

but 'twas thy beauty that provoked me! Nay, now dispatch: 'twas I that stabbed young Edward—but 'twas thy heavenly face that set me on!"

In an instant, she might have rid the world of a monster; but the hunchback had judged shrewdly. She shook her head and let the sword fall. Richard's eyes glittered with triumph. He lifted her unresisting hand and, taking a ring from his own finger, placed it upon hers. "Vouchsafe to wear this ring."

"To take is not to give," she whispered feebly; but it was all too plain that the dragon had conquered the lady . . .

Courteously, the twisted Duke stood aside, and suffered the dead King and his attendants to pass on. When the procession had gone, he shook his head as if amazed by his own unsuspected powers as a lover. "Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?" he marvelled. "Was ever woman in this humour won? I'll have her," he laughed; and his hand went to his dagger, "but I will not keep her long . . ."

Then, setting his feathered cap at a gallant angle, he and his leaping shadow went on their merry, murderous way back to the palace . . .

The King's sickness was deepening. The Queen and her muttering, pale-faced kindred were greatly distressed: not so much for the King as for themselves. If he should die, what would become of them? The King's two sons—the little Princes—were too young to rule; and it had been decided that, should the King die, his youngest brother, the hunchbacked Duke of Gloucester, would be Protector. And the Duke hated the Queen and her family—

"They do me wrong, and I will not endure it!"

Even as they stood, whispering and murmuring uneasily, the hunchbacked Duke burst in among them, raging like the boar that was painted on his shield! "Who is it that complains unto the King—?" he demanded, limping and hobbling round the room and glaring into every frightened face. They were all against him! They had poisoned the King's mind with tales of his harshness. All lies! "Cannot a plain man live and think no harm, but thus his simple truth must be abused—?" he shouted, blazing with indignation. "A plague upon you all!"



the Queen and her kindred tried to defend themselves against his accusations of the hunchback, whose hand was never far from a dagger. Their voices grew shrill; they began to turn upon each other, like snapping dogs.

"Hear me, you wrangling pirates!"

Unnoticed, there had crept into the room, a living dead woman. In a twist of smoke, she had drifted among the quarrelling lords, her wild white hair hanging about her wild white face, and muttering.

At length, she could bear it no longer. "Hear me, you wrangling pirates!" she screamed, staring about her at those who had betrayed her of husband and crown. She was Queen Margaret, the half-sister of murdered King Henry.

And all, she cursed them for their crimes against her; for they had divided the House of York, and she, of Lancaster: the two mighty houses whose bloody quarrel had caused the kingdom to groan and bleed in civil war.

"How done thy charm, thou hateful withered hag!" cried Richard, in a menacing gesture towards her.

"Leave out thee?" she shouted. "Thou elvish-marked, abortive, begotten hag!"

Turning to the others, she warned them of the monster in their

midst. "The day will come," she prophesied, "that thou shalt wish for me to help thee curse this poisonous bunch-backed toad!"

At last she was done with them: "Live, each of you, the subjects to his hate," she pronounced, pointing a finger, sharp as a quill, at the hunchback, "and he to yours, and all of you to God's."

But no sooner was she gone from the room than news came that caused her curses and grim prophesies to be forgotten. The King was calling for them; and by the grave looks of the messenger, he was nearing his end. At once, all their old fears were brought back; and anxiously the Queen and her kindred hastened to the King's side.

The hunchback was alone. So, one of his brothers was dying, and the other, on the edge, awaiting only the final push. He smiled, and hobbled off to his own apartment, where two good lads were ready for him, two excellent fellows, well-skilled in the trade of private murder . . .

The Duke of Clarence, a prisoner in the Tower, awoke in terror. He had had a bad dream. He had dreamed that he was walking on board a ship, beside his brother Richard; when Richard had stumbled, fallen against him and tumbled him into the all-engulfing sea. "O Lord!" he confided in trembling tones, to the Keeper of the Tower, "methought what pain it was to drown: what dreadful noise of water in my ears; what sights of ugly death within my eyes!"

Priest-like, the Keeper sat beside the bed and listened as the prisoner confessed how, in his dream of death, the shrieking ghosts of all he had wronged had come to drag him away to the torments of hell . . . "My soul is heavy," he sighed, at length, "and I fain would sleep . . ."

"God give your Grace good rest," murmured the Keeper, pityingly; and kept watch over the prisoner until his eyes closed in sleep.

He rose to go. He stopped. Two men stood in the doorway. One was bearded, the other, dirty-shaven; otherwise there was little to be seen: they wore caps pulled down over their eyes.

"What would'st thou?" he whispered, uneasily.

"I would speak with Clarence," answered the bearded one; and produced a warrant, bidding the Keeper deliver the Duke of Clarence into the bearers' hands.

Silently, the Keeper pointed to the sleeping Duke, and then withdrew. He wanted no part in the dark business that was afoot.

The hunchback's two good lads stared down at the quiet, helpless prisoner.

"Shall I stab him as he sleeps?" whispered the bearded one, drawing a knife.

The other shook his head. To kill a sleeping man was cowardly; and they would answer for it on the Day of Judgement. At the mention of Judgement, the bearded one frowned. Some stirrings of conscience troubled him—

"Remember our reward, when the deed's done!" murmured his companion.

At once, conscience perished. "He dies! I had forgot the reward!"

While they were debating the sleeper's death, Clarence awoke. He stared with sudden dread at the two figures beside him.

"In God's name, what art thou?"

"A man, as you are."

"Who sent you hither? Wherefore do you come?"

They looked at one another; and their looks were plain. They had come to murder him. In terror, he fled from his bed. He rushed about the room for escape. There was none. Frantically, he pleaded with his murderers, turning from one to the other for some spark of pity in their stony eyes. There was none. They were merely tradesmen, about their business . . .

"I will send you to my brother Gloucester, who shall reward you better for my life than Edward will for tidings of my death!" he promised desperately; for he believed that it was the King who had ordered his murder.

Then came the hammer blow. "You are deceived," said the bearded one grimly: "your brother Gloucester hates you. 'Tis he that sends us to destroy you here."

Clarence faltered. He grew icy cold as, for the first and last time he saw into the devilish villainy of his brother's heart. Horror, disbelief and despair were so plain in Clarence's face that the bearded murderer scowled and bit his lip.

"My friend," cried Clarence eagerly, falling to his knees and lifting

his arms in supplication, "I spy some pity in thy looks!"

But the other fellow was more resolute.

"Look behind you, my lord!" cried out the bearded one. Too late. His companion had already thrust his knife into the prisoner's back.

He went down like a sack of meat. But not dead. Angrily, the murderer struck again and again; but the man still clung on to his life. And worse, there was no help from the murderer's friend: he just stood there, his bushy face all tangled up with pity. So, mindful of his employment, he heaved the dying Duke up onto his broad shoulders and, with grunts and curses, thrust him, head foremost, into a barrel of malmsey wine that stood in a corner of the room.

When the commotion subsided, some few dark bubbles arose, and then no more. True to his dream, Clarence was dead by drowning.

"By heavens," panted the murderer to his feeble friend, "the Duke shall know how slack you have been!"

"I would he knew that I had saved his brother," whispered the bearded one. "Take thou the fee!" and he fled.

"Go, coward as thou art!" muttered the other, contemptuously; and, with a shrug of his shoulders, went off to collect his pay for a task well done.

Richard was well-pleased. He had judged shrewdly and had butchered his brother Clarence in excellent good time. King Edward was dead. Now all that lay between himself and the throne were Edward's unnecessary brats, the two little Princes. But there was still much to be done. The Princes must be removed from the influence of their mother, the Queen; and the power of that wretched woman and her ambitious family must be destroyed.

The elder of the children, the Prince of Wales, was at Ludlow; and the Queen's brothers set off in haste to bring him back to London for his coronation. But they were too late. The hunchback had a clever friend, a proud and greedy man who saw much to gain from Richard's success: the mighty Duke of Buckingham. Said he to Richard, privately: "My lord, whoever journeys to the Prince, for God's sake let not us two stay at home."

Richard nodded. They were of one mind. "My dear cousin," he

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a child will go by thy direction. Toward Ludlow
stay behind.”

n's brothers reached Ludlow, in happy expectation
y their royal nephew with shouts of childish delight,
stead with sudden disaster! By order of the great
er and Buckingham, they were instantly arrested for
e murder of the Duke of Clarence in the Tower!
denied the monstrous charge. In vain. They were
Pomfret Castle, to be executed without delay. Now
had only one uncle left to look after him: the uncle
back and the crooked smile . . .

the Queen in terror, when she learned of the fate of
er eldest child. “I see the ruin of my House: the tiger
ne gentle hind!”

she fled to the Abbey for holy sanctuary, taking
ining child, the pretty little Duke of York.

no sanctuary for one so near the throne. The Duke
ighting holiness with holiness, despatched the Lord
the child from his mother's arms, if needs be, by

met in a London street, with dukes and lords and fat
od knows what else besides, smiling their welcomes,
houted loud hurrahs. And beyond, crowded the
like heaped-up apples, some red, some yellow, some
ked by birds, and some half-eaten by worms . . .

cried the Duke of York, to his comical, hopping,
cle Richard, “the Prince my brother hath outgrown
ointed to his brother, who was soon to be King.

lord,” agreed Uncle Richard; and his hand stroked

cle,” begged the little Duke, “give me this dagger,”
n eager, childish hand for the glittering toy.

ttle cousin?” laughed Uncle Richard. “With all my

of Wales, proud of his coming dignity, saw fit to

spoil his brother's pleasure. "A beggar, brother?" he said with a frown. But Uncle Richard was all good humour; and when the child asked for his sword as well, he laughed again: "What, would you have my weapon, little lord?"

"I would, that I might thank you as you call me."

"How?"

"Little!"

"My lord of York will still be cross in talk," interrupted the Prince of Wales severely; "Uncle, your Grace knows how to bear with him."

"Uncle," pleaded little York, "my brother mocks both you and me: because that I am little like an ape, he thinks that you should bear me on your shoulders!" and he pointed, mischievously, to his uncle's hump!

There was silence. The Duke of Buckingham put on a school-masterish face, and wagged a reproachful finger. But Uncle Richard took it in good part. Laughing, he bade the Princes pass along, and said he would bring their mother to meet them at the Tower.

"What," cried York, to his brother, "will you go unto the Tower, my lord?"

"My Lord Protector needs will have it so," said the Prince of Wales.

"I shall not sleep in quiet at the Tower."

"Why," asked Uncle Richard, much surprised, "what should you fear?"

"My uncle Clarence' angry ghost: my grandam told me he was murdered there."

"I fear no uncles dead," said the Prince of Wales, with an odd look at Uncle Richard.

Uncle Richard smiled. "Nor none that live, I hope," he said gently.

"And if they live, I hope I need not fear," said the Prince of Wales, and took his brother, York, tightly by the hand. "But come, my lord," he said: and, hand in hand, the two little Princes walked on towards the Tower.

The Dukes of Gloucester and Buckingham stared after them. "Think you, my lord," murmured the Duke of Buckingham, "this little prating York was not incensed by his subtle mother?"

Richard nodded. "No doubt, no doubt. O, 'tis a parlous boy, bold,

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genious, forward, capable: he is all the mother's, from the top

et them rest," said the Duke of Buckingham, with a meaning
turned to more pressing matters. If Richard was to become
needed more support. Accordingly, he told Sir William
a trusted follower of Richard, to sound out Lord Hastings,
Chamberlain, and discover if he could be won over to their
all we hear from you, Catesby, ere we sleep?" Richard asked.
all, my lord," said Catesby with a smile, and away he went.
my lord," murmured the Duke of Buckingham to his royal
what shall we do if we perceive Lord Hastings will not yield
plots?"

off his head, man!" answered Richard, as if surprised his
and should ask so foolish a question. Then, linking his arm
ely with Buckingham's, he promised, "When I am king,
of me the earldom of Hereford, and all the moveables
e King my brother was possessed."
on that promise at your Grace's hand."

ok to have it yielded with all kindness," Richard assured
smiled fondly at one another: they were the best of friends.

orrow, Catesby, you are early stirring," said Lord Hastings
rprise. It was four o'clock in the morning, and he had been
n a pleasant sleep in the loving arms of the merry Mistress
le King Edward had lived she had shared the royal bed; and
mforted the Lord Chamberlain's. "What news, what news
tottering state?"

eeing world indeed, my lord," said Catesby gravely, "and
ill never stand upright till Richard wear the garland of the

wear the garland?" demanded Hastings, with a frown. "Dost
the crown?"

y good lord," murmured Catesby; upon which Hastings
n the face with anger. "I'll have this crown of mine cut
shoulders before I'll see the crown so foul misplaced!"
outraged by the idea of the rightful heir to King Edward's

throne being pushed aside.

Catesby bowed his head. "God keep your lordship in that gracious mind," he said; and averted his eyes . . .

When Catesby had gone, Lord Hastings was satisfied that he had, by his firmness, put a stop to the Duke of Gloucester's ambition. None but the young Prince of Wales must be king; and the sooner he was crowned, the better. It was with this fixed resolve, that he attended, that very morning, a meeting of the High Council in the Tower . . .

"Now, noble peers," said he, taking his place at the table in the rich dining-apartment of the Tower, "the cause why we are met is to determine of the coronation." He gazed inquiringly at the assembled lords. Some toyed with their wineglasses, some studied their fingernails. None answered. "In God's name, speak," he demanded impatiently: "when is the royal day?"

There was a general murmuring, and the fat Bishop of Ely proposed that it should be tomorrow; but the Duke of Buckingham was doubtful. "Who knows the Lord Protector's mind herein?" he very properly observed.

"Your Grace, we think, should soonest know his mind," said the Bishop; but Buckingham shook his head. He turned to Lord Hastings, and smiled: "Lord Hastings, you and he are near in love."

This was very true. Though others might speak against the hunchback Duke, he, Hastings, had always found him to be a good and true friend. "I have not sounded him," he admitted, "but you, my honourable lords, may name the time, and in the Duke's behalf I'll give my voice, which—"

"—In happy time, here comes the Duke himself!" cried the Bishop, as, into the chamber, limped the Lord Protector of the Realm.

He was, thank God, in excellent spirits. All smiles, and with his hand, as was his habit, touching his little jewelled dagger, he hobbled round the room, apologizing for his lateness: he had overslept.

"Had you not come upon your cue, my lord," said Buckingham, also in high good humour, "William, Lord Hastings had pronounced your part—I mean your voice for crowning of the King."

At once, the merry hunchback, catching the reference to the stage, imitated the actor. "Than my Lord Hastings," he declaimed with a



ow, "no man might be bolder! His lordship knows me well, me well." Then, glancing at the laden table, he addressed the Bishop. "My Lord of Ely, when I was last in Holborn," he said with a knowing smile, "I saw good strawberries in your garden; I do beseech you, send for some of them!" "I will, my lord, with all my heart!" cried the Bishop, leaning over the table, quivering with eagerness to oblige the Duke. When the Duke of Gloucester and the Duke of Buckingham came together on some private matter; then they, too, with-

talk was resumed about the coronation day, when the Bishop returned. He peered round the table. "Where is my lord the Duke of Gloucester?" he asked anxiously. "I have sent for these straw-

berries. His face looks cheerfully and smooth today," said Lord Hastings, with a happy smile. He had every reason to feel pleased. It was plain to the Duke of Gloucester that the foolish idea of being king had been banished from the Duke of Gloucester's mind, and, like a little boy, his desire had turned to strawberries! "I think," said he to the company, "there's never a man in the world whose freedom can lesser hide his love or hate than he, for by his face shall you know his heart—"

He stopped. The easy faces round the table had changed. They were staring at him intently, almost fearfully. He looked up. The Dukes of Gloucester and Buckingham had returned. Their looks were grim.

"I pray you all, tell me what they deserve," Richard demanded harshly, "that do conspire my death by devilish plots of damned witchcraft, and that have prevailed upon my body with their hellish charms?" He fixed his stare upon Lord Hastings.

"I say, my lord," muttered Hastings, his happiness freezing on his face, "they have deserved death."

"Then be your eyes the witness of their evil!" shouted the hunchback; and, dragging up his sleeve, displayed his arm, all shrunken, withered and brown. "See how I am bewitched! And this is Edward's wife, that monstrous witch, consorted with that harlot, strumpet Shore, that by their witchcraft thus have marked me!"

"If they have done this deed, my noble lord—" whispered Hastings, in sudden terror.

"If?" screamed Richard. "Thou protector of this damned strumpet, talks thou to me of ifs! Thou art a traitor! Off with his head! Now by Saint Paul I will not dine until I see the same!" He turned to two gentlemen who were plainly eager to please him: "Lovell and Ratcliffe, look that it be done; the rest that love me, rise and follow me."

With one accord, the company rose and followed the furious little hunchback, leaving the dazed and broken Hastings with his executioners.

"Come, come, dispatch," said one impatiently: "the Duke would be at dinner; make a short shrift: he longs to see your head."

With a groan of despair, Lord Hastings suffered himself to be led away. When he had gone, the Bishop of Ely's servant, sweating from haste, came in with a bowl of bright red strawberries for his Grace, the Duke.

The Lord Mayor of London, his shining chain of office jingling and dancing on his portly bosom, and accompanied by no less a gentleman than Sir William Catesby, hastened to the Tower. His attendance had been requested by the highest in the land: the noble Dukes of Gloucester and Buckingham.

King Richard the Third

...ls of anxiety trickled down the Lord Mayor's crimson
...ght on by both the heat of the day and the worry of the
...the death of the King, there was a great uneasiness about
...governed by a child; and citizens had been speaking out
...Queen's party and against the Duke of Gloucester. There
...al fear of tyranny, oppression and ruinous war; and now,
...execution of Lord Hastings, without examination or trial,
...scandal, and cause for concern.

Dukes were waiting by the draw-bridge of the Tower.
...looked weary, like soldiers after a battle; but it was only to
...for they carried on their shoulders the heavy burdens of
...e the Lord Mayor could speak, they told him about Lord
...they were free and open; they held nothing back. Lord
...d been a dangerous traitor. The safety of the realm had
...ened.

...ce of England," confided the Duke of Gloucester, clasping
...ayor's hand warmly between his own, "enforced us to this

...id harsh things about the Duke of Gloucester, but the Lord
...ving met him, found all the talk to be quite mistaken.
...all and unfortunate in his bodily appearance, the Duke was
...cellent, true-hearted gentleman, not in the least high and
...d with no trace of deceit or guile about him. He took the
...rd for it about Lord Hastings without question; and when
...f Buckingham, drawing him to one side, murmured that it
...o bad thing for England if a man like the Duke of Gloucester
...king, the good Mayor nodded his fat head in whole-hearted

...ke looked pleased; and then, to the Mayor's great pride, the
...leman linked arms with him and confided something not
...known. There were doubts about the little Prince's right to
...e. It was suspected (and strongly suspected!) that King
...he child's father, was himself a bastard and should never have
...crown! The Mayor was shocked, amazed; and when the
...gested he should gather the aldermen and leading citizens and
...them to beg the Duke of Gloucester to become England's

rightful king, he readily agreed. He had never felt more important in his life.

Away he went, propelled into haste by the Duke of Buckingham, who filled his trembling ears with the Duke of Gloucester's many virtues. As quickly as he could, he gathered together the aldermen and as many leading citizens as he could lay hands on; and, in hasty procession, led them to Baynard's Castle. There, he had been informed, the good Duke of Gloucester would be found at prayer.

"Ah, ha, my lord," cried the Duke of Buckingham, as they reached Baynard's Castle, "this prince is not an Edward: he is not lolling on a lewd love-bed, but on his knees in meditation!" and sure enough, the good Duke of Gloucester was to be seen at a window with a holy clergyman on either side of him. And one of them, the Mayor was honoured to see, was his own brother, Doctor Shaa! He was overcome. Never had he seen a prince displaying such modesty, such humility, and such downright holiness!

"Long live Richard, England's worthy King!" shouted the Duke of Buckingham, and threw his cap into the air.

"Amen!" cried the Lord Mayor, and, with vigorous wavings of his arms, encouraged the aldermen and citizens to shout likewise: "Amen! Long live Richard, England's worthy King!"

Three women, all in black, stood before the Tower. One was the Queen, another was the Lady Anne, now the hunchback's wretched wife, and the third was the old Duchess of York, his unlucky mother. The day was dying and the Tower loomed darkly against the bloody sky. Somewhere within its grim bulk were the two little Princes; but by order of the Duke of Gloucester, they were not to be seen, even by their mother.

"O my accursed womb," wept the old Duchess, striking at her belly with frail, despairing fists, "the bed of death! A cockatrice hast thou hatched to the world whose unavowed eye is murderous!"

As the women stood, staring up at the ancient fortress, a gentleman approached the Lady Anne. "Come, madam," he murmured, "you must straight to Westminster, there to be crowned Richard's royal queen."



poor soul," said the Queen, to her unwilling successor, "I
ny glory."

Anne sighed. Since her wedding to the crooked Duke, her
en a misery to her. "For never yet one hour in his bed did
e golden dew of sleep, but with his timorous dreams was
ed," she whispered. "He hates me . . ."

madam, come," urged the gentleman. "I in all haste was

the women parted. The Queen was last to leave. She looked
ne Tower, where her children were imprisoned. "Pity, you
ones, those tender babes," she pleaded. "Rough cradle for
ty little ones, rude ragged nurse, old sullen playfellow for
inces, use my babies well."

hard in glory. Trailing a vast velvet robe, like heavy scarlet
e hopped and hobbled across the royal chamber, as if he would