

The First Part of the Contention

1.2

*Enter Duke Humphrey of Gloucester and his wife
Eleanor, the Duchess*

DUCHESS

Why droops my lord, like over-ripened corn
Hanging the head at Ceres' plenteous load?
Why doth the great Duke Humphrey knit his brows,
As frowning at the favours of the world?
Why are thine eyes fixed to the sullen earth, 5
Gazing on that which seems to dim thy sight?
What seest thou there? King Henry's diadem,
Enchased with all the honours of the world?
If so, gaze on, and grovel on thy face
Until thy head be circled with the same. 10
Put forth thy hand, reach at the glorious gold.
What, is't too short? I'll lengthen it with mine;
And having both together heaved it up,
We'll both together lift our heads to heaven
And never more abase our sight so low 15
As to vouchsafe one glance unto the ground.

GLOUCESTER

O Nell, sweet Nell, if thou dost love thy lord,
Banish the canker of ambitious thoughts!
And may that hour when I imagine ill
Against my king and nephew, virtuous Henry, 20
Be my last breathing in this mortal world!
My troublous dream this night doth make me sad.

DUCHESS

What dreamed my lord? Tell me and I'll requite it
With sweet rehearsal of my morning's dream.

GLOUCESTER

Methought this staff, mine office-badge in court, 25
Was broke in twain±±by whom I have forgot,
But, as I think, it was by th' Cardinal±±
And on the pieces of the broken wand
Were placed the heads of Edmund, Duke of Somerset,
And William de la Pole, first Duke of Suffolk. 30

This was my dream±±what it doth bode, God knows.

DUCHESS

Tut, this was nothing but an argument
That he that breaks a stick of Gloucester's grove
Shall lose his head for his presumption.
But list to me, my Humphrey, my sweet duke: 35
Methought I sat in seat of majesty
In the cathedral church of Westminster,
And in that chair where kings and queens are
crowned,
Where Henry and Dame Margaret kneeled to me,
And on my head did set the diadem. 40

GLOUCESTER

Nay, Eleanor, then must I chide outright.
Presumptuous dame! Ill-nurtured Eleanor!
Art thou not second woman in the realm,
And the Protector's wife beloved of him?
Hast thou not worldly pleasure at command 45
Above the reach or compass of thy thought?
And wilt thou still be hammering treachery
To tumble down thy husband and thyself
From top of honour to disgrace's feet?
Away from me, and let me hear no more! 50

DUCHESS

What, what, my lord? Are you so choleric
With Eleanor for telling but her dream?
Next time I'll keep my dreams unto myself
And not be checked.

GLOUCESTER

Nay, be not angry; I am pleased again. 55
Enter a Messenger

MESSENGER

My Lord Protector, 'tis his highness' pleasure
You do prepare to ride unto Saint Albans,
Whereas the King and Queen do mean to hawk.

GLOUCESTER

I go. Come, Nell, thou wilt ride with us?

DUCHESS

Yes, my good lord, I'll follow presently. 60

Exeunt Gloucester and the Messenger

Follow I must; I cannot go before

While Gloucester bears this base and humble mind.
Were I a man, a duke, and next of blood,
I would remove these tedious stumbling blocks
And smooth my way upon their headless necks. 65
And, being a woman, I will not be slack
To play my part in fortune's pageant.
(*Calling within*) Where are you there? Sir John! Nay,
fear not man.

We are alone. Here's none but thee and I.

Enter Sir John Hume

HUME

Jesus preserve your royal majesty. 70

DUCHESS

What sayst thou? `Majesty'? I am but `grace'.

HUME

But by the grace of God and Hume's advice
Your grace's title shall be multiplied.

DUCHESS

What sayst thou, man? Hast thou as yet conferred
With Margery Jordan, the cunning witch of Eye, 75
With Roger Bolingbroke, the conjuror?
And will they undertake to do me good?

HUME

This they have promise'd: to show your highness
A spirit raised from depth of underground
That shall make answer to such questions 80
As by your Grace shall be propounded him.

DUCHESS

It is enough. I'll think upon the questions.
When from Saint Albans we do make return,
We'll see these things effected to the full.
Here, Hume (*giving him money*), take this reward.

Make merry, man, 85

With thy confederates in this weighty cause.

Exit

HUME

Hume must make merry with the Duchess' gold;
Marry, and shall. But how now, Sir John Hume?
Seal up your lips, and give no words but mum;
The business asketh silent secrecy. 90
Dame Eleanor gives gold to bring the witch.

Gold cannot come amiss were she a devil.
Yet have I gold flies from another coast±±
I dare not say from the rich Cardinal
And from the great and new-made Duke of Suffolk, 95
Yet I do find it so; for, to be plain,
They, knowing Dame Eleanor's aspiring humour,
Have hired me to undermine the Duchess,
And buzz these conjurations in her brain.
They say `A crafty knave does need no broker', 100
Yet am I Suffolk and the Cardinal's broker.
Hume, if you take not heed you shall go near
To call them both a pair of crafty knaves.
Well, so it stands; and thus, I fear, at last
Hume's knavery will be the Duchess' wrack, 105
And her attainture will be Humphrey's fall.
Sort how it will, I shall have gold for all.

Exit