

William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, 1.2

(c. 1592-94)

Enter the corpse of KING HENRY the Sixth, Gentlemen with halberds to guard it; LADY ANNE being the mourner

LADY ANNE:

Set down, set down your honourable load,
If honour may be shrouded in a hearse,
Whilst I awhile obsequiously lament
The untimely fall of virtuous Lancaster.
Poor key-cold figure of a holy king!
Pale ashes of the house of Lancaster!
Thou bloodless remnant of that royal blood!
Be it lawful that I invoke thy ghost,
To hear the lamentations of Poor Anne,
Wife to thy Edward, to thy slaughter'd son,
Stabb'd by the selfsame hand that made these wounds!
Lo, in these windows that let forth thy life,
I pour the helpless balm of my poor eyes.
Cursed be the hand that made these fatal holes!
Cursed be the heart that had the heart to do it!
Cursed the blood that let this blood from hence!
More direful hap betide that hated wretch,
That makes us wretched by the death of thee,
Than I can wish to adders, spiders, toads,
Or any creeping venom'd thing that lives!
If ever he have child, abortive be it,
Prodigious, and untimely brought to light,
Whose ugly and unnatural aspect
May fright the hopeful mother at the view;
And that be heir to his unhappiness!
If ever he have wife, let her he made
A miserable by the death of him
As I am made by my poor lord and thee!
Come, now towards Chertsey with your holy load,
Taken from Paul's to be interred there;
And still, as you are weary of the weight,
Rest you, whiles I lament King Henry's corse.

Enter GLOUCESTER

GLOUCESTER:

Stay, you that bear the corse, and set it down.

LADY ANNE:

What black magician conjures up this fiend,
To stop devoted charitable deeds?

GLOUCESTER:

Villains, set down the corse; or, by Saint Paul,
I'll make a corse of him that disobeys.

GENTLEMAN:

My lord, stand back, and let the coffin pass.

GLOUCESTER:

Unmanner'd dog! stand thou, when I command:
Advance thy halbert higher than my breast,
Or, by Saint Paul, I'll strike thee to my foot,
And spurn upon thee, beggar, for thy boldness.

LADY ANNE:

What, do you tremble? are you all afraid?
Alas, I blame you not; for you are mortal,
And mortal eyes cannot endure the devil.
Avaunt, thou dreadful minister of hell!
Thou hadst but power over his mortal body,
His soul thou canst not have; therefore be gone.

GLOUCESTER:

Sweet saint, for charity, be not so curst.

LADY ANNE:

Foul devil, for God's sake, hence, and trouble us not;
For thou hast made the happy earth thy hell,
Fill'd it with cursing cries and deep exclaims.
If thou delight to view thy heinous deeds,
Behold this pattern of thy butcheries.
O, gentlemen, see, see! dead Henry's wounds
Open their congeal'd mouths and bleed afresh!
Blush, Blush, thou lump of foul deformity;
For 'tis thy presence that exhales this blood
From cold and empty veins, where no blood dwells;
Thy deed, inhuman and unnatural,
Provokes this deluge most unnatural.
O God, which this blood madest, revenge his death!
O earth, which this blood drink'st revenge his death!
Either heaven with lightning strike the murderer dead,
Or earth, gape open wide and eat him quick,
As thou dost swallow up this good king's blood
Which his hell-govern'd arm hath butchered!

GLOUCESTER:

Lady, you know no rules of charity,
Which renders good for bad, blessings for curses.

LADY ANNE:

Villain, thou know'st no law of God nor man:
No beast so fierce but knows some touch of pity.

GLOUCESTER:

But I know none, and therefore am no beast.

LADY ANNE:

O wonderful, when devils tell the truth!

GLOUCESTER:

More wonderful, when angels are so angry.
Vouchsafe, divine perfection of a woman,
Of these supposed-evils, to give me leave,
By circumstance, but to acquit myself.

LADY ANNE:

Vouchsafe, defused infection of a man,
For these known evils, but to give me leave,
By circumstance, to curse thy cursed self.

GLOUCESTER:

Fairer than tongue can name thee, let me have
Some patient leisure to excuse myself.

LADY ANNE:

Fouler than heart can think thee, thou canst make
No excuse current, but to hang thyself.

GLOUCESTER:

By such despair, I should accuse myself.

LADY ANNE:

And, by despairing, shouldst thou stand excused;
For doing worthy vengeance on thyself,
Which didst unworthy slaughter upon others.

GLOUCESTER:

Say that I slew them not?

LADY ANNE:

Why, then they are not dead:
But dead they are, and devilish slave, by thee.

GLOUCESTER:

I did not kill your husband.

LADY ANNE:

Why, then he is alive.

GLOUCESTER:

Nay, he is dead; and slain by Edward's hand.

LADY ANNE:

In thy foul throat thou liest: Queen Margaret saw
Thy murderous falchion smoking in his blood;
The which thou once didst bend against her breast,
But that thy brothers beat aside the point.

GLOUCESTER:

I was provoked by her slanderous tongue,
which laid their guilt upon my guiltless shoulders.

LADY ANNE:

Thou wast provoked by thy bloody mind.
Which never dreamt on aught but butcheries:
Didst thou not kill this king?

GLOUCESTER:

I grant ye.

LADY ANNE:

Dost grant me, hedgehog? then, God grant me too
Thou mayst be damned for that wicked deed!
O, he was gentle, mild, and virtuous!

GLOUCESTER:

The fitter for the King of heaven, that hath him.

LADY ANNE:

He is in heaven, where thou shalt never come.

GLOUCESTER:

Let him thank me, that help to send him thither;
For he was fitter for that place than earth.

LADY ANNE:

And thou unfit for any place but hell.

GLOUCESTER:

Yes, one place else, if you will hear me name it.

LADY ANNE:
Some dungeon.

GLOUCESTER:
Your bed-chamber.

LADY ANNE:
Ill rest betide the chamber where thou liest!

GLOUCESTER:
So will it, madam till I lie with you.

LADY ANNE:
I hope so.

GLOUCESTER:
I know so. But, gentle Lady Anne,
To leave this keen encounter of our wits,
And fall somewhat into a slower method,
Is not the causer of the timeless deaths
Of these Plantagenets, Henry and Edward,
As blameful as the executioner?

LADY ANNE:
Thou art the cause, and most accursed effect.

GLOUCESTER:
Your beauty was the cause of that effect;
Your beauty: which did haunt me in my sleep
To undertake the death of all the world,
So I might live one hour in your sweet bosom.

LADY ANNE:
If I thought that, I tell thee, homicide,
These nails should rend that beauty from my cheeks.

GLOUCESTER:
These eyes could never endure sweet beauty's wreck;
You should not blemish it, if I stood by:
As all the world is cheered by the sun,
So I by that; it is my day, my life.

LADY ANNE:
Black night o'ershade thy day, and death thy life!

GLOUCESTER:
Curse not thyself, fair creature thou art both.

LADY ANNE:

I would I were, to be revenged on thee.

GLOUCESTER:

It is a quarrel most unnatural,
To be revenged on him that loveth you.

LADY ANNE:

It is a quarrel just and reasonable,
To be revenged on him that slew my husband.

GLOUCESTER:

He that bereft thee, lady, of thy husband,
Did it to help thee to a better husband.

LADY ANNE:

His better doth not breathe upon the earth.

GLOUCESTER:

He lives that loves thee better than he could.

LADY ANNE:

Name him.

GLOUCESTER:

Plantagenet.

LADY ANNE:

Why, that was he.

GLOUCESTER:

The selfsame name, but one of better nature.

LADY ANNE:

Where is he?

GLOUCESTER:

Here.

She spitteth at him

Why dost thou spit at me?

LADY ANNE:

Would it were mortal poison, for thy sake!

GLOUCESTER:

Never came poison from so sweet a place.

LADY ANNE:

Never hung poison on a fouler toad.
Out of my sight! thou dost infect my eyes.

GLOUCESTER:

Thine eyes, sweet lady, have infected mine.

LADY ANNE:

Would they were basilisks, to strike thee dead!

GLOUCESTER:

I would they were, that I might die at once;
For now they kill me with a living death.
Those eyes of thine from mine have drawn salt tears,
Shamed their aspect with store of childish drops:
These eyes that never shed remorseful tear,
No, when my father York and Edward wept,
To hear the piteous moan that Rutland made
When black-faced Clifford shook his sword at him;
Nor when thy warlike father, like a child,
Told the sad story of my father's death,
And twenty times made pause to sob and weep,
That all the standers-by had wet their cheeks
Like trees bedash'd with rain: in that sad time
My manly eyes did scorn an humble tear;
And what these sorrows could not thence exhale,
Thy beauty hath, and made them blind with weeping.
I never sued to friend nor enemy;
My tongue could never learn sweet smoothing word;
But now thy beauty is proposed my fee,
My proud heart sues, and prompts my tongue to speak.

She looks scornfully at him

Teach not thy lips such scorn, for they were made
For kissing, lady, not for such contempt.
If thy revengeful heart cannot forgive,
Lo, here I lend thee this sharp-pointed sword;
Which if thou please to hide in this true bosom.
And let the soul forth that adareth thee,
I lay it naked to the deadly stroke,
And humbly beg the death upon my knee.

He lays his breast open: she offers at it with his sword

Nay, do not pause; for I did kill King Henry,
But 'twas thy beauty that provoked me.
Nay, now dispatch; 'twas I that stabb'd young Edward,
But 'twas thy heavenly face that set me on.

Here she lets fall the sword

Take up the sword again, or take up me.

LADY ANNE:
Arise, dissembler: though I wish thy death,
I will not be the executioner.

GLOUCESTER:
Then bid me kill myself, and I will do it.

LADY ANNE:
I have already.

GLOUCESTER:
Tush, that was in thy rage:
Speak it again, and, even with the word,
That hand, which, for thy love, did kill thy love,
Shall, for thy love, kill a far truer love;
To both their deaths thou shalt be accessory.

LADY ANNE:
I would I knew thy heart.

GLOUCESTER:
'Tis figured in my tongue.

LADY ANNE:
I fear me both are false.

GLOUCESTER:
Then never man was true.

LADY ANNE:
Well, well, put up your sword.

GLOUCESTER:
Say, then, my peace is made.

LADY ANNE:
That shall you know hereafter.

GLOUCESTER:
But shall I live in hope?

LADY ANNE:
All men, I hope, live so.

GLOUCESTER:
Vouchsafe to wear this ring.

LADY ANNE:
To take is not to give.

GLOUCESTER:
Look, how this ring encompasseth finger.
Even so thy breast encloseth my poor heart;
Wear both of them, for both of them are thine.
And if thy poor devoted suppliant may
But beg one favour at thy gracious hand,
Thou dost confirm his happiness for ever.

LADY ANNE:
What is it?

GLOUCESTER:
That it would please thee leave these sad designs
To him that hath more cause to be a mourner,
And presently repair to Crosby Place;
Where, after I have solemnly interr'd
At Chertsey monastery this noble king,
And wet his grave with my repentant tears,
I will with all expedient duty see you:
For divers unknown reasons. I beseech you,
Grant me this boon.

LADY ANNE:
With all my heart; and much it joys me too,
To see you are become so penitent.
Tressel and Berkeley, go along with me.

GLOUCESTER:
Bid me farewell.

LADY ANNE:
'Tis more than you deserve;
But since you teach me how to flatter you,
Imagine I have said farewell already.

Exeunt LADY ANNE, TRESSEL, and BERKELEY

GLOUCESTER:

Sirs, take up the corse.

GENTLEMEN:

Towards Chertsey, noble lord?

GLOUCESTER:

No, to White-Friars; there attend my coining.

Exeunt all but GLOUCESTER

Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?
Was ever woman in this humour won?
I'll have her; but I will not keep her long.
What! I, that kill'd her husband and his father,
To take her in her heart's extremest hate,
With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes,
The bleeding witness of her hatred by;
Having God, her conscience, and these bars against me,
And I nothing to back my suit at all,
But the plain devil and dissembling looks,
And yet to win her, all the world to nothing!
Ha!
Hath she forgot already that brave prince,
Edward, her lord, whom I, some three months since,
Stabb'd in my angry mood at Tewksbury?
A sweeter and a lovelier gentleman,
Framed in the prodigality of nature,
Young, valiant, wise, and, no doubt, right royal,
The spacious world cannot again afford
And will she yet debase her eyes on me,
That cropp'd the golden prime of this sweet prince,
And made her widow to a woful bed?
On me, whose all not equals Edward's moiety?
On me, that halt and am unshapen thus?
My dukedom to a beggarly denier,
I do mistake my person all this while:
Upon my life, she finds, although I cannot,
Myself to be a marvellous proper man.
I'll be at charges for a looking-glass,
And entertain some score or two of tailors,
To study fashions to adorn my body:
Since I am crept in favour with myself,
Will maintain it with some little cost.
But first I'll turn yon fellow in his grave;

And then return lamenting to my love.
Shine out, fair sun, till I have bought a glass,
That I may see my shadow as I pass.

Exit