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The Boleyn Wife and
The Confession of Piers Gaveston




The STOLEN *Crown*

A NOVEL



IT WAS A SECRET MARRIAGE...
ONE THAT CHANGED THE
FATE OF ENGLAND FOREVER



SUSAN HIGGINBOTHAM



Praise for *The Stolen Crown*

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—Christy English, author of *The Queen’s Pawn*



The
TOLEN
Crown

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SUSAN HIGGINBOTHAM

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To those who died in 1483

Characters

ALL THE NAMED CHARACTERS IN THIS NOVEL ARE BASED ON HISTORICAL figures. I have listed all of them below, except for a few, like some of Edward IV's daughters, who appear only fleetingly. I have also listed several historical figures, such as Eleanor Butler and Elizabeth Shore, who never make an appearance but who are mentioned by the other characters.

The House of York

Edward IV ("Ned"), King of England.

Elizabeth ("Bessie") Woodville, his queen.

Elizabeth ("Bess"), their eldest daughter, later queen to Henry VII.

Cecily, one of their younger daughters.

Edward, Prince of Wales, their eldest son. Later Edward V.

Richard, Duke of York, their younger son. Married to Anne Mowbray.

Cecily Neville, Duchess of York. Mother of Edward IV.

Anne, Duchess of Exeter, sister of Edward IV. Married to Henry Holland, Duke of Exeter, and to Thomas St. Leger.

Elizabeth, Duchess of Suffolk, sister of Edward IV. Married to John de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk.

George, Duke of Clarence, brother of Edward IV. Married to Isabel Neville, Duchess of Clarence.

Edward, Earl of Warwick, their son.

Margaret, Duchess of Burgundy, sister of Edward IV. Married to Charles, Duke of Burgundy.

Richard, Duke of Gloucester, brother of Edward IV. Later King Richard III. Married to Anne Neville, Duchess of Gloucester.

Edward, their son. Prince of Wales during Richard III's reign.

John, out-of-wedlock son of Richard, Duke of Gloucester.

Katherine, out-of-wedlock daughter of Richard, Duke of Gloucester.

The House of Lancaster

Henry VI, King of England.

Margaret of Anjou, his queen.

Edward of Lancaster, Prince of Wales, their son.

The Staffords

Henry ("Harry") Stafford, second Duke of Buckingham. Married to Kate Woodville, Duchess of Buckingham.

Anne Neville, Duchess of Buckingham, widow of Humphrey Stafford, first Duke of Buckingham. Later married to Walter Blount, Lord Mountjoy. Grandmother of Harry Stafford.

Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Stafford, widow of Humphrey Stafford, first son of Anne Neville and Humphrey Stafford. Mother of Harry Stafford.

Henry Stafford, second son of Anne Neville and Humphrey Stafford. Married to Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond. Uncle of Harry Stafford.

John Stafford, Earl of Wiltshire, third son of Anne Neville and Humphrey Stafford. Uncle of Harry Stafford.

Joan, daughter of Anne Neville and Humphrey Stafford. Married to William Knyvet. Aunt of Harry Stafford.

Humphrey Stafford, younger brother of Harry Stafford.

Edward Stafford, later third Duke of Buckingham, son of Harry Stafford and Kate Woodville.

Henry ("Hal") Stafford, son of Harry Stafford and Kate Woodville.

Elizabeth Stafford, daughter of Harry Stafford and Kate Woodville.

Anne Stafford, daughter of Harry Stafford and Kate Woodville.

Humphrey Stafford, deceased son of Harry Stafford and Kate Woodville.

The Woodvilles

Richard Woodville, first Earl Rivers.

Jacquetta Woodville, Duchess of Bedford, his wife. Widow of John, Duke of Bedford, younger brother of Henry V.

Anthony Woodville, Lord Scales, later second Earl Rivers. Son of Richard and Jacquetta. Married to Elizabeth Scales and to Mary Fitzlewis.

Elizabeth (“Bessie”) Woodville, queen to Edward IV. Daughter of Richard and Jacquetta. Previously married to John Grey.

Richard Woodville, later third Earl Rivers. Son of Richard and Jacquetta.

John Woodville, married to Katherine Neville, Duchess of Norfolk. Son of Richard and Jacquetta.

Jacquetta Woodville, married to John, Lord Strange. Daughter of Richard and Jacquetta.

Anne Woodville, married to William Bouchier. Daughter of Richard and Jacquetta.

Mary Woodville, married to William Herbert, later Earl of Pembroke. Daughter of Richard and Jacquetta.

Lionel Woodville, later Bishop of Salisbury. Son of Richard and Jacquetta.

Margaret Woodville, married to Thomas Fitzalan, Lord Maltravers, later Earl of Arundel. Daughter of Richard and Jacquetta.

Joan Woodville, married to Anthony Grey of Ruthin. Daughter of Richard and Jacquetta.

Edward Woodville. Son of Richard and Jacquetta.

Katherine (“Kate”) Woodville, Duchess of Buckingham, married to Harry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham; Jasper Tudor, later Duke of Bedford; and Richard Wingfield. Daughter of Richard and Jacquetta.

Thomas Grey, later Marquess of Dorset. Son of Elizabeth Woodville by John Grey. Married to Anne Holland and to Cecily Bonville.

Richard Grey. Son of Elizabeth Woodville by John Gray.

The Nevilles

Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick (“the Kingmaker”).

Anne Beauchamp, his wife, Countess of Warwick.

Isabel Neville, Duchess of Clarence, daughter of Richard Neville and Anne Beauchamp. Married to George, Duke of Clarence.

Anne Neville, Duchess of Gloucester, later queen to Richard III. Daughter of Richard Neville and Anne Beauchamp. Married to Edward of Lancaster, Prince of Wales, and to Richard, Duke of Gloucester, later King Richard III.

John Neville, Marquess of Montague, brother of Richard Neville.

George Neville, Archbishop of York, brother of Richard Neville.

The Tudors

Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond, married to Edward Tudor, Earl of Richmond; Henry Stafford; and Thomas Stanley.

Henry Tudor, son of Margaret Beaufort and Edward Tudor. Later King Henry VII.

Jasper Tudor, brother-in-law of Margaret Beaufort and uncle of Henry Tudor. Later Duke of Bedford.

Others

Ralph Bannaster, retainer of Harry Stafford.

Edmund Beaufort, styled Duke of Somerset, maternal uncle of Harry Stafford.

Richard de la Bere, sheriff of Hereford.

Walter Blount, Lord Mountjoy, husband of Anne Neville, Duchess of Buckingham. Stepgrandfather of Harry Stafford.

Henry Bouchier, Earl of Essex. Relative of Harry Stafford.

Thomas Bouchier, Archbishop of Canterbury.

Robert Brackenbury, servant of Richard III.

Eleanor Butler, purported first wife of Edward IV. Sister of Elizabeth Talbot, Duchess of Norfolk.

William Catesby, official of Richard III.

William Caxton, printer.

Cecilia, attendant of Katherine Woodville.

Peter Courtenay, Bishop of Exeter.

Walter Devereux, Lord Ferrers, owner of the manor of Weobley.

William, Lord Hastings, courtier and friend of Edward IV.

John Howard, made Duke of Norfolk in 1483. Married to Margaret Howard.

Thomas Howard, made Earl of Surrey in 1483.

Richard Huddleston, servant of Richard III.

William Knyvet, uncle by marriage of Harry Stafford.

Francis, Viscount Lovell, courtier of Richard III.

John Morton, Bishop of Ely.

John Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk (died 1476). Married to Elizabeth Talbot,
Duchess of Norfolk.

Anne Mowbray, their daughter. Wife to Edward IV's son Richard, Duke
of York.

Thomas Nandyke, physician and astrologer of Harry Stafford.

John Nesfield, servant to Richard III. Custodian of Elizabeth and Katherine
Woodville.

Katherine Neville, Duchess of Norfolk. Married to John Woodville.

Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland.

Richard Ratcliffe, official of Richard III.

Thomas Rotherham, Archbishop of York.

Thomas St. Leger, lover and later husband of Anne, Duchess of Exeter.

Elizabeth Shore, mistress of Edward IV.

Thomas Stanley, third husband of Margaret Beaufort, Countess of
Richmond.

Robert Stillington, Bishop of Bath and Wells.

George, Lord Strange, son of Thomas Stanley. Married to Joan, niece of
Elizabeth and Kate Woodville.

Elizabeth Talbot, Duchess of Norfolk. Sister of Eleanor Butler and mother
of Anne Mowbray.

Thomas Vaughan, chamberlain of Edward IV's son Edward, Prince of Wales.
The Vaughan family, residents of Tretower in Wales, unrelated to Thomas Vaughan.

John de Vere, Earl of Oxford.

Christopher Wellesbourne, servant of Richard III.

Richard Wingfield, servant of Kate Woodville.

“Now take heed what love may do, for love will not nor may not cast no fault nor peril in nothing.”

—*Gregory's Chronicle*, on the marriage of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville

Harry: November 1, 1483

YOU MIGHT THINK THAT THE LAST NIGHT OF A CONDEMNED TRAITOR would be a rather solitary affair, but you would think wrong, for the last couple of hours have been bustling with people coming and going. In some ways I welcome the commotion; it keeps my mind from the object that lies hard by my lodgings here at the Blue Boar Inn in Salisbury. It is a scaffold, and I will be its first, and probably its last, occupant, for it has been built just for me. Such is the fate of a man who tries to take a king from his throne, and fails.

Yet I do wish that things were more peaceful so I could better gather my thoughts, for what I say in the next world about my life will determine whether I am saved or damned. The best way to explain myself, I suppose, is to start at the beginning.



People who knew all of us say—or said, for there are few of them alive now—that I favor my mother more than my father. I will have to take their word for it, for he died just a month or so after I turned three. I remember a man who bounced me on his shoulders and held me on his lap when I saw him, which was not all that often, and I remember the scar on his right hand, which I would trace wonderingly because it made the hand so different from my mother's, soft and white, and my nurse's, plump and scarred by nothing worse than years of honest labor.

Father's scar was from the battle at St. Albans in May 1455. The battle had

been a disastrous one for my family. My mother's father, Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, had died there, and his eldest son, Henry, had been hauled away insensible in a cart, more dead than alive. My paternal grandfather, Humphrey, had had his face slashed, and my father too had been badly injured. Worse, the battle had left the Duke of York the ruler of England in all but name, and my family had fought for the House of Lancaster.

All of this must have dispirited my parents, and I like to think I cheered them a little when I was born on the fourth day of September of that year and when I was named not Humphrey, the name my father and his father bore, but Henry, after the king for whom they had fought. I do hope indeed I cheered them, for in my eight-and-twenty years in this world I do not think I can say that I have done so for many people.

In the fall of 1458, the pestilence, which in those days still swept through England regularly, paid one of its dreaded visits. It did what the Yorkists had failed to do—kill my father. As I was now the heir to the dukedom of my grandfather, he and my grandmother wished to take custody of me. So to their care I went, once the pestilence had stopped its raging and it was considered safe for me to travel. I was not much upset at the change. The two mainstays of my existence at that time were my nurse and my puppy, and both went with me.

I came to know my grandfather somewhat better than I had my father, being more of an age now to observe what went on around me—and being doted on by my grandparents besides that. (Four of their seven sons had died young, my father had just died, and neither of my surviving uncles, Henry and John, had sons yet. I, therefore, was precious.) Grandfather, Humphrey Stafford, was a good man who tried to do what was best for England and to protect King Henry while trying to reach some sort of accord with the Duke of York. If only he had lived longer for me to profit by his example!

As I settled into my new life with my grandparents, Fortune's Wheel, which had been spinning back and forth with regularity, spun in the direction of Lancaster. As a result, not long before the Christmas of

1459, visitors arrived at my grandparents' Essex manor of Writtle: Cecily Neville, Duchess of York, and her three youngest children, Margaret, George, and Richard. Cecily was my grandmother's younger sister. Needless to say, she and my Lancastrian grandmother had not been on the warmest of terms as of late, and though we politely referred to her and her children as our guests, it was no social visit the Duchess of York was paying now. The Duke of York was in exile, and his wife had been placed in my grandmother's custody at the order of King Henry.

Since the youngest of the York children, Richard, has proven to be the death of me, I wish I could say there was a sense of doom from the first day of our meeting back at Writtle, but of course there wasn't. I was four at the time, just a month shy of being three years younger than Richard and nearly six years younger than George. My younger brother, Humphrey, who had been born shortly before my father died, was living with my mother. Thus, up until now there had been no other boys in the household except for pages, whose duties kept them to themselves. Naturally, I was delighted by this new company. I tagged along behind the York brothers, did my best to insinuate myself into their games, and tried with all my might to impress them. I am sure they regarded me as a thoroughgoing nuisance—and a Lancastrian nuisance at that. Probably I was an annoyance in another way as well. At the time, neither Richard nor George was a duke or a king's brother; they were simply two younger sons, far less important in the grand scheme of things than their father or their two older brothers, Edward and Edmund, both of whom were earls. Even at my young age, I, on the other hand, knew full well that I would be the next Duke of Buckingham, heir to one of the richest estates in the realm. I probably pointed this out more often than was strictly necessary.

Yes, I must have been completely insufferable.

Grandmother counted Queen Margaret among her dear friends and often said that the queen was only doing what was right, fighting for her husband's throne and that of her dear little son, Edward. She could not forbear from expressing this opinion to Cecily, who as Duchess of York

held a view that was considerably to the contrary. Because of this, there was occasional tension in the household, but for the most part, the sisters rubbed along well enough. Both, after all, were worried for their husbands and sons, and both knew that their lives could be changed at a stroke of a battle ax.

For about seven months, we lived together in this fashion. Then, one day in July 1460, I was confined indoors with a bad cold, much to my disgust, for it was the first day in several that it had not rained. George and Richard were outdoors shooting at butts, and I deluded myself that I had improved my skill enough to give them at least a hint of competition. Some men came to see Grandmother on business, and she left the solar where the rest of us had gathered and was gone awhile. I was tossing a ball to my dog, and Cecily and her daughter Margaret were at their embroidery, when Richard and George rushed into the room as Cecily was critiquing Margaret's stitches. "Mother! Do you know what has happened?"

"Obviously not. George, when will you learn not to interrupt?"

"It is important, Mother. Truly. We heard it from the servants of the men who came here just now. Mad King Henry has been taken captive by the Earl of Warwick and Ned!"

"It was at a place called Northampton," put in Richard.

"It's a disaster for Lancaster, Mother! The men who were guarding that fool Henry's tent were killed by the Kentishmen. They didn't stand a chance. The Earl of Shrewsbury, Egremont, the Viscount Beaumont—and best of all, the Duke of Buckingham! Dead, all of them! The rats."

"George, you fool!" Margaret dropped her embroidery. "Harry—"

"Oh." George winced and looked at me. "Er, sorry."

"It's a lie!" I said. "You're just making that up to tease me." He often did things like that, and having grown up with no other children in the household until recently, I was particularly vulnerable to such tactics. Hopefully, I looked around for confirmation of my words.

Richard shook his head. "No, Harry. It's the truth."

I broke free of Margaret's consoling hand and ran to my grandmother's

chamber. She was sitting in her cushioned window seat, sobbing. I had not known until then that people of my grandmother's age—she was nigh on fifty—cried. I had no need to ask her if what I had heard was true. When she saw me, she wrapped her arms around me and held me tight, but she did not stop weeping until my own sobs started. "Get your tears out now, Harry," Grandmother said, patting me on the back as I huddled against her shoulder. "Don't let that Yorkist brood of Cecily's see you cry. And then when you are done, I have something for you."

After a time, she rang a bell and whispered something into the ear of the page who responded. When he came back, he bore a small box.

Grandmother unlatched the box and showed me the coronet glittering inside it.

"Wear it proudly, my boy, in your grandfather's memory," she said, setting the golden coronet on my curling black hair as I brushed at my eyes. "You are now the second Duke of Buckingham."

Kate: September 1464

IT WAS ON A FINE SEPTEMBER MORNING IN 1464 THAT THE KING MARRIED my sister, although I couldn't tell a soul about it, and in truth I wasn't supposed to know myself.

I found out the secret when, just after dawn, my older sister kicked me in her sleep. As Joan was a compulsive kicker and I was well used to such awakenings, I normally would have gone back to sleep, but something made me sit up instead and listen. There appeared to be more life in our manor house at Grafton than usual, a sense of something extra going on besides the usual servants arising.

Disentangling my legs from my sister's—not only did she kick me, she encroached upon my half of the bed, though she claimed it was purely accidental—I climbed out of bed, took my night robe off its peg, draped it over my shoulders, tucked my favorite doll under my arm for company, and quietly made my way downstairs. Sure enough, there were sounds coming from the chapel—a highly unusual occurrence, for these days my family was in no position to keep its own chaplain. I pulled upon the heavy door.

Inside were a priest, my mother, two gentlewomen of my mother's acquaintance, a good-natured-looking man whom I guessed to be in his thirties, my sister Elizabeth, and a rather young man—the last two kneeling by the altar. It was obvious even to my six-year-old self that I had interrupted a wedding, but why on earth was my sister getting married at dawn, with none of the family present but Mother? And why was everyone—even the bride and groom—in everyday clothes? Why, the groom might have been going out for a day's hunting, so casually was he dressed.

As I stood there, at a loss for words and sensing that I had somehow done a Bad Thing, the groom turned and stood, making me gasp. He was tall—well over six feet—and dazzlingly handsome, with hair of a rich brown. Small, sallow, and of middling appearance, I was none of those things, and I averted my eyes as if caught gazing into the sun. “Well, now. Who is this young lady?”

“Katherine, sir,” I managed.

“Kate,” the groom said as I thrilled from my head to my toes. How did this man know that I loved to be called “Kate,” only Mother insisted on the more dignified “Katherine”? He turned to my sister. “I’ve changed my mind, I’m afraid. *This* will be my new bride.”

“She’s a trifle young for you,” said my sister a little tensely. (She was, I could not help but notice, several years older than the groom.)

“Oh, maybe a bit,” the man conceded. He smiled. “Some other lucky man will have little Kate, then. Lady Kate? Can you keep a great secret?”

“You had better,” my mother warned.

“I know Kate will,” the man said reassuringly. He looked down—a long way down—straight into my eyes. “Kate, I am getting ready to marry your sister. But it is a great secret. No one can know until I announce it personally.”

“Your family would not approve?” I ventured, as he was being so confiding.

“Indeed no.”

“That is a pity.”

“But they will come to understand in time.” He cleared his throat and looked thoughtful for a moment, then appeared to make up his mind. “But there are other reasons why there are difficulties just now. I suppose you have not seen our King Edward yet, Kate?”

“No.”

“Have you heard much of him?”

I was delighted by his question, for it gave me the opportunity to demonstrate what a good Yorkist I was, a great necessity in our family, since it was not so terribly long ago that Papa and my brothers Anthony and

Richard had fought for the House of Lancaster. Having gone over to what now all agreed heartily to be the right side, Papa had sternly informed us children that we should always speak well of the House of York. As with all of my father's advice, I had heeded it dutifully, but I seldom had the chance to put it into practice, for all of my brothers and sisters, being older and much wiser, were naturally much better Yorkists, and never made a mistake I could correct. "No," I admitted. "But I hear he is very brave. And very handsome."

The second man laughed, a sound that made the chapel echo. He was well over a decade older than the groom and less handsome, though his ruddy face was a pleasant one. "Ned, there's a fine courtier for you! Shall I?"

The younger man nodded, and the older man reached in a purse and drew out a fine gold chain, then handed it to me. (Later, I was to learn that he always kept one or two on his person, in case of emergencies.) "There's a reward for your loyalty, Lady Kate."

"Thank you," I said vacantly, staring at the chain. It was lovely, and even to my inexperienced eyes looked frightfully expensive. Was my sister marrying a highwayman?

The younger man laughed at my expression. "You see, Kate, *I* am the king. And I have come here to marry your sister."

There were any number of dignified and proper responses I could have made to this announcement. I, of course, made none of them. My mouth gaped open, most unattractively I fear. "*You?*" I asked. "*Her?*"

"Me. Her." The king nodded. "She will make a lovely queen, don't you think?"

"Yes," I admitted feebly. Bessie was indeed lovely; sometimes I thought that she and my brother Anthony had taken so much beauty for themselves that there was not enough left for the other ten of us children, especially me.

"But you must keep this a secret, Kate, as I have said. You will promise?"

"On my life!"

“Good girl,” the king said. He grinned. “Or I would be obliged to put you in my Tower as a lesson, you know.”

My previous promise was empty compared to the one I made now. “I swear and hope to die if I break my promise,” I vowed, kneeling and making the sign of the cross for good measure. I might have gone further and prostrated myself had Bessie not interrupted.

“Time passes. Ned, I know the child will not tell. Can we please resume the ceremony?”



While my sister and the king are getting married, it seems a good time to explain what sort of family the king was marrying into.

My mother, Jacquetta of Luxembourg, was the daughter of the Count of St. Pol and the second wife of John, Duke of Bedford, brother to Henry V. My mother was but seventeen at the time of their marriage; the duke was in his forties. They had been married only two years when the duke fell ill and died, leaving Mama free to contract her scandalous marriage to my father—the son of the duke’s chamberlain.

Mama could (and did, when roused) trace her ancestry to Charlemagne, but my father, Sir Richard Woodville, was a different matter altogether. He was no more than a knight when he and my mother wed, secretly and without the license of the king, the unfortunate sixth Henry, then a mere youth. The king could not let such a match pass without censure, and he promptly fined my parents a thousand pounds. But he got over it soon enough, and so completely that the marriage was the making of my father, a fact that he was candid enough to admit in the privacy of Grafton. In time my father was made a baron and a Knight of the Garter by King Henry. He and Mama were among those appointed to bring Henry’s bride, Margaret of Anjou, from France for the couple’s marriage, and my mother was soon on the best of terms with Margaret, then a girl of fifteen. When poor Henry went mad (or took ill, as good Lancastrians said) and the

Duke of York claimed the crown, Papa fought for Henry and for Margaret on the side of the House of Lancaster.

Then, in 1461, there was the dreadful battle of Towton. My father and my oldest brother, Anthony, were on the queen's side—by this time poor Henry was in such a state that no one thought of him as the person they were fighting for—and the queen lost the battle, horribly, on a blindingly snowy day. The Woodville men were captured, and the queen, the king, and their young son fled to Scotland. All seemed lost for the House of Lancaster, so when Father and Anthony were given the chance to make their peace with our new, young king, the fourth Edward, they took it gladly. So faithfully did my father discharge his new allegiance that within two years, he became a member of the king's council.

It was not all war and advancement with my parents since their marriage, however. There was the matter of begetting children—and that, my parents often said fondly, was a pursuit in which God had richly blessed them. Some died quite young, to everyone's sorrow, but by September of 1464 there were twelve of us living, seven girls and five boys, Anthony at seven-and-twenty being the oldest and me at six being the youngest.

I knew my parents worried about how they were going to provide for all of us when we grew older. My father's wealth came chiefly from my mother's dower lands, and because of England's reversals in France, Mother no longer enjoyed the revenues from her estates there. We were by no means poor, but she had to manage our household carefully. Yet as shabby as some of our everyday furnishings were, our house was full of beautiful objects from my mother's days as the wife of a king's son: sparkling gold cups, lushly illuminated manuscripts, my mother's coronet. They were too steeped in family history to be sold, but they hardly fit in with our modest existence at Grafton either. Still, my parents had managed to make matches for three of us: Bessie with Sir John Grey, Anthony with Elizabeth, Lady Scales, and Jacquetta with Lord Strange. They were good marriages, all agreed, and at six I was not much worried about whether a similarly suitable husband would be found for me when

my time came. There were, after all, many sisters to get through before I became anyone's concern.

Poor Bessie, though, had not been married for long when her husband—just barely knighted, poor man—was killed in the second battle at St. Albans in 1461, leaving her with two boys, Thomas and Richard. Bessie's husband, though of good family, had not been rich, and my sister was left with a small income and a fear that her husband's family would take what was due to her sons. She came back to us at Grafton, and with us she had been living for the past three years. Lovely as my sister was, no one had offered for her since; I suppose in those uncertain days more than just beauty and virtue was needed to attract a man.

Until the king came along.



When the ceremony ended, there were none of the usual festivities. The priest went to my sister's chamber—being widowed, Bessie had been given one to herself when she came back to Grafton—and blessed the bed, practically mumbling so as not to wake the rest of the household. Then we all left, leaving the king and Bessie to consummate their marriage, the king's friend to go for a ride ("A very long ride. Eh, Ned?" I'd heard him hiss to the king), and my mother and I (though I do not think she was anticipating my assistance) to figure out how to keep the secret from spreading through the household. Some contrivance was certainly necessary, as the king was going to have to emerge from my sister's chamber sooner or later, and at six feet tall and with his dazzling looks, he did not exactly blend into his surroundings. I was full of helpful suggestions—dressing up the king in Father's clothes, dressing up the king in Mother's clothes, dressing him up in a monk's habit, having him use a rope ladder to crawl out the window, drugging the entire household with a sleeping potion—but in the end, my mother settled for confiding in the most trustworthy of the servants and the eldest of my brothers and sisters, who found various ways to occupy the uninitiated outside the house. This solution rather disgusted me, for I was

certain I could have obtained a monk's habit if someone had just given me the chance.

With this problem solved, though not as ingeniously as I would have preferred, the newlyweds tarried in my sister's chamber for several hours while the rest of us went around the daily business of the manor, keeping as well away from the bridal chamber as we could. I had to pass it a couple of times (I couldn't help it, truly) and found that the sounds within were pretty much of the sort that emanated from my parents' bedchamber on occasion, with the exception of a few feminine giggles. I wondered what the king was doing to provoke this reaction from my rather serious sister.

By noon, the king and his companion—William, Lord Hastings, I later learned—had ridden off, the king having first kissed Bessie very tenderly in the privacy of my mother's chamber, where he took his leave of us. My sister went back to her bedchamber to do whatever a commoner who had just secretly married a king did to pass the time, and I went outside, where I proposed to my nephews, who were nearer my own age than most of my brothers and sisters, that we play a game of getting married. They found the idea exceedingly dull and girl-like, and said so in no uncertain terms, so we played buck-hide instead, with I the hunter and they the bucks. It took me a while to find them, but I always succeeded.



One of the advantages of having so many older brothers and sisters was that there was always someone I could find to give me whatever help I needed. If I was puzzled over my lesson, I went to Anthony if he was at Grafton or, most often, Lionel. If I needed to get through some difficult embroidery, I went to Mary. If I needed someone to get me out of trouble with Mama, I went to John. If I wanted a frog to put down someone's back (usually Joan's), I went to Edward.

If I wanted information, though, I went to Anne, who more than the rest of us had the confidence of my sister. So that night, after everyone had

retired, I climbed out of the bed I shared with Joan and climbed into the bed that Anne had all to herself. “Kate! It’s late.”

“Please? When else can I ask you?” I didn’t even need to tell her what I sought. She knew.

“Oh, all right.” Anne sighed, purely for show. She loved being a fount of information. Meanwhile, several other heads poked out from behind bed curtains, for just as I relied upon Anne for information, my sisters had come to rely on me to ask the questions that they were too discreet to ask. “I suppose all of you know by now that Bessie got married today.” Everyone nodded, to my disapproval, for this meant that someone had told the secret. I certainly had not. “But do you know who the groom is?” Joan and Margaret shook their heads. “Well, you’ll think that this is madness when I say it, but it’s not. Bessie has married the *king*.”

Joan and Margaret stared. “Are you joking?” Joan asked.

“She is not.” I tossed my head. “I was at the wedding.”

“What was a chit like you doing there?” That was Margaret.

“Keeping my eyes and ears open,” I said grandly. Then I realized that I was upstaging poor Anne, whose pretty face had turned almost sour. “But I don’t know how they met, or anything like that. I just know that they married today and it is a great secret until the king says it can be told. So how did it come about?”

Anne relaxed, relieved that I was not attempting to usurp her. “Well. You know that poor Bessie had had problems with the Greys about her lands.” I nodded, for even I knew about this; it was a topic on which my sister (naturally enough) expounded a great deal. “Papa, of course, would have done what he could to aid her, being on the king’s council, but the Greys are so very well connected, what with their ties to the king’s family, and we are—not so very well connected. So she decided to go to Lord Hastings, the king’s great friend, for help. He has land not far from here, you know.”

“I met him this morning,” I broke in grandly. “A charming man. Oh. Pardon me.”

“Not far from here at all,” Anne continued, a note of warning in her voice. “Anyway, he and Bessie agreed that one of her boys would marry one of Lord Hastings’s daughters—although he doesn’t have any yet. They were to share in the rents and profits of what could be recovered for the boys. That way, Bessie knew Hastings would help her to get what was due to her and to her sons. Wasn’t that clever of Bessie?”

We nodded approvingly.

“So it might have ended there, but”—she looked at me and hesitated—“Lord Hastings is, er, a man with an eye for a pretty woman, they say, and so is the king. He, ah, sometimes introduces the king to women he thinks he might—like. And Hastings thought that the king might like Bessie. So when the king and Hastings went to Stony Stratford on business, he told Bessie that the king wanted to see her about the arrangement. And she came to him.”

“And the king liked her,” I surmised.

“Very much. But you see, the king likes a great many women. Anyway, he spoke with Bessie a very long time, and then he found an excuse to call her back to him the next day, and then he asked Bessie to be his mistress.” The raptness of her audience overcame Anne’s discretion, fortunately for me, for I could not have borne it had she fallen silent. “You know, to lie with him but not to be his wife. He told her that if she did, she could have anything she wanted for herself and for her family, and that she would be kept in the best of comfort.”

I nodded sagely, though in truth I was shocked. I had seen some wicked women once at a fair, with tight, bright gowns and brighter cheeks and hair, and had been hustled past them by my brother John. Surely that was not what the king had had in mind for Bessie.

“But Bessie refused. She said that she had her boys’ good names to protect and her own honor, along with that of Papa and Mama, and that she would be no man’s mistress, not even if the man was her king. So the king shrugged and dismissed her rather coldly.”

“This was way back in April. Then, just a few weeks ago, Hastings asked

the king for our nephew Tom's wardship and marriage, as part of the agreement he'd made with Bessie. The king agreed and signed the document. Then, just three days ago, Bessie got a note from the king, asking to see her alone."

"After he tried to seduce her?" asked Mary. I made a mental note to find out what "seduce" meant. Maybe Lionel could tell me.

"Well, she felt she had to. It might affect Tom's lands, after all, and he wasn't asking for a meeting by night, so she felt safe. So she went and waited by that old oak tree that people meet at around here, and then he came galloping up and told her that he had been thinking about her all summer and that he couldn't bear it any longer. And then he told her that a queen should be virtuous, and a queen should be beautiful, and that she was both, so why should she not be his queen? His advisers wouldn't like it, but they would have to accept the idea or they could go hang. I believe they must have kissed and so forth quite a long time"—Anne blushed—"and then he gave her his ring as a token of his fidelity and told her to have Mama find a priest and that they would marry the next morning—that is, today. And so they did."

"That is the most splendid, romantic thing I have ever heard in my life," I murmured. I could hardly wait until the next morning to reenact the scene with my dolls, though I was still somewhat unclear about the mistress and seducing part. Still, I could improvise quite well, and I certainly understood the kissing part.

"I wonder when the king will announce it," said Mary.

Anne shrugged. "It will probably be a while. The Kingmaker won't like it."

"The Kingmaker?" I asked. "I thought God made kings, just like the rest of us."

Margaret rolled her eyes. The next frog Edward procured would be for her.

Anne laughed. "The Kingmaker is Richard Neville, the Earl of Warwick. He is immensely rich, and very popular among the people, and it was with

his support that King Edward gained the throne after his father, the Duke of York, was killed at Wakefield. Were it not for the Kingmaker, Henry might still be on the throne.”

“So why would he not like the king marrying Bessie?”

“Because he would prefer him to marry another king’s daughter, or at least a member of another king’s family. Such marriages can be useful at times of war. Bessie can be of no good that way, being English. And there is the matter of a dowry as well. Kings like rich brides, and sometimes need them quite badly.”

“But she is virtuous and beautiful,” I said, deciding that no Kingmaker would be welcome among my dolls tomorrow. Edward and Bessie could do quite nicely all by themselves.

“That will have to be enough, because she certainly won’t bring a dowry with her. Not fit for a king, anyway!” Anne laughed.

“I wonder what that will mean for us, once it is announced,” said Margaret. “We will be the queen’s sisters, after all. Shall we go to court?”

“Why not?” said Mary.

“Court,” I murmured. “How wonderful that would be!” Then I yawned immensely, and Anne shook her head.

“Before you think of going to court, missy, you’d best think of going to bed.”



As the days passed, the Queen of England continued her usual life at Grafton with the rest of us: tending her two sons, embroidering, even helping with the work of the household when necessary. When no servants were present, for not all had been let in on the secret, I rather enjoyed calling my sister “your grace” when possible. “Will your grace come to dinner now?” “Has your grace seen that shirt I was mending for Father?” But the charm of that began to wear thin, especially for Bessie, who more than once told me to stop my your-gracing and make myself scarce. She said it, though, in a suitably regal tone.

I might have wondered if the wedding had been a dream, but it was not that the king had forgotten about his bride. Every couple of days, a nondescript messenger on a nondescript horse would appear at Grafton with a royal letter for Bessie and usually a small gift—some trimmings, a purse, a top for the boys. Sometimes there were pretty presents for the rest of us as well; I still have a little brooch from that period.

Papa, meanwhile, had been visiting one of our other manors on business, unaware that he had acquired the king as a son-in-law. When he arrived home, Mama and Bessie quickly pulled him aside for a conference, from which he emerged looking like a man who had been struck by lightning. For the rest of his stay, he looked pleased and proud but also a little dazed. That first evening home, he asked, “Did I ever tell you younger children what happened at Sandwich?”

We were all sitting in the solar, one of the improvements my parents had made to Grafton while they still had the income from their French lands and when there were not quite so many of us children. Most of us shook our heads. “Well, Anthony and I were fighting for Lancaster at the time, back in 1460.” My father looked vaguely apologetic before continuing. “We were planning to set sail for Guines, which the Duke of Somerset had taken, to help him take Calais. Instead the Yorkists took your mother and Anthony and me by surprise, in our beds, no less. So we were captured and hauled off to Calais. We had good weather, but it was about the longest trip I’ve ever made in my life, let me tell you, for I was a prisoner of York. When we arrived there, the Earl of Warwick and the Earl of March—that is, our present king—rated us mercilessly. They said that I was a lowborn knave’s son who had been made by marriage and that Anthony as my son was no better.”

“I could have scratched their eyes out!” Mama interrupted. “Such impudence. And I in my oldest nightshift!”

“I believe you would have scratched their eyes out, my dear, if they hadn’t taken the precaution of shackling you. Anyway, they carried on like that for hours, or at least it felt like it, and as we were at sword point and badly outnumbered, there was nothing we could do but bear it with

dignity. When the king appointed me to his council, he said nothing of the incident, and neither did I; better just let some things be, I've always said." He smiled wryly. "And now the man is my son-in-law? I am sorely tempted when I attend his council at Reading to remind him of our conversation."

"Do you think he'll announce it at Reading?" Anne asked.

"He left a letter assuring me that Bessie would receive all honors due her, but did not give specifics. Who knows? Do you, Bessie?"

Bessie held out her palms and shrugged. "He tells me he will announce it when the time is right."

"Whenever that is," muttered Margaret.

"It is an awkward situation for the king, my dears. When has such a thing happened before in England, a king marrying in secret and making his bride his queen?"

"Well," said my brother John cheerfully. "Someone had to be the first."



My sisters and I, including the queen, were sewing one morning in late September when we heard the sound of approaching horses. *Many* horses, I realized just as Bessie with a sharp intake of breath walked to the window. "It is true!" she breathed. She grabbed Anne, her usual confidante. "The king has told his council! The secret's out."

We all crowded to the window, where I saw that the days of our non-descript, single messenger had ended. A score of men were riding up on the finest horses to be seen in England, and no one who saw them could be in any doubt as to from whom they came, for the man in front bore what even I recognized as the king's standard: the lion of England and the lily of France. A gaggle of villagers had attached themselves to the contingent and trailed at a respectful distance behind them, doubtlessly hoping to pick up some gossip.

"Follow me."

We lined up behind Bessie obediently and filed into the hall, where the

royal entourage had just arrived. My sister had barely cleared the doorway when the king's men went down upon their knees. "Rise?" she ventured after a moment or two. With growing confidence, she added, "What news do you bring?"

"Your grace, I bring word from the king. His grace has informed his council at Reading of his marriage. He wishes your grace to proceed to Reading so that your grace might be introduced to the council and to others of importance." Even in the midst of all these "your graces," Bessie looked down at her dress, which was far from new, with such a look of horror that the man came close to smiling as he guessed my sister's thoughts. "The king wishes to assure you that all necessary items of apparel are being prepared against your grace's arrival."

I longed to ask, "Can the rest of us come?" but hardly dared. My eyes, however, must have spoken for me, because the man added, "His grace will be pleased to see the queen's family at Reading also, but he asks that they return to Grafton afterward while lodgings are being prepared for them."

"Where?" asked the queen.

"It is not certain, your grace. The king intends to stay at Windsor after he leaves Reading, but he may choose quarters at Greenwich or Sheen for the family of your grace. For now."

"For now?" my mother asked.

"It is the king's intention that your daughters be wedded suitably, and soon, to men worthy of a queen's sister. Their residence at court may thus be only temporary."

I grabbed at one of my sisters' hands—any sister would do—to keep upon my feet. *Windsor*, spoken as we might say "Grafton." *Wedded suitably*. I had imagined this scene often enough, enacted some reasonable facsimile thereof with my dolls, but now that it was coming true, it was beyond belief. Nothing, I realized, would ever be the same for the Woodville family now. Nothing.

September 1464 to May 1465

THE KINGMAKER, IT APPEARED, HAD GIVEN MUCH THOUGHT TO FINDING a suitable bride for the young king. It had been with the greatest satisfaction that he informed the king's council, meeting at Reading Abbey, that he was all set to travel abroad to negotiate for the hand of the French king's sister-in-law, Bona of Savoy ("a most beauteous lady," the Kingmaker noted with an appreciative smack of his lips). The Earl of Warwick was getting ready to elaborate, whether upon the proposed terms or upon the lady's charms no one shall ever know, when the king held up his hand for silence.

"I fear that there is an obstacle of my own making to this proposed match," he said quietly. "You have had my interests well at heart, and I commend you for it and shall remember it. But no marriage can take place, for the best reason in the world. The truth is, my lords, I am already married." He paused, but no one even attempted to speak. "To an Englishwoman. To a beautiful, seemly Englishwoman who will fulfill her role admirably. To the former Lady Elizabeth Grey, the daughter of Lord Rivers here."

According to my father, my informant, the Kingmaker's expression might have scared the dead out of their tombs. The king rose and beamed. "I suspect, my lords, you may wish to discuss this matter amongst yourselves more freely. I shall take myself off so that you can do so, and I shall send for my queen so that she may be received by you in the proper manner. Come, Lord Rivers, with me."

My father obeyed, but he had barely cleared the room before the

Kingmaker let forth a series of expletives, in both English and French. Even if I could bring myself to reproduce his words here, it would be impossible, for my father felt that they were far too vivid and descriptive to be shared with the family. There was more silence, either in awe of the earl's hitherto unknown verbal dexterity or in fear that the king would return, until Lord Hastings said mildly, "Now, now, my lord. I've seen her, and I can tell you that she's a lovely woman. And with two sons, she's fertile to boot."



"Which one is the Kingmaker?" I hissed to John as we rode toward Reading Abbey, me riding pillion behind John. For most of the trip to Reading, I'd been behind one of the king's men, but for the last stretch of the journey, I'd begged to ride behind John, who as ever had cheerfully obliged.

"Never seen him, you know. But I'd lay odds on the brown-haired man standing next to the king. He looks disgusted enough," said John.

As subtly as I could, which was probably not very subtly at all, I gazed at Warwick the Kingmaker, if indeed that was he, and felt a twinge of disappointment. Aside from his robes, which were obviously of great cost, he was an ordinary-looking man, neither tall nor short, handsome nor plain. Even his hair was the most unassuming type of brown. It did not help, of course, that he was standing next to my new brother-in-law, who was every bit as fine as I remembered.

We rode toward the rear of the queen's party, whose imminent arrival had evidently prompted the king and several other men to stand at the abbey entrance, waiting. As the rest of us drew rein, the king stepped forward and headed straight toward my sister's horse. As Warwick and a boy in his teens watched, both looking slightly greenish, Edward greeted my sister not as a king meeting his queen, but as a young man of twenty-two who had been eagerly awaiting his love. Not allowing a page to do the job, he assisted Bessie from her horse, embraced her, and kissed her soundly and quite at length for their being in a public place. "Welcome to Reading, my dear," he said, stepping back. For a moment I thought he was going to

draw Bessie into another extended kiss, but he mastered himself and waved a hand that included all of the family. "And welcome, all!"

Warwick's eyes moved from Woodville to Woodville, quite evidently counting us and arriving at a figure he thought was too high. It was the boy, however, who said, "Quite a sizable family, Ned."

"As a matter of fact, George, there are some missing, I believe," said the king genially. He glanced around. "Who's not here?"

As this seemed to be a question anyone was free to answer, the impulse to be the one to provide this information to the king was irresistible to me. "My sister Jacquetta," I called out. "And my brother Anthony. We hope they will be here soon, though."

The king's smile grew even broader, and he walked to where I still sat my horse behind John. As effortlessly as if he were lifting a kitten, he swept me out of my seat, then swung me round as I squealed in delight. "This is my wife's chief rival for my affections," he said solemnly, after kissing me on the cheek and placing me on the ground before Warwick and George. "I am very glad to see you here, Kate."

George tried not to glare at me as I beamed toothily up at them. The Kingmaker managed, "A fine new sister-in-law indeed." He smiled. It looked like a painful process.



It was a couple of days later, on Michaelmas, that the king's council and some sundry other men of importance gathered into Reading Abbey and awaited the formal presentation of my sister as England's queen. My mother and my second oldest sister, Jacquetta, Lady Strange, were to carry my sister's train, but the rest of us Woodvilles stood in a large knot in the transept with the others.

The Kingmaker and the king's brother, George, were to lead my sister into the abbey. By now I had learned that the king had a number of brothers and sisters, but several had died very young. The next oldest boy after Edward, Edmund, had died, aged seventeen, with the Duke of York at

the battle of Wakefield. Remaining to the king were three sisters, Anne, Duchess of Exeter, Elizabeth, Duchess of Suffolk, and the Lady Margaret, who had yet to be married, and two brothers, George, Duke of Clarence, and Richard, Duke of Gloucester.

George, the only one of them present at Reading, was not quite fifteen at the time. Though his hair was lighter, he otherwise greatly resembled the king. He was tall and nicely built, having an exceptionally handsome face without the spottiness that marred so many faces of youths his age. Yet I did not find his looks as nearly as appealing as the king's, though I could not quite understand why. Still, he looked more agreeable than he had the day of our arrival, perhaps because he was aware of the fine figure he cut as silence was ordered and he and Warwick processed into the abbey, my sister between them.

I gasped as John lifted me onto his shoulders to get a better look. Lovely enough in everyday clothes, Bessie was stunning in the scarlet and gold robes, trimmed with ermine, that the king's tailor had hastened to make for her. The king, I supposed, must have given her the jewels that sparkled as she moved, for they were certainly not anything from my mother's collection, which I liked to sort through on rainy days. Were it not for the fact that her hair was concealed by her headdress, instead of being unbound, she might as well have been going to her coronation. She might have been born to be a queen, indeed, for she walked with her two escorts and her train-bearers as though she were perfectly accustomed to such pomp.

Bessie walked to the altar where the king stood. He stepped forward and took her hand as my mother and my sister gracefully swiveled backward with her train, which fortunately for them was a relatively short one. "I give to you your most gracious lady, my wife and consort, your Queen Elizabeth!"



After that, any business of the council was strictly anticlimactic. Soon its members dispersed to their homes, as did we Woodvilles. The king and queen stayed at Reading for several weeks, with only a small company of

servants. I knew there were hopes—in my family, at least, and presumably on the king's part—that my sister would emerge from this quiet time with an heir to the throne in her belly.

Before the council departed from Reading, however, the king, my father, and the Earl of Arundel had a conference. When it ended, my sister Margaret was betrothed to the earl's fourteen-year-old heir, Thomas Fitzalan. We had barely settled ourselves at Grafton before it was time to escort Margaret to Arundel Castle in Sussex, where she was to live with the earl's family until she and Thomas were a little older and were considered ready to consummate their marriage.

Perched up high above its surroundings and even more magnificent inside than it appeared from the outside, the castle was the grandest place in which any of us girls had been to date, and as the earl and his family were most hospitable, I was at liberty to wander around it undisturbed. I lost no time in climbing the winding stairs to the castle's highest turret, where I gazed down at the River Arun and the town below, imagining myself in the glorious days of the third King Edward, with some knight in shining armor racing across the terrain to save me. (From what he was supposed to be saving me was a matter on which I was vague, not to mention historically somewhat confused.) When we left Margaret in her new home and returned to Grafton, it seemed unbearably small, even with fewer of us living there now.

I did not have too long to suffer, though, for in December we were on the move again, this time to Eltham Palace. It would not only be my first time at a royal palace, it would be the first time I met the king's family, other than Clarence, and I did not think he had boded all that well.

Our days at Eltham were formal, with the elaborate lengthy meals that I was used to, on a considerably smaller scale, from Grafton. In the evening, however, only the immediate family gathered in the king's chamber, some to play chess or other games, some to dice, some to dance, and some just to chatter, and it was then that I began to get a sense of who my new relations were.

Cecily, the king's mother, was pointedly absent from the gathering—I heard later that she had carried on dreadfully about her son's marriage to a commoner, and John swore that steam had been seen to rise from her hen-nin when she heard the news—but the king's brothers and youngest sister, Margaret, all had come for the festivities from Greenwich, where they spent most of their time. George, of course, I had met. Margaret was eighteen; old, I thought, to still be unmarried, especially since she was quite seemly in appearance, though very tall for a woman. If she had any misgivings about her brother's marriage, she kept them to herself and spoke quite amicably to the queen and the rest of us. Encouraged by her approachability, I always claimed the closest seat to her on informal occasions, when protocol did not forbid it. If she got tired of me doing this, she had the goodness never to say so.

Richard, Duke of Gloucester, twelve years old, was the youngest of the royal family. Unlike the king, George, and Margaret, he was of middling height, with just a fortunate inch or so saving him from being called short. He was darker than they were too, though far from ill-favored. As he was much quieter than his brother or George, though not at all melancholy, I paid little mind to him.

Edward's sister Elizabeth, the Duchess of Suffolk, and her husband the duke, John de la Pole, did not make much of an impression on my young mind either, though my mother had been godmother to Elizabeth twenty years before when she was born in Rouen. They were a quiet couple. My brother Lionel told me that the Duke of Suffolk was the great-grandson of the poet Geoffrey Chaucer, which impressed Lionel a great deal. I, however, stayed at a distance lest the poor duke, who in all fairness did not appear the least bit inclined to do so, fall into reciting verse to me.

By far the most interesting of the king's family (aside, of course, from the king himself) was his older sister, Anne, Duchess of Exeter. She had arrived at Eltham after Margaret, George, and Richard. Finding it strange that a duchess should be without a duke, I sidled up to the Lady Margaret at the earliest opportunity. "Where is the duke, my lady? The Duke of Exeter?"

“Oh, dear,” said Margaret. “You mustn’t mention that duke, you know.”

“Why? Is he dead?”

“Worse. A Lancastrian.” Margaret looked around to see if she could speak in safety, and finding that she could, continued, “Her husband is Henry Holland. My late father arranged their marriage when they were quite young, but they never suited, although they have a girl—another Anne, who is to marry Warwick’s nephew.”

“The Kingmaker? That Warwick?”

Margaret smiled. “Yes, that Warwick. Anyway, the Duke of Exeter was never loyal to my father, even though he was his son-in-law. He fought against him time after time, and Anne had no influence over him. He could have made his peace after Towton, as did all others with sense”—she glanced in my father’s direction—“but he refused, and now he is in France with that virago Margaret of Anjou. Where we all hope they stay and rot.”

“Of course. It must be hard for her. The Duchess of Exeter,” I hastened to add, as Margaret’s eyebrows shot up and she stiffened. I wondered if she had been named for the virago in more congenial times.

Margaret, evidently assured that I did not have latent Lancastrian tendencies, relaxed again. “Well, my brother has treated her well. She was granted her husband’s forfeited estates, so she lives quite comfortably. And she has custody of the little Duke of Buckingham, who is very wealthy. I wonder that he is not here with her, in fact. Hush, now, here she comes.”

I hardly needed the warning, as the Duchess of Exeter was a large lady, though of the sort who carried her avoirdupois grandly, and her entry into a room could not be readily missed. I moved to let the sisters sit side by side, but Margaret kindly steered me to a nearby stool. “We are all sisters now. Stay.” As I settled down, respectfully silent but quite alert, she asked Anne, “So where are your charges?”

“They stayed behind. Humphrey is ailing.”

“Poor Humphrey is always ailing. I am surprised, though, you chose not to bring Harry by himself. There has been talk, you know—”

“I know. But Humphrey never does well without Harry, and I shall not have it on my conscience that I caused the boy to sicken worse. And Harry wouldn’t have gone with Humphrey ill, anyway. He’s very protective of him. It’s sweet to see, but quite sad too. That boy hasn’t long for the world, even though I have the best physicians attending him. There’s plenty of time for this other business, after all; Harry’s but nine.”

“So has a girl been chosen, by the by? There seem to be several likely choices.”

“I cannot say. But I think the answer is close at hand.”

“Ah.”

“So, sister, how goes it with your marriage negotiations?”

But my favorite new relation was the Duchess of Norfolk, who was the king’s aunt, being his mother’s older sister. She was four-and-sixty and immensely rich, and Margaret told me in private after she came to know me a little better that her heirs had a running wager over whether she would ever die. More as an accessory than out of need, she used a cane, finely carved and richly bejeweled, and in speaking, she often used it to emphasize her points, sometimes even poking the listener when she wanted to be particularly emphatic. By this I do not mean that she was a harridan; her pokes were usually of the friendliest sort. I should know, as she took somewhat of a fancy to me—“my fellow Katherine” and “a bright-eyed creature,” she called me—and I was often called upon to help her thread her needle or some similar task suited for the young and sharp-eyed.

John, my third oldest brother, though quite useless for such ladies’ tasks, also got quite a few pokes with the cane that Christmas, being, like the duchess, quite fond of chess. Just after a few days at Eltham Palace, it had become generally accepted that a small table in the corner was reserved for them alone, and I often heard the duchess thumping her cane in satisfaction when she had made a good move or in warning when John was being too dilatory in making his.

It was nearly Twelfth Night when the king came in and waved for silence, rather to my disappointment, for I had been practicing some dance

steps with my brother Richard, who, despite being the quietest male in the family, was the best dancer. Thanks to his skill, I was practically floating. As we came to a halt, Edward said, "I am pleased to say that there will be another wedding in the family. Within a couple of weeks, as a matter of fact."

We unmarried Woodville girls looked back and forth at each other. We shared the same suite of chambers at Eltham. Had one of us been keeping a secret from the others? It was something we frowned upon.

"Not I, brother, I hope?" asked Margaret. There was always some scheme afoot to marry her to someone, I knew. I suspected that she was in no hurry to leave England.

"No, my dear, don't you think I'd have the courtesy to tell you first? No. Our happy couple is my dear aunt, the Duchess of Norfolk, and young John here." He gestured over toward the chess table where my brother and the duchess had duly lifted their attention from the game. "Will you join me in congratulating them?"

"Have you lost your senses?" said George.

"No. Have you lost yours, speaking to your king like that?"

"Brother, it is diabolical! A man of how old—twenty?—and a lady in her sixties?"

"George—"

"It is obscene!" He looked around for the youngest female in the room, who much to my dismay turned out to be me, and pointed. "Why not put this girl in bed with a man of seventy, while you're at it?"

"How dare you speak of my young sister in bed with anyone, you blackguard?" demanded John.

"How dare you address me so when you are not even a knight?"

"That will soon be remedied, I hear," said John. "In the meantime, how are my marital affairs any of your concern? I am not in your wardship."

"No, because a ward must have an income, and you've none—a fine sort to marry a duchess, and my own aunt! Ned, don't you see the canker you've set loose? It's not bad enough that you marry a nobody just because she wouldn't spread her leg—"

The king lunged at George, and I truly think he might have murdered him then and there were it not for what happened next. The Duchess of Norfolk stepped between the brothers and rapped her cane against the floor with a mighty thud. Then she prodded George with it. "Silence, you fool!"

George stepped back. Breathing hard, so did the king.

"As my heirs know to their chagrin, I am in full possession of my faculties. I am marrying this young man under duress from no one and at no one's instigation except for his and mine," said the duchess. "Our motives are simple: I wish for congenial companionship in my old age and he wishes for a larger income. We have become friends over these past days, and we understand each other perfectly. Our marriage will provide us both with what we desire, which in neither case has anything to do with the bedchamber. So, Nephew George, you may rest your mind easy on that account. In fact, I suggest you retire and rest your body as well before you say something else you will come to regret."

George muttered something that sounded vaguely apologetic and left the chamber. My sister's lip was trembling. I had seen it do so from anger as well as from hurt, and I wondered which emotion was uppermost. The king put a hand on her shoulder. "George can be a fool sometimes, as you've seen," he said quietly. "I will speak to him further about his folly tomorrow. I suggest we retire for the evening, my dear." He waved breezily to the rest of us. "But the rest of you are free to stay and make merry."

None of us, however, felt like doing so.



"Why, John? Why would you put us to shame?"

"Shame in marrying a rich widow, sister? I'm not exactly the first man to conceive such an idea, my dear."

The king was transacting some business, leaving the queen with her ladies, Mama, and some of her sisters to do needlework together. Along with the rest of the ladies, save for Mama, I moved off at a distance and

made a great show of playing with my sister's dog by the hearth, hoping that my presence would not be remembered, as it too often was when conversations turned interesting.

"A rich widow forty years older than you!"

"Not to be ungallant, but it's five and forty, actually."

"What will people say? It would not be so bad if there were a possibility of children, but—"

"You heard the lady last night. It suits us both. And by 'people,' I suppose you mean the Earl of Warwick, not just the king's fool brother George?"

"John, do bear in mind that the earl is a powerful man, and that George is next in line to the throne. He cannot be dismissed so easily, not until I bear a son."

"Something you have had no difficulty doing in the past, and something the king has effected with others in the past too, if rumor informs me correctly. Ah, sister, don't look so distressed! You cannot believe that the king came to your bed a virgin."

I concentrated hard on making myself invisible, and evidently succeeded.

"John, I am in no mood for your jests today. I have found out but recently—" My sister bit her lip and fixed her eyes on her embroidery.

"Found out what, Bessie?"

Mama said, "The king has a mistress, it appears."

"The king has several, of varying degrees and complexion," John said bluntly. "Always has. Always will. Bessie, your husband is not the sort of man who can be faithful to a single woman. Some men simply aren't, you know. Face that, and treat it as a failing about which you can do nothing, and you will be far happier. They're not his queen. You are."

"That is what Mama tells me. But—"

"But what, sweetheart?"

"I am not with child, yet again. I have had evidence of it just this morning."

"Pshaw! You and the king have been together constantly only since late September. There's plenty of time. Now, let me tell you the conditions that the duchess has set upon my marriage with her, and that will make you

smile. I am not to incur huge gaming debts. A gentlemanly amount is fine, but not *huge* ones. I am to spend time at my wife's household regularly, except in time of war, when I can be excused. My dogs are to stay out of her chamber. My harlots—the duchess flatters me by assuming I have harlots, though I don't—are to stay far away from any property that she owns. And I am not to wear my doublets too short, for it is a fashion of which she mightily disapproves and that she informs me makes any man appear to have a large arse."

"Did she really say *arse*?"

The queen and my mother looked stricken. "Katherine, do go work on your music. Immediately."

"Yes, your grace."

"Kate?"

"Yes, John?"

"She did say *arse*. Now run along."



The Duchess of Norfolk and John were married not long after that, in the king's chapel at Westminster Palace. The duchess's heirs stayed far away from the ceremony, as did her nephews the Kingmaker and George, but those of us who attended enjoyed ourselves thoroughly—and John's doublet was not at all too short.

With this excitement over, the court was busy planning for my sister's coronation in May, while we unmarried Woodvilles settled into our living quarters at Greenwich, which the king had granted to my sister along with Sheen. Overlooking the Thames and a short barge ride to Westminster or Sheen, it well deserved its nickname of Placentia—House of Pleasure.

I had been resident at Greenwich Palace (which is precisely how I liked to say it in those days) for some time when, around Easter, the Duchess of Exeter was announced. She swept into the queen's chamber, followed by two boys who almost seemed lost behind her rustling, trailing skirts.

The boys knelt to the queen, who quickly bade them to rise, after which

I had the leisure to study them. I guessed the older to be about nine, the younger about seven. With their curling, dark, shoulder-length hair, large brown eyes, and finely etched facial features, it was obvious that they were brothers, but though neither boy could be called robust looking, it was painfully apparent that the younger boy was of delicate, if not outright sickly, health. His gentle face was too pale and had a pinched expression, and he seemed to need the help of the older boy to rise.

“Your grace, may I present the Duke of Buckingham, Henry Stafford,” the Duchess of Exeter said. “And Lord Humphrey Stafford, his brother.”

My sister smiled. “Welcome, boys, to your new home. I believe you shall like it well here.”

New home? The boys, however, did not look surprised.

“Someone shall show you your chambers,” the queen continued. Her eyes traveled to me. “And then my sister, Lady Katherine, will show you around the grounds if you like.”

“Not Humphrey, your grace, if you please,” said the Duke of Buckingham quickly. “He’s tired from the barge and needs to rest.”

Tired from the *barge*? I wondered in the arrogance of good health. “Harry, speak only when you are bidden,” warned the Duchess of Exeter.

“But Humphrey’s tired,” said the small duke in a firm voice. There was something fierce in his face, which changed abruptly when he looked down at his brother. “Aren’t you, Humphrey?”

“A bit,” admitted Humphrey.

“Then he must be allowed to rest.”

The Duchess of Exeter opened her mouth, probably to give the Duke of Buckingham another talking-to, but my sister said, “I quite understand, my dear. Go to your chamber and rest as long as you need, both of you. There will be plenty of time to get used to your new surroundings.”



“I told them I didn’t need to have you show me around, but they said I should go anyway,” said Harry a while later. “You see, I’ve been here

before with the Duchess of Exeter. I probably know this place better than you do, actually.”

As the youngest of twelve children I was well used to being told that other people knew things better than I did, so I merely shrugged and said, “Probably.”

Harry Stafford looked somewhat perturbed by my lack of opposition. “But I suppose your sister wouldn’t know that.”

“My sister the *queen*,” I reminded him loftily.

“Well, anyway, I’ve been to most of the royal palaces. I’m a ward of the king, you see, and I’ve been in the care of the Duchess of Exeter.”

“I know. The duchess mentioned it when she was at court for Christmas.” I felt that I had scored a point here, and being naturally magnanimous, I added, “I suppose you are a ward because your father is dead?” I had begun to understand how these things worked.

The boy nodded. “My father and my grandfather, the first duke. My father died a couple of years before Grandfather was killed at Northampton.”

“How was he killed?”

“Why, in battle in 1460, of course. He was guarding King Henry’s tent and some knaves killed him. He was outnumbered badly or he would have slain the cowards.” The duke’s eyes narrowed disdainfully, not at the knaves but at my ignorance. “Don’t you know anything?”

“I can speak French.”

“Well, so can I. Anyone can.”

“But not like this.” Thanks to my mother, I spoke French as easily as English and with no trace of an English accent. I launched into some prayers in my mother’s tongue, at top speed—but not, I am afraid, with the proper reverence due to the words I was speaking—and saw to my satisfaction that I had left the boy far behind me, so fast and fluent was I.

“Well, that’s not so much,” he said when I finally stopped for air. “The French are our enemies, after all.” He frowned. “You sound *too* French, I think.”

Youngest as I might be, I could be pushed only so far. “I was born in

England, for your information. And the king says I have a lovely speaking voice; just you ask him! And what is it to you how I sound?"

"Because—"

I stomped off in high dudgeon before the Duke of Buckingham could finish his sentence.



"What do you know about the Duke of Buckingham?" I asked Cecilia, my nurse, that evening as she braided my hair for the night.

"Little Duke Harry? Oh, my." Cecilia gave my half-formed braid an emphatic tug. "When he's of age, he'll be the richest person in England other than royalty, at least once the dowager Duchess of Buckingham dies and he gets her dower lands. Of course, he's close enough to royalty himself. A descendant of Thomas of Woodstock, the third King Edward's youngest son, and of his second oldest son John of Gaunt, if you please, through Katherine Swynford. John and Katherine had the Beaufort babes when he was married to someone else, mind you, but then they tidied things up right well after he was widowed by marrying themselves. So the duke has royal blood on both sides of the blanket. His Beaufort relations are Lancastrians through and through, and so were the young duke's Stafford father and grandfather. I don't know if little Harry has an opinion on the matter."

"Oh, I think he has an opinion on everything," I muttered.

"Eh? The young duke didn't make a good impression?"

"I thought he was very rude. How am I to know about Northampton, with so many battles to keep straight?" I sulked for a moment or two. "Is his mother alive?"

"Yes, but as the Buckingham heir, young Harry was taken to live with his grandparents when his father died. Then the king bought his wardship from his grandmother the Duchess of Buckingham, and he was put in the Duchess of Exeter's household to be raised, and now in the queen's to be raised. It's a great deal of shunting around for a boy his age, but such is the lot of the rich."

“Why’d they take the boys from the Duchess of Exeter’s household and put them in my sister’s?”

“My, you’re full of questions, aren’t you? Well, it’s the only way to learn things, they say.” Cecilia stepped back to admire her handiwork, as she always did. “Well, I’ve a notion, but as it’s no more than that, I think I’d best keep it to myself for now.”

“Why?”

“Because that’s my notion.”



The next day I was told that my sister had a visitor of some importance, who particularly wished to see me. After some delay, during which more fuss had been made than usual about my clothing, I was sent to my sister’s chamber. There sat a lady who, though somewhat younger, reminded me a bit in appearance of the Duchess of Norfolk. With her was my mother, newly arrived from Grafton, where she traveled to and from court from time to time.

“Hello, my dear,” said Mama, giving me a kiss after I dropped a curtsy to them all. “This is the Duchess of Buckingham. We have known each other a very long time, since we were often at court together during the time of Margaret of Anjou. The Duchess of Buckingham is sister to the Duchess of York, the king’s mother, and to the Duchess of Norfolk, John’s wife.”

Momentarily overwhelmed by all of these duchesses, I merely nodded, then remembered that I had been told by the Duchess of Norfolk that her father, Ralph Neville, the Earl of Westmorland, had sired nearly two dozen children, including the Kingmaker’s late father, by his two wives. I wondered how he had kept their names all straight. Perhaps he couldn’t, and had assigned one of his servants to this task exclusively.

“She’s a little thing,” said the Duchess of Buckingham. “Why, the title will be longer than the girl!”

“But very healthy. Katherine has hardly had a sick day in her life.”

“That’s certainly to be desired. Tell me, child. I hear that you met my grandson Harry yesterday. Did you like him?”

I was still indignant about being called too French, but I could hardly tell this to Harry’s grandmother, especially as I was puzzling over this exchange between her and Mama. “Yes, your grace,” I said in a rather flat tone.

“Good. It has been arranged that you are to marry him. The wedding will take place just before the queen’s coronation. So you and I shall share a title. Duchess of Buckingham.”

I rocked back on my heels.

Since coming to court I had learned a great deal about matters of precedence, and I knew that as Duchess of Buckingham, I would be one of the greatest ladies of the land. Only a few women, such as the queen and the king’s sisters, would outrank me. Sakes alive, my own sisters—except for the queen—would have to give way to me! I would wear a gold circlet on my head. Save for one of the king’s brothers, I could not have made a grander match in all of England.

And the young duke was rich. How many castles and manors would he have to call his own when he came of age? I would have my own household, my own servants, my own ladies. In time, I would surely have my own children, set to continue this grand lineage down through the generations.

I came out of my ducal ruminations to see that my mother was staring at me with amusement. “I don’t believe our Kate has ever been so quiet for so long.”

“I am most honored,” I managed.

The Duchess of Buckingham—soon to be the dowager Duchess of Buckingham, I thought dreamily—chuckled and patted me on the head. “Mind you, child, one of my nephews won’t be happy to hear about this. You might as well know.”

“The Earl of Warwick?”

“My, she is a sharp little thing, isn’t she?” The Duchess of Buckingham gave me another pat. “Yes. He has two girls of his own, you see, both

of whom would have done quite nicely for Harry with all that they will inherit, and I daresay Warwick had hopes in that direction. But we women have decided that you will suit better, and the king has given the match his blessing. So that is that. Nephew Richard will just have to fume. And fume he shall, I've no doubt."

I was on the way to becoming a duchess, and I had made the Kingmaker angry. What more could a child of seven have accomplished in one day?

When I left my sister's chamber, I saw that my betrothed was waiting for me—a bit of a jolt, for in my excitement I had forgotten that Harry and I had not made a sterling impression on each other. "So they told you?"

"Yes. I hope I shall be English enough for you."

"I told Grandmother when she talked to me this morning that I thought you were too French," Harry said solemnly. "But she told me that I was being foolish, that when I was older I would be delighted with your French ways. She didn't say why. Anyway, she told me that it was either you or the Earl of Warwick's girls and that if I married one of them, he would probably insist that I go to the North and live with him—I wouldn't want to do that, my lands are in Wales and nearby, and a man should live on his own lands—and he would try to rule me as he tries to rule the king even when I came of age. She thought I'd enjoy marriage to you more. And she said that you would probably be a better bearer of children for me. The Earl of Warwick's countess has only had the two, and lost others, they say, and the Duchess of Bedford your lady mother has had so many healthy ones. So I said that I guessed that you would do, and Grandmother said that I was shaping up to be a man of sense after all."

"Oh," I said, my mood somewhat dampened.

"And better yet, Humphrey and I are to become Knights of the Bath soon after you and I marry, right before the coronation. We might have had to wait if I weren't going to be your husband. So I've decided that marrying you isn't such a bad thing as I thought at first."

"I am glad to hear that," I said hollowly, and continued walking toward my chambers.

My spirits, however, were usually pretty resilient back then—indeed, they still are today, I think—and I soon regained them in full force. As the days before my wedding passed, I played Duke and Duchess with my dolls, letting the least feminine looking of them stand in for the duke—not that I intended any disrespect toward my fiancé. Because their play consisted mainly in saying what my dolls usually said to each other, with the added novelty of them addressing each other as “your grace,” I tired soon enough of this, after which I would count up the duchesses of England and never cease to find the figure gratifyingly low, even on the occasions when I realized I had missed one or two. There was the Duchess of York, the Duchess of Norfolk I knew, and the wives of her late son and her living grandson as well, the Duchess of Exeter, the Duchess of Suffolk, her mother-in-law the Dowager Duchess of Suffolk, Mama the Duchess of Bedford, and the Duchess of Buckingham. Eventually, I supposed, there would be a Duchess of Gloucester and a Duchess of Clarence. It was a select company indeed—and joining it would be me.

I soon had no need to while the hours away, for there was the matter of my wedding dress, not to mention the dress for my sister’s coronation, in which I as duchess would get to take a prominent part. As a result, my sister’s tailors were always coming and measuring me, or holding bits of cloth against me, and the days passed quickly.

John, hearing the news—he was my sister’s Master of Horse and often around—visited one morning in my chamber immediately after the queen’s tailor had finished one of his visits. As soon as I saw him, he fell to his knees, then prostrated himself. “My duchess, do have consideration on us poor lowly peasants from time to time, won’t you?”

“Oh, John,” I giggled. “Do get up.”

He did, and cut me a low bow. “So, you have met young Buckingham, I presume? Does he suit?”

“He did not want to marry me, but he will not have to go to the North if he does, and his grandmother says I am likely to be a good breeder, and he will be knighted soon as well. So he is content.”

John laughed. “The unappreciative puppy! I am to be made a Knight of the Bath with him. Shall I drown him in his for you?”

“No, John! No! I would not want to hurt him—and then I would be a widow.”

“Very well, I’ll keep my hands off the young fool. He’s but a lad, after all. Someone older would be able to see your potential for beauty and be well content.”

“Beauty?”

“Poppet, I am old enough to remember our sister Bessie when she was not so much older than you are now. You are the image of her then, skin-niness and all. And now look at her. Buckingham has a treat in store for him, ill as he deserves it.”

I pondered this possibility and found it incomprehensible. “Anyway, his grandmother is very kind to me. I like her, and she likes me, I think.”

“Yes, and so does *my* duchess. Here is something from her for your wedding apparel. She wore it when she was a girl, I believe.”

I gasped at the gold ring he held out to me. It was sized for a child and fit snugly on my right fourth finger when I slipped it on. “John, it is beautiful! I will write to her and thank her straightaway,” I added, for my handwriting had improved immensely since I had joined the queen’s household.

“She thought you might enjoy it.”

“It is so kind of her,” I said. My lip began to wobble, just as my sister’s did when she began to lose her composure. “John, what if I can’t be a good wife to him?”

“Kate?”

“I mean, what if I can’t bear him children, or run a household, or do all I will have to do? They will send me back! We will all be in disgrace!”

John put his arms around me and let me cry upon the fine new doublet he was wearing. “Wedding nerves, even at your age, sweetheart,” he said, patting my head. “Do you think our sister and our mother won’t have taught you how to do all you need to know when you begin to live together as husband and wife? And as for children—goodness knows there

are enough of us alive and thriving. The Lord has His own ways, I know, but I think His way with you will be more likely than not to give you children. You will do fine. We all will be fine.”

“You really think it’s just wedding nerves?”

“Yes. Even I had them. I was a bundle of nerves, let me tell you, before my wedding. Just ask my wife.”

I began giggling.

“Now dry your eyes and let me take you riding in the fine fresh air, where you shall get away for a time from all of this pother. I’m not Bessie’s Master of Horse for nothing, you know.”



Our wedding was a relatively quiet affair, most of the court’s energy—and funds—going toward my sister’s coronation to follow in a few days. Still, it was a grand occasion, and over thirty years later, I still remember it clearly.

What should I write of? My dress? I have worn finer ones since, I suppose, but I loved the exquisite little creation of blue and yellow silk that my sister’s tailor finally completed the evening before I married Harry. I remember Harry’s robes too: scarlet, worked with the golden knots that were the Stafford badge and that I learned early on could not be called “twisty little knots,” as I called them by mistake a time or two, but “Stafford knots,” if you please. Topping off the Stafford-knot-covered robe was the shining circlet of gold that Harry wore on his head as a mark of his dukedom. No doubt, as all the adults commented, the two of us made a charming little couple. And yet I do not want to write about dress.

The ceremony? My father and my oldest brother, Anthony, led me to the chapel door at Greenwich Palace, where the king and queen awaited us under a gold canopy. Harry was there before me, having been led to his place by George, Duke of Clarence, in rather better spirits since he had complained of John’s marriage to his aunt. (Later, I realized that he himself wished to marry one of the Kingmaker’s daughters and was quite pleased

that one of their prospective bridegrooms had been taken off the market.) But yet I do not want to write about the ceremony, save perhaps for the kiss Harry gave me at the appointed time. It was a little boy's kiss given to a little girl, but there was a tenderness in it that I had not expected and that I cannot think of to this very day without shedding a tear.

The feast afterward? It was a great feast, with the most amazing variety of food I had seen to date, though it was to pale beside the coronation banquet that I would attend in a few days. There was a great variety of wine, too, and the king and Lord Hastings seemed to enjoy it particularly well, though Harry and I of course got only a couple of watered-down sips as we sat in our places of state. But it was not the food or the drink that I wish to write about, but this:

It was a very long feast as well as a grand one, at least for us children. Humphrey, Harry's brother, finally gave up staying awake as a hopeless task and went to sleep with his head almost upon his plate, and I myself, infected by his example, started to drift off. Too tired to think of what I was doing, I let my head rest on Harry's shoulder and began to give myself up to a long-needed sleep.

Laughter and exclamations came from the adults near us, and in my half-dreaming state I sensed someone trying to pluck me out of my seat, doubtless to carry me to bed where I belonged. But Harry held on to me tightly as I opened my eyes to gaze around confusedly.

"Don't disturb her," he said in the same voice he had used when he had spoken of Humphrey that first day I met him. "My wife is comfortable as she is."

May 1465 to February 1466

THOUGH I AM NOT OLD—EIGHT-AND-THIRTY NOW—I HAVE SEEN MY fair share of crownings. My sister Bessie was my first.

Because of our youth, Harry and I were to be carried on squires' shoulders during most of the procession—a subject Harry waxed indignant upon when we were told. "I'm too old for that! I stayed awake through our entire wedding, after all."

Humphrey, the sweetest-tempered lad I knew, sat back and watched his brother fume with his usual gentle expression. "But your wedding was much shorter than the coronation will be," he pointed out mildly.

"It seemed to take forever," my spouse muttered ungallantly.

Harry's anger somewhat cooled, however, as the day when he was to be made a Knight of the Bath approached. Humphrey was also being knighted, as were my sister Margaret's husband-to-be and my brothers Richard and John. My brother Anthony had been knighted some years before; Lionel was destined for the Church; and Edward, the youngest, would have to wait for his turn later, there being a great many young men and boys who were to be dubbed at the Tower.

Among them was a man of twenty-two, John de Vere, the Earl of Oxford. I felt very sorry for the young earl, who had gained his title in the saddest possible way several years before when his father and his older brother had both been beheaded on charges of plotting with Margaret of Anjou. King Edward had been very kind in allowing him to succeed to the earldom and to attend my sister's coronation, I thought, as there were

rumors that he was not inclined to be loyal to the House of York. But he had married a sister of the Kingmaker, who was as good a Yorkist as could be, so that was a good sign.

Harry and Humphrey had been told many times what to expect at their knightng, and listening to them talk about it, I was rather relieved on the whole that I was a girl and would never have to go through such a ceremony. The bath on the evening before the knightng would be pleasant, I thought, if it were warm enough, and the blue ermine-trimmed robes one put on at the very end sounded magnificent. But the all-night vigil of prayer beforehand sounded cold and wearisome even for the most pious. All in all, I decided as I snuggled into my warm bed with Cecilia and my favorite doll the evening Harry and the others were to proceed into the chilly church, it was far more pleasant to be a Knight of the Bath's lady than a Knight of the Bath.

I probably slept no better that night than Harry, though. The next day, Friday, May 24, was the day my sister was to ride from Eltham Palace to the Tower, where as was the custom she would sleep before proceeding to Westminster. I was all agog; if my sister was a fraction as excited as I, she must not have slept a wink.

When at last the morning came, the king's aunts and sisters, my mother, a few other sundry duchesses, and myself were seated in several richly decorated litters, behind one in which Bessie rode in solitary splendor. We were to ride to London's great bridge, where the mayor and the alderman had prepared a show on which they had been working for months. At Shooters Hill, the fathers of the city, their scarlet robes ablaze against the usual grayness of the London sky, joined us.

Though my travels had mostly been by barge, John had taken me across the bridge once or twice. It had been a marvelous enough sight then; now I barely recognized it. The laundry poles that protruded from the houses that lined both sides of it had been festooned with banners, and the mud and muck on the path of the bridge had been obliterated by clean sand that seemed to momentarily confuse the horses. Stages had been erected every

few feet. On them were men dressed as angels and saints, choirs of boys sweetly singing, and members of all of the guilds of London in their finest clothes. I could not see my sister's face as she took in all of this that had been planned for her, but I saw Mama next to me trying not to cry tears of pride. I squeezed her hand, and she smiled at me and squeezed back.

But, of course, the ceremonies were only beginning.

At the Tower, the newly made Knights of the Bath greeted us in their blue and silver robes, Harry as the highest ranking standing at the forefront of the group. John looked especially dashing in his robes, which later earned him an approving thunk of the cane from his wife, and my brother Richard looked quietly dignified in his. Harry at nine, I am afraid in retrospect, looked rather more quaint than manly in his knightly attire, especially as he was surrounded by grown and nearly grown men, but of course his grandmother told him that he was the height of mature masculinity, and he puffed up in a manner indicating that he believed her wholeheartedly. Humphrey, fortunately, was having a good day and looked almost the picture of health as he stood with his comrades, as proud as the rest of them.

I thought the new Earl of Oxford looked appealingly melancholy as he stood there with his fellow knights. (Much later in life, having had occasion to become friendly with the earl, John de Vere, I mentioned this to him. "Of course I looked melancholy," he replied. "I was a Lancastrian in a sea of Yorkists. How else could I look?")

On Saturday, the Knights of the Bath escorted my sister from the Tower to Westminster, we ladies following in our shared litters behind Bessie in her open litter as we wound our way through the city streets, lined with guild members. Bessie flashed her smile right and left, and so, for that matter, did I. I waved so much my wrist ached, and the Fishmongers and I gave each other such enthusiastic welcomes that when we had passed clear of them, Mama muttered through clenched teeth, "Child, it is not your coronation. Have you forgotten that?"

"But they like us so much, Mama!" I protested. Still, I tried to conduct myself with a little more dignity—for a few minutes, anyway. Then the

joy of the occasion swept me up again, and even Mama and the dowager Duchess of Buckingham (whom I now called Grandmother Buckingham) lost some of their matronly reserve and began to dimple and wave as much as I.

At last, coronation morning, Sunday, May 26, arrived. The Earl of Warwick was not there, being in Burgundy on the king's affairs. (There was speculation that he might have absented himself on purpose, but I supposed that he was simply a very busy man.) The king's mother, the Duchess of York, had no business to excuse her own absence, as everyone well knew, and I felt sorry for Bessie's sake that she was being snubbed so. But the king's sisters Margaret and the Duchess of Suffolk were there, smiling and pleasant, and I soon forgot to care about Cecily Neville's absence. If she wished to miss the finest day in England, let her do so!

"Lord God, keep me from swooning," Bessie muttered that morning as my mother adjusted her robes for the millionth or so time. She was a vision—with her honey-colored hair falling unbound to her shoulders, her purple mantle, and a golden circlet upon her head—but a very nervous one. "Has anyone ever swooned during this, I wonder?"

"Now, now," my mother said.

My sister took a deep breath and took her place underneath a purple canopy borne by the four barons of the Cinque Ports. "I'm hot," she moaned. "I *will* faint."

Three people at once moved to fan my sister.

Meanwhile, I, clad in ermine and red velvet like the other duchesses and countesses, clambered on the shoulders of the squire who was to bear me. When I had settled myself safely, the squire—a strapping, handsome young man for whom any maiden over fourteen would have died for the privilege of being carried so—carefully arose. "Up we go, Duchess. No fingers around my eyes, please; I need to see where I am walking, you know. You're a light weight, I'm glad to say."

"And you are very strong," I said gallantly, staring around me. "It's better than being on horseback!"

My mother left off adjusting my sister's robes for a moment to fiddle with mine. From where we were, we could hear the sound of the Duke of Clarence, the Earl of Arundel, and the Duke of Norfolk riding through Westminster Hall on horseback, clearing a path through the onlookers so that my sister and the rest of us could pass safely through.

The Bishop of Salisbury and the Bishop of Durham took their places on either side of my sister, while the Abbot of Westminster listened for a signal from within the hall. "Time, your grace," he said at last, and took his place behind Bessie under the canopy. A trumpet sounded.

I do think my sister groaned. Then she took a scepter in each hand and a deep breath and began walking forward as Grandmother Buckingham lifted her train.

Never in my life had I imagined that so many people could crowd into Westminster Hall—not that I had had much occasion to consider the matter. I knew not whether to look at them or to look at the rafters of the hall above my head, which thanks to my squire I could see better than I ever had in my life. "Hold tight, my lady, and keep a sharp look-out," my squire hissed as the spectators pressed forward. "Some of them will try to grab at the ladies' gowns, for souvenirs."

I gasped and tightened my grip on the squire. As I did my little gold coronet drooped to one side a little, giving me what I suppose now must have been a rather jaunty air.

My gown and the other ladies' made it through Westminster Hall intact, though, and we arrived outside of Westminster Abbey unmolested. There waiting for us was the Archbishop of Canterbury, and surrounding him were so many other bishops and abbots that if the Lord Himself had suddenly appeared among them, I would not have been the least bit surprised. The Duke of Clarence, the Earl of Arundel, and the Duke of Norfolk had left their horses—which had been as splendidly attired as any human present—behind, and stood ready to lead the way into the abbey. With them, carried like me on the shoulders of a squire and looking far less pleased about it, was Harry. I caught his eye and smiled as Bessie stepped

out of her shoes to walk upon the striped cloth spread for her to make her way to the high altar. He made a motion with his mouth that could have been a grimace or a hint of a smile.

I decided to take it as a smile.

Behind Harry, a group of earls and barons, my father and my brother Anthony among them, and the newly made Knights of the Bath led my sister inside the abbey, Grandmother Buckingham still holding her train for dear life. It must have been heavy, for she looked as nearly as grim as Harry had, but she rallied as the procession started up again. Behind her were my mother and the king's sisters Elizabeth and Margaret, and behind them was—me. Snaking in back of us was a group of other richly clad ladies, including a few of my sisters. I knew not to look for the king, for it was not the custom for him to attend, but I did think it sad that he was missing all of this splendor. Perhaps he had found a secret place to watch, I hoped.

Bessie at last reached the altar and knelt as the Archbishop of Canterbury began to read in Latin, words that were incomprehensible to me but which Harry appeared to be following quite well, an accomplishment of which I knew his tutor, Master Giles, would be duly proud. At least the effort had distracted Harry from the indignity of being carried, for he no longer looked sullen but attentive.

The archbishop paused in his Latin, and my sister prostrated herself gracefully (a feat I would not have thought possible to accomplish gracefully until my sister did it) upon the red velvet cushions. More Latin followed, then Bessie rose. I watched impatiently as her circlet was removed and she was anointed with oil on her head. Then her gown was opened at the lacings specially provided for that purpose so that she could be anointed on the breasts. I would have giggled or shivered or blushed if the archbishop had been touching me so, I was sure, but my sister took this all with perfect composure; no one could have guessed that she had been threatening to faint not at all long before. A ring was blessed and put on Bessie's finger.

All eyes turned to the jewel-encrusted crown that had been sparkling on the altar all this time. The archbishop blessed it—an endless process

as far as I was concerned—and a coif was placed on my sister's pretty hair to keep safe the holy oil with which she had been anointed. Then, at last, the golden crown was placed on my sister's head, and she was led to her throne.

The squire who had carried me patiently on his back all this time looked up as one, then another, of my tears of pride splashed on his forehead. "Happy day, eh, Duchess?" he whispered.

"Oh, yes," I whispered back.



Bessie's crown must have carried with it some special powers, for a few weeks later, as I was sewing in her outer chamber, the queen gasped and without a word of warning ran into her inner chamber, where we heard the unmistakable and very unroyal sound of retching. My sister Anne, who was one of her ladies in waiting, hastened to help her, while Mama sat smiling on her chair. "The third time in three days," she said when Bessie finally emerged, looking decidedly greenish. "Have you mentioned this to the king?"

"I would like to wait a month or two, Mama, just—just in case. But I am certain. I was just as miserable when I was carrying Tom and Richard."

I gasped. "You mean you are to have a baby? That I am to be an aunt?"

"You already are an aunt," Anne pointed out as Bessie nodded blearily.

"But this is different," I said. Tom was a couple of years older than I, Richard about the same age. They hardly counted as nephews. Besides, this would be a royal baby—perhaps even a king. I stared at the queen's belly in awe. "How long?"

"February, I think. But keep quiet, Kate! The king must hear it from me first, and no one else, and not until I am quite certain."

"I can't tell even Harry?" I pouted.

"No. He might tell Humphrey, and Humphrey keeps nothing to himself." I nodded gloomily. Telling anything to Humphrey was equivalent to passing an Act of Parliament.

“John?” He was a great secret-keeper, having never revealed the unfortunate accident that had befallen Mama’s best hennin two years before when I sneaked it from her chamber to try it on. (How was I to know that my puppy would find it so irresistible?)

“Oh, all right. But tell him it is a secret.”

“Now?”

“Oh, go. You’ll be good for nothing if you don’t.”

Grinning, I raced down to the stables to find my brother.



Bessie had not been mistaken. On February 11, 1466, at Westminster, she bore the king his first child—not the hoped-for son, but a fine girl, whom the king named after Bessie. I helped attend my sister during her confinement in her last days of pregnancy and during the childbirth itself—men were not allowed in the birthing room, so Bessie had needed as much help as she could get—and came out of the ordeal with the certainty that whatever exactly Harry would have to do to get me with child, it could well wait for another ten years.

Little Elizabeth’s birth proved to be the impetus needed to get Cecily, Duchess of York, to court. I suppose like any other woman, she wanted to see her grandchild, no matter what she might feel about her daughter-in-law. The king, moreover, added a sweetener by asking her, along with my mother, to be one of her godparents.

All was being put in readiness for the christening of Bess, as she was called among the family, when the arrival of the Duchess of York was announced. She kissed the king, who was standing by the cradle admiring the dexterity and cunning with which Bess took a nap, as casually as if she had just seen him the previous day, and she greeted my sister as graciously as if Cecily had made the match between her and the king herself. The queen responded in kind, and the rest of us took our cue from her. It was as if we had known each other always, except that we didn’t know each other at all, which would have made for some awkward moments had it not been for Bess

choosing to awake at that moment and to commence howling at the top of her lungs. She was not a terribly attractive sight when she did this, and I decided that Harry could wait yet another five years before he begat any such creature on me.

Cecily nodded approvingly as two nurses nearly banged heads in their haste to comfort Bess. "She has her father's lungs," she said, turning to the king. "My, you would scream at the least provocation. And you had the finest nurse in all of Rouen."

I watched with interest as the quicker of the nurses picked up Bess and put her to her breast. Being the youngest of twelve, and of an age with or younger than my nephews, I had no experience in taking care of babies. With Bess quiet, she was considerably more appealing. I flicked out a finger and touched the fuzzy hair on her head. "It's so soft," I said reverently.

Cecily, wonder of wonders, looked at me and smiled. "One of your girls?" she asked my mother.

"Yes. The Duchess of Buckingham—Kate, that is—is my youngest."

"Ah, Harry Buckingham's wife. I remember him when he was a little lad." The Duchess of York's eyes took on a far-off look. "Much has changed since then."

By-and-by, it was time for the christening. The Duchess of York and Mama were little Elizabeth's godmothers; the Earl of Warwick—smiling and genial—was the godfather. His brother, George Neville, the Archbishop of York, officiated. I was not much given to thinking about such things then, but to older observers, the christening must have boded well: the king and his mother on good terms again, the Kingmaker content with his role and looking positively avuncular as he stood at the font with the king's firstborn child.

The older observers, of course, would have been dead wrong.

June 1468 to August 1468

I WAS JEALOUS. MARGARET, THE KING'S YOUNGEST SISTER, WAS GOING TO Burgundy to be married to its duke in July, and my brothers Anthony and John were to be in the wedding party accompanying her across the seas. I was not. "I could be of plenty of use," I told Harry and Humphrey, who were bearing all this with remarkable patience. "I could keep her gowns in order, and fetch things for her, and—"

"Kate, the king himself is staying here! So is almost everyone else in England. It's not as if you're the only one not going."

"Well, it feels that way," I said, and flounced off to heap a little guilt on John's shoulders.

I told my tale of woe to John as he sat studying my sister's stable accounts, but he only smiled. "Be reasonable, poppet. We all can't go."

"But you are going!"

"A lot of tiresome ceremonies, I'm sure."

"And jousting." John loved to joust.

"Well? It's not as if you can joust, after all."

"I ought to go! I am a duchess, after all. The youngest Duchess of Norfolk is going—and Harry's dukedom is far greater than the Duke of Norfolk's."

"Oh, the ducal nose is out of joint? That is the problem? Methinks your head has swollen a little, poppet."

I was silent. It was true that I did enjoy my position very much. Whenever there was a procession, I was near the front of the ladies, behind only the

king's sisters, and I loved wearing my small, jeweled, golden coronet, which glittered so prettily on my sandy head, on those grand occasions. Perhaps I had also been a bit too forward lately in reminding my own sisters (all married now, but none higher than to earls' heirs) of my superior rank.

John was my favorite brother; I could never pretend otherwise. I loved him even better than my father, whom I had not seen as much when I was little. To have him looking disapprovingly at me was more than I could bear. "Am I that awful, John? Truly, I didn't mean to be!" My eyes began to well with tears.

"Kate! For God's sake, don't cry. Tone it down a little, is all I advise. We know you're a duchess, after all."

"All right, John. I will mend my ways, I promise." I tried to look as humble as I could. "I will go now and read my Book of Hours."

"Stay a while, sweetheart, before you turn too holy on us. We haven't talked lately." He patted the seat beside him, and I settled in happily. "I'll tell you, though, our family has put some noses out of joint lately. Truth be told, that's probably why of the family, only Anthony and I are accompanying the Lady Margaret abroad."

"How?"

"Well, with myself and you married so well, and all of the other girls married now—"

"But their husbands were happy to marry them! I know that some of them asked the king for the chance. Bessie said so."

"True, but people think what they want to think, and some want to think that the men were given no choice. And with other girls—though none as fair as the Woodvilles, I'll grant—going begging for matches, some are upset."

"Oh, you are speaking about Warwick's girls again, I wager! I don't see why they can't marry the king's brothers and be done with it."

"Me neither, but I'm the queen's Master of Horse, not the king's adviser. And when Bessie bought the Exeter girl's marriage from the duchess, it made things even worse with Warwick."

Warwick's nephew, young George Neville, had been expected to marry the Duchess of Exeter's little girl, Anne, who would inherit all of the Exeter estates. Then Bessie had bought the marriage for her own eldest son, Tom, for four thousand marks. They had had a lovely wedding at Greenwich, though not as lovely, I thought complacently, as my own. "Well? She paid a fair price for it, and the Duchess of Exeter was well content."

John shrugged. "True. But to Warwick it was just something else snatched from his hand. Then there is Father. His having been made an earl, and treasurer and constable of England—"

Papa had looked so pleased and so proud when he was girded with his earl's belt. Earl Rivers! "But why should he not be? He does his work well; I heard the king telling someone so."

"He deserves it. But for some it's a matter of too far, too fast. And the king has raised others as well, which doesn't suit the likes of Warwick. William Herbert, for instance. And now Warwick's in another huff because of this upcoming marriage of the Lady Margaret's. He wanted a match with France."

There was a lot, I realized, I was missing in my snug little cocoon at Greenwich.



After my talk with John, I made a conscientious effort to be rather less irritatingly grand, and I was duly rewarded by heaven (as I saw it) when I was allowed to travel in the entourage taking Margaret to the coast. The Earl of Warwick, again putting his displeasure aside (he did a lot of that in those days, I must admit), was one of the party. He rode beside Margaret, though, well away from my brothers.

Harry too went with us to Margate, from where the future Duchess of Burgundy set sail, not to return to England for many years. Humphrey stayed at Greenwich, for consumption, which had been clawing at him for years, had him firmly in its grip. The winter had been a bad one for him, and the milder conditions of spring and summer did nothing to restore him.

My sister called in the best physicians for him, but to no avail. The next person she sent for was Harry and Humphrey's mother, Margaret, Countess of Stafford.

Though the countess was my mother-in-law, I had never met her, for she never came to court. For one thing, she was a Beaufort, and the Beauforts were not in favor with the king. Harry's maternal grandfather, Edmund Beaufort, the first Duke of Somerset, had died at St. Albans. His sons had kept up the fight. For a time, Henry Beaufort, the eldest—whom my own father had served in his Lancastrian days—had appeared to accept King Edward, but he had turned traitor and had led troops against the king, leading to his execution four years before. The other sons, Edmund and John, had escaped and were living in Burgundy.

Their sister Margaret, Harry's mother, had remarried after Harry's father died and had a little girl, another Margaret. She did not live with her husband, Richard Darell, however, but in a convent, which I thought was a most peculiar place for a countess who was not a widow. Cecilia had once told me that there was something not quite right about her that made her live there instead of with her husband and child, but she had not elaborated. Harry seldom spoke of her, and when he did, he was so guarded that I knew instinctively not to bring the subject up on my own.

By the time the countess arrived at Greenwich, a few weeks after we had returned from Margate, Humphrey was beyond the reach of any physician. There was nothing for his mother and Grandmother Buckingham and Harry to do but sit in his chamber and wait. I joined them there on occasion, for Humphrey was my brother-in-law as well as my playmate, but I felt as if I were an intruder on the family's grief. So for the most part, I went around my daily business of learning to be a great lady, occasionally coming to Humphrey's outer chamber to wait for news.

The third or fourth day of this, I had no need to ask for news; I could hear Humphrey fighting for each breath even behind the heavy wooden door of his chamber, could see the priest and the physician rush in and know that it was the former and not the latter who was needed most. At

last, the room was silent. Humphrey had given up the struggle. Then I heard another sound: Harry's sobs.

I rushed into the chamber and straight to Harry, who was kneeling by the bed, his face hidden in the coverlet. I barely noticed Humphrey, lying on the bed and holding a cross in his lifeless hands. "Harry! I'm so sorry."

He did not turn his head. "Go away."

"But Harry—" I touched him on the arm.

He did turn his head now, and shoved me away so hard that I nearly reeled onto the bed and into poor Humphrey. "Why couldn't it have been one of your brothers and sisters? There are so many of them, and just one of Humphrey! Or you? What do I need with a wife? It should have been one of you. Not my only brother!"

"Harry!" Grandmother Buckingham put down her handkerchief to stare at him in horror. "Kate—"

But I was already gone.



I was sitting in my chamber embroidering—or rather, in my present mood, stabbing a needle through a poor defenseless square of cloth—and making a mental list of all of the things I hated about Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, when someone knocked. "Come in," I said sullenly, regretting this interruption of my list. It was shaping up to be a long one.

Harry's mother entered, without the nuns who usually were by her side, and I realized as she did that I had never been alone with her during her visit. I had been looking for whatever was not quite right about her and had not yet seen it, for she was a pleasant-looking woman, dressed very plainly for a countess, though, and not much given to conversation. She was still a Lancastrian, though, and so good a Yorkist had I become, I wondered if I should check her for horns. "Katherine?"

She didn't even know I preferred "Kate." "Yes, my lady?"

"Harry did not mean what he said a while ago."

"It sounded to me as if he did," I said sulkily.

“When people are grieving they say foolish things sometimes. Harry loved Humphrey very much, you know.” She brushed at her eyes and added, “Probably more than he loves me.”

I wondered if she had meant me to hear that.

In a stronger voice, she said, “He was speaking out of shock, you see.”

“But poor Humphrey was always sick. No one expected him to live long.” Too late, I remembered that I was speaking to Humphrey’s mother, who might not appreciate this sound common sense. “I beg your pardon, my lady.”

“There is truth in what you say. I knew this day would come. But all of us hoped in a way too that it never would, and I think Harry hoped that more than any. So you see? He did not intend to hurt you just now. I know he will repent of what he said later. He was so fond of his broth—”

Her eyes began to fill with tears. I remembered that she had lost one brother to the headsman and had two others far away, whom she might never see again. Impulsively, I put my arms around her, Lancastrian or no. “I am so sorry about Humphrey, my lady. I liked him.”

She cried a little, then touched my hair. “You are a good girl. Now I want you to do something for me. Will you go find Harry now, and keep him company? I think that will do him good.”

“But he won’t want me there. And I will probably say the wrong thing.”

“I think just your being there will make him feel a little better. You needn’t say much at all.”

“Well, where is he?”

“I don’t know. I thought you might.”

“Oh, he is in his secret place, I suppose. I know where that is, though I’m not supposed to. Humphrey told me.” I looked at his mother apologetically. “Humphrey never was any good at keeping secrets. Oh! I’m sorry, my lady. But he really wasn’t.”

The countess almost smiled. “No, he wasn’t, indeed.” She pinched my cheek. “I think they did right to pick you as Harry’s bride.”

By the banks of the Thames a large tree had fallen years ago, providing a natural if not a particularly comfortable seat. Shrubbery grew unchecked around it, making the spot a secluded one. Harry and Humphrey, who both liked to fish, had dragged a wooden chest there in which they stored their tackle. It was a boys-only spot, Humphrey had told me even as he parted with his secret, and I had dutifully stayed away except to wander there sometimes when I knew the brothers were elsewhere. I had even sat there myself from time to time, but I failed to see the attraction of the place, and quickly had left to sit in my own favorite spot at Greenwich, underneath a large oak tree where a person who was obviously fond of the creature comforts of life had erected a bench that afforded an excellent view of the Thames. Perhaps Margaret of Anjou herself had put it up.

Having arrived at the boys' lair, I pressed through the shrubbery. Sure enough, Harry was sitting on the fallen tree, a rod in his hand and a line dangling in the water. His thin face had a puffy look, and I suspected that he had been crying hard not long before my arrival.

"Go away."

I decided against telling Harry that his mother had sent me. "Greenwich is my sister's property. I can go where I please here as much as you can."

To my surprise, Harry conceded the point with a shrug. "Don't fall in, then," he offered as I gingerly made my way along the slippery bank.

"I won't."

I sat down on the tree, careful not to sit too close to Harry, and watched the Thames flow and the occasional boat pass as Harry sat in silence. No fish showed any interest in his line.

After a while, the sun and the silence soon made me drowsy. I closed my eyes, only to hear Harry's voice. "Kate? I'm leaving now. You'd best come with me. You shouldn't sit here all by yourself."

The remark struck me as absurd, but I did not argue. Dutifully standing up to leave, I watched as Harry stowed his fishing gear in the box, then carefully locked it. "Someday I could fish with you?" I suggested cautiously.

“You don’t know how.”

“Yes, I do. John taught—I mean, I do know how.” I cursed myself for my gaffe in mentioning my superbly healthy brother. “I can bait a hook and cast a line, and I was very quiet just now, and did nothing to scare the fish. You saw that.”

“Yes. Well, maybe someday. They weren’t biting today, I guess you noticed.”

“Yes, I did notice.” I had also noticed when Harry pulled his line from the water that Harry had not even baited the hook, but I kept my counsel.

He walked up the slope and pushed through the brush, then turned and gave me his hand to help me. “Be careful.” Then he said to the ground, “You’re not bad company, for a girl.”

It was, I knew, the equivalent to a heartfelt apology.



Humphrey’s body was taken to Pleshey to be buried next to that of his father. I had come to like Harry’s mother, and when it came time for her to return to her convent, I felt sorry for her. As she and her nun companions made ready to leave, accompanied by only two manservants, I ventured to ask, “Will you come back soon to court, my lady? I am sure the king would be glad to have you.”

She smiled at my naïveté. “Hardly, I fear. My brothers still work to overthrow your king, child.”

“But surely you do not—”

“My allegiance is to the House of Lancaster, and always will be.” My mouth dropped open, and the countess chucked me on the chin. “It shocks you, good little Yorkist that you are, and I am sorry for it. Never fear, I do not spy or plot; I am not even in communication with my brothers. It would endanger Harry and all whom I love. But I can pray, and I pray daily for the restoration of King Henry to the throne.” I shuddered at such heresy, and Harry’s mother smiled again. “Anyway, even if Edward wanted

me at his court, it is an odious place to me. My Harry must stay there because he is a ward of the crown, and I would do nothing to interfere with his Stafford inheritance. But it is not a place I wish to be. Not while York sits on the throne.”

She looked at Harry, who I think had been hoping that she would agree to extend her stay. Quietly, she said, “And there is another reason why I keep to myself. Has Harry told you?”

I shook my head.

“Mother—”

“Hush, Harry. The child is your wife, and should know.” She turned toward me. “Several years ago, Kate, after the birth of my daughter, the demons came upon me, and I tried to do violence to myself—and to her. We were both saved, thank the Lord, but my husband decided that I should not live with him and her after that, and he was right. I lived with his mother for a time, and when she died, I moved to where I am now. The nuns take good care of me, and when my fits of melancholy come upon me, they tend me and bring me out of them with prayer. I fear Humphrey’s death will bring another on.”

She shuddered, and one nun gently touched her shoulder. “They have never been as bad since that first time, my lady.”

“Yes. God has been merciful.” She kissed me and then tightly hugged Harry, who had been staring at the ground. “You are growing into a man, Harry. I hear you will be moving to Westminster soon?”

“Yes. It is time I learned more of the arts of war, the king—Edward—says.”

Margaret smiled. “Learn them well, and perhaps you can put them to use for Lancaster one day!” She shook her head. “No, I should not say that. Your loyalties are torn enough as it is. Be a true man and an honest one, York or Lancaster, and I shall be well satisfied.”

She kissed Harry and let a man assist her onto a horse. After we had stopped waving good-bye and she was well out of sight, I said, “Harry—”

“Don’t you ever tell anyone of what she said just now. Never.”

“All right, Harry.”

He stared after her a little while longer. "Let's go fishing," he said at last, and we turned away.

Harry: January 1469 to March 1469

SOON AFTER MY GRANDFATHER WAS KILLED AT NORTHAMPTON IN 1460, Cecily of York and her children left us for London, where they waited for the Duke of York to join them from abroad. Warwick, though he had captured King Henry just as that creature George had said, made a great show of being his obedient subject, but no one was fooled, even less so after the Duke of York returned to Westminster and placed his hand upon the throne. His obvious intentions did not meet with the reception he wished, and war broke out anew. Within a matter of months, the Duke of York and his second son, Edmund, died in battle outside Wakefield, King Henry was a fugitive, Margaret of Anjou was traveling about desperately trying to raise troops, and the Duke of York's eldest son, Edward, the Earl of March, was on the throne as Edward IV. It was a confusing time to be an Englishman.

During all of this tumult, I had been left undisturbed in my grandmother's household, and my position did not change when the throne came to York. I was lucky, I realize now. The new king could have found some pretext to seize my grandfather's estates, depriving me of them, but he did not, nor did he prevent my dukedom from descending to me. No doubt it helped that my grandmother was aunt to both the king and the Kingmaker and sister to the king's mother. If Grandmother was not happy with the latest turn of events—and I am heartily sure that she was not—she wisely kept her opinions to herself.

I was lonely after the York children left us, and my grandmother,

recognizing this, sent for my younger brother Humphrey to join me. Being so young, he was not ideal company at first, but once he reached an age where we could play together more readily, we became inseparable. Together we went to live with the king's sister in 1464, when the king purchased my wardship from my grandmother, and together we went to the queen's household the following year. I enjoyed the chance to be the older brother to Humphrey, and tried my best to shield him from any harm. When he died despite my best efforts, I was grief-stricken.

Fortunately, this sad time in my life was soon followed by a happier occasion: my turning thirteen. I continued to learn my lessons with my tutor Master Giles and the rest, but it was necessary that I spend more time learning the manly arts as well. Because this knowledge was quite beyond the queen's ken, I was moved to Westminster in the early part of 1469.

My cousin Richard—made the Duke of Gloucester after his brother was crowned king—was there as well. Until recently, he had been staying in the Earl of Warwick's household, learning the many lessons that mighty man could impart, but he at sixteen was, evidently, now considered old enough to take up some responsibilities for the king, which included helping occasionally with my own knightly training. This time, unlike those days at my grandparents' manor of Writtle, we became friends.

"Friends" is an understatement, however, for I loved him, as a matter of fact. Why wouldn't I? Richard was bright, charming, and confident; he was trusted by his brother the king; he had come through Warwick's schooling (so I heard from the other boys and young men at Westminster) with nothing but acclaim. I was thirteen, three years his junior, raised mostly in the company of women and of my beloved but frail younger brother. Quick in my studies, I knew little of the ways of men. Richard was everything I wanted to be.

I like to think that our friendship was not entirely one-sided. There was that three-year gap between us, to be sure, but I was no longer as insufferable as I had been when I was age four. I was not as nearly as important to the Duchess of Exeter and to the queen and king as I had

been to my grandmother, and Humphrey's presence had made me more bearable as well. And I was not without winning qualities myself, I hope. Be that as it may, Richard must have had some regard for me, for we began to go out riding sometimes even when he was not required to give me instruction.

It was on one of those rides that Richard asked me, "How does it feel, being married?"

I was pleased that this was a matter about which Richard, for once, knew nothing. "Kate will make a good wife, I suppose. She's pretty and sweet."

"You don't mind that she came with no portion? From a family of nobodies?"

"The Duchess of Bedford isn't a nobody," I pointed out. "She was married to the fourth Henry's brother."

"*Was* is the operative word, Harry."

"But she's still a duchess. My grandmother is married now to Sir Walter Blount, Lord Mountjoy, and she's still a duchess. And they're our family now anyway—the Woodvilles, that is."

"If you say so. You could have married one of Warwick's girls, you know."

"Yes, Grandmother told me once." I frowned. "How did you know?"

"The earl told me. He said that he had hoped Isabel or Anne would have married you. What an estate that would have been! Your estates and half of the Countess of Warwick's Beauchamp and Despenser estates. Of course, the Warwick estates are entailed in the male line, so his nephew will inherit. Still, that would have been grand for you."

"Kate will be a beauty one day, I expect. And she's from good childbearing stock."

"So is many a peasant."

I did not much like this conversation, for I was genuinely fond of Kate. Low-born on her father's side she might well be, but she was certainly no peasant. "Well, I like her, and that's important too. What if I had married one of the Warwick girls and we didn't get along?"

“Oh, they’re agreeable girls, and pretty too. I’ll probably marry one of them, most likely Anne, as she’s the younger. You would have gotten along. But if you didn’t, it wouldn’t matter if you didn’t like her. You could pack her off to some manor and come back just long enough from time to time to beget a child upon her.”

“I could do that with Kate. I will have sufficient estates.” (It was time, I thought, I reminded Richard of this.) “And I don’t want to pack her off! When she’s old enough, I think I shall like her in my bed.” I blushed as I touched upon a subject I thought about altogether too much lately, though not yet, of course, with little Kate as the object. (At the time, Margaret, Duchess of Burgundy, if you must know—and what harm can you knowing possibly do me now?—was the main occupant of my thoughts in that direction.)

“Oh, there are mistresses for that.”

This was too much. “You’re not going to tell me you have a mistress!”

“But I do. Soon I’ll have a bastard, as a matter of fact.”

“She’s with child?”

“That’s the way it works, old man.”

I sat back in my saddle, amazed at the worldliness of the man—I could call him nothing but a man now—at my side. “How do you get one? A mistress?”

“Easy enough when you’re a king’s brother. Or even just an ordinary duke, maybe,” he said kindly, to give me hope. “Women push themselves forward. It’s just a matter of picking one who’s the most fair and personable. I suppose you don’t even have to pick just one, but more than one can get complicated, not to say expensive.”

I nodded in what I hoped was a jaded manner. “Richard, when—I mean, can—”

He was good at guessing my thoughts back then. “You’re a bit young, I think, to taste the pleasures of life. When you’re older, there’s some houses I can take you to.”

“In Southwark,” I said, eager to prove that I was not entirely ignorant.

“Yes, that’s the place. I’ll take you there when you’re sixteen.” He snorted. “If Ned hasn’t already taken you by then.”



During my thirteenth year, my mind was not always preoccupied with carnal matters. I spent a great deal of time thinking about my family—the family I’d been born into, not the one into which I’d married.

My Beaufort grandfather died in battle while I was still in my mother’s womb, as I have said earlier, but he left behind three sons, my uncles. The eldest, Henry, the second Duke of Somerset, had been carried off half dead from the first battle of St. Albans, after which he had waged war against the House of York and the Earl of Warwick for years until finally making his peace with Edward. The king, at least, had been sincere in his desire for reconciliation; he’d hunted with my uncle, arranged a tournament in his honor, even done him the great honor of allowing him to sleep beside him. But Henry Beaufort had either been planning to rebel all along or undergone a change of heart. He soon fell back in with some of his old comrades, who rose against the king. It was a fateful choice. John Neville, the Kingmaker’s younger brother, defeated the Duke of Somerset’s troops at Hexham in 1464. My uncle and thirty others were executed straight-away. No one in the Duchess of Exeter’s household, where I was living at the time, saw fit to tell me the news; I found out later when I heard some servants gossiping.

There were two other Beaufort uncles left to me after that: Edmund (who called himself the third Duke of Somerset, though the king said that he had no right to do so) and the youngest, John. They had fled abroad after the defeat at Hexham and were now living under the protection of Charles, the Duke of Burgundy—much to the irritation of Edward, whose sister Margaret was Charles’s duchess.

I, of course, had never met any of these uncles, which gave them all a certain glamour to me. No one spoke to me of them, save for my mother when Humphrey died; it was as if I were not supposed to know that they

existed. One day, Kate and I were playing at bowls in the queen's chambers when the king stormed in, muttering about Duke Charles sheltering the whoreson Edmund Beaufort, the Duke of Sowshit, and then he noticed me and hastily changed the subject, saving his rant for a more private time, I suppose. Fortunately, others were less circumspect than the king, and I picked up information about my Beaufort uncles here and there. I wondered if I looked like them or had any of their mannerisms.

My Stafford uncles were another matter. There were two of them, Henry and John, and both had made their peace with York. Owing to that, I saw them now and then, so neither, of course, interested me nearly as much as the Beauforts.

With half of my family for Lancaster and the other half for York, I naturally spent, as I said earlier, a lot of time thinking about the subject. My mind should have been made up for me, I suppose, as I was married to the queen's sister and was being raised at Edward's court. But it was not. Edward was affable enough to me back then, when he noticed me, and I adored Richard and tolerated George. But I was named for King Henry, and I could not forget that or my relatives who had died fighting for his cause.

King Henry had been in the Tower since 1465, having been a fugitive for months before finally being captured and taken there. I would look at the fortress when my travels brought me by it and wonder what it was like for a man who had been king since he was nine months old to be a prisoner there. Once or twice, I even wondered about getting permission to visit him. I said as much one day to Richard, who replied, "Are you daft, Harry? How much of a Lancastrian are you, anyway?"

"I was named after him, after all. And Grandmother Buckingham was godmother to his son. Grandfather presented his baby son to King Henry after Henry had been ill for all of that time."

Richard snorted. "Ill, Harry? Mad as midsummer, you mean. I'd not brag about that connection if I were you."

"I don't. I just get curious."

“Ned wonders about you, you know, with your Beaufort blood, whether it will out. And it doesn’t help that you are always asking all and sundry about those uncles of yours.”

I flushed. I thought I had been more subtle. “Well, what I am supposed to do? Pretend they don’t exist, as does everyone else?”

“At the moment, that might be a good idea. Have you forgotten what happened last autumn to Poynings and Alford?”

I had not forgotten. Though you couldn’t have guessed it from life at Greenwich or Sheen, Edward had never been all that secure on his throne. Each time one threat to it was removed, another popped up, and last year had been a particularly bad one. That summer, Thomas Cook, a rich draper who had been the mayor of London for a time, had been convicted of misprision of treason for not revealing a Lancastrian plot to kill the king. He’d been fined eight thousand marks, and he should have been grateful that was all that had happened to him; that same autumn, Henry Courtenay, Thomas Hungerford, and the Earl of Oxford had been arrested. The earl had gone free—it helped that he had wed Warwick’s sister—but perhaps terrified of the fate that had claimed his father and his brother, he had implicated John Poynings and William Alford, servants of the Duke of Norfolk. When in Burgundy in the Duchess of Norfolk’s train, they had taken the opportunity to communicate with my uncle Edmund Beaufort, who frequented the Duke of Burgundy’s court. For that, Poynings and Alford had lost their heads in November. Other deaths had followed; it had been a fine season for London’s executioners. “I suppose you’re right. I shouldn’t mention my Beaufort uncles.”

“That would be wise indeed. Especially because, if you ask me, more treason will soon be afoot.”

“Oh? I thought the king had taken care of his enemies.”

“For the time being, but Ned’s shortsighted. He doesn’t realize how the Earl of Warwick and others detest his favorites. Your Woodville in-laws and that lot. Or if he does realize, he can’t be bothered to worry about it.”

“They’re your in-laws too. And what have they done that’s so offensive?”

“It’s not so much what they’ve done as who they are. Upstarts. Warwick feels pushed aside, especially after the king made that alliance with Burgundy when Warwick was pressing for France. And Ned isn’t as popular as he once was. His taxes have irritated people; trade isn’t all that it could be. The laws aren’t enforced properly; order isn’t kept. Sometimes I think Ned’s a little lazy, to be honest. If I were—” He stopped and looked me full in the face. “I’ve been speaking to you very frankly of Ned and his faults. Too frankly, really. Don’t say anything of this conversation, Harry, will you?”

“Of course not,” I said.

And I kept my promise. Only on one occasion have I ever been untrue to Richard.

Kate: March 1469 to December 1469

IN 1467 BESSIE BORE THE KING ANOTHER DAUGHTER, MARY. IN MARCH of 1469, she gave birth to the king's third child—yet another daughter, named Cecily after the king's mother, who naturally was the baby's god-mother. If Edward was bothered by the lack of a son, he did not make it apparent, and we had another grand christening, with a festive churching a month later.

Not long after Bessie's churching in April, word arose of a rising up north. (I have never been to the North, by the way. I cannot say that I regret this.) It was led by someone who gave himself the absurd name of Robin Mend-All, and John Neville, who had recently been made Earl of Northumberland for his loyalty to the king, handily put it down.

Then yet another group of northern malcontents appeared. This group wished to restore Henry Percy, a youth who had been long imprisoned in the Tower, to his family's earldom—the earldom, in fact, that had been given to John Neville. Neville put this rising down as efficiently as the last, and beheaded the leader—who was yet another person calling himself Robin, this one Robin of Holderness—for good measure.

Then Robin Mend-All surfaced again in June.

The king decided that traveling to the North himself would be the best way to deal with the problem, but neither he nor anyone else saw any reason to rush. Instead, he went ahead with plans to go on a pilgrimage to Bury St. Edmunds and to Walsingham, then to make his way north.

My father and my brothers Anthony and John accompanied him, as did Richard, Duke of Gloucester.

Much as I had sulked when I could not accompany Margaret of York to Burgundy, Harry outdid me when he found that he was not to go on pilgrimage with the king, for he was a great admirer of the Duke of Gloucester and had also hoped to see a touch of battle up north. The king, however, was adamant. Harry was to stay with the queen, who herself was traveling to Fotheringhay Castle. In the king's absence, he reminded Harry, who better to escort the queen on her travels than a duke?

"Richard could get to fight. And I must travel with the queen and her mites!"

Needless to say, this speech was directed to me and not to the king. "They surely wouldn't let you fight yet. You're still only thirteen."

"But I could watch and learn, and help the men get into their armor. Instead, I'm stuck with a bunch of women!"

I tried to look sympathetic, but in truth I was delighted about our trip, and also pleased that Harry would be coming along. He had spent so much time at Westminster lately that I had not seen much of him. And when I did see him, all I heard about was Richard, Richard, Richard. Maybe a separation would mean that I wouldn't have to hear so much about the wonderful Duke of Gloucester, who, if Harry could be believed, combined the best qualities of Richard the Lionhearted, the Black Prince, and Henry V.

So to Fotheringhay Castle we went, with the queen's two oldest girls forming part of the company. It was pretty country, but somewhat dull compared to Greenwich with its proximity to London, so I was duly grateful when, at the end of June, the king and his entourage joined us. Papa was not with them, being off in our manor of Middleton raising troops, but John and Anthony were there. I greeted them with delight, but my joy was as nothing compared to the greeting Harry gave Richard.

"Have you seen the castle?" Richard asked later, when the royal party was all settled in and we were relaxing in a solar.

Seated beside Harry in a window seat, I assumed that I was included in

the question. "Why, of course. It's been so quiet here, there's been nothing to do but explore."

Richard looked at me as if it were the castle laundress who had dared to join in on this conversation. "Well, I suppose that's true. Still, I was born here, you know. Harry, I've a fancy to see the chamber. Would you like to come along?"

Harry did not wait to answer, but got up straightaway, leaving me forlorn and alone in my window seat until John took Harry's place. "Where's our young buck off to?"

"The chamber where Richard was born," I muttered.

John laughed and patted me on the knee. "The holy shrine! That will have to do unless Harry can get to Bethlehem one day, I suppose."

"I don't understand what Harry sees in him," I said sulkily, after some snickering. "He's not nearly as fine as the king, I think."

"Hero worship. Common enough in lads his age; he'll grow out of it. Why, there's the one I worshipped when I was Buckingham's age," he added as our oldest brother walked over to lounge at our side.

I had always been rather in awe of Anthony myself. He was much more handsome than the rest of my brothers (though John's looks were the type that grew on one), and people still talked of the great joust Anthony had had with the Bastard of Burgundy not that long after Bessie married the king. Yet he was not merely a comely man and a splendid jousting. He was much more learned than anyone in our family, though Lionel, who was in his teens now and had entered the Church, showed some promise in that direction. Although all of us Woodvilles spoke excellent French thanks to Mama, Anthony could write and translate from it also, as easily as if it were his first language. He even wrote verses, though only his wife, Elizabeth Scales, saw most of them.

Perhaps because of all of these accomplishments, I had never been as close to Anthony as I was to John, or even as I was to my youngest and wildest brother, Edward. I looked up at him almost shyly as he stood beside us. "What's this?"

"We were discussing idol worship. Oh, not that kind, Anthony, don't

look so perturbed! Harry Buckingham's for Gloucester, and mine for you, to be more exact."

"Yours for me? Why?"

"Merely because you do everything so well, and so much better than the rest of us."

"Oh? I seem to recall you distinguishing yourself in Burgundy. Prince of the Tournament, wasn't it? You put me quite to shame. I was proud of you. Still am."

For the first time in my life, I saw John at a loss for words. "Well, thank you," he muttered at last. "A lot of it was luck, I believe."

"Luck, against some of the finest jousters in Europe? I think skill was more likely."

With the king seeing some petitioners in the castle's great hall, and Gloucester reliving his youth with Harry in tow, there was none but us Woodvilles in the solar now. Perhaps eager to change the subject, John said so that my sister could hear, "Well, we've news of George. The wedding that he's not supposed to be making is proceeding along apace."

"Don't speak of that in front of Edward, John. It's one of the few subjects that turns him ill-tempered."

The Earl of Warwick had long wanted to marry his daughters to George and Richard (Harry having been taken), and George, now nineteen, had been eager to oblige with seventeen-year-old Isabel. The king, however, had forbidden the match, partly out of irritation at the earl's high-handedness in demanding it, partly because he wanted to give George to a foreign bride. Undeterred, the earl and George had pressed on with their plans (Isabel's point of view in all of this was unknown, of course), and rumor had it that the Pope had granted his dispensation a few months back.

"I won't, Bessie, trust me. But you have to admire the sheer gall of the man. It's to take place in Calais, they say, and Warwick's been inviting all and sundry to the wedding. No secret marriage here! Er, sorry, Bessie."

"Apology taken," my sister said sweetly.

“Why doesn’t the king just lock up George?” I asked. “And Warwick?”

“It’s an awkward situation,” said Anthony. “Warwick’s very popular with the people. At his house in London, they say, anyone who comes by at mealtime can walk away with all of the meat he can carry, which always wins friends. Same at his other residences. Up north, he’s a positive hero.”

“He can well afford all that largesse,” said John. “For all that he complains about our marriages, he did well in that area himself, through a couple of lucky deaths that made his countess a great heiress. Of course, it helps that he’s taken to piracy on occasion.” John was quiet for a moment, then pulled a dreadful face.

“John! What’s wrong?”

“My invitation! I’ve lost my invitation to the wedding!”

“Really?” I asked, for John looked so mournful.

“Of course not, poppet, I’m only being foolish. Do you think we Woodvilles would be invited to the marriage? Not even my wife has been invited, thanks to her folly in marrying me. So I’m deeply affected—though not as bad as Anthony. Just look at him. He’s in a brown study.”

“I had something else on my mind, actually. This rising by this Robin Mend-All—”

“Robin of Redesdale in formal company,” added John.

“This rising by whatever you call the man. Sometimes I wonder if there’s not a stronger hand behind it. A strong hand like Warwick’s.”

“What gives you that idea?”

“Nothing I can put my finger on. But coming at the same time of this marriage, which is such a blatant act of defiance of the king, something in it seems suspicious.”

“Have you told the king of your suspicions?” asked Bessie.

“No. They’re too vague as of yet. To tell the king without good grounds to support them would be to have him think that we are trying to estrange him further from Warwick. If this marriage takes place, all will likely become clear soon enough.”

The king tarried at Fotheringhay for several days, awaiting men and

supplies. We in the queen's household were rather busy, for we were preparing to go to Norwich, where the king had been received warmly in early June. So pleased had he been by the city's welcome, which appeared all the more gracious in contrast with the northern troubles, that he had pledged that his queen would visit.

We set out on our journey the same day that the king's party set out on its own way northward. "Do be careful," Bessie warned the men, having embraced her brothers and then been kissed good-bye by the king in a manner that made me sigh romantically and Harry roll his eyes.

"Don't worry," said Edward. "We'll take care of the wretches—if there are any of the churls left by the time we get there." He grinned and locked my sister into another long embrace.

Harry parted from Richard with such reluctance that I, having parted affectionately but calmly from my brother Anthony, rolled my own eyes. Then came time for me to embrace John, and I found that I could hardly bear to let him go. "There could be a battle!" I wailed, holding onto him stubbornly.

"The king is right, sweetheart. Don't worry." John pried me loose and smiled at me. "The king has many men. They'll make short work of our cocky friend Robin." I giggled at the pun, on which John had laid a great deal of emphasis so I would not miss it. "That's a good girl! Frankly, I think you're in for a rougher time than we are."

"How?"

"You'll have to listen to every man of any importance in Norwich giving a long-winded speech of welcome, that's why."

"Oh," I said gloomily.

John laughed and mounted his horse. "Picture them in their drawers, sweetheart. That's what I always do."



Despite a few speeches, which fortunately were not long enough for me to have to utilize John's advice, the citizens of Norwich put on a wonderful

spectacle—even Harry was impressed, I think, although he wouldn’t admit to it. The angel Gabriel himself greeted us, along with all twelve apostles, two patriarchs, and sixteen virgins. There were pageants, and singing by boys with voices so sweet they might have been angels themselves. All would have gone wonderfully had it not been for the drenching rain that started with barely a warning cloud, forcing the citizens to hustle Bessie and the rest of us to our lodgings at the Friars Preachers while the city fathers and the performers tried frantically to salvage the materials upon which they had bestowed so much time and effort.

We had been in Norwich for a day or so, and the rain had yet to let up, when one of Edward’s messengers, grim-faced, came to see the queen in her modest lodgings. He and she conferred in low tones while her ladies stitched and Harry tried to teach me to play chess.

Even I could see that my sister was badly shaken when at last the messenger left. She waved us all over to her—even Harry and me.

“The Duke of Clarence and Isabel Neville have married,” she said. “But that was expected, and is not the worst of it. The day after the wedding, Clarence and the Earl of Warwick issued a proclamation. They claim that England has fallen into a dreadful state, and they blame it all upon our family and the king’s other friends. They name Papa, Anthony, and John. Even Mama. And the Earl of Pembroke, the Earl of Devon, and Lord Audley. They plan to cross to England, and then take an armed force to Canterbury to seek a remedy and reformation.”

“Remedy?” asked Anne. “What type of remedy?”

“They do not say. But they compare the king to Edward II, Richard II, and the last Henry.”

All three of them, deposed. And even I knew of the fates of the first two. I shuddered, and Harry in one of his bursts of protectiveness put his arm around me. “Maybe Kate should lea—”

“No!”

“There’s not much more to tell anyway,” said Bessie. “The king has sent Papa and Anthony and John away for their own safety. I do not want to

frighten any of you, least of all Kate, but the king wished us to be aware of the situation. He still seems quite confident that all will be well, and he wishes us to stay in Norwich until we next hear from him. He is raising more men, and the Earls of Pembroke and Devon will be dealing with Robin of Redesdale.”

“Robin of Redesdale?” Anthony’s wife, Elizabeth Scales, one of my sister’s ladies, asked. “Why not with Warwick and his followers?”

Bessie’s hands trembled, and I wondered if she entirely shared the king’s confidence.

“Because Anthony was right about Robin of Redesdale,” she replied. “His real name is John Conyers. And he is Warwick’s man.”



In early August, another messenger rode to us at Norwich, this time from William Hastings, the king’s closest friend. He knelt before Bessie and said, “I can do no better than to put this plainly to you, your grace, and then explain. The king is Warwick’s captive.”

My sister has been called many things, most of them untrue, but none have ever dared to call her a weakling. She took this news and remained standing upright. “Explain.”

“Has your grace heard the news from Edgecote?” Bessie shook her head. “Several days ago, Pembroke’s and Devon’s Welshmen engaged with the men of that Robin of Redesdale. There had been some sort of quarrel between Pembroke and Devon, and Devon’s forces were slow to arrive. By the time they did, it was too late. Our men were outnumbered, and they were slaughtered. Devon escaped, but Pembroke and his brother were taken and beheaded on Warwick’s orders the next day.”

The Earl of Pembroke, William Herbert, was father-in-law to my sister Mary. I gasped as Bessie said, “For supporting their lawful king?”

“It is madness, your grace. The king was unaware of all this. He was at Nottingham during the battle, and had planned to join forces with Pembroke and Devon. At Northampton, he heard the news. My lord and the Duke of

Gloucester stayed with him, but most of the rest panicked and deserted him, the whoresons.” The man stopped to excuse himself, but my sister waved her hand. “The king headed toward London. At Olney, he was arrested by the Archbishop of York, acting on his brother Warwick’s orders.”

“And Edward allowed this creature in a bishop’s miter to take him captive? I cannot believe this!”

“The king had no real choice; I was there. The archbishop had troops with him; the king had almost none. He has been taken to Warwick Castle. My lord and the Duke of Gloucester were released and sent on their way. They have gone to London.”

“Is there news of my father? My brothers?”

“None, your grace, at least that I have heard.”

“We must go to London ourselves,” Bessie said. She looked at the handful of servants who could fit into our cramped quarters at the Friars Preachers. They were standing still, mouths agape. “Well? It’s time. Start packing. Anne, Elizabeth, go with my men and make our excuses to the mayor. Harry, look after Kate.”

“I don’t need looking after,” I protested. But I didn’t argue when Harry led me from the room, and though I was eleven years of age, that night I was more than happy to sleep with Cecilia’s arms wrapped tightly around me. What would happen to all of us?



When we arrived in London, we found that the council had voted to make the queen a gift of wine. Just in case, Anne said sardonically, we wanted to drown our sorrows.

Bessie had thought the Tower the safest place for us to go. The old King Henry, of course, was lodged there also, and we all wondered if we—or at least Bessie and Edward—would end up prisoners there as well. For what did Warwick intend to do? It was all we talked of at the Tower. Did he plan to rule through Edward as a figurehead, as had been tried before with Henry? Did he plan to put the Duke of Clarence in his place? Had

he conceived of his own claim to the throne? No one knew, and the Kingmaker, at Warwick Castle with England's other captive king, was not saying, at least not in public. He summoned a Parliament to meet in September—at York, in the heartland of his own supporters. There, we supposed, he would show his hand.

We were still worrying and wondering over Warwick's plans for the king when, one hot day in mid-August, I saw Cecilia and my sister Anne walking toward me in the garden where I was sitting. I knew when Anne drew me close to her and put her arms around me that something was very, very wrong. "Kate," she said, "I have news. Very bad news. It concerns Father and John. They have been captured."

I began to shiver. "Are they safe?" I whispered.

Anne held me tighter, so much that it hurt. "Sweetheart, they are where no man can harm them. They are in the arms of the Savior now."



Father and John had not wanted to leave the king; they wanted to stay and fight for him. But Edward insisted. So for several weeks, dressed nondescriptly on equally nondescript mounts, they had been roaming the countryside, attended only by one man each, picking up what news they could. Hearing through that means of the defeat of William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, at Edgecote, they had made their way to the environs of Chepstow, where they had had the misfortune of being recognized by one of Warwick's men. They had resisted their captors, but it was futile. They were far outnumbered. From Chepstow, they'd been taken to Coventry, where Warwick and George had ridden to order their deaths and to see them die.

In Coventry, they pleaded for each other's lives. Father said that John was a mere youth still and had done nothing wrong: why should he die? And John said that his father, a man in his sixties, had served the crown since he was in his teens: why should he die when he had been nothing but loyal to his king? But Warwick and Clarence would have none of it. They allowed them no trial. This pair of murderers gave my brother and my father time

to confess their sins and to write their wills, and in that they congratulated themselves they were being most generous.

John went first on that evil day of August 12, 1469. He bore himself bravely and said he had lived as Edward's loyal subject and was dying as the same. My father had to watch as John died, as the headsman bungled the first stroke and had to take another. Then it came his turn. He prayed as he died and was still praying when they took his head.

I did not learn these details until much later, when I was a woman grown and could bear to hear them. At the time I first heard the news, I did not care how or where the deed had been done. I only knew that the men I loved best in the world—Father, and above all others, John, who had never harmed a soul in his life—were gone for good.



With Father and John dead, we waited to hear the worst of Anthony or even the king. Beheading, we were certain, awaited one; death in a remote castle by some mysterious means the other. It was only a matter of time. Our fears were increased when news came that the Earl of Devon had been captured and killed.

All of England seemed to take the king's capture and these killings as a signal to go simultaneously mad. John Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, began besieging the Paston family's castle of Caister. The Berkeleys and the Talbots were feuding; so were the Stanleys and the Harringtons. Some Londoners rioted in favor of the king, some in favor of Warwick, some simply for the sheer fun of rioting. There was even a rising in Hexhamshire by Sir Humphrey Neville, Warwick's cousin, in favor of the House of Lancaster.

Warwick tried, none too successfully, to control this violence, but he found the leisure to attend to other matters as well. In doing so, he helped distract my family from its misery somewhat, though this was surely not his intention.

He branded my mother a witch.

The accusation did not come directly from Warwick himself. As with

Robin of Redesdale, he acted through a proxy—in this case, one Thomas Wake, whose son had died fighting for Warwick at Edgecote. He produced a leaden image, broken in two, of a man in arms which Wake claimed was supposed to represent the Earl of Warwick. My mother was also reported to have produced leaden images of the king and queen, supposedly at the time the two were courting, and joined them together in an indecent manner.

If the earl and Wake thought that my mother, newly widowed and mourning the loss of John as well, would be too unstrung by grief to fight her accusers, they reckoned wrong. Mama sent an impassioned note to the mayor and aldermen of London, proclaiming her innocence and reminding them, not at all subtly, of the good services she and Grandmother Buckingham had performed for the city years before by interceding on its citizens' behalf with Margaret of Anjou, whose troops it was feared would wreak destruction upon them and their goods. The city officials agreed to assist her in putting her case before the king's council—which, of course, was essentially Warwick's council at the time—and Mama, who had been placed under guard by Thomas Wake, was allowed to travel to join us at the Tower.

I think some effort was made to keep the news of this latest family disaster from me, but it must have failed miserably. Already crying myself to sleep each night with thoughts of John and Papa, I now had the worry that Mama—as pious a lady as any I knew, though not ostentatious about it—would be found guilty of witchcraft. Would she be burned alive? Or would she merely be forced to walk barefoot through the streets and then be imprisoned for life, like Eleanor Cobham, the wife of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, had been, less than thirty years before? Would my remaining brothers be accused with her, and sentenced to the horrid death of a traitor? Would my sisters suffer? Would I?

Harry was no comfort to me during this time. It was not for lack of effort on his part—he tried to distract me in sundry ways, and he even shunned Richard's company on one or two occasions for my own—but his very status as my husband only added to my misery. I knew that my marriage

to Harry had angered Warwick, and it was perfectly logical to my eleven-year-old self to deduce that had Harry not married me, Papa and John might still be alive and Mama would not be branded as a witch.

I was still in this unenviable state of mind when our fortunes shifted yet again. Charles, Duke of Burgundy, had used his considerable influence with the merchant classes in London to calm the situation there, but he was no friend to Warwick, who in the meantime was attempting to cope with Humphrey Neville's rising but was finding that no one would answer his call for troops, a kingmaker being a very different thing from a king. Only with Edward at liberty would men respond, so in September—all thoughts of holding a Parliament being put aside—the king was allowed to travel in due state to York and then to Pontefract, after which Humphrey Neville was duly caught and executed. Having let Edward out of his cage, the Earl of Warwick could hardly now put him in again, especially since the episode had reminded everyone that Edward could be quite effective when the occasion demanded it. The upshot was that in October, the king rode triumphantly back to London, surrounded by the cream of the nobility of England and the mayor and aldermen.

It was not a sight I saw, for with the kingdom having returned somewhat to normal, I had been sent from the Tower to pretty Greenwich. I had been listless and pale since the news came of my father's and my brother's deaths, and it was thought that there I might recover my spirits. With the king back in London, my sister and her daughters returned to the comfort of Greenwich as well, and soon the king had left Westminster to join us there for a family evening, as had been his wont. Only one thing had changed in Bessie's chamber since then: the window seat on which John had liked to perch was empty. No one dared sit in it.

We were all gathered there—all of us Woodvilles, that is, for John's widow, said to be feeling her age these days, was at one of her manors outside the city—when Edward came in. A few months ago, I would have run to him and embraced him, for I was a demonstrative child and Edward not one to stand on ceremony with his family. Now I curtsied and returned

to my seat, where I was working on the same piece of embroidery that had occupied my hands for weeks now. It was my only pastime then. It was deadly dull, a biblical scene instead of the bright flowers and cheerful birds I preferred, but it was complex enough to occupy my thoughts so I did not have to think of the picture that haunted my mind at all other times: my father and handsome, lively John, headless and lying tangled together in a heap of dirt near Coventry.

“Kate.”

I blinked and realized that the king had been speaking to me. “Yes, your grace?”

“I asked how you had been occupying your time lately. It must have been dull for you at the Tower; I know you are fond of Greenwich.”

“I have had this, your grace,” I said, and looked at my embroidery. So did the king. All of a sudden, I saw what he saw: a hideous mishmash of stitches that would have shamed even my little niece the Lady Elizabeth had she produced them. “It’s horrid,” I said, clapping my hand to my mouth. “Isn’t it?” Then my tears began falling fast.

The king hauled me to my feet. “Come. We need to have a talk.”



“Bessie is very worried about you, Kate. She says you hardly eat or speak and want to do nothing but sit and attend to that needlework of yours.”

“I do not mean to worry her. I am sorry, your grace.”

“Stop calling me ‘your grace.’ We are brother and sister, are we not?” His voice was very gentle. “I know you are grieving for your father and for your brother. So am I, for they were good men. And I can understand your grief, for I have grieved for my father and my brother too, you know. My father was all I wanted to be, and my brother Edmund was my closest companion.”

“Yes.”

“I suspect it was easier for me than it is for you, for after they died I had no time to mourn; I had to carry on their fight.”

“But no one is carrying on Papa and John’s fight. They have been forgotten.”

“Kate?”

I stared at the floor and felt my tears start to fall again. “They say the Earl of Warwick and the Duke of Clarence will be coming back to court soon, and that you shall forgive them.”

“That is true. And what would you have me do to them?”

“Kill them, as they killed Papa and John.”

I waited for lightning, or Edward, to strike me dead.

The king shook his head. “Do you know how it chills my blood to see a pretty child like yourself standing there saying that? It is not that easy. For one thing, George is my brother.”

“But the Earl of Warwick isn’t.”

“No. But it is not as simple as that. The truth is, Kate, I couldn’t kill him either, even if I could forget his years of service to me, which I cannot. It is not a good time for me or anyone else on my behalf to take vengeance, even though it might please some. I myself have little love for them; did you know that they have even spread rumors that I am a bastard? The offspring of my mother and some archer she fancied?” Edward stared off into space, his face hardening. “For George to slander his own mother so, and Warwick his aunt! But for now, I must work with them.”

“But you are king!”

“A king, not God. We mortals must sometimes keep company we would prefer not to, I am afraid.”

“But it is so hard to think of my father and John dead, and no one paying the price.”

“My brother and my father are dead, too. Some paid the price for that, and yet it is still hard to think of their deaths. It will always be hard, Kate. I won’t tell you otherwise. But your grief will ease with time; that I can tell you for certain. It will help, I think, if you will remember your father and John at their best and happiest, and keep that picture in your mind when you think of them.” He plucked the embroidery out of my hand and threw it into the fire. “It will ease faster yet if you put aside things like this, which I know well give you no pleasure, and do things that bring

you cheer. Your mourning should not keep you from going out riding, for instance. Has Harry been riding with you? I know you used to like going with him."

"He has been." I drew a breath. "But that is another thing. I cannot be married to Harry anymore. I want to take the veil."

For a moment, I thought Edward was going to laugh. Then he saw my face and drew me closer to him. "Sweetheart. Are you serious?"

"Yes. I want to have my marriage annulled and no longer be Duchess of Buckingham. I know it is one of the things that made the Earl of Warwick so angry, that I married Harry when one of his daughters could have. If I hadn't married him and become a duchess, perhaps Father and John would not have—" I could not bear to finish the sentence.

"Christ," Edward muttered. "Now I begin to understand this better yet." He released me and stepped back. "Kate, I will not lie to you. Your marriage did anger Warwick. But it was one thing, only one thing of many, and much of the problem is simply that Warwick could not control me forever as he would have liked to. You must not believe for a moment that you are responsible for his anger or that you could have prevented your father's and your brother's deaths. You will never be happy again if you let yourself think that."

"But if I take the veil, perhaps Mama will not be found to be a witch. She can say she gave me to God to please Him and that she is a good daughter of the Church."

"Sweetheart, the matter is before my council now, and there is not a man there who will find your mother a witch. That I can promise you. She has friends there and friends in London as well. She does not have to sacrifice you to the Church to prove that she is a pious woman. I am aware that she is."

"Then I can't take the veil?"

"I have seen you squirming in chapel many times, Kate. You would make a miserable nun indeed. No. You will make a much better duchess. If you truly wish to please God, you must moderate your grief. God likes moderation in all things, the priests tell me." He grinned. "Not that I always listen."

I could not help but smile.

“There’s an improvement! Now there are three things I wish you to promise me before I send you back to Bessie’s chamber. The first is that you will embroider me a handsome bluebird cushion for my chamber, to match the redbird you did a while back. A nice plump one that looks as if it is about to burst into song.”

“I will!”

“I shall look forward to it. The second is that when Warwick and George return to court, you will face them proudly with your head held high. You have as much right as they to be here, and you are a far more pleasant sight at court than they are.”

“I will do it.”

“That’s my Kate! The third is that when you go back to Bessie’s chamber, you will sit in John’s seat.”

“John’s seat!”

“You were his favorite sister. I can think of no one else he would like to see sitting in his favorite seat. I shall lead you to it.”

“All right,” I said.

Together the king and I went back to Bessie’s chamber. With a slight prod from Edward, I took a breath and headed as nonchalantly as I could to the empty window seat and sat down. It was full of John’s presence, and I was amazed at how comforted I felt by being there. When I dozed off a while later—for I had not been sleeping well lately, and the soothing music the king’s musicians played soon had me nodding—it was as if I were leaning against John’s strong shoulder again.



I did not stop mourning for Father and John after my talk with the king, but I took the king’s advice and thought hard of the last time I had seen each of them and their last good-byes to me: my father’s gently affectionate one, John’s jovial one. It comforted me and made me more at peace.

It helped, too, that there was a bit of brightness in our lives that I had

scarcely acknowledged at the time: Anthony was safe and sound. He had been imprisoned at Norwich, it turned out, but fortunately Warwick, finding by that time that his popularity was not as great as he had expected, had hesitated to issue the order to kill him. By October Anthony was back at court, with one difference: he was now the second Earl Rivers, and the king made a point of calling him by his new title. Perhaps because John's easier-going nature no longer stood between me and Anthony, I grew a little closer to him than I had been, and was less intimidated by him. Perhaps Anthony too, grieving like the rest of us, became a little less austere and a little more approachable.

By December, Warwick and Clarence were back at court as well, along with their wives and Warwick's younger daughter, Anne. Warwick had come into my sister's immediate presence only once, looking deadly uncomfortable, and had made his escape after a few inconsequential remarks. It was a different matter with the earl's wife and daughters. As these ladies were blameless of Father's and John's deaths, they could be safely sent to the queen, and it fell to them and to us Woodville women to exchange small talk and pleasantries as if nothing the least bit untoward had happened over the past few months. John, no doubt, would have found our predicament an amusing one.

I could not dislike any of the Warwick women, though I certainly tried at first. The Countess of Warwick and her daughters were each amiable and pretty, though in a delicate way that made me remember what Grandmother Buckingham had said about the girls not promising to be good breeders. None were the harridans I might have expected to belong to the Earl of Warwick or to George. Isabel, who was eighteen, tried to boss her thirteen-year-old sister, Anne, about in a manner that was all too familiar to me from my own childhood with six older sisters, and Anne resisted in a manner that was quite familiar to me as well.

The Countess of Warwick was of a rather anxious disposition, I thought, and she had a way of hovering over the Duchess of Clarence in a manner that seemed peculiar for a girl of Isabel's age. In a day or so, when the

countess proudly displayed a baby blanket she was embroidering, the reason became clear: Isabel was with child. This fact, once learned, turned out to be a godsend to our awkward little company, for Bessie, as the mother of five, and the countess, as a mother of two and as an attendant at many a childbed, were more than happy to trade stories of childbirth and to heap Isabel with advice about how to conduct herself in the months to come and how to choose a good wet nurse for the baby. Isabel rolled her eyes when the older women were not looking, and Anne looked alternately bored and jealous that she was not the center of attention. I could not help liking them for that.

Only once did a chink in our female good fellowship appear, when in a rare departure from baby conversation, young Anne, undoubtedly with the best of intentions, inquired about Mama's health. I saw Bessie start to reply blandly, then give way to temptation. "She is doing well," my sister said sweetly. "For an accused witch, that is."

The countess blushed as I snickered into my embroidery, and Bessie then had the kindness to switch the conversation to which draper the ladies patronized.

Congenial as our relations were with the Warwick women, I was still grateful not to have to spend the Christmas festivities with them. My excuse came via an invitation for Harry and I to spend that time with Harry's uncle Henry Stafford and his very rich wife, Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond. They had a home at Woking, and we were to stay in Guildford.

Harry always liked to talk about his Beaufort relations, and from him I had learned that the Countess of Richmond was his mother's first cousin, both ladies sharing the name of Margaret. The countess had been married first to Edmund Tudor, Earl of Richmond, a half brother of the sixth King Henry, whose widowed mother, Catherine of Valois, had made a scandalous secret marriage to a nobody named Owen Tudor. (Not even my own parents' marriage could match it.) Margaret Beaufort had borne Edmund a posthumous child, one Henry Tudor. Not long afterward, she

had married Harry's uncle. Harry had seen the couple a few times, but they were strangers to me.

"Do you think they'll like me?" I asked Harry as we traveled to Guildford in high state. It was our first real journey together as duke and duchess, outside of travels with the king or queen, and Edward and Bessie had sent us off in grand style, surrounded by attendants from the household Harry now had at court.

"Why wouldn't they?"

I shrugged. The last few months had sapped my self-confidence a little. "I don't know."

Harry said kindly, "I don't see why they wouldn't. But ask the countess about her son, Henry Tudor, and you'll have made a friend for life. He's a ward like me. Henry was in William Herbert's care"—Harry hurried past these words as I winced, remembering this man who had died shortly before my father and my brother—"but Lord Ferrers, who's married to Herbert's sister, took him in after Herbert was killed."

"Murdered!"

"Murdered, then. The countess would like to see Henry restored to his lands and title, but there's not much chance of that, I think, with Jasper Tudor as his uncle."

"Jasper Tudor?"

"Lancastrian. He's King Henry's youngest half brother, and assisted the countess and her baby after the Earl of Richmond died. He raided Wales last year, but Lord Herbert defeated him. Jasper escaped to France. He's there now, no doubt up to something. The Countess of Richmond is very fond of him, because of his help with her and Henry Tudor, and King Edward knows it."

"So where's Henry Tudor now?" I asked, somewhat bored with the subject of Jasper Tudor.

"Weobley, with Lord Ferrers. The countess is trying to work out the details of his wardship now that Lord Ferrers is gone."

"Does she have other children?"

“No. She had Henry when she was only thirteen. They say the birth was a hard one and that she can’t bear children now. So Henry is very important to her.”

It was soon after this that I met the Countess of Richmond. She was a young woman, only twenty-six, but she bore herself with the authority of a woman twice that age, despite her very small stature—indeed, she was scarcely taller than my eleven-year-old self. Even in the high-waisted fashion of that day, it was apparent that her figure was that of a girl in her early teens. Having seen statuesque Bessie bear three babes, and all of the effort involved, I wondered how on earth tiny Margaret had survived her single ordeal. It was no wonder she was protective of her son.

Despite her undeveloped figure, Margaret was a handsome lady with sharp, expressive eyes, which she fixed upon me to intimidating effect. “Your wife is a pretty child, Harry,” she announced. She made “pretty” sound as if it were my only asset. “Are they teaching you to look over household accounts, I hope? You will need to be useful as well as decorative when Harry comes into his estates.”

“Of course, my lady,” I said. I decided not to mention that the accounts were not my strong point. (Indeed, my eldest son will tell you they are still not.)

“I think I will never come into them,” said Harry, more, I think, to rescue me from Margaret Beaufort’s scrutiny than to register an actual complaint.

It worked, for Margaret Beaufort turned her eyes on Harry. “Don’t be a fool, Harry. A fourteen-year-old lad out there in Wales with all of that land? Your tenants would take advantage of you, or eat you alive. I’m not sure which. Maybe both. You’re best off waiting for your majority. Frankly, I think most young men would do well to wait until after their majority, and let the womenfolk manage for them. Now, tell me about this mummery between the Earl of Warwick and the king.”

“You should come to court to see for yourself, Aunt,” said Harry with a rare mischievousness in his tone. I realized with a pang of jealousy that brusque as Margaret Beaufort might be, she and Harry were evidently quite fond of each other.

The countess snorted. "I've had quite enough of the Yorks, thank you very much. When Warwick had control over the king I went to the Duke of Clarence's house in London to discuss the Earl of Richmond's situation."

"Her son Henry," Harry hissed, seeing my puzzled expression.

"My hearing is quite sharp, Harry. You have another thirty years or so before you can expect it to be otherwise. Yes, my son Henry, the Earl of Richmond, as I call him, and as he should be called. Well, as I was saying, I went to Clarence's place. He wasn't there, of course, he was in the North. Hiding under Warwick's wing, the young fool. But his man of business was there, which at first pleased me just as well, because I'd as soon deal with a man of mature years as with that puppy Clarence. But he gave me no assistance either." Her voice dropped to an approximation of a masculine one. "'All must wait until my lord the Duke of Clarence and the Earl of Warwick return to the city, my lady.' Bah! He could have at least been honest and said just the Earl of Warwick. Clarence hasn't a mind of his own; everyone knows that." She patted Harry on the cheek with affection. "You would have made him a better son-in-law."

I was beginning to wonder if I should take a walk somewhere, such an intruder did I feel. Then a genial-looking man entered the room unannounced and pecked Margaret on the cheek. I could only assume that such a liberty meant that he was Henry Stafford, her husband, and sure enough, I was right. He embraced his nephew Harry and then brought my hand to his lips. "The Duchess of Buckingham," he said gallantly. "And a lovely one she is."

I curtsied. The Countess of Richmond looked at her husband fondly, then shook her head. "The worst thing about my jaunt to Clarence's is that it angered the king once he was released and found out about it. I don't know why—would not any mother do the same? But it did anger him. And now my husband's younger brother is to be Earl of Wiltshire, and my husband is to have nothing."

"You are a Beaufort, my dear," said Henry. "That's cause for suspicion

enough in King Edward's mind. Hardly your fault. Don't fret about John's earldom. He deserves it well."

Margaret sighed. She looked at Harry again. "So, Harry, you never told us. How are matters between Warwick and the king?"

"They are friendly and were planning to celebrate Christmas in great fashion together. But—"

"But what? You notice things, Harry, always have, because you keep quiet while others chatter. But what?"

"I believe that they hate each other, and would destroy each other if they could."

"And I believe, boy, that you are probably right." Margaret Beaufort rose. "But come now! It is time we began the Christmas festivities ourselves."

Harry: October 1470 to April 1471

THE RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN THE KING AND THE EARL OF WARWICK was doomed to failure, as even I had predicted.

All seemed to go smoothly at first, though. The king's council, Warwick among them, cleared the Duchess of Bedford of the charges against her, much to my wife's relief. (I for one had never believed there was anything in them; the only thing the poor duchess was guilty of was speaking English with a much too pronounced French accent and of breeding an eldest daughter who was too beautiful for anyone's good.) The king's oldest daughter, the Lady Elizabeth, was promised in marriage to Warwick's small nephew George, who stood to inherit the Warwick estates entailed in the male line. Little George was made the Duke of Bedford, and his father, John Neville, Earl of Northumberland, was made Marquess of Montagu, though he lost his Northumberland earldom when it was restored to the Percy family. That pleased at least some of the northerners, who had risen previously on the Percy heir's behalf, though there were whisperings that John Neville himself did not think much of the lands he was given in compensation for losing those attached to the Northumberland earldom. But John, who had never joined his brother the Kingmaker in intriguing against King Edward, made no complaint. The king himself, while devoting most of his time to putting his government back in order, did not neglect his marital duties or (so I heard) his extramarital affairs. England, in short, as the new year of 1470 came and went, appeared to be on the mend. I felt rather foolish for having told my elders at Guildford otherwise.

Then this tranquil state of affairs vanished almost overnight. An incident in Lincolnshire, seemingly a private quarrel involving one of the king's servants, turned into another uprising—led from behind the scenes, it turned out, by Warwick and Clarence. This time, there was no doubt of their intentions. They meant to depose Edward and place Clarence on the throne.

On this occasion, though, Edward, marching north, was far too wary to be trapped. Instead, it was Warwick and Clarence who ended up fleeing the country in April, their wives and Warwick's younger daughter, Anne, in tow. Aboard ship, the young Duchess of Clarence gave birth to a stillborn child, who had to be buried at sea. Nothing daunted by this, Warwick alternated between playing pirate in the Channel and negotiating with the French king, Louis, for his assistance. Soon, shocking news arrived in England: Warwick had formed an alliance with none other than Margaret of Anjou herself. Gone was the talk of putting Clarence on the throne. Instead, Henry VI would be restored and Edward, his son, would regain his position as rightful heir. He was also to get a bride: Anne, Warwick's daughter.

Soon there were new risings, coordinated from abroad by Warwick, who arrived back in England himself in September, accompanied by a sulky Clarence and a radiant Earl of Oxford and Jasper Tudor, delighted at this Lancastrian turn of affairs. Edward might have dealt with this yet, but then the unthinkable happened: John Neville, who'd been utterly loyal to King Edward, suddenly turned his coat and joined his brother the Kingmaker. Facing an attack he knew he could not win, Edward saw it was now his turn to jump on a ship. Together with the Duke of Gloucester, Anthony Woodville, Lord Hastings, and a handful of other stalwarts, Edward fled to Holland. Queen Elizabeth—heavily pregnant—took herself and her daughters to sanctuary at Westminster.

It was October 1470. Henry VI was back on the throne as King of England—and if you understood the twists and turns of fate that had returned him there, I probably have confused you.



King Henry's return to the throne came just weeks after my fifteenth birthday, and flush with this new manhood, I had outright refused to accompany Queen Elizabeth into sanctuary. The thought of being cooped up there was grim enough, but being shut in with three little girls, and probably a fourth girl on the way, was downright unbearable.

Rather to my disappointment, as I had wished for more of an argument, the queen acquiesced readily—not, I realize now, out of respect for my fifteen years but because she had no more desire to share close quarters with a bored boy of my age than I had to share lodgings with the queen's girls. Because my grandmother was staying at her house in Bread Street, as was her custom this time of year, it was arranged that I would go to her.

Kate insisted on going with me—a surprise, for I thought for sure she would want to stay and help with the baby, whose arrival was expected in a matter of weeks. But she said that it was her marital duty to accompany me. Perhaps Kate, loyal sister though she was, had also thought life in Bread Street preferable to life in sanctuary.

We had just settled into Bread Street in early October when Warwick made his grand entrance into London. I could not resist seeing this sight, and I took Kate along.

That was a mistake. I had been as glad as anyone else when Kate, who at first had slunk around like a little wraith following the deaths of her father and her brother, had begun to return to her former talkative self, but now I wished she had had a temporary relapse. No sooner did the first sign of Warwick's army appear than Kate decided it was time to speak her mind. "Wicked traitor!" she muttered. Then, evidently finding that she had made herself insufficiently clear, she raised her voice. "How can he live with himself, knowing that he betrayed his king? The real king. King Edward!" she added helpfully, in case anyone around us was in any doubt as to her loyalties.

We were not inconspicuous to begin with. As Duke and Duchess of Buckingham, we were probably the best-dressed couple within the confines of the city, even wearing everyday attire as we were. And Kate, who

was about twelve and a half, was no longer the skinny, sharp-faced little girl I'd married. Like all of the Woodville sisters, she had developed early and amply, and I realized that she had become quite pretty. So, too, did most of the men standing around us, judging from the admiring glances they shot her, even as she made remark after remark that would probably have got anyone other than a lovely young girl thrown into Newgate.

"Kate, I told you. It's a complicated business."

Kate ignored the low tone I'd spoken in as a hint. "And poor King Henry! I heard that when he was taken out of the Tower, he was in a frightful state—all dirty and ill-clothed, without much idea of what was happening. It is cruel to put him back on the throne. Cruel! Warwick just seeks to use him."

"Kate, you must be more dis—"

"He should be ashamed of himself! All last year, when King Edward had forgiven him—which he never should have—to be thinking of turning traitor all along. What a blackguard! And look—there he is!"

Sure enough, there was the blackguard himself, the Earl of Warwick, magnificent on his black charger. He acknowledged the cheers of the crowd, managing neatly to look triumphant and benevolent at the same time (not a mean feat—I have since tried it). Beside him rode the Duke of Clarence, nodding condescendingly at the bystanders as if it had not yet occurred to him that he was not a bit closer to the throne than he had ever been.

The shouting had even drowned out Kate's Yorkist rants. She tensed as Warwick drew nearer, and for a horrid instant I feared that she would spit on him. Instead, in that faintly French-accented voice of hers that carried so nicely, she shouted piercingly, "Long live the King! King—"

As her husband, I could slap Kate, or I could kiss her. Having the instincts of a gentleman, I kissed her, and kept kissing her until Warwick rode serenely by, utterly unaware of this treason within feet of him. I probably kissed her longer than was strictly necessary. At last I pulled back, and I saw with gratitude that I had reduced my wife to utter silence. "Let's go," I said as Kate stared at me.

"That was our first kiss since our wedding," Kate said finally as we left the throngs behind. "It was *hard*."

"Watch what you say in public, or I may have to give you another such," I said, realizing as I did that I had not put this as well as I could have.



The next few months were, I must admit, some of the best of my life. The queen had kept a close eye on me as her ward, and much to my chagrin, the king when I arrived in his household had turned out to be no better. Like many licentious men, he was a strict guardian. Under his regime, I'd had very little chance to wander about London unaccompanied. Now, as my elders were preoccupied with other matters besides my upbringing, I was virtually my own man. For the first time I enjoyed idling in taverns and gambling with the ample allowance my grandmother allowed me. I was not naturally dissolute, so my adventures were of the mildest sort, but it was nonetheless a heady time for me.

My pocket money was sufficient to take me into the best brothels of Southwark had I chosen to go there, but something made me turn back on the one or two occasions my feet (urged forth by another appendage) took me in that direction. Richard had promised to take me there when I was sixteen, and I felt that if I went now instead of waiting, I would almost be disloyal to him, living in Holland as he and his brother Edward were. In any case, I felt like a bit of a fool going on my own. What would I say? Would it be painfully obvious that I had never been with a woman before? What if I made an utter ass of myself? So I resisted temptation and waited for Richard's return, being confident that he would somehow make his way back to England. I missed him a great deal; it was the one blot on the sunshine of my days then.

In the meantime, in late October I was invited—if my aunt Margaret Beaufort's peremptory message could be deemed an invitation—to sup with her and my uncle. There, my aunt wrote, I would at last have the chance of beholding my cousin Henry Tudor, whom his faithful uncle Jasper had recently brought from Wales.

Kate frowned when I told her of the news. “Am I invited?”

“Of course. You are my wife.”

“I don’t know if I want to come. Your aunt didn’t seem to care for me, and there will be so many Lancastrians there.”

“You may have to start getting used to that,” I said, not unkindly.

My aunt, however, was in such a transport of good spirits when we went for supper the next day that she even parted with a smile and an embrace for Kate. “Well! Things have changed since we last met, have they not, Harry?”

“Indeed they have.”

“My son and Jasper will be here presently. Do you know, yesterday my son had an audience with the king? It went very well, I thought. Of course, King Henry is always kind; it is Warwick and Clarence with whom we must deal, though. I would like to see my Henry get his title and lands restored to him, but Clarence may be difficult. We shall see. Ah! There you are!”

My uncle Henry came in, along with a boy a little younger than myself—he was a couple of months shy of his fourteenth birthday—and a man of about forty. Kate’s eyes widened at the pair, who could be no other than Henry and Jasper Tudor, but she greeted them politely enough. Then Jasper Tudor, whose father, after all, had managed to get himself into the bed of a queen, said something about English roses that made my wife blush rather prettily. For a man who’d spent most of his time on the run, he seemed quite at home.

While Jasper made inroads with Kate, I greeted my cousin. “What was the king like?”

“Not what I expected, but I wasn’t sure what to expect. I was a little worried that he might be—well, you know.”

“Mad,” I agreed.

“He wasn’t, not as you would think a madman would be, anyway. He didn’t talk gibberish or anything. He knew Uncle Jasper perfectly well, and he knew who everyone around him was. But sometimes he would

just stare off into space for a moment or so before he would remember that we were still there and continue with the conversation. And he said something very strange to me. Mother liked it, but I didn't know what to make of it."

"What?"

"He said I would be king someday."

"You? With his own son alive and well and getting ready to marry Warwick's daughter?"

Henry shrugged. "It sounded strange to me too, but that's what he said. He just said it in ordinary conversation, too, not as if he were a soothsayer or something." He glanced at his mother, who was talking to my uncle. Jasper Tudor was still charming Kate, it appeared. "Mother said we ought to keep it quiet, though. It's not the sort of thing one would want to get back to Queen Margaret, after all."

"I can see that," I said drily.

"I'd be quite content just to get my father's lands and my title back, and to see my uncle get his own lands restored to him. Mother?"

My aunt had suddenly started weeping. Uncle Henry instantly broke off the conversation he'd been having with Jasper Tudor and Kate. "Sweetheart? What is wrong?"

"Nothing." Margaret brushed at her eyes. "I am ashamed of myself. It is just so moving to me. To have so many whom I love in one place. It is what I have wanted for so long—" She began to snifle again.

Henry Tudor looked mortified, as any lad of our age might, but Jasper Tudor stood and raised his cup, all of us having been sipping wine. "Of course, it is a cause for celebration! Let us raise our cups to our three Henrys—and to their lovely mothers and wives as well."



I never saw Henry or Jasper Tudor after that day. Soon they traveled with my aunt Margaret to her estate at Woking, then to her other lands, and by late November Jasper and Henry had returned to Wales, where

Jasper had business. I regretted this, for I had got on quite well with Henry Tudor.

Jasper Tudor was a different matter. Kate on the way home asked me what I had thought of him, and at fifteen I could only tell the truth, that I thought he had been far too flirtatious with her and that she had not sufficiently discouraged him.

Needless to say, Kate did not accept my remark in the constructive way it had been offered. "Flirt? He never flirted with me!"

"Then you're too young to know a flirtation when you see it."

"I know perfectly well what one looks like, Harry Stafford! He was merely kind to me—more so than your aunt, who always looks at me as if I were a fly in the room that she wishes she could—could—"

"Swat. She does nothing of the sort. She is very civil to you."

"I was going to say 'swat' if you had given me a blessed moment, Harry! And if you call saying that I am merely decorative civil, then I suppose she was civil. Why, she never asked about Bessie, and she will be brought to childbed any day, we expect."

"Did Jasper Tudor ask about her?"

"No, but he is a man. One doesn't expect men to ask about such things."

"So what did he ask you about, if he wasn't flirting and he wasn't discussing your sister's lying-in?"

"He asked if all of the Woodville girls were as pretty as I was," Kate allowed after a moment or two.

"No, no flirting there." I looked at the men escorting us, who were all making a show of not hearing this quarrel. Plainly, each and every one of them was enjoying it immensely.

"He didn't mean it like that. And he said other things as well. Like—like—"

"Like what?" I snapped, before I noticed that Kate's eyes were filling with tears. There is enough bad that can be said about me now, but it can never be said that I was so base as to enjoy seeing my wife weep. "For God's sake, don't cry. What?"

“He told me that he thought Warwick had behaved badly in killing John and Papa. He did say that! Do you call that flirting?”

“No, no, Kate. Here.”

Kate blew her nose on my handkerchief almost triumphantly.

Just a few days later, on November 2—a date that meant nothing to me then but that has acquired a certain significance thirteen years later—Queen Elizabeth, meagerly attended in sanctuary, gave birth to a healthy baby boy, whom she defiantly named Edward.

Kate was as smug as if she’d delivered the baby herself. “I said it would be a boy,” she announced. (I remembered her saying no such thing.) “Now the king is sure to come back and claim his throne!”

“You may well be right, child,” my grandmother said.

Kate had to do most of her gloating that day by herself, however, for Grandmother and I were on our way to see the king—King Henry, that is. Grandmother, after much deliberating, had decided to pay her respects—she was, after all, the godmother of his son. “And as your grandfather died in his cause, Harry, I know he would like to meet you, too.” It was decided that Kate, as Queen Elizabeth’s sister, was best off staying at home, a decision to which Kate gladly acquiesced. I suspected that she would bat her blue eyes at some of the household men and coax them into taking her to see Elizabeth and the new baby in sanctuary, King Henry having chivalrously insisted that the deposed queen—if that be the proper phrase—be allowed to receive visitors.

As Grandmother and I rode by water to Westminster, we could hear a few church bells bravely pealing, celebrating the birth of little Edward. “What do you think, Grandmother? Do you think Edward will come back?”

“I don’t doubt it for a moment.” Grandmother sighed. “And then all this will begin all over again. My, but I’m feeling too old these days to live through much more of these men trying to push each other off the throne.”

“What do you wish for, Grandmother?”

She shrugged. "I'm not partial to Warwick, nephew of mine that he is. He's not the king, and he forgets that. Young Edward—King Henry's Edward—is a proud, high-tempered lad, they say, and when he comes back to England, he's not going to be happy to be led around on a chain by Warwick as his poor father is. And I suspect that when Warwick's old enemies—your uncle Somerset and the rest—return, there will be more trouble. Warwick's made himself some strange bedfellows, and I for one don't know if one bed can hold them all." Grandmother gazed over the Thames. "If King Edward comes back, your uncle John will fight for him, I know. So will my husband. Your uncle Henry—I don't know. His wife Margaret is a strong-minded woman, and I know she would like to see him fight for King Henry, but your uncle can only be pushed so far before he balks. I suspect he will fight with the rest of the Staffords, and their loyalties are with Edward now."

"I am looking forward to seeing my Beaufort uncles," I confessed.

"I know you are, lad. And chances are they will soon be in arms against your Stafford uncles. You realize that, don't you?"

I nodded, and my grandmother gently ran her hand through my hair, reminding me of the day Grandfather had died. "Either way, you will suffer a loss, I fear. I do not envy you, Harry."

King Henry's chambers, where we soon arrived, were nothing like King Edward's. Whereas Edward's chambers had been bustling, with people scurrying back and forth and dogs roaming in and out, Henry's were quiet, with a clerk writing in a corner and a few guards standing silently by. Edward had sat smack in the middle of the room; Henry's great chair was in a corner. Henry, indeed, seemed to be an afterthought in the rooms, for they had been decorated to house Queen Elizabeth during her lying-in and still very much reflected the queen's quite feminine preference in colors and textures. I could even see her emblem, a gillyflower, here and there.

The king was a stooped man, with the prematurely old look of someone who had suffered greatly in his mind, yet he had a very pleasant voice. He even managed an air of gallantry when my grandmother was announced,

though I doubt he would have known her had she not been named upon her entrance. "Ah, the Duchess of Buckingham. It seems like only yesterday that my lady and I were in company with you and your dear lord. A brave, loyal man. How I miss him."

"I too, your grace."

"And this is your grandson, the present duke. A fine-looking lad. Grow up to be like your grandfather, my boy."

"I will endeavor to do so, your grace."

"Good. But where is Margaret? She will never come, I fear. She is not ill?" He looked sharply around him, at no one in particular. "They would tell me if she were ill, would they not?"

"Of course they would, your grace," said Grandmother softly. "She is quite well, but I believe she has details to attend to before she leaves that have taken much of her time. No woman can move as quickly as a man likes, you know."

The king suddenly smiled, for a moment appearing entirely rational. "'Tis true. And we have a boy. I should like to see my boy again." He looked at me, and for a horrible moment I feared he had mistaken me for Edward of Lancaster. Instead, he said genially, "Perhaps you can come live in his household when he arrives. He would like that. Would you?"

"Indeed, your grace."

"Then it shall be arranged!" The king nodded before his face started to cloud again. "Henry... I saw another boy named Henry just a few days before. Do you know him, son?"

"Henry Tudor?" I ventured.

"Indeed. He shall be king, you know." King Henry nodded at me cheerfully. "I do not know how or even why, but I know it." He settled back into his chair, and I realized that this brief conversation had exhausted him. In a moment, he had begun to doze, and a servant led us off.

I was deeply affected by poor King Henry's plight at first, but as the days passed and our encounter became less vivid in my mind, my boyish callousness reasserted itself. I decided that if I ever saw Richard again—and

however torn my loyalties were during this period, I always prayed for his safety and his prosperity—I would tell him about this madman’s wild prophecy. It was something that would no doubt amuse him.

Christmas came and went, rather sadly for Kate, who had held ill-concealed hopes that some disaster might befall the Earl of Warwick and place Edward back on the throne. My grandmother, her husband Walter Blount, and I dined occasionally at Westminster, but we never had another private audience with King Henry, who made only the briefest of public appearances. Rumor had it that he wore the same blue gown he’d been wearing as a captive in the Tower and that he adamantly refused to change into something more suitable for a king, though his servants did manage to clean it while he was abed. It was certainly what he had been wearing when I saw him.

Rather to my excitement, my uncle Edmund Beaufort, the Duke of Somerset—at least, he styled himself so—returned to England at the end of January. I was eager to meet him, having never known my mother’s kin except for my aunt Margaret, but events dictated otherwise, leaving Somerset no time to bother with a nephew in his teens who, as a ward, couldn’t raise troops. For raising troops suddenly became of the utmost urgency. France was at war with Burgundy, and when Warwick sided with France, the Duke of Burgundy gave in to Edward’s pleadings and lent his assistance. By mid-March, Edward was back in England, and armies were once again on the move in our country.

I too was on the move, in one respect. For two weeks after Edward landed, I was a prisoner in the Tower.



It was nothing personal, the soldiers at Grandmother’s Bread Street house told Walter Blount, Grandmother’s husband, as they tied his hands behind his back, then started on mine. But these were dangerous times, and the Earl of Warwick could not risk having potential enemies at large.

As Bread Street was hardly in a good state of defense and a dozen armed

men had come to arrest us, we were not in the best position to argue. Instead, Blount, who in any case had never manifested more than resigned tolerance for Warwick's regime, nodded grimly. "But why the boy? He's no danger to Warwick." (Normally, I would have bristled at being called a boy, but I gave Blount credit for good intentions here.)

"He's old enough to fight if need be, and he's married to a Woodville and is in your care. That's enough, says my lord. No harm shall come to him."

I was not fearful—in fact, I was oddly excited, thinking that at last I would be sharing in some of the danger that Richard had faced. Kate was a different matter altogether. "You can't take Harry! He's done nothing. He's not even a good Yorkist. Harry, tell them you're not!" Kate grabbed the arms of the man who was attempting to tie me. "Let him go!"

"Kate, it's all right," I said, turning to comfort her and only further frustrating the efforts of my guard. "It's only temporary."

"You don't know that, do you? You know what that evil man did to my father and to John!" Kate threw herself on the back of the guard and began pummeling him with very little effect. The other guards looked at her open-mouthed, either reluctant to use force against a young girl or finding the scene too amusing to interrupt, I do not know.

My grandmother caught Kate by her dress and yanked her backward, then dealt her one smart slap on the face. "You are disgracing your title, girl, to carry on so. Stop it immediately or you shall be whipped."

Kate stared open-mouthed at my grandmother. I knew then that Grandmother herself must have been frightened for us, or she'd never have treated Kate so. I turned to Kate and took her into my arms—clumsily, not being accustomed to marital embraces. She was trembling, poor creature, from head to toe. "Kate. There is nothing to fear. I am sure of it."

"But—"

"You must be brave, Kate." I pulled her a little closer, and she rested her head against my doublet. I felt her tears fall on my chest as I awkwardly patted her back. "Promise me you will be."

"All right, Harry. I promise."

I released Kate, and she took her place beside my grandmother, who patted her on the shoulder and said in the usual kindly tone with which she addressed my wife, “Good girl.”

“The lad speaks the truth,” Walter Blount said jovially as my relieved guard resumed tying my hands. He scooted forward to kiss his own wife on the cheek, then smiled at Kate. “Nothing to fear. You ladies will be glad to have the house to yourselves for a while, I wager.”

They led us off, our duchesses waving goodbye and even managing smiles as if we were on our way to a banquet instead of to a cell in the Tower. When we had passed out of sight of them, my guard shook his head. “Is your lady always like that, my lord?”

Being led away from my grandmother’s house by armed men was beginning to give me pause. For the first time I considered the possibility that Warwick might indeed shut us up for life, or worse. I also realized, to my surprise, that nuisance as she was at times, I was beginning to miss Kate already. “Always like what, man?” I said coldly. “If you mean to ask if she is always loyal to those she loves and concerned about their welfare—yes, then she is always like that.”

Sometimes, I am pleased to say, I have given my wife her due.



The Tower was already teeming with newly made prisoners when we arrived, including my uncle John Stafford, the Earl of Wiltshire. He owed his earldom to King Edward, and probably Warwick had remembered this fact. The three of us were put in a fairly comfortable chamber together, not far from that of my relatives the Bouchiers, whom we often met when allowed out for walks. It was quite a family gathering.

Our guards, we soon found, were rather more inclined to support Edward than Warwick, whose French alliance was not particularly popular, especially with those London merchants who traded with Burgundy. Not that the guards cared much for that; when it came down to it, they simply preferred the robust, free-spending, womanizing Edward to poor Henry.

He'd been a prisoner in the Tower for so long, the guards sometimes forgot he was back on the throne, one confessed to us. As a result, we had no difficulty getting news from our captors, and the first piece they brought us was impressive: the Duke of Clarence had assembled a large army—and marched it straight to his brother instead of to his father-in-law.

“Prostrated himself before King Edward, he did,” said Henry Bourchier, the Earl of Essex, stroking his thickening beard—my elders' barbers had not accompanied them to the Tower—contentedly. “I'd have given much to see that sight. The king pulled the lad upright too soon, in my opinion. I'd had kept him on his knees a good long while, as they say Margaret of Anjou kept Warwick when he made his peace with her.”

“Was the Duke of Gloucester there?” I asked. The Bourchiers' guards were considerably more informative than our own, we'd found.

“Oh, yes. All three brothers embraced.”

“Very touching.” Uncle John snorted. “I'd have been checking Clarence for knives if I were King Edward.”

“What brought him back to the king?” (I meant King Edward; captivity at Warwick's command had turned me into a good Yorkist, though not perhaps as good as Kate would have liked.)

“Mainly his women. The Duchess of York, the Duchess of Exeter, and the Duchess of Burgundy all begged him to come back to the fold. I had a hand in it myself before I got shut up in here. We all reminded him of how much his brother had done for him—and how little Warwick was likely to do for him, now that he's got Beaufort and the rest of them to please, not to mention Margaret of Anjou. Poor Warwick had it much simpler last year.”

“Where do you think they'll go, the king and his brothers?”

“Straight to London.” He paused. “And I think we ought to be there to join them when they do.”

Kate: April 1471

WITH THE TOWER FULL OF SUSPECTED YORKISTS, THE SANCTUARIES full of unmistakable Yorkists, and all but a handful of the most important Lancastrian leaders having left London to raise troops, London was an eerie place. Business went on as usual, but with a sense of just going through the motions while everyone was waiting to see what would happen next.

The Archbishop of York, George Neville, who was Warwick's younger brother, tried his best to raise some Lancastrian enthusiasm by parading poor mad King Henry through the streets, accompanied by the archbishop himself and by Ralph Butler, Lord Sudeley. As I had not seen Henry before, I begged Grandmother Buckingham for permission to see this show, and she consented immediately—probably as it got me out from underfoot for a while. Although I was trying to be brave, as a great lady should be, I found it rather hard. I could not resist the temptation to ask, three or four times a day, whether there had been news of Harry and the other prisoners.

Showing King Henry to the people was a mistake, as even I at thirteen saw. Harry had told me how oddly he had acted during their meeting, down to his prophecy that Margaret Beaufort's spotty-faced son would be crowned king, and the stress of recent days had evidently done nothing to help his state of mind. Stooped and bewildered-looking, he hardly seemed aware of the crowds around him as he sat his horse, and a small child next to me went so far as to whimper in fright at his strange appearance. He was wearing what I knew from Harry was his usual blue gown, an item at

which a draper standing near me clucked his tongue in disgust and muttered, "My dog wouldn't piss on it!"

Poor Henry had been a respectable horseman in his younger days, people said, but having been a prisoner for so long, he appeared to have forgotten how to manage even the gentle mare on which he rode. He clearly needed the pages who were leading the animal along.

If a man with presence, like the Earl of Warwick on his black charger or the Duke of Somerset, who was said to be of a handsome, dashing appearance, were with the king, it might have helped—it couldn't have hurt. But the Archbishop of York, a plump man, however solemn and grand a figure he might have cut in a church procession, looked simply silly on his own horse, and Lord Sudeley, who had no doubt been a fine man in his prime, was long, long past it. The attendants who came before and after this unhappy trio looked as if they would rather be doing almost anything else in the world, like shoveling out the royal garderobes.

The bystanders were polite. There was too much gentleness in Henry's ravaged face for anyone to want to mock the king, but there was nothing in it to inspire anyone either. Motherly-looking women here and there called, "God bless you, your grace," but no one could manage a more enthusiastic response than that.

When the procession disappeared from sight—heading, I was glad to see, toward the bishop's palace at St. Paul's, where Henry was better off than anywhere else and where poor Lord Sudeley could take a much needed nap—there was a general sense of relief. I wended my way home with the pages who had accompanied me. We were on Bread Street when one of my pages suddenly grabbed my sleeve. "My lady! It's your lord, and Walter Blount!"

"Harry?" I stared. Sure enough, my husband was being ushered into his grandmother's house. I hoisted up my skirts and raced down the street, heedless of anyone unfortunate enough to be in my path. "Harry!" I threw myself upon my husband and hugged him tight. Nearby, Walter Blount was receiving similar attention from Grandmother Buckingham, normally not a demonstrative woman. "You're safe!"

He kissed me gingerly. “Well, of course. I told you I would be.”

I stepped back and dabbed at my eyes. “But how did you come here?”

“We escaped,” said Harry laconically. I could have strangled him. Instead, I turned to the more communicative Walter Blount.

“The lad’s right. We prisoners there overpowered our guards—with the help and connivance of some of our other guards—and took over the Tower. It’s in the hands of York now.”

“But how?”

“Coordination, Kate, coordination. The friendly guards had been smuggling us weapons for several days in advance, so we were well armed. As the others made their rounds, we seized them and locked them in our own cells. Bit by bit, we got farther and farther. Some guards who hadn’t shown support for our cause before suddenly turned in our favor too. When that happened, the game was up for Lancaster.” Walter Blount nodded at Harry. “Your husband’s got a strong arm on him, lass. He knocked one of the blackguards senseless, though he was coming to himself when we left him.”

Harry, despite his nonchalance, was visibly pleased at the compliment. I clapped my hands before adding piously, “I hope there was no bloodshed.”

“No. There’s a few whose heads will hurt, but they’ll get over it.” Harry grinned, a rare thing with him.

Walter Blount snorted. “We heard of that farce that took place just now—parading poor Henry about. It’s no good, and George Neville knows it. Rumor has it that King Edward is encamped at St. Albans and will be entering London tomorrow. From what we heard coming over here, he’ll not meet any resistance in London. The merchants for one will be more than glad to have him back—some so they can have their debts paid, some so the king can run up more debts. Henry hasn’t been good for business, they say.”

“Not in that blue gown,” I said, giggling, and again felt quite ashamed of myself. By way of repentance, I said three extra Hail Marys that evening as I prayed—but I also prayed long and hard for Edward’s safe coming into

the city, having long been convinced that God was as good a Yorkist as I. He had just been testing us lately.



I could hardly concentrate on anything the next day—Maundy Thursday—and neither could anyone else, not even Grandmother Buckingham. She squirmed through morning prayers almost as much as I. No one in the city could go about his business as usual, it seemed. By noon, we gave up trying and went to Bishopsgate, where it was considered most likely that the king would make his entrance. The guards at the gate had been sent home to dinner, and fresh ones had not been put in their place. Some men had been seen that morning wearing Warwick's badge of the ragged staff, but they had disappeared from the streets—gone back to hide in bed, the crowd at the gate jested.

The church bells of the city rang out one o'clock, then two o'clock. And then a roar came from outside the city gate, and I saw one of the finest spectacles I have ever seen in my life.

King Edward was on a splendid horse—a white one, if you please—and in the months that the people had not seen him, they had forgotten just how handsome he was. After poor King Henry's ride the day before, he could not have been more of a welcome sight. Soon the ground underneath him was a mass of blossoms, all of the women and girls in the crowd, including myself, having brought flowers to throw the king's way. They might have run up to the king had not he and his entourage—the king's brothers, my own brother Anthony, and Lord William Hastings among them—been flanked by the Flemish soldiers who had accompanied the king from abroad.

Edward rode on, smiling and waving and blowing a kiss to a particularly pretty woman now and then. Beside him was the eighteen-year-old Duke of Gloucester, whose smile and wave were somewhat stiffer than that of his older brother. The Duke of Clarence, who so recently had been allied with Lancaster, fixed a smile on his lips and kept it there, but stared straight

ahead, probably hoping that no one remembered that he had ridden into the city not too many months ago under Warwick's banner. Lord Hastings acted as his dearest friend, the king, did, and my brother Anthony, while acknowledging the crowd, looked a tiny bit removed from his surroundings, as if his body was all there but his mind was not.

Even though Harry and I, as Duke and Duchess of Buckingham, had been afforded a good vantage point from which to see the king, I doubted he could see us and Harry's Stafford relations, so thick was the press of the crowd and so protective the Flemings of the master they had been hired to serve. But I hoped he could hear me. "Long live King Edward!" I shouted. "Our rightful king!"

The bystanders near me took up the cry. "Long live King Edward! Our rightful king!"

The cry carried the king to St. Paul's.



At St. Paul's, the king and his entourage heard mass, after which—so I heard from Anthony later—Edward went to the Bishop's Palace and greeted the man whose occupancy of the throne had just ended for all practical purposes. Henry, poor man, ignored Edward's proffered hand and embraced him, saying, "My cousin of York, you are very welcome. I believe that in your hands my life will not be in danger." Edward assured Henry of his kind intentions, and then consigned him to the Tower. Then he went to Westminster, where the Archbishop of Canterbury, who had been imprisoned in the Tower with Harry and the others, hastily recrowned him.

During all of this, Bessie and her children had remained in sanctuary, and it was there the king next proceeded. In the interval, Harry and I had arrived there ourselves.

As Edward walked into Bessie's lodgings, Bessie ran into his arms. They kissed for what must have been a solid five minutes. Then Mama led in the little girls. Bess, the oldest, hugged her father straightaway, but the younger

two required a little coaxing. Only when the king had won them over and jiggled them on his knee for a little while did Bessie nod at me.

I went into the other room and very carefully lifted little Edward out of his cradle. Then I carried him back into the chamber and placed him in his father's arms.

For the first time, and the last, I saw King Edward lose his composure altogether.

"My son and heir," he said in a cracking voice, taking the baby's fingers in his. "Bessie, you have given me the most precious treasure a woman can give a man. Everything I do from here forward will be for him—and for you, my love. The lady of my heart."

At that point the rest of us had the good sense to make ourselves scarce.



By that evening the king had removed Bessie and his children to Baynard's Castle, where the king's mother lived. The Dukes of Clarence and Gloucester were there as well, as were Lord Hastings and my brother Anthony. As Harry was enjoying his reunion with Richard, and I with Anthony and Bessie and the children, we stayed at the Duchess of York's that evening, too.

After we heard divine service, the entire family gathered in the solar. It was almost as if we were at Greenwich again that night.

Life for the exiles, we discovered as they reminisced for us, had not been entirely without its pleasures. Anthony and even Edward described the wonderful manuscripts in the collection of Louis of Gruuthuse, who had been a generous host to the king and his followers. Even Lord Hastings—whose eye I had hitherto believed was attracted only to a pretty woman—rhapsodized over them. I must have shown my weariness of this topic in my face, for during a pause in Anthony's discourse, Lord Hastings looked at me and suddenly laughed. "Upon my word, my little duchess! If those masters who paint from the life were to see you now, they would have to depict you with a very sour face. What makes you frown so, your grace?"

"I have had so much of books lately," I admitted reluctantly. I looked apologetically at Harry, but he was deep in a conversation with Richard. "Grandmother Buckingham, you know, is a biblio—biblio—"

"Bibliophile?" suggested Anthony.

"Yes. A bibliophile like you and like the Duchess of Burgundy. When Harry was in the Tower, I would worry, and Grandmother Buckingham would tell me to read, so I would improve my mind and not fret about Harry so much. And I did—but I became so very tired of it, I do not want to be improved anymore!"

"Indeed, I do not believe you can be, in appearance at least," said Lord Hastings gallantly. I wondered how the ladies in the Low Countries had withstood his charm. Perhaps they had not, and a crop of bastards would soon result. "You have grown lovely since we saw you last, your grace. Harry will have to guard against poachers."

I blushed furiously.

Anthony rescued me. "Yet at the risk of boring Kate further, I must say there is someone that fascinates me. Have you ever seen one of these?"

He held up a book. It could not have looked more dull if it tried. We stared, trying to discern whatever quality in it appealed to my brother. Even Harry and Richard were drawn into the mystery.

"I know!" said Harry finally. "It's printed, isn't it?"

Anthony nodded and passed the book, which turned out to be in German, to him. "In Cologne. An Englishman I met in Bruges gave this to me. His name is William Caxton—he's a prominent merchant there—and he plans to start his own printing press in Cologne. I wish he would bring his venture here instead."

"But what good is it?" I asked. "The illuminators make such pretty books as it is."

"But they are slow to make. The printing press can produce many copies of the same book, you see. With this, anyone who wanted a book could simply go in a shop and buy it as other things are bought."

I frowned, not convinced at all that this was a good thing. The king

laughed. "So Kate, my bibliophobe, what would you rather be doing than reading?"

"Playing ninepins," I confessed. "Riding. Dancing. None of which I have had any of lately." I heaved a martyred sigh.

The king grinned. "Soon, Kate, we shall have all the ninepins and riding and dancing you wish, God willing."

"After Easter, of course," the Duchess of York said severely.

"After Easter," conceded the king. He sighed. "And there are other matters we must attend to first, we men that is. Indeed, I fear you ladies must excuse us now, for we have matters of which we must talk. Warwick's army was not far behind ours."



On Good Friday, men emerged from sanctuary and traveled from their estates in the country to join Edward's troops. Even Harry's uncle Henry Stafford joined, probably to the chagrin of his wife and to the great relief of Grandmother Buckingham. She had been much distressed by the prospect of her son John fighting against her son Henry.

The reinforcements came just in time. Late that afternoon, we learned that Warwick's men were at St. Albans. Doubtlessly they had hoped that the holy days would put Edward off his guard, but they had reckoned ill. The king had never forgotten that his own father had been killed just days after Christmas, during a supposed truce. So on the Saturday before Easter, the king and his army—Harry among them, for he had begged for the chance to fight—left London to face Warwick.

What would happen if Edward lost this battle? If he survived the fight, he would surely die on the block. Bessie and her little girls might end their days in a convent, her small son as a prisoner. And if... if Harry were to die, I would find myself a virgin widow.

I pulled a ribbon from my gown and handed it to Harry as the men said their last good-byes. "Wear this, please."

"Kate, it's not a tournament."

“I know that, Harry! Please. Wear it for luck.”

“All right.” He thought for a moment, then looked around as if afraid of being caught in what he was going to do next. Satisfied that no one was watching, he brushed his lips against mine, then pressed them cautiously a little closer.

A trumpet blared, and we jumped apart. It was the signal for the army to start moving. “Well,” said Harry. “I’ll see you soon, I guess.”

I watched as all of the men I loved slowly passed and drew out of sight, and wondered if I would ever see them again. Then I saw one more familiar figure—King Henry, headed to the battle as Edward’s hostage. Good Yorkist that I was, my heart still ached when I saw this man who had been king since he was nine months of age, seated in a litter and looking like a scared child.

And he was still wearing the same blue gown.

Harry: April 1471 to May 1471

WHEN EDWARD RETURNED TO LONDON, I BEGGED TO BE ALLOWED to fight, not so much for the House of York but for my Stafford and Bouchier relations. Our shared imprisonment had given me a sense of Yorkist solidarity that all my years as a royal ward had not. “You’re but fifteen,” said Edward dubiously. “You’ve not had that much training.”

“Fifteen and a *half*.”

“It’s a strange age,” Edward conceded. “Almost too young to fight, almost too old to sit back with the baggage carts. But when I was fifteen, I’d have wanted to fight, so I shall say yes. You will serve under Lord Mountjoy’s banner.”

Walter Blount did not appear to be very pleased when I told him the news; undoubtedly he dreaded bearing my youthful corpse back home to my grandmother. “For God’s sake, obey my orders and don’t do anything brash. There will be other battles.”

I nodded, happily picturing the glory that would soon be mine.



On the night before Easter, we arrived at Barnet, near which Warwick’s army was encamped. Lord Hastings was commanding our left wing, Richard the right, and Edward, with the dubious aid of Clarence, the center. Warwick commanded his reserve, his brother the Marquess of Montagu the center; on the right was the Earl of Oxford, who’d been made a Knight of the Bath alongside me but had long since fallen astray

from King Edward's cause. On Warwick's left was the Duke of Exeter, who was married to my former guardian, Edward's eldest sister, but who had not cohabited with her in years. My uncle the Duke of Somerset was on the coast awaiting Margaret of Anjou, whose arrival had been expected for some days now. For that reason, Edward was eager to bring Warwick to battle before more troops arrived, Easter or no Easter. Already he was outnumbered by several thousand, we estimated from our spies.

All that night we heard the rumble of Warwick's artillery, firing at us noisily but futilely, for we were closer to the Lancastrians than they thought, and they were overshooting. We kept our own guns silent to avoid alerting them to the mistake, and we kept ourselves as silent as we could also. It was eerie. No one could sleep, not even me, though like most lads my age I had a great capacity for doing so. Instead, I sat in my stepgrandfather's tent and dined wordlessly with him and my Bouchier and Stafford relatives.

Easter announced itself not with an angel from heaven, but with a mist so thick that I could not imagine how we were to walk in it, much less fight in it. Edward, however, determined that we should fight in it. So at around five in the morning on April 14, 1471, I joined my first battle, fighting in the troops commanded by the king in the center.

I could hear arrows whizzing by me, the men near me breathing hard, the thud of bodies clashing and falling, but I could scarcely see beyond my own hand in the fog. Someone—I could only hope that it was a Lancastrian—suddenly hove in front of me, and we began fighting hand to hand, as all around us were fighting.

To my shock, the man went down, whether felled by my own mace or someone else's I shall never know. Before I could congratulate myself, another rose in his place. He laid me a blow that sent me reeling backward, but the force of someone pressing behind me kept me upright and allowed me to strike back.

Then something crashed against my helm, causing a pain that first blinded me, then invited me to sink into the darkness. After making one last attempt to swing my mace, I accepted the invitation.



To my great irritation, someone was jerking on my helm and sloshing water on my face. “Stop,” I mumbled. I turned my head and found myself looking into the face of my uncle John.

“Well, you’re alive, at least.” He completed pulling off my helm, this time without protest from me, and gently touched my temple. I flinched and yelped. “Nasty-looking bruise, but that looks to be the worst of it. I wasn’t so sure when I found you whether you’d wake again. You’re lucky no one decided to finish you off after you fell.”

I frowned groggily. Something was missing. There were voices around me, shouting orders to and fro, some groans here and there, and footsteps going back and forth, but there was no fighting. No mist, either; it had turned into a perfect April day. “Is it over, then?”

“Over for Warwick’s men. Victory for us.” He and my page helped me to a sitting position. “Easy there. Just wait until you get your bearings a little more before you try to stand. It was anyone’s battle there for a while. Oxford’s men routed Hastings’s troops, but the fools decided to go toward London and loot to celebrate. Oxford finally got them back in order, but when they returned, they ran into Montagu’s men instead of the king’s. It was still damnably foggy, and the Marquess’s men started attacking Oxford’s. Oxford’s men started screaming, ‘Treason!’ and that’s when all started coming undone. Montagu was killed, and Warwick’s men got spooked and began breaking rank. Oxford escaped, we think. No one knows what became of the Duke of Exeter. Warwick—”

My still muzzy head was having difficulty following this. Less out of rudeness than out of my dazed condition, I interrupted. “The Duke of Gloucester?”

“Slightly wounded. He made a fine name for himself today, the ones who could see him in the mist say.”

Proud as I was to hear this about my friend, I could not help but contrast it with my own less glorious performance. The mighty Kingmaker had been defeated, and what would I tell my sons? That I had spent most of

the battle lying unconscious on the field. Scowling, I touched my forehead, hoping for blood, and found none, only a pulpy welt. So I would likely not even have a scar to show off. Then I remembered the words my uncle had said when he first saw me conscious. “Who of our people died?”

John sighed and crossed himself. “Lord Mountjoy’s eldest son was killed. So was Sir Humphrey Bourchier.”

I winced. Hours ago, I’d been playing dice with these men. They’d lost at that game, too.

“Our Henry’s alive, but badly wounded.” John’s good-humored voice cracked a bit. “I don’t know if he’ll recover. I’m going to look after him now that I know you’re in no danger.” My uncle helped me to my feet. “Try it now.”

I was a trifle dizzy, but no worse, and I had my page to lean on. As I got my bearings back, I asked, “And what of Warwick?”

John pointed to the woods where Warwick’s men had kept their horses and baggage. “You’ll find him over there.”



Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, the mightiest man in England, lay stripped of his armor, his underclothing dark with his own blood. I joined the Duke of Gloucester in staring down at the body.

“They say that once he realized all was up, he tried to reach his horse and flee, but he couldn’t move fast enough. Some blackguards killed him, even though Ned had given orders that his life be spared.” Richard pointed to the earl’s hand, bare of the costly rings that usually adorned it. “They stripped him and cleared out before anyone knew what was happening, I suppose.”

“You were in his care once,” I said. “It must be hard seeing him so.”

Richard flicked a hand toward the earl’s body. “He brought it on himself. Ned gave him opportunities to make peace.” He turned his dispassionate gaze from his dead guardian onto me and tapped his forehead. “I see you’ve seen some action.”

I shrugged modestly, which wasn't hard under the circumstances. "A bit. You too," I added, noting that Richard's left arm was bandaged. "I heard that you distinguished yourself."

Richard gave his own modest shrug, which was certainly more honestly come by than mine.

"So what next?" It was the first chance I'd had to talk with Richard since Thursday. The second most important man in London, he'd been running around over the past couple of days, busy with war preparations, while I had been occupied mainly in staying out of everyone else's way.

"Capture the French bitch and her bastard-born whelp, I hope."

"You really think Edward of Lancaster's a bastard?"

Richard snorted. "Doesn't everyone? By your grandfather Edmund Beaufort, they say. Or at least he's the leading candidate." He grinned and suddenly clapped me on my shoulder, which I discovered, rather to my pleasure, was sorely bruised as well. Yet another war wound. "Oh, sorry, old man. I know you don't like to hear ill about your Beaufort relations. Though it's not such an ill thing to get a queen in one's bed, is it? Anyway, that's off in the future. As for the here and now, I think, Ned will be heading back to London shortly. Who knows? We might be back at the Tower in time to hear mass with my lady mother."

He was right. Before we began our triumphant ten-mile return to London, however, I stopped by the tent where the highest-ranking wounded, including Uncle Henry, had been moved. Uncle John was there by his cot; he and his older brother were close, like Humphrey and I would have been if he'd lived. "How goes he?" I asked.

"Drifting in and out."

I looked at my uncle, wounded so badly in a battle he'd never really wanted to fight. As I stood there awkwardly, thinking I might never see him alive again, Uncle Henry opened his eyes. "Harry? You'll send my love to Mother?"

"Yes. Of course."

He smiled. "And Margaret. Tell her I'll see her soon."

“Yes.” In my most cheerful tone, I added, “I imagine she’ll soon be sending people to see after you.”

“Yes,” said my uncle contentedly, his eyes starting to close again. “Margaret thinks of everything.”



The day after we arrived in London—“we” including our hostage the unfortunate King Henry, who had probably never been so glad to see his apartments in the Tower as he was that afternoon—a cart lumbered into the city bearing the bodies of the Earl of Warwick and John Neville, Marquess of Montagu. Edward planned to give them honorable burial at Bisham Abbey, the resting place of their father the Earl of Salisbury, but first he wanted all of London to have a look at them—partly to scotch rumors that they had survived Barnet, partly to remind everyone of the fate of rebels. So for two days, the brothers were to lie at St. Paul’s, clad only in loincloths.

Kate wanted to see them. I rather doubted the wisdom of this; she’d not seen a dead person except for my brother Humphrey, and he in death had looked peaceful and sweet, nothing like these men with their ugly wounds. I didn’t want to see them again myself; there were enough live men walking around London with cloths over their faces, concealing mutilated features. But Warwick had ordered the deaths of Kate’s father and of her favorite brother, and I could understand her wish, unexpressed though it was, to gloat over his corpse.

Women, however, are strange creatures, I was quickly discovering. Kate took one look at the two brothers and began to cry. “It’s so sad, Harry,” she whispered. “Their feet are so sad.”

“Their *feet*?”

“Well, look at them.” I obeyed and saw nothing out of the ordinary, except that the Kingmaker’s toes were less calloused than those of his brother, and certainly nothing that would bring tears to my own eyes. “Bare like that—they could be anyone, couldn’t they? Peasants, even. *Anyone*. All the glory, all the titles—all come to nothing.”

All this philosophy from my little wife was disconcerting. (Maybe she'd been paying better attention to Grandmother Buckingham's improving books than she let on.) "Well? Aren't you glad to see him come to nothing, after what he did to your family?"

Kate touched her favorite ring, given to her by her father. Her pretty blue eyes turned hard and tearless. "Yes. I am." She gave the Kingmaker one last glance before we turned away. "But it is still a sad sight to see."



As Kate and I were viewing the Kingmaker, word arrived in London that Margaret of Anjou, her son and her daughter-in-law in tow, had landed in England at last. She had, in fact, arrived on the morning of Barnet. Instead of turning tail when she received the news of Warwick's defeat and death, she had begun raising an army. It was led by my mother's brother, Edmund Beaufort, the Duke of Somerset. Leaving his queen and the rest of his family in the Tower, along with Kate and others, King Edward went out to confront Margaret's forces.

It would be tedious to recount the twists and turns Margaret's army and King Edward's followed over the next days. Suffice it to say that on May 4, 1471, they finally met in the town of Tewkesbury, not far from the town's fine abbey.

I can say no more of my performance at Tewkesbury than that I remained conscious throughout the battle this time. I was kept in the reserves by Walter Blount, who had probably made a promise to my grandmother to that effect after Uncle Henry had come so close to dying. By the time we joined the battle, it had pretty much been won by the House of York.

Under fire, the Duke of Somerset brought his men downhill into Edward's at the center, a maneuver that might have worked had he not been met not only by Edward's men, but by Richard's on his flank as well. Even then, as Somerset was pushed back uphill, there might have been hope had it not been for Edward's idea of stationing two hundred men at arms in a wood, where they would be able to come to his aid when they believed that the

conditions warranted it. They chose this moment to advance, and what followed was a slaughter. When Edward's men were finished with Somerset's, they started on the Earl of Devon's, then on Edward of Lancaster's. By the time all was done, seventeen-year-old Edward of Lancaster lay dead on the battlefield, the last hope of Lancaster destroyed.

John Beaufort, the youngest of my mother's brothers, died not far beside the prince. The Duke of Somerset, along with a host of others, took sanctuary in Tewkesbury Abbey. King Edward would have hauled them all out at swordpoint straightaway had not the abbot, armed only with the sacrament, begged him to pardon them all. He did—but only for the time being. For on Monday, the intervening Sunday having given the men inside the abbey a reprieve, the king changed his mind and decided to force the Lancastrian leaders from sanctuary.

It was a heinous act, I thought then, and I still think it now. Swords drawn, a few dozen of the king's men barged into the abbey just after matins, while most of the men who had sought shelter, their arms cast aside, were still half dozing among the abbey's great columns. The abbot pleaded, the monks pleaded, some of Lancaster's men pleaded, but to no avail. Several men gathered up some swords and tried to fight; for their pains they were slain right there and then in this house of God, their blood polluting its aisles and staining the monuments that had rested there in peace up until now.

I tried to push my way inside the abbey, perhaps with some wild idea of trying to intervene myself, but I couldn't get through its great door; it was blocked by Edward's men. Instead I had to wait outside with the rest of the king's army and watch as one Lancastrian after another was dragged out in shackles past us, to the jeers of the Yorkist troops.

Then the last of the leaders was hauled out. I'd never seen my uncle Edmund Beaufort, save as a distant figure in armor, but I knew him instantly as he was hustled through the throng. His face, even when bloodied and covered with dirt and sweat, was unmistakably that of my mother's brother.

“What is to happen to them?” I asked my uncle John Stafford as he stood beside me.

“A trial, with the Dukes of Gloucester and Norfolk as their judges,” he said quietly, not looking at me. “Harry—”

“And then?”

There was no need for the Earl of Wiltshire to answer my question; his face as he turned to look at me said it all. I ran to the king’s tent, where he was giving instructions to Richard and the Duke of Norfolk, and more or less shoved my way past his guards. Edward stared at me, then waved away the guards who were belatedly trying to seize me. “It’s always a pleasure to see you, my young cousin,” he said genially. “But you might try asking next time.”

“Your grace. Is my uncle Somerset to die?”

“Yes, unless he can explain away his presence on the battlefield against me two days ago.”

“Then, your grace—please grant me a boon. Spare him.”

The two dukes stared at me as I fell to my knees. From a height above me, the king said, “Are you mad, boy?”

“No! As his nephew, I want you to spare his life. And perhaps those of the others, too,” I added generously.

“Rise, Harry.”

I obeyed. With scarcely an effort, the king then shoved me down again, so I landed on my backside. I sat blinking at him.

“By God, someone should have done that earlier, you fool boy. Have you no idea what your damned Beaufort relations have cost this country, in men, in money, in time wasted? Have you no idea that I pardoned your beloved uncle Henry Somerset, only to be betrayed by him? I did more than that: I shared my bed with him, went hunting with him, even held jousts in his honor. In that traitor’s honor! When men threatened his life in Northampton, I saved it. I should have let them slay him then and there. How did he reward it? By plotting against me!”

“But that was Henry. Not my uncle Edmund.”

“Not my uncle Edmund,” the king mimicked. “Your uncle Edmund was scarcely better. I released him from my prisons when I pardoned Henry Beaufort, and what did Uncle Edmund Beaufort do? Smiled and grinned his thanks, then followed his eldest brother’s lead and took off to join that she-wolf Margaret of Anjou the first chance he got. That bitch is still at large, need I remind you? Perhaps when I find her, I should set them up in their own household together, Harry, with a handsome annuity. Would you like that?”

“No! I just want you to spare him. For my mother’s sake. He’s the only brother she has left now.” My own temper was beginning to rise. “What harm would it do you? You’ve always treated my mother unkindly, just because she’s a Beaufort. You’ve never let me visit her, the whole time I’ve been in your wardship. I wouldn’t have seen her the last time if Humphrey hadn’t died. She and her husband haven’t even been allowed to administer any of my lands. She’s a countess but she might as well be a squire’s wife, the way you treat her.”

“I’ve treated your mother as I have because she’s not only a Beaufort but half mad, Harry. Don’t delude yourself.”

“You hauled my uncle and the others out of sanctuary, with no right, after promising to honor it. You broke your word as a king and as a gentleman! Not only that, you’ve treated all of the Beauforts shabbily, and their kin! Aunt Margaret’s son Henry has never been allowed his title or his lands, although he’s nearly as good as a title to the throne as y—”

Edward was one of those men who did not raise his voice when he was angriest. “Get that brat out of my sight. Now.”

Richard, who was stronger than he looked, grabbed me and more or less hauled me out of the king’s tent. When we were at a safe distance, he grinned at me and said, “You don’t know when to stop talking, do you, Harry? I don’t think there’s much of a future for you in Ned’s diplomatic service after you started outlining that Henry Tudor’s claim to the throne.”

“I only wanted him to spare my uncle. He’s part of my blood. Why did he explode at me?” I rubbed my backside. “I was respectful, at least at first.”

Richard shrugged. "Aside from not liking to be told his business by a youth of fifteen, Ned doesn't much like executing people, never has. He'd rather be playing the jolly king. And he didn't like taking those men out of sanctuary; it goes against what piety he has. Maybe you made him think of things he'd rather not think."

I turned to Richard and placed both of my hands on his shoulders. "Richard. If that's the way he feels, perhaps you could persuade—"

"No. Harry, think. What would happen if your uncle was put in prison instead of being executed? More years of chaos, even if he didn't find a way to escape and stayed locked up, because men would still rise up on his behalf. Ned's decision is the best one."

"So you'll condemn him and the rest to death?"

"Yes. I'm sorry, Harry. Sometimes it's better for the safety of the realm as a whole that a few should die. And don't lie to yourself. They're grown men; they knew the risk that they were facing."

I was silent, knowing that there was no hope left.

"Harry? Is it true what he said about your mother?"

"I don't want to speak of it. Not now or ever."

"All right, Harry." Richard was kind enough to ignore the tears that were falling down my face. Then he said, "I need to get back. There's a little yet to be done before we're ready to try them. Would you like to see your uncle in the time being? I know that's not quite what you wanted, but—"

"How?" I swatted at my cheek. "Edward—I mean, the king—would never let me."

"But I can."

He led me to a tent and left me waiting outside while he spoke to someone within. In just a moment or two, he emerged. "Come on, Harry."

Inside the tent sat what remained of the cream of Margaret of Anjou's army—my uncle Edmund, Sir Hugh Courtenay, and Sir John Langstrother among them. My uncle was sitting between a couple of guards, evidently lost in his own thoughts. He was a young man, only in his early thirties, and good-looking; thanks to his long exile, he would die without ever

having taken a wife. Rousing himself, he gave me a cold stare as I was led to where he sat. “So, a little Yorkist come to gloat. To what do I owe this pleasure?”

This was too much. “I’m your nephew, Harry, Duke of Buckingham, and I didn’t come to gloat. I begged for your life, as a matter of fact, but the king wouldn’t grant my wish. I came to see you for my mother’s sake, because you’re part of my family. But if you’re going to be like that—well, then, go to hell. To hell with the king and the whole sorry lot of you.” I cannot overemphasize the immense satisfaction that all of these consignments to the world below gave me, but as I turned on my heel, I did suspect that Richard at my age would have managed this business more eloquently.

“Wait. For God’s sake, boy, wait. I’m not in the best of humors at the moment, you see. Make some allowances for circumstances. Come back, and we’ll talk. Please, Harry?” He half smiled at me as I returned to stand warily beside him. “Not language that I expected to come out of a lad with such an angelic face.”

I shrugged, hoping it made me look less angelic and more manly.

“You look like Meg, I see now.”

Meg? It took me a moment to realize he was speaking of my mother. I’d never heard her called this; it belonged to a long-ago time when the Beauforts were flying high. “I suppose.”

He gave a wry smile. “And you favor me, too. Though my face has become less angelic with the years. Along with the rest of me.”

I had been schooled at court in the art of polite conversation and was fairly adept at it (despite the coarseness in which I had just engaged, which I assure you was not the doing of my tutors), but none of my training had prepared me for this encounter. Now that my uncle was speaking to me, what did one say to a man whose head would be off in a couple of hours? Especially to a man whom I had just cursed? My uncle, however, must have understood how I felt. “Sit. How old are you, Harry?”

“Fifteen.”

“Did you fight here?”

I nodded. “Here and at Barnet.” Something made me confess, “I didn’t distinguish myself, though. I was in the reserves here and never did all that much. At Barnet I was knocked out and missed most of the battle.”

“We all have our bad days, and you’re very young,” my uncle said kindly. “You’ll improve. I suppose you’re still a ward of the crown?”

“Yes, and I hate it. I want to live on my own lands so much, to be my own master. I’ve not seen any of my estates since I was little.” It occurred to me that my uncle, who aside from his present circumstances had long ago lost his own inheritance through his family’s attainder, might not find my plight especially moving. “I know that must sound like a trivial complaint to you.”

“It’s a quite natural one. What lad doesn’t want to be out on his own? You’re married, aren’t you, to one of the Woodville girls?”

“Yes. Kate—Katherine.”

“No use asking if she came with a dowry, then. Is she pretty, at least?”

“They say she is very fair.”

“They? Surely at fifteen you have an opinion. What do you think?”

“I think so, too.”

“Then that’s all that matters. And Meg? How is she?”

“She’s married again to Richard Darell and they have a daughter. I haven’t seen her since my younger brother died. The king discourages contact between us, you see, because—”

“Because of her Beaufort brothers? I should think that obstacle will be soon removed entirely,” my uncle said, with perfect composure.

“But there is another reason.” My voice dropped to a whisper, and I found myself telling him what I had never told Richard, and never wanted to discuss with Kate. “There are times when the demons come upon my mother. Once she even tried to make away with herself and her young child.”

My uncle sighed. “During her fits of melancholy?”

“Why, yes,” I said.

"She had them even as a girl." He patted me on the shoulder. "I'm sorry, Harry."

"Do you think *I* could run mad?" I dared to ask him.

"You look sane enough to me, Harry, and your father and your Stafford grandfather were a level-headed pair." He grinned. "If you've anything to worry about in your Beaufort blood, it's foolhardiness. God knows there's a lot of that to spare."

We talked for a while longer—a little about my uncle's years in Burgundy, which he remembered with fondness, a little about my mother as a girl, but mostly about myself. I would not have monopolized the conversation in that manner, but it seemed to be how my uncle wanted it to go, so I deferred to his wishes. He asked me about mundane things—my studies, my knightly training, whether I wanted to go abroad, whether I liked music, whether I preferred hawking or hunting, the lands I would inherit, which castles I thought I would spend most of my time in. Not since Grandfather Buckingham died had any man bothered to talk to me thus, and I chattered on as if this were a perfectly normal talk between uncle and nephew. Not once did we speak of Lancaster or of York or of the battle that had been fought. When there was at last a pause in our conversation, I blurted, "Perhaps I should try again for your life. This time I'll grovel to the king. I'll offer him my lands, anything. I don't want you to die!"

My uncle laid an arm on my shoulders and pulled me closer to him. "You would beg in vain, Harry, even with the kind offer of your lands. Stay here instead. Your presence does me good."

We sat there talking quietly for a precious few more minutes. Then there was a clatter, and the king's men barged in. "All's ready. Come along, all of you."

I helped my uncle up—I had seen that he had a fresh wound in his leg that would make it difficult for him to stand without assistance—and supported him until he could get his balance. He thanked me, then slid a ring off his finger. "Wear that as a remembrance of me, and give Meg my love, if you can do so without grieving her too much."

Not trusting myself to speak without tears, I nodded.

“And when you come into your lands, I’d like you to have some masses said for my soul. You’ll do that?”

“Every day,” I managed.

Two of the king’s men surrounded my uncle, and I stepped back reluctantly as they led him off. “Harry?”

“Uncle?”

“Meg ought to be proud of you. God keep you.”



The trial was purely a formality—not that anyone had expected anything different. Richard played his part in the show with becoming gravity, and moved through the proceedings as though he’d been doing it all of his life. My uncle sat through the business with a look of cool detachment on his face, which changed only to show a glint of relief when it was announced that the king would not exact the penalty of hanging, drawing, and quartering reserved for traitors.

So forgone had been the conclusion, the scaffold was ready and waiting at Tewkesbury’s market cross when the dozen men were led out to execution—the first one I’d seen. It was something that a man was supposed to watch without flinching, and I managed it, not wanting to give anyone the satisfaction of seeing me betray any girlish emotion. The prisoners were beheaded in reverse rank; my uncle, as the head of the army, had to wait until all of his followers died. None of the condemned men made any speeches; a few prayed. The executioner held up each head as the deed was done but made little to-do about it. There wasn’t much of an audience except for Edward’s army and a cluster of townspeople.

My uncle was looking around for something as he waited his turn, and I knew it was me he sought. I moved my cap ever so slightly, until he saw me. Then he smiled faintly, knelt and placed his head on the block, and prayed. In a stroke, the male line of the House of Beaufort was extinct.



After my uncle's execution, I slunk off, not wanting anyone's company. I wandered through the town of Tewkesbury, through the wooded areas around it, all the while paying very little attention to my surroundings. Finally I made my way back to the market cross by which my uncle had been executed just hours before. The scaffold had already been knocked apart. Its remnants, and the bloody ground surrounding it, were the only signs of what had happened there.

I stood there staring for a while. Then, heedless of the passersby, I fell to my knees and wept, until presently someone knelt beside me and put an arm around my shoulder.

"Easy, old man. Easy."

Much of what I did years later, I suspect, can be attributed to that one moment—that when Richard sat beside me and held me next to him as I cried my heart out. We must have presented quite a spectacle—two well-dressed young men smack in the middle of the marketplace, one bawling like a baby while the other supported him—but Richard paid it no mind. Only when I had exhausted my store of tears and lay almost limp against his shoulder did he raise me. "Come. Let's get some food and drink in you. You'll feel better."

Wiping my nose on my sleeve, I let Richard lead me away. We had walked in silence for a while, me still mostly leaning against him, when he said, "There will be no display of their heads, Harry. The king is going to pay for your Beaufort uncles to be buried with all due honor at the abbey."

I tried to gather together a little dignity. "How kind of him."

"Well, it is, considering the alternative, and they'll be in fine company, with all of the old Earls of Gloucester and our Clare ancestors. It is meant to be a mark of respect, Harry. Take it as such, is my advice."

I blew my nose. "I suppose I can understand what you said earlier about the king having no choice about my uncle Edmund. But I miss him."

Richard tried not to smile. "Miss him? Harry, you spent less than an hour with the man in your entire life."

"I know. But we got on well. I shall miss him all the same." I crossed myself, and Richard kindly followed suit.

We went into a tavern—after the shock of the battle, the merchants of Tewkesbury had rebounded nicely enough. Richard ordered us ales and meat pie. As we tucked into our food, which I found did indeed improve my spirits, I began to realize how much I had missed Richard during these past months. Even after he had returned to England, he'd hardly had a chance to speak to me, so busy was he with the king's affairs.

I took another deep drink of the ale. Perhaps in my famished state, it went to my head a bit, for I dared to ask Richard, "Now that the Lady Anne's a widow, are you thinking of marrying her?"

Richard looked surprised. "I did tell you that I would probably marry her, didn't I? You still remember that?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, I'd like to. I don't think Ned can possibly object now that Warwick's dead. And, of course, if she'll have me."

"Why wouldn't she?"

He shrugged. "Edward of Lancaster died in fair battle, but at the hands of York. Women can bear a grudge. And she was set to become queen of England in her time. Duchess of Gloucester might seem a comedown after that."

"She'd be a fool not to have you, Richard, queen or no queen. Any woman would be a fool not to have you. She's not worth the having if she refuses you." I banged my knife to emphasize my point.

He grinned at me. "Christ, I'm fond of you, Harry. I wish to God that I'd had you instead of Clarence as a brother. Or maybe just as another brother. The younger brother I never had."

"Sometimes I think of you as the older brother I never had," I admitted, my cheeks burning in the dim light of the tavern.

"Really? Then..."

With a quick, graceful gesture, Richard flicked his knife across my finger, drawing blood, then did the same to his. "Hold it next to mine until they merge. There. *Loyaulte me lie.*"

“Loyaulte me lie.”

“We are brothers in blood, Harry. From henceforth we are all to each other. We help each other, support each other, uphold each other in our time of need. If it be necessary, we’ll die for each other. Agreed?”

“Agreed.”

Having carried out this solemn rite, we continued in a more common and far less solemn rite of brotherhood—drinking far into the evening. With what I know now was my usual poor head for drink, I was thoroughly intoxicated when we left the tavern, and even Richard was somewhat tipsy, as I had never before seen him. On the way to our respective tents, we encountered William Hastings heading toward his tent, accompanied by a busily dressed woman who very clearly was profiting from our stay at Tewkesbury. He nodded at us as we wound toward him, arm in arm. “Your graces. Good night to you.”

“Shesh a beauty!” I announced approvingly for all of Tewkesbury to hear. Richard, laughing, clapped me on the back.

Hastings (dismally sober) looked at me and shook his head. “Do you need some assistance getting the Duke of Buckingham to his tent, perchance, your grace?”

“No. I’ll have him sleep in mine tonight.”

“Blood brothers mush share a bed,” I explained. “Like the king and Henry Beaufort.”

“Oh,” said Hastings. “Then I do believe I’ll leave you to it.” He beat a very hasty retreat with his light of love.

In Richard’s tent, I rolled into his ample camp bed without bothering to undress. The more sober Richard stripped to his shirt and washed his face before climbing into bed next to me and giving me a brotherly embrace. “Good night, brother.”

“Good night, brother,” I echoed, returning the embrace before the ale carried me off into a deep slumber.



The next day, we set off for the North, where some supporters of King Henry were continuing to make trouble. On the way there, a messenger informed King Edward that Margaret of Anjou, her daughter-in-law Anne Neville, and two of the queen's ladies, the Countess of Devon and Katherine Vaux, had been found in hiding at another abbey. They had submitted to Edward's authority and craved his pardon.

Several days later, the ladies were brought to the king at Coventry. Though Anne and Katherine Vaux had each been made widows at Tewkesbury and the queen had lost her only son there, none had had the opportunity to have mourning clothes made, so they made a rather incongruous sight as they rode up to us under guard, dressed in subdued but still pretty colors and with carefully arranged headdresses—courtesy of the serving women who accompanied them. Their captors hadn't been unkind. Margaret of Anjou had been put in a chariot for security's sake, but the other three rode on the fine horses they'd brought with them from abroad. A wagon behind them carried six coffers of belongings: two for Margaret, two for Anne, and one each for the other ladies.

Margaret of Anjou made no move to leave her open chariot when it pulled up at Coventry. I thought at first it was the arrogance of a woman who had had people dancing attendance on her for years and hadn't adjusted yet to the change in circumstances. Then I realized that it was grief and shock that had rendered her impassive.

Katherine Vaux dismounted and stepped inside the chariot. I could hear her making coaxing noises. Then she emerged with the queen. I'd never seen her that I could recall; for most of my life she had been in exile. Now as she at last turned her face toward my direction I gasped at her beauty, ravaged even as it was by her recent anguish. My sister-in-law Elizabeth Woodville was lovely, but she had nothing of Margaret of Anjou's classical features.

She composed herself enough to sink to her knees in front of the king, her head touching the floor. Moonstruck, I would have loved to have pulled her up and comforted her, but even I had enough sense to realize that this would be a mistake. Edward let her rest in that position for longer

than seemed chivalrous. Finally, he said, "Rise, madam. Have you anything to say for yourself?"

Margaret of Anjou began to say something, cleared her throat, and tried again. Finally, in a voice husky with sorrow, she said, "Your grace has a newborn babe. Would you not do anything to protect him, to keep the throne for him? I have done all for love of my own son. In doing so I have acted only as any loving parent in my position would act. But that is all gone. From henceforth I am yours to command. I ask only that you allow me to end my days in peace and dignity and that—"

"Not an only wish, after all, madam? Well. Go on."

"I ask that you extend your protection to the Lady Anne, and to my dear friends the Countess of Devon and Lady Vaux. They have been loyal wives and, in the case of the Lady Anne, a loyal daughter as well. I should be sorry to have them suffer for anyone else's actions, particularly the Lady Anne. She is but fifteen years of age."

She bowed her head again. "Rise," said Edward gruffly. The queen obeyed. "You have been troublesome, madam, but you need not fear for your person or for theirs. You and the countess and Lady Vaux will be taken to London and held in the Tower until suitable living arrangements can be found for you. The Lady Anne will be taken to join her sister, the Duchess of Clarence. My brother the Duke of Clarence shall be her guardian." He narrowed his eyes at the Lady Anne, who had been kneeling beside the queen. "Cousin, forgive a blunt question. Are you with child?"

The Lady Anne, Kingmaker's daughter that she was, narrowed her eyes right back at him. "I believe not. Is that the answer you wished, your grace?"

Beside me, I heard Richard make a half-suppressed whistle of admiration.

The king snapped, "It was." In a kinder tone, he said, "We stop here overnight. My men will find some suitable lodgings for you. In the meantime, perhaps a tent can be made available for you to— Oh, they can have your tent, Richard? Very thoughtful."

He walked away, visibly glad to be free of the female prisoners. It was a much more straightforward matter to deal with men, I supposed. You

either executed them or you clapped them in prison; you didn't have to worry about the niceties.

Richard offered Anne his arm to lead her toward his tent. Since no one else was considerate enough to do so, and because I was longing to get closer to her, I took the opportunity to offer my own arm to Margaret of Anjou.

"Thank you. You are a kind young man, er—"

"Harry, Duke of Buckingham, your grace."

She turned her violet eyes on me, and I nearly swooned. "Is it so? Your father and his father were some of the truest friends I ever had. And your Beaufort grandfather and his sons—" I saw her fight back tears. "I fear your family has suffered much for my cause, young Harry."

"It was worth it for a lady such as yourself," I said fervently.

She clucked her tongue at my treasonous remarks, and I sensibly fell silent as I continued escorting her. Our progress was slow: either from grief or from the aftereffects of her journey in the none-too-comfortable cart, she moved like an arthritic old woman. "Harry, tell me something. Do you think I will be allowed to join my husband? He will be grieving sorely for our son."

I caught the word *our*, given just a hint of emphasis. Richard might be right about many things, but he was wrong about one thing: Margaret of Anjou's son was not my grandfather's by-blow, or anyone else's. "I don't know, your grace. I am not in much favor with the king, and cannot guess his temper that well."

She sighed as we reached the tent. "I fear—" She stopped herself and turned to me. "Thank you, Harry. I shall always remember your family in my prayers."

Then she kissed me on the cheek and slipped inside the tent. It was the only conversation I ever had with her.



With no male Nevilles to rally round and the Earl of Northumberland, Henry Percy, lending his support to King Edward, the rising in the North

collapsed without our army ever having to leave Coventry. We cut short our northward journey and headed south, toward London.

Then news arrived that there was trouble in Kent and London from a die-hard known as the Bastard of Fauconberg, who was a nephew of Warwick. Having been denied admission to the city, he was attacking it. The mayor and aldermen of London wrote a frantic letter to the king, informing him that his queen and his children in the Tower stood in the gravest jeopardy. Edward sent an advance guard of fifteen hundred men to hasten to the city and began to hurry there himself. He could not get to London fast enough, as far as I was concerned. What might happen to a pretty young girl like Kate if those vengeful brutes penetrated the Tower?

My fears proved to be for naught, however, for good tidings soon arrived: the Londoners, led by the Earl of Essex and Anthony Woodville and encouraged by a thoroughly Yorkist mayor, had repelled Fauconberg, leaving us a quiet city to enter in all due magnificence on the twenty-first of May. I'd been restored to sufficient favor to ride with the other dukes: Gloucester, Clarence, Norfolk, and Suffolk. Much farther back in the grand procession was Margaret of Anjou, in the same open chariot she'd been in before. She sat upright between the Countess of Devon and Katherine Vaux, looking straight ahead and ignoring the stares and the occasional taunts of the crowd.

Kate, her face aglow, threw herself into my arms when the procession was over and we were all reunited at the Tower, having first attended a service of thanksgiving at St. Paul's. "Anthony was a hero!" she informed us after at last releasing me from her grip. She turned to her brother, who stood there with his usual kindly but abstracted look. "You were!"

"Many did their part, Kate. The Earl of Essex, Sir Ralph Josselyn, the citizens of London—"

"But Anthony did most of all," Kate insisted. She began telling us what we had heard already from messengers, but no one had the heart to stop her. "That Fauconberg man attacked London! It was a week ago today. His men tried to burn down the houses on the bridge, and they were attacking

the city gates as well. It was worst at Aldgate, but the mayor and the sheriffs pushed them back to St. Botolph's. And then Anthony came from the postern gate here and began to fight them, with arrows and hand to hand." Kate was bouncing around now, happily slaying imaginary Lancastrians with her sword arm. "Finally the whoresons—oh, I beg pardon, Fauconberg's men—started to retreat. Anthony chased them to Mile End, and then to Stratford. He crushed them!"

"We are well proud of him and the rest," agreed the king, finally getting a word in edgewise. "And that includes you, Kate, for being brave."

Kate beamed as the conversation turned to other topics. As the king began a conversation with his queen and the rest of began our own private conversations, she said, "You look more manly somehow, Harry. Older, too."

"Well, I have aged a month," I said dashing, but I thought as I looked in a glass in my chamber at the Tower that night that I was more manly. I'd fought in two battles, stood up to the king, acquired a blood brother, and been kissed by a queen, all in a matter of weeks. Perhaps fifteen wasn't such an awkward age after all, I thought that night before falling into a sound sleep, having first prayed for the souls of my uncle Edmund Beaufort and all of my other dead relations.

The next morning, I woke to a pounding at my door and the shrieks of my wife. Had the Bastard of Fauconberg resumed the fight? Beating my page to the door, I sprang up and undid the latch, heedless of the fact that I was clad only in my shirt.

Kate did not even notice. "He's dead, Harry! Dead!"

"Who?"

"That dear sweet man, King Henry. They found him dead in his chamber here late last night." She wiped her eyes. "I saw him once or twice, when he was taking some fresh air. He always smiled at me, and I always smiled back. Once I gave him some flowers I picked from the garden, and he thanked me so very kindly. What harm was there in it, after all, if it brightened his life a little?"

“What did he die of?” I asked, knowing full well the answer as I saw Margaret of Anjou in my mind’s eye, saying, “I fear—”

“Some say his heart was broken when he heard of the death of his son. But—” Kate swallowed. “But others say he was helped to his death, and I—I think so, too. I know my history, Harry.”

So did I.

October 1471

WITH EDWARD BACK SECURELY ON THE THRONE, LIFE BEGAN TO return to normal—much to my disgust. I was restored to my royal guardians and resumed my old routine of studies, waiting on my elders at table, and knightly training, as if I'd never seen a battle.

I complained about this vigorously and often to Richard, when I saw him. This wasn't frequently, for he had more responsibilities now and was often up north, having been granted Warwick's castles of Middleham, Sheriff Hutton, and Penrith and many of the offices he had held as well. Richard wasn't terribly sympathetic, however, as he had problems of his own: George wanted all of the Warwick estates.

Warwick's countess had taken sanctuary at Beaulieu Abbey upon landing in England and learning that her husband had died that same day at Barnet. She was an heiress in her own right, to the Beauchamps and the Despensers, and should have been allowed to keep those lands after Warwick's death, along with jointure and dower, but no one except the countess herself was concerned much about her claims, even though she was passing her days at Beaulieu writing every woman of any importance in the kingdom about her rights. Kate got one such letter; even the king's eldest daughter, Elizabeth, was the puzzled recipient of one. The letters probably made the countess's dreary days in sanctuary go more quickly, but they otherwise served no purpose. The only question in anyone's mind was whether the Duke of Clarence, by dint of being married to Isabel, would get the entire Warwick inheritance, or whether Anne would get a share. And Richard,

having made it clear that he wanted to marry Anne, was determined that he and Anne got a share.

The summer had come and gone without this quarrel being resolved when I heard sad news: my uncle Henry Stafford had died on October 4, just a month after my sixteenth birthday. I was not surprised, for he had never been of the strongest health and had suffered deeply from the effects of his wounds at Barnet. It was a dismal time for his widow, my aunt Margaret. Even after Tewkesbury, her brother-in-law Jasper Tudor had stubbornly continued to resist Edward, but he had at last given up the fight and fled to Brittany with Margaret's son Henry. First, however, Jasper Tudor had executed a Welshman, Roger Vaughan, who had been sent by Edward to capture him and who had evidently had a hand in the execution of Jasper's father years before. I add this only because Roger Vaughan's death was to have unexpected consequences much, much later; at the time, Roger Vaughan's fate meant nothing to me. I only felt sorry for my aunt Margaret, a widow whose only child was an exile.

Then the king summoned me to his chamber. Our relationship had been polite since the day he ordered my uncle's execution, but rather stiff, which in all fairness was more my fault than the king's, for he had been kindly enough disposed to me now that my Lancastrian relations were safely dead and buried. He'd even allowed me to spend a few days visiting my mother.

Upon my entry, I bowed deeply, knowing full well that it irritated Edward, who with family was inclined to be far less formal. "Your grace," I said in my best courtier's manner.

"We were sorry to hear of your uncle Henry Stafford's death, Harry."

"Thank you."

"You are sixteen. Time, perhaps, for you to have a bit more freedom. Certain of his lands reverted to you, as your grandfather's heir, upon his death. It is our intention to let you enter upon them."

I stared, too stunned by this good news to keep up my formality. "Really?"

The king shot me an amused glance. “Really. Mind you, these things take time to settle, so don’t pack your belongings tonight. And lest you be wondering, you are still a ward of the crown. Your grandfather’s estates will remain in our hands until a more suitable time.”

“And my Bohun lands?” I ventured.

Edward’s face changed. “*Your* Bohun lands?”

“The Stafford properties that came into the crown’s hands with the marriage of my ancestor Mary de Bohun to the fourth Henry. With the sixth Henry now deceased and without heirs—”

“We are quite aware of the origin of the claim, Harry. Whether it is as strong as you seem to believe is another matter entirely. It is not an issue we are disposed to decide today, if ever.”

“Yes, your grace.”

“Who has been speaking of those lands to you, anyway?” He frowned. “Your mother?”

“No, your grace,” I said truthfully. My mother, in her grief at losing the last two of her brothers, hardly cared about her own chamber at the convent, much less the Bohun lands. It was Aunt Margaret who had reminded me of my claim to them. “It is common family knowledge.”

“Hmph,” said Edward. “Well, you may be excused now.”



When Richard came back to court from the North a few days later, I lost no time in acquainting him with my good fortune. “I shall have land of my own now! Of course, I was sorry about my uncle Henry,” I added piously, though I confess I hadn’t given my poor uncle, of whom I had been fond, a second thought since Edward gave me the news. “I also mentioned the Bohun inheritance to him. You know about that? It was probably premature to raise the subject, but I think now that at least it’s been broached, he might—”

“For God’s sake, Harry! Stop yammering about your lands. You’ll be rich soon enough, if you don’t goad someone into stabbing you out of sheer boredom first.”

“Richard? I—”

“Anne’s missing.”

“Missing?”

“He echoes, too,” Richard told the wall.

“Ech— Richard, I beg your pardon. I just don’t understand. Wasn’t she staying with George?”

“Supposedly.” Richard took a turn around the room, then took a deep breath. Having composed himself, he said, “Edward gave me permission to ask for her hand in marriage. I’ve not raised the topic in so many words with her, because it seems from what she’s let drop that she did have some regard for that bastard whelp of Margaret’s who was her first husband.” I started to protest Margaret of Anjou’s virtue and thought better of it. “Don’t worry, I’ve not called him that to her face. But she’s an intelligent wench, more so than most, and I think she realizes that I’m the best match for her. She doesn’t want to see George get all of the Warwick lands any more than I do.

“So when I arrived in London today, I stopped by George’s place. I’d brought some gifts from the North; Anne rather prefers it up there, I gather. I figured it was about time to start making my intentions more clear. But when I asked to see her, as I’ve done before, I was told that she was no longer living there. No one would tell me where she’d gone. The worst of it is, I’m not sure if anyone there could tell me. I tried bribery, threats—everything. All I got was the same reply. The Lady Anne was not staying there, and where she had gone they did not know and could not venture to say.”

“George wouldn’t tell you?”

“I wasn’t admitted to his presence. That alone tells me he has something to hide.”

“Jesus,” I whispered. “Do you suspect—” I could not bear to finish the sentence.

Richard shook his head. “I don’t believe he’s murdered her, if that’s what you mean. He’s genuinely fond of Isabel; he’d not harm her sister.

What I do believe is that he's poisoned her mind against me somehow, or convinced her that she'd be best off taking the veil. That's what worries me most, actually. She's stubborn; if she determines on a course of action, she'll stick to it."

I thought of the times at court I'd seen Isabel and Anne, during that almost comical period when Edward and Warwick were trying to pretend all was well. The Warwick girls were pretty, with finery befitting their father's wealth that they plainly enjoyed showing off. I couldn't imagine either of these heiresses settling for a nun's habit. Richard must have read my skepticism, for he said, "Don't underestimate George's smooth tongue when he cares to exercise it. And remember, Anne doesn't know me that well. She was off in someone else's household most of the time that I stayed in Warwick's. George can tell her every sin I've committed, real or imagined, and she might just believe him."

"We have to find what's become of her, then."

"We?"

"We are blood brothers, are we not?"

"Harry, there was a great deal of ale as well as blood between us that night." I must have looked shattered, for Richard hastened to add, "Well, yes, we are. But how can you help? You're not a confidante of George. And"—Richard hesitated—"frankly, Harry, you can run off at the mouth sometimes. I'd prefer to keep the inquiries discreet."

"I see." I stood. "Well, then you must excuse me. I'm off to my nursery."

"Harry!" But I was long gone.



When my anger cooled, I realized that Richard was quite right. I did let my tongue run away with me sometimes, as I had at Tewkesbury and about the Bohun inheritance. I still had much to learn about the world, I began to realize. All the more reason, I decided, that I should prove my worth to Richard by finding Anne. But how?

George and I were on civil terms, and could chat idly on the few

occasions when we were thrown in each other's company at court, but I didn't like him. I'd not liked him since that day he'd so triumphantly announced the death of my grandfather, a man worth a dozen of the Duke of Clarence. Even making allowances for George's youth at the time, I couldn't like him.

I doubted, however, whether he thought enough about the matter to like or to dislike me. Six years younger than he, I was probably quite insignificant in his eyes. And did he know that I was good friends with Richard? I had no idea. I tended to think not, though he had to know we talked together. But that in itself meant nothing. After all, we were all cousins, all dukes, and all (more or less) on Edward's side. There was no reason why we shouldn't talk together. No reason, either, why I shouldn't pay a visit to my cousin the Duke of Clarence—except that I never had. Would it not look strange if I did now? I needed an excuse.

Then, that same evening at supper at court, two men got into a brawl, one that was quickly broken up but which left both men with impressive-looking bruises. As I watched them being hauled away to cool their tempers in a cell for the evening, I suddenly had my inspiration. Now I just needed to put my plan into action.



"The Duke of Buckingham, your grace."

George stared at me as I limped into his chamber, clothes torn and dirty, leaning on my page. "Harry? What the hell happened to you?"

I stared shamefacedly at the floor. "A brawl," I muttered.

"Well, I hope you didn't get the worst of it."

"I did." I hoped my page, still supporting me, was keeping a straight face. At my command, it was he who had roughed me up an hour or so before, and he had set about his duties with more enthusiasm than seemed quite proper. In his zeal, he'd knocked me rather hard on the cheek, which ached intensely. "Your grace, I was hoping you would do me a favor."

"Not avenge you, if that's what you're thinking," George said affably.

“No. It’s just—well, you know how it is at court. Everyone knows everyone else’s business. If I came back there as I look now, I’d be the talk of the place, and that would be humiliating. Since, as you say, I got the worst of it. And besides—”

“Out with it, Harry.”

“The king keeps us wards under close watch, as you’ve probably heard. And—well, I would hate for him to know what happened. If he found out, I’d probably never be allowed out on my own until I was one-and-twenty.” That was no lie; the king did guard us closely. “I was hoping that I could wait here and clean up while my page went and fetched me some fresh clothes. Then when I come back, nothing will look so amiss, and if the king asks where I was, I can say I was with you. He can’t object to that.”

“Ah, but what about your cheek, Harry? Quite a bruise you have coming up there.” He tapped it hard, and I winced.

“I tripped in the dark.”

“Clever boy.” Clarence showed me a set of dazzlingly white teeth. “All right, you can stop here for a while. But tell me. What was a pretty lad like you brawling about? Because I just can’t picture it.”

I gave the floor another piercing gaze. “A woman,” I admitted.

“A woman! And you a married man, Harry!” Clarence snorted. “Don’t tell me you’re on the way to siring a bastard too, like my upstanding brother Richard.” He rang for a servant. “Wine, man!” Then he snorted again. “Not one bastard, mind you, but another on the way! And the hypocrite turns his fastidious little nose up at Ned’s escapades.”

Richard had another bastard on the way? It was the first I’d heard of it. Remembering that Clarence himself had a reputation as a faithful husband, I hastened to give my own disapproving snort at Richard’s hypocrisy.

“So, what’s her name?”

“Er—Molly.” I hoped George didn’t ask for more intimate details, for I’d yet to lose my virginity, except in my imagination. “She has black hair and green eyes. A real beauty. With lovely breasts,” I added for good measure. (There was no reason to stint myself, surely.)

“Best keep her far away, Harry. Ned won’t like to hear of you keeping company with the likes of Molly when you’ve got your pretty Kate waiting for you. Now, that’s a beauty, Woodville or no. If I were you, she’d have been in my bed by now.”

“She’s still very young,” I said in my most urbane manner as the servant brought our wine. Here, I knew, was where the hardest part of the evening lay.

George could drink prodigiously. He wasn’t a habitual drunkard by any means, though his drinking would get worse (and sloppier) later. Most of the time he drank in moderation. But when he chose to, he could drink vast quantities of wine, and he would be drinking long after the last of his companions was in a stupor on the hearth. Richard had witnessed these episodes two or three times and had told me that George scarcely seemed drunk, except for his speech being much less guarded. I could only hope that this would be a drinking night, and that I would be able to keep my faculties intact sufficiently to lead him onto the subject of Anne.

It didn’t work out that way.

George liked sweet malmsey wine, so that was what we drank that night; to this day, the thought of the stuff makes me queasy. I didn’t try to keep up with him; that surely would have killed me. He drank twice as much as I did, and never showed it.

Nor did he talk of Anne. We talked about every subject under the sun—he turned out to be able to discourse well on almost any topic—and I think we even recited the prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* together at one point, for reasons that mercifully escape me now. We talked of Isabel; we talked of the Countess of Warwick; we talked of Margaret of Anjou; we talked of my wife; we talked of Cleopatra, even—but no Anne.

Finally, the wine having overcome my discretion, I hazarded, “How is the Lady Anne? Is she grieving the loss of her husband?”

“She is well.”

“I thought I might pay my respects to her—and your lady wife—before I left.” By this point in the evening I could manage this longish sentence,

and the ones before it, only by speaking very slowly. I hiccupped once, then twice for good measure.

George chuckled. "I don't think either lady would welcome seeing you at present, Harry."

"But I truly hoped to see them. They're so"—I searched vainly for a gallant remark but could not find one in the mists fogging up my brain—"pretty. Couldn't I at least see Anne and just gaze upon her?"

Clarence's smile faded and he put down his wine cup. "You want to see Anne," he said. "Well, she's not here to see. Why, you're not surprised to hear that, are you? You little snake! Richard sent you, did he not?"

"No! I came myself." The wine was beginning to make me queasy. "But not to spy..." I felt myself slumping to my left.

George yanked me up. He was a tall man, not quite as tall as the king but still impressive, and I thought he might try to kill me. He certainly could have without much effort, especially in my condition. Perhaps it was the very lack of challenge I presented that dissuaded him, for he stared in my face for a moment or two, then grinned and released me. "Well, since you took the trouble to come here, I'll tell you what my man told Richard. I don't know where the lass is. And I'll do you one better for your pains by telling you this: I don't care a damn." He shoved me into the arms of my page. "Take your idiot master home, boy. Use the river landing if you please. He looks green. Don't let him puke on those fresh clothes you dressed him in; it's a sad waste of fine fabric."

We were making our way to the landing, my feet growing more unsteady with each step I took, when the servant who had been given the task of seeing us out—one who had been in and out of Clarence's chamber earlier in the evening, and who I realized later had been paying unusually close attention to our conversation—whispered, "Your grace? If you are indeed a friend of the Lady Anne, I have tidings for her of you."

"I am," I said faintly.

"She is in the habit of a cook maid, at a tavern in Fleet Street."

"*What?*"

“It is true, your grace. There’s no time to explain; I must be back.” He handed a slip of paper to me, then thought better of it and gave it to my page. “Here is the address.”



Late as it was when our waterman finally deposited us at Westminster—more or less hauling me out of the boat by my collar—I insisted on being brought to Richard’s chambers, with a vociferousness that carried the day against the common sense of my page. Richard’s servants would have kept me out, but I protested so vigorously, and so loudly, that I at last heard Richard say wearily, “Let him in. God know what he wants, but it had better be good.”

“It ish!” I promised as my page supported me into Richard’s bedchamber.

Richard stared at me. “Harry?”

“I’ve found her! Anne! She’s in a cook shop! In Fleet Street.” I held out my hand with a flourish, having forgotten that it was my servant who had the precious paper. “Address!”

“Harry, you’re drunk.”

“That’s where she *ish!*”

Richard sighed. “Harry, how did you come by this er—information?”

“Clarence’s man.” Wobbling out of range of my page’s grasp, I teetered dangerously to one side, then to another, and caught hold of a bedpost after only one or two misses. “Visited his house. We drank together,” I added in a confidential tone.

“Well, I can believe that much.”

“It’s the truth, Ricshard. She’s a kitchen maid! In Street Fleet!” To better demonstrate my credibility (clearly my words were not doing the job), I let go of my friendly bedpost to wave my hand in emphasis. Somehow I ended up in an undignified heap on the floor. “I wist you would believe me,” I said lugubriously from my new station.

“Shall I take him to his chamber, your grace?” my page asked as I tried to remember how to rise to my feet. It was a question that suddenly required a lot of thought.

“No. He’s too far gone; you’d probably have to drag him. I’ll keep him here with me. You go and explain that he took slightly ill and he’s staying here overnight. God knows, he will be ill, so there’s no lie there.” Richard helped me to my feet as my page scurried off. “Easy now, Harry. Let’s get you undressed and into bed.”

“Cook shop,” I repeated with a drunkard’s stubbornness. “Anne.”

“All right, Harry. If you say so. I’ll check in the morning.”

I pointed in what I thought was the direction of my page and touched my own nose, which I couldn’t have managed otherwise. Staring at my finger in surprise for a moment, I finally added, “Has address.”

Shaking his head, Richard propped me against the bed and began undressing me. Whether it was the strangely erotic sensation of being undressed by hands other than my page’s, or whether it was my complete and utter intoxication, or whether there was some longing in me that I had never dared to acknowledge, or all three, I do not know, but when Richard had stripped me of my clothes and more or less pushed me into his bed, I put out my hands and drew his face to mine, then kissed him full on the lips, with a passionate abandon of which I would not have guessed myself capable at age sixteen. “I love you,” I whispered.

To Richard’s everlasting credit, he did not slam me across the face or laugh. He pulled away from my grasp and pushed my hands down upon my chest, gently. “You’re very drunk, Harry,” he said quietly. “I’d best sleep elsewhere tonight, I think.”

“No. Stay.”

“Go to sleep, Harry. I’ll wait here while you do.”

Had he done the unthinkable and acted upon my kiss, I hardly know how I could have managed to play my part; I am not sure I even knew exactly what that would entail. Too inebriated to form further words of protest, I closed my eyes and did not open them until late in the morning, when my page obligingly held back my hair as I retched into the basin he had wisely provided for me. Twice I repeated this inglorious act before falling into a deep sleep, from which I did not awake until late in the

afternoon. My head was pounding, half from the effects of drink, half from the awful memories of my behavior with Richard. Hoping that some time the previous evening I might have caught some plague that would carry me off without delay and with a minimum of fuss, I buried my face in the pillow and turned against the wall.

Then I heard Richard's voice and felt him shake my shoulder. "Awake, old man?" I whimpered some sort of answer. "Good! You were right! I have found her."

"Did you doubt me?" I asked miserably, still with my back to him.

"Of course. Addled as your brain was last night, your own mother would have doubted you. Your own confessor! But you told me true. *In vino veritas*, eh? I've brought Anne out and taken her to sanctuary. St. Martin's. They've pleasant quarters for a lady. She'll stay there until she and I marry."

"Did you find her well?" I asked, less out of concern than a desire to forestall the moment when we would come to my unspeakable act the night before. Painfully, I rolled over to look at Richard.

"Yes. She's Warwick's daughter, all right; she was telling them how to run the kitchen! What a manager! They won't be sorry to see her go, I'm sure. I will make good use of her talents on my own estates. Damn George had her convinced I'd personally slain her husband as he was fleeing so that I could get her estates, instead of him dying in fair battle."

"But why was she in the cook shop?" I asked foggily.

"It's owned by a family that's connected with one of George's servants. George and he arranged for Anne to board there until George could quietly move her to one of his estates to escape my wicked clutches while Anne pondered whether she wanted to take the veil." He saw my puzzled look. "I know, it's somewhat lacking as a plan, isn't it? Did George really think everyone would just forget about the girl after a couple of months? Even Anne admitted that it had its shortcomings. But she said she couldn't stand to marry the man who'd killed her husband in cold blood. Fortunately, we got that straightened out. I told her I had witnesses—and I do—to prove

that I did no such thing and that Clarence was not exactly a disinterested party. Wenches! You never know what they are going to get into their heads, even the intelligent ones.” He chuckled and then looked at me sympathetically. “Speaking of heads, how’s yours, Harry?”

“It would be kind of you if you chopped it off.”

“You’ll feel better by tomorrow. Sooner if you’re lucky. But what possessed you to drink with George? And why is your cheek bruised?” He touched it gently. “Did he assault you?”

I longed to prove myself to you. To serve you, I almost said. I shrugged. “No, he didn’t assault me. It’s a long story. I just wanted to help you find her, that’s all.”

“Well, you did that, even though I told you not to, and I’m grateful. But don’t try to keep up with George again, old man, whatever you do.”

“I won’t.” I started the painful process of getting out of bed, then remembered my state of undress and decided to stay put. “Where’s my page?”

“I sent him out for a while. There’s something I wanted to talk about.”

“Richard, I—”

Richard looked out the window. “You’ve not been with a woman yet, have you, Harry?”

“No. Kate’s too young to risk getting with child just yet.”

“I wasn’t thinking of your wife. Do you remember I promised to take you to some houses I knew when you turned sixteen?”

“Yes.”

“Well, it’s time, I think. Your wife will need a man with some experience when the day comes. You’re sixteen, right?”

“I just had my birthday in September,” I said, a little hurt that Richard had not remembered the date.

“Well, then, you need to go to Southwark with me. I’d say tonight, but I think you’ll have more enjoyment if you wait until tomorrow. The wares there are best sampled with a clear head. Anyway, I need to stop by and see how Anne’s faring.”

“All right. Tomorrow.”

“Good. I’ll call in your page for you.” He turned away from the window and smiled at me. “Thank you again for helping me find Anne. I won’t forget it.”



I will leave the details of my visit to Southwark to the imagination, as my experience was probably no different than that of any other youth my age. Richard, much amused by the story of my visit to George that I told him when I was feeling more myself, made a great point of trying to find a whore named Molly, but the only Molly we found in the fine establishment Richard patronized was a rather tall, large lady whose Amazonian presence might have intimidated even the king or William Hastings, never mind a novice like myself. Instead, we settled on Sally, a comely lass of around twenty who appeared to specialize in initiating nervous young gentlemen.

I enjoyed myself with Sally. I even returned to see her from time to time, though not perhaps as much as another youth my age might have done, for I soon discovered in myself a certain fastidiousness that shrank from enjoying women who had been palmed by so many others. It was much sweeter to think of chaste Kate, who would be all mine and no other man’s when the time came. There was something else, too, that I might well admit now that I never could admit then: that the odd feeling that Richard—and no other man but Richard—had stirred in me never quite left.

I suppose, at this point, it never will.

Kate: May 1472 to January 1473

WITH HARRY WAITING IMPATIENTLY TO ENTER ONTO HIS LATE uncle's estates—there had been a delay in proving the will that delayed the assignment of the lands—I itched to be away from my sister's household and to be the mistress of my own establishment. I knew how to run a household—in theory, at least. I could dance gracefully, sing, play the lute, and embroider. I could make gracious small talk for hours on end in English, if called upon, and I could do the same in French—much better than many others, thanks to Mama. I knew the uses of various herbs, and I could dress a wound if need be. At fourteen, in short, I knew all I could possibly know, and I was eager to demonstrate this once and for all.

My longing increased when Mama died in May 1472. She had been ailing quietly for some time, so her death was not a surprise, though we all mourned her deeply. I prayed for her several times a day, liking to think that she would soon be out of Purgatory and reunited with my father and John, who surely had not tarried long there before landing duly in Paradise. But her death made me even more acutely aware that my childhood had drawn to a close, and that it was time to leave childish things far behind.

There was something else: I wanted to share a bed with Harry.

The bawdiness of my brother-in-law's court has been greatly exaggerated. It was true that Edward had mistresses—sometimes more than one at any given time, especially if Bessie was in the late stages of pregnancy and was unavailable to him. But he conducted his amours discreetly; his mistresses were not seen at court, and he would not have welcomed them

there to mingle with Bessie and his daughters. We in the queen's household were expected to behave with propriety, and even the boys at court, as Harry had often complained, were kept on rather a short leash. It was, in short, a decorous place for young people. Yet I had become well aware of what went on between men and women, and I wanted nothing more than to have it happen between me and my husband. Not being a wanton, I thought of the act with no other man; my daydreams and my night dreams were all of Harry.

Harry and I had married so young and so long ago, the details as to when we were to consummate our relationship had been left very vague, all depending, I gathered, on how soon I physically matured. The word "fifteen" had been mentioned now and then, but when I considered the matter one evening as Cecilia was undressing me, I looked at my full hips and breasts and decided that this was a purely arbitrary figure and that fourteen was just as good. How much difference, after all, would a few months make? This, I decided, would surely be Mama's sensible position on the question if she were alive.

I had high hopes that summer of 1472, for there were two family weddings at that time. The first nuptials, in June, were of Harry's aunt Margaret Beaufort to Thomas Stanley, the king's steward. As she was nearly thirty and he nearly forty, and she had been married twice before and he once before, with a large brood of children to show for it, it was not a terribly romantic wedding, but I hoped against hope that it might give Harry ideas. It did not, a circumstance for which I blamed Margaret Beaufort. Though her wedding dress was obviously expensive, it struck me as old-fashioned, and indeed, the bride looked rather prim and grim throughout the whole proceeding. I suspect that she found Stanley tolerable enough but would have preferred to live the pious life of a wealthy widow had she not thought that this marriage might somehow serve her young, exiled son.

The next wedding, between the Duke of Gloucester and Anne Neville, which took place just weeks later, was more promising, especially as the bride was only a couple of years older than myself. Accordingly, I dressed

myself as alluringly for the festivities as I could, even coaxing Cecilia to dab a tiny bit of rouge on my cheeks and to let me wear a tad more scent than usual.

I felt quite confident when we were finished. Poor, sweet John had been overly kind in his prediction that I would match my sister in looks, but I knew I was by no means unattractive. My scattered freckles were so small that only a man kissing me could notice them, and then wouldn't he have his eyes shut anyway? My hair was sandy, but indisputably on the safe side of blond, my eyes were bright and blue, and my features were regular. I had wide, red lips, covering white teeth. My bosom, though not magnificent, was more than adequate. I was neither too thin nor too wide, and although I was on the short side, there was no harm in that, as it would have been a dreadful thing had I towered over Harry. Any false modesty I might have possessed had been destroyed some time ago by Lord Hastings, a known connoisseur of women who had often cast his approving eye in my direction as of late. I knew that his admiration was harmless, as he was not the sort of man to toy with a married lady who was also the queen's sister, and I took some comfort in his appreciative glances.

The Gloucester wedding was a stately one though not an elaborate one, the newlyweds having wished to get it over with quickly so that Richard could attend to his affairs in the North, in which he was greatly interested. The bride's mother did not attend, being still in sanctuary in Beaulieu Abbey, but the Duchess of York made one of her rare appearances, along with the Duchess of Exeter (minus her imprisoned Lancastrian husband) and the Duchess of Suffolk (with her faithfully Yorkist husband). Anne's sister, the Duchess of Clarence, was there too, of course, as was the Duke of Clarence, who played his role in the proceedings with a martyred air, it having been his hope, Harry said, that Anne would take the veil and that he would get all of the Warwick lands for himself.

Harry was an especially honored guest at the wedding. Evidently he had done Richard some service in finding Anne, who had been hidden away

by George for a time, and this was confirmed when I noticed that George reserved some of his most sullen looks for my husband. But with the king himself at the wedding, along with the queen and a couple of the older royal daughters, he could do no more than sulk and glare.

By the end of the evening, I was sulking and glaring nearly as much as George. Harry paid my finery no attention whatsoever. We danced together, once or twice, but we might have been sister and brother as we moved together palm to palm. His only concession to our married state was to escort me to my chamber, where he gave me the most formal of good-night kisses and left. With him gone, I relieved my frustration in the only way I knew how: by dashing an expensive container of scent across the room.

Cecilia, who fortunately had been out of harm's way, stared. "Good Lord, girl, what is the matter?"

"I shall never be Harry's true wife! All of this was for naught." I yanked at a hand cloth and began removing my spot of rouge. "I might as well be old and dried up. He'll never lie with me."

"Child, you are still very young."

"But I'm ready now! And I'm not getting any younger. Why, I'm fourteen, for heaven's sake!"

Cecilia repressed a smile. "Oh, I think it'll be a while before you're past your prime, my lady. And Harry is young too, you must remember. Not all men are like the king, you know, who they say was seducing ladies when he was younger than you. Some men start later."

"The Duke of Gloucester has two bastards already, and he's but nineteen."

"Aye? You want Harry to sire some bastards, then?"

"No, of course not." I scowled at Cecilia. "I want him to sire children on me, and don't tell me I'm too young. The Countess of Richmond, that Margaret Beaufort—"

"Had a child when she was barely thirteen, and it almost killed her. Her husband should have waited."

"I'm more developed than she ever was." I pouted as Cecilia, having removed my hennin, began to pull pins out of my hair until it finally fell

around my waist. Thick and slightly curling, it was a fine sight for a man's eyes, I privately thought, one that I wondered if Harry would never see. "Cecilia, do you think he could be what they call a—a sodomite?" The very word made me blanch.

"No, child. I think you just need to give him time. When the hour is right, he will come to you."

"If I'm not dead by then," I groused. "And buried."



At Windsor Castle that autumn, the court gathered to welcome Louis of Gruuthuse, who had sheltered the king during much of his exile. In gratitude, the king had planned a round of festivities, which would culminate in Louis being made the Earl of Winchester.

As we women waited for Louis to be brought to meet the queen in her chambers, the Duchess of Exeter and I played at ninepins. It is a game for which I have always had a gift, and I was trouncing my opponent handily.

The duchess didn't seem to mind, for she was much preoccupied by other matters. "Ned has finally agreed to help me get my annulment," she announced as a servant set up my pins again. "Soon, the Lord willing, I shall be shed of that man."

I nodded sympathetically, though I secretly felt a little pity for the Duke of Exeter. A servant of his had found him stripped of his armor, lying half dead on the field at Barnet. The man had taken his master to a surgeon, then smuggled him into sanctuary at Westminster, but the king had removed him from there and confined him in the Tower, where he was said to live a comfortable but very dull existence.

The duchess read my mind. "If he'd switched his allegiance to the House of York like any sensible person, now he'd be in a world of difference, wouldn't he?" Her ball sailed past the patiently waiting ninepins, and I shook my head in disbelief. Little Bess, my niece, could do better than that. "But no. He had to stay true to Lancaster. All well and good, his loyalty,

but there comes a time when it becomes stupidity. Though I'm not sure York would have had him anyway. The man could quarrel with a tree."

My ball slammed into the pins, producing a gratifying sound of crashing ivory as I tried to think of a suitable reply. It was a sign of my maturing appearance, I supposed, that the duchess was bothering to speak to me of such adult matters. I finally managed, "Shall you remarry, my lady?"

This was a much less innocent question than it might appear, and actually almost an impertinent one, it being common knowledge that the duchess had long had a lover, Thomas St. Leger. He was only a knight in the king's household, though—hardly a suitable husband for a king's sister. Belatedly, I hoped the duchess did not take offense. Anne, however, merely smiled archly. "The king has promised I may marry as I wish, provided it is to a man who has been loyal to him, and my choice shall produce no worries on that score." She rolled her ball again and gasped as it grazed two pins, knocking both down. "Now, will you look at that! How about you, my dear? My old charge, your husband, has just turned seventeen, if I recall correctly. Are plans being made for you to live with him?"

"I wish!"

"Aye?" The duchess glanced at me appraisingly. "Have you bedded with him yet? You look of a condition to do so."

"I certainly am. But I have not," I added mournfully.

"I suppose the queen won't allow it until you're older."

"She has not forbidden it. Neither has the king."

"I see."

"It is Harry," I confessed, lowering my voice, though it was hardly necessary in the noise of the room. The queen and some of her ladies were playing at tables, and another group was dancing to a lively tune. "I have encouraged him in every way possible, but nothing happens. I contrive to stand in dark corners with him, perfume myself, dress my best—and nothing! Is it something in me, do you think? Is my breath sour?" I exhaled for the duchess's benefit.

"No, not at all."

“Then what is it, do you think?”

“You are hardly speaking to an authority on the subject of marriage, child. The Duke of Exeter and I bedded together just long enough for him to sire my girl, and no more. It was not until later that I realized that the act need not be unpleasant—but I speak too frankly. My husband and I did not suit, plain and simple, in or out of bed. Yours is a different situation, I think. Shyness, maybe. Harry never was a very forward lad when he was living in my household, at least around women. He is fond of you, isn’t he?”

“Like a sister,” I grumbled. I stared at the ninepins thoughtfully. “But he does treat me like a wife in one way at least. He doesn’t like it when men flirt with me. He got angry back when that Jasper Tudor did, or at least Harry said he did. I think he was just being pleasant.”

“Then perhaps what he needs is a reminder that you are not his sister.”

The door to Bessie’s chamber swung open and the king, unannounced, strode inside, followed by Louis of Gruuthuse and a crowd of courtiers, including Harry. “Is not this a splendid sight?” Edward shouted to his guest over the din. “The fairest ladies of England at their play.”

“There can be none more pleasant.”

I puffed out my chest and hoped that Harry found it a pleasant sight, too.



Six-year-old Bess, the king’s eldest daughter, had been dressed in her prettiest clothes for Louis of Gruuthuse’s visit, and her dancing master had been just as hard at work as her tailor. The evening before, after Louis arrived at the queen’s chamber, she had danced with her tall father, to the delight of all of the onlookers. Tonight Harry partnered her. Being much shorter than the king—as most men were—Harry was rather better suited for her. He was a good partner, leading little Bess around gracefully and amending his pace to hers.

The king, never one to sit and watch others dance, led my brother Anthony’s wife to the area that had been cleared for the dance, and soon others were following suit.

“May I?”

“Why, of course, Lord Hastings,” I said.

From the moment Lord Hastings led me out to dance, I knew something was very odd. He never directed any of his remarks to my face, but to my bosom, which I admit was as much in evidence as it could be without going beyond the pale of respectability. He touched me much more often than was necessary to the dance, and his hands lingered where they had brushed. I was utterly baffled, for Lord Hastings, though his glance might linger on a woman, was never other than perfectly correct in his outward conduct.

The Duchess of Exeter, partnered by the discreet Thomas St. Leger, brushed against me heavily. When I glanced over, irritated at her clumsiness, she gave me a wink. Light dawned.

Never in my life have I entered into a conspiracy so gladly as I did on that day—with one notable, later exception. I bestowed my best smiles upon Lord Hastings. I threw my shoulders back so that my bosom was even more prominent. I made arch conversation and laughed.

And all the while, Harry danced studiously with the Lady Elizabeth.

William Hastings shook his head as I looked over to Harry to see some sign of a reaction. “It’s not working, is it?”

“No,” I muttered.

“Then perhaps, my lady, more drastic measures are called for.” And with that, Lord Hastings gave my rear a mighty pinch.

“Lord Hastings!” I squawked. I slapped him across the face as hard as I could. “How dare you!”

I had not even had a chance to pull my hand back when Harry was at my side, eyes ablaze. “What mean you by this? Did you take liberties with my wife, you blackguard?”

Lord Hastings was the soul of contrite sheepishness. “My lord, I know not what came over me. Forgive me, your grace. And especially you, my lady.” He bowed and reached for my hand, but before he could bring it to his lips, Harry was dragging me out of the room and to my chamber.

“Out!” he yelled to Cecilia, who lost no time in obeying. He shoved me onto a stool. “What were you doing to lead that creature on?”

“Nothing,” I said sullenly. “I was merely enjoying the dance and the company.” The Duchess of Exeter’s and Lord Hastings’s plan, if it could be dignified as such, plainly had not worked.

“Hastings doesn’t usually do that sort of thing uninvited. You must have done something.” He eyed me coldly. “You dress too provocatively, I’ve noticed.”

“I dress like every other lady at court.” I dabbed at the tears that were beginning to fall down my face. “I put on my prettiest gowns for you, and you pay no mind. I spend hours on my headdress, and you pay no mind. I might as well be old and covered with warts. I might as well be shut away in a nunnery.” I snatched off my towering, sharply pointed hennin—perhaps one of the most idiotic contraptions women have ever been known to put on their heads, and a fashion that I have had the pleasure to outlive—and stamped on it with my foot. “Why don’t you send me to one? It can’t be worse than this.”

Harry stared. “You’ve been dressing like a harlot for *me*?”

“I have not been dressing like a harlot, and yes, I have been doing it for you.” To stop my tears, I retrieved my hennin and started to make a great production of securing it back on my head, but such a task seemed impossible without the help of Cecilia. “But no more, as it has been a wasted effort.” I returned to my work on my hennin.

“Stop. Don’t put that thing back on.” Harry touched my hair, cautiously. “Can you take it down?”

“I suppose.” I began yanking out pins willy-nilly, and very shortly my hair hung to my waist. “All done,” I said, since Harry seemed at a loss for words.

“It’s beautiful,” he finally said. “I always wanted to see it hanging down loose.”

“All you had to do was ask,” I said softly. My heart was thumping. Even more softly, I asked, “Would you like to see more of me, Harry?”

After what seemed an eternity, he nodded. I pulled off garment after garment until I finally stood in front of Harry dressed only in my stockings

and shift, and then after a deep breath I undid my garters. As my stockings fell to the floor, I untied my shift and let it slither after them.

Harry stood transfixed. I did not drop my eyes but stared at him boldly. What did I have to be ashamed of? I was his lawful wife, and I was coming to him a virgin, which was more than Harry could probably say. “Do you like what you see, my lord?”

“Yes.” Harry took me in his arms and kissed me, cautiously at first, then with more fervor. He drew back. “You’re shivering. Are you frightened?”

“I’m *c-cold*.”

Harry led me to my bed. I climbed under the covers and huddled under them, too grateful for the warmth for the moment to wonder if Harry would follow me inside. Then after a few minutes Harry, bare as I was, parted the bed curtains, then lay beside me and took me into his arms.

Goodness knows who will be reading this, so I shall only say that our first loving was sweet, if a bit clumsy, and that when I was at last a true wife to Harry, I was as happy as any girl in England. We lay drowsing together afterward, and I had nearly dozed off against Harry’s chest when Harry whispered, “Kate? I must confess something to you. I—” He swallowed. “I am—not as experienced as you might think I am, being a man. I have been with women—one woman, actually—only a few times. There’s a lot I don’t know.”

“Well, there’s much more that I don’t know,” I said lightly.

“You’re so French in some ways, and— I was afraid I’d not please you. I kept meaning to come to you. Then I’d lose my nerve.”

“You did please me.” I spoke the truth, though I see now what a bumbling, fumbling pair we had been that first time. “It did hurt,” I admitted. “But they say it doesn’t the next time. Is that true?”

Harry did not reply, but pulled me closer against him.

Years later, vile men would tell stories of how my husband had detested me and our marriage, so much so that his resentment caused him to bring down a king. I would remember our first night together then; I often wondered

whether Harry did also. But that was in the future. For now, Harry and I tried out our new pastime one more time that night before falling asleep in each other's arms, truly husband and wife at last.



To my immense delight, there was not a soul in Windsor Castle who did not know the next morning that Harry and I had consummated our marriage. Cecilia, finally arriving back in my chamber after Harry had left it (following our third essay into the marital act), glanced at my sheets and said, grinning, "My, someone's been busy." At dinner, Lord Hastings nodded at me with a distinct look of accomplishment, and the king, passing me, pinched my cheek and said, "Why, you little minx! Seducing young Harry!"

Sore from my deflowering, I still managed to strut, instead of to merely walk, that day. In my sister's chamber, the Duchess of Exeter made a few heavy jokes about my having been ridden hard, though only out of the hearing of Bessie, who said nothing about my new state. Only when we were in comparative solitude did she say, "You should have waited."

"You're not going to lecture me about the hazards of getting a child, surely," I protested. "Not with seven of your own."

"No. You're sturdy enough, I daresay. But if you had waited, we could have had your bed blessed. A proper ceremony, and a feast."

I smiled, then kissed Bessie. "I didn't want a ceremony or a feast. Just Harry."



With Harry seventeen and the two of us now bedding together, we hoped daily that the king might hand over Harry's Stafford lands to him. Then Harry and I could have our own households, our own servants, and—most important—our own bedchamber.

Having discovered the joys of each other's body, we were shameless those days in our lust, which we indulged every time Harry could get away from the king's household and visit me, usually at Greenwich. Sometimes

he managed to stay the night, but most of the time we dallied in the afternoon in my own chamber. Our skill had grown as our shyness with each other had rapidly decreased. I had been unaware that there were so many variations on how the sexual act could be performed, and Harry, though less naïve, confessed to me that he'd felt too foolish to experiment widely on Sally, the whore he'd visited before we consummated our marriage. There was no need for Sally now; we had each other.

If I could only get with child! I thought. The king would be bound to give Harry his lands—my sister, who had been supporting me and my servants in her household for years, would hardly want to be paying for a wet nurse as well. We would be free. But my monthly course came as promptly and as annoyingly as ever.

In December a very sad thing happened, one that at last got my thoughts out of the bedchamber: Bessie's newest baby, Margaret, died. She was only eight months old. It was the first such loss Bessie had experienced, and coming just months after Mama's death, it made her very quiet for a few weeks. The king himself was more subdued than usual. It was a much less lively Christmas than the festive one we'd had the year before, and I thought it boded ill for the new year.

Instead, just after the beginning of January, the king called Harry and me into his chamber. "A belated New Year's present for you, Harry," he said, and handed him a parchment. "For Kate, too."

Harry turned pale as he read, and I squealed.

The king was allowing Harry to enter into his grandfather's inheritance.

*Harry: January 1473 to
December 1475*

HOW OLD IS THIS CASTLE, SIR WALTER?" ASKED KATE.

Sir Walter Devereux had been custodian of Brecon Castle for the past couple of years, and had traveled from his home at Weobley to help us get installed in what would be our chief residence. He handed over the keys to me wistfully, as if sending his child out into the world. "Old," he said succinctly, and launched into an account of its history since Norman times.

I listened only to be polite, for since I had learned to read I had perused the chronicles eagerly, alert for any mention of the lands that would someday be mine. There was not anything Sir Walter could say that was new to me. In any case, Sir Walter's intended audience was Kate, off whom his gaze seldom moved. I'd begun to get used to the way men's eyes lingered on my wife; what man in his senses could do otherwise than contemplate her? I didn't care so much now, for I knew that I was the only man she looked at the way she had looked at me the night when we had consummated our marriage.

Even now, thinking of her standing before me unclothed that evening made me blush and my blood run hot. To hide the state I'd put myself into, I turned toward a window and gazed at the valley and the River Usk below, keeping a polite ear turned toward Sir Walter.

My journey to my new lands was the first time I had ever seen Wales as an adult. It was a beautiful country, but all wild and strange to me, and I wondered how I would get on with my tenants. I had been told by everyone—or at least by Grandmother, Aunt Margaret, and the king—that

I and my men would have to be firm with them; otherwise, at seventeen, I would be taken advantage of mercilessly.

Sir Walter was well into the saga of the Braose family, a thoroughly unpleasant lot. I was relieved to hear him move on to my Bohun ancestors, who were considerably worthier in my estimation. The king hadn't seen fit to give my share of their great inheritance, but I hoped that it lay in my future. For once, I'd kept a discreet silence about the matter.

"No one died here, did they, Sir Walter? I mean, I know people did die here—but not unpleasantly, did they?"

Sir Walter pondered. "Well, there's been some attacks from time to time through the years, but all very long ago, I believe." He smiled. "All omens appear to be good for the two of you. You make a fine young couple."

I turned away from the window and took Kate's hand. She squeezed it in a way that I had learned held a great deal of promise. Something must have showed on our faces, for Sir Walter coughed and said, "I believe I must be heading back to Weobley now."

"Do take some refreshment first," said Kate in her best lady-of-the-castle voice. She must have been practicing.

"No. The two of you have traveled far and will want to rest by yourselves, I am sure."

We did indeed want to be by ourselves, but not to rest. When Sir Walter had been seen out with all due form, Kate and I adjourned without any discussion to my bedchamber. Furnishings had been sent up before our arrival, and my magnificent new bed sat patiently waiting for us. Gallantly lifting Kate over the threshold, I set her down on the bed and began kissing her, then pushing her backward and her skirts upward. "Harry! Let me at least undress first."

Her laughing protest carried no conviction whatsoever, and was quite inconsistent with the actions of her own hands. "Next time," I promised.

Afterward, now lying decorously side by side under the covers, we stared up at the canopy over our heads. It still was difficult to take in the fact that we were no longer dependents in others' households, but the master and

mistress of our own domains. “Whom shall we invite to stay with us first, Harry?”

“My mother.” It’d been a dream of mine for so long to entertain her in the style to which she ought to have become accustomed. “I saw a chamber that I want to have made ready for her. She’ll like the view over the castle gardens.”

“I should like to see her again; she was very pleasant. And I would like to have my brothers and sisters visit.”

Not all at once, I secretly hoped. “Of course. And my aunt Margaret—oh, come now, she’s not the harridan you think. And Grandmother, if she’s up to traveling. And Richard, too.”

“Oh, yes, Richard.”

I had noticed that my wife had never taken all that kindly to my friend. For that matter, I did not think that my friend had ever taken all that kindly to my wife. Perhaps there were just too many years between them. “He’d come with Anne, of course. You like Anne.”

“Oh, yes. It will be good to see her again.”

There could have been more enthusiasm here, but I did not press the matter, especially since Kate was pressing another matter altogether. “Harlot,” I whispered as she covered my mouth with hers, her sandy hair tickling my chest.

What I can say? We were young, and it was an exceedingly commodious bed.



My mother did come to visit a few months later. She had been much affected by her brothers’ death at Tewkesbury, and I thought that she had faded a great deal since I had last seen her, but the trip to Brecon and the sight of my riches seemed to do her good. She admired the chamber we had had refurbished for her, although she scolded me for running up a debt in doing it—which indeed I had, and I was glad of it, for it was pleasant for both of us, I think, to have Mother scolding me like anyone else’s mother. I also had

put in a generous order with the draper, and Kate's tailor stayed hard at work turning the material into new robes for my mother. I wanted her to look like the countess she was, even if she did spend her days in a convent.

The nuns who kept my mother told me that despite her grief, she had not had any of her struggles with her demons over the last year, and I thought because of that, I might have her to stay with me permanently. Kate, whose sweet nature was never so sweet as when she spoke to my mother, heartily joined in my invitation. But Mother refused. She felt more safe from the demons at the convent than in any other place, she told us, and after life there for so long she was ill fitted for life in a great household, preferring as she did to take her meals in private and to pass her days helping the nuns with their good works and praying for my father and for her many Beaufort dead. Reluctantly, then, I let her go. It was a pleasant visit nonetheless, and I thank God that we had that happy time together, for the next year, she caught a fever and was dead in a couple of days.

I was a little pensive myself after Mother left, but soon Kate and I had a new distraction, for we had received word that Richard had business with the king in Shrewsbury, where he was staying at the time, and would be glad to visit Brecon.

Poor Kate had to put up with a lot from me at this time. Mother had seen everything and pronounced it good, but I noticed that she did not pay much attention to her surroundings. Richard was a different matter, and I wanted everything to be perfect for his visit down to the little bells on my fool's cap.

"I don't see why we are making so much fuss," grumbled Kate after I had made my latest inspection tour and found things still sadly wanting. "It's not as if the king were coming. And if the king were coming, it wouldn't be half so bad, for he would just enjoy himself. Why can't Richard be as easy to please?"

"His household is said to be very well organized," I said stiffly. "Perhaps you could profit from the example. You are a little lacking in that, you know."

Kate said a few things in French that were spoken too quickly and eloquently for me to grasp, which was probably just as well. That night she shut me out of her bedchamber, from which I was usually barred only when she was having her monthly course.

But on the day Richard was due to arrive, everything was in order—minstrels in tune, old rushes replaced with new, adequate plate for all, servants functioning perfectly. Not a minute too soon, for just minutes after I had ascertained all of these things, the Gloucester horses were spotted at a distance.

Richard having brought Anne along, as I had hoped, the ladies went after supper to Kate's chamber, while Richard and I decided to ride off our meal. "I suppose you've heard about Ned's and George's children," he said.

I nodded. Just three days apart, the Duchess of Clarence had given birth at Farley Castle to a girl, Margaret, and the queen had given birth at Shrewsbury to her second son, Richard. We had sent a gold cup in honor of little Richard, a silver one in honor of little Margaret. Without thinking, I said, "I suppose it's your turn next."

"I won't be obliging this year. Anne had a miscarriage a couple of months ago."

I winced. "I—"

"Don't say she's still young, or that we're likely to have more, or that it's God's will."

All were true, though. I said quietly, "I wasn't going to say any of those things. Only to offer my sympathy. Kate hasn't conceived either," I offered as a consolation. "With her being one of twelve, I thought we'd have a child well under way by now. But she's shown no sign of quickening with one. Her old nurse Cecilia thinks she might need a year or two."

Richard raised his eyebrows. "You're bedding with her? I thought for sure the queen would make you wait until she was a safer age. Twenty, perhaps."

"She doesn't meddle in that sort of thing. In any case, Kate didn't want to wait. She seduced me, you might say."

Richard snorted as I smiled dreamily, remembering not that night but the one just past. Kate and I had made up our quarrel over the management of our household in the most satisfactory way possible. “You certainly seem content with yourself these days.”

“I’d be more so if you were happier. What ails you? You’ve been irritable since you arrived here.” I frowned. “Is it the food? My servants? We tried to make everything right.”

For the first time since his arrival, Richard laughed. “For God’s sake, Harry, don’t start turning anyone out of doors. Your food and your people are fine. I have been irritable, you’re right. More George, I suppose. It’s what I came to see Ned about.”

“He’s still not satisfied with his share of the Warwick lands?”

Richard nodded. “Anne’s been wanting to have her mother out of sanctuary, so I finally gave in and asked Ned for permission to bring her out. He’d have soon let her stay there for life, I think—he doesn’t trust any of the family after Warwick betrayed him. Not even Anne, really. But I told him that we would make sure the countess didn’t get up to trouble, and he finally agreed. Anyway, George took it very badly. He decided that I’d brought the countess out as a means to having Ned give her all of her land back, so that she could convey it all to me. Why he just didn’t offer to bring her out himself first is beyond me, but you know how George’s mind works. Or maybe you don’t, having been spared him as a brother. This is what you get from trying to please your wife, Harry. Remember that when your pretty Kate bats those Woodville eyes at you.”

“So what is the king going to do about it?”

“Placate him, as he always does, I suppose. And what’s worse, I think George is turning traitor again.”

“How?”

“Plotting with Oxford.”

Whatever you could say about the Earl of Oxford—and the king had plenty to say about him, none of which need be repeated in polite company—he was not one to give up easily. After Barnet and Tewkesbury,

a different man might have either resigned himself to life in exile or thrown himself on the king's mercy, but Oxford had doggedly continued to harass Edward. Just last year, he had been plotting with the Archbishop of York, who was the last of the Kingmaker's brothers and who had been sent a prisoner to Hammes Castle for his pains. With French help, Oxford had attacked Calais several times, and he had managed to land in Essex in the spring. He had been repelled, but completely unbowed, had turned to piracy and was said to be quite successful at it. Secretly, probably for my uncle Edmund's sake, I rather admired the man, though it was a sentiment I naturally kept to myself. "Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm not sure. If I were, I'd make certain Ned knew of the details." Richard shook his head. "All I have is suspicions." He brightened. "At least Oxford's old mother can't send him any aid. Did I tell you I've acquired her lands?"

"How?"

"Got the old lady to sign them over to me, last Christmas as a matter of fact. Ned had sent her to live in London, in a convent there. Stratford le Bow. With her son up to no good, he wanted to keep a close eye on her. I told her that she was the mother of a traitor and that she could either sign them over to me, for a fair consideration, or I'd get them some other way and she'd get nothing. She's a reasonable enough lady and agreed to sign them over to me, though not without putting up a bit of a fuss. I had to threaten to take her to Middleham. What is it about some people that the thought of going to the North scares them so?" Richard pitched his voice to resemble an old lady's quavering tones. "'To Middleham, my lord? In all this great frost and snow? I would surely die!' So I saved her from a fate worse than death, to hear her tell it."

"Was that quite necessary? The woman must be in her sixties. She can't be in the best of health."

"Now you sound like Ned, Harry. Not everyone is an eldest son like you; some of us have to expand our holdings by other means. It's not that she got such a bad bargain; I agreed to pay her an annuity of five hundred

marks, to pay her debts, and to promote her youngest son who's studying at Cambridge. Odd place for the Earl of Oxford's brother to be studying, by-the-by. And in any case, what's good for me is good for the realm, for with the countess in the convent, where were her revenues going to go? Straight to her pirate son and his brothers, or to Louis over in France. I'll put them to much better use than any of them, I'll wager. Not that I have them yet. Her feoffees are dragging their heels; I've had to go to Chancery to get them to turn them over. I'll win, but it's another irritation I don't need."

I absently stroked my horse's mane, not knowing what to say. Richard's behavior with the Countess of Oxford struck me as less than chivalrous, and not quite worthy of him. For all that the old lady's son was a traitor, she was an old lady.

"Well, I do intend to uphold my share of the bargain," Richard said irritably.

"Yes, of course." I decided to change the subject. Waving around me, I said, "Have you spent much time in these parts?"

"Not all that much. Have you trouble keeping order?"

"A bit," I admitted. "Everyone does here, though. That's one reason why the king's moved the Prince of Wales' household to Ludlow. Well, of course, you know that. You're on the council, right?"

"Nominally. I have a man who attends it." He frowned. "But you're not on the council, are you? Why not, with all your holdings here?"

It was a question that had occurred to me also, though only fleetingly. "I suppose because of my age."

"You're almost eighteen. I was commanding armies when I was eighteen, Harry."

"The king has appointed me to some commissions here," I said lamely.

"That's hardly the same, though, is it? You need to keep a lookout, old man, that he doesn't shut you out." He waved a hand as if to indicate the landscape through which we were riding, all of which belonged to me. It was a thought that still made me giddy at times. "Don't let yourself get complacent here in Wales. It's easy enough to do when you're far from court."

"I won't," I promised. For a few moments, I brooded on my not being a member of the prince's council. Then I brightened. "We have fine minstrels, Richard. Just wait until they play for us tonight."



I didn't forget Richard's words to me about the council, but a rumor soon reached Brecon that when there came a vacancy in the Order of the Garter, I would be elected to it. This was far more appealing to me at eighteen than sitting on the council of a small boy, albeit a very important small boy, so when the rumors proved to be true, I forgot for the time being all about the matter of the council.

In anticipation of this great occasion, I applied to the College of Arms to be allowed to use the undifferentiated arms of my great-grandfather, Thomas of Woodstock, the youngest son of Edward III. My grandmother, visiting us in the spring of 1474, shook her head when I showed her a copy of the decision in my favor. "I'd not remind the king of your royal ancestry, Harry."

"Why? He's got two sons now, and two brothers as well. I'm no threat to him."

"Still and all, there's no need to provoke him." She sighed. Last year, her youngest son, my uncle John, who'd helped tend me after I was injured at Barnet, had died, survived by a little son. He and I were the only male Staffords now. "I've not got any Stafford men to spare, Harry."

"That's why I wanted to bear Thomas of Woodstock's arms. To pay tribute to them. Nothing more." I was sorry to see that age seemed to be turning the Dowager Duchess of Buckingham into a somewhat nervous old lady. I smiled at her with all of the superior wisdom of my eighteen years. "Grandmother, it won't bother him in the slightest."

And it didn't seem so, either, for I was indeed elected a Garter knight. My only regret was that my mother was not alive to see me in my Garter robes, my new arms duly mounted in my stall at the Chapel of St. George at Windsor Castle. I wore gowns over my doublet as seldom as possible so that

the world could all the better admire the jeweled garter that rested under my left knee. Kate was ecstatic the first time she saw me in it, and what happened after the first time she took it off me was indescribably pleasant.

To cap it off, we were heading toward war again with France, a prospect that all of us younger men regarded with delight. After years of fighting each other with nothing to show for it, it was time for us Englishmen to fill our castles with French booty and to gain some glory.

I spent the late months of 1474 and early 1475 raising troops, as did virtually every other man of quality in England. When in April I arrived at Barham Downs in Kent, riding at the head of more than four hundred men wearing the Stafford knot, I could not have been happier. Only Richard and George (for the time being, not quarreling with each other over their lands) had done better.

By July we had landed in Calais, where we tarried awhile, awaiting the arrival of our ally the Duke of Burgundy. It was not the duke who first appeared, however, but his duchess, of whom I'd been quite enamored as a boy. She had not worn well, I thought with great disappointment. Like her mother Cecily of York, she had become overly pious, though she unbent somewhat at the sight of the Duke of Clarence, always her favorite brother. Margaret and the Duke of Burgundy had no children, which was not surprising since it was said that his martial activities preoccupied him so that the two of them were hardly in each other's company. Looking at her, still pretty but too prim, I compared her smugly to my delicious Kate and congratulated myself on my good fortune.

After Margaret left Calais, her husband arrived—without the army we all had expected. There were some who were ready to give up the campaign then and there, including, I suspected later, the king himself. But Charles, though he had come without men, had not come without plans. He suggested breezily that the English forces conquer Normandy and then move into Champagne. There they would be met by the Duke of Burgundy himself and his men, fresh, as the plan went, from conquering Lorraine. In Rheims, Edward would be duly crowned as the King of France. It seemed

like a reasonable enough plan, particularly the crowning part, for which the king was rumored to have brought a magnificent garment along just in case. So by July 18, our army was marching at last, led by the King of England and the Duke of Burgundy.

The best that can be said about the days that followed was that we spent two nights encamped at Agincourt, where our forefathers had fought so nobly. From there, it was all downhill. King Louis of France, having at last learned of our whereabouts, began moving toward Compiègne. Our ally the Duke of Burgundy would not let our army into any of his towns, much to the disgust of some of the common soldiers, some of whom began raiding as far off as Noyon and who got killed by King Louis's men for their trouble. The Count of St. Pol having promised to deliver St. Quentin into English hands, yet another group went there, only to be greeted by a cannon blast that killed several more men. In a drenching rain, the miserable party marched back to St. Christ-sur-Somme, where we had an excellent view of the gates of Péronne, shut as firmly against as the rest of the Duke of Burgundy's towns.

I can recount all of these circumstances jadedly enough now, yet at the time I saw them only as minor annoyances. I was ready for war and glory, and was convinced that soon all would fall into place and we would be soundly defeating the French. I actually daydreamed, as I sat in my tent at St. Christ-sur-Somme, of which French castles I might beg of the king. I'd heard of several that would suit me perfectly.

Then on August 12, the Duke of Burgundy left us to join his own forces. The king called his captains to the little wooden house, covered in leather, that had been made for the king's lodgings and could be hauled from place to place. "Louis has made it known to me that he wishes to treat for peace," he said. "His real quarrel is with the Duke of Burgundy, not England, and he is offering to make terms."

I snorted with laughter. Terms! Plainly the man was worried.

"It could be worth our while," Edward continued, glancing in my direction with the trace of a frown, for no one else had made a sound. For the first time, I realized that Edward was putting on weight. "His envoy was

vague, but it appears that Louis is prepared to pay quite generously for a treaty. And having been dealing with Burgundy lately and seen the results, I'm ready to listen to his terms. In short, I will be sending a delegation to treat with him. We shall draw up our proposals tonight."

"Edward?" asked Richard. "You truly mean this?"

"Brother, I know this is not to your taste, but it's best for us. We've seen how useful an ally Burgundy is; he appears with no men, and he won't let us into his towns. We saw how mighty the Count of St. Pol was. What can we expect if this continues? More of the same. I've had my doubts from the start, and they've only been confirmed. Don't worry, England shan't be the worse for this." He smiled charmingly. "We won't be bought cheaply, rest assured."

"But, brother—"

"But you will be bought."

"Ah," said Edward. His smile was thin. "Young Harry."

Richard opened his mouth, then closed it as I stood, so angry I was trembling. The greatest army that England had ever sent abroad, by all accounts, had been amassed for this venture, and what was it coming to? "All of this preparation, will it go for nothing? Why, we could win this. We have the men, the determination, the equipment—everything! It's true it might look grim now, but it has before. Think of Crécy, of Agincourt. All we need is the will, the will and the leadership."

Edward said politely, "Oh? Tell me, Harry, about your vast military experience, if you please. Tell all of us."

The men around me were looking at this exchange with interest, caught, no doubt, by the novelty of seeing a man digging his own grave. Anyone with an ounce of common sense, which has never been my constant companion, would have stopped then and there. But I was only getting started. "Of course I don't have vast military experience, and I never will, because you're going to sell us out! To sell yourself! It's prostitution, that's what it is. We'll be no better than those strumpets parked outside our camp. No better than common whores."

“Holy sh—” whispered Richard, and William Hastings stared studiously at his rings.

“We’ll never achieve the glory of England as it once was at this rate,” I said, not unwisely changing tack. “We’ll be the laughingstock of Europe if we enter into a treaty, and what makes you think the French will honor it? And we’ll be letting down the Duke of Burgundy. Your own brother-in-law,” I added helpfully, in case the king had somehow forgotten this fact. “I know he hasn’t been entirely reliable, but what makes you think Louis will be any better? All we’ll do is alienate Burgundy; we’ll gain nothing.” It was time for a breath. “England’s honor will be tarnished because of this, don’t you realize? Yours most of all. Why, if you enter into this treaty, you’ll be disgracing your forebears, and disgracing yourself most of all. You won’t be fit to be remembered alongside the third Edward and the fifth Henry. Please! Don’t do this to yourself, to us, to England! Don’t treat with Louis. Fight him. That’s what we all came here for, wasn’t it?”

“Have you finished?”

“Yes.” After a beat, I added submissively, “Your grace.”

“Good. I’ve borne with your ranting and your slanders because you’re my kinsman and you’re young, though your time for giving that excuse is beginning to run out, don’t you think? But my patience has reached its limit. Tomorrow morning we’ll be sending men to treat with Louis. I think it’d be best for all concerned if you were gone by then.”

“Gone?”

“I mean packed and headed back to England. Take yourself out of my sight now and do your best to keep yourself there. I’ll give you until dawn to break camp. Oh, and your men will be joining you. You can regale them on the way home with tales of Agincourt and Crécy.”

I stood and walked out. It was the loneliest walk I’d taken since that time I’d begged for my uncle’s life at Tewkesbury, but this time, Richard didn’t follow me. No one did. No one spoke to me that entire miserable night as my men and I prepared to leave. I was utterly alone.



The less said about my journey back to England, the better. My men were baffled by our sudden departure and sullen about missing the action they still hoped would transpire.

Once in Calais, I had to borrow money to pay our expenses home and to pay the men. I was already heavily in debt, both from setting up my household and from this present expedition. Revenues from my Welsh estates were always difficult to collect, and I'd been at considerable expense to equip my men properly. I had hoped that this trip would be the making of my fortune.

Having beggared myself, I then had to wait around while I scrambled to find ships to take us all home. If there was any bright spot to this, it was that while we were idling in Calais, the news reached us that the treaty had been signed at Picquigny near Amiens—so at least my men could no longer silently accuse me of having blighted their prospects. There was another bright spot: when I at last rode into the courtyard of Brecon Castle, Kate, bless her, greeted me as joyously and as sweetly as if I'd come home laden with glory and booty.

By early September, our men began coming home from Calais. With them came the news of the terms of the treaty, which made more lips than mine curl in disgust. Edward had been bought off with a promise of fifteen thousand pounds within fifteen days of the signing, with an additional ten thousand pounds each year for the rest of his life. Ample pensions were to be given to Lord Hastings and to a number of others, and the king's oldest daughter, Elizabeth, was betrothed to the Dauphin Charles. Richard, I'd heard, had refused to be present when the treaty was signed, and was not among those getting pensions, but even he had not escaped unsullied: he'd visited Louis at Amiens and had received fine horses and plate.

Some disgruntled soldiers had not returned with the rest of the army, but had taken service with the Duke of Burgundy, who was rumored to have been so angry at Edward's conduct that he'd torn his Garter into pieces with his teeth. (I'd settled for slamming mine against the side of my pavilion.)

Another man would never return: my kinsman Henry Holland, the attainted Duke of Exeter. The king had released him from the Tower with the promise that if he conducted himself well on the French expedition, he would be restored to some of his lands. Instead he drowned on the voyage home, a victim of one of the wine-soaked brawls that had broken out between the soldiers again and again since the French treaty. I had hardly known the duke, but the pity of his life—he'd spent much of his adulthood as a prisoner or an exile, and had been deprived of his daughter and his spouse before meeting his lonely end at sea—added to my melancholy that autumn of 1475. It was with trepidation, then, that one day around Christmastide, I looked up from my accounts (a gloomy enough sight) to find Kate standing over me. "Harry. I have some news for you."

"The tenants are revolting?"

"Don't be so silly. Here. Feel." I put my hand on her belly, and my eyes widened as I realized from its roundness what a less oblivious and more experienced husband would have guessed weeks ago. "I wanted to be absolutely sure before I told you. I am with child, Harry."

May 1476 to February 1478

IT WAS IN EARLY MAY OF 1476 THAT I NEARLY DRAGGED GRANDMOTHER out of her antelope-and-Stafford-knot-covered chariot as it lumbered into the courtyard of Brecon Castle. “Harry, patience! My bones are older than yours.” She and her ladies (utterly ignored by me) adjusted her dress as I danced a little jig of impatience. “I gather Kate has begun her labor?”

A blood-curdling scream answered her question. She cocked her head and listened dispassionately. When a second scream followed, accompanied by words that I was unaware were in Kate’s vocabulary, Grandmother nodded approvingly. “A woman who can scream and curse like that isn’t weak, Harry, and it’s when they get weak during birth that you have to worry. As I said when the marriage was arranged, the girl’s mother was a good breeder, and she probably will be too.” She glanced around at Brecon Castle. “You’ve made some improvements here, it appears.”

“Never mind the improvements. Go to Kate. Now.”

One of Grandmother’s older ladies chuckled, and I gave her a freezing look.

The castle was already full of women. My aunt Joan, Grandmother’s only living daughter, had arrived the day before, and several of Kate’s sisters—I never could quite keep them all straight—were here also. The queen had sent her own midwife, who, according to reports coming out of Kate’s chamber, was feuding with the local midwife. (I could only hope that they didn’t come to blows in the middle of the delivery.) But it was Grandmother I wanted by Kate’s side, though as she disappeared behind the door of the birthing chamber, I wished she were by mine as well.

William Knyvet, Aunt Joan's husband, was the only male guest at Brecon Castle. He clucked at me sympathetically as I returned to my chamber. "Perhaps a game of tennis to pass the time?" I'd had a court installed so that my expected son could play, and Knyvet, who'd never tried the game, had been admiring it wistfully since his arrival.

"Perhaps," I said, and kept my seat in front of the fireplace, the best place at Brecon Castle by which to brood, I'd found.

Six hours later, I heard a cry from poor Kate that shook the foundations of the castle, then a piercing wail, followed by a bang on my chamber door. Grandmother, looking wrung out, but not as wrung out as I from sitting and waiting, smiled and patted me on the shoulder. "You have a lovely little girl, Harry. Kate is tired, but well. They will clean them and bring the baby to you shortly."

Girl? It was not quite what I had expected. But presently the local midwife, trailed by the wet nurse Kate had engaged, came into the room (it was kind, I supposed, for the royal midwife to let her have the honor) and with Grandmother's assistance, put my daughter into my arms.

Like all good subjects, we had never been in doubt what to name our first child: Edward for a boy, Elizabeth for a girl. I held little Elizabeth gingerly, scared to death that I might drop her, and cautiously kissed her on the forehead. Men begat these tiny creatures daily, in and out of wedlock, yet I could still scarcely believe that I had managed this feat myself. I wondered whom she would favor, Kate or me. I could have kept holding my child forever and smiling foolishly at her, except that after a few minutes she started whimpering and the wet nurse instantly reached for her.

Grandmother smiled as I reluctantly gave up my precious burden, having first whispered, "Papa's pretty little love," in a voice that I hoped no one else had heard.

"I was going to tell you not to let Kate see your disappointment over her being a girl. But I don't think I need to now, do I?"

I shook my head and watched, enthralled, as the wet nurse settled on a

stool with Elizabeth. After worshipfully watching my daughter make her first acquaintance with the breast, I went upstairs to see my wife.

Kate lay dozing in her great bed, her eyes ringed with dark circles. She had been laboring for four-and twenty hours, at least. Her sister Anne, whom I knew better than the other Woodville sisters because she was married to the Earl of Essex's son, sat by the bed, embroidering. I'd not expected to see my wife looking so peaked. "Is she going to recover?"

"She's not ill. Just exhausted, and a little inclined toward being tearful. Some women get that way after childbirth. I wish Mother were here for her, poor lamb."

Anne gave her place to me and I sat there looking at my wife, now the mother of my child. At my command, my page went on an errand, and when he returned, I took the bracelet he had brought from my chambers, where it had been stored up for several weeks, and fastened it onto Kate's wrist. She opened her eyes then. "Harry? What is this?" She lifted her wrist, and sapphires sparkled. "It's beautiful."

"It's a gift of thanks for giving me such a beautiful daughter."

"Harry..." Her eyes filled with tears. "I wish I had borne you a son."

"Why? Elizabeth is lovely. She's sweet. Just like her mother." I kissed her. "Go back to sleep, and when you wake, the three of us—we and Elizabeth, that is—will sit a while together. And we'll have your favorite dishes brought to you and plan your churching and what you'll wear. I want you to look more beautiful than ever for it."

She smiled wanly and obediently closed her eyes. Lying still on her back, pale from her recent ordeal, she looked like a lovely corpse, and my blood chilled. *Don't die*, I thought, and I must have said the words, for Kate opened her eyes. "Don't be silly, Harry," she murmured before falling asleep again. "I'm fine. Just very tired."

I prayed fervently that she was right.



God was merciful. Kate did indeed quickly regain her strength, and by the

time she was church'd a month later looked as fit and hearty as she had ever been—except that now she had a bit of extra padding on her hips, which after consideration I decided suited her wonderfully. We were equally blessed in that Elizabeth was a healthy baby, suckling vigorously and growing rapidly. To my council I became an utter bore on the topic of her many perfections. Soon, Kate's ordeal and my fears long forgotten, we began hoping for another child.

There was more pleasant news that spring, for Richard's return from France a month or so after my own had had the same effect on Anne that mine had had on Kate. Anne gave birth at around the same time Kate was having her churching. Their son—naturally named Edward—was a fine lad, quite worthy, I thought, of marriage to my Elizabeth.

There was a cloud upon my happiness, though, for what I had dreaded in France had come to pass: there was no place for me at Edward's court. It was a subtle snub, for outwardly, things were as normal. I'd been sent a silver cup from the king when Elizabeth was born, and the queen and Kate were on good as terms as ever. But when the king set up commissions, I was not on them, and I played no role in the council of the Prince of Wales, even though his household at Ludlow was not all that far from Brecon.

I had sent the king a letter of apology after he returned to England. It took me hours to compose: to grovel, but not to grovel so much as to sound insincere, proved to be no easy matter. The king sent me a genial reply that must have been dashed off in a couple of minutes by one of his most junior clerks. All was forgiven, and I would be welcome at court any time I chose to come there. But as I finished reading the letter, I realized belatedly that it wasn't the king's forgiveness that I needed, it was his trust, and that, I feared, I had lost for good—if I with my Beaufort connections and my own royal blood had ever had it in the first place.

I tried to pretend that this did not bother me, and a reasonable voice in my head advised me to let it be for the time being and let time prove my reliability to the king. Instead, I turned my attention to my own affairs, which indeed needed some ordering. First on my priorities was more aggressively pursuing the revenues owed me.

By nature I am not hard-dealing or cold, though it seems that I have acquired a reputation among my tenants for both. I wanted to be a good lord, and I truly tried to be. But I was in debt and could not afford to be overly indulgent, especially now that I had a daughter who would need to be attended properly and married well. And I have to say that I was not entirely at fault; my estates having been comparatively neglected during my minority by some of the people who had the running of them, my tenants had grown accustomed to thinking that this relaxed state of affairs would continue. Perhaps they would not have minded so much if I had had royal plums to hand out, but being in little favor at court, I had none.

But my problems would soon be as nothing compared to the Duke of Clarence's.

Unlike me and the more restrained Richard, George had not remonstrated with Edward about the French peace, but I doubt he could have been happy with it. The king had not trusted him with any major responsibility since his antics with the Kingmaker, and George had probably hoped to prove his ability in the French war. If he was disappointed, though, he kept his thoughts to himself. Like me in 1476, he turned his attention to his own affairs.

Then, at the end of the year, his duchess died, followed on New Year's Day by his infant son.

Whatever else his faults, George had been a good husband, faithful to Isabel even in circumstances like our French expedition when the most uxorious man might have felt justified in taking some pleasure on the side. She in turn had been a good wife to him, even to the point, common rumor had it, of having played the chief role in persuading him to abandon her own father's doomed cause for Edward's. With her gone, George was cast adrift. He began to drink more wine than was good for him, men who did business for both of us told me. At the same time, he was now an eligible widower, and when he was not being maudlin on the subject of poor Isabel, he was weighing up the possibilities of a dazzling new match.

For this we had the Duke of Burgundy, Clarence's brother-in-law, to thank, for just a few days into the new year of 1477, Burgundy was killed

in battle, leaving behind as his heiress Mary, his daughter from an earlier marriage. The Duchess of Burgundy could think of no better thing for her stepdaughter to do than to marry George, her favorite brother. If that wasn't enough, the Scottish king, James III, proposed that George should marry James's sister.

Edward thwarted both matches.

It wasn't hard to see why. Either marriage could offer George an excellent chance for mischief-making, and George had openly rebelled against Edward twice and was suspected of having engaged in more treason on the sly. The Burgundian marriage would have also irritated Louis of France and the Archduke of Hapsburg, Mary's betrothed. But all of these practical objections were lost on George, as I suppose they would have been lost on me if I had been in his position.

He didn't take the disappointment well. George's tongue began to run away from him, making me look almost discreet in comparison. To anyone on his vast lands who would listen, he raked up the old rumor, started back in the day by his late father-in-law, that the king was a bastard, sired by a commoner in a moment of weakness on the Duchess of York's part. No one seriously believed it that I ever heard of—it was hard enough, frankly, to imagine the pious and austere duchess in bed with her own husband, much less with some obscure churl—but the rumors spread, as rumors will when people run out of other things to gossip about. If those idiot rumors were the worst of it, though, Edward might have shrugged them off, for George talking was something not all that harmful. George acting was another thing altogether, and in April of 1476, he acted about as badly as a man could act.

He hung one of his duchess's ladies.

Following Isabel's death, Ankarette Twynho, an older lady in receipt of a modest pension for her services, had returned to her family in Somerset, where one day, out of the blue, Clarence's men came and dragged her out of her home. It was not until the poor woman arrived at Warwick—the heart of Clarence country—that she found out the charges against her:

poisoning the duchess. To cap matters off, a local man, John Thursby, was accused of poisoning Isabel's infant son. In a matter of three hours, both were tried and convicted by a jury that was plainly too scared of Clarence to return any other verdict other than guilty. They were dragged to the gallows straightaway.

One of Ankarette's relations did business for me as well as Clarence, and he said that Isabel and her babe had been ailing since the birth. And what, after all, would either of the defendants have to gain by poisoning either of them? Whether this ever occurred to George, I do not know, just as I do not know whether George ever believed the truth of his accusations. Perhaps it was simply a matter of wanting to believe them. I suppose George had to find someone in corporeal form to blame; one couldn't hale God to Warwick and hang Him high.

But the play was not yet finished, for during that same mad spring, an Oxford astronomer, John Stacy, was accused of using his arts to bring about the king's death. His confession, extracted by means that were said to have been none too gentle, implicated Thomas Blake, another Oxford astronomer, and—more sensationally—Thomas Burdett, a member of George's household. A commission was formed to try them—needless to say, I was not on it, which for once I was happy about—and it found all three guilty. After they were convicted, they were hung at Tyburn.

Burdett and Stacy had maintained their innocence to the end; whether they were or not is beyond me to say. Their heads had been perching on London Bridge for but a day or so when the Duke of Clarence stormed into the king's council chamber at Westminster, dragging a preacher with him. The man—the same man who had proclaimed the sixth Henry's claim to the throne back in the fall of 1470—was made to read out Burdett's gallows-side protestation of innocence. Then Clarence, having made his point, swept out of the room, leaving the council agape.

It was Clarence's last great scene, and Edward's last straw. By late June, George, Duke of Clarence, was a prisoner in the Tower.

One thing Edward could not be accused of with regard to Clarence was summary justice. He remained shut up, with all the comforts due to a king's brother, but shut up all of the same, while the king dithered for the next few months about what to do with him.

Meanwhile, in November 1477 I came to London, where the seven-year-old Prince of Wales, paying a visit to his father's court, was to host a great dinner and take homage from the various lords of the land. It promised to be a busy couple of months, for a royal wedding was in store: that of Richard, Duke of York, to little Anne Mowbray, who was heiress to the deceased John Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk. She was a rich little girl, or would be once the elderly but still spry dowager Duchess of Norfolk, who had been married to Kate's brother John, died and finally freed up her dower lands. Edward spared no expense for the wedding, which he decided should take place the following January, to coincide with Parliament.

"How's your wife?" Richard asked me as we settled ourselves in for a companionable evening at Baynard's Castle, one of the Duchess of York's homes. Richard was staying there while in London; I'd borrowed Grandmother's Bread Street residence. Our goods had scarcely been unpacked when I'd decided to pay a visit to Richard. "Is she here in London?"

"Yes. She's with child again, did I tell you? We expect the baby around February."

"I'm surprised you didn't leave her in Wales."

"She's in good health, and she wanted to come to the wedding. We figured she might as well come up now instead of having to travel later when she's heavier with child. I suppose Anne's here?"

"No. I wish she had come, but she didn't want to leave our son. She frets too much over him when she's away from him, although he's been of good health. She's become worse about it since her sister died." He took a sip of wine.

"So, tell me. Is the king going to bring George to trial?"

"Most likely. It looks as if he's going to be the main business at Parliament. Edward's been assembling quite the case against him."

“What do you think will happen to him?”

“Execution.”

He spoke as casually as if we were speaking of slaughtering a pig. “Are you serious, man? Do you think the king would put his own brother to death?”

Richard shrugged. “He’s been rather more than your ordinary nuisance, don’t you think? Aside from hanging his servants on a whim, he’s been spreading rumors about the king’s bastardy, associating with the likes of Burdett and Stacy... There’s even talk that he was behind that Earl of Oxford imposter last summer.”

The Earl of Oxford’s luck had finally run out. The earl was safely locked up in Hammes Castle near Calais, but the summer before, a person claiming to be him had been stirring up unrest in Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire. “The king could simply keep George locked up.”

“Yes. But it’s safer to put him to silence. Of course, our mother will likely have a go at talking him out of it, but my money’s not on her. Edward the king will prevail over Edward the son and brother.”



The Prince of Wales’s feast a few days later in November was the first great dinner the seven-year-old had ever hosted. Though his father the king was fairly informal in private, he liked a great deal of pomp and circumstance in public, and the dinner was accordingly a rather stiff affair. It was made even more so by everyone being on his best behavior for the child host, a dire necessity, for the king guarded the virtue of his son most strictly, leaving nothing to chance. I knew from Kate that Edward had drawn up a series of ordinances sternly prohibiting swearers, brawlers, backbiters, and gamblers from coming into the young boy’s presence at Ludlow, and ribald words were absolutely forbidden. The ordinances might have been drawn up by the ghost of the late Henry VI.

After a performance by a decorous juggler, followed by some stately tunes, it was time for those of us who held lands of the prince to give

him homage as he perched in a great chair with his four-year-old brother, Richard, Duke of York, seated nearby. We lined up to pay our respects.

The Duke of Gloucester, naturally, went first. Young Edward watched Richard solemnly as, bareheaded and with his belt ungirded, he knelt, put his hands between those of the prince, spoke the words of homage, and kissed him on the cheek. “We thank you that you do this so humbly,” Edward said.

With Clarence in the Tower, I was next. I placed my hands between the prince’s. They were fine and delicate, and I could not help but think of the son I hoped that Kate was carrying in her belly. “I become your liege man of life and limb and truth and earthly honors, bearing to you against all men that love, move, or die, so help me God and the Holy Dame.”

A lot of trouble and grief for a lot of people could have been averted then and there if the Lord had sent a convenient bolt of lightning to strike Richard and me dead at that moment. He did not, and so I move on.



William Caxton, an old acquaintance from Anthony Woodville’s days in Bruges, had returned to England the year before and set up a printing press at Westminster, where his maiden production had been the first printed version of *The Canterbury Tales*. I was curious to see his shop, and Kate in particular had a good reason for wanting to go there: Anthony had translated a book from the French, *The Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers*, and Caxton had printed it that November. It was released in the middle of that month, and naturally, we went to buy a copy.

The release was quite a family occasion: except for the queen, most of Anthony’s brothers and sisters, and some of their spouses and children, were crowded into Caxton’s shop when we arrived. I could hardly see for Woodvilles, but from the little I could tell, Caxton’s shop was a pleasing sight: the tables piled high with books, some printed by Caxton here in London, others imported from Caxton abroad.

Anthony, the man of the hour, stood in the middle of all of this, clutching a copy of *The Dictes* like a proud parent. “I came across this when I

was on pilgrimage to Santiago,” he explained when one of his sisters asked. Plainly, he did not need much encouragement to expand. “It was given to me by a fellow pilgrim. I’ve always cherished it, and I thought it would be an excellent work to translate for the Prince of Wales. He knows much French already, but this way he can enjoy the entire work now, and so can the members of his household.”

Edward Woodville, who was a couple of years older than Kate, picked up a copy and began reading. “‘A Wiseman ought to beware how he weds a fair woman, for every man will desire to have her love and so they will seek their pleasures to the hurt and displeasure of her husband.’” He grinned at Kate and me. “My lord of Buckingham must take care.”

“For shame, Edward!” Kate said, looking quite pleased with the implied compliment, though.

“Aye, but Lord Rivers did have a care for the sensibilities of the ladies,” said William Caxton. He nodded toward Kate and her sisters. “The philosopher Socrates, as you may be aware, has some rather uncomplimentary and ungallant things to say about your sex. But Lord Rivers left them out.”

“And you put them back in,” said Edward. He read, “‘I find that my said Lord hath left out certain and divers conclusions touching women. Whereof I marvel that my Lord hath not written them, ne what hath moved him so to do, ne what cause he had at that time; but I suppose that some fair lady hath desired him to leave it out of his book; or else he was amorous on some noble lady, for whose love he would not set it in his book.’ Anthony! You rascal!”

Anthony snorted. He seemed to be enjoying himself thoroughly.



Soon after the new year began, I received a summons to the king. I obeyed it dutifully and not without a little dread, given my history to date with him.

I need not have worried. With money rolling in from France, the Duke of Clarence unable to make any trouble, and the Duke of York

about to marry the richest little girl in England, Edward was in fine spirits these days.

“Good to see you, cousin,” he said as if our meetings had always been the height of good fellowship. “I’ve a job for you, Harry.”

My spirits soared. A diplomatic assignment, perhaps? Well, no. But a place on his son’s council? That was certainly a possibility. “I’m happy to serve you, your grace,” I said modestly.

“Good. We’ll need you and my brother Richard for the wedding. He’ll lead the bride to the feast on one side, you on the other. It’ll be a charming sight, don’t you think?”

“Charming indeed,” I said in a voice as hollow as the honor I was receiving.



Richard raised his eyebrows when I told him later about my audience with the king. “Don’t you find that insulting, Harry? You should be on the king’s council, or the Prince of Wales’s council. Or both. Not relegated to escorting little girls to their weddings.”

“Well, I’m better off than George.” I shrugged. “What can I do about it? France put an end to any hopes I had in that direction.”

“Has it ever occurred to you that it’s more than France? Granted, you made a fool of yourself there, but it’s been over two years. Ned usually doesn’t hold grudges that long.”

“So I’m the lucky exception. Anyway, I’m used to it. Almost.”

“He should be including you instead of those low-born relations of his wife.”

“Who include my own wife, incidentally.”

“Your wife’s not the problem, it’s the men. Anthony’s not so bad; at least he has some learning, even if he trifles it away on tournaments. I’ve never understood the point of them. But the others! The Marquess of Dorset’s a fool; if he didn’t have the queen for a mother, he’d be rotting on some obscure manor somewhere. His brother Richard Grey’s a puppy. And yet the king can find room for them in his government, but not for you,

the third greatest duke in the land. The second, if we take George out of consideration, and we probably should.” He stared at me thoughtfully for a while. “Perhaps I should have a word with Ned.”

“Richard, please. Don’t.”

“Why?”

“Kate once offered to do the same thing with the queen for me. It would humiliate me, that’s why, having my relations pleading my case. I wouldn’t want to think that the king brought me back into favor just to humor you or Kate. I’ll have another chance to prove my worth to the king, I’m sure of it. Let me handle it myself. If that means sitting quietly and behaving myself for another two years, or longer, I shall. At least I’ll have earned my way back by my own efforts.”

“Very well, then.”

“But I do appreciate the offer. It means a great deal to me. For a while—” I decided not to complete my sentence and say that for a while, when France had made me a laughingstock in the court, I thought that Richard had lost interest in our friendship. Instead, I said brightly, “So. Which side of the little bride shall I take?”



Kate and I at ages seven and nine had been a young enough married couple, but the Duke of York and his bride, aged four and five, made our wedding appear to be an elderly affair indeed. They got through the long ceremony with a minimum of squirming and looking about, but they were clearly at the end of their tethers toward the end. Only when it came time for the wedding feast, and the promise of sweetmeats, did the newlyweds’ faces brighten. I heard the groom announce, “I’m hungry, Mama!” and even the bride, the elder and the more dignified of the pair, would have rushed headlong to her place of honor had not Richard and I each had hold of one of her hands.

I did my duty at the feast unexceptionably, and was rewarded with the further honor of being asked to carry the Marquess of Dorset’s helmet at

the tournament that was to take place within a few days. As I had not been planning to joust myself—it was not my forte, and even if it had been, Kate’s pregnancy would have deterred me for fear of having an accident that might upset her and take our coming child—I graciously agreed, though remembering Richard’s contemptuous words about Dorset, I could have done without the privilege. For my acquiescence I received a royal smile, which I tried to tell myself might lead to some duties of some real substance.

Kate was at the feast as well, seated next to the bride’s mother, the widowed Duchess of Norfolk, Elizabeth Talbot. My wife was too great with child to join in the dancing and merriment that followed, and left the celebration early. When I came back to Bread Street late in the afternoon, exhausted from playing the good courtier, she was lying on the bed in our chamber, dozing with an open book—*The Canterbury Tales* from Caxton’s shop—spread next to her belly. As soon as I came in, she pushed aside the book and stretched like a contented cat stuffed with kittens. “Harry? Did I miss anything interesting?”

I clambered onto the bed next to her and patted the belly that I hoped this time contained a son, though I loved my little Elizabeth dearly. “No. Oh, I should say that the bride’s mother was rather tipsy and began telling me all about the bargain the king struck with her for the marriage. She was quite pleased with her negotiating skills.”

Kate sniffed. “I thought her a shrew when I sat beside her this morning. Scratch, Harry? Please?” I obeyed as Kate turned on her side. She sighed happily as I began to move my fingers over her back. “Anyway, I think the Duchess of Norfolk should take more care around wine. Do you know, she told me at the banquet that her sister had a dalliance with the king.”

“Eleanor?” I’d not thought of Eleanor Butler in years, though she and her sister the Duchess of Norfolk were relations of mine through the Bouchiers. The widow of Thomas Sudeley, she had died back in the late 1460s, still quite young. I’d never met her that I could recall. “When?”

“A year or so before he married Bessie, and after Lady Eleanor was widowed. The Duchess of Norfolk didn’t know that much, really. She just

said that her sister had succumbed to the king's charms and that after a few months he got bored and moved on. The way they say he often does with his lemans. Of course, one can't call Lady Eleanor a leman, but—"

"If it's true, she's certainly a cut above his usual choice of woman." Too late, I realized that this could be taken the wrong way by the queen's sister. "I mean—"

My wife kicked me. "Edward even spoke of marriage, but the duchess didn't say why it never took place. The king wandered by, so she stopped talking. I'm certainly glad they didn't marry, because then you and I would never have married, I suppose. Harry? You don't regret marrying me, do you, instead of someone like Warwick's girls?"

Kate when she was breeding was a moody creature, I'd discovered, apt to change emotions in a heartbeat; in the middle of this short utterance, she'd turned almost tearful. "Of course not, sweetheart." I kissed her on her cheek and patted her belly. "I'm very thankful you're my wife. Don't talk nonsense."

She sighed and lay quietly against me. I was thinking that she had drifted off when she said, "I have been thinking, perhaps it would be better if I went back to Wales. Then our next child would be born at Brecon, and we would not have to worry about traveling with him—or her—from London in winter."

"I like the idea, but are you sure you can travel safely?"

"I will have plenty of attendants, and I do not think my time is that near yet. Even traveling slowly, I think I will have time to spare."

I did want my son, if I were to be blessed with one, to be born at Brecon. "All right, but I just hope to God that you're right about the timing. I wouldn't want the babe to be born in a manger, even if it sufficed for our Lord. Brecon is better."

Kate laughed and rolled over—a cumbersome process—to face me. "In all honesty, Harry, there is another reason I wish to go back to Wales. This business with the Duke of Clarence saddens me."

"Why? You've no love for him, I'm sure."

"No. But I hate to see the king being forced into the position that he

has been placed. He will be executed, don't you think? It is sad to have to execute one's brother for the good of the kingdom, especially with the Duchess of York living. And then the Duchess of Norfolk said the most unkind thing to me at table today."

"What?"

"She said, 'I suppose the king will do the queen's and your family's bidding, and put his brother to silence.' Harry, it is not our bidding! None of us like him after Papa and John's deaths, but we did not force Clarence to murder that poor harmless old woman. We did not cause him to spread those rumors about the king being a bastard. We did not make him associate with that dreadful Stacy person. We did not entice him into plotting with the Earl of Oxford. My poor sister can't force Edward to give up his mistresses, much as she would like to. How can people think she could force him to execute his own brother?"

"There, there." Kate had begun to cry. "I think you're right about leaving," I said, stroking her hair, which she had taken down for her rest in bed. "People are always saying malicious things at court, and you shouldn't take them to heart. But I think you would be happier at Brecon, far away from all of this nonsense. Still, you must send me word of your health every day. Promise?"



Parliament—the first in three years, for Edward was not partial to them—opened the next morning with a suitably ominous sermon by the Bishop of Rotherham, who expanded on no uncertain terms on the text, "The king does not carry the sword without cause." There were a few days of the usual parliamentary petitions, important to those who brought them but of little interest to the rest of the human race, then an interlude for a tournament, at which I dutifully performed my ceremonial duty of carrying Dorset's helmet. In this I must have pleased the king, for I was named as a trier of petitions from Gascony, all other places overseas, and the Channel Islands. It was, as I wrote Kate in my daily letter to her, an improvement.

All this time, the seat normally occupied by George, Duke of Clarence was a vacant, silent reminder of why we were all there. Toward the end of January, he at last was brought in for his trial. Edward had a long list of charges against him. George had accused the king of falsely putting Burdett to death and of resorting to necromancy. He had claimed that the king was a bastard. He had accused the king of taking his livelihood from him and of intending his destruction. Queen Margaret had promised him the crown if Henry VI's line failed—old business, surely, for Margaret, a shadow of the fiery queen of my youth, had been sent back to France as part of the French treaty. He planned to send his son and heir abroad to win support, bringing a false child to Warwick Castle in his place. He planned to raise war against the king within England and made men promise to be ready at an hour's notice. In short, he had shown himself to be incorrigible, and to pardon him would endanger the realm. Sundry witnesses were introduced, who largely echoed the king's accusations.

George answered, but to little effect. He offered only to prove his case through personal combat with the king, a proposition that might have met with approval in King Arthur's court but fell flat in the year 1478.

Preordained as its conclusion was, all of this took time. January had passed into February, and February was six days old when a messenger from Brecon Castle accosted me just as I was about to depart for Westminster. "I come from the duchess, my lord. She is doing well."

"No letter?"

"No, my lord. She told me to tell you that she was too busy." The man finally cracked a smile. "Three days ago she bore your grace a fine boy."



I sent messengers to anyone with whom I had even a nodding acquaintance. I even started to send one to my grandmother—recalling just before the messenger departed that she had gone to stay at Brecon with Kate and therefore hardly needed to be told of her great-grandson's arrival.

My good news had preceded me to Parliament, and both the king and Richard were waiting with their congratulations when I arrived there. “You’ll be wanting to go to Wales, I know,” said Edward, in a kindly tone I’d not heard from him in years. He hesitated. “But there is one service I require of you first.”

I had a brand-new son, and the king had chosen this time of all others to finally discover my merits. But I was in too jovial a mood to quibble. “Yes, your grace?”

“Parliament will vote on the Duke of Clarence’s fate today,” the king said as matter-of-factly as if speaking of a distant acquaintance. “I’ve no doubt he will be convicted. A high steward must be appointed to pronounce his fate. Normally, my brother Richard would be called upon, but in this situation it is a bit awkward, as you can see. So you will be appointed steward of England in order to pronounce the sentence.”

I gulped. Though the sentence—and I had no doubt what it would be—would not be of my own ordaining, it was still a daunting task to proclaim that a king’s brother must die. Following hard upon the heels of the birth of my son, it also seemed ill-timed and even ill-omened. Yet it was my place and duty, as Duke of Buckingham, to serve as steward, and the bad had to be taken with the good. “Very well,” I said.

“Good. All will be in readiness by tomorrow morning. You can leave immediately afterward to see your son and that pretty wife of yours.” I waited to be dismissed, but the king showed no sign of letting me go. “Cantref Selyf,” he said after a pause.

“Your grace?”

“Cantref Selyf shall be yours. I’ll have the papers drawn presently. Run along so we can get this business over with and you back to Wales by tomorrow.”

Cantref Selyf was part of the Bohun inheritance, which I’d not dared to mention to the king in years. Who knew what would come next? I bowed my thanks. As I left (practically skipping), I heard Richard saying, “Now for me, Ned. My son’s to be Earl of Salisbury, right?”

Clarence's title. "Why, of course," the king said as I stepped out of hearing range.

Not surprisingly, the Duke of Clarence was found guilty that afternoon. He had never put up much of a defense, though he had spoken eloquently (and lengthily) enough—perhaps he had none to put up. The very next morning, I took my seat as steward of England and pronounced the sentence: death, by a method of the duke's own choosing.

George didn't blink when I spoke the words. I half expected him to repeat his offer to prove his innocence by combat, but instead he simply said, when invited to speak, "I have no choice but to accept this sentence. Pray for me, my lords." Then he was led away.

I watched, thinking of the boy who'd run into the solar at Writtle to gleefully announce my grandfather's death, and felt no pity. God forgive me.



Kate had had much less trouble giving birth to Edward, our new son, than to our firstborn, and she looked lovely and serene when I arrived at Brecon several days later. Her chamber was sparkling with plate we'd been sent as christening gifts, to which I added a golden cup, courtesy of the king. It was the red-faced creature who the nurse put in my arms, however, that occupied my attention entirely. "He's in good health?" I asked for about the sixth time or so since I'd come home.

"Perfect, Harry," Kate said for the sixth time also.

Elizabeth, having caught wind of my homecoming—she'd been napping in her nursery when I arrived—toddled into Kate's chamber and bristled at the sight of her new brother and me. "Baby go!"

"No, Elizabeth, he's here to stay, but it's your turn to visit Papa. Come sit here. I've brought a new doll for you. All the way from London."

Elizabeth climbed into my lap and gave the offending baby, whom Kate had taken from me, a triumphant glare. I cuddled her and gave her the new doll, which looked as much like Elizabeth as a doll could look. It was, I know now, the happiest day of my life.

Kate did not ask about the Duke of Clarence, and I did not tell her—for all I knew, the sentence might have been carried out by now. That was a topic for another time and for another place. There was no room in this chamber at Brecon Castle, where I sat with my fine new son and my lovely little girl and my beautiful wife, for the ghost of George.



I was wrong, though: George still walked the earth, or at least the small portion of it that was the Tower. “Ned’s dithering,” Richard told me when I reluctantly returned to Westminster. “At this rate, George will outlive all of us.”

“Why does he delay?”

“Conscience, I suppose—it’s not been known to trouble Ned much, but it makes an unwanted appearance now and then.”

“I suppose your mother is pleading with him also.”

“No—she is just praying. Mother doesn’t waste time with ordinary mortals when she can speak to her Maker. I supped with her yesterday, and she said, ‘What will be, will be. The Lord will determine his fate.’”

The Lord finally acted in the person of the Speaker of the Commons, William Allington, who with a delegation asked that the sentence be carried out. Probably the king had been hoping that someone would do just that, for several days later, on February 18, the Duke of Clarence was dead.

George’s execution was a strictly private affair, out of consideration for the Duchess of York more than anyone else. She spent a long time with George before his death; so did Richard. I asked him what their last encounter had been like, and he shrugged. “Damned awkward. But he was in a suitably pious frame of mind, getting all in order, so it wasn’t as bad as I expected. He spent a lot of time enumerating his debts; Ned has agreed to pay them. Oh, and your in-laws did nicely too. George asked that lands be alienated to Anthony Woodville to recompense him for the injuries to his parents.”

“I hardly think that my wife would count that as recompense.” Kate still

was quiet and pensive on the anniversary of her father's and her brother John's deaths. "So how did they do it? I suppose they beheaded him?"

"Now here you have to give George credit for imagination. He asked to be drowned in a barrel of wine. And by God, that's how they did it. They gave him a little sleeping draught with his last meal, and when he dozed off, they dumped him headfirst into a barrel of malmsey and held him."

Clarence's feet sticking up in the air out of a barrel made such an absurd picture in my mind, I did something truly unforgivable. I smiled, or at least I twitched my mouth upward. Richard stared at me, and then he smiled himself.

"Come on, old man," he said, lifting the cup he was holding. "Let's get good and soused in memory of Brother Clarence."

And we did.

As the night wore on and both of us had some difficulty remaining upright, we flopped in front of the fireplace and lay there side by side with our feet propped up, sometimes getting our cups to our mouths, sometimes sloshing them over the rushes. "I remember when you called my brother a whore," Richard reminisced. For once, he was far drunker than I was.

"Not that again."

"You should have seen his face."

"I did see his face."

"But you were right, Harry. He was a whore. And you know what? We're whores, too."

"How?"

"How are we whores? Hear, Harry, how we hath been whores."

"*Hic, haec, hoc,*" I intoned. Master Giles, the tutor of my youth, would not have been pleased.

Richard gathered together his dignity. "The Duke of Bedford."

The Duke of Bedford, a boy in his teens, was John Neville's son. He had some lands from his mother's inheritance, but the rich Neville inheritance, which by rights should have been his as it was entailed in the male line, had gone to Richard after John Neville, the Marquess of Montagu, had died

at Barnet. I rubbed my forehead, which I found helped to clear my brain. “Parliament ruled that he wasn’t able to support the dignity of his dukedom anymore. Right?”

“It did, because Ned knew I wanted it to do so. He didn’t want me to make a fuss about Brother George, you see. So now thanks to Ned, young Neville can’t come to Parliament to complain about his inheritance, can he? He won’t even inherit his father’s barony. Oh, and Ned gave me other things as well. The earldom of Salisbury for my boy, some better lands—anything to keep me happy. And I am. I’m a happy whore, Harry. And so are you, because he gave you Cantref Selyf. Part of your Bohun inheritance, right?”

“Someone had to pronounce sentence on George. It could have been anyone.”

“But it was you, old man, wasn’t it?”

“All right, then. I’m a whore.” I raised my cup and managed to get it to glance against Richard’s. “To us whores.”

“To Ned.”

“And to George.”

“Rest in peace, brother.” Richard raised his cup high in the air, then let it fall with a crash. “Christ, Harry, what have I done? I could have saved him if I’d begged Ned for his life. Could have if—”

He staggered to his feet and kicked his cup into the fireplace. “If I’d wanted to,” he finished.



Two days later, George’s body, borne on a black-draped hearse, began making its way to Tewkesbury Abbey, where his wife had been buried. That same day, Richard got a license to found colleges at Barnard and Middleham Castles.



The next five years can be disposed of quickly. Kate bore me three more children: two sons, Henry and Humphrey, and one daughter, Anne. Poor

Humphrey, like his namesake my own brother, was frail. He never thrived, but still it broke our hearts when he died in our arms.

Grandmother died in 1480, full of years. I wish she had lived long enough to see her little namesake, and I wish she had lived long enough to give me the wisdom of her counsel when I needed it most—but I anticipate myself. With her death and the release of the lands she'd held in dower, I became truly rich, second only to the king himself and Richard.

With my newfound wealth, I thought that my influence at court might grow accordingly, but of course I was wrong. It took me a long time to realize it, but the king was not hostile toward me. He probably even liked me well enough—after all, I'd not insulted him in years—but there was no place in his grand scheme of things for me. There did not have to be, for England was at peace. Trouble-making George was dead. The Earl of Oxford was locked up tight in Hammes Castle. Margaret of Anjou, poor lady, was dead; her most valuable possessions—her hunting pack—having gone to Louis of France. Jasper Tudor, that aging Lancastrian, and his nephew Henry were exiled in Brittany and would probably die as old men there. The Scots caused their usual trouble but were handily subdued by Richard. Everything was working in perfect harmony. Why disturb the balance? Why take a chance on an untried young man like myself, with a history of saying the wrong thing? As 1483 approached, I could almost see the king's point.

Almost.

January 1483 to May 1483

WAR WAS IN THE AIR AGAIN IN 1483, WHEN EDWARD CALLED A Parliament. There had been a to-do between Burgundy and France, which ended in the Treaty of Arras in December 1482. Poor Elizabeth, Edward's eldest daughter, had been the chief sufferer by it. As part of the Treaty of Picquigny, she'd been affianced to the Dauphin of France, and Edward had even insisted that she be addressed as Madame la Dauphine, a title that for a while had tied many a good English courtier's tongue into knots. But now that her title finally slid off everyone's lips with ease, it was no more, for the Dauphin was to marry Margaret of Austria, daughter to Burgundy's regent, and poor Elizabeth was back to "the Lady Elizabeth."

"I was right all along," I told Richard breezily as we supped that evening, having arrived in London for Parliament. "I knew Picquigny would never last. And Edward even lost his pension! So, do you think we'll be going to war with France?"

"You'd like to think so, wouldn't you, Harry? Don't get your hopes up."

"I'm not the fool I was at nineteen, if that's what you think," I said. "I know it could all come to naught. But he did wage a war in Scotland."

"No. I waged it for him while he sat back in England and amused himself with Mistress Shore."

Elizabeth Shore was a London mercer's wife who had caught the king's eye some years back. With help from the king, it was generally supposed, she had had her marriage annulled on the ground of impotency (her husband's, needless to say). Since then, she had lived in a comfortable house

in London, where she was said to divide her time between entertaining the king and doing good works for the poor. Buxom and cheerful, she was the sort of harlot whom even men who did not like harlots liked. I smiled. "There are worse things."

Richard, however, was one of the rare holdouts against Mistress Shore's charms. "The creature's got even the Marquess of Dorset panting after her."

"I hope for his sake he isn't trying to poach on the king's territory."

"He's stupid enough to try, even though it irks William Hastings as much as the king." Dorset was married to Hastings's stepdaughter. Though Dorset was not a model of fidelity, he certainly could not be accused of avoiding his wife's bed; I'd long since lost count of their offspring. My household had practically a standing order to send a christening cup to Dorset each year. "Two enemies for the price of one. The man's an utter fool. How the queen produced him is beyond me, for she has some sense."

I felt like a boy asking the next question, but I could not stop myself from asking it. I said quietly, "But fool or no fool, Dorset served on your Scottish campaign. So did Edward Woodville; you even made him a banneret. I wasn't asked to go. Why, Richard?"

Richard sighed. "I thought you would ask that sooner or later. Harry, I had no choice with Dorset; the king thinks he should work for his keep, and he has the peculiar idea that he's capable of it. And Edward Woodville is capable. Foolhardy sometimes, but at least he gives his men a fighting spirit."

"But that doesn't answer my question."

"Harry, between my troops and those of Northumberland and Thomas Stanley, there were quite enough of us when Dorset and Woodville were added in; we didn't need you as well. Besides, you've not much presence in the North. It wasn't your fight. And—" He hesitated.

"And?"

"You've no experience in battle, Harry, save for that little bit at Barnet and Tewkesbury. You've never led men in a fight. The Scots would have

made a dog's breakfast of you and of your men. Frankly, you would have been a liability."

"I see."

"You've other abilities, of course."

"Oh? Catching rats, mayhap?" I took a sip of ale. "Well. Let's change the subject."

"Harry, you shock me. I thought you would have swept everything off the table in anger."

"No. I'm not the fool I was at nineteen, as I said earlier. You're right. I lack military experience. Why should I be angry when you spoke the truth?"

Inside, of course, I was hurt. But I was seven-and-twenty, and it was time to stop playing the fool.

Richard continued to look at me quizzically for a moment or two, unconvinced of my calmness. Finally, he shrugged and said, "I think Hastings was rather hoping that Dorset might get at the wrong end of a Scottish sword. Aside from Dorset's wenching about under his stepfather's nose, they just rub along together the wrong way. Of course, Hastings isn't fond of Anthony Woodville, either. Too different, and Hastings has always suspected Anthony of slandering him to the king after Hastings replaced Anthony as Captain of Calais. Is the feeling mutual, do you know?"

I shook my head. "Kate and I visit Ludlow once in a while, but Anthony and I are not confidants. I don't know of anyone who is, really. Not even Kate, who can talk to anyone. He's perfectly friendly, but he's always at a remove, it seems. Fortunately it doesn't seem to have rubbed off on the Prince of Wales. He's intelligent, but he likes horses and dogs more than the contemplative life, though he's certainly fond of his uncle Anthony."

"Is it true that Rivers wears a hairshirt? Ned said something of the sort once."

"I don't know. He's never shared a bath with me for me to see him strip, and if there's a hairshirt, I'd just as soon not have the privilege. For his wife's sake, I hope he's abjured it for the time being." Anthony had

recently remarried. I sometimes felt sorry for his young bride, who seemed almost an afterthought to her husband's duties as the prince's governor.

"Well, he wasn't wearing one when he fathered his bastard daughter, I suppose."

"Neither were you," I said sweetly. "Or your bastard son."

Richard grinned at me. "Touché."

"How do the two of them fare?"

"Both John and Katherine are thriving. They're at Middleham now with my son Edward. Anne put up a bit of a fuss about them coming, but she gave in soon enough. She's become quite fond of Katherine in particular, as I knew she would, not having a daughter of her own. And they're good company for Edward; even Anne says so now, especially as they're likely to be the only brother and sister he has. Anne's not conceived in years."

"I'm sorry, Richard."

"That's what I get for marrying an heiress, I suppose. Have you ever noticed that either women are heiresses or they're good breeders, but almost never both? Like your wife. No dowry, but five children, one after an—Christ, Harry, I'm sorry. I forgot you lost Humphrey just a short while ago."

"Even with four healthy children left, I still mourn him."

"I know, old man. Forgive me."

He touched my hand gently. After we had both concentrated on our food for a while, he said, "Well, let me tell you what our cloth merchants have begged Parliament to enact. No one below the estate of lord is to wear any gown or cloak unless it covers his genitals and buttocks while he is standing upright. A beneficial piece of legislation, no doubt, but who wants to be the fellow who has to check?"

"Not me," I said, my good humor restored.



Though Edward as king could have worn his gown or cloak as short as he pleased, I found myself thinking with some gratitude that he had not

exercised this prerogative, for the last couple of years had not been kind to him—or he had not been kind to himself. He was still a good-looking man, but he'd added to the extra weight he already carried back at the time of the Treaty of Picquigny. Going to war would have done his physique wonders. Yet he still cut an impressive figure, dressed in robes that surpassed in magnificence anything that had been seen in England, and he dealt with his Parliament as briskly and as efficiently as he ever had.

Therefore, I received the shock of my life when, back at Brecon in April, I was riding back from an afternoon of hunting when I saw my wife and some of my men riding toward me at a fast pace. I galloped to meet them. “Kate? Are the children well?”

“Yes. It is the king.” She stared at me as though not believing the words that came out of her own mouth. “He’s dead, Harry.”

“Dead?” Edward was just under one and forty. For all that he was no longer the fine-looking man he’d been in his youth, he’d never had a day of ill health.

“He caught a chill. For a while it looked as if he were shaking it off, and everyone thought he would recover—but then he suddenly took ill again and failed rapidly. Harry, it is so sad! The king had faults—I never liked his spending time with harlots—but who does not? And he did love Bessie truly, for all that; she told me he never had an unkind or hasty word to say to her in his life. He was kind to all of us Woodvilles, never making us feel unwelcome like some did. I am so sorry for Bessie!”

“I’m sad to hear about it too,” I said, and crossed myself.

My thoughts—God curse me for them—were anything but the kind, though. I did pity my wife, who aside from her sympathy for the queen was probably half in love with the king, as most women seemed to be; I even pitied the queen and the king’s children. But I knew this: with the king gone, my own time had come.

Young Edward—I would have to think of him as King Edward now, I realized with a jolt—was but twelve years of age. There would have to be a protectorate, and there was no better choice for protector than the old

king's brother—Richard. My friend, who had so often commented on my exclusion from anything of real importance. With Richard guiding the king, I would no longer be a nonentity; I would be a man of importance, like my grandfather the first duke. And I would make the most of my new responsibility, so by the time the king came of age, I would be indispensable to him. Why, he might even give me my share of the Bohun inheritance—if Richard didn't give it to me before that.

It was the beginning of a brand-new life for me—and for my children, for that matter. I would leave a legacy of not only land but also power to my own Edward. There might even be an earldom for my younger son, great marriages for my daughters. And Kate, though she might not appreciate her good fortune now, would enjoy it with the rest of us. It was a pity, I'd often thought, for her beauty to be wasted on our estates in Wales when she could be shining at court.

Richard's court, in all but name.

I hoped I wasn't smiling as I took Kate's hand. "I'm sorry, sweetheart; I know you were fond of him. I shall miss him, too."



The king had died on April 9, not too long after midnight. For much of the day, he had been displayed naked from the waist up at Westminster, where various church and city dignitaries had dutifully filed by to view his body—probably not, I thought rather disrespectfully, the most pleasing sight in the world, seeing as the king had carried so much of his weight in his belly. From there he had been taken to the chapel to lie in more dignified state.

That was the news that the king's messenger brought us before he took some refreshment and rode on to his next destination. Just a few hours later, a second messenger arrived. He came from Lord Hastings. God rest his soul.

I liked Hastings, though we were dead opposites in personality and years separated us. For those very reasons, though, we weren't close, so I was

surprised when the messenger handed me a letter. "Your grace, my lord wishes you to read this in privacy." He hesitated. "Out of the company of the duchess."

"Why?"

"Your grace, it will be apparent from the letter."

I shrugged and broke the seal. It was addressed to both me and to Richard, and appeared to have been dictated hurriedly. Hastings was convinced that if the Duke of Gloucester did not bring men with him to London in sufficient numbers, the queen's relatives, especially the Marquess of Dorset, would take the rule of the realm into their own hands, excluding the deserving, such as Gloucester and me. Already the king's councilors who were there in London had set a date for the coronation, and when it had been urged that this decision wait until Gloucester had arrived, the arrogant young fool, as Hastings told it, had replied, "We are so important that even without the king's uncle we can make and enforce these decisions." The only way the disaster of a Dorset rule could be avoided, Hastings had concluded, was for Gloucester and me to bring a strong force with us. The queen, Hastings added, had seen reason and had asked her brother Earl Rivers, who would be escorting the young king to London, to limit his escort to two thousand men. If he did not, Hastings was fully prepared to take ship to Calais, where he would have no difficulty raising a force to thwart Dorset's fool ambitions if necessary.

I put down the letter with a frown. Did Dorset really think that he could take Richard's rightful role from him? Edward would have certainly wanted him to guide his young son through his early years of kingship, and as the man who'd soundly defeated the Scots, the man who was virtually king in the North, there was no better man suited for the task. No wonder Hastings was threatening to take off for Calais! Dorset, whose only talent was in the begetting of children, would be bad enough merely as a member of the king's council. As its leader, he would be sheer disaster. Given the choice between him and Louis of France running the government, many an Englishman might wish for Louis.

Clearly, this fool had to be stopped.

I sent Hastings's messenger back with assurances that I understood the import of Hastings's news and would assist Richard in every way possible. To Richard, I sent a letter assuring him of the same. I was apprehensive about what might happen next, yet oddly exhilarated. Here, at last, was what it felt like to be of importance!

In a few days, I heard from Richard, not in the form of a letter but from the mouth of his messenger, who told me that Richard had arranged to meet the king and Anthony Woodville on their way to London. Would I join them?

Of course I would.

Richard told me that Anne was staying behind for the time being, though she would likely join him later, and I decided to have Kate do the same. Kate didn't object; she liked Brecon and our estate in Gloucestershire, Thornbury, particularly well and had our children and her ladies to keep her company. "What a fine sight all of your men make," she said fondly as they all assembled to begin our journey. "So many Stafford knots!"

"And Richard will be bringing even more men with the badge of the white boar."

"Northerners," said Kate, wrinkling her pretty southern nose. "You'll give my sister my love when you see her, Harry? And my brother Anthony?"

"Of course."

I hugged my children—all of them doubly precious to me since poor Humphrey's early death—and gave Kate one last, long embrace. She'd been too grieved at the old king's death to show any enthusiasm for my advances over the last few days, but finally, the night before, we'd given each other a proper farewell. Perhaps, I prayed, she'd soon quicken with child again. Between Humphrey and the king and my elderly great-uncle, the Earl of Essex, there'd been too much death lately among us; we needed a respite.

Little did I know.



Waiting for me at Northampton were Richard and Anthony—but not the king. Anthony explained that as the day had been fine, he had decided to ride on to Stony Stratford and lodge there, leaving more room at Northampton for our own followers. Tomorrow, he proposed, we could leave at first light and meet the king, then make the journey to London together. It was agreeable to Richard and me.

That little matter of business being done, it was a convivial evening, and Anthony being older and better traveled than either of us—far better traveled than me—the conversation eventually meandered toward his adventures abroad. We’d traveled around Italy with Anthony, jousting a bit, and been waylaid by bandits when Anthony smothered his second or third yawn in an hour. “Time to retire,” he said sheepishly. “For me, at least.”

Richard waited until Anthony’s small band of attendants was lost from sight. Then he said to one of his men, “Stand by the door. Let no one pass. Station others outside the windows.”

“Richard?”

“Harry, we must talk.”

“We must?” Truth was, I’d been tempted to follow my brother-in-law off to bed. I stifled my own yawn. “About what?”

“Anthony Woodville is plotting against me—and you too, perhaps. He means to rid one, or both of us, of our lives.”

That woke me up. I stared at Richard. “What?”

“My men have intelligence that some of his men, dressed as common bandits, mean to stage an attack on the three of us as we move to Stony Stratford the next morning. I will be killed; probably you as well. It will be passed off in London as a tragic accident.”

“Why?”

“Why do you think? To prevent me from serving as protector. To keep the Woodvilles in control during the king’s minority.”

“Anthony would do that? Richard, I don’t believe—”

“You doubt me?”

“No. Not you. But perhaps your spies—”

“My spies are first rate. Think, Harry! Anthony’s no innocent beneath that hairshirt, if he’s wearing one. For all these years he’s been the most important man in the king’s household, had the virtual ruling of Wales—at your cost, I might add. Do you think he’s keen to give all that up? If he can eliminate me, and perhaps you—he may not think you’re an obstacle, being married to his sister and shut out of power for so long—then he has a few years yet to run the country. To run the country with a king who’s thought of him like a father and will give him anything he wants.”

“But—”

“Don’t you know that he just recently requested a copy of the patent Ned gave him to raise troops in Wales?”

“I heard something of that. I assumed it was in readiness to fight the French or the Scots. Or in case there was trouble in Wales.”

“You assume too readily, Harry. The man’s a danger.”

I put my head in my hands, thinking. Anthony a killer? I found it hard to believe, but the truth was, as I had told Richard a few months ago, I didn’t know Anthony all that well; I’d sometimes wondered if anyone did. There might be things going through his head of which I’d never dreamed.

But Richard I did know. We’d been friends since I was thirteen. He’d comforted me after Tewkesbury, overlooked that foolish drunken kiss I’d given him, taken me to my first brothel. I loved him like a brother, at the very least. And we were—as I recalled now—brothers in arms. He’d supported me when I needed it. Now he needed my support.

I lifted my head. “So what do we do next?”



“The two of you are stark raving mad. Mad!”

“Shackle him,” I told the guards. It was dawn. Overnight, Richard’s men and mine had blocked every road out of Northampton and put a guard around Anthony’s chamber. My men with drawn swords were the first sight his page saw when he poked his tousled head out of the door.

"I don't understand. Is this a peculiar joke of yours? If so, it's gone too far. Plotting against the two of you? Is that what you said? Harry, all I want is what the two of you want! To get the king crowned and to get back to business. There's trouble with the French, trouble with the Scots—we need to get a council in place to deal with all of this."

"There will be a council, don't you fear. But you won't be on it."

"Harry, I'll have a chance to clear my name, I hope, and you'll see, I've done nothing but my duty to the king, to the Duke of Gloucester, and to the kingdom. There's no plot. Listen to me!"

"We need to get moving."

"Harry! You're fond of Kate, I know. For her sake, won't you believe me?"

"Oh, I forgot. Kate sends you her love. Though that was before she knew you planned to make her a widow."

"A widow? You're well and truly mad! Why on earth would I want to kill you? What harm have you ever done to anyone?"

I stared past Anthony Woodville and thought of what Richard had said to me as we talked late into the night. "Has it never occurred to you that there was something more than your outburst in France that's shut you out all of these years? Ned could have put you on the prince's council; the worst that could have happened was that you'd blunder and then he could give that shrug of his and replace you. No, Harry, there was someone else who found it convenient to have you stay an outcast, and that someone was Anthony Woodville. He wanted to keep you as obscure as possible so he could build up his own power in Wales. God only knows what rot he's talked to Ned about you all of these years."

"As he did with Hastings," I had said slowly. "After he was replaced in Calais."

Richard had nodded solemnly. "Precisely. But now that Ned's gone, mere slander's not going to work for him any longer, is it? He has to find another solution."

Anthony's guards had him all trussed up now. My brother-in-law's voice

changed again. “By all that is holy, Harry Stafford, I swear it! There is no goddamned plot!!”

I turned on my heel and walked away.



“But why did you arrest them? My father chose these men to serve me. He would not put evil counselors in my household. And Richard Grey is my own brother!” The young king stared at Richard and me.

I am not proud of how we seized Richard Grey, the king’s half brother, and Thomas Vaughan, the king’s aged chamberlain. We arrived at Stony Stratford, asked to see them in private, and then gave a signal for our own men to rush in and shackle them. It was done to prevent bloodshed, and also to spare the king the sight of witnessing their arrest, but knowing what I know now, I wish the men at least had had the chance to put up a fight.

“You must trust us, your grace,” said Richard in a mild voice. From the time of our arrival, he and I had been perfectly respectful to the twelve-year-old king. “There are plots afoot that threaten not only my safety and that of the Duke of Buckingham, but of perhaps your own person as well. These two men, I fear, are implicated deeply in them.”

“I don’t believe you. And who are you to arrest my men, anyway? Who gave you authority to do so?”

This was not going to be easy. Richard himself looked a little nonplussed. We’d expected more of a boy, less of a king. “Your grace, your late father, my dearest brother, wished for me to be your protector. I know not what you might have been told by those bearing false witness, but that is the truth. It was his dying wish that I assist your grace in governing until you come of age—”

“You weren’t even there when he died!”

“—and I intend to carry out that trust.”

“Indeed, your grace,” I put in, “before he came to Northampton, the Duke of Gloucester went to York and swore fealty to you, and had his followers do the same.”

The king flicked his hand as if swatting away a fly—his mother’s gesture.

Richard went on, “Your father knew that I have governed the North for him well and wisely. He would not have put you in my charge if he did not think I would discharge my duties to the best of my ability and in a manner best calculated to bring to you the most profit and honor. I have the additional advantage of being popular with the people, which can only redound to your advantage.”

“My father picked good men for my household. I have seen nothing evil in them.”

“You are inexperienced in the ways of the world, your grace, and have had little opportunity for comparison.”

Edward drew himself up taller, looking more like his father than ever. “And what will my mother the queen have to say about this?”

“You show your youth by such a question,” I said. “Women have no business to govern kingdoms. You must not put your faith in your mother, not as an adviser anyway. You must trust to the nobles of the realm, and most particularly in your uncle the Duke of Gloucester.”

The king gave me a mulish look, then dropped into a window seat and scowled. Something else in his face made me regret what I’d just said. I had two sons of my own; I’d not want them to be in a situation like this, with all of their familiar advisers under arrest and two uncles they barely knew telling them to trust them. I sat beside Edward and said in a more gentle tone, “Your grace, we really are acting for your own good, though it may not seem so now.”

The king ignored me. “Are we leaving?” he demanded. “Or staying here?”

We both looked to Richard for an answer. “We’ll return to Northampton once I take care of a few things here. It shouldn’t take very long.”

“Where are you taking Uncle Anthony? And my brother Richard and Sir Thomas?”

“To the North,” said Richard. “They shall be comfortably housed.”

“Can I say good-bye to them?”

I was glad this was Richard’s decision to make. He made it swiftly. “No.”



We left Stony Stratford that same morning, the king's household and his escort, leaderless and dumbstruck, having obeyed Richard's orders to disband. A few attendants had been allowed to stay, though, and they trailed uncertainly behind us as we made our way toward Northampton, the king, mounted on his favorite horse, riding between Richard and myself. Just the act of doing something appeared to have lifted his spirits a bit.

Richard did his best to encourage this brighter state of mind. We took a little detour to the spot where the battle of Northampton had been fought—a gloomy place for me, as Grandfather had fallen there, but the site of one of King Edward's early triumphs in his days as Earl of March. I suspected that Edward had not been quite as key to the victory as Richard told his son—that credit would probably be due to the treacherous Lord Grey of Ruthin, who'd chosen that day to switch sides—but I dutifully played along. When we reached our lodgings in Northampton, our small sovereign was in reasonably good spirits.

We stayed in Northampton through the next day, Richard wanting to hear some news from London before we made our entry there. Meanwhile, he found the king some business to do, starting with perfecting his royal signature. "You wouldn't want to blot it, after all, and force your poor clerks to write what you are signing all over again, now would you?"

"I've already practiced it," the king confessed, in a sheepish tone that made me smile. "I'll show you."

I handed him a quill and spread a sheet of parchment in front of him. Without hesitation, the king inscribed a neat "Edwardus Quintus" on the paper—evidently, he had indeed been practicing. Richard nodded approvingly. "Have you ever seen mine? Here." He wrote, "Richard Gloucester," and for good measure added, "*Loyaulte me lie.*"

"You too, Uncle Harry."

I signed "Harry Buckingham," followed by "*Souvente me souvene.*" "Remember me often," I explained.

The king frowned. "I know what it means, Uncle." He shook his head. "*That's* your signature?"

It was, I admit, an elaborate one with several flourishes, almost whimsical, but it was legible. Richard pulled the parchment to him and started laughing. "For God's sake, Harry. Signing a few documents a day with that would wear a man out. And what's that little touch here? It doesn't mean anything, Harry. It's an utter waste." He squinted. "Or maybe they're supposed to be little spectacles here?"

"I like my signature. I devised it when I was about the king's age."

"It shows. And what an absurd motto, Harry. 'Remember me often!' What are people supposed to remember? Could be your valiant deeds, but could also be that you owe them money. I'd change it if I were you."

"I'll consider it," I said huffily as the king snickered with Richard as if they were old friends. You would have thought it was my idea to take Anthony Woodville and the rest into custody.



News came from London just before nightfall in the form of Francis Lovell, who had been made a viscount by the fourth Edward a few months ago. He was one or two years younger than me. I'd seen him from time to time but didn't know him well, and was chagrined to find that he and Richard appeared to be on the best of terms. Evidently Lovell had served under Richard in the Scottish expedition from which I'd been excluded.

"Things have been wild in London," Lovell said, settling down in Richard's chamber. "First, Edward Woodville has taken to sea, supposedly to fight the French."

There had been French raiders pestering the coast since the old king's death, I knew. Richard asked, "With permission?"

"With the council's permission, but considering... He should have waited for you. But it gets better. As soon as the news of what happened to Rivers, Grey, and Vaughan came, the queen dashed into sanctuary."

“Sanctuary? Why, for God’s sake?”

“She’s putting it out that you have ill designs on the entire Woodville family. And God knows, they’re scattering like rats. Edward Woodville’s out to sea. Dorset is with the queen in sanctuary. Though not before he tried to raise an army. Couldn’t do it. The council received your letters, Richard, and is glad you’re in control. Hastings is positively glowing.”

“Where’s the Bishop of Salisbury?” Lionel Woodville had achieved a bishopric the year before. “And Richard Woodville?”

“Oxford, as far as I know, for the bishop. And as for Richard, who knows? He’s never done much more than potter on his estates. One hopes he’ll keep doing that.”

I frowned. Not for the first time, it occurred to me to wonder what Kate would think when she heard that I’d arrested her brother and her nephew. It wasn’t a thought upon which I liked to dwell. Richard, however, was grinning. Lovell said dryly, “You don’t seem too concerned.”

“I’m not. This proves that they’re guilty as hell. I’ve already told the council of the plots against us. This just buttresses our claims. It couldn’t be better.”

“But you’re not going to tarry here much longer, are you?”

“No. Tomorrow we’re leaving here. With all our men we’ll be moving slowly, but we should get into London the day after next.”

“The fourth of May. That was the day the council set for the king’s coronation.”

“It’s going to have to wait, then. We’ll tell the king that more time is needed to make it a grand affair—and that’s true enough.”

“Is the boy in good spirits?”

“The king,” corrected Richard. “His moods come and go. He has a chaplain he’s fond of. Tomorrow we’re going to appoint him to a church. That should keep him happy for a while. And then when he enters London as king, there will be a grand show, of course. If he’s not reassured by all of that, then I don’t know what will.”

“Has he asked you what you plan to do with his uncle and the rest?”

“Many times. I tell him that it’s for the council to decide.”

“And what when he finds that his mother is in sanctuary?”

Richard yawned. “We’ll deal with that when he finds out.” He stood. “Anyway, it’s time to pay your respects now. Bow deeply. His grace gets touchy when you don’t.”



The king could not have wished for more ceremony than he received when the three of us, accompanied by five hundred men of Richard’s retinue and mine, rode into London on May 4. We had sent cartloads of arms belonging to the Woodvilles—rounded up, Richard told me, by his spies—ahead of us as proof of the plot, but they had not made much of an impression, we later heard. All wanted only to see the new king.

As we approached the city at Hornsey, we were greeted by a flood of scarlet and murrey—the mayor and the aldermen clad in the former, the hundreds of men from the city guilds clad in the latter. Richard and I, garbed in mourning, looked downright gloomy next to them. The king was smiling, though, and he kept on his smile as the mayor launched into a long speech of welcome. Only when he had finished and the procession began to wind its unwieldy way toward Bishopsgate did Edward say, “My uncle Anthony should have been here! And my brother Richard and dear old Vaughan! When do you intend to release them?”

“When I am satisfied that they pose no threat to me,” said Richard. “Or to your grace.”

Edward stared sullenly at his horse’s mane for a moment. Then he lifted his head and resumed smiling at the guildsmen.



There is nothing so exhausting as ceremony, particularly royal ceremony.

By the time the king had been settled at the Bishop of London's palace and all of the necessary forms had been gone through, I could have crawled into a corner and slept for hours, and so, I suspect, could Richard.

At the palace, however, was William Hastings, and he was too elated to be tired. "The power in the right hands, and with no more blood than would have been spilled from a pricked finger!" he said after we had described the events at Stony Stratford and Northampton to him. "Though I really didn't think that the Woodvilles would go as far as to try to assassinate you. An ambush, you say?"

"Yes, and we've the weapons to prove it. Four cartloads of weapons stored up outside the city."

"Yet hadn't those been stored there long ago for the Scottish campaign? But your intelligence is no doubt superior to mine. The king looked well, considering. Poor lad, all this must be a shock to him. We must get his brother to him; he's a merry lad and will be good company. If the queen had had more sense than to scamper into sanctuary with him... But all will come right. You'll find the council most amenable to your serving as protector, your grace."

"So Lovell said."

"Those letters from you were very reassuring to the council. Which, I presume, my lord of Buckingham will be joining now?"

"Indeed," said Richard. "Harry's been invaluable to me."

I smiled.

"And there shall be offices for Harry as well, very soon."

I gulped. All those years in outer darkness...

Hastings just barely raised his eyebrows. Perhaps he was wondering about the speed of my ascent, and wondering if something might come his way as well, but he was too polished to say anything other than, "Well deserved, I'm sure."

"Shall you stay for supper with us?" I stammered.

"I must decline, your graces, as I have a previous engagement. Mistress Shore has asked me to sup with her tonight. Indeed, I should be setting out now."

He took his leave, a decided spring in his step. Richard shook his head after he was gone. “Taking over that Shore wench, and Ned dead for less than a month. The old rooster.”

May 1483 to June 1483

ONCE THE CEREMONY OF THE KING'S ENTRY INTO LONDON WAS OVER, the council—including me—set busily to work. We scheduled the king's coronation for June 22, and it was I who suggested that his lodgings be moved to the Tower. It was a sensible enough suggestion; there were comfortable royal apartments there, room enough for both the king and his brother when the queen came to her senses and saw fit to let him leave sanctuary.

Rivers, Grey, and Vaughan were all still in prison: Rivers at Sheriff Hutton, Grey at Middleham, and Vaughan at Pontefract. Richard was all for executing them, and requested that the council authorize him doing so. But the council would not agree without more definite proof of a plot. Richard's own word was good enough for me, but I didn't gainsay the council on this point. I'd already written Kate to tell her the news, and I'd received a furious letter in her own hand, then another letter in the same hand a day later, this one begging me to use my influence to see that the three men were shown mercy.

I frowned at the second letter with irritation. Kate was a grown woman, who'd not taken it all that amiss when the late king executed his own brother. Did she really expect Richard to show mercy to the men who had plotted against his own life—and perhaps mine? But yet these were her blood relations; I couldn't expect her not to be angry. So I was glad to write to her and say that they were still in prison, but that nothing had been decided and that there was an excellent chance that in time—perhaps

when the king was a man grown and they could cause him or Richard little trouble—they might go free again.

I believed that, Kate. I truly did.



In the meantime, Richard more than kept his word to grant me offices. I was made chief justice and chamberlain of North and South Wales, and constable and steward of so many castles, I could not tell you all of them now, less than six months later.

From nobody to virtual king of Wales was a dazzling change, and I would be a liar if I told you that it did not go to my head. I careened around town with a large escort, spent huge sums of money, and slapped Stafford knots on any man who would stand still long enough to allow it. Yet I did attend to my new duties conscientiously, as all of us on the king's council did. I wanted to be worthy of the trust Richard had placed in me—and perhaps I also wanted to show the dead king how ill-advised he had been not to place such trust in me.

As for the living king, despite the initial signs of a thaw he had exhibited, he had not really warmed to Richard or me—that, I knew, would not happen, if ever, until the day came that Rivers, Grey, and Vaughan were released. Maybe not even then. Hastings, however, was not at the same disadvantage we were, and as he had sons and wards not far from the king's age, he made considerable inroads in Edward's confidence. One day, he requested permission to take the king hunting, a proposition to which Richard agreed, though somewhat reluctantly.

"You've not rewarded him much," I said after Hastings had made his amicable way out of the door.

"Should I relieve you of some of your offices?"

"Well, no. But simply reappointing him as Master of the Mint didn't seem that generous to me."

Richard shrugged. "He's a decent fellow. But he's Ned's boon companion, not mine." He drummed his fingers on the table at which

we sat. “I wonder if I should have allowed Hastings to take the king hunting. He’s been pressing in council to release Rivers and his ilk, you know, and the king’s bound to ask him about it. I’ve a mind to recall my permission.”

“I wouldn’t. You’ll only make more of an enemy of the king than he is already to you. And to me.”

“Enemy?”

“I’m not overstating it, Richard. The boy hates us for those arrests. Before Northampton, when I saw him at Ludlow, he would talk to me readily, laugh. All has changed.”

“You’re right, I suppose. I did right to have the council extend my powers as protector beyond the coronation, until he’s of age.”

“But after that? You’re Duke of Gloucester. Not a title without ill omens. You know the history as well as I. My forebear Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, was murdered on orders of Richard II. Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, died suspiciously during the sixth Henry’s reign.”

“You speak of ill omens, and yet you tell me to allow the boy to go off alone with Hastings?”

“Yes. You don’t want the boy growing up with a grudge against you. He’s no fool, no more than his father ever was. So you need to gain his confidence. Do more than let him go hunting. Free his Woodville kin, Richard. My wife would thank you for it also. You can keep a close eye on them, limit their landholdings and power, to ensure there’s no trouble.”

“I don’t know. Maybe I should just start by taking him hunting, like Hastings did.”

“You could do Hastings one better by taking him to a brothel.”

“That’s more Hastings’s department.” For the first time, Richard smiled. “He’s made a conquest of that Shore woman, I hear. He spends every night with her; it’s convenient that his wife hasn’t arrived in London yet.”

“Dorset in sanctuary must be going mad with envy.”

“Sometimes I wonder, Harry, who corrupted whom: Hastings, my brother, or my brother, Hastings?”

“It’s surely a toss-up.”

“Well, Ned has Hastings beat by sheer numbers, not to mention variety. Tavern wenches, shopkeepers, merchant’s wives, gentry—they’ve all been well represented in my brother’s bed. A miniature parliament in skirts, you might say, except for the nobility.”

“Well, there was the Earl of Shrewsbury’s daughter, Eleanor Butler.” I chuckled. “Kate told me some choice gossip about that years ago.”

“Oh?” Richard yawned.

“Yes. According to the Duchess of Norfolk—Lady Eleanor’s sister, that is, not the old dowager—Edward went so far as to promise marriage to her if she would succumb. Or maybe she simply succumbed without the inducement. It’s all hazy now—Richard?”

Richard’s face had gone white. “What the hell did you just say?”

“The Duchess of Norfolk said—“

“I heard you, I heard you. For God’s sake, Harry, how could you have kept this to yourself?”

“What was to report? That Edward had made yet another conquest? And the lady was long dead when I heard about it.”

“Christ, Harry, don’t you see? If he promised her marriage and they had sexual intercourse, there was a marriage! This could change the whole succession! Don’t you see? If there was a marriage between those two, there was no valid marriage between the king and that Woodville woman. That means—”

“Young Edward is a bastard. All of the king’s children are bastards. Leaving Clarence’s son next in the line for the throne.”

“No. Clarence was attainted. So leaving—”

“You.”

We sat there staring at each other for a few minutes. Then Richard shoved his chair back. “We have to find out the truth. Now. Starting with the Duchess of Norfolk.”



“The king took advantage of my sister,” said the Duchess of Norfolk. We had been so fortunate as to find her at hand in London, where she’d traveled to attend the upcoming coronation. “She was widowed and vulnerable, and he young and handsome, so she was an easy mark for him. It didn’t take long for her to fall into his bed.”

“But did he promise her marriage beforehand?” Richard asked.

“She didn’t care to speak of the matter, not to me at least. Perhaps to her confessor. But I can tell you this: my sister was a lady of the highest principles. She would never have allowed him into her bed by any other means.”

“But he reneged on his promise.”

“Yes. The Woodville woman turned his head, with a little help from that witch her mother. I wouldn’t be surprised if the daughter wasn’t dabbling in the black arts as well, but that’s for another day.”

“She never tried to hold him to his promise?” I asked.

“Well, what choice did she have? He was the king, not some ordinary knight, after all. And she had her pride. Who would want to be queen under such circumstances, with the king being forced by the papal courts to acknowledge the marriage? No, she stayed silent, and so did I, except on the occasion you know of.” She chuckled ruefully. “Heady wine the king had at that wedding celebration. I always assumed that the marriage of my daughter to the Duke of York was some sort of recompense, though goodness knows the king also had his eye on my daughter’s Norfolk inheritance.” The duchess sighed, for little Anne Mowbray had died just a few years after her magnificent wedding to the Duke of York. “I would be pleased to at last see my sister’s good name vindicated.”

“And perhaps you shall, my lady,” said Richard, rising. “Perhaps you shall.”



“Well,” said Richard as we left the duchess. “We have it.”

“But do we? Lady Butler never said straight out to the duchess that there was a promise of marriage, or gave her any details. Can we really be sure

that there was a promise? Do we really have enough evidence to put this before a court?"

"You're in a questioning mood today, Harry."

"I'm just trying to look at things sensibly—for a change." I smiled, but Richard did not. "The king could charm many a virtuous woman out of her shift. The duchess just might not want to admit that her sister could fall so easily. I think we should speak to others—like Hastings."

"Very well. You speak to Hastings. I shall make my own inquiries."



Like Edward his friend, Lord Hastings had become an admirer of all things Burgundian during his enforced stay there, and his private chamber in his London home was a tribute to that duchy, with paintings on the walls and gorgeously illuminated manuscripts spread out on tables for all to admire. I duly did so, then told him of the rumor I'd heard and the need to inquire into it.

"Lady Butler? Now that's a name I haven't heard in a while."

"But you did hear of her before from the king?"

"Why, of course—just as I heard of many another in those days. Think of it, your grace. A young man loses his father and his brother, the person he respects most in the world and the person he loves most in the world, on the same day. Just three months later, he gains the crown. There's the pain of how it was gained, but there's also the pleasure, in knowing that everything he dreams of can suddenly be his. Women are ready to fall into his arms with but a smile. What young man's head wouldn't be turned by all that? What young man wouldn't be profligate in such circumstances?"

"I was not condemning the king."

"No. You think I'm digressing. I'm not. Eleanor Butler was a pretty young woman, though a few years the king's senior—with all that he had been through at a young age, he rather liked his women a little older. The two of them met in the usual way, when she came to him to have her dower rights sped along. He took a fancy to her, and her to him, I daresay,

and very soon, they were bedfellows. I know; I helped them meet privately now and then; out of the glare of her family and the court.”

“But did he promise her marriage?”

Hastings snorted. “To use an old cliché, why buy the cow when you can get the milk for free? And Lady Butler was most willing to be milked. Not that it’s a reflection on her virtue. There was only one woman who held out against Ned, or at least only one about whom he cared, and you know what happened to her. He made her his queen.”

“But couldn’t he have made her the promise, just to inveigle her into his bed?”

“Ned didn’t break his promises. And why make one to begin with? She was a lovely woman, but he didn’t love her, no more than he did the others he meddled with at the time. If she refused him, there were others who wouldn’t. He wasn’t in love with her; he wasn’t ready to love anyone at that time. It wasn’t until several years later, when the novelty of being able to bed anyone he wanted had worn off a little, that he fell in love, and that woman he married. He was willing to incur the anger of everyone around him for her. Not for Lady Butler, even though she would have been a better match for him in terms of rank.”

“And what happened to the king and Lady Butler?”

“She was too proud to be his mistress openly, and he got tired of all of the secrecy involved, especially where there were others who could satisfy him as well or better without all of the to-and-fro required with her. My apologies for my bluntness; I mean no disrespect to the memory of the lady, who was a kinswoman of yours if I’m not mistaken. She was proud, as I say, and I believe she came to regret the affair also. It just ran its course in the end. He found others, and she decided to devote herself to religion. Ned drove more than one lady into the arms of the Church, you know. I hope the Lord remembers that.” Hastings sighed. “Christ, I miss him.”

“His likes will never be seen again in England,” I said.

“Hm. Gloucester’s not seriously thinking there’s anything to this promise of marriage business, is there? For I can tell you, Ned loved those boys of

his. If there were anything amiss that would threaten the succession, he would have paid the Pope a pretty sum to get it put smooth. He would have done—and did—a lot more than that. Clarence died because Ned didn't want him to menace his son's throne one day."

"He's simply doing his duty to investigate a rumor he has heard. He too is concerned for the king's security."

"Well, I'll be glad when the lad is crowned. For Ned's sake. Maybe that will get the queen to come out of sanctuary, too. The sooner that nonsense is all finished, the better."

Hastings walked me to my waiting barge. As it pulled away, another barge pulled into view, close enough for me to recognize Thomas Rotherham, Archbishop of York, and John Morton, Bishop of Ely. Evidently they were coming to visit Hastings.

Odd, I thought. Why not just meet at Westminster?



As I walked into Richard's inner chamber at Westminster, I hoped that he had not set his heart on becoming king, for it seemed to me that if anyone knew the truth about King Edward and Lady Butler, it would have been Hastings. Richard, however, hardly blinked when I told him of our conversation. "I expected as much."

"Richard?"

"Harry, if there is one thing you can say about Hastings, he was devoted to Ned. He'd do anything for him, including lying for him, and he naturally wants to see Ned's son safe on the throne. Commendable, but an incentive to lie. So if he says there was no contract of marriage between him and Lady Butler, it's almost a guarantee that there was one."

"But what if he simply happened to be telling the truth?"

"How did he act when you asked the question? Surprised?"

"Well, no. But hearing that a wench had entangled herself with Edward wouldn't come as a surprise to him."

"Especially not if he'd prepared a story beforehand, knowing that the

time was coming for him to be questioned about it. Now on the other hand, we have the Duchess of Norfolk. What would she gain by lying? Nothing. The story makes her sister look like a simpleton, and there aren't any offspring to gain the throne by its telling. No, Harry, I think we have to give the duchess precedence over the lord, in both rank and truth. And knowing that, and guessing what Hastings would say, I've been speaking to a bishop."

"Bishop Morton?"

"Why, no. What brought him to mind?"

"I saw him at Hastings's house. Him and the Archbishop of York."

Richard frowned, then shrugged. "Well, in any case, I've been speaking to the Bishop of Bath and Wells. Stillington has a fine mind."

"Speaking to him about what?"

"Why, this marriage between the old king and Lady Butler, of course. Or shall I call her the uncrowned queen?" Richard yawned. "No, that's too time-consuming. Let's stick with 'Lady Butler,' shall we? She's not in a position to mind, poor lady."

"But the only word we have is her sister's! And she wasn't unequivocal."

"No, there are other circumstances to support it. Look at my brother George. Why do you think he was killed?"

"Because he executed Annette Twynho for no good reason. Because he was dabbling in treason well before he became of age, with Oxford and the like. Because he spread those rumors that Edward was a bastard. Because—"

"Because he knew the truth about the king and Lady Butler."

"How?"

"Who knows? Maybe someone babbled it to him. Maybe even Ned did in a misguided moment. But why else kill him? Annette Twynho's death was an outrage, but it wasn't a threat to Ned. As for the other reasons, the House of Lancaster wasn't exactly flourishing at the time. And no sane person would believe that my mother was an adulteress."

I could not help smiling. "You're certainly right about that."

"So there's only one reason that I can think of that would explain why

Ned executed George: George knew something that would threaten the succession. And this was it. Don't think it's just my opinion; Stillington thinks there might be something to it also. Harry? You're looking green."

"You mean to take the crown," I said. "You want it. Don't you?"

Richard nodded slowly. "Yes. I do."

"Even if it means taking it from your nephew?"

"I'm not even convinced it belongs to him. And if it does? Harry, you know your history. Richard II and Henry VI were child kings, and look what happened. Disaster after disaster, crisis after crisis."

"But they had poor advisers, men who were interested in their own gain. Here you would be in charge, and you would rule wisely."

"Yes, for a few years. And then what would happen when the king came into his majority? All my good work would be undone; all wasted with a few strokes of a whelp's pen. With me being king, England could be great from the very start, and could go from triumph to triumph. We'd win back the lands in France that Henry VI lost, for one thing; we'd be bringing Edward III's dream to fruition. You hated that Treaty of Picquigny; so did I. Why, Louis has been laughing up his long nose at us ever since. Do you want more of that?"

"But—"

"It wouldn't just be France. The people of the North love me, and with good reason; I've served them well. Why couldn't all of the people grow to love me? They wouldn't love me because of my cockmanship, like they did Ned; they'd love me for what I did for them. I'd give them good government, better laws, peace and tranquility. Trade would flourish, because we'd open new markets. Now, Ned's boy is a clever boy, I'll grant you that, but he's a boy. By the time he got on his feet as king, assuming that he stood upon his own legs and wasn't guided by his mother's people, precious years could be lost. There are so many things we could be doing now, now and for years to come. We would make this little island the envy of the world."

He draped an arm around my shoulders.

"I'm telling you all this because I know I can trust you more than any other man in the world. You've never failed me; you've always wanted to serve me. Will you help me in this? If you say no, I'll manage, but I'd like to share this glory that is to come with you."

"All right," I said. "I'll help you."

Richard embraced me hard and held me there for a long time. Finally he released me, and burst out laughing.

"Just think, Harry. All this is due to one man's inability to keep his cock in his drawers."



We set to the work of claiming the crown—I never thought of it as usurping, not then—that very afternoon. First on the agenda was Richard's sending to York for armed men. They were needed, he wrote, to protect us against the queen, her kin, and her affinity, who were intending to murder the two of us and all of the old royal blood.

"The queen plotting against us?" I asked skeptically. "She's in sanctuary. How can she plot?"

"Dorset's still there. Besides, if she's not plotting now, she will be when the news of the marriage with Lady Butler comes out. In any case, we're going to need the troops, and this will get them here as soon as any other means."

Without protesting further, I watched as Richard put his seal to the letter.

Quietly, we set about finding other witnesses to the relationship between Edward and Lady Butler, for although we were counting on Edward's notoriety with the female sex to carry a great deal of weight, we wanted something more substantial than the Duchess of Norfolk's sisterly assurances of the lady's virtue. But nothing was forthcoming, so we consulted with Bishop Stillington and William Catesby, a lawyer whom Richard had recently made Chancellor of the Earldom of March, and decided that other grounds should be put forth. "The oldest lawyer's trick in the book," explained William Catesby. "Throw enough muck against the wall, and hope that some of it sticks."

"I should hardly call this muck," protested Bishop Stillington. He was a former chancellor of the fourth Edward's, and had spent several months in the Tower after Clarence's execution. No one, not even Richard, who had been back in the North at the time, was quite sure why, but I had always assumed he'd made a careless comment about the high-handed manner in which George's trial had been handled. He'd not stayed on Edward's bad side for long: the following year, he'd been sent to treat with the Bishop of Elne, King Louis's ambassador.

"Don't mind me, your grace. I simply tell it as it is."

I knew William Catesby well, which was not to say that I liked him, but he was certainly competent. He'd acted as one of my estate agents for several years and was a man of talent and energy. His chief patron was Hastings, though, and it had been through Hastings that he had come to my attention. I was used to his plain speaking, as he liked to call it, but poor Stillington looked discomfited, even more so when Catesby said, "Well, your grace. Give us some muck."

"I hardly—Well, for one thing, the king's marriage to Elizabeth Woodville was made without the knowledge and assent of the lords of the land."

Richard frowned.

"Not the firmest ground on which to rest a case, I know. More to the point, it was made privately and secretly, in a private chamber, a profane place, with no banns."

Richard smiled, then frowned again. "Of course, the Butler marriage was secret too."

Catesby put in. "Let us think back to Warwick's time, gentlemen. Was it not put about that the Duchess of Bedford procured the marriage of her daughter to the king by sorcery and witchcraft?"

"She was acquitted," I said.

"By a council controlled by the king. How could it help but acquit her, his mother-in-law? Another council, not intimidated by the king, might have reached a very different result. And is it not odd, you think, that the Duke of Bedford—only in his forties—died so soon after marrying

his young duchess, and that she married that obscure squire Woodville so soon afterward?"

Richard grinned. "What think you, Harry? Was your mother-in-law a witch?"

"I hardly knew her." Some residue of decency made me add, "But no, I don't believe she was. She was a pious woman, but just very French. Bedford was in failing health and was under immense strain at the time of his death; his cares aged him, they say. It's no wonder that his widow looked for a lusty young man afterward."

"Nonetheless, it may bear looking into," Richard said. "Well. Go on."

Stillington said, "There is the question of jurisdiction, your grace. Strictly speaking, the matter of the precontract should be raised in the Church courts, but the resolution might not be a speedy one—and the verdict would not be sure by any means, I fear. If it were brought in Parliament on the grounds of public notoriety, however—"

"Look into that for me, Bishop." Richard stood and stretched. "I think we've done a good day's work."

Thus dismissed, Stillington hurried off, but Catesby lingered. Seeing him do so, I, of course, did also. "Well, Catesby? What think you? Do we have a case?" Richard asked.

"With your troops from the North, you won't need one," said Catesby. "Not much of one, anyway. Londoners are scared to death of anyone from up there. Just the knowledge that armed northerners are on the way will throw them into a panic here. They're a soft lot when it doesn't involve commerce. No, I think you have another problem on your hands, your grace."

"Oh?"

"Hastings. When the news of the marriage hits the council, he's going to do anything in his power to keep that boy on the throne. Including calling on his followers. Who are numerous, here and in Calais. Plainly speaking, your grace, he could destroy you."

Richard looked at me. "You mentioned that Morton and Rotherham paid him a visit the other day."

“Yes. It could have been nothing.”

“It could have been treason.” He twisted the dagger he wore at his side.

“Well. Something else to look into.”



John Morton, Bishop of Ely, was a plump man who always made sure that refreshment was on hand for our council meetings. At the last meeting, his servant had brought in wafers so good I'd taken a couple with me when I left to tide me over later between dinner and supper. On Friday, June 13, a bowl of fat, glistening strawberries greeted us as Hastings, Catesby, Morton, Rotherham, Thomas Stanley, Richard, and I filed into the council chamber at the Tower at around nine. The rest of the council was meeting at Westminster, for greater efficiency, Richard had decided.

The berries disappeared quickly. “You must have more brought to us, Bishop,” said Richard affably. “Delicious!”

“There are plenty more where those came from,” said Morton proudly. “They are flavorful, aren't they? My gardener outdid himself this year, truly.”

“Then have some more brought, please. And it would be kind to share them with those meeting at Westminster, don't you think?”

Inwardly, I heaved a sigh of relief. Since yesterday, I'd felt uneasy, worrying about Richard and Hastings. But if Richard was sitting chatting about strawberries, there clearly couldn't be anything amiss, not now.

Morton's manservant went out to fetch the strawberries, and we spoke for a while about the situation with Edward Woodville, who had taken his fleet to Southampton. There Richard had sent men to seize him, but Woodville, learning of his brother Anthony's arrest, had managed to escape. Reports had it that he had landed safely in Brittany—along with some ten thousand pounds in gold that he had seized from another ship, as forfeit to the crown, while at Southampton. We were all bemoaning this loss when Richard excused himself to answer nature's call.

“I do hope it wasn't the strawberries,” Hastings said. He popped another one into his mouth.

“Never,” said Morton touchily. “To the contrary, they are most healthful.”

The door swung open, and Richard marched in.

It was if another being had taken possession of his body. His eyes glowed with anger, and he even looked taller somehow, so rigid he was. “My lords,” he said. “What would you do if you discovered treason in your midst?”

The answer seemed to be an obvious one, so much so that we all simply sat there staring. But Richard clearly expected an answer, so Hastings finally said, in a light tone, after gulping his strawberry, “Why, arrest the traitor, of course.”

“Correct, Lord Hastings. Then, come! Arrest the traitor.”

A dozen armed men sprang into the room and seized Hastings. “What the devil is this?” he sputtered as they tied his arms and legs. “Gloucester, have you gone mad?”

“You will deny you have been plotting against me, and Buckingham, and all of the blood royal?”

“Deny it? Hell, yes! I was the one who urged you to take on the protectorate, have you forgotten that? What ails you?”

Morton stood. “My lord protector, there is the gravest misunderstanding here!”

“Yes, there is—in trusting you! Arrest him too. And Rotherham.”

Morton and Rotherham stared at each other as men grabbed them from behind. Then Rotherham thudded to the floor in a dead faint.

Hastings jerked in my direction. “Buckingham! You tell him. We’ve done nothing treasonous. Nothing—” His face suddenly changed. “Christ,” he said softly. “This is about that business you saw me about the other day, isn’t it? That Eleanor Butler strumpet?” Hastings’s face was ashen. “This whoreson Gloucester means to take the crown for himself!”

“Take him out! I’ll have his head. Now!”

“No block,” the youngest of Richard’s guards squeaked.

“Improvise!”

Hastings was fighting now, trying to break free of his bonds. “You’ll

not take the crown from Edward's boy, not while I've breath in my body! Someone let me near him. I'll kill him! I'll kill him!" They jerked him backward, began to drag him out of the room as Richard watched impassively. "For God's sake, Ned! Forgive me! I thought it best for the boy that Gloucester take over. I only wanted the best for him. Never in my life did I think—" Hastings's voice broke into a sob, and then strengthened again as his heels cleared the threshold. "A curse on you, Gloucester, and Buckingham as well! A curse on you, and upon your sons!"

"Take Morton and Rotherham to cells here," Richard commanded. "Let Hastings have a priest if he can stop babbling long enough to confess."

"Good work," said Catesby. He nodded and put the last of Morton's strawberries in his mouth.

Richard sank into a chair and bit his nails. I sat rigid in mine.

A quarter of an hour later, two of Richard's men appeared, carrying a sack. Without saying anything, one of them pulled an object out of it.

I looked upon the head of Lord William Hastings, Edward IV's best friend, who'd whored with him, shared exile with him, fought with him, triumphed with him. Then I vomited on my shoes.

Kate: April 1483 to June 1483

HOW CAN I DESCRIBE THE MONTHS AFTER THE FOURTH KING EDWARD died? It was as if the world went topsy-turvy, not once but over and over again.

I mourned the late king for days. I knew his faults, as a man and as a king. I deplored his killing of the sixth Henry, his unfaithfulness to my sister, his refusal to give poor Harry the responsibilities due the Duke of Buckingham, but I also loved the man who had honored my sister in every way except for faithfulness of his body, who had comforted me after John's and Papa's deaths, who had made me a duchess at age seven. I mourned his death doubly because no one had expected it. True, the king had not cut the fine figure he had as a youth—but dead, at age forty?

And then came the news that my brother Anthony, my nephew Richard Grey, and the young king's chamberlain, Thomas Vaughan, were under arrest. Anthony, one of the most learned men in England, who'd served the House of York for over twenty years. Richard, who had tamed his wild ways and was turning out to be an excellent administrator in Wales—the king had told us so. Old Thomas Vaughan, who had carried the infant Edward around at court as proudly and as lovingly as if he had been his own son. And they had been arrested at the orders of that creature Gloucester—and at those of my own husband.

I had never liked Gloucester, but my dislike for him had been strictly personal, based on the supercilious way in which he'd always treated me. Yet I had known him for a loyal man, faithful to his brother the king.

But how loyal could a man be who arrested men appointed by the late king himself?

Then came the news that my sister was in sanctuary, my nieces and nephews with her, my brothers there or in hiding. The king's coronation had been postponed, and Gloucester had made himself protector.

I could not sit in Wales waiting to hear what happened next. Though Harry had told me he would send for me when the time had come to go to London for the coronation festivities, I decided not to wait. Harry might not like it, but I was coming to join him in London.



To my dismay, as my men drew close to London, they learned that the Duchess of Gloucester was making the same journey as I and that our paths would inevitably join soon. As she took precedence over me, it would have been the height of impropriety not to acknowledge her, so when I settled down—irony of ironies—in Northampton where she was also staying, I dutifully sent my respects and was duly invited to dine with her.

What do two duchesses speak of, when their husbands are allies and when one duchess's husband has sent the other duchess's relations to prison? We spoke of our children, naturally. She described her little Edward's education and knightly training with great pride, and I described my little Edward's education and knightly training with equally great pride—leaving out my younger son and my two girls so as to not seem that I was rubbing in the fact that I had four children to her one. When that topic was worn to death, we discussed what we were planning to wear to the coronation of yet another little Edward, being very careful to compliment the other's appearance a few times as we did so. We discussed the shortcomings of a few of our staff. We discussed our flower gardens and our herb gardens. In short, we discussed everything except for what was uppermost in our minds.

Only after we were parting for the evening did I dare to ask, "My lady, has your lord given you any indication of what is going on in London? What on earth does it all mean?"

The Duchess of Gloucester shook her head. “We shall soon find out, I daresay.”



As expected, Harry’s greeting was not an enthusiastic one. “What in the world are you doing here? I said I would send for you.”

“And when would that have been? Christmastide? Harry, what is going on? Why are my relations in prison? Why is my sister staying in sanctuary?”

“Your relations are in prison because they were plotting against Richard. They might have been plotting against me as well. Your sister’s in sanctuary because she was involved in the plot and is afraid to leave.”

“Harry, I cannot believe that.”

“I don’t expect you to,” Harry said with the air of one reasoning with someone either very young or very stupid. “Now, how are the children?”

“They are well.” I was not to be deterred. “What proof does this Richard of yours have of a plot?”

“The Duke of Gloucester has his spies, and he displayed cartloads of weapons stockpiled by your kin. Kate, I’m sorry, but it’s their own folly that brought them to this. Not mine, not Richard’s. But I am certain that Richard will be merciful. As for your sister, she’s free to come out whenever she sees fit to grace us with her presence. We are prepared to swear an oath as to her safety if she has any fears, which she shouldn’t have.”

“Can I see her?”

“No. Being allowed to see her family as normal can only encourage her to stay there. But I’m sure she’ll see reason soon.” Harry’s hand suddenly landed on my breast, and he pulled me close to him. “Now that you’re here, I must admit that I’ve missed you,” he said coaxingly.

“I’ve had a long journey, Harry. I’m tir—”

Harry only pulled me against him more tightly, and I deemed it best to let him have his own way. But it was like lying with a stranger, at least for me, and as passively as I lay under Harry as he completed his business, it probably was for him, too.

This was on the fifth of June. For a few days afterward, I did believe that all might come right. Preparations were being made for the coronation, I saw, and while there seemed no prospect of having Anthony and the rest released, there was no reason to think that any worse might befall them either.

Then, on June 13, William Hastings was beheaded, and the world was no longer topsy-turvy. It had gone stark raving mad.

Harry: June 1483

WHY? WHY?"

"Harry, I had no choice. The man was plotting against me. You heard Catesby."

"Couldn't you have imprisoned him, like you did the Woodvilles?"

"No. He was too popular, too dangerous."

"He cursed us and our sons."

"Harry, I've heard watermen do the same for people who short them on their price. It hasn't cut down on water traffic that I've seen."

"Has the king heard of this? He may have seen it, for Christ's sake!"

"No. I had him taken elsewhere. But he will hear of it in due time, from me personally. So will the entire city, for I've drawn up a proclamation explaining the treason. Harry, you can't turn soft on me. The man knew what he was doing, the risks involved. And I shall be generous with his widow. She is, after all, Anne's aunt." Lady Hastings was a sister of the Kingmaker. "She shall get her dower, and Hastings won't be attainted, which is certainly better than he deserves. Why, I'll even honor Hastings's wish to be buried at Windsor in a tomb next to Ned's. They can whore together for all eternity."

I sighed.

"In the meantime, we have other things to worry about. Dorset has escaped from sanctuary. Probably with the help of that strumpet Mistress Shore, whom I've placed under arrest. And with that, it's high time we brought the Duke of York out of it to stay with his brother."

We had a long council meeting the next day, and it was decided to

send the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Bourchier, and a delegation to Westminster to reason with the queen. The archbishop—my grandfather's half brother—did not take to the task enthusiastically. He was seventy-two years of age and had largely retired from public life until we'd written to him back in May, ordering him to take custody of the Tower and its treasure.

The archbishop did not know of the Eleanor Butler business. Only a handful of us knew; indeed, those who had met at Westminster on the day of Hastings's death had been busy working out the details of the coronation.

The human mind can perform majestic acrobatics, and mine was proving particularly adept at this art. I did not think of myself as dishonest as I joined Richard in arguing that the Duke of York should be freed from sanctuary so that he might take part in his older brother's crowning. In the back of my mind I was still thinking that Richard might decide that his case was too weak or that something might come to light that made his case so strong that there could be no question that Edward was indeed a bastard, in which case we could have no qualms about taking him from his throne. In the meantime, I persuaded myself, there was no shame in going forward as if there would indeed be a coronation on June 22.

So on June 16, a flotilla sailed from the Tower to Westminster, bearing the archbishop and a load of soldiers. We had supplied him with any number of points to raise in argument against the queen. Her refusal to release the boy was inciting the hatred of the people against the nobles of the land, making it difficult for them to govern and making England a laughingstock among nations. The Duke of York, having committed no crime, and being of tender years, had no right or need to take sanctuary. The sanctuary was rife with criminals of the worst sort, with whom it was highly improper for the boy to consort. The king was in need of company of his own age and station.

It was hours before the archbishop returned to Westminster Hall, where I awaited him. The queen, no fool, had met him argument for argument, even in the face of all of the soldiers flanking him. Only when

the archbishop, exhausted as she was, pledged that no harm would come to the boy, and begged her to let him go voluntarily lest sanctuary be broken and the Lord's house dishonored, did she finally agree to relinquish her son. The armed men lurking behind the bishop no doubt influenced her decision as well.

So the Duke of York stood in front of me, holding the archbishop's hand. "Sanctuary was *dull*," he said chirpily as I conducted him to the Star Chamber where Richard awaited him. "Nobody but Mama and the girls there. I shall enjoy seeing Edward. Has it been dull for him?"

"Indeed, I think it has, your grace."

"When he's crowned it won't be so dull, I imagine. Is it ever dull, being king, do you think, Uncle Harry?"

"I suppose anything could get dull occasionally."

"That's when having a lot of minstrels comes in handy, I suppose. Or mistresses."

"*Mistresses?*"

"Well, something like that. One day I heard Papa saying that he had three mistresses. One was the merriest, one was the wiliest, and one the holiest in the realm. I suppose they must be a very special sort of minstrel."

"No doubt," I said, grateful that we had reached the Star Chamber.



The next day, Richard ordered that the coronation would be postponed again—until November 9.

There would be no more postponements, everyone had started to realize. There would be no coronation. Not for Edward.

We'd stopped trying to improve our case about Eleanor Butler—Catesby had been right. With Hastings's death, and rumors that troops from the North would be pouring into the city, we didn't need much of a case. We could have put a crown on the city rat-catcher and called him a king, and the Londoners probably would have accepted him—sullenly, but without a fight. They remembered what Margaret of Anjou's

unchecked northerners had done to the countryside, and they had visions of their own shops in flames, their sons beaten to a pulp, their wives and daughters despoiled, their own heads lined up in neat rows on London Bridge. They weren't visions that we did anything to discourage, even as we had to smile at the impossible numbers of troops the Londoners were conjuring up in their heads. Twenty thousand was one of the more modest estimates I heard.

"After I've ruled for a while, the people of the South will realize I don't have horns and a tail," said Richard. "In the meantime, it won't hurt to let them think I might be in league with the devil."

"While keeping the Church on your side, too," I reminded him. The next day, Sunday, June 22, preachers throughout London were to give sermons on the subject of the king's bastardy.

"Well, old man, no one said that this was going to be easy." Richard laughed, then shook his head. "Harry, there's something I must tell you."

"You've changed your mind."

"No. Yesterday I sent orders out to Sheriff Hutton, Middleham, and Pontefract. Rivers and the rest of them are to be executed at Pontefract."

"Richard!"

"I know you didn't want it done, Harry, so I didn't consult you. That way, you'll have a clear conscience."

It wasn't clear at all, though. "Wasn't there some way you could have let them live?"

"Yes, and spend my entire reign fretting about them plotting against me. No, Harry, it's best to show my claws at first. When things are settled, I can show mercy. That's where Ned made his mistake. At the beginning of his reign he was merciful to scoundrels like your Beaufort kinsmen—sorry, old man, but it's true—and it came back to haunt him. If he'd been ruthless from the start we might have been spared a lot of bloodshed."

He gave the papers he was riffling through a great thump and left the room, leaving me with nothing but my conscience for company.

I knew Kate mourned the loss of her brother John and her father to this day; for as long as we had been living together, I'd seen her making her way in silence to our chapel every August 12.

But Kate's father and John Woodville hadn't been traitors. Anthony and the rest were.

Then where is the proof? Kate's voice asked me. *Where is Richard's proof?*

In the end, it was bad enough facing Kate's voice inside my head without facing Kate herself. I stayed at Westminster that night, and for the next couple of nights after that. Besides, I had a speech to draft, the most important speech I would ever give in my life. It was the one in which I was to urge the leading men of the city to offer Richard the crown—the stage having been set with the Sunday sermons.

Writing it would be a hell of a lot easier than trying to figure out how to tell Kate that her brother was doomed to die.



The sermons went well. As hoped, they put everyone in London in a thoughtful mood, and gave them the rest of Sunday and all of Monday to recall the old king's sexual proclivities. They were, after all, better known to Londoners than anyone, Edward having had a pronounced liking for merchants' wives and daughters, as they were not so lowborn to be disagreeable to the senses and not so highborn as to be a nuisance. There were even hints in the speeches that the old king himself was a bastard—not a text of my making or of Richard's, to do us justice, but a holdover from the Warwick days slipped in by the overenthusiastic Ralph Shaa, who'd not much cared for the old king. Warwick's house full of meat, free to anyone who asked, and his slanders about the king were well remembered, it seemed.

With the sermons out of the way, I set myself to practicing my speech in any spare moment I had—sometimes with my pages as my audience, sometimes with Catesby as an audience, sometimes with only the ravens flapping outside my chamber window as an audience. I was not entirely a

novice at such things. As a boy, I had been given some training in rhetoric. I'd done well, my tutor always said. Though by nature I was reserved and rather quiet, I knew my voice was pleasing, and I could project it well so as to be heard—there had been no difficulty in hearing me at Clarence's trial, the last time I'd had to make a pronouncement to a large audience. But I was still a bundle of nerves, because this speech had to be perfect. On it rested Richard's future, and mine as well. For if anything happened to arrest the momentum in which London was moving, our lives would not be worth the purchase when young Edward came of age.

On Tuesday I proceeded to the Guildhall, where the mayor and the leading men had been summoned. There, I reiterated the story—what there was of it—of the precontract between Edward and Eleanor Butler. For good measure, I dropped vague hints that Edward might have been involved in marriage negotiations abroad before his secret marriage to Elizabeth Woodville—quite possibly, I reasoned, there could have been a betrothal that had never been revealed to us in England. Then I moved on to the subject of Richard's virtues.

I wish Richard had been there to hear me. Men afterward told me that it was an eloquent speech, uttered with an angelic countenance, and who am I to gainsay them? I spoke of Richard's years of faithful service to his brother, who, I hinted, was not entirely worthy of such dogged devotion. I spoke of his bravery at Barnet and Tewkesbury and about his triumph over the Scots. I spoke of his piety, his generosity to the Church, his munificence to the poor. I spoke of how the North had come to love him, a child of the South, and how when the South saw more of him, they would soon do the same. By the time I finished, I was choking with tears, so convinced had I become myself that the country could not flourish without Richard. When I at last finished, I cried out, "And now, gentlemen, will you take this good man as your king?"

There was a silence, which continued for an agonizing moment too long before a group of my men, primed for such an eventuality, shouted, "Yea! Yea!" Then, much to my relief, the mayor and the rest joined in, their

voices firm if not enthusiastic. It was not the rapt acceptance I had hoped for, but it was enough.

On Wednesday Stillington, aided by Catesby, put the final touches on the petition we were to present to Richard, urging him to take the throne. On Thursday the lords of the land, spiritual and temporal, rode to Baynard's Castle, the Duchess of York's London home, where Richard was staying. I was at the head of the procession.

That day, June 26, 1483, is a blur to me now. I remember kneeling before Richard with the petition, tears streaming down my face, and I remember Richard raising me, then telling the assembly that yes, he would take on the duty of kingship for the sake of the realm. I remember riding from Baynard's Castle to Westminster, where Richard, putting on royal robes with my assistance, and taking the scepter handed to him, sat in the marble chair at the King's Bench. I remember Richard's speech—one that put my effort to shame—in which he said that he would administer the law without delay or favor and that he would pardon those who had offended against him. (Did I think, then, of Anthony Woodville, Richard Grey, and Thomas Vaughan, lying in a common grave at Pontefract Castle since the day before, having been given but a show of a trial? Probably not.) I remember John Fogge, an elderly cousin of the queen who had taken sanctuary at Westminster, being brought out to Richard, who took his hand in friendship. I remember processing into the abbey, where Richard took Edward the Confessor's scepter in his hand, and then another procession back to the city, and a procession to St. Paul's. I remember a great joy, and yet underneath it all a great sadness, at the thought that my dearest friend now belonged not only to me and a few others, but to all of England.

Was my great sadness a foreknowledge of what was to come? I think not; I have not the gift of prophecy.

At last I remember processing back to Baynard's Castle. There Richard shooed the others out of his chamber. When we were alone, he smiled. "We've changed history, my friend," he said.

I nodded, wondering if people who changed history always felt a little

seasick afterward. Seasick, and drunk with fatigue as well. "So it seems." I yawned before I could even cover my mouth. "My apolo—"

Richard laughed. "Poor Harry, you're about to fall over, aren't you? So I am I, I'm not ashamed to say." He nodded toward the inner chamber. "You shall have the privilege of sharing my bed tonight. The first person to be so honored by me as king."

"No Anne?"

He shrugged. "She didn't help me to the crown. You did." I made as if to take his robes off, and he shook his head. "No. We must do this in proper form. Boys!"

A group of pages hastened in and began the work of preparing the king's bed and undressing us, a ceremony that no doubt would later become more elaborate in the days to come. On this night, however, the task was accomplished briskly. When all had departed and we lay side by side, Richard said, "Do you think I'll make a good king?"

"If I didn't, why did I tell half of London you would? You'll be the best king England could ever have, Richard."

Richard smiled in the light of the cresset lamp that burned over us. "Thank you." His voice dropped a note. "I couldn't have had a better friend than you in all of this." He leaned over and kissed my cheek, lightly. "I love you, Harry."

Those were, I realized as Richard rolled over in preparation for sleep, the four words I'd been longing to hear since I was thirteen years of age.

Kate: June 1483 to July 1483

HARRY TRIED TO JUSTIFY WILLIAM HASTINGS'S DEATH TO ME. HE SPOKE vaguely of secret meetings, plots, fears for his and Richard's life. I believed none of it. No one did, really, especially when, just days later, Richard and Harry began to put it out that Edward had been precontracted to Eleanor Butler.

I remembered, faintly, the Duchess of Norfolk tipsily babbling about a romance that her sister had had with the king. I remembered, also faintly, mentioning it to Harry. But a marriage? I could not believe it. Surely if there had been the slightest hint of such a thing, Edward, a loving father and a proud Yorkist, would have done all that he could to protect the crown for his son. He'd obtained papal dispensations for his sister the Duchess of Exeter to annul her marriage to the poor Duke of Exeter on the flimsiest of grounds. He'd helped his mistress Elizabeth Shore annul her marriage to her supposedly impotent husband. Why for the sake of his sons could he not have done the same for himself, if there were such a marriage in his past? I even asked this of Harry, in the early days when I could still hold a conversation with him, but he merely shrugged. The best minds of the Church, he said, were looking into the matter. It was not a woman's business to meddle.

In the meantime, other rumors swirled, put in motion by the king and his creatures. There was the vile old one that the Duchess of York had committed adultery and that her son the late king was the bastard offspring of their relationship. There was the vile new one that my sister Bessie had

taken the royal treasury into sanctuary with her—the amount of her haul grew daily, so that within a week or so the late king (and therefore my sister with her purloined goods) had become as rich as Croesus. Within another week, my brother Edward and my nephew Dorset, and then all of us Woodvilles, shared in the loot.

Mama was a witch, so was Bessie. The ladies of our family gathered each All Hallows' Eve with our familiars and cast spells over anyone who had slighted us recently. Poor Lionel, who had become the Bishop of Salisbury just the year before, did unspeakable things with the Host. Edward had turned pirate. Even my brother Richard, who had no taste for public life and who was happiest on his manors deep in the country, was said to be lusting after the crown.

During those miserable days, I hardly saw Harry. I did, however, beg him to spare my brother's life, and those of Richard Grey and Vaughan, for I knew that with Hastings's death, their own lives hung by the weakest of threads. I got back a reply that any petitioner would get: my request would be considered.

Then, the day after Richard, Duke of Gloucester, became the King of England, the news arrived that Anthony, Richard Grey, and Thomas Vaughan had been beheaded at Pontefract. Harry had not told me; I learned it when the news was cried out by Gloucester's heralds.



"I'm sorry, Kate. I know you're upset."

Upset, as if three men's deaths were no more than a spoiled bolt of fabric or an overcooked piece of meat. "You knew all along he planned to kill them."

"I did not! Kate, you have to understand, they were plotting against Richard—and even me as well. They wanted to destroy us. Richard had to order their deaths. It wasn't a decision he made lightly."

"They wanted to take my nephew to London and crown him, as his father wished! You and Gloucester swore your allegiance to the boy!"

“That was when we believed that he was the rightful heir to the throne. Kate, you’re hardly unbiased, being Elizabeth Woodville’s sister.”

“And you’re unbiased, being Gloucester’s friend?”

“I told him of the story about Eleanor Butler—the story you told me—and the Duchess of Norfolk confirmed it, as best she could. The king did nothing to influence her. If she had denied it, we would not be having this conversation.”

I gave up, realizing what a hopelessly circular conversation this would turn into. Harry would justify anything his idol, Richard, did. “I have asked my tailor to have mourning robes made for me. I trust you will at least allow me to wear them, and for me to have masses said for my brother’s soul, and those of the rest?”

“Well, of course,” said Harry. He touched my face, and for a moment I almost recognized the remnants of my husband in what had become Richard’s creature. “I am sorry, Kate, truly. Perhaps Anthony felt that he was acting for the best. It is—unfortunate that he’s gone.”

“Yes. But I still have three other brothers, don’t I? We Woodvilles are so very expendable.”

Harry shifted on his feet uncomfortably. “I am sorry for your brother’s death, sincerely, whether you think it or not. But now there is something else I must say to you. I am afraid you will not be allowed to take part in the coronation as one of the queen’s attendants. It would be very awkward—your being a Woodville, you see, and so bitter toward the king.”

“Indeed. There is no telling what I might do, lawless wretch that I am.” I inspected my sleeve. “Yes, I could fit a dagger right here, and stab Gloucester when he walks by.”

“I am sure, though, that in time, you will be welcome at Richard’s court, as of course, will our children.” I closed my eyes, sick at the very thought of my darlings at that man’s court. Harry continued, “But for now, I think it best that you stay away.”

“But it is such a pity. I had already planned my robes, with matching ones for my familiar. It would have been quite charming.”

“Kate, those rumors. I didn’t st—”

“Go to the devil, Harry.” I turned away, then looked back over my shoulder. “But you already have, haven’t you?”



There is nothing quite like being in a city preparing day and night for something in which you can take no part, and that you pray every night the Lord will work a miracle to prevent. A day or so after this last exchange, Harry returned to his quarters at Westminster in order to superintend the preparations for the coronation, of which he had the ordering. Though many of his servants had followed him there, others remained by necessity in our Bread Street home, and I watched with amusement in those days as the poor things scurried around, frantically doing their part to ensure that all was ready for July 6, the date that had been set for the crowning. For, as I was fond of saying to anyone who would listen, time was of no object to the usurper.

My own servants did nothing to assist Harry’s in the days that followed. Indeed, they hindered them in what small ways they could, while I smiled blandly. I am half—but only half—ashamed to say that I thoroughly enjoyed the difficulties we caused them.

But despite the lack of cooperation from the distaff side of Harry’s household and my fervent, unanswered prayers—evidently even the Lord himself had been corrupted by Gloucester—the preparations went ahead on schedule. Poor Harry was more efficient than the fourth Edward had ever realized, it appeared. So when it was apparent that the coronation was inevitable, I gave in to the lure of curiosity and decided to watch the procession from the Tower to Westminster that would take place the day before the crowning. After all, Harry had not said that I could not do that, and it might be my only chance to see what the devil looked like in his royal robes.

In my scheme I found a willing accomplice: my page, Richard Wingfield, a boy of around thirteen whom I had long suspected of harboring a bad case of calf love, with myself as the object. At an old-clothes market he procured

me suitably shabby garments, with what turned out to be a resident colony of fleas, which made me itch for days afterward. “You look terrible, my lady,” he said approvingly as we footed it toward Cheapside.

“And so do you,” I said. We looked like the perfect laboring brother and sister, honest poor folk come to get a glimpse of royalty. Perhaps we might even catch some coins the king’s servants threw our way.

As a duchess I was ill accustomed to the press of the crowds around me, for someone had always been there to clear the way to let my party pass. Without Richard Wingfield’s help, I would have given up early on. But he, the eleventh of twelve living sons, was well used to pushing his way about, and through his judicious use of elbows and his yanking me through spots where I would never have dreamed I could fit, we at last arrived at a fair vantage point. Had Harry looked straight at me at that moment—my feet aching and blistered, my head covering awry and my hair tangled underneath it, my face smudged with the grime that seemed peculiar to London, my skirt stained with substances that I decided would not bear close analysis—I doubt he would have recognized me as his wife.

We had arrived there early, so we had a long wait. Richard manfully guarded our precious places so that none could press in front of us and obstruct our view. At last, however, the sound of a moving procession reached our ears.

Richard protected me from the push of the people behind us as I watched impatiently, shifting on my uncomfortable pattens, while the first wave of the procession—various lords, knights, aldermen, royal heralds, and royal officials—made its way past us at a stately pace. I knew many of the men, at least by sight, from Edward’s court. Some of the older ones had been present for my sister’s coronation. Maybe those two squires who had borne Harry and me on that day were in this procession too, wearing the new king’s badge with that cruel white boar, while I stood in my stinking old clothes gazing at them. It was unreal.

At last the mayor of London came into view. After him came John Howard, a rich lord in his late fifties whom I had always thought a man

of honor. Yet he had sided with Richard throughout the last few weeks, never raising a word in favor of my nephew the young king, never blinking, it was said, when Hastings was murdered. In return he had been made the Duke of Norfolk, there being no more Mowbrays of the male line to inherit that title. His son Thomas Howard—riding next to him bearing the king's sword—had been made the Earl of Surrey. *Bought and sold, both of you*, I thought.

And on the other side of Surrey rode a man I knew very well. Nearby, a woman clucked her tongue. "Fine-looking man, the Duke of Buckingham. Wouldn't I like to warm his bed."

I instinctively moved to slap her for her impertinence, then fortunately stopped myself.

Not a man who smiled easily, Harry on this occasion was beaming, turning his head graciously from side to side as he moved past the onlookers. My neighbor was right: he did look handsome in his blue velvet robe, embroidered with golden, burning carts, and for an aching moment I desired him myself. He was on his finest palfrey, a chestnut that matched my own favorite steed. In better days, before the world went mad, we'd ridden them side by side.

I could not brood long on this, though, for just behind the sword of state, underneath a canopy carried by four knights, rode the devil himself, a vision in purple.

He must have practiced the expression he wore. It wouldn't do, after all, to look too terribly happy about having snatched the crown from a twelve-year-old boy, one whom he had sworn to protect. So instead of a smile, like Harry, he'd plastered a look of benevolence onto his face, mixed with humility.

I wore a dinner knife at my waist. I could have bolted into the road and stabbed Gloucester in the thigh; perhaps I could have even swung upon his horse and thrust my blade into his chest or, better yet, into the neck below that odious visage. But I would have been killed in the doing of it, even if I had the strength to force my knife in deep enough, and I could

not bring myself to make that suicidal gesture. Instead, I contented myself with fixing upon him a look of utter hatred, hoping against hope that looks could, occasionally at least, kill.

They could not.

Presently the queen's procession came into view. It was a spectacle that occasioned more interest than that of the king, for he'd been a familiar sight around London for the past few days, clattering around town with Harry and their hordes of retainers, whereas hardly anyone outside of the North had seen the queen since she had married Gloucester.

As was the custom for a queen about to be crowned, Anne, clad in white cloth of gold and seated in a richly draped litter, wore her hair loose. I had thought when I saw her at Northampton that she looked a bit peaked, but with her golden hair falling past her shoulders, framing her face, she appeared to be a few years younger than she was, which flattered her. If she had any misgivings about the way her husband had reached the throne, they didn't show. No doubt Warwick the Kingmaker, if he had managed somehow to wrangle his way into Paradise, was mighty pleased with the twists of fortune that made his daughter a queen after all.

Richard Wingfield suddenly squeezed my hand. I did not think it overfamiliarity, for I knew he sought to comfort me. The duchesses were coming.

There were six in England at the time, including myself, but only four were in the procession: the Duchess of Suffolk, who was the old King Edward's sister (King Richard's too, of course, but I did not like to think of that), and three Duchesses of Norfolk. I sighed inwardly as Katherine Neville, my brother John's widow, came closer. Among the tales put out by Richard's creatures was that she'd been forced to share John's bed, even though she was eighty and had cried pitifully at the thought. In a couple of weeks, she'd probably be a hundred and forced at knifepoint to lie with my brother, I thought bitterly. I fingered the rosary that hung from my belt.

At least John would soon be joined in Paradise by Anthony. Perhaps he was there even now, being idolized by John once more. It brought a slight smile to my face.

Beside John's widow sat Elizabeth Talbot, whose sister Eleanor Edward had supposedly married before Bessie. Did she care how much trouble her careless words had caused? Was she pleased at their effect? Next to them sat the newest Duchess of Norfolk, John Howard's wife. Margaret Howard had been a duchess for only a couple of weeks and still looked bedazzled by her elevation. I knew the feeling; it had worn off only recently.

But where was the Duchess of York, the king's own mother? It was true that she was an aged lady, close to seventy, but she was a good fifteen years younger than her sister Katherine Neville, who was wrinkled and fragile now but still looked alert. Berkhamsted was not terribly far from London; surely the Duchess of York could have made it to the city in time for the coronation, traveling in easy stages. Had she not considered her son's coronation an important enough event to drag her from her religious devotions even for just a few days? Or—I hoped—had her son's means of acceding to the throne appalled her?

The women beside me were counting up duchesses too. "No Duchess of York."

"Too old, maybe."

"Well, after what they said about the old king being a bastard!"

"Plenty of Duchesses of Norfolk, ain't they? But where's the Duchess of Buckingham?"

"That's her."

"No, you bird-brain, that's the Duchess of Suffolk."

"'Tis odd that she's not here, then. They say that the Duke of Buckingham had the arranging of all of this."

"So where's his duchess?"

The loudest of the women dropped her voice. "I don't know, but they say he was forced to marry her when he was just a wee lad. By the old queen, of course. Dragged the poor little mite kicking and screaming to the altar, they say. He's hated the whole lot of the Woodvilles ever since, and all their kin."

"Is his duchess old?"

“Now, I don’t know that, but they say she’s not much to look at.”

“Oh, she is old—at least a dozen years older than the poor duke. Starved for a man, they say, by the time they married him off to her. They forced the lad to lie with her to satisfy her devilish lusts, though he was not even in his teens.”

“Witches, those Woodville wenches, all of them.”

“Well, *I* heard that she was young, but that she’s an idiot. Her keepers take her to the Duke of Buckingham once a month or so, so he can try to beget a child upon her. They hold her down for him. And when she does quicken, her keepers mind her until she pops out a babe. So she’s good for that much, at least.”

“Poor man. It’s a sad life for one so handsome, and so rich. I thought he looked melancholy, with all of his finery and burning carts.”

“A reason we should all be grateful for the station to which the Lord has called us.”

I stared fixedly at the procession, thinking that doing so would stop me from trembling with rage. Then a young male voice spoke loudly beside me.

“I have seen the Duchess of Buckingham through my master’s business with the duke. She is only five-and-twenty, younger than the duke, and she is not an idiot. Not by any means. And as for her person—she is most seemly. Some think her as beautiful as an angel. And I agree with them.”

Someday I would have to find a way to show my gratitude toward Richard Wingfield.

“Well, if you say so, young man,” said the senior of the goodwives. “But why isn’t this angel of yours here with the other duchesses? Can you tell me that, Master Know-All?”

Richard hesitated. Then he shrugged. “Because the Duke of Buckingham has nothing but rags between his ears. That is why.”



Even if I could have contrived to view the coronation itself the next day, I had no stomach to try. I had seen, and heard, enough.

It was four or five days later, when the post-coronation festivities had finally ceased, that Harry returned to Bread Street. We greeted each other civilly before Harry closeted himself with his chamberlain. After a polite supper and some music, we retired to our separate chambers.

Cecilia was taking down my hair when Harry stormed in, scattering her and my other ladies. When they were gone, he said, "You were watching the procession. Without my permission."

So someone in our household had turned traitor. It hardly mattered who. "Well, what of it? I was told not to participate, and I did not. I was not told that I could not be a spectator like anyone else in London."

"How do I know you were not recognized? It would be humiliating for me if you were."

"I took great care to disguise myself. I have the flea bites to prove it."

For a moment Harry looked almost admiring. Then he snapped, "That's no better. You're not used to wandering around London unaccompanied; what if some churl had ravished you? Or found out who you were and held you for ransom?"

My, Harry had a wild imagination when he worked at it. "As a Woodville, my ransom would have been cheap, surely? But in any case, I had a protector."

Harry frowned. "Who?"

"I shall not say. It is past, and he discharged his duty well and faithfully. There is no vice, after all, in protecting a lady."

"You needn't. It was that impudent Wingfield boy, wasn't it? The one who always makes sheep's eyes at you."

"So what if he does? It is a far sight better than hearing that I am a dozen years your senior, an idiot, or sore disfigured, or all three, and that I ravished you when you were a small boy, all of which is gossip making the rounds."

Harry wrinkled his nose. "What vile rumors."

"You think them so? Only because you and that creature Gloucester weren't clever enough to start them yourselves, I suppose."

“Who?”

“You heard me. That creature Gloucester.”

“You will address my friend the king properly.”

“I will address your friend the usurper as I please. He is a whoreson, a devil’s spawn. A murd—”

“Silence! I’ve put up with much of your insolence since you came to London—without my permission also—knowing of your grief. But no more! You shall do my bidding and speak of the king with respect.”

“He deserves no respect.” I snorted. “A brave man, to take a throne from a boy!”

“He was entitled to it, as I have told you time and time again! I am warning you, you shall give him respect, just as you shall give me the respect due to a husband and to your better!”

“My better?”

“Yes, your better! I’m of the blood royal; you’re the daughter of a Frenchwoman who married above herself and who then degraded herself by marrying a handsome nobody who took her fancy. He brought nothing to their marriage, just like you brought nothing to ours when it was pushed upon me. No royal blood, no prestige, no dowry—nothing.” He snorted. “Nothing but your Woodville cunt. That’s all you and your sisters ever had to offer, wasn’t it? By God, it ought to be on your family’s coat of arms!”

I started to slap him, but he grabbed my arm, so instead I spat in his face. He gasped, then with one sure blow knocked me against the bed, onto which I clambered instinctively, like a pursued animal seeking higher ground. “So that’s your game?” he said softly. “Well, for once you’ll do as I say!”

Harry was on the bed with me now, his hands on my shoulders. “Harry! No! Please!”

He pushed me onto my back and pinned me underneath him, slapping me hard when I tried to resist. Dazed and winded as I was, I still protested and struggled, but it only aroused him. It was over quickly—though I would not have said that at the time—and when he had spent himself he

also seemed to have exhausted whatever demon had possessed him as well. I willed myself not to cry as he lay shuddering on top of me. “Are you all right?” he finally asked.

“What do you think?”

“Kate—”

I managed to extricate myself from beneath him and sat up. He had held me so tightly my arms ached, and I knew I was bleeding where he had forced himself into me. I had never known that the sexual act—or Harry—could hurt so badly. I caught my breath. “Our marriage and my Woodville cunt, as you so graciously put it, have brought you four beautiful, healthy children, Harry. Five if the Lord had not taken poor Humphrey. You might remember Edward and the rest of them if you choose to free yourself from me. I suppose you can find grounds for an annulment if you work at it.” Any one of my remarks might have merited another blow, but I no longer cared. “One of the king’s creatures can advise you, I am sure. Who knows? Perhaps I was precontracted to one of our grooms at Grafton.”

“Kate, I—”

“Please. Leave.”

To my surprise, he did.

When he was gone, I huddled, fully clothed, on my bed, too miserable to move. After a few minutes a knock came, and Richard Wingfield came in at my barely audible response. He was holding an all-night of bread and ale—a redundancy since one had been brought earlier—and his hands were shaking as he set it down. “Thank you, Richard.”

He nodded and turned toward the door. Then he swung around. “My lady! I can’t leave without saying anything. I heard— Did he hurt you?”

“I am fine. Go to bed. I shall soon be doing so myself.”

“I wish I could kill him for you. I do.”

“That would create more problems than it would solve.” Believing that I had not been as firm as the situation might require, and not fancying myself in the role of Henry II and Harry in that of Thomas Becket, I added sternly, “There will be no killing, Richard. These things happen

among married people on occasion. You will understand when you are older and married.”

“But I don’t see how he can treat you like this. You’re so pretty, and so sweet. If you were my wife—”

“Now, Richard. I am a Woodville, and that is a liability at the moment, so perhaps it is just as well that I am not your wife.” I smiled at my page. If I were the witch the king’s creatures said we Woodvilles were, I thought, I would use all of my powers to make Harry a youth again such as the one before me now, guileless and kind. “There is one thing you can do for me.”

“Only tell me what.”

“Tell my chamberlain that I wish to be gone from here tomorrow as soon as possible. I think Brecon is the best place for me at the moment.” There was no place for me in Gloucester’s and Harry’s England, that was for certain. “And tell my ladies that they may return to my chamber. And, Richard—tell them that I do not wish to discuss what took place tonight. Not now or ever.”

Richard looked disappointed, probably because I had not ordered him to slay anyone, but he nodded, kissed my hand, and left. My ladies—Harry’s spy, perhaps, among them—appeared almost instantly, then helped me into my nightshift and without comment sponged off the area around where Harry had hurt me so. I went to bed positively reeking of rosewater, but it did nothing to make my dreams—the few I had, for I scarcely slept—rose-colored.

The next morning, I made my impending departure no secret from Harry. How could I have? Everything I owned, everyone who waited on me, was under his control. Indeed, he could have ordered me to stay, and the law would have bound me to obey him, but to my relief, he raised no objection. Instead he treated our parting as the perfectly routine desire of a mother to see her children, though by this time there was probably not a soul in the household who had not learned of his shouted words to me the evening before and of what had followed. It suited me well

enough to acquiesce in this pretense of normality. “Soon I’ll be sending Bishop Morton to Brecon,” he informed me as I got ready to step into my Stafford-knot-adorned chariot, surrounded by an even larger entourage than usual. Harry might despise me as a parvenu, but he evidently had no intention of losing face by letting me travel in less than ducal style. “He is to be lodged as befits his office, of course.”

“Of course,” I said coldly. How did he expect me to lodge an imprisoned bishop? In a dungeon?

“Give the children my love. I will be there soon once my business here is finished.”

I nodded, and Harry bent and pecked me on the cheek, then the lips—for show, I thought scornfully as I let him hand me into the chariot. When we were safely out of sight, I brushed with my finger at the place where his lips had been.

Beside me, Cecilia snorted as she heard the driver crack his whip. “I’m not to discuss a certain matter, I know, but I’ll say this much. Do you know what the driver told me?”

“What?”

“That he wanted to use that whip of his on someone else we all know. And that there’s not a man in the household—your lord’s as well as yours—who doesn’t feel the same way.”

I smiled.



A couple of weeks after I had settled back down at Brecon, Bishop Morton arrived, as promised, with an entourage that belied the fact that he was a prisoner. Harry had every reason to have an uneasy conscience, but at least it could not be said that he mistreated a man of the Church.

Though the record-keeping aspect of running my household had never been my outstanding point, I was quite capable of making my guests, willing and otherwise, comfortable. After I had given the bishop some time to settle in and have some refreshment, I went to his chamber.

Bishop Morton smiled at me as I entered.

"I came to make sure that you had everything you needed."

"Indeed, yes." He gestured toward a chess set that I had provided, complete with its own table. "It was kind of you to think of this. Do you play?"

"No." It was yet another one of my many failings; I'd never enjoyed the game and had forgotten most of the little I'd learned about it from Harry. "I prefer more frivolous pastimes, I fear. Such as cards."

"Really, my lady? I confess to a weakness for them myself. Perhaps when you have a spare moment we can have a game." He patted a stack of fresh parchment approvingly. "And you have been thoughtful enough to provide writing materials too, I see. I shall quite forget I am in prison, with such consideration. You see to everything, my lady."

My eyes filled with tears. It was a novelty for me to receive a compliment from a grown man these days. Bishop Morton missed nothing. "I have grieved you somehow, your grace. I beg your pardon."

"It is not that," I said. "It is Harry."

In moments I was spilling out the whole miserable saga, sans Harry's forcing himself on me. "I am certain he will annul our marriage," I concluded. "Richard will have thoroughly convinced him that he can do better. Perhaps he will marry abroad, or there is even that bastard daughter of Richard's. I would not be surprised. And then what will become of me and the children?"

"Surely your husband would not bastardize his children?"

"Who knows? Perhaps Richard has even convinced Harry that they are another man's. They are not," I added hastily. "I have never been with any man but Harry. Not even in my thoughts. But what does the truth matter now, in Richard's England? I have been friendly with other men; it is my nature. Richard can twist that into any slander he likes, just as I am certain he twisted King Edward's dalliance with that Eleanor Butler woman into a precontract. If Richard says I lay with some dead man like poor William Hastings, how can I possibly disprove it? If my ladies testified that I have

spent every night with them that I have not spent with Harry, Richard would say that they have been suborned by me. The children have my coloring more than Harry's, too, which makes it even easier. And—"

"Dear lady! Your worries may be all for naught. I have heard your husband speak with pride of his children. *His* children. The worst you fear may never happen."

"No, and then I will merely have to live out my life with a man who despises me and my kindred." I shook my head. "And I feel scarcely different about him. It has all gone so wrong, Bishop Morton, and so suddenly. I don't understand it. I have been a good wife to Harry; I have my failings, but don't we all? Yet Harry was kind to me up until recently—and to my family. At least, he never spoke ill of us. But now he is entirely under the spell of—that hellspawn." I sighed, then came to myself. "I have been rattling on about myself, your grace, and I apologize. Your lot is worse than mine. I am merely a miserable wife; you are a prisoner. Tell me; we are alone, and your secret is safe with me. Was there a plot against Richard?"

"Upon my word, no. Hastings believed until the last minute that Gloucester's motives were honorable. We did meet to discuss some concerns we had—among them, I must say, that your husband was being given too much power too quickly, given his inexperience and his past impetuosity. Hastings was also, I think, feeling neglected in terms of offices and the like. But he was willing to wait until the young king was crowned and to see how the situation developed."

"You were right about Harry, I fear. I will tell you: I believe that Hastings was killed because he knew there had been no marriage with Eleanor Butler and could give evidence to that effect. Harry would tell me that was women's imaginings."

"If so, my lady, I am unmanned, for I have imagined the same thing. And I will do you one better by suggesting that the Archbishop of York and I were arrested to get us safely out of the way in case Hastings had spoken of the matter to us. Were we not men of the Church, I do not doubt that we would be dead as well."

We sat there staring at each other mournfully for a while. “What news is there from London?”

“Gloucester has left on a royal progress so that his subjects may get to know him better.”

I snorted. “They might find they know him as well as they want to. Is there news of my sister and her children?”

“I have picked up little, but it appears that there have been no attempts by Gloucester to force Queen Elizabeth—I may call her that in her sister’s company, I hope—from sanctuary, as some feared he might do. The boys—”

He stopped. I crossed myself and said, “There is a piece of the True Cross in this place, passed down from Harry’s Clare ancestors. I will swear an oath upon it that if you have a secret to tell me about the boys, it shall stay with me.”

“There is no need, Duchess. Your honesty shines upon your countenance. There is a plan, led by some of the old king’s faithful servants, to free them from the Tower, then to take them abroad where they can be kept in safety until young Edward can be restored to his rightful throne. Through some of my household with contacts in the Tower I have lent what support I can—mainly money.”

“Oh, that it might succeed!”

“I hope so, my lady. I pray so. For I fear that if it does not, I shall have no need to pray for the welfare of the boys, as I do daily. I shall be praying instead for the welfare of their souls.”

Harry: July 1483 to August 1483

WITH MY NEW OFFICES, I HAD BEEN GIVEN MAGNIFICENT CHAMBERS at Westminster that were, if not quite fit for a king, certainly fit for a kingmaker. One had to get through several outer chambers, and the suitable complement of servants, before one could even get to see me. I had hung my walls with rich tapestries and covered the floor with rugs from the East, and there was not a silver cup in sight—everything was gold. It was the sort of room that I had dreamed of during all of those years of obscurity in Wales.

It was certainly not a setting that was conducive to misery—and yet, just a few days after Richard’s coronation, a triumph of good order and high ceremony, I was utterly miserable.

The night before, I’d lost my temper with Kate. I had had every right to; her recent insolence and disobedience were more than any husband, not henpecked, could be expected to endure. But I had gone too far; I had known that even then. I’d insulted her lineage and made her sound little better than a peasant and a whore. And when she had spat straight into my face, I had struck her, then forced myself upon her. It had been as if some other man had inhabited my body, for though I’d been annoyed with Kate many times over the years, I’d never hurt her. Not in that way. It was against every rule of chivalry I had ever been taught.

I’d only wanted her to show some respect to me, and to Richard. Then I could take her to court again; then Richard would see how gracious and lovely she could be, Woodville that she was. She in turn would see him for

the good man he was, despite the hard measures he had had to take. We would be reconciled, and then we could lie together—not as we had the night before, but as lovers—and we could make another child. One whose presence would perhaps ease our grief over our little Humphrey, who had died in my arms one cold November night at Brecon, though we had prayed so hard for the Lord to spare him.

I suddenly shivered, warm as the July day was, for I could not help thinking about my living sons, Edward and Hal. Hastings had cursed Richard and me, and our sons. Richard had said that it was an impotent curse, but...

I shook my head and reached for an apple on my table. I was half-famished and exhausted, that was all. I'd been keeping later hours than usual lately, and I hadn't slept well last night or eaten this morning. I'd felt too ill to eat or sleep, for I could see and think of nothing but Kate's terrified eyes as I went down upon her—

“Why the long face, Harry?”

I blinked. There might be many chambers one had to go through to reach me, but they were not an obstacle for the king. “Kate left for Brecon this morning.”

“Oh.” Richard looked thoughtful for a while. “Tell me, old man. Have you ever considered annulling the marriage? You really could do better, you know.”

I dropped the apple. “Are you mad, Rich—your grace?” And yet Kate had said the same to me the night before. “I would never do that to Kate. And how could I? I've been married to her for eighteen years. We've had five children!”

He shrugged. “You were children yourselves when the Woodville wench palmed her off on you. And rather slow to consummate it. You could say you were forced to consummate it.” He smiled. “After all, you once told me that it was the girl who seduced you, instead of the other way around.” I flushed, wishing I'd not shared this story with Richard. “Her mother was a witch, so is that sister of hers, I'll wager. Who knows? Perhaps your bride knew some tricks of the trade.”

"It was nothing like that." I thought of my first night with Kate, her luscious body at last in my arms, her eager yet suddenly shy face as I taught her the little I knew about the act of love. There had been no sorcery there, just a lovely girl with desires of her own.

"Are you even sure she was a virgin? You weren't the most experienced swordsman at the time, were you?"

"I am very sure." For the first time in my life, I found myself becoming angry at Richard. To calm myself, I added, "Besides, have you forgotten our children? I'm fond of them. Why would I bastardize them?"

Another shrug. "I'm fond of my bastards, too. Treat them as I will mine. Marry them well and put them in high positions. Why, one of your bastards could marry one of my bastards, you know."

For a moment I actually gave this some consideration before coming to my senses. "Richard, I have no bastards! They are my lawful children, from my lawful wife, and all will stay that way."

Richard sighed. "Well, I tried. But in any case, you won't need to marry well."

"Richard?"

"I'm granting you your Bohun inheritance. It will have to be approved by Parliament, but I'm sure that won't be a problem."

I was dizzy with shock. All these years, I had hoped for this—but never in my wildest dreams had I thought it would simply be handed to me like the apple on my plate. "How can I possibly thank you?"

Richard shrugged again. "You've earned it, Harry. It's a small token of my gratitude." He turned to go. "I've some people to see before I leave on progress. I spotted your aunt Margaret out there, by the by. Shall I have your men send her in, or tell them to shoo her away? She'll want to inveigle you about that son of hers, no doubt, and you look peaked. The Countess of Richmond should be taken on a full night's sleep and with a full belly, I think."

I grinned at him. "I'll hazard it."

Even before Richard became king, my aunt had been after him—through me—to allow her son to return to England and take up some of

his inheritance. I had broached the subject to Richard, as the countess was, after all, kin to me and the only Beaufort relation I had left. But Richard had been less than receptive.

“Your brother was on the verge of letting Henry Tudor come back,” I had reminded him. “With some of his lands, and some of the estates of his grandmother, the late Duchess of Somerset.”

“Yet another reason Ned was a blockhead. For one thing, who would come back? Not only the man himself, but that Jasper Tudor. Why not invite the Earl of Oxford back as well? It’d be the House of Lancaster’s grand reunion. No, Harry, sorry. Your aunt Margaret is going to have to do without her heart’s desire. She got to carry Anne’s train at the coronation. That will have to suffice.”

I didn’t have the heart—or the stomach—to tell this outright to my aunt, however. One angry woman in my life was enough.

In very few minutes, Margaret was in my chamber, which she gave an approving glance—I’d been in rather more modest quarters when we last spoke together. “Well. Your mother would be very proud to see you now, Harry.”

“I hope so, Aunt. I wish she had lived to see this.”

“Yes. It is sad that she didn’t. It is also sad when a son has a living mother, but is unable to see her.”

I could not help smiling. “You do come to a point quickly, Aunt Margaret.”

“Don’t I? Yes, people have always said I don’t shilly-shally. Well? Has the king come to a decision?”

“He is—uncertain, but I hope to persuade him.”

Aunt Margaret frowned. “Why, what obstacle could there be?”

“Not so much your son—who, after all, no one in England has seen since he reached manhood—but his companions. Mainly Jasper Tudor, I believe.”

“Jasper Tudor is no fool. He knows the cause of Lancaster is dead and will not try to resurrect it.”

“You seem well informed of his state of mind.”

My aunt was not in the least abashed. “Well, why not? He is with my son, and a mother ought to stay in contact with her son by whatever means presents itself. Tell the king, if you please, that I am ready to stop fighting this war if he is. I only want my son back, and I want him in a position to receive his inheritance when I am gone. And I have another proposal, also. Let my son marry the Lady Elizabeth, or whatever we call the poor girl these days.”

“I am not certain he would look favorably on that, Aunt.”

The countess flicked her wrist in irritation. “How can he object? The girl is a bastard—or at least they say.” (My aunt uttered this addendum in so sweet a tone no one could have found it treasonous.) “That being the case, how can there be any harm in allowing her to marry my son? It could be argued that my son was too good for her, actually.”

“I suspect that you might say that about any young lady, Aunt.”

Aunt Margaret snorted. “How well you know me, Harry. Do continue to press my case with the king, I pray.”

“I shall.”

“There is another matter, not a personal one. The old king’s boys. What is to become of them?”

I saw no harm in telling her. “I believe the king intends to move them to one of his castles in the North. Why?”

“There is gossip about them. They have not been seen lately, and the people are concerned about their future. The king needs to reassure his subjects that they are being treated kindly. Their father was a popular man in London, after all. This is not the North, where hardly a soul has laid eyes on the boys. Here, they remain of importance. The king is deluding himself if he thinks otherwise.”

It was a shame, I thought, not for the first time, that my aunt had been born a woman. A little stiffly, though, as she *had* been born a woman and was meddling outside her sphere, I said, “I am certain he realizes the importance of seeing to their safety and comfort, and will do so.”

“For their sake, I hope so.” My aunt’s face took on a wistful expression.

“They are but boys, Harry. Remember your own lads when you think of them.”



I had not wanted to tell my aunt, but a few days after the coronation, the boys' old attendants, from Edward's personal physician, Dr. Argentine, on down, had been replaced with ones of Richard's choosing. It was a reasonable step to take, for the boys were no longer a king and a royal duke, but merely royal by-blows, and there was no need to keep their former entourage intact, especially an entourage inclined to be bitter about the blighting of their own prospects. The boys were also kept largely in their rooms, a necessity these days because ever since Richard had been declared king, there had been hints here and there of plans to take them overseas to start another court in exile. As if we hadn't had enough of that in poor Margaret of Anjou's day.

Still, Aunt Margaret's words sent a twinge of guilt through me. I'd not seen the boys ever since the Eleanor Butler business was made public, and they were my kinsmen through the king as well as my nephews by marriage. It was only right that I pay them a visit, little as I relished the prospect of dealing with two sullen young boys.

“Welcome to our prison,” Edward greeted me as I was ushered in.

“It's not a prison, Edward.”

“Oh? We've not been allowed outside for days now; our servants have all been sent away; and my brother Richard Grey and my uncle Anthony and faithful old Thomas Vaughan are dead. And Hastings, who treated me with respect, is dead. So what do you call it, dear uncle? The Parthenon?”

I blinked. Anthony had had this boy reading widely indeed. But now Richard—lively, merry Richard—broke in. “You lied to me, Uncle! You told me that I was to attend my brother's coronation, when you meant all along to depose him and take away my own title! Isn't that true?”

“No,” I said hopelessly, knowing that it probably was, even if I hadn't admitted it at the time. “Boys, you must realize this: your father's marriage

to your mother was invalid. It was being investigated when I took you here, Richard, that is true. But it was an investigation done in good faith. You must understand that.”

“Dr. Argentine said that a church court should have investigated it, and that my uncle didn’t have one do so because he knew there was nothing in it. That it was all lies that he made up.”

“Bishop Stillington investigated it, Richard, and he is learned in the law. The lords of the land accepted it as true. I am sorry, boys.” I waited, expecting another rejoinder, but got only two sullen stares.

I took the opportunity of the boys’ silence to look around their chamber. It was large and comfortably furnished, and connected to a chamber that was equally pleasant looking, but both had mere slits for windows, and the boys had a pasty look. Clearly, they needed to be taken north soon. There, little known, they could safely be given more freedom. “As for your quarters here, I know it is getting wearisome,” I resumed. “It is for your own protection, though you might not believe it. But it won’t be like this forever, I can promise you that. Soon you shall be taken north to live, I believe. It is not a bad place, you know. The king’s own son lives there. So does his natural son, the Lord Bastard, John.”

“Maybe we won’t have to move north,” muttered Richard. “Maybe we might get to live someplace el—”

Edward put a warning hand on his brother’s shoulder.

“What did he mean?” I asked sharply.

“Nothing. He’s just talking nonsense.”

I looked back at Richard, but he had plainly decided to clam up. Something was going on. “Is there anything the two of you want, in the meantime? Some more books? Some games?”

“We have all of that. Until our dear uncle Richard decides that we’re not even fit to have that much.”

Richard’s lip wobbled. He looked, I realized, a great deal like his mother and my Kate. “I just want out of here. I hate it here, Uncle.”

“I know you do,” I said, more gently than before. I touched his shoulder,

and he didn't resist my comfort. "I promise you, Richard, I will see that you and your brother are soon out of here. I am in favor with the king, and I shall use my position to help you. But you must trust me—and not others who you might be convinced are working in your interests, when they are working in their own."

"Why trust you?" asked the former king. "You put us here."



A few days after this, one of the Tower guards came to its new constable, Sir Robert Brackenbury, and told him that there was a treasonous scheme afoot. The plan was to set fires across the city, then, during the confusion, to snatch the boys out of the Tower and spirit them abroad. The wardrober of the Tower, Stephen Ireland, was one of the ringleaders. Some of the boys' old attendants had also been implicated. All in all, about fifty men were involved.

I hastily wrote to Richard about what Brackenbury had learned and arranged for the arrests of the men involved. Then, my business in London being over, I left the city myself. I would meet Richard on his progress and then go to Wales, where there was much work to be done, thanks to the offices with which Richard had entrusted me. I was glad to be going. London in late summer was oppressive, whereas my Welsh estates, particularly Brecon, were at their loveliest that time of year. So was my Kate.

As I rode toward the Midlands, surrounded by a veritable mob of attendants, I pondered a new idea. Why not take Edward's boys to stay at Brecon? It was as well fortified as any of Richard's northern castles, and Wales was a familiar place to Edward at least. My sons, four and five years of age, would enjoy their cousins' company. Besides, growing up in the North along with Richard's son, the boys would never be able to forget the contrast between his status as heir to the throne and theirs as heirs to nothing. In Wales they could grow used to their changed position and gradually learn to accept it. And Kate would be the kindest of aunts to them.

So enamored was I with my new plan that as soon as I reached Gloucester, where Richard's party had arrived, I raised it the moment the king and I were alone.



"No."

"Richard? I don't understand. They would be kept at my expense, of course—"

"Expense has nothing to do with it."

"Then why? I've more retainers than I can keep count of now, you know, with so many of Hastings's men joining my household. God knows, they need more to do; they'd keep the boys as secure as they would be up north. You can trust me."

"I know I can." He walked to the window and stared out of it before abruptly turning round again. "You let me know very quickly about that business in London."

"Well, of course," I said, baffled by his strange manner.

"And I sent two men to London. The first went to the chancellor, ordering him to commence the prosecution of the conspirators. The second went to the Tower with a verbal order to the boys' servants. It was carried out yesterday."

"An order for what? Richard, you're speaking in riddles."

"I shall be plain, then. Harry, the boys are dead. At my order."

I thought for a moment that I was going to vomit or to faint, but I managed to do neither. Hastings. Rivers. Grey. Vaughan. And now his own nephews. *My own nephews.* "How?" I managed.

"Smothering," said Richard easily. We could have been talking of killing rats. "They were asleep—had been given a little something to make them sleep more deeply. They didn't feel a thing, I'm sure of it. They went to bed happy. They had a message that they would be leaving the Tower the next day and would be heading north, as promised. Their things were all packed and ready to go, in fact." He shrugged and pointed upward. "Well,

of course they were heading north, in a manner of speaking. The cooks made them their fav—”

“Tell me no more about it.” I sank down upon a stool.

“For God’s sake, Harry, don’t stare at me like Christ and all of his saints rolled into one! It was necessary for the safety of the realm. If there was another way, I’d have taken it, but there was no other. Not once I learned of that plot. We foiled this one, but what of the next one, and the one after that, and the one after that? There will be peace in England now that they’re gone, just as there was when we did away with poor old King Henry.”

“We?”

“Why, Ned and I, of course. It was Ned’s order, but I did the deed. I had to; Ned didn’t trust anyone else to carry it out without talking. Just a pillow over his face when he was fast asleep. He was a sound sleeper; it couldn’t have been easier. He was half dead anyway; had been for months. Years. He’d probably have thanked me if he’d had a chance, the poor holy fool. You never guessed?”

“No.”

“And what came out of it? Years of peace. We can make something even better of this, Harry, you and I. It will be a golden age, the age my brother was too lazy to let come to fruition.”

“A golden age,” I echoed. An age founded on a lie—I could no longer gainsay it—and steeped in blood. As if this was just a routine matter of business we were discussing, I asked, “Will you display their bodies?”

He shook his head. “I considered it, but no. They were handsome lads, not worn-out wrecks like old Henry. Seeing them dead would upset the people. As it is, people will at first think they’ve just been secreted away, and by the time they figure out the truth, they won’t care anymore, because England will be so strong and prosperous they won’t want to care. After all, who cares about Arthur of Brittany, whom King John put to death?”

“Who cared for King John?”

“John was a fool; he alienated the people. I’ll win them over. They love me in the North. Why can’t they learn to love me elsewhere? Already I’ve

pleased them on this progress by refusing to take their money.” He chuckled. “Ned would have had bagfuls of it by now. Not to mention siring the odd bastard or two along the way.” When I didn’t chuckle in return, Richard said more stiffly, “I can assure you, it’s not a decision I relished making. But it’s for the best of all, in the long run.”

“Sometimes it’s better for the safety of the realm as a whole that a few should die,” I recited.

“Well, precisely. I won’t lie and say I slept well after giving the order, but it had to be done.” He poured some wine, then proffered the cup to me. I shook my head and he drank from the cup himself. “I’m glad I’ve unburdened myself to you, Harry. I hadn’t been looking forward to telling you, after I told Anne. I had to; she kept asking me when the boys were coming north.” He smiled, very slightly. “All of this could have been avoided if everyone hadn’t been so uncommonly anxious to take them out of the Tower.”

“What did Anne say?” I asked for the sake of saying something.

“What do you expect? She’s a woman. She wept and carried on and said that God would have his revenge on me, that I’d doomed the entire House of York. Oh, she also said that if my father had known what I would do, he would have had the midwife strangle me when I came out of my mother’s womb.” Richard winced. “One thing you can say about my wife; she’s not shy in expressing her opinions when the occasion suits. I let her huff and storm for a while, and then I reminded her that those boys would be a threat to our own son’s crown and that they had to be eliminated because of that. That calmed her a bit, and I think after that she began to see reason. Or she will, given a little time. Women will forgive a great deal when you tell them it’s for the good of their children, especially when it also happens to be the truth.”

“And God? Will He forgive you?”

Richard sighed. “I suppose the Lord might be even less understanding than Anne, but when my time comes He will weigh the good to the entire nation against the harm to the two boys; I’m sure of it. What sort of life

would it have been for the poor lads, anyway? I never would have felt safe having them at large; they would have had to be prisoners always in deed if not in name. Even at your Welsh paradise of Brecon, Harry.”

I could hardly bear to ask my next question. “There was no plot by Anthony Woodville and the rest. Or by William Hastings. Was there?”

For a passing moment, I saw what I had never seen before in Richard’s face when he looked at me: contempt. Then he shrugged. “Not that I could verify. There would have been if they had been allowed to live. Some chances aren’t worth taking.”

“The precontract?”

“Come now, Harry! You heard the evidence as well as I. It’s damn shabby. But all it takes is a promise of marriage, followed by sexual intercourse. It certainly could have happened. I wouldn’t underestimate Ned’s determination when he was rutting. Hell, he could have secretly married half of the female population of England before he got around to Eleanor Butler. Edward’s real queen could be one of my mother’s laundresses for all I know.”

“Did you plan to take the throne all along? Back at Northampton?”

“Lord, Harry, you’d think you had me on the witness stand! The possibility did occur to me, but back then all I really wanted to do was to clear the queen’s nuisance relations out of the way. What real choice did I have? It would have been nothing but struggles between me and them as long as Edward was a child, and what would that have accomplished? We’d have been at arms against each other in the end. I didn’t need that again. Neither did England. Sooner or later, one side was going to be vanquished, and it sure as hell wasn’t going to be mine.” He smiled at me. “Actually, it was you, with your dire warnings about the fates of the dukes of Gloucester, and your information about Eleanor Butler, who finally decided the issue for me. So you truly have been a kingmaker, Harry. Who would have thought it back all those years ago at Writtle?” Richard laughed. “Did I ever tell you what a snotty-nosed brat you were at the time?” He put his hand on his hip and his nose in the air and squeaked, “I am Harry, and one

day I will be the second Duke of Buckingham!’ Thank God you improved with age.”

“Indeed,” I managed.

“Now, there are some others waiting for me, Lovell said. I’d best see them; we’ll be off early tomorrow. You don’t mind, old man, if I leave you alone after your journey?”

“No.” I forced a smile and rose off the stool. “I’m stiff from riding, anyway. I need to stretch my legs before the sun sets.”



I’d had my conversation with Richard alone, with a couple of my men waiting outside his chamber for me. I ordered them off and wandered around the streets of Gloucester, scarcely knowing or caring where I went.

Two young boys were dead, after I had promised them they could trust me. True, the killings hadn’t been my idea. None of the deaths had been. But I’d not done anything in defense of the victims. Instead I had helped place Richard on the throne. If I had protested, refused to give him my support, King Edward’s sons might still be alive today.

There was no more despicable crime than infanticide. And my hands were hardly cleaner than Richard’s. From the day those boys’ attendants were withdrawn and their confinement became closer, I should have known what fate awaited them. Anyone who knew his history would have known. Edward II, Richard II, Henry VI—all had died when they lost their thrones.

But the boys were children. Who would have thought that he would put them to death?

Everyone. The men who had staked their lives upon getting them out of the Tower. The men whom I had passed in the streets on occasion, pointing to that fortress and whispering, tears streaming down their faces. Aunt Margaret. The boys themselves. Only I, foolish I, had willed myself blind to their danger.

What if I had resisted Richard’s quest for the throne or sided with my

wife's relations? Probably Richard would have disposed of me as easily as the others, with some regret, perhaps, but without hesitation. But the thought that I would resist had probably never crossed his mind. He knew me, and the love that had made me abandon all honor, much better than I did myself.

I had wandered to the quay. The sun had long since set, and under the cover of the darkness it would be easy enough to throw myself into the Severn and disappear from the world forever. Indeed for several hopeless moments I stood there contemplating just that. But then sense took hold. My children would already have to live down the association of the Stafford name with infanticide—and regicide. How could I shame it more by staining it with my own self-destruction?

I turned and made my way back to St. Peter's Abbey, where the king and his nobles were staying. Instead of going straight to my lodgings in the priory, I knocked at the Cemetery Gate, where the pilgrims entered. If the monk who opened the door thought there anything odd about my appearance, as there surely must have been in my state of mind, he said nothing. "Take me to the tomb of King Edward, please. I should like to stay there alone for a while."

"Yes, your grace."

King Edward II was an ancestor of mine, and Richard's too of course, and it was his deposition following his disastrous reign that had set the stage for so much misery to come by showing men that it was not all that hard, after all, to get rid of an unwanted king. He had suffered a horrid, unspeakable death at Berkeley Castle. As a young boy in the queen's household, I'd snickered about the means—a red-hot poker shoved into his fundament. Every lad my age had made a nervous jest about the subject. Yet in his time poor Edward had been thought a saint by some, and it was the offerings of his pilgrims that had made the abbey the fine place it was today. Even today, some still came to this tomb and prayed.

I stood next to the tomb and gazed at the king's alabaster face. It was his love—some said a wicked and unnatural love—for his friends that had

brought him down. He had clung to them when to forsake them would have been to save himself. This, then, was a man who could understand the love I bore for Richard, the love that until this day had proven steadfast against all other considerations.

“I didn’t think he would do it, your grace,” I said softly as the alabaster face with its sweetly sad look stared impassively at the tomb’s canopy. “How could I? I loved him. I *still* love him.”

Then I leaned my head against the tomb and wept until sheer weakness sent me to my knees. Once upon them, I sent prayer after prayer to the skies.



Richard and I were both up early the next morning, and we met as if all were normal. He chatted about his recent visit to Magdalen College at Oxford, and twitted me about my own Stafford family’s distinct preference for Cambridge. Mostly, though, we spoke of business, chiefly concerning my duties in Wales.

“So you’re off for Brecon,” Richard said finally as I started to take my leave of him. “I can’t persuade you to venture north on my progress with me, just for a few days? Not even to see whether the northerners truly have tails, as all of you southerners seem to think?”

“I’ll take your word for it.” I managed a ghost of a grin.

He walked with me to the abbey entrance, where all my men had gathered, and embraced me as I prepared to mount my horse. “God keep you on your progress, Richard,” I said as we embraced in farewell. I held him more tightly than was my wont; did I know then that we would never meet again? “I shall write soon of events in Wales.”

“God keep you, Harry.” He smiled and said into my ear, “It was for the best, old man. Remember that.”

“I will.”

I longed, as I proceeded to Wales, to have someone beside me to whom I could unburden myself about what I’d learned the night before. But for

all of the men who surrounded me, there was not a single one of them in which I could confide such a terrible secret and seek the counsel I so desperately needed. I had no close friends, I realized with a jolt—except for Richard.

The gods of old could not have played a better joke on a man if they had tried.

Kate: August 1483 to October 1483

WHILE I MOURNED MY BROTHER AND MY NEPHEW AND FRETTE ABOUT my own future, my children, of course, were happily oblivious to all. They knew only that due to a puzzling turn of events that no adult could explain adequately, there was a new king on the throne and that their papa was a very important man now. Their only complaint was that he was not in Brecon with them, and when in early August a man brought news that Harry was expected shortly, their happiness was complete. For the children adored Harry, and much as I was schooling myself to despise him, I could not gainsay that he had always been a loving father. I could only hope that Richard would not poison even that.

Everything had to be perfect for Papa's arrival, seven-year-old Elizabeth sternly informed the household, me included. Edward at five was not much less commanding. When word came that Harry was just a few miles away, he stared at my gown as if it were made of rags. "You're wearing that?"

It was less than a year old, and as expensive as anything else in my wardrobe. "Yes."

"But it's not Papa's favorite! You should wear his favorite." Edward screwed up his face in deep thought. "He likes you best in your light blue gown. The one with the pretty golden birds on it."

Edward was right. It was for that very reason that this gown had not seen the light of day this summer. But how could I tell a small boy that it no longer mattered what I wore for his father? "All right. I shall put on the one with the birds."

“And not that hennin either,” Elizabeth chimed in. She plucked it out of my lady’s very hands. “The one with the gold trim around the edges looks so much better. And it matches the birds,” she added firmly.

Just minutes after I was dressed to my eldest children’s satisfaction, I heard the sound of horses. Bracing myself, I went down with the children and the rest of the household to await my husband’s arrival. Even Bishop Morton was there, standing dutifully at attention.

Four-year-old Hal pumped my hand. “I see him! There’s Papa!”

“I saw him first!” protested Elizabeth, who was a little short-sighted but hated to admit it.

“*I did,*” said Edward, in a voice that indicated that as he was the heir, the matter was as good as settled.

“Me!” piped up three-year-old Anne. “I saw him too.”

For the sake of the children, I plastered a smile onto my face. “I think you all saw him at the same time.”

Elizabeth suddenly grabbed my free hand, “Mama, he looks ill.”

That was putting it mildly, I realized. He looked ghastly. Had there been illness recently in London? I wondered. It would not have been surprising; even without the devil sitting on the throne, the place was at its most unpleasant in summer.

Harry dismounted from his horse, far too slowly for a man not quite eight-and-twenty. The children swarmed around him while I stood politely nearby.

At last, Harry rose from the children’s level and kissed me on the cheek as I tried not to recoil. Quietly, he said, “Kate. I must see you alone. I will send for you when I am ready.”

My blood froze within me, but I said calmly, “Yes, my lord.”



“You’re wearing my favorite dress.”

“Edward forced me.”

“Sit down, Kate.”

I obeyed, and decided I would go down fighting. "If you have called me here to tell me you are annulling our marriage, I promise you I shall not let you make a beggar of me or the children. I have relations in Luxembourg to protect me, you know." I didn't even know most of their names. "And—"

"Kate! It's not that. It's nothing to do with the two of us. Not in that way." He drew a breath, then another one. Finally, he said, in a voice so low I had to strain to hear him, "King Edward's boys are dead."

I heard the news with a strange sort of calmness. "How?" I asked unnecessarily.

"Murdered."

I forced myself to ask, "At your order?"

"No. I am innocent of that, at least. The king's order. I knew nothing about it until it was too late. But I should have guessed."

"Yes."

He looked down into my face for the first time. "You're not surprised."

"No. Bishop Morton feared for their lives, he told me. And I never expected anything good from Gloucester once he arrested my kinsmen."

"I did. Try to believe me, Kate. I did. I never thought him capable of shedding the blood of infants." He fiddled with the dagger at his side, a gesture he'd copied from Richard years ago. "Yet there is more. You were right about your brother and the rest, and about Hastings. They were innocent."

"The precontract?"

"A lie, most likely. No one shall ever probably know the truth but Edward and Eleanor Butler. And perhaps William Hastings. At the very least, there's not enough evidence to say that there was one."

We were silent for a time. Then I asked detachedly, "What shall you do?"

"I don't know. I have been asking myself that since I left Richard at Gloucester." He gazed out the window. "I tell myself that he can do no worse than he has done, that with this deed—no, these deeds—done and over with, he will be a good and just king. He might be, Kate. He is not a cruel man by nature."

I chose not to argue the point. “What of my nieces?”

“I don’t believe he would harm women or girls. But I cannot be sure. I am sure of nothing now.”

“Have you spoken to your confessor of this?”

“No. You are my first confessor, Kate.” He sank on the bench beside me and put his arm around my rigid shoulders. His voice cracked as he said, “Try to forgive me. I have wronged you so much, but that seems the least of my sins now.”

We sat there in mute misery. Finally, I drew back. “You need counsel, Harry, wiser counsel than I can give. There is someone here who can give you such, if you will heed it.”

“Who?”

“Bishop Morton.”



“Amen.”

We all maintained a moment of respectful silence for the poor boys who had died in the Tower. Then Bishop Morton raised his head. “So, your grace. What do you intend to do?”

“Kate asked me the same question. I still don’t know. He might do naught but good from now on.”

“Or he might do more evil, your grace. Six people have died, two of them children. And more, God help them, will die for their role in this failed plot to rescue the poor lads.”

“Yes.” Harry stared into space. “I just don’t know what I can do. Put someone in his place? The young Earl of Warwick has a better claim to the throne than he. But he’s a child—and the son of Clarence, for whom no one mourned overmuch. No one even advocated on his behalf when Richard seized the crown. Would people fight for him?”

“There is yourself.”

“Me?” Harry smiled tiredly. “Do you know, I actually thought of that while riding here? My claim to the throne isn’t a poor one. But no. I

would inherit all of Richard's enemies, and none of his friends. And—" He shook his head sadly. "I'd not make a good king. These last few months have taught me that. And besides, what joy could I take from a throne that came to me through the deaths of innocents? No. I don't want it."

"Then allow me to suggest another candidate. Henry Tudor."

"That spotty boy?" I said involuntarily.

Bishop Morton smiled at me. "He is surely neither a boy nor spotty now, my lady."

"I know; it is just how I remember him. But king?"

"His claim is not a remote one. Through John of Gaunt—"

"But it is a bastard one," said Harry. "And no one knows anything of him, save his mother, who is hardly impartial. I met him myself only briefly."

The bishop spread his hands wide. "What can I say, your grace? Desperate times call for desperate measures. I do not believe that the people would accept you as king, as you yourself say, and the Earl of Warwick is under the disadvantage of youth." He nibbled at a sweet cake I had set out; I had learned that the bishop appreciated good food. "You might protest that I am attempting to restore the House of Lancaster, which I supported for many years. I can only tell you that I have served the House of York faithfully since the battle of Tewkesbury, and that the late King Edward was well pleased with my services. It was through his own good offices that I was made Bishop of Ely. Were his son on the throne, I would have gladly continued to serve the House of York. It comes down not to Lancaster or York, but to this: with the poor boys gone, what is left is a choice between this unknown Welshman and the murderer Gloucester."

Harry shook his head. "For all that Richard has done, he is my friend, and I don't know if I can bring myself to betray him," he said softly. "I must mull this over, Bishop."



That night, Harry came to my bedchamber. Instinctively, I gathered the covers around me protectively. He sighed. “Might I lie beside you? Just to sleep?”

“I suppose.”

He crawled in beside me and touched my unresponsive hand, then rolled over on his side. Much later, long after the time we both should have been sleeping, I heard the sounds of sobbing. I lay there rigid, staring at the canopy. Then the sobs at last stopped, and we both fell asleep.



Though the plan to rescue the boys from the Tower had failed, and its four leaders had been hung, England was at last arising from the stupor into which she had sunk in the days before Richard’s coronation. From Harry, I heard that plans were being made to smuggle my nieces out of sanctuary. Alas, Gloucester learned of the plan from a spy, and men were sent to guard Westminster Abbey so that it looked, so I was told later, like a foreign city under siege. But with that plan foiled, others sprang up in its place. Soon Harry was appointed by Richard to investigate treasons in London, Surrey, Sussex, Kent, Middlesex, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Essex, and Hertfordshire. The plans were to smuggle the poor boys out of the Tower, for besides Richard and the men who had done his bidding, only Harry, Bishop Morton, and I knew that they were dead.

During this time, Harry acted as Richard’s trusted servant, carrying out his orders with an alacrity and ability that made me wonder how differently things might have turned out if the late King Edward had shown him more favor. Yet he continued to closet himself with Bishop Morton daily, and I knew that he was struggling with the question of whether to remain loyal to Richard. For once I restrained myself and said nothing, thinking that my womanly meddling might produce an effect opposite from that I most desired.

Meanwhile, unwelcoming as I had been on his first night home, Harry continued to come to my bed at night. We slept as close to our respective edges as possible at first, but each evening we moved a little closer and

exchanged warmer good-nights, and one night in mid-September, perhaps out of sheer loneliness more than anything else, we found ourselves in each other's arms again. Harry let me initiate each stage of the lovemaking that followed. When it was over, I was at last ready to share the knowledge I'd had for some days. I put his hand on my belly. "Harry," I said quietly. "I am with child again."

"Sweetheart! But when—" Harry buried his face in my neck. "Christ," he whispered. "Kate, try to forgive me for the pain I caused you that night."

"I have. I goaded you into it, perhaps."

He shook his head. "What I said and did was inexcusable." He rolled on his back. "But I loved him so much. It hurt me when you spoke ill of him as if you spoke against my very self, and I lost all reason." He caressed my belly again. "I can't believe it. It is a mercy that something good came out of that miserable night."

"A mercy, and more than that, perhaps. Harry, this cannot go on, your being half Richard's man and half the good man I married. Let our babe be a sign to you. Will you join the fight against the king?"

The world seemed to stop as I waited for Harry's answer. It was short and simple. "Yes." He took my hand. "I shall join forces with the rebels—the very men I have been investigating for Richard. And I'll write and invite Henry Tudor to take the throne."



The news that Harry set in motion the next morning—that the old king's sons had been murdered at the command of King Richard, their own uncle—was the final spark the rebellion needed to take fire.

Men started galloping to and from Brecon, bearing news of a new arrival to our cause each day. Men from the fourth Edward's household joined. My brother Lionel, the Bishop of Salisbury, joined. My brother Richard—his modest landholdings seized by Gloucester solely because he was a Woodville—joined. The husband of my brother Anthony's bastard daughter joined. The late Duchess of Exeter's husband, Thomas St Leger,

joined. Lionel and Richard, a home-loving man who I knew would have rather been doing anything besides raising men in revolt, joined because of what had been done to our brother Anthony and our nephew Richard Grey. Some joined because of the land or the positions the king had taken from them. Yet others—many others—joined for the love of their old master, Edward IV, and for their anger at what had been done to his young boys.

Margaret Beaufort joined too—or, to put it more aptly, she connected her own conspiracy with ours. Angry that Richard had ignored her requests to bring her son safely home to England, she had been involved with the failed plot to free the boys from the Tower. Her half brother had already had his lands seized for his suspected role in the plot. When she learned from Harry of what had been done to the lads in the Tower, she became the heart and soul of the rebellion in London.

Margaret had a physician, Lewis Caerleon, who also served my sister. As my sister was indeed ailing, he was able to pass freely into sanctuary, despite the guards that questioned everyone coming or going. It was he who broke the news to Bessie that her boys were dead, and at whose hands. It was he who also carried another proposal: that Bessie salvage the wreck of our family's fortunes by allowing her eldest daughter to marry Henry Tudor: a joining of the houses of York and Lancaster for once and for all. From their union, Caerleon told her, would result a son who would blend the best of the two houses.

So we plotted, and we prayed, as King Richard continued on his progress, making a show of refusing any monetary gifts that were offered to him and smiling benevolently upon the poor who were all but shoved into his path so that he could make a show of giving alms to them.

At Brecon, I was the one doing most of the praying, for Bishop Morton was enjoying himself much too thoroughly to spend much time on his knees. Instead, he helped Harry, dashing off letters and conferring with messengers late into the night and in general moving about like a man half his age. Harry needed the help, for though he had never swerved from his purpose once he committed to overthrowing his dear friend, I knew that

it pained him deeply and that it took its toll on his body as well as on his peace of mind.

In early October, the letter that Harry had been dreading for days arrived. It was a curt note from Richard ordering him to join him at Pontefract. I had seen other letters from Richard, full of friendly affection; this bore none. "He knows?" I said, leaning over Harry's shoulder.

"He knows." Harry turned to the clerk nearby. "Tell him that I suffer from an infirmity of stomach, and cannot accede to his request."

He sighed, and I wrapped my arms around him gently, for I knew that he was indeed sick at heart. "Soon this will all be over, Harry."

"For one of us," Harry said.



On a crisp, pleasant October day, Harry's troops were finally ready to march east from Brecon.

My boys and I were among them. The plan was for the three of us to cross the Severn with Harry's men, then settle at Thornbury in Gloucestershire; Harry had feared that if we were left in Wales, we might be taken hostage by one of Richard's followers. The girls too were to have gone, but at the last minute, little Anne fell ill with a bad cold. She was a delicate creature at that time, and Harry and I, still nursing our grief for our dead son Humphrey, did not wish to risk the journey. So we left her and Elizabeth there, well attended. "We can send for them soon," Harry reassured me. Clearly, he was trying to reassure himself as well. "It won't be long, and no one shall bother a pair of little girls. You as a Woodville, and the boys as my heir and his brother, are more at risk."

I nodded sensibly, stifling my misgivings. I had no knowledge of these things, but it did occasionally occur to me that our plan might be called a foolhardy one. A man with almost no experience was leading an army against a man who had defeated the Scots and helped to scatter Margaret of Anjou's hopes to the winds. He was to be aided by a near stranger from Brittany with no service as a soldier whatsoever. And even I, woman that

I was, could look at Harry's troops and realize that they had no heart for this battle. Richard, Henry Tudor, the Earl of Warwick, King Arthur—it mattered not to them who was king. There was little glory to be won in a civil war, and there would be precious little booty to come out of this one. These men were here only out of duty, and grudgingly given duty at that.

"Papa! It all looks so glorious!" Elizabeth nodded at the banners with Stafford knots flapping in the breeze. "And you look so fine in your armor."

For the first time in days, Harry smiled. He lifted Elizabeth in the air and twirled her around, just like King Edward had me that long-ago day at Reading. "It looks all the better because you helped polish it, sweetheart."

"I wish I could come with you and Mama and the boys."

"And I do too. But you must take care of Anne. She would be lonely without you. And when she feels better, you must help make sure that she minds Nurse and doesn't catch cold again."

"Oh, I will," Elizabeth said in a tone that made me as a fellow youngest sister feel rather sorry for poor Anne.

Harry pointed to the uppermost turret of Brecon Castle. "Now come. You must go to the top of the castle and wave your handkerchief at me as we depart. It is what all fair maidens do."

"I shall!" said Elizabeth. She kissed me hastily, gave Harry another hug, then scampered off.

Shortly, we saw a white handkerchief fluttering from the castle. Only then did Harry's army begin to march. As we set off, I said one last prayer, short and simple: *God help us*.

Instead, He sent the rains.



Never before, or since, have I seen rain and wind like that which came that October of 1483. The winds whipped the Stafford banners out of their bearers' hands, blowing them into the faces of the men who rode behind them. The rains came through the sides of the chariot, soaking me and the

boys to the skin. Even the very act of breathing made us swallow drops of water. To complete our misery, the chariot began to list to one side, then jolted to a halt. A wheel was stuck in the mud.

Harry got me and the boys on horses, the boys riding pillion, and we resumed our slow progress, the horses slogging through the mire. Finally, I saw the faint outlines of a manor house. I had traveled this road many a time, but such were the rain and wind that I had lost all track of my surroundings “Where are we?”

“Weobley,” said Harry. He looked around at the weary men and horses surrounding us. “We’ll stop here for the night.”



Walter Devereux, Lord Ferrers, who had welcomed us to Brecon Castle so many years before, stared at the soaked crew inside his great hall. “I have heard of this mad scheme of yours, your grace. As your senior by many years, I take the liberty of speaking frankly to you. I beg you, abandon it and make your peace with the king. Nothing good can come of this.”

“It is not a good thing to remove a usurper and a child-murderer from the throne? I have heard of the murders from his own lips, sir.”

“You will throw the country back into civil war.”

Harry shook his head, spraying water as he did. “This discussion boots nothing. My wife and sons are sodden through. Give them and my party lodgings. It is all I ask.”

“Aye, and how could I refuse, with an army at your back? But as my daughter-in-law is your wife’s niece”—Cecily, standing in the hall gaping at our mud-splattered appearance, was my sister Anne’s daughter—“I would have agreed to shelter her in any case.”

Harry smiled his thanks. “You sheltered Henry Tudor once, too.” He had been in the care of Walter’s sister years before.

“Yes, and that is another reason I don’t attempt to throw you out of my home. Perhaps if you stay here, I can talk some sense into you.”

“Or we might be able to convert you to our cause,” put in a waterlogged

but smiling Bishop Morton. I was beginning to learn that it took a great deal to demoralize him.

"I doubt it," said Sir Walter with a sigh. "Come. Let me get the lot of you before a fire."



Instead of ceasing, the storm was only worse the next day. Harry sent out men, who returned the next day in a bedraggled state to tell him that the Severn was flooded. There was no hope of crossing it. Until we could, Harry's army would not be able to join with the rebels in the West Country.

For days upon days it rained. The flooding was so bad in spots that people claimed later to have seen babes in their cradles floating down the Severn amid the remains of their washed-out houses.

Each day more of Harry's soldiers—billeted wherever they could beg or command a place to lay their heads, as no one could make camp—deserted. I could hardly blame them. Harry went out daily to speak with them—sometimes ordering them to stay, sometimes begging them—but to no avail. Soon we were down to a couple of dozen men.

Then on the sixth day of our stay one of our servants from Brecon arrived, not wearing any sort of badge to identify himself. "My lord. I bear bad news. Brecon has been overrun and plundered."

Harry went white. "Where are my daughters?"

"At Tretower."

Tretower was the home of the Vaughan family, who had been longtime retainers of the Staffords. I clutched at Harry. "You mean the Vaughans took them into their care?"

"No, my lady. Not in that sense. It was the filthy Vaughans who overran the castle. They had a swarm of men with them—far outnumbering the garrison at the castle—who'd been promised spoils. Gloucester had spies in the neighborhood, you see, my lord, and they knew exactly when to make their move. Within hours of your departure, they marched on Brecon.

We tried to defend it, but there were just too many of them. Some of the garrison are dead.”

I crossed myself. Harry looked numb. “Go on,” he managed.

“Once they made it in, they had the decency to bring the young ladies out—they were screaming and crying, but not hurt. Their attendants were taken with them.”

“Anne had a cold,” I said. “Elizabeth has nightmares sometimes. Harry, we must return to them!”

“My lady, you can’t. Brecon was sacked. Looted, and all of my lord’s papers burned. All of the land around it was laid waste—at least as much as they could before the rains started. And now you could not go there if you tried. The Vaughans and their creatures, acting on Gloucester’s orders, have blocked the roads leading to and out of Brecon. Everyone who goes is being watched. I have been days trying to get here myself, and they nearly caught me once or twice.”

“But I don’t understand,” I said. “What did we ever do to the Vaughans? They have never had trouble with Harry that I can recall.”

“I asked one of their followers myself. He cuffed me for my impertinence, but he’d been at your wine and answered readily enough. Jasper Tudor executed the Vaughans’ father back in ’71, my lady, and they are at last exacting what revenge that they can. That is why.”

The year 1471, when I was still a child and Harry only a lad of fifteen. And my little girls were in the hands of these men. I laid my head on Harry’s shoulder and wept.

Bishop Morton, uncharacteristically grim-faced, had been standing listening to all of this in silence. Over my sobs, he said, “It’s all up here, my lord. You can’t get over the Severn, and you can’t go back to Wales, and you’ve not enough men to fight.”

“And, my lord, you can tarry here no longer.” Lord Ferrers’s voice was apologetic but firm. “It is treason to be sheltering you, and I can no longer put myself and my family at risk. Your lady, of course, is a different matter, as are the children. I’ll not turn them out. But the men must go.”

“Then we shall be gone tonight,” said Harry calmly. He turned to Richard de la Bere, Sheriff of Hereford. “But there is one last favor I wish to ask of you.”

“Anything, my lord,” said Richard gently.

“Take my eldest son and convey him from here, secretly. You understand the necessity for this, Kate? If I am—gone—he might be the target of the king’s wrath. I cannot risk that.”

I was still sobbing for my girls, but I nodded a mute assent.

“Hal shall stay with you, Kate. I do not think his danger is as great.”

I nodded again.

“The boy had best be disguised in coarse clothing when he is conveyed from here,” said Bishop Morton. “You too, my lord. As well as myself. We shall all be out of your hair soon, Lord Ferrers.”

“I am very sorry, your grace.”

“There is always another day,” said the bishop, so brightly that for a brief moment I forgot my girls and contemplated strangling him. “Well, what are we waiting for? Let us find some clothes and go.”



In our chamber, Harry prepared to dress himself in the second-worst set of clothes that could be found at Weobley—Bishop Morton having gallantly put on the worst, which smelled not at all faintly of pig. We had sent our attendants out and were spending these last moments alone. As I helped him out of his own clothes, he shook his head. “Nothing’s gone right with this, Kate, and I’ve put us all in danger. Forgive me.”

“I should be asking for your forgiveness, Harry. I encouraged you to rebel.”

“Yes. But I couldn’t have lived with myself if I hadn’t.”

“It may still go well, Harry. Henry Tudor may be able to join the rebels. Richard’s army may not be able to control the rising in the South.”

He sighed. “I hope so. Kate, if it doesn’t go well and I end up an exile, we may not see each other for years. Or—”

“Don’t say it, Harry. Don’t even think it.”

He pulled me against him and we embraced each other for a long time. All of the remaining bitterness that had been between us in those last few months melted as we stood there together, our tears blending.

Finally, we pulled apart. As I wiped my eyes, Harry said, "I want you to keep something safe for me, sweetheart. Lift your skirts."

I obeyed. Harry unstrapped his jeweled garter from his calf and gently strapped it on my own. "Do you remember? When I was eighteen and received this, I checked every hour to make sure it was still there."

"I remember. I shall take good care of it."

He smiled sadly. "It was Richard who first strapped it on me, did you know that? But it is where it belongs now, on the being that I love the best in all the world." He pulled on a pair of dingy hose, then the rest of his garments, and put his arm around me. "Come, sweetheart. Let me take my leave of the boys."



"I am to go away soon too," bragged Edward as Hal stared sulkily at the floor.

"You must be good and mind what Sir Richard tells you. And Hal, you will have much to do as well, taking care of your mother, so don't look so surly. But now, boys, let me have a word with each of you."

He bent and spoke at length to one son, then to the other as Sir Walter stood uncomfortably by. I wondered if he was having second thoughts about evicting his houseguest. But Harry looked strangely calm when he stood. "Good-bye, Sir Walter. I thank you for your kindness to my family."

"God be with you, your grace, if not with your cause." He hesitated. "There's still time to reconsider."

Harry smiled and shook his head, then embraced me. We clung together for a short time as Bishop Morton called out his cheery farewells to our reluctant host.

Then Harry and the other men disappeared into the darkness.

*Harry: October 1483 to
November 2, 1483*

JOHN RUSSELL, BISHOP OF LINCOLN, HAD A SAYING WHENEVER DETAILS were too unpleasant to be elaborated upon: “Why enlarge?” It had become a catchphrase among the king’s councilors, I had discovered when I at last became one, and one that could send them off in gales of laughter when used at the right moment.

And now I am eight-and-twenty, in the prime of life and the peak of good health, and I shall be dead within hours. Why enlarge? But I suppose I must.



My few followers—Bishop Morton, my physician and astrologer, Thomas Nandyke, my uncle by marriage, Thomas Knyvet, and a few others—each took a separate path when we left Weobley. Our plans were to await the outcome of the rebellion in the South and then, if necessary, to flee abroad. I chose to go north, then head east toward the coast and take ship if the rebellion proved a failure.

I had not told even Kate where I was going, thinking it best that she knew as little as possible should she fall into the king’s hands. Already he, through the Vaughans, had my daughters under his control... I put the thought from my mind, for it could only paralyze me. I had to keep moving.

I had a retainer, Ralph Bannaster, who had a good-sized house near Wem, not far from Shrewsbury. I didn’t know the man that well, but I had favored him in the past and knew his family to have long been loyal

to the Staffords. So it was his house to which I made my way under cover of darkness. I went by foot, as a man in my shabby garments riding a fine horse would have been too conspicuous. Besides, a horse would be just one more encumbrance.

The rain had subsided to a drizzle, just enough to make my journey a miserable and cold one. It was a distance of about seventy miles between Weobley and Wem. I did most of my walking at night; during the day, I hid where I could and slept.

On a day near the end of October, I entered Shrewsbury. It was a bustling place, and in my disguise I felt safe walking through it openly in broad daylight. In the market square some placards had been posted, and it was there that I read, with the strangest sort of feeling, that a reward of a thousand pounds was being offered for my capture. "Lucky man, to catch the duke," a man beside me said.

"Lucky, indeed," I agreed. It then occurred to me that I did not look the sort of man who could read, and I hastened to get lost in the throng and out of Shrewsbury.

The weather had turned dry and crisp—precisely the type of weather I could have used at Weobley—and within three hours I was at Ralph Bannaster's manor. It took me some considerable time to be admitted to him, as I would not reveal my identity to anyone else in his household, but once I finally stood before him, I was surprised at the warmth of his greeting. I had fully expected to have to use the gold I had secreted on my person as a bribe.

"Stay as long as you need, your grace," he said kindly. "Now, come and lie down for a time. You must be exhausted. I'll have some food brought to you." He shook his head. "You look like two miles of bad road."

"More like seventy," I said, smiling. It was good to hear some friendly words.

Bannaster led me to his own chamber and sat me down before the fire. I had not realized until then how worn out and cold I was, and when a pallet was brought out for me, I wanted nothing but to settle down into it

and sleep my life away. I hardly wanted the wine or food that was served to me, but Bannaster insisted. “Take some refreshment, your grace, or you’ll be weak when you awake.”

In my exhausted state this made a good deal of sense to me. I sipped the wine and felt it go to my head at once. Bannaster took the cup from my fingers as I yawned and curled up on my pallet. “Want—sleep,” I mumbled.

My host draped a blanket over me and settled a pillow under my head. “Sweet dreams, your grace,” he said as I mumbled my thanks.



There was someone standing over me, but I refused to let this interfere with the dream I was having about Kate, who was stripping to her shift and smiling at me all the while. I pushed my head deeper into the pillow and gathered the blanket around me more tightly. It was chilly; the fire had gone out.

“Come, your grace. Your little game is up.”

I rolled on my back and stared up irritably. There were a dozen men, all armed, surrounding me. “I don’t understand,” I said sleepily.

“Aye? You’re under arrest, for high treason. Now do you understand, my lord of Buckingham? It doesn’t get much plainer than that.”

And then I recognized the speaker: Thomas Mytton, the sheriff of Shropshire. I sat up and looked around. At the edge of the circle of men was Ralph Bannaster, staring at his feet. “You betrayed me,” I said. “Why?”

Ralph shrugged. “What do you expect a man to do when a thousand pounds walks inside his home and plants itself at his hearth? You made it too easy.”

“That’s what you think,” I said, rising to my feet and reaching for the dagger that hung at my side. But it had been taken from me while I slept. No matter; I had some pride left in me. I lunged at Ralph and landed a blow on his jaw, then tried to break away from the sheriff and his men and run for my life.

It was a futile gesture, of course; there were too many of them. In a matter of minutes I was shackled and led outside.



It all goes downhill from here. Wrapped in the rusty black cloak I'd been wearing for days, I was taken to Shrewsbury and held prisoner there, and on All Hallow's Eve two of Richard's men, James Tyrell and Christopher Wellesbourne, came to conduct me south, where Richard and his army had gathered. We moved quickly: today is the first of November, and I am in a guarded room at the Blue Boar Inn in Salisbury.

It could be worse, I told the guards when I saw the place. It could be the White Boar Inn.

Rather late in life, I seem to be developing a sense of humor.



Hastings, Rivers, Grey, and Vaughan, all innocent men, died without trial or with only the mockery of one. I, guilty as charged, receive one, after a fashion at least. As Constable of England, it would be my job to conduct this trial, and I indeed suggest saving some time by doing this—a joke that falls flat with my guards. It might appeal more to Richard's sense of humor, I think.

Well, perhaps not under the circumstances.

In lieu of my own services, Ralph Ashton conducts the trial. It is a short one, and the only thing in doubt is whether I shall die the traitor's death of hanging, drawing, and quartering or the nobleman's death of beheading. Nobility wins out, and I whisper a prayer of thanksgiving, for it is hard enough to contemplate being cut open while still alive, and harder yet to think of my wife and children learning that I died such a death.

After that, I am taken back to my room at the Blue Boar Inn, outside of which construction of my scaffold is proceeding apace. The workmen, though busy, nonetheless find leisure to converse and joke among themselves, which strikes me as less than tactful under the circumstances, but no

doubt they are delighted at the chance of earning some unexpected wages. I hope they are suitably grateful to me.

I have assumed that these last hours would hang heavy, but I find much to do. First there is my will to write. As an attainted traitor I will have no possessions to leave, but I can list my debts in the hope that Richard sees fit to pay my creditors, and I can make some bequests for the good of my soul with the hope that he may honor them. The debts take the better part of the afternoon to list; my life has not been an inexpensive one.

Then there is Kate. I specify a jointure of a thousand marks for her, as was promised upon our marriage. It will be enough to keep her comfortable and, I hope, to attract a good husband for her, for my sweet Kate is not the stuff of which vowesses are made. I wonder what sort of man she will marry; whoever it is, I know, will serve her better than I have in the past few months.

I sigh and go on writing. When one of my guards returns, I ask, “Did the king return an answer?”

“He’ll not see you. You should know that by now.”

I have been begging since my arrival at Salisbury to see Richard, who is in the city, though he was not present at my trial. Not to plead for my life—I know that is beyond hope—but to plead for the well-being of my wife and children. I would remind him that although I betrayed him, I served him faithfully in the past and loved him dearly, and I would tell him how well it would become him to treat a traitor’s wife and children kindly and allow them to prosper. I would remind him of the times that he was kind to me when no one else was, as at that miserable day at Tewkesbury when my uncle was executed, and I would beg him on my knees to remember that and to repeat it.

I would spend the rest of the afternoon on my knees before him, if it suited him, if I could die with my mind at ease about Kate and the children. But it appears that I shall never get the chance.



The landlord of the Blue Boar offers to make me a last meal. I hesitate at first, remembering the false hospitality shown to me by Ralph Bannaster. But there is nothing to gain from drugging me now, I realize, so I ask for chops and ale, Bannaster having put me off wine for life, or the little I have left of it.

My last meal is delivered, and is delicious. Perhaps my cause had a sympathizer at the Blue Boar. I think to myself that the next time I am in Salisbury, I must make a point of stopping at this inn.

Well, no.

Each time the door of my chamber bangs open, I perk up, hoping against hope that it is a message from Richard, but it never is. This time, it is Francis Lovell, with a run-down of what I may expect tomorrow. I will be shaven and shriven, in that order, which relieves me, for I am vain enough to want to go to my death looking my best, and I desperately want to make my last confession. I will be given a clean shirt and hose, which is also soothing. At around ten I will be led to the scaffold, where I may make a short speech if I please. "Nothing treasonous, mind you, or you'll be put to silence more roughly than you might like."

"I know. I might be about to lose my head but I haven't lost my mind."

Lovell snorts, almost in laughter, and starts to leave. Then he turns. "Why did you do it, Buckingham? He gave you everything. Was there some mean office, some half acre of land he omitted that made you rebel?"

I long to tell him that it wasn't greed, it was the boys. But what if he is asking Richard's question? "Allow me to see Richard, just for a few moments, and I will tell him all. I would like to do so, in fact."

"Nice try, Harry. He won't see scum like you. He has better things to do. Like taking a piss. Or a crap."

Doomed men are hard to insult, I am finding. "If he changes his mind, I'll be here."

Lovell slams the door and thumps down the stairs.



I should have asked Lovell where my body will be taken; in my will, I requested burial with my parents and brother at Pleshey, but I doubt that my wish will be honored; most likely the king will hand me over to the Grey Friars. Pleshey makes me think of my poor mother, who lost all of her kinsmen to the ax or to battle, and I am grateful that she did not live to see my death as well.

The guards inside my chamber being occupied in a game of dice in the corner, I practice my last speech under my breath. It shall be a short, simple one: a warning for others to profit by my example, a plea for forgiveness, and a plea for mercy toward Kate and the children. Yet even as there is little to remember, I worry that my nerves will overcome me and that I may omit or repeat something. I would not want to look foolish.

It is a foolish thing, I grant you, for a man whose severed head is about to be held up by the hair for all of Salisbury to gawk upon to worry about looking a fool in public, but there you have it. And I hope they remember the clean shirt as well.



There are two schools of thought, I suppose, about whether one should sleep before one's execution. The first group reasons that one is about to sleep for eternity, so why bother? The second is that one should get a good night's rest before doing anything of importance, including dying. I turn out to belong to the latter, for when my scaffold is complete and the streets of Salisbury fall silent, I decide to lie down for the night.

In another part of Salisbury, Richard might be doing the same. Or is he going to stay awake? He might; he once loved me as a brother, or at least he said he did, so perhaps his mind is too troubled to sleep. I shall never know, I suppose.

My guards curtly agree that I can retire. The shackles on my feet jangling, I kneel beside my bed and curl my fingers around an inexpensive rosary, the only personal possession that was not taken from me when my captors searched me. I tell the beads and pray for the dead: those whose deaths of

which I was guiltless and those whose deaths for which I must share the blame. Then I pray for the living. When I am done with my prayers and am lying in my last earthly bed, blankets pulled tightly around me to keep out the cold, I fall fast asleep and do not wake until dawn.



Lovell spoke true: just as the barber leaves and I pull a clean shirt over my head, a priest enters. There is no need to repeat what I tell him; you have heard it all. I am forgiven my sins, and for the first time (and the last time) in my life, that knowledge moves me to tears.

And at last, men come into my chamber and bind my hands tightly behind my back. Trussed securely, I am led out of my chamber and to the scaffold.

On this Sunday, All Souls' Day, there is a good-sized crowd in the marketplace of Salisbury; after all, one doesn't see a duke die every day. From the scaffold I can see Lovell and many other of Richard's men, but there is no sign of Richard himself. Strangely, that no longer bothers me. All is out of my hands now. I must trust to the Lord's mercy.

I make my speech. I don't falter, just like I did not falter that day at the Guildhall, but today I speak to a better purpose. When I am finished, I kneel and place my head on the block. Like the scaffold, it is spanking new, and the pigeons, I am pleased to see, have left it alone. I turn my mind to higher matters and begin repeating my prayers.

There is a blow, and some shouting, and then a long, long darkness. Then there is a burst of light, and a man is standing beside me. "Well, Harry," he says, grinning at me in welcome. "You certainly did make a fine mess of things, didn't you?"

"I can't argue with that," I say sheepishly.

My uncle Edmund Beaufort laughs kindly. "Come. We've all been waiting for you," he says as he links my arm in his and leads me to kneel before my Savior.

*Kate: October 1483 to
January 1484*

THE DAY AFTER HARRY LEFT, RICHARD DE LA BERE, ACCOMPANIED BY Harry's uncle by marriage, William Knyvet, took little Edward away to Sir Richard's manor at Kinnersley. Dressed in the shabby little coat his father had had made for him, he looked at me tolerantly as I fluttered over him and kissed him again and again. "It's *fine*, Mama."

Sir Richard, dressed as shabbily as his charge, finally parted us by lifting my son in his arms. "Don't worry, my lady. We'll do all we can to conceal his identity." He glanced at Edward, who was fair-haired like myself but otherwise, with his delicate face, could have been his father as a small lad. "If worst comes to worst, we can dress him as a lass."

Edward's face scrunched up into a look of utter disgust. "A *girl*? I don't want—"

"Hush, Edward. Sir Richard and Sir William know best, and you will do as they tell you. Think of it as a great adventure."

Edward grumbled and submitted reluctantly when I gave him one last kiss.

With our party at Weobley down to me, Cecilia, a couple of other ladies, and Hal and his nurse, I kept mostly to my chamber. Sir Walter was not unfriendly—to the contrary, with Harry gone, he was quite gracious—but I felt keenly my awkward position here, as a fugitive's wife who did not dare go to one of her own homes to stay. Knowing that there had been risings scheduled all over the south of England and that Henry Tudor was set to invade, I could only hope that even without Harry, King Richard

would be overthrown and I would be welcoming Harry home soon—from wherever he was.

That was my hope. Always I have had the power to hope—whether that be a good thing or bad, you may decide. So a few days into November, when Sir Walter came to my chamber and said he wished to speak to me about a serious matter, I hoped, even though nothing in his face encouraged it. “Richard is defeated?”

“No.”

“Harry has escaped abroad?”

“No.”

“He is still in England?”

“No. My lady, please hear me out. It is grim news for you. Your husband was taken prisoner near Wem. He was brought to Salisbury and tried for treason. The sentence was carried out on All Souls’ Day.”

I blinked. “You mean Harry is—” I could not get the word out. Sir Walter nodded. “But he loved the king!”

“He rose against him, my lady.”

“But he never meant to harm him! And what of our children?” Sir Walter blinked and I rushed on. “They love Harry; they need him! The king can’t take him away from them just like that. He can’t! There is some mistake. There has—”

My knees gave way and I sank to the ground dizzily with my hands over my face, willing myself not to be sick or to swoon. When the world finally stopped spinning, Sir Walter was gone and Cecilia was supporting me. “Let me put you to bed, my lady.”

“No!” I wrenched away. “We must get out of here. Now.”



An hour or so later, I walked into Weobley’s great hall, trailed by Cecilia and by Hal and his nurse. Sir Walter stared at my traveling clothes. “Where in the name of God are you going?”

“To sanctuary.”

“Which one?”

“I don’t know. I will come across one, I am sure. Now let me pass. I thank you for your hospitality. I know we have imposed upon you greatly.”

Sir Walter stopped me with a hand. “You are going nowhere,” he said quietly. “I have sent word to the king that you are here and that we shall await his orders as to what you are to do next.”

“The king— You cannot—”

“I have emphasized your innocence in all of this. You have nothing to fear from him, your grace.”

“But I am not innocent. And you cannot keep me here!” I tried to push him out of my way.

Sir Walter grabbed my wrists. “My lady, even if I did not know my responsibility to the king, I would not let you leave here today. The weather’s foul, you haven’t men to escort you even if you knew where you were going, and it will be dark shortly. And there is the matter of your condition too.”

I flushed. Evidently someone attending me had been talking.

Cecilia—crying, though I could not fathom why, since I was perfectly collected—touched me on the arm. “He is right. Please. Let me take you back to your chamber.” She looked apologetically at me, then at Sir Walter. “My lady is not at all well, my lord. She’s fevered, poor creature, can you see? I tried—”

“Yes, of course, woman. I see.” Sir Walter began to steer me in the direction from which I had came. “You’re going to get in bed and rest, your grace. My wife and daughter-in-law will tend you themselves. We’ll have no more nonsense about leaving.”

“All of you traitors! Let me pass!” I tried to yank away from Sir Walter. Then I dropped to my knees as a gush of blood poured down my thighs and onto the rushes.

Ignoring the mess, Sir Walter scooped me up into his arms and carried me to my chamber. Poor man. I was screaming the entire way.

I had nothing to complain of as to my treatment at Sir Walter's hands after I lost Harry's child—quite the opposite. His own physician attended me in the dangerously high fever that followed, and when I resisted with all my might my caretakers' efforts to remove Harry's garter from my calf, Sir Walter himself thought of the clever expedient of strapping it to my arm, where I could look at it all I liked. For the benefit of my addled self he made a point of charging everyone who came into my presence that it would be certain death if they took it from me. He had them bring Hal to my chamber door so I could hear his voice—at my worst point I was convinced he had been taken to Salisbury to die on Harry's block—and he tried, I later heard, to have my daughters brought from Tretower as a comfort to me but was refused by the Vaughans, who said they would do nothing without an order from the king. By the time their reply arrived, I was well out of danger and entirely rational, and I was sitting up and taking a little bit of food. When two knights arrived from the king to take me into custody a couple of weeks later, I was quite restored to my usual state of health.

Sir Walter helped me down the stairs as I left my chamber at Weobley for the last time. "If you don't feel you're strong enough to travel yet, your grace, I can explain to the king. I am certain that he will understand."

"No. The sooner I find out what is in store for me the better. It cannot be worse than what I am imagining."

He grasped my hand. "There is nothing to dread, my lady. The king will be merciful, I am sure. Why, you know that he allowed Lord Hastings's widow her jointure, and did not attain him after his death. That was chivalrous of him."

It would have been even more chivalrous, I thought, not to have killed Hastings in the first place. But there seemed no point in arguing, so I just shrugged.

Sir Walter, however, was wearing the expression that I knew by now meant unpleasant news. "I do not know if you are acquainted with the

men who are to take you to the king. Sir Richard Huddleston is married to Queen Anne's bastard sister, Margaret."

"Yes, I've heard of him and her."

"Sir Christopher Wellesbourne was one of the men who escorted the late duke from Shrewsbury to Salisbury, your grace. He has also been attempting to find your eldest son."

"Has he asked you about his whereabouts?"

"Yes. I know nothing."

I gave Sir Walter's hand a grateful squeeze and went to meet my escorts.

Waiting in the great hall with them were Hal, all bundled up in warm clothes like myself, and Cecilia and Hal's nursemaid, who by my own decision were staying behind until I learned of my status. It might have been a reprise of the day when I in my distraction had tried to flee to sanctuary, except that we were in mourning attire now and that I was no longer carrying Harry's child. Only one thing was unchanged: I had no idea of what the future might hold for me, and I found that I did not much want to think about it.

Sir Walter released my arm. "This is the Duchess of Buckingham, sirs."

I glared at my captors, whose own expressions made it clear that they could think of better things they could be doing than escorting a traitor's wife and a small boy nearly two hundred miles to London. In this friendly manner, we proceeded out to the courtyard.

Waiting for me there was a litter that would have shamed my servants to be seen in. "That contraption is the crown's now, you know," explained Sir Christopher when I suggested that the chariot I had traveled in from Brecon, having been dragged out of the mud and taken to Weobley once the rains stopped, could be used instead. "All of your husband's goods are forfeit."

I looked back toward the stables, thinking of our horses, each one of which Harry and I and the children had named. "I suppose our horses are the crown's too now?"

"Down to the saddle and harness." He glanced at the jeweled clasp on my cloak, a gift from Harry following the birth of my son Hal. "Technically,

all your frippery is the crown's, if you get right down to it. But I suppose you might be allowed a trinket or two."

I blinked back my tears and turned to Sir Walter. "I am sorry to have brought so much inconvenience upon you, my lord. You have been very kind to Hal and me." I looked down at my mourning robes, made at Sir Walter's expense while I was ill. At least they were mine, I supposed. "I am sorry I cannot repay you for having these made."

"It is not expected, your grace."

"At least I can spare one of these." I stood on my tiptoes and gave Sir Walter a peck on the cheek. It was mostly his wife and my niece who had tended me in my illness, and they had been gentle and attentive, but it was Sir Walter who had sat beside me and tried to comfort me that terrible night when, my fever gone and my sense of reality fully intact, I had at last broken down and cried for Harry and our lost child, my weeping so violent that I doubled over on my bed and pounded the mattress with my fists until my knuckles bled. Sir Walter had been like a father to me on that occasion, and I would sorely miss him.

He smiled and helped me into the litter. "Why, I don't believe I've ever been kissed by a duchess before. Thank you, your grace." He turned to Sir Christopher and Sir Richard. "Take good care of my lady. I shall be up for Parliament soon, and I will be asking about her welfare. I will want to hear that she was well treated."

As the litter began jolting along, I waved good-bye to Sir Walter and his family, then patted my calf where Harry's garter was safely back in its place. "Give me courage, love," I whispered, so softly that only the dead could hear. "I shall need it where I am going."



"Good Lord, does the boy have to piss again?"

"You cannot expect a boy of four to have the control of a grown man," I said as our litter lurched to a stop. It gave me some gratification that traveling with a small boy with a small bladder was proving to be a rather

trying task for my custodians. Sir Christopher reluctantly handed me out of the litter, and I just as reluctantly accepted his assistance, then helped Hal out. "He has been very patient, I think. Go here, Hal."

Hal lifted his black skirts with one hand and took hold of his small member with the other, then aimed toward a likely looking tree and did a fairly good job of hitting the mark. He crowed with delight and I clapped, then tried to look refined. "Almost as good as Papa can," Hal said with satisfaction.

My lip wobbled just as I had seen my sister's do. "Almost," I said, rearranging Hal's clothing. "Just keep practicing." I began to move off toward a large bush. "I shall return presently."

"Woman, where the devil are you going?"

"I have been quite patient myself, Sir Christopher. Trust me; I shall not prolong the experience. I have been used to the luxury of a portable close-stool."



We stopped not only to make water, of course, but for refreshment and sleep, and it was at the inn at which we stopped for the night, where I sat picking at my food while the men talked around me as though I were invisible, that I learned that Harry's rebellion had been completely crushed. Thomas St. Leger, the king's own brother-in-law, had been beheaded at Exeter, as had several others. Henry Tudor, delayed in the Channel by bad weather, had dropped anchor near Dorset a day or so after Harry's death. Suspicious of the effusive greetings he received from the men on shore, he had recognized them for Richard's creatures and had pushed back out to sea. No one was certain of the whereabouts of my brothers Lionel or Richard, or my nephew Dorset, or Bishop Morton, but it was thought that they were either in sanctuary or abroad.

So all was lost, and Harry had died in vain. Richard would be stronger than ever. As Hal dozed against me, I pushed away my food uneaten and huddled over my cup of ale. In the dim light, no one saw the tears that dropped into it.

That night in our chamber, I lay down with Hal until I saw that he was sound asleep. Then I drew a cloak around me and cracked the door, guarded by two of Sir Christopher and Sir Richard's men. "Please let me see Sir Christopher."

My escorts stared at me in horror as I was led into their chamber. Fortunately, both were still dressed.

"I am not here to try to seduce either of you," I said wearily. "Trust me, it is the furthest thing from my mind. Sir Christopher, you saw my husband in his last hours. All I want is to know about them—and with Hal by my side I cannot ask at any other time. Do me that one kindness, and I will ask for nothing more."

Sir Christopher coughed. "My lady, it is a delicate—"

"My father, two of my brothers, and my nephew Richard all lost their heads as well as Harry. It is a subject I am as familiar with as anyone in England, I daresay. Do you think I will faint, or scream, if I hear about another such death? I will not, I give my word. I only want to know. It is unbearable not to. Why, no one has even told me where his body lies."

"Very well." Sir Christopher pointed me to the room's stool and began his tale as Sir Richard disappeared into the confines of the room's large bed. From time to time as Sir Christopher spoke, I saw garments being thrown out from behind the bed curtains. "The duke sought shelter with a Ralph Bannaster, who turned him in out of fear or for the money—I don't know which. Bannaster brought the sheriff and his men there while the duke was sleeping. He put up a fight when they took him, they say, but by the time we got him at Salisbury, he wasn't any trouble at all. He seemed resigned to his fate, and didn't say much of anything. Unlike some parties I can think of, we made good time traveling with him." Sir Christopher paused so that I could reflect on my husband's better example as a captive. "On the day after All Hallow's Eve we brought him to the Blue Boar Inn at Salisbury. I didn't see him after that, but he had a quick trial and spent the rest of the time in his chamber at the inn, where they let him write his will. Very quiet he was, so his guards told us, although they say he kept begging to

see the king. The king refused, of course—no need to see the likes of him. The next morning I saw him as they led him out. He bore himself well and didn't show any fear, I will give him that. He had asked to be shriven before he died, and the king did grant him that one request, so I suppose his mind was at peace."

"Where did it take place?"

"The marketplace, on a scaffold built just for him. It was a fair-size crowd." Sir Christopher paused again, as if expecting me to be pleased about Harry's ability to attract spectators, and seeing my lack of gratification, went on. "He walked up the scaffold, then spoke for the first time. His voice didn't shake, but then, he didn't speak all that long. He asked that the king show mercy to his wife and children." Sir Christopher nodded at me in case I was so dim as to miss this reference to myself. "Then he begged forgiveness for betraying his king. I thought that was only proper."

"He was referring to the fifth Edward. The rightful king."

Sir Christopher looked at me with the all-patient look of a man who had long ago decided that women were fools and was constantly having his opinion reconfirmed. "Oh, no, my lady, I'm certain he was referring to our King Richard. Why, you weren't even there! Anyway, after the duke asked for forgiveness, he said that he deserved his death as a sinner. Then he laid his head on the block. He started praying and was still praying when—well, you know. It was done with one stroke, quick and clean. The head was brought to King Richard for him to see that the deed was done, and then the Grey Friars took him away, head and all, in a cart, to their abbey in Salisbury. The king gave them a little something for their trouble in burying him." He nodded at me sternly. "He could have displayed the head, you know. You can consider yourself a lucky woman that he did not."

"I could not possibly be luckier," I agreed. I felt a twinge of guilt for my sarcasm, but it had apparently gone over Sir Christopher's head. I rose to my feet slowly. I was only twenty-five, but I felt twenty years older than that. "Thank you for humoring me, Sir Christopher."

“Not so quickly, my lady. I have humored you. Perhaps you can humor me. You must know that I have been looking for your eldest son, at the king’s order. Where is he?”

“I do not know,” I said truthfully. “And I shall anticipate you by saying that if I did, I would not tell you.”

Sir Christopher shook his head. “There’s no need for secrecy. The king wants only to round up all of the duke’s family to prevent further rebellion.”

“As my son is but five, I think it is safe to say he shall not be inciting a rebellion, wherever he is.” I gathered myself to my full height, which was not at all impressive. “My children are all I have left now, Sir Christopher. I shall not put my boy in the king’s hands without knowing what he intends to do with him.”

“Very well.” He whistled and the guards came to lead me back to my chamber. “We’ll be leaving at dawn tomorrow. Have yourself and your other boy ready by then.”

“Sir Christopher?”

“Yes, wo—your grace?”

“If you will let Hal and I ride on horseback, I daresay our journey to London will be much quicker than in that dreadful litter.”

“Amen to that,” said Sir Richard’s voice behind the bed curtains.

Back in my chamber, I heard the sounds of muffled sobs. I hastened to the bed and held Hal as he cried on my shoulder. “Mama. I thought you had gone away too like Papa.”

“I had a headache and needed some fresh air, that is all. I am sorry to have frightened you. Come. Lie back down and we’ll go to sleep together.”

“I want Papa.”

When King Richard took my husband’s head, had he thought of the four-year-old boy who would be weeping into his pillow? But of course he had not. No one ever thought of such things. I stroked Hal’s hair, so like his father’s, and held him tighter. “I know you do. I want him too. But it cannot be. You know what I told you. He fell very, very ill while he was traveling and is with God now, helping to watch over us.”

“I want Brecon. I want Edward and the girls.”

So did I. “I know, but they must stay where they are for now, and we must go to London. It is a very interesting place.” I decided not to bring up the fact that we were prisoners of the crown now. Enough was enough for one night. “Why, your brother and sisters have never seen it. You will be the very first.” I kissed Hal on the forehead. “You must get to sleep now. We will be up early tomorrow.”

To my surprise, he nodded and lay quietly against me. Soon he was asleep. It was I who spent a sleepless night, wondering what life could possibly hold for us now.

To my gratification, Sir Christopher and Sir Richard allowed Hal and me to ride on horseback the next day, albeit not on our own horse, but each of us on a pillion behind a squire. With that, we made better time, aided by the weather, which could not have been better for our journey to the king. We did not get even a drop of rain. Thinking of the weather that had shut us in at Weobley, I was beginning to have a very dim opinion of the Lord’s sense of humor.

Several nights and several inns later, we were at Westminster. I was stiff and chilled when I was helped off my horse, but it was not for that reason that I could barely walk. Sir Christopher said gruffly, “Courage, Duchess. You’ve shown it so far. The king won’t harm a lady. Why, the Countess of Richmond was involved in the scheme as deep as the devil himself, and she’s suffered naught but being given into the custody of her own husband.”

“Poor man,” muttered Sir Richard.

I was briskly steered to the king’s presence chamber, at a pace so sharp that I was unable to take much notice of my surroundings other than to notice a general prevalence of white boars, snorting and pawing on every surface imaginable. There were other supplicants waiting to see the king or, failing that, one of his officials, but Sir Richard and Sir Christopher went to the guards and said a quick word. In just a moment, I was in the presence of the man I hated more than any being on earth, before and since. Pushing Hal down with me, I sank to the floor in an obeisance.

The king looked at me. With my eyes cast to the floor, I could not see his gaze, but I felt its hostility. Whatever contempt he had had for me earlier, when I was merely an upstart Woodville, must have paled for what he felt for me now, not only a Woodville but the wife of his betrayer as well.

Beside me, little Hal sneaked his head up to stare in awe at the king—the first one he'd seen, I realized. Somehow it had not occurred to me on our journey that I should have given him some pointers in royal etiquette, and I could only hope that nothing would inspire my son, who since Harry's death had shown a tendency to turn chatty around men near his father's age, to tell the king about his and Harry's pissing contests. Hal had finally managed to lure Sir Christopher into one, I had observed on one occasion before hastily averting my eyes. (Lack of endowment, I had discovered, was not the explanation for Sir Christopher's occasionally sour temper.)

"Is that the king?" Hal whispered.

"Yes," I hissed, grateful that Hal had not picked up on any of the less flattering appellations I had for our sovereign. "Hush."

"Leave us," Richard said to Sir Richard and Sir Christopher. "Take the boy away too."

"Take him away? Where?" Forgetting myself and looking at the king, I clutched at Hal.

I saw then in the king's face the very faintest hint of shame for what he had done to those two other children. In a matter of seconds, however, the king had resumed his impassive gaze. "They may take the boy to get some refreshment," he said icily. "He will be brought back to you when we are done."

"Oh." I relaxed my grip on my son's arm. "Mind your manners," I hissed as Sir Richard and Sir Christopher led Hal away.

"Rise."

I obeyed, trembling.

"Lady Buckingham, you are the widow of the most untrue creature living."

"Harry loved you, your grace. It broke his heart to rebel against your grace."

"His broken heart is nothing to us. He is lucky we did not choose to rip it out of him while it was still beating. Were it not for his being our

close kinsman, we would have done so. Enough about him, though. He shall rot in a hell of his own making, we hope. Have you anything to say for yourself?"

"I heartily beg your forgiveness," I said, deciding that this was the only safe reply. I considered kneeling again for good measure but decided against it.

"You were privy to your husband's schemes?" I hesitated. "Lying will boot you nothing."

"Yes, your grace."

"You encouraged them?"

"Yes, your grace."

"You aided them?"

"Yes, your grace."

The king scowled. "We do not kill women," he informed me. "Otherwise..."

Just children and innocent men, I thought. Involuntarily, I gave my neck a pat for reassurance. I thought of inserting another plea for forgiveness but decided to keep silent until I was addressed again.

"We cannot have you at large at this time," Richard said finally. "Your husband showed himself as untrustworthy as a man can be, and we have no reason to think you better. So what shall we do with you?"

"I thought I could stay with one of my sisters," I ventured. "Anne, Margaret, and Joan still live."

Evidently, however, the king's question had been purely rhetorical. "So you can send messages and plot with your brothers? You'll go where we say." I looked as meek as possible. "You and your son will be lodged at the Abbey of the Minoresses for now, and must remain inside its walls. Behave yourself, and you will be allowed to go where you will in due course. Don't behave yourself, and you will find yourself in the Tower instead."

At least, I reflected as Hal and I were placed onto the barge that would take us to the Minories, as it was called, I knew now where I stood with the king.

Our chambers at the Minories, located conveniently near the Tower so that I could all the better contemplate the price of not behaving myself, were by no means uncomfortable. The convent had been patronized by generations of great ladies, some of whom liked to travel between their lodgings here and their great estates in the countryside, and our rooms had all of the luxuries I was used to, with the added benefit of not having Sir Christopher and Sir Richard snoring in the next room. The king had made a small allowance for our board, and my sisters Anne, Margaret, and Joan, having learned of my whereabouts, soon sent me gifts and money. Were it not for the absence of my girls and Edward, I could have settled into a sort of resigned numbness.

As it was, however, I passed the December days by praying for Harry's soul, by answering Hal's questions about our present state, which came at a rate of about twenty per hour, by doing needlework, and by sending petitions to the queen begging to be allowed to see her. Queens were supposed to intercede with their husbands for their subjects, and if my sister was any indication, they enjoyed doing this. I decided that it was time Queen Anne got some more practice at it.

In seeking a royal audience, I proved more successful than had Harry, for after a week or so of pleading, I was brought to the queen in her suite at the royal apartments at the Tower. After she bade me rise, she studied me. "You look very thin, my lady. I do hope you and your son are getting all you need to eat at the Minories?"

"Yes, your grace." I decided not to waste the queen's time and to make my request straightaway, especially since the queen had allowed me such a good opening. "My meals are ample, as is the king's allowance, but I am not eating well, your grace, because I am anxious. My young daughters, as your grace might know, are at Tretower in the care of the Vaughan family."

"I do know that. I have made a point of inquiring after them, and have been assured that they want for nothing and are in good health."

"That might be, your grace, but I fear for them, irrational as that might be, and I miss them deeply."

“The king tells me you have actively secreted your elder son from him.”

“I carried out my husband’s wishes, your grace. He was a wanted man, and he was terrified that our son might fall into the hands of men less generous and merciful than his grace the king.” (Even today, I congratulate myself on that turn of phrase.) I dropped to my knees. “Your grace, in the name of the Virgin Mother, might I humbly ask that you be my advocate with the king in this matter? My petition is that all of my children be reunited and be returned to my custody, without punishment for those who have sheltered Edward.” My voice began to shake. “Please, your grace, as a mother, you must understand. My heart bleeds for them every day. I have already lost my little Humphrey and—and after Harry died I lost the child that I carried in my womb. Without the four remaining to me I have nothing I wish to live for. *Nothing*.”

I had rehearsed the first half of my speech, but not the latter; it came straight from the heart. I began sobbing violently.

Women seeing other women crying are either moved or hardened, I have found; there is seldom any in between. Fortunately for me, Queen Anne was of the former type. She stooped and put her arm around my shoulder as I bawled. “I know well what it is to be the child of a rebel, and I know well how it is to miss a child,” she said when I finally quieted. “I shall put your petition to the king. As he is a loving father, I believe he will look upon it with favor.”

“Thank you, your grace.”

“Sit and have some refreshment and compose yourself, Lady Buckingham, before you return to your lodgings.”

I obeyed and asked the queen about the Prince of Wales, a subject, I soon found, on which she was inexhaustible. He was not in London with his parents, I knew, but at Middleham in the North. As the queen chattered on about her son’s intelligence, precociousness, and charm, I wondered whether he had remained at Middleham for reasons of state, as had been the case with the fourth Edward’s heir being sent to

Ludlow, or whether his health kept him from traveling long distances, but it was not a question I could presume to ask. As if sensing it, Anne said, “I do wish my Ned could be with us this Christmastide; he loves the festivities. But his father does not believe he should hazard the journey to London, for he is a bit delicate. Next year, we trust, will be different. He only needs to get through this growing spell he is having, I think.”

“I pray for his robust health,” I said. To give myself due credit, I did wish the best for the little boy.

Anne rose, and I knew she would shortly be dismissing me. I was sorry to have our encounter come to an end, for the other ladies at the Minories kept a distance from me because of my husband’s treason, and I had not many opportunities for conversation these days. Impulsively, I asked, “Your grace, do you ever wonder what would have happened if you had married my husband?”

The queen looked shocked. “Whatever do you mean?”

“I was told as a child that your grace’s father would have liked to marry your grace or the Duchess of Clarence to my husband, had not my sister arranged for him to marry me.” I smiled ruefully. “It would have all turned out quite differently had your grace done so, would it not have?”

“Differently indeed,” said Queen Anne. Her voice turned brisk. “I will lend you a Book of Hours, my lady. That will help you keep your thoughts better occupied.”



A few days later, I had my reply: the king, remembering that it was the season of the birth of our Lord and a time in which Christians should show clemency to their fellow Christians, had granted the queen’s request. Messages, at the king’s expense, were sent to Tretower and to Kinnersley, Sir Richard de la Bere’s residence. Early in January, Edward and the girls, escorted by Sir Richard himself, stood before me.

I burst out weeping for joy and tried to embrace them all at once. When

I had finally hugged them all to my temporary satisfaction, I turned to take a second look at all of them. “Edward? Good Lord, you did dress him as a girl!”

Sir Richard grinned. “Aye, we wondered when you’d notice.” Edward’s eyebrows had been plucked to thin lines and his forehead shaven bare. The hair had just begun to grow back. “When the king’s men came looking for the boy—which happened almost as soon we left Weobley—we decided the only way to keep him safe was to disguise him as a lass. My daughters’ governess—who is to be my wife—made him into the perfect little gentlewoman. She dressed him in my older girl’s clothes and shaved his forehead and plucked his eyebrows—my, what a howling there was that day! I don’t know how you ladies bear it. His own father, God rest his soul, wouldn’t have recognized him. But the boy was brave and played his part well, even when the king’s men were within a foot or two of him. He bore his womanhood like a man, you might say.” Richard smiled and tousled Edward’s hair. Then he glanced around. “My lady, might I see you alone?”

I nodded and led him to an adjoining chamber. Sir Richard said in a low tone, “My lady, I have taken the liberty of telling the children of their father’s death, though not of its cause. When I fetched the young ladies from Tretower, you see, I learned that they were expecting his return any day. Lady Elizabeth was praying for it as much as an hour on end. It broke my heart to see that.”

I looked though the door at Elizabeth, who stood to herself clutching her doll, and my own heart broke, too. Sir Richard continued, “I did it as gently as I could, and I told them only that he had fallen ill and died suddenly. All three cried a great deal at the time, but I think the eldest lass took it harder than the rest. Pray forgive me, my lady, if I presumed.”

“There is nothing to forgive. I am grateful for all of the kindness you have shown.” What if Harry had taken refuge with this loyal man at Kinnersley, I wondered, instead of going to that scoundrel’s at Wem?

Perhaps he would still be alive. Disguised or exiled, but still alive. I pushed the thought from my mind. "How could the Vaughans be so cruel, to let them hope like that?"

"I don't know whether it was cruelty or whether they didn't want to break the news to them. Guilt, perhaps, as your husband had favored the Vaughans and they repaid him so treacherously. They didn't treat the young ladies ill, from what I could tell—they brought them away before they laid the insides of Brecon waste, and the Vaughan women seemed kindly enough disposed to them. But just in taking them, the whoresons did frighten the little lasses. Lady Elizabeth has nightmares about being snatched out of Brecon, her attendants tell me."

I wiped at my eye as a series of thumps and footsteps announced the arrival of more people and goods into our rooms. The king had allowed several servants to accompany the children, but there was an unexpected face among them that made me blink. "The Wingfield boy?"

Sir Richard followed my eye. "Another liberty of mine, your grace. The lad begged to be allowed to join you when he heard you were here. I found it hard to say no, as his older brother may be attainted for supporting your husband and the rest of the brood may suffer as well, but I can take him back with me if you wish. I know there's not much need for a page here."

"No, leave him with me." I smiled. "I am very glad to have him here. Aside from the fact that he is dear to me, he will be good company for my sons. Sir Richard, will you be attainted?"

He shook his head. "I was under suspicion for a short time, but it appears that I am forgiven and will be left alone."

"We can thank the queen for that, and I shall. What of Sir William Knyvet?"

"Being your husband's uncle by marriage, I doubt he will escape attainder. They say nearly a hundred will be attainted at Parliament. But they are lucky; that is all that will probably happen to them. Several of the king's yeomen were hung here in London."

I crossed myself in memory of the poor men. "So all was for naught."

“Don’t be so sure of that, my lady. The day after the duke—God rest his soul—died, Henry Tudor was proclaimed king at Bodmin by the men there. And many men have joined him in his exile. Men have got the idea of deposing Richard in their minds, and he may find it more difficult than he expects to get it out.”

“We shall see,” I said dubiously.



After we had arranged our lodgings to accommodate all of the newcomers, I took Edward aside and asked if he wanted to speak about his father. He shook his head vigorously and instead launched into an account of his adventures with Sir Richard de la Bere and his wife-to-be. I decided not to press the matter, knowing that he would mourn his father in his own fashion and in his own time. Besides, Sir Richard said he had wept. Perhaps he had cried his fill of tears already.

Anne was quieter than usual, but Hal’s company seemed to do her good, as her company did Hal. Soon they were bickering as of old.

Elizabeth was a different matter. She helped us rearrange our quarters but said nothing, not even to boss her younger brothers and sister. When the others went outside to explore their surroundings, she remained sitting in a window seat, staring into space. “Don’t you want to go with the others? You must have had a long and dreary ride here, and will want to move about a little, surely. It will be growing dark soon.”

“N-No.”

This stutter was new also. Even when Elizabeth was just a toddler, her speech had been remarkably clear. “Well, good. There is something I want to give you in private.”

Elizabeth gasped as I took an object from a coffer and handed it to her. “P-papa’s garter?”

“Yes. Before he left, he gave it to me and told me that you should have it if he could not come back.”

“But w-won’t Edward want it?”

“Edward is a boy. He will have his own garter when he becomes a man,” I said firmly, though the possibility of this seemed slim to nil. “Your papa wanted his most special lady in the world to have this, and you were his most special lady. Anne, too,” I added hastily. “But she could not take care of this properly as you will.”

Elizabeth lovingly stroked the garter as I held her close to me. “Mama? The V-Vaughans said that Papa was a traitor. That is a b-bad man, is it not?”

I mentally heaped yet another curse upon the Vaughans. “Your papa was not a bad man. You must never believe that. He thought he was doing the right thing for England, and I believe that he was.” I ran my hand through my daughter’s curls. “But we must not say that here, or we will not get to leave. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Mama.” Elizabeth was quiet for a long time. Then she said, “I m-miss him, Mama.”

“I know you do, sweetheart. I miss him, too.” I paused before saying, “And I know what it is like to lose a father, for when I was not so much older than you, my own papa died, and so did my dear brother John.”

Elizabeth looked startled, as do all children when realizing that their parents were once young. “Were you sad? D-did you cry?”

“Yes. All the time. But a very wise man, the old King Edward, told me something I shall never forget. He told me to remember them at their best, and to keep that picture in my mind, and that it would ease me. And it did. It still does today. Oh, you mustn’t think that it will cure your grief. It won’t. Only time does. But it will make it easier to bear.”

I fell silent, realizing that I needed to take my own advice. I’d eaten little lately and spent much of the time when Hal was asleep brooding about Harry and nursing my hatred for Gloucester. But now that my children were here, we could heal together, I hoped.

That night, my girls and I shared a bed, while everyone else doubled or tripled up as well. I watched as Elizabeth settled Harry’s garter carefully under her pillow and said a prayer. She frowned as Anne, lying between us, squirmed. “It’s too c-crowded in here,” Elizabeth said.

I smiled to hear the sweet sound of my daughter grumbling again. It was true, what had been spacious accommodations had suddenly turned quite cramped, but I shook my head. “To me it can never seem so,” I said. “Not now that we are finally together again.”

March 1484 to August 1485

ON THE FIRST DAY OF MARCH, WILLIAM CATESBY, ONE OF THE KING'S chief councilors, paid a visit to me. I greeted him less than warmly, for he had been the speaker at the Parliament that had just met. There, word had reached me, my sister's marriage to the king had been declared void on the grounds that the king had been precontracted to Eleanor Butler, that the marriage had been made without the consent or knowledge of the lords of the land, that it had been conducted in a private and profane place without banns, and—the accusation that I sincerely hoped would follow Richard to the gates of hell—that it had been procured by witchcraft and sorcery on the part of my mother and my sister.

“I come here with an offer for you from the king,” Catesby informed me after I shoed all of the children outside to play. “Today, your sister Lady Grey agreed to leave sanctuary, along with her daughters.” I blinked before remembering that “Lady Grey” was the new official title for Bessie, who could no longer be called queen thanks to Richard. “The king has provided a pension for her and has promised to provide for each of her daughters, and he has also pledged to marry the girls to gentleman born and to give them each a portion.”

“Why would they need portions if my sister can work her magic to find them husbands, Master Catesby?”

Catesby scowled at me. “They shall be living under the supervision of John Nesfield, one of the king's squires of the body, at Hertford Castle, where he is constable. The king is proposing to allow you and your

children to join them there. You will be allowed a generous pension of two hundred marks a year, at the king's pleasure"—Catesby gave an emphasis to the last phrase—"from the issues of your husband's former property of Tonbridge."

"That hardly seems generous to me, Master Catesby, as I was given to understand some time ago that my jointure would be a thousand marks. Harry made a will, did he not?"

"He did, but he died a traitor. The king has nonetheless arranged to have his debts paid out of the revenues of some of his lands. I am among those who have custody of them for that purpose."

I wondered if Harry's creditors would ever see any of their debts paid. "I do know a little of the law, Master Catesby. Even though Harry was attainted, I am entitled to jointure, am I not?"

"You'll get what the king allows you to get, my lady, which is the two hundred marks he is offering you."

"With all due respect, Master Catesby, I don't see how this is an offer. I may live at Hertford Castle under the eye of one of the king's creatures, with a modest sum to live upon, one that is much less than my jointure, or I may rot as a virtual prisoner here. An offer implies some bargaining power on my part; I have none."

"You have a lawyer's mind, my lady."

"No. I am not devious enough."

Catesby flushed, and I wondered if I had been unnecessarily rude. "Whatever you think of me, or my profession, or of the king, I'd take his offer, as I choose to call it. As I said, he's promised to provide marriage portions for the old king's daughters, and as your girls are his kinswomen, he might someday do the same for them, provided that you've stayed out of trouble. And he might eventually be willing to grant your eldest boy some of his father's forfeited land, and help establish the younger boy in a profession. Perhaps even the law." Catesby smiled archly at me. "One never knows."

"True."

“There might even be the possibility of a second husband for you, my lady. No more dukes, I daresay, but you’re still young, and would be quite pretty with some more meat on your bones. The king might put a knight in your way, or even a lord.”

“We can leave my bones out of this conversation, Master Catesby, if you please, and a marriage to a man of that creature’s choosing does not enthrall me nearly as much as you might think. But I will accept this offer, as you call it, for my children’s sake.”

“Good. Though I normally approve of plain speaking, as you know, I would suggest that as part of your good behavior, you refer to the king as ‘his grace’ or even simply ‘the king’ instead of ‘that creature,’ by the way.”

“Point taken, Master Catesby.”

“And who knows? Perhaps if the right man comes along, the king might even allow you your jointure.” He shrugged. “Or part of it, anyway.”



Bessie and her five girls were already settled into Hertford Castle when I and my brood joined them. My sister and I had not seen each other for many months, and we had a long, tearful reunion while our nine children got acquainted with each other. Finally, Bessie stood back. Taking her prerogative as the ex-queen and as my elder sister, she said, “Kate, you look horrid.”

I shrugged. Catesby had been right about me needing more meat on my bones. But Bessie looked far worse than I; the last year had aged her a decade. Seeing that Nesfield was occupied with directing my servants and belongings to the suite of rooms that had been set aside for us, I took her hand. “Bessie—the boys...”

She said quietly, “I have come to terms with it. There is nothing more to be done. I tell myself that God must have had some reason to take those innocent children.”

“Bessie, please believe me. Harry did not know what Richard’s intentions were. I have heard him weeping himself to sleep, from regret for what Richard did. He was guilty of much, but not that.”

"I know, Kate. And he has paid dearly for what he did do. I have forgiven him." She sighed as I watched my eight-year-old Elizabeth gazing worshipfully at my sister's eighteen-year-old Bess. "I still wake at night, though, thinking it has all been a terrible dream. Who could have thought it? Ned loved Richard, trusted him, denied him nothing. He died thinking that the kingdom would be in the best possible hands until our dear son came of age. And in less than twelve weeks—"

"I shall never understand it myself." I glanced around to make sure no one was within earshot. "I have heard rumors that at Christmas, Henry Tudor took a great vow at Rennes that he would marry your Bess."

My sister nodded. "I heard it too—we had a friend or two among the monks who reported such news to us. I believe that is why Richard offered us such comparatively generous terms. He is hoping to gain the hearts of the people to stave off future trouble, and being kind to us is one such way. The people were fond of Ned, and they are fond of the girls for his sake." Bessie smiled for the first time since my arrival. "I will tell you, though, whatever his motives, I was happy to accept his offer, for the girls—especially Bess and Cecily—were miserable in sanctuary. The king has sent them material for new dresses, and they are ecstatic. The queen has even offered to have them stay with her when they return from their travels." The court was headed north again.

"They wish to go? But surely they know about the boys?"

"They do. But they are young and eager to have some pleasure again; they have convinced themselves that some underling overstepped his authority and that Richard told your husband that he was responsible because he was ashamed to admit that he had so badly lost control over the situation. Their story gets more elaborate and their uncle saintlier each day." Bessie shook her head. "I cannot blame them at their age for wanting to think what they want to think, and for wanting to be where they can meet eligible men. After all, you and I were married and mothers at Bess's age."

"You don't fear for them in Richard's court?"

"No. They are girls, which is their best protection. It would be suicidal

for Richard to harm them. Besides, he took a public oath that they will be in surety of their lives and that he will not imprison them in the Tower or any other prison. And the queen is kind—”

A loud quarrel had erupted between Bess and fifteen-year-old Cecily, who moments before had been chatting with every semblance of amicability. My sister laughed. “Wait until your girls reach their age, Kate! No, if they come to stay at Richard’s court, I think it is Richard who may be getting more than what he bargained for.”



The next few weeks at Hertford were pleasant ones, so much so that at times it was easy to forget that we were living under supervision and that our futures depended on the whim of the king. Though our correspondence—mostly to and from our sisters—had to be read by Nesfield, and we were accompanied by his men whenever we ventured off the castle grounds, our freedom was not otherwise restricted. My boys took up fishing in the River Lea, and Nesfield allowed them the use of a horse. The girls and I planted a little flower garden together. My sister and I taught our younger children their letters and worked on everyone’s French conversation, and the castle chaplain proved willing enough to instruct the boys in Latin. My Elizabeth slowly lost her stutter, and in the Hertfordshire air all of us women began to bloom and fill out again.

We had all gone for a long walk one sunny April day when we returned to find a grim-faced Nesfield waiting for us. “The Prince of Wales has died at Middleham, following a short illness. The king and queen are said to be half mad with grief.”

I am not a woman to rejoice in the death of an eight-year-old boy. Neither was my sister. We crossed ourselves and even shed some tears for the sake of the poor child and his bereaved mother. But as we filed silently into our chambers and made ourselves seemly to attend chapel to pray for the lad’s soul, I knew that my sister was thinking the same thing I was. Richard had killed to take the throne.

Now, at last, the Lord had exacted a price.



In November, the bereft king and queen settled at Westminster, and it was then that the long-awaited invitation for Bess and Cecily arrived at Hertford. They left in the midst of a fine quarrel, this one over whom Uncle Richard would find a husband for first. “I am the oldest,” said Bess, tossing her head. “Why would our uncle arrange your marriage before mine?”

“He might if he finds someone closer to my age than to yours first.”

“Yours can wait.”

Cecily narrowed her eyes, which I had learned was a sign of danger. “True,” she said sweetly. “After all, you’re almost nineteen. You’ll be leading apes into hell if you don’t get married soon. Maybe our uncle—”

Bess found a stray strand of Cecily’s hair and yanked it as hard as she could before my sister leapt into the fray. Dealing them each a smart slap on the cheek, she said, “If the two of you act like hoydens and speak like fishwives, neither of you will find a husband, not through your uncle or through anyone else!” She shook her head. “I’ve a mind to tell the king that you are unfit to be at court.”

“No, Mama, please!”

“We will be good!”

“Very well,” said Bessie. She shook her head as the girls departed at last, amicable at least until they moved out of earshot. “I do think court is the best place for them,” she said gloomily. “Here with no society but each other and the garrison they have lost all of their manners and graces of which their father was so proud. As I fear we all shall.”

I glanced down at my skirts, muddy from my riding with the boys, and could not muster an argument.



Bess and I heard sad news just a couple of weeks later: our brother Lionel died at Beaulieu Abbey, where he had been in sanctuary since Harry’s rebellion. We had but two brothers left now: Richard, in sanctuary himself,

and Edward, living in exile with Henry Tudor. I often wondered if I would ever see them again.

Then, in December, we heard news of our brother Edward from an unexpected source: the king. Through a proclamation in which Edward, the Bishop of Exeter, my nephew Dorset, and Jasper Tudor were denounced as rebels and traitors, I learned that the exiles had moved with Henry Tudor into France, where they had been taken under the protection of the government. Somehow even the long-imprisoned Earl of Oxford had ended up a free man and had joined what seemed to be a rival court to Richard's.

I pondered the subject of the proclamation as I lay in bed one night in mid-December. Barely over a year ago, Richard had crushed his opposition and taken my husband's head. Now he was plainly expecting another invasion—and this one backed by the might of England's greatest enemy.

That summer, William Collingbourne had pinned a rhyme on the door of St. Paul's:

The Cat, the Rat and Lovell our Dog
Rule all England under a Hog.

The rhyme referred to Richard Ratcliffe, who'd supervised Anthony's execution, and to Catesby and Francis Lovell. Richard had not found it amusing. Still less amusing had he found the fact that Collingbourne had been attempting to send a message to Henry Tudor to invade England on October 18, a date that too neatly coincided with the rebellion of the year before. Poor Collingbourne—who had once served Richard's own mother—had been hung, drawn, and quartered on Tower Hill just a couple of days earlier this December. The crowd had not jeered but stood silent, mourning, as Collingbourne managed his last words, "Oh, Lord Jesus, yet more trouble," in the instant that his entrails were ripped from his belly. I shuddered to think of the death of that brave man.

And yet men kept on plotting against Richard, inside and outside of England. There was hope yet that this king might fall.

I smiled. “Yet more trouble indeed, Gloucester,” I whispered. Then I turned over and fell into a sweet sleep.



A week from Christmastide, an invitation arrived from the king for Bessie and me to join the festivities at court. Lest we be tempted to plead the time-honored woman’s excuse of having nothing to wear, it was accompanied by bolts of fine fabric from the queen, in subdued but attractive colors appropriate for us in our widowhood.

I must admit that I did not even consider refusing, even if such a refusal would not have been wildly impolitic in my position as a royal pensioner. Though I said a treasonous little prayer each night that Henry Tudor—or anyone—would overthrow Richard, I was not entirely sure on which side the Lord’s sympathies lay. Therefore, if ingratiating myself with Richard meant that someday Edward would be restored to his father’s title and lands, that Hal would find a wealthy bride, and that my girls would make good marriages, I was willing to plaster on a smile for the king, and this was a good opportunity to do it. In addition to that, I was curious to see his court.

Richard was not impolite to Bessie and me at these festivities. Indeed he rather suavely complimented each of us, as well as our other sisters, who had also been invited. As far as we were concerned, and probably the king too, the gallantries couldn’t have been over fast enough.

Bessie and I, a former queen and a disgraced duchess, were not the only curiosities at court. After my nephew Dorset had fled from sanctuary, Elizabeth Shore, accused of aiding him and concealing his goods, had been locked up in Ludgate prison, where, everyone had assumed, she would end her days. Instead, she had had the extraordinary luck of attracting Thomas Lymon, the king’s solicitor, who instead of merely dallying with her in her cell had proposed marriage to her. The king after some grumbling had, in his new mode of benevolence, granted permission for the couple to marry. A beaming Lymon had brought his new bride to the festivities, where she

sat demurely with the wives of other officials, looking as staid and as prim as if she'd never been a king's mistress.

There was only one lady who shone at the Christmas court, however, and that was my niece Bess. Now that she was out of the everyday clothing she had worn with us at Hertford, I realized for the first time that she was a beautiful girl. Like Queen Anne, she was tall and fair complexioned, but the resemblance ended there, for the queen, despite her bright smile, showed every sign of her recent bereavement, whereas Bess was flitting around the court as if she did not have a care in the world. It was more than that, though, I realized as I studied the two of them together. The queen, always pale, looked downright wan, as if she were not only grieving but ailing.

"They say that if the queen dies, the king will marry Bess in a trice," my sister Margaret, Lady Maltravers, said to me in a low voice as we sat in my chamber together that night. Margaret's husband, Thomas Fitzalan, the son of the elderly Earl of Arundel, was on good, though not intimate, terms with the king, and because of that I was allowed to talk freely with my sister. Fortunately Lord Maltravers did not stint in his duty of bringing his wife gossip from court.

"Marry her? But she's his niece! And he declared her a bastard!"

"They are saying that a dispensation might be got for enough gold. And what's her bastardy to him when she can give him a son? The poor queen's quite beyond that, it seems. Even in her prime she brought only one babe into being, and that was years ago. And you saw her tonight. She's not long for this world. Anyone with eyes can see that."

I crossed myself. "The king might need a son, but there are surely other women who could do that just as well."

"True, but what better way to make peace with those who loved the old king than by marrying his daughter? And it would foil Henry Tudor's hopes, too. Not to mention satisfying the king's lusts. He can't take his eyes off the girl. For all he rails against his enemies as adulterers in those proclamations of his, he's got a prick of his own, and it's given him two bastards already."

“What do his advisers say?”

“Tom says they are appalled. They don’t think the people would stand for it, especially the northerners, who would consider it an affront to the queen’s memory. But what can the king’s advisers say, with the queen still alive? They can only hope that if he becomes a widow, Richard will act like a man of sense and look abroad for a wife.”

“Poor Bess. And poor Anne.” I snorted. “And poor Richard, if this marriage goes through. How will he live down the shame of having a Woodville for a mother-in-law? Not to mention a passel of Woodville aunts.” I made my voice even lower. We were alone, but one never knew at Richard’s court. “Has there been news of Edward?”

Margaret shook her head. “No, but they say the king is desperate to win men back to him. I suppose you have heard about the Earl of Oxford.”

“Something of him. Didn’t he escape from Hammes Castle?”

“Not escaped. The constable, Thomas Blount, turned against Richard. Abandoned his post and took Oxford and the garrison with him straight to Henry Tudor. That was a sore blow to the king, they say, for Oxford has known battle and is still popular in Essex. Anyway, Tom says that the king has asked him to make overtures to our brother Richard, to see if he will pledge good behavior in exchange for a pardon, and I believe he is going to ask Bessie to invite her own Tom to come home.”

“What could possibly induce Bessie to agree to that?” I asked.

“Love,” said Margaret flatly, and I realized how stupid my question had been. She sighed. “Remember, he is the only son she has left now.”



The next evening, Anne and Bess appeared in matching robes. It was a common enough honor—I had had such garments made for myself and my own ladies to wear at festivities—but Anne and Bess wore masks, so that it was hard to tell them apart except when they stood together. Then the differences in their appearance became cruelly apparent, for Anne was thin where Bess was nicely rounded, and Bess’s cheeks bloomed where Anne’s were deathly pale.

Richard, however, appeared to be completely baffled about which woman was queen and which was bastard niece. Challenged by his fool after a round of dancing with both ladies to kiss his consort, he spent a long time looking at one, then the other, until the fool finally suggested that the court help him by yelling out each lady's name. Yet though far more people yelled that the lady on his left was his queen, he kissed the lady on the right first. Only when both ladies swept off their masks did he realize his mistake and bestow his kiss on his left.

Nearby me, John Russell, Bishop of Lincoln, shook his head. "Frivolous! Shameful!" he muttered under his breath. "The queen ailing, and the prince dead just eight months before!"

Shameful? It struck me more as sad, for the gaiety of this court had something very forced about it. Except for Bess and Cecily and some other young people, everyone here would have rather been somewhere else—Bessie and I with our children at Hertford Castle; the courtiers in the privacy of their own homes, where they did not have to watch every word they said; the queen in the comfort of her chamber, where she could mourn her young son and not have to pretend she enjoyed cavorting next to a girl of eighteen; probably even the king among his loyal subjects in the North, where no one whispered behind his back or prayed nightly for his destruction. Even the fool had the appearance of a man whose mind and heart were elsewhere.

If I hadn't hated Richard so, I could almost have felt sorry for him.



The next morning, the day before we were to depart for Hertford, Bessie and I were summoned to the queen. Anne looked tired from her exertions of the evening before, and her eyes had an unnatural glitter that reminded me uncomfortably of Harry's younger brother in the last months of his life. Yet she was not giving in to her illness meekly: she had been dressed with great care and looked every inch a queen.

"I have called you here at the king's request to discuss a delicate matter," Anne said after we had given our condolences for the loss of her son and

she had asked us about the welfare of our own children. "Perhaps you have heard something of it already. The king wishes your brother Richard to accept his pardon, and he wishes the Marquess of Dorset to abandon Henry Tudor's cause and to return to England. If the marquess does so, the king will publicly extend his hand in friendship to him and allow him to return to his wife and children. The king hopes that you will encourage your brother and the marquess to accept these kind offers."

Bessie hesitated. "Your grace, I must speak frankly in order to discuss this matter. May I?" The queen nodded. "His grace has treated my daughters well and honorably, as promised. I am grateful, and I know Bess and Cecily are happy here. But my son the Marquess of Dorset is a different matter. He is a man grown, and he has conspired against the king. Worse, my son Richard Grey died at the king's orders for a crime that he never committed, whatever the king might have believed at the time or might believe now. As for my other boys—" My sister paused, then plunged ahead. "I make no accusations, but your grace must know what is said, and no one has given me any reason to believe that what I have heard is false. Can I trust his grace to allow my son Tom his freedom if he returns? Can I trust his grace with my son's life?"

"I will do you the honor of speaking frankly too, my lady. My husband—" Anne began coughing. "What a nuisance," she said brightly when she ceased, pressing a handkerchief to her mouth. I thought I detected a spot of red on it when she brought it down again. "My husband has done much good," she resumed. "It was his intent when he became king to see that the laws were administered more fairly, and he has done much toward that in the short time he has been king. He has taken steps to make juries less corrupt, and he has made it easier for men to get bail. He has even set up a means by which poor men can get legal redress. And that is not all that he has done. He has set up a Council of the North, which is much needed now that he is no longer resident there. He has abolished benevolences and protected English merchants."

"I do wish Edward had given more thought to such matters," Bessie admitted. "But—"

Anne raised a hand to cut off my sister's speech. "But despite the good my husband has done, and that he intends to do in the future, the Lord is displeased." The queen looked directly into Bessie's eyes. "I need not tell you, of all people, why. He has shown his displeasure by taking our only son. The king has felt this blow deeply. So have I." The queen's face shadowed, but she went on calmly, "He will not risk the wrath of God further by pledging to pardon your only son and then betraying his promise. That is provided, of course, that your son solemnly swears off Henry Tudor's cause and pledges to be his faithful subject, and that he keeps his own word."

"I will give the matter serious consideration, your grace, and will have my answer for the king shortly."

"Good." Anne rose to dismiss us, only to have another long fit of coughing. "Do think hard upon what I have asked you to do," she said quietly after catching her breath. "The king does mean well. The dead cannot be brought to life, not on this earth, but justice can be done for the living. Let my husband do the good he intends for our country—and for your own family. He needs to do it. It may save his soul."



"I have agreed to write to Tom," Bessie said to me later that evening.

"I trust the queen, and believe that she was sincere. But can you truly trust the king?"

"I would not have said so a year ago, but I believe I can now." She saw my look. "You are thinking of when I delivered my little Richard to him."

"Yes," I said gently.

"Believe me, I never will cease to relive that moment. If only I had refused!"

"I do not think you could have refused for long, with the might of Gloucester and the rest against you. After all, you handed him over to the Archbishop of Canterbury. What man could you have trusted more?"

"I know." My sister brushed at her eyes. "Poor old man, he meant

well, I know; he was duped, too. But Richard is not the man he was just months ago. He knows now that he cannot trifle with the lives of others and go unpunished.”

Bessie sighed and studied her wedding band. I broke her reverie by saying, “Our brother Richard?”

“I am to write to him, too. I have even been told that my letters to them need not be read by John Nesfield.” She gave me an arch look. “That will disappoint you.”

I smirked. Though Nesfield and his deputies were not unkind to us, I resented having my perfectly innocuous correspondence read and for that reason always penned my missives in a tiny, cramped handwriting that bedeviled our nearsighted custodian and that made my wrist hurt afterward. “It saves on paper,” I had explained sweetly when Nesfield complained to me. “Parchment is dear, and I am a royal pensioner of limited means.”

“And the king told me when I gave him my answer that he will soon arrange a marriage for Cecily, too,” my sister said. “He is considering young Ralph Scrope. They are of an age.”

Poor Bess, I thought, married after her younger sister just as predicted. “Did he say anything about a marriage for Bess?”

Bessie looked around her swiftly and dropped her voice. “I believe he is deliberately keeping her single for now.”

“Do you think it possible that he could marry her if, God forbid, the queen dies? Could she bear to make such a marriage?”

“She likes him, she tells me. He has been very kind to her. So has the queen, but I fear he has made more of an impression.”

I knew all too well from Harry’s case that Richard could make an impression on one’s heart, even when he didn’t try. And perhaps with Bess he was trying. My sister went on, “You saw how he has treated her during our stay here—it has been that way since the very start. Showering her with pretty clothes, dancing with her, putting her in a place of precedence. Cecily too, but not nearly so much as Bess.” Bessie shook her head.

“Indeed, she is more spoiled by him than she was at her father’s court, I fear. Because this king can look at her as a woman, and Bess is all woman. I see her eyes wandering; she needs a husband. I regret every day that the French marriage never came through.”

“What of Henry Tudor?”

“What of him? I have prayed that his cause would succeed, as I know you have also, and our prayers have not been answered thus far. Perhaps it is not meant to be.” Bessie rose and kissed me on the cheek in good-night. “I do not like the fact that King Richard sits on the throne. But I cannot ignore the possibility that he may be on it for as long as I live, and I must consider the future of those children who remain with that in mind. I cannot make them hostages to an eventuality that may never take place.”

“But I will keep praying for it.”

Bessie smiled at me. “In truth,” she admitted, “so will I.”



It was the day after the ides of March, and my daughters and I were working in our garden when I noticed the sky blackening, but not the type of blackening that meant a storm was coming on. Instead, the sun was being blotted out, bit by bit.

I stood transfixed, unsure of whether to run for my life, drop down to my knees and pray, or simply stare at this horrifying yet strangely alluring sight. Then Richard Wingfield, who had been shooting at butts with my sons nearby, hurried up beside me. “’Tis an eclipse of the sun, I think,” he said in an awe-stricken voice. “Thomas Nandyke told me of such things, your grace.”

“But what does that mean? Will the sun come back?”

“Yes. They have happened before, he said. Sit down, my lady.”

I shakily did as I was bidden, clutching the children close to me and trembling as Richard Wingfield and a few other brave souls stood around and pointed. Soon we were plunged into utter blackness. Someone screamed (I am not at all sure it was not me), but just as I was expecting

the devil himself to rise up, a chink of light appeared and slowly dilated. Soon the sun was shining down on us in Hertfordshire as brightly as if it had never left.

“We may never see one of those again, your grace,” said Richard proudly. He helped me to my feet. “Some say they are a bad omen, but I thought it a marvel.”

I stared at the sky nervously, thinking that marvelous as such a sight might be, I would be well content to have seen it just once.

Later that evening, we were sitting in the solar my sister and I shared when one of the guards came in, his face pale. “Queen Anne is dead,” he said. “She died almost at the same time the sun was blotted from the sky.”



We learned later that the queen had died of consumption, having deteriorated rapidly after the Christmas festivities. Richard, it was said, had hastened her demise by refusing to share her bed, although in all fairness to him, a king with no heir could hardly risk the contagion from her illness.

We at Hertford were not invited to the funeral, although I daresay we would have mourned as sincerely as anyone else there, for the queen had been kind to us. Instead we had to rely on the account of Bess. She wrote to us that the Duchess of Suffolk, Richard’s only sister left in England, had served as the chief mourner—it being the custom, of course, for a king not to attend his consort’s funeral—and that Bess herself had followed the queen’s hearse along with Anne’s ladies in waiting. The queen had been buried with great ceremony at Westminster Abbey.

And then came the question of what would happen to Bess. The queen’s household would soon be broken up, once her ladies and damsels and servants went back to their families or found new positions. Bess could hardly stay at court with her widowed uncle—a widowed uncle who was rumored to lust after her. Would she stay with Richard’s mother or the Duchess of Suffolk, or would she be sent back to Hertford? We had no idea, for no letter from Bess came after the one she sent about the funeral.

It was plain that something was going on in London, but what? Nesfield was annoyingly circumspect, as were all of his underlings.

I was sitting in the solar one rainy day just after Easter, pondering the question of how to get some information, when I saw my daughter Elizabeth poring over a book. And there I had my solution.



“I am requesting permission to visit William Caxton’s shop,” I said, batting my eyes at Nesfield in hopes that I still retained some feminine wiles. “My oldest daughter is a great reader of romances, and I confess, Master Nesfield, I am rather fond of them myself. And I would also like to acquire a good history for my sons,” I added primly.

“Women and their romances,” Nesfield said indulgently. “Well, I see no harm in it. But who shall escort you, and where shall you stay?”

“With your permission, I shall take Richard Wingfield with me. He is acquainted with London, and he has relations there who can put us up for an evening. We shall be gone no more than two days.”

Nesfield hesitated. I dared not bat my eyes again. There was such a thing as being too blatant, and I did not want to flirt my way into this man’s bed.

“Oh, very well,” he said after a long interval. “But to Caxton’s, and to the lodgings young Wingfield shall tell me of, and to nowhere else. Understand, my lady? I am trusting you.”

“I shall not abuse your trust. Thank you.”

Now I just had to hope that William Caxton would remember that my brother Anthony had been his first and greatest patron in England. And that when I asked him for news, he had some to give.



I proved lucky on both counts.

“Your brother was a fine man, Duchess,” William said, crossing himself in his shop at the sign of the Red Pale. He sighed. “The mirror of chivalry.” He hesitated. “At the risk of causing you pain, where does his body lie?”

“Somewhere at Pontefract Castle, I believe, with that of my nephew Richard Grey. I suppose there is no monument, and doubtless will never be.”

“I beg your pardon. I have caused you pain. But, my lady, you are wrong about there being no monument.” He picked up a copy of *The Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers* and spread it open tenderly. “This is it, along with the other books he translated for my press. They will be passed from generation to generation and live on, long after we all have turned to dust.”

I pulled the book to me and read:

Whereas it is so that, every humayn creature by the sufferance of our Lord God is born and ordeyned to be subject and thralld unto the storms of fortune, and so in divers and many sundry wayes man is perplexed with worldly adversities, of the which, I, Antoine Wydeville, Erie Ryuersj Lord Scales, &c. have largely and in many different manner, have had my parte, and of him releived by the infinite grace and goodness of our said Lord, through the means of the mediation of mercy, which grace evidently to know and understood hath compelled me to set aparte all ingratitude, and droofe me by reson and conscience as far as my wretchedness would suffice to give therefore singular lovynges and thankes, and exhorted me to dispose my recovered lyf to his service, in following his lawes and commandements, and in satisfaction and recompense of mine iniquities and fawtes before donn, to seke and execute the workes that might be most acceptable to hym...

Had Anthony recalled these words as he awaited his turn to die at Pontefract? I brushed at my eyes. “My own copy was left at Brecon Castle. I doubt I shall ever see it again.”

“But there you have the beauty of printing, my lady. You shall take one with you when you leave here today, as my gift in memory of that fine man, your brother.” I smiled my gratitude. “Now, what brings you here, my lady?” He himself smiled. “Earl Rivers once told me that you were not a great reader, so you will forgive me if I think you might have other business with me.”

"You are quite right, Master Caxton. I do wish to purchase some books—my children, you will be pleased to hear, are more appreciative of the written word than I—but I also want some information. What are they saying of my niece Elizabeth?"

"Why, you've not heard?" I shook my head, and Caxton said, "They do isolate you, don't they? It is notorious in the city, my lady. Well, then, this is what happened: immediately before Easter, the king called many lords and the mayor and aldermen and most of the merchants here—including myself—into St. John's Hospital and claimed that it had never entered his mind to marry the young lady. He declared that he was not glad of the queen's death and that he was in fact grieving for her. He charged the people not to speak of such things, and ordered that anyone who does be seized and taken before him."

"The king had to say that?"

"Aye." He shook his head. "The graybeards there said that they had never seen anything like it. A king having to stand in front of the people and deny that he lusted after his niece!"

I tried in vain to picture any other king—even wicked John or the second Edward with his favorites—having to make such a speech. Caxton continued, "It was felt necessary, I'm told, because the king's advisers told him that if the northerners thought he had caused the queen's death so that he could marry his niece, they would turn against him, and they are the chief friends that he has. Indeed, the king had to out-and-out deny poisoning his queen."

"*Poisoning* her?"

"I can't believe that even of him, but that's the gossip that's been going around, your grace. Many believe it, after the young king and his brother disappeared." He crossed himself. "If things were different, people might have excused this as a lonely man making a fool of himself over a pretty lass, and indulged him. But as it stands—"

"He has dug a hole for himself," I said with satisfaction.

"Aye," said Caxton. He gently closed *The Dictes and Sayings of the*

Philosophers and handed it to me. “In confidence, my lady, I hope it turns into his grave.”



We finally heard from Bess after I returned to Hertford, having visited only where I promised Nesfield that I would visit and having arrived home well within the scheduled hour, dutifully bearing several printed books as well as Caxton’s gift to me. Bess and Cecily, who was to wait a year before consummating her marriage, were to be sent to Sheriff Hutton, where the Duke of Clarence’s son and daughter resided. Uncle Richard, Bess wrote grumpily, had promised to try to marry her to the Portuguese heir, but who wanted to go to Portugal? It was *so* unfair that she had to leave court because of some stupid gossip.

Meanwhile my brother Richard had made his peace with the king and had been pardoned his life in exchange for a hefty bond, although he had not been restored to his estates and had to live with one of the king’s men, just as Bessie and I had to live under the supervision of Nesfield. Though we had heard that my nephew Dorset would accept Richard’s hand of peace, Dorset himself had yet to appear in England. Whether he had changed his mind or whether he had not been able to get out of France, we did not know.

The king had more to deal with than the gossip that still circulated about him and the death of the queen: Henry Tudor, with the backing of the French, was all set to invade. As my own brother Edward was expected to be with him, Nesfield had been less than forthcoming about this, but when the king began to issue proclamations against Henry Tudor and his followers, it could hardly be kept secret.

“A ragtag army they say that Tudor has collected,” Nesfield informed us before he at last set off in August to join the king at Leicester, word having arrived that Henry Tudor had landed in Wales. “Most of them Frenchies, and mercenary Frenchies at that. And some motley Scots as well, plus a few hundred English traitors and some Welsh scum that he’s picked up

along the way. A scurvy lot indeed. Whereas our king has the cream of the nobility assisting him. The Duke of Norfolk, the Earl of Surrey, the Earl of Northumberland—”

“The Stanleys?” I asked. Thomas Stanley, after all, was Henry Tudor’s stepfather, although the men had never met. Harry had hoped that he would join his own rebellion.

Nesfield scowled. “They’ll turn up if they know what’s good for them. Lord Strange is in Richard’s custody to ensure their good behavior.” Lord Strange, Thomas Stanley’s son, was married to Joan, the only daughter of my long-dead sister Jacquetta. Our custodian put a hand to his throat. “For if they don’t turn up, the king will have Lord Strange’s head.”

Bessie and I shuddered, and Nesfield turned jauntily on his heel. “Behave yourselves, ladies. Until the Tudor scum is vanquished, I have given orders that you be kept close. I trust you understand the necessity.” He nodded toward a pair of his sulky deputies, whose expressions made it clear that they were unhappy at the prospect of missing battle in order to guard two Woodville women and their collection of children. “Don’t worry. It won’t be long before we’ll be back.”

“Under the circumstances, we can hardly wish you Godspeed,” my sister said. “But we will pray that God will lead the proper side to victory.”

“I’m sure he will,” said Nesfield affably. “After all, the North loves the king, and they say that the Lord is a Yorkshireman.”



God’s regional affinities aside, I did not dare hope for much from Henry Tudor’s invasion. That he was ashore was an improvement over 1483, but Nesfield’s reports, which I had no reason to doubt, made it appear that he would be sorely outnumbered if battle were joined. And if my brother Edward—singled out for special attention in the king’s latest proclamation, along with Henry himself, his uncle Jasper, the Earl of Oxford, and the Bishop of Exeter—were captured instead of falling in battle, beheading was the very best that he could expect. I thought of my youngest, wildest

brother suffering the fate of poor William Collingbourne, and I shivered in the August sun.

My worries were for myself as well. If Henry Tudor were vanquished, what need would a triumphant Richard have to court the favor of the people, especially if he married a foreign princess and had the backing of her country? He would be able to do as he pleased with us remaining Woodvilles and with the old king's daughters. And what might happen to my sons, bearing as they did a claim to the throne not far after Richard's? The older they got, the more dangerous they would grow in Richard's mind, especially if he were unable to sire an heir to replace the son who had died the year before.

I shivered again. Suddenly these last few months of my life seemed almost carefree.



No matter what the state of my mind, my garden had to be weeded. I got down upon my knees one afternoon near the end of August and yanked at the latest crop, trying to focus my thoughts on matters horticultural. Bessie, who did not share my taste for the physical aspect of gardening, sat on a bench nearby, trying to train her own thoughts on the altar cloth she was embroidering.

From our vantage point, we could see some men riding over the moat and to the guardhouse, but what of that? A lot of local business took place at this castle, and the men did not seem agitated. I went back to my weeds, and Bessie back to her stitches.

Just a moment later a trumpet sounded, emitting blast after insistent blast, summoning everyone inside the castle to the gatehouse. Bessie and I followed the procession slowly, dreading the tidings that lay there. Then Bessie froze and pointed. "Mother of God! Can it be?"

Side by side on good horses, waiting at the gatehouse, were two men whose surcoats bore the Woodville arms.

I yanked my sister forward, forgetting that she had twenty years on me, and together we ran through the gates and to our brothers Richard and

Edward. They saw us and scrambled down from their horses. Crying out incoherent greetings, all four of us came together, laughing and sobbing in each other's arms.

Then the children joined us.

"Uncle Edward! Uncle Richard!"

"Was there a battle?"

"Are you prisoners?"

"Did you escape?"

"Are you free?"

"Where is the king?"

"What has happened?"

"Where have you been?"

"Did you bring me anything?"

"Can I ride your horse?"

My brother Edward pulled free at last.

"Oh, there was a battle all right," he said, grinning. "Trumpet!" It sounded obediently, and a dead silence fell as my brother hopped back into his saddle to make himself better heard. "People! Two days ago, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, usurper and murderer of innocents, late calling himself king of England, was slain in Leicestershire. Long life to your new king. King Henry!"

I have taken all of the bad news in my life standing upright, but my consciousness proved unequal to these very different tidings. "King Henry!" I shouted obediently. Then I slumped to the ground in a dead faint.

But Bessie had swooned first. Queen and older sister that she was, she had first right, I suppose.

August 1485 to October 1485

HOW? HOW DID HENRY WIN THE BATTLE?"

Edward grinned. "God's favor, of course. And a little help from the Stanleys." He looked around the solar. "Do you want to hear the story?"

"No. We want to hear how the autumn crops look," I snapped.

My brother grinned again. "I missed you too, Kate." He shook his head. "You looked so sweet there lying on the ground just now. So docile."

"So quiet," agreed Richard.

"Go on!"

Edward laughed and rearranged the nieces on each knee, and Richard, sitting with another pair of nieces, followed suit. "Well, if you insist. The first thing of any importance, for our purposes, is that two days before the battle, a certain Sir Richard joined us." He nodded at his older brother.

"I took Gloucester's pardon only because I hoped the two of you might benefit," Richard said. "But when I realized that I was expected to be fighting for Gloucester—against Edward—I couldn't stomach it. Even if Edward wasn't my only living brother, I wouldn't bear arms against him—not even if Gloucester were worth doing it for. So I followed my orders and marched with Richard's army, but I was determined to desert and fight on Edward's side, or die trying. Fortunately, I got an opportunity to slip off under cover of darkness, and I took it. So did many others, those last couple of nights."

"What a sight it was, awakening the next morning with my brother standing over me!" said Edward. He grinned ruefully. "It almost made up

for the fact that no one could find poor King Henry. Never let the king know I told you this, but he got separated from his men the evening before and was wandering around in the dark, lost as a man can be. We were wondering how we could go to battle with no leader when Henry rode in the next morning, saying that he had been meeting with some secret friends. Fortunately, that same day he actually did meet with some secret friends—the Stanleys. They promised they'd join him when they safely could, but with Lord Strange being Richard's hostage, they had to be cautious.

“That night, the twenty-first, we camped near Atherton, and we knew that the time for battle was coming, for Gloucester's men were encamped nearby. Even with those who had joined us after we crossed into England, Gloucester's side had the advantage, both in ground and men, but our spies told us an encouraging piece of news the next morning: Gloucester had slept badly. He didn't sleep much, and when he did, he had nightmares. Some say that the ghosts of those he'd murdered visited him. He said before battle that if he won, he would utterly destroy all who had fought against him. No ransoms, no mercy.

“Well, that was daunting to hear, and seeing his men all lined up on a hill, outnumbering us three to one at our best guess, was even more daunting. But King Henry gave the order to march, and so we did.

“As promised, the Stanleys were out there on the field, in force, but they neither helped nor hindered either side. That in itself was a fearsome sight, because we couldn't be sure of whether Gloucester had suborned them in the meantime, and they could have slaughtered us if they had chosen to do so. We learned later that Gloucester was furious when he realized what was happening, and that he ordered the execution of Lord Strange, who'd been dragged along just in case such a situation arose. But there was too much going on, and fortunately for our niece Joan, Lord Strange was forgotten about and will be coming safely home to her.

“Then the Duke of Norfolk's men smashed into the Earl of Oxford's troops. Poor Oxford has never stopped regretting what happened at Barnet, you know, when he lost control of his men and they had to be rounded up

and taken back to the field, only to fight against their fellow Lancastrians. Well, he redeemed himself at last. His men drew around their standard and gave no ground. Worse for Gloucester, they began to drive Norfolk's men back against themselves. Norfolk was killed." Edward took a long draught of ale. "A pity that such a noble man died in such an ignoble cause. Richard, you take over. You can tell it as well as I can, if not better."

My oldest living brother smiled modestly and cleared his throat. "Norfolk's death must have been a blow to Gloucester—if he knew about it. Norfolk was the oldest and most experienced man in his command. If Gloucester did know, maybe that's why he did what he did next. Depending on your point of view, it was either extremely brave or extremely foolhardy."

"Or both," put in Edward.

"Or both, as I was about to say." Richard, usually the most serious of men, suddenly grinned. "Bessie, do you remember how he used to do this when he was little, never losing his chance to get a word in? I've missed it. Anyway, at this point Richard, with just a few followers, charges pell-mell down the hill. He'd spotted King Henry's standard and must have hoped he could finish Henry himself off there and then. I'll anticipate Edward by saying that he almost did."

"We were there in the thick of it, Richard and I," interrupted Edward.

"So we were. Sisters, just picture a fully armored knight, followed by more, careening toward you downhill at full gallop. It was the last sight poor William Brandon, King Henry's standard bearer, ever saw. Pity. Brandon was a brave man.

"We were holding our ground as best we could, and fighting back, but it wasn't looking good. Richard was almost within striking distance of King Henry. And that's when the Stanleys finally moved in—for us. They swept in and began to pick off Gloucester's men. And then they reached Gloucester himself."

Bessie and I had joined hands and were barely breathing by now.

"He didn't last long after that, needless to say—men in all directions were trying to take him down, some for glory, some out of pure hatred. I'll give

him credit, he fought like a tiger—not that he had much choice, for he couldn’t escape even if he’d wanted to, and if he was taken alive, he’d be facing the block. So it behooved him to go out with a good fight. At last he died—but not before Edward and I had stricken some blows upon him for the sake of Anthony and your sons, Bessie. Not the most chivalrous thing we’ve done, perhaps, as he was outnumbered, but it was satisfying.”

“I thank you,” my sister said quietly. “What happened to his body?”

“Stripped naked, flung across a horse like a slaughtered animal, and taken to the Grey Friars at Leicester for display. Some thought that as a king, he should have received more dignified treatment, but others thought that given his crimes and the way he attained the throne—”

“He deserved what he got,” I finished firmly, thinking of all the good men and the innocent boys who had perished at the order of Gloucester. “Who else died?”

“Catesby was captured, and will probably be executed, I heard before I left. Sir Richard Ratcliffe died in battle, so did Sir Robert Brackenbury. Your man here, Nesfield, died. And Walter, Lord Ferrers.”

“His death I am very, very sorry for,” I said, and crossed myself. “He was a fine man.”

We were quiet for a while, reflecting on those decent men who had given their lives for both sides, and upon those who had suffered before this battle for their loyalty to my nephews and to the memory of Edward IV. I was silent too for Harry, who’d died trying to bring about this day.

Finally, Bessie said dryly, “Now that our prayers have been answered, I realize I know almost nothing about King Henry. You must have come to know him well in exile, Edward. What sort of man is he?”

Edward considered. “He’s shrewd, he’s fond of gambling—goodness knows this enterprise was a gamble—and he has a certain sense of humor. He’s ordered that the common soldiers who fought for Richard be allowed to return home safely, and I believe that aside from Catesby, he’ll be merciful to those of a higher rank who supported Richard. He’ll rule with a firm hand, I suspect, being wary from all those years in exile, but time will

have to tell. In the meantime, he's not Richard. That will have to suffice for now."

"Amen to that," I muttered.

"What of Tom?" Bessie asked.

"He will be returning home soon. He tried to get back to England when Gloucester offered his pardon—against my advice, I might add—but Henry's men caught up with him and persuaded him, rather emphatically, to stay. Anyway, he was left behind in France as a surety for the money that the French loaned to our enterprise. I'm sure the French will be pleasantly surprised to find that they don't have to keep him; they didn't have a great deal of hope for our cause, I fear. And here is something else to look forward to: a wedding. King Henry means to marry Bess, as promised. Men have been sent to Sheriff Hutton to fetch her and Cecily to London, where the king will be arriving shortly. And men have been sent to fetch their lovely mother and aunts to London, too. Can you guess who they are?"

I smiled. "And the king's mother? I suppose men have been sent to fetch her?"

"To escort her," said Richard. He grinned. "No one *fetches* the Countess of Richmond. Not even the new king himself."



I had been in London several days when I received a message from Margaret Beaufort to attend her at the Bishop of London's palace, where our new king, just recently arrived in the city himself, was staying.

Naturally, I obeyed, albeit with not a great deal of enthusiasm. It had been some years since I had seen Margaret Beaufort, except for an occasional superficial encounter at court, and I wondered whether she still considered me a useless, decorative object.

To my surprise, the king's mother—looking none the worse for wear for her nearly two years of house arrest—surprised me by greeting me with a hearty embrace. "I am very, very sorry that your late husband did not live

to see this day," she said, more quietly than usual. "He was a fine young man. His sacrifice will not be forgotten. Nor shall yours."

"Thank you, my lady." I felt tears sting at my eyes at this unexpected kindness. No adult, not even my sisters, not even my brothers, ever spoke to me of Harry, even now that it was safe to do so. Their intentions were probably good, but it hurt me deeply, for it was as if the man to whom I had been married for over eighteen years and borne five children had never existed. This short eulogy was the first mention I could remember hearing of him in months. "I still miss him terribly."

"Of course you do," Margaret said in her more normal tone of voice as I showed signs of giving way to my emotions. "But you have your whole life ahead of you. You are but young." She squinted at me—the countess was short-sighted—approvingly. "And still very fair."

"Thank you," I said, thoroughly nonplussed.

"My son the king wishes to see you."

I cannot possibly convey the sense of utter satisfaction with which Margaret Beaufort said those first four words.

In the chamber where the king was staying, I sank to a deep curtsy until Henry, in a pleasant voice with more than a tinge of a French accent, bade me to rise. I had seen him briefly on the day he had entered the city—no borrowed rags for me that time, for I had watched the procession from the comfort of a viewing platform hastily set up for myself and other honored ladies—but I had not been close enough to study him well. Now I saw that at eight and twenty, he had a lean physique and fair hair. His blue eyes, set in a mobile face, were bright, without the rather piercing quality of his mother's. All in all, he was an attractive man, I was pleased to note for my niece Bess's sake. "It has been many years since we have seen you, my lady," Henry said, taking my hand. "Time has been kind."

"Thank you, your grace."

"Were you aware that your husband had made a will, in which he set you a jointure?"

"Yes, your grace. William Catesby told me of it."

The king smiled. “The late Master Catesby was rather taken with you, it seems. Did you know that you were mentioned in his will? No? Well, how could you have? He left a hundred pounds to you, to provide for your children and to help pay the late duke’s debts and to see his will executed.”

Poor Catesby; he might have been a good man in better company. I sighed, thinking of the waste.

“Well, my lady, you shall receive the jointure that you should have received upon the late duke’s death. And we also wish to assure you that your husband’s good services to us will not be forgotten. His attainder, along with those of the many others who were unjustly condemned by the late usurper, will be reversed at the next Parliament, which we will be calling soon. Your son Edward will be restored to his father’s dukedom and to his lands.”

“Thank you,” I murmured. I could not help but feel a little dizzy as all we had lost was handed back. King Henry saw my reaction. “Be seated, my lady. Ah, thank you, uncle.”

A man who had unobtrusively entered the room had pulled a stool for me. Now that I got a better look at him, I recognized him as Jasper Tudor. “Thank you, my lord,” I echoed.

“My pleasure,” said Jasper Tudor.

“We understand that you speak excellent French, my lady.”

“It was my mother’s native tongue, of course, and we learned it from her,” I said half apologetically, remembering my small husband’s reaction all those years ago.

“Of course.” The king suddenly switched to French. “We rather like speaking it ourselves, don’t we, uncle?”

“*Oui*,” agreed Jasper Tudor firmly. He smiled at me and reverted to English. “It was my mother’s tongue, too, of course. Queen Catherine.” He crossed himself, and we all followed suit. “Were you named for her, perchance, my lady?”

“No, my lord. Saint Katherine is my patron.”

“A fine saint,” said Margaret Beaufort firmly.

I was beginning to find all of this approval bewildering. So wrapped up was I in my puzzlement that I nearly missed the next remark of the king's mother. "As you may know, Duchess, my brother-in-law Jasper has never married."

I almost said, "That is a pity," until I thought about it. Perhaps it was not to be thought a pity, but a conscious choice? "Ah," I said, in a vague tone that I hoped covered any eventuality.

"He has not had the settled life that lends itself to marriage, you see." So perhaps it was a pity, I surmised. "When my dear husband died, Jasper took up his fight for the cause of the sixth Henry, his half brother, and in his service of that cause, he was forced into long years of exile, as was my son the king. It was not a disinclination for the married state that kept him single, but his situation."

"And now that has changed," the king put in. "So that—"

"If you please, I can handle this," interrupted Jasper Tudor. He stepped toward me and lifted my hand. "I am asking you, my lady, to do me the honor of becoming my wife."

I sat there, stunned. I should not have been surprised, I suppose—more often than not, young widows did remarry, especially young widows with handsome jointures—but still, I had not seen this coming, especially in the presence of the new king himself. As the moments passed without my returning an answer, Margaret Beaufort cast upon me her familiar look of disapproval. "Perhaps the king's uncle, and Queen Catherine's son, does not suit you, your ladyship?"

"It is not that," I said. "It was unexpected."

"Well, then? Might we have an answer?"

"Might I see my prospective groom alone? And then I can give *him* my answer?"

Margaret sputtered, but her son looked amused. "Of course, my lady." He nodded to Jasper Tudor. "We will leave you to court in private. There is business to see to elsewhere in any case."

“Well, my lady?”

“I shall marry you. How could I refuse you, with my children and I dependent upon the good will of the king, and he himself urging the match? I simply wished to give my answer without the Countess of Richmond boring her eyes into me.”

Jasper smiled. “The countess is a managing woman. Having been apart from her for so long, I had forgotten precisely how much that was true.” He took my hand. “But, my lady, I do not wish you to feel that you are compelled to marry me. The king will treat you and your children justly, for their late father’s sake and for honor’s sake, whatever your answer.”

“That may be, but if life has taught me nothing else, it is to be cautious around kings. I cannot risk finding out otherwise. I will marry you.” Something amused in his expression made me add, “So do not think of withdrawing your offer.”

“I shall not, for you are very fair.”

“Flatterer.”

He smiled and lifted my chin gently. “You know, my dear, when the king told me that I should find a wife, it was you I thought of immediately, for I remembered when I first saw you. Even then I thought you would be a lovely woman when you came of age. And Margaret confirmed it.”

I snorted. “My jointure had nothing to do with your decision?”

“Of course it did. You are wealthy as well as young and lovely. You can hardly expect a rational man to ignore that. And to add to your appeal, you are closely allied with the House of York. The king is eager to see the houses united. So, dear lady, you hardly stand a chance of remaining single, unless you take a vow of chastity, and that would be a tragic waste.”

I smiled. “King Edward’s daughter betrothed to a Tudor, and now his sister-in-law to another one? The poor man must be spinning in his grave.”

“No doubt. And I think he would be rather jealous of me, too.”

“Why?”

“Because of what I am going to do now.”

He drew me against him, whereupon I soon found that this man could kiss life into a statue. “Goodness,” I managed weakly when it was over. Then I startled myself by anticipating and indeed almost initiating the next kiss. It was every bit as satisfying as the first, and led to more intimate contact, thereby confirming every joke made about lusty widows. But I had badly missed being in a man’s arms, more than I realized, and this man knew a woman’s body well indeed.

In the midst of a complicated embrace we heard Margaret Beaufort’s voice at the door. “Jasper?”

“Bother,” muttered Jasper, and I snickered a little breathlessly. “I shall be with you presently, Margaret,” my betrothed called. Then he led me out a back door to his bedchamber, where in less time than I care to admit we were lying together in his bed, our clothes marking the trail of our progress to it.

I do hope Margaret Beaufort didn’t spend too much time waiting for Jasper that day.



While Jasper and I were thusly improving our acquaintance, things were bustling around me. Bishop Morton, chirpier than ever, returned from exile, along with my nephew Dorset. The king had set his coronation date, and with it flowed the inevitable ceremonies and rewards. Thomas Stanley was made Earl of Derby. My older son, Edward, was made a Knight of the Bath—and I freely admit that I wept when I saw him in his garments and thought of the day my nine-year-old husband had received the same honor. Jasper Tudor was made Duke of Bedford.

And in the midst of all these events, I married Jasper and became the Duchess of Bedford. It was the title my mother had borne through her first marriage, and for weeks afterward I started when I heard myself heralded, expecting Mama to be right beside me. Perhaps in spirit, she was.



Yet in all of this flurry and ceremony, I did not forget my Harry. Just a few days after my marriage to Jasper Tudor, I traveled to Salisbury, where my brother Lionel had been bishop for such a short time and where my husband had died. With me came my children.

We passed by the Blue Boar Inn, where poor Harry had spent his last night on earth. I asked to be shown the room where he had stayed, but it was occupied, and although the friendly innkeeper would have allowed me to look inside anyway, I decided to let it be. It was enough to stand at the last earthly doorway through which Harry had passed on his way to the scaffold, enough to gaze at the spire of Salisbury Cathedral where his own eyes must have wandered in his last moments. Then we walked on to the Grey Friars Abbey, where Harry lay at rest. I remembered that the Grey Friars at Leicester had taken Gloucester's body, and wondered, as ever, at the Lord's strange sense of irony.

The abbot himself greeted us. "I shall lead you to his grave straightaway, your grace. But first, this was found pinned inside of his shirt when we buried him. It was addressed to your ladyship."

He handed me a folded, but unsealed, sheet of paper. I felt a weak-kneed sensation as I recognized Harry's handwriting on the outside: *For my duchess*. I thanked the abbot, who moved away. Then I unfolded the letter.

There is no one here to whom I can entrust this letter, for I can expect no kindness from the king's guards. I believe that the monks of Grey Friars will take my body when all is done. I can only hope, Kate, that they will find this paper then and that you will be the one who reads it.

I have been faithful to you since we consummated our marriage. I make no boast of this, for there is little else that can be said good of me as a husband. Were it not for whom I leave behind, I would be glad of my death, which I have deserved.

Until the darkness fell, I could see from my window the scaffold that I am to die upon. I have been rehearsing in my mind my walk toward it. For

your sake and our children's I shall be brave and approach it composedly and quietly. Better men than myself, like Hastings and your brother Anthony, have made that final walk and for much less cause; I can do no more than to emulate them.

I love you, Kate, and I love the children you have brought me. I cannot write of them more—if I do, I will break down, and I have tried to be courageous. Give my love to them. May all of you prosper.

Harry

“What did he say?” Elizabeth demanded as I stood there, tears streaming down my face.

“That he loved all of us,” I said, wiping my eyes. “Come. Let us see your father’s grave.”

Harry’s grave, in an obscure, dingy corner, was covered only by an unmarked slab. Now that I had the means, I would have to provide a suitable monument, though what would be suitable for a man who had helped to destroy so many I held dear, and whom I still loved deeply nonetheless, was something that would surely baffle even the most skilled mason.

“Harry,” I whispered. I dropped to my knees, along with the children, and together we prayed for his soul. And then we wept, I not only for my husband, but for all of those who had lost their lives in these past two years, including Queen Anne and her young son. I even shed a tear or two for Richard—for Harry’s sake.

When we had cried our fill, we carefully spread a cloth of gold over the slab, then decorated it with the bright red and white roses the children had carried in with them. Elizabeth laid hers down last. “Mama, you won’t forget Papa, will you, now that you’ve remarried?”

I put her hand on her shoulder. “Never,” I promised my children. “I will always be your papa’s duchess.”

Epilogue

June 1492 to January 1496

I WAS THE YOUNGEST OF TWELVE, AND BY 1492, I WAS THE LAST OF THE Woodville children left on this earth. It was a strange feeling.

My sisters Anne, Margaret, and Joan and my brother Richard drifted off peacefully in their beds, attended by priests and surrounded by their families and servants, but poor Edward was killed in 1488 at St. Aubin-du-Cormier, fighting for the Duke of Brittany in what proved to be a lost cause against the French. He died a Knight of the Garter, having been raised to that honor by King Henry just months before his death.

After the rest died, there remained but two of us—myself and Bessie, whose marriage to the king had raised our family so high and brought us so much sorrow. And on June 8, 1492, Bessie died at Bermondsey Abbey, to which she had retired in 1487 with the active encouragement of King Henry, who was not at all displeased at the revenue this saved him.

I did not go to the funeral; the news reached me too late for me to travel to the ceremonies. My oldest daughter, Elizabeth—now one of Queen Bess's attendants—went in my stead. On Whit Sunday, two days after her death, Bessie was conveyed by water to Windsor, where her husband the king rested. She was attended by the prior of Charterhouse at Sheen, by her chaplain, and by Grace, a bastard daughter of the king whom Bessie had reared in her household. My sister was buried without pomp, in accordance with her wishes for simplicity. On Wednesday the requiem mass was held, attended by her only surviving son, Tom, and his wife, Bessie's daughters Anne, Katherine, and Bridget, my own daughter

and several other nieces, and a few others. The queen did not attend, having just been confined with her fourth pregnancy. Neither did the king nor his mother.

“King Henry should have come,” my daughter said indignantly. Aged sixteen now, she had grown tall and very fair; Harry would have been proud. “And his mother! It was disrespectful of her not to do so.”

“Come, you know that the king is busy with the French,” I said. We had fallen out with our allies of 1485, partly because of their reception of a young man, one Perkin Warbeck, who claimed to be the younger of Bessie’s murdered sons. Henry was planning an invasion. “And the Countess of Richmond probably fancied herself needed by the queen’s side,” I added dryly. Bess had borne the king three children already: Arthur, Margaret, and, just a year before, little Henry. Margaret Beaufort had been present at each confinement and birth, sending the royal midwives into a state of distraction with her determination that everything be done according to plan. Bess, usually rather gracious toward her mother-in-law, had once muttered that Margaret would have probably been present at the conception of the royal children if King Henry had been willing.

“Yes, that is the excuse she gave,” said Elizabeth. “But I think she was being rude regardless. And the torches! They were old! I know it was supposed to be simple, but there could at least have been new torches.”

As Elizabeth fumed some more about my sister’s funeral, I listened absently, unable to share her indignation. Shabby as her burial might have been in some respects, my sister had been laid to rest beside the king as his lawful wife and his queen, not as the concubine Gloucester would have had the world believe her to be, and she had been buried as a pious Christian, not as the witch Gloucester had branded her so many years ago. And that, I thought, was really all that mattered.

“You got the last word, Bessie,” I said softly as I lit a candle for her that evening. “God keep you, my sweet sister.”



On December 21, 1495, I became a widow for the second time. Jasper, whose health had been failing, caught a chill and died, aged five-and-sixty.

I sorely missed him. I cannot say that Jasper and I loved each other passionately—he had been too long accustomed to bachelorhood to truly know quite what to do with a wife outside of bed, and my heart remained in Harry’s keeping—but we got on well together, and until the last few months of his life we freely enjoyed the pleasures of each other’s bodies.

“Shall you marry again, Aunt Kate?” asked one of my nephew Dorset’s many daughters one day, as my ladies and I prepared to go out riding with Richard Wingfield as our escort. He was still in my household and had been knighted by Jasper not long before his death.

I shrugged. “As I am eight-and-thirty and past my prime, I suppose not, unless the king and his mother find some use for me as a bride.” I snickered. “Besides, Perkin Warbeck has been taken.” Much to King Henry’s disgust, the pretender had been moving from court to court in the last few years and after an ignominious attempt to invade England had landed in Scotland, where King James IV, either because he believed in the young man or because he knew it would annoy our king, had not only greeted him warmly, but married him to James’s kinswoman, Lady Katherine Gordon.

“The fool will regret the day he was born if he ever falls into King Henry’s hands,” Richard said. “But you are not past your prime, my lady, if I may be so bold as to say so.”

It *was* rather bold, but Richard had been in my household for so long that I allowed him considerable license. I blushed modestly and said a little wistfully, “Well, too old to bear children, probably.” I had never quickened with child during my marriage to Jasper, and I rather missed my own children, all of whom were at court. Perhaps it was time I left Thornbury in Gloucestershire, where I was staying, and paid a visit to London where I could see some of them, as well as my niece the queen and her family. I was especially fond of lively little Henry, now the Duke of York.

“I think I shall go to London soon,” I said, following my thoughts instead of the conversation. “I need a change from here.”



“My lady, may I see you privately?”

I had never seen Richard Wingfield look so peculiar, or speak so formally. “Of course, Sir Richard,” I said, falling into formality myself. “I hope there is not bad news from one of your brothers or sisters?” I said when we were alone. I could think of no other news that would turn the man so pale.

“No, my lady. They are well.” He forestalled my next question. “There is nothing amiss with your kindred either, my lady.”

“Then speak, Richard, and as a friend. We have been friends for many years. What troubles you? I shall be only too glad to help you if I can. You know that.”

“My lady—” He bit his lip.

“Richard! It cannot be so bad. Perhaps you wish to leave my service now that the Duke of Bedford has died?” I asked, a little hurt. “I shall miss you greatly, but in the household of a great lord, I must admit that it is true that you will find better opportunities than in the household of a wid—”

“No! My lady, it is not that at all. I never want to leave you. In fact, I wish to marry you.”

I stared.

“Hear me out, please.” There was no need for him to say this. I was stricken dumb. “I love you. I have loved you since I was a boy in your household. When you married the Duke of Bedford, I was wretched.” He swallowed. “I even hoped when Gloucester fell that you would never get your jointure, so that when I got older you would turn to me as your protector and I could marry you then. Forgive me, my lady, for hoping that. I was but a boy.”

“Of course,” I said blankly.

“Will you consider my suit? I know I am far your inferior in rank. I know I have no wealth or great position. I know it will displease the king and others—” He swallowed. “I know many things against the match, but I also know I love you dearly, and I do not care about those things. Please, my lady—Kate. Be my wife.”

He dropped to his knees, and I stared down at him, amazed. I had suspected Richard Wingfield as a boy of loving me, but now? I had watched him grow into a man—a handsome one, I realized for the first time—and never guessed his secret. He had been honorable to keep it for so long, especially in those last weeks when Jasper had been sick and crotchety and I vulnerable to temptation. A woman could do far worse than to marry such a man.

Yet if I married Richard Wingfield, the court gossips would ridicule me as a pathetic, aging woman hoodwinked by a younger man obviously interested only in my wealth. My sons, especially Edward (who resembled his father more every day), would be scandalized. My daughters would titter as only daughters can. The king, who no doubt wished to keep me and my jointure in reserve for some exigency, would be furious. His mother would be disgusted. Clearly there was only one sensible answer I could give.

But since when had a Woodville made a conventional match? My father, a mere knight, had married a duchess. My brother John had married a duchess forty years his senior. I had married a duke. My sister had married a king. I owed my very existence to an unequal match. It was practically a family tradition—and thus, it was all the better that I, the last of the Woodvilles, uphold it.

I sat down beside Richard Wingfield and touched his face. “I would be honored to be your wife.”

In reply he kissed me gently, then passionately as I gave myself up to the pure pleasure of his embrace.

You can probably guess the rest.

Author's Note

KATHERINE WOODVILLE MARRIED RICHARD WINGFIELD BY FEBRUARY 24, 1496, without royal license. Less than fourteen months later, on May 18, 1497, she died. The cause of her death, which occurred when she was about thirty-nine, is unknown. It is tempting to wonder if she died from a late-life pregnancy; however, there is no record of her having children by Wingfield. Richard Wingfield remarried and went on to have a distinguished career as a diplomat in Henry VIII's service. While on an embassy to Charles V, he fell ill in Toledo and died on July 22, 1525. In his will, he asked that masses be said for the soul of his "singular good Lady Dame Katherine."

Henry VII died in 1509, having outlived his queen, who died in 1503, nine days after giving birth to a short-lived girl. Their first son, Arthur, died in 1502; their only other surviving son, of course, became Henry VIII. Margaret Beaufort died just two months after her beloved son, but lived long enough to see the coronation of her grandson Henry VIII and his new bride, Catherine of Aragon.

Edward Stafford, third Duke of Buckingham, fared far less well under Henry VIII than did his stepfather Richard Wingfield. Buckingham's royal blood and pride in his lineage, Henry VIII's notorious difficulties in siring a male heir, and Buckingham's poor relations with Thomas Wolsey ultimately led to accusations that Buckingham himself aimed at the throne. On May 17, 1521, he was executed on Tower Hill. Edward had married Alianore Percy, the eldest daughter of the Duke of Northumberland, and had four children.

Henry Stafford, Katherine's younger son, was made Earl of Wiltshire by Henry VIII. He married Cecily Bonville, the widow of Katherine's nephew Dorset. Having managed to avoid Henry VIII's displeasure after the execution of Edward Stafford, Henry Stafford died on April 6, 1523, without heirs. Cecily, nineteen years Henry's senior and the mother of fifteen children by Dorset, outlived Henry.

Elizabeth Stafford married Robert Radcliffe, Lord Fitzwalter, in 1505, and died before May 11, 1532, having borne her husband at least four children. Her eldest son, Henry Radcliffe, second Earl of Sussex, was active in bringing Mary I to the throne.

In 1500 Anne Stafford married Sir Walter Herbert, the illegitimate son of William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, who had been executed in 1469 by Warwick. Following her first husband's death, Anne married George, Lord Hastings, who later became Earl of Huntingdon. Hastings was a grandson of the Lord Hastings murdered by Richard III. The couple had eight children. Anne survived her second husband, who died in 1544.

The date of Edward IV's marriage to Elizabeth Woodville is usually given as May 1, 1464, but as both Michael Hicks and David Baldwin have pointed out, there is some reason to suppose that the May 1 date found in some chronicles may owe more to its romantic associations than to historical fact. Hicks notes that on August 10, 1464, William Hastings was granted the wardship of Elizabeth's son Thomas Grey—an odd grant to make if Edward had married Elizabeth months before. Furthermore, as Hicks also points out, Edward IV granted the county of Chester to his brother the Duke of Clarence on August 30, 1464, apparently in recognition of Clarence's status as the king's heir apparent. Such a grant would seem unlikely if Edward IV had married Elizabeth Woodville, who could be expected to give him an heir. David Baldwin has also noted that in the late summer of 1464, Edward IV was staying at Penley, halfway between London and Grafton; he was also staying there in early September 1464. Hence, I have departed from tradition and placed the couple's wedding in early September, several weeks before it was announced at Reading.

There is no proof that Richard, Duke of Gloucester, killed Henry VI, though Warkworth's *Chronicle* pointedly notes his presence at the Tower at the time of the imprisoned king's death. If Gloucester did indeed carry out the murder, it almost certainly would have been at the orders of Edward IV. The story that Henry VI predicted that young Henry Tudor would wear the crown appears in *Vergil*; though it can be regarded with a certain skepticism, it was too apt a topic of conversation for young Henry Tudor and young Buckingham to be left out.

All of the named characters in this novel actually lived, although in many cases, such as the lesser known Woodville siblings, their personalities are lost to us. One of the most elusive figures is Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham (who signed himself as "Harry," which he spelled "Harre"). We know little of him as a man, and what is conjectured about his personality depends largely on the reason assigned for his rebellion in 1483—a probably insolvable mystery. Most of Buckingham's records were destroyed in 1483 when the Vaughans (not connected to the Thomas Vaughan executed by Richard III) raided Brecon Castle and in a later raid on the castle by Welsh rebels in 1485–86. Harry is recorded as being present at various public events—for example, the coronation of Elizabeth Woodville, the procession of Edward IV into London following his victory at Tewkesbury, the welcoming of Louis of Gruuthuse to England, the wedding of the Duke of York to little Anne Mowbray—but almost nothing is known about his private life. He and Richard, Duke of Gloucester, would have had numerous opportunities to encounter each other before 1483, but whether they were close friends is unknown.

What is certain is that once he came of age, Harry was an outsider at court, who held none of the high offices that a man of his rank, wealth, and royal connections might have expected to receive. It has been suggested variously that Edward IV disliked or distrusted Harry, that Edward IV was wary of Harry's royal descent, that the king was cautious about giving too much power to the higher nobility, that Harry was inept or even mentally unstable, or that the Woodvilles contrived to squeeze Harry out

of office. Both Michael Jones (in *Richard III: A Medieval Kingship*, edited by John Gillingham) and C. S. L. Davies (in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*) have speculated that the anticlimactic French expedition of 1475 might have had something to do with Harry's alienation from the king, hence my scene where Harry remonstrates with Edward over the proposed treaty. Though the scene is fictional, Harry is recorded without explanation as having "returned home" from the expedition prematurely. He was not among the men who enjoyed pensions from Louis following the Treaty of Picquigny, about which Richard, Duke of Gloucester and unspecified English "men of quality" were said to be unhappy.

As noted by Michael Hicks in his biography of George, Duke of Clarence, Harry took supper with his uncle Henry Stafford, husband to Margaret Beaufort, on October 28, 1470. On that occasion he might well have encountered his kinsman Henry Tudor, who had met with Henry VI the previous day, according to a record cited by Michael Jones and Malcolm Underwood. Harry's presence at Barnet and Tewkesbury is not recorded, though a report written by an observer, Gerhard von Wesel, indicates that he was among the men arrested by Warwick's government in the spring of 1471. I have invented the incident where Harry begs Edward IV to spare his uncle Somerset's life, but Harry was in Edward IV's triumphant procession to London after the battle of Tewkesbury and might well have been at Tewkesbury to witness his uncle's death.

Harry's mother, Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Stafford, is a curiously obscure figure for a woman of her rank. Even her death date is uncertain, though we know that her second husband, Richard Darell, remarried in 1481. A record of a lawsuit shows that in 1463, Darell boarded Margaret with his mother, to whom he paid a certain sum each week for the countess's "diets" before Darell's mother died in 1464. From that entry the editor of *The Collections for a History of Staffordshire* has surmised that Margaret was an "imbecile," and it does sound as if Margaret was being made the responsibility of her mother-in-law rather than staying with her as an ordinary guest. Whether Margaret was actually incapacitated, mentally

or physically, is not clear from this one record, but as there is a recorded instance where an insane widow, that of the rebel James Tuchet, was placed in her mother-in-law's care, it seems likely this might have been the situation with Margaret.

As is most often the case with medieval women, little is known about Katherine Woodville's life and personal qualities. Katherine and Harry were indeed carried on squires' shoulders during Elizabeth Woodville's coronation, and Katherine is recorded as sitting beside the Duchess of Norfolk at the feast following the Duke of York's wedding. The Duchess of Buckingham was conspicuously absent from Richard III's coronation ceremonies and was not among the noblewomen who received robes on that occasion, but whether she was barred from attending or refused to attend is unknown.

It is generally assumed that the Buckinghams' marriage was a miserable one, but that assumption is largely based upon one remark: Dominic Mancini, an Italian observer visiting England during the fateful summer of 1483, wrote that Buckingham detested the Woodvilles "for, when he was younger, he had been forced to marry the queen's sister, whom he scorned to wed on account of her humble origin." With no axe to grind on behalf of either Richard or his enemies, Mancini is one of the main and most valuable contemporary sources for the events of 1483. Nonetheless, his remarks about Buckingham's attitude toward the Woodvilles and Katherine are likely to be heavily colored by the gossip he was hearing in 1483, and must be read with that caveat in mind. Buckingham certainly cooperated with Katherine's brothers during the rebellion of 1483, and he took Katherine with him to Weobley before making his fatal flight to Wem. There is no evidence that his relations with the Woodvilles before Edward IV's death were hostile.

Part of the belief that Harry was unhappy in his marriage from the beginning lies in a misapprehension of Katherine's age that has been perpetuated by a number of modern authors, most of them partisans of Richard III. These writers depict Katherine as being much older than her young

husband, thereby giving the impression that she was a sexually frustrated spinster pawned off by the vile Woodvilles on the hapless little Harry. One Ricardian novel even depicts the twenty-something Katherine as sexually molesting the twelve-year-old Harry! Primary sources, however, including a postmortem inquisition of Richard Woodville, the contemporary description of Elizabeth Woodville's coronation, and Elizabeth's household records, all indicate that Katherine was a child at the time she married Harry and as such had no more say in the marriage than did her husband. According to the postmortem inquisition, her birthdate was about 1458, making her about three years younger than Harry, who was born on September 4, 1455.

An account by Elizabeth de la Bere found among Edward Stafford's family papers indicates that Katherine was brought to the king from Weobley following her husband's execution and that Edward himself was dressed as a little girl and hidden from Richard III's officials during this time. It is sometimes said by modern writers that Katherine joined her sister Elizabeth in sanctuary at Westminster following her husband's death, but I have not seen any documentation or citation to support this claim. In December 1483, however, Richard III allowed Katherine to bring her children and servants to London; whether she was living on her own, imprisoned, or living under supervision in London at the time is unknown. It seems most likely that after she was brought from Weobley, she was boarded at a convent, a genteel way of confining troublesome ladies, but her whereabouts after December 1483 through the remainder of Richard's reign are unrecorded.

Elizabeth Woodville left sanctuary in March 1484. She was placed under the supervision of Nesfield, who was the constable of Hertford Castle. As there is no record of where Elizabeth stayed after she left sanctuary, I took the liberty of placing both her and her sister Katherine at Hertford, a location that was convenient for both the ladies and for my own purposes.

Richard III publicly pledged to provide for Elizabeth Woodville and her daughters if they would come out of sanctuary; interestingly, he also swore

that they would be in surety of their lives and would not be imprisoned in the Tower or in any other place. Richard also was obliged to publicly deny poisoning his queen and planning to marry his niece.

William Catesby did indeed leave Katherine a bequest of a hundred pounds in his will “to help herr children and that she will se my lordes dettes paid and his will executed.” The 1485 Act of Parliament assigning Katherine a jointure of a thousand marks also refers to Buckingham’s will, which apparently has not survived.

Harry Buckingham’s burial place is uncertain. The *Chronicle of the Grey Friars of London* states that he was buried at the Grey Friars in Salisbury, but other writers claim that a tomb at the Church of St. Peter in Britford was erected in his memory, although there is some question about whether it contains any remains. To complicate matters further, in 1838, renovations at the Saracen’s Head Inn in Salisbury, on the site where the Blue Boar Inn stood, uncovered a headless skeleton that was also missing its right arm. The skeleton underwent an extremely unscientific examination by the locals, with the inn’s landlord measuring a rib against his own and concluding that the deceased was of “large dimensions,” before the remains were knocked around and merged in with the surrounding clay. Nineteenth-century antiquarians suggested that these could have been the remains of Harry. Colorful as this story is, I opted for Grey Friars, which was in accordance with Richard III’s general habit of allowing his enemies an honorable burial. Whatever the location of Harry’s body, Harry’s ghost is said to haunt the Debenhams department store in Salisbury, which stands on the site of the Blue Boar Inn. Katherine’s burial place is unknown.

The quotations from *The Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers*, translated by Anthony Woodville, are taken from William Caxton’s original edition, a facsimile of which is available through the Internet Archive. In connection with Caxton, I should mention that when Katherine refers to reading “romances,” she is referring not to what we call “bodice rippers” but to a broad variety of narratives dealing with such themes as adventure, love, chivalry, and honor.

Edward IV's most famous paramour, Mistress Shore, bore the first name of "Elizabeth"; it was not until the late sixteenth century that she was christened "Jane" by a dramatist, Thomas Heywood. I have accordingly called her by her given name, Elizabeth Shore.

There are three great mysteries surrounding this period of history: Was Edward IV secretly married to Eleanor Butler? What happened to the princes in the Tower? Why did Buckingham rebel against Richard? Pages upon pages have been devoted to each of these subjects, and one can do no better than to read the sources—both those favorable and unfavorable to Richard III—and decide for oneself, as I have. There are a few comments I would like to make about my own choices, however.

I have not overlooked the story that Bishop Stillington himself officiated at the marriage of Edward IV and Eleanor Butler; rather, I have rejected it. Only one source, the Burgundian chronicler Philippe de Commines, states that Stillington presided at the ceremony; no English chronicler makes such a claim. A yearbook entry in 1488, on the other hand, states that Stillington drafted the petition urging Richard to take the crown, while Eustace Chapuys, ambassador to Henry VIII's court, wrote to Charles V in 1534 that Richard III "declared by definitive sentence of the bishop of Bath [Stillington] that the daughters of King Edward were bastards." Both the yearbook entry and Chapuys's comment suggest that Stillington played the role not of a witness to the marriage but of Richard's mouthpiece.

Stillington was arrested in 1478, following the execution of Clarence, and Paul Murray Kendall and other defenders of Richard have taken this as evidence that Stillington had told Clarence of the precontract. But Stillington spent only a brief time in the Tower and continued to serve Edward IV after his release. He was even sent in 1479 to treat with a French ambassador. To me it beggars belief that Edward, knowing that Stillington was in possession of information that could threaten the succession, would allow him to see the light of day, much less be placed in a position where he could gossip to the French.

Henry VII himself arrested Stillington after the battle of Bosworth. Yet Stillington was again imprisoned only briefly, and was pardoned that November. Only in 1487, when Stillington lent his support to a rebellion against Henry, was he imprisoned once more. Even then, he spent some time at his episcopal manor of Dogmerfeld in 1489 and 1491 before dying in the spring of 1491, aged eighty or so. This relatively lax treatment of Stillington suggests that although Henry VII might have regarded him as a political enemy, he did not regard him as possessing dangerous information.

What happened to Edward V and his brother, the Duke of York? No trace of them exists after the summer of 1483, and contemporary rumor, never denied by the king, accused Richard and/or Harry of their murders. It has been said in Richard's defense that he had no motive to kill his nephews, having declared them to be bastards, but this holds true only if bastardy was regarded as being an insurmountable barrier to kingship, which does not seem to have been the case, and if the allegations of the precontract were widely accepted. Mancini and the Crowland chronicler, the main sources for this period, were skeptical of the allegations, as were the men who died trying to restore Edward V to the throne just weeks after Richard was crowned. It has also been said that Richard's failure to exhibit the boys' bodies is proof that he did not kill his brother's sons, but Richard, already facing suspicion from his new subjects, might well have chosen not to risk outraging the public with such a display. Most telling of his guilt, however, is the fact that he never produced the boys alive after they disappeared into the Tower, even when doing so would have aided his reputation and hurt Henry Tudor's cause.

As for Harry Buckingham, I do not think he can be ruled out as a suspect in the princes' deaths (assuming, of course, that they were murdered), although I believe him innocent. If he did indeed have a hand in the deaths, it was most likely in collusion with Richard. Only if he himself aspired to the throne could he gain more from arranging their deaths on his own than he had already gained through Richard. While the possibility that he fancied himself king cannot be discounted entirely, it is notable that neither

Richard's proclamations against him nor Buckingham's attainder mentions such an ambition. It is also significant that Henry VII, a famously wary man, allowed Buckingham's son Edward to recover his dukedom and his lands, something that he might not have risked had he believed that Edward's father was aiming at the crown in 1483.

This brings us to the final question: why did Buckingham rebel? No one knows, though one possibility mentioned by Tudor chroniclers—that Richard denied him his coveted Bohun lands—has been long since discounted by evidence to the contrary. Besides royal ambition, various other scenarios—that Harry was mentally unstable, that he was pathologically greedy, that he had some sort of falling-out with Richard III, or that he joined the rebellion to avoid reprisals should it succeed—have been put forth. Yet it may well be, as the Crowland chronicler wrote, that Harry was simply “repentant of what had been done” and that it was his conscience that ultimately led to his destruction. In the end we shall probably never know what was in Buckingham's mind in 1483—but one wonders what, if Richard had granted his former ally the audience he sought before his execution, Harry would have said to the king.

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Finally, I must repair omissions in my previous acknowledgments by mentioning other family members. My cats, Ginny, Stripes, and Onslow, have diligently kept my reading chair and my computer chair warm for me when I am not sitting in them. Boswell, my cairn terrier, standing guard by the sliding glass door in the kitchen, has protected my workspace against

countless invasions by local squirrels, rabbits, and deer, all undoubtedly on a relentless quest to sabotage my hard drive. He has earned all of the many treats he has received during the writing of this novel.

Reading Group Guide

1. Lord Hastings tells Harry that Edward married the only woman who refused to go to bed with him. Do you think Edward married Bessie out of pure lust? Or do you think he picked her because he respected her denial of him?
2. Harry is named after the king for whom his family fought, rather than after his father and grandfather. What does this say about loyalty in the fifteenth century?
3. Harry supports several of Richard's heinous actions because he loves his friend. Do you sympathize with Harry or do you think he should have seen the fault in Richard's actions?
4. Like most major events throughout history, a tiny spark can incite a fire. Do you think this marriage between Bessie and Edward is responsible for all the warring? Or was it the excuse needed to justify a grab for the throne?
5. Kate is married to Harry when she is just seven years old and he is ten. Although they dislike one another at first, their love seems to blossom as they grow older. What makes their relationship so much stronger than those of other members of the court, who seem to merely tolerate their spouses?
6. John marries a woman forty-five years his senior in order to increase his wealth. His wife, on the other hand, marries him in order to have a companion. Are these motivations acceptable for marriage? Is marriage just a deal to be made for the betterment of both parties?

7. The morning after Harry and Kate consummate their marriage, Kate is pleased to learn that the entire court knows. Cecilia remarks about the bed sheets, King Edward jokingly calls her a minx, and the Duchess of Exeter teases her about being ridden. How did you feel about the court discussing Harry and Kate's sex life so openly? How would such behavior be taken today?
8. When Richard finally tells Harry that he loves him, Harry realizes that he has been waiting for those words of validation for fourteen years. Does Richard really love Harry? Or does he just use Harry's love to manipulate him into doing his bidding?
9. Harry violently rapes his wife after she insults Richard and spits in Harry's face. Months later, after he has repented of all his wrongdoings, she forgives him. Would you be able to forgive in such a situation?
10. Unlike his brother George, who openly rebels against Edward's reign, Richard waits until Edward is dead to reach for the throne. First he becomes protectorate of the young king, but he quickly broadens his horizons to aim for the kingship for himself. Which brother do you think is worse—openly rebellious George or patiently power-hungry Richard?
11. Harry is distraught when his only brother dies of consumption. Kate also loses all her brothers by the time Henry Tudor takes the throne. How important are sibling relationships in this novel? Are they more or less important than spousal relationships?
12. Harry and Kate both brag about their high social standings when they are young children, when neither of them has done anything to deserve his or her title. How would you feel living in a time period when your name and your family history are the predominant factors in your chance for success? Are there times today when family name plays a large role in social standing?
13. The public's loyalty constantly sways as king after king is forced off the throne. With all the upheaval and treason, is loyalty represented as a good quality to have? Or does loyalty bring danger as power shifts from king to king?

14. Richard tells Harry that “Edward the king will prevail over Edward the son and brother” when Edward is forced to execute George for his treason. Would you be able to make this same decision if you were in Edward’s shoes? Would you choose to protect your kingdom over your brother?
15. Harry is easily duped by Richard because he loves him and trusts him. He doesn’t see that he’s committing treason and usurping the rightful king. How would you have responded in that situation? Have you ever been led astray because of your love for someone?
16. Kate dislikes Richard from the moment Harry starts raving about how wonderful he is. Is this dislike a result of jealousy? Or does Kate see the latent danger in Richard?
17. After reading the first chapter of this novel, we know that Harry is going to die. Later we learn that Kate is telling her story twelve years after Harry tells his, meaning that Harry is already dead. How did this knowledge affect the way you read the novel?
18. When Harry is beheaded, he meets Uncle Edmund in the afterlife. Why do you think Harry meets Uncle Edmund, a man he barely knew, rather than his mother or his beloved brother Humphrey?
19. Several characters in *The Stolen Crown* experience losses of those close to them: Harry, with the death of his brother and the loss of his friendship with Richard; Bessie, with the murder of her two sons and the death of her husband; Kate, with the murder of her father, brothers, and husband. Who do you think suffers the greatest loss in this novel?
20. *The Stolen Crown* begins with a secret—the wedding between Bessie and Edward. It seems everyone has a secret to keep from someone else—suspicions of treason and knowledge of the whereabouts of others. Do you think some of the loss and tragedy could have been avoided if everyone were more open with their information?

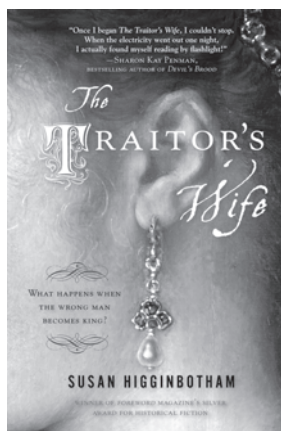
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SUSAN HIGGINBOTHAM LIVES WITH HER family in North Carolina and has worked as an attorney and as an editor. Her first two historical novels, *The Traitor's Wife* and *Hugh and Bess*, were republished by Sourcebooks in 2009; *The Traitor's Wife* won the gold medal for historical/military fiction in the 2008 Independent Publisher Book Awards. More about Susan's novels and the historical background to them can be found on her website, www.susanhigginbotham.com, and on her blog, Medieval Woman.



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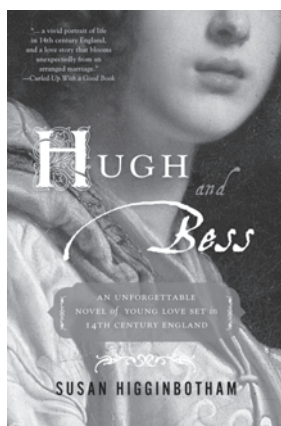


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