

King Henry VI, Part 2

by William Shakespeare

Presented by Paul W. Collins

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Chapter One Ceremony, Acrimony

A flourish of heralds' trumpets salutes the arrival of two colorful processions at the front of a high, majestic hall in the royal palace at London. Measured, stately strains of court musicians' lutes and hautboys accompany the grand entrance, at the left, of young King Henry VI and his train. He is about to meet, for the first time, his bride, newly arrived from France; she is entering, across from him, with her ladies-in-waiting.

With him are his uncles, the Duke of Gloucester and Cardinal Beaufort of Winchester, and the Earls of Salisbury and Warwick. At the lovely lady's side is William de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk; following are her attendants and the Dukes of York, Somerset, and Buckingham.

As the elegant gathering of nobles from across England strains to see her for the first time, the regal parties move to their places, meeting at the center.

Lord Suffolk approaches the king and bows. "As by Your High Imperial Majesty I had in charge, on my departure for France as procurator for Your Excellence, to marry"—by proxy—"Princess Margaret for Your Grace, so, in the famous, ancient city, Tours, in presence of the Kings of France and Sicilia, the Dukes of Orléans, Calaber, Bretagne and Alençon, seven earls, twelve barons and twenty reverend bishops, I have performed my task, and was espoused.

"And humbly now, upon my bended knee, in sight of England and her lordly peers, deliver up my title in the queen to your most gracious hands, that are the *substance* of that great shadow I did represent, the happiest gift that ever marquis gave, the fairest queen that ever king received!"

"Suffolk, arise," says King Henry, beaming, and moving timidly toward her. "Welcome, Queen Margaret! I can express no kinder sign of love than this kind kiss." He bends to touch, delicately with his lips, the back of her extended hand.

Reverently, the monarch looks up toward the high, vaulted ceiling. "O Lord that lends me life, lend me a *heart* replete with *thankfulness*! For thou hast given me in this beauteous face a world of earthly blessings to my *soul*, if sympathy of *love* unite our thoughts!" He turns to smile at the lady with whom Suffolk contracted the marriage.

Says Margaret, "Great King of England and *my* gracious lord, the mutual conference that my mind hath had, by day, by night, waking and in my dreams, in courtly company or at my beads, with you, mine alder-liefest"—all-preferred—"sovereign, makes me the bolder to salute my king with such ruder terms as my wit affords, and overjoyed *heart* doth minister!"

Henry, boyish and bookish, takes her other hand, enchanted. He thinks, *Her sight did ravish!—but her grace in speech, her words, clad with wisdom's majesty, make me from wonderment fall to weeping joys!—such is the fullness of my heart's contentment!*

He regards the throng. "Lords, with one cheerful voice welcome my love!"

The noblemen kneel and the ladies curtsey, all exclaiming, "Long live Queen *Margaret*, England's *happiness*!"

She nods as they rise. "We thank you all."

Trumpets sound again to note the sovereign's turning of attention, briefly, to England's affairs of state at the middle of the fifteenth century.

Suffolk goes to Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, who has served as the king's guardian during his childhood and adolescence, and presents a document. "My lord protector, so it please Your Grace, here are the articles of contracted *peace* between our sovereign and the French King Charles, after eighteen months concluded by consent."

The marriage is part of a truce in the war with rebellious France, which had been conquered by the English ruler's father, King Henry V.

Gloucester reads aloud. "*Imprimis*: It is agreed between the French King Charles and William de la Pole, Marquis of Suffolk, ambassador for Henry, King of England, that the said Henry shall espouse the Lady Margaret, daughter unto Reignier, King of Naples, Sicilia and

Jerusalem, and crown her Queen of England ere the thirtieth of May next ensuing.

“*Item.*” His voice is strained as he reads on. ““That the duchy of Anjou and the county of Maine... shall be *released*—” He pauses, clearing his throat. “—and delivered to the king her father....” Choking with anger, he drops both hands to his sides. He had proposed a different marriage for Henry—a profitable one, that would have ceded less, and retained large, captured French provinces. But the young king overruled the match in favor of Margaret, the landless lady whom Lord Suffolk had found very attractive.

Henry frowns. “Uncle, *how now?*”

“Pardon me, gracious lord,” says Gloucester. “Some sudden qualm hath struck me at the heart, and dimmed mine eyes such that I can read no further.”

The king takes the document and hands it to the cardinal. “Uncle of Winchester, I pray, read on.”

The prelate proceeds: “*Item.* It is further agreed between them that the Duchy of Anjou and the County of Maine shall be released and delivered over to the king her father, and she sent over at the King of England’s own proper cost and charges...”—annoyance creeps into his voice—“without having any dowry.”

Even the young king can sense a stir among the courtiers, and he motions for the churchman to stop reading the articles. “They please us well,” he says firmly.

“Lord marquis, kneel down,” Henry tells the earl. “We here create thee the first *Duke of Suffolk*, and gird thee with this sword!”

He addresses another lord. “Cousin of York, we here discharge Your Grace from being *regent* on our part in France, now that the term of eighteen months be full expired.” Richard, Duke of York, has served in that capacity following the death of his predecessor, Henry’s brother John.

The king smiles and faces the noble assembly. “Thanks, Uncle Winchester, Gloucester, York, Buckingham, Somerset, Salisbury, and Warwick! We thank you all for the great favour done in entertainment to my princely queen!”

He motions toward the high doors. “Come, let us in, and with all speed provide to see her coronation be performed!”

King Henry VI takes Margaret by the hand, and, followed by the new Duke of Suffolk, happily leads the way to those formal ceremonies, to be conducted by the cardinal at Winchester Cathedral.

Meeting with several English lords after the queen has been crowned, Gloucester addresses them gravely. “Brave peers of England, pillars of the state, to you Duke Humphrey must unload his grief—*your* grief, the common grief of *all the land!*”

“*What?*—did my brother Henry”—King Henry V—“spend his youth, his valour, coin and people in the *wars? Did* he so, often lodging in open field, in winter’s cold and summer’s parching heat, to *conquer* France, his *true inheritance?*”

“And did my brother *Bedford* toil his wits to *keep* by policy what Henry got?” John of Bedford, serving as Regent of France, died in the fighting against rebellion there.

“Have you *yourselves*, Somerset, Buckingham, brave York, Salisbury, and victorious Warwick, received deep *scars* in France and Normandy? And have Beaufort and myself, with all the learned Council of the realm, studied so long, sat in the council-house early and late, debating to and fro how France and Frenchmen might be kept in awe—and had his highness, in his infancy, *crownèd in Paris*, in despite of *foes?*”

His voice rises as he paces. “And shall these labours and these honours *die?* Shall Henry’s conquest, Bedford’s vigilance, your deeds of war, and all our counsel *die?*”

He turns, again facing the nobles. “O peers of England, *shameful* is this league!—*fatal* this marriage, cancelling your fame, blotting your names from books of memory, razing the characters of your renown, defacing monuments of conquerèd France, undoing *all* as if all had *never been!*”

Beaufort steps forward, frowning. “What *means* this passionate discourse, this peroration with such circumstance?” The ambitious cardinal has long been Humphrey’s rival for influence over the devout young king—and thus for power. “As for France, ’tis *ours*—and we will keep it still!”

“Aye, we will keep it *if we can*,” says Gloucester sourly, “but now it is impossible we *should!*”

“*Suffolk*, the new-made *duke* that rules the roost, hath given the duchies of Anjou and Maine unto the poor ‘King’ Reignier, whose large *title* agrees not with the leanness of his *purse!*”

Graying Lord Salisbury, whose father-in-law, a renowned general, was killed in the fighting at Orléans, is also angry at the losses—and the bar to further gains. “Now, by the death of Him that died for *all*, those counties were the *keys* to *Normandy!*”—large territories lying just south of England’s long-occupied, highly prized northern holdings.

He regards the nobleman beside him. “But wherefore weeps Warwick, my valiant son?”

“For grief that they are *past recovery!*” groans the earl. “Were there hope to conquer them again, my *sword* should shed hot *blood*, mine eyes no *tears!* *Anjou* and *Maine!*—myself did win them *both!*—those provinces these arms of *mine* did conquer! And are the cities that I got with *wounds* delivered up again with peaceful *words?*” He scowls. “*Mon Dieu!*”

Says Richard, Duke of York, “As for *Suffolk’s* duke, may he be *suffo-cate* who dims the honour of this warlike isle!

“France should have *torn and rent my very heart* before *I* would have yielded to *this* league! *I* never read but that England’s *kings* have had large sums of *gold* and *dowries* with their wives—yet our King Henry *gives away his own*, to match with her that brings no vantages!”

Gloucester is also perturbed about a newly imposed tax: “As proper a *jest* as never heard before is that *Suffolk* should demand a whole *fifteenth* for costs and charges in *transporting* her!

“She should have *stayed* in France and *starved* in France,” he adds angrily, “before—”

“My Lord of Gloucester, now ye grow *too hot!*” protests the cardinal. “It was the pleasure of my lord *the king!*”

Gloucester glares. “My lord of Winchester, I know *your* mind! ’Tis not my *speeches* that you do dislike, but ’tis my *presence* that doth trouble ye! *Rancour will out!* Proud prelate, in thy face I *see thy fury!* If I longer stay, we shall begin our ancient bickerings.” He surveys the nobles grimly. “Lords, farewell—and say, when I am gone, I prophesied France will be *lost* ere long!” With that, he leaves the hall.

The cardinal sniffs, “So, there goes our ‘*protector*’ in a rage.

“’Tis known to you he is mine enemy—nay, *more*: an enemy unto you *all!*”

“And no great friend, I fear me, to the *king*. Consider, lords: he is the next of blood, and *heir apparent* to the English *crown!*—had Henry gotten an *empire* by his marriage, and all the wealthy kingdoms of the west, what reason would *he* have to be *displeasèd* by it?

“*Look* to it, lords! Let not his smoothing words bewitch your hearts; be wise and circumspect. What if the *common* people do favour him?—calling him ‘Humphrey, the *good* Duke of Gloucester,’ clapping their hands, and crying with loud voice, ‘Jesu maintain *Your Royal Excellence!*’ and ‘God preserve the *good Duke Humphrey!*’ I fear me, lords, for all this flattering gloss, he will be found a *dangerous* ‘protector!’”

Says Lord Buckingham, “Why *should* he, then, protect our sovereign?—he being of age to govern in himself!” The king is twenty-four. “Cousin of Somerset, join you with me, and *all* together with the Duke of Suffolk, and we’ll quickly hoist Duke Humphrey from his seat!”

The eager cardinal nods. “This weighty business will not brook delay! I’ll to the Duke of Suffolk immediately!” He hurries away to find the new peer.

Edmund, Duke of Somerset, steps forward. “Cousin of Buckingham, though *Humphrey’s* pride and greatness of his place be grief to us, yet let us watch the haughty *cardinal!* His insolence is more intolerable than all the princes in the land beside! If Gloucester be displaced, *he’ll* be protector!”

“Either thou or I, Somerset, will be protector,” Buckingham tells him, “despite Duke

Humphrey or the cardinal.”

The two noblemen confer privately, leaving together, just after Winchester.

“*Pride* went before; *ambition* follows him,” says Lord Salisbury sourly to his son and Richard, Duke of York. “While those two labour for their own preferment, it behooves *us* to labour for the *realm*!”

“I never saw but that *Humphrey*, Duke of Gloucester, did bear him like a noble *gentleman*; oft have I seen the haughty *cardinal*, more like a *soldier* than a man of the Church, *swear* like a *ruffian*, and demean himself like the *ruler* of a commonweal!—as stout and proud as if he were *lord of all*!”

“Warwick my son, the comfort of my age, thy deeds, thy plainness, and thy housekeeping have won the greatest favour of the commoners, excepting none but good Duke Humphrey!” Only Gloucester is more admired by the English people for plain dealing and efficient management.

Says Salisbury, “And brother York, *thy* acts in Ireland in bringing them to civil discipline, and thy late exploits done in the heart of France, when thou wert regent for our sovereign, have made thee respected and honoured by the people.

“Join *we* together, for the public good!—do what we can to bridle and suppress the *pride* of Suffolk and the cardinal, along with Somerset’s and Buckingham’s *ambition*—and, as we may, cherish Duke Humphrey’s *deeds*, while they do tend to the profit of the land!”

Salisbury’s son heartily agrees. “So God help Warwick as he loves the land and common profit of his country!”—aid him in the same proportion.

Richard nods. “And so says York!” But he thinks: *For he hath greatest cause!* His hereditary title and lands, lost years ago during failed attempts to seize the crown for his late father, have been generously restored by the king—and Richard believes his own claim to the throne is superior to Henry’s.

“Then let’s make haste *away*,” urges Salisbury, “and look unto the *main*!”

“‘Unto the main....’ Oh, Father, *Maine* is *lost*,” moans Warwick, “that *Maine* which by *main force* Warwick did win, and would have *kept* so long as breath did last! *Main chance*,”—greatest opportunity, “Father, *you* meant; but I mean *Maine which I will win from France*, or else be slain!”

They take their leave of York, and are soon deep in consultation.

Now alone, Richard ruminates—angrily.

Anjou and Maine are given to the French! Paris is lost; the state of Normandy stands on a tickle point, now that they are gone!

Suffolk concluded on the articles, the peers agreed, and Henry was well pleased to exchange two dukedoms for a duke’s fair daughter!

I cannot blame them all: what is’t to them? ’Tis mine they give away, and not their own! Pirates may make cheap pennyworths of their pillage, and so purchase friends, and give to courtizans, ever revelling like lords—till all be gone!

The mere owner of the goods, he thinks dourly, weeps over them, and wrings his hapless hands, and shakes his head, and stands aside, trembling, while all is shared, and all is borne away!—set to starve, but daring not touch his own!

So York must sit, and fret, and bite his tongue, while his own lands are bargained for and sold!

Anjou and Maine, both given unto the French! Cold news for me, for I had hope of France, even as I have of England’s fertile soil.

A day will come when York shall claim his own; and therefore I will take the Nevilles’ parts—he will ally with Salisbury and Warwick—and make a show of love to proud Duke Humphrey—and when I spy advantage, claim the crown!—for that’s the golden mark I seek to hit!

Nor shall proud Lancaster, —King Henry— whose church-like mind’s not fit for a crown,

usurp my right, nor hold the sceptre in his childish fist, nor wear the diadem upon his head!

Then, York, be still a while, till time do serve. Watch thou, and wake when others be asleep, to pry into the secrets of the state, till Henry surfeits in joys of love with his new bride, and England's dear-bought queen and Humphrey be fall'n to jarring with the peers!

He remembers his humiliation, before being elevated to duke, by the Duke of Somerset and other Lancastrians in a London law-college garden. There he had chosen, as emblem of his cause, a flower.

Then will I raise aloft the milk-white rose, with whose sweet smell the air shall be perfumèd!

Then in my standard will I bear the banner of York, to grapple with the House of Lancaster!

And force-perforce I'll make him yield the crown, whose bookish rule hath pulled fair England down!

Chapter Two Ambitions, Petitions

Why droops my lord, like over-ripened grain hanging the head at *Ceres'* plenteous load?"—as if troubled by bounty. "Why doth the great Duke Humphrey knit his brows, as if frowning at the *favours* of the world?" asks the duchess, at their London home this morning. "Why are thine eyes fixèd to the sullen earth, gazing on that which seems to dim thy sight?"

"What seest thou there?" she persists, hopefully. "King Henry's *diadem*?"—crown, "enchasèd with all the *honours* of the world! If so, *gaze on!*—and *grovel* on, thy face, until thy *head* be circled with the same!" she urges. "Put forth thy hand!—extend thy *reach* for the glorious gold! What?—is't too short? I'll lengthen it with *mine!*"

"And, having both together heaved it *up*, we'll both together lift our heads to *heaven!*" she cries, "and never more abase our sight so low as to vouchsafe one *glance* unto the ground!"

Humphrey frowns. "O Nell, sweet Nell, if thou dost love thy lord, *banish* the canker of *ambitious thoughts!* And may that thought when I imagine *ill* against my king and nephew, virtuous Henry, be my last breathing in this mortal world!"

He rises, goes to a window, and stares down at the street. "My troublous *dream* this past night doth make me pensive."

"What dreamed my lord? Tell me, and I'll requite it with sweet rehearsal of my *morning's* dream!"

He nods toward a corner by the door. "Methought this staff, mine office's badge in the court, was *broke in twain*—by whom I have forgot, but, as I think, it was by the cardinal—and on the pieces of the broken wand were placed the *heads* of Edmund, Duke of Somerset, and William de la Pole, first Duke of Suffolk!"

He smoothes his gray-streaked beard, frowning. "This was my dream; what it doth bode, God knows...."

The duchess smiles. "*Tsk*, this was nothing but an argument that he who breaks a *stick* in *Gloucester's* grove shall lose his head for his presumption!" she assures him confidently.

She moves closer. "But list to me, my Humphrey, my sweet duke! Methought I sat in a chair of *majesty* in the cathedral church of Westminster!—and in that seat where kings and queens are crownèd, Henry and Dame Margaret kneeled to *me*, and on *my* head did set a diadem!"

"Nay, Eleanor, then must I *chide outright!*" says Gloucester, alarmed. "*Presumptuous* dame, *ill* natured Eleanor, art thou not second woman in the realm, and the *protector's* wife, beloved of him? Hast thou not worldly pleasure at command above the reach or compass of thy thought?"

"And wilt thou still be yammering *treachery*, to tumble down thy husband and thyself from top of *honour* to *disgrace's* feet?"

"Away from me, and let me hear no more!"

"What, *what*, my lord! Are you so choleric with Eleanor, for telling but her dream?" she asks,

affecting innocence. “Next time I’ll keep my dreams unto myself, and not be checked!” She turns away, pouting.

“Nay, be not angry,” he says gently, embracing her, “I am pleased again.”

As he has been expecting, a messenger arrives from the king.

“My lord protector,” says the man, “’tis his highness’ pleasure you do prepare to ride unto Saint Albans, where the king and queen do mean to hawk”—hunt wildfowl, using trained falcons, in the marshlands twenty miles away.

“I go,” replies Gloucester, buckling on his sword. He reaches for his plumed hat and his staff. “Come, Nell; thou wilt ride with us.”

“Yes, my good lord, I’ll follow presently.” She watches as Humphrey and the messenger stride away toward the stable.

Follow I must; I cannot go before, while Gloucester bears this base and humble mind! Were I a man—a duke, and next of blood!—I would remove these tedious stumbling-blocks, and smooth my way upon their headless necks!

And yet, being a woman, I will not be slack to play my part in Fortune’s pageant!

She calls down the corridor: “Where are you, there? Sir John!”

The priest comes to her, brushing crumbs from the front of his cassock, and looking around apprehensively.

“Nay, fear not, man,” she tells the portly cleric, “we are alone; here’s none but thee and I.”

Hume bows, smiling. “Jesus preserve Your Royal Majesty!”

“What say’st thou?—*majesty!* I am but ‘Grace.’”

“But, by the grace of God, and Hume’s advice, Your Grace’s title shall be multiplied!”

The duchess is impatient. “What say’st thou, man? Hast thou as yet conferred with Margery Jourdain, the cunning witch?—with Roger Bolingbroke, the conjurer? And will they undertake to do me good?”

“This they have promised: to show Your Highness *a spirit*, raised from depth of underground, that shall make answer to such questions as by Your Grace shall be propounded him!”

The duchess is satisfied, for now. “It is enough; I’ll think upon the questions. When from Saint Albans we do make return, we’ll see these things effected to the full.”

She hands him money. “Here, Hume, take this reward; make merry, man, with thy confederates in this weighty cause!” She goes to change attire for the journey toward a day of sport in the country.

The priest regards the coins. *Hume must make merry with the duchess’ gold—marry, and shall!*

But how now, Sir John Hume?—seal up your lips, and give no word but ‘mum!’ The business asketh silent secrecy. Dame Eleanor gives gold to bring a witch!

Gold cannot come amiss, were she a devil! Yet have I gold that flies from another host I dare not speak of: from the rich cardinal!

And from the great and new-made Duke of Suffolk!

Yes, I do find it so; for to be plain: they, knowing Dame Eleanor’s aspiring disposition, have hired me to undermine the duchess, and buzz these conjurations in her brain.

They say ‘a crafty knave does need no broker!’—yet am I Suffolk and the cardinal’s broker! He laughs. *Hume, if you take not heed, you shall go near to calling them both a pair of crafty knaves!*

Well, so it stands; and thus, I fear, at the end Hume’s knavery will be the duchess’s wreck; and her attainture will be Humphrey’s fall!

He shrugs, pocketing the money. *Sort how it will, I shall have gold for all!*

Commoners wait in a wide corridor at the palace, hoping to give Duke Humphrey written petitions for relief. “My masters, let’s stand close,” advises the oldest, a farmer. “My lord protector will come this way by and by, and then we may deliver our supplications in the

quill.”

“Marry, the Lord protect him, for he’s a *good* man!” says his friend, a shepherd. “Jesu bless him!”

At the far end, doors swing open and Queen Margaret emerges, accompanied—as usual—by William de la Pole.

“Here ’a comes, methinks, and the queen with him!” says young Peter, hurrying forward. “I’ll be the first, sure!”

“Come back, fool!” whispers the farmer. “This is the Duke of *Suffolk*, and not my lord protector!”

The nobleman greets the youth—and takes his paper. “How now, fellow! Would’st anything with me?”

“I pray, my lord, pardon me, I took ye for my lord protector. . . .”

Queen Margaret glances at the front of the folded sheet. “To my Lord Protector. ’ Are your supplications to his lordship? Let me see them. What is thine?”

Says the graybeard, “Mine is, an’t please Your Grace, against John Goodman, my lord cardinal’s man, for keeping my *house* and *lands*, and wife and all, *from* me!”

William is amused. “Thy *wife*, too!—that’s some wrong, indeed!” He turns to another man. “What’s yours?” He unfolds the paper. “What’s *here*?—‘Against the *Duke of Suffolk*, for enclosing the commons of Melford.’ *How now, Sir Knave!*”

The shepherd twists his cap in his hands. “Alas, sir, I am but a poor petitioner for our whole *township!*” All of his rural neighbors need access to the now-fenced-in land to graze their animals.

Peter pipes up: “Against my master, *Thomas Horner!* For saying that the Duke of York was rightful heir to the crown.”

“What sayst thou?” demands Queen Margaret, frowning. “Did the *Duke of York* say he was rightful *heir to the crown?*”

“That my *master* was?” asks the dim lad. “No, forsooth; my master said that *he* was, and that the king was an *usurper.*”

Suffolk turns and calls for a servant: “Who is there?” A man in royal livery comes forward from the queen’s train and bows. “Take this fellow in, and send for his master with a pursuivant”—one of the herald’s deputies—“immediately!”

“We’ll hear more of your master before the *king!*” he tells Peter, as the flustered youth is led away.

Margaret glares at the other men. “And as for *you*, that love to be protected under the wings of our *protector’s* grace, begin your suits *anew*—and sue to *him!*” She tears up their notes. “*Away*, base cullions! Suffolk, let them go.”

The old farmer, flushing, bows awkwardly. “Come, let’s be *gone*,” he murmurs to the shepherd, and they hurry away, relieved at not being taken into custody.

The queen is annoyed. “My lord of Suffolk, *say*: is *this* the guise, is this the *fashion* in the court of England? Is this the *government* of Britain’s isle, and this the *royalty* of Albion’s *king*?”

“What?—shall King Henry be a *pupil* still, under the surly *Gloucester’s* governance? Am I a *queen* in title and in style, yet must be made a subject to a *duke*?”

“I tell thee, Pole, when in the city of Tours thou ran’st atilt”—like a jousting knight, riding in a tournament, “in honour of my love, and stolest away a lady’s heart from France, I thought King Henry had resembled *thee* in courage, courtship and proportion!”

“But all *his* mind is bent to *holiness*, to numbering *Ave-Maries* on his *beads!*” she complains bitterly. “His *champions* are the prophets and apostles, his *weapons* holy saws of sacred writ; his study is *his* tilt-yard, and his *loves* are brazen images of canonized *saints!*”

“I would the College of the Cardinals would choose him *Pope*, and carry him to Rome, and set the triple crown”—as pastor, teacher, priest—“upon his head! *That* were a state fit for his *holiness!*”

“Madam, be patient!” pleads Suffolk. “As I was cause Your Highness came to England, so will I in England work for Your Grace’s full contentment,” he promises.

But Margaret is perturbed. “Beside the haughty *protector* have we *Beaufort*, the imperious churchman—*Somerset* and *Buckingham*—and grumbling *York*! And not the *least* of these but can do *more than the king!*”

Suffolk must concur. “And he of those that can do most of all cannot do more in England than *the Nevilles*: Salisbury and Warwick are not simply *peers*.”

The queen paces. “Not *all* these lords do vex me half so much as that proud dame, the lord protector’s *wife*! She sweeps it through the court with troops of ladies, more like an *empress* than Duke Humphrey’s wife! Strangers in court do take *her* for the *queen*! She bears a *duke’s revenues* on her *back*,”—her wardrobe is extravagant, “and in her heart she scorns *our poverty!*”

“Shall I not live to be *avenged* on her?” demands Margaret angrily. “*Contemptuous*, base-born callet as she is, she vaunted ’mongst her minions t’other day that the very *train* of her *worst* wearing gown was better worth than *all my father’s lands*, till Suffolk gave him *two dukedoms* for his daughter!”

William moves closer, and speaks quietly. “Madam, *myself* have limed a bush for her!”—set a trap like the gummy paste used to catch birds, “and placed a choir of such *enticing* birds that she will alight to listen to their songs—and never mount again to trouble you! So let her rest.

“And, madam, list to me, for I am bold to counsel you in this: although we fancy not the cardinal, yet must we *join* with him, and with the lords, till we have brought Duke Humphrey into disgrace.

“As for the Duke of York, this late complaint”—Peter’s—“will make but little for *his* benefit!

“So, one by one we’ll weed them *all*, and at last *you yourself* shall steer the happy realm!”

They hear a sennet of cornets, and the king, emerging from the throne room, leads forth a procession of courtiers and ladies.

“For my part, noble lords,” Henry tells those with him, as they walk, “I care not which: either Somerset or York, all’s one to me.”

Richard protests: “If York have ill *demeanored* himself in France, *then* let him be denayed the regentship!”

“If Somerset be *unworthy* of the place,” says that Lancastrian proudly, “let *York* be regent; I will yield to him.”

Warwick tells him, “Whether Your Grace be worthy, yea or no, debate not that; *York* is the *worthier!*”

“*Ambitious Warwick*, let thy *bettors* speak!” chides Cardinal Beaufort.

Warwick the warrior scowls. “A *cardinal’s* not my better in the *field!*”

Lord Buckingham sneers. “*All* in this presence are thy *bettors*, Warwick!”

The young earl touches the hilt of the sword. “Warwick may *live* to be the best of all!” he growls.

“*Peace*, son!” says Lord Salisbury. “And show some *reason*, Buckingham, why Somerset should be preferred in this.”

“Because the *king*, forsooth, will *have* it so!” says Queen Margaret.

Gloucester frowns. “Madam, the king is old enough to state his judgment *himself*; these are not women’s matters.”

“If he be old enough, what needs Your Grace to be *protector* of his excellence?” she counters.

Gloucester replies with grave dignity: “Madam, I am ‘protector of the *realm*’—and at his pleasure will resign my place.”

“*Resign* it then, and leave thine *insolence!*” demands Suffolk, as Margaret opens a folded silk fan to cool her heated brow. “Since thou wert *king*—as who is king but *thou?*—the commonwealth hath daily run to *wreck!* The *dauphin* hath prevailed beyond the seas, and all the peers and nobles of *this* realm have been as *bondmen* to thy sovereignty!”

Under the peace agreement, the dauphin, the prince who was crowned as King Charles VII of France, was to have served as its viceroy under King Henry VI; but now the French are in revolt. And at home, taxation grinds the English. “The *commons* hast thou *racked!* The *clergy’s* bags are lank and *lean* with thy *extortions!*” claims Cardinal Beaufort.

“Thy sumptuous *buildings* and *thy wife’s attire* have cost a *mass* of public treasury!” adds Somerset—dryly, with a glance at the cardinal, one of the richest men in England.

“Thy *cruelty* in execution upon offenders hath *exceeded law*,” charges Buckingham, “and left to *thee* the *mercy* of the law!”

Gloucester, again irked that the tranquil king does not intercede in his behalf, stalks away angrily; but his wife stays behind—to listen.

The queen calls after the royal administrator: “Thy *sale* of offices and towns in France—if they were to be found as great as is the *suspicion*—would make thee quickly *hop without thy head!*” Much agitated, Margaret briskly fans her face; but now she pauses, and suddenly loses her grip. “Give me my fan!” she demands of the duchess, pointing to the floor.

Lady Eleanor flushes, but after a moment reaches down.

“*What*, minion! *Can ye not?*” asks the queen, spreading her arms wide—a gesture that delivers to the stooping lady a box on the ear. “I cry you mercy, madam,” says Margaret coldly. “Was that you?”

“*Was’t I!*” cries the furious duchess, starting forward. “Yea, I it *was*, proud *Frenchwoman!*” Suffolk’s arm blocks her path. “Could I come near your beauty with my *nails*,” she shrieks, “I’d set *my ten* commandments on your *face!*”

King Henry is quite discomfited. “Sweet aunt, be *calm*,” he pleads, taking the fan from the duchess. “’Twas against her will.”

“Against her *will!*” cries Eleanor. “Good king, *look to’t!*—in time she’ll *hamper* thee!—and *dandle* thee like a *baby!*” She faces the queen. “Though in this place most *masterly*, if wearing no *breeches*, she shall not strike *Dame Eleanor* unrevengèd!” With that, she storms away.

In the ensuing talk among the king’s scandalized courtiers, Buckingham speaks privately to Beaufort. “Lord Cardinal, I will follow Eleanor, and listen after Humphrey—how he proceeds. She’s *stirrèd* now! Her fuming needs no spurs!—she’ll gallop far enough—to her *destruction!*”

Gloucester returns, unaware of his wife’s humiliation. “Now, lords, my choler being dispersèd by walking once about the quadrangle, I come to talk of *commonwealth* affairs,” he tells them pointedly.

“As for your spiteful, false objections,” he says calmly, “*prove* them, and I lie open to the law. But may God, in mercy, so deal with my *soul* as *I*, in duty, love my king and country!”

He addresses Henry. “But, to the matter that we have in hand: I say, my sovereign, *York* is meetest man to be your regent in the realm of France.”

Suffolk objects. “Before ye make election, give me leave to show some reason, of no little force, that *York* is the most *unmeet* of any man!”

“I’ll *tell* thee, Suffolk, why I am unmeet!” cries Richard of York, red-faced with indignation. “First, for that I cannot *flatter pride in thee!* Next: if I *be* appointed for the place, my lord of *Somerset* will *keep me here!*—without discharge, money, or furnishing!—till France be won into the *dauphin’s* hands!

“*Last time* I danced attendance on *his will* till *Paris* was *besieged, famished, and lost!*”

Warwick concurs vigorously. “That can *I* witness!—and a *fouler* fact did never *traitor* in the land commit!”

Suffolk warns the earl, “*Peace*, headstrong Warwick!” He watches as deputies arrive with Peter and an armorer.

“*Image of pride*, why *should* I hold my peace?”

“Because the Duke of *York* is a man *accused of treason!* Pray God he can *excuse* himself!”

Demands Richard angrily, “Doth anyone accuse *York* for a *traitor?*”

King Henry himself now intervenes. “What mean’st thou, Suffolk? Tell me, what are these?”

“Please it Your Majesty, this is a man that doth accuse his master of *high treason!* His words were these: that Richard, Duke of York, was *rightful heir unto the English crown*—and that Your Majesty was an *usurper!*”

Henry asks the armorer. “Say, man: were these thy words?”

Richard interjects: “An’t shall please Your Majesty, *I never said nor thought* any such matter! As God is my witness, I am *falsely accused* by the villain!”

“By these ten bones, my lords,” says Peter, opening his hands, “he did speak them to me, in the garret one night as we were scouring my lord of York’s armour!”

York flushes and glares at his artisan. “Base *mechanical* and *dunghill villain!* I’ll have thy *head* for this thy traitorous speech!

“I do beseech Your Royal Majesty, let him have all the *rigor* of the *law!*”

“*Alas*, my lord, *hang* me if ever I spake the words!” cries the armorer. “My accuser is my *’prentice!*—and when I did correct him for his *fault* the other day, he did vow upon his knees he would *get even with me!* I have good *witness* of this! Therefore I beseech Your Majesty, do not cast away an *honest* man for a *villain’s* accusation!”

The king turns to Gloucester. “Uncle, what shall we say to this, in law?”

“*This* doom, my lord, if I may judge: because in York this breeds suspicion, let *Somerset* be regent over the French.” As Richard silently fumes, Gloucester motions toward the commoners. “And let these have a day appointed them for single combat in convenient place, for he hath witness of his servant’s malice; this is the law, and this Duke Humphrey’s judgment,” he pronounces solemnly.

Somerset, eager to assure his appointment to govern in France, steps forward and bows. “I humbly *thank* Your Royal Majesty!”

“And I accept the combat willingly!” says the armorer—who has long practiced with the weapons he makes.

Peter, though, has not. “*Alas*, my lord, I cannot *fight!*” he cries. “For God’s sake, pity my case! The spite of the man prevaieth against me!”

“O Lord, have mercy upon me! I shall never be able to fight a blow!” He clutches at his chest. “Oh, Lord, my heart!”

Gloucester is stern. “Sirrah, you must either fight or else be hanged.”

“Away with them to prison,” King Henry tells the officers, “and the day of combat shall be the last of the next month.” Accuser and accused will wait in jail for six weeks. “Come, Somerset,” says Henry, happy to escape from the squabbling. “We’ll see thee sent away.”

York can only seethe, knowing that a royal ship waiting on the Thames will soon carry the new regent and his retinue to France.

Chapter Three Flushing the Game

Holding a torch, the cleric unbars the gate to let several heavily cloaked visitors into the dark, walled garden of Lord Gloucester’s estate. “Come, my masters! The duchess, I tell you, expects *performance* of your promises!”

“Master Hume, we are provided therefore,” Roger Bolingbroke assures him. “Will *her ladyship* behold and hear our exorcisms?”

“Aye, what else? Fear you not *her* courage!”

The astrologer nods. “I have heard her reported to be a woman of an invincible spirit. But it shall be convenient, Master Hume, that you be by her *aloft*, while we be busy below; and so, I pray you, go, in God’s name, and leave us.”

Hume places the torch in an iron bracket on the stone wall, and goes into the mansion.

“Mother Jourdain,” says Bolingbroke, “be you prostrate, and grovel on the earth.” She kneels,

then begins to crawl, carefully arranging some materials near her lantern; its metal blades restrict light to the nearby ground. “John Southwell, *read* you, and let us do our work.”

As they prepare for the ritual, Hume comes to a window above; watching beside him is the duchess. She calls down: “Well said, my masters; and welcome all! *To* this gear, the sooner the better!”

Bolingbroke bows. “Patience, good lady; wizards know their times: *deep* night, *dark* night, the *silence* of the night—the time of night when *Troy was set on fire!*—the time when screech-owls *cry* and bannèd dogs *howl!*—and *spirits* walk, and *ghosts* break up from their *graves!* *That* time best fits the work we have in hand.

“Madam, sit you, and fear not: whom we *raise* we will make fast within a *hallowed* verge.” The necromancers motion around themselves to define a prayer-protected ring. Then they begin to perform their grim ceremonies. Southwell reads, in deep, ominous tones, arcane Latin phrases—exhortations to summon the dead.

A flash startles the duchess, and a *boom* buffets the dank air. She blinks at the flickering scene below, as the cowed conjurers, arms raised, their pale hands extending from dark robes, continue the incantations, and a dim, ghastly spirit—a wisp of vapors—rises slowly at the smoldering center of their circle.

A deep and hollow voice seems to emerge from the apparition, moaning: “*Add-sum!*”

Margaret Jourdain hails the faint figure. “*As-math!*”

“By the eternal God, whose name and power thou tremblest at, *answer* that which I shall ask—for, till thou *speak*, thou *shalt not pass from hence!*”

The subservient spirit is heard. “Ask what thou wilt—so that I had said and *done!*” says a muffled voice—strained, as that of one eager to be gone.

Southwell moves closer and reads from a note: “‘First, of the *king*. What shall of *him* become?’”

“The duke yet lives that Henry shall depose,” the specter pronounces gravely, “but him outlive, and die a *violent* death.”

As the spirit speaks, the magician notes its answer on his paper.

“‘What fate awaits the Duke of *Suffolk?*’” asks Southwell, reading from the list provided by Hume.

“By *water* shall he take his end and die.”

“‘What shall befall the Duke of *Somerset?*’”

“Let him shun *castles*,” says the tormented spirit. “Safer shall he be upon the sandy plains than where castles mounted stand.” The ghostly voice rasps in supplication: “*Have done*, for more I can hardly *endure!*”

“Descend to darkness and the burning lake!” commands Roger Bolingbroke. “False fiend, *avoid!*”

A roar follows another stunning burst of light. Dame Eleanor blinks, and strains to see as a smoky plume rises into the darkness.

But now a new clamor erupts: armed deputies of Sir Humphrey Stafford burst in through the gate, followed by the Dukes of York and Buckingham.

“*Lay hands* upon these *traitors* and their trash!” cries York to the sheriff’s men. “Beldam, I think we watchèd you *at an inch!*”—*just in time*, he informs the scowling crone in black, who has indeed been followed closely. Richard looks up to the window. “What, madam, are *you* there? The king and commonweal are deeply *indebted* for this piece of pains!” he calls, dryly. “My lord protector will, I doubt it not, see you well *guerdoned*”—rewarded—“for these good deserts!”

The duchess is scornful. “Not half so bad as *thine* to England’s *king*, injurious duke, who *threatest* where’s *no cause!*”

“True, madam, none at all,” replies Buckingham lightly; but then he points to the wizards’ circle. “What call you *this?*”

“Away with them!” he tells officers surrounding the conjurers. “Let them be clapped up

close!—and kept asunder!

“*You*, madam, shall with us,” he informs the duchess. “Stafford, take her to thee”—to jail. “We’ll see your trinkets here all forthcoming,” Buckingham tells the sorcerer; the officers collect the magical paraphernalia. “All, away!”

The conjurers are marched off, their hands bound behind them. The Duchess and Hume are escorted away by deputies who had entered the house.

Richard is pleased. “Lord Buckingham, methinks you watched her *well!* A pretty plot!—well chosen to *build* upon!” They will make full use of incident.

Richard holds Southwell’s note. “Now, pray, my lord, let’s see the Devil’s writ!”

“What have we here?” He reads aloud: “‘The duke yet lives that Henry shall depose, but him outlive, and die a violent death.’”

He laughs. “Why, this is just ‘*Aio te, Aeacida, Romanos vincere posse!*’”—*You the Romans can conquer*, the famously ambiguous prophecy given to Pyrrhus, the King of Epirus, as he faced battle in ancient days.

“Well, to the rest. ‘Tell me what fate awaits the Duke of Suffolk?’ ‘By water shall he take his end and die.’”

“‘What shall betide the Duke of Somerset?’ ‘Let him shun castles; safer shall he be upon the sandy plains than where castles mounted stand.’”

Richard folds up the paper and pockets it, chuckling. “Come, come, my lord; these oracles are *hardly* attained,”—gotten at great cost, “and *hardly understood!*”

“The king is now in progress towards Saint Albans—with him the *husband* of this lovely lady,” he tells Buckingham. “Thither go these news as fast as horse can carry them!—a sorry *breakfast* for my lord protector!” he adds, with a smirk.

Buckingham grins. “Your Grace shall give me leave, my lord of York, to be the *post* in hope of that reward!”

York laughs again. “At your pleasure, my good lord!” Buckingham goes out past the open gate.

The duke calls toward the house. “Who’s within there, *ho!*” One of the sheriff’s officers comes out. “Invite my lords of Salisbury and Warwick to sup with me tomorrow night.” The man bows and goes.

York summons the remaining deputies. “Away!”

Near the hillside town of Saint Albans in the green, farming country of Warwickshire, falconers’ men cry out along the edge of a wide stream, urging their hounds into the marshes to stir up waterfowl for pursuit in the air by the noblemen’s trained predators.

Queen Margaret is enjoying the day of hunting. “Believe me, lords, for flying at the brook, I saw not better sport these seven years’ day!” She condescends to King Henry, whose hawk has failed to take flight: “Yet, by your leave, the wind *was* very high—and, ten to one, old Joan had not gone out!”—was afraid.

The earnest young ruler compliments Suffolk. “But what a point, my lord, *your* falcon made, and what a pitch she flew above the rest! To see how God in all his creatures works! Yea, man and birds are fain to climb high!”—drawn toward heaven.

Suffolk comments—sourly: “No marvel, an it like Your Majesty, that my lord *protector*’s hawks do tower so well; they know their master loves to be *aloft*, and bears his *thoughts* above his falcons’ pitch!”

Gloucester replies: “My lord, ’tis but a base, *ignoble* mind that mounts no higher than a *bird* can soar.”

Beaufort sniffs. “I thought as much; *he* would be above the *clouds*.”

“*Aye*, my lord cardinal!” says Gloucester. “Now think *you* by that!—were it not good *Your Grace* could fly to heaven?”

The benign king smiles warmly, thinking of paradise. “The treasury of everlasting joy!”

Cardinal Beaufort glares at Gloucester. “*Thy heaven is on earth!*—thine eyes and thoughts bear on a *crown*, the treasure of thy heart, pernicious *protector*, *dangerous* peer, who smooth’st it so with king and *commonweal!*”

“What?—is your priesthood grown *peremptory?*” chides Gloucester. “*Tantaene animis coelestibus irae?*”—*Is there anger in celestial minds?* “*Churchman* so hot? Good cardinal, hide such malice with *just holiness!* Can you do it?”

“No *malice*, sir!” argues Suffolk. “No more than well *becomes* so good a *quarrel* with so bad a *peer!*”

Gloucester frowns. “As *who*, my lord?”

“Why, as *you*, my lord, an’t like your lordly *Lord Protectorship!*”

“Well, Suffolk, England”—the king—“knows thine insolence,” says Gloucester calmly; but his face is reddening.

“And thine *ambition*, Gloucester!” says Queen Margaret, at Suffolk’s side.

The king turns to her, gently lifting a palm. “I prithee, *peace*, good queen!—and *whet not* on these furious peers; for blessed are the *peacemakers* on earth.” He touches her elbow, and moves her away toward the stream.

“Let *me* be blessed for the peace I make against this proud protector with my *sword!*” mutters Cardinal Beaufort.

Gloucester growls, “Faith, *holy* uncle, I would *’twere* come to that!”

Says the cardinal defiantly, “Marry, whenever thou *darest!*”

Gloucester steps closer. “Make up no factious numbers”—summon no supporters—“for the matter! In *thine own person* answer thine abuse!”

“*Aye*, where *thou* darest not *peep!* But *if* thou darest: this evening, on the east side of the grove!”

King Henry has looked back, and he sees their continuing contention. “How now, my lords?” he calls.

The cardinal speaks louder—but calmly, to cover the deadly challenge. “Believe me, cousin Gloucester, had not your man put up the fowl so *suddenly*, we had had more *sport!*” He hisses to Gloucester, “Come with thy *two-hand* sword!”

To Henry, Gloucester sounds jovial: “*True*, Uncle!”

“Are ye advised?” whispers Beaufort. “The east side of the grove!”

“Cardinal, I am *with* you!” says Humphrey angrily.

The king has caught the tone. “Why, how *now*, Uncle Gloucester?”

“Talking of hawking; nothing else, my lord,” Humphrey tells him, smiling. He turns away, apparently to look at the falcons. “Now, by God’s Mother, *priest*, I’ll *shave your crown* for this, or all my fencing shall fail!”

“*Medice teipsum*, protector; see to’t well: protect *yourself!*” mumbles the cardinal, who is well acquainted with using the sword.

King Henry returns, concerned. “The winds grow high; so do your *tempers*, lords! How irksome is *this* music to my heart! When such strings jar, what hope of *harmony?* I pray, my lords, let me resolve this strife—”

“*A miracle!*” The loud cry interrupts the king as a townsman runs to the royal party.

“What means this noise?” demands Gloucester. “Fellow, what miracle dost thou proclaim?”

“A miracle!” cries the rustic, bowing awkwardly, his eyes wide open in astonishment. “*A miracle!*”

Suffolk urges the young man forward. “Come to the king and tell him what miracle.”

“Forsooth, a *blind* man, at Saint Alban’s shrine within this half-hour, hath *received his sight!*—a man that ne’er saw in his *life* before!”

King Henry is delighted. “Now *God be praised!* To believing souls He gives *light* in darkness, *comfort* in despair!”

Beaufort looks up along the slope. “Here come the townsmen in procession, to present Your

Highness with the man.” The kindly king is known for his munificence.

The Mayor of Saint Albans is leading some boisterous city people, two of whom bear, on a wooden bench carried between them, an unkempt man wearing some of the threadbare, cast-off clothes of a gentleman.

“Great is his comfort in this earthly vale!” says Henry, “although by his *sight* his *sin* may be multiplied....”

“Stand by, my masters,” Gloucester tells the people from town. He motions toward the one being carried. “Bring him near the king; his highness’ pleasure is to talk with him.”

Henry addresses the man. “Good fellow, tell us here the circumstance, that we for thee may glorify the Lord! What, hast thou been *long* blind, and now restored?”

“*Born* blind, an’t please Your Grace.”

“*Aye*, indeed *was* he!” says another ragged person as she presses forward.

“What woman is this?” asks Suffolk.

“His *wife*, an’t like Your Worship,” she says proudly, now standing beside her husband.

Thinks Gloucester, as to his birth: *Hadst thou been his mother thou couldst have better told.* He waits to hear their story, as she smoothes the man’s dirty hair.

“Where wert thou born?” asks the king.

“At Berwick, in the north, an’t like Your Grace.”

“Poor soul, God’s goodness hath been great to thee!” cries Henry. “Let never day nor night unhallowed pass, but still remember what the Lord hath done!”

“Tell me, good fellow,” asks Queen Margaret, “camest thou here by chance, or of devotion to this holy shrine?”

“God knows, of pure *devotion!*—being called a hundred times, and *oftener*, in my sleep by good Saint Alban—who said, ‘Simpcox, come, *come!*—offer at my shrine, and I will *help* thee!’”

“Most *true*, forsooth,” says the wife, “and many time and oft *myself* have heard a voice to call him so!”

The cardinal looks at the bench. “What, art thou lame?”

“*Aye*, God Almighty help me.”

“How camest thou so?” asks Suffolk, standing beside the queen.

“A fall off of a tree.”

“A *plum*-tree, master,” adds the wife.

“How long hast thou been blind?” asks Gloucester.

“Born so, master.”

“*What*, and wouldst *climb a tree?*”

The man blinks, but nods. “*But that one*, in all my life—when I was a youth.”

“Too *true*,” says the wife sadly, “and bought his climbing very dear!”

“*’Mass*, thou lovedst plums *well*, that wouldst venture so!” says Gloucester.

“Alas, good master, my wife desired some damsons, and *made* me climb, with danger of my life!”

A subtle knave, thinks Gloucester. *But yet it shall not serve.* “Let me see thine eyes,” he tells the seated man. He leans forward. “Blink now; now open them.” He steps back, frowning. “In *my* opinion, *yet* thou seest not *well.*”

“*Aye*, master, clear as *day!*” insists Simpcox, “thank *God* and *Saint Alban!*”

“Say’st thou me so? What colour is this cloak of?” asks Gloucester, touching his own.

“*Red*, master; red as blood.”

“Why, that’s well said. What colour is my coat of?”

“*Black*, forsooth: coal-black as jet!”—a polished marble used in fine jewelry.

King Henry frowns. “Why, then, thou know’st what colour jet is of.”

Says Suffolk of the pauper, “And yet, I think, jet did *he* never see!”

“But *cloaks* and *coats*, before this day, *a-many!*” says Gloucester wryly.

“*Never*, before this day, in all his life!” protests the wife.

“Tell me, sirrah, what’s my name?” demands Gloucester.

“Alas, master, I know not.”

Gloucester points to a townsman. “What’s his name?”

“I know not.”

“Nor *his*?”

Simpcox knows neither. “No, indeed, master.”

“What’s thine *own* name?”

“Saunders Simpcox, an if it please you, master.”

“Then, Saunders, sit there, *the lyingest knave in Christendom!*” cries Gloucester. “If thou *hadst* been born blind, thou mightest as well have known *all* our names as thus to name the several *colours* we do wear! Sight may *distinguish* among colours, but suddenly to *nominate* them all—it is impossible!

“My lords, Saint *Alban* here *hath* done a miracle.” He raises an eyebrow. “And would ye not think *his* skill to be great who could restore this cripple to his *legs* again?”

“Oh, master, that you *could!*” says Simpcox hopefully.

Gloucester asks the locals, “My masters of Saint Albans, have you not *beadles* in your town, and things called *whips*?”

The mayor nods. “Yes, my lord, if it please Your Grace.”

“Then send for one now.”

The mayor tells a local boy, “Sirrah, go fetch the beadle hither straight!” The lad runs into town to find the officer who punishes convicted wrongdoers.

“Now fetch me a stool hither by and by,” Gloucester tells a servant in the royal retinue.

When it is brought, Humphrey sets it before Simpcox. “Now, sirrah, if you mean to save yourself from *whipping*, leap over this stool and *run away!*”

Simpcox twists uncomfortably on his seat. “*Alas*, master, I am not able to *stand* alone!” He glances fearfully at the arriving beadle—who brings his whip. “You go about to torture me in vain!”

“Well, sir, we must have you find your legs,” insists Gloucester. “Sirrah beadle, whip him till he leap over that same stool.”

“I will, my lord. Come on, sirrah, off with your doublet—quickly!”

King Henry, watching, bites his lip, but holds his tongue.

Simpcox spreads his frayed sleeves wide. “*Alas*, master, what shall I *do*? I am not able to stand!”

But after the first harsh stroke of the lash he jumps up with a yelp and runs away—pursued by several townsmen, who cry out, angrily, “*A miracle!*”

King Henry is saddened. “O God, seest Thou this, and bearest so long?”

Margaret is amused. “It made me *laugh* to see the villain run!”

“Follow the knave,” Gloucester tells an officer, “and take this drab away.”

“*Alas*, sir, we did it for pure *need!*” pleads the woman as she is seized.

Gloucester ignores her. “Let them be whipped through every market-town till they come to *Berwick*, from whence they came.”

The mayor, highly discomfited, dabs at his brow with a kerchief, and bows. Without a word, he leads the beadle and the others back up to town.

Says the cardinal to Suffolk, with a tone of mockery, “Duke Humphrey has done a *miracle* today.”

Richard of York sneers. “True—made the *lame* to leap and fly away.”

“But *you* have done more miracles than I,” Gloucester tells the former Regent of France.

“You, my lord, in a day made *whole towns* to fly!”—escape English control.

The arrival of another nobleman halts the exchange. “What tidings with our cousin Buckingham?” asks King Henry.

“Such as my heart doth tremble to unfold!” claims the young lord, dismounting and bowing.

“A set of *evil persons*, lewdly bent, under the countenance and confederacy of *Lady Eleanor*, the protector’s wife—the ringleader and head of all that rout—have practised *dangerously* against your *state*, dealing with *witches* and with *conjurers*!

“Whom we have apprehended *in the fact!*—raising up wicked spirits from under ground, asking about King Henry’s life and death, and other of Your Highness’ Privy Council!—as more at large Your Grace shall understand.”

The cardinal enjoys the explanation of Eleanor’s absence. “And so, my lord protector, by *this* means your lady *is* forthcoming—but at *London!*” He moves closer to crow privately. “This news, I think, hath *turned* your weapon’s edge; ’tis likely, my lord, you will not keep your hour!”—for the duel.

But Gloucester has been stunned by the announcement. “Ambitious churchman, give me leave to attend my *heart!* In *sorrow* and *grief* have all my powers vanished!—and, vanquished as I am, I yield to thee—or to the *lowest groom!*”

King Henry laments: “O God, what mischiefs work the wicked ones, heaping destruction on their own heads thereby!”

Queen Margaret attacks: “Gloucester, see here the *tainture* of thy nest! And look that *thysself* be faultless, thou wert best!”

Humphrey is devastated. “Madam, for myself to *heaven* I do appeal, as to how I have loved my king and commonweal!

“And as for my wife, I know not how it stands; sorry I am to hear what I have heard! Noble she *is*; but if she have forgot honour and virtue, and conversed with such as, like pitch, *defile* nobility, I banish her my bed and company!—and give her as prey to law and shame, who hath dishonoured Gloucester’s honest name!”

King Henry shakes his head in dismay at his uncle’s plight. “Well, for this night we will repose us here. Tomorrow toward London back again, to look into this business thoroughly, and call those foul offenders to their answers—and poise the case in Justice’s equal scales, whose beam stands *sure*, where *rightful* cause prevails!”

Chapter Four Craving Justice

The Duke of York escorts his guests into the private garden of his London estate. “Now, my good Lords of Salisbury and Warwick, our simple supper ended, give me leave in this close walk to satisfy myself in craving your opinion of my title—which is *infallible*—to England’s crown.”

“My lord, I long to hear it at full,” the old man tells him.

“Sweet York, begin,” says Warwick. “And if thy claim be good, the Nevilles are thy subjects to command.”

“Then thus,” says Richard. “King Edward the Third, my lords, had *seven sons*: the first, Edward the Black Prince, Prince of Wales; the second, William of Hatfield; and the third, Lionel, Duke of Clarence—next after whom was John of Gaunt, the Duke of *Lancaster*. The fifth was Edmund Langley, Duke of York; the sixth was Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester. William of Windsor was the seventh and last.

“Edward the Black Prince died before his father, and left behind him his only son, who after Edward the Third’s death reigned as King Richard II—till Henry *Bolingbroke*, Duke of Lancaster, the eldest son and heir of John of Gaunt, *seized* on the realm, *deposed* the rightful king, and was crownèd by the name of Henry the Fourth. He sent Richard’s poor queen to France, from whence she had come, and him to Pomfret Castle—where, as well you know, harmless Richard was *traitorously murdered!*”

“Father, the duke hath told the truth,” says Warwick to Salisbury. “Thus got the House of

Lancaster the crown.”

“Which now they hold *by force*, and not by *right*,” says York, “for Richard, the *first* son’s heir, being dead, the issue of the *next* son should have reigned!”

Salisbury frowns. “But William of Hatfield died without an heir.”

Richard explains: “The *third* son, Duke of *Clarence*, from whose line *I* claim the crown, *had* issue: *Philippe*, a daughter—who married *Edmund Mortimer*, Earl of March. *Edmund* had issue: Roger, Earl of March; *Roger* had issue: Edmund, Anne and Eleanor.”

Salisbury now remembers York’s uncle. “*That* Edmund, in the reign of Bolingbroke, as I have read, laid claim unto the crown—and had been *king* but for Owen Glendower,”—a rebellious Welsh lord, “who kept him in captivity till he died.

“But as to the rest.” York continues: “His older sister, Anne, *my mother*, being *heir unto the crown*, married Richard, Earl of Cambridge, who was son to Edmund Langley, Edward the Third’s fifth son.

“By *her* I claim the kingdom: she was heir to Roger, Earl of March, who was the son of Edmund Mortimer, who married Philippe, sole daughter unto Lionel Duke of Clarence.

“So, if the issue of the *elder* son succeeds before the younger’s, *I am king!*”

Salisbury blinks, but Warwick, who wants to be convinced, concurs: “What plain proceeding is more plain than *this*? Henry did claim the crown from John of Gaunt, the *fourth* son; *York* claims it from the *third!*”

“Till *Lionel’s* issue fails, *John’s* should not reign! And it fails not *yet*, but flourishes in *thee* and in *thy sons*, fair slips of such a stock!” he tells Richard—proudly; the Duke of York’s wife, Cecily, is his aunt. “Then, father Salisbury, kneel we together!—and in this private plot be we the *first* that shall salute our rightful sovereign with honour of his birthright to the crown!”

Both lords kneel. “Long live our sovereign, *Richard*, England’s *king!*”

York smiles. “We thank you, lords,” he says, in the royal style. “But I am not your king till I be *crowned!* *Then* will my sword be stained with heart-blood of the House of Lancaster!—and that’s not *suddenly* to be performed, but with *advice* and silent *secrecy.*”

Salisbury and his son rise. Richard tells them, “Do *you* as *I* do in these dangerous days: close your eyes to the Duke of Suffolk’s insolence, to Beaufort’s pride, to Somerset’s ambition, to Buckingham—and *all the crew* of them, till they have snared the *shepherd* of the flock: that *virtuous* prince, ‘*the good Duke Humphrey!*’

“’Tis *that* they seek—and in seeking that, they shall *find their deaths*, if York can prophesy!”

Salisbury bows. “My lord, break we off; we know your mind at full.”

His son bows deeply. “My heart assures me that the Earl of Warwick shall one day make the Duke of York a *king!*”

“And, Neville,” replies York, “this I do assure myself: Richard shall live to make the Earl of *Warwick* the greatest man in England *but* the king!”

Standing before his courtiers, who have convened in the supposed safety of courtyard sunshine to hear testimony in the case of the duchess accused of witchcraft and treason, King Henry VI sadly summons the defendant—his aunt—just after her trial.

“Stand forth, Dame Eleanor Cobham, Gloucester’s wife.” Under guard, the duchess is led before him; with her are Hume and the three conjurers, their hands bound behind them. “In sight of God and us, your guilt is great!

“Receive the sentence of the *law* for sins such as by *God’s* Book are adjudged *death.*”

“You four, from hence to prison back again,” Henry tells the commoners. “From thence unto the place of execution. The witch in Smithfield shall be *burned to ashes*, and you three shall be strangled on the *gallows!*” The guards drag them away.

“*You*, madam, for you are nobly born, but despoiled of your honour by your life, shall, after three days’ *open penance* done, live in *banishment* here in your country—with Sir John Stanley, on the Isle of Man,” an austere and lonely place not far from Ireland.

“Welcome is banishment!” says the duchess. “Welcome were my *death!*” she adds, glaring at her husband.

“Eleanor, the *law*, thou see’st, hath judgèd thee,” says Gloucester sorrowfully. “I cannot justify whom the law condemns.”

He watches as she is led away. *Mine eyes are full of tears, my heart of grief! Ah, Humphrey, this dishonour in thine age will bring thy head with sorrow to the ground!* He wipes his eyes. “I beseech Your Majesty, give me leave to go, now without solace in mine age, without ease.” He starts away.

But the king stops his uncle. “Stay, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. Ere thou go, give up thy staff. Henry will to himself protector be—and *God* shall be my hope—my stay, my guide, and lantern unto my feet.

“Then go in peace, Humphrey, no less belovèd than when thou wert protector to thy king.”

Says Queen Margaret sharply, “I see no reason why a king of years should be protected like a *child!* God and *King Henry* govern England! Give up your staff, sir!—*and the king’s realm!*” she tells Gloucester.

“My staff,” says the duke quietly, looking at the wooden symbol of authority. “Here, noble Henry, is my staff.” It falls to the stone terrace with loud clatter. “As willingly do I the same *resign* as e’er thy father, Henry, made it *mine*—and even as willingly at thy feet I *leave* it as others would ambitiously *receive* it!

“Fare well, good king. When I am dead and gone, may *honourable peace* attend thy throne,” he says solemnly, again wiping away tears. He bows, deeply, and goes.

- “Why, now is *Henry* king—and Margaret *queen!*” she whispers happily to Suffolk. “And Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester is scarcely *himself*, bearing so harsh a maim! Two palls at *once*: his lady banished, and a *limb* lopped off!”

She steps forward. “This staff of honour caught,” she says, picking it up, “there let it *stand* where it best fits to be: in *Henry’s* hand.”

Her downcast husband accepts the rod; held loosely, it slants down at his side as he watches his uncle go.

- Suffolk whispers for Margaret’s ribald amusement: “Thus *droops* his lofty pine, and hang his *sprays!*”

- She adds, “Thus *Eleanor’s* pride died in her youngest days!”

Now the Duke of York, eager to dispose of another matter, draws attention from Humphrey. “Lords, let him go.” He approaches the king. “Please it Your Majesty, this is the day appointed for the combat; and ready are the appellant and defendant, the armourer and his man, to enter the lists, so please Your Highness to behold the fight.”

The queen is annoyed. “*Aye*, good my lord—for purposely *therefore* left I the court: to see *this* quarrel tried!” she tells York, her sarcasm sour.

But the king intends that justice be served. “In God’s name, see the lists and all things fit,” he commands. “God defend the right!—and here let them end it.” He signals his attendants, and the courtiers move across the grass.

Richard wants to quiet the dangerous topic of his great aspiration. “I never saw a fellow worse beset, or more *afraid to fight* than is the *appellant*, the servant of this armourer, my lords,” he tells the other nobles, as they walk to the cordoned area on a lawn beside the palace.

Commoners may not fight on horseback, so the place for the contest is small. From one side of the gathered spectators, the armorer comes forward with his fellow craftsmen, bearing on his shoulder a thick oaken cudgel. The other men have encouraged him so enthusiastically that he is quite drunk.

“*Here*, neighbour Horner,” cries a very jovial man, “I *drink* to you with a cup of *sack!* And *fear not*, neighbour!—you shall do well enough!”

“And *here*, neighbour, here’s a cup of *charneco!*” says another, offering another wine.

“And here’s a pot of good double *beer*, neighbour! *Drink*, and fear not your man!”

“*Let it come, i’ faith, and I’ll pledge you all!*” laughs Master Horner. “And a *fig*”—a crude hand gesture—“for Peter!”

At the other side, his man, a borrowed cudgel standing beside his foot, is glad to see the sun again after a month and a half of imprisonment. He has been watching as other apprentices quaff—all of them heartily, since they face no danger.

“Here, Peter, I drink to *thee!*” gushes the eldest. “And be not *afraid!*”

“Here, Peter, here’s a pint of claret wine for thee!”

“And here’s a *quart* for *me!* Be *merry*, Peter, and fear not thy master! Fight for credit of the *’prentices!*” urges the youngest.

“I thank you all,” says Peter glumly. “Drink, and *pray* for me, I pray you; for I think I have taken my last draught in this world! Here, Robin; an if I die, I give thee my apron. And Will, thou shalt have my hammer. And here, Tom, take all the money that I have.

“Oh, Lord bless me!” he moans. “I pray to God, for I am never able to deal with my master, he hath learnt so much of fencing already!”

Lord Salisbury motions the combatants together at the center. “Come, leave your drinking, and fall to blows.” The men advance to a lone drummer’s stark cadence. “Sirrah, what’s thy name?”

“Peter, forsooth.”

“Peter? What more?”

“Thump.”

“*Thump!* Then see thou thump thy *master* well!”

Horner addresses the gallery. “Masters, I am come hither upon my man’s instigation, as it were, to prove him a *knave*, and myself an *honest* man!

“And touching the Duke of York,” he adds blearily, “I will stake my death,”—wager his life, “I never meant him any ill—nor the king, nor the queen!

“And therefore, Peter, *have at thee* with a downright blow!”

“*Dispatch!*” insists York. “This knave’s tongue begins to double. *Sound alarum*, trumpets, to the combatants!” he demands.

At the horns’ signal, the men crouch, raise their heavy clubs, and move forward. Horner, staggering, swings first, but clumsily. The weapon brushes past Peter—who, shaking with fright, brings his cudgel down with great force on the armorer’s head.

Horner falls hard, and blood streams from his nose. “*Hold*, Peter,” he gasps, feebly lifting a hand, “*hold!*” He coughs and spits. “I *confess*,” he groans, trying to sit up, “I confess *treason*.” He blinks as if puzzled—then sags back, his eyes still open.

Peter stares down in surprise at the dead man. Then he vomits.

York moves swiftly. “Take away his weapon,” he tells an attendant. He grasps Peter’s arm. “Fellow, thank God—and the good *wine* in thy master’s way.”

“Oh, God, have I overcome mine enemy in this presence?” asks the masterless apprentice, dazed. “Oh, Peter, thou hast prevailed in... right,” he mumbles.

King Henry motions toward the corpse. “Go, take hence that traitor from our sight; for by his death we do perceive his *guilt!*”

“And God in justice hath revealed to us the truth and innocence of *this* poor fellow, whom he had thought, wrongfully, to have *murdered!*”

“*Come*, fellow,” he tells Peter, “follow us for thy *reward!*”

Chapter Five Fallen from Grace

Gloucester surveys the sky. *Thus sometimes hath the brightest day a cloud; and after summer, evermore succeeds barren winter, with its wrathful, nipping cold. So cares and*

joys abound as seasons fleet....

“Sirs, what’s o’clock?” he asks.

“Ten, my lord.” His attendants’ long, dark cloaks, made for mourning, contrast with the colorful apparel and festive mood of the citizens gathered on the street to observe a spectacle.

Ten is the hour that was appointed me to watch the coming of my punished duchess. He dreads the walk of penance she must perform, barefoot, before her voyage; for such a proud lady, it will be very difficult. *Uneasily she’ll endure the flinty streets, to tread them with her slender, feeling feet.*

Sweet Nell, ill can thy noble mind brook the wretched people’s gazing on thy face with malicious looks, laughing at thy shame!—those who erst did follow thy proud chariot-wheels when thou didst ride in triumph through the streets!

But, soft!—I think she comes; then I’ll prepare my tear-stained eyes to see her miseries.

Following the Sheriff of London, and between two officers armed with tall halberds, the disgraced lady slowly approaches, as ordered: holding a lighted taper. Her costly gown is wrapped in a plain muslin sheet; pinned to the back are notes citing, in poor verse, her offenses. Sir John Stanley walks after her.

One of Humphrey’s servants, angered by the lady’s distress, pleads: “So please Your Grace, we’ll *take* her from the sheriff!”

Gloucester’s jaw tightens sternly. “*No!*—stir not, for your lives! Let her pass by.”

The duchess pauses near him. “Come *you*, my lord, to see my open shame?” She glances at the crowd. “Now *thou* dost penance, too!—look how they gaze—see how the giddy multitude do point, and nod their heads, and throw their eyes upon *thee!*”

“Oh, Gloucester, *hide* thee from their hateful looks, and, in thy rooms pent up, rue my shame and damn thine enemies—both mine and *thine!*”

He takes her hand. “Be patient, gentle Nell; forget this grief.”

“Ah, Gloucester, teach me to forget *myself!* For whilst I *think* I am thy married wife, and thou a *prince*, protector of this land; methinks I should not thus be *led along*, mailed up in *shame* with papers on my back, and followed by a rabble that *rejoice* to see my tears, and hear my deep-felt groans!

“The ruthless flint doth cut my tender feet—and when I start, the spiteful people *laugh*, and bid me be advised *how I tread!*”

“Oh, Humphrey, can I *bear* this shameful yoke? Trow’st thou that I’ll ne’er look upon the world and count among those who *happily enjoy the sun?* No, *dark* shall be *my* light, and night *my day!* To think upon my *pomp* shall be *my hell!*”

“Sometimes I’ll say, ‘I am *Duke Humphrey’s* wife, and he a *prince* and ruler of the land!’ Yet so he rulèd, and was such a prince, as to *stand by* whilst I, his forlorn *duchess*, was made a wonder and a pointing-stock for every idle, rascal follower!”

She regards him disdainfully. “But *be* thou mild, and blush not at my shame, nor stir at *anything*—till the *axe of Death* hang over thee!—as, surely it shortly *will!* For *Suffolk*, he that can do *all in all* with her that *hateth* thee, and hates *us!*—and *York*—and impious *Beaufort*, that false priest, have *all limèd bushes* to belay thy wings! And fly thou how thou canst, they’ll *tangle* thee!

“But *fear* not thou, *until thy foot be snared!*” she cries angrily, pulling away her hand, “and never seek *prevention* of thy foes!”

“Ah, Nell, forbear!—thou aimest all *awry!* I must *offend* before I can be attained; and had I *twenty* times so many foes, and each of them had twenty times their *power*, all those could not procure me any scathe, so long as I am loyal, true, and crimeless.

“Wouldst have me rescue thee from *this* reproach? Why, still thy *scandal* were not wiped away, but *I* in danger for the *breach of law!* Thy greatest help is *quiet*, gentle Nell! I pray thee, sort thy heart to *patience*; these few days’ wonder will be quickly worn.”

A messenger from the king has come to find Humphrey; he bows. “I summon Your Grace to his majesty’s Parliament, holden at Bury the first of this next month.”

Humphrey is surprised—and disturbed. *And my consent ne'er asked herein before? This is close dealing!* He frowns. "Well, I will be there." The man bows and goes.

"My Nell, I take my leave. And, master sheriff, let not her penance exceed the king's commission," he warns.

"An't please Your Grace, here *my* commission stays," the sheriff tells him, "and Sir John Stanley is appointed now to take her with him to the Isle of Man."

"Must you, Sir John, protect my lady there?"

The knight nods. "So am I given in charge, may't please Your Grace."

"Then treat her not the worse in that *I* pray you use her *well*," says Gloucester. "The world may smile again—and I may live to do you *kindness*, if you do it her. And so, Sir John, farewell."

"What?—*gone*, my lord, and bid *me* not farewell!" cries Eleanor, as he starts away.

Humphrey turns to her. "Witness my *tears!*" His voice is choked. "I cannot stay to speak." As he walks toward their home, he is weeping.

She watches, forlorn. *Art thou gone, too? All comfort go with thee—for none abides with me! My joy is death—Death, at whose name I oft have been afeared, because I wished this world's eternity!*

"Stanley, I prithee, go, and *take me hence!* I care not whither, for I beg no favour; only convey me where thou art commanded."

"Why, madam, that is to the Isle of Man," says the knight kindly, "there to be used according to your state."

Eleanor laughs bitterly. "That's bad enough, for I am but in *reproach!* Then shall I then be used reproachfully?"

"Like to a *duchess*, and Duke Humphrey's lady—according to *that* state you shall be used."

She turns to the officer. "Sheriff, farewell," she tells him, "and better than *I* fare, although thou hast been conduct of my shame."

He flushes. "It is my *office*; then, madam, pardon me."

"Aye, aye, farewell; thine office is discharged. Come, Stanley, shall we go?"

"Madam, your penance done, throw off this sheet, and go we to attire you for our journey."

"My *shame* will not be shifted with my sheet; no, it will hang upon my richest robes, and *show* itself, attire me how I can." She pulls the coarse cloth tightly around her.

"Go, lead the way; *I long* to see my prison!"

Inside, King Henry looks toward the wide, closed doors of the abbey at Bury St. Edmund's, northeast of London in Suffolk, where he has convened the Parliament. "I muse my lord of Gloucester is not come; 'tis not his wont to be the hindmost man, whate'er occasion keeps him from us now."

Queen Margaret seems exasperated. "Can you not *see?* Or *will* ye not to observe the strangeness of his altered countenance?—with what a *majesty* he bears himself, how *insolent* of late he is become, how proud, how *peremptory*, and unlike himself?"

"We know a time since, when he was mild and *affable*; and if we did but glance a far-off look, immediately he was upon his knee, so that all the court *admired* him for submission. But meet him *now*, and, be it in the morn, when every one will '*Good*' the time of day, he knits his brow and shows an angry eye, and passeth by with stiff, unbowed knee, disdainingly *duty* that to us *belongs!*"

"Small curs are not regarded when they show teeth, but great men tremble when the *lion* roars—and Humphrey is no *little* man in England!"

"First, note that he is *near you* in descent, and should you fall, *he* as the next will *mount!* To me it seemeth, then, it is poor *policy*—respecting what a rancorous mind he bears, and his advantage following your *decease*—that he should come about your royal person, or be admitted to Your Highness' counsel!"

"By flattery hath he won the *commons'* hearts, and when he please to make *commotion*, 'tis to

be feared they all will follow him! Now 'tis the spring, and weeds are shallow-rooted; suffer them now," she warns, "and they'll o'ergrow the garden and choke the herbs for want of husbandry!

"The reverent care I bear unto my lord made me collect these dangers in the duke," she claims. "If it be foolish, call it a *woman's* fear—which fear, if better reasons can *supplant*, I will subside, and say I wrongèd the duke.

"My lords of Suffolk, Buckingham and York," she says, facing them, "reprove my allegation, if you can—or else conclude my words effectual!"

Not surprisingly, Suffolk concurs. "*Well* hath Your Highness seen into this duke! And had I first been put to speak my mind, I think I should have told Your Grace's tale.

"The duchess *by his subornation*, upon my life, began her devilish practises! Or if he were not privy to *those* faults, yet by reporting his high descent, as next the king he was successive heir, and such high vaunts of his nobility, he did *instigate* the bedlam, brainsick duchess by wicked means *to frame our sovereign's fall!*

"Smooth runs the water where the brook is *deep*; and in his simple *show* he harbours *treason!*

"The fox barks not when he would steal the lamb," he tells the young king—patronizing him with maxims, even though they run counter to the queen's assertion that Humphrey is blatantly insolent. "No, no, my sovereign, Gloucester is a man *unsounded* yet—and full of deep *deceit!*"

The cardinal nods. "Did he not, contrary to form of law, devise strange deaths for small offences done?"

"And did he not, in his protectorship, levy great sums of money through the realm for soldiers' pay in France—and *never send it?*" asks York—who had, in fact, received the gold, and used *some* as it was intended. "By means whereof the *towns* each day *revolted!*" he adds.

Says Buckingham, "*Tsk*, these are *petty* faults, compared to faults *unknown* which time will bring to light in smooth Duke Humphrey!"

King Henry lifts a soft hand against the chorus of complaint. "My lords, one at a time!

"The *care* you have for us, to mow down thorns that would annoy our foot, is worthy of praise; but if I shall speak *my* perception, our kinsman Gloucester is as innocent from meaning *treason* to our royal person as is the sucking lamb or harmless dove! The duke is *virtuous, mild*, and too well-given to *dream* of evil, or to work my downfall!"

"*Ah*, what's more *dangerous* than this fond affection?" protests Margaret. "Seems he a *dove*? His feathers are but *borrowed*, for he's disposèd as the hateful *raven!* Is he a *lamb*? His skin is surely *lent* him, for he's inclined as is the ravenous *wolf!* Who cannot steal a shape that aids deceit?" she demands. "Take heed, my lord: the welfare of us all hangs on the cutting-short of that fraudulent man!"

The doors open, and a nobleman, voyage-weary and dusty from overland travel, leads his attendants into the Parliament. "All health unto my gracious sovereign," he says, bowing.

"Welcome, Lord Somerset," says Henry. "What news from France?"

"That all your interest in those territories is *utterly bereft you!*" says new regent grimly. "All is *lost!*"

"*Cold news*, Lord Somerset!" says King Henry. "But God's will be done," he sighs, as the lords of the realm consider the latest word from the continent.

Cold news for me! thinks Richard, *for I had hope of France as firmly as I hope for fertile England! Thus are my blossoms blasted in the bud, and caterpillars eat my leaves away!*

But I will remedy this fear ere long, or sell my title for a glorious grave! he vows.

Gloucester now arrives to join the convocation—late, he learns. "All happiness unto my lord the king," he says, bowing. "Pardon, my liege, that I have stayed away so long."

Suffolk steps toward him. "Nay, Gloucester, know that thou art come *too soon*—unless thou wert more *loyal* than thou *art!*" he says angrily. "I do *arrest* thee here for *high treason!*" he cries, and motions to the king's guards.

Humphrey is impassive as he is surrounded. "Well, Suffolk, thou shalt not see me blush nor change my countenance for this arrest. A heart unspotted is not easily daunted. The purest spring

is not so free from mud as I am clear of treason to my sovereign!

“Who can accuse me? Wherein am I guilty?”

York steps forward “’Tis thought, my lord, that you took *bribes* from *France*, and, being protector, stayed the soldiers’ pay—by means whereof his highness hath *lost* France!”

“Is it but ‘thought’ so?” replies Humphrey scornfully. “Who are they that think it?”

“I never robbed the soldiers of their pay, nor ever had one *penny* of bribe from France, so help me God! And I have watchèd through *nights*—*aye*, night after night, in studying *good* for England! Let *doit* that e’er I wrested from the king, or any *groat* I hoarded to *my* use, be brought against me at my trial-day!

“*No!* Many a *pound* of *mine own* proper store, have I disbursèd to the garrisons, because I would not tax the needy commons—and never asked for restitution!”

The cardinal scoffs. “It serves you well, my lord, to *say* so much!”

“I say no more than *truth*, so help me *God!*”

York persists. “In your protectorship you did devise for offenders *strange tortures* never heard of, such that England was defamed for *tyranny!*”

Humphrey only laughs. “Why, ’tis well known that whiles I was protector *pity* was all the fault that was in *me!*—for I should melt at an offender’s tears, and lowly *words* were ransom for their guilt! Unless it were a bloody murderer, or foul, felonious thief that fleecèd poor passengers, I never gave them but condign punishment!

“*Murder*—indeed *that* bloody sin I tortured above a felony, or what trespass else.”

Says Suffolk, “My lord, these faults are readily, quickly answered. But *mightier* crimes are laid unto your charge whereof you *cannot* easily purge yourself! I do arrest you in his highness’ name—and here commit you to my lord cardinal to keep, until your further time of *trial.*”

King Henry is apologetic. “My lord of Gloucester, ’tis my special hope that you will *clear* yourself from all suspect! My conscience tells me you are *innocent.*”

Gloucester fears that the feeble young king will not—cannot—contend with the conniving courtiers. “Ah, gracious lord, these days are dangerous!” he warns. “*Virtue* is choked by foul *ambition*, and *charity* chased hence by *rancour’s* hand! Foul *subornation* is predominant, and equity *exiled* from Your Highness’ land!”

He looks around at his glowering adversaries. “I know their complot is to have *my life!*—and if my death might make this island happy, and prove the *end* of their tyranny, I would expend it with all willingness. But *mine* is made but *prologue* to their play—for *thousands more*, who yet suspect no peril, will now *conclude* their plotted tragedy!

“Beaufort’s red-sparking eyes blab his heart’s *malice*, and Suffolk’s cloudy brow his stormy *hate*; Buckingham unburthens with his sharp tongue the envious load that lies upon his heart!—and doggèd York, whose overweening arm I have pluckèd back, reaches by the *moon*—by *false accuse* doth level at my *life!*”

“And *you*, my sovereign lady, with the rest, *causeless* have laid disgraces on my head, and with your best endeavour have stirred up my dearest *liege* to be mine *enemy!*”

“*Aye*, *all* of you have laid your heads together—myself had notice of your conventicles!—and all to make away my guiltless life! I shall not lack false witnesses to condemn me, nor store of ‘treasons’ to augment my ‘guilt!’”

“The ancient proverb will be well effected: ‘A staff is quickly found to *beat* a *dog.*’”

The cardinal protests to Henry: “My liege, this railing is intolerable! If those that take care to keep your royal person from *treason’s* secret knife and *traitors’* rage be thus upbraided, chid and rated at, and the *offender* granted scope of speech, ’twill make them cool in zeal unto Your Grace!”

Suffolk stands beside Queen Margaret. “Hath he not twit our *sovereign lady* here with *ignominious* words, though clerkly couchèd?—as if she had subornèd some to swear false allegations to o’erthrow his state!”

Says she, as if sadly, “But I can give the loser leave to chide...”

“Far truer *spoke* than *meant!*” says Gloucester. “I lose *indeed!*—beshrew the *winners*, for they played me *false!* And *well* such losers may have leave to speak!”

Buckingham would stifle further hearing. “He’ll wrest the *senses*, and hold us here all day! Lord Cardinal, he is your prisoner,” he says, insistently.

Beaufort turns to his tawny-coated men. “Sirs, take away the duke, and guard him sure!”

Says Gloucester, as they seize his arms, “Ah, thus King Henry throws away his *crutch* before his legs be firm to bear his body! Thus is the *shepherd* beaten from thy side, when *wolves* are gnarling over who shall *gnaw thee first!*”

“Oh, that my fear were *false*—oh, that it were!” he moans, as they pull him away. “For, good King Henry, *thy decay I fear!*” Humphrey is soon led out, to be taken to Beaufort’s Winchester palace.

On the throne, the young king stares down, shaken by all the virulent accusations. He rises and sighs, deeply depressed. “My lords, what to your wisdoms seemeth best, do or undo, as if ourself were *here.*”

The queen watches him. “What, will Your Highness leave the Parliament?”

“Aye, Margaret; my heart is drowned with *grief*, whose flood begins to flow within mine eyes, my body being round engirt with misery!—for what’s more miserable than *discontent?*”

He ruminates. *Oh, Uncle Humphrey!—in thy face I see the map of honour, truth and loyalty! And yet, good Humphrey, is the hour to come that e’er feared for thy faith, or proved thee false?*

What luring star now despises thy estate, that these great lords and Margaret our queen do see subversion in thy harmless life? Thou never didst them wrong—nor any man wrong!

But as the butcher takes away the calf and binds the wretch, and beats it when it strays, bearing it to the bloody slaughter-house, even so remorseless have they borne him hence!

And as the dam runs, lowing up and down, looking the way her harmless young one went, and can do nought but wail her darling’s loss, even so my self bewails good Gloucester’s case with sad, unhelpful tears, and with dimmed eyes look after him, but cannot do him good, so mighty are his vowed enemies!

His fortunes I will weep, and, ’twixt each groan say, ‘Who’s a traitor?—Gloucester, he is none!’

The king, shaking his head, motions to his attendants, and they leave the hall.

Before long most of the other lords and gentlemen have gone as well.

Margaret addresses Humphrey’s clustered enemies. “*Free*, lords!—cold snow melts with the sun’s hot beams! Henry my lord is cold in great affairs, too full of foolish *pity*; and Gloucester’s *showing* beguiles him, as the mournful crocodile with sorrow snares a relenting passerby, or as the snake, rolled on a flowering bank with shining, chequered slough, doth sting a child that for the beauty thinks it excellent!

“Believe me, lords, were none more wise than I—and yet herein I judge mine own wit good—Gloucester should be *quickly rid this world*, to rid *us* of the fear we have of him!”

The priest concurs. “That he should die is worthy policy. But we yet lack a coloration for his death; ’tis meet he be condemnèd by *course of law.*”

“But in my mind *that were no policy!*” says Suffolk. “The king will labour still to save his life, the commons perhaps *rise* to save his life! We have but trivial argument more than *mistrust* that shows him worthy *death.*”

York frowns: “So then, by this, you would *not* have him die?”

Suffolk assures him, “Oh, York, no man alive is so fain as I!”—eager for it.

’Tis York that hath more reason for his death! thinks Richard. “But, my lord cardinal, and you, my lord of Suffolk, say as you think, and speak it from your souls: were’t not all one”—the same—“if an *empty eagle* were set to guard the chicken from a *hungry hawk?*”

“Restore Duke Humphrey as the king’s protector.” He considers the ambitious others to be even greater threats.

Margaret shakes her head. “So the poor ‘chicken’ should be *sure* of death.”

“Madam, ’tis true,” says Suffolk. “And were’t not *madness*, then, to make the *fox*, being accused as crafty *murderer*, surveyor of the fold? His guilt should not be idly posted over because his purpose is not yet *executed*.”

“*No!* Let him *die* in that he *is* a fox—as Humphrey’s shown by arguments to my liege—by nature proven an enemy to the *flock*, before his jowls be stained with crimson blood!” He wants Henry to hear no more of Gloucester’s warnings.

Suffolk presses for action. “And do not stand on quilllets *how* to slay him! Be it by engines, by snares, by subtlety, sleeping or waking, ’tis no matter *how*, so he be *dead!*—for that is a *good* deceit which checkmates him *first* who first intends defeat!”

Margaret, stirred, touches William’s arm. “Thrice-noble Suffolk, ’tis resolutely spoken!”

“Not *resolute* except in so much as were *done*,” he replies. “For things are often *spoke* and seldom *meant!* Because *my* heart accordeth with my tongue, seeing the *deed* is meritorious; and to preserve my sovereign from his *foe*—say but the word and I will be his priest!”—deliver the duke’s last rites.

Says Cardinal Beaufort, “But *I* would have him dead, my lord of Suffolk, ere you can take due orders as a priest. Say you consent and judge well the deed, and I’ll provide his executioner.” He adds, to seem justified, “I tender so the safety of my liege.”

“Here is my hand,” says Suffolk, offering it. “The deed *is* worthy doing!”

Margaret nods as the men shake hands. “And so say I!”

“And I,” says York. “And now we three have spoke it,” he tells the conspiring noblemen, “it spells not greatly who impugns our doom”—questions the decision.

A messenger bursts into the hall, looks around frantically, pulls off his hat, and bows. “Great lords,” he cries, “from *Ireland* am I come amain to signify that *rebels there* are *up!*—and put the Englishmen *unto the sword!*”

“Send *succors*, lords,” he pleads urgently, “and stop the rage *betimes*, before the wound do grow incurable!—for, it being *new*, there is great hope of *help!*”

“A breach that craves a quick, expedient stop,” murmurs the cardinal. “What counsel give *you* in this weighty cause?” he asks the Duke of York, with facetious courtesy.

“That *Somerset* be sent as *regent* thither,” says Richard with heavy sarcasm. “’Tis meet *that* lucky ruler be employèd; witness the fortune he hath had in *France!*”

“If *York*, with all his absentee *policy*, had been the regent there instead of me,” insists Somerset indignantly, “he never would have *stayed* in France!”

“No—not so long as to *lose it all*, as *thou* hast done!” cries York, angrily. “*I* would rather have lost my *life* betimes than bring a burthen of *dishonour* home by staying there so long that *all were lost!* Show me one *scar* charactered on *thy* skin! Men’s flesh preservèd *so whole* doth *seldom* win!”

Margaret mocks their bickering: “*Nay*, then, this spark will prove a raging fire—if *wind* and *fuel* be brought to feed it with! No *more*, good York; sweet Somerset, be *still!*”

“Thy fortune, York, hadst thou been regent there, might haply have proven far worse than his.”

“*What?*—worse than *nought?*” demands Richard. “*Nay*, then, *shame* take *all!*”

“And in that number, *thee*, who *wishest* shame!” retorts Somerset.

The cardinal steps between them. “My Lord of York, *try* what your fortune is!” he urges. “The uncivil kerns”—peasant foot soldiers—“of *Ireland* are *in arms*, and temper clay with *blood of Englishmen!* To *Ireland* will you lead a band of men, collected choicely, from each county some, and try your hap against the Irishmen?” The challenge is intended to send one rival abroad.

York considers. He nods. “*I will*, my lord, so please his majesty.”

“Why, *our* authority has his *consent*,” Suffolk points out, “and what *we* do establish, he confirms. Then, noble York, take thou this task in hand!”

“*I am content*,” says York. “Provide me *soldiers*, lords, whiles I take order for mine own affairs.”

Suffolk, too, is quite pleased that Richard will leave England. “A charge, Lord York, that I will see performed.

“But now return we to the false Duke Humphrey . . .”

“No more of *him*,” says the cardinal, “for I will deal with him such that henceforth he shall trouble us no more! And so break off; the day is almost spent. Lord Suffolk, you and I must talk of that event.”

“My lord of Suffolk, *within fourteen days* I expect my soldiers at *Bristol*,” York tells him. “From there I’ll ship them all for Ireland.”

Suffolk agrees. “I’ll see it truly done, my lord of York.” He and Cardinal Beaufort leave with the messenger, and the queen and her attendants return to the royal palace.

Alone, Richard grasps the hilt of the sword hanging at his side, and he paces, his footsteps echoing in the huge hall.

Now, York, or never, steel thy fearful thoughts, and change misdoubt to resolution! Be what thou hopest to be, or what thou art resign to death!—it is not worth the enjoying! Let pale-faced fear keep with the mean-born man, and find no harbour in a royal heart!

Faster than springtime showers come thought on thought, and not a thought but thinks on dignity! My brain, more busy than the labouring spider, weaves careful snares to trap mine enemies!

Well, nobles, well!—’tis politicly done, to send me packing—with an host of men! I fear me you but warm the starvèd snake, who, cherished in your breasts, will sting your hearts! ’Twas men I lacked—and you will give them to me! I take it kindly!

And yet be well assured you put sharp weapons in a madman’s hands!

Whiles I in Ireland nourish a mighty band, I will stir up in England such a black storm as shall blow ten thousand souls to heaven or hell! And this fell tempest shall not cease to rage until the golden circle on my head, like the glorious sun’s transparent beams, does calm the fury of this mad-bred show!

And for a minister of my intent I have seduced a headstrong Kentishman, John Cade of Ashford, to make commotion, full well as he can, under the name of ‘John Mortimer!’

Cade will pretend to be a nobleman of the House of York.

In Ireland have I seen this stubborn Cade oppose himself against a troop of kerns, and he fought so long that his thighs with arrows were almost like a sharp-quilled porpentine’s! And I have seen him, in the end being rescued, caper upright like a wild morisco, —morris dancer— shaking the bloody darts as he his bells!

Full often, like a shag-haired, crafty kern—in disguise— hath he conversèd with the enemy and, undiscovered, come to me again and given me notice of their villainies!

This devil here shall be my substitute for that John Mortimer, now dead, who in face, in gait, in speech he doth resemble. By this I shall perceive the commons’ mind—how they affect the house and claim of York.

He considers. *Say he be taken, racked and tortured. I know no pain they can inflict upon him will make him say I moved him to those arms!*

Say that he thrive, as ’tis great like he will; why, then from Ireland come I with my strength, and reap the harvest which that rascal sowed!

For, Humphrey being dead, as he shall be, and Henry put apart, the next’s for me!

Chapter Six Called to Judgment

Coming down stone steps in the Bury St. Edmund’s estate of Cardinal Beaufort, a burly man sweats after doing some hurried work. “Run to my lord of Suffolk; let him know we have dispatched the duke as he commanded.”

“*Oh*, that it were *to* do!” moans his still-gasping companion, rubbing chaffed hands on his rough coat as if to clean them. “What have we *done*? Didst ever hear a man so *penitent*?”

“Here comes my lord...”

Asks William of Suffolk impatiently. “Now, sirs, have you dispatched this thing?”

“Aye, my good lord; he’s dead.”

“Why, that’s well said. Go, get you to my house; I will reward you for this venturous deed.

“The king and all the peers are here at hand,” says William. “Are all things well, according as I gave directions? Have you laid *fair* the bed?”

“’Tis good, my lord.”

“Away! Be gone.”

Suffolk returns to the hall where the visiting courtiers are convened.

“Go, call our uncle to our presence straight,” King Henry tells Suffolk this afternoon. “Say we intend to try his grace today, to find if he be guilty as ’tis published.”

The duke bows. “I’ll call him immediately, my noble lord.” He and an attendant go to the chamber where Humphrey has been held prisoner in the cardinal’s custody.

“Lords, take your places,” says the king, presiding from a seat at the front of the large hall, “and, I pray you all, proceed no stricter ’gainst our uncle Gloucester than from *true evidence*, of good esteem, he be proven culpable in *practise*.”

Queen Margaret seconds—in her own way: “God forbid any *malice* should prevail, that may condemn a *faultless* nobleman!” She sees Henry’s flicker of a frown. “Pray God he may acquit himself of suspicion.”

“I thank thee, Meg,” says Henry. “These words content me much.” He sees Suffolk returning. “*How now!* Why look’st thou pale? Why *tremblest* thou? Where is our uncle? What’s the matter, Suffolk?”

“Dead in his bed, my lord!—Gloucester is *dead!*”

“Marry, God forfend!” cries the queen.

“God’s secret judgment!” pronounces the cardinal. *I did dream last night the duke was mute and could not speak a word!*

King Henry, stunned by the death of his closest blood relative, faints.

Margaret sees him slipping sideways. “How fares my lord? *Help*, lords!” she cries out, “the king is dead!”

Somerset is less eager for that. “Rear up his body,” he tells attendants. “Wring him by the nose.” A servant does so, prompting a groan from the king.

“*Run, go!* Help, *help!*” cries the queen. “*Oh*, Henry, ope thine *eyes!*”

Suffolk is standing beside the king’s chair. “He doth revive again. Madam, be patient.”

Henry sits up, tears in his eyes. “*Oh, heavenly God!*”

“How fares my gracious lord?” asks Margaret.

“*Comfort*, my sovereign!” says the duke, kneeling, “gracious Henry, *comfort!*”

King Henry, rising unsteadily, clumsily pushes the duke away. “*What?*—doth my lord of *Suffolk* comfort me? Came he just now to sing a *raven*’s note, whose dismal tune bereft my vital powers!—and thinks he that the chirping of a *wren*, by crying ‘*comfort*’ from a hollow breast, can chase away the *first-conceived* sound?”

“Hide not thy *poison* with such sugared words!—lay not thy hands on me!—*forbear*, I say! Their touch affrights me as a *serpent*’s *sting!* Thou *baleful* messenger, *out of my sight!* Upon thine eye-balls *murderous tyranny* sits in grim majesty to fright the world! Look not upon me, for thine *eyes* are *wounding!*”

“Yet do *not* go away!” he sobs, as Suffolk moves back. “*Come, basilisk*, and *kill* the innocent gazer with thy sight! For in the shade of death I shall find *joy*—in *life* but *double* death, now Gloucester’s dead!”

“Why do you berate my lord of Suffolk thus?” demands Margaret. “Although the duke was

enemy to him, yet he most *Christian-like laments* his death!”

She steps between Henry and Suffolk. “And as for myself, foe as *he* was to *me*, might liquid tears or heart-offending groans or blood-consuming sighs *recall* his life, I would be *blind* with weeping, *sick* with groans, look pale as primrose with blood-drinking sighs!—and all to have the noble duke *alive!*”

“What know I how the world may deem of *me?*—for it is known we were but hollow friends. It may be judged I *made the duke away!*—so shall my name with *slander’s* tongue be wounded, and princes’ courts be filled with my *reproach!*”

“This get *I* by his death! *Ay me!*—unhappy to be a *queen* and crownèd with *infamy!*”

King Henry sits and weeps. “*Oh*, woe is me for Gloucester, wretched man!”

“Be woèd for *me*, more wretched than *he* is!” insists Margaret. “What?—dost thou turn *away* and *hide thy face?* I am no loathsome leper!—*look* on me! *What?* Art thou become deaf like the adder?—be *poisonous* too, and *kill* thy forlorn queen! Is all thy *comfort* shut in *Gloucester’s* tomb?”

“Why, then, Dame *Margaret* was *ne’er* thy joy! Erect *his* statue and worship it, and make *my* image but an *alehouse sign!*”

She paces, seeming ever more distraught. “Was I for *this* nigh wrecked upon the sea, and twice by awkward wind from England’s bank driven *back again* unto my native clime? What *boded* it but that the well-forewarning wind did seem to say, ‘Seek not a *scorpion’s* nest, nor set no footing on this unkind shore!’

“*What did I* then, but *curse* the gentle gusts and he that loosed them from their brazen caves, and bid them *blow toward England’s blessed shore!*—or turn our stern upon a dreadful rock!”

“But *Aeolus*”—god of winds—“would not be a *murderer!*—yet left *that* hateful office unto *thee!* The pettish, vaulting *sea* refused to *drown* me!—knowing that *thou* wouldst have me drowned on *shore*, with tears as salt as sea, through thine *unkindness!*”

“The splitting *rocks* cowered, sinking into the sands, and would not dash me with their ragged sides, because *thy flinty heart*, more hard than they, might in thy *palace* punish Margaret!”

“When from thy shore the tempest beat us back, as long as I could ken thy chalky cliffs I stood upon the hatches in the storm! And when the dusky sky began to rob my earnest, gaping sight of thy land’s view, I took a costly jewel from my neck—a *heart* it was, bound-in with *diamonds*—and threw it towards thy land! The sea received it—and so I wishèd *thy body* might *my heart!*”

“And just then I *lost* fair England’s *view*—and bid mine *eyes* go packing with my heart, and called them *blind* and *dusky spectacles*, for losing ken of *Albion’s* wishèd coast!”

She recalls her courtship by surrogate: “How often have I tempted Suffolk’s tongue?”—the courtiers steal knowing glances at each other—“the *agent* of thy foul *inconstancy*, to sit and bewitch me, as Ascanius did when he to madding Dido would unfold his father’s acts, commenced in burning Troy!” Queen Dido of Carthage was inflamed with love for Aeneas by Cupid, whom Venus sent disguised as the Trojan warrior’s son; when Aeneas left her, she killed herself.

“Am I not ’witchèd like *her?* Or *thou* not false like *him?*” she demands, stopping before Henry. The queen glares at the sorrowful young king. “*Ay me!*—I can no *more!*” she wails. “*Die*, Margaret! For Henry weeps that thou dost *live so long!*”

A clamor is heard from outside the hall, and the doors swing open to admit Lords Salisbury and Warwick—and then some angry gentlemen and workmen.

Warwick hurries to bow before the king. “It is reported, mighty sovereign, that good Duke Humphrey *traitorously is murderèd*—by *Suffolk* and the *Cardinal Beaufort’s* means!”

“The *commons*, like an angry hive of bees that want their leader, scatter up and down, and care not whom they sting *in his revenge!* Myself have *calmed* their spleenful mutiny—until they *hear the manner* of his death!”

“That he is dead, good Warwick, ’tis *too true,*” the king tells him tearfully, “but how he died,

God knows, not Henry!

“Enter his chamber, view his unbreathing corpse, and comment then upon his sudden death...”

Warwick bows again. “That shall I do, my liege!” He turns to his father. “Stay, Salisbury, with the rude multitude till I return.” The older man nods, and goes out with the commoners.

King Henry looks upward. “O Thou that judgest all things, *stay my thoughts!*—my thoughts that labour to persuade my *soul* some violent hands were laid on Humphrey’s life! If my suspicion be false, forgive me, God—for judgment doth belong to only *Thee*.

“Fain would I go to chafe his paly lips with twenty *thousand* kisses, and to drain upon his face an *ocean* of salt tears, to tell my love unto his silent, deaf trunk, and with my fingers feel his hand unfeeling!

“But *all in vain* are these mean obsequies! And to survey his dead and earthly image—what were it but to make my sorrow greater?”

Warwick returns, followed by four of his men carrying a plain, narrow bed—on which lies Gloucester. “Come hither, gracious sovereign; view this body.”

The sheltered young king stares. “That is to see how deep *my grave* is made!—for with his soul fled all my worldly *solace!*—for, seeing him, I see my *life in death!*”

Warwick moves forward angrily. “As surely as my *soul* intends to live with that dread King that took our state upon Him to free us from his Father’s wrathful curse, I do believe that *violent hands* were laid upon the life of this thrice-famed duke!”

Suffolk scoffs. “A dreadful oath, sworn with a solemn tongue! What *instance* gives Lord Warwick for his vow?”

Warwick points to the corpse. “See how the blood is settled in his face.

“Oft have I seen a *timely*-parted ghost—of ashy semblance, meagre, pale, and *blood-less*—it being all descended to the labouring heart, which, in the conflict that it holds with death, attracts the same for aidance ’gainst the enemy. Within the heart, there it *cools*, and ne’er returneth to blush and beautify the cheek again!

“But *see!*—*his* face is dark and *full* of blood!—his *eyeballs* further out than when he lived, staring full ghastly like a *strangled* man!—his hair *upreared*, his nostrils stretched with *struggling*; his hands *abroad* deployed, as one that *grasped* and *tugged* for life, and was by strength *subduèd!*

“Look on the sheets! His hair, you see, is *sticking!*—his well-proportioned beard made *rough* and *ragged*, like the summer’s wheat by tempest dislodgèd!

“It cannot be but he was *murdered* here! The *least* of all these signs were probative!”

Suffolk challenges: “Why, Warwick, who should do the duke to death? Myself and Beaufort had him in *protection*—and we, I hope, sir, are no *murderers!*”

“But both of you were avowèd Duke Humphrey’s foes!” Warwick turns to the cardinal. “And *you*, forsooth, had the good duke to *keep!* ’Tis likely *you* would not *feast* him like a *friend!*—and ’tis *well seen* he found an *enemy!*”

The priest, gaping at the dead man and feeling nausea, makes no reply.

Margaret scorns Warwick’s implication. “Then belike you suspect *these noblemen* as guilty in Duke Humphrey’s but *timely* death?”

“Who that finds a heifer dead and *bleeding fresh*, and sees fast by a *butcher* with an *axe*, but will suspect ’twas he that made the slaughter?” demands Warwick. “Who finds a partridge in a predator’s nest but may imagine *how* the bird was dead?—although the hawk soar with unbloodied beak! Even so ‘suspicious’ is *this* tragedy!”

The queen laughs. “Are you a *butcher*, Suffolk? Where’s your *knife*? Is Beaufort termed a hawk? Where are his *talons*?”

“I wear no knife to slaughter *sleeping men!*” growls Suffolk, “but here’s a *vengeful sword*, rusted with ease, that shall be *scourèd* in his rancorous *heart* who *slanders* me with *murder*’s crimson badge!” He steps closer. “*Say*, if thou darest, proud lord of Warwickshire, that I am

faulty in Duke Humphrey's death!"

Warwick stands defiant. "What dares *not* Warwick, if *false Suffolk* dare him!"

The cardinal motions weakly to his attendants, and silently they leave the room.

Complains the queen of Warwick, "He *dares not* calm his *contumelious spirit*, nor cease to be an arrogant *controller*, though Suffolk dare him twenty thousand times!"

"Madam, *be still!*" cries Warwick. "With *reverence* I may say that—for every word you speak in *his* behalf is *slander* to your royal dignity!"

"*Blunt-witted* lord, *ignoble* in demeanor!" says Suffolk. "If ever lady *wronged* her lord so much, *thy mother* took into her blameful bed some stern, *untutored churl*, and noble stock was graft with a *crab-tree* slip!—whose fruit *thou* art, and never of the *Nevilles'* noble race!"

Warwick, furious, moves closer, a hand at his sword. "But that the *guilt of murder* shields thee, I should rob the deathsman of his fee, quitting *thee* thereby of *ten thousand shames!* And but that my *sovereign's presence* makes me mild, I would, *false, murderous coward*, on thy *knees* make thee *beg pardon* for thy passèd speech, and say it was *thy mother* that thou meant'st!—that thou thyself was *born in bastardy!*

"And after all that fearful homage done, *give thee thy pay*, and *send thy soul to hell*, pernicious blood-sucker of *sleeping men!*"

"*Thou* shall be waking well enough!—*I'll shed thy blood*, if from this presence thou darest go with me!" cries Suffolk.

"Away *even now*, or I will *drag thee* hence!" shouts Warwick, starting for the doors. "Unworthy though thou art, I'll cope with thee, and do some service to Duke Humphrey's ghost!"

The king, wiping his reddened eyes, watches as the two angry lords storm toward the courtyard, followed by Lord Salisbury.

Henry is confident that the outcome will reflect God's will. "What stronger breastplate than a heart untainted! *Thrice* is he armèd that hath his quarrel *just*; and he but *naked*, though locked up in steel, whose conscience with injustice is corrupted."

Queen Margaret looks fearfully to the doors; angry shouts can be heard outside. "What noise is this?"

Suffolk backs quickly into the hall with his blade drawn and raised, followed closely by Warwick, also brandishing a sword. Then men armed with pikes and knives burst into the room, followed by Salisbury.

King Henry rises, watching warily. "Why, *how now*, lords!" he protests. "Your wrathful *weapons drawn!*—*here*, in our presence! Dare you be so *bold?*" He points to the commoners. "Why, what tumultuous clamour have we *here?*"

Suffolk is desperate. "The traitorous Warwick with *the men of Bury*, set *all* upon me, mighty sovereign!"

Salisbury orders the townsmen, "Sirs, stand apart! The king shall know your mind." The yeomen grumble, but slowly they leave the room.

The old nobleman faces Henry. "Dread lord, the commons send you word by me: unless Lord Suffolk straight be done to *death*, or *banishèd* from fair England's territories, they will by *violence* tear him from your palace and *torture* him with grievous, *lingering* death!

"They say *by him* the good Duke *Humphrey* died! They say *in him* they fear *Your Highness'* death!—and sheer instinct of *love* and *loyalty*—free from any stubborn opposite intent, as being thought to contradict your liking—makes them thus forward in his banishment!

"They say, in care for your most royal *person*, that if *Your Highness* should intend to *sleep*, and charge that no man should *disturb* your rest, on pain of your dislike—on pain of *death!*—notwithstanding such a strong edict, if there were a *serpent* seen that with forkèd tongue glided slyly towards *Your Majesty*, it were but *necessary you were waked!*—lest, you being left in that harmful slumber, the lethal snake might make thy sleep *eternal!*

"And therefore do they cry, though you forbid, that *they will guard you*, whether you will or no, from such fell *serpents* as false *Suffolk* is, with whose envenomed and fatal sting your loving

uncle—twenty times *his* worth, they say—is shamefully bereft of life!”

A man demands, from the door: “An *answer* from the king, my lord of Salisbury!”

Suffolk sheathes his sword, fuming. “’Tis likely the *commons*, rude, unpolished *hinds*, could send such message to their *sovereign*! Were *you*, my lord, *glad* to be so employèd,” he asks the silver-haired nobleman, “to show how clever an *orator* you are! But all the *honour* Salisbury hath won is that he was the *lord ambassador* sent from an assortment of *tinkers* to the king!”

“An *answer from the king*,” calls another voice outside, “or we will all *break in*!”

Henry turns to the tall lord. “Go, Salisbury, and tell them all from me I thank them for their tender of loving care!”

“And had I not been incited so by them, yet did *I* purpose as they do entreat!—for surely *my* thoughts do *hourly* prophesy mischance unto my state *by Suffolk’s means*! And therefore by *his* majesty”—God’s—“I swear, whose far unworthy deputy I am: he shall not breathe infection into *this* air but three days longer, on the pain of *death*!”

Lord Salisbury bows deeply, and he goes out to speak to the crowd.

Queen Margaret moves to the king. “Oh, Henry, let me plead for gentle Suffolk!”

“*Un-gentle* queen, to call him ‘*gentle*’ Suffolk!” He raises a hand. “*No more, I say!* If thou dost plead for him, thou wilt but add *increase* unto my *wrath*!”

“Had I but *said*, I would have kept my word—but when I *swear*, it is *irrevocable*!”

He turns to Suffolk. “If, after three days’ space, thou here be’st found on any ground that I am ruler of, the *world* shall not be ransom for thy life!”

Suffolk is speechless; Margaret prudently holds her tongue.

The king motions for his attendants to follow. “Come, Warwick! Come, good Warwick,” he says wearily, “go with me; I have great matters to impart to thee.”

Soon the hall is empty but for the queen and her paramour—and the corpse.

She scowls at the still-open doors. “*Mischance* and *sorrow* go along with you! Heart’s discontent and sour *affliction* be playfellows to keep *you* company!”

Henry and Warwick have gone. “There’s *two* of you,” cries Margaret to the empty corridor, “may the *devil* make a *third*!—and threefold *vengeance* attend upon your steps!”

“Cease, gentle queen, these execrations, and let thy Suffolk take his heavy leave.”

“*Fie*, coward *woman* and soft-hearted *wretch*!” she complains to her cohort. “Hast thou not *spirit* to *curse* *thine enemy*?”

“A *plague* upon them!” he mutters. “Wherefore should I *curse* them? Could curses kill as doth the mandrake’s groan, I would invent as *bitter*, *searching terms* as ever curst!—as *harsh* and *horrible* to hear, delivered strongly through my fixèd teeth, with full as many signs of deadly *hate* as lean-facèd *Envy* in her loathsome cave! My *tongue* should *stumble* on mine earnest words!—mine *eyes* should spark like the beaten *flint*, my hair be fixèd *on end*, as in distraction!—*aye*, *every joint* should seem to *curse* and *damn*!”

“And even now my burthened heart would break should I *not* curse them!” he cries, clenching his fists. “*Poison* be their drink!—*gall*—*worse* than gall!—the *daintiest* that *they* taste! Their *sweetest* shade a grove of *cemetery* trees!” he rages. “Their chiefest view, *murdering basilisks*! Their softest touch as smarting as *lizard’s sting*! Their *music* frightful as the *serpents’ hiss*—and boding *screech*-owls make the concert full! All the foul terrors in dark-seated Hell—”

Margaret interrupts: “Enough, sweet Suffolk! Thou torment’st *thyself*—and these dread curses, like the sun ’gainst glass, or like an overchargèd gun, recoil, and turn the force of them upon *thyself*!”

“*You* bade me *damn*!—and will you bid me *stop*?” demands Suffolk. “Now, by the ground that I am *banished* from, well could I curse away a *winter’s night*, though standing *naked* on a mountain top where biting cold would never let grass grow, and think it but a *minute* spent in *sport*!”

“Oh, let me entreat thee *cease*!” she says, moving closer. “Give me thy hand, that I may dew it with my mournful *tears*! Ne’er let the rain of heaven wet this place, to wash away *my* woeful

monuments! Oh, could this kiss be *imprinted* in thy hand, that thou mightst think upon *these*,”—she touches her lips, “the seal through which a thousand sighs are breathed for thee!

“So get thee gone, that I may *know* my grief; ’tis but *surmisèd* whiles thou art standing by, as one *surfeits* thinking on a *want*!

“I will *repeal* thee, or, be well assured, adventure to be banished myself! And banishèd I *am*, if but *from thee*!

“Go; speak not to me; even now be gone!” But as he turns, she grasps his arm. “Oh, go not yet! Even two *friends*, *thus* condemnèd, *embrace!*” she cries, throwing her arms around his neck, “and *kiss*, and take *ten thousand* leaves, loather a hundred times to *part* than *die!*”

He responds to her kisses, but soon she pulls away. “Yet now farewell; and farewell *life* with thee!”

“Thus is poor Suffolk *ten times* banishèd,” he moans, despairing, “once by the king, and three times thrice by *thee!* ’Tis not the *land* I care for; wert *thou* thence; a *wilderness* is populous enough, so Suffolk had thy heavenly company! For where *thou* art, there is the world itself, with every several pleasure in the world!—and where thou art *not*, *desolation!*”

“I can no more!” he groans. “Live thou to joy *thy* life; for myself, no joy in aught but that *thou* livest!”

A knight of Beaufort’s household emerges from a corridor at the far end of the hall, and hurries toward the doors.

“Wither goes Vaux so fast?” calls Margaret. “What news, I prithee?”

Sir William pauses, turns, and bows to the queen. “To signify unto his majesty that Cardinal Beaufort is at point of death! For *suddenly* a grievous *sickness* took him that makes him gasp and stare!—and catch at the air, *blaspheming God*, and *cursing men on earth!*”

He comes closer, clearly very troubled. “Sometimes he talks as if Duke Humphrey’s *ghost* were by his side; sometime he calls the *king*, and whispers to his pillow, as if to *it*, the secrets of his overchargèd soul!—and I am sent to tell his majesty that even now he cries aloud for him!”

She nods; the priest’s confession could lessen suspicion of his cohorts. “Go tell this heavy message to the king.” The knight bows and goes.

“*Ay, me!* What is this world!” groans Margaret—wondering, now, what sins of hers the prelate may relate. “What news are these!”

She takes her lover’s hands. “But wherefore grieve I at an *hour’s* poor loss, omitting *Suffolk’s* exile?—my soul’s treasure! Why, Suffolk, I mourn only for *thee!*—and with the southern clouds contend in tears!—theirs for the earth’s increase, mine for my *sorrows!*”

“Now get thee *hence!* The king, thou know’st, is *coming!*—if thou be found beside me, thou art but dead!”

“If I depart from *thee*, I cannot *live!*” he protests. “And *in thy sight* to die, what were it else but like a pleasant *slumber* in thy lap? *Here* could I breathe my soul into the air, as mild and gentle as the cradle-babe lying with mother’s dug between its lips!—while *from* thy sight I should be raging *mad*, and *cry out* for thee to close mine eyes!—to have thee with thy lips stop up my mouth! So shouldst thou either *turn back* my flying soul, or I should breathe it so into *thy* body—and then it lived in sweet *Elysium!*”

“To die *by* thee were but to die in *jest*; *from* thee to die were *torture* more than death! Oh, let me stay, befall what may!”

“*Away!*” cries Margaret. “Though parting be a fretful corrosive, it is applièd to a *deathful wound!* To France, sweet Suffolk! Let me *hear* from thee!—for wheresoe’er thou art in this world’s globe, I’ll have an Iris”—swift messenger of the gods—“that shall find thee out!”

Suffolk kisses her hand. “I go.”

“And take my *heart* with thee!”

“A *jewel*, locked into the woeful’st cask that ever did contain a thing of worth!” He turns away. “Even as a splitted bark,”—a wrecked ship, “so sunder we this way, fall I to death!”

But Queen Margaret is already heading away to meet her husband. “This way for me.”

Chapter Seven Punishment

King Henry approaches the cardinal's bed. "How fares my lord? Speak, Beaufort, to thy sovereign."

The churchman squints, pale and unseeing in his anguish and fear. "If thou be'st *Death*, I'll give thee England's *treasure!*—enough to purchase such *another* island!—so thou wilt let me live, and feel no pain!"

Henry is disturbed by his uncle's unseemly dread. "*Ah*, what a sign it is of evil life, where death's approach is seen so terrible!"

From among other lords, Warwick steps forward. "Beaufort, it is thy *sovereign* speaks to thee," he says solemnly.

Says the feverish priest, "Bring me unto my trial when you will!" He frowns, trembling. "Died he not *in his bed*? Where *should* he die? Can I *make* men live, whether they will or no?"

"Oh, torture me *no more!* I will *confess!*"

He regards the king, who looks calm. "*Alive again?*" he cries eagerly. "Then *show* me, where he is!—I'll give a *thousand pound* to look upon him!"

But now the cardinal moans, staring in horror beyond the visitors—as if at a man back from the grave. "He hath no *eyes!*—the dust hath blinded them! Comb down his hair!—look, *look!*—it stands *upright!*—like limed twigs set to catch my winged *soul!*"

He sinks back, wiping his face with a shaking hand. "Give me some drink—and bid the apothecary bring the strong poison that I bought of him!"

Warwick shakes his head; he has an idea how that compound might have been used.

Henry kneels beside the bed, clasps his hands together, and closes his eyes in prayer. "O Thou, eternal mover of the heavens, look with a gentle eye upon this wretch! Oh, *beat away* the busy, meddling fiend that lays strong siege unto this wretch's soul, and from his bosom *purge* this black despair!"

Warwick watches as Beaufort's suffering deforms his face. "See how the pangs of death do make him groan!"

"Disturb him not," says Lord Salisbury. "Let him pass peaceably."

The king rises. "Peace to his *soul*, if it God's good pleasure be." He leans forward. "Lord cardinal, if thou think'st on heaven's bliss, hold up thy hand—make signal of thy hope!"

After a moment, Henry says, sorrowfully, "He dies, and makes no sign. O God, *forgive* him!"

Says Warwick gravely, "So bad a death argues a monstrous life."

"Forbear to judge, for we are sinners all," says Henry, slowly rising. "Close up his eyes, and draw the curtain; and let us all to meditation."

White birds gliding in the warm, golden sunset over quiet waters near the coast of Kent are scattered by the harsh noise of a cannon's blast.

An English galleon shudders under the impact of iron rounds hurled into it; already doomed to sink, it is grappled by many desperate men. The ship's trumpet alarum is cut short by the slash of a knife.

From their two-masted vessel, lighter and faster, more pirates clamber aboard, looking for treasure—and for travelers from wealthy families.

The thieves soon prevail, and several sailors' bloody bodies are tumbled overboard, left to drift down into the cold darkness of the deep.

Later, ashore beside a fire, the freebooters' captain, a former navy lieutenant, looks out at the western stars. He muses: "The gaudy, blabbing and remorseful day is crept into the bosom of the sea."

“And now loud-howling wolves arouse the jades”—flying steeds—“that drag the tragic, melancholy night, who with their drowsy, slow and flagging wings, clip dead men’s graves, and from their misty jaws breathe foul, contagioned darkness into the air.”

He rouses himself, rubbing his strong hands together eagerly. “Therefore bring forth the survivors of our prize!” he orders his second. “For whilst our pinnace anchors in the downs,”—lies hidden among nearby shoals treacherous to strangers, “here shall they march their *ransom* on the sand, or *with their blood* stain this shore *discoloured!*”

The pirate crew shoves forward three gentlemen whose arms are pinioned behind them.

The captain looks at the more prosperous-looking two. “Master, this prisoner freely give I thee!” he tells his boatswain, pointing to the older. “And thou that art his mate, make boot of this!” He tells an angry man whose head is wrapped in a bloody bandage, “The other, Walter Whitmore, is *thy* share!”

“What is my ransom, master?” asks the older gentleman. “Let me know.”

“A *thousand crowns*, or else lay down your *head!*”

“And so much shall *you* give,” the first mate tells his reward, “or off goes *yours!*”

The captain is annoyed by the travelers’ discomfiture. “*What?* Bear you the name and port of ‘gentlemen,’ yet think it *much* to pay two thousand crowns?”

“*Cut both the villains’ throats!*” he growls. He glares at the prisoners. “For *die* you *shall!*—the lives of those which *we* have lost in fight be not counterpoised with such a petty sum!”

“I’ll *give* it, sir,” says the taller gentleman, “and therefore spare my life.”

“*And so will I,*” cries the older, “and write home for it *straight!*”

But Whitmore grabs his prisoner by the arm. “I *lost mine eye* in laying the prize aboard, and therefore to *revenge* it shalt thou *die!*” He scowls at the other two. “And so should *these*, if I might have *my* will!”

“Be not so rash!” says the pragmatic captain. “Take *ransom*; let him live.”

“Look on my *George*,” says the tall captive—the disguised Lord Suffolk—haughtily. The ribbon he pulls from beneath his worn, faded doublet bears the badge of St. George—awarded by the crown to knighthood’s highest order. “Rate me at what thou wilt, thou shalt be paid. I am a *gentleman!*”

“And so am *I*—my name is Wa’ter *Whitmore*.” He is surprised when the prisoner recoils. “*How now?* Why start’st thou? What, doth death *affright?*”

“Thy *name* affrights me, in whose *sound* is death! A cunning man”—the late astrologer Roger Bolingbroke—“did calculate my birth, and told me that *by water* I should die.” He adds, “Yet let not this make thee be bloody-minded; thy name is ‘*Gaultier*,’ being rightly sounded.”

“*Goal-tear* or Wa’ter—which it *is!*—I care not,” mutters the pirate. “Never yet did base dishonour blur *our* name—when broken be my sword, my coat of arms torn and defaced, and I proclaimed a coward through the world—but with our *sword* we wiped *away* the blot!” he boasts regally. “Therefore *merchant*-like I sell *revenge!*” He draws a knife.

“*Stay*, Whitmore,” the captain now commands, “for thy prisoner is a *prince*—the Duke of Suffolk, William de la Pole!”

Whitmore is doubtful. “The Duke of *Suffolk*—muffled up in *rags?*”

“Aye, but these rags are no part of the *duke*,” says William. “*Jove* sometimes went disguised, and why not *I?*”

The captain has learned of Gloucester’s murder. “But *Jove* was never *slain*—as *thou* shalt be!” he says dourly, moving closer.

Suffolk regards the cashiered naval officer with open contempt. “Obscure and lowly *swain*, King Henry’s blood—the honourable blood of *Lancaster!*—must not be shed by such a *jaded groom!*”

“Hast thou not *kissed thy hand*, holding my *stirrup!*—plodded bare-headed beside my foot-cloth *mule*, and thought thee *happy* when I but *gave a nod?* How often hast thou waited for my *cup*, fed from off my *trencher*, *kneeled down* at the table when I have feasted with *Queen*

Margaret? Remember—and let it make thee crest-fall'n—*aye*, and belay this thy abortive pride!—how in our voiding lobby hast thou stood and dully *waited* for my coming forth!

“This hand of mine hath writ in thy behalf,”—for his naval commission, “and therefore shall it charm thy riotous tongue!”

“Speak, captain,” says Whitmore, eager for vengeance. “Shall I *stab* the forlorn swain?”

“First let my *words* stab him, as he hath *me*.”

Suffolk scoffs. “Base slave, thy words are *blunt*—and so art *thou*!”

The captain shrugs. “Convey him hence, and at our longboat’s side strike off his head.”

“Thou *darest* not, for thine *own* head!”

“Yes, *Pool*.”

“Pole!”

“*Pool*! Sir *Pool*, lord!” shouts the captain. “*Aye, sink!—kennel puddle!*—whose *dirt* and *filth* trouble the silver spring where *England* drinks!

“Now will I *dam up* this thy yawning mouth, for *swallowing* the treasure of the *realm*! Thy lips that kissed the *queen* shall sweep the *ground*!—and thou that *smiledst* at good Duke Humphrey’s death shalt grin in vain into the insensible *winds*!—which in *contempt* shall *hiss* at thee again!

“And *wedded* be thou to the *hags of Hell* for daring to affy a mighty lord unto the daughter of a worthless king having neither subject, wealth, nor diadem!

“By devilish *politics* art thou grown great and, like ambitious Sylla, overgorgèd with gobbets of thy mother’s”—England’s—“bleeding heart! By *thee* were Anjou and Maine *sold to France*! The false, revolting Normans in Picardy through *thee* disdain to call us lord!—have *slain* their governors, *surprised* our forts, and sent the ragged soldiers home *wounded*!

“The princely Warwick, and the Nevilles all, whose dreadful swords were never drawn in vain, in *hating thee* are rising up in arms! And now the *House of York*—thrust *from* the crown by shameful murder of a guiltless king, under lofty, proud, encroaching *tyranny*!—burns with *revenging fire*!—whose hopeful colours our half-facèd *sun*”—Richard—“advances, striving to *shine*, under the which is writ *Invitis nubibus!*”—the motto *Despite clouds*.

Cries the enraged captain, “The *commons* here in Kent are *up in arms*!

“And, to conclude, *reproach* and *beggary* are crept into the palace of our *king*!—and *all by thee*!

“*Away!* Convey him hence!”

Suffolk is red-faced with fury. “*Oh*, that I were a *god*, to shoot forth *thunder* upon these paltry, servile, abject *drudges*! Small things make *base* men proud: *this* villain, here, being captain of a *pinnace*, threatens more than *Bargulus*, the strong *Illyrian* pirate!” He sneers. “*Drones* suck not *eagles’* blood, but rob *beehives!*” The nobleman is defiant: “It is impossible that I should die by such a lowly *vassal* as thyself! Thy words move *rage*, and not remorse, in *me*!

“I go with message from the *queen* to the *King of France*! I charge thee, *waft me safely cross the channel!*”

The captain nods toward the boat. “Walter—”

Whitmore grins. “Come, Suffolk, I must *waft* thee to thy *death!*”

The duke backs away, thinking, *Gelidus timor occupat artus!*—cold fear grips me. “It is *thee* I fear!”

Whitmore roughly grabs the front of his coat. “Thou shalt have *cause* to fear before I leave thee! *What?*—are ye *daunted* now? *Now* will ye stoop?”

“My gracious lord, *entreat* him!” urges the older gentleman. “Speak him *fair!*”

But the duke refuses. “*Suffolk’s* imperial tongue is stern and rough, used to *command*, untaught to plead for favour! Far be it we should honour such as *these* with humble suit! *No*, rather let my *head* stoop to the block than these *knees* bow to any save to the God of heaven, and to my king!—and sooner may it dance upon a bloody pole than stand uncovered to *the vulgar groom!*”

“True nobility is *exempt* from fear! More can *I* bear than *you* dare execute!”

The captain is disgusted. “Haul him away, and let him talk no more.”

“Come, *soldiers*, show whatever cruelty ye *can*,” demands Suffolk scornfully, “that thus my death may never be forgot! Great men *oft* die by vile *bezonians*: a Roman sworder and *banditto* slave murdered sweet *Tully*; Brutus’ bastard hand stabbed *Julius Caesar*, savage islanders, *Pompey the Great!*—and *Suffolk* dies by *pirates!*”

Whitmore happily agrees, and pulls him toward the longboat.

The captain tells the master, “And as for these whose ransom we have set, it is our pleasure one of them depart. Therefore come you with *us*,” he tells the younger passenger, “and let him *go*.” The other gentleman is to arrange payment for their freedom.

As the graying captive, his hands untied, walks along the shore, he passes Whitmore—who, laughing, hoists Suffolk’s severed head, still dribbling blood, and dangles it by the hair.

The pirate drops his grim trophy onto the hard, damp sand. “There let his head and lifeless body lie, until the *queen*, his *mistress*, bury it!” He stamps away to join his mates.

The nobleman stares down, aghast. *Oh, barbarous and bloody spectacle!*

His body will I bear unto the king. If he revenge it not, yet will his friends!—so will the queen that living held him dear!

He hurries up a road into the town.

Chapter Eight Insurrection

In Blackheath, a few miles south of London, a young blacksmith urges his wary friend, “Come and get thee a *sword*, though made of a lath! They have been *up* these *two days!*” But Nick, an old man, does not relish involvement in the rebellion. “Then they have the more need to *sleep*, now.”

“I tell thee, Jack Cade the *clothier* means to ‘dress’—address—“the *commonwealth!*” says George. The southern uprising is growing, and the working men nearing them are among thousands who have rallied to join Cade’s movement, begun at Kent. Another play on *dress* occurs to the smithy: “And to *turn* it, and set a *new* nap upon it!”—spruce it up.

“So he had need—for ‘tis *threadbare*,” grumbles his graybeard companion. “Well, *I* say it was never merry world in England since *gentlemen* came up.” That rising class, eager for acquisition, exercises increasing economic power, and thus political influence.

The younger man concurs. “Oh, miserable age! Virtue is not regarded in *hand-crafts* men.”

“The nobility think *scorn* to those in leather aprons,” says Nick, a cobbler.

“Aye! What’s more, the king’s *Council* are not good *workmen!*”

“True; but still it is said, ‘*Labour* in *thy* vocation.’” Nick adapts the maxim: “Which is as much as to say, ‘Let the magistrates be *labouring* men.’ And therefore should *we* be *magistrates!*”

“Thou hast hit it!” says George, “for there’s no better sign of a brave *mind* than a hard *hand!*”

“I *see* them!” cries Nick, pointing. “*I see them!*” Approaching is a throng of men, many armed with clubs and sharpened poles, that has grown ever larger as it traveled toward the capital. “There’s Best’s son, the tanner of Wingham!”

“He shall have the skin of our *enemies*, to make dog’s-leather of!”

“And Dick the butcher!”

“Then is *Sin* struck down like an ox, and *Iniquity*’s throat cut like a calf!”

“And Smith the weaver!”

“*Ergo*, their thread of life is *spun!*”—as if played out by one of the Fates, three goddesses, and soon to be cut by another. George points to the men. “Come, *come*, let’s fall in with them!”

The two tradesmen join the amassing crowd, and a man with a drum strikes up a marching

cadence.

As the protesters surge northward, a tall firebrand is striding at the fore, waving his raised right arm. He cries out: "*We, John Cade*—so termed after our *supposed* father—"

Or rather for stealing a cade of herrings! thinks the brawny man walking beside him. Dick works as a butcher in Kent. Cade's royal *we* amuses him.

"—are inspired with the spirit of *putting down* kings and princes! Our enemies shall fall before us!" But Cade frowns; his prophetic words are being lost in the commotion. "Command silence," he tells Dick.

"*Silence!*" bellows the butcher.

Cade, who styles himself a nobleman, continues. "My father was a *Mortimer!*"—a relative of King Richard II's declared heir.

He was an honest man, thinks Dick, of the mortarer, *and a good bricklayer*.

"My mother a Plantagenet!"—a royal line from which stemmed, through King Edward III, the Houses of both York and Lancaster.

I knew her well; she was a midwife.

"My wife descended of the Lacies!"—a family of English nobility.

She was indeed: a pedler's daughter, and sold many laces.

Smith, the Kentish weaver, also knows her. *But now of late, not able to travel with her furred pack*, —wealthier women— *she washes laundry there at home!*

"Wherefore am I of an honourable house!" calls Cade.

Dick concurs. *Aye, by my faith, the field* —also the term for an area on a coat of arms— *is honourable; and there was he born—under a hedge, for his father had never a house but the cage!* —jail.

"*Valiant* I am!" cries Cade to the marching men.

He must needs be—for begging is bold! thinks the weaver dryly.

"I am able to endure much!"

No question about that, thinks Dick, *for I have seen him whipped three market-days together!* —punished so by a town beadle.

"I fear neither *sword* nor *fire!*" proclaims Cade.

- "He *need* not fear the sword," says the weaver privately to the butcher, "for his coat is of proof!"—thickly waterproofed with pitch.

- "But methinks he should stand in fear of *fire*," says Dick, "being burnt i' the hand"—branded as a thief—"for stealing of sheep!"

Cade exhorts the multitude. "Be *brave*, then, for your *captain* is brave, and vows *reformation!*" he cries—not intending irony. "There shall be in England *seven* halfpenny loaves sold for a penny!—a three-hooped pot shall have *ten* hoops!—and I will make it a *felony* to drink *small* beer!"

His hyperbole is roundly applauded.

"*All the realm* shall be in *common!*"—open to everyone's animals for grazing, he promises, "and in *Cheapside* shall *my* palfrey go to grass!" His horse will graze in London's district of thriving commerce, he claims.

He cries, exuberantly, "And when I am *king!*—as king *I will be!*—"

"*God save Your Majesty!*" shout many.

Cade waves, "I thank you, good people!—there shall be *no money!* All shall eat and drink on *my* score!"—his account, "and I will apparel all in *one livery*, that they may agree like brothers, and worship me, their lord!"

"The first thing we do, let's *kill all the lawyers!*" cries Dick.

"*Aye, that* I mean to *do!*" crows Cade. "Is not this a lamentable thing, that of the skin of an *innocent lamb* should be made parchment, and that *parchment*, being scribbled o'er, should *undo* a man?"

"Some say the *bee* stings; but I say 'tis the bee's *wax!*—for I did but unseal *one thing*,"—a

lawsuit summons, “and I was never mine own man since!”

Cade spots a fearful man being pushed forward roughly through the unruly crowd. “How now! Who’s there?”

“The *Clerk* of Chatham,” Smith tells him. “He can *write* and read, and cast *account*!” the weaver charges, with immense disgust.

Cade glares. “Oh, *monstrous!*” In workmen’s lives, writings mean only further oppression, mathematics only more taxation.

“We took him setting boys on *copies!*”

“*Here’s a villain!*” cries Cade.

Smith points angrily. “He has a book in his pocket with *red letters* in’t!”

They are, in fact, a calendar’s designation of the saints’ days, but Cade is appalled. “*Nay!*—then he is a *conjurer!*”

“*Aye!*” cries Dick, also a victim of the law’s devilish process. “He can make *obligations*, and write *court-hand!*”

Cade shakes his head sadly. “I am sorry for’t! The man is a proper man, on mine honour,” he allows, charitably. “Unless I find him guilty, he shall not die,” he declares to the crowd.

“Come hither, sirrah, I must examine thee,” Cade tells the clerk. “What is thy name?”

“Emmanuel.”

“They used to write that on the top of *letters!*” cries Dick. The butcher—unaware that the common prefix to correspondence means *God with us*—scowls at the literate man. “’T will go *hard* with you!”

“Let *me*, alone,” Cade tells his lieutenant, pushing past him. “Dost thou use to *write* thy name?” he asks the clerk, “or hast thou a *mark* to thyself, like an *honest, plain-dealing* man.”

“Sir, I thank God, I have been so well brought up that I can write my name.”

Angry outcries surrounds him. “He hath *confessed!*” “Away with him!” “He’s a *villain* and a *traitor!*”

Cade agrees. “*Away* with him, I say! *Hang* him!—with his pen and ink-horn about his neck!”

The poor clerk is dragged away, terrified, and soon will meet his death.

A stabler’s boy trots among the men, making his way toward the front. “Where’s our general?”

Cade is pleased with that. “*Here I am*, thou particular fellow!”

“Fly, fly, *fly!*” warns young Michael, pointing to the north. “Sir Humphrey Stafford and his brother are hard by, with the *king’s* forces!” He starts to run.

“*Stand*, villain!” cries Cade, grabbing the lad’s arm. “*Stand*, or I’ll fell thee down!” He looks up the street, toward the advancing troops. “He shall be encountered with a man as good as *himself!* He is but a *knight*, is ’a?”

Michael nods.

“To equal him,” says Cade, “I will make *myself* a knight immediately!” He kneels, and says regally, “Rise up *Sir John Mortimer!*” He comes to his feet. “Now *have at* him!”

Sir Humphrey rides toward Cade, boldly leading a dozen troops; they are armed with steel blades—broadswords and tall halberds—and the townsmen make way.

“Rebellious *hinds*, the filth and *scum* of Kent, marked for the *gallows!*” shouts the knight angrily, “*lay your weapons down!* Home to your *cottages!*”

“Forsake this *groom!*” he demands, pointing at Cade. “The king is *merciful*, if you *so* revolt!”

“But angry, wrathful, and inclined to *blood* if you go forward!” warns Sir William. “Therefore yield or *die!*”

Cade laughs. “For these silken-coated slaves *I’ll* pass *not!*” he calls out. “It is to *you*, good people, that I speak, over whom, in time to come, I hope to reign—for *I* am *rightful* heir unto the crown!”

“*Villain*, thy father was a *plasterer!*” cries Sir Humphrey, “and thou thyself a *shearman*, art thou not?”

Cade shrugs. "And *Adam* was a *gardener!*"

"What of that?" challenges Sir William.

"Marry, *this*: Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March, married the Duke of Clarence's daughter, did he not?"

"Aye, sir," says Sir Humphrey gruffly.

"By her he had two children at one birth."

Sir William frowns. "That's *false!*" There was no twin.

"Aye, *there's the question!*—but *I* say 'tis *true!*" insists Cade. "The elder of them, being put to nurse, was by a beggar-woman *stolen away*—and, ignorant of his birth and parentage, he became a bricklayer when he came to age! His son am *I!*—deny it, if you can!"

"Aye, 'tis *too true!*" cries Dick. "Therefore *he shall be king!*"

Smith, too, supports the pretender: "Sir, he made a chimney in my father's house—and the bricks are alive at this day to *testify* it! Therefore deny it not!"

Sir Humphrey looks out over the workmen. "And will you credit this base *drudge's* words, that speaks *he knows not what?*"

Harsh voices reply: "Aye, marry, *will* we!" "Therefore get ye gone!"

Sir William is indignant. "Jack Cade, the *Duke of York* hath taught you this!"

He lies, thinks Cade, *for I invented it myself!* "Go to, *sirrah!*" The knight flushes at that insult. "Tell the king from me that, for his *father's* sake—Henry the Fifth, in whose time boys went to encounters for '*French crowns*,'"—a gibe on conquering, taking gold, and contracting syphilis, "I am content he shall reign," says Cade, in specious magnanimity. "But *I'll* be *protector* over him!" he shouts. The crowd laughs and cheers.

"And furthermore, we'll have *Saye's head*," says Dick fiercely, "for *selling the dukedom of Maine!*" He long ago encountered, to his sorrow, Lord Saye, the former sheriff of Kent, one of the Duke of Suffolk's allies and now King Henry's treasurer—despised for being the national tax collector.

Cries Cade to the citizens, "With good *reason*, and *fain* to go on a *staff*, but that my *puissance* hold it up! Fellow kings, I tell you that Lord Saye hath *gelded* the commonwealth, and made it an *eunuch!*—for thereby is *England maimed!*"

"And, more than that, *he can speak French!*—and therefore he is a *traitor!*"

Sir Humphrey regards him contemptuously. "Oh *gross* and miserable *ignorance!*"

"Nay, *answer*, if you can!" insists Cade. "The Frenchmen are our *enemies!* Go to, then!"

"I ask but this," he cries out to the crowd. "Can he that speaks with the tongue of an *enemy* be a good *counsellor*, or no?"

"*No!*" comes the loud response. "*No!*" "And therefore we'll have his *head!*"

Sir William turns to his brother. "Well, seeing gentle *words* will not prevail, assail them with the troops of the king!"

"Herald, away!" commands Sir Humphrey, "and throughout every town *proclaim them traitors* that are up with Cade!—and those who fly before the battle ends may—even in their *wives'* and *children's* sight—be *hanged up* for *example* at their *doors!*"

"And you that be the king's *friends*," he calls out, "follow me!"

The Staffords turn and ride away, leading their contingent of soldiers back toward the king's army.

"And you that love the *commons*, follow *me!*" shouts Cade. "Now show yourselves *men!* 'Tis for *liberty!*"

"We will not leave one lord, one gentleman! Spare none but such as go in *clouted shoon*,"—laborers' hobnail shoes, "for they are thrifty, *honest* men, and such as would, but that they *dare* not, take *our* parts!"

The butcher points up the street; behind the knights are hundreds of soldiers in formation. "They are *all in order*, and *march toward us!*"

"But *we* are in order when we are most *out of order!*" cries Cade. "Come, *march forward!*"

Despite their trumpets' encouragement and superior arms, the ranks of proud troops sent as a vanguard to quash the uprising are surprised—and soon overwhelmed, when waves of angry men swarm against them, battering down shield and sword with crude cudgels. Civilians' knives, they learn, cut throats as effectively as military blades.

Surrounded, Sir Humphrey's black charger rears up, its iron-clad hooves pawing forward to strike at yeomen; but as it comes down, a sharpened oak pole, angled against the ground, pierces the beast. Neighing in agony, the stallion struggles and rolls over onto the knight, who is quickly dispatched by a jubilant tailor.

Not far away, a farmer's rope pulls Sir William from his mount; he rises and kills two boys with his bloody sword before being clubbed down, then pounded to death by their furious father.

Jack Cade happily surveys the havoc, as the surviving soldiers flee back toward the Thames. "Where's Dick, the butcher of Ashford?"

"Here, sir."

Cade beams. "They fell before thee like *sheep* and *oxen!*—and thou behavedst thyself as if thou hadst been *in thine own slaughter-house!*

"Therefore thus will I *reward* thee: the Lent shall be *as long again* as it is, and thou shalt have a licence to kill for a hundred lacking one!" Unique permission to butcher ninety-nine animals during the doubled Lenten prohibition of others' meat will be highly profitable.

Dick smiles and bows. "I desire no more."

"And, to speak truth, thou deservest no *less!*"

Cade pulls Sir Humphrey's blood-spattered helmet from the corpse. "This monument of the victory will I bear, and the bodies shall be dragged at my horse's heels till I do come to London—where we will have the *mayor's sword borne before us!*"

Dick advises, "If we mean to thrive and do good, break open the jails and let out the prisoners!" He knows, only too well, the way to Marshalsea—the debtors' prison.

"Fear not *that*, I warrant thee!" says Cade, nodding.

"*Come*, let's march towards *London!*"

Chapter Nine Assault on the Capital

At the palace, King Henry unfolds a petition of demands, sent ahead by Cade's rebels, and brought here by the Duke of Buckingham. With them are Lord Saye and the queen.

Henry has directed that William de la Pole's remains be taken to the Suffolk family mausoleum at Wingfield for burial; but Margaret, deeply mourning, still cradles his linen-wrapped head in her arms.

- She paces, alone. *Oft have I heard that grief softens the mind, degenerates and makes it fearful; think therefore on revenge, and cease to weep!*

- *But who can look on this and cease to weep?* She presses the stained bundle to her heart. *Here may his head lie on my throbbing breast!—but where's the body that I should embrace?*

The lords are concerned with the swift approach of defiant English citizens—thousands of them. "What answer makes Your Grace to the rebels' supplication?" asks Buckingham.

"I'll send some holy *bishop* to *entreat*," says Henry, "for God forbid so many simple souls should perish by the sword! And I *myself*, rather than bloody war shall cut them short, will parley with Jack Cade, their general."

He looks at the document. "But stay; I'll read it over once again...."

Margaret lifts a fold in the cloth. *Ah, barbarous villains! Hath this lovely face ruled over me like a wandering planet, yet could it not enforce them to relent who were unworthy to behold the same?*

Henry looks up, appalled, from the paper. “Lord Saye, Jack Cade hath sworn to have thy head!”

The treasurer smiles comfortably. “Aye, but I hope Your Highness shall have *his!*”

Henry glances at Margaret. “How now, madam? Still lamenting and mourning for Suffolk’s death? I fear me, love, if that *I* had been dead, thou wouldst not have mourned so much for *me.*”

She says, without looking up, “No, my love, I should not mourn, but *die* for thee.”

Henry nods; he needs to believe in her affection.

A captain of the guard rushes into the throne room.

“How now! What news?” asks the king. “Why comest thou in such haste?”

“The rebels are in *Southwark!*”—just across the Thames. “*Fly*, my lord! Jack Cade proclaims himself *Lord Mortimer*, descended from the Duke of Clarence’s house—and openly calls Your Grace *usurper!*—and vows to crown *himself* in Westminster!

“His army is a raggèd multitude of hinds and peasants, rude and *merciless!* Sir Humphrey Stafford and his brother’s demise hath given them heart, and courage to proceed!

“All scholars, lawyers, courtiers, gentlemen they call false *caterpillars*, and intend their death!”

King Henry is disturbed. “Oh, *graceless* men! They know not what they do . . .”

Buckingham urges caution: “My gracious lord, return to Killingworth”—a castle in Warwickshire—“until a power be raised to put them down!”

Margaret fumes, staring at Henry. *Ah, were the Duke of Suffolk now alive, these Kentish rebels would be soon pacified!*

“Lord Saye, the traitors *hate* thee,” says Henry. “Therefore away with us to Killingworth.”

The nobleman demurs. “Thus might Your Grace’s person be endangered; the *sight* of me is odious in their eyes. And therefore in this city will I stay, and live alone as secretly as I may.”

A sergeant, runs, nearly breathless, into the tall chamber; he pulls off his hat and bows. “Jack Cade hath gotten *London Bridge!* The citizens *fly*, and *forsake their houses!*

“The rascal *people*, thirsting after *prey*, join with the *traitor!*—and they jointly swear to *despoil* the city and *your royal court!*”

Buckingham motions toward the doors. “Then linger not, my lord!—*away, take horse!*”

“Come, Margaret,” says Henry, “God, our hope, will succor us.”

She precedes him in glum silence. *My hope is gone, now Suffolk is deceased.*

King Henry looks back to Lord Saye as they go out. “Farewell, my lord! Trust not the Kentish rebels!”

“Trust *nobody*, for fear you be *betrayed!*” urges Buckingham.

The treasurer is calmly confident. “The trust I have is in mine *innocence*, and therefore am I bold and resolute.”

Buckingham nods as he leaves; but his own faith is in battalions.

Worried, Lord Thomas de Scales, responsible for protecting the Tower of London—which includes an armory—comes out onto one of its southern parapets, and peers down to the street below; this side is, briefly, quiet again. Several citizens approach hurriedly, and he calls down. “How now! Is Jack Cade slain?”

“No, my lord—nor *likely* to be slain!” cries a portly old councilor, “for they have won the *bridge*, killing all those that withstand them! The lord mayor craves *aid* of Your Honour from the Tower, to defend the city from the rebels!”

“Such aid as I can spare you shall command,” says Scales, “but I am troubled here with them *myself!*—the rebels have assayed to *win the Tower!* But get you to Smithfield and gather head,”—assemble forces, “and thither I will send you Matthew Goffe!” The well-known captain is a veteran of the valiant fighting to hold England’s captured lands in Normandy.

“*Fight* for your king, your country, and your *lives!*”

“And so farewell, for I must hence again!” He goes inside.

The gentlemen return to tell the mayor that Goffe will bring help.

Rebellious countrymen stand boldly with Cade on Cannon Street. “Now is *Mortimer* lord of this city!” cries their commander, using the identity he has bestowed upon himself.

“And here, sitting upon London Stone,”—the ancient Roman marker from which the main streets radiate, “I charge and command that, at the city’s cost, the Pissing Conduit”—a fountain supplying a central market’s water—“run nothing but *claret wine* this first *year* of our reign!” Thus he both expropriates and vastly enlarges a royal tradition.

“And now henceforward it shall be *treason* for any that calls me other than *Lord Mortimer!*”

As he turns to survey the broad thoroughfares, one of his new followers comes running with news. “Jack Cade! *Jack Cade!*” calls George.

The commoners’ leader scowls. “*Knock him down* there!” he orders, with a careless wave. The startled youth is clubbed to his knees, and he cries out as a sword, taken from a murdered soldier, pierces his back.

Smith jerks the blade free and wipes blood from it onto the corpse. “If this fellow be wise,” he says wryly, “he’ll never call ye *Jack Cade* more!” He casts a meaningful glance at the men around them. “I think he hath made a very fair *warning*.”

The butcher has already heard the news; he tells Cade, “My *lord*, there’s an army gathered together in Smithfield.”

“Come, then, let’s go *fight* with them! But first, go and set London Bridge *on fire!*—and, if you can, *burn down the Tower*, too!

“Come, let’s *away!*”

The royal forces formed up at Smithfield by Matthew Goffe confront the rebels’ irregulars—and warriors found gallant in chivalry now fall under the tumultuous fury of a reckless, angry crowd. Goffe himself is slain.

Cade calls together his corps of rustic captains. “*So, sirs!* Now go, some, and pull down the Savoy!”—the Duke of Lancaster’s town residence. “Others to the Inns of Court,”—chambers of legal societies and their lawyers, “and *down with them all!*”

The butcher comes forward. “I have a suit unto Your *Lordship*.”

Cade is delighted. “*Be* it for a lordship, thou shalt *have* it for that word!”

Dick is eager for the new order. “That the *laws* of England may come only out of *your mouth!*”

- “*Mass*, ’twill be *sore* law, then,” whispers Holland to the weaver, “for he was thrust in the mouth with a spear—and his tongue’s not *whole* yet!” He implies a bloody duplicity.

- “*Nay, John,*” replies Smith, his voice hushed, “it will be *stinking* law—for his breath stinks with eating *toasted cheese!*”—the poor man’s meat.

Cade announces, “I have thought upon it; it shall be *so!*”

“*Away!*—burn all the records of the realm!—*my mouth* shall be the Parliament of England!”

- “Then we are likely to have *biting* statutes, unless his teeth be pulled out,” mutters Holland.

“And henceforward *all things* shall be in common!” proclaims Cade, calling an end to private property.

One of his lieutenants, fresh from venturing toward the palace, comes to Cade and bows. “My lord, a *prize, a prize!*” He points to a hatless and coatless old nobleman, his shirt torn, being prodded along, hands tied before him. “Here’s the *Lord Saye*, which *sold the towns in France!*”

He adds—with even greater indignation: “He that made us pay one-and-twenty *fifteenths*, and one *shilling* to the *pound* for the last subsidy!” The tax for the cost of bringing Queen Margaret from France was actually *one* fifteenth; and Parliament had authorized the one-shilling tax for support of the crown.

An old cobbler shoves Lord Saye forward.

“Well, he shall be *beheaded* for it *ten times!*” cries Cade. “*Ah, thou saye,*”—also a word for

silk, “thou *serge*,” he gibes, “nay, thou *buckram* lord! Now art thou within point-blank range of our regal jurisdiction! What canst thou *answer* to my majesty for the giving up of *Normandy* unto Mounseieur ‘*Basimecue*,’”—as in *baise mon cul*, or *kiss my ass*, “the dauphin of France?”

“Be it known unto thee by these presents—even the presence of *Lord Mortimer*—that I am the broom that must sweep the court clean of such *filth* as *thou* art! Thou hast most traitorously *corrupted* the youth of the realm by erecting a *grammar school*!—and whereas before our forefathers had no other books but the score and the tally,”—the bar tab and bill, “*thou* hast caused *printing* to be used, and, contrary to the king, his crown and *dignity*, thou hast built a *paper-mill*!”

“It will be proved to thy face that thou hast men about thee that talk casually of a *noun* and a *verb* and such!—*abominable* words as no *Christian* ear can endure to hear!

“Thou hast appointed justices of peace to call *poor* men before them about matters they were *not able to answer*!”—did not understand. “Moreover, thou hast put them in *prison*; and because they could not *read*, thou hast *hanged* them—when, indeed, for *that* cause alone they have been most worthy to *live*!”

“Thou dost ride on a foot-cloth, dost thou not?” The nobleman’s steed goes adorned with costly fabric complementing Saye’s livery.

“What of that?”

“Marry, thou oughtest not to let thy *horse* wear a cloak, when honester men than *thou* go in their hose and doublets!”

“And work in their *shirts*, too!” growls Dick with menace, clapping a fist to blood-stained front of his open jerkin—“as *myself*, for example, that am a *butcher*!”

Lord Saye begins to protest: “You men of Kent—”

“What say you of *Kent*?” cries Dick, instantly angry.

“Nothing but this: ’tis ‘*bona terra, mala gens*!’”—good land, bad people.

“*Away with him, away with him!*” cries Cade, “he speaks *Latin*!”

“Hear me but speak,” demands Saye, “then bear me where you will.

“Kent, in the *Commentaries* that Caesar writ, is termèd the civil’st place of this isle! Sweet is the country, because full of riches, the people liberal, valiant, active, wealthy—which makes me hope you are not void of *pity*!”

“I *sold* not Maine; I *lost* not Normandy!—and to *recover* them, would lose my life!

“*Justice with honour* have I always done: *prayers* and *tears* have moved me; gifts could *never*!”

“When have I aught exacted from your hands but to maintain the king, the realm, and *you*?”

“Large gifts have I bestowed on my learnèd clerks, because my *book*”—of careful accounts—“I proffered to the *king*!”

“And seeing that *ignorance* is the curse of God, *knowledge* the wing wherewith we fly to heaven—unless you be *possessèd* by *devilish spirits*, you cannot but *forbear* murdering me!

“This tongue hath parleyed unto foreign kings for your behoof—”

Cade scoffs. “*Tsk*, when struck’st thou *one blow* in the *field*?”

“Great men have *reaching* hands,” argues the courtier. “*Oft* have I struck those that I never saw, and struck them dead!”

“Oh, monstrous *coward*!” retorts the smith. “What?—to come *behind* folks!”

“These cheeks are pale from watching *for your good*!” insists old Lord Saye.

Cade only laughs. “Give him a box o’ the head, and that will make ’em red again!”

“Long sitting to determine poor men’s causes”—considering their pleadings, as lord chamberlain—“hath made me full of sickness and diseases!”

“Ye shall have a *hempen* caudle, then,” says Cade, “and the help of *hatchet*!”—the comfort of a hangman’s rope, relief of an executioner’s ax.

Dick moves closer to the nobleman, staring intently. “Why dost thou quiver, man?”

“The *palsy*, and not fear, provokes me.”

“Nay, he *nods* at us!—as if to say, ‘I’ll be *even* with you!’” charges Cade angrily. “I’ll see if his head will stand steadier on a *pole* or no! Take him away and *behead* him!”

“Tell me wherein I have offended!” cries Lord Saye. “Have I affected wealth?—or *honour*? *Speak!* Are my chests filled up with extorted gold? Is my apparel sumptuous to behold? Whom have I injured, that ye seek my death?”

“These *hands* are free, guiltless of blood-shedding, this *breast* from harbouring foul, deceitful thoughts!” He falls to his knees, beseeching, “Oh, let me *live!*”

Cade considers. *I feel remorse in myself with his words; but I’ll bridle it! He shall die—an it be but for pleading so well for his life.*

“*Away* with him!—he has a *familiar*”—a demonic spirit—“under his tongue; he speaks not o’ God’s name! Go, take him *away*, I say, and strike off his head immediately! And then break into his son-in-law’s house, Sir James Cromer, and strike off *his* head, and bring them both upon two poles hither!”

“It shall be done!” is the cry from the rabble.

“*Ah*, countrymen,” groans Saye, as he is pulled to his feet, “if, when *you* make *your* prayers, *God* should be so obdurate as yourselves, how would it fare with your departed *souls*? And therefore yet *relent*, and save my life!”

“*Away* with him, and do as I *command* ye!” shouts Cade. The treasurer is dragged roughly to his execution.

“Lord Mortimer” raises his arms to address the milling men. “The proudest peer in the realm shall not wear a *head* on his shoulders, unless he pay me *tribute!*”

“There shall not a maid be married but she shall pay to *me* her maidenhead! Ere they have it, men shall hold it mine *in capite*”—by sovereignty, “and we charge and command that their wives be as *free*”—promiscuous—“as heart can wish or tongue can tell!”

Dick craves just such gratification—and soon. “My lord, when shall we go to Cheapside and take up *commodities* upon our *bills*?”—a lewd proposal regarding brothels, one which plays on the term for long axes.

Cade tells him, laughing. “*Marry, immediately!*”

As a man arrives holding aloft two long pikes, each with a severed head at the top, dripping blood. A cheer goes up.

“*Oh, brave!*” cries Cade. “But is not *this* braver?” He reaches up to pull the poles together so the heads touch. “Let them *kiss one another*, for they loved well when they were alive!”

“Now *part* them again—lest they consult about the giving up of some *more* towns in France!”

“Soldiers, defer despoiling of the city until night! For with *these* borne before us, instead of maces, will we ride through the streets, and at every corner have them kiss!”

“*Away!*”

Cade is pointing furiously, directing the flow of his hellish hordes into ways of destruction. “Up Fish Street! Down to Saint Magnus’ Corner!”

“*Kill and knock down!* Throw them into *Thames!*”

From behind one of the nearby buildings, a trumpet sounds. Cade frowns. “What noise is this I hear? Dare any be so bold as to sound retreat or *parley* when I command them *kill!*”

“*Aye, here* they be that dare—and *will disturb thee!*” cries the Duke of Buckingham, approaching—under the protection of truce with some rebels—with Lord Thomas Clifford. “Know, Cade, we come as ambassadors from the *king* unto the commons—*whom thou hast misled!*” He raises his voice, so as to be heard by those around them: “And here pronounce *free pardon* to them all that will forsake thee, and go home in peace!”

“What *say* ye, countrymen?” calls Clifford. “Will ye *relent*, and yield to *mercy* whilst ’tis offered you?—or let a rebel lead you to your *deaths!*” He turns in place, surveying the men. “Whoever loves the king, and will embrace his pardon, fling up his cap, and say, ‘God save his majesty!’”

“Whoever *hateth* him, and honours not his *father, Henry the Fifth*, who made all *France* to quake, shake he his weapon at us, and pass by.”

The response is immediate: “*God save the king! God save the king!*”

Cade, irked, raises his arms to silence the hearty shouts. “*What?—Buckingham and Clifford, are ye so brave?*”

“And you, base *peasants*, do ye *believe* them?” he demands disdainfully. “Will you *need be hanged*—with your ‘pardons’ about your *necks*?”

“Hath my sword *therefore* broke through *London gates*, that you should *leave me in Southwark*, at the *White Hart*?”—a *hostelry*. “I thought ye would *never* have given up these *arms* till you had *recovered your ancient freedom!*” he shouts angrily. “But you are all *recreants* and *dastards*, and *delight* to live in slavery to the nobility!

“*Let them* break your backs with burthens, *take* your houses from over your heads, *ravish your wives and daughters* before your *faces!*”

“As for me, I will *make shift* for *one!*—and so *God’s curse light upon you all!*” He turns as if to leave.

“We’ll follow *Cade!*” cries one man, and soon it is echoed: “*We’ll follow Cade!*”

Lord Clifford challenges: “Is *Cade* the son of *Henry the Fifth*, that thus you do exclaim you’ll go with him? Will *he* conduct you through the heart of *France*, and make the meanest of you *earls* and *dukes*? Alas, *he* hath *no home*, no place to fly to!—nor knows he how to live but by the *spoil*—unless by *robbing* of your friends and *us!*”

“Were’t not a shame that, whilst you live by jarring, the fearful *French*, whom you late vanquishèd, should make upstart o’er seas and *vanquish you?* Methinks *already* in this civil broil I see them lording it in *London streets*, crying ‘*Peel-ahge!*’”—he pronounces *pillage* with English contempt—“unto all they meet!

“Better *ten thousand* base-born *Cades* miscarry, than you should stoop unto a *Frenchman’s* mercy! To *France, to France*, and *get* what you have lost! Spare *England*, for it is your *native* coast!

“*Henry* hath money; you are strong and manly!—*God* on our side, doubt not of *victory!*”

The crowd is stirred. “*A Clifford!*” is the loud and common cry. “*A Clifford!*”

“We’ll follow the *king* and *Clifford!*” Caps fly into the air amid hearty cheering.

Cade watches sourly. *Was ever feather so lightly blown to and fro as is this multitude? The name of Henry the Fifth hales them to a hundred mischiefs, and makes them leave me desolate!*

Now he observes with alarm. *I see them lay their heads together to surprise me!* He draws his blade and turns to go. *My sword, make way for me!—for here is no staying!*

“In *despite* of the devils in hell, *have through* the very midst of you!” he shouts, slashing ahead to clear a path, cutting down a man who would have hindered him. *And heavens be witness that there’s no want of resolution and honour in me!—that only my followers’ base and ignominious treason makes me take me to my heels!*

“What, is he *fled?*” cries Buckingham scornfully. “*Go, some, and follow him!* And he that brings *his head* unto the king shall have a *thousand crowns* for his reward!” A half-dozen rekindled patriots dash after the erstwhile Lord Mortimer.

“Follow me, soldiers!” the duke tells the rabble. “We’ll devise a means to reconcile you all unto the king,” he says—with a sideways glance at Lord Clifford.

Chapter Ten Flight

King Henry VI has left the capital for the safety of Kenilworth Castle, where he paces on the broad stone terrace at the front. Nearby are several courtiers; the sullen queen stands alone, fanning herself.

Henry is miserable. *Was ever king that 'joyed an earthly throne, yet could command no more contentment than I? No sooner was I crept out of my cradle but I was made a king—at nine months old! Was never subject longed to be a king as I do long and wish to be a subject!*

A flourish of the herald's trumpet announces new visitors, and soon Lords Buckingham and Clifford come to bow before the king.

"Health and glad tidings to Your Majesty!"

Henry is puzzled by their smiles. "Why Buckingham, has the traitor Cade been surprisèd? Or is he but retired to make himself strong?"

The nobles turn to look: coming from behind the castle, a glum procession of downcast prisoners marches forward—and each man wears a noose.

Clifford beams. "He is *fled*, my lord, and all his powers do *yield!*—and these *humbly*, with halters on their necks, await Your Highness' doom of life or death."

The king is delighted. "Then, *Heaven*, set ope thine everlasting gates to entertain my vows of *thanks* and *praise!*"

He walks before the men who surrendered. "Soldiers, this day have you *redeemed* your lives, and showed how well you love your prince and country!

"Continue still in this so-*good* a mind, and Henry, though he be infortunate, assure yourselves, will never be *unkind!*

"And so, with *thanks* and *pardon to you all*, I do dismiss you to your several counties!"

The men are astonished—and greatly relieved. "*God save the king! God save the king!*" they cry out, as they are led away for release.

A trumpet signals another arrival; a worried young messenger, wringing a cap in his hands, approaches and bows. "Please it Your Grace to be advisèd: the *Duke of York* is newly come from Ireland!—and, with a puissant and a mighty power of *gallowglasses* and stout *kerns*"—Irish chieftains' warriors, "is marching *hitherward* in proud array...." The lad gulps. "—And proclaimeth, as he comes along, that his arms are only to *remove from thee* the Duke of *Somerset*—whom he terms *traitor!*"

"Thus stands my state," groans King Henry, "'twixt *Cade* and *York* distressèd! Like to a ship that, having 'scaped a *tempest* and calmed is straightway *boarded by a pirate!* Only just now is Cade driven back, his men dispersed, and here is *York*—and *arms to second* him!

"I pray thee, Buckingham, go and meet him, and ask him what's the *reason* for these arms." He rubs his chin thoughtfully. "Tell him I'll send Duke Edmund to the Tower."

Henry turns to that nobleman himself. "And, Somerset, we'll commit thee thither until his army be dismissed from him." The Tower of London, an armory, treasury and prison, also serves as a royal residence—and safe haven.

Somerset bows. "My lord, I'll yield myself to prison willingly, or unto *death*, to do my country good!"

"In any case, be not too rough in terms," Henry advises Buckingham, "for he is fierce, and cannot brook hard language."

"I will, my lord—and, doubt not, so deal as all things shall redound unto your good."

Henry goes to Margaret. "Come, wife, let's in, and *learn to govern better.*"

He shakes his head sadly. "For yet may England curse my wretched reign!"

Cade crouches warily inside the enclosed grounds at the back of a country gentleman's ivy-laden house in Kent. *Fie on ambition! Fie on myself, that have a sword, and yet am close to famishing!*

These five days have I hid me in the woods and durst not peep out, for all the country is laid for me! But now am I so hungry that even if I might have a lease on my life for a thousand years, I could wait no longer!

Wherefore, o'er a brick wall have I climbed into this garden, to see if I can eat cress!—pick some sallet—salad— or other which is not amiss to cool a man's stomach this hot weather!

And I think this word 'sallet' —also a term for helmet— was born to do me good! For many a time, but for a sallet, my brainpan had been cleft by a brown bill! —a rusty halberd.

And many a time when I have been dry, and bravely marching, it hath served me in stead of a quart pot to drink from; and now the word 'sallet' must serve me to feed on!

He squats on the ground, hungrily taking big bites from a head of cabbage.

The home's large squire has decided to enjoy a brief afternoon stroll. "Lord! Who would live turmoiled in the court, who may enjoy such quiet walks as these?" he asks his gardener, one of several servants following him to the door.

Stepping into the summer sunshine, the householder smiles, "This small inheritance my father left me contenteth me as worth a *monarchy!* I seek not to wax great by others' waning! To gather wealth I care not! Without envy, it sufficeth that what I have maintains my state, and sends the poor well pleasèd from my gate." He leads the way toward fragrant apple trees, passing the neat rows of tall green plants and leafy vegetables.

Cade, hearing him coming, leaps to his feet. *Here's the lord of the soil, he thinks sourly, come to seize me for a stray—for entering his fee-simple without leave!*

He faces the big man dourly. "Ah, villain!—thou would *betray* me, and get a thousand crowns from the king by carrying my head to him! But I'll make thee *eat iron* like an ostrich, and *swallow my sword* like a great *pin*, ere thou and I part!"

The gentleman raises his eyebrows and stares at the intruder. "Why, rude companion, whatso'er thou be I know thee not! Why, then, should I *betray* thee? Is't not enough you climb my walls in spite of me, the *owner!*—break into my garden like a *thief* coming to rob my grounds!—but thou wilt *brave me* with these saucy terms?"

"*Brave* thee! *Aye*, by the best blood that ever was broachèd!—and *beard* thee, too!" Cade glares. "*Look on me well!* I have eaten no meat these *five days!* Yet *come thou*, and thy five men! Even if I do not leave you all as dead as a doornail, I pray God I may never more *eat grass!*"

The prosperous gentleman raises a palm. "Nay, it shall ne'er be said while England stands that Alexander Iden, an esquire of Kent, took odds"—needed help—"to combat a poor famished man!

"Oppose thy steadfast-gazing eyes to mine—see if thou canst *outface* me with thy *looks!*" he warns. "Set limb to limb, and thou art far the *lesser*: thy hand is but a *finger* to my fist, thy leg a *stick* compared with this truncheon; my *foot* shall fight with all the strength *thou hast!*—and if mine arm be heaved in the air, thy grave is diggèd already in the earth!

"As for words whose greatness *answers* words: let this my *sword* retort what speech forbears!" And with that he bares his blade.

Thinks Cade, weary and desperate, but vexed, *By my valour, the most complete 'champion' that ever I heard!* He draws his sword—and rushes forward, sending the servants fleeing. *Steel, if thou turn away thine edge, or cut not the burly-boned clown into chines of beef ere thou sleep in thy sheath, I beseech God on my knees thou mayst be turned into hobnails!*

They fight, but Cade's thrusts are all blocked, and his furious blows clang harmlessly against the other man's broadsword. He slashes crosswise viciously, but the miss exposes his right side—into which Iden's sword drives deep.

Pushed back by the force, Cade gasps as the blade is withdrawn. "*Oh, I am slain!*" He stares down as blood wets his doublet. "*Famine* and no other hath slain me! Let *ten thousand devils* come against me, give me but the ten meals I have lost and I'll *defy them all!*"

He staggers to the wall. "*Wither*, garden!—and be henceforth a burying place to all that do dwell in this house, because the unconquerèd soul of Cade is *fled!*"

Iden is stunned. "Is't *Cade* that I have slain?—that monstrous *traitor!*"

"Sword, I will *hallow* thee for this thy deed, and hang thee o'er my tomb when I am dead! Ne'er shall this blood be wipèd from thy point; but thou shalt wear it as a *herald's* coat, to emblaze the honour that thy master got!"

Cade sinks to the ground, his side soaked red. "Iden, farewell, and be *proud* of thy victory!" He struggles for breath. "Tell Kent from me she hath *lost her best man!* And exhort all the world for being *cowards!*—for I, that never feared any, am vanquished by famine, not by *valour!*"

The effort has cost him; he inhales with a sudden spasm, his face twisted in pain.

"How much thou wrong'st me, heaven be my judge," growls Iden. "*Die, damnèd wretch,* the curse of her that bore thee!" he cries, stabbing Cade through the heart. "And as I thrust into thy *body* with my sword, so I wish I might thrust thy *soul* into *Hell!*"

"Hence will I drag thee headlong by the heels unto the *dunghill* which shall be *thy grave!*—and there cut off thy most-ungracious *head!*"

"Which I will bear in triumph to the king, leaving thy trunk for *crows* to feed upon!"

Chapter Eleven

Face to Face

With drums pounding, and flying his own colors, the Duke of York has led his force of soldiers and hardened mercenaries, captained, now, by his sons, south of London to a field at Dartford—facing King Henry's army, which is amassed at Blackheath.

Richard is exuberant. *From Ireland thus comes York to claim his right, and pluck the crown from feeble Henry's head!*

He looks toward town. *Ring, bells, aloud! Burn, bonfires, clear and bright, to entertain great England's lawful king!*

O 'sancta majestas,'—sacred majesty— who would not buy thee dear? Let them obey that know not how to rule!

He regards his fist. *This hand was made to handle nought but gold! I cannot give due action to my word unless a sword or sceptre balance it!* He smiles to himself, proud and determined. *Have I a soul, a sceptre it shall have!—on which I'll emboss the fleur-de-lis of France!*

He sees an English nobleman approaching from the front ranks of the king's troops. *Whom have we here? Buckingham, to disturb me! The king hath sent him, surely. I must dissemble....*

"York, if thou meanest *well*, I greet thee well," says the emissary.

"Humphrey of Buckingham, I accept thy greeting. Art thou a *messenger*, or come of pleasure?" he asks the duke dryly.

"A messenger from *Henry*, our dread *liege!*—to know the reason for these *arms* in peace! Or why thou, being a subject as I am, *against thine oath* and *true allegiance sworn*, should raise so great a power without his leave—or dare to bring thy force so near the court!"

Richard stares down for a moment. *Scarce can I speak, my choler is so great! Oh, I could hew up rocks and fight with flint, I am so angry at these abject terms—and now, like Ajax Telamonius, on sheep or oxen could I spend my fury!*

I am far better born than is the king!—more like a king, more kingly in my thoughts! But I must make fair weather yet a while, till Henry be more weak, and I more strong.

He looks up. "Buckingham, I prithee pardon me that I have given no answer all this while; my mind was troubled with deep melancholy. The cause why I have brought this army hither is to remove from the king proud *Somerset*—*sedition* to his grace, and to the state!"

Buckingham frowns. "That is *too much presumption* on thy part! But if thine arms be to no *other* end, the king hath yielded unto thy demand: the Duke of Somerset is in the Tower."

York is startled. "Upon thine honour, is he *prisoner?*"

"Upon mine honour, he is prisoner."

"Then, Buckingham, I do dismiss my powers!" He summons two officers, one Irish. "Soldiers, I thank you all! Disperse yourselves; meet me tomorrow in St. George's field. You shall have pay and every thing you wish." The soldiers bow, content.

"And let my sovereign, virtuous Henry, command my eldest son—nay, *all* my sons! As

pledges of my fealty and love, I'll send them all as willing as I live! Lands, goods, horse, armour, anything I have, is his to use, so *Somerset* may die!"

"York, I commend this kind submission," says Buckingham. "We twain will go into his highness' tent."

But they see that King Henry is already coming to them, leading his train and attendants. The two lords stride toward him and bow courteously.

Asks Henry, hopefully, "Buckingham, doth York intend no harm to us, that thus he marcheth with thee arm in arm?"

"In all submission and humility," says Richard, kneeling, "York doth present himself unto Your Highness!"

The king looks out over the army of troops, most of them foreign. "Then what intend these forces thou dost bring?"

"To heave the *traitor Somerset* from hence," replies York, rising, "and fight against that monstrous rebel *Cade!*—who I've since heard to be discomfited."

Henry hears a stir behind him; he turns as way is made for members of the royal guard, who bring forward a southern visitor they believe he will be pleased to hear.

Alexander Iden bows to the king. "If one so rude and of so mean condition may pass into the presence of a king, *lo*, I present to Your Grace a *traitor's head!*—the head of *Cade*, whom I in combat slew!" He raises a dark-stained sack.

"The head of *Cade!*" cries Henry. "Great God, how *just* art Thou!"

"Oh, let me view this visage, being *dead*, that living wrought me such exceeding trouble!"

Iden reaches in, grips hair now stiff with dried blood, and lifts out the ghastly remnant.

"Tell me, my friend, art thou the man that *slew* him?"

"I was, an't like Your Majesty."

"How art thou called? And what is thy degree?"

"Alexander Iden, that's my name—a poor esquire of Kent, that loves his king."

"So please it you, my lord," says Buckingham, smiling, "'twere not amiss he were *created knight* for his good service!"

King Henry nods. "Iden, kneel down." The squire complies. "Rise up a *knight!* We give thee for reward a thousand marks, and will that thou henceforth attend on us!"

"May Iden live to merit such a bounty!" says the man from Kent, rising, his eyes glistening with happy tears. "And never live but true unto his liege!"

King Henry looks to see who is coming to join them—and is alarmed. He whispers, "*See, Buckingham!*—*Somerset* comes with the queen! *Go!*—bid her hide him quickly from the duke!"

But Margaret, on the arm of her new favorite, waves Buckingham away. "For a *thousand* Yorks he shall not hide his head, but boldly stand and front him to his face!" she proclaims, marching up to the king's party.

Richard, instantly furious, stares. *How now? Is Somerset at liberty? Then, York, unloose thy long-imprisoned thoughts, and let thy tongue be equal with thy heart! Shall I endure the sight of Somerset?*

"*False king!*" he cries angrily. "Why hast thou *broken faith* with me, knowing how hardly I can brook *abuse?*"

"*King* did I call thee? *No*, thou art *not* king!—not *fit* to govern and rule multitudes!—who *darest* not—no, nor *canst* not—rule as a *traitor!*"

"That head of thine doth not *become* a crown; *thy* hand is made to grasp a *palmer's* staff,"—that of a religious pilgrim, "and not to grace an awesome, princely *sceptre!*"

"That golden round must engirt these brows of *mine*, whose *smile* and *frown*, like to Achilles' spear, is *able* with a change to *cure* and *kill!*"

"*Here* is a hand to hold a *sceptre* up, and with the same to *enforce* controlling laws!"

"*Give place!*" he cries, in a rage. "By heaven, thou shalt rule *no more* o'er him whom Heaven created for *thy* ruler!"

Somerset confronts him angrily. “*O monstrous traitor! I arrest thee, York, for capital treason ’gainst the king and crown!—obey, audacious traitor!—kneel before grace!*”

“Wouldst have me *kneel?*” snarls York. He motions toward his lieutenants—and the army still behind them. “First let me ask of *these* if they can brook that I bow a knee to man!

“Sirrah,” he tells an attendant, “call in my *sons* to be my *bail!*” The man runs to find them. York scowls defiantly at Somerset. “I know ere they will have me go to *ward* they’ll pawn their *swords* for my enfranchisement!”

“Call hither *Clifford,*” Margaret tells Buckingham. “Bid him come amain!—to say whether the *bastard boys of York* shall be the surety for their *traitor father!*” The nobleman goes to find the eighth Baron of Westmoreland.

Richard frowns at the nominal Italian princess. “O blood-besotted *Neapolitan—outcast* of Naples, England’s *bloody scourge!*—the sons of York, *thy betters* in their birth, *shall* be their father’s bail—and *bane* to those that will refuse the boys for my surety!” He spots two sons approaching: Edward is the Earl of March, Richard, the Earl of Salisbury. “See where they come! I’ll warrant they’ll make it good!”

Queen Margaret sees the baron, Lord Thomas, with his son John. “And here comes Clifford to *deny* their bail!” she counters.

Old Clifford kneels facing Henry. “Health and all happiness to my lord the king!”

But York steps forward as if *he* had been addressed. “I *thank* thee, Clifford! Say, what *news* with thee? Nay, do not fright us with an angry look!—*we* are thy *sovereign!*”

Clifford rises, red-faced.

Says Richard, with facetious magnanimity, “Clifford, kneel again; for thy mistaking so, we *pardon* thee.”

The baron nods toward Henry. “*This* is my king, York; I do not mistake—but *thou* mistakest me much to *think* I do!” He turns away from Richard. “Is the man grown *mad?*” he mutters. “To *Bedlam* with him!”

“Aye, Clifford,” says King Henry sadly, “a *bedlam* and *ambitious* humour makes him oppose himself against his king.”

“*He is a traitor!*” cries Clifford. “Let him go to the *Tower*, and *chop away* that factious pate of his!”

“*He is* arrested, but will not *obey,*” Margaret tells the Cliffords. “His *sons*, he says, shall give their *words* for him!”

“Will you *not*, sons?” asks York.

“*Aye*, noble father, if our words will serve!” says Edward, as his brother Richard frowns at the Lancastrians. “And if *words* will not, then our *weapons* shall!”

Clifford is appalled by the audacious affronts. “Why, what a *brood* of traitors have we here!”

“Look in a glass, and call *thine* image so!” retorts York. “*I* am thy *king!*—and thou a false-hearted *traitor!*” He addresses an attendant: “Call hither to the stake”—as found in a baiting amphitheater—“my *two brave bears!* Bid *Salisbury* and *Warwick* come to me, that with the very shaking of their *chains* they may astonish these *foul, lurking curs!*”

Soon the Nevilles, Lord Salisbury and his son, have joined York.

Lord Clifford snorts. “Are *these* thy bears? We’ll bait *thy* bears *to death!*—and manacle the *bear-ward*”—keeper—“in their chains, if thou darest bring them to the baiting place!”

The younger Richard of York is taut with anger. “Oft have I seen a *hot, o’erweening cur*, because he was withheld, *run* forth to bite—but being offered the bear’s *fell paw*, hath clapped his tail between his legs and *cried!* And such a piece of service will *you* do, if you oppose yourselves to match Lord *Warwick!*”

“*Hence, heap* of wrath, foul *indigested lump!*” shouts Clifford, “as crookèd in thy *manners* as thy *shape!*” Because of his shoulder’s deformity, the young earl is known as *Richard Crookback*.

“Nay, we shall eat *you* anon!—*thoroughly!*” warns York.

Clifford replies, “Take *heed*, lest by your heat you *burn* yourselves!”

King Henry regards the Nevilles. “Why, Warwick, hath thy knee forgot how to bow? Old Salisbury, *shame* to thy silver hair, thou mad *misleader* of thy brain-sick son!

“*What?*—wilt thou on thy death-bed play the *ruffian?*—and *seek* for sorrow with thy *spectacles?*”

“*Oh*, where is *faith?* *Oh*, where is *loyalty?* If it be banished from the *frosty* head, where *shall* it find a harbour on the earth?”

“Wilt thou *in the grave* go dig to find out *war*, and *shame* thine honourable age with *blood?* Why, art thou *old*, and yet lacking *experience?*—or wherefore dost *abuse* it, if thou hast it?”

“*For shame!* In duty bend thy knee to me, you who bow unto the *grave* with mickle *age!*”

“My lord,” says Salisbury, “I have considered within myself the *title* of this most renowned duke—and in my conscience do repute his grace the *rightful* heir to England’s royal seat.”

“Hast thou not *sworn* allegiance unto *me?*” demands Henry, amazed.

Salisbury flushes. “I have.”

“Canst thou *dispense with Heaven*, given such an oath?”

“It is great sin to swear unto a sin—but *greater* sin to keep a *sinful* oath!” argues Salisbury. “Who can be bound by any solemn vow to do a *murderous* deed?—to *rob* a man, to *force* a spotless virgin’s chastity, to reave the orphan of his *patrimony*, to wring the widow from her customèd *right?*—and have no other reason for such wrong but that he was bound by a solemn oath!”

Queen Margaret’s voice is harsh with contempt. “A *subtle* traitor needs no *sophistry!*”

Grimly, King Henry turns to an attendant. “Call Buckingham, and bid him arm himself.”

“Call Buckingham and *all the friends thou hast!*” cries York, “I am resolvèd for *death or dignity!*”

“The *first*, I’ll warrant thee,” says Clifford, “if dreams prove true!”

Warwick sneers. “You were best to go to *bed* and dream *again!*—to keep thee from the tempest of the *field!*”

Says Clifford, “I am resolvèd to bear a greater storm than any *thou* canst conjure up today—and *that* I’ll write upon thy *burgonet*,”—carve into his helmet, “might I but know thee by thy household badge!”—recognize him in combat.

“Now, *by* my father’s badge—old *Neville’s crest*, the *rampant bear*, chained to the rugged staff—this day I’ll *wear aloft* my burgonet,” says Warwick, “as on a mountain top the *cedar* shows that *keeps* its leaves in spite of any storm!—to *affright* thee with even the *view* thereof!”

“And from thy burgonet I’ll *rend* thy bear,” warns Clifford, “and *tread it under foot* with all *contempt*, despite the bear-ward that protects the bear!”

Young Clifford starts away. “And so *to arms*, victorious Father, to *quell* the rebels and their ‘complices!”

“*Fie! Charity*, for shame!” gibes young Richard. “Speak not in *spite*—for you shall sup with *Jesu Christ* tonight!”

“Foul *stigmatic*, that’s more than *thou* canst foresee!” young Clifford retorts.

“If *I’m* not in heaven,” warns Richard, “*you’ll* surely sup in *hell!*”

The furious factions separate—eager to prepare for deadly warfare.

Chapter Twelve Hand to Hand

His raised visor reveals the armored warrior’s rage. “Clifford of Cumberland, ’tis *Warwick* calls! And if thou dost not *hide thee* from the bear, now—when the angry trumpet sounds alarum, and dead men’s cries do fill the empty air!—*Clifford*, I say, come forth and *fight with me!*”

“*Proud* northern lord, Clifford of Cumberland, Warwick is *hoarse* with calling thee to arms!”

he shouts angrily, past the men fighting near him, and toward the king's troops, arrayed ahead on the field of battle at Saint Albans.

"How now, my noble lord! What, all *afoot*?" asks the earl, as York walks toward him.

"The deadly-handed Clifford slew my *steed*!" complains the duke. "But *match for match* I have encountered him, and made a prey for carrion hawks and crows of the bonny beast *he* loved so well!"

And now they both spot old Clifford, approaching on foot.

Warwick, reaching to lower his visor, calls, "For one or both of us, the time is *come*!"

"Hold, Warwick!" says York, drawing his sword. "Seek thee out some other chase, for I *myself* must hunt *this* deer to death!"

Says Warwick, stepping aside. "Then, *nobly*, York!—'tis for a *crown* thou fight'st!" Stamping away, he looks back, briefly. "As I intend, Clifford, to thrive today, it *grieves my soul* to leave thee unassailed!"

Richard regards the graybeard.

"What *seest* thou in me, York?" demands Thomas Clifford. "Why dost thou pause?"

"With thy *brave bearing* should I be in awe, but that thou art so firmly mine *enemy*."

Clifford understands "Nor should *thy prowess* want praise and esteem—but that 'tis shown *ignobly*, and in *treason*!"

"Let it help me now against thy sword, insofar as I in *justice* and *true right* express it!"

Clifford strides toward York. "My soul and body—on this action *both*!"

"A dreadful lay!"—a dangerous bet, says the younger man. "*Address thee instantly!*" he cries, springing forward to swing his sword.

They fight, and Clifford's experience serves him well. By turns the two drive each other back, and each recovers to press forward. But finally the old man's strength wanes, and he falls, beaten down under a sequence of heavy broadsword blows.

York moves to stand straddling his foe; with both hands grasping the hilt, he raises his sword high, poising its point above the downed nobleman.

Staring up, Clifford murmurs, "*La fin couronne les oeuvres*"—the end crowns the efforts.

The blade drives downward, its point sliding past a metal gorget to pierce throat and neck.

York steps back from the still-shuddering body. Gasping and sweating, he pushes against the standing sword to free it, then tugs it out. "Thus war hath given thee *peace*, for thou art still."

He breathes in deeply. "Peace with his soul, Heaven, if it be Thy will."

York moves off cautiously, returning to lead the companies of his troops in and around the town of Saint Albans.

—

Angrily, young John Clifford moves alone toward the steadily advancing Yorkist enemy.

Shame and confusion! All is on the rout! Fear frames disorder, and it wounds where order should guard!

O War, thou son of hell whom angry heavens do make their minister, throw into the frozen bosoms of our part hot coals of vengeance! Let no soldier fly! He that is truly dedicate to war hath no self-love! He that loves himself hath nought essentially—hath the name of valour only by circumstance!

He passes yet another corpse—and, recognizes his father. He stops, gaping. *Oh, let the vile world end, and the promised flames of the Last Day knit earth and heaven together! Now let the general trumpet blow its blast, particularities and petty sounds to cease!*

He drops to his knees beside the body, sobbing. *Wast thou ordained, dear Father, to lose thy youth in peace, and to achieve the silver livery of advised age—then, in thy reverence and thy chair-days, thus to die in ruffian battle?*

He rises, resolute. *At this sight my heart is turned to stone! And while 'tis mine, it shall be stony!*

York spares not our old men; no more will I their infants! Tears shall be as unorigined in me

as the dew to fire!—and beauty that the tyrant oft spares for to use shall to my flaming wrath be oil and flax!

Henceforth I will not have to do with pity! Meet I a child from the House of York, into as many gobbets will I cut it as wild Medea young Absyrtus did! In cruelty will I seek out my fame!

He bends to lift his father. Come, thou new ruin of old Clifford's house! As did Aeneas old Anchises bear, so bear I thee upon my manly shoulders!

He weeps. But then Aeneas bore a living load—nothing so heavy as these woes of mine!

York's son Richard is injured and weary, but elated; just outside town he encountered Lord Somerset, and he has fought the hated enemy to his death.

The earl stares down triumphantly at the corpse in the road. On the hideous, still-oozing wound, sliced deep into the Lancastrian duke's neck and shoulder, sunlight glistens.

Richard laughs, remembering a prophecy, cited in some notes his father had confiscated, concerning the necromancer Bolingbroke. *So lie thou there! For underneath an alehouse's paltry sign—by The Castle at Saint Albans—Somerset hath in his death made the wizard famous!*

Wincing in pain, he firms his resolve. *Sword, hold thy tempering; heart, be wrathful still!*

He signals for two of his men to join him. Scornfully, he pictures the devout King Henry as they advance.

Priests pray for enemies—but princes kill!

The forces defending the king against York's army are thwarted by setbacks—individual defeats, lost skirmishes, failed forays—and find themselves backing away in stunned retreat.

And now a massive excursion of fierce Irish kerns, hurtling forward in their furious advance against the formally arrayed royal ranks, threatens to overwhelm the cordon guarding King Henry VI himself.

He remain calm, confident of safety provided by God's inevitable will, as soldiers clash with howling attackers—and many perish within the sight and hearing of his retinue.

“Away, my lord!” cries Queen Margaret. “You are *slow!*—for *shame, away!*”

“Can we outrun the heavens?” murmurs Henry, watching with passive acceptance. He smiles at her kindly. “Good Margaret, stay.”

“What are you *made of?*” she demands angrily. “You'll nor *fight* nor *fly!*”

“Now it is *manhood, wisdom* of defence to *give the enemy way*, and to secure us by what we *can*, who can do no more than *fly!*” A trumpet echoes from some royal troops already far withdrawn. “If *you* be ta'en, we then should see the bottom of *all* our fortunes! But if we haply 'scape—as well we may, if not through *your neglect!*—we shall to *London* get, where you are *loved*, and where this breach now in our fortunes made may readily be *stopped!*”

While a man helps the queen to mount, another servant struggles to steady her skittish stallion.

Young Clifford, anger darkening his blood-smeared face, strides to the king and bows. “But that my heart's on future mischief set,” he says, “I would speak *blasphemy* ere bid you fly!

“But fly you *must!*—*uncurable* discomfiture reigns in the hearts of all our present parts!

“Away, for your relief!” Clifford glowers, still aching over the death of his father, and watches as enemy soldiers relentlessly advance. “And we will live to see the day when they to *our* fortune give way!

“Away, my lord, *away!*”

Finally, Henry agrees to go.

The royal party leaves the king's remaining forces, leaderless and broken, in disarray—trying to escape alive, however they may.

Many do not.

After the royals' rout, the Duke of York and his son Richard are joined by Lord Warwick, as

their victorious warriors assemble again into companies, summoned by drums to the duke's colors.

"Of *Salisbury!*—who can report of *him?*" calls York to his captains. "That winter lion, who in rage forgets aged contusions and all brush of time, and, like a gallant in the brow of youth, *repairs* him with *occasion!*"

"This happy day is not itself, nor have we won one foot, if *Salisbury* be lost!"

"My noble father, three times today I help him to his horse," says Richard. "Three times bestrid him"—stood defending the fallen lord. "Thrice I led him off, persuading him from any further act.

"But wherever *danger* was, there I met *him!*—and like rich hangings in a homely house, so was his *will* in his old, feeble body." He points. "And, noble that he *is*, look where he comes!"

Salisbury strolls to the front, beaming. "Now, by my sword, *well* hast thou fought today! By the mass, so did we *all!* I thank you, Richard!" he tells the young nobleman. "God knows how long it is I have to live—but it hath pleased Him that *three times* today you have defended me from imminent death!"

Still, a frown appears. "Well, lords, we have not *got* that which we'd have: 'tis not enough our foes are at this time fled, being opponents of such a *repairing* nature," he warns.

York concurs. "I know our safety is to *follow* them—for, as I hear, the king is fled to London, to call a present Court of Parliament. Let us pursue him ere the writs go forth!

"What says Lord Warwick? Shall we after them?"

"*After them!*" cries Warwick eagerly. "Nay, *before* them, if we can!

"Now, by my faith, lords, 'twas a glorious day! Saint Albans battle, won by famous York, shall be eternized in all ages to come!

"*Sound*, drums and trumpets!—and *to London, all!*"

"And *more* such days as these to us befall!"