

An excerpt from
Dark Sovereign
Act 1, Scene 3

Truth introduces herself to her audience. It's a tough task. Truth's audience has already met her identical twin sister, Rumour. People cannot tell the two apart. Are they listening to Truth, or to Rumour? The audience must decide.

Having identified herself, Truth explains how King Edward IV's queen, Elizabeth Woodville, has caused many of the domestic troubles plaguing the nineteen years of Edward IV's reign. Favouring her own Woodville family, Elizabeth has cut off the 'Old Nobility' from its accustomed perks of office. Her meddling affects everything: disbursing others' estates, assigning appointed offices to her siblings and favourites, even assigning them wealthy spouses in marriage. Powerful men have been shunned. Anger rises, fury bubbles; factions sharpen blades. Without her husband's protection, Queen Elizabeth would stand on the brink of major trouble.



Truth and Rumour

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Dark Sovereign, Act 1, Scene 3

TRUTH is discovered sitting in King Edward's seat. Truth's garment is similar to Rumour's, but cut from coarse, unadorned material, well suited to 'plain truth'. She starts by describing the ongoing quarrel between King Edward's younger brothers, George Duke of

Clarence, and Richard Duke of Gloucester. They—Truth calls them ‘the carrion princes’—are fighting to possess Lady Anne Neville, or rather Lady Anne’s estate, the largest in England.

TRUTH, *to her audience*: Their fury raged for a three-years-day,
and all the while the carrion princes peck’d at Warwick’s bones. [1]
All that estate they divided,
and though their storm abated by little bits,
methinks their envy minish’d never a whit.
She rises: But stay, you are uncertain of me!
You wrong me, mortals, every way. Bear me good mind:
I am a spirit, whole, in most men’s heart.

I have you! Ha! About the eyes, whereat you speak,
make I no doubt t’assign the doubt that I must answer:
Your doubting answers to one only name.
Such a one came at you in your way: She mock’d you,
bid you quest to truth chastis’d with lies, wi’ falsehood.
Sweet didymists! We are twins. She was my sister, Rumour. [2]
I am Truth. Where she is gaudy, I am plain.
Where she would put impediment to history,
I, without dissembly, answer truly,
when the course gives me to understand.

Enter **QUEEN ELIZABETH WOODVILLE**, embroidering

Soft! Here comes one that can cunning
equal with the Florentines. [3]
Since the fore-end of Edward the Fourth his reign,
this lady hath rent England into parts. [4]
Her kin have too much; other hath too little; [5]
most all have set their heart to enmity to her.
And all because King Edward stew’d in coming passion
of the male kind. Fourteen years ago he stole a marriage [6]

—with a lady some steps below—
and she the widow to a knight, Sir John Grey, slain,
for cause of *Lancaster!* at Saint Albans field.
Moreover, her father and her brother bloody quarrel had
to Edward the Fourth at Towton.
Yet notwithstanding, here she stands,
Elizabeth Woodville, wife to King Edward, queen of England.

RUMOUR, *voice off*: She's voic'd to be a witch!

TRUTH: Sister Rumour!

Enter RUMOUR.

RUMOUR: Sister Verity.

TRUTH & RUMOUR embrace.

TRUTH places RUMOUR on her left.

TRUTH: Stand by me, so.

Thine advocacy's needful
for each malapert and prating head.
The part sinister shalt thou play. [7]

To the audience: Rumour ushers in the darkest clearness.

RUMOUR: There is as darksome truth as talk;
more, rumour is oft the same that truth. [8]
All-telling talk will have the queen a witch,
that, by art magic, snared the king; and she,
well over-summer'd, is five winters elder than he is.
He wish'd to mistress her; but she, full ripe of woman cunning,
kept him from her bed, whereon, in 's lust, he burn'd.
When he besought her for her favour,
she did threat to thrust his dagger in her breast,
making vow as she would sooner die,
th'intemperate slave of chastity, [9]
than Edward's other tool might prick her flesh.



Elizabeth Woodville,
wife to Edward IV

TRUTH: Such a naughty talk of pricks!

RUMOUR: Please thee wit: There's more is just
in love than war, for love abides no chivalry.
Thy sister as I am, this is truth:
King Edward wedded her he would but bed.
Wherefore fames do noise abroad: The queen's a witch!

TRUTH: O, Rumour, pooh!
She chanc'd upon a woman's chance,
and 'twas her chancing, won a king. [10]
If chastity be sorcery, then many a woman's a witch,
for many a man's bewitched withal.

RUMOUR *concedes defeat with a shrug:* The duchess,
his mother, took shame of their match, threatening him
that she'd denounce his kingly body for a bastard.

TRUTH: 'Tis of truth he fell a lip at counsel; [11]
the king would not be rul'd. Could we the future,
then had we heard said: Who reigneth o'er the self
to rule his passion, he is the more king. [12]
And yet is this lady so pleasing to her lord, she can no wrong. [13]
Puff 'd up with pride, and great of avarice,
Elizabeth hath rais'd a flock of kin, joining them in marriage
t' th' noblest in the land ...

RUMOUR: ... or whether they would, or no!

TRUTH: Four sisters put she to the heirs of earls;
another to the duke of Buckingham, and Harry not past lad-age.
Her brother John, a stripling, did she to the dowager
of Norfolk ...

RUMOUR: ... a lady of such years that had brib'd Sergeant Death!

TRUTH: ... and she near three score years and ten!

RUMOUR: ... and ten again.

TRUTH: 'Twas but t'attach the portion ...

RUMOUR: ... and withal her quality. The house of Woodville
is as covetous as Joseph's brothers. And as rife.

TRUTH: And in this meanwhile, Clarence, loud as sounding brass,
proclaims his brother's queen and kindred's tree
in every way obscure.

RUMOUR: He takes no drink with her at meat,
publishing Elizabeth intends him dead.
The whiles she thinketh to be Judith to her kin,
the whiles the duke will have her Messalina. [14]
The king's blood call her Lancaster's hedge cuckoo in York's nest ...

TRUTH: ... whereon Elizabeth, to have her due,
maligns whom Edward loves. Great lords casts she aside;
nor spouses to their issues grow, for want of noble mates. [15]
The Woodvilles fasten hands with all.
Thus Warwick raught to treason. [16]

RUMOUR: But soft! I hear a footfall on the stair!

TRUTH: Here comes the earl of Rivers, brother to the queen;
with Marquis Dorset, that's her first-born by the knight
that fell for Lancaster.

RUMOUR: Come away. We'll hear what they may say. *They go.*

Excerpted from [Dark Sovereign](#), Act 1.3, © Robert Fripp

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Endnotes for this excerpt from [Dark Sovereign](#):

[1] 1.3.2. *princes*: *Dark Sovereign* uses this term more loosely to include the royal dukes than does any play of Shakespeare's. As late as the reign of James I/VI, 'Prince' was a title extended only to the eldest son of the monarch. The longer formal title Prince of Wales being therefore redundant, it occurs less frequently in Period plays, although Shakespeare does use it in *I Henry IV* and *Henry V*.

[2] 1.3.14. *didymists*: doubters.

[3] 1.3.20. *Florentines*: Francesco Guicciardini, Niccolò Machiavelli.

[4] 1.3.22. *parts*: rival factions.

[5] 1.3.23. *other hath*: *Other* is a valid plural form. *Hath* as a literary plural dies at the stake with Hugh Latimer, according to *OED*. However, it occurs in *Macbeth* III.i.109, and *King Lear* III.i.27. (The Cambr. ed. preserves both examples, but many modern editions alter to *have*.)

[6] 1.3.26. *stole a marriage*: married secretly.

[7] 1.3.39. *sinister*: The stress falls on the middle syllable.

[8] 1.3.42. *the same that truth*: the same as truth.

[9] 1.3.51. *intemperate*: undefiled.

[10] 1.3.61. *She chanc'd ... won a king*: She chanc'd upon a woman's opportunity, and getting lucky, won a king.

[11] 1.3.67. *fell a lip at counsel*: sneered at or ignored advice.

[12] 1.3.70. *Who reigneth ... is the more king*: Truth retrieves this paraphrase from 'the future'. But then, she is spirit, and spirit is timeless. Cf. Milton, *Paradise regain'd*, 2, 466 (1671).

[13] 1.3.71. *she can no wrong*: In the context of the times, the expression is more literal than figurative. In modern use it is often ironic, but here it follows the legal maxim *rex non potest peccare*. Thus Starkey (c. 1538): 'Hyt ys commynly said ... a kyng ys above hys lawys'. *Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*.

[14] 1.3.92. *Judith*: The widow who broke the siege of her home town by killing the Assyrian commander, Holofernes. § *Messalina*: The third wife of Claudius, who used her position to gratify her own ambitions, until brought down and executed in the year 48.

[15] 1.3.97. *nor spouses to their issues grow*: nor can their children obtain spouses. The verb *grow to* suggests expectation by virtue of tradition or inheritance. Cf. 5.1.77.

[16] 1.3.99. *raught*: reached for, turned to.