

King Henry VI, Part 1

by William Shakespeare

Presented by Paul W. Collins

King Henry VI, Part 1

By William Shakespeare

Presented by Paul W. Collins

All rights reserved under the International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. Except as permitted under the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this work may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, audio or video recording, or other, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Contact: paul@wsrightnow.com

Note: Spoken lines from Shakespeare's drama are in the public domain, as is the Globe edition (1864) of his plays, which provided the basic text of the speeches in this new version of *King Henry VI, Part 1*. But *King Henry VI, Part 1, by William Shakespeare: Presented by Paul W. Collins* is a copyrighted work, and is made available *for your personal use only*, in reading and study.

Student, beware: This is a *presentation*, not a scholarly work, so you should be sure your teacher, instructor or professor considers it acceptable as a reference before quoting characters' comments or thoughts from it in your report or term paper.

Chapter One Relapse and Resolve

As the elaborate funeral for King Henry V concludes at Westminster Abbey, the royal guard plays a slow and solemn march. Attending nobles gather outside on the wide stone steps, and the mournful call of heralds' trumpets echoes hollowly down London's streets beyond the church.

"Hung be the *heavens* with *black!* Yield, day, to *night!*" cries the deceased monarch's brother John, the stately but care-worn Duke of Bedford and Regent of France—a nation conquered by Henry, but since grown rebellious. "*Comets* importing change of times and states, flourish your crystal tresses in the sky, and with them *scourge* the bad, revolting stars that have consented unto Henry's death!—*King Henry the Fifth*, too famous to live long!

"England ne'er lost a king of so much *worth!*"

"England ne'er had a *king* until *his* time!" says Henry's brother Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. "*Virtue* he had, *deserving* to command! His brandished *sword* did blind men with its beams; his *arms* spread wider than a dragon's wings; his sparking *eyes*, replete with wrathful fire, more dazzled and drove back his enemies than mid-day sun fierce-bent against their faces!

"What should I say? His *deeds* exceed all speech! He ne'er lifted up his hand but *conquered!*"

"We mourn in black; why mourn we not in *blood?*" demands their uncle, the Duke of Exeter. "Henry is dead, and never shall revive; upon a wooden *coffin* we attend, and *Death's* dishonourable victory we with our stately presence glorify, like captives bound to a triumphant cart!

"*What?*—shall we curse the planets that charted thus our glory's overthrow for mishap—or shall we think that the *subtle-witted French*, conjurers and *sorcerers*, afraid of him, by magic verses have *contrived his end!*"

France has challenged the foreign rule won by Henry V, whose young son, born at Windsor Castle, is about to become King Henry VI. Humphrey, Lord Gloucester, is serving as "lord protector of the realm," the royal child's guardian.

"He was a king blessed by the *King of Kings*," says the bishop—also one of the boy-monarch's uncles. "Unto the French, the dreadful *Judgment Day* will not so dreaded be as was *sight of him!* The battles of the *Lord of Hosts* he fought! The Church's prayers made him so prosperous—"

"The *Church!*" snorts Humphrey. "Where is *it?* Had not *churchmen* prayed, his thread of life had not so soon *decayed!* None do *you* like but an *effeminate* prince, whom like a school-boy you may over-awe!"

"Gloucester, whate'er we like, *thou* art *protector*—and lookest to command the prince *and realm!*" counters the bishop. "Thy wife is *prideful*; she holdeth thee in awe more than God or religious churchmen may!" The lady is known to be ambitious.

Humphrey returns the scorn: "Name not *religion*, for thou lovest the *flesh*, and ne'er throughout the year to church go'st *thou* except it be to pray *against thy foes!*"

"Cease, *cease* these jars," cries John, "and rest your minds in peace!" He motions toward the church doors. "Let's to the altar; heralds wait for us.

"Instead of gold, we'll offer up our *arms!*" says the regent, angry in his frustration. "Since *arms avail not*, now that Henry's dead, posterity looks for *wretched* years, when at their mothers' moist eyes babes shall suckle, and our isle be made a marsh of salt tears, with none but women left to wail the dead!

"Henry the Fifth, thy *ghost* I invoke: *prosper* this realm; keep it from *civil broils!* Combat with adverse planets in the heavens!—and a far more glorious star thy soul will make than *Julius Caesar*, or bright—"

“My honourable *lords*, health to *you all!*” Interrupting, a knight has rushed toward to the convocation. “*Sad tidings* bring I to you out of *France*,” he says, bowing, “of discomfiture, of *loss* and *slaughter!*”

“Guienne, Champagne, Rheims, Orléans, Paris, Guysors, Poitiers—are *all quite lost!*”

John is appalled by the report. “What *say ’st* thou, man, here before dead *Henry’s* corpse? Speak softly, or the loss of those great towns will make him burst his lead”—coffin lining—“and rise from death!”

“Is *Paris* lost?” gasps Humphrey. “Is Rouen *yielded?* If Henry *were* recalled to life again, these news would cause him *once more* to yield up the ghost!”

“How were they lost? What *treachery* was used?” demands Exeter, for whom an honorable French victory is unthinkable.

“No treachery, but *want* of *men* and *money!*” replies the knight boldly. “Amongst the soldiers *this* is muttered: that here you maintain differing *factions*—and whilst a *field* should be *dispatched and fighting*, you are disputing about your *policy!*”

“*One* would have lingering wars with little *cost*; *another* would fly swiftly, but wanteth *wings*; a *third* thinks that without expense at all, by *guileful* fair words peace may be obtained.

“*Awake, awake*, English nobility! Let not *sloth* dim your honours new-begot! *Croppèd* are the flower-de-luces”—the *fleur de lis* is an emblem of France—“from your arms!—of England’s coat, *one half* is *cut away!*”

Lord Exeter is pale. “Were our tears wanting for this funeral, *these* tidings would call forth their flowing tides!”

“*Me* they concern!—regent am *I* of France!” cries John of Bedford. “Give me my steelèd coat! I’ll *fight* for France!—away with these disgraceful *wailing* robes! *Wounds* will I lend the French, instead of eyes to weep *their* intermissive miseries!”

A messenger rides up, dismounts, and bows. “Lords, view these letters full of bad mischance!” Exeter takes the documents. “France is *revolted* from the English quite, except some petty towns of no import. The *dauphin*, Charles, is *crownèd king* at Rheims!—the bastard of *Orléans* with him is joined; Reignier, Duke of *Anjou*, doth take his part!—the Duke of *Alençon* flieth to his side!”

Exeter stares at a letter listing the new French monarch’s new allies. “The dauphin crownèd *king*—all *fly* to him! Oh, whither shall *we* fly from this *reproach?*”

“We will not fly but to our enemies’ *throats!*” cries Humphrey. “Bedford, if thou be slack, *I’ll* fight it out!” he tells his brother.

John frowns. “Gloucester, why doubt’st thou of my forwardness? An *army* have I mustered in my *thoughts* wherewith *already* France is *overrun!*”

A third messenger arrives. “My gracious lords, to add to your laments, wherewith you now bedew King Henry’s hearse, I must inform you of a dismal fight betwixt the stout Lord Talbot and the French!”

“What? Wherein *Talbot overcame!*—is’t so?” asks the bishop. The legendary general, an English hero, has commanded the British troops besieging an important French city on the Loire.

“*Oh, no!*—wherein Lord Talbot was *o’erthrown!*” The noblemen are stunned. “The circumstance I’ll tell you more at large.

“The tenth of August last, this dread lord, retiring from the siege of Orléans,”—after receiving few provisions and no reinforcements, Talbot had to withdraw, “having well scarce of six thousand in his troop, by *three and twenty thousand* of the French was round encompassed and *set upon!*”

“No leisure had he to enrank his men. He lacked pikes”—thick, pointed poles—“to set before his archers—instead whereof, sharp stakes *plucked out of hedges* they pitchèd in the ground confusedly, to keep the horsemen off from breaking in.

“More than *three hours* the fight continued, where valiant Talbot enacted *wonders* above human *thought* with his sword and lance! *Hundreds* he sent to Hell, and none durst stand against

him! Here, there, and every where, *enragèd* he flew! The French exclaimed the *Devil* was in arms!—all the whole army stood agazèd on *him*.

“His soldiers, spying his undaunted spirit, ‘*A Talbot! A Talbot!*’ cried out amain, and rushed into the bowels of the battle!

“Here had the conquest fully been sealèd up—if Sir John Fastolfe had not played the *coward!* He, being placed behind the vaward with purpose to relieve and follow them, cowardly *fled*, not having struck one stroke!

“Hence grew the general *wreck* and *massacre!*—enclosèd were they by their enemies! A base *traitor*, to win the *dauphin’s* grace, thrust *Talbot*—whom all France with their chief assembled strength durst not presume to *look once* in the *face*—with a spear into the *back!*”

John is appalled. “Is *Talbot slain?* Then I will slay *myself* for living *idly* here in pomp and ease whilst such a worthy leader, wanting *aid*, unto his dastard foemen is *betrayed!*”

“Oh, no, he *lives*—but is took *prisoner!*—and Lord Scales with him, and Lord Hungerford—most of the rest, slaughtered or took likewise.”

“His *ransom* there is none but *I* shall pay!” cries Bedford. “I’ll *haul the dauphin headlong from his throne!*—his *crown* shall be the ransom of my friend! *Four* of their lords I’ll ’change for *one* of ours!

“*Farewell*, my masters; to my task will I! *Bonfires* I am to make forthwith in France to keep our great *Saint George’s feast* withal! *Ten thousand soldiers* with me I will take, whose bloody deeds shall make all *Europe* quake!”

“So you had *need*,” says the knight dourly, “for at Orléans is the English army *besiegèd*, grown weak and faint! The Earl of Salisbury”—now in command there—“craveth *supply*, and hardly keeps his men from mutiny, since they, so few, watch such a multitude!”

Exeter regards the brothers. “Remember, lords, your oaths to Henry sworn, either to quell the dauphin utterly,”—kill him, “or bring him in obedience to your yoke!”

“I *do* remember it!” says John, “and here take my leave, to go about my preparation.” He strides away, leading his attendants toward the palace.

Humphrey signals his own men. “I’ll to the Tower”—which is also an armory—“with all the haste I can, to view the artillery and munition—and then I will *proclaim* young Henry *king.*” Ceremonies for the child’s coronation were already imminent.

Exeter nods. “To Eltham,”—the palace in a suburb east of London, “where the young king is, will I, being ordainèd his special governor,”—tutor, “and for his safety there I’ll best devise.”

The lords hurry away, eager now to respond to a crisis on the continent.

The Bishop of Winchester watches them go—sourly. *Each hath his place and function to attend! I am left out; for me nothing remains.*

But I will not be Jack out of office long!

Envisioning the new ship of state, he thinks, playing on “stem to stern,” *The king from Eltham I intend to stem—and sit at chiefest stern of public weal!*

Charles, eldest son of the French king whom Henry V defeated, had been called *dauphin*, after the dolphin emblem on the family coat of arms. Various French forces surrounding the British have now consolidated, and King Charles VII meets with his commanders—who urge an immediate attack.

The new monarch is confident. “*Mars’s* true moving, even as in the heavens, so on the earth, *this* day is shown: late did he shine upon the English side; now *we* are victors!—upon *us* he smiles! What towns of any moment but *we* have? At pleasure here we lie near Orléans!

“Otherwhiles, the famishèd English, like pale *ghosts* faintly besieged us *one hour* in a *month!*”

“They want their *porridge* and their fat-bull *beeves!*” says the Duke of Alençon scornfully. “Either they must be dieted like *mules*, and have their provender tied to their mouths, or *piteous* they will look, like *drownèd mice!*”

Reignier, Duke of both Anjou and Maine, and the titular king of Naples and Jerusalem, is eager for battle. “Let’s *lift* their siege!—why live we *idly* here? Talbot, whom we were wont to fear, is *taken*; remaineth none but mad-brained Salisbury—and he may well in *fretting* spend his gall: neither *men* nor *money* hath he to make war!”

Charles decides. “*Sound!*—*sound alarum!* We will rush on them!—*now*, for the *honour* of the forlorn French!

“Him I *forgive* my death who killeth me when he sees me *go back* one foot, or *fly!*”

In the general French alarum, horns sound for retreat; the English have driven away Charles’s troops, and continue to inflict great losses, even as they edge back toward their positions outside the besieged city.

Charles and two of his lords angrily watch their soldiers running—the wounded staggering—as they try to escape from the carnage.

“Who ever saw the like?” cries the king, amazed. “What *men* have I?” He shouts at those stumbling past. “*Dogs! Cowards! Dastards!*”

“I would ne’er have fled,” he tells the dukes, “but that *they* left me ’midst my enemies!”

Complains Reignier, “Salisbury is a *desperate homicide!*—he fighteth as one *wearied of his life!* The other lords like *lions* wanting *food* do rush upon us as do hungry on *prey!*”

Alençon shakes his head in dismay. “Froissart, a countryman of ours, records *England* as all Olivers and Rowlands,”—stalwart heroes, “bred during the time Edward the Third did reign. *More* true now may this be verifièd!—for none but Samsons and Goliases it sendeth forth to skirmish *one to ten!* Lean, raw-boned rascals!—who would e’er suppose they had such *courage* and *audacity?*”

Charles, thwarted, is petulant. “Let’s *leave* this town!—for they are hare-brained *slaves*, and *hunger* will enforce them to be more eager!” He despises the stubborn British. “Of old I know them: rather with their *teeth* they’ll tear down the walls than forsake the siege!”

Reignier watches the Englishmen’s steady, determined defense as they back among the strewn corpses. “I think by some odd, gearless *device* their arms are set like *clocks!*—stiff to strike *on!*—else ne’er could they hold out so as they do!

“Even by my consent we’ll let them alone.”

Alençon nods. “Be it so.” The French lords will wait, knowing that the sequestered invaders lack provisions, and that their privation will only grow more dire.

They see a young French lord approach—grinning. “Where’s the prince ‘*Dolphin?*’” calls the nobleman to Reignier. “I have *news* for him!”

King Charles laughs. “‘*Bastard* of Orléans,’ *thrice* welcome to us!” The English use that name for his friend Count Jean Dunois, the out-of-wedlock son of the captured Duke of Orléans, now being held prisoner in England.

“Methinks your looks are *sad*, your *cheer* appallèd!” says Dunois. “Hath the late overthrow wrought this offence?” he taunts. “Be not dismayed, for *succor* is *at hand!*” he cries—wryly. “A holy *maid* hither with me I bring, who, by a vision sent to her from heaven, *ordainèd* is to raise this tedious siege, and drive the English forth the bounds of France!”

He moves closer, speaking with feigned fervor. “The spirit of deep *prophecy* she hath, exceeding the *nine sibyls* of old *Rome!* What’s *past* and what’s *to come* she can descry!

“Speak: shall I call her in? Believe *my* words, for they are certain and *unfallible!*”

Charles chuckles at the pretend pontificating; but he has heard of the peculiar girl from a country village, and of her eccentric claims. “Go, call her in.” Dunois bows and goes.

“But first, to try her skill, Reignier, stand thou as dauphin in my place,” says the king mischievously. “Question her *proudly*; let thy looks be *stern!* By this means shall we sound what ability she hath.” He steps back, and Alençon moves forward to stand beside the other lord.

Dunois returns from the camp, bringing Joanne la Pucelle—*Joan the Virgin*—a young woman with fine features and flaxen hair, cut short. She is dressed in armor; the noblemen are amused.

Reignier comes forward. “Fair maid, is’t *thou* wilt do these wondrous feats?”

She faces him squarely. “Reignier, is’t thou that thinkest to *beguile* me? Where is the dauphin?”

She motions the nobles apart. “Come, come from behind; I know thee well, though never seen before. Be not amazèd, there’s nothing hid from me.” She steps toward Charles. “In private will I talk with thee, apart.

“Stand back, you lords, and give us leave awhile.”

Reignier laughs at the impudence. “She takes upon her *bravely* at first dash!” But after a glance from the king, he and Alençon move, indulgently, away.

She begins with assurance. “Dauphin, I am by birth a shepherd’s daughter, my wit untrained in any kind of art. Heaven and Our Lady gracious hath it pleasèd to shine on my contemptible estate. Lo, whilst I waited on my tender lambs, and to the sun’s parching heat displayed my cheeks, God’s Mother deigned to appear to me, and in a vision full of majesty, willèd me to leave my base vocation, and free my country from calamity. Her *aid* she promised, and assurèd *success!*

“In complete *glory* she revealed herself! And, whereas I was short and dark before, with *those clear rays* she infused in me that beauty am I blessèd with, which you see.

“Ask me what question thou possibly canst, and I will *answer*, unpremeditated.

“My *courage* try by *combat*, if thou darest, and thou shalt find that I exceed my sex.”

With clear blue eyes she regards him intently. “*Resolve* on this: thou shalt be *fortunate*, if thou receive me for thy warlike mate!”

“Thou hast astonished me with thy high terms,” says Charles. “Only *this* proof I’ll of thy valour make: in single *combat* thou shalt buckle with *me!*—and if thou vanquishest, thy words are *true*; otherwise I renounce all confidence.”

“I am prepared,” says Joan. “Here is my keen-edged sword, decked with five *fleurs de lis* on each side—the which at Touraine, in Saint Katherine’s churchyard, out of a great deal of old iron I chose forth.”

Charles draws his costly new blade of the finest steel. “Then come, o’ God’s name! I fear no *woman!*”

“And while I live, I’ll ne’er fly from a man,” she vows.

He makes a quick thrust, intending to startle her, but she blocks it effortlessly, and surprises him with the power of a sideward stroke that he barely manages to stop.

Annoyed, he brings down four heavy blows, each skillfully deflected—indeed, brushed aside with apparent ease. He presses forward, jaws clenched as the other noblemen watch, and slashes vigorously, first from one side, then the other, without pause—but to no avail; impassively, she counters each attack.

As he wipes the sweat from his face, she springs forward with startling agility, and he finds himself struggling to bring up his sword fast enough to meet—and withstand—the clanging blows. He is amazed at the calm strength behind each careful, well guided stroke.

As he backs away, red-faced, he observes the lords’ looks of utter astonishment.

“Stay, *stay thy hand!*” cries Charles, dropping his sword. “Thou art an *Amazon*, and fightest with the sword of *Deborah!*”—an Old Testament prophet.

Joan lowers her blade. “Christ’s Mother helps me; else I were too weak.”

The king stares at the beautiful woman, her cheeks even more rosy now. “Whoe’er helps *thee*, ’tis thou that must help *me!* Impatiently I burn with desire; my *heart* and *hands* thou hast at once subdued!”

He stares. “Excellent Pucelle, if thy name be so, let me thy *servant*, and not sovereign, be! ’Tis the French *dauphin* sueth thus to thee!”

Joan sheathes her sword. "I must not yield to any rites of *love*, for my profession's *sacred*, from above." She draws a deep breath. "When I have chased all thy foes from hence, then will I think upon a recompense."

Charles smiles warmly. "Meantime look gracious on thy prostrate thrall!" He moves closer.

- Reignier watches the panting pair. "My lord, methinks, is very *long*—in talk," he says with an arch smile.

- "Doubtless he *shrives* this woman down to her *smock*," murmurs Alençon, "else ne'er could he so long protract his speech."

- "Shall we disturb him, since he keeps no mean?"—is fully smitten.

- Alençon smirks. "He may *mean* more than *we* poor men do know! These women are shrewd tempters with their *tongues!*"

Reignier approaches the king. "My lord, where are you?—what devise you now?" asks the commander. "Shall we give over Orléans, or no?"

"Well, *no*, I say, distrustful *recreants!*" cries Joan. "*Fight* till the last gasp! *I* will be your guard!"

Charles nods. "What she says I'll confirm! We'll fight it out!"

Joan faces the men with a stern, intense resolution. "Assigned am I to *scourge the English!* This night their siege assuredly I'll raise!"—end. "Expect Saint Martin's summer, halcyon days, since I have entered into these wars!

"Glory is like a circle on the water, which never ceaseth to *enlarge* itself—till by *broad* spreading it disperse to nought. With *Henry's* death, the *English* circle ends; dispersed are the glories it included.

"Now am I like that proud, insulting ship which bore Caesar *and* his fortune *together!*"

Charles regards her with awe. "Was *Mahomet* inspirèd by a *dove*? Thou with an *eagle* art inspirèd, then! Not Helen, the mother of great Constantine, nor even Saint Philip's daughters were like *thee!* Bright star of Venus, fall'n down on the earth, how may I reverently worship thee enough?"

Alençon can see that the king will not be dissuaded. "Leave off *delays*," he says gruffly, "and let us raise the siege."

Reignier has been examining, with surprise, the fresh nicks and gouges in the king's sword. "Woman, do what thou canst to save our honours! Drive them from Orléans, and be immortalized!"

"Presently we'll *try!*" cries Charles. "Come, let's away *about it!*"

"*No* prophet will I trust, if *she* prove false!"

Chapter Two Brawl and Battle

Followed by six liveried serving-men wearing the House of Gloucester's blue coats, Humphrey approaches the entrance of the Tower of London, a royal residence, military storehouse—and sometime prison for nobles. "I am come to survey the Tower this day," he tells his steward. "Since Henry's death, I fear, there is *conveyance!*"—theft.

He pounds on the locked panel at the center of tall iron bars, rattling the gates. "Where be these warders, that they wait not here? *Open the gates!* 'Tis Gloucester that calls!"

A warder shouts from within. "Who's there that knocks so imperiously?"

A serving man calls toward the doors: "It is the noble *Duke of Gloucester!*"

Another voice replies: "Whoe'er he be, you may not be let in."

"*Villains*, answer you so the *lord protector?*" cries the indignant servant.

"The *Lord* protect *him*," replies the warder, at the distant door. "So we answer him." But, upon seeing the duke, he shrinks back inside. "We do no otherwise than we are willed."

Humphrey is irate. “*Who* willèd you?—whose word will stand but *mine*? There’s none ‘protector of the realm’ but I!” He turns to his men. “Break ope the gates; I’ll be your warranties! Shall I be flouted thus by *dunghill grooms*?”

Gloucester’s men draw back, then hurl themselves forward to test the lock’s strength with their shoulders.

In the ensuing clatter, a military officer comes to the door beyond. “What noise is this? What traitors have we here?”

Humphrey calls: “Lieutenant, is it you whose voice I hear? Open the gates; here’s *Gloucester* that would enter!”

“Have patience, noble duke!” pleads the soldier. “I may not open!—the Cardinal of Winchester forbids! From him I have express commandment that *thou* nor *none of thine* shall be let in!”

“Faint-hearted Woodville, prizest *him* ’fore *me*?” demands Gloucester. “*Arrogant Winchester*, that haughty prelate, whom Henry, our late sovereign, ne’er could brook? Thou art no friend to *God* or to the *king*! *Open the gates*, or I’ll shut *thee* out shortly!”

His steward, too, warns: “Open the gates unto the lord protector, or we’ll *burst* them open, if that you come not *quickly*!”

Humphrey’s servants are preparing for another assault when they spot the red-clad Bishop of Winchester. Followed by six of his men, all in light-brown livery, he approaches Gloucester and stands blocking the entrance. “How *now*, ambitious Humphrey?” he demands. “What means this?”

“*Peelèd priest!*” Henry V had undone Beaufort’s elevation to cardinal by Rome, but he still dresses as one. “Dost thou command *me* to be shut out?”

“I *do*, thou most usurping *proditor!*—and not *protector*, of the king *or* realm!”

Gloucester waves him away. “Stand back, thou manifest *conspirator!*—thou that contrivedst to *murder* our dead lord!—thou that givest *whores* indulgences to *sin*! I’ll *wrap* thee in thy broad cardinal’s hat if thou proceed in this thine *insolence!*”

The bishop is defiant. “*Nay*, stand *thou* back! I will not budge a foot! If this be *Damascus*, be *thou* cursèd *Cain*, to slay thy brother Abel if thou wilt!”

“I will not slay thee, but I’ll *drive thee back!* Thy scarlet robes as a child’s bearing-cloth I’ll use to *carry thee out of this place!*”

“Do what thou *darest!* I *beard* thee to thy face!”

“*What!* Am I dared and bearded to my *face*?” cries Gloucester, furious. “*Draw*, men, for all this privileged place!—blue coats against tawny coats! Priest, beware *your* beard!—I mean to *tug it*, and to *cuff you soundly!* Under my feet I’ll stamp thy *cardinal’s* hat! In spite of Pope or dignities of Church, here by the *cheeks* I’ll *drag thee up and down!*”

“Gloucester, thou wilt *answer* this before *the Pope!*”

“*Winchester goose,*” —a term for *prostitute*, “I cry a *rope*, a *rope!*” retorts Gloucester, as if calling for a beadle’s lash. He turns to the steward. “Now *beat them hence!*—why do you let them *stay*?” He starts for the bishop. “Thee *I’ll* chase hence, thou *wolf* in sheep’s array!”

“*Out*, tawny coats! *Out*, scarlet *hypocrite!*”

As the nobles’ men cross swords, the portly mayor of London and a dozen of his officers—all armed with tall halberds—enter the hurly-burly, and soon have separated the factions. “*Fie*, lords!” cries the high official. He glares at them. “That *you*, being supreme *magistrates*, thus contumeliously should *break the peace!*”

“*Peace*, mayor!” demands Gloucester. “Thou know’st little of my *wrongs!* Here *Beaufort*—that regards nor *God* nor *king*—hath *distrainèd* the Tower to *his own use!*”

“Here’s *Gloucester*, a *foe* to *citizens!*” counters the bishop, “one that ever motions *war*, and never peace, o’ercharging your free purses with large *finés!*—that seeks to *overthrow religion* because *he* is ‘protector of the realm!’—and would have *armour* here *out* of the Tower—to crown *himself* king, and *suppress the prince!*”

Gloucester is livid. "I will not answer thee with words, but *blows!*" He springs at the churchman, and the blue and tawny coats again move closer, swords once more raised.

The mayor is appalled. "Naught rests for me in this tumultuous strife but to make open *proclamation!* Come, officer!—as loud as e'er thou canst, *cry out!*"

The big deputy steps away from the fray and bellows at the combatants: "All manner of men assembled here in arms this day against God's peace and the king's, we charge and *command* you *in his highness' name* to repair to your several dwelling-places—and not to wear, handle, or use any sword, weapon, or dagger henceforward, *upon pain of death!*"

Humphrey releases his grip on the bishop's robe. "'*Cardinal,*' I'll be no breaker of the law!" he growls, "but we shall meet and break our *minds* at large!"—fully assert differences.

"Gloucester, we *will* meet—to thy *cost*, be sure!" The bishop dabs his torn lip with a lace kerchief, thinking, *Thy heart-blood I will have for this day's work!*

The mayor shoves aside one of the bishop's servants. "I'll call for *clubs*, if you will not away!" he warns the commoners. *This cardinal's more haughty than the devil!* he grumbles to himself.

Gloucester nods to his steward, and his other men start away. "Mayor, fare well," says Humphrey. "Thou dost but what thou mayst."

Abominable Gloucester, guard thy head! thinks the bishop, *for I intend to have it ere long!* He storms away, leading his servants.

The mayor watches as the disputants straggle off. "See the coast cleared," he tells the chief deputy, "and then we will depart.

"Good God!—that these *nobles* should such *stomachs* bare!"—exhibit so much anger.

"I *myself* fight not once in forty year!"

Atop the high stone wall protecting the city's northern edge, a grizzled French officer walks, under gathering storm clouds, with a boy who cradles an old musket. "Sirrah, thou know'st how Orléans is besieged, and how the English have the suburbs won—"

"I *know*—and oft have *shot* at them, father!" says the boy respectfully. "Howe'er, unfortunately I *missed* in my aim."

"But be thou ruled by me, now thou shalt *not!* Chief master-gunner am I of this town; *something* I must do to procure me grace!" Enemy soldiers have kept beyond his weapons' range, except for some too near the wall for cannon fire. "The prince's espials have informed me how the English, close intrenchèd, through a *secret grate* of iron bars in yonder tower are wont to overpeer the city, and thence discover how with most advantage they may vex us with shot, or with assault!

"To intercept this inconvenience," he says dryly, "a piece of *ordnance* 'gainst it I have placed,"—he has aimed a cannon, "and even these three days have I watched if I could see them."

He lays a hand on the lad's shoulder. "Now do *thou* watch, for I can stay no longer. If thou spy'st any, *run and bring me word!* Thou shalt find me at the governor's." With that, he stamps away, going down to the placid, shielded street.

The boy looks at the ready cannon, then moves carefully to the wall's edge. His glance runs from the huge, barred doors far below, across the bridge, and up a high stone tower just across the river. *Father, I warrant you!*

Take you no care! he thinks eagerly. *I'll never trouble you if I may spy them!*

"*Talbot!*—my life, my joy, again *returnèd!*" whispers Lord Salisbury, delighted to see his friend the general coming up the circular stone steps to join the other British officers who have climbed, with some stealth, through the dank old riverside tower. "How wert thou handled being prisoner? Or by what means got'st thou to be *released?*"

"Discourse, I prithee, at this turret's top," he says, as the other men move toward a window in the masonry.

Lord Talbot stands beside him. “The Duke of Bedford had a prisoner called ‘the brave Lord Ponton de Santrailles’; for *him* was I exchanged and ransomed.

“But once with a *baser* man of arms by far, for *contempt* they would have bartered me—which I disdaining *scorned*, and craved *death* rather than I would be so vilely esteemed! At last, redeemed I was as I desired.

“But, *oh*, the treacherous *Fastolfe* wounds my heart!—him with my *bare fists* I would execute, if I now had him brought into my power!”

“Yet tell’st thou not how thou were treated....”

Talbot flushes with anger. “With *scoffs* and *scorns*, and contumelious *taunts*! In open *market-place* produced they *me*, to be a public spectacle to all! ‘*Here,*’ said they, ‘is the terror of the French, the *scarecrow* that affrights our children so!’

“Then broke I from the officers that led me, and with my *nails* diggèd stones out of the ground to hurl at the beholders of my shame! My grisly countenance made others fly!—none durst come near, for fear of sudden death!

“In *iron walls* they deemed me not secure! So great a fear of my name amongst them was spread that they supposed I could rend *bars of steel*, and spurn into pieces posts of *adamant*! Wherefore a guard of chosen shot”—pistol experts—“I had, that walked about me every minute—while if I did but stir out of my bed, ready they were to shoot me in the heart!”

- Across the river, the boy is slipping carefully through the shadows with a thin stick, its tip smoldering. He crouches, then crawls toward the cannon.

“I grieve to hear what torments you endured,” says Salisbury, “but we will be revengèd sufficiently! Now it is supper time in Orléans; here, through this grate, I view the Frenchmen, count each one, in how they fortify!

“Let us look—the sight will much delight thee!

“Sir Thomas Gargrave, and Sir William Glansdale, let me have your express opinions where is best place to make our battery next.”

The knights step forward to look through the rusty grate.

“I think at the north gate; for there stand lords,” says Gargrave.

The other knight points down. “And I, *here*, at the bulwark of the bridge.”

“For aught I see,” says Talbot, noting no weakness, “this city must be *famished*,”—starved into submission, “or with light skirmishes enfeebled.”

A pounding crash hurls the men back, stunned by fragments of stone and shards of iron.

In the swirl of dust, Salisbury gasps, unable to rise from the floor. “*O Lord*, have *mercy* on us, wretched sinners....”

Gargrave sees the blood spilling onto his own legs. “*O Lord*, have *mercy* on me, woeful man!” he groans.

Talbot staggers up. “What chance is *this* that suddenly hath crossed us?” He goes to kneel. “*Speak*, Salisbury—at least, if thou *canst* speak, mirror of all martial men! How *fares* thou?” *One of thine eyes and thy cheek’s side are struck off!* “*Accursèd tower! Accursèd fatal hand* that hath contrived this woeful tragedy!

“*In thirteen battles* Salisbury o’ercame! *Henry the Fifth* he first followed to the wars! Whilst any trump did sound, or drum struck up, *his sword* did ne’er leave off *striking in the field!*”

“Yet livest thou, Salisbury? Though thy speech doth fail, *one* eye thou hast to look to heaven for grace! The *sun* with one eye vieweth *all the world!*”

“Heaven, be Thou gracious to none alive,” he sobs, “if *Salisbury* wants *mercy* at thy hands!”

He points to Glansdale, as English soldiers come running up the stairs. “Bear hence his body; I will help to bury it.

“Sir Thomas Gargrave, hast thou any life? *Speak* unto Talbot!—nay, *look up* at him....” But the knight is still.

Talbot rises. "Salisbury, cheer thy spirit with this comfort: *thou* shalt not die whiles—" He moves closer to the fallen lord. "He beckons with his hand, and smiles on me—as if to say, 'When I am dead and gone, remember to *avenge me on the French!*'"

"Plantagenet, *I will!*—and, like Nero, play on the lute, beholding the towns *burn! Wretched only* shall France be, in *my* time!"

From outside, below, a trumpet is sounded, and, as lightning flares behind the darkening clouds, thunder engulfs the tower.

"What stir is this?" cries Talbot. "What tumult's in the heavens? Whence cometh this alarum and the noise?"

A messenger rushes to him, nimbly dodging soldiers who are carrying the knights' bodies. "My lord, my lord, the French have *gathered head!*—the *dauphin*, joinèd with one Joan de Pucelle, a holy *prophetess* new risen up, is come with a great power to raise the siege!"

Salisbury moves, trying to rise.

"Hear, *hear* how dying Salisbury doth groan!" cries Talbot. "It irks his *heart* he cannot see *revenge!*"

He faces the shattered opening as the English party evacuates. "*Frenchmen*, I'll be a *Salisbury* to you!

"*Pucelle* or *puzel*,"—virgin or whore, "dolphin or *dogfish*, your *hearts* I'll *stamp out* with my horse's heels, and make a *quagmire* of your mingled *brains!*"

"Convey Salisbury unto his tent," he tells a sergeant, "and then we'll try what these dastard Frenchmen dare!"

Fighting rages just south of the river: more French forces have reached the city, and men from its garrison now pour forth to join in assailing the embattled Britons.

Lord Talbot again commands his men, and his guard sounds alarums; but not far away, Joan leads a band of French knights in a charge, driving the British back from them.

Talbot stares, aghast, surveying the chaos. *Where is my strength?—my valour and my force! Our English troops retire!—I cannot stay them! A woman clad in armour chaseth them!*

Here, here she comes!

"*I'll* have a bout with thee!" he cries, confronting her, sword ready. "Devil or devil's dam, I'll *conjure* thee! *Blood* will I draw though thou art a *witch!*—and straightway give thy *soul* to him thou servest!"

Joan motions her knights away and flourishes her sword. "Come, *come!*—'tis only *I* that must disgrace *thee!*"

Talbot strikes viciously at her, intending to cut down the challenge immediately. But his sword is thrust aside, and instantly the blade is battered by a series of blows so strong that merely fending them off numbs his arm.

He is astonished. *Heavens, can you suffer Hell so to prevail? My breast I'll burst with straining of my courage, and from my shoulders crack my arms asunder, but I will chastise this ambitious strumpet!*

Pitching himself forward, he swings his broadsword violently; again and again it arcs up and crashes down, wearying his outstretched arms as he pounds futilely at a seemingly impervious barrier.

When the Englishman, blinking, pauses for breath, Joan steps away. French forces' supply wagons are pulling up. "Talbot, farewell; thine hour is not yet come," she says calmly. "I must go victual Orléans forthwith."

She signals her soldiers, and they begin leading the provisioners safely across the bridge.

"O'take me, if thou *canst*," she calls back. "I *scorn* thy strength! Go, *go*, cheer up thy *hungry, starvèd* men! Help *Salisbury* to make his *testament!*"

"This day is *ours!*—as many *more* shall be!"

Talbot stands facing the city, amazed. *My thoughts are whirlèd like a potter's wheel; I know not where I am, nor what I do! A witch, by fear, not force, like Hannibal drives back our troops, and conquers as she lists! So bees with smoke, and doves with noisome stench, are from their hives and houses driven away!*

They called us for our fierceness English dogs!—now, like to whelps, we crying run away!

British trumpets call again—to no avail. “*Hark, countrymen!*” he shouts, as fearful soldiers run past. “Either renew the *fight* or *renounce your soil!*—tear the *lions* out of England’s coat!—give *sheep* in lions’ stead!” He scowls. “Sheep run not *half* so fast from the wolf, or horse or oxen from the leopard, as *you fly, treacherously*, from your oft-subduèd *slaves!*”

More French troops now confront them, and the English are forced to fight for their lives.

Talbot realizes they are being overwhelmed. “It will not be!” he calls, in disgust. “Retire into your trenches!

“You’ve all *consented* unto Salisbury’s death!” he cries, “for none would strike a stroke in his *revenge!*”

As the retreat is sounded and rain begins to fall, Talbot stalks angrily after his men.

Pucelle is entered into Orléans, in spite of us or aught that we could do!

Oh, would I were to die with Salisbury! The shame hereof will make me hide my head!

On a platform high above the massive city gates, Joan stands with the king and several lords, and their guard of soldiers.

“Advance our waving colours on the walls!” she orders. “*Rescuèd* is Orléans from the English! Thus Joan la Pucelle hath performed her word.”

Charles is delighted. “Divinest creature, *Astraea’s* daughter, how shall I honour thee for this success? Thy promises are like *Adonis’* gardens, that one day bloomed, and *fruitful* were the *next!*”

“France, *triumph* in thy glorious prophetess!”

He surveys the scene below as the English huddle in disarray. “Recovered is the town of Orléans! More *blessèd* hap did ne’er befall our state!”

“Why do the *bells* not *ring aloud* throughout the town?” asks Reignier. “Dauphin, command the citizens to make bonfires, and *feast* and *banquet* in the open streets,” he cries, elated, “to celebrate the day that God hath given us!”

Alençon beams. “*All France* will be replete with mirth and joy, when they shall hear how we have played the men!”

Says Charles, “’Tis *Joan*, not we, by whom the day is won!—for which I will *divide my crown* with *her*, and all the priests and friars in my realm shall in procession sing her endless praise! A statelier pyramid to her I’ll rear than Rhodope’s or Memphis’ ever was!

“In memory of her when she is dead, her ashes, in an urn more precious than the rich-jeweled of Darius, transported shall be at high festivals before the kings and queens of France!

“No longer on Saint Denis will we cry, but *Joan la Pucelle* shall be France’s saint!

“Come in, and let us banquet *royally*, after this golden day of *victory!*”

Chapter Three Surprises

A weary French sergeant stations two of his troops on the parapet. “Sirs, take your places, and be vigilant! If any noise or soldier you perceive near to the walls, by some apparent sign let us have knowledge at the court of guard.”

A new corporal nods. “Sergeant, you shall.”

As the old veteran heads back down to the city, the young men crouch beside the crannied stone.

Thus are poor servitors, when others sleep upon their quiet beds, constrained to watch in darkness, rain and cold! complains one sentinel, a beardless lad—to himself.

At Lord Talbot's signal, battalions of British troops move, silently, closer to the dark, fortified city. At the front of their lines, foot-soldiers carry long ladders for scaling walls.

Talbot addresses the noblemen among those who have just converged; fresh English forces, led here by John of Bedford, have now joined his. And with them is the powerful French duke who once negotiated peace with Henry V, and whose troops now side with England.

"Lord Regent, and redoubted *Burgundy*—by whose approach the regions of Artois, Wallon and Picardy are *friends* to us this happy night!—the Frenchmen are secure, having all day caroused and banqueted.

"Embrace we then this opportunity as *fitting*—best quittance of their *deceit*, contrived by art and baleful *sorcery!*"

Mutters Bedford, "*Cowardly France!*"—King Charles. "How much he wrongs his fame, despairing of his *own* army's fortitude to join with *witches* and the help of Hell!"

"Traitors have never *other* company," says Lord Burgundy—intending no irony; he is another of Henry VI's uncles. "But what's that *Pucelle* whom they term so pure?"

"A *maid*, they *say*." Talbot remembers his own encounter with her.

"A maid," says the regent, "and to be so *martial!*"

"Pray God she prove not masculine for *long*," says Burgundy, motioning for the men with ladders to move forward, "if beneath the standard of the French she carry armour as she hath *begun!*"

Talbot is confident. "Well, *let* them practise and converse with spirits! *God* is *our* fortress, in whose conquering name let us resolve to scale their flinty bulwarks!"

They turn to a section of the wall. Bedford sees that their troops are ready. "*Ascend*, brave Talbot; we will follow thee!"

Talbot regards the grim bastion, a black form rising before them in the night. "Not all together; better far, I'd guess, that we do make our entrance *several* ways, so that, if it chance the one of us do fail, the others yet may rise against their force."

The regent nods. "Agreed. I'll to yond corner."

"And I to that," says Burgundy, pointing.

"And here will Talbot mount, or make his *grave!*" He glares at a tower. "Salisbury, for *thee*, and for the right of *English Henry*, shall this night appear how much in duty I am bound to both!"

From above comes a French cry, "*Arm! Arm!*—*the enemy doth make assault!*" The sentinels rush down the steps to rouse the reinforced garrison.

Within the breached city of Orléans, cries of "*St. George!*" and "*A Talbot!*" echo across the square, as the British soldiers press forward in their incursion. Startled French troops, some still in sleeping-clothes, rush angrily from their quarters, clutching weapons.

Commanding the city's own defenses is Count Dunois. Carrying a coat, he saunters out into a courtyard to find two other noblemen pulling on boots as they stand, sheathed swords lying nearby.

"How now, my lord!" taunts Alençon. "What, all *unready* so?"

"Unready?" says Dunois. "*Aye*—and *glad* we 'scaped so *well!*"

Reignier agrees: "'Twas time, I trow, to wake and leave our beds—hearing *alarums* at our *chamber doors!*" he says wryly.

Complains Alençon, annoyed, "Of all exploits since first I followed arms, ne'er heard I of a warlike enterprise more *venturous* or *desperate* than this!" The city has yet to learn of the army of Britons brought by Bedford, or of Burgundy's troops.

Portly Dunois watches the violent combat nearby as he pulls on his coat. "I think this Talbot be a fiend of hell!"

“If not of hell, the heavens surely favour him!” says Reignier, carefully placing a plumed hat on his head at the proper angle.

“Here cometh Charles.” Alençon nods toward the center of town, as the regal contingent ambles forward. “I marvel how he *sped!*” he adds, with sarcasm.

“*Tsk!* Holy *Joan* was his defensive guard,” notes Dunois.

The king is challenging her as they arrive. “Is this thy *cunning*, thou deceitful dame? Didst thou at first, to *flatter* us withal, make us partakers of a little gain, so that now our loss might be ten times so much?”

Joan is indignant. “Wherefore is Charles impatient with his *friend*? At *all* times will you have my power *alike*—*sleeping* or *waking* must I ever prevail, or you will blame, and lay the fault on *me*?” She glares at Dunois and the other lords. “*Improvident* soldiers! Had *your watch* been good, this sudden mischief never could have befallen!”

Charles frowns. “Duke of Alençon, this *was* your default, in that, being captain of the watch tonight, you did look no better to that weighty charge!”

“Had *all* your quarters been as safely kept as that whereof *I* had the government,” replies Alençon hotly, “we had not been thus shamefully surprisèd!”

“*Mine* was secure!” claims Dunois.

“And so was mine, my lord!” insists Reignier.

“As for myself, most part of all this night, within her quarter and mine own precinct,” says Charles, “I was employed in passing *to* and *fro*...about relieving of the sentinels. “Then *how* or which *way* could they first break in?”

Joan is annoyed. “Question, my lords, no further the of case *how* or *which way*!—’tis sure they found *some* place but weakly guarded, where the breach was made. And now there rests no other shift but this: to gather our soldiers, scattered and dispersèd, and lay new platforms to endamage them!”

But just then a squadron of British soldiers, furiously waving raised swords, charges forward, crying, “*A Talbot! A Talbot!*” The French must flee, leaving various articles of clothing scattered about as they are chased away.

An English conscript lags behind. *I’ll be so bold as to take what they have left*, he thinks, gathering up items of fine silk. *The cry of ‘Talbot!’ serves me as a sword!—for I have loaden me with many spoils, using no other weapon but his name!*

Trumpets sound another shrill alarm, and more of King Henry’s troops rush in through the now-opened gates.

—

John of Bedford, Regent of France, surveys an open area of the town, now quiet and guarded by English soldiers. “The day begins to break, and night, whose pitchy mantle over-veilèd the earth is fled. Here sound retreat,” he tells a soldier, “and cease our hot pursuit.”

The horn blares out into the dawn, bringing respite for the French, rest for the harrying British troops.

Talbot motions solemnly to the guard of his colors. “Bring forth the body of old Salisbury, and here advance it in the market-place, the muddy centre of this cursèd town!”

“Now have I paid my vow unto his soul: for every *drop* of blood as was drawn from him, there hath at least *five Frenchmen* died tonight! And that hereafter ages may behold what ruin happened in revenge of him, within their chiefest temple I’ll erect a tomb wherein his corpse shall be interrèd—upon the which, that every one may read, shall be engravèd the sack of Orléans, the treacherous manner of his mournful death, and what a terror he had been to France!

“But, lords, in all our bloody massacre, I muse we met not with the dauphin’s *grace*—his new-come champion, virtuous Joan of *Air*—or any of his false confederates!”

Bedford reports: “’Tis thought, Lord Talbot, when the fight began, rousèd on the sudden from their drowsy beds they did amongst the troops of armèd men leap o’er the walls for refuge in the field!”

Says Burgundy, "Myself, as far as I could well discern for smoke and dusky vapours of the night, am sure *I* scared the dauphin and his trull, when arm-in-arm they both came swiftly running, like to a pair of loving turtle-doves that could not live asunder day or night!

"After things are set in order here, we'll follow them with all the power we have."

An unarmed French serving-man, now acting as an messenger, approaches the nobles, leading his horse away from the sentries. "All hail, my lords! Which of this princely train call ye the warlike *Talbot*, for his acts so much applauded through the realm of France?"

"Here is that Talbot. Who would speak with him?"

"The virtuous lady, Countess of Auvergne, with modesty admiring thy renown, by me entreats, great lord, thou wouldst vouchsafe to visit her poor castle where she lies, that she may boast she hath beheld the man whose glory fills the world with loud report."

Burgundy grins. "Is it even so? Nay, then, I see our wars will turn unto a peaceful, comic *sport*, when *ladies* crave to be encountered with! You may not, my lord, *disprize* her gentle suit!"

Talbot laughs. "Ne'er trust me then; for when a *world* of men could not prevail with all their *oratory*, yet hath a woman's *kindness* over-ruled!" He anticipates a gratifying experience. He turns to the rider. "And therefore tell her I return great thanks, and in submission will attend on her.

"Will not Your Honours bear me company?"

"No," laughs the regent, "truly it is more than *manners* will bear! And I have heard it said, *unbidden* guests are often welcomest when they are *gone*."

"Well then, alone, since there's no remedy," sighs Talbot, in mock resignation. "I mean to *test* this lady's courtesy!" He signals an officer. "Come hither, captain." He whispers briefly. "You perceive my mind?"

The captain smiles and bows. "I do, my lord, and intend accordingly."

In the large manor house at Auvergne, the countess sends away a thin old man. "Porter, remember what I gave in charge; and when you have done so, bring the *keys* to me."

"Madam, I will." He bows, and returns to his post in a side chamber by the front doors.

The countess paces in anticipation, while three servants stand waiting. *The plot is laid! If all things fall out right, I shall as famous be by this exploit as Scythian Tomyris by Cyrus' death!*

Great is the rumor of this dreadful night, and his achievements of no less account! Fain would mine eyes be witness with mine ears, to give their assessment of these rare reports.

She goes to a table just as her plump steward leads the general into the chamber and bows. "Madam, according as Your Ladyship desired, by message craved, so is Lord Talbot come."

The Englishman is resplendent, with a medallion at his chest, a sheathed sword, and a glistening trumpet hanging at his side. He sweeps off his plumed hat with a courtly bow.

"And he is welcome," says the countess, turning. "*What?* Is *this* the man?"

"Madam, it is."

She stares, seemingly incredulous. "Is this the *scourge of France?* Is this the *Talbot* so much feared abroad that with his name the mothers silence their babes?"

"I see report is *fabled* and *false!* I thought I should have seen some *Hercules*, a second *Hector* for his grim aspect, and the large proportion of his strong-knit limbs. Alas, this is a *child*, a silly *dwarf!* It cannot be that *this* weak and writhled shrimp should strike such terror into his enemies!"

Lord Talbot only nods, his suspicion confirmed. "Madam, I have been bold to trouble you, but since Your Ladyship is not at leisure, I'll sort some other time to *visit* with you." He strides away.

"*What means* he now?" says the indignant countess. "Go ask him whither he goes," she orders.

The steward hurries after the visitor. "Stay, my lord Talbot; for my lady craves to know the cause of your abrupt *departure!*"

Talbot raises an eyebrow. “Marry, for *that* she’s in a wrong belief; I go to *certify* for her that Talbot’s *here*.”

The countess sees the porter returning with his keys; she smiles, triumphant. “If thou be *he*, then art thou *prisoner!*” She nods to her men, who draw their rapiers.

“Prisoner? To whom?”

“To *me*, blood-thirsty lord!—and for that cause I trained thee to my house!

“Long time thy *shadow* hath been thrall to me, for in my gallery thy *picture* hangs. But now the *substance* shall endure the like, and I will *chain* these legs and arms of thine, that hast by tyranny these many years wasted our country, slain our citizens, and sent our sons and husbands captivate!”

Talbot is clearly amused.

“*Laughest* thou, wretch? Thy mirth shall turn to *moan!*”

“I laugh to see Your Ladyship so foolish as to think that you have aught but Talbot’s shadow whereon to practise your severity.”

“Why, art not thou the man?”

“I am indeed.”

“Then have I *substance*, too!”

The venerable officer smiles. “No, no, *I* am but shadow of my *self!* You are deceived: my substance is not here—for what you *see* is but the smallest part and least proportion of humanity. I tell you, madam, were the *whole* framed here, it is of such a spacious, lofty pitch, your roof were not sufficient to contain it!”

The countess scoffs: “This is a riddling *merchant* for the *nonce!* He will be *here*, and yet he is *not* here—how can these contrarieties agree?”

“That will I show you immediately.” Talbot lifts the horn to sound a sharp, brief call; drums pound outside, a cannon booms, and the doors fly open with a crash of splintering wood. The lady’s servants stumble back in fear, as six soldiers rush into the room, swords drawn—and more troops peer in through the wide-open entrance.

“How say you, madam?” asks the English lord calmly. “Are you now persuaded that himself is but shadow of *Talbot?*” He smiles at the captain and his men. “*These* are his *substance*—sinews, arms and strength with which he yoketh your rebellious *necks*, razeth your *cities*, and subverts your *towns*, and in a moment makes them desolate!”

The Countess of Auvergne flushes. “Victorious Talbot, pardon my abuse! I find thou art no less than fame hath bruited, and more than may be gathered by thy shape. Let my presumption not provoke thy wrath; for I am sorry that with reverence I did not entertain thee as thou art.”

He smiles again. “Be not dismayed, fair lady; nor misconstrue the *mind* of Talbot, as you did mistake the outward composition of his body; what *you* have done hath not offended *me*.

“Nor other satisfaction do I crave, but only, with your patience, that we may taste of your wine, and see what cakes you have!—for soldiers’ stomachs always serve them well.”

He signals to the captain, and more foot-soldiers stamp into the mansion, already looking for the kitchen and pantry—and full larder.

As they file past, the countess moves back and stands, watching, beside her wide-eyed servants.

“With all my heart,” she says, weakly, “and think me honoured to feast so great a warrior in my house....”

Chapter Four Rival Roses

Great lords and gentlemen, what means this *silence?*” demands young Richard Plantagenet, descended of the House of York. “Dare no man *answer* in a case of *truth?*”

William de la Pole, the Earl of Suffolk, speaks softly; they have adjourned an argument about litigation, begun at a college residence for London law students, in order to continue outside. “Within the Temple-hall we were too loud; the garden, here, is more convenient.”

“Then say at once if I maintained the *truth*, or else was *Somerset* wrangling in the *error*!”

Suffolk laughs at Richard’s tricky phrasing. “Faith, I have been a *truant* in the law, and never yet could frame my will to it—or, therefore, *frame the law* unto my will!” he gibes.

Somerset, however, is not amused. “Judge *you*, then, my Lord of Warwick, between us!”

The old Earl of Warwick, a visitor at the college, holds up his hands in mild demurrals. “Between two hawks, which flies the higher pitch; between two dogs, which hath the deeper mouth; between two blades, which bears the better tempering—between two *horses* which doth bear him best, between two *girls* which hath the merriest eye, I have perhaps some shallow spirit of judgment.” He shakes his head, smiling. “But in these fine, sharp quilllets of the *law*, in good faith, I am no wiser than a daw!”—a crow.

Richard is annoyed. “*Tsk, tsk*, here is a *mannerly* forbearance! The truth appears so naked on *my* side that any purblind eye may find it out!”

“And on *my* side it is so well-apparelled—so clear, so shining, and so *evident*—that it will glimmer through a *blind* man’s eye!” counters Somerset.

Richard confronts the others. “Since you are tongue-tied, and so loath to *speak*, in silent signification proclaim your thoughts.” He steps to a trellis laden with blooms. “Let him that is a true-born *gentleman* and stands upon the honour of his birth, if he suppose that I have pleaded *truth*, from off this brier pluck a *white rose* with me!” He picks one, and holds it high.

Somerset immediately finds an opposing symbol. “Let him that is no *coward* nor no *flatterer*, but dares maintain the party of the *truth*, pluck a *red rose* from off this thorn with *me*!”

“I love no *colour*,” shrugs the Warwick, “but without any colour of base, insinuating *flattery*, I pluck this white rose with Plantagenet.”

Suffolk gently grasps a bloom. “I pluck this *red rose* with young Somerset, and say withal I think he held the right.”

Vernon, a gentleman of the Inns of Court, would quiet the matter. “Stay, lords and gentlemen, and pluck no more, till you consent that he upon whose side the *fewest* roses are cropped from the tree shall *yield* that the other’s is the right opinion.”

“Good Master Vernon, it is well objected,” says Somerset. “If I have fewest, I’ll subscribe in silence.”

“And I,” says Richard Plantagenet.

Vernon nods. “Then for the truth and plainness of the case, I pluck this pale and maiden blossom here, giving my verdict on the white-rose side.”

Somerset frowns. “*Prick* not your finger as you pluck it off, lest *bleeding* you do paint the white rose red, and so fall on *my* side, against your will.”

Vernon will not be bullied. “If I, my lord, for my *opinion* bleed, opinion shall be surgeon to my hurt, and keep me on the side where still I am.”

“Well, well, come *on*,” says Somerset to the others. “Who else?”

A young Temple lawyer resents the tone. “Unless my study and my books be false, the argument you held was wrong in you.” He reaches into the foliage. “In sign whereof, I pluck a white rose too.”

Richard Plantagenet is pleased. “*Now*, Somerset, where is your argument?”

“Here in my *scabbard*, meditating what shall dye your white rose in a bloody red!”

Richard scoffs. “Meantime your *cheeks* do counterfeit our roses: for *pale* they look with *fear*, as witnessing the truth on our side!”

“No, Plantagenet, ’tis not for fear but *anger*!—that *thy* cheeks blush for pure *shame*, counterfeiting *our* roses!—and *yet* thy tongue will not confess thy error!”

“Hath not thy rose a *canker*, Somerset?”—a caterpillar within.

“Hath not thy rose a *thorn*, Plantagenet?”

“*Aye*, sharp and *piercing*, to maintain its *truth*, whiles thy consuming *canker* eats its *falsehood!*”

Somerset scowls. “Well, I’ll find *friends* to wear my bleeding roses, who shall *maintain* what I have said is true where false Plantagenet dare not be seen!”—in nobles’ company.

Richard flushes angrily. “Now, by this maiden blossom in my hand, I *scorn* thee and thy *fashion*, peevish *boy!*”

Now Suffolk is offended. “Turn not thy scorns *this way*, Plantagenet!” he warns.

“Proud Pole, I *will*,” insists Richard, “and scorn both him *and* thee!”

“I’ll return *my part* thereof into thy *throat!*” cries Suffolk.

But Somerset, welcoming the fuming nobleman to the Lancastrian faction, takes him by the arm. “Away, *away*, good William de la Pole! We *grace* the *yeoman* by conversing with him!”

Warwick objects: “Now, by God’s will, thou *wrong’st* him, Somerset! His grandfather was *Lionel, Duke of Clarence*, third son to the third Edward, *King of England!* Spring crestless *yeomen* from so deep a root?”

Says Richard with scorn, “He bears him on this *place’s* privilege”—students are allowed considerable latitude for debate, but none for fighting, “or *durst not* for his *craven heart* say thus!”

Somerset responds to the implicit challenge: “By Him that made me, I’ll *maintain* my words on any plot of ground in Christendom!”

He faces Plantagenet. “Was not thy father—Richard, Earl of Cambridge—for *treason* executed in our late king’s days?” he asks, disdainfully. “And, by his treason, stand’st not *thou* attainted, corrupted and exempt from ancient *gentry*? His trespass yet lives *guilty* in thy blood—and, till thou be restored, *thou art a yeoman!*”

Richard is furious. “My father was *attachèd*,”—arrested, “not attainted; condemnèd to die for treason, but no *traitor!*—and that I’ll *prove* on better men than *Somerset*, when growing *time* once ripens to my will!” He cannot lawfully challenge a titled nobleman—yet. “As for your part-taker, *Pole*—and you *yourself!*—I’ll note you in my book of *memory*, to *scourge* you for this affrontation! Look to it well, and say you are well *warned!*”

“*Oh*, thou shalt find us *ready* for thee still!” says Somerset. “And know us by these *colours* as thy *foes*—for these my friends in *spite for thee* shall wear!”

Richard brandishes his white flower. “And, by my soul, this pale and angry rose, as cognizance of my *blood-drinking hate*, will I and *my* faction forever wear, until it wither with me to my grave, or flourish to the height of my *degree!*”

Suffolk stalks away, disgusted. “Go forward and be *choked* with thy *ambition!*” He patronizes with a phrase: “And so fare well—until *I* meet thee next.”

“Have *with* thee, Pole!” says Somerset, following the older man. He glares at Plantagenet. “Farewell, ambitious Richard.” They leave, striding into one of the Temple’s dim corridors.

Richard seethes. “How I am *braved*, and must perforce *endure* it!”

Warwick believes Richard will be granted his hereditary title. “This blot that they object against your house shall be wiped out,” he assures the fiery young man, “in the next Parliament, called for the truce of Winchester and Gloucester. And if thou be not then created *York*, I will not live to be accounted *Warwick!*”

“Meantime, in signal of my love to thee, against proud Somerset and William Pole”—the earl considers Suffolk’s *de la* an affectation—“will I among *thy* party wear this rose.” The white-haired earl regards the white blossom solemnly, turning it slowly in his hand. He says, sadly: “And here I prophesy: this brawl today, grown thus to *faction* in the Temple garden, shall send, between the red rose and the white, a thousand souls to death and deadly night.”

But Richard turns to the others. “Good Master Vernon, I am bound to you, that you on my behalf would pluck a flower!”

“In your behalf, ever will I *wear* the same!”

“And so will I!” says the lawyer.

“Thanks, gentle sirs,” says Richard. “Come, let us four to dinner!
“I dare say this quarrel will drink blood *another* day!”

In a chamber high in the Tower of London, a bed-ridden old man addresses two of the jailers. “Kind keepers of my weak, decaying age, let dying Mortimer here *rest* himself. Even like a man new-halèd from the *rack*, so fare my limbs with long *imprisonment*; and these grey locks, the pursuivants of Death, augur the end of Nestor-like Edmund Mortimer, agèd in an age of care.

“These eyes, like lamps whose wasting oil is spent, wax dim; weak shoulders are overborne with burthening grief; and pithless arms, like to a withered vine, droop sapless branches to the ground, as drawing to their exeunt. These feet, whose strengthless stay is numb, unable to support this lump of clay, are yet swift-wingèd in my desire to get to a *grave*, as if witting I no other comfort have.

“But tell me, keeper, will my nephew come?”

“Richard Plantagenet, my lord, will come,” the senior jailer replies. “We sent unto the Temple, unto his chamber, and answer was returnèd that he will come.”

Lord Mortimer nods. “Enough. My soul shall then be satisfied.” He lies back, closing his eyes, and the keepers leave him.

He thinks of Richard. *Poor gentleman!—his wrong doth equal mine! Since Henry Monmouth—Henry V—first began to reign, before whose glory I was great in arms, this loathsome sequestration have I had! And ever since then hath Richard been obscurèd, deprived of honour and inheritance.*

But now that the arbitrator of despairs, just Death, kind umpire of men’s miseries, with sweet enlargement—setting free—doth dismiss me hence, I would his troubles were likewise expirèd, so that he might recover what was lost.

In less than a hour, a voice awakens the old man. “My lord, your loving nephew now is come.”

Slowly, Lord Mortimer struggles to sit up, trying to see. “Richard *Plantagenet*, my friend—is he come?”

“*Aye*, noble uncle, though ignobly used, your nephew, lately despisèd Richard comes.” He sits at the side of the prisoner’s bed.

Mortimer reaches out. “Direct mine arms I may embrace his neck, and in his bosom spend my latter gasp! Oh, tell me when my lips do touch his cheeks, that I may kindly give one fainting kiss!

“And now declare, sweet stem from York’s great stock, why didst thou say of late thou wert *despisèd*.”

The law student smiles at the frail figure. “First, lean thine agèd back against mine arm; and, in that ease, I’ll tell thee my *dis*-ease.

“This day, in argument upon a case, some *words* there grew ’twixt *Somerset* and me—among which terms he used his lavish tongue, and did *upbraid me* with *my father’s death!*—which obloquy set bars before *my* tongue, else with the like I had *requited* him!

“Therefore, good uncle: for my *father’s* sake, and honour of a *true Plantagenet*, and for *alliance’* sake—*explain* now the cause for which my father, Earl of Cambridge, lost his head!”

Mortimer’s eyes glisten. “*That* cause, fair nephew, which imprisoned me, and hath detained me all my flowering youth within a loathsome dungeon here to pine, was the cursèd instrument of his decease!”

“Uncover more at large what cause that was, for I am ignorant, and cannot guess.”

Mortimer nods. “I will, if that my fading breath permit, and Death approach not ere my tale be done!

“Henry the Fourth, grandfather to *this* king, *deposed* his nephew Richard, Edward’s son—the first-begotten and *lawful heir* of Edward, *king*, the *third* of that descent!—during whose reign the

Percies of the north,”—the lords of Northumberland, “finding his *usurpation* most *unjust*, endeavored *my* advancement to the throne!

“The reason which moved those warlike lords to it was this: young King Richard thus removed, leaving no heir begotten of his body, *I was the next* by birth and parentage!” Indignation flashes anew as he recalls. “For by my mother I derivèd am from Lionel, Duke of *Clarence*, the *third* son to King Edward the Third; while he”—Henry IV—“from John of *Gaunt*—but *fourth* of that heroic line—doth bring his pedigree!

“But *mark*: in this haughty attempt, as they laboured to plant the *rightful* heir, I lost my liberty, and they their *lives*!

“Long after, when Henry the Fifth, succeeding his father, Bolingbroke, did reign, *thy* father—Earl of Cambridge, derivèd from famous Edmund Langley, Duke of York, and marrying my sister, who thy *mother* was—again in pity of my hard distress, *levied an army*, in supposition it could redeem me, and install me *with the diadem*!”—the crown.

The ancient shakes his head sadly. “But, as did the rest, so *fell* that noble earl, and he was beheaded. Thus the Mortimers”—nobles of the House of York—“in whom a title rested, were *suppressed*.”

Richard regards his uncle. “Of which, my lord, Your Honour is the last.”

“*True*; and thou seest that I have no issue,”—offspring, “and that my fainting words do certify death.” The old man leans forward, touching his hand. “*Thou art my heir!*—the rest”—others of the House of York—“I wish thee to *gather!*” He whispers, urgently, “But yet be *wary* in thy studious care!”

Richard nods. “Thy grave admonishments prevail with me! But yet methinks my father’s *execution* was nothing less than *bloody tyranny!*”

“With *silence*, nephew, be thou *politic!*” warns Mortimer, ever fearful here in the Tower. “Strong-fixèd is the House of Lancaster, and like a mountain, not to be removèd!

“But now thine *uncle* is removing hence,” he moans, his voice faltering, “as princes do their courts, when they are cloyed with long continuance in a settled place.”

“Oh, Uncle, would some part of *my* young years might but redeem the passage of your age!”

Weakly, Mortimer laughs. “Thou dost then *wrong* me, as doth that slaughterer which giveth *many* wounds when one will kill. Mourn not, except thou sorrow for *thy good*. Only, give order for my funeral.

“And so *farewell*... and *fair* be all thy *hopes*, and *prosperous* be thy *life*... in peace and war...” He sinks back. His eyes close, and in a moment he is gone.

Richard, tearful, eases him down onto the bed. “And *peace*, no war, befall thy parting soul! In prison hast thou spent a *pilgrimage*, and like a hermit”—religious recluse—“overpassed thy days.”

He rises. *Well will I lock his counsel in my breast!—and what I do imagine, let that rest.*

He calls, and the jailers come. “Keepers, convey him hence, and I myself will see that his burial is better than his life.” They turn and go.

Here dies the dusky torch of Mortimer, choked by the ambition of a lesser line!

And for those wrongs—those bitter injuries which Somerset hath offered to my house—I doubt not but with honour to redress!

And therefore haste I to the Parliament, either to be restorèd to my blood—or take by ill the advantage of my good!

Chapter Five Civil Contention

King Henry VI, all of ten years old, is meeting this morning with lords of England at the Parliament-house in London. One of his father's brothers walks forward, holding out a document to be offered for consideration.

But another uncle, the Bishop of Winchester, snatches it from his hands—and angrily tears it in half. “Comest thou with deep-premeditated *lines*, with written *pamphlets* studiously *devised*, Humphrey of Gloucester?”

“If thou canst *accuse*, or aught intend'st to lay unto *my* charge, do it without *invention*—*immediately*, as I with sudden and extemporal speech purpose to *answer* what thou canst object!”

“*Presumptuous priest!*” cries the duke, a hand at he hilt of his sheathed sword. “This *place* commands my patience, or thou shouldst *find* how thou hast dishonoured me!

“Think not, although in *writing* I proffered the manner of *thy vile, outrageous crimes*, that therefore I have forgèd, or am not able verbatim to *rehearse* the method of my pen! *No*, prelate! Such is thy audacious *wickedness*—thy *lewd, pestiferous* and *dissentious* pranks—that very *infants* prattle of thy pride!

“Thou art a most pernicious *usurer!*—*forward* by nature, enemy to *peace*; *lascivious*, wanting more than well-beseems a man of thy profession and degree!—and as for thy *treachery*, what's more *manifest* than that *thou laid'st a trap* to take my life!—at *London Bridge*, as well as at the *Tower!*”

“Beside, I fear me, if thy *thoughts* were sifted, the *king* thy *sovereign* is not quite exempt from envious malice of thy swelling heart!”

“Gloucester, I do *defy thee!*” cries the furious bishop. He surveys the noblemen in the huge hall. “Lords, vouchsafe to give me hearing in what I shall reply!

“If I *were* covetous, ambitious or perverse, as *he* will have me, how am I so *poor*? Or how haps it I seek not to advance or raise myself, but *keep my wonted calling*?” Hearing the barely stifled chuckles—the priest is one of realm's most wealthy men—he glares. “And as for *dissension*, who preferreth peace more than I do?—except I be *provoked!*”

“*No*, my good lords, it is not *that* which offends; it is not *that* which hath incensed the duke—it is because *no one should sway but he!*—no one but *he* should be about the king!—and that engenders *thunder* in his breast, and makes him roar these accusations forth!

“But he shall know I am as good—”

“As *good*?” cries Gloucester. “Thou *bastard* of my grandfather!”

The bishop sneers. “*Aye*, lordly sir—yet what are *you*, I pray, but one *imperious* in *another's throne*?”

“Am I not *protector*, saucy priest?”

“And am not I a *prelate* of the *Church*?”

“Yes—and *useth* it to promote his *theft*, as an *outlaw* in a *castle's keep!*”

“*Unreverent* glosser!”—redefiner.

“*Thou* art ‘reverent’ touching thy spiritual *unction*,”—soothing rhetoric, “not thy *life!*”

The bishop scowls. “Rome shall *remedy* this!” he warns.

“*Roam thither*, then!”

Somerset would calm Gloucester: “My lord, it were your duty to *forbear*....”

“*Aye*,” says Warwick, in mock sympathy with the powerful priest, “see that the bishop be not *overborne!*”

Somerset chides him: “Methinks my lord should be *religious*, and know the *office* that belongs to such!”

“Methinks *his* lordship should be *humbler!*” counters Warwick. “It befitteth not a prelate *so* to plead!”

“Yes,”—it does, “when his *holy* state is touched so near!” insists Somerset.

“*State!*—holy or unhallowed, what *about* it?” asks Warwick. He nods toward Humphrey. “Is not *his* grace protector to the king?”

- Among the listening nobles, disinherited Richard must suffer in frustration. *Plantagenet, I see, must hold his tongue, lest it be said, ‘Speak, sirrah, when you should; must your bold verdict enter talk among lords?’ Else would I have a fling at Winchester!*

But now earnest young King Henry, upset by the strife, steps forward. “*Uncles*—of Gloucester and of Winchester, the special *watchmen* of our English *weal*—I would prevail upon you, if *prayers* might avail, to join your hearts in *love* and *amity!*”

“Oh, what a scandal is it to our crown that two such noble peers as ye should jar! Believe me, lords, *my* tender years can tell that *civil dissension* is a viperous *worm* that gnaws the bowels of the commonwealth!”

He hears a disturbance outside the doors, where an angry voice cries out, “*Down with the tawny-coats!*”

“What tumult’s this?” asks the boy.

Warwick replies: “An uproar, I dare warrant, begun through malice of the *bishop’s* men!”

The shouting just outside grow louder. “*Stones! Stones!*”

A door flies open, and the mayor rushes into the hall. “Oh, my good lords, and virtuous Henry, pity the City of London, *pity us!*”

“The bishop’s and the Duke of Gloucester’s men, forbidden of late to carry any weapon, have filled their pockets full of *cobblestones*, and, banding themselves in contrary parts, do pelt so fast at one another’s pate that many have their giddy *brains* knocked out!

“Our *windows* are broke down in every street!—and *we*, for *fear*, compelled to *shut our shops!*”

The tall doors swing wide, and liveried serving-men with bleeding knuckles burst in, struggling in the grasp of others.

The youthful monarch calls to them: “We charge you, on *allegiance* to *ourselves*, to *hold your slaughtering hands* and *keep the peace!*”

“Pray, Uncle Gloucester, mitigate this strife!” he pleads, wide-eyed.

One of the combatants turns. “*Nay*—if we be forbidden *stones*, we’ll fall to it with our *teeth!*”

The man’s closest opponent uses the opportunity to break his nose. “Do what ye *dare!*—we are as *resolute!*”

As the brawling continues, Gloucester moves forward. “You of *my* household, *leave* this peevish broil, and set this unaccustomed fighting *aside!*”

A man stumbles from the fray to bow hastily to Humphrey. “My lord, we know Your Grace to be a man just and upright; and, for your royal birth, inferior to none but to his majesty! And ere that we will suffer such a prince, so kind a father of the commonweal, to be disgraced by an *ink-horn mate*,”—mere clerk, “we and our wives and children, *all* will *fight*, and have our bodies slaughtered by thy foes!”

“*Aye!*” cries the man now wiping blood from his face onto a sleeve, “and the very *parings* by *our nails*”—torn wounds—“shall *pitch* the field”—blacken it with dried gore—“when we are dead!”

Arms flail as the men, growling and kicking, engage in further fisticuffs.

“*Stay, stay, I say!*” shouts Gloucester. “And if you love me as you *say* you do, let me persuade you to *forbear* a while!”

On the throne, the boy is weeping. “Oh, how this discord doth afflict my soul!” He turns to the bishop, whose men appear to be having the best of it. “Can *you*, my lord of Winchester, behold my sighs and tears, yet not at once *relent*? Who should be *pitying*, if *you* be not? Or who should study to prefer a *peace*, if holy *churchmen* take delight in *broils*?”

Warwick is appalled by the men’s severe breach of decorum, security and law. “*Yield*, my lord protector! *Yield*, Winchester!—unless you mean with obstinate repulse to *slay your*

sovereign, and destroy the realm! You see what mischief, and what *murder*, too, hath been enacted through your enmity! Then be at *peace*, unless ye *thirst for blood!*"

"He shall submit, for I will *never* yield!" says the stone-faced bishop.

"Compassion for the *king* commands me *stop*," says Gloucester, "or ere the priest should get that privilege of *me*, I would *see his heart out!*" But some of his combatants have already gone, and he motions again for his men to leave.

"Behold, my lord of Winchester," Warwick tells the bishop, "the duke hath *banished* moody, discontented fury, as by his smoothed brows it doth appear! Why look *you* still so stern and tragical?"

"Here, Winchester—I offer thee my hand," says Gloucester. But the bishop turns away.

"Fie, Uncle Beaufort!" cries King Henry. "I have heard you preach that malice was a great and grievous *sin!*—and will not you *maintain* the thing you teach, but prove a *chief offender* in the same?"

"Sweet king, the bishop hath *unkindly gird!*" says Warwick. He moves swiftly toward the prelate, ignoring his adamant glare. "For *shame*, my lord of Winchester, *relent!* What?—shall a *child* instruct you what to do?"

The bishop flushes. "Well, Duke of Gloucester, I will yield to thee love for *thy* love," he says sourly, "and hand for hand I give."

Aye, but, I fear me, with a hollow heart! thinks Humphrey. Still, he shakes the bishop's hand, and calls out, to some still-scuffling commoners: "See *here*, my friends and loving countrymen! This token serveth for a flag of *truce* betwixt ourselves and all our followers—*so help me God*, as I dissemble not!"

So help me God, as I intend it not! thinks the bishop, as the fighters separate.

"Oh, loving uncle, kind Duke of Gloucester," cries the boy, "how *joyful* am I made by this contract!"

"Away, my masters!" he tells the intruders. "Trouble us no more, but join in *friendship*, as your *lords* have done!"

"Content," mutters broken-nose. "I'll to the surgeon's."

"And so will I," says his opposite, one cheek swollen purple, his lower lip bleeding.

"And *I* will see what physic the *tavern* affords!" a third brawler decides.

Led away by the mayor, the bruised and battered servants leave the hall.

The Parliament moves, slowly, back into orderly assembly, facing the king.

They quiet as Warwick brings a document to Henry. "Accept this scroll, most gracious sovereign, which in the right of Richard Plantagenet we do exhibit to Your Majesty."

"*Well urgèd*, my lord of Warwick," says Gloucester. "For, sweet prince, an if Your Grace mark every circumstance, you have great *reason* to do Richard right—especially for those occasions at Eltham Place I told Your Majesty of...."

"And those occasions, Uncle, were of force," says Henry. "Therefore, my loving lords, our pleasure is that Richard be restored to his blood!"—hereditary title.

Warwick nods. "Let Richard be restored; so shall his *father's* wrongs be recompensed."

The bishop looks around the hall. "As do the *rest*, so willeth Winchester," he says, hoping to seem conciliatory.

King Henry nods kindly to Plantagenet. "If Richard will be *true*, not that alone, but *all the whole inheritance* I give, that doth belong unto the House of York, from whence you spring by lineal descent."

Richard bows. "Thy humble servant vows obedience, and humble service till the point of death!"

The king begins the ceremony. "Stoop then, and set your knee against my foot."

Richard kneels.

"And, in reguerdon of that duty done," says Henry, "I gird thee with the valiant sword of York!"

“*Rise, Richard, like a true Plantagenet, and rise, created princely Duke of York!*”
 Richard beams at the boy. “And so thrive Richard as thy *foes* may *fall!* And as my duty springs, so *perish* they that grudge one *thought* against Your Majesty!”
 “Welcome, high prince,” says one of the noblemen.
 “The mighty Duke of York!” cries another, amid the general acclaim.
 Thinks the Lancastrian Duke of Somerset, *Perish, base prince, ignoble Duke of York!*
 The lord protector approaches the boy. “Now will it best avail Your Majesty to cross the seas and to be crownèd in *France*,” Humphrey advises. “The *presence* of a king engenders love amongst his subjects and his loyal friends, as it disanimates his enemies.”
 Henry smiles agreement. “When Gloucester says the word, King Henry goes; for friendly counsel cuts off many foes.”
 Humphrey bows. “Your ships already are in readiness.”
 The king’s guard sounds a sennet, and with a colorful flourish, the royal party leaves the hall. Soon the lords and their attendants are drifting away as well.
 The silver-haired Duke of Exeter stands, pensive, in the chamber.
Aye, we may march in England or in France, not seeing what is likely to ensue! This late dissension grown betwixt the peers burns under feignèd ashes!—a forcèd love!—and will at last break out into a flame!
And as festered members rot but by degree, till bones’ flesh and sinews fall away, so will this base and envious discord breed!
Now I fear that fatal prophecy which in the time of Henry named the Fifth was in the mouth of every sucking babe: that Henry born at Monmouth —Henry V— should win all, and Henry born at Windsor lose all!
Which is so plain that Exeter doth wish his own days may finish ere that hapless time....

Chapter Six Rouen

As dawn approaches, Joan walks along a wide road, leading four French soldiers; but all five are disguised as farm hands, and the men carry grain sacks. She peers ahead in the dark, past a stand of trees. “These are the city gates, the gates of Rouen, through which our *policy* must make a *breach!*”

King Charles’s nearby forces intend to reclaim, one by one, cities held by the British.

“Take heed,” she says. “Be wary how you place your words; talk like the vulgar sort of market men that come to gather money for their wheat. If we have entrance—as I hope we shall, and that we find the slothful watch but weak—I’ll by a *sign* give notice to our friends that Charles the dauphin may encounter them!”

The captain carefully besmirches his face with dark earth. “*Our* sacks shall be a mean to sack the *city*; then *we’ll* be lords and rulers over Rouen! Therefore *we’ll knock.*” The soldier would prefer an open assault.

At the heavy doors, a watchman beyond is eventually roused. He calls from within, irritated by the rough banging, “*Qui est la?*” —Who’s there?

“*Paysans, pauvres gens de France,*” calls Joan as he approaches, yawning. “Poor market folks that come to sell their wheat.”

The fat English private unlatches a tiny window; the glow of his low-held lantern gives his face a demonic cast. He closes the peephole and unbars the doors. “Enter,” he says, pushing one of them open a bit. Glancing behind him, he rubs stubbly jowls. “Go in; the market bell is rung.”

The soldiers again shoulder their sacks—many weapons are hidden within—and enter the city. Joan follows, peering up at the shadowy towers. *Now, Rouen, I’ll shake thy bulwarks to the ground!*

—
Says King Charles softly, as he leads columns of French troops up the gentle slope toward town, “Saint Denis bless this happy stratagem!—and once again we’ll sleep secure in Rouen!”

Count Dunois edges forward to look past the trees. “Here entered Pucelle and her practisants; now that she is there, how will she specify where is the best and safest passage *in*?”

Reignier replies: “By thrusting out a torch from yonder tower—which once discernèd shows her meaning and which way, for its *weakness*, should be entered.”

Even as they watch intently for a signal, Joan is climbing to the top of an eastern tower.

While her comrades’ knives silence the English guard forever, she looks down into the now-teeming darkness outside the wall. Heavy oaken doors creak open, and she raises an arm. *Behold! This is the happy wedding torch that joineth Rouen unto her countrymen!—burning deadly for the Talbotites!*

Dunois points. “*See*, noble Charles, the beacon of our *friend*! The torch in yonder turret stands!”

“Now shine it like a *comet of revenge*,” cries the king, “a *prophet* to the fall of all our foes!”

Reignier is already moving. “Defer no time; delays have dangerous ends!”

“*Enter immediately*, and cry ‘*The dauphin!*’” he calls to the running troops, “and then do execution on the watch!”

—
As trumpets wail a shrill alarm, British soldiers rush out to counter the violent incursion.

Their general is red-faced with rage. “France, thou shalt *rue* this treason with thy *tears*, if *Talbot* but survive thy treachery!”

“*Pucelle*, that witch, that damnèd *sorceress*, hath wrought this hellish mischief, such that we, unawares, escape *hardly* the pride of France!”

—
Driven from the town, Talbot and Burgundy meet on the grounds just outside its gates, where skirmishing continues. Brought to join them is the ailing regent, now huddled in a chair carried by two men.

Joan, above on a parapet with the king and Lords Alençon, Reignier and Dunois, looks down. “Good morrow, gallants!” she calls to the British. “Want ye *wheat* for *bread*?” she calls, taunting. “I think the Duke of Burgundy will *fast* before he’ll buy *again* at such a rate!”

“’Twas full of *darnel!*”—weeds. “Do you like the *taste*?”

Burgundy glares. “Scoff on, *vile fiend* and shameless *courtezan*! I trust ere long to *choke* thee with thine own words, and make thee *curse* the harvest of *that* wheat!”

Charles laughs. “Your Grace may *starve*, perhaps, before that *time*.”

Bedford leans forward in his chair. “Oh, let no words, but *deeds* revenge this *treason!*” he urges his companions.

Joan laughs at him. “What will *you* do, good grey-beard? Break off a lance, and run a-tilt at Death—*within a chair*?”

Talbot rages at the enemies above. “*Foul fiend of France*, and hag of all despite, encompassèd with thy lustful paramours, it *becomes thee* to taunt his valiant age, and with *cowardice* twit a man half dead!

“Damsel, I’ll have a bout with you *again*, or else let Talbot *perish* with this shame!”

“Are ye so *hot*, sir?” laughs Joan. “Yet, *Pucelle*, hold thy peace; if *Talbot* do but thunder, *rain* will follow!” she gibes; empty threats yield but tears.

She watches the English lords confer. “God speed the *Parliament!* Who shall be the *speaker*?”

Talbot steps forward. “Dare ye come forth and meet us in the *field*?” he cries.

Again Joan laughs. “Belike Your Lordship takes us, then, for *fools*, to try whether *our own* be ours or no!”

Angrily, Talbot motions her aside. "I speak not to that railing Hecate, but unto *thee*, Alençon, and the rest! Will ye, like *soldiers*, come and *fight it out*?"

Alençon regards him with contempt. "Signior, no."

"Signior, *hang!*" shouts Talbot. "Base *muleteers* of France! Like *peasant foot-boys* do they keep to the walls, and dare not take up *arms* like *gentlemen*!"

Joan feigns fear: "*Away*, captains! Let's get us *from* the wall!—for, by his looks, Talbot means no *goodness*!"

"God be wi' you, my lord," she calls, as they go. "We came but to tell you that *we* are *here*."

The English commander turns from the wall. "And there will *we* be, too, ere it be long, or else *reproach* be Talbot's greatest fame!

"*Vow*, Burgundy, by the honour of thy house, pricked on by public wrongs sustained in France, either to *get the town again* or *die!* And *I*—as sure as English Henry lives and as his father was *conqueror* here, as sure as in this late-betrayèd town great Coeur-de-lion's heart was buried!—so sure *I* swear to *get the town or die!*"

Burgundy nods grimly. "My vows are equal partners with thy vows!"

"But, ere we go, regard this dying prince, the valiant Duke of Bedford.

"Come, my lord," Talbot tells John, "we will bestow you in some better place, fitter for sickness and for distracted age."

"Lord Talbot, do not so dishonour me!" protests John. "Here will I sit before the walls of Rouen, and will be partner of your weal or woe!"

Burgundy comes to his side. "Courageous Bedford, let us now persuade you—"

"Not to be gone from *hence!*" cries John. "For once I read that stout Pendragon"—King Arthur's father—"in his litter, *sick*, came to the field and vanquished his foes!" He looks up at the nobles. "Methinks I should revive the soldiers' hearts, because I ever found them as myself."

Talbot is quite moved. *Undaunted spirit in a dying breast!* "Then be it so! Heavens, keep old Bedford safe!"

"And now no more ado, brave Burgundy, but gather we our forces from out of hand, and set upon our boasting enemy!"

Amid the new fighting before the gates, an English captain looks up from cutting the throat of a fallen French townsman on the trodden grass. "Whither away, Sir John Fastolfe, in such haste?"

"Whither *away?* To *save* myself by *flight!* We are not likely to have the overthrow again!"

The officer frowns. "*What?* Will you fly, and leave Lord Talbot?"

"*Aye!*—all the Talbots in the *world*, to save my *life!*" cries Fastolfe, dashing down the road.

"*Cowardly* knight! *Ill fortune* follow thee!"

John watches, pleased as the course of battle turns, and the French troops are driven to retreat. *Now, quiet soul, depart when heaven please, for I have seen our enemies' overthrow!*

He coughs, and his attendants move closer.

What is the trust or strength of foolish Man? They that of late were daring with their scoffs are glad and fain by flight to save themselves!

He groans, and closes his eyes.

The soldiers glance at each other.

Lord John of Bedford is dead, they find; they carry him away in his chair.

"Lost, and *recovered* again—in a *day!*" cries Lord Talbot with jubilation. "This is a *double* honour, Burgundy! Let *heavens* have glory for *this* victory!"

"Warlike and martial *Talbot*, Burgundy *enshrines* thee in his *heart*, and there erects thy noble deeds as *Valour's monuments!*"

“Thanks, gentle duke. But where is *Pucelle* now? I think her old familiar”—the Devil—“is asleep! Now where’s the Bastard’s dares and Charles’s gleeks? What, all *amort*? Rouen hangs her head for grief that such a *valiant* company are fled!” he says, with exultant sarcasm.

“Now will we make some order in the town, placing therein some expert officers, and then depart to *Paris*—to the *king!*—for there young Henry and his nobles lie.”

The French-born duke happily agrees. “What wills Lord *Talbot* pleases *Burgundy!*”

“But yet, before we go, let us not forget the noble Duke of Bedford, late deceased, but see his exequies fulfilled in Rouen.

“A braver soldier never couchèd lance; a gentler heart did never sway in court; but kings and mightiest potentates must die, for that’s the end of human misery.”

Compelled to abandon the city, Charles and his battered forces hasten to reassemble on the wide plains nearby.

Joan is undaunted. “Dismay not, princes, at this accident, nor grieve that Rouen is so recoverèd! *Care* about things that are not to be remedied is no cure, but rather *corrosive*.

“Let frantic Talbot triumph for a while, and like a peacock sweep along his tail; we’ll pull his plumes, and take away his train, if the dauphin and the rest will but be ruled....”

Charles nods. “We have been guided by thee hitherto, and with thy cunning had no difference. One sudden foil shall never breed distrust.”

Dunois agrees. “Search out thy wit for secret policies,” he tells her, “and we will make thee famous through the world!”

“We’ll set thy statue in some holy place,” says Alençon, “and have thee revered like a *blessèd saint!* Employ thee then, sweet virgin, for our good!”

For a moment, she regards the town, deep in thought. “Then thus it must be.

“This doth Joan devise: by fair persuasions mixed with sugared words we will entice the *Duke of Burgundy* to leave the Talbot, and to follow us.”

“*Aye, marry, sweeting!* If we could do *that*, France were no place for Henry’s warriors!” says Charles. “Nor should that nation *boast it* so with us, but be extirpèd from our provinces!”

“*Forever* should they be expelled from *France*,” says Alençon, “and not have title of an *earldom* here!”

Joan is confident. “Your Honours shall perceive how I will work to bring this matter to the wishèd end.”

In the distance they can hear trumpet calls, and a military cadence. “Hark! By the sound of drum you may perceive their powers are marching unto Paris’ ward.” They can see the British forces moving steadily away in long formations. “There goes the Talbot, with his colours spread, and all the troops of English after him.”

She watches, her eyes narrowing. “Now in the *rearward* comes the duke—as his fortune in favour”—esteem among the English—“makes him lag *behind*.”

Joan turns to the king. “Summon a parley; we will talk with him.”

“A parley with the Duke of Burgundy!” calls Charles to the guard of his colors; men ride forward, and soon deliver the offer.

The duke, accompanied by a contingent of knights, approaches on horseback. “Who craves a parley with Burgundy?” he demands.

Joan replies, “The princely *Charles of France*,” adding, “thy *countryman*.”

“What say’st thou, Charles? For I am marching hence....”

Charles defers. “Speak, *Pucelle*.” *And enchant him with thy words!* He watches as she moves forward.

Says Joan, removing her helmet, “Brave Burgundy, undoubted hope of France!” A slender hand smooths her soft, tousled hair. “Stay; let thy humble handmaid speak to thee.”

“Speak on; but be not over-tedious,” says Burgundy, dismounting. If the French king is proposing some settlement, Talbot will want to know about it.

“Look on *thy country*, look on fertile *France*, and see the cities and the towns defacèd by *wasting ruin* of the cruel foe!” cries Joan. “As looks the mother on her lowly babe when Death doth close his tender, dying eyes, see, *see* the pining malady of *France*! Behold the *wounds*!—the most *unnatural* wounds, which thou thyself hast given her woeful breast!

“Oh, turn thine edgèd sword another way!—strike those that *hurt*, and hurt not those that *help*!

“One *drop* of blood drawn from thy country’s bosom should grieve thee more than *streams* of foreign gore!”

Her blue eyes scan his face. “*Return* thee therefore, with a flood of tears, and *wash away* thy country’s stainèd spots!”

Despite his impassive expression, the duke is moved. *Either she hath bewitched me with her words, or nature makes me suddenly relent!*

Joan steps closer. “Besides, France and all French *exclaim* on thee, doubting thy birth and lawful progeny! Who *joint’st* thou with, but with a lordly nation that will not *trust* thee but for *profit’s* sake? When once Talbot hath set *footing*”—a full occupying force—“in France, and fashioned by *thee* that instrument of ill, who then but English *Henry* will be lord?—and *thou* will be thrust out like a *fugitive*!

“Call ye to mind, and mark but *this* for proof: was not the Duke of Orléans thy *foe*? And was he not in England *prisoner*? But when they heard he was *thine* enemy, they *set him free* without *his ransom paid*—in *despite* of Burgundy and all his friends!

“See, then, thou fight’st against thy *countrymen*, and joint’st with them that will be thy *slaughtermen*!

“Come, come, *return*!—*return*, thou wandering lord! *Charles* and the rest will *take thee in their arms*!”

I am vanquishèd! thinks Burgundy. *These proud words of hers have battered me like roaring cannon-shot, and made me almost yield upon my knees!*

He removes his plumed helmet. “*Forgive* me, country, and sweet countrymen!” he says tearfully. “And, lords, accept this hearty, kind embrace!” He clasps Alençon around the shoulders. “My forces and my power of men are yours!”

He glances away, toward the distant British columns. “So, farewell, Talbot! I’ll no longer trust thee!”

Joan’s smile is wry; she holds the common view of nobles’ unvarnished honor: *Done like a Frenchman: turn, and turn again!*

“*Welcome*, brave duke!” cries Charles. “Thy friendship makes us fresh!”

Dunois beams. “And doth beget new courage in our hearts!”

Thinks Alençon, *Pucelle hath bravely played her part in this, and doth deserve a coronet of gold!*

Charles grasps Burgundy’s hand. “Now let us *on*, my lords, and *join* our powers, and seek how we may *harm the foe*!”

Chapter Seven Paris

In a French hall of state, King Henry VI of England holds court; his guardian, the Duke of Gloucester, stands beside the boy. Among the lords who have sailed with them to France and ridden into Paris are Richard Plantagenet, newly created as Duke of York, and the Dukes of Suffolk, Exeter and Somerset, the Earl of Warwick, and the Bishop of Winchester.

A much-honored officer addresses the king this morning. “My gracious prince, and honourable peers,” says Lord Talbot, “hearing of your arrival in this realm, I have awhile given truce unto my wars, to do my duty to my sovereign.

“In sign, whereof,” he says, kneeling, “this arm—that hath reclaimed to your obedience fifty fortresses, twelve cities, and seven wallèd towns of strength, beside five hundred prisoners of esteem—lets fall his sword before Your Highness’ feet, and with submissive loyalty of heart ascribes the glory gotten by this conquest, first to my God, and next unto Your Grace!”

The boy looks up at Humphrey. “Is this the Lord Talbot, Uncle Gloucester, that hath so long been resident in France?”

“Yes, my liege, if it please Your Majesty.”

“*Welcome*, brave captain and victorious lord! When I was young—and as yet I am not *old*—I do remember how my father said a stouter champion never handled sword!

“Long since were we resolvèd of your truth, your faithful service, and your toil in war; yet never have you tasted our *reward*, or been reguerdonèd with so much as *thanks*, because till now we never saw your face!

“Therefore, stand up; and, for these good deserts, we here create you *Earl of Shrewsbury*; and in our nation take your place!”

Talbot sheathes his sword and bows, and courtiers gather around him with warm congratulations on his additional title and lands.

A sennet and flourish are sounded, and the lords proceed into the throne-room, eager for young Henry’s coronation as King of France—even if the French will not recognize him as such.

But two young gentlemen remain in the room, still angry after exchanging words on the voyage from England.

“Now, sir, to *you*, who were so hot at sea, *disparaging* of these colours that I wear in honour of my noble Lord of *York!*” says Vernon. “Darest thou maintain the former words thou spakest?”

“Yes, sir!” cries young Basset, “as well as *you* dare support the envious *barking* of your saucy tongue against my lord the Duke of *Somerset!*”

“Sirrah, *thy* lord I honour as he *is*.”

“Why, *what* is he? As good a man as *York!*”

“Hark ye: *not so!* In witness, take ye *that!*” cries Vernon, striking him.

“*Villain!* Thou *know’st* the law of arms”—wartime regulation—“is such that whoso draws a sword, ’tis present *death*, or else this blow should broach thy dearest *blood!* But I’ll unto his majesty, and crave I may have liberty to *avenge* this wrong!—when thou shalt see I’ll meet thee *to thy cost!*”

“Well, miscreant, *I’ll* be there as soon as you!” says Vernon, starting toward the royal party. “And, after, *meet* you sooner than you *would!*”

—

The Bishop of Winchester stands just behind King Henry of England, both hands raised to position the French crown just above the boy’s head. At the front of the wide throne-room, Henry and his lords have been joined, for the coronation, by the nobleman chosen to serve as the English governor of Paris.

“Lord bishop,” says Gloucester, “set the crown upon his head.”

Winchester lowers it slowly, calling, “God save *King Henry*, of that name the sixth!”

The boy smiles happily.

“Now, Governor of Paris,” says Gloucester, “take your oath that you elect no other king but him, esteem none friends but such as are *his* friends, and none your foes but such as shall pretend malicious practises against his state. This shall ye do, so help you righteous God!”

As the governor affirms his allegiance, a knight comes forward and bows to the king.

“My gracious sovereign,” says Sir John Fastolfe officiously, “as I rode from Calais to haste unto your coronation, a letter was delivered to my hands, writ to Your Grace from the Duke of Burgundy.” Gloucester accepts the folded, sealed paper.

“*Shame* to the Duke of Burgundy and *thee!*” cries Talbot, coming forward to confront Fastolfe. “I vowed, base knight, when I did meet thee next, to tear the garter from thy craven’s

leg!” He rips away the ribbon, badge of the Order of the Garter. “Which I have *done*, because *unworthily* wast thou installèd in that high degree!

“Pardon me, princely Henry, and the rest! This *dastard*, at the battle of Patay—when in all I was but six thousand strong, and the French were almost ten to one—*before we met* or a *stroke* was given, like an untested *squire* did *run away!*”

“In which assault we lost *twelve hundred men!* Myself, and divers gentlemen beside, were there surprisèd and taken *prisoner!*”

“Then judge, great lords, if I have done *amiss*—and whether such *cowards* ought to wear this ornament of knighthood, yea or *no!*”

Gloucester stares at Fastolfe. “To say the truth, this crime was *infamous*, ill beseeming any *common* man—and much *more* so a knight, a captain and a leader!”

Talbot continues: “When first this order was ordainèd, my lords, Knights of the Garter were of *noble* birth, valiant and virtuous, full of haughty courage, such as were grown to *credit* by the wars: not fearing death, nor shrinking for distress, but always resolute in the most extremes.

“He, then, that is not furnished in that sort doth but *usurp* the sacred *name* of ‘knight,’ *profaning* this most honourable order!—and should, if I were worthy to be judge, be quite *degraded*, like a *hedge-born* swain that doth presume to boast of *gentle* blood!”

The young king frowns at the knight. “*Stain* to thy countrymen, thou hear’st thy *doom!* Be *packing*, therefore, thou that *wast* a knight! Henceforth we *banish* thee, on pain of *death!*”

Without a word, Fastolfe bows—and again flees.

“And now, my lord protector,” says Henry, “view the letter sent from our uncle the Duke of Burgundy.”

Examining the document, Gloucester frowns. “What *means* his grace, that he hath changed his *manner*? No more than plainly and bluntly, ‘To the king’! Hath he forgot that he is *his* *sovereign*? Or doth this churlish superscription portend some alteration in good will?

“What’s here...?” He reads aloud: “‘I have upon especial cause—movèd with compassion for my country’s wreck, together with the pitiful complaints of such as your oppression feeds upon—forsaken your pernicious faction, and *joined with Charles*, the *rightful* King of France!’”

“Oh, *monstrous treachery!* Can this be *so?*—that in alliance, amity and oaths there should be found such *false, dissembling guile!*”

“*What?*” says Henry. “Doth my Uncle Burgundy *revolt?*”

Gloucester nods. “He doth, my lord, and is become your foe.”

“Is that the worst this letter doth contain?” asks the king.

“It is the worst, and *all* he writes, my lord.”

Henry blinks. “Why, then, Lord Talbot, there, shall *talk* with him, and give him *chastisement* for this abuse.” He looks at the commander. “How say you, my lord? Are you content?”

“*Content*, my liege? *Yes!*” cries Talbot. “But that I am prevented,”—the king has spoken first, “I should have *begged* that I might have been so employèd!”

“Then gather strength and march unto him straight,” says Henry. “Let him perceive how ill we brook his *treason*—and what offence it is to *flout his friends!*”

Talbot bows. “I go, my lord, in heart desiring you may ever behold confounding of your foes!” He strides away, followed by his officers—all quite eager for a *talk* with Lord Burgundy.

Two young gentlemen hurry to the throne. Both bow, but Vernon manages to speak first: “Grant me the *combat*, gracious sovereign!”

“And *me*, my lord!—grant me the combat too!” says Basset.

Richard of York steps forward to stand beside Vernon. “This is my servant,” says the duke, nodding to the lawyer. “Hear him, noble prince!”

“And this is mine!” says the Duke of Somerset, joining Basset. “Sweet Henry, favour *him!*”

“Be patient, lords, and give them leave to speak,” says the king. “Say, gentlemen, what makes you thus exclaim, and wherefore crave you combat. And with whom.”

Vernon gestures. “With *him*, my lord!—for he hath done me wrong!”

“And I with *him*; for he hath done *me* wrong!”

The boy-king regards them, both more than twice his age. “What *is* that wrong whereof you both complain? First let me know, and then I’ll answer you.”

Basset begins. “Crossing the sea from England unto France, this *fellow* here, with envious, carping tongue, *upbraided* me about the *rose* I wear, saying the sanguine colour of the bloom did represent my master’s *blushing cheeks* when stubbornly he did repugn the truth about a certain question in the law argued betwixt the Duke of York and him!—with *other* vile and *ignominious* terms!

“In confutation of which rude reproach, and in defence of my lord’s worthiness, I crave the benefit of *law of arms!*”

“And that is *my* petition, noble lord!” cries Vernon. “For though he’d *seem*, with a forgèd, quaint conceit, to set a *gloss* upon his bold intent, yet know, my lord, *I* was provokèd by *him!*—and *he* first took exceptions to *this* badge, pronouncing that the paleness of the flower bewrayed a *faintness* of my master’s *heart!*”

Richard, now Duke of York, chides the other’s persistence: “Will not this *malice*, Somerset, be *left?*”

“*Your* private grudge, my Lord of York, will *out*, though ne’er so *cunningly* you’d smother it!”

King Henry is perturbed by his followers’ contention over *flowers*. “Good Lord, what *madness* rules in brainsick men, when for so slight and frivolous a cause such factious jealousies shall arise! Good cousins, both of York and Somerset, *quiet* yourselves, I pray, and be at *peace!*”

“Let this dissension first be tried by *fight*,” says York, “and *then* Your Highness shall commend a peace!”

“The quarrel toucheth none but *us* alone,” says Somerset. “Betwixt *ourselves* let us decide it then!”

York throws down a glove—a formal challenge in chivalry. “There is my pledge; accept it, Somerset!”

But Vernon is petulant. “Nay, let it rest where it began at *first!*” he urges York.

Basset tells Somerset, “Confirm it *so*, mine honourable lord!”

“*Confirm* it so?” cries Gloucester angrily, moving forward to intervene. “*Confounded* be your strife!” he tells the gentlemen, “and *perish ye*, with your audacious prate! *Presumptuous vassals!*—are you not *ashamed* with this immodest, clamorous *outrage* to trouble and disturb the *king*—and *us?*”

He confronts the dukes. “And *you*, my lords, methinks you do not well to *bear with* their perverse objections—much less to take occasion from their mouths to *raise a mutiny* betwixt yourselves! Let me persuade you to *take a better course!*”

“It *grieves* his highness,” notes old Exeter, nodding toward the throne. “Good my lords, be *friends!*”

Henry rises. “Come hither, you that would be combatants. Henceforth I charge you, as you love our favour, quite to *forget* this quarrel and the cause!

“And *you*, my lords, *remember where we are!*—in *France*, amongst a fickle, wavering nation! If they perceive *dissension* in our looks, and that within *ourselves* we disagree, how will their grudging acceptance be *provokèd?*—to wilful *disobedience*, and *rebellion!*”

“Beside, what *infamy* will arise when foreign princes shall be certified that, for a *toy*, a *thing of no regard*,”—a quarrel over roses, “King Henry’s peers and chief nobility *destroyed themselves*, and *lost the realm of France!*”

“*Oh*, think upon the conquest of my *father*, my tender years—and let us not forego, for a *trifle*, what was bought with *blood!*”

“Let me be umpire in this doubtful strife. I see no reason, if I wear this *rose*,” he says, taking Basset’s red one, “that any one should therefore be suspicious I more incline to Somerset than York! Both are my *kinsmen*, and I love them *both!* As well they may upbraid *me* about my *crown*”

because, forsooth, the King of *Scots* is crownèd!”—a small and parochial distinction, in the English view.

“But your discretions can better persuade than *I* am able to instruct or teach,” adds Henry soothingly. “And therefore, as we hither *came* in peace, so let us still *continue* in peace and love.

“Cousin of York, we institute Your Grace to be our *regent* in these parts of France!

“And, good my Lord of Somerset, unite *your* troops of horsemen with *his* bands of foot—and, like *true* subjects, *sons* of your progenitors, *go cheerfully together*, and divest your angry choler—*on your enemies!*”

“Ourself, my lord protector and the rest, after some respite will return to Calais, and from thence to England—where I hope ere long to be presented, by your *victories*, with Charles, Alençon, and that *traitorous rogue!*”—Burgundy.

The boy motions to his herald, and heads for his chambers, under a trumpet flourish; the lords and other courtiers bow, and most depart.

As they walk, Warwick says, lightly, hoping to soothe the sting of admonition, “My lord of York, I promise you, the king *prettily*, methought, did play the *orator!*”

“And so he did,” says the duke. “But yet I like it *not*, in that he wears the badge of *Somerset!*”

“*Tsk*, that was but his fancy; blame him not! I dare presume, sweet prince, he thought no harm.”

Mutters York, frowning, “An if I thought he *did*.... But let it rest; other affairs must now be managed.” Attended by Vernon, he and the earl leave the room.

Alone in the long, high hall, the Duke of Exeter again ruminates. *Well didst thou, Richard, to suppress thy voice! For, had the passions of thy heart burst out, I fear we should have seen deciphered there more rancorous spite, more furious raging broils, than yet can be imagined or supposed!*

But howsoe'er, no simple man sees this jarring discord of nobility, this shouldering of each other in the court, this factious bandying by their favourites, but that it doth presage some ill event!

'Tis much when sceptres are in children's hands, but more when envy breeds unkind division. There comes the rain—there begins calamity!

Chapter Eight In Southwestern France

Go to the gates of Bourdeaux, trumpeter! Summon their general unto the wall!” The horn blares out its demand, and soon the French garrison's commander and several city officials appear, aloft, to stare down at the British troops assembled behind their general.

He speaks: “English *John Talbot*, captains, calls you forth!—servant in arms to Harry, King of England!

“And thus would he: *open your city gates!* Be humble to us, call my sovereign *yours*, and do him homage as obedient subjects, and I'll withdraw me and my bloody power.

“But if you frown upon this proffered peace, you tempt the fury of my three *attendants*: lean *famine*, quartering *steel*, and climbing *fire!*—who in a *moment* shall lay your stately and air-braving towers *level with the earth*, if you forsake the offer of their love!”

Scornfully, the French general calls down: “Thou *owl* of ominous Death, *terror* of our nation's fearful, and their bloody *scourge*, the period”—end point—“of thy tyranny *approacheth!*”

“From *us* thou canst not entreat but for *death*, for I protest we are well fortified—and strong enough to *issue out and fight!*”

“If thou *retire*,” he says, pointing past the English force, “the *dauphin*, well appointed, stands with the snares of war to *tangle* thee! On *either hand* of thee there are squadrons pitched to *wall*

thee from the liberty of flight! And no way canst thou turn thee for redress but that *devastation* doth meet thee in the face, and pale *Death* front thee with obvious spoil!

“*Ten thousand French* have ta'en the sacrament to train their dangerous artillery upon *no Christian soul but English Talbot!*”

He motions at the general below. “*Lo*, there thou stand'st, a *breathing, valiant* man, of an invincible, unconquerèd spirit; this is the *final* glory of thy praise that I, thine *enemy*, endue thee withal, for ere the glass that now begins to run *finishes* the process of its sandy hour, these eyes, that see thee now well colourèd, shall see thee *withered, bloody, pale* and *dead!*”

“*Hark! Hark!*—the dauphin's drum! A *waning* bell sings heavy music to thy timorous soul—but *mine* shall *ring thy dire departure out!*” At his nod, bells in the city's towers begin to chime—a signal. He stalks away, leading the townsmen from the parapet.

Talbot is alarmed. “He fables not; I *hear the enemy!* Out, some light horsemen, and peruse their wings!” he calls, to a captain among his closely gathered troops. But the big French battalions are already marching into view.

“Oh, *negligent* and *heedless* discipline!—now are we enclosed as if *mazed in a park*, a little herd of England's timorous deer, bounded by a yelping kennel of *French curs!*”

“If we be English *deer*, be then *in blood!*—not whelp-like to fall down at a pang, but rather *moody, mad*, and desperate *stags!*—to *turn* on the bloody hounds with heads of *steel*, and make the cowards stand apart, at bay!”

He draws his sword and raises it high. “Sell *every* man his life as dear as *mine*,” he cries, “and they shall find *dear*”—costly—“deer in *us*, my friends!”

“God and *Saint George, Talbot* and *England's right* prosper our colours in this dangerous fight!”

—

Elsewhere in Gascony, a messenger who is hurrying through the British encampment toward the Duke of York's command tent is hailed by England's new Regent of France. “Are not the speedy scouts that dogged the mighty army of the dauphin returned again?” asks Richard.

“They *are* returnèd, my lord!—and give it out that he has marched *to Bourdeaux* with his power, *to fight with Talbot!* As he marched along, by your espials were discovered *two mightier troops* than that the dauphin led, which *joined with him* and made *their* march for Bourdeaux!”

Richard complains to his officers: “A *plague* upon that *villain Somerset*, who thus *delays* my promised supply of horsemen that were *levied for this siege!* Renownèd Talbot doth expect my aid, but I am flouted by a *traitor villain*, and cannot help the noble chevalier! God comfort him in this necessity! If he miscarry, *farewell* wars in *France!*”

Sir William Lucy rides up at a gallop, quickly dismounts, and greets Richard with a bow. “Thou princely *leader* of our English strength, *never so needed* on the earth of France, *spur to the rescue of the noble Talbot*, who now is girdled with a waist of *iron*, and hemmed about with grim *destruction!*”

“To *Bourdeaux*, warlike duke! To *Bourdeaux*, York! Else, *farewell* Talbot, France, and England's honour!”

Richard seems angry. “Oh, *God*, I would that *Somerset*, who in proud heart doth *stop* my cornets, were in Talbot's place!—thus should we save a *valiant gentleman* by forfeiting a *traitor* and *coward!* Mad ire and wrathful fury make me weep, that *thus we die*, while *remiss traders sleep!*”

Sir William pleads: “Oh, send *some* succor to the distressèd lord!”

But York only stares out, morosely, over his legions of foot soldiers. “He dies; we *lose*—I break my warlike *word!* We mourn, France *smiles!* We lose; they daily *get*—all because of this vile traitor *Somerset!*”

The knight stares. “Then God have mercy on brave Talbot's soul!—and on his son, young John, who two hours ago I met in travel toward his warlike father! This seven years did not Talbot *see* his son!—and now they meet where both their lives are done!”

York nods sadly. “*Alas*, what joy shall noble Talbot have, to bid his young son welcome to his *grave*?” He motions to his lieutenant for the troops to begin breaking camp. “Away! Vexation almost stops my breath, that Sundered friends greet in the hour of death!”

He turns, ready to prepare for the march. “Lucy, farewell; no more my fortune can, but *curse* the *cause* I cannot aid the man!

“Blois, Poitiers, Maine and Tours are won away, *all due to Somerset’s delay!*” he insists, going into the tent.

The knight reflects angrily as he mounts his sweaty steed. *Thus, while the vulture of sedition feeds in the bosom of such great commanders, sleeping neglectation doth betray to loss the conquest of our scarce-cold conqueror, that man of ever-living memory, Henry the Fifth!*

He spurs the steed forward. *Whiles they each other cross, lives, honours, lands and all hurry to loss!*

“It is too late; I cannot send them *now*,” Lord Somerset tells the frantic sergeant dispatched by Talbot from Bourdeaux. “This expedition was by *York* and Talbot *too rashly plotted*: all our general force might, *in one sally*, be buckled to that very town! The over-daring Talbot hath sullied all his gloss of former honour by this unheedful, desperate, wild adventure!

“*York* set him on to fight and die in shame so that, Talbot dead, *great York* might bear the fame!”

The sergeant sees a rider approaching. “Here is Sir William Lucy, who with me set forth for aid of our o’ermatchèd forces....”

“How now, Sir William,” calls Somerset, frowning, “whither were you *sent*?” He had expected the gentleman to remain with York.

The knight glowers, stepping down from his lathered mount. “*Whither*, my lord? From bought-and-sold *Lord Talbot!*—who, ringed about with bold adversity, *cries out* for noble York and Somerset to beat assailing *Death* from his weak legions!

“But, whiles the honourable captain there drops *bloody sweat* from his war-wearied limbs, and as advantage lingers, looks for rescue, *you two*—his *false hopes*, the trusts of England’s *honour!*—keep *off*, aloof in worthless *rivalry!*”

“Let not your private discord keep *away* the levied succor that should *lend him aid*, while he, renowned, noble gentleman, *yields up his life* unto a *world* of odds!

“Orléans the bastard, Charles, Burgundy, Alençon, Reignier *compass him about*, and Talbot *perisheth!*—*by your default!*”

But Somerset is defiant. “*York set him on*; York should have sent him *aid*.”

“And *York* as fast upon *Your Grace* exclaims!” cries the exasperated knight, “swearing that you *withhold* his levied host, collected for this expedition!”

“*York lies*,” says Somerset. “He might have *sent* and *had* the horse! I owe him little duty, and less *love*—and take in full scorn to fawn on him by *sending*.”

Sir William shakes his head in despair. “The *feud of England*, not the force of France, hath now entrapped the noble-minded Talbot! Never to England shall he bear his life—but dies, *betrayèd* to Fortune by your strife!”

Wary, now, of that perception, Somerset turns toward the camp’s eastern edge, where the horses have been kept. “Come, I will dispatch the horsemen straight. Within six hours they will be at his aid.”

Six hours. “Too late comes rescue,” says the knight sadly. “He is ta’en or slain. For fly he *could* not, if he would have fled; and fly would Talbot *never*, though he might.”

Says Somerset, “If he be dead, then brave Talbot, adieu.”

His fame lives in the world, thinks Sir William, *his shame in you!*

Amidst the closing English ranks at Bourdeaux, Lord Talbot confers urgently with a captain—his son, nineteen.

“O young John Talbot,” moans the general, “I did send for thee to tutor thee in stratagems of war, that Talbot’s name might be in thee revived when sapless age and weak, unable limbs should bring thy father to his drooping chair.

“But—*oh, malignant and ill-boding stars!*—now thou art come unto a *feast of death*, terrible and implacable *danger!* Therefore, dear boy, mount on my swiftest horse, and I’ll direct thee how thou shalt escape by sudden flight! Come, dally not!—*be gone!*”

The young man shakes his head. “Is my name *Talbot?* And am I *your son?*—and shall I *fly?*”

“*Oh*, if you love my mother, dishonour not her honourable name by making a *bastard* and a *slave* of me! The world will say, ‘He is not *Talbot’s* blood, that basely fled when noble Talbot stood!’”

“Fly to *revenge* my death, if I be slain!”

John only smiles. “He that flies so will ne’er return again.”

“If we both stay, we *both* are sure to die!”

“Then let me stay, and, Father, do *you* fly! *Your* loss is *great*; so your regard should be! My worth unknown, *no* loss is known in me. Upon my death the French can little boast; in yours they *will!* With *you* all *hopes* are lost!

“Flight cannot stain the honour *you* have won—but *mine* it will, who no exploit have done! You fled for *vantage*, every one will swear; but, if *I* bow, they’ll say it was for *fear*.

“There is no hope that *ever* I will stay, if in the *first* hour I shrink and run away!” He removes his helmet. “Here on my knee I beg *mortality*, rather than life preservèd with infamy!”

“Shall all thy *mother’s* hopes lie in *one tomb?*”

“*Aye*, rather than I’ll shame my mother’s womb!”

“Upon my blessing, I command thee go!”

“To *fight* I *will!*—but not to fly the foe.”

Talbot pleads: “Part of thy *father* may be saved in thee!”

“No part of him but might be *shamed* in me!”

“Thou never *hadst* renown, nor canst not lose it.”

“*Yes!*—*your* renownèd name! Shall flight *abuse* it?”

“Thy father’s charge”—order—“shall clear thee from that stain!”

“You cannot *witness* it for me, being *slain,*” protests John Talbot. “If death be so apparent, then *both* fly!”

Talbot is aghast. “And leave my followers here to fight and die? My age was never tainted with such shame!”

John Talbot rises. “And shall my *youth* be guilty of such blame? No more can I be severed from your side than can yourself yourself in twain divide! Stay, go, do what you will, the like do I; for live I will not, if my *father* die!”

Lord Talbot regards the young officer proudly. “Then here I take my leave of thee, fair *sun*, born to eclipse thy life this afternoon!

“Come, side by side, together live and die! And soul with soul, from France to *heaven* fly!”

Drumming rumbles along the field of battle, and trumpets signal the rise and fall of soldiers’ excursions into violent clashes of armed men—some striding, proud and fierce in fine armor, with swords of Spanish steel and emblems of heraldry painted on their shields, determined to find glory; others crouching in drab and dirty homespun, hoping to survive, with fear in their hearts, knives and pikes clutched in hands slick with blood.

“*Saint George* and *victory!*” cries Lord Talbot. “*Fight*, soldiers, *fight!*” he calls to his men. “The regent hath with Talbot *broken his word*, and left us to the rage of France’s sword!”

He cuts down a French foot soldier among three attacking an English knight, and slashes the left shoulder of another, who whirls to face him. Talbot’s sword stabs deep into the belly; pressing a foot against the enemy’s thigh, he jerks the blade free, and watches blood gush forth.

The young face goes pale, and the boy's eyes roll back as he falls to the very turf he played on as a child.

"Where is *John Talbot*?" calls the general, while the nearby knight graciously finishes off a screaming French man whose severed arm lies on the ground beside him.

As his son removes his helmet, grinning, Talbot smiles. "Pause, and take thy breath! I gave thee life, and rescued thee from death!"

"O *twice* my father, twice am I *thy son*! The life thou gavest me first was lost and done, till with thy warlike sword, defying 'late,' to my determinèd time thou gavest new date!"

"When from the *dauphin's* crest *thy* sword struck fire, it warmed thy father's heart with proud desire of bold-faced victory!" Talbot tells him, of one earlier incident. "Then leaden age, animated with youthful spleen and warlike *rage*, beat down Alençon, Orléans, Burgundy—and from the *pride of Gallia*"—Charles and the three nobles—"rescued thee!"

"The ireful bastard of Orléans, that drew blood from thee, my boy, and had the maidenhood of thy *first* fight, I soon encounterèd—and interchanging blows, I quickly shed some of *his* bastard blood!—and to his disgrace bespoke him thus: '*Contaminated, base and misbegotten* blood I spill of thine, mean and right poor, for that pure blood of mine which thou didst force from Talbot my brave boy!'"

He glances around them on the field. "Here, purposing the bastard to *destroy*," he says, "I came in strong rescue.

"Speak to thy father's care; art thou not weary, John? How dost thou fare? Wilt thou yet leave the battle, boy, and fly, now thou art *sealèd* as a son of chivalry?"

"*Fly!*—to *revenge* my death when I am dead! The help of *one* stands me in little stead! Oh, too much *folly* is it, well I wot, to hazard all, our lives in one small boat! If I today die not with Frenchmen's rage, tomorrow I shall die with mickle age! By *me* they nothing gain an if I stay: 'tis but the shortening of my life one day!"

"In *thee* thy *mother* dies, our household's *name*, my death's revenge, thy youth, and England's fame! All these and more we hazard by thy stay; all these are saved if thou wilt fly away!"

Says John, still bleeding, "The sword of Orléans hath not made me to smart, drawn life-blood from my heart; these *words* of yours, bought with such shame, own *that* advantage: to save paltry *life* and slay bright *fame!* Before young Talbot from old Talbot fly, may the coward horse that bear me fall and die! Then liken me to the *peasant boys of France*, to bear *shame's* scorn, a subject of Mischance!"

"Surely by all the glory you have won, an if I fly I am not Talbot's son! Then talk no more of flight—it is no boot! If son to Talbot, die at Talbot's foot!"

Cries the graybeard, "Then follow thou thy desperate sire of *Crete*, thou *Icarus!* Thy life to me is sweet! If thou wilt fight, fight *by thy father's side!*"

"And, commendable proved, let's die in *pride!*"

A corporal leads Lord Talbot, now gravely injured, through an open space.

"Where is my *other* life? Mine own is gone," groans the warrior. "Oh, where's young Talbot?—where is valiant John?"

"O triumphant Death, smearèd in capturing, *young Talbot's valour* makes me *smile* at thee!" He regards his own gory gashes. "When he perceived me shrink, then on my knee, his bloody sword he brandished over me, and, like a hungry lion, did commence rough deeds of rage and stern impatience!"

"But when my angry guardant stood alone, alarmed at my ruin and assailed by none, dizzy-eyed fury and great rage of heart suddenly made him from my side to start, into the clustering battle of the French!"

"And in that sea of blood my boy did drench his over-mounting spirit," he sobs, "and there died my blossom, my *Icarus*, in his pride!"

The servant points. "O my dear lord, *lo* where your son is borne!" Two soldiers carry John Talbot to his father.

Slowly, painfully, Lord Talbot kneels beside the fallen youth. "*Thou antic*, Death, which laugh'st us here to scorn," he calls out, "anon from thy insulting tyranny, coupled in bonds of perpetuity, *two Talbots*, blithe and wingèd, through the *sky* in thy despite shall *escape* mortality!"

He touches the still-warm face. "O thou, whose wounds beckon hard-favoured Death, speak to thy father ere thou yield thy breath!"

Reaching a steadying hand to the ground, he manages to sit. "*Defy* Death!—speak whether he will or no! Imagine him a *Frenchman*—and thy *foe*!"

"Poor boy. He smiles, methinks, as if to say, 'Had Death been *French*, then *Death* had died today!'"

Talbot motions to the men. "Come, come and lay him in his father's arms; my spirit can no longer bear these harms!"

The men so move the body—but flee as French troops approach.

"Soldiers, adieu!" calls the old man. "I have what I would have: now my old arms are young John Talbot's grave."

Leaning forward to kiss his son's cheek, he gasps at a sudden new pain—and then he is still.

As some dejected British prisoners are being led away under guard, King Charles walks among the dead with Alençon and Burgundy, Joan and Dunois. Soldiers follow.

"Had York and Somerset brought rescue in, we should have found a bloody day in *this*!" notes the king.

Dunois strides to two bodies. "How this young whelp of Talbot's, *raging*, did flesh his puny sword in French men's blood!"

"Once I encountered him," Joan tells them, "and thus I said: 'Thou *maiden* youth, be vanquished by a *maid*!' But with a majestic-high scorn, he answered thus: 'Young Talbot was not born to be the pillage of a *giglot wench*!' So, rushing into the bowels of the French, he left me—proudly—as *unworthy* to fight." She smirks now, looking at his corpse.

Burgundy kneels beside the father and son. "Doubtless he would have made a noble knight; see where he lies, enhearsèd in the arms of a most-bloody nurser of his harms."

"*Hew them to pieces!*" cries Dunois angrily, "hack their bones asunder, whose life was England's glory, Gallia's wonder!"

Charles stops the sergeant. "Oh, no; *forbear*. For that which we have *fled* during the life, let us not *wrong* it, dead."

They see a French officer approaching—followed by an English knight and his attendants. "Herald," Sir William Lucy is saying, "conduct me to the dauphin's tent, to know who hath attained the glory of the day."

"On what submissive embassy art *thou* sent?" demands King Charles.

"*Submission*, dauphin? 'Tis a mere *French* word; we English *warriors* wot not what it means. I come to know what prisoners thou hast ta'en, and to survey the bodies of the dead."

"For *prisoners* ask'st thou? *Hell* our prison is!" retorts Charles. "But tell me whom thou seek'st."

Sir William names only one man—comparing him to Hercules: "Where's the great *Alcides of the field*?—valiant Lord *Talbot*: created Earl of Shrewsbury for his rare success in arms, great Earl of Washford, Waterford and Valence, Lord Talbot of Goodrig and Urchinfield, Lord Strange of Blackmere, Lord Verdun of Alton, Lord Cromwell of Wingfield, Lord Furnival of Sheffield, the thrice-victorious Lord of Falconbridge, knight of the noble orders of Saint George, worthy Saint Michael, and the Golden Fleece, great marshal to Henry the Sixth for all his wars within the realm of France!"

Joan laughs harshly. "Here is a *silly* stately style indeed! The *Turk*, that *two-and-fifty* kingdoms hath,"—a deck of minor, heathen conquests, "writes not in so tedious a style as this!"

She points. "Him that thou magnifiest with all these titles, *stinking* and *fly-blown* lies here *at our feet!*"

The knight moves to kneel beside the bodies. "Is *Talbot* slain?—the Frenchman's lone scourge, your kingdom's terror and black nemesis!"

He stares up at the enemy lords. "*Oh*, were mine eyeballs turned into *bullets*, that I in rage might *shoot them at your faces!* *Oh*, that I could but call *these* dead to life!—it were enough to *fright the realm of France!* Were but his *picture* left amongst you here, it would amaze the proudest of you *all!*"

"Give me their bodies," he demands, rising, "that I may bear them hence, and give them burial as beseems their worth!"

Joan sneers: "I think this upstart is *old Talbot's ghost*, he speaks with such a proud, commanding spirit!"

"For God's sake let him *have 'em*," she tells Charles. "Keeping them here, they would but *stink*, and putrefy the air." The king nods. "Go, take their bodies *hence!*"

"I'll bear them hence," says Sir William, tears in his eyes, "but from their ashes shall be reared a *phoenix* that shall make all France afeard!"

Charles has already turned and started away, and is pulling on his lace-trimmed gloves. "So we be *rid* of them, do with 'em what thou wilt."

He smiles at Joan, walking beside him. "And now to *Paris*, in this *conquering* vein!
"All will be *ours*, now bloody *Talbot's* slain!"

Chapter Nine Proposing Peace

In the palace at London, King Henry VI has received missives from Pope Eugenius IV, from Sigismund of the Holy Roman Empire, and from a leading French nobleman. Now of legal majority but still childlike, sheltered, and religious, Henry continues to take guidance from his uncle.

"Have you perused the letters from the Pope, the Emperor, and the Earl of Armagnac?" he asks Humphrey this morning.

"I have, my lord," says Gloucester, "and their intent is this: they humbly sue unto Your Excellence to have a *godly peace* concluded between the realms of England and of France."

"How doth Your Grace like their motion?"

"*Well*, my good lord," says the duke, "and as the only means to stop effusion of our Christian blood, and establish quietness on every side."

Henry is pleased. "*Aye, marry*, Uncle!—for I always thought it was both impious and unnatural that such inhumanity and bloody strife should reign among professors of *one faith!*"

"Beside, my lord, the sooner to effect—and surer to *bind*—this knot of amity, the Earl of Armagnac, near-knit to Charles, and a man of great authority in France, proffers his only daughter to Your Grace in *marriage*, with a large and sumptuous dowry!" Humphrey has carefully arranged the lucrative agreement.

Henry, pious and scholarly, blushes. "*Marriage*, Uncle? Alas, my years are young, and fitter is my study in my *books* than wanton dalliance with a paramour!"

"Yet call the ambassadors, and, as you please, so let them have their answers, every one. I shall be well content with any choice that tends to God's glory and my country's weal."

At Gloucester's nod, the herald's cornet sounds a sennet, and three emissaries enter the tall throne room, followed by their attendants. The legate from Rome is accompanied by an English prelate robed in red.

Thinks Lord Exeter, surprised; *What? Is my lord of Winchester called, installèd unto a cardinal's degree?* He frowns. *Then I perceive that what Henry the Fifth did sometime prophesy will be verified: 'If once he come to be a cardinal, he'll make his cap co-equal with the crown!'*

Henry smiles at the visitors. "My lords ambassadors, your several suits have been considered and debated on. And therefore are we certainly resolved to draw conditions"—list terms—"of a *friendly peace!*—which by my lord of Winchester we mean shall be transported presently to France."

Gloucester addresses Armagnac's representative: "And for the proffer of my lord your master, I have informed his highness so at large that, as liking of the lady's virtuous gifts, her beauty, and the value of her dower, he doth intend she shall be *England's queen!*"

Henry slides a ruby ring from his finger. "In argument and proof of which contract, bear her this jewel, pledge of my affection." He hands it to the French gentleman.

"And so, my lord protector, see them guarded and safely brought to Dover," Henry tells Humphrey, "where inshippèd, commit them to the fortune of the sea!"

The emissaries, all highly pleased, bow and begin to follow Gloucester out past the high double doors.

The cardinal advises the Italian privately, "Stay, my lord legate. You shall first receive the sum of money which I promised should be delivered to His Holiness for clothing me in these grave ornaments."

"I will attend upon Your Lordship's leisure."

As they walk, the churchman savors progress. *Now Winchester will not submit, I trow, nor be inferior to the proudest peer!*

Humphrey of Gloucester, thou shalt well perceive that neither in birth nor for authority will the bishop be overborne by thee!

I'll either make thee stoop and bend thy knee, or sack this country with a mutiny!

Chapter Ten Prisoners

On the plain of Anjou in France, King Charles shows a document to the commanders of his forces challenging English occupation. "*These news, my lords, may cheer our drooping spirits! 'Tis said the stout Parisians do revolt, and turn again unto the warlike French!*"

"Then *march to Paris*, royal Charles of France," cries Alençon, "and keep not back your powers in dalliance!"

But there has been contention among factions in Paris. "Peace be amongst *them* if they turn to us," says Joan sternly, "else may *ruin* compete within their palaces!"

A horseman rides up to the king, dismounts and bows. "Success unto our valiant general, and happiness to his accomplices!"

"What tidings send our scouts?" asks Charles eagerly. "I prithee, speak!"

"The English army that was divided into two parties is now conjoinèd in *one*, and means to give you battle presently!"

Charles is taken aback. "Somewhat too *sudden*, sirs, the warning is! But we will presently provide for them!"

"I trust the ghost of *Talbot* is not there," says Burgundy. "Now *he* is gone, my lord, you need not fear."

Jaws tightening, Joan grasps the hilt of her sheathed sword.. "Of all base passions, *fear* is most accursèd!

"*Command the conquest*, Charles!—it shall be *thine!* Let *Henry* fret, and all the *world* repine!"

Charles is exuberant. "Then *on*, my lords—and France be fortunate!"

Soon ready, they march to meet the English.

Alone on a hilltop, Joan watches in dismay as the powerful, combined force now led by Richard of York fights its way ever closer. *The regent conquers, and the French men fly!*

She looks up at the thick and gathering clouds, lowering dark above her. “Now *help, ye spells* for charming!—and *periapts!*” She rubs her arms to incite the magical protections invoked by what is written on the cloths wrapping them. She peers up into the gloom. “And *ye, choice spirits* that admonish me, give me signs of future occurrence!”

Lightning flashes, briefly illuminating the valley below, and providing a glimpse of the deadly battle in which English troops are engulfing resistance.

She calls, as the thunder rumbles away, “You speedy *helpers* that are substitutes under the lordly monarch of the *North,*”—the strongest of cold winds, “*appear,* and *aid* me in this enterprise!”

While the storm looms nearer, gusts stir up dry dirt and dead leaves—and dim, inchoate figures rise in the eddies swirling around her. “This speedy and quick appearance argues proof of your accustomed diligence to me!

“Now, ye familiar spirits, that are cullèd out of the powerful regions *under earth,* *help me this once,* that France may get the field!”

With feverish intensity she watches the specters dancing about her.

“Oh, hold me not with *silence* over-long!” She bares a scarred arm. “Where I was wont to feed you with my blood, I’ll *lop a member off,* and give it you in earnest of *further* benefit, if you do condescend to *help me now!*”

As rain begins to fall, the fleeting forms slow.

“No hope to have redress?

“My *body* shall pay recompense, if you will grant my suit!” she cries in desperation.

“Cannot my body nor blood-sacrifice entreat you to your wonted furtherance? Then take my *soul!*—my body, soul and *all!*—rather than England give the French a fall!”

The shrinking shadows dissipate, and crumpled bits of withered leaf flutter and drift to the ground as the storm breaks.

I see they forsake me!

She draws her sword and starts down the hill in the pelting rain.

Now the time is come that France must lower her lofty-plumèd crest, and let her head fall into England’s lap. My ancient incantations are too weak, and Hell too strong for me to buckle with!

Now, France, thy glory droopeth to the dust!

Joining a band of French soldiers in the vanguard of a lone, bold excursion, Joan flings herself forward, sword darting out to fell a huge advancing Briton just as he lifts an axe over his head; astonished, he topples back. Her blade proves lethal among the men, all taller—until she loses footing and falls; the bloody old sword of Touraine drops into the mud.

She sees that the French troops are all running to follow their fleeing army. English fighters surge forward, and two soldiers quickly haul Joan from the ground, pinioning her arms behind her. Their commander, leading the attack, spots the prisoner.

“Damsel of France, I think I have you fast!” cries Richard of York. “Unchain your spirits *now* with spelling charms, and try if *they* can gain your liberty!”

He pulls off her helmet. “A goodly prize, *fit* for the *Devil’s* grace! See how the ugly wench doth bend her brows!—as if with *Circe* she would change *my* shape!” The goddess turned Odysseus’s men into swine.

Joan spits. “Changèd to a *worser* shape thou *canst not be!*”

“Oh, *Charles* the *dolphin* is a proper man!” gibes York. “No shape but *his* can please your dainty eye!”

“A plaguing *mischief* alight on Charles *and* thee!” cries Joan, feeling betrayed and forsaken. “And may ye *both* be suddenly surprised by bloody hands when *sleeping on your beds!*”

“Fell, damning *hag!* Enchantress, *hold thy tongue!*”

Says Joan, seething, “I prithee, give me leave to curse a while!”

York motions for the men to drag her away. “*Curse, miscreant, when thou comest to the stake!*”

—

The sun has come out again. “Be what thou wilt, thou art my prisoner,” says the English officer, taking a young French lady by the hand at Tours, just outside a besieged castle—to which she has been caught trying to flee as the British approached.

“O fairest beauty, do not fear nor fly!” he tells her kindly. “For I will touch thee but with *reverent* hands!” He lifts her left one. “I kiss these fingers for eternal *peace*, and lay them *gently* at thy tender side.

“Who art thou? Say, that I may *honour* thee.”

“Margaret is my name—and daughter to a *king*, the King of *Naples*,” she says haughtily, “whosoe’er *thou* art.”

“An earl I am, and Suffolk am I called. Be not offended by Nature’s miracle: thou art *allotted* to be ta’en by me! So doth the *swan* her downy cygnets *save*, keeping them prisoner underneath her wings!

“Yet if this servile usage once offend, go and be free again, as Suffolk’s *friend!*”

“Oh, stay!” he pleads, laughing, as she starts to pull away. William de la Pole is enchanted. *I have no power to let her pass! My hand would free her, but my heart says no! As plays the sun upon the glassy stream, twinkling at another, counterfeited beam, so seems this gorgeous beauty to mine eyes!*

Fain would I woo her, yet I dare not speak! I’ll call for pen and ink, and write my mind....

Fie, de la Pole! Disable not thyself!—hast not a tongue? Is she not here? Wilt thou be daunted at a woman’s sight?

Aye!—beauty’s princely majesty is such as confounds the tongue, and makes the senses rough!

Margaret faces him boldly. “Say, Earl of Suffolk—if thy name be so—what ransom must I pay before I pass? For I perceive I am thy prisoner.”

He does not want to release her yet. *How canst thou tell she will deny thy suit before thou make a trial of her love?*

“Why speak’st thou not? What *ransom* must I pay?”

She’s beautiful, and therefore to be wooed; she is a woman, therefore to be won!

“Wilt thou accept of ransom?—yea, or no!”

Fond man, remember that thou hast a wife! Then how can Margaret be thy paramour?

She frowns, watching the troubled Englishman. *I were best to leave him, for he will not hear!*

William is staring down, muttering. “There all is marred; *there* lies a cooling card.”

Margaret is puzzled. *He talks at random; surely the man is mad!*

Suffolk ponders. “And yet a dispensation may be had.”

She is impatient. “And yet I would that you would *answer* me!”

I’ll win this Lady Margaret! He ponders sourly. *For whom?*

Why, for my king! Suffolk is fast contriving a scheme to keep her close at hand. He pictures the pious and credulous young Henry—and chuckles, blurring out, “*Tsk, that’s* a wooden thing!”

She stares. *He talks of wood!—it is some carpenter!*

William is thinking. *Yet so, my fancy may be satisfied—and peace established between these realms! But there remains a qualm in that, too; for though her father be the King of Naples, Duke of Anjou and Maine, yet is he poor, and our nobility will scorn the match....*

Margaret pulls her hand away, annoyed; she is hardly accustomed to being ignored. “*Hear ye, captain!*” she says angrily. “Are you now *on leave?*”

Suffolk is resolved. *It shall be so, disdain they ne'er so much! Henry is youthful, and will quickly yield.* He steps closer. "Madam, I have a *secret* to reveal!"

"What, though I'm already *enthralled*?" she asks, voice deep with sarcasm. *He seems a knight, and will not dishonour me any way....*

"Lady, vouchsafe to listen what I say!"

Perhaps I shall be rescued by the French, and then I need not crave his courtesy. She turns away.

"Sweet madam, give me hearing in a cause...."

Margaret reassures herself: "*Tsk*, women have been captivate ere *now!*"

Now Suffolk is nonplussed. "Lady, wherefore talk you so?"

"I cry you mercy," says Margaret sourly to the puzzled lord, "'tis but *quid* for *quo!*"

But he smiles, and speaks soothingly: "Say, gentle princess: would you not suppose your *bondage happy*, to be made a *queen*?"

"To be a queen in *bondage* is more vile than is a slave in base servility," she replies sharply, "for princes should be *free!*"

"And so shall *you*, if happy England's royal *king* be free!"

"Why, what concerns his freedom unto me?"

"I'll undertake to make thee *Henry's queen!*—to put a *golden sceptre* in thy hand, and set a precious *crown* upon thy head, if thou wilt condescend to be my—"

"What?"

"His love."

Surprised—and flattered—Margaret considers carefully. "I am unworthy to be Henry's wife...."

"No, gentle madam, *I* unworthy am, to woo so fair a dame to be his wife!" *And have a portion in the choice myself!* "How say you, madam; are ye content?"

Margaret slowly nods. "An if my *father* please, I am content."

Suffolk is delighted. He signals to his ensign. "Then call our captains and our colours forth! And, madam, at your father's castle walls we'll crave a parley, to confer with him."

The herald's trumpet sounds a call for negotiation, and before long Lord Reignier comes to the stone parapet high above.

"See, Reignier, see, thy daughter prisoner!" calls Suffolk.

"To whom?"

"To me!"

Reignier recognizes him; but he shrugs. "Suffolk, what remedy? I am a *soldier*, and unapt to weep, or to exclaim on Fortune's fickleness."

Suffolk steps forward, smiling. "Yet there is remedy *enough*, my lord! *Consent!*—for thine *honour*, give consent: that *thy daughter shall be wedded to my king!* I with pain have wooed and won her thereto!—and thus her easy-held imprisonment hath gained thy daughter *princely* liberty!"

Reignier is astonished. "Speaks Suffolk as he thinks?"

"Fair *Margaret* knows that Suffolk doth not flatter, feint, or feign!"

The King of Naples nods happily. "Upon thy princely warrant, I descend to give thee answer of thy just demand!"

"And here I will expect thy coming."

The trumpet sounds again as the castle gates swing open, and the duke emerges with attendants. "*Welcome*, brave earl, into our territories! Command in Anjou what Your Honour pleases!"

Suffolk bows courteously. "Thanks, Reignier, happy for so sweet a *child*, fit to be made companion with a *king!* What answer makes Your Grace unto my suit?"

“Since thou dost deign to woo her little worth to be the princely bride of such a lord—upon condition that I may quietly *enjoy mine own*, with Maine and Anjou, free from oppression or the stroke of war—my daughter shall be Henry’s, if he please.”

Suffolk smiles. “*That* is her ransom! I will deliver her, and undertake that Your Grace shall well and quietly enjoy the two countries.”

Reignier bows, very pleased. “And I again, in *Henry’s* royal name, give thee, as deputy unto that gracious king, her hand for sign of plighted faith.”

“Reignier of France, I give thee *kingly* thanks, because this is in traffic of a king!” says Suffolk. *And yet, methinks, I could be well content to be mine own attorney in this case!*

“I’ll over, then, to England with this news, and make this marriage to be solemnized.

“So farewell, Reignier!” He kisses Margaret’s hand. “Set this *diamond* safe in golden palaces, as becomes it!”

Reignier goes to him. “I do *embrace* thee, as I would embrace the Christian prince *King Henry*, were he here!”

Margaret beams. “Farewell, my lord!” Her eyes flash. “Good wishes, praise and prayers shall *Suffolk* ever have of Margaret!”

“Farewell, sweet madam! But hark you, Margaret: no princely commendations to my *king*?”

“Such commendation as becomes a maid. A *virgin*, and his *servant*, say to him,” she adds.

Suffolk smiles. “Words sweetly placed, and modestly directed. But madam, I must trouble you again: no loving... *token* to his majesty?”

“Yes, my good lord: a pure unspotted heart, never yet tainted with love, I send the king.”

“And *this* withal?” Suffolk kisses her cheek.

“That for *thymself*; I will not so presume as to send such pleasing tokens to the king.”

As Reignier returns to his castle with the lovely lady, William watches her.

Oh, wert thou for myself!

But, Suffolk, stay; thou mayst not wander in that labyrinth!—there Minotaurs and ugly treasons lurk!

Solicit Henry with her wondrous praise. Bethink thee on her virtues, that surmount, and most natural graces that extinguish art! Repeat their semblance often on the seas, so that when thou comest to kneel at Henry’s feet, thou mayst bereave him of his wits with wonder!

On the edge of the British encampment at Anjou, Richard of York calls to guards outside a mud-spattered tent. “Bring forth that sorceress condemnèd to *burn!*”

Soldiers surrounding Joan, whose arms are tied behind her, propel her forward. An old man walks along behind them. “*Ah*, Joan, this kills thy father’s heart outright!” he moans. “I have sought in every county far and near, and now that it is my chance to *find* thee, must I behold thy untimely, cruel *death*?”

“*Oh*, Joan, sweet daughter Joan, *I’ll die with thee!*” he wails, falling to his knees.

She sneers. “Decrepit miser! Base, ignoble *wretch!* I am descended of a gentler blood! Thou art no *father*, nor no friend of *mine!*”

“*Out, out!*” cries the wizened shepherd. “My lords, an’t please you, *’tis not so!* I *did* beget her, all the parish knows! Her *mother* liveth yet—can *testify* she was the first fruit of my bachelorship!”

Lord Warwick scowls at the woman. “*Graceless*, wilt thou deny thy *parentage*?”

York shakes his head. “This argues what *her* kind of life hath been: *wicked and vile!*—and her death *concludes* it so!”

The shepherd weeps. “*Fie*, Joan, that thou wilt be so obstacle! God knows thou art a collop of my flesh, and for thy sake have I shed many a tear! *Deny* me not, I prithee, gentle Joan!”

She scoffs: “Peasant, *avaunt!*”

“You have *suborned* this man,” she protests to the Englishmen, “of purpose to *obscure* my noble birth!”

Says the shepherd, "'Tis true I *gave* a noble"—a coin—"to the *priest* the morn that I was wedded to her mother...." He rises and goes to Joan. "Kneel down and take my blessing, good my girl." She turns away coldly.

"Wilt thou not stoop?" He wipes tears from his eyes. "Now *cursèd* be the time of thy nativity! I would the milk thy mother gave thee when thou suckedst her breast had been a little *ratsbane*, for my sake! Or else, when thou didst keep my lambs a-field, I wish some ravenous *wolf* had *eaten* thee!

"Dost thou deny thy *father*, *cursèd* drab?"

"Go, burn her, *burn her!*" he tells the soldiers. "*Hanging* is too *good!*" He stamps off, and leaves the camp.

"Take her away," orders York, "for she hath lived too long, filling the world with *vicious* quiddities!"

Joan steps toward him. "First, let me tell you *whom* you have condemned!" she demands. "Not one begotten of a *shepherd* swain, but issued from the *progeny of kings!*—*virtuous* and *holy*; chosen from *above*, by inspiration of *celestial Grace*, to work exceeding *miracles* on earth!

"I never had to do with wicked spirits! But *you*—that are polluted with your *lusts*, stained with the guiltless blood of *innocents*, corrupt and tainted with *a thousand vices*—because you lack the grace that others have, you judge it straight a thing impossible to accomplish *wonders* but by help of *devils!*

"*No, misconceivèd!* Joanne la Pucelle hath been a virgin from her tender infancy, chaste and immaculate in very *thought!*—whose maiden blood, thus rigorously effusèd, will cry for *vengeance* at the gates of *heaven!*"

"Aye, aye," says York, disgusted, "away with her to execution."

Says old Warwick dryly, "And hark ye, sirs, because she is a *maid*, spare for no branches—let there be *enough!* Place *barrels* of pitch upon the fatal stake, that so her torture may be *shortened!*"

"Will nothing turn your unrelenting hearts?" asks the woman. "Then, Joan, reveal thine infirmity—that warranteth *by law* to be thy *privilege!*

"I am *with child*, ye bloody homicides!" she cries out. "*Murder not*, then, the fruit within my womb, although ye'd hale *me* to a violent death!"

York grins. "Now heaven *forfend!* The *holy maiden* with *child!*"

Warwick laughs at her. "The greatest miracle that e'er *ye* wrought! Is all your strict discipline come to *this?*"

"She and the dauphin have been '*juggling*,'" says York. "I did imagine this would be her refuge!"

Warwick motions the guards onward. "Well, go to; we'll have no *bastard* live—especially since *Charles* must have fathered it!"

Joan shakes her head. "You are deceivèd; my child is none of his. It was Alençon that enjoyed my love."

"Alençon!" cries York. "That notorious *Machiavel!* It *dies*, then, if it had a *thousand* lives!"

Joan is desperate. "Oh, give me leave!—I have deluded you! 'Twas neither Charles nor yet the duke I named, but *Reignier*, King of Naples, that prevailèd!"

"A *married man!*" cries Warwick, feigning outrage. "That's *most* intolerable!"

"Why, *here's* a girl!" laughs York. "I think *she* knows not well, there were so *many* whom she may accuse!"

Warwick concurs. "It's sign she hath been liberal and free."

York seems puzzled. "And yet, forsooth, she is a *virgin* pure...."

"*Strumpet!*" he shouts at her, "*thy words* condemn thy brat and thee! Use no entreaty, for it is in vain!"

Says Joan, glaring as the men pull her away, "Then lead me *hence* from whom I leave my *curse*: may never glorious sun reflect his beams upon the country where *you* make abode!—but

darkness and the *gloomy shade of death* environ you, till mischief and *despair* drive you to *break your necks*,” she calls back, “or *hang yourselves!*”

York watches as she is chained to the stake. “Break thou in *pieces*,” he mutters, “and be consumed to *ashes*, thou foul, accursèd *minister of hell!*”

Chapter Eleven Solemn Peace

Richard of York and his commanders meet with a powerful delegation from England. The Cardinal of Winchester has sailed from London, and made his way here to Anjou, in the Loire Valley. “Lord Regent,” he says to Richard of York, “I do greet Your Excellence with letters of commission from *the king!*” He hands the documents to Lord Warwick.

“For know, my lords, the states of *Christendom*, movèd with remorse over these outrageous broils, have earnestly implored a *general peace* betwixt our nation and the aspiring French. And here at hand,” he says, gesturing back toward his procession, “the *dauphin* and his train approacheth, to confer about such matter.”

“Is all our *travail* turned to *this* effect?” cries York, appalled. “After the *slaughter* of so many peers, so many captains, gentlemen and soldiers that in this quarrel have been overthrown, and sold their bodies for their country’s *benefit*, shall we at the last collude with *effeminate peace*?”

“Have we not *lost*—by treason, falsehood and by treachery!—most part of all the towns that our great *progenitors* had *conquerèd*?”

“Oh Warwick, *Warwick!* I foresee with grief the utter loss of *all the realm of France!*”

“Be *patient*, York,” urges the old earl—who is equally angry. “If *we* conclude a peace, it shall be with such *strict* and *severe covenants* as little shall the Frenchmen gain thereby!”

With his contingent—Alençon, Reignier, Dunois and others—King Charles now comes forward. “Since, lords of England, it is thus *agreed* that peaceful truce shall be proclaimed in France, we come to be informed by yourselves what the conditions of that league must be.”

York is livid. “*Speak, Winchester!*” he says scornfully, “for boiling *choler* chokes the hollow passage of *my* poisoned voice by *sight* of these our baleful enemies!”

The cardinal has persuaded his royal nephew, and now he addresses the French. “Charles, and the rest, it is enacted thus: in regard that King Henry gives consent, from mere compassion and of lenity, to ease your country of distressful war, and suffer you to breathe in fruitful peace, you shall become *true liegemen to his crown*.

“And, Charles, upon condition thou wilt swear to pay him *tribute*, *submit* thyself, thou shalt be placed as *viceroi* under him, and still enjoy thy regal dignity.”

Alençon, glowers. “Must he be then as a *shadow* of himself?—*adorn* his temples with a coronet, and yet, in *substance* and *authority*, retain but privilege of a *private* man! This proffer is *absurd* and *reasonless!*”

Charles is surprised—and indignant. “’Tis known that I am *already* possessed of *more than half* the Gallian territories *unvanquishèd*, and therein revered as their lawful *king!* Shall I, for lure of the rest, detract so much from that prerogative as to be called but *viceroi* of the whole?”

“No, lord ambassador! I’ll rather *keep* that which I have, than, coveting for more, be cast from *possibility* of *all!*”

“*Insulting Charles!*” cries York angrily. “Hast thou by *secret means* used *intercession* to obtain a league?—and now that the matter grows to *compromise*, stand’st thou *aloof* upon *comparison*? Either accept the title thou *usurp*’st—a benefit proceeding from our king, and not out of any *challenge* or *deserving*—or we will *plague thee with incessant wars!*”

- Charles turns away, and confers privately with the French party.

- Reignier, whose daughter is betrothed to King Henry, wants no more war. "My lord, you do not well in obstinacy to cavil on the course of this contract! If once it be neglected, ten to one we shall not find *like* opportunity!"

- Alençon must concur. "To say the truth, it is your 'policy'"—simply judicious—"to save your subjects from such massacre and ruthless slaughters as are daily seen by our proceeding in hostility," he tells Charles. "And therefore *take* this compact of a truce—although you *break* it when your pleasure serves."

"How *say'st* thou, Charles?" demands Warwick. "Shall our condition *stand*?"

Charles nods. "It shall. Only reserved: you claim no interest in any of our towns of garrison."

York unsheathes his sword and thrusts it forward, upright; the hilt and blade form a cross. "Then swear allegiance to his majesty, as thou art knight, never to disobey nor be rebellious to the crown of *England*—thou, nor thy *nobles*, to the *crown of England!*"

Charles touches the sword and swears.

"So. Now dismiss your army when ye please," says York contemptuously. "Hang up your ensign, let your drums be still," he says, red-faced, "for here we entertain a solemn *peace*."

King Henry VI is exuberant. "Your wondrous, rare description, noble earl, of beauteous Margaret hath *astonished* me!" he tells Suffolk, from the throne in London. "Her *virtues*, gracèd with *external* gifts, do breed love's unsettled passions in my heart!

"And like as rigor of tempestuous gusts provokes the mightiest hulk against the tide, so am I driven by breath of her renown!—either to suffer shipwreck, or to arrive where I may have fruition of her love!"

Says Suffolk, "*Tsk*, my good lord, this *superficial* tale is but a *preface* of her worthy praise! The chief perfections of that lovely dame, had I sufficient skill to utter them, would make a *volume* of enticing lines, able to *ravish* any *dull* imagination!

"And, which is more, she is not only so *divine*, so fully replete with choicest of all *delights*, but with a humble submission of mind she is content to be *at your command!*" he says, almost breathlessly. "Command, I mean, of virtuous, *chaste* intents," he quickly adds, "to love and honour Henry as her lord."

The virginal young monarch blushes. "And otherwise will Henry ne'er presume!" He turns to Humphrey. "Therefore, my lord protector, *give consent* that Margaret may be England's royal queen!"

"So should I give consent to *flatter sin!*" says Gloucester flatly. He too has arranged a marriage—one of political value to himself. "*You know*, my lord, that Your Highness is betrothèd unto *another* lady of esteem! How shall we then dispense with *that contract*, and not *deface* your honour with *reproach*?"

Suffolk replies: "As doth a ruler with an *unlawful* oath!—or as one who, at a tournament having vowed to try his strength, yet forsaketh the lists by reason of his adversary's odds!" Rules of chivalry forbid too great a difference in opponents' ranks. "A poor *earl's* daughter is unequal odds; and therefore it may be broken without offence."

Gloucester protests: "Why, *what*, I pray, is Margaret *more* than that? Her father is no better than an earl, although in glorious *titles* he excel!"

Suffolk is ready. "*Yes*, lord!—*her* father is a *king*, the King of *Naples* and *Jerusalem!*"—both important ports of commerce, "and of such great authority in *France* as his alliance will *confirm* our peace, and keep the Frenchmen in allegiance!"

"And so may the Earl of *Armagnac* do!" argues Gloucester, "because *he* is near *kinsman* unto *Charles!*"

"Beside, *his* wealth doth warrant a liberal *dower*," adds Lord Exeter, "while Reignier sooner will *receive* than give."

"A *dower*, my lords?" cries Suffolk. "*Disgrace* not so your *king*, that he should be so abject, base and poor, as to choose for *wealth*, and not for perfect *love!*"

“Henry is able to *enrich his queen*, and not seek a queen to make him rich! So do worthless *peasants* bargain for their wives—as market-men for oxen, horse, or *sheep*.

“*Marriage* is a matter of more worth than to be dealt in by *attorneyship*—not whom *we* will, but whom *his grace* affects must be companion of his nuptial bed! And therefore, lords, since *he* affects *her* most, it most of *all* these reasons bindeth us that in our opinions she should be preferred!

“For what is *forcèd* wedlock but a *hell*?—an *age* of discord and continual *strife*!—whereas the *contrary* bringeth *bliss*, and is a pattern of celestial *peace*! Whom should we match with Henry, being a king, but *Margaret*, who is *daughter* to a king?

“Her peerless features, joined with her birth, approve her fit for none *but* for a *king*! Her valiant *courage* and undaunted *spirit*, more than in women commonly is seen, will answer our hope for *issue* of a king!—for Henry, son unto a *conqueror*, is likely to beget *more* conquerors, if with a lady of so high resolve as is fair *Margaret* he be linked in *love*!

“Then yield, my lords; and here conclude with me that *Margaret* shall be queen, and none but *she*!”

The king rises and hurries to William. “Whether it be through force of your report, my noble lord of Suffolk, or for that my tender youth was never yet attained with any passion of inflaming love, I cannot tell—but of *this* I am assured: I feel such sharp *dissension* in my breast, such fierce alarms both of *hope* and *fear*, that I am sick with the working of my thoughts!

“Therefore take *shipping*!—*posthaste*, my lord!—to *France*! Agree to any covenants, and procure that Lady Margaret do vouchsafe to come!—to cross the seas to England and be crowned King Henry’s faithful and anointed *queen*!

“For your expenses, and sufficient for the task, among the people gather up a tenth”—assess a tax. “*Be gone*, I say! For, till you do return, I rest perplexed with a thousand cares!”

Henry turns to Gloucester. “And you, good uncle, banish all offence! If you do judge me by what you *were*,”—younger, “not what you are, I know it will excuse this sudden execution of my will!”

He motions to the royal attendants. “And so conduct me where, away from company, I may revolve and ruminatè my grief!”—suffer in anticipation. They head toward his private chambers.

“Aye!—*grief*, I fear me—both at first and *last*!” says Gloucester to Lord Exeter, watching as Henry leaves the throne room.

Thinks William de la Pole, *Thus Suffolk hath prevailed!*

And thus he goes, as did the youthful Paris once go to Greece, with hope to find the like event in love!—but to prosper better than the Trojan did! Lord Paris found Helen—another lord’s wife—but in doing so provoked the long war with Greece.

Margaret shall now be queen, and rule the king!

But I will rule both her and the king—and the realm!