

***The Lost Days of Edward V***

A Verse Novel

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2020

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*The Lost Days of Edward V* is a compelling middle-grade verse novel that tells the story of twelve-year-old King Edward V through his 15<sup>th</sup> century imprisonment in the Tower of London. Aware of their many enemies, Edward knows that there is only one thing for him and his brother to do: survive at all costs. Fast-moving fact and fiction with themes of identity and transformation.

***It is currently awaiting publication—enjoy this draft copy in the meantime! 😊***

## **The Lost Days of Edward V**

### **Prologue**

*What would happen if you suddenly discovered  
you'd become the reigning monarch,  
King of England?*

*What if next you found yourself  
a captive  
shut away with your brother  
in the Tower of London?*

*Would you accept your fate?*

*Or would you fight for freedom?*

*That's what this is all about,  
this story of my life.  
My life... and my brother's life...  
and maybe too  
our death.  
Or...maybe not.*

*I'll share what I remember  
of those days.  
And then it's up to you.  
Decide what really happened  
to us both...*

*and what could happen still...*

## **Section I: The Tower of London**

### **Fear of Horses**

I'm terrible at this.  
Acting like a king and  
trying not to fall  
while soldiers press around me  
easy on their mounts.

I'm not king material.  
I'm not proud or strong or fierce.  
Or even all that interested  
in England.

Never in my nightmares  
did I think I'd ever take the throne  
so soon.  
And now I'm heading to my Coronation  
clutching at  
the saddle,  
Father's gold ring twisting on my thumb.

Was there once another king so terrified of horses?  
And everything?  
Most surely not.

## **Heredity**

Edward IV was set to reign for years, not sicken,  
die, a young man still.  
As eldest son, I'm next in line.

My brother Richard, Duke of York  
would do much better  
though he's only nine.

He's very like our father.  
Very like our grandfather.  
Very like King Arthur, whom he furiously reads about.  
Not like me.

Even our Elizabeth,  
my oldest sister and  
our mother's namesake,  
would be a far more fitting choice to rule.

Every furlong forward  
clumsy with a fear  
I must not show  
and grief  
I must not name  
and yet I'm forced to carry on.

Not grief that he is dead.

The King. Most surely not. In truth...I sorrow for myself.

## **Ghosts**

The trees that line our way  
are ghostly figures drenched in mist.  
They whisper of the monarchy,  
a gruesome path of finished kings.

I know those stories well.

Uncle Anthony, Mother's favorite brother and  
my vowed protector,  
scans the road ahead.  
He's not afraid of ghosts  
or anything.  
Sturdy Knight,  
he should be Regent in my place.

Mother says that in this kingdom  
sons are bound to fathers,  
cannot be forsworn even if the son is weak.  
Or childishly unsteady.  
Or heedlessly unwilling.

Is she safe in Sanctuary  
while I ride from Wales?

In truth, I think the ghostly figure following behind  
is Father. Watching me.  
And measuring. As always, I can never meet the mark.

## Ambush

Suddenly we stop.

“Who goes?” a soldier calls, and then  
the horses skitter sideways.

Here is Uncle Richard, father’s younger brother,  
dark and small, but oddly similar  
riding toward us through the bruise of evening  
bringing Hastings and his men.

“Welcome, Gloucester!” Uncle Anthony falls back, at ease.

Our men advance.

And suddenly I see Lord Hastings  
like a wary badger, prowling to my right.

But where is Uncle Anthony? Lord Grey? And all the rest  
from Father’s service? Gone?

“*Wait,*” I call. My voice is breaking into high notes.

“*Wait!*”

And Uncle Richard turns.

“Fear Not,” he says, and Hastings wheezes:

“Do not fear, Your Highness. We will see you safe.”

The men of Uncle Richard’s cavalry press closer.

Far behind, I see my father’s men:

Anthony. Lord Gray. The rest. Surrounded.

Now my heart is beating heavily against my throat.

I’m hanging on as best I can.

## Dark Thoughts

Every mile closer to the London gates  
my terror grows.  
Uncle Richard's words *Fear Not!*  
have just the opposite effect.  
I think of turning back, of galloping away,  
a brave knight charging toward the sunset.

Then weakness rushes in. The old horse terror.  
Anyways, I'd not get far.  
The dark is plentiful.  
The horse is wild.  
Without the soldiers flanking us  
to guide the way  
I could be tossed and trampled.  
Broken in the dirt.  
So all that's left to do  
is keep my seat  
and pray.

Although I'm sure that God  
does not have ears  
for this  
or me.

## **Toothache**

A fire in my jaw ignites.  
In flames I stupor,  
pasted to the saddle.  
Rain begins to fall, the shadows smothering the fire  
but not the ache.  
We pass the night like this.

And finally the puddles dry in dawn's first light.

The horses shamble awkwardly along some sort of hasty way  
against the public road and through the woods.

Am I to die here? Surely Uncle Richard wants me dead,  
then only Richard Duke of York, my brother,  
stands between our uncle and the throne,  
an easy mark should he come out of Sanctuary.

But just ahead I see the sunrise.  
Sky a blend of pinks and purples.  
I remember sweet peas in a jar  
and some lost garden blooming with them.  
A world like this—so beautiful—I cannot leave it!

If I am to die, in truth I won't go easily!  
But when I look around I know, in fact, it's hopeless.  
Me against this horde of men.

I wait.

**London**

Just up ahead. The City!

I feel my lungs constrict. It's like I'm strangled.

London!

Hundreds wait for us, they're mounted and resplendent,

scarlet on their backs

the liverymen in violet.

Maybe I've mistook my Uncle's care for injury?

This seems a fitting welcome for a king.

I try to catch my breath. And wonder:

when the Lord Mayor greets me

what shall I reply?

Should I call for help?

"Behold your Prince and Sovereign Lord!" my uncle bellows,  
drowning out all possibility.

## Lies About the Queen

I see a string of wagons through the crowd  
and hear a story of an evil Queen.

The Queen? My mother?

They are talking of my mother!

Ammunition spread

for all to see, accusing her of treachery--  
weapons in the wagons visible to all.

The Queen, my mother, would not plot  
or store these weapons.

She, her brothers, plotting?

All of this, all lies!

How ridiculous it is. I have to speak!

*“As far the—the government of England,”* I begin  
and twist the ring that marks me King.

*“I have great confidence Earl Rivers and Lord Grey...  
the Queen...”*

Uncle Richard laughs as if I speak in jest, and drowns me out.

“Women are not fit for ruling kingdoms, Sire,” Hastings hisses,  
snapping at his reins and shifting his horse square against my own  
to press me forward.

“I must caution you in this,” my uncle adds.

“All your confidence must lie with me, Lord Hastings,

and our men. And we will serve you well.

### **Reaching the Tower**

Now I'm championed forward, crushed by forces out of my control.

And in a most un-kinglike manner,

hang my head and think the sky will fall.

But it does not.

A small rain passes and we reach the Tower of London.

Are these Coronation rooms or just a cell

to hold me for the night?

Only time will tell.

## Captive

A plate of roasted meat, a candle by the bed...  
with these bright reassurances I'd take my rest  
except I try the door.  
And find it locked.  
So. I'm a prisoner,  
my puny words a tempo in my brain:  
*"I have great—confidence Earl Rivers and Lord Grey...  
the Queen..."*

And then I think of him, my father.  
Had he not been ill and died in bed,  
I would not be here,  
would not have to wear his ring.

Perhaps he got a chill from fishing,  
or a gout from eating too much fruit.  
A man who mended armies  
ought to mend himself  
but didn't.  
A sweeping hatred takes me.  
If it weren't for him  
I wouldn't be here.

Him and God.

*"I'll never die in bed,"* I tell myself.

## **Self Protection**

Thinking about all my enemies, I gather to myself  
the knife I dined with, hide it  
underneath the feather mattress,  
climb beneath the covers in my shirt.

Let them try to take me in my sleep,  
just let them try.  
Better to be ready like a man,  
than cowering  
like a boy in nightclothes.

## Bad Dreams

Waking early with my tooth ablaze,  
I use the garderobe, then listen to the footsteps  
back and forth outside my door  
and someone coughing.

Dreams from fitful sleep still cling  
like petals to a stamen, scenes of being carried out and in,  
beheaded, killed again.  
Dragged toward a giant vat of Malmsey wine,  
the fate that took my Uncle George fantastically presented,  
now a gory image in my dreams.  
He took an awful end.

Elizabeth, my eldest sister, has a remedy  
for nightmares.  
"Think of something else," she'd say.  
"And sew your disposition to it."  
She, of all them in Sanctuary,  
I miss the most.

What I would propose, if dreams came true,  
involves a new design  
of houses stitched together, sharing heat,  
long courtyards front and back for gardens,  
roof lines stretched for service, overhanging eaves.

This would be my choice of work instead of being King.

Carpenters do not make enemies. Or have to ride.

### **A New Room**

They have brought me breakfast:

    salty porridge, milk,  
    and tea.

I eat alone.

Then wait. Finally, I hear  
the heavy footsteps. Many men are coming.  
Breathlessly, I stagger to the bed.

Soldiers, just as I'd predicted.  
But surprisingly I'm not at risk.  
Instead they march me to another room more splendid.

*"When am I— to see my uncle?"*

No one bothers to reply.  
Once again the door is closed and locked.  
Still locked.  
And fitfully, the bone cage of my chest  
arrests a bird that, beating,  
hammers at my breath.

When finally I'm calm  
I notice that the tiles on the floor are glazed,  
the walls are freshly whitewashed.  
Above the fireplace a painting:  
Edward IV, his piercing eyes attest  
that once he held this kingdom in his grasp.  
"Now," he muses, "on to you."

But surely I'm to die here.

### **Small Escape**

In the chamber, light streams boldly through a double window.

Bars shed patterns on the floor.

Suddenly I think of zebras, resting here to take the sun.

I smile.

A single westward window frames the garden.

On its ledge a pigeon struts.

I shout with sudden energy:

*"I say, it's time to take the morning air!"*

**"I hear you, now, Your Highness,"** comes an answer.

To my surprise, the door swings open

towards a giant of a man. He bows.

*"If I am allowed,"* I say, and falter.

Should I not be louder, if I'm King?

***"I demand to see the garden!"*** There. I've said it.

And he waves me out.

So I advance.

## **In the Garden**

I taste a hint of summer in the breeze outside.  
Even though it's early June  
I notice flowers forced yet hardy.  
Delphiniums already staked  
are thickly blue, and burly sunflowers lean their elbows on the fence.  
The gardener here must know his ground.

Then my mind turns back to business.

Uncle Richard vowed to keep me safe,  
but prisoner?  
I explore the fence and try the gates. Impossible.  
Yet suddenly a sound awakens hope.  
The river's polishing its banks nearby.  
And where a river runs, are boats!  
And possibly, safe passage!

## Reunited With My Brother

I sit back against the stones and wonder  
how to save myself.

I think about my brother.  
Richard, Duke of York.  
Where is he now?  
He sometimes can predict the future.  
I hope he reads the sky and stays in Sanctuary.

A game we played with pebbles comes to mind.  
I'd hold a secret few of them in one closed fist  
and ask the question *Birds in hiding?*

He would guess their sum,  
the difference from the total kept as penalty,  
continuing the play until one meets the total loss of 30.

I often lost.

And just as if my thoughts have conjured him,  
he's here! The Duke of York, my little brother Richard  
pelts across the grass,  
    a child still in short pants,  
    hair a little longer than it was when last I saw him!

“*How so!*” I shout. “*Our Mother and our Sisters too?*”  
He grasps my hand.

## **Birds in the Bush**

"They stayed in Sanctuary, Edward," says my brother. "Only I am brought."

*"By Uncle Richard?"*

"Yes, the same. He told me to surprise you, and I have! But Edward  
what a journey! What a lark!

We crossed three drawbridges to get here! Three! And  
two of them right angles!"

He's just the same, old York.

Too loud.

Too talkative.

And I suddenly realize that  
two are captive  
in this bush, two birds are trapped instead of one.  
What folly to have sent him from the nest!

One by one  
our uncle's getting stronger.  
Circling toward the throne,  
he's closing in.

## Family Stories

York is full of news.

"Your Highness, Edward!

Liz'beth and Cecily are going. Mother said

to tell our uncle

they'll be sent away. I'm not exactly sure about the details but

Uncle looked quite scowl-y when I said it.

Truly, it is fine to be outside!

All that time in Sanctuary felt like ages!

Do you come outside here any time you like?"

I tell him no, that this is just the first day. Then I ask him:

*"Did the Queen have any message meant for me?"*

He shakes his head.

"But she was mad at Liz'beth."

*"Mad? Elizabeth is rarely false."*

"Liz'beth gave our uncle something.

*A/e* I think. And Mother took and smashed it  
on the hearth.

And sent him out. And later, sent me with him.

Cross as ever I have seen her.

Crosser than that time with

Father when he rode out with that servant. Pretty Lucy—”

**Nemesis**

I hush his talk of Lucy. No one knows of that, or should.

“Where our sisters go, I do not know.

But Mother’s friend—that Lady Stanley—

she was visiting one day...perhaps it’s she

who’ll be their benefactor? Edward—

look! Ten pebbles? Shall we play our *Game*?”

Just to humour him, we play it.

“Edward, now that you are king...” he says,

“Am I allowed to win?”

“*Of course,*” I tell him, frowning at his childishness.

“*But maybe not too often.*”

All through our game I think of it. The Lady Stanley,  
and her eldest son. One Henry Tudor.

Something of that Henry rankles me, a pebble in my shoe,  
my nemesis. Everything I’m not:

strapping strong, a horseman, sport,  
a scholar, well connected to his peers.

Red haired Henry Tudor.

And I wonder.

What is Lady Stanley’s business with my Mother?

## The Chrysalis

My brother finds an anthill,  
sits completely mesmerized.

I sigh and lie beside him.

Now he lifts a patch of earth, discovering a twisted looking lump.

"A chrysalis!" he says.

"A Large Blue Butterfly will  
come from there! When he was  
just a caterpillar, eating wild thyme, he  
squeezed a juice  
that called the ants!

They took him to this hill and milked him  
while he

hibernated. Then when he awoke,  
he ate the ant eggs and the larvae.

Hanging from the ceiling of the nest

he wove himself

into this

chrysalis."

*"York, you cannot know all this!"* I mutter.

"I do," he says, and strangely I believe him.

## The Pigeon

York leans against the window ledge.  
I see he's brought that chrysalis inside  
and left it in the evening sun.  
He turns toward our jailor:  
"What's your name?"

"Will Slaughter," says the giant  
and I swear he smiles,  
the first I've seen from him.  
I shiver.  
Does my brother see in him an enemy  
or friend?

The big man leaves.  
The key turns in the lock.  
I wonder...should I speak? A warning?  
But then I see that York has spied the pigeon at the window.  
"Oh," he says, and hurries towards it.

Wings beat hard inside my chest. I feel us  
trapped together, York and I.  
I won't let on. And let him have his fun.

He leans against the window  
and I swear he knows  
that pigeon as a friend.

### **More About the Pigeon**

And it's odd. The pigeon seems to know him back.  
It isn't possible, I realize,  
but sometimes children have a way with animals,  
have a game that looks like witch-craft  
yet it's make believe.

If I were not the wiser,  
I would say they spoke together,  
boy and bird.

But that is just preposterous  
and makes me look the fool.

I wish to God that I were only nine  
and spoke to birds in *my* imagination.

More than this,  
I wish that I were someone else entirely.  
Anyone--  
a commoner whose life is stretched out  
full of questions  
dips and turns.  
Not like mine:  
    a straight line to the throne  
    or else an empty page.

## Big Will

Big Will brings our evening meal  
and takes the lamp away.

He seems the only servant left to us  
within these prison walls.

Our only hope.

And yet our jailor.

Three days pass like this:

the pebble game; a ball to kick; a kind of tennis on the grass;  
then archery. The bows and arrows brought  
with fanfare, in a wooden case.

**“My fav’rit sport,”** Big Will announces. **“Is it yours?”**

I hear his soaring vowels,  
mark the voice of Wales among his blends.

“Our father wished it so,” says York.

“And yet I long for cricket.

Father banned it years ago, and said  
because it took away from archery  
it was not worthy.

Edward! Soon, when you are truly King,  
will you bring cricket back?”

My stomach lurches.

"And Edward, porridge? You could ban it too!"

### **Losing My Temper**

*"I command you, York, stop talking!*

*You are not to speak until we leave the garden."*

Somehow all his chattering will drive me mad.

And also now my tooth is aching.

Big Will merely watches us,

his dark eyes flickering

to here

and there,

ensuring, what?

That no one enters this captivity?

Or no one exits?

## Hearing the Truth

Finally my brother wakes to wonder  
why we two are kept.

I have no answer for him.

Big Will's slippery voice,  
the slide of Welshmen, beckoning us out,  
and in, but always there's a lock,  
a key,  
a coughing in the hall  
where someone's listening.

I ask my brother what he knows of us,  
our situation.

He pauses; when he speaks  
he does not meet my eye.

"I heard," says Richard in a sharp, clear voice,  
"there is to be no Coronation."

As I'd thought! If York is right  
then  
I am lost.

Or am I? Just because I am not crowned  
does not mean death.  
Or does it?

## **Pretending**

I do not know exactly what to tell him.

So I pretend surprise.

*“And where would you hear that?” I scoff.*

*“The walls? The tiles?”*

*Of course they must prepare, that takes some time,*

*and on that day I’ll wear the cloth of gold,*

*and lay my crown before the altar.*

*That is what will happen.*

*After the Te Deum*

*I’ll be raised, the Bishops offer me the oath.*

*And then it’s done.”*

I hope that Will is listening at our door.

He mustn’t know we worry.

If escape presents itself,

we must be ready

as with any war

the weapon of surprise

an asset.

## Confusion

At night we're brought our meal, as usual:  
white bread, cheese, salt pork, small ale.  
My stomach sick with urgency,  
    that tooth awake and burning in my cheek  
        I cannot eat.  
My thoughts buzz heavily like autumn flies.

Richard speaks of the Menagerie. We once attended it  
in this same keep, with Father.  
I'd forgotten.

**"Going there would never do,"** Big Will responds, but smiles at York.  
**"The lions, Prince, especially like to dine on royal children."**

My brother laughs, a hearty sound within these walls, and nods.  
**"Tomorrow we shall go there!"**

He is sounding more a king than I. And maybe...

But. The reason we are here means  
both of us will be deposed.  
His fate is less than mine, yet just as necessary  
if Uncle Richard wants the crown.

But does he?

## **The Murder of Lord Hastings**

It's early dawn, and York is at the window. Checking on that pigeon.

But suddenly a hub of voices draws us both.

We see a group of men. Lord Hastings in the middle,  
looking up, his white face glowing.

Then a movement from behind,

he's on his knees

and someone swings an ax.

We hear the sound.

It's steel on bone.

And while his body tumbles to the right,

his head is lost.

And then I see it

lying on a block of wood.

"Edward, should we yell?" my brother cries.

Then instantly we spy him. Uncle Richard.

Separating from the rest.

He's down there. This was his design.

*"I don't think we were meant to see,"* I say.

York is sick, immediately so.

My belly heavy, nothing there to lose,

I pat his back, then tuck him into bed.

Lord Hastings was a friend of Father's.

Now he's gone.

*Friday June 13.* I'll not forget this most unlucky day.

### **Hopelessness and Hope**

It's morning. York is in the bed,  
the covers pulled up tight.  
He could be dead or sleeping  
but for intermittent sounds  
of sobbing. I ignore him.

From his painting Father's eyes appear to follow me.  
Anywhere I am in this small room, he sees  
and measures. Whether lack of courage  
or of stature  
either way I disappoint.  
As always.

Then that blasted pigeon settles on our ledge.  
"Shoo," I nudge it through the bars.  
"Get off!"  
It flies and circles, stops once more.  
I prod it less than gently with the poker.

"Don't!" says York, awake. "Stop doing that!"

I jab again.

And then I hear the water. It's the Thames!  
And where there's water there are boats.  
Might the River save us after all?

## My Brother's Fears

Later, York confides his dreams.

"I was trying to escape him—but he always  
found me!"

*"Uncle Richard?"*

"No! Anne's father!"

*"What? Lord Mowbray? Why are you afraid of him?"* I ask.

*"You wedded Anne.*

*And he's your father-in-law."*

"But ever since Anne died, I'm heir to his estate. You  
understand. If someone knocked me dead,  
Lord Mowbray's lands  
could go to anyone Lord Mowbray pleased."

How just like York, to worry about something totally impossible.

Anne, a scrawny, mewling sort of little girl

had not been very likeable.

It's strange they married her to York

with both so young.

But marriages are business.

*"York, we are protected here.*

*Think not of Mowbray. Take some comfort.*

### **The Menagerie**

Today the giant leads the way  
to see the animals.

Perhaps he wants to take our minds off our confinement  
out of pity.

**“Remember what I said about the lions,”** Big Will tells us,  
winking.

York returns his grin.

The lion, in my memory a champion,  
lies behind a lattice, muscles slack.  
Watching him, I think his will is broken.  
He’s befriended by a dog who paces to and fro,  
sometimes nipping at his heels to make him stir.  
Despair. I see it in his eyes.  
And cannot bear it.

Furthermore, the smell in here is foul.  
Creatures lying in excrement  
cannot hold themselves with pride.  
And think of all the illness odors carry!

While my brother seems to whisper with the wolf,  
I contemplate the lion again.  
King of Beasts.  
And now a scrawny shadow.

I would build a yard for exercise.

### **Thinking About Captivity**

I'd fashion stairs to let that lion climb to other levels.

Channels in the upper cages could be made to take away the foulness.

Double cages would assist  
with pulley-operated doors.

While animals break fast in one  
adjoining quarters could be cleaned.

As these thoughts take wing, a hammer in my jaw begins,  
the tooth again  
and then my notions spiral into broodings.  
Useless now to plan such architecture.

What's the use of anything?

Something in my throat is dry,  
the feel of feathers  
tickling in my chest.

Just as this Menagerie holds captives,  
so it seems I'm tethered to a peg  
and twisted by a royal fate gone wrong.

## **The Pigeon Again**

I lie upon my bed  
while Richard checks the chrysalis  
then whistles for that pigeon,  
pushing crumbs between the bars.

*"You'll make a mess there when it rains,"* I call,  
my fever rising.

**"Look,"** he says. **"She takes them all."**

And then in my delirium the pigeon speaks to us,  
her voice familiar.  
She tells us to have courage, trust the planets.

*"What witchcraft, York!"* I cry.

I tumble into darkness, sweat and pain.  
My jaw is flaming hot.

When finally I rouse,  
another morning circles, clear and cool.

Goodness knows we need a guardian angel.  
Who won't look like a pigeon.

I slip back into sleep, for that is simpler.

## Signing Papers

Uncle Richard wakes me, calling “Sire, Sire!”

Sitting up in bed, I blink my eyes.

“Soon we’ll be away,” he says, “except for now

I need these papers signed and sealed. Might you be persuaded  
to oblige?”

“*Away?*” I mutter, barely comprehending.

“Your Coronation, Sire, happens goodly soon.”

“*Today?*” I ask. My voice is cracking.

“Oh, but not that swift,” he answers slyly,

sets the sheaf of papers in a pile,

prepares a candle for the wax.

“Your Highness, are you well?”

I overtake the table. Somehow things are going silly.

Vision swimming, here’s the documents,

the pen. I dip it into ink and form my name,

again, I write, again until it’s done,

the letters signed and sealed,

a ball of wax on each

imprinted with my ring.

## **Signing Anthony Away**

And then I sign the last of them.

But suddenly a name I recognize arrests me.

It's a deed to Anthony's domain—

position of Chief Butler

which he cherished.

Now Lord Lovell is to get it!

Traitor!

Am I turning on my kinfolk?

Anthony, Protector, must be dead.

That this deed is here...

it means my Uncle Anthony is gone.

My brother, unaware, is by the window.

I do not make a sound.

He's just a child. He cannot know about this

recent

dark

discovery.

## More Dreams

I'm building layer on layer of single dwellings.  
Instead of stairs,  
a common corridor conceals  
a room that raises, lowers occupants from floor to floor,  
and airily they're carried up and down.

When I wake, that pigeon's tapping at the glass.  
*Don't despair!* I hear the words as if...  
A pigeon, speaking?  
Now I must be raving mad.  
My face is burning, fever from my jaw is flooding everything.

I groan, I cannot help it.  
York is quickly at my side.  
"Guinevere is back!" he says. "She likes us!"

*"Guinevere? Don't tell me you have named that bird!  
I'd call it... Window Sniffer!"*

After this I'm tumbled into sleep  
and this time not so sweet.  
Men have died this season  
and for what?  
For me?  
But soon all will be silent.  
Death advances on its soft white feet.

## Fireflies

When I wake, it's dark and York is sitting by the window.

I stir. He talks of fireflies.

Fireflies!

He talks and talks and  
talks!

I can't believe one person  
has this great amount of talking in them  
bursting to get out!

"They're coming, Edward!"

"What?"

"The little lights."

I move on wobbly legs  
across the moonlit tiles.

He's right.

The fireflies have come, are lighting up  
the garden like a sky of stars.

"Make a wish!" my brother says,  
and even though we are too old for this,  
I do.

I touch the ring and press my hands together.  
Probably I should be thinking of my brother  
but somehow when the words come out

there aren't enough for both of us.

### **The Doctor**

In the morning Big Will bangs into the chamber.

**“Be quick,”** he calls. **“No lingering! It’s moving day!”**

Richard takes the chrysalis. I see him put it in his pocket

think of jeering at him

haven't got the strength.

Jaw too swollen, haven't eaten, maybe it will end

like this?

And then we're led into another room.

And there's...a woman. Someone new, to see us.

She pokes and prods while Big Will watches—

nervously, I think.

“Cannot be helped,” she says.

“We'll build his strength

with broth—can you find vegetables? An onion,

leeks, and turnips? Then soft foods—fish and almond milk...

...and boiled cabbage...”

“Build his strength for what?” York asks.

“The surgery,” she says, and smiles.

“That tooth has got to go.”

The doctor and Big Will confer.

## **A Real Plan**

I hear them speak in whispers, Big Will and the Doctor.  
Not about my tooth  
but something about troops. A northern stronghold, orders,  
something about Margaret.

Margaret Beaufort?

I remember Henry Tudor, tall and strong, her son.  
I remember when he beat me at a game of chess.  
Is he a friend  
or foe?

Later, drifting in and out of sleep,  
I hear my brother rattling on about the river.  
"You said that it will set us free," he says. "But  
Edward—I am sore afraid."

I am slipping, barely catch my brother's words:

"Remember, Edward! I've not learned to swim."

## **The Fire**

It seems a long time later when he wakes me.

"Outside! There! It's Liz'beth!"

I stumble to the window,  
stare against the current,  
thunder rolling by in heavy waves,  
and see them in the courtyard.  
Elizabeth, her long hair hanging loose  
red-gold against her shoulders,  
    him behind her on the horse.  
    Our Uncle.

*"Elizabeth?"* I say, incredulous.

*"Coming for my Corona—"*

I'm suddenly aware of smoke.  
Our uncle spurs the horse—  
    they gallop through an open gate.

"Fire!" someone yells.

We reach the door together, York and I.  
No matter how we push and kick  
it's locked.

"Will, Will Slaughter! Get us out of here!" York yells.

The smell of smoke gets stronger.

**The Panic**

*“Help!”* my voice is ragged, yet I scream again,  
each sound an agony.

*“Get us out!*

*Will!*

*Uncle!*

*Anyone!”*

I run from door to window,  
door  
to  
window.

*I will not die in bed, I think.*

*No matter what.*

Then—coughing in the corridor. A key turns in the lock.

And Big Will enters,

flings us clothes.

**“No time to talk, Lads! Wear these dresses and**

**I’ll see you safely out!**

**The bonnets too!”**

## **The Escape**

Pulling on the shifts, our eyes are streaming,  
soon we're in the hall, the ribbons dangling at my neck.

Pushing past us, Big Will drags a roll of quilts inside.  
I see him heave onto the bed what looks like—bodies!  
Two boys sized much like ourselves.  
But dead. Their skin amass with sores.

Suddenly I understand.  
This fire's planned to mask our exit,  
dresses to disguise us as we flee.  
I pull the gold ring from my finger, jam it deep into a pocket.  
*Edward's dead, I think. Long live...*

And then I push past Richard towards the stairs.

## **Section II: Fact or Fiction?**

### **On the Thames**

Pressed against the wooden bottom of a dory,  
I smell the brackish water sloshing at its sides,  
see the jointed masonry above as we are through the channel,  
then the sky  
and we are on the open water of the Thames.

York is with me.  
I remember pushing past him.  
Trying to save myself.

I try and speak.  
My lips and cheek are swollen, feverishly  
    pressed against the fishy boards.  
My hands and feet are cold.

### **Proclaiming the Plague**

Big Will rows while sweat drips down.

**“Let us pass!”** he calls. **“My daughters have the plague.  
Stay back!”**

Words return across the water:

“God be with you.”

I pull myself upright  
and see a fishing vessels and a trawler  
giving us wide berth.

My brother leans towards me.

“Edward, are you well?” he asks.

“Your Highness?”

*“Call me something else,”* I rasp.

*“A different name is  
altogether necessary.”*

Then I’m sick against the keel,  
my vision blurring,  
wondering who my enemies are  
and where they wait.

## **Rescue Boat**

When I see the big man tiring  
I try to take an oar but cannot lift it.  
Richard's bailing water from the bow.  
The current tugs and pulls.

And suddenly  
a bigger boat advances.  
"Throw your line!"  
And Big Will does.  
"My daughters..." he begins,  
and someone answers.  
"In the name of God,  
STAY BACK!"

I hold the gleaming masthead in my glance.  
A woman—witch? In bronze  
she seems to wink at me  
and then we're moving forward.

"**Couldna do it,**" says the Welshman,  
wiping at his brow.  
"**This wasn't in the plan, to row us all this way,  
but going back would spell disaster.**"

Calling to the other ship, he says,  
"**I'll pay ye for safe passage!**"

"STAY AWAY." The words are final.  
**Magic**

Then a drift of wings,  
a feather brushes past my cheek.

*A river...will this river set us free?*

**Westminster Abbey**

The sunset blazes as we clamber to the shore  
while the boat nudges against muddy reeds.

"I hope she's safe," says York. I don't know what he's yammering about  
and do not answer,

think again of how I struck him on the stairs.

To save myself.

And now

I grip his hand for steadiness, we trudge  
through bracken at the water's edge  
and brave our steps toward Westminster Abbey.

We walk until I'm spent.

I stumble and Big Will takes me up.

I call out to my brother.

*"Never leave me!*

*Do not leave me here!"*

"I promise!" Richard says.

My last thought before darkness blots my sense:

*Who will be here at the Abbey?*

*Mother? Sisters?*

*Or just the pair of us, in hiding...*

## **A Safe Place**

The sheets are burning hot around me.  
Where I am I cannot say,  
but it is small and plain, this room,  
no windows here.

I try and rise  
but weakness in my legs prevents me.  
Falling back against the pillow  
all I do is breathe  
and listen.

"We rowed into black water,  
through the Traitor's Gate!" Here, I know this voice!  
"Through Traitor's Gate! The water stank of weeds and  
lapped against the boat but Big Will  
oared us forward. When he tired  
someone came along and  
towed our boat upstream."

"Big Will?" a woman asks.

In truth!  
It is my mother! We are safe  
in Sanctuary!

"Will...Something. I forget his last name.

**Telling the Story**

“York!” I call. “Pay some attention!”

Instantly they’re at my bedside.

Mother, brother, sisters—even our Elizabeth is here.

“Slaughter,” I provide the name, and try to sit. “Will Slaughter!”

Anne, Katherine, and Bridget clamour at the bed.

And Cecily, taller than I remember, holds a moistened cloth.

“Give us room,” I pant, collapsing back against the pillow.

“Ale,” says Mother to Elizabeth. “And more cool water.”

“I was telling them about the journey,” York explains.

“And now we’re at the ending. At the last a friendly vessel

towed us all upstream,

and the tide was

coming in

and you, Edward, lay there

like a dead fish

in the bottom of the boat!”

“Hush,” says Mother. “Don’t tell tales about our King, your brother.”

“I was... *sleeping*,” I correct, and take a gulp of ale.

## **The End of the Story**

"He lay there  
like a dead fish  
in the bottom of the boat!" my brother says again.

"Hush!" the Queen responds.  
"We shouldn't speak of it!"

"But I'm not finished!" Richard says. "After that, the  
ship came near the Abbey but  
the bank was full of soldiers! Big Will rowed us past,  
and into marshy shallows,  
then we had to jump and wade. At least,  
I did. And Big Will waded  
while he carried Edward  
looking dead!"

*"I was sleeping!"*

"When we got here Edward wasn't waking up! And  
Big Will brought us to the Abbey, telling everyone we met  
his daughters have the plague  
and need a priest for blessing.  
People kept away!"

"It won't be long before you'll be discovered here."  
**The Queen's Plan**

The Queen looks hard at both of us.

"I'll think what we will do."

She reaches out and feels my forehead.

Her hand is icy cold.

"Herbs!" she shouts. "His fever must be broken."

*"The fire,"* I say,

and look at our Elizabeth.

"T'would have been your funeral pyre," Mother says.

"But God has saved you from your uncle."

"Uncle Richard was honorable!" Elizabeth responds.

"Just because you hate him doesn't mean that he's a murderer!"

*"In the fire..."* I try again. *"Two bodies..."*

"Indeed. That was to be your fate," our mother snaps.

"Your tutors have at least provided you with basic mathematics."

My meaning is adrift, but I must say it.

*"Two skeletons in ashes that are smaller than a man."*

"God in Heaven! Return him to his senses!" the Queen commands.

## **Surgery**

When I awake the doctor's here  
and spreading out her instruments across the bed.  
My mother calls her Dr. Argentine.  
It seems as if she's part of a design to help us travel.

"First the surgery," she says, surveying me with some precision.  
"Necessary to prevent imbalance, even death."

"*The surgery?*" I ask.

"Removing the infected tooth, Your Highness."

It hurts and someone holds my arms, another holds  
my legs. I yell and swallow blood until it's over.  
Then I'm forced to drink a bitter tea. The world swings back and forth.

"A summer tonic for the others," Dr. Argentine prescribes.

"Why?" asks Anne. "We're not yet into summer."

"You are missing sunlight, Little Girl.  
Inside it feels like winter all year long," the doctor says.

"I'm not a little girl, I'm almost nine!" says Anne.

"I'm four," says Katherine, holding up four fingers.

"I'm four," says Bridget, spitting out the bitter drink.

"You're not four, you're only three," Anne tells her, holding up three fingers.

### **About the Doctor**

"Where did you train for doctoring?" York asks.

The doctor answers, packing up her bag,

"I went to Oxford.

Luckily my family could pay the fees.

Not so for everyone, and more's the pity.

Modern medicine's the answer

contradicting stupid remedies.

No longer, for example, should we use a honey plaster

smeared with pigeon dung

for curing kidney stones."

Richard, perking up his ears at 'pigeon' asks her,

"What's the cure instead?"

"Well, it depends..." she says. "It's based on humours—  
blood, phlegm, black and yellow bile.

Depending on what's dominant, the cure is chosen.

But lithotomy is common."

"Lithotomy?" asks Richard.

"Cutting for the stones," she says.

"Then grinding them so they will pass more easily.

Of course, God as High Physician decides the final fate."

### **Richard's Dream**

"Someday I will be a doctor," Richard says.

"Nonsense," snaps our mother.  
"You are second to the throne.  
Your duties will be suited to your station."

Can it be that  
York has dreams he's never shared, as I have?  
Maybe York and I both  
    long for what is out of reach.  
    Then more's the pity.  
    He's as bound to royal servitude  
    as I am.

"I was just your age," the doctor says to him,  
"When Emily, my older sister, had a  
tooth like Edward's. What the doctor did  
was foolish. Held a candle to the tooth and hoped  
the worms would fall into a cup of water. Only twelve,  
my darling died of the infection."

Dr. Argentine glances fiercely at us.  
"Make sure Edward rests for now," she says.  
"And keep the swelling down.  
All will be well."

I see an envelope change hands from her to Mother.

### **Trusting the Stanleys?**

Mother reads the letter in the envelope and smiles.

"The plan is solid then," she says. "At dawn replacement soldiers come. And we'll escape this place."

"Which direction, Mother? North or south?" Elizabeth is asking.

"I'll not tell you, wretched girl! Riding out that way without permission!"

"I went to see my brothers! Uncle Richard promised me a visit!"

"For shame!" the Queen admonishes.

"Your uncle has no right to promise anything to you!

We trust Lord Stanley, only him!

And you must all remember that!"

What I remember is that Lady Stanley's son  
is somewhere in this greediness.

If ever there was one that looked a King, it's he.

So why would Lady Stanley side with us  
when someone in her own nest could be singing?

But I do not say it.

Mother's mind is set.

And if I am to change the road ahead,

I need to plan

in secret.

### **Bad Dreams**

"Hush," my mother says.

"Hush, Edward. It's the middle of the night!"

I hear a voice that's wailing out for mercy.

"We are not afraid," she hisses.

"Royals do not cry!"

I shut my mouth. She shakes my shoulders.

"Bear up, Edward! You are King  
and soon we'll all be back at court!"

"Anyone can be afraid." York's voice is small.

"In truth, a king can be afraid as anyone..."

"Stop it, Richard!" Mother's fury turns on him.

"And he thinks he talks to pigeons," I confess.  
And then I'm suddenly ashamed.

"I do!" says Richard.

*"Uncle Anthony... I'm sure he's dead!"* I say  
to try and make amends.

*"I dreamed it all again. I couldn't save them.*

*Kneeling there. I couldn't, Mother!*

*Now they're dead! And even Hastings!"*

### **Waking Nightmares**

*"Uncle Richard killed him!*

*Killed them all!"* I tell my mother.

"Hush!" she says.

It's over now!"

*"But I don't want to rule!"* I blurt.

So there. I've said it.

Press my hands together. How I shake.

She strikes me square against the jaw. I fall back, stunned.

My mouth is full of blood.

"You will!" she whispers fiercely. "Edward, you will rule!

It's in the stars. I'm certain of it!

And I'll be triumphant!

Mother of Kings!"

I feel the blood inside my throat and gag. The plural *kings* could only mean...

### **Escaping Sanctuary**

Richard's breathing steadily beside me.

I lie awake until the very early dawn.

And finally nudge him.

*“Richard? York?”* I ask.

He startles. **“What?”**

*“By the time our Mother rides  
we must be disappeared.”*

He doesn’t answer.

But I know he heard.

*“Richard? Stay here if you like  
but they will find you.  
And you understand about that, right?”*

I feel around and find our clothes.

I must make ready for the birds to fly  
whether Richard comes along  
or not.

I push my hand into a pocket,

find the ring.

still there.

And warming to my touch.

## **Section III On the Run**

### **To the River**

He's with me.  
First we struggle into pants and shirts,  
then dresses overtop  
and bonnets.

"Too tight!" my brother says.

"It makes me breathless, Edward."

*"Shshsh," I tell him. "Soon we'll be away,  
and if they search, two girls will disappear more easily."*

My jaw is aching  
and I wonder:  
Can we really leave this life behind?  
But York is at the door  
and so I follow.

Underfoot the grass is damp.  
My legs are shaking  
    as we slip towards the river,  
    careful to conceal ourselves in shadows  
    just in case the soldiers are patrolling.

Strange that none are now about  
but maybe if our uncle thinks us dead  
his troops are less particular.

**Mary**

"Which way do we go?" my brother asks.

"Your Highness!"

*“Hush,” I tell him. “Call me something else. A girl’s name.  
We’re two girls, remember?”*

**“Sorry, Ed—”**

*“Hush!” I say. “Don’t call me Edward. Call me...Mary. Mary!  
Don’t forget.”*

**“I won’t!” he says. “But who will I be?”**

### **And Rose**

“I don’t care what name you pick,” I answer. Full of talk  
and now he can’t come up with just one name?

"I could be... Elizabeth!" my brother says.

I shake my head. "You want a name  
that nobody connects to anyone, not  
Plantagenets, or Woodvilles, or the Rivers' family."

"Mary was our sister," York reminds. "So *she* connects..."

"Mary is a common name," I say.

"God rest our sister's silver soul.

So you'll be...Rose. All right?"

"All right," he says. "At least I keep the *R*."

We trudge through bushes to the water's edge,  
a thick mist hanging like a curtain waiting to be drawn.

If it were tight around us,  
would we disappear?

Wings just overhead, a pigeon vanishes,  
A feather drifts like smoke  
and points the way.

We might as well take its advice.

It's one direction                      or the other.

### **Luck and Liberty**

Hope runs through my veins.

We head along the water's edge

toward a blazing sunrise.

"Ring-a-ring-a roses, pocket full of posies," Richard sings.

His voice is high and sweet.

"Ashes, ashes, we all fall down."

"Hush," I tell him. "*Speaking of the plague is just bad luck.*"

"I know, your High—Edward. I mean, Mary!" Richard says.

"Mary—what's our last name?"

"*Something farmerish,*" I answer.

"*We'll say that we were... travelling...we lost our parents.*

*Now we're working our way home.*

*The name is...*

*Armstrong.*

*Mary and Rose Armstrong."*

## More Stories

"Armstrong... I remember that!" he says.

"That story of the armour bearer!"

Elizabeth once told me it.

A king's horse was killed in battle, then a man  
lifted the king onto his horse. The man  
used only one arm and from then on  
Armstrong was his name."

I wryly smile.

And think that if a name could bring us luck  
and liberty  
then this be it.

But this brave man, my namesake?

Nothing could be further from a match.

### **Into the River**

I hear cracking branches.

There are soldiers just behind

on horseback!

*"Step in the name of King Richard III!"*

Our Uncle? Named as King?

We run into the river,  
dresses billowing around us.

*"Girls!"* a soldier calls.

*"Come back!"*

But we don't listen.

First an arrow whizzes by  
and then another.

In the swirling mist  
the shoreline vanishes.  
We're out of sight!

But what of York?  
His head's below the surface,  
body thrashing.

*Remember, Edward,*

*I've not learned to swim!*

The words return too late.

**Drowning**

He's just beyond my reach  
and going deeper.

I tear away my dress  
and kick my legs  
my arms like windmills, beating towards him.  
Finally I grab him

and he grabs me back, a desperate bid for air,  
he climbs on top, we're rolling in the current.

I can't  
breathe  
like  
this.

It's like a hundred horses under only worse.

Can't breathe.

Need

air.

**In the Current**

One last try. I shove at him and push him off.

He's clawing back.

I grab him with one hand,

hitting with the other

and his head jerks back

eyes closed.

I've done it.

Knocked him out.

I kick to keep afloat

and hold him,

keep his head above the surface

as I make for shore.

The current jostles, tugs.

I taste the salt

and worry that we're heading out to sea.

My legs are weak.

And Richard's head is slipping.

Water rises over.

But furious, I won't give up!

It's both or none!

And then I touch a sandbar.

Desperate relief.

I drag him out

and lay him on his side,

and then fall back                      exhausted.

### **Terror**

His hands are icy cold, his face is white.

I thump his back, it doesn't help.

I don't know what I'll do if Richard does not wake.  
It's all my fault; I knew he couldn't swim.

I thump his back, it doesn't help.  
His lips are blue and I don't think he's breathing.  
It's all my fault. I knew he couldn't swim.  
I try and pray to God but he's not listening.

I feel my heart again, a captive bird.  
I don't know how to make this horror right.  
I pound him on the back, it has to work!  
Oh please, dear God, please let him live!

I pound him on the back, it has to work!  
I don't know what I'll do if Richard does not wake.  
Oh please, dear God, please let him live!  
His hands are icy cold, his face is white.

*"York!"* I whimper, falling to my knees  
when weakness overtakes me.

### **On the Shore**

"Edward. Edward! Are you dead?"

In my dream his voice is sharp and clear.

"Edward!

I mean, Mary!"

Opening my eyes, I meet my brother's frantic gaze.

"I thought that you were dead!" he says, and then

"And Mary, I've a massive headache."

Now I cannot speak. I'd thought that he was gone and everything our father ever said of me was true.

"*Onward,*" I say finally, looking out across the sandbar.

"*Here we're sitting ducks.*"

## **Trust**

"Maybe when the tide..." he starts. I shake my head.

“No. Now.” I lead him to the water’s edge.

“But I can’t swim!” he says.

*“I know. But Richard, I will help you. If you trust me.”*

“I’ve—I’ll try,” he says. “But I’ve a massive headache. Someone hit me.

Mother—I remember now! She hit me  
in the forehead!”

*“I hit you,” I confess. “I had to do it. You were drowning me.  
So just stay calm. And no more flailing.”*

“I’ll try,” he says again.

Pushing off

I feel him tense against me and

I let the current help us,

kicking out to navigate.

At last we reach the shore

and rest a minute.

Then take stock.

Without the dress, I need another name.

*“You’ll have to call me Jack,” I tell him.*

**In Disguise**

*“But you’re still Rose,” I say.*

And then I see just how he’s covered face to foot

in mud and sea slime. Try to keep the laughter in.  
A rose he's surely not.

"It's not funny that I have to be the girl," says Richard crossly.

"Never mind," I tell him. "*It's a great illusion.*  
*Didn't any of King Arthur's knights go in disguise?"*

"Yes, but it was armour. Never dresses!"

## **Journey Forward**

I see that pigeon strutting just ahead of us

and leaving footprints in the mud.

"Guinevere! You found us!" York's delighted.

"Oh Edward, I was worried she was burned  
or lost! But she is safe!"

I look at him, his bonnet laced with mud,  
the ribbons dragging dolefully  
and start to laugh.

"You've named it...Guinevere?" I chortle.

"Edward—

—Jack! I think she knows the way!"

A pigeon, leading us to safety?  
*Stranger things, I think, have come to pass.*

*"You really think so?"*

"Maybe..." Richard gives a pasty smile.

"But maybe not..."

Still, we follow.

### **More Stories**

Slower.

Slower.

Slower still my brother walks.

*“What about a story?”*

*What about Tristan and Isolde?”* I ask.

“Uncle Richard gave a book of that  
to Liz’beth. For her birthday,” he murmurs.

Uncle Richard, giving our Elizabeth  
these stories? Taking our Elizabeth  
out riding?

Clearly he is thinking of her dearly.

Thinking of Elizabeth while Anne, his sickly wife,  
is resting, drinking honeysuckle.

“Tell it, Edward. Jack!”

At least he has some energy returned.

And so I tell the whole romance.

### **York’s Regrets**

“I wish I hadn’t married Anne,” blurts Richard.

*“Well... never mind,”* I say.

"People shouldn't marry when  
they're children.

I was—how old?"

"*Four,*" I tell him.

"*Four. And already a husband.*"

"*Now a widower,*" I tell him.

"Lord Mowbray's lands at *Greenwich* are bequeathed to me.  
But truly, brother, I don't want them!"

Greenwich? Now I look around and start to worry.  
This place is just a bit familiar...

### **Through the Woods**

On we walk,  
with Guinevere a constant shadow flying overhead.

"You'd make a good king, Edw—Jack!"

My brother looks me in the eye.

"No," I say. *"And anyways,  
I think you're saying that because...  
because you are my sister!"*

Richard scowls.

"Why am I the only one  
to wear a dress?"

We trudge along in silence.

And suddenly we meet a group of men  
intent on partridges that scare at our approach.

Although the guns are raised and fired,  
no birds fall.

The pigeon disappears.

That Window Sniffer, going when the going's good.

"What are you two doing here?" The leader's voice is rough.

### **Salmon Fishing**

A question for a question is my only strategy.

*"What is it that you're hunting, goodly Sir?"* I ask.

"Did you not see the partridges?" he says.

"And is that not your reason here for trespassing?"

*"We're on the way to market,"* I respond.

*"My sister thought she saw a salmon in the stream  
and tried to get a closer look. And now we've lost the way."*

"More than one of them has been in swimming," says another man.

"I warrant it was salmon *poaching* they were up to!"

*"No!"* I say. *"She really likes them, don't you, Rose?"*

*She thinks of them with fondness!*

*Talks to them sometimes!"*

Richard doesn't answer and I jab him in the ribs.

"Ow! Oh yes, I like them well enough!" he shrills. "To study!"

"A little scientist!" Their laughter peals.

"Go west to reach the market," says the first man, pointing.

"What is it you're after on a day so fine for hunting?"

"Handkerchiefs," my brother squeals.

### **Palace of Placentia**

"I recognized that man," my brother says

when we are out of earshot.

And then we see it.

Beautiful Placentia,  
the palace rising pale above the trees.

"The Mowbray home!" my brother cries.  
"I knew it! I was here to visit Anne.  
And in this garden we played Hide and Seek  
and she kept winning."

"Are you sure?" I ask him.

"We cannot be here!" my brother says.  
And then I hear them.  
Men with guns.  
Only one thing left to do.  
We do it.  
Scramble in the opposite direction.

### **Greenwich Market**

And soon we're lost.  
My lips are dry as sand.  
I plunge my hand into a pocket,  
    find the ring.

But nothing useful.

We finally stumble on the lane

that takes us into Greenwich.

There is a market here

where we can beg for water.

An owlsh woman blinking by a wagon

offers us a crust of bread. We split it, sit,

and chew. It hurts my ragged gums.

"Thank you kindly," Richard says.

"You baked this bread yourself?"

She hoots a mirthless laugh.

"There was a time when we could bake our own but now  
we're forced to buy it from the lord's own oven."

Then she pours us water, watching carefully.

"You've not got Plague?" she questions.

*"No, my—sister's had a fall, and we are lost,"* I say.

"Is that the truth?" she asks.

### **Adding Lies**

"We've lost our parents," Richard tells the woman.

"Dead?" she asks. He nods and then I kick him.

"None of that!" The woman takes my arm. "Your sister needs to rest.  
And then another drink before she faints.  
Poor lass, what took your parents?"

"Drowning," Richard sputters. "In the Thames!  
And now we've got to find our relatives'."

The woman pats his collar, fingering the lace.

"Such fine apparel you are wearing, dear.  
Your kin will be so grateful that you're found."  
She smiles a toothless smile.

"Where is it you're headed?"

"*Gray*—" I start, composing somewhere far.

"Gravesend! Well, we've a daughter there!  
And that's at least a two day's walk!"

She smiles wider.

"When our Duck is back we'll take you home.  
And later in the week we will to Gravesend!"

### **The Herdsmans' Farm**

"You'll note the house and byre to be separate,"  
Mrs. Herdsman says, and spits.  
"Not everyone has luxury like this!  
Although we miss their heat, when it gets cold,

the sheep are better off back there.”

Her husband, Duck, a quiet man  
just tips his hat when Richard offers thanks.  
“Tomorrow Jack can help me with the shearing.  
That is thanks enough,” he says.

Soon there’s pottage, made with bits of veal.  
And we are bedded down before the fire.  
Mrs. Herdsman brings an extra quilt.  
“For Rose, my dear, because the nights are cool.”

The next day, when I wake,  
the house is quiet.  
I use the outside privy, then I look around.  
Richard’s slowly carding piles of wool  
while Mrs. Herdsman and her husband shear.

“Ah there you are!” says Duck, and looks so grateful  
that I cannot help but feel ashamed.

Much later when I have a word alone with York, I say,  
*“We’ll wait until they sleep  
and steal away.”*

### **Brothers Divided**

Richard shakes his head.  
“I like it here,” he says.  
“You go on without me, Edward. Jack.  
You’re better off. And I can be a farmer.”

*"You're a girl!"* I tell him.

"That won't matter, Edward.

I can tell them once you're safe away.

I'll say our parents died, that's partly true.

And that we thought a girl would get more sympathy."

He looks so eager to be rid of me

it makes me mad.

And anyways, I see that he's their favorite.

He's always been the favorite.

Maybe he would do better on his own.

### **On the Road Again**

I wait until the house is sleeping quiet.

Then I rise.

York stirs and wakes

but will not change his mind.

So stubborn!  
He's a fool to make this choice  
I head out into moonlight  
wondering.

Should I have left him?

Owls hoot from nearby trees  
then distant others answer.  
Perhaps there's owl brothers in this night  
communicating thus.  
Were that were us.

Suddenly I hear the throb of hooves.  
I hit the ditch  
and lie there, in the weeds.  
A frenzied horse bursts past,  
its rider spurring.  
I would know him anywhere.  
Others follow,  
soldiers, by their dress.

“Stop at every farm!” my uncle Richard calls.

### **Lost and Found**

Crossroads up ahead.  
I smell the river, turn towards it  
dizzily, my body hot and aching  
in the swell of grief about my brother.

Soon I see a building.  
Smaller than a castle, just as sturdy.  
Things begin to spin, I see a door, and hammer on it.  
Sway.  
And fall

Burning hot,  
I'm once again in bed.  
And there's a cup tipped to my lips.

"Yarrow," says a low, deep voice.  
"For fever."

Spinning into sleep  
I've nothing to hang on to  
in this small, plain room.  
Nothing to sustain me  
but my anger.

*"York, you should have come with me,"*  
I whisper.

## **Waking**

Sometime later on  
I wake.  
The monk who took me in  
is followed by another taller man who's  
carrying a tray with porridge.

I think how Richard hates the stuff.

*“What is this place?”* I mumble.

“Danfield Monastery, of course,” replies the taller monk.

“And are you here to stay?”

*“I—no,”* I stammer. *“Thank you, but I—  
have another path.”*

“I should have asked your name last night,” the shorter monk inquires.

*“It’s Jack,”* I say. *“Jack Armstrong.”*

“Well, Jack Armstrong, eat your fill. Then Brother Edward here will take you to your work.”

*“Brother Edward?”*

“You’re assigned the wood pile,” the taller monk replies.

“There’s lots of chopping to be done. If you are well?”

My mouth feels better and the fever’s gone. I nod.

### **Squirrels, Girls and Harps**

Suddenly a squirrel runs overtop the coverlet.

“Hungry thing,” says Brother Edward. “Didn’t Brother Albert feed you?”

*"It's—you have a squirrel?"* I ask.

"It's better than that monkey Brother Martin had.  
That creature smelled so rank. Especially during Matins!"

I laugh. This isn't what I think of when I think of monasteries.

*"Are we near Placentia?"* I ask.

"Affirmative. It's just a little further south.  
Is that where you are headed?"

*"Oh, well..."* I stammer.

*"...Used to know someone from there, is all,"* I tell him finally.

*"I am headed north."*

"A lass, no doubt," says Brother Edward, winking at me.

"Well, she won't be here. The last girl here  
stole bread in broad daylight.

She was a wandering harp player  
and since then the Abbot has forbidden girls  
and harps in Danford Abbey."

### **Loss**

Soon enough, I'm on the road again,  
a packet filled with bread and cheese for supper.

"You're better off without me," Richard said.

But what of him?

Do I not owe him anything,

my brother?

But no doubt it's too late.

Our uncle's men

have surely found him.

Now he's gone.

And I'm alone.

I trudge towards the river.

Misty rain is falling

and I rub a sleeve across my eyes.

Another farmer here might take me in.

A traveller.

Not so strong.

But getting stronger!

Trying not to think of who I've left behind.

And what's befallen him.

## **Reunited**

And then I turn to see a figure on the road behind.

He's walking toward me steadily.

I feel a chill of fear

and then I see that it's a child.

A girl.

It's—

Richard's running toward me!

"York!" I split the gap and catch him up and swing him.

"York, what say you?"

"Hello, Jack," he says.

"But you can call me Rose."

"What then has happened?"

"They gave up on me," he says. "The soldiers searched last night, and while the Herdmans kept me safe, they didn't want a permanent addition.

It was all about reward

from our rich relatives.

When I said we had none,

that no-one wanted us in this wide world,

that did the trick."

"I'm-- glad to see you, York, or Rose, or any name you like!" I say.

### **The Pigeon Returns**

And on we walk,

every now and then that pigeon

coasting over.

"Window Sniffer," I suggest,

"is finally good for something.

*Seems it knows the way we need to travel."*

"Somewhere we can work?" my brother asks.

I nod.

And as I do, there's something in me shadowy and small  
begins to stretch.

The lion.

Reaching out its paws  
to hug my brother.

## **Transformation**

"Wait! It's hatching!" Richard cries.

My brother stops and feels inside a pocket,  
gently lays the chrysalis  
against a leafy branch  
and waits.

*"I can't believe you saved that thing,"* I say.

He grins.

Legs first,  
    then feelers,  
        bit by bit  
a butterfly is trying to free itself.  
I feel a prayer against my lips.

And finally it's fully out.  
And then another! "*Twins!*" I breathe.

"That isn't possible," says Richard.  
"Brothers, though.  
Two Large Blue Butterflies."

We watch them. And I'm awed  
to see this transformation.  
    Thinking it impossible,  
    yet possible.  
    God listening after all.

### **The Cave**

Night is falling and we're on the road.  
"*Keep watching for a place to rest,*" I say.  
"*We cannot risk the dark.*  
*Or stay out unprotected.*"

As if in answer, Guinevere darts up and to the right  
and disappears across a ledge.

We follow. It is steeper than I thought,  
with rocks that crumble underfoot.

But in the end  
we reach a cave,  
its corners full of wings.

"It's pipistrelles!" York says.

"In hundreds!"

*"What strange birds, that roost in caves!"*

"Not birds!" he tells me.

"Bats!"

I back away.

"And one of these can eat 3000 insects  
in a single night.  
A single night!"

### **Glow Worms**

I turn toward the walls  
and see the surface, glowing.

*"What—" I begin. "Are fireflies...?"*

"They're glow worms!" Richard crows.

"The blinking ones are larvae and

the others adult females.

And they live for only

fourteen days!"

*"We're ancient, in comparison!"* I say

and feel the richness of my life

in contrast.

We huddle there together in the damp.

The hours creep past.

## **Soldiers**

In the morning, Richard's eyes are dark with circles.

Guinevere is at his feet.

She likes him best.

"Are you still speaking to that stupid bird?" I snort.

"Shshsh," he says. "You'll make her fly."

And then I hear it. Something pounding towards us.  
Horses. Hooves on solid earth  
and moving closer  
every second.

### **Saving Richard**

The soldiers, riding up the slope!  
I curse myself for my stupidity!  
While we can't instantly be seen...  
Our backs are to the stones, there's no escape.

I curse myself for my stupidity!  
My brother's life is hanging in the balance.  
While we can't instantly be seen...

We're soon to be discovered here.

My brother's life is hanging in the balance.  
I turn to him, a few words now is all I have.  
We're soon to be discovered here.  
And with these words I try to make him listen.

I turn to him, a few words now is all I have.  
The soldiers, riding up the slope!  
And with these words I try to make him listen.  
While we can't instantly be seen...

### **Eye on the Prize**

I turn and see my uncle in the entrance of the cave.  
He's standing there.  
And calculating.

“Here!” I roar. “There's something that you want!”  
I open up my hand to show the ring.  
He sees it, reaches,  
                    crashes forward

in his eagerness.

I fling it out towards the sunlight.

A whirl of wings, and Guinevere has caught it.

Now she's beating up towards the sun.

"Take it to Elizabeth!" I call,

and in that moment

using all my strength

I heave my brother up

into the

rocky

crevasse

of the cave.

Make sure he's safe.

And try to follow.

Nothing like the boy my father thought he knew.

### **Section III: Home Free**

#### **Afterward**

I'm lying on a patch of grass. I feel it in my fingers.

Some past self reminds me not to look,

to stay asleep.

And so I do.

Someone says  
"No worries.  
He'll awaken soon."

And pats my cheek.

### **God is With Me**

I'm lying on the grass.  
Sunshine warms my face.  
I reach into my pocket,  
then remember.  
That it's gone.  
The ring is gone.

I blink and look up.  
Into brightness.

“Oh!” I gasp.

I look directly into light.  
And there  
just waiting for me  
are my dreams.

THE END

### *Author's Note*

*The train is stuffy.*

*As we hurtle through the tunnel  
I'm reminded of their life,  
their story.*

*“Next stop, Tower Hill,” my husband says.*

*The intercom commands us "Mind the gap."*

*We exit into gray,  
the drab air of a Sunday afternoon in London.  
Crossing in the lines,  
I see the stone wall  
separating past and present.*

*My husband buys a ticket, wanders in to join the tour.  
I choose a bench outside,  
a vantage point to wait and watch  
the Tower visitors.*

*A crumpled paper underfoot tells history of this place.*

**"Begun in 1078 by William Conqueror,  
it's been a royal palace, fortress, prison,  
place of execution, mint and arsenal, menagerie,  
and jewel house."**

*So much more this flyer doesn't tell. I sit and ponder  
everything  
unsaid.*

*A Large Blue Butterfly skims against the sky  
and drops against my sleeve.  
I smile.*

*The creature opens filmy wings,  
and lifts.*

*Against the sky, the butterfly is sapphire,  
eye level for a moment  
and then  
gone.*

*But left behind—  
this story.*

### **Author's Historical Note**

The mystery of the Princes in the Tower has intrigued me since I came upon it while I was in London researching a previous novel, *Falling for Henry*. I discovered that twelve-year-old King Edward V and his nine-year-old brother Richard were imprisoned in the Tower of London by their Uncle Richard during the spring and summer of 1483. There is still some debate about what really happened to the two boys, and a few people believe that they did somehow escape and make secret lives for themselves in England. I hope in my heart that this is true, and that the princes found a way towards freedom, and a happy future. My story allows this to happen, and I

have found that reconstructing history towards a happy ending, fictional though it may be, is a very satisfying pastime.

Some historians think that Edward and Richard's Uncle Richard killed them to ensure the crown for himself, thus engineering his own coronation as King Richard III, and this is the heart of Shakespeare's famous play *Richard III*. Other historians point fingers at other potential enemies who may have preferred the princes dead to alive. These include: Lord Mowbray, Margaret Beaufort and her husband Lord Stanley, and Margaret's son Henry. This Henry in reality defeated King Richard III in battle, becoming King Henry VII, and it was Henry VII and Edward's older sister Elizabeth who became the parents of the prince who would someday be the notorious Henry VIII.

Through this work of fiction I have taken artistic license with facts and details. While including some historically accurate information, a number of things have been changed for the sake of what I hope is an entertaining story. The first of these is the timeline. While the real story of the princes in the Tower unfolded over a period of months, from May to October, 1483, my story, for adventure's sake, occurs over a period of days. Another liberty I have taken is presenting Dr. Argentine, a doctor who attended Edward V in the Tower of London, as a female. Contrary to popular opinion, there were Oxford educated women doctors in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and because I wanted to highlight this, I've changed the real Dr. Argentine's gender, trusting that it is too late for him to register a complaint. As for the magical realism in the story...your guess is as good as mine whether these sections are true...or not...

### Suggested Reading

When looking for the necessary history to begin this book, I did a lot of reading. Two books both named *The Princes in the Tower*, one by Alison Weir and the other by Elizabeth Jenkins, offered helpful facts. Also informative were Peter Lane's *The Middle Ages*, Edward Impey & Geoffrey Parnell's *The Tower of London*, and two volumes called *Westminster Abbey*: one by Edward Carpenter & David Gentleman, the other by Richard Jenkyns. *The World of King Arthur and His Court* by Kevin Crossley-Holland offers further reading about King Arthur and the knights of the

round table and would have been a favourite of young Richard's had he the chance to read it. A lovely fiction novel called *The Daughter of Time* by Josephine Tey offers a detailed examination of the various theories of the princes in the Tower. Perhaps you will find other interesting connections! For photos and other details related to the writing of this book, please see: [www.beverleybrenna.com](http://www.beverleybrenna.com).

### **Acknowledgements**

Gratitude to the University of Saskatchewan for the sabbatical during which this verse novel was crafted. Thanks for the excellent advice of Aiden McCrorie-Wilson, Taylor Piece, and Kieran McKercher regarding a much earlier narrative draft of this manuscript. Thanks also to my friends and family for their ongoing love and support. A special thanks to Dwayne for his love of history.