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Loyalty Binds Me

Richard Plantagenet was taken by surprise on August 22, 1485 at the Battle of Bosworth. Not by the presence of Henry Tudor's troops, for he had marched across England to intercept them. The surprise for Richard was the presence of Lord Stanley's 7000 troops supporting the claims of Henry Tudor ("History").

Loyalty was the hallmark of Richard III's life. His personal motto was "Loyaulte me lie", French for "Loyalty binds me" (Fields 39). Brother of King Edward IV, Richard was known for his loyalty to Edward, a loyalty tested through rebellion and battle. In 1469 and early 1470, Richard stood behind his older brother when their brother George and uncle Richard Neville rebelled against the Crown. Richard fled with Edward into exile in Bergundy in October of 1470, accepting the loss of his estates rather than betray Edward (Kendall 100). By April of 1471, Edward and Richard had returned to reclaim Edward's throne, defeating and killing Richard Neville in the Battle of Barnet (Fields 42).

George chose to kneel to his brother Edward prior to the Battle of Barnet, but right up to the battle he offered to switch sides yet again. Richard Neville declined George as too uncertain an ally (Fields 42). Richard, now Duke of Gloucester, rose ever higher in his brother's esteem. "By 1480, thanks to his Neville connections, his brother's support, and his own abilities, Richard had constructed a loyal and extensive affinity in the north, which he governed on Edward's behalf" ("Richard III.").

At Edward's sudden death in 1483, the kingdom quickly began to unravel:

When Edward died on April 9, 1483, Richard immediately swore allegiance to his nephew, Edward V. However, Richard was suspicious of his sister-in-law Queen Elizabeth Woodville and of the ambitious Woodville family... Supported by William Hastings, Lord Hastings, and other royal servants who feared that the Woodvilles meant to use their influence with Edward to control the government, Richard seized his nephew, arrested Anthony Woodville, Earl Rivers, and frightened the queen into taking sanctuary at Westminster. ("Richard III.")

And yet Richard did not intend to take the throne. Edward had named him Protector for his son, and despite the efforts of the Queen and the Woodville family to ignore the late King's wishes, Richard was determined to carry them out, and began planning his nephew's coronation. It was not until his discovery of the boy's illegitimacy that he claimed the throne as his own (Kendall 261-266). Doubts about the validity of Edward's marriage to Elizabeth Woodville had surfaced before the King's death (Coote and Thornton), but not until his brother had died would Richard face the reality of the Woodville's grasp at power and act. Loyalty to Edward was paramount.

Richard valued loyalty. Men such as Lord Stanley valued opportunity. Married to the mother of the Lancastrian claimant to the Throne, Henry Tudor, William Stanley professed devotion to King Richard, and received rewards of estates (Coward 11). Yet such rewards did nothing to prevent men such as Stanley from putting personal gain before honor or honesty. Stanley saw greater gain in the kingship of Henry Tudor. Henry Tudor, a more realistic ruler than Richard, knew a traitor when he saw one, and watched Stanley for treason, executing him in 1495 (Coward 14).

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