

KING'S GAMES  
by Nance Crawford

Excerpt from Act I

*Crosby Place, London  
Late May, 1483*

**RICHARD**, Duke of Gloucester, named Lord Protector in the Will of his late brother, Edward IV, has taken custody of his young nephew, Edward, with the help of his cousin, HARRY Stafford, Duke of Buckingham. In conference with Robert STILLINGTON, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, he is interrupted by Francis, Viscount **LOVELL**, who has returned from seeing the Dowager Queen, Elizabeth (nee Woodville), who has fled into sanctuary at Westminster with her other children.

STILLINGTON

You've given it much thought.

RICHARD

How could I not?  
It's hardly left my mind.

STILLINGTON

Nor mine, my lord.  
I've prayed on it for years.

RICHARD

So you have said. And now it comes to me.

STILLINGTON

The queen, my lord, is leaving you no choice.  
You cannot doubt she'll do all that she may  
To influence her son against your writ.  
Her husband's Will means nothing to her now.  
She does not want you governing her son.

RICHARD

Her husband's Will is written in his blood,  
In blood we shared, that I share with her son.

STILLINGTON

And you evade the question.

RICHARD

I do not.  
My brother's Will confines me to his rule.  
I've always been Ned's man, whatever came,  
And now he's gone I cannot shame his trust.

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STILLINGTON

You must not shame your own before the Lord.

(A brief knock at the door, and LOVELL enters,  
ULC, bows, then kneels to kiss Stillington's  
ring.)

RICHARD

So, you have seen her, Francis?

LOVELL

Yes, my lord.

RICHARD

And?

LOVELL

And she will stand her ground. She'll not be moved.  
She knows she's safe, inside Westminster's walls.

RICHARD

The woman's safe wherever she may stand  
Or sit or lie. She's mother to the king.  
Who'd dare to harm her?

LOVELL

(Sarcasm:)  
I am told she fears.

RICHARD

She's known me twenty years! If she's afraid,  
She fears her conscience, seeing all the world  
Exactly as she knows herself to be.  
But tell me of the children? How are they?

LOVELL

I asked, but was not given leave to see,  
Though told, in passing, that young Richard's ill.

RICHARD

Has he a doctor?

LOVELL

Yes.

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STILLINGTON

And more than one.  
He lives in state, his mother saw to that,  
As do they all, for on the day they fled,  
Their progress into Church stopped traffic dead.  
The wall that blocked the way into the close  
Provided gaping access for their goods,  
Once she had ordered it to be torn down.  
Sanctuary is become most regal,  
With all her Household moved within its walls.  
The monks are all astir; it's not repaired.  
Westminster's clanging more with spite than prayers.

RICHARD

It's time there is an end.  
(To LOVELL)  
What did she say?

LOVELL

As little as she could. In fact, she turned  
Away when I declaimed your kind regard.  
She said she never knew you had such wit.  
She'd kept me waiting while she ate her meal,  
Then left me standing on my knees, throughout.  
I've never liked her much. I like her less.

RICHARD

The king has asked to see her. Does she know?

LOVELL

Oh, yes, of course. She will not stir abroad.  
I told her that her freedom was her own,  
That she is free to leave Westminster now,  
To join him at the Tower, in estate.  
She said she dared not, she was safest there.

RICHARD

The woman is a termagant, I swear!

LOVELL

She thinks as much of you.

RICHARD

She doesn't think!  
She lives upon her instincts and her spite.

LOVELL

The Tower most concerned her. She was vexed.  
I told her that the council did debate,  
Did choose the Bishop's Palace for the king,  
But Buckingham, applying all his charm,  
Insisted that the Tower is the place  
Of greatest regal dignity, and won.  
As I have said, I said again, once more:  
I told her she was free to join him there.

RICHARD

And her reply?

LOVELL

High scorn and looks to kill.  
She raked me with her eyes and took her leave.

STILLINGTON

She does not want to see him, not at all?

LOVELL

We all must guess. She didn't say to me.

RICHARD

She is his mother, mother of the king.

STILLINGTON

I think, my lord, that's best to keep in mind.  
If I might have a further, private, word?

RICHARD

Yes. Francis, you may go.

LOVELL

I did my best.

RICHARD

I know. So must we all.

LOVELL

Good day, my lords.  
(HE bows and exits, C.)

STILLINGTON

What manner of reply did you expect?

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RICHARD  
Anticipating nothing, I had hoped.

STILLINGTON  
What? That the tigress' stripes would turn to spots?

RICHARD  
We're taught in Church that no prayer is in vain.

STILLINGTON  
We also learn that asking God for wine  
That's pressed from poison tempts the Blesséd Lord  
To show us our own worthless vanity.  
Which brings me to my point. There is much more.  
Consider, sir, the temper of the queen:  
One-half her temper lives within her child.

RICHARD  
It hasn't shown itself to me, at all.  
It might have, when we stopped them on the road.  
He's still said nothing of that day to me.

STILLINGTON  
The crafty young, they bide. He knows he's king.

RICHARD  
He's known that it would come.

STILLINGTON  
Since he drew breath,  
But not so soon. And that's the question now.  
What if he has his mother's temperament?  
If it lies dormant, now, then springs to life  
When he is crowned - You trust the realm to that?

RICHARD  
He's but a boy.

STILLINGTON  
And past the age to mold.  
He's only half his father but which half  
Is still unknown. It matters not at all  
Whom he may grow to be, not in the Law.  
We've not discussed those consequences, sir.

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RICHARD

I am inclined to trust the Will of God  
Has placed us on the proper path.

STILLINGTON

Suppose  
That, in His greater Wisdom, He's revealed  
A different road that He desires you  
To take, now. If He'd wanted none to know,  
He'd long ago have called me home to Him,  
For none were wiser if my tongue were stilled.  
Without me, why, there is no proof at all.  
I am the single witness left to tell.

(Beat.)

I told one other man, whilst in my cups.  
And he's no more.

RICHARD

You told another this?

STILLINGTON

I whispered into ears I thought discrete,  
But ears attach to mouths, and mouths too filled  
With drink will bubble truth without remorse.

RICHARD

Who was it that you told? Whom did you tell?

STILLINGTON

Nine years have passed since I forgot myself,  
Your brother, sir, I told your brother, George.  
And Clarence found it far too rich to hold.

RICHARD

Sweet love of God, you told this tale to George?

STILLINGTON

My grievous fault, oh, my most grievous fault.

RICHARD

I'll have no riddles, Stillington, speak plain!

STILLINGTON

Are you so blind? What riddle do you hear?  
Regard what happened to your brother, George:

## STILLINGTON (Continued)

Count all the other games that Clarence played,  
To wrest the throne from Edward in the past.  
They were far more often treason, were they not?  
Your brother pardoned him so many times, before,  
Until that last, and that's the reason why!  
For what? I'll say, "for what," because it came  
To haunt me daily that I'd so misjudged;  
He must have let it slip to someone else.  
That someone used it to regale the king.

## RICHARD

How could that be?

## STILLINGTON

You know it must be so!  
What other reason could the Woodvilles have  
To fear a man they knew a worthless drunk?  
He had to die because he knew too much!

## RICHARD

Then why not you? Good God, Ned must have known  
That George's knowledge had to come from you.

## STILLINGTON

What could he do to me? Oh, mercy, no.  
A promise made in secret, not confessed,  
Was hanging in the air above his head.  
He kept his wits, he knew it might come out.  
Nor did he need a Becket on his soul.  
Not even he, for all his rage, could move  
Against my life. Instead, I was locked up  
And no one knew the reason for it, then.

## RICHARD

I knew you were confined. I never thought —

## STILLINGTON

Oh, I did, and I knew he must relent.  
I found I was a man and not a saint,  
And lived upon my knees and prayed until  
The path that I need take was shown to me.  
When next he came, alone, to test me out,  
I gave my pledge and swore to keep my peace.  
And now I must abjure my perjury.

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(Two sharp knocks at the door, C.)

RICHARD

Yes, enter.

HARRY

(Enters, ULC, bows.)

Richard - ah, I interrupt -

RICHARD

No, Harry, stay.

(HARRY kisses Stillington's ring.)

RICHARD (Continued)

You tell him, Stillington.

(To HARRY)

It's time you know what's burdened me for days.

HARRY

I'm flattered and all ears.

RICHARD

This is no jest.

The Bishop brought me word of it, last week

(HARRY gives STILLINGTON his full attention;  
STILLINGTON stares back, then:)

STILLINGTON

For twenty years I've kept a secret vow -  
But vows to hide a truth that flaunts the Law  
Cannot be binding in the eyes of God.

(Beat)

The children of Bess Woodville and the king,  
God grant him peace, are illegitimate.

HARRY

You're mad.

STILLINGTON

A sworn betrothal binds for life,  
In Canon of the Church and civil law.  
King Edward was betrothed, was promised forth,  
Was wed! When he espoused Elizabeth.



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HARRY

God's Blood Above, how came you by this tale?

STILLINGTON

I was the single witness, to the deed.

HARRY

Can this be proved? My God, who was the girl?

STILLINGTON

She was the daughter of old Shrewsbury,  
Called Eleanor. A widow just his age.  
They had no time to share it with the world.  
Events intruded, then it was too late.

HARRY

Too late? But -

RICHARD

Ned was suddenly thrust front -  
His future prospects all at once too great,  
Far sooner than he thought that they would be.  
He must have trusted father would endorse  
Whatever choice he made, he always did,  
Then Da was gone -

HARRY

Where is she, now? Alive?

STILLINGTON

Retired to a convent in great shame,  
When she learned Edward's pledge was all for nought.  
(Crosses himself; beat.)  
She's been with God, these fifteen years or so.

HARRY

She's dead?

STILLINGTON

Yes, dead. Her secret's in her grave.

HARRY

(Paces briefly, thinking, then:)  
An oath to marry is an old device:  
Frivolity to bribe a wench to bed.

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HARRY (Continued)

In practice, it's a taproom lark, to some,  
To kneel before a crucifix and swear  
Eternal fealty in the dark. It's less  
Than tuppence, spent upon a willing whore!  
"I swear, I love thee to forever, sweet,  
And God now hears my vow!" Forever lasts  
'Til sunrise, or an hour, if she's dull.  
What man would be the judge of it? All know  
That such a vow to marry is a jest!

STILLINGTON

Not when the couple swears within a church,  
A Bishop as the witness to their troth!  
When I, in honest, priestly, love, stood by,  
Gave blessing to their vows, I spoke in faith,  
And it became a marriage, binding them.  
A Sacrament as true as that bespoke  
When Jacob bound himself to Rachel's love,  
And fourteen years stood testament to faith!

HARRY

That doesn't matter now, the woman's dead!

STILLINGTON

Not dead enough, not soon enough! Not she!  
Though still alive and cloistered, she was spouse!  
A Papal Dispensation was required!  
But his new bride had family in tow -  
Enough of them to keep the king in hand  
Until he made it public, five months hence.

HARRY

So Warwick's fine French princess lost her chance  
To be defamed. What luck for France, withal.  
When did she die?

STILLINGTON

Beyond his bigamy.  
Six years beyond, but that is not the point.  
When I was told, I rushed to see the king,  
To tell him he must validate the queen  
In secret, and at once, but he would not.

HARRY

But why would he refuse? What lack of sense!  
If none but you and he and she could know,  
Then reason would demand it, for his sons!

STILLINGTON

He had no sons, then. Who knew that he would?

HARRY

(Beat; realizes; amused:)  
He was afraid to tell her, wasn't he?

STILLINGTON

You know the queen. Would you confess? Who would?  
That woman, fresh from childbed, in her shift,  
Tell her she held a second bastard child?  
Not then. When she is carrying the next?  
Oh, she'd have made his life a living hell.  
I think perhaps he'd had some thought, by then,  
Of putting her aside.

HARRY

What pretty hope.  
We all saw he was drowning in her kin.  
It would have meant rebellion, at the least.  
He could have faced rebellion one more time.

RICHARD

And sacrifice his comfort? Not our Ned.  
He put it off and built himself a trap.

HARRY

He could have found the time, withall the cost,  
For who would know? Just he and she and God.  
His daughters might be left outside the law,  
What need was there for anyone to know?  
His sons would be protected.

STILLINGTON

They are not.  
They have no patrimony in the law.

HARRY

The bitch must know it. Yes! No innocent  
Would act as she has, bolting off - as if  
Her life hung on a thread. And so it does!

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HARRY (Continued)

Her life is her ambition for her kin.  
With kin as king, the apex has been reached:  
They'll have the crown. If Neddy is not king,  
She's lost all purpose to her life. My God!  
Undoubtedly, she knows the truth of it.  
She knows he can't be king!

STILLINGTON

The blame is mine.

HARRY

What blame?

(To RICHARD)

It's opportunity, my lord!  
How often I have said it in the past,  
I do not know. However may it be,  
I'll say again: this country has no need  
Of untried babes to fondle at her breast.  
She cries for strength and wisdom, for a king!  
There is no other master to be served.  
The time is yours. What say you now, my lord?

RICHARD

There's nothing to be said. It's not a choice.

HARRY

It is the only choice!

RICHARD

No! I'm no king!  
Read Edward's will: my place is with the king.

HARRY

Your place will be the scaffold, should she win!  
I know her. I don't trust her charity.

RICHARD

She has no place in this, she must have none!  
I'm tied to Edward's Will, I gave my pledge!

HARRY

You gave your pledge to die? Oh, Richard, think!  
God's Holy Name, was ever such a man?

HARRY (Continued)

I am your friend, is that not so? Your friend  
Who speaks, and scorns the pleasant wooing of  
False flattery, for it is thine, my friend,  
So close, within thy grasp! Turn not away  
Or this I tell thee in my ardent love:  
Thou art a fool! A fool! Look forward, now,  
And see it in the pages yet to come!  
What will this England, with a child as king?  
You think to tear him from his mother's heart,  
And she from his? At Stoney Stratford -

RICHARD

No!

HARRY

When first we met him on the road, you saw!  
He did not know you. He suspects you, still!  
For all your faith, you will not face the truth!  
He does not know you, nor does want to know!

RICHARD

He is my brother's son.

HARRY

And what's that worth?  
Nought all! He is the son of Edward's queen,  
And half her grasping blood, all nursed and papped  
And coddled by her kin! He is Woodville spawn!  
He did not know your face!

RICHARD

Peace, Harry, peace.

HARRY

Yes, peace. We'll talk of peace. In pieces, soon.  
What will this child, when Margaret Stanley's son  
Brings mercenaries here? Call for his mum?  
What will that pack of Woodville vermin do,  
When Henry Tudor greets them at the gate?  
For he will come!

RICHARD

He will not come.

HARRY

He'll not?

Oh, Richard, Richard! See it clearly, man!  
What do you think the Earl of Richmond does  
Whilst he's in France, delight the ladies?  
No! He plots a crown and well you know he does!  
And who will fight for England when he comes?  
A child of twelve? Oh, God, deliver us!

STILLINGTON

Yours is the only valid claim, my lord.  
Young Edward is a bastard in the law.  
The crown can never rest upon his head.

HARRY

I ask you.

RICHARD

Stop at once, I've had enough!

HARRY

So shall England, bleeding, cry for mercy.

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