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Henry VI, Part 3

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characters

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York

Richard, the Duke of York, believes that he is the true king of England. Since King Henry's grandfather seized the throne illegally from Richard II, then the real legal heir should have been the offspring of the younger brothers of Richard II. Richard is descended from Richard II's eldest brother, whereas Henry VI is descended from Richard II's younger brother. With this claim, York has brought dissention to the court, arguing with other nobles in *1 Henry VI* and staking his claim in *2 Henry VI*. He agrees to let Henry rule during his lifetime and receive the crown on Henry's death, but York's son urges him to seize the crown sooner. York dies in battle in the first act.

Henry

King of England at the beginning of the play, Henry is not a strong king; his nobles and his wife, Margaret, take advantage of him. Unable to live up to the legacy of his legendary father, Henry V, Henry loses all the English territories in France and cannot seem to control his warring nobles. In this play, he is twice thrust from the throne and twice imprisoned and once returned to place at the head of state. He flees battles and flees to Scotland but is always captured and brought back. Finally, he wishes to become a private citizen, desiring to be king in name only while other men rule. But in the end he is killed in prison by Richard.

Edward

York's eldest son, Edward inherits York's struggle for the throne, and seizes it soon after his father is killed in battle. But the new power soon blinds him to the need to listen to his advisors and brothers, and he marries Lady Gray, thus, alienating Warwick and the king of France, who had negotiated for a wedding to the French king's sister. Edward falls from the throne and is

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imprisoned but freed by Richard and again becomes king at the end of the play.

George –

Edward's younger brother, George was in France at the beginning of the play, returning with reinforcements after his father's death. George joins his brothers' battles, until Edward marries Lady Gray. George breaks with his brother and joins Warwick, though he rejoins his brothers later and helps defeat Warwick. George receives the title of the Duke of Clarence from his brother, and he is often referred to as "Clarence" throughout the play and into *Richard III*. George is Richard's next target at the end of the play.

Richard

A younger brother of Edward and George, Richard is a fierce supporter of the Yorks' claim to the throne. Most noted for his physical deformities, including a hump back, lame leg, and shriveled arm, Richard takes his physical deformity as proof that he will not succeed with women or in the world of the court. Therefore, he decides that the only thing for him is to gain the throne. Yet there are many ahead of him in line to the crown, who he must eliminate along the way, performing the role of a good brother and subject while secretly behaving with bloodthirsty abandon. Killing Henry, Richard declares himself severed from a world of family and brotherhood; he stands alone in his quest for the crown. One of the most compelling characters in Shakespeare's oeuvre, Richard has greater command of language than most other characters, and he has the best speeches. Richard's deformities raise many questions; does he use his deformity as an excuse for his behavior, or is his body an outward manifestation of his ambition and his evil nature?

Warwick

Long one of York's allies, Warwick was a pivotal force in bringing Edward to the throne. Later, he is sent to France to negotiate for marriage between Edward and Lady Bona, sister of the king of France. When Edward marries someone else, Warwick feels slighted and switches his allegiance to Henry, joining Margaret's army. Eventually, he is killed in battle with Edward's forces.

Margaret

Henry's French wife, Margaret was wooed in *I Henry VI* by Suffolk, who later became her lover. Alarmed that her husband is such a weak man, Margaret begins taking over for him. She scolds him for having given in to York's pressure in agreeing to pass the throne to York after his death. Then, she raises an army to fight with York; later, she stabs York to death. When Edward comes to the throne, Margaret goes to France to ask for aid and returns to lead more battles. Margaret is cursed repeatedly by her enemies for being an unnatural woman, in having taken on such a masculine role to lead Henry's armies. Yet she is the strongest inspirational force among all Henry's supporters.

Prince Edward

[TIMON OF ATHENS](#)[TITUS ANDRONICUS](#)[TROILUS AND CRESSIDA](#)

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Son of Margaret and Henry, Prince Edward delights Henry's supporters in his show of strength and courage; they hope he is another Henry V. Yet finally he is captured in battle and killed by York's sons.

Rutland

York's youngest son, killed by Clifford. Margaret dips a handkerchief in his blood to taunt York with after she captures him.

Clifford

Clifford's father was killed by York at the end of 2 *Henry VI*, so Clifford begins this play with blood lust. He kills York's young son Rutland, then York himself. He and Richard become enemies, and Richard tries to kill him on the battlefield, but Clifford dies from an arrow wound before Richard can find him.

Montague

One of Warwick's relatives, Montague supports York, then Edward. At a certain moment, probably after Edward marries Lady Gray, Montague appears on Henry's side and later is killed in battle alongside Warwick.

Westmorland

One of Henry's supporters

Exeter

One of Henry's supporters

Norfolk

One of Henry's supporters

Somerset

One of Edward's supporters, he joins George in going over to Warwick's side after Edward marries Lady Gray.

Northumberland

One of Henry's supporters

Lady Bona

Sister of the king of France, Louis, Edward proposes marriage to Lady Bona through the ambassadorship of Warwick, and she agrees. But when word arrives that Edward has married Lady Gray, Lady Bona asks her brother to lend support to those who would topple Edward.

Lady Gray

Lady Gray comes to Edward to ask him to restore her lands to her, as they were taken when her husband died. He proposes that she become his lover but she refuses. Then, he asks her to

marry him, and she agrees, becoming the queen.

Louis –

King of France, Louis lends support to Margaret when Edward insults his sister Lady Bona by marrying Lady Gray instead.

Oxford

One of Henry's supporters.

Rivers

One of Edward's supporters, brother of Lady Gray.

Hastings

One of Edward's supporters.

Montgomery

One of Edward's supporters.

Richmond

The young Henry, Earl of Richmond, meets Henry when he is first freed from prison by his supporters. Henry prophesies big things for Richmond; in fact, Richmond is the future Henry VII, and he will help found the house of Tudor and end the War of the Roses when he defeats Richard in *Richard III*.

Soldier

Henry watches from the field as various soldiers bring bodies from the field, one discovering he has accidentally killed his own son, and another his father. The soldiers suffer the unnaturalness of the War of the Roses, a war between extended family, which has enveloped the nation.

Summary

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The Duke of York enters the throne room with his sons and followers, wondering where King Henry has fled to after their recent battles. Warwick urges York to take the throne. As York sits, Henry enters with his followers, who want to fight York right there. Henry urges calm and asks York to descend from the throne. York makes public his alleged claim to the throne, while

Henry defends his hereditary possession of the crown. Suspecting that his claim to the throne may be spurious, Henry asks York to let him rule while he lives, and he will pass the throne on to the house of York on his death. York agrees and departs, but Henry's nobles are astonished that he would deny his son the birthright of becoming king on his father's death. Margaret, Henry's queen, arrives and accuses him of being an unnatural father for having disinherited his son and a bad ruler for thinking that York will let him rule.

Back in the town of York, Richard's sons Edward and Richard, and his follower Montague, urge York to take the throne immediately, rather than await Henry's death. York insists he has sworn an oath to let Henry rule, but Richard easily convinces him that the oath was not binding. Meanwhile, Margaret's forces arrive to challenge York.

Richard's other son Rutland is captured and killed on the way home by Clifford, who wants to avenge his father's death at York's hand. York's troops are losing the battle, and York is captured by Margaret and Clifford. She offers him a handkerchief dipped in Rutland's blood and challenges him to wipe his tears with it. He rails against her, calling her unnatural, and Clifford and Margaret stab him to death.

Edward and Richard wonder about the fate of their father, when they see a vision of three suns on the horizon, which Edward believes is a sign that the three York brothers must become as one. Richard isn't so sure, preferring to keep his allegiance only to himself. A messenger arrives with news of York's death, and the brothers are devastated. Warwick and Montague prepare to march to spar again with Margaret's forces, this time bringing the aid of York's other son George's troops.

Margaret and Clifford, with their followers, meet Henry at the town of York. Clifford urges Henry to undo his disinheritance of his son, but Henry isn't convinced that sons automatically appreciate that which their fathers leave them, since he didn't enjoy his father Henry V's legacy. Edward and his men burst in and demand the throne. The nobles from each side insult each other, and Henry tries to speak, but none will listen to him. Edward blames Margaret's pride for the civil war, and he declares that they will have to argue on the field of battle, since she won't let Henry speak.

Richard hunts Clifford on the field of battle in order to revenge his brother's and father's death. The tides of the battle ebb and flow as Henry watches from afar. He sees two soldiers drag dead bodies away from the scene of the fighting, trying to find valuables to steal. As the soldiers remove the armor from the bodies, one discovers he has accidentally killed his own father, and the other, his son. Henry mourns that the battles of the nation have come to this

level of unnaturalness. Henry's son Prince Edward urges him to flee.

Clifford is wounded and dies. Edward sees he has won the battle, though Henry is nowhere to be found. They head to London to crown Edward and to give new titles to Richard and George. Meanwhile, as Henry wanders through the forest, he is arrested by two men who support Edward. Edward sends Warwick to France to ask for the hand of the king of France's sister, and Margaret goes to France to ask for aid against Edward.

In London, Lady Gray petitions Edward to get her land back. He takes a liking to her and asks her to marry him. His brothers are annoyed to hear Edward's enthused announcement of his imminent marriage. Richard, alone, considers his potential route to the throne. Many people stand in his way, but what alternative is there? He could enjoy the pleasures of the court, but his physical abnormalities, including a hump back and withered arm, make him undesirable. Therefore, nothing remains for him but to connive and plot to get the crown. He decides he will play the role of the good brother and subject, while he plots ways to eliminate everyone in his way to the throne.

In France, Warwick and Margaret arrive at the same time. King Louis decides to give the hand of his sister, Lady Bona, to Edward, thus, denying Margaret aid, when a messenger arrives with news of Edward's marriage. Insulted to have been sent on a futile errand, Warwick changes sides, pledging his allegiance to Henry. Louis gives Margaret troops to fight with Edward.

In England, Edward and his brothers and lords discuss his marriage. They receive news that Warwick and Margaret have joined forces. George is so upset by Edward's new marriage that he leaves with Somerset to join with Warwick. In preparations for the coming battles, Edward is captured. Seeing George on the enemy's side, Edward gives up the throne and consents to be imprisoned at Warwick's brother's estate. Yet Richard and Hastings soon spring Edward from his gilded prison.

Warwick, George, and their nobles find Henry in the Tower and free him. Henry says he wants to be king in name only, and he names Warwick and George as joint protectors of the kingdom. They receive word that Edward has escaped to Brittany, from where he soon returns with reinforcements. Returning to the town of York, Edward thinks he wants only to be the Duke of York, but his followers urge him to seek the crown.

Henry's followers go to gather troops to battle Edward. Edward and Richard capture Henry and send him to the Tower before they march to meet Warwick's army. Edward's army meets Warwick's forces, and Edward asks Warwick if he will again swear allegiance to him. Warwick refuses. Warwick's supporters arrive, including George. Richard convinces George to break

with Warwick, and the forces prepare to fight.

Warwick is wounded in battle and dies. Warwick's surviving supporters, Somerset and Oxford, go to join Margaret's army. Margaret urges on her forces, and they meet Edward's army. Edward wins this battle; he sends Somerset and Oxford away, kills Prince Edward, and imprisons a mourning Margaret. Richard sneaks off to the Tower, where Henry awaits.

Henry prophesizes that thousands will suffer because of Richard's deeds, for Richard was born under all the most inauspicious and evil signs. Richard kills Henry and declares himself separated from the ties of family and brotherhood. Since he was punished by the heavens with such unfortunate physical attributes, he will fight for himself alone hereafter. And with Henry and his son out of the way, Richard's next goal is to eliminate George and Edward.

Edward's son has been born, and George and Richard kiss the child. Edward calls for festivities to celebrate his attainment of the throne. At last there is no one to oppose him--except his own brother.

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