The Road To Redemore 1450-1485

1 The Setting

Barely four miles from where I live in Leicestershire lie a hamlet and a village linked by a short, narrow, winding lane, which, at one point, accompanies the canal where strollers pause to feed the expectant mallards. Though both settlements are built on high ground, the village is slightly higher than the hamlet and between them there is a natural bowl in the landscape. The village church of Saint Margaret of Antioch is the dominant feature and it was from its belltower that villagers witnessed the most famous battle of mediaeval England. The village is Stoke Golding and the hamlet Dadlington. I have good friends in the latter, and from the end of their garden they can point vaguely to an area where King Richard III was savagely deprived of his life and crown.

On a windless day, were it not for the occasional barge dawdling along the canal, the scene might be a still photograph. Apart from the odd warning hoot from a car approaching a narrow hump-back bridge near the village, there is silence. The mad three hour slaughter of August 22nd 1485 and the nineteenth century digging of the canal were probably the only major disturbances of that idyll in two millennia, since Roman legions marched, beating drums, along nearby Fenn Lane, a track of their own construction, joining Ratae (Leicester) to their Watling Street which, under King Alfred, would become the border between Saxon and Viking England. The Romans might have been on their way to confront and defeat Boudicca at Mancetter, a candidate for that ancient battle site, just over the border in present day Warwickshire.

This is, as the county signs of Leicestershire proudly announce, the heart of rural England. Leicester was one of the most easily accessible cities of England and Richard III was a frequent visitor. When Henry Tudor turned south-east from North Wales, having gathered support from his natural constituency, to follow Watling Street from Shrewsbury; and when Richard left Nottingham Castle in a hurry to intercept the hated pretender before he could make more progress towards the prize of London, the probability of a clash in the vicinity of the central route of that ancient road became a certainty. What had seemed inconceivable in 1483 (the year of Richard's coup) - a challenge from the doomed Lancastrian contingent - would become, in late summer 1485, inevitable.

Having often stood gazing in my dear friends John and Carolyn Patullos' long garden at that scene, from my mind-copy I must strip away the hedgerows, fill in the canal and demolish the many houses until only a few simple dwellings remain around the church; the drained farmland in the hollow has to be restored to fenland (hence: Fenn Lane). And there will have to be dense woods again on the meadow slopes.

Now I can begin…bizarrely perhaps, with my Uncle Nicholas.

2 The Challenge

My uncle was a loveable eccentric. He had a large, round, shiny head, somewhat like a marbled ball on a gate post, shiny as if, in my childish imagination, it was sticky like a toffee apple - to which passing fluff must have become attached. That dome contained a brain of ferocious intelligence. As a child, wondering where all the hair had gone, I had been troubled by him as he behaved very differently from my other relatives, tending to glower at nothing visible and to mutter sometimes under his breath. My mother told me it was nothing to worry about - that he did not bother about the impression he made and that he was wont to argue with himself.

His wife, my aunt and my mother's sister died of cancer when I was an infant. For me, she was a shy lady on a photograph; for him she was the whole world. He never remarried and, without other expensive hobbies, he steadily and unconsciously accumulated a small fortune from his salary as the Head of History in a well-regarded private school in south Leicestershire, erstwhile mansion of an impoverished baronet.

His passion for old books and manuscripts was not a great drain on his resources. He loved to attend specialist auctions and house clearances of the superior sort, and developed an expert eye for a bargain as well as the skills of a polite but tenacious haggler. He also spent hours browsing the dark and dusty shelves of somnolent bookshops. As his strength began to fade, through arthritis, the internet became a godsend, providing him with a wealth of websites to browse for rare and elusive titles.

Not many things - certainly not the narrow party politics of Britain - caused him to be annoyed in the world beyond his beautiful Edwardian villa, in which garden he cultivated the most glorious roses, lupins and delphiniums, but he could be brought to boiling point by what he called *the credulity and self-deception of those Ricardian twerps,* by which he meant the the adherents of The Richard III Society. Although a latecomer to the internet, he took full advantage of email to carry on a vituperative exchange of views with a Ricardian - ironically a man called Richard from Market Bosworth. In retaliation, Uncle Nick might have formed a Henry Tudor Society, but his scepticism of royal virtue and fitness - which extended even as far as the present Incumbent - precluded that.

"Were they any different to the Mafia?" he asked quietly one Christmas as the dinner plates were being cleared away by my mother in haste for the Queen's Speech. Quietly, because he knew she hated politics.

"Now, your *Catholic* has the relief of confession; your *kings* though had their Divine Right - to carry on as wicked as they pleased - because God blessed the enterprise."

I had drunk a couple of glasses of wine and felt the temptation to get him going which could not be suppressed in spite of a dark shake of the head from my disappearing mother. I let drop the name of a TV historian whom I already knew he disliked.

"Him!" he muttered. "As naïve a fool as the Ricardians. They pompously warn us against applying "modern" moral judgments to historical figures, but where Henry VII is concerned, in having a go at him, they do precisely that - and don't even realise it - while exonerating Richard on grounds of expediency. Fools. One day people like them will be excusing Adolf Hitler as just a product of his time - shaped by the context of prevailing circumstances, bla, bla, bla - the Zeitgeist - what deterministic twaddle."

Now I overstepped the mark.

"Well….to a great extent I suppose he was. Tout comprendre est tout pardonner?"

"Don't be so *bloody* pretentious - and stupid! What is there left to be understood about Hitler? How could any decent human being pardon him? He had a conscience like Richard the Third but chose to ignore it. Richard was steeped in religion and piety - Hitler wasn't - but both chose atrocity. Was 1945 better or worse than 1485? *Plus ça change*? You're not the only French speaker here."

To my later shame and my mother's censure, I decided to needle him further (but at least I didn't ask him if he wanted to watch the Queen's Speech).

"But surely monarchs had some kind of entitlement by precedent. They were originally tribal chieftains - the most powerful and able members of the tribe."

My mother was shouting irritably something about *cream or custard?* from the kitchen, but was soon eclipsed by my uncle.
“Whatever happened to those radical views your poor father drilled into you?” he demanded. “Most kings were fools, villains or both. Heaven help us! How will we ever have a meritocracy, if people of your intelligence aren’t committed to it?”
“But if the descendants of the rulers are weak fools - “
“Precisely! Like Henry VI who gave away all his father’s French possessions -”
“Then what should happen to the power and wealth inherited by the weak offspring of the meritocrats? Should there be a mass asset-strip and redistribution every generation? Who will sanction it - the beneficiaries?”
At this, he sighed, shook his great head and stared at his wine glass.
“Point taken.” he replied gloomily. “I suppose the oligarchs are the new royalty. Finance, banking, energy, sport. We are probably as far again as ever from a fair society. Yes, I suppose you’ve got a point, but how depressing. Rivalry rules every species - strength wins and the weak go to the wall. But answer me this one - if a fool and his money are soon parted, how do they get together in the first place?”
I shrugged my shoulders.
“By inheritance, of course. And we all inherit more than money - stupid ideas we never question.”
His eyes, magnified by his spectacles, sparkled and he clinked my glass. Softened, I told him I was winding him up a little and he frowned. I said I was sorry for upsetting him but he waved the apology away. It depressed him, he murmured, to recall an event which he considered an anachronistic absurdity.
“You were only seven or eight. The flag-waving women at the quayside whipped into a frenzy of patriotism by the Sun - sending their men off to die for a pointless cause in a place few had even heard of. It sickened me. Before that, I thought the Great War was the last mediaeval battle.”
“The last *mediaeval* battle?”
“Yes. Men sacrificing themselves for the king, the nation and other nebulous concepts. Vera Brittain mentions a speech she heard at Uppingham where the headmaster of her young man’s school said *If a man cannot be useful to his country, he is better dead.* Essentially no different to Richard’s exhortations in 1485. What hypocritical rot! But men enlisted by the hundreds of thousands, victims of tradition buffed up by the same kind of propaganda. They were probably keener than Richard’s peasants! Two years later, Vera’s young man was dead in a foul trench, like a million others. So much for heroism.”
Was he getting his own back now? I examined his eyes for a mischievous twinkle, sign of a wind-up, but saw none.
“Surely you acknowledge their heroism, Uncle Nick!”
“Heroism or just bravery? There is a difference. As they stood in the blood and mud and squalor did they really think their suffering and sacrifice worthwhile? For a noble cause? The bloody king they’d never met? For Lloyd George? For a bloody flag? For freedom? Did they understand why they were there? Can there be heroism in blind ignorance? Or was it the bereaved back home calling it heroism - to allay their grief…and their guilt? And what about the conscientious objectors and internationalists who stuck to their principles and were persecuted? Were they not brave?”
“*CREAM OR CUSTARD?!!”*
“Not bothered!”

“Shall I tell you what I really think?” I asked.
“Go on.”
“They must have been very many men who sacrificed themselves in comradeship, to rescue a comrade…….wounded in a shell hole or in the barbed wire of No-Man‘s- Land. *They* were heroes.”
“Of course, in that sense, you’re right. But the irony is, if they hadn’t been herded out there in the first place, there would have been no need for heroism.”
“But you doubted that the peasants wanted to fight for King Richard. Would you have been a conscientious objector in 1914? A turncoat, a stay-away or runaway in 1485?”
“How can I tell? I am of man of here and now and not of then….which brings us neatly back full circle to the great problem of historical moral judgement….”
“There’s the cream - here’s custard..” said my mum, returning with pudding. “Come on. Let’s just enjoy the rest of the day now. *Please*…..”

It was the week after Richard III’s crumpled skeleton was unearthed in Leicester that Uncle Nicholas died suddenly and instantaneously of a unsuspected aneurism. He was a month short of 64. He had no-one to leave his estate to apart from me and my married sister, so that overnight we became quite rich. My mother had been nominated the executor of his will. On the understanding that I would have his house cleared, his belongings sold and the property placed in the hands of a reputable estate agent, I found myself bequeathed a thousand more than Estelle. With its long back garden, wonderful views and position, it would fetch more than a million. I calculated that, with a clever move down-market, I could more or less retire from my futile job as a French teacher, enabling me to pursue my ambition to write. In the box containing his will, was a letter addressed to me.

Well, Ian, if you’re reading this, my time has finally come and I am now truly history! I am sure Estelle will not mind you being slightly richer - she has plenty on her plate with her children, so I want you to get the house cleared and put on the market. Do not undersell it, mind! Get Spencers in to value it - I trust them.
I have had a funny feeling for a while that I will not be long. So I have been selling off my library. The rest is yours to keep or give away as you like - my old school would take a few things and the County Library might be worth a try.
But I have a challenge for you! You know I collect everything I can lay hands on to do with that famous battle, including works in foreign languages. I have one - not even bound - written in French by an unknown author - the title page is half torn, you see. I picked it up in 2012 near Leicester Cathedral in a stuffy bookshop for an unbelievable twenty pounds. The callow youth behind the counter had no idea of its provenance - or what a provenance even was - he was looking after the place for his grandfather. The book, or rather manuscript, was held together with old string. It was a mess - pages upside down- some torn - some missing, as if it had been dropped at some point and scattered. I started to try and sort it out but soon gave up. You need to be able to follow the French, and mine is not up to it. The title is La Bataille de Redemore, which is the name given to the battle at the time. It only became the Battle of Bosworth - quite erroneously - in the seventeenth century. So the manuscript must be quite an early account. Chroniclers, as historians were called back then, had no eye-witnesses of the battle to rely on and the earliest reports emerged in the decade after it took place. I recall you saying once that

you wanted ideally to be a novelist. Well, here is your chance. Nobody knows for certain how or even where the battle took shape, so you would not offend too many historians. After all, Shakespeare pleased himself. He casually missed out twelve years between one scene and the next!

Take care,

Your Uncle Nicholas

P.S. Remember what they say about fools and money!

The solicitor in Market Bosworth handed me the house key and I drove out to Upton, a village not far from the battle site. I soon found myself standing in his library, staring at three walls of bookshelves surrounding his desk, interrupted by a long Georgian window through which the serene South Leicestershire meadows stretched away to a hazy horizon. I had last stood there twelve or so years earlier as a young teenager when Uncle had been very poorly with bronchitis, just after my father's road accident.

The shelves were, to my great relief, considerably depleted and I soon spotted what I was meant to find, enveloped in discoloured and stained vellum, fastened with an ugly red plastic strap which he had adapted from some other function. I placed the manuscript on the desk and untwisted the ends of the strap. The pile of pages, quite yellow as if tea-stained, was about two inches thick, and handwritten in a tiny script with many crossings out; I had the feeling that it was an early draft of what was meant to become an accomplished piece of work. I knew I was facing a formidable task and almost gave up before I began. Were there not, I told myself, innumerable learned tomes about the Wars of the Roses culminating in the Battle of Bosworth? Yes, I heard my uncle reply, but this might be an early source completely unknown and more trustworthy and compelling than any of the later ones. I was, I admit, intrigued by that argument. There was a magnifying glass on the desk and I began to peruse the mediaeval French text. Having read Rabelais at university, I found it quite straightforward. But, as Uncle had said, at some point someone had spilled the lot on the floor. To put it all in the right order would take days.

In fact it took many weeks, causing eye strain and migraines. Before I reached the end, I knew I had an invaluable document and I quickly developed a great affinity for the unknown author. I set about translating it and, using my imagination and delving into other sources, the project grew far beyond the confines of a disputed battlefield, to chart the lives of two men destined to meet two years after one of them stole the crown of England from his own nephew's head when the other stole it from his.

Please understand that I must be allowed the freedom to speculate on what may have been said or felt or thought by these historical characters in logical response to the events and established facts set out below. This is part novel, part history. Shakespeare's Richard III was not a verbatim or accurate account of that time. How could it be? There are more gaps than facts, so many inconsistencies, so many irresolvable puzzles.

You alone can judge whether the words I have chosen to embroider that roll of history are able to recreate vanished sentiments, and whether I am guilty of exaggeration or insipidity. I also decided to use the familiar second person pronouns *thou* and *thee* where appropriate.

There is, however, another problem. At which point on the road to - or from Redemore should I

begin? And I must comment on the public debate and the argument between the descendants of Richard III and the University of Leicester as to the king's proper final resting place, the former advocating Yorkminster. As a Lestrian, I naturally oppose this. I have considered writing to the quality press to point out that Richard was not Richard of York, but of Gloucester - and that many Yorkshire men of quality and of little or of none had been glaringly absent or uncommitted at Dadlington…….

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Blow me! I had just scrawled that last sentence in my notebook when it was announced on the radio that a court in London has ruled in favour of Leicester. In our cathedral of Saint Martin's - which is, by the way, no grander than a parish church - work is to begin on a tomb to take Dick's twisted bones - oddly minus his feet, which may be missing, not for some dastardly reason, but due to previous ground disturbance through foundation workings in the vicinity. Yet I cannot help thinking that those nice archeologists have been a little too kind to those overhasty diggers of his burial hole, who might have found a very quick way to make him fit better.
So, Richard will reside for ever only a couple of stones' throw from the car park where he was unearthed. I do find it bizarre that he will, like a film run backwards, go on a short royal progress around the battlefield villages, not on a steed, but in a smart coffin in the back of a black limousine, while many descendants of those who stood watching him ride to Redemore wave handkerchiefs and flags as he passes. Will some even shed a tear? Will fights break out between Ricardians and Tudorians by the roadside? What would he have thought, had those images flashed, by sorcery, into his terrified and despairing mind as he faced his final blow?

I approached the last section of G de B's account with mounting excitement and trepidation. Would I be disappointed? Would I be able to create the terrors and drama of the battle? What would Brother Michael, via his translator, have to say? How much at variance and how much more detailed would his eye-witness account be than that of the Tudor historian Polydor Vergil, writing twenty years later, upon which, I assumed, Ms Philippa Gregory has drawn? (By the way, I assert in all modesty that my project and purpose are wholly different to hers and absolutely refute - as someone has cruelly commented - that her work is Mills and Boon in chain mail.)

Having read Michael's reports several times over, having made copious notes and drawn a detailed map, I felt ready to attempt the biggest challenge of all. I had to imagine and describe a mediaeval battle and cast myself into the centre of the fray! After many failed attempts, I decided to beg a favour of my friends the Patullos. Could I possibly bring my briefcase and my camera and sit at the end of their long garden , one sunny day in August, possibly the 29th, the anniversary by the modern calendar of the battle, which had taken place 529 years before?
They had no objection. John even offered to do one of his special bbqs and bring down a good bottle of wine from the house, but, politely I refused, explaining why I wished to be on my own.

That explains why I am sitting here now, on August 29th , as the scarcely older sun describes the same ecliptic, as if no time has passed, debating in which tense I should recount the battle, while I survey that tranquil scene of former turmoil and slaughter which stretches out below me. There are a few flimsy clouds drifting over the fields casting fleeting shadows, and a green barge is

moving at a snail's pace below Stoke Golding towards the right. There are no cries of anguish or terror to inspire me, only the occasional rattle of a magpie. I follow the canal with my eye, and all at once realise what a wonderful clue it is! It marks the contour of the lowest ground where water would have collected by gravity into a bog. The oblivious bargeman is just - is he? - passing the very spot where a king of England died. I put down my notebook and pen and squeeze through the hedge. The incline is surprisingly steep. I have a spot in focus and I kick through dock, nettles and thistles, wondering whether the metal detectorists have missed anything, and walk on through the ghosts of the victors and the vanquished. As I follow with my eye a meander in the canal I find myself suddenly treading through mud and I know I am close.

3 : A Quest

Dadlington is a tiny hamlet of about ten houses. There is a smithy, a priest, a miller, a farmer and some labourers' cottages. It can be reached by an ancient Roman track which runs from Leicester in the north to Fenny Drayton, a village near Mancetter on Watling Street. Dadlington is a place of no significance, save for those who live and work there, and its tiny fame does not carry for many miles in any direction. No person of quality ever visited before 1485.

The name of the village first came to me from the lips of a Norman soldier, Gaston, a mercenary, who struggled home to Caen, my native town, in October 1487, two years and two months after a battle which he had missed, having tumbled drunk into a ditch before dawn of that very morning. As a chronicler, I had long harboured the wish to travel to England to find material about the long war between the Houses of York and Lancaster. After a quarter of a century of rivalry, cruelty and revenge, Redemore had been the last battle. The good fortune of meeting a man who had - almost - fought there, sharpened my curiosity. He told me of a long and arduous march, frought with perils, from a cove in southern Wales of a small band comprising English exiles, Scottish soldiers and French brigands whose leader hoped to recruit Welshmen to his cause - a man few had ever seen, some never heard of - to take on the full might of an English army. The allegiances of the powerful were undecided and Henry Tudor's motley force might have been attacked and destroyed at any time as it made its way north. It was a miracle it was not.

Gaston described Henry as a man of piety and modesty, even to the point of shyness. The reputation of Richard Plantagenet was wholly different: the blatant usurper, tyrant and infanticide. But Gaston was influenced by the talk of his fellow soldiers and captains. Could I accept that this was a battle between an Angel and a Demon? I could not. Yet if I travelled to London, would I hear anywhere a dispassionate account? Surely, as a Frenchman, I would provoke only the hostility of Englishmen wholly loyal to their Tudor king, if I dared to question the truth of their assertions. It was then that I made up my mind, being still sturdy and fit enough to undertake the journey, that it would be wisest to travel up to the county of Leicester to find local men who might be persuaded to give a true account of the battle and of events leading to it. I have, as a foreigner, no reason to prefer one side or the other. I shall be wary of believing those whose witness is not confirmed by others, and I swear to be a true narrator. So help me God, I shall.

My sea-crossing was calm and my journey from the south not as difficult as I feared. The Roman road north, Watling Street, is mostly passable in the summer. In London I purchased, after a little haggling, a decent horse at a fair price. Much to my relief, the cut-throats and cut-purses I was told to fear by my friends (who thought me mad) were busy elsewhere. The June weather was mainly kind and I found lodging in inns and farms. My horse threw a shoe just after Northampton but, seeing a church spire, I could lead him into the nearby village to the smithy,

guided by the hammering of its sweaty-browed incumbent.
My drunken man in Normandy had amazingly recalled the name of the abbey near the small town of Atherstone where Henry's army had camped on the eve of the battle. The abbey was called Merevale. I prayed that I would be received with hospitality and be provided with good counsel and information. In no respect was I disappointed. I arrived there very weary as the great red sun was setting, and was admitted with warmth to a plate of cheese, bread and good wine. The abbot, Brother Geoffrey, was a jovial man who joined with me, to my surprise, in wine, not a tankard of ale as I had expected.
"Our Saviour did not despise wine, and therefore I have a good example to follow," said he, refilling his goblet with a wry smile. "We gather God's gifts of blackberries and elderberries in the autumn and make our wine from them."
He helped me to some more and I soon felt a delicious warmth spread into my back and behind, sore from hours of trotting. I began to tell him of my great intention and his old eyes grew wide.
"But tomorrow you must speak with Brother Michael! He too is a chronicler, who not only witnessed the battle from a high vantage point but who has also charted the lives of of the two adversaries up to that dreadful day."
All eagerness, I sat forward. What an extraordinary piece of fortune!
"Did he stand on one of the hills?"
"No! He stood on the tower of Saint Margaret's church in Stoke Manford*. He saw the king slain on the Redemore ground."
In spite of my tiredness and the wine, I could barely fall asleep that night, so excited was I at the prospect of meeting this Cistercian monk described to me as man of wisdom, kindness and patience.
He received me in his cell after matins, fetching a stool so that I could join him at his table. The rising sun was beaming in a golden shaft of blessing light through the narrow window. To my surprise, Michael was a young man of about twenty-five, about ten years my junior. He was of slight build with a fine, wide forehead, shiny black hair and a full beard. Within a few minutes of conversation - a mixture of English and French - it became clear that he loathed Richard the Third, calling him Richard of Gloucester, the imposter king.
"A man of no scruples, hated by the people."
Had I been in a London tavern, I would not have dared question this. I was taken aback by the vehemence of his declaration, expecting more respect for Richard in a more northerly county which he had often favoured with his presence.
"But men fought and died for him, Brother Michael. He must have been loved by many. Can he have been wholly bad? A good chronicler must keep his mind clear of
other mens' jealousy which may be ill-founded - or determined by irrational dislike."
I saw immediately that I had, by innocently impugning his judgment, offended him . His dark eyebrows drew his ruddy brow into a frown, and he shook his head.
"Men cheered on the church tower to see him cut down. We watched his forces melt away - even before the battle - like the frost of an autumn morning. I shall prove to you that he was an evil man. If you wish to find men who will testify in his favour,
then you must journey further north. But bear in mind - the men of York either know not or care not about his southern misdeeds - he was the son of the Duke of York and that sways them in his

** The original name of Stoke Golding. The change of name suggests a crowning. The village road sign declares proudly* ***The Birthplace of the Tudor Dynasty****.*

favour. Bear in mind also that many northern men of quality, like Northumberland, who had been summoned to fight, and many commoners who had been mustered, either failed to come in time to Redemore or, having come, either stood still or crept away into the woods to lie low."
I countered by asking if he knew enough of Henry Tudor to swear that he was any better than Richard.
"Are not all such men - great men - required to be ruthless in order to defend their gains?"
At this attempt to propitiate him, Michael allowed a smile to creep back onto his face, not in pity of my lack of perceptiveness as I feared, but of generosity. I decided then to raise a matter which caused me particular anguish, my own great-grandfather having been a victim of English ruthlessness.
"All the English, commons and nobles, have a reputation in my native land for loving war and slaughter .We have endured so many invasions and the laying waste of our towns and fields in the last century - and this one."
"One might counter by mentioning 1066 and its aftermath. Not one Anglo-Saxon nobleman survived the hunting-down; scarcely one town was spared fire. But I am a man of peace - as most are. The peasants and yeomen hereabouts certainly yearn for
peace but must endure the constant fear of being compelled to bear arms for the great potentates whose lands they farm. Besides the taxes on their hard work and harvest - gruelling enough - they must face with terror that ultimate impost which warfaring exacts because their betters, despising them, cannot be content with their vast riches - unimaginable to those peasants whose land they have taken. Do they tire of their idleness so much that they can only occupy themselves with squabbles and threats of
retribution on their equally troublesome rivals?"
These uncommon and daring thoughts encouraged me to express my own.
"Indeed. And then there are those who will risk all for the greatest prize - the crown of the realm."
"Yes! Then the potentates themselves must endure the terrors of allying themselves with the wrong contender - and thence the threat to life, liberty and the dreaded attainder of lands, title and wealth. God knows, it is a precarious enough life as it is, with the ever-present dangers of witchcraft, famine, tempest and pestilence. Must men add to these by their greed, ambition and violence?"
We saw with pleasure that we were of one mind and I felt encouraged to add -
"For an eternity men are not; and only for a brief interlude in that vastness of endless time do they feel the warmth and light of the sun. And how do they enjoy it?"
Michael whispered a prayer, said Amen, and looked at me steadily in a thoughtful silence. We were friends. I wondered how he had begun his chronicle and was about to ask when he began to speak again.
"You must bear in mind that there was a halt to war in the land when Richard seized the crown from its rightful inheritor, Edward, his own nephew. And, for a while, men were thankful for an end to attrition. But it was soon whispered that the young prince and his brother, taken to the tower, were not sequestered there for their safety. But men could scarce believe that a sovereign of England would be so cruel and unnatural as to raise his hand against his own kin, even if they were illegitimate, even if it were shown to be an expedient for bringing an end to so many years of turmoil. But would not such an absence of conflict and rivalry be only a dissembler of peace - and a poor one at that? It was true that the Lancastrians were in disarray and put to flight.

Richard sat secure on his throne. Yet men were soon speaking ill of him. Words of malice would translate easily into deeds."
"But what of Henry Tudor?" said I, returning to my earlier theme. "Did no rumours of malfeasance circulate about him?"
"I was about to tell you. Now I will prove to you, as has been proven to me, that he was virtuous and honourable He had a reputation for a love of money, but in December of 1485, King Henry made good the damage to our crops by paying our abbot one hundred marks. Is that the way of a greedy and unscrupulous man? But there is so much more to be told. After the battle, one of his priests, a man called Clement, who had long been in exile with him in Brittany, was brought here with an arrowhead buried in his shoulder. At first we thought we could save him. The arrow was cut out and the wound sealed with a hot poker. But within a month, a raging putrid infection took hold, to which, in spite of prayers and poultices, he finally succumbed."
He reached out and patted a pile of parchment on the corner of his table.
"But before he sickened and grew worse he dictated to me his story. You may read and copy of it as much as you wish. The man was a pious, true believer who would not endanger his immortal soul by dissembling. He knew his time was short. Could there be a greater spur to tell the truth?"
At last, telling me he had gardening duties to perform, Michael left me alone with his precious pile.

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My stay here at Merevale has lasted well into July, but I cannot leave, having been struck down with the sweating sickness which sweeps the villages hereabouts and takes many of us off. I am so hot I cannot bear to wear clothes and in case I shall not survive, I dedicate my chronicle to my poor, late friend, Brother Michael, and trust that the abbot will take care of it.

G de B, xxii Iulius mdlxxxvii

4: Conception 1456
Edmund Tudor took hold of his bride's tiny shaking hand and did his best to calm her. He was an ambitious but not a cruel man.
"It will not take long, I promise, child. And I will be very gentle. Now divest yourself and lie back. You need to point you toes at the corners. As far apart as you can. Good girl. There now - look to your pillow, not me."
He bent over her and, dismissing with a nod the blushing maidservant who had brought in a piece of cloth, slid it underneath Margaret's back. Gazing with a mixture of pity and curiosity at her childish body and her small breasts which she now covered with her trembling hands in shame, he undid his buckle. He could not even be sure that she was capable of conception. He looked at her tight, hairless lips.
"It would be easier, Margaret, if you made yourself a little more ready to…..take me in."
She could not help but glance up at him, and, with a whimper of horror, she reached down with both hands. She was not yet thirteen; Edmund was a sturdy, lusty man of twenty-six who meant to get his heir as soon as he could, for he knew that the birth of a child - even if it died and took the mother with it - would entitle him to Margaret Beaufort's lands worth nearly a thousand pounds per annum. He could not know, of course, as he knelt on the end of the bed and then pushed into his bride, planted his seed almost immediately and withdrew before she could even

cry out, that his decision not to bide his time and deflower his wife at the traditional age of fourteen, would found the Tudor dynasty. Seven months afterwards, his wife heavily pregnant, Edmund Tudor died of the plague in Carmarthen Castle where he had been held prisoner as an indirect result of of the rivalry between Henry VI, of Lancastrian descent, and Richard, Duke of York; a rivalry which his unborn son would bring to an end at Redemore nearly thirty years later. The child-widow was understandably terrified, contemplating a birth which her small frame would surely not survive, in a cold month, in a cold place without a protector. On St Anne's day on 28th January 1457 in Pembroke Castle, after hours of agonised labour, Margaret gave birth to Henry Tudor. She was so physically damaged that she never had another child.
As her final screams died away and Henry began to cry, many miles away in Yorkshire, in the Wensleydale castle of Middleham, his third cousin, the five year old Richard Plantagenet was sleeping soundly.

3: Removal
Edmund Tudor had a brother called Jasper. Their father, Owen, was the descendant of a Welsh prince who had secretly married Catherine de Valois, the young widow of Henry V. Having been acknowledged as the half-brothers of the Lancastrian King Henry VI, Jasper and Edmund had become very close to his cause.
As law and order threatened to break down in South Wales in the winter of 1457 Jasper made haste to rescue his sister-in-law and her son from Pembroke Castle, a stone's throw from the cove where, elver-like, Henry Tudor would return with dread purpose twenty-eight years later. Drenched from the foul storm raging outside, he hurried up the spiral staircase to her bedchamber, finding her huddled by the fire which shrank back, as she did, from the sudden blast of air from the doorway. Margaret looked up in terror but then in relief as Jasper knelt down beside her to give her reassurance and comfort.
"Dearest sister. Tomorrow we must try to reach Newport. I have negotiated with our cousin the Duke of Buckingham who is willing to take us in - provided you agree to his one condition."
He looked at her pale, drawn face and pitied her, as she cradled her tiny sleeping infant. His open, honest expression told her that the condition would be an unpleasant one.
"What must I do, brother?"
"The Duke is a powerful man and no-one - certainly not the Duke of York - and not even the king- would willingly court his displeasure."
"What must I do?"
"His second son, Henry, is a fine, courteous man - "
"How old is he?"
Jasper looked down at the floor. Margaret wept.
The hundred mile journey to Newport was an arduous one, with Margaret and her son having no more protection from the wind and snow than the leather tilt of a cart. Jasper rode in front with six of his henchmen behind.
In January of the following year, Margaret, then fourteen was married to her second cousin, the thirty-year-old Henry Stafford after the Bishop of Lichfield granted a special dispensation in view of their consanguinity. To Margaret's relief, her husband proved to be a gentle and considerate man and their marriage was a happy one, lasting from 1458 until 1471 when Henry died of wounds inflicted at the Battle of Barnet.

But I need to go back briefly to 1450 to explain how the civil war began.

5: Seeds of Conflict: 1450

Richard, Duke of York, and King Henry VI were distant cousins. Richard was the great-nephew of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, third son of Edward III. Henry VI was John of Gaunt's great-grandson.

This tenuous family tie was put under increasing strain by Richard's resentment of Henry's preferment of others, by Henry's weak judgment and particularly his pitiful surrender of hard-won territory in France under the influence of his hated wife, Margaret of Anjou. His incompetence and mental abberations led to popular unrest which Richard, a seasoned warrior, was only to keen to exploit for his own royal ambitions, whetted by Henry's failure to produce an heir; Londoners convinced themselves that pious and naïve Henry had been persuaded to neglect his wife's bed by his priests and manipulative, greedy counsellors. Waste, extravagance and corruption caused further exasperation. Faction, rebellion and civil war would be the inevitable result. Skirmishes grew more bloody and frequent until, in the fateful year 1461 three battles took place, culminating in the defeat of the Lancastrians at Towton near York where nearly thirty thousand men died in snow and mud.

The consequences of 1461 for the nine-year-old Richard Plantagenet and the four-year-old Henry Tudor were life-changing. Richard's father and his eldest brother had been killed at the battle of Wakefield. He had witnessed the verbal and sexual abuse of his mother at the hands of Lancastrian soldiers. These shocking events sowed seeds of hatred which would flourish in the man. Having spent a few months in exile with his elder brother George, Duke of Clarence in Flanders, he returned after the Yorkist victory at Towton to be placed under the protection of his cousin, the Earl of Warwick, twenty years his senior, at Middleham.in Yorkshire. There he was schooled in the arts of the battlefield.

As for little Henry Tudor, the defeat of the Lancastrians led to his capture with his child-mother. The Duke of Buckingham, their protector, had been killed in battle. Jasper was forced to flee after Towton and after last desperate attempts to secure a stronghold in Wales he had no choice but to follow Henry VI and wife Margaret of Anjou into exile in Scotland. This disaster left his sister-in-law and nephew entirely at the mercy of the Yorkists.

Henry Tudor had to undergo the agony of separation from his mother. She managed to give him a handkerchief embroidered with MB as she was ushered away distraught from her wailing child. For a thousand pounds, Henry was sold into the wardship of the ambitious and grasping Lord Herbert who intended him and his inheritance for his daughter. Materially, if not emotionally, this ensured that he was well looked after. His education, in contrast to Richard Plantagenet's, was not dominated by skills in combat. Henry's tutors marvelled at his quickness of understanding and love of literature and theology. In only one aspect of warfare - archery - was he to become proficient. As he grew older he took out the handkerchief to wipe his tears ever less, and, when he realised he was having to force them, hardly at all.

As the fortunes of the Yorkists and Lancastrians ebbed and flowed, the growing boys became more and more conscious of the turmoil around them, yet understood little of its causes. Henry, especially, was disturbed by news of the slaughter of thousands of commons and the cutting off of many heads of quality. When he was twelve he witnessed the Battle of Edgecote, near Banbury, alongside his keeper Lord Herbert. . Richard, now seventeen, watched fascinated from a nearby hill, frustrated at being held in reserve. Did they see each other that day?

Herbert was captured and beheaded the next morning. A shocked Henry had been escorted from

the field to the safety of Weobley in Herefordshire where a relative of Herbert, took him in.
In the civil war, Henry had lost his father and grandfather; Richard his father and brother, Edmund. Their young lives and minds were shaped by that murderous context. Henry confided in his Breton priest Clement - the man who had died at Merevale - that he had been haunted by a recurring nightmare of being led to the block. While Richard, despite his twisting spine - or because of it - grew into a determined and skilful wielder of a sword and battle-axe, Henry remained a sensitive, even frail child. There was no reason to harden him into the ways of soldiery; in fact the very opposite. Wth Henry a child in body and his deposed step-uncle Henry VI a child in mind, the Lancastrian position seemed hopeless. Henry Tudor was deemed merely a remote survivor of a lost cause.
Or it would have been lost but for the determination of his Uncle Jasper and his step-sister-in-law Margaret of Anjou who continued to hatch plots and seek support beyond the Channel for them. In this they were aided by the immaturity and impetuosity of the usurper Edward IV. He would manage to offend the new French king Louis XI by striking up alliances with his rivals the Dukes of Burgundy and Brittany.
Furthermore, Edward's impetuosity in matters of the heart and his unquenchable lust sowed dissension at court, for he had succumbed to the charms of the beautiful young widow of the fallen knight Sir John Grey, Elizabeth Woodville, and married her in secret. Her family were of minor status and many courtiers were appalled at the match and the rise to favour of her grasping kinsmen; and one courtier in particular took especial exception, the Earl of Warwick, Kingmaker, who had made Edward IV. His jealousy and resentment would ultimately threaten to cause Edward's unmaking……

6 The Young King

In 1464 Edward was growing comfortable - too comfortable - on his throne of three years. Warwick was not content just to be, saving the king, the most powerful man in all England. He wished to add even more prestige and more wealth to his dynasty by marrying his daughters Isabel and Anne to the king's brothers, George and Richard. To that end, he secretly invited them to Cambridge where he planted those seeds in their impressionable minds. George was fifteen, Richard only twelve.
When Edward was informed by a Woodville of Warwick's overtures, he flew into a rage and summoned the boys to his presence.
Richard was precocious and, after years of hardening in the skills of combat, grown bold and outspoken. He could not bear the sight of his elder brother of twenty-two - whom he had met less than ten times - lording it over him and showing off in front of the low-born courtiers and easy women he loathed. He knew the signs of drunkenness and here they were in abundance. His dark eyes beamed hatred when the sycophants around him began to smile and titter to hear the king's slurred remonstrances.
"Thou art not to listen to the Lord Warwick. We and we alone will determine whose hand thou shalt take in marriage!…….Richard?…. Do we see confusion - or is it defiance in thy countenance? Understand that we will not have thee take a commoner to thy bed, except as thy mistress…..as soon as thou hast learnt what to do to her!"
At this jest, the Court roared with laughter, and George could not help but smile, especially on glancing at Richard's earnest face. Seeing this, Edward hurled his goblet of wine at George, ruining his ermine doublet, of which he was justly proud.
"Damn thee for smiling, George. Thou art my successor - unless I beget me one. Thou art older

than Richard and shouldst know better. Here is no cause for merriment."
"But I could not help laughing, Edward."
"Sir! Could not help laughing *Sir*, damn thine eyes."
He staggered forward from his dais, almost falling. Richard could contain himself no longer.
"We are, as thou - as you remind us…*Edward*. …noble Plantagenets, and you not should treat us with such scorn in front of these men and women of low birth…..It is said that you are not
even not even our proper "
He managed to swallow the word *brother*, but all present gasped. It was the great unspoken secret. A simple counting back from April, the month of his birth, to July suggested that Edward Plantagenet might have been conceived before his father's return from Pontoise to Rouen - where his wife Cecily Neville was in residence - and not afterwards. It was possible that Edward had been prematurely born but his marked lack of resemblance to his father meant that the suspicion persisted.
In the terrible silence which Richard's outburst had caused, Edward's handsome face turned pale and ugly. He launched himself at Richard, boxing his ears and bloodying his nose. But he refused to cry out in pain or weep.
"I hate thee!" he shouted and ran from the throne room. The king lurched off in pursuit but soon stopped and, with a forced belly-laugh, went back to grab George by the back of his glossy crop.
"That boy has spirit for a half-cripple. More than thou, hey, my pretty boy! Go, follow him and wipe his nose clean. And go to our tailor for a new jacket. Get out. Go! Summon the minstrels somebody…and *thou*, fetch in more wine…and *thou*, why hast thou not yet cleaned up this damned mess?"

George found Richard in his bedchamber, weeping in anger, making blood stream onto his shirt.
"Thy intemperate heart will be the death of thee, Richard. Thou must learn to hide thy feelings as I do."
"I hate him and those flattering bawds and bastards. And he is a bastard, in temper and in birth. I disown him."
"Hush."
"I could cry out to see our mother kneel at his wife's ignoble feet. And dost thou wish to marry that Frenchwoman as Edward wishes?"
"No - and shall not! But I must proceed with guile and caution. I may yet be king if the Woodville woman fails to produce a child and he carries on with his gluttony and whoring."
Richard looked long at the brother he loved, yet saw for the first time what a selfish young man he was. He began to weep again.
"Oh, England! You have endured one weak king- and now a glutton, a lecher sits on his throne."
"But I should be better!"
George offered his brother his handkerchief but Richard waved him away in disgust.

King Edward's time was so taken up with his pleasures that he neglected to notice that his key ally Warwick, who had made him, was growing estranged. He began to take advantage of George's ambitious fancies to flatter him into believing that he might yet be king with his support. Warwick grew ever more disenchanted with Edward and his Court of greedy Woodvilles, a nest of upstart cuckoos. Edward's ineptness in his dealings with France reminded Warwick too much of Henry VI whom he had helped depose and consign to the Tower. In the country too, mumurings of discontent were growing louder - and Warwick decided to exploit it.

I come forward to the year 1469. The infant Henry Tudor, deprived of his mother at the age of four, had learnt, by the age of twelve, to do without her. She, however, awoke thinking of him and went to sleep with him in her prayers. Their meetings had been infrequent and brief.
Edward had been on the throne eight years and was facing a rebellion in the north. George, Duke of Clarence and Warwick had gone in secret to France where George married his daughter Isabel. When they returned they joined the rebels at the aforementioned Battle of Edgecote. The death of Henry's warder/keeper William Herbert meant that mother and son could be reunited at last. Margaret, a good head shorter than her son, hugged him tearfully while he wept too, but principally out of guilt.
"At last, thou shalt be restored to thy rightful position and entitlement," said she touching his pale, worried face, a tired, old head on a child's shoulders. "And we shall live together. We are perceived as no threat to King Edward who fears Clarence more. The Lancastrian cause is dead. I am sick of the bloody war!"

She needed not have despaired, for two years later, incredibly, King Edward IV sat in impoverished exile in Flanders. The bewildered Henry VI, rescued from the Tower by the scheming Warwick, was sitting again on the throne. His step-nephew, Henry, was in due course admitted to his presence, but his dementia precluded all recognition of him.
Margaret of Anjou was due to return from exile in France to be reunited with her husband, bringing with her her son, Prince Edward and his new bride Ann, Warwick's other daughter. Warwick thought he had thereby ensured his descendants' greatness by attachment to the dynasty he had restored.
The dim Clarence soon realised he had been used. His claim, as Edward's eldest brother, had been thrust aside. It was inevitable that he would be marginalised at a Lancastrian Court, and it was not long before he was listening to overtures from his brother abroad who was preparing the ground for a fight-back to power. With him was Richard Plantagenet, now a single-minded, self-disciplined man of nineteen who grew daily more impatient to wreak vengeance on his erstwhile mentor, the turncoat Warwick. Richard excused George's defection on the grounds of his weakness and vanity, an easy prey for Warwick's flattery and empty rhetoric. Richard was much closer to George in age and affection than to Edward but had learnt to be more cautious in his dealings with him. He would wait until his drinking bouts produced a surge of morbid self-pity and sentimentality before whispering into his ear "Spare George, brother, the weight of your righteous judgement when you are restored. Do not be so angry with him. Warwick is the true villain. I pledge to take off his head myself when we return if you promise to spare George. Look how Warwick deceived…..even you. How much easier was it to deceive poor George?"

Although, in 1470, Henry VI sat again on the throne, Warwick was king in all but name. He was a wily, intelligent and experienced man but even he was out of his depth in the morass of French and Burgundian politics. This would ultimately prove fatal to him.
Louis XI of France had funded Warwick's expedition to topple Edward from the throne on the understanding that the restored Henry would form an alliance with him against the hated Duke of Burgundy. The duke had duly snubbed the exiled Edward IV in the hope that Henry, through Warwick, would support him instead. Warwick was devious but he could not please both men. He had promised Louis a contingent of the king's renowned English archers but he dithered. To force his hand, Louis declared war on Burgundy. The fact that Margaret of Anjou had stupidly

delayed her return from exile in France with her son Prince Edward, meant that they were virtually hostages of Louis. Warwick had no choice but to follow Louis' lead and declare war on Burgundy as well.
Incensed, Duke Charles summoned Edward IV, his brother-in-law, from Bruges.
"I am sorry, Lord Edward, that I have not welcomed you to my court until now, but my realm was in danger from that puppet the English call Henry the Sixth and his evil master the Lord Warwick."
Edward and his brother Richard had at first knelt in feigned respect for the man before them who was renowned for his intelligence and quick temper. To hear him speak so insultingly of men they knew he had wished to humour caused them to raise their heads in amazement. Edward sprang to his feet and stretched out his hand to the Duke, who, after a pause, decided to take it. Charles hated the untrustworthy and inconstant English and his broad, handsome face betrayed no emotion. He could only wonder at the huge difference in height, build and looks of these two men deemed brothers. Richard, his right shoulder little higher than the left because of the twist in his spine, leant on his sword.
"You should know" said Charles in soft, measured tones "that - entirely without cause - that ugly man Louis of the huge snout has declared war on us, and that the puppet Henry VI, like a child of no mind of his own, has declared war on us also."
He watched how Edward took in this news. Little escaped his piercing eyes. A solemn response would be insincere. The honest Edward could not contain his excitement.
"Assist our return, Your Grace, and I pledge to unseat my usurper and wage war on France, our natural enemy."
"You swear by your honour?"
"I so swear."
Charles knew that Warwick could not join Louis in war if Edward was marching on London. A gift of eight thousand pounds to recruit men and hire ships was a small price for Charles to pay to buy time and respite; in his clever gambit, he thought little of Edward or his chances of success.

But fear of failure was outstripped by his ambition and self-belief. Landing at Ravenspur with a mere two thousand soldiers, he marched into York and thence south, winning over ever more men to his standard. Warwick went north to intercept Edward before his strength could increase, but was outmanoeuvred. George, Duke of Clarence, deserted Warwick and joined forces with his brothers near Banbury. Richard was delighted to see his favourite brother forgiven and embraced. George, likewise, was pleased to see how well and loyally Richard now loved Edward, the brother he had once loathed.
"I am ashamed, Richard," said he as Edward rode off to address his united troops. "I have been much mistaken and deceived in Warwick. He is an evil man, a deceiver and a sorcerer…..I am pleased that a year together has drawn thee and Edward so close - as brothers should be."
Richard searched his blank, stupid face for a hint of irony and insincerity but, finding none, told him how he had learnt to love their brother in Bruges.
"Besides, George," he confided "he was ever mine and thy best hope for our various causes. We are both ambitious. Once Warwick, Henry and his bastard son are gone……."
"Indeed, indeed. Now I see clearly.."
Richard allowed himself a faint smile and tightened the grip of his gauntlet on the reins. He assured George that he would be rewarded richly for his return to the Yorkist fold.

“I pled thy cause often with our brother and finally persuaded him. Come, we are about to march to London. What a joy it will be to taste good roast beef again!”
Richard had learnt from George’s good advice - and bad example - that it was wise to keep one’s true intentions and opinions to oneself.
On April 11th 1471, having given Warwick the slip, Edward marched in triumph into London unopposed and was reunited with his wife Elizabeth, brought out of sanctuary with his new son and heir, while Richard and Clarence looked on, trying to outdo each other in smiles.

“Sire…….I am come to tell you that your old room at the Tower has been made ready for you.”
Henry VI stared in utter incomprehension at the servant who, pronouncing *Sire* with exaggerated respect, had not even bothered to bow before him. The man turned and nodded to the two guards who had entered the royal bedchamber with him.
“Is Margaret not yet come then?” whispered Henry.
Indeed she had not. She had not yet set sail for Weymouth and had not heard of Edward’s return to power.
“No, your Grace, not yet,” replied the servant, suddenly feeling pity for this broken man of fifty. “Come, the barge awaits you.”
The guards stepped forward and lifted their old king from his chair to walk him out of the Palace of Westminster to his place of incarceration - and imminent death.

Two days later, refreshed and restored to power, having taken no trouble to visit his deposed rival, Edward rode out of London, determined to take revenge on Warwick for a lost year in exile due to his treachery. Besides, this would be his chance to snuff out any further challenge to the Yorkist supremacy. On 13th April, 1471, at Barnet, Warwick’s luck ran out. After a fierce battle in dense fog, Warwick’s forces, hearing cries of “Treason!” lost heart and fled. Richard was denied the pleasure of removing Warwick’s head when he was surrounded by Yorkist soldiers and hacked to death in a wood while trying to escape.
Margaret of Anjou, finally landed at Weymouth, soon heard of Warwick’s demise, but nothing daunted, she rode northwards to try and meet up with a large army of Welshmen mustered by Jasper Tudor. The rendez-vous never took place and at Tewkesbury the larger Lancastrian army was routed by Edward and Richard’s superior tactics. In the aftermath, many Lancastrian knights were either hacked down or, having been taken prisoner, beheaded the following day. Amongst the fallen was Prince Edward, only son of Henry VI. Surely this was the end of the Lancastrian branch of the Plantagenet dynasty which had ruled England since 1154.

Margaret of Anjou’s capture and imprisonment seemed to seal that fate. On 21st May, Edward returned to London in triumph to the acclaim of the populace. As the king and his knights feasted and caroused at Westminster, a sober Richard Plantagenet, ordered five of his entourage to follow him. They boarded a waiting barge and, in silence and rain, travelled the three miles downriver to the Tower. He banged at the door of the White Tower and demanded that it be unlocked in the name of the Duke of Gloucester. The door creaked open.
“You four - remain here to prevent anyone leaving and anyone following. I have heard of a plot to kill Henry. Hastings - follow me.”
He instructed the guard to lead the way up the spiral staircase. Lord Hastings, full of wine and meat, tried to keep up, gasping out questions about the plot his friend had discovered. Richard ordered the guard to stop and, seizing the candelabra from him, held it aloft.

“Behind yonder door there flickers a withered candle,” he whispered. “A candle with a near-spent flame, which it would most prudent now - and a great kindness - to extinguish.”
He blew one of the candles out and thrust the holder back into the hand of the terrified guard. He bade him open the door but to his amazement the guard refused.
“I have orders to admit nobody except by royal warrant,” he stammered.
“I am the king’s brother. Open the door or give me the key. There are murderers within. I will take full responsibility. Damn it man, do as I say!”
The guard put the trembling key into the lock and turned it. Richard pushed the man away, kicked the door open to find the old king in a white nightgown sitting staring at the spitting, roaring logs in the grate. Richard laid his hand on the fast sobering Hastings’ shoulder and told him to swear to tell no-one of what he was about to witness.
“You shall say that we came here to thwart those who were to murder him, but found him died in his sleep. If the truth gets abroad, it could only be bruited by you, for I never talk in my sleep.”
“But he is not dead in his sleep.”
“Do you SWEAR?”
“I swear on my life. If I ever betray you, you may take off my head. But how -?”
“Watch. There can be no wounds upon him. It will be a moment of pain and then nothing. A kindness. Edward will then have no rival to fear and there will be a blessed peace. One old Englishman‘s life for a thousand others.”
So saying, he tipped the chair backwards, drew his sword, raised the nightshirt and thrust the blade expertly through the rectum up to the hilt. Henry’s eyes goggled and he gasped and died as the tip ripped his heart. Richard held the blade in place until he was sure the heart had stopped pumping.
“Fetch me the fat candle,” he ordered. He withdrew the sword and plugged the wound.
“For God’s sake, bring the sheet and wipe his arse clean! Then burn it.”
Hastings did as he was told then retched into Henry’s chamber pot. “Could you not have smothered him with the pillow?”
“A woman’s way. Besides, the Devil might have breathed new life into him. Now the rightful Plantagenets are safe. Help me put him back into his chair then summon the guard.”
The man came and was given the pot. He found Richard crouching at the feet of Henry, head in hands.
“Henry was sick. Empty that foul pot, man, and then carry the heavy news to the constable that his most precious resident died as he sat here. At least, by God’s will, he cheated his assailants.”
Hastings could only stare in amazement at a man he thought he knew well.

A few days later, many, many miles away in Pembroke Castle, Jasper Tudor, having fled west after the disaster at Tewkesbury, took his nephew’s bloodless hand and tried to smile.
“Thou hast a grave expression, Uncle,” said Henry, looking up from his book of hours “is there more bad news?”
“Yes, Nephew, there is.”
“My mother!”
“No, no. Our kinsman, thy Uncle Henry and my brother the king - is dead.”
“Sweet Jesus!”
“Never was there a king more pious and gentle - too good for the turmoil and cruelties of this world!”
“And was it a kind death?”

Jasper could have simply nodded and repeated the official proclamation made in Chepstow that morning. But sooner or later Henry would hear the other version of the event which a drunken Kentish soldier had blurted out in a low tavern.
“Thy silence tells me no, Uncle.”
Jasper immediately saw a means of provoking his conciliatory nephew into anger.
“Is it not strange that he died on the very night of Edward’s triumph in London? It is rumoured that one of Edward’s men - even one of his kinsmen - Clarence or most likely the Cripple - took him off.”
A tearful Henry looked heavenward and called on God to mete out justice to his murderers. Jasper was pleased to see his tears were of anger.
“Am I then in terrible danger again, Uncle?”
“No“ he lied. “But the bastard Edward would have my head on a spike. I cannot stay long in one place. He does not deem thee a serious threat.”
Henry was not a child in his head - he had come to understand where he stood in relation to the succession, however weak his claim by second marriage through a foreign queen consort, Catherine de Valois, might be considered.
“Uncle Jasper,” said Henry, biting his nether lip “I am tired of living this restless life. I want to be a normal boy. Let me go to the king and swear loyalty. I wish to enter a monastery. I know documents can be signed as my mother did to settle my wardship. Let me sign one to renounce any claim to the throne!”
When he saw more tears - of self-pity - streaming down Henry’s face, Jasper resisted the temptation to strike him. He seized his shoulders and gently shook him instead.
“Thy mother is a Beaufort descended from John of GAUNT - the third son of our great King, the third Edward. York was only the fourth son! Thou canst not escape thy heritage, even if thou wouldst wish to - nor thy destiny.”
“But the king’s grandfather married a Mortimer, a descendant of the second son!”
“Nonsense! The Lancaster line is God’s true elect. The Yorkists are usurpers. Thousands of men have died for our righteous cause. Cry for them, Henry, not for thyself! If thou *didst* go to London, Edward would likely throw thee in the Tower and throw the key into the moat.”
“So I am a threat. God help me. Why was I born?”
“That thou wert born at all was a miracle. God meant thee to be born and survive. To be king of England. Thou art fourteen, time to leave childhood behind for manhood. I know it has been hard, but there are many with greater hardships to bear. This is life, Henry. A struggle from beginning to end, with heaven or hell to look forward to. Now wipe thy tears and take a breath. Think on avenging Henry - it is God’s will that thou shouldst!”
Henry threw his arms around his uncle and sobbed. He had become his true father.
“I would not wish to stay here in the castle without thee, Uncle. Without one friend.”
He went to the window to let the breeze dry his face. He watched the sea dashing itself onto the beach under the leaden, scudding sky, and felt as unsettled as the scene before him. To throw himself down would end his misery and that constant churning in his stomach. Then he noticed ragged children on the beach out collecting shells and pebbles. Their laughter and cries came to him whenever the whistling wind paused. With heavy weary eyes he followed their halting, scurrying progress. Jasper watched him watching and realised he had vastly underestimated his nephew’s perception of his own situation, his sensitivity and suffering, so taken up had he been with his own plots and perils. He decided then and there that he would have to take him away from Wales and England to a new life, in the hope that some new opportunity to return later in

triumph would arise. After all, Margaret of Anjou could plead their cause to the French king- and he knew that Edward would not be long in waging war against France to regain provinces forfeited by King Henry. Edward was a brave warrior but politically unwise. The tide would surely turn - as it had for Edward the previous year.
“Thou sayest to me that the Prince of Wales was murdered at Tewkesbury?” murmured Henry without taking his eyes from the beach. Jasper nodded.
“So I heard. I have no reason to disbelieve it.”
“Then I am one step closer to the throne. Only the Duke of Exeter has as good a claim as I - on the Lancastrian side.”
Jasper was surprised again at his perceptiveness. Exeter, his close ally, was the grandson of Henry IV’s sister.
“Yes, but thou must see thyself as the king and others see thee Henry. Even if Edward knew thy whereabouts, would he or his brothers take pains to hunt thee down? They are hardened men, but are they cruel enough to kill a child? They have no rivals to fear and Edward will, if he is wise, pardon those who have recently opposed him. He will buy loyalty. The country is sick of war and exhausted. If Edward gives thee a passing thought as he raises his goblet, it is only to laugh at thy claim. Who will be left to raise rebellion in thy name? Me? I have only influence in Wales.”
Henry turned away from the window and fixed his heavy eyes on Jasper.
“So if my cause is so hopeless, why willst thou not allow me to do as I wish and seek sanctuary?”
Jasper’s eyes rolled in their sockets. The boy had trapped him.
“I said thou must see yourself as others see thee, but their perception may be wholly wrong! Edward is erratic. He drinks. He steals other men’s women. He makes enemies easily. He is impetuous and arrogant. With such a man on the throne, our chance - thy chance will surely come.”
“So I must pass my days ever in the hope of profiting by the foolishness of another - and never in the enjoyment of what I truly delight in. Very well. If God wills it, so be it.”

Late that afternoon, one of Jasper’s spies came hammering at the castle door and was quickly admitted.
“Lord Pembroke, Sir Roger Vaughn is arrived in Chepstow sent by the bastard Edward to capture you.”
Jasper was planning to visit his castle at Chepstow the very next day and had sent out orders three days previously for supplies to be taken in. He knew that he had thereby been betrayed. His fear and anger gave way to determination. Here was a chance to trap the very man who had ordered his father Owen’s beheading ten years previously in Hereford.
“You say he is already in Chepstow?”
“Aye, and has taken rooms for the night for himself and his men.”
“How many men?”
“Nine or ten.
“Right. Send down to Gryffyd to saddle up ten of our best. We will give that fucker Vaughn a surprise welcome.”
They entered the town in disguise and separately before the gates closed at twilight. After tying up their horses, they made their way along the narrow deserted lanes until they reached the tavern on the square where Jasper guessed his enemy would be lodged. Flickering candle and fire

light, lute music and raucous laughter told him he had guessed right.
Having swiftly and quietly disposed of two guards, they entered through the kitchens at the back, grabbing platters of fowls and mutton to hold aloft at head height to deceive the drunken guests. As their applause and cheers died away, Jasper's men launched the platters at them, then quickly drew swords to point at their throats. Gaping in shock and amazement, they dared not move.
"Landlord! Fetch rope!" shouted Jasper. "Gather your people together and have them tie their hands."
This done, Jasper approached the trembling Vaughn who had been pointed out to him. His hair was matted with grease and face reddened by the hot juices of the much anticipated mutton.
"Sir Roger. You will spend a pleasant night by the fire tied to this chair. And in the morning, when I have broken my fast, I will remove your ugly fucking head from your shoulders."
A slow spring night passed. Jasper slept soundly in a room above while below, watched by several of his men in turn, Vaughn wept, prayed, lamented and wriggled, sitting in his own waste.
"By heaven!" exclaimed Jasper entering the room shortly after dawn, "has somebody shit himself?"
"Please, Lord Pembroke," cried Vaughn "Spare me and I will join your cause. I can muster a thousand, two thousand men in Brecon."
"Cause? Our cause seems lost, Vaughn, thanks to traitors like you."
"Have mercy, for pity's sake. I have young sons and a sweet daughter who will be heart-broken……oh no….."
Jasper approached him dissembling friendship and pity.
"I will accord as much mercy to you as you did to my poor father. Gryffyd! Will you do the deed? I wish to see his fat face as he anticipates the blow."
He was picked up and carried into the yard where two strokes of a broadsword removed his weeping head.
When Jasper gleefuly told of these events to Henry, he expected him to be pleased.
"Our Saviour tells us to give the other cheek to our enemies, Uncle. But how can we, when they plot our destruction?"
"Thou dost dwell overmuch on these matters, Nephew. We must kill or be killed in these dangerous times - and I know which I prefer."
"Our Redeemer preferred crucifixion."
"Yes, because he came to surrender himself for our sins. Vaughn cried like a baby and bled like a pig. When he put thy grandfather to the block Vaughn laughed. Edmund Tudor knelt down with the courage of a man and took the blow."
"And so shall I." he replied, biting his nether lip.
"Not while there is a breath in my body!"

Hearing reports of Vaughn's death, a furious Edward sent out a small army to besiege Pembroke Castle. Jasper and Henry were only able to escape to Tenby when his ally David ap Thomas launched a surprise attack on the besiegers. But with the king's forces closing on Tenby, Jasper had no option but to put to sea with his nephew, a few friends and servants. Storms thwarted his attempts to land in France and he was driven south to Brittany. It was the summer of 1471. Henry, fourteen, would not see his native land again for twelve years.

7 In Exile

Francis, the Duke of Brittany was, at thirty-eight, a shrewd and skilful politician. In order to prevent his dukedom being swallowed by France, he had to be.
Although his advisors had informed him of Henry's weak claim to the English throne, he immediately saw that it was strong enough to be a rallying point for Lancastrian and other English dissidents and therefore a constant irritant to King Edward in his quest to sit easy on his throne. When the English ambassador informed him tetchily that his master deemed Henry a "nobody," Francis smiled and wondered out loud why, if so, his master so urgently sought his return to England?
A wonderful gift had been blown by that gale into Francis's possession and he meant to take full advantage. Although welcomed by him with warmth and hospitality, Jasper and Henry were, in all but name, his captives and pawns in a complex game of chess.
When King Louis XI heard of the Tudors' arrival in Brittany, he tried to browbeat the Duke into surrendering them to him, citing their original plan to land in France. Louis knew that Edward would sooner or later resume the Plantagenet obsession with reconquering French territory; the Tudors would therefore be a wonderful bargaining counter. Francis, quite aware of how desperate Louis was to get hold of them, was determined to resist all pressure to give them up. To continual overtures from France and England, his reply was always the same. He had given his word to the Tudors which in all honour he could not break. Henry Tudor, hearing of these machinations, realised despondently how truly his Uncle Jasper had spoken when he had told him "You must see yourself as others see you." In fact, he saw no end to a life of being seen as a boy in thrall to the causes of others. He could only seek relief in his prayer book and his host's library. And by holding tight the precious handkerchief marked MB.

Duke Francis realised the Tudors were such a valuable asset that either France or England might launch a mission to capture them. He therefore took a bold decision and summoned Jasper to inform him of it.
"Lord Pembroke. I hear rumours of Edward's intention to have you both seized. You cannot spend your days locked in my palace. I therefore intend to separate you."
"But my Lord! Henry needs me. He is a sensitive boy and would surely go mad if deprived - "
"My Lord, it is only politic to do as I wish. If both were seized, your cause would be over. I have considered Henry's youth and shyness. I intend to place him in the care of Jean de Rieux, marshall of of my Chateau Largoët. It stands deep in a forest. Rieux has two sons about the Lord Richmond's age. He could hunt with them and continue his studies with them under their tutor, an excellent man."
Jasper studied the duke's face, which was open and boyish despite his middle age. Jasper knew he was more concerned for his own welfare than for theirs. Reading his thoughts, Francis allowed himself a smile.
"Believe me, Jasper, this is the best solution for us all."
When the news was broken and explained to him Henry was not as distraught as Jasper had feared, but seemed resigned.
"Uncle," he said, biting his lip "I am like a cork on water. I will bob in whatever direction the current takes me. I know the duke is a good man and will keep his word to us."
It was Jasper's turn to shed tears at his nephew's good sense and moral strength as they hugged while the guards waited impassively to take Henry away.
At Largoët, for the first time in his life, Henry found himself within the embrace of a warm family. While his childhood experience in the Lord Herbert's household had been one of a polite

but rather chilly kindness, here he found a pair of boys, Jean, sixteen, and Louis, at seventeen a year younger than him, who were merry pranksters, let out on a loose rein by a father, rather stout and cheerful, who enjoyed his wine - and indulged by a loud, affectionate mother.
At first, Henry was pained and almost driven to tears when they hid his books and pulled long faces with their bottom teeth thrust out in mimicry of his solemnity, but to his own surprise, he began to laugh, and having laughed once and, finding it pleasurable, soon got into the habit. But one day, Louis, the older boy, played a trick on him that he failed to find amusing.
The younger son had gone riding with his father, leaving Henry and Louis who had cried off riding with cramp, at their studies. Louis made some excuse to absent himself and left Henry puzzling over his Virgil. A cough made him start and look up. Before him at the door, eyeing him nervously, was a young pageboy with a smooth face and large eyes dressed in a cap and smock.
“Have you some message for me, boy?”
“No, Sir. I am sent by Master Louis to be of service.”
“How?”
The boy took of his cap, shook down his long brown hair and pulled his smock over his head to reveal the sturdy naked body of a lovely fourteen year old girl. Henry shot to his feet and knocked over his chair as he recoiled from this angelic vision which evoked shock and desire in equal measure.
“Don’t you like me, Sir? I am Louis’ special friend. I promise you he has had me bathe.”
Henry had never blushed - having hardly enough blood to do it, but now he did. He almost ran to the window and turned his back on the girl.
“Please, child, put your clothes back on. I - I …….God”
He felt a tender hand on his shoulder and shook with shame and desire.
“Please….put on your smock - and let us talk.”
The girl began to whimper. “Louis will be angry with me if we don’t….”
“Then I shall say we did. Let me know when you are dressed. W-what is your name?”
“Jeanne - like our saint……..You can turn now.”
She was sitting at his table, eyeing the lemonade in the jug. He poured her a glass and sat in the other chair.
“You are Louis’… friend?”
“I am but his mother does not know. She would - send me away if she did. Please -”
He gave her a reassuring smile. She was a beautiful child who might pose as a cherub for some grand master.
“I do like you, but I cannot……It would be wrong.”
Jeanne frowned as if she suspected another, quite different reason, and Henry, seeing her doubt, shook his head.
“Please do not think that. I *did* feel tempted. I am a man after all. But you are very young.”
He thought despairingly of his mother.
“You like…..only the older girls?”
He blushed again.
“Yes,” he lied.
Instantly, Jeanne saw the truth and could not stifle a giggle. Henry grabbed the jug of lemonade and filled his glass. He asked her too quickly to tell him something of herself. He knew he ought to have thrown her out but she had beguiled him with her eyes and her smile. And he could smell she had doused herself with something like rosewater and the perfume made his spine tingle and

his ears thrum.
His request for her to tell her story had turned her gaiety into a pensive silence.
“Come, Jeanne, what have I said?”
“I have had a sad life, Sir and you have reminded me of it.”
“Sad at your age?”
She lowered her head and nodded, then looked up at him with those adorable brown eyes.
“Louis says you might one day be King of England.”
He laughed bitterly. “I might. You might be a lady.”
“No. I will always work in the kitchens. I would like to be a lady’s maid……If you are king, what good will you do?”
Henry had never given this much thought, so remote was the possibility.
“What *good*?”
His stupid response made her stare in disappointment and he felt obliged to give a proper answer.
“I would have prayers said at court…..there will be no coarse language or drunkenness….I will not spend frivolously….”
“Yes, but what good for the people?”
While he thought this over, he noticed tears welling in those accusing eyes and she rose to leave. He took her arm and begged her to stay.
“Tell me why you are sad.”
“When I was eight….I became an orphan. Soldiers came as they often did but this time they were specially cruel. Usually, they tossed my father a few livres for a sheep or two but this time they took them all. And when my father protested….he was hacked down. We watched as my mother went out to them and was run down by their horses. My aunt in the village took us in - three of us. My uncle was mustered for battle against the French and never came back. I still remember how he trembled and wept to leave us. Why are there soldiers, Sir?”
The question left him speechless.
“My father was not cruel. My uncle was not cruel. Are there more kind men than cruel men?”
“You ask impossible questions, Jeanne. We are all…..fallen.”
If he thought this piety would enlighten the peasant girl about original sin, he was mistaken. As he drew breath to speak of Eden, she interrupted him.
“All fallen? You live high in this castle. My aunt says you are the high and mighty while we live like swine in the mire. How will you help the English peasants?”
The door creaked open and Louis showed his smirking face and sniffed the air.
“All done?”
Jeanne jumped up, kissed Henry long on the cheek and whispered *I think you will be a good man*, then ran past Louis who smacked her playfully on the bottom.
“Is she not a fine, fiery little thing, Henry? Such sweet little breasts and a lovely juicy quinny! Big as a - ”
“She is indeed a very special girl.”
“So you enjoyed your little surprise?”
“Yes, Louis. A real eye-opener.”
Henry got up and thanking him, kicked him soundly up the arse.

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By 1475, having squeezed enough money from Parliament, Edward was ready to launch his

invasion of France. Louis had no stomach for a ruinous war and, as many Anglo-Saxon and Carolingian kings had done in earlier centuries, faced with warlike Vikings, he decided to buy Edward off. The French and English armies marched into Picquiny near Amiens - not to fight but to feast, whore and drink together. Many English nobles, including Richard, who had come seeking adventure, booty and ransom, were disgusted by Edward's veniality and weakness - and his disloyalty to his brother-in-law Charles, Duke of Burgundy who had joined his campaign, albeit with a paltry contingent of soldiers. Richard returned disillusioned to England before the sordid deal was all done, with only a gift of plate from Louis to placate him.
Edward did much better; he was awarded a rich pension by Louis and ransom for the imprisoned Margaret of Anjou (who would sink, lonely and doubly bereaved of husband and son, into obscurity, dying in 1482, three years before what she had plotted came to be.)
Waving Edward farewell, the wily Louis turned to his entourage with a snigger and boasted that he had bought the English off with wine, women and venison. The greedy ineptitude of their king, in raising ruinous taxes for war, only to return with French crown pieces for himself, disgusted English nobles and commons alike.

When fully sober in the grey light of day dawning over the Channel, Edward realised how unregally and selfishly he had behaved, so resolved to do all he could to justify the expedition and pacify unrest. He began to reverse attainders on his natural enemies and even suggested to Margaret Beaufort, while an impassive Richard looked on, that she should summon her son to return in order to be betrothed to his own daughter Elizabeth, as the means of reuniting the two Plantagenet Houses. Margaret had had to become expert in feigning sentiments she despised; she managed to look delighted and thanked Edward profusely, concealing in her heart her distrust and loathing. Edward was notorious for breaking promises made in a flush of wine-induced generosity, later regretted when sober. One glance at Richard's sharp eyes told her what reception Henry could expect - no-one believed that the old king had died in his sleep, not five minutes after the warder had bid him goodnight and after Richard had forced his way in. And everyone at Court knew that Edward's much vaunted concession from Louis not to invade Brittany was not born of kindness but of a desire to prise Henry from Duke Francis's grasp as reward for the favour.

There was, however, one totally unexpected consequence of Edward's notorious expedition to France. Prior to the invasion, the Duke of Exeter, seeking plunder and glory, had been reconciled to the king. On the way home, still intoxicated, he went to piss over the side, fell overboard and drowned, thus eliminating one Lancastrian who had as strong a claim to the throne as Henry. Like grit in a soft oyster, the strengthening of his claim irritated Edward even though he openly scorned it. Henry, he knew, might still attract inveterate Lancastrians who dissembled at Court and other dissidents to his banner.
One morning, Edward rose from his mistress's bed and found Richard in the ante-chamber.
"Thou hast a weary look, Edward. Does Mistress Shore keep the awake all night?"
"I only wish, Richard, it were so. Thou knowest too well what disturbs my slumbers."
"That is why I am come so early. He keeps me awake too, though most likely with a dream very different to thine. Let me speak plain."
Richard dismissed the attendants and began to pace and lurch.
"I have a plan. Let me steal into Brittany with a few good men. A few crowns would soon loosen tongues as to Tudor's hidey-hole. I would winkle him out and either - bring him back - or - kill

him there and then - OR- no, listen! - cause him to disappear beneath the waves like poor Exeter."
"Oh, if only the doing of the deed could be as easy as its speaking! I would give my French pension now to the doer!"
"I will do it for nothing. The Court bores me!"
"If it could be done without suspicious eyes falling on us, I would agree. But thy back and walk mark thee out too well. And I could not trust the task to anyone else."
"Listen! We would speak French, dress after their fashion and throw the blame thereby on Louis. Francis would be forced in all honour to declare war, Burgundy would follow and we could join in. The murder of an English Earl, though attainted would be cause enough! Rouen and our - thy other provinces could be regained. "
Edward stared at him in wonder and admiration. He felt tears prickle his tired and sore eyes.
"And to think I once imagined thou didst not love me, brother. Thou art such a clever man! If…if…the worst befalls me, I know thou willst outwit and thwart any rival in order…..in order….to protect my Edward until he comes of age….but, no, thy enterprise is too risky. Diplomacy and pressure will force Francis to give him up. Our ambassador reports a wavering in his resolve since we guaranteed his borders."
"And if not, we must ever live with that dim gleam of hope in the Beaufort woman's eyes, and all her dissembling cronies. It is not to be endured!"
He turned and walked towards the door.
"Richard, stay! No man ever sat entirely comfortable on his throne. I really could bear it…. but for my dream that he will one day come and drive us away again. I have even considered sorcery to drive the damned dream out! It is like a tune which plays over and over."
"While I have strength in my sword arm he will never prosper here."
Edward rallied at these words. "Let the bugger come then! Our spies will give us fair warning of an invasion and we shall strengthen every coastal garrison. What could he, a few renegades and a troop of ragged-arsed Welshmen ever do against our army?"
On his way out, Richard met George in a corridor who enquired of his health.
"Thy aspect is so pale and grim, Richard. Hast spoken with the king, our brother? Is he still within?"
"Yes," he snarled. "He cannot tear himself away from that filthy whore Jane Shore to do his duty."

*

Edward's fears did not stop haunting him; even in waking hours when he was making love or merry, the image he retained of fleeing from Lynn, penniless, wearing only his armour, would enter his consciousness like an arrow and stop him dead. He had sworn never again to be reduced to that parlous state. Fearing that Richard might put his daring plan into action if the Tudor question was not resolved, he decided to apply more pressure and persuasion at the Breton court. To that end, he sent his wiliest ambassador, Andrew Langley, to match the wiles of Duke Francis. There were three ploys to use. The first was to arouse in the duke a sense of obligation to Edward for having King Louis respect his independence. The second was the promise that Henry would be welcomed into the royal family as the husband of the king's daughter Elizabeth. The third was more straightforward - gold, based on the promise of rich pickings from taxing the extra goods Edward and Louis had agreed to trade.

Once again, Francis declared that he could not break a pledge but this well-worn argument began to sound, even to his ears, shabby and stale, half-based as it was in hypocrisy. Francis was wearied by the effort of fending off the French and the English, and, seeing the pile of gold increasing on the table, decided it was as good a time as any to cash in. He summoned his treasurer, Landais, and instructed him to ride out with the English to Largoët.
The ambassador was a man suited to and shaped by his profession; ridiculously thin, smooth-tongued, whispering, sweet-smiling and obsequious, he had acquired, without intending it, a bend in his midriff, so accustomed was he to bowing in feigned submission and humility. When the normally cheerful de Rieux, marshall of the castle gravely introduced him into the schoolroom, Henry, roused from poring over his books, was instantly revolted.
“Lord Richmond,” said his protector disconsolately “this…gentleman is sent by your king and by our gracious duke to take you back to England.”
“And I must go?” he demanded in alarm.
Landais, a short, stout man known for his bluffness, stepped forward and, with as little enthusiasm as the marshall, announced flatly that the duke had been convinced of the king’s goodwill towards his “honoured guest.” He intoned those words with some irony which Henry immediately noticed, causing his misgivings to multiply.
“I will not go!” he shouted, causing his two boyish companions to stand shoulder to shoulder with him. Now Langley came forward, flapping his hands, palms down, to give reassurance. He bowed deeply but had no intention of addressing this boy of eighteen by a title of which his king had long ago stripped him.
“Henry Tudor, you must accompany us. His Grace, Duke Francis, has agreed for the fact that his Royal Highness has sworn to afford you, by my good vigilance, safe passage unto his realm.”
“Unto? No further?”
Langley smiled and shook his head in apology. “You *will* be safe. King Edward means to welcome and reward you. He means to draw the poison between your house and his - and impose a good peace.”
“Must I leave, Uncle?” said Henry to the marshall whom he had come to love. De Rieux looked at the floor, glanced imploringly at Landais, and put his hand to his brow. Landais took a breath to compose himself and, without a trace of emotion, announced that what had been decided was his master’s will and edict and could not be opposed.
“Henry,” said de Rieux “you should collect up your things.”
“Indeed,” said Langley “we must leave soon if we are to reach Saint Malo before nightfall. We sail at first tide on the morrow.”
Henry began to collect his precious books together and a servant was summoned.
After a tearful farewell from his dear friends, Henry set forth on horseback in pouring rain, once more on an uncertain road, hemmed in by four English guards, led by Landais with the ambassador in the rear sheltering under the tilt of a cart bearing Henry’s trunk. It was a cold as well as a wet day and soon Henry was shivering and coughing. His chest had never been strong. By supper time they had reached the port but Henry was ill and faint, quite unable to lift his spoon to eat the potage in front of him. A physician declared him feverish and he was carried to bed. Departure would have to be postponed and Langley sent word to the ship’s captain,
As the noise in the lively tavern where they had rooms began to die down, a knock came at Langley’s door as he was about to get into his nightgown.
“What do you want?
“I have an important message. Let me in.”

Langley admitted this person and immediately recognised his pale, bony face as one he had glimpsed on board their ship and assumed to be one of the crew. He opened his satchel and thrust a letter into Langley's hand.

It is our will that Henry Tidder, pretender, traitor and miscreant, should be killed before he reaches our shores.

Langley handed the parchment back and, for once, exercised his own will.
"On whose authority is this issued? It is not signed or sealed and is not lawful. Get yourself gone."
The fleshless man was nothing daunted.
"The author is one of the greatest men in England. To oppose him would be folly."
"One of? The greatest man in England is my lord, King Edward. I would not risk my neck for the designs of a lesser man. Who is he?"
"I cannot tell you, but understand he stands very near to our Sovereign Lord. And will be mighty displeased if he hears - as I shall say - that you have been obstructive. Henry is ill. If we carry him on board tomorrow, he will surely die of his fever as the seas will be rough. If your conscience troubles you, why not let Providence decide. If he dies, all aboard would swear his death was natural and he would be buried at sea."
"And if he survives?"
"With me close by, he would most likely not."
He opened his satchel and took out a phial of clear liquid.
"This is a very special medicine," he added with a wry smile. "You had no idea of its magical ingredients. You were not responsible."
"I will give it some thought. Now let me to bed. I must rise early to see how my prisoner fares."
Langley went to blow out his candle, but before he did he sent orders that the guard outside Henry's door should be doubled

At Largoët, chivvied by his wife, his sons and his own conscience, de Rieux was unable to settle to anything. After an hour or two, he sent a message to his good friend Jean de Quellenec who lived a few miles away. He was an admiral of long standing and of impeccable reputation. He had met Henry Tudor on one of his visits to Largoët and had been impressed by his piety, sobriety and erudition. As soon as he learned of Henry's capture, convinced of some base English trick, he rode at breakneck speed to the ducal place where he found Francis in the garden. The admiral was probably the only man in Brittany who dared tell the duke he was wrong. When Francis confirmed, rather sheepishly, that he had indeed allowed Henry to be taken, and gave his reasons, the admiral's gloomy face said better than any words how ill he took the news. The duke had hoped his trusted advisor would appreciate the pressures of the dilemma in which he had been placed. Seeing only de Quellenec's grave disappointment, the duke began to bluster.
"I thought you, at least, de Quellenec, would understand how heavily this whole affair has taxed my resources. The French and English have been gnawing at me like ferrets! It was not I but the northerly wind which drew the Tudors here."
"Your Grace, let me speak and then I will leave. You are loved by your people for your benevolence and justice. King Edward is, as you well know, a scheming, ruthless man, as is his crippled brother. They have both been deformed by years of brutality. The people will not

understand why you have surrendered the Lord Richmond to these wolves, particularly when they recall the pledge - the honourable pledge - you made to him."
"But I have been assured by the English ambassador that Henry will be safe, will be welcomed back with open arms - even to the extent of being betrothed to his daughter."
"Can you have the document fetched so that I may peruse it?"
"Document?"
"The document which Edward must have signed under his seal, promising all this."
The duke blushed and turned away in shame. De Quellenec spotted a dandelion seed head in the grass and carefully picked it. With one breath, he blew the seeds into the air and watched until every filament had been carried away on the breeze.
"Who can now prove the dandelion was there, Your Grace? Of such stuff too are spoken words." Curtly the duke dismissed him.
An hour later, his treasurer Landais and an armed escort were riding hard to St Malo with orders to prevent the English ship from sailing. They carried saddlebags full of English crowns to return to Langley.
The ambassador had spent a restless night in combat with his conscience. He even hoped - though dared not pray - that Henry's fever would have so much worsened that his death was inevitable. When there came a hammering at his door at dawn he half-expected to hear that welcome news. Before him, however, stood the wet and windswept Landais and his men who had ridden through the night. He had the saddlebags tossed onto the floor and felt emboldened enough to call it blood money. He thrust a scroll into the bewildered Langley's hand and demanded the whereabouts of Richmond.
Langley read the duke's excuses and frowned. He had to think quickly.
"Henry Tudor is aboard our ship attended by our excellent physician for a bad cough."
Landais turned and was giving orders to his soldiers when another joined him and whispered in his ear. Furious, Landais turned to Langley with a sharp reprimand.
"My mother said - never trust the word of an Englishman. We will take Richmond into our custody before -"
The clatter of feet on the stairs made him pause. Having heard of the arrival of Landais, the ugly man who had petitioned Langley the previous night had gathered his men together. The Bretons were outnumbered and could only half draw their swords before Landais bid them yield.
Fortunately for Tudor, the landlord of the tavern, having heard rumours that he was in grave danger had already acted. Distracting the two weary guards with wenches carrying tankards of steaming ale, he had had Henry carried down the backstairs and out into the wind and rain of the dawn into the sanctuary of a nearby chapel. The English, finding the bedchamber empty, were incensed and demanded to know his whereabouts. Landais was genuinely amazed and his demeanour persuaded Langley that not he but the Malouins - infamous for their piracy and hatred of the English - had conspired against him. He ordered his men to make enquiries and search the walled town. Eventually, a crown loosened the tongue of a starving vagrant and the English went in force to the chapel, debating how to prise or lure Tudor out. Upon hearing that the English meant to desecrate the chapel and break sanctuary, a large crowd gathered, so angry with the soldiers that, fearing for their safety, they had no choice but to retreat. Henry was safe. Within a day he recovered miraculously from his fever and, in disguise, was returned to the ducal palace.

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Edward screamed with fury when the shame-faced Langley appeared before him in the Presence Chamber, having returned empty-handed. Even the sight of his gold could not console him - at first.
Langley knelt long before Edward could bear to let him rise. He demanded an explanation.
“Your Grace, Tudor has many friends in Brittany. Had he not fallen ill, we would have him standing here before you now.”
Richard, who had been leaning on the corner of the throne, threw Langley a nasty glance.
“Did you not suspect a ploy? Was he so ill?”
“Yes, Your Grace, he had a bad cough.”
“A bad cough? You gullible fool! You should have had the miscreant carried on board ship out of harm’s way.”
Langley avoided his piercing, dark eyes, instantly knowing from his speech in whose part the ugly messenger in St Malo had come.
“I never thought, my Lord, that the Duke would change his mind. He was so relieved at the end of our negotiations to be rid of Tudor.”
Edward put his head in his hands and raked his scalp with his fingers, as if trying to draw out the fears which plagued him.
“That damned boy will ever haunt me.”
“So much for diplomacy,” said Richard curtly, begging to take his leave.
“Stay a while, brother. I do not wish to be left alone. I desire counsel.”
The ambassador saw his chance now to channel their anger away from him amd produced with a flourish a scroll from his bag.
“I was given this by Landais, the duke’s treasurer for His Majesty‘s perusal.”
Edward waved Langley from his presence, ripped open the seal and read aloud

His Gracious Majesty has been generous but I cannot in all Christian conscience break a pledge given to his cousin Richmond. Be assured and consoled that I shall keep said Richmond under such close watch so that he may inspire, initiate or commit no act of nuisance or mischief to trouble His Majesty. Furthermore, I shall arrest any spies or rebels cleaving to his cause and expel them along with all his servants and retainers who are already here present. This is a guarantee of our close friendship and alliance against the Louis of France and in continued gratitude to His Majesty for securing our frontiers with said France.

Brittany.

Seizing and crumpling the parchment, Richard burst out in a temper. “Cousin Richmond! Francis mocks us - he knows Tudor is not Richmond. And does he mention that traitor Jasper? Will *he* be expelled?”

8 Clarence

To Edward’s relief, Duke Francis was as good as his word. King Louis, hearing of Henry’s near capture, began a new onslaught on the duke to release him into his protection. But Francis steadfastly resisted all his cajoling and threats and sent his ambassadors packing.
By the year 1477, Edward had restored his despoiled reputation and further asserted his authority in England, personally intervening in the squabbles of his greedy nobles and bringing troublemakers before the courts. Furthermore, he felt at ease with his financial situation; taxes on

imports of French wine and exports of English wool had swelled the treasury of which he had taken closer personal control. These taxes alone brought in over thirty thousand pounds per annum. For the first time in a century, the monarchy was solvent, and the great magnates could rest easy, fearing no enforced loans to an impecunious king. Assured of the respect of his people, high and low, Edward's fears about a challenge from his defeated Plantagenet cousins, under the Tudor banner, faded away.
Seeing her husband at ease, the wily and vindictive Elizabeth Woodville judged the time ripe to take her revenge on a man she had good cause to loathe and who had good cause to loathe her; George, Duke of Clarence, the king's unreliable brother. He had conspired with the dead traitor Warwick to have her father and brother beheaded without trial after Edgecote field, to have her husband deposed and herself forced to flee into sanctuary; he had never bothered to tone down his insulting remarks about her family's low status, and had spoken openly about the queen's "bewitching qualities," referring ironically to the well-worn tales originated by soldiers who had been present at the first encounter between their King and Elizabeth in the woods in 1464.
"How did she guess the exact place and time of our brother's passing?" Clarence had tipsily asked of Richard in the presence of others. "The lady has remarkable powers as well as remarkable looks. How did she so fascinate a man of such a handsome face and bearing - name one woman who could resist his advances! - so-o-o beguile him that he would risk destroying the good opinion of his council and the Lord Warwick by marrying the……woman? I mean *lady*. Marrying! He would have dragged any other wench straightway into the bushes!"
Richard had tried to lead him away from his audience - which contained grim-faced Woodvilles - before his ambiguous words took on a plainer, treasonable meaning. As Richard shouldered him away along a corridor, he whispered in a voice none failed to hear "She would sell her quinny to the Devil for a favour."
"For God's sake, George! Have a care. The king will get to hear……"
"Oh no. He is too busy with his other whores to care. Thou cannst not abide her either. Why dost thou then dissemble?"
"*Because* ……once upon a time thou didst advise me to."

The queen, of course, knew all these calumnies by heart. Edward had never quite forgiven his brother for his exile, and his behaviour had become more and more erratic and reckless. Elizabeth had placed a spy at Warwick Castle, seat of his dead father-in-law, the Kingmaker, to where her increasingly disaffected enemy Clarence had more or less withdrawn from Court. Finally and exultantly, she received a report which she was convinced must at last trouble Edward - as no snippet of gossip had managed so far to do.
"I have often voiced my concerns to thee, Edward, that Clarence hates us and would never allow our son to succeed thee, have I not?"
"Oh please Elizabeth," he replied, rolling away from her to his side of the bed. "Not this old tune again. I am sick of it. Clarence is a fool but no villain."
"Listen. He so hates me and mine and thine that he has - and I have it on good authority - had a horoscope drawn up to calculate the likely time of thy death."
Edward swung his legs out of bed, threw back his head and laughed.
"Thou believest such sorcery? Mmm…..beautiful…witch - perhaps thou dost!"
"Thou dost believe in the Devil, so thou shouldst believe in his power."
The seed was planted. In the candle-shadows of a restless night, at an early hour, the thought of the horoscope returned to trouble him. Elizabeth had left a note with a name on it in their

chamber. Thomas Burdett. Edward summoned one who had lately been in Warwick and showed him the name.
"Certainly, Sire. He is your brother's astrologer."
Edward sent to have him arrested and brought to London - where under torture he confessed, but exonerated his master, Clarence, from all blame and complicity. Burdett was tried, convicted and hung, drawn and torn into quarters by horses at Tyburn. When Clarence discovered that his servant had been kidnapped, he was furious.
"Burdett was a great scholar. He has been betrayed by witchcraft and he confessed only due to the agony of the rack. I know who - which woman - witch woman! - is the instigator of all this."
This outburst in the king's Council could not be ignored and within days, Clarence was shut up in the Tower. Richard had lately argued bitterly with Clarence over the Warwick inheritance - they had each married a daughter of his - but reports of George's arrest horrified him. He knew that his death would mean rich rewards in offices and land for himself, but he loved his wayward brother and could not believe Edward would have him executed for the treason of which he had been convicted, preferring to think he meant to shock him into reform and obedience.
On February 18th 1478 George was taken out of his cell and plunged headfirst into a butt of wine. Richard was almost as much appalled by the grotesque manner of his death as by the fact of it. His grief matured into indignation and he persuaded himself that Edward could only have been brought to such a vile, fratricidal act by the trickery of the Woodvilles - and by the sorcery of one in particular. He kept tight-lipped but, as soon as could, he slipped away from London to his Middleham estates in Yorkshire and did not return to Court for a very long time.

On this occasion, Edward had not acted impetuously - indeed, the very opposite. Over two months elapsed between the arrest of George and his execution. He took pains to sound out various courtiers and counsellors and found that, excepting Richard, no-one argued warmly on George's behalf. Sure of Richard's loyalty of longstanding, pressed by Elizabeth and her kin, reminded in vivid terms of George's betrayal and insubordination, seduced by the idea of a trouble-free reign, Edward eventually decided - when Parliament urged that the sentence of death be carried out - to put his name to the warrant. In the tranquil weeks that followed he decided to forgive himself.
With dissent in his realm all but snuffed out, the years following 1477 were to prove the halcyon days of the first Yorkist monarchy.

9: Waiting
After Henry's near capture in St Malo, Duke Francis decided to send him to the fortified town of Vannes. There he was briefly reunited with his much relieved Uncle Jasper.
"Edward's obsession is a compliment to thee, Henry. Wert thou of no consequence, and therefore of no threat, he could safely ignore thee. He must forever sit in discomfort on his throne, as if there is one of his own spurs beneath the cushion."
Sighing, Henry touched his nether lip, sore and swollen from gnawing, with the tip of his tongue.
"Do I exist solely to be an irritation to him?"
"As a pearl is to a fat oyster! Take heart - God has spared thee capture in Malo for great things and thou shalt shall come into thy right. Good tidings will come!"
But the good tidings never came. Henry's optimism dwindled as he found himself under the guardianship of a series of Breton gentlemen, barely settling in before moving on again, still dependent on the duke's generosity, still a cork bobbing on restless waters.

He saw his uncle but rarely - mainly at Christmas - and as each year was passing into a new, he was given the same reassurances by him, though the smile at Jasper's lips began to be outdone by the dejection in his ever less limpid eyes. One Christmas, however, Jasper seemed more confident.

"I hear such strange stories of Edward. He who was once so sturdy and straight is grown round and ruddy of face. He is become so gluttonous that he takes an emetic to be sick so that he may gorge himself again. And if his appetites for meat and drink do not carry him off, then his lust will - there is not a woman at Court high or low he would not shag. Even the dog bitches cower at him. The pox will surely cause his privy parts to wither off, God willing."

"This is all just wishful thinking, Uncle."

A soldier entered and cleared his throat.

"I am to be taken off again to a secret place, Henry. But I shall write. Take heart, good tidings will come soon."

If Edward was poisoning himself, it was slow acting. Henry continually feared that further overtures from Edward would overcome the duke's resistance, and never went to bed without checking his door was locked in case someone in the household had betrayed him to an abductor or assassin. Much to his relief, none ever came; much to his disappointment, he began to realise that his value as a prize had fallen. Edward would doubtless live long, so that the prospect of dying in exile without the comforts of a wife, a family or friends terrified him. Only his Christian faith was able to prevent his spirit from descending into a great inner darkness.

Reports of the stability and popularity of Edward's regime came often to him, and he believed less and less the reassurances of Jasper. The scholarly part of him yearned still for a quiet, private life, and only Jasper stood in the way. He tried his best not to resent him.

As he passed his majority, however, leaving boyish fears and misgivings behind, he developed a manly confidence in his own ability and standing. He found himself thinking more on power. For twelve years he had lived in exile, in obligation and debt - which he swore to repay - but he knew that only a transformation of his fortunes and circumstances could make him master of his own finances and destiny. As the fourteen eighties dawned, he longed to exercise his own will and move out of the shadow of his uncle. He confided in his priest how he dreamt of building a great library, the envy of the world, and of encouraging the arts. He thought long on what means could be used to curb the power of the great magnates, such as Warwick, magnates who stirred and fostered rebellion against the Crown. Henry was impressed by accounts of how Louis XI ruled effectively and autocratically in France and wished to follow his example. He decided that if he ever came to power, he would restrict private armies, ensuring that squabbling nobles would be able to create less mischief for Englishmen high and low……

But in 1482 these were dreams.

10 A Change of Fortune

In January 1483, Edward was looking forward to celebrating his forty-first birthday and anticipating many, many more years on the throne. Overindulgence in feasting and drinking had thickened his waist and fattened his face and neck - but there was no reason for anyone to suspect that within four months he would be dead.

At first, Elizabeth made light of the chill he had caught one April morning when he had discarded his doublet on his way down to the river bank, only to shiver as he sat angling in a boat. "Cast ne'er a clout, till May be out!" she sang teasingly. But as his face grew paler and his breathing more laboured, and as the faces of his physicians grew more perplexed, she felt a

terrible panic grip her. She thought despairingly of her young son in Ludlow and prayed fervently that he would not have to hear of the untimely death of his father without her loving hand to comfort him. And she feared for him, a twelve-year-old at the mercy of ambitious men. She knew Richard Plantagenet did not love her, having long guessed the purport of his staring silences and the cold formality of his greetings and farewells. He had made little effort to conceal the resentment burning in his heart over the death of Clarence.

Kneeling at Edward's bedside she begged him in a whisper to make her own brother, the second Earl Rivers, Anthony Woodville, their son's protector.

"Anthony has him at Ludlow and loves him as his own son, Edward, and dearly loves me. Thou wouldst not have us the prey of our enemies, dear God. Is it not already too much agony to bear that I might lose thee?"

"Do not weep, my love. I shall doubtless recover my strength without the help of these mountebanks. Get ye gone from our sight!"

The physicians scuttled out, leaving only the Groom of the Stool present. Having raised his weak voice, Edward coughed for a whole minute; both saw with horror blood on his chin and nightshirt. Enfeebled, Edward told the groom to fetch a scribe and witnesses. If he was to die, Edward wished to do so restored to the love of his only brother. His nomination as the young prince's Protector, in affirmation of his status as England's foremost nobleman, would surely regain the estranged Richard's affection.

"Richard will guarantee our dynasty, Elizabeth."

"No, he feigns love for thee - and hates me! He blames me for Clarence."

Edward took slow deep breaths for he meant to speak his mind in full.

"No Thou art mistaken and ill-advised. To pass him by for Rivers would incense him. Edward will be well guided by him and taught O God and taught the ways of kingship,"

He looked at the troubled scribe and ordered him to write to his dictation.

In spite of fervent prayers from his queen and his confessor, Edward breathed his last the same day.

The news brought London to a standstill; as it rippled outwards, and town criers rang their bells, one town after another fell into a fearful silence. As it filtered out to the villages and fields, the rumour caused peasants to lean on their scythes and rakes and look up for some sign of calamity in heaven, but the nesting birds still sang and the warm breeze still blew.

When the news reached Richard two days later, he could not believe it. As soon as the affrighted messenger swore it was true and assured him that he was named by Edward as Protector, Richard knew instinctively that, by return, he must send his commiserations and promises of fealty to the woman he hated. He sent the exhausted messenger to the kitchens and spent an hour crafting his reply.

The messenger having departed, Richard sat down with his council to consider what the consequences of Edward's death might be. He feared principally for the peace of the kingdom, for who might not now chance his arm to settle old scores with his neighbour? Who might, on the Lancastrian side of the family, having dissembled loyalty to Edward, now show their true colours and raise rebellion? Had not Elizabeth Woodville's first husband, Sir John Grey, died fighting at St Albans in 1459 for the Lancastrian cause? The suspicion that Elizabeth had taken a private vow in 1464 to restore the Lancastrians to the throne could not, he knew, be taken seriously for it would mean the disinheritance of her own child; but he did not trust the ambitious

Woodvilles. He could easily be persuaded that Anthony, Earl Rivers, had used his sister and meant to throttle the boy king at Ludlow with the intention of settling his own low Woodville arse on the throne.
By withdrawing in high dudgeon to the north, apart from one or two visits to London,, Richard had allowed the vipers to consolidate their power. What was the value of being Protector if he could not assert his will against a Woodville majority in a regency council?
“The last thing we need at this critical moment,” he declared to his northern allies “is a stalemate in government. Rivers, a man of no consequence, holds Edward at Ludlow. I do not trust the man. His brother has control of the navy and her son by that old traitor Grey, Dorset, is deputy governor of the Tower. I fear a coup. We need to act.”
All assented. Richard knew he could count on their support for whatever extraordinary measures he might be forced to take. A report that Dorset had seized the king’s treasure and cannon at the Tower convinced the few who had been sceptical of Richard’s warnings at the meeting that his prediction was coming true.
And when Lord Hastings sent an urgent message to Richard, his friend of longstanding, reporting Woodvillian opposition in Council to his being appointed sole protector, insisting that he be merely chief among many persons, he saw his fears starkly realised.
“I must saddle up and run south, Anne,” he said to his wife. “Edward is scarcely cold in his grave and already the Woodville woman is undermining his authority and final ordinance. Hastings writes that he even fears for his life, he is so in the minority in asserting my rightful position in the teeth of those greedy wolves. They would tear him to pieces.”
“I know the queen hates him for arranging Edward’s many whores - especially the Shore woman. But must thou go, Richard? I have already lost one husband in combat. I dread to lose another.”
Richard could not but avert his eyes from his wife’s pleading stare, having always kept from her that he had not intervened, claiming to be elsewhere on the field, when her first husband, the Prince of Wales, son of Henry VI, had been pursued at Tewkesbury and hacked down. And he had assured her that rumours of his hand in the demise of her father-in-law, the king, were malicious, and that Hastings would confirm his natural death.
“Fear not, wife. I shall have my friends and retainers for protection. Hastings writes that the young Edward will only have a force of a few hundred to bring him to London from Ludlow. I must intercept them before Rivers can do his worst. If I fail, the country will be at war again.”
“But if thou dost intervene against the Woodvilles and their friends, there will still be war. I know it.”
“There will not be war if I can put my plan into action and take them by surprise.”
Richard pondered very carefully, as he set out south, as to what form of words to use in a letter to Ludlow which would arouse no suspicion in the mind of Earl Rivers.

“Thy Uncle Gloucester sends his commiserations, Edward, and asks us to meet him before London at a place of our choosing, so that….what does he write? Ah, here!….*so that we might ride to Westminster together in a show of unity and firmness of purpose….”*
Edward’s open, pleasant face could not help betray a frown of anxiety.
“But I have seen him so seldom, that I would hesitate to call him uncle. Thou art my uncle! I hardly remember what Gloucester looks like, except that he stares with those eyes and hardly speaks. And he walks so strangely. Can we be sure he loves us?”
“He is, I admit, no great friend of mine - though he did act favourably as arbiter in my dispute with my neighbour in Norfolk. He is a distant man who keeps his peace, but he must love thee as

his own brother's son. He is to be thy protector, on thy father's command."
"But did not my Uncle Clarence hate thee and Mother?"
"He did. But he was not in his wits. Ever since thy Aunt Isabel died in childbirth eight years ago. The Devil put wicked thoughts in his head - that thy mother cast a spell on her."
Edward slowly shook his curly head in wonder. He was a clever boy and did not really believe in sorcery.
"When shall we have to leave, Uncle? Can I take my books?"
"I am still mustering young men in the villages. We must proceed in surety."
Rivers looked on the date and place of the letter and calculated that they might meet Richard somewhere near Northampton in three days.
"Go collect what thou dost need for thy amusement. I shall write to Gloucester - and have the maid put up thy finest livery. What a handsome figure thou willst make on thy entrance into London! And from tomorrow, I shall have to say *you* and not *thou*!"

Rivers' messenger found Richard near Nottingham, making ready for the night. He smiled to read Rivers' pleasant and unsuspecting reply. Straightway he called for quill and parchment in order to reassure the queen once more of his goodwill - and to make his intentions clear to the Council. He affirmed that he would defend the new King Edward with his life and let no man stand in his rightful way. The letter, however, ended with a scarcely veiled warning - that he was entitled by law and his late brother's ordinance to act as *sole* protector of Edward and to take the government of the realm in his own hands. No man had the status or quality to supercede him in this, or the right to oppose his will, as his will was the will of the late king and thereby the Will of God Almighty. Nothing contrary to law and his brother's moribund wish could be decreed *without harm.*
The next morning, he proceeded towards Northampton, encouraged by the acclaim of villagers and townspeople on his route who had been informed by heralds of his mission and came out in throngs to bless it. He had been joined by the Duke of Buckingham who had just cause to oppose the Woodvilles, having been forced, at the tender age of eleven into marriage with the queen's sister, Catherine, a woman he had never respected even though she bore him four children. Buckingham, greedy and ambitious, saw in Richard an opportunity - denied to him by his brother, the late king- to regain lands of his Bohun ancestor which had been swallowed up in the Duchy of Lancaster and eventually confiscated by Edward IV. Thwarted by one brother, he saw the other as his last chance to regain his status - and, as a direct descendant of Edward III, perhaps, if he played his hand well, achieve the grandest status of all.
On 29th April the two dukes and their retainers reached Northampton and were informed that Rivers and his royal nephew were fourteen miles away in Stony Stratford.
Richard issued an invitation to Rivers and Edward's half-brother Richard Grey to dine and stay overnight with himself and Buckingham. Suspecting nothing, they accepted and were duly hospitably received. As they set out the next morning to fetch the king and his retinue to Northampton, they were ambushed and arrested. Soon they were on their way not to London, but to the cells of Pontefract Castle within Richard's northern domain.
Richard made haste to Stony Stratford and had all Edward's servants dispersed and his chamberlain arrested. Edward was naturally greatly upset to hear Richard, his uncle in name only, patiently explain, as if to a five-year-old, why he had been forced to take such grave measures.
"Your Uncle Rivers was - is a man of no principle. A bad man. He plied your poor father with an

excess of claret which ruined his health and left him prey to the rheums and fluxions which took him off. Your Royal Highness is too precious to leave in the custody of such a villain. Besides, I have lately discovered a plot - perhaps hatched by Rivers, as we shall doubtless find out in Pontefract - to ambush me, your named Protector, and do the Devil knows what mischief to Your Royal Person."

Expecting to find his nephew all acquiescence and gratitude, Richard was astonished when he protested.

"My uncle and my brother Grey are good men. They love me and would never allow harm to be done to me. My poor father gave my person to them in trust and guardianship. Do you now insist he was wrong? That he was deceived??"

Seeing in Edward a remarkable reflection of his own defiant younger self, Richard took a pace back.

"You will learn, dear Edward, that men are not always what they seem. Even those - particularly those with the kindliest faces might harbour the most viperish mischief in their hearts. Though my countenance does not please, though I do not simper and smile sweetly, I am your true servant. Do not misconstrue my looks which are too honest for my own good. Your father appointed me at the last as your protector which overturns the earlier responsibility of your Uncle Rivers. I would lay down my life to spare yours. Come, wipe these tears and get yourself ready to leave. Your people and your destiny in London await you."

When the queen heard of her kinsmen's arrest which she had half expected, she flew with her younger son, Richard and her four daughters into sanctuary.

London was soon in uproar as these reports were heard and heralds arrived announcing the progress south of the Duke of Gloucester and King Edward. Some terrible and unnatural catastrophe was feared. Sombre crowds lined the streets unsure whether they should cheer or lament as the young king, pale and earnest, passed by alongside his inscrutable uncle, followed by truculent northern men clad in black, drawing wagons of weapons which Richard had cunningly had stamped with the Woodville coat of arms to pretend that he had thwarted a plot.

At Westminster, Richard issued a summons to the mayor and all men of quality thereabouts to join him in swearing an oath of loyalty to the new king. No man dared raise a voice against the legitimacy of the Royal Protector, even though the minds of many were troubled. Richard shrewdly had those on whom he knew he could rely, as well as their cronies and servants, go about declaring that it was only right that the king should be under the wing of his father's brother. This rapidly became the accepted wisdom in taverns and shops. By mid-May, as trees burst into blossom under clear skies, the capital relaxed. And it was soon generally mooted that the queen was a fool to fear the goodly Gloucester.

At the first meeting of Council, Richard was confirmed, without dissent, as Royal Protector until at least the 22nd June, the date of Edward's coronation. Lord Hastings, having feared in April a great disagreement and worse, could not control his joy in May that matters had been so easily and peaceably settled. He was not aware that the Woodvilles and their allies had, by prior agreement, decided to bide their time, reluctant to oppose Gloucester in the knowledge that their kinsmen were at his mercy in Pontefract. Conciliation would, it was hoped, secure Rivers' and Grey's release, which event would then leave them less constrained to show their true opinions and curtail the protector's power. In private, they smiled and savoured the irony that Edward IV by his own political ineptitude and indolence, and that Gloucester by his own indifference and antipathy, had allowed their party a dominance of the Council which would ultimately thwart the wishes of the one, and the ambitions of the other. As natural Lancastrians, they had no love of a

Yorkist monarchy and little relish for a regency. They were sure that the Council - their Council - would keep their dangerous enemy, Gloucester, perpetually in check when the dust had settled. Many believed that Richard of Gloucester had misread their silence at Council as weakness and docility, but he, wilier that they could ever imagine, had already worked out what their game was and meant to spring a surprise and flush them out. The last thing he was prepared to concede was the release of Rivers and Grey, knowing that they would immediately plot vengeance. Richard was far from home with only a few hundred men at arms. He was vulnerable, knowing he could not rely on Londoners in a crisis.

At the next meeting of Council at the Tower, he launched his gambit, calling for Rivers and Grey to be indicted for treason, and then waited to make note of which men were most vociferous in their opposition, even gambling that his own faction with the Lords Spiritual might outvote his enemies. To his disgust and astonishment, it was his old trusted ally Hastings who opposed him most vehemently - and persuasively. After a vigorous though inconclusive exchange of views, Hastings asked for the floor.

"Gentlemen……Richard….How can they have been guilty of treason against thee in April, if thou hadst not been appointed legally Lord Protector until May?"

Hastings loved to demonstrate his cleverness, expecting it to be admired by others as much as by himself. To this extent he was a fool. In the breathless silence which followed, Richard managed a wry smile, rapped the table with his knuckles and feigned appreciation of the legal point, before pretending to gaze at some distant object which had become of greater importance to him than the moment, as if to say he was not in the least humiliated or embarrassed to have been so comprehensively skittled. Under intense scrutiny, the more astute present thought they could sense the fury he was so calmly concealing. Seeing one or two glance at each other with smirks, Richard lowered his gaze and said as casually as he could "It speaks highly of our free manner of government that, unlike the French, no-one fears to speak his honest mind, and that a word of truth and logic - even from our closest friends and even from those who love us a little less - or who even feign to love us - is preferred to words of soothing flattery - and that he who is proven mistaken does not bear a grudge."

Delighted with his friend's generosity of spirit, Hastings dared to reach across and pat Richard's still tight-clenched fist, finding it surprisingly cold, given the warmth of the room. The speech reassured those around the table least sceptical of Richard's goodwill and, attended with much relief and good cheer, arrangements for the coronation next came up for discussion, a matter which provoked no controversy. Richard appeared content to listen and sat with a fixed smile looking from one to another as each took his turn to speak.

As soon as the meeting broke up, he returned to his private rooms in the Tower and snarled at the servant to get out. His gamble had misfired not due to the rhetoric of his enemies but of a friend. He feared above all that a Woodville proposal would appear on the agenda of the next meeting to free his prisoners. Like wasps in a glass, the longer they remained trapped, the more angry and more likely they would be to sting upon release.

In the next few days, his spies returned with alarming reports that London was turning against him because of his discourteous treatment of the queen and her children. He blamed the Woodville party for spreading rumours around the streets that he was ignoring pleas from her for guarantees of safety; that he was not behaving with the chivalry expected of a great peer of the realm.

Richard was in no mood to compromise with the Woodvilles. Sensing danger, Sir Edward Woodville, another brother of the queen, had set sail with the small royal fleet before Richard's

arrival and anchored off the Kent coast. Knowing he could not return or stay at anchor for ever, he eventually decided to take two ships and ten thousand pounds in bullion and flee into exile. His choice of port, St Malo, was a fateful one, for he would go and make his peace with a person whom, not two months previously, he had been openly scorning.
Edward Woodville's flight was not the sole thorn in Richard's side. Another brother, Thomas, Marquess of Dorset, had crept out of sanctuary and escaped despite searches with dogs in the fields beyond the city.
Feeling his position threatened, Richard resorted to bribery. He gambled that the Parliament he had convened would support his proposal of awarding land and money to loyal supporters of the dead king and win them to his colours. His gifts to Buckingham whose retainers provided extra security for the regency were lavish. He gained the stewardship of over fifty Welsh castles.
By contrast, Lord Hastings had to be content with being created Master of the Mint. His hurt was apparent at the next meeting of Council on June 9th when he opposed Richard's suggestion that the king's young brother Richard of York be brought out of sanctuary to attend the imminent coronation. Hastings, unable to stop thinking of his friend's cold-blooded ruthlessness and dissimulation in the old king's bedchamber, did not trust his motives for seeking so urgently the giving-up of his younger nephew. Meeting in secret with Archbishop Rotherham - whom Richard had already dismissed as Chancellor - and with the Bishop of Ely, a close ally of the queen, Hastings aired his fears for the safety of the king who had been ominously lodged in the Tower. Hastings knew he had to tread carefully with Richard, but believing there was a generous, rational side to the man which could be appealed to by a frank-speaking, affectionate friend, he decided to seek an interview as the tension in the streets around Westminster grew. He had no idea that Richard had written secretly to the Mayor of York to request that an army be raised to come to London and oppose "his enemies," and had ordered the illegal seizure of certain Woodville lands

Hastings began by reporting disquiet in the streets about the situation of the queen and, more particularly, of the king.
"Many are saying he should be housed more comfortably here, Richard, and have his leisure and brother as playmate and fresh air. The Tower is - these days - as much prison as palace. I support thy wish to have young Richard brought from the Abbey - but not by trickery or by compulsion. Cannot an oath be sworn in Council to guarantee the safety of Elizabeth and all her brood? Some wonder why thou dost risk thy popularity by allowing doubts to arise as to thy true intentions. *I* know thee to be a just and -"
Richard had had his back to him gazing at the lawn. He turned around suddenly in a ghastly fury.
"My true intentions? Dost doubt them then?"
"No, but many do!"
"Give me names!"
"Names? Should I collect the names of half of London? Who and how many is scarce the point. People are even doubting that the coronation will take place, preparations are so sluggish."
Richard quickly mastered his temper and decided to pretend to confide in him.
"William, let us not quarrel! Understand my heavy burden and dread. Edward is twelve and will not have his majority for three years. I face three more years arguing with Woodville foxes while the country threatens to tear itself apart again. That man - over there - I shall not sully my lips with his name - is no doubt plotting how to get Tidder's arse onto the throne for his own advantage. And what if Edward turns out to be as self-indulgent and unwise as his father? He is

certainly proud and insolent. *My* father, York, spent his whole life defending our possessions over there," - he pointed a shaking finger south, unable to say the word France - "only to see them given away by that whore of Anjou! Dear God, shall we never have them again? We must be strong for when that Tidder slithers back in. We must act before the evil and not after."
Richard's confidential manner had altered to rhetoric - as if rehearsing a speech before Council. Hastings felt afraid. He reminded him as deferentially as he could that his brother had chosen him as protector not ruler.
"Chip away at the Woodville block! Summon the whole council - do as thou didst getting rid of Rotherham and bring in an ally now and then…. Thou art a canny man, Richard. Thou cannst outwit those foxes! The Bishop of Ely and certain others warm to thee -"
"Too tedious! If I should trim and talk rather than act, who knows how much I - we might live to regret it? Men are plotting. Take Edward from the Tower where he is safe - to play bowls on the lawn here? Madness! I am his Protector and shall ever keep him safe until London is safe."
"The Council will not agree."
"That is why, Lord Hastings, the Council is not our friend. Many want to manipulate the king for their own greedy ends and that is why we shall do our utmost to keep him out of their grasp."
As soon as Hastings left the room, Richard summoned his man from behind the screen.
"Was this the man thou didst see at Rotherham's house?"
"Yes Your Grace."
"Go thou straightway after him and report to us this evening where he goes now and elsewhere."
Certain of gaining extra strength imminently from the north and armed with evidence of a plot, Richard calculated that his time had come.

11 The Usurper

13th June: Nine days before the coronation. It is a fine, sunny morning and a Council meeting is due. Richard produces two agendas and divides the Council into two, one half to debate general matters, one to discuss the coronation. Richard will attend the latter meeting at the Tower, where he has ensured that Hastings and the Archbishop of York, Thomas Rotherham will be present.
Richard appears all smiles and sends out for strawberries from the Bishop of Ely's garden. Any tension in the room has been eased by this jolly request and, while Richard absents himself, Hastings chats easily, never suspecting what appalling fate is a moment away from being his.
Suddenly the door flies open and Richard re-enters, face of thunder clouds, and bangs the table. There comes a cry of "Treason" from without and Richard's spy enters to point at Hastings and Rotherham, swiftly followed by guards who seize every councillor by the shoulders to prevent them rising. In the struggle, many are jostled and assaulted, including Thomas, Lord Stanley, the third husband of Margaret Beaufort. Wiping the blood from his nose, he demands an explanation. The spy is still pointing. Swaying, Richard begins to circle the table. He tells Stanley to ask Hastings for an explanation. Stanley stares at him. There is silence. Richard announces that Hastings, Rotherham and the Bishop of Ely have been secretly plotting to install Elizabeth Woodville as queen regnant and depose Edward. All gasp. Hastings declares this to be a lie. Before he can defend himself further, upon a nod from Richard, he is carried out onto the courtyard, forced to bend over a tree stump and beheaded with a sword. The two bishops are arrested to be taken into imprisonment in Wales.
Hastings' appalling execution without trial marks the end of law in London but not of order. Opposition to Richard dare not now speak its name.

June 16th: Coronation six days away. In the morning, Richard sends soldiers to Westminster Abbey. The aged Archbishop of Canterbury pleads with Elizabeth Woodville to send out her son Richard rather than allow the church to be desecrated by soldiers taking him by force. The expectant crowd briefly cheers to see the pale boy appear and then falls silent as he is loaded into a cart like a calf for market and driven away to the Tower.
In the afternoon, Richard issues writs cancelling Parliament and postponing the coronation until the autumn.
June 20th: The Mayor of London imposes a night curfew and appoints a Watch to enforce it.
June 22nd: In a sermon preached by a Doctor Shaw outside St Paul's, Edward and Richard are declared illegitimate on the grounds that their father had entered into a pre-contract with another lady before marrying Elizabeth Woodville. His marriage was therefore bigamous. A silent crowd, hemmed in by soldiers, dares not cry out in protest when the doctor goes on to cast doubt even on the late king's legitimacy.
June 25th: The Duke of Buckingham repeats the same allegation at the Guildhall to the mayor and his aldermen. Soldiers in black line the walls, with orders to study faces. A few aldermen feel obliged to cheer but the many remain grimly silent.
June26th: In Pontefract, Richard's ally, the Earl of Northumbria, pronounces a guilty verdict on Earl Rivers, Thomas Grey and Thomas Vaughn, young Edward's chamberlain, for treason; and with barely time for a priest to hear their confessions, they are taken away to have their heads cut off.
Meanwhile, in London, a delegation led by Lord Buckingham, begs the Duke of Gloucester to take the crown. He hesitates and then, in resignation and reluctance, accepts. Within the hour he has discarded his mourning garments and has donned royal purple.
July 6th: It is the day of Richard's coronation. Five thousand men from the north have arrived and are stationed on every street to ensure good order and proper respect. For the people of London, these muscular rude men with their strange dark accents are as good as foreigners. Rumours are spreading that opponents of the new king are plotting to kill him! Low cloud seals in a climate of fear. Richard arrives in a doublet of gold and blue, cloaked in purple and his wife follows his caparisoned steed on a litter. Instead of becoming Queen Anne by virtue of marriage to Prince Edward - the son of Henry VI, who would have been the Fifth, a Lancastrian - she is about to be proclaimed Queen Anne of the second Yorkist monarch. The little boy whose title he has usurped who should be Edward V has not been invited and lingers in the Tower. If Anne is perturbed, her proud face does not show it. A drunk in the crowd cannot help but shout whore. He is taken away and is not seen again.
In the Abbey, Buckingham, the new kingmaker, is master of ceremonies. As he places the crown on Richard's dark head, is he harbouring thoughts that perhaps one day, and not too distant a day, an archbishop will place it on his own?

At last, the take-over is complete. Long live the king!

12 Stifling Dissent

It was imperative for Richard III to consolidate power and not relax his grip. He had seen his own brother grow lazy and complacent and would not make the same mistake. He was immediately active in rewarding those who had supported him and who had strategic value in the country for maintaining order and preempting rebellion. He took pains to make his peace with Thomas, Lord Stanley, a northern noble of immense wealth and influence. Could Stanley

persuade his wife Margaret to persuade her son Henry Tudor to return home to be welcomed with open arms in the Presence Chamber? Richard has already mentioned it to her and she seemed interested. He was well aware that she missed him so much that she might be tempted to believe his promises of a Yorkist-Lancastrian reconciliation and convince Henry to take the renewed bait of a betrothal to the oldest Woodville girl. When his spies told him that this very match was still very much in her own thoughts, he was delighted.
What he did not know, for he had underestimated the wily Margaret, was that this reconciliation for which she was hoping did not envisage Richard as a part of it.

Sure of London, pleased with himself and confident that he was gaining on all fronts, Richard set out, shortly after his coronation, on a royal progress to show himself off and ingratiate himself with the people of each town through which he passed.
But no amount of smiling and award of favours could dispel the bad odour which followed him everywhere - that the princes in the Tower were dead by his command. Before he had embarked on his progress, his spies had discovered a plot involving many Londoners - some of them officials at the Tower - to start fires to divert attention from an attempt to free them. The plotters were dragged behind horses to Tower Hill where their heads were cut off and impaled on spikes while London looked grimly on. The rumour spread that one of the conspirators had tried to shout out that the princes were dead but had been gagged.
If dead, there could only be one person powerful and ruthless enough to order such an atrocity.

*

“The king has again expressed a wish that I might prevail upon thee to write to Henry, Margaret.” whispered Lord Stanley one day over dinner, after dismissing the servants. “Offering reconciliation.”
His diminutive wife, showing few signs of middle age in her girlish face, nibbled at her strawberries and shrugged.
“And shall I?
“I leave it entirely to thee.”
“Dost trust him?”
“As much as I would a wolf with a lamb. What shall I tell him?”
“Tell him that I shall urge Henry to return to marry Elizabeth.”
“And shalt thou?”
“I might.”
“Thou art a hard woman to fathom, Margot.”
“One has to be, Tom. These days particularly.”
Margaret had been shocked by rumours of Richard’s involvement in the old king’s death and by his betrayal of Hastings. She wept over the poor princes and knew by Stanley’s account that Richard was trying to get his hands on Clarence’s young son, Warwick. All three children, as the sons of brothers older than Richard, had a superior claim to the throne than his. Margaret had little doubt what kind of peace settlement he really and truly had in mind for her own son. The peace of settling into a grave. Besides, she knew that her brother-in-law Jasper would rather set fire to a ship than allow it to set sail to England with Henry aboard.
Being of very high birth, Margaret Beaufort had partly shared the general disapproval at Court of Elizabeth Woodville, but on the few occasions they had met she had found her gracious and not

over-proud, and her unusual beauty had charmed her. She too was a mother denied the presence of her offspring and Margaret developed a natural affinity for her.
By August, the princes were being seen less and less at the windows of their prison, and soon not at all. Elizabeth had to accept that they were likeliest dead and her fears for her daughters grew. A report that she meant to smuggle them out of the Abbey in disguise caused the king to have guards posted at every door.
Despite her maternal sympathy for Elizabeth, Margaret could not suppress feelings of growing optimism for her son's cause because of the princes' demise. Opposition to Richard III could now only look to one figurehead. And opposition in the southern counties was growing. A network of Woodvilles, their allies and Edward IV's courtiers - some with private ambitions, some without - was forming, and, sensing her Henry's time was nigh, Margaret sent for her physician, Lewis Caerleon.
"What ails you Madam?"
"It is a sickness of the heart, Caerleon."
"Alas, for such maladies I have no physic."
"But you do! You are Queen Elizabeth's physician are you not?"
"Indeed I am. I attend to Her Majesty and her daughters every week."
"And how does she?"
He looked darkly around the room and Margaret assured him he could speak plainly.
"She is mightily aggrieved and cast down in spirit. And I fear that her youngest will not survive the rigours of the coming winter in that cold place. She has a weak chest. But I cannot see how……or what…"
He begged her pardon, not quite knowing how to ask of what import their condition was to her, and what good he might do for them on her behalf.
"I wish to communicate with her, Caerleon."
His solemn face lengthened in foreboding.
"But the Abbey is surrounded by the king's men. If they searched me and found a letter….."
"But they cannot search your head, man - even if they took it off."
Caerleon rarely laughed but this time he allowed himself a wry grin. She told him to listen carefully.
"Mention these things to the queen. Say there is a fresh desire to unite the House of Lancaster with the House of York, by marriage of my son with her eldest daughter, as her own husband desired. Now even the new king says he wishes it."
She searched his sagging eyes for any sign which might lead her to distrust him, as he searched hers to discover her true intent. She knew that what she was about to say would probably, if disclosed, cost her her head. She had kept her intentions secret even from her own husband, Stanley.
"Tell her she has new friends, some of them even her old enemies, Richard disgusts them so much. I hear there are men so sorely troubled by her sons' confinement and disappearance that they mean to oppose him. Tell her that if Richard were to lose his crown, it would be vital to avoid another time of uncertainty. Tell her she should consider who has the strongest claim to the throne. Clarence's son Warwick? He is a child. Buckingham? He is greedy and ambitious, and most opine that he would be no less cruel and injust a king than Richard. Tell her that my son is a gentle, pious Lord who loves peace and justice. Espoused with her daughter, Elizabeth, he would unite our England after twenty-five years of division. I pray night and day for this and I know it to be God's will. I - we, Caerleon - could be the instruments of His will. Might you help? Her

Majesty would never betray you."
Caerleon returned to Margaret two days later with an encouraging smile.
"At first, Her Royal Highness was suspicious for she was not sure you loved her. She fears even her own shadow. Finally, I managed to convince her of your earnest and she wept for joy. She has, she told me, a priest at the Abbey in her confidence who is in contact with her brother the Marquess of Dorset. She welcomes your support and hopes you can find the means of winning over many more men to oppose a villain who, she fears, has killed her boys."
"Give her this pearl ring - she knows it well and has much admired it - as a token of my good faith. She should know by it that our causes are joined."
As soon as he had left, she summoned her worthy and long trusted servant, Reginald Bray. After the Battle of Barnet, he had offered to arrange the funeral of her husband, Sir Henry Stafford. She tasked him now with informing all those in her circle of the former queen's support for her son.
He returned to her a week later with amazing news.
"I took the opportunity to visit the Bishop of Ely in Brecon Castle."
"Was Buckingham there?"
"Yes."
"And does Buckingham take good care of him in his confinement?"
"He is very comfortable and has his books. The Duke treats him with courtesy."
Margaret wondered at this. She had feared that the good John Morton would disappear like the princes. Morton had been a faithful supporter of the Lancastrian cause until Edward's second accession and the death of Henry VI, whereupon he had resigned himself and made his peace with York.
"And did you speak with my damnable nephew?"
"His Grace was courteous enough to ask me to dine with him, rather than to return to my tavern."
At this, Margaret was alarmed. She had taken bitterly against her nephew, Buckingham, never a favourite, for his support of Richard.
"Sweet Jesus! I hope you were discreet, Reginald. He would have all our heads taken off as wantonly as a boy whipping flowers."
"Madam, I hope you have known me long enough to know that I would never betray you intentionally or unintentionally. I told him I had come to see John because he was an old friend - nothing more. He offered me wine but I took only one measure. But what he said after he had drunk four goblets, astonished me. He asked me first if I had heard of a conspiracy in Kent to depose the king."
"But he himself was ordered by Richard to preside over an inquiry - but was met with silence. He must have been dissembling drunkenness to get names."
"Aye, my first thought too - but pray let me finish Madam."
His bluntness displeased her but she saw that he was bursting with excitement.
"The Duke dismissed his servants from the room and told me that he supported the rebellion."
"Sweet Jesus - he is a cat's-paw for the Cripple! I thought him wicked and sly - but not so sly as this. And did you -"
"Please, Madam! I told him, face as impassive as I could make it, that if there was a rebellion, neither I nor you knew a thing of it. He smiled and sat back nodding, whereupon I made an excuse that I was very weary from my journey and wished to retire. The next morning, after I had broken my fast, he came to wish me God's speed and left me in the great hall. As I mounted to ride away, his chaplain brought me this."

From his cloak he produced a scroll, sealed with red wax but not imprinted with any shield, the Duke's coat of arms. Margaret wondered at that but took it and went to the window to look out at her park. Margaret disliked Buckingham for less honourable reasons than she was wont to express to her friends. She knew her feelings were unnatural in an aunt, but it grieved her that Fate had played her a low trick. Had Humphrey Stafford, the eldest son of the first Duke of Buckingham died of the plague before 1455 and not in 1457, then his son - her nephew - would never have been conceived and the great title would have gone to the second son, her own husband, Sir Henry Stafford. His death in 1461 would, in turn, have left her in possession of the Buckingham fortune. Instead, it had passed to the grandson of the first duke, her nephew. The child she had first met when he was five had grown fat and avid of eye. He had attached himself to Richard like a leech to increase and had been well rewarded. She could not believe that he would wish to join the rebellion - and therefore only suspected a trap.
After tapping and tapping the palm of her tiny hand with the scroll, she finally decided to tear it open.

My dear Madam,

You will not admire the devious means I have used to advance our Cause, and in all conscience neither can I. Dissimulation does not come easily to me -
"What loathsome hypocrisy!" she shouted, throwing the parchment down. "As a child he was always being found out in a lie! And what does he mean - *our* cause?"
Bray picked up the letter and after a moment, when she had regained her composure, she took it from his hand again.
"I shall read it aloud to you, Reginald……..*My grandfather died fighting for King Henry at Northampton, my father fought for him at St Albans. My uncle, your husband fought for Henry at Barnet. We are Lancastrians. I have nursed a private grudge and hatred against the Yorkists these many years. When Edward died I decided to be avenged. I could have openly and honestly opposed Richard's overgrowing ambitions as the virtuous Lord Hastings did, but would only have earned the same sharp reward. By pretending to support his odious claim even to the extent of declaring his own nephews bastards and offering him the crown, I thought to destroy him from within* ….…Aye, Reginald! As a worm might an apple …… *to destroy him from within by causing the people to hate him and desire his death. My spy in Wiltshire tells me that this brew of mine is coming to the boil, and that you too, dear Aunt, have had a stir of it. You might have wondered why I have withdrawn to Brecon. There are three reasons. First, and the plain one, I was charged by Richard himself to bring John Morton here. This suited me as I could find ample cause to delay my return. Morton has ever been a faithful Lancastrian and we have spoken at length about the present times, deciding that the only way of deposing the Tyrant is by his defeat in battle by armies led by your son. My second reason for remaining in Wales is the horror of the proposal which Richard made to me. You must believe me when I aver that I only ever wished the Princes to be declared ineligible to rule in order to enable a Lancastrian to take the throne. When that brave and honourable knight asked me privately to arrange their disappearance for good, as he could not face doing such an unnatural deed himself, I refused. I can only suppose some creature of his then offered to do it.*
My third reason for being here relates directly to our Cause. At its ripening, I shall have five thousand loyal Welshmen ready to bear arms.
I urge you to destroy this letter now, for its falling into the wrong hands would certainly mean

our - at least my destruction.

B

"Well! Do you honestly think he is sincere, Reginald?"
He took the scroll and read it through while stroking his grey beard thoughtfully.
"If he can play the king false, he can play you false too, Madam. He is ambitious. He can argue direct descent from Thomas, youngest son of Edward the Third, which is at least as strong a claim to the throne as your son's. I note that he writes of Henry defeating Richard but omits to mention his crowning. Let us put ourselves in his position. He knows that a great rebellion is likely, which may well succeed. If he does not support it and it succeeds, he will fall, for he is presently hated. If he supports it, he will prosper - and may already be plotting to unseat your son - or even worse. Yes, he has laid a path to the throne for a Lancastrian…but I believe he sees his own feet striding along to take it. That is my surmise."
"So, how should I respond?"
"You should not. But keep the letter under lock and key, for it might one day serve a purpose."
"I shall. Reginald, do not think me unnatural…….I would prefer that this matter is kept from my Lord Stanley. He loathes Buckingham and is jealous of his new power in Wales. He would never ally himself with Buckingham. He holds him partly responsible for the death of Hastings - and even suspects him of killing the two young princes."

I3: Vannes, April 1483
Henry's spirits, subdued even more by a long winter, had naturally risen a little in spring. He was pleased to be back at Vannes at the ducal court, with its greater variety of distractions. Besides his beloved books, he enjoyed cards and chess, in which he was acknowledged for his cunning. He had turned twenty-six in January and was making a fine man. He would never be handsome but, slender and graceful, he had lost his boyish awkwardness. His speech was measured and witty, and his eyes shrewd, ever seeming to be on the brink of a friendly smile which never quite came.
On mid-April morning which, in the clear southern sky, heralded summer, but looked back to winter in the north where low bruised clouds were threatening cold rain, Henry had just opened with his king's pawn against his priest Clement when a messenger entered and bowed.
"Your Grace, His Grace the Duke would speak with you on a matter of great urgency."
Trying to suppress his rising panic, Henry stood and almost knocked over his stool, before following the man out into the hall of the chateau to ascend with heavy legs the great staircase leading to the Presence Chamber. Jasper had looked weary and ill at Christmas; was he dead?
Two servants opened the great double doors and in the golden light of the April sun, Henry immediately spotted the brown leather jerkin and broad shoulders of the man he loved. He gasped out loud with relief as his uncle turned to greet him. But his delight vanished as he saw how stern he was. Fearing bad news, his feet dragged and stopped. His mother?
"Is she dead, Uncle Jasper?"
Jasper shook his head and reached out to take his hand. The duke sat in his great chair leaning to his right. He was now fifty, still handsome but showing signs, in and around his eyes, of weariness after so many years of effort keeping at bay wolves greedy for swallowing his beloved Brittany. On his lips there was the trace of a smile he was trying hard to suppress. The contrast between the two men's expressions confused Henry.
"Are we to be returned to be reconciled with Edward?" said he, looking with undisguised

misgiving at Francis, and gnawing his nether lip. He knew that if enough money and pledges could be extorted from Edward, a weakening Francis would one day let him go.
Jasper shook his head again - and then broke into a huge smile and embraced his nephew. Breathless from the bear-hug, he asked him what had happened.
“Just over a week ago, King Edward IV took to his bed with a chill and growing worse by the hour….with some mysterious ailment……..he expired! His whelp of a son is to be king with the Cripple his protector. Thy time has come, Henry!”
An even greater fear now seized him, and Henry almost smiled in an effort to conceal it. He bit his lip again.
Francis, wily as ever, had never told either man of a secret which he now thought it timely to reveal.
“A year ago, Edward offered me three thousand pounds in silver for you, Richmond, as well as four thousand stout archers to shoot at Louis, at any time I might request them. Whereupon I sent my spy - whom Louis believed was his! - to tell him of the offer, adding two more thousand archers - so that he would not make war against me. A small price *not* to pay for the doubt and hesitation it produced in Louis!”
He smiled to see their alarm turn to relief.
“Your Grace is an ingenious and great ruler!” exclaimed Jasper.
“Oh flattery! Well, I almost took the silver. I am now waiting for Bignose to offer me five thousand pounds for you both - though I shall insist on ten - so that I may ease my guilty conscience in my counting house and have my peace of mind again.”
They forced a laugh. On the way down the stairs however, Jasper whispered that there were many a true word spoken in jest.
“Take care, Henry. Francis is growing old and will always do what suits Brittany best, not us. Richard will do his best to buy us now. He hates us. He is far more cunning and determined than his brother.”

*

Jasper was right. After Edward Woodville’s escape with two ships and English bullion, a furious Richard sent an envoy, Thomas Hutton, to Francis with orders to demand that the hated pirate not be given protection at the Breton Court, and to sound him out about Tudor.
To the request about Woodville, Francis graciously agreed, well knowing there was more, much more on Hutton’s mind. He duly raised the matter of Henry Tudor himself - (whom Woodville had already enriched by several thousand pounds of Richard’s treasure and with whom, at that very moment, he was sitting down to cards in another room of the duke’s chateau. Edward Woodville had also brought Henry tidings that many more of his kinsmen and other Yorkists were ready to change allegiance and oppose the usurper.)
Francis set his face in an expression of anxiety and told Hutton of his troubles.
“I must report, ambassador, that I am under enormous pressure again from Louis to release the Lords Richmond and Pembroke into his custody. In short, he threatens invasion . I shall try to resist his menaces because I know if I give in, he will furnish the two rebels with soldiers and ships to challenge your Sovereign Lord. England is an old ally very dear to me, for whom I would wish to cause no mischief. I shall do all in my power to stand firm.”
“But Your Grace could send the two traitors back in my custody,” said Hutton, sensing a chance of glory “then you would be rid of the burden they impose upon you.”

Francis smiled, placed his palms together as if in prayer and gazed at the ceiling, shaking wistfully his greying head.
“If only it were so simple, dear Hutton, then they would have been long gone. But to expel them to England would so incense Louis that he would hurl all his might against us.”
“But King Richard would never stand back and allow the French to prevail over Brittany!”
“Ah! I am gratified to hear that I can rely on the new king as much as the old.”
He glanced up quickly at his servant who brought over a letter under his seal.
“Pray give this to your Master. It contains proposals apposite to the present perils we both face and how we might collude to overcome them.”

14: London, August / September 1483

Richard hurled the Duke of Brittany’s letter onto the table and turned on Hutton.
“Did you know of these terms - when you left our money with him? Three thousand pounds? THREE THOUSAND!”
“No, Sire” he replied alarmed, imagining that Richard’s eyes were glancing in flashes at his neck. The king snatched up the parchment again and read aloud.
“*I cannot at present render Richmond and Pembroke to His Royal Highness* - Richmond and Pembroke, such impudence! - *because Louis would avenge himself upon us by force of arms. Be assured therefore that they shall be closely guarded and moved from place to place in case Louis attempts their capture.* - he means capture by us! - *My one concern is that, being overwhelmed by said Louis’ armies, we would not be able to withhold their hiding places from him for long, so that I fear they would be taken by force, either for ransom or, worse, sent into England to raise rebellion. I urge you therefore to have standing at our disposal and for our protection, four or five thousand archers, with good captains, so that in the event of war they would be sent to us, salaries paid by your exchequer, to be followed by three thousand more* - three thousand more!! - *every next month.*
With Louis surely repelled and subdued by such forces, the said Richmond could be returned to his proper home for his Royal Highness to dispose of in whichever manner may suit him best. Know also that the pirate Woodville shall be driven from our shores as soon as His Royal Highness subdues sundry English miscreants who have been raiding our northern waters around St Malo. I have kept the money which your gracious envoy, Hutton brought, so that diverse Breton merchants shall be compensated for their losses.……And this is what you bring me in return for my trust in you, Sir? Did you not threaten to withdraw our support for him entirely?”
Hutton was sweating. He had been beguiled by the Duke’s charm The terms set out in the letter were a polite insult.
“His Grace, the Duke was so pleasant and reassuring that I saw no necessity -”
“No necessity? The fox has outwitted you entirely - has kept our money and given you nothing - you a man whose wits were recommended to me. My spies tell me that he does not keep Tidder a prisoner. He roams the woods hunting with that blasted Jasper Tidder. And the Woodville traitor sits down with them at cards gambling with our money! Send four thousand archers? I shall send ten thousand - to shoot at Bretons! Get thee gone from our sight!”
So saying, he grabbed a candle and set the parchment alight. Tudor was further from his grasp than ever.
And, when Richard learned of King Louis’ death at the end of August, he knew instantly that France would be embroiled in such questions over the succession of his eight-year-old son, Charles, that no-one would think to threaten Francis anymore. Tudor, without lifting a finger,

had gained an advantage and King Richard saw in it all the work of the Devil.

15: Brittany, September / October 1483

Henry Tudor read with shaking hand and tearful eyes the letter which had just been placed in his hand.

My dear Son,

Today, I have the fortune to bring thee good tidings. Thou shalt soon receive a letter from my nephew Buckingham pledging his support for thy cause. At first, I was incredulous that he would turn against the usurper, his ally and benefactor, yet sundry reports from my own servant and trustworthy gentlemen have persuaded me that this is so. He promises to raise rebellion in Brecon on thy arrival. Thereafter, thou willst have to watch him for he surely has secret designs for his own aggrandisement.
I urge thee to come before the winter to save us from the bleak icy blasts of this most despicable usurper and regicide. My messenger has brought thee money I have raised to pay for men and arms. I am advised that thou shouldst try to land in Wales, God willing, to join forces with Devonshire and Wiltshire men and Buckingham's men from Brecon. Kent and Essex will rise as soon as reports come of thy approach and, London being gripped from West, East and South, thou shalt surely prevail.

Your affectionate Mother,
Margaret Stanley

Henry raced to find his uncle and together they begged for an audience with Duke Francis. As soon as he read the letter, he smiled.
"So, after all these years your time has come, Lord Richmond. Know that I am sore displeased with King Richard. He has not had the courtesy to respond to my letter nor has he made mention of the young Prince Edward whom his father pledged in marriage to my daughter Anne."
"We fear he is dead, Your Grace."
"So I have heard. The villain. His own nephew…."
"We intend to depose him, Your Grace," said Jasper. "At the earliest time we can."
"You shall have all that you need. For I know I can rely on you to repay me in full, by coin and by friendship."
Henry ventured a step closer to the throne, towards a man he both feared and admired. He bit his nether lip.
"Your Grace has been like a father to me these last twelve years. Will you give me your hand, Sir?"
Francis blushed a little, to think of the devious back-game he had been forced to play with Henry. Finally, he held his hand out, long and slender, in its lacy cuff, and Henry grasped it with both of his.
"I shall never forget you, Sir."
When Henry reflected on on the few months elapsed since March he could scarcely believe the change - the transformation in his fortunes. Yet his delight was mingled with terror because he knew that should his enterprise, now unstoppable, meet with defeat in England, then it would mean his certain death, and, should her treason be discovered, the death of his mother.

“Did I prefer the safety of a hopeless exile?” said he in confession to his oldest friend, Clement.
“I dare not tell of these inner doubts and terrors to my uncle.”
“Henry, God will bless thy righteous cause.”

16: Lincoln, October 11th 1483

The mayor knelt down and bowed deeply. Being rather stout and infirm he had difficulty in standing up again. Generously, and against all rules of formality, Richard stepped forward and helped him to his feet, causing the assembled aldermen, clerics, squires and magistrates to applaud and cheer.
“Gentlemen! My Lord Mayor! We are grateful for your welcome to this ancient city of Lincoln, and we look forward to our stay and your hospitality.”
“Your Grace,” declared the mayor “we have collected for a gift to commemorate your visit. We would be honoured if you would accept this silver goblet engraved with your name and coat of arms.”
“Are we not delighted, Queen Anne, to be overwhelmed by the love of our people here and everywhere on our Royal Progress?”
He took her hand to raise it and she smiled sweetly and prettily, bestowing nods of gratitude around the council chamber.
A door in the corner opened suddenly and all heads turned to look. Richard was surprised to see his spy, Collinson, appear whom he had set on to pursue Hastings six months previously. A pikeman was barring his entry.
“Let him pass!” exclaimed the king. “My Lord Mayor, I would be glad of a private audience with this man.”
Richard soon found himself in the robing room, alone with Collinson.
“We will not be overheard here. Hast thou reports of the Tidders? Are they at sea - or landed? Thy face is all alarm. Speak man!”
“No, Sire. I am here to report on the Lord Buckingham.”
“Oh. Has he changed his mind about meeting us in Leicester, as was agreed?”
Collinson pressed his lips together grimly, as if loath to form the words which he knew would infuriate his master.
“Has the Devil got thy tongue?”
“I can find no easy way of telling you….”
“What? Is he dead?”
“As good as, my Lord. He is a traitor and is even now raising rebellion in Wales.”
“WHAT?”
“He is in collusion with divers gentlemen in the south, a great many malcontents, some even who served the king, your brother.”
Richard hurled the only thing to hand - the silver goblet, at the wall, denting it.
“Of those bawds, gluttons and drunkards I would have expected it. But of Buckingham, a man whom I have rewarded and trusted as a brother? Can it be true, villain - or has a Woodville viper poured this poison into thine ear?”
“Sire, no less a person than the Chancellor has confirmed it by his own reports, bidding me then to ride here in all haste to acquaint you withal. I have here a list of all his conspirators.”
Richard snatched the scroll from his grasp and read rapidly through the names, searching for one in particular he dreaded to see. Stanley’s name was not there. But its omission did not satisfy him. He overcame his fury and lowered his voice

“Hast heard the Lord Stanley’s name mentioned - or the Lady Margaret’s, his wife?”
“No, Your Grace.”
“Thank God.”
On the table were a quill and ink and parchment. At speed, he wrote out three proclamations. The first was a summons to arms, with assembly fixed for Leicester on 21st October.
“Get the scribes to copy as many of this one for the mayors of all our towns in the Midlands and North. This second one to be passed by all mayors in our realm to their criers offering rewards for killing or capturing the principle rebels - your scroll to be copied likewise.”
Collinson took both parchments, noting with amazement the thousand pounds offered for the head of Buckingham.
“As for this third one, have done likewise for all our mayors - it is a pardon for those commons who lay down their weapons.”
The king had written rapidly, holding his breath and exhaling suddenly in great sighs.
“These must go to all points in haste. Go and have Thomas Hutton and the Captain of Horse sent in. Look lively!”
Collinson could not help but study the beads of sweat on the king’s brow while he spoke.
“Why dost thou look at me so strangely, man? Get thee gone!”
Richard reentered the Council Chamber and all murmuring ceased. The queen looked abashed.
“Know that southern traitors are raising rebellion against us,” shouted Richard. “We cannot dally here and must to Leicester.”
Collinson gave the papers to the king’s secretary who could scarce believe their contents. The two men stared at each other until at last Collinson broke the silence.
“King Richard is afraid.”

17: The South Of England, mid-October 1483

In Kent and Essex, feelings were running so high against the king that it worked, ironically, in his favour, in that their rebellion broke out early, before rebels in counties further west were ready. The hated Yorkshire soldiers of Richard prevented the men of Kent from crossing the Thames to join with their allies in Essex, and the uprising was contained. Rebels in Surrey drew back to Guildford, to await forces from Wales under Buckingham, and from Exeter under the Marquess of Dorset, Elizabeth Woodville’s son. But for Buckingham they would wait in vain. Richard, riding south with his army, sent riders ahead to give orders that all ports on the south coast should be watched.
At the Stanleys’ London home, the servants were sent packing downstairs out of earshot by the furious master of the house.
“Didst honestly think, Margot, that I would throw in my lot with a man so despised and despicable as Buckingham? Even his own retainers are deserting him. He is a boastful man, one who overestimates by a great degree his own importance and influence. He sees himself as the new Warwick. The Brecon people hate him as a cruel master and will not rise“.
“Then the whole enterprise will fail and Henry will die! He will arrive expecting the whole country in uproar. I must send word to him to stay in Brittany.”
“Thou wilt do no such thing! Richard’s spies are everywhere and we are suspected. Hast thou sent any messages to Buckingham?“
“None at all. And I have burned his to me.“
“Thank God…If Henry can land in Wales, he will find out soon enough that he must stay his hand. The Brecon people who have deserted thy damnable nephew might rally to him if he can

get a foothold at Pembroke or Chepstow. There he will offer opponents of Richard a rallying point."
"Dost thou hate Richard, Tom - or art thou dissembling? I never guess thy true thoughts. Swear to me that thou dost truly hate him!"
"Of course I do! But I love thine and mine own head more! We must leave all to Providence now, for this rebellion thou hast part conceived is still-born. I have seen too many good men lose their heads in this war for making imprudent choices too soon. We will keep ours on our shoulders for as long as we can. I would fain die in bed with mine under my nightcap! Now dry thy tears. Pray for thy son. God will surely save him from harm."
"But he will never come into his right. I despair at this misfortune after so much preparation."
"His time will come, for the king is generally despised. Until the time is ripe we must wait and see."
"Wait and see, wait and see….That, Tom, should be thy motto. What is it in Latin?"

18: Brittany, 30th October 1483

On the first tide, in fair weather, fifteen pinnaces set sail from the small port of Paimpol. The wind was stiff and favourable but in mid-Channel it blew into a gale and Henry glumly turned on Clement.
"Is this the blessing of God thou didst promise for our mission?"
After a blustery, sleepless night a filthy grey dawn revealed only one pinnace of the other fourteen in sight, rising and pitching in turbulent seas. When a sailor came down to tell him, Henry, sick at heart and stomach, lamented bitterly. Jasper lifted him from his couch and embraced him.
"White cliffs are in sight. It is Poole harbour. We shall be safe. Come up with me. It will do thee good to loosen thy stiff limbs after such a cramped night."
Henry climbed the wet steps and the fresh wind instantly blew from his nostrils the terrible smells of the air below.
"Good morning, my Lords," shouted Captain Guillaume and came close so that his words would not be blown out to sea.
"We must change our plans and land in Dorset, else risk a wreck, for the storm might be yet worse farther west. And we have been cheated by the victualler - two of our barrels of salt herring are foul."
Henry looked to port and, peering through the spray and the rain, had his first glimpse of Britain since 1471 when he had gazed back in despair at the receding Welsh coast. It was not a welcoming sight. Instead of a feeling of euphoria as he had expected, he felt repulsion. While Jasper went below to rouse the men Henry stood with Clement in prayer.
"Take heart, Henry. The Good Lord has spared us the storm and brought us safe to land."
"Dear Clement. Pray for Him to bring me courage," he said biting his lip.
"We are all afraid, Henry."
"Yes - but on which of us would a gamer now place his money? On a man tossed by these seas with only two ships - or a man on firm ground with an army at his back? A man so ruthless for power that he would murder his own brother's children - or a man who is not even quite certain that he wishes the prize?"
As the current and wind carried them closer into shore, soldiers appeared raising pikes in welcome.
"The rebellion has begun," declared Jasper. "God has whipped up the storm to bring us to a

nearer and more favourable place."
"And turned the fish rancid," said Henry gloomily. Jasper shrieked with laughter and clapped him on the shoulder. "Thou shalt save thyself the cost of a jester when thou art king!"
"Can we tie up safely in this swell, Captain Guillaume?" asked Henry.
"We shall soon see."
One of the men on the jetty cupped his hands together and announced that they were the Duke of Buckingham's men, come to guide them to his camp. Jasper took out his sword to signal that he had understood.
"Uncle - it is doubtless a trap. By my mother's reckoning and plan, Buckingham should be in Bristol or Exeter now, not in Poole."
"Perhaps the rising has come on better than anyone dared hope. Perhaps the whole of the south has -"
"Uncle. I have not sat on my arse these many years just to be taken like a crab in a basket. We are only two ships. Scarce a hundred men. Let a boat be launched, Captain, to take a closer look at these friends of ours. The voice we just heard was a northern one, not Welsh."
Jasper, realising he had been over-eager, stepped back in surprise and admiration of Henry. He nodded his approval of his proposal to Guillaume.
A rowboat was duly launched with Jasper amongst the crew. He returned much the wiser.
"I shouted to them in Welsh and was met with silence. And they are tall - as the men of York are. I fear the rebellion has been betrayed or put down."
"Then let us wait until midday at anchor. The wind is slackening. If other ships arrive, we shall sail on together to Exeter and march to Bristol. If not, we return to Paimpol."
"As you command, my Lord Richmond." said the captain.
Jasper and Clement looked at Henry now almost in awe.
By the afternoon, with not a single sail in sight, Henry aborted the mission and the two ships came about and made for home.

19: Salisbury, Late October

As the end of the month approached, a terrible deluge swept in from the west and, with hardly a let-up, it doused the scattered fires of rebellion in Wiltshire and surrounding counties. Hearing no reports of an invasion fleet approaching his well-guarded southern ports, Richard, giving thanks to God for His blessing, could afford to turn his attention westwards to Wales and Devon and Cornwall, ever sources of staunch Lancastrian support. In particular, he wished to wreak vengeance on Buckingham.
He had tried to make contact with the Marquess of Dorset, unaware that he, Dorset, had given up all idea of confronting the king and had gone back into hiding. The duke soon found himself wandering around in the forest of Dean with his paltry band of supporters melting daily away under incessant pouring rain. Finally, he had to accept that the cause was lost. Wet through to the skin, with only a handful of servants, he made his way back to Brecon intending to gather together as many of his belongings as he could and go into hiding too. As he approached the castle he was forewarned that the king's men were lying in wait for him. With mounting despair, he turned north, hardly better than a vagabond, cursing himself for the miscalculation of his support, and cursing God for the misfortune of the weather.
Richard, meanwhile, decided to halt in Salisbury to await the end of the storm.

"Your Grace, Buckingham has been captured near Shrewsbury. His own servant and sole

companion betrayed his location, a low hovel where he had disguised himself as a yokel."
The king threw back his head and laughed - a phenomenon so singular that it took his fellow feasters aback.
"A yokel! Sic transit gloria mundi! Shall we have him hanged up then in his rags like a common deer thief? Or, better, shall we have him stripped naked, castrated, guts drawn and have horses tear him into four joints of pork? Have him brought here to us."
At the end of October, as Henry was setting sail from Brittany, expecting to join Buckingham in Devon, the latter was travelling south to meet his doom, his braggart swagger entirely vanished, and his portly self much reduced by hunger.
On the first of November, summarily condemned to be executed on the morrow, he spent his last day on earth pleading with the guards for an audience with the king.
"Tell him it was all a ruse, to drive the traitors like deer from their covers. Tell him I have more names - names he would never suspect of treason. I would have met Tudor and captured him - but for the accursed weather. Tell him I was within a mile of catching the traitor Dorset - I only returned to Brecon because of the damned rain!"
And so on.
Even as he was led in drizzle onto the town square of Salisbury before Richard, enthroned, and his black-vested northern army at attention, he attempted to plead his case.
"Richard, I am betrayed! I am loyal!"
Unmoved, the king indicated that he should be hooded. With the black wool clinging tight to his mouth, muffling his arguments, he was picked up by men at each arm and leg and pinned, squirming and squealing like a pig to the cobbles, as the block was thrust under his throat. At a nod from Richard, he was deprived of his fat head with one blow of the axe.
While his blood spurted then trickled from his neck and spread between the wet cobble stones, a silence was maintained, as Richard had commanded. Finally, he leant to his left and stood up with difficulty.
"Know ye that I am a just and merciful man. This Judas' treachery and ingratitude against us were so heinous that we might have tormented him for a week before giving him a death far more terrible and fitting than this. In sundry towns and counties of our realm have ye already subdued riots and rebellions against us. And we are grateful! Now we must turn west and drive the remaining vermin into the sea. Are ye loyal Englishmen and true?"
"WE ARE!" came a great shout in return.
"Then rest ye and feast ye one more day - for tomorrow we march."
"God save the king," squeaked a voice from a window, which was echoed by a thunder of others around the square.
Richard beckoned Collinson over.
"What shall I have done with the corpse, Sire?"
"Sling it naked over an ass, parade it and throw it in the river. Give his head to the boys for a football."

News of Buckingham's death struck fear into those few rebels still stalwart and resolute. The failure of Henry Tudor to arrive in atrocious weather was the final blow from which the revolt could not recover. As the king's army marched through the gateway of Exeter and into Devon the "vermin" scattered and scrambled for the coast, hiring, stealing and commandeering boats.
Richard showed no mercy to those captured and even his brother-in-law, Thomas St Ledger, in spite of pleading from his own sister and promises of gold and silver, was forced to endure the

traditional traitor's death of hanging, of watching the drawing-out of his innards, and of quartering.
Hundreds of prominent Englishmen - a miscellany of traditional Lancastrians, of Woodvilles and their clique, of Yorkists who had loved King Edward, and of many with personal grievances against King Richard, for example, friends of William Hastings - had indeed been driven into the Atlantic and the Channel and left with no other option but to set course for Brittany to throw in their lot with a man none but a few had ever met.
Henry's ship had not sailed as far as Brittany. Forced to to tie up in Normandy, he had made his way back, with the permission of a French Regency in no mood to be entangled in English politics, to Duke Francis at Rennes. Henry did not need to say to Jasper what was obvious to all: that his value as a threat, to the English Crown, after the recent debacle, was so negligible that the distracted French could hardly be bothered with him.
And yet, and yet - once the euphoria of his victory over his rebels without one battle worthy of the name had faded, Richard realised with a heavy heart that he had inadvertently - by his determination to drive the vermin into the sea - driven them instead beyond his own reach and into the camp of his enemy where they might become closer allies, pooling resources of funds and ideas and organizing a challenge far more coherent and threatening than the piecemeal effort he had so easily crushed.
In 1483-4, like his brother before him, Richard sat uneasily on his throne, facing a winter of chilling anxiety, sleepless nights - and, yes, discontent.

20: Rennes, Brittany, December 1483
Henry was so deep in thought that he did not heed his uncle's approach. He was just placing his red queen onto a threatening square when Jasper laid his hand on his shoulder, causing him to start - causing all the pieces on the board to jolt and settle back down on their squares.
"What - "
"I have just come from the duke. He is complaining that if any more Englishmen arrive, he will be unable to give them quarters. Ten and more arrive daily."
It was a gloomy afternoon and the candles were already lit. The year was approaching its longest night. Henry, almost smirking, studied Clement's glum face staring at a hopeless position.
"I cannot see a way out for thee, Clement," said Jasper. "Oh…I hope thou art not playing for money. Nephew, thou art not taking money off him - again?"
Clement held up his hand in resignation and laid his king flat on the board, before tossing Henry a crown.
"Shame on thee. It is thy worst vice, thy love of money. Clement. I would talk with Henry in private."
When they were alone, while Henry was picking up a pawn from the floor, Jasper reached down, picked up the white queen and hid it in his hand.
"I have never asked thee if thou hast known woman yet, but it is about the getting of a one that I am come. Here…"
Jasper let the queen drop into Henry's hand.
"A white rose yet in bud. A virgin…..like you? Edward's eldest daughter, the lovely Elizabeth."
He picked up the red king and placed it next to the white queen which Henry had put down.
"It will be time soon to end this terrible endless war of two roses. If thou dost wed her, the two claims to the throne will be united in one. England will know peace again and will thrive."
"My mother has mentioned this before in letters. If the lady is willing…"

“If the lady is willing? Would she refuse to marry the king of England, even if he never smiled - and cheated at chess?”
“I would hope never to cheat at anything - least of all at chess or in love.”
He reached out and picked up a pawn to twirl between his fingertips before setting it firmly down on the second rank, on the square from which games usually began. Looking at Jasper with his usual wry smile, he pushed the piece two squares forward.
“Uncle, how can I think about the endgame when we have not yet made a firm opening?”
“Well, I have been sounding opinions out amongst our new allies some of whom hate each other. They need something to unite them, A promise.”
Four days later, on Christmas Day, Henry took a solemn oath in Rennes cathedral in front of the Duchess of Brittany and the disparate - and desperate - bunch of English exiles - that he would marry Princess Elizabeth of York.

Francis, the duke, being affected by one of his seizures, could not attend the ceremony. Increasingly frail and bowed down by the cares of office, he had been delegating ever more authority to his trusted treasurer, Pierre Landais.
Brittany was facing a relentless onslaught from Richard’s navy and pirates, and fears grew that an invasion would take place after the winter. Breton goods and ships were being impounded in London, the situation becoming so bad that Henry feared Landais would recommend to Francis that he capitulate and surrender him. Landais was an honourable man, he knew, but he would ultimately put Brittany before honour. Might he be obliged to sacrifice his Englishmen to secure a peace? Jasper thought not, but the shadow of doubt led Henry to seek an urgent audience with Francis.
The interview with the ailing duke allayed his fears.
“I shall not allow that wicked tyrant to intimidate and dictate terms to me. Could I place any faith in any treaty I might conclude with a man who would murder his own nephews? He is the new King Herod. Any treaty would merely be a parchment he would set fire to the next day. I will equip you anew in the spring and, with a fairer wind and God’s blessing, you will prevail.”

21: London, December 1483
Thomas, Lord Stanley, long and solemn of face, smoothed down his scarlet jerkin and ran his fingers through his greying beard. Though near fifty, he was still considered handsome and he took obvious pride in his bearing and the admiration it won. He was assiduous in dealing with the world in a measured and graceful manner, and, even when annoyed, took pains to preserve his dignity.
The great oaken double doors of the Presence Chamber at Westminster were so thick that they allowed no clue of the proceedings within to escape. The two pikemen stood stiffly as wooden figures in a church. Stanley became more agitated and impatient with every minute more he was kept waiting and he could only subdue his resentment of the insult, calculated as it was, by the thought that his very life might depend on the answers he was about to give before the king and his Council. The egress, every so often, of lesser men he despised, creatures and cronies of the king, with faces euphoric for the favours of land and annuities just bestowed on them, tried his patience even more. They had been brought down from the north to replace traitors who had fled to Brittany leaving the south of England, bereft of local authority, dangerously exposed to further disorder.
As they swept past, Stanley managed a faint smile at every one of them. He breathed deeply and

tried to slow his heart, but felt his blood pulsing like a soft tambour in his throat and head. He had to aim for a calm demeanor but avoid nonchalance. He knew there would be men around the king all too keen to trip him up and twist his meanings. Northumberland, who had raised Yorkshire against the rebels - and Suffolk, who had subdued Kent and Essex, had already wondered aloud why he, Stanley, had not come south with men from his lands in Cheshire and Lancashire to support the king. Mentally, he ran over again the emphatic and unchallenged answer he had already given and looked for any weaknesses which they, upon reflection, might try to exploit. His lands, his wealth and his life - and those of his wife - were hostages to his good judgement and persuasive tongue. He had heard from his own men that rumours were abroad of his wife's involvement in treason and that he was either complicit or an ignorant fool. Was he not master in his own house? Was he merely a dull instrument played by his wife?
The doors swung suddenly open and his name was called. The hall seemed longer than usual and his footsteps echoed on the marble slabs as he approached the throne where Richard sat absent-mindedly, leaning slightly to his left, fiddling with his ring.
"Your Grace," said Stanley, taking Richard's proffered hand and kissing the ruby. Stanley had quickly counted thirty- three members of the Council arrayed to the left and right and behind the throne, whose faces were at once expectant and inquisitive.
"We are right sorry to have kept you, my Lord Stanley, but matters of lesser import needed to be dealt with first."
Lesser import. The slow words were as pointed as knives and Richard seemed to enjoy the alarm he saw in the raising of Stanley's eyebrows. There was a deep silence as if everyone was holding their breath. There was no chair. Was this the counterpart of God's Judgement Seat in heaven? Stanley looked slowly round at the faces and fixed on the sardonic gleam in the eye of Sir William Catesby, a man he despised and suspected of betraying William Hastings in the spring. He felt his hand tighten on the pommel of his sword as he imagined in a flash running the villain through. He took a long deep breath. He feared at least an attainder. Catesby, Richard's closest counsellor, had probably recommended it…….
"You look so solemn, Lord Stanley. Will you take a stoop of fine wine?"
"No thank you, Your Grace. Not at this hour. I would prefer to get straight to business, to the reason I am summoned here before Your Highness and these….gentlemen."
From his jerkin Richard drew a parchment and gave it to Stanley. With trembling fingers which he silently cursed, he pulled away the ribbon and read the contents of the scroll. The relief he felt could not be disguised.
"You see how much we appreciate your loyalty in the tumults of the autumn just gone, my Lord."
"Your Grace is too generous in the bestowal of such marvellous rewards!"
"Aye, sundry malicious and jealous persons, some even close at hand, have said as much - that you do not love us as much as you should. As much as we love you."
"Then they speak false and in calumny. You know me to be an undemonstrative man who abhors flattery and loud pretence of exaggerated affection."
"Just as we do. But some gossips and slanderers say you stayed in Chester merely to……wait and see how events would turn out."
"I too have heard this said - whispered indeed by some men - by those even who are great and who ought therefore not to think such mean thoughts unworthy of their standing. Let me declare before them now, that in Chester, reports were brought to me that Welsh - and even Scotch miscreants meant to seize their chances in the northwest in the event of my absence in marching

south."
"And do you know too that wagging tongues impute treason to your wife, the Lady Margaret, by reason of her encouragement of sundry knaves, bawds and adulterers to plot our downfall?"
"Then permit me, Your Grace, to call upon those slanderers to produce evidence to prove it!"
Stanley glanced around, terrified that someone or other would step forward with parchments to give the lie to his wife's avowal that she had neither written any letter nor received one. The ranks held and only a log on the roaring fire cracking and spitting broke the silence. Stanley was heartily relieved.
"My Lady does not dabble in matters political and -"
"Even though her only son, Henry Tidder, would have had the advantage of that rebellion, had it prospered? Some might deem such disinterest in *matters political* - so pertinacious to her only child's glory - quite unnatural. What say ye, men of our Council?"
"Aye, Your Grace!"
Stanley almost recoiled as the shout went up in unison. He had not planned for this and had to think quickly.
"Your Grace…it is understandable that some would suspect her because of - by the will of God - whose mother she is. She cannot of course help her state of motherhood. Suspicion, we all know well, leads to rumour, but in her case it only proceeds from the minds of her accusers and not from the actions of the Lady. A half-eaten haunch of venison near to a dog might cause the dog to be whipped while the vagabond, the real culprit, steals away. The vagabond is of course Buckingham who had good reason to provoke revolt against Your Majesty - for he had greedy designs on your throne - "
"If Buckingham is the vagabond in your analogy, are you saying your wife can bark? Should I tell her of your insult?"
All laughed long at the king's jest, including Stanley, much relieved that the tension had been broken.
"Indeed, no, Sire. But to be serious again, Henry has been - and would have had been - a foolish puppet of Buckingham. The Lady Margaret feared greatly for her son in this affair and would have told him to stay away, much preferring a peaceful resolution to England's travails by his espousal to the Princess Elizabeth of York, to which Your Grace has already given his blessing."
"Yes, Stanley, this would have been our wish, but events abroad supercede it. Our spies at Rennes report that our traitors, once our brother's loyal followers, wish for this marriage too - not for our sake or the sake of our realm - but as a means of causing a new rebellion, murder and mayhem and the usurpation of England's rightful monarch, King Richard the Third."
"Then I am right sorry to hear it - and so shall be my Lady."
Stanley hoped he had said enough. The fire crackled again and he noted, glancing around, that many he did not trust even seemed disappointed. Richard leant back and smiled. Stanley pushed the ribbon back onto the scroll, letting out a breath he had unconsciously held long.
"We are summoning a Parliament in late January which will approve, we hope, the seizures of traitors' land and its award to our loyal friends, as well as confirming our Titulus Regius, in case any man should doubt our right to wear this crown, and thereby put his life in PERIL."
"It seems right fitting so, Your Grace."
"Lord Stanley, you are a great peer of our realm and it troubles us that you suffer because of the taint of suspicion. You cannot help being related to Tidder by marriage - though some less scrupulous and honourable than you might find remedy. It troubles us that many doubt you and Your Lady - and that these doubts sometime cloud our eyes too. Know then, that at said

Parliament we intend to put the Lady Margaret above suspicion by seeking approval for the awarding of her lands to you until your death, upon which they will come into the possession of the Crown -"
"But Your Grace -"
"Of the CROWN. Furthermore, so that no man shall say in slander that she sends and receives messages by way of her private servants, all such shall be removed from her service, with you being charged to keep her under strict observance - as of course - all our ladies should be - for they a weak sex, are they not, gentlemen?"
"Aye, Your Grace!"
"For as much as you keep her strictly within doors, within earshot and within sight, you shall be able to declare, hand on heart and on Holy Scripture - should any villain accuse her - that she is blameless."

As soon as he was in home, Stanley called for brandy.
"What on earth is wrong, Tom? Hast seen a ghost?"
"Aye, almost my own - and thine."
As Stanley recounted what had happened Margaret turned as pale as he.
"The tyrant means to put us to the test," concluded Stanley "The loss of my head would mean the loss of everything we have. He would have it off my shoulders now if he could guarantee the peace and loyalty of our northern territories. We dare not advance Henry's cause anymore. So let God decide the outcome - and we……"
"Must wait and see?"
"Yes. YES! I rue the day -"
"Thou didst marry me?"
"No! The day when Edward fell ill. Whence proceed all these ills and disquiet."
"And so I am to be a prisoner in our own house."
"He will post spies to ensure it."
"When this villain falls, by the grace of God, I shall rejoice."

In January, Parliament met and, under the speakership and watchful eye of Catesby, members obediently shouted aye to all of Richard's attainders and his gifts of offices, annuities and land. All over the Midlands and the south of England, yeomen and peasants watched in grim silence as Yorkshiremen, as good as foreigners with their rough dialect, became their new landlords - and many experienced first-hand in the flesh the truth of the old saw that the old devil is better than the new. Dissent was frozen in January and February as hard as the water in the millrace, with nowhere envisaged anytime a thaw.
Confident that opposition was, at least on the home front, nullified, Richard had spent lavishly on Christmas celebrations and in the New Year he turned his attention to the problem of Elizabeth Woodville and her four daughters sitting in sanctuary since her husband's death. In order to trump Henry Tudor's Queen of Hearts, he needed to get the Princess Elizabeth and her sisters married off. Their mother, again under great pressure to leave the Abbey and fearing a repetition of her sons' demise, insisted on Richard swearing an oath. To this he agreed and on the first of March, 1484, before an assembly of peers, the Mayor of London and his aldermen, Richard swore to protect Elizabeth and her daughters.

"That he should agree to swear such an oath before us all," said Stanley quietly on his return

home “is to my mind a perverse proof that he did the evil deed of regicide or ordered it done. Otherwise he would surely have refused Elizabeth‘s demand, in a show of great indignation that he might be thought capable or culpable.”
“But he is desperate to marry the Princess off to thwart us and Henry.” replied Margaret. “He would marry her to a beggar to protect his throne. He is a clever and formidable opponent.”
“Yes, but lately I detect some signs of insanity in his searing look and braggart speech. I hope and pray he might be the cause of his own downfall. It gnaws at him like a black rat, I can tell, that he cannot bend Brittany to his will.”
“Would that the rat gnawed at his conscience! Why does no-one dare ask him about the princes? He never ever utters one word about them - surely this silence too pronounces loud his guilt! Will Elizabeth demand to know of them or see them when she is free? Why did she not make it a condition of her leaving sanctuary that the princes be brought to her alive?”
“She is to be allowed to retire into the country. It seems to me she knows they are dead. It would be unwise of her or anyone else to embarrass or provoke the king.”
“Dost thou dare ask?”
“No!”
“*I* would! Is there no man at Court brave enough?”
“Brave enough? Or foolhardy? There is no man there who does not prefer his head to making material a truth which haunts the Palace like a ghost.”

22: France, December 1483
If the political landscape in England could be described as deep f**r**ozen that winter, turbulence in French affairs were making waves within its borders and beyond, and the backwash would effect a remarkable change in the fortunes of Henry Tudor.
In December, the mother of the boy king, Charles VIII, died and a tussle broke out for control of him between his eldest sister, Anne of Beaujeu, and her brother-in-law, the Duke of Orleans. Over the border in Brittany, similar eddies of discontent were running. As the health of Duke Francis deteriorated further, his treasurer Landais gained so much say in government that it aroused the jealousy of several Breton nobles who despised him for his low birth. They began to plot to oust him from power. When their coup failed, they were forced to flee into France and seek the protection of Beaujeu who had already seen a chance to unite France and Brittany by marrying her brother Charles to Duke Francis’s daughter.
With renewed meddling in Breton affairs threatened by France, Landais needed support, and one obvious ally was the said Duke of Orleans. He, Orleans, had already contacted France’s hostile neighbour Maximilian of Austria (who had married Mary of Burgundy, King Richard‘s sister) and, most significantly for our history, King Richard III.
As the year turned, it looked as if France might have to face a Grand Coalition of Brittany, Burgundy, French dissidents and England. Determined to regain parts of Burgundy and Flemish towns lost to Louis XI in 1482, Maximilian had already encouraged Richard to invade France while it was vulnerable due to internal strife. When Richard hesitated Maximilian dangled before him a very tasty morsel, a bait which his allies Duke Francis and Landais might finally feel obliged, after twelve years, to cast into the sea.

23: London, March 1484
Assembled in a room near the queen’s quarters, were men of quality and the king’s Council. Before them, on a table of elm were set out a parchment, an inkwell and a quill. Behind the table,

erect as he could make himself and leaning only slightly to his left to compensate for his higher right shoulder and twisted back, stood the crowned King Richard, arms folded. His noble subjects stood roughly in line in the corridor with the three greatest, Norfolk, Northumberland and Stanley foremost. A door behind Richard opened and his son Edward, pale and nervous, was ushered in to stand beside his father.

It had mystified many why the boy had been away at Middleham while his cousin Edward, the young Earl of Warwick, son of the traitor Clarence had been entertained at Court over Christmas, being served third after the king and queen. His claim to the throne outmatched Richard's and his own son's.

"He might have been too ill to travel south in December, being renowned for his frailty." Stanley had remarked to Margaret. "If he had died in the cold, who would succeed Richard but the boy Warwick?"

"Pooh, Tom! Richard wished to to show himself off as the generous uncle, one too kind to be suspected of the deaths of his other nephews. I see straight through him, he must think us all fools with his false smiles!"

Margaret had already been alarmed to hear of Richard's moves to pardon his enemies - including her own servant Thomas Bray - and to seek reconciliation with the many who had fled to be with Henry. Some, she knew, had returned to shake Richard's hand.

"He extends the hand of friendship - I would not take it for there is a viper up his sleeve."

"Perhaps he means to make amends, Margot. Perhaps he would act more kindly if he did not fear a rival."

"Oh? He would not have murdered his nephews if they had not had a better claim? Or had never existed?"

"Consider, they may be yet alive. A man close to the Constable of the Tower told me only yesterday that Richard has sent the princes to be with his sister Margaret in Burgundy."

"Indeed? And you prefer to believe this?"

"The man reports that their clothes, books and playthings are gone. So the boys are either in a different part of the Tower are are gone too."

"Or dead and buried."

"Some people in the Tower must know the truth."

"But, Tom, dare they speak? What if they have been sworn - or themselves been killed? Only Richard knows the truth."

"Shall it ever come out? He cares nothing for them now they have been declared bastards. To ask him how the boys fare, after the attempt to release them, would be treason, - a question only of import to the Woodvilles."

"The boy Warwick should fear his cup of kindness! According to thee, had he not had a devil for an uncle, he might have had a saint."

"Do not mock me, wife. Kings must sometimes be ruthless for the sake of their realm, as I have had occasion to be in Wales. I hate what *I* must do when I must do it."

"Oh Tom, do not tell me that thou art softening toward him. Yes, thou must see the occasional sheep stealer or cutpurse hanged but that is nothing to his crimes. Do not say he acts from necessity for that it is to excuse evil."

As he awaited his summons to sign the pledge on the table Thomas Stanley stood recalling this bitter exchange with his wife. He was relieved that he had not blurted out in anger to her that he considered Henry's quest hopeless, particularly since events in France had overshadowed it to the point of obscurity.

“Thomas, Lord Stanley!” intoned the man-at-arms. He stepped forward, bowed to the king and read:

We here present do hereby assert that we recognize, accept and will defend the right of Edward, newly created Prince of Wales, Earl of Chester and Earl of Salisbury, son of King Richard III, lately declared by statute Titulus Regulus by His Grace’s Parliament to be England’s rightful king, and son of his Royal Consort, Queen Anne, to succeed as rightful heir of the said King Richard, and thereunto we now, being summoned by the said King Richard to His Presence, and by appending our names and titles below do solemnly swear our allegiance to the said Prince Edward, Prince of Wales, Earl of Chester and Earl of Salisbury and swear to remain his faithful and loyal servants upon his succession to the throne of England and France.

Stanley felt Richard’s dark eyes burning into his skull as if he might read his innermost thoughts. He picked up the quill, dipped it, scrawled his signature below Northumberland’s, bowed and took his leave by a side door. The Yorkist monarchy and dynasty were secure.

24: Nottingham, April 1484

Richard loved Nottingham Castle so much that he had had timber living quarters installed upon the great tower. That spring, by dint of increasing patrols in English waters and by replenishing the royal arsenal held in the Tower, he had managed to subdue his fears of an invasion by Henry Tudor. He had already consolidated his power by putting down the autumn rebellion and had even managed to entice several rebels to return to his fold. His right to reign had been framed in law by Parliament and his succession had just been secured by an oath of loyalty. No man of any consequence had failed to sign. He held the rebellious southern counties in a firm grip. At home he feared no-one. Abroad, Henry Tudor was a diminished man. As the April weather turned barmy and spring flowers opened up to dot the Nottinghamshire meadows, he could afford to look out with his beautiful queen on a sun-blessed horizon and look forward to a peaceful and successful second year on his throne and many more years to follow.

On the ninth of April, he had just risen and was being attended to in his dressing when a terrible unearthly wail emanated from his wife’s chamber sending his blood cold. Half-dressed, he rushed in and found her collapsed on the floor.

“Our son is dead!” she sobbed. “A m-message from Middleham.”

Richard found the messenger trembling in the corridor.

“Knave, thou liest!” he yelled . “Who has put thee up to such a base trick?”

“Sire, I was given the scroll by the constable of the castle and told to ride here without let. I did not know what -”

Richard let go of his collar and went back into his lady’s chamber where he picked up the parchment she had spilled. He read the briefest of messages - that God had taken his son two nights before after a seizure of bloody coughing.

The king fell slowly to his knees, covered his face and howled like a dog. His wife was so shocked that it jolted her temporarily out of her grief.

“Richard,” she whispered, shuffling across on her knees to place a consoling hand on his shoulder. But as she tried to find a word of comfort he shook her off.

“Who should now succeed us? Warwick? We shall send him out of our sight and have him guarded for I might die of grief. If only thou hadst borne me another son! Canst still?”

“Thou dost know that I will! But how cannst even think on it when Edward is not yet cold?”

“Every time I think we are safe, God sends us more trouble. I cannot bear it.”
As soon as the news spread, only one thought crossed men’s minds - that God had indeed found a just punishment for a man who had killed his own kin.
Richard had no time to grieve. More reports came from his spies that Henry, in spite of the erosion of his support in Brittany, was planning to invade. Richard doubted these rumours but could not afford to ignore them. On May1st he issued Commissions of Array to have men between the ages of sixteen and sixty inspected and assessed in every town and parish for their battle-readiness The country was being placed on a war footing with orders that men should be prepared to march, armed and armoured in accordance with their estate, at a day’s notice. Even Richard’s enemies had to marvel at his ability to organize a relay of riders to carry messages in all directions twenty miles at a time, from one to the next, so that two hundred miles could be covered in just two days.
Richard sensed that Edward’s death, besides being a catastrophic blow in all senses, marked a turning point in his fortunes. His attempts to nullify threats from north of the border by supporting the Duke of Albany’s claim to the Scottish throne ended in failure and, worse, caused Scotland’s traditional alliance with France to be renewed and strengthened. French fleets began to attack English pirates in the Channel and an invasion in the summer was feared.
In July, a spate of seditious posters appeared as if by sorcery overnight - some as simple as ~~RIII ,~~ others containing satirical verses mocking the king. On top of other misfortunes, this so incensed him that he had one perpetrator dragged by horse through the streets of London, hanged till he was nearly dead then held down and forced to watch a knife slice him to the groin and take off his genitals before being made to stare at his still beating heart in the fist of the executioner. Londoners looked on with horror and amazement that a piece of doggerel could be so savagely punished, when a spell in the stocks would have done. It was whispered under the breath that Richard was indeed a cruel king.

25: Vannes, Brittany, April 1484
Charles VIII’s councillors had arrived at the Breton Court promising French support for a new venture against the English under the leadership of Henry Tudor. At first, a subdued Henry was delighted to see his star rise again but Jasper advised caution.
“We need to play our cards carefully for we hold no aces. I do not trust these French envoys. They do not have thy interests at heart and wish to use thee as a cat’s-paw to scratch and irritate the Cripple. Mark my words.”
When Francis, in a rare lucid moment, ordered a paltry six ships to be equipped for Henry, Jasper’s prediction seemed true.
Not many days later, while they were alone out hunting Jasper had more cold water to pour on Henry’s hopes.
“De Rieux, thy old Protector, came to see me this morning. He is sure that the French have only one purpose - to drive a wedge between the Duke and Landais. They are determined to prevent Landais from supporting the Cripple against Charles. They are using thee as a pawn. Landais has been corrupted from the honest man who rescued thee in St Malo. He loves the power he has and wants more.”

26: London, August 1484
“Margaret, sit down.”
Stanley rarely called her Margaret.

“Tom, what ever is wrong? Thy face is as pale as it was after thy meeting with the Council. Are we in danger?”
“No….but Henry is.”
He told her there had been secret negotiations at Pontefract between an envoy from Landais and one of Richard’s Council.
“A truce has been agreed to last until next April.”
“Where didst hear of this?”
“A friend in Council told me. Richard has agreed an end to piracy and to send a thousand archers to Brittany in case the French invade. Fifteen Breton ships are already on their way to take them over.”
“And what has Landais promised to Richard?” asked Margaret quietly. “Oh, I dread to ask.”
Stanley went to the window unable to look at her.
“I see. Then we must get word across to warn him.”
“How can we, Margot, when the king’s spies are out everywhere, like fleas on a dog?”
“So, must it be left to Providence? No! I shall disguise myself and get aboard a ship.”
Stanley wheeled around, shaking his head. Margaret went to leave the room but he stepped into her path.
“Thy mention of a ship! It has given me an idea.”
A consignment of wool from Stanley’s Welsh estates was expected to arrive in London for shipping to Flanders that week. Stanley knew that his steward would not return to Wales until he had seen the bales safely loaded and until the ship had sailed, for theft at the docks and from the holds of ships was rife.
Stanley sent a servant to the inn where he knew, from his own accounts, his steward always put up, with a message to be given to him to send back word upon his arrival. Stanley meeting his own man to inspect and superintend his own wool would arouse no suspicion. Within days, Stanley was strolling on board the Dutch ship with his steward, and was cordially invited by the captain to take a goblet of wine with him. After a while of talking about the weather, the cost of sailcloth and the dangers of piracy, Stanley casually asked the captain for a favour.
“An old friend of mine lives in Bruges and I would be grateful if you could get this letter to him. His name is John Morton. I do not know his lodging however.”
Stanley did not tell the captain that Morton was the former Bishop of Ely and on the list of Richard’s traitors.
“Be assured, my Lord, I shall make enquiries and soon have his place discovered.”

27: Bruges, August 1484
Morton was preparing to eat his cod with mussels in butter, a dish for which Bruges was renowned, when a knock came at his door. In a temper, he shouted his servant to see who it was and a scroll was brought to him. He was half-way through his dinner mopping up the delicious sauce when his curiosity got the better of his half-sated appetite.
“Very well, let me see.” he murmured to himself and broke the seal.

Dear Morton,

We have heard that a plot is being hatched in Brittany to seize a man of great importance to you and to us and to surrender him to a despicable fate in England . We beg you to send a messenger in all urgency to warn him thereof that he might devise a plan to save himself. Burn this letter

now.

S

Morton pushed his plate away and shouted to his servant to fetch the priest Christopher Urswick who had been in the confidence of Henry Tudor before the failed rebellion of 1483.
“Urswick, you must get to Vannes as fast as you can to warn the Lord Richmond. Look at this letter before I destroy it and take this message instead. Ask for Clement. Go now, before the town gates are closed. Go!”

28: Vannes, Brittany, August 1484
Christopher Urswick spoke French badly but Dutch tolerably well. By speaking Breton French with a heavy Dutch accent and by wearing clothes of Flanders fashion, he could dissuade even the most perceptive spy from suspecting he was English. His papers - forged - were subjected to no close scrutiny at the north gate of Vannes and his priestly habits and explanation that he was visiting a fellow cleric saw him waved easily through. Once inside the walls, he charged a boy to take a message to Clement at the ducal palace and settled down to a salty gigot of lamb in the tavern he had chosen for their assignation.
When Clement arrived, he immediately spotted the black priestly hat which the message had told him to look out for and went to sit opposite Urswick.
“The Lord Richmond is in grave danger,” he whispered, pouring Clement some wine. “Landais is preparing to sell him to our enemy. This letter from my master, John Morton, explains it all. Take it quickly.”
Clement raced back to the palace and found Henry and Jasper playing cards with two English gentlemen. He bent down as if to give advice about which card to play and whispered to Henry that he needed to speak with him urgently.
“Excuse me gentlemen.”
“But Your Grace,” protested Thomas Arundel “I am well down and need to get my own back.”
Jasper, catching that something was amiss, tossed Arundel a crown and pushed back his chair with a scrape. Henry followed Clement out into the corridor and Jasper came to hang his craggy head round the door. Spotting him, Clement beckoned him out.
“My Lord Pembroke, I think you too should hear. It is a letter from John Morton in Bruges.”
Henry took it and tore away the seal.

My Lord Richmond,

A person very close to your heart in London has sent word that you must seek sanctuary out of Brittany before the blackguard Landais surrenders you to a blackguard even more infamous in England, in as much as both have conspired in an agreement they hoped to keep secret, being the work of depraved and impious villains whom God will surely see fit to punish when He has judged their Pride at its most bloated and therefore best to pierce.

M

“Pompous ass!” exclaimed Jasper, slightly tipsy, having read the letter over Henry‘s shoulder.
“What is this on the parchment? Grease?”
“His man Urswick has ridden here in great haste, my Lord,” said Clement.

“It must be my mother who has sent word,”, said Henry biting furiously at his lip.“She would not take the risk or put me to dismay unless she was sure.”
“Nephew, take care. This might be a ruse to flush thee out of cover. Has Urswick been suborned? Where shouldst thou run to? Flanders? France? Scotland? The hunter might be already in wait. Stay here in Brittany where thou art safe.”
“No.” said Henry, turning to face his uncle. “Thou hast said already that Landais is not to be trusted anymore. The duke is weak and no longer reliable.”
“But there are nearly a thousand of us here - would Landais provoke a riot?”
“He might mean to take me when I am out hunting. I dreamt the other night of being snared in a dark wood. This confirms it. We must away. Tomorrow. I am overdue to visit my friends at Largoët. I shall announce it nonchalantly at dinner and then when I am on the road I shall divert and make for the border into France. This is my firm resolve.”
Jasper knew by this dictum and Henry’s heavy-lidded stare that he had truly made up his mind, so did not attempt to dissuade him.
When Henry retired to his chamber an hour later he took out a treasure which he had kept safe for twenty- three years. He unfolded the white handkerchief, kissed the initials MB and whispered a prayer.

Jasper went to Clement’s chamber that night when he had gotten his thoughts straight and instructed him to tell no-one of Henry’s plan.
“Thou must stay with the rest here in Vannes so as not to arouse suspicion. At dinner, I shall announce a trip to visit the duke who is recovering from his latest seizure and join Henry over the border by a different road. If he is taken, then I shall have to lead the rebellion.”
“But we shall all be at the mercy of Landais when he discovers the trick.”
“Think man! If just one of us is a spy, then all would be lost. All must remain in ignorance. As soon as our flight is discovered, ye shall all have to do as best ye can to escape. If a few are taken or killed, so be it. Especially if they are bloody Woodvilles.”
Clement hardly slept but was relieved the next day when Henry casually announced before Landais and the Breton courtiers that he *and* his priest would ride out to Largoët, the weather being so fine. As soon as they entered the deep forest, Henry discarded his finery and donned the habit of a priest which Clement had brought with him, and they rode hard for the border.
It was in the mid-afternoon, upon the arrival of de Rieux at Court, knowing nothing of his old ward’s planned visit, that a furious Landais realised he had been duped. He straightway ordered men saddled up to go in pursuit along various trails which led to the border. A peasant ricking hay told one group of breathless pursuers that two priests, one wearing silver spurs, had crossed over into France barely an hour before.

The English exiles were terrified to be left high and dry by Henry, though most understood his reasons when Landais’ treachery became known. Sir Edward Woodville was summoned by Landais and subjected to a tirade of threats and insults.
“Did you know of Tudor’s duplicity? Is this a proper way to reward so many years of hospitality and kindness at our Court? No wonder people here say never trust an Englishman!”
“So, Monsieur,” said Woodville, loading the word with as much contempt as he dared, “what do you intend to do with us now? Shall King Richard pay a pretty price per head for us? Might we rather work for nothing in the fields or the kitchens?”
Landais was stuck for words at such mockery and about to dismiss Woodville from his sight

when the great doors swung open and Duke Francis, pale and grey-haired, was carried in on a litter. His voice was weak but clear.
“I have heard that you, Landais, have made a pact with the English to send back the Lord Richmond for a thousand archers, causing Richmond to flee into France. Is this true?”
“My Lord, I am glad to see you recovered - “
“Answer my question!”
He was helped out of the chair and onto the throne which Landais had hastily vacated.
“My Lord Francis, we stood in great danger again from the French. I had no choice.”
Francis waved him away contemptuously but insisted that Woodville remain.
“I might have been too hard on him, Woodville, for I too was once tempted to give up Henry Tudor. I cannot pretend that I am not pleased - at last - to be free of a burden at once precious and troublesome to me. France will threaten us no longer though England will. If we appease one enemy, the other hates us the more. Oh. I am worn out by all this - whence proceeds my infirmity.”
Woodville kissed his proffered hand and knelt before him.
“Get up. Gather your men together on the square as soon as you are ready. I will have Landais distribute a thousand livres amongst you as his punishment, then go, with my blessing into France to rejoin your Lords Richmond and Pembroke.”
“Your Grace is too generous!”
“I know. May God go with you and bring success to your enterprise.”
Woodville turned and marched for the door but upon hearing his name called looked back at the duke who smiled and said “Do try to stay away until then.”
Francis leant back well satisfied. He knew that Richard would not invade his beloved land while France threatened invasion of England by proxy of Henry Tudor and that France would be too preoccupied with threats from Burgundy and England to bother with Brittany. For the time being he was safe. Landais had achieved by accident what he never had been able to achieve by design. Francis grinned, closed his eyes and slept.

29: Montargis, France, October 1484
The French Court was at Montargis not far from Paris when Anne of Beaujeu sought an audience with her fourteen-year-old brother Charles, king of France.
“Brother, we have a welcome visitor come over to us. Henry Tudor, the attainted Earl of Richmond, who would be king of England.”
Charles and his sister shared the same long, solemn face and long nose inherited from their father Louis XI. When he smiled, as he did now, he looked clownish
“So what mischief could we make with him?” he asked eagerly, knowing that his scheming sister, twenty-two, with a remarkable high brow full of brains had the talent to outwit any adversary in the ongoing war of wits besetting the French regency.
“Richard. I hate him for his insults to out late father and for his many atrocities. Henry is by reputation a a gentler man who would be our friend if we helped him. We might even one day regain Calais in return. We could make it a condition.”
“But if you - we infuriate Richard, he might well join our enemies in Flanders and Brittany in invading us.”
“The duke, I hear, is in his right mind again. We shall have Brittany when his daughter becomes thy wife.”
“Ugh!”

“Thou dost not have to like her, brother!”
Anne was calculating that to equip Henry Tudor would be the least expensive option for keeping Richard in check.
“He knows if he invaded us that he would face rebellion at home on all sides whether Henry Tudor is there or not. So he dare not join Orléans - that is why he tried to bribe Landais. He is like a rook that has to fly out to defend its nest from usurpers but dare not leave it for fear of it being taken. Let us make the most of Henry; praise him, proclaim him the rightful king, equip him with ships and money and men…..but not too liberally. Only sufficient to keep the tyrant over yonder from his sleep.”

30: London, October 1484
Men drew lots to decide who would tell the king of Henry’s escape into France. When his fury had abated he sent orders that the archers he had promised to Landais be prevented from embarking, only to be told that they had already sailed.
“Great God in heaven,” he shouted, his eyes flicking from one face to another, “what have I done to deserve more misfortunes? I have endured these all my life!”
No councillor seated around the great table dare speak the answer; none dare look into the eyes of his neighbours. Richard put his head in his hands.
It had not been many days since he had received troubling news about his queen. Since the summer, Anne had felt ill. At first, her physicians ascribed her symptoms of fatigue and loss of appetite to her bereavement, but she had started a cough in late September and in spite of a variety of herbal remedies it had refused to clear up. Moreover, she frequently had to take to her bed with sweats.
A physician the king trusted more than most had come to him one dismal morning with a long face.
“Sire, I have seen these symptoms before. It may be phthisis. From reading the Middleham note, I think that phthisis may well have taken off His Grace, your son.”
“Heaven help me!”
“Sire, I may be wrong and her cough may clear when these persistent fogs clear but I feel I must advise you to avoid her bed and her close company, for phthisis is contagious….”

Richard stood up and looked around his silent Council for reassurance and advice.
“So what shall we do? About our traitor Tidder? Lord *Stanley*.”
Stanley’s enemies were pleased to see him jolt in perplexity. But staring in particular at Northumberland, he immediately spoke the thought which had just entered his head.
“We should strengthen our garrison at Calais, Your Majesty. Forthwith.”
“Yes, of course! And have that traitor de Vere brought here at our disposal.”
John de Vere, Earl of Oxford, an implacable foe of the Yorkists, had been imprisoned at Hammes Castle in the Calais Pale since 1473. He was a renowned soldier and commander who could only bring strength and prestige to Henry’s cause. He had strong personal motives to be revenged on Richard in particular, for Richard had been rewarded with his confiscated lands by Edward IV, and had helped himself to Oxford’s mother’s properties upon his accession, reducing her to paupery. The idea of him being at large struck even more fear into the king’s heart than the escape of Henry Tudor. At the Battle of Barnet in 1471, Richard had witnessed and admired his qualities as a warrior, even though Oxford had been on the opposite and losing side.
Now Richard wanted his head in compensation for his many setbacks that year. An order was

issued in Council for his return.

Once again, when a new report arrived, men drew lots to tell Richard that the Earl of Oxford had not only escaped but had also persuaded the captain of Hammes Castle to defect and ride with him into France with half the garrison.
“Who has cursed me?” shouted Richard. “Is it that Woodville witch? I would have her burnt upon a shred of proof!”
More bad news followed. A ship had set sail from Essex carrying many gentlemen and their servants to join their old ally, Oxford, and Tudor in France.

31: Montargis, France, November 1484
As the autumn days shortened and the blue gloom of twilight set in by mid-afternoon, a moral gloom entered Henry’s spirits. The euphoria of escaping and of being reunited with his friends at Montargis had vanished. He and his fellow exiles faced a long winter of waiting with no guarantee that Charles’ and Anne’s promises of aid would be fulfilled. War had broken out in Flanders between Charles and Maximillian so that Henry’s enterprise was subsequently hardly spoken of. And Henry blushed whenever he thought of Charles’ proclamation of his royal entitlement, naming him as the son, not the step-nephew of Henry VI. Henry Tudor realised, detecting Anne’s wicked sense of humour in it, that this was designed to antagonize Richard rather than bolster his own claim. Moreover, eyebrows had been raised amongst the Yorkists at Court, with many doubting that Henry - if Europe’s greatest Power, France, regarded his claim as entirely legitimate and sufficient unto itself - would hold fast to his vow to marry Elizabeth of York. By their absurd announcement, Charles and Anne had also unwittingly handed Richard a gift which Henry feared he would use against him in England.
“It is thy move, Henry,” said Clement as calmly as he could so as not to arouse his suspicion. He had just captured Henry’s knight with his castle - an apparent blunder. However. if Henry captured the castle with the pawn guarding his king - as seemed logical - then Clement would inflict an unpreventable checkmate within two more moves.
“Didst hear what I said, Henry? Thy move.”
Henry continued to stare at the board, biting his lip, though his thoughts were mainly in other places.
“Playing chess - playing at war - is all we do, Clement. Anne and the child use us like these pieces. I am tired of being used. I fear that Francis will turn out to have been a better friend.”
“When Charles has subdued his northern borders he will turn to us again in the spring.”
“Pawn takes rook. I think thou hast blundered once more.”
He placed the castle on the table as Clement eagerly leant forward, a smile breaking out on his round face. With a weary grin, Henry now saw the trick and leant back.
“A very, very sly piece of work, Clement. Devilish sly and unchristian. Thou art normally so clumsy on the board that I underestimate thee. Well done.”
As soon as Clement gleefully slid his queen onto the same file as Henry’s king in check, Henry resigned.
Jasper had crept up behind Henry to watch, having quietly entered his chamber.
“Well, well! Hast won back a crown, Clement? Wert distracted, Nephew?”
“Aye, Uncle. I am a little downhearted but it will pass.”
“He captured my castle thinking I had made one of my usual mistakes.” said Clement gaily,

putting the crown in his purse.
“I am annoyed to be outwitted.”
Jasper winked at Clement, picked up the offending castle, threw it, bounced it on his forearm and caught it in his great fist.
“I am come here with tidings of another castle. The one at Hammes.”
“Where Oxford is imprisoned?”
“Was, Nephew! Even as we speak, he is on his way here with the constable of the castle and his retinue. Take heart, Henry Tudor! This is a good augury. The Cripple will shit his breeches when he hears.”

32: London, December 1484

“This piece of work,” declared Richard, shaking a parchment he had received from his Woodvillian spy “marks a change in our fortunes.”
He turned to his scribes and ordered them to take down exactly what he said.
“For we shall make such a stir by proclamation out of this!”
Richard allowed the French document to be passed from one part of the table to the next observing closely the reactions of his councillors who, aware he was watching, were assiduous in adopting the proper expressions of contempt by look and by word.
“The *son* of King Henry the Sixth? He is the grandson of a Welsh Nobody, bastard-born, who married in secret - for her shame’s sake - the Frenchy Valois whore who could not suppress her filthy widowed lusts. He has a lesser claim to our throne than many of ye! And if ye are appalled, what do our traitors in France think of this? Shall they be content to follow a man who has persuaded that child Charles and his venomous sister - who hates us - to declare such a nonsense? We shall lure them back here with bribe and pardon. We hear already that many tire of Tidder because he is not loved by the French but only used to provoke us. And what shall our subjects - high, middle and low - think when we shall have it read out in every village and town that Tidder, forsaking all honour and Christian teaching, would come here with an army of French scoundrels to butcher, rape and rob our beloved English people for his own ambition? England invaded and conquered by France and a Welshman! Never, while I breathe! And how would Tidder reward the Child and the Whore? With our Calais and our Normandy and our Gascony - as the damned Margaret of Anjou plotted to do against our father, York. And would our gentlemen of quality, such as ye, welcome Tidder back who would strip ye of all honours and lands given to ye by our brother Edward and by us? Well??”
“NO!” roared the councillors as one man.
“We shall stir up our proud English people, peasants, yeomen, townsmen and gentry, into such foment that they will resist Tidder and his miscreants in every corner of our realm, in every valley, on every hilltop until he is thrown back into the sea and until we prevail! My words shall soon resound by report in the ears of every true Englisman!”
They stood in awe and amazement, clapped, cheered and stamped their feet, delighted that their king had shaken off his despairing autumnal lethargy and come roaring back as brave and bold as a lion.

“Richard truly is a great leader of men who knows exactly how to move his audience.” said Stanley wearily as his servant dragged of his muddy boots and left the room.
“I am glad thou hast been so inspired.”
“Leave off thy mockery, Margot. For I am weary. All this turmoil, this sleeplessness and parade

of bad dreams. Were we only made for this? Will there never be peace? Why did God create us with ambition?"
"He never did, Tom. He forbade Adam to taste the fruit. But Adam, wanting the More, could not be content with the Less. And we are his children."
"We stand on the brink of another year to fear. How can we live and love properly if Death haunts us, and how can we be happy if Mischance might cast us down at any time? I look at Richard and see fear and agitation in his eyes despite his brave words. I wonder if he wishes now he had allowed the boy Edward to be crowned. What has he gained? The throne. What has he lost? His peace of mind."
"And his soul. If he had one…."
"No, Margot. I remember him as an open-hearted and ardent child with great spirit and tenacity. He killed a boar with his sword when he was twelve. Then his back twisted more and so did he. Men said unkind things - even his brother when he was drunk. It seemed to spur him on to more violence and desire for battle as if to prove himself."
"So we are in danger because God deformed him."
"Or the Devil. 1485 will bring me a dread choice."
"Well, thou knowest well what thou must do until then."
"Aye, wait. God help me to make the right choice - and to know when to make it."

33: Into 1485

With his optimism essentially restored, Richard spent lavishly on Christmas and New Year celebrations. Queen Anne had regained enough of her strength to sit at table and seemed to take pleasure in the presence of the Princess Elizabeth who was truly a delight to look at, with a graceful, slender body ideal for the dance and long blonde hair which, as she capered., she knew how to send swirling. Margaret Stanley observed her carefully for altogether different reasons to that of her many admirers, in that she looked for signs of dejection over the absence of her brothers in the presence of the very man whom she must have suspected, as did everyone else present, of doing away with them.
"She is as shallow as the mother," she whispered to Stanley at the banquet who pretended not to hear. "I only wish," she continued "that I could find a way to exploit her naivety to have her ask the king the obvious question."
"And who would she say put her up to the matter?" whispered Stanley as he raised his goblet pretending to take a sip. "Let this sleeping dog lie, for heaven's sake, in case it bites *us*."
But Margaret noticed something else. Queen Anne's appearance had indeed improved in the drier air of December and although she was not strong enough to dance, she seemed determined not to be outdone by Elizabeth in dress and ornament. She was a pretty young woman, older than Elizabeth by only seven years. Elizabeth reacted to the queen's frequent change of dress by changing her own and Margaret began to suspect there was more involved than mere feminine rivalry. She switched her attention from the women to the king and noticed how he kept his distance from his wife, lingering at her side for only as long as courtly manners demanded, and noticed too that he stole many sly glances at the princess while giving the semblance of engaging his attention elsewhere.

"The queen adopts a brave front but she is still poorly. Her smile cannot conceal it." said Margaret as she took off her necklace. "Her eyes are dull and she fights fatigue. How can there be a new heir if the king shuns her bed?"

“So, what intrigue do you suspect now,” asked Stanley, thoroughly wearied by the Court and its self-indulgent proceedings.
“I only suspect what many other ladies suspect, which you men with your faces in your plates and goblets do not notice - that the king means to divorce the queen on account of her barrenness and illness…..and marry the young princess.”
“His niece?? The Pope would never allow it! And London would be in uproar. No, Margot, you aim wide of the mark here.”
“If he can declare his own nephews bastards - and even imply that his own mother was an adultress - is he not capable of saying his own brother was a cuckold?”
“Elizabeth Woodville an adultress?”
“Edward’s Court was notorious for its immorality. Richard is canny enough to exploit it.”
“But he would never marry the bastard daughter of his cuckolded brother! Or his proper niece. Thy fancy outruns thy good sense. For God‘s sake, do not gossip on such matters!”
“I would put nothing past him.”

Besides the health of his queen and the threat of invasion, Richard had other worries as 1485 came in. His extravagance in December had left his Exchequer perilously low, and, like a carouser finding his head sore and his purse empty the next morning, he brooded and scolded his Chancellor who had the temerity to point the horrible truth out to him.
He ordered petitions to be carried to men of substance throughout his kingdom, suggesting how much, according to their means, should be lent to him upon the promise of repayment the following autumn. Foremost in his mind, as reports came in from his spies in France of the growing benevolence of Charles VIII towards Tudor, was the realisation that he would need to equip and pay for an army to oppose him, most likely in the summer.
The response to his begging letters was disappointing.
“Is this all the money which could be raised?” gasped the king, while his Chancellor retreated, having passed him the document with trembling hand. “Not even four and a half thousand pounds? Perhaps men fear they shall not be repaid if Tidder prevails and we, their debtor, lie dead, on the field! The least generous of these faint hearts shall feel our mighty displeasure when I have Tidder’s cowardly head on a spike.”
The Chancellor, Catesby, smiled, relieved to hear his master in determined mood, for he had seemed very disconsolate in January and February.
“These men do not doubt that Your Grace will carry the day against a rabble army. I can only suppose that they, like Your Grace, have feasted perhaps a little too well and too often at Christmastide. In the late summer, when harvests come in, their treasuries will swell. I shall send out our men again to point this out.”
“A stronger warning shall have to be in their satchels, William. Such meanness is tantamount to treason. Must I borrow from the usurers?”
“Perhaps a little. Perhaps some of the jewels and gifts in the Treasury could be offered to the pawnbrokers - for a short time?”
“See to it. I shall cancel our visit to Nottingham. For one thing, the queen is ill and, of course, we must be damnedly frugal.”

In France, Henry was increasingly reassured of King Charles’ favour although promises of financial support for an invasion were not turned into coin. Charles was still beset with problems of a challenge from his uncle, the Duke of Orléans, and he was still fighting against Maximillian

in Flanders.
Richard's campaign of bribery to lure back Yorkist rebels, having been quite effective, had stalled. And soon, as the king reacted with furious vengeance against seditious rumours about his treatment of the queen and his designs on Princess Elizabeth of York, the tide of returnees would peter out and then reverse.
Queen Anne's brave efforts at Court in December were but a prelude to a new decline in her health. She grew thinner and and her cough returned - a cough which speckled her handkerchief with blood. This confirmed phthisis. In late January she took to her bed and remained there.

34: London, March-April 1485
March 16th 1485 dawned bright and promising but by the ninth hour, although the clouds concealing the sun were not bruised and not threatening rain, daylight began to fade. Presently, it was almost dusk and the ebullient birds of early spring had ceased to chatter. Men looked at each other fearfully in the fields and the lanes and many made for their churches fearing that Christ was about to come with his Angels in search of the Elect.
The sun, finally escaping the clouds, appeared diseased, bitten into by a black opal, cockroach-like. Few men had witnessed an eclipse at home or abroad, and the cries of reassurance from those who had were drowned by the piteous wails of the many who had dropped to their knees in prayer, terrified as to whether they had done enough good to be counted among the sheep, not the goats. The dark opal widened and lengthened until at last the sun went out and a fiery crown blazed around it. Here at last was the sign that Christ was on His way in His Glory to put an end to the world. There was silence as all gazed in awe to see His Face.
But, after many minutes of a world stricken motionless, it was not a face which appeared, but a brilliant gem of light on the edge of the black disk. As the sun was restored and the opal diminished, men and women danced in joy, though some began predicting a disaster in the fortunes of mankind, some even muttering that the king might die as suddenly as his brother had.
In the afternoon, the death-knell began to toll from Westminster Abbey.

Queen Anne was dead.

*

Richard seized the bill offered to him which read

The Boar has stifled Queen Anne's breath
To marry his Elizabeth

"Who has put up such vile slander?" shouted the grieving king through his tears.
Many such posters had appeared in the London night as magically as inkcaps. The Captain of the Watch had no ready answer.
"It must have been after the third hour, Your Majesty, when all was quiet and we were fewer."
"Then double the Watch and have any villain apprehended brought straight to us!"
Towards the end of that morning, a printer was dragged into the Presence Chamber, his hands bound and sticky with ink. His face was bruised. The captain threw a sheaf of bills in front of him.
"Get thee to thy FEET!" whispered Richard.
The man, stout and balding, stood up to the king and looked around in awe.
"Why dost thou print such sedition? We are still in grief for a dearly beloved queen."

If Richard expected the printer to be cowed and contrite, he was mistaken.
“Sire, I know I am condemned so I will tell you the truth. Even the same which every man and particularly these gentlemen know, that you are an unnatural tyrant and regicide. Why else would loyal Englishmen of all qualities flee from you?”
“Take him out to be hanged - slowly - and put his head on the gate!”
“You may strangle one voice but a thousand more shall decry your villainy!”
The captain clapped a hand to his mouth and twisted him round.
In truth, the king was almost as appalled by the rumour of his desire to marry his niece as of being his wife’s murderer. He had in fact made plans for Elizabeth to marry a Portuguese prince and to take a new wife for himself, the Infanta at the Portuguese Court, a descendant of the sister of the Lancastrian king, Henry IV. These two marriages were designed to unite the conflicted houses of York and Lancaster and to be doubly detrimental to Henry Tudor’s regal aspirations.
In response to posters and rumours, the king issued a proclamation charging his subjects, high and low born, to arrest anyone speaking and spreading sedition against him.
So the spring witnessed the suppression of all dissent, particularly in the southern counties where Richard’s Yorkist allies wielded absolute judgement without recourse to trial. Some magnates became renowned for their devising of cruel and unnatural punishments, for example, putting victims in barrels stuck with spikes to be rolled downhill. As seditious talk and rumours about the king’s amorous intentions were stamped out, men began to distrust other men, even friends and relatives in case they might be betrayed for favour or reward. Silence became the only guarantee of safety, though sometimes even the silent were denounced by ambitious enemies for treasonable words they had not uttered.
Londoners, disgusted by the reign of terror rumoured or witnessed daily, almost managed to rescue one dissenter from his guards as he was being taken they were to be beheaded. Reinforcements arrived however and he was wrested back from the crowd and rushed to the block.
In such a climate of fear, those who were able to leave set sail to join Henry Tudor.
“Why have so many more friends of King Edward - and now of Anne fled?” asked Margaret Stanley.
“They suspect he poisoned her,” her husband replied. “but it was not poison. We know she had phthisis. Men always think the worst.”
“They would not do so if the king had not given them good cause.”
“At this rate, Kent, Sussex and Essex will be empty of all but peasants. I have never known a king so hated.”
“How shall men in the future who might wish to excuse the king explain all this? We are a most unhappy people.”

35: Evereux. France, Spring 1485

The collapse of the rebellion against Charles VIII and his reconciliation with his uncle, Orléans, marked a decisive turning point, at the Court in Evreux, in the fortunes of Henry Tudor . Charles could now give more attention to Tudor’s enterprise, even though he was still at war with Maximillian in Flanders. When the French army was driven back from the gates of Bruges Charles feared that this reverse might encourage England and Brittany to invade. He needed to create a diversion. Henry was sent for. Money would be made available forthwith to equip and pay an army of French mercenaries and provide ships. The invasion seemed to be on at last.

“Henry, this new friend of thine, Thomas Fox is, I think well named.”
Fox had sought an audience with Henry. He was a teacher of philosophy at the university and had come to pledge his support. Clement had taken an instant dislike to him.
“Well, I need as many friends as I can get, Clement.”
“But he is much too friendly, as the fox was to Chanticleer. I have made enquiries. His cousin is a clerk for Richard’s Chancellor. He may well be a spy.”
When Jasper got wind of this he offered to beat a confession out of Fox. But Henry came up with a subtler plan, ordering that Fox‘s house be watched. Clement’s suspicions seemed confirmed when a London merchant called on him and the merchant’s carter said they were on their way to Calais for a ship.
“Such a learned man keeps company with a purveyor of lace?” sneered Jasper. “Do they discuss first the price of handkerchieves and cuffs - and then Aristotle? Shall I arrange an accident to befall him?”
“No, Uncle. He can be of use to us. Richard knows we are coming but not the when and not the where. Let us summon a pretend Council of War with Thomas Fox there to advise us - and with the Earl of Oxford present whom we shall forewarn of our suspicion. Let us reach a false conclusion which Fox might send to Richard.”
By the blessing of King Charles, a room was made available with guards posted outside to ensure privacy. Oxford, at forty-three a seasoned man in the arts of battle and subterfuge, had congratulated Henry on his cunning and set his face so that nothing should be given away of his contempt for Fox.
Spread out on the table was a map of England. Thomas Fox volunteered to take notes of their deliberations, at which offer Jasper curled up the corner of his mouth.
“Item. We must keep our musings to just the four of us,” began Henry “for we suspect that Richard has sent spies out with the Yorkists.”
All nodded and swore a brief oath of secrecy.
“Item. The first question is When. A horoscope I have had made for me shows June, the third week, to be the most favourable if we can get a fair wind and weather.”
“That would give Richard less time to prepare,” said Oxford, whose roundness and mildness of face reminded Jasper more of a monk than of a warrior. Jasper admired Oxford’s pluck for he had been an exile for many years and had even once jumped from the battlements of his castle prison - either to escape or die trying - only to be recaptured.
“And I have heard that the Cripple is desparately trying to raise money,” added Jasper. “On the other hand, we shall have more time to prepare if we delay perhaps till September. Consider, if he keeps issuing commissions of array at every rumour of our coming and every false alarm, men will weary and grow sceptical and resentful at leaving off their work. And the Cripple will grow more and more agitated, wondering why we delay while the favourable summer weather passes. Indeed, if we have not come by the end of August he might decide that we have postponed until 1486, especially if we let it be known that Charles only gives a quarter of the money he promises -”
“Which is the very truth!” said Henry bitterly.
Thomas Fox dipped his pen and scribbled rapidly while these and other comments flew across the table.
“What is your opinion, Fox?” asked Henry when the general debate had subsided into a pensive silence.
“It would be a clever instrument to dismay the king if the invasion suddenly took place after a

long summer waiting in vain. He would always be on the back foot, for a state of readiness cannot be long maintained."
The other three considered this argument but in the end Henry decided against it. He needed to keep his own men in a state of readiness. June it would be.
"So, which would be the best place?" wondered Oxford, standing over the map. "Kent would be the shortest crossing and all men there would rise in rebellion if we landed in Dover, Sandwich or Rye. Except that our enemy has all the ports there closely watched and the Dover approaches patrolled."
"His men of York would swoop down from London and crush us." said Jasper.
"What about Milford in Devon?" suggested Henry, tracing the route from Harfleur with his finger. (By prearrangement, Jasper and Oxford gasped). "Well, you are amazed gentlemen, but the Marquess of Dorset's men would join with us as we marched east. Devon and Corwall are loyal to Lancaster and could join us with Dorset. By clever countermarches we could even leave Richard floundering and beat him to London."
Thomas Fox rapped the table and declared it to be an excellent plan.
"But," said Oxford "Milford is a hostage to fortune. We would be four or more days at sea and at the mercy of the weather. Milford is on the north Devon coast and is too far. Let me argue for a daring plan. For Harwich. We could choose a moonless night and sail straight past Calais on a north-westerly. I am sure we could evade Richard's navy. If we could get an advance force into Colchester before daybreak, we could block the road against messengers getting through to tell Richard. Think what a surprise we could spring on him."
Henry and Jasper studied the narrow channel between Calais and Dover with interest, well knowing that Oxford's proposal was too fraught with danger.
"It would be like sprats squeezing through the claws of a lobster," said Henry sadly. "A few might pass through safely, then - snap!"
"Your Grace," exclaimed Fox "you have taken many risks and prospered with God's blessing. Richard would never expect such a daring plan. You shall number but three of four thousand men and cannot guarantee a swell of support in a cowed land. And the elements may not again be in your favour. A surprise attack on London would surely win. You might even capture the king abed."
All laughed at the jest, though Jasper could not prevent his fist squeezing the pommel of his sword as his eyes stared savagely at the scraggy neck of Fox. Henry looked at Jasper and almost smiled, and almost closed one heavy eyelid in a wink.
"The plan is absurd but so ingenious that I favour it. I am not a good sailor and the passage to Essex would be short. The risks of sailing past Calais would be outweighed by the risks of spending longer at sea. What if we were scattered by a gale as happened last time?"
"So Harwich it is?" asked Fox.
"Harwich it is. In June."
When Fox had left they congratulated themselves on their fine performances. The decision remained as it had been made the week previous; Milford, but not Milford in Devon. Milford Haven in Pembroke - a huge distance. Their preferred time was early August.

36: Nottingham, June-July 1485
After a period of seclusion while he grieved for his wife, Richard came to Nottingham in June to rally the midland and northern counties to his banner, and also to be well placed for marching to any region of his kingdom. He had increased patrols around the Essex coast and strengthened the

garrisons at Harwich and Colchester although he half-suspected that the report he had had of an attack on Harwich was a deception, especially when contrary reports reached him naming Milford. Doubt was piled on doubt.
“Harwich and Milford are both incredible for differing reasons. And which Milford? We cannot have armies at every port!”
As July came in, he was pacing up and down cursing his cowardly enemy for delaying.
“By all the stars in God’s Heaven, we would give them all as ransom to know Tidder’s true mind!” he declared at dinner to his liegemen. “I would meet him as he landed and challenge him in single combat - to save common lives. He would doubtless refuse and our traitors would desert the coward as rats from a sinking ship. All men would see then what a true and generous monarch I am. We cannot rule as mercifully as we would with these traitors at our throat. We would even forgive those damnable Woodvilles to have a year or two of peace. We would complete our reforms of abuses in our law courts. There would be justice for high and low. We mean to do so much good, so why is our reign so ill-starred?”
No man present dared tell him the answer which hovered in the air like the billowing smoke driven out of the chimney by a downdraught.

37: Evreux, France, June 1485
“We might let Richmond have a thousand of our soldiers lately in Flanders. The scoundrels love the fight and, if our uncle decides to oppose us again, might rally to him for payment. So get them away. And besides them, let him have about a thousand of those our father installed in Normandy - at ruinous expense - against an English outbreak from Calais, which never came. The local people will be glad to be rid of them and the trouble they cause.”
The boy king Charles looked in puzzlement at his haughty sister.
“But are not such seasoned men vital to our defence, Anne?”
“Charles, Charles…. Burgundy is exhausted and Brittany too timid, so let us be subtle. Let us take the fight to the English. They have had many years of family strife, such as we have just managed to avoid with our uncle. In all that time, the only threat of conquest came to us - thou werst but four years old - was when that pig, Edward, had subdued his enemies at home. Remember - peace in England always threatens our peace. Richmond, with his men, with our men and with the Scotchmen which King James lent our father three years ago, would be enough to foment another five, ten or even more years of war and turmoil over there. And even if Richmond does not win outright, or is forced to flee the field, what new mischief might he and his allies conjure for Richard? For this, our ten thousand pounds is a bargain price to pay.”
Charles smiled so hideously that even his sister flinched.
“And the victory of Richmond or the confounding of Richard might one day regain Calais for us and all the rest. A double game we should not lose.”
“Brother thou art beginning at last to think like our dear father.”
“But should we not therefore give Richmond a little more of the sum we promised him?”
“Why? Richard will not leave his castle this summer for fear of Richmond. Richmond cannot leave here without our money - which he will not have. They are as fighting bears trapped in a pit of our making. By our astuteness, we can keep our bear in harness or unleash him as and when is most apt to our purpose. Ten thousand pounds will do. If Richmond wishes to attack, he can borrow the rest. And if he borrows it from our friend, Lullier - as I shall make sure is recommended to him - then we shall have a share in the interest.”
“Dearest Anne, it is wonderful to play a game which we cannot lose.”

As July came in and the time of invasion came closer, money was becoming an increasing problem for Henry Tudor. Not only did he have to find enough to hire and victual ships, not only did he have to find enough money to pay his own refugees, he had to recruit, maintain and pay an army of mercenaries. The booty brought over by Sir Edward Woodville, Richard's turncoat admiral, was near exhausted. The war chest was bare.
Jasper returned grim-faced from an audience with Charles.
"It is as we feared, Nephew. Charles plays with us like pawns - or rather his proud ugly sister does. The time is not yet ripe, says she - to give us the rest of the money we need - though she herself is overripe and has long been so. She is a teaser. God knows, she must make her husband wait - though I would wait till Doomsday. I dread to imagine the dried up condition -"
"Uncle, what shall we do? We must either borrow or lose all."
After much enquiry, a solution was eventually found. In order to secure thirty thousand pounds, Henry's dubious ally, the Marquess of Dorset, and another Yorkist would be left behind as guarantors of the huge loan. Henry's creditor, the Seigneur Lullier, counsellor to King Charles, was sure of repayment with interest, even if Henry failed, for it was reckoned that Richard would pay any amount to lay hands on his traitors.

As July came close to an end, Henry had his exiles summoned to a great meeting in the courtyard of the royal castle. The atmosphere was one of excitement and expectancy for reports had come from Harfleur, seventy miles away, of many ships being rigged. The sun was climbing steadily towards noon - and at last Henry made his entrance in a fine doublet of scarlet, his black cap adorned with the feather of a hawk. He stepped forward onto a dais and, with his fists on his hips, surveyed, almost smiling, the faces upturned to him.
"Dearly Beloved," he began in traditional regal fashion, in a clear though soft voice " I we can reveal that the day after tomorrow shall our great enterprise begin, our endeavour to free our England - and our Wales from the yoke of tyranny. In Harfleur, two days ride, twenty-eight ships stand almost ready to board at high tide. We cannot yet reveal our port of destination for secrecy is of the essence until we are at sea. Any unguarded word might still reach the ears of the enemy so that he might lie in wait for us. We know that ye have given up much to flee the tyrant. Many of ye served his brother Edward faithfully and must have slept badly tormented by many doubts before throwing in your lot with me - a man of Lancastrian descent. Could any man ever doubt that this, your coming to us, be not overwhelming proof that Richard of Gloucester is a usurper, a regicide and a rogue?"
Up went a great shout of acclaim and approval.
"So prepare yourselves well, settle honourably your affairs here - let no Frenchman say of ye that you left debts, for ye have been hospitably received - show your gratitude to your hosts by word and deed, make your peace with men and God and last but not least do not forget to kiss your lady friends in fond farewell - for, gentlemen, gentlemen, we stand on the brink of a great undertaking, at the beginning of a new age of peace for our long-suffering England. Some of ye here present will not witness this new age but those at home not yet born shall surely look back on this year Anno Domini 1485 and thank God for ye and say that in your glorious hour of battle and sacrifice you were fine and honourable Englishmen!"
A roar of triumph echoed from the walls of the courtyard and straightway servants brought out wine and sweetmeats. Anyone who had doubted Henry's qualities as leader was forced to confess to himself that he had been in error.

While the men were carousing, Jasper slipped away and went to a tavern within viewing distance of Thomas Fox's house. He did not have to wait long before the fellow came scurrying along as fast as his short legs could carry his portly frame. In the hot sun, his face was red and blotchy. Jasper put down his goblet of wine and sidled out into the busy street, picking his way between heaps of dung. Fox entered his house and within a moment a servant came rushing out. Jasper watched him all the way to a stable. A few moments later, the man was trotting down the cobbled street in the direction of the north gate.
"Did that fellow state his destination?" asked Jasper casually of the ostler, well knowing that he would have done.
"What's it to thee?" he replied insolently as he picked up a horse's hoof to scrape it ready for a shoe. Jasper grabbed him by the shoulder and threw him to the ground then sat on his chest. He drew his dagger, pierced a lump of dung and brought it close to the man's nose.
"Wouldst thou fain eat shit as thy last mortal meal?"
"No, damn you! He went to Calais."
"On what business?"
"He would not say. He never does. His master pays me well every month to have a fast horse ready at a moment's notice. Ever since the damned English arrived."
"His master?"
"I do not know his name. His servant pays me."
Jasper pulled the man to his feet and dusted his smock clean of hay dust. Flicking the dung at his bonce, he bid him a pleasant farewell.
There soon came a knock at Fox's door.
"Lord Pembroke!" he exclaimed. "What? Is there more news? Do come in - I have a fine claret open in celebration."
Jasper smiled and followed him along the corridor. Before he could reach his parlour he felt a tickle on his neck. He went to scratch it and felt a warm spurt of blood. He was suddenly dizzy and not many seconds after sinking to his knees and falling forward, squashing his nose against the wall, dead.
Fox's man was in Calais three days later before nightfall. As the sun began to set, a beacon was lit on the shore and this was immediately reported to the constable of Dover Castle by the look-out on the battlements. The beacon he ordered lit at Dover set off a chain of others and well before midnight London knew of the invasion. The necklace of lights extend further northwards and as he was preparing for another restless night, Richard heard the news.
"At last he comes! If only I knew where."
Richard had already given serious consideration, having put himself in Henry Tudor's situation, to the advantages of a Welsh landing. It was his uncle's territory, and like the apples on the August trees, Welshmen could be easily dislodged from their flimsy loyalty to the Crown by the trample of rebels' feet marching through Pembrokeshire. But against this conclusion, calculated Richard, there were many arguments, principally of distance by sea and on land.
A few hours after being told of the invasion, he looked out, unslept, from the battlements of Nottingham Castle on the golden fields at dawn. He saw no sign in the sky of alteration of the mellow weather, no sign of a vile storm which had ruined Buckingham's coup nearly two years before.
"William," he said to Catesby as the sun finally rose intact, from a hazy blue cloud, like the glorious emblem Sun of York "I have a strange and imperturbable idea that he heads for Milford Haven and am sore tempted to gamble all on directing our army, when assembled, straight into

Wales. Is it the Devil advising me?"
Gnawing at the inside of his cheek, the king turned to look at Catesby.
"Richard. I am not a gambling man. My wagers have always been wrong."
The king had the example of Harold Godwinson to think on, for he had chosen to fight the Viking raiders first at Stamford Bridge before facing William the Bastard's Normans at Hastings.
"Would Harold have lost his life and crown had he met William first? Indeed, had it been so, might I now be a lord in Normandy, at ease and in comfort, knowing nothing of this damned England, fount of all my woes?"
Catesby, of Viking descent, was perplexed and uncomfortable, knowing that his great friend expected advice. He dreaded a failure of the will in his king, for his life depended entirely on his.
"Richard, if thou dost gamble on Wales but art wholly wrong, then Tidder might enter London in triumph leaving us scrambling through sheep shit up some damned Welsh hillside. Even if thou art right, he might creep past us in the night like some damned cowardly fox, and beat us back to the prize. Why not sent word to William Herbert and Rhys ap Morgan to be at the ready to pounce? And Thomas Vaughn at Tretower would gladly be at the ready to cut off the Tidders' heads for us in revenge for his father."
"Yes, yes," murmured Richard in relief. "Thank you William. Then I can stay here, ready to move down any road in any direction as soon as a definite report of the bastards' landing place comes."
"Richard, thine eyes are heavy. Let me issue the general commission of array this morning. Get thee to bed."
"I shall. And by God's grace I shall sleep at last."

38: Harfleur, Normandy, August 1st 1485

On the recommendation of the Earl of Oxford, a man called Casenove, nicknamed Coulon, had been chosen to be the Tudors' naval commander. He was a privateer who knew his coasts, the waters and their perils intimately. At first, Henry had objected to being guided by a man little better than a pirate, but Oxford had been adamant.
"Your Grace, to find a sea captain of saintly virtue would be tantamount to discovering the holy grail wrapped in the golden fleece. Coulon is hired only to take us to Milford, not to celebrate communion. You would never find a better sailor."
In the mid-afternoon of August the first, Henry and Jasper crested the final hillside and looked down on the pretty port of Harfleur radiant in the sun, on the brink of the vast sparkling sea. The distant harbour was crammed with ships and the soldiers Henry had hired were crowding the quayside, helmets and plated brigandine jackets glinting in the sunlight.
An hour later, Henry stood with Jasper amongst the tumult, watching the last artillery pieces and chests being hoisted on board - and barrels, large and small, of fish, of biscuits, of wine and gunpowder being rolled up the planks. Gulls were shrieking, sailors no more than boys were scampering up rigging to deal with tangles, men were laughing and scalding, ships were gently falling and rising in the slow swell, the drones of accordion music, laughter and song were drifting from quayside taverns and smells of salt and fish were mingling with the stench from bilges where everything least welcome on board gathered and festered, from human waste to dead rats. The breeze occasionally spared noses the smell only for it to return with increased pungency. There were no flags on the thirty pinnaces, which were unadorned and, made for speed and manoeuvre, entirely practical. They were light and of shallow draught, and loved to glide and skip across the surface in pursuit of heavy laden merchants and treasure ships. Henry

ran his eye over them and groaned.
“I dread the crossing.”
“It will be smooth.” said Jasper. “We shall at least be private this time in our cabin. No-one shall see the puke. Shall we aboard?”
French voices were mingling with Scottish; some men were embracing sweethearts or shaking the hands of friends; many were already aboard shouting or gazing down from the decks; some were being carried or shouldered up gangplanks, drunk, in spite of solemn warnings to be moderate. As Henry and Jasper strolled towards the lead ship, the Poulain, one drunk attempting to board a ship on his own, fell and sank without trace in his heavy harbergeon jacket of mail.
“The Devil will always find his fool,” murmured Jasper. “He would have been of no use to us.”
“I suppose not. One less fool to pay. But I shall pray for his soul.”
They walked on, acknowledging the good will of the townsfolk who fell back to allow them to pass, many of whom would sorely miss the purses of the soldiers though not their raucous, argumentative owners.
“Can we possibly win with such a rag-bag army, Uncle?” asked Henry.
“The long march yonder will whip them into shape. Ah - is that man waving to us up there, the rogue Coulon? What the deuce is delaying the Lord Oxford?”
A handsome man with a dagger beard was looking down from the first ship, with a beautiful black-haired woman hanging drunk on his shoulder.
“Milords Richmond and Pembroke, I presume! I hear you have some business in England! Well, may fortune smile on you. Come aboard. Your cabin is ready. We must sail before the tide turns. Come and take wine with us - and fine ham and cheese. A game of cards? I hear you like chess. Marie here plays - I wager you would love a game with her!”
He cupped together his hands and shouted up to one of his men.
“Jacques! Time to sound the all aboard. Anyone remaining on the quay when the planks are removed shall have to remain in France or swim after us!””
“Wait!” shouted Henry. “I would address the soldiers before they board.”
“Sound then just one short blast, Jacques,” ordered Coulon.
The shrill horn turned all heads in their direction and Henry leapt onto a large crate. Tall and impressive in his black cloak, drawn tight at the throat and fastened with a broach of jade, he removed his black cap and let down his fair hair, holding up the palms of his hands to crave attention. Jasper looked at him with pride, the nephew who had once been so nervous and self-effacing, who had become a man of assurance and noble bearing. In French then English he addressed his men.
“We greet ye well, men, on this momentous day, at the beginning of our historic enterprise. Richard Plantagenet has sown so many seeds of discord that he will reap a meagre harvest of men to his banner. From us, however, he shall reap a whirlwind. Ye are a miscellany of Scotch, of French and of English and we bid ye love one another for upon one another ye must rely for victory. In our strength through unity shall we prevail. Ye shall be then well rewarded, or your widows compensated. Bear in mind also, that we shall expect ye to deal kindly and fairly with all those we encounter when we land yonder, and if ye steal or commit violence or murder, ye shall do so at your own peril. Our priest, Clement, will now say a prayer before we embark at the next blast of the ship’s horn. Be ye then of good heart and of good cheer!”
All hurrahed and then fell silent and knelt as Clement crossed himself and looked heavenward. Every soldier, drunk or sober, bowed his head.
“Almighty God, we call on you to bless our mission to rid a great nation of a most unnatural

tyrant, an appointee of your enemy, Satan. We pray for strength, for courage and endurance and do now swear an oath to be faithful to your commandments in the days that lie ahead, to love God and one another above all, and all men who might be our friends. May you grant us constancy of will not to waver from this vow to which we all, with one voice, now say Amen."
A great amen and then a cheer rang out. The horn sounded again and the quay very slowly began to empty.
"A good speech, Your Grace," shouted Coulon as they mounted the gangplank. "A proper miscellany - or misalliance indeed. Can they be tamed and trained - to love each other?"
Henry looked back over the men - less an army than a throng.
"That might prove as difficult a battle as the one we shall have with Richard," said Henry, grasping Coulon's hand.
"Excellent!" he roared.
"Thank you, Captain. Have you allocated the different men to separate ships, as we requested?"
"Yes indeed."
"Good. In spite of prayers, it will be wiser to test their brotherly love on dry land yonder, than on the open sea."
The Tudor party made their way onto the deck and Coulon gave them all a hearty welcome. Soon, only the townspeople were left to wave, most in regret, some in relief, as the ropes were unwound from the capstans and sails unfurled. The sun was nestling on the rooftops as a benevolent southerly took one ship after another out into the Channel in a slow and stately procession. With the twilight spreading westwards, the sail of the last ship flapped like a seagull in the fading sunlight and disappeared into the haze. The endeavour which had been planned for years could not be recalled.

39: Nottingham, Saturday 6th August

As the early days of August passed without reports of his enemies' landing, Richard's suspicion that they had chosen a long sailing to a distant port grew into a conviction. The word Wales kept sounding in his head until he was tempted to beat it out. Richard knew that Tudor knew that his departure from Evreux would cause the Calais beacon to be lit and that Richard would therefore know of his coming. Richard suspected that this delay in his arrival might be designed to torment him. And the king knew that the Earl of Oxford was a wily campaigner. What if Tudor's ships were sitting at anchor over some horizon in order to spur him into marching to the wrong place?
"Stay in Nottingham, stay in Nottingham" had been his Council's advice and it rang in his ears like a descant to "Wales" so that the end result of all these musings was a paralysis of the will. He sat in his chamber staring at nothing, speechless, sleepless, hardly eating, only remembering the better times he had had at the castle before the loss of child and wife. He could not then prevent tears rolling down his cheeks and he sent out his attendants with a wave of his hand.
His greatest fear was that if Tudor would indeed land in Wales, he planned to join with Thomas and William Stanley in Cheshire. In his mind he examined again and again a meeting he had had with Thomas Stanley in the spring in London. Stanley had written to him to ask for permission to leave his London residence, Derby House. to go to his estate at Tatton. Richard had sent for him and watched his eyes carefully for dissimulation while he questioned him as to his purpose.
"I must inspect building work at Tatton Park, Your Grace," he had explained truthfully, matching the king's unflinching stare with a stare of his own.
"And shall the Lady Margaret go with you? She must know as we all do that her son is likely to come to visit us this summer. We cannot believe that she would be displeased to see him."

Stanley could not evade the thrust of this, but had come prepared. He looked around at the suspicious faces of Richard's entourage and shook his head.
"I have kept my lady under close watch to protect her from those who might wish to test her loyalty by messages and codes. I swear she has heard nothing from Normandy and sends no letters, even to her friends in England. In answer to your question - no, Your Grace. Margaret shall remain here in London."
"Then we would hate for her to be all alone, Stanley. A chamber shall be made ready for her at Westminster until your return."
Stanley had curtly bowed his head at this invitation to house arrest, murmured a word of gratitude and had taken his leave.
Every time Richard obsessively re-examined the scene, he grew more certain that Stanley's move north was part of a plot. He had remained at Tatton. How long did bricks need to be looked at to ensure that they well mortared?
"Damn him!" he shouted suddenly, causing the dozing attendant outside the door to fall off his chair. "I should have had his head when I could. Well, two can play at that treacherous game!"

40: Milford Haven, Pembroke, August 7th fifteen days before Redemore.
On this occasion, fair wind and weather blessed Henry's expedition and he gave thanks for it. The fleet had been arranged into three parallel lanes and the ships followed their leaders as obediently as ducklings. Henry's ship, the Poulain, led the line innermost and closest to the coast, cruising just over the horizon and out of view of Richard's lookouts. Although Coulon had his compass he could determine the position of land from the movements of seabirds and the lie of clouds so that it was no surprise to him when the Scilly Isles were spotted to starboard five days from Harfleur. Here his course was reset NE and a lookout soon sighted the tip of Lands End. The ships then steered NNE At Lundy Isle, the fleet turned to head just west of north.
On the seventh day of August, in the late afternoon, the coast of Pembroke was hailed. The descending sun turned the red cliffs into a blinding gold, and men, astonished, fell silent at the spectacle.
Cautious as ever, Henry ordered Coulon to launch a rowboat to reconnoitre the beach and cliffs. The experience at Poole two years before was still fresh in his mind. The castle at Dale was not far away, and even though the left hand headland rose steeply enough to block the castle's view of the inlet, who could be sure that a spy had not already raised the alarm?
All on deck watched as the boat beached itself and the ten men sprang out with swords drawn and scrambled up to the top of the cliff. After an anxious wait, one man reappeared waving his arms as a sign of all-clear.
Mill Bay was too narrow to allow more than one ship at a time to enter. It was vital to unload as many ships as possible of men, beef cattle, pigs, horses, carts and baggage before sunset, and before a warning beacon could be lit near the castle. Men were sent to patrol the cliffs and take anyone walking there into custody to prevent the alarm being raised. The secrecy afforded by Milford - as well as its strategic value for a Pembrokeshireman trying to attract support - had been greatly in its favour.
One by one, on the half-tide, ships came in as far their captains dared, for men to leap laughing from rope ladders into the sea, ready to grab terrified horses and cattle in their rope harnesses hoisted down, and to carry barrels on their shoulders and artillery pieces between them onto the beach, all supervised and directed by Henry's English captains. Not all the ships could be unloaded of their provisions that evening and as the light began to fade, many turned, as planned,

to head north for a cove near Cardigan four days march from Milford, to lie in wait at anchor beyond the horizon until a sign from Henry would summon them.
The last men to come ashore by rowboat were the Tudors, Lord Oxford and the party most loyal to Henry in all the long years of exile. As they stepped ashore, Henry bade them kneel on the sand and knighted them before kneeling down himself in tears to kiss his precious native land so long missed.
The beach was overcrowded and the captains were striving to impose marching order on men and beasts and vehicles. There was only one way for an army to leave the beach, by scrambling up the steep bank over stones and masses of weeds and thorns. Swordsmen cleared a path and, straining every muscle, the soldiers slowly dragged themselves, carts, livestock and cannon to the top before the sunset. The village and its castle were now in view and an advance party led by Jasper had already ridden off to ensure their safety and to prevent the beacon being lit.
The constable of Dale Castle was drunk. A minor appointee of the king's ally, Sir Walter Herbert, he was heartily disliked by the garrison and refused at first to believe the guard who had run down from the battlements to announce that armed men were riding through the village.
"Liar!" he shouted, hurling an empty goblet at the pasty-faced fellow.
"As God is my witness, Sir. I am telling the truth."
"Then run to St Anne's Head and light the damned beacon. If it be a false alarm, thou shalt set thine arse upon it."
The beacon was situated on the top of a stone tower, a landmark for sailors, on the highest point of Milford. It was the first of a chain of beacons, the second being on the lower south side of the cove, placed to alert the towns and villages inland. It was vital for defenders to light the first beacon if the alarm was to be raised in Pembroke and beyond. It was vital for invaders to prevent it.
The guard knew that if he left the castle in the grey twilight, he would be seen and cut down. So, trembling, he disobeyed. The flustered constable summoned another man who likewise refused.
"Go thyself!" shouted another from the courtyard. Furious, the constable staggered outside, just in time to be hailed by Jasper Tudor for whom the gateman had raised the portcullis. Some of the older soldiers recognised with great joy the former Earl of Pembroke and knelt in homage. The constable stood speechless and perplexed.
"Constable," said Jasper with exaggerated politeness for he had quickly seen what state he was in and in what respect he was held, "We would have the use of your kitchens and any spare rooms you might have for Henry Tudor, our future King of England, and for his liegemen."
At this, the constable fell to his knees and bade him welcome, putting the entire castle at his disposal.
Outside, the first tents were being put up. Lanterns and fires were being lit. Latrines were being dug. Cattle and shrieking pigs were led away for slaughter and the castle's stores were quickly picked clean. On the battlements, flanked by Jasper and the Earl of Oxford, and illuminated by torches, Henry Tudor stood tall to address his men.
"Dearly beloved. Brethren! Our Lord has blessed the beginning of our great venture with fair weather and protection against our foes as we landed here. But it is only a beginning and many days march and many obstacles, foreseeable and unforeseeable, lie ahead, before we get into Wales and turn east for Shrewsbury. We shall conquer these mountains of rock and of adversity only by our united purpose. Again I bid you, love each other. We shall be supplied again at Cardigan but our stocks cannot last as long as we shall need. Our harbingers shall scour the land for food and shall pay a fair price by negotiation. Ye shall have sufficient from us in your purses

to pay likewise for your needs. If the innkeeper demands a sixpence for his wench and is adamant - then ye shall offer threepence, and if he refuses either pay his sixpence or walk away - and please yourselves."
As this advice sunk into French skulls which had already been throbbing with alcohol issued on board their ships as they waited nervously to land, and as Henry translated it for the Scots and English all laughed and cheered. But Henry only meant to underline a serious point with this jest. He raised his hands for silence.
"Men, we are scarcely four thousand. Our cunning has indeed given us an advantage over the tyrant, He sits now in his castle at Nottingham chewing his nails to his knuckles and watching, unable to sleep. He thinks and hopes we might have drowned. But soon he will know we have not and we must therefore make haste before he can summon all his cruel northern friends. I have said before - we need the people in these counties and Wales to love us. For if they love us, they might help us, speed us and join us. If they hate us, they will stay away, hinder us and betray us. As matters stand anyway, we shall be like salmon swimming upstream escaping the snapping jaws of bears and wolves. It may not prove as easy to overcome other castles and other towns as this one here, and we shall need all the friends we can muster. So we give you now fair warning. Any soldier who distresses, dispossesses or abuses the good people who would be our allies, does so at his great peril by our most stern judgement. Have ye understood?"
A great roar went up from the men who were now almost invisible as their fires and lanterns outshone the last moments of daylight.
"Good! Now replenish yourselves with the joints of meat ye shall collect to roast, and with some - though not too much - of the wine stored in yonder tents. For at first light we shall be ready to march - to march, with God's grace - to a great victory!"

41: Five Miles North of Haverfordwest, Monday 8th August, fourteen days before Redemore.

"Your Grace," declared Jasper "if the rope is kept taut then the man will strangle and die slow."
Pierre, a great hulk of a Norman, freed from prison in Harfleur to accompany Henry, had been seized after a tearful peasant woman had entered the camp to point an accusing finger at him. He had refused to pay the proper price for her best hog and had broken her complaining husband's head with his sword. The woman's accusation had caused Henry to recall the tale of the young maid sent into him for his pleasure at Largoët Castle.
The peasant seized his hand and kissed it.
"My man is at death's door, Your Highness, and I have five children."

Now, Henry looked at the great lout whose hands were bound behind him and studied his pale face. His dark eyes, though they were attempting defiance, were full of fear as they took their final survey of the world. Jasper came closer and faced Henry so that his words were for him only.
"How many times hast thou warned these French villains against such mischiefs? It would cause terror amongst thy other miscreants to see his eyes bulge and his legs dance. And he will justly suffer much for his sins. Make the rope taut."
Henry stepped past him and called the hangman to him.
"He is a heavy man," he announced for all present including Pierre to hear. "Put a slack of two, no three feet in the rope. Scrape out a hollow beneath the horse so that his feet will not touch the ground. When he comes out of the saddle his neck should break. The certainty and dread of

death shall be terror enough for him……and any other man tempted to disobey us."
He turned to the distressed peasant woman and asked her courteously if she wished to watch. She shook her head, kissed his hand and went to go. Henry ordered his treasurer to give her ten pounds.
"Your Grace," shouted Pierre roughly "a last gulp of wine, if I may!"
Henry nodded and the flask was taken to him as he was lifted onto the horse.
"You are a just and merciful man, Henry Tudor," he shouted as Clement stepped away from him, crossing himself. "May God bless you!"
"And may He have mercy on thy black soul."
Pierre laughed. The horse, clapped on its haunch, sped away. The victim fell a few feet to his instant death as his neck bone snapped. Henry ordered the onlookers to disperse - and then that Pierre's purse be brought to him straightway.

As the camp was busy preparing food the same evening, after an exhausting seventeen mile trek since dawn, the raising of a dust cloud on a track to the east caused alarm in case it was a surprise attack by Sir Rhys ap Thomas of whose proximity Henry had been made aware at Dale. Henry had sent out a messenger to find him and to urge him to join his cause. The messenger had not returned.
Henry was alerted to danger, and as the dust subsided before a nearby wood, he sent out a scouting party. When two men were escorted back and were greeted warmly by Henry and Jasper, the soldiers, being tired and with no heart that evening for battle, were much relieved. The men were John Morgan and Arnold Butler whom Henry had last seen in 1471 when the Duke of Brittany had expelled them as a condition of offering the Tudors sanctuary. His joy on being reunited with them was tempered however by the bad news they brought.
"We and a few others have left Rhys ap Thomas," said Butler "because he dithers like a maid. Your messenger is held captive. We have argued for your cause and for leaving Richard's service but the fool maintains that your army - he has been spying on you since you left Dale - is too puny. To which I have countered that if he came over, you would be far stronger! He cannot see it! He says he cannot unswear the oath his men have made to the king, but they are good Pembroke and Brecon men who have been terrified into allegiance after the atrocities of eighty-three - and all would flock to your banner if only bloody stupid Rhys gave the order!"
"But do not be disheartened," added John Morgan "if they will not flock, they will fly away to you in small numbers before you turn for the border, mark my words. But I have other bad news. Reginald Bray contacted Arnold to say he was bringing money raised by your mother, but he is either lost or captured or robbed and killed."
"This is grievous indeed," exclaimed Henry, biting his lip and looking at Oxford who had joined them in the tent. Oxford smiled and put a consoling arm on Henry's shoulder.
"Well. Your Grace. It is simple. We cannot afford a long drawn-out war, so we had better make it a short one. By September, I promise, you shall be the crowned King of England."
"Pour us some wine!" shouted Jasper to their servant. "Let us drink a toast to that."
After they had drunk, Henry went out to address his army once more.
"These men have come from Rhys ap Thomas who leads a thousand men. He is close by but will not attack us or join us - for he cannot decide if he is more afeared of us or of Gloucester. His soldiers are good and true men of Pembroke who naturally love us and will, we are assured, begin to drift over to us like the leaves of yonder trees in autumn - as long as we conduct ourselves virtuously and do no harm to their people."

He pointed at the mound of earth under which the newly hanged Pierre lay.
“Ye saw this villain hanged today for his mischief. Ye know well I am a man of my word. We swear that we will hang any man - be he high or low - who breaks our laws. Now refresh and replenish yourselves - though moderately - for tomorrow we shall have an arduous climb over these Preseli mountains and shall camp within sight of Cardigan - thence to cross - on Wednesday - the river there into the principality of Wales. So rest ye well and regain your strength.”

42: Cardigan, Wednesday 10th August, twelve days before Redemore.

The march to camp on the heights of the Preseli hills had been a sore and arduous one. At least the army faced an easy march down into Cardigan and Henry allowed his men to sleep longer in order to restore their strength before beginning the descent, for he was anxious that the castle in Cardigan might prove a more formidable obstacle than the one at Dale.
When the constable of the castle, Hugh Gryffed, refused absolutely to yield, Henry was faced with the dilemma he had dreaded. To lay siege would consume precious time and resources; to pass the castle by would raise doubts amongst his soldiers and in the minds of the people in the town and beyond as to his determination, effectiveness and the strength of his support. Besides, he did not wish to harm the garrison of Welshmen who would make well armed and well armoured recruits to his banner. Trotting forward on his white stallion to within hailing, but not shooting distance, Henry demanded of the men on the battlements that they summon their constable to parley. When one of the soldiers returned with his refusal, Jasper began to lose his temper.
“Tell him that when I seize him by the throat I shall squeeze out his last mortal breath!”
“Wait!” shouted Henry. “Tell him that no harm shall come to him.”
“He thinks you mean to shoot at him with arrows,” the soldier shouted back.
“Tell him that I, Henry Tudor, swear upon my honour and on my mortal soul that he shall not be harmed. I would avoid all bloodshed.”
Eventually, the grim-faced constable decided to step out from behind a battlement, a helmet pulled down tight and his body protected by a halbergon jacket. He was defiant.
“Henry Tudor, I am sworn to serve King Richard. He is a dread king and I would not break my oath.”
The townspeople who had gathered in Henry’s support greeted this with boos and whistles. With a wave of his hand, Henry bade them be silent.
“Lord Constable, you are a loyal and obedient servant and we shall reward you well, for men like you are precious to their masters. Before the summer is out, I shall be King of all England and Wales -”
The army and the town cheered but the constable did not move.
“Hugh Gryffed, know that Richard, Duke of Gloucester, is not king. He has usurped the throne, terrified his Parliament, subdued the people and killed Edward, the rightful king, his own nephew. To kill a child is not the act of a king but of a coward. We declare your oath null and void for in the sight of God Almighty and in the eyes of all right-thinking men there is no such person as King Richard the Third. You see before you here the sole and only rightful claimant to the throne. So come out with your men and we shall welcome you with open arms.”
For a moment, the constable did not waver and then vanished from view. Henry said a silent prayer. All around there was silence too - until the creak of machinery was heard and as soon as the portcullis began to rise all threw their hats and helmets in the air in delight. Out walked the

whole garrison led by the constable. Henry bade him kneel and drew his sword. The crowd gasped.
"I dub you Sir Hugh Gryffed," declared Henry. "Arise Sir Knight!"
"God bless King Henry the Seventh!" shouted a voice from an upstairs window. The cry was echoed around the square and Henry, much relieved, acknowledged the acclaim.
When he had gone to his tent he summoned his uncle to him.
"Uncle Jasper…Lord Pembroke…you know we love you well - but never again countermand us or interrupt us in the exercise of our authority. Both high and low shall disobey our orders - at their peril."
Jasper at first frowned and then with a huge smile took his nephew's hand and knelt.
"Your Grace!"
That evening, his self-confidence never higher, Henry decided it was time to send out letters to all men of quality in Wales, summoning them to join him in all haste with their soldiers. He showed his letter to Jasper in private for approval and he shook his head.
"Thou art too meek in thy address, Henry."
"What do you mean?"
"See here - *wherein your coming shall cause us in time to be your good lord who shall reward you well…."*
"And? So I shall! As I rewarded the constable."
"But these men shall not see thee in person or with an army. They will read the letter, put it down and go back to their wine, their venison or their wench and never think on it more. Thou must balance thy generosity with a steely determination to be obeyed."
"What should I say then instead?"
"*….to be your good lord….your good lord……..and that ye fail not herein as ye will avoid our grievous displeasure and answer unto at your peril.* That would work a miracle on their sloth, a physic to move their bowels, too. If thou - if you can put the shits up me, you should put the shits up them"
Henry actually laughed and agreed to the amendment. The letter was copied out many times that night and duly delivered far and wide in the north of Wales.

43: Nottingham, Thursday 11th August, eleven days before Redemore.
"Catesby, let us go out hawking - I cannot stand to sit here hour after hour any longer," said Richard, gnawing the inside of his cheek, pressing the place against his molars with his knuckle.
Catesby tried hard to reassure him
"Eleven days, Richard. Perhaps there has been rebellion at sea - such a rabble of strangers cannot be easily managed. Perhaps Tidder's ship has been wrecked. No news is good news -"
"No news is driving me fucking mad! I need to take my mind off this."
A hammering came at the door and an attendant entered.
"Tidder is landed, Your Grace. Four days since. A messenger has ridden all the way from Pembroke."
"From Pembroke? Then I was right!" he shouted in delight before dismay overtook him. "Why did I not trust myself? I might have been in Pembroke at this very moment with my foot on the traitor's chest. Now I shall never again doubt what I feel and shall not listen to advice. Send for my riders now."
Messages were immediately dispatched to his placemen in Wales to intercept and destroy Henry Tudor. At the same time, new orders were issued demanding that all men of substance from lords

to squires come straightway with their men to Nottingham upon peril of loss of land and life. This would cause almost all recipients to quiver with fear. The last battle in England had taken place in 1471. Men were used to peace; even those who had relished the fight at Tewksbury were fourteen years older now and many who had inherited their titles had been children back then. Most feared a king who was rumoured to have killed his own kin. To this summons, to be speedily in Nottingham, most responded with sloth, many not at all, praying that the war would be resolved without them, many harbouring the treasonable hope that Tudor would win and reward their absence from Richard's side.
When Thomas Stanley sent word from Manchester that he had fallen ill and would be delayed, Richard knew only one way to interpret the message. Stanley was Tudor's man - as he had suspected all along. Yet Thomas and William Stanley commanded armies in the thousands. Their forces would certainly influence if not decide the outcome of any battle. As soon as Thomas Stanley's son by his first marriage, the Lord Strange, arrived in good faith with his men at Nottingham two days later, Richard placed him under arrest. He would be held as a hostage to coerce the Stanleys into compliance. The king had Strange issued with a quill and parchment to write to his father and uncle of his plight.

44: New Quay Thursday 11th August

After replenishing his supplies from the ships waiting off a cove in Cardigan Bay,
Henry halted after a march of twenty-three miles, two miles south of New Quay. He gave strict instructions that no-one was to go into the town.
As the light turned grey, a mob of angry townspeople came into the camp, demanding to speak with the Lord Richmond. At their midst, bound at the wrist, were three Scottish soldiers, staggering drunk, being prodded along with staves.
"This man," announced the man who had declared himself to be the mayor "has disgraced the wife of our innkeeper and knocked him senseless to the floor when he tried to protect her."
The man in question was pushed forward.
"These two," continued the mayor "sat back and laughed and refused to pay their bill."
All three now stood with heads bowed as the town and the army waited in silence to see what Henry would do.
"Disgraced the wife? How?" he asked, pale with fury.
"By raising her skirts and touching her in her privy place."
"This man? Just this man? Not the other two?"
"Aye my Lord."
"Is this true, soldier?"
"She was wanton, Your Grace! Making lewd comments and staring at us with her great big eyes and draping her great tits over my face when she served us!"
"It is not true, Sir!" shrieked a woman, red-faced and eyes swollen, now coming to the fore. "The rascal made a lewd jest and I made the mistake of being pleasant and polite enough to smile at it - and he took me all wrong."
The woman was not very buxom and not at all alluring.
"Were there witnesses?" demanded Henry.
A man stepped forward and said he had seen it all.
"The lady gave him no encouragement, Sir. I know her to be a pious and devout Christian woman. This villain grabbed her as she bent over another customer - and did what the mayor said, God strike me dead if I tell a lie."

Henry ordered the two others to be stripped to the waist. All watched in awe and horror as they were flogged until their backs had scarce a white band of skin left.
"That will do. Rub salt in the wounds and put them out of our sight."
The man accused of assault looked terrified. Henry went to him and struck him across the face.
"I gave orders for men to remain in camp. Villain. Didst thou think I am not to be obeyed? Bring rope!"
The man wept and begged for mercy.
"Henry," whispered Jasper "this time thou must show no mercy. In mercy the devil only sees weakness,"
"I will not dance to the devil's tune."
"Henry. Listen to me once more and then I shall be silent. Thou art a good and just man a kind man. But wouldst thou be as kind - and as despised - as our kinsman, the late King Henry?"
Henry took a deep breath and summoned his hangman to him.
"We shall not be taken vantage of by rogues," he declared without a tremble in his voice.
"Executioner make the rope as taut as may be."
The dancing man took three long minutes to die. Henry would not have to hang another.

45: Aberystwyth, Friday 12th August

In Aberwystwyth, the constable of the castle proved a more truculent opponent. Not only did he refuse, to yield, he posted archers on the battlements.
"Are all Welshmen so bloody awkward?" sighed Oxford.
But when one of the defenders was wounded by an arrow the rest laid down their weapons and refused to fight.
"No," said Jasper. "Most show a lot of commonsense."
The constable had no choice but to open the portcullis and went out to beg for mercy.
Henry was in a less forgiving mood, for in the brief skirmish, one of his best Scottish captains had succumbed to an arrow through his throat. He ordered the constable to be put in the stocks where many townspeople gathered to pelt the loathed man with an assortment of overripe items.
As they rode on towards Machyncleth, the ancient capital of Owen Glendwyr's Wales, Henry kept glancing towards the hills in the east, where riders had been shadowing their progress for hours.
"They are scouts for Rhys," muttered Jasper. "Why does he not send word as to what he truly intends? Shall I send one of our own to spy on him?"
"Yes, do so. The doubt is making me nervous."
Two hours later, the scout returned with troubling reports.
"Your Grace, they are three valleys away and there must be near on two thousand men. And women and children. As if the whole of Wales has risen for him."
"And didst thou speak to any of them?"
"A woman leaving the camp with babe in arms. All had answered Rhys' summons because he was a good knight and well loved."
"Not for Richard?"
"She made no mention of him."
When the scout had been dismissed, Henry decided he would send a party under a flag of truce to find out Rhys' intentions.

46: Machyncleth, Saturday 13th - Sunday 14th August

Henry decided to rest in Machyncleth and to wait for any who might join him from the north before he turned east away from the coast. His men were leaner and fitter after their exertions and he began to take a pride in them. They had covered ninety miles in six days. They still marched in separate columns by nationality and camped likewise, but so far not one squabble had broken out between them and many new friendships had been forged. To test their self-discipline, he allowed them to associate with the townsfolk and only had to flog one Scotsman for drunken behaviour.

Henry's secretary, Clement, had made careful note of those gentlemen who had not yet committed themselves, and more letters, more urgent and more stern were sent out demanding that absentees come to him between Welshpool and Shrewsbury before the seventeenth of August, Jasper was concerned that this was a hostage to fortune.

"If just one is a traitor, Henry, then our plans and position shall be revealed. Walter Herbert or Rhys Thomas might be lying in wait to kill us."

"We must take that risk. The whole enterprise is a risk."

By afternoon, Henry's spirits were lifted when he received a reply from Rhys ap Thomas setting out his condition for changing his allegiance. He wanted to be Governor of Wales. Henry had that position in mind for his uncle, but under the circumstances he had no option but to agree.

47: Manchester, Monday 15th August, Seven Days before Redemore

Beloved Father,

I am commanded by our Sovereign Lord Richard to write to thee that thou shouldst make haste here to Nottingham with thine army. I have been told that thou hast fallen ill with a fever but that the king, being impatient to rally all England to his banner, requires thee to be brought here in a wagon, the weather being not inclement, by thy men if thou canst not ride. To that end, he has taken me hostage and has declared that thy longer absence will be deemed treason, upon which my too short life may be forfeit. I have reassured the king that thy absence is not by malice and deception and that thou shalt send a promise by return to come at thy earliest convenience.

George Strange

I have sent this letter also to my Uncle William Stanley.

Lord Thomas Stanley, still afflicted by fever, had been making preparations to return to his castle at Tatton on the morning when this letter arrived. The Lady Margaret had been spirited away from London after Richard's departure and was in the next room. He went in to her and showed her the letter.

"Well, Margot. My heart is well and truly riven down the middle. Which son should I sacrifice, thine or mine?"

His wife read the message and wearily shook her head.

"Why was I born in such troubled times? The man is a monster. Now thou must pretend more cleverly than ever. Send word that thou art recovered enough to come south and that George's life should be spared. By Wednesday, Henry should be in Shrewsbury. Tell Richard that it would be quicker to meet him south of Stafford or Lichfield to make up the delay. Richard will have

realised that Henry means to come from Shrewsbury along Watling Street and will understand thy reasons -"
"Or see treachery in them, that I mean to join forces with him. No. I will pledge to join him in Nottingham but head off to Lichfield, sending word later that I had heard that Henry meant to cut and run for London and that I meant to block him. I am sore tempted to send an advance party in apparent friendship to Nottingham to kill the bastard and free George. But do I dare?"
"It is too risky, Tom. The king might survive and kill George. And then hunt us down. Oh what shall we do?"
"What we have done since eighty-three…….Now I must assure the king and send word to William to follow us south."
"But can thy brother dissemble as well as thee, with his hot temper? Oh God, that we should be placed in such a crucible of anguish and doubt! I wonder often if it would be better to be my scullery maid. Her life is toil but at least she sleeps."

47: Nottingham, Monday, 15th August

Richard had been confident that his liegemen in Wales would corner Henry's "trifling" army and destroy it. H**e** had rewarded them all well after they had refused to join Buckingham's autumn rebellion in 1483. He was relaxing at his hunting lodge at Bestwood after a good day's sport when he received the shattering news that the castles at Cardigan and Aberytwyth had fallen without a fight and that Henry was making rapid and unopposed progress north.
"Cowards! Traitors! Where does Thomas tarry? And Herbert? Why is Lord William Stanley not come down from Chester to give Tidder battle? Must I do everything myself? I have rewarded all these men richly and am repaid with sloth and cowardice and treason."
As he was brooding over dinner, more bad news came. First, from the Mayor of York, a messenger arrived asking how many men should be mustered and sent south.
"How many? Is the mayor out of his wits? If I issue a general commission of array, all able-bodied men up to the age of sixty should be sent! Dost thou mean to tell me that they are not yet on the way? Get back on thy fucking nag and ride back without pause and tell the mayor to make haste - or I will have his damned head."
Richard's friends around the table tried to cheer him but he remained stubbornly silent. He had not touched the venison from the day's hunt. He was drinking an unwonted amount of wine.
"I shall lead the brave soldiers we have already gathered here and confront Tidder at Shrewsbury!" he burst out suddenly.
The Duke of Norfolk could not help but shake his head and pull a long face. Richard banged the table.
"Why dost shake thy head, Mowbray? Advise me properly - thou art a damned councillor! Should I sit here while the bastard runs south unopposed? I said I would trust my own instinct - and so I shall! Bring me a map."
In the stunned silence, men wondered what they should say. The risk of being countermarched by the Tudors' slim army and left stranded was as great as ever. The table looked to William Catesby as the king's closest friend to try to persuade him not to make a terrible mistake. Richard had stood up to lean over the map which the servant had fetched from the next room. Catesby went to stand beside him as the trembling royal finger traced a line on the map.
"He is bound to come down Watling Street. I should intercept him - here - at Wellington - or here at Weston. The further south he comes, gathering more of our traitors to himself, the stronger he will be. And when the Stanleys know I have Strange as hostage they will have to

chase Tidder down - and between us we can crack him like a walnut."
"It is a good plan ,Your Grace," said Catesby mildly. "But you should rely on your loyal bailiff, Mitton, at Shrewsbury to keep the town closed to him. Tidder cannot avoid Shrewsbury. If, denied, he has to lay siege, then we shall have nigh on fifteen thousand men within the week to go there and chase him back the way he came. It is better to wait, for time is on your side not his."
"But what if Mitton yields like the rest?" countered Richard. "And what if those idle laggards from York - whom I have ever blessed with kindness these many years - fail to come in time?"
Now Norfolk went over to look at the map.
"Send immediately a good scurrier to Shrewsbury to keep watch. You cannot rely on Stanley or his mad brother. Better not to chase after Tidder but to lie in wait for him - here - near Hinckley south of Leicester. With fifteen thousand men at your command, well positioned, how could he slither past if we keep close watch, night and day?"
Men waited with bated breath to see whether this would placate or infuriate the king.
"Is this the opinion of you all?" he said at last, gnawing the inside of his cheek.
All nodded.
"Very well. God help you if you are wrong. *I* shall be dead on the field. *You* shall face attainder and the block."
Richard left them. As he was saying his prayers, a knock came at his door. A messenger had just returned from the north.
"Your Grace, the Lord Stanley had me whipped and sent away!"
"Thomas?"
"No, William."
"Then he doth confirm his treachery. And we shall proclaim it in every town."

48: Near Welshpool, Tuesday 16th August

After camping near Welshpool, then marching straight through the town to the wonder and admiration of all, Henry began a steady climb to the top of Long Mountain, six miles further on, and there he thrust his red dragon standard of silken sarsenet into the grass. Remounting his horse, he turned to address his soldiers.
"Men - before us, yonder, stretches all England. Today we wait here for we have summoned our allies who shall not mistake this position. Rest and refresh yourselves - though not too liberally - for tomorrow we mean to cross the river Severn and enter Shrewsbury - whence we shall march on to battle and victory."
Henry's rallying point could not be ignored by those whom he had commanded to join him. All day and all evening, newcomers scrambled or rode up the slope to be welcomed, but the most momentous event was the arrival of Rhys ap Thomas under his banner of the raven, bringing close to two thousand men, doubling Henry's army. Henry had expected a man with suspicious and foxy eyes, so was much taken aback by his noble features and graceful bearing.
"Better late than never, Your Grace," said he, kneeling before him.
"Get up," replied Henry without smiling. "You drive a hard bargain., Sir."
"Dick was ever a generous and gracious lord to me - I could not make up my mind."
"You have not heard of his acts of tyranny and the murder of his nephews?"
"Aye, we have heard the rumours. Some believe, some doubt it. Perhaps we shall never know. I am, like Our Lord's disciple, a doubting Thomas. I would wish to see the true wounds."
"So why have you come to me?"

“I sent word to our sage Dafydd Lwydd. He prophesies your victory.”
“So you do not doubt his word?”
“He has never been wrong for me - yet.”
Later, as the sun began to lengthen shadows on the fields around, crowded with men and tents and beasts, Oxford came to Henry well pleased.
“We are beginning to be a fine army. Not one soldier is drunk. The Cripple shall have more but we shall have better. And I know how to make the better prevail. I calculate that we shall meet him in Leicester - or he might try to stop us near Cannock.”
“If you were he - what would you do?”
“Shit myself.”
Henry laughed.
“No, I would stay in Nottingham until my northern men arrived. They must be on their way. But I would send five thousand men through Burton to Watling Street tomorrow to lie in wait. He cannot tarry in Nottingham too long in case we slip past him.”
“We should not be devious”, replied Henry. “It would only prolong the war. We must meet him soon and win or lose. We have waited long enough - all my life has been war - and now I wish for peace - of whatever sort, earthly or eternal.”
“I agree with you absolutely Henry. Mine has been the life of a quarry and captivity. I will be free, here or in heaven. But we shall win.”

49: Shrewsbury, 17th August, five days before Redemore

The descent to the ancient town of Shrewsbury did not take long. Wagons had to be steadied by gangs of men on the steepest parts as oxen and sheep and men picked out the kindest pathways. Drums began to beat to signal the army’s approach but Thomas Mitton, the bailiff, had known for days of their whereabouts and intentions.
There was no alternative to crossing the Severn over the bridge at the Welsh gate. Jasper rode across with Oxford to demand entry, for the portcullis was down. Mitton appeared on the battlements and refused.
“Sweet Jesus!” exclaimed Jasper. “Not another Cripple’s man! Have they no commonsense?……Listen, man - is it Mutton?”
“Mitton. Thomas.”
“Thomas Mitton - we intend no habitant of the town harm - we shall pass though like the wind, without drinking a drop of ale and without stealing one pie or sausage. Your wives and daughters could run naked in the streets and we would look neither left nor right! We have urgent business in England with a certain tyrant and cannot pause even to bid you good day.”
When Mitton left the walkway, Jasper, fully expecting the gate to be raised, congratulated himself on his new-found tact. But when, some little time later, archers appeared on the battlements, he cursed loud and rode back to Henry who had retired to a tavern in a nearby village.
The army waited all day on the water meadows while their leaders debated what to do. Every new approach to Mitton was greeted with the same answer.
“Ye shall pass - o’er my dead body.”
If Jasper could have found a way in, so it would have been.
Ten miles or so upstream, as the sun passed noon, a man on a horse was crossing the river by rope ferry from the English side. One of William Stanley’s spies had ridden out of Shrewsbury from the east gate to take him word of Henry’s predicament.

As campfires were being lit and demoralised soldiers were wondering whether they would have to march miles out of their way, to cross at a more southerly town - and whether they would be refused again the right of entry - the man on horseback - a messenger from Sir William Stanley - arrived.
“Your Grace, your uncle has been told of Mitton’s refusal, and has sent me with this message.”
Henry undid the scroll within which another had been rolled up and sealed with wax and indented with Stanley’s signet ring. Henry read the first scroll and set the second aside.

Henry,

Nephew, I greet you well. I have just heard of Mitton’s refusal. He is a loyal man to the point of stubbornness. I like him well, but he stands in the way of thy right. I have written him a message in the other scroll of which I beg thee not to break the seal, for when he knows for sure it comes from me, one who commands respect in Shrewsbury, he will surely agree to permit thy passage. Here below is the content of said scroll which should be wrapped around a stone and hurled over the wall.

Mitton - I love thee well. But know that my men are well placed in the town to remove thine head from thy shoulders and take it to Nottingham so that Richard will admire thy loyalty just before his own evil head is cut off. So open the gates of Shrewsbury and throw thyself on the mercy of my beloved nephew who is a pious and just man.

Lord William Stanley.

Henry, thy father is much troubled as I am by Richard’s arrest of his son and thy half-brother George Strange, for he holds him as hostage against our loyalty. We cannot be seen to commit to thee until he is either safe or dead. God help us all against such a wicked tyrant.

Henry gave immediate orders that all should be up at cock crow and ready to march at dawn.

As the sun rose on yet another balmy August day, the eighteenth, Henry’s army fell in and was soon on its way to the river Severn. The second scroll was wrapped around an arrow and fired lazy and loose to fall beyond the Welsh gate. Behind the archer, the soldiers were arranged four men wide, ready to march across the bridge. But the portcullis remained down and by the time the sun was peeping above the rooftops opposite, the early mood of expectancy had turned to frustration. The yelping of the jackdaws and cackling of a magpie began to sound like mockery.
“Has the damned arrow been found?” wondered Jasper aloud. “Has Mitton bothered to read it? Why do Stanley’s men delay in taking the bugger‘s head off?”
Henry ignored him and turned to look at his soldiers who stood in perfect order and silence. The river, deep and slow, passed by with the first early leaves of autumn. On the bank opposite, a heron stood immobile in patient wait for a fish. Oxford leant forward on his horse to ask Henry if he should approach the gate to demand a parley with Mitton. Henry bit his nether lip and shook his head. Casting his eye upstream, he spotted a gnarled branch being borne along.
“Let us wait until yonder branch has passed under the bridge and is out of sight. Then, if there is no change, we shall summon our grapplers”
The branch was swept through the main arch then carried away south and out of sight. Henry

nodded and Jasper rode back to bring ten men running, carrying ropes wound around their waists and a heavy grappling hook in their hands. Behind them ran archers to provide protection. Still no-one appeared on the battlements.
Paying out a little rope at a time, the men swung their hooks around their heads at first slowly and then more quickly until it was impossible to follow them with the eye. And then, almost simultaneously, the hooks flew up and over the battlements and all took hold. With daggers in mouths, the men began to climb the ropes. The strongest had nearly reached the top when a voice yelled HOLD! Mitton in nothing more than a shirt showed himself. The archers, with bowstrings taut and muscles bulging, waited for the order to fire.
"Stand down!" shouted Henry. "Do not fire. Let us hear what he wishes to say."
"Henry Tudor!" shouted Mitton. "I have read the Lord Stanley's message. I love him well - but I am sworn to King Richard, with God as my witness. Would you have me break a solemn oath and endanger my soul?"
"Oh not again!" cried Jasper Tudor, and then whispered, "Henry - give the fat fucker thy Cardigan speech."
Henry tried his best but Mitton was unmoved. Then Henry had an idea.
"Bailiff Mitton - if you will let us enter now and pass, I shall forgo taxes from Shrewsbury for a twelvemonth. For I shall be king! If, however, you stubbornly refuse as you did yesterday, then woe betide you, for how will your people love you hereafter? - for you shall have none but a dead lord to obey and shall later reap our great displeasure - and your people shall pay taxes more than double - for as long as we have a memory of this day."
Mitton continued to stare out and for a long time said nothing.
"Henry," whispered Jasper " The archer with the bad skin yonder can shoot a rook from a branch at two hundred paces. Let me give the order to try and shoot the rogue."
"No, Uncle. I admire him and would sooner come to an agreement. If he is killed, the people will believe that we mean to sack the town…….Thomas Mitton! I shall be king by the will of God and when I am, then the Lord will count your oath null and void. How can a promise to a usurper who is not king by divine right and blessing be a solemn oath? Think, man!"
Jasper shook his head when this met with silence. "We have come all this way by land and sea to be stopped by a gate -"
"Do you swear not to harm the people?" shouted Mitton.
"Clement! Bring me my prayer book…..quick…"
His priest dismounted and pulled the book out of a saddle bag.
"Thomas! I swear on this, my book of hours that neither you nor the lowest stable boy in Shrewsbury shall come to any harm. We will ride straight through, for we are already delayed in our purpose."
"And do you swear to forgo our taxes?"
"Aha!" said Oxford. "What wonders money can work on oaths!"
"I do!" shouted back Henry.
Mitton disappeared and a few anxious moments passed - before the creak of winding was heard and, to cheers within and without, the portcullis rose. The vanguard began to walk over the bridge with Henry to the fore. Mitton was discovered lying prostrate on the cobbles and Henry jumped down. Jasper joined him and instinctively half-drew his sword but Henry bade him hold with a wave of his hand.
"Thomas Mitton" he said, gazing at his grey monkish head, "You said I should pass over your dead body."

“If it please,” he groaned. “For if you lose - and I have dreamt that you shall - my life will be forfeit.”
Henry stepped over him and lifted him up, dusting down his cloak.
“Mitton, you are good and faithful servant to the point of stubbornness - and if you would be loyal to a villain, how much more loyal would you be to England’s rightful king? You look unslept and ill.”
“I am Your Grace,” he replied tearfully.
“Then get yourself to bed. And dream a better dream.”
All along the street people were looking on nervously, many at windows, some clutching flowers.
“Salopians!” declared Henry, remounted. “Never blame this man. He thought of ye not himself. We shall always remember this day and hold to our promise to Shrewsbury when we rule England.”
To loud cheers, the army marched straight through with eyes fixed ahead and out of the English gate en route for the ancient British track of Watling Street which in Roman times had been paved in part.

When Richard heard late that night of Shrewsbury’s capitulation he was furious. There was no longer any doubt in his mind that he would have to move soon even though the Lord Thomas Stanley, the Earl of Northumberland and men from York had not yet joined him. Studying the map again, he knew that he had to move south not west for he risked missing his enemy. His trembling finger hovered and landed on Leicester.

50: Newport, Shropshire, 19th August, three days before Redemore
Henry’s anxieties had been stilled by the support of his uncle, William Stanley - a man he had never met. But as the army marched out of Shrewsbury Henry’s euphoria diminished as his dismay over the capture of Lord George Strange, his half-brother, increased - though not because he loved the man - he was a stranger to him also - but because it put the ultimate support of both Stanleys in serious doubt. If Richard looked likely to win a quick victory, then they would surely not intervene. If the battle were prolonged, or if they failed to support the king in extremis, then George would surely be executed.
As they marched towards the Shropshire town of Newport where they meant to camp, all kinds of possibilities troubled Henry’s thoughts and he remained silent. Even the swelling of his ranks by other gentlemen and their retainers brought but the briefest of smiles and few cheerful words from him. That night he slept badly.
The next morning, the nineteenth of August, there arrived a messenger from Sir William Stanley, offering to meet him in Stafford twelve miles away and on his intended route for Lichfield and Watling Street.
“We are camped to the north in Stone,” said William, a handsome man of fifty, having embraced his nephew warmly. “Thy father is in Lichfield to the south.”
“Already?”
“Yes. But he is not well, having had the sweating sickness. And of course he desponds at the reports of George his son - as I do. Landlord! Bring us wine.”
To Jasper’s practised eye, Stanley seemed ill at ease and he noticed how his hand trembled as he raised his goblet.
“Well, thou art more a Frenchie than an Englishman after so many years away,” said Stanley

with a forced grin, wiping his mouth on his sleeve. “Or a Welshman.”
“I am both, Uncle,” replied Henry watchfully, refusing, like Oxford, to touch his wine and regretting that his other uncle, Jasper, was drinking quickly. Stanley got to his feet and began to pace.
“Believe me, Nephew, I would bring my army to join thee here now, but for George. He is a fine man, a fine soldier - the best. Curse Richard! I, personally, have nothing to lose and everything to gain but I shall be forced to practise deceit which is not my way.”
When Henry asked him why he had nothing to lose, William’s eyes swelled with tears.
“Mt stepson, Edward, a fine boy, died two weeks ago. His title is no more and his estates go to his damned sisters. Thou seeest before thee a poor man.”
“Uncle, join me in battle and I will reward you well.”
“I would - for Dick has already proclaimed me a traitor. For I was distraught at my son’s death and found Dick’s messenger surly - I kicked his arse and drove him away, telling him to tell Dick to hang himself.”
“Then, indeed, you do have nothing to lose, if -”
“Would the Cripple kill George Strange if you joined us and Thomas your brother did not?” demanded Jasper impatiently. “Think man, if you were he, would you be so provoked?”
“How can anyone tell?” William retorted. “The best policy would be for me to hold back and intervene only if it were going so badly for thee, that only I could turn the battle in thy favour.”
After William had left the tavern, Henry sent Oxford out and had angry words with Jasper.
“This is the second time you have cut me as I spoke, You are drunk! How can I ask my men to be moderate if their general cannot be?”
Jasper hung his head in shame and swept his goblet from the table. He put his hand on his heart and swore an oath to touch not another drop until the battle was won.
“Very well. Now advise me, for I am low in spirit. I would hate to be the cause of my brother’s death.”
“Henry….George Strange rode to Nottingham to join the Cripple, so he deserves all he gets. My concern is for William Stanley.”
“For his predicament?”
“No, his character. I do not like him. He is intemperate and selfish and hypocritical - crying for his stepson? What shit! Only for the loss of his estates. He reminds me of another greedy man - of Buckingham. Ask John de Vere what he thinks - he has not heard me and will therefore speak his true mind.”
Henry shouted in the landlord and told him to summon the Earl of Oxford.
“Did you hear what was said, John?” asked Jasper.
“Only raised voices. Is all well between you?”
“What is your opinion of Henry‘s other uncle?”
“I have always disliked the man. He fought for Edward at Tewkesbury and served him at Court. He was always a Yorkist and was well rewarded by the Cripple in eighty-three for not joining the rebels. Were I Richard, I would despise him. He is disloyal and ungrateful. He is your uncle but do not count him a friend.”
“No more than his brother, my father,” muttered Henry “or Rhys Thomas or the others if they get a better offer. And yet he came to our assistance at Shrewsbury. How many more have ignored our summons? Whom can I rely on save you two?”
“Men are fickle like the weather,” said Oxford. “That is why it is vital to win the day in one coup - and so we shall!”

“Against fifteen thousand men?”
“With our French and Scottish soldiers in the vanguard against terrified peasants we cannot fail. Let us make haste to rejoin them for I wish to put them through their paces this afternoon. Come, be of good cheer, Henry Tudor!”

51: Nottingham, 19th August.

It was getting late and still there was no sign of the Earl of Northumberland or of any soldiers from York. Richard stood on the battlements of the castle in two minds. As far as the eye could see the fields were full of soldiers, marching, cooking, feasting, playing football, cleaning armour and weapons. They would spend another warm night under the stars. Richard was pleased.
When he scanned again the northern horizon for dust rising from hooves beating down on the dry fields and tracks, but saw none, he bit his cheek and cursed the very men on whom he had felt he could rely on most.
“Why do they delay, Catesby? Have I not rewarded them generously enough? What fickle beasts men are.”
“It will soon be twilight. They are doubtless camping as we speak just a few miles away and will join us in the morning.”
“Send out scurriers again - tell them to say we shall be leaving for Leicester tomorrow and should follow us there for we cannot wait any longer here.”
“Come down now for dinner. Thou hast watched long enough.”
A messenger was waiting below in the great hall. Richard took the scroll and sat down heavily at the head of the table around which his close allies sat, including the Earls of Surrey and of Lincoln. Servants began to bring in meat and wine while Richard examined the seal on the scroll.
“Ah!” he exclaimed. “The Lord Thomas Stanley deigns to send me word. Is he still sweating abed, I wonder?”
He quickly scanned the parchment and then gnawed the inside of his cheek.
“Well?” asked Surrey. “Is he coming or no?”
“He is in Lichfield.”
“Lichfield? Does he not know the bloody way to Nottingham?”
“Listen to what he writes. *I am here in Lichfield not by choice but out of necessity. Reports have come to me that Tidder means, being the weaker party, to avoid battle altogether, and will cut and run for London. I shall therefore go before him on Watling Street and block his way.*…..Well, gentlemen, let us all admire Stanley’s military prowess. He means to force Tidder to retreat or turn him east towards Leicester straight onto our blades! How shall I reward such cunning when you sit dumbly on your arses growing fatter on mutton and venison?”
The table left off their meat and stared in anxious silence at their king, astonished that he had become so naïve. Looking from one solemn face to the next, Richard gradually relaxed his scowl and smiled - then tittered and laughed until he was red in the face.
“Fools!” he gasped. “Ye think Richard Plantagenet taken in? Has lost his wits? That I would trust a Stanley by any name any more? I would not trust him to empty my pisspot. We shall carry the day without him, without Northumberland and those scurvy dogs from York. And without Stanley’s insolent, graceless brother. Go to the battlements before dark and try and see one blade of grass. There has never been seen in England such an army! We are three soldiers to every one of Tidder’s. When there is peace at last we shall have all our traitors headed and make beggars of their kin! To victory!”

All raised their goblets and stood cheering. Richard had come roaring back to them and it was noted that he only sipped at his wine.
“We shall leave early tomorrow, gentlemen, in full certainty that Stanley would never dare allow Tidder to pass after such a guarantee, for I would take off his son‘s head. We shall defeat Tidder while this bright August sun of York still shines on us.”

52: Leicester, 20st August, Two Days before Redemore.

To drum beat, with much ceremony, his ears ringing with the cheers and good wishes of the people, Richard had led his huge army out of Nottingham, wishing that he was as well loved in London and other southern parts of his kingdom. He had been a kind and generous patron of Nottingham and events in London were as remote to its citizens as the craters on the moon. Rumours about Richard’s murder of the princes were largely disbelieved. Their mother, Elizabeth Woodville, had gained a reputation locally for self-serving and her former husband Lord Grey of Groby, a village near Leicester had been famed for his meanness. However, her second husband, King Edward had proclaimed himself king at Nottingham and the town had always been staunchly Yorkist. Most saw their betters as a race apart, conducting their affairs in a manner most advantageous to themselves, and if they were accounted evil, it was for God to condemn them. The threat of an invasion by Welshmen, Scots and - worst of all - Frenchmen, stirred their fears and patriotic emotions so that any doubts about Richard’s right to rule were subsumed by nightmares of alien domination, for stories about Norman atrocities after Hastings were still told.
Having been drilled and transformed from a rag-bag rabble into an army, Richard’s soldiers marched out of the city in step and in tight ranks. Aware that the invader’s force was a small fraction of theirs, they were in good spirits and good voice as they began to pace out the twenty miles to Leicester with which city Nottingham had ever had a rivalry, usually good-natured. Most men were confident that in such a throng they would be most likely spectators rather than combatants and would be home before the end of August, unscathed, resuming their normal lives and feasting at harvest time. The lowest of them were the least well armoured and hoped that they would be there as pushers and shovers in the middle ranks or held in reserve. The artillery pieces which Richard had had brought up from London were formidable. All had watched in awe to see cannon in practice reduce trees to splinters. Morale was high and Richard was resplendent on his white stallion in a cloak of white sarsenet over his scarlet doublet - but most impressive of all, glinting in the sun, was the golden battle crown which he wore with conspicuous pride.
As the sun settled on the walls of Leicester, Richard entered with his entourage to the acclaim of the populace, leaving his men and their captains to camp on the water meadows by the river Soar. The mayor and his aldermen paid him homage and he made his way to the White Boar Inn followed by a cart bearing his bed.
Once feasted, he settled down with his advisors, joined by the aged Duke of Norfolk, to hear reports of his scurriers and to discuss tactics.
A linen map was unrolled and smoothed flat on the table and, with Richard bent over it at the end, gnawing his cheek, a scurrier who had been to spy on the opposition and the lie of the land was ushered in.
“Sire, the Lords Stanley are camped separate, William in fields near Hinckley and Thomas - there - at Mancetter entirely blocking the way south. Tudor is further north at Atherstone and will not be able to come further along unless he sprouts wings.”
“Well, gentlemen,” said Richard with a twinkle of irony in his eyes “perhaps Thomas Stanley is

indeed as good as his word."
The Duke of Norfolk who owed his position entirely to Richard resented Thomas Stanley and had never understood why his king had not condemned him.
"I never trusted one word he said, You cannot rely on him, Richard."
"And neither shall I," he replied and then addressed his spy, asking how many men Tidder had.
"He has been joined by many other traitors but still has no more than five, five and a half thousand men, Your Grace."
"Still a fraction of our strength!" declared the Earl of Northumberland who had marched all day to join Richard that evening. "Tudor must be kacking himself."
"It is not Henry Tidder but that drunken scoundrel Jasper Tidder and that belligerent Earl of Oxford who whip the dead Lancastrian cause forward like a corpse. Henry is their rabbit."
Richard asked his scurrier where they should camp and he pointed to a spot near the village of Sutton Cheney.
"They call this Ambion Hill, beyond which the ground falls towards - here - to the left of the Roman Fenn Lane. There are two villages nearby - Dadlington and Stoke Manford…there is one hazard - here at Redemore - a marsh which is still soft and heavy after the rains of July - one for horsemen to avoid."
"Excellent," declared Richard. "We shall form our main battle here to the right of the marsh and try to push the enemy onto it. With the sun on our backs and in the eyes of the enemy, and with our greater strength, how can we fail? And now to bed, gentlemen, for we have important business the morrow."

53: Merevale Abbey, Atherstone, 21st August, Eve of Redemore Field

Having entered Lichfield in triumph on the twentieth of August and having been ceremoniously received by the mayor and his aldermen, Henry rode on to camp near Tamworth. On the next day, the twenty-first, he rode on seven more miles to Atherstone a short distance north of Mancetter near to where Fenn Lane joined Watling Street. As a courtesy, he went to the nearby abbey of Merevale and apologized for the damage his army had done to their crops. The abbot greeted him pleasantly and told him that a visitor was waiting for him. He was amazed to find a man almost the double of William Stanley - in fact the stepfather he had never seen. Immediately, Henry took out the precious handkerchief embroidered with MB and Thomas Stanley wept.
"I would allow thee to pass, son, but he will kill George. I have promised thy mother that I will do my best to save both our sons. I have sent the king - have sent Richard word that I am forcing thee to choose either to retreat or turn east after Mancetter towards Leicester. At the battle - surely somewhere near here - I shall wait until George is safe or dead and then kill the bastard myself."
"What is that place?" asked Jasper looking at the map.
"Stoke Manford - a village. My best man has been to examine the land and we shall have the high ground. But we must stand at least a mile apart from you. I shall leave a man to wait for you tonight as a guide."
"But cannst thou swear never to join Richard against me?" asked Henry.
Stanley had been asked the question he dreaded - even to ask himself.
"Never doubt it," he said almost too quickly. "I have been forced to dissemble and placate Richard two long years. My brother has been foolish for he is low in spirits and not of sound judgement, causing Richard to declare him a traitor. This works perversely in thy favour. And to

George's."
"How so?"
"Richard has my son not his. William can act without constraint. If he sees an occasion to come to thine aid at some critical time, he has vowed to do so."
"And has made the same promise to us," said Jasper.
"This action would, I hope and pray, not cause Richard of itself to kill George for I should remain uncommitted. If Richard is in his right mind - and I admit I have questioned his sanity - he will understand that to do the wretched deed would provoke an inevitable reaction from me. My five thousand men would charge into him and that, he knows, would turn an uncertain battle of tired men."
"It would be as a move in chess which is forced on an opponent," murmured Henry.
"Yes, indeed. A good comparison."
"But you might never tell whether George is alive or dead," said Jasper.
"I have two spies with Norfolk's army. They will endeavour to bring George to safety in the confusion or - God help me, wave a red cloth the instant he is dead."
"Very well, Father. I have one more thing to ask. Cannst thou be certain that William will not join the king after all?"
This took Thomas by complete surprise. He meant to answer yes adamantly but a sudden voice of doubt caused the word to freeze on his open lips. When the word emerged defiantly it was too late. Henry's appalled face told him he had understood. Oxford broke the uncomfortable silence.
"We should return to our army, Your Grace. We have said as much as can be said."
When they were riding back to the fields of corn nearby, which the resting soldiers had flattened, Jasper said what the other men were thinking.
"I trust neither brother. They look alike and sound alike. They love the Stanleys best. They were rewarded for staying aloof in eighty-three, and would be stupid not to do the same in eighty-five. Consider this. If we are losing, it would be madness to interfere; if winning, it would be unnecessary. If I can think it, so can they."
These voices of uncertainty and the nagging certainty of Richard's numerical superiority could not be silenced and Henry dreaded a sleepless night ahead. The army was roused from its somnolence in the afternoon heat and arranged in ranks. Then began the last stage of their long march of fourteen days and two hundred and twenty miles from Milford. The land to the right of Watling Street was flat. London lay a hundred miles to the south. To the left, on the north-eastern horizon there rose up the hills of Charnwood Forest near Leicester. At last, just after Mancetter, a man on horseback rode out to meet them.
"Good evening, gentlemen. Here to the left is Fenn Lane. Richard is camped on a hillside five miles to the north-east. The Lords Stanley are camped apart, a mile either side of Higham down there to the south-east. I have found a good and spacious field if you would follow me."

As the day faded and Henry's troops prepared for night, a few fields away in the ancient Danelaw, a lone figure on horseback was being challenged by Thomas Stanley's guards.
"Tell him his brother is here. And be damned quick about it."
"There is no need, my Lord," said another, approaching, who recognized him. "Please follow me."
The brothers greeted each other more dutifully than affectionately.
"I am sore troubled, Will - and not well. Please be brief."
He did not offer him wine as he knew he would accept.

“Tom, I have a plan. There is a only a slip of a moon. I have left twenty men in the next field, brave fellows who would pretend to be latecomers for Richard from Essex. One has the gift of mimicry and would persuade. The sentries would let them pass.”
“To what end?”
“Either to find George and rescue him - or to kill Richard as he sleeps - preferably both. Think how many lives of good men would be saved - not least our own!”
Thomas looked at his brother dumbfounded.
“Hast been drinking? How could they manage to find any particular man amongst fifteen thousand in the dark?”
“There will be campfires. The king’s tent would be easy to find.”
“But well guarded against such enterprises. It is a reckless plan. And how wouldst tha find George in such a throng?”
“But if we fail, what harm is done? If we succeed…..”
Still Thomas hesitated and William lost patience.
“Tha wouldst hesitate at the gates of heaven! Why cannst tha never make up thy damned mind? I should have done the deed without thy consent.”
“Do it then, b’ God! But if George is killed, I shall never speak to thee more.”
William left the tent in high dudgeon. He had done his best and would not feel guilty if the day turned out badly. If so, he had already made up his mind to ride off into exile. He stood down his twenty men down and got drunk.

54 Out of Leicester to Ambion Hill, 21st August, the Eve of Redemore

Richard left Leicester before noon, having waited in vain for men to arrive from York, but leaving word for them to join him as quickly as possible -
“For the battle is imminent.”
It took the best part of an hour for Richard’s army, led by him right royally, to march in from the North Gate, through the city and out of the West Gate to cross the river Soar before turning south-west towards the ancient track of Fenn Lane. Sparks flew from Richard’s spur as it touched the wall of Bow Bridge. Soon they were in the village of Kirby Muxloe, approaching its small Norman castle. Stragglers would be in no doubt as to what the route should be taken, for thousands of feet and hooves and wagons had left the way well worn and rutted.
In the village, men and women shrank back to watch the king’s passage from their doorways.
“What ails these peasants?” asked Richard irritably. On his left, opposite the castle, stood a timber frame with only some infill in place.
“This was the favoured village of Lord William Hastings,” whispered William Catesby. “He mentioned to me a house he was building. Before he died.”
The house had been abandoned. A great pile of dung stood uselessly by, next to a scatter of laths. Richard, superstitious, took its incompleteness as an ill omen.
“Then have it burnt to the ground!” he ordered.
To either side of the chase stood dense forest and, ahead, the low horizon of Warwickshire to the north-east of Coventry where Richard had spent the feast day of Corpus Christi in June that year. This was all his beloved territory - and he gripped his reins tight with fury and snorted savagely in realizing that less than five miles away a man with no claim to the title of king was lurking intent on snatching it all away from him.
As the fire behind him crackled, he pictured again the face of Hastings being led out to the tree stump, more amazed than terrified. He closed his eyes. But the vision grew bolder. He turned his

horse around to survey his army from the top of a rise, and saw it stretching for two miles behind him, marching in step, ten abreast, to the steady beat of the tambour. He told himself that a king was obliged to do unpleasant things to reap this reward of allegiance and power, and took heart from the scene before him, countless ranks of men with pikes and armour and helms glittering in the warm afternoon sun, reflecting God's blessing on his world. He would rather die than yield it up. After days of anxiety, he tried to banish his misgivings and troubling memories, persuading himself that after so many misfortunes his star would rise and rise. He turned back to face the way ahead and prayed that God, like the sun, would bless the day to come.
"What village is that, to the left of this rise?" he asked Catesby, who turned back to consult a scurrier and then rejoined his king.
"It is Sutton Cheney, Richard. Over the ridge there is a gentle incline. Tidder is on the high ground near Upton. Dost see the church spire of Stoke? He is beyond there. Near Fenny Drayton."
"Yes. And I see there is a small church here besides, where I would hear Mass this evening. Ride ahead and arrange it."
Richard rode on over the brow of the hill and saw a wood below him, a mile or so away.
"This is where we shall camp. And that wood I shall use to my advantage and Tidder's undoing."
"It is Ambion Wood," said Catesby "and this is Ambion Hill. To the right of us lies the village of Bosworth. Before us lie Dadlington and Stoke. The low ground to the right of them and left of the lane is called Redemore."
"Then Redemore shall be the last Plantagenet battle of all. Then we shall live at peace, and I shall become the king I was destined to be."

After Mass had been celebrated and the holy sacraments taken, Richard went up to the priest who knelt in homage.
"Dearest Father," he said tearfully, drawing him to his feet.
"Yes, Your Grace?"
"Will you hear my confession?"
Richard's companions Norfolk, Surrey, Lincoln and Northumberland looked at the church floor with some unease, unable to face each other. The priest led Richard behind a curtain as the light faded. But the king forbade candles to be lit.
"A lot weighs upon his mind," whispered Catesby, unable to bear the silence of the men and the church.
"If he feels so obliged to confess his sins on the very eve of battle, then a lot weighs upon my mind as well," declared Northumberland who was not a particularly pious man. "A lot - indeed too much."
After a quarter of an hour, Richard emerged into near darkness, his face very pale though far less drawn. He gnawed at his cheek. The priest followed. His eyes betrayed almost despair. He alone, apart from his king, knew his secrets. And he would take them to his grave.

Near Fenny Drayton
"The key to victory is to get at the peasants behind their vanguard," said Oxford, cutting himself wedges of bread and cheese. "Our men are seasoned killers and would slit any throat for a shilling. Once a few heads are broken and hacked off, the Cripple's men will run like rabbits. If we fight head to head, vanguard to vanguard, we would be pushed back by weight of numbers and crushed - and so, with time against us, would be bound to lose. To divide our army and

outflank the enemy left and right will cause panic. In this way shall we win the field. I guarantee it."
"Richard will then have no choice but to flee." said Jasper, who had just entered the tent, irritably waving away the servant who was offering to fill a goblet for him.
"I wish the matter to be settled tomorrow," whispered Henry, gnawing his lip. "I would not put England to more years of strife."
"But if he flees, the bugger would be hunted down," declared Jasper. "The Stanleys would be bound to pursue him once Strange is seen to be dead or safe."
"But if he managed to flee to York?"
"Henry - we can only do our best on the day - the days to follow are in God's hands!"
Oxford had listened patiently to this exchange. Rolling up his map, he intervened.
"Richard Plantagenet is courageous. I detest him as a man but admire him as a warrior. I doubt he would flee. If he cannot prevail tomorrow, I think he would rather die on the field. Do you both agree to my plan of campaign?"
Jasper cautiously nodded his approval and Henry thanked the Earl of Oxford who, yawning, withdrew. Jasper soon followed and, with a smile, bade his nephew a peaceful good night.
It was very warm in the tent. Henry went out to look at the far eastern horizon and, below the legions of brilliant stars, against the dark of the hillside there glowed the fires of Richard's soldiers, mostly simple men who, he regretted, would have to die the next day. There came to him the smell of roasting meat from his own camp and the low conversations of other condemned men he could not see. One group, he knew, had killed a stag which might even have escaped from Bradgate, the park in Charnwood Forest of Lord Grey of Groby, the first husband of Elizabeth Woodville. They had feasted richly on the venison and had graciously brought him a piece of it, but, having no appetite, he had refused. His old companion came out to join him at his shoulder
"I am sore afraid, Clement," he whispered.
"As I am too, Henry. Let us pray together for courage on the morrow."
Henry looked deep into his eyes and placed his hand on his shoulder.
"I have been thinking on heroism. What is it? It is a feat of courage. But to place oneself simply in danger is not heroism. If I stand on the edge of a cliff or walk into a raging torrent - for no good reason, then I am not a hero, but a fool. Only if I am prepared to give up my life for a noble cause, am I a hero. Are these men heroes? Many are only here for wages, and because they love the battle. I am not trained for warfare, as Richard is. And most soldiers are far stronger than I. When I was a boy, as you know from my confession, I desired only peace and seclusion. Now I am a man I shall go into battle to save England from tyranny and turmoil. There will be peace and justice - or I shall die. I must overcome my fear and do what is not natural for me to do."
"Then, my Lord Henry, thou art and shalt be a hero."
Henry smiled at him and accepted his blessing, before turning again to look into the distance.
"I wonder which fire marks the tent of Richard? Is he staring out even now looking for mine?"

On Ambion Hill

"William," said Richard to Catesby once his tent had been erected in the thickening twilight and he had finished a meagre platter of cold meat and bread, "please stay a while."
"Art thou not tired?"
"I am but I fear I shall not sleep. My head is full of…things. If I shut my eyes, I see them more, not less clearly. I wish it could be dawn this very second. The night is abhorrent to me. The work

of the evil one…."
"Art thou afraid?" he whispered for his ears only.
When Richard turned away and did not reply, a terrifying feeling of defeat, loneliness and death transfixed Catesby's heart. His life depended entirely on his king's supremacy. The candles flickered as Richard paced near.
"Afraid? The man who says he is not afraid of death is a liar. A glorious blue sky…. a stray arrow, the stumble of a horse's hoof…….then darkness. I do not fear any man alive, only misfortune."
"But thou hast confessed. The priest has given thee absolution."
"If a priest truly can, then I am saved. But I am afraid of my own thoughts. Please carry your rugs in and keep me company tonight."
Catesby could hardly refuse.
Richard was restless in the dark and mumbled in his sleep. Once he seemed to cry out *Hastings*! The more Richard thrashed about, the more anxious Catesby became. He did not fall asleep until deep into the night.
Before dawn had properly broken, Richard was up. Having called for a breakfast of porridge, he roused Catesby and placed his hand on his shoulder. Catesby was shocked to see a face hanging over his like a pale moon, distorted by the gnawing of his cheek. Catesby asked him as a matter of form if he had slept well.
"Sleep? I dreamt all night but, as if possessed, could not wake, There were faces invading my darkness. Shall death be as a dream from which we cannot awake?"
Seeing troubled expressions around him, Richard was anxious to dispel any suspicions that his haggard looks might be construed as fear rather than sleeplessness, and meant these and other more jocular complaints about the night to be overheard by his servants and companions.
"Now, by God's daylight, I shall rout our enemies!" he declared.
But by the time the rumour of the king's disposition spread to the extremities of his army, anxious men were saying - *the king fears he will die.*
Men had woken to another mellow day but had for only the briefest instant taken delight in it. They had rolled up their rugs chattering and jesting to keep their dread at bay. The report of the king's mood reduced them to silence as they gnawed on the end of a piece of bread or on a remnant of hard cheese. From the newly dug ditches there drifted across on the fresh breeze the terrible smell of men's belly-aching terror and overindulgence of the previous night.
Richard hardly touched the oats he had been brought.
"Bring me instead the bread and wine of the sacrament," he ordered. But his priest was nowhere to be found and it was too late to send for the cleric at Sutton Cheney.
"God blast the damned coward!" he yelled, burying his superstitious fear within his fury.
Impatient for the field, he summoned his armourers to attend him. As each new gleaming piece was tied onto his arms, shoulders, breast, thighs and leg bones his courage rose. He emerged from his tent to slow cheers, gathering in volume as men turned to see what was the cause. He was magnificent. A king. Norfolk took the battle crown and placed it on his helmet before gesturing to the men closest to voice their approval. But the doubt in the acclaim could not be concealed.
"Captains!" yelled Richard, now lifted onto his white stallion and standing high on his stirrups to be heard. "Look to your ranks. Men, we shall give ye a great feast when the day is ours. Be of good courage. For, by God's grace and our own steadfastness, we shall prevail!"
He turned to Norfolk and gestured to the three great assemblies concentrated like blackfly on the

slopes near and opposite. The army of Thomas Stanley was closest to him, to the right of the tiny church in Dadlington. Above and between Dadlington and Stoke Manford was the smaller array of William Stanley. Facing him was Henry Tudor.
“I have not been in a proper battle these fourteen years, John. This is my element, not the ennui and elegant pretences of Court. By God, I shall enjoy separating those damned traitorous Stanleys’ heads from their necks. I shall do it myself!”
He ordered George Strange to be brought close to his standard.
“He is my talisman. Strip him to the waist, bind him to his saddle and tie his standard to his body so that he cannot be missed.”
“When dost thou mean to head him?” asked Norfolk.
“I cannot predict yet - but I shall know when.”
Norfolk looked to the east and sighed. The sun was pale and diffuse behind thin shreds of cloud. The light was milky.
“It is a pity that we shall have no advantage from a strong sun in their damned eyes.”
But Richard smiled and shook his head. “Then let us defeat them by valour and cunning, not by the elements, John.”

Looking east, John de Vere, Earl of Oxford was pleased.
“Even better than I could dare hope, Henry. The light is as soft as a maiden’s breast. And they are still running around over yonder like lost sheep. Let me put the fear of the wolf into their guts. Have I thy permission to lead on?”

Anxious shouts from his men made Richard look up from the sight of the George Strange, handsome and sturdy though pale with fright, being led closer on horseback..
“Sire! They are moving forward down yonder!”
“Sound assembly” shouted Richard.
Panic. A strangled trumpet sounded briefly as its player could not muster enough air. The captains mounted and began to harry the ranks into square. Stragglers were still running into line, some pulling up their breeches. Richard rode out with his standard bearer to inspect his vanguard, the first ranks of his sturdiest and best armoured soldiers and archers. There was a tense silence pierced only by the screams of his angry captains and the distant lowing of cattle which could not be milked. After their captain had passed, two men broke from the middle ranks and began to flee. Another captain spotted them and hacked them to the ground where they shuddered and then lay still. An archer, little more than a boy, fell to his knees and puked. Richard rode over and swiped off his head.
“Shall ye die like this wretch as a puking coward - or as brave Englishmen?”
No-one responded. The drums of the approaching army could now be heard and grew louder like heartbeats. From longer grass, a group of startled peewits flew up and away.
Sticking the point of his sword in the windpipe, Richard scooped up the head and flung it out of the way, then rode back to the cannon placements off to his left.
“Fire a volley!”
“But Sire, they are not yet in range,” said the nearest gunner. Richard reached down and boxed his ears.
With a deafening roar, the serpentines and bombards loosed shot and balls high in an arc but all fell well short to distant cheers of derision. Ordering them to reload and adjust, Richard rode back to the left of his vanguard and summoned his standard bearer and entourage to his side. He

stood up straight in his stirrups.
“Henry Tidder!” he shouted across the chill morning air. “We despise thy claim to the throne of England, as do all true Englishmen and all men present, be they of thy camp or mine. Thy followers would desert thee now without the promise of pay, for they are not made loyal by thy claim, or by thy person - only by thy purse. I, Richard Plantagenet, Duke of Gloucester and the rightful King of England - do challenge thee, Tidder, to single combat in this hollow below us, with the choice of weapons thine, as well as the manner of the fight, on foot or on horseback. I fear no man. I have long suffered with a twisted back and will have one arm tied behind it in facing thee, if thou dost dare leave the comforting embrace of thy bastard uncle!”
Richard’s men roared with laughter and approval of this speech which had rung out across Redemore as clear as a Sabbath bell. Yet hardly a word had been understood by Henry’s mercenaries, though his English and Welsh allies knew full well that Henry Tudor would be no match for Richard Plantagenet.
“We would have no man lose his life for a villain such as thee, Tidder - on our side or thine. All who cross to us now from the coward shall be pardoned.”
Nobody moved, except that suddenly, on the enemy’s left flank diagonally opposite to Richard, a knight on horseback with a pennant of a red and gold quartered shield cantered onto a hillock.
“Thou art, Dick, a perverted cripple and a murderer of thy own anointed king, of thy wife and even thy little nephews.” retorted a dark voice. “Thou didst collude in thine own brother Clarence‘s murder - or didst not raise a hand against it.”
“Might that be Oxford? Thou art a bloody liar! And a man of thine age should still be abed at this hour and not on the field!”
Few laughed. Oxford’s reputation as a warrior was terrifying.
“I shall make thee laugh on the other side of thy face before noon Cripple. Thou hast usurped my lands without justification and made a pauper of my pious mother who confected no harm for thee. Dost dare speak of bastardy? Thy brother was a bastard - and by such a reckoning must thy mother be a whore! Even thou hast earnestly declared - or - in cowardly fashion - allowed thine own traitor Buckingham to declare - that she made thine own father, King of Nowhere, cuckold. So if thy strumpet of a mother was as lascivious and as weeping with lust from that infernal cunt of hers, whence was brought forth that drunken bawd thy brother Edward - then with which dog must she have coupled in her clawing frenzy to beget thee? Dirty BASTARD!”
There was a shocked human silence. Banners tutted and fretted in the breeze. Horses whinnied. Distant cockerels crooned. A soft light caressed the armies and the ground. Men in the opposing vanguards, pale, aching and anxious, surveyed their adversaries a few hundred yards away and wondered if they stared at their destroyer or their victim. Despite the cheers, these speeches from men at the rear were of no real comfort to those at the front.
“Well, Oxford, if thy milksop of a leader - a leader! - refuses to show himself, we shall have to join in battle. Is he there - at the very rear, ready to flee- or still at Merevale? Show thyself at least, Tidder! Be brave enough at the very least to raise thyself up on thy stirrups. We do not see thy standard. Is it a white one with a yellow lily?”
“No, Dick!” said Oxford, pointing over his right shoulder. “His is the red dragon, come hither to consume thine ambition. Henry Tudor is on the field and shall be, by noon, king - and shall prove a great king. He is by his own admission no warrior, but thou art shown up by thine own cunning and unnatural malice to be no king.”
“Ah! Shall he be king after me?? God bless him then. Dost hear me Tidder? I shall presently

anoint thy scurvy bastard crown with blood. And let us hope, Oxford, that in the turmoil to come we might meet at last for then I shall take extreme delight in removing thy ugly, traitorous head from thy shoulders. Trumpeter! Sound the advance."
"Fool." said Richard to his companions. "He has given me now a target to look for to aim my lance of contempt when I judge the time right. Let us draw into our right flank as many of the enemy as we may, to entice men away from his right where Tidder skulks. Take the order to Norfolk that we should feign a retreat upon two blasts of the trumpet. We shall take up position with our cavalry behind yonder clump of trees to bide our time."

Watched by the Stanleys, the two vanguards now came down the gentle slopes and closed on each other. Oxford rode left, having given orders to his captains to keep to the left of the marshy ground which would act as a deterrent to any surprise outflanking attack. He ordered his bowmen to fire as the same order was given two hundred yards away. Two whistling showers of arrows crossed each other.

"Arrows!" yelled Jasper, just in time for Henry and his entourage to raise up their shields against them. But Clement was not quick enough and a bolt mischievously pierced the only exposed place on his body, between collar and shoulder bone, and plunged in deep.
"Oh Henry, I am hit!" he screamed, falling from his horse. His trembling hand went to pluck it out but Jasper jumped down to stop him.
"It will have to be loosened gradually, then the arrowhead dug out and thy flesh cauterised, so leave it be."
Henry turned to a trusty knight and ordered that Clement be taken forthwith to Merevale Abbey.
"Here, take this purse and tell the abbot to give him the very best care. You two, lift him onto the horse."
"No, Henry! I will remain at thy side. I can endure this until thy victory is sure."

Oxford watched with disgust as a second shower from his bowmen fell mostly harmlessly onto helmets in the opposing van. Only a few yelps were heard.
"Fire into the middle battle as I commanded ye, damn your eyes!" shouted Oxford.
For it was there, in the centre, that most harm could be inflicted, where the more lightly protected peasantry were cowering. From the shouts of surprise and pain which followed the third and fourth volleys, Oxford knew this was effective. The sight and sound of the dead and wounded were already striking terror into the hearts of the commons, and as he watched he saw the first of them breaking ranks, too numerous for the captains to contain, and run towards Shenton village.
There then came two blasts on a trumpet and the enemy vanguard fell back. At first encouraged, as his men poured forward, Oxford turned to look anxiously over his right shoulder.
"But where the devil has the Cripple got to? But we must stick with our plan."
He rode to the front of the battle where pikes and swords were clashing but the crush prevented him from reaching the first ranks. He turned and waved his right arm at his middle ranks to encourage them to go around to attack Richard's right flank, and then beckoned his specially trained Scots to charge forward and drive a wedge into the left of Richard's vanguard.
Peering through the branches of a low tree, Richard was delighted to watch Oxford's efforts to outflank his army left and right, but mainly his right, this being exactly the manoeuvre he expected of him, having witnessed this tactic at the Battle of Barnet fourteen years earlier which had gone disastrously wrong for Oxford when his left flank had eventually attacked his right in

the fog.
Richard had expected many of his peasants to flee and was pleased to see it for it encouraged Oxford deeper in. As soon as Oxford had encircled the middle and rearguard, the Earl of Northumberland would surely do as he had been ordered and attack. At that critical point, the main battle would turn to face Oxford and his contemptible army would be surrounded with no means of escape. The king was looking forward to the arrival of Oxford's head.
But as time passed and the enemy made startling inroads into Richard's middle ranks and his vanguard was isolated and fragmented, and when Northumberland still made no move from his position a quarter of a mile to the rear of the battle, the king's confidence drained away.
"Now!" shouted Richard, as if Northumberland could hear him. "Attack now and he will be swamped! Why do you not do as we planned, damn and blast you?"
The explanation was cruel and simple. Northumberland had decided to support Henry Tudor, expecting as reward the bestowing of Richard's northern lands adjacent to his own.
"Catesby!" yelled Richard. "Send a man to tell him to charge."
A man rode off. He never came back. Northumberland stood still.
Like a whirlpool, the battle began to spin sunwise as the impetus of Oxford's main thrust against the king's right flank became irresistible. The sun had risen from its torpor and now shone into the eyes of Richard's turned army. Weapons glinted malevolently in its generous light. Men shielded their eyes and looked in vain for the royal standard leading a counter-attack. Soon it was on everyone's lips - *The king has fled the field - The king has deserted us - Merciful God, help us*! Peasants fell over bodies dead, alive and dying into great heaps. Before Oxford's ranks of stiff pikes and swords, more and more waving arms offering no resistance were aloft in surrender.
Richard looked on in horror, and, glancing with hatred at the Stanleys on the higher ground to his left, he ordered George Strange to be brought forward. As he was drawing his sword and testing its sharpness on his palm, a cry from the Earl of Surrey made him look up.
"Is that Norfolk fleeing the field by yonder oak tree?" exclaimed Surrey.
Richard instantly recognised Norfolk's grey head and physique, armour discarded, and his limping gait in a desperate attempt to reach a spinney. His standard lay in the grass amongst cowpats.
"God help us! It is Norfolk! That he should flee! All must be lost."
Even as Richard looked, men pursuing the old man encircled him and he was soon out of sight under a welter of swords and poleaxes.
"Richard," stammered Catesby, as the men around him grew nervous and restless. "We should prepare to flee. Forget Strange."
"No! I will have his head on a pike for his father Stanley to admire! And we shall stand our ground."
At the point where Oxford's attack was least intense, scores of peasants were pouring out of the battle and fleeing, helped on their way by the flats of swords on their legs and backsides wielded by jeering Scots and Frenchmen. Cries of "I yield" swelled into one terrified bleating. Then, to Richard's delight, Northumberland charged. But his delight turned to disgust as his watched his own commons hunted down and put to the sword.
"By all the saints! If God will yet grant me victory, what a slow and varied death that rotten bastard Northumberland shall endure! But Norfolk and those fleeing are not true Englishmen as were my Uncle Henry's men at Agincourt. These had not the will to defend their freedom and they ought to endure the tyranny which their cowardice has earnt."

Then he spotted Oxfortd's pennant, flying like a bird to challenge the last resistance of his shattered and scattered vanguard.
"What a general Oxford is," he muttered to the Earl of Surrey who sat on his horse looking on in terror. "Why did I not have him headed when he was my prisoner in Calais?"

As the Tudors watched all this from their slope, they grew ever more excited in anticipation of a resounding victory. But Henry knew that he could never rejoice in it unless and until Richard was slain or captured.
"Where the devil is he?" he asked Jasper."Can he truly have fled the field? He is not in the battle. Is he hiding?"
Jasper pointed to the distant army near Sutton Cheney beyond Ambion Hill.
"Perhaps he has gone to consult Northumberland."
"But why does neither engage?"
Jasper asked if he should ride to William Stanley for any word of George Strange.
"If the Stanleys join now, it would deter Northumberland and we would not fail. If Richard intends to flee, it would be best to circle around beyond the battle towards Bosworth to stop him from heading back to Leicester. I shall ask Stanley for twenty men. May I take ten of ours?"
Feeling secure with his bodyguard of thirty Welsh pikemen, Henry approved Jasper's mission. He clambered down from his horse and shooed it away, preferring to stand amongst his bodyguard.
"Norfolk is dead!" shouted a runner hurrying up the hill away from the mêlée. "The Lord Oxford had him pursued and he was hacked to death near yonder spinney. And Richard Plantagenet is nowhere to be seen, fled! The field is ours, Your Grace!"
"Raise our standard!" shouted Henry, elated. "We will go in closer."
"But Henry," said Rhys ap Thomas, "Wait a little while longer until the outcome is sure. They fend off our eager men as weakly as a maiden who wishes to surrender. It cannot now be long until his vanguard yields."
"No," exclaimed Henry Tudor. "I shall be there in the white heat of victory, not when the forge is cold. Let us proceed, for I see no danger."
Surrounded by his pikemen, Henry picked his way carefully around the tussocks of grass and cow dung, forgetting in the daze of imminent victory the bog at the bottom made sticky and treacherous by the hooves of horses and cattle.

"Look! Tidder's standard at last!" shouted Catesby, pointing left.
Richard turned his stallion away from the debacle below and looked with murderous glee at the small party creeping down less than half a mile away into the bowl of Redemore.
"I knew that God would finally bless our cause," he exclaimed. "We will ride the buggers down and make a great show of heads on Leicester's gates tonight - with Tidder's prime exhibit. I shall settle with Strange and his kin later. I shall take off all three heads with a broadsword at once on a wall so that they shall see each other sweat in their final terror. Am I cruel? Only when I defend our realm. This Welsh rabbit has scaped me fourteen long years and now the snare is set. Draw your swords, gentlemen! But leave the plucking of his guts and the tickling of his scrag to me."
As Jasper Tudor rode towards the higher ground which William Stanley had occupied, a strange cry made him look back. He saw with horror the royal standard emerge from the thicket preceded by the king on his white stallion, sword pointing forward in his right hand, catching the

sun wickedly.
“Lord Stanley!” he shouted. “Do you see? Henry will be killed and all lost.”
Richard had outpaced his bodyguard and was magnificent as he encountered the first line of men which tumbled backwards in surprise. He had skilfully swerved around a patch of marsh which bore the imprint of a herd, but many of his followers rode straight into it. Two horses fell, barring the path of those behind. They looked on helplessly but in admiration as Richard broke through the first line of the enemy, breaking pike staffs with his sword, howling like a wolf and terrifying even the most battle-hardened into a nightmarish paralysis of arms and legs. He made straight for the standard bearer, Sir William Brandon, who relinquished the banner of the red dragon to draw his sword. But his hand had not reached his scabbard before Richard had drawn his battleaxe from its holder and brought it savagely down onto his helmet, splitting his head down as far as the nose. This horror caused the scene to freeze. All gasped. More men had joined Richard. The two parties stared at each other.
“Which of ye is Tidder? Show thyself!”
Henry shrugged off the tight grip of Rhys ap Thomas and pushed aside the two pikemen in front of him. He took one step forward. For the first and last time the two looked at each other, separated by ten ranks of men. Richard laughed. Henry almost smiled as if sharing a good joke.
“Before I kill thee, why dost thou pretend to this golden crown of England to which thou hast no damned right, either by descent or by spirit?”
“Why did you steal it from its rightful head, your own nephew’s?”
“He was bastard-born. As art thou.”
More men, abandoning their horses, joined Richard now. He looked for the best way to strike more terror into the guts of his enemy. His brother Edward had always advised him to make straight for the biggest if surrounded by a crowd. *For as soon as he is felled like a tree, so the rest will tremble and turn to flee.* A giant of a man, Sir John Cheyney had mounted a stray horse and was riding in to retrieve the standard. At six foot three he towered over Richard who was not much more than five foot six. He drew his sword again, rushed and ducked underneath him to push him straight off his horse, sending him crashing to the ground in his armour, waving arms like a crab on its back, helpless and prone. The king laughed to see this and cut the standard pole which Cheyney had managed to keep hold of, into two.
“Defend us pikemen!” screamed Rhys, as most of Richard’s supporters had by then raced to catch up with him. He pulled at his reins and the stallion pranced around. He cut the pike off another staff and the man knelt in terror and cried mercy. Men stared in amazement at his brazen courage. He wheeled around again intending a broad sweep to take off the soldier’s head but this time he strayed into marsh grass and the horse’s leg stuck. The momentum snapped it, the horse toppled with a scream and Richard flew from his stirrups onto hard ground. He got to his feet and turned to follow the eyes of his adversaries staring in horror at the angle of the horse’s leg and heard its agony.
“Surrey, thou hast been a trustier friend to me than any here. Now I have nothing.”
Reverently, he placed the blade of his sword on its white neck and gently drew it across the artery, instantly producing a spurt of blood. The terrified eyes of the beast relaxed into death. Richard smeared his face with the blood and shook his gory sword at his appalled enemies, speckling them red.
“Come, my friends, let us go in and have our sport. Yield now pikemen, and ye shall have a good dinner with us -”
A growing din to the left made the king pause. The thunder of hooves brought the flagging battle

to a standstill. All looked up to see the army of William Stanley bearing down on the confrontation at the bottom of the hill. Oxford looked directly at the army of Lord Thomas Stanley positioned to the right of Dadlington church.
“Now we might see their true colours,” he said wearily. “Richard or Henry? After all this, here stand I - a bloody fool - too far away to make a difference.”
Richard turned, side-stepped the first rider, and put his foot straight into a patch of mud. The weight of his armour pinned him fast.
“Cowards! Traitors!” he cried as men surrounded him. “Would ye dare kill a king? Would ye dare go before the Almighty and tell Him ye killed His own anointed king?”
These words made the surrounding group hesitate. Richard tried to lift his boot from the sump but it made only a farting noise. Men laughed. Sir William Stanley dismounted and threw mud at him.
“Henry! Shall we kill the Cripple here or parade him in Leicester then head him?”
Henry opened his mouth to speak but Richard demanded he be killed where he stood.
“I was born a soldier and would die as one.”
A horseman came closer. He swung his blade at Richard’s throat but missed, cutting instead his cheek and severing the chin strap of his helmet. Richard swayed but did not fall. He tilted his head to glare at his attacker as if to remember his face. This movement and the weight of the crown caused it to slide off, taking the helmet with it. His head was exposed. He fell to his knees feeling the gash on his cheek. Blood seeped through his fingers. He looked up and his eyes met Henry’s.
“Come, Henry Tudor,” he whispered. “Now thou hast the advantage. Come and do the deed if thou dost dare, for thou wouldst be a brave king.”
He reached out his left hand in an effort to pick up the crown.
“Please bring it to me. I would die a crowned king.”
Nobody moved. Then, the same attacker dismounted and stood behind him, drew a rondel dagger and stabbed the king’s skull, but finding little penetration, went for his face trying for the eye. He missed.
“Not his face, fool!” shouted Rhys. “ He must be recognized so that no man shall say he escaped.”
“Is this thy best man, Stanley?” said Richard slowly, growing faint. “Is that thee, Rhys ap Morgan, thou despicable traitor? Watch him, King Henry, for he would betray thee and his own mother for a farthing.”
The first attacker was pushed aside by a much heavier man who meant to claim fame and glory with a halberd. As the weapon fell Richard’s head sank down and the blade only shaved his scalp.
“Jesus,” whispered Richard, now on all fours.
Rhys was appalled. “The bastard even cheats death! Is there no man -”
Somebody laughed. It was Richard. Unable to reach the crown, he was tearing up grass and singing softly, a lullaby. The furious soldier tried again but slipped in blood and crashed to the ground. All laughed, none louder than Richard.
“Come,” he stammered. “There must be one man here competent.”
“I am sorry Richard,” Henry could not help but say, much moved by his courage.
A man called Ralph Rudyard from Staffordshire stepped forward, picked up the vicious halberd and swung it. It slice off the back of Richard’s head, sending bone, brain and blood into the air. As the king sprawled out instantly dead, Rudyard plunged the spike of the halberd into the skull.

All were so fascinated, feeling privileged to attend the death of an English king, that for many seconds no-one spoke, until Rudyard whooped with delight, which broke the spell.
As the cheers died away, Richard's knights knelt and begged for clemency.
"I joined him with a heavy heart," said Surrey. "On pain of attainder and worse."
Henry stepped forward in generous mood.
"Return to your homes. We will settle terms with ye later -"
"All but Catesby!" shouted Jasper. "Which of ye is Catesby?"
Henry glared at his uncle who fell immediately silent. William Catesby stood up.
"I am your man, Your Grace."
"You were his special creature. Seize him. Take him to Leicester. We will find out certain matters pertaining to his reign."
Sir William Stanley jumped down, picked up the golden crown and placed it on his step-nephew's head.
"I herewith crown you Henry the Seventh, King of England and France."
"You shall ever have a special place in my heart, Uncle. For you saved my life."
"Three cheers for King Henry!" yelled a soldier. "Hip hip…."
"HURRAH! HURRAH! HURRAH!"
"We will walk up to yonder hill by Stoke church. We wish to address all our soldiers and the good people on the tower. You three - stand guard over Richard - remove his armour - put it in a cart - let no man approach."
Richard reached the top of the hill, ever since known as Crown Hill and surveyed Redemore Field.
"Today ye have fought right bravely in our just cause. Whatever we might think of him as king, we have witnessed the death of a very brave man. Had it not been for the long years of warfare between our families, York and Lancaster, we might have been loving kinsmen and friends. Now, I declare that war over. People of Stoke and Dadlington! We have trespassed upon your fields long enough……"
Now he could not speak for emotion. As far and wide as the eye could see, men in their thousands were streaming away, thanking God, beginning the long walk home. On the field, more than a thousand men, slain and half-slain, were staring at the ground or the blue sky.
"People of Stoke and Dadlington, we shall soon leave you in peace. Tend the wounded of whichever stripe and ye shall be well rewarded. Bring the dead to be buried in the churchyard at Dadlington. Men! Clear the field and leave just it as it was. Tonight we shall give ye a great feast in Leicester!"
Having thanked his army and the villagers, he declared that Stoke Manford should be renamed Stoke Golding. Northumberland and Thomas Stanley arrived to pay homage. Henry half-smiled and eyed them suspiciously.
He mounted his horse and rode back to where Richard lay, now naked.
"Who has stabbed him in the buttock?" he demanded furiously. They did not know.
"Cover his private parts and put him on a horse. If any man defiles him more, he shall swing for it."
In the confusion and euphoria of victory, Henry did not say farewell to his priest and friend whom he would never see again. One hour later, apart from hoof marks, it was if no battle had taken place.

The folk of Leicester, hearing amazing reports of Henry's victory at first laughed. Then they

believed them and were terrified. They watched in silence from the walls as Richard's near naked body crossed Bow Bridge tied to a nag, his head grazing the very stone which his spur had struck. A wise woman had predicted it. She had also predicted that the city would be pillaged in revenge for its love of Richard. But when King Henry was inside and he had shown by his placid and pleasing countenance and graceful bearing that he was no devil, the people were calm. On the market square, in a clear, melodic voice, he guaranteed the good conduct of his soldiers.
The landlord of the White Boar Inn had quickly changed his sign to the Blue Boar. That night, in Richard's chamber, Henry slept soundly, having ordered huge quantities of meat, ale and wine to be taken out to his men camping outside the walls. They feasted well and got drunk, but nothing was stolen, nothing extorted and nothing bought cheap from the tradesmen who ventured out with their wares. The Scots, Welsh and French which the people had been taught to fear were long spoken of as honourable and courteous fellows.
Of all the men who had opposed Henry, only Catesby was held prisoner. He was interrogated the following day but he refused to give any evidence of his friend's misdeeds, saying he loved him more than his own life. Angered by his stubbornness to say more than I do not know, and encouraged by Jasper to show his metal, Henry ordered him beheaded on the square that afternoon. He did not watch.
In the persisting warmth of August, the body of Richard Plantagenet, put in the cell next to Catesby, was corrupting fast. Henry gave orders that he be buried by the Greyfriars without ceremony, promising to have a tomb built on the spot when he had settled other business, including his marriage to Princess Elizabeth and his reunion with his mother. He took out her handkerchief and kissed it. He knelt and prayed for the recovery of Clement.

The next afternoon, two days after the battle, he left a cheering Leicester, passed through Earl Shilton and Hinckley and headed down Watling Street towards London.
Harvesters stood and watched his army disappear over the horizon.
Below the fresh earth in Dadlington, as the twilight came, men were settling in for eternity. And cattle were kneeling and chewing the cud on Redemore.

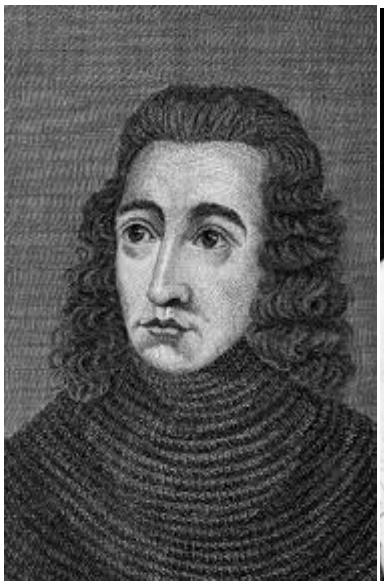
And so my tale is at an end and these characters, these people, who suffered, rejoiced, slept fitfully, dreamt, plotted and deceived are now become again their flat, lifeless portraits for whom we have no sympathy.

Margaret Beaufort 1443-1509

Elizabeth Woodville 1437-1492

Jasper Tudor 1429-1495

Edward IV 1442-1483




Duke of Clarence 1449-1478 Duke Francis of Brittany 1433-1488


Thomas Stanley 1435-1504 William Stanley 1435 – executed for treason 1495

Richard III 1452-1485

Henry VII 1457-1509