



## History of Henry IV, Part II

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### Prologue

*Enter RUMOUR, painted full of tongues*

**Rumour.** Open your ears; for which of you will stop  
 The vent of hearing when loud Rumour speaks?  
 I, from the orient to the drooping west,  
 Making the wind my post-horse, still unfold 5  
 The acts commenced on this ball of earth.  
 Upon my tongues continual slanders ride,  
 The which in every language I pronounce,  
 Stuffing the ears of men with false reports.  
 I speak of peace while covert emnity, 10  
 Under the smile of safety, wounds the world;  
 And who but Rumour, who but only I,  
 Make fearful musters and prepar'd defence,  
 Whiles the big year, swoln with some other grief,  
 Is thought with child by the stern tyrant war, 15  
 And no such matter? Rumour is a pipe  
 Blown by surmises, jealousies, conjectures,  
 And of so easy and so plain a stop  
 That the blunt monster with uncounted heads,  
 The still-discordant wav'ring multitude, 20  
 Can play upon it. But what need I thus  
 My well-known body to anatomize  
 Among my household? Why is Rumour here?  
 I run before King Harry's victory,  
 Who, in a bloody field by Shrewsbury, 25  
 Hath beaten down young Hotspur and his troops,  
 Quenching the flame of bold rebellion  
 Even with the rebels' blood. But what mean I  
 To speak so true at first? My office is  
 To noise abroad that Harry Monmouth fell 30  
 Under the wrath of noble Hotspur's sword,  
 And that the King before the Douglas' rage  
 Stoop'd his anointed head as low as death.  
 This have I rumour'd through the peasant towns  
 Between that royal field of Shrewsbury 35  
 And this worm-eaten hold of ragged stone,  
 Where Hotspur's father, old Northumberland,  
 Lies crafty-sick. The posts come tiring on,  
 And not a man of them brings other news  
 Than they have learnt of me. From Rumour's tongues 40

They bring smooth comforts false, worse than true wrongs.

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