

Richard II

The Whole Story (unabridged synopsis)

Henry Bolingbroke (son of Gaunt, the Duke of Hereford) and Mowbray (Duke of Norfolk) accuse each other of treason and plotting Gloucester's death, in front of Richard. Each throws down a gage (gauntlet, nowadays) and they resolve to duel.

The Duchess of Gloucester prods Bolingbroke's father, John of Gaunt, to avenge Gloucester's death, plotted by Mowbray. Gloucester and Gaunt are 2 of the 3 surviving sons of Edward II. Richard is their nephew. Gaunt cannot cross his King, saying, "God's substitute (Richard), His deputy anointed in his sight, hath caused his death."

Bolingbroke and Mowbray are about to fight when Richard banishes them, Bolingbroke for six years and Mowbray for life. He does this so "For that our kingdoms earth should not be soiled with that dear blood which it hath fostered." Richard later shortens Bolingbroke's sentence to 6 years. Afterwards, King Richard jokes with his advisors (Bagot, Bushy, Green and Aumerle) about Bolingbroke's banishment. They discuss Bolingbroke's popularity with the common people and the need to raise money to fight the Irish by leasing out land and taking money from noblemen.

Gaunt, now sick, talks to his brother, York, of how England has lost its glory in being leased out to others. Richard arrives and Gaunt chastises him, saying "Landlord of England art thou, and not King." Shortly afterwards, he dies and Richard seizes Gaunt's possessions, which should have gone to Bolingbroke. Northumberland, Ross and Willoughby plan to meet Bolingbroke, who they hear is coming back to England with an army. They also describe how Richard has overtaxed and bankrupted the country.

Bushy and Bagot comfort the Queen on Richard's departure to fight the Irish. Green announces that Bolingbroke and his forces have landed at Ravenspurgh. York tells how he will try to raise a force against Bolingbroke, although all of the noblemen have fled and the commoners

are behind Bolingbroke. Bushy and Green plan to flee while Bagot plans to go to Richard. Bolingbroke, now back in England, meets Northumberland and his son, Harry, surnamed Hotspur. He tells them how Worcester, Northumberland's brother, has forsaken his office and gone to Ravenspurgh to support the growing rebellion. Bolingbroke offers Percy his life-long thanks and devotion for his help and makes promises to Ross and Willoughby for their help. York arrives and accuses Bolingbroke and his troops of being traitors. Bolingbroke points out that he is only coming for his due and asks York to accompany them. York gives in, pretty much against his will, because he has no choice.

Meanwhile, the King's forces, including a Welsh captain, are deserting right and left, as they see Bolingbroke's forces grow. Bolingbroke captures Bushy and Greene, accuses them of treason and quickly executes them both. He offers the Queen "kind commends and Greetings."

Richard finally arrives back in England, and receives all the bad news: general revolt; death of Bushy and Green; armies deserted and York joined with Bolingbroke. Richard proclaims despair in a famous speech. He says, "of comfort no man speak: Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs". He retires to Flint Castle, "discharge my followers. From Richard's night to Bolingbroke's fair day."

Bolingbroke sends Northumberland to tell Richard that he will lay down his arms if Richard repeals his banishment and restores Bolingbroke's property to him. Richard grants Bolingbroke's request, but then realizes that he is effectively relinquishing his power by doing so. He immediately comes to Bolingbroke and submits to him completely, "Your own is yours, and I am yours, and all."

The queen and her ladies overhear some gardeners lamenting that Richard has not tended his country as well as they have tended their garden. The Queen hears that Richard is deposed and leaves in despair.

At Westminster, Bolingbroke asks Bagot who killed Gloucester. Bagot accuses Aumerle. Aumerle challenges Bagot and soon five or six people have challenged each other, most accusing Aumerle. Bolingbroke announces that he will bring back banished Norfolk (Mowbray) to try him, but he is informed that Norfolk is dead. Bolingbroke states that all challenges will wait until trial dates are set for everyone. York arrives to announce that Richard gives Bolingbroke his scepter. He accepts it and effectively accepts the Crown. The Bishop of Carlisle says that if this unnatural thing comes to pass, rebellion will rule England. He is arrested for his trouble. Richard arrives and, expressing his sorrow, gives Bolingbroke the crown. Northumberland asks Richard to publicly read a list of his crimes and Richard refuses. Bolingbroke tells Northumberland to stop demanding that Richard read his crimes and has Richard conveyed to the tower. The Bishop of Carlisle, Abbot of Westminster and Aumerle begin to plot a rebellion against Bolingbroke (now Henry IV).

Richard meets with the Queen for the last time and they say goodbye. Northumberland arrives to tell him that he is to be taken to Pomfret and the Queen to France. Richard warns Northumberland of how Henry will suspect him and think him rebellious (which is exactly what happens in Henry IV Part 1)

York tells his wife, the Duchess of York, how the people greeted Henry and threw dirt on Richard. Aumerle, their son, arrives and York finds him with a letter plotting to overthrow Henry. York leaves to tell the King. The Duchess and Aumerle follow to stop him.

Bolingbroke laments how he has not seen his son (Prince Hal in Henry IV Part 1) and how Hal frequents the taverns. Aumerle arrives and asks for a pardon without saying for what. York arrives and tells Henry of his son's plot. The Duchess arrives and pleads for her son on her knees. Henry pardons Aumerle, but declares that a force will be put together to capture and kill the other traitors.

Sir Pierce of Exton tells a servant of how he heard the King wishing for Richard's death. He says, "I am the King's friend, and will rid his foe."

Richard, at Pomfret castle, talks to himself of how the prison has become his world. A stable boy arrives and pledges his service to Richard. Exton arrives and murders Richard.

Henry gets the news of victories against the rebel forces from Northumberland and Fitzwater. He thanks them both and promises that they will be rewarded. Hotspur, Northumberland's son, arrives with captured Carlisle and Henry grants his life, saying that although an enemy, he has been noble. Exton arrives with Richard's coffin. Henry laments Richard's murder and pledges to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to wash the blood from his hands.