

THE GOLDEN YOKE

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A Novel of the War of the Roses

OLIVE ECKERSON

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To Allan and Edith Cook

THE GOLDEN YOKE

The golden yoke of sovereignty

RICHARD III

The Characters

Real Personages

RICHARD PLANTAGENET, afterwards Richard III
ANNE NEVILLE, his Queen
EDWARD IV
ELIZABETH WOODVILLE-GREY, his Queen
GEORGE, Duke of Clarence, brother to Edward and Richard
ISABELLA NEVILLE, his Duchess
RICHARD NEVILLE, Earl of Warwick—the Kingmaker
ANNA, his Countess
LADY CICELY OF YORK, mother to Richard
LOUIS XI, King of France
CHARLES THE BOLD, Duke of Burgundy
MARGARET OF BURGUNDY, his Duchess
EDOUARD OF ANJOU, Pretender to the English throne
HENRY VI, his deposed father
MARGARET OF ANJOU, his mother
HENRY STAFFORD, Duke of Buckingham
FRANCIS LOVELL } friends to Richard
ROBERT PERCY }
WILLIAM CATESBY } followers of Richard
RICHARD RATCLIFFE }

The Children

EDWARD V, son of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville
BESS, his sister
MARGOT PLANTAGENET } children of George of Clarence
EDWARD PLANTAGENET }
EDWARD, Prince of Wales, "NED," son of Richard and Anne
JOHN OF GLOUCESTER, bastard son of Richard

Fictional Characters

GERVASE RIMBAUD, a Norman minstrel
ALAIN DE LA TOUR, a French page
CLOTILDE, French waiting-woman to Anne
GIFA, Welsh nurse to Anne

1. "Loyauté Me Lie"

HIGH on the rooftops of Bruges the June sun slanted, burnishing the gray-blue slates and gilding the plaster points of the city towers. The crooked streets were gay with bright flags, hung out in honor of the guests who crowded the city to bursting; England, France, and Flanders, all swarming to aid Burgundy in celebration of the marriage of its duke to an English princess.

The yellow striped banners of the bridegroom Charles the Bold vied with the gold and blue checkers of Warwick, and floating over the tower of the Lord Mayor's palace were the azure lilies of France. That afternoon, King Louis himself had arrived. Between Louis and Burgundy there was small love lost, but for the moment a truce kept the peace between them. Rumor had it that Louis was in Bruges for reasons of his own, reasons that had nothing to do with the Burgundy wedding. Those who had the ear of Louis's barber said it had something to do with one of Warwick's two daughters, but which one it concerned, they did not know. And most did not care, for all had come to make merry and to enjoy this bright-colored celebration.

Though the sun had already begun to decline from its meridian, it was blazing hot on the tournament grounds where all was confused preparation for the Jousting of the Golden Tree. Clouds of dust from the restless feet of men and horses dimmed the scene and settled on the solid mass of people behind the barrier. Within the jousting ground itself, heralds and squires moved purposefully, leading the great horses.

In the heart of the confusion, a bright knot of youths clustered about Richard of Gloucester, a leggy youth of seventeen, who was amusing them with one of his stories. Flanked by his two friends, Robert Percy and Francis Lovell who had accompanied him to his sister's wedding, Richard stood in a characteristic pose, hands thrust beneath his belt. Under his gay orange cap his dark sallow face was lit by a grin as he came to the point of his tale and from the group a

great roar puffed up, while a loitering groom, convulsed with laughter, clapped him on the back. Even though he was brother to the King of England, Richard allowed the buffet and with the back of his hand gave the fellow a friendly push.

A trumpet warned of the imminent arrival of the King, and with an arm about the shoulders of each of his friends, Richard moved off toward the gate at the bottom of the lists. He walked with a swinging thrust of his lean shoulders, his air at once arrogant and graceful. When he was little, people laughed at the peacock strut of this young York prince, but it was not now fashionable to make sport of the Plantagenets. When King Henry of Lancaster, who was now mad, held England's throne with the help of his masterful Queen Margaret of Anjou, the young striplings of the House of York walked beneath a shadow and counted for naught. But the fortunes of York changed; Warwick placed Richard's brother Edward on the throne; the mad monarch was shut up in the Tower of London while his Queen fled to France with her young son; and suddenly everything the Plantagenets did was admired and copied.

Dressed for riding, Richard wore a split surcoat blazoned with his arms. The motto *Loyauté Me Lie* joggled on his thin back but the colors shone bravely. Anne Neville, his betrothed, had embroidered it, and his keen eye sought her out in the crowd. The royal pavilion was as yet empty, but the ladies' stands were a mass of fluttering fans and veils. Richard searched among the colors for Anne. He saw his sister the bride, her calm brown eyes lighting at sight of him, and next to her Anne's mother, the Countess of Warwick, here instead of their own mother who was ailing in London; and there was Isabella, Anne's sister, slim and fashionable in an enormous hennin, and next to her, at last—Anne! He waved his cap.

Not quite fourteen, Anne of Warwick appeared very dignified, sitting erect and slender between Isabella and their governess, the Lady Philippa. She wore a high-waisted gown of vivid blue, her little bosom outlined by a thin band of ermine, her bright blond hair shining beneath a tall fez of dark velvet. Like a young duchess she returned his wave with a bow and a sweep of her peacock fan. A shadow crossed Richard's face and the line about his mouth contracted. He had heard whispers that her father no longer favored their marriage and intrigued to wed her to another.

A cloud of dust caught them in the throat. "A rumpy-too affair," coughed Richard to his two companions. "I should have thought they

could put on a better show than this." He looked contemptuously about him at the dirt and disorder. The great town of Bruges, queen city of Flanders, with its Cloth Halls and its artisan printers, had never looked to him so down-at-heel.

"Of course, it's not as if this were Burgundy's first marriage," said Lovell. "When he espoused the Lady Isabel of Portugal there were fountains of wine and all Burgundy was drunk for a month."

"What's that to do with it?" demanded Percy, who could not see that a Portuguese princess could be the cause of a greater show than an English one.

"Edward was in such a huffer-mugger hurry," said Richard. "They've had no time to prepare." At the same time he wondered why Edward had been in such haste to push through this marriage of their sister. But then, there had been thirteen in the York family, he the youngest, and always it seemed that someone was making hurried preparations for a marriage before the bridegroom went off on a campaign.

"Better wait, Diccon." Percy was looking back over his shoulder. "They're coming in." And the three youths paused inside the gate.

The fanfare of trumpets swelled, ending on a slightly sour note as the royal heralds of France appeared in the main entrance. Between them came Louis, by grace of God, King of France, a thin figure in a wrinkled velvet pelison, its uneven hem hanging about his heels, and on his head a battered hat stuck full of golden images of the saints. At his side walked a common-looking man, his barber and constant companion, into whose waxy ear he was said to pour his most secret confidences. Mincing along with short tottery steps, Louis nodded casually to the bowing multitude, the ladies bending like flowers in the breeze. He rounded the end of the royal pavilion, paused at the foot of the crimson stairs and from beneath the long peak of his hat peered at Burgundy who followed close behind.

But it was not for Burgundy he waited. Behind the Duke came the stocky figure of the Earl of Warwick, and Louis slipped his arm through that of the Englishman as together they mounted the red stairs.

"What make you of that?" whispered Lovell.

"Louis is up to something." The words slid out of the side of Richard's mouth.

"A sharp poke in the eye for Burgundy," murmured Percy.

Richard was uneasy. He looked upon Warwick as a father. He

had been practically raised by the mighty Kingmaker, his guardian ever since the death of his father, the Duke of York. It had been understood that Richard and Anne were to marry, to cement the two houses in everlasting friendship. Was not their brother George of Clarence to marry Anne's sister Isabella in Calais next month? And here was Warwick, arm in arm with the Spider-King, England's arch-enemy, the prince who never ceased plotting against them all, including the Earl himself. What could it mean?

Louis was taking his time getting to his place in the royal pavilion but at last he appeared; a moment more he stood, as if enjoying to the full the fact that a thousand people must await his pleasure. Then with a foxy half-grin on his thin face, he sat slowly down. With a creaking relief and a great flutter of skirts and veils the privileged who could sit did so, and the throng settled to the inevitable waiting of a poorly managed tournament.

"My Lord! My Lord of Gloucester!" Richard turned to see the wiry figure of Aloys, his groom, pushing toward him. "My Lord Richard!"

"Aloys! What is it?"

"The pony, my lord. He has cast a shoe and Tim thinks the hoof is split." There was apologetic concern in the elderly face. He had schooled Richard himself, teaching him all he knew of horsemanship, taking a fatherly pride in his progress. This was a serious matter, for Richard was to ride at the quintain in exhibition with the other youths.

"The devil with it!" Richard shoved through the crowd of peasants and stable hands. Between two rows of pitched tents they hurried to the straw-thatched stables. On an upturned water jar Tim, Richard's ostler, sat, the hoof of Black Beau on his leather lap. Richard stooped. There was no mistaking it; the hoof was split and when Tim pressed the frog of the foot with his experienced thumb, the animal winced and tossed its head.

"There, there!" Richard gentled it. The creature rolled its eyes and let him stroke its cheeks.

"You can have Grayling, Diccon," offered Percy.

Richard swung around. "What are you saying? What will you ride?"

Percy shrugged. "There'll be other chances."

Richard walked to the back of the stables, his head down, his hands thrust through his belt. Much as he hated to miss his chance, he knew

what the riding meant to Percy. Damn Edward's parsimony! Then he felt ashamed. Loyalty bound him fast to his brother, whom he had sworn to serve. Edward was tightfisted with money, to be sure, but Richard was his favorite, and had he known there was only Black Beau to rely on, Richard knew he would have seen to it that his young brother had a stableful of beasts from which to choose. But this was cursed luck, for in any case it was madness to ride a strange mount in this sort of thing; it would be bad enough to have to manage with Grayling, a horse he had not often ridden.

In his roped-off stall Grayling stood, his intelligent dappled face turned toward his master, who patted Black Beau. Richard put his hand over the velvet muzzle and the horse knew him and remained quiet. Well trained for the quintain, he would obey perfectly. "Well, lad," Richard whispered to him, "will you carry me to victory?" The horse nickered faintly but it was at his approaching master.

Richard moved aside. He must cover the feeling of embarrassment he felt at Percy's generosity, and left, in search of his brother.

In a gay little pavilion he found George of Clarence arming for the joust. The tall elegant duke, just twenty, was submitting to the lacing and riveting that occupied his busy squires. Richard wondered if the beautiful armor so artfully encasing his spendthrift brother were paid for, or if some unlucky smith held Clarence's worthless note of hand. Upon Richard he turned his clear blond face, with skin fair as a girl's and eyes of a true York blue. About his mouth could be traced the same line that Richard bore, a family trait, but on the older brother it was more tightly drawn to resemble a perpetual and polite sneer.

"Well, Diccon." Clarence lifted one foot and gave the kneeling squire a shove that sent him sprawling. "Get out, all of you. I'll call when I need you." He bent himself gingerly into a heavy wooden seat and from the little table at his elbow poured wine. "It's cursed hot—will be worse out there on that field. Why did our sister and Burgundy choose this time of year to get wed?"

"Better now than dead of winter. I'd rather burn than freeze." Richard hated the cold of the bitter months. But he had not come to discuss the marriage with George. He wanted to hear what his brother thought about Warwick and Louis.

He watched Clarence drinking his wine. His brother drank too much and if he were not careful, would be too addled to ride in the joust; a disgrace for Edward. But it was never Richard's way to find

fault with Clarence. Between them was a veiled antagonism that neither would acknowledge. Jealous of Edward's preference for Richard, Clarence was too vain for an overt expression of his feeling, for this would be stooping and Clarence was resolved never to stoop—unless it were expedient. As for Richard, ruled as he was by the close tie of family, to voice distrust of a relative would be the rankest disloyalty. There were plenty of enemies to pull them to pieces without their doing it to themselves.

“Did you see Louis and Warwick today?” Richard asked.

“Hm.” Clarence pulled the collar of his tunic around the ring of his armor where it chafed his neck. “What of it?” And he poured another cup.

“But this—this public display of friendship. What do you make of it?”

Clarence turned on him a wine-bright eye, a sly smile twisting his mouth. “What think you?” he countered.

“I—well, to say the least, you must admit it looks queer. Warwick has always hated Louis and the Lancastrians, and now”—he flung out his hands—“I can't make head or tail of it. All I know is, I don't like it.”

“No?” Carefully Clarence got off the chair. “Well, it's about time you awakened from your rosy dream, my young brother. Let me acquaint you with the facts—” He swayed slightly and approached Richard who backed away, a strange fear rising within him. “Warwick, your foster father, is as full of plans as an egg is full of meat. What would you say”—into the blue eyes came a look of cunning and the voice sank—“what would you say if I told you we shall shortly have a new King in England?”

Instinctively Richard looked behind him. They were alone. “I'd say you are already drunk and unfit to ride.” He spoke through stiff lips.

Unsteadily Clarence came closer. He leaned his weight on Richard. “You think he'll give you Anne and her dowry, don't you?” he sneered. “Well, I happen to know he'll give the little golden dolly to another. A Lancast-castrian,” he stumbled on the word, “prince.” He threw up his head and his mocking laughter filled the little pavilion. “What a jest!”

Rage filled Richard. “You lie, by your head!” He gave a mighty shove and twisted clear of Clarence's weight. “You lie!”

Clarence's laughter died. "None says that to me!" His fist shot out, caught Richard a fair blow on the chin so that his head jerked back hitting the boss of Clarence's shield on the tentpole behind him.

A shower of stars burst behind his eyes and the tent walls spun. Shaking his head, he stumbled out into the dazzling sunshine. From a long way off he heard his name called.

"Come on, Diccon! Francis is already up." He shook his head again, his vision cleared and he made out Percy standing at Grayling's head. Down the row of tents he jogged, his head jumping painfully with every step. Percy shot him a look but if he remarked the red bruise on his friend's chin or his confused state, he held his peace.

Richard mounted. His head still rang and a throbbing pain beat behind his eyes. The rumors then were true and what he had seen was a silent announcement to the world that Warwick was turning his coat to take sides with Louis and the Lancastrians.

The warning trumpet pierced his reflection; it was time to go, the herald already cantering through the gate to announce the contest of the quintain. Richard pulled himself together, tried to shake his mind free of this anxiety and give his attention to the problem of the moment. *Loyauté Me Lie* was embroidered on his breast—Loyalty binds me. He would be Edward's loyal man to the end, however bitter.

He wheeled into place and between Lovell and Edmund Dugdale, a brilliant rider, jogged through the gate. Dugdale was very clever at the quintain, and the wagers were heavy on both him and on Richard, whose own prowess at this feat was great. Like all the Yorks, he rode as if bred to the saddle, but his head kept pounding and the bright sunlight hurt his eyes. He forced himself proudly erect, remembering only that he had promised both Anne and his brother the King to win.

The quintain had been set up, a wooden figure freshly painted in red and blue, mounted on a heavy pole which they dropped into a stone socket set deep in the ground. In his younger days Richard had spent many hours riding stubbornly at their battered old dummy, as under the cruel taunting of Clarence he nerved himself to greater and greater effort. But now the quintain was provided with a heavy sandbag dangling from the outstretched arm, and unless a rider were wary and quick he could scarcely hope to avoid a swinging blow.

Stiff and important in their saddles, the youths waited while the herald tonelessly read out the rules. Five tries for each, points to be

awarded for riding and striking, the winner to receive a purse of twenty gold nobles and a pure white peacock.

"*À la Bourgoyne.*" With a flushed smile, the Burgundian youth Guy de Charolles acknowledged his supporters.

"*Le Genêt!*" A Gascon, whose cap bore a cluster of yellow broom, the family crest of the Plantagenets, cried out for Richard but his voice was drowned in the roar from Yorkist throats. The English looked to their favorite son to bring them honor this day. Richard forced an answering smile, though by now his head was paining sorely.

The contest went briskly forward, and from the first it seemed that luck was with Richard of York. Despite the close strikes of the Burgundian and Dugdale, his was the best record, with three fair hits, twice in the head, once in the breast. He cantered to the starting line and sent a bold grin in the direction of Anne, then leaned forward on his pommel, blowing out his breath as he awaited his next try. His head had cleared, the beating somewhat subsided, for the excitement of his successes had revived him. Now again he shot forward, and this time he caught the figure square and true in the center of the forehead. The ringing shout deafened him. He was going to win!

Charolles prepared for his fourth try and flew down the run. But at the last moment his lance slipped and glanced off the wooden shoulder. The figure whipped about but missed him as he brilliantly avoided the blow. It was a pretty bit of horsemanship for which he was roundly cheered, but as he returned to the line his face was black with rage and shame.

With set jaw Richard couched lance and thundered toward the goal. He felt calm and assured. But the breeze, suddenly fresh, whirled a small cloud of dust in his face, and at that moment, a sharp pain shot through his temples. Though for only a second he was blinded, it was enough. His point, off center, struck the arm of the figure which instantly swung round to catch him a swiping blow with the sandbag. Off balance from the lunge, stunned by the blow from the bag, he fell from the saddle, pitched heavily onto the point of his shoulder, rolled, then flopped limply into the dirt before the ladies' pavilion.

Unconscious, he did not hear the cry from the stands, nor see the little knot of ladies holding up the near-swooning figure of his betrothed.

The throbbing in his head woke him. He supposed he had been asleep but he felt queer. He tried to move and white-hot agony took his breath.

He heard a strange voice. "He's coming around." Something pungent was thrust beneath his nostrils. He gasped and opened his eyes. A soft dark blur receded and the strange voice said, "He will do well now." A face came into focus, pale, with a pair of enormous blue eyes that looked anxiously down at him. A cool hand touched his head. Anne.

"Diccon, darling, how is it with you?"

"Nan." It was all he could manage at the moment.

"Thank God you stayed in your swoon till they had done with you." She held his hand tightly in hers. The dislocation of his shoulder had been skillfully tended, but the pain of this would well-nigh have killed him. "You have a grievous hurt."

He looked down at his naked chest, saw that his left arm and shoulder were strapped tightly in broad bands of linen. Now he could manage a smile. "Take that look off your face, Nan. I shan't die."

She laughed shakily. "Of course not, my foolish one. It will take more than a fall from the saddle to finish you."

Now memory revived and the scene in the lists came clear. His face flamed. "Who won?" he sighed.

"Edmund Dugdale." She hesitated. "But you didn't want that peacock anyway, Diccon. It looked awfully sulky in the golden cage."

His smile broadened. She was perched on the bed, still in her blue velvet gown though she no longer wore the fez, and her hair clung in soft little curls to her high forehead. "Nan," he murmured, "I love you." He knew she understood how the humiliation of his failure was tormenting him, worse than the pain in his shoulder. "Well, thank the saints it was an Englishman who carried off the honors and not the Burgundian."

Having finished his instruction to the nun who was to nurse Richard, the bearded doctor now approached his patient. His French had a strong Flemish accent. "You are fortunate, sir, that the hurt is not irreparable. We were able to mend you while you remained in your swoon. You will sleep now and tomorrow I shall see you again." He gathered up his drugs and instruments and departed.

The plump nun brought a beaker to the bed. "He must not talk any more now, my lady. It is the fever we have to fear. Already he is flushed. He must rest."

Anne knew that sometimes men burned with fever when bones were broken. But this was no fever that dyed Richard's brow, for it was more than a mere physical injury from which he must recover.

"Nan—" Richard moved his hand in hers. "Nan—if I cannot get to Edward, you must do it." Then he rolled his head away from her and stared at the wall. How could he tell her that Edward was to beware the treachery of her own father?

"Don't try to talk now, Diccon." Anne was persuasive. "Sleep, and I will return." Carefully she lifted his head and tipped a cup of sleeping potion to his lips.

Suddenly Richard was terribly tired, and all he craved was oblivion. He drank, the pewter cup, beaded at the brim, cool against his lips. The spiced wine, bitter with the drug, slid down his throat and with a sigh he sank back into the pillows.

It was early evening when Anne presented herself to her father as he had ordered earlier in the day. She found him alone in his little paneled cabinet, his head bent over parchments. Within the arras she paused, waiting for him to look up and acknowledge her. The candle on the table flickered in the draft and he reached out to trim it, looked up and saw her.

"Ah! You are better, my child?" The deep voice was soft. Relieved, she came forward to the corner of the table. He leaned back in his chair. The countenance he turned upon her wore the expression he kept for her alone, but Anne knew how the strong face with the cleft chin could freeze into the cruel mask of anger or assume the distant air of imperious authority. But for her, it was gentle. "You are recovered?" His eyes twinkled.

She flushed, the blood bright in two spots on her pale cheeks. From his royal pavilion seat her father had observed her near collapse, the anxious little knot of women hovering about her. Nothing escaped his eagle eye. "Quite recovered, my lord."

"It was warm in the pavilion, and perhaps your custom was upon you? I rejoice to see you better. You are only weary now?"

"No, my father."

"I thought to include you in the supper tonight. King Louis has been asking for you."

Instantly she replied. "I should like to be excused."

He pursed his lips as if considering the matter. But she knew if he really wanted her at the supper with Louis, she would be forced to

attend. He was not thinking of them. "Excused, *hein?*" He laughed softly. "Well, it is no matter. Perhaps it would be better for you to seek your bed. There is plenty of time."

Plenty of time, for what? She had longed to ask her mother about King Louis and her father, but by sending for her he had forestalled that. Well, she *would* know. On the eve of their sailing, Isabella had hinted she would do well to forget Diccon, that the marriage was no longer pleasing to their father. Anne had carried the little nag of that in her breast. Now she would find out what it meant.

"I grieve for Diccon." Narrowly she observed her father.

There was the slightest tightening of his hard fingers. But he was too honest to play with her. He would not say, "*Pardie*, he will soon be walking the earth again." He knew her mind, so instead he asked, "How old are you, Anne?"

"In July, on my saint's day, I shall be fourteen."

"Ah, so." He picked up a slim dagger used for breaking the waxen seals on letters. "I remember when you were born, a wee yellow-haired creature, with eyes blue as sapphires. We hoped for a son, but I have never regretted. You know that."

She knew. And always up to now she had striven to please him, as if she were the boy they never had. Even the astrologers had predicted she would be a boy, so the disappointment when she was born was crushing. And her father had behaved magnificently, even when the doctors told him his wife could have no more children. Her mother told her how tenderly he lifted her from the golden cradle, holding her soft little head to his face; the great Earl of Warwick, who would have no son unless he put aside the well-loved wife and took another. The beating of her heart rose to her very ears and she dreaded what was to come.

"It is time we found you a husband. Isabella will be wed next month and then it will be your turn."

"Diccon will soon be healed of his hurts." Perversely she determined to force her father into the open on this.

Delicately her father laid the dagger down. "You will put Gloucester out of your thoughts."

Gloucester! She caught her breath. There was something sinister in her father's use of the title. Never had he called her betrothed that. It was "Young York" when he felt playful, or "Diccon" when he was affectionate, or "Richard" when formality demanded, but

never "Gloucester." It sounded almost insulting, as if Diccon had become their enemy.

"But—why?" She persisted.

"I have other plans for you. I shall wed you to Prince Edouard of Anjou."

"Anjou!" she gasped. The red Lancastrian—whose father was mad, whose mother rode to battle like a man. But why? Her Beauchamp and Neville blood rose within her, demanding to know why this sudden *volte-face* of her father. "I thought we owed allegiance to King Edward," she said. Her father had fought to place Edward of the White Rose party on England's throne.

"Edward's Queen has no boys." He was talking as if she understood these political matters. "Unless a son come to wear the crown, it will go hard with England. There is already a young prince with a strong enough claim to the throne. I shall restore him." He turned to his papers.

Anne clenched her hands. She saw it all now. She would be wife to Prince Edouard, and her father, bound by her marriage to the future king, would become England's real ruler. He would seize and hold the power as under Edward he had never been able to do. A mad king, a woman, and a youth—these he could control easily. This is why he had come so willingly to Flanders to the marriage of the hated Burgundy; it gave him a perfect opportunity to intrigue with the Duke's hereditary enemy, King Louis. This was why the two of them walked arm in arm up those red steps, right in Burgundy's very face. How Louis must be chuckling to himself at how he had won the support of England's mighty Kingmaker in the restoration of the Lancastrians. What an alliance he could build when once his cousin Queen Margaret and her son were back in England!

Anne stared down at the bent head of her noble father. With the marriage of Isabella to Clarence, he would still have a foot in the Yorkist camp, should his plans miscarry; and with her marriage to Anjou, he would control the Lancastrians. It was a brilliant plan. No wonder people trembled when his name was spoken. And she was to be the instrument of all this. Her father had spoken gently, to be sure, but none the less firmly. Most noble fathers gave cold commands, their daughters were dressed and taken to church to marry men they hardly knew. Because she was her father's favorite, he would appear to cajole but in reality he would compel. Anger surged

through her as she stood at the corner of the table, ignored but not dismissed. Hot words rose to her lips.

But as if he read her thoughts, he spoke. "You do understand, my child?" Laboriously he traced his signature at the foot of the parchment. Suddenly he looked up. It was a trick he had when dominating a person.

Though she swallowed nervously, she endured the piercing gaze, staring back as she set her jaw, so like his. "I understand, my lord."

"Then you will not see Gloucester again." He spoke as if conferring a favor. "I am told he lies in the east wing recovering of his hurts, where I have ordered he remain for a month. At dawn we ride for Calais and you will have your women prepare you early. I advise that you go straight to bed." He drew her to him and she suffered his kiss. She knew how used he was to a person cowering when he spoke, for all the world like some small creature before a great forest lord. She lifted her skirts and curtsied.

"I bid you good night, my lord father."

She slipped through the door and leaned her back against it. Anger choked her now. Within her the pliancy her father counted on was fast hardening into rebellion. So the great Earl Warwick thought he had won, did he? Well, let him think her a small white rabbit cowering before him if he wished.

She skimmed down the dark corridor. She had caught the flash of a silver-gilt head. "Alain!" She drew her page into a window embrasure. "Alain, now listen to me. You are to sleep outside the Lord Richard's door tonight and bring me word the instant he wakes."

"Aye, my lady." Alain's devotion to Richard was only a shade less than to her.

She would see Richard before they started for Calais. She had to find out what it was he wanted her to tell King Edward.

2. The Lion's Paw

REBELLION burst over England. Under sealed orders from his kinsman Warwick, John Conyers, calling himself by the romantic name Robin of Redesdale, managed to collect an army larger than that of the King and led an insurrection in the North. Edward himself hurried to suppress it. Although his lords told him who had planned the trouble, he refused to believe that Warwick and his own brother Clarence had actually turned on him. Not until the arrival of Richard, pale, still bandaged, did he learn the bitter truth.

He called on his loyal earls to bring what assistance they could muster. Then he sent three letters, one to Warwick, one to Clarence, and one to Warwick's brother, the Archbishop of York. He told the three he did not believe the rumors regarding them, and sent cordial invitations to come to a peaceable meeting.

"And then we'll see," he told Richard grimly.

Warwick did not come immediately. News trickled across from Calais that in a glittering ceremony attended by Garter Knights and other notables, the Archbishop of York had united Warwick's older daughter Isabella in marriage to George of Clarence.

"And I hear also that Warwick terms himself The Lion, these days," Hastings told the King.

"He does!" Edward eyed his Lord Chamberlain, an old friend and comrade in arms. "Lion, eh?"

Hastings did not add that people were calling Clarence a jackal who stalked the Lion of Warwick's heels to share in whatever pickings were available. He would spare his old friend this additional smart. Edward had always styled himself the King of Beasts, emulating the famous Lionheart of crusade days, and indeed he fought like one in the field. This was a direct insult.

It then became apparent that Warwick had set sail for England with Clarence, the Archbishop, and the Earl of Oxford, the mighty Lancastrian, who alone commanded more men than all of his three

comrades combined. When word reached him that they had landed in Kent, Edward said, "We must look to it."

His earls Pembroke and Devon gathered their Welsh pikemen and West Country archers and marched north to his aid. But Robin of Redesdale was near and stalked them. The two Yorkist lords fell out over the spot to billet, parted in rage, and Redesdale ambushed Pembroke who was the weaker in force. Fighting savagely, Pembroke held Redesdale off but at the crucial moment an advance party of Warwick's horse charged in. It was too much. Pembroke and his younger brother, fighting back to back, were taken. The two lords, covered with blood, mostly that of their enemies, were haled into Warwick's camp.

"Kill them, my father," advised Clarence.

Warwick shot him an unpleasant look. "They may live till morning," he decreed. "Fetch them a clerk." The prisoners would wish to write to their families.

At dawn, they were beheaded.

Edward, back in Nottingham with Richard and Hastings, knew nothing of this dire defeat. But as he marched south to Olney he was met by fugitives from the battle with the news that Warwick and Clarence were at their heels. "And Earl Rivers and Sir John Woodville are slain!" they cried. "And they do say Herbert and Devon are taken."

At this appalling announcement, Edward's army began to melt. Those that remained staunch, Edward dismissed. "Get you gone, all of you, till I shall have further need!" he cried. And they rode away.

Richard was aghast. Warwick had sharpened his ax with a vengeance and was evidently for beheading the lot of them. He was not sorry that Earl Rivers and his son Woodville, Edward's relatives by marriage, were done for; a scurvy lot, who supported Edward only for gold. But Herbert and Devon were something else. "What now?" he asked.

"What now, Diccon?" Edward was calm. "Since I am no longer the lion and the good Warwick has assumed the role, I must change. I shall become the fox."

Richard wrinkled his brow at his brother. Edward stood before him, begrimed with the dust of his hot ride beneath the August sun, a magnificent figure in royal armor. Though the line about his mouth was tight, he was smiling. It was what the people of England liked most about him. "Our smiling golden King," they called him.

Edward was resourceful, but at this moment it was more than Richard could do to read his mind. The situation could not have appeared more hopeless. Yet Edward was smiling.

He sat on a little scarlet stool and let his hands droop between his knees. "As I see it, Warwick has me on the hip. But only for the moment. I cannot hope to meet him successfully in the field, not with that damned Oxford to swell his strength. So—I capitulate. Play their game." Now, for a moment, he actually looked the fox, the point of his long Plantagenet nose seeming to twitch delicately as he scented his enemy.

"You mean surrender?"

"No." Edward's mouth tightened. "I may have to be their guest for a few weeks while we gather strength."

"How do you know they won't—won't—"

"Kill me? Nay." Edward shook his head. "I'm too valuable. Besides, they don't quite dare to do that. They'll probably haul me off to Warwick Castle, more likely Middleham, which will be nice and handy when I escape and leg it for the coast. I may have to get to Flanders for help."

"Escape from Middleham? How could you?"

"It can be done."

"Couldn't you run now?" Anxiously Richard peered through the tent opening.

"They'll be expecting that and every road will be watched. I'd be taken. Why waste the time?" Edward came and put his arm about his brother's shoulders. Taller than Richard by several inches, as unlike in coloring from him as he could be, his handsome golden hair contrasting against Richard's dark sallowness, he yet resembled him. There was something in the way both had their heads set on their shoulders, in the proud lift of their chins, that marked them as kin.

"I can't bear it," Richard muttered.

"And if it weren't for you, Diccon, I couldn't bear it, either." Edward was sober, his smile faded.

"Come." Edward touched him lightly on the head. "Take that thunder look off your face and hear what I have for you to do." The brothers sat down. "I mean for you and Hastings to ride away before I leave. Wear plain clothing and you will be taken for stragglers from my army. Hastings will slip down into Lancashire and raise my force there; you are to head for York. Go to Amyas and the mayor-

ality and start organizing forces. Percy and Lovell can aid you. Keep in touch with me. We have friends in both castles.”

Richard thrilled with pride at his brother's trust. “I shan't fail you,” he promised.

A shout brought them to their feet. “Ah.” Edward peered outside. “I thought so.” They saw a dust cloud, scattered now by the breeze to reveal a stout column of riders. “Well, they've jumped us, Diccon. You and the others remain till they have arrived, and then slip off. It would not do for you to go now.”

The riders drew to a halt. The Archbishop of York alighted and clanked toward them in full armor. “I came to escort your Grace to my brother.”

Edward turned back into the tent. “Let us refresh ourselves before we ride, sir.” His manner was easy but Richard felt the tension in the air.

He slipped around to the side of the royal tent, found Lovell pitching daggers with Percy. “We ride.” Some of the resolution of Edward had entered his own breast and he felt himself competent and ready. They would carry out Edward's orders to the death. And there was one good thing to come out of all this. Warwick had been so busy marrying off Isabella to their brother and attending to his rebellion here in England, he had had no time to do anything about Anne and the Prince of Anjou.

Less than an hour later, while his brother the King ate and drank and exchanged compliments with his Archbishop, Richard, Hastings and their few attendants, all dressed in plain riding gear, left camp and struck off on the north road. They were not stopped.

For a second Richard looked back at the bright little tent with the golden crown sparkling in the afternoon sun. “God keep him,” he muttered.

Middleham Castle drowsed in the September afternoon. Unlike the French castles, it was not a graceful fortress of slender towers crowned with high conical roofs, but a squat Norman structure sturdily rising from the southern slope of Wensleydale, a dour enough place unless one had grown up there and loved it. In its setting of rolling moors, it had a sort of grandeur that spoke to northerners far more eloquently than all the splendor of London or the beauty of France.

Hidden in a thickly grown coppice with his friend Lovell, Richard

strained his eyes as if to pierce those stout walls and espy Edward. The old eastern tower presented a blank face to him, while from its crenellated summit floated Warwick's own gold and blue checkers. A grim jest, thought Richard, to fly the pennon over the very tower where lay the prisoner King.

Also in that castle was his love, the Lady Anne, whose quick wit and courage had brought him here. She it was who dispatched her Norman minstrel Gervase to seek out Richard and send him to Middleham. The time for Edward's escape was ripening. On their last meeting, Edward had said to his brother that escape from Middleham was possible; it now remained for them to find a way.

"Do you see anything?" he muttered to his companion.

Lovell squinted against the afternoon sun. Both young men wore dark plain doublets and woolen hose. "Nothing," he sighed. "I don't think he's coming, Diccon."

"Gervase said he came out every afternoon on the off chance of finding us," said Richard. "I think he'll manage."

He cast his eyes over the Yorkshire scene, so dear to him. Every tree and bush were familiar. The duckpond, low with the long summer, where as children they got so muddy, the little coppice in which they lay, believed by peasants to be haunted on All Hallows' Eve by a white shrouded figure with no face. He loved it here in the north; here he was entirely himself. The rugged land had made him, sturdy little boy, lanky youth, now a full-fledged royal duke and the King's Man.

He tensed. "Look!" He caught Lovell's arm. A small figure had crossed the drawbridge with a panniered donkey, and the sun caught the flash of pale yellow hair beneath a jaunty cap. "It's the lad, all right." Impatiently the two young men awaited the boy's approach. "We'd best get back a bit farther." It would not be hard for a pair of keen eyes to spot them from the topmost window of a tower.

They crouched out of sight. The clatter of small hoofs neared and a swishing sound told that youth and donkey were pushing their way on the overgrown path.

"Hist!" Richard attracted the page.

"Saints, my lords, you gave me the start!" The tawny face peered through the bracken. "I was not sure you would be here."

"How do you get out of the castle?" Lovell asked, while Richard took a quick look to see that Alain had not been tracked.

"It's easy as paring cheese. I go to the village every afternoon for

vegetables and eggs. I can't stop here long, though, for the bridge goes up at sunset."

"Right." Richard was all business. At any moment, people might come riding from the castle or, for that matter, returning to it. "Now, attend. You must bring the Lady Anne here. When does she ride?"

"When the weather is fair. But there is usually someone with her."

"Then she must contrive to come alone. Just you and the French girl, perhaps."

"Does the Lady Isabella ride with her?" put in Lovell.

"The Lady Isabella has the carrying sickness and cannot ride."

"Ah! One less to deal with," said Richard. "Bring the Lady Anne tomorrow afternoon. We shall await her here." He dared not confide the details of the rescue to the youth who, however intelligent, could be caught and questioned.

"She shall be here." The confidence in the youth's tone appealed to Richard. Perhaps he had underestimated Alain. But no, he must speak to Anne himself. He would not admit even secretly that in this time of mortal danger he could be thinking of his love, of the joy of seeing her again after all these weeks of separation.

"How is it with the King?"

"The King does well enough, though he grows somewhat silent. He lies in the tower and the Queen climbs to see him every day, though she is big with child. But of late he has seemed to take heart."

"Our messages have reached him?"

"Aye. Before your lordships' arrival, we received your news."

"How is that?"

"Women from the village come to gather herbs in the simple-plot, behind the rose garden. The Queen's woman goes there, too."

Richard grinned. This game they were playing had its own particular relish. When all was over, he and Edward would have many a chuckle together.

"Have the Lady Anne here tomorrow by the second hour after noon. Do not fail us." Richard moved away, his hands beneath his belt. "You must go now."

3. Rescue

IT RAINED hard that night, but morning brought a warm drying sun. The land steamed. Like a sentient thing raising its sodden head to shake off the wet, the castle came to life. From their huts the bailey workers flocked forth, armorer and wainwright, ostler and smith, greeting one another as they tramped into the muddy courtyard. Knight, squire, and lady made ready to ride abroad with the hawks.

Anne found it easy to defer her own ride. To her mother's invitation to join them in the hunt she sent word that her monthly illness was upon her and if she ventured out at all, it would be when the sun was high. In a subdued frenzy of waiting she paced her chamber. Dressed for riding, Clotilde and Alain watched with her. At last the French girl turned from the window. "They are all gone, my lady, every one."

They descended into the great hall, quiet save for a few pages playing numblety-peg in some straw before the fire. Wrapped in a dark cloak, Anne set out with her two attendants.

Across the plashy meadow they galloped, and at the edge of the coppice, well out of sight of a stray passer-by, they tethered their mounts. With a wildly beating heart Anne followed Alain into the heart of the little wood. It was quite overgrown, a perfect shield for a secret rendezvous. As children they had played and shivered in its intriguing shadow, half expecting to see the faceless ghost gibbering at them from behind some bush or tree.

Alain stopped and peered about. "It is here we have met before," he murmured. But Anne had already seen Richard—a spare figure in brown, emerging from the bushes; Lovell, in dark gray, with him. Quietly Lovell drew the other two out of earshot, leaving the lovers to themselves.

"My love." Richard stooped and kissed her. It grew very still in the little coppice, and Anne heard nothing but the hard beating of her own heart.

“Diccon,” she whispered.

For the moment, they were content to look at each other. To her, Richard seemed older, thinner, and she wanted to call back time, to return to the old days when he sat beside her, wearing his old stained doublet, teasing her, while the two of them ate bread and cheese. He was Diccon Plantagenet then, and no more. Now he was Richard, Duke of Gloucester, Sire of the Blood Royal. To him, she too looked older. She was more of a woman than a girl, for all of her tender years, and he yearned to protect her. It was not right that she, this delicate love of his heart, should have to engage in so grim a business as the freeing of a king from his enemies. But her eyes met his, clear and unwavering.

“How is your shoulder?” Anne found her voice.

“All right. Gives me the devil now and then. Now, tell me about the King.”

“There’s so little to tell. He’s in the tower, under guard, and the Queen goes up to see him every day. I expect you already know that. Gorick is posted.”

“I know all that. Give me news.”

“There is nothing else.”

“Hm,” he mused. “Your old friend Gorick, eh? It’s perfect, you know. How could we ever think they’d put Edward in the tower? It’s perfect!” He struck his hand on the tree against which he leaned. “Down to the privvy platform, over into the moat, it’s a long slide, but Edward’s young enough, and scamp! across into the trees—it’ll be like skimming cream off the dairy pan.”

She stared, her staggering thoughts forming the unbelievable pattern. “Rescue! You can’t mean it, Diccon.” At most she had thought to obtain news of the mustering of forces, exact figures to retail to the King. But—rescue!

“But I do mean it, and you shall do it, you and the lad and the girl here.”

“But—how? You can’t show yourself and I—”

“Now, attend to me. Listen carefully, and if ever you’ve used your wits, let it be now.” Swiftly Richard outlined the plan. “England is up in arms over this latest outrage. And you don’t think our allies are taking it lying down, do you? Burgundy threatens dire vengeance if a hair of Edward’s head is damaged. All the magistrates of London are pledged in loyalty to us. Warwick has both won and failed. The Ragged Staff has lost its magnetism, as he will find out when

he tries to raise more troops. I'd say they've bungled it!" Delight gleamed in his eyes.

"My father has many men garrisoned in his castles." Anne was doubtful. "And my uncle the Archbishop—"

"Your sainted uncle is a loony. At Olney he let Hastings and me slip like oil through his fingers. And so, what then? Hastings is in Lancashire gathering forces, and yes, here's something else. Your Uncle Northumberland is up at Bamborough—refused to come here to Middleham. *Refused* his great and lordly brother. Did you know that?"

Anne shook her head. "So that's why they've looked so worried of late." Her father's brother John Neville, Lord of Northumberland and Warden of the East Marches, on whom he depended for aid in the North, had let him down. "They've done nothing but frown."

"And well they might." Richard was grim. "Even so, there's a smart little rebellion flourishing up on the border."

"Robin of Redesdale?"

"Not him." Richard was contemptuous. "He's disbanded and his men have gone home. No, it's something a bit more annoying to all of us. Your father has a distant kinsman, Humphrey of Brancepeth, and he's rampaging about up there. He was misled by the Lancastrians that are sniffing about your father, awaiting their great day, and has jumped in headfirst. It's only a small leak but it could swell into a torrent."

"But, then, that is bad for you and the King."

"Aye, and still worse for your father."

"I heard my lord father and my uncle the Archbishop at supper the other night. My father said he would kill Edward and put George of Clarence on the throne."

"He did, eh?" Richard's teeth gleamed. "And plunge England into chaos."

"Oh, Diccon, do you think he would dare?"

"I doubt it. There's always Louis. *That* spider spins a different web. He'd never stand for putting George on the throne." Richard flicked his hand against the tree. "Thank the saints your father has made a few mistakes. And the worst of all was bringing Edward up here. They should have put him in the Tower with Henry, who spends all his time drooling into his porridge and playing at snap with his warders. Edward could have kept the addlepate company."

"Gervase told me they did not dare leave King Edward in the

Tower down in London. Besides, my father makes him sign things. Thus the people think he still rules.”

“That minstrel of yours is a shrewd fellow. I had talk with him at York. Pity he spends all his time strumming a lute. Any time you wish to get rid of him he can take service with me.”

“Oh, how is Gervase?” Anne felt compunction at her neglect of her favorite.

“A very clever man. He knows something besides music, for all he plays so well. Better not let Edward hear him. You’d surely lose him.”

“If Gervase wished to go to court, I’d not stop him,” said Anne proudly. “He knows that.”

Richard laughed. “He’d never leave you. And I fancy he is bound by something more than mere loyalty. How long has he been with you?”

“My father took him into our service in France. Let me see, it must have been in ’61. I know I was only a little girl then. I had been ill, and he brought me Gervase to divert me. The other two were with him. I remember he would not consent to be parted from them. Alain was such a pretty little boy.”

Lovell and the others moved restlessly in the bushes nearby. Richard shook off reminiscence. “Well! We have no time for chatting, Anne.”

“No. I am sorry.”

“No matter. Now to business. Once we have sprung Edward’s trap, we have a safe escort for him to Bamborough where your uncle has a goodly force already gathered and waiting. It is not going to be necessary for Edward to go to Flanders—not unless things go seriously wrong. But first—the trap. That is where you come in.”

Anne swallowed, wishing her heart did not jump so uncomfortably. Richard took her hands. “Are you brave, *ma mie*? Very brave?”

Proudly she returned his intent gaze. Of course she was brave. But she could only whisper, “I think so.” Then she added, “For you—I could dare anything.”

“Good.” Richard would waste no time on sentiment. “This is what I have in mind. You say the Queen’s Grace visits the King daily. Then you shall take a message from him to her. Anything, to get that door open for the space of a second.”

“But—Gorick?” The guard was required to sleep across the door and was relieved only night and morning long enough to eat and to

ease himself. With his life, he was answerable to the Earl. "Gorick is a good man," she said doubtfully.

"Ah, yes." Richard brushed that aside. "When it is proved that Gorick was overpowered, rendered senseless by a surprise attack, even your father will understand and forgive him."

"A surprise attack? Gorick senseless?" Anne laughed a little. It was too fantastic.

"Boy!" Richard beckoned Alain to come closer. Rapidly he explained what had to be done. "You will do this at dark of night. Anne, you must think of a way to lure the squire to the head of the stairs, and then you, Alain, will strike him from behind, something wooden, not metal, and be careful how you hit him. A tap is all it takes, high up on the back of the skull. Does he wear a helmet?"

"No, a woolen cap."

"Heaven be praised for that. On the back of the skull, mind you, and then tie him up—and for all saints' sake, don't forget to haul him back to the door. It must not appear that he left his post."

"No." Anne shivered. Her father's vengeance would then indeed be dreadful. There were those horrible cells down in the donjon. No longer used, the grates and knives had long since rusted, but grates could be cleaned, fires built under them, and knives sharpened. "We won't fail to put him back there," she promised.

"Then you think you can do it?"

"Of course."

With the true enchantment of the Plantagenets, Richard beamed on her. "Ah, we're going to be grand together." They stood close without speaking, and enfolded against him, Anne knew a moment's perfect happiness and at the same time thought how impossible it would be ever to refuse him anything he asked of her.

He squinted up at the sky through the thick branches. "We cannot tell how long the weather will hold. It had better be tonight."

"But the King—does His Grace know?"

"He knows. Another of their blunders was bringing the Queen. We have been sending messages through her for days now."

Anne's eyes widened. Alisande, the Queen's waiting-woman! Every day she went out to the herb garden behind *Retraite* to gather simples for her mistress. How easy it would be to slip a message into the waiting-woman's hand as she leaned over a bed of agueweed!

A breeze wandered through the wet little coppice. Anne had a strange feeling that she stood at a kind of crossroad in her life, that

after today, no matter what befell, nothing would ever be quite the same. Even were she to fail . . .

Richard was regarding her fixedly. "It's for the King, Nan," he said quietly.

"I know." She looked down at the ground. "And what about us, Diccon, you and me?" The defeat of Edward's enemies might take months. In any case, they were facing another long separation.

"Edward swore to me at Olney that we should be wed." He put his hand beneath her chin.

But she pressed against his shoulder. "Oh, Diccon, I just don't know!" Quivering she clung to him.

"Courage, *ma mie*. This must be done first. And then—you'll see—the rest will come easily."

Now she looked into his eyes, dark and softly shining. "You do believe it, Diccon?"

"On my life, I do." He pressed her fingers to his lips. "I love you." She drew a shaky breath.

"Beshrew me," said Richard suddenly. "I near forgot." He fumbled at his breast. "It was to be for your saint's day." Pinned to his underclothing, still warm from his body, was a brooch which he unclasped and laid in her hand. It was an antique jewel, one that must have been in the family for years. Round the gleaming violet stone the twisted gold formed the letters *AEI*.

Together they bent over it, their hooded figures drooping in the gloom. "It means 'Forever and aye,'" said Richard. "I want you to have it."

Anne's eyes misted over. That he should have thought of her like this in the midst of all his care and worry touched her to the quick. Then she smiled up at him. Her fingers closed on the brooch, and from its hard feeling she drew strength. "It's all right, Diccon, we won't fail you." Turning to go, she looked back at him. "The King shall be free tonight."

Anne got leave to sup in her chamber. Still feigning illness, she sent away everyone except her two attendants and Gifa. It would not do to leave *that* end untied. Now the nurse was grumbling and clacking about the room.

"For the love of God, boy, do something!" she said as Alain stumbled over a stool and sent a pewter pitcher clanging to the floor. "Put a stick on the fire. And you, my girl, where is your sewing?"

Sighing, Clotilde got out her work. She was embroidering a shirt for Anne, but in her present state of nerves she did not feel like fine stitching. Behind the mask of her usual calm she hid her fears and excitement. Her beloved lady was running a terrible risk. What would the Lord Warwick do when he found out, as she feared he surely would, that his daughter had played a part in the King's rescue? She had pleaded with Anne to send only the two of them, her and Alain. But Anne would not listen.

"They'd know I sent you," she reasoned. "And besides, you forget—I gave my word to Richard to see it through myself."

Richard had been explicit. "The third hour after sunset. Watch carefully, and turn your hourglass." She reached out and turned it now and Clotilde shook inwardly. Thought of those long dark passages, the fear of discovery, the dread encounter with Gorick, terrified her. Long before the sand had run through once more, they must be on their way to *Retraite*.

Ever since Anne took her into the garderobe, to whisper into her ears the plan, the sickness of fear had tightened on the French girl. Now she bent to her sewing, her stool pulled to the candle, mentally rehearsing her part in the rescue. Against the jutting hood of the fireplace Alain sat on a bench, knees to his chin.

"We must make sure of Gifa, she's the only one I fear," Anne had said.

Puttering among Anne's clothes, the nurse showed no sign of departure. Anne lay watching through half-closed eyes the inexorable trickle of sand through the narrow waist of the glass. This was by far the hardest part; to lie quietly, while the furious thoughts boiled about in the brain. Resolutely she kept at a distance terror of her father's vengeance, while once again she bent her mind to getting rid of Gifa. From the shadows she caught the intent ice-blue gaze as Alain looked hopelessly from her to the nurse.

She turned, making her voice sleepy. "Gifa!" she called. "Gifa, dear!"

"Eh?" The nurse turned from her bending over a coffer.

"Do come here."

Gifa dropped the garment and came to Anne. Her face with its drooping cheeks was severely indifferent. "And what now?"

"Gifa, dear," Anne pulled her down to whisper, "I'm so sleepy, and if you'll go belowstairs, I promise to drop right off. Please! It bothers me that you have not yet supped."

"Sol!" Grudgingly the nurse smiled as if Anne's consideration of others was something new. She eyed the other two, who had suddenly become industrious, one stitching away for dear life, the other busy with the hearth brush. "And these?"

"Oh, they'll go. When I'm asleep."

Anne snuggled down in the bed and smiled meltingly at her old nurse. Clotilde had made sure there were pigs' feet stewing in the big pot down on the cookroom fire, a dish Gifa dearly loved. It would take her ages to pick all those nasty little bones of their succulent gristle. The salty food would doubtless bring on a great thirst and Gifa would drink deeply. She would be sure to fall dozing on the settle and by the time she awoke, stiff and cold before a dead fire, and climbed back to their tower, they would be finished and safely back.

She watched the old woman make her slow way to the door. Oh, if Gifa only knew that Anne had met secretly that very afternoon with young Richard, whom she hated, how angry she would be! Anne felt a sudden perverse delight in so deceiving her.

Until Alain signaled from the door she lay still. Then she flashed out of bed, thrust her arms into the dark robe held for her by Clotilde and, in her old blue slippers, skimmed to the door.

By devious ways they gained Edward's tower. There was a narrow musty little underground passage that connected the tower to the lord's portion of the castle, through which, single file, they groped their way.

Without noise they reached the top of the winding flight. Down the passage fitfully lit by a single guttering torch, they saw the guard's bulky figure, heard his soft stamp to restore circulation to his feet. Needless, thought Anne, his trying not to disturb the royal prisoner's repose, for doubtless at this instant Edward must be crouching close on the other side of the great studded door, awaiting its swing that he might slide through.

Gorick gave a great yawn and laying down his halberd, prepared to stretch out for his own rest. So much the better; if he were sleepy, he would be easier to deceive.

"Now! she whispered the signal.

Clotilde crept forward to the King's door. They heard Gorick's surprised grunt, then her sobbing murmur. She was telling him that Anne, coming with a message for the King from the Queen's Grace, had slipped on the curving stairway. Clotilde sobbed that she was terrified. The Lady Anne lay on the stair, quite still, and did not answer. She feared her lady had struck her head, but, oh, would

Gorick bring the torch and see if she were badly hurt? The Lady Anne did not move! If he would lift her up and carry her into the passage, Clotilde would run for help. But she dared not move her lady in the stairway, unconscious as she was, lest she roll farther down.

Thank God, thought Anne, for Gorick's simplicity. Simple, uncomplicated, with the stolid loyalty of the trained yeoman, he knew that he was answerable to his lord for the life of the captive, but the Lady Anne was his friend. It could do no harm just to look. The sobs grew louder. Quivering, Anne waited. Clotilde was doing very well. Plainly Gorick was impressed, for they heard his rumbling reply, the concern in his voice, as his steps drew nearer. In the shadows Alain crouched, mallet ready. Anne lay on the narrow step, her heart hammering. The light raised, Gorick bent to look, the youth leaped, bringing the mallet crashing down on the unguarded head, and with a sigh the man slid to the floor. In a shower of sparks the torch rolled down the steps and went out. Eyes wide, Anne stood an instant, staring. Had they killed him?

But Alain was kneeling for the key. They raced to the door and in a second had it unlocked and open. The King slid through.

"Good lad," he breathed and as he passed them, touched Anne briefly on the shoulder. Noiselessly he slipped to the garderobe at the end of the passage. It was a crude place, with a drain opening into a wide pipe that slanted down to a lower platform. This pipe, built of bricks unevenly projecting and wide enough to admit a man's body, offered a nice challenge to anyone hardy enough to climb down inside it.

Edward did not hesitate. Winding his cloak firmly about his body, he lifted the chute lid and let himself cautiously down inside the oozing pipe. At the top the three waited, breaths suspended. The King was to signal his safe descent. In a few minutes they heard a clank, soft but insistent. He was rapping on the slimy side of the pipe to let them know he stood safe on the empty platform. There the privy chute opened into a sort of cistern where the ordure collected to be used on the land. Edward had climbed down, soiled but safe, and in the rising wind and the emptiness would find a rope, rigged for him by Alain late that afternoon. He would have to slide for it, take a steep drop into the moat, then it would be nothing to slip across the dark meadow to the trees, where Richard awaited with a pair of fast horses.

For a moment more the three stood in the garderobe. Had the King reached the ground? There was no uproar, no sound of challenge,

but then, the wind covered everything. Panic seized Anne. She had to regain her chamber before her absence was discovered. Her father was capable of coming himself to see what had kept her from supper. Oh, what a fool she had been not to show herself at table! Her father—the thought raced through her like fire.

“Come!” In the dusk of the passage they ran. “Oh, do hurry!”

Down the stairs they plunged, Anne’s only thought to get back, get back! Their skittering footsteps died away while behind them lay the unconscious Gorick, slumped in the shadows, unremembered, the door standing ajar, its key still sticking in the lock. Outside the wind whistled about the high tower.

Morning broke, cold and gray. There was no trace of yesterday’s warm sunlight. It was a dull day, presage of winter. Emilie attended Anne’s waking and when she asked for Clotilde, the maid told her the French girl was below, summoned by the Lady of Warwick.

With a sinking heart Anne knew herself discovered. Her head ached and her tongue felt coated and dry. She had dreamed all night long of rescuing the King and fleeing before her father’s wrath. In silence she took the broth the servants brought; she would need all her strength. She drank but did not taste. Quickly she dressed, all the time longing to get back into bed, to cower behind the curtains, ill and unable to see anyone. Of course, that was unthinkable. So she clenched her will. If only the King had made good his escape, getting right away from Middleham, she could endure anything. What had she said to Richard?

Clotilde now appeared, her pale face frozen, her eyes full of terror. “We forgot Gorick,” she whispered.

Aghast, Anne stared, every nerve end prickling. Gorick! Lying far from his post. How could they have been so careless? The Lady of Warwick had been questioning Clotilde. “But I told her nothing at all.” With quiet pride the French girl said it.

“You are wanted in the great hall, Anne.” Isabella had come for her, her long green eyes cold with accusation.

Shaking with fear, Anne descended to the hall where her father received visitors of rank or held court on important matters. Like a tribunal it was now arranged, with the Earl in the place of justice, seated on his raised chair on the platform before the colored glass window. His face was set in grim lines, his hands, elbow-propped,

joined at the finger tips. At his side was her uncle the Archbishop, his face blank and official, and behind his chair stood George of Clarence. His expressionless eyes flicked over her then looked away. Of her mother there was no sign. She was truly alone.

This was what she had feared even to imagine and now it had come, bringing with it a sort of dreadful relief. The worst was out. Never, never could she deceive her father. She must have been mad to try. She forced herself to meet his eyes as, chin up, she went toward the steps of the dais, a prisoner at her arraignment.

Then, as she moved forward, she saw Gorick. In the gloom of a doorway at the far end he had been standing and now he was pushed out into the room by a pair of guards. Anne's lips turned icy and her stomach churned. Lividly pale, Gorick's face was shiny with sweat, his hair hung in clammy wisps, the small droplets quivering at the ends. His arms, which it appeared he could not move, hung at his sides, the hands twisted queerly at the wrists, and down one side of his doublet was a dark stain. The hand of a guard touched it and came away red. On his face was agony but his eyes, filmed with pain, met hers steadily.

"Gorick!" she breathed.

"Anne!" Her father's voice cracked, a whiplash.

She started, looked at him, and could not look away.

"I see you know what has happened." The tone was dry. "I hoped you might be innocent of this."

Anne found her voice. "It was not Gorick's fault."

"Then you *do* know?"

Anne knew herself trapped, confessed, before a single question had been asked. But all she could think of now was Gorick, her friend, terribly hurt.

"We found this in his hand," went on the Earl, "that is, after we pried it open." And he held out to her a soiled blue bow of ribbon. "Yours, I believe?"

Fascinated, she stared guiltily at the telltale bit of ribbon. Her father knew everything! It must have come loose from the toe of her slipper, to lead the trail directly back to her. Regaining his senses, Gorick would have dragged himself to the open door, where his gradually clearing eyesight caught the gleam of blue. Faithful, simple soul, he knew he must hide it if he could. Oh, Gorick!

"Yours, then." Her father flung it down. "And now, since ob-

viously my squire is unable to tell us what we want to know, perhaps you will be good enough to explain."

If her father had used his gentle voice, had reproached her, she might well have melted into tears of confession. But the cold iron in his tones froze her own defiance.

"Well?"

"My father, I cannot do that," she said proudly.

She did not know her father any more. Never in all her life had he spoken to her like this. The chilling tones, the tight face of anger—then those stories of him on the battlefield that she had never believed were true. She met the cold stones that were his eyes and she was as hard as he.

"You know I cannot tell you, my lord father," she repeated.

The lion had her beneath his paw though the claws were sheathed. "I know Gorick is your friend. You do not wish him to suffer more?" Now she felt the claws beyond the velvet pads.

She felt queer, as if somehow she had suddenly grown old. How monstrous that her father, of all people, should do this to her! Helplessly she looked from him to Gorick who drooped, broken and agonized, between his guards. She twisted her hands together. What should she do? By this time, it was clear the King must have got safely away, else they would never be bothering to ask her about it. Perhaps, after all, she could save Gorick. It could do no harm to speak now.

But as if through his suffering he caught dimly her intent, the yeoman gave a hoarse cry and suddenly darted toward the dais. Startled, the guards lunged forward to seize him but Gorick, whose legs at least were sound, dodged, sobbing, behind the chair of the amazed Earl, and threw himself against the bottom of the window. With a splintering crash of colored glass he was through. They heard his shriek as he fell.

Anne's ears rang but she did not faint. Instead, she continued to look straight into the cold stony eyes of her father. Then she heard herself saying through stiff lips, "Now, my lord, do with me as you will."

4. The Kingmaker

THE quick wit and lightning brain of Warwick reacted almost instantaneously to disaster. Not one hour after the discovery of Edward's escape, a trusted messenger clattered down the drawbridge ramp, hot on the trail with a letter for the fleeing King. If Edward would bargain with him, they could come to terms.

In his great hall the Earl sat on at his table, tapping his fingers, while around his chair the cold wind swirled, unheeded by him in his deep absorption. He must act swiftly. From his now dead yeoman he had learned but little, from his daughter even less. But he could guess a good deal.

"Ask my brother to come in, will you?" He sent Clarence, who disliked running errands for his father-in-law, to fetch the Archbishop. George Neville came, his slack face flushed from the meal he had been consuming.

Warwick sighed. So much to be done, and his brother was feasting. "You know I've sent to Edward?" The brother nodded. "Then you shall go to him."

Go to Edward? Neville too sighed and threw back the sable lapels of his jacket. "I have small relish for the errand, my brother."

"It's as simple as gathering apples." Warwick knew his brother's thoughts. Neville feared that with his disarming smile and frank manner Edward could outwit him. Neither he nor Warwick forgot how Richard and Hastings had slipped away at Olney. And besides, Neville hated Edward who, two years before, had stripped him of his greatest honors, among them the Lord Chancellorship of England. He was not anxious to assume this task for his brother.

"I wonder," said the prelate. "Well, what is it you would have me do?"

Pushing aside a wine flask, Warwick unrolled a map. "We know once the word is out that Edward is loose, York forces will rally; soon he'll have enough men."

"To engage you?" Neville twisted his amethyst ring.

"To get Edward to Flanders. He'll have made for Pontefract. The garrison there is friendly to him, and with their escort he can push on up to the coast. But we have one good move left." He looked up from the map. "He needs York and York will not move without assurance from you, its Archbishop. Now, there is that accursed rising along the border and I have thought how to turn it to our advantage."

"Aye?" Neville knew how exasperated his brother was with this premature rebellion of Brancepeth who had jumped the signal like an overready lad at a race. Sure that Lancaster was come to its triumph, he had attacked without waiting for the word from his master.

"Edward cannot afford to leave the country with Humphrey of Brancepeth up there in revolt. And we cannot afford to have him leave at all. You shall offer Edward a state entrance into York."

"In return for what?"

"In return for our putting down the inconvenient rebellion up north—with Edward's assistance, of course."

Neville smiled appreciatively. "Before God, you are no churchman, else would you have made an ideal papal secretary of state, my brother."

"I have larger ideas than dancing attendance on His Holiness."

"It's a good plan." The Archbishop fingered his chain. The plan was one in which he himself could figure to advantage. He would continue his support of his brother the Earl, and then one day together they would so manipulate Rome that he, George Neville, Chief Prelate of York and onetime Lord Chancellor of England, might wear the scarlet hat and sapphire ring of a cardinal. Meanwhile, the scheme was perfect. Warwick would use Edward to strengthen his own weakened position, for it was becoming increasingly difficult to raise men to the Ragged Staff standard, then he would await the favorable moment to strike, this time with sufficient force and cunning to destroy the King and his upstart Woodville connections. The few wavering Lancastrians among the Yorkists his brother would weld to his side with promises and rewards. He then could place either Isabelle or Anne on England's throne, and for his one loyal relative the road to Rome and the scarlet hat would lie open.

"A good plan," he repeated. And then he thought of the immediate. The first thing he had to do was to go to Pontefract and conciliate Edward. This he did not relish.

"Thank the saints we can now move." Warwick stirred restlessly.

"This paralyzing inaction plays the very devil with the nerves. England has to think Edward still rules—that is vital—and I must have all the people with me. So we must establish connection with Edward as soon as we can. I chose my swiftest rider who is bound to overtake him. Then we shall see. If you can manage to make it appear that Edward did not escape but that he left with my sanction, so much the better."

"That won't be easy."

"You've a glib tongue in your head. Use it."

"Young Gloucester is not going to keep his mouth shut. And there can be small doubt that he was at the bottom of all this. That was a clever trick they served you, my brother."

Warwick winced. He did not need prodding to know he had been betrayed, that Anne's falseness could not have been managed without help from Richard. But he was too much the Neville not to admire Anne's daring. "But she must bow the knee. I have been too soft with her. What a queen she would make for England!"

"She's your own child, Dick, and she'll bear watching. I have a man who is skilled in this matter. What if I lend him to you?"

"Perhaps." Warwick studied a document.

"He's a Spaniard who came in '59 with Coppini. You remember Coppini?"

"Eh?" Warwick looked up scowling. "That popinjay!" He had never liked the Papal Legate who ten years before had captivated the court with his iridescent ways and his fulsome friendship with Henry VI. "What about him?"

"Nothing." Neville threw out a nervous hand. "I speak of the Spanish priest. He stayed to complete a wall painting in that chapel at York, a fellow of some skill, and he never went back with his master to Rome. I suggest he watch Anne for you. It won't do for her to be receiving messages from young Gloucester."

"As you wish." Warwick was well satisfied with his brother's plan of placing a spy to watch Anne. Among his own private hates was Richard of Gloucester, another popinjay whom he meant to crush completely. This youth he had partly raised in this very castle, had nurtured him in army and policy, only to have the young traitor turn on him and go skulking to Edward. He sent for Saffron, his steward, to whom he gave orders concerning the Lady Anne's two servants.

So it happened that before noon of Anne's first uneasy day, his Grace the Archbishop of York, with a train of attendants and priests,

rode out from Middleham under a light gathering rain. In a cluster of his personal servants were two slight figures, those of a youth and a girl, both heavily hooded against the weather. The whole party bore due south, but a single messenger struck off for the east and his master's city of York. In his leathern scrip he carried his master's orders concerning one Frey Siserone, a Spanish priest attached to the cathedral. The priest was summoned at once to Middleham Castle, there to assume a special duty for the Earl of Warwick.

Meanwhile Anne sat alone in her chamber. She heard the chapel bell strike for Terce and Sept, calling the castle priests to prayer. With but one attendant to serve her, afraid to go out, she waited, numbed with the rapid events of the past few hours. The last development—Alain and Clotilde, summoned by Saffron to dress for riding, taken away without so much as a word of explanation—had terrified her.

But at last she gathered enough courage. She descended the stairs from her chamber, her face set. Youth had drained from her and she was entirely a woman. And as she went down she had only one fear, which was that her father might not be there. That would be ill fortune, indeed. But fortune had not entirely forsaken her, for her father still kept his seat on the dais before the shattered window through which the wind blew coldly. Straight forward she went, giving herself no time to quail.

"My lord father"—she clenched her trembling icy fingers behind her, willing her voice to remain steady as she addressed the down-bent head—"my lord father, I desire to speak with you."

Startled he looked up. Absorbed in his work, he had not even heard her approach. For an instant his brows drew together but the habit of softness, strong within him where she was concerned, stilled the harsh reply. "Well, then?" He laid down his pen and drew back in his chair.

They took the measure of each other. She, slender and determined, her face, pinched and pale as it was, controlled, her manner resolute. And he, bulky in the chair, his own expression blank and official, only the eyes burning in the cold mask.

"My lord father, I pray you to grant me a boon."

"A boon!" The short mirthless laugh escaped him. "By the iron combs of Blaise, you are either foolhardy brave or witless."

But she would allow him no time to refuse, to order her from his sight. "Only tell me where they have been sent." Strained and expectant, she fixed him with her eyes. Surely he had not been cruel

enough to return them to France, the land so feared and hated by Clotilde, so cold and unfriendly to Alain.

"Oh, that." He picked up the pen. "Is that all? For a moment, I fancied you came for something else." He began to write, tracing his name slowly on the parchment; the arts of inscribing had never been his.

She waited, swallowing painfully. "Have—have they gone to France?"

"To France?" He did not raise his head. He finished the signature, stared at it a moment, then dashed the sand over the ink. "No. They have not gone to France."

Warm relief washed over her. Then she would not have to tell Ger-vase the two people he loved most in the world had been sent back to their own country.

"I thank you." A moment more she waited. He would not speak again. Did she fancy his hand moved in dismissal? Without waiting to hear more, she turned away and left.

On September 28th, in weather turned mild for the occasion, just within Bootham Bar in the shadow of York Minster, Warwick awaited the coming of Edward. Word had come that the King was within a quarter mile of the city, riding at the lead of an imposing force. Astride a great gray charger, a still figure in his black armor, he sat at the head of his officers. The way within the Bar was narrow and Warwick had about him only his own captains, and at his side George of Clarence. Edward, with all his military suite, would have hard work to squeeze in, and as for his horse and foot, they would have to quarter in the garrison and the field.

Warwick pulled off his glove and stroked his cleft chin. He himself had plenty of men now, but how many of them were committed to his own service he could not say. Not until it was known that Edward had escaped, that the Earl of Warwick once more rode beneath his King's colors, did men flock to his own Ragged Staff. Humiliating to think he could not command them on his own. By the saints, he must be more careful in the future; he knew now where he had blundered. So long as Edward remained at large, he, Warwick, could raise as many men as he wished, pretending it to be for England's protection against Lancaster and Louis. He would walk with extreme caution now.

As for his brother, the Archbishop of York, that worthy had failed signally in his charge, for Edward proved more than a match for the table-loving prelate. Plenty of good food, flattery, and that damned smiling countenance had accomplished Edward's success and Neville's ruin. At thought of this, Warwick seethed.

Now it remained to be seen how Edward would receive the man who so recently had risen against him, holding him prisoner in a dirty prison tower. Perhaps Edward would choose to forget this, since he had come to no harm, and since Warwick had so obediently done his liege's bidding. Letters had reached Warwick in Middleham, agitated ones, signed by his brother, who wrote from Pontefract where Edward calmly remained. *I advise that you set about the King's business with all dispatch*, Neville wrote. *For His Grace will do nothing until Brancepeth is subdued.*

Warwick had no choice. At once he set about doing the thing he had planned for Edward to do. He soon accomplished the deed. Believing the Lancastrian rebellion to be in full flower, Brancepeth came eagerly to meet him and it was easy for Warwick to secure him, load him with chains and bring him to York as an attainted traitor. Surely, thought Warwick, Edward would take this into consideration.

But there was Clarence, that stumbling block. He cast a look at the slim figure beside him; his new son-in-law might prove to be a plate of Dead Sea fruit after all. How would Edward regard the seduction of his younger brother? An embarrassing moment was at hand when the two Plantagenet princes met.

Cheering now began. The King must be very close. Warwick's gray moved a little and the Earl placed a restraining hand on the great neck. And then, riding in the midst of his council lords, Edward passed beneath the frowning shadow of Bootham Bar into the sunlit square—all that Warwick had left of it. Smiling inside his lifted visor, Edward acknowledged the dipping of Warwick's colors, then swung off his horse. With a clanking and rattling, everyone dismounted and Edward stood quietly, Richard at his side, while Warwick and Clarence crossed over to him.

"All hail, my loyal subjects!" Edward looked straight at Warwick's face. His brother he chose for the moment to ignore. "It has been a warm ride. Let's go within." And he turned and mounted the long flight of steps that ran sidelong by the gatehouse.

A long string of knights followed while Warwick and Clarence remained at the foot, waiting. God! Had Edward brought every York-

ist noble to the meeting? His brother Richard, with William Hastings the Chamberlain, the Duke of Suffolk and young Henry, Duke of Buckingham, the Earl of Essex and Arundel, faithful Northumberland, and a dozen or more lesser lords mounted after Edward. The line was endless. Scowling after his brother of Northumberland, Warwick turned to mount. But Mountjoy, a minor lord, had already placed a steel-shod shoe on the step. With an oath Warwick shoved him aside. Feeling as if he were on fire, he climbed those steep steps, the sweat running down inside the golden neck of his corselet.

In the great hall Edward was already seated drinking wine, Richard lounging on the corner of the massive oaken table. But at a look from the royal eyes, he slid off and came around behind his brother's chair, where he leaned against the high point and regarded the approach of his brother of Clarence. The last time he had seen George had been through a haze of pain in a little tent in Bruges, his head ringing from George's blow.

"Well, my lord!" cried Edward pleasantly. "So you took Brancepeth! It is well done."

"He awaits your Grace's pleasure," Warwick replied stiffly.

"Well, well, tomorrow will do." Edward took a drink. "Your brother has gone to his Manor of the Moor. We had a pleasant time at Pontefract."

"Indeed." Warwick was grim.

"But I forget myself. Do join us, my lord." Edward waved Warwick to a seat. "You must be dry with all that waiting in the sun." Then he turned to Clarence, graceful, poised, his gauntlet drawn off one fine hand, his sallet under his arm. "And you, my brother. How is it with you?" Edward's smile quivered a little at the corners of his mouth.

"In health, I thank your Grace." Clarence took the cue, dropped to one knee and kissed the royal hand so graciously extended.

"And your lady? When last I heard, she was ailing."

"It is nothing."

"Nothing that time will not cure." Edward spoke with the ready experience of one who thrice had been a father.

Clarence rose and turned on Richard his two-edged smile. "Diccon, your shoulder is mended?"

"Quite." Richard was surprised that George did not clap him on the sore place and rally him on the sorer point of losing the contest. George of Clarence was, for him, quite subdued.

"You bring a goodly host, my liege." Warwick set down his cup.

"Just a few," Edward replied cheerily. "They form my escort to London."

"You need so many, now the rebellion of Brancepeth is subdued?"

"We plan a royal entrance into the city, my lord. I thought to bring those who had helped me so loyally." To this pointed remark Warwick said no more.

Next morning, outside Micklegate Bar, which had the largest area for assembly, a rough scaffold was erected and here Humphrey of Brancepeth was led out to his execution. The sun rose pitilessly, on the side of York, seeming to refuse those weeping drops of rain so common to this time of year. Brancepeth came stoically to his fate. His captains, chained, lay deep in the dungeons of York Castle where they would remain, technically still Warwick's prisoners. Under a royal canopy of scarlet and blue Edward, flanked by Richard and Hastings, witnessed the beheading of the traitor. On a lower platform Warwick and Clarence watched unmoved. Warwick had seen many a head roll and one, more or less, did not matter. This Humphrey was an overready fool who could not wait for orders from his leader, whose poor judgment had cost him his head. Warwick did not mean to make the same mistake.

But Richard, who had not seen so many executions that he had become calloused to them, paled as the man's head was struck off. The thud of the ax, the pouring blood, the straw—these were unnerving sights. Blows struck in the heat of battle, unfelt while the red haze of fighting were upon a man, were different. This killing in cold blood was horrible. Richard's own neck tingled at thought of how he and Edward might have been kneeling where a moment ago Brancepeth had been.

"And now," Edward spoke clearly over the heads of the assemblage, "we desire to reward the fealty of our dearest brother Richard, Duke of Gloucester, in public acknowledgment of his service to our person and to the realm we govern."

Richard was astounded. Edward had said absolutely nothing to prepare him for this public display. Stunned, he sank on his knees. Edward drew his great sword. Lightly on each shoulder he tapped his young brother. "Rise, Sir Richard, Knight Royal of our Realm." Richard stood now while two squires deftly fitted the golden spurs to his shoes. Edward himself girded on the finely chased sword, its velvet scabbard crusted with jewels. He put his arm about Richard

and turned him to face them all. "Know you by these presents that we here proclaim our brother of Gloucester Lord Constable of England for life, President of the Court of Chivalry and of Courts-Martial, with all authority of determining treasonable acts within this our realm. God save England and St. George!" The people of York cheered the new knight and the golden King.

Thus, in one glorious gesture, Edward dealt out a lesson to his enemies.

In a couple of days, they began the long ride south to London. And all along the way Richard, who rode at Edward's side, heard the details of his new duties. "I look to you to aid in reducing the realm to order. You will have the authority of determining treasonable acts by the simple inspection of fact. Use your head and mete out punishment promptly where it is needed. No squeamish qualms, Diccon."

"These are great honors you bestow upon me, Edward. Have you forgotten that I am well-nigh penniless?"

"That I have not. I have arranged to transfer to you the deeds of some of the Crown lands and I shall give you Sudely. 'Tis a rich manor and if well administered, will give you heavy coffers."

Edward knew full well that he was loading responsibility upon young shoulders, but he had seen the dispatch and resolution with which Richard had performed his duties, the engineering of his own escape, his calmness in the face of danger. Richard had inherited some of the greatness of their father. He would more than balance the rotten apple that was Clarence.

Just as they crossed the border of Yorkshire word reached them that George Neville, Archbishop of York, and the Earl of Oxford, of all people, sought to join their company to ride with them into London. "By the rood," swore Edward, "these two take upon themselves a good deal. Just because I put up with Neville at Pontefract, he thinks to bask in my shadow now." He called one of his couriers. "Take with you our herald, ride back to the Lord Archbishop's Manor of the Moor, and convey to him this, our reply. It is our royal wish that the Lord Archbishop and the Earl await our pleasure, when and if we have need of them. Then and only then will we send for them." He would not dignify the offer of the two traitors by a written reply. Then he grinned at Richard. "At dinner this evening, I will tell my Lord Warwick what I have done. Watch his face. It will be worth it."

In regal splendor they entered a shouting London. Edward, handsomely mounted, shining in the sun that feebly struggled through

the October mist, was supported by a brilliant display of his Yorkist lords. Riding to the rear of the column was the Earl of Warwick with his retinue, no less kingly than Edward's, for all he was the follower rather than the leader. In chains came his prisoners, Brancepeth's luckless captains.

The pleasant news Edward learned on reaching Westminster was that his Burgundian agent had been waiting for more than a week to see him. "Ah! News of our brother-in-law. Show him in."

The agent ushered in another lord, a very splendid one indeed, who bore upon his jupon the flamboyant arms of Burgundy. He carried a flat box of velvet and when the insubstantial ritual of courtesy had been exchanged, he bade leave to open it. And there, sparkling in jewels and fine enamel, was the gorgeous collar and pendant lamb of the Order of the Golden Fleece.

"Well!" Edward was delighted beyond words. "My Lord Warwick!" he called over the heads of his lords. "Come and feast your eyes on this." All in his armor as he was, he signed to Hastings, who lifted the bauble from its velvet nest and clasped it around the neck of his King.

For several days Edward displayed this glittering token of his ally's friendship. Doubtless Warwick, glowering about the court, would send word to Louis and that woman of Anjou that the English King had received this additional pledge of the support and trust of the great Duke. And when the emissary of Charles the Bold returned to Flanders, he bore with him another flat velvet box containing the most Noble and Chivalric Order of the Garter, bestowed by Edward of England upon his puissant friend of Burgundy.

"And now," Edward said to Richard, "let me see how I can further tweak the noses of my enemies."

He summoned his wife's brother Anthony Woodville, and in public show conferred upon him the title of Earl Rivers, which had been chopped from his father by the ax of Warwick's executioner. Warwick himself he stripped of his many former honors and these he divided between Richard and Rivers.

"And what of Anne?" Richard pressed him.

"Later, later." Edward was harassed. "I have pinpricked Warwick enough for the nonce. There is no time for a royal wedding while we have these matters relating to our realm as yet unresolved. I want you to go into Wales and investigate the trouble in Anglesey." He struck the table with his jeweled fist. "Damn it, I miss Pembroke. He would

have known why the Sheriff up there will not pay his tax. Blast Warwick!"

Blast Warwick, Richard echoed in his heart. Were it not for him, he and Anne would even now be planning their marriage.

Edward had his hands full within his private household. Nightly he had to endure the reproaches of his wife, querulous in her advancing pregnancy. Never had she behaved like this. "If you crushed Warwick once and for all," she insisted, "you would have the mastery." Her lips thinned and her pansy-blue eyes glistened with anger. "Even a youth and a maiden were able to set you free. For what do you wait?" So long as Warwick was at large, they sat upon a toppling throne.

"I must build greater strength." Edward was stubborn. "His power is crumbling. When I have used him to wipe out these petty uprisings and all the spring enlistments are complete, I shall strike him once and for all."

"Provided Louis has not marshaled *his* strength to our undoing."

Edward eyed her uncertainly. He did not want to argue politics and military strategy with her. He wanted to make love to her, to forget his cares and relax in the delicious languor of their passion. But tonight she seemed more short-tempered and cross than usual. Was she going to be difficult and refuse him her bed?

"You will wait too long," she warned him darkly as she climbed the little scarlet steps. She felt clumsy and tired and she wished to God this child were born. A son for the throne would make all the difference in the world, would surely stiffen Edward's resolution and unite the people of England as nothing else could. "Good night, Edward." She yawned. "I'll see you on the morrow." With a sharp jerk she clashed the curtain rings and drew the hangings close.

For a moment he stared at the crimson curtains. Women! Shrugging he left the bedchamber.

Next day he summoned Warwick and Clarence to the great hall at Westminster. Dressed in deepest black as if to mourn the sad necessity that forced this meeting, Warwick lounged restlessly in the audience chamber. He had come at the King's command, it was true, but he meant to dominate Edward in this matter of the reconciliation, to receive written pardons for himself and Clarence, to take the measure of Edward's strength. The offhand way in which Edward had behaved ever since the rendezvous in York had been nerve-racking. He knew that today all would come out in the open.

But where was everyone? The room was empty. Edward had commanded them to present themselves at noon. Leaning on a table he watched his son-in-law, hands behind him, whistling through his teeth. As if to proclaim the purity of his intentions, Clarence was dressed in purest white, a color he often affected, but Warwick knew he was tense with nerves, too. Now Clarence flopped into a chair and stared at the ceiling beams.

A sardonic smile creased Warwick's weathered cheeks. More and more he was coming to feel that when finally he grasped the certain power, he could never seat this sorry creature even close to England's throne.

A bustle in the passage, a gay voice, and Edward entered, coming forward jauntily as he pulled off his gauntlet. He had been flying his falcons. Warwick marked the Plantagenet swagger, the blue eyes cold as a wintry sea, though the smile held the old magic. He pulled himself together. "My liege," and he would have bent the knee had not Edward prevented him.

Edward nodded to Clarence who had tardily risen to his feet. The two brothers faced one another. Impossible to think they had ever been lads together, the nine-year-old Ned leading the toddling George, as the little child clung to his finger with a pudgy fist. Now they were worlds apart. Richard came in, caught them looking at each other, the younger one for a moment abashed.

"George!" His own greeting was short. "And you, sir." With a faultless bow he acknowledged Warwick.

The entrance of the Queen and her five sisters broke the tension. They had been downriver to the mercers at Whittington House and they surrounded Edward, full of chatter about the exciting stuffs freshly in from Bruges. Alexandrine velvet, pansy satins, rich silks, all for the new Christmas gowns. Edward was enveloped in the bright veils and the feminine laughter he loved. With an arm about the prettiest of his wife's sisters, he led the way in to dinner. Warwick followed. There was nothing to do but to submit to the delays of the meal, to contain the impatience while the succulent foods were handed around and enjoyed.

But at last they were all gathered in the cold light of the council chamber. All were there, the lords and episcopal pair of anxious bishops, rich in their rustling silks, all come to give and to receive. Solidly this time the bishops supported Warwick, for they believed that whoever was King, he would be master. Pleasantly Edward faced

them, clustering about the table where the scribes had ready the scrolls and pledges, to be sealed and signed in the presence of all.

Expecting to have to bargain, Warwick was prepared. In case Edward proved difficult, he had as pawns the rebels under his personal guard. But Edward was more than agreeable. He had seen it was no use to try governing without Warwick, since they must, for the present, pool their resources and work together.

For the great body of insurgents who had risen against him in the North, Edward promised pardon; and then he looked at Clarence, magnificent in his jeweled white. What of his true blood brother? He put an arm lightly about George's shoulders. As for his true blood brother, he assured the lords that he had forgotten any difference that lay between them. Full pardon for both Clarence and Warwick concerning any offenses committed against the Crown. Edward finished. He looked straight into the dark face with the cleft chin. And what would the Lord of Warwick now perform?

Solemnly Warwick rose. He looked about him at the expectant faces and his heart leaped to think how soon he would indeed be master of all. A careful move, a powerful stroke, and he would hold England in his mailed fist. He cleared his throat. In round English, none of your flowery French, he swore in future Edward was to be free in all respects, free to govern his realm. No more plots, no more imprisonings. All to be fair and open with peace for everyone. And in earnest of this, he flung down his pawns. The rebel captains were the King's, to do with as suited his pleasure.

Smiling, Edward thanked him.

In crooked black script, the scrolls were signed. Hot wax dropped, stamped into crested symbol, sand dashed across the parchment, and in the cold chamber the stiffness relaxed. Sighs of relief flew around the board, while over a careless shoulder Edward flung an order. Fresh heads for Tower Bridge that all might beware the vengeance of a laughing King.

Calling for his women and music, Edward now strode from the council chamber. And down at the bloody Tower, the headsman sharpened his ax.

5. For England

THE advent of Yule, at which Richard planned to meet Anne secretly, brought both sadness and joy to the lovers. Warwick brought his household to York, and the gray-frocked friar no longer shadowed Anne; her father had released her from the spying eyes. In her relief she forgot to be uneasy or to wonder why he no longer cared if she saw Richard or not. She knew better than to think her father had capitulated; far from it. He and Clarence were remarkably easy and relaxed these days. But for the moment she was full of the joy of anticipation. Richard and her beloved ones were awaiting her at York.

Into a swathed town they rode, the sturdy northerners standing in deep snow to welcome them. Hard and long as the journey had been, Anne felt bubble-light as she hastened into the hall with its high carved vaulting. There they were—the four of them. Richard all in scarlet, Gervase at his shoulder, more gay than she had ever seen him, brave in a new doublet, and on either side the familiar faces of Clotilde and Alain.

“Diccon! Clo!” About them both she flung her arms. Gervase and Alain were on their knees but she raised them. “It is like wine and music to see you.”

She watched her parents now to see if in their greeting of Richard, the King’s Man, surrounded as he was by his bright retinue, they betrayed anything of their intent. But the impressive salutations told her nothing. Richard was the host to Edward’s great vassal. The two men talked as easily as if they had never had a hard thought toward each other. And that evening there was a fine feast spread in honor of the Lord of Warwick.

For Anne, the night was pure delight. Her sixth sense told her to beware of all this smiling and conviviality but, for the time being, she ignored it. It was enough that she could sit and look at Richard, lean and dark in his brilliant blouse, the gold chains of his office sparkling on his breast. Gervase, standing near with his lute, had his eyes on her,

but their somber expression did not disturb her. Gervase always looked so. If there was a deeper sympathy in their gleam, she could not know that he was pitying her that Richard must so soon leave her again. For he knew King Edward had ordered his Lord Constable to ride once more into the West, there to hold the winter hearings in place of the dead Pembroke, who as Lord Chief Justice always performed that office. Richard would have to go hence within the week. And Anne would have to keep Christmas with only the joy of her old friends at her side. If Gervase had his own fears about that and the Lord Warwick's sudden ending of his anger against his daughter, he was prepared to keep his counsel.

In a small private cabinet, Anne and Richard snatched a brief hour together. High above the noise of the banquet hall, they could be quite alone. He drew her into his arms. Gently he kissed her, soft at first, then harder, more insistent, pressing apart her lips, his whole lithe body curved against her. She gasped, "Diccon!"

He loosed her, but kept his hands on her shoulders. "By the saints, are you not yet a woman, Nan? Let me look at you."

Blushing now, she stood within his grasp, feeling his glittering eyes on her small budding bosom, passing down her slender hips to her knees. She knew one great yellow braid had come loose, and under his hard hands her gown was wrinkling. Her face flamed.

"Look at me, Nan."

Slowly then she raised her eyes, and suddenly her confusion melted. This was Diccon. With a little cry she clung to him. Now his closeness did not take her breath as before. "Oh, Diccon. When shall we be married?"

"That's more like it." Then he grew somber. "Aye, when?" They sat upon the settle by the fire and he told her that once more he must ride away on Edward's service.

She took it calmly. "If you must, then I suppose you must." She turned away to hide her trembling mouth. This was a blow she had not expected. "Shall you be here for Yuletide?"

"I doubt it." His own sigh echoed hers. "Tell me, Nan, what maggot does your father carry in his brain these days?"

She shook her head. "All I know is that my lord father has not abandoned his idea of bringing the Lancastrians back to England. But how he intends to do this, I do not know."

"Speaks he of France?"

"Not to me, but my mother does. She has mentioned the marriage

plan, the one my father broached when you were hurt in Flanders. My mother says I must do it for England.”

“Ah!” The Plantagenet smile lit Richard’s face. “So they will bind your hurts with the sweet oil of sacrifice.” He flexed his shoulder.

Anne saw that he had changed. By nearly an inch he was taller than when last she saw him, and the splendid clothes of the Lord Constable of England gave him a strange new dignity. His scarlet surcoat furred with mink had its folds pinched tightly to the waist and flared out precisely over the slim muscular thighs. In the Flanders hose his legs showed up well, but the feature of his costume was the magnificent gold chain he wore slung about his shoulders. Anne admired it, thought perhaps Margaret, who as Duchess of Burgundy, could well afford such expensive presents, might have sent it for his birthday in October. If this were true, it augured well, for Richard had never been among her favorite brothers. Perhaps Margaret was beginning to share her husband’s feeling of loyalty for the King and his Lord Constable. But it was at his face that she looked the longest. There she saw a subtle maturing.

But if Richard had grown up, with his manhood had come the great and alarming problems that touched them both. “Diccon.” She arranged the long hanging scallops of her sleeves. “I’m afraid.”

He made no attempt to soothe her and for that she loved him; never had they pampered one another. Their situation was becoming desperate and they both knew it. He turned from the fire. “Courage, *ma mie*.”

“But—Diccon!” The small devils of fear naggged at her. “Suppose they do drag me off to France—what then?”

“Be agreeable.”

“Agreeable!”

“Consent to what they would force upon you.”

She could not think he knew what he was saying. She heard his long finger scrape against his chin. “I do not think,” he chose his words with care, “I do not think they will attempt to complete your marriage in France.”

The idea of a marriage to anyone other than Richard chilled her. But she kept quiet.

“Queen Margaret is much too foxy to give the youth into your father’s keeping till the Earl’s side of the bargain is kept. He must seat her firmly on England’s throne before she will marry her son to his daughter. Agree, be fair and open, let them betroth you with

their silly ceremony, and if I mistake not, they will quarrel over the contract. It's inevitable once that lot gets together. There is too much bad blood between them as it is. You'll see. You'll be brought back to England and then"—his face steeled—"it will be our turn."

"But suppose they decide to have the wedding anyway." Anne was too inexperienced in political matters to see beyond the mere fact of what to them was the desirable marriage.

"They won't. Not if she can prevent it. Use your head. Margaret of Anjou does not intend to be relegated to the role of Queen Mother; she intends to rule England. Once let Edouard out of her hands and into your father's and she would lose all control. Warwick would have Henry declared incompetent, Edouard rushed to Westminster and crowned, and then he himself would assume the regency. And he would force Council to dance to his tune."

"But suppose my father *promises* her the regency—what then?" Anne could not stifle her fear. "She might agree to the wedding then."

In Richard's irritation rose. Now he was all Plantagenet, ready to tweak the offender. Into Anne's sweet anxious face he looked and there was a cruel edge to his smile. "I'll tell you, my white cat. Kill him! In the marriage bed it would be easy. And then I'll be there to whisk you away on a charger."

Now it was her turn for exasperation. He was laughing at her, one of his old tricks. She turned away, biting her lip. It was all very well for him to joke; he wasn't going to run this deadly peril. Well, she would show him that she would not blench, either. "Kill him?" she said. "Well, you know, I might just do that."

Richard swung her around and into his palm he tipped her chin. "Let there be no talk of killing. My sweet, do you not remember that I love you?" He kissed her and the pressure of his lips was bruising. But she did not recoil in maidenly confusion as when he kissed her before. A sudden thrill shot through her, blazed into ecstasy as she returned his kiss, woman to man. He let her go. "I was wrong. You *are* a woman, Nan." He glittered in the firelight, all scarlet and gold, and she thought he had never looked so desirable.

Anne sensed his wavering and pressed her point. "Why can't we be married now?" she pleaded. "The King promised. Have you not deserved this one thing at his hands?"

He shook his head. "If only we could." He took her hands. She sighed. When people, even lovers, took your hands, they were usually going to broach something unpleasant.

"It is not so simple, *ma mie*. Can you understand?" His voice was gentle but his eyes began to glow. "You and I must do this thing for England—truly for her." He jumped up and began to pace about in subdued excitement. "Commons up in Lincolnshire are vigorously demanding the restoration of King Henry, and this is only one of a dozen trouble spots throughout the land. Edward needs the support of George and your father to hold his position. There are great plans for a spring campaign to clean the land of rebels. Were he to allow our marriage now"—he flung out his hands—"you know what your father intends. Do you think he wouldn't take the opportunity to strike us hard?" Now his eyes were blazing. "The moment is critical, Anne. Edward cannot afford to do one thing to antagonize your father now. He must use Warwick to delay the issue until at last he can crush Lancaster once and for all. Then he will be master of England."

It was indeed a new Richard who stood before her. Edward, too, had recognized the power that lay in this quick mind and resolute heart. Now his pale face was flushed, his breath came quickly. This was authentic love of something that extended far beyond the mere lust for power, masked beneath a pretended concern for the realm. It was a passion he asked her to share. The warm air of the little room seemed suddenly charged.

"We can take no chances," he continued. "Even though we are assured of success at the last, we cannot be absolutely sure of the means. Charles of Burgundy inclines toward us; not much more, for there's Margaret, you know. She and George have always been mutual favorites and I think she would dearly love to see him on England's throne. Margaret is not noted for brains, at least where policy is concerned. But should we lose your father's support, she may well get Burgundy to fling all into the scales against us."

"And there is Louis—don't forget him," Anne reminded.

"Ah—the spider." Richard puffed out his lean cheeks. "When your father's grand scheme collapses, he will turn his attention elsewhere. I shouldn't put it past him to make a treaty with Edward that would bind them to a lifetime of peace, though I myself would like to see Louis brought to his knees in the field. At any rate, Louis is not going to favor George as England's King. On the other hand, once let him realize that Margaret of Anjou and her son will never reign in England, either, and he'll spin new webs for the catching of fatter flies."

"Oh, it's all so complicated." Anne rested her head on her hand. Her temples had begun to throb, what with the heavy supper she had

eaten and the foreboding that cast its shadow over her. She had been so sure that she would not have to go through with the farce of the betrothal in France. Now it looked as if the sea would heave between her and her love, and she clutched him to her. "I can't leave you, Diccon," she whispered. "Not again."

"I know." He rested his cheek on her hair. Her slight body with its small bones felt so frail. But he knew she was her father's daughter and could be both silk and steel. In her veins ran some of the same blood that was in his. "I can't let you go, either. But I shall do it, and you will play your part, my love, and some day—" But now he could not go on.

They could only clasp each other, heart to heart, there in the fitful shadowy light of the dying fire.

From her shadowed corner in the York cathedral, unseen but seeing all, Anne watched the shimmering figures of nobility move over the stone floor. She saw the Guinevere grace of Isabella in her green cloak, the cream of her mother's wimple. The dark velvet shape with the clipped hair was her father and at his side, rich in purple, the imposing Archbishop, her uncle. And, stretching back down the nave, the great mass of followers, Stanley, Oxford, Shrewsbury—her father had many loyal friends who shared his feelings: his desire to reinstate the Lancastrians, his hatred of Edward's Woodville marriage, his proposed alliance with Louis of France. These great lords mingled with the important people of York, the Guildsmen, under whose auspices the Mystery was performed, the town officials, Richard's adherents, and those who bowed the knee only to King Edward himself and his deputies. If the Guildsmen were disappointed that royalty had not graced with its presence their festival, they said nothing, declaring themselves quite satisfied with the splendor of the Lord of Warwick and his supporters.

But there were many besides Anne who missed the young Lord of Gloucester, those who had stood to cheer his leaving the previous day. Off to the west, it was said, on the King's business. Memory of their last meeting brought a thrilling ache.

A stillness settled on the assemblage as the organ thinned to a thread and, high on the lectern, the boy Angel cleared his throat. His clear voice chanted, "Hail, Mary, full of grace!" as down by the rood

screen, tense behind a great curtain, the actors of the Nativity tableau gleamed in the torchlight.

"When can we reach his lordship?" A sibilant whisper startled her, it was so close. She strained into the shadows about her and made out two figures crouched in the dimness of the transept elbow, heads together. One turned his face long enough to the light for her to see that it was Norwald, her father's swiftest courier. Nothing strange about Norwald's seeking out her father; but for some reason she had a premonition of dread. Noiselessly she slipped from her place and muffling her face in the hood of her cloak, crept behind the great pillar till she could come close enough to hear.

"You are lately returned?" Anne knew *that* voice, for it had the throaty sound of the King's Champion, Sir Thomas Dymock, he who was Edward's staunchest supporter. What did he do talking privately with Norwald? She crept closer.

"Ah, yes, on the instant." Norwald's Scandinavian accent was clear. "I have urgent news for the Lord of Warwick."

Urgent news! Then Norwald was in from the South where she had heard her father had dispatched him. And what did the King's Champion have to do with her father's courier? The two men were talking again. She could only catch a word here and there. But her quick wit pieced together the news. The truce was to be broken at any time, the trouble was to start in Lincolnshire.

"Sh!" Dymock cut off Norwald. "There are Yorkists about. Come, I know where we can catch the Earl. This will soon be over."

Sickness clutched Anne. She had heard the names Willoughby, Welles and Henry—a full-fledged plot to attack Edward. Her head whirled. Then she stiffened her back against the stone pillar. She had heard something not intended for any ears but those of the enemy, and she must get the news to Richard at once.

6. The Tables Turned

AS SOON as Gervase reached Richard in Wales with Anne's message, Richard lost no time in dispatching the news to Edward that his erstwhile truce-friends were about to break their agreement. A new rebellion was brewing. Edward's own Champion, his public defender and uncle by marriage, was plotting against him. Again Edward disbelieved. There was in the whole fantastic thing an element of the incredible; even though Warwick meant so soon to forswear himself, he was surely not ready to strike yet. When the weeks slid by with no unusual happening, Edward sat back. After all, Diccon had told him nothing except that the trouble would start in the Midlands, advising him to keep his eye on Dymock.

Meanwhile the land lay quiet, as if gathering strength for a new struggle. The people of England went about their winter business or, worn out with the long cold months, huddled by farmhouse fires and thronged the city taverns. The court kept Twelfth Night, and the new year passed into February which brought more ice and snow with a late thaw.

And then it started. Sir Thomas Burgh, Edward's Master of the Horse, complained bitterly to the King that his manor had been plundered.

"By whom, in the name of God?" Edward demanded.

"By Willoughby and Welles."

"What in the name of ten devils do they think they're doing?" Willoughby had sworn fealty, and though an old Lancastrian, Welles had proved loyal in the past. "You are sure of this, my lord?"

"As sure as I hope for salvation. De la Lande and Dymock are in it, too."

"Ah, Dymock." Edward's eye gleamed. "Then it's come." He sat with his chin sunk on his breast, his lower lip puffed out. Then he stirred. "So be it. They have begun, now we shall take a hand. We'll see which way the cat jumps. Summon my Lord Warwick."

Warwick, who had spent the winter weeks in London awaiting his liege's pleasure, came, found Edward dining frugally and alone. This was not like the pleasure-loving King who, however pressed with royal business, kept his household meals in state. The servant was just removing the remains of a cold bird as Warwick entered.

"Your Grace is not well?" He gestured toward the half-eaten meal.

"I am not hungry." Edward was curt. "Pray take a seat, my lord." He moved his hand and the servant brought wine and a dish of sweet cakes. Edward watched his guest. Then he came to the point. "I am told there is trouble up in Lincolnshire. Know you of this?"

"Lincolnshire?" Warwick feigned to ponder the news. "Where?" he questioned delicately.

Edward scowled. So they were going to play cat and rat. "Burgh has had his manor plundered. An outrage. I am told Welles and Willoughby are at the bottom of this. I have summoned them."

"A wise procedure."

The blood rushed to Edward's head. Warwick's coolness was maddening. By God, they would have it out to the death, this time. The sooner they met in the field the better. But he controlled himself, pressed a linen napkin to his mouth and continued. "It seems the trouble is spreading, so I shall want you to convene my army at Grantham."

Warwick bowed his head. "It shall be my first duty to guard your interests, my liege."

Edward ignored the courtesy. "You will ride north and make for the town, arriving by the twelfth. You'll have to brave the March tempests as best you can."

"And His Grace, my son-in-law?"

"If you can use George, by all means take him." Edward flung Warwick his brother as if he were glad to be rid of him.

"I'll send him to your Grace on the morrow."

"Let it be done."

Neither man had given the other the slightest hint of what was uppermost in his own mind. They might have been idly acquainted men of business, working out a contract in some city undertaking.

Before he had risen the next morning, Edward was informed by Hastings that the Duke of Clarence prayed entrance. Edward threw a bedgown about his nakedness, girdled his hard waist with a tight

cord and ordered George admitted. "You come with the cocks, George."

"Ah, yes." After a night's hard drinking, Clarence was only faintly puffy beneath the eyes. "I am told there is trouble."

"Nothing that Warwick cannot engage." Edward was not going to cry a poor mouth before his brother. "He leaves for Lincolnshire. Do you wish to accompany him?"

"I had thought of going westward to see my wife. She is at Warwick Castle with the other women. I can go north if that is your wish."

"Suit yourself." Edward rang the bell for his barber. He was sick of the whole intriguing business. After a constrained farewell, he dismissed George.

Submitting to his barber, Edward leaned back and pondered. By sending Warwick and Clarence off to his army in the North, well equipped with commissions of array, he would strip them of their claim of the previous autumn that they had been the injured parties. He knew they would immediately move against him; he also knew the people of England would see them for what they were—a pair of great rebels. If it were not for the sickening business of Clarence, he would not mind whipping the great Kingmaker to his knees.

That morning he received a pair of newcomers—Welles and Dymock had arrived in London. They denied they had plundered Burgh's manor. There had been a local uprising, the fighting had spread to Lord Burgh's lands—a regrettable business. They swore fealty, and were accordingly pardoned.

"I absolve you of all disloyalties committed before Christmas," said Edward. This covered the assistance they had rendered Warwick in the capturing of their King. "You will, however, remain in London."

But scarcely was this interview concluded when a courier arrived from Lincolnshire. His news was grim. Lord Welles' son Robert had sent a herald, bearing the joint arms of Clarence and Warwick, into the churches of Lincolnshire. There he cried that every man must assemble to resist the King, who was coming in all haste to destroy the people.

"And, by God's Nails, that is what I shall do!"

Edward lost no time. He mustered his lords and in twenty-four hours was on his way northward. In the center of his main column, under heavy guard, rode Welles and Dymock.

At Huntingdon they rested; it had been a long hard pull. Edward sent for the two traitors. Confident of pardon, they came prepared to talk their way out of this new dilemma. But this was no golden King they faced; it was the steely Edward of the battlefield. "You have eight-and-forty hours to bring me word your son has desisted from his infamy," Welles was informed. Dymock was ignored.

Although his lips were cold with fear, Welles said proudly, "I am the King's hostage."

"Never mind the boastful posture," was the chill reply. "Get to the business. Unless that false attainted son of yours is stopped you are both for it."

Welles rushed off to dispatch a courier. He begged his son to place himself at Edward's disposal, promising that he, the father, would do all he could to get him mercy.

The younger Welles laughed. He knew a trick worth two of that. With his army he skirted Grantham and made camp at Eppingham, only five miles from where Edward lay.

"By the pigs, he means to snatch his father right from beneath our very nose!" Edward was astounded. "We'll see about that."

He had the block rolled out to the center of a hollow square where his staff was drawn up and enough of the horse and foot to witness the King's justice. Welles and Dymock died bravely. Remembering how his own father's head had been ornamented with a paper crown at Wakefield, then sent to adorn the spiked main gate of York, he ordered the heads of the condemned men to be mounted on pikes and planted where Welles' outposts would find them. "And we'll see Robert Welles laugh on the other side of his face!" cried Edward. Then he looked about him at his lords. "And when we strike the son's head from his body, my entire army shall witness it." He waved his sword. "Now, my lords, shall we go and take him?" With a grand flourish of trumpets, he led his army out of Stamford to meet Welles' advancing host.

Despite the battle cries for Warwick and Clarence, the rebels were scattered, and losing heart they ran, shedding their heavy padded coats and armor as they went.

"Ha! Ha!" Edward spurred after them. "They strip off their things!" Later he laughed and told his company at dinner the place could well be named "Lose-Coat Field."

They brought him Welles, captured at the rear of his fleeing army. He was bleeding from fresh injuries. He had been stubborn

but Edward's clever persuaders had broken him. Gasping before an unmoved Edward, he admitted he had moved at the design and command of the Earl of Warwick and the Duke of Clarence.

"To what end?" asked Edward harshly, as if he did not know the answer full well.

"To the end that my Lord of Clarence might sit on the throne."

"Take him away," said Edward, suddenly nauseated.

And on Monday, March 19th, Edward made good his boast. In the presence of his entire army, Robert Welles was beheaded at Doncaster.

Returning to his tent, he was given the plea from Warwick that he be allowed to present himself under safe conduct before his King.

"I shall not see him again except he be in chains," decided Edward. "Bring me no more dispatches from the Lord of Warwick." He had a sudden yearning for home. "Is there news of my wife?" He knew Elizabeth's confinement to be imminent, and news of a son's birth would sweeten his bitterness. There was no news from London.

Six days after the beheading of the younger Welles, Edward formally proclaimed Clarence and Warwick traitors, attainted, their heads and all their estates forfeit to the Crown. From Warwick's brother John Neville, faithful to him, Edward took the great Northumberland estates that had been stripped from its Lancastrian earl and restored them to their rightful owner. Thus, at a stroke, he deprived the loyal Neville of the honors and rewards that had been his.

"But, Edward," protested Hastings, "why do so rash a thing? Northumberland would as soon slit your throat, and you know it."

"I know he must go home to his people who clamor for his return, and I must make sure of my own strength up there," was Edward's reply.

"But what of Neville?"

"I'll make him Marquis of Montagu."

Hastings shook his head but held his peace. He had already said more than he intended, for none argued with Edward these days. But he wondered what Neville would do when he lost this princely earldom, and how he would feel when asked to content himself with this new title which brought nothing like the wealth or prestige of the other.

"Are there no couriers in from the West?" asked Edward wearily.

For more than a week there had been no word from Richard, still down in Wales. But, as chance would have it, a rider galloped in, flung himself from a heaving shuddering horse and fell at Edward's feet.

"Good news, my liege!"

"Yes, what?"

"My Lord of Gloucester sends his loving duty—and—" Breath failing him, the messenger held up the letter.

Edward tore it open. Riding toward Cheshire, Richard had surprised Stanley, Warwick's brother-in-law, with a goodly troop. Though he had succeeded in breaking through and scattering them, they had escaped. It was at once a triumph and a warning. The letter concluded, if Edward would issue orders of array, Richard would carry out a support in the West. Edward flushed and with the back of his hand touched his eyelids. Coming on the heels of one brother's faithlessness, this loyalty was like relief after unbearable pain. Then he mastered himself.

"Send me Lord Hastings." He would dictate Richard's patent to array the men of Gloucestershire and Herefordshire. The Duke of Gloucester was to bring them in all haste to aid his King in dispatching the rebels.

Expecting to meet Stanley and his reinforcements, the two rebels forged southward to Warwick Castle where they were anxiously awaited by their women with their households. But they had not been at the castle more than twenty-four hours before it became certain they were not going to benefit by Stanley, who had about-faced and offered Edward his forces. With this and the collapse of Welles, with the additional melancholy news that Northumberland had capitulated and was even now on his way back to his border estates, the two knew their scheme had collapsed. Richard was rallying hundreds of men to Edward's star-burst banner, and when Warwick knew for a certainty that he had begun his eastern march to rendezvous with Edward, he made an instant decision.

"We'll have to make a run for it to Calais."

Hampered with their women, they made for the Devonshire coast. Now they were fleeing. And all through the dread journey, there was but one bright moment for Warwick. As he rested a few miles above Southampton, news came in from London.

"My lord—tidings from Westminster."

"Ah—Westminster!"

"The Queen's Grace has been pleased to miscarry of her child. A fall from her barge as she stepped onto the ice."

"By the rood!" Warwick's drawn face relaxed in a smile.

"Aye, my lord. She was carried shrieking into the palace and about eleven of the clock was delivered of a dead child."

"Hear that?" Warwick called to Clarence, glumly slumped in a field chair by the fire. "The Queen has dropped the child." Then, to the messenger: "Another girl, of course?"

"No, my lord. A son."

But Warwick's pleasure was short-lived.

An appalling disaster awaited him at Southampton. He was stopped a mile from the coast by a warning that his trim little warship, the *Trinity*, in which he expected to slip off to France, had been surprised and captured by the Earl of Worcester, one of Edward's Constables. Two of the sister vessels had been sunk, the others driven off to the west. The white-handed Worcester had a degenerate streak. He ordered the heads, hands and feet of the captains and lesser officers struck off and exhibited in a manner at once frightful and revolting.

"The butcher!" raged Warwick. "Why torture my men to learn what he already knows for a certainty?"

Anthony Woodville, the newly made Earl Rivers, was flying down from the east to intercept them. This new hazard maddened Warwick. Where to turn?

Desperately they struck off in disorder through a secret woodland way and, just after dawn, burst out upon the rocky beach near Dartmouth. Isabella, unable to ride, lay in a litter, deathly sick and near her time, and Anne rode at her side, her anxious eyes on the pea-green face of her ailing sister. Even though they were fleeing from Richard and Edward, Anne had but one thought now, which was to get Isabella onto a ship where they could put her to bed and the physician could minister to her.

In the cold gathering dawn light they saw the single old carrack teetering to the tide, a shabby, unseaworthy craft. It was all that could be obtained. In a rush of soaking April showers, they clambered up its steep sides and stepped aboard amidships. "Thank God," breathed Anne as she saw Gervase and one of Isabella's grooms carrying her to one of the little cabins. "Now, where is Doctor Riche?"

But the doctor was nowhere to be seen. Alain came aboard, his hair in light wet tags on his forehead. "They do say the doctor is taken," he announced.

"Taken!" Anne gasped.

"Aye. Woodville's men cut them off from us. You can see for yourself how it is."

Anne turned to the shore. A disordered clump of men struggled on the tiny beach, and even from their retreating vantage point they could make out their own, surrounded by twenty or thirty of Woodville's yeomen. They could not make out the snowy hair of Doctor Riche, but he certainly was not with them on board. She was filled with fear. "They mustn't harm him! Oh, they can't!" Thought of their kind old doctor in the hands of that awful Worcester terrified her.

"They won't harm him. Woodville is no barbarian." It was the deep voice of Gervase. "He'll be safe till our return."

"But—Isabella?"

By his silence she knew he agreed with her that Isabella's case was desperate. She was already very ill. If she were obliged to give birth on this stinking little ship, Isabella would die.

7. Isabella

THEY had barely escaped with their lives. At least the men would have been executed, and the women and their offspring attainted. It was small comfort to Anne to know that she alone would have survived, sheltered under the protecting arm of Richard, Edward's favorite. She had been brought to the coast against her will.

She felt only despair as she watched the coast of England slipping away to the distance. Cut off from the Yorks, she must now stay her course alone. She would draw courage from what Richard had told her up in York. "They will not force the marriage through yet."

Ah, but would they not? Who knew her father's intentions now the picture had changed so? Edward had risen so gloriously to the crisis and had made it plain that Warwick would have his work cut out to carry through his design. And Richard, the negligent and teasing companion of her childhood, had become the King's Man. But Diccon had always had it in him. As a youth of thirteen, he had convoyed his father's headless body to its magnificent burial in York. They said the slender dark-faced lad so bore himself that it brought tears to the eyes of all beholders. Remembering it now, Anne felt the tears gather in her own eyes.

Clarence stepped over a coaming and emerged onto the deck. Wrapped in a dark cloak, he seemed disinclined for social intercourse, for with a curt movement of his head he marched to the far end of the deck and leaned against a bulkhead. He too watched the fading coastline of England.

Anne wondered what his thoughts were. How could he be otherwise than discomfited at his anomalous position, more wretched than her own? After all, he was a Plantagenet, proud, stiff-necked, and ruthless in his own way, and he played a desperate game. Which-ever way it came out, Clarence stood to lose the highest stakes. Anne knew her father would not place him on England's throne, and with a sick certainty she knew that she herself was destined to sup-

plant him. No wonder he looked at her with such distaste. Although they were making for Calais, soon, too soon, they would be in Paris where she must face Margaret of Anjou, that *soi-disant* Queen of England, eager to seize her throne again, ready to snatch at any means to do it. And with her would be that young Edouard, on whom the hopes of all rested. Back came Richard's jest about slaying him in the marriage bed.

But it was no jest now. Anne had, all alone and in secret, resolved that should the dread disaster befall, should her father force through the marriage, rather than prove false to Richard and to their troth, she would indeed slay Edouard. Then she would slay herself. There would be nothing left. She felt of her small swelling breast and wondered what it felt like to be stabbed. Would she have courage to do it to herself?

And what of Richard? Would he be like all young men—would he shake his head sadly for a day or two, then seek another bride? She fought down a desire to shriek into the rising gale, and shivering turned to go below. She began to feel queasy, and as the deck beneath her lurched suddenly, her stomach heaved, she clapped her hand to her mouth and hurried off to the cabin.

Already the women were making inhuman sounds. Isabella was gasping over a basin held for her by a waiting-maid, her own face as green as that of her mistress.

"Holy Mary! La Manche is behaving like a devil!" Gifa cried out as a strong lurch threw them against the bulkhead. "Has it bruised you, my chicken?" She rubbed Anne's shoulder.

They had undressed Isabella's swollen body and she now lay tossing beneath the covers Gifa kept pulling up around her. Anxiously Anne noted the blazing cheeks and the long eyes glittering with fever. "Your Grace!" the nurse protested as the restless girl threw off the silken spread. "Your Grace! You must be covered."

Anne wondered if they had told Isabella their physician was captured, that if her labor began she must submit to the ministrations of the anxious women. Did Gifa really know about childbirth, for all her rubbing goose grease on their baby chests, holding their small shrinking feet for the surgeon's bleeding lancet, scolding and badgering them to keep out of the sun, to keep warm in winter, to behave like ladies? There had been no children born in the family within Anne's recollection, though she had heard stories enough about the terrors of childbed, especially when young women had hips as nar-

row as Isabella's. There was fear in the cabin. Anne stroked the hot forehead and Isabella turned large bright eyes upon her. Their emerald green had gone glazed with fever.

"I fear," she whispered to Anne through dry lips, "only one thing."

Anne nodded. Isabella feared to give birth to a girl, to dash the hopes of her husband and their father. Now that her time was nearly upon her, she was strung to the breaking point, bodily discomfort lost in her nervous anxiety lest she fail in this, her most important duty. Tenderly Anne smiled down on her. "I wonder if I should be so concerned," she murmured.

"Don't fuss over me." Isabella was fretful. "I shall be all right."

Gifa shook her head in the white cap and Anne followed her to the window of the little cabin. "Will it be well with her?" she whispered.

"Those hips," muttered Gifa. "'Tis well she knows not what lies ahead of her, else might she die of fright."

"Isabella is not afraid." Anne spoke with dignity.

"That's because she doesn't know."

Anne looked at her sister lying still now, her eyes closed in a slack face. The silken coverlet mounded the bloated figure. "God grant it be a boy," she prayed. The air was heavy with unpleasant odors, for some of Isabella's women had been sick and though Clotilde put small bunches of dried herbs tied with ribbon about the chamber, they were not strong enough to sweeten the air. She now pushed open the little leaded window and the two girls gratefully inhaled the fresh salt air.

"Saints above!" Gifa clicked shut the window and glared at Clotilde. Anne shrugged. She had forgotten Gifa's prejudice against sea air, or any air, for that matter, flowing into a sickroom.

"Come"—she took her cloak—"let us go where it is not so fetid." Together the two girls climbed to the deck. The captain had borne south to escape their pursuers and it was going to be a good deal longer journey than the mere crossing from Dover. "Where are we?" she stood in the wind and asked Alain.

"Captain says we are making for Cap de la Hague."

"Oh, I don't think Father will let him go so far out of our course—on account of the Lady Isabella."

"We're bearing due eastward now." The youth had his tawny hand cupped over his eyes as he squinted into the glare of the sun.

Gervase joined them, his tall spare body braced to the slant and tip of the deck. "How is it with my lady?"

Anne shook her head. "I do not know," she confessed. "Gifa does not look too hopeful." She glanced back at the companionway. There was no rushing for the forward cabin where her parents sat with Clarence. She knew the moment Isabella's labor began, her mother would be brought.

With midmorning came a freshening of the wind and the little vessel began to pitch and toss like a bucking horse. Anne went below. She could hear the booming of the wind in the sails while on her sides the little carrack took the swish and smack of the waves. They rolled incessantly, and Isabella's ladies were constantly shrieking and holding onto things to keep from being thrown down. The sick girl herself moaned and moved restlessly but was otherwise quiet.

Day wore into night and, with Clotilde, Anne lay on cushions, a heavy cloak tucked about her. There was no proper accommodation for ladies aboard this shabby little craft, and the cabin they were crowded into was inadequate as either a sickroom or a chamber for travelers. Isabella's ladies lay on the floor and Gifa dozed, her bunched little figure slumped in an old hard chair.

Anne did not know whether or not she had really slept but the long eerie cry of the watch aloft wakened her with a start. She struggled up and put aside the tangling folds of the cloak. Clotilde, her hands wound in her rosary, lay quite peacefully on her back, her long lashes like flower stamens on her cheeks. Anne rubbed her eyes, then looked over at Isabella. The gray light of dawn filled the little cabin. The lantern had run dry of oil and had long since guttered out.

Isabella too lay quite still, her face puffy from her pregnancy, empty of expression, her hair like brown lace tangled over the pillow. But she began to sigh and stir, and from her chair Gifa now got stiffly to her feet. She bent her sharp face, drawn with sleep and anxiety, over the bed and laid her hand lightly on Isabella's stomach.

A roll flung Anne against the wall of the cabin, raising on her wrist a great purple bruise, but she scarcely felt it. For now a trumpet call came clearly down to them and she knew the harbor must be coming into view. She resolved to stay below till the moment of their landing. Her father and mother with Clarence would be on their high deck, awaiting the coming of the Lord Lieutenant's launch, and she shrank from joining them, as much to avoid the dread moment of setting her foot upon French soil as to avoid the unpleasant

presence of her brother-in-law. When drunk he always looked at her as if he felt a foul odor rising in his nostrils, and when sober he baited her with delicately barbed sarcasms. She prayed there would come no summons for her to present herself at the forward cabin.

Soon they would all be behind the ramparts of Calais. Clotilde was awake, sitting on the pile of cushions, hands to her disordered head. "Thank the saints the Lady Isabella is safe," she murmured to Anne.

But a moan from the bed frightened them. Gifa took Isabella's hot hand and stroked it. "Where is your pain, my child?" She slipped her hand beneath the covers but with a violent shudder Isabella pushed it away. She gasped and her eyes went wide. Her teeth came down hard on her lip but a tiny scream escaped.

Anne's blood ran cold. It had happened. Isabella was going to have her baby and there was no doctor. They were not even in the harbor. Overhead there was a rush of feet, then an appalling clatter. She stopped her ears, as much to shut out the harsh chatter of the anchor chain as to muffle Isabella's gasping cries. Beneath her she felt the deck tilt as the claws of the anchor gripped the sandy bottom and held the vessel swinging by the taut chain. They must be at their journey's end. But Isabella could not be moved.

The gloom in the cabin thinned and the hourglass stood empty. Absently she turned it. For a moment all was quiet, with Gifa moving about, whispering to the women who stared with scared faces at Isabella. She lay still, her eyes shut, her hands limp and unclenched on the cover. Stiffly Anne rose and slid around to the window. She opened it a crack and tried to make out something, anything, but all she could glimpse was the seaward side and the dark expanse of water lapping uneasily against the ship.

A scream from the bed whirled her around while behind her the window swung shut. Isabella, her face scarlet, her mouth distorted, was thrashing about. At that moment the Countess Anna appeared, her own face quite bloodless. And after her crowded the women, flocking to the bed where they fluttered and moved, while in the center of their bending figures was the heart of pain and the terrible cries. Anne clutched Clotilde, felt the girl's arms wind about her head. She saw her mother turn from the bed, hands at her ears. Was she too going to shut out the screams?

"Quick!" Her women understood and one snatched a cup into

which another splashed a little wine. From her ears the Countess tore her two great pearls and dropped them into the wine. Anne's mouth fell apart. These were her mother's marriage pearls, her most precious jewel. Wine would dissolve them. Tensely her mother stared into the cup, moving gently round and round in the woman's hands. "Now!"

Gifa slipped her arm beneath Isabella's head and they tilted the cup to her mouth. "Drink!" The girl shrank from the cup. "I command you!" Almost harshly the Countess spoke and Isabella obeyed, taking the cup like a child, her teeth chattering against it. She drank and shuddered with nausea. Gently Gifa laid her down.

But soon the pains began again. The melted pearls had not helped. Someone came running with a sword and Anne recognized the bull's head embossed on the hilt. It belonged to the sick girl's husband. "This will cut the pain in two," said Gifa as she thrust it beneath the bed. Then she lapsed into Welsh, muttering as she tried to straighten the tumbled bedcovers and to move Isabella to a more easy position. In her writhings she was lying almost across the bed. She rolled her crimson face back and forth on the pillow.

"Someone do something!" she cried. "Help me!"

Anne gasped and stumbled blindly for the door. She could bear no more. Up the ladder she ran, grabbing at the narrow railing, and across the slanting deck to the rail where she clung panting and shaking. She did not feel Clotilde putting her cloak on her shoulders. She only knew she felt deadly ill, with a great knot in her stomach and a pounding heart. She did not know how long she stood bent over the rail, her eyes shut, swallowing the sour saliva that welled up in her mouth.

But the dank salt air revived her and she looked about. The whole harbor was shrouded in a white fog that rolled over the sea. She felt numb, helpless, caught in the grip of something fearsome. Fate, like the fog with all the fullness of horror unknown, was moving in on them, and there was no escape. Isabella was going to die, perhaps she herself was going to die, and her family—they would be exiled for life. With the death of young Edouard of Wales, with Isabella dead in childbirth, and she, his favorite, dead in her marriage bed, what would be left for her father? For him there would be no tomorrow. To this it had come.

Frozen, she stared blankly at the distant harbor. They were lying

outside the circle of ships beyond which rose the familiar skyline of Calais, seen a hundred times before when, in happier days, they approached it. Now it looked remote and hostile, wrapped in mysterious fog, spellbound and sinister.

"What will become of you?" Dully she spoke to Clotilde.

"My lady?" The French girl's eyes were wondering.

Anne shook her head. No use to explain. She could tell no one. She felt Alain touch her arm. His gray cap was pulled low over his light hair, his eyes sparkling. He was grave. "We're not going to land. They won't let us."

She stared. So that was why they were lying outside the harbor. "Why?"

"The Lord Lieutenant did not come. He sent his officer to milord, and it is said that should we attempt to approach the harbor, we shall be fired upon."

Anne was aghast. Had the world gone mad? Sir Thomas Wenlock was her father's trusted Lord Lieutenant, left to carry on in his absence. Was it possible Wenlock had turned traitor against her father? "Why?" she repeated.

"Who knows?" Alain drummed a small tattoo on the railing with his fists.

"Don't!" Wildly she tried to think. Isabella! "Have they sent for the doctor, do you know?"

"So they say—"

But now they caught sight of Gervase descending the ladder from the forward cabin. "Oh, Gervase!" She ran toward him.

"Not now, my lady." Almost rudely he pushed past. It was then she saw a small boat nearing from the harbor and her minstrel standing ready to receive the man who had one foot on the gunwale, his arm already outstretched to grasp the rope and clamber aboard. Soon his head in the flat cap appeared over the side and he jumped down onto the deck.

"You are the doctor? Follow me, I pray you." Gervase was brief.

"Doctor!" The man laughed. "By the saints, no! I am no leech, good sir." From beneath his cloak he produced a long straw-wrapped bundle. "My master the Lord Lieutenant sends his deep regrets that there is illness aboard your vessel, and hopes the lady will find this wine to her comfort."

Gervase took the bundle, his face set. "My lord returns his thanks." He turned away, while Anne watched the figure of the messenger

nimbly descending the ropes. He stepped onto the waiting board, the oars dipped, and they melted into the fog.

"Isabella will die." Softly Anne said it to herself. "She will die."

A cold little hand slid into hers. "I shall pray to the blessed Sainte Thérèse," murmured Clotilde.

The nightmare was real now, was horrible, as the morning wore on. They sat, the three of them, Anne and Clotilde and the page, on the steps leading down to the stern cabin. From its awful depths the sounds came, muffled by the thick door, sounds faint and mournful, rising now and then to the shriek of anguish. Shocked to her soul, Anne listened. Was this what marriage and motherhood meant? She tried to pray, to whisper with the ease of Clotilde, whose beads clicked constantly through her fingers. She could not. Her desperate thoughts clung to the practical, the tearing and shedding of blood, the frightful necessity of a difficult birth. She thought of ladies she knew who time and again had faced this torment; Richard's mother, the Lady Cicely, with her brood of twelve, now an upright spare figure of unbreakable dignity. But she had groaned in this same misery, her calm shattered, her inviolable privacy invaded. Twice had their own mother gone down into this valley to bring life to them, even to this very girl, caught now in her own ordeal.

But this being who shrieked and writhed was not her sister, the proud, graceful Isabella, whose voice was always pitched to the low and pleasant tones of a lady, whose emotions were firmly leashed. This was a creature in mortal agony, abandoned to pain, heedless of hearers; this was a mother, rent apart, panting to tug the new life into the world. And for what? Almost Anne wished for the stern presence of the monk Frey Siserone to rally with his ascetic doctrines her fainting spirit. Gervase—where was he—why was he not with her? But with the shrinking of her father's escort, the services of Gervase were in demand in the forward cabin.

Drearly she leaned her head against the stair wall. All three of them were cold and hungry, the step damp with the clammy fog, the cold striking through to their legs and backs. The mist sent long gray fingers down the companionway and the whole vessel swung, held in the spell of some evil genie. The nightmare persisted as, chilled to the bone now, they huddled in silence. Curled on the step above Anne lay Alain, Isabella's pet monkey snuggled to his breast. Now and then the little creature chirruped plaintively, for it too was hungry.

They did not know how long they huddled there on the companionway. But Anne was aware that someone was shaking her shoulder and she looked into the face of her maid Emilie. "Come!"

Stumbling, they followed to the cabin, Alain at their heels curious, still hanging back in the doorway, the long silky tail of the monkey curled around his neck. As for Anne, she was conscious only of a hot smell in the air and a great hush. Then reality rushed in and her heart throbbed. It was all over. Isabella had died and they were taking her to see the fair corpse. And the baby—had it died, too?

Then she saw her sister. Utterly spent, she lay sleeping, the silk pillow darkly stained with the sweat from her long brown hair. Great purple shadows encircled her eyes but she was at peace. Beside her sat the Countess, her strained face linen-white, her fingers at her daughter's pulse. A stir at the door, a quick kneeling of silken ladies, and the Earl and the Duke stepped over the thwart.

Large in the little chamber, the Earl stood awkwardly, his head bent, awaiting the news. Behind him Clarence, his own face puckered petulantly, stared across at his sleeping wife and the nurse who was busy with something in her lap. But the Earl now looked steadily at his wife.

With the barest shake of her head, the Countess turned and put her hand on the sleeve of Clarence. "My lord Duke, your wife lives. She will bear you other sons."

"Come, my lord." Gently the Countess plucked him toward the nurse who lifted the gauze from the tiny dead face.

Anne's breath caught. It had been the baby then, not Isabella who died. The long dark journey had been too much for it and, without even a cry, the little soul had winged back to the mysterious realm.

Something forced Anne to look at her father. Like a heavy statue he stood, not attempting to see the dead child or to notice the young mother lying so pitifully spent on her terrible bed. He stood, lip caught between strong teeth, and now as his eyes slid around to her she caught the subtle tendril of thought that writhed between them. Isabella had failed and it soon would be her turn. It was as if he had said, "Let us see what Anne can do. Is she strong enough to bear a male child?"

She swallowed. "My lord father—"

"Hush." As if to a child the finger was raised, the low tones were stern, the command inexorable. "Don't wake her." They were mov-

ing about now, the ladies looking curiously at the bereaved young father, Gifa swathing the little form for its burial, the Countess bending once more over Isabella to listen to the shallow breathing.

"Does she know?" Satisfied that the child was dead, the Duke turned his attention to his wife.

"Not yet. We have given her poppy juice and she will sleep for some hours and when she wakes she will be strong enough to bear it."

For a moment more the young man stood, his tall figure drooping over the bed. A slight spasm shook his mouth. He slid his fingers within the throat of his shirt and pulled out a great diamond set in bands of chased gold. "When she wakes, give her this." Then he too was gone, glad to be quit of the chamber of blood and birth and death.

Anne felt outrage rising within her. What good to give the young mother a jewel to assuage her hurt? She watched Gifa working more swiftly now, her face set against tears and lamentations. "Oh, don't," she begged, "don't cover it yet."

Gifa revealed the little face, already waxen. "His name is Edmund Plantagenet." In her Welsh accents the name sounded strange.

"What a little baby." In a rush of pity Anne bent down. They had named the child after George's dead brother, and in so doing perhaps had doomed it even as the other Edmund at the age of seventeen had been doomed, slain on the field of battle.

Feeling as if she herself had endured the ordeal of birth, Anne climbed aloft to find the fog dispersing to reveal the towers of Calais coming clear out of the mist. Behind her she felt Clotilde, faithful at her back. She had not even realized the French girl had been with her in the cabin. Gervase was searching the shoreline but at Anne's approach he swung about.

"Isabella's babe is dead," she said somberly.

"Aye." He nodded. "So they say." He peered at her. "And you, how is it with you?"

She shook her head. "I hardly know."

He made an inarticulate sound. But they would not speak of her great dread. It was enough for her that he knew and felt for her. "Tell me, Gervase," she said, "why wouldn't Wenlock let us land? I don't understand."

He shrugged. "Who knows? Perhaps Burgundy bought him out. We only know he is a traitor to the lord your father."

"What do we do now?"

“First, they will bury the child.”

“Oh!” She caught her breath. “In the sea?”

“A clean burial.”

She looked down at the cold water. Was it? She forced her mind away from the watery grave. “And then?”

“Then I fancy we proceed along the Normandy coast. If I can guess aright from what I have heard, we shall rendezvous with your father’s old ally the Bastard of Fauconberg.”

“Edward’s bitter enemy,” she breathed.

“Yes. Then together, your father and he will seek haven in one of Louis’s ports.”

She looked now at her three servants, the man wrapped in his mist-wet cloak, the slim girl, and the youth with the brown cheeks and yellow-gilt hair. She would have to see that all three were safely out of her father’s reach—and soon.

8. Queen Margaret

WARWICK was feverish to get to the heart of the business that had brought them to France. The tragic death of Clarence's child, the worse disaster of the attempted landing at Calais with Wenlock's treachery, had sent him flying to Louis. Now, with the French King, they were riding south from Paris to meet Margaret and Edouard. In perfect summer weather they flashed along the rural highways toward Saumur. At the head of the column Louis rode among his priests, a careless and sloppy figure in the saddle, his dusty dark blue costume flapping in the breeze, his legs dangling on either side of his mount where, to rest them, he had taken his feet from his stirrups. Down through Plessis, his stronghold, they passed, into the pretty gardenlands of Anjou.

Anne rode with her mother, though neither said much. Both were weary, preoccupied with private thoughts. The Countess was worried over the outcome of the meeting with Margaret whose will was every bit as strong as that of her husband. The two of them would be like great proud forest creatures, suspicious, wary and vain of their strength. As for Anne, she was haunted by a new terror. Her resolution to take her own life, if necessary, had brought with it memory of Igraine, the daughter of Middleham's seneschal, found hanging from a beam in her father's chamber. To take one's own life was a deadly sin for which there was no salvation. In vain the seneschal had pleaded that his girl's brain was turned by lost love, but the priests were adamant. She was buried with a stake through her heart and no masses were said for her soul's repose. How that white ghost must be shrieking through the dark glades of purgatory at this very moment! With cold shaking hands Anne gripped her palfrey's reins.

"How charming!" murmured the Countess. They had rounded the rise of a small hill and now they could look down into the rich valley of Saumur. Like a fair crown tipped with blue and gold, the Château de Saumur rested on the softly swelling hills, the feet

of its towers pressing down into the earth below. "Look, Isabell!" The Countess called back to where her older daughter, still not recovered from her birth ordeal, lay in a little scalloped litter. They all drew rein and regarded the scene. Wearily Anne wondered which of the fairy towers with its pointed blue roof and gay gold weather vane would receive them for the night.

On all sides stretched the bright vineyards, the emerald fruit shining and hard, soon to turn richly purple for pressing into the famous wine. Over the winding dusty roads the cavalcade flowed, and the peasant workers stood up among the vine rows to gape at the ambling pageant. Flashing over the scene went the prismatic company, hawk bells a-jingle, veils and feathers fluttering in the breeze, the long skirts of the ladies glowing with color, shot through with gold and silver. Across the graceful little stone bridge they swept, under the iron fretwork of the gatehouse into the château.

The beauty of the place soothed Anne's jangled nerves. Gervase took her out on one of the high balconies of the clustered towers to watch the last of the sunset, and just as the brilliance flamed into dusty pink and the first evening star sparkled, a servant summoned her to her mother.

She found the Lady Anna alone save for her favorite waiting-maid, Nette, who was brushing out the long brown hair as the Countess lay in her low-backed chair.

"Come, *petite!*" Her mother welcomed her. "And how like you this place?"

"It is well enough, madam."

The Lady Anna sighed. Daughters could be so difficult. And they had tried to be patient with Anne. "I am grieved that you cling to sadness, Anne. Is there not something we can do to lighten your spirits?"

Anne stared coldly at her mother. "How can I feel otherwise, madam?" she asked.

"I know." The Countess closed her eyes and for a moment surrendered to the soothing swish of Nette's brush. "I know, *petite!*" Then she sat up. "Enough, Nette. You may go." When they were alone, she folded her hands in her lap. Anne waited. "More than ever, Anne, you must understand what is to be. Your father has sworn to unmake Edward. You know that?"

"I know."

"It is to be the Anjou prince. He has definitely decided. England

may not have another Plantagenet upon the throne." Though she did not say it, Anne knew she meant that drunken, flaccid Clarence had been abandoned, more especially now that poor Isabella had lost the child. "Your father is prepared to humble himself before this woman and her son—for England."

Anne's lips tightened. What did her mother know of an aching heart? England! Anne was going to serve England by slaying at one stroke the Lancastrian prince.

"Do we take the road tomorrow, madam?" She tried to keep her voice casual.

"Not for a few days." The Countess allowed her face to sag in lines of pure weariness. "I myself shall be glad to lie here." Then she regarded Anne—the pale set expression, the unflinching blue eyes, the small firm mouth. "I want you to promise to go out into the sunlight and try to enjoy yourself. There will be time to be serious later. Is it not beautiful enough here?" There was a note of wistfulness in her mother's voice. "Come!"

They went to the window. They were in one of the small tower chambers that clung to the point of the wall, and the windows, criss-crossed with diamond panes, swung open to the soft evening air. Slowly, obedient to the vesper bell, came the peasants, spots of color brightened by distance, touched up by the women's white caps. Tiny figures, seen from so great a height, a mother and her two doll children, caught Anne's eye as they disappeared into the little chapel. The sunset sky was now all faded to an early gray, jeweled with the summer stars. How hard it would be to leave it all—rare tears stung Anne's eyelids, but she remembered that Gervase had once said tears were only for the weak and she forced them back. But since their arrival in France, she had all but abandoned hope. Her marriage to Edouard now seemed certain.

Inside the little dressing room Anne stood, revolving slowly before the critical eyes of the Countess and Lady Philippa. Before great hampers knelt the seamstresses brought from Paris by Anne's mother that her daughter might appear in the latest modes before the woman who was to be her mother-in-law. Out of the hampers tumbled the rich lengths of silk and velvet. Anne was splendid in a yellow gown, the gold-colored velvet falling in sleek folds to her feet.

"Yes," approved the Countess. "We shall use this one for the presentation."

But Anne turned indifferently to her favorite maid. "Emilie, unfasten me."

"What think you of this one, Anne?" Her mother motioned, and the seamstresses spread out a magnificent silk heavy with embroidery. Anne felt her gorge rise. Lancastrian red! "I have never thought crimson to be my color, madam," she said coldly.

"Perhaps not. But you wear so much blue."

"*Ah, l'azur!*" With a quick movement, a woman drew from her basket a length of cerulean blue satin and flung it rippling to the floor. "*Le ciel bleu!*" She turned to Anne who was in her underrobe, Emilie having removed the heavy yellow. The French seamstress drew the lustrous fabric over Anne, whipped it deftly to her shape, then seized a long strip wrought with pearls and aquamarines and tied it girdlewise round the slender waist. "*Voilà!*"

"Ah, exquisite!" Lady Philippa clasped plump hands. "They do say the King's Lady Sava has a blue robe like this."

"We shall not dress the Lady Anne like a French whore." The Countess was curt. Lines of fatigue had begun to etch themselves in her highbred face. "Enough for today."

"Ah!" Anne stretched her tired arms and clasped her hands behind her neck. "I am weary with standing. Give me the old blue gown, Emilie, and a ribband for my hair. I'm going down to the garden. Come, Clotilde, you've done enough of that stupid sewing for one day. And where's Alain? I have a fancy to play shuttlecock."

Together the three young people descended the broad stair to the pleasure grounds at the back of the château. There they found a dozen of the Countess's women playing shuttlecock on the velvety turf. As she raced about among them Anne felt light and young, and she batted the feathered cock, laughing and shouting with them. For an hour, she was playing a private game, pretending she had no cares, that those clothes they were consulting over with such earnestness up there in the tower were the bridal clothes of the young Duchess of Gloucester. A wild swing from the Nette sent the cock whizzing over her head into the hedge behind where the maze began. Flushed and laughing, Anne pursued it but when she gained the entrance to the maze, the cock was nowhere to be seen.

"*Pardie!* It was here, I am sure. Come, someone, and help me!"

On hands and knees Anne peered beyond the hedge where she was certain she had seen the flash of white feathers.

"Is this what you lose, *demoiselle*?"

Startled, she looked up into the face of a youth showing above the hedge, the feathered cock in his hand. Unable to collect herself, she could only stare up at him, her cheeks ablaze, her hair tumbled out of the binding.

"Did I alarm you?" The voice, just deepening into manhood, was gentle. Anne tried to place him. Taller than Alain, he looked to be about Richard's age, but he was blonder than any of the Yorks, his hair, hanging heavy and sleek on his neck, of an authentic gold. Although he was simply clothed in a light jacket over faded rose-colored hose, his dress meaner than that of the shabbiest groom, there was about him the look of the blood royal.

In a flash, Anne knew that standing before her was Edouard of Anjou and Lancaster, Prince of Wales.

Conscious of her grass-stained skirt and wind-blown appearance, she nevertheless remembered her breeding and curtsied as she took from the outstretched hand the recovered shuttlecock. "I thank you, sir." Until formally presented, it would be impolite for her to address him in any other way.

With a light graceful movement he vaulted the hedge. "I am just arrived," he said easily. "I heard you all laughing. May I join you?"

When he smiled like that, he was charming. Anne wondered if he knew who she was. A hundred times she had rehearsed the haughty manner in which she would greet her hated bridegroom, but now she felt nothing save a strong desire to be polite. Together they crossed the lawn. Gervase, who had suddenly appeared, lifted his brows but Anne ignored him. To Alain she said, "This—this gentleman wishes to play. Get another battledore."

Soon they were shouting together in pursuit of the feathered ball. More than once Anne slipped on the grass and was helped to her feet by Edouard, who constantly batted the bird in her direction. At last they flung themselves panting on the lawn to watch the others while Anne fanned her hot face with her kerchief. Her eyes softened at the delight of Clotilde and Alain as they played together. The girl's cheeks were pink as a wild rose and her gray eyes sparkled. Her wide mouth, parted in a laugh, showed the tips of her pretty teeth. Alain batted the cock out of her reach and when she collapsed in a whirl of skirts, ran to pick her up, his brown face alight.

Anne laughed. Beside her, propped on his elbows, Gervase lay, a quizzical expression in his deep-set eyes. She refused to meet them and fell to plucking blades of grass. She was glad she had been polite to Edouard, not snubbing him as at first she planned. Obviously he did not know who she was, dressed like this, her hair flying, her manner unconstrained.

Then curiously she looked at him. Stretched at length he lay, his blue eyes on the sky, his hand carelessly flung behind his golden head. And she felt strangely weak, as if resolution were draining from her. This could not be happening; it must be some sort of dream from which she would awaken to familiar reality. For she *knew* this had to be Edouard. And since it was he, would she ever have the strength to plunge a dagger into that softly heaving breast, to bring the death pallor to that flushed and healthy face?

Here before her lay the flesh-and-blood reality of her tragic drama. Could she do it? With a throb, she thought of Richard's teasing laugh: "In your wedding bed. It would be easy."

"My lord!" Hurrying onto the lawn came an old man, white hair hanging, his expression urgent. "My lord Prince, please to come, you are wanted."

Edouard made a face and rolled over onto his stomach. "Alas! It is always thus. Whenever I am enjoying myself. My lady mother." Lighly he got to his feet. "I fear I must take my leave. This has been delightful." Then, with a touch of impatience: "I come, Sir John. Please do not hurry yourself. I come!" And without a backward glance he ran lightly to the bottom of the garden, jumped the hedge and disappeared.

Through the gap came the Lady Philippa. At sight of her governess's scandalized face, Anne sighed. "I, too."

"So that's young Lancaster," said Gervase softly. "Did you suspect?"

"Of course. I knew him in a minute. Whatever may be said of him, he's a prince. Only a prince would have been so easy with strangers, and servants, too."

"Servants!" Gervase laughed.

Anne held her peace. Her heart was pounding heavily, and for some reason she felt very tired. Of course it had been Edouard. She had never doubted it. She looked steadily at Lady Philippa, whose face was red with anger and hurrying.

"My lady Anne!"

But Anne, once more a woman, was calm. "I needed the diversion, madam, and if you are worrying about Prince Edouard, you needn't. That was he you just passed. We have all been sporting together."

"Saints preserve us!" Lady Philippa gasped.

"Calm yourself. Oh yes, we romped and romped most scandalously, and he and I fell over each other more than once. I have seen my future bridegroom!" And she hurled the battledore into the hedge.

"Well," groaned Lady Philippa, "come you inside. If we take care, we can get you away without anyone else seeing you in this state."

"If those clothes he is wearing are the best he has, we have small room to worry." Anne swept into the château as if her grass-stained gown were regal robes, her head high. Through the rose garden she went, and at sight of the scarlet blooms something hard welled up inside her. She would send Emilie to gather a great sheaf of them for her to carry when they presented her to the Prince of Anjou and his mother. Scarlet was the color of treachery, she had heard.

The arrival of Queen Margaret threw the château into a flurry. Out in the mews, the falconers gave tender attention to the little merlin hawks; the Queen might wish to hunt. And lest the delicate flavor of a dish be lost in oversteaming, the cooks down in the great fiery kitchens hung over their pots in a state of instant combustion, for Queen Margaret ate daintily and with discrimination. The minstrels tuned their instruments to precision and ran their scales.

Even Gervase was drawn into the practicing frenzy. "They say she has the nicest ear in all Europe," he told Anne as he changed a string on his lute.

Anne merely shrugged. She did not intend to join in the scurry. "When all is said and done, this is only another woman, and by my faith, if she is as shabby-appearing as her son, she will be put to shame by my mother's waiting-maid."

Gervase screwed up his dark face. "Since when do you judge a book by its cover?" He spoke as if to a child.

Abruptly Anne left him. To retreat was easier than matching wits with Gervase in a sententious mood. She sought the upper rooms where her parents were dressing for the all-important meeting with Louis and Margaret. She passed the royal cabinet where Louis must

be pottering about, chivvying his secretaries as they put finishing touches to the great parchments; among the sand and inkpots they lay, stiff and official, ready for the desperate signatures.

Down in the great apartment Warwick stood tensely among his dressers who buttoned him into his splendid black surcoat shot with gold, at his feet the busy valet looping the little jeweled chains, fastening the long points of his shoes to his knees.

"Ah!" He smiled at Anne, the knobs of muscle rising on his cheeks. "*Petite!*" He tried to move, but the valet had not clicked the chain into place. "*Suffit, suffit,*" he snapped. He sat while the barber passed a linen cloth swiftly over the hanging tassel of his hair, polishing it to ebony blackness. On his spread fingers they slipped the heavy rings.

But Anne was not fooled. For all his appurtenances of wealth and power, her father was uneasy, since he knew himself at last to be only the means to an end. He could not hide from her the anxiety in his eyes, and no flashing jewel or whispering sibilance of silk could mask the unhappy intentness of purpose. Anne pitied him. For all his power, he was vulnerable, naked to his enemies, whose own bitterness would be sweetened at the thought of how his very soul was to be galled by this contract.

Her mother swept in, splendid in embroidered Turkish velvet over silver tissue, her shoes of coral heavy with seed pearls and little golden whorls of braid. In rich draperies she flowed past her daughter, her eyes only for her husband.

"It's come." His lids drooped over his eyes.

"I know, my love." She rested her hands with the long pointed sleeves on his shoulders. "But we shall win."

For a moment more they lingered, the two rich Florentine figures dressed for the masque; only this to which they went was no festival. Were the signatures to be signed in blood, it could not be more deadly. Anne's eyes met her father's. He opened his arms and she submitted to the velvet and gold embrace. "*Ma fleur,*" he murmured. "*Ma fleur d'or.*"

She watched them from the chamber. Then, viewing herself in the long glass, she patted her décolletage where her father's romantic embrace had ruffled it. He had called her his golden flower; the name suited her this day. As if to emphasize her value, they had dressed her in the yellow velvet. She passed her hands over the pale coronet of her hair and nodded approval at her reflection. Those two spots

of color in her cheeks would match the spray of scarlet roses Emilie had fashioned for her to carry. She would go and get them now.

"I don't want any of you," she informed her household. "I shall go alone." Something perverse in her made her want to do this. She would not bring a suite of attendants to impress the French. And before they recovered from their astonishment, she was skimming down the polished corridors to the great staircase.

Demurely she entered the audience chamber. Surely all those chattering people who stared at her did not belong to Queen Margaret; word must have gone around quickly that the Warwicks were restoring the Lancastrian throne. She looked about her. *They* were clustered about a table under a multicolored window, and seated where the shafts of rose and green light shimmered down on her, was the onetime Queen of England.

Like brilliant chessmen waiting to be moved on the checkered floor, her parents stood and Anne quietly joined them. They were like pawns, she thought, all of them. She felt her father's hand, iron-heavy with its rings, on her shoulder weighting her down. Above her head the deep voice rumbled. "The Lady Anne, madam."

From her low curtsy Anne rose, looked straight into the level eyes of Margaret of Anjou. If the chance meeting with the young prince had caught her off guard, the sight of the mother entirely amazed her. Where was the malicious smile, the overbearing manner she had been led to expect?

Before her, seated in a thronelike chair with a high pointed back, was a woman who once had been exceedingly beautiful. Even sorrow and a long lingering of misfortune could not entirely dim that beauty. It shone in the dull gold hair, heavy and lustrous like her son's, in the strained blue eyes alight with intelligence. With her look of breeding, she rivaled the great ladies Cicely of York and Anne's own mother, Anna of Warwick; but the delicate transparency of her skin had hardened to the pale set face of resolution and it was plain that here was a woman who would neither bend nor break beneath the buffets of adversity. In the babel of talk she sat silent.

Formally Margaret bent her head, holding out her fingers to be kissed, and Anne took the square hand, inert and cool, touching it with her lips.

The son had appeared shabby but the mother was worse, in a worn gown of violet edged with marten fur that had seen better days, her quiet hands bare of jewels except for the heavy band of her betrothal

ring. About her white neck she wore a simple little golden chain from which hung her cognizance, an enameled daisy, but in the light from the great window above her, the hennin towered regally high. Deposed, penniless, bereft of husband and home, she still was great.

Anne guessed the shabby gown to be part of the contempt with which the lady regarded all of them, for surely Margaret, onetime Queen of England and Princess of Anjou, must have better clothes than these. Calmly Margaret eyed the rich figures flashing before her, a small smile edging the corners of her still-beautiful mouth. Her son was nowhere to be seen.

From kneeling on the hard floor, the Earl of Warwick's fine shoes were wrinkled and dusty, and raising her eyes from them, Anne caught the grin on the face of Louis, who leaned on the high back of Margaret's chair, his dark fingers entwined in his heavy chain. Suddenly Anne loathed her own rich dress, her jewels, the scarlet flowers in her hand.

"I cannot see my way clear here." Margaret's cool French voice cut across the hum of argument. Warwick was scowling over the shoulder of a secretary at the stiff parchment the scribe tilted for his eyes. "There have been too many changes in your policy, my lord. How do I know my own position will be secure?"

She had not looked again at Anne, who regarded her with a sort of wonder. No woman ever argued with her father. A kind of strangled sigh escaped Louis and, mincing, he came around to face the Queen. "Madam, we have been over this thoroughly; surely your Grace is content to believe in me?"

The grin had shrunk to a mask of friendly concern. But inside Louis was raging, as all who saw him must know. For months before the arrival of the Warwicks, he had cajoled, pleaded, even threatened Margaret into reason, leaving her only when he was sure he had her convinced of the common sense of the plan. Now here they were, all together, and womanlike she was wavering. To the devil's caldron with all females!

But he only said, "Have I not cherished you for all these years, and shall I now throw you to the lions?" He knew that between Warwick and Margaret a veritable tide of blood flowed. With ferocious calm they had slain each other's nearest, and for years they had vowed vengeance on each other. Now here they were, and if Louis had his way, the fantastic foes were to take arms against a common one.

“Well, madam?”

Margaret shrugged, held out her hand to her secretary, who put into it a letter. “What say you to this?”

“What?” Nearsightedly, Louis peered. No one spoke or moved. “Read it, someone.”

Anne recognized the seal of England. The letter must be from Edward. Margaret flung it onto the table below her. “Read for yourselves. Your cousin of England has other plans for me.”

Louis now snatched at it and put it nearly to his nose. Then he too threw it down. “That’s not Edward’s hand,” he said in disgust.

Margaret remained silent.

“What, in the name of the sacred pigs, is it?” burst from Warwick.

“An offer of marriage,” said Margaret coolly. “In which he puts forth his oldest daughter, the Princess Elizabeth. I have every reason to believe it genuine.”

Warwick glared at her while Anne held her breath. What would happen now? She saw her father’s face freeze, knew his bitter humbling of himself before Margaret to be of no avail, since it seemed she was quite ready to turn her back and make an alliance with Edward after all. And should Edward remain sonless, at his death Elizabeth and Edouard would rule England. Warwick went livid.

“Then take the brat, madam!” he cried harshly. “Wed your son to the daughter of a lowborn commoner, if you will.” He turned on his heel, then swung back. “And if the King has a boy, what then? Your son will be as far from the throne as ever.”

“My lord,” whispered the Countess Anna, through lips pale as his own. She put on him a restraining hand. To the Queen and Louis she said, “I thought the Princess Elizabeth was betrothed to young Neville.”

“There was such talk,” admitted Margaret. “We are told Edward felt he must reward Northumberland’s loyalty by giving his daughter to John Neville’s son, but it seems he has now given your brother, my lord,” she addressed Warwick, “other bribes to continue friendship.” Her cool tones were insolent.

Louis opened his mouth but she forestalled him. “I am tired,” she declared flatly. “I shall retire. Tomorrow my father will be here and we shall speak further. Until then, I pray you excuse me.” Calmly she rose, shook out her faded skirts and, followed by her women, passed through the bowing court out between the great doors and was gone.

"Imbécile!" Louis hissed the word as he flung himself onto the high-backed chair, where he lay staring with lowered brows at the furious Warwick.

"Let us hear some music!" The Countess signaled to the minstrels in the gallery. So while Louis lay in his chair and nibbled candied cherries, music flooded the long room and the young people, relieved from the necessity of standing about in court attitudes, gathered into knots for dancing.

A slim yellow figure with bright unseeing eyes, Anne allowed herself to be led through the slow dipping and swaying. From one to the other she passed, dancing gracefully, her heart beating in silent anger against these arrogant Angevins. With her air of greatness and her regal calm Margaret had almost fooled her, but the letter, the brushing aside of her father and mother, even of Louis, filled her with fury. And Edouard. His absence was an added insult. If she had to stand there to be bargained over like a sheep at market, he should have been beside her. These French needed taking down. Bowed beneath the weight of adversity, they still were unsubdued.

9. Check

QUEEN MARGARET gave in. It was settled that the betrothal, in accordance with her fancy, should take place in the church of St. Mary, at Angers. The eve of the ceremony found Anne tense and wakeful, rigid in her bed, Clotilde a faithful figure in the shadows of the bed curtains.

"Go you to bed, Clo." Anne tossed on her pillows. "There is no need for you here."

"Not till you sleep, *ma chère*." Clotilde stroked the hot head. Her own heart ached, for she had come to feel the full wretchedness of Anne's plight. After the game of shuttlecock on the lawns of Saumur, when the young Lord Edouard turned up so unexpectedly, she knew that she loved Alain. They had not told one another of their love, but in the light blue eyes of the page she read her own heart. Now she looked at Anne and the lump of pity was large in her throat. To be forced into ring contract with a disliked stranger, while your own true knight was far away, perhaps lost to you forever—Clotilde quivered.

And Anne was so calm and steady. This hurt worse than if she had wept and flung herself about in her misery. Clotilde read fortitude in the familiar face of the girl she had served for so long, saw the eyes glittering with the unshed tears, the pale brown eyebrows contracted in pain. Anne had one of her nervous headaches.

"Courage," whispered Clotilde. "Remember, it is betrothal only, not marriage, my sweet lady."

Anne turned feverish eyes upon her and allowed a tiny moan to escape. What would this gentle maiden say if she knew the dark thoughts that filled her breast? How she would blench and recoil from thought of the violence, the knife and the blood! She would know what Clotilde thought.

"What think you of Prince Edouard?"

Faint color stained the French girl's cheeks. "He seems well—that is—" Lamely she paused.

"Well enough if we had not anything to do with him—that is what you mean?" Anne smiled. "Is that how you are inclined toward him, Clo?"

Clotilde hesitated. This was a gay personable young prince, a companion who had romped with them in the garden. And he had been courteous with them all, treating Alain like another young man, crossing lightly the barrier between knight and page. "I think I do like him a little," she confessed.

"I, too." Anne lay very still. "And do you know, I think Richard would warm to him. He is Richard's kind. He has been well taught in all things, and if he is cruel—it is no more than the others. Ah me, what a coil!"

She threw her arms behind her aching head and considered the drawn silk canopy of her bed. How could she ever bring herself to kill this proud, charming, exasperating young man! Perhaps, and here a slow horror crept over her, perhaps she would give in weakly and let herself be drawn into the marriage bed, to be loved, and thus be planted within the very heart of her father's ambitious intent. On her head they would place that jeweled wonder, the crown of England, and she would walk through the years, a proud lifeless creature surrounded by her blond children, wedded forever to her Lancastrian prince.

On the edge of this fantasy, a reproachful figure with long ivory finger upraised, stood Richard, his black eyes watchful. Anne set her teeth. "It is well we remember what it all means. Help me not to forget how arrogant they are, how heedless of any but their own. Help me, Clo! And help me not to betray my own true love!" She buried her face and now she cried hard.

Clotilde stroked the exposed neck. "Dearest one," she soothed. She knew tears would bring relief but heavy crying would make the headache worse. Anne must sleep. She looked out into the passage. The pale light flooded from a high window at the end and sitting in the seat, his gilt head almost white in the moonbeams, was Alain.

Noiselessly he came. "She sleeps?"

"Sh! Not yet. Tonight her heart is sore. Where is Doctor Locke? Try to find him."

"I think he sits below in the common room with Gervase. I saw them drinking together."

Soon the physician came, black gown flapping, the pointed beard a snowy wedge on his chin, the bony hands curled around a potion. And after that Anne slept.

Shining as it was full on her face, even the morning sun failed to wake her and she must be shaken to be aroused. "Lady love! Come, awake, my bud!" Gifa was cheerful as a lark. "'Tis high time."

With a small groan Anne returned to the day. Her head felt heavy and at sight of the food they brought her, her stomach rebelled. She nibbled on the fair white cake and forced herself to sip the warmed wine while she watched them filling her bath, dropping in the perfumes, holding the woolen drying cloths to the fire.

"She should eat nothing. There will be mass." Lady Philippa rustled in.

"I'll not have fainting at the altar, mass or no mass," declared Gifa.

Only a few moments were allowed Anne for her orisons before they fetched her. The rest was a dream. It would be impossible ever to recall it; all she was to remember was the flash of color, the heady perfume, the smell of wax tapers in the church, and a blur of rose and white at her side, the left arm a dull plum color to match her own.

A heavy ring placed on her right hand and then—then—the piercing shock of looking across the chapel straight into the eyes of Richard.

He stood on the crowd's edge, a hood pulled over his face, his long ivory hands thrust through his belt in the old manner, his black eyes fixed on her so that even from a distance, with all the people between them, it seemed as if they were alone. The cold blood raced down the backs of her legs and her lips went numb. What if they saw him there! But there was no time to wonder and, in a sort of agony, she felt herself drawn into the sacristy, where on a great table lay the documents for signing. All her proud silent resolutions against fainting were draining out of her. After the long months of waiting and worrying, she reeled under the shock of this sudden appearance and there was a buzzing in her ears.

Part of her had stayed out there in the chapel with Richard and she felt confused here in the sacristy. In a daze she saw her father place his hand on a crystal box that stood on a small table.

"On this most precious part of the Holy Cross, I swear to be true knight to his liege King Henry the Sixth, Sovereign of England, and

to forswear all other allegiance, so help me God." Warwick's voice filled the small place.

Anne burned with shame. Although so near, Richard could not hear the treacherous words which now seemed doubly false. From a distance she heard Louis and his brother Charles swearing to their parts. They were to aid Henry on every point and to refuse aid to Edward, no matter what the offer.

The husky tones of King Louis rose. "And I swear by my saints to aid and comfort Queen Margaret and her son, the high and mighty Prince Edouard of Wales and Anjou, and his children by the Lady Anne Neville, here contracted to him in promise of marriage."

Margaret stepped forward in her blue and ermine gown. Placing her white hand on the holy relic, she spoke. "And I swear by Our Lady and this most precious appurtenance of Christ's martyrdom to hold Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, as my faithful vassal and subject, forgetting all past behavior, and regarding only this present promise and allegiance."

Then she faced Warwick, her handsome face set. "It is now time, my lord, to make known to you my further intentions." Within the close stone walls her cool voice rang out clearly. "Under no circumstances is my son to leave France without me, where we shall remain until the usurping Edward is either slain or conquered. On our arrival in England my son will be appointed Prince Regent, to govern in the name of his father, who is obviously unfit to assume the kingship in anything other than name."

Warwick's face, pale as her own, went livid. "This, madam, is a new development." His fist in the velvet glove struck the table. "Am I to understand, then, that this marriage will not take place as planned?"

"On the contrary," replied Margaret, and her voice was silky now, "it will take place exactly as planned. And that will be when you, my lord, have fulfilled your share of the bargain and restored to me and my son our throne."

"And what, may I ask, is to be my position in this?" On Warwick's thin lip there was foam, and in his heart he already knew her answer.

"You, my lord, will be my son's guardian and protector. So long as no harm comes to him, you may make it quite sure in your mind that the marriage will go forward and your daughter will be Queen of England."

The stern faces closed in a circle about Anne and her betrothed,

lounging at his ease as he played with a silken loop on his doublet. He actually winked at her. Arrogant Angevin! She saw her mother had gone marble-white. As for her father, he continued to glare at Margaret, his shaking lip caught under his teeth, his gloved hand on his dagger. This was his bitterest hour. To be relegated to a position of ignominy as guardian to the young prince, a place without power, even less in influence than that of the ancient tutor who now stood so near his young charge, his white head shaking with palsy.

King René did not trouble to hide his grin of triumph at this master stroke of his daughter, and even Queen Jeanne's almond green eyes were wrinkled in a sour-sweet smile to match her husband's. Only Louis was not smiling, his withered face screwed into a doubtful scowl. This could blow up in their faces after all, for who knew what these two hotheaded creatures might do in their heedless rage.

Mounted as she was on the little dais by Edouard, Anne could make out over the heads the small familiar clot of her own people at the sacristy entrance—Gervase and Clotilde, and squarely before them, a broad smile glinting from the shadow of his hood, Richard himself. "What did I tell you?" the grin seemed to say. "You're safe till England falls into the hands of the Red Rose." Then he pushed through her servants and disappeared.

Safe till then? Anne felt weak and faint. Terror for Richard and for herself had robbed her of all strength. "I should like to sit down." The faraway voice was her own. King Louis placed her in a chair. Pathetically she looked up into the shriveled face.

"There, *petite*," he soothed. "You are not alone in this." His smile held no mirth, only menace, but he patted her shoulder. "You have done well today—for England."

The day dragged on. Feasting and celebration, and she the center of it all, who must sit proud and erect, the set smile on her lips, horror in her heart. Louis smothered her with attention, ordering his own pages and squires to serve her. "I can do no less for our royal bride, *hein*?"

Now she hated him. It was as if he knew, in some secret way, how much she longed to be with her own people, to get some news of Richard. She would not be surprised if this Spider-King knew that Richard was actually among them. They said he knew everything, had unbelievable ways of gaining information. She forced herself to attend to what went on about her. That way, time would pass, night would come, and she could learn where Richard had gone and how

he would come to her. Her bedchamber was one refuge of escape from Louis, this leering shadow, always at her, breathing on her, his hand with the soiled nails resting on her neck, pinching tiny folds of skin. This habit of nipping people on the neck was his most loathsome mannerism.

Under the afternoon sun they watched a passage at arms; nothing so elaborate as Margaret of York's Tournament of the Golden Tree, of course, for Louis had no intention of pouring money out in mere ostentatious display, but none the less boring for Anne. She endured the day until sunset, when she sought her chamber, resolved that nothing should make her show her face again in public this day. Whatever they had planned for the evening would have to take place without her.

"Shut the door!" The arras fell and they were alone. Now she would learn what all day, ever since Richard's eyes met hers across the heads in the chapel, she had burned to know. "What news?"

"The Lord Richard is nowhere to be found. He has verily melted away." Alain shook his head.

"Disappeared! You cannot have searched properly. Go and find him at once." Then: "No, wait!" She bit her lip, considering. "He knows what he is about. He waits, doubtless for the dark. We must have patience." Before her the two stood, the girl and the youth, awaiting her pleasure.

She sank onto a chair and spread her hands on her lap. On her finger gleamed Edouard's troth ring. The first step was taken. By the token of gold, she was promised to Anjou. What was next? Ah, she knew what was next. "Come!" She motioned to cushions piled on either side of her chair. "Sit with me." They obeyed, their faces turned trustingly toward her, for all the youth was fast approaching manhood and the girl had long since given up her childish ways.

"It is of your future and welfare I must speak." Anne put her white hand on Clotilde's dark head, stroked the cheeks, and felt the French girl's lips on her fingers. "Before I am wed, you all must be safely home. It is well the Lord Richard has come today, for I will arrange all for you, Alain. Gervase has told you, doubtless, that the Duke will take you into his household at Michaelmas." The youth nodded. "Ah, then you do know." She tipped Clotilde's chin into her hand as older women often did to her. "And you, *ma chère*. What is your will? Do you wish to take this—this squire's apprenticeship to your wedded husband?"

They all laughed together and for a moment Anne's heart stopped aching. They could not possibly know how much it cost her to part with them, nor how firm her resolve that they should be well out of France before her dread destiny took the fatal turn that would lead her to the deed of blood.

But the ache came back, and not even the blushing face of the French girl nor the warm fact that Richard would have them both in his care brought relief. "Bring me Gervase." She sighed. "I am not sleepy and we may have a long wait."

Gervase came. He too had no news of Richard. Sighing, Anne requested music. One did not command Gervase. But he was ready to let his lute say what his lips might not utter. Never had he been so full of songs as on this summer night in France, in the strange bed-chamber at Angers. He sang of the chase, of the beasts of the sweet foot, and because he was Gervase, he chose to sing of the Seven Sorrows of Mary instead of her Holy Joys. He sang the Legend of St. Nicholas, that dour story of the babes in the pickle barrel. And then he strummed the opening bars of Madelon the Shepherdess' song in the Christmas Mystery, and Clotilde's pale red lips parted to let the song float through.

"Lully, lulla, thou little tiny child,
By, By, lully, lullay,
O sister too! how may we do
For to preserve this day,
This pore youngling, for whom we do sing
By, by, lully, lullay."

So had she sung it in the great cathedral at York, the company quiet beneath the rich thread of her voice floating over the thrumming lute.

Anne lay in her chair, her hand with the heavy gold ring trailing over the side to the little chamber dog that sat with its head against her skirt. The others were silent, still under the spell of the maid's singing. Then Anne stirred.

"Was ever lady so attended in her pleasures?" she murmured. And, she might have added, was ever lady so bereft as I shall be when once you have left and I am alone to do what I must? Then she remembered Richard. "You must seek him out, Alain, for he will not know how to reach me. It must be time now."

But Gervase was at the door before the page. "It is a risky thing,

and he is easily marked, my lady. Allow me." Before she could protest, he had slipped through.

"Undress me, Clo. If Gifa should chance to come, or the others, it must not appear that I await someone." And while Alain kept the chamber door, Anne got into her night shift. "Now, leave me, both of you." Before the little statue of St. Anne she sank on her *prie-dieu*, her head in her hands.

"Say one for me, too." The low voice behind her startled her out of her wits. Richard stood in the gloom at her shoulder.

"Ah!" She gasped. "You!"

"Aye." He had her in his arms. "Nan! Nan! Did you really think I wouldn't come?"

She clung to him. "How could I know? You sent no word. And today—one glimpse of you and then—nothing. I have been frantic."

Noiselessly he laughed. "Mother of God, it's good to have you in my arms. But I sent you word. Did you not receive it?"

"Never." She shook her fair head.

"Ah! Poor *petite!* How alone you must have felt. I should have chosen a better way to reach you." He ran his hands over her hanging hair. "I had the devil's job to get here at all."

"How?" she marveled.

He grimaced. "I am supposed to be in Bruges with Margaret and Burgundy. Edward would flay me alive if he knew where I was at this moment. I gave it out that I was gone on a hunting party for a few days, took Lovell and Percy, and then struck off down here."

"Francis and Rob—they are here, too?"

"Body of God, no! Do you think I'd bring them into the lion's den? No, hard work as it was to escape them, I came alone." She gave a little moan of fear but he only laughed and squeezed her tighter. "It was not so bad. I'd a friend or two along the way to hold a knife against a loud mouth, and I had to slit a pair of weasands myself. 'Tis no matter. I'd have dared the fires of hell to see Warwick's face today in that chapel." With relish he laughed and Anne put her hand over his mouth.

"Hush!" she cautioned.

"Listen, Nan. I must spend the night here." At her startled look: "Never fear. You can hide me somewhere. Let's see"—he looked about—"ah, the cupboard is wide, and you can give me some of these cushions. The main trouble will be keeping awake." And now, in the glimmering light, she saw how utterly spent he was. Great cir-

cles of weariness framed his eyes and his face, like stained ivory, was haggard. He sighed and tossed his hanging hair. "I don't like the look of your father. I suspect he will try anything, and soon. He is desperate and doesn't mean to be balked. Should they come for you, I shall get to Margaret who will know what to do. Now, *there's* a woman. Would she were on our side."

But Anne thought only of the closing net that caught her, and Richard's presence here took on a new and frightening significance. He would never have risked his own life to come down to Angers had he not feared the Warwicks would do something rash. Apparently the something rash was one of those secret midnight marriages hastily solemnized in cold dark chapels, the knot tied so securely that not even the Holy Father in Rome could untie it.

"Oh, Diccon!" Terrified now, she clung to him. "How can you save me—now?" On her finger Edouard's betrothal ring was a heavy reality; the other was a dream.

"Have I come all this way to let them take you from me?" And now, as if for the first time he realized he had her in his arms, his grasp of her tightened and he ran his hands over the smooth silk that covered her naked body. He pushed the loose sleeves up her arms and kissed the warm flesh of her shoulders. With a sudden delight, she shivered. In her nostrils was the smell of spice that always hung in his clothes, and now it excited her with a new intense feeling that was part pleasure, part pain. He was pressing her to him, huskily murmuring against her throat, but her own blood sang so loudly in her ears she could not hear him. As his lips found hers, pressed them apart, the tip of his tongue against hers, a tingling took her and she could think only of the eager thighs against her own.

Dreamily she felt him drawing her to the bed. The strange room, wrapped in darkness now, was their secret world, far from discovery. It was a quiet nuptial chamber and together they lay, his hands on her bosom, his face a dark blue above hers, their short breaths mingling. She ached now for the feel of his bare flesh and made no protest when he pushed the bedgown from her shoulders.

All of a sudden he lay rigid, listening. Over her own held breath she heard nothing.

"Body of God!" She felt him rising on his knees, felt the bed spring as he bounded softly off it. Too surprised to speak, she lay quite still, her eyes wide in the darkness, the bedgown entirely off her

shoulders, exposing her bosom to the waist. Then she heard the step in the corridor.

Still dazed, she saw the chamber door swing open and someone, candle in hand, came in. It was Gifa, her spare neat figure and coifed head nunlike in the taperlight. "You are awake, my lady?" She set the light down and went to the clothes press.

"I—I—what is it?" Embarrassed, Anne pulled the bedgown about her throat. She did not dare glance toward the cupboard.

"Come." The nurse had a warm quilted robe in her hands. "Your lady mother sends for you."

"Like this—now?" Anne could not gather her spinning thoughts, was only vaguely aware that the nurse was pushing slippers onto her bare feet, wrapping her in the folds of the cloak.

"Yes." Now the nurse urged her toward the open door and the dimly glowing corridor. At sight of three of her father's men, fully armed, danger thrilled through her. She hung back. "Where am I going?" Now she was alert.

But they closed about her, and the nurse pushed her along. It was not far they had to go, just a chamber at the bend in the passageway, and there the steel band parted and at that moment her robe fell open as a draught plastered the thin bedgown against her shivering body. It was her father who confronted her, still wearing the splendid clothes he had worn in the church, and beside him was her mother, a long golden cloak about her shoulders. Behind them stood a priest, nervously gnawing his lip, his hands fidgeting the pages of a breviary.

Now fear was a white-hot dagger. It was happening! They were going to do as Diccon feared, to marry her in secret and by force. Suppose Diccon were unable to reach Margaret—and if he did, suppose she suspected a trap and threw him into chains. Anne felt like the small white rabbit her father thought her, caught beneath the paw of the great forest lord. But she refused to cower, and faced him, her golden hair tangled at her back, her eyes black with fear and defiant anger, her cold hands clenched at her side.

Edouard, blinking as if he had been brought suddenly into the light, now entered between a pair of her father's men. It was taking quite a number of the Warwick force to drag two young people to the altar. Edouard wore a shabby robe belted at the waist, and the fine bright down of his beard stubbled his chin.

With the cold hiss of the steel Warwick's dagger slashed out of its sheath. "Now," and his voice was deadly calm, "I want no words

from either of you. We shall here and now join you two in legal and holy wedlock. Sirrah, to your office.”

“You can put up the dagger, my lord.” The contempt in Edouard’s drawling tones aroused Anne’s grudging admiration. In spite of her own agony, she must admit this young man was no coward. She knew that rather than be balked in this, his greatest enterprise, her father would slit the young man’s throat, thus making sure that none else reaped the harvest he had so painfully raised. “I have no objection to espousing the Lady Anne here and now, but I feel bound to point out to you that should you do this thing, my mother will be highly displeased.”

“We have not come to palter,” snarled Warwick. “Get on with the rite, priest, I have waited long enough.”

Anne’s eyes beseeched her mother who stood, her own gaze cast down, white hands locked in her rosary. She turned to her father, that black figure of doom, his dagger still bared, his jaw quivering. “My lord father,” she began, but she could feel the claws already drawing her blood. “I—I—beg of you—”

“Be silent!”

Around her hand, cold and limp, Edouard’s closed. He squeezed it as if to give her courage and she almost returned the pressure. But this was the man she had sworn to kill.

The priest cleared his throat. “Here—in the presence of God and these witnesses—”

A shout and a scuffling at the door. Warwick’s two men drew their knives.

“Go on!” ordered Warwick.

But the noise grew and now Margaret’s voice rang out. “Let me pass, poltroons!”

The door burst open and a pair of guards clashed with Warwick’s men. A grunting scream and one of them sank to the floor, clutching his middle. The other crashed back against the wall, a pair of daggers at his throat. Behind them Margaret, her way carved by her own soldiers, swept into the room. Her face was marble, about her mouth a tight ring.

Straight to the priest she strode, plucked the breviary from his hand and dashed it to the floor. “I will have you unfrocked,” she said in a low, furious voice. To Warwick she said, “And you, my lord, do you again add murder to your other crimes?” Not waiting a reply, she turned away while he stood, his whole countenance compressed into

a grimace of bitter anger. He knew it was of no use to try to force through the marriage now, for Margaret was quite capable of calling out her father's entire force, which was considerable. The whole thing would degenerate into a life-and-death clash. No use undoing what already was accomplished.

"Get dressed, my son. We leave at once." Margaret spoke briefly to Edouard. "And you," again she turned her withering gaze on Warwick, "will abide by the agreements spoken this day in church. When I have my throne again, then and only then will you have my son for your daughter."

With no backward glance she left, regally in possession of the field. Anne might have been a bag of gold over which they bickered. But far from caring, she felt her heart sing with relief.

"Farewell," she spoke to the young man at her side. "May good fortune attend you."

Straight into her eyes he smiled. "To our next meeting, my lady." He kissed her hand, letting his lips linger. Then he too left them.

10. Down York, Up Lancaster!

A SEPTEMBER tempest blew Richard home to England where he at once forged inland to Doncaster to meet Edward, who lay encamped there with about three thousand men. The King was awaiting the arrival of Montagu who was to bring reinforcements in readiness for the expected arrival of the Earl of Warwick and the Duke of Clarence. At Doncaster Edward received Richard affectionately.

"Come in, come in, Diccon!" He embraced his brother. "What make you of this weather?"

Richard looked out of the small window in the gatehouse where Edward was lodged; the heavy wind was blowing the trees about and banging among the chimney pots of the town.

"If it continues as squally as when we crossed, I doubt if Burgundy can hold his blockade out there on the point." They knew that Warwick and Clarence had a huge fleet provided by Louis and awaited only the chance to slip through a break torn in Burgundy's lines by torrential wind and waves.

"Warwick weather, I call it. Perhaps Louis has been heard in Heaven. I'm told he prays loud enough." Edward flung into a chair. "Give me the tidings."

Richard told him all he wanted him to know. He had warned his two friends not to betray his activities in Angers. "What Edward doesn't know won't hurt him, so see you both hold a hard cheek to it," he said.

Now, sitting on the table corner, Richard told him all. He described the interrupted marriage at Angers, Margaret's fury and Warwick's rage, and he spoke of Louis and his latest maneuvers, careful not to mention that he had his news firsthand.

"Where's our precious brother?" Pouring out wine, Edward feigned a nonchalance that did not deceive Richard.

"In Normandy, last I heard. I fancy he is now with Warwick."

"Who has doubtless told him that if Anne bore Anjou no heir Clarence'd get my throne."

"I suppose," said Richard moodily.

Edward moved about the little room. "I have sent for Montagu, but he is tardy in arriving." He did not add that he feared the Marquis, Warwick's brother, might not come at all; since his Northumberland estates had been stripped from him, he might give in to his rage and revert to Warwick's side.

From beneath lowered brows Richard regarded him. Edward seemed worried, his face twisted into a scowl, something in his expression quite foreign to his usual sanguine manner. He had insisted on snatching away from John Neville, Marquis of Montagu, those rich lands that had been his reward, restoring them to the Lancastrian Northumberland who claimed them as his inherited due. Richard looked across at Lovell leaning over Hastings, engrossed in a game of chess with Percy, and at that moment their eyes met. Lovell shook his head. The plight of Montagu and its possible reverberation onto Edward was critical, uppermost in all minds.

The groom of the chamber appeared. "A message, my liege!" But he was pushed aside by an agitated officer, his face scarlet.

"Sire," he dropped to one knee, "they come for to take your Grace!"

Edward frowned down upon him but was calm. "What, man, do you say?"

"I say, my lord, that the Lord Montagu is your Grace's enemy. He comes to destroy you."

"Where did you get this?" Edward gnawed his lip. "Bones of God, I know not whether to believe you or have you hanged." Shoving the man out of his way, he strode from the room. Hastings rose, the edge of his sleeve overturning the chessboard, and hastened after him.

"Can it be?" Richard marveled.

"Aye, my lord." Slowly the man got to his feet. "The Lord Montagu cries that the King's Grace has beggared him, that he cannot maintain his position since he is left only a pie's nest to do it with."

Richard was upon him in an instant. "You have been sent by the foul traitor!" He seized the officer by the throat.

Percy stopped him. "No, Diccon," he reasoned. "Use sense. Would he send to warn Edward?" To the messenger, who rubbed his throat, he said, "You may go."

"Do you credit this?" Richard asked.

"Aye." Lovell was gloomy. "The best way to make a Warwick frantic is to take back a favor."

"But Edward gave him the estates of Montagu."

"And an empty purse to maintain them."

"But he knows Edward will amply reward him when all is over. And besides, he loves Edward."

"Does he?" said Lovell briefly.

Edward spent the night alone and if he was wakeful, none knew it. This too was unlike him, for when it pleased him to be sleepless, he usually summoned someone to amuse him. He was up betimes, and had barely finished a frugal breakfast when his sergeant of minstrels burst in upon him.

"Foot soldiers, my liege!" he gasped. "They pour in from everywhere."

There was no doubt now. These were Edward's men, chased from their outposts, full of the dire tidings. Montagu had indeed turned his coat and now wore his brother's colors, declaring openly for the Earl of Warwick and Lancaster.

Edward lost no time. "We'll to horse. It's Burgundy for us, this time. And if I mistake not, it will be nip and tuck!"

He was right. With his noble lords, Richard, Hastings and his brother-in-law Rivers, he set off at full gallop to the northern shore of The Wash. But there he met with a check. There was no transport for the dash across the sea to Burgundy, for moored to the landings were only tiny craft, barely enough to accommodate the royal suite and its officers.

"So be it!" Edward gave orders and before the gathering storm they flew across The Wash to Lynn. But again, there were only fishing boats. Crowding these to the danger point, they shoved off, the brave little sails aloft as the toy fleet set its course for the Low Countries.

Chased by the vessels of the Hanseatic League, they barely managed to limp into Alkmaar to the protection of the strong arm of de la Gruthuyse, Governor of Holland.

Richard's stay in England had lasted less than a month.

The weather continued to favor Warwick and at last he was able to break through Burgundy's blockade, blown off course by the great winds of the North Sea. Warwick and Clarence led Louis's great fleet

for England. Landing at Plymouth, the first news he received was that his brother John Neville, Marquis of Montagu, was ready and waiting for him in the North, with a huge army to reinforce his new-found loyalty.

Warwick felt better than at any time since he had left England. When before he fled from Edward, he had been a fugitive, his future uncertain, his prospects only half guaranteed. Now he had returned to a land empty of its golden King and that gadfly Richard of Gloucester, a land that waited only for his valiant leadership to restore it to Lancastrian greatness.

Early the next morning a vast gathering assembled on the water front of Plymouth to hear the Earl of Warwick, mounted on a high stand hung with crimson, give his message to England. Shining in his golden armor, his stern dark face alight with triumph, he was an elegant figure among his officers who themselves formed a glittering mass behind him, while at their backs crowded as many of his army as the space would hold. French faces beamed in the autumn sun, fleur-de-lis and Red Rose banners whipped in the wind, among them the blue and gold checkers. The ladies of the household with their women stood on a wheeled stage, once used for the traveling Mystery Plays, now hastily rolled forward and carpeted for the use of the noblewomen. Mingled with the soldiers, the English grew quiet only when silver trumpets gave imperious command for silence.

Warwick's herald stepped forward and read the Earl's proclamation.

“From the high and mighty Richard Neville, Earl of Beauchamp and of Warwick, Governor of Calais, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Warden of the Western Marches, and lord ambassador to the Sovereign Lady, Margaret of Anjou and England, to the people of England, Ireland, and Scotland, know you by these presents that the said nobleman does here and now call upon the foul usurper styling himself Edward the Fourth, onetime Edward, Earl of March, to release from bondage the person of his most gracious and noble sovereign liege lord, King Henry. In default of which the said Earl of Warwick will meet and challenge the said oppressor, destroyer, and tyrant, to combat and prove his words upon his body.

“God save King Henry the Sixth, by God's grace, sovereign lord of England, Ireland, Scotland, and France.”

The people of Plymouth looked uneasily about them but said nothing, and when the cheering began from the army they followed suit, but halfheartedly. If the Red Rose of Lancaster were to replace the White Rose of York over Westminster, it was all one to them. There would still be taxes, and treason would still be met with drawing and quartering. They shrugged, then lifted their hats in the air.

And that afternoon, taking his household with him, Warwick set off for London. Dispatches came south to meet him on his way and every new one lightened his load, made him raise his head and square his shoulders more confidently. Riding easily in his shadow, Gervase caught the news and brought them down the line to where Anne lay in her litter. A nervous headache after the proclamation made riding impossible. Her mother said it was because she had stood looking full on the sea that glittered in the morning sunlight. Anne said nothing. How could she tell anyone that she was sick to her soul from what she had seen and heard, that she felt a deeper despair than at any time yet? Her father was winning, or so it seemed. She had no idea where Richard could be, and as for Edward—she turned a wan face to Gervase.

“Do you feel brave?” he asked, and his deep voice was gentle.

“Tell me.” Her pale lips shaped the words but no sound came.

He let her have it straight. “The King and the Lord Richard have fled.”

“Fled?” She raised herself on an elbow, the pink staining her pale cheeks. “Never fled!”

“Then have it that they have left England.”

“I like that better.” She lay back on her pillows. Then she knew that Gervase had deliberately pricked her to make the deeper pain easier to bear. Irritation had submerged the real hurt.

“Dearest lady, would you not like some lemon nectar?” Clotilde offered the small flask.

Her stomach churning at the thought, Anne shook her head. “And the Lord Montagu?” She knew only the barest rumors of her uncle.

“He has joined your father.” Gervase would not say “us” and for that she loved him. They were on a little island of their own, the four of them, surrounded by enemies, alien among their very own. The familiar London skyline of tower and cathedral came as a relief to Anne and an hour later Westminster received them.

In regal state Warwick led his army toward the palace. Already the Lancastrian banner floated from the tower. The Londoners, though

noncommittal, offered no resistance. Like the people of Plymouth, they were indifferent as to what master they served. They had been raised in the drama of Lancaster and York; one or the other was forever pushing to the top. It was a nobleman's affair and they had their own business to attend to. They stood in crowds to watch the Earl of Warwick and his brilliant army troop through their streets to Westminster.

Late that afternoon they were treated to another spectacle. Borne in triumph from his dirty rooms in the Tower came Henry, a pale puzzled man with no shoulders, a very soiled and shabby cloak hastily draped about his emaciated form. They brought him out at the back as if shamed to admit he had been all this time in durance, and the little escort paused at the slimy water stairs to let a light barge discharge its passengers. Up the slippery ascent came a tall, golden-haired lady, her shapeless body shrouded in a long blue cloak. It was Elizabeth Woodville, pregnant, friendless, deposed, seeking sanctuary in England's strongest prison.

She looked up at Henry on the landing, his ragged gray locks blowing in the river breeze. "My Lord of Lancaster," she inclined her head, "you are leaving and I am arriving. I hear you go to Westminster."

Henry looked at her and blinked. This tall blond woman was—no, it could not be. "Margaret," he quavered.

A sardonic smile curved Elizabeth's lips. "My name is Elizabeth, Queen of England," she said. "You have mistaken me for someone else."

"But—they said Margaret was here." Henry turned to his escort. Now the deposed Queen was beside him, and he must cast up his own eyes to see her, who was taller. "Where is Margaret—and my little boy—my son?"

"Ask your master that, my lord." Scorn rang in her clear voice. "Ask Warwick, who made you, even as he made us all. Do not think because you wear the crown that you will reign in England. Nor will your son."

Now Henry looked right at her and recognition dawned in the poor mad eyes. "I know you," he said, pleased as a child at making the discovery. "You are the golden whore that Edward married. They told me all about you." Then he peered more closely. "You think that is a son you carry in your belly, do you not? And you thought he would wear the pretty crown and be the King?" He laughed, a

ghostly cackle. "If you ask me, nobody will be King in England, nobody but me. I am the King. Ask anyone. They'll tell you." His voice sank to a mumble as his escort with a firm mailed hand urged him down the slippery steps to the waiting boat.

The Westminster apartments to which they bore him had been Queen Elizabeth Woodville's very own and were still full of her perfume, her dresses hastily flung down, her little dogs and birds still chained to perches and kennels, her lovely tapestries glowing from the walls in the afternoon sun. With an exclamation of mild pleasure, Henry clasped a pair of thin hands and looked about him. While he did not approve of all this opulence, and the dresses that hung from chairs and presses appeared to have very little bodice to them, he liked his new rooms better than the moldy apartments he had occupied for the past six years.

Hardly had he time to look about him before the door was held by a bowing page who showed the newcomers far more deference than to him, though he was the King; and the Earl of Warwick strode through into the sun-filled room. Straight to Henry he came, bowing low.

"My liege," he said in his deepest voice, "I bring you greetings from your lady and from the Prince your son."

"Ah—my lord Earl." Henry chewed a little as if tasting the air. "I thank you—I thank you kindly." The small ragged beard he had grown in prison waggled on his chin and Warwick made a mental note to have the royal barber shave it off as soon as possible.

"I bring your royal robes," he said, as two squires came in carrying Edward's robe of state, carefully holding up the purple velvet furred with miniver. "We shall escort you through Cheapside on the morrow."

"How nice," said Henry. "And the Queen? Will she be with me?"

"Her Grace will meet you later," said Warwick smoothly. No use in upsetting this feeble mind with details.

"But my chaplain—I must have my chaplain." Henry looked about him with a lost air.

"Certainly." Warwick sighed and Henry's old chaplain, a cleric even more menial-appearing than his master, came forward.

"We must pray," said Henry. Then with a momentary flash of his old kingship: "You have our permission to retire."

Warwick bowed and left. "Merciful saints," he swore to his brother, "it's even worse than I thought. He's completely mad."

Even so, Warwick kept his head. Dulled with trouble and privation, Henry would present no problem; Margaret would be another matter. But Margaret was still in France, and there was much to do before she and her son arrived in England.

Cleverly he decided to take little for himself. That would come later when Anne was on the throne at Edouard's side. He would retain his old captaincy of Calais and the post of Great Chamberlain, both of which he had held under Edward, and with these modest holds on the power, with his great wealth, he would still be the unacknowledged King of England. And George of Clarence?

George was inclined to wrangle. "Our apartments are not satisfactory," he told his father-in-law. "My lady does not like the heights we have to climb to reach them."

"You will not be staying there, my lord Duke," said Warwick with a touch of hauteur. He had no intention of allowing Clarence to live here under the very shadow of the puppet king, who could so easily be twisted, whose signature could cleverly be obtained in all sorts of devious ways. "You are to occupy Shrewsbury's house."

"That draughty cellar!" George was furious. "And what position, may I ask, do I hold in this day of our ascendancy?"

"What say you to the Lord Lieutenancy of Ireland?"

"Ireland! I'll jump into the Channel first."

"We cannot afford to snatch the plums yet, my lord," said Warwick coolly. "Be satisfied I have your fortunes at heart. Should I cause my own daughter to suffer through loss of care, do you think?"

Clarence thought his father-in-law would do anything that best suited his plans. Already he felt his own slender hold on the throne sliding from his grasp, and he had half a mind to cut and run for it, to go back to Edward. What had treachery brought him, after all? Suddenly he drank a glass of wine, felt the dry warmth pouring into his stomach. He drank more and tension eased.

"For the nonce you will remain in England," Warwick was saying. "I wish Isabella to keep an eye on Anne. I have reason to believe she receives messages from young Gloucester, and there must be no hitch this time. When Edouard arrives the marriage will take place immediately. I will not again be balked."

Despite the easing warmth of the wine, Clarence felt a twinge and the old sullenness returned. So they were to preserve the little golden-haired doll to be Queen of England, were they? Beneath his breath he swore a particularly filthy oath as Warwick began pacing and dic-

tating to his secretaries. Suddenly the Earl turned. "There is a thing you can do for me."

Clarence glowered. The Earl behaved as if he had just done his son-in-law a favor that merited some requiting.

"We have captured Worcester, hiding in a tree in Huntingdon Forest. They've brought him into London. I want him dispatched tomorrow. He's belowstairs in the dungeons now, and you'll have hard work to get him alive to the Tower. The people bear him astonishing ill-will for his cruelties. He wishes to be executed with three strokes—in honor of the Trinity, he says. Do this for me, will you, like a good man?"

Clarence nodded and left. He should take a savage pleasure in carrying out this duty.

But Isabella sought Anne. "I have tidings." Narrowly she watched her sister.

"The King?" Anne's lips were dry.

"Even so." With maddening deliberation Isabella took up her embroidery. "Edward has bought a duchy in Flanders and he and Richard mean to remain there."

"I don't believe it."

"Edward is no fool, Anne. He knows when he is hopelessly beaten and there are too many traitors about him." Then with a touch of malice she added, "And Richard knows a living dog is better than a dead lion."

"Richard is loyal."

"A loyal fool, if you ask me, who has never known where his fortune lay. George is the only one of the Yorks with the wit to advance himself. This is the end of Edward and Richard. England won't see either of them again."

Anne was too stunned to weep. Isabella had never been so cruel before. She had grown to be like George her husband. She was not like the sister she had known all of her life. She retreated into her dignity. "If you do not mind, Isabella, I have a pain in my head."

And having done her worst for the moment, Isabella left her.

Next day Henry was borne in state to the Lord Bishop's where the Earls of the old Lancastrian days once more took the oath of fealty. Warwick carried the King's train and behind him walked the proud Earl of Oxford bearing the sword of state. The people of London, who had recovered their equilibrium, were ready with shouting and clapping and called "God save King Henry!" at appropriate moments.

Limp, helpless, a mere sack of wool in the hands of his lords, Henry lifted trembling hands to his head where the golden circlet cruelly pressed it. He felt a strange yearning for the quiet familiar walls he had quitted when he left the Tower. He was confused. Where was Margaret and why did she not come and bring Edouard, their little boy? The newly restored King was most unhappy. But his master, the Kingmaker, was jubilant.

Thus England came once more beneath the banner of the Red Rose. Up Lancaster, down York!

11. The Open Clash

IN FLANDERS Richard was too busy to mope over the turn their affairs had taken, for Edward kept him fully occupied. While the followers of the Red Rose rampaged over England, forcing the Yorkists to seek sanctuary, snapping up the prizes left behind and bustling about, they also worked madly to marshal their forces against the return of Edward. He on the other hand was no less engaged in preparations. Still a guest of de la Gruthuyse, he worked from Alkmaar, keeping an eye on the west from whence came news of home, and on the east, where his brother-in-law Charles the Bold of Burgundy turned like a weathercock in the wind.

"By my faith," Edward told the Siegneur, "I know not which way he will swing next. I am told he actually threatens to sign truce with Warwick." Burgundy was not at all sure that Edward was going to win. How then would he stand with victorious Lancaster? "It seems I cannot be certain of him, though we are joined by the bonds of marriage."

"*Ach*, so?" The Hollander stroked his narrow sandy beard. "Your sister has then no—influence?"

"Who knows?" Edward shrugged. "I should have said she could control Charles, but there are no children, you know." Barren wives must be either very rich or very beautiful to bear much weight with powerful husbands.

This was in the second week of November. Early in the third week came tidings that made the heart leap in Edward's breast. Elizabeth Woodville, his Queen, had been brought to bed of a fair son. She sent word they had christened him Edward.

"At last!" exulted Edward. "Now, by God, let them do their worst." He rewarded the messenger with ten crowns, which he was obliged to borrow from de la Gruthuyse. And as if the good news could generate more, came word from Bruges that Louis had suddenly declared war on Burgundy. In the face of this, Charles the

Bold steadied his vacillating intentions and threw in his lot with York.

Come, my lord Edward, he wrote, and we will celebrate the Mass of Christ and pray together for victory.

“What say you, Diccon?” Edward threw down the screed with the florid signature of Burgundy. “Shall we keep Yule with our sister and Charles? In any case, we cannot tarry. I shall want you down at Flushing to see to the victualing and equipping of my force. You’ll take Hastings with you. As for me, I want to be home before Easter. By the time my son is six months old, I shall once more wear my crown.” This was a new Edward, confident, almost gay, full of hope and assurance of victory.

“Do you think Margaret has gone back yet?” Richard had Anne on his mind. If Margaret were in England with Edouard, Anne might be in deadly danger.

“I doubt it.” Edward was positive. “She’ll delay as long as she can, hoping for Warwick to bear the brunt of the fighting so that she and her son can sweep in at the victorious finish. I have heard no word of her leaving France as yet.”

Richard nodded. Margaret would not consider Warwick’s side of the bargain kept until Edward and he were either dead or in chains in London Tower. The open clash was yet to come.

On a bleak morning the two brothers set off to meet Burgundy in Bruges. De la Gruthuysse, who had a fine town house in the city, accompanied them. Ten miles out they were met by Burgundy’s household troops who escorted them within the walls. Edward was pleased at this attention. His mind was busy with the details of how he would approach his brother-in-law the Duke in the matter of a loan of fifty thousand crowns and of what he would have to promise in return. Whenever Burgundy was pinched for men in the running war with Louis, Edward would have to supply troops. But all this would come in the future when he had won back his kingdom. In the meantime, Burgundy would have to come forward with the long-promised aid. To the joyous sound of Flemish trumpets, they clattered into Bruges.

All fell out as Edward had hoped and planned. Three busy months later, Edward and Richard landed at Ravenspur with a small force of English and Flemings. At dawn the next day, on one shore, Edward

donned the three feathers of Lancaster and the men were told to strip off their York badges and cry for Lancaster. By this ruse they would make their way safely to York, and from there through the countryside to rally to their forces the loyal Yorkists. Time enough to show their true colors when they were assured of numbers firmly at their backs. The people of York, dazzled by his dashing good looks and cheerful smile, befooled by his Lancastrian colors and the cries of his men, threw open their gates to him. He entered, declaring loudly for Henry and young Edouard, calling that he had but come to claim his duchy of York. Of course! If that were all, he should have his duchy, by God! They cheered him. Everywhere flew the scarlet of Lancaster, and the men poured into the great city of York, choking the narrow streets, while Edward went to kneel in the ancient Minster. The people of the midlands felt safe. There would be no battle, after all.

But Edward, who had fewer than a thousand men, looked warily about for fresh troops. His army was commanded by sick and exhausted knights who had withstood the stormy crossing but lamely, many of whom had to be lowered to landing boats like so many sacks of meal. They had not as yet attained their land legs as, inbred to weakness, they rallied slowly. York gave Edward supplies and moral support and a few men, and with these he turned south. Boldly through the center of England he marched, picking up Yorkist nobles and their friends as he went; always, however, declaring for Lancaster. Northumberland, four times as strong, surged up to meet him, but Edward knew a trick worth two of that and with uncanny skill maneuvered around him. And more and more castles disgorged their Yorkist lords, who with their small troops swelled his numbers.

At the town of Warwick, Edward rode under the gate, entered the guildhall and stripped off his gauntlets. He bent his head and the squire unbuckled his helm. "And take off those accursed red feathers," he ordered wearily as he sank into a chair and accepted a cup of wine from Richard. When next the Wales feathers appeared, he meant to wave them above his own son Edward, who would be the Fifth, after him.

"Gladly, sire," beamed the squire, himself bone-tired as his master. Unbuckling the leather bags he had so carefully guarded, he took out the gleaming crown and lovingly fitted it about the great sallet, then laid it down as if handling the Rood itself. Henceforth his lord would wear his true colors, God be thanked.

The truth was out now. Edward was back as King, and meant to wade to his throne through blood if need be.

Southward still they marched and no one stopped them. Indeed, they were rather ignored. Men in the field straightened aching backs from bending over hoes and mattocks, stared, then returned grimly to their work. This was the all-important month of March, for the sowing of oats, rye, and barley. Like their own scarecrows, the field laborers stood as the shining throng rode by, the pale sun catching in its lance points.

This was how life in the English countryside went on all over the island. Pedlars and friars wandered over the Roman roads, across the medieval bridges; and as in the time of Chaucer, the pilgrims went down to the shrine of St. Thomas. War was only for the professional soldiers and the great lords.

However, in the towns and hamlets it was different. There where Edward made his nightly camps, the young men, lured by the flaring fires, came to stand and listen, and at dawn to march away with the soldiers, their meager clothing augmented by the generosity of some Yorkist noblemen, who after ten years of prosperity under the White Rose, could well afford to do it. Thus Edward's force grew.

Down, down he came, and still Warwick waited. A quick forced march to Newark surprised Oxford, as Edward had predicted, and that lord, quite off guard, fled so hurriedly he left part of his men behind him. And now as he approached Coventry in the heart and center of the land, Edward was really in enemy territory.

Completely stunned, Warwick could only gape at him from behind his great stone walls and gather his own strength more closely about him. Edward was at last here, lying just outside, in the meadows that nestled about the town.

"Satan has lent him wings," Warwick told Somerset. He did not speak of his own chagrin at the failure of Northumberland, Montagu, and Oxford to cope with this blond giant and his cheering horde of soldiers. "I shall keep him idle here, awaiting battle," he decided. George of Clarence, with seven thousand men, was on his way to Banbury and must soon arrive to join them here. Then and only then would Warwick give Edward the battle.

But Edward, resolved on a master stroke, did not intend to wait. "Let's go down to Banbury and surprise my brother of Clarence," he suggested, a gleam in his eye. Quietly then, under cover of darkness, they broke camp, slipped out and crept down through War-

wickshire, its blossoming trees pinched and frostbitten, showering petals on them into the wind. A fog blew inland from the sea, shrouding their movements.

In the early morning, Warwick looked out on a deserted camp. He guessed that Edward had gone to engage Clarence and he smiled. It could not have fallen out better. With seven thousand men, Clarence would give him a bad beating.

In battle dress Edward approached the road outside Banbury. But George, emerging, had made no such preparation. In the lightest of riding suits, his yellow head bared, he rode forward. In the midst of his own, Hastings and Rivers, Richard at his elbow, Edward cantered lightly out, drew rein and waited. George of Clarence, his hair shining in the morning sunlight, dismounted and gracefully knelt in the wet dust of the road. But Edward flung off his horse, caught him by the shoulders and clasped him to his steel breast.

The years rolled away and they were youths together again. Clarence smiled crookedly and touched the back of his glove to his eyes. Then he turned to Richard and embraced him. The brothers did not speak. But the two armies cheered and their knights mingled.

As for George of Clarence, he suddenly flung his hat into the air. "For Edward and York!" And the men echoed the cry. There was a grand ripping of badges and a furling of scarlet pennons as Edward's men went among George of Clarence's seven thousand, handing out the York colors.

Late that night, in Banbury, the brothers talked. "You shall go to Warwick and bear him our forgiveness. We'll send terms." Thus Edward would save Clarence's honor.

And strangely enough, Clarence was willing to do this. Richard stared at him; it would take more temerity than *he* possessed to do so cool a turnabout and then agree to bear its witness right into the very camp of the enemy. Clarence was drinking deeply, the steward constantly filling his cup. Was he drinking his courage? Richard wondered if perhaps George was stupid rather than brave. For if he went himself to Warwick, what might not that irate nobleman do to him?

Next day Clarence turned back to Coventry to make terms with Warwick and Edward pushed on toward London. His baby son and the people he loved most were there. On Palm Sunday he knelt in the church at Coventry and gave thanks for his successful and so far bloodless return to his country.

Huddled beneath blanketing fog, London waited. As for the Lan-

castrians, panic had seized them as the city became a nightmare place of violence and danger. Yorkists, boldly emerging from sanctuary, darted out of courtyards and seized the men of the Red Rose, ripping from their necks the SS collars with the hanging swans, to fling them into the gutters. The whores of Southwark took down the Red Rose from their doorways and gave custom only to those who wore the badge of York. Was not the great golden Edward the best whore-master of the lot? Street brawls were common and life was cheap. The men of Lancaster stormed the Archbishop's Palace. Let my Lord Bishop do something, and quickly! The Lord Archbishop, left in charge of the King in the Tower, for all his wearing of armor, was no great fighting man. The best he could think of to do in this crisis was to tidy up King Henry, put him on a horse at the head of about six hundred men and, himself riding among them, lead him through the streets.

"Here, good people! Here is your liege lord!" But the people, wildly excited at the prospect of their favorite Edward's return, jeered the spectacle of Henry flopping along on his steed and threw stones at the feet of his escorts' horses.

In the great guildhall the leading citizens sat and nervously fingered their golden chains. As for the merchant princes, they urged Council to fling wide the city gates to Edward without delay, for they saw no other way of recovering the vast sums he owed them. The nobles thought of the baby son, a secure bond for the succession. The aldermen had a more pressing problem. They thought of their wives, who had threatened to close their beds to them unless their darling, King Edward, were admitted to the city.

In the eyes of London ladies the shambling figure of King Henry was a scandal and a disgrace. How ridiculous to prefer such a creature to one who shone so gloriously in the jewels and velvets of knighthood, to say nothing of the favors he extended to every pretty woman under the age of forty. Hail, Edward, liege lord and sovereign!

Council nodded its collective head, rose, and gave orders for the garrison and those who had the safety of the city in charge to go home to dinner. And while they were eating, Edward was quietly let in. It was exactly one month to the day since his landing at Ravenspur.

"The devil enters by the back door," mourned George Neville, the Archbishop, the while he hastily prepared to pay his respects to the newly arrived King. Edward received him pleasantly. Of course

the Lord Archbishop should be granted a full pardon, provided he produce without delay the person of the *soi-disant* ruler King Henry the Sixth.

They brought Henry, looking much older than his fifty years, his sparse brown hair plentifully sprinkled with gray, his head trembling. Long years of mental distress had left his eyes watery and vacant. He put out thin hands to Edward.

"My cousin of York, you are very welcome." A wistful look clouded the light blue eyes. "I know that in your hands my life will be in no danger."

A flash of anger thrust through Edward. This was the pitiful puppet they had put back on his throne! Despite his resolve, the sight of the poor deluded creature touched pity in him. He knew they had promised Henry his wife and son, and now, after months of obedient waiting, if he saw them at all, it would be in prison or at the block. "For your safety, my lord," Edward was short, "you shall continue to lodge in the Tower. There are many wild dogs in our streets who long to drink your blood." As if the sight of Henry being led away among his guards were too much for him, Edward turned to the Archbishop. "You, my lord, shall accompany me to the Abbey."

He would allow himself a pleasant moment to sweeten the sour taste of all this.

Firmly forgetting Henry, he strode to the Abbey, Richard, Rivers and Hastings at his heels, a great flood of knights and captains following. Up the center aisle they clanked, past the figure of St. Anne, whose candles were all ablaze, and to the altar, where Edward bent the knee. Out from the sacristy came the Archdeacon, his servers bearing the crown, richly gleaming on a purple cushion. Kneeling, the bishop praised God, then got nimbly to his feet. He lifted the crown from the cushion, raised it aloft, then placed it firmly on the bared golden head.

"God save the King!" To the vaulted arches rang the shout.

A short prayer to still the wild beating of his heart, then Edward signed himself, kissed the Bishop's ring and arose, facing the high altar. It had been a short and simple ceremony, but then, he had been crowned before with all due pomp and circumstance. This rite had been the reaffirmation that he was King of England, son of his father, standing for St. George and for York. He permitted the crown to be removed from him and returned to its cushion. He had but

wished to feel the pleasant weight before turning to sterner matters. First, one more pleasure awaited him.

He faced his knights. "And now." His voice rang out clearly on the cold air. "Bring me my son!"

Desperate and furious, Warwick was marching onto London. He felt balked, bereft, betrayed. First Clarence and now his brother the Archbishop. Surely George Neville must have been in league with Edward, so as to have surrendered up the sacred person of their lord the King, and then to have crowned Edward in the Abbey! Warwick swore by ten thousand saints to have vengeance. It will be his head or mine, he vowed. As for Clarence and his perfidy, the thought made him writhe and smart.

He had not seen Clarence. At the last minute, deciding that discretion was the better part of valor, George sent a messenger with Edward's offer of forgiveness.

Warwick went livid. Condescension from his greatest enemy! "Tell the Duke of Clarence," he sent back word, "that I am not the man to follow the example of faithlessness and treason so set me by him, false perjured caitiff that he is! I stand true to my oath and will prove my words in blood."

And he plunged on to meet Edward.

At the head of a force grown gigantic he encamped on Good Friday at a small hill near Monken Hadley Church, where he stood looking down on the town lights of Barnet.

And down at London, Edward, with his Queen Elizabeth Woodville and Richard, heard vespers at Baynard's Castle. After a snatched hour or two of sleep the brothers called for their esquires, who came, knuckling sleepy eyes, to rivet them into their steel.

In all his eighteen years Richard had never known such a moment. Suffused with glorious excitement, sure of the promise of victory, he stood, tongue clamped between his teeth, his ivory hands thrust beneath his belt, legs apart, watching them hoist and buckle the tall King into his armor. Elizabeth Woodville, rosy with sleep, her eyes full of the languor of love, trailed in, and with her own white hands buckled on the great English sword with the fretted hand-piece.

"Farther around to the side—that's it. Well, my girl, give me one buss before I put on my iron pot." Edward clasped her to his steel

breast and bent his head over her. She gave a little scream of delicious pain and delight. Then she tossed back her blond hair and drew the furred gown close about her throat.

"I declare, Ned, you feel clammy already." She shivered and her women threw over her shoulders a great robe lined with swan's-down into which she burrowed. Like a lively sibyl she stood while they brought her husband's jupon, stiff satin blazing with his colors, dropping it over the tall head, tying it at his sides. It was a gorgeous thing, quartered with his arms, the sun blazing in splendor among the flat white roses and stars. Then the basinet.

But by this time Richard was bawling for his men. "Jack! Tom! Name of ten devils—oh, there you are. Look sharp, don't be a month of Sundays, lads. My lord is already buckled in." In their haste the squires knocked him on the side of the head with the gorget. "Gently, don't brain me." Silently, swiftly, they worked, the two of them like twins, bending and buckling. John Milwater was an up-country lad whom Richard had acquired the year before when fighting in the North; and Thomas Parr had been trained with Edward's own squires here in London. They were ready to die for him.

They clamped the skirt of tasses over the narrow hips and cinched the belt so tight he gasped. "Easy, there." He batted Milwater lightly on the chin. "This is the day, Jack. How's your marksmanship? Do you feel lucky?"

"Aye, my lord Duke." The light sweat stood out on Milwater's forehead as he knelt to fasten the thigh guards.

"Tom"—Richard thrust his chin out of the circle of the gorget—"Tom, you'll bear my pennon and bide close." At the hurt look on Parr's face he softened. "I know, I know. But this will be touch and go. We are vastly outnumbered, you know. If this accursed fog plagues us, we might get separated, and should you fall—" He broke off abruptly. Suddenly the thought of anything of the kind occurring to either of them was intolerably painful. They had become a part of his man's life and he had grown fond of them. He held his peace and ducking his head, allowed them to fasten his sallet, against which the jeweled orle swung clinking. Through the slit he could see narrowly the flushed faces of the two youths as they stooped and pulled. Neither of them had seen twenty; all three were of a height, although Richard's helm made him tower above them.

"Give me a cup." Within the sallet his voice was hollow. Tom brought him the wine, raising his visor for him. Tipping his head

back stiffly, Richard drank. They dropped his jupon over his shoulders and although he could not feel anything, encased as he was within his shell, he could hear the slish of the silk as they tied the bands in hard knots at his sides. Glowing on back and front of him now were the boars of his device, and wound like a ribband among the white satin roses and green leaves was his motto: *Loyaulté me lie*. By this he would be bound for all of his life.

The brothers clanked out to the horses and into the cold night, amongst the flaring torches, and rode off, the great concourse of knights following. Within the closeness of his sallet Richard felt remote and private. He thought of Elizabeth Woodville and wished Anne had been there to wish him Godspeed. Little Nan—and a warm feeling not due to the wine he had just drunk flowed through him to lodge somewhere near his breastbone. He thought of their last meeting in France during the past summer, of her slim body, warm in the thin silk under his hands, her shy response as she clung to him. A sweet virgin for a man to take to a bridal bed. But to gain her would take some doing. He wished he might have made her his that night in Angers. God's peace, she had been willing enough, had even surprised him a little as she returned his kisses ardently as a true woman should. There was far too much pother over this business of bringing the maidenhead intact to the marriage bed. For kings, yes, since it would be a bit awkward if someone else were to father the heir, but for lovers such as they were, promised to each other, it could not matter.

A moment more he allowed his thoughts to stay with Anne, to regret he had not insisted that Edward bring her out of sanctuary, so that at least they might have a brief moment together before the battle. Then he tore away his thoughts and set his mind to what lay ahead of him. He felt no dread of the huge Lancastrian army they were to face, had no doubt of his ability to carry off this, his first real command, in triumph. Edward had given him the right wing in charge, and this would be his first real test in battle. He would cleave to thought of his father; it would put strength into his arm, strength to match the valor of his spirit.

He pressed his lips together, then urged his horse closer to Hastings who sat, grimly silent within his great basinet, his right hand in the steel gauntlet arrogantly set on his thigh. He would command Edward's left wing, leaving the center for Edward himself. Richard silently joined him. What a strange fellow this Hastings was! Many

times during their past months of intimacy he had heard Hastings give vent to his hatred of the whole Woodville clan into which Edward had so rashly married, but still his support of Edward and the cause of the White Rose was steady, and today he was prepared, if necessary, to prove it with his life.

Blind loyalty. Richard mused on the idea. There were some who laughed at him for his passionate support of Edward. He knew his brother Clarence, the calculating George of Clarence, who must tear their mother's heart every day with his black disloyalty to their father's sacred cause, had jeered at him for his stubborn adherence to Edward. George, the graceless one, who had come airily back to the fold, since he was sure theirs must be the winning side. Richard shook his head privately, hitched his weight in the saddle and pressed his thighs against the sides of his mount.

Somewhere in the rear rode Clarence, and Richard was glad not to have to rub elbows with him. Whatever Clarence felt, Richard was uncomfortable in his company. Back also at the rear rode the deposed Henry, seated on a led horse with two of Edward's trusted men.

"But why bring him?" Richard was puzzled.

"I shall not leave him in London for Margaret to use as a mascot." Edward was right. Making a sudden appearance, Margaret could well use Henry to consolidate her force. And without that pathetic figure her cause in London was well-nigh hopeless. Yes, it was well to bring Henry. Besides, who knew what might happen to him in the battle? A stray arrow, a spear thrust in the fog—who knew?

And so Edward the King, with his young brother of Gloucester, led his Yorkists confidently forward to meet their destiny.

12. Bloody Barnet

THE darkness that precedes the dawn settled more deeply about them as they made their torchlit way out of London. Silently they rode, each man brooding, not speaking to his neighbor, no jubilation at the prospect of an easy victory quickening the thoughts. Almost as if fleeing, they crept along, the torches flickering on the mist-wet stones of the walls on either side.

Good Friday was now wasted and Easter Saturday dawned in a brown choking fog that clammed the armor and made the men shut their visors, their breath steaming out through the slits. Now the soldiers crushed out the torches, stowed them behind saddlebags, and the great army wound its cumbrous way into open country. A brief halt to rest the horses, then Edward impatiently gave the word and hoisted himself once more into the saddle.

He looked about for his young brother of Gloucester. Milwater's mount had gone lame and Richard was bent over the beast's leg, passing his hand over the hock, pressing his thumb into the sore muscle, while the animal flinched and tossed its head.

"Come, Diccon!" Edward moved with a steel gauntleted hand the gold circlet that clanked on his helm. "Why do you loiter?"

But Richard kept his head bent to his squire. "You'll have to manage as best you can, Jack. If it gets much worse, have Aloys find you another mount. Go back, Tom, and see what there is. Don't get any sort of hack, get him a beast that will hold up. Jack, you stay here." He would not trust the lame animal, one of his own, to the tender mercies of Edward's military grooms. "Coming, my lord brother!" He waved a glove at the scowling face of Edward and let John Milwater heave him to the saddle.

For some hours, till past noon, they jogged along the country road in the mist.

"God save King Henry!" The sudden shout startled them as out of nowhere, with a sharp clatter of hoofs, a slender guard came full tilt

into the head of their cavalcade, a wet Lancastrian banner whipping scarlet folds above their heads.

The surprise scattered Edward's escort. For a few moments, all was confusion, with men and horses tangled together, in the midst the furious tall figure of Edward sawing at his horse's mouth. He rose in his stirrups, motioned to Hastings, some yards in the rear, gathering his troop to the rescue. "Get me these gadflies out of the way!" he yelled.

With his troop, Hastings dashed up and clashed into the very heart of the melee, scattering the attackers who fled across a meadow into the swallowing mist.

"God's peace, what next?" With a snap, Edward shut his visor and hunched his steel shoulders. Warwick must have ordered this little sortie, in an attempt to snatch Henry from their grasp. He pricked his horse's sides and the heavy creature started and quickened pace. And thus they slogged along into the overtaking gloom of late afternoon.

"By the bloody wounds of St. Sebastian," groaned Edward, "at this rate it will be night before we make Barnet. And in this damned fog we can't find the enemy. Ah!" He slapped his horse's neck. "Weather's always been with Warwick. He's well encamped, while we must scratch for it."

"But, sire," reasoned Hastings, "if we don't know where he is, neither knows he of us."

"Always practical, William." Edward kned his horse's sides. "I suppose you're right."

But soon they were stumbling blindly, each man afraid of riding down the one before him, no man seeing his neighbor.

"The foot are near winded, Edward." Richard drew near.

"Aye," sighed Edward. "Well, give the word."

So the captains drew their men off the road. They squatted in the damp, relieving themselves, pulling open wallets to gnaw at the dried meat they carried, passing the skin bottles of sour wine.

"If only we could smell them out." Edward raised his fine chiseled nose as if winding the campfires of Warwick, who must be lying somewhere quite close and snug.

"They'll have no campfires," said Hastings. "The saints pity any man who lights up tonight."

"Well, God's peace, it's comforting to know they must be cold and clammed as we." Edward swung to the ground.

They settled down in an immense hollow, which proved to be good, for now they found Warwick to be very close. With a red flare his guns began to cough and bang at them. "Well, at least we know where he is." Edward was grimly satisfied.

The crashing went on but the balls whistled high over their heads. Some of the officers were wild to reply.

"Spread the word I'll have the head of any man who dares to respond." Edward gave curt orders. "So long as we are silent, we are reasonably sound." As another ball went wild he laughed. "I'll wager the good Earl is threatening to crop some ears if they don't find our range soon."

And the cannon of Lancaster banged harmlessly on.

Among his own captains and household knights Richard stood, chilled to the bone. All night he had moved restlessly about, seeing to the settling of his men, taking rest at last only when his captains insisted. Dawn was here and they faced the rising sun red-eyed, stomachs clamoring, crouched on the wet earth, ready for battle.

Richard's nerves were stretched and he had to resist the desire to yawn. He had no real taste for battle, being too slightly built to be a warrior, not believing enough in violence to prefer it, and he had no bright words to stir the imagination of his followers to knightly deeds. Edward was the warrior and Clarence had the silver tongue; but Richard had only his loyalty to Edward and their cause, the memory of his father, and his courage. This he drew about him as he made his way to the King. Flanked by Clarence, Edward stood among his chaplains. And in the midst of a small guard, staring woodenly out of his basinet which no man had thought to close for him, his lance couched awkwardly in the crook of his arm, sat Henry. On Edward's orders, he soon would be brought to the forefront of the battle.

Richard joined them, and Edward sank to his knees, his bare head diamonded by the mist as he prayed, hand before his face. Richard knew that at that moment his brother's heart was full of the great gravity of his task, that he called on his God for victory and the Crown; but he also knew that behind the soldier and the king was the man, his heart sore for those who must die this day.

Among the bowed heads of the men the chaplains moved, their prayers ascending above the kneeling host. Stout archers and pikemen, long lines of foot soldiers brave in Edward's blazon, their leather

caps and iron helmets in their hands, they allowed the Latin voices to speak aloud for them, while in his heart each man addressed himself to his favorite saint.

Richard strained his gaze through the mist. Somewhere out there Warwick waited. Would he be in the center of his lines, as Edward hoped? Richard knew Warwick to be a flank man who reckoned his army's strength to lie in its wings, and he had tried to make Edward see this, but for some reason Edward clung stubbornly to his strategy as he had drawn it up, electing to chance it that he and Warwick could meet head on. Richard saw Hastings move off with his knights to the left wing, the steel men silently following, swords bared, battle-axes trailing, some with trefoil maces cocked over their shoulders. Far to the rear the horses shuddered with the damp cold, nervously throwing up their heads to neigh. Their cries were checked by the leathern gloves of their grooms. They wanted to carry their masters into what for them would be sure death and fretted against the waiting in the cold discomfort. But in this fog, no man cared to ride.

Richard made his way to the center of the right wing and quietly joined his officers. He stared on into the mist. Wrapped in that soft wet were the men they would try to kill, Warwick and Oxford, the mighty Lancastrian, and with them Richard's own brother-in-law, Exeter, married to their sister Anne. Would he have to slay his own sister's husband on this day? He would relish meeting Oxford who had fled before Edward on his return, leaving his men behind him. Perhaps Oxford would flee again today. But of Warwick's other great soldiers, Montagu and Somerset were the terrible fighters who would stand before the very gates of Hell itself.

Tensely they waited the silver sound of Edward's trumpets. All was deathly, dreamlike. It was near four of the clock. And in the breath-held silence, from a farm behind the hill, came the first far-off sleepy call of a cock.

Then the trumpets shrilled.

The fighting went badly for Richard. Obscured by mist and fog, he hurled his line against the enemy but he could not know he far outflanked that of Exeter—for it was indeed his brother-in-law who commanded Warwick's left wing. He could not find them. Where in the name of a thousand devils were they? Nothing!

"After me!" he shouted, his voice muffled in his sallet. And he

led his men floundering into a marshy bottom. But the enemy was not there. Hurriedly his captains clustered about him.

“What now, my lord?”

“We must swing to the west.” Richard was breathless from dragging his steel-shod feet out of the sucking mud. “We must have overshot our mark. Get back up to the top!” And with a shout they burst over the brow of their steep slope to clash head on with Warwick’s left flank. Ah, at last!

Then it was all close combat, the hot breaths mingling, steel breasts locked together, eyes glaring through slits, the slash and cut into the soft unprotected parts, the pouring blood and the squishing fall. Then came the chance to drop savagely upon the unprotected one, to hold the dagger to the throat and with a quick downward punch to end the life. Edward wanted no prisoners.

“Ah!” Milwater parried a lance point that lunged at Richard’s breast.

“Good man!” Richard fetched his adversary a blow that stretched him dead or senseless. He heard a sigh and a gasp behind him and whirled. Through his slit he saw the face of Milwater, crossed by a crimson stripe of wet blood, his staring eyes rolled up at the shaft that stood straight out between his brows. Then the face slid from sight and Richard felt the dead weight of a body across his feet.

Not stooping he pushed it aside and stepped away. He felt nothing. Back into the battle he plunged and swung swords with a large figure in an old-fashioned chain suit. High in the rear he glimpsed his brother-in-law’s pennon, the Exeter blazon with its three church bells.

The Lancastrians came pouring. Christ’s blood, where were they coming from! Were there any left to engage Edward and Hastings? Setting his teeth, Richard waved his men onward and they surged after him.

“’Tis the whole York army we battle!” Richard heard the cry from Warwick’s lines and a fierce pride surged through him. If Exeter really thought this, he would send to Warwick and they could expect the weight of his reserves to be flung against them.

“For St. George and Edward!” He screamed the words, and with a shout his men echoed. In a momentary break of the mist he caught the flash of an azure lion, Percy’s cognizance, and hoped Lovell too was somewhere near. God grant they still could stand.

Now a lull came as the fog thickened. And out of it burst a panting

figure, one of Edward's own squires. "My lord hears you are sore beset. Can you hold out?"

About him Richard looked at his panting men. "Forever!" he said. And they raised the cheer.

And so it went on. With fresh cries, two armies heaved together and hacked at one another in blinding mist. "Mind you don't slay our own!" cautioned Richard, tripping over a dead tree stump. At last all stopped for breath. At a thicket edge Richard leaned gasping against a tree. "Hoo!" He blew out his breath. "Sit you down." He motioned to Parr, who all the time had stuck to him like a plaster. The damp folds of the boar banner flapped against Parr's shoulders as he leaned on its staff letting his spear trail from his tired hand. Neither man spoke of Milwater.

Richard wiped his sword on the coarse grass. Blood was slimed and congealed on his steel gloves and one whole side of his jupon was fouled. He longed to lift his sallet and gulp in one breath of fresh air, choked with fog though it still was. Within his helmet his own breath smelled foul and the sweat stung and itched in his hair. His shoulder was giving him hell, what with the damp and the wrenching he had given it with his swordplay. His captains were cleansing weapons, binding slashes and calling to the watermen. Fighting was thirsty work.

"How I should like to know what goes with the others!" Lovell and Percy joined him. Confusion, cries and shouts, the trampling of feet in cracking thickets, all muffled by fog, were what they could hear of the battle.

"Let me go," urged Percy. "I'll smell about a bit."

"No," Richard refused. "You'll get a dagger in the back."

"My lord!" Parr sprang to his feet and with a quick thrust planted his standard and raised his spear.

But it was one of their own who dashed out of the fog. "Tidings!" he gasped. "The Earl of Hastings is routed, and the Lords Oxford and Vere have broken through our lines. Our men are fled!"

"Fled! Hastings!" Through his helm, Richard stared. Blindly he turned away. "And my lord the King?"

"His Grace is hard pressed, and they do say the Duke of Clarence and the mad King are both slain." The man's face, grimed with sweat, quivered.

"Heard you that?" Richard called to his captains. "Hastings is fled."

"He must have overshot Oxford, as we did Exeter, Richard," offered Lovell.

"Aye. But 'tis unlikely."

"I heard much the same. Hastings' men, utterly routed, have fled down the Barnet road to find horses. Now they ride full tilt for London, crying that their leaders, including you, are slain, and the day gone to Warwick." Lovell spoke apologetically.

"You did not tell me this."

"I have but just heard it and I think it a lie."

"Why?"

"You live, do you not? That, at least, is a lie. I will not believe the other." Lovell wiped a bloody glove on his jupon and turned away.

"Keep it hard within you," cautioned Richard.

But now a wild shouting and a clash of arms burst into the edge of their thicket. "They come!" shouted Richard. And out of the thicket they ran, to see emerging from a fog a fresh force of the enemy, a tidal wave of men bristling with raised lances, swords and axes.

"We cannot withstand this," gasped Lovell, running at Richard's side.

"We can!" cried Richard. "I'll never send for the reserves!" And on the eastern plateau the two lines smashed together. Now they were facing north and south instead of east and west, having swung right around, and were fighting deep in enemy territory. Surely those were Edward's trumpets behind them! Richard could not be certain.

Somewhere along the line he had lost Parr. Parr must be dead. Only that would drag him from his side. But how long had the battle lasted? Since morning it seemed a lifetime. Suddenly a breeze sprang up and the mist thinned. The Lancastrian line appeared to shiver, then to break, as if some dread blight from within had struck at its heart.

"They yield!" cried Richard. "Sound trumpets to the charge!" And wearily they surged forward in one last agonized push onto the hedge of steel. It wavered, parted, melted and vanished in full flight. And at that moment appeared Parr, his pennon flapping in the breeze, whole, if breathless.

"To the King!" Richard panted after the fleeing enemy. Somewhere he heard frantic neighing, trumpet alarums, and hoarse shouts. A thousand men must be engaged up ahead. Sobbing now for breath, tripping over roots and bushes, he bruised his steel-shod toes on the

stones. He must get to Edward—and Warwick. Not for one moment now did he believe that Edward had been routed.

Through the last curtain of mist he broke, his officers at his heels, and there, clear before him, was the horror. Locked together, hacking and slashing, the cursing mass of men, clutched in steel arms, rolled in the mud, the plunging heavy hoofs of horses ringing on armor as they trampled the bodies.

“Treason! Treason!” The wail rose from Warwick’s men. Richard and his officers, backed by a thick concourse of soldiers, stood rooted, staring. For as they watched, the archers of Warwick turned their bows on their own men. It was Oxford and Vere they attacked, who broke and ran for the open field, screaming as they went.

“Why do they do it?” marveled Richard.

“It’s the starburst. They think Oxford and Vere are Edward’s men!” Percy’s voice rose to a hysterical pitch. “They shoot their own men!”

“Betrayed!” screamed Oxford, who did not realize that his own cognizance, so like Edward’s, had misled Warwick’s archers. “We are undone! They have sold out to York!” And he leapt a ditch and floundered over the springing grass.

“False traitors! Ye have been bought!” Beneath pattering arrows Vere crouched. Warwick’s ordnance sent a blast of cannon fire among them and they turned and ran as steel men had never run before.

Richard shook with nervous laughter. It could not be, yet it was happening. Noble knights in full flight from their own men! Suddenly the struggling mass parted and thinned out to a ragged thread, and there was Edward, whole and unhurt. Tall and golden, he stood swinging a bloody ax about him and as Richard ran up he heard Edward laughing like a boy within the hollow shell of his basinet.

“Brother!” Through the small holes punched in front of Edward’s helm came a flash of white. Clash! Bang! His ax sheered off the feathers of a Lancastrian, then crashed back against his own thigh. Edward staggered, regained his balance and brought his weapon with horrible force on the upraised arm of his attacker. With a muffled scream the knight went down.

Light as an eggshell, Richard’s heart leaped in his breast. Edward was safe and fighting magnificently. His own strength returned, and had there been the need, he could have flung himself headlong into the battle once more. Instead, his own men, as a final stroke, sent

a shower of arrows peppering in among the enemy, who returned with a dark cloud. Automatically they ducked as they had been taught when boys.

Edward now strode toward them. The arrows had suddenly ceased and the din was fading. "It's all over," he announced, raising his visor and smiling broadly upon Richard. "They throw away their weapons as they run. Are you whole?" He looked down at his brother.

Richard stroked his jupon, now befouled with mud and blood. His bad arm throbbed and he truly did not know whether the blood was his own or another's. "If I am not, 'tis a scratch."

"I owe you the victory." Edward's lips, dried with his hot breath and grimed at the corners with dust and sweat, were quivering. "Your right wing has met mine as you see and the battle is ours. But you withstood the first shock right nobly."

"Warwick?" Surely the victory could not be claimed while Warwick ran free and alive.

"Broken and fled. My men are taking them even now."

"Death to the Bear!" The cry went up as a large detachment of Edward's and Richard's men, waving their pennons, crashed off in the direction of Wrotham Wood.

Then, as if coming to himself from the triumph of his victory, Edward hitched his belt. "I must be in at the kill." He shut his visor and started across the field.

Everywhere lay the dead and dying. Richard clambered over a steel-clad pile and slithered down upon the other side. A knight flopped over and lay, helm upward, to the sky. With his toe Richard turned over the shield and the silver and three church bells gleamed up at him. It was his brother-in-law Exeter. Beside him, lying crossways on his knees, was the squire, not quite dead as it turned out, for as Richard and Parr bent over him, he gathered his ebbing strength and stabbed upward. The blow took Parr in the groin, and with a shriek he clasped himself and sank down. Making a last effort, Exeter's squire rolled aside and struck fiercely through the pennon shrouding Parr's chest. The youth quivered and lay still. Richard swung his sword across the man's neck but it was a wasted blow, for he was already dead.

He sighed and took one last look at Exeter, then at his own dead squire. "And I did not kill his slayer."

"Come on, Richard." Lovell had seen too late to help. And they joined Richard's men as they flowed toward the Lancastrian rear.

All were fleeing toward Wrotham Wood, and one of Gloucester's archers caught the pennon-bearer full in the back. He fell forward, and with a howl the pursuing knights seized upon the glorious banner, ripped and tore it, and trampled it into the mud. They already had more Lancastrian banners than they could carry back to London.

And now Richard glimpsed the golden bear on Warwick's black helm and the silver rings of Montagu gleaming beside it. The two noblemen, circled with those they had slain, were back to back, battering down their attackers. Suddenly they flourished their weapons and with defiant shouts broke for the trees where the horses were tethered, pursued by Edward and Clarence.

"Warwick is mine!" Richard heard Edward's voice swell into triumph, and after his brother he crashed into the wood. His lungs were bursting, his heart thudded, and the sweat dripped into his eyes. He panted to be in at the end. He must!

But he was too late. Not even Edward got there in time. Warwick stepped before Montagu to receive on his head the full force of a whirling mace wielded by one of Edward's knights that crushed him to the ground. Almost instantly Montagu himself was felled and lay, an inert mass of steel atop his brother.

Richard was rooted. Somehow he had not realized it could come to an end so quickly, that in one mighty blow his archenemy could be smashed. It was all over—and in a minute, it seemed.

There was no need of haste now, and thrown off balance by the sudden turn of events, Richard reeled a little as slowly he neared the small silver knot of men. They parted to reveal the fallen nobleman. The body was spread-eagled on the ground, the hands relaxing from the clench of death, every armor joint oozing blood. Already the helm had been torn from his head, the neck gashed in a dozen places, the bright jupon slashed and smeared. Two men knelt and began to batter at the black armor.

"Cracking them open." Richard was bitter. They had been cheated right to the last. Neither he nor Edward had slain their enemy.

"'Tis no matter," replied Edward. He staggered backward, his crest high above the others, and leaned against a tree. "We've won, but God's peace, I am spent."

The battle was over. And here, at last, came the pale April sun to light up the scene, revealing the bloody details of the final drama.

Although he would have liked to take the Neville brothers alive, Edward's orders concerning the other prisoners had been explicit. His men toured the widespread fields, moving with knives and hammers among the heaps of dead, searching out the wounded. The scattered and shamefaced remnant of Hastings' wing returned to share the slaughter. The men of York were assiduous. Many of their own wounded, unidentified by badge or blazon, perished with the enemy.

"Come." Richard beckoned a crossbowman who squatted on a grass tussock, gnawing at a piece of meat he had taken from his pouch. "I have need of you." He was resolved to find his squires.

Parr he found easily, as he lay beneath the boar banner, its gold glinting in the sun. But it was hard work seeking out Milwater. Back they went through the thicket wrapped now in the silence of death, for Edward's men had just finished their work there, and at last, just as with a shrug and a sigh he had given up, they spotted a brown foot sticking out from beneath a pile of bodies. It was the soft shoe he himself had given the youth. Grunting and heaving, the two of them pushed and rolled at the dead weight of corpses and dragged out the brown feet.

"I'll take the head," said Richard, and so, slowly, with their burden, they went back to the King.

Clarence, unharmed, came now with a small company bearing enemy banners, which they planted before Edward in a great bouquet of colors mingling with the sunburst pennons and the scarlets and blues of Edward's own knights. Back to them the King stood, feet wide planted, his helm off, the pale light sparkling in his hair. Above him floated the black and white of Syward, the scarlet and white of Dugdale, the gaudy colors of St. Pol, dominated by the proud Beauchamps in gold and red, all mingled, the conquered and the conquerors, united, as Edward meant them to be, in peace and concord.

To them Richard and the archer now came and lowered gently the body of Milwater, the shaft now broken off, still sticking in his forehead.

"Who's that?" Clarence spoke contemptuously. "It's a messy sight, that I'll say."

Richard did not reply. His head was bent over his two young squires, while with the steel point of his shoe he traced a line in the dirt. Bloodied and brave, the two youths lay, their life's adventure ended before hardly it had begun. It gave him no comfort to realize that this was how they would have it, fighting for him. All he knew

was that they were gone and if he must fight the next battle, it would be without them. And they were his age. Every joy was spoiled by something sour. With his foot he touched lightly the hand of Milwater, then turned away.

Past the long line of dead knights he went, and noted Exeter, in his rightful place now among his followers, staring sightless at the sky. He thought of Parr, slain by Exeter's squire, and averted his eyes. He approached the bier of Warwick, a stretcher hastily devised of shields resting on crossed spears set into the ground. Stripped naked, the body lay under a cloak, inviolate, for Edward would not allow it to be abused. He now joined Richard and lifted the covering from the face. The wounds had ceased to bleed and the face had settled into the wax of death. The eyes, half open, gleamed, the stern mouth was relaxed, the lines of purpose sunk away.

As if the eyes bothered him, with his finger tips Edward moved the lids down. "A great man," he sighed, looking at his hand. "A pity."

"So much for so little." Richard was still struck by the irony of Warwick's life and death. All over. The long years of struggle, the brilliant planning, the flaunting of power, the proud assertiveness, were come to this. Warwick was as dead as the poorest foot soldier who companioned him on the field of defeat, for he had at last met his greatest adversary. Whose mace had dealt the blow? The brothers did not even know.

Edward pulled himself together. "I shall expose the body for three days. There shall be no doubt that he has indeed perished." At John Neville, Earl of Montagu, the brother, he hardly glanced.

But Richard remained staring down at the body of Warwick. He felt the presence of Clarence at his side, looked sideways to see how his brother was taking these deaths. Here lay Clarence's powerful father-in-law, the man with whom once he had thrown in his lot. Whatever Clarence felt he concealed it from Richard. His handsome face, drawn with battle dirt, was empty.

It came to Richard suddenly that this was Anne's father. Anne so small, slender and fragile. Hard to believe this grim dead man to be her sire, that his blood flowed in her veins. A thrill shot through him. Now they could marry. There was nothing to stop them. Eagerly he turned to Edward who, beneath the fluttering banners, was eating and drinking from a plate held by his squire. "The couriers have started for London?"

From beneath lowered brows Edward shot him a look. "That they have."

"And I wonder how the news will sit there?" asked Clarence.

"How should it sit?" Richard was irritated. Clarence was forever pouring cold water on people's triumphs.

"You forget, my brother, there are those who will mourn this victory."

Edward grunted at that and hitched his sword belt about his hips. "Aye, by the rood. We are not through. There's Margaret."

Margaret. The last they had heard of her was that she was nearing the coast with a large fleet. They were certainly not out of the wood yet.

In custody of his guards Henry now came up, vacant-eyed, walking glumly in their midst. "I set him in the van," assured Guy of Helston, whose task it had been to see that Henry was killed. "They were never minded to slay him, and we had our work cut out to see they did not take him from us alive."

"You gave the job to a fool, brother," drawled Clarence. Then to the pikeman: "Had you no dagger of your own, fellow?"

"Enough." Edward was short. He had told Helston to see that it was the Lancastrians who slew Henry. Now they would have to dispatch him some other way. It was the one bit of bad luck in the whole day; that, and Diccon's losing his two squires.

Edward's army settled down to field rations and the binding of wounds. The surgeons were about their bloody work, patching up Edward's battered men, and screams and struggles denoted that amputations and other mendings were under way. The sound ones shrugged and prepared to rest. They were told to renew their strength for the final struggle yet to come.

By noon Edward and his knights were on their way back to London, Henry in their midst. "With this fog lifted, we shall make the ride in less than half the time it took us to come," Edward said, eager to get to London and his triumphal entry.

But Richard, riding with Clarence, said nothing. Every mile they jogged brought him nearer to Anne. As soon as he had attended to his duties, he must go to comfort her.

13. The Return of Margaret

FROM her chamber in Westminster sanctuary, Anne watched the red sunset. Through the open casement the wild tumult of the streets swirled up at her, with the mad ringing of the bells. But she could see nothing of what went on down there, for her windows opened on the courtyard from which rose her gloomy tower. The bells were not ringing for Easter Sunday; they were ringing in the victorious return of Edward. All Anne knew was that York had won the battle, that the King, weary but exultant, had ridden quickly down from Barnet. They said Richard and Clarence were with him.

So she had not seen the triumphal entry, the King with a young duke on either side, the battle-worn warriors trooping behind. But she could imagine the tall Edward, tired, grinning joyously at his cheering people. And Clarence, too, haughty and unconcerned at his side, ignoring the nudges and whispers of those London folk who knew his story. Perfidious Clarence! Of Richard she could have no notion. What would he be like after the terrible battle? Unhurt, they said. All three brothers had lost blood at Barnet, but the wounds were mere scratches. They had left a thousand slain on the field.

Gervase came to tell her of the glorious entry into London. "And my father?" Agonized, she awaited the answer. Surely her father had not been dragged in chains behind his captors. At worst, they must have brought him on his black charger Saladin, attended by a guard. But Gervase shook his head. "We have no word."

"No word!" Anne stared. "Incredible!" No word of the most famous prisoner of the lot! "You are keeping something from me, Gervase. What have they done with him?" Then her heart jumped sickly. Was it possible that they had executed her father upon the field? Edward was terrible when roused. But this was a great political prisoner, who must be formally charged and attainted before—before— She waited for Gervase to reply. The minstrel's eyes were oddly veiled.

He had been strictly cautioned by the Countess. "I myself shall tell the Lady Anne. Until then—" But it was difficult to keep anything from Anne. Besides, Gervase thought it wrong. Anne could better abide the dread news of death than she could bear the scorching ignominy of thinking of her father as a prisoner of the gloating Edward.

"I must know." And she sought her mother. But the squire of the door would not open to her. "Not to me!" She was outraged. But the man was stolid. Biting her lip, she turned away. She thought of her mother keeping her bitter hour alone. "I should be with her." But her mother would not want her. She was indeed bereft—Isabella turned away with her husband Clarence to their greatest enemy, the King, and Anne who had never been with them, ever. Anne thought of this as slowly she returned to her own room.

That night she tossed restlessly on her bed. Where was the wild elation she should have felt at the victory of York, at the sure promise of her marriage, at the relief from the long pressure of the dread future? She felt empty, drained, and the future held for her no shape nor color—it was a great steep that fell away from her feet into thin, colorless air. A weariness took her and she sank into sleep.

The first heavy rest over, she began to move in bed. No hint of dawn drifted across her sleep with the mirage of awakening, and she slipped into a dream. Shapes floated about her, voices murmured and dim colors touched the figures of her vision. There was her father, leaning down from Saladin, whose legs glittered like ebony in the light. Into the familiar bruising pressure she was swept as he embraced her, and she cried out as never in life. With a laugh her father let her slide down to the ground. A hand brushed her shoulder and there was her mother, wimpled against the breeze, the gauze shrouding her face to remoteness.

"Anne!" The voice was urgent.

"Mother, *ma mère*," she replied and woke. Light, brighter than day, dazzled her eyes. She blinked against it and for a moment did not know the shadowy figure at her bedside. Her mother stood with her pale face draped in a paler veil, her eyes great pools of pain against the tiny flame.

"Anne, are you awake? Can you hear me?"

"Of course." Anne struggled upright and put back her hair.

"I have come." Her mother spoke with difficulty. "I would not let them tell you before."

"Tell me?" Anne put out her hand and felt the icy clasp about her fingers.

"He is dead. He has been killed."

The blood beat in Anne's ears. Pale faces of last night—the locked door—her father dead. "I think I knew it," she whispered. Her blurred vision cleared while her mother stood stricken, silent. "You should have told me. I am no child."

"I couldn't. I had not the words. Myself, I had to believe it—who knows what I thought?—to spare myself or you these few hours."

"Is there a way to soften the telling of sorrow?"

"You are right," sighed her mother. "No way."

"How—how did he die?"

"On foot—bravely." Anne's head went up. The Countess set down her taper and moved about, her hands pressed together. "He was full young to die."

To Anne's sixteen years, forty-three seemed a great age; but oh, not to die. All over and done. The great career closed. Never to speak to her again, never with heavy hand to touch her hair; and with a strange wonder she realized she would never again defy him. He was gone. She felt no relief—no sense of freedom. At this she marveled. Even though he had not, after all, wedded her to Edouard, and even though the fruit of his great scheme would never be plucked by him, guilt stabbed her as if she herself were to blame.

"Shall we see him?"

A spasm twisted her mother's face. "He will be exposed for three days. No, we shall not see him."

Horror shook Anne. Great men, slain in battle or privately executed, were always displayed in public lest men doubt the veracity, the awful truth of their deaths. How the people would crowd about the bier, some to laugh at the poor dead thing, some to curse and spit at it—only the sight of her mother's rigid face kept down the rising sob.

The Countess stood still now. "Attend to me. We must get away at once. I do not know what the King may do. I mean to take refuge in Beaulieu Abbey."

"But we are here in sanctuary!"

"We must get to the Queen. Frey Siserone knows the abbots hereabouts. He will help us." Anne nodded. Her father's Spanish spy, though no longer under official orders, was still attached to their train. "Queen Margaret is nearing the southern coast, and I think

she will begin her inland march at once. Perhaps we can join her. There will be a great number of faithful knights awaiting her in the West."

"So we make a run for it—to the Queen?" Anne doubted her own senses. It could not mean that her mother was obstinately going through with her father's great scheme; it could only mean she was concerned for their bodily safety. But Richard would never let any harm touch them. Could she not see that?

"We go to the Queen—and Edouard."

Anne flinched. She felt her mother's hand on her head and endured the searching eyes. "Anne, I trust you. Our name can bear no more disgrace." Between them lay the unhappy remembrance of Isabella, a bitter thought. And deeper still, though neither would voice it, lay the thought which at that moment occurred to both. Anne had only to cry out to Richard now to be rescued forever. "You *do* understand, Anne, that nothing is changed? Your father's plan must be completed." In her mother's tone she detected an echo of her father's iron purpose. So she was not safe; she was still the trapped animal.

She sat silent in the bed, revolt stinging within her.

"Arise now." Her mother turned away. "I grieve to cut short your rest but there is no time to be lost. My woman will prepare you. Make your farewells to your people." Preceded by its gigantic shadow, the tall dark form moved toward the door.

"I may not take my own?" Anne managed the words from a strangled throat.

The Countess turned back, her face gleaming ghostlike in the tiny lambent flame. She set her candle down and came to the bed, her great circled eyes brimming. "It will be touch and go. The fewer there are of us, the better." Then suddenly she clasped Anne in her arms, and their sore hearts throbbed together. "Nan." The single word shook them both. Startled, they drew back into their pride. "Nan, help me. Our courage is all we have left." Once more her mother pressed her and then she was gone.

Slowly Anne pushed back the covers and stepped shivering to the bare floor. By the curtained bed she stood and her gaze rounded the colored walls to the window where cold dawnlight was bringing the day. The night's numbness was wearing off and the pain was beginning. Thought of Richard still stung her. Despite her mother's plea, she was tormented by the thought that now her father was dead,

she and Richard could so easily be married. She had only to send one of those devoted to her, and never again need she be galled by thought of Margaret and Edouard. She would be rid of them forever. The pain grew sharp, for she knew with a certainty that she would not do this. She would not try to reach either Richard or the King. Not now.

She was trapped. Beyond death her father had reached out his long hand to claim her. Her course was clear. Her mother had need of her and, no matter the cost, she would remain. Together they would wear their weeds, the Countess for husband and daughter turned false, she for father and sister. For Isabella, worse than dead, had made it impossible for her to strike at her mother now. She could still feel the warmth of those tense circling arms.

And the heart of her white-hot pain was Richard. But there would be time to think of that later, when she could bear it. The room grew deathly quiet. Where had all the merrymakers of the previous night gone? Were they too weary with it all, and had they gone stumbling to their beds? If they thought at all, they must know that the fighting was by no means over and perhaps within another month they would be cheering the other side.

Before her *prie-dieu* she sank down, her cold hands fumbling for the rosary. But she could not begin her prayer. She rested her arms on the little sloping desk and thought of her father. How was it—did he have time to bid farewell to life, or did they strike him down without warning? Of war she had no real conception, fancying a battle to be something like the tournament with rules for striking, each man taking his chance. But then it all rolled in upon her at once. It was suddenly unbearable, and she beat her fists upon the little desk as the hard tears that brought no relief rolled down her face.

Drying her eyes, she gasped a little. She must control herself and think of what lay before her. Perhaps they would be captured or killed on this perilous journey to Beaulieu. At any rate she alone would suffer; the loved ones would remain here in sanctuary, with Richard to protect them. What she meant to do was right—it had to be right. To this she clung. She and Edouard together would produce strong children, offspring healthy enough to wipe out the curse of Henry's Valois madness. This would be her gift to England. She would help Edouard to be a good king, not like Edward Plantagenet with his extravagances and his women. Perhaps the York line had worn thin, indeed, diluted as it was with the Woodville woman's blood. What could not she and Edouard do for England? She thrust

away the stabbing thought of Richard. By the time they were crowned in the Abbey, Richard would be either banished or dead. Shivering now, she wrapped a warm quilted robe about herself and sent Emilie to find Gervase.

He came, his solemn face stubbled with beard, looking smudged and dirty. But he was alert.

"You did not tell me last night," she accused.

"Orders."

She nodded. "I should have guessed."

"And now?" Gervase sensed her grave decision.

"And now—" She pressed together her icy hands within the folds of the cloak. "And now, my course is clear. I must do as my father wished."

"You know what you do?" The eyes grew keen. "There is no one here to force you now."

"That I know. I also know I bid farewell to happiness." Then she burst out. "Tell me, Gervase, that I do well, that I shall not always feel like this"—her voice sank—"so wretched that I would fain die myself."

"You are resolved?" He ignored her outburst.

"I am. I must abide my father's decision and stand at my mother's side."

"And if Lancaster loses?"

She threw out her hand. "I cannot think of that. I must think only of victory for them, and the throne for Edouard and me."

He shook his head. But he would not torture her with his own doubts. He knew what painful deliberation had brought about this, her final decision, and for her there was no other way. He would not spoil the hour of her renunciation with cloudy doubts and useless fears. She had Richard's steely strength. Perhaps that was her misfortune.

"Have you anything to say to me?" Timidly she spoke, as if expecting some reproach.

"Nothing you have not already said to yourself."

She bent her head. It was true. She had only to carry out the grim contract she had made with conscience.

"You have orders for me?" The minstrel looked incredibly old and tired.

Their eyes met. Once again they took the measure of each other, as so often they had done before. "I go to Beaulieu with my mother.

It is best you remain here with the others. We must ride as small a body as we can manage. Send Alain to—to Richard. It is time.”

“And the girl?”

“She will be safe here in sanctuary. Safe, at least, till my return.” The unspoken thought passed between them. “Should it go ill with us, and we are taken, send her to the Duchess Cicely. And see that she and Alain are wed.” She forced a stiff smile. “And now, good friend, leave me. We shall not meet again—for some time.”

He went, lighter of heart than she, for he believed York would win, in which case Richard would claim her. But there would be grim deeds done ere this could be.

Anne stood at the mirror and the light was quite strong enough to show her her reflection. Girlhood was gone forever. It was a woman’s image she saw, the face pale but determined, the burning eyes steady, the whole form steeled to endure without complaint her beckoning future.

And while the mother and daughter clung despairingly to their shred of hope, another mother and her son, their own hearts high, stepped ashore from a ship, to take horse immediately for a long ride. Refusing to linger in Weymouth for tidings, Margaret struck inland at once.

Riding at his mother’s side, Edouard looked curiously at the English country scene which over seven years before, he had left. All he remembered of it then was the dark forest through which they fled, the stormy beach where they took ship, and the fading coast. He felt a little disappointed, for they said April was the spring month that made of southern England a garden spot; but he saw nothing to compare with his beloved Amboise, which at this time would be carpeted with flowers. However, it was with a quickening at his heart that he surveyed the landscape, his country, which at last he had come home to govern. He and his mother would rule together, with his father no more than a puppet; he squared his young shoulders as if already he felt upon them the burden of kingship. Their fleet was large with many mercenaries, bought by French gold, and after they had chastized Edward, possibly cut off his head, he and his mother would set about the great work.

He raised his finely chiseled nose and, like a hound, sniffed the air newly refreshed by a brisk rain. In lush greenness the grass quiv-

ered, bright and spiky beneath the budding trees. England! This was his home. "*C'est un beau paysage,*" he said, and his mother drew aside her wimple to smile affectionately on him.

She too was feeling a peculiar tingle of the heart at coming back after all these years. Long ago she had taken the country to her breast, learning to love it as did the English-born themselves, and spring had always been her favorite season, when the pale primroses and the daisies, her cognizance, spangled the meadows and lanes.

But in the armed figures at her back there was tense anxiety; English and French, they were feeling no surge of pride at sight of the land they served. The proud knights who had crossed with their squires and their ladies, waiting on the Queen, all knew the struggle was just about to begin, with the outcome most uncertain. Of the enemy Edward, of their ally Warwick, there had been no word, nothing at Weymouth, and without waiting for news Margaret ordered an immediate departure into Dorsetshire. Her chaplain, Dr. Morton, was a friend of old Roger Bemynter, who would give them sanctuary in his abbey of Cerne, some fifteen miles distant from the sea. Beneath the wings of the Church, they would await the tidings.

They went splashing across the Frome River, and now Dr. Morton pointed ahead. "There is Cerne, madam." Just above the puffy tops of the trees they could glimpse the pointed roofs.

"God be thanked," sighed Margaret.

It had been a hard journey from France, with stubborn winds forcing them back to Harfleur no less than three times, and then, when the fleet finally got under way, the frightful crossing. Though nearly spent, Margaret held herself erect in the saddle, staunchly proud, turning her tired smile upon all. The fifty knights of her escort were led by Sir John Langstroter, who had accompanied her from France. Behind Edouard jogged his old tutor, Sir John Fortescue, his white head shrouded in a gray capuchon. His face was set with exhaustion, his watery eyes fixed on space.

Again Margaret sighed. "Perhaps here we shall have news of your father, my son."

Beneath the trees stood the abbot, his scanty gray locks blowing back from his face. Morton dismounted, embraced his elderly friend and brought him to Margaret's stirrup. The venerable Bemynter, his old eyes full of tears, welcomed her in calm and gracious tones. "May the saints be praised you are safely arrived, madam."

But Margaret caught the sober greeting and her own face stiffened.

Without her customary courteous response, she slid from her horse and entered the abbey. The stone floor resounded to the clank of steel-shod feet as they crossed the great hall. She sank into a chair. Crowding in after her came the knights in their black and silver armor, tunics brilliant against the somber stone of the walls. About the Queen hovered the protective cloud of duchesses, tall in their cloaks, their gray-tired faces framed in wimples and hoods. Here was a large part of the Lancastrian flower of lord and lady, to whom this contest was an all-important matter of life and death. With his arm about the shoulders of old Sir John, Edouard stood, his tunic sadly wrinkled by the saddle.

"Well, my lord Abbot?" Quietly Margaret fixed her eyes on his face.

He stood before her, hands hidden beneath his scapular. "I grieve to bear you these tidings, madam."

"Speak." Like a small silver hammer, the single word fell on the palpable air.

"On Easter Saturday, at Barnet, there was a great battle. Among the slain were the Earl of Warwick and the Lord Montagu."

The knights clanked convulsively and, shocked off her guard, Margaret sprang to her feet. Her body was rigid, her face pallid as her wimple. In a low voice she said, "Can it be?" A violent shudder passed through her, and the Duchess of Pembroke held out her hand.

"Madam!" To a friar: "Quick, some wine!"

But Margaret dashed it aside. "Not now." Still rigid, as if made of stone, she turned to Edouard. "My son—my son—you must return at once to France. There is no time to lose."

"And give up!" Edouard was aghast. Old Sir John was patting and stroking his unfeeling hand. Instead he fixed his mother with an intense stare. "You'd surrender?"

Margaret made a despairing gesture.

"But"—Edouard turned to the monk—"what of the battle?"

The sorrowful head bent. "A complete rout, my lord Prince. The Yorkists were entirely victorious."

Margaret sank into the chair, her head against its high back. "Henry—England—" she murmured. Her eyes sought Edouard who stood, lips compressed, his brow bent to a scowl. Now he was the grandson of Henry of Agincourt and Margaret saw the resolution in

his face. "Edouard," she pleaded, "cannot you see—you must leave—and at once!"

"No!"

Margaret beat her hand on the chair. "I will not have you killed too!" Her voice broke.

Then he started toward her but the abbot held out a thin restraining hand. "Madam," he ventured, "the two lords of Somerset are hard by; indeed, they are expected hourly, and there are many in the West who are rallied to your Highness's support. Will you not wait till you have spoken with them?"

"My lady mother." With the grace of his grandfather Harry, Edouard sank to his knees. "I beg of you to allow me to bide here with you. It is my right."

Taut silence hung over the knights, the monks and friars, and among them, like great quivering moths, the ladies in their shrouding veils.

At last Margaret raised her head and for the first time in all the bitter years, she looked beaten. Then steadily and with a great sigh, she rose, lifting Edouard with her. Still holding his hand, she faced her knights, alert in their silk and steel. "My lords, all," her clear voice was exquisite, "here is your sovereign prince, the future King of England. What is your will?"

They were astonished. Their Queen had suddenly turned from a headstrong mistress into a woman, all soft mother-creature, leaning on them for support.

John Langstroter came and knelt to her. "Madam, my lady," his deep voice was gentle, "my lord Abbot counsels well. It is in all our minds to await the coming of the others, and we pray you to allow us to hold in safety the person of our prince." His brown eyes brimmed with pity. "For who knows what may have befallen our liege lord King Henry?"

Margaret's own eyes glistened. But all she said was, "As you will, my lords." Her face was now linen-white. "As you will." Then she let them lead her to a chamber where she might break her fast and lay her weary bones in a bed.

Early next day the abbey gates opened to admit the Lord Somerset and his brother John, who together had commanded the archers at Barnet, escaping with their lives only because Richard and Edward were otherwise engaged. Hard behind them came Jasper of Pembroke, the Earl of Devonshire, and Lord Wenlock.

In the great hall of Cerne Margaret sat at the head of a refectory table, the lords ranged on either side. Still pale from the dread news of Barnet, she had otherwise recovered herself and, once more steadfast, bent her shrewd brain to devise a victorious end to the struggle. Intuition told her it must be the last.

"Jasper." She turned her vivid face in the direction of the Earl of Pembroke who sat, head sunk on chest, lower lip puffed out in thought. He raised his brows, met her eyes, but did not move. "Jasper, you shall go to Wales. They tell me my levies are about to rendezvous at Exeter, where they assemble in some force. Get me a thousand men."

Pembroke grunted. If a thousand men were to be had, he would procure them.

"Devonshire has a plan, madam," spoke up Edouard, who sat by the young-looking Earl.

"What then?" Margaret turned piercingly to them.

"I propose, madam, that we march as rapidly as may be to Bristol, where we can pick up the force that waits beneath the banners of the loyal West. York will assume we either march on London or go north to meet Tudor's levies in Wales. We shall do neither, but to deceive York we shall send detachments as if against him, while we ourselves work by devious route to the Severn. By the time he has tumbled to our plan, we shall be strong and ready."

Like a child, Edouard chuckled. But Margaret sat with her chin on her jeweled hand. "Ah, yes, I see. Once across the Severn, and with the Welsh"—she drew a deep breath and a smile crossed her drawn face—"we shall win the victory."

Then the days slipped by, three, four, five, full of preparations and council meetings. At sunset of their fifth day in Cerne, Edouard sat at his mother's feet. They were alone save for the abbot's dogs and the quiet crackling of the fire. With weary care Margaret stroked his hair.

"Are you not glad to have me here with you, *maman*?" Edouard gave her his sunny smile.

Margaret lifted a strand of the fine light hair and held it to the light. "I hardly know, *mignon*." The deep sigh failed to lift the leaden weight at her heart. "I had a bad dream last night." But she did not tell him she saw him lying dead, gashed in a hundred places, drained white of blood. Still she clung to her original conviction that he ought

to be on his way back to France, but she knew her Lancastrians would never be satisfied to part with their young prince.

"Ah, dreams. You are weary, *ma mie*." Like a lover he turned his lips to her hand. "The victory will be ours, you will see. And then—"

"And then?" Margaret's face was lined with fatigue. "I weary just thinking of what must be done, once the power is ours. It will take years to repair the damage, but I am resolved to lift England to greater heights of glory than have yet been imagined." Her eyes flashed and she smoothed back the golden hair, her hands lingering on the head as if already she saw about its brows the diadem of St. George.

Edouard hugged his knees and rocked back and forth. "I think our future the most glorious in the world."

"But a heavy task, too," she reminded. "Kingship is not easy, my son. There are times when the crown is made of thorns." Edouard hummed a light song. Yearningly she looked down on the yellow head. How young he was! "And there is the battle to be won. You forget that."

"Oh, no, *maman*." His face shone.

She knew his thoughts. His boy's mind was reeling with delighted visions of himself riding into battle, brandishing his maiden sword, his feathers waving proudly within their golden cirlet, his men shouting his war cry. Well, what lad's heart would not quicken at so brave a prospect?

"But I would we might attain our fortune without the bloodshed," she sighed.

"And not fight! I wouldn't miss that for anything."

"No, there is small danger of your missing that. You shall ride with Somerset and Beaufort."

He swung around. "But I am to lead. You promised."

"Of course," she assured him. "How shall you rule if you do not lead in battle?" Then her face softened. "You are your grandfather's own child. King Hal loved a fight, too. 'Tis a great heritage we are handing you, Edouard, and though the saints forgive me for saying it, I am glad there is so little of your father in you."

"My father." Then soberly: "What think you has happened to him?"

"He is not dead, I am certain. Hardly would they keep *that* to themselves." Her white hand clenched. "I fancy they have dragged him with them, to put him in the van of the battle, for it would be

just like one of their filthy Yorkist tricks to have our own people slay him."

"I wonder. Scarcely can I recall him, *maman*."

"But, *mignon*," now she smiled at him, "you must. You were ten years old. Surely you do not forget how you and he used to play at closheys on Westminster lawns. You always knocked down your father's ninepins, and he always let you. Don't you remember the pretty ivory set he gave you for your ninth birthday? I wonder whatever became of it. Ah, I can see the two of you now, fishing in Lambeth Pool." She did not remind him there were also times when Henry, his mind clouded over, ordered them to take the child away, declaring it to be none of his.

"Fishing? I lost my taste for that in France. But I do remember the little silver swans I used to give away, and how the people cried for St. Edward, my namesake, whenever I appeared." He laughed. "I told Anne about it when we were at Saumur last summer. She's a pretty little thing, but I think she has no liking for me. I expect they will wed her to Richard now." He took a lute and swept its strings.

"Wed her to him? Nothing of the sort." Margaret spoke with asperity. "I hear she and her mother, poor souls, have fled London and are sanctuaried for the nonce in Beaulieu Abbey. I fancy they plan to leave there and get up to Warwick Castle."

But Edouard was weary of the subject of Anne and plucked a soft introduction on his strings. "Shall I sing to you?" In his light tenor he began one of the old Provençal songs they both loved and she leaned back, the quivers of regret and remembrance piercing sharply through her. At the third verse, she stopped him.

"The Lady Anne has a fine musician in her train—this Gervase—is that how he is called? Shall you keep him when you and she are wed?"

"If we are wed," he corrected her. Then he stretched and yawned. "Ah, yes, Gervase. That one has the true music in him. Funny how we've not forgotten the fellow's name."

"He is not easily forgotten. Your grandfather noticed him and told me he seemed to recall seeing him in Rouen, quite a young man. Even then his playing and singing were renowned. His father was the King's torturer."

"So? A sorry trade for one with the music in his soul." Sprawled on the floor at her feet, Edouard played with the tassel that hung from her girdle.

Slowly Margaret waved a feather fan. "And that little silver-haired page the Warwicks think so much of—his name quite escapes me—Grand-père said he had the strange Icelandic look of the de la Tour family, wiped out by Cauchon soon after the Maid of Orleans was burned." She shivered. "I was a babe myself at the time, but they spoke of the burning for years. Another black Burgundy crime."

"So the boy's family was killed by the Butcher of Beauvais," murmured Edouard. "You think it likely the lad may be the sole survivor?"

"Who knows?" Margaret shrugged. "The de la Tours had a daughter but she perished with her parents under torture. If they spared the boy, it must have been because someone rescued him. Perhaps the minstrel had raised his eyes to the fair face of the sister. There is something of the sort written in those dark eyes. I found his sadness quite fascinating."

They fell silent, Edouard thinking of the romantic story of the young page and the minstrel, but Margaret, wrapped in her own memories, had already forgotten the de la Tours. She was recalled to her youth, the travels in Italy with her mother, then in her sixteenth year the awful journey to England and Henry, the pale slight youth who could not bear the sight of his bride's white, uncovered bosom. He knew no more how to cherish her than if she were some strange exotic bird arrived from a foreign land in a golden cage.

Behind her he hid himself and she, young as she was, found herself alone before the intriguers of his court. How the bitterness grew within her, as year after year she was disappointed of a child. Eight long years before her life changed, and when at last the baby boy came, the father, his mind already darkening, did not know his own child. She had to fight all over again, this time to save her son from the grasping schemers who would usurp his inheritance. She thought of the father, weak offspring of an insane line, resigned to capture and prison. In his tower room, he was quite happy with the reliquaries and holy figures, and he passed many a pleasant hour gazing at the faded Old Testament pictures on his walls. This they told her, when alone and hiding with her child, she planned her escape.

Then the flight to her father in France, the long years of plotting and planning. And now at last it had come, the vengeful return. Were it not for the fact that it would weaken her cause, she would be content to let the enemy do Henry to his death.

Softly Edouard began again to strum the lute and the sweet sounds

seduced her. Her dark blue eyes, dreamy with memories and shadowed with fatigue, drooped and closed, and in an ivory calm she slept.

Slowly Margaret and her Lancastrians worked their way to Exeter, striking into the West rather than to the North. And for a time, Edward appeared to take the bait. He sent small companies against their detachments but himself remained at Windsor among the trees and lawns, preparing to celebrate the Feast of St. George. The twenty-third of April came and went, and still Edward lingered.

Margaret determined on a bold move. Straight north they marched to Taunton, and from there they plunged on to Glastonbury. About noon of a clear beautiful day, they rode into the ancient town of the fabled Arthur. Edouard was enchanted with the beauty of the place but Margaret was restlessly anxious to get on, and with no more than a night's pause, they pushed forward to Wells.

From the towers of the great cathedral the bells pealed their glad welcome, and crowds jammed the narrow streets and impeded the progress of the steel cavalcade. Holding out her white hands to them Margaret smiled and Edouard waved his scarlet cap. Before she took any food, the Queen went up the shallow steps, passed under the filagree façade of the church into the cool nave to say her prayers. Outside, in great numbers, her host was gathering.

They left Wells and approached Bath, to see encamped before the town their army, but the glad sight of this was somewhat marred by the ominous news that met them. Tired of celebrating his victory at Barnet, Edward had sprung suddenly to action. With a huge army he rode out of Windsor and was marching due west.

"Good!" cried Margaret. Under the strain of uncertainty as to whether Edward would come to give them battle or she would be obliged to make the weary trip herself, her nerves were cruelly taut. So he would bear the long fatigue of the march westward, and they could gather strength while awaiting him.

"He thinks to beat us to Tudor in Wales," said Langstroter. "I cannot see how he moved so fast with all that artillery."

"He will not outmarch us," declared Margaret.

Late that night in the Town House of Bath, she sat with her leaders. Edward had got as far as Cirencester, at the edge of the Cotswold Hills, and if they were not sharp and wary, he would cut in between

them and the Severn River, across which lay the greater part of their strength. Margaret bent her brows in thought. Then her hand came down on the chart she was studying. "It is but a short ride to Bristol. We shall send troops in that direction and camp a party at Chipping Sodbury. There is a hill there, I am told, and thus can we counterfeit a battle stance, meanwhile ourselves creeping up to Gloucester."

"But—Gloucester, madam," put in the Earl of Devonshire. "The castle there is held by Beauchamp's men for the King."

"For what king?" demanded Margaret haughtily. "You forget yourself, my lord."

"For the lord Edward." Devon was shamefaced.

"That is better. There is but one King in England and let us remember it. As for Beauchamp, when he sees our strength he will open to us. Give the word, Langstroter, to march at dawn. And you, Devon, shall take the decoy detachment to Sodbury Hill." They would befool Edward into thinking they meant to give him battle there.

In quick march Margaret and her Lancastrians set forth for Gloucester. Scouts overtook them with the news that Edward had again fallen for the bait, and arriving in full strength at Sodbury, found only a mocking small fragment under Devon, not worth the engaging. Margaret smiled grimly. Their feint had succeeded. When they had picked up additional strength at Gloucester Castle, where they might rest and refresh themselves, they would immediately resume the march to the river crossing. What Margaret did not know was that a messenger had gone from Edward to the castle in Gloucestershire, bidding Beauchamp stand firm.

All night she and her host marched, the men near collapse, every horseman feeling the shift and chafe of his armor. Before the castle gates the next morning, they drew rein.

"Summon the Lord Beauchamp!" ordered Margaret.

But there was no surrender. The battlements bristled with men and the portcullis remained down. Edward's messenger had arrived in time.

It was ten o'clock and the sun on the armor was unbearable. Men huddled cloaks over their metal and stood in the shadow of their horses.

"We must water the beasts and rest the men," advised Lord Wenlock.

Margaret's face tightened. "We shall do neither. We cannot wait

to be trapped here. I am resolved to get across the Severn today, and we march at once to Tewkesbury.”

A resigned sigh rippled through the knights but in the face of this set determination, they knew argument to be useless. Wearily they sent their captains with the orders, and within the hour the army took the road for Tewkesbury, there to cross the river. Once over and joined with Tudor, the Lancastrian position would be well-nigh invulnerable.

“I take it York is hard upon our heels,” remarked Edouard to Wenlock. He felt his excitement rise. Already he thought he could smell the blood and smoke of battle, with shouting troops under his command.

“Sure to be,” cut in Somerset from his other side. He had fought hand to hand with Edward at Barnet, and had not forgotten the dreadful swing and crash of the bloody battle-ax upraised in the long arm. “I hope I get another crack at him myself.” Bold in battle, Somerset was aching for a return bout with York.

“It’s life and death to him to prevent our crossing.” From his raised visor Wenlock spoke, and the fish-belly white of his face gleamed through the dark stubble of beard.

“Which is what he shall not do,” replied Somerset. He had no opinion of Wenlock, whom he suspected of cowardice. About four of the afternoon they came in sight of the roofs of Tewkesbury and, beyond, the river rolling wide and deep before them.

Margaret wheeled her mount and faced her men who trooped about her, their horses’ bodies steaming in a strong odor. “There is no bridge?” Her face was gray with dust and exhaustion but she sat erect and supple, her hand in the soft-skin glove steady on the rein.

“None that will bear the weight of man and horse,” she was told.

“Then let us ford the stream.” Wenlock at her elbow glanced apprehensively about. Margaret looked at him. He *was* a craven. Anything to put distance between Edward and themselves.

“The men have marched thirty-six miles, madam,” put in Somerset. “Should York overtake us and cross after, he could destroy us in our weariness.”

“Then you counsel sitting here for him?” In his helmet, Wenlock’s shrill voice rang hollow.

Somerset ignored him. “Can you go on a little farther, madam?” he said quietly.

Margaret looked as if ready to fall from the saddle but she stared

calmly at the knight. "Of course, my lord. Is there a skin of wine?"

It was Edouard who brought her the drink. "We'll go to Gupshill, *ma mie*," he said. "It is less than a mile. Can you?" In the shadow of his visor, his face was drawn like her own, his young eyes circled.

Margaret drank, the wine staining her pale lips. "Let us go on."

At the little abbey the nuns received the ladies in their sheltering arms and led them tottering withindoors. All aflutter, the abbess gave up her bedchamber and later, sitting within the curtains, bathed and refreshed by food, Margaret received her lords.

Heartened by prospect of rest and rations, the men had speedily pitched camp at Holme Hill near the great highway. With the advantage of the elevation, it was a perfect position in which to await the coming of Edward and his Yorkists.

"'Tis a place right evil to approach." In his dark face Somerset's teeth gleamed. "We are throwing up strong entrenchments in the front and on both sides, and there are many muddy lanes and ditches to trip up the enemy."

"And Edward?" asked Margaret quietly.

"He has left Chipping Sodbury and is said to have some three thousand men. But ere he can approach us he has the Cotswolds to climb."

"Send out scouts in all directions south and east. We must know what he is doing." As one of her women appeared at the corner of the bed: "What is it, Lady Vaux?"

"Madam, there are new arrivals."

"Oh?" Margaret peered around the curtains. "Is that you, Edouard?"

Divested of his armor, and bareheaded, Edouard came in. By the hand he led Anne, pale and dusty in a long cloak. "See who is here, *maman*."

Before Margaret could reply, the Duchess of Devonshire appeared with Anne's mother. The Queen and the Countess clasped hands, a fierce sort of sorrow for the moment uniting them. A vital part of both of them had gone into the grave with Warwick and the sight of each brought home the tragedy to the other.

"I grieve for your loss, madam," said Margaret. The Countess bent her head but did not reply.

14. Tewkesbury

SINGING birds outside her casement woke Anne and she sat up, rubbing her eyes, conscious only of the sunlight in her chamber and the sweet smell of blossoming hedges. In the hurry and excitement of the previous evening, they had forgotten to close the window against the night and now the morning air, sweet and fresh, greeted her. For a moment she felt entirely content. Then reality rushed in, bringing the sick throb. Today, they said, would see the dread battle.

She got out of bed and crossed to the window. On so fair a morning it was impossible to think that within a mile or two, men waited to kill each other, to befoul the green grass with blood and gore.

"Lady Anne, have you prayed?" It was her mother's Lady Masham who stood behind her. "It is time to dress."

Anne submitted. They would make of her a child again, she whose girlhood was forever gone. She ached for the hands of her own about her; never would she be used to their absence.

By quiet lanes and sheltered roads she and her mother, with their tiny escort, had ridden toward Warwickshire, and only last evening, when they had positive knowledge of Margaret's whereabouts, did her mother give the order to turn their horses toward Gupshill.

"Where are the Yorkists?" Anne stood to have her bodice laced. The word "enemy" stuck in her throat, for Richard was there, and Edward whom she could never hate.

"I do not know. But the Lord Edouard wishes to see you before he goes forth. Please to hurry!" Lady Masham hovered about. "One short prayer."

In the tiny hall downstairs, Edouard waited with Somerset and his mother. Both knights were in full war harness, and through the diamond-paned window the early light touched the boy's hair. Descending the stairs, Anne was struck by the change in him. Hardly a trace remained of the teasing youth of Amboise and Saumur, the long hanging hair giving him so girlish a delicacy. The hair was

cropped above the ears, the young face had hardened, the cheeks hollowed and the lips firmed.

"May I have your favor, my lady?" As he smiled at her he might have been going to a tilting match instead of to the most fateful battle of his entire life.

"Why—" Anne was confused. Her wrinkled traveling gown had no jewel. She put her hand to the bodice. "The ribband, perhaps?" That at least was fresh and she quickly pulled it through the loops.

Edouard took it. "I cannot wear it next my heart, for already I am buckled into my steel, but"—he took the helm from his squire—"I can tie it on my crest." And he tied a clumsy bow in the center of the three feathers. "It will bring me *bonne chance*." He bent forward to her upturned face and as she stood on the bottom step he kissed her gently on the lips.

"God keep you." Her voice caught. He was young, younger than Richard. Oh, God and the saints keep them both! Through dimmed eyes she saw the youth kneel at his mother's feet, saw her hands on his hair. Then they were gone, all the men, and Margaret was left standing in the center of the hall, her pale proud face quivering. But her eyes were dry.

Anne dared not show her compassion. This was the imperious lady of Anjou who had faced Anne's father at the altar in Angers, at the banquet table, in the great hall of Château Saumur, the proud shabby Queen, always distant and formal with her. But across the heads of the ladies their eyes met. They were two women whose men had gone out to war.

"Come"—Margaret opened the door to her left—"we break our fast." Among her ladies she passed into the long refectory where the pale silent nuns stood before their places, awaiting the coming of the guests who were to share their meal.

Between her mother and the Queen, Anne sat and partook of the frugal breakfast set before her. She nibbled the oatcakes and sipped the fresh milk, watching the Sisters, still silent as they pushed small morsels of cake between their lips and, with downcast eyes, attended to their food. Where were their own men and relations, and what had they known of life before the encircling arm of the Church drew them into its protection? Some were noble, she knew, for all religious houses sheltered ladies of rank who had renounced the world for piety. Had they seen their men go forth to war?

"Eat, Anne," whispered her mother, "you will need your strength."

And later, Anne understood her mother's words, for they brought her cloak. "We go to see the battle from the hill." Into the sunlight she followed the others. Behind the abbey house was a small hill overgrown with short grass, split by a narrow path winding to its summit. The ladies of the Queen now began to climb, their long skirts held up in front, their shoes wet by the dew-damp bushes. And above their heads the birds in the budding trees sang and flew about in the fresh morning air.

Leading the little procession was the Duchess of Devonshire, tall and stately in her dove-colored cloak, and behind her was the Lady Vaux, she who had received them on their arrival the previous evening. A very great lady, with her highbred white face and long hands, she walked up the hill as if strolling among the rose gardens of Provence with no heavier thought on her mind than the set of her gown. And behind them came the Queen.

She had chosen to wear a robe of scarlet and on her veil was a thin circlet worked into points flashing in the morning sunlight. This was to be her great day, and she would wear the Lancastrian colors, ready to face whatever the day brought forth. Upright, she climbed steadily, her robe held in white hands, her eyes fixed on the summit crowned with the bushy growth of scrub trees.

And trailing them all came the abbey serfs who carried chairs for the ladies to sit on. At the top they paused for breath and looked about. Stretching at their feet was the quiet land, seeming to breathe softly in the lovely morning air, awakening to the May day. This was the land so soon to be rent by the sound of war.

To her ladies Margaret was speaking as a man among men. Anne did not understand the terms "van" and "flank," but she dimly gathered that Edouard was to lead the main division immediately following Somerset and Beaufort, and would be in a position of extreme peril. Again she thought how foolish it was for him to wear his golden circlet and feathers which made him so easy a target for arrows, but hard on this thought came the certain knowledge that it was sacred custom, and a knight would rather lie dead in his blazon than save himself in the anonymous armor of a stranger.

"But—the main battle, madam." It was her mother speaking. "Is he not over young for so great a charge?"

Pride shone in Margaret's face. "He is a man." Then her mother-fear clung to reassurance. "And he has Wenlock and the Prior of St. John at his elbow." But she felt a leaden sinking of the heart, for

she had no faith in Wenlock. Against her better judgment she had allowed Somerset to place him with the prince. "Somerset and Beaufort will lead the van and they will cut a path for the others."

Anne shuddered. She still was bewildered, not understanding it at all. She strained to see beyond the trees where they said the enemy lay encamped, but all she could make out was a glitter of metal shimmering in the morning sun, and the motley sprawl of tents and banners. A thin call of trumpets spiraled up to them among their scrubby trees on the hilltop. Margaret stiffened and her breath quickened. Anne saw her face light up, the chiseled nostrils quivering. "It begins." Her low voice was tense, her eyes sparkling. Now Anne could make out a long spiky line advancing over the spread carpet of meadows and lanes. The men looked like the toys with which children played before the fire on wintry evenings. The little horses and their riders were neat and compact, the suits of armor glistened bravely and the banners fluttered over their heads. She could not make out the crests but somewhere in the advancing line was Richard.

"That will be Gloucester," murmured Margaret.

"Where?"

"There, in the van. He's got the artillery."

Now Anne knew "van" must be front, for she could see the bowmen and among them the cannon, dragged along, the line dipping here and there to disappear in the tangle of ditches and lanes. And now, like a play, it began. In darting arcs the arrows flew among the Lancastrians.

"Oh, Somerset, reply!" cried Margaret. Then sharply: "What's that?" Over to the right where the woods were dense was the gleam of spears and shivering activity among the trees. "It's a company! Somerset must have planted them there to surprise the enemy once they are well within our lines. Ah, *bon!*"

But Somerset, galled by Richard's fire, fell upon the Yorkist center coming up immediately behind and with shouts and ringing of trumpets, savagely drove them back. In an open field between sheltering hedges the ladies could plainly make out the struggle as Somerset and Beaufort turned right from the fleeing Yorkist center and drove straight at Richard.

"Now!" Margaret cried in glee. "Now, Somerset, bring out your men from the wood!" In her excitement, she had forgotten her son, somewhere behind Somerset and his fellow knights who had so bravely scattered Edward and Richard. And as if Margaret's words

had carried to the commander himself, the men with their spears and pikes burst from the trees, but with a sort of terror Anne saw them fall upon Somerset, hacking and thrusting at his rear. They were not Lancaster at all, but York, led by Edward in a clever march upon the enemy. Even she could see how the Lancastrians gave way to panic as they broke and scattered over the landscape. Dwarfed figures scrambled over ditches and leaped hedges and the small pursuing toy men ran after them and slashed them to the ground.

"Ah!" It was her mother who gasped. Blindly she reached for Anne's hand and with the pressure of cold fingers conveyed to Anne her thought. Was this how it had been with husband and father?

Taller than the rest, distinguishable by the glittering crown on his helm, Edward surged forward among a thickset body of his men. And a shorter, more slender figure came flying from the right. It must be Richard. The tide had turned, all in a moment it seemed, and the Lancastrians were scrambling back to their own lines. Where was Edouard and how was it with him? Flashing water splashed up from the swollen brooks and meadow pools, and now the noise of battle came clearer to them. It could mean only one thing. Their men were making a desperate stand at their own rear.

From the abbey water mills came a great commotion in the meadow close to the town. "They are driving them into the water," whispered the Countess Anna. The mill pools were deep and in their armor the knights must drown, while even men in leather and wool would stand a poor chance.

The ladies sank into their chairs. The fighting had slackened and there was a lull. Just as they sprang to their feet in the excitement of the tournament, then relaxed into their seats, now they felt the release of the tension and sighed and braced themselves for the next encounter. But there was no great activity from either side. Small parties of soldiers met and clashed together, and now and then a line ran shouting on the farther side. The main push was over.

Another hour crept by. Although they had been sitting less than a couple of hours, to Anne it seemed a day's span. Through the sheltering trees the hot sun beat down and she longed to creep within-doors, away from the heat and the horror in the meadow. She knew the Lancastrians had lost the battle.

Margaret knew it too, for in a voice of deadly quiet she said, "Let us return."

In silence they descended the little hill and entered the nunnery.

Margaret's face was stone and none dared address her. Hovering about were the ladies, their faces whiter than their coifs. All had men in that battle; in every heart was the same terror. Their darting glances flicked out toward their Queen, but she said nothing. Like a statue she sat on in her chair, her clenched hands twisted together in her lap.

And so, with the fear they could not smother and the hope they dared not name, they waited.

Soon the clanking of the dismounting knights was heard. Into the hall came Somerset, his helm still closed. Like a man in a dream he walked up to Margaret and uncovered. His face was that of an old man, streaked with grime and sweat, down one cheek the spider-trickle of dried blood.

"Well?" Margaret scowled to control her features.

Somerset shook his head. He could not at first speak, then with a great effort his voice, rusty and hollow-sounding, broke the silence. In measured accents he recited, and every name fell like a blow on the air. "Devonshire, Vaux, Hampton, Fielding, Whittingham, Seymour, Beaufort—"

"Beaufort slain?" Margaret stopped him. "What of Wenlock?" They had been the guardian companions of the prince.

"Wenlock?" Scorn strengthened Somerset's voice. "I myself dashed out his brains, for the craven that he was." He paused. The dreadful question hung unspoken.

Margaret summoned her courage. "The prince?"

He bent his head and did not try to hide the bright tears on his cheeks. "He was taken. When I last saw him the Duke of Clarence had seized him."

Margaret drew a shuddering breath. "Even so? My son. Well, he fell in good company."

With the soft despairing gasps of the old, Sir John Fortescue began to weep.

"Before they took him, he had fleshed his sword." But Margaret did not hear. Somerset put this in, for he could not tell her that Edouard, still no more than scratched, had been taken to Edward's tent, to face his Yorkist foes. He dared not hint that her son might still be alive. She had borne too much already.

Anne ached. Less than three hours ago, he was standing in this very

hall, tying with a boy's clumsiness a ribband on his helm, a scarlet favor to make a gay bow on a prince's feather.

With a flurry of skirts the abbess appeared in the entrance. "Madam! They are coming! Get you to the chapel."

Unhurried, Margaret rose. She did not care for anything now, and had it not been for the others, might have sat on in her chair, ready for chains and London. They crowded into the small chapel, Anne close to her mother. The tiny oratory was musty with candle fat and incense, the distinctive odor of sanctity, the only light filtering through the small windows painted with the Stations of the Cross. A dirty, dusty place, it was refuge. At the desk in the center of the floor where the abbess said her prayers, Margaret sank down, her face bowed in her hands. They had not long to wait. Outside on the steps of the chapel the abbess stood, her high-pitched voice ringing above the clang of armor.

"But, my lords, this is sanctuary!" She was indignant. "You may not force it on pain of committing a deadly sin!"

"Since when is a nunnery sanctuary for the dogs of treason!" And with a bang as if he smote it with a heavy gauntlet, the door burst open and Clarence stalked in. He strode up to Margaret, ignoring completely the huddle of women in front of the tiny rood screen and the knights who stood before them. "Madam, you are now my prisoner. I arrest you in the King's name!" He held out his hand as if to assist her from her knees. "Come! We have made sure of your son and now must take you."

But Margaret knelt on, her folded hands steady on the small desk. At her elbow hovered the abbess, her pale face that of an accusing saint. "I would remind you again, sir, that this lady is in sanctuary."

"Oh, come now!" He addressed Margaret. "This is no shelter, and well you know it. 'Tis merely a retreat for disappointed females and a resthouse for travelers. I pray you, arise." And now his hand was beneath her elbow.

"Unhand the lady," growled Somerset. Stooping, he himself lifted Margaret to her feet. For a single piteous instant she looked into the face of her old friend and loyal supporter, then she sighed and turned to her captor.

"I should like to know if my husband still lives." In her mind she had given up her son, feeling sure that he had been dispatched at battle's end.

"He awaits you in London," replied Clarence. And when Somerset

would have accompanied her, he pushed his heavy glove against the soldier's breast. "You, my lord, will remain. You stand attainted of high treason and it is our liege's pleasure that you be tried in summary court." Over the faces of the Yorkist knights the grim smiles flitted. Tewkesbury was as good a place as any for trying the rebels, and the market place would serve excellently for their beheading.

Anne stood rooted by her mother. All this time Clarence had not as much as glanced in her direction, and for all of him, they might have been the shabby little statues in the chapel. Toward the door now moved the tall figure in scarlet, the head in the veil and crown held high within the steel ring that closed about it. Arrogantly before her, swaggering in the style of a Roman conqueror, went Clarence, with Hastings and Dorset flanking him.

They passed from sight. Anne looked up into the face of a short man in a leathern tunic painted with the sunburst of York. "My lord awaits you, my ladies." He was polite.

"Come, Anne." With dignity, the Countess swept toward the door while a guard of men held back the knights who would have followed after. Behind them the studded doors slammed and three men-at-arms moved before them. Sealed within the chapel, the men of Lancaster would abide their trial and execution.

Now Anne could turn her mind to Richard. Where was he and why had he not come for her himself? She felt almost angry that he had exposed her and her mother to the bad manners of Clarence. It did not occur to her that Richard might be in attendance on Edward. There were always things to be done after a battle and the confusion was great.

Led by the men-at-arms, she and her mother crossed the grass that shone in the afternoon sunlight. In the small space before the chapel a great commotion of men and horses milled about. There was no sign of either Edward or Richard. But a knot of men gathered about a platform on handles which four of them had set down. They now stood, wiping the sweat from their faces. Anne felt a terrible presentiment. She feared to look, and having looked, could not turn away her head.

There lay the body of Edouard, drained white of blood, the gashes in his naked flesh no longer oozing, across his legs the careless folds of a tattered Lancastrian banner. Unable to move her own legs, she stood, her mother dreadfully still beside her. One of the dead hands hung down and now a burly fellow stooped and dragged off

the ring that adorned the little finger. The claw of the jewel tore into the flesh from which a few drops of blood fell.

"Killed in field?" Anne asked a crossbowman who loitered curiously near.

"Nay. The lords did for young puppy in tent. 'Tis said my lord the King asked him what he did here and he said summat about getting his father's kingdom. It was then Duke set upon him and finished him off then and there."

The bearer wiped his nose with the back of his hand and gripped his end of the bier. "Come on, Dirk. Grave's waitin'."

They lifted their burden and plodded away.

The women watched. The head of Edouard was turned away and all they saw was the line of the jaw and a tumbled mass of golden hair. The body was borne rhythmically out of sight. It was then that Anne looked fearfully around. Had Margaret seen this ghoulisn figure of her son? But Margaret was nowhere to be seen.

"Thank the saints," breathed Anne.

"Yes," murmured her mother. She knew what Anne was thinking.

But Anne's limbs were still heavy. Who had foully murdered Edouard in the King's tent? Did Richard's dagger drink his blood? Wearily she took her mother's arm and they followed their escort. That same afternoon, still not having seen Richard, she and the Countess took the road with Margaret and her guard, bound for London.

15. Clarence

THE royal apartments of London Tower were ablaze with splendor. Once more Edward celebrated a triumphant return. This time, it was not with the half-smile of an initial success that he entered his capital, but in the full flush of complete victory. Warwick, his onetime friend turned enemy, was forever stilled; Margaret, the other strong threat, was safe in chains; and the youth who was to have shoved him from his throne had been crowned with the cypress of death and hurried to his grave. There remained only Henry, Old Harry Sixth as the derisive song designated him, Henry, feeble remnant of a lost cause. And with him Edward lost no time in dealing.

"See it done tonight," he directed Richard. "I trust you to carry it out quietly and with dispatch. I wish him dead before they bring Margaret here." There should be no hitch, and he would not risk a chance of secret messages passing between the prisoned Queen and her husband.

"Shall I assist you, my brother?" Clarence was disappointed that a job so much to his own taste had been handed over to Richard. "Edward, you have small faith in me."

"I can manage." Richard was short. He was annoyed at Edward for giving him this butcher's job. He was also annoyed that Edward had sent Anne and the Countess directly to Baynard's Castle, to their mother, keeping him so busy that he had had scarcely a word with his beloved. And Anne herself had been strangely cool and distant. Was it possible she had become fond of this Edouard of Anjou and was mourning his death along with her father's? He was puzzled and a little angry. And now Edward forced upon him this unsavory task of the disposing of Henry.

"Let me accompany him, brother," coaxed Clarence, his teeth gleaming as he grinned.

Edward was firm. "See it done tonight, Diccon."

The brothers bowed and departed. "You have small stomach for

this," Clarence prodded him as together they descended the winding stone stairway from the royal apartments. "You had no qualms about the son."

"Oh, cease!" Richard snapped. Killing sickened him. But Clarence would never understand this.

Together they entered the stone room hung with the holy tapestries of the saints so loved by Henry of Lancaster. Alone at his *prie-dieu*, Henry knelt, his thin back to the door. Richard signed to the two burly men who followed them. It did not take long. The keen daggers were swift; the praying man was taken by surprise. With hardly a sigh, he slid from their grasp and bumped to the floor, the dusty velvet cap rolling from his head with its sparse graying hair. Wiping their daggers, the assassins looked expectantly at Richard who was vividly pale, breathing fast, his hand clenched on his belt.

"What ails you?" Clarence spoke beneath his breath.

Richard chafed his tender shoulder, staring at the bright stream that ran from Henry's head and sullenly congealed in a crack.

"You are squeamish. God's body, you have seen men die before."

"Aye. On the battlefield." Richard's breath was still short.

"Tsha! What's odds?"

A priest came through the arras, stopped, his face set in horror. "Holy Mother!"

"Blood of God," groaned Richard.

The priest turned to flee, actually gained the door. "Him, too!" Clarence's high-pitched tones cracked with excitement. "Don't bungle it!"

The priest was dragged back, babbling for mercy. Quickly, more brutally than they had taken his master, they finished him with their sharp points. A gray-white heap he lay, his blood staining the soiled and shabby rug.

"Give a look outside." Richard's voice was steady. "Make sure we are alone." The man turned and nodded. "'Tis well. Bury the priest, but leave the—the other till morning." The two assassins took the limp body of the priest between them and left; the studded door creaked shut.

The room was very quiet. Clarence bent over the dead man, ran the long point of his velvet shoe through the rosary chain still wound about the hand. "Now this is an ugly thing to leave aboveground. A few hours and it will be stinking." He dropped the chain rattling to the floor.

"Then it is an ugly thing." Richard spoke sharply. "Nevertheless, I mean to leave it here till dawn."

"Then what?"

"It will be discovered. We shall cause it to be known that upon hearing news of Margaret's defeat and the death of his son, Henry swooned and fell to his death upon the stones."

"Elaborate fable," jeered Clarence. "Who's to believe it?"

"It is not necessary that it be believed. But why twist the knife in Margaret's wound?"

Clarence threw back his yellow head and his laughter rang out. It was a cruel sound. "God's blood, Richard, is your liver turned chicken?"

But Richard pulled the door ajar and left. Jumping lightly to the step beneath the window, Clarence watched his brother run down the curving outside stairs to his barge. The jewels on his breast flashed in the torchlight that also burnished the hair of a youth who stood aside for the Duke to board.

"The Neville page," murmured Clarence.

Richard's barge glided away downstream and Clarence knew where he was bound. He was going down to Baynard's to their mother and that Neville girl, sister of his own wife Isabella. He gnawed his lip. That girl! Unless he were nimble, Richard would make her his duchess and himself the master of her father's fortune. He would have to sound out Edward in this matter of Anne's money. By rights, none of Warwick's vast fortune was hers, for it was all forfeit to the Crown, but surely his royal brother would reward him for his volte-face; the return to Edward's fold had been a tricky business for Clarence. What if Warwick had won? He would have shown his son-in-law no mercy. He would be even now like that dead old man who lay so quiet back there on the floor. And Margaret, his Queen? He supposed Edward would hold her for a fat ransom, which her father would surely raise. If Edward got a nice round sum out of King René, he would not go after the Warwick money with such avidity.

He rested his arm on the wide sill of the deep-set window and looked out on the night scene. The river was a gay sight, the torches sending their shimmering light-paths across the water, the laughter and the hurrying about on the mossy steps of houses where Yorkists, not bidden to the royal revels, were merrymaking on their own. Below in the great audience hall Edward and Elizabeth would be mov-

ing about among their guests amid warm-breathing perfume of wine and flowers.

And Edward will be swinging the prettiest woman through the dance, thought Clarence. I'll join them.

Without a backward glance at the still figure by the overturned *prie-dieu*, he left the apartment.

With a downward flourish Edward scratched the last of his signature *REX* at the bottom of a document. He tossed the parchment at his secretary who tenderly sanded the fine-drawn chirography and stamped the equestrian seal of the King into the hot wax. Drooping over the table, Clarence picked it up. It provided that the estates of the late Earl of Devonshire, slain at Tewkesbury, should revert to the Crown.

"Aah!" Edward yawned, then stretched, tipping his chair back on its legs. "That's the last of them, thank the pigs!" Since his glorious return, a week ago, he had signed a good many of these deadly papers and was beginning to weary of the everlasting work. With a bang he brought his chair back and held out his hand to Clarence for a cup of wine. He tossed it down. "I've earned that."

"So that cleans 'em up," smiled Clarence. "What a merry beheading it was in Tewkesbury. Thirteen of them! And nice little bundles like these." He flicked the Devonshire document. "How much do you reckon to get from Devonshire?"

"Not half enough."

Clarence frowned, dropped the parchment. Edward was in his noncommittal mood. There would be no getting anything out of him this afternoon.

Edward raised his head. "Where's my son?"

"Oh, God," groaned Clarence to himself.

A soft scuffling behind the arras, and Elizabeth Woodville came in carrying the baby. Over the small head, her chin was elevated. "Finished, Ned?"

"Aye." Fondly Edward beamed on them, the triumphant blond mother and the baby, beautiful in his sixth month. With a malevolence he could not altogether hide, Clarence glared at them. This brat had put a blight on his chances at the throne. So long as Edward had only girls, it was plain sailing; now things were abruptly changed. Edward was swelling these days, what with his stunning victories at

Barnet and Tewkesbury, and awaiting him at home, this sweet pair.

"Put away those foolish papers and see what we have for you." Elizabeth plumped the baby onto his lap. "I do believe he's cutting a tooth at last." On her own knees, she pulled open the button mouth and with a finger explored the soft red gums. "Here, feel!"

Sullenly Clarence watched Edward poke his finger into the child's mouth, who gurgled and bit down on the soothing pressure.

"Isn't he the best-natured child in the world?" Maternal pride shone in Elizabeth's lovely face. "Mary or Cicely would have screamed if you so much as touched their swellings."

"He has a stout heart already." Edward withdrew his finger and wiped it on his tunic. "I can't feel anything." Earnestly he gazed into his son's face. "But do you not think he has the look of my father?" Both of them examined the child's features. "See those markings over his eyes and the shape of the nose."

Thought of another Yorkist prince to follow Edward on the throne of England was too galling for Clarence. "You aren't going to call that nose aquiline, are you?" The Duke their father had had a high curved nose, handsome as an eagle's beak. With hatred he marked the plump rosiness of the child, who was the picture of health. And this blond witch might have another. Three boys she had presented to her two husbands and could easily have a fourth. From her languid look, she might even now be carrying another child-under-the-girdle.

Meeting her husband's eyes, Elizabeth made a *moue* as gently she caressed the tiny nose. No, it was scarcely aquiline, and anyway, she would as soon this first of her princelings resembled her side of the house. What a triumph that would be! The little Edward, his pink face framed in a lace cap, smiled angelically on them all, displaying his bare gums, then with a chirp of joy snatched at his father's golden chain, his fists tight closed about it.

"Oho!" laughed Edward. "He wants the royal state already." He swung the child up and kissed him. "Wait a bit, young'un, till your father's in his tomb!" The baby crowed and pulled till the taut chain bit into his father's neck. "Here, take him, Bess, he's strangling me."

Elizabeth unbent the tiny fingers and took the child into her arms. "I wanted you to come out into the garden with us." Through the colored window the pleasant afternoon sunlight streamed from the gardens of Westminster. Out there, between the flower beds, their gowns bright among the blossoms, the maidens played on the lawns that stretched to the gleaming river, while from the strolling min-

strels came sweet music. All was gaiety and charm. There was a rich scent of early summer and royal prosperity about the palace. "Come out with us," begged Elizabeth. She sank down on his knees and fastened her red mouth on his.

Edward slid his hands about her soft throat. "Can't do it," he said and pushed her away.

Pouting, she took the baby and swept her silken skirts through the arras. Smiling now, Clarence watched her go.

"Diccon still at Baynard's?" He poured himself some wine but held the cup loosely in his hand, while from the corner of the table he swung his long leg in the scarlet hose.

"Still?" Edward grinned appreciatively. "He's only just arrived there from chasing Fauconberg."

Clarence scowled down into the cup. Just Diccon's luck to get the plummy job of chasing and capturing the Bastard of Fauconberg who, determined to strike one last blow for Warwick, had drawn up some feeble artillery, set fires about London, destroying Southwark Gate and many houses.

"That Diccon of ours is a good lad in a pinch." Edward hooked his fingers into his chain and his fair blond face took on a sly Plantagenet look. Clarence saw this and was resolved not to squirm. "Thanks to him, we've got the Bastard and we'll soon have his parboiled head on the Bridge."

Clarence flushed. "It would not have been so easy to catch him had not Rivers intercepted him on the other side of Kingston."

"Yes," granted Edward. "My brilliant brother-in-law did his share. But it was Diccon who saved the day." Then, noting the flush of discomfiture upon the other: "By cock-and-pie, George, you're jealous! Come, admit now that Diccon did a good job and has earned his reward."

"Reward! Oh, yes, the wealthy marriage. Is the little blond dolly down at Baynard's, too?"

"The Neville girl? I believe they took her there. What of that?"

"Then the marriage will be soon?" Clarence's hands fairly itched for the pleasant feel of the gold piled up in the Neville and Beauchamp coffers.

Edward's grin broadened. "Our Diccon's in luck. The girl is pretty and now has become a veritable Danaë. I suppose he won't spoil her till he gets her in the marriage bed." His full lips moistened. "She's a toothsome little morsel at that, so I suppose we should wed them

without delay. They can hang the bed with gold." He tittered. "Twill sweeten their bliss."

"Spoil her? Not he," sneered Clarence. "When he wants to put a maid upon her back he goes elsewhere. He has some odd ideas about women." With a shaking hand he raised his cup. But his eyes, that by the noontide were usually bleared, were cool and keen. "He fancies himself in love with her, and I vow he'd wed her were she a pauper." He drank and gustily blew out his breath. The vexed question of money was a damned nuisance.

"The good Earl hung all his bells upon one horse," smiled Edward.

"Aye." Clarence winced now. Wedded to the only other Neville girl, he ought by rights to share the Neville wealth, but the father had not so intended. When his son-in-law defected to Edward's side, he was cut out of the will, and Anne stood to inherit the whole of the immense fortune.

"You intend to let the marriage go on?"

"What else?" Edward's brows shot up.

Now Clarence saw his advantage. "A tall order, perhaps, but to your interest, my brother. Once let Diccon get his hands on that money and you may whistle for a penny of it. You know how the people feel about our precious brother of Gloucester. He'll spend that money like water to please them, with his ridiculous notions of manors and schools."

He saw he had gotten through to Edward at last—Edward, who needed money as other men needed air. The damned war with France; and Burgundy and the English people awaiting the long-expected war with Louis; and Edward's own voluptuous tastes, his resolve to make his court the richest and most beautiful in all Europe. Where was the money to come from?

"Send Diccon to Flanders and shut the girl in a nunnery." Clarence's tone was seductive. "Better yet," he bent to Edward's ear, "better yet, appoint me as her guardian. She shall be under the care of Isabella." Full in his brother's face he now looked, his clear blue eyes compelling the other's gaze. He saw the yielding in Edward's face. It was coming. Did Edward's hand twitch to take up his seal?

A burst of laughter came on a cloud of sweet afternoon air. Edward shook his head quickly, and with it went the spell of Clarence. "So, I'm to seize the property, stop the marriage, hand the girl over to you, and plaster Diccon's smarts with gold, is that it?"

"Beshrew me, but you take your time about driving your hogs to market." Clarence did not feel the relief he expressed. Edward always asked irritating questions to which he already knew the answers when he intended to be difficult.

"Well, I shan't do it. I'm King of England, George, and such things are not done."

In amazed disgust, Clarence stared. "Oh, come off it, Edward. Kings have long arms, as well you know. And in any case, the money is forfeit to the Crown; breaking the will is only the long way round. The girl is attainted, like her mother, and you can keep them both shut up as long as you like." Now he held his breath as he thought he saw Edward hesitate.

But all Edward said was, "'Tis no use. Diccon must have his reward."

Clarence's eyes went ugly. "Then you'll do nothing?"

"Oh, I'll make you guardian of the girl, but as to the other—what can I do?" Shrugging, he got to his feet. "And now, my brother, I must leave you." Calling to his squires, he strode from the room.

With an oath Clarence hurled the cup against the wall. Within its sheathing of filagree, the delicate Venetian glass shattered in a ruby spray, and the golden shell rolled onto the floor. He glanced in the mirror and with both hands smoothed his golden hair. Then he went to find Isabella.

He found his Duchess among her women, all busily embroidering. Again pregnant, Isabella had ordered an entire new layette for her child, for she determined to use nothing that might remind her of that other sad affair. Now that she and Clarence were climbing high on fortune's wheel, she meant to prepare a rich reception for her baby. One look at her husband's face warned her of his mood and she signed to her ladies, who folded their silks, rose and departed. Isabella went on embroidering the tiny cambric shirt with scarlet.

Clarence knelt on the window seat and gazed moodily out on the gay scene in the gardens, his hand clenched on a fold of silken curtain. "I've just been with Edward."

"Oh?" Isabella drew her thread through a loop and went on sewing. She felt languidly content, not sick and sore as with the other child.

"He's nursing some stupid idea of gratitude to Diccon. He'll not move."

She dropped her sewing into her lap. Then her child would have

nothing. All the enormous weight of her father's wealth to go to the adorning and strengthening of another—Anne—and the children she would bear to that arrogant Richard. She was speechless.

"Have you nothing to say?" George was peevish, the start of a throbbing in his temples beginning to bother him.

"I must think." Isabella put her slender hand to her head. "Anne is at Baynard's, they tell me."

"With him." As if they were thread, Clarence bit off the words. "He's just returned from Sandwich." Again the affair of Fauconberg galled him. Edward would be more than generous to Richard—with the Warwick money. And he owed him something in the matter of the dead Henry of Lancaster, so neatly managed by Richard. He sighed.

Isabella regarded him, handsome and tall in his gold-colored tunic. Liar, drunkard, weakling that he was, she hated herself for finding him attractive. She knew what he was, that he would stop at nothing. Anne was in danger, and a throb of compunction disturbed her. After all, it was her only sister, and in her husband's blue eyes, sliding around so uneasily to hers, she could see the glint of murder. She picked up her sewing and hid her own eyes.

She would have to devise some way of keeping Anne safely out of Clarence's way till she could be secretly dispatched out of the country to someone they could trust. "Do you wish me to go to Baynard's?" She spoke calmly, her nerves taut, awaiting his answer.

"To do what?" Instantly he was on the alert. "You'll never talk them out of the marriage."

"I had not thought to do that."

"Then, what?"

"We might take Anne away."

"That's it! 'Twas what I suggested to Ned, but may my bones rot if he didn't pull the pious mouth. It wouldn't surprise me if he hadn't some plan of his own to seize the money for himself and those precious Woodvilles."

"Careful." Isabella looked around, her penciled brows contracted. It was not as if they were in their own London palace.

"Tsha! I live too near the wood to fear the owl." He sat down on the window seat. "The girl is to be given into our custody and I propose we shut her into a nunnery."

Pityingly she smiled now. Men were so obvious. This called for the cunning of a woman. "We cannot put her where Richard can find her. You know what he is when he's crossed. He'd turn out every nun-

nery in England if he thought we were hiding her in one of them. Then when he'd found her, he'd get around Edward, there would be a chapel wedding, and what of us?"

He stared at her respectfully; she was subtle and clever. And he thought how she had advised him so that in the nick of time he had dragged away from his alliance with her father against his brother; only a hairbreadth of luck had saved his head, and herself, who might at this moment be lying attainted like her own mother. "You are right, *ma belle*."

"We'd better send Anne to Flanders. Margaret will take care of her. She'd do anything for you." It was true. George was the favorite brother of Margaret of Burgundy. Isabelle stabbed her needle through a scarlet flower. "Let me handle Anne. I'll get her away, then we can work on Edward." They would lard the pleasure-loving Edward with flattery, arrange some merry games, devise rich feasts, invite beautiful new women to the court; they might even bring themselves to be polite to that hateful Jane Shore. They would let the King see they bore his brilliant mistress no grudge.

Within her the child stirred and she hardened her heart against any pity for Anne. Thus far her own marriage had yielded little other than embarrassment and shame; unless she could produce living healthy boys with a fortune to grace them, her life would count for nothing. She did not intend to finish like her mother, stripped of position and money, lying attainted in sanctuary; nor even like the great Duchess of York, who had never worn the crown, who wore instead her sad widow's weeds. She and Clarence had nearly reached the top, and if she were not very careful, would fall more swiftly yet. It was not fair that Anne should have all the money.

"We must move fast." Clarence was drinking now, his speech thickening. "What shall we do?"

"Leave all to me. One of Anne's servants is false to her, and with help from that one, we can get her to the coast before either Edward or Richard is aware. By the time the cry has died down, she'll be safe with Margaret in Flanders." And once in Flanders Isabella resolved that Anne should speedily be wed to some obscure nobleman in Burgundy's court.

"Diccon will raise an awful stink," giggled Clarence, his handsome mouth glistening with wine.

"If we are to enjoy the fire, we must put up with the blaze." Isabella spoke without humor. Her brain was whirling with a plan for snatch-

ing Anne out of her husband's clutches, for she knew his temper. No accident, either on the way to the coast or aboard the vessel, should befall her only sister; she would not have that on her conscience.

"I can abide the whiff of smoke from a golden blaze." And with that bit of drunken wisdom, Clarence settled down with his wine to the serious business of the day.

16. Anne

THE Countess of Warwick craved permission to leave Baynard's Castle and the custody of the Lady Cicely, Duchess of York, to retreat into sanctuary at the Abbey of Beaulieu. This Edward permitted. "Why not?" In the face of Clarence's frown, he was nonchalant. "As good there as anywhere and when I want her I'll know where to find her." As a matter of fact, he intended doing exactly nothing with the widow of his late adversary. He had more urgent business touching the ransom of Margaret of Anjou.

The Countess took Anne's face between her hands and searched it lovingly. "I hate leaving you," she sighed. "But you're quite safe here. The Lady Cicely will watch over you till—" Delicately she paused and Anne flushed.

"Yes." Neither spoke of the impending marriage. If the Countess were happy that her youngest daughter was to get the dearest wish of her heart, she kept it to herself. Her own heart was too heavy with sorrows.

"I suppose, as soon as your dowry is fixed, you'll be wed." Anne nodded. "I do hope there will not be long delays. Sometimes these things take months." The Countess was impersonal, almost as if discussing the problems of a distant relation.

"Delay?" Anne's eyes widened. Richard had come to her briefly the other evening while Edward was making merry in the Tower. "Diccon spoke of an immediate wedding. What delays could there be?"

"Who knows?" The Countess arranged her black veil. "George is not going to let all that money slide through his hands, and I know your father left him nothing—nothing at all." She hesitated. "All is to go to you, Anne."

Anne's color deepened. Her mother, once one of the richest women in the realm, was now practically penniless. In order to take money to the Abbey she had actually sold her jewels. Secretly Anne re-

solved to arrange a grant for her mother, enough to keep her properly for the rest of her days. But here, and she too sighed, she had first to get her hands on the money and there were so many who stretched out for it; Edward for one, not to mention Clarence. And Richard, too, wanted money for his cherished schemes. Richard! Ah!

"*Ma mère*"—hesitantly she approached the subject, the tormenting fear that since Tewkesbury had haunted her—"do you think Richard had a hand in killing Edouard—do you?"

The Lady Anna took her daughter's hands. "You must not allow yourself to think on these matters, Anne. There is nothing you can do, in any case. In battle"—she stopped, and her face, so clear and patrician, clouded over—"in battle, men are not themselves. Some, by nature gentleness itself, become beasts in the field." The Countess knew Richard to be no exception to this, why should he be? She also knew the truth about Henry's death in the Tower. Richard had been there. But that too had been kept from Anne.

Anne was brooding. Her mother was telling her that like her own father, Richard, the man she loved, into whose keeping she had given her heart, was savage and uncontrolled when the battle lust was on him. It was a bitter way of learning that men were not all of a piece. Perhaps as she came to know him better, Richard would—she laid her hand on her breast. "Whatever the truth, it cannot touch me here." Her timidity was gone. No matter what Richard became—she would always love him. "As with you, my mother."

They kissed and parted.

On the following evening, Richard came to her and in a little high tower room they sat down to chess. The bells from St. Paul's were ringing vespers. "I must descend to wish the Lady Cicely good night," said Anne.

Chin on hand, Richard considered his next move.

"When do you think Gervase will arrive? The weather is good and if they left two days ago, they should be here soon." And without thinking, she moved her pawn; Richard's jeweled hand immediately swept it away.

"Patience, *ma mie*." Scowling he watched her next move. And as her hand touched her knight: "Oh, for the love of the saints, Nan, don't do that. Give me some chase for my money." Anne moved her queen. Grinning now, Richard flanked the little ivory lady.

"I'm off my game, today, Richard," sighed Anne. "Let's stop."

"Giving up, eh?" Snatching a handful of sugared raisins, he tossed

them into his mouth and, munching, leaned back and regarded her. She was prettier than ever now those circles had vanished from beneath her eyes and color bloomed in her cheeks, and he felt himself softening as always when he really looked at her with nothing else on his mind. "How does it feel to be free and safe?"

"Unbelievable." The single word held all her wonder. "But am I free, Diccon?"

"And who is to say you nay?" He watched the hair at her temple stir in the evening breeze from the open window.

"The King."

"Edward?" Richard licked his sticky fingers, wiped them, balled the silken kerchief and flung it across the room. "God's blood, why Edward?"

"Has he or has he not signed the marriage contract?" she challenged. "It's the money—you know that." It was always the money, if it came to that. The stops and the checks were all dictated by the gold or the lack of it. And some dark game was afoot now.

"Aye, the money. Never fear, you'll get it. And then you'll be rich, richer than Sister Margaret even, and God knows she and Burgundy have half the wealth of Europe in their coffers. So what think you of that?"

"I care nothing for it. I just want you."

"Talk! The rich care nothing for money so long as they haven't to do without it."

Anne's color deepened. "If the business of my inheritance is going to delay our marriage, I would then we were penniless."

"Well, by the eleven thousand virgins, I don't." Richard took more raisins. "I want money up to the elbows." Noisily he munched and spat out a tiny seed. In this new light Anne considered him. Always indifferent to finances, Richard had grown up in shabbiest clothes, purse flat, unconcerned over bills, wages, and the like. "We'll need money for our manors and castles." He pursued the subject. "I mean to improve the Yorkshire lands, to restore Middleham, a hundred other things." In cunning imitation of Louis, pottering among his treasurers and coin changers, he screwed up his face. "And that is where you come in, *hein?*" He stuck out his tongue and waggled a forefinger.

"Oh, don't!" Anne laughed in spite of herself. "I hate to think you're going to be like all the rest of them."

"Not quite, *ma mie.*" Suddenly he stopped his joking.

Just the same, she thought, Richard had become money-conscious, the change bringing about a foreign dandyism in him. His hands now flashed with jewels he had always refused to wear, declaring they hampered his fingers, chafed his sword hand, that the swinging chains caught on his harness. Always she thought he had no need of jewels to proclaim his nobility; even in the stained old doublet and frayed hose he had a royal grace. But now his dress was all splendor, the velvet and brocade hanging modishly on his spare frame, his shoes of the latest exaggerated cut, the soft skins tinted to odd hues of scarlet and puce. His silken legs made a slishing sound as he crossed them and his trailing sleeves swept the chessmen to the floor when he forgot fastidiously to lift them with a free hand.

Now he was fiddling with the chessmen. "Do you wish to be married here or in Middleham?"

"Oh, at Middleham. I hate the Abbey." Never had she outgrown her dislike of the great glowering pile stuffed with its air of pomp and consequence, all public to the world. It was the place of crownings and of royal weddings—a place where there was no love, only the glory and fearsome weight of state puppetry. Middleham held all that was dear of the past, in the chapel, or even in the great sunlit hall where once she had stood, steeled before her father. Thought of Gorick crossed her mind, the man whose work of that terrible night had brought his lord the Earl to his downfall. She shook from her mind the stinging memory of those dark days. It was time for her to seek the Duchess.

The Lady Cicely's downstairs world was not large but it was, as always, crowded with activity. About her were a dozen women, employed beneath her benign direction. A group of seamstresses with the high cheekbones and strong color of the Flemish were working a heavy piece of raw sendal into a hanging, their nimble fingers busy among embroidery of blossoms and tiny animals. In their strongly accented tongue they argued the merits of two shades of scarlet. As Anne entered, the Duchess looked up. "Ah, Nan, there you are!"

Anne approached her future mother-in-law. Over her gown, tied fishwife style, the Lady Cicely wore a canvas apron and her sleeves were tucked into arm bags. Into wooden bowls held by her pages she was ladling soft food from the great pot in the crook of her arm into which she dipped with a long-handled spoon. She spooned the mass of giblets and broken meats and bread which a cook pressed

with her hand into compact masses, sprinkling the whole liberally with red pepper.

"There!" Briskly the Duchess spoke. "Those for the six huts, and mind they return the bowls. And keep the liquors separate." She turned to Anne. "I cannot abide the slops that go from our tables to God's poor. They may not eat dainty but, by the Lord, they shall have better stomachs for it in this fashion." She stripped off her sleeve bags and dropped them into the lap of a girl who with a long tapestry needle poked into a golden cage, gently scratched an ecstatic green bird. "Here, Gillian. You shall dole out the slops for the rest of the week. I trust you observed me."

"Madam," pouted the girl. "I cannot endure the smell."

The Duchess chucked her under the chin. "Obey me, saucy one."

Anne marveled at this erect woman in her black dress. How extraordinary she was! Margaret of Anjou was imposing in her majestic beauty, her own mother was a great lady, but the Duchess Cicely, the Rose of Raby, widow of Richard of York and mother of his immense family, was the most impressive woman in all the world. Of the Duchess's family Gifa was wont to say, "Thirteen times she has brought forth upon the groaning stool, and the runt of the litter came last." Gifa had never liked Richard.

Watching her now as she moved among her women in queenly grace, Anne knew that never could this lady have borne her children like others. She would not swell and bloat like them, to hang at last above the midwife's chair weeping, till the ripe womb burst and the fruit came forth. She would carry her babes carefully, proudly, through the months of waiting, never blenching, till it came time to lie prone on her bed, marble face contracted, while they took from her the issue of the House of York. Anne, Henry, Edward, Edmund, Elizabeth, Margaret, William, John, George, Thomas and at last Richard, the small wrinkled baby with the yellow skin and jetty hair. Two others had died a-borning. Anne thought of the screaming nightmare of Isabella's confinement aboard the carrack and looked earnestly at the Duchess. She must contrive to probe this secret of composure, of courtesy under pain. Of the eleven babies that had survived birth, but five remained alive, three boys and two girls. But the Lady Cicely had endured in silence the pain of bearing and of losing. Deep as that wound was, her other grief had been greater than the losses of her children.

Now she was laving her hands in a silver bowl held for her by her

favorite waiting-woman, Lizel, and she turned quite feminine and bent her tall head to the mirror to put back her wimple. Sighing, she passed her fine hands, Richard's hands, over her body, smoothing the severe black lines of her robes, swinging her jeweled rosary on her hip. She sank into a chair, lifting her long feet automatically for the hassock slipped beneath them by Lizel.

"Come, *petite*." She smiled at Anne, who knelt and put the older woman's hand against her cheek. "You'll be the most adorable of my little duchesses. When is it to be? Have they told you?" She put aside a curl on Anne's forehead.

"Soon, I would say." Anne shook her head. "But I would I knew when my people will come to me and if they will reach me in time."

"Ah." The Duchess drank some wine, leaned back and closed her eyes. "The minstrel and the page."

"And my waiting-maid."

"Loyalty is a fine thing," she mused. "It's Richard's blazon, you know. *Loyauté me lie*." She sighed. "You must see to it that he takes care. Sometimes I think he sticks too close to Edward."

"What would you have him do, madam?" Anne really did not expect an answer.

"I know, I know. But you should understand this, Anne. You have loyalty in your heart's core, too, and nearly to your undoing. I know your decision to turn your back on happiness after your father's death and what it would have cost you. That you were not called upon to carry out your resolve makes it none the less brave—and foolhardy. Suppose you had married Edouard and he had been restored. With your father gone, what could Margaret and Somerset do to hold the throne? Edward is a lion in the fight."

"But there is always Louis," reminded Anne.

"Louis! Louis! All my life I've had that bogey thrust before me. Louis stays at home and his webs are only silk for easy tearing."

Anne thought of the Lady Cicely's husband, dead at Wakefield, his head in its paper crown exposed on Micklegate Bar. Was Louis then the harmless spider in that, for all he was far away in Paris? But she would not reopen *that* wound. "I suppose you are right." She sighed. "I could have been mortally attainted—but I *am* attainted now. You forget I am technically Edward's prisoner."

The Duchess smiled fondly. "Fettered with gold and wardered by your own true love. *Ma mie*, the attaint will be cleansed in the marriage bed." She marked the warm rush of color to Anne's face. "Aye

me, it puts me in mind of my own virgin days. Richard won't be the man in bed his father was." She marked Anne's slimness. "You'll bear but sparsely, the two of you. Get it over soon and grow up with your children. 'Tis what I did. Once every year as my man came back to me, a new baby for him to dandle each time he came, and a new one under the girdle when he left me. And each one was different!" She sank her chin on her hand.

"What a wonderful life you led, madam. If only I could do half so well. But I do not bear pain gracefully. I fret and complain."

The Duchess pushed back Anne's face and looked down into it. "One learns, Anne. I had to, and it was hard. But I learned to submit to pain because it is inevitable in this our life; I learned to bow to bereavement because in this day of wars and violence it comes and it is irreparable; and I shall suffer my death because it is my destiny."

Again she grew silent. Anne knew that one of the bitter drops in her cup of sorrows had been the matter of George of Clarence, the weakling and the favorite, the graceless one who would never rise to greatness or indeed to anything at all, but who would claim the largest share of the mother's aching love. She stroked the hand in the black lap.

"Well." The Duchess roused from her reverie. "You asked for your people. I thought Richard knew they were nearing London even now; he asked me to have them here for the wedding. I suppose you can't be married without their benison."

"Oh, no!" Anne was earnest. "Not after what has passed; they must be with me." Strange to feel this compulsion to have them at her side, when perhaps her own mother would not be there to bless her.

"Loyalty." The Duchess said it again, and subtly Anne felt she had a reservation, a dislike of the thought. It must be that the Duchess had seen too much misery as the result of loyalty, blind or otherwise. But anything else was unthinkable. Lady Cicely was now practical. "Now, let me see. They had but to come up from Hampshire. They ought to be here by now. Lizel," to the waiting-woman, who was stirring a posset in a silver cup, "do you go below and inquire after the Lady Anne's servants. If anyone has come by the southern road, bring him to me whether he has news or not."

But it was Richard who brought the glad word. "They're here!" Anne sprang up, evading the restraining hand of the Duchess. "Let her go, Mother. She'll have naught to do with us now."

"Her young heart," chided the Duchess, but Richard's smile, for

once, was indulgent. Breathless at the door, Anne turned back. This could be one of Diccon's tricks; he was still a Plantagenet and all three of these princes knew how to torment their women. "You do not play with me?"

Richard thrust out his lip. "Go! Would I cheat you of this?"

She skimmed through the door.

He wheeled around on his mother. "When, in the name of the devil, is Edward going to sign those papers?"

"Patience." It was what *he* had said to Anne in the matter of her people, and now the mother said it to him. "Does it not seem hard to you that George is completely cut off in what is no more than his just due?"

"Are you insane, *ma mère*?" snapped Richard. "You know George forfeited all rights when he foully betrayed Edward, and Edward is not too big a fool to see this. If he plans to overlook what George has done, then I swear to God I wish I had never thrown in my lot with him."

"Alas for George," murmured the mother.

"I pity him." Richard fidgeted now. "He's water-weak and, what is more, he is unlucky in his judgments, and God knows a man can hardly be more ill-favored than that."

"But consider the provocation," pleaded the Duchess.

Richard shrugged. "An excuse, think you?"

"To know the cause drains away the censure," she reminded him. "He was played upon by so many urges—so many people. Have you forgotten his wife? She is her father's own child. It is your fortune that Anne is not like that."

"Little do you know." He laughed shortly and dropped onto the stool at her side. "Anne is rock-strong. Consider, and you'll agree there's not a Neville to surpass her in that. I respect it in her even though I know it's not the fashion to rejoice in a strong-minded wife."

"Behind the great men there are always the women." Smiling now, the Duchess crinkled her eyes in amusement. "And you, my youngest"—she smoothed the polished black hair—"well, *ma mie*, do you want me to go to Edward for you and Anne?"

"Would you, Mother?" He held her hand against his breast. Mother and son exchanged a look of pure love. He knew what it would cost her to counsel her son against the favorite, but he also knew her stern sense of justice would prevail over her feelings, and

it was not just that he and Anne should be kept from their reward. "Would you?"

She leaned to him and kissed him between the brows. "We'll see," she promised. It was what she always said to them when they asked her to resolve their difficulties. And when the Duchess said it, it was usually as good as done.

"Dear, dearest Clo!" Anne's eyes widened. "Why, Clo, you are lovely!" Delighted, she held the French girl off at arm's length. Clotilde was glowing with a new beauty, her gray eyes soft, her olive skin like cream. She had, besides, a new gown, cut to her swelling figure. In the deep cherry velvet she looked like a rich summer flower.

"My lady—*ma chérie*." Clo pressed her flushing cheek to Anne's.

Somehow the chessmen had got knocked over and Alain was down on his knees, and now he looked up from his gathering, tossed his swinging hair and grinned at her. Then, more sedately, he rose, bent the knee. "My lady." He kissed her hand. He was quite the man now, his slim height set off by his green suit, his hair neatly clipped, his features firm.

Anne was amazed. "Let me look at you!" Both of them had grown up in these few weeks of their separation. "Gervase?" She turned to look for her minstrel.

"Did you not see him? He reports below to the Duchess."

"Ah, I ran up so fast by the back way, I must have missed him. I saw no one." She drew them to the window seat. "Now, tell me everything. I die with wondering."

"First"—it was Richard at the door—"we shall crave your grace for a sweet bride and groom."

"Bride and groom!"

"Aye. Your page has tied a knot with his tongue that he cannot undo with his teeth."

Together they stood, the new husband and wife, hands joined, eyes brimming with rapture. Anne's small red mouth stayed open. "Wedded!" She could not grasp it.

"Aye. Wedded and bedded." Richard relished the discomfiture of the blushing couple. Alain grinned, shifted his weight, and Clotilde looked down. The Duke Richard's pleasantries embarrassed her.

"When?" Anne still could not believe it.

"Just after you left Beaulieu, my lady. The lord abbot joined us. I was with my lord at Tewkesbury," Alain informed her.

Anne lifted the shy hand of her French waiting-maid on which was the ring of troth, a simple golden band with one pearl deeply imbedded. "A married woman," she marveled. "And no one told me."

Now Clotilde looked distressed. "My lady, we meant no harm. It was to be our surprise."

From her throat Anne took her heavy chain, a rich jewel hung with rubies. "A wedding gift," she said and she and Alain hooked it about the bride's neck.

"If it's a matter of presents"—Richard unslung his own chain and flung it at Alain—"here, lad, deck yourself to match your wife."

"But, my lord." Alain dangled the chain from his hands. "Already you have done much for us."

"Nonsense. I needed a new squire and you needed a ring to wed your bride."

"A squire, then!" Anne cried.

"Aye. That, too, was to be a surprise. At Tewkesbury I knew it would be touch and go and I thought it a pity for him to have his throat cut before his wedding night. So I wedded him to the girl and made him my squire." Richard frowned at the memory of Milwater and Parr, who were to have trained Alain.

"Could you not have told me this thing?" Anne asked.

"It seemed unimportant." Richard was unconcerned. "They wished to make it secret. Put the chain on, man." And silently Anne came to help Clotilde as they drew the chain over Alain's head and pinned the shoulder clasps. Was there perhaps in Richard's brain a tiny maggot of jealousy against her three servants? She dismissed the thought as unworthy and fell to admiring Richard's new squire. His green tunic was embroidered with sprays of yellow broom, the Plantaganet badge; with his smart attire he had taken on a new dignity that was not entirely due to his married state. But Anne felt a stab of disappointment. Not thus had she planned the wedding of her two favorites.

"A toast to the wedded pair." Richard went to the table. "Take a look in the cupboard there, Alain, we need more cups." But the cupboard was bare, so they filled the only cup they had, the bride kissed its edge, and it was passed around the little circle.

Into this pretty scene walked the Duchess Isabella and two of her waiting-women, Lady Blaise and another. She put back the hood of

her scarlet cloak and loosened the gauze scarf about her throat. Her quick glance took in the group, Duke Richard, her sister Anne, and the servants. On them she wasted not a look.

"Nan!" She swept forward to take Anne's hand, bent her head, and they kissed. "My lord Duke." She bowed. "You drink to something?"

"To the wedded happiness of this pair." It was Richard who replied.

"Alain and Clotilde—they are married," said Anne. She wondered why Isabella was here.

"Indeed," Isabella gave cold reply. She turned to Anne, seated between her favorites, her yellow hair full of the filtering sunlight from the tall window. Her arm was thrust through that of Alain and she held Clotilde by the hand. Intolerable impatience gripped Isabella. "I wish to see you, Anne. It is important."

"Too important for them?" Anne looked around them at her sister. Secrets—she had had enough of those.

"Take me to your chamber." Isabella cut in. "My business cannot wait." Followed by her two women she went to the door.

"Wait for me," said Anne to the others. Down the corridor she took Isabella to her own sleeping chamber. Once inside and alone, Isabella seemed to throw off her tension. She smiled at her sister.

"What is it?" For some reason, Anne felt uneasy.

"We haven't much time. I have a boat waiting. It's our mother. She's very ill. We go to Beaulieu."

"And this is what you could not tell me before the others?"

"It is the King's order."

"We go *now*?"

"Instantly. We dare not wait."

"How can I go?"

Isabella touched a slender hand to the pouch at her girdle. "I have the order here. You are to go in secret." She pushed open the window, looked quickly out and drew in her head. "Come!"

"Does Richard know?" Anne did not move.

"Of course not." Isabella opened a press. "Is there a cloak here?"

"But I must tell him I am going."

"You'll be back in a day or two." She huddled the cloak about Anne, drew the hood closely about her head. Then she took the unresisting arm and drew her sister to the door. Now Anne knew deadly fear. They were out in the corridor and she turned at once to go back to the tower room. "No!" cried Isabella.

But Anne was running lightly down the hall. Something was wrong. She must get to Richard!

"Get her!" cried Isabella. And the three women closed about Anne, clutched her and dragged her back.

"Diccon!" Her scream was instantly muffled as a suede glove was forced into her mouth. What malignant fate had emptied their little corridor of servants? Or had Isabella's gold bought their absence? The four women scuttled down the back stairs, their flight covered by the deepening shadows of night, and Anne felt under her slippers the mossy steps down which she slithered and would have fallen had not her captors held her fast. Half blinded by the hand on her face, she felt rather than saw the barge that awaited them, felt it tip and sway under her weight as she was forced aboard and pushed down on the thwart. Dizzy and trembling, she wrenched free and tore the smothering hand from her face.

There was a fifth woman in the barge—one who must have been awaiting them. As she put back her own hood, she revealed to Anne the face of her favorite waiting-maid, Emilie.

17. The Lost Bride

AT ONE end of a long table, Richard leaned on his knuckles and regarded his brother George of Clarence who sat on the far corner of the table in his favorite attitude, long leg swinging, an empty cup twisting in his hand. Irritation turning to fury held Richard, who for some time now had vainly tried to pry from Clarence some word of Anne. Again he cursed himself that after Anne had left them to go with her sister, he carelessly departed from Baynard's, not to return till late on the following day. Twenty-four hours lost! And more than that, for no one thought to miss Anne for several days, since it was given out that she had, under permit from Edward, gone to her mother.

Not yet had he applied to Edward. It would be too humiliating to carry his tale of a lost bride, snatched from his very sight; Edward would only clap him on his sore shoulder, jibe at him and roar with laughter. No, he must first apply the pump to Clarence who, after all, would be the one to tell him anything. Intolerable!

"I'll give you a cat's wink to tell me where she is." He set his jaw.

With the old teasing smile, Clarence countered. "For the last time, I tell you I do not know." And for once he spoke truth. "She went with Isabella."

"I know that much." Richard's black eyes glittered.

George was thoroughly enjoying himself. This baiting of Richard was egg-and-pie to him and he wondered how much longer he might draw it out. Richard had a habit of suddenly losing his temper and lashing out. "Has it not occurred to you, my brilliant brother, that the Lady Anne might have gone to see her mother?"

Richard made no reply. He wasn't going to admit to sending Lovell posthaste across the river to Beaulieu, only to have his friend return empty-handed. No word!

Clarence sniggered and poured wine. "The missing bride! Fit subject for a song, should you say? We must have our minstrels compose

a ditty. Home the conquering hero comes, summons his bride—turns his back”—he snapped his fingers—“she is gone!”

Stung beyond endurance, Richard knocked the cup spinning across the room and seized Clarence by his tunic, the sharp edges of the filagree chain tearing his fingers. “You know, you hellhound!” His fierce eyes burned into the insolent blue stare. “Now, tell me!”

Clarence wrenched loose, his fine chain awry, his tunic crushed and stained with a smear of Richard’s blood. “All right,” he said sulkily, the joke suddenly stale, “and much good may it do you. She’s gone to Flanders.”

“Flanders!” Richard reeled back. “By whose orders?”

“Whose—Edward’s, of course. Who leaves England without the King’s patent?”

Richard snicked his dagger in and out of the sheath, a nervous habit he had acquired since Barnet. “But why?”

“How should I know?” Clarence’s eyes were cold now. “Perhaps the King’s Grace thought the girl needed a sea voyage to set her up. And there is no doubt he could use her money. I fancy he wants to marry her off to a Flamand.”

“Marry her!” Richard was aghast at suggestion of Edward’s treachery. Then common sense prevailed. “And how, pray, does one buy a bridegroom without money?”

“You think not? The girl has beauty and there are those besotted enough to buy that. Charles can use the girl as a likely pawn for bargaining.” Then as he saw Richard’s fury rising: “Why should you care? England’s a-dust with girls ripe enough for begetting your boys. There’ll be plenty of time for you to try setting a son upon the golden throne.”

“What do you mean?” Richard’s anxiety for Anne was swallowed up in this maddest of all Clarence’s mad ideas.

“I mean”—Clarence was now tipsy and did not trouble to lower his voice—“I mean we shall all have a chance at the stars and the moon—and the sun. The Woodville brat will never be King.”

Richard’s lips went numb. What besotted idiocy was this? Even here at Cold Harbor, in his own house, the Duke of Clarence could be betrayed by a crouching servant. Then he rallied. “Pooh, you’re drunk.”

“Not—quite—yet.” The words came carefully. “And if I am a little liquor-ish, dear brother, did you never hear the adage”—he pointed a wavering finger—“*in vino veritas*?”

"Bah!" Richard turned aside. "Little Ned will be king; he's a sturdy baby and he'll live to grow up." He made for the door.

"Don't be too sure!" Clarence wavered after him, leaned a heavy hand on his shoulder. A smirk twisted his wet lips. "Wouldn't you like to know my li'l secret—wouldn't you?" Then he lurched aside, screaming and hiccuping with laughter.

Disgustedly Richard left. He would seek out Isabella and learn the truth of why Anne had gone to Flanders. At her chamber door the way was barred. "My lady is combing her hair. You cannot enter." The ten-year-old voice was shrill.

"One side, popinjay." Not ungently Richard took the child by the shoulders, ignoring the boy's sputterings as he strode in on his sister-in-law. In a low-backed chair, her white hands folded on her swelling stomach, Isabella sat to have the flowing light-brown curtain of her hair combed out. She raised delicate brows. Never had she grown used to Richard's impetuosity. "What brings you, my lord?"

"You know. Where is Anne?"

"Do compose yourself. Sit down." She signed and a lady offered cake and wine. He ignored them and remained standing.

"It's no use, my lady. I am going to the King. That is, unless you can tell me what I want to know."

"You have seen my lord?"

"He put me off with some cock-and-bull tale of Flanders." He felt his anger rising against his sister-in-law who was going to be as difficult as her husband.

Isabella's heart jumped. Flanders! George had swallowed the bait; now to do the same to Richard. Deliberately she picked up a long-handled mirror and examined a tiny red spot on her chin. "It's quite true."

Richard fumed. Either they were sticking together in the lie or else it was true indeed, and at this moment Anne, poor lass, was tossing about on La Manche. "Why Flanders?"

"The King's Grace does not wish a marriage for Anne till the vexed question of money is settled. She has gone to Margaret."

"Margaret! Bones of God!" He would have to leave England to fetch her back and quickly, before George and Isabella wove their web around Edward.

Isabella watched him take his leave, the mirror in her hand. She then touched her chin with a tiny brush tipped with white salve. Deep within her coiled the secret of Anne, hidden away in Lambeth Palace,

guarded well by those she had paid. What luck that Anne had a false maid; those ridiculous French attendants she kept about her were steel-true, and to corrupt them would have been impossible. But this little girl from the London slums had been easy, caught through love of the finery George's gold had provided. But now she had Anne in her keeping she must keep both brothers from finding it out. It was a grim jest, this sending Richard off on a mad goose chase; now she must contrive to move Anne about till his return, since George had spilled the one piece of information she wished kept secret till Anne actually was abroad. Had she paid her servants well enough to keep that secret for her?

Richard did not wait. A brief interview satisfied him that Edward believed Anne to have actually been sent out of the country and from his amused brother Richard wrung permission to fetch her home. Taking Lovell and Percy, with Alain to wait upon his body, he rushed off to Flanders. Within eight days they were approaching the notched roofs of Bruges, the houses all hung with flags and flowers. They found the Duke and Duchess of Burgundy preparing to celebrate the Feast of St. Barnabas, due on the first of June.

Margaret of Burgundy was delighted to see him, if only to learn news of her favorite, Clarence. But Richard was not disposed to discuss his graceless brother. Together he and his sister sat in the Duchess's beautiful palace apartment, the casements open to the summer breeze whipping in off the sea.

"I know now I was tricked," said Richard morosely as he stared out at the clustered ships. "What I don't understand is why Edward let me come all this way to be hoaxed."

"Perhaps Edward did not know it himself." Margaret's comfortable voice fell soothingly on the warm air. She looked up from her tapestry frame, the needle poised in her fingers, and smiled lovingly at him. She really *was* glad to see him, and no doubt this little snarl about Anne would come right in time. Margaret had not changed much from the girl who sat at the Tournament of the Golden Fleece and watched her bridegroom jousting in those shabby lists. Her mousy hair, tinted to a golden color that suited her, was wound by some clever tirewoman in two great coils twisted with pearls at the back of her head. Her body, unravaged by childbirth, was sleeker with the two years of rich food and security. Apparently Margaret was not troubled that up

to now she had given her husband no children and the vast wealth of Burgundy would possibly revert to the French crown. But that would be years hence, and meanwhile she was very comfortable and happy as she was.

"I think Edward, too, was hoaxed," she repeated.

Richard turned. "I could wring George to death. *And where is Anne?* If Edward doesn't know, then where in God's name is she?"

"In a nunnery, I should imagine."

"A nunnery! They'd never dare."

"Why not? Come now, Isabella is her father's own child. I fancy this is all her idea."

"I don't know. George said a queer thing to me the other day." He looked around at the rich room, the women sitting at their embroidery and gossip. "Send them away." And when they were alone, he bent to her ear. "Margaret, you know George through and through, you've always loved him best. Do you think he has a maggot in his brain?"

"George mad? Oh, no!" Her wholesome laugh rang out. "What makes you say that, Diccon?"

"He was babbling to me about Edward's boy never getting to the throne. You don't think he plans—" Even he could not say it.

Margaret looked up, her candid eyes bare of guile. Her mind did not take in the word that hung invisibly in the air above them. Doting as she did upon Clarence, she could not conceive he would wish any harm to his brother's baby prince. "He must have been in his cups." Here she sighed. "They tell me he drinks a good deal."

"Constantly. As if he were running from something." Despising his brother as he did, Richard felt for that poor vessel a dint of pity.

"Ah, yes. George has had his disappointments. I do hope this new baby will be another boy."

"I must return immediately." Richard forgot his fears of George. He had to find Anne.

"Oh, no!" Margaret protested. "You've only just come. You must stay with us at least a few weeks."

"Impossible." Richard fidgeted about the chamber, his connoisseur's eye taking in the beauty of the glorious tapestries glowing like paintings on the walls.

Nibbling a cherry, Margaret leaned back. Her brother was a personable young man, even if he did carry that one shoulder a bit high, poor boy. "I see you favor that shoulder of yours," she observed as

absently he rubbed it. "We've a good surgeon who might look at it for you."

"Thanks, no." Richard was sardonic. "I had your good surgeons when it was hurt. Small good they did me then."

"Poor little Anne nearly collapsed," Margaret reminisced. "She's frail, and they say Isabella is thinner than ever. It will be a pity if history and heredity repeat themselves and they have no sons, either of them. Ah, our mother was not like that. Thirteen of us, Diccon!"

Richard looked sharply at her. She was really very dense. She herself had produced no children at all, and seemed totally unconcerned at her failure. But he was too kind to remind her of this. All the same, women were unaccountable.

"You've improved," she went on. "I should not have said you'd ever be handsome, but you are truly our brother." Considering the sallow little boy he had been, overshadowed by the glowing good looks of George and Edward, Richard had made a surprisingly attractive man. She saw how well he wore his clothes; he must have a good dresser among his servants, an even better tailor. His journade, cut short enough to show his well-shaped legs, not bowed or bunchy with muscles, was very smart, though the wrong color with his black hair. It took a fair man to carry that rich dark purple. She resolved to send back with him some of the lovely new stuffs her Flemish artisans had been weaving. Then a new idea shot into her mind.

"I'll send for Mary. She's visiting friends in Antwerp, but she can be here in a day or so." Diccon was good-looking enough to interest her husband in considering him as a suitor for Mary; fond as she was of her young stepdaughter, Margaret would be happier when the question of the girl's marriage was settled and she was established in a place of her own. "Do stay!" she coaxed.

Richard shook his head. He was not listening to Margaret, for his mind was full of dark suspicions. It might well be that Edward was indeed implicated in this disappearance of Anne, and was using this means to get at her money. Edward had a grasping hand and was always short of the means to gratify his appetites. And George and Isabella needed to secure their own position which had never been too strong with Edward. Then, like a gadfly, back came the sting. Where was Anne?

"I must find her," he said.

"Well, time for that after the feast. Surely you'll stay for that." Margaret settled back to her embroidery. "We are planning so many

pleasant things. Maximilian is coming up from Austria next week and he is bringing some of the rare treasures from his newly returned expedition to the Far Eastern lands, and we have some really clever entertainers from the guilds here, and—oh, yes, Diccon, this will interest you. Master Caxton is presenting his newest book to Charles.”

Richard regarded her affectionately. “You’re a nice girl, Margaret, but you don’t understand, not one bit. No!” He stretched and yawned, tossing back his hair. “I leave with the morning tide.”

“But what if Anne is at this moment approaching Flanders? Have you thought of that?”

“They know I am here. If she had not left England before my start, they’d never send her now.”

Margaret sighed. Diccon was always the most obstinate one of the family.

“I’ll tell you what,” said Richard suddenly. “I must depart tomorrow, but I’ll leave my squire here. Should Anne arrive, I count on you to send her back with him at once. Your pledge?”

“Of course.” Margaret spoke with dignity. Diccon was so dramatic. Why ask for her pledge when he knew she never wanted anything but the welfare of all her brothers? Of course she would send Anne right back to England; but she would also send a swift courier to inform George of what she had done. Loyalty demanded that much. Then her two brothers could settle it between themselves.

So it befell that Richard took his leave of the Duke of Burgundy that evening, and at dawn next day, kissed his sister’s hands and boarded the little vessel that was to take him and his two friends back home.

A fair breeze blew Richard out of the harbor at Bruges, but before he had been many hours at sea the wind, after the fashion of the summer season, turned treacherous, and his captain was forced to make a run for it to Dunquerque. While the wind raged without, Richard with his two friends raged within, irritation growing to alarm, as alternately he paced the deck or lay in his cabin.

“You must go below,” urged Percy. “Richard, you are chilled through.”

“I’m all right,” insisted Richard, though his teeth chattered like jackstones. “Will this infernal weather never let us across?”

"It will soon let up," soothed Percy. This was a different Richard from any the friends had seen. They had waited out the grim hours of the battle eve with him; Richard was nervous then, but exalted, as he fidgeted about in battle dress. Now it was uncertainty that tormented him, fear for Anne, frustration in his inability to get back to her in England. "Come," urged Percy again.

At last he swung around on his heel, jaw clenched against chattering, and sought his bed. In the middle of the night he woke, shivering and sweating with a chill and the apprehension of his nerves. From then on, the two friends took it in turns to lay wet cloths on the burning head, to nurse him in their clumsy male fashion, and when at last the ship weighed out of Dunquerque, Richard lay muttering, too ill in fever to know he was at last on his way. They reached Dover in a thick fog and he was carried ashore to the nearest inn.

"We'll have to lie here," said Percy as they watched him tossing and mumbling on his narrow bed. "Francis, do you get up to Westminster and I'll watch him here till he's fit to ride."

Always the impetuous one, Lovell was glad to do something active. To sit with a flushed and delirious Richard, who spent hours cursing his brother George of Clarence, then tried to get out of bed, calling to his young betrothed that he would rescue her no matter what, did not appeal to Lovell. And Percy of the level head would know what to do in case of emergency, for Richard looked very ill indeed. Meanwhile Lovell would go straight to the King at Westminster. Without stopping for food, he set off at once for London.

Once arrived, it was hours before he could gain admittance to the royal presence; the King was in council, then he was with the Queen; and it was not until late in the evening that Lovell was kneeling before his royal master.

Edward was irritated, only vaguely concerned in Richard's plight, for illness always bored him. If Diccon were down with the sweating sickness, let him recover as quickly as possible and get back to London.

"I require his attendance," he said pettishly. He put a hand heavy with jewels to his forehead. Council had been damnably difficult, pressing for the war with France, and his debts were steadily mounting. It was stupid of Diccon to fall ill just at this time, when there was need of his cool head and wise advice, stupid of him to go dashing off to Flanders after that girl. "I shall be heartily thankful when this blasted marriage is settled," he grumbled. "By the way, where is the

wench now?" He turned to the silent Isabella, gambling at cards with Rivers.

"On her way to Flanders, may it please your Grace." And before Rivers could snatch his breath, she had snatched up a trick.

Lovell stifled a groan; Diccon would be wild. But at least the girl was safe, and the Duchess of Burgundy would send her speedily back to England under the protection of the young squire, who seemed bound body and soul to Richard. Meanwhile it was apparent the King's Grace was not in the mood to send a leech down to Dover to attend Diccon, and all Lovell could do was mingle with the crowd and hope for a change of heart on the morrow.

Weary after his long ride, he was quietly slipping away when a cool voice stopped him. The Duchess Isabella came through the archway. "Master Lovell, I grieve to hear of my brother-in-law's ill health. It is not dangerous, I hope?" Her long green eyes held watchful concern.

"I don't know, madam," confessed Lovell. "I thought the King's Grace might help the Duke. He seemed to be in rather ill case when I left Dover."

"I shall send my own apothecary; we can do no less," said Isabella promptly. "Can you return with him tomorrow?"

"I am most grateful, madam." Lovell kissed her hand. He thought the Duchess of Clarence a good sister-in-law to Diccon; it was lucky there was someone to help. It had not occurred to him to seek out the Lady Cicely.

Isabella, her head bent on her long white neck, took her barge for home. She did not intend to have Lovell sniffing about while Anne was still in London; more than ever it was imperative that she get Anne out of the country. She would send Master Bates off first thing in the morning with instructions to keep Richard in bed at Dover for as many weeks as possible. She knew her husband had learned that Anne had not as yet left for Flanders, and was watching the ports. It was only a matter of time before he found out where they had hidden her.

She was feeling a bit frantic. Above all, she had to get Anne safely away before some carefully contrived accident befell her. Her own strong sense told her that the false servants, Emilie and her own, could be rebought; a word dropped in the right ear and Anne would be doomed. But this illness of Richard's was a fortunate turn of event which she could use to good advantage.

Isabella's physician proved devoted in his care of the sick man. Hiring a good woman of the town, the two of them ministered to the ailing Duke, but it was a good month or more before a shaky Richard mounted his horse for London.

Straight to Baynard's he went, to his mother. "My son!" and she put him into a cushioned chair by the fire. She sent for some mulled ale; the June day was unseasonably cool and he looked pinched and cold.

This was the meeting she had dreaded. It had fallen to her lot to break the news to Richard that Anne had been sent abroad, that her marriage to one of Burgundy's noblemen was indeed *un fait accompli*. This much she had forced from George and Isabella.

"This has been done with Edward's permit?" She was amazed.

"We were given custody of Anne," said Isabella smoothly, "and the King's Grace will be relieved that the vexed question of dowry has been resolved. The gentleman took her with a small portion of gold."

"I see."

"And it is better that Richard marry with someone more acceptable to the party," added Isabella.

"Doubtless." But the sarcasm was lost on the Clarences, each concerned with private thoughts.

It sounded reasonable, but now, as the Duchess Cicely looked at the pale, suffering Richard, she wondered how best to begin her tale.

He caught her sorrowful look and laughed. "Beshrew me, Mother, but it is good to feel my legs again. After all the purging and bleeding, I must look a sorry sight." He sighed and flung out his arms. "Now, if I can just get shut of this accursed weakness, I can take up where I left off. Let me tell you what I learned in Flanders."

"But first I have news for you." His mother's face quivered and she moved behind his high-backed chair. In her widow's weeds she looked nunlike. He put up his hand to her and she took it in her own, stroking the long, supple fingers. "You look better than I expected, my son." Her mellow voice was strained. Then she braced herself. "Diccon, there is something I must tell you."

"Can't it wait till morning? I am weary." Richard was feeling weak as water now that the effort of making the journey had worn off.

She swallowed. "Diccon, it's Anne. They've wedded her." She paused to let it sink in but he stared dreamily at the fire. Then, pierced by the meaning, he whirled to his feet, his eyes round and startled.

Slowly the blood drained from his face, leaving the lips livid. "What did you say?" His voice was a croaking whisper. "What?"

She gripped the chair. In a long and terrible life, this was a truly bad moment. "They wedded her in Flanders." Her own lips were quite white.

"I don't believe it." Then, illogically: "To whom?"

"To the Lord Montreau, one of Burgundy's vassals. They say it is a good match," she finished lamely.

"May God blast Margaret's cheating soul!" choked Richard. "She promised." Then, with a groan, he put his hand to his head and fell to the floor.

Tall and black, her face colorless as her wimple, the Duchess stood over him. "I should have waited," she said with quivering lips. "He was too weak."

At the door through which he was carried Clotilde de la Tour hovered. "Oh, may I help!" Her gray eyes were soft with pity. "Madam—please? I have knowledge of this sickness."

For a moment the Duchess hesitated. Then: "Go, my child. Be gentle with him."

Richard's swoon was brief, and he lay staring into the shadows of his room, no word coming from him, only the sigh and the restless turning beneath his covers. The bed curtains moved and Clotilde was there with a little bowl. He turned weary eyes upon her. What a pretty girl, he thought absently. But then he marked the circled eyes, the delicate tip of the nose faintly pink as if she had been weeping.

"What use tears?" he muttered.

"Come, my lord." She slipped her arm beneath his head. "You are to drink this." Like a child, he opened his lips to the warm meat juice.

She scarcely left him. Each morning for a week she arrived to let in the light at his casements, and tenderly she washed the thin body with warm water and refreshed him with cooling draughts. He was feverish again and would have no one tend him but her as he lay, refusing himself to all comers. Lovell tiptoed to the door but was denied. Percy, Catesby, all were sent away. His chaplain came, but Richard's revulsion was violent. "God has forsaken me!" hoarsely he cried to the shocked face at the door. "I have no word for His servant."

But he suffered Clotilde, who knelt before the image of St. George in the wall niche, before whom she daily put fresh flowers. "I have prayed to the good saint who slew the dragon to heal you, my lord."

She arose from her devotions. "Tomorrow you must get up." But her eyes filled with tears as she stood at the bed foot, a slim shape between the curtains.

Richard's high cheekbones seemed to start through the taut skin, and in his black eyes was a glint of madness. Her hand sought the ivory figurine at her neck. How pretty and fresh she is, he thought. No wonder his squire adored her. He saw the small amulet beneath the caressing fingers. "What have you there?"

She came and knelt on the little velvet step at the bed head. "The Lady Anne gave it me," handing it to him. "On my last saint's day. I cherish it." Her gentle voice shook. Richard rubbed the tiny amulet against his thin cheek. "It's St. Anne. Slip it beneath your pillow, my lord. 'Twill comfort you, as indeed it has me these many times." Her French fell softly on his ear. She had never mastered the difficult English well enough for more than ordinary greeting. Only on formal occasions did she force her mind to the foreign tongue. With Richard she felt easy. She admired the long hands, the well-turned feet she had washed, and the romantic gauntness of his face. Thought of his great ancestry thrilled her, for here was a royal duke, the beloved of the Lady Anne, reduced to the status of a boy who clung to her like a child.

Each day the Lady Cicely, a tall distinguished figure in her black and white, came to stand at the bedfoot, to search his face with her keen eyes. "You have done well, my child," she approved, turning to Clotilde, who was always shy in her presence. "He will soon recover."

The rosy flush stained Clotilde's pale cheeks and her gray eyes glowed. What a lot she would have to tell Alain when he returned. Of her young husband she had heard nothing save that he had been left behind on the Lord Richard's business—and now she thought of her poor young lady, in dreadful straits, no doubt, who must be finding Alain a comfort to her. Soon they would send him home to her. With a throbbing of her heart, half love and half pity, Clotilde thought she could spare her bridegroom for a short while longer, if her lady had need of him.

"What were you thinking?" Richard had been watching her. "You have heard from Alain?"

"No word, my lord." She was apologetic. His eyes dulled. She knew he hoped for some word, some sign from Anne. "Nothing," she whispered and turned from the bed.

"I have sent Lovell to Flanders. There are things I must know." Restlessly he turned in the bed. Until he was satisfied in his own mind that Anne was provided for, that she was married to someone who would cherish her, he could settle to nothing here at home. As soon as he was satisfied, he would arise and play the man again. Wedded! He drew in his breath sharply. What should he do? And had Anne forgotten him already or was her heart as sore as his? He could not remain in England, that was clear; he was through with Edward, and as for Clarence, the only safety there would be for him to put distance between himself and his perfidious brother. He thought of Rivers, who talked of going to Portugal; perhaps he would accompany him and see the world.

He slept fitfully that night, but his mother, the Lady Cicely, slept not at all. Late in the evening a rider had come in from the coast.

"You have news from Burgundy?" she asked.

"From her Grace the Duchess, madam."

The Lady Cicely read the brief note from Margaret. Richard's young squire, the one he left behind with his sister, had met with a fatal accident. Boar hunting with the Duke's men—a low-hanging branch—his head horribly broken. A valuable servant lost to Richard. A pity. But Lady Cicely felt only the cruelty of the blow that would fall on the pretty young thing who had been nursing Richard.

"Soon I shall acquire skill in breaking evil tidings." Grimly she spoke to Lizel, her woman. "Bring me the girl in the morning before she goes to the Lord Richard." She must try to do this job less clumsily than when she struck Richard to the floor with her news of Anne. Then it suddenly occurred to her that the letter had contained no word of Anne. None at all. Strange.

Roused by a stranger entering with his morning meal, Richard demanded, "Where is the French girl?"

It appeared the French girl was ill in her chamber. Did his lordship desire her presence?

"No, never mind. Perhaps later I shall arise. Send me someone to shave me."

After the departure of his barber with bowls and razors, Richard still lay on the bed, loath to make the effort of rising and submitting to the fatigue of being dressed. He missed Clotilde and, as is the way with one suffering new grief, he felt this was to be a bad day. The first shock numbs, then slowly the body crawls back to sensation and the agony sets in. The pain was now hard. Memories—Middleham,

Warwick, Calais—he groaned on his pillows, haunted by the pale face with the pointed chin, the clear blue eyes. In torment he lay, refusing his food, the books unopened.

At sunset Clotilde came in. Her face was ivory white, her eyes dark, and he thought perhaps her monthly pains were upon her. “You are ill?”

“No, my lord.” Against the dark of her hair, gathered into a net, her face was an oval of beauty. “No, I am not ill.”

“Then what brings that look to your face?” He was pettish. If she were not ill, why had she neglected him? “You’ve no reason to mope.” A stab made him wince. “You’ve not lost what you hold most dear.”

Steadily she looked at him then and her great eyes filled, brimmed, then the crystal tears spilled down her white cheeks. He stared back at her, amazed, as she stood before him, not sobbing, the clear drops falling. “Alain—Alain—” She tried to speak.

“Not coming home?” Only this could make the girl look so grieved.

“Never.” She shook her head, her wide lips quivering.

He felt a strange shock. “Never? Alain?”

She nodded, her face a mask of pain with the slow-dropping tears. From her bodice she drew a small roll. She shook the water from her cheeks and appeared to master herself. “It was given me today—the Lady Cicely—” Her voice trailed off.

He took it. In ornate and difficult script the message, addressed to him, told of a young squire, Alain de la Tour, late of the Duke of Gloucester’s service, killed in a hunting accident—Richard flung it down on the bed. What a horrible mischance! His heart ached for her. Then he snatched it up again to look for word of Anne. Nothing! Surely Anne could have sent some message to her favorite. Had she then forgotten them so soon? His heart ached. “You know how it was?”

She was silent, and he understood. No use giving her the details. It was enough for her to know her young husband, her bridegroom, was gone. He felt tied to her by tragedy. “First me—now you.” He spoke softly. “And Gervase?” He wondered how the minstrel would take the news.

“Gone.” Dully she crouched beside the bed. “The Lady Cicely sent him to Flanders.”

Ah, yes. His mother would send the minstrel to find out where they had laid the young squire, knowing that only action could ease a heart newly bowed by grief. For a moment, shame stabbed Richard

to think how he had lain here in the bed like a lad, groaning in his own misery. Even the girl here had risen to attend him. She still crouched against the bed hangings, her head pressed sideways on the cover, her face empty. Her tears had ceased flowing and her skin was now damp and dewy, her long lashes in wet tags shading her clear eyes. In her grief she was lovely.

He touched her hand but she did not respond. Far away from him and his own grief, she was lost in her own, thinking of her brief beautiful marriage; the pitifully few nights she had lain in her young husband's arms, and the certainty that she would never bear his child. For her monthly cycle had come and gone, and she was still a sterile woman with no gilt-haired child to keep warm in her breast her lover's memory. She shivered and pressed her hands against her cold cheeks.

Richard felt his heart turn over. "Poor lass, you're cold." Between his own he chafed her icy little hand. She sighed and drooped her head. Gently he drew her onto the bed beside him and lifted a fold of the coverlet to spread over her. Hardly aware of what she was doing, she lay, her chilled body gradually warming, conscious only of a pair of strong arms that held her, and lips touching her soft throat. Richard too felt the comfort of the slender body pressed against him, the tiny breasts and the yielding thighs. His lips moved to hers and he drew her closer.

The little amulet of St. Anne rolled from beneath the pillow to the floor.

18. London Prison

AFTER four weary weeks spent in the great London house to which she had been taken, Anne gave up trying to escape. The first stunned surprise at Isabella's treachery gave way to fear, then to anger, then to frantic determination to get away. She was kept beneath a staircase, locked in a tiny squalid chamber; the retreat, she supposed, of chambermaids, though she saw none. She spent hours searching the walls and ceiling for some crack or weak spot. High in the plaster wall was one small window with thick panes of curly-looking glass and she dragged and pushed the battered washstand beneath it, but it shook under her and would not bear her weight.

She lifted her fists, white and frail, against the stout oak door and banged; all she heard from without was the crashing of pottery, dropped no doubt by some serving-boy, and the endless thump of footsteps above the slant ceiling of her prison. She knew she must be in some huge town house, hidden under a great staircase, but where she could not tell, for the smothering kerchief pressed over her face as she was dragged from the barge had shut out all but a flashing glimpse of a huge wall and a back stairway through which she was bundled. Her prison room received her and here she had been for some four weeks.

She tore a strip from her shift and with blood pricked from her finger traced a wavering *A*; this, in case she should have a chance to send to Richard. But the chance never came, for she was kept here, waited on only by the maid Emilie and on rare occasions receiving a visit from Lady Blaise, who looked in on her with cold curiosity but did not address her.

Thought of the tame submission that had led to her easy abduction made her writhe; why had she not cried out, struggled, resisted more fiercely, anything, to call attention? Gifa might have heard slender screams; surely Gervase, whose ears were like needles. Over and over again she tortured herself thinking of the rapid descent into the

waiting barge, the four men dipping their oars in the darkening water, the river so quiet at that time of day, then the gliding toward Southwark. *Southwark!* When Isabella gave the order, she knew then that they were not on their way to the crossing that would set them ashore on the road to Beaulieu and her mother. Why had she not raised a tumult, even sprung overboard to catch the interest of a passing boat!

Left alone in the dreary little room, she had grown quite stupid with doing nothing. Night and morning they brought food to her, but the rest of the time she was alone with her thoughts and the muffled noises of the house. Church bells told her when to pray, rattle of dishes meant the feeding of those within the great dwelling, sound of music pierced her with remembrance of Gervase; and after her solitary evening meal, the vesper bell and the softening sounds told her it was time to sleep.

She wondered what they were thinking and doing back in Baynard's. Richard must be frantic, at this moment might be scouring London in search of her. And the Lady Cicely, how would she counsel him in his anger and frustration? She tried to recall what the Duchess had said to her on that last afternoon which now seemed so long ago. Learn to submit to pain because it is inevitable? Ah, so it is, but why? Frey Siserone would explain it on the theological level and Gervase, in his cynicism, would tell her that pleasure was impossible without it. She hid her head in her hands and strove for pleasure in her new trial.

And day after day slid by. She fell to watching a spider that let itself down by a long filament in the corner of the room. On the days that it did not come out into the sunlight, she felt more melancholy than ever, and when either it or one of its tribe clung in a tiny bundle of legs at the end of the thread, she took strange comfort in the presence of another living thing. She now was acquainted with prison, and she thought of the people she knew who endured years of this before death released them, and marveled at the toughness of the human spirit. Strong as he was, her father had been spared the misery of incarceration, and each evening when she made her devotions, she remembered to thank the saints that he was at rest.

With the bezel of her ring she scratched a tiny groove each day in the wooden floor, and now she had twenty-eight marks. She drew some crude squares, and using the ring as a counter, she played jackstones against a shadowy adversary. But this palled, and when on this morning she made the daily mark, a sort of sickness seized her. She

had a fear that she was here to stay. And the dragging day seemed unusually long. Now it sank to its end and the late sun sent a suffused glow through the thick panes of her little window.

The lock of her door rattled and she jumped. She still was unaccustomed to the visits of her captors and she braced herself to remain aloof and proud. It was Emilie with a bundle of clothes under her arm. "May it please you, my lady, you are to put these on." She laid the bundle down on the dirty bed and loosened her own cloak. Throughout the whole month of Anne's imprisonment she had been quite casual, her greenish eyes meeting Anne's unabashed, her whole manner practical and composed. Anne stood silent, waiting to be dressed.

The maid unlaced her from the blue silk gown, now crushed and dabbled, then peeled off her underclothes. How Gifa would have cried out in her Welsh at sight of the soiled and stained undergarments! A homesick pang twisted Anne but she ignored it. The soiled clothes had tried her sorely, being one of the worst discomforts, but she scorned to reveal this. She looked down at the girl bent to her task, and marveled at the treachery that must have been bought—with what? She now regretted the giving away of the ruby necklace to Clotilde, for it surely would have purchased back the girl's service.

Money and jewels would buy most servants. Perhaps this was why Diccon's letters had never reached her in France. This girl was subtle and clever, quick-witted as a good spy must be; the touch of her hands gave Anne an unclean feeling.

She now was clad in the coarse shift of a serving-maid, covered by a rough kirtle and petticoat of dark blue, her feet thrust into cloth slippers too large for them. She wondered why all this trouble, and a small throb of fear tugged at her. She pulled at the tight sleeves of the kirtle and struggled to preserve her calm. It was her one refuge. Emilie now stood, finger at mouth, considering Anne's hair, a fluffy mass of yellow tangled on her shoulders. Again the door rattled and the maid darted to admit Lady Blaise.

"Well!" The woman's English had a foreign accent and Anne remembered that Isabella had picked up a serving-woman in Calais who had proved faithful. "You have not finished?" Smartly she turned Anne about. "*Imbécile!*" Her French was sharp. "The hair—the jewels—what a fool!" She stripped the rings from Anne's fingers, tore from her head the netted cap. Anne saw the greedy eyes of Emilie

on the jewels, thought despairingly how she might have purchased something with them. Now the girl would get them for nothing.

"A kerchief!" Out of the maid's hand Lady Blaise whipped a scarf, then for the first time appeared to take notice of the mass of yellow. "That won't do. Fetch my scissors!"

Anne gasped. "You cannot cut my hair!" Never since she was a little girl had her long curling hair been cut, and when she was a married woman, it would be wound into intricate designs and coils. Every gentlewoman prided herself on her long hair. Anne clutched her masses of curls. Richard had declared that if ever she bound her head in gauze and wore the hennin he would tear it off before the world. She wound her hands tighter, gathering up her hanging hair. "You cannot!" This would be the one indignity Richard could never forgive.

But Lady Blaise now had her shears and approached Anne who backed to the wall, her eyes fixed on the glittering blades. "No foolishness now!" The waiting-woman seized a yellow handful close to Anne's head.

"No! You cannot! You must not!" Anne's voice rose to a shriek.

"Hold her hands." Lady Blaise grasped the hair tighter. Anne struggled, felt the sharp point of the scissors nick into her finger. Eyes gleaming, panting a little, Emilie held her hands while a grinding snip sheared off one side of hair which fell to the floor. "Be still, if you do not want the point of the scissors in your eye!" And Anne stood still while they cropped her close to the nape, like a harlot. Angry tears stung her eyes, but she willed them to stay. Bitter as it was, this should not degrade her to the point of weeping.

Her blazing eyes swept over the false maid who was brushing from her shoulders the last stray hairs. "No matter what you do, you cannot make me look like you." She was cutting but Emilie was impervious to insult. Calmly she watched Lady Blaise tie the kerchief firmly over Anne's cropped head, then stand back critically.

"Her hands are too white. *Tiens*, 'tis no matter. You can smear them with dirt and ashes later. Meanwhile"—she threw Anne's cloak about her and pulled the hood around the pale face—"her starved-cat look does well enough."

They pushed Anne out into the dim hall and she looked eagerly about for help. There was no one. Quickly they gained the courtyard where a covered cart stood. Hardly were they within when the flap was tied down and they creaked and jounced into the gathering gloom.

Between the two women Anne felt bound and gagged. It seemed easy to leap from the back of the cart—easy, but she knew she could never do it. Something told her not to try.

The cart stopped. She felt the firm clutch of hands that pulled and dragged rather than helped her to descend. They were in another dark yard. "Do not think of crying out," close to her ear the French voice warned. "Even if anyone came, they would find only a serving-maid."

Now Anne felt real fear. They were stumbling down a winding stairway. She felt sure they were taking her to some lonely dungeon to be stabbed or strangled, then flung into the river. Why else had they stripped her of identification, hiding her in the clothing of a kitchen maid? She bit her lip on a tiny private whimper.

But as they descended, the air grew warmer instead of dank and cold as she had expected. And a great banging of pots and pans was heard as they stepped onto the stone floor of a passage ending in a double arched door thickly studded with iron boltheads. This Emilie pushed open. They were in the huge rabbit-warren kitchens of a great London house and beyond open archways glowed the fires and there was a sound of chopping on wooden blocks. Anne's wondering gaze darted about. If only she knew where she was. There were so few of the houses of London she knew—Westminster, of course, the royal apartments in the Tower, their own immense house which they said was now sealed by the King's order, Cold Harbor—so few places she knew. There were no liveries she could recognize, although the servers who came down from the upper floors had bright blazons on their tunics.

Fear disappeared into surprise. So this was where food came from! In relief, she looked at the cooks and knaves scouring and sweating, basting and turning the meats on the spits. An immense fellow with a front like an enormous round pudding wrapped in a dirty cloth waddled toward them, a bloody knife in his hand. Beneath woolly hair powdered with flour, he had a red ram's face. Anne shrank back.

"It's all right, Pepin," called Lady Blaise. "We are going into the small cookroom there!"

The woolly-haired fellow growled and pushed past them, unseeing, and they threaded the kitchen throng, past the hungry heat of a charcoal grate sizzling with little bird bodies, and as they walked they slipped on the greasy rushes. Under another archway they passed into

a small kitchen with no other door and Emilie led Anne to a settle by a little hooded bake fire. Anne was glad to be free of the other place with its scarlet fires and its bleeding carcasses dangling from hooks in the ceiling and, above all, the fat man with his knife. This was a better place, full of white wooden tables where men were rolling out dough and the air was full of the blessed smell of new-baked bread.

“Come,” said the maid. They approached a small table where pies in round tins stood ready for the oven. “We are to earn our bread here. Do as I do.” She took a bowl of raisins and began to stick them into the soft white dough. For a time Anne watched, then curiosity mastered her and she took a raisin and put it into the edge of the pie. She was surprised to feel the dough so soft and velvety beneath her fingers; this, at least, was better than the solitude of the chamber beneath the stairs. And there were people here; surely someone would be found to help her to escape.

Naked in the center of her chamber, Jane Shore stood while her women perfumed her and prepared her for bed. To take the chill off the October evening, they had lighted the charcoal braziers in their delicate pierced holders and Agnes, the confidential waiting-woman, was fussing, for the King’s mistress was to spend the night with her royal lover. She lifted the masses of Jane’s dusty-golden hair from her bare shoulders and a maid puffed on the scented powder, but when she saw another woman approaching with a linen nightcap she frowned.

“No! When you have been longer in my lady’s service, you will know we never cover her head when she sleeps with the King’s Grace. Take it away.” Edward loved to wind his hands in the dull golden hair that was Jane’s most astonishing beauty. They slipped over her head the mantle of rose red which flowed about her, leaving bare one perfect arm, the other covered in a long loose sleeve. Dreamily Jane submitted, unaware of the soft chatter of her women. She was lost in thought of what she would have to tell Edward before she slept.

Two weeks before, Queen Elizabeth Woodville had sent her to a revel at Cold Harbor, the town house of the Duke and Duchess of Clarence. Escorted by the Queen’s dashing handsome brother, Earl Rivers, she appeared at Isabella’s fete dressed as a virgin, where she created a most enjoyable scandal. Jane had a sense of fun which often

led her to do something to prick a bubble of self-importance. An intimate of the Queen, she was hated and despised by the great Yorkists of Edward's court. Always kind and courteous to her husband's mistress, Elizabeth used her to keep Edward out of the clutches of Yorkist ladies. She herself had no real objection to Jane, who seemed to be without political aspirations, who was clever with Edward when he was fatiguing, a safe mistress for a pleasure-loving king.

She decided to send Jane to Cold Harbor, there to probe into the mysteries that concerned her husband's favorite, Duke Richard; she wished to know more of the disappearance of the Lady Anne, last seen with her sister Isabella. So she sent Jane, who was both subtle and clever.

At the fete Jane was aware that the Duchess Isabella had a new squire, a pale effete young man who waited closely on her. With her sixth sense Jane knew that here was a link in the puzzling chain she had been sent to unwind. She addressed Isabella.

"My lady, I admire your young squire there. You have had him long?"

"You mean Aubert? He assists my falconer and does odd services for me. I have had him these nine months or so. You find him personable?" Isabella smiled coldly on her fair guest.

"He seems devoted. Would I might command such service." And she set herself to attract young Aubert. Narrowly she watched him. A weak chin, and from his private glances her way, easy and pliable as most men. Straight into the dazzled eyes she smiled, and before she took her leave that night, she threw out a baited hook that she hoped would bring the fish to her net.

"Madam," to the Lady Isabella, "those candied strawberries in wine are the most rare I have tasted this year. May I hope you will allow Aubert to carry some to the Queen's Grace? She has a wondrous craving for juicy things these days." The Queen was again carrying a child-under-the-girdle, and her appetite was in need of pampering.

Isabella's smile was condescending. "I thank you, madam, for suggesting it. Aubert shall carry some to the palace on the morrow."

And so began the softening and breaking of the squire Aubert. It had taken longer than Jane thought to break down the servant's loyalty, but she knew ways to bring the very ducks off the pond. Now, two weeks later, she knew all. She knew the Lady Cicely to have been duped with the false message of Anne's marriage, cleverly concocted

to gain time, and she rejoiced to think how the plan, so nearly hatched by the Clarences, would be crushed in the shell. The last precious morsel of intelligence had been wrung from Aubert this very day. The Lady Anne was still in London, though soon to be moved. And tonight she would plant the seed in Edward's mind.

"My lady!" Agnes held back the curtain of the *chambre basse* and she passed into the cozy little cubicle, also heated by a glowing brazier, sank down on the commode and rested her hands on the padded needle-point arms. As she stared across at the cosmetic table with its glittering glass load, she wondered how best to approach Edward. Even with her, who enjoyed his constant favors, he had his difficult moments; pray God he be not drunk.

Hardly had they finished their touches of scent when the page came to escort her down the private staircase to the King's bed-chamber. Holding the fur-edged robe about her, she entered into the beautiful room, her steps muffled by the soft bright carpet, where Edward stood spreading his fingers to the glow of charcoal.

"Ah, Janette, sweeting, you must be perished. These autumn nights set me shivering."

She smiled up at him, relieved to see he was sober. Against his tallness she leaned, her arms about him, her head on his breast. She could feel the body beginning to thicken, the muscles that once flowed in hard planes softening with the start of flabbiness. Edward ate and drank too much, did not exercise enough, and Jane decided to organize some hunts. Edward should ride every day, and it was evident that the Queen did not care if her husband grew as fat as a moldwarp. He should also play some tennis; he could still bang the balls about the court and perhaps he ought to go back to archery and get his chest and arms hardened up. She gave a tiny sigh. Tomorrow she would start on him; tonight she must speak of Anne and Richard.

He rubbed his chin on top of her sleek head. "Come on," he murmured. "Let's to bed."

"In a minute." She tightened her hold. "Ned, I want to tell you something."

"Can't it wait till tomorrow?" He yawned. He supposed she was going to tell him she was with child; women always made such a ceremony of breaking this to their men, and God's blood, there was plenty of time for that. He looked down at her, slim and pliant in his arms; a child would be a pity, would spoil her beauty. "Can't it wait?"

"Oh, yes." Beneath her cheek Jane felt the scratch of the gold embroidery on his nightshirt. "But I thought I'd tell you now."

"Out with it, then." Always he had humored Jane, who had more sense than most of the women about him—or men, for the matter of that.

"I have heard it said that Neddie will never be King." As quietly as if asking for a new gown, she dropped out the words.

"Eh?" He drew out of her arms, staring at her, his blue eyes quite round with surprise. "What's that you say?"

"That the baby will never be King—'tis what is said."

The angry blood rushed into Edward's face. "Who dares?"

"Who?" Her light voice fell softly on the heated air in the great chamber. "Who but the first duke of the land?"

"George?" He stiffened. "By God's most precious death, what does he think he is playing at?" In agitation, he took a few short steps, his bedgown swirling about slippered feet. "Does Richard know of this?"

"It was said to him, my lord." The lurking Aubert, well paid by her, had carried to her the conversation between the drunken Clarence and Richard on that day, weeks ago, when Richard had striven so to extract from his brother news of Anne. Though Jane did not know the meaning behind Clarence's leering insinuation of his "li'l secret," and though she had strained every resource to learn it, she had been unable to pierce the heart of *that* mystery. But she guessed the Clarences to be holding a secret that could send them both to the block.

Now she planted the seed in Edward's mind; the rest would be up to him. "And I know where the Lady Anne is, too."

"The Neville girl? You've told Diccon?"

"I wanted to tell you first," she said sweetly. She must put him back in his good bedtime mood. She could have raced off to Richard with her bit of news, that Anne was somewhere here in London, that indeed Isabella's false servant already had his instructions, but Edward she must handle with care. In these matters he was tender.

"Right." He was grave. "Well, where is she?"

"Isabella has her hidden in Lambeth Palace."

With one of his sudden changes of mood, common to the whole family, Edward threw back his head and roared. "Lambeth! God's blood! I thought the girl to be in Flanders these past weeks." He slapped his leg. "Poor Diccon! All that watery way for nothing."

"It really isn't any joke, Edward." Jane was solemn, her head on

one side. Edward was enchanted and put his hand beneath her chin.

"Well, sweeting, you want me to rescue the girl, is that it?" He relished the idea of tweaking the nose of the Archbishop of Canterbury, whom he had never especially liked, whose harboring of the girl was a piece of impertinence.

But Jane was now coy. Coaxingly she wound her arms about his neck. "Oh, let Richard do it. He can go off first thing in the morning. It will be so romantic!" And such a slap for George of Clarence, she thought but she did not say it. With her meager knowledge of Clarence's drunken secret, she had no intention of bringing up that subject again.

She let her royal lover take her to the great bed with its embroidered suns and golden lions where, like any married couple, they lay beneath the scarlet canopy and out of habit, enjoyed their love, then stretched themselves luxuriously for sleep. Edward punched his pillow into a little mound and with a satisfied sigh sank his cheek into it, and Jane snuggled closer to him. Edward was a good lover and she had had many hours of pleasure with him. And besides that, she loved him, was happy that at last his heart was at rest over the healthy baby boy, a child born to—

"What was that about George again?" Edward's speech was thick and drowsy.

"Tomorrow," she whispered and crept closer into his arms.

The sound of the matin bell came across the water from St. Paul's and woke Anne where she lay in a dark little room in Lambeth Palace. With a sigh, she turned on the fetid bed which she shared with Emilie, who also sighed and yawned, then groped her way from the bed to the table where their one candle stood. She struck the flint and the little room sprang to shadowy life. Anne looked wearily at the objects now grown familiar: the dirty basin where they washed, the rush-bottomed chair, and the bed heaped with the tumbled clothes.

She dressed herself. These were things she did thankfully, for they helped to make endurable the monotony of her days. As she lifted the sweat-stained clothes, she shrank fastidiously from putting them on. She felt herself stale and tacky. There was so little water for cleansing; she ran her tongue over her teeth that felt coated and dirty too. Her hair, unwashed and untended these many weeks, had grown longer and hung in an unkempt bunch on her neck. She had no

comb to tidy it, and she scorned the help of Emilie who was now humming as she laced her own bodice over her swelling bosom.

Anne knotted the kerchief over her head and pushed under it as much of her hair as she could. Oh, the long baths she would take when she escaped from this place! She would make them wash and wash her hair, and she would have her nails tinted; she felt as if she would like to spend hours in her chamber, the air scented with sticks of lemon and vanilla, following those rituals of fashionable ladies, devoted to matters of dress and elegance.

They took their morning meal in the bake kitchen. To reach it, they crept through the drafty passages where the tubs and baskets were piled high with the day's produce, past great bundles of leeks and tubs of writhing eels, into the huge arched room with the scarlet fires, banked for the night, now being raked out by sleepy spitboys.

They carried their bowls of milk and savory herring pie to the hooded fireplace. At one time the smells of garbage and slimy fish would have sickened Anne, but she had grown used to it all, could eat among unbelievable scenes, indeed had come to relish the plain fare. Never had she liked the rich and heavy foods served at her father's banquet tables. The jellied birds, saffron-flavored cakes, and spiced meats brought their aftermath of cramps and it seemed to her they were always dosing themselves following a feast. She finished eating and brushed the crumbs from her lap.

Emilie, who also had finished, was watching the far end of the room. Instead of removing their bowls and getting to work on the pies as usual, she was staring over the bent heads of the scullions as if expecting something. Anne did not address her. She never spoke to the girl if she could avoid it. Frigid acknowledgment of service was as much as she would stoop to say. Disgust filled her whenever she looked at the girl. Never having known the pinch of want nor the longing for the pretty things so dear to the heart of a girl, she was quite unable to comprehend the treachery to which Emilie had stooped for the gratification of her desires.

Anne wondered when the girl would reap the results of her boldness. She did not wear the jewels she had taken from her mistress and showed no sign of new prosperity. But Anne was not curious enough to ask Emilie what she planned to do; this would be showing interest in her own future. The novelty of the Lord Archbishop's kitchens had long since worn off; bored as she was, she still shrank from handling most of the food that heaped tables and benches in

such abundance. Emilie kneaded bread, peeled fruit and joked with the knaves, and when she was absent on her own affairs, her place was taken by Lady Blaise, who kept frigid watch over Anne and relinquished her charge with obvious relief when Emilie returned. But Anne had lost interest in the food. She no longer cared to practice the art of fluting the pie edges or to sprinkle the colored sugar over the grand confections turned out by the master baker. She had become listless, had lost count of the days she had spent in her new prison, was worn out with her one obsession—escape.

She tried to talk to the kitchen knaves and scullions and looked longingly at the greasy girls who washed the pots and who screamed and laughed when the potboys handled them with rough familiarity. The girls ignored her. Once she had slipped through a slit of a door but in a flash Emilie was after her and dragged her back from the ill-smelling passage. Whoever had chosen her jailers had done well.

Now another day had begun, one just like the rest. She wondered how to endure it. Suddenly she started. A new kitchen knave, whose light hair seen from the back reminded her of Alain, raised up from beyond one of the high tables. Emilie had left her side, was threading through the pastry shelves to the door. Fumbling for her amulet, a tiny figure of St. Anne, she jerked the chain from her neck and approached the youth.

Timidly she tapped his back. "*Voulez-vous—*" she began, then started back from the face he revealed, vacant and horribly disfigured by a harelip. Desperately she looked back at Emilie, engaged in talking with a bakeman at one of the brick ovens. She must try. She might never get another such opportunity. She would speak to him in English. Of course the fellow had no French. Holding up the little silver charm, she whispered, "Would you please help me?"

His tiny eyes grew cunning and he snatched at the charm. He smiled, revealing the crooked broken teeth of the harelip. But he was doubly afflicted, for it seemed he could not speak. He shook his head.

"Please! I must get away! I will give you money, a lot of gold. Help me!" She did not know how this misshapen creature could help her, but perhaps he could take her to an outside door. It was the first time anyone had paid her the slightest attention. Though she shrank from the wet loose mouth and the little red eyes, she would trust him. "Another door?" Fearfully she looked back for Emilie. "A door?"

The scullion nodded his shock-head, beckoned her to follow as he ducked beneath a table, rounded a pillared archway and pushed

open a little door beneath a slanting staircase. Another of those! For a second she hesitated, then darted inside. Next thing she knew was the slamming of the door on darkness and the rough hands of the harelip as he seized her.

The instant shock of surprise turned to terror as she felt her bodice ripped open. Now he was slobbering through his rattling breath as he pushed her to the floor. She fought back with teeth and nails, rolling and twisting under the hard wiry muscles, her stomach turned at the reek of grease and sweat and the slime of his spittle on her bosom.

Suddenly her terror turned to rage. No longer was she afraid, only furious. All the pent-up fear of the past weeks boiled over into exasperation. This was the last straw. "No! No!" she screamed. Her screams rose in the darkness and she writhed from his grasp. "Stop! Stop!" she cried. "Let me go! Help! Help!" He snatched at her again but she tore loose and fell violently against the door as it opened and she was plucked into the light. For a moment more she fought the new grasp, looked up through her torn hair to see the red ram's face of Pepin. Somehow this frightened her more than anything and she screamed again, this time louder than before.

"Nay, lass!" Pepin's voice was strangely deep and kind. "What's to do here?" To the harelip who was slobbering foolishly he said, "Be off with ye! And gie me that!" He snatched the little silver charm from the scullion's neck. "Is this what he stole, lass?"

"Oh, keep it, please!" Anne was shaking now as she leaned against the wall, trying to draw her ripped bodice over her nakedness.

"She is here!" It was Emilie who burst through the archway with Lady Blaise and a young man. Anne put back her hair and saw he was wearing her sister Isabella's livery. So much she noted before she looked down at herself, her kerchief gone, her kirtle ripped to the waist, her face bleeding from the broken nails of the harelip. She forced herself to stop trembling and crossed her arms over her breast.

"Permit me, madam. I am Aubert." The elegant young man gently put her cloak about her and she clutched it over her naked shoulders.

"Quick!" Lady Blaise was agitated. "There is no time to lose."

The squire put a cautious head out of the great door at the foot of the stairs. "'Tis safe."

And then they were out in the morning light, to receive on their faces the fine October drizzle. On the wet stones awaited the same cart that had brought them to Lambeth, but this time it was guarded by half a dozen men in plain livery. It was a deserted hour in London,

before most people were astir. Lady Blaise gripped Anne, forced her inside the cart, the while she looked anxiously over her shoulder. Within the cart the air was damp and musty with the smell of the rotting straw beneath their feet.

Anne's scratches smarted now and her bruises were starting to ache, and she shook at the thought of her peril. Drawing her cloak about her, she shrank into a small bunch on the hard seat between the two women. She had heard only one thing as Aubert climbed in beside them. "To the Blue Tabard."

So she was not to be whisked out of London just yet. There was still a chance for rescue. The young squire Aubert had been gentle to her, treating her as a demoiselle, and she wondered if he would help her. It seemed hopeless, though, for he was in her brother-in-law's service, and now it was evident that the Duke of Clarence would stop at nothing to keep her and Richard apart. So long as they were not married, Clarence had a chance at the vast fortune that her father's death had assigned to her. Oh, Richard! First it was power, now money that kept them apart. She felt sick and numb, tired of struggling, of thinking. She could do no more. All she wished for now was that they do whatever they intended with her, and quickly. They could not mean to force her to spend the remainder of her life shuttling from the cellar of one great house to another. Prison, nunnery, death—what would it be? Let it be soon, she prayed.

Aubert had fastened the back flap, but so hastily under the urging of Lady Blaise that now it flapped loose, letting a gust of fresher air into their fetid gloom.

"Fasten it!" hissed Lady Blaise.

"Oh, dash my feathers! I shall be wringing wet!" The elegant young man made a face, then swung himself out of the swaying cart, stood on the tips of his bright blue shoes and reached over the top of the canopy. His shapely legs in the sheening violet hose writhed as he hoisted himself up higher.

"What in the name of ten thousand devils is that fool doing?" Within the shadow of her hood, Lady Blaise's face was distorted with anger. "Get inside!" she ordered. "We must not be seen!"

"Can't—reach—the—flap," gasped Aubert, whose violet legs thrashed the air. "Aah—no, you don't!" He was addressing the whipping flap that eluded him. His voice rose. And suddenly Anne knew she was witnessing a carefully contrived incident, designed to delay

them and to attract attention. Her heart leaped. She leaned forward craning to see, but they pulled her back.

A sudden clatter of hoofs, a great shout, and something was thrown violently against their cart, which teetered and rocked, flinging the three women together in a bruised heap. The two faces so near Anne's were now white, one frozen in angry scorn, the other in fear. She started to rise but again they dragged at her. "Sit down! Do you want your bones broken!"

"Let me see!" Anne found her voice again. "Help!"

But none could hear her voice muffled within the cart, certainly not above the deafening din out in the street. A cry brought the heart fluttering into her throat. "Gloucester!"

"Diccon!" Instantly a hand clamped over her mouth, but she bit viciously.

"Vixen!" Lady Blaise cried out in pain. Then she snatched at the curtains in front and tore them apart. "Drive through them!" Anne caught a glimpse of a tangle of legs, then nothing, as the men fell with a crash into the street.

She tried again to scream but her throat was raw. Her voice died. The oaths and scraping clatter of hoofs, sounds of hard blows, and angry groans accompanied the rocking and lurching of their cart. She jumped forward but the two women held onto her clothes, their clutch now one of desperation. With a rending sound, the blue petticoat tore away from the waistband. Anne had a hysterical desire to laugh. She knew now she was being rescued and it looked as if her rescuers would have to be quick or she would be stripped to her skin.

Aubert climbed into the cart. "Come!" He held out his hand as if to lead her to the dance.

"One side!" Someone thrust the squire away and there, with his hands in the soft skin gloves set on either side the cart frame, stood Richard. The women fell back but Anne crouched on the narrow seat, staring with enormous eyes from the gloom, quite unable to rise.

He held out his arms, and somehow she got strength to step into them, felt herself swung to the ground among groaning men and struggling horses, all tangled in the street. Snatching off his surcoat, Richard flung it about her, and she snuggled into the rich-smelling fur.

Aubert, who had sprung lightly to the head of Richard's horse, now grinned at her as she was lifted to the saddle and Richard mounted behind.

Leaning down, Richard dropped a purse which the squire flourished, then swept them an elegant bow. But Anne leaned against Richard and closed her eyes. At that moment, she had everything she had ever wanted.

19. The Child

ATTENDED by Richard, Anne rode into the courtyard of Cold Harbor to call on her sister Isabella who had miscarried of the child for which all during the long weary months she had waited and hoped.

"I don't know why you want to go," he grumbled at Anne.

"But, Diccon," she sighed, "to lose the child. It is a bitter thing." She knew Richard did not approve of her having anything to do with the Clarences, but Isabella's illness altered everything.

Richard marked her frailness and a shadow fell on him. Would she suffer the same fate as her sister? He wanted children, sons, but more than that, he wanted Anne, alive and well, at his side. Her wistful look was more than he could bear. "You want to go, then? I'll take you to her myself." He would not risk anything else going wrong. And never would he trust his brother Clarence again.

So now they were coming into the yard together. Anne slid from her horse into his arms and they mounted the stairs in silence. Anne was looking dainty again, with little trace of her squalid experience of the past months. Her hair had grown long enough to be coiled at the back of her head and constant applications of milk-of-almonds had restored her skin to its former dazzling whiteness.

On a great bed upstairs lay Isabella, her face a white wedge against the silken curtain. She turned listless eyes toward the door as Anne entered. "So they let you come." An ironic smile twitched the corners of her pale lips. "Does Richard know?"

Anne sat on the bed, her eyes large with pity. It seemed unnecessary to tell Isabella that Richard, arms folded, legs astride, stood outside the chamber door. "How is it with you, Isa?"

"I shall recover. Probably to be barren all my days. I can see now the saints do not wish me to have a son." She turned her bitter face away. Anne thought of the terrible night aboard the carrack when she and Clotilde crouched outside Isabella's door, listening to her

moans. "I suppose you think I am being punished," went on the tired voice.

"Oh, no." Anne's own voice shook. "I never wanted you to be hurt, Isa."

Isabella rolled her head back and suddenly the proud face crumpled. Spasms tore her body, flat and thin beneath the covers, and she twisted the sheets in her hands. Through her sobs she gasped, and wise enough to know the solace of tears, so rarely shed by either of them, Anne let her sob her heart out. When the storm subsided and Isabella lay back exhausted, she wiped the wet face and smoothed back the heavy hair.

"The Sisters of St. Martin's have sent some things to hearten you, and I have told your woman to heat up the soup." And when she fed a few spoonfuls to the sick girl, she had the ineffable joy of seeing Isabella's eyes soften and with something of their youth she smiled at Anne.

"Why does everything have to be so—so difficult, Anne?" She would not reveal her real feelings, admit that she felt beaten, finished, ready to give it all up. She now searched Anne's face, saw the new seriousness that had settled over the fine features, the firm curving lips, the shadow in the blue eyes. Anne was growing up, was over seventeen now. She too had had a difficult time. Her feminine soul longed to confide in another woman, a lady of her own rank—she yearned to unbosom herself of those fears and suspicions of her husband. She knew that within his brain Clarence bore the maggot of a guilty secret, something treasonous and dreadful. Should she reveal what little she knew to Anne, plead with her to get Richard on their side, to reason with Clarence before it was too late?

The words trembled on her lips. But at that moment Richard's head came through the arras. Anne rose from the bedside. Isabella watched her go, thankful then that she had not weakened. She would handle this thing in her own time and in her own way.

Richard took Anne back to sanctuary in St. Martin's-le-Grand. There the Sisters would keep her safe till their wedding. For the matter of the money had finally been settled. It had taken weeks and weeks, but at last Council decided to divide it equally between the two brothers. Both had demanded the entire amount; neither one had received his claim. And the Lady Anna, Anne's mother, had been left to the mercy of her two daughters. Isabella's husband would give her

nothing; it would be up to Anne and Richard to provide her with a living.

All during the long waiting time Anne was more concerned over Clotilde than she was over the fact that she might be cut off without a penny of her father's vast wealth. For Clotilde's baby did not come. The French girl dragged her swollen body about, her wistful eyes dark-circled, the whole household watching for the first sign of a pain that would announce her labor.

Anne questioned Gifa anxiously but the nurse kept her opinions to herself. Alain had left his bride in June, and when March of the following spring brought no cessation of pregnancy and April slid by, there was shaking of heads and wonderment.

But in the fullness of time the child was born. With no fuss Clotilde endured the agony, mercifully short, and brought forth a wizened boy baby with dark hair and long narrow hands and feet.

"You have a son!" Joyously Anne announced to the tired girl the news. "Do you hear that, Clo? A son! Now Alain can never die."

"Your pardon, my lady." The doctor put a draught to Clotilde's lips. "She must rest."

Anne crouched above the child in Gifa's lap. The small red-puckered infant showed no resemblance to the dead squire. "What a pity," she murmured. "Do you think his hair will fall out and come in lighter, Gifa?"

"I do not." The nurse put the child in the cradle and rocked it with an experienced foot. "He'll be black to his grave, or I'm mistaken."

Anne touched the baby fist, curled fast by the cheek, and at the clutch of the fragile fingers her heart contracted and a warm wave flooded her. More than anything in the world, now her marriage was secured, she wanted a child of her own, hers and Richard's. She kissed the downy head and tiptoed past the bed to her own chamber.

For two days Richard had been down at Windsor, but he had promised to be back on the morrow for a Maying party in Westminster meadows. Anne had set her heart on one carefree excursion before the state of wifehood descended upon her. On the chosen day she ran to the casement to see that the warm mild weather was still with them. It was a tender April day.

Quickly, with assurance, she chose her gown, pale green, scalloped about her feet, and she made her women fasten up her hair beneath a little horned hat that was pure coquetry. Excited, she kept pushing from them to run to the window, where below in the courtyard waited the tall white palfrey Percy had brought from the North as his wedding gift to her.

"Blanchette! She's really handsome." Anne leaned far out of the window, the tiny gauze veil fluttering on her neck. "It's a beautiful present, far nicer than those animals Louis gave us." In addition to some blooded steeds, the French King had sent silvery hounds with long pointed noses and sleek coats, very continental and therefore disliked.

Gervase entered. "Where's Clo?" demanded Anne.

"*Le petit*. He has the small fever and, by your leave, she will remain at home."

"Bother!" She felt herself a child deprived of its pleasure. Motherhood could be a nuisance. She picked up her trailing skirts and ran down the passage to the nursery.

The baby was crying thinly, and three of Anne's women hung with the young mother over the cradle. Anne felt a sudden exasperation. She saw Gifa take the child, turn him over and give his tiny backside a thump. The infant gasped and threw up a little milk onto her shoulder. "Only a small stomach cramp," the Welsh woman said and settled the child, now quiet, in his cradle once more.

"Well, thank the saints. Now, Clo, you can get ready."

But the French girl remained drooping over the cradle. "I must stay," she murmured apologetically.

Fascinated as always by the sight of the child, Anne looked down at him. Relieved of his pain, he snuggled into his pillow, fists pressed to a mouth that already showed a fine chiseled shape. Clotilde too was quiet, lids lowered over her eyes. Quite recovered from the birth ordeal, she was once more the slim and lovely figure that had tended Richard in his grief.

Anne lingered. "What name shall he have? He must be blessed by Holy Church before we journey north."

"I—I have not thought."

"Not thought!" Anne was amazed. "But you must. In addition, of course, to his father's name."

"His father's?" Clotilde turned startled eyes on her.

"What is the matter with you, Clo?" Then, as Richard came into

the room: "Diccon, here's Clotilde saying she doesn't know what to name her son. Did you ever hear anything so ridiculous?"

He approached and Clotilde stiffened, her hand clenched on the cradle. She leaned to push the covers about the sleeping face.

"You're smothering him." Anne pulled them back. "He's no changeling child, to be hidden from sight. Did you ever see a more handsome baby, Diccon?"

A gust of spicy perfume enveloped them as Richard bent his thin frame over the cot and with a long male finger stirred the coverlet. For a moment he stood still and watching the child herself, Anne did not see the intense gray gaze of the mother fixed on him. Then he straightened. "Call him John," and he hitched his belt about his waist.

"John!" cried Anne. "But that's so ordinary. He must have a French name like his father. John won't do."

"I see nothing wrong with it. A good Plantagenet name." His eyes met Clotilde's. "We once had a king of that name." He took Anne's arm. "Come."

But Clotilde stood rigid, her hand on the cradle hood, her eyes following him. "A Plantagenet name," she murmured.

In her chamber Anne, forgetting Clotilde and the child, caught up her gloves and drew Richard to the door. He had dressed for the excursion in a gay patterned tunic and wore a rakish cap. She was rosy and full of joy and at sight of her, his eyes softened. She looked what soon she would actually be, a pretty windflower of a young duchess off with her courtiers for a frolic in the country.

"Do we await the others?" he asked.

"Not Clo. She won't leave the child."

"He is ill?" Sudden quiet was in Richard's tone.

"A tiny fever. Gifa says it is no more than a stomach cramp. Young mothers, you know." She smiled indulgently.

"And Gervase?"

"Gervase is so gloomy these days that the very sight of him depresses me. I have bidden him to stay behind."

"Then let us go." And Richard held out his arm and she placed upon it her hand. Everything they did nowadays seemed like a small ceremony and she thought of their childhood days, when they would have gone racing down the Middleham stairs to be first at the door. Gathered to watch their departure were the jostling servants and the color mounted in Anne's cheeks as she saw them whispering their

admiration. Ah, yes, she knew she looked well on her white horse, Blanchette, the green reins hung with tiny bells. Percy put her up and she looked to see if Richard were watching. But he wore a lowering expression and scowled as he spoke to Lovell who held his horse. Anne moved in beside him and they led their small cavalcade out onto the river road. Laden with sweet dews, the morning air was enchantingly fragrant.

"It's not like London at all. Clo should have come. She fusses too much." She shot him a gleam.

Richard rode with brows compressed, his thin lips tight drawn. She could not understand the quick declension of his pleasant spirits; when he came into the nursery he had been all smiles, and by the time they descended the staircase he had fallen cold and silent. Something was tormenting him.

"Come on, Percy!" With a light laugh she pushed her palfrey ahead and together they bent beneath the fluffy trees, their tinkling bells musical on the breeze. She was determined that on this day nothing should spoil her joy.

"Robert, was Diccon upset about anything—something, perhaps, with the King?"

"No, madam. Does not your ladyship imagine things?"

"Oh, Robert," she laughed into the brown eyes, "for the love of heaven, do not call me that! Let me be 'Anne' to some of you. Have you forgotten we played together?"

He bowed, the color rising in his smooth cheeks. Then he peered around among the trees. "Here's a sweet stopping place."

He drew rein and the others halted, Richard at the rear, chatting with Lovell. He rose in his stirrups and called over the heads. "What's to do?" The morning breeze fanned the black hair from his cheeks and the sun glinted on the jewel in his cap. "Rob—what is it?"

"The place for stopping—we have found it, my lord!"

"As you will." Indifferently Richard sank back and the whole company dismounted, the grooms leading the horses to a small thicket where, free of their bridles, they began cropping the tender grass. It was a lovely spot they had chosen. All her life Anne was to remember this particular April morning, Maying in the meadows outside Westminster. Beneath their feet the sward was smooth and green, studded with low bushes of white Maybloom through which the dogs ran, lifting their legs and snuffing for field mice. Anne and her women scattered, their hands full of the dark green sprays starred

with waxy bloom, and soon every lady wore a Botticelli wreath of spring in her hair.

They fastened blossoms onto Anne's white-horned hat. "Careful." She smiled into a small mirror. "Don't make me like a young tree. I don't want the birds roosting in my hair." With a happy laugh she perched on a little knoll and spread her skirts on the pink cloak they had laid for her. Poised and slender in the pale green gown, her eyes very blue beneath the little hat with the floating veil and the leaves, she was the incarnation of spring.

"You look like the goddess Flora herself." Percy lay at her feet, his eyes brimming admiration.

"Rob, beshrew me, you are a heartless knave." Under lowered lids she shot him a naughty glance, while with nimble fingers, stained green at the time, she began to weave a garland of the flowers they had dropped into her lap—white moonpennies and tiny scarlet pimpernels.

His face fell and he plucked three stalks and twisted them together. Forced from his love who had been whisked to Paris, his heart was sore, for her parents frowned on the suit and talked of betrothing her to another. But the older loyalty persisted as he looked up into the blue eyes of the girl on the knoll above him. "There is room in my heart for both of you."

"Pooh!" With a ringing laugh Anne tossed a handful of white flowers onto the air. "I could not find room in my heart for anyone save Diccon." She shook a stained finger at him. "And you—you should share your love with none." She thought she would have to enlist Richard's aid with the King, to see what could be done for the lovelorn Percy. She sprang to her feet. "Find me my lord and let me hang him with these." In her hands dangled the finished rope of flowers.

She now approached her governess, the Lady Philippa, sitting alone and unnoticed, nursing her damaged dignity in injured silence. "I fear, my lady, you do not relish our Maying party." She spoke soothingly to her old attendant. "Never mind, you shall sit at my side at the feast." She patted the inert hand in the large lap.

Lady Philippa lifted a distressed face. "I shall never desert you, madam."

"Of course not." Anne sighed happily. "Oh, I think nothing in the world could make me pull a long face on this day." She held up

her flowers, scarlet and white woven in a tight rope among the green. "Lancaster and York!"

"You are young, madam." But in the contagion of Anne's radiance, the sallow face relaxed into a smile. "May you never be sadder than at this moment." It was a perfunctory wish, but Anne leaned forward impulsively and kissed the faded cheek. She felt pleasantly at one with the dull prim woman who was part of the past—the dreadful but somehow beautiful past. Beyond them the stewards and pages unpacked the baskets, spreading the grass with a fair linen cloth, putting out the jellied fowl and bowls of fine egg custard.

Contentedly at peace Anne watched Richard with Lovell and Percy as they approached, laughing together. Whatever threw the shadow over Richard had now passed and he was merry again. Her fond eyes lingered on him; the swinging walk, the thin cheeks creased in the smile, the long pale hands carelessly hanging over the shoulders of his two friends. Her breath fluttered with the excess of her love. Soon she would be his Duchess, his wife, and he would be her true lover, the two of them sleeping together in one great bed, wrapped in the silence of their love.

"The lord Duke has cast off his gloom." The low voice came from the other side of the bush against which she sat with the Lady Philippa. She glimpsed the bright skirts of two of her young women who wove daisy chains as they chatted. Indulgently she smiled. Lady Constance and Lady Eleanor were among her new attendants who had arrived within the week. The red-haired Eleanor d'Evreux had been sent by Margaret of Burgundy—something about a young squire and the swift avoidance of scandal; the other, an older girl with a sharp tongue, Lady Constance Hemingford, had come from Elizabeth Woodville's retinue.

Anne thought it right that her ladies should concern themselves with the megrims of her lord, but she meant to control the matter with no tiptoeing and hushing of voices in her household, just because the lord chose to frown. She had seen too much of that with her parents, had heard Elizabeth Woodville and Isabella, with her parents, calling on their saints to help them endure the whims of their husbands. She would be serene and rule with a quiet hand, that her children might grow up in a happy home.

Again the voices. "He appears quite easy now." The French girl it was who spoke.

"'Tis ever the way with men." The deeper English voice was

careless. "Out of sight, out of mind, leave the woman at home to tend the ailing babe and make sport on your own."

Something caught at Anne, who sat rigid as a pointer, the flowers hanging from her hands.

"But he *was* upset, that you cannot deny." A low laugh rippled through the leafy screen.

The Lady Philippa began to get heavily to her feet. "It is damp on this ground, my lady." She spoke with something of her old authority.

"No!" whispered Anne, her hand clamped on that of the older woman.

"All young fathers suffer with the first. But after they have half a dozen, this or that side of the blanket, it matters not, they do not care if one here or there dies. There are always plenty more where that one came from." Together the two girls tittered.

"Does the little duchess-to-be know?"

"Sh! Of course not. The wife—you know—always the last. And she'd never suspect that mealymouthed French girl on whom she dotes. It really is a delicious joke. There *she* was, smeared with kitchen grease, and there *he* was, dallying with the French girl, conveniently married to a fellow dispatched to France and most conveniently killed. The only flaw in the nice design was the little baby de la Tour—John of Gloucester, they should call him. No matter what the old wives say about first babies, he *was* born out of season." Again they giggled.

"What now, then?"

"What now? There may be more, but when the Duke has fathered a child on his bride, it won't matter."

"She'll hear." The French girl's voice sank to a whisper.

"Not she!" The other was confident and did not trouble to lower her voice. "She's off somewhere with Percy. And that's another pair of shoes. He's plainly besotted on her. And what of that? When she's safely married, it will not matter. A slice off a cut loaf is never missed."

"An interesting little masquerie. 'Twill make exile in this country almost bearable." The Lady Eleanor rose, and with a rich rustle the two girls shook out their skirts and moved away.

Though it was quite warm in the meadow, Anne had grown deathly cold, even her lips chilling. Pathetically she looked at her governess, her blue woebegone gaze meeting the faded eyes. For an

instant pity gleamed before the formal mask shut down on the sallow face. But she pressed Anne's cold hand. "Bear it, my lady. 'Tis not the end of the world."

But Anne sat as if frozen, the forgotten flowers limp on her lap. The sun went behind a cloud, the sweet scents grew stale, the happy laughs were touched with malice, and every smile was a smirk. So that was why Richard grew solemn when he heard the child was ailing. The silence of Clotilde told nothing; outwardly she was a grieving young widow, whom none would expect to look merry. Did they all know—all but she? Ah, but *she* knew now. Did Percy, to whom she had just said "I could find room in my heart just now for none save Diccon"—did he know, and was he too laughing at her? With a sort of terror, she saw Richard quite close, the three of them smiling gaily. She caught her breath.

"Madam," begged the woman at her side.

But she could only stare dumbly into the dark face of her betrothed.

"What is it, Nan? By Judas, you look as if you had seen a banshee!" Though Richard still smiled, his eyes were alert. He stretched out his hand to raise her.

Sudden strength shot through her and she lifted her head and laughed. "A banshee? Nonsense, Diccon. Come, let us refresh ourselves." And taking his proffered hand, she moved lightly forward to the flower-decked meal.

Back at the house, she sent everyone away. She could not endure the gaze of the red-haired French girl in her violet gown, and the haughty detachment of Constance Hemingford. Though they could not have known she had overheard them, her eyes would give her secret away. "Bring my minstrel," she ordered.

He came in, dark and grave, and stood before her. The sight of him, so dear and familiar, pierced her intolerably and she burst into tears. "Oh, Gervase, help me, help me!" Heedlessly she rolled her head from side to side in the chair.

"So you know."

Through her tears she gazed. "Even you." She bit at her fist. "I shall never forgive him—they—never!"

He let her cry, the tears rolling fast now. Evidently she had worn a proud face all day, keeping back her grief. She who never wept

had need of tears now. When she stopped sobbing and fought for breath, he spoke. "You must forgive them both." He heard the quick indrawing of indignant breath. "Have you forgotten you are your mother's child? What would she have done?"

Scorn flashed from her wet blue eyes. "My father would never have behaved so. You defame his memory."

"There are other hurts a man may inflict on the woman who loves him."

Loves! The word was torture. Thought of Richard and Clotilde gave the lie to his love for her. "Love!" she sniffed, the flash of temper drying the last of her tears. "Richard never loved me. It was the money. I see it all now."

"So you think the whiter the cow the more surely it goes to the altar?"

"I am not interested in your wise sayings, Gervase." The tears were all gone now. "I only know I shall not overlook what they have done. I shall send her away—and as for my lord—"

"You cannot send her away. Do you want Richard to place her in a castle of her own? 'Tis your pride that cries out in its pain. Shall you forget then all those times when he was true to you? In time you shall forget not them, but this."

How like a surgeon with a sharp knife he was. No cossetting, no pity, only the cold icy treatment of the leech. But this was a hurt nothing could cure. "Forgive—I might—but forget—never. Have you looked at the child?" The baby mouth, the black hair, the treacle-dark eyes in the tiny face—Richard's! How could she have been so blind. Soon the child would be his father's image. And she was to accept this. Well, she might learn to live with the thought of the infidelity, but those who had been unfaithful—her lover and her best friend among the women of her household—ah, never!

"If only I knew how—and why—" She choked.

"What possible good could that do? All great houses have children born awry. It has happened. You must take care it does not happen again."

Again! She gasped at the blow. "I must know how it happened," she persisted.

"Do not seek to know." From the shadows came the warning. "That way leads to hate."

"I must." Once she knew, she might find it in her heart to understand. Forgiveness could come later—if at all.

From the firehood he turned. "Stubborn! Your father's true child. Know then, if you must. There is one who can tell you how it came to be. But to your lord say nothing."

"Nothing!" She was outraged. "Are you mad?" Not to have a scene with Richard who had so foully wronged her? To speak no word for Alain, the dead and betrayed? The child that bore his name was none of his, and Alain had come of a good family. She stared, insulted, at her minstrel.

Of course. Gervase was a man, and hated scenes. No matter how the canker ate at the heart of the woman, she was supposed to endure in silence. Well, this was one time she did not intend quietly to submit. "I shall have it out with Richard." There was a cutting edge to her tone. "Sometimes, Gervase, I think you are hardly human. You may leave me now."

Watching him go, the head with the hanging hair downbent, she took a perverse pleasure in the thought that she had hurt him. It was right and proper that someone else should feel the smart she had endured for so many hours.

Alone, she crouched in her chair, awaiting Richard who was to escort her to a state banquet at Westminster. But when he came, he would find her in her chamber robe, her women sent away, no sign of preparation for appearing in public. Already she had sent word to her mother that she was ailing and would seek her bed early. They would understand that she was gathering strength for her wedding. Her wedding! The smart was keen now. She began to think of the bitter reproaches she would hurl at Richard. She pictured him before her, silent under her scorn, but when she tried to think what he would reply, imagination failed. Never mind! She would say it all and when she had lashed him, she would think how best to deal with Clotilde. As yet there was no surge of resentment there; it was all against her lover. She bent her brows and stared into space while she searched her mind for stinging words with which to flail him.

But into the tangle of frantic thoughts crept the horror of Alain. What had they said—"conveniently killed"—oh, no, Richard would never stoop to that. She did not believe the story that it was his dagger that first struck Edouard in the throat as he defied the King in his tent at Tewkesbury. She had not believed Richard to have killed Henry. But Richard was in the royal tent when Edouard was killed;

he was there in the Tower when Henry died. A light dew broke out on her forehead. She felt suddenly ill.

Deep in her trancelike quiet, she did not hear him enter and when he stood at her chair she jumped.

"You are ill, *ma mie*?" He put his hand on her head and looked into her face. "By the saints you *are* ill! Let me call someone. Where are your women?"

She jerked her head from beneath his hand. Now her heart was pounding and she felt the sweat under her arms and in the palms of her hands. "If I am ill, Richard, I have cause. I speak of the child—yours and hers."

"Oh." A slight embarrassment curved his lips. "Well, lass, I am sorry about that." Lamely he spoke. "I had meant, one day, to tell you. But it can make no difference to you and me."

She gasped. He spoke as if he had killed a pet dog or a bird she loved. How dared he assume she would love him as well as ever! The effrontery of men. She fought for words to lash him on the raw. "You're like all the Plantagenets," she told him freezingly. "Spilling children in haylofts and taverns. Where got you this one? In the stables?"

His brows rushed together and his hands clenched. "May black shame strike you." His voice was low and harsh. "I never expected the lady I would make my wife to behave like a kitchen wench."

"Perhaps I learned it when I was a kitchen wench," she reminded him, "while you and my precious brother-in-law were wrangling over my moneys. Since it seems I am to marry a man who behaves like a kitchen knave, it appears we are even."

Then even in her cold rage, she knew she was behaving foolishly. All the great men of England had bastard children and their wives did not kick and scream like tavern women. At least Richard's child was sheltered beneath the sanctity of marriage and, in time, people would forget how he had been born and would come to regard him honorably. She looked at Richard with the bitter line about his mouth and new rage rose. "I suppose every time I turn my back I shall have to worry lest you are fathering a new brood of bastards."

"There will be no more bastards, and this one would not have been—ah—" In disgust he broke off. "Why explain?" He struck the round head of the chair back. "You wouldn't understand."

"Indeed, and I would not." But she was bewildered. This was not going at all as she had planned it. Where was Richard's embar-

rassment, his silent shame, his rueful concern, his apology? He did not make the slightest attempt to soothe her. With her haughty scorn she had driven all this away and the scowling Plantagenet whom in less than a week she would call husband stood with long hands gripping the chair, behaving for all the world as if she were the one to blame. He was trying to make her feel as if somehow she had failed him. Well, she would not take the blame for this.

"I do not care for an explanation." She set her small mouth. "There is no word that will make me take heart of grace in this most grievous matter." The coldly formal words sounded strange to her and tears were perilously close to falling now.

For a moment he stayed, eyes wide open, fixed on hers. "Then, madam, I bid you good night." And he left her.

She sprang to her feet, tried to say something. He could not go. They had not finished. She stared foolishly at the swaying door curtain. She had a feeling that she was wrong. But where? Gervase had been right and with irritated anger she thought it must be wonderful to know all the answers to the riddles of life. She would like to have him here now, to throw at him her scorn.

Relieved by her outburst, she now felt troubled. Her rage had availed her nothing. She ought to have remembered that before temper Richard always grew stiff and distant. Tears perhaps might occasionally move him, but she shook the paltry thought aside. She wanted to cry now but she would not, and before Richard she would first have died. She had handled it badly and he would never tell her anything about the child. And she could ask no one else.

And suddenly she wanted him, faithful or not. Her arms ached horribly for the feel of his embrace. What did the past matter? Only the present counted. What a fool she had been! She lifted her little crystal bell but at the first tinkle, revulsion shook her. What if he refused to come! She smothered the sound against her skirt.

She would not send for him. No matter how long it took, Richard should come to her.

20. Consent

FROM Gervase Anne learned gradually the futility of grief. But still it seemed that whenever she looked at the little John, her heart would burst. There was something in the dark eyes, in the silky curve of hair at the back of the head, that was so unbearably Richard. It was not that by now she did not know the variable nature of man's love, that while professing devotion to one woman he might father a bastard upon another; she knew quite well what Gervase said was true, that each great house had its share of children so born. But for so long, sustaining her through the dark years, her love of Richard had been the star of her life, shining in its remote heaven, while she worshiped in him the "gentil parfit knight." She would have said they held their troth equally sacred.

And Clotilde—ah, there the pang was sharp. Where was her clear unwavering love for her dead husband? Too soon had she turned for comfort to another man's arms. Anne longed to speak of this to her; indeed, there were times when the words hung palpably on the air but something foreign to her woman's nature held her quiet. Gervase might have told her some of the explaining circumstances but she shrank from asking him. She feared his quiet scorn.

For she had driven Richard from London. It was announced that the nuptials of the Duke of Gloucester and the Lady Anne Neville had been interrupted in order that the King's Lord Constable might attend to pressing business in the North. On his return, they would be married in the Abbey.

Left alone with her household, Anne realized to the full how badly she had behaved. No matter what men did, they desired not to be reproached, and the only way to make them repent their misdeeds was with gentleness and charm. Now she sought her minstrel and with downcast eyes listened to him, drawing from the stern dictates of friendship a certain comfort as she clung to this man who was to her half servant, half confessor. Feminine sympathy would

have sobbed with her, building dull fires of resentment, leaving her undone and unsatisfied. So she banished her women, preferring the lone company of her musician.

And it was thus she learned the futility of grief. Timidly she spoke of the past and he did not rebuff her.

"To think," she sighed, "that you and I might never have met."

So slim a chance had brought them together; and doubly dear he seemed because the sacrifice had been her gain. But for what? The child, for whom Gervase had sacrificed so much, had been briefly a man, and now was gone. How could Gervase be so calm—and how could he have relinquished so quietly this other dearest wish of his heart?

"You never saw him flower to full manhood," she said sadly. "It was all for nothing."

"There you are wrong. Because of you and your household, the lad grew straight and strong, he lived to hold his love in his arms, and he died in the service of the man who was his friend."

She marveled at the power of this love beside which her own seemed pale and weak. Oh, how different she would be to Richard if only he were here. "I would I knew what my lord is doing." Restlessly she moved.

"He is deep in his own affairs." The minstrel spoke freely. "He is among the people who worship him." Then his eyes pierced her. "But he needs you."

"Then why does he stay away?" She could not keep back the perverse retort.

"A man's life is his work. For the moment, the Lord Richard has set love aside, has thrown himself into that which gives his life its real meaning. You have sent letters?"

Under the probing eye she grew hot. "I have not written personally—no."

"Still the matter of the child?" He regarded the blue sky through the casement. "You must bring your mind to this." With the authority of the confessional he spoke, but not as a priest, rather as a man learned in the arts of living.

Anne wrinkled her white forehead. "Easier said than done, Gervase. It is a snarl I cannot unknot."

"Do not try. Learn to live with it day by day. Grace will be given you for this."

"It is hard."

He ignored her protest. "What if you yourself prove childless?"

She writhed. That fearful tragedy was possible. Her health was frail and Isabella had as yet no children. What if she bore Richard no heir? She shrank into the sheltering chair.

If she did not conceive, she would become a discarded wife, reigning over Richard's castles, walking beside him at royal functions, her long train carried by the proud duchesses who would smirk at her flat bosom and barren body. And in quiet country houses would be the echo of small Plantagenets, children with the gray eyes of their French mother and the swagger of their father, and the oldest one, he would be Richard's especial care—ah, how she could see Richard with his long hand on the round young neck. He might even legitimize the boy. "Since my wife has given me no heir of my body."

To stop its trembling, she clenched her jaw. She must bring him to her side again and soon. They would be married and then she would bear a child. She would take every care, send for the finest leeches and midwives, keep them at her side the whole long waiting time. She would not be set aside for a mistress and a bastard. But first her pride must bow its stiff neck. Cold little thrills ran through her. She would bring Richard back with a loving letter and then all would come right. For this she would abase herself, to bear a son; and most of all, because she loved him so.

Clotilde and the child remained, for Anne had given up all thought of sending them away. She would let Richard see how generous she could be. Daily she forced herself to watch the progress of the child's growth, to share the mother's delight in the first tooth, in the first smile of recognition, and when the soft wavering hands curled around her she felt an odd wrenching of the heart. Across the cradle hood her eyes met Clotilde's and she kept her face calm, her lips steady.

Like two old wives they sat by the child, for all they were young women this side of twenty, one of them a widow. The baby lay, milk-full, on his mother's lap, his round eyes, soft and dark, fixed on the bright embroidery at her breast. With a small tender smile, she ran her hands over the silky head where the hair hung in delicate straight strands.

From her little book Anne raised her eyes. "How like his father he grows."

"You think so?" Now there was no startled questioning of eyes

or lips. "Yes, I see it. He does indeed resemble—him." Sweetly on the air fell the last word.

Anne stared at the bent head. Did Clotilde love Richard, then, and was she serenely joyful because she had borne his child, with promise, perhaps, of more? She wondered if there came letters, warm and sweet, written perhaps in Richard's own hand, assuring his love and duty to the woman who had given him a son. This was the time for the tormenting questions, for the forced answers, by word or by the rising blush and the shamed eyes. But she could not drag the horrid thing out into the open to squat between them, keeping them hatefully apart. In her agitation she rose, shook out her skirts and walked away. She did not see the gray eyes, full of tears, watching her.

"*Pardonnez,*" murmured the French girl. Gathering up her child, she began to croon a berceuse.

That night Anne sat late writing to Richard the longest letter she had ever penned. She sent her love, written so meltingly that only a man of stone could resist her.

I pray you, my lord, to look upon my last words to you as those of a stranger, who knew you not. It is now your love who pleads for a sight of your eyes.

ANNE

Swiftly she folded the parchment, herself ran the hot wax, and pushed it into the hands of a courier.

But Richard did not come. Instead he sent Percy, who arrived on a cool August morning bearing Richard's duty to his betrothed and dispatches for the King. Biting her lip, Anne read, her hand absently extended to Percy's kiss. Deeply wounded as she was, she would not reveal her hurt. Suddenly she looked at Percy, seeing him not as a courtier and Richard's messenger, but as a man and their friend.

"You have news from Paris—of your lady?"

His face clouded. "She is gravely ill. The pox."

Anne caught her breath. If the pretty Lady Beatrice survived the dread disease, she would likely be marred for life. She pressed the shoulder of the kneeling youth. "I grieve for you, Rob. But you must take heart. She is not lost to you as yet."

She smiled and with the ease of long habit he responded. But in his heart he had given up his love and somehow she knew it. She had had experience of something of the same, and knew how it nagged

and ate its way into your very soul, and bitterly she thought how, when you grasped your heart's desire, you stood to lose it.

She listened, eyes cast down, fingers pleating the gauze of her sleeve, while he spoke of Richard. The Duke was well, somewhat thin but of good cheer. He was busy winning all hearts in the North, and would soon be coming south to his wedding. Anne drew a long breath. She would play the game as the board had been set up. To all who knew her sore heart and its cause, she would show that she could rise above this trial.

She went hunting with Percy, and in the evening she danced with him and urged him on to beat Gervase at chess. In the young man's need for distraction she found her own relief and as she tried to drive the desolation from his eyes she felt a slight easing of her own grief. From Paris had come no further word, although Robert spoke of a loyal bedchamber woman who had promised him news of his love. By now the young lady must be recovering of her malady, plastered with the salves and pastes that ladies used in vain to restore their ruined faces.

On St. Bartholomew's Day they heard mass and Anne experienced a strange comfort. The day was soft, a golden Wednesday in late August, and for the first time since the meadow party she felt almost at peace. Shortly after noon came letters from abroad and Anne went in search of Percy. Surely he had word of his love.

She found him in a small gallery, standing at a little casement, his head in his hands.

"Robert?"

He raised a bleak face. She stooped to the letter that lay on the little step at his feet. Lady Beatrice Stanville was dead. She sank to the window seat, the paper rattling in her hands, her lips forming the words of pity she could not speak. Instead she held out her arms and blindly he fell to his knees and buried his face in her bosom, his dry sobs racking them both. Her cheek on his hair, she murmured soft words and kissed his face. Numb with misery, he clung to her. Then he began to kiss her as if she and not the dead girl in Paris were his love. Entwined as lovers, they sat on in the afternoon twilight.

Neither of them heard anything as the arras lifted and Richard stood, surprised, in the little doorway.

In private they faced each other; Anne proud, silent, furious. Why had she so recoiled from the grieving youth, almost pushing him

away as she rose, startled, to her feet, and why, with such confusion in her heart, had she so meekly followed after Richard?

Now he stood looking at her, his lower lip thrust out, his brows contracted. "I see I returned at a most inopportune moment," he said, and at the sarcasm in the deep voice she shivered.

"I—I was comforting Robert, who is in sore distress." She spoke haughtily. Why explain? It was as if Richard did not trust her. Disgust welled up in her.

Richard walked restlessly about. Then, as she sat silent, he wheeled upon her. "You have always had a kindness in your heart for Percy."

"If it had never been, it would be true now." Slowly she replied, her eyes raised to his dark face. "He has been so good to me."

Left alone as she was, wounded and miserable, Percy had come to be her chief comfort, even more so than Gervase, for where the minstrel was determined to teach her the art of living, with Percy she could practice the art of forgetting. He had shared her light moments, and now his own sorrow was upon him, how could she help taking him to her heart, to bind up his hurts with some of that same balm offered so freely to her?

"Percy is a good man in a pinch." He grimaced. "But I will be eternally damned if I will have him making love to my betrothed."

She gasped. "Making love!" He could not know what he was saying. Her hand closed around a wine cup on the table and for a moment she could have thrown it at him. How to whip him with her scorn, then to run and lock her chamber against him—anything to wipe away that dark sneer.

Then, suddenly, as she held her breath in anger, came the mild deep voice of Gervase, slanting across her fury, to calm her wild heart. Her hand fell away from the cup. "Robert has lost his love. She is dead. I—I pitied him—that was all." She bent her head to hide her brimming eyes. "Perhaps he thought since I was so soon to wed my own true love, I might understand his grief."

Ah, but Gervase had said grief was futile, that it only wore out the griever and brought no relief. "Consent—consent"—that was the lesson of life. Fighting now for control, she could not see him through the glinting tears.

"That was all?" She heard only disbelief in his voice.

"All!" A momentary flash of anger returned. "What else?"

"He has been alone with you many times. How should I know?"

Now it was pride she had to battle. Subduing it, she felt only sadness. "You must know, Diccon, because I tell you. Surely what we tell each other has to be the truth."

And like a flash of very bright light, she remembered their last scene together, all bitterness and unbelief. She must not think of that now. But, and here her sense of fair play had the upper hand, she had not believed Richard then—so why should he believe her now? Her lips fell apart. Was this how it had happened to him—caught off his guard by pity?

She took a step toward him and put out a wavering hand. "Diccon?" He raised a wretched face to her. "Diccon?"

She was in his arms, held close, her face crushed against his shoulder. With his long hand he smoothed her hair. "Nan."

He did not speak of Clotilde. There was no need. She knew, as surely as if he himself had told her, of the brokenhearted girl whose gentle ministrations he had accepted in his despair, that together they had found what she herself had so earnestly sought during those past weeks and months, the balm of oblivion. Had Richard known she was still in England, within his reach, with even the slightest chance of their being together, anything else would have been unthinkable.

The agony was over. The rest—the child, and the world's opinion—did not matter.

21. Duchess of Gloucester

ANNE opened her eyes. The sound of bells had awakened her on this breezy October morning. She sat up in bed, arms about her knees. It was the day of her wedding. It was here. The day for which they had worked, prayed and endured was actually upon them.

"I simply can't believe it."

"Believe what?" Gifa shook out the fine linen shift. "Come, come, my chicken, 'tis time we had you into your bridals."

"Do you believe it, Gifa?"

"Do I not, indeed? And for what else do we make ready?" The nurse clapped her hands at the door and the chamber filled with women, the old attendants and the new ones. They poked the fire, someone brought in a bowl of warm milk, and everywhere they were spreading the bridal garments.

"No." Anne refused the drink. "I shall fast." First she would pray, then she would submit to their hands to be made ready for her marriage.

From the *prie-dieu* she turned to the mirror. She cupped her face in her two hands. Had the forced waiting aged her and would she be an old-appearing bride, for all she was no more than eighteen? She put aside the shadowing curtain of yellow hair. But it was the old familiar image, telling her nothing save that she was flushed with the two pink spots of agitation, her eyes a little brighter than usual.

"You are sure you can go to the Abbey fasting, *ma mie*?" It was the Duchess of York who, in the absence of her mother, still in sanctuary, hovered over her. "You may become faint. You are composed?"

"A small flutter here." Anne laid her hand on her stomach. "Is this how you felt, madam, on your wedding day?"

The Duchess gave one of her rare laughs. "My wedding was squeezed in between the Duke's campaigns. I think we were too hurried for nerves." But Anne heard her sigh, saw how she hid her face

in the nunlike widow's coif as she examined a snag in the pearl-embroidered hem of the wedding dress.

Quietly Anne stood to be dressed, bending her head as they dropped over it the rich silk. She ran her hands down the sleek white and gold gown, felt the furry edge of miniver outlining her hips. No longer was it modish to tie the girdle beneath the breasts; indeed, there was no girdle at all, only the long torso line swinging gently at the sides to melt into a train.

"The new mode becomes you, Anne." The Duchess cast a critical eye over the drapery. Then she tossed back her own veil. "Now the crown."

Clotilde brought it, a fragile diadem of muguet lilies, all wrought in gems, the King's gift to the bride. On her upturned hands she offered it as if the jeweled flowers were alive and, remembering the times when Clotilde kept fresh muguets before the image of the Virgin, Anne smiled. Ah, those were distant days when they were girls together, full of their fearful plans. The fervent prayers had no doubt brought them to this day, and the bitter past was about to sink forever into memory.

Clotilde stroked to satin smoothness the top of Anne's blond head and they set upon it the flashing little circlet. Gifa, whose hands had done it when she dressed Anne for her betrothal to Edouard in France, spread the spirals and tendrils of the hanging hair. Warm on her throat were pearls, Richard's gift, a great milky rope gleaming on the bare flesh.

"I could wish for a little more shape." Anne draped the pearls over her girlish breasts. "I've grown so thin of late." The evil time of her abduction had done one good thing for her, as the plain food she ate improved her figure, firming the flesh over the fine bones. But the past months of grief and worry had melted the becoming curves away.

"With the first birth, your bosom will round out," assured the Duchess, and for her life, Anne could not forbear the quick glance at Clotilde, whose own shape, with motherhood, had softly blossomed into roundness. Did Clotilde—but the girl's small pointed face was wan.

"What ails you, Clo?" Stiffly Anne turned in her robes. "You are unwell?" On this day of days, Clotilde's mood must match her own, as together they shared this solemn triumph. For this they had endured nameless terrors of blood and violence. "You look bleak."

"I—I feel cold. It is nothing, my lady."

But Anne knew. Clotilde was desolate, and why not, the bridal day bringing with it the intolerable ache for Alain, the dead lover, he who was not the father of her little son. "Drink some wine, my love." She gestured to the ruby decanter on the little tabouret at her side. "It will warm you."

"But—this is for you—for the bride," objected Clotilde. "It was specially sent."

"Yes," Anne replied vaguely as she wound the pearls around her throat. "Some wedding gift or other. I know not. I think perhaps it came from my Lord of Clarence, he who knows the rare vintages so well, but it is no matter." As Clotilde still hesitated, Anne poured the wine herself. "Here," she held out the little golden cup, "take it. I am the bride, and I command you to drink to my health." She pushed the royal little cup at Clotilde.

"If you wish," and like a child Clotilde took the cup and drank. The ruby wine stained her pale lips.

"That's better." Lovingly Anne smiled at her. "You are so pale. I cannot have you pinch-faced at my wedding." Curiously she looked at the decanter, a splendid example of Venetian art, the fine glass crusted with filagree gold. "I wonder who did send it," she murmured. But no one heard. In the heart of the confusion she stood while they shook out her skirts, Lady Cicely and Gifa draping the veil over her hair. With a quick gesture she replaced the jeweled stopper. "Someone find out who sent this that we may return our thanks. It is truly a royal gift." She turned to the French girl. "Now let me look at you," but Clotilde gave a sudden gasp, dropped the gold cup and clutched her throat. Her face went ghastly, her eyes, fixed on Anne, grew enormous, and with a groan she slid to her knees and doubled onto the floor.

"You *are* ill!" Anne's scream was lost in the cry of her women. Down on her own knees, she pulled Clotilde's hands away, as if to see what they concealed. Clotilde lay collapsed, her eyes closed.

"Cushion!" The Duchess steadied the rolling head and slipped beneath it a small chair pad. "Bring Doctor Riche!" Shrewdly she looked into the livid face. "And my priest!"

Anne was chafing the cold hands, putting back the long black hair. "*Chérie, chérie,*" she murmured. "What is it?"

"Allow me, my lady." The doctor had come quickly in, Gervase at his back. "Here," he beckoned the minstrel, "lift her up." On Anne's great bed they laid her. "Find my priest, sirrah." The Duch-

ess looked briefly up at Gervase, her fingers at the pulse of the inert hand. The doctor had his ear at the heart. Anne ran around to the other step of the bed, her bright robes billowing. The women clustered, frightened, about Gifa, who for once in her life stood helpless, a finger at her lip.

The doctor raised an eyelid. "Poison," he said briefly. Then he straightened. "She has but moments."

Anne heard the Lady Cicely sigh, saw with mounting terror how she drew back, as if resigning Clotilde to death. "No!" The word crackled in her dry throat. "No!" Wildly she addressed the doctor. "Do something! You must!" There were draughts to purge away a deadly drink which, if administered in time, could save. They were not even trying. "You must!"

He shrugged. "I am sorry. It looks like one of the baneberry juices. She drank—what?" His eye roved about the room.

"I gave her some wine," Anne replied mechanically. Then she stiffened. *I gave her some wine!* She didn't want to drink it, not from the royal cup, but I made her. But—the wine—her eye was drawn to the gold-crusted decanter, the cup standing where someone had replaced it. The wine—*meant for me!* Terror gripped her, forcing her heart to pound.

The doctor bent over the dying girl. "Ah!" The eyelids were fluttering. He motioned Anne closer, and even in her panic she marked how the delicate features had gone suddenly pinched, saw the livid look fading to a gray pallor.

"Clo—" The pleading whisper could not hope to reach those dying ears.

But Clotilde lifted heavy lids and looked drowsily at her. "You—you—are—" The words trailed off.

Anne knew. The old devotion could not die. In her final moment, Clotilde feared for her. The eyes, bright gray now but already filmed over, tried to convey something more, and Anne bent till her ear brushed close.

"Le—petit—Jean—" The laboring breath could scarcely form the words.

Ah, the child. The mother's last legacy. Silently Anne nodded, her throat aching. Not only because he was Richard's son, but for Clotilde, she would wear this child in her heart of hearts. With the faintest of sighs, Clotilde appeared to sink back into the pillow. But still her breath fluttered and still they waited. Then again the lips

moved, and light as a puff of thistledown, the sound floated through—"Alain."

Then the face shrank and suddenly smoothed, and it was the face of the child who so long ago stood with Gervase and the youth at the bedside of the little ailing Anne.

"'Tis over, God rest her soul." The long fingers of the doctor moved the fixed lids over the empty eyes. At that moment the priest, vestments flying, rushed in. Gervase had found him in the chapel praying for the wedding couple. At once he sank to his knees and commenced the office of the dead. Gervase, his carven features more deeply marked than ever, hair hanging over his cheeks, regarded the dead girl. The women began the soft bustle about the corpse, and without taking his eyes from her he moved out of the way to the bedpost, curved one hand about it, himself as still as if made of wood. Against the other golden column Anne steadied herself. In dazed silence she saw them straighten the limbs, crossing the hands over the crucifix, veiling the quiet face. In his low trained voice the priest continued his recitation.

"My child"—the Duchess rose from her own brief prayer—"there is nothing more to do now." She touched Anne.

"I cannot believe it," Anne whispered, as if afraid to wake Clotilde. "Only a moment ago—" Her voice died. Who had sent the wine? Was it indeed Clarence? A wave of faintness washed over her but the sharp anguish of the loss saved her from swooning. Gentle as a dove the dead girl lay enfolded on the bed. And in the chamber, all was still, as if the watchers held back their tears till the dread visitor should have departed.

The arras swished. "My lord Duke."

A tall figure in white came in. Anne started. Her brother-in-law, the Duke of Clarence—he! Unable to move, she gripped the bedpost. Was it fancy, or did he look disturbed?

A moment only he hesitated, taking in the scene. Then he stepped forward. "Your serving-woman?" Toward the bed he gestured.

"My serving-woman is dead." Some inner strength enabled her to make the harsh reply. And then she knew it was entirely possible that he had indeed sent the poisoned vintage in a last crazy attempt to stop her marriage. Rage welled up in her and suddenly she wanted to fling the wine at him, to stain the immaculate whiteness in which he was arrayed. A step only; hardly aware of what she did, her hand

closed around the decanter. Deliberately drawing on his gauntlet, Clarence eyed her warily.

The Duchess was quicker. "No, Anne." The quiet voice cut through the haze of rage and pain. She loosened Anne's contorted fingers, motioned to Gervase. "Destroy this." And the minstrel disappeared with the golden tray. With shaking hands she straightened Anne's robes, pulled tight the shoulder knots of the scarlet velvet mantle. Their faces were close. "You must go on." Her whisper was urgent. "Leave this for now."

Aye, the living had to go on, no matter what the pain. Only the dead had finished with suffering. The Lady Cicely was right. There would be time later for tears and mourning—and for dealing with whoever had brought this about.

"Come." Clarence's voice sounded smooth and urbane. "This is indeed regrettable, but—your bridegroom awaits, my lady."

Richard—the wedding. The day was marred but somehow, like everything else, it would pass. She pressed the Duchess's hand. "I am ready." In control of herself and without a backward glance, she allowed her guardian to escort her from the chamber.

Out into the brisk air she stepped, to the tumult of sound that was London on a royal wedding day. The cold wind off the river revived her somewhat but as Clarence led her across the courtyard she felt as if her legs were made of wool. On the walls, glimpsed through gates ajar, she saw the cheering folk of London, come to speed her on her way to the Abbey. Through the lane made by Clarence's guards, they approached the chariot. And there, beside the open door, waited Gervase.

Without a word he swung her up into the high seat, disposed her robes as deftly as a woman, stepped aside for Clarence to mount, then slammed shut the door. For a second the steady eyes met hers, calmed her, quieted the painful pounding of her frightened heart. Then they moved and she saw him no more.

At her side the tall white figure, seeming to be elegantly at ease, betrayed its own agitation by the tugging of a velvet gauntlet. "Bow, my sister," the slurring words taunted her, "smile, my sister."

And she forced the smile to her stiff lips, lifted her hand in greeting, bowed to the screaming people. Through the window hurtled a flower, where it lay on her skirt, a crimson heart of perfume. Where had anyone obtained roses in October? she thought idly. Now the crowd threw more flowers, real and artificial, beneath the feet of

the horses, in at the windows. How they cried out their well wishes as slowly she began her brief way to the Abbey. They could not know, and doubtless would not care if they did know, how sore was her heart at this moment. She knew that she belonged to them, as the image of the happy bride, the romantic princess, riding in her fairy coach to meet her prince. She was no longer Anne Neville, but the future Duchess of Gloucester, to be the wife of a royal prince. And for this she must pay, for the privilege of sitting upon satin cushions, of receiving the bows and homage of Englishmen. And for this she must walk always in the shadow of the threat, always and forever, and she must endure the close brushing of the wing of Death until he came for her.

Had she not suffered enough—had she not earned the right to be Diccon's wife? Evidently not. Part of the price was still to be paid, as part had been paid this very morn—but by the girl who lay so quietly back there in the bedchamber. Bitterness flowed over her and she stared unseeing at the tufted silk walls of her bridal carriage.

Clarence caught a flower and, laughing, tossed it at the maid who had thrown it. Then he too leaned back. "Unfortunate about the French girl." He was pulling again at his glove. "What was it?"

"Poison." The sibilant word fell between them. "In the wine. A rare vintage sent to me by someone—perhaps by you, my lord?" She wondered where she got the courage to accuse him so openly.

"I?" His light laugh held no mirth. "Surely you cannot mean that, my sister."

Sister! Her Warwick blood was now roused as fear melted into anger.

"Come now!" His persuasiveness was loathsome. "You cannot believe I sent you tainted wine. Poison is a woman's weapon, not a man's."

"The decanter!" Now she remembered. "Many times I have seen it on Isabella's serving table."

"Oh, that. One of a great service belonging to our father. I believe there were at least twenty of those Venetian bottles when our mother distributed his plate among us. You cannot prove I sent you that wine." Perplexed, she sat now, her fingers crising the edge of her veil. "Besides," his voice sank, "you have been betrayed by your own, you will recall."

Bought with your money, she longed to retort but caution kept her silent. He wanted her to lose her temper, to break down, to shame

Richard and herself before the world. And what use, anyway, to accuse one who squirmed so cleverly out of every tight corner?

"This is going to be difficult to explain away, my lady." Difficult—she shot him a questioning look. "You see, I know it was you who gave the girl the drink." Ah yes, he had spies in her household, and one of them had waylaid him as he mounted her stairs. "So," he went on, "have you considered how this will look? After all, the girl is the mother of Richard's bastard, and we all know how you took that news. And now—the wronged bride—the false maid—the woman's weapon—" The ugly insinuation was left hovering in the air. She had played into his hands and now he was grinning in her very face.

Clenching her fingers in her lap, she fought for control.

"So I think, my sister, that you will do well to forget about who sent the wine. Let this be an unfortunate illness, perhaps, but not an unfortunate—accident." His hand, steel in the velvet, closed on her arm.

She bit her lip, looked out of her window at the sky of brilliant blue flecked with chasing clouds, the alternate flashes of sun and shadow dappling the happy faces that lined the way. Summoning all her strength, she bowed and smiled, even raised her free hand to wave. Her brother-in-law's grip was painful now, the hard fingers, ring-heavy, biting into soft flesh, bruising, as he bruised every life that touched his own.

The ride was over. The Abbey, austere and solid, loomed above them, the chariot wheeled, stopped, and Anne stepped out onto the royal blue carpet to a welcoming roar that dazed her. She took a deep breath and, aware of Clarence's extended arm, placed her hand upon it, and lifting her head, moved beside him. She knew that beneath the tight satin sleeve she bore the blue marks of his fingers but she no longer cared. Richard awaited her.

With every mounting step of the shallow stairs she gained strength. This, this was what she was born for, to walk with a royal escort of guards to meet a royal bridegroom. She felt herself truly her father's daughter, and as they reached the top step and passed beneath the arched doorway she thought, "And I am a Plantagenet, too. He shall not have it all his own way."

Full of a cold pride, she stood while the bridemaids fussed with her train and veil, settled the diadem more carefully, chattered among themselves.

"You are ready?" Clarence's manner was faultless.

"I am ready." Again she said it, and this time there was no doubt of it.

They began the long walk down the nave. No longer were her legs weak, and her heart, quieted now, beat steadily. Thankfully she drew about her the shrouding cloak of her pride, kept her mind resolutely on Richard far down at the eastern end, concealed in the heart of brightness beyond the rood screen. The nave was narrow, choked with the standing figures, all the great lords of York and Lancaster, gathered beneath the high, gently waving banners.

They neared the transept. Now she was passing the tall Duchess of York, that splendid mother of England's three princes; quietly in her place, disciplined to calmness, the slim, reedlike figure of Isabella at her side. And now she was at the very seat of royalty, and there was the Queen, her body hugely swollen with her latest expected child, sunk in her chair, her nose buried in a fragrant bunch of herbs. Through the pierced rood screen she could see the King, bulky and golden, legs apart, his hand twisted in his heavy chain. And Richard.

Richard was pale enough but composed. With a quick movement Anne freed herself of Clarence, gave her hand to Richard. At its icy chill, he started, lifted his brows. "Beshrew me, Nan," he whispered, "if I did not think you were never coming." His eyes, brilliant in his dark face, softened at sight of her.

"Diccon," she murmured.

His warm hand clasped hers, and with no more ado than if they were going on a stroll in a rose garden, he led her forward.

But the high altar awaited them and the archepiscopal dignity of her uncle, standing there, stiff in his robes, on the step. Solemnly now she let Richard lead her, for never again would they be Nan and Diccon. Never again would they make merry together as in their childhood. Never again would they quarrel childishly, flinging cruel words at one another over their private griefs. There would be no time for this. A greater role awaited each of them, the role that would be the fulfillment of their tremendous destiny. Duke and Duchess they were, but forever England's own, loving her before themselves, serving her, living for her.

Before the high altar they knelt, and the choir began to sing.

22. The King's General

SINCE the arrival of the English in Calais early in July, nothing had gone right. The despair Richard felt he kept from Edward. The first twinge that all was not well came when Charles the Bold failed to keep his rendezvous with them, sending instead his Duchess. The three Plantagenet brothers were pleased to see their sister Margaret, but she had eyes only for Clarence, her favorite, to whom she deferred in most flattering affection. Wryly the other two watched her petting her brother George and wondered if either of them had had anything to do with the Duke's failure to appear at this most crucial of meetings.

Edward was in France at last to regain the provinces lost twenty-five years before, to reassert the claim of his distant cousin Henry V to the French crown.

To Richard, this was a glorious cause, one to which he felt completely dedicated. For this he had spent the backbreaking months of preparation, mustering his share of Edward's mighty army, now eating its head off in camp outside Calais as they awaited the arrival of their ally, Burgundy. For this, Parliament had raised the huge sums of money; for this Edward had formed friendly alliance with Castile, Brittany, and Scotland, all of whom had sent sizable grants of money and bodies of armed men.

But with the failure of Burgundy to appear, the English felt a severe check. Disquieting news had come from the east that Charles the Bold was pursuing a private quarrel with Louis on his own.

"What think you?" Edward counceled with Richard.

Richard kicked at the log in the fireplace. The August night had turned chilly. "He plays for time. I think he doesn't mean to lend himself to open battle."

"Well, I've got to start forward." Edward sighed. "I waste away here like butter in the sun."

A diversion occurred as Margaret came in with Clarence, their faces bright with color from the cold wind off the harbor. "We've had the most delicious ride!" Margaret cried. "You should come out and see the sun setting. It's beautiful."

"I see the sun set every day," growled Edward. "Tell me, Margaret, are you sure Charles said he would be at Saint-Omer by the weekend?"

"Oh, positively. We have to be there for the Feast of the Assumption. We couldn't miss that." Margaret's brown eyes were serious.

"Feast of the Assumption! What's that to do with it?" cried Edward while Clarence smiled silkily.

"We have a favorite little chapel in which we have a special interest because of the reliquaries there. We always come to Saint-Omer to celebrate the Feast."

"Hoo!" Edward blew out his breath. He had other matters on his mind than the observances of religious rites. "Thank the Blessed Virgin for small favors. At any rate, you do know he'll be there?"

"Ah, yes." Margaret laughed, showing the tips of her teeth. Now she resembled her three brothers. All had the same smile lines at the mouth corners, though on the thin faces of Richard and Clarence, they were more like the fine chiseled marks of a sculptor.

Early next morning with her brothers and their suites, Margaret set off for Saint-Omer to meet Burgundy. Already Richard felt the depression of disappointment which settled like soot over his spirit. With a reminiscent ache he thought of the past spring, all those months of preparation, spent away from Anne and their son, while he mustered Edward's army. Three hundred more men than he had indented for made a brilliant showing at Canterbury, and so pleased Edward that he gave Richard a new castle and made him Sheriff of Cumberland for life. For weeks, Richard could not recall this without the tingle of excitement that filled him when Edward so publicly acknowledged his work. But now the feeling of elation had gone and in its place was a leaden fear that things might well go amiss.

He observed Margaret and Clarence, their mounts almost touching, conversing animatedly as they cantered along. Margaret's little riding hat was enchanting, the short veil fluttering on her neck. Her brown eyes beamed on George of Clarence whose sudden laugh rang out on the warm morning air. Not a care between them, thought Richard, who could not, at that moment, have laughed at anything.

At Saint-Omer where they drew rein in the early afternoon, word

was brought that His Magnificence the Duke of Burgundy was just riding in from the southeast.

"Where's he been?" muttered Edward. He had not long to wait to find out. Burgundy came, but without his host; he was attended only by a mere bodyguard.

"Name of God!" Edward was astounded. "My lord Duke, where is your army?"

"We have been besieging Neuss." Charles was bland, his round face with the drooping mouth unconcerned.

"Neuss!" Edward's eyes popped. "Ten thousand devils, why Neuss?"

"Why not? *Tiens*, my lord, is it not one of Louis's towns?" Burgundy signed to his squire who divested him of his helm. He then strode to an inner room where he later sent for his barber and dispatched a courteous invitation to his brother-in-law of England to join him at supper.

But Edward had not recovered from the shock. "I think," he confided to Richard and Hastings, "he is addled." And he added, "Neuss!"

At dinner that night, Charles was bright with enthusiasm. "Your magnificent host! News of it lying outside Calais has reached me." In his flamboyant Burgundian fashion he complimented Edward. "With that number not only could you march through France, but to the very gates of Rome!"

"Aye." Edward was dry. "Possibly."

Richard lay back in his chair picking at his food. He had a sick feeling that the expedition, for which they had given so much, was doomed to failure. And somehow he felt that Burgundy, Margaret, and Clarence, sitting together at the board, were leagued against Edward and himself. Charles was flattering Edward, throwing dust into the blue eyes that watched his every move. "We have broken our siege"—Charles tore the wing from a fat capon—"and my army is pillaging down in Lorraine. But—" as Edward opened his mouth to protest, "you, my lord, will have but to sweep across Normandy to Champagne, and there I will rejoin you with all my host."

Yes, thought Richard, after your precious army has ramped all over Louis's duchy of Lorraine, spending strength, wasting time and supplies, even deserting. He saw Edward bury his sharp Plantagenet nose in his cup.

Then Edward set the cup down with a bang. "I cannot wait. My

army eats and drinks to no purpose. St. Pol sends word he will deliver up Saint-Quentin and I propose to establish a base there. You, my lord, must stand firm."

"Of course." Burgundy's round face held only surprise. Had there been talk of anything else? With this, Edward had to be content.

On August 11th, he approached Saint-Quentin without Burgundy, who had ridden off to resume command of his own troops. As Edward neared the town he was met by a salvo of guns.

"St. Pol must have heard!" cried Edward, whose own scouts had brought him word that Louis, at the head of a huge army, was on the march from Beauvais. "These French!" St. Pol had given way to panic and, at the last minute, turned his coat to the colors of his King. "What's to do out there!" For just outside his hastily pitched tent there was a commotion.

"It's an officer from the Count St. Amand's suite. We caught him on the reconnoiter." Clarence came through the tent opening.

"Ah." For a moment Edward thought. "I won't see him. But you, Clarence, drop a word in his ear that I am not averse to discussing terms with Louis. Make it appear that you are giving away our secret—you'll know how—" Edward was suddenly embarrassed. Not so George of Clarence, who would gladly perform the little act of espionage.

Richard, who had heard all, was stunned. He could not believe his ears. What dire calamity was bad enough to force Edward to terms, turning his back on their glorious enterprise? Sick now with the sure knowledge that his secret dread was a reality, he walked away.

So Clarence dropped the word in the Frenchman's ear, and in a few hours Louis replied. "An attractive offer of peace" was what awaited the Lord Edward; Louis was willing to treat with ambassadors.

Edward collected his lords about him. The royal dukes, the earls, the marquesses, jostled each other uneasily. But they were, for the most part, favorable to the bloodless peace that Louis and Edward proposed. Only Richard and his two friends opposed the shameful idea.

"How can you, sire," he addressed his brother, "break faith with our people who have beggared themselves to pay for this war?"

Edward shifted in his chair. He found Diccon tiresome. "My lord Duke," in like manner he replied to his brother's formal address,

“when you have been in this boat as long as I, you will see that discretion can outweigh valor.”

“And you, who camped only last week upon the field of Agincourt!” Richard cried out as if in physical pain.

But Edward wore his obstinate expression; there would be no moving him now. His mind was made up. Richard could have wept. How could they face their people who would never understand that an agreement could be as honorable and glorious as a victory in the field?

“We leave for Amiens in the morning,” said Edward, and he rose from the council.

Richard remained behind. And Edward did not press him. “Let him alone,” he told Hastings. “He has much to learn. I’ll plaster his hurts with French gold and we’ll see what that will do.”

But Hastings made no reply. Much as Richard liked money, it would take more than Louis’s gold to bind up these most grievous wounds. So it fell out that when Burgundy came storming into the English camp, there was only Richard to receive him.

“Perfidy!” he screamed. “What lily-livers have we here?”

“My brother the King knows what he is about,” Richard told him stiffly. Whatever he himself felt, he would not tolerate abuse of Edward from another, especially this erratic weather vane who had kept them all on the anxious seat ever since their arrival in July.

“What do we gain from this co-called truce?” Burgundy was waspish.

“I know not, but Edward will not settle for anything less than an appropriate ransom, and I should imagine there will come a royal marriage from it.” But Richard spoke with an assurance he did not feel.

“I should have known it would come to something like this. You can tell your brother of England I will have no part in such a peace.” And in a fury Burgundy banged out.

At Picquigny, Edward and Louis met on a wooden bridge.

“And you should have seen ’em.” Clarence retailed the incident to Richard. “Edward wore his best and, by my faith, I have never seen him looking better. Louis”—here Clarence slapped his knee and chuckled—“Louis never looked worse. That barber of his must have convinced him someone would attempt his life, for they had dressed him in all the shabby odds and ends they could find. He was a sight!”

"Humph." Richard rubbed his tender shoulder. "I've yet to see Louis looking other than as if he just rolled out of a dust barrel."

"That's not all," with relish Clarence continued. "That adviser Comynnes was dressed in exactly the same fashion. Dubious honor!"

"To divide the danger."

"Exactly. Then Louis and Edward swore on a splinter of the True Cross to honor the treaty and there was some bowing and scraping. I was not close enough to hear what they said, but Louis laughed in that odd way of his. I fancy Edward was pleasuring him with some more of his wit."

"What was decided?" Richard was glum but practical.

"Oh! Well, of course, we go home with the first die. Truce is for seven years with annual payments of fifty thousand crowns."

"Nothing now!"

"Yes. Seventy-five thousand beautiful golden crowns paid down at once. And that's not all." Sideways he looked at Richard.

"What, then?"

"Edward's Bess is to marry with the Dauphin."

Richard leaped up. "I cannot understand what Edward thinks about. Here we are, on Louis's neck, and he so anxious to be rid of us that he will give us anything we ask—even to his gold and his son. Surely Edward must see how easily the victory could have been ours."

"You forget Burgundy."

"Yes," Richard muttered. "I do, indeed." Edward could win, indeed, but without support of Burgundy he could never hope to exploit his victory.

But with or without Burgundy, it had been clear that Edward held the upper hand. Knowing this, Richard was galled to think that Louis had escaped the trouncing they came to give him. He would do anything to get the English out of France. Those earls and captains whose military pride had suffered severely from Edward's bloodless victory Louis plastered and cozened with gold. Pensions were awarded right and left, and Hastings prepared to go home richer by two thousand crowns yearly, to be paid from Louis's own coffers. The Spider-King rubbed his soiled hands and wondered if in his passion for bribery he had overlooked anyone. Ah, the King's young brother, Lord Richard, Duke of Gloucester!

Do take dinner with me in Amiens. So read his cordial invitation.

Bored and miserable, Richard decided to accept. "I might as well," he sighed to Lovell and Percy.

Louis wriggled with pleasure at sight of him. "Ah, lord Duke, what an honor you do us, and what pleasure to an old man!" Richard bowed and accepted the chair at Louis's elbow. "And tell me about the little Lady Anne. She is well? Ah, I remember the last time I saw her at breakfast in Angers. A pretty young thing!"

"The Lady Anne is well, I thank you, sire."

"I am told you have a son. Good fortune, indeed." Louis also knew that the Lady Anne would have no more children, that the difficult birth of her little Ned had almost killed her. He speared a pickled eel on his silver dagger and dropped it down his throat. They were well out of that tangle with the Lancastrians and the Earl of Warwick. But memory of *that* brought a twinge. Louis gulped and well-nigh choked on his eel. Queen Margaret was still a prisoner in London, and before the damned English went home, there would come up the matter of her ransom. Well, he would make King René tip up handsomely for that.

Richard had been discussing his son but Louis could not have told him a word of what he had been saying. Now he heard Richard. "More than two years old. Soon we shall start the riding lessons." Richard attended to his plate, to screen his eyes from the searching gaze of Louis. Never even to themselves did he and Anne admit they had produced a weakling, a child that might never grow up, and the fact that Anne would remain childless was a ghost that haunted them day and night.

"I have prayed to the Holy Mary for the safe outcome of this enterprise," Louis was saying, as sanctimoniously he looked down his narrow nose. "And she has heard my prayers. Things have turned out well. Quite well, indeed."

Richard suddenly stared up at him as he sat slightly enthroned on a small dais at his side. Louis expected him to show his disapproval or at least to complain of his brother on behalf of the English people. But Louis had reckoned without Richard's heart, which still was Edward's.

"My brother has done that which will entirely content our people. We desire only peace and amity with you, sire." Richard could parry any sly thrust of the French King.

Louis smiled, his withered face screwed into a grin. He knew the

game Richard played and he relished it. But all he said was, "*À chaque saint sa chandelle.*"

It was now Richard's turn to smile. To each saint his candle, forsooth. Honor to whom honor is due. Was that it? The only thing was, whose honor had been preserved in this summer of Anno Domini 1475?

In the great lower hall of Middleham, Anne stood in the stream of light from the armorial window, waiting to greet Richard, home from the French war. For long she had expected him, but he had not come straight to her; instead he had gone to York which had demanded his immediate presence, for Edward's defaulting in France had borne bitter fruit. Now it was almost Christmas.

As he clanked slowly through the door in his steel suit, he appeared very tall in the towering helm, his arms and legs angular in the jointed metal that protruded from the bright edge of his tabard. Anne wondered why, when he might have changed into the comfort of wool and velvet, he had chosen to ride in his battle dress. A presentiment of trouble took her. But now he reached her and she melted into the bruising embrace as he enveloped her in his hard arms. His steel was icy from riding in the December wind.

"*Pardieu!* It's good to be home." He kissed her hard. Then he looked at the others. The two little boys, John and Ned, nestled against Anne's skirts, the smaller one shrinking into the shrouding folds, the other staring unabashed at the clanking stranger.

"How the lads grow!" Richard creaked to his knees, the better to view his two sons. Laughing, he poked a long finger into the fat stomach of little John of Gloucester who wriggled, then burst into a gurgling laugh. Anne dislodged her own son from his burrowing.

"Come, Ned, 'tis your father." She ruffled the light brown hair, no longer of her color, getting more like her sister Isabella's. "He's getting on. Soon he'll be two and a half." She spoke as if this great achievement were something for which the child himself was wholly responsible. She pushed back his face, stared earnestly into it, then looked up at Richard. "Does he appear to have changed, Diccon?" After all, Richard had been gone for the better part of six months and children at this stage of their growth alter fast.

But Richard continued to tickle his other son, their grins ridiculously alike. "Here!" He put his helm on the floor. The child squat-

ted suddenly, the better to view the feathery wonder. "Play with that." Staggering a little, he got to his own feet. His hand closed around Anne's. "Let me out of this shell." And together they sought his chamber.

"Why did you ride all that way in your armor?" Perched on the bed, she watched the squires getting him out of his steel.

"Trouble between here and York."

"Trouble?"

"Aye. We're out of the wood in York, but there are more than our people of the North who burn over this thing of Edward. And I'll have to go back in a day or two. I came only to see you and the lads." He stretched and scratched his bared chest. "By holy Paul, 'tis meat and drink to be with you, Nan." His head popped through the opening of the shirt they dropped over him and now he looked at her as if for the first time since his arrival, his eyes softening. It was time he noticed her, she thought. Like the girl she still was, she perched on the bed in her favorite position, her silken knees drawn to her chin, as slowly she ate a preserved fig, licking the sticky sugar from her fingers as they used to do when children. Laughing, he rolled onto the bed beside her.

"What a child you are!" He snatched the last sweet morsel and popped it into his own mouth. "Do you do this sort of thing all the time?" It sometimes escaped him that she was a royal duchess with a suite of ladies to carry her train. "Where are your women?"

"It was such nice weather, I sent them into the country for the day." And at her ingenuous remark, Richard laughed again. He knew she did not relish keeping up her state here at Middleham, that she loved her privacy, had planned this nice little domestic welcome without benefit of the long face of etiquette. He flopped onto his back and pulled her down beside him where together they lay, Duke and Duchess, gazing up at the canopy with the scarlet and gold blazons. But suddenly his laugh choked off and he put one arm over his face so that all she could see was the bitter line of his mouth. She sat up and took his other hand, now limp, playing with his fingers. "Diccon, tell me."

"You had my letters." From beneath his arm, his voice was muffled.

"But I cannot believe Edward would do such a thing."

"Nevertheless, he did it." He was short. "He signed a separate treaty with that damned Louis. A truce—for seven years! Sold out

his allies, tossed aside his sacred word!" Snatching away his hand, he beat it on the satin coverlet.

"Is that bad—I mean a truce? Is it not better for the country to have peace?"

"You talk like a fool, Anne. All you women can ever see is the not-fighting. There are times when fighting is the only course compatible with honor."

Honor. Oh yes, she thought, always live with honor, no matter who suffers, who is maimed, killed, bereft. Honor must be preserved, that men may ride proudly before the world. Anne felt some of his bitterness but not for the same reason. She looked at the lanky form of her husband flung down beside her, his arm over his eyes, his mouth moody and down-drawn. How recklessly he would throw away his life for honor. And what of those left behind?

Now he twitched. "We had jack's delight to play with that fool Burgundy. He's another to drive a man to the devil. Diddled us fairly. Sent Margaret to meet us at Calais—Margaret, loaded with all sorts of fancy presents—and then when he did come himself, he had nothing but smooth talk." Suddenly Richard sat bolt upright, as if forced up by the sheer surprise of his own words. "Nothing!"

"I know." Anne had read the letters, scratched from the furious pen of Richard himself or written by his scribe Kendall, whose fair chirography could not conceal the white heat of his master's angry dictation. The finest army ever raised by England had gone into France to do battle for England's honor, to teach Louis his long-overdue lesson, and to bind together in lifelong amity the strongholds of Brittany and Burgundy together with Edward's island kingdom. And to what had it all come? Betrayal, treachery, and black disgrace for the gentlemen of England.

"But if Edward had such a marvelous army, why did he not fight Louis himself?" Anne wanted to know.

"No good without the others." Richard was gloomy. "Our sister Margaret could not persuade Charles to come to the scratch, and as for Francis of Brittany, something went wrong there before ever we landed. He and Charles could not agree where to start fighting—one was for Normandy and the other for Guienne—a pair of boobies, you may be assured. It's my belief they meant all the time to leave Edward to pull the nuts out of the fire. At any rate, they failed us. And that was when Louis stepped in with his damned golden bribes."

"Wouldn't Edward listen to you, Diccon? He often does."

"I cannot think what's come over him of late, Nan. He's changed. All he thinks about now is money, and God knows Louis offered him plenty of that."

"Money." Anne could not take in the need of money, for never had she felt its want; there had always been so much of it in her family.

"Louis tried to ingratiate himself with me," went on Richard. "To bribe me—spread for me a dinner at Amiens the like of which he thought I had never yet seen. Stupid fool of a spider! Since when had food ever meant that much to me?"

"Why food? Was there nothing else?"

"Well," Richard looked cunning, "there was a matter of gold plate and some really fine horses. I took them and told him plainly I should pay him nothing for them, but accept them as an earnest of his friendship to me and mine. There's a splendid gray, a two-year-old, beautifully broken, that you might ride when next we go abroad." Then an idea struck him. "Why not come back with me to York?"

"The trouble is over?"

"For the nonce. Edward had some of them in chains for their rebellious anger over his pact with Louis, and he swore he would revoke the city charter. We worked to prevent that." Richard looked for a moment as if the fatigues of a century had descended upon him. Then his face grew bitter. "We bring back neither booty nor glorious battle scars. Only debts. I took a thousand archers out of York alone, and for what? For our black disgrace!" He bit the words off. "Edward never meant to fight at all."

Anne had not seen this mood of Richard against his age-old idol. There was bitterness against Clarence, and with good cause. But since Richard's own babyhood, Edward had been his guiding star. She must change the subject.

"What of Queen Margaret?"

"The Angevin? She's to go home this spring. Louis has finally ransomed her." His face twitched. "Oh, yes, our royal brother has lined his pockets well, what with the weight of the crowns paid down on the spot and the promise of yearly tribute."

But Anne heard only that Margaret of Anjou was at last to go home. Poor lady! Anne longed to see her once more, to touch that proud hand, to speak with the woman who had so nearly become her mother-in-law. They said all the bright glitter was faded from the

splendid hair now besprinkled with gray, that the flashing eye was dull, the light clear voice sunk to a dry whisper. Broken and bowed, Margaret lived with her husband's holy relics, awaiting her release and the sad journey home.

"Poor Margaret," she murmured. Then rousing herself, she asked about the others. "What of Clarence? You know we've had Isabella with her little Margot staying with us here. The child is the image of George and is coming two. Has a temper, too!" Privately she sighed, remembering that her own child had not even spirit for that.

"Clarence went to London and I hear Edward has dispatched him to Calais again. There is some smoothing out to be done there. He is also to look into the matter of your uncle."

Ah yes, Anne's uncle, the famous Archbishop of York. Caught in a plot with the mighty Lancastrian Oxford, Neville had roused Edward's fury anew. Declaring that he had been too lenient with his erstwhile enemies, he arrested Neville in April and sent him to Hammes Castle, a fortress outside Calais.

"Do you think Edward will release my uncle?"

"I have advised it. There is nothing to be gained by keeping him there, where unknown to us, anyone can get at him." Richard did not elucidate the "anyone" but both he and Anne thought of their brother of Clarence. "There's something else." Anne wondered if any more ill tidings could be added to the load that Richard bore. "Edward is marrying Elizabeth to the Dauphin. Louis screwed that out of him in return for the crowns."

"But that is good for Edward, and England, is it not?"

"That's as may be. There are other courts, you know. For myself, I would not trust the spider to the edge of his web. Never would I give child of mine into his keeping." With a sudden change of mood, he flung his arm about her waist and they lay face to face. "I wonder if I should take you with me, Nan."

She pouted and put her fingers to his lips, tracing their thin outline. "When did I ever shrink from danger?"

Their eyes were near and she felt herself swimming in the velvet blackness of his. "Never, my lass," he whispered. "Never." And now he crushed her to him, his kiss soft and sweet on her mouth, then harder, as he pressed apart her lips. The coil fell from her hair and rolled to the bed edge, but they knew nothing save that they were one, lost in the melting sweetness of their love.

York was wild. Bells clashed and clamored and the white stone walls bloomed with festooned banners and spicy boughs of fir and ropes of holly and ivy. It was another double celebration, like the one when Edward came home from exile in Flanders and the Christmas crowds cheered him all the way from Dover. Now the blessed Christmastide was upon the land once more and all York had turned out to welcome the Duke of Gloucester and his lady.

Richard was the hero. He it was who had reconciled York with their angry King, even offering to stand hostage himself for the city fathers till Edward's wrath should have subsided. And all York acclaimed him for this. Feasts and celebrations had been readying for the past month, with boar's head and ceremonial swan, the mummers and Mystery Players trained to perfection, awaiting the arrival of the royal visitors.

A flurry of snow was in the air and from the tower of the great minster, newly finished after all the years of building, the bells shook onto the bitter air their metallic sounds. Shivering in her ermine-lined cape of scarlet, Anne longed only for the end of the ride, but resolutely she bowed and smiled, now and then waving her hand from the warm shelter of her cloak. All her ladies were enduring the cold as best they might, although the Lady Philippa was really turning blue and the rest of them looked wretched enough. Poor souls, she thought, with no glory to sustain them. Erect at her side, riding easily, his flaming surcoat bright in the gloom, his liripipe fluttering from his shoulders, Richard rode with an almost rakish air. He caught her eye, winked, and shivered into his fur collar. She pressed together her icy lips in a stiff smile and clutched closer her charcoal box. It was quite cold now, for it had been some hours since it had been renewed. If only the wind would not whip down the narrow streets under her skirts. She was sure her legs were absolutely frozen and when she had to alight, she wondered how she would bend them. Like her own, Richard's sharp nose was pink at the tip, his eyes full of wind tears, but he was smiling with joy at the tumult about them.

The horses picked their tired way over the uneven stones of the winding street, now growing wet and slushy from the sprinkle of snow, while from every small-paned window flung wide, a shouting head was thrust. Deafened, Anne looked dizzily up ahead where loomed the points of the minster spires, neat and sharp against the yellow-gray sky. Soon they would be within the Chapter House, and this night, at least, she meant to go early to bed. Richard might sit up

with the bishop till midnight if he so wished, but she would make them heat her bed with stone bottles of water, and then she would sleep and sleep. On the morrow she planned to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Archbishop William, the saint in whose honor the minster had been started back in the time of King Stephen, to pray for the recovery of her small son, who was ailing with a cold when she left. But this night she would snuggle down in a warm bed and forget her duties and responsibilities. It was well she did not know what awaited her and Richard.

In the Chapter House they were greeted by Robert Stillington, Bishop of Bath and Wells, who, with his priests, had ridden in from the Abbey of Jervaulx. A thin man with a certain gleam in his cold gray eyes, he sat at table that evening and fidgeted, while Anne ate and ignoring the talk about her, watched him instead. There was something that intrigued her about the bishop. Nervous as he was, his jeweled hands never still, jerking about in his chair as if he itched, Stillington nevertheless had the appearance of a wary fox who would look before he leapt. For over nine years now he had been bishop and Edward's favor had raised him to the Keeper of the Privy Seal. Anne watched him crumbling his bread, picking at the food which had been excellently prepared in the Bishop of York's kitchens, as he ate but little and spoke even less. She wondered why the lord bishop, who apparently had everything in his favor, seemed so nervous.

"My brother of Clarence has returned to Calais." Richard was speaking easily. "It appears there is some smoothing down to be done, and he is due to spend the Yuletide festival with my sister and the Duke of Burgundy."

The bishop reached across the table and upset his goblet of wine. A servant hastily mopped up the mess while Stillington, as if resolved to eat no more, leaned back in his chair and played with his amethyst ring. Anne was sure that Richard's chance remark had caused the sudden outflinging of the bishop's hand with the disaster to the goblet. Her Uncle Neville was in Calais, shut up in Hammes Castle, and perhaps it might have occurred to the Bishop of Wells that Clarence was there for reasons private only to himself. But how could this concern the churchman?

After dinner the party drew near to the comfort of the great fire in the hall, and Anne, though she had meant to seek her bed, lingered uneasily close to Richard. For some reason, impossible to ex-

plain, she had a sense of impending disaster, and she felt it had to do with this nervous churchman with the magnificent jewels. A young novice threw on another great log and the leaping light caught the gold and fur on Richard, touched the black crosses hanging about the necks of the clerics and winked over Stillington's ruby buttons fastening his short cape of marten fur.

"You have brilliantly resolved the difficulties here, my lord Duke," Stillington offered, his head inclined to Richard as they drew their chairs closer together.

"Their charter is not revoked, if that is what you mean," smiled Richard. "It was nip and tuck, but we managed. Buckingham gave good assistance when things threatened to get out of hand." He kept his voice low, for these matters were not pleasing to the ears of the city fathers of York who were gathered about Ratcliffe and Buckingham down at the other end of the fireplace. "A good man, Buckingham."

"You might do well to walk with care in that quarter, good my lord." Stillington barely opened his lips as he spoke. In the firelight, his thin face was very sharp.

"Buckingham? He's staunch." Richard was frowning now.

But Stillington only shrugged.

Suddenly weary to the point of drooping, Anne rose to retire. Her ladies came eagerly forward, relieved at last to be moving in the direction of bed. As Anne bade the noble company good night she was aware that Stillington remained at Richard's shoulder, his closed face dark and wary.

When at last she stood in her night rail, ready for the warm waiting bed, she had a sudden desire to see Richard. Why did she feel this strange compulsion? Weary as she was, her body clamored for rest but her troubled mind refused to let go.

"Ask my lord to come to me as soon as he can." She sent Lady Philippa downstairs. "I would speak with him before I sleep." She climbed into the canopied bed and drew the harsh linen high under her arms. Despite the warm stone bottles at her feet, she could feel the little nervous tremors tingling down her back and legs. She had to see Richard before she slept.

She had no doubt that Richard would come to her. He was not like his brothers, who were careless and neglectful of their wives. Without so much as a day's visit to his ailing wife who was expecting their second child, Clarence had rushed off back to France. Even

Edward was beginning to treat his Queen Elizabeth Woodville with a cavalier attention, offhand in his courtesy and indifferent to her moods. A waspish attack of her temper could put him off his feed in the old days, but now he merely shrugged and spent the time with Jane Shore till Elizabeth recovered her good humor. There were plenty of children now, even if she never slept with him again. They had two baby sons and another daughter, Anne, had arrived this autumn. Lying in her bed, Anne thought of all this. Richard was still devoted, close to her in mind and spirit, entirely hers. Opening heavy eyelids, she found him bending over her.

He was deathly pale. He sat on the edge of the bed, not speaking, and when she could bear it no longer, she spoke. "What is it, Diccon?"

He lifted her hand in his and put it to his forehead. "It's past everything!" he groaned.

"I can bear anything if only you will speak." Now her lips were pale as his own.

"Edward is going to destroy George."

Anne stared. Then it flooded over her. Destroy Clarence! "I can't believe it. Why think you such a thing?"

"Stillington told me. He says Edward will have George arrested on his return from Calais."

"On what charge?" This was fantastic.

"Treason. George will be attainted."

"Holy Mary!" Then it was true. George was plotting with her uncle and, with uncanny cruelty, Edward had sent him to get the very rope which would hang him.

"George wants the throne. He has always wanted it. I think I was born knowing that. Stillington says there is some sort of plot hatched in his brain and in your Uncle Neville's. George plans to strike soon."

"But the people—they'd never turn against Edward."

"George seems to think they will. He's been babbling again about his 'secret' as he calls it."

"Edward knows this?"

"We don't know what he knows, but evidently it is enough to send George to the Tower."

The Tower! "Isabella—I must go to her." Perhaps Isabella, always more levelheaded than her husband, could save George.

Richard walked about. "We've got to think. This may be a mare's nest, stirred up by Stillington and others for their own ends, but

we'll have to chance that. This comes of naming George and his heirs as next in line."

"But that was when the King had no sons. There are two of them now."

"Who knows what George can do? He has the maggots of madness in his brain."

"But—Diccon—"

"Whatever it is, Edward is roused and means to act. I feel sure that Stillington is speaking truth. He and Neville are brother bishops, and he says George swears with your uncle to upset the whole country. Edward is not likely to stomach that. Holy saints—both are my brothers and they would destroy each other. Great God, Anne, what shall I do?" His face was puckered with dismayed alarm.

But Anne was numb, her skin prickling, her hands icy. The Tower, the block, and poor Isabella! "I must ride to her as soon as possible," she said firmly.

Richard neither replied nor demurred. It was as if the dread tidings had thrown him off balance, and he was tottering as he tried to regain his senses. He sat on, staring into space, his hands pressed between his knees.

Then he roused himself. "Ride—tomorrow?" He was just realizing what she had said. "We shall see what the weather is like. And first, you must sleep." He drew the covers about her.

But even after he had left her, Anne lay shaking. She wished she had not left Gervase to watch over little Ned; she needed him here to give her wise counsel. And what would the Duchess of York, that unhappy mother, say to this? She did not feel that her stone bottles had grown cold. She only lay, aching a little, awaiting sleep that did not come.

23. Edward and Clarence

ON A COLD February night about a year later, the watchman was making his rounds. *Midnight and all's well!* Richard, lying at Westminster, groaned and turned on his pillows. If only all *were* well. Just dozing off, he felt a hand on his shoulder. "My Lord of Gloucester!" It was his secretary, Kendall, apologetic, blinking in the light from a candle.

He rolled over. "What is it?"

"The King's Grace, my lord."

"Again?" Richard sighed, threw off the covers and took his furred gown from Kendall. Edward slept badly these nights and did not hesitate to disturb the peace of others. Yawning widely, Richard went down the corridor.

He found Edward standing over a shivering page who stirred the fire. "The devil has driven sleep from me." Irritably Edward turned a drawn face as Richard came through the door. "I'm properly hag-ridden."

Are we not all? thought Richard. "What keeps you awake tonight—George or Louis?"

"In faith, I know not." Edward rested his elbows on his knees and bent forward as if he felt a cramp. He shot a quick look at Richard. He did not want him to know it was the worry of George that robbed him of sleep—George of Clarence, still at large, despite Edward's determination of the previous year to lodge him in the Tower on his return from Calais. How Richard had pleaded—too well, it seemed, for while Clarence caroused in London, surrounded by his sycophants and toadies, his royal brother walked the floor in nightly trepidation. But Edward would admit none of this, least of all to Richard. He would speak of other anxieties. "I've lost control in Burgundy, you know that?"

Richard nodded. He was surprised to hear Edward admit the dreary fact. For with the death of Duke Charles the previous month

while fighting in the snow before Nancy, Edward had lost a relative, a political ally, and Burgundy had become a pawn. Bidders crowded closely about Mary, the marriageable daughter. Thus the widowed Duchess, their sister Margaret, would be obliged to favor whatever alliance her stepdaughter might choose to make.

"And as for Louis and that accursed treaty, I dream every night that the money—all fifty thousand crowns of it—slips through my fingers." Edward pressed back his hanging hair.

"But Louis has signed his promise. What makes you think he'll default on his sworn word?" Richard stifled another yawn. The sooner he calmed Edward, the sooner he could return to his own bed.

Edward twisted his yellow head around and gave his brother a sour look. "Louis!" He spat into the fire. Then his face knotted and he clamped both arms across his stomach. "Aah! Get Hobbes!"

His page went running and brought the royal physician. It seemed long to Richard, anxiously watching Edward writhe, before Hobbes had the relieving infusion prepared. Edward snatched the mixture, gulped it down and tossed away the cup. With the back of his hand he wiped his mouth. He was lividly pale.

"Your Grace should go to bed," suggested the doctor, knowing full well that Edward would please himself.

Another twinge twisted him. "What foul draught are you poisoning me with now?" The sweat gleamed on his face.

"To bed," urged the doctor.

"To the fiend with you!" Edward gasped. He got to his feet. "Would you send me back to that?" He pulled open the bed curtains to reveal the Queen, her pretty scarlet mouth wide in a yawn.

She sighed and opened violet-blue eyes. "What is it, Edward? Is it your stomach again?" Her voice was indolent with her sudden waking.

With an oath Edward clashed the curtains back together. He was better. The movement had dispersed the tormenting gas and he gave a loud belch. "Ah!" he sighed. "I am relieved." He turned back to the fire.

"Go to bed, Hobbes," Richard spoke quietly. "I'll sit up awhile yet."

"If you two are going to stay up talking, I might as well go to my own chamber." Elizabeth was pettish. Behind the bed curtains she

moved about. Then she put her head in the gauze nightcap through the slit. "Fetch my women, will you, Richard?"

"Stay where you are," ordered Edward. "Boy! Stir the fire."

"Let him be." Richard threw on a log and the quickening fire cracked and sparkled, bringing the startled child to his feet. "It's all right, Denis." Richard tweaked the forelock sprouting from the boy's temple. He was reminded of his father's pages who hated to lie abed during the day, then were beaten because they could not stay awake on night duty.

Freed of his pain, Edward now relaxed. "What were we saying when that accursed gripe took me?" He rolled his head against the high back of his chair. "Ah—Louis!"

Richard raised thin brows. Why had Edward qualms in that quarter? Surely the treaty would hold the French King to his bargain. "You have the money," he reminded, "and your daughter will be Dauphiness of France." Candidly he looked into his brother's blue eyes. Richard believed in treaties, even when the terms proved disagreeable to one of the parties. Evidently Edward did not share so ingenuous a view.

"The money?" Edward gnawed his lip. "That Treaty of Picquigny sticks in my craw. Bribes, hollow friendships—I lost ground there, Diccon."

Richard turned away his head. So at last Edward admitted the disgrace of this treaty, the forswearing, the forsaking of their allies. No wonder all Europe smirked behind its glove at the swaggering golden King of England, so neatly outwitted by a withered-faced man in a shabby hat stuck full of saintly images. But was this all that irked Edward? Richard noted the rumpled figure with the fur gown slipping from the shoulders, the hair awry, the face stubbled, the eyes red-rimmed from sleeplessness.

"I lost ground," Edward muttered again. "We shall have to see, we shall have to see." Always when a problem blocked him, Edward shelved it with this remark. Again he leaned forward, his long fingers joined together, the rings sparkling from every joint. From his thumb he slipped a great cabochon ruby and began to toss it into the air, letting it chink back into his palm.

"George gave us another performance tonight." He thrust his lower lip forward.

"So?" A dark presentiment took Richard. This, then, was what had really kept Edward awake, and not the matter of the French

King. In his own chambers he had supped with his steward and Kendall, the three of them deep in matters concerning the North. He missed Anne, who was up at Warwick with Isabella, dangerously ill after the birth of a third child. In her absence he frequently ate alone, having no taste for his brother's ornate banquet scenes. And Clarence, here in London, lost in his own dark designs, had apparently been indulging his appetite tonight for dramatic scenes.

"He refused to eat," said Edward. "There he sat, dressed like a bell horse, arms folded, drinking only wine served by his private butler. Name of God, does he think we intend to poison him?"

"Oh, you should know George by now." Richard shrugged off the dramatic show, the feckless follies that marked their brother of Clarence.

But Edward scowled into the fire that by now had burned to a rose-colored glow. Longing to pierce the veil of secrecy, Richard held his peace. What move was it Edward feared? Was it only a matter of time before either one would take the desperate step into tragedy? Edward was slumped in the chair now, the ring of England sparkling on his restless tapping hand.

"Headlong over the cliff," murmured Richard, but Edward did not hear.

The winter of 1477 was the most severe in years. Mantled in ice and buffeted with sleet, the streets of London were bitter lanes through which the merchants and burghers scuttled, their faces muffled against the cutting wind as they raced from one shelter to another. Shops were shuttered all day, for only emergencies sent Londoners abroad to buy goods, and shopkeepers remained withindoors huddled over their charcoal braziers, almost dreading the tinkle of the bell that would summon them to the demands of some customer. Stiff and stark, the frozen bodies of the poor lay awaiting the dead carts that would come to haul them off to the common sink.

The rich fared little better than the burghers, for their great chilly-roomed houses and palaces were difficult to heat. A seven-foot log in a large hall warmed the space before it but the walls exuded moisture and the damp chill crept through and clammed even the bed linen, so that the hardest shrank from its touch, curling shivering bodies against the relentless cold.

In his old rooms at Crosby Richard sat and toasted his aching feet

at the fire. His chilblains burned with a steady pain and he moved his toes gingerly in the soft loose slippers. He felt his shoulder, too, that souvenir of Bruges. He chafed it, then as his mother came in, took away his hand. In her hand she held a letter. "From Anne." Her eyes were somber.

"Isabella?"

She nodded. "Last Friday. Poor soul. The babe, too." Together they signed themselves in the age-old ritual of supplication. Before him she stood in her black-and-white, and a fold stirred in the fabric of his memory. So had she stood, grief in her face, when she told him that Anne had been abducted to Flanders and a loveless marriage. He thought of the aftermath and winced. The young John of Gloucester was growing up; soon he would need a tutor and plans must be made for his future. Now Isabella of Clarence was dead, leaving behind her a young girl and a younger boy. What of *their* future?

"Twenty-four years old," murmured the Duchess. "And what a load of trouble she packed into those few years." It was the only admission she would make that her second son had been a poor husband and a worse father; for no matter what infamies he wrought, George would always be the nearest and dearest to her heart.

Richard shook off his lethargy. "We must ride north. And George, too."

"George goes to Flanders." Quite steadily she met his amazed stare, as if a newly widowed Duke's sudden journey across the Channel were the most natural thing in the world. "He goes to Margaret."

"But—Isabella—the funeral rites—the child—" What new folly was this?

"There is naught we can do for the dead, save pray." The Duchess was short, her lips tight.

"I marvel at Edward's letting him go." Indeed, this seemed to Richard to be the height of foolishness. To let George go anywhere in the vicinity of Hammes Castle and his old friend and accomplice Neville, Archbishop of York! It was unthinkable. Was this the test, the final trial of loyalty that Edward planned for George? This was a festering sore that lay between the two brothers, the aching matter of the crown. It could not be forgotten that Clarence had once bent the knee to Warwick, who had at that time guaranteed the throne to Clarence and his heirs. But Warwick was in his grave. It must be that Clarence sought an alliance with a woman rich and powerful

enough to provide him with an army to reinforce his demands on Edward.

"Perhaps it is as well to put distance between those two," said Richard. "But—Flanders!"

For answer, his mother let out her breath in a long sigh. He took her hand, put it to his cheek. She was leaning back in her chair, her closed eyelids dark, her mouth drooping. The widow's coif framed her pale face sharply and he marked how the years had etched their subtle lines upon it. He kissed the hand and laid it in her black lap. Anne's letter fluttered to the floor and he picked it up. His wife had sent him her love but was too weary with watching and weeping to write further. Ah well, he would go and comfort her; it would be a relief to get away from London, with its dread presage of disaster that haunted his days and disturbed his nights.

They did not wait for the weather to improve but left London almost immediately. Richard rode escort to the two ladies, his mother and his mother-in-law, the Countess of Warwick, newly out of sanctuary and remanded by the King to his care. They took fewer than fifty attendants, for there was to be no elaborate ceremony. Edward sent mourning wreaths of sable to his dead sister-in-law and left it to his mother to convey his condolences to Anne. At no time on the ride was Clarence mentioned; but all felt the disgrace of his absence.

The little company wound its slow way into the western midlands to Warwick, the weather growing less bitter as they entered the confines of the wooded country. Sitting erect on her gray palfrey, her sable robes nearly sweeping the ground, the Duchess of York headed the cavalcade, at her side the Countess of Warwick, whose widow's weeds seemed to have taken on a new significance with the double loss of a daughter and a new grandchild. Among his gentlemen, his black hair hanging from beneath a roundel of gold brocade, went Richard, and bringing up the rear was the escort of priests, come to represent Edward at the funeral, solemn reminders of the sadness of the errand.

In the piercing wind outside the castle they were met by Anne who wordlessly embraced the two ladies and led them indoors. Although she herself looked pale and drawn, she was quite calm. Oblivious of the raw air, Richard stood about under the trees with his gentlemen and grooms, waiting for the arrival of the Abbott of Tewkesbury.

"Where is George?" Almost accusingly Anne faced her mother-in-law withindoors.

"He has gone to Flanders." The Lady Cicely held out her hands to her two ladies, who removed her gloves and chafed her frozen fingers.

"Not to Flanders, surely!"

"Yes." The word came serenely, and a tide of bitter anger surged up in Anne. It was like the Duchess Cicely to be so calm over Clarence, who had not even the grace to come to his wife's bier but must needs go to negotiate a new marriage.

"Never mind, my love." It was her mother's loving whisper, and Anne drew near and clasped the cold hand held out to her.

"If Charles were alive," Anne spoke cuttingly, "things would be very different." Widower or not, George of Clarence would stand but little chance with Burgundy. Charles the Bold would shut his only daughter in a nunnery first. But Charles was dead. "Thank the saints they will do nothing about Mary's marriage while Burgundy is still in mourning."

"The world goes on," said the Duchess. No use telling Anne that Burgundy's death would probably be ignored in the matter of an important marriage for Mary. But Anne was calling for some mulled ale to drive away the pinched and blue look from the faces of the ladies. The women knelt to remove their shoes and took away the sodden cloaks.

Next morning they all went down to Tewkesbury Abbey where for thirty-five days the body of Isabella had lain before the high altar. They entered the cold church, their furs huddled close, their marble faces resembling those of the effigies in the niches about them. To Anne the sight of the carved casket with its ducal arms and purple pall was familiar, for here she had come daily to pray and weep. But to Richard it was a dreary reminder of the body's frailty and he looked down at Anne beside him, so slight and fragile, and he drew near her as if with his own slender form he might ward off disaster.

And while the *castrati* chanted the burial psalm, he thought of the strangeness of fortune; had things turned otherwise at Barnet and Tewkesbury, these might be the obsequies of a queen, and he himself might have been dead or exiled across the sea. Clarence, then, would be kneeling in crown and royal robes, to mourn the passing of a consort and the death of a royal heir. He looked at the tiny coffin below that of the mother, pallied in black and on it the small coronet of a royal prince. He raised his beads to his lips and gravely signed himself.

With relief they came out into the clear sparkle of the frosty morning. The two boys had colds and Anne was anxious to get back to the castle. They put their horses to the gallop.

Sometime after the noon meal, Richard joined Anne in the solar. Alone with the boys at her feet, she sat in a patch of sunlight that struggled palely through the green diamond panes of the tall window. The upper floors of the castle were unusually quiet, for she had sent the household out to take advantage of the break in the rain and the snow. And she wanted a private talk with her husband. At his entrance, her pale pointed face, raised from her embroidery, was lit by the radiance of her smile. "Come, sit with us, my love." From her cushioned stool she drew aside her skirts. "Make room for your sire, lads." And with her velvet toe she stirred the boys lying flat on their stomachs among lines of toy soldiers.

"Bang!" cried John, as he knocked down a line of Edward's men.

"That's not fair!" Ned's delicate face flushed. "I wasn't ready and you said you'd wait."

"What have we here?" Onto the floor Richard sprawled with his two sons. His face was quite serious, though his black eyes were soft.

"It's the Battle of Barnet," explained John with an earnestness that belied his tender years. "And I'm the Yorkists and Ned is never ready. He takes too long to line up his men."

Richard grinned. "Well, by the saints, Warwick himself was a bit tardy that day, too." He tousled the fine hair of his second-born. "So they make you the Red Rose today, do they?"

"I always have to be Lancaster." Sadly Ned gathered up his men and placed them in a crooked line.

"So?" Richard sympathized. "That's a rough part for the future Duke of Gloucester to play. Why don't you take Lancaster, Jack?" He looked shrewdly at Clotilde's boy.

"I am a Plantagenet," declared John proudly. Richard shot Anne a look but she was bent over her sewing.

"You are both Plantagenets, and don't you ever forget it." Richard was deliberate. "Off with you, now, and find Aloys. Tell him I said you were to have five sugared tangerines. Five, mind you."

"Each?" John looked cunningly up at his father.

"Between you." Richard laughed outright. He knew where the boy's French blood was taking him.

"But—five?" The lad's brow puckered. If he did not quite under-

stand the division of a single fruit, he knew the number to be uneven. "There will be one over, my father."

"And that one is for Ned, because he had to be Lancaster. By the pigs, there must be some compensation for so heavy a sentence. Off with you, I say!" He smacked them lightly on their behinds and sent them skipping away.

"They'll both be sick tonight," sighed Anne. But she loved Richard for spoiling them and, strangely, she loved his manner toward his bastard.

"Not they." Richard sat on the stool and began to play with the long jeweled ribbands that hung from her waist. He knew she was pleased with the shrewdness of his eldest son who, in addition to the manly virtues, had the sharpness of a scholar.

"You have news from London, Diccon?" Anne laid aside her embroidery and leaned back in her chair.

"Oh, yes." His face grew somber. "I must return at once. Edward's in a panic. Louis has gone to Artois and you know how near that is to Calais."

"Do you want me to come with you?" She stroked his hair. There was nothing to keep her here in Warwick now, with her dead laid in the earth and the boys in reasonable health, recovering from their rheumy colds. And it would be heaven to be with Richard again. She needed to laugh at his mordant wit, to enjoy the Plantagenet jokes with him.

"Where's Gervase? I have not seen him." Richard missed the minstrel.

"He's been gone to Flanders this month and more. I sent him to see about the grave."

"Ah, I see." Then, in a moment: "You still miss them, don't you?"

"I shall miss them till I die." Simply she said it. She would never get used to not hearing the light step of Clotilde, her voice with its pretty French cadence falling softly across the thoughts. And the young man—Alain. Now he was gone Anne remembered a hundred times when she had scolded or praised, when he had irritated or pleased her. A simple crack on the head from a low-hanging bough—and it was all over. A hundred times Aloys had warned them all about the greatest of dangers when a-horseback. "Beware of your head! Always watch for the hazard!" What had the young squire been doing when the treacherous tree struck him down? Turning to laugh, to call over his shoulder as she had often seen him do? Well,

they were both dead, and if the blessed saints were kind, they were together.

Anne took a deep breath. "What's down in London?"

"Could be anything." Richard was worried. "Doubtless Edward fears that Louis and George might get together."

"Then why did he let George go?"

"God knows. It passes me. I swear I cannot understand Edward these days. He resents the pointed insults of George yet allows him every advantage to work evil against him."

"Ah, insults." Anne shook her blond head. "I have heard how he attacked the Queen and Rivers before the whole court."

"Aye. Edward was livid. That's what I mean." Absently Richard wound one of the jeweled bands about his wrist. "But I think Edward is a fool to take any notice of George's drunken words."

"You forget to whom Edward is married. I'm told Elizabeth Woodville can work terror when once she gets her knife into you."

"And I have heard it said," Richard spoke slowly, "that she has sworn to destroy George."

Early next day they left for London.

They found Edward in a fine froth of temper. The moment he laid eyes on Richard he burst out as if it were he and not George and Louis who had so upset him. "The spider! What think you now? He has claimed the Duchy of Burgundy as a male fief and at this very moment he is sniffing at my Calais!"

"Well, you signed the pact with him, I didn't. He's a friend of yours, isn't he?" Richard was cool as he pulled out a chair for Anne. "What do you hear from Flanders?"

"Margaret, you mean?" Edward grinned mirthlessly. "She's all for Mary's getting married, even before the period of mourning is over. But I fancy that young wench will look twice before hopping into bed with the likes of George!"

Anne watched Richard whistling through his teeth, sure sign that he was thinking deeply. As for Richard, he felt reasonably sure that Mary of Burgundy would not marry their brother; but strange things happened and George of Clarence could be fascinating when he chose. There was that cruel streak in him that some women found irresistible. If Mary of Burgundy did such a thing, it would put the cat among the pigeons, indeed! He saw Edward drawing toward him

a fine illustrated map of France. Was it possible he contemplated another march into that controversial country?

Edward tapped the map. "I have sent Hastings over to Calais to see to the strengthening of the garrison."

"So?" Richard raised his brows. "You expect it to come to a force of arms?"

"God knows." Impatiently Edward pushed aside the map and rested his head on his hand. "I do not have the stomach for a fight. Perhaps all I need to do is to forestall Louis." He struck the table. "God's blood! Can't they see that?" Pitifully now he looked at his brother.

Richard felt a twinge of sympathy. Edward was indeed caught on the horns of a dilemma. He desired peace, it was true, but for what real reason? Was it not that his growing miserliness and his failing health were supplanting those fine notions of honor by which his father and their common ancestors had lived? Edward was a lineal descendant of the great Edward III who had literally lived in his armor; to what pitiful narrows had the great warlike leadership of England shrunk?

But Anne saw only that Edward was getting fat. She noted the roll that thickened his waistline, once so trim and hard, saw the blurred outline of his chin. His eyes were bloodshot as if his food lay sourly in his stomach and the effects of dissipation were plain upon him. Apparently Elizabeth Woodville no longer cared if he spoiled himself, or perhaps her influence had waned. With Jane Shore to bewitch him, Edward was no longer so besotted on his Queen as he once had been. It seemed that he sought oblivion from his worries in the bottle; surely Jane might do something in the interest of the King's handsome appearance. So much of Edward's popularity in those first days had grown out of the people's pride in their golden King.

On the same afternoon of their arrival, ambassadors from the North waited upon the King. Gleaming in silver brooches and rich in their tartans, they strode in to present their master's humble duty and an offer from King James for the widowed Duke of Clarence to marry with his sister.

"Ah." Edward's eyes were keen. "A noble offer, my lords." Such a marriage would put Clarence into a position of undoubted power and authority. He turned to Richard. "How shall you like having our brother sitting on the far side of the Scottish border, my lord Duke?"

Richard's bowels contracted. He should not like that at all. Would

Edward allow such a thing? Edward's mouth widened in a broad smile. "You will thank His Grace of Scotland for his royal offer and say that our brother the Duke of Clarence will wish to mourn his wife for the space of a year." The Scottish lords withdrew, and with his arm about Richard's shoulders, Edward passed into his small cabinet.

"How shall you explain this to George?" Relieved at Edward's decision, Richard was now concerned as to how their brother would take this new development in his fortunes.

"Explain? I shan't. It's time George began to do as he is told. I shall advise him to put all thoughts of it out of his head."

"Suppose he loses in Burgundy? This will only put him into a black crazy rage."

"Let it. I have a good idea he *will* lose there. By the way, I'm told that Louis has offered the Dauphin to Mary."

"But he is contracted to you!" The terms of the Treaty of Picquigny provided for an alliance between young Elizabeth of York and the French heir.

"Since when did you know Louis to keep to a bargain if it did not suit him?" Edward picked a walnut off a pile of nuts on the table and flung it into the fire. "The Dauphin is six years old and Mary is twenty if she's a day. A bonnie pair they'd make!"

Richard smiled now. Age discrepancies mattered very little in royal marriages. But the breaking of a treaty—ah, that was something else. If honor did not drive Edward to fight Louis, wounded pride might. The French war could still take place.

George came storming home. It had fallen out as Edward prophesied. Mary had suddenly eloped with Maximilian of Austria. George of Clarence was scorned and rejected.

Edward sent Richard to Cold Harbor to call on their brother. He found Clarence still in his traveling clothes. The two brothers confronted one another.

"Bad crossing?" Richard accepted the wine Clarence poured.

"Not so bad, thank the pigs." Clarence tossed down his own drink, then refilled his cup. "I'm informed our royal brother has declined the Scottish offer." His teeth gleamed in a wry smile. Richard shrugged, said nothing.

Clarence continued. "Think you I do not know chicanery when I meet it? Spare me that false innocence, Diccon, you try to wear. Our royal brother's fine Italian hand wrought failure for me in Burgundy as well. Ill-will—what else can I expect from him?"

"There are other possibilities."

"Perhaps you suggest I take one of Edward's castoffs," sneered Clarence. Then, suddenly he laughed. "I might do just that, provided she has money."

Richard knew Clarence was pressed for funds. The years of licentious living had impoverished the rich legacy of money and lands received from his dead wife's father. He eyed George's clothes and wondered if the magnificent chain of rubies that hung over his velvet blouse were paid for, or if it only represented another in a long line of George's debts. Perhaps it had come from Burgundy's store of jewels.

"What is Edward doing about Isabella and the babe?" The jeering mood had vanished and a sullen look crept into George's blue eyes. Evidently he had some fresh grievance.

"Doing?" Richard did not follow this new line.

"Yes. Isabella and the babe were poisoned, done to death. They think I don't know that."

Richard's eyes widened and a twinge of real fear shot through him. George was not drunk and this was no babbling. It must be that his worst fears were realized and George truly had a maggot in his brain.

"You cannot mean what you say." He strove for calmness.

"I mean it. Isabella's waiting-woman Twynyo and that knave Thursby—they were paid to poison my wife and child. And I know whose gold smeared their hands." He drank again. "It was the witch herself."

The witch! It was what George always called Elizabeth Woodville when he believed himself secure from prying eyes and prattling tongues. He was fond of saying that Edward and Elizabeth had their crowns by sorcery, that they were under the spell of Friar Bungay, a notorious priest, well known to be in league with the devil. All this Richard shrugged off as a mild peculiarity among his brother's many, not to be taken seriously. But this fantasy of poisoning was something new. Oh, if Edward knew of this, he would be convinced of George's madness.

"Isabella—" Richard would not speak of the Queen. "She died of

her lungs, and the child—it was never destined to live, George. It was too weak. It was well tended and surely—”

“*Poison!*” Clarence shrilled. “And justice shall be done. Edward will do nothing to redeem my honor, so I shall take my own steps.” His hand groped for the wine cup.

“You cannot take the King’s justice into your own hands, George,” Richard was shocked into replying, even though he knew it to be useless to reason.

“I cannot?” Clarence laughed hysterically. “We—we shall see about that.” And reeling, he fell into a chair. So Richard left him.

A day or two later Clarence quitted London, bound for the western midlands. The people of England were sympathetic. His Grace of Clarence had gone to Tewksbury to mourn his Duchess as was right and proper, and with bared heads they stood while his cavalcade flashed through town and village. A favorite figure, it was as if he was loved by them for those very faults of recklessness that so disturbed his family. On the other hand, the people of England were cooling toward their golden King, once their adored idol. If Edward had lost standing abroad, he had also lost it at home, what with the fiasco of the French war and the disgraceful Treaty of Picquigny.

In Clarence’s train rode two prisoners, tied to their saddles and closely guarded. They were the waiting-woman, Ankarette Twynyho, and the steward, John Thursby. Into the North they all vanished.

At Crosby Place Anne and Richard waited, their hearts troubled, their nights disturbed. Each morning Anne arose with a pain at the pit of her stomach, just as years ago she had awaited the dread outcome of her betrothal to Edouard of Anjou. It was with this pain she lived as she nerved herself to hear further news of Clarence’s mischiefs.

And around them all in London the whispers gathered. Clarence’s toadies who doubtless were living for the great day when the Duke would be wholly in command of the situation and they would reap their rewards, busily circulated with fearless irresponsibility their gossip. It was true, what the Duke said, that the King was indeed bewitched, wearing his crown only by the conjurations of the devil-serving Bungay. Under the spell of the monk and the Queen, the King shamefully abused His Grace of Clarence. God’s peace, he would not even move in so scandalous a thing as the murder of the Duchess herself and their tiny son!

Active as Clarence's spies, those of the Archbishop of York hummed and buzzed about London. Tongues clacked with lessening caution and dark looks followed Edward whenever he went abroad among his people. That whore of a Queen with her lowly birth and her sluttish manners was to blame for it all; thus the people looked to a scapegoat to explain their own infidelity.

Shut into their private cabinet, Anne and Richard talked fearfully, their voices lowered as if they did not trust their own servants. "He is now boasting up there in Warwick that soon Edward and the boys will be dead." Richard said it as if he did not believe his own words.

Anne's eyes filled with horror. "Oh, no," she whispered. This was treason of the worst kind.

"Yes. He talks of the old Warwick promise as if it still held good. By God, he brands Edward no better than a usurper!"

Anne shut her eyes. "Tell me no more." She wished for the twentieth time that Gervase were home to give her strength in this trial. Richard, nerve-racked as he was, could not comfort her. She must needs comfort him.

The situation grew desperate. Then across the restless waiting shot a thunderbolt. Clarence had tried the woman Ankarette Twynhyo and the man Thursby in open court; under his pressure the judges had found both guilty of administering poison to the Duchess Isabella and the babe. Edward sent his officers posting north to stop the proceedings but they were too late. The executions had been hustled and when the King's officers arrived, they were shown the graves of the wretched pair. Of the Duke of Clarence there was no sign; they seized Stacey, one of Clarence's creatures, and brought him in chains to London.

"Question him," ordered Edward.

He himself avoided the torture scene; he had not the stomach for the gasping confession between the groans. Soon Stacey broke and confessed to having leagued with Burdette, of Clarence's London household. Leagued for what? Beyond all hope now, the miserable man told the truth. To place the Duke of Clarence on the throne.

Edward put the heads of both Stacey and Burdette on Tower Bridge. Richard brought Anne the details. "And that's the tale."

She was pale and woebegone. "What will it all mean?"

"It means the sands are fast running out. This may not be the first private justice of Clarence but, by Heaven, it bids fair to be his last."

He paced back and forth, absently rubbing his shoulder. "I'm convinced this is the end. A year ago I should have said it; now I know Clarence is bent on doing it himself. He has a devil."

"Possessed of a devil—" Anne shivered. "If only we could reach him—anything to stop—"

"Only our father could ever check George."

Perhaps this was the bitterest aftermath of the death of the great Duke who was not here to control his erring son. Richard could remember the gangling boy in his early teens, already unmanageable; and the Duchess, their mother, when she no longer had her husband's steel hand on which to depend, seeking to exert her mild authority. When on rare occasions she meted out a punishment, it was always Margaret and Edward who stood up for George and somehow the graceless lad wriggled free of the penalty. With his handsome face, a beauty so winning in youth, he could cajole a servant or smooth down a petulant brother or sister. His temper became imperious and with it grew his appetites; the small boy, championed by his brother and sister, became the ill-tempered youth who demanded fine clothes, beautiful young women and, later, the full cellars of wine. And as often as Edward sheltered him, so George would whip around to sting his protector. Ingratitude was second nature to George.

So now it was brother against brother, soon to face each other in the final deadly combat.

Anne put her hand on her husband's shoulder and with loving eyes she searched his face. He wore the look that thoughts of his dead father always brought. Of all the Duke's children, he alone understood the loss sustained by the family, and most of all, though unacknowledged, the loss felt by his mother.

Anne nestled to him. Then, in spite of herself, the words, half smothered, came out. "I'm afraid."

He stroked her hair and held her to him. He too was afraid, and now he sought to reassure her whom he loved. "I shall stand between the two of them. It will not happen." But he was unconvinced.

Anne put cold hands to her burning cheeks. An inward fever of fear filled her. "I feel—"

"Aye." Richard cut her off. To speak their fears aloud would be to admit there could be no turning back. To say it would be like sealing Clarence's doom. He put her from him. "He's mad." He

paced the room. "George is mad. I can doubt it no longer. But will Edward agree? He must—for all our sakes—he must." He swung around to his wife. "Fratricide! It is a crime under heaven! Edward cannot destroy him. A crazed mind knows not what it does."

"We must pray," said Anne.

24. The King's Justice

IN TIGHT silence Richard was riding with the minstrel the short distance to Westminster. It was not like Edward to send fussing after him, and whatever had brought Gervase hastening to his side must be dreadfully urgent. By the raw feeling within him, Richard knew that the dreadful day must be upon them, a day only to be exceeded by the one on which Clarence must meet his death. Anxious to hear, he flung off his horse and hurried withindoors.

Among men in Edward's livery he saw the arms of Louis of France as the attendants crowded about the antechamber to the private cabinet. With Edward he found Monsieur Le Roux, personal ambassador from Louis, and a French secretary. Seated with them was Queen Elizabeth Woodville in a gown of azure velvet and a white gauze wimple. Her color was high, her blue eyes flashing, her mouth set in a hard smile. And at the blazing look of triumph in her face, Richard quailed. She had changed from the indolent rounded creature who had captivated Edward; for some time now, she had taken an interest in affairs of state. It was as if, having borne ten children to her two husbands, she must now devote herself to the protection of their interests. With her attention to politics came a change in her beauty. Her face sharpened, her eyes narrowed, and whereas she used to look at a man from beneath drooping lashes, she now eyed him shrewdly, her chin sunk on a jeweled hand, her slim foot tapping the floor. In this position she now sat.

Edward was breathing hard, his own face set in fearful lines of anger and disgust. "It seems," he addressed Richard, "that Monsieur Le Roux brings us something beside the good wishes of our cousin of France. Tell him, my lord ambassador."

The Frenchman threw out his hands. Did His Grace of Gloucester know there was a strong movement afoot to return Margaret of Anjou to England?

Edward's short laugh interrupted. "I have told him that we have

forever laid that bogey; we lopped off the dangerous heads, and as for Margaret, she has nothing—husband, son—all are gone. So, to what purpose would she return? This I have asked him.”

Then Le Roux spoke. And while Edward shielded the pale mask of his face with his hand, Le Roux told them again of the plot, the one involving their brother George of Clarence who had written letters to Margaret of Anjou, promising to restore her throne. In return, she was to name him the successor.

“You have proofs?” Richard asked hoarsely. The Queen moved in her chair. Proofs, indeed!

Le Roux gestured and his secretary handed him some of the actual letters, signed by Clarence, letters that the agents of Louis had intercepted on their journey across France to Margaret.

“Now, Edward, will you move?” Elizabeth shrilled across the shocked quiet of the little room. She too was breathing hard, her nostrils dilated. At last! She would be revenged for the killing of her father and her brother, for all the insults heaped upon her by that hated man. At last!

Edward took his hand from his face. He looked old. And if Richard had quailed before the incarnate hatred in Elizabeth Woodville’s eyes, he now chilled to the stone-cold blue of his brother’s.

“Well?” Edward challenged.

“You must do what you must,” Richard spoke through white lips.

“I shall.”

On the eve of the Feast of the Holy Innocents, a hooded man and two small boys rode with a small retinue through the rising river mist toward Crosby Place. It was Gervase Rimbaud and the young Edward and John of Gloucester. Slightly in front of his older brother, as befitted his rank, Ned rode with a groom on either side. He had a girlish fear of riding but to please Gervase, whom he loved, he strove to master it. The minstrel’s nod of approval was more precious to him than any praise. He pulled himself erect on his pony and tried to remember to round his wrists as he had been taught. When the people cheered him a slight flush rose in his cheeks. Behind him, with Gervase, rode John of Gloucester who had a much better seat on a horse, wearing upon his tabard the ducal arms of his father. If he were aware of the whispers concerning his bastardy, he did not show it. Both boys were round-eyed with wonder at this great monster of a

city, its green arms extended in a Yuletide welcome. Till Twelfth Night the mumming and the masques would go on, for London was not only celebrating the blessed Christmastide. Another royal wedding was taking place, an excitement the city had not had for some time. It was mainly for this that the two Gloucester boys were in London; their cousin, King Edward's little Richard of York, was being married to Anne Mowbray, heiress to the vast Norfolk fortunes. And Ned's mother, Anne, was having a great party for all the royal children in her town house at Crosby.

They clattered into the wet courtyard and were taken aloft to Anne's great warm chamber where, among a myriad glittering toys, the royal children were gathered. Confused by the din, Ned stood by his mother as she peeled off his traveling woolens, pulling over his tousled fair head a light indoor tunic. The children were engaged in boisterous sport.

There were the King's five, three girls and two boys, marked by their blond hair, silvery-light to deep yellow, and in their midst Clarence's two with their dead mother's pale brown beauty. Little Edward of Clarence, who ought to have been in bed, clapped chubby fists, staggered to his feet and smiled enchantingly on everyone. Margot, his sister, growing into a handsome maid of four, was at the moment scarlet with rage at Edward of Wales, who had just slapped her for pulling his brother's hair.

"For shame, your Grace," corrected Gervase, forestalling Edward's tutor, who came fussing up. "We do not strike females."

"Then let her stop hurting Richard." Nimbly Edward climbed to the back of a spotted rocking horse and began madly to ride up and down. Anne smiled. They were all so willful, all—and here she sighed—all except her own son, wincing aside from the boisterous rocking of Edward, who clapped his heels to the sides of his mount. Ned was a weakling, afraid even of wooden horses, terrified to mount a flesh-and-blood pony. He even screamed away from the mummers and their mock dragons. He could not even bear the nurses' tales of Rawhead and Bloodbones, two favorite bogeys of all children. She dreaded the black eyes of Richard resting searchingly on his son, who since his winter illness of last year seemed to get more frail than ever. It seemed to her that his skin, at times as transparent as Isabella's in her last sickness, looked paler than usual. Devoutly she prayed he would not go down in one of his feverish attacks while they were here in London. It would call too strongly to Richard's mind the

difference between his child and the others, so sturdy and full of life.

If only she might have another child! But though she and Richard enjoyed their love frequently, there was no sign of pregnancy. Every upset of the stomach or attack of dizziness in getting off a horse filled her with expectation, but the punctual arrival of her monthly cycle dashed her hopes and drove her back to disappointed waiting. Ned now was kneeling on the bearskin by the fire, his delicate pointed face bent above a spinning top. Suddenly she could not bear to think what lay ahead for him, the tilting and riding he must master—for every nobleman spent much of his life in the saddle—the cold steel armor, the foreign campaigns, the heritage that, as Duke of Gloucester, he must carry on. A surge of protective love poured over her. Somehow she and Gervase must contrive to prepare him for life, to buckler him against its harsh cruelties. And above all, she must soften the blow of Richard's disappointment. This child, whose birth had been hailed with such solemn delight, should, after all, have been a girl. It would have been much better.

The King's two daughters were wrangling. "Richard will be sick." Cicely eyed the small bridegroom who had joined his two cousins of Gloucester. Anne thought how alike the boys were; Richard of York was not much stronger appearing than her own Ned. "He will be sick," repeated Cicely. "He always is when he gets excited."

"Richard will *not* be sick," contradicted Bess. "I have explained everything to him and he will control himself. And he won't have anything to eat before the wedding, so he can't be sick." And she looked with fond concern at her four-year-old brother.

"Well, then, he'll be sick afterward." Cicely was not malicious but she wanted to be right in something. Anne saw how like her mother she grew, with something of Elizabeth Woodville's own perversity, whereas Bess, the older child, resembled her grandmother, the Duchess of York.

"What will they do if he *is* sick?" persisted Cicely.

On the fringe of the others stood the younger Suffolks, children of the King's sister, rare visitors at court, since the Lady Elizabeth of Suffolk did not see eye to eye with the Queen and her horde of Woodvilles. Silently the Suffolk children listened to the two princesses. The older of the boys suddenly snickered at the thought of the royal bridegroom vomiting with nerves before his wedding guests; but a look from Bess quelled him.

She stared him down. "If he *is* sick," she said slowly, not looking at

her sister, but keeping her eyes sternly on her cousin of Suffolk, "if he *is* sick, it will be afterwards and it won't matter." At the advanced age of thirteen Bess knew already that the main thing was to get yourself safely married and what happened afterwards in the privacy of your own chamber was your own affair.

Anne came and put the hair back from the girl's flushed earnest face. "I know it will be all right tomorrow," she assured Bess. She was thinking that if anyone were to be ill, it would probably be her own delicate son. Bess gave her a pained smile. Evidently she did not relish being treated like a child and Anne remembered how grown-up she herself felt at the same age. At thirteen, she had attended her sister's wedding in Calais, and already they had been talking about a bridegroom for her. The memory throbbed.

The sun of York that smiled so broadly on the royal nuptials of the two children now blazed forth in majestic anger and golden relief. The festival was over, the merrymaking stilled; dread necessity raised its head and could not be dodged. The vexed question of Clarence was upon Edward and he could delay no longer.

On the very day after the wedding, he convened Parliament before an uneasy assemblage that heard the Chancellor speak on the fidelity owed by subjects to their King. No specific reference was needed, for everyone, acutely conscious of that fleeing figure up in the Tower, knew what was meant. And when the minister chose for his text of the day, "He beareth not the sword in vain," all those who knew the power and extent of Edward's wrath shivered.

Pale and distraught, Edward himself stalked about his palace at Westminster. The short winter day had drawn to a close and a moaning wind was rising about his castle walls. To those with him, it seemed like the wailing voice of death and destruction. At Edward's heels followed Buckingham, disliked by Edward, now created Lord High Steward. On the following day the Bill of Attainder must be brought against Clarence, and if allowed, it would be Buckingham's duty as first lord of the realm to pronounce sentence. The sight of him sickened Edward.

"If there were only some other way," he muttered and turning suddenly, trod on the toes of Buckingham. "Get out of the way, Henry," he snapped. "God's teeth!"

In a corner of the room where with a secretary he attended to some

pressing business from the North, Richard could not keep back a nervous grin at the evident discomfiture of Buckingham who, with an anxious smile on his lips, followed Edward about, trying to combine obsequiousness with the pomp of his sudden elevation. Hysterically Richard thought how even in the most dread circumstances there was always something to laugh at. Buckingham, with all his stately magnificence, was a comic figure; he was so patently anxious to please Edward who so obviously detested him.

Behind his hand Richard yawned. He was not getting much sleep these days, for Edward frequently sent for him in the night. Together they were wrestling with the awful necessity that confronted the King. Richard put forth the possibility of George's madness, but Edward shrugged it away. His mind was full of something else, a matter he did not name.

In a pouring rain they brought Clarence from the Tower to the great hall at Westminster. Edward, who had succumbed to a weeping fit the night before, sat quite still, a black velvet cap on his bright hair, his handsome face marble-white.

A thrill ran through the assembly when Clarence appeared, as men looked, looked away, then were drawn back to the jaunty figure that bowed mockingly to the Crown, to the Chancellor, and to the company. Clarence then sank into the chair of the accused. He was splendidly dressed for the occasion in a tunic of white damask, the hanging sleeves richly furred, his breast sparkling with jewels. Above the modishly tight collar his face was calm, his manner self-possessed. He might have been appearing at a prenuptial contract, instead of attending a trial for his life.

Edward's hand contracted nervously and the clerk placed in it the fearsome document. Richard began to feel sick. His heart beat painfully and he longed to leave the place. But he set his teeth, at the same time wondering how to endure the painful hour. His only hope was that, despite his firm intention to see George attainted, Edward would never carry out the sentence. Perhaps it would be enough for Clarence to be imprisoned, or banished; surely after their long talks in the dead of night, Edward would never murder their brother.

In a low, husky voice, his chin tucked in so that some of the older councilors must cup their ears to hear, Edward read. The dreary list of accusations went on—Clarence's false claims, his treacherous slanderings, the attempted uprisings—and in the midst of all, Richard sharpened his ears for some clue to the "secret." It was not men-

tioned. The old Warwick allegiance was dragged forth and with it, the outrage of the traitor Burdette. Edward's voice strengthened as he came onto familiar ground, for Clarence had declared him a bastard unfit to rule, and therefore unlawfully upon the throne of England.

Richard broke into a sweat. No one had told him this. How could George so malign their mother! He looked over at him as he lolled in the chair of the accused, his fingers wound in his jeweled chain, his gaze fixed on some distant object. His beautifully chiseled mouth was drawn down in supercilious disdain and the only sign that he was listening came from the slight quiver of his nostrils.

Feeling deathly ill, Richard rose and pushed from the room. Once out in the antechamber, he was violently sick and he sat, hunched and gasping, while over him hovered a pair of anxious pages and Lovell came running in from the outer corridors. Richard sought Anne and with her he remained, not stirring forth to see or to hear. But shortly after supper came the summons from Edward.

"By what right did you leave the Council?" he demanded.

"I was not needed." But truth to tell, now it was all over, Richard felt shame at his hasty retreat.

Edward rested his head on his hand. He felt the weight of his own skin too much to bear. "None helped me," he mourned. "I had to do it alone."

"That is your task," Richard reminded him.

"You know how it ended?" Sadly Edward put the question.

Richard nodded. Lovell and Percy had acquainted him with the horrid details. On their feet, glaring defiance, the Duke and the King accused and denied, for all the world as if they were alone. It was brother against brother, as in the old days when they rode in the tilt-yard or played pitch-and-toss. The quarrel was a private one, with one brother holding the golden prize, the other coveting it to the point of madness.

"Did he say anything about his 'secret'?" asked Richard.

As if shot, Edward looked up and a slow red crept under his skin. "No. Why should he?"

"I thought only that it must be his trump card." Richard was somewhat lame. If Clarence had a real charge, one that would stand up in a court of law, this morning was the time to bring it forth.

Edward frowned into space. "He suddenly stopped speaking. By the saints, I felt as if the bottom had dropped out of my boat. He

wouldn't utter another word, not even when Buckingham sentenced him. He didn't care," Edward finished miserably, "he didn't care."

"Did you think he would?"

"Perhaps he is not to blame, after all." Wretchedly Edward looked for a word of comfort.

There was a rustle behind them. It was the Queen with young Edward of Wales. Richard's eyes widened. What was she doing? She had dressed the boy in scarlet and ermine, and on his head was the coronet he had worn at his brother's wedding.

Edward stared heavily at his son. *He* knew what Elizabeth was doing. She was reminding him of his duty to the child who one day would be Edward the Fifth.

"Edward is proud of his father," she said and a hard smile curved her red lips. "A worthy prince of a worthy lord," she went on, standing with her hand on the boy's shoulder, the two of them facing him.

"I know," Edward sighed. "I know what I must do."

"Speak, my son." And on the child's shoulder Elizabeth's white hand contracted.

The little prince shifted his weight and swallowed, tucking in his chin in his effort to remember. "My uncle of Clarence is a foul traitor, and when I am King, I shall visit his sins upon, upon—" He rolled his eyes upon his mother, whose watchful gaze never left him. With her lips she formed the words. He continued, "Upon his children and upon their children." Triumphant he stopped. "May I have it now?" he whispered, nestling to his mother.

From her sleeve Elizabeth drew a long sugar stick and gave it to her son. "And now, bid your father and your Uncle Gloucester good night."

Obediently the child kissed his father, who appeared not to notice him, then went to his uncle, who took his face between his hands and searched it. Then softly, "You will be merciful, my prince," Richard said, and let the boy go.

All through January Edward miserably delayed. Whenever his ministers dared they spoke of the accused man. "I know!" Edward flew into fierce rages. "I know! Mother of God, who should know better?" Every night he laid his head on the pillow and thought of George, that handsome figure, stretched on a straw mattress under the cold moonlight that sent dark bars across his bed. Every morn-

ing he saw red sunrise, like blood over London. Merciful God, how he knew!

A night in mid-February found him brooding in his private cabinet, surprised by a sudden movement of the arras as a page held it up for the Queen to sweep through.

"I must see you alone, my lord." She waited. Then when they were by themselves: "What is this latest outrage of Clarence's?"

"There are so many," said Edward heavily.

"But not like this. He dares to deny that we are man and wife, that our children are legitimate issue of the Crown. He dares!" Her white fist smote the table like any man's. Rage distorted her beauty. At that moment, woman though she was, she could with ease have strangled George of Clarence.

Edward's face had gone stiff, his eyes round and glassy. So it had reached her at last; he wondered who had been prattling. He should have stopped Stillington's mouth forever, not merely gagged it with gold.

"Well!" Elizabeth waited.

"There is nothing—nothing he can prove."

"Prove! What can you mean?"

Edward threw out his hands. "Nothing," he repeated.

"Before God and our saints," Elizabeth's voice shook, "in the name of our children, Edward, tell me if there is anything in this."

In the little chamber the silence was terrible. It was for Edward the moment of naked truth. "Before God, I tell you, there is nothing—we are bound in holy wedlock and Edward shall sit on the throne." He had said it.

Elizabeth crumpled to her knees, her face hidden in her hands on the edge of the table. Gasping sobs shook her. "I knew it was false," she choked. "It had to be."

Clumsily, without his usual grace, Edward comforted her.

"All these years," she said huskily, "that I have been true wife to you, Edward. You offered me your heart and your throne. Do you remember?" She looked at him, the tears shining on her ivory cheeks.

Now he was hot and uncomfortable. "I remember. Go you to your women," he soothed, and led her to the door. When she had gone, he summoned his secretary. "Fetch my lords of Gloucester and Buckingham."

Richard got there first. "What ails the Queen's Grace?"

Edward's face tightened. How news traveled! "It is nothing."

He dropped his eyes and played with his golden seal. "It is Stillington that concerns me."

"Stillington?"

"I hear he has bribed the guards to admit him to George."

Richard's eyes were keen. *Stillington!* He remembered that night at Fountains Abbey, the restless prelate, his nerves on edge, his manner constrained. How did *he* fit into this dread design? "They are old friends," he said. "It is natural he would attempt to see George, to offer him spiritual comfort." He tried to speak calmly.

"Condemned men receive only those sanctioned by the Crown," said Edward curtly. "And may I be damned if Stillington sees him."

Buckingham now hurried in, buttoning his collar. "My liege." Humbly he knelt.

"Arrest the Bishop of Wells and take him to the Tower."

Buckingham was surprised off his guard. "My lord bishop?" he said stupidly. "The charge, may it please your Grace?"

"Conspiracy with a condemned man." Edward snapped out the words. "Where's your sense, Henry?" He held out his hand and the secretary gave him the order. He scrawled his name. Then he pointed the pen at the death warrant of Clarence that lay night and day, always handy before him. "And that."

A thrill pierced Richard. "No," he muttered.

Edward flung back in his chair. "Christ's teeth!" He fairly groaned out the words. "I've had the Speaker of the Commons petitioning me today, and tomorrow he goes before the bar of the Lords. I can delay no longer." Deliberately he bent over the table, scratched his name. The shaking hand of the secretary sealed, stamped and sanded the document.

"How will you do it?" Richard was somber. Nothing could save Clarence now.

"He shall have all the rites of the condemned." The horrid words fell from his lips like small stones. His head sank onto his breast. "Leave me."

At the doorway Richard turned to look. Edward had not moved. He sat, his bright head bent, his shoulders miserably slumped. And Richard ached for him. Who would wear the crown and do such a thing as this?

Over the palace settled a pall. The word was out that the Duke of Clarence must die.

"A public execution?" Anne wondered. "With the people feeling as they do?"

"It won't be that public." Richard was bitter. "Edward's too clever for that. I shouldn't be surprised if, after all, one of his creatures did the job by night, and secretly."

Henry of Lancaster! Uncomfortably Anne looked at her husband. That was how he had died, with Richard in command of the assassins. It was their way. Condemn their enemies and do them to death secretly or else by the time-honored and summary justice of the battlefield. But never in legal manner with official pomp of public execution.

"No," repeated Richard, "it will be one of Edward's creatures."

On the evening of the 18th, Richard had himself rowed quietly down the river to the Tower. With Lovell and Percy he slipped into the Tower, and at the familiar sight of his dark face, the guards opened studded doors and grilled ports and, at last, the creaking heavy oak that fastened the cell of Clarence.

In a loose blouse, across his chest a partlet of fine linen somewhat soiled, Clarence sat playing chess with his guard. At sight of the visitor his haggard face broke into a smile. Richard dropped his hood and came forward.

"Well!" Clarence leaned back in his chair, his arms pushing straightly away from the chess board. "Beshrew me, if it's not my brother the King's brother!" He was unshaven and Richard had never seen him so unkempt. Despite this, his splendid beauty shone undimmed and his manner was jaunty as ever.

"I thought you might be the priest come to shrive me," jeered Clarence. "Why *have* you come, my brother?"

Now that he was here, Richard could not fathom really why he had come. He could no longer help his brother, that much was clear. Did Clarence know he was so soon to die?

"Do you wish a priest, George?"

"Should I?" George laughed aloud. "By the pigs, no! Edward won't kill me, he lacks the guts. All he is good for is to spend and whore and lead his victorious army after the fighting." The last was grossly unfair, for Edward was a renowned warrior, but Richard let it pass. What malevolent goblin had George in its grip? How he had veered back and forth from one side to the other, always for gain! And how he rubbed a man the wrong way! From pity Richard had come, but

now all he wanted to do was to strike his brother in his weakest spot.

"You've seen your last sunset. You die tomorrow."

George's mouth twisted up at one corner and he sat very still. "Even so?" He spoke softly now. "Then he is actually going to do it. By God's blood, I did not think he had the bowels." Standing as he did on the edge of eternity, Clarence felt a reluctant admiration for a king's strength of purpose. He knew that in Edward's place he would have done so, but then he was not Edward.

"Tell me," he continued, and now he was very white, "how went the royal wedding?"

Richard found it difficult to speak.

"That was wise of Edward," said Clarence. "He was always clever, and he did well to secure the Norfolk money for the lad. But who will look out for Edward of Wales?"

"Who should do that but his loyal people?"

"Ah!" The old cunning look crossed Clarence's face. "If only I could have raised an army, I could have told a different tale."

Richard was puzzled, unable to follow this last. Clarence was full of mysteries, the result no doubt of the wine by which he lived. He shook his head. "I am come to see where I can serve you, George."

Clarence played with the twisted cords of his shirt. Then suddenly he looked up and clapped Richard lightly on his shoulder. It was the weak one and it gave him a twinge. "There's naught, unless"—here he paused—"unless it be the children."

"They shall be looked after with my own. They grow sturdy, George."

"I suppose they are attainted, too." The ancient bitterness welled up.

"Times will change. Much water can stream beneath the bridge before they are old enough for it to matter." Richard spoke soothingly.

"I never liked you, Diccon," Clarence spoke almost pleasantly, "but, by God, you are a true man this day." He held out his hand and Richard grasped it. "On a battlefield, I should have done my best to split you to the chine, but you are up and I am down. 'Tis destiny." His light voice broke and he covered it with a laugh.

Richard bit his lip to still its quivering.

"I hear Edward threatened to stand me on my head in a pipe of malmsey," said Clarence, and now he was grinning. "Do you think he could be persuaded to stand by that?"

And on that jest, the brothers parted.

On the morning of the 19th, the February sun sent long bars of light into the cell of the condemned man, but these were red bars, not the black ones of the still moonlight. The Tower of London was quiet, too quiet, as if the warders and prisoners knew that a dark deed had been done the night before.

Half on and half off the bed with the thin straw mattress, lay the body, flat in death, a long scarlet gash across the throat, from which the blood had soaked into the fur of the collared bedgown. The hands, unclenched now, were stiff-fingered, and over one slender wrist trailed a golden chain bracelet from which hung, not dangling any more, a medallion. On the side toward the light were the pictured heads of a boy and girl, and on the other was the likeness of Isabella, Duchess of Clarence.

25. The King Is Dead!

EDWARD the King lay dying. Westminster Palace was wrapped in profound and gloomy silence, its towers and battlements looming high above the green meadows that were sweet with April. Within, the Court moved softly, almost as if they dreaded to attract to themselves the spectral eye of the Guest who had taken up residence among them. His presence hung in the fetid air of the sickroom; it was felt in the river mist that rolled in with the evening bell.

For six days now, Edward had kept his bed. To the worried Court the equally concerned doctors gave out their opinion; the King's Grace had suffered a chill as a result of his fishing party in the damp spring meadows near the palace. The long Lenten season over, Edward celebrated Easter with a jaunt into the countryside, riding far afield, to return unusually exhausted, complaining of his old stomach cramps.

Not all the doctors, drugs and potions could keep down his steadily rising fever, while his stomach remained hard and bloated and at times his pain was cruel. They purged him with salts of antimony and calomel, which only increased his cramps and brought no relief.

At times his mind wandered and then they blistered his scalp and gave him infusions of nutmeg in hot milk. "For," as Dr. Hobbes said, "the resemblance the nutmeg bears to the brain makes it efficacious in such extremes." But Edward only groaned and turned his head aside from the drink they offered him.

Briefly he rallied but now, on the seventh day of his illness, he sank into the livid look of the mortally stricken.

In the outer anteroom, Lord Hastings paced about nervously. "Has his Highness sent for the Queen?" He snatched at the sleeve of a squire who came hurrying out of the bedchamber.

"No, my lord." The squire continued on his hurried way. "The King's Grace sleeps." And he was gone.

Lord Hastings shook his head. As Edward's best friend, he felt it his duty to rouse him to this, but the doctors refused to let him alarm their patient with any such necessity. The Queen was up at Ludlow Castle with the young Prince Edward. Last evening Dr. Hobbes declared the King to be in no danger, and a rider had gone posting north with this comforting intelligence. Elizabeth Woodville would not leave her son if this were merely another of Edward's upsets. She would shrug her white shoulders and declare that her lord could expect no other results from his nightly indulgences. And she certainly would not journey south in the April rains to be at his bedside while they purged and dosed him.

Hastings stroked his bearded chin. If only the Lord Richard were here. But, like Ceres, who stooped laboring in the fields while the lord of the underworld stole away her darling child, so in the northern lands Richard was laboring while grim peril threatened his beloved brother.

Out of the sickroom now came Hobbes, his face nearly the color of his white hair. "The Queen's Grace should be here," he admitted.

"At last!" Thomas Grey, Marquess of Dorset, the Queen's eldest son by her first marriage, who had been lounging with his friend Stanley, jumped to his feet. Grey's eyes were bloodshot and he appeared to have trouble fixing them on the worried face of the doctor. "And why, if I may make so bold as to ask, has my mother not been summoned before?" Nastily he glared at the Chamberlain. Hastings curled his lip. He knew Grey for a waster and a libertine, and he knew him to be concerned only for his own welfare in the crisis of Edward's illness.

Ignoring Grey, he turned to Hobbes. "Then it *is* serious?" He kept his voice below the hearing of the others who bunched about in anxious groups. Every man felt at the pit of his stomach the same shrinking; if their stalwart lord and master were indeed preparing to leave with the Guest who had tarried in the palace this week, their own cases were surely desperate.

"I demand that the Queen be summoned," insisted Grey.

"Moderate your tone, my lord Marquess," ordered Hastings. "We have no wish to alarm the others."

"To the devil and his dam with the others!" Grey's voice rose. But at a signal from Hastings, Lord Stanley took the young man by the arm and led him grumbling to a table where they joined the lords of Suffolk and Surrey, who were taking a glass of wine.

As for Hobbes, he looked Hastings straight in the eye, and together they two, the Chamberlain and the royal physician, their heads bent, left the room, the eyes of all following them to the door. Their manner meant only one thing: the King had not long to live and in a last attempt to get her here in time, they were going to send to the Queen.

In red and mocking splendor the April sun sank, its glow lighting up Edward's chamber, the fiery light touching the quiet hands of the sick man as he lay sunk in a lethargy that waited only for death. The great frame, once so sturdy and golden, lay scarcely disturbing the bedclothes, smoothed by the hands of the nuns who nursed him, as hour after hour he remained so still, only the barest flutter of breath passing his lips. His face, once bloated with feasting, was again thin, the splendid Plantagenet bones showing, gaunt and handsome beneath the hot dry skin.

Just as candles were brought, he began to move about in the bed, turning his head from side to side on the pillow, his hands clenching and pulling at the covers. The sick chamber rustled into nervous life, nurses moved about with sponge and basin, and the doctors mounted the bed step and listened to the King's breathing.

Then the long light-brown lashes, golden at the tips, trembled, revealing the bright feverish gaze. Edward looked into the grave face of his doctor. "I am dying." With perfect calmness he spoke the words and the sound came clear.

"Ah, no, sire." The doctor's professional gravity denied the certainty. "Your Grace will rally and recover."

The faintest ghost of a smile lit Edward's weary eyes. "By cock-and-pie you lie," he murmured. "I've done with the lot." His dried and cracked lips barely moved. In faith, he was too tired to care that he was leaving his beautiful world, so full of pleasure and so full of pain. *Pain!* Louis had dealt him his deathblow, Louis and all those others who had soured the sweet of his success. Even his Queen, once so well loved, for whom he had dared so much—he moved restlessly—even she had at last withdrawn herself, and lived only for her sons and her gilded ambitions.

"Louis—Maxi—" He could not finish the Austrian's name, but those who listened heard. "Hobbes—"

The doctor put his ear to Edward's lips and caught the whispered commands. Though the body was mastered by pure exhaustion, the patient's mind was quite clear.

"As your Grace wishes." Hobbes motioned, and the Squire of the

Body went to give the last summons of his high and mighty prince before he himself was summoned.

Quietly the lords trooped in and found the King propped on his pillows. Too weak to do more than roll his eyes, Edward signaled his wishes, and soon they were gathered as he separated them on either side of the bed, the two factions to whom he would leave the tender person of his little prince.

On one side were his stepsons, Grey gnawing his lip, at his elbow his younger brother; hopelessly Edward looked at them, his fever-bright eyes sunken in his head. He knew how venal they were and how, once he was out of the way, the Queen would advance their cause. With his stepsons stood his wife's two brothers, the fat chunky figure of the Bishop of Salisbury and the stolid soldier, Edward Woodville. There they stood, a solid block of bright colors, the Queen's men, ready to draw weapon in defense of her restless ambition.

Sighing, Edward rolled his head away and saw with relief the steady and watchful figure of Hastings, his Chamberlain and dear friend, flanked by Suffolk, who through marriage with his own sister was bound to him, then Surrey, and behind them the great lords of the land. What with his last bit of strength should he say to them?

Watchfully they waited. This was a terrible thing, the death of their King at so untimely an age, leaving the land in the hands of a lad and his guardians. "Unhappy the land ruled by a child"—more than one was thinking it.

"Love—love one another—" Falteringly Edward addressed them. "My son—my son—" His voice trailed off. His tears of weakness filled them with foreboding. He was leaving to them his son—to what end? "I leave him—prince—undoubted lord—" The words trailed weakly off.

His head rolled to one side and his eyes, grown suddenly large, were pleading. Would these lords not say—for him—that they would abstain, would keep the peace for the sake of England and of his son? Suddenly Hastings thrust his hand across the bed. To the Greys and Woodvilles he said, "I pledge me your friend and fellow Englishman." Dorset responded and the two men clasped hands.

Edward's eyes softened, the lids drooped, and he floated into a doze. If only they meant it—to keep the peace—to save the realm. Richard! Richard—he must come and hold them to their promise.

One by one the noblemen bent the knee, kissed the inert hand and stole away. Edward did not show he was aware of their going.

"Will he wake again?" whispered Hastings, watching the sunken face with its hectic flush.

"Sometimes they do." Hobbes had his hand on the King's wrist.

In a little while he roused, refreshed from his nap, his mind once again clear. But Hobbes knew and he beckoned the priests. Praying in the shadows of the great chamber, they now moved forward in an ecclesiastical body, bearing with them the solemn objects of their ceremony.

Edward's gaze became intent. It was as if he distinctly saw, lurking in the shadows quitted by the priests, the floating form of his brother George of Clarence. Had he the strength, he would have shrieked. He could only gasp. Then the burly form of the Cardinal Archbishop interposed, but Edward felt sure the white mocking face of the murdered man was just behind him.

"Ah—no—" he murmured.

The priest thought he spoke from fear of dying. "Make your peace with God, my lord," he exhorted.

As if outraged at the thought that he did not desire to enter the Kingdom of Heaven at one with his Maker, Edward's eyes widened. The vision of Clarence was gone. Relief, flooding him, gave a moment's strength. "My—my will," he managed.

The executors thrust aside the priests, who drew back, but warily, as though they feared Edward might die unshriven. "Be brief, my lord," whispered the Cardinal to the Bishop of Durham who, as chief executor, must hover over the dying man for any last requests. He was a tactful man who knew what desires lay closest to the royal heart.

"Your Grace's just debts shall be paid, the extortions rectified, and the poor—yes, yes, your Grace—the poor shall be remembered in the funeral distributions." Edward sighed and the tenseness went out of him. He sank back into his pillows. But once again the fire flared up and his eyes grew urgent. "Yes, sire?" The bishop leaned close.

"To—to my brother—the lord Richard—my son—Lord Protector—" Now, absolutely at its limit, Edward's voice trailed off. But his eyes were agonized.

The bishop inclined his head. "All shall be done," he promised.

Then there was nothing left for Edward to do save to turn his face

to the glory of the Holy Eucharist and to surrender his soul to God. About midnight, the bells of London began sorrowfully to toll.

Veiled in deepest black, Elizabeth Woodville entered the death chamber. She had tarried long enough to don her mourning and now approached her dead husband, her blond beauty shrouded in diaphanous veils, about her white neck a great rope of pearls from which hung a heavy cross of ebony and nacre. With a graceful movement she sank upon her knees at the bier.

Naked from the waist up, the dead king lay upon a board, and before his bed had passed all those on whom was laid the duty of attesting to the death of the high and mighty King, Prince Edward, titled Fourth of that name. For a moment Elizabeth gazed on the sunken face, then fumbling for her cross, she took it off her neck, kissed it and laid it gently on the bare breast. Most briefly she prayed while the priests knelt silently in the background. Then she rose to face them.

"What ceremony?" Her voice was cold and she looked at the Bishop of Salisbury, who stepped toward her as if he were some strange prince of the Church and not her blood brother.

"On the morrow the King's Grace will lie in St. Stephen's, and thence we shall bear him to the Abbey. When all is decently done, he will rest at Windsor."

"I see." For a moment she turned back to the bier. "He was full young to die." But she did not weep. Her blue eyes, once so like flowers in her face, were frosty with resentment as her gaze swept the little monkish group. "I would I had been brought here sooner." And with no backward glance at the dead man, she left the chamber.

In her private cabinet she found her son, the Marquess of Dorset, awaiting her. With his back to a cold fireplace he stood, a slender figure of some thirty years.

"Ah, Tom!" She sank into a chair, then closed her eyes, letting the weariness of the journey and the sad entry into black London wash over her. Today she felt her years. The bearing of seven children to Edward had taken some of the voluptuous vitality of her younger days. Edward had died just short of his fortieth birthday, but she would never see forty again.

"Well, what's to be done?" Dorset was blunt. There would be

plenty of time for resting and pitying oneself and the dead King once they had decided what to do in the face of this horrid calamity.

But Elizabeth was unresponsive. She was trying to think, to see clearly where she stood. The creatures would gather, no doubt of that, and after them the vultures, and she must be ready. Edward had left the kingdom under the protection of Richard of Gloucester, and him she did not fear; but would Richard be able to hold the power for the boy King? She rubbed a hand over her forehead. There was that fox, Henry Tudor, sitting over there in Brittany, waiting only for the word to come sailing across the waters, with all the might of Louis and Duke Francis of Brittany behind him. The Lancastrians would come out of hiding, and there must be hundreds of them, ready to strike. That must not happen. And in addition to all this, there was Hastings, here on the very doorstep, her dead husband's friend, but none the less an enemy to all the Woodvilles.

She opened tired eyes. "They will swarm around, the jackals and the foxes, you know that?"

"Aye." Dorset struck his fist into his palm. "And first will be that hound Buckingham. He'll bear watching. Where is he now—in Wales?"

"Yes. We had a weekend visit with him last month. I took his measure then. Given the chance, he'll rush against us." Buckingham was indeed a menace. He was weak and ambitious, a dangerous combination. Which way would he jump? With his wealth and prestige of birth, he was a figure of consequence.

"What of Uncle Rivers?" He was biting some loose skin on his thumb and over it he shot his mother a look.

"Anthony?" She drew a deep breath. "It is he I trust to get Edward safely to us here. But before that, we must have secured the power." Then she tossed her veil back from her neck. "It's of no use pretending, Tom. We are detested here. And your mode of living has not done us any good, either."

"I'm no worse than any of the men in our family—my precious brother Dick—or your own brothers." Insolence edged his voice and with a pang she thought how when she was wife to the King, he would not have used that tone with her. Even her own— She rose and went to the window.

Down on the river she could see Edward's pleasure barge with its gaudy awnings and gilt poles, swinging idly at its mooring. Tears stung her eyelids. They had so often gone up and down their river

in the happy carefree days. But she resolutely put away such thoughts. No use to weep before Tom—or any of them, for that matter. Since her elevation, nearly twenty years before, they had lived in profligacy, the lot of them, even Lionel her brother, the Bishop of Salisbury. And why not? they said. Was there not plenty for all, and should they sit back while the arrogant blue-bloods took their fill of the land and its riches? By the liver of God, no! She sighed. They had had their fling, and now she could wish they had been concerned with something besides their own pleasure. But who could have foreseen that Edward would die so young?

Desperately she turned to Dorset. She and he must not bicker. "I look to you. They'll tear Edward from me and push us out in the cold if they can. I look to you." Back to her chair she went and sat down with resolution. "Tom, you control the Tower armaments and the Treasury."

"Yes?"

"This must be turned to account." Her face sharpened. In this black-swathed figure of determination, there was small resemblance to the careless beauty the King had married. "With all speed we shall bring Edward to London for his crowning, but first—" Here she paused. She must make sure he understood. "First, we must convene council."

His brows shot up. "We can do that?" Both knew that with the King's death, his Council was dissolved, did not exist, and there was no advisory board till the new King or his guardians called one together. "What of Hastings? By the saints, Edward should have dealt with him after that fiasco at Barnet, instead of taking him to his bosom."

"We must chance it. At any rate, if we convene council, it will be a bird in the hand." Her tired face relaxed into a smile and then she was the Elizabeth Woodville of old, who charmed men to their undoing. "I shall deal with Hastings. And when your Uncle Rivers comes to town, we can do much with his signature. Meanwhile you, as 'uterine brother,' will sign for the King."

"How fortunate we have the same mother," he said lightly.

"And now—listen." She beckoned and her son dragged his chair nearer to her lowered voice. "You shall propose in council that we enlarge and strengthen the fleet."

"So—to what particular end?" Dorset knew they always needed ships, but his mother must have something special in mind.

“On the surface”—she shrugged—“to oppose Louis’s freebooters. Under that devil Cordes they have been active enough to arouse alarm, as well you know.” He nodded. “It should be no task to convince the lords that with Edward’s death, the French will take their chance to strike and strike hard. Hence—more ships.”

“Have you thought the French may not strike?”

“I have indeed. I think they will not. But we shall have the ships and, unless I mistake, we shall need them for an enterprise much nearer home.” She laced her hands together. “You shall appoint your Uncle Edward Woodville Knight Commander, and he will apply directly to you for funds with which to fill his ships.”

Silence filled the elegant little room. Each was busy with his own thoughts. The Queen was thinking how with control of the fleet, the treasury, of the arms ashore, they might easily maintain the power. And then, too, there was the Church. She had cultivated the clergy, so unpopular with the people. It was almost as if she knew it would come to this. The princes of the Church would cleave to them and to the young King. Dorset was thinking of Richard, shrewd, clever, worshiped by the people of the North, rapidly becoming as well liked here in the South. The Lord Protector.

“What of Gloucester?” He broke in.

“What of him? We shall use him, my son, to hold the people grappled to our side. They adore him—and this will prove most useful to our needs.” Elizabeth Woodville did not fear Richard. She had always friendly relations with him, and he was only a man, after all. By his love for the dead brother, he was bound to serve and protect the boy King. Edward may have named him Lord Protector of the realm—but she and her men held the control here in London—and with the speedy crowning of her son—ah no, there was no need to fear Richard of Gloucester. She spoke again.

“Anthony must bring Edward to us here at once. I shall see to it that they do not bother to wait for Gloucester.”

And mother and son exchanged a slow smile.

It had been a lovely day for April, with a kind sun shedding its benign warmth over the meadows about Middleham Castle.

“Oh, do come out with us, Diccon,” pleaded Anne. “Ned and I have scarcely seen you since your return from York. And you promised.”

So Richard had yielded, leaving his secretaries devotedly scratching at the everlasting papers. For himself, he was glad to leave the work, so pressing lately, with so much to be done for the people of the North. For the war with Scotland had been successfully closed and he was once more able to turn his attention to matters nonmilitary.

With Anne he sat under the trees at the edge of the archery butts and watched the boys at their shooting. Young John, well past eleven now, sturdy and straight, was a pretty figure as he sped his arrows clean and true to the target. He quite outshot the pair of lads who competed against him. They were wards of Richard, brought down with him from York to study with the tutors and trainers of his sons. A little competition for the youths, thought Richard, would spur them on. Already John's archery had improved. With pride, well concealed, Richard watched the boy, his thick black hair shining in the sun, his young shape already long-waisted like his own. Anne watched too, and her color rose. She could hear Ned, somewhere in the background, sporting with his special friend, young Geoffrey, son of the garrison captain. They would be playing with their clo-sheys, she knew. It was a game for girls and women, not for lads who one day would carry their shields into battle.

Her son's merry laughter rang out. At least he was good-natured, that was something. He now came toward them, his yellow hose all green-stained where he had been rolling on the damp meadow grass. He was grinning for pleasure at having his mother and father with him on this picnic outing. A breeze, scented with hawthorn, blew the hair back from his happy face.

"By my troth, 'tis a merry day!" He slapped his thigh in imitation of Richard's squire, Guy de Hardville.

Richard burst out laughing. "By your troth! You young weasel, you are not even promised. What say you, Nan, shall we find him a girl with green hair and silver eyes, who will witch him for fair? He's ten years old and marriageable."

"Don't tease him." Anne smoothed the hair back from her son's soft face. "When the time comes, my Neddie, you shall have a fair young lady for your bride—" Here she strained him to her, suddenly afraid for this delicate one, whose fragile bones she could feel beneath the skin. So much to do, before he was a man, ready for wedding and for wearing his majority. A shiver took her and she drew her cloak closer. This April weather had a way of changing

quickly. It was cooler than it had been when they came into the sunny meadow.

Ned dragged away from her and put his hand on the Duke's neck. "Look, my father!" he cried. "Someone comes!"

Richard gazed keenly into the distance. There was indeed a rider galloping across the meadow. "He comes from the South," he said and got to his feet. The man urged his beast forward, its neck lathered with foam. The distance between them shrank and in a flurry of dirt clods horse and man reached them. The messenger flung off the saddle and knelt.

"My Lord Protector—" he began.

"Protector!" Anne gasped, then put her hands over her mouth. Richard stared.

"The King's Grace is dead." Cap in hand, the man waited, his head bowed beneath his news.

"When?" Richard was suddenly hoarse.

"On Wednesday the ninth at about the hour of midnight."

"*Requiescat in pacem,*" murmured Anne. All signed themselves. But Richard sank back on his bench, stunned. He turned haggard eyes on her.

"My brother," he muttered. He held out his hand and in a single movement the messenger unstrapped his pouch and gave him Hastings' dispatch.

"Spare not horse nor self," the Lord Chamberlain had instructed, and the man had ridden constantly.

Walking as if in his sleep Richard crossed the meadow, reading the letter as he went.

"Mother!" began Ned.

"Hush!" Anne cut him off and the boy for once shrank into silence.

As if a blight had suddenly struck them, the little party straggled after Richard back to the castle. At her side Anne was aware of Ger vase, softly following with the two boys, the three of them whispering together. She felt numb. It could not be that Edward, their vital golden King, was no more. As if to clear her thoughts, she shook her head. She reached her husband who paused at the foot of the courtyard steps, the letter in his hand, staring off into space. Together they mounted and passed out of the sunlight into the dank shadow of the keep.

At the top of the stairs Anne left him. "Get all our black clothing

out," she directed her women. "Take down all the garlands from the hall. We shall attend requiem mass this afternoon." Decent attention must be paid to the obsequies for the dead. Till that was done, they could not think of themselves.

In the cold chapel they knelt, their rosaries clicking softly as they prayed for Edward's soul. Richard's silence and pallor shocked Anne. She had not as yet heard the details of the King's death and Richard seemed unable to speak of them.

At last they sat to food in their small cabinet. Listlessly Richard played with the tiny roasted bird on his plate. Meat sickened him. Anne drank some wine and read the letter he gave her. It was short and to the point, and ended thus:

The King has left all to your protection—goods, heir, realm. Secure the person of our sovereign Lord Edward the Fifth and get you to London.

HASTINGS

There was something sinister about the brevity. It was as if the Lord Chamberlain feared to spend a single unnecessary moment that might delay the intelligence on its way to Richard.

"What shall you do first?" Anne wished he would eat.

"Send to Rivers at Ludlow. I must know what he intends and what manner of force he means to take to London."

"Force?" The word pierced her. "But it will be only the usual escort, will it not?"

"Hardly. However, there is no reason for alarm. It's not as if we were at civil war. The people will rally to Edward the son as they did to Edward the father. It will be wise to enter London with only a moderate force. No need to antagonize our enemies."

Enemies! Anne could not explain her nervousness, for what could be simpler than the fact that the boy up in Wales was now King and Richard was his Protector? It was true, the Woodvilles were heartily detested and a Woodville was now Queen Mother, but all the great and powerful nobles had been on the side of Edward and his son and now—she looked yearningly at Diccon—the people of England adored Richard, their Lord of the North. What danger could there be?

"Ought you not to get to London immediately?"

“No. They’d hardly wait till I arrived to bury Edward. When I hear from Rivers I shall know what to do.”

Next morning a dusty rider from the West clattered into the yard. He bore the duty and respect of his master, Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, and Richard read the letter, shrugged, and sent the messenger to have something to eat. How swiftly evil tidings traveled! Buckingham offered the Lord Protector a thousand men. For what?

“Write,” he directed his secretary, “to my Lord of Buckingham, that I shall meet him on the road, but that I beg him to come with no more than three hundred at the most.” He would not make any show of force that might be misconstrued by his enemies.

Two days later he was bidding Anne farewell. At the postern gate they lingered in the rose garden for their last private moments. In sad silence they stood, with spring all around them. There were no roses blooming as yet but a few late daffodils and crocuses, planted long ago by the Countess of Warwick’s gardeners, dotted the ground below the bushes. The morning air was moist and sweet with the promise of May.

“So—you are off for York, Diccon.” She was glad he meant to go first to the beloved land and the people, more his own than any in the whole of England. She tucked the hanging ribbands of his doublet inside and tried to smile at him. His face was graven in lines of worry and his eyes were somber. “You look far from well, my love. Do take care. I wish you might have taken Gervase with you.” The minstrel’s blunt philosophy would have aided him to endure the blow that had fallen upon him.

“Gervase? He’s to stay here with you. I have Lovell and Percy for my needs.” He sighed and played absently with the long tassel of her hood. “I am the only son left. There were so many of us—once.” He bit his lip and scowled into the distance.

Anne ached for him. She knew. Once the Lady Cicely had shown her the miniatures of all her children. Little round faces, delicately tinted in babyhood. Henry, William, John, Thomas, Ursula—five tiny ones who did not survive the cradle. Edmund, next to Edward, the hope of the family, was slain in his eighteenth year at Wakefield with his glorious father; and the girls, Anne, Elizabeth, and Margaret, grown now into great ladies, grieving at this moment no doubt for their golden brother. And of course—in her musing, Anne looked up at Richard—there had been George, the favorite.

"I should have written to my mother." Richard roused himself. "I leave that to you, Nan. You will know what to say."

"Yes, oh yes." This was something she could do. "I shall write today, Diccon, so soon as you have left."

In gratitude he looked down at her. Slight, frail thing, she was the very heart of his heart. She would help him through this incredible calamity. She stood before him, her small pointed face rosy with the morning chill, her blue eyes clear and honest, her hair, still lovely, curling from beneath her hood.

"Nan—" Like a lover he kissed her, lingeringly, then hard on her parted lips.

"Diccon!" Despite her heavy heart, she was confused as a maiden when she first feels the touch of her lover's mouth.

Richard released her. "See that Ned sticks to his lessons and—" He checked himself.

"I know. The riding. He shall be much improved when next you see him."

Once again they kissed and then she sped indoors where she might watch from her tower window as the cavalcade wound its way across the meadow. With Ned and John pushing each other aside at the window, she strained her eyes after the stream of color that crossed the green landscape, the men and horses pushing to the far horizon where they lost themselves among the hills as they took the road for York.

"Where will Father go then?" Ned was curious.

"After he gathers his force at York, he will meet Buckingham and then they will await the Lord Rivers and the King's Grace." Anne paused. "Poor little lad."

"I should like to be the King's Grace." John had silently watched his father's departure. "Then I should do just as I like."

"And what would that be?" smiled Anne.

"I should ride a great horse and have adventures across the water."

Anne sighed. Already the child was straining at the leash.

"I should never do lessons if I were the King's Grace," declared Ned. "Nor—" Here he cocked an eye at his mother as if fearful lest she read his thoughts. Ned thought that were he to be King of England, there might be some way devised to spare him from the horses. He still detested and feared riding.

“Lessons!” chided Gervase, who had come in to hear this last. “The King’s Grace spends more time at his lessons than you can imagine. ’Tis no easy task to be a king—and a child, too.”

“Never mind,” murmured Anne. “Why sadden them? It’s not their lot.”

26. The Lord Protector

AT YORK Richard gathered his men together, dogged all the while by the frantic messages from Hastings down in London. Hurry, hurry! And out of the West came Rivers. With him he brought an excited boy, the two of them with their suites heading the long train of carts with the King's household gear and his barrels of armor.

By the side of his "uterine uncle" rode young Edward the Fifth. Sorrow at his father's death was lost in the proud bewilderment of suddenly being King, of having great men kneel to kiss his hand, to address him as "my liege." He had never known his father very well, since his mother had made him spend so much time here on his lands at Ludlow. Now he was going up to royal London to be crowned.

He smiled at his splendid uncle, then threw back his thin shoulders, gripped the sides of his beautiful pony with his thighs and, with chin up, rode bravely forward.

But he had not bargained for his uncle leaving him on the road to Stony Stratford, and watched with dismay the diminishing column that surrounded Lord Rivers as it struck off in the direction of Northampton.

"Why cannot I go with him?" he complained. "He is only going to meet my Uncle Gloucester."

"It is out of the way, your Grace." Richard Grey reached out and disentangled Edward's rein that had caught around a point on his saddle.

Edward eyed his half brother suspiciously. He was not too fond of either Richard or Tom, who were never nice to him when his father was alive. Somehow, with a child's odd insight, he felt the sudden obsequiousness distasteful.

"Out of the way or not," he pouted, "I am not pleased to see my Uncle Rivers leave us."

Meanwhile Anthony Woodville, Lord Rivers, posted on to North-

ampton and Richard, whom he meant to circumvent as best he could. Outside the little inn, he swung his long lithe figure off his horse and pushed through his escort of knights and their steaming mounts.

He found Richard hugging a small smoky fire in the upper room of the inn. Richard was bone-weary. The royal magnificence of Edward's obsequies at York Cathedral had been exhausting, and even though there had been no royal catafalque, he skimmed nothing. The only gladness he felt was that by remaining at Middleham, Anne had been spared the official mourning with its depressing pomp and ceremony.

Dressed in deepest black, his face an ivory mask, he faced his visitor. The two of them, the King's uncles, exchanged bows. "You come alone, my lord?" Richard inquired.

A handsome flush glowed on Rivers, who was a little out of breath. Suddenly, as if embarrassed, he laughed. "Ah, yes, my lord." It was then that Richard caught the watchful calm of his eyes, where the smile had not ascended.

"The boy?" Richard too was watchful.

"The King's Grace has pushed on to Stony Stratford." Rivers attempted nonchalance.

"Stratford!" Surprise threw Richard off guard. Stony Stratford was fourteen miles nearer London.

"There are hardly accommodations here, my lord, for the King's train."

"True." Richard sat down and waved his hand toward the table. "Pour yourself a drink." He raised his voice. "Guy!" His squire de Hardville was at his elbow in an instant. "See that Lord Rivers and his escort are suitably provided for at the Cock and Bottle." Then to Rivers: "'Tis the only other place that can bed you down."

Rivers had the cup in his hand and his light laugh was easy and bland. "I assure your lordship that His Grace wishes to greet you with all love."

"'Tis all one. We shall travel together on the morrow."

"On the morrow," smiled Rivers.

Richard's head was whirling. He knew now what the plan was. They were going to hustle the lad on ahead and without doubt would try to make sure that he himself did not reach London, if indeed he survived the journey at all, in time to gain control of the young King. It all matched the fevered reports coming to him daily from London under the seal of the Lord Chamberlain. With incredible

effrontery, the Queen and Dorset had seized the power. The wishes of the dead King were calmly set aside and in accordance with the designs of the widow and the stepson, ships, money, men, all were diverted to their use. Under the scrawled and stamped signature of Dorset, who as "uterine brother" acted for the young King, power and wealth flowed steadily into their hands. They must be feeling very sure of Rivers and of his plan to catch the Lord Protector in ambush.

Richard ordered food. Perhaps over the meat he could pierce the front of Rivers' guile and learn what the Woodvilles intended next. In friendly terms he then spoke to Rivers, and the two sat down to supper as if they were no more than a couple of gentlemen traveling through the country. Relaxed and graceful, Rivers had just addressed himself to the cold goose, hastily trimmed up by the landlord himself, when the door flew open to admit Buckingham. All exuberance, his face glowing, his eyes bright, he strode in.

He knelt to Richard. "My Lord Protector." To Anthony Woodville: "My Lord Rivers."

His obsequious manner was amusing to Richard. The first lord of the realm should not crawl quite so openly. It was obvious that Henry Stafford had had little practice in greeting his masters. And why should he, since for the most of his thirty years he had been systematically snubbed by Edward, who never forgot that in all the great decisive battles, Buckingham's kin had fought against the Yorks. It was Elizabeth Woodville, the Queen, who had taken the fatherless young boy under her care, assuming the wardship of him and his wealth. As soon as he was marriageable she had wedded him to her sister Catherine.

Richard knew how the Duke hated his obligation to the Woodvilles and how he writhed under the King's indifference. The only real notice Edward had ever taken of him was in the matter of Clarence. As Lord High Steward, he had been dragged forward to pronounce sentence upon the traitor, and as soon as he had served Edward in this wise, he was thrust into the background again. How galling this must have been to the descendant of Edward III!

By the light of the still-smoking fire, the three men sat on and talked of everything but what was on their minds. Stafford was excited and voluble; Rivers was disposed to speak of his travels. But Richard, drawing a word here and there, was for the most part silent. He had recovered from the initial shock of Rivers' arrival and

he knew now what was afoot. Concealing his impatience, he waited for Rivers to go.

Not till late did the Queen's handsome brother rise to his tall height to make his farewells. "We shall all meet in the dawn for the ride to Stony Stratford." He smiled. A bright figure among his gentlemen, he turned from the door. "Are you coming, my lord Buckingham?"

"I have a chamber here, such as it is," replied Stafford.

"Then I bid your lordships good night." And Rivers left.

With him went the lightness and the gaiety as Richard sat, stolid and silent, the rushlight burnishing the blackness of his hanging hair. Buckingham hitched his chair close to that of his new friend. He was intoxicated by his great chance. No more languishing in country houses, in rural retreats, while the golden King and his court blazed over the land. The sudden death had lifted him to the side of the Lord Protector and he thanked his saints he had had the wit to offer his support which, to his unbounded surprise, had been accepted without question. Fortune had thrust into his hand a wand of power. Eagerly he began to talk while Richard, his hand twisted in his chain, listened, his chin sunk on his breast.

The Lord Buckingham had his strong opinion of the behavior of the Lord Rivers. On his way to meet Richard, he had surprised rumors that the King's "uterine uncle" had a great body of men waiting only for the word to fall upon Richard's slim escort of a mere three hundred and annihilate them. Should not something be done about this?

Richard listened on. This loquacious young fellow was not such a fool, if only he would not talk so much, be more discreet. Buckingham had men and money, energy and the will to serve. He cut into the chatter.

"You say you know why Rivers sent the young King on ahead," he said.

Buckingham paused for breath. "I—well—" He was reluctant to speak further.

"Oh, come off it, Stafford." Richard was impatient. "You know as well as I do that they do not mean me to reach the boy. Hastings has kept me posted on what goes forward in London. The Woodvilles are building a pretty fortress for themselves. By the pigs, they are as busy as Cheapside merchants."

“What—then, my lord Richard?” Buckingham stumbled over the familiar address for fear of a snub.

“I mean to show them they have reckoned without their host. It was folly for Rivers to come without the boy.”

“What then shall you do?”

“Strike.” The word fell like a stone. “I did not work all those years for Edward without knowing what to do in cases like this. Violence. ’Tis the only way.” Richard squared his shoulders. “Fetch my lieutenants.”

So it was that before dawn next day, the frightened servants of Rivers woke him with the news that his inn was surrounded by the men of the Lord Protector and of Buckingham. His escort also was in custody. They were all prisoners.

Rivers crawled from his bed. A single glance out the window sufficed. “Calm yourselves,” he told them. “Send to the Lord Protector that I request to see him.”

In a few minutes he was dressed and at the door of his inn. There sat Richard mounted, his two hands clasped on his pommel, his face sternly set.

“My Lord Protector.” Rivers, his blond hair ruffling the breeze of early dawn, was the very model of propriety. “What means this”—he waved his arm—“this armed gathering at my door?”

For answer Richard lifted his bridle hand and a small detachment of men closed in a steel ring about Rivers. “But—” he protested. He was hustled withindoors.

“Let us go,” said Richard. He and Buckingham, followed by their men, turned their horses toward Stony Stratford. “We must make haste.” And Richard put his horse to the gallop.

They entered the town square to see Edward, his slender foot in the hand of a squire, in the act of mounting his pony. With a clapping of hoofs on the stones, an advance guard was already on its way out of the square, bound for the high road to London.

Now in the saddle, Edward gazed surprised and round-eyed at the newcomers. It was his Uncle Gloucester whom he hardly knew but had never liked. Where were his favorite Uncle Rivers and the rest?

Between kneeling ranks of their gentlemen, Richard and Buckingham approached. With a lightning eye Richard noted the two figures flanking the boy, his half brother Richard Grey and the old chamberlain Vaughan, and behind them the assorted gathering of Woodville men, obviously come posthaste from London to meet and

bring him there. He and Buckingham had arrived not a moment too soon. Indeed, Richard felt as if this were one of those supreme moments ordained by fate.

"My liege," he bowed respectfully to the lad who sat quite still, his hostile gaze bent downward, "I am rejoiced to see you in health. Let your Grace alight and come withindoor, for I have grave tidings to impart."

"But—" began Edward piteously, his eye rolling around to his old chamberlain, "where is Uncle Rivers? I want him!"

"Come." Richard held out his hands and the old Plantagenet smile flashed. "'Twill take but a few moments."

Helpless, the lad slid into his arms, and with his hand on the thin shoulder Richard led him indoors.

"By the blood of God!" Grey started angrily forward.

"Hold your tongue," said Buckingham, putting a steel glove on his bridle. And because there were more men in the Gloucester and Buckingham escort, Grey was silent. Their own steel ranks were too thin.

Inside the Town House Richard sat and drew Edward between his knees. What a fair lad it was! No older than his own John, the boy had a pale pointed face, his mother's deep blue eyes, and his father's handsome nose and mouth. Beneath a little purple cap, his hair of golden brown waved to his shoulders.

"Now," began Richard, "you are not afraid of me, are you?"

"No, my lord." The answer was forthright but the boy's chin contracted and there was the slightest quiver of his lip.

"'Tis your uncle, who loves you well." Between his hands Richard had the boy's cold one in its velvet glove. "Your father named me to look after you. You know that, do you not?"

"No." The blue eyes were still troubled. "They—they did not tell me." Almost fearfully his gaze traveled beyond his uncle's shoulder.

"Ah!" Richard's eyes gleamed. "They wouldn't." Then he fixed Edward. "Shall I tell you what they planned?" Fascinated the boy stared back. "It was my death they planned, just like your father's."

"I don't understand." Edward was plainly puzzled.

"Were it not for his false companions, your father would be alive today. Always they tempted him, kept him feasting and drinking. He ate and drank himself to death. And there was more—but that is for when you are older and can understand. And these are the men who seek to deprive me of my position as Lord Protector." Then,

as Edward still hesitated: "Why do you think your Uncle Rivers and Grey have carried all that armor and war gear in your train? They plot my very life, to leave you helpless and alone."

Now the pale mask came alive as the blood boiled into the lad's cheeks. "This is an outrage!" The young chin went up. "We are the King and we shall not permit it!" It was a Plantagenet speaking, all royal, the voice ringing with authority. Richard smiled. Then the lad knew something of injustice and vile plots. It had not all been cosetting and the conning of Latin.

"Spoken like the King's Grace!" he approved. "Now, listen well. I am here to stand at your side in all things, to show you your friends. Lord Buckingham here," he gestured as Henry Stafford entered, "he and I shall protect your person and your state. And there are many doughty lords who await your coming in London."

"And my brothers and my Uncle Rivers," put in Edward, still clinging to those who had raised him.

"You may not trust them."

"They are my friends," stammered Edward.

"Not any more."

"But," he protested, "they promised to help me govern, and my mother the Queen—"

"Your mother has no rightful authority, Edward." Richard now spoke gently. "By the terms of your father's will and by his dying commands, I am your guardian, and my friends will assist me."

"Then—" Edward bit his lip and his blue eyes filled.

"I have served Edward the King, I shall serve Edward the son. Trust me, my boy. Your father trusted me in all things above the others. I beg you to do the same." Richard was grave.

Edward sighed helplessly. He was confused, angry that his mother's relatives were not here to support him, and though he would not admit it, he was a little frightened.

"You will sign nothing without my approval—is that clear?" Straight into his nephew's eyes Richard looked.

Slowly Edward nodded. "I shall remember."

"Good." Richard was brisk. "Now, your Grace, you will return with us to Northampton till we get word from London that it is prudent for you to enter. Your followers will return to their homes, for they are no longer needed. We shall escort you the rest of the way." He gestured and Buckingham rose. Richard followed him to the door. "Grey and Vaughan—place them under strong guard. See to it." In

low tones he spoke so as not to agitate the boy further, who stood by the chair his uncle had quitted, a pale figure of perplexity.

At Northampton, Edward mounted wearily to the chamber they had given him. His legs ached abominably, but then they always did that when he rode long distances. They had roused him before dawn, bundled him into riding clothes with scarcely a sup to fill his stomach, and now he had ridden the miles from Stony Stratford and no one had thought to offer him anything to eat.

In his chamber he found strange faces. Where were Miles and Roy and his funny fool who mimicked so beautifully? These people wore tunics with an ugly white boar instead of his own handsome blazon. When a squire in the tabard of his Uncle Gloucester knelt and humbly begged leave to remove his things, Edward burst into tears. "I don't want any of you," he sobbed. "Where are the others?"

Later, recovered from his weeping fit, the end of his small nose only slightly pink from his tears, Edward walked into the great hall to find the entire assemblage on its feet awaiting him. With dignity he moved to his place. How good the food smelled! He was hungry. Then he saw a dear little suckling pig with a rosy apple in its mouth. He sat staring at it and took no notice of the delicacies they pressed upon him.

"What is it, your Grace?" Richard leaned toward him.

"That." With his small silver knife he pointed. "The pig. 'Tis a dish my Uncle Rivers especially favors. Often we have—" He stopped and bit his lip.

"Ah!" Richard signed to a steward. "Carry the dish to Lord Rivers with the King's compliments." Then he speared up a morsel of capon and put it on Edward's plate. "Eat, lad. You look famished."

On the sunny fourth of May, the very day on which Queen Elizabeth Woodville and her clique had planned the coronation of the boy King, Richard and young Edward rode out of St. Alban's. Edward was feeling somewhat better. These few weeks with his Uncle Gloucester had taught him something of the thin dark man who rode so beautifully and who had been so friendly to him. What they told him before must have been all lies, for here was a man constantly kind and gentle, and possessed of a comforting firmness in dealing with puzzling problems. How carefully he explained all the things one did not understand. Edward had more confidence now,

and it was with dignity and a certain solemn joy that he approached his capital city of London.

Over the land of historic scenes and famous battles they rode, and along the way Richard entertained his young companion with ringing tales of Barnet and of the great Kingmaker, Warwick himself. With shining eyes Edward listened to the low clear voice at his side, and at thought of his own glorious destiny his boyish heart beat fast. He was King of England and this was his realm.

Down the winding road they went from Barnet Hill and on to London. Already they could feel the bustle of excitement in the very air. Soon the sound of bells came on the breeze, and Richard grew quiet. No need to speak of ancient glories now. They stretched before the boy King, fire enough for kindling his pride and his love for the land.

The lines of cheering men grew ever thicker as they neared the city itself. His head regally high, Edward rode under the frowning arch and into London.

They had dressed him in bright blue which showed bravely against the somber black of the two dukes who rode on either side of him. All Richard's Yorkshiremen wore black too, as did those of Wales. London should be made to remember that a King had died to make room for this radiant boy in the brilliant blue, sprig of the House of York, and that the perilous state of his realm was due to the false friends who had clung about Edward the Fourth.

The noise of the welcome swelled till it reached Westminster sanctuary itself, where Queen Elizabeth Woodville and the Marquess of Dorset had sought refuge. For four days they had cowered behind those sheltering walls, their plans shattered, their hopes slain. Instead of the great steel rally that should wrest Edward from the clutch of Buckingham and the Lord Protector, they had nothing. All had retreated, leaving them with only a handful of terrified supporters who with them had fled the mercy of Richard.

With pale faces they awaited the latest news of the others. Ever since the dread tidings of Rivers, Grey, and Vaughan, who still lay in the North awaiting their certain doom, the Woodville faction had been paralyzed with fear. Their partisans who had escaped to the country shut themselves in their castles, drew up their bridges and importuned their particular saints. They had no intention of exposing themselves to the wrath of the Lord Protector at this time; their sole concern was the saving of their skins. Let the boy take his chance

with Gloucester. And at the blazing scorn of the Queen Mother they snapped contemptuous fingers.

Edward the Fifth was borne to the palace of the Bishop of London, there to await the day of his anointing. Till that ceremony was held under the wing of the Church, he was not truly in all things King of England. To the palace flocked the lords to kneel in homage before the slight figure, to kiss the small hand of their liege lord and undoubted sovereign.

Weary to the bone Richard sought his mother's house at Baynard's. Not for a moment had he been able to relax his protective custody of the young King, but now the boy was in safe hands he had a sudden yearning to be with his own. There would be letters, no doubt, from Anne. It had been a tiring month but now it was over.

27. The Vultures Gather

DOWN the river glided the barge bearing Anne to the Tower to meet Richard, in attendance on the young King. Tired from her long ride through England, she leaned back against the scarlet cushions and surrendered to the soothing motion of the river as it carried her downstream to her destination. Dreamily she surveyed the scene. There was something infinitely restful about this smooth gliding through the heart of the city. Her pulse quickened to the panorama spread before her. How glorious it was, with its spires and roofs solidly massed and its broad flowing river winding to the sea! Like great birds, the ships rode at their moorings and a thousand spidery masts pricked aloft, ready to shake out brown and orange sails, to be off for far places in search of rich cargoes. Old St. Paul's loomed, calm and watchful, a stone square in the summer sky, its bells silent. Ah, but soon they would awaken, to join all the others in glad celebration of the boy King's coronation.

With a feeling of fear that was almost terror, she had ridden in from Algate on Roland, the great gray that Richard had brought her from France after the fiasco of Edward's war with Louis. The noisy city jarred her nerves with its blatant merrymaking, the brilliant colors hanging from window and balcony, the swarms of gypsies and beggars who had invaded the narrow streets of London, ready to cut purses and throats, if need be, to gain a few silver pence. Anne felt something sinister in the air and it was with relief that she left the dirty street at Crosby and took the river barge for the Tower.

She did not mind the cries of the bargemen in their argosies of red and blue and gilt, or the shouts of the rowers who took their busy little boats briskly up and down river. Here on this great waterway, with the strength and power of the city all about her, she lost the feeling of terror she had felt when she rode the narrow twisting streets with the pushing crowds and the filth.

They approached the Tower, that stately pile of crenellated walls,

from its summit the royal standard floating bravely in the sun. Somewhere within the stone embrace were Richard and the young King. She climbed the dirty water stairs, stepping fastidiously through the slime. She had forgotten how ill-kept these steps always were, and regretted the thin soles of her shoes. Then up through the Gate of St. Thomas she passed onward to the cloisters. She stepped onto a brilliant green lawn, to see the King's lion keepers leading in a pair of brown bear cubs on a leathern leash.

A burst of laughter floated from beyond the arches as the young King, followed by his two cousins of Clarence, ran through onto the grass. The three children looked charming and innocent in their snowy clothes of purest white. Young Edward ran clumsily and Anne saw how he favored one knee; evidently the bone trouble with which he was born had not cleared up, despite what the Queen's doctors had said the previous summer. At his heels ran young Edward of Clarence, now styled the Earl of Warwick, inherited through his dead mother, and Margot, her hair brown as a chestnut in the sun. All three crowded about the bears, Margot, impetuous and willful as ever, trying to touch them. But the keepers warned her that even baby bears have sharp claws. To which she stoutly objected.

"Oh, do be quiet, Margot!" snapped Edward. "Do you want to be torn to ribbons?" Then, over his shoulder to Lord Howard, who had just emerged from the arches: "Come, my lord Admiral, come and see!"

"Your Grace." Howard was grave. "The Lord Protector's lady awaits you here." Anne, standing there, a slight figure in gray between her two ladies, smiled at her old friend of the North. Young Edward stopped in his tracks, made a *moue* and allowed himself to be led forward over the grass. Anne sank to her knees, not however before she saw the boy's face stiffen and a cold glassiness becloud his blue eyes.

"How pleasant it is here!" She rose from her knees. "Do you like it, Edward?" The freshening air came off the water and bobbed the roses at the edge of the lawns. In gay green and white tubs the flowering shrubs were loaded with blossoms that vied in crimson with the fluttering royal leopards high above.

"It is nicer than my lord bishop's. That's a gloomy hole," declared Edward. Anne remembered how the boy's father had loved it here, with the solemn pomp and the colorful grandeur. Strange not to hear the ringing laugh, to see the great figure come striding through the arches, a fair lady clinging to either arm. "Yes," boasted Edward,

“you should see my suite. It’s all hung with scarlet and white and my cushions are gold. Oh, I like it here. Only—” He paused and looked at Lord Howard.

“I know,” soothed his father’s Admiral. “Your brother will soon be here and your sisters, too.” All the others, the brother and the five sisters, were with their mother in sanctuary and Anne thought it unlikely that Elizabeth would surrender them. How much of this did the boy understand? Sometimes children were strangely knowing.

But she forgot Edward in the joy of seeing her sister’s children again. The little Earl of Warwick, Isabella’s son, was playing ball with his squire and, for an eight-year-old, threw very well. Margot was growing tall and now, at ten, looked quite a maiden though her waistline remained chubby. Both children appeared sleek and well-fed. Whatever the dismal fate of their parents, the children had not been made to suffer.

“Margot, should you like to come and live with us?” Anne stroked the chestnut hair.

“It is well enough here,” the child replied indifferently.

“You must be fatigued, madam.” Lord Howard bent a fatherly face above her. “Has anyone informed the Lord Protector of your arrival?”

“With the King’s permission, I shall seek him now.” Anne looked at Edward with a demure expression.

“You have our leave to retire,” said Edward grandly. “This is our hour for play. My Uncle Gloucester is somewhere within, signing those tiresome papers. Come on, Eleanor!” he shouted to a young girl who, with a lady, was picking roses at the edge of the lawn. “Come, let’s play at closheys!”

Closheys! Anne turned away. Edward should be shooting at the butts, riding, learning to hawk, not playing ninepins with girls. He was more Woodville than Plantagenet, that was plain. She thought of her own Ned; it appeared they were raising a generation of weaklings. Then she glimpsed Richard hurrying toward her.

Beneath his arm he tucked her hand and took her into his private world, full of the smell of warm wax, linen, and parchment. Wordlessly they embraced. He put back her hood and searched her face, loving the dear features, one by one. “It’s been a lifetime,” he murmured as he kissed her cheeks, her lips, her throat.

“Silly.” Her light laugh was shaky. Then she drew back. “Diccon, you look careworn. What have they been doing to you?”

"Well," his smile was rueful, "I've small time to mope, even for sleeping, for that matter. Here," he thrust her a dish of pears, "eat. 'Twill refresh you. I have seen you looking better yourself."

She took a golden pear. "It's little enough you eat, yet you always urge others."

"I eat—when I remember to. I fear I am a trial to Hugh and Kendall. Louis sent these to Edward, an early crop from Provence. But they bring out a rash on the boy, so his doctors forbid his eating them. Let's hope they're not poisoned." Together they laughed. Then he snatched the pear from her and took a bite. Love brimmed in her eyes. It was an old trick of his, and so had they shared food hundreds of times, turn and turn about. Seeing him now, his legs swinging from the table edge, biting into the juicy pear, it was hard to think of him as the most important man in England. Again, as when she entered the city, she felt the cold breath of the shadow.

"Does Edward miss his father?"

"I doubt it. He appears less affected by the death than, well, than Louis." He took another pear. "I hear *he* is ailing—well shaken up over our loss."

"Here, wipe your chin." She gave him her kerchief. She had suddenly remembered Louis at table in the Château Angers, slopping his way through a pear compote. And now, if reports spoke truth, he was mortally ill. And Edward already dead. Strange, how Edward, though an embalmed corpse at Windsor, lingered among them. It was as if that very door were about to open to admit the tall swaggering figure with the narrow waist and the splendid shoulders. It was quite impossible to think of that thin-shanked child with the swollen knee as King.

"How is young Edward shaping up?"

Richard frowned. "I thought I had his heart up there in the country. But since his arrival he has changed into the hostile little lad I met in Stony Stratford. I think his mother gets to him—but how, how!" Richard struck the table. "By Our Lady, it passes me!"

"But, outwardly?"

"Oh, outwardly all is love and joy. Look you there." He handed her a parchment where in childish letters Edward had scrawled his name and below, in laborious script, *By the advice of our dearest Uncle the Duke of Gloucester, Protector and Defender of this our realm in our young age.* And under Richard's scholarly signature, the Duke himself had added in black-tailed letters, *Loyauté me lie.*

He ran his hand through his hanging hair. "There's been a lot to do since we got here. And what I should have done without Russell and some of the others, I know not. We made him Lord Chancellor after we took the Great Seal away from Rotherham. *There* was an eager dog! Archbishop and Chancellor he thought gave him supreme power. We rapped his knuckles for giving the Seal to the Queen. Russell is wise as well as learned and has a careful head on his shoulders. It's a high step from Bishop of Lincoln to Lord Chancellor, but he can withstand it. I gave the Treasury to Wode."

"And they will call that favoritism." Wode was among Richard's devoted friends.

"Not a bit of it." He was airy. "He's long experienced in the work." Anne shook her head. The appointment was logical, to raise an undersecretary who had proved himself capable, but what would Richard's enemies make of it?

"We removed Edward to the royal apartments here," resumed Richard. "I could not stand the worry of having him at large in London. Dorset escaped, you know, with Robert Ratcliffe, and we have put a price on their heads, and with them out of sanctuary, I could not take the risk. I breathed easy when we had the lad behind these walls. It was Buckingham, by the way, who suggested we put him here. Sometimes that fellow has excellent ideas."

"What about Lord Hastings?" Surely this old friend of Richard's dead brother, who so staunchly supported Edward's dying wishes, had helped the Lord Protector in his heavy task.

"Ah—Hastings." Richard gnawed his lip. "I fancy he is not too pleased at Buckingham's rise. He behaves as if his nose were out of joint. I think he meant to rule *through* me and had not reckoned with Henry at all. He's been very cool since we arrived."

"But he supports you in all things?"

"In a fashion. I wanted Vaughan, Grey, and Rivers attainted, but it was he who pointed out to Council that when they planned to ambush me I was not officially proclaimed Lord Protector, and therefore this could not be legally adjudged as treason. A nice point—and it carried."

"Where are they now?"

"Rivers and his precious set? Secure, I promise you. Still in the North, and if I have my way, they will not see London again." Now Richard was grim, his mouth bitterly contracted, his black eyes hard.

"The Queen—I suppose she hates you now. It's such a pity, for she always had a kindness for you."

"The Queen! All tears and the flurry of veils." He grimaced. "We have talked with her but she will have none of us. We offered her the title of Queen Dowager, with all honors, but she flounced away as if we had stung her. I fancy she waits for Dorset and the rest to come against London with an army. By the pigs, her ladyship will have a long wait."

Anne looked anxiously at him. It was indeed a heavy load for these shoulders, broad as they were, one of them aching, she felt sure, though he did not rub it.

"And as if that were not enough," he went on, "we had the vexing problem of her precious other brother Edward Woodville, and that fleet they got together. Oh, we have been busy!" He yawned and stretched; then, chuckling reminiscently, he slid down in his chair. "I sent Fulford and Brampton against him and I must say they managed the whole affair brilliantly. The only noxious feature of the whole wretched business was that Woodville got clean away. Took some of the royal treasure with him, and I leave you to imagine what he plans to do with that."

"I cannot."

"He will use it to bolster up Henry Tudor over there in Brittany, that fellow who styles himself Earl of Richmond. Ah—that I regret. But—" he was philosophical, "we can't have everything on a silver platter. We did conclude the French thing quite well."

"Don't tell me there was anything more!" cried Anne.

"Yes, indeed. Woodville fitted out the ships and gathered the men supposedly to fight Cordes and the French freebooters, all part of the Queen's plan. So we had to arrange a truce there. With Louis dead, France will be in a mess and we shall have nothing to fear for some time."

"Louis—dead?"

"He has not long to live, I'm told." Richard dismissed the fact. "By the saints, I feel like a juggler keeping ten balls aloft at once." Then he looked at her. "But how go things in the North? Never once have I asked. Beshrew me, but I am a poor father. What of the lad?"

This was the question she had dreaded. "He sometimes finds the weight of his own skin heavy," she confessed, "but, for the moment, he is better."

"But not well enough to travel?"

She shook her head. "But I have brought young John. He shall see the coronation." She would not further depress Richard by telling him that so long as their son had his puppet toys, his friends of the castle, and his dogs, he was content to miss the long journey and the excitements that lay at its end. "Gervase came with us. Along the way he discoursed to me of the four elements. I have learned quite a lot since leaving home." She made her voice light and waited for Richard's sardonic reply. He made none but only sat staring between his knees. Timidly she reached out and touched him. "There is a thing, Diccon, that I was bidden to bring to you."

"Aye?" He raised his head and now she saw his pain-filled eyes.

"Your friends the citizens of York grow anxious about their suit. They petitioned me when I stopped there. Cannot Council act upon it soon, or perhaps you yourself have the power?"

He shook his head. "We cannot authorize the reduction of the city fee just now. Yes, I could issue the grant, but think how it would look at this season. I must move warily and this is no time for such a decision. I'm hard pressed with work, but I'll find time to write this very evening. They shall be assured of my love and concern." He shook back his hair. "I am busy as a dog in a fair!"

The door burst open to admit Edward. In his fist he clenched a letter. Richard rose and bowed. "You wished to see me, my liege?"

"Uncle," Edward was petulant, "you promised—you know you did. Why has your promise not been performed? Why?" At this moment, Edward was the image of his mother when she used to pout and cajole her lord the King.

"Edward, perhaps you will tell me what it is I have not performed." Richard spoke gently.

"You promised that John Geoffrey should be rewarded. Now I am told he is still up at Ludlow cooling his heels in that miserable chapel. You promised he should have the church at Pembrigg. It's ever so nice and he wanted it."

"Edward," Richard was infinitely patient, "listen to me. Kendall did write the letter, on that same day when you spoke of this. Do you think I should fail your Grace in this, your first request as King?"

"I don't care!" Edward stamped his white shoe. "He is not rewarded! He is not! He was my favorite chaplain and he rubbed my knees when they hurt, and he helped me with my Latin, and I love him well!"

"Edward, listen!" At the sharp note in Richard's voice, Edward's

tantrum died down. "The grant was given to another, at the discretion of the Lord Archbishop. Your chaplain shall be suitably rewarded, I promise you. Now—are you satisfied?"

"No!" Edward's face was angrily flushed. "What is the good of a Lord Protector if he cannot do the King's bidding? I wish my Uncle Rivers were here. He liked John. He would have given him Pembridge. I am displeased!" And he went out banging the door behind him.

"Phoo!" Richard blew out his breath in a short laugh. "What a tempest in a pot." But his face had gone ivory white, the eyes darkly circled.

Anne touched him gently. "Do not let it upset you, *ma mie*. Remember you are dealing with Elizabeth Woodville's boy. He's been spoiled, but he's only little. You can manage him."

But she was not convinced herself. She knew only that Richard was surrounded by problems, torn by constant disturbances, deserted by his onetime friends, and that the young King neither liked nor trusted him.

And later that night, in the dark privacy of their drawn bed curtains, Richard imparted to her his most secret thought. "Hastings is false; there is no doubt of it. He will forswear the promise he gave Edward on his deathbed."

"What does it mean?"

"It means that the vultures will gather to tear my flesh, if they can. And some of them sup with us tomorrow."

From his place at the head of the table Richard surveyed his guests. Seated in the new Italian fashion around a long narrow board in Crosby Hall were most of the noble retainers of the Lord Protector's official household and their ladies. Richard was in deep mourning, his face pale between the black velvet and the hanging black hair. But the rest of them had tentatively begun to wear color and there was a plentiful flash of rich jewels to set off the sober half-mourning hues of gown and tunic.

Three important members of the court were absent. Stanley, Earl of Derby, the fair-weather friend but newly forgiven and restored to favor, pleaded a rheumy cold; Rotherdam, the eminent divine whom Richard had rebuked and stripped of his powers, sent word that he was celebrating special and private masses for the repose of the dead

King's soul; while Morton, the most dangerous of them all, the ex-Lancastrian Bishop of Ely, he who worked tirelessly to gain his ends, pleaded acute fatigue.

So Hastings, their new ally and confidant, had come alone. As Lord Chamberlain he sat on Richard's right, while he only played with the gobbets of glazed chicken upon the silver dish before him. But he drank cup after cup of wine, applying himself with the fervor that put Richard in mind of the old days and Clarence. He raised his own cup, a magnificent covered beaker embossed and chased in gold.

"A handsome example of the goldsmith's art, my lord." Hastings admired the cup in Richard's pale hand.

"A gift from Lord Howard." Richard spoke with design. Knowledge that Howard, who at one time had been the intimate and generous friend of Hastings, had transferred his allegiance to the Lord Protector would gall the Lord Chamberlain. No more handsome presents to be expected from him. Howard sat down the board, near Anne, who listened to his discourse on music, her head supported on her hand, her eyes downcast while a slight smile curved her lips. But Richard was not deceived as to the Lord Admiral Howard. He knew Howard was after one thing only, the restoration of his estates, filched from him by the dead Edward when the little Anne Mowbray was wedded to the baby Duke of York. Now that the little bride was dead of plague, Howard looked to see his estates returned, his future secured under Richard as Lord Protector of the young King and of the realm. A bitter smile twisted Richard's mouth and he too pushed the food about on his plate with the point of his knife, then shoved plate and food aside and began absently to trace little patterns on the cloth.

"Nay, 'tis only the flank movement in such engagements that counts." Hastings was discussing military tactics with that same Fulford who had trounced Edward Woodville in the recent uprisings.

Flank movement! From beneath lowered brows, Richard moved only his eyes to observe Hastings, who shifted restlessly and loosened his tight collar.

"Ah well, enough of warfare." He filled Richard's cup and his own, and gravely Richard drank with him. The wine had flushed Hastings but Richard was still deathly pale and in his head his eyes burned like live coals. Hastings raised his voice. "Perchance the ladies crave some word of the King's coronation clothes. Buckingham, give us some

news that is pleasing to our ears. You have this in charge, I believe?" There was the hint of a sneer in the half-tipsy voice.

"If the tailors do not get on with it," declared Buckingham, "the King's Grace may go to the Abbey in his night shift." Into his cup he sputtered appreciatively as if he had just uttered a killing witticism, and a silvery ripple ran through the ladies.

Robert Stillington, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, his fox-face bent over his plate, eating rapidly, now looked up. "You speak with small respect of the King, my lord Buckingham. There is always plenty of purple and ermine for the crowning of a sovereign in England."

"My lord bishop is pleased to be *dis*-pleased." Buckingham sniggered again, and everyone about him smiled.

But Richard had suddenly had enough of table talk. It was time to get on with more serious affairs. He beckoned with a long finger to Gervase, who came lightly to his shoulder. "The song, Gervase," he requested.

The Norman rested his foot on a bench, tucked his lute beneath his arm and began the "Ballad of the Red Baron." It was a story of blood and treachery and Richard saw how the face of Hastings darkened as thirstily he continued to drink his wine. Richard's eye wandered around the board. Buckingham looked bland; Stillington's expression was unfathomable, but his eye flicked across at Richard as if he had something to impart; Howard fingered his knife, an absent smile on his lips; Russell, the new Chancellor who had replaced Rotherham, was simply enjoying the music; Catesby, Richard's Squire of the Body, with Lovell and Percy, sat easily in his chair; and Richard Ratcliffe, one in whom Richard had an absolute trust, was dozing. The three dark faces that were absent hung ghostlike in the imagination, to haunt Richard's fancy like the specters they were.

The song over, Richard and Anne led their guests to the withdrawing room where the chess and cards, and ivory pegs for tossing fortunes awaited them. And above, in the minstrels' gallery, the sad little minor airs stirred the air in semimourning for the dead King, who so often had enjoyed these supper parties. Stillington, close behind Richard, murmured in his ear. "A word, I pray you, my lord."

They went into Richard's private little cabinet.

Anne did not see Richard again till the guests were departing, and then she saw him standing beneath the torch glare, looking so ghastly ill that she barely repressed a cry of fearful surprise. She could not

wait for the last barge to slip away before finding out what caused that stricken look. He had looked pale and distraught all evening, and she knew the cause of that, but this was the look of death. She saw him with Lovell and Percy turn back to the entrance; oh, pray God, she thought, that the two are not going to keep him up till all hours.

She had long finished undressing for bed, completed her orisons, and had waited till she was sure the dawn must be creeping in pink streaks over the river, before Richard came to her. His dark robe lay open at the breast and his face gleamed, the two deep creases furrowing the cheeks down to the chin. "You are ill, Diccon?"

He stopped in the center of the checkered floor. "I am sick to my soul." His voice rang hollowly in the quiet chamber. "My life began in violence and it will end in violence. I know it. It is the only way."

"You frighten me, Diccon." About her raised knees Anne locked trembling hands. From the shelter of their bed, she entreated him: "Please, what is it?"

"It is—" His voice failed and he twined his arm about the bedpost and supported his weight against it. "Nan—" The voice clicked in his throat and he swallowed. "He—Edward—the boy—will never be crowned. He can never be King."

Her lips were dry. "What do you say?"

"They were never wedded—Edward and Elizabeth. Stillington has proofs incontrovertible. He was contracted to another. The children are—" A violent shudder took him.

"Bastards." She said it for him.

"All."

"Then that was why Clarence died. That was the guilty secret he used to babble about." Her mind worked matter-of-factly, as if to explain logically the tremendous thing Richard had said. With this knowledge Clarence had hoped to pry Edward and his progeny off England's throne. "And Edward shut his mouth forever," she said wonderingly. "He died for knowing too much." Now, reason came to the surface. "But Edward—how could Edward—"

"You mean why didn't Edward legitimize his marriage?" Richard's haggard face relaxed in a sardonic smile. "Edward doubtless considered himself duly married with the Church's blessing, however he may have been previously contracted. It's the only explanation we can think of and small good it does us." He shook his head.

Now the stupendous fact took hold in Anne's mind. If Edward

had not married Elizabeth Woodville legally and young Edward was not legitimate, of course he could not be crowned. And that meant . . . "Then—then—" She could not finish.

"Yes." His very lips were white. But behind that pale face glowed something exalted, magnificent. "I shall be King of England."

"King of England," she repeated softly.

But Richard did not hear. He stared into space, while slowly his eyes filled and the great silent drops ran down his thin face and fell onto the velvet of his robe where they sank out of sight.

28. Unhappy the Land

ALTHOUGH Richard had almost fearfully expected the news of the young King to burst over the land, nothing of the sort happened. As yet, only a handful knew the fatal secret. Richard and Anne, the boy's paternal grandmother the Duchess of York, Buckingham and Stillington, these were the only ones who at the moment shared the crushing fact that England was without a ruler.

"Why, why did it have to be?" groaned Richard. He had sent for Buckingham and the Bishop of Bath to come to him in his chamber, and now he sat among the pillows, his face flushed with a feverish chill, his eyes glittering in his head. "A few words spoken before a bishop and all would have been well." He looked at Stillington, who flushed. Those few words spoken before *him* now proved England's undoing, for it was he who had performed the first betrothal, without which the Lady Eleanor Butler would not suffer the King's attentions; once she had the troth ring gleaming on her soft hand, she yielded, for in her eyes and in the eyes of Holy Church, they were as good as wedded.

Stillington was thinking that they were all paying dearly for the stubborn Plantagenet nature that sought to take into its hands not only the laws of man but of God. And now justice was to be done—on the innocent child and on the realm he would have governed.

But Buckingham took a different view. "It may prove a blessing in disguise." He soothed Richard's fluttering nerves. "The realm needs a man, not a boy, and your lordship stands high in the people's favor." And he was thinking that he himself would stand higher than ever he could have stood as friend and adviser of the Lord Protector, later to take a back seat whenever this petulant child came of age. Now, with Richard as King, his own fortunes were gloriously secure.

"Unhappy the land that is ruled by a child," murmured Stillington.

ton. "Now this will not be." He himself wished heartily for Richard to assume the crown, to share with him the secret of Edward's falseness.

"Did you never try to dissuade Edward?" Richard was coming to dislike this man with the fox-face more and more. His part in the bigamy had been almost as great as that of his royal master.

"Oh, many times I did." Stillington was unctuous. "His mother, too. But he had seen the Lady Elizabeth Woodville-Gray—and—well!" He threw out a nervous hand. As a matter of fact, Edward had sworn at him: "God's truth, Stillington, I cannot wed every woman I sleep with!"

Behind the stone walls of the rich manors of Grove and Dorset with which Edward had soothed her wounded pride, the Lady Eleanor hid her shame, and when she realized all was lost, that Edward would never acknowledge her, that any further attempts would result only in disaster to her and her family, she quietly desisted. When he married Elizabeth Woodville in the farcical chapel ceremony, the Lady Eleanor went into a Carmelite nunnery, and on a fair June day in the year 1465 she breathed her last.

"For fifteen years, Edward could have married Elizabeth properly." Richard mused aloud. "Why did he not do it?"

"You forget, my lord," reminded Stillington, "the damage was done."

"Pish!" retorted Richard. "Bastards have been legitimized ere now, my lord Bishop."

"The Lord Edward preferred to hide the matter from the world. The Woodvilles would have been only too ready with reprisals, and there was always Louis."

Richard's eyes narrowed. Shrewd and knowledgeable, this man was a fit repository for his brother's fatal secret. Louis would never wed his son to a girl over whose birth there was a cloud, however tardily removed. Edward went to his grave with the secret well kept. Clarence, the Lady Butler, all were dead—only Stillington remained.

"Doubtless Edward meant to outlive you, my lord Bishop," Buckingham pinpricked the Bishop of Bath. "How could he know he would be carried off when he had barely passed forty?"

"But I *have* outlived him, my lord, and I dare not see the boy crowned." With pontifical calm Stillington stated it.

Richard abruptly dismissed him. He could stand the sight of him no longer. "Beshrew me," he said as the door closed behind the dis-

comfited prelate. "But I should not like to have *that* fox on my tail."

"It took courage to reveal the truth, Richard."

"You think Stillington a hero, then? What a babe you are, Henry. It's ambition, not conscience, that moves our good bishop. He'll never forgive Edward for bribing him, or for forcing the secret upon him in the first place, and you are forgetting how this serves Stillington's hatred of the Woodvilles. No, this is once when the duty of conscience weighs less than heavily."

"You will have to tell the boy. Shall I do it for you?" Buckingham was obsequious, bending above Richard to push his pillow more comfortably, filling his wineglass.

"I am his uncle. I shall do it." And curtly Richard dismissed his new ally.

And then he lay alone in the great bed, the satin rope of the bell trailing through his fingers. Was ever man so torn as he? On the one hand was the scintillating prospect of becoming King, to work his will for the beloved realm and its people; on the other, the grievous business of the child. But pleasant thoughts have a way of crowding out their darker cousins, and it was so now. He let his mind wander the bypaths of imagination. Now he could reward those he loved and respected. Russell would hold the government here at Westminster in his firm, capable hands, for Richard meant to spend much time in his ancient seignury of the North; Catesby he would clasp close in confidence; Francis Lovell would become Lord Chamberlain of England. With his orderly mind for figures, Percy would make an admirable Comptroller of the Royal Household, and Brackenbury would serve him as Governor of the Tower. As for the others, fortune hunters and fair-weather friends all, Howard should depart for East Anglia, Buckingham to Wales, and Northumberland, that stormy petrel, should hold his vast estates in the North.

And what of Stanley, Ely, Rotherham, and Hastings—the Unholy Four? These would have to be dealt with—and soon. Even before the vexing business of young Edward and Parliament.

He jerked the bell rope. Fever or not, he had to get out of bed.

Three days later Richard convened council. The meeting was announced to discuss coronation plans, and in addition to the others, the Unholy Four were bidden to meet with the Lord Protector in the White Tower at ten of the clock. With Lovell, Percy, and the ubiquitous Buckingham, Richard arrived early. He felt he could not bear to make an entrance before the four archtraitors. At the carved and

painted casement he stationed himself, while he tried to subdue the wild beating of his heart.

His two friends joined him at the window. Behind them the others were flowing quietly into the chamber. "See anything of the Lord Chamberlain?" asked Percy.

"Aren't those his colors?" Lovell was leaning out to look upriver. A slender gilt barge with scarlet and blue pennons was rapidly approaching St. Thomas Gate.

Richard, too, leaned out. Now he was feeling the full bitterness of this, his first official act since learning about young Edward. "Aye, look at him," he murmured. "We fled together to Flanders and Burgundy, and he was Edward's right hand. By God"—the blood now beat in his throat chokingly—"by God, we were together before Barnet on that clammy morning. You remember. I can see him now, grinning through the mist!" He drew back and looked into the faces of his friends. Lovell, slim and dark, was grave, and Percy's fair skin was suffused with color. The three friends now turned their eyes to the river. The Lord Chancellor's gay little barge had come to its moorings and Hastings was calling to Stanley and Morton, just debarking behind him. Their voices came thinly up to the great height of Richard's casement. They mounted the water stairs, their figures foreshortened by distance; Richard thought how easy it would be to drop a heavy bolt upon them and wipe out all three. Then they would not need to be accused to their faces. But now the three had disappeared and he drew back into the room. He had not seen Rotherham, and without him they would not start.

But now the erstwhile Lord Chancellor came sweeping in and in his rear the other three. "My lord!" Smilingly Hastings extended his hand to Richard, who stooped to tie his shoe. "Has anyone heard how the King's Grace keeps this morning? We saw his grooms with the ponies."

"The King's Grace is pleased to be in health. I believe at the moment he sits with his tutors." Buckingham answered for Richard who seemed unable to speak.

Hastings inclined his head and took his seat. What was wrong with the favorite this morning that he looked so pale and constrained? Had his master the Lord Protector been correcting him? Stillington now came to his place, a dry hand holding his jeweled cross as it swung over his canonicals. God's teeth, thought Hastings, he looks bad enough. But then he always looks as if he expected someone to

give him a sharp push from behind. He adjusted his own rings and slung the great jewel about his neck into place on the center of his fur collar. The others all bent the knee to the Lord Protector and found their places.

Richard looked them over: Morton, the prelate of Ely, fidgeting in his chair, severe in his cassock and skullcap; Stanley the ambitious schemer, coughing and reaching for his comfit box; Rotherham, with thin raised eyebrows, eternally questioning the actions of his adversaries. Richard's eye went around the lot and he knew that outside of Lovell, Percy, and Catesby, he had not a true friend at the table. Howard would stick till he got what was rightfully his, and then what? Buckingham was a self-seeker, and Stillington—he dismissed him as less than nothing.

"My lords, all," he began in a husky voice, which he attempted to correct by clearing his throat, "my lords all, it is a heavy task I perform this day. There is among us a band of traitors, a group of scurvy knaves who must be rooted out and destroyed. Such is our task today." A ripple ran around the board and, as if he felt the earth shudder beneath him, Hastings shifted in his seat. "It is a conspiracy," went on Richard, "against the welfare and government of the realm. And it grieves me to tell you it stems from the Queen Dowager and her friends." He now fixed Hastings. "Including Mistress Shore." He paused. "I think my Lord Chancellor can enlighten us."

"I?" Hastings spoke with determined calm.

"You, my Lord Hastings. I accuse you of plotting with the Woodvilles against me as Lord Protector."

"This I deny." Hastings had gone pale to the lips.

"You have proof, my lord?" Stanley was practical.

"Naturally," was Richard's caustic reply. "I should scarcely be here now in so sad a case, were I not certain. Would to God and His saints it were false!"

"I'll know who brings this charge."

"It's no use, Hastings." Exhausted, Richard leaned back in his high-backed chair. "Jane Shore carries messages from the young King to his mother and back; your body servant is Catesby's friend."

"Catesby!" snarled Hastings.

"You will need to display these base charges in evidence." Above the ecclesiastical ruff, Morton's face was sour as vinegar.

"You—Lancastrian!" Richard whirled on him. He scorned this man

who was more political than spiritual, more cunning than clever, more ambitious than learned. "You disgrace the cloth you wear!"

"By the precious blood of God!"

"Silence!" Buckingham cut in. "My lord Bishop, it is not seemly for you to defend a liar and a man attainted."

"Attainted!" Hastings sprang to his feet. "Who dares say that?"

"I dare!" Richard could bear no more. "I hereby declare you guilty of high treason, you and your three friends, there. You, Morton, Stanley, Rotherham!" He stabbed a long forefinger at each in turn. But by now there was the flash of bare steel as Stanley and Hastings each drew their daggers. Hastings lunged at Catesby.

"A madman!" Stanley made for Richard, while Buckingham, Lovell, and Percy shoved forward tensely.

"Treason!" screamed an usher at the door, thinking his lord to be in danger of his life. "They do attack the Lord Protector!" A small knot of Richard's guard burst through the door with a clatter of arms. Hastings whirled, his back to the table, his breath short. One look convinced him that resistance was of no use. They were outnumbered. With a bitter laugh he threw his dagger to the floor. Quietly Stanley sheathed his.

Richard had not moved. His hands, ivory white, rested on the arms of his chair, while his face, even whiter, seemed to have sunk back between his shoulders. He sighed and Buckingham stepped toward him. "Your pleasure, my lord!"

"Morton and Stanley," Richard had difficulty speaking, "remain in the Tower. Take Stanley under guard to his own place." A light sweat spangled his brow.

"And—" Embarrassed, Buckingham gestured toward Hastings, who stood like a statue.

"Fetch him a priest." There was a gasp, but from whom none knew. For the space of a moment, Richard and Hastings looked at each other. Then they took him away.

The silence was painful. Low accents in the adjoining room of the priest told them Hastings was confessing himself. Then steps resounded in the stone passage and faded away.

Like an old man, Richard got to his feet and crossed stiffly to the window overlooking the courtyard below. The small square with the green lawn was bright with sunlight, precisely divided by the shadow from the wall; and into this enclosure stepped the little knot of men. Hastings, in their midst, bareheaded, gleamed white, for they

had peeled him down to the undershirt. His arms pinioned behind, he stood with the priest.

There was some delay, most painful to Richard above. The headsman was ready with his ax, but they did not get on with the execution. And then he saw them dragging a great rough square timber, one of which they had been using to mend the gate. The priest said something to Hastings and then that great Yorkist knelt. The act was childlike in its obedience as the doomed man crouched before the great rough timber, his neck resting on its edge. The ax swung, the stroke was merciful, and in a second the headsman lifted by the hair the severed head and turned its frozen features to Richard.

“So perish all the King’s enemies!”

“You mean they struck off his head—just like that—without a block, or anything?” Anne was horrified. What would posterity say to this hustling of a man from the council chamber to such a death?

“You mean without a trial, not a block.” Richard was brief. “There is but one way to deal with treason. Summary justice. We had the proofs—why wait for an uprising?”

“His family?”

“I intend to treat them with all honor. They are not to blame. I shall seal an indenture for his widow, your aunt, and until his heir reaches majority, he shall be in my custody and their daughter’s husband, young Shrewsbury, shall be my ward.” Richard’s orderly mind worked like a legal document.

“You won’t let them be attainted?”

“Never. ’Tis a cruelty I cannot believe in.” And she knew he was thinking of his brother Clarence’s two small children growing up under the shadow of Edward’s jealous anger that had declared them and their issue attainted. “A man’s evil ought to die with him, though, God knows, it is not often the case.”

“And Jane?”

“Jane has been arrested. I shall keep her there for some time. Then she must do public penance for harlotry. After that—”

“After that?” Now Anne was smiling. Jane was sensible and would see that Richard had no choice where she was concerned. As for her public penance, there was not a man in London who would not pity the woman with the hanging powdery hair of gold and the pretty white bare feet of penitence, as with hands crossed before her she

went her way meekly through the London streets. And Richard thought he was being severe.

"After that, if there is a man in London to come forward for her, she shall be decently wed to him and live out her days in propriety."

Lovingly she looked at him. He was the true child of his parents, with their proud idealism and their sense of honor. She ached for his misery. "You blame yourself, Diccon."

"Till I die. There ought to have been some other way out of it."

She was solemn now. "Richard, remember how Hastings swore fealty at Edward's deathbed. A false oath for all the world to know. The world will judge."

He clasped her to him. "My only comfort," he murmured. She stroked his cheeks and whispered words of love. Then, as if he gained new strength, he spoke firmly. "We must now inform the people what we—what I have done."

"The people." Instantly she was again fearful.

"And then, they must know of Edward's illegitimacy. I shall have the Gospel preached at Paul's Cross this Sunday. The text shall be: 'Bastard slips shall not take root.' "

She sighed. "It is hard."

"It must be done. The people will understand."

A childish voice was heard, a knock on the door disturbed them, and Anne remembered she had sent for the little Earl of Warwick. Now the child came in, a chubby eight-year-old, accompanied by the grave figure of his young tutor.

"We did not expect you till tomorrow." The youth bowed.

But Richard with lifted brows said, "What is this?"

"I have asked him here to play with John. Ned will not be here with Gervase till next week." How like his father he was, thought Richard, with something of Clarence's grace already showing in his walk. His chubby face was flushed as if he had been running.

"We raced up the stairs," he announced, enduring his aunt's kiss but not returning it.

His tutor flushed. "My lord," he murmured.

The boy stopped, put his feet together formally and bobbed. "I greet your Graces," he said in his stilted way. "It gives me pleasure to be here." Then his roguish smile broke forth and Anne was intolerably reminded of Isabella. "I won!" he cried. She put a hand on his head.

"We are so happy you are here, Edward. Greet your uncle."

The boy stood before Richard. "Am I to stay?"

Richard turned tired eyes upon him. "Do you want to, my boy?"

"I hardly know. I must see if I like it." The answer was so like Clarence that Richard laughed outright. Then, with a quick change of expression, the boy said, "Is it true you are going to be King, my uncle?"

"Who tells you that?" cried Richard harshly.

"Edward!" remonstrated his tutor.

"And shall you cut off my Cousin Edward's head as you did my Lord Hastings?" the child persisted.

Richard went green in the face. "Take him away!"

The frightened tutor led him off, his hand on the boy's nape. The little Earl, quite unmoved by his uncle's outburst, went obediently. "But what did I say?" His high childish voice was heard as the door closed.

"I'm sorry, Diccon." Anne had thought to surround Richard with the merry laughter of children, to ease his tired and aching heart with the lightness of youth. One of her dearest wishes was to persuade him to take into their household these attainted children Edward and Margot. But Edward of Warwick had made a poor start with his uncle.

"Even the babes prate," muttered Richard, whose color had returned.

"But you *will* be King, Diccon. Do you hate it so much as all that?"

"I do not hate it at all. What man would not want to govern so fair a land? And at last I can work my will for the people. It's the getting there that sticks in my craw."

Through blood. That was how he must wade to the throne.

Two days after the unfortunate incident of the little Earl of Warwick, Anne and Richard set off to see Edward in the Tower. It hurt Anne to see their royal guard hustling women and children out of their way as the curious crowd pressed for a close look at the Lord Protector and his lady. Anne had a feverish chill and a slight ache in her bones, and while she knew she ought to be in her bed, she had forbidden her women to say anything in Richard's hearing that would make him forbid her accompanying him on this painful errand. They were going to break the news to the boy that his bright dream was over, that he was not going to be King, after all. It was all he talked about, they said—what he would wear, how he would behave in the Abbey when the Archbishop crowned him.

They were bringing the little Duke of York to the Tower sometime during the afternoon, and both she and Richard hoped the child would arrive soon; somehow it would be easier to talk to Edward if he were not so dreadfully alone. Anne cowered away from thought of the scene that must even now be ensuing as they tore the boy from his mother's side. But it had been decreed that until the state of the country was more settled, the two boys should abide together in the Tower. It was pleasant enough there, with fountains and gardens, dogs and horses, to offer pastime from studies.

They approached the great pile of brick and stone, and with a pang Anne saw that the royal standard with its leopards and lilies had been hauled down. The water stairs were nearly empty of people and on the King's stairs there was small sign of activity. It had not taken long for the fair-weather friends to depart.

Indifferently Edward greeted them. "I greet your Graces." He spoke automatically.

Anne could not reply. The sight of the fair child, so young and so alone, pierced her. But Richard moved swiftly in. "You will observe, Edward, that your staff is reduced."

"Is it?" Apparently the boy was not interested in that, either. "I have not noticed. But I *am* lonely, if that is what you mean. I have not seen anyone I like for days now, except of course my fool, but today he has a megrim and keeps his bed. And Mistress Shore does not bring me greetings from my mother any more." He broke off, his eyes wary. "I wish Richard were here."

"There is something I must tell you, Edward. Surely you have noticed the bishops have not seen you of late."

"No, thank the pigs." Edward was his father's own son. "They annoy me with their silly sermons and stupid rules and I like them not."

Richard tried again. "There is a reason why you are not so served. The bishops are with me now at Baynard's Castle."

"But you told me you would perform all the business. There is no reason why they should not be there."

"Have you signed any papers lately, Edward?"

"That I have not." Edward spoke with satisfaction. "I think they are managing finely. When I am crowned, I shall not allow them to bother me at all if I do not wish it."

"But that is it." Edward had given Richard the word. "You will

not be crowned. That is what I am trying to tell you." And gravely he explained.

Edward raised his head, his lips parted, his eyes fixed painfully on his uncle. "I am not to be King?" Incredulously he stared at the words with their meaning took hold. His lower lip trembled, but instantly he caught it in his teeth.

Then Anne found her voice. With a swift movement she knelt at his side. "Edward, listen. You shall have everything you wish. You will be so happy, and there will not be those tiresome papers to sign, nor the ministers to receive when most you wish to play."

"I did not mean I wished nothing but play." Austerely the boy spoke.

"No, no, of course not. But—"

"Where is my Uncle Rivers?" he interrupted. "He would have saved me from those who do steal my throne."

She bit her lip. Evidently he had not comprehended what Richard had said concerning his father. But this was a child of twelve, who missed his friends and those who had been most dear to him. And the worst was yet to come. "Your uncle cannot come to you." Then her heart failed her. She could not tell the child his uncle was in prison, attainted, under the death sentence. She despised herself when she said, "He is ill."

"Ill? My uncle?"

"Very ill." There was one person only who could have done this painful thing less clumsily, and that was Gervase, in the North, gone to fetch young Ned who, with them, must wear upon his childish head the weight of the royal diadem. Unflinching now, she met the boy's gaze. "He is so ill that I doubt if you will see him again in this world."

"That means he is dead, doesn't it? They've killed him, too." His small slender hands clenched and he strove for composure. "It was Ratcliffe, wasn't it? I knew he had gone to the North, I knew it!"

"Who told you?" Richard rapped it out.

But Edward's lips shut tight and the old obstinate look came into his blue eyes. "I need not tell you that."

"No." Anne wound her arms about him protectively and over his yellow head she faced Richard. "He need not tell us that now."

"I should have cut off Stanley's head, too," muttered Richard.

"I am waiting for you to tell me about my uncle," went on Edward with dignity.

Richard blew out his breath and went to the window to look for the arrival of Edward's brother, the little Duke of York. Anne let Edward go and he moved away from her, his eyes still accusing. "It is true that Sir Richard Ratcliffe rode north at your Uncle Gloucester's command," she said quietly. "You are too young to understand the peril for England. He took Lord Rivers to Pontefract and there he and Grey and Vaughan will all suffer for their crimes."

"Then I shall not see any of them again." Now the eyes were full in the boy's flushed face.

"It is better this way." She cursed herself for the lame rejoinder. Edward remained indifferent to her attempt at comfort, the slow tears dripping unheeded.

Little Richard of York bounded into the room, then stopped abashed as he saw his brother crying. Edward turned away, clumsily dabbing at his face with the back of his hand. "Is that you, Richard?" His voice was muffled.

"Yes, I am here." The boy looked round-eyed at his aunt and uncle of Gloucester.

"I am your Aunt Anne. I think you do not know me very well," Anne offered.

"You are Ned's mother. We played with his puppets once." A winning smile lit his face and she ached to draw him to her. At the same time she was relieved to see the boy so cheerful. The scene of parting from his mother at Westminster had evidently not upset him. "Tell them to bring the Lord Edward's dogs," she directed.

The animals entered, barking, and Fallon the hound jumped for Edward, put his paws on his shoulders and licked his face for joy. Edward hugged him and his face quivered. "How is Mother?"

"Oh, I nearly forgot. She sent you this." He fumbled in his blouse and brought out a medallion of fine Limoges enamel set in the green shimmer of emeralds. Indifferently Edward took it. Richard came forward, his eyes keen.

"I will see that, my boy." He took it from Edward's hand and pressed open the spring. A small bit of paper fell out. Anne caught her breath. What had Elizabeth Woodville written to her elder boy?

In her own peculiar crabbed script, so difficult to read, the Queen had written, *Edward, my prince, your father was King.*

"What does it mean?" Edward's young brow was furrowed.

"It means," said Anne softly, "that you are your father's own dear son, whatever else may be said." She put back the bit of paper, slung

the chain around his neck. How explain to the boy the blow his father had dealt him?

Richard had to return to Baynard's, but Anne stayed with the two boys till late, reading to them as, with their dogs, they sprawled on the rug at her feet. How simple Edward's life had become, tended only by his tutor, his valet, and a serving-woman or two who saw to his clothes and kept his belongings in order. Even his old nurse, Anne Caux, had disappeared. Anne thought she must see Edward had a physician in attendance, for Richard looked delicate. She had stopped reading and now she looked at the sleepy two, their yellow heads pillowed on the gently heaving sides of their dogs. The Little Bastards they had become, never again to be recognized by any other name.

Unusual quiet hung about the Tower when she set out on the return trip to Baynard's. As she passed the watermen in her long blue cloak, she almost hated to see them present arms. The boat left the landing and she put back the curtains and looked back. High in his tower burned Edward's little golden light, dim and flickering, casting a long finger out across the water. She had told them to put both boys in the one bed and to let the dogs remain. What difference did it make now?

London adjusted itself to the new idea. The claim of the Lord Protector's party to put forward the only surviving son of the late Duke of York was formally admitted by the Lords and the Commons. On the whole, England was relieved. The Woodvilles had never been liked, and as for Edward's profligacy, the country had tolerated it and nothing more. The religious elements shook their pious heads and declared that evil inevitably destroyed itself. The political faction felt that in Richard they had a strong and resolute leader. The general population was pleased to live under the Duke of Gloucester, their popular Plantagenet, who had such a sweet wife and a steadily growing son. It was a pity for the boys in the Tower that the Lord Edward had neglected to wed their mother, but on the whole, a good thing for England.

On Thursday, June 26th, the nobility and dignity of the land gathered at Baynard's Castle. The streets outside the stately residence were jammed with people bearing banners with the blazon of the Lord Protector, shouting his name and waving his colors to the wind.

Within the great hall, with its checkered floor and its noble minstrels' gallery from which swung the boar banners, Buckingham and the prelates of Canterbury and Westminster, together with the Dukes of Suffolk and Norfolk, awaited the appearance of Richard. At length he came, his mother and his wife with him, stood a moment at the center of the balcony looking down, while below the heralds blew melodiously on their trumpets and the waiting throng applauded.

Very pale, his black hair lying against his cheeks, he slowly descended the staircase, his body spare and graceful in the yellow and red tabard. At sight of Buckingham, so puffed and important, a slight smile curved his thin lips. It was well they had chosen this rich imposing figure of a man to read the petition offering to the Lord Protector the crown of England.

Richard listened, his head slightly bent, the smile frozen on his lips, his hand lightly clenched on the stair rail. When Buckingham paused, having reached the end of the formal appeal, there was a deep silence. No one moved.

Richard moistened his lips. He looked at them all—Howard, his brother-in-law Suffolk, and the princes of the church, cardinals and bishops. Beyond them were the knights, many of whom he recognized as having borne arms with him. And beyond them were the merchant princes, the gentlemen adventurers, the solid citizenry of London. All eyes were fixed on him, and as he turned and swept the whole scene with his dark gaze, he saw as in a mist the faces of his ladies, those two fair figures of his softer side. Anne's great blue eyes held his with a painful intensity. Only a second longer he paused.

"Is this then your will, my lords?" He spoke so low that only those nearest him heard.

At their murmured assent, his head went up and he sprang back till he was three or four stairs up, raised high above them all. Now his voice rang out loud and clear, for all to hear.

"Then by God and St. George, I do here and now accept this most holy charge!"

At that, all arms were raised and the glad response echoed through the hall.

"God save King Richard the Third!"

29. The Crowned Head

THE heavy door had been shut between the newly crowned sovereigns and the reveling court. Dukes and duchesses, lords and ladies all, were left on the lower levels as with his wife and sons, Richard sought the seclusion of an upper private chamber. To the scandal of his suite, the King's Grace would have none but a single page brought from his castle in York and that upstart Norman minstrel who had served the Queen since her girlhood. Not even Buckingham, the new intimate, was allowed to share the royal retreat; the door had been firmly closed in his ducal face.

Among the perfumed candles the little group dispersed itself, the boys sprawled on the white skin rug between Anne and Richard, who sat in their chairs, drained to exhaustion by the rigors of the long hot coronation day. In their pale faces their eyes were darkly hollowed; Anne, frail but indomitable, drew herself erect as she struggled to bear her fatigue.

"Close the casement, Gervase," she directed. And the minstrel shut out the roar of the city as it swirled about Westminster in a blaze of bonfires and a redolence of roasting meat. She flung up her arms in the gold tissue sleeves. "I think I have never been so weary." She put her hands to the great whorls of pearl-netted hair over her ears. "Ah! Even the silence hurts."

The boys at their feet were subdued, Ned too tired to take any notice of his wonderful miniature castle complete with moat and drawbridge; while John absently buckled and unbuckled the jeweled collar on the neck of Halla, his hound. The dog too suffered the fret of the boy's hands as it lay supine, its muzzle couched on quiet paws.

"Beshrew me, but we are a merry crew!" Richard lifted the circlet of gems from his head. Its weight had pressed into the ebony polish of his hair that now he disturbed as he ran his hands through it and rubbed his throbbing temples. The momentous day with its excitements and demands had left him empty of elation, conscious only of

the weight and drag of royal responsibility. The moment of high rapture when the Archbishop lowered the crown onto his head had passed, lost somewhere in the color and confusion of the ceremonious hour.

Anne rustled to her feet and slipped off the sleeveless robe of state, letting it shimmer richly to the floor; she shed the tiara with which they had replaced the state crown she wore in the Abbey, stripped from her finger the heavy coronation ring, and dropped them chinking onto the silken folds of the robe. She sighed with relief.

"You are weary, Ned?" She looked down on the slight figure of her son, his thin legs in the oyster-silk hose stretched among the light-colored dogs. "Asleep, Ned?" He lifted his pointed face, delicate like her own at the age of ten, his shadowed eyes still wide open.

"I am not asleep." If John could remain awake, so could he. This was royal London, noisy and a bit frightening, and the day had been very odd, but somehow he did not mind it, after all. "I think I shall like it here."

Over his head Anne exchanged a smile with Gervase. Hating to be torn from his friends of the North, from the sleepy pleasures of Middleham, Ned still came willingly enough, and Gervase had schooled him well on the long ride south. Now he was trying on his new role as Prince of Wales, and his Plantagenet blood and Neville strain were standing him in good stead. Through her bone-weary body Anne felt the thrill of her pride. "Like it here? Of course you will, *ma mie*."

But Richard handed the boy a sugared plum. "You will make a prince yet," he approved. "And you," he stirred John with the point of his shoe, "what swims through that mind of yours after this long, hard day?"

John of Gloucester buckled Halla's collar. He raised gray eyes fringed in black, Clotilde's own eyes, to his father's face. "I, my lord father?" Only a year older than Ned, he looked adolescent already.

"Yes. What, for instance, should you like best in the world?" Indulgently Richard awaited the reply of his bastard son.

The lad considered, tongue clamped between his small square teeth. "When I am grown I want to go to sea. I want a ship all my own, with great brown sails and a dolphin on the prow. And I shall call my galley *The Royal Richard*."

"So?" Richard was smiling oddly. "You learn the arts of flattery

at a tender age." But the boy stared off into space, his brown forehead puckered, his fancy already gliding downriver to the great sea.

"Take the boys to bed." Anne nodded to Gervase. "I wish to talk with my lord." And the three of them departed amid the scuffle of the dogs and the childish talk. When the door closed she said, "That was a sharp thrust, Richard."

"He's too young to remark it." Carelessly Richard dismissed the thought. But Anne was hurt to think how easily kings grow suspicious, even of their tenderest own. A sigh escaped her, a sigh for the old days of Nan and Diccon, long gone forever. Was this how it would be? Suddenly the room seemed full of ghosts: Clotilde and Alain who would have solemnly shared with them this day; Edward, on whose hand she had so often seen the ring of England that now Richard must wear, Edward whose fingers had been so busy, stroking the fair neck of a girl, banging a table in anger, his ring glittering as he raised an ungloved hand to close his helm. Her father, who had made and unmade kings—she felt his presence strongly about her this night; and the attained ones—Hastings, Rivers, Vaughan, Grey—did they shift and murmur in their graves? And Clarence, a shade now with Isabella his wife—was it her fancy or did the shadows rustle and whisper in the flickering candlelight?

Richard moved nervously about in his magnificent shot-purple cloth-of-gold, crusted with the jeweled insignia and powdered with white roses, and as he moved, from him came the spicy scent of cloves.

"Sit down, and let me stroke your head." Anne feared she had hurt Richard with her mention of young John. Obediently he sat beneath her hands.

"Do you think it went well?" That he should ask her this touched her. It was as if he craved approval of her above all others.

"Ah yes, all of it." She thought of the tremendous shout that went up at his crowning. Whatever the dark Lancastrians whispered in corners about the uncle of the Little Bastards in the Tower, there had been no lack of crying out for King Richard the Third by his loyal supporters. "You have their hearts, Diccon."

"Aye. The hearts of our friends."

"Friends—yes. Diccon," soothingly she stroked his ebony hair, "do you think it wise to take the Stanleys to your bosom?" For Richard had forgiven Lord Stanley the treachery with Hastings, had restored him to favor, and Lady Stanley had borne Anne's train in the Abbey. "Do you think it wise?" she urged.

"Better in my bosom than at my back with daggers loose."

He felt her hands slide from his head, heard the soft thump of her fall, and whirling from the seat he stared down at her, white and nerveless in the heavy gold robe, her eyes closed, her head turned sideways on her slender neck like a flower whose stem is broken.

"The Queen's Grace has swooned!" The page at the door screamed.

"Quiet!" Richard called hoarsely. "Fetch the doctor. Bring Her Grace's women! Be quick!"

Kneeling beside her, he raised her limp head. Silently he cursed himself for the chance remark about the Stanleys; he cursed the day that since dawn had sapped her strength with the long, sickly banquet, the formal presentations. Suddenly the room was alive with chamberlains, with women, with the bedchamber ladies. They lifted her to the bed and he watched while Hobbes skillfully brought her back to consciousness.

"The Queen's Grace is pleased to return to herself." The old doctor drew back from the bed. "She will do well now."

"How are you, Anne? Forgive me." Richard leaned over the pillow.

"Diccon." Her white lips moved softly, her eyes surprised.

"You swooned."

"Bleeding, perhaps?" Antony Amytas, Hobbes' assistant, had his lancet ready. One of the bedwomen was turning down the cover, had Anne's foot in her hand, ready to strip it for the knife.

"Wait." Richard stopped them.

"Sire," protested Hobbes, "the Queen's Grace should have blood let. The rush to the head."

Richard looked at Gervase in the shadows of the bed curtains. The minstrel shook his head.

"Go away, all of you," directed Richard shortly.

Hobbes looked sourly at Gervase. He detested this upstart of a strummer, with whom he had often clashed over matters scientific. The Queen's favorite took unwarranted license. "As you will, sire." He shrugged, motioned to Amytas, and the two of them took their departure.

"I'll have Gifa to undress me," decided Anne. The sight of the familiar face might, she felt, dispel the terror that still hung about her.

"I am here, my chicken." Gifa bustled in, the long night shift over

her arm. Beneath hair white as her coif, her wrinkled face was rosy and reassuring. "Let your Grace be leaving her to me." She moved Richard aside as if, like the old days, she was in sole charge of Anne and Richard was a mischievous obstacle to the necessities of duty. Richard submitted. This was women's business now.

So it came about that on her first night as Queen of England, Anne Neville was soothed by the ministrations of her old Welsh nurse, and she fell asleep to the music of her beloved minstrel.

But in the outer room, the haughty peeresses whose prerogative it was to undress the Queen on the night of her coronation hovered like angry birds trailing bright plumage over the checkered floor. In furious disdain they whispered together, the Lady Stanley, the Duchesses of Norfolk and Suffolk, the Countess of Northumberland, and the Lady Catherine of Buckingham, herself a Woodville, and therefore a hater of Richard who had taken the life of her brother Anthony. Though none of them dared voice her secret thought, all insisted in their hearts that England had come upon evil times, with a sickly Queen, a puny Prince, and a King whose way to the throne had led him across a river of blood.

A puff of soft music as Richard opened the door and came out of Anne's chamber. He stopped, sardonically viewing the cloud of duchesses who swept to the floor then drew back, their beautiful gold headdresses lustrous against the black panes of the casement behind them. Bulwarked in feminine pride and rich in their robes of state, they appeared solid and formidable.

"Retire you to your rest, my ladies," Richard advised. "The Queen's Grace goes to Windsor on the morrow and you must take horse before the sun is high."

"And if the Queen's Grace is not able to ride?" Lady Stanley's chiseled nostrils quivered in disgust.

Richard's piercing gaze leveled her. "The Queen will ride." And with his hand on the nape of Denis his page, he left them.

Anne was so much better the next morning that she insisted on going to Westminster sanctuary to see Elizabeth Woodville, the Queen Dowager; she had something she wished to ask her.

"You're wasting your time," Richard warned her. He had been up all night with Russell, the two of them deep in the affairs of state that must be settled before the new King set out on his royal progress through his realm.

"We shall see," said Anne. In a light cool gown of violet, her head

bound in a simple cap of gold mesh, she looked rested and refreshed, no hint of the dark swoon that had engulfed her the previous night. "Thank fortune we Nevilles have recuperative powers," she told Gervase as together they sought the chapel that led to the Queen Dowager's retreat. A page lifted the tapestry and the two of them passed through the gaping hole that yawned raw and ugly, where Elizabeth Woodville's men had cut it when she fled from Richard. "Remind me to speak to the Chief Steward about this. It's a disgrace." Anne's tidy mind abhorred the shabbiness of broken brick and plaster. Now she was Queen she meant to have all the royal palaces clean and habitable, with none of the sluttish and luxurious disorder that Edward and Elizabeth had tolerated. Lifting her violet skirt, she crossed the silent chapel and entered the shadows of the small transept.

A face whisked into the gloom, disappeared. "Who was that? Did you see?"

"No." Gervase *had* seen, and by the tiptilted nose and slanting eyes, he recognized Elizabeth Woodville's younger sister Catherine, the Lady of Buckingham. But he would not disturb Anne by suggesting that the lady had gone to see the Queen Dowager in her retreat for any reason other than a sisterly one.

Anne felt no premonitory twinge. She was concerned with penetrating to the heart of Elizabeth's retreat. In a small but sunny chamber she found Edward's widow with her ladies, her two eldest girls on cushions, feeding their dogs. From an adjoining chamber came the merry shrieks of the Queen Dowager's three other girls at play with yelping puppies.

"To what do we owe this honor, madam?" At Anne's entrance, everyone was at once on her feet. "We trust we see your Grace in health." In Elizabeth's voice was the lingering of honey sweetness, but Anne was at once uncomfortable. Had the sanctuaried Queen heard about her swoon of the night before?

"I am about to depart for Windsor," she replied, ignoring the inquiry concerning her health.

Bess, a tall maiden of eighteen, pushed forward a chair. "Will it please your Grace to sit?" She was grave and composed.

Elizabeth's expression as she waited for Anne to begin the conversation, as etiquette required, was unfathomable. The famous beauty, whose pearl-white skin had grown a little pasty during her three months' confinement, was lovely as ever. Always devoted to

matters of dress, the Queen Dowager was groomed to perfection, her brows plucked to a fine arch, her hair glitteringly brushed, her gown fresh and unwrinkled. About her throat she wore a jeweled hand clasped with a red enamel rose, memento of her former days as wife to a Lancastrian, and on a long chain hanging over her bosom was the miniature of Edward, set in fine Italian filagree. It was like Elizabeth Woodville thus to parade her marriages.

Anne came to the point of her visit. "I bring you assurances of our love and good will," she said. "But more. Should you care, madam, for the Ladies Elizabeth and Cicely to accompany me to Windsor? It would be a fine ride and the weather is fair. I promise you they shall be well attended."

The girls were at once tense with excitement, their dancing eyes fixed on their mother. But she drew in her breath with a sharp hiss. "So that is what brings you!" Her words stabbed the air. "It is not enough for you to take my sons, and for all I know, they have been done to death—"

Anne gasped. "Madam!" She sprang to her feet and all rose with her. The two Queens faced each other, bosoms heaving, their cheeks pale. "I swear before God and His saints that your sons are alive and well, for I saw them not a week since. Alive they were, and at their archery." But she had been grieved to see that Edward was ailing, with an ulcerated jaw. She would not tell this to the mother, lest in her frantic passion she declare them to have been poisoned.

Elizabeth moved to the back of her chair, her hands clenched about its posts. She was a creature at bay. "You—secure, with your ring and your crown—you shall never have my daughters, never—do you hear? When they leave sanctuary, it shall be with my friends, and they will be neither Plantagenet nor Neville." Her face was distorted, her blue eyes hard with hatred. "It is your husband, madam, styling himself King, who has bastardized my children, and who now seeks to destroy them."

Anne looked quickly at the girls, their cheeks crimson, their heads bent to their sewing. A sudden passion of anger rose in her against Edward their father, who in his vain heedless folly had brought them to such a pass.

"You may think because I am shut up here in sanctuary that I am unaware of what goes on outside." Elizabeth's furious voice was rising. "Well, they will never keep me in total bondage, never, do you mark that? You Plantagenets have a way of keeping Queens locked

up—aye, and Kings too—but I have my friends, plenty of them, and my day will come again. Though you contemplate that most foul crime, I shall be avenged!” She paused for breath.

“Have you finished?” Anne’s deadly quiet voice cut through the anger of the older woman. “I do not know how you are served, madam, but these you call your friends are false to you. It is *your* husband—God rest his soul—not mine, to whom you must look for this your sorry plight.” She drew her silken scarf about her shoulders. “I came in love and friendship.” She turned away, biting her lips. “I bid you farewell.”

Shaking now, she returned with Gervase through the chapel, her head in a whirl. Scenes of any kind always left her hollow inside, drained and trembling. Richard had warned her of the venomous tongue and the ready anger of his brother’s widow; but more than the face-slapping rage was the creeping fear concerning the boys. What was this ugly thing about doing them harm? Someone was poisoning the mind of Elizabeth Woodville, while scheming to deal her and them the deadliest blow of all. Then her racing thoughts came up sharp against a stony fact. “Gervase,” she whispered, “was it not Buckingham who suggested lodging the boys in the Tower?”

“Aye. But for safety, remember.”

“Blessed Mary,” she breathed. “Oh, Blessed Mary, preserve them!”

But Gervase was thinking even darker thoughts. Usurper, executioner, tyrant—these were the epithets hurled at Richard by his enemies. Would they now add child murderer?

While Anne rested at Windsor, without the company of the Queen Dowager’s two daughters, Richard plunged into his work in London. Two weeks he had given himself to get the affairs of state in something like order before setting off on royal progress. While Buckingham dashed about arranging for the journey that was to bring the new sovereign within hail and call of his subjects, Richard grappled with the immediate problems of governing.

On the night before his departure, he sat with the ambassadors in the great hall at Westminster. The foreign-looking gentlemen watched the new King narrowly. Would he temporize, cajole, flare into anger as Edward used to do?

Richard was firmly in command of himself. He addressed the envoy from Burgundy. “While your master the Lord Maximilian is oth-

erwise occupied with his subjects, we cannot hope to conclude any sort of satisfactory alliance. Come to me when the situation betters." He would not come out openly and tell the Flamand that Maximilian had better stop quarreling with his Flemish allies and spend his attention on more important matters.

He regarded the Irish Earl of Kildare who sat so negligently at the board, his frosty little eyes twinkling. Gadfly! With a piercing look he fixed the Irishman. "And what, my lord, is your country doing in the matter of the coinage?" Only the day before, Richard had had the merchant guildsmen complaining of the Irish, who were minting bad money so closely resembling English silver that a casual trader could not distinguish between the two. This was causing serious financial losses to the English. "Your report, my lord?" Richard lounged in his chair and slid the ring of England back and forth upon his finger.

"Ah, now," Kildare was persuasive, "am I not your Grace's Deputy, and shall I not be protecting the interests of both our countries?"

"One, certainly." Richard was dry. "I await you, my lord."

"Well, we have passed an edict providing that we shall coin moneys only in Dublin and Waterford. There will be no more trouble."

"Good. But if I come across any more of these bastard imitations of good English shillings, I shall cram them down the throat of the first Irisher I meet. Do I make myself plain?"

"Ah, quite, my lord."

The Scottish ambassador made a queer sound in his throat. It could be a laugh or a cough. Richard turned to him. "Ours is business more to my liking, sir. You shall tell your master I accept his proposal." James the Third of the stormy realm above the Scottish border had proposed an eight-month truce with a promise of lasting peace. Richard was not deceived. He privately resolved that should James vacillate from his position, he would send the two Scots renegades who at the moment were enjoying the hospitality of the English court posting north to join with Northumberland in holding James to his promise.

He rose. "And now, my lords, all, I pray you pardon me." Nodding to Kendall, he sought his study.

"There will be two letters to dispatch this night," he told the secretary. "One to Brittany and one to Louis."

"His Grace of France is very ill, I hear." Kendall mended his pen.

But Richard was indifferent to the health of Louis. "Let us hope he lasts long enough to get our letter. I mean to reply in exactly the same manner as that in which he greeted our accession. By Heaven, he treats England and its King as if it were some tenpenny kingdom with a puppet prince. If he cares no more than that for amity between our two selves, I'm hanged if I do, either."

"Perhaps he is in his dotage, my lord."

"Dotage, my eye! That spider will be alert to his last twitching breath, mark my words! I mean to tweak him in proper style." Whereupon Richard composed a drawling parody of Louis's offhand greeting of such wit and acidulous turn of words that the narrow shoulders of Kendall shook with suppressed laughter. "And add that we are sending it by one of our grooms of the stable. That'll give him pause. I'll sign it when you've written it."

He then directed Kendall to write to Francis of Brittany. "And here, if you will, is a weathercock. Edward never knew how he stood and I'm damned if I do. Tell him I am sending Hutton to treat with him to find a way to safeguard our mercantile relations."

"You wish to mention the Earl of Richmond?" Kendall looked up from his notes.

"Who?" Richard stared at his secretary, though he knew perfectly well whom the man meant. Kendall referred to Henry Tudor, who lived at the Court of Brittany, despite the fact that his parents, the Stanleys, were high in favor here at home.

Kendall was used to Richard, so he merely smiled in the manner of Gervase, shook his hair over his cheeks and bent to his work. "I am in error, my lord."

"I shall not mention Henry Tudor now or ever. Why should Duke Francis think I hold the Tudor in the slightest consequence?"

"No reason, my lord."

"I should think not." Richard rang his little bell and sent the chamberlain to inquire as to whether his ladies would receive him yet. The squire soon returned, praying his lord to join the ladies in the Painted Chamber.

They were all there with the Duchess of York who had come from her town house of Baynard's to bid Richard farewell before his journey of the morrow. The Lady Cicely sat with her girls and their caged birds, and Anne had her mother. There was a pleasant hum of feminine voices and the smell of perfume in the air. Richard's black eyes softened as he acknowledged their bows; they were a handsome

lot of women to grace the court of any king. He kissed his mother's hand and sank down at her side.

"You have finished business, Diccon?" Her wimpled face bent maternally over him and she marked how careworn he already appeared.

"Yes, thank the saints." Richard took the cup of wine from Anne's hand. "I think the pot will keep on the boil till my return."

"Provided someone does not stoke the fire so that it boils over," remarked the Countess of Warwick, who spoke from long experience of living with a man whose pots were always in danger of boiling over.

"You are content, my son?" The Lady Cicely touched his hand.

"I believe I am. I feel I can do important things; at least I now have the opportunity. Mine is the ultimate place of action."

"You never thought to be King."

He smiled and shook his head. "Ah, no. I did not think to be called so high. But since God has seen fit to lift me to this seat, I know I can serve my people well." He spoke calmly, reflectively, without trace of boasting, as if he felt within his breast that surety in his judgment that must mark the actions of a successful ruler. "There is no greater happiness than being able to use your full powers in a great cause." Then he laughed. "But, beshrew me, I did not come to talk of myself. Let us have music and dancing. Come, my ladies, tread a measure for your King."

And though he was too weary to step to the music, his Queen and her ladies all danced in the Painted Chamber till the candles began to burn down and Anne declared that unless they sought their beds, Richard would never be fit to set out on his long ride through England.

The King left London in state, his suite consisting of Lovell and Percy, the Lords of the North and East, and Thomas Stanley, whose privilege it was to ride on the right hand of his royal lord. Richard meant to keep a close eye on the stepfather of the Earl of Richmond, that Henry Tudor of Brittany who had declared himself as directly in line to rule as Richard Plantagenet. He had promised Anne to consider the Stanley matter most carefully. Buckingham was not with them. He had remained behind to finish the last odds and ends of the journey and was to meet the King's entourage at Gloucester.

The fair summer weather held and the royal cavalcade wound its

way slowly north through Oxford, thence to the country of the Cotswolds, arriving at Gloucester on the afternoon of the third day. Here the royal party was overtaken by Buckingham, on his way to his home in Brecon. Gorged with honors, dazzled by the glittering marks of Richard's favor, the Lord Chamberlain of England rode with an impressive retinue. He and Richard supped together and made plans to meet again in London on Richard's return. But Buckingham was up betimes the next morning to get an early start on the road to Brecknock Castle. There he kept Richard's prisoner, John Morton, Bishop of Ely, held in trust for the time being. Pleasantly the two wished one another well and parted.

Richard moved along the Severn to Tewkesbury, that town of fabled memories. Here he meant to stop for the night. With mixed feelings he strode through the great Norman door to pass within the chilly stone walls where lay the bodies of Clarence and Isabella. Before their catafalques he knelt with his beads to pray for his brother and Anne's sister. Nearby, beneath the stones of the chancel, slept young Edouard, that blond Lancastrian prince who fell before the daggers of Edward's knights. His mother Queen Margaret now languished in France, awaiting death to unite her with her son.

Richard rode out of Tewkesbury and headed for Warwick. He stopped at town after town, passing into the shade of cordial roofs that shielded him from the August sun. He granted charters, heard wrongs demanding redress, restored favor and eased grievances, all with an easy dispatch and quick decision. Behind him he left a feeling of renewed confidence among his people who would now look to him to lead them into an era of prosperity for the realm. Through harvest country he rode, passing over meadows lush and ripe for garnering into the great barns of the country manors.

The abbeys and nunneries offered him warm welcome but his heart was grieved to see how secular the strongholds of Christ had become, with inmates who had bought their way into the orders, bringing with them dogs and servants and the bright ways of the world. The Church lay rich and supine in its engorgement, and the great religious communities were no longer the fortresses of the faith. It was not that the Church had come upon evil times but that its people had grown lazy. All this the keen eyes of the new King noted and as he rode there were long silent hours while he pondered it in his heart.

At Warwick Anne joined him and her retinue had an exotic touch in the person of the dark, gaily caparisoned gentleman who rode at her side. Señor Graufidius de Sasiola, arriving in London from Spain after the King's departure, had joined the Queen on her journey north. He bore the true assurances of his royal mistress Queen Isabella that she desired peace and meant to make good her offer to aid Richard against Louis XI of France.

Richard was pleased with the newcomer and the two men spent some pleasant hours discussing the softer arts and the new wave of creative beauty that was sweeping through Spain and Italy. Sasiola had brought some exquisite examples of Spanish and Italian jewelry for the new sovereigns. On the subject of his recent visit to Italy he was eloquent.

"I have been to Roma and to Venezia—ah, wondrous things are there to be seen. But Firenze! It was there I saw the remarkable painting of the Adoration of the Magi by a young man calling himself Leonardo da Vinci. A masterpiece—though, alas, unfinished."

"But he will finish it?"

"No, Excellence, more's the pity. He has departed for Milano to take service under Duke Ludovico. A man of many talents, this Leonardo, but soon he tires of what he is doing."

"Strange," observed Anne.

"Ah no, madam. This man is the profound spirit of his age, but it is a roving spirit. It must be free to do as it will."

"A happy climate, Italy," mused Richard. "I have never been so far south."

"Ah yes. More even than my beloved Granada. The children have been singing for a hundred years."

"I would we had this Leonardo at our court."

"But, sire," the Spaniard assured, smiling warmly, "here you have the greatest of them all. I mean your Master Caxton, he who will place the riches of learning within the hands of the world."

Richard inclined his head. The compliment was graceful, but the old sardonic smile twisted his mouth. Perhaps books might transcend the great art of painting; true or not, it was sure Queen Isabella had chosen her envoy wisely.

On a Saturday late in August, Anne and Richard with their pale son entered York. It was an occasion to rival the gorgeousness of the

coronation itself. All the shire in scarlet, blue and gold, had turned out to greet the royal visitors, and it was here that Richard felt the true pulse of his people. Always closely allied to York in bonds of affection, he now tasted to the full their loyalty and devotion. They were frantic with delight that he had chosen their city for the scene of the Prince's investiture.

Richard bent a watchful eye on his son riding easily at his side. The boy's fine gray pony carried him gently between the two magnificent mounts of his parents. Ned had thought to ride with his mother in the splendid litter on wheels, the gold curtains tied back so they might bow and smile to the people.

"If you will ride your pony, Ned, I will ride Roland," said Anne. And Ned had agreed. It was not so bad when you went slowly; it was galloping that upset him.

"Good man," said Richard, and just before they set out, reached across to correct Ned's hands on his reins. "Hold your head up and remember to smile."

But it had been no task for Ned to remember to smile. The exciting pageants with which they were welcomed enchanted him; the first one just inside the Gate of York, another at the river bridge, still another at Stayngate. The tumblers were so droll that he laughed till the color flooded into his white cheeks. John of Gloucester, riding easily behind him with Gervase, threw gold coins to the players.

Early the next morning, Ned was dressed for his investiture. In a white velvet doublet so heavily embroidered that it seemed to be made of gold, he walked carefully into the splendor of the great nave of York Minster. The light from the stained glass touched his head as he approached the high altar. They gave him a golden wand and fitted a gilt wreath about his white brows. Raised to God, he was dedicated Edward, Prince of Wales, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Earl of Salisbury and, by God's grace, heir apparent to the throne of England. If he lived, he would be Edward the Sixth.

"If he lives," muttered the nobles, whose hearts were heavy with doubt.

Within two days Edward lay white and strengthless, a shadow among the shadowed bed curtains, his eyes listlessly following the movements of his nurses and attendants; he refused to turn his head to see the antics of his fool, even crying out against the music of Gervase, which he declared hurt his ears.

"So soon as he can travel, I shall take him home," said Anne. The illness of Prince Edward was the one sad moment in a joyful progress for his parents. A cloud had come over the sun.

Richard turned southward, braving early October rains in his journey back to London. He stopped in Lincoln, prayed in the cathedral, then ordered an early supper, that he might get to his bed. The damp had crept into his bones and his shoulder was aching abominably.

Sipping his wine after the meal, he sat by a smoky fire alone. He had sent for no one and none had disturbed his peace. He was beginning to wonder at this when the chamberlain brought him word that Lord Robert Percy, his Comptroller, wished to see him.

"Come in, Rob, come in." Richard's tired smile was cordial. "Sit, man, you look dished."

Robert Percy had been working madly among his stewards and their sumpter mules with the carts and impediments of a royal progress, trying to bring some order to the misdirected and badly organized train of baggage. He looked pale and disturbed. In the half-opened doorway Lovell hesitated, as if uncertain of what to do.

"Shut the door, Francis, you're making a draft." Richard motioned him in. "Come and take a cup with me before we retire. I was beginning to weary of my own company."

Lovell was as pale as Percy, and the two nobles faced their long-time friend and companion, now their liege lord and King. Uneasily they eyed one another. Who would be the one to tell him?

All at once Richard realized something was amiss. "What is it—have the sumpter carts lost their wheels again? Why so crestfallen, Robert?"

"Richard—" Percy cleared his throat and addressed his old friend as an equal. "Richard, we have that to tell you that will tear your heart. Bates is in from London with a message from Russell. He could not bear to tell you himself."

"London?" Richard did not grasp the import. The only dread news could come from the east where his son lay in Warwick Castle, still ailing. "Why London?" he repeated. He had left all in Russell's capable hands, the ambassadors had their assurances, there was no threat from over the sea—why London? Bates was Russell's swiftest courier, and with what tidings had he galloped north?

"I would you might be spared this grief," went on Percy. "The

heavy news is that the southern counties have risen in revolt against you.”

Richard grasped the arms of his chair and pushed himself erect. Before he asked the question, he knew the answer. “Under whose leadership?”

“The Duke of Buckingham.”

30. The Silver Traitor

THE conspirators had planned well. While Richard was leading his fantastic pageant on royal progress through his counties, with only the slenderest of ceremonial guards, they had stealthily made ready. In the West, Buckingham called and impressed a huge body under his banner; in the North, Dorset, who had been hiding in Yorkshire ever since his escape from London sanctuary, now came boldly forth with the Bishop of Salisbury and Richard's own brother-in-law, Sir Thomas St. Leger, his sister's second husband. But in the South, the Countess of Richmond, for reasons that must conflict with those of Buckingham, pretended to work for the freeing of the two princes in the Tower, while sending frantic messages across the Channel to her son in Brittany to make ready to sail and claim his kingdom.

Richard lost no time. Within an hour or two of receiving the dread intelligence from Russell, he sent commands to the Council at Westminster and ordered his army to rendezvous with him at Leicester. His loyal lords called up their followers in true feudal style, the most heartening word coming from Howard, down in London. He had been supervising the repairing of Crosby's Place for Richard but now he dropped everything. At the first rumble he swept down into Kent and took steps to cut off the rebels of the South from those of East Anglia.

This was a comfort to Richard. After a long day of work, he sat at a cold meal on a tray, picking at the wing of a bird. Lovell, Percy, Ratcliffe, and Catesby watched him anxiously. His face had grown more gaunt in the first twenty-four hours of the rebellion, his eyes glittered with excitement and fever, but his hand was steady, his mind razor-sharp. He even baited Lord Stanley, whose wife up in London was a key figure in the uprising.

"So your wife hopes to see her son on England's throne, eh, my lord? How think you this will sit with those who seek to restore Edward's line through the boys?"

The four friends of Richard enjoyed Stanley's acute discomfiture. "I know not, sire," he acknowledged.

"Hmm." Richard sprinkled some black pepper on his meat. "But it pleases *you* to remain loyal to us. Is that it?" He shot a piercing look at the man, then he turned aside to Lovell. "I hear St. Leger, my worthy brother-in-law, has joined his hand to Dorset. Well, he'll fight for reward and that, by the rood, is all. Dorset has a son and he has a daughter, and Dorset will need to make good on that."

"They all grind axes," remarked Lovell.

"Aye. And they will turn the sharp edges on one another, else I am mistaken." Richard's shrewd mind penetrated to the heart of the weakness among the conspirators. "Truth to tell, I am not too surprised that they rise against me; it is only likely they should attempt my throne." He tossed the meat to his hound. "But beshrew me if I thought the dog would turn wolf." The sting of Buckingham was sharp.

"How can it be?" Percy wondered.

"How, Rob?" replied Richard sadly. "You forget, 'twas I myself who put the means into his hand. I never should have given Buckingham custody of Morton, the wily fox. How did it happen, you say? A little flattery, a little push here and there, and the good Bishop of Ely easily convinced Henry Stafford that he was another Warwick."

"Warwick came to his end." Lovell signed to a page to take away the splintering bones the hound was chewing.

"Yes, but whoever thinks that such will be his own fate? If I could look into the mind of the false and silver hound, I would see not the restoration of my brother's sons, but something else. I would wager my crown, the hound has his eye on it."

"So high?" marveled Percy.

"Why not? He does not quarter the Woodstock arms for naught; always he loves to remind us of his lineage descending from Edward the Third's youngest. And this, moreover, is a male line." He now pinpricked Stanley a little more. "Henry Tudor, that stepson of yours, how does he trace his line? Through a woman—your wife. And his father? Will you not agree that your wife's first husband Edmund Tudor was not even legitimate issue of Kate Valois and her Welsh squire? So where does this leave your Henry Tudor?"

"King Henry set aside this," protested Stanley. "He had all his half brothers by his mother and Owen Tudor legitimized."

"Pish-tush!" Airily Richard dismissed the protest. "Who takes any

stock in what poor potty Henry Lancaster did? No, my lord. Your wife's son is still the issue of a tainted line. 'Tis Buckingham who has the stronger claim."

Richard ate no more that night, and before he slept he sent word by fast courier that Russell was to send John Nesfeld to double the guard on Elizabeth Woodville's sanctuary. "None to go in or out," he directed. "I can take no chance on her smuggling one of the girls out of England to pick up a foreign prince." In the back of his mind he felt that Henry Tudor would lose no time in espousing young Bess, Edward's eldest daughter, to strengthen his claim to England.

He marched his army down to Coventry, where he received two severe checks. Hutton had hurried back from Brittany and now arrived with news that the vacillating Duke Francis of Brittany had moved once more with the wind and was assisting Henry Tudor to launch a huge fleet against England. Richard was not surprised but he could not help the slight desperation that crawled over him.

But it was the other piece of intelligence that bade fair to rob him of sleep for some weeks to come. From the western stronghold of Buckingham himself, Percy brought in a stained and weary soldier. "One of the Brecknock garrison, sire."

"Brecknock!" Richard's eyes narrowed. "When did you leave?"

"Three days gone, my lord." The man swayed on his feet.

"Three days!" Richard put down the batter pudding he had begun to eat. "Before God, you have ridden hard, man." The soldier, with a weary nod, acknowledged the fact. In crossing the country from Wales, he had spared neither horse nor self as he dodged hostile troops, forded rivers shrunken with the summer heat, to stagger at last into Coventry.

"Well, let's have it, whatever it is." Richard held out his hand.

"Your pardon, my lord, but Hugh of Dunstan, my captain, said I was to carry this by mouth."

"By mouth, eh? So I have a friend in Brecknock?"

"More than one, my lord." And then the soldier, in a dead-tired voice, told his tale. Standing his watch late one summer evening, he had been privy to the guarded conversation of the Lord Bishop of Ely and the Duke as they strolled on the battlements of Brecknock. The bishop appeared to be greatly concerned over the condition of the two young boys, to which the Duke replied, "Make your mind quite easy, my lord; even though the King's nephews live, I can promise you it will not be for long. He will see to that."

All this the man heard, but told none till three days gone, when he had repeated it to Hugh. "I did not know till then, my lord, that it was important."

Richard had gone very pale. For some moments he sat without speaking, then softly he said, "And so your captain sent you to me."

"He slipped me out by a secret way, under cover of darkness, and told me to ride like all the fiends of hell."

Richard shook his head as if his brain needed clearing. Then to Lovell: "Twenty gold nobles to this man and a captaincy in my guard. 'Tis clear he can't go back to Brecknock. He is sharp of wit and brave. He has served me well." And then, as the man clumsily fell to his knees, more drunk with his dazzling reward than with fatigue, Richard added, "A moment. You risked your life, man. Any special reason?"

The soldier's eyes lighted up in his grimy, sweat-streaked face. "We shared a drink of water once, my lord."

"We did?" said Richard. "Where?"

"Tewkesbury."

"Ah!" Then Richard let him go. A drink of water, brackish and foul, no doubt, shared in the heat of battle, had brought him the devotion of this simple man. But to his two friends he turned a tired and bitter face. "They will kill the lads."

"And pin the crime on you, Richard."

"Aye. Now I know there is nothing wonderful beneath the sun."

He was up betimes the next morning to issue a proclamation. It was the dread announcement of attainder against the rebels who now had a price on their heads. For Buckingham a thousand pounds, alive or dead; for Dorset and the two renegade bishops a thousand marks; for lesser traitors lesser amounts or lands equivalent. And as Richard turned to go withindoors it began to rain.

"Ah!" He was grimly humorous. "Now, if only my bishops throughout the land will pray for Warwick's weather, we shall find an easy victory." His eye sparkled as he grinned at his lords and he looked better than he had for the past three weeks. "If you recall, gentlemen, weather usually favored my worthy father-in-law on these occasions. We must all pray for a norther to blow Tudor off the sea, and a small tempest to puff over from Ireland to confound the host of my former Lord Constable. He'll have a bad time crossing some of those rivers. Which reminds me"—he ran his eye around the room—"as

soon as Blackwell gets here, bring me Assheton. I must make me a new Lord Constable."

"Blackwell is here, my lord," said Catesby. "I saw them leading in a heaving horse to your liege's stables a moment ago."

"Good man!" Richard held out his hand to Blackwell, his Clerk of the Chancery, who fell to one knee and kissed it, then drew from his doublet the white skin bag containing the Great Seal. He had come racing to Richard as soon as possible. "How goes it up in London?"

"It is raining, sire."

"So! Pray, all of you! Pray for Warwick's weather!" Richard called to them. "And get out your foul weather gear! We head into Wiltshire in the morning!"

The rain set in and continued, a torrential downpour that began in the West and swept southward, drenching Buckingham's rebels and Richard's loyal hosts alike. But whereas Buckingham had only his clerical friends and one or two nonmilitary figures to aid him, Richard's loyalists were headed by such veterans as Humphrey Stafford, the Vaughans, who knew the region like the palm of their hands, and rustic brawlers, who were undismayed by the downpour of rain and the swollen rivers that tore out bridges. What the weather did not destroy, they did themselves, so that Buckingham was confounded. His troops began to desert. Smelling disaster, they melted into the storm-torn country, taking horses and supplies with them. Among these was Morton himself, the good Bishop of Ely, chief support and adviser of the rebel Duke. In a flood of rain he galloped away, hid himself in the fen country, and word came that he was headed for the east coast and Flanders.

This broke Buckingham. Traitor and false friend himself, he was utterly undone; when it came his turn to sip the bitter brew he succumbed to panic. Not waiting to hear what his other supporters elsewhere in England might have accomplished, he donned the costume of a common countryman and fled northward into Shropshire.

The news reached the King as he rode down from Wiltshire against Woodville. He reined in his great mount White Surrey and sat with his hands crossed on his pommel. "So! The fox has streaked to his burrow, and the silver hound runs yelping after. Come, Surrey, carry

me to the other rebels!" And he galloped his horse down the winding road.

But word flew ahead of him. Richard now had a mighty force of most of England's great military earls and captains at his back and word of Buckingham's flight struck fear into the hearts of his allies. As Richard had foretold, they turned the sharp edges of their axes against each other. Woodville and St. Leger fled from Salisbury, and when Richard and his column trooped in, they found only the embers of dead campfires and the empty fair stalls where Woodville's men had sacked them of fresh food.

"I am disappointed," declared Richard. "Are those rebels never going to stand their ground? Have they no liver for a fight?" He doubled the price on Buckingham's head. "But bring him in alive. I want the silver traitor's head on his body."

Without so much as a skirmish he was in possession of Salisbury, and he put up in the Chapter House. The weather had cleared and the drenched plain, refreshed after the long, hot summer, was sparkling and green. Like a jewel in stone, the cathedral rose from its flat fields, its one long spire pointing solemnly to Heaven. At its altar Richard prayed and gave orders for the bells to ring. "Though we have won but a partial victory, we must return thanks to God for what He has vouchsafed to us."

About sunset of the following day, they came in with the news. The silver hound was taken. Through fear or hope of reward, his servant Hugh Bannister had betrayed him to the Sheriff of Shropshire.

"False servant is falsely served." Richard's lips were tight. "Assheton, you are Constable. See to it."

Brought under guard to Salisbury, Buckingham was soon convicted in summary trial. Terrified now, his courage drained away, his strutting air gone, he could only confess his sins against his liege lord and the realm. "I pray you of your mercy, take me to the King's Grace." Though disarmed, he had a stiletto of fine Italian steel hidden in his breast. He would strike one more blow at England's heart before he himself went.

"You may not see the King," Assheton told him coldly. "Time was, my lord Duke, when you could have seen His Grace at any season of your choice. A pity to have renounced the privilege."

But Buckingham was past sarcasm. "If only you will take me to the Lord Richard," he pleaded. "You must know I cannot die with-

out his forgiveness." Lacking the courage to plunge his dagger into Richard's heart, in the back of his shallow mind he cherished another idea. Perhaps he could buy his life with the revelation that the King's enemies meant to murder the princes in the Tower and pin the crime on Richard, thus blackening him forever in the eyes of posterity and calling down upon his head the hatred of Christendom. He must see Richard! Surely his lord would reward anyone who saved him from so dire a threat!

But Richard was adamant. He wanted only to get the whole wretched business behind him. "Do not draw it out," he instructed Assheton. "Let it be brief."

That night Henry Stafford lay listening to the pounding of the masons who were erecting his scaffold. In the market place, to be executed like any common cutpurse, beheaded in public. He shivered. Terror-stricken, for the last time he begged to see Richard.

"You forget," he was reminded, "that in the eyes of our lord the King treachery is the one crime without remission."

It was Sunday morning when they led him out into the bright wintry sunshine of a November day to die. With only the briefest of rites, he was beheaded.

Richard stayed within the Chapter House, absently tracing on an old piece of parchment his motto: *Loyauté me lie*. By this he had lived, regarding the tie of loyalty as binding in all respects. He had never liked Buckingham, but the sting of the treachery was intolerable. And he was furious at himself for making the treachery possible, and somewhere deep in the recesses of his Catholic conscience was the tormenting little thought that through his own blundering he had brought about the downfall of this man. Life is short, he reminded himself, all too short for living honorably and well; and he had helped a man to forswear his honor.

Kendall came in, his face grave. "It's over?" demanded Richard. The secretary bowed. No need of words. As if he knew his master's sore mind, he quietly sat down and pushed open the head of his inkhorn. Then he mended his pen and waited. In a low level voice, Richard began rapidly to dictate. Elizabeth Woodville's sister Catherine was now a widow; she must be provided for since all her estates were forfeit to the Crown. And there were his loyal supporters in the South. He must send dispatches to them before the noon sun declined.

Little by little, the rebellion crumbled and collapsed. The weather,

in one last puff, blew Henry Tudor off the seas back to Brittany.

"He's off our minds," sighed Richard. "He'll make no more attempts this year."

The November frosts had come when, after an absence of four months, the King rode into his capital city of London to a brilliant welcoming force of aldermen and townsfolk. He had swept the land of rebels, and this without a single engagement of his own host. It had been the task of his devoted friends in the West and South to deal with the violence in their parts of the realm. Some rebels escaped onto the sea, some were caught and hanged, and the rest, headed by the Countess of Richmond, Lady Stanley, were remanded to the care of jailors. Lord Stanley was made responsible for his wife to Richard. There were those who said the lady should have been beheaded, but Richard was suddenly sick of bloodshed and uprisings. Besides, it was coming Christmas and he wanted to see his wife and son.

31. Edward, My Son!

A FULL, dull day, with gray snow clouds hanging over the city. The river was leaden and the very ships looked cold as they huddled to their moorings, their rigging stiff and their decks clear of sailors. The stormy autumn was giving way to a bitter winter. All day until mid-afternoon Richard had worked with Kendall; their last job was the tricky one of concocting a letter to Duke Francis of Brittany, who now had sued for peace. The changeable Breton regretted his backing of Henry Tudor's abortive effort to invade England from the sea and craved only the friendship of his good neighbor of England.

"The whole contract smells to Heaven," said Richard, "but there is no other way. It is not the time for me to go and trounce him, dearly as I should love to meet him in the field, or anywhere else for that matter." He went to the window and moved the brocade hanging. "It is not yet snowing, though I taste it in the air. I shall go to the Tower. I want to see Brackenbury and the lads." He had promised Anne to keep an eye on the young princes and when she arrived on the morrow, with Ned and John, he wanted to be able to tell her he had seen them and that they were well.

"If it should begin to storm, my lord." Kendall did not want to answer to the Queen for letting the King's Grace go out in bad weather to catch a chill.

"Let it. I am not made of barley sugar. I shan't melt. I shall be there and back before you know it. Kendall, you grow like an old woman." But he smiled at his secretary who reminded him so of Gervase. He had missed the musician during these disturbed weeks when the Norman had been with Anne and young Ned. Now they would all be with him and they would throw off care and celebrate their victory along with the blessed Yuletide. He put on a heavy fur cloak and with only Catesby, his Squire of the Body, he rode to the Tower.

"It is near five months since I saw the lads. They'll have grown, I doubt. I must put my mind to their welfare, Catesby." Richard was

thinking aloud, and his Squire did not reply as they picked their way down Thames Street into the Tower precincts. There were few people abroad, for the afternoon had turned raw and cold with now and then an actual flake of snow whisking on the wind. A few Londoners ran at Richard's heels but the three yeomen who rode with the King and his Squire shouted them away. Muffled to the nose, Richard turned into the courtyard of the White Tower and a groom ran forward to his bridle.

Within the chilly pile itself they climbed midway up the Tower to a hall where a raging fire attempted to cut through the cold to thaw out the bones of the garrison. From the heavy table at which he was writing close to the fire's glow, Robert Brackenbury rose and rubbing his hands together came forward to kneel before his liege lord and old acquaintance.

Richard spread his own hands to the blaze, then turned and, lifting his fur cape, warmed his backside. "Well, Brackenbury, I'd have sent for you sooner, but I've been busier than a dog in a fair these three days since my return." Then it was that he caught sight of Brackenbury's shrunken pallid face. "Before God, man, what ails you? They did not tell me you were ill."

Rising from his knees, Brackenbury turned haggard eyes on his King. "I am ill indeed, your Grace," his voice shivered, "but what afflicts me cannot yield to drugs or doctors."

His arm about Brackenbury's shoulders, Richard led the Constable back to his seat. "Now, what brings this look to your face?"

"Not since that night have I slept more than an hour or two at a time." Brackenbury rubbed his tired eyes sunken far back in his head. "I cannot get it out of my mind. I fear, my liege, you have chosen but a poor stick for your Constable."

"What night, man?" Richard looked across at Catesby, whose shrewd face showed concern.

An uneasy light glinted in Brackenbury's eyes as he avoided Richard's intent gaze. "The night of the twentieth, your Grace."

"The twentieth of what?"

"The night my Lord Buckingham"—he threw out a deprecating hand—"your Grace knows."

"I am waiting for you to tell. I know naught of the twentieth or of Buckingham, blast him for a black traitor. You speak in riddles."

Accusingly and with grief, Brackenbury looked at his master. "It is the night the princes died, sire."

Catesby started and an icy chill took Richard. "*The night the princes died?*" His voice was a hoarse croak. "What is this you say?" He marked Brackenbury's pained look of disbelief. "Before God and His saints, I knew naught of this."

In the deathlike hush their breathing was audible. Richard felt as if he had been running. Then, to his horror, the officer began to weep. The sound of his choked sobs was intolerable, but they waited while he pressed his sleeve to his face and strove to command himself. "I thank my God for these words I have heard, that your Grace was not concerned in the matter."

"By the blood of Christ—" burst out Catesby, but Richard threw up a nervous hand.

"Be quiet, William. You say the boys are dead? What befell?"

"On the night of July the twentieth, less than a day after your Grace's departure on progress, at about three hours after sunset, the Duke demanded entrance to the Tower."

Richard nodded. As Constable of all England, official doors would be open to Buckingham. "He was alone?"

"No, sire. There was Bannister, you know, his personal servant, and two fellows. I tell you, I did not like their looks."

"Why?"

"They looked like rogues from up in the fen country, low fellows."

"Go on."

"The Duke demanded to see the princes. I did not question this, since in your Grace's absence I understood him to have supreme authority."

"You were in error there. It is to Russell you should have applied."

Brackenbury bowed his head. With an effort he resumed. "My lord Duke ordered me to take them to the Tower apartments of Edward, the Lord Bastard, and though I wondered much at this, I—I took them." His voice trailed off and he stared painfully at Richard.

"You took them." Like a lad conning his lesson, Richard repeated it after his Constable. Then he appeared to shake off the horror that had crept over him. "Take me—take me now."

Sighing heavily, Brackenbury reached down a flaming cresset from the wall and led the way out into the stone passage. A draft of cold air smote their hosened legs, and through a small slit window

came the dry smell of snow. The three men walked down the echoing hallway to a heavy studded door which Brackenbury unlocked. This gave onto a tiny passageway to the foot of a winding staircase. At the top was the apartment where the boys had slept.

"I did not go up." Brackenbury paused with his foot on the lower step. "My lord Duke ordered me to remain. I confess I was somewhat troubled."

"Troubled!" muttered Catesby.

"The worst I suspected was that they might have come to abduct the princes. I had no idea—I did not—" He leaned against the rough wall and turned away his face.

Richard made a convulsive movement as if he meant to mount the stairs. "You remained below?"

"Aye. It could not have been more than a few moments before I heard them returning." Brackenbury now looked up the winding staircase as if he expected the scene of the July evening to be re-enacted. "They were bearing the boys in their arms."

"Ah!" Richard drew in his breath.

"They had wrapped them in cloaks, but now they put them on—onto the floor—about there—" With the black toe of his shoe he pointed out the spot, at which Richard and Catesby now earnestly stared.

"What saw you?"

"I could see—could see the Lord Bastard's hand lying on the stone. Very white it looked. I know it was the Prince Edward, for I had seen the ring on his finger only that very day. It was one his mother sent to him."

Richard shuddered. "Go on. Don't spare a word."

"The two fellows fetched bills and mattocks from the lower hall and they tore up the floor at the foot of the staircase."

"And you let them?"

"Your Grace forgets—it was the Duke himself."

"Aye," groaned Richard, "the Duke."

"They dug a fair hole. It took time but the men worked fast. They were stalwart and sweated as they worked."

"Show me."

Brackenbury led them around the foot of the staircase, and there, sure enough, were the two great slabs of stone with signs of having been recently disturbed, the earth dried and crusted around their edges but not settled with age. "They put them in the ground?"

"No, sire. An old arrow chest used to stand over there." He pointed to the wall on the opposite side. "I should not have thought it large enough—but the lads were small."

"And you—what of you?"

"It was while they were putting the chest into the ground that my lord Duke must have thought of me. 'This is your King's command,' he said. 'You will say nothing of this to anyone, on pain of death.' And then they left me."

His shoulders bent, Richard traced with his shoe the line of gray dirt at the edge of the slab, then he turned and began slowly to mount the staircase. Up they went into the little vaulted chamber where the boys had played on wet days and slept. The great bed had been put in order and he went to it and turned down the clothes. A musty odor came from the linen and on the topmost sheet there was a yellow-brown stain. "What is this?" Richard touched it with his cold finger.

"The little Bastard Dick would eat in bed. I remember the *blanchisseuse* who washed for them was forever complaining about the state of their linen. It is not blood, my lord. There was nothing."

"Then, how?"

"I heard no outcry. I should think they were smothered as they slept."

The great square pillows stuffed with down could easily have been held over the small faces till the lads stopped breathing. Richard sank onto the bed and hid his face in his hands. The two men stood in the chill silence. Then, with a deep sigh, he looked up. "This is the heaviest news I have sustained since my father died at Wakefield. So foul and so shrewd a move—to kill the innocents, thus ending Edward's line forever. And then, to put the crime on me—the devil works well when he works."

"We must seek out the murderers." Catesby's lawyer mind sought refuge for Richard in the practical.

"What use?" Richard spoke drearily. "What use, William?" He struck his hands together. "Curse the day I ever left Buckingham behind! And curse the day I sent James Tyrell to Calais!" Tyrell had been his Master of the Horse and Henchmen, based here in the Tower but sent to France on a mission. He looked at Brackenbury. "Aye, Robert, what use to curse? If you could not stop them, how could he?"

"Shall I give orders?"

"For what?" Already Richard was at the door and now he turned back, his pale Plantagenet face ghostly in the half-light of the torch.

"For the boys' bodies to be taken up?"

"Let them sleep." For a moment more he looked around the shadowy room, at the battered singlesticks and wooden balls piled in a corner, at the few books on a table near the bed, and hanging from a nail in the wall, a boy's violet tunic, now dusty and beginning to fade where the sun had streaked it. Then he said, "Come. We can do nothing here." He had remembered he must face Anne on the morrow and worse still, Elizabeth Woodville, who would have to be told her sons were dead.

With his Squire he went out into the fast-falling snow.

On Christmas Day in the cathedral of Rennes in Brittany, Henry Tudor swore an oath to marry with Elizabeth of York, the elder daughter of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville. The news traveled across the Channel to Richard and Anne, who wretchedly had nerved themselves to a gay Yuletide celebration.

At this grandiloquent gesture toward the House of York on the part of the Tudor, Richard merely shrugged. "He'll have to catch his pigeon before he can cook it," he said.

He was recovering slowly from the shock of the princes' death. As for Anne, her main thought was to do something, anything, to drive from his face that haunted, careworn look. Accordingly, she gave orders for the court to keep Christmas as it should be kept, and the lords and ladies, thinking the new monarchs wished to astonish the world with their magnificence, obeyed. Anne herself ordered rich new clothing, recklessly spending in excess of a thousand pounds on gifts and holiday attire.

"We can't afford it, Nan," said Richard when her secretary brought him the bills from the mercers. "I am short of money as it is, and I shall have to pawn some of the royal plate to ease my own finances. We don't need all that heavy bullion and the money can be put to good use elsewhere."

"I can use some of it right here," said Anne promptly. "I think it very important that we show a gay face to the world this Christmas especially."

So Richard let her do it. He had flung himself into work, the better to fill his days and to make him so brain- and bone-weary that he

might sleep at night. And when Anne protested against his driving himself so mercilessly, he shrugged. "Work is the sugar of life, in which"—and here he sighed—"it is true I find no sugar."

But there was some sweetness to life. He was surrounded by scholars, men who were congenial to him in their taste for mental exercise and the intricate problems of governing. Preoccupied as he was with justice, the new King set in motion some of his dearest schemes for the welfare of his people. "My brother set up a strong central government," he told his councilors, "but we are only as strong as the merest Englishman." At this odd statement, coming as it did from a feudal lord, a Plantagenet, some of the lords frowned and others put their hands to their mouths to hide their smiles. It soon became known that any man might have the Lord Richard's ear, especially if he came from the North, which was the region most beloved in all England by the King.

As for the tragedy of the two princes, there was still no outcry, no outward sign that the news was current. In her sanctuary Elizabeth Woodville kept a deathly silence. Taking with him Anne and Gervase, Richard had gone to her himself with the dread tidings of her boys. Partly for secrecy, but mostly because of some austere conviction that it was his duty to undertake the heavy task, he would allow none but himself to do this. Dreading acutely the scene he must face, nevertheless on the very day after the horrid disclosure of Brackenbury he went to Westminster sanctuary. As gently as he could, he told the mother why she had had no news of her sons since the summer.

Elizabeth Woodville sprang to her feet. Every drop of blood left her face and, without a sound, she fainted. When she revived, there was no moaning and crying; there was only the deep prostration of a grief that was denied even the solace of tears. Thus it was that Elizabeth Woodville bore without a single tear her worst sorrow. Somehow, this hurt Richard far more than if she had behaved like Niobe, weeping her drops of blood for her lost children.

He could not tell if the announcement of Henry Tudor, now an open pretender to the English throne, of his intention to wed her eldest daughter and to place the girl, if he could, on England's throne, was of any comfort to her. Did she believe that this could be done? Elizabeth Woodville was not without sense, had proved that there was something beneath that beautiful golden hair of hers

besides mere feminine wiles to entrap men; surely she must know that a successful invasion of England was highly doubtful.

But the children were here in London and the holidays not yet over, and at last on Twelfth Night Richard yielded to Anne's pleading that he lay aside the cares of state and join their frolic on the ice. The snow had given way to a sharp frost and the river was thickly frozen over. The ladies of the court and their squires and pages, along with the King's two sons, and Margot and Edward, Clarence's children, joined Anne and Richard, the whole company trooping down to the river in their gay little wagons and covered carts. Ice-men and snowmen swathed in bright woolen scarfs and hoods had been built on the icy floor of the river, booths with hot roasted nuts and apples crowded the Southwark shore, and the Christmas mummers paraded through the holiday crowd. Soon the royal children were racing with the others, playing ball, sliding on the ice, pelting each other with handfuls of the dry snow that drifted on the banks. As Ned, on the end of a long line of lads, whipped around on the slippery ice and slid on his backside, Anne laughed heartily, the first real comfort she had felt since her arrival in London, and Richard permitted himself a faint smile. Even Gervase unbent and joined the three lads in a pitch and toss on the icy slide.

Sitting in a covered pavilion with a box of charcoal at her feet, Anne chatted with Robert Percy and his new young wife. She looked about for Richard, saw him at a distance, the center of a knot of befurred men, his head bent as he listened to them. "Business, always business," she sighed. "What do you suppose they are at now, Robert?"

"I think I see Harrington, your Grace." Percy strained to pierce the distance. "And if I mistake not, that will be Ratcliffe on his right. I believe he is wearing the scarlet journade. They are probably talking about the new merchant grants; Harrington has recently been appointed to the Court of Requests, and Ratcliffe, I know, has some interest touching the customs on woolens. I know he has been wanting to lay this before the King for some time."

"Here and now? Out there, on the ice?" Anne worried. Richard would catch his death, standing about in the cold like that. She peered out to see what the boys were doing, saw Gervase carrying a dripping bundle, followed by a crowd of children and courtiers. "Rob! Alyce! It's Ned, I do believe!" She stepped out on the ice so

quickly that she would have fallen had not Percy seized her arm and steadied her.

"It's all right, my lady!" Gervase called over the heads of the crowding boys. "The Prince has broken through the thin ice and is somewhat wet." They had rolled Ned in a fur cloak from which his pointed face peered like some pale little animal in a burrow.

"I am whole and sound!" he cried. "But, by my faith, I am soaked to the skin!"

There was no more frolicking after that. Anne took her son inside the palace at once and he was stripped before a blazing fire and rubbed down by his chamber grooms. There was much rushing to and fro and many voices raised in advice, in the midst of which could be heard Ned's piping: "I don't want to go to bed! Let me stay up!"

"He should be in his bed." Gifa was firm.

"Indeed, your Grace," protested the doctor.

Passing down the corridor to his private audience chamber, Richard poked his head into the noisy room. "Go to bed, Ned," he ordered. "We shall sit with you tonight."

And so the lad was bundled into bed. Since his arrival in London just before Christmas, he had coughed constantly, his thin cheeks hectically flushed, his narrow chest contracted by the paroxysms that racked him.

"The Prince's body humors are disturbed," declared Hobbes.

"I was always ailing when I was his age." Richard dismissed the condition of his son's health. "And see me now."

Aye, thought Anne, see you now. Richard's face now wore a habitual look of pain, the eyes narrowed beneath a puckered brow, his thin Plantagenet lips pressed together, and he had developed a habit of sliding his ring up and down on his finger. He carried his tender shoulder high and frequently rubbed it to ease the aching. Winter weather always plagued it.

But shortly after vespers they all gathered in the child's bed-chamber, a heart of blazing warmth and color. In the corner the fragile boy lay propped on his pillows, and within reach of his hand on the scarlet satin coverlet crouched a tiny fawn-colored dog. On the bearskin rug by the fire John and young Edward of Warwick played at toss-pegs, Margot above them on the high window settle, her feet dangling, her brown eyes soft with dreams as she listened to Gervase strumming a ballad. A good deal of the petulance of her

babyhood was leaving her and she was beginning to resemble her Cousin Bess.

"A pretty scene," cried Anne as she stopped to survey them. "And you, Gervase, have you turned warden of the nursery?"

"*Ma mère!* I am not a child. I am ten and the Prince." Ned pouted.

"Not a child? Not even when you fall into the river?" she teased. "Can you imagine the others being so foolish?"

"I did but try my weight on the ice edge. How could I know it would not sustain me?" The boy had turned fretful as he puffed out his lips and drew the silky ears of his little dog through his fingers. With a twinge of pain, Anne marked the delicate shadows beneath the eyes, the thin neck, and the fragile wrist bones. At the soft clash of the curtain rings, she turned. The page was raising the arras for Richard to step through. "Children, your lord the King!"

But before the children could rise, Richard lifted his hand. "Let them bide. Tonight I am father to all." A knife turned in his heart as he viewed his boys who, had Buckingham lived, would surely have followed their little cousins into the grave.

But tonight was the children's. "What do you present for our pleasure, Gervase?" With a smile in his black eyes Richard turned to his minstrel. "Beshrew me, man, when are you going to get a new suit? That one is threadbare." A Yuletide gift of ten marks had made no difference in Gervase's appearance, for he still wore his old green doublet and russet hose. He smiled but made no reply.

"I have tried," said Anne, but she too was smiling. "I have told him he is a disgrace and a rebuke to our wardrobe fees. I know, I know, Gervase. Since when do we judge a book by its cover?" Gervase would go shabby to his grave and they would only love him the more.

"Go on, Gervase!" cried Ned. "You promised us a new tale."

"Very well, then, I commence." Gervase laid down his lute and folded his arms over the high back of a chair. "With your Graces' permission, I shall relate the 'Tale of the Jackdaw of Rheims.'"

It was a charming old legend that he had rendered into Chaucerian tetrameter, telling of a saucy little pet jackdaw that stole the Lord Cardinal's ring when the prelate washed his hands after the noonday meal. Whereupon, in holy anger and pious grief, the Cardinal cursed the rascally thief.

He cursed him in sleeping, that every night
He might dream of the Devil and wake in a fright.

Utterly devastated, the jackdaw lost his feathers and his spirit, and at last confessed his crime, leading them to his nest in the bell-fry. Then the Cardinal took off the curse, and the jackdaw immediately grew sleek and fat, became so pious in his own life that when he died he was canonized.

It was a sly tale and not a thing was lost upon Richard who listened, an odd smile on his lips. Gervase and he had often discussed religion and the minstrel knew his King's views regarding the clergy, views which so nearly resembled his own. Whereas the children loved the fantasy of the regenerated bird, Richard saw only a portrait of a pompous prelate, concerned over the loss of his costly turquoise ring to the extent of damning an immortal soul.

"What does the Devil look like?" Ned turned large feverish eyes on his father.

Little Edward of Warwick sprang to his feet. "He is black and hairy, and he has horns." He pointed a chubby forefinger at Richard. "He is like my uncle the King there!" And strange, unchildlike laughter bubbled from him, peal on peal, that froze their blood. He was like some evil incarnation of Clarence his father.

"Edward!" Margot slid from the settle and slapped her brother hard across his face. She turned to Richard and Anne. "Pray pardon him, your Graces. He knows not what he says."

"I do! I do!" Though tears of pain from the sharp slap coursed his cheeks, Edward was still laughing. "It's what they all say. The King is the Devil!"

"Come, Edward," said Anne, her face white as her wimple. "It is time you went to bed. Take him, Gervase."

"You have not answered me, *mon père*." Ned had paid small attention to the scene raised by his cousin.

"The Devil, my son?" Richard sighed and stroked the hot head. "Who knows? There are times when he speaks you fair and looks like anyone else in the land."

The little evening was spoiled. Though Anne and Richard stayed with the children till the promised hour was spent, there was small heart for games or music.

Gradually the palace sank into sleep. The guards, the pages on night duty, the squires whose charge it was to sleep at the doorway of the King and Queen, were the only restless ones. But about two hours after midnight, a disheveled maid ran sobbing down the King's

private corridor. She stumbled over the dozing squire and startled the page on duty within the arras.

No one could have told very clearly what happened then. There was a great outcry, a rushing of feet, and a deathlike hush within the little Prince Edward's chamber as the fateful figure of Hobbes stooped over the inert form, his ear at the quiet heart.

"The Prince is dead," he announced sorrowfully. "His heart has stopped." The child lay, half smiling, as if his life had ended upon a pleasant dream. But the parents stood in their trailing night robes, stunned, unable to realize their loss.

Not until the tolling of the bells that announced the death of the heir and only child of their Graces the King and Queen struck upon their ears did their minds and hearts respond to the tragic misfortune that had befallen them.

And in his episcopal residence Thomas Rotherham, Archbishop of York, remarked to his attendant priest, "The King's Grace did kill his brother's sons, and God has killed his son. The ways of Heaven are just. Praised be the Name of the Lord."

32. Farewell, My Love

A SORT of twilight settled over Richard and Anne; a twilight of the spirit, some said. For a time, lethargy gripped them as they clung to one another in their pain, knowing only that they were man and woman bereft of an only child, visited by affliction and acquainted anew with sorrow. Their whole preoccupation was with their grief. They made plans for taking Ned to York, for the solemn and magnificent obsequies of a Prince of Wales, and Richard chose the boy's resting place. They would lay him just outside the beloved city of York, in the chapel Richard himself had built onto the church of Sheriff Hutton.

The stone masons began work on a tomb of surpassing loveliness, a design worthy of the frail but regal child whose body it was to hold. Richard drew the sketches for the stained-glass windows that would shine above the alabaster effigy of Edward clad in a loose robe with a coronet upon his curly head.

"Look, my love." He showed Anne the drawing, but with a little moan she turned aside.

They journeyed in the cold weather to the North and on the night before the funeral, Anne sent for John of Gloucester. The boy came, a troubled shadow in his gray eyes. Anne drew him to her, felt how rigidly he endured her caress, for he had reached the age when the demonstrations of women embarrassed him. "So you are twelve now," she murmured, pretending not to notice how he stood, unresponsive to her stroking of his hair. She picked up Edward's gold cup that stood on a table at her side. "You are to have this."

John drew back. "Oh no, madam." As the King's son, he had many beautiful things of his own, but this was the cup of the Prince of Wales, embossed with his feathers delicately worked into the gold.

"I insist. It is your father's wish. You must be a comfort to him now, John. He has only you. And there will not be another Prince of Wales in our time." She felt the boy's perplexity. Impossible to explain to her husband's bastard son that she could bear her lord no

more children, that he was the sole male issue, unless—unless the King's Grace took another wife into his bed.

John took the cup in his brown hand, turning it about, his head bent. "Ned drank out of it when—when—" he stammered, heaved a sigh, and lifting the hand with the cup, awkwardly tried to hide his eyes. But the tide of misery rose and suddenly he flung himself, cup and all, on his knees and buried his face in Anne's lap. He cried hard, the unwilling sobs of a lad of twelve who feels himself almost a man, while still in the clutch of a boyish grief.

"There, there," soothed Anne as she stroked the sleek head. So would she have to hold and comfort Richard when the full tide of his sorrow washed over him.

On the morrow they knelt, a bereaved pair of monarchs, in York cathedral. In her black sweeping robes, Anne was a quiet figure with a white shadowy face, but Richard was carved from stone. Now that all was done and it remained only to lay the childish form in the receiving earth, the full force of the blow smote him. In the light of the Five Sisters window he knelt, and the greenish-brown glow from the glass in the lancets turned his fallow face ghastly. Before the high altar rested the catafalque of their son, the colored figures from above looking serenely down upon it. Raised on its high bier, draped with the hues of death and royalty, the coffin was covered with Edward's blazon, and on top the circlet of the Prince of Wales. When the solemn young figure in the white and gold had last been seen here, the cathedral walls had bloomed with banners and there was gay rejoicing for the investiture of England's heir apparent. Now the banners were gone, the transept and nave swathed in black, the only gold the tiny flickering tongues of the tapers.

Kneeling in serried ranks were the nobility of the land, and a brilliant sun glowing through the stained glass at the eastern end of the nave touched the somber figures with deceptive blotches of color. But the heads were bowed in grief and dismay. Who would follow the King on England's throne? For, from the delicate creature at his side, there could be no further hope of issue. They clutched their beads and muttered private prayers, petitions that had nothing to do with the requiem of the priests and the anthems rising from the chancel.

Behind the screen of carved flowers came the childish voices of the boys, and the sweet sound pierced the parents who desperately besought God for the soul of their dead. Richard's frozen numbness

had begun to thaw and now he thought of England without an heir. The doctors had assured him long ago that Anne would have no more children; now they were warning him that her health might break. Another king, mindful of his duty and the dictates of desire, would put such a wife aside, taking to bed a healthy woman on whose body he could beget sons. For him and for England Anne would submit to this, her firm will sustaining her, but he could not; and he despised himself that he was too much the man and not enough the King to do this thing for England.

He had resolved to name his sister's son as his heir; Katherine de la Pole's eldest, now the Earl of Lincoln, was grown, and though not as close in claim as Clarence's eldest, was infinitely the better choice. There was something about Edward of Warwick that sent a shudder down the spine; it would be hard to forget that night of Ned's death with its prelude of dreadful laughter and the glassy eyes of the little boy on the bearskin rug, pointing his finger and screaming at his uncle. This child was odd—slow at his Greek and Latin, definitely peculiar; and in any case, he was under attain, and it would take an Act of Parliament to remove that.

The *Dies Irae* drew to its groaning close and Richard rose from his knees. He caught sight of his son John, with Gervase in front of a great pillar. An authentic Plantagenet that, growing into a strong youth. A faint tremor of pride stirred in Richard, and the twinging regret. He *had* a son, a true son of his body, but the ways of life were strange.

He would name the young Earl of Lincoln as his heir; but he would also appoint John of Gloucester Captain of Calais; the lad should grow up with something to hold to, a future that beckoned and promised.

Following the funeral, Richard took Anne down to Nottingham where the weather might be a little milder. But soon she decided to return to Middleham. She found it hard to rest anywhere and she craved the familiar stones and the salubrious air of the beloved home. "I hate leaving you, Richard"—she stood in the long hall, drawing on her gloves—"but I feel I shall never get back my strength if I don't go home."

"I know not." Richard turned troubled eyes on her. He took her thin face between his hands. "But there is one thing, *ma mie*. Sadness makes you the more beautiful." For with her sorrow, Anne's face had taken on an ethereal transparency, until it resembled the pale angel

in the stained glass of the minster. Suddenly, with a kind of sinking fear, Richard said, "You *must* take Gervase. I insist."

"My love—it has been agreed. And you promised." Gently she kissed his lips. "Grant me this boon." His need of the quiet Norman's strength was greater than her own, and to leave him behind was the sole thing that nerved her to attempt the journey across to Middleham.

Bareheaded, Richard accompanied her out into the cold sunshine of the courtyard. He put her up into the saddle. "I shall come when I can," he said. "You will have more time than I to write. I shall live for your letters."

She gathered her reins and looked down from Roland's height. At the shabby figure behind her husband she smiled. "I leave him in your charge, Gervase."

"My lady." With Richard, Gervase watched her ride away with her ladies and gentlemen, the long column of her guard winding behind her. Her assumption of strength had not deceived him who had known her so well for so long, and he knew that so soon as she was out of sight, she would take to her carriage. It would be the only way she could survive the winter ride. He followed his lord the King indoors.

In the private study the table was piled with documents, Kendall and his two assistants struggling to get them into some sort of order. Richard flung into his chair and threw back his wide sleeves. "Let's get at it, John," he addressed his secretary. "I want the charter of the mariners first." It had long been a cherished plan of his to allow every merchantile ship a maiden voyage free of tax duty, and the master mariners of York were to receive this assurance. Bending his long nose over the parchment, Richard held out his hand for the pen. With a scrape he corrected a word here and there, then traced at the foot his curly signature.

All the long day he worked, scarcely stopping to eat. He was expecting Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, by the end of the week and he wanted to have all the plans mapped out for the shaping of the Council of the North. "You will be my eyes and ears," he told John of Lincoln, who sat attentively at his elbow. "This Council is a very great attempt." He meant to form it as a body for the redressing of grievances and maintaining harmony; possessing both civil and criminal jurisdiction, it would be a veritable King's Court here in the remote regions of the realm, to bring to the people assurance of their King's concern in all matters that touched their lives.

"You will learn government here, my lord." And with a sort of painful intensity he smiled on the young man who would be his heir. He should begin his training at once. "Some day, you will have to take my place."

"A long time hence," was Lincoln's dutiful response.

"Who knows? At this moment, I feel my age upon me. My very bones ache." Richard gave a great sigh and pushed back his chair. "Enough for the day. No more work."

He descended to the lower hall where the royal pages mingled with the Nottingham stewards in carrying in the King's supper. But the warmth and color brought the want of Anne and he turned away. "Denis!" he called his page. "Tell Master Gervase to have my meal sent upstairs. I'll sup with him tonight."

In the small cabinet just off his bedchamber, Richard supped with his old friend. He had almost forgotten how relaxing it was to sit with the Norman whose bearing, so uncomplicated, so free of obsequious mannerism, afforded the rare privilege of man meeting man. His months as King had made it apparent that even the old intimacy with Lovell and Percy had stiffened into a certain formal relationship. He missed not having anyone to whom he could speak as an equal.

"I fear that in loading grants and gifts upon my friends I have only put them at a distance from me." Richard filled their two cups. He had distributed money and honors with a lavish hand, forgetting none, giving everyone sums of gold and rich lands and titles. "I hear that my treasury is getting down to the bare boards; but I have plans to replenish it." He rubbed his stiff shoulder. "The days are not half long enough. That's the trouble. There's so much to do."

"You feel alone, my lord?"

"In the midst of it all, crowded as it is, I must confess I do." Richard slid his ring back and forth. "I fancy it was what plagued Edward on all those nights when he could not sleep. Beshrew me, I shall never replace all those lost hours of the night; perhaps that is what wearies me now." At the whimsical fancy, both men smiled.

"You will never be alone, so long as you live, not while the people of England walk the earth. You may not know it, but already you, their six months' King, have shown more concern for them than has anyone since the second Henry. You have given England new life and its people new reason for being."

"I have made a start. But I fear I shall never be at peace; I cannot reconcile those things I must do with what I feel here!" He struck his breast.

"It is the trouble of princes, my lord. Stewardship is a heavy burden. To rule by merit is an even heavier charge."

"To rule by merit. Shall I ever be able to do this?" He laid his hand upon his Lollard Bible. "I find comfort here"—he smiled wryly—"to the scandal of my bishops, I fear. They'd call me heretic if they dared."

"You do but read the word in English—how can that be wrong?"

"It is not wrong, and that is what my people must feel. It is every man's right to follow his faith according to his own lights. Did you know I am having Wyclif's New Testament copied?" He stroked the book lovingly. "The word here fills the spirit as the wind fills the sail. Would that I had more time to study it. But I have so many balls in the air." He pulled toward him a fine volume of the Order of Chivalry and opened it to some genealogical tables of ancestral lineage. "Have you seen this? Caxton has dedicated it to me."

"Why do you concern yourself with the past, my lord? And why glorify these noble lines of feudal days when the new spirit is quickening among men of other classes?"

"There speaks the pride of middle class." Richard smiled indulgently. "Perhaps I know not why I interest myself in an age that is surely passing away from the land. Is it not natural to cling to what is best of the ancient days?"

"Perhaps." Gervase would not commit himself. "I know that with all those pursuits to which you have given yourself, the chapels, and hospitals, and college building, the councils you have created, the courts set up—I cannot begin to remember it all as we have heard of it—you are going to have to relinquish some of these minor indulgences to which you have lent yourself. You must let someone else purvey the justice and sit in the Courts of Request. A man's strength suffices for only so much."

"I am admonished, Gervase." Richard fidgeted under the Norman's advice. He could not bear to think his strength would not stretch to the uttermost boundaries of his desires for his people. "Tell me, while you were in the North before, heard you anything of Colyngbourne? I am told he is an agent of Henry Tudor and now he is reputed to be in hiding."

"All I know is the monstrous impudence of his lampoon."

"Ah, yes." Richard's smile was sardonic. He passed his long hand over his chin. "How went it?"

"The Cat, the Rat, and Lovell our dog
Rule all England under the Hog."

Richard laughed outright, but his eyes were full of pain. It hurt intolerably to think there were those who believed that with Catesby, Ratcliffe, and Lovell he tyrannized over his realm. "I expect we shall have to catch him and then—" He shrugged.

"And then?"

"What then, Gervase? The law must take its course." But both men were silent, thinking of the horrors of such an execution reserved for traitors. Butchered by inches, no less, the warning was sufficiently dread to deter others from a similar transgression.

Before he retired that night, Richard had news from France. Not only had his most powerful enemy the Earl of Oxford, the mighty Lancastrian, escaped from his ten-year imprisonment in Hammes Castle, but Duke Francis had allowed Henry Tudor to slip through his fingers again. This time the Tudor had been received warmly by the French court, although in its state of demoralization following Louis's death, it could offer little hope of aid in his projected invasion of England. But with the escape of Oxford from Hammes, things took on a more serious color.

Before a dying fire in his bedchamber Richard sat and brooded over the news. He would not have time to turn his attention to the readying of the Cinque Ports on his own coast and must look to the strength of Calais and its twin forts of Hammes and Guisnes.

All his golden schemes for his realm and his people would come to naught if he could not hold onto that which he had taken.

The busy year of 1484 wore on, England quietly readying for the inevitable clash with Tudor. Richard and his Council were now worked to death, with commissions for array, the military census-taking recording the number of men who could be called up at half a day's notice. His nerves strained to the limit, Richard kept an ear cocked for any sign that Tudor planned an invasion before the cold months set in. If none developed ere then, England had another six months to get ready.

"How weary the land must be of summonses and commissions of

array," he sighed. "But my people must know my throne is not secure and their peace is surely threatened." Richard felt this most keenly when word would reach him that an old supporter had gone over to the Lancastrian side, had fled to France perhaps, or, in going there on the King's business, now declined to return. It was only natural, he reasoned, that some of the old hates should flare up; but he grieved that he had failed to win them to his cause.

There was one comforting moment, however. Elizabeth Woodville, that most bitter enemy of his, still immured in the heart of London sanctuary, made a strange move. She announced that she was releasing her five daughters into the custody of their liege lord the King, and for herself she craved permission to retire to a nunnery in the country.

"Why the sudden volte-face?" Richard sat with Anne in the garden. The mild summer afternoon had enticed her out to enjoy its pale golden rays among the late-blooming flowers. "I confess I am puzzled."

"It may be she has remembered she is a mother. She cannot keep those girls shut up forever," Anne replied. "But it is a great comfort to me that she so publicly shows her trust in you." If Elizabeth Woodville were willing to entrust her girls to Richard, she could not believe that he had caused the deaths of her sons. "Where shall you send her?"

"Possibly she would like to go down to Edward's old place in Surrey. John Nesfeld can attend her. He is tactful and wise and will manage all things well." And keep an eye on the Queen Dowager, he might have added. He still could not believe that there was not some ulterior motive in this unaccountable attitude. "In any case, I feel she is no longer with Tudor, despite his offer for Bess. I have heard that she has written to Dorset to give up his mad allegiance and come home."

"She wants her son," said Anne softly, thinking of the two little boys sleeping under the stones of the Tower. "I can understand that." Elizabeth Woodville's son Dorset would be in evil case should he follow the Tudor to defeat here in England. It was the age-old cry of the mother, seeking the safety of her child.

On the day following Elizabeth's announcement concerning her daughters, Richard called an assembly. Into Westminster Hall trooped the flower of English pride, the lords spiritual in cassock and band, the lords temporal in jewels and furs, and official London with

its severe trappings of city government. Among his gentlemen, friends and courtiers, the King appeared.

They brought in the five girls, a colored bevy huddled about the tall figure of Bess, the eldest. A pain seared Richard as he saw the fair fruit of a union unconsecrated by God, brought to this lamentable pass by the unbridled lust and vanity of his dead brother. He gripped the arms of his chair and privately swore that so long as he lived, not one of them should have cause to weep.

In her green satin gown with the white satin vest, her fair hair hanging, Bess stood, a serene figure surveying with candid eyes the scene. Clinging to her fingers was the three-year-old Bridget, trying to be solemnly good, her baby face framed in the butter-yellow hair of infancy. Prim copies of Bess were Anne and Katherine, their watchful eyes upon their older sister. Cicely, standing slightly apart, had her mother's small red mouth and sidelong glance. In their gowns of pink and white flowered like the spring, they appeared frail and defenseless before the austere majesty of Church and State, females who, if not already in distress, might well come to it at some future time. This went to the heart of every man present, be he a robed cleric or a belted earl.

The ceremony was brief. The King's clerk read out for Richard who swore to maintain, defend and protect the said Elizabeth Gray's safety and that of her daughters; to find husbands and dowries for the five girls; and to hold the gentlemen whom they married accountable to him for the happiness and well-being of their wives. The oath further provided that the daughters of the late King Edward, whatever their legal position, were to be protected from calumny, and that in such a case, their defamers would answer to the King himself.

To escape from the flattering praise of his lords, Richard left the council hall and sought the company of the Norman. "An unwarranted fuss," he told Gervase. "I made a sincere if not a particularly handsome offer. There have been wards of the King of England since time immemorial and I see nothing extraordinary in what I have done. It is not as if I loaded them with gifts and rewards."

"Which would be termed bribery and reparation for a guilty soul?"

"Exactly. None shall say I murdered the princes and then plastered shut the sisters' mouths with gold." By now, Richard was able

to bring the whole vexed question of the princes into the open. "But, by the rood, I cannot understand why she did it."

"The ways of women are unaccountable, my lord. She is a mother, first, and *then* a widow."

"Aye, 'tis what Anne said. But why would she call Dorset home when her brothers are still there, when she believes I killed her sons, as I truly murdered her other brother and her son by Grey?"

"In her heart she does not condemn you for this; these were legal executions. She knows as well as anyone the price of treason." Gervase recalled Richard to reason.

"Perhaps you're right. We princes live by a cruel logic."

"And I feel bound to point out that should fortune go against you, the Queen Dowager will be just as ready to make terms with our conqueror."

"You thrust shrewdly home, Gervase. But for the marriage offer of Henry Tudor"—he snapped his fingers—"I have only that! He'll first have to win a kingdom. If young Bess thinks to wait this out, by God, she will have a bleak outlook."

Gervase joined the calloused tips of his fingers together and held his peace. He would not repeat the foul whisperings that floated among the King's enemies and fair-weather friends, for it had never been his habit to offer information or to give it. But the Queen was failing fast; her frailness was now so marked that only her husband could fail to see how really ill she was. To everyone else it was apparent that the King would soon be seeking a new consort. In his private chamber of horrors Gervase kept secret what was now being said: the King's Grace had forced the Queen Dowager to surrender her daughters out of sanctuary in order that he might marry with the eldest, Elizabeth of York. To make all appear right, he had brought his ailing Queen to London, but soon he would send her into the bitter North to hasten her speedy end.

With the approach of the holiday season, Anne rallied. She now was able to leave her bed every day, to go about the palace, the two pink spots fixed in her white cheeks, her eyes bright with pleasure as she drew the young people of the family about her. Bess was no less delighted to be drawn into the vivid court life. On a morning shortly before Epiphany, she knelt at Anne's side, her blue eyes, so like her mother's, full of affectionate concern. She kissed Anne's hot dry

hand and held it to her fresh cheek. "Your Grace feels better this morning?"

Anne touched her lips to the smooth brow, keeping the girl's soft hand in hers. "I am looking at my festival gown."

"How beautiful!" cried Bess. She had her mother's love of rich clothes.

"Hold it against the Lady Elizabeth, mistress." Dazzled, Bess rose while the seamstress, on tiptoe behind the tall girl, reached around and held the heavy damask to her shoulders. Its color matched the tints of her fair face and made her golden hair gleam. "Have you more of this goodly silk?" Anne asked. Then to her niece: "How should you like to dress like me at the banquet?"

The girl's eyes danced. Then she sobered. "It would not be seemly, your Grace." Lightly she smoothed the rich crimson silk hanging against her body. "It is passing lovely," she sighed.

"Make her one," directed Anne. "Trim it with golden tissue and narrow bands of ermine. She will look like her Aunt Margaret of Burgundy at her wedding feast. And we'll wind her hair with rubies. Tell them to bring my jewels." Not since her sorrow had anything so contented her; she thought nothing would so divert her as to dress this tall fair creature in silk and jewels.

So it came about that at the Feast of Epiphany, in the magnificence of her costume the Lady Elizabeth of York rivaled her aunt the Queen of England. But no two figures could look less alike. Though crowned with the same fair hair, there was a world of difference to set them apart. Beside the radiant beauty of the young girl with the flaming rose on her cheeks and lips, Anne looked transparently pale and spiritual. It was a cruel trick of her malady that sharpened her fine features to carven alabaster, while the shadows about her clear eyes enhanced their vivid blue. But where Bess looked earthly, of solid flesh and blood, Anne looked as if already she had taken leave of this world, lingering only for a last longing look at her beloved husband, the man who was still her lover, her perfect and gentle knight.

As the colorful throng moved out of the banquet hall, Gervase, elegant for once in deep-colored velvet that made the cap of clear silver that was his hair gleam like metal, lingered behind Ratcliffe and Catesby, close enough to hear what they said. As the Queen held a kerchief to her face, Ratcliffe remarked, "What a churchyard cough! Think you she can last much longer?"

“Obviously not. Did you observe the Lady Elizabeth’s attire?” Catesby walked shoulder to shoulder with the King’s Knight of the Body.

“Did I not? Who could miss it?” Ratcliffe smiled. “I understand it is by the King’s order that she is so attired. But I did not think he would make his intentions so plain as all that.”

“Then you think—” Catesby did not finish.

Gervase saw the enigmatic shrug of the shoulders which, seen as it was from behind, could not but convey the grim thought that filled the mind of the King’s Squire.

Whether or not whispers such as these reached Anne, she now drooped rapidly; the severe weather of early spring caused her to keep to her bed for long hours, and night after night Richard supped with his lords without the soft feminine voices to grace the royal dining hall. Since the Queen’s Grace was unable to sit at table, Richard ordered the ladies to keep to their own chambers, and it was a man’s world belowstairs.

Watching him carefully, Gervase was thankful for the anxiety of Henry Tudor that kept Richard busy from morning till night. Over and over with his officers he discussed strategy—all theoretical, for they could have no certain knowledge of when and where Tudor would strike. John Howard, his Admiral, the two Staffords from the North, Ratcliffe, Lovell and Percy—these were his mainstays. Conspicuously absent was the haughty Northumberland; despite the munificence of Richard’s gifts and honors, Henry Percy felt no compunctious loyalty drawing him to the side of his liege lord and benefactor.

“Will he come in at the pinch?” Richard wondered. “It will be deuced awkward if he chooses to sit up there in his East Riding when we need him.”

Not the least part of the preparations was the raising and laying out of money. With reckless impunity Richard sold and leased the crown plate and jewels. “Plenty of money is the sinews of war,” he declared to Russell, who urged him to curtail his spending. “No, my Lord Chancellor. This is the final struggle and I mean it to be the end. Too long have we lived with blood and murder. If England is ever to come into her heritage, we must buy for her the peace.” And he plunged back into the spending.

The spring months came, driving back the frost and snow. Perhaps there would be a mild year of weather. The rains were light,

but the fog which constantly shrouded the island caused the men of science to predict an eclipse of the sun.

"The sun will hide its face!" cried the superstitious. "'Tis the judgment of God." And they shook their heads. It was only what the unrighteous of this wicked city could expect. God would hide from them His face as surely as He was taking away their Queen.

Anne was dying. Even Richard now knew it, for with the coming of March, there could be no doubt. Her eyes had grown supernaturally large in her thin face, and on the scarlet coverlet her fragile hands lay like transparent flowers. Now her main concern seemed to be with the boy John, and she insisted that Kendall bring her Richard's patent which made John, still a minor, Captain of the Crown City of Calais. Propped on her pillows, she lay smiling faintly at the great formal scroll and she asked Kendall to read again the passage: ". . . our dear son, our bastard John of Gloucester, whose quickness of mind, agility of body, and inclination to all good customs give us great hope of his good service for the future."

"How beautiful," murmured Anne, a flush rising in her cheeks. Then, to Gervase, who sat within her curtains: "How proud she would have been."

But the Norman was thinking not of Clotilde but of the young Alain. And he mused on the ways of fate that took the two and left the one behind.

Each evening at sunset Richard came to bid Anne good night. The doctors warned him that her malady was contagious, but he would not listen. "If I am to be protected, God will do it," he said.

And each evening Anne had herself prepared for her husband, that her beauty might please him still. She could not know how really lovely she was, lying, pale tinted among her rich satins, her little golden head weakly resting against the great crimson pillows at her back. She strove to hide both her pain and her weakness; the rawness in her chest and the heavy headaches almost overwhelmed her, but she clenched her will to endure with a smile for so long as he was in the room.

They talked of his future. "You must remarry, my love," she begged feverishly. "Promise! There has to be a Queen and there must be children."

"I will not give you up," he muttered helplessly. And at that she smiled and stroked his hand.

On the night of the 15th, he stayed longer than usual with her.

She had never seemed so dear to him. They had talked and now, her strength gone, they sat hand in hand in the shadowed room. But as she dozed off he arose and, no longer able to bear the pain of her lying there in the great bed, he noiselessly left the chamber. Outside, Bess of York was talking with Agnes, Anne's waiting-woman, and at sight of him both girls sank to the ground. "Go in," he ordered the woman. Then to Bess: "What have you there?"

She held out the little golden jar. "It's angel water—you know, roses and lavender and angelica—to refresh her when she wakes. The poor darling will be feverish."

He looked at her, tall against the dark curtain of the arras. Heaven, how like her father she was. Bess had his splendid height, but softened into delightful curves, her hair a blend of both parents—rich, rippling gold, wound in two great spiral plaits at the back of her head. "You love her too, don't you?"

The girl's clear eyes filled and her full underlip shook slightly. "I do. It is a cruel thing, this sight of her sufferings."

Richard was suddenly full of concern for this fair young girl who clung to Anne. "Do you know what they are saying of us—you and I?" He put the question bluntly to her. She looked straight at him without replying. "They are saying that I wish to marry you—to make you my next Queen."

The color flooded her cheeks and dyed her fair white neck. But her clear gaze never wavered. "I could not marry with you, my lord," she said simply. "You are my father's brother."

For answer Richard raised her hand to his lips. Then he put aside the arras and Bess went through to Anne.

Inside the chamber she found Gifa whispering to Agnes. "They will not see her again," she was saying. All day Gifa had been worrying because Anne's two mothers were not here at her bedside. The Duchess of York was ill with a chest cold and her doctors kept her at Berkhamsted, and the Countess of Warwick, who was on her way from the North, had not yet arrived. "They will not be here in time." Bess joined them and all three stood looking at the wasted form so slightly mounding the rich covers. "Last night," the Welshwoman's voice sank still lower, "I saw a gytrash. On my life, I saw it down there in the garden beneath the Queen's window. It sniffed the ground and then bared its red jaws and padded away down by the sundial through the roses, and on to the river."

"Ssh!" Bess spoke calmly. She was not given to strange fancies and

fears. Gifa's old-woman talk of the doglike presager of death had helped her to calm herself after the disturbing words of her uncle the King. "Ssh! You will wake her, the poor dear." She beckoned the little page who sat curled up on the window settle staring through at the moon. "Go and find Gervase. She may want music when she wakes."

Soon, softly through the corridor stole the sound of a lute as the Queen's minstrel played the "Ballad of the Shepherd Upon the Hill." When he came to the end of his song, he sent the page for Dr. Hobbes. The doctor came in, bent over his patient and felt the frail pulse. "She will rally. The King is in the deep sleep of exhaustion and we shall not wake him. I have seen many of these cases and her heart beats steadily."

Outside, the uneasy March winds moaned fitfully about Westminster, and in its sleep London moved and murmured. Besides the mortal illness of their Queen, Londoners feared the sun's eclipse. Gervase watched the hourglass. At dawn he drew back the heavy brocades from the casements and glanced speculatively up at the sky. No sign of sunrise, only a murky expanse full of fuzzy clouds.

They brought Richard in now, hollow-eyed as he was, his face creased from lying heavily on his pillow. Hopelessly he looked at Hobbes who was listening to the Queen's heart. She stirred ever so slightly. "Ned," she said sweetly, as if still lost in a pleasant dream. Then she opened her eyes. "Diccon! Has the sun arisen?" Her faint voice was quite clear.

They gasped. They thought she would never even raise her heavy eyelids, much less speak to them. But Richard's face broke into its enchanting smile as he leaned to kiss her. "No, sweetheart. You have outrun the sun today, thanks be to God and His saints."

She smiled, sighed, and closed her eyes. With a tiny spoon Dr. Hobbes put wine between her lips and weakly she swallowed. But she lay, an inert dying flower, her hand only faintly responding to Richard's clasp.

A stir outside drew several to the casement. The sun was up, a flaming disk in the dusty sky. The morning hours wore on as it climbed to its zenith, and the people of London came out of their cowering, flooded the streets, calling for joy. Someone had said the Queen's Grace had rallied, the sun had arisen, and perhaps all would yet be well.

But about noon, the drooping watchers in the royal bedchamber

heard a fearful cry. It came from the streets about Westminster. Behind the murky clouds that thinly veiled the sun, now crept a darker shadow, slowly edging over the red ball as if something were taking a giant bite out of the celestial shape. The cry grew louder, more terrible, and a page went running to shut the window.

Anne roused. With their candles the bishops drew closer and began the prayers for the dying. With meek obedience she tried to fold her hands as she heard but dimly the sound of the shriving, and Richard, his tears fast dropping, moved them together for her. Like a child she opened her mouth to the divine food that should make her one with her blessed Lord.

Outside in the streets rose the cry. "Woe, woe to the land that is stricken by the Lord!"

With a quick motion, Hobbes sent them all to a distance and they moved back, the clerics, the lords and ladies, the beloved ones. This was the moment of husband and wife.

Just as the dark shadow slid over the sun, blotting it out entirely, Anne opened her eyes again. With infinite tenderness she smiled up at Richard.

"Farewell, my love," she murmured.

33. Bosworth

THERE is mercy in all affliction. The loss of Anne, reopening the deep wound of Ned's death, only temporarily unmanned Richard. Before the growing threat of Tudor invasion, his pain retreated to a dull ache that throbbed only when he remembered it.

"I have no time for grief," he told Gervase. "When I have resolved this present conflict, then I shall go into mourning for them both. Till then, I must think only of the living."

But there was another salted wound. Still the rumor persisted that the King meant to marry with his niece. Catesby and Ratcliffe insisted that he deny the gossip and at this Richard's fierce anger welled up. "Now will they add incest to my other crimes!" he cried. He glared at his two friends. "Why need I concern myself with so foul a slander? Full well you know how began this against me—so why not consider the source and dismiss it?" For he felt sure it was none other than Henry Tudor who had set afloat the rumor of the King's unnatural desire toward his brother's child.

But the two would not let it rest. "It is not enough," declared Ratcliffe. "You express contempt to us—but what of those who believe and fear this?"

One who believed and feared was none other than Thomas Rotherham, who came with word of a letter written by Bess to her mother when Anne was in her last illness. "I have proof, my lord, that in this very letter, the Lady Elizabeth in her own hand wrote: 'Will Anne never die?' If such as this trickle out of the palace, how will it sit with those who already believe your Grace to be in love with the young woman?"

"How, indeed!" Thoroughly roused now, Richard spoke harshly. "Have you all so little faith in me that you could deem me capable of such a sin? Go away from me, all of you. You fill me with horror."

But he told Gervase about the letter described by Rotherham. Gervase was calm and reasonable. "It is what anyone who loved our

lady would have written. I deem it no more than a plea by the Lady Elizabeth that God would shorten her agonies.”

“She shall be sent away. I will not have her here where their foul tongues can wag to the ruin of both of us.” Richard was not comforted by his minstrel’s words.

“And call your Council and the lords of London together and make a public denial. What have you to lose? Then any further talk of this will be a charge of malignment against the King’s word. You can then punish the offender.”

“I’d like to wring Rotherham’s neck.” Richard was still gloomy. “Well, I suppose you’re right. You usually are.”

The spring was fast fading into mild warm summer and if they were to be prepared for the Tudor there was no time to lose. Richard flung himself into the preparations. Marriage, forsooth! What time had he for that? There was money to be raised and God knew that to be a titanic job. Scorning to tax an already overburdened people, Richard scraped away at the wealthier of his subjects for loans. It was uphill work. The lords of England stood ready, most of them, to follow their liege lord into battle, but opening their purses was another matter. It smacked too much of feudalism, that old bugbear that forced every man to beggar himself for his overlord. Richard found it easier to get blood than money out of them.

But now a tense expectancy began to creep over England. Though the people were not concerned in the military preparations, they kept a wary eye on the ordnance carts that rumbled up and down the land. The stout farmers worried over their crops which might lie in the way of an embattled army, and the merchant mariners watched for enemy shipping to invade their sea lanes. Whichever side won made little or no difference to them; but the fighting that must take place before this was decided might alter their entire lives. So they were tensely waiting.

Among the military there was one burning question in all minds. It was not *when* would Henry appear, but *where*? Few doubted that he would fail to take advantage of the mild weather that was settling in. But where would he launch his attack?

“The North or the East?” Richard wondered as he talked with his Admiral. “Tudor has no following in either place, but I’ll station you, Howard, in East Anglia, and you’ll keep an eye on the approach to London. And Northumberland must stand firm up on the border.”

"Then you expect it to come from the South?"

"It has often fallen so, has it not? And the ports not a day's march from London. I'll send Lovell to guard the Kentish harbors. Scrope can look after Devon and Cornwall."

"The West—what of Wales?"

"A mixed business there. Tudor's being half a Welshman puts Pembroke and Jasper Tudor into his support. But I have much strength there, and since the affair of Buckingham, I think Tudor will have to pass over many a Welsh belly to get at us."

"And you, my lord?"

"I shall go north. I have a feeling that the great clash will come somewhere in those midland regions. Tudor will penetrate inland, and we shall have to concentrate our forces to meet him when he has been depleted by the rigors of long marching."

"But what if he rolls up a host as he goes?"

"This I doubt. He has only Pembroke's Welsh on whom to rely and all the rest he must bring with him. If we let him straggle inland, we can destroy him in one big encounter."

Norfolk puckered his broad brow. He had grave doubts of Richard's allies Northumberland and Suffolk, the latter having announced his intention of remaining on his estates. And there was William Stanley, openly hostile, lying there in the West, and as for Thomas Stanley, his brother, held here at court against his will, who could fathom what lay behind those long narrow eyes? He took his leave of Richard and departed.

Till the end of May Richard lingered in London. On the night before his departure for the North, he took Gervase with him to visit Anne's tomb in the Abbey. They had laid her, as befitted a Queen, in the doorway to St. Edward's chapel, and though it was nearly two months since her obsequies, people were still bringing flowers to her shrine. On her effigy lay a little wreath of Maybloom. Richard thought of the hedgerows of Middleham, where as a lanky boy he had played with her when they were little.

"Already she is a legend," he murmured to the Norman as together they knelt by the tomb. He bowed his head on his cold hands and tried to order his thoughts to prayer. But he was oppressed by the thought that the family had spun out to so thin a thread that at any time it might break. If he did not survive the coming struggle, it would break. The last Plantagenet would quit the earth forever. When she was dying Anne had begged him to consider remarriage,

and to quiet her he had agreed, but now that she was gone he could not bear to think of it.

With Gervase he rode back to his palace, a silent somber figure in his dark velvets. "Come to my cabinet," he said. "There is a thing we must discuss." At first Richard talked only on the surface of his concerns, while Gervase waited for him to speak of what was really in his mind. Suddenly Richard looked piercingly across at the Norman. "You are not going with me, Gervase."

Gervase put his head on one side and regarded the floor. "I had thought otherwise, my lord," he said quietly.

"I know. But you must serve me elsewhere. Will you do this?"

"You know I will. It is the boy?"

"Aye, the boy. Until this business is over and settled, we must protect him." Richard's face twitched. He was thinking of that other time when he had gone from London leaving behind two boys in the Tower. Should Henry Tudor prevail, John of Gloucester's life would not be worth a peascod.

"What will you have me do?"

"My mother is at Berkhamsted. I want you to take him there. Wait for me, and when I have vanquished the invader, I shall bring you both back here. I want the boy to grow up with the best tutors; he shall be the most learned Captain that Calais has ever seen. And when his beard is showing, we shall find him a fair young wife. He has a good head on him, that lad of mine." Pride shone out in Richard's gaunt face and the old spark lit his eye. "I ask a great deal of you, I know, that you go into that world of women, for my mother leads a nun's life, they tell me. But it will not be for long. And you'll weather it."

Gervase raised his head, joined his calloused finger tips together and looked straight at his master. Baldly he said it. "And if you fall?"

Richard laughed shortly. "You never dodge a qualmish thought, do you, Gervase?"

"I find it useless, my lord. I repeat—if you fall?"

Richard shrugged. "One of us must fall, that much is certain. And I mean it to be him. I have no right to think otherwise. But, as you say, should I fall—then you will get out of England. Go to my sister in Burgundy. She will receive you and she will look after the lad till he is old enough to shift for himself. But get you gone—flee as if the very devil were on your heels. You've done it before."

"Aye. I've done it before."

There was no need to pursue the matter. Gervase would only brood over the bitter memories; and Richard could not afford to dwell on the possibility of failure. "I suppose I ought to go to bed if we are to get into the saddle by sunup." He moved restlessly now. "I would fain sleep tonight, even though I dream. My nights are full of fantasies." He sighed. "I torture myself with doubts. I wonder if young Edward would be alive today if I had quashed Stillington's tale."

"You cannot believe England is not better off under you than ever it would have been with only a Protectorate. I counsel you to use your sense, my lord." As always, Gervase was blunt.

"Alas! I cannot tell. I have tried to see the way—God knows. But rumor and conspiracy have dogged me ever since my crowning." At this moment, he felt as if all his good works of the past two years were drowned in the blood that had flowed as he climbed to the top. Henry, Clarence, Edouard, Buckingham, Hastings—every rung of the ladder was slippery with their gore. "And those girls of Edward's. I should have found them husbands. How would they fare under the Tudor?"

"You forget their mother."

"Ah, the tigress. I did, indeed." And there was one thing more, though Gervase did not voice it. Should Tudor win, he would certainly marry the Lady Elizabeth of York, whose sisters would then be safe.

"Go you to bed, my lord. Shall I play to you?"

"I think I could stand a stave or two, Gervase." And so the minstrel played his King into a dreamless sleep.

With his son Richard heard early mass. With the boy he knelt on the stone pavement of the chapel, the two of them remote and private from the attendant earls and squires. The lad's fresh face glowed in the gloom, his gray eyes, so like Clotilde's, flickering, the only sign that he was restless beneath the solemn restraint of the service. Richard was absorbed, oppressed by a feeling of finality as he only half heard the strains of music and prayer.

There was relief for both when they came out into the summer dawn. The brief farewells with the bishops and city officials made, Richard soon was riding out of the city. John, already growing tall, was at his side, managing his pony with a skill that struck painful joy to the father's sore heart. A few miles on the road they halted and the lords must mask their impatience while the King's Grace bade his son an affectionate farewell. Not until the boy and his silver-haired

companion were out of sight on the eastern road would Richard resume his journey.

He reached his destination in a July drizzle and there he settled down. High on the rock at Nottingham Castle, virtually without armed protection, with only the Knights and Esquires of his Body, and his few friends, he waited. Each day he went hunting in Sherwood Forest. And still he delayed the call to arms. It was as if one half of him were too proud to place himself on open guard against the shabby impostor, and the other half were too reluctant to put the loyalty of his subjects to the test. Somehow it seemed mean to ask for payment in return for what as their prince he had given them as their due; yet there was no help for it. When Henry Tudor arrived, they would be forced into the defensive posture.

And now Lord Stanley, constantly in attendance for the past two years, began to pull away. The narrow-faced courtier came with a request that he might seek rest and retirement on his estates from which he had long been absent. Richard looked heavily at him. This man he had grappled to his side with hooks of steel, the better to watch and control him. What now was in the wind—the entering wedge of a split? He said he would think the matter over.

With the permissive right of long service, Kendall counseled against granting the request. Ratcliffe, Catesby, others, pleaded with Richard to consider long before allowing Stanley to depart. "I must do it." On this Richard was adamant. "I cannot refuse." But he could not explain that this was the first real test of loyalty to be exacted from an otherwise hostile subject. If he could command the support and adherence of this man, all others might be safe. He was stubborn.

But Catesby persisted. "Have you forgotten this man is Tudor's stepfather?"

"Not for a moment do I forget. But I will not hold him here." He marked their hesitation. "If it will make you easier, I will hold his son as hostage."

Catesby laughed. "And what makes you think my Lord Stanley would let that deter him, should he decide to throw in his lot with the others?"

"Before God, William, you have become nasty!" he snapped. "Leave me, all of you. And, Denis!" he called to his page. "Find my Lord Stanley and bring him to me." He would begin the test at once.

"I have decided to excuse you from service." He checked Stan-

ley's bow of gratitude. "On one condition. We are pressed for men of experience and you will need to supply a replacement. Your son, Lord Strange, is well acquainted with your work. He shall remain here with us."

"Of course." Stanley did not flicker an eyelash. "I shall be most honored to leave my work in my son's hands. His loyalty is no less than mine to your liege." They were taking the measure of one another. Both knew the other's mind. Behind Stanley's dark beard the shadow of a sneer twisted his full mouth. But Richard's face betrayed nothing. "Have I then your Grace's leave to begin my packing? My son shall wait on your Grace immediately." Richard nodded and dismissed him.

Some hours later, from an upper window high on his rock, he saw Stanley with his escort ride away. He knew in his heart that the man was a traitor, that he was going to his brother and thence to Tudor, leaving his son behind to bear the weight of royal wrath. But he yearned for it to be otherwise. Above his head the banners on the wall bore his motto: *Loyaulté me lie*. Perhaps he would prove to be wrong about Stanley.

Two days later came the word. He knew that Henry Tudor's fleet was readying at Harfleur, but now it seemed he had taken to the high seas and was approaching the shores of England.

"You will send out the call?" Catesby was on the alert.

"Not yet." Richard was strangely calm. Now the time was actually at hand, he hung back from flying into action. On the eve of St. Lawrence's Day he again went hunting in the forest. Someone had brought him some rare falcons from Wales and he wanted to try them out. The sport was good, and as he ambled along the forest aisles he felt almost at peace with his future. Turning back, they approached the edge of the dense oaks when the sound of a hard-pressed horse came to them. Shouts greeted a rider who dashed out of a thicket and drew rein before Richard.

"The enemy is here, my lord! Landed last Sunday at Milford Haven!"

"God be thanked," said Richard. "I shall hear early mass on the morrow."

Somehow Henry Tudor, with about twenty-five hundred men, had managed to elude Richard's fleet as it cruised the southeastern coast

and had slipped around to the tip of southern Wales, putting in at the great bay of Milford Haven down in Pembrokeshire.

"Pembrokeshire." Richard stroked his chin. "That means Jasper Tudor. Well, it's only natural. But what, in the name of ten devils, were Lovell and Scrope doing? It was their job to keep a sharp eye peeled."

From then on, Richard's agents kept him informed of every move made by the invader. Not a letter nor a rider left the Tudor camp but Richard knew about it; if the contents of their messages were not known, it was not too hard to guess them. Henry Tudor would have to rouse up his kinsmen, his mother, and those Lancastrians who had long awaited this day, and his most anxious uncertainties would have to do with the Stanleys.

"Which way will that cat jump?" Ratcliffe asked Richard.

"Aye, which, indeed?" Catesby was cynical. "Don't think he will give his son a second thought."

"No need to speak truth, William," said Richard.

They heard only that Henry was creeping north along the coast of Wales; he was obviously waiting for the Stanleys to make up their minds and for the remainder of his army to gather. He would not plunge eastward into England's heart till he knew himself strong enough to meet the immense host now rallying to Richard's call. His progress through Wales, unmolested as it was, depressed Richard, who could only conjecture that those Welshmen he had believed loyal to him had betrayed him.

"Rhys ap Thomas and the rest! I would have staked my kingdom on them." Then word came that Tudor had been graciously received at Shrewsbury, and Richard's control snapped. He jumped up and struck the table a blow with his fist. "Treason! They shall all die as traitors!" His voice rose. "And where is Northumberland? Will he too betray me? I sent to him these three days gone and yet there is no sign."

Then he controlled himself and, heartsick, went into the chapel to pray. It was August 15th, the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, and he tried to calm his fluttering nerves with the plainsong and poetry of the sacred rite. His lords fidgeted, anxious to start south, but he would not leave till the long mass was over.

As he at last took horse for Leicester, his scouts reported that Tudor and his confederate Oxford were approaching Lichfield. When they arrived, only seventeen miles would separate the two armies.

“And the Stanley White Heart? Is it joined to Tudor’s banners?” asked Richard.

“There is but a slender retinue of the scarlet coats riding with the Lords Stanley,” was the reply.

“Ah!” Richard smiled. “Then they straddle the fence. How Tudor must be sweating!”

All roads, it seemed, convened on the midlands and the banners were breaking out on the summer breeze. Above the Lord Admiral’s troops rippled the Silver Lion of Norfolk; and Richard’s force followed the leopards and lilies and the King’s own White Boar standard. Forging in from the West came the enemy under the Red Dragon of Cadwallader, the Welsh blazon adopted by Tudor, and rippling against it, Oxford’s Streaming Star. The highways were choked with marching yeomen slogging along after the long cavalry lines. Men hurried to Richard’s call, some from loyalty, some lured by promise of adventure, some because they hated the very name of Lancaster and would give their last drop of blood to keep the sun of York shining over England. But still there were many who stayed at home, refusing to become involved in this last convulsive struggle of York and Lancaster. The Duke of Suffolk, Richard’s own brother-in-law and the father of his heir, remained on his estates; and John Paston, the dear friend of Richard’s Admiral Norfolk, also hung back. It was not that these men wanted Richard dead; but they had had enough of marching, fighting, and slaughter. And it began to look as if Northumberland also might be numbered among those who elected to remain neutral in the King’s great encounter with his enemy.

But late in the evening of the 20th, Northumberland rode in with his own men and the levies of the East Riding. Richard did not rush out to meet his tardy ally. “I know he looks to see me vanquished,” he told Lovell and Percy. “I should not be surprised but that he has Tudor’s pardon in his pocket at this moment.”

Coolly in command of himself, Northumberland doffed his helm and bowed the knee to Richard. “I know I am late, my liege,” he apologized, “but the blame lies with my men who were tardy in assembling. And now they are so exhausted that I fear they will serve you indifferently. Would it not be wise to assign us to the rear guard?”

“We’ll see.” Richard would not commit himself.

But that night he conferred with his captains and it was decided that the King’s army should move forward on the morrow and that

the Earl of Northumberland should hold his men in readiness at the rear till they were needed.

Sunday morning broke warm and sunny. The royal host began to clank its way out of Leicester in the direction of Kirkby Mallory. Behind a screen of cavalry the men-at-arms and archers marched and then, between Northumberland and Norfolk, came the King. He rode White Surrey, his favorite, and in his full armor he soon began to feel the warm sun. Above the light crown of gold that encircled his helm floated the banners of St. George and England, and his heralds and squires were gorgeous in their tabards on which glistened the satin lilies, the leopards, and the White Boar. Till high noon they marched, then stopped at Market Bosworth, just north of Ambien Hill.

Galloping scouts brought the news that Henry was moving down from Atherstone and Richard frowned. "Now, by the rood, do you think they intend to slide past us and make for London?"

He had dismounted and was sitting on a grassy bank, eating a cold leg of goose. Hastily with the bone he sketched a diagram in the dirt between his steel-shod feet. "If they take this road here," he drew a line representing the southeast highway, "we shall miss them entirely."

"Then there is but one thing to do," Norfolk was decisive, "we must block their way, and if we get on now, we can make Sutton Cheney. Then we can separate into three wings to guard their approach from any angle."

Commands pulled the army back onto the road. And as they approached the little hamlet of Sutton Cheney, they could glimpse Sir William Stanley's encampment in the distance. "You'll watch them," Richard instructed Northumberland.

On Redmore Plain flanking the road where Tudor must pass if he advanced, Norfolk stationed his vanguard. And Richard took his host to Harper's Hill just at the edge of the Plain. Thus, in three detachments, his army guarded the road in a strong, if divided, wall while a mile or so off, Henry Tudor paused, supported on either side by the two Stanleys who still had not assumed a warlike stance.

And so they waited.

About four in the afternoon the declining sun glanced off the metal tips of Tudor's lances as slowly they advanced down the Roman Road. But before they could come near enough to be picked out in detail, they wheeled aside to make camp for the night. Twinkling

lights pierced the dusk and an uneasy quiet fell on the countryside. Men shed as much of their battle gear as they could and, with their field rations, crouched by the fires. It was a mild summer night and as one by one the fires sank and went out, the men did but murmur and turn in their sleep on the hard ground, and here and there a young unhardened beginner drew his cloak about him against the dew-dampened air.

Softly among his tents Richard walked, and over across the road, above the swamp at the foot of Ambien Hill, the will-o-the-wisps began to flash about. So had Henry the Fifth walked on the night before Agincourt. At his camp's edge he stood straining into the distance at the lights of Stanley and Tudor. Tomorrow would decide the issue, whether he would be allowed to live and go on with his work or whether the land would be dominated by another European-bred tyrant who would give his mind and whatever talents he possessed to the intriguing of England with her political enemies abroad. From what he knew of Henry Tudor, this would be his position. And York would be done for—finished forever. Rule by fear would return to England, with all the friends of the Plantagenets hunted down to the last man to be butchered by the conqueror.

"Sire"—it was Catesby at his shoulder—"the captains await your Grace."

Sighing heavily, Richard followed his Squire back to his pavilion. Etched against the silk by the candlelight he could make out the sharp silhouettes of his officers. He wiped the dew from his breastplate, pushed aside the tent flap and entered.

At his entrance all rose, but he waved them back. "Sit," he ordered briefly. He stood at the small table, leaning his hands upon it while he surveyed them. "What is our plan?"

"Do we send to Stanley?" Catesby asked.

"A waste of time." Richard was short. "If he meant to come over to us, he would have accomplished it ere now. He's close enough, God knows. Double the guard on Lord Strange; his head shall fall on the morrow."

A sigh of satisfaction ran through the assemblage, for this was no time to be squeamish with traitors. Innocent as well as guilty must lose their lives.

"Now, this is what I purpose." Richard's voice was low and steady. "Across the road there is Ambien Hill which I shall occupy. It's no use my staying on this side the road. Either of the Stanleys could

come up and drive between you and us, Norfolk, and then where should we be?"

The others murmured assent. If Richard took his troops across the roadway around the swamp and up onto the rise of Ambien Hill, he could command the approach of all three of the rebel hosts and be in a position of advantage to boot. Northumberland had not even bothered to come down to the meeting of the captains, and there was grave doubt in all minds that he would be of any real use on the morrow. Still sitting at the eastward end of the road, he was supposedly watching William Stanley's camp about half a mile away.

A few more details on the rough map that lay before them on the table. Steel-shod fingers traced lines where Norfolk would take his mass of men onto Bosworth Field by the Roman Road at dawn to cover Richard's ascent of the Hill. There was nothing more to do, except the hardest thing of all—to wait and build up that reserve of strength that would be needed at the crisis.

Richard flung himself down on a light camp bed and forced shut his eyes. He fell into an uneasy doze, his sleep disturbed by the phantom figures of his dream. The quiet deepened, the air chilled, and then the first faint pink streaks of a summer dawn brought the gray of morning. The sleeping soldiers were awakened and there was a smell of porridge in the air as the army cooks stirred the gruel in their great iron pots. About Richard, now on his feet, the officers assembled; all were there, the old loyal faces of Percy and Lovell, Ratcliffe and Catesby, Brackenbury, Kendall, Assheton—all but Norfolk who was at the foot of the hill and the straggler Northumberland who could be seen moving sluggishly about among his men in the rear.

"Kendall!" Richard looked up from the bowl held by a squire, from which he was spooning lukewarm porridge. "Send a message to Stanley. I'll give him one last chance. Tell him his son's life hangs upon a word."

"My lord," a low voice called him and he wheeled to see another of his squires regarding him with a troubled face.

"What ails you, Gilbert?"

"My lord," the man faltered, "there are no chaplains to pray with the men."

"I intended none. If this our quarrel with the Tudor is God's, we need not supplicate; if our cause be not God's, then we are already beyond hope." He swung onto White Surrey and held out his hand.

“Come, man, my helm.” Gilbert de Burgh handed it up to him with its yellow circlet of royalty.

“My lord,” protested Catesby, “ought you to advertise yourself so to the enemy?”

“I will live and die, if need be, the King of England.” Within the beveled ring of his gorget his face showed greenish-pale, but there was no quiver of his lip nor any flinching. He was beginning to have painful doubts of Catesby, whose own face wore the stiff look of fear. This was not the battle-eye sign of painful preoccupation. It was a look of abject fright. Richard felt heavy as he turned Surrey. “Come, let us get on. It grows lighter by the minute.” And he moved away down the hill.

There at the foot awaited Norfolk and Surrey, his son. Staunchly beneath their banners they stood, drawn up in a thinnish line of steel, ready to receive the first shock of attack. Northumberland now cantered up to join them.

“The rebels move!” he cried.

“Which ones?”

“The Tudor.”

“No sign of Stanley?”

But just then a scarlet-coated rider came posting down the Roman Road to give a message into the hand of one of Norfolk’s officers, then went scurrying back. The message was brought, but Richard had closed his helm and could not read. “Tell me.”

“To the usurper Richard—I have other sons, and at this moment, I am not of a mind to join you. Stanley.’”

The blood rushed to Richard’s head. “By the pigs! Gilbert! Bring me Strange’s head! We shall see what this unnatural father will say to this!” Then, as the man turned to do his bidding, he called, “No! Stay!” The faces of his silent officers told him nothing. But whereas last night they had sighed their satisfaction over the reprisal against Stanley, now they kept whatever feelings they had, hidden. “No. He shall abide the issue. Keep him in chains till the battle is over.” He was aware of a silent figure behind him, sitting his horse. It was Northumberland awaiting orders. He wheeled. “What is your suggestion, my lord?”

Northumberland hesitated. “I propose to remain at Sutton Cheney behind the hill. In that way I can fall on Stanley should he press forward against you, or I can reinforce you from the rear.”

“Aye,” grunted Richard. “From the rear. So be it.”

He did not wait to see the Earl spur away, but wheeled his own mount to the foot of Ambien Hill. Up the grassy rise they went, Richard leading about two hundred horse and foot shepherded by his Household. Ratcliffe, Harrington, Assheton, Humphrey and Thomas Stafford—all pressed after him in bright array of steel and silk. Lovell and Percy came abreast of him, and right behind White Surrey the only commoner—John Kendall, his faithful secretary.

At the top they drew rein and looked down toward the western foot of the hill. There, staunch and ready, was Norfolk's line, thin but unwavering. So had the English awaited the French at Agincourt. Richard's blood beat in his ears and in his wrists.

"By God!" he swore. "I can think of those I would rather meet in the field!"

But some of Henry Tudor's force was English, some Welsh, those fierce fighters, and his French troops looked stiff and capable. Now the Red Dragon force was getting near, and with a yell they broke into a charge. Oxford's Streaming Star banners mingled with Norfolk's Silver Lion as together the lines swayed and struggled, a mass of axes, swords, and spears. Oxford pressed hard at the center. Norfolk bent backward into a crescent.

"Assheton! Take the reserves!" Richard snapped the command over his steel shoulder, and with a cry Assheton's detachment plunged down to Norfolk's aid. In a tangle of tongues the cries rang out. But the lines parted and drew back from one another to gain breath.

"My lord! My lord!" A yeoman dashed up to Richard.

"Well?"

"Look you, my lord!" Richard opened his helm, his eyes following the extended arm, and there on a rise opposite, not a quarter mile off, was a tall massive figure astride a gray horse, and as the breeze puffed, a silk banner as large as a sail bellied out to show the rampant dragon with uplifted scarlet claws. As they watched, a rider spurred up, flung off his horse and sank to his knees. No doubt of it. The motionless figure under the silk was Henry Tudor.

A peculiar tingling shot through Richard. At last! This was his archenemy, but he was separated from him by the long scarlet line of William Stanley. If they rushed Tudor in a surprise attack, they might well pull off the victory. Only William Stanley stood in the way. They would have to chance it. If they waited till Oxford had time to recover, they would then be facing the brunt of all four of the rebel commanders.

"Come on!" Richard shouted. He touched White Surrey's sides. But even as he started down the hill, a fearful cry arose. "What is that?" A cold chill took him. The cry came from his own lines at the foot of Ambien Hill. . .

"My lord! Norfolk is slain!"

Richard reined in. For a moment his slim figure buckled under the blow and he sat with his head bent. Then he raised it. "Form for charge!" he called.

But Catesby, his face pallid with fright, called to him. "We cannot force the victory now! Would not flight be better? One battle more or less cannot matter, and when we are stronger—" Richard's look of blazing scorn cut him short.

"You dying duck! Go and tell Northumberland to come forward at once. And stay back there yourself if you are afeared." Catesby galloped off. The others closed around Richard. He rose in his stirrups. "We ride to seek Henry Tudor!" Then with a snap he closed his visor and held out his steel-shod hand. Gilbert de Burgh handed up his battle-ax. "*A moi!*" His battle call echoed hollowly in his helm as he moved forward.

White Surrey picked his way downhill, then at a touch broke into a gallop. Faster and faster Richard urged him, his ax resting on one hip, his armor clanking as he flew past Stanley's lines, seen through his visor slit as one continual flash of red. He was now at the rim of Bosworth Field.

But Henry's lines were advancing toward him and he felt the surge of angry excitement as he spurred forward. With a fearful ring of metal the two armies clashed into a tangle of squealing horses and snarling men. Richard saw in the distance the top of Henry's helm, but there were too many steel bodies filling the gap between the two leaders. Henry was not in combat but remained on the rise. A huge horseman loomed up before Richard, who caught one glimpse of Cheyney's arms before feeling the jarring blow on his helm. His head singing, he swung his ax at the enormous front and dealt Cheyney a blow over the heart. With a choked cry, the man fell. Richard pushed forward over the prostrate body, madly seeking Tudor. He was nowhere to be seen. Could he have fled? He saw through his visor the blazon of Ratcliffe and then his friend was down, and on top of him Kendall. Panting, gasping, Richard swung his ax. One for Ratcliffe and one for Kendall. He carved a circle that none dared enter.

And then he saw the Tudor. Just behind his standard-bearer Brandon he waited.

"Have at thee!" Richard swung his terrible ax again and Brandon rolled bleeding and dead onto the ground. With a savage blow he hacked the standard down. Now only a few men kept him from the Tudor and he pressed forward again. Leaning over his saddle he swung his ax till his shoulder burned, and cut his way through Tudor's men.

"My lord! My lord! On guard!" Someone grasped his bridle and as his mount swung around, he saw Stanley's scarlet host in full gallop toward him.

"Stand firm!" he called and tried to go back. But his own men were hurled against him, their lines thinned, crumpled, beaten down. He felt Surrey stagger beneath him and then as the horse went down, he himself rolled to the ground. Floundering and neighing with terror, the animal tried to get up, but he was hamstrung. "Help me up!" he called to Brackenbury who was bleeding in a dozen places. Gasping, the Constable hauled him up and collapsed at his feet.

The scarlet line closed in. They were all about him. He beat them back and tried to reach Tudor. His breath now came sobbingly in his throat. Oh, Father of mercies, let him get at the invader!

"Foul usurper!" It was Stanley's shout.

"Treason! Treason!" Richard was beside himself now. Back and front they were beating at him. In his circle he was alone. "Treason!"

Then a blazing golden shower burst inside his head and the dark closed in. He did not know when he fell.

With howls they fell onto the inert body, gashing, stabbing, ripping at the bloody tabard, driving their daggers through the scrolled motto, tearing at the white roses, now crimson dappled. Someone pulled off the helm, revealing the dead face, and drew a dagger across the throat. He tossed aside the sallet and the slender golden circlet rolled under a bramblebush, and William Stanley himself stooped, recovered it, and ran toward the still figure on the gray charger. "Long live King Henry the Seventh!"

Henry wheeled his mount and from his height looked down at the scarlet-clad knight. He had lived through some mixed emotions in the last few minutes. He had seen Cheyney, his giant champion, felled by Richard's ax; he had seen Brandon slain at his very feet. Almost the terrible glittering blade had reached him and he had had to force himself not to run. Now he had won and they were offering him the crown.

Slowly, then, he leaned down, took it, and even more slowly raised it to his helm. As it clicked down into place, the ringing shout went up. "Cadwallader! *Vive le roi!* Long live the King!"

He turned northward and then at the head of a quickly forming column, began to move away from Bosworth Field with its dead and dying. Without a backward look, he rode past the spot where Richard lay, a heap of bloody satin and steel. Oxford's battered forces straggled into some sort of order and joined onto Henry's column. As they passed the foot of Ambien Hill, a man came and knelt to Henry who turned his face in the raised helm to look at him. The kneeling man was Northumberland, Richard's renegade commander. Henry's light-colored face with the sandy whiskers flushed a little.

In his gauntleted hand Northumberland held a paper. It was the pardon that Tudor had sent him before the battle. Curtly Tudor nodded his head. "Protective custody," he ordered, and passed down the Roman Road. As Northumberland turned into the column the men of the North, Richard's own, averted their faces. He had disgraced himself and them forever. The whole body moved off toward Leicester.

William Stanley and his brother Thomas lingered near Richard's body. It was as if Tudor had washed his hands of all of them, leaving them behind to clear up the battle mess. "You! Herald!" Thomas Stanley summoned Gilbert de Burgh who loitered near, Richard's bloody tabard trailing from his hand. "You! You have a horse?"

The man raised his head. He was weeping, his cheeks furrowed with dirt and tears. "I have a horse," he choked.

"Take the usurper and put him up."

For a moment the herald hesitated. Then, hopelessly, he crossed over to Richard. The body was naked, thin, brown-skinned, laced with rivulets of blood. A yeoman, wearing the scarlet of Stanley, stooped with him but de Burgh waved him aside. He slipped his hands beneath Richard's armpits and knees and heaved him across the horse that started as the dead weight was flung across its back. The herald laid the bloody tabard over the body and then mounted, turned the horse and rode at the bridge over the Soar. Still blinded by his tears, he went too close to the parapet; the lolling head battered against the stones. The stiff satin tabard, stiffer now with the blood, slid off the corpse and caught on the rough edge of the low abutment. There it hung, fluttering a little as the last soldiers rode across the bridge.

Epilogue

SUNRISE streaked the summer sky as the two figures of a man and a boy climbed a small hillock overlooking the broad road that led to Bruges. They had been walking most of the night and now they stopped to rest before descending the road into the town. The man, silver-haired, somewhat stooped in the shoulders, bore upon his back a skin bag containing a lute, and this he hitched into a more comfortable position as he drew long breaths of the crisp morning air into his lungs and turned tired, deep-set eyes on the lad at his side.

The boy, soon to be a youth, had his clear gray eyes fixed on the distant town as though it beckoned him into a new world, a world utterly different from the great and terrible one he had left behind. Then he squatted at the man's feet and, wrapping his arms about his knees, waited till his companion should be ready to move on. The first of the morning carts came crawling down the road and the driver, a rotund Flamand, waved a friendly arm to the travelers as he creaked by. The boy raised a tentative hand to acknowledge the greeting but the man with the lute remained still, retreated into the world of his own thoughts.

All about them the flat Flemish landscape was starting to shimmer as the growing light caught the dew on the fields, and the first sleepy twitter of larks, nesting in tiny thickets, broke the pastoral silence. The pink glow in the eastern sky deepened to rose, then suddenly, with a flame of gold, the day broke. The glittering curve of the sun appeared and the town, a mass of spires and points, came alive. At the same moment, the bell from the great tower, its voice muted by distance, rang out.

The man on the hillock stirred, raised his drooping shoulders and gave another hitch to his lute. Then he held out his hand to the boy and together they descended the hillock and struck out upon the road.

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