

daughter, now so marvellously restored to him. It seemed as if all his misfortunes, brought about by his blindness and folly, had, like a tightly coiled spring, suddenly unwound; and that Jupiter had given him a second chance. He held out his hands to his splendid princes, and smiled at his daughter. "O Imogen, thou hast lost by this a kingdom!"

"No, my lord," she answered; "I have got two worlds by it," and sister and brothers embraced. It seemed they were already known to one another, though how, and when, and why, remained for Cymbeline to discover. Only one thing still lingered, like a shadow on his happiness. "The forlorn soldier that so nobly fought," he sighed, "he would have well become this place, and graced the thankings of a king."

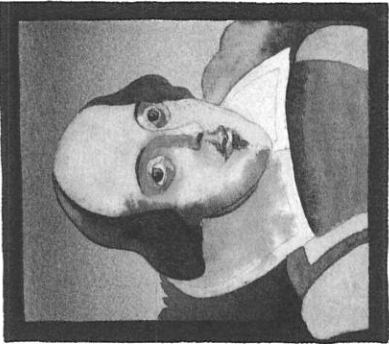
But Jupiter, if indeed it was the god who had made the morning, did not spoil perfection for lack of one detail. "I am, sir, the soldier that did company these three!" cried Posthumus, coming forward; and he called upon Iachimo, whom he had defeated in single combat, to confirm that he had been that very man, in the ragged garment of a peasant.

"I am down again!" cried Iachimo, once more sinking gracefully to his knees; and, with woeful looks and gallant gestures, that wrung the hearts of all the ladies present, he gave back the ring and the golden bracelet he'd stolen from the sleeping Imogen's arm. "Take that life," he begged earnestly of the man he'd wronged, confident that it would not be demanded of him.

He was not disappointed. Posthumus shook his head. "Live," he said, "and deal with others better."

Cymbeline rejoiced. His daughter's husband had proved himself a prince not by blood, but most surely by nature. He turned to Lucius and the Roman prisoners. "We'll learn our freeness of a son-in-law," he declared: "pardon's the word to all!"

So peace was made, honourably, between Britain and Rome; and there was peace in King Cymbeline's once-turbulent heart. With those he loved about him, he knelt to give thanks for the forgiveness he'd been shown: "Laud we the gods," he prayed, "and let our crooked smokes climb to their nostrils from our blest altars . . ."



*King Richard the Third*

George, Duke of Clarence, had been arrested! Heavily guarded, he was hurried along the dark, stony passages deep in the Palace of Westminster, on his way to the Tower. He was pale and bewildered, and stumbled as he walked. So sudden had been his arrest, that he was still clutching a glass of wine from the dining-table at which he'd been seized. Foolishly, he was trying not to spill it—as if it was as precious as his life's blood—

"Brother, good day; what means this armed guard?"

The party halted. Out of the shadows and into the leaping torchlight limped a queer, misshapen figure: a hunchback in black velvet. Instinctively, the guards shrank back. Although he was short in stature, and a pitiable object, there was an air of danger about him; and his restless right hand went continually to his dagger.

But the prisoner sighed with relief. The hunchback was his brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester. Hastily—for the guards were plainly restive—Clarence told him that he had been arrested by order of their brother, the King.

"Upon what cause?"

"Because my name is George," came the reply.

The hunchback stared, uncomprehendingly; but as his brother explained, his lean, sinewy face grew hard with anger and indignation.

The King, it seemed, had grown as sick in mind as he was in body. He was swayed by dreams and prophecies. Some wizard had told him that the letter G was dangerous to him, that 'G' would steal his throne. "And for my name of George begins with G," said Clarence, as if still unable to believe it, "it follows in his thought that I am he."

The hunchback scowled, and his hand hovered menacingly above his dagger. "Why, this it is, when men are ruled by women!" he exclaimed furiously. He blamed the Queen. It was she and her kindred who were making trouble. It was she and her brother who had sent the great Lord Hastings to the Tower, from where, thank God! he had just been released.

"We are not safe, Clarence, we are not safe!"

Clarence nodded. The times were indeed dangerous. Richard, seeing his troubled look, clasped him by the hand. "Well, your imprisonment shall not be long," he promised. "I will deliver you, or else lie for you."

There never was such a brother as Richard! Though he was shrunk and twisted in his body, his heart was straight and true.

"Have patience," Richard urged; and Clarence smiled. "I must, perforce," he murmured ruefully. "Farewell."

Impulsively, Richard embraced his brother, and there were tears in his eyes. Thoughtfully, he relieved him of the inconvenience of the wineglass, and stood, a little figure with a mighty shadow, watching with a sorrowful gaze as Clarence was taken off to the Tower.

Presently, the footsteps of the grim procession died away. The hunchback remained unmoving; but the expression on his face had changed. He was smiling; and his shadow, cast upon the stony wall by the leaping torchlight, jumped and danced as if with glee. "Go," he whispered after Clarence, "tread the path that thou shalt ne'er return; simple, plain Clarence, I do love thee so that I will shortly send thy soul to Heaven—"

It had not been the Queen or her kindred who had poisoned the King's mind against Clarence; it had been the hunchbacked Duke of Gloucester himself.

His smile broadened. So . . . the King was sick. "He cannot live," he murmured, "I hope, and must not die till George be packed with

## SHAKESPEARE STORIES II

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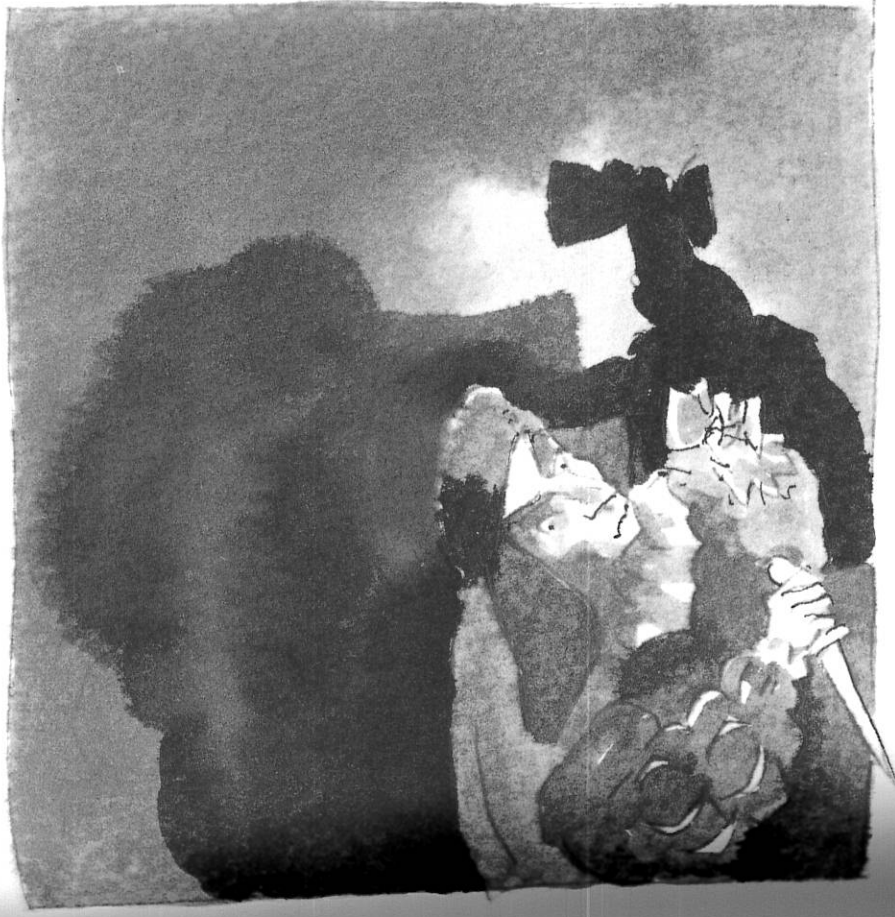
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## King Richard the Third

post-horse up to Heaven." His hand touched his dagger. "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!"

He laughed; and, raising the glass of wine he'd had off Clarence to his monstrous shadow, the pair of them drank a silent toast to the ill-health of all who stood between Richard and his huge ambition: the throne itself!

Already the hunchback's hands were rich with royal blood. He'd stabbed to death the mild and foolish King Henry in the Tower, and murdered his son at Tewkesbury. The removal from this world of his brother Clarence was but another rung on the bloody ladder he'd begun to mount. Clarence was a fool, and Richard had no time for fools . . .



But now his busy thoughts turned to softer matters. He needed a wife, and one who would make him royal in his bed. "I'll marry Warwick's youngest daughter," he decided; then, recollecting that he had killed her husband and her father, which might, on the lady's side, prove some impediment to the match, he shrugged his shoulders and grinned: "The readiest way to make the wench amends is to become her husband, and her father . . ."

He gave a little hop and a skip, and concluded by sweeping a gallant bow to his shadow. The pair of them would go a-courting, smelling like a bridegroom, of roses . . .

Down a steep street from St Paul's to Blackfriars, a dead, forgotten king was being carried, on his way to burial. His following was meagre: no muffled drums or solemn trumpets, no stately, black-draped carriage; only a weeping lady and a little shuffling of mourners, and four weary gentlemen bearing his coffin, open to a leaden sky.

The way was uneven and from time to time the bearers, despite their best endeavours, stumbled and jerked the coffin, so that the silent form within seemed to toss and turn, as if, even in his sleep of death, the murdered King Henry was being plagued with bad dreams of his troublesome reign, and its bloody end.

Presently, the mourning lady, who followed first after the coffin, begged the bearers halt awhile. Gently, the coffin was lowered to the ground, and the bearers stood back respectfully. The lady knelt, and gazed sadly at the crumbling face of murdered majesty.

"Poor, key-cold figure of a holy king," she sighed, "hear the lamentations of poor Anne, wife to thy Edward, to thy slaughtered son, stabbed by the self-same hand that made these wounds . . ." Bitterly, she cursed the monster who had orphaned and widowed her. Then, rising to her feet, bade the bearers take up the coffin again—

"Stay, you that bear the corse, and set it down!"

From out of the ground, it seemed, the devil himself had sprung forth!

"Set down the corse!" It was the velvet hunchback. He crouched in the coffin's path. He drew his sword—

"What, do you tremble? Are you all afraid?" cried the Lady Anne

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as the bearers set the coffin down and shrank away from the murderous Duke. "Foul devil, for God's sake hence, and trouble us not!"

Those who watched were indeed trembling: not for themselves, but for the lady. Heedless of the hunchback's drawn sword, his savage temper and reputation for quick murder, she cursed him, pleaded for Heaven's vengeance on his head, called him 'hedgehog', 'toad', 'lump of foul deformity'—

But far from silencing her with a thrust of his sword, he stood, half-crouching, his head twisted up on his misshapen shoulders, and gazing almost mildly at his accuser. "Lady," said he, reproachfully, "you know no rules of charity, which renders good for bad, blessings for curses."

The softness of the reply served only to drive the Lady Anne to wilder expressions of grief and loathing, even to spitting in the hunchback's face, to which he responded with silken compliments and amorous smiles; and when she drew back the covering of the dead king's body and displayed his wounds to the monster who had made them, he laughed and, resting his foot on the coffin's edge, declared, "The better for the King of Heaven that hath him."

"He is in Heaven, where thou shalt never come," she cried.

"Let him thank me that help to send him hither," returned the hunchback, "for he was fitter for that place than earth."

"And thou unfit for any place but hell!"

"Yes, one place else, if you will hear me name it."

"Some dungeon?"

"Your bedchamber."

The watchers held their breath. What was happening was extraordinary, unbelievable! Over the body of her murdered husband's murdered father, the murderer was courting the lady! He pleaded, he coaxed, he cajoled, he skipped and danced around her; while she, poor soul! like a caught fly, struggled in vain. "If thy revengeful heart cannot forgive," he cried, every inch the lover, "lo here I lend thee this sharp-pointed sword—" He gave her the weapon and, kneeling before her, begged her to kill him if she would not take him to her bed! She took the sword; she hesitated—

"Nay, do not pause," he urged, "for I did kill King Henry—