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This new novel, the first of a series about the Plantagenets, came from my discovery of one of the most interesting and thought-provoking queens of England: Elizabeth Woodville. Most of the story that I tell here is fact not fiction – she lived a life far beyond even my imagination! She was indeed the famously beautiful descendant of the Dukes of Burgundy, who cherished the tradition that they were descended from Melusina, the water-goddess. When I discovered this fact I realised that in Elizabeth Woodville, a rather disregarded and disliked queen, I would be able to re-write the story of a queen of England who was also the descendant of a goddess and the daughter of a woman tried and found guilty of witchcraft.

Given my own interest in the medieval view of magic, of what it tells us about women's power, and of the prejudice that powerful women meet, I knew this was going to be rich terrain for me as a researcher and writer – and so it has been.

We know that Elizabeth first met Edward with a request for financial help, and that she married him in secret, but their meeting on the road as she stood under an oak tree (which is still growing at Grafton Regis, Northamptonshire, today) is a popular legend and may or may not be true. Her drawing of his dagger to save herself from rape was a contemporary rumour; we don't know it was historical fact. But much of her life with Edward was well recorded, and I have drawn on the histories and



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based my novel on the facts wherever they exist. Of course, sometimes I have to choose from rival and contradictory versions, and sometimes I have to fill in the gaps of history with explanation or accounts of my own making.

There is more fiction in this novel than in my previous ones, since we are further back in time than the Tudors, and the record is more patchy. Also, this was a country at war and many decisions were taken on the spot, leaving no documentary record. Some of the most important decisions were secret plots and often I have had to deduce from the surviving evidence the reasons for particular actions, or even what took place. For example, we have no reliable evidence as to the so-called 'Buckingham Plot', but we know that Lady Margaret Stanley, her son Henry Tudor, Elizabeth Woodville, and the Duke of Buckingham were the main leaders of the rebellion against Richard. Clearly, they all had very different reasons for the risks they took. We have some evidence of the go-betweens, and some idea of the plans, but the exact strategy and command structure of the plot was secret and remains so. I looked at the surviving evidence and the consequences of the plot and I suggest here how it may have been put together. The supernatural element of the real-life rain storm is, of course, fiction, and was a joy to imagine.

Equally, we don't know, even now (after hundreds of theories), exactly what happened to the princes in the Tower. I speculate that Elizabeth Woodville would have prepared a safe haven for her second son, Prince Richard, after her first son, Prince Edward, was taken from her. I genuinely doubt that she would have sent her second son into the hands of the man she suspected of imprisoning the first. The provocative suggestion, by many serious historians, that Prince Richard might have survived, led me to speculate that she might not have sent him to the Tower at all, but used a changeling to take his place. But I have to warn the reader that there is no hard evidence for this.

Again, there is no definitive evidence as to how the boys met their deaths, if they did; nor who gave the order, and of course,

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there are still no bodies positively identified as those of the princes. I suggest that King Richard would not have murdered the boys, as there was little to gain and much to lose for him; and I don't believe that Elizabeth Woodville would have put her daughters in his care if she had thought him the murderer of her sons. It seems also that she recalled her son Thomas Grey from the court of Henry Tudor, which perhaps indicates that she was disenchanted with the Tudor claim, and allying with Richard. All this remains a genuine mystery and I merely add my suggestion to the many others proposed by historians, some of which you can find in the books listed in the bibliography.

I am indebted to the scholar Professor David Baldwin, author of *Elizabeth Woodville: Mother of the Princes in the Tower*, both for his clear and understanding portrayal of the queen in his book, and for his advice on this novel, and I am grateful also to the many historians and enthusiasts whose studies are based on their love for this period, which I now share, and I hope you do too.

More information about the research and writing of this book can be found on my website, [PhilippaGregory.com](http://PhilippaGregory.com), where there are also details of seminars on this book which I give on tour in the UK, US and worldwide, and as regular webcasts.