

THREE ENGLISH KINGS



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Series editors: K R Cripwell and Lewis Jones

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from Shakespeare

THREE ENGLISH KINGS

Simplified and retold by Margery Morris

Illustrations by Willie Rodger

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King Richard the Second

God's Chosen King

Five hundred years ago, people believed that a king was chosen by God. Fighting against a king, or killing him, was the worst crime. Everybody knew this, but not everybody remembered it when they were angry.

King Richard the Second was a young man. His uncle, John of Gaunt, tried to teach and help him, but Richard did not often listen to the old man.

One day, John of Gaunt told Richard that two of the lords were quarrelling. One was Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk. The other was Henry Bolingbroke, Earl of Hereford. Bolingbroke was John of Gaunt's son, and the king's cousin.

"Bring them to me," said Richard. "I will decide."

Bolingbroke and Mowbray were brought to the king. Both men were very angry, but they bent low in front of him.

Bolingbroke said, "My loving lord."

"Happiness," said Mowbray, "I hope you'll be happy all your life."

"Thank you," said Richard. "Cousin Bolingbroke, why do you argue with Mowbray?"

Bolingbroke said, "There have been many plans to kill you, my lord, and he is behind them all. You gave him money to pay your soldiers, and he stole it. I repeat, he is your enemy, and I will fight and kill him."

“Mowbray?” said the king.

“It is not true,” said Mowbray between his teeth, “I have never planned to kill you, and I haven’t stolen money from you. Name a day, your majesty, and I will fight and kill him.”

King Richard looked at the two men. “Forget this. Be friends.”

“I won’t. I can’t,” said Bolingbroke.

“Never,” said Mowbray.

The king said coldly, “A king does not ask. He commands.”

Mowbray and Bolingbroke didn’t answer.

“You must fight,” said the king. “At Coventry, on September 17th, I will come to watch you.”

At Coventry

So, in front of the king and queen and all the lords, Bolingbroke and Mowbray met to fight.

Music sounded. The two men lifted their swords, there was a breathless silence, and then, suddenly, the king moved his hand.

“Stop!”

Bolingbroke and Mowbray looked at him with surprise.

“Come here.”

They went and stood in front of him.

“I have changed my mind,” said Richard. “There will be no fight. I want peace in England, not blood and death. Bolingbroke, you will leave the country. You may not come back to England for ten years.”

Bolingbroke bent his head. “You are my king,”

he said.

“Mowbray,” said the king, “you too must leave this country.”

“And when shall I return?”

“Never,” said the king. “Never.”

Mowbray’s face was white. “This is too hard,” he said. “I love my country. I’ve spoken English for forty years, and I’m too old to learn another language now.”

“You must not argue with your king,” said Richard.

“Then I will go into darkness,” said Mowbray. “But first, Bolingbroke, I will say something to you.” He spoke in a loud clear voice. “God knows you, Bolingbroke, and I know you. And soon, too soon, the king will find out what you really are.”

Mowbray walked slowly away.

Old John of Gaunt looked at Bolingbroke with sad eyes, and the king saw this.

“Not ten years,” he said. “Six, only six.”

“The king speaks, and his power is great,” said Bolingbroke, “four years disappear.”

“Ten, six,” said the old man. “I shall die before my son returns.”

“Why, uncle,” said the king, “you’ll live for many years.”

John of Gaunt shook his head. “No,” he said.

“Say goodbye to your son,” said the king coldly. “I have commanded, and he must go.”

“You can’t command me to live longer,” said the old man sadly.

When John of Gaunt was alone with his son, he

tried to comfort him. "Only six years," he said. "Tell yourself it's a long holiday. Every place under the sun can be a home, if a man thinks rightly. If you can think you're happy, my dearest son, you will be happy."

"Impossible, father," said Bolingbroke.

"If I were young like you, I wouldn't stay here," said his father. "Come, I'll go to the ship with you."

Bushy, Bagot and Green

King Richard was a weak young man. He enjoyed his power, and he enjoyed acting like a king. But when he was with his three close friends, Bushy, Bagot and Green, he spoke quite differently.

"I'll tell you why I stopped the fight and sent them away," he said. "Men like them are dangerous. Bolingbroke wants my crown. And the people like him. I've heard him talking to them; so kind, so friendly. He's too popular."

"Well," said Green, "he's gone. Forget him. Now, my lord, we must think about other things."

"Ireland," said Bushy.

"Yes," said Bagot. "They're fighting against you, you'll have to send an army."

"I'll go there myself," said the king.

"But where will you get the money?" said Green.

"From the people," said Richard, "of course. I'll order new payments."

"Will they pay?" said Bagot. "They're already paying heavily."

"They must give me money," said Richard, "if I order them."

The Death of an Old Man

Old John of Gaunt was very weak. "Is the king coming?" he said to his brother, the Duke of York, "I must talk to him. He must change his life."

"He won't listen," said York, "he won't listen to anyone except those three, Bushy, Green and Bagot; and they agree that he should take the people's money and spend it."

John of Gaunt lifted a shaking hand. "I can see the future," he said. "England, my country, this jewel ringed by the silver sea, this beautiful land, is in fearful danger."

The king and queen arrived. The gentle queen kissed the old man. "How are you, dear uncle?" she said.

"Old, and ill, and unhappy," said the dying man. "But you are ill too, Richard. You don't rule your country well. You spend your time with bad friends, who only want to please you and help you spend money."

Richard was angry at once. "Old fool," he said, "how dare you speak to your king like that? I could tell my men to kill you."

The old man was too weak to say more. He was carried away, and York tried to quiet the king's anger. "He loves you, Richard," he said, "he loves you as much as he loves his son Bolingbroke."

"You must not say that name to me," said Richard.

One of the lords came in. "Sir," he said, "John of Gaunt is dead."

"I hope I'll die next," said York. "The dead can't feel sadness."

"He's dead and we're alive," said the king shortly. "Now, about the money for my war in Ireland. I'll take all Gaunt's money, his castle, his land, everything."

"Richard, Richard," said old York, "Gaunt's money belongs to his son. You can't steal it, you'll lose a thousand friends and make a thousand enemies. I dare not think what will happen."

"Think what you like," said Richard. The queen was crying. "Come my love," he said, "you mustn't be unhappy, you mustn't be sad. Tomorrow I'm going to Ireland, and I want to remember a smiling queen."

A Secret Plan

Three lords listened to York and Richard. They were Lord Northumberland, Lord Willoughby, and Lord Ross. They said nothing until they were alone, and then Lord Northumberland said, "Old John of Gaunt is dead."

"But his son Bolingbroke is alive," said Ross.

"But he has no home, no land, no money now," said Willoughby.

There was a long silence. Northumberland broke it. "The king is led by bad friends, and they hate us. If the king ordered them, they would take our castles and land too," he said.

"The people don't love him, he's lost everyone's

love," said Ross.

"And they have to pay him more every day," added Willoughby. "When will it end? I have no hope."

"I have," said Northumberland, "but I dare not say it."

"You can tell us," said Ross.

"All right, listen." He looked at the doors and windows, and lowered his voice. "I know that Bolingbroke is coming back to England with a large army. He'll wait until the king's in Ireland, and then he'll land at Ravenspur in the North, and march across the country. If you both want to join him, you can ride north with me and my son. If you're afraid, stay here, but keep our secret."

"We'll ride with you," said Willoughby and Ross at once.

Fearful News

The queen was sad and Bushy tried to comfort her.

"You must smile and be happy and please the king," he said.

"I'm afraid."

"Of what?"

"I don't know. Something bad is going to happen. I can feel it."

Green came in, white-faced and breathless. "Madam," he said, "Bushy, Bagot, has the king gone to Ireland?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Oh fearful news! Bolingbroke has landed with

an army in the north."

"Now I know why I am so heavy and sad," said the queen.

"And there is worse news, madam," said Green. "Northumberland and his son, young Harry Percy, and several other lords have ridden north to join him."

"And my uncle, the Duke of York?"

"He's here, madam."

The old man hurried in. "Uncle," said the queen, "say something to comfort me."

"I can't," said York. "I don't know what to do. Someone must go to Ireland and tell the king. And where can we get the money to fight these men? And how can I fight? Richard is my king, I ought to fight for him, but Bolingbroke is my brother's son and the king has wronged him deeply. Bushy, Bagot, Green, go and give orders to the soldiers. Madam, come with me."

He hurried away, shaking his white head, and the queen followed him. Bagot said, "We can't get an army together. Who would fight for Richard, or for us?" Green said, "I shall go to Bristol Castle. I have friends there. If I can reach them safely."

"I'll come with you," said Bushy. "Are you coming, Bagot?"

"I'll try to reach the king in Ireland."

He held out his hand. "We may never meet again. So this is goodbye."

"But not for ever," said Bushy, "not for ever. We may meet again?"

"I think not," said Green.

The Return

Bolingbroke and his army landed in the north. Old York came to speak to his nephew. Bolingbroke bent low. "My uncle York," he said.

"Don't call me uncle," said York angrily. "I'm not an uncle to my country's enemy. The king told you to leave England for six years. And now you dare to come back with an army. If you're looking for the king he is not here, and I am ruler of England while he is away. If I were young and strong, I'd fight you myself."

"I've done nothing wrong," said Bolingbroke. "When I left, I was the Earl of Hereford. Now I'm the Duke of Lancaster, which was my father's name. And the king has stolen everything."

"I know all that," said York. "I know the king has wronged you, but you can't come here with an army. That's not the way to put things right. You're an enemy to England."

"I've come for what is mine."

The old man shook his head. "I'm helpless, I have no soldiers, no power. Do what you like. I can't stop you."

The King Returns

The king sailed back from Ireland and landed on the west coast. Lord Aumerle, who was the Duke of York's son, and the Bishop of Carlisle were with him, and he had a few soldiers.

There was an old castle not far away. "What's that castle?" said Richard. "Berkley Castle, is it?"

"Yes, sir."

Richard stood still. "I'm crying and smiling," he said, "because I love my country. Let me touch the earth with my hand. Dear earth, do not help my enemies; let your stones become soldiers and fight for me."

"We mustn't waste time, your majesty," said Aumerle. The king wasn't listening. "When Bolingbroke sees me," he said, "he will shake with fear. God's king can never be destroyed; all the water in all the seas cannot wash God's mark from me. My army is God's army; and he will fight for me."

They heard a horse coming fast towards them. It stopped and the rider jumped off and hurried to the king.

"It's Lord Salisbury," said Aumerle. "A friend."

"Welcome," said Richard. "Where are your soldiers, Lord Salisbury?"

Salisbury bent his head. "Call back yesterday, tell time to return," he said. "Then you would have 12 000 fighting men. Today they've gone to join Bolingbroke."

Richard stared at him.

"My lord," said Aumerle quickly. "Remember who you are."

"Of course. I am the king. And I know my uncle York will have enough men."

Another rider appeared in a cloud of dust, stopped his horse, and ran to the king.

“Sir Stephen Scroop,” said Aumerle.

“What is your news?” said Richard. “I’m listening, I’m not afraid.”

“I’m glad,” said Scroop, “because the news is very bad. Every man in England, it seems, young or old, has joined Bolingbroke.”

At first the king couldn’t speak. Then he said: “Bushy? Bagot? Green? Are they with Bolingbroke?”

“No, sir.” He stopped. “They’re . . .”

“They’re dead? Are Bushy, Green and Bagot dead?”

“Comfort, sir,” said Aumerle. “You must be brave.”

“Don’t talk about comfort,” said Richard. “We’ll sit on the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings; and water shall fall from our eyes like rain upon the dusty earth.”

“My lord,” said the Bishop, “brave men don’t sit and feel sorry for themselves. They help themselves. They fight.”

“My father York has an army, surely,” said Aumerle. “Sir Stephen, where is he?”

“Your father York has joined with Bolingbroke. All your castles in the north have fallen, and all your lords in the south will fight against you.”

Berkley Castle

Bolingbroke marched successfully across England to the west coast, and camped near Berkley Castle. Northumberland’s son, Harry Percy, was sent to the old castle to find out if anyone was

there. After some time, he came back.

“Welcome, Harry,” said Bolingbroke, “won’t these old walls receive us?”

“No, sir, because a king is there.”

“What? King Richard is in the castle?”

“Yes, and with him Lord Aumerle and Lord Salisbury, Sir Stephen Scroop and the Bishop of Carlisle.”

“My lord Northumberland,” said Bolingbroke.

“Sir?”

“Go to the castle, sound the trumpets, and say you have words for the king. Tell him I won’t fight. I’ll send away my army, if he will let me stay in England, and give back what is mine. If not, this earth shall be red with the blood of Englishmen.”

Lord Northumberland went. And Bolingbroke waited and watched. Suddenly he said, “Look up. Richard is there, on the walls, with Aumerle and the Bishop.”

“He still looks like a king,” said York.

There was a long silence. Richard looked down at Northumberland. Then he said, in a cold, clear voice, “I am surprised, Lord Northumberland. You should be bending low before me, your king. Why have you come?”

Northumberland told the king what Bolingbroke said.

The king turned to Aumerle and the Bishop. “What shall I say? Must I tell Bolingbroke that he is welcome, and shall have everything he wants? Or shall we fight?”

“No, my lord,” said Aumerle gently, “We’ll fight only with words, until we have more friends to help us. Tell Bolingbroke you agree.”