

# The First Part of the Contention

## 2.4

*Enter Duke Humphrey of Gloucester and his men in mourning cloaks*

**GLOUCESTER**

Thus sometimes hath the brightest day a cloud;  
And after summer evermore succeeds  
Barren winter, with his wrathful nipping cold;  
So cares and joys abound as seasons fleet.  
Sirs, what's o'clock?

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**SERVANT** Ten, my lord.

**GLOUCESTER**

Ten is the hour that was appointed me  
To watch the coming of my punished Duchess;  
Uneath may she endure the flinty streets,  
To tread them with her tender-feeling feet. 10  
Sweet Nell, ill can thy noble mind abrook  
The abject people gazing on thy face  
With envious looks, laughing at thy shame,  
That erst did follow thy proud chariot wheels  
When thou didst ride in triumph through the streets. 15  
But soft, I think she comes; and I'll prepare  
My tear-stained eyes to see her miseries.

*Enter the Duchess, Dame Eleanor Cobham, barefoot,  
with a white sheet about her, written verses pinned  
on her back, and carrying a wax candle in her  
hand; she is accompanied by the [two Sheriffs] of  
London, and Sir John Stanley, and officers with bills  
and halberds*

**SERVANT** (to Gloucester)

So please your grace, we'll take her from the sheriffs.

**GLOUCESTER**

No, stir not for your lives, let her pass by.

**DUCHESS**

Come you, my lord, to see my open shame? 20  
Now thou dost penance too. Look how they gaze,  
See how the giddy multitude do point  
And nod their heads, and throw their eyes on thee.

Ah, Gloucester, hide thee from their hateful looks,  
And, in thy closet pent up, rue my shame, 25  
And ban thine enemies±±both mine and thine.

**GLOUCESTER**

Be patient, gentle Nell; forget this grief.

**DUCHESS**

Ah, Gloucester, teach me to forget myself;  
For whilst I think I am thy married wife,  
And thou a prince, Protector of this land, 30  
Methinks I should not thus be led along,  
Mailed up in shame, with papers on my back,  
And followed with a rabble that rejoice  
To see my tears and hear my deep-fet groans.  
The ruthless flint doth cut my tender feet, 35  
And when I start, the envious people laugh,  
And bid me be adviseÁd how I tread.  
Ah, Humphrey, can I bear this shameful yoke?  
Trowest thou that e'er I'll look upon the world,  
Or count them happy that enjoys the sun? 40  
No, dark shall be my light, and night my day;  
To think upon my pomp shall be my hell.  
Sometime I'll say I am Duke Humphrey's wife,  
And he a prince and ruler of the land;  
Yet so he ruled, and such a prince he was, 45  
As he stood by whilst I, his forlorn Duchess,  
Was made a wonder and a pointing stock  
To every idle rascal follower.  
But be thou mild and blush not at my shame,  
Nor stir at nothing till the axe of death 50  
Hang over thee, as sure it shortly will.  
For Suffolk, he that can do all in all  
With her that hateth thee and hates us all,  
And York, and impious Beaufort that false priest,  
Have all limed bushes to betray thy wings, 55  
And fly thou how thou canst, they'll tangle thee.  
But fear not thou until thy foot be snared,  
Nor never seek prevention of thy foes.

**GLOUCESTER**

Ah, Nell, forbear; thou aimest all awry.  
I must offend before I be attainted, 60

And had I twenty times so many foes,  
And each of them had twenty times their power,  
All these could not procure me any scathe  
So long as I am loyal, true, and crimeless.  
Wouldst have me rescue thee from this reproach? 65  
Why, yet thy scandal were not wiped away,  
But I in danger for the breach of law.  
Thy greatest help is quiet, gentle Nell.  
I pray thee sort thy heart to patience.  
These few days' wonder will be quickly worn. 70

*Enter a Herald*

**HERALD** I summon your grace to his majesty's parliament  
holden at Bury the first of this next month.

**GLOUCESTER**

And my consent ne'er asked herein before?  
This is close dealing. Well, I will be there.

*Exit Herald*

My Nell, I take my leave; and, Master Sheriff, 75  
Let not her penance exceed the King's commission.

**[FIRST] SHERIFF**

An't please your grace, here my commission stays,  
And Sir John Stanley is appointed now  
To take her with him to the Isle of Man.

**GLOUCESTER**

Must you, Sir John, protect my lady here? 80

**STANLEY**

So am I given in charge, may't please your grace.

**GLOUCESTER**

Entreat her not the worse in that I pray  
You use her well. The world may laugh again,  
And I may live to do you kindness if  
You do it her. And so, Sir John, farewell. 85

*[Gloucester begins to leave]*

**DUCHESS**

What, gone, my lord, and bid me not farewell?

**GLOUCESTER**

Witness my tears±±I cannot stay to speak.

*Exeunt Gloucester and his men*

**DUCHESS**

Art thou gone too? All comfort go with thee,  
For none abides with me. My joy is death±±

Death, at whose name I oft have been afeard, 90  
 Because I wished this world's eternity.  
 Stanley, I prithee go and take me hence.  
 I care not whither, for I beg no favour,  
 Only convey me where thou art commanded.

**STANLEY**  
 Why, madam, that is to the Isle of Man, 95  
 There to be used according to your state.

**DUCHESS**  
 That's bad enough, for I am but reproach;  
 And shall I then be used reproachfully?

**STANLEY**  
 Like to a duchess and Duke Humphrey's lady,  
 According to that state you shall be used. 100

**DUCHESS**  
 Sheriff, farewell, and better than I fare,  
 Although thou hast been conduct of my shame.

**[FIRST] SHERIFF**  
 It is my office, and, madam, pardon me.

**DUCHESS**  
 Ay, ay, farewell±±thy office is discharged.  
*[Exeunt Sheriffs]*  
 Come, Stanley, shall we go? 105

**STANLEY**  
 Madam, your penance done, throw off this sheet,  
 And go we to attire you for our journey.

**DUCHESS**  
 My shame will not be shifted with my sheet±±  
 No, it will hang upon my richest robes  
 And show itself, attire me how I can. 110  
 Go, lead the way, I long to see my prison.  
*Exeunt*