

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 unavoided 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."



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

dy Anne sighed. Since her wedding to the crooked Duke, her
een 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
he 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

fly up the steps to the throne. Awkwardly, he mounted, and seated himself in the sacred place. Dukes and lords stood watching him; and he watched them. He was frowning. Though he wore the crown there was something still gnawing at his soul. He beckoned to his friend, Buckingham, who came and knelt beside him.

"Shall we wear these glories for a day," he asked softly, "or shall they last . . . ?"

"For ever let them last!" answered his friend.

But Richard shook his head. "Young Edward lives—think now what I would speak."

"Say on, my loving lord," murmured Buckingham, unwilling to commit himself.

"Why, Buckingham, I say I would be king."

"Why so you are, my thrice-renowned lord."

"But Edward lives."

"True, noble Prince."

"Cousin, thou wast not wont to be so dull. Shall I be plain? I wish the bastards dead. What say'st thou now?"

"Your Grace may do your pleasure."

"Tut, tut, thou art all ice. Say, have I thy consent that they shall die?"

Buckingham looked about him. Was it possible they had been overheard? "Give me some little breath, some pause," he muttered uncertainly, "before I positively speak in this." He rose, bowed and withdrew. His face was pale. Even he shrank from the murder of children.

Richard stared after him. "High-reaching Buckingham grows circumspect," he murmured thoughtfully. He summoned a page. Did the boy know, he inquired, almost idly, of any gentleman who might be bought for money. The page knew of just such a gentleman. His name was Tyrrel. Quietly, Richard bade the boy call him hither.

Before he was king, he had been consumed only with a desire for the crown; now it was his, he was filled with a dread of losing it. He must be secure. His wife, Anne, was in his way. He needed a better marriage . . .

Lord Stanley, a man he did not trust, approached the throne. He

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not low enough. He had news. The Marquess of Dorset, kinsman, had fled to France and joined forces with the Duke of Somerset, of the hated House of Lancaster, who was in exile

He pushed the news aside. He had other matters on his mind. He had just received the news from Sir William Catesby. Catesby came and knelt before Richard. Richard beckoned him close. "Rumour it abroad," he murmured into Catesby's ready ear, "that Anne my wife is very grievous sick and like to die. About it!" Catesby stared. "Look to it, my lord. Take order for her keeping close." Catesby stared. "Look to it, my lord!" muttered Richard angrily. "I say again that Anne, my wife, is sick and like to die. About it!" Catesby stumbled away. Richard's mind turned to marry Elizabeth, his niece and daughter-in-law. It was a bold plan. "Murder her brothers, and then marry her. A bold and uncertain way of gain!" He shrugged his shoulders and went on. There was a fellow who had slipped in among the attendants. A restless-looking gentleman who was plainly trying to catch Richard's eye. He hovered the page. Richard looked at him inquiringly. The page nodded. This was the man. The page whispered to Richard. And the man came quickly forward and crouched beside

"Come Tyrrel?"

"Tyrrel, and your most obedient subject."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, my gracious lord."

"Thou resolve to kill," murmured Richard, "a friend of

mine; but I had rather kill two enemies," answered the loyal

"In thou hast it; two deep enemies," whispered the King. "I mean those bastards in the Tower."

Richard had chosen well. Tyrrel was a fellow after Richard's own liking. No hesitations, no doubts; he nodded eagerly, and hurried away. He told the Duke of Buckingham, all smiles. It seemed he had forgotten his previous evasiveness. But he was too late. Richard was no longer interested. Instead, he spoke of Dorset's flight to the Duke of Somerset.

"I hear the news, my lord," said Buckingham; and then that arrogant and greedy gentleman presumed to remind the King of his promise. "I claim the gift," he said, bringing his face so close that the King could smell his sickly breath. "The earldom of Hereford, and the moveables which you have promised I shall possess."

"I do remember me," said Richard, as if Buckingham had not spoken, "Henry the Sixth did prophesy that Richmond should be King, when Richmond was a little peevish boy."

"My lord!" muttered Buckingham, growing red in the face.

"How chance the prophet," mused Richard, almost to himself, "could not, at that time, have told me—I being by—that I should kill him?"

"My lord, your promise for the earldom—"

Richard looked at him coldly. "I am not in the giving vein today. Thou troublest me. I am not in the vein."

With that, he rose, and, followed by his court, left the chamber.

"And is it thus?" whispered Buckingham, trembling with anger. "Repays he my deep service with such contempt?" Then he remembered the fate of Hastings. He grew cold. He left the chamber, and with all the haste he could command, fled from London while his head was still on his shoulders.

Good news and bad. Tyrrel had proved an honest fellow. King Edward's two brats were dead. Pillows had been pressed on their sleeping faces, and forced down till their little strugglings had finished. Then their sweet little bodies had been buried . . .

Now the bad. The foolhardy Buckingham had raised an army in Wales; and much worse, the fat Bishop of Ely had abandoned his strawberries in Holborn and gone over to the dangerous Earl of Richmond.

But good again. He was a widower. Anne, his Queen, was dead. Her life had been a misery to her; it was a kindness to have helped her out of it.

The good outweighed the bad. The way to marry his brother's daughter, Elizabeth, was now free from all impediment. He rubbed his hands together. "To her go I, a jolly thriving wooer," said he

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scented himself with roses and put on his gorgeous
that flowed after him, like a sea of blood. Then, in royal
set out from the palace, accompanied by the warlike
pets and drums.

the music ceased. Two shouting women had stopped it.
Queen, the other was that tedious old crone, his mother,
of York. They had learned of the deaths of the little

“thou villain-slave, where are my children?” shrieked the

“thou toad, where is thy brother, Clarence?” screamed
and much else besides. Furiously the King commanded the
up and drown the accusing voices. The trumpets blazed,
ng women were reduced to frantic white faces with
npty black Os, shouting nothings!

up their useless clamour, and the King signalled the music

and entreat me fair,” he warned; and his mother bowed



"I will be mild and gentle in my words," she promised.

"And brief, good mother, for I am in haste."

"Art thou so hasty?" she asked bitterly. "I have stayed for thee, God knows, in torment and in agony."

"And came I not at last to comfort you?" said he, and mockingly opened his royal arms as if to embrace her.

She shrank back in horror. "Thou cam'st on earth to make the earth my hell!" she cried; and all her hatred for her murderous, misshapen son burst out in a flood of bitterness. "A grievous burden was thy birth to me: tetchy and wayward was thy infancy; thy schooldays frightful, desperate, wild, and furious; thy age confirmed, subtle, sly and bloody—"

Richard scowled. He'd had enough of his mother's disagreeable screechings. He raised his hand for the trumpets to drown her out—

"Hear me a word," she demanded, "for I shall never speak to thee again!"

Richard shrugged his shoulders; and in gratitude for his forbearance, his mother cursed him, and prayed that he should fall in battle. "Bloody thou art; bloody will be thy end!" she prophesied; and, turning away, she departed, her black gown flapping like a harpy's wings.

The Queen was about to follow, when Richard detained her. "Stay, madam: I must talk a word with you." He had not forgotten the purpose of his expedition: to secure the Lady Elizabeth as his wife. This meeting with her mother might prove advantageous. True, he had just murdered her little sons, but he was confident that with a little flattery, a little show of repentance, and a few worthless promises, her frantic outpourings of grief would soon be cut down to . . . sighs.

"I have no more sons of the royal blood for thee to slaughter!" cried she.

"You have a daughter—"

"And must she die for this? O let her live!" pleaded the Queen wildly. "I'll corrupt her manners, stain her beauty, slander myself as false to Edward's bed—"

"Wrong not her birth; she is a royal princess."

"To save her life I'll say she is not so!"

"Her life is safest only in her birth," said Richard gently. "I love thy

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and do intend to make her Queen of England.”
at him. His shameless villainy was beyond belief! She
and rage against him, crying out the bloody catalogue of
eds—

at is done cannot be now amended,” said Richard, when
or breath. “If I did take the kingdom from your sons, I’ll
ur daughter . . .”

ir and reasonable offer, but the wretched woman would
he was still distraught over the loss of her sons.

on that string, madam,” said Richard, losing patience;

t still shall I, till heart-strings break!” she wept. Wearily,
ed; and put forward all the excellent reasons for the mar-
queen’s family would be secure, England would be at

didst kill my children.”

ur daughter’s womb I bury them,” murmured Richard,
at nest of spicery, they will breed selves of themselves to
orture.”

shook her head. All her fire and fury was spent. “Shall
of the devil thus?” she whispered.

devil tempt you to do good.”

win my daughter to thy will?”

happy mother by the deed.” He opened his arms. “Bear
love’s kiss,” said he, and, enfolding her in his embrace,
ld lips tenderly, like a son.

fool, and shallow, changing woman!” he murmured, as
queen departed, dazed and forlorn.

would undoubtedly secure him; but before it could take
matters began to clamour for his attention. Suddenly the
un to stir and heave with the maggots of rebellion. News
prisings in Kent, and armed men gathering in the west.
ned on the throne, Richard’s looks were fierce and his
re bloody. It seemed as if his mother’s curse was being
him—

"Richmond is on the seas!"

It was that slippery gentleman, Lord Stanley, who brought the news. "There let him sink, and be the seas on him!" said Richard contemptuously. "What doth he there?"

"He makes for England, here to claim the crown."

Richard's hand went to his dagger. He half drew it from its sheath, as if he would bury it in Stanley's throat. "Is the chair empty? Is the sword unswayed? Is the King dead? Where is thy power then to beat him back?"

Fearfully Stanley confessed that his power was in the north. He begged leave to go and gather his friends. But Richard did not trust him. "Go then, and muster men," he bade him, "but leave behind your son, George Stanley," and his hand returned to his dagger.

No sooner had Stanley scuttled away, than yet another messenger of doom approached.

"My lord, the army of great Buckingham—"

"Out on you, owls! Nothing but songs of death!" shouted Richard in a fury, and struck the messenger so that the wretch stumbled and fell. But he had been over-hasty. This time the news was good. Buckingham's army had been scattered by storm and flood, and their leader had wandered away like a beggar.

"I cry thee mercy!" laughed Richard, and flung the fellow a purse of money to heal his unjust blow. Then he turned to Sir William Catesby, whose news was even better: Buckingham had been taken!

It gladdened Richard's heart to hear it. He smiled in rare delight. Very soon, now, that ambitious gentleman's smooth, sleek, nodding head would be nodded off his shoulders.

But Catesby carried other news that was not so welcome. The Earl of Richmond, with a mighty army, had landed in Wales! At once, a fierce energy seized Richard. "While we reason here a royal battle might be won and lost!" he cried; and gave orders to march against the invader without delay. Then a little smile flickered across his face, like a fleeting ray of sunshine. He commanded that the Duke of Buckingham be brought to Salisbury, and put to death. Even in the turmoil of approaching war, Richard was not the man to forget his friends.

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"Fight, gentlemen of England!"

King Richard the Third

was setting in fiery glory as King Richard's army pitched in the nearby village of Bosworth, frightened inhabitants in their inquisitive children, bolted their doors, and prayed for safety and property. War had come to them: the Earl of Richmond and his forces were close at hand.

Richard bustled to and fro. His soldier's eye was everywhere, seeking strengths, spying out weaknesses . . . "My Lord of Surrey, why are you so sad?" he asked reproachfully.

The young man blushed. "My heart is ten times lighter than my sword," he assured his king.

Richard turned to the young man's father. "My lord, we must have knocks—ha, must we not?"

The father must both give and take, my loving lord."

Richard nodded; and turned to watch as soldiers raised his tent. With a flourish it went up, like a great gold and scarlet flower, blossoming in the green. He hobbled round it, examining the silken ropes and fastenings, satisfying himself that all was well done. "Here will I lie to-night," he declared at length, "but where tomorrow?" He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, all's one for that! Come, noble gentlemen," he called to the lords and officers who accompanied him, "let us survey the ground. Let's lack no discipline, make no delay," he said, "for, lords, tomorrow is a busy day!" and he rubbed his hands together in the manner of a sturdy workman approaching his task. He was in his natural element, and he thrived in it. A man in armour and on horseback. "Weak piping time of peace," as he contemptuously said of the peace he had always despised . . .

At five o'clock, Richard and his nobles returned to the royal tent. The ground had been surveyed and the plan of battle decided upon. He gave ink and paper to draw up orders for his captains, and dispatched Catesby to bid Lord Stanley bring in his power before sunrise. He knew that if he failed, his son George would pay for it with his life. He turned to the Duke of Norfolk. "Hie thee to thy charge; use careful watch, and keep thy trusty sentinels."

God bless my lord."

Richard, with the lark tomorrow, gentle Norfolk," he called after him;

and then, ordering that his favourite horse, Surrey, be saddled for him in the morning, he retired within his tent.

A single lamp burned on his table, making of the tent's interior, a smoky, golden nest. The air was heavy, oppressive, and hard to breathe. Beside his couch, his armour had been set out. It lay there, gleaming dully, like a dead and empty King. He remembered that the visor of his helmet had been stiff; but the effort of going to make sure it had been eased was too great. A strange weariness had come over him. His limbs felt dull and heavy, as if they were already incased in armour, invisible and of immense weight.

Someone had entered the tent. It was Ratcliffe, with ink and paper. He set them on the table and was about to leave. "Give me a bowl of wine," said Richard, and frowned. "I have not that alacrity of spirit nor cheer of mind that I was wont to have." Obediently, Ratcliffe poured out the wine, and, with a faintly troubled look at his master, withdrew.

The wine did not refresh him. It failed to lighten either his spirits or his limbs. He tried to settle down to composing the morrow's orders; but his thoughts were sluggish, and his pen like lead. He rose from the table and lay on his couch. Ordinarily, sleep avoided him, but now it seemed to be dragging him down, down into blackness . . .

The tent-flap shifted as a sudden cold wind arose. The lamp flickered wildly; then the wind died and the flame burned steadily again. But its colour had changed, from yellow to a curious pale blue. The sleeper stirred. He was troubled. He had become aware that ghosts had entered the tent.

They were clustering round the lamp, like weird, tall grey moths. They were a strange company, huge-eyed and bloodless: an old king and his son, lords and dukes in their prime, a weeping flimsy lady, and even two children, hand in hand. They were not unfamiliar to the sleeper. He had murdered them all to gain the crown.

He struggled vainly to avoid them as they advanced upon him. One by one, they bent over him and, whispering their deaths in his ear, bade him, "Despair and die . . . Despair and die . . . Tomorrow in the battle think on me . . . Despair and die . . ."

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