

# Festival 09

## The War of the Roses

### Summary of Part One:

Richard II rules England. His cousin Henry Bolingbroke is in dispute with Mowbray and they have brought their grievances before the King. Bolingbroke believes Mowbray has wasted the gold meant for paying the King's army. Mowbray is also implicated in the recent murder of the King's Uncle, the Duke of Gloucester. Mowbray denies all charges. With the assistance of his uncle (and Bolingbroke's father) John of Gaunt, Richard attempts to calm the men, but they insist on a duel, to be held at a later date.

The widow of the dead Gloucester upbraids Gaunt for not defending her husband.

With formality the ritual of the tournament begins. But before the fighting can begin, Richard intervenes and sentences both men to banishment. Mowbray is expelled forever, Bolingbroke for six years.

John of Gaunt dies, foreseeing the bankruptcy of England, and Richard seizes his property and wealth. This angers Northumberland, who condemns the King for his wastefulness and tyranny. The exiled Bolingbroke is transformed by his father's death, and despite the entreaties of the Duke of York (another brother of Gaunt), he prepares to return to England, determined to claim what the King has stolen.

In the face of invasion, rebellion and desertion, the King must face the shattering of his vision of what Kingliness is. He is eventually cornered and forced to abdicate. Bolingbroke not only claims his inheritance, but claims the throne as King Henry IV. Richard is imprisoned. After hearing King Henry's 'living fear', one of his supporters, Exton, murders Richard. King Henry is mortified by the crime and vows to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to cleanse himself of his part in Richard's death.

Henry IV's reign is disturbed. His hope that a pilgrimage to Jerusalem would quell his unease over the circumstances whereby he gained the throne is thwarted by continuing warfare in Wales and Scotland.

Much of the heroism in these skirmishes is being displayed by Henry Percy, known as Hotspur, the son of Northumberland. Hotspur has captured several important Scots; the King wants him to hand them over. Hotspur however first wants the King to release Hotspur's uncle, Mortimer, who has been taken prisoner in Wales for rebellion. Henry is furious and refuses. He has made an enemy of Northumberland and Hotspur, who foment rebellion.

In contrast to Hotspur's resolution, Henry's son, Prince Hal, is leading a dissolute life. He has taken up with Falstaff, an old soldier. The revolt brings him face to face with Hotspur, whom he fatally wounds. The crisis averted, Hal seems to return to his shady other life, and the King sickens and collapses. Hal comes to his unconscious father and believes himself to now be King. He takes the crown.

When the King wakes he thinks Hal cares only for power and has no love for his father. Hal returns and persuades the King otherwise. The King tells Hal to earn Kingship by focusing England on 'foreign quarrels'. Reconciled, Henry IV dies.

Now King Henry V, Hal turns his back on his old friend Falstaff. He invades France, where he overwhelms the enemy and achieves greatness (marked by his command of language and heights of rhetoric). Having triumphed, he attempts to court the French Princess, using marriage as an act of reconciliation. There seems hope that England's ructions are likewise healed. But the Chorus informs the audience that Henry V will die young, and leave his infant son to be the new King.

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