RICHARD III

(The Condensed Story)

After the death of King Henry VI of England, the reign of the House of Lancaster ends and the House of York reclaims power under King Edward IV. Richard Duke of Gloucester is the youngest of three brothers – the other two being King Edward IV and George Duke of Clarence. Richard considers himself to be deformed and unsuited to peacetime. He'd rather wage war than pursue the pleasures of the harmonious times his brother’s reign has brought to the country. So, he plots and schemes to take the throne of England for himself.

Many people stand in Richard’s way. The king himself is first, then the king’s two sons and then the Duke of Clarence. Clarence is older than Richard and he would become king if anything happened to Edward and his sons. Richard spreads rumours that Clarence is plotting to overthrow the king, by means of a prophesy that states that “G” of Edward’s heirs will disinherit him. Richard prompts the king to interpret “G” as referring to “George” [Duke of Clarence] and this has the effect of having Clarence imprisoned in the Tower of London.

Richard next needs to consolidate his claim to the throne. He decides to marry Lady Anne Neville, daughter-in-law of the late King Henry VI, in an attempt to gain support from both Yorkists and Lancastrians, even though he killed her husband and her husband’s father. Anne resists him at first, but eventually succumbs to his advances, which illustrates Richard’s supreme skill in the art of feigned sincerity.

The atmosphere at court is poisonous. The established nobles are at odds with the up-and-coming relatives of King Edward’s wife, Elizabeth Woodville. This hostility is fuelled by Richard. He then has Clarence murdered in the Tower and pretends it was at the instigation of Queen Elizabeth and her family. Margaret of Anjou, Henry VI’s widow, returns from banishment and tries to warn the squabbling nobles about Richard. The nobles, however, are all Yorkists and unite against Margaret, a Lancastrian, and Richard’s plots and intrigues continue.

Edward IV becomes seriously ill and dies. However, his eldest son should now succeed him as King. Richard, as Protector, has both princes sent to the Tower “for their protection”, before the eldest can be crowned Edward V by Elizabeth and her relatives. Richard has most of the relatives executed and he’s now in a position to put himself forward as the preferred candidate for the throne. Those who disagree are also executed.

Richard declares that Edward IV’s sons are illegitimate and, with manufactured support from the people, he feels powerful enough to have his two nephews in the Tower secretly killed, leaving the way finally open for his coronation as Richard III of England. However, the increasingly paranoid Richard loses his allies – the closest, the Duke of Buckingham, revolts and Henry- Earl of Richmond arrives with an army from France and confronts Richard at Bosworth Field. On the night before the battle, Richard is visited by the ghosts of those he murdered and they all tell him to “despair and die”. Next day, Richard is deserted by the Earl of Derby during the battle and his army is defeated. Richard is killed by the Earl of Richmond, who succeeds as Henry VII, the first Tudor king of England, ending the reign of the Plantagenets and the Wars of the Roses.
SECTION 1
Act 1, Scene 2, lines 33 to 186

Background

Lady Anne Neville is the daughter of Richard Neville- Earl of Warwick, also known as ‘The Kingmaker’. The Wars of the Roses were notorious for the number of times the leading figures changed sides whenever it suited them and Anne’s father was no exception.

Lady Anne Neville was married at fifteen to seventeen-year-old Edward-Prince of Wales, heir to Henry VI. With the death of Edward at the Battle of Tewkesbury, she was taken prisoner. Richard’s brother, Clarence, was married to Anne’s sister Isabel and he took her in as his ward. Henry VI was imprisoned in the Tower of London during the Wars of the Roses and he was murdered there in 1471. Many people blamed Richard for this murder.

Lady Anne is on her way to bury Henry VI at Chertsy Abbey, when she’s stopped by Richard-Duke of Gloucester. Richard is planning to take the throne of England by any means necessary. He knows a marriage to Lady Anne Neville, widow of Henry VI’s heir, will strengthen his claim and, perhaps, placate the hostile Lancastrians to accept a Yorkist king and a Lancastrian queen.

How does Richard persuade a woman who hates him to marry him? He killed her young husband at the Battle of Tewkesbury and murdered her father-in-law in the Tower of London. Act1-Scene2 is an illustration of Richard’s supreme skill in the art of insincerity. He has already confided to the audience :-

“I’ll marry Warwick’s youngest daughter.
What though I kill’d her husband and his father?
The readiest way to make the wench amends
Is to become her husband and her father:
The which will I; not all so much for love,
As for another secret close intent,
By marrying her which I must reach unto.”
STOP! PUT THAT CORPSE DOWN.

WHICH WICKED MAGICIAN CONJURED UP THIS DEVIL TO INTERRUPT OUR FUNERAL?

PUT DOWN THE CORPSE, YOU VILAINS!
OR I'LL MAKE A CORPSE OF ANY MAN WHO DOESN'T.

ARE YOU SHAKING? ARE YOU ALL AFRAID?
I DON'T BLAME YOU, YOU'RE ONLY HUMAN -
AND HUMAN EYES CANNOT LOOK AT THE DEVIL.

GO AWAY, YOU GHASTLY AGENT OF HELL!

YOU MAY HAVE HAD POWER OVER HIS HUMAN BODY, BUT YOU CANNOT HAVE HIS SOUL.

SO, SO AWAY!

FOR KINDNESS SAKE, DEAR LADY, DON'T BE TOO ANGRY.

LOOK! DEAD HENRY'S WOUNDS HAVE OPENED UP AND ARE BLEEDING AGAIN.

SHAME ON YOU, YOU PERFORMED CREATURE!

ON GOD, WHO MADE THIS BLOOD, REVENGE HENRY'S DEATH!
YOU EARTH, THAT SOAKS UP THIS BLOOD, REVENGE HENRY'S DEATH!

OH STINKING DEVIL!
FOR GOD'S SAKE, GO AWAY AND LEAVE US ALONE.
YOU'VE MADE THE WHOLE WORLD INTO A LIVINGS HELL, FILLED WITH CURSES AND SCREAMING.
IF YOU ENJOY LOOKING AT YOUR HORRIBLE CRIMES, THEN SEE THIS EXAMPLE OR YOUR BUTCHERY.

IT'S YOUR PRESENCE HERE THAT'S MAKING THIS BLOOD FLOW FROM HIS COLD VEINS.
YOUR MONSTROUS CRIME IS CAUSING THIS UNNATURAL BLEEDING.

LET HEAVEN STRIKE THE MURDERER DEAD WITH LIGHTNING, OR LET THE EARTH OPEN UP AND SWALLOW HIM, AS IT DOES WITH THIS KING'S BLOOD, WHO THIS HELL-GOVERNED BUTCHER KILLED!!
SCOUNDREL! YOU DON'T KEEP TO THE LAWS OF GOD NOR MAN. EVEN THE FIERCEST ANIMAL HAS SOME PITY.

IT'S AMAZING TO HEAR THE DEVIL SPEAK THE TRUTH.

IT'S MORE AMAZING TO SEE AN ANGEL SO ANGRY.

PLEASE, BEAUTIFUL LADY, GIVE ME A CHANCE TO PROVE MY INNOCENCE OF THESE CRIMES.

YOU'RE WICKED BEYOND BELIEF. THE ONLY EXCUSE YOU CAN MAKE IS TO BLAME YOURSELF.

IF I DID THAT, I'D CONDEMN MYSELF.

IF YOU DID THAT, YOU'D BE EXCUSED FOR TAKING REVENGE ON YOURSELF.

YOU, WHO SLAUGHTERED SO MANY OTHERS.

WHAT IF I DIDN'T KILL THEM?

THEN, THEY WOULDN'T BE DEAD.

YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL BEYOND WORDS.

JUST GIVE ME A LITTLE OF YOUR TIME TO EXCUSE MYSELF.

PLEASE, YOU DISGUSTING MAN.

GIVE ME A CHANCE TO CURSE YOU FOR THE CRIMES I KNOW YOU HAVE COMMITTED!
I did not kill your husband.

Then he must be alive.

No, he's dead—killed by Edward.

You're lying through your teeth!

Queen Margaret saw your sword steaming with his blood.

You would have killed her as well, but your brothers stopped you.

She provoked me with her lying mouth, she wrongly accused me of their crime.

You were provoked by your bloody mind, that only thinks about killing.

You killed this king, didn't you? I'll grant you that.

He's in heaven, where you'll never be. He should thank me for sending him there.

You grant me refuge?

Then God grant me that you'll be drowned to hell for that wicked crime!

He was such a gentle, kind and good man. All the more suitable for gods, who has him.

And you're only suited to hell!

Perhaps—and one other place, if you'll allow me...

SOME DUNGEON!

YOUR BEDROOM.
A curse be on the room where you lie!

Indeed, there will be merrym. until I lie with you.

I know it will never happen.

But, dear Lady Anne, let's drop this battle of wits and talk about something else.

Would you say that whoever caused the deaths of Henry Herd and your husband Edward was just as guilty as the one who wielded the sword?

You are the cause and the effect!

Your beauty was the cause of that effect.

Your beauty haunted me in my sleep. I would have killed the whole world, just to be able to spend one hour next to you.

I couldn't bear to see that. I wouldn't allow it, not while I'm close.

Just as the sunshine cheers up the world, I'm cheered up by your face. It is my day and my life.

If I believed that you were a murderer, these nails would tear that beauty from my face.

I hope night darkens your day, and death ends your life!
YOUR EYES, DEAR LADY, HAVE ENCHANTED ME.

I WISH THEY WERE TOO, THEN I'D DIE QUICKLY, INSTEAD OF LINGERING IN A LIVING DEATH.

I WISH MY EYES WERE SERPENTS, TO STRIKE YOU DEAD!

YOUR EYES HAVE MADE ME CRY, SHAMEFULLY, LIKE A CHILD.

THOSE EYES, THAT NEVER CRIED BEFORE - NOT EVEN WHEN MY FATHER AND MY BROTHER EDWARD WEPT, WHEN THEY HEARD HOW MY BROTHER EDMUND, EARL OF RUTLAND, WAS BRUTALLY SLAUGHTERED BY BLACK-FACED CLIFFORD.

NOT EVEN WHEN YOUR FATHER, THE EARL OF WARWICK, TOLD THE STORY OF HOW MY FATHER DIED AT THE BATTLE OF WAKEFIELD. HE HAD TO PUSE MANY TIMES TO SOB AND THERE WASN'T A DRY EYE AMONGST ALL THOSE PRESENT, BUT I DIDN'T SHED A TEAR - NOT EVEN THEN.

WHAT THESE THINGS COULDN'T DO, YOUR BEAUTY NABE, IT'S MADE ME CRY TIL I COULDN'T SEE. I NEVER BEGGED A FRIEND OR AN ENEMY AND I'VE NEVER SPoken SWEET WORDS. BUT NOW YOUR BEAUTY MAKES MY PROUD HEART BEG - AND MY TONGUE SPEAK.
YOUR LIPS WERE MADE FOR KISSING, NOT FOR SNEERING IN CONTEMPT, LADY.
IF YOU CAN'T FORGIVE ME THEN, HERE, TAKE MY SHARP SWORD.

AND BURY IT IN MY HEART, SO THAT MY ADORING SOUL CAN BE SET FREE.
I LAY MY HEART OPEN TO THE FATAL THRUST AND GO DOWN ON ONE KNEE.

TO BEG FOR DEATH.

NO. DON'T HESITATE!
I KILLED KING HENRY - PROVOCED BY YOUR BEAUTY.
COME ON, KILL ME!
I KILLED YOUR HUSBAND, EDWARD, ENCRUZED BY YOUR LOVELY FACE.

GET UP, YOU LIAR.
I WANT YOU TO DIE, BUT I WON'T BE THE ONE TO KILL YOU.

Pick Up the Sword - Or Pick Up Me.
AFTERMATH

Richard’s efforts succeed and he marries Lady Anne in 1472. They live together for thirteen years – it’s to be eleven years before Richard becomes king and Anne becomes queen consort in 1483. They have one son, who dies at the age of ten. The marriage doesn’t succeed in placating the Lancastrians and the Wars of the Roses continues until Richard’s death at the battle of Bosworth Field. Anne’s health declines during her years of marriage – Shakespeare attributes this to Richard:-

“For never yet one hour in his bed
Have I enjoy’d the golden dew of sleep,
But have been waked by his timorous dreams.
Besides, he hates me for my father Warwick;
And will, no doubt, shortly be rid of me.”

Anne dies in 1485, at twenty-nine. She probably dies of tuberculosis, although there are rumours of poisoning. She’s left in an unmarked grave until 1960, when a bronze tablet is erected on a wall near her burial-place.
SECTION 2
Act 4, Scene 4, lines 199 to 342

Background

Elizabeth Woodville (Queen Elizabeth) is the widow of Edward IV, Richard’s brother and king before Richard. Her two young sons, The Prince of Wales and The Duke of York have been murdered in the Tower of London, paving the way for Richard to become king. Elizabeth blames Richard for this and also for the execution of her brother, Earl Rivers. Elizabeth herself and her daughters have just emerged from sanctuary and are returning to court.

Here again, we have Richard trying to persuade a woman who hates him to allow him to marry her daughter, his own niece, and again, we see his skills in the art of insincerity.

The final chapter in the Wars of the Roses is about to be written, at the Battle of Bosworth. Neither Richard nor Queen Elizabeth know what the outcome will be, although Richard is confident of winning and is planning for the future. Lady Anne Neville is dead and Richard wants to marry young Elizabeth of York to cement future relations with the powerful Woodville family, who have very strong allies and who can help him keep order in the country if he wins.

Unknown to Richard, Queen Elizabeth is secretly negotiating with agents of Henry Tudor-Duke of Richmond, to marry her daughter Elizabeth of York to him, should he succeed in defeating Richard. Queen Elizabeth can’t be sure who’ll win, so she doesn’t rule out a marriage to Richard – that way, her family will be restored to power, wealth and prestige, no matter what happens.

Richard’s insincerity is obvious when he says, after Queen Elizabeth has departed in the carriage with The Duchess of York:

“Relenting fool, and shallow, changing woman!”
I have no more royal songs for you to murder. My daughters will be devout nuns, not grieving queens – so please leave them alone, Richard.

Don't do that, she's a princess.

Her life is all the safer because of who she is.

They were unlucky to be born under bad stars.

I'll say she's not – to save her life.

The same safety that killed her brothers.

No, they were unlucky to have bad friends.

You have a daughter called Elizabeth. She's pretty and innocent and royal and elegant.

Does she have to die for that? Please, let her live! I'll destroy her elegance and her beauty. I'll say I cheated on Edward and she's not his child. I'll stain her character if that will prevent her from being murdered.
BAD DESTINY CANNOT BE AVOIDED.

YOU SEEK TO THINK THAT I KILLED MY NEPHEWS.

TRUE, WHEN EVIL MAKES DESTINY, MY CHILDREN WOULD HAVE LIVED TO DIE A PROPER DEATH. IF DESTINY HAD GIVEN YOU A PROPER LIFE.

YES. YOUR NEPHEWS — CHEATED BY THEIR UNCLE OF THEIR HAPPINESS, THEIR BIRTHRIGHT, THEIR FAMILY, THEIR FREEDOM AND THEIR LIVES. WHOEVER KILLED THEM — YOU SAVE THE ORDER.

YOU SHARPENED THE KNIFE ON YOUR STONY HEART. YOU'RE STEEPED IN THE BLOOD OF MY BABIES.

BUT CONSTANT GRIEVES LESSENS THE EFFECT OF THAT GRIEF. I SHOULDN'T SAY ANY MORE ABOUT MY BOYS.

UNTIL MY NAILS HAVE EMBRACED THEMSELVES IN YOUR EYES, I'LL TEAR MYSELF TO PIECES ON THE ROCKS OF YOUR HEART, LIKE A BOAT THAT'S LOST ITS SAILS.

IF I SUCCEED IN THIS DANGEROUS AND VIOLENT WAR, MADAM, I'LL MAKE IT UP TO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY FOR ANYTHING I HAVE DONE TO YOU IN THE PAST.

WHAT GOOD IS THERE, THAT CAN DO ANYTHING FOR ME NOW?
THE PROGRESSION OF YOUR CHILDREN, DEAR LADY.

NO - TO THE HIGHEST OF HONOURS, THE HIGHEST POSITION ON THIS EARTH.

UP SOME SCAFFOLD, TO BE KILLED.

TELL ME ABOUT IT, IN MY SIGHT, TELL ME WHAT POSITION, WHAT HONOURS? WHAT COULD YOU POSSIBLY GIVE TO ANY OF MY CHILDREN?

EVERYTHING I HAVE! AND MYSELF AS WELL! I'LL GIVE IT ALL TO ONE OF YOUR CHILDREN - IF YOU'LL FORGET THE WORRISSE YOU IMAGINE I'VE DONE TO YOU.

SPEAK QUICKLY, IN CASE YOUR KINDNESS RUNS OUT BEFORE YOU'RE FINISHED.

I LOVE YOUR DAUGHTER FROM MY SOUL.

DON'T BE SO QUICK TO TWIST MY MEANINGS. I LOVE YOUR DAUGHTER WITH MY SOUL AND I MEAN TO MAKE HER QUEEN OF ENGLAND.

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?

THAT YOU LOVE MY DAUGHTER FROM YOUR SOUL, JUST AS YOU LOVED HER BROTHERS FROM YOUR SOUL'S LOVE, AND I THANK YOU FROM MY HEART.

I BELIEVE THAT.

TELL ME WHO DO YOU MEAN TO BE HER KING?
THE ONE WHO MAKES HER QUEEN. WHO ELSE?
WHAT, YOU?
YES, WHAT DO YOU THINK?
HOW CAN YOU POSSIBLY ATTRACT HER?
THAT'S WHAT I NEED TO LEARN FROM YOU, YOU KNOW HER BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE.
AND WILL YOU ACCEPT WHAT I SAY?
WITH ALL MY HEART, MADAM.

LET THE MAN WHO KILLED HER BROTHERS BRING HER A PAIR OF BLOODSTAINED HEARTS WITH EDWARD AND YORK ENGRAVED ON THEM. THAT WILL MAKE HER CRY.
THEN GIVE HER A HANDKERCHIEF LIKE THE ONE MARGARET SWEPT IN RUTLAND'S BLOOD.
TELL HER IT WAS USED TO WIP UP HER SWEET BROTHER'S BLUE BLOOD AND ASK HER TO DRY HER EYES WITH IT.

IF THIS DOESN'T MAKE HER LOVE YOU SEND HER AN ACCOUNT OF YOUR OTHER NOBLE DEEDS.
TELL HER YOU DID AWAY WITH HER UNCLE CLARENCE AND HER UNCLE RIVERS — YES AND, FOR HER SAKE, HER KINDLY AUNT ANNE.

THERE'S NO OTHER WAY — UNLESS YOU CAN TAKE ON ANOTHER SHAPE AND BECOME SOMEONE ELSE.
TELL HER I DID IT ALL FOR HER LOVE.

NO, THEN SHE'LL REALLY HATE YOU, FOR TRYING TO BUY LOVE WITH SUCH BLOODY SNOW.
LOOK, WHAT’S DONE CANNOT BE UNDONE. MEN DO FOOLISH THINGS SOMETIMES, THEN THEY’RE SORRY AFTERWARDS WHEN THEY’VE TIME TO THINK ABOUT IT. IF I TOOK THE KINGDOM FROM YOUR SONS, TO MAKE UP FOR IT I’LL GIVE IT TO YOUR DAUGHTER.

IF I KILLED YOUR CHILDREN, I’LL GIVE YOU BACK CHILDREN FROM YOUR DAUGHTER.

THERE ISN’T MUCH DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A GRANDMOTHER’S LOVE AND A MOTHER’S. THEY’LL BE LIKE YOUR OWN CHILDREN, JUST ONE STEP REMOVED.

YOU LOST OUT ON YOUR SON BEING KING, BUT THAT LOSS WILL MAKE YOUR DAUGHTER QUEEN.

I CAN’T MAKE EVERYTHING UP TO YOU AS I’D LIKE TO, SO PLEASE ACCEPT WHAT I CAN DO.

YOUR SON, THE MARQUIS OF DORSET, WHO RAN AWAY IN FEAR TO FRANCE, COULD COME HOME TO A PROMOTION OF HIGH RESPECT.

THEY’LL BE FROM YOUR BODY, YOUR BLOOD, YOUR EFFORT - EXCEPT FOR ONE NIGHT OF LABOUR, WHICH YOU ENDURED FOR YOUR DAUGHTER. YOUR OWN CHILDREN WERE A WORRY TO YOU IN YOUR YOUTH, BUT WINE WILL BE A COMFORT IN YOUR OLD AGE.

IF I CAN CALL YOUR BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER WIFE, I’LL CALL THE MARQUIS BROTHER. YOU’LL BE THE MOTHER OF A KING AGAIN. ALL THE MISERIES OF UNHAPPY TIMES WILL BE DONE AND YOU’LL BE TWICE AS CONTENTED AS BEFORE.
WHY, WE HAVE
MANY HAPPY DAYS
IN FRONT OF US.
TEARS THAT WERE ONCE
SHED IN GRIEF WILL BE SHED IN PLEASURE,
LIKE PEARLS, YOUR HAPPINESS WILL GROW
LIKE THE INTEREST ON A LOAN, UNTIL IT'S
TEN TIMES ITS ORIGINAL SIZE.

GO, MOTHER,
TO YOUR DAUGHTER,
GO - GIVE HER THE BENEFIT
OF YOUR EXPERIENCE,
MAKE SURE
SHE'S READY TO HEAR
MY WORDS OF LOVE.
LIGHT A FLAME OF AMBITION
TO BE QUEEN IN HER HEART,
TELL HER ALL ABOUT THE JOYS
OF MARRIAGE.

WHAT'S THE BEST THING TO SAY?
HER FATHER'S BROTHER WANTS TO
BE HER HUSBAND? OR SHOULD
I SAY HER UNCLE?
OR - THE ONE WHO
KILLED HER BROTHERS
AND HER UNCLE?
WHAT POSSIBLE NAME CAN I GIVE THAT'LL APPEAR TO HER YOUNG EARS - EVEN WITH THE HELP OF GOD, THE LAW,
MY DIGNITY AND HER OWN
EMOTIONS?

- AND, WHEN
I'VE DEFEATED
THIS SMALL TIDE,
STUPID REBEL,
BUCKINGHAM,
I'LL RETURN IN
TRiumphant GLORY TO
LEAD YOUR DAUGHTER TO
A Conqueror's Bed,
I'LL GIVE HER AL
I'VE WON AND SHE'LL BE THE ONE
WHO BANS EVERYTHING - SHE'LL BE CEasar's CEasar.
AFTERMATH

In the end, Richard is defeated and killed at the Battle of Bosworth Field. Henry-Duke of Richmond becomes Henry VII, the first Tudor king, thus ending the reign of the Plantagenets. Henry marries Elizabeth of York and their son, Henry VIII, continues the Tudor line of monarchs.