

King Richard III

by William Shakespeare

Presented by Paul W. Collins

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Chapter One Outsider

Pacing alone on a street outside Westminster Palace in London, the younger of King Edward IV's two brothers ponders recent events following the long and brutal civil war between noble families, both of Plantagenet lineage and descended from King Edward III.

Richard's own ancestral House of York has overwhelmed that of Lancaster in historic battles which have cost England many thousands of lives; the reign of the King Henry VI ended with his capture and his death in the Tower of London—at Richard's hands.

Surviving English enemies of the Yorkists languish in prison or exile, or reside in fearful, vigilant repose; the foreign troops that supported Lancastrians have sailed for home in defeat. Edward, whose emblem is three suns, now rules without apparent challenge.

Edward's queen, Elizabeth, has recently borne him a son, and the king has elevated his brothers, rewarding each with a dukedom. The comfortable, slovenly sovereign is growing ever fatter.

But Richard frowns as he waits near the front gates, and his rumination about England's new ruler is sour.

Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by this sun of York—and all of the clouds that loured upon our house are in the deep bosom of the ocean buried!

Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths; our bruised arms —battered weapons— hung up for monuments!—our stern alarums changed to merry meetings, our dreadful marches to delightful dances!

Grim-visaged War hath smoothed his wrinkled front, and now, instead of mounting barbèd steeds to fright the souls of fearful adversaries, he capers nimbly in a lady's chamber to the lascivious plying of a lute!

But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks, nor made to court an amorous-looking lass!—

I, that am rudely stamped, and lack Love's majesty — attractiveness granted by Cupid— to strut before a wanton, ambling nymph!—

I, that am curtailèd of that fair proportion—cheated of features beyond a dissembling nature—sent unfinished, into this breathing world before my time, deformèd, scarce half made up!—and that so lamely and unfashionably that dogs bark at me as I halt by them!—

In this weakly piping time of peace I have no delight for passing away the time—unless to see my shadow in the sun, and descant on mine own deformity!

Since birth, Richard has been different; a larger left shoulder and shorter left arm have brought him public taunts, personal torment.

And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover to entertain these fair, well-spoken lays, I am determined to prove a villain, and hate the idle pleasures of these days!

Plots have I laid: by drunken prophecies, libels as 'dreams,' inductions dangerous, to set my brother Clarence and the king in deadly hate, the one against the other!

And if King Edward be as true and just as I am subtle, false and treacherous, this very day should Clarence be closely mewed up —imprisoned— over a 'prophecy' which says that 'G' of Edward the Third's heirs shall be his murderer!

He spots one brother at the palace doors. *Dire thoughts, down to my soul—here Clarence comes....* Richard moves eastward, gazing down as if walking here from his own princely residence, Baynard's Castle.

George, Duke of Clarence, emerges—surrounded by royal soldiers, and in the custody of the officer who serves as chief keeper—jailer—at the Tower of London.

"Brother, good day!" says Richard. "What means this armed guard that waits upon Your Grace?"

George replies wryly: "His *majesty*, tendering my person's *safety*, hath appointed this

conduct to convey me—to the *Tower!*”

“Upon what cause?”

“Because my name is *George!*” says the duke angrily.

“Alack, my lord, that fault is none of *yours*; he should, for that, commit your godfathers!” says Richard glibly. “Oh, belike his majesty hath some intent that you shall be *newly* christened in the Tower.” George is not amused. “But what’s the matter, Clarence? May I know?”

“Yes, Richard—when *I* know!—for, I protest, as yet I do not! But, as I can learn, he hearkens after *prophecies* and *dreams*, and from their cross-row”—shared content—“plucks the letter *G!*—and says a *wizard* told him that by *G* his issue *disinherited* should be! And, as my name of course begins with *G*, it follows in his thought that I am *he!*”

“That, as I learn, and such-like toys as those have moved his highness to *commit* me now!”

Richard is not surprised. “Well, thus it is when men are ruled by *women!* ’Tis not the *king* that sends you to the Tower—my lady Grey, his *wife*, Clarence, ’tis *she* that tempts him to this extremity!

“Was it not she—and that ‘man of *good worship*,’ Anthony Woodeville, her brother—that made him send *Lord Hastings* to the Tower—from whence this present day he is deliverèd?”

“We are not *safe*, Clarence, we are not *safe!*”

His brother heartily concurs regarding the Woodevilles. “By heaven, I think there’s *no* man is secure but the queen’s *kindred*—and *night*-walking heralds that trudge betwixt the king and *Mistress Shore!*”—wife of a commoner, one of lusty, corpulent King Edward’s paramours. “Heard ye not what a *nimble suppliant* Lord Hastings was to her for his delivery?”

Richard nods. “Humbly complaining to ‘*her deity*’ got my lord chamberlain his liberty! I’ll tell you what: I think it is *our* course, if we would keep in favour with the king, to be *her* men, and wear her *livery!*”

“The jealous, o’erworn widow”—the matronly queen, whose first husband, Sir John Grey, died in the war—“and *Mistress Shore*, since our brother dubbed them *noblewomen*, are *mighty familiars*”—powerful pets—“in this monarchy!”

The Constable of the Tower, increasingly alarmed by their comments—disparaging at best, at worst seditious—steps forward. “I beseech Your Graces both to pardon me! His majesty hath straitly given in charge that no man, of what degree soever, shall have private conference with your brother,” he tells Richard.

“Even so,” says Richard curtly. “An’t please *Your Worship*, Brakenbury, you may partake of anything we say—we speak no *treason*, man!” He offers his version of the conversation: “We say the king is *wise* and *virtuous*, and his *noble* queen *well struck* in years, fair, and not *jealous*; we say that Shore’s wife hath a bonny eye, a pretty foot, a cherry lip—and a *surpassingly* pleasing *tongue!* And that the queen’s kindred are made *gentle*-folks.

“How say you, sir? Can you *deny* all this?”

Sir Robert edges back fearfully. “With this, my lord, myself have nought to do...”

“*Naught* to do with *Mistress Shore!*” says Richard, feigning alarm. “I tell thee, fellow, he that doth naught”—mischief—“with her, excepting *one*, were best he do it *secretly!*”

The poor officer blinks, puzzled. “What one, my lord?”

Richard means Edward—but he will not be so quoted. “Her *husband*, knave!” His eyes narrow. “Wouldst thou *betray* me?”

The flustered knight raises his palms. “I beseech Your Grace to pardon me, and withal forbear your conference with the noble duke!”

Says George kindly, “We know thy charge, Brakenbury, and will obey.”

Richard scowls. “We are the queen’s *subjects*, and *must* obey!”

“Brother, farewell. I will unto the king; and whatsoever you will employ me in—were it to call King Edward’s widow ‘*Sister!*’—I will perform it, to enfranchise you!”—to free him.

Richard looks as if he’s near tears. “Meantime, this disgrace touches me, in *brotherhood*, deeper than you can imagine!”

The captive smiles, wanly. "I know it pleaseth *neither* of us well!"

"Well, your imprisonment shall not be *long*," says Richard—truthfully, if not benignly. "Meantime, have patience."

George shrugs. "I must *perforce!* Farewell." He nods to Brakenbury, who, much relieved, again leads the way toward the Tower.

Richard watches as they head down the wide street. *Go, tread the path that thou shalt ne'er return on! Simple, plain Clarence! I do love thee so, that I will shortly send thy soul to heaven!—if heaven will take a present from my hands!*

He sees a nobleman walking toward the palace. *But who comes here?—the newly delivered Hastings!*

Lord Hastings greets him: "Good time of day unto my gracious lord!"

"As much unto my good lord chamberlain! Well are you welcome to the *open air!* How hath Your Lordship brooked imprisonment?"

"With patience, noble lord, as prisoners must." He adds, angrily, "But I shall live, my lord, to give them '*thanks*' that were the *cause* of my imprisonment!"

"No doubt, no doubt—and so shall *Clarence*, too!—for they that were *your* enemies are *his*, and have prevailed as much on him as you!"

"More's the pity that the *eagle* should be mewed, while hawks and *buzzards* play *at liberty!*" Hastings is dismayed by changes in the royal court; Edward has elevated numerous commoners who are related to the queen.

"What news abroad?" asks Richard casually; the chamberlain's Tower stay has been brief, thanks to Mistress Shore's careful, private intercession.

"No news so bad abroad as this at *home*: the king is *sickly*, weak and melancholy, and his physicians fear for him mightily!"

"Now, by Saint Paul, this news is bad indeed! Oh, he hath kept an evil diet long, and overmuch consumed in his royal person! 'Tis very grievous to be thought upon. What, is he in his bed?"

"He is."

Richard, seeming quite worried, motions Hastings on. "Go you before," he says, rubbing his chin thoughtfully, "and I will follow you." The chamberlain bows and goes to the palace.

Richard thinks of the ailing king. *He cannot live, I hope—but must not die till George be packed with post haste up to heaven!*

I'll in, to urge his hatred of Clarence more, with lies well steeled by weighty arguments! And if I fail not in my deep intent, Clarence hath not another day to live!

Which done, God take King Edward to his mercy—and leave the world for me to bustle in!

For then I'll marry Warwick's youngest daughter. What though I killed her husband and her father?—the readiest way to make the wench amends is to become her husband and her father!

The which I will, not all so much for love as for another secret, close intent, that I must reach unto by marrying her.

But as yet I run before my horse to market: Clarence still breathes; Edward still lives and reigns.

When they are gone, then must I count my gains!

Chapter Two Crept into Favor

In a slow, stately procession, six gentlemen cloaked in black carry a coffin down the wide steps of St. Paul's Cathedral to the London street; soldiers bearing tall, steel-bladed halberds accompany the remains of King Henry VI from his funeral.

The principal mourner, tearful and veiled, is the younger daughter of the late Lord Warwick.

Lady Anne Neville asks the solemn marchers to pause before the cathedral. “Set down, set down your honourable load—if *Honour* may be shrouded in a *hearse*—whilst I a while lament in obsequy the untimely fall of virtuous Lancaster!”

The troops move away from the bier.

Her thin, gloved hand tips up the casket’s cover. *Poor, key-cold figure of a holy king!—pale ashes of the House of Lancaster! Thou bloodless remnant of that royal blood, be it lawful that I invoke thy ghost to hear the lamentations of poor Anne!—wife to thine Edward, to thy slaughtered son, stabbed by the selfsame hand that made these wounds!*

After a recent battle of the long war in which her father died fighting, King Edward and his brothers, Richard and George, together executed a captive: Anne’s new husband, Prince Edward, the young son of King Henry VI and Queen Margaret. Richard, newly named Duke of Gloucester, had then rushed to the capital, where he killed King Henry, a prisoner in the Tower.

The lady weeps, thinking of the sovereign’s injuries. *Lo, in these windows that let forth thy life, I pour the helpless balm of my poor eyes!*

Cursèd be the hand that made these fatal holes!—cursèd be the heart that had the heart to do it! Cursèd the blood that let this blood from hence! More direful hap betide that hated wretch, who makes us wretched by the death of thee, than I can wish to wolves!—to spiders, toads, or any creeping, venomèd thing that lives!

If ever he have child, abortive be it—or prodigious and untimely brought to light!—whose ugly and unnatural aspect may fright the hopeful mother at the view, and then be heir to his unhappiness!

If ever he have wife, let her be made as miserable by the death of him as I am made by my poor lord and thee! she tells the dead king.

Lady Anne closes the coffin and steps away; she nods to the bearers. “Come, now, towards Chertsey with your holy burden, taken from Paul’s to be interrèd there.” She chokes, again, and sobs, “But, as you are weary of the weight, still rest you whiles I lament King Henry’s corpse!”

After a moment, she recovers composure; they have just begun to move again when the Duke of Gloucester confronts them, striding forward to stand in the way. “Stay, you that bear the corpse, and set it down,” Richard orders.

“What *black-magic sorcerer* conjures up this *fiend*, to stop devoted, charitable deeds?” demands Lady Anne.

“Villains, *set down* the corpse!” insists Richard, “or I’ll make a corpse of him that disobeys!”

One of the ceremonial guard comes forward, holding his weapon aslant his chest. “My lord, stand back, and let the coffin pass.”

“Unmannered *dog!* *Stand thou* when I command! Advance thy halberd higher than my breast, or, by Saint Paul, *I’ll strike thee to my foot* and *spit* upon thee, beggar, for thy boldness!” The officer lifts the weapon to his side and backs away.

Anne regards the other mourners. “What, do you *tremble?* Are you *all* afraid? Alas, I blame you not; for you are mortal—and *mortal* eyes cannot endure *the Devil!*”

She glares at Richard. “*Avaunt*, thou dreadful minister of *Hell!* Thou hadst but power over his mortal body—his *soul* thou canst not have! Therefore *be gone!*”

Richard smiles and comes toward her. “Sweet saint, for charity, be not so curst.”

“Foul *devil*, for *God’s* sake, *hence*, and trouble us not! For thou hast made the happy earth thy *hell!*—filled it with cursing cries and deep exclams!”

As he moves closer she raises the coffin’s hinged lid. “If thou delight to *view* thy heinous deeds, behold *this* pattern of thy *butcheries!*”

“Oh, gentlemen, see, *see!*—dead Henry’s wounds open their congealèd mouths, and *bleed afresh!*” No gash is visible, of course, but her hearers share the common belief that a victim’s injuries ooze when the murderer is near. She cries to Richard, “Blush, *blush*, thou lump of *foul deformity*, for ’tis thy presence that expels this blood from cold and empty veins where no blood dwells! Thy deed, *inhuman* and *unnatural*, provokes this *divulge* most unnatural!”

She looks up to the sky above the church. “O *God*, which this blood madest, *revenge his death!* O *Earth*, which this blood drink’st, *revenge his death!* Either Heaven with lightning *strike the murderer dead*, or Earth gape open wide and *eat him alive*, as thou dost swallow up the blood of *this good king*—whom *his hell-governed arm hath butcherèd!*”

Richard intends to calm the faithful young woman. “Lady, know you no rules of *charity?*—which renders *good* for bad, *blessings* for curses!”

“*Villain*, thou know’st no law of *God nor man!*” she counters. “No *beast* is so fierce but knows *some touch of pity!*”

Richard smiles. “But I know *none*—and therefore am no beast.”

Anne’s laugh is bitter. “Oh *wondrous*, when *devils* tell the *truth!*”

“*More* amazing when *angels* are so *angry.*” He gently raises a palm against her reply. “I vouchsafe, divine perfection of Woman, these supposed *crimes*, only to give myself leave to *acquit* myself by circumstance—”

“‘*Vouchsafe,*’ verbose *infection* of a man? For these *known evils*, but give *me* leave ‘by *circumstance*’ to *curse* thy accursèd self!”

He tries again, softly: “O fairer than tongue can *name* thee, let me have some patient leisure to excuse myself.”

“O *fouler* than heart can *find* thee, thou canst make *no* appropriate excuse *but by hanging thyself!*”

“By such despair I would *accuse* myself,” he points out.

“And *despairing shouldst* thou stand accusèd!—*worthy vengeance* on thy self, which didst unworthy *slaughter* upon others!”

Richard challenges: “Say that *I* slew them not....”

“Why, then they are *not slain!* But *dead* they *are!*—and, devilish slave, *by thee!*”

“I did not kill your husband.”

“Why then he is *alive.*”

“Nay, he is dead—and slain by *Edward’s* hand.”

“*In thy foul throat* thou *liest!* Queen Margaret *saw* thy murderous falchion steaming with his blood!—which blade thou at once didst bend against *her* breast, but that thy brothers beat aside the point!”

“I was *provokèd!*—by her *slandrous tongue*, which has laid *their* guilt upon my guiltless shoulders!”

“Thou wast provoked by *thy bloody mind!*—which never dreamt on aught but *butcheries!*” She points defiantly at the open coffin. “Didst thou not kill this king?”

Richard nods, mournfully. “I grant ye.”

“Dost *grant* me, *hedgehog?*” cries Anne, furious; his badge in heraldry sports a white boar. “Then, *God* grant *me*, too: that thou mayest be *damnèd* for that wicked deed!” She looks sadly at the dead monarch. “*Oh*, he was gentle, mild, and *virtuous!*”

“The fitter for the King of Heaven, that *hath* him,” Richard pronounces piously.

“He *is* in heaven!—where *thou* shalt *never* come!”

“Let him *thank* me, who help to send him thither; for he was fitter for that place than earth.”

“And *thou* unfit for any place but *Hell!*”

Richard regards her tenderly. “Yes... *one* place else, if you will hear me name it....”

“Some *dungeon!*”

“Your bed-chamber.”

She sneers, “*Ill* rest betide the chamber where *thou* liest!”

“So *will* it, madam, till I lie with you.”

“I hope *so!*”

“I know so. But, gentle Lady Anne, to leave this keen encounter of our wits, and fall into a somewhat slower method: is not the *causer* of the untimely deaths of these Plantagenets, Henry and Edward, as blameful as the executioner?”

“*Thou* art the cause, and most accursèd *effect*.”

“*Your beauty* was the cause of that effect!—your *beauty!*—which did haunt me in my sleep to undertake the death of *all the world*, if I might live *one hour* in your sweet bosom!”

She raises a tiny hand, claw-like, to her face. “If I thought *that*, I tell thee, *homicide*, these *nails* should *rend* that beauty from my cheeks!”

Richard protests: “These *eyes* could never endure sweet *beauty’s* wreck! You should not blemish it, if *I* stood by! As all the world is cheerèd by the sun, so I by *that!* It is my *day*, my *life!*”

“May *black night* o’ershade thy day, and *death* thy life.”

“Curse not *thyself*, fair creature: thou art *both!*”

Anne slowly shakes her head. “I would I *were*, to be revengèd on thee.”

“It is a quarrel most unnatural to be *revenged* on him that *loveth* you!”

“It is a quarrel *just* and *reasonable*, to be revenged on him that *slew my husband*.” Neither she nor the prince had reached twenty at the time of his death.

“He that bereft thee, lady, of thy husband, did it to *help* thee to a *better* husband!”

“*His* better doth not breathe upon the earth.”

“He lives that *loves* thee better than he could!” claims Richard.

“Name him.”

“Plantagenet.”

“Why, that was *he*.”

“The selfsame *name*; but one of better *nature*...”

“Where is he?”

“Here!” Both of the houses that fought each other in the war are Plantagenets.

Her response is immediate.

“Why dost thou spit at me?” asks Richard wiping his cheek.

“I would it were *mortal poison*, for thy sake!”

Richard smiles and speaks gently. “Never came poison from so sweet a place.”

“Never hung poison on a *fouler toad!* Out of my *sight!*—thou dost *infect my eyes!*”

“Thine eyes, sweet lady, have infected mine,” he says, gazing fondly into them.

“Would they were *basilisks*, to strike thee dead!”

Richard looks utterly forlorn: “I would they *were*, that I might die at once; for now they kill me with a living death!” He begins to weep. “Those eyes of thine from *mine* have drawn salt *tears!*—*shamed* their aspect with store of childish drops!

“These eyes that never shed remorseful tear—not when York my *father* and *Edward* wept to hear of the piteous moan that *Rutland* made, when dire-faced Clifford shook his sword at him!”

Anne flushes; she knows that the Lancastrian lord murdered Rutland—Richard’s brother Edmund, a boy of ten—in cold blood.

Richard sounds sorrowful: “Nor when *thy* warlike father, like a *child* told the sad story of my father’s death—and *twenty times* made pause to sob, and *weep* such that all the standers-by had wet their cheeks like trees be-dashèd with rain!”

Her father, the Earl of Warwick, had once urged Richard’s father to rebel against King Henry VI, and as a York ally he had brought the news of the duke’s death in battle. For now, Richard ignores the fact that Warwick later switched allegiance, fighting in support of the Lancastrian queen and her son, briefly Anne’s husband.

“In that sad time,” says Richard, “my manly eyes did *scorn* an humble tear—but what *those sorrows* could not then exude, thy *beauty* hath, and made them *blind* with weeping!” He wipes his eyes with the back of a hand. “I never sued to friend nor enemy; *my* tongue could never learn sweet, *smoothing* words—but now that *thy beauty* is proposèd as my fee, my proud *heart* sues, and prompts my tongue to *speak!*”

He can sense her growing fascination. “*Teach* not thy lips *scorn*,” he pleads, “for they were made for *kissing*, lady, not for such contempt!

“If thy revengeful heart cannot *forgive*,” he says, boldly offering her his rapier, hilt-first, “*lo*, here I lend thee this sharp-pointed sword!—which if thou please to hide in this true bosom, then let forth the soul that adoreth thee!” She grasps the handle, and he unbuttons his doublet, then the silk shirt. “I lay it naked to the deadly stroke, and *humbly*, upon my *knee*, beg the death!”

As he kneels, she lifts the blade, aiming it at his heart.

“Nay, do not pause!” he cries, “for I *did* kill King Henry—but ’twas *thy beauty* that *provokèd* me!” he moans, tears flowing.

The lady has never before held a sword; it droops as she wavers.

“Nay, now *dispatch!* ’Twas I that stabbed young Edward; but ’twas *thy heavenly face* that set me on!”

Angry with herself, Anne nevertheless allows the blade to fall, clattering, onto the pavement.

Richard’s gaze is adoring. “Take up the sword again—or take up *me!*”

She regards him charily. “Arise, dissembler. Though I wish thy death, I will not be the executioner.”

“Then bid me kill myself, and I will do it!”

“I *have* already.”

“*Tsk*, that was in thy *rage!* Speak it again, and, even with the word, that hand which *for* thy love did kill thy love, shall for thy love kill a far *truer* love!”

“To both their deaths, thou shalt be *accessory*,” he adds, gazing at her longingly.

“I would I knew thy *heart*,” she admits.

“’Tis figured in my *tongue!*”

“I fear me *both* are false.”

“Then never man was true!” the perfidious prince tells her.

“Well, well, put up your sword,” says Anne, wearily. She wants to proceed, to go with the procession to the king’s interment.

Richard rises and sheathes his rapier. “Say, then, that my *peace* is made!”

“That shall you know *hereafter*,” she says pointedly. But she studies his eyes.

He presses. “But shall I live in hope?”

“All men, I hope, live so.”

“Vouchsafe to wear this ring!” He removes it from his hand.

“To take is not to give,” Anne cautions.

“Look how this ring encompasseth thy finger,” he says happily, sliding the gold circle. “Even so thy bosom encloseth my poor *heart!* Wear *both* of them, for both of them are *thine!*”

“And if thy poor, devoted supplicant may beg but one *favour* at thy gracious hand, thou dost confirm his happiness forever!”

“What is it?”

“That it would please thee to leave these sad designs to him who hath *more cause* to be a mourner,”—Richard himself, “and presently repair to Crosby Place—where, after I have solemnly interred at Chertsey Monastery this noble king, and wet his grave with my *repentant tears*, I will with all expedient duty see you.” Looking sorrowful, he closes the coffin.

His voices chokes as, again tearful, he looks into her eyes. “For divers unshown reasons, I *beseech you* grant me this boon.”

Despite herself, the lady is moved. “With all my heart; and much it joys me, too, to see you are become so *penitent!*” She turns to the gentlemen by the casket. “Tressel and Berkeley, go along with me,” she asks. They bow, ready to follow her to Richard’s London mansion, one leased for him by the crown in Bishopsgate.

“Bid me fare well!” pleads Richard.

“’Tis more than you deserve,” says Anne turning. “But, since you’d teach me how to *flatter* you,” she says, with a slight smile, “imagine I have said fare well already.” She and her escorts walk away, toward his huge house.

Richard turns to the mourners. “Sirs, take up the corpse.”

“Towards Chertsey, noble lord?”

“No, to Whitefriars; there attend my coming.” From that priory the body will be taken across the river, then to the abbey. Later, on Richard’s order, it will be moved—never again to be found. The gentlemen bow, and they bear away their burden.

Richard watches as Anne moves down the long street. *Was ever woman in this mood wooed? Was ever woman in this mood won?*

I’ll have her!—but I will not keep her long.

He gloats. *What?—I, that killed her husband and his father!—to take her in her heart’s extremest hate, with curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes, the bleeding witness of her hatred near by!—having God, her conscience, and those bars against me, and I nothing to back my suit at all but the plain devil of dissembling looks!*

He crows to himself: *And yet to win her, all the world against nothing! Hah!*

Hath she forgot already that brave prince, Edward, her lord, whom I, some three months since, stabbed in my angry mood at Tewkesbury? He remembers the belligerent Prince of Wales—with envious anger: *A sweeter and a lovelier gentleman, framed in the prodigality of nature, young, valiant, wise, and, no doubt, right royal, the spacious world cannot again afford!*

And will she yet debase her eyes on me, who cropped the golden prime of this sweet prince, and made her widow to a woeful bed? On me, whose all not equals Edward’s moiety! On me, who limp, and am unshapen thus!

He laughs. *My dukedom to a beggarly coin, I did mistake my person all this while! Upon my life, she finds me, although I cannot myself, to be a marvellously proper man!* He thinks, wryly, *I’ll be at charges for a looking-glass!—and employ some score or two of tailors to study fashions to adorn my body! Since I am crept into favour with my self, I will maintain it with some little cost!*

Richard watches as the coffin-bearers round a corner. *But first I’ll tip yon fellow into his grave, and then return, lamenting, to ‘my love.’*

Menace taints his drollery: *Shine out, fair sun, till I have bought a glass, so that I may see my shadow as I pass!*

Chapter Three Curses Laid

Have patience, madam,” Anthony Woodeville, now Lord Rivers, tells his sister, the distraught queen, in her royal quarters at the palace in London. “There’s no doubt his majesty will soon recover his accustomed health!”

“In that you *brook* it ill, it makes him worse,” cautions her son Richard, now Lord Grey. “Therefore, for God’s sake, entertain good *comfort*, and cheer his grace with quick and merry words!”

Another grown son, Thomas, the new Marquis of Dorset, nods in concurrence.

Elizabeth has tears in her eyes. “If he were dead, of what would it *betide* me?”

Rivers assures her, “No other harm but loss of such a lord.”

The queen moans. “The loss of *such* a lord includes *all* harm!”

“The *heavens* have blessed you with a goodly *son*,” notes Grey, of his half-brother, “to be your comforter when he is gone.”

But Elizabeth wrings her hands. “Oh, he is *young*, and his minority is put unto the trust of Richard of Gloucester, a man that loves not *me*, nor none of *you!*”—her relatives and friends, raised in rank by her husband.

“Is it concluded that *he* shall be protector?” asks Rivers. When a prince is not yet of age, a nobleman is appointed to serve as his guardian, called Protector of the Realm.

“It is determinèd—not concluded yet, but so it must *be*, if the king *miscarry!*”

They look to the doors as two noblemen arrive. “Here come the lords of Buckingham and Derby,” says Grey.

“Good time of day unto Your Royal Grace,” says Buckingham, bowing to the queen.

Derby bows. “God make Your Majesty joyful as you *have* been.”

Elizabeth raises an eyebrow. “The Countess *Richmond*, good my Lord of Derby, will scarcely say *Amen* to your good prayers!” The countess’s son, Henry, the Lancastrian Earl of Richmond, lives in voluntary, protective exile in Brittany, a territory of Gaul. “Yet, Derby, notwithstanding that she’s your wife and loves not *me*, be you, good lord, assured I hate not *you* for her proud arrogance.”

The murdered King Henry VI, impressed by Richmond when he was but a boy, had called him *England’s hope*—“his head by Nature framed to wear a crown, his hand to wield a sceptre, and himself likely in time to bless a regal throne.”

The Earl of Derby is discomfited concerning his wife. “I do beseech you, do not believe the envious slanders of her false accusers!—or, if she be accused in true report, *bear with* her weakness, which I think proceeds from wayward sickness, and no grounded *malice*.”

Elizabeth asks, “Saw you the king today, my lord of Derby?”

“Just now; the Duke of Buckingham and I are come from visiting his majesty.”

“What likelihood of his amendment, lords?”

“Madam, good *hope*,” says Buckingham. “His grace speaks cheerfully.”

“God grant him *health!*” says the queen. “Did you confer with him?”

“Madam, we did. He desires to make *atonement* betwixt the Duke of Gloucester and your brothers, and betwixt them and my lord *chamberlain*, and sent to summon them to his royal presence.”

“Would all *were* well! But that will never be,” says the queen sadly. “I fear our happiness is at the highest.”

Bursting into the room with Lord Hastings, Richard tells him, loudly, “They do me *wrong*, and I will not *endure* it!

“Who *are* they who complain unto the king that I, forsooth, am stern and love them not? By holy Paul, they love his grace but *lightly* that fill his ears with such contentious rumours!” The two have just come from the king’s bedchamber. “Because I cannot *flatter* and speak *fair*, *smile* in men’s faces—*smooth*, *deceive* and *cog*—duck with *French* nods and *apish* courtesy—I must be held a *rancorous enemy!*”

“Cannot a *plain* man live, and think no harm, but that his simple truth be thus *abusèd* by silken, sly, insinuating *Jacks?*”

Rivers glares at the intrusion—and implied accusation. “To whom in all *this* presence speaks Your Grace?”

“To *thee!*—that hast nor *honesty* nor *grace!*” Richard seems deeply indignant. “When have I *injured* thee? When done thee *wrong?*” He points to others. “Or thee? Or *thee?* Or *any* of your faction? *A plague upon you all!*”

“His royal person—whom God preserve better than *you* would wish!—cannot be quiet for scarcely a *breathing while* but you must *trouble* him with *lewd complaints!*”

The queen steps forward, frowning. “Brother-in-law of Gloucester, you *mistake* the matter! The king’s *own* royal disposition, and not provokèd by any suitor else—aiming, belike, at *your interior hatred*, which in your outward *actions* shows itself against my kindred, brothers, and *myself*—makes him to send, that thereby he may gather the *ground* of your ill-will, and so *remove* it.”

Says Richard, apparently in exasperation, “I cannot tell!—the *world* is grown so bad that *wrens* may *prey* where *eagles* dare not *perch!* Since every Jack became a ‘gentleman’ there’s many a *gentle* person made a *Jack!*”

“Come, come, we know your meaning, brother Gloucester!” says Elizabeth. “You envy my advancement, and my friends’. God grant we never may have need of *you!*”

Retorts Richard, “Meantime, God grants that we *have* need—*because* of you! Your brother-in-law”—George—“is *imprisoned* by your means, myself *disgracèd*, and the *nobility* held in *contempt!*—whilst many fair promotions are *daily* given to ennoble those that, some two days since, were scarcely *worth* a noble!”—a coin valued at half a mark.

Elizabeth protests, “By Him that raised me to this *care-filled* height from that *contented* hap which I enjoyed, I *never* did incense his majesty against the Duke of Clarence, but have been an earnest *advocate* to *plead* for him! My lord, you do me *shameful injury*, falsely to draw me into these vile suspects!”

“You may *deny* that you were the cause of my Lord *Hastings*’ late imprisonment—”

Her brother interrupts hotly: “*She may*, my lord, for—”

“*She may*,’ Lord Rivers?” says Richard. “Why, who knows not so? She may do *more*, sir, than deny that: she may help *you* to many fair *preferments*, and then *deny* her *aiding hand* therein, and lay those honours to your high *deserts!* What may she *not*? She *may*, yea, marry, may she—”

“*What*, marry, may she?” growls Rivers.

Richard seizes upon a word: “Why, *marry*, may she!—marry with a *king!*—a bachelor, a *handsome* stripling, too! Your *grandam* surely had a *worser* match!”

Elizabeth turns away angrily. “My lord of Gloucester, I have *too long* borne your *blunt upbraidings* and your *bitter scoffs!* By heaven, I will *acquaint his majesty* with these *gross taunts* I often have endured! I had rather be a country *servant-maid* than a great queen, with *this* condition, to be so *baited, scorned, and stormed at!*

“*Small joy* have I in being England’s *queen!*” she complains.

- *And being that it is small, lessen it, God, I beseech thee!* thinks Margaret, widow of King Henry VI. She has come in from the corridor to stand, unnoticed, by the open side doors. After the war, Edward had exiled her to English-held territory in her native France. *Thine honour—state and seat—is due to me!*

Richard challenges Elizabeth. “What?—*threaten* you me with telling the king? *Tell him*, and spare not! Look that what I have said I will *avouch* in presence of the king! *I dare* adventure to be sent to the Tower! ’Tis time to *speak!* *My pains!*—wartime efforts—“are quite *forgot!*”

- Margaret scowls. *Out, devil!—I remember them too well!—thou slewest my husband Henry in the Tower, and Edward, my poor son, at Tewkesbury!*

Richard tells Elizabeth, “Ere you were queen—yea, or your husband *king!*—I was a *pack-horse* in his great affairs!—a weeder-out of his proud *adversaries*, a liberal rewarder of his *friends!*

“To royalize *his* blood I *spilt mine own!*”

- *Yes, and much better blood than his or thine!*

Richard continues his attack on Elizabeth. “In all which time you and your husband *Grey* were factious!—for the House of *Lancaster!* And, Rivers, so were *you!*”

Richard faces the queen. “Was not your husband”—Lord Grey—“in *Margaret’s* army at Saint Albans slain?”

“Let me put it in your minds, if you *forget*, what you *are*, what you *have been* ere now—withal what *I* have been, and what *I am!*”

- *A murderous villain!—and so art thou still!* thinks the former queen.

Richard rants on: “Poor Clarence did *forsake* his father-in-law, Warwick—yea, and forswore himself!—which Jesu pardon!—”

- *Which God revenge!* thinks Margaret. George had sided with her, briefly, after marrying the elder daughter of Lord Warwick, her general; but just before the decisive battle, George again switched allegiance, to his brother, who is now king.

“—to fight in Edward’s party for the crown!” says Richard. “And for *his meed,*”—merit, “poor lord, he is *mewed up!*”

“I would to God my heart were *flint*, like Edward’s!—or Edward’s soft and *pitying*, like *mine,*” he groans. “I am too *childish, foolish, for this* world!”

- *Then leave the world, thou caco-demon! Hie thee to Hell for shame! There thy kingdom is!* thinks Margaret.

“My lord of Gloucester,” says Rivers, “in those busy days which here you cite to prove us enemies, we followed our *then-lord, our lawful king!* So should we *you*, if you should be our king.”

“If *I* should be!” cries Richard. “I had rather be a *pedlar!* Far be it from my heart, the *thought* of it!”

“As little joy, my lord, as you suppose you should enjoy were you this country’s *king,*” Elizabeth tells him, “so little joy may you suppose in *me*, that *I* enjoy, being the *queen* thereof!”

- Margaret nods. *Little joy enjoys the queen thereof—for I am she!—and altogether joyless! I can no longer hold me patient!* She steps forward. “*Hear me, you wrangling pirates, who fall out in sharing that which you have pillaged from me!*

“Which of you *trembles* not to *look* on me?—if not to *bow like subjects* for my being *queen*, then to *quake like rebels* for that I was by you *deposèd!*

“O gentle *villain,*” she cries to Richard, who would ignore her, “do not turn away!”

“Foul wrinkled *witch,* what makest *thou* in my sight?” he demands.

“But *recitation* of what thou hast *marrèd!*—*that* will I make before I let thee go!”

He is irked by her presence. “Wert thou not *banished?*—on pain of *death!*”

“*I was;* but I do find more pain in *banishment* than death can yield me here by my abode.

“A *husband* and a *son* thou owest to me!” she shouts at him. “And thou, a *kingdom!*” she tells Elizabeth. “All of you, *allegiance!*” she calls to the rest. “The *sorrow* that *I* have is by right *yours,* and all the *pleasures* you usurp are *mine!*”

Richard has not forgotten how she tormented his father, the Duke of York, after his capture—and with her own knife stabbed him to death. “The curse *my noble father* laid on thee, when thou didst crown his warlike brow with *paper,* and with thy *scorns* drew’st rivers from his eyes—and then, to dry them, gavest the duke a kerchief steeped in the innocent *blood* of pretty *Rutland!*” Richard’s brother Edmund, Earl of Rutland, was killed at age ten. “His *curses then,* denounced against thee from that *bitterest* of souls, are all *fall’n upon thee!*

“And *God,* not we, hath *plagued thy bloody deed!*”

For once, Elizabeth can agree with Richard. “So just is God in righting the innocent!”

Says Lord Hastings, “Oh, ’twas the *foulest* deed to slay that child!—and the most *merciless* that e’er was heard of!”

Rivers nods. “*Tyrants* themselves *wept* when it was reported!”

“No man but prophesied *revenge* for it!” adds Dorset.

“*Northumberland,* then present, wept to see it,” notes Buckingham of one of Margaret’s former allies.

She laughs harshly. “*What?* You were all *snarling,* before I came, ready to *catch each other by the throat!*—and turn you your hatred now on *me?*”

“Did York’s dread curse *prevail so much* with Heaven that *Henry’s* death, my lovely *Edward’s* death, their *kingdom’s* loss, my woeful *banishment,* could *all* answer for merely that peevish *brat?*”

“Can *curses* pierce the clouds and enter *heaven?* Why, then, *give way,* dull clouds, to *my* living curses!”

“If not by *war,* by *surfeit* die your king, as *ours* by *murder* died to *make* him a king!”

“May Edward *thy* son, who now is Prince of Wales,” she tells Elizabeth, “for Edward *my* son, who *was* Prince of Wales, die in his youth by *like* untimely violence!”

“*Thyself* a queen, for me that *was* a queen, *outlive* thy glory, as did my wretched self! *Long* mayst thou live—to *wail thy children’s* loss!—and see *another* as I now see *thee,* decked in *thy* rights, as thou art installèd in mine! Long before thy death die thy *happy* days!—and, after many, *lengthened* hours of *grief,* die!—neither mother, wife, nor England’s queen!”

“Rivers and Dorset, you were standers-by, and so wast thou, Lord Hastings, when my son

was stabbed with bloody daggers! *God!*—I pray *Him* that none of you may live to your natural age, but by some unlooked-for incidence be *cut off!*”

Richard waves her away. “Have *done* thy spell-casting, thou hateful, withered *hag!*”

“And leave out *thee?* Stay, *dog*, for thou shalt *hear me!* If the heavens have any *grievous plague* in store exceeding those that *I* can wish upon thee, *oh*, let them *keep* it till thy sins be *ripe*—and then *hurl down* their indignation on thee, the troubler of the poor *world’s* peace!

“The worm of *conscience* ever *begnaw* thy soul!”

“Thy *friends* suspect for *traitors* while thou livest—and take *deep* traitors for thy dearest *friends!*”

“No *sleep* close up that deadly eye of thine—unless it be whilst some *tormenting dream* affrights thee with a *hell* of *ugly devils!*”

“Thou *goblin*-markèd, *abortive*, rooting *hog!*—thou that wast marked in thy nativity as the *slave* of Nature and the *son* of *Hell!*”

“Thou *slander* of thy *mother’s* heavy womb!—thou *loathèd* issue of thy *father’s* loins! Thou *rag* of honour! Thou detested—”

“*Margaret!*” he cries.

“—*Richard!*”

His eyebrows rise, as he regards her blandly. “What?”

“I call thee not!”

“I cry thee mercy then; for I had thought that thou hadst called *me* all those bitter names.”

“Why so I *did!*—but looked for no reply!” she says, annoyed. “Oh, let me make the *period* to my *curse!*”

Richard shakes his head. “’Tis done—by *me!*—and ends in ‘*Margaret!*’”

The queen laughs at the older lady. “Thus have you breathed your curse *against yourself!*”

Margaret scoffs. “Poor *painted* queen, vain *flourish* of my fortune!” She points toward Richard. “Why strew’st thou sugar on that *mottled spider* whose deadly web *ensnareth thee about?* Fool, *fool!*—thou *whet’st* a knife to *kill thyself!* The time will come when thou shalt wish for me to *help* thee curse that poisonous, *hunchbacked toad!*”

Warns Lord Hastings, “False-boding woman, end thy frantic curses, lest to thy *harm* thou move our *patience!*”

“You have *all* movèd *mine!*” cries Margaret. “Foul *shame* upon you!”

“Were you well *served*, you would be taught your *duty!*” says Rivers.

“To serve me *well*, you all should *do* me duty!—teach me to be your *queen*, and you my *subjects!*” insists Margaret. “Oh, *serve* me well, and *teach* yourselves that duty!”

“Dispute not with her,” advises Dorset. “She is lunatic!”

“*Peace*, Master ‘*Marquis!*’ You are malapert!” says Margaret, with great contempt. “Your fire-new *stamp* of honour is scarcely *valuable!* *Oh*, that your *young* nobility could judge what ’twere to *lose it!*—and *be miserable!* They that stand *high* have many blasts to shake them!—and if they *fall*, they dash themselves *to pieces!*”

Richard glares at Dorset. “Good counsel, marry! *Learn it, learn it*, marquis!”

“It toucheth *you*, my lord, as much as me,” retorts the new peer.

“Yea—and *much more!*” says Richard. “For I was *born* so high—*our* aery buildeth in the *cedar’s top*, and dallies with the wind, and scorns the sun!”

“And turns the sun to *shade, alas, alas!*” cries Margaret, glowering at him. “Witness my *son*—now in the shade of *death*—whose bright, out-shining beams *thy cloudy wrath* hath in eternal *darkness* folded up!

“Your aery buildeth in *our* aery’s nest!

“O *God* that *seest* it, do not *suffer* it! As it was won with *blood*, be it *lost* so!”

“Have *done,*” Lord Buckingham tells her, “for *shame*, if not for charity!”

“Urge neither charity nor shame to *me!*” She regards the others. “*Uncharitably* have you dealt with me, and *shamefully* by you my hopes were *butchered!* My charity is *outrage, life* my

shame—and in that shame lives ever my sorrow's *rage!*"

"Have done, have *done!*" cries the nobleman.

Margaret softens—a little. "Oh, princely Buckingham, I'll kiss *thy* hand, in sign of league and amity with thee! Now *fair* befall thee and thy noble house! *Thy* garments are not spotted with our blood, nor art thou within the compass of my curse."

"Nor *anyone here!*" says he, frowning at her, "for *curses* never get past the lips of those that breathe them into the pure air!"

"I'll not believe but that they *ascend to the sky*, and there awaken *God* from his gentle, sleeping peace!" she tells him. "Oh, Buckingham, take *heed* of yonder *dog!* Know that when he *fawns* he *bites!*—and when *he* bites, his venomèd tooth will rankle *to thy death!* Have nought to do with him! *Beware* of him! *Sin, Death, and Hell* have set their marks upon him, and all their ministers attend on him!"

Richard seems puzzled. "What doth she say, my Lord of Buckingham?" he asks, as if he hadn't understood.

"Nothing that I *respect*, my gracious lord."

"*What*, dost thou *scorn* me for my gentle counsel?" demands Margaret, "and *soothe* the devil that I *warn* thee from? *Ah*, then *remember this* another day, when he shall *split thy very heart* with *sorrow!* Then say poor Margaret was a *prophetess!*"

She surveys the nobles' faces. "Live each of you as subject to his *hate*, and he to *yours*—and *all of you* to *God's!*"

Her diatribe done, Margaret turns abruptly and leaves them.

Lord Hastings gasps. "My *hair* doth stand on end to hear her *curses!*"

"And so doth mine!" says Rivers. "I muse why she's at *liberty!*"

Richard now feigns magnanimity. "I cannot blame her; by God's Holy Mother, she hath had too much *wrong*—and I repent my part thereof that I have done to her."

"I never did her any, to my knowledge," says Elizabeth.

"But you have all the *advantage* of her wrong." Richard points out. He sighs. "*I* was too hot to do somebody *good*; that was too cold, in thinking of it now.

"Marry, as for Clarence, he is well repaid: for *his* pains, he is penned up to *fatten.*" The Tower's noble inmates are confined, but in comparative comfort. "God *pardon* them that are the *cause* of it," murmurs Richard sanctimoniously.

"A virtuous, and a *Christian-like* conclusion," nods Rivers, "to *pray* for them that have done scathe to us."

"So do I ever," claims Richard. *Being well advised!*—*for had I cursed them now, I had cursed myself!*

A knight of the king's household comes into the chamber. "Madam, his majesty doth call for you, and for Your Grace," he tells Richard, "and you, my noble lords."

"Catesby, we come," the queen tells Sir William. "Lords, will you go with us?"

"Madam, we will attend Your Grace," says Rivers. He and the courtiers follow Elizabeth and the knight.

Richard, now alone, considers the steps he's taken—and laughs. *I do wrong them when first they begin to brawl: the secret mischiefs that I set abroad I lay unto the grievous charge of others! Clarence, whom I, indeed, have laid in darkness, I do bewep to many simple gulls—namely, to Hastings, Derby, Buckingham—and say it is the queen and her allies that stir the king against the duke my brother! Now they believe it—and withal whet me to be revenged on Rivers, Vaughan, and Grey!*

But then I sigh, and, with a piece of Scripture, tell them that God bids us do good for evil—and thus I clothe my naked villainy with old, odd ends stolen out of Holy Writ—and seem a saint when most I play the devil!

Two broad-shouldered men appear at the door, holding weather-stained brown hats. *But, soft! here come my executioners.* "How now, my hardy, stout, resolvèd mates!" says Richard. "Are

you going now to dispatch this deed?"

"We are, my lord," says the larger, "and come to have a warrant, that we may be admitted where he is."

"Well thought upon," says Richard. "I have it here about me." He pulls the folded paper, with the king's barely-dry signature on it, from inside his coat. "When you have done, repair to Crosby Place.

"But, sirs, be *sudden* in the execution—withal *obdurate!*—do not hear him plead, for Clarence is well-spoken, and perhaps may move your hearts to pity, if you mark him."

"*Tsk*, fear not, my lord," says the heavier man, "we will not stand to prate. Talkers are not good doers; be assured we come to use our hands and not our tongues."

Richard nods. "When *fools'* eyes drop tears, let your eyes fall *millstones*. I like you, lads. About your business straight! Go, go—*dispatch!*"

The other killer takes both meanings. "We will, my noble lord."

Chapter Four Dire Discussion

Why looks Your Grace so heavily today?" asks Sir Robert Brakenbury, visiting with his princely prisoner in the Tower.

George, pacing, pale and distraught, presses both hands to his head and pushes back long, disheveled hair. "Oh, I have passed a *miserable night*, so full of ugly sights, of ghastly *dreams*, that, as I am a Christian, faithful man, I would not spend *another* such a night though 'twere to buy a *world* of happy days, so full of *dismal terror* was the time!"

"What was your dream?—I pray you tell me."

The duke sits down, heavily, beside a table, and stares into a dark corner. "Methought that I had broken from the Tower, and was embarked to cross to Burgundy!

"And, in my company, my brother Richard, who from my cabin tempted me to walk upon the hatches. Thence we looked toward England, and cited up a thousand fearful times that had befall'n us during the wars of York and Lancaster.

"As we paced along upon the giddy footing of the deck, methought that Richard *stumbled*—and, in falling, struck *me*—who had tried to stay him!—*overboard!*—into the tumbling billows of the main!

"*Lord, Lord!* methought, *what pain it was to drown!*—what dreadful noise of *waters* in mine ears!—what ugly sights of death within mine *eyes!*

"Methought I saw a thousand fearful *wrecks*, *ten thousand men* that *fishes* gnawed upon!

"*Wedges of gold: great anchors!* Heaps of *pearl*, inestimable *stones*, invaluable *jewels*—all scattered on the bottom of the sea! Some lay in dead men's skulls—and in those holes where *eyes* did once inhabit there were crept, *in scorn* of eyes, as 'twere, reflecting *gems*, which wooed the slimy bottom of the deep, and mocked the dead bones that lay scattered by!"

Asks the keeper, "Had you such *leisure* in the time of death?—to gaze upon the secrets of the depth!"

"Methought I *had!* *Often* did I *strive* to yield up the ghost!—but still the envious flood *kept in* my soul, and would not let it forth to seek the empty, vast and wandering *air*, but smothered it within my panting bulk, which almost *burst* to belch it into the sea!"

"*Awaked* you not with that sore agony?"

"*Oh, no!*—my dream was *lengthened!*—and after that last, *oh*, then began a *tempest against my soul!*—which passèd, methought, across the melancholy floor with that grim ferryman whom poets write of, unto the kingdom of *perpetual night!*

"The first that *there* did greet my stranger soul was my great *father-in-law*, renowned *Warwick*, who cried aloud, 'What *scourge* for *perjury* can this dark monarchy afford *false*

Clarence?” George had betrayed the earl, once an ally, at the war’s end. “But soon he vanished....

“Then came wandering by a shade like an *angel*—his bright hair *dabbled with blood!* And he shrieked out loud, ‘*Clarence is come!—false, fleeting, perjurèd Clarence, that stabbed me on the field by Tewkesbury! Seize him, Furies!—take him to your torments!*’

“With that methought a legion of *foul fiends* environed me about!—and *howled in mine ears* such hideous cries that with the very *noise* I trembling *wakèd!*

“And for a season after could not believe but that I was *in Hell*, such terrible impression made the dream!”

Says the keeper, “No marvel, my lord, that it affrighted you! I promise *I* am afraid to hear you *tell* it!”

“Oh, Brakenbury, I have *done* those things which now bear evidence against my soul—for *Edward’s* sake!—and see how he *requites* me!

“O *God*, if my deep prayers cannot appease Thee, and Thou wilt be *avengèd* on my misdeeds, yet execute thy wrath on *me alone!*—oh, *spare* my guiltless *wife* and my poor *children!*” he sobs.

After a moment, though, he takes his hands from his face and wipes his eyes. “I pray thee, gentle keeper, stay by me. My soul is heavy, and I fain would sleep.”

“I will, my lord. God give Your Grace *good* rest.”

The Duke of Clarence, exhausted, lays his head on his arms at the table, and soon he is asleep.

Brakenbury, listening to his fitful moaning, reflects. *Sorrow breaks the seasons of reposing hours—makes the night morning, and the noon-time night!*

Princes have but tithes of their glories: an outward honour for an inward toll! And in imaginings unfelt, they often feel a world of restless cares! If so, betwixt the high and lowly name there’s nothing differs but the outward fame.

As he muses, two brawny commoners come silently to the chamber door. “*Ho!* Who’s here?” demands the taller.

The constable looks up, startled. “In God’s name, what are *you*, and how came you hither?”

“One that would speak with Clarence,” says the shorter man, “and I came hither on my legs.”

Annoyed by the impertinence, the gentleman faces them. “What, so *brief?*”

“’Tis better, sir, than to be tedious,” says the tall man. “Show him our commission,” he tells the other. “Talk no more.”

Brakenbury reads the king’s order. “I am, in this, commanded to deliver the noble Duke of Clarence unto your hands.” He eyes the pair warily. *I will not reason what is meant hereby, because I would be guiltless of the meaning.* “Here are the keys; there sits the duke, asleep.

“I’ll go to the king, and signify to him that thus I have resigned my charge to you.”

The big man nods. “Do so; it is a point of wisdom. Fare you well.”

Folding the conveyance, Brakenbury leaves them.

“What, shall I stab him as he sleeps?” asks the short man.

“No; then he will say ’twas done *cowardly*, when he wakes.”

“When he *wakes!* Why, fool, he shall never wake till the *Judgment Day!*”

“Well, *then* he will say we stabbed him sleeping.”

They move closer, but the smaller one frowns, rubbing both hands on his coat. “The urging of that word ‘Judgment’ hath bred a kind of remorse in me....”

“What, art thou *afraid?*”

“Not to kill him, having a warrant for it—but to be *damned* for killing him, from which no warrant can defend us!”

“I thought thou hadst been resolute.”

“So I *am*,” says his companion, backing away, “to let him *live.*”

The older man snorts. “Back to the Duke of Gloucester—tell *him* so!”

But the squat knave is hardly eager to do that. “I pray thee, stay awhile.... I hope my *holy*

mood will change; 'twas wont to hold me but while one would count to twenty....” He closes his eyes and begins.

The bigger man waits. “How dost thou feel thyself now?”

“Faith, some certain dregs of conscience are yet within me.”

“Remember our reward when the deed is done.”

“*Zounds!*—he *dies!* I had forgot the *reward!*”

“Where is thy *conscience* now?”

“In the Duke of Gloucester’s purse!”

“So when he opens his purse to give us our reward, thy conscience flies out?”

The man shrugs. “Let it go; there’s few or *none* will entertain *it!*”

“How if it come to *thee* again?”

“I’ll not meddle with it!—it is a *dangerous* thing!—it makes a man a *coward!*”

“A man cannot steal but it *accuseth* him; he cannot swear but it *checks* him; he cannot lie with his neighbour’s wife but it *detects* him! ’Tis a blushing, *shame*-faced spirit that *mutinies* in a man’s *bosom!* It fills one full of obstacles! It once made *me* restore a purse of *gold* that I found!—it *beggars* any man that *keeps* it!

“It is *turned out* from all *towns* and *cities* as a dangerous thing; and every man that means to live *well* endeavours to trust to *himself*, and to live *without* it!”

“*Zounds!* It is even now at *my* elbow, persuading me not to kill the duke!” the big man admits.

“*Take on* the devil in thy mind, and believe him not!—he would *insinuate* with thee but to make thee *sigh!*”

“*Tsk*, I am *strong*-framed; he cannot prevail with *me*, I warrant thee!”

“Spoke like a tall fellow that respects his reputation!” The small man moves toward the prisoner. “Come, shall we fall to work?”

Says his companion, “Take him over the costard with the hilt of thy sword,”—break his head, “and then we will throw him in the malmsey-butt”—sweet-wine barrel—“in the next room.”

“Oh, excellent device!—make a *sop* of him!”

“Hark! He stirs! Shall I strike?”

“No, first let’s converse with him.” Despite Richard’s warning, the smaller one wants to hear the condemned lord. The other man moves behind the duke.

George stirs. He sits up, rubbing his eyes. “Where art thou, keeper? Give me a cup of wine,” he yawns.

The younger knave chuckles. “You shall have wine *enough*, my lord, anon!”

George rises, alarmed, tipping over the chair. “In God’s name, what art thou?”

“A *man*, as you are.”

“But *not*, as I am, *royal!*”

“Nor are you, as *we* are, *loyal*,” retorts the tall man angrily; he believes Richard’s claim that his brother is plotting against King Edward.

George looks back at him, fearful. “Thy voice is thunder, but thy looks are humble....”

“My voice is now the *king*’s; my looks, mine own.”

George edges away. “How darkly and how *deadly* dost thou speak! Your eyes do *menace* me! Why look you pale? Who sent you hither? Wherefore do you come?”

“To....” The men avoid his eyes. “To—”

“To *murder* me?”

They nod—mumbling, “Aye.” “Aye.”

“You scarcely have the hearts to *tell* me so, and therefore cannot have the hearts to *do* it! Wherein, my friends, have I *offended* you?”

“You have not offended *us*, but the *king*,” says the larger man.

“I shall be *reconciled* to *him* again,” George assures them.

The short man shakes his head. “Never, my lord. Therefore prepare to die.”

The duke objects: "Are you callèd forth to slay, from out a *world* of men, the *innocent*?
"What is my offence? Where are the evidences that do accuse me? What *lawful quire* have given their verdict up unto a frowning *judge*?"

"Or *who* pronounceth the bitter sentence of poor Clarence' death before I be convicted by course of *law*? To threaten me with *death* is most *unlawful*!"

"I charge you, as you hope to have redemption by Christ's dear blood, shed for our grievous sins, that you *depart* and lay no hands on me! The deed you undertake is *damnable*!"

The big man shakes his head. "What *we* will do, we do upon *command*."

The other nods. "And he that hath commanded is the *king*."

"*Erroneous*, vassal!" cries Clarence. "The great *King* of kings hath in the tables of *his* law commanded that thou shalt *do no murder*! And wilt thou, then, spurn at *his* edict, and fulfill a *man's*? Take *heed*!—for He holds *vengeance* in his hands, to hurl upon their heads that break his law!"

But now the short man is indignant. "And that *same* vengeance doth He hurl on *thee*, for *forswearing*—and for *murder*, too! Thou didst receive falsely the Holy Sacrament to fight in quarrel for the House of *Lancaster*!"—for the former king, Henry VI, anointed as deputy of the Lord.

His companion concurs. "And, like a traitor to the name of God, didst *break* that vow!—and with thy treacherous blade uprippedst the bowels of *thy sovereign's son*!"—the young Prince of Wales.

"Whom thou wert sworn to cherish and *defend*!"

"How canst thou urge *God's* dreadful law to us, when thou hast *broken it* in so dear degree?"

George protests: "*Alas*, for whose sake *did* I that ill deed? For *Edward*!—for my *brother*, for *his* sake! Why, sirs, he sends ye not to murder me for *this*, for in this sin *he* is as deep as *I*!"

"*Oh, know you*: if *God* will yet be avengèd for this deed, He'll do it *publicly*! Take not the quarrel from his powerful arm!—He needs no indirect nor lawless course to cut off those that have offended Him!"

"Then who made *thee* a bloody *minister*, when gallant, brave-springing *Plantagenet*, that princely novice, was *struck dead* by thee?" demands the big man—with unintended irony; he means Margaret's son, but both sides in the contention were Plantagenets.

"My *brother's love*, my *rage*, and the *Devil*!"

"Thy brother's love, our *duty*, and *thy crime* provoke us hither now to slaughter *thee*."

George pleads: "Oh, if you *love* my brother, hate not *me*!—I am his *brother*, and I love him *well*!"

"If you be *hired* for *need*, go back again, and I will send you to my brother *Richard*, who shall reward you better for my *life* than Edward will for tidings of my death!"

The short man laughs. "You are *deceivèd*—your brother Richard *hates* you!"

"Oh, no, he loves me, and he holds me dear! Go you to him from me!"

"*Aye*, so we *will*."

"Tell him that when our princely *father*, York, blessed his three sons with his victorious arm, and charged us from his soul to *love* each other, he little thought of *this* divided friendship! Bid Richard think of this, and he will *weep*!"

"*Aye*—*millstones*, as he lessoned *us* to weep."

George still hopes for rescue by Richard. "Oh, do not *slander* him, for he is *kind*!"

"Right—as *snow* during *harvest*," says the tall one. "Thou deceivest thyself. 'Tis *he* that sent us hither now to slaughter thee."

"*It cannot be*!—for when I parted with him, he hugged me in his arms, and swore, with sobs, that he would labour for my delivery!"

"Why, so he *doth*," says the tall man, amused. "Now he delivers thee from *this* world's thralldom to the joys of *heaven*."

"Make peace with God," advises the short one, "for you must die, my lord."

George regards him. “Hast thou that *holy* feeling in thy soul, to counsel me to make my peace with *God*, and art thou yet to *thine own* soul so blind that thou wilt *war with God* by *murdering* me?”

He thinks of another point. “*And, sirs, consider*: he that set you on to *do* this deed will *hate* you *for* the deed!”

“What shall we do?” the smaller one asks the larger; Richard is not known for benevolence.

“*Relent!*” cries George, “and save your *souls!*”

“*Relent?* ’Tis cowardly and *womanish*,” says the big man.

“*Not to relent* is beastly, savage—*devilish!* Which of you, if you were a prince’s son, being pent from liberty as I am now, if two such murderers as yourselves came to you, would not *entreat* for *life?*” George moves forward to plead with the barrel-shaped man. “My friend, I spy some *pity* in thy looks! Oh, if thine eye be not a flatterer, come thou on *my* side, and *entreat* for me as you would beg were *you* in my distress!

“What beggar pities not a *begging* prince?”

The man has an answer. “Look behind you, my lord.”

George turns—and gasps as a sharp steel blade plunges deep into him.

“Take *that!*—and *that*,” grunts the killer, stabbing him again as he falls, then as he lies groaning. “If all this will not do, I’ll *drown* you in the malmsey-butt within.”

“A *bloody* deed, and *desperately dispatched!*” says the short man, faint and shaken, as his partner wipes the sword on silk of the nobleman’s shirt. “How like *Pilate* would I fain wash my hands of this most *grievous, guilty* murder done!”

“*How now!* What *meanest* thou, that thou help’st me not? By heavens, the *duke* shall know how slack thou art!”

“I would he knew that I had *saved his brother!* Take *thou* the fee!—and tell him what I say!—for I *repent* me that the duke is slain!” He hurries away into the dim corridor.

“So do not *I*. Go, *coward* as thou art!”

Now must I hide his body in some hole, until the duke make order for his burial.

He drags George into the next room, where he pulls the wooden cover off a half-empty wine barrel. He hefts the body and dumps it, head first, into the cask.

And when I have my meed, I must away; for this will out—and here I must not stay!

Chapter Five Harvest of Kings

Holding court at the palace, despite being seriously weakened by illness, King Edward is pleased. He rises, slowly, from the throne. “Why, *so!* Now have I done a good day’s work! You peers, *continue* this united league!

“I every day expect an embassy from my Redeemer to reclaim me hence; and now my soul shall part to heaven in *peace*, since I have set my *friends* at peace on earth!

“Rivers and Hastings, take each the other’s hand—disclaim now your hatred; swear your love!”

“By heaven, *my* heart is purged from grudging hate!” says Lord Rivers. “And with my hand I seal my true heart’s love!”

“So thrive I as I truly swear the like,” says Lord Hastings as they clasp hands.

“Take heed you not dissemble before your dying king,” Edward cautions, “lest He that is the supreme King of kings confound your hidden falsehood, and award either of you to be the other’s *end!*”

Says Hastings, “So prosper I as I swear perfected love.”

“And *I*, as I love Hastings with my heart!” says Rivers.

Edward addresses the queen. “Madam, yourself are not exempt in this, nor your son! Dorset,

Buckingham, nor *you*—you have been factious one against the other.

“Wife, love Lord Hastings; let him kiss your hand—and what you do, do it unfeignedly!”

Elizabeth extends her arm. “Here, Hastings; I will never more remember our former hatred, so thrive I and mine!” she pledges. He bows, and kisses her hand.

The king motions two noblemen together. “Dorset, *embrace* him; Hastings, love the lord marquis!”

Says Dorset, “This interchange of love, I here protest, upon my part shall be unviolable!”

“And so swear I, my lord,” says Hastings as they shake hands.

“Now, princely Buckingham, seal *thou* this league with thy embracement of my wife’s allies, and make me happy in your unity!” commands Edward.

The duke bows to the queen. “Whenever Buckingham doth turn his hate on you or yours, nor with all duteous love doth cherish you, may God punish me with hate in those where I most expect *love*. When I have most need to employ a *friend*, and to be most assurèd that he *is* a friend, deep, hollow, treacherous and full of guile be he unto me; this do I beg of God, when I am cold in zeal to *yours*.”

King Edward beams. “A *pleasing cordial* unto my sickly heart, princely Buckingham, is this thy vow!” He looks around the throne room. “There wanteth now our brother *Richard* here, to make the blessed period of this peace!”—to complete it.

Buckingham spots him, just now entering the throne room. “And, in good time, here comes the noble duke with Sir Richard Ratcliffe.”

“Good morrow to my sovereign king and queen,” says Richard. “And, princely peers, a happy time of day.”

“*Happy indeed*, as *we* have spent the day!” says Edward. “Brother, we have done deeds of *charity*: made *peace* of enmity, fair *love* of hate, between these once swelling-incensèd peers!”

“A blessed labour, my most sovereign liege!” says Richard blithely, looking around.

“Amongst this princely heap, if any here by false intelligence or wrong surmise hold *me* a foe—if I unwittingly, or in my rage, have aught committed that is hardly borne by any in this presence—I desire to *reconcile* me to his friendly *peace*!”

“’Tis *death* to me to be at enmity! I *hate* it, and desire all good men’s *love*!”

“First, madam, I entreat *true* peace of you, which I will purchase with my duteous *service*; of you, Lord Rivers and Lord Grey—of *you* that, without my deserving, have frowned on me!”

He smiles. “Of *you*, my noble cousin Buckingham, if ever any grudge were lodged between us!” They have already come privately to terms.

“Dukes, earls, lords, gentlemen!—indeed, *all*,” says Richard, “I do not know of that English man *alive* with whom my soul is any jot at odds more than the infant that is to be born tonight!”

“I thank my God for my *humility*.” Enjoying the irony, he exudes apparent benevolence.

Elizabeth is delighted. “A *holy day* shall this be kept hereafter! I would to God *all* strifes were so well compounded!” She adds, in the spirit of the moment, “My sovereign liege, I do beseech Your Majesty to take our brother *Clarence* into your grace!”

Richard startles the court with an angry protest: “Why, madam, have I offered *love* for *this*?—to be so *foulèd* in this royal presence! Who knows not that the noble duke is *dead*?”

As the others gape, Richard, sounding hurt and indignant, tells the queen, “You do him *injury* to *scorn his corpse*!”

Gasps the king, “Who knows not he is *dead*?—*who knows he is*?”

Cries the queen, “All-seeing *Heaven*, what a world is *this*!”

Asks Buckingham calmly, “Look I so pale, Lord Dorset, as the rest?”

“*Aye*, my good lord!—and there’s *no one* in this presence but his red colour hath *forsook his cheeks*!”

Edward staggers to his seat, appalled. “Is Clarence *dead*? The order was *reversèd*!”

Richard sighs mournfully, although proud of his own celerity. “But he, poor soul, died by your *first* order, that a wingèd Mercury did bear.” He regards the queen’s courtiers with hostility.

“Some *tardy cripple* bore the countermand—that came too lag to *see him buried!* God grants that *some*—less *noble* and less *loyal*, near in *bloody thoughts*, not in blood—deserve not worse than wretched *Clarence* did—and yet go *without suspicion!*”

As the courtiers exchange whispered comments, Lord Stanley, Earl of Derby, hurries into the tall throne room; he strides forward and kneels before the king. “A *boon*, my sovereign, for my service done!” he pleads.

“I pray thee, *peace*,” groans the king, waving him away. “My soul is full of *sorrow!*”

“I will not rise unless Your Highness grant!” says the earl urgently.

Edward, closing his eyes in weary resignation, tips back his head and breathes an almost silent moan. With an effort, he looks at Derby. “Then speak at once what it is thou request.”

“Thy *pardon*, sovereign, of my servant’s *life*, who slew today a righteous gentleman lately attendant on the Duke of Norfolk!”

King Edward stares down at his own hands. “Have I a tongue to doom my *brother’s* death?—and shall the same give *pardon* to a *slave?*” he asks, anger rising along with remorse. “My brother *slew no man!*—his fault was *thought*, and yet *his* punishment was cruel death!”

He looks around the court, stares at the lords’ faces. “Who sued to me for *him?* *Who*, during my rage, kneeled at my feet and bade me be *advised!*”

“Who spake of *brotherhood?* Who spake of *love?* Who told me how the poor soul did forsake the mighty *Warwick?*—and did *fight for me!* Who told me how in the field by Tewkesbury, when Oxford had me down, *he rescued me!*—and said, ‘Dear brother, *live*—and be a *king!*’

“Who told me how, when we both lay in the *field*, almost *frozen to death*, he did wrap me even in his own garments, and gave *himself*, all thin and naked, to the numbing-cold night?”

“*All this* from my remembrance brutish *Wrath* sinfully pluckèd—and *not a man of you* had so much grace as to put it in my mind!”

“But when your *carters* or your *waiting-vassals* have *done a drunken slaughter*, and defaced a precious image of our dear Redeemer, you straight are *on your knees* for pardon!—*pardon!* And, too, that I must *urgently grant it you!*”

“But *for my brother* not a man would *speak!*—nor I, *ungracious*, speak unto *myself* for him, poor soul! The proudest of you all have been *beholding* to him in his life—yet none of you would *once* plead for his life!”

“O *God*, I fear thy *justice* will take hold of me!” he cries. He looks out and sweeps his hand to include the queen. “And *mine*, and *you and yours* for this!”

He sags, steadying himself by grasping, weakly, the back of the throne. “Come, Hastings, help me to my rooms,” he tells the lord chamberlain. “*Oh, poor Clarence!*” he sobs, as he and the queen, followed by attendants, go to their chambers.

“*This is the fruit of rashness!*” cries Richard angrily to his companion, Sir Richard Ratcliffe—as the other courtiers listen. “Markèd you not how the guilty kindred of the *queen* looked pale when they did hear of Clarence’ death?—*they who did ever urge it* unto the king!”

“*Oh*, God will *revenge* it!”

“But come,” he tells the knight, “let us go in, to *comfort* Edward with our company!”

“We’ll wait upon Your Grace,” says Buckingham, dryly, as he and Derby follow.

Edward Plantagenet, the new Earl of Warwick, eight years of age, has been worried. “*Tell me*, good grandam—*is our father dead?*”

“No, boy,” claims the Duchess of York, widowed by the war in which her son Edmund of Rutland was murdered. Of her grown sons, Edward is King of England and Richard is Duke of Gloucester, but the boy’s father, George, Duke of Clarence, now lives on only in her heart.

“Why do you wring your hands, and beat your breast, and cry, ‘*O Clarence, my unfortunate son!*’” demands her grandson.

His sister, Margaret, is ten; she, too, confronts the duchess tearfully. “Why do you look upon us and shake your head, and call us *wretches, orphans, castaways*, if our noble father be alive?”

The frail lady, sitting by a window in their quarters at the royal castle in London, sighs. “My pretty children, you much *mistake* me. I do *lament* the sickness of the king, loath to lose him, not your father’s death.” She glances out, sadly, over the grounds below. “It were lost sorrow to bewail one that’s lost.”

“Then, Grandam, you conclude that he *is* dead!” cries the boy. “My uncle the *king* is to blame for this! God will *revenge* it!—Him I will importune with *daily prayers*, all to that effect!”

The girl nods. “And so will *I!*”

“Peace, children, *peace!*—the *king* doth love you *well!* Incapable and shallow *innocents*, you cannot guess who caused your father’s death.”

The boy is angry. “Grandam, we *can!*—for my good Uncle Richard *told* me: the *king*, provoked by the *queen*, devised impeachments to *imprison* him!

“And when my uncle told me so, he *wept*, and hugged me in his arms, and kindly kissed my cheek—bade me rely on *him* as on my father, and he would love me dearly *as his child!*”

The duchess scowls. “Oh, that Deception should steal such *gentle* shapes, and with a virtuous vizard”—mask—“hide foul *guile!* He is my son—yea, and therein my *shame*; yet from my dugs”—nipples—“he drew not his *deceit!*”

Young Edward frowns. “Think you my uncle did *dissemble*, Grandam?”

“*Aye*, boy!”

He frowns. “I cannot think it.” He looks up. “*Hark!* What noise is this?” he asks, as the queen, tearful, her hair in disarray, bursts into the room from her nearby chambers. With her are her grown sons, Lords Rivers and Dorset.

Sobs Elizabeth, “*Oh*, who shall *hinder* me?—to *wail* and *weep*, to *chide* my fortune and *torment* myself! I’ll join with black Despair *against* my soul, and to *myself* become an enemy!”

The duchess rises, annoyed. “What *means* this *scene* of rude impatience?”

“To mark with *violence* a tragic *act!*—*Edward*—my lord, your son, *our king!*—is *dead!*”

“Why grow the *branches*, now that the root is withered? Why wither not the *leaves*, the sap being gone? If you will live, *lament!*—if die, be *brief*, so that our swift-wingèd souls may catch the king’s!—or, like obedient subjects, *follow* him, to his new kingdom of perpetual rest!”

Edward’s mother begins to cry. “*Oh*, as much interest as I had title to in thy noble husband have *I* in thy *sorrow!*”

“I have bewept a worthy *husband’s* death, and lived by looking on his *images*”—his sons. “But now *two* mirrors of his princely semblance are *cracked into pieces* by malignant *Death!*—and I for comfort have but one *false* glass, which *grieves* me when I see him, to my shame!

“Thou art a widow—yet thou art a *mother*, and hast the comfort of thy children left thee! But *Death* hath snatched my husband from mine arms, and pluckèd two crutches from my feeble limbs, *Edward* and *Clarence!*”

“Oh, what a cause have I to overgo *thy* plaints, and drown thy cries, thine being but a *moiety*”—half—“of *my* grief!”

George’s son regards the queen angrily. “Good aunt, you *wept not* for our *father’s* death!—how can we aid you with our kindred tears?”

“*Our* fatherless distress was left unmoanèd,” says the girl. “Your *widow’s* dolour likewise be unwept!”

“Give me no help in *lamentation!*” says Elizabeth. “To *bring forth* complaints I am not *barren!* All springs reduce their currents to *mine* eyes, so that I, being governed by the watery moon, may send forth *plenteous* tears to *drown the world!*”

“*Oh*, for my *husband!*—for my dear lord, *Edward!*”

The children look at each other. “*Oh* for our *father*, for our dear lord, *Clarence!*” cries Margaret.

The duchess, in tears, falters as she finds her chair. “*Alas* for *both!*—both *mine*, *Edward* and *Clarence!*”

Groans the queen, “What stay had *I* but *Edward?* And he’s gone!”

The boy weeps. “What stay had *we* but Clarence?—and *he’s* gone!”

The duchess shakes her head. “What stays had *I* but they? And *they* are gone!”

“Was never *widow* had so dear a loss!” moans Elizabeth.

“Were never *orphans* had so dear a loss!” says the girl.

The white-haired lady rises. “Was never *mother* had so dear a loss!” she insists. The duchess regards the others. “*Alas*, I am the *mother* of these moans! *Their* woes are parcellèd; *mine* are *general*!”

“She for an *Edward* weeps, and so do *I*! I for a *Clarence* weep; so doth not she.

“These babes for Clarence weep, and so do *I*! I for an *Edward* weep; so do not they.

“*Alas*, you three!—*on me, threefold* distressèd, pour all your tears! I am *your sorrow’s* muse, and I will dampen it with lamentations!”

Dorset tells the queen, “*Comfort*, dear mother! God is much *displeasèd* that you take his doing with *unthankfulness*! In common, worldly things ’tis called *ungrateful* to repay with dull unwillingness a debt which with a bounteous hand was kindly *lent*. Much *more so* to be thus opposite with *heaven*, when it requires the *royal* debt it lent you!”—calls back a king.

Rivers tells the queen, his sister; “Madam, bethink you, like a *careful mother*, of *the young prince your son*!” Her first child by the king was elevated, while still an infant, to Prince of Wales—and heir to the throne; that Edward is now thirteen. “*Send for him* straight!—let him be *crownèd*! In *him* your comfort lives!

“*Drown* desperate *sorrow* in dead Edward’s grave—and plant your *joys* on *living* Edward’s *throne*!”

The doors onto the long corridor open, and Richard enters the room, followed by Hastings, Buckingham, Derby and Ratcliffe. He goes straight to the queen and bows politely. “Sister, have comfort! All of us have *cause* to wail the dimming of our shining star; but none can cure the harms by wailing them.”

Now he turns. “Madam, my mother, I do cry you mercy—I did not see Your Grace! Humbly on my knee I crave your blessing.”

“*God* bless thee,” says the duchess coldly. “And put *meekness* in thy mind!—love, charity, obedience—and *true* duty!”

“Amen,” says Richard, rising. *And make me die a good old man—that’s the butt-end of a mother’s blessing. I wonder why her grace did leave it out?* he thinks—wryly; she has always known he is treacherous.

Lord Buckingham, standing with Richard, addresses the grieving royal family. “You clouded princes and heart-sorrowing peers that bear this mutual, heavy load of moans, now *cheer* each other in each other’s *love*! Though we have *spent* our harvest from this king, we are to *reap* the harvest of his *son*!

“Their *rancour* broken, your high-swol’n hearts—lately splintered, but now knit and *joined together*—must gently be so preservèd, kept and *cherished*!

“To me it seemeth good that, with some little throng in attendance, *forthwith* the young prince be fetchèd from Ludlow hither to London, *to be crownèd our king*!”

“Why with some *little* train, my Lord of Buckingham?” asks Rivers.

“Marry, my lord, lest among a *multitude* the new-healèd wound of *malice* should break out!—which would be so much the *more* dangerous as by how much the *state* is *green*, and yet *ungovernèd*!—where *every horseman* bears a commanding rein, and may direct his course as pleases *himself*!

“And it is apparent, in my opinion, that *fears* of harm ought to be prevented as well.”

Says Richard, “I hope the king *made peace* with *all* of us. The compact is *firm* and *true* in me.”

“And so in *me*,” says Rivers, “and so, I think, in *all*. Yet, since it *is* but green, it should be put to no apparent likelihood of *breach*, which perhaps by *much* company might be urgèd. Therefore I say with noble Buckingham it is meet that some *few* should fetch the prince.”

Hastings agrees. “And so say I.” The lord chamberlain wants no armed, partisan force to seize the boy.

“Then be it so,” says Richard, “and we’ll go to determine who they shall be that straight shall post to Ludlow.” The prince has been brought up in Rivers’ home there, not far from Wales.

Richard turns to the queen. “Madam, and you, my mother—will *you* go, to show your approving of this weighty business?”

“With all our hearts!” says Elizabeth as the duchess nods.

Eager to see the boy, and to have him installed as king, the Woodeville nobles immediately begin to confer about his arrival and coronation.

With Richard, Buckingham speaks privately. “My lord, *whoever* journeys to the prince, for God’s sake let not *us* be too far behind!—for along the way I’ll find occasion, as index to the story we late talked of, to *part* the king from the queen’s proud kindred!”

Richard smiles and claps a hand on his shoulder. “My other *self*, my counsel’s *consistory*, my *oracle*—my *prophet*! My dear cousin, I, like a child, will go by thy direction,” he tells Buckingham—guilefully; the scheme is his own. “Towards Ludlow then!”

Using the royal *we*, Richard muses, darkly: *For we’ll not stay behind.*

Chapter Six Parlous Boys

A young London merchant calls to an acquaintance on Cannon Street, near St. Paul’s Cathedral. “Neighbour, well met! Whither away so fast?”

“I scarcely know *myself*, I promise you!” replies the bearded gentleman, pausing. “Hear you the *news* abroad?”

“*Aye*, that the king is dead.”

“*Bad* news, by’r Lady! And seldom comes any the *better*.” He wags his head and tugs at his whiskers, fretting. “I fear, I *fear* ’twill prove a *giddy* world!”

A portly lawyer, his face freshly shaven, joins them. “Neighbours, God speed.”

“Give *you* good morrow, sir!” says the youth.

“Doth this news hold, of good King Edward’s death?”

“*Aye*, sir, it is too true!” says the graybeard. “God help the while!”

“Then, masters, look to see a troublous world.”

“No, *no*,” says the merchant, “by God’s good grace, his *son* shall reign!”

“Woe to the land that’s governed by a child,” says the newcomer.

The old man considers. “In him there is, no doubt, a *hope* for government: that in his non-age with a Council under him, and in his full and ripened years *himself*, he shall then, and till then, govern *well*.”

“So stood the state when *Henry the Sixth* was crownèd in Paris at but *nine months* old,” the young man notes.

The one with pink jowls shakes his head. “Stood the state *so*?—no, *no*, good friends, God wot!—for *then* this land was famously enrichèd with *politic*, *grave* counsel!—*then* the king had virtuous *uncles* to protect his grace!”

“Why, so hath *this*!—by both the father and mother!” protests the youth.

“Better it were they *all* came by the father, or by the father there were *none at all*,” mutters the stout barrister “For now rivalry over who shall be *nearest*”—and so control the prince—“will touch *us* all *too* near, if God prevent not!”

“Oh, full of *danger* is the *Duke of Gloucester*! And the queen’s sons and brothers *haught* and *proud*! Were they to be *rulèd*, and not to rule, this sickly land might solace as before.”

Says the merchant, “Come, come, ye fear the *worst*. All shall be well.”

The fat lawyer, frowning, shares the common sagacity: “When *clouds* appear, *wise* men put

on their cloaks; when great leaves fall, the *winter* is at hand; when the sun sets, who doth not look for *night*? Untimely *storms* make men expect a *dearth*!

“All *may* be well; but if God sort it so, ’tis more than *I* expect—or we *deserve*.”

The graybeard nods. “Truly, the souls of men *are* full of dread! Ye cannot even discuss it, almost, with a man that looks not *heavily*, and full of *fear*.”

“Before the times of *change*, it is ever so,” says the attorney, rubbing a raw and motley cheek. “By a divine instinct, men’s minds anticipate ensuing dangers—as, for proof, we see the waters swell before a boisterous storm.

“But leave it all to God. Whither away?”

“Marry, we were sent for—to the justices,” the old man tells him.

“And so was I! I’ll bear you company.” Together they head to the assizes.

Before many a juror, crimes are soon to be unfolded.

Visiting the capital for the coronation, the Archbishop of York happily reports, to the Prince of Wales’ mother and grandmother at the palace, news of the boy’s progress from Ludlow toward London. “Last night, I hear, they lay at Northampton; at Stony-Stratford will they be tonight; tomorrow or next day they will be here!”

“I long with all my heart to see the prince!” says the old Duchess of York. “I hope he is much *grown* since last I saw him.”

The queen smiles at her other boy, Richard, the ten-year-old Duke of York—next in line for the throne after his older brother. “But I hear *no*—they say my son of *York* hath almost overta’en him in his growth.”

“Aye, Mother, but I would not *have* it so!” protests the lad.

“Why, my young cousin, it is *good* to grow,” the duchess tells him.

“Grandam, one night as we did sit at supper, my uncle Rivers talked of how I did grow *more* than my brother.

“‘Aye,’ quoth my uncle Richard, ‘small *herbs* have grace; great *weeds* do grow *apace*.’”

“And since, methinks I should *not* grow so fast—because *sweet* flowers are slow, but weeds make haste.”

The duchess is annoyed. “*Goodness!* The saying did not hold in *him* that did object the same to *thee!*—he was the *wretched* ’st thing when he was young—so *long* a-growing, and so *leisurely*, that if that rule were *true* he should be *gracious!*”

The archbishop—from York, one hundred, seventy-five miles away—is surprised by her vehemence. “Why, madam, so, no doubt, he *is*.”

“I *hope* he is,” says the duchess sourly, “but yet let mothers doubt.”

The boy has been thinking. “Now, by my troth, if I had but remembered, I could have given my uncle’s grace a *flout*, to touch *his* growth nearer than he touched mine....”

“How, my pretty York?” asks his grandmother. “I pray thee, let me hear it.”

“Marry, they say my uncle grew so fast that he could *gnaw* a *crust* at two hours old! ’Twas full two *years* ere I could get a *tooth*.” He giggles; “Grandam, it would have been a *biting* jest!”

“I pray thee, pretty York, who told thee that?”

He knows very well that the tale is a touchy one. “Grandam, . . . his nurse.”

“His *nurse!* Why, she was dead ere thou wert born!”

He shrugs. “If ’twere not she, I cannot tell who told me.”

His mother chides: “A *parlous* boy!”—mischievous. “Go to, you are too shrewd!”—cutting.

The archbishop intercedes gently. “Good madam, be not angry with the child.”

But Elizabeth has enough trouble with her brother-in-law already; she wants to avoid annoying him. “Pitchers have ears!”—an apothegm: *household servants can repeat what they hear*.

The churchman nods toward the doors. “Here comes a messenger. What news?” he asks the grim-faced rider.

“Such news, my lord, as grieves me to unfold!”

Elizabeth is immediately concerned. “How fares *the prince?*”

“*Well*, madam, and in health.”

“What is thy news, then?” asks the duchess.

“Lord Rivers and Lord Grey are *sent to Pomfret*—with them Sir Thomas Vaughan—*prisoners!*”

The knight who is being held with the queen’s brother and adult son has served as the young prince’s chief guardian at Ludlow. Pomfret Castle in Yorkshire has dungeon cells; King Richard II was murdered in one of them.

“Who hath committed them?” demands the duchess.

“The mighty Dukes of Gloucester and Buckingham.”

“For what *offence?*” asks the astonished queen.

“The sum of all I *can* I have disclosed; why, or for what, these nobles were committed is all unknown to me, my gracious lady.”

“*Ay me*, I see the downfall of our house!” cries Elizabeth. “The *tiger* now hath seizèd the gentle *hind!*—insulting *tyranny* begins to sit—and *aweless*—upon the innocent *throne!* Welcome, *destruction, death, and massacre!* I see, as on a *map*, the *end of all!*”

The Duchess of York is angry. “O *wrangling* days, *accursèd and unquiet!*—how *many* of you have *mine* eyes beheld!

“My *husband* lost his life to *get* the crown!

“And often my *sons* were tossèd up and down, for me to joy and weep at their gain and loss!

“Then, being *seated*, and domestic broils blown clean over, *themselves*, the conquerors, *make war* upon themselves—blood against *blood*, self against *self!*

“O *preposterous* and frantic *outrage*, *end* thy damnèd spleen!—or let me *die*, to *look* on death *no more!*”

The queen grasps her young son’s hand. “Come, come, my boy; we will to *sanctuary!*” She nods to the duchess. “Madam, farewell!”

“I’ll go along with you!”

“*You* have no cause,” Elizabeth tells Richard’s mother; the duchess is no threat to his ambition.

The prudent archbishop urges the queen, “My gracious lady, *go*, and thither bear your *treasure!*—and your goods!”

As chancellor of the realm, he offers an affirmation: “As for my part, I’ll resign unto Your Grace the Seal I keep”—the Great Seal of England. “And so betide *me* as well as I tender *you*, and *all* of yours!

“Come, I’ll conduct you to the sanctuary!”

Trumpets sound a regal flourish for the arrival in London of Prince Edward, but the glum lad is almost hidden, led within the phalanx of an armed escort. Nobles, gentles, and common citizens crowd the street at a northern gate of the capital, waiting to hail the boy who already is considered by many in England to be king.

“Welcome, sweet prince, to London!—to your chamber!” says Lord Buckingham, bowing.

Richard smiles, bowing too deeply. “Welcome, dear cousin, my thoughts’ sovereign. The weary way hath made you melancholy—”

“*No*, Uncle,” says the young Prince of Wales sharply, “but our *crosses* on the way”—changes made despite protest, “have made it tedious, wearisome, and heavy!” He resents Richard’s taking control, and he misses Rivers—and Vaughan and Grey. “I want *more* uncles here to welcome me!”

“Sweet prince,” says Richard, “the untainted virtue of *your years* hath not yet dived into the world’s *deceit*. Nor can you distinguish more in a man than his outward *show*—which, God, He knows, seldom or never jumpeth with the heart.

“Those uncles which you want were *dangerous!* Your Grace attended to their sugared *words*, but looked not on the *poison of their hearts!* God *keep* you from them, and from such false friends!”

“God keep me from *false* friends,” says the young prince, “but *they* were none!”

Richard sees a procession making its way through the crowd. “My lord, the *Mayor* of London comes to greet you.”

Followed by his train of officials, the Lord Mayor approaches and bows to the prince. “God bless Your Grace with health and happy days!”

Richard is pleased; proper address to a king would be *Your Majesty* or *Your Highness*. Buckingham’s minions in the city have managed to make young Edward’s reign seem tentative.

“I thank you, good my lord,” says the prince, smiling as he waves to the throng, “and thank you all!” But he looks around, puzzled. “I thought my *mother* and my brother *York* would long ere this have met us on the way....” Nor does he see the lord chamberlain. “Fie, what a slug is Hastings, that he comes not to tell us whether they will come or no!”

Buckingham points. “And, in good time, here comes the sweating lord.”

Young Edward greets the nobleman, who is out of breath after his haste. “*Welcome*, my lord! What, will our *mother* come?”

Hastings, bowing, is perplexed. “On what *occasion*, *God*, He knows, not *I*, the queen your mother and your brother *York* have *taken sanctuary!*” He wipes his brow with a silk handkerchief. “The tender *prince* would fain have come with *me*, to meet Your Grace, but by his mother was *perforce withheld!*”

Buckingham, thwarted, scowls; he wants both royal heirs to be close at hand. “*Fie!*—what an indirect and *peevish* course is *this* of hers!” He motions for the Archbishop of Canterbury to come forward. “Lord Cardinal, will Your Grace persuade the queen to send the Duke of York unto his princely brother?—immediately!”

“If she *deny*.... Lord Hastings, go *with* him, and from her jealous arms *pluck him perforce!*”

The archbishop, Thomas, Cardinal Bouchier, flushes. “My Lord of Buckingham, if my weak *oratory* can from his mother win the Duke of York, expect him here anon; but if she be obdurate to mild entreaties, God in heaven forbid we should infringe the holy privilege of *blessèd sanctuary!* Not for all this land would I be guilty of so deep a sin!”

“You are too obstinate, my lord—too ceremonious and senselessly *traditional!*” complains Buckingham. “Weigh it but with the grossness of *this age*: you break not *sanctuary* in seizing *him*; the benefit thereof is always granted to those whose dealings have *deservèd* the place, and those who have the wit to *claim* the place. This prince hath neither claimed it nor deserved it, and therefore, in mine opinion, cannot *have* it!”

“Then, taking him from thence who *is not there*,”—in actual sanctuary, “you break no privilege nor charter thereof. Oft have I heard of ‘sanctuary men’—but sanctuary *children*, ne’er till now!”

The cardinal hopes to see the issue resolved peaceably—and outside the church. “My lord, you shall o’er-rule my mind, for once. Come on, Lord Hastings, will you go with me?”

“I’ll go, my lord,” says the chamberlain curtly, perturbed yet again by a Woodeville.

The boy wants to see his mother. “Good lords, make all the speedy haste you may!” he calls as they go. “Say, Uncle Gloucester: if our brother come, where shall we sojourn till our coronation?”

“Where it seems best unto Your Royal Self,” Richard replies, with apparent carelessness. “If I may counsel you, some day or two Your Highness shall repose you at the Tower; then where you please... as shall be thought most fit for your best health and recreation.”

Edward frowns. “Of *any* place, I do not like the *Tower!*” He spots Richard’s flash of annoyance. “Did Julius Caesar build that place, my lord?”

“He did, my gracious lord, *begin* that place,” says Buckingham, “which, since, succeeding ages have re-edified.” One of the several royal residences, the Tower of London also serves as an

armory—and sometimes as a prison for nobles.

“Is it upon *record*, or else *reported* successively, from age to age, that he built it?”

“Upon record, my gracious lord.”

“My lord, even were it not *registered*, methinks the *truth* should live from age to age, retold as it *was* to *all posterity!*—to the general, all-*ending* day!”—*Judgment Day*.

His implication is not lost on Richard. ‘*So wise so young, they say, do never live long.*’

Prince Edward is regarding him carefully. “What say you, Uncle?”

Richard pronounces solemnly, “I say: without characters,”—written records, “*fame* lives long.” Thus, like the formal vice *Iniquity*, I moralize two meanings in one word. The morality-play figure would approve his second meaning: the *famous* may *not* live long.

As the populace listens, Prince Edward replies: “Julius Caesar was a man famous for what did *enrich* his valour: his *wit*, set down to make his valour *live*. Death makes no conquest of *that* conqueror, for now he lives in *fame*, though not in life.”

The boy thinks for a moment. “I’ll tell you what, my cousin Buckingham....”

“What, my gracious lord?”

“An if I live until I be a man, I’ll *win again* our ancient right in *France!*—or die a *soldier*, as I lived a *king!*” The delighted crowd responds with immediate applause and cheering.

As usual, Richard’s thought belies his smile: *A forward spring is likely to have a short summer.*

Buckingham has been peering down the street. “Now, in good time, here comes the Duke of York!” he tells Richard, as the cardinal and Hastings arrive, bringing the other child.

Prince Edward greets the boy warmly: “Richard of York! How fares our loving brother?”

“*Well*, my dread lord!—for so must I call you now!” says young Richard sheepishly.

Edward sadly remembers their father. “Aye, brother; to our”—the royal form of *my*—“grief, as it is to yours; too recently he died who might have *kept* that title which, by his death, hath lost much majesty.”

Richard of Gloucester regards the young duke. “How fares our cousin, noble lord of York?”

“I thank you, gentle uncle.” The boy remembers something. “Oh, my lord, you said that *idle weeds* are fast in growth.” He nods toward Edward. “The prince my brother hath outgrown me far....”

“He hath, my lord.”

“And therefore is he *idle?*”

Richard smiles. “Oh, my fair cousin, I must not say so.”

The boy still resents the slight. “Then *he* is more beholding to you than *I*.”

Says Richard smoothly, “He may command me as my *sovereign*, but you have power in me as in a *kinsman*.”

The young duke arches an eyebrow, ready to test that; he points. “I pray you, Uncle, give me this dagger.”

“My *dagger*, little cousin? With all my heart!” he says—wishing they were alone. But he hands it, sheathed and haft-first, to the boy.

“A *beggar*, brother?” asks Prince Edward—a humorless jest.

“Of my kind *uncle*,” says the other lad, sliding the knife out of its leather, “who I know will give *this*, it being but a trifle which is no *grief* to give.”

Richard smiles. “A *greater* gift than that I’d give my cousin.”

“A greater gift,” says the boy, turning the gleaming blade thoughtfully. He glances up at Richard. “Oh—that’s the *sword* to it.”

Richard’s hand is firmly on the hilt of his long blade: “*Ah*, gentle cousin, were it *light* enough....”

“*Ah*, then, I *see*,” says the boy. “You will part but with *light* gifts; in weightier things you’ll tell a beggar *no*.”

“It is too heavy for Your Grace to wear.”

The boy's glare is fiercely contemptuous. "I'd weigh it *lightly*"—not respect it—"were it even heavier."

"What?—would you have my weapon, little lord?"

"I would—so that I might *thank* you as you *call me*."

"How?"

"*Little*."

Prince Edward is aware of their uncle's rising ire. "My lord of York will ever be cross in talk!" he says lightly; the boys dare not press too far. "Uncle, Your Grace knows how to bear with him."

"You mean, to *bear me*," says the younger child, "not to bear *with me*."

"Uncle, my brother mocks *both* you and me: because *I* am little, he thinks that *you* should bear me on your shoulders like a monkey!"

Buckingham is impressed. *With what a sharp, provided wit he reasons! To mitigate the scorn he gives his uncle, he prettily and aptly taunts himself! So cunning and so young is a wonder!*

Richard of Gloucester asks the prince, "My lord, will't please you *pass along*? Myself and my good cousin Buckingham will to your mother, to entreat of her to meet you at the Tower and *welcome you*."

The younger boy is surprised. "What?—will you go unto the *Tower*, my lord?"

Prince Edward nods unhappily. "My lord *protector* needs will have it so."

His brother shakes his head in dismay. "*I shall not sleep in quiet at the Tower!*"

"Why, what should you fear?" asks Edward, as courtiers and citizens listen.

"Marry, my uncle *Clarence's* angry *ghost*! My grandam told me he was *murdered* there!"

"I fear no uncles *dead*," Edward tells him, glancing pointedly at the new Protector of the Realm.

"Nor none that *live*, I hope," smiles Gloucester.

The prince misses Lords Rivers and Grey. "If they live as *I* hope, *I need not fear*," he replies. "But come, my lord," he says to Hastings. "With a heavy heart, thinking on *them*, go I unto the Tower."

A trumpeter with the soldiers carrying the Prince of Wales' colors sounds a sennet, and the regal retinue proceeds into the City of London.

As the town-dwellers drift away, the Duke of Gloucester lingers with two of his allies.

Buckingham is irked; he speaks privately to Richard. "Think you not, my lord, that this little, prating York was incited by his *subtle mother* to taunt and *scorn* you thus opprobriously?"

Richard fumes. "No doubt, no doubt! Oh, 'tis a parlous boy!—bold, quick, ingenious, forward, capable—he is all the *mother's*, from the top to toe!"

"Well, let them rest," says Buckingham. "Come hither, Catesby." Sir William, who dwells in the royal household, moves closer. "Thou art sworn to conceal what we *impart*, and to *effect*, deeply and closely,"—secretly, "what we *intend*!"

"Thou know'st our reasons, urgèd along the way here; what think'st thou? Is it not an easy matter to make Lord William Hastings of *our* mind?—*for* the instalment of this noble duke in the *seat royal* of this famous isle!"

But Catesby shakes his head. Hastings had served King Edward faithfully. "He so loves the prince for his *father's* sake that he will not be won to aught against him."

"What think'st thou, then, of Stanley? What will he?"

The Earl of Derby, too, was well treated by the late king. "He will do, all in all, as *Hastings* doth."

"Well, then," says Buckingham, "no more but this: go, gentle Catesby, and *sound* thou, far off, as it were, Lord Hastings—how he doth stand affected to our purpose. Then summon him tomorrow to the Tower, to meet about the coronation.

"If thou dost find him *tractable* to us, *encourage* him, and show him all our reasons; if he be leaden, icily cold, unwilling, be *thou* so too, and so break off your talk. Then give us notice of his

inclination, for we tomorrow hold *divided* Councils, wherein thyself shalt be doubly employèd.”

“Commend me to Lord William,” says Richard. “Tell him, Catesby, that his ancient knot of *dangerous adversaries* are to *bleed* tomorrow at Pomfret Castle!

“And bid my *friend*, for joy of this good news, to give Mistress Shore one gentle kiss the more!” he adds. Following King Edward’s death, the woman has become the chamberlain’s own mistress.

“Good Catesby, go; effect this business *soundly*,” cautions Buckingham.

The knight, accustomed to Richard’s flippancy, nods. “My good lords both, with all the heed I may.”

“Shall we hear from you, Catesby, ere we sleep?” asks Richard.

“You shall, my lord.”

“At Crosby Place, then, shall you find us both,” says Richard, as the knight bows and goes.

Buckingham frets. “Now, my lord, what shall we do if we perceive Lord Hastings will not yield to our complots?”

Completely confident, Richard replies with a casual wave of a hand: “Chop off his head, man.” But he is thinking. “*Something* we will do.

“And, look you, when I am *king*, claim thou from me the *earldom of Hereford*, and the *moveables* whereof the king my brother stood possessèd.”

The duke is delighted with the proposed rewards. “I’ll *claim* that promise at Your Grace’s hands!”

“And look to have it *yielded* with all willingness!

“Come, let us sup betimes,” says Richard, “so that afterwards we may digest ‘our complots’ into some form.” He is amused that Buckingham considers himself a partner.

Chapter Seven Devilish Plotting

Lord Hastings is awakened in his bed-chamber at the palace; a muffled voice calls again, “My lord! *My lord!*” The royal chamberlain wearily throws back the covers, stands, and ambles toward the noise, pulling on a robe. “Who knocks at the door?” he demands.

“A messenger from Lord Stanley,” says Derby’s man, as Hastings open the door.

“What is’t o’clock?”

“Upon the stroke of four.”

Hastings frowns. “Can thy master *not sleep* these tedious nights?”

“So it should seem, by what I have to *say!* First, he commends him to Your Noble Lordship—”

“*And then?*”

“—and then he sends you word he dreamt tonight the *boar* had *razèd off his helm!*” The white boar is Richard’s emblem. “Besides, he says, there are *two* Councils held—and matters may be determined at *one* which may make you and him to *rue the other!*”

“Therefore he sends to know Your Lordship’s pleasure—if you will *immediately take horse with him*, and with all speed post toward the north, to shun the *danger* that his soul divines!”

Hastings shakes his head in annoyance. “Go, fellow, *go*; return unto thy lord! Bid him not fear the separate Councils: his honour and myself are at the one, and at the other is my servant Catesby, where nothing can proceed that toucheth *us* whereof I shall not have intelligence.” He pauses for a yawn. “Tell him his fears are shallow, wanting instance!

“And as for his *dreams*, I wonder that he is so fond as to trust the mockery of *unquiet slumbers!* To *fly* the boar before the boar *pursues* were to incense the boar to *follow* us—and *make* pursuit where he did mean no chase!

“*Go*, bid thy master rise and come to me, and we will both together to the Tower, where, he

shall see, the boar will use us *kindly!*"

"My gracious lord, I'll tell him what you say." Derby's servant bows and goes.

Hastings has just finished dressing when his agent—he believes—knocks at the door.

"Many good morrows to my noble lord!" says the knight, bowing.

"Good morrow, Catesby! You are early stirring; what news? What *news*, in this our tottering state?"

Sir William follows him into the chamber. "It is a reeling world, indeed, my lord! And I believe 'twill never stand upright till Richard wear the garland of the realm...."

Hastings stops and turns, eyebrows raised. "What? *Wear* the *garland*? Dost thou mean the *crown*?"

"Aye, my good lord."

Hastings' hands smooth back his graying hair. "I'll have this crown of *mine* cut from my shoulders ere I will see the crown so *fouly misplaced!*" He regards Catesby. "But canst thou guess that he doth *aim* at it?"

"Aye, on my life!—and hopes to find *you* forward among his party for the gain thereof!

"And thereupon he sends you *this* good news: that this very same day your *enemies*, the kindred of the queen, must *die at Pomfret!*"

Hastings is surprised. "Indeed, I am no mourner for *that* news," he admits, "because they *have* been ever mine enemies.

"But that I'd give my voice on *Richard's* side—to *bar* my *master's* heirs in true descent!—God knows I *will not do it*, to the death!"

Catesby blanches. "God keep Your Lordship, in that gracious mind."

Hastings thinks of the Woodevilles. "But a twelve-month hence I shall *laugh* at this—at they who brought me into my master's hate!"—who initiated, he believes, King Edward's brief suspicions. "I *live* to look upon their *tragedy!*" He ponders. "I tell thee, Catesby...."

"What, my lord?"

"Ere a *fortnight* make me older, I'll *send packing* some that yet think not on it!"

The knight regards him. "'Tis a vile thing to die, my gracious lord, when men are *unprepared*, and look not for it."

Hastings happily concurs: "Oh, monstrous, *monstrous!*—and so falls it out with *Rivers, Grey, Vaughan!* And so 'twill do with some men *else* who think themselves as safe as thou and I, but who, as thou know'st, are not dear to princely Richard and to Buckingham!"

Catesby manages a smile as he watches Hastings positioning his hat. "Those princes both make *high* account of *you*." *For they account his head upon the bridge!* Traitors' severed heads, coated with thin tar, are impaled on iron spikes, then displayed atop a tower at the southern end of the London landmark.

"I know they do," says the Chamberlain, "and I have well *deserved* it!"

Lord Stanley appears, knocking at the open door.

"Come on, come on; where is your *boar-spear*, man?" gibes Hastings. "Fear you the boar, and go so *unprovided?*"

The Earl of Derby smiles, somewhat abashed. "My lord, good morrow! Good morrow, Catesby. You may jest on, but, by the Holy Rood, I do not like these differing Councils!"

Hastings, nearly ready to leave, buckles the leather strap from which a rapier hangs at his side. "My lord, I hold *my* life as dear as you do *yours*; and never in my life, I do protest, was it more precious to me than 'tis *now!* Think you I would be so triumphant as I am but that I know our state secure?"

Derby, still worried, smoothes his mustache. "The lords at *Pomfret*, when they rode from London, were jocund, and supposed *their* state was sure, and indeed that they had no cause to *mistrust*. Yet you see how soon their day grew *overcast!*

"This *sudden stay* of rancour I *misdoubt!* Pray *God*, I say, I prove a needless *coward.*" He sighs. "What, shall we toward the Tower? The day is spent," he says morosely, resigned to going

to the meeting.

Hastings strides to the door. “Come, come, *have with you!* Wot you what, my lord?—today the lords you talk of are *beheaded!*”

The earl, too, is gratified—but hardly reassured. “For their *truth*, they might better wear their *heads* than some that have *accused* them wear their *hats!* But come, my lord, let us away.”

As they are leaving, an officer of the palace guard passes by in the corridor.

Hastings motions to Derby and Catesby. “Go on before; I’ll talk with this good fellow.

“How now, sirrah! How goes the world with thee?”

The guard is flattered—and relieved. “The better that *Your Lordship* please to ask!”

“I tell thee, man, ’tis better with me *now* than when I met thee *last* where now we meet!” says Hastings merrily. “*Then* was I going as *prisoner* to the Tower, by the suggestion of the queen’s allies! But now, I tell thee—*keep it to thyself*—this day those enemies are *put to death!*—and *I’m* in *better* state than *e’er I was!*”

“God hold it, to Your Honour’s good content!” says the officer.

“Gramercy, fellow!” Hastings hands him a coin. “There—*drink* that for *me!*”

“God save Your Lordship!” says the beaming guard, with a bow.

Hastings goes down the stairs, past the doors of other rooms, and out at the front entrance, where he encounters a waiting informer.

The priest bows. “Well met, my lord; I am glad to see Your Honour.”

“I thank thee, good Sir John, with all my heart! I am in your debt for your last exercise; come the next Sabbath, and I will content you!” He looks around cautiously, and then speaks quietly with the cleric.

Lord Buckingham strides toward them on the street. “What, talking with a *priest*, Lord Chamberlain? Your friends at *Pomfret*, *they* do need the priest! Your Honour hath no *shriving* work in hand!”—nothing to confess.

Hastings nods. “In good faith!—and when I met this holy man, those men you talk of came into *my* mind! What, go you toward the Tower?”—where the Council is to meet.

“I do, my lord; but I shall not stay long.” He smiles. “I shall return before Your Lordship from thence.”

Hastings nods. “’Tis like enough, for I’ll stay dinner there.”

And supper too, although thou know’st it not! thinks Buckingham. He starts toward the meeting. “Come, will you go?”

Hastings follows cheerfully. “I’ll wait upon Your Lordship!”

Come, bring forth the prisoners,” Richard’s minion orders the guards at Pomfret Castle. Surrounded by men with halberds, their steel blades gleaming, Lord Rivers and two other hatless men are led out into a paved courtyard to stand before him.

Rivers glares. “Sir Richard Ratcliffe, let me tell thee this: today shalt thou behold a subject die for *truth*, for *duty*, and for *loyalty!*”

Lord Grey sneers at Ratcliffe. “God keep the *prince* from *all the pack of you!*” he cries. “A knot, you are, of *damnèd blood-suckers!*”

“You that live after shall cry *woe* for this!” warns Sir Thomas Vaughan.

Ratcliffe motions to the guard. “Dispatch!” He tells the condemned men, gruffly, “The limit of *your* lives is out.”

Rivers looks around as they are prodded toward a large, dark-stained block of wood. “O Pomfret, *Pomfret!* O thou bloody prison, fatal and ominous to *noble* peers! Within the guilty closure of thy walls, here, Richard the Second was hacked to death!—and, for *more* slander to thy dismal seat, we give thee up *our* guiltless blood to drink!”

Says Grey glumly, “Now Margaret’s curse is fall’n upon our heads, for standing by when Richard stabbed her son.”

“Then cursed she *Hastings!*” says Rivers, “then cursed she *Buckingham*, then cursed she

Richard! Oh, *remember, God*, to hear her prayers for *them*, as now for us!

“And as for my sister and her princely sons, be *satisfied*, dear God, with *our* true blood, which, as Thou know’st, unjustly must be spilt!”

“Make *haste*,” Ratliffe tells the headsman. “The hour of death is expired.”

Rivers looks to the others. “Come, Grey, come, Vaughan, let us all embrace!—and take our leave, until we meet in heaven!”

As John Morton, Bishop of Ely, arrives to join the noblemen already seated around a heavy oaken table in the Council chamber at the Tower, Lord Hastings rises and nods to greet them all. “My lords at once, the cause why we are met is to determine of the *coronation*; in *God’s* name speak.” To anoint a king is to install the Deity’s vice-regent. “When is the royal day?”

“Are all things fitting for that royal time?” asks Buckingham.

Derby nods. “Yes; it wants but naming.”

“Tomorrow, then, I judge a happy day,” offers the bishop.

“Who knows the Lord Protector’s mind herein?” asks Buckingham. “Who is most inward with the royal duke?”

The priest replies softly. “*Your Grace*, we think, should soonest know his mind.” Ely, who supported the Lancastrians defeated by the Yorkists, knows Richard craves the crown—and that both the prince and his brother are now under Gloucester’s control, here in the Tower.

“Who?—*I*, my lord?” says Buckingham demurely. “We know each other’s *faces*, but as for our hearts, he knows no more of mine than I of *yours*—nor I no more of his than you of *mine*.” He looks to the standing nobleman. “Lord Hastings, *you* and he are near in love....”

“I thank his grace, in that I know he loves me well,” says the chamberlain. “But as for his purpose in the coronation, I have not sounded him, nor he delivered his gracious pleasure any way therein.

“But you, my noble lords, may name the time; and in the duke’s behalf I’ll give *my* voice, which, I presume, he’ll take in gentle part.”

The bishop, surprised, looks past him, and Hastings turns. “Now in good time, here comes the duke himself!” Hastings bows to Gloucester, and sits down.

Richard faces the Council. “My noble lords and cousins all, good morrow! I have been long a *sleep*er.” Actually, Richard has been hearing reports, first from Buckingham, and just now from Catesby. “But I hope my absence doth obstruct no great designs which by my *presence* might have been concluded.”

“Had not you come upon your *cue*, my lord,” says Buckingham dryly, “William, Lord Hastings had *pronounced your part!* I mean, your voice for crowning of the king.”

“Than my Lord Hastings no man might be bolder.” Richard’s smile is thin. “His lordship knows me well, and loves me well.”

The lord chamberlain, unaware of the sarcasm, smiles. “I thank Your Grace.”

Richard looks down the table. “My lord of Ely!” he says sharply.

“My lord?”

“When I was last in Holborn I saw good strawberries in your garden there; I do beseech you send for some of them.” The request is trivial—but, however insulting, it is clearly an order.

“Marry, and will, my lord, with all my heart!” says the churchman, rising. He hurries away. To the others, the implication—regarding his low importance and high peril—is apparent.

“Cousin of Buckingham, a word with you,” says Richard, drawing him aside. His voice is kept low. “Catesby hath sounded Hastings in our business, and finds the gentleman *testy!*—so hot as he will *lose his head* ere give consent that ‘his *master’s* son,’ as he worshipfully words it, shall lose the royalty of England’s throne.”

Buckingham understands. “Withdraw you hence, my lord; I’ll follow you.” They leave the chamber.

Lord Stanley, Earl of Derby, interrupts the buzz among the nonplussed Council. “We have not yet set down this day of triumph,” he notes. “Tomorrow, in mine opinion, is too *sudden*,” he says, now even more worried, “for I myself am not so well provided as else I would be, were the days prolonged.”

The bishop returns. “Where is my lord Protector? I have sent for those strawberries!” he says, trying to read the faces as he takes his seat.

“His grace looks cheerful and smooth today!” says Hastings, comfortably. “There’s some notion or other he likes *well*, when he doth bid ‘*Good morrow*’ with such a spirit! I think there’s never a man in Christendom that can less *hide* his love or hate than he!—for by his *face*, straight shall you know his *heart*!”

Derby has doubts. “What of his heart perceive *you* in his face, that by any likelihood he showed today?”

“Marry, that with no man here is he *offended*—for, were he, he had shown it in his looks.”

Derby wants to believe it. “*I pray God* he be not, *I say*!”

Richard now returns—openly angry. Behind him, with Buckingham, are Ratcliffe and Lord Francis Lovell.

Richard looks around the Council table. “I pray you all, tell me what they deserve that do *conspire my death*, with *devilish plots* of *damned witchcraft*, and that have *prevailed upon my body* with their hellish charms!”

Hastings, imagining further Woodeville affronts to the duke, replies eagerly. “The tender love I bear Your Grace, my lord, makes me most forward in this noble presence to doom the offenders, whosoever they be! *I say*, my lord, they have deserved *death*!”

“Then be your eyes the witness of *this ill*!” cries Richard, raising an elbow to let his hand dangle crookedly. “See how I am *bewitched*!—*behold*, mine arm is, like a *blasted sapling*, *withered up*! Thus has *Edward’s wife*, that monstrous *witch*, consorted with that harlot, strumpet *Shore*, and by their witchcraft thus have marked me!”

Hastings, startled, is taken aback. “If they have done this thing, my gracious lord—”

“*If*? Thou *protector* of this damned strumpet!” cries Richard, “tellest thou me of *ifs*? Thou art a *traitor*!”

“*Off with his head*! Now by Saint Paul I swear, I will not *dine* until I *see* the same! Lovell and Ratcliffe, look that it be done!”

“The rest, that love me, rise and follow me!”

Chairs scrape as the lords rush to do so, leaving the pallid Hastings with his approaching executioners.

He sits quietly. *Woe, woe for England!*

Not a whit for me—for I, too foolish, might have prevented this! Stanley dreamed the boar did raze his helm, but I disdained it, and did scorn to fly! Three times today my foot-sure horse did stumble!—and started when he looked upon the Tower, as if loath to bear me to a slaughter-house!

Oh, now I want the priest that spake to me! I now repent for what I told the pursuivant—triumphing, as ’twere, over mine enemies—over how they at Pomfret were bloodily butchered, and I myself secure in grace and favour!

O Margaret, Margaret, now thy heavy curse is lighted on poor Hastings’ wretched head!

Ratcliffe grips his shoulder. “*Dispatch*, my lord!—the duke would be at *dinner*. Make a short shrift; he longs to see your head.”

Hastings rises. “*O, momentary* grace of mortal *men*—which we more hunt for than the grace of *God*!—he who builds his hopes in the *air* of *your* good regard lives like a drunken sailor on a mast!—ready with every nod to tumble down into the fatal bowels of the deep!”

Lovell pushes him toward the door. “Come, come, *dispatch*; ’tis bootless to exclaim.”

“*Oh, bloody Richard! Miserable England!*” moans Hastings as he goes, “I prophesy the fearful’st time to *thee* that ever a wretched age hath looked upon!”

“Come, lead me to the block! Bear him my head!
“They *smile* at me who shortly shall be *dead!*”

Walking out onto the battlements with Buckingham after a fine lunch and much excellent wine, Richard, once a ruthless warrior, now a conniving civilian, is amused by the sight of some piled-up pieces of discarded armor. Battered, neglected and tarnished, it seems oddly out of place—like theatrical properties here atop the massive stone walls of the Tower, which for three centuries has loomed at London’s eastern end, just north of the Thames.

He challenges Buckingham’s aptitude for dissimulation. “Come, cousin, canst thou *quake*, and change thy *colour?*—murder thy breath in the middle of a *word*, and then begin again and stop again, as if thou wert *distraught*, and mad with terror?”

“*Tsk*, I can counterfeit the deep *tragedian!*”—a stage player. Buckingham demonstrates, crouching: “Speak and look back, and pry on every side!” he says in a loud whisper. Imitating certain platform performers’ unintentionally comic gestures, he looks with great wariness over a shoulder, then creeps along the parapet wall, peers up and down at nothing, and stops to stare intently ahead.

Suddenly he leaps back in mock horror. “*Start and tremble* at wagging of a *straw*, implying deep *suspicion!*”

He bows as Richard slowly claps. “*Ghastly* looks are at my service—like enforced *smiles*—and both are ready at any time by their offices to grace my stratagems.

“But, what?—is Catesby gone?” he asks.

“He is—but, see, he brings the *mayor* along.”

Sir Edmund Shaw, the portly Lord Mayor of London, puffing after the long climb, emerges with Sir William from a sheltered stone arch beside a section of the leaded roof.

Buckingham hails him: “Lord Mayor—”

“*Look to the drawbridge* there!” cries Richard with seeming alarm, pointing over the edge of the parapet.

Buckingham seems startled. “*Hark—a drum!*”

“*Catesby,*” cries Richard, “*o’erlook the walls!*”

Buckingham moves forward, laughing. “Lord Mayor, the reason we have sent—”

“*Look back!*” cries Richard, peering past them and reaching to draw his sword. “*Defend thee;* here are *enemies!*”

Buckingham throws his hands up as if in fear. “*God* and our *innocency* defend and *guard* us!”

The prank concluded, Richard sheathes his blade. “Be patient,” he tells the shaken mayor calmly, “they are *friends*: Ratcliffe and Lovell.”

Those noblemen bow, and Lovell opens a sack and lifts out, by the hair, a grim proof of accomplishment. “Here is the head of that ignoble *traitor*, the dangerous and unsuspected Hastings!”

With a loud sob, Richard clasps a hand over his heart. “So dearly I *loved* the man, that I must *weep!*”

“I took him for the plainest, most *harmless* creature that breathed upon this earth as a Christian!—made him my *book* wherein my *soul* recorded the history of all its secret thoughts! So smooth he daubed his *vice* with *show* of *virtue*, that—his *apparent, open guilt* omitted; I mean his assignations with Shore’s wife—he lived free of all attainder of suspicion!”

Buckingham would comfort the stricken duke: “Well, well, he was the *covert’st* sheltered traitor that ever lived!” He turns to the mayor. “Would you *imagine*—for who would believe it, were’t not that by a *great preservation* we live to *tell* it you—the subtle traitor *this day* had plotted in the Council-house to *murder* me and my good lord of Gloucester!”

The Lord Mayor is appalled. “*What?—had* he so?” He stares at the head’s gaping mouth, the dulled eyes, and the gray beard that now dribbles blood.

Richard no longer seems to weep. “What, think you we are *Turks* or *infidels?*” he demands.

“Or that we would, against the form of *law*, proceed thus rashly to the villain’s death, but that the *extreme peril* of the case—the *peace of England*, and our *person’s* safety!—*enforced* us to this execution?”

The mayor gulps. “Now *fair* befall you! He *deservèd* his death! And you, my good lords, both have *well* proceeded, to warn false traitors from the *like* attempts!” He regards the solemn lords charily. “I never looked for *better* at his hands, after he once fell in with Mistress *Shore*,” the official claims. The artisan’s wife, as he has often been keenly aware, is very attractive.

Richard moves closer. “And yet we had determined he should *not* die until Your Lordship came to *see* his death—which now the loving haste of these, our friends, somewhat against our meaning, has prevented. Because, my lord, we would have had you *hear the traitor speak*, and timorously *confess* the manner and the purpose of his treason!—so that you might well have signified the same *unto the citizens*—who might *misconstrue* us in him, and bewail his death.”

The mayor hastily assures Richard, “But, my good lord, Your Grace’s *word* shall serve as well as if I *had* seen and heard him speak! And doubt you not, right noble princes both, but I’ll acquaint our duteous citizens with all your *just proceedings* in this cause!”

Richard nods in appreciation. “And to that end we wishèd Your Lordship here—to avoid the carping censures of the world.”

Buckingham lays a hand on the Sir Edmund’s fat arm. “But since you come too late of our intents, yet witness to what you hear we *did* intend. And so, my good lord mayor, we bid farewell.”

The official bows, and hurries back down the steps to begin his assignment.

“Go! After, *after*, cousin Buckingham!” urges Richard. “The mayor hies him in all post towards Guildhall”—which houses the city’s government and meeting hall. “There, at your meet’st advantage of the time, imply the *bastardy* of Edward’s children.”

All of England is anticipating the coronation of a new sovereign—and Richard intends to be that king. He wants the support of commoners—who, for now, consider the Prince of Wales to be heir to the throne.

Richard pictures the late king, his elder brother. “Tell them how Edward *put to death* a citizen for saying only that he would make his son heir to ‘The Crown’—meaning, indeed, his *house*, which, by the sign thereof was termèd so.

“Moreover, urge his hatefully *luxurious living* and *bestial appetite* in the charge of *lust*, which stretchèd to their servants, daughters, *wives* even!—whomever his lustful eye or savage heart, without control, was inclinèd to make his *prey!*”

A new idea charms him. “Nay, if need be, thus far come near my person: tell them that when *my mother* went with child, with the insatiable *Edward*, noble York, my princely father, then had *wars in France*, and by just computation of the time found that the issue was *not his begot!*—which well appearèd in Edward’s lineaments’ being nothing like the noble duke’s, *my father’s.*”

Buckingham chuckles in feral admiration.

“But touch this sparingly, far off, as ’twere, because, you know, my lord, my mother lives,” Richard adds—with facetious concern for the duchess.

Buckingham laughs. “Fear not, my lord; I’ll play the orator as if the golden fee for which I plead”—the crown—“were for *myself!* And so, my lord, adieu!”

Richard follows him to the dark arch. “If you thrive well, bring them to Baynard’s Castle, where you shall find me well accompanied with *reverend fathers*—learnèd *bishops.*”

“I go,” says Buckingham, bowing. “And, towards three or four o’clock, look for the news that the Guildhall affords.” He hurries in and goes down the stone steps.

Richard turns to the others. “Go, Lovell, with all speed to Doctor Shaw. Go thou to Friar Penker,” he tells Catesby. The two influential bishops have been disseminating reports—also false—among their London congregations. “Bid them both meet me within this hour at Baynard’s Castle.”

The others bow and go.

Richard looks out and down at the sunny, sprawling capital of England. He rubs his hands together, thinking about King Edward's son, held here in the Tower with his brother.

Now will I in, to make some private order to draw the brats of Clarence out of sight—and to give notice that no manner of person at any time shall have recourse unto the princes!

Later, in a windowless chamber below, an old, bespectacled scrivener finally sets down his quill, and caps the inkwell. Sliding a candle closer, he examines the papers drying on the table before him.

Thus is the indictment of the good Lord Hastings, which in a set hand fairly is engrossèd, so that it may be this day read over in Paul's —announced at the cathedral.

And mark how well the sequels hang together: eleven hours I spent to write it again, for yesternight by Catesby was it brought me; the precedent —the scrawled original— was full as long a-doing.

And yet within these five hours Lord Hastings lived, untainted, unexamined—free, at liberty!

He shakes his head. *Here's a good world the while!*

Blotting the last wide sheet with care, he considers the deception his work is intended to support. *Why, who's so gross that seeth not this palpable device?*

Yet who's so blind but says not he sees it!

The execution's purpose will be widely understood—but considered too dangerous to speak of. Richard's power has grown, and none at court dares cross the coldblooded duke.

Sad is the world, and all will come to nought, when such bad dealings must be seen but in thought!

Chapter Eight Summoned to Glory

Richard sometimes resides at Baynard's Castle, two miles west of the Tower, beside the Thames, and just within the city wall. He comes down to the main hall, where long shafts of afternoon light slant through tall windows, illuminating portraits of the House of York's ancestral nobles. He meets his lieutenant at the entrance. "How now, my lord; what say the citizens?"

Buckingham is annoyed. "Now, by the Holy Mother of our Lord, the citizens are *mum*, and speak not a word!"

"Touched you on the bastardy of Edward's children?"

"I did," says Buckingham, "along with his contract with Lady Lucy, and his contract by deputation in France,"—the king's broken promises of marriage; he wedded Elizabeth even as the latter was being made to Lady Bona—"the insatiate greediness of his desires, his forcing of the city wives—and his tyranny for trifles!

"And his *own* bastardy—begotten when your father was in France, his semblance being not like the duke's. Withal I did imply *your* lineaments' bearing the right ideal of your father, in both your form and nobleness of mind."

Richard laughs; he inherited neither.

Buckingham made every effort, he reports, to win over the burghers: "I laid open all your victories in Scotland, your discipline in war, wisdom in peace, your bounty, virtue, fair *humility*—indeed, left nothing fitting for the purpose untouched, or slightly handled, in discourse.

"And when mine oratory grew to an end, I bid them that did *love their country* to a good cry: '*God save Richard, England's royal king!*'"

"*Ah!*—and did they so?"

"*No!* So God help me, they spake *not a word*, but, like breathing statues of speechless *stone*, gazed each on the other, and looked deadly pale!—which, when I saw, I *reprehended* them, and

asked the mayor what *meant* this wilful silence.

“His answer was: the people were not wont to be spoke to but by the *recorder*”—the city clerk. “Then *he* was urged to tell my tale *again*: ‘Thus saith the duke; thus hath the duke inferred’—but he *nothing* spake in warrant from *himself*.”

“When he had done, some followers of mine own, at the lower end of the hall, *hurled up their caps*, and some ten voices cried, ‘*God save King Richard!*’

“And *thus* I took the vantage of those few: ‘*Thanks, gentle citizens and friends!*’ quoth I. ‘This general applause and loving shout argues your *wisdom*, and your *love of Richard!*’

“And there I broke off, and came away.”

Richard is irked. “What *tongueless blocks* were they! Would not they *speak?*”

“No, by my troth, my lord!”

Richard frowns. “Then will the mayor and his brethren not come?”

“The mayor is here at hand. Pretend some *reserve*,” Buckingham advises; Richard should seem diffident, wary of attention. “Be you not spoken with but *by mighty suit!*”

“And, look you, get a *prayer-book* in your hand, and stand betwixt the two churchmen, good my lord; for on that ground I’ll build a *holy* descant.

“And be not *easily won* to our request; play the *maid’s* part: ever answer *nay*—then *take* it!”

Richard grins. “I go—and if you plead so well to them that I may *myself* say ‘*nay*’—to *thee*—no doubt we’ll bring it to a happy issue!”

Buckingham heads toward the doors. “*Go, go, up the stairs—the Lord Mayor knocks!*”

Richard hurries back to the guests waiting for him in a room above.

“*Welcome, my lord!*” says Buckingham at the entrance. He steps aside as the mayor and a dozen prestigious citizens come into the tall chamber. “I dance in *attendance* here; I think the duke would not be spoke withal,” he says, apologetically. He looks toward the stairs. “Here comes his servant.

“How now, Catesby; what says he?”

The knight bows very courteously to the duke. “My lord, he doth entreat Your Grace to visit him *tomorrow*, or next day. He is within, with two right-reverend fathers, divinely bent to meditation; and by no worldly suit would he be moved to draw himself from his holy exercise.”

“Return, good Catesby, to thy lord again,” urges Buckingham. “Tell him myself, the *mayor* and *citizens*—in deep designs and matters of *great moment*, no less importing than *our general good!*—are come to have some conference with his grace.”

“I’ll tell him what you say, my lord.” Catesby returns to the stairs.

Buckingham comments, to the mayor, “Ah, my lord, *this* prince is not an *Edward!*—*he* is not lolling on a lewd day-bed, but on his knees at *meditation*; not dallying with a brace of courtezans, but meditating with two deep *divines*; not sleeping, to make gross his idle body, but *praying*, to enrich his watchful *soul!*”

“Happy were *England* would this gracious prince take on himself the sovereignty thereof! But I surely fear we shall ne’er win him to it.”

Recognizing that Richard, as Protector of the Realm, effectively rules England already, the Lord Mayor has denigrated the late King Edward and his son while speaking before the city council, as has his brother from the priest’s pulpit. “Marry, *God forbid* his grace should say us *nay!*”

“I fear he will,” says Buckingham sadly, as Sir William comes down. “How now, Catesby; what says your lord?”

“My lord, he wonders to what *end* you have assembled such troops of citizens to speak with him, his grace not being warned thereof before.

“My lord, he fears you mean no good to him,” Catesby confides.

Buckingham seems taken aback. “Sorry am I that my noble cousin should suspect of me that I mean no *good* to him! By heaven, I come in perfect *love* to him! And so once more return, and so *tell* his grace!” Catesby again climbs the flight of stairs.

“When *holy* and *devout* religious men are at their beads,”—in prayer, “’tis hard to draw them thence, so sweet is zealous contemplation,” Buckingham tells the townsmen.

The mayor points upward, as Richard, speaking softly with Bishops Shaw and Penker, enters the gallery overlooking the room. “See, where he stands between two clergymen!”

“Two props of *virtue* for a *Christian* prince,” says Buckingham, “to stay him from the fall of vanity—and see: *a book of prayer* in his hand!—true ornament to show a *holy* man!”

He calls to Richard, as Catesby comes down the stairs again, “Famous *Plantagenet*, most gracious *prince*, lend favourable *hearing* to our request, and pardon us the interruption of thy devotion and right-Christian zeal!”

The Duke of Gloucester nods politely. “My lord, there needs no such apology. I rather do beseech *you* pardon *me*, who, earnest in the service of my God, neglect the visitation of my *friends*.” He closes the book. “But, leaving this, what is Your Grace’s pleasure?”

“Even that which I hope pleaseth *God above*,” Buckingham tells him, “and all *good men* of this ungovernèd isle!”

Richard seems concerned. “I do suspect I have done some offence that seems *dis-gracious* in the city’s eyes, and that you come to reprehend my ignorance....”

“You *have*, my lord!—and would that it might please Your Grace, at our entreaties, to *amend* that fault!”

“Else wherefore breathe I in a *Christian* land?” asks Richard humbly.

As the gentlemen look up, Buckingham explains. “Then *know*: it is your fault that you *resign the supreme seat*—the *throne majestic*, the sceptered office of your *ancestors*, your state of fortune and your due of *birth*, the lineal glory of *your royal house*!—to the corruption of a *blemished stock*!

“Whilst you are in the mildness of sleepy thoughts—which here we’d *wake*, to our country’s good!—this noble isle doth *lack her proper limbs*!—her face *defaced*, with scars of *infamy*, her royal stock grafted with *ignoble* plants—almost *shuttered* in the swallowing gulf of *blind forgetfulness* and dark *oblivion*!

“Which to *cure*, we heartily solicit Your Gracious Self to take upon you the charge and kingly government of this, *your land*!—not as Protector, steward, substitute, or lowly *factor* for another’s *gain*, but as *successively*, from blood to *blood*!—*your right of birth*, your *emperey*!—*your own*!

“For this—consorted with the *citizens*, your very worshipful and loving *friends*, and *at their vehement instigation*—in this just suit come I to move Your Grace!”

Richard looks distressed. “I know not whether it best fitteth my degree, or your condition, to depart in *silence*, or bitterly to speak in your *reproof*.”

“If I do not *answer*, you might, perhaps, think it tongue-tied *ambition*: not replying as if *yielding*—to bear the golden yoke of sovereignty which fondly you would here impose on me.

“If to *reprove* you for this suit of yours, so seasoned with your *faithful love* to me, then, on the other side, I *hold my friends in check*.”

“Therefore, to speak and to avoid the first, and then, in speaking, not to incur the last, definitively thus I answer you: your *love* deserves my *thanks*; but my *deserving*, unmeritable, shuns your high request.

“First, if all obstacles in my path were cut away, and the crown seen as my ripe revenue and *due by birth*, so much is my poverty of *spirit*—so mighty and so many are my *defects*—that I had rather *hide* me from my greatness, being a bark to brook no mighty sea—in my greatness, *covet being hidden*!—smotherèd in the *vapour* of my glory!

“But, God be thanked, there’s no *need* of me—and much *I’d* need, to help you if need *were*! The royal tree hath left us *royal fruit*, which, mellowed by *the stealing hours of time*, will well become the seat of majesty, and make us, no doubt, happy by his reign!

“On *him* I lay what you would lay on *me*: the right and fortune of his happy stars—which God prohibit that I should wring *from* him!”

Buckingham seems touched by the duke's devotion to the young Prince of Wales: "My lord, this argues *conscience* in Your Grace!

"But the respects thereof are precise and trivial, *all* circumstances well considered. You say that Edward is your brother's son; so say *we*, too—but *not* by King Edward's *wife!*—for first he was contracted to Lady Lucy!—your mother lives as *witness* to that vow—and afterward by substitute betrothèd to Bona, sister to the King of France! *Those* both *slighted*, a *poor* petitioner, the care-worn mother of *a-many children*—a beauty *waning* and a *distressed widow*, even in the afternoon of her best days—made prize and purchase of his lustful eye!—*seduced* the pitch and height of all his thoughts to *base declension*, and loathèd *bigamy* by her!

"In his *unlawful* bed was begot this Edward whom our *manners* term 'the prince!'

"*More* could I expostulate *bitterly*, save that, for reverence to some alive, I give a sparing limit to my tongue.

"Then, good my lord, take to your royal self this proffered benefit of dignity!—if not to bless *us* and the *land* withal, yet to draw forth *your noble ancestry* from the *corruption* of abusing times, unto a *lineal, true-derived* course!"

"*Do*, good my lord—your citizens *entreat* you!" says the Lord Mayor.

Buckingham pleads: "Refuse not, mighty lord, this proffered *love!*"

"*Oh*, make them *joyful*," calls Catesby. "*Grant* their lawful suit!"

Above, Richard moves forward to place both hands steadily on the polished wooden railing. "*Alas*, why would you heap these *cares* upon me? I am *unfit* for state and majesty! I do beseech you, take it not amiss: I cannot, I will not, yield to you."

Buckingham regards him. "If you refuse it—as in *love* and *zeal* loath to depose the child, your *brother's*—be it so, as we know *well* your *tenderness of heart*, and the gentle, kind, effeminate concern which we have noted in you for your *kin*—and *equally*, indeed, for *all* estates.

"Yet whether you accept our suit or no," he says sternly, "your brother's son *shall never reign as our king!*—but we will plant *some other* on the throne!—to the *disgrace* and *downfall* of your *house!*"

Buckingham adds, turning abruptly: "And in this resolution, here we leave you! *Come*, citizens! *Zounds!*—I'll entreat *no more!*"

Richard winces, upset, it would seem, to hear such an impious expletive—*zounds* is short for *God's wounds*, the stigmata of Jesus. "Oh, do not *swear*, my lord of Buckingham!" he chides.

But the duke stalks away, herding several worried gentlemen toward the door.

Catesby beseeches Richard: "*Call* them again, my lord, and *accept* their suit!"

"*Do*, good my lord," cries a London merchant, "lest *all the land* do *rue it!*"

Richard wavers. "Would you *enforce* me to a world of *care?*"

"Well, call them again," he sighs. "I am not made of *stone*, but penetrable to your kind entreaties, albeit against my conscience and my soul."

Buckingham returns, following, now, the city leaders.

Richard gazes down, resigned to his kingly duty. "Cousin of Buckingham, and you sage, grave men, since you will buckle Fortune on my back, to bear her burthen whether I will or no, I must have patience to endure the load.

"But if black scandal or foul-faced reproach attend the sequel of your imposition, your *sheer enforcement* shall acquit me from all the impure blots and stains thereof!—for God, He *knows*, and you may partly *see*, how far I am from the *desire* thereof."

"*God bless* Your Grace!" cries the delighted mayor. "We *see* it!—and will *say* it!"

"In saying so, you shall but say the *truth*," Richard assures him.

Buckingham is ebullient "Then I *salute* you with this kingly title: *Long live royal Richard, England's king!*"

"*Amen!*" cry the citizens and Lord Mayor.

Buckingham steps forward. "Will it please you to be *crownèd tomorrow?*"

"Even when you please, since you will have it so."

“Tomorrow, then, we will attend Your Grace.” Buckingham bows. “And so most *joyfully* we take our leave!”

Richard turns to the churchmen. “Come, let us to our holy task again.” Their wine is waiting.

He nods to those below. “Farewell, good cousin; farewell, gentle friends,” he says with regal dignity.

Walking with the white-haired Duchess of York are the graying queen, Elizabeth, and her grown son Thomas, Marquis of Dorset; they have come to the Tower of London this morning to visit Prince Edward and his brother. As they reach the wide main gates, another party approaches, also attended by liveried servants.

“Who meets us here?” the duchess wonders aloud. She spots the child Margaret, daughter of her late son George. “My niece Plantagenet!—led in the hand of her kind aunt of *Gloucester!* Now, for my life, she’s wandering to the Tower, in pure heart’s love to greet the tender princes!

“Daughter-in-law, well met!” she cries, embracing Lady Anne.

“God give Your Graces both a happy and a joyful time of day!” replies Richard’s wife.

King Edward’s widow tells Anne, “As much to *you*, good sister-in-law! Whither away?”

“No farther than the Tower—and, as I guess, upon the like devotion as *yourselves*: to gratulate the gentle princes there.”

“Kind sister, thanks! We’ll enter all *together.*” Elizabeth sees Brakenbury emerging from the front of the building. “And, in good time, here the lieutenant comes.

“Master Lieutenant, pray you, by your leave, how doth the prince, and my young son of York?”

Sir Robert bows—still behind the iron bars of the closed gate. “Right well, dear madam.” He flushes, discomfited as the ladies wait expectantly, fans fluttering in the late-June sunshine. “By your patience, I may not suffer you to visit them. The king hath straitly charged the contrary.”

“*The king!*” cries Elizabeth—his widow. “Why, who’s *that?*”

Brakenbury turns scarlet. “I cry you mercy!—I mean the Lord Protector.”

“The Lord protect *him* from that kingly title!” scowls the indignant queen. “Hath he set bounds betwixt their love and *me?*” she demands angrily. “I am their *mother!* Who should keep me *from* them?”

“I am their *father’s* mother!” says the Duchess of York imperiously, moving forward. “I *will* see them!”

Lady Anne can see that the keeper greatly fears her husband. “Their *aunt* I am, in law; in *love*, their mother; so bring me to their sights. I’ll bear thy blame, and take thine office from thee on my peril.”

But Brakenbury lifts his hands as if fending off an attack. “No, madam, *no!*—I may not leave it so! I am bound by oath, and therefore pardon me!” He bows again, and hastens back across the pavement to the massive Tower.

As the would-be visitors, left speechless, watch the officer hurry away, a nobleman strides toward them. Lord Stanley, Earl of Derby, a cautious survivor in times of turmoil, has just come east through the city. He bows. “Let me but meet you ladies *one hour hence*, and, as a reverent looker-on, I’ll salute Your Grace of York,” he tells the duchess, “as mother-in-law of *two* fair queens!

“Come, madam,” he tells Lady Anne, “you must straight to *Westminster*—there to be crownèd *Richard’s* royal queen!”

The noblewomen are stunned. Elizabeth staggers, pale. “*Oh, cut my lace in sunder*, that my pent *heart* may have some scope to beat,” she gasps, clutching at her tightly laced bodice, “or else I swoon with this dead-killing news!”

Anne is perturbed. “*Despiteful* tidings! Oh, *unpleasing news!*”

Lord Dorset, Derby’s younger brother, tells her kindly, “Be of good cheer....” He offers his arm to support the queen. “Mother, how fares Your Grace?”

“*Oh, Dorset, speak not to me!—get thee hence!*” Elizabeth warns her sons: “Death and destruction dog thee at the heels!—thy mother’s *name* is ominous to *children!* If thou wilt outstrip Death, go across the *seas* and live with *Richmond*, away from the reach of *Hell!*”

Just before his death years ago, King Henry VI had prophesied that a boy, Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, would one day ascend to the throne. In those tumultuous times the lad was taken, for his safety, to live across the channel in Brittany. He is now twenty-six.

“*Go, hie thee!*” cries Elizabeth, “*hie* thee from this *slaughterhouse*, lest thou *increase* the number of the *dead!*—and make *me* die as a thrall of *Queen Margaret’s curse*: not mother nor wife, nor *counted* England’s queen!”

Derby is well aware of the danger threatening any who might oppose Richard’s sovereignty. “Full of wise care is this your counsel, madam,” he says gravely. He turns to Dorset. “Take all the swift advantage of the hours! You shall have letters from me to my son”—George, Lord Stanley—“to meet you on the way, and welcome you. Be not *taken*, tardy by unwise delay!”

“Oh, ill-dispersing wind of misery!” groans the old duchess. “O my accursèd womb, thou bed of *Death!*—a *cockatrice* hast thou hatchèd to the world, whose unavoièd *eye* is *murderous!*”

Derby urges Lady Anne, “Come, madam, *come!* I *in all haste* was sent!”

“And I in all *unwillingness* will go!” says she. “I would to *God* that the inclusive verge of golden metal that must round my brow were *red-hot steel*, to sear me to the brain!” She looks tearfully at Elizabeth. “Let me be anointed with *deadly venom*,”—instead of holy water during the ceremony, “and *die* ere men can say ‘God save the Queen!’”—first cried upon the coronation of one.

Elizabeth touches her hand gently. “Go, go, poor soul! I envy not thy glory, to feed my distress; wish *thysel*f no harm!”

“*Why not?*” asks Anne, wiping her eyes. “When he that is now my husband came to me, as I followed *Henry’s* corpse—when scarce was the blood well washèd from his hands which issued from my *other* angel—*husband!*—and that dead saint whom then I weeping followed—”

She pauses, sobbing. “—*Oh*, when, I say, I looked on Richard’s face, *this* was my wish: ‘Be thou,’ quoth I, ‘*accursèd* for making me, so *young*, so old as *widow!* And when *thou* wed’st, let *sorrow* haunt thy bed; and be thy *wife*—if any be so *mad!*—as *miserable* by the *life* of thee as thou hast made *me* by my dear lord’s death!’

“*Lo*, ere I could have *repeated* that curse—even in so short a space!—my woman’s heart grossly grew captive to his *honeyed words*—and proved the subject of *my soul’s own curse*, which ever since hath kept mine eyes from rest! For never yet one hour in his bed have I enjoyed the golden dew of *sleep*, but have been wakèd, timorous, by *dreams!*”

“What’s more, he *hates* me for my *father, Warwick!*—and will, no doubt, shortly be *rid* of me!”

Says Elizabeth, “Poor heart, adieu! I pity thy suffering!”

“No more than from my soul I mourn for *yours!*” says Anne.

“Farewell, thou woeful welcomer of ‘glory!’”

“Adieu, poor soul, that takest thy *leave* of it!”

The old duchess tells Dorset, “Go thou to Richmond, and *good fortune* guide thee!

“Go thou to Richard,” she tells Anne, “and *good angels* guard thee!

“Go thou to *sanctuary*,” she urges Elizabeth, “and *good thoughts* possess thee!

“I to my *grave*, where may peace and rest lie with me,” she says, wearily. “*Eighty*-odd years of sorrow have I seen—and for each hour’s joy, been wracked with a *week* of *grief!*”

As they turn to leave, Elizabeth pauses for a moment. “Stay... yet look back with me unto the Tower....

“Pity, you ancient stones, those tender babes whom evil hath immurèd within your walls! Rough *cradle* for such little, pretty ones—rude, ragged *nurse!* Old, sullen playfellow for tender princes, *use my babies well!*”

“So foolish sorrow bids your stones farewell!” she moans, and hurries away.

Chapter Nine Prophecies Remembered

King Richard III, dressed in splendor, and just now crowned in pomp, stands before his new court at the royal palace in London. “Stand all apart!” he calls out. “Cousin of *Buckingham!*”

The nobleman comes forward and bows. “My gracious *sovereign!*”

“Give me thy hand.” Taking it, the king leads the duke up the wide steps of the stone dais toward the tall, carved-oak throne, as the herald’s coronets play a sonorous sennet. “Thus high, by thy advice and thy assistance, is *King Richard* seated!”

He settles himself as the nobles below applaud. They soon begin to talk among themselves, chatting and gossiping.

Privately, Richard asks Buckingham, “But shall we wear these honours for a *day*—or shall they *last*, and we *rejoice* in them?”

“Still live they, and forever may they last!”

“Ah, Buckingham, now do I apply the *touch*,”—as in using a touchstone—“to try if thou be *current* gold indeed”—not unspendable pyrite. Richard regards him carefully. “Young Edward *lives!* Think, now, what I would say . . .”

“Say on, my loving lord.”

“Well Buckingham I say I would be *king.*”

“Why, so you *are*, my thrice-renowned liege!”

“*Hmh.* Am I king? ’Tis so . . .” He frowns. “But *Edward* lives.”

“True, noble prince.”

Richard is annoyed. “Oh, *bitter* consequence, that Edward still should *live!*” He mimics Buckingham’s responses: “‘*True*, noble prince!’ Cousin, thou wert not *wont* to be so *dull!* Shall I be plain? *I wish the bastards dead!*—and I would have it *suddenly performèd!* What sayest thou? *Speak*; be *brief.*”

“Your Grace may do your pleasure.”

“*Tsk, tsk!*—thou art all *ice!*—thy kindness *freezeth!* *Say!*—have I thy consent that they shall die?”

Even Buckingham is loath to murder children. “Give me some little *breath!*—some *pause*, dear lord, before I positively speak in this. I will resolve Your Grace soon,” he says, bowing. Clearly troubled, he leaves the throne room.

Among the courtiers, Catesby whispers to a companion: “The king is angry! See—he bites the lip . . .”

King Richard decides on a change: *High-reaching Buckingham* grows circumspect! *I will converse with iron-witted fools and unreflective toys!*—*none is for me that looks unto me with considering eyes!*

He looks up. “Boy!”

A page, seventeen, hurries to the throne. “My lord?”

Richard motions for him to come closer, and lowers his voice. “Know’st thou not any whom corrupting *gold* would tempt unto a close exploit of death?”

The youth thinks for a moment. “My lord, I know a discontented gentleman whose humble means match not his haughty mind; gold were as good as *twenty orators*, and will, no doubt, tempt him to anything!”

“What is his name?”

“His name, my lord, is Tyrrel.”

Richard nods. “I partly know the man.” The old knight had once served in Parliament. “Go, call him hither.”

The page bows and runs to find Tyrrel.

The king fumes. *The deep, revolving, witty Buckingham no more shall be the neighbour to my counsel! Hath he thus far held out with me untired—and stops he now for breath?*

Richard sees Lord Derby enter the hall, and waves him forward. “How now! What news with you?”

The earl kneels. Just minutes ago, his brother’s ship left the dock, sailing into safety. “My lord, I hear the Marquis Dorset’s fled to *Richmond*, in those parts beyond the sea where he abides.” He notes the king’s pensive frown, and after a moment he rises, silently, and moves away.

Richard looks around. “Catesby!”

“My lord?”

Richard speaks just above a whisper. “Rumour it abroad that Anne, my wife, is *sick*, and likely to die; I will give orders for keeping her close”—confined and out of sight. “Inquire me out some mean-born gentleman, whom I will marry straight to Clarence’s *daughter*; the boy”—George’s son—“is foolish, and I fear not him.”

Catesby blinks, uncertain; Margaret is ten.

Richard glares. “Look how thou *dream’st!* I say *again*, give out that Anne, my wife, is sick and *likely to die! About it!*—for it stands much upon me to *stop* all hopes whose growth may damage me!”

Catesby bows and goes in quest of a suitably rank-reducing groom.

Richard ruminates about other royal-succession threats. *I must be married to my brother’s step-daughter, or else my kingdom stands on brittle glass!*

His target is Elizabeth of York, eldest daughter of Edward’s queen, Elizabeth; the young lady is the sister of Lords Rivers and Grey. Richard laughs. *Murder her brothers, and then marry her!* And now he frowns. *An uncertain path toward gain!*

But I am in so far in blood that sin will urge on sin! he thinks dourly. *Tear-falling pity dwells not in this eye!*

He sees the page return to the court, and a tawdry knight approaches. “Is thy name Tyrrel?”

The gentleman kneels. “James Tyrrel, and your most obedient subject.”

“Art thou, in *deed?*”

“Prove me,”—by a test, “my gracious sovereign.”

“Darest thou resolve to kill a friend of mine?”

“Aye, my lord—but I had rather kill *two enemies.*”

King Richard offers a slight smile. “Why, there thou *hast* it!—two *hidden* enemies, foes to my rest, and my sweet sleep’s disturbers are they that I would have thee steal upon!” Richard leans closer. “Tyrrel, I mean those bastards in the Tower.”

The knight does not flinch. “Let me have open means to come to them, and soon I’ll rid you from the fear of *them.*”

“Thou sing’st sweet music! Hark, come hither, Tyrrel.” Richard hands him the folded paper he would have given to Buckingham. “Go, by this token.

“Rise,” says Richard, “and lend thine ear.” He whispers some instructions. “There is no more but so: say it is *done*, and I will love thee—and *prefer* thee too!”—provide rewards.

“’Tis done, my gracious lord.”

“Shall we hear from thee, Tyrrel, ere we sleep?”

“Ye shall, my lord.” Tyrrel bows and strides away, bound for the Tower.

Buckingham returns. “My Lord, I have considered in my mind the late demand that you did sound me in.”

“Well, let that pass,” says Richard; he is troubled by a new concern. “*Dorset is fled, to Richmond.*”

“I heard that news, my lord.”

The king stares down, thinking about the exiled Earl of Richmond—now the son-in-law of

Lord Derby. *Stanley, he is your wife's son. Well, look to it! —beware.*

Buckingham comes before the throne. "My lord, I claim your gift—my due by promise—for which your honour and your faith are pawnèd: the earldom of Hereford, and the moveables that you promised I should possess."

Richard's ire is rising. *Stanley, look to your wife! If she convey letters to Richmond, you shall answer for it!*

"What says Your Highness to my just demand?"

Richard's jaws are clenched as he worries, abstracted, about the young English lord. *As I remember, Henry the Sixth did prophesy, when Richmond was a little, peevish boy, that he should be king!*

A king? Perhaps... perhaps....

Buckingham tries again. "My lord..."

Thinks Richard wryly, *How chance the prophet could not at that time have told me, I being nearby, that I should kill him?*

"My lord, your promise for the earldom..."

Richmond! When last I was at Exeter, the mayor in courtesy showed me the castle, and called it 'Rougemont'—at which name I started, because a bard of Ireland told me once I should not live long after I saw Richmond!

To one whose suspicions abound, the names sound alike.

"My Lord!" says Buckingham.

The king looks up. "Aye, what's o'clock?"

"I am thus bold to put Your Grace in mind of what you promised me."

"Well, but what's o'clock?"

"Upon the stroke of ten."

"Well let it strike."

Buckingham is puzzled. "Why let it strike?"

"Because, like a Jack, thou keep'st the stroke!—betwixt thy begging and my meditation!" snaps Richard. *I am not in a giving vein today*, he thinks dryly.

"Why, then resolve me whether you will or no."

But Richard, rising, waves him away. "*Tsk, tsk*, thou troublest me; I am not in the vein." He walks slowly to his new quarters in the palace, hands clasped behind his back, pondering.

Buckingham watches him, surprised—and alarmed. *Is it even so? Rewards he my true service with such deep contempt?*

Made I him king for this?

Oh, let me think on Hastings!—and be gone to Brecknock while my fearful head is on!

Brecknock is his hereditary family seat—in Wales.

Tyrrel waits in a side chamber of the king's quarters.

The tyrannous and bloody deed is done!—the most-arch act of piteous massacre that ever yet this land was guilty of!

Dighton and Forrest, whom I did suborn to do this ruthless piece of butchery, although they were fleshèd villains, bloody dogs, —experienced killers— melting with tenderness and kind compassion wept like the two children in telling the sad story of their deaths!

'Lo, thus' quoth Dighton, 'lay those tender babes!'

'Thus, thus,' quoth Forrest, 'girdling one another within their innocent, alabaster arms! Their lips were four red roses on a stem, which in their summer beauty kissed each other. A book of prayers on their pillow lay—which once,' quoth Forrest, 'almost changed my mind!

'But, oh, the Devil!'

There the villain stoppèd, whilst Dighton thus told on: 'We smothered the most resplendent, sweet work of Nature that since the prime Creation e'er she framed!'

Thus were both gone: with conscience and remorse, they could not speak! And so I left them,

to bring this tidings to the bloody king.

And here he comes. "All hail, my sovereign liege."

Richard's eyebrows rise. "Kind Tyrrel, am I happy in thy news?"

"If to have done the thing you gave in charge bring you happiness, be happy then, for it is done, my lord."

"But didst thou *see* them dead?"

"I did, my lord."

"And *buried*, gentle Tyrrel?"

"The chaplain of the Tower hath buried them, but how or in what place I do not know."

"Come to me, Tyrrel, soon after supper, and thou shalt tell the process of their death.

Meantime, think but of how I may do thee good—and be *inheritor* of thy desire! Farewell till soon."

The knight bows; he goes to consider his reward.

The king paces. *The son of Clarence have I pent up close; his daughter meanly have I matched in marriage; the sons of Edward sleep in Abraham's bosom—and Anne, my wife, hath also bid the world 'Good night!'*

But he is still troubled by the handsome young earl in Brittany, who from there has courted one of Richard's nieces. *Now—for I know the Breton Richmond aims at young Elizabeth, my brother's daughter—and by that knot looks proudly o'er the crown!—to her I'll go, a jolly, shriving wooer!*

Ratcliffe rushes into the room. "My lord!"

"Good news or bad, that thou comest in so bluntly?"

"Bad news, my lord: *Ely is fled to Richmond! And Buckingham, backed with hardy Welshmen, is in the field, and ever his power increaseth!*"

The information is met with scorn; the aging cleric can provide the young exile with no military help. "*Ely with Richmond troubles me more near than Buckingham and his rashly levied 'army.'*"

"Come," says Richard, heading for the door. "I have heard that *fearful commenting* is a leaden servitor to *dull Delay*—and Delay leads impotent, snail-paced Beggary.

"Then *fiery expedition* be my wing!—Jove's *Mercury*, and herald for a *king!*"

"Come, *muster men!*" he tells Ratcliffe. "My counsel is my shield: we must be *brief*, when traitors brave the *field!*"

A dowager lady walks slowly down a long street of large, elegant London mansions toward the palace, oblivious to October's chill, and the gray, gathering clouds. A cold wind from the Thames' choppy waters whisks past, as King Henry VI's banished widow pauses to look on ahead.

So, prosperity begins to melt now, and drip into the rotten mouth of Death! Here in these confines, slyly have I lurked to watch the waning of mine adversaries. A dire prologue am I witness to!—and I will go to France, hoping the consequence will prove as bitter, black, and tragical!

Spotting two ladies now rounding the nearby corner, she turns away. *Withdraw thee, wretched Margaret! Who comes here?* She moves behind some tall, well trimmed shrubs garnishing a building's impressive stone front.

A black veil shelters the tearful face of the taller noblewoman approaching. "*Ah, my young princes!*" she moans. "*Oh, my tender babes!*—my sweet, newly appearing, *unbloomèd flowers!*" She stops and looks up into the gloomy skies. "If yet your gentle souls fly in the air, and be not fixèd in destiny perpetual,"—heaven, "hover about me with your airy wings, and hear your mother's lamentation!"

- Watching, the embittered, vengeful Margaret urges: *Hover about her—and say that 'right for right' hath dimmed your infant morn to agèd night!*

Says the sad, elderly lady walking with the queen, “So many miseries have scoured *my* voice that my woe-wearied tongue is numb and mute.” But she sighs, remembering her grandson. “Edward Plantagenet, *why art thou dead?*”

- *Plantagenet doth pay for Plantagenet! Edward-for-Edward repays a dying debt!* Margaret’s boy was stabbed to death before her eyes by Richard and his two brothers, after the battle at Tewkesbury.

“Wilt *Thou*, O God, fly from such *gentle lambs*, and throw them into the entrails of the *wolf?*” sobs Elizabeth, the erstwhile queen. “Why didst Thou *sleep* when such a deed was done?”

- *Or when holy Harry died?—and my sweet son!* Margaret’s husband was the pious Henry VI, their son the fierce young Edward, Prince of Wales.

The companions stop near a paved area before the tall house, where visitors can tie reins to iron posts beside two benches of dark stone. Elizabeth sits and dabs at her eyes with a small silk handkerchief.

The Duchess of York pulls her winter-weight cloak closer. “*Blind sight, dead life—*poor mortal, living *ghost,*” she says sorrowfully. She eases herself down beside her son’s widow, and looks toward the river. “*Woe’s scene, world’s shame!—grave’s due by life usurpèd!* Brief abstract and record of tedious days, *rest* thy unrest in England’s lawful *earth*, unlawfully made drunk with *innocents’ blood!*”

Elizabeth speaks to her native land. “O, that thou wouldst as well afford a *grave* as thou canst yield a melancholy seat! Then would I *hide* my bones, not rest them here.” She watches ships out on the river, their sails unfurling as crews strive to reach berths before the storm. She moans, “Oh, who hath any more cause to mourn than I?”

Margaret marches forward to stand before the black-clad ladies. “If *ancient* sorrow be most revered, give me the benefit of seniority, and let *my* woes claim the upper hand! If sorrow can admit *society*, count your woes again by viewing *mine!*”

“I had an Edward—till a *Richard* killed him. I had a Harry—till a *Richard* killed him!

“*Thou* hadst an Edward,” she tells the duchess, “till a *Richard* killed him!

“*Thou* hadst a *Richard*, till a *Richard* killed him!” she tells Elizabeth.

The duchess rises, staring fiercely and remembering her husband, the Duke of York. “I had a *Richard*, too—and *thou* didst kill him! I had a *Rutland*, too; *thou* *holp’st* to kill him!”

Says Margaret coldly, returning her glare, “*Thou* hadst a *Clarence*, too, and *Richard* killed him!

“From forth the *kennel* of thy womb hath crept the *hell-hound* that doth hunt us *all* to death!

“That *dog*, that before his eyes had *teeth*, to tear at *lambs*, then lap their gentle blood!—that foul defacer of God’s handiwork, that excelling *grand tyrant of the earth*, who reigns in galled eyes of weeping souls!—*thy womb* let loose, to chase us to our graves!

“O upright, just, and true-disposing *God,*” she cries, “how I do *thank* Thee, that thus the *carnal cur* preys on the issue of his *mother’s* body, and makes her pew-fellow with *others* who mourn!”

Cries the duchess, “Oh, Henry’s wife, *triumph* not in my woes!—as God witness me, I have *wept* for *thine!*”

“*Bear with me!*” demands Margaret. “I am *hungry* for *revenge!*—and now I *cloy* me with *beholding* it!

“*Thy* Edward, he is dead that stabbed *my* Edward. *Thy other* Edward, dead to ’quit *my* Edward! And *young* York, he is but *bounty*—because *they both* match not the high perfection of *my* loss!

“*Thy* Clarence, he is *dead* that killed my Edward; and the *beholders* of that tragic day—the adulterate Hastings, Rivers, Vaughan, Grey—smother untimely in their dusky *graves!*”

“Yet *Richard* lives!—*Hell’s* black intelligencer, preservèd but *as its agent*, to buy souls and send them thither!

“But at hand—*at hand!*—ensues his *piteous* but unpitièd *end!*” she prophesies. “*Earth* *gapes*,

Hell *burns!*—fiends *roar*, saints *pray!*—to have him *suddenly conveyed away!* Cancel his bond of life, dear God, I pray, so that I may live to say ‘*The dog is dead!*’”

Elizabeth rises, sharing in the wrath. “Oh, thou didst *prophesy* the time would come that I should wish for thee to *help* me curse that mottled *spider*, that foul, hunch-backèd *toad!*”

Margaret remembers. “I called thee, then, ‘vain flourish of *my* fortune.’ I called thee then ‘poor shadow, *painted* queen’—a mere *picture* of what I was; the fluttering *index*—written listing—“of a direful pageant! One *heaved* a-*high*, only to be hurlèd down *below*; a mother only *mocked* with two sweet babes; a *dream* of what thou wert, a *breath*, a *bubble*; a *sign* of dignity, a garish *flag!* A being in the aim of every dangerous shot! A queen in *jest*, only to fill the scene!

“Where is thy *husband* now? Where be thy *brothers*? Where are thy *children*? Wherein dost thou *joy*? Who *sues* to *thee*, and cries ‘God save the Queen’? Where be the bending peers that *flattered* thee? Where be the thronging troops that *followed* thee?

“In all that *declinèd*, see what *now* thou art: happy *wife*, to most distressed *widow*; joyful *mother*, to one that *wails* the name; *queen*, to very *caitiff*, crownèd with *care*; from one being sued unto, to one that *humbly* *sues*; from one that *scorned* at me, now scornèd *by* me. One being feared by *all*, now a fearing *one*—from *commanding* all, to one obeyed by *none!*

“Thus hath the course of *Justice* wheeled about, and left thee but a very *prey* to *Time!*—having no more than *thought* of what thou wert, to torture thee the *more*, being what thou *art!*

“Thou didst *usurp* my *place!*—and now thou dost usurp the just proportion of my *sorrow!* Now thy proud neck bears half my burdened *yoke*—from which, even here, *I slip* my weary head, and leave the burthen of it *all on thee!*

“Farewell, *York’s* wife, and *queen of sad* mischance! These *English* woes will make me *smile* in France!” She turns to go.

Elizabeth lifts her veil; her face angry, expression severe. “O thou, *well skillèd* in *curses*, stay awhile!—and teach *me* how to curse mine enemies!”

Margaret has learned the regimen only too well. “*Forbear* to sleep in the nights, and *fast* in the days! Compare *dead happiness* to living *woe!* Think that thy babes were *fairer* than they were, and he that slew them *fouler than he is!* *Bettering* thy loss makes the bad causer worse!

“*Revolving* this will teach *thee* how to curse!”

“My words are dull! Oh, *enliven* them with *thine!*” pleads Elizabeth.

“Thy woes will make them *sharp.*”

“And piercing, like mine,” Margaret tells her—sadly, suddenly aware of what such skill has cost her.

With that, she leaves—hurriedly; they are not to see her tears.

Chapter Ten Great Designs

The old lady watches, sourly, as the former queen walks, for the last time, toward her English lodging. “Why should *calamity* be full of *words?*”

But Elizabeth wants words—and strong ones: “Windy attorneys to their client *woes*, airy succeders of *intestate* joys, poor breathing orators of *miseries!*—let them have *scope!* Though what they do impart help not at all, yet do they *ease* the *heart!*”

The duchess touches her hand. “If *so*, then be not tongue-tied! Go with me, and in the breath of bitter words let’s *smother* my damnèd son, that thy two sweet sons smotherèd!” Whispered word has been passed that two woundless boys were buried in the grounds behind the Tower.

“I hear his drum,” says Richard’s mother. “Be *copious* in *exclaims!*”

The army of King Richard III has been called to assemble for its march toward the rebellious forces being marshaled in Wales to challenge his reign. But the royal guard, on its way to take the lead, must come to a halt before two ladies: the queen mother and a former queen block their

way.

Richard, highly annoyed, comes pushing forward past a flustered captain. “Who *intercepts* my expedition?”

“Oh, she that *might* have intercepted *thee!*” cries the duchess, “by *strangling* thee in her accursèd womb, before all the *slaughters, wretch*, that thou hast done!”

Demands Elizabeth, “*Hidest* thou with a golden *crown* that forehead where should be graven, if sight were *right*, the *slaughter* of the prince that *owned* that crown!—and the *dire deaths* of my *two sons and two brothers!*”

She steps toward him, sobbing with rage. “*Tell* me, thou *villainous slave!*—*where are my children?*”

Richard, aware of the many observers, blanches—he is leading these men into combat to defend his rule.

“Thou *toad, thou toad!*—where is *thy brother Clarence?*” cries George’s mother. “And little *Ned Plantagenet*, his son?”

“Where is kind *Hastings?*” demands Elizabeth. “*Rivers, Grey, Vaughan?*”

“*Flourish, trumpets!*” calls Richard angrily; too much is being aired in the invective. “*Strike alarum, drums!* Let not the heavens hear these tell-tale women rail on *the Lord’s anointed!* *Strike*, I say!”

Drums pound, and the herald’s horns blare out a flourish, then sound the bold calls intended to encourage soldiers to fight. Shouts Richard to the women, “Either be *patient*, and *entreat* me *fair*, or with the clamorous report of *war*, thus will I drown your exclamations!”

The Duchess of York nods gravely, and Richard signals for silence. The guards’ officer issues an order, and the soldiers march back to wait, discreetly, at a distance.

“Art thou my son?”

“Aye, I thank God, my father, and yourself.”

“Then patiently *hear my impatience!*”

“Madam, I have a touch of *your* condition—which cannot brook the *accent* of reproof!”

“*Oh, let me speak!*”

“*Do* then; but I’ll not hear—”

“I will be *mild* and *gentle* in my speech.”

“And *brief*, good mother; for I am in haste.”

“Art thou so *hasty?* I have stayed for *thee*, God knows, in anguish, pain and agony!”—waited during pregnancy.

“And *came* I not, at last, to comfort you?”

“*No*, by the Holy Rood! Thou know’st it well!—thou camest on earth to *make the earth my hell!* A grievous burthen to me was thy *birth*; tetchy and wayward was thy *infancy*; thy school-days *frightful*—desperate, wild, and *furios*; thy prime of manhood daring, bold, and venturous! And thine *age*, confirmèd *proud, subtle, treacherously bloody!*—more mild, but yet more *harmful*: kind, in *hatred!*”

“What comforting *hour* canst thou name that ever gracèd me in thy company?”

“I’ faith, none but *Humphrey Howler*, who called Your Grace to *breakfast* once, forth from my company.” The duchess scowls at the play on a name. “If I be so disgracious in your sight, let me march on, and not offend Your Grace,” says Richard. He turns. “Strike the drum!”

“I prithee, hear me *speak!*” says the duchess.

“You speak too bitterly.”

“*Hear* me a *word,*” she commands, “for I shall never speak to thee again!”

Richard hardly objects to that. “So.”

“Either *thou* wilt die by *God’s just ordinance*, or ere from this war thou return a conqueror I shall *perish*, with grief and extreme age, and never look upon thy face again.

“Therefore take *with* thee *my most heavy curse!* In the day of battle, may *it* attire thee more than all the complete armour that thou wear’st!

“My *prayers* along with the *adverse* party fight!—and there may the little souls of Edward’s children whisper to *the spirits of thine enemies!*—and *promise them success and victory!*”

“*Bloody* thou art; bloody will be *thine end!* *Shame* serves thy life, and doth thy *death* attend!” She turns brusquely and walks away.

Elizabeth shakes her head. “Though I’ve far more *cause*, yet much less spirit to curse abides in me; I say *Amen!* to all.” She starts to go.

“Stay, madam,” Richard tells his older brother’s widow. “I must speak a word with you.”

“I have *no more sons* of the royal blood *for thee to murder!* As for my *daughters*, Richard, they shall be *praying nuns*, not weeping queens! And therefore level not to hit *their* lives.”

“You have a daughter called Elizabeth, virtuous and fair, royal and gracious....”

The lady’s mother is immediately alarmed. “And must she *die* for that? Oh, let her *live!*—or I’ll corrupt her manners, stain her beauty!—slander *myself* as false to Edward’s bed!—throw over her the veil of *infamy!*” she warns. “So that she may live unscar’d by bleeding *slaughter*, I will ‘confess’ she was not Edward’s daughter!”

Richard frowns; his own heir must be born of the former monarch’s legitimate child. “Wrong not her birth!—she is of *royal blood!*”

“To save her life, I’ll say she is *not* so!”

“Her life is *safe* only in her *birth.*”

Elizabeth scoffs: “And in *that* safety *died her brothers!*”

“Lo, at their births good stars were opposing—”

“*No!*—to their lives *bad friends* were contrary!”

He shrugs. “All unavoided is the doom of *Destiny.*”

“*True*—when a *voided* grace *makes* destiny! My babes were destined to a fairer death, if Grace had blessed *thee* with a *fairer* life!”

Richard feigns indignation. “You speak as if *I* had slain my cousins!”

“*Cousins?*—indeed by their uncle *cozened!*—out of *comfort, kingdom, kindred, freedom—life!* Whose *hand* soever lanced their tender hearts, *thy head*, albeit indirectly, gave direction! No doubt the murderous knife was dull and blunt, till it was *whetted* on thy *stone-hard* heart to revel in the entrails of my lambs!”

She leans forward, fists clenched, and glares with contempt at his polished armor. “Except that long *use* of grief makes wild grief *tame*, my *tongue* should to thine ears not name my boys till my *nails* were *anchored in thine eyes!*—my poor ship of sails and tackle in such a *desperate bay of death* more like a *raft—dashèd all to pieces* on thy rocky bosom!”

Having allowed the venting, Richard now intends to ingratiate himself. “Madam, may I thrive—in my enterprise, and success in dangerous, bloody wars—so much as I *intend more good, to you and yours*, than ever you or yours were by me wrongèd.”

“*What* yet covered by the face of heaven could be revealèd that can do *me* good?”

“The advancement of your children, gentle lady.”

“Up to some *scaffold*, there to lose their *heads?*”

“No, to the dignity and height of *honour!*—the high, *imperial* mode of this earth’s glory!”

She challenges: “Flatter my sorrows with report of it—tell me what *state*, what *dignity*, what *honour*, canst *thou* devise for any child of mine?”

King Richard spreads his arms wide. “Even *all I have!*—yea, *myself* withal will I endow upon a child of thine!—if in the Lethe of thine angry soul thou drown the sad remembrance of those wrongs which thou *suppose* I have done to thee.”

Elizabeth sneers. “Be *brief*, lest the process of *thy* kindness’ *telling* last longer than thy kindness’ *act!*”

“Then know that from my soul I *love* thy daughter!”

The queen shakes her head, amazed; she stares at him. “My daughter’s mother thinks it with *her* soul—”

“*What* do you think?”

“—that thou dost love my daughter from *thy* soul as from thy soul’s love didst thou love *her brothers!* And from *my* heart’s ‘love’ I do ‘*thank*’ thee for it!”

“Be not so hasty to confound my meaning! I *mean* that with my soul I love thy daughter—and mean to make her *Queen of England!*”

“Say, then: who dost thou mean shall be her *king?*”

“Even he that *makes* her queen!—who should be else?”

“What?—*thou?*”

“*I*, even *I!* What think you of it, madam?”

She blinks, aghast. “How canst thou *woo* her?”

He smiles. “That would I learn from *you*, who are best acquainted with her moods.”

Elizabeth is incredulous. “And wilt thou *learn* from me?”

“Madam, with all my heart!”

The erstwhile queen thinks, then nods. “*Send* to her . . .

“From the man that *slew her brothers*, send a pair of *still-bleeding hearts*, thereon engravèd ‘*Edward*’ and ‘*York!*’

“Then perhaps she will *weep*; therefore present to her a handkerchief—as once Margaret did to thy father, it *steeped in Rutland’s blood!* Which, say to her, did drain the purple sap from her sweet *brother’s* body!—and bid her *dry her weeping eyes* therewith!

“If *that* inducement force her not to love, send her the story of thy noble *acts!*—tell her thou madest away”—murdered—”her uncle *Clarence*, her uncle *Rivers*—yea, and, for *her* sake, madest quick conveyance with her good *Aunt Anne!*” Richard’s wife has died—suddenly, after a brief, unknown ailment.

“Come, come, you *mock* me!” protests Richard, the very image of hurt feelings. “That is not the way to win your daughter,” he protests gently, looking quite downcast.

“There is no *other* way!—unless thou couldst put on some other *shape*, and not be *Richard* who hath *done* all this!”

He regards her thoughtfully. “Say that I *did* ‘all this’—for *love* of *her!*”

Elizabeth laughs bitterly. “Nay, then indeed she cannot choose but *hate* thee, having *bought* love with *bloody spoil!*”

Richard appeals to her, his voice pleading. “Look you, what is *done* cannot be now *amended!* Men shall deal unadvisedly sometimes, which *after* hours give leisure to *repent!*” He turns away, apparently struggling with a mighty grief.

He faces her again, tears in his eyes, appealing with renewed determination. “If I did take the kingdom from your *sons*, to make amends I’ll *give it to your daughter!*”

“If I have killed the issue of your womb, to bring *your increase* to life I will upon your daughter beget *mine* issue—from *your* blood! A *grandam’s* name is little less in love than is the title of doting *mother!* As for children, they are but one step below—even of *your* mettle, of *your* very blood!—all delivered of *one pain!*—save for a night of groans endured by her for whom *you* did a *like* sorrow!

“Your children were *vexation* to your youth, but mine shall be a *comfort* to your *age!* The loss you have is a son being king—but *by* that loss your *daughter* is made *queen!*”

“I cannot make you what amends I *would*; therefore accept such *kindness* as I *can!*”

“*Dorset*—your son who with a *fearful* soul spends discontented steps on *foreign* soil—this fair alliance shall quickly *call home*, to high *promotions* and *great dignity!* The king that calls your beauteous daughter *Wife*, familiarly shall call thy Dorset *Brother!*”

“Again shall *you* be ‘Mother’ to a king—and all the ruins of distressful times *repaired* with *double* riches of *contentment!*”

“*What!* We have *many goodly days* to see! The *liquid* drops of tears that you have shed shall come again, *transformèd to orient pearl*, advantaging their loss with interest of *ten-times double* gain of *happiness!*”

“*Go* then, my mother-in-law!—to thy daughter go! Make bold her bashful years with *your*

experience; prepare her ears to hear a *wooer's* tale! Put into her tender heart the aspiring flame of *golden sovereignty*; acquaint the princess with the sweet, silent hours of *marriage joys*!

“And when this arm of mine hath *chastised* the petty *rebel*, dull-brained Buckingham, bound with *triumphant garlands* will I come and lead to a *conqueror's* bed thy daughter!—to whom I will retell my conquest won! And *she* shall be sole *victor*—Caesar's *Caesar*!”

Elizabeth seems to be struggling. “What were I best to say? Her *father's brother* would be her lord? Or shall I say her *uncle*?” Or, *he that slew her brothers and her uncles*! “Under what title shall I woo for thee, that God, the law, mine honour and love can make seem *pleasing* to her tender years?”

“Imply fair England's *peace* by this alliance.”

Which she shall purchase with continuing war?

“Say that the *king*, who may command, *entreats*.”

At her hands that which the king's King forbids! —incest.

“Say she shall be a high and mighty *queen*!”

Elizabeth stares. *To bewail that title as her mother doth!*

“Say I will love her ‘*everlastingly*!’”

But how long shall that term ever last?

“Sweetly impress upon her: a *fair* life to the end—”

But how long, fairly, sweetly, shall her life last?

“—so long as heaven and nature lengthen it!”

So long as Hell and Richard like of it!

“Say I, her sovereign, am her *subject* in love!”

But she, your subject, loathes such sovereignty.

“Be *eloquent* in my behalf to her!”

Says Elizabeth, after a moment, “An *honest* tale speeds best being *plainly* told.”

“Then in plain terms tell her my loving tale.”

“Plain but not *honest* is too *harsh* a style.”

“Your reasons are too *shallow*, and too *quick*!”

“*Oh, no*; my reasons are too *deep*, and *dead*”—the opposite of *quick* in its sense of *living*.

Tears streak her cheeks. “*Two deep and dead*, poor infants, in their grave!”

Richard is soothing. “Harp not on that string, madam; that is past.”

Harp on it ever shall I, till heart-strings break! She weeps.

To affirm vows, Richard cites what impresses him: the Saint George medal, awarded to only a few; knighthood's most distinguished honorary fraternity, the Order of the Garter; and the diadem. “Now, by my George, my garter, and my crown—”

“*Profaned, dishonored*—and the third *usurped*!”

“I swear—”

“By *nothing*! For this is no *oath*: *thy* George, *profaned*, hath *lost* its holy honour!—*thy* garter,”—emblem of valor and loyalty, “*blemished*, its knightly virtue *pawned*!—*thy* crown, *usurped*!—*disgraced* kingly glory!”

She makes a stark challenge: “If something *thou* wilt swear is to be believed, swear then by *something that thou hast not wronged*!”

“Now, by the world—”

“’Tis *full* of thy foul wrongs!”

“My father's death—”

“*Thy life* hath *that* dishonored!”

“Then, by *myself*.”

“*Thyself thy self mis-usest*!”

He reveals a spark of anger: “Why then, by God—”

“*God's* wrong is most of *all*!”

“If thou hadst *feared* to break an oath to Him, the *unity* the king thy brother made had not

been *broken!*—nor my brothers *slain!* If thou hadst feared to break an oath to *Him*, the imperial metal circling now thy brow had graced the tender temples of *my child!*—and *both* the princes had been *breathing* here! Thy *broken faith* hath made two tender playfellows into *dust*, and prey for *worms!*

“What canst thou swear by *now?*”

“The time *to come,*” says Richard.

Elizabeth shakes her head scornfully. “*That* thou hast wronged in the time *o’erpast!*—for I myself have *many* tears to wash hereafter time for wrongs by thee!

“And the *children* live whose parents thou hast slaughtered!—ungovernèd youth, to bewail it in their *age!* The *parents* live whose children thou hast butchered, to bewail it with their age, as old, *withered plants.*”

“Swear *not* by time to come!—for that thou hast *misused* ere *used*—misusèd in *times past!*”

Richard faces her. “So much as I intend to *repent,* by that much may I prosper and thrive in my dangerous attempt of hostile arms!”

He never feels remorse—but neither does he willingly accept being refused; he persists in promising. “Myself *myself* confound!—Heaven and Fortune bar me *happy* hours!—day, yield me not thy *light,* nor, night, thy *rest;* be *opposite* all planets of *good* luck to my proceedings!—if, with *pure heart’s love,* immaculate *devotion,* *holy* thoughts, I tender not thy beauteous, princely daughter!

“In *her* consists my *happiness*—and *thine!* Without *her,* follows to this land, and to me—to *thee, herself,* and *many* a Christian soul!—*death, desolation, ruin and decay!*”

“It cannot be avoided, but by *this!* It *will* not be avoided but by this!

“Therefore, good Mother—I *must* call you so!—be the attorney of my love to her! Plead what I *will* be, not what I *have* been!—not my deserts, but what I *will* deserve! Urge the *necessity* and state of *times,* and be not found peevish in *great designs!*”

Elizabeth’s face softens. “Shall I be tempted by the Devil thus?” she murmurs.

“*Aye,* if a devil tempt thee to *do good!*”

“Shall I *forget* myself to *be* myself?”—royal once again.

“*Aye!*—if your self’s remembrance *wrong* yourself!”

“But thou didst kill my children—”

“But in your daughter’s *womb* I bury them—where, in that nest of niceness, they shall *breed selves* of themselves, to your recomforture!”

Elizabeth looks at him. “Shall I go win my daughter to thy will?” she asks quietly.

“And be a *happy mother* by the deed!”

“I go,” she says. “Write to me very shortly, and you shall understand from me her mind.”

“Bear her my true love’s kiss!” he says, taking her hand and kissing it. “And so, farewell!”

Richard smiles brightly as she turns to go.

Relenting fool, and shallow, changing woman! he thinks, triumphantly, as the dark figure moves slowly down the cold street.

Chapter Eleven Before the Battle

Richard’s London-area forces have all been assembled, At the front of the waiting ranks of royal troops, the noble lords, all in armor and accompanied by their attendants, are gesturing in animated discussion. “How now! What *news?*” he calls, approaching.

Ratcliffe hurries to him and bows. “My gracious sovereign, on the *western coast* rideth a *puissant navy!* ’Tis thought that *Richmond* is their admiral!—and there they but lull, expecting the aid of *Buckingham* to *welcome them ashore!*”

“To our shores throng many of your doubtful, hollow-hearted ‘friends’—*unarmèd,* and

unresolved to beat them back!”

The French, well aware of Buckingham’s rising Welsh challenge to Richard’s reign, have provided the exiled Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, with ships bringing two thousand soldiers and mercenaries for an invasion to begin along the far-western coast of Wales.

Richard is alarmed. “Some light-footed friend, post to the Duke of Norfolk!—Ratcliffe, thyself—or *Catesby*; where is he?”

“*Here*, my lord!”

“Fly to the duke!” he tells them. “When thou comest thither, post thou to Salisbury....” He pauses, pondering, and turns away to pace, deep in thought.

After a minute or so he glares at Catesby. “Dull, unmindful *villain*, why stand’st thou *still*, and go’st not to *the duke*?”

“First, mighty sovereign, let me know your mind!—what from Your Grace I shall deliver to him!”

“Oh... true, good Catesby. Bid him levy straight the greatest strength and power he can make, and meet me immediately at Salisbury.”

Catesby bows. “I go!” He and his attendants start away, to alert John Howard, the new Duke of Norfolk, and commander of Richard’s regional forces.

Asks Ratcliffe, “What is’t Your Highness’ pleasure I shall do at Salisbury?”

Richard frowns. “Why, what wouldst thou do there before *I* go?”

“Your Highness told me I should post before....”

Richard, unaccustomed to speaking frankly or taking open, forthright action, is perturbed. “My mind is changed.” He addresses the arriving Earl of Derby: “Stanley, what news with *you*?”

“None *good*, my lord, to please you with the hearing, nor none so bad but it may well be told—”

“*Hoyday*, a *riddle*!—neither good nor bad!” says the king angrily. “Why dost thou run so many miles about when thou mayst *tell* thy tale a *nearer* way? *Once more*,” demands Richard harshly, “*what news*?”

“Richmond is on the seas.”

“There let him *sink*, and be the *seas* on *him*! *White-livered runagate*!—what *doth* he there?”

“I know not, mighty sovereign, but by guess—”

“Well, sir, as you *guess*, as you *guess*!”

“Stirred up by Dorset, Buckingham, and Ely, he makes for England, here to claim the crown.”

Richard rages: “Is the chair *empty*? Is the *sword unwielded*? Is the king *dead*?—the *empire unpossessed*? What heir of York is there alive but *we*? And who is England’s king but *great York’s heir*?”

“Then, *tell* me: what *doth* he *upon the sea*?”

“Unless for that, my liege, I cannot guess.”

The king glares at Derby. “Unless for that he comes *to be your liege*, you cannot guess wherefore the Welshman comes! *Thou wilt revolt*, and fly to *him*, I fear!”

“*No*, mighty liege!—mistrust me not for that!” insists Lord Stanley.

“Where is thy *power*, then, to *beat him back*?—where are thy *tenants* and thy *followers*?” He reveals his suspicion: “Are they not now upon the western shore, *safe-conducting the rebels from their ships*?”

“*No*, my good lord, my friends are in the north!”

“*Cold* friends to *Richard*! What do they *in the north*, when they should serve their sovereign in the *west*?”

“They have not been so *commanded*, mighty sovereign! Please it Your Majesty to give me *leave*, I’ll muster up my friends and meet Your Grace where and what time Your Majesty shall please!”

“*Aye, aye*, thou *wouldst* be gone!—to *join with Richmond*!” The exiled lord is Derby’s

stepson. "I will not trust *you*, sir!"

"Most mighty sovereign, you have no cause to hold my friendship doubtful! I never *was*, nor ever *will be* false!"

Richard waves him away. "Well, go muster men—but, *hear you*: leave behind *your son*, George Stanley. Look that your faith be *firm*, or else his *head's* assurance is but *frail*!"

"So deal with him as I prove *true* to you," says Derby. He bows with dignity, and goes to raise another force of armed Englishmen—and soon.

A knight hurries past the columns of soldiers, comes to Richard, and bows. "My gracious sovereign, now in *Devonshire*, as I by friends am well advisèd, Sir Edward Courtney and the haughty prelate, Bishop of Exeter, his brother there, with many more confederates are *in arms*!"

Another messenger, a rider, reaches them; he dismounts hastily. "My liege, in *Kent* the Guildfords are *in arms*!—and every hour more compatriots flock to their aid, and ever their power *increaseth*!"

Nearly breathless, a runner approaches. "My lord," he gasps, "the army of the Duke of Buckingham—"

"*Out on you, owls!* Nothing but songs of *death*?" cries Richard. He strikes the man. "Take *that*, until thou bring me *better news*!"

The soldier wipes a bleeding lip. "The news *I* have to tell Your Majesty is that by a sudden *flood* of falling *waters*,"—after a drenching rain, "Buckingham's army is *dispersèd* and *scattered*!—and he himself has wandered away *alone*, no man knows whither!"

Buckingham's scheme to lead Welshmen swiftly through England has been thwarted by storms with enough rain to swell two wide rivers, the Severn and the Wye, both now racing and impassable.

Richard is pleased. "I cry thee mercy. There is my purse to cure that blow of thine," he says, tossing the pouch of coins. "Hath any well-advisèd friend proclaimed *reward* to him that brings the traitor in?"

The messenger nods. "Such proclamation hath been made, my liege."

A knight comes to the king and bows. "Sir Thomas Lovel and Lord Marquis Dorset, 'tis said, my liege, in *Yorkshire* are *in arms*! Yet this good *comfort* bring I to Your Grace: the *Breton navy* is *dispersèd* by *tempest*!"

"*Richmond*, off Dorsetshire, sent a boat unto the shore to ask those on the banks if they were his supporters, yea or no—who answered him they came from *Buckingham*—upon *his* party. *Richmond*, *mistrusting* them, hoisted sail and made away for Brittany!"—went back to the Continent.

Richard is pleased. "March on, *march on*, since we are up in *arms*—if not to fight with *foreign* enemies, yet to beat down these *rebels* here at home!"

Catesby comes to the king and bows. "My liege, the Duke of *Buckingham* is *taken*!" But the knight holds his hat, shifting his feet uncomfortably. "That is the best news. That the Earl of *Richmond* is with a mighty power *landed at Milford* is colder tidings, yet they must be told."

For a moment, Richard is disconcerted; he knows residents of that port city in Wales will welcome a Tudor pretender to the English throne.

And *Richmond* will in fact draw several thousand additional supporters from among the Welsh; then, as they march, more from the English population.

"Away towards Salisbury," says the king. "While we *reason here*, a royal battle might be won and lost."

He pulls on gloves. "Someone take order that *Buckingham* be brought to Salisbury."

He signals to a captain. At the herald's nod, a trumpet blares, drums pound, and the royal troops begin to move.

"The rest march on with me."

Outside a lowly farmhouse in western England, Lord Derby meets with Christopher Urswick;

the priest, a clandestine visitor here, is chaplain to Lord Richmond.

“Sir Christopher, tell Richmond this from me: that in the *sty* of this *most-bloody boar*”—Richard—“my son *George Stanley* is guarded in *hold*! If I revolt, off goes young George’s head! The fear of that withholds, for now, my aid.

“But, tell me, where is princely Richmond now?”

“At Pembroke, or at Harford-west, in Wales.”

“What men of name resort to him?”

“Sir Walter Herbert, the renowned soldier; Sir Gilbert Talbot; Sir William Stanley; Oxford; redoubted Pembroke; Sir James Blunt; and Rice-ap-Thomas, with a *valiant crew*!—and many *more* of noble fame and worth!

“And toward *London* they do bend their course, though on the way they be *fought* withal!”

“Return unto thy lord; commend me to him,” says Derby. “Tell him the queen hath heartily consented that he shall espouse her daughter Elizabeth!”

As does Richard, the young Tudor earl hopes for an heir whose grandfather was King Edward IV.

Derby hands the priest a leather pouch. “These letters will resolve him of my mind. Farewell!”

Will not King Richard let me *speak* with him?” asks Lord Buckingham, as six sheriff’s men, four of them flanking him with halberds, head toward a low platform this morning in Salisbury.

“No, my good lord,” says the sheriff. “Therefore be patient.”

Buckingham, not yet thirty, is not patient; he sweats at he walks, despite the chill of late autumn, remembering the victims of his efforts on Richard’s behalf. He looks up.

Hastings, and Edward’s children! Rivers, Grey! Vaughan!

Holy King Henry, and thy fair son Edward! And all that have miscarried by underhand, corrupted, foul injustice!—if your moody, discontented souls do through the clouds behold this present hour, for revenge mock my destruction!

He stumbles, but two deputies right him, gripping his bound arms firmly. “This is All-Souls’ Day, fellows, is it not?” he asks, as they near the scaffold.

“It is, my lord,” the sheriff tells him.

“Why, then all *souls’* day is my *body’s* doomsday.”

This is the day that, in King Edward’s time, I wished might fall on me when I was found false to his children or his wife’s allies! This is the day wherein I wished to fall by the false faith of him I trusted most! Thus this All-Souls’ Day, to my fearful soul, is the determined response to my wrongs!

That high All-Seer that I dallied with hath turned my feigned prayer onto my head, and given in earnest what I begged in jest! Thus doth He force the swords of wicked men to turn their own points on their masters’ bosoms!

Now Margaret’s curse is fallen upon my head: ‘When he,’ quoth she, ‘shall split thy heart with sorrow, remember Margaret was a prophetess!’

They have reached the two wooden steps. Buckingham straightens his shoulders as a deputy pulls off his hat.

“Come, sirs, convey me to the block of shame!

“Blame’s the due of wrong; and wrong hath *nought* but blame.”

Fellows in *arms*, and my most loving *friends!*” calls Lord Richmond to commanders of his army, now briefly halted fifty miles inside England. “Bruisèd beneath the yoke of *tyranny*, thus far into the bowels of the land have we marchèd on *without impediment!*” He holds up a packet of letters. “And here receive we from our father-in-law, Stanley, lines of fair *comfort* and *encouragement!*”

Other rebellious Englishmen have joined his troops as they move through the farming counties.

“The *wretched, bloody* and *usurping boar*—that *despoiled* your summer fields and fruitful vines, swills your warm *blood* like wash, and makes his *trough* in your disembowelled bosoms!—that *foul swine* lies now even in the *centre* of this isle, near to the town of Leicester, as we learn. From Tamworth thither is *but one day’s march!*”

“In *God’s* name, cheerly *on*, courageous friends, to reap the harvest of *perpetual peace* by this one bloody trial of sharp *war!*”

As the soldiers and citizens cheer, the Earl of Oxford comments, to the nobleman beside him, about their peers’ supporters: “Every man of *conscience* has *a thousand swords* to fight against that bloody *homicide!*”

Sir Walter Herbert nods. “I doubt not but his ‘friends’ will fly to *us!*”

“He *hath* no friends but who are friends for *fear*,” says Sir James Blunt, “who in his greatest need will *shrink* from him!”

“All for our vantage,” nods Richmond. He calls out again, to the troops. “Then, in *God’s* name, *march!*”

“*True hope* is swift, and flies with swallow’s wings!

“Kings it makes gods, and meaner creatures *kings!*”

Marching northward in great haste, King Richard III’s main army has reached Leicester, and this evening he himself has led a party west another twelve miles.

“Here pitch our tents, even here in Bosworth field,” he tells his officers. “My Lord of Surrey, why look you so sad?”

“My heart is ten times lighter than my looks,” claims the earl, Thomas Howard.

Richard looks for the young man’s father. “My Lord of Norfolk—”

“Here, most gracious liege,” says John Howard, the duke.

The king wants to quell the invasion and rebellion, whatever the cost. “Norfolk, we must have *knocks, eh? Must we not?*”

“We must both give and take, my gracious lord.”

Richard points, as soldiers lead a pack horse forward. “Up with my tent *there*. Here will I lie tonight.” *But where tomorrow?* he muses. *Well, all’s one for that.*

“Who hath descried the number of the foe?” he asks the lords.

“Six or seven thousand is their utmost power,” Norfolk reports.

Richard sneers. “Why, *our* battalions *treble* that amount! Besides, the *king’s* name is a tower of *strength*, which they among the adverse party lack.”

He knows, though, that many believe the *king’s* name is not *his*. “*Up with my tent there!*” he shouts at the foot soldiers, annoyed by their slowness in erecting the unfolding canvas.

He summons the commanders into conference. “Valiant gentlemen, let us survey the vantage of the *field*.”

“Call for some men of sound direction. Let’s lack no *discipline*, make no *delay*,” he warns. “For, lords, tomorrow is a busy day.”

On the other side of the wide field, near the market town of Bosworth, Lord Richmond’s army continues to stream forward, marching into the growing military encampment behind him.

In the flickering light of torches, he watches, smiling, as soldiers pitch his tent. “The weary sun hath made a golden set, and by the bright track of his fiery ride gave signal of a goodly day tomorrow!

“Sir William Brandon, *you* shall bear my standard!” The knight bows, pleased and honored.

“Give me some ink and paper in my tent,” Richmond tells a lieutenant. “I’ll part in just proportion our small strength, assign each several leader to his charge, and draw the form and model for our army.”

“My Lord of Oxford, you, Sir William Brandon, and you, Sir Walter Herbert, stay with me. The Earl of Pembroke keeps with his regiment; good Captain Blunt, bear my good-night to him, and desire the earl to see me in my tent by the second hour in the morning.

“Yet one thing more, good Blunt, before thou go’st: where is Lord *Stanley* quartered, dost thou know?”

The captain grins; Derby’s troops have supposedly come here in support of Richard. “Unless I have mistaken his colours *much*—which well I am assured I have not done!—his regiment lies half a mile, at most, south from the mighty power of the king.”

Richmond smiles, pleased by the news. “If without peril it be possible, good Captain Blunt, bear my good-night to him—and give him from me this *most needful scroll!*”

“Upon my *life*, my lord, I’ll undertake it!” Sir James bows. “And so God give you quiet rest tonight!”

“Good night, good Captain Blunt.” Richmond motions his officers. “Come gentlemen, let us consult upon tomorrow’s business!

“Into our tent,” he says, holding a flap open for them, “the air is raw and cold!”

As the writing materials are unpacked, he stands at a field table, unfolding a map.

The king is impatient. “What is’t o’clock?”

After their long march, the soldiers are cooking. “It’s *supper*-time, my lord!” says Catesby—but then he spots the scowl. “It’s nine o’clock.”

“I will not sup tonight. Give me some ink and paper.” Richard frowns, seeing a boy hurrying back from his armorer. “Well, is my visor easier than it *was*?—and all my armour laid into my tent?”

“It is, my liege,” Catesby assures him, “and all things are in readiness.” But when Richard has turned away, he whispers to a servant, who hurries into the tent.

The king motions a lord to him. “Good Norfolk, hie thee to thy charge; use *careful* watch—choose *trusty* sentinels!”

“I do, my lord.” The duke, who has seen considerable combat, feels insulted.

“Stir with the lark tomorrow, gentle Norfolk!”

“I warrant you, my lord,” mutters the nobleman, going to his own tent.

“Catesby!”

“My lord?”

“Send out a pursuivant-at-arms to Stanley’s regiment; bid him bring his power before sunrising,” Richard orders, adding, with menace, “lest his son *George* fall into the blind cave of eternal night.” Catesby bows, and starts off toward Derby’s forces.

Richard tells servants: “Fill me a bowl of wine. Get me a candle. Saddle my white stallion for the field tomorrow. Look that my lance be *sound*, but not too heavy.

“Ratcliffe!”

Sir Richard comes from the torch’s shadows. “My lord?”

“Saw’st thou the melancholy Lord Northumberland?”—one of his disheartened followers.

“Thomas, the Earl of Surrey, and himself, much about dusk, from troop to troop went through the army, cheering up the soldiers.”

“So. I am satisfied.” Richard shouts at a servant: “*Give me a bowl of wine!*”

“I have not that alacrity of spirit, nor cheer of mind, that I was wont to have,” he tells Ratcliffe wearily. He glares at the fearful serving-man who brings a flagon toward the tent. “Set it *down!*”

“Is ink-and-paper ready?”

Ratcliffe looks inside. “It is, my lord.”

Richard yawns. “Bid my guard watch; leave me,” he tells a waiting lieutenant. “Ratcliffe, about the mid of night come to my tent and help to arm me.” He frown at the others. “*Leave me, I say!*”

Ratcliffe bows and goes, following the king's attendants.

Richard steps into the tent. From candles' wavering yellow flames, thin streams float upward, curling with soot. He sits, hands lying flat on the table before him, deep in dark rumination.

Richmond has finished consulting his commanders. He rises from the table as a visitor enters.

"Fortune and *victory* sit on thy helm!" says Lord Derby, bowing.

Richmond beams, embracing him. "All comfort that the dark night can afford be to thy person, noble father-in-law! Tell me, how fares our loving mother?"

"I by attorney *bless thee* from thy mother!—who prays continually for Richmond's good!

"So much for that," Derby tells the lords. "The silent hours steal on, and slaking darkness breaks within the east! In *brief*—for so the season bids us be—prepare thine army *early* in the morning, and put thy fortune to the arbitrement of *bloody strokes* in mortal, startling *war!*"

Richmond nods; his battle design has already been completed.

Derby continues: "That which I *would* I *cannot!* As I *may* with best advantage, I will *deceive* for a time—then *aid thee* in this uncertain shock of arms! But on thy side I may not be too forward lest, that being seen, thy stepbrother, tender George, be *executed* within his father's sight!

"Farewell! Short leisure of this fearful time cuts off the ceremonious vows of love, and the ample interchange of sweet discourse, which so-long-sundered friends should dwell upon. May God give us more leisure for those rites of love!"

He pauses at the tent opening. "Once more, *adieu!* Be *valiant*, and speed *well!*"

Richmond requests a clandestine escort: "Good lords, conduct him to his regiment.

"I'll strive with my troubled thoughts," he tells the captains as they leave, "to take brief *rest*, lest leaden slumber weigh me down tomorrow, when I should *mount* with *wings of victory!*"

"Once more, good night, kind lords and gentlemen!"

Alone now, he goes to his knees.

O Thou, whose captain I account myself, look on my forces with a gracious eye; put in their hands bruising irons of thy wrath, that they may crush down with a heavy fall the helmets of our usurping adversaries! Make us thy ministers of chastisement, that we may praise Thee in the victory!

To Thee I do commend my watchful soul, ere I let fall the windows of mine eyes!

Sleeping and waking, O Lord, defend me still!

He rises, lies upon his cot, and soon is fast asleep.

Richard sits in near-darkness, exhausted from travel, but unable to sleep. One of the candles has burned out, and the dwindling fire outside makes the tent-front glow but dimly.

Suddenly he pales; his eyes widen, and he grips the table, knuckles white, to gape at a ghastly figure that floats, translucent, before him.

The gore-blotched ghost of Edward, Prince of Wales, stares intently, and its hollow voice is chilling. "Let me sit *heavy* on thy soul tomorrow! Think how thou *stab'dst* me in my prime of youth at Tewkesbury! *Despair*, therefore—and *die!*"

The specter looks toward the west, and seems almost to smile. "Be cheerful, *Richmond*—for the wrongèd souls of butchered princes fight in *thy* behalf! *King Henry's* issue, Richmond, *comforts* thee!"

As if summoned, the shade of King Henry VI appears, hovering before Richard. "When I was mortal, my *anointed body* by thee was piercèd with deadly puncture! Think of the *Tower*—and *me!* *Despair*, and *die!* Harry the Sixth bids thee *despair and die!*"

The dead monarch turns his gaze toward Richmond's camp. "Virtuous and holy, *be thou conqueror!* Harry, who *prophesied* thou shouldst be king, doth comfort thee in thy sleep. *Live*, and *flourish!*"

Richard, frozen in fear, now sees the ghost of his brother George. The figure speaks. "Let me sit heavy on thy soul tomorrow!—I that was *washed* unto Death with *fulsome wine!*—poor

Clarence, by thy guile *betrayèd* to death! Tomorrow in the battle *think on me!*—and let *fall* thy *edgeless sword! Despair, and die!*”

The dead duke cries, looking toward sleeping Richmond, “Thou, offspring of the House of *Lancaster*, the wrongèd heirs of *York* do pray for *thee!* Good angels guard thine army! *Live—and flourish!*”

The spirits fade—but then three more come glimmering into view.

“Let *me* sit heavy on thy soul tomorrow—*Rivers*, who died at Pomfret! *Despair, and die!*”

“Think upon *Grey!*—and let thy soul *despair!*”

“Think upon *Vaughan!*—and, with guilty fear, let *fall* thy lance! *Despair, and die!*”

The vengeful specters turn from the king, all facing west. Says *Rivers’* ghost, “*Awake, and understand that our wrongs in Richard’s bosom will conquer him!*”

“*Awake, and win the day!*” urges *Grey*.

Then a harsh new voice startles *Richard*: “*Bloody and guilty!—guiltily awake!*—and in a bloody battle *end thy days!*” Dried blood encrusts the grim ghost’s neck. “Think on *Lord Hastings! Despair, and die!*”

“*Quiet, untroubled soul, awake, awake!*” it calls toward *Richmond*. “*Arm, fight, and conquer, for fair England’s sake!*”

The visions vanish.

Feverish, *Richard* sags, wiping his forehead with a sleeve as he leans back. But when he looks up, the ghosts of two young boys appear; close together, they near him, their pale eyes staring.

“*Dream on thy nephews, smothered in the Tower!*” says the older. “Let us be *lead* within thy bosom, *Richard*, and weigh thee down to *ruin, shame, and death!*”

The younger glares at the transfixed king. “Thy nephews’ souls bid thee *despair and die!*”

They look away. “*Sleep, Richmond; sleep in peace, and wake in joy!* Good angels guard thee from the boar’s annoy!” says the older—*Edward V*, king uncrowned for three months of misery.

“*Live, and beget a happy race of kings!*” urges the Duke of *York*, dead at ten. “*Edward’s* unhappy sons do bid thee *flourish!*”

A woman’s ghost appears behind those of the boys. “*Richard, thy wife—wretched Anne, wife that never slept a quiet hour with thee—now fills thy sleep with perturbation!*”

“Tomorrow in the battle think of *me!*—and let *fall* thy *edgeless sword! Despair, and die!*”

“*Thou, quiet soul,*” she tells *Richmond*, “*sleep thou a quiet sleep; dream of success and happy victory! Thy adversary’s wife doth pray for thee!*”

Richard gasps, then struggles for breath as the phantoms fade.

But yet another takes shape. A wry grin forms above the demoniac figure’s bloodied beard. “The *last* was I that helped thee to the crown; the last was I that *felt thy tyranny!*”

“*Oh, in the battle think on Buckingham!*—and die in *terror* of thy *guiltiness!*”

As *Richard* recoils, the ghost drifts forward. “*Dream on, dream on!*—of *bloody deeds and death! Fainting, despair!*—despairing, *yield thy breath!*”

Then he turns. *Buckingham’s* shade tells *Richmond*, “*I died while hoping I could lend thee aid; but cheer thy heart, and be thou not dismayed!*—*God and good angels fight on Richmond’s side!*”

He looks back. “*And Richard falls!*—in the height of all his pride!”

The king, reeling in horror, tips forward; his head drops to his arm on the table.

Fading, the floating image soon disappears into the deep, soft hiss of darkness.

Richard groans—away now, lost in a nightmare of violent battle.

“Give me *another horse!*” he moans, voice muffled. “Bind up my *wounds!*”

“*Have mercy, Jesu!*—”

Suddenly he starts, then sits up, slowly. He stares around, blinking.

Soft!—*I did but dream!*

O coward conscience, how thou dost afflict me!
 He looks at the candles near the tent's entrance; their flames are small. *The lights burn blue; it is now dead midnight!*
 He rubs his eyes, his face. *Cold drops stand on my fearfully trembling flesh!*
What do I fear?
Myself?
There's none else by.
Richard that is Richard loves Richard! And I am I!
 He peers around sharply. *Is there a murderer here?*
No.
 But his relief is brief. *Yes!—I am!*
Then fly!
What, from myself?
Great reason why!—lest revengèd!
What?—myself upon myself? I love myself!
Wherefore?
For every good that I myself have done unto myself!
Oh, no! Alas, I rather hate myself for hateful deeds committed by myself! I am a villain!
Yet I lie—I am not! Fool, of thyself speak well!
Fool, do not flatter!
 He rises. *My conscience hath a thousand several tongues, and every tongue brings in a different tale—and every tale condemns me for a villain!*
Perjury, perjury in the highest degree! Murder, stern murder in the direst degree! All various sins, all used in each degree, throng to the bar, crying out, 'Guilty! Guilty!'
 He remembers the ghosts. *I shall despair!—there is no creature loves me! And if I die, no soul shall pity me!*
Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself find in myself no pity for myself?
Methought the souls of all that I had murdered came to my tent!—and every one did threaten tomorrow's vengeance on the head of Richard!
 "My lord..."
 "'Zounds!'" cries Richard, startled. "Who is there?"
 The tent flap is pulled back. "Ratcliffe, my lord; 'tis I. The early village-cock hath twice done salutation to the morn; your friends are up, and buckle on their armour."
 "Oh, Ratcliffe, I have dreamed a fearful dream! What thinkest thou?—will our friends prove all true?"
 "No doubt, my lord."
 "Oh, Ratcliffe, I fear! I fear—"
 "Nay, good my lord, be not afraid of shadows."
By the Apostle Paul, shadows tonight have struck more terror to the soul of Richard than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers, armèd for a trial and led by shallow Richmond!
 He steps outside. "It is not yet near day."
 "Come, go with me," he says. He frowns. "Beside our tents I'll play the eaves-dropper, to see if any mean to shrink from me..."

Chapter Twelve Victory

Good morrow, Richmond!" The earl's generals have come to join him. He moves forward, smiling, to meet them. "I cry mercy, lords and watchful gentlemen, that you have ta'en a *tardy sluggard* here!" But his gleaming armor is already

fastened on, and his sword is slung at his side.

“How have you slept, my lord?”

“The *sweetest* sleep, and *fairest-boding* dreams that ever entered into a drowsy head have I had since your departure, my lords! Methought their *souls* whose bodies Richard murdered came to my tent and *cried me on to victory!*”

“I promise you, my heart is very *jocund* in the *remembrance* of so fair a dream!” He pulls on gauntlets. “How far into the morning is it, lords?”

“Upon the stroke of four.”

“Why then ’tis time to *arm*, and give direction.” Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, strides out to stand, in torchlight, before his assembled commanders and the front ranks of their troops.

“No more than I *have* said, loving countrymen!—the enforcement of the time forbids dwelling upon it at leisure.

“Yet remember this: *God* and our *good cause* fight upon our side!—the prayers of *holy saints* and *wrongèd souls* stand like high-rearèd *bulwarks* before our faces!

“Richard excepted, those whom we fight against had rather have *us* win than him they follow!

“For what *is* he they follow?—truly, gentlemen, a bloody *tyrant* and a *homicide!*—one raised in blood, and one in blood established; one that *made* means to come by what he hath, and *slaughtered* those that were the means to *help* him!—a *base, foul stone*, made precious by the foil of England’s chair, where he is *falsely set!*”

“One that hath ever been *God’s* enemy! And if you fight against *God’s* enemy, *God* will in justice *ward* you as *his soldiers!*”

“If you do sweat to put a *tyrant* down, the tyrant being slain, you *sleep in peace!*”

“If you do fight against your country’s *foes*, your country’s fat shall pay your pains the hire!

“If you do fight in safeguard of your wives, your wives shall *welcome home* the conquerors; if you do free your children from the *sword*, your children’s *children* will requite it in your age!

“Then *in the name of God* and all these *rights*, advance your standards, *draw your willing swords!*”

The men before him know all too well the ways of war—from the experience and legacy of a hundred-years’ war with France, and the long, bitter struggle between the Houses of York and Lancaster.

And, along with the deaths of thousands of farm hands and yeomen, gentlemen and knights, they have seen the ransom of captured or surrendered lords who were clad in fine, costly armor.

Declares Richmond, “As for me, the ransom of *my* bold attempt shall be *this cold corpse* on *the earth’s cold face!*”

“But if I *thrive*, the gain of my attempt the least of you shall *share in*, each his part thereof!”

The troops are stirred by his bold words and calm assurance—and the promise of reward. Loud cheers rise from the ranks, and men wave their caps in the air.

Cries Henry Tudor, “Sound drums and trumpets boldly and cheerfully!

“*God* and *Saint George!* *Richmond* and *victory!*”

It is still dark. “What said Northumberland, as touching Richmond?” asks Richard, waiting just outside his tent as rain begins to fall.

“That he was never trained up in arms,” Ratcliffe reports.

“He said the truth. And what said Surrey then?”

“He smiled and said, ‘The better for *our* purpose!’”

“He was in the right; as so indeed it is. Give me a calendar; ’tend the clock, there. Who saw the sun today?”

“Not I, my lord.”

Looking at the open almanac handed him by a servant, the king frowns. “Then it *disdains* to shine!—for by the book it should have braved the east an hour ago! A black day will it be to

somebody. Ratcliffe!”

“My lord?”

“The sun will not be seen today; the sky doth frown, and lour upon our army.” He watches as rain, heavy now, spatters up mud. “I would these dewy tears were off the ground!

“Not *shine* today,” mutters the last of the three suns on the flag of King Edward IV. “Well, what is that to *me* more than to *Richmond*? For the selfsame heaven that frowns on me looks sadly upon *him*.”

Just then the Duke of Norfolk comes riding up at a gallop; he jumps down from his steed, and rushes toward the king. “*Arm, arm, my lord!—the foe vaunts in the field!*”

“Come, bustle, *bustle!*—caparison my horse!” shouts King Richard to his servants. “Call up Lord Stanley!—bid him bring his power!” he orders a captain. “I will lead forth my soldiers to the plain, and my battalions shall be orderèd thus: my fore ward shall be drawn out in all length, consisting equally of horse and foot; John, Duke of Norfolk, and Thomas, Earl of Surrey, shall have the leading of this foot and horse. Our archers shall be placèd in the midst.

“They thus directed, *we* will follow in the main army, whose puissance on either side shall be well wingèd with our chiefest horsemen.

“This—and *Saint George* to boot!

“What think’st thou, Norfolk?” he asks, as officers rush to ready their forces.

“A good direction, warlike sovereign.” But he frowns, unfolding a paper. “This found I on my tent this morning.”

Richard reads: *Jack of Norfolk, be not so bold; for Dick thy master is bought and sold!*

The king scoffs. “A thing devisèd by the *enemy!*” He crumples the taunt and drops it into a puddle.

“Go, gentlemen!—every man unto his charge!

“Let not our babbling *dreams* affright our souls! ‘*Conscience*’ is but a word that *cowards* use, devisèd at first to keep the *strong in awe!* Our strong *arms* be our conscience, *swords* our *law!*”

“March on!—join *bravely!* Let us go to it *pell-mell!*—if not to *heaven*, then hand-in-hand to *hell!*”

Most of the captains have now returned, ready to move their companies into fighting formation. King Richard III climbs onto a wagon to stand before them. “What shall I say more than I have implied?

“Remember whom you are to cope withal: a sorting of *vagabonds, rascals, and runaways*; and a scum of *Bretons*, base, lackey *peasants* whom their o’er-cloyèd country vomits forth to desperate ventures and *assurèd destruction!*”

“You sleeping safe, they’d bring to you *unrest!* You having *lands*, and blest with beauteous *wives*, they would stain the one, *restrain* the other!” The troops laugh, if uneasily.

“And who doth lead them but a *paltry fellow*, long kept in Bretagne at others’ cost! A *milk-sop!*—one that never in his life felt so much cold in snow as *covers shoes!*”

“Let’s *whip* these stragglers *back o’er the seas again!*—lash *hence* these overweening rags of *France*, these famished *beggars*, weary of their lives!—who, but for dreaming on *this* foolish exploit, for want of means, poor *rats*, had *hanged themselves!*”

“If *we* be conquered, let *men* conquer us, and not these bastard *Bretons!*—whom our fathers have in *their own land* beaten, bobbed, and thumped, and left them on record the *heirs* of *shame!*”

“Shall *these* enjoy our *lands*? Lie with our *wives*? Ravish our *daughters*?”

A deep, rhythmic pounding sounds from across the fields. “*Hark!* I hear their drum!

“*Fight*, gentlemen of *England!* *Fight*, bold yeomen! *Draw*, archers!—draw your arrows to the *head!* Spur your proud horses *hard*, and *ride in blood!* *Amaze the sky* with your broken *lances!*”

The captains mount their horses, and ride to take their positions for combat.

Richard comes down from the wagon as a messenger returns from Derby. “What says Lord Stanley? Will he bring his power?”

“My lord, he doth deny to come.”

“Off with his son George’s head!” Richard looks around angrily for Ratcliffe.

But Norfolk’s voice is urgent. “My lord, the *enemy is past the marsh!*” Richmond’s forces will be upon the king’s in mere moments. “*After the battle let George Stanley die!*”

Richard growls, “A *thousand* hearts are great within *my* bosom!” He mounts his stallion. “Advance our standards!—*set upon our foes!*”

“Our ancient words of courage, fair ‘*Saint George,*’ inspire us with the spleen of *fiery dragons!*”

“*Upon* them! *Victory* sits on our helms!”

All across the wet fields the fighting is furious and bloody, as foot soldiers and armored knights clash, face to face, sword to sword, with daggers drawn. By the hundreds, men struggle forward in the mud, only to be pierced by cruel arrows—many aimed straight at their hearts or throats, but some falling through the rain from flights the archers have sent high above. Deep-plunging lances kill horses and men, whose neighs and shrieks blend in a horrid dissonance.

During the excursions, trumpet alarums call for valor and glory, and men’s hoarse voices cry out for help—or plead in agony, desperate for an inevitable death to end the pain.

Norfolk’s men are hacking their way forward with broadswords, driving back the Welsh invaders, when Catesby finds him, bringing an urgent appeal: “*Rescue, my lord of Norfolk, rescue, rescue!*”

“The king enacts more *wonders* than a *man*, daring any opponent unto *every danger!* His horse is slain, and *all on foot* he fights, seeking for Richmond in the throat of Death!

“*Rescue, fair lord, or else the day is lost!*”

King Richard comes toward them, a bloody sword in hand; his visor is up as he scans the nearby ground. “*A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!*”

Catesby rushes to him. “*Withdraw, my lord!—I’ll help you to a horse!*”

Richard shoves him away. “*Slave, I have bet my life* upon a cast, and I will *stand* to the hazard of the dice!” He is furious. “I think there be *six* Richmonds in the field!—*five* have I slain today instead of *him!*”

He stalks away, past the many dying men, stepping over corpses as he goes.

“*A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!*”

Richard finds Richmond. With a roar of rage he hurls himself forward, sword slicing in a wide arc before him.

The younger man’s blade pivots heavily left, then right, as he bars the blow, then another.

Richard presses the earl fiercely with a string of vicious attacks, but his furious slashes, blocked and countered, begin to wane, and his weariness is apparent as, cursing, he circles his foe and begins a new salvo of desperate thrusts, wide swings.

His long blade finally strikes home in a blow aimed at Richmond’s left arm; but the earl’s bright armor withstands the Spanish steel, and a stroke in return gouges into Richard’s shoulder. The king backs away, bleeding and panting. His sword droops as he gasps for breath.

Richmond, gripping the hilt with both hands, strides forward, lifts his sword, and swings a brutal strike downward. With surprising speed, Richard drops to a knee and raises his sword to block the falling blow—and his left hand flashes out with a dagger, flying toward Richmond’s exposed side.

But chain mail stops the bruising blow, and Richard is thrown off balance. He falls, furious, watching Richmond’s gleaming blade, aimed at his chest. He can only stare as the sword-point plunges down to pierce the breastplate and cleave his pitiless heart.

A retreat is soon sounded, and Richard’s desultory forces pull back from battle, discouraged and in disarray.

A flourish hails Lord Richmond, as his jubilant commanders surround him, standing in

triumph on the field near where Richard lies. The earl calls out, sword raised high, to those with him, “*God and your arms be praised, victorious friends! The day is ours!—the bloody dog is dead!*”

Lord Stanley, Earl of Derby, bends to grasp the crown of England. He kneels before the victor as the other lords watch, beaming. “Courageous Richmond, *well* hast thou acquitted thee!”

He offers the crown. “*Lo, here!* This long-usurpèd royalty from the dead temples of this bloody wretch have I pluckèd off, to grace *thy* brows withal!

“Wear it, enjoy it—and *make much* of it!”

Richmond sheathes his sword, removes his helmet, and looks up. “Great God of heaven, say *amen* to all.” He takes the crown, and as Derby rises and the others watch, places it firmly on his own head.

Amid the loud cheers, King Henry VII touches Derby’s arm. “But tell me, is young George Stanley living?”

The father smiles. “He *is*, my lord, and safe in Leicester town!—whither, if it please you, we may now withdraw us.”

“What men of name are slain on either side?” asks the king.

“John, Duke of Norfolk; Walter, Lord Ferrers; Sir Robert Brakenbury, and Sir William Brandon.”

King Henry nods solemnly. “Inter their bodies as becomes their births.” Most of the other casualties—a thousand of them—will share mass graves.

“*Proclaim a pardon* to soldiers fled who in submission will return to us.

“And then, as we have ta’en the Sacrament to do, we will *unite* the white rose and the red!”—emblems of the warring Plantagenet houses. “Heaven, that long have frowned upon their enmity, *smile* upon this fair conjunction!

“What *traitor* hears me and says not *Amen*? England hath long been *mad*, and *scarred herself!*—the brother blindly shed the brother’s blood; the father rashly slaughtered his own son; the son, compellèd, been butcher to the sire! All this York and Lancaster *divided*, in their dire *division*.

“Oh, now let Richmond and Elizabeth, the true *succeeders* of each royal house, together, by *God’s* fair ordinance, *conjoin them!*

“And let their heirs—God, if *thy* will be so—enrich the time to come with smooth-faced *peace*, with smiling *plenty*, and *fair, prosperous days!*

“Abate, gracious Lord, the blades of traitors that would induce these bloody days again, and make poor England weep in streams of blood! Let them not *live* to taste this land’s increase who would with *treason* wound this fair land’s *peace!*

“Now civil wounds are stoppèd!

“*Peace lives again!*

“That she may *long* live here, *God say Amen!*”