

The First Part of the Contention

3.2

[The curtains are drawn apart, revealing Duke Humphrey of Gloucester in his bed with two men lying on his breast, smothering him in his bed]

FIRST MURDERER *(to the Second Murderer)*

Run to my lord of Suffolk±±let him know

We have dispatched the Duke as he commanded.

SECOND MURDERER

O that it were to do! What have we done?

Didst ever hear a man so penitent?

Enter the Duke of Suffolk

FIRST MURDERER Here comes my lord.

5

SUFFOLK

Now, sirs, have you dispatched this thing?

FIRST MURDERER Ay, my good lord, he's dead.

SUFFOLK

Why, that's well said. Go, get you to my house.

I will reward you for this venturous deed.

The King and all the peers are here at hand.

10

Have you laid fair the bed? Is all things well,

According as I gave directions?

FIRST MURDERER 'Tis, my good lord.

SUFFOLK

Then draw the curtains close; away, be gone!

Exeunt [the Murderers, drawing the curtains as they leave]

Sound trumpets, then enter King Henry and Queen Margaret, Cardinal Beaufort, the Duke of Somerset, and attendants

KING HENRY *[to Suffolk]*

Go call our uncle to our presence straight.

15

Say we intend to try his grace today

If he be guilty, as 'tis publisheÁd.

SUFFOLK

I'll call him presently, my noble lord.

Exit

KING HENRY

Lords, take your places; and, I pray you all,

Proceed no straiter 'gainst our uncle Gloucester	20
Than from true evidence, of good esteem,	
He be approved in practice culpable.	
QUEEN MARGARET	
God forbid any malice should prevail	
That faultless may condemn a noble man!	
Pray God he may acquit him of suspicion!	25
KING HENRY	
I thank thee, Meg. These words content me much.	
<i>Enter Suffolk</i>	
How now? Why look'st thou pale? Why tremblest	
thou?	
Where is our uncle? What's the matter, Suffolk?	
SUFFOLK	
Dead in his bed, my lord±±Gloucester is dead.	
QUEEN MARGARET Marry, God forbend!	30
CARDINAL BEAUFORT	
God's secret judgement. I did dream tonight	
The Duke was dumb and could not speak a word.	
<i>King Henry falls to the ground</i>	
QUEEN MARGARET	
How fares my lord? Help, lords±±the King is dead!	
SOMERSET	
Rear up his body; wring him by the nose.	
QUEEN MARGARET	
Run, go, help, help! O Henry, ope thine eyes!	35
SUFFOLK	
He doth revive again. Madam, be patient.	
KING HENRY	
O heavenly God!	
QUEEN MARGARET How fares my gracious lord?	
SUFFOLK	
Comfort, my sovereign; gracious Henry, comfort.	
KING HENRY	
What, doth my lord of Suffolk comfort me?	
Came he right now to sing a raven's note	40
Whose dismal tune bereft my vital powers;	
And thinks he that the chirping of a wren,	
By crying comfort from a hollow breast	
Can chase away the first-conceiveÁd sound?	
Hide not thy poison with such sugared words.	45

[He begins to rise. Suffolk offers to assist him]

Lay not thy hands on me±±forbear, I say!
Their touch affrights me as a serpent's sting.
Thou baleful messenger, out of my sight!
Upon thy eyeballs murderous tyranny
Sits in grim majesty to fright the world. 50
Look not upon me, for thine eyes are wounding±±
Yet do not go away. Come, basilisk,
And kill the innocent gazer with thy sight.
For in the shade of death I shall find joy;
In life, but double death, now Gloucester's dead. 55

QUEEN MARGARET

Why do you rate my lord of Suffolk thus?
Although the Duke was enemy to him,
Yet he most Christian-like laments his death.
And for myself, foe as he was to me,
Might liquid tears, or heart-offending groans, 60
Or blood-consuming sighs recall his life,
I would be blind with weeping, sick with groans,
Look pale as primrose with blood-drinking sighs,
And all to have the noble Duke alive.
What know I how the world may deem of me? 65
For it is known we were but hollow friends,
It may be judged I made the Duke away.
So shall my name with slander's tongue be wounded
And princes' courts be filled with my reproach.
This get I by his death. Ay me, unhappy, 70
To be a queen, and crowned with infamy.

KING HENRY

Ah, woe is me for Gloucester, wretched man!

QUEEN MARGARET

Be woe for me, more wretched than he is.
What, dost thou turn away and hide thy face?
I am no loathsome leper±±look on me! 75
What, art thou, like the adder, waxen deaf?
Be poisonous too and kill thy forlorn queen.
Is all thy comfort shut in Gloucester's tomb?
Why, then Queen Margaret was ne'er thy joy.
Erect his statue and worship it, 80
And make my image but an alehouse sign.

Was I for this nigh wrecked upon the sea,
 And twice by awkward winds from England's bank
 Drove back again unto my native clime?
 What boded this, but well forewarning winds 85
 Did seem to say, `Seek not a scorpion's nest,
 Nor set no footing on this unkind shore'.
 What did I then, but cursed the gentle gusts
 And he that loosed them forth their brazen caves,
 And bid them blow towards England's blesseÁd shore, 90
 Or turn our stern upon a dreadful rock.
 Yet Aeolus would not be a murderer,
 But left that hateful office unto thee.
 The pretty vaulting sea refused to drown me,
 Knowing that thou wouldst have me drowned on
 shore 95
 With tears as salt as sea through thy unkindness.
 The splitting rocks cow'ed in the sinking sands,
 And would not dash me with their ragged sides,
 Because thy flinty heart, more hard than they,
 Might in thy palace perish Margaret. 100
 As far as I could ken thy chalky cliffs,
 When from thy shore the tempest beat us back,
 I stood upon the hatches in the storm,
 And when the dusky sky began to rob
 My earnest-gaping sight of thy land's view, 105
 I took a costly jewel from my neck±±
 A heart it was, bound in with diamonds±±
 And threw it towards thy land. The sea received it,
 And so I wished thy body might my heart.
 And even with this I lost fair England's view, 110
 And bid mine eyes be packing with my heart,
 And called them blind and dusky spectacles
 For losing ken of Albion's wisheÁd coast.
 How often have I tempted Suffolk's tongue±±
 The agent of thy foul inconstancy±± 115
 To sit and witch me, as Ascanius did,
 When he to madding Dido would unfold
 His father's acts, commenced in burning Troy!
 Am I not witch'd like her? Or thou not false like him?
 Ay me, I can no more. Die, Margaret, 120

For Henry weeps that thou dost live so long.
*Noise within. Enter the Earls of Warwick and
Salisbury with many commons*

WARWICK (to King Henry)

It is reported, mighty sovereign,
That good Duke Humphrey traitorously is murdered
By Suffolk and the Cardinal Beaufort's means.
The commons, like an angry hive of bees 125
That want their leader, scatter up and down
And care not who they sting in his revenge.
Myself have calmed their spleenful mutiny,
Until they hear the order of his death.

KING HENRY

That he is dead, good Warwick, 'tis too true. 130
But how he died God knows, not Henry.
Enter his chamber, view his breathless corpse,
And comment then upon his sudden death.

WARWICK

That shall I do, my liege.±±Stay, Salisbury,
With the rude multitude till I return. 135
*[Exeunt Warwick at one door, Salisbury and
commons at another]*

KING HENRY

O thou that judgest all things, stay my thoughts,
My thoughts that labour to persuade my soul
Some violent hands were laid on Humphrey's life.
If my suspect be false, forgive me God,
For judgement only doth belong to thee. 140
Fain would I go to chafe his paly lips
With twenty thousand kisses, and to drain
Upon his face an ocean of salt tears,
To tell my love unto his dumb, deaf trunk,
And with my fingers feel his hand unfeeling. 145
But all in vain are these mean obsequies,
*[Enter Warwick who draws apart the curtains and
shows] Gloucester dead in his bed. Bed put forth*
And to survey his dead and earthy image,
What were it but to make my sorrow greater?

WARWICK

Come hither, gracious sovereign, view this body.

KING HENRY

That is to see how deep my grave is made: 150
For with his soul fled all my worldly solace,
For seeing him I see my life in death.

WARWICK

As surely as my soul intends to live
With that dread King that took our state upon Him
To free us from his Father's wrathful curse, 155
I do believe that violent hands were laid
Upon the life of this thrice-fameÁd Duke.

SUFFOLK

A dreadful oath, sworn with a solemn tongue!
What instance gives Lord Warwick for his vow?

WARWICK

See how the blood is settled in his face. 160
Oft have I seen a timely-parted ghost
Of ashy semblance, meagre, pale, and bloodless,
Being all descended to the labouring heart;
Who, in the conflict that it holds with death,
Attracts the same for aidance 'gainst the enemy; 165
Which, with the heart, there cools, and ne'er returneth
To blush and beautify the cheek again.
But see, his face is black and full of blood;
His eyeballs further out than when he lived,
Staring full ghastly like a strangled man; 170
His hair upreared; his nostrils stretched with
struggling;
His hands abroad displayed, as one that grasped
And tugged for life and was by strength subdued.
Look on the sheets. His hair, you see, is sticking;
His well-proportioned beard made rough and rugged, 175
Like to the summer's corn by tempest lodged.
It cannot be but he was murdered here.
The least of all these signs were probable.

SUFFOLK

Why, Warwick, who should do the Duke to death?
Myself and Beaufort had him in protection, 180
And we, I hope, sir, are no murderers.

WARWICK

But both of you were vowed Duke Humphrey's foes,
(*To Cardinal Beaufort*)

And you, forsooth, had the good Duke to keep.
'Tis like you would not feast him like a friend;
And 'tis well seen he found an enemy. 185

QUEEN MARGARET

Then you, belike, suspect these noblemen
As guilty of Duke Humphrey's timeless death?

WARWICK

Who finds the heifer dead and bleeding fresh,
And sees fast by a butcher with an axe,
But will suspect 'twas he that made the slaughter? 190
Who finds the partridge in the puttock's nest
But may imagine how the bird was dead,
Although the kite soar with unbloodied beak?
Even so suspicious is this tragedy.

QUEEN MARGARET

Are you the butcher, Suffolk? Where's your knife? 195
Is Beaufort termed a kite? Where are his talons?

SUFFOLK

I wear no knife to slaughter sleeping men.
But here's a vengeful sword, rusted with ease,
That shall be scourge in his rancorous heart
That slanders me with murder's crimson badge. 200
Say, if thou dar'st, proud Lord of Warwickshire,
That I am faulty in Duke Humphrey's death.

[Exit Cardinal Beaufort assisted by Somerset]

WARWICK

What dares not Warwick, if false Suffolk dare him?

QUEEN MARGARET

He dares not calm his contumelious spirit,
Nor cease to be an arrogant controller, 205
Though Suffolk dare him twenty thousand times.

WARWICK

Madam, be still, with reverence may I say,
For every word you speak in his behalf
Is slander to your royal dignity.

SUFFOLK

Blunt-witted lord, ignoble in demeanour! 210
If ever lady wronged her lord so much,
Thy mother took into her blameful bed
Some stern untutored churl, and noble stock
Was grafted with crabtree slip, whose fruit thou art,

And never of the Nevilles' noble race. 215

WARWICK
 But that the guilt of murder bucklers thee
 And I should rob the deathsman of his fee,
 Quitting thee thereby of ten thousand shames,
 And that my sovereign's presence makes me mild,
 I would, false murd'rous coward, on thy knee 220
 Make thee beg pardon for thy passeÁd speech,
 And say it was thy mother that thou meant'st±±
 That thou thyself wast born in bastardy!
 And after all this fearful homage done,
 Give thee thy hire and send thy soul to hell, 225
 Pernicious blood-sucker of sleeping men!

SUFFOLK
 Thou shalt be waking while I shed thy blood,
 If from this presence thou dar'st go with me.

WARWICK
 Away, even now, or I will drag thee hence.
 Unworthy though thou art, I'll cope with thee, 230
 And do some service to Duke Humphrey's ghost.
Exeunt Suffolk and Warwick

KING HENRY
 What stronger breastplate than a heart untainted?
 Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just;
 And he but naked, though locked up in steel,
 Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted. 235

COMMONS (*within*) Down with Suffolk! Down with Suffolk!

QUEEN MARGARET What noise is this?
Enter Suffolk and Warwick with their weapons drawn

KING HENRY
 Why, how now, lords? Your wrathful weapons drawn
 Here in our presence? Dare you be so bold?
 Why, what tumultuous clamour have we here? 240

SUFFOLK
 The trait'rous Warwick with the men of Bury
 Set all upon me, mighty sovereign!

COMMONS (*within*) Down with Suffolk! Down with Suffolk!
Enter from the commons the Earl of Salisbury

SALISBURY (*to the commons, within*)
 Sirs, stand apart. The King shall know your mind.

(To King Henry)

Dread lord, the commons send you word by me 245

Unless Lord Suffolk straight be done to death,

Or banishéd fair England's territories,

They will by violence tear him from your palace

And torture him with grievous ling'ring death.

They say, by him the good Duke Humphrey died; 250

They say, in him they fear your highness' death;

And mere instinct of love and loyalty,

Free from a stubborn opposite intent,

As being thought to contradict your liking,

Makes them thus forward in his banishment. 255

They say, in care of your most royal person,

That if your highness should intend to sleep,

And charge that no man should disturb your rest

In pain of your dislike, or pain of death,

Yet, notwithstanding such a strait edict, 260

Were there a serpent seen with forkéd tongue,

That slily glided towards your majesty,

It were but necessary you were waked,

Lest, being suffered in that harmful slumber,

The mortal worm might make the sleep eternal. 265

And therefore do they cry, though you forbid,

That they will guard you, whe'er you will or no,

From such fell serpents as false Suffolk is,

With whose envenomeéd and fatal sting

Your loving uncle, twenty times his worth, 270

They say, is shamefully bereft of life.

COMMONS (*within*) An answer from the King, my lord of
Salisbury!

SUFFOLK

'Tis like the commons, rude unpolished hinds,

Could send such message to their sovereign. 275

But you, my lord, were glad to be employed,

To show how quaint an orator you are.

But all the honour Salisbury hath won

Is that he was the Lord Ambassador

Sent from a sort of tinkers to the King. 280

COMMONS (*within*) An answer from the King, or we will
all break in!

KING HENRY

Go, Salisbury, and tell them all from me
I thank them for their tender loving care,
And had I not been 'cited so by them, 285
Yet did I purpose as they do entreat;
For sure my thoughts do hourly prophesy
Mischance unto my state by Suffolk's means.
And therefore by His majesty I swear,
Whose far unworthy deputy I am, 290
He shall not breathe infection in this air
But three days longer, on the pain of death.
[Exit Salisbury]

QUEEN MARGARET *[kneeling]*

O Henry, let me plead for gentle Suffolk.

KING HENRY

Ungentle Queen, to call him gentle Suffolk.
No more, I say! If thou dost plead for him 295
Thou wilt but add increase unto my wrath.
Had I but said, I would have kept my word;
But when I swear, it is irrevocable.
(To Suffolk) If after three days' space thou here beest
found

On any ground that I am ruler of, 300
The world shall not be ransom for thy life.
Come, Warwick; come, good Warwick, go with me.
I have great matters to impart to thee.

Exeunt King Henry and Warwick with
attendants [who draw the curtains as they
leave]. Queen Margaret and Suffolk remain

QUEEN MARGARET *[rising]*

Mischance and sorrow go along with you!
Heart's discontent and sour affliction 305
Be playfellows to keep you company!
There's two of you, the devil make a third,
And threefold vengeance tend upon your steps!

SUFFOLK

Cease, gentle Queen, these execrations,
And let thy Suffolk take his heavy leave. 310

QUEEN MARGARET

Fie, coward woman and soft-hearted wretch!

Hast thou not spirit to curse thine enemies?

SUFFOLK

A plague upon them! Wherefore should I curse them?
Could curses kill, as doth the mandrake's groan,
I would invent as bitter searching terms, 315
As curst, as harsh, and horrible to hear,
Delivered strongly through my fixeÁd teeth,
With full as many signs of deadly hate,
As lean-faced envy in her loathsome cave.
My tongue should stumble in mine earnest words; 320
Mine eyes should sparkle like the beaten flint;
My hair be fixed on end, as one distraught;
Ay, every joint should seem to curse and ban.
And, even now, my burdened heart would break
Should I not curse them. Poison be their drink! 325
Gall, worse than gall, the daintiest that they taste!
Their sweetest shade a grove of cypress trees!
Their chiefest prospect murd'ring basilisks!
Their softest touch as smart as lizards' stings!
Their music frightful as the serpent's hiss, 330
And boding screech-owls make the consort full!
All the foul terrors in dark-seated hell±±

QUEEN MARGARET

Enough, sweet Suffolk, thou torment'st thyself,
And these dread curses, like the sun 'gainst glass,
Or like an overchargeÁd gun, recoil 335
And turn the force of them upon thyself.

SUFFOLK

You bade me ban, and will you bid me leave?
Now by this ground that I am banished from,
Well could I curse away a winter's night,
Though standing naked on a mountain top, 340
Where biting cold would never let grass grow,
And think it but a minute spent in sport.

QUEEN MARGARET

O let me entreat thee cease. Give me thy hand,
That I may dew it with my mournful tears;
Nor let the rain of heaven wet this place 345
To wash away my woeful monuments.

[She kisses his palm]

O, could this kiss be printed in thy hand
That thou mightst think upon these lips by the seal,
Through whom a thousand sighs are breathed for
thee!

So get thee gone, that I may know my grief. 350
'Tis but surmised whiles thou art standing by,
As one that surfeits thinking on a want.
I will repeal thee, or, be well assured,
Adventure to be banished myself.
And banished I am, if but from thee. 355
Go, speak not to me; even now be gone!
O, go not yet. Even thus two friends condemned
Embrace, and kiss, and take ten thousand leaves,
Loather a hundred times to part than die.
Yet now farewell, and farewell life with thee. 360

SUFFOLK

Thus is poor Suffolk ten times banished±±
Once by the King, and three times thrice by thee.
'Tis not the land I care for, wert thou thence,
A wilderness is populous enough,
So Suffolk had thy heavenly company. 365
For where thou art, there is the world itself,
With every several pleasure in the world;
And where thou art not, desolation.
I can no more. Live thou to joy thy life;
Myself no joy in naught but that thou liv'st. 370

Enter Vaux

QUEEN MARGARET

Whither goes Vaux so fast? What news, I prithee?

VAUX

To signify unto his majesty
That Cardinal Beaufort is at point of death.
For suddenly a grievous sickness took him
That makes him gasp, and stare, and catch the air, 375
Blaspheming God and cursing men on earth.
Sometime he talks as if Duke Humphrey's ghost
Were by his side; sometime he calls the King,
And whispers to his pillow as to him
The secrets of his over-charge'd soul; 380
And I am sent to tell his majesty

That even now he cries aloud for him.

QUEEN MARGARET

Go tell this heavy message to the King.

Exit Vaux

Ay me! What is this world? What news are these?

But wherefore grieve I at an hour's poor loss 385

Omitting Suffolk's exile, my soul's treasure?

Why only, Suffolk, mourn I not for thee,

And with the southern clouds contend in tears±±

Theirs for the earth's increase, mine for my sorrow's?

Now get thee hence. The King, thou know'st, is

coming. 390

If thou be found by me, thou art but dead.

SUFFOLK

If I depart from thee, I cannot live.

And in thy sight to die, what were it else

But like a pleasant slumber in thy lap?

Here could I breathe my soul into the air, 395

As mild and gentle as the cradle babe

Dying with mother's dug between his lips;

Where, from thy sight, I should be raging mad,

And cry out for thee to close up mine eyes,

To have thee with thy lips to stop my mouth, 400

So shouldst thou either turn my flying soul

Or I should breathe it, so, into thy body±±

[He kisseth her]

And then it lived in sweet Elysium.

By thee to die were but to die in jest;

From thee to die were torture more than death. 405

O, let me stay, befall what may befall!

QUEEN MARGARET

Away. Though parting be a fretful corrosive,

It is applieÁd to a deathful wound.

To France, sweet Suffolk. Let me hear from thee.

For wheresoe'er thou art in this world's Globe 410

I'll have an Iris that shall find thee out.

SUFFOLK

I go.

QUEEN MARGARET And take my heart with thee.

[She kisseth him]

SUFFOLK

A jewel, locked into the woefull'st cask
That ever did contain a thing of worth.

Even as a splitted barque, so sunder we±±

415

This way fall I to death.

QUEEN MARGARET This way for me.

Exeunt severally