



By Loyalty Bound: The Story of the Mistress of King Richard III

Elizabeth Ashworth

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With the scant remains of Richard III lifted recently from such humble soil, Elizabeth Ashworth presents us here with the results of her own excavation. Perhaps no other ruler has engendered such a spirit of ambivalence in the British public - murderer or maverick, disfigured disgrace to the throne or exciting, romantic anti-hero, unafraid of getting his hands dirty in the heat of battle. The various contradictions that feed our understanding of the man are enacted here, focusing on a series of formative events in his early life that cast him in an interesting new light.

When 17-year-old Richard, Duke of Gloucester, defies his elder brother, Edward IV, and rides to Hornby Castle in the north of Lancashire to help James and Robert Harrington defend their birthright against Sir Thomas Stanley, he engenders a chain of events that will have repercussions for years to come. His fight for justice for the Harringtons and his relationship with Anne Harrington, whose ward-ship has been given to Thomas Stanley, cause a rift between the two men that will never be healed, and which will lead to Richard being betrayed when he most needs Stanley's support.

Relayed here is the story of defiant Anne Harrington, the woman destined to become mistress to the enigmatic Richard as a consequence of his involvement in the trials of her family. With her father and grandfather killed fighting for the Yorkists at Wakefield in 1460, Hornby Castle falls to her as an inheritance at the tender age of five years old. When her ward-ship is handed over to Thomas Stanley by the king himself, Anne's uncles and the influence they might otherwise have wielded are virtually cut off. The story traces the Harringtons fight to keep possession of their ancestral home, the support given to them by Richard, Duke of Gloucester, and Richard's tumultuous and beguiling relationship with Anne as she is forced into a marriage arranged for her by her guardian, a man who has objectives beyond the determination to secure her future happiness.

With a close eye for detail, Ashworth creates an intricately nuanced landscape, which serves as a remarkably effective and convincing backdrop. Richard, Duke of Gloucester, a man often demonized in literary adaptations with his hunched back and questionable moral code, is revived to supreme effect. The romance of the era is effectively relayed, communicating a real sense of drama borne out of political tensions heightened by the emotional complexities that characterized the age.



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