

An Eclipse of the Sun

by

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Scenes from the life of Lady Anne Neville

(1456 – 1485)

First performances:

Middleham Castle, August 2006

A play for three characters:

**Lady Anne Neville, later Queen,
between the ages of eight and twenty-eight;**

Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, her father;

**Richard of Gloucester, later Richard III, from the ages of
twelve to thirty-four.**

**(All assistant and 'SERVANT' roles will be played by
pre-selected members of the audience.)**

The years: 1466 – 1478

The place: Middleham Castle, North Yorkshire

Extract from:

Scene 6: Rescue by Richard of Gloucester

[RICHARD goes amongst the audience, holding the flag of the white boar aloft and ad libbing. As soon as he can, he gives the flag to a young member of the audience with a request that s/he carry it and follow him.]

RICHARD: The lady Anne of Neville? Have any of you seen the Lady Anne? ... You, young sir[maid]? Here, bear my standard. ... Is there any among you who will tell me where she bides? I will reward thee well. ... Show me where. *[The audience will point out ANNE sitting a little way off.]* ... My thanks, kind lady[squire]. Follow me, standard-bearer and guard us close. (etc.)

[ANNE sits, head bowed, with a set of rosary beads. Her dress is that of a kitchen girl: kerchief about her head and her shabby, rough-cloth dress covered with an apron. She appears numbed and haunted.]

RICHARD: This is no worldly place to find you, madame.

I have turned all London upside down to retrieve you. Bishopsgate to Billingsgate, Cripplegate to Moorfields. I have bailed up clerks and merchants and prioresses; practically dredged the river – and after all, I find you close under my nose. ... I am come to carry you to safety – my lady.

ANNE: My lord – Gloucester! ... In this squalid place? ... Yet I have been left here so long.

RICHARD: You have been kept hid from the world – and from me. My brother George of Clarence has owned you and disowned you as a chattel.

ANNE: *[overcome]* Better by far if they had paraded me all the way from Tewkesbury bound at the wrists on a slave cart and trawled me through the towns! This has been twice the pain - yet now I feel

nothing. ... They – *all* gave me away, passed me on And now you ...?

RICHARD: I will not pass you further. My brother the king wants you wed ...

ANNE: What? Again?

RICHARD: ... as a way of stopping Clarence from having his way with you more – and - he has granted me leave to seek your hand – as my wife. Clarence has blocked my path to you, to be sure: he told me one day that you were sick, another that he knew not your whereabouts, yet another that you were vanished utterly ...

ANNE: Utterly. Taken from his own house in the dead of night and mewed up in a London back street. I – of noble Neville and raised at Middleham - working feudal in a basement kitchen, a Hades of fires and jeering and shovelling.

RICHARD: I am come to free you from it all ...

ANNE: *[turns on him]* But you rode away from me at Tewkesbury and did not wait to know my sentence! But for the mercy of Edward, I would not have even been offered Clarence's rescue.

RICHARD: ... I come now to reverse all that delinquency.

ANNE: *[distracted and tearful]* Even my sister and my mother, consigning me to my fate with ne'er a backward glance.

RICHARD: I will soften your scullion's hands and place a ring upon that finger. ... I will return you to Middleham.

ANNE: Middleham? *[She becomes tearful.]* Our ivory towers.