240
And yet we have but trivial argument
More than mistrust that shows him worthy death.

YORK

So that, by this, you would not have him die?

SUFFOLK

Ah, York, no man alive so fain as I.

YORK (*aside*)

'Tis York that hath more reason for his death. 245

(*Aloud*) But my lord Cardinal, and you my lord of
Suffolk,

Say as you think, and speak it from your souls.
Were't not all one an empty eagle were set
To guard the chicken from a hungry kite,
As place Duke Humphrey for the King's Protector? 250

QUEEN MARGARET

So the poor chicken should be sure of death.

SUFFOLK

Madam, 'tis true; and were't not madness then
To make the fox surveyor of the fold,
Who being accused a crafty murderer,
His guilt should be but idly posted over 255
Because his purpose is not executed?
No±±let him die in that he is a fox,
By nature proved an enemy to the flock,
Before his chaps be stained with crimson blood,
As Humphrey, proved by reasons, to my liege. 260

And do not stand on quilllets how to slay him;
Be it by gins, by snares, by subtlety,
Sleeping or waking, 'tis no matter how,
So he be dead; for that is good conceit
Which mates him first that first intends deceit. 265

QUEEN MARGARET

Thrice-noble Suffolk, 'tis resolutely spoke.

SUFFOLK

Not resolute, except so much were done;
For things are often spoke and seldom meant;
But that my heart accordeth with my tongue,
Seeing the deed is meritorious, 270
And to preserve my sovereign from his foe,
Say but the word and I will be his priest.

CARDINAL BEAUFORT

But I would have him dead, my lord of Suffolk,
Ere you can take due orders for a priest.
Say you consent and censure well the deed, 275
And I'll provide his executioner;
I tender so the safety of my liege.

SUFFOLK

Here is my hand; the deed is worthy doing.

QUEEN MARGARET And so say I.

YORK

And I. And now we three have spoke it, 280
It skills not greatly who impugns our doom.

Enter a Post

POST

Great lord, from Ireland am I come amain
To signify that rebels there are up
And put the Englishmen unto the sword.
Send succours, lords, and stop the rage betime, 285
Before the wound do grow uncurable;
For, being green, there is great hope of help.

[Exit]

CARDINAL BEAUFORT

A breach that craves a quick expedient stop!
What counsel give you in this weighty cause?

YORK

That Somerset be sent as regent thither. 290
'Tis meet that lucky ruler be employed±±

Witness the fortune he hath had in France.

SOMERSET
 If York, with all his far-fet policy,
 Had been the regent there instead of me,
 He never would have stayed in France so long. 295

YORK
 No, not to lose it all as thou hast done.
 I rather would have lost my life betimes
 Than bring a burden of dishonour home
 By staying there so long till all were lost.
 Show me one scar charactered on thy skin. 300
 Men's flesh preserved so whole do seldom win.

QUEEN MARGARET
 Nay, then, this spark will prove a raging fire
 If wind and fuel be brought to feed it with.
 No more, good York; sweet Somerset, be still.
 Thy fortune, York, hadst thou been regent there, 305
 Might happily have proved far worse than his.

YORK
 What, worse than naught? Nay, then a shame take
 all!

SOMERSET
 And, in the number, thee that wishest shame.

CARDINAL BEAUFORT
 My lord of York, try what your fortune is.
 Th'uncivil kerns of Ireland are in arms 310
 And temper clay with blood of Englishmen.
 To Ireland will you lead a band of men
 Collected choicely, from each county some,
 And try your hap against the Irishmen?

YORK
 I will, my lord, so please his majesty. 315

SUFFOLK
 Why, our authority is his consent,
 And what we do establish he confirms.
 Then, noble York, take thou this task in hand.

YORK
 I am content. Provide me soldiers, lords,
 Whiles I take order for mine own affairs. 320

SUFFOLK
 A charge, Lord York, that I will see performed.

But now return we to the false Duke Humphrey.

CARDINAL BEAUFORT

No more of him±±for I will deal with him
That henceforth he shall trouble us no more.
And so, break off; the day is almost spent. 325
Lord Suffolk, you and I must talk of that event.

YORK

My lord of Suffolk, within fourteen days
At Bristol I expect my soldiers;
For there I'll ship them all for Ireland.

SUFFOLK

I'll see it truly done, my lord of York. 330
Exeunt all but York

YORK

Now, York, or never, steel thy fearful thoughts,
And change misdoubt to resolution.
Be that thou hop'st to be, or what thou art
Resign to death; it is not worth th'enjoying.
Let pale-faced fear keep with the mean-born man 335
And find no harbour in a royal heart.
Faster than springtime showers comes thought on
thought,
And not a thought but thinks on dignity.
My brain, more busy than the labouring spider,
Weaves tedious snares to trap mine enemies. 340
Well, nobles, well: 'tis politicly done
To send me packing with an host of men.
I fear me you but warm the starveÁd snake,
Who, cherished in your breasts, will sting your hearts.
'Twas men I lacked, and you will give them me. 345
I take it kindly. Yet be well assured
You put sharp weapons in a madman's hands.
Whiles I in Ireland nurse a mighty band,
I will stir up in England some black storm
Shall blow ten thousand souls to heaven or hell, 350
And this fell tempest shall not cease to rage
Until the golden circuit on my head
Like to the glorious sun's transparent beams
Do calm the fury of this mad-bred flaw.
And for a minister of my intent, 355

I have seduced a headstrong Kentishman,
 John Cade of Ashford,
 To make commotion, as full well he can,
 Under the title of John Mortimer.
 In Ireland have I seen this stubborn Cade 360
 Oppose himself against a troop of kerns,
 And fought so long till that his thighs with darts
 Were almost like a sharp-quilled porcupine;
 And in the end, being rescued, I have seen
 Him caper upright like a wild Morisco, 365
 Shaking the bloody darts as he his bells.
 Full often like a shag-haired crafty kern
 Hath he converseÁd with the enemy
 And, undiscovered, come to me again
 And given me notice of their villainies. 370
 This devil here shall be my substitute,
 For that John Mortimer, which now is dead,
 In face, in gait, in speech, he doth resemble.
 By this I shall perceive the commons' mind,
 How they affect the house and claim of York. 375
 Say he be taken, racked, and tortureÁd±±
 I know no pain they can inflict upon him
 Will make him say I moved him to those arms.
 Say that he thrive, as 'tis great like he will±±
 Why then from Ireland come I with my strength 380
 And reap the harvest which that coistrel sowed.
 For Humphrey being dead, as he shall be,
 And Henry put apart, the next for me.
Exit