

Anne of the
Thousand
Days

Maxwell Anderson
1948

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FOR M_{AB}

ANNE OF THE THOUSAND DAYS

Anne of the Thousand Days

ANNE BOLEYN WOMAN SERVANT
MARY BOLEYN ATTENDANT
THOMAS BOLEYN THREE MUSICIANS
CARDINAL WOLSEY THREE SINGERS
SERVANT MADGE SHELTON
HENRY VIII JANE SEYMOUR
HENRY NORRIS THOMAS MORE
MARK SMEATON THOMAS WYATT
DUKE OF NORFOLK THOMAS CROMWELL
LORD PERCY, EARL OF BISHOP FISHER
NORTHUMBERLAND JOHN HOUGHTON
ELIZABETH BOLEYN KINGSTON
COURIER CLERK
BAILIFF

Act One

PROLOGUE

The curtain rises in darkness. Then a single spotlight comes up to show, sitting at stage right, a young woman dressed in a gray fur-trimmed costume of a fashion usual at the time of Henry VIII. There are dark hangings behind her, broken only by a small, barred window which the lights project on one panel of the curtains.

The young woman is Anne Boleyn, and the time is the evening of May 18, 1536.

ANNE

If I were to die now—
but I must not die yet,
not yet.

It's been too brief. A few weeks and days.
How many days, I wonder, since the first time
I gave myself, to that last day when he—
when he left me at the lists and I saw him no more?

Well, I can reckon it.

I have time enough. Those who sit in the Tower
don't lack for time.

[*She takes out a little wax tablet, with a stylus*]

He could never cipher.

He was shrewd and heavy—
and cunning with his tongue, and wary in intrigue,
but when it came to adding up an account
he filled it with errors and bit his tongue—
and swore—

till I slapped his hands like a child and took the pen
and made it straight.

“A king,” I said, “a king, and cannot reckon.”

I was his clever girl then, his Nan;
he'd kiss me then, and maul me, and take me down.
On the rushes. Anywhere.

Why do I think of it now? Would he kill me? Kill me?

[*She laughs*]

Henry? The fool? That great fool kill me?

God knows I deserve it. God knows I tried to kill,
and it may be I succeeded.

I did succeed. I know too well I succeeded,
and I'm guilty, for I brought men to death unjustly,
as this death of mine will be unjust if it comes—
only I taught them the way. And I'm to die
in the way I contrived. . . . It may be. . . .

No, but Henry. He could not. Could not . . .

Could I kill him, I wonder?

I feel it in my hands perhaps I could.

So—perhaps he could kill me.

Perhaps he could kill me.

If it came tomorrow, how many days
would it have been,

[*She makes a mark on the tablet*]

beginning with our first day?

[*The lights dim down and go out except on Anne's face. She remains visible in reverie during the first few moments of the first scene*]

Act One

SCENE 1

The lights come up on a circle at stage left. A great window, partly of stained glass, is projected on the curtain background, and Mary Boleyn (she is the wife of William Carey, but that hardly counts for she has been the mistress of King Henry for four years, and she is only twenty-three) stands, peering through one of the panes. We are in the castle at Hever, owned by Thomas Boleyn, the king's treasurer, and the year is 1526. It is early spring. THOMAS BOLEYN enters from stage right.

BOLEYN Mary?

MARY Yes, father.

BOLEYN You watch for someone?

MARY I thought I saw the king on the road below.

BOLEYN We were to talk over the enclosure of a hunting park near Hever.

MARY He's here to see you, then?

BOLEYN I think so, child.

MARY Not me?

BOLEYN Not this time.

MARY But I may speak to him in passing, surely?

BOLEYN Perhaps—but—

[He pauses in embarrassment]

I wonder if you could do this? Could you go to your room while he's here—and not see him—and send no message?

MARY Why?

BOLEYN Could you do this?

MARY Go to my room! But for what reason? I have some rights in this house I should think—as your daughter, if not as the wife of my husband. And in the kingdom as the king’s mistress, which, God help me, I am, and which you have encouraged me to be!

BOLEYN Did you need encouraging, Mary? Think back on the fever you were in those days. Did you need encouragement?

MARY If I am sent out of the way I shall ask the king why.

BOLEYN Very well.

MARY And now. I shall ask him now!

BOLEYN The truth is, the king sent ahead to make sure we two could speak alone. He and I.

MARY He asked—not to see me?

BOLEYN Not in so many words—but—

MARY That could mean—I was not to see him again.

BOLEYN One never gets used to these things—there’s always a hell to go through. But when a girl gives herself so completely—

MARY You knew when I gave myself! And where. It has helped you! Yes, you live by it! Steward of Tunbridge and Penshurst, sheriff of Bradsted, viscount, king’s treasurer—and all these revenues have come to you since I opened my bedroom door to him!

BOLEYN Mary, girl, I’ve always loved you. I wouldn’t want to hurt you in any way. And all these things are true. The king has been generous to me because you were generous to him—and I know that and I’ve known it all the time. But could I have refused what he gave? I’ve been grateful to you, Mary—and ashamed of having to be grateful—yet I couldn’t refuse what was offered. And now—if you’ve lost the king, I don’t know how to help with that. I shall help any other way I can. . . . You still have your husband.

MARY Who wants my husband?

BOLEYN I'm caught here, Mary—we're all caught. . . .

MARY It's true, though. The moment I became all his, and held nothing back, I had lost the king, and I knew it. Yes, I've lost him—

[MARY turns Away. As she does so an elegantly robed prelate enters from stage right. The girl goes out past the ecclesiastic without trusting herself to speak. The newcomer is CARDINAL WOLSEY.]

WOLSEY You've told her?

BOLEYN Yes.

WOLSEY And Anne?

BOLEYN The earl is with her.

WOLSEY The king rode close behind me, Thomas.

BOLEYN My dear Cardinal, I have encouraged Anne with the young noble. He'll have the greatest estates in the north of England. It was something off my mind that Anne should like him and want him, for she's not easy to please. It never entered my head that the king had noticed her. What can I say to her now?

WOLSEY To send the earl away.

BOLEYN I think they have a sort of engagement between them.

WOLSEY Well—the king's here.

BOLEYN I think it would need more time.

WOLSEY Suppose you take the king to look at your hounds. Tell him that Anne had ordered a new dress and there's some trouble with it—her hands tremble over the fastenings, and other rubbish of that sort. I'll speak to Anne and to the earl.

BOLEYN Well—if you'll manage it.

[*A SERVANT enters*]

SERVANT

My lord—

[*HENRY VIII enters behind the servant. A rough, shrewd, merry, brutal man in the thirties, accustomed to making himself at home in this house and with all his subjects when he thinks the effect might be good. NORRIS and SMEATON enter after him*]

HENRY

[*To NORRIS and SMEATON*] Wait for me, gentlemen. Only your king, Thomas. No ceremony. Only your Henry.

[*Nevertheless he gives his hand to be kissed and BOLEYN kisses it.*

[*NORRIS and SMEATON go out*]

And how's the vicar of hell this chilly spring morning?

[*The SERVANT goes out*]

WOLSEY

I keep warm, Majesty.

HENRY

I'm sure you do. With your feet on the devil's fender. Meanwhile toasting your paddocks at God's altar.

WOLSEY

And running the king's errands. It's a busy life.

HENRY

Has he done my errand?

BOLEYN

Yes, he has.

HENRY

May I smell this pretty posy of yours?

BOLEYN

My lord, if you mean Anne, she's still at her mirror, and—if you could give her a half hour.

HENRY

We've this whole day.

BOLEYN

There was a clump of red deer grazing within view when I last looked out. In velvet, but they give promise of sport later.

HENRY

We'll see them. We'll see your red deer, and afterward we'll appraise what was seen in that same looking glass.

[*He turns*]

WOLSEY Good hunting, Majesty.

HENRY You won't be with us?

WOLSEY It happens there is a poor soul in the house who seeks the ministrations of a religious. I must go where I am called.

HENRY You will go wherever it's most profitable for the Cardinal of York to be at any given time. So go there, and no more of these holy thin excuses.

WOLSEY Yes, Majesty.

[*He goes out*]

HENRY There's no hurry about the deer. I want three words with you.

BOLEYN Yes?

HENRY There's always a temptation, when a man's in my position, that he'll think of the nation as his own trough, and get all four feet in it and eat from one end to the other. I don't want to look like that to anybody.

BOLEYN You don't, my sovereign.

HENRY I'm a religious man, Boleyn. I want to do what's right in the eyes of God and the church. And myself—and my people—and you.

BOLEYN That's a swath of folk to satisfy—if you include God.

HENRY I include both God and the women—among them your daughters. What will your daughters say of me—the two of them together—talking at night?

BOLEYN What two women say together—talking at night of one man who has wanted them both—and taken both. No man will ever know that. But I think—if you don't mind—

HENRY I've asked you.

BOLEYN I think you go a little rapid with Annie. You'll need to be gentle.

HENRY But she'll have me—in the end?

BOLEYN

She's no fool, my lord.

HENRY

[*After a pause*] What I do is God's will.

BOLEYN

Now, if a man or a monarch could be sure of that!

HENRY

I've worked it out, in my mind—

I pray to God.

[*He hesitates*]

I tell you this first, Boleyn.

God answers prayer. That's known. Every morning I go on my knees
and pray that what I do may be God's will.

I pray him to direct me—that whatever thought
comes to my mind—whatever motion
floods in my heart—shall be God's will—and I
only His instrument. Wherever I turn,
whatever I do—whether to reach for food,
or thread my way among the crossed paths of the law,
or interpret the holy word,
or judge men innocent—or guilty—
every morning I pray Him on my knees
nothing shall rise in my brain or heart but He
has wished it first.

And since He answers prayer,
and since He's given me such heavy power to act,
power for good and evil,

He must answer this. He does answer.

I find such peace
in this, that not one morning my whole life long
shall I fail these devotions.

BOLEYN

This is a noble thought, of course, but Your Majesty realizes that it
might be used as an excuse for—

HENRY

For what?

BOLEYN

For doing as you please.

HENRY

I'm quite serious, Boleyn. I want no trifling.

BOLEYN

It was not my intention to trifle.

HENRY

But you do! I tell you I pray and God answers!

BOLEYN

Yes, my lord.

HENRY

I am younger than you. I am younger than Wolsey.
I am younger than many dukes and earls and peers.
But I am the king of England. When I pray God answers.
I will not have this questioned.

BOLEYN

Yes, my lord.

[NORRIS *and* SMEATON *enter*]

NORRIS

We're sent as a delegation, my lord.

HENRY

Come in, come in. Pour it on, whatever it is. Your king is your natural receptacle for whatever you can't hold any longer.

NORRIS

The fact is we are sent to keep you amused while Sir Thomas Boleyn confers with his lady wife. There is a sort of kitchen rebellion afoot and his voice is needed.

HENRY

Go, Boleyn, mollify your women.

BOLEYN

If you'll excuse me.

[*He goes*]

HENRY

Come in, lads. I want a word with you, anyway—man to man, kingship aside. You buzz the girls you two—you've thrust your hands in amongst a flutter of larks often enough and pulled out the one you wanted. Tell me, what's the best cast of all for a maiden?

SMEATON

A maid, Your Majesty?

HENRY

I wouldn't swear to that. Not medically. But a young one—a bit wild—uncaught.

NORRIS

I couldn't say of my own knowledge, sir, but Tom Wyatt has an unfailing way. He writes them poems.

SMEATON But you can't catch a ticklish hoyden with madrigals. That's for matrons.

HENRY Then your lure, Smeaton? Your favorite?

SMEATON My king, my acquaintance doesn't run among the grade of females you seek. I'm more successful with waiting women and ladies' maids.

HENRY Don't be modest, lad. I've followed your spoor so close there was scarce time to close the window you left by—or change perfumes to put me off the scent—

SMEATON Truly, truly—

HENRY I've breathed your same air in some close quarters, singer. So speak on. Your lure. Your most seductive.

SMEATON Why, being a singer, I sing to them a good deal—but, in addition to that—you will not be offended?

HENRY I'll be offended if you keep back, musician. Be ashamed of nothing. We live in a new age, a new time. I was born within a year of the discovery of the new world. We revise all the old laws to suit ourselves. And the mysteries and manners.

SMEATON Why, then, if you truly want her, make her believe you're potent only with her, Majesty, and that will do the business. Make out that you've tried with numbers of others, gone to bed and kissed hotly, and hung embarrassed and unable. But with her you rouse up. You're a man again. They can't resist that. They open like—

HENRY Never mind the simile. There's nothing like it. But, lad, this is new, this device.

SMEATON I think it's my own.

HENRY And ingenious.
[NORFOLK *enters*]
We're speaking of the best way to woo a green maid, Norfolk. You're a man of expedients. You know these things—if you haven't forgotten them.

NORFOLK Why, my advice is, if you want a woman, take her.

HENRY There are certain preliminaries. There's consent, anyway. You must have consent.

NORFOLK Nonsense. Take her and make her like it. Why should a woman have anything to say about it?

HENRY It may have been so in the good old days. Today we woo—and wait.

NORRIS Do you wish her to be in love with you, my lord?

HENRY That I do.

NORRIS Do you wish to be in love with her?

HENRY In love with her? I? Personally? Now, I'll tell you the truth, so far my experience of being in love is like this: love is a kind of wanting, a panting and sighing and longing. What does a man desire of a lass, anyway? To be assuaged. He wants his pain assuaged. Well, that done, what more's to be done?

SMEATON Is it *lèse-majesté*, or may I ask—

HENRY Nothing is *lèse-majesté* in this conversation.

SMEATON Have you ever been refused by a maid?

HENRY Refused? I? No, I think not. When I've wanted them I've had them. And once I've had a wench, I'm cured. That's general, isn't it? Broad and narrow?

NORRIS My king, with me it's the opposite. Once I've mixed flesh and lips with her I'm in danger of a golden wedding—should we both live.

HENRY It can happen so?

SMEATON The poor gudgeon's hooked now. He'll never swim free again.

NORRIS And she won't look at me.

HENRY Keep me from that, good God!

NORFOLK

Can you youngsters leave talking of virgins long enough to look at the venison?

HENRY

Yes—come. Next to the haunch of a virgin there's nothing like a haunch of venison.

[The lights go out on the scene]

Act One

SCENE 2

The lights go up on a circle at stage left, where Anne Boleyn and Percy, Earl of Northumberland, sit on a bench, their arms about each other. Anne is younger than in the Prologue, and dressed in a simple morning dress of the period. Percy is a young, headstrong, handsome fellow, not without brains and spirit. A half-open casement takes shape on the curtains at the rear.

ANNE I'm angry with myself about one thing.

PERCY Yes, dear.

ANNE I spent two years at the court of Queen Claude. I met there the silkened flower of the aristocracy. Such manners, such grace, such horsemanship and dancing! They spoke Greek, they spoke Latin, they spoke Italian—and they spoke their own French with a wit and a fencer's point that gave me a new glimpse of what a language could be!

PERCY But what disappointed you?

ANNE Among them there were—well, truly gallant men. Captivating men. Charmers. With an ease of carriage—and a way with women that . . . and I fell in love with none of them. I came home and promptly fell in love with a—a thistle. A countryman from the north. With no graces at all. Can't dance. Can't sing. Can hardly speak English.

PERCY Can put his arm around you.

ANNE Doesn't do that well. Not as well as I've known it done. But it's the one arm I want—for some God-knows-what reason. You do everything badly—everything awkwardly—and I love it the way you do it.

PERCY I'm glad I wasn't educated in France.

ANNE Why?

PERCY You wouldn't have loved me.

ANNE I wonder. It may be true.

PERCY Silks are for holiday. Honest homespun wears through the years.

ANNE One thing though. If we love enough to marry we must love enough to keep nothing back. I shall keep nothing from you.

PERCY Nor I from you, sweet.

ANNE But you have. You don't know what I mean.

PERCY Are we to lie together? Before?

ANNE If you like. But that's not it.

PERCY My bonny, what more can there be than that?

ANNE Kiss me hard.

 [*He kisses her*]

PERCY I wish I had you in my house.

ANNE [*Musing*] That's part of it, too. To be Lady Anne, and live with you in your house, and sleep with you at night, and in the morning—well, the servants will bring in breakfast to the earl—to Percy, the Earl of Northumberland, and his wife.

PERCY Will you like that?

ANNE Yes. It's far from the court. It's buried in the north hills, a long way off. But it's power, and I love you, and I'll like it. Tell me, are you a virgin?

PERCY I?

ANNE Yes, Earl of Northumberland—you.

PERCY I'm a man.

ANNE

I know. But are you a virgin? When we bed together shall I be your first?

PERCY I—

ANNE Don't be confused, dear. Folk are such barbarians here in England! Say it out as it was. For me, I'll say it all frankly, the way they do in France. In England we make muddy mysteries of such things. As if they were crimes—but they've happened to all of us. We don't come out of a rainbow at seventeen and there's no use pretending we did. You may ask me whatever you like.

[*A pause*]

PERCY Are you a virgin?

ANNE No.

[*They look away from each other*]

PERCY Was this something that happened in France?

ANNE Yes. But long before France, too. When I was little I was playing with a boy in the woods near Hever, not far from here. We quarreled about something, and he threw me down and—

[*She rises*]

God help me, I'm blushing. All over. I thought I'd finished with that. But no—it began at my heels—I could feel it—and rushed up in a wave till now it burns at the roots of my hair. And I've told this before—

PERCY Without blushing?

ANNE [*Defiantly*] Yes! But there's something in the foggy, torpid air of this island that makes people want to hide things. Like savages.

PERCY There might be another reason.

ANNE What?

PERCY Look at me.

[She does so]

Were you ever in love before?

ANNE I think—no. No.

PERCY Now I'm no spring of wisdom in these matters, Anne, but it may be you're not a woman till you're in love. It may be you've nothing to hide till then.

ANNE *[Slowly]* Yes. It may be. It may be that you're wiser than you think.

PERCY I hope so. A man has to be wiser than he thinks or he won't go far.

ANNE It's strange. I stand here still trying to say it to you—and it's a perfectly natural thing—and my tongue won't say it.

PERCY Never mind. I don't want to hear it.

ANNE You are a Boeotian, aren't you, darling? You're horribly embarrassed. But you shouldn't be, and I shouldn't. I won't take up with these shamefaced country manners—

PERCY I don't want to hear it. I'm afraid I don't like this game you learned in Paris.

ANNE Were you an angel, darling?

PERCY No. I was not.

ANNE Tell me about the girls. How many and when.

PERCY One thing you'd best learn now, my sweet. I'll be the man of the house when we have a house, and if any game's to be played I'll lead in that game and not follow. I don't want to sear my tongue or redden my forehead with this kind of thing. The game I like now is to put my arms about you and say nothing.

ANNE You know, I think I like that better, too. Come, then.

[PERCY takes ANNE in his arms again. At the same moment a shadow moves toward them from the center of the stage, and ANNE puts up a hand to hold Percy's lips from hers]

I think the Cardinal is here.

[She rises. PERCY keeps his seat and holds her hand. WOLSEY steps toward them into the light. PERCY rises]

WOLSEY I'm glad I find you together, for I have to speak to you both. I'm sorry to find you so intimate, for it's about that I have to speak to you. My lord, your father and the king have given some thought to where you shall marry, and an alliance with the Talbots, through one of the daughters of the Earl of Shrewsbury, is thought best.

PERCY An—alliance with—! Not by me, my lord Cardinal.

WOLSEY Anne, my dear, your father has a claim on the Ormond estates in Ireland. He and the king have agreed that you will marry the Earl of Ormond to reinforce that claim.

ANNE I—marry into Ireland?

WOLSEY It's so decided.

ANNE But how can you—? It's not so decided! Not one word of this has been said to me! Of Ormond or Ireland—!

WOLSEY Your father will deal with you. As for Lord Percy, remember, if you will, that I brought you to court and that you are still a member of my household. A half-grown steer and a leggy girl will not be allowed to overturn the policies of England, fixed in council.

PERCY But, my lord, I am of full age, and I have pledged myself to this girl before many witnesses—among them her own father! It's a good match for both of us, and nothing's been said against it till this moment! More than that, we've pledged ourselves to each other, and our hearts go with that pledge!

WOLSEY No doubt. And this is the reward I get for my kindness to you.

[He turns away]

ANNE *[Softly]* My lord Cardinal, that we two are in love, and have been these two months, every servant in the house knows, for we've made

no secret of it before them or anyone. That we are in love, that we mean to marry, has been no secret from the whole world all that time. Why you've come here now to tell us suddenly that we're to match elsewhere, we don't know. There must be some reason behind it. Tell us what it is.

WOLSEY I have told you.

ANNE Then you talk nonsense, and I won't listen!

PERCY Nor I!

WOLSEY I stand here as the king's minister, and you're aware of that. I knew a great lord to die for less than you have just said. His name was Buckingham.

PERCY [*More humbly*] You know I have no wish to anger the king. But tell us what this means and why you say it to us.

WOLSEY [*Thundering*] Do you think the king and I come lightly to such decisions as this? Do you think we have not weighed every reason for and against before we issue a command? One thing I can tell you, you will obey or your estates are forfeit! If you continue disloyal it's doubtful how long you will live! Go now, for I wish to speak to Anne alone.

PERCY Anne—

ANNE Yes, you must go.

PERCY Kiss me then.

WOLSEY Do not touch her.

PERCY All this talk of sudden death makes it very easy for you, my lord. But I shall kiss her if I like.

[*And he does so*]

ANNE Only take care of yourself. I shall see you.

PERCY Yes.

[He turns and goes stage right, into darkness. Anne stands silent and defiant, looking at Wolsey]

WOLSEY Look your knives through and through me, mistress. At my age it will do me no hurt—and at yours, though you hurt easily, you will cure quickly. Are you serious about this thorn apple from the north?

ANNE My lord—he’s mine—and I’m his.

WOLSEY But if there were another and worthier, well, you could change?

ANNE No.

WOLSEY But I think when you see him you will.

ANNE The Lord of Ormond? Hardly.

WOLSEY That was only a name plucked out of the air. I had another in mind.

ANNE I want no other. And if you do him harm—this my chosen husband—I am only a girl, but you will know you have an enemy!

WOLSEY Look down at your necklace, Anne. Do you see a writing on it?

ANNE There’s no writing on it.

WOLSEY There is, though, and I can see it, though it may not be visible to you as yet. The writing is a quotation from a poem. It says: “Noli me tangere, for Caesar’s I am.” You have studied Latin?

ANNE Yes.

WOLSEY “Touch me not,” the translation might go, “I belong to the king.”

ANNE What king?

WOLSEY We have only one king in England.

ANNE I want no king. I want only the person of my choice.

WOLSEY When Harry of England turns his eyes on a girl she can hardly look away.

ANNE [After a pause] Forgive me if I seem slow to understand what you say. Do you mean that King Henry has looked at me?

WOLSEY Yes.

ANNE And sent you to me?

WOLSEY It is sometimes my pleasure to anticipate his desires.

[Two figures come toward them out of shadow from stage right]

ANNE Perhaps you would be wise to anticipate the answer he will receive from me if he comes. We have had him in the bosom of our family for some years. My sister is probably with child by him at the moment. And of no further use to him. I shall not go the way of my sister, thank you—

[THOMAS BOLEYN and his wife, ELIZABETH, come forward out of the shadow]

BOLEYN Anne!

ANNE Do you also offer me up to this royal bull—you, my father? And you, my mother?

BOLEYN Hush, daughter! Manage your voice. He's in the house.

[There is a silence]

ANNE Why is he here?

BOLEYN To see you.

ANNE Well—you've let him come—I haven't. Find some way out of it.

BOLEYN It's not my doing. It's his. He came quite openly demanding you. And since that is what every girl in England prays for, how was I to know it would displease you?

ANNE Do you know what it is to be in love? Either of you? Do you remember? Remember what it's like to have your whole life follow one person out at the door—and not to live again, and not want to live, till

he returns?

BOLEYN

You have been in France—and at the court.

ANNE

I've been many places, and done more things than you know—yet there's only one man I want now! And I'll have no one else! No one! Mother!

ELIZABETH

[*Softly*] Yes—I said these things once—all of them—and I would help you now if I could. But I know now that we're not free to have or take or choose. You are here—and you live—and we all of us live—because we took advantage when it came our way, because we stood at the door and waited, because we smiled where a smile would help, and kissed when a kiss would help—

BOLEYN

And struck down where a death would help! And we're not safe now! If you think we're safe, or that you are, or that we'll ever be safe, or that you will, you're more of a fool than any daughter of mine has a right to be!

ELIZABETH

Do you know what it means when a king asks for you? Do you know what goes with it?

ANNE

Yes—I know that. I know, all too exactly.

WOLSEY

If he feels a coldness in you he'll not want you, I can assure you of that. Indicate only a slight doubt—and the king will be gone. He is not accustomed to hesitations.

ELIZABETH

And do you know what it means when a king asks for you and you turn him away? We can say farewell to all we've worked for and all we have if we lose the king's favor.

ANNE

Then say good-by to all that—all of you—this whole family and house—for I won't have the king! I don't want him and I won't have him!

BOLEYN

As for this boy you've set your heart on—this Northumberland—don't count on him beyond the castle gate. Would he dare touch a girl the king had bid for?

WOLSEY

Would he dare marry into a family which had displeased his sovereign?

ANNE He would dare anything!

WOLSEY He will not dare either of these.

ANNE My lord Cardinal, we are only one family among many at court—and in this family only two sisters, Mary and I. Surely one of two sisters should be enough. Surely he could look elsewhere now.

WOLSEY There are only two things to blame—the king’s will, and your own self, your form and face and words. The king has seen you and heard your voice and liked you. I can’t change you and I can’t change him.

ELIZABETH He is our king, Anne. He is a great king. He is young and handsome. He knows poetry and music; he speaks and dances better than any other in the court. Surely it’s not hard to think well of him.

ANNE Yes, mother. I’ve been well trained. I’m trying now. . . . Young? Well, it’s true he married at eighteen, but he’s been married nearly seventeen years, and if all his children had lived, legitimate and illegitimate, there would have been at least a dozen. He can be only fairly faithful to a mistress. I think my sister Mary kept him longest. That lasted four years—and now that’s over. And what becomes of Mary? No, I won’t ask that. He’s a great king, you say. It’s true that his father, who was unscrupulous and a miser, left him a mountain of money. It’s true therefore that he has great power, but as for his being a great king, I rather doubt it, for he’s neither wise nor just nor merciful. You say he knows poetry and music. He’s much praised for his poetry and music at the court, where, as you have noticed, if you don’t praise him you’re likely to be unlucky. You say he speaks and dances better than any about him—and wouldn’t it be a silly courtier who outdanced the proud Henry? When it comes to warfare his wife Katharine is a better soldier than he. She won the great battle of Flodden Field while he was abroad subjugating two minor French towns with an army sufficient to conquer all Europe.

[A shadow moves into the darkness at stage center and HENRY’S voice is heard]

HENRY *[Still unseen]* You there! Kindly inquire if the king may enter! Right!

Right! I speak to you! A sovereign has so little privacy that he knows how to respect the privacy of others. So ask! Inquire!

SERVANT *[Appearing at the edge of the ring of light]* May the king come in?

HENRY That says it. That puts it bluntly. A good honest half-witted servingman you have here, if ever I saw one. Aren't you, fellow?

[He claps the servant on the back]

SERVANT If Your Majesty please, yes, Sire.

BOLEYN Your Majesty knows that you are always welcome in this house.

HENRY As you in mine, Sir Thomas. And now my manners. I have greeted all here, I think, save only the Lady Anne. Sweet Nan, will you give me a kiss?

ANNE Yes, Your Majesty.

[He comes forward with his arms jovially outstretched, ANNE bows, then takes one of his hands and kisses it coolly]

HENRY It was not such a kiss I meant, my dear.

ANNE I have been drinking foul medicines for a cold, my lord. You would never forgive my breath.

HENRY Have you tried hippocras, a strong glassful every hour, steaming hot?

ANNE No, I haven't.

HENRY You shall have some of my own brewing. I'll send it today. For your health is very dear to me, sweet Nan, and you must keep well. We live all too brief a time—and what little we have should not be wasted in sickness.

[He stoops suddenly and kisses her]

There is neither fever nor medicine on your lips, sweetheart, but such a honey scent as bashful maidens breathe. . . . Shall I send away this chaperonage that rings us round?

ANNE No.

HENRY

I will, though, by your leave; no, without your leave. Mothers, fathers, churchmen, all these may depart.

[WOLSEY *and the* BOLEYNs, THOMAS *and* ELIZABETH, *bow out backward toward stage right*]

You would never credit how fast my heart beats, nor how hard it is to draw breath. A king is not fortunate in these matters, Nan. I come to you as frightened as a 'prentice who takes his first nosegay to a wench—but whether you like me or not—whether any woman likes me or not—I shall never know. I shall never be sure I have the truth—because I am the king, and love is paid to me like taxes. . . . Do me this favor, Nan. Look on me not as a monarch who commands and may demand, but as the doubting, hoping, tremulous man I am—wishing to be loved for myself.

ANNE

If you were a common man, doubtful of yourself, and tremulous, would you have sent an ambassador to warn me and make sure of me?

HENRY

Did I send an ambassador?

ANNE

Wolsey speaks for you, I believe.

HENRY

Has he spoken clumsily?

ANNE

No, very deftly. He made it plain that what the king wanted he would have.

HENRY

Then he was clumsy. I swear to you, Nan, only this very cruel thing has happened to me: I have fallen in love. I tried to argue myself out of it, but seeing you day by day here, and trying not to see you, not to think about you, I have tangled myself deeper day by day, till now I can't keep it to myself. I must tell you. And ask your pity. . . . The truth is I dared not speak to you first myself. I was afraid.

ANNE

You were afraid?

HENRY

Yes.

ANNE

Of what?

HENRY

That you wouldn't care for me.

ANNE Then perhaps you will understand the very cruel thing that has happened to me: I have fallen in love. And not with you.

HENRY By God!

ANNE You were complaining a moment ago that such remarks were not made to kings.

HENRY By God, I got it full in the face that time! Who is it? Northumberland?

ANNE Would I be wise to tell you?

HENRY Never mind. I know. I've been told but I didn't believe it. How far has it gone?

ANNE We mean to be married.

HENRY Yes?

ANNE But not as my sister's married. He would not be a complaisant husband—and I would not be an accessible wife.

HENRY All wives are accessible—any husband can be placated!

ANNE Not all.

HENRY Yes, all! But I don't want you that way! Damn my soul, and yours—I want you to myself!

ANNE What can I do?

HENRY Give up this young wattle and daub—
give him up, I tell you,
and this kingdom shall turn round you, bishops and peers—
and whatever you've wanted, for anyone,
a knighthood,
an estate, a great income rolling in forever,
titles and places, you shall dispose of them
just as you please!

ANNE And be thrown out in the end
like a dirty rag. I haven't seen Mary disposing

of revenues.

HENRY
She asked for nothing. Look, Anne,
I stand here desperate. I can't bargain with you.
Ask for what you want.

ANNE
To be free. To be free
to marry where I love.

[HENRY *pauses*]

HENRY
No.

ANNE
I've seen you too close
and known you too long. I've heard what your courtiers say
and then I've seen what you are. You're spoiled and vengeful,
and malicious and bloody. The poetry they praise
so much is sour, and the music you write's worse.
You dance like a hobbledehoy; you make love
as you eat—with a good deal of noise and no subtlety.
It was my doubtful pleasure once to sleep in Mary's room—
or to lie awake when you thought me asleep—and observe
the royal porpoise at play—

HENRY
This is not safe.

ANNE
Yes, I've been told it's not safe for any of us
to say no to our Squire Harry. This put-on, kindly
hail-fellow-well-met of yours. My father's house
will be pulled down—and Northumberland's, too, they tell me.
Well, pull them down. You are what I said.

HENRY
I had no wish to come here. I came
because I must, and couldn't help myself.
Well—I'm well out of it. Let it end here this morning.
I thank you for your anger,
and for raising anger in me. There's no better way
to make an end.
Say farewell to all here.

I'll go back to my ancient wife and my cold statecraft,
card houses and card empires . . .
and card ruins.

[He turns]

ANNE

You will not—touch—Northumberland?

HENRY

I'll try not.

Bloody as I am, I'll try not.

[He calls]

Wolsey!

[He turns and goes into darkness]

Where's the fat saddlebags? Where's this vicar of hell?

[The lights go out]

Act One

SCENE 3

The lights come up on Anne as we saw her in the Prologue, wearing the fur-trimmed dress. The same little barred window of the Tower cell comes slowly into focus.

ANNE

Then I could only wait,
and pace my room,
and write to Northumberland in secret,
saying, "I've sent him away. Take care of yourself.
But for God's sake come if you can—
for I'm alone."
And I waited alone. In my little room.
It was my father's pleasure
to keep me prisoner in my little room.
And over and over the one dream, the one dream
whenever I'd fall asleep—
Northumberland standing
with his arms stretched out to me
[*At stage right a figure is glimpsed in darkness*]
and his eyes torn out and bleeding—
[*We see PERCY with bloody eyes, reaching out his hands*]
as I see him now.
I tried not to sleep, for when I slept,
day or night, I saw him there.
Till the news came.
[*The figure of PERCY vanishes*]
They wouldn't tell me at first.
The messenger came to the kitchen.

[*A half-light comes up at stage left. In it a courier can be seen with a woman servant*]

COURIER

I've ridden thirty-five hours and I'm dead for sleep.

This is for the Lady Anne. Nobody's to know.

[He hands over a letter]

SERVANT

Where are you from?

COURIER

From Northumberland. Let me lie down here—anywhere.
I'm dead.

[He throws himself on the floor and sleeps instantly]

SERVANT

[Fingering the letter] Is it good or bad? He's under already. Man!

[She shakes him]

Man! Is it good or bad?

[There's no response from the courier]

It can't be good or it 'ud 'a' traveled slower. I'd
best keep it in my pocket.

[She pockets the letter. The lights go out on stage left]

ANNE

But when she brought it at last

it cut through my years

like a dull knife through screaming flesh. I feel it yet.

"I'm a prisoner, too,

and I'm to be married," it said.

"To the Shrewsbury hag. She hates me and I hate her.

One of us will murder the other. I'm afraid God's on her side,
and she'll kill me first.

Anne, my bonny, forgive me."

Well, she did kill him. Anyway, there was no love between them,
and within two years he was dead.

And the king came back to Mary,

and she took him, took him again,

and began to have a child by him—

and again he left her.

And still I sat in my room.

And again the king came to see us.

[MARY BOLEYN appears near stage center and speaks to Anne, who

seems to sit at the window of her bedroom at the right]

MARY

Father says

you're to make yourself ready in the best you have.

The king will be here tonight.

[Anne is silent]

Make yourself pretty, dear.

I know you're weary of your room. It's you he wants to see.

Make yourself charming.

And don't think of me.

Oh, I'm to appear.

[She comes over to Anne and kisses her]

But you know, dear, the human liver or lights—

or heart—or whatever one loves with—

these are tough, perdurable organs. I can look at him

and it won't matter. I've . . . I can look at him.

[Anne is still silent]

Yes, as you do.

I don't even dislike him.

I begin to be in love with someone else.

ANNE

Oh?

MARY

Yes—so—I mean it—

wear the best you have.

[She moves toward stage right]

I'd stay and help you—only—

I'm dressing up—for somebody else.

It's silly, but I am.

[The lights go out on Mary]

ANNE

[Again in the Tower cell] He had been hunting, they said, and threw down his bow and said, "I must see her."

[At stage right the lights come up on King Henry sitting in a hunting pavilion, stringing a bow. Wolsey holds spare staves and arrows near-by]

WOLSEY

The first buck you struck died in the midst of a leap. The arrow pierced him through and brought out heart's blood on the other side.

HENRY

Is there any other sovereign in Europe who could plant an arrow behind the shoulder of a stag in motion?

WOLSEY

There is not one who could kill a deer in any decent fashion. I have heard that the Emperor Charles hunts the boar with powder and ball.

HENRY

Let us not believe evil of any man or prince till proved.

WOLSEY

True. It was only a rumor.

HENRY

Give me the longbow. [*Quoting*] "Who list to hunt, I know where is an hind—."

[*An ATTENDANT in shadow hands him a bow*]

WOLSEY

As for the longbow, there is no other man in all Europe, commoner, noble, or sovereign, who could flex this stave of yours a full yard.

HENRY

[*Fitting a cord to the bow*] A man's not as good at thirty-five as at twenty though.

[*He throws down the bow and arrow*]

Damn the hunting—and damn all entertainment! And damn all women! Why must it be this one girl I want—who doesn't want me? We'll give over here. "Since in a net I seek to hold the wind." I'll see her.

[*The lights go out on Henry and Wolsey, then, after the next scene begins, on Anne*]

Act One

SCENE 4

The lights go up at stage left on a WOMAN SERVANT carrying a little table on which there is a silver basket full of cakes. A MAN SERVANT follows behind with a carved chair.

WOMAN Set it here and I'll put the basket of cakes beside it. When I make seedcakes like these he eats the basket empty, down to the last. I've made plenty this time.

MAN That's right, feed him up and fat him. He's got himself trained down till he can jump in the air in the middle of a dance and crack his hocks together three times. You'll ruin that with your cakes.

WOMAN Would you have every man thin but you, you great hunk?

MAN I'd keep my king thin because he'll live longer.

WOMAN He was born to be oversize. Has a king no right to be heavy?

MAN Not my king hasn't. . . . Where do I put the chairs for the musicians?

WOMAN Here, near His Majesty. Come in, masters.

[THREE MUSICIANS, *with violins of the period, come in through the curtains from stage right*]

We'll put the chairs for you here, and the king himself will bring you the music. He writes a round, clear hand, music and words, and you'll read it easily.

[*The SERVANTS place chairs for the musicians, who sit to tune their instruments. One of them plays a little mournful sprig of a tune*]

MAN

When you've finished with that sad kind of stuff there's sweet sack in the buttery.

1ST MUSICIAN We'll have it afterward, if you'll save it. Here they come.

[The whole stage begins to light up. The curtains at the rear now look like a wall tapestry showing the return of the Prodigal Son. The musicians' stools and the king's chair and table are seen at stage right. ELIZABETH and MARY enter, dressed for a formal occasion. ANNE follows them]

MARY There was more than a little talk about you and the king—when you were young.

ELIZABETH Well, be sure it all came to nothing, and none of you children are his—though I'm not sure I could have held him off if he'd tried hard for me. We were about of an age, and we danced together a good deal, and he had the face of an angel in those days. And danced like an angel. But he was naïve and gentle—and I think he'd have been afraid to ask me. There was something innocent and pure about him then. He wanted to be a good king. He wanted to be a great king—almost a Messiah.

MARY He's changed indeed.

ELIZABETH Yes. He reads Machiavelli now.

[ELIZABETH and MARY take their places]

MARY But when he came to me first, he was still naïve. He was afraid of women who might be difficult. He wanted someone to whom he could say, "Open, sesame," and she'd open. I'm afraid that's what attracted him to me. He said, "Open, sesame," and there I was. His—his mule. It's his own word.

ELIZABETH You may yet be the mother of a king of England.

[ANNE sits beside her mother]

MARY Small chance of that. And small reward in it.

ELIZABETH It's more than I've ever had—of anything. And it won't happen so

easily again. He's grown infinitely more complex—and brutal. He wants a woman who will resist—a woman hardly won, a Roman conquest.

ANNE I've hated him from the beginning. I hate him now.

ELIZABETH That's what he wants.

ANNE I hate him and I hate Wolsey. What they did was like a murder. . . . It killed him. I think it will kill me too.

ELIZABETH If women died as easily as men there would be no women in this world.

MARY If you ever go to him, lock up your heart, never surrender yourself, keep a cold reserve of hate and anger and laughter and unfaith—

ANNE Thank you—I shall not go to him.

MARY For the moment you are won and conquered and a worshiper he will give you back to yourself and walk away. He'll want no more of you.

ANNE I shan't go to him, nor let him come to me. I'm not sure I shall live. Tell me why I should wish to live.

[THOMAS BOLEYN *enters from stage left*]

BOLEYN Are we ready?

ELIZABETH Quite ready, Thomas.

BOLEYN I think the king is waiting and anxious.

ELIZABETH We are waiting.

[BOLEYN *crosses the stage and looks within the curtains at stage left, then returns to stand behind his wife. THREE BOY SINGERS enter and take places near the musicians. KING HENRY comes from stage left, his hands full of manuscripts. The women rise and bow. WOLSEY follows HENRY in and waits*]

HENRY I am not here tonight as your king. Something was said at one time—I

forget by whom—about my bad poetry and bad music. It rankled deep—but then I saw that there was only one answer: to write great poetry and great music. And since I have a cause for anguish in my life, and songs come out of anguish, I have heard these strains in the night when I woke out of sleep, and I have risen and written them down. Many songs came to me. This is only one. It may be it is not a great song, but when I hear it I know it sings what is in my heart—the pain and the loss and the parting that’s like death. Here are your parts, masters. Play it and sing it as it is written, and sing it gravely, for it carries the awkward burden of a grief.

[The KING sits in his chair after giving out the music. The MUSICIANS look over the parts briefly, then the leader raps for attention and they begin. Wolsey stands behind the king]

SINGERS

Alas, alas,
What shall I do
For love, for love,
Alas what shall I do—
Since now so kind I do you find—
To keep you me unto?
To keep you me unto?

Oh my heart,
Oh my heart,
My heart it is so sore,
Since I must needs from my love depart,
And know no cause therefore—
And know no cause therefore!

[The SINGERS go out stage right. HENRY crosses to Anne]

HENRY

The music will now play a saraband of my writing. Will you dance it with me, Nan?

[ANNE looks down at the floor for a moment, rises silently and puts out her hands for the dance. The music begins and they take the first steps of the saraband. Then the lights dim down and close in till we see nothing but the faces of Henry and Anne. The music

hushes to pianissimo, so that we can hear their voices. They cease dancing, and now we see only their two faces motionless in a medallion of light]

ANNE Northumberland is dead.

HENRY Not by my order.

ANNE You sent him to marry elsewhere—and it killed him.

HENRY I couldn't let him marry you. I tried—but I couldn't.

ANNE When I look in your face I see his murderer.

HENRY I have learned something that makes me very humble, Nan. One cannot choose where he will love. Even a king cannot choose. I tried again and again to love elsewhere. I didn't want to come here, this year or last. But here I am. Bringing you the best I have—my music and my poetry and my love for you.

ANNE Even if I loved you, you offer me nothing. You're not free.

HENRY Not free?

ANNE You are married to Katharine.

HENRY Does that matter to a king? A king makes his own rules.

ANNE Does he? A king or no king, if he's married he's not free.

HENRY If you loved me you'd find me free.

ANNE From your marriage?

HENRY Here is my marriage, Nan. My older brother Arthur was heir to the kingdom. To make an alliance with Spain he married Katharine of Aragon. Then Arthur died—and I was heir to the throne of England. To continue the alliance with Spain I was advised to marry Arthur's widow, six years my senior. And I did. At seventeen I married her. I never loved her. I should never have married my brother's widow. There's a curse on the marriage. We cannot have sons. Our sons are all born dead. There is no heir male to the English crown because of this

accursed union. The kingdom faces anarchy when I die, and I face anarchy in my own life, because I have no male heir—yet because of the church and our friendship with Spain, I remain Katharine's husband. More than anything in this world I want a son, and she can't give me one—yet I must not publicly put her aside. Do you understand now? This marriage is a form—important only in statecraft and churchcraft, not to you or me.

ANNE Important or not, you can't break it. It's stronger than you are—and so you offer me nothing.

HENRY It's not nothing, Nan. It's my whole life. I know because I tried to erase you and fill my life with other things. It won't work. I can think of nothing but you.

[She has been looking straight into his eyes. She drops her head]
It's not only this pain, this stitch in the side, this poetry I can't keep from writing, this music that I hear when I think of you and must write down. . . . I'm a man, too, Nan. I want you—and only you. I find myself—when I'm talking to an ambassador, perhaps—I find myself thinking of you. And what am I thinking? Of you and me playing at dog and bitch. Of you and me playing at horse and mare. Of you and me every way there is. I want to fill you up—night after night. I want to fill you with sons.

ANNE Bastards? For they would be bastards, you know.

[There is a long pause. The music stops. The lights come up on the whole scene, revealing Henry and Anne in the middle of the stage, the others watching]

HENRY If you say one more word I shall strike you. One word more.

ANNE *[In his teeth]* But it's quite obvious that if you and I had children they would be bastards.

[There is another long pause, then HENRY strikes Anne heavily across the face. She goes down to one knee. WOLSEY and BOLEYN step forward, but do not interfere]

WOLSEY

[*Low*] Your Majesty.

[ANNE *gets slowly to her feet, a little dazed, then faces the king*]

ANNE You have not yet understood what I mean, I think. What I am trying to tell you is that you not only offer me nothing—you offer yourself nothing. You say you want a son, an heir to the throne. You need such an heir, and the kingdom needs him. But an heir must be legitimate—not baseborn—and while you are married to Katharine you can have only bastards. Fill me with as many sons as you like, you would still have no heir, and I would have—nothing. As for your music and your poetry and your love for me—you know I don't love you. You've given me good reason not to love you.

HENRY Would you marry me if I were free of Katharine?

ANNE You can't get free of Katharine. You know that. And I know it.

HENRY But if I were free of her, and free to marry you, and would make you queen of England, would you marry me?

[*There is a long pause*]

ANNE None of these things could be. Yes. If you'll make me queen of England I will marry you.

HENRY Wolsey!

WOLSEY We can do many things, as you know, my sovereign. We can shake the thrones of the Emperor and of the King of France. We can sometimes get our way in Rome. But this we could not do. Try to divorce Katharine and you'll have the whole world against you. You'll be at war with all Europe.

ANNE Very well.

HENRY You knew you'd get this answer.

ANNE Yes. I knew it.

WOLSEY The king asks very little of you, Anne. Any other woman would give it

readily.

ANNE Out of fear.

WOLSEY No.

ANNE Out of gratitude, then. But I'm not flattered, and I'm not afraid. If he will marry me and make me queen of England I will give him boys in plenty. But I will take nothing less.

HENRY It's true that I go through life
dragging a sick woman—cold and sick—
blotched and middle-aged—and fanatic—
who can give neither pleasure nor a living son.
I have worked at that long enough, I think. I know
what can come from that bed.
There never was much need for the hair shirt
she wears next her skin. And none now.

WOLSEY Any son of the king could be made legitimate—
could be made the heir.

HENRY Yes. It's true.

ANNE Your Majesty
already has a natural son. Have you made him the heir?
Is he legitimate?

WOLSEY He's made Duke of Richmond.

ANNE Could the Duke of Richmond inherit the throne?

WOLSEY He may. It could be. The lad's not well.
Not like to live.

ANNE But he would come first, shall we say? And then Mary's child.
It happens that any baseborn son I might have
would be younger than Mary's. Her child would come before mine.
My entry would be third.
Now we
are affectionate sisters, Mary and I.

We forgive each other
the little things that sisters must forgive.
Yet she would rather her son sat on the throne
than mine.
I'd rather mine than hers.
I'd rather have no son than a son baseborn.

HENRY

I shall rid myself of Katharine.
I shall make this girl queen.
I shall settle the question of the succession
once for all!

WOLSEY

Oh, my lord, I beg you,
as your faithful servant, I beg you,
don't promise this now.
It may mean your death—or the loss of your kingdom—
Or her death.
You are not yourself. This is not a small error.
It—

HENRY

I shall make this girl queen.

WOLSEY

She's never said she loved you!

HENRY

I shall make her queen.
If it breaks the earth in two like an apple
and flings the halves into the void,
I shall make her queen.

[The lights go out]

Act One

EPILOGUE

A center of light comes up on Anne at stage right, in the furred gown of the Prologue, the barred window behind her.

ANNE He knew very well I'd love him
 when once he'd made me his. And so it was.
 This is the night on which he made me his—
 the night I write here.
 After that night I loved him more and more
 and hated him less and less—
 and I was lost.

[The lights dim down]

CURTAIN

Act Two

PROLOGUE

The curtain rises in darkness, then the lights come up on Henry, alone, seated stage left at a table with a paper before him and a quill pen, ready to sign. On the curtains at the rear a window sharpens into focus gradually, showing in its colored panes the royal arms of the king of England.

HENRY

This is hard to do—
when you come to put pen on paper.
You say to yourself:
She must die. And she must—
if things are to go as planned.
Yes, if they are to go at all. If I am to rule
and keep my sanity and hold my England off the rocks.
It's a lee shore—and a low tide—and the wind's a gale—
and the Spanish rocks are bare and sharp.
Go back to it, Henry, go back to it.
Keep your mind
on this parchment you must sign.
Dip the pen in the ink; write your name.
[He dips the pen, draws the paper toward him, then lays down the pen]
You've condemned men, nobles and peasants.
She's struck down a few herself—
or driven you to do it.
It's only that a woman you've held in your arms
and longed for when she was away,
and suffered with her
and waited
for the outcome of her childbed—
No, but she promised me an heir.
Write it down.

Write Henry Rex and it's done.
And then the headsman
will cry out suddenly, "Look, look there!"
[*He points suddenly off stage*]
and point to the first flash of sunrise,
and she'll look,
not knowing what he means, and his sword will flash
in the flick of sun, through the little bones of her neck
as she looks away,
and it will be done.

What will it seem to men
I was like when I did this?
It will be written and studied.
The histories of kings are not secure.
The letters they have hidden, the secret ciphers
are unraveled and chuckled over.
"He loved her and he had her and he killed her,"
the books will say. The letters will be printed,
the stolen love letters where I played the fool
like a country boy to his milkmaid.
There's a heart drawn
at the bottom of one, and in the heart "A. B."
laboriously printed. "Henry Rex seeks
A. B., no other."

[*He prints the A. B. on the air with his finger*]

So the legend reads,
and will read so forever.
When she first refused me
I made off in a lash of anger and blood and spume—
a bull whale with the ocean at his prow—
"There's a whole world of women with eyes and purse-string mouths
and legs and pockets! Let her keep empty!"
But the harpoon had sunk deep, and it tugged me in,
and I came again—and took her—
and must have her.
And now I seek her death.
But she betrayed me. She has earned death.

Take the pen and write the name.
Let us pretend it's not your name at all,
but the name of a just judge.
You prayed this morning. You were long on your knees.
God will not allow you to condemn unjustly.
If you write your name here it is just.
But then, this hesitation to write my name,
is that, too, from God?
If I question that I question my whole life and all I've done.
Well, I do question it. At times.
[He takes up the pen]
Could she have betrayed me?
I think, as I loved her less she loved me more.
Even in anger could she have betrayed me?

[The lights dim down on Henry, coming up on stage right and center, though we still see the king as he watches the first scene]

Act Two

SCENE 1

Four players sit about a card table at stage right. They are Anne Boleyn; Mark Smeaton, a good-looking young gallant; Jane Seymour, a girl of Anne's own age—lady in waiting to Anne; and Henry Norris, a gentleman about the court. About them are grouped, some sitting, some standing, Elizabeth and Thomas Boleyn; the old Duke of Norfolk, Anne's uncle; Madge Shelton, another of Anne's waiting women; and Sir Thomas More, who stands watching in half-shadow. The players are placed so that Norris sits facing the audience. Anne faces toward stage left. Jane faces stage right, and Smeaton faces stage rear. An elaborate tapestry is gradually etched on the rear curtain.

NORRIS This is a new game they play in Paris now.

ANNE Does it have a name?

NORRIS They call it King's Ransom. First we all ante a noble
[*They ante*]
and then I deal four cards to each player, including myself. Face up,
thus.
[*He deals*]
Then, when all have four cards showing, the eldest hand—that's you,
darling—bets that she can beat the next card in the deck with one of
her own. You can bet any part of the money on the table—or all of it—
or nothing.

JANE I must beat it in the same suit?

NORRIS You must.

JANE But I have only one suit here, all clubs, and no court cards.

NORRIS Oh—your chances are very bad. You shouldn't bet at all.

JANE I thought so. I retire.
[*She picks up her cards*]

SMEATON I'm afraid this is not a game for wise men.

ANNE But you can play, my dear.

SMEATON *Touché*. I'll risk one noble.
[NORRIS *turns up a card*]

NORRIS Seven of diamonds. You win. You have the nine there.

SMEATON So I do.

NORRIS Here's your noble.

ANNE I'll bet what's on the table.

NORRIS Ah, you have four kings. You couldn't possibly lose.
[*He turns up a card*]
And you don't.

ANNE Is there no way I could bet more?

NORRIS None, alas. It's the chances of war. Like Alexander, you can't win more than there is at stake.

BOLEYN Do you need money, Jane?

JANE No, I'm even so far.
[NORRIS *pushes the money toward Anne*]

NORRIS Another gold noble, please. All round.
[*They ante*]

BOLEYN I ask because the king's treasury stands behind you tonight.

JANE Why does it, sir?

BOLEYN Because you are sitting in the king's chair. Whoever plays in the king's

place may draw on the resources of the king. I have known an earl to lose a thousand pounds in that seat, and walk away paying nothing because the king's treasury paid.

JANE But if he had won?

BOLEYN Oh, what you win you keep.

NORRIS Now, that's the way to live.

SMEATON Aye. That's the arrangement I'd like to have with my bankers.

MORE How men love injustice.

NORRIS Don't they? They know what would happen to them if they got what they earned.

ANNE Do you love justice, Sir Thomas?

MORE Now where would I have seen it?

[Henry is seen standing at the entrance, listening]

Still, men do seem to get what they deserve—in a rough way—over a long period.

ANNE You think so, truly?

MORE Well, it's my guess. There's no proving it. Nobody's ever made up the accounts. Think of the accounting system they'd have to have in heaven to reckon our follies and sins and good deeds, and decide what we should get. Think of the decisions they'd have to make—and revise. And reverse. Think of the good deeds that turned out badly—and of the murders that turned out to be a good thing. Yet—on the whole—it's my guess that what should come to a man does come to him.

ANNE Or to a woman.

MORE They're not exempt.

NORRIS I wonder who makes these intricate calculations. For example, I slapped my wife last Thursday. Now I thought it was good for her. I think she thought it was bad for her. Anyway, she gave me a black

mark for it. But suppose it definitely improved her character? What mark would heaven give me for it?

ANNE Think what it did to your character.

NORRIS That's another complication. It may have been bad for my moral structure to slap my wife. But suppose it was good for her? Am I then a martyr, having sacrificed myself, and acquired a black mark, in order to make her a better woman?

ANNE There must be a machine up above that computes these things, and filters them automatically—and keeps the score.

MORE But who built it? And suppose it gets out of order?

NORFOLK It's out of order all the time. I know. I've been watching it these many years.

ELIZABETH There may have been an error in it from the beginning.

MORE But somehow we came here. Somehow we are as we are.

NORRIS We're not as you made us in *Utopia*.

NORFOLK I hope God's happy in heaven. And got what he wanted.

SMEATON It's your play, Norris.

NORRIS I'll stay out of it. I've nothing here. Turn in your hands and Jane will shuffle and deal.

[*They throw in their cards.* SIR THOMAS WYATT *comes in from stage right*]

MADGE Ah—now we have another Sir Thomas—and the evening grows more and more literary!

SMEATON Take my chair, Wyatt. I don't half like this game.

ANNE Let's break it up. Tommy promised to bring a poem if it was finished—and might even read it for us. Won't you?

WYATT

It's the usual thing. After you've written a poem, you read it. And then, if you're a man of sense, you run for your life. Any other poets present?

MORE Only a plodding prose writer, friend.

WYATT They're the worst, of course. They hold all prose superior to all verse.

MORE True. And make no distinctions. Read your bad verses, man.

WYATT My bad verses?

MORE All verse is bad. Its intention is to mislead.

ANNE Is this a quarrel?

MORE Oh, an ancient one, my dear. A quarrel to the death, but unimportant. Only writers involved.

ANNE [*Rising*] I feel very foolish saying this to wise and learned men, but one thing we must not forget here in the court. It's the things we say and do here that set the pace for what is said and done in England. If Sir Thomas More is honored at court for his *Utopia*, then he is honored through England. If Sir Thomas Wyatt's verses are read at court, then through England men will want to read them—and it will be, well, honorable to write verses. And we should be aware of this—

MORE But not too much aware—

WYATT Lest the verses should not be good.

ANNE Do I speak too much like a queen? I am not queen yet, as you know, and yet if I am not queen there is no queen in England—for Katharine says nothing, is never sure—and the things a queen should do are not done.

MORE If you are hoping for a renaissance of letters—and of the spirit—in our England, my dear Nan, I fear you're ahead of your time. Men are always hoping for that kind of thing—and how often does it happen? Well—it happened once, in Greece, as everybody knows, and a sort of substitute renaissance happened in Rome later on. But that's all. The

rest is darkness through all Europe, through all later time. I hardly think we shall roll it back with our few books and sonnets.

ANNE But you write your books.

MORE I write them. I hope for no great upswing—till all men are free—and changed.

MADGE Still, I'd like to hear the poem.

ANNE Yes, Tommy.

WYATT Only if it's unanimous.

NORFOLK It's unanimous, lad. I know nothing about poetry, but I'll sit quiet and make the proper faces.

ANNE No excuse—no haw, no hem—no hanging back. Sit in the light here and read.

WYATT Here I sit, and here I read:

They flee from me that sometime did me seek,
With naked foot stalking within my chamber:
Once I have seen them gentle, tame, and meek,
That now are wild, and do not once remember
That sometime they have put themselves in danger
To take bread at my hand; and now they range,
Busily seeking in continual change.

SMEATON Is this about birds or women?

ANNE Hush!

NORFOLK It's about his women, son. Nobody has that much bellyache over birds.

WYATT The advantage of poetry is that nobody knows what it means.

Thanked be fortune, it hath been otherwise,
Twenty times better; but once especial,
In thin array, after a pleasant guise,
When her loose gown did from her shoulders fall,

And she me caught in her arms long and small,
And therewithal so sweetly did me kiss,
And softly said, “Dear heart, how like you this?”

NORFOLK Yes, he’s had his troubles with human females.

WYATT In the interests of the renaissance I continue.

It was no dream; for I lay broad awaking:
But all is turned now, through my gentleness,
Into a bitter fashion of forsaking;
And I have leave to go of her goodness;
And she also to use new-fangleness.
But since that I unkindly am so served,
“How like you this?”—What hath she now deserved?

MORE We were talking about that before you came in—about what people deserve, and whether they get it. Always, never, or sometimes.

HENRY [*Speaking out of half-darkness*] All three, I think. Some get it always, some get it never, some get it sometimes.

[*The court rises and bows*]

Sit, sit, bend no more, either at the half or the quarter or the three-quarters. Relax necks, knees, and middles, and, if you’ll be more comfortable, unbutton. I’m unbuttoning my own doublet right now. That last portion—well, probably what I feel now is my just desert. . . . Did nobody understand that?

ANNE We were being very quiet and respectful, my good lord.

HENRY You were indeed. What’s in the air tonight?

ANNE Henry Norris has taught us a new card game from Paris and Sir Thomas Wyatt has read us a poem about women.

NORFOLK His women.

ANNE I gathered they’re not his women any more.

HENRY [*Sitting*] You’ll forgive me for this, I know—I listened for a few moments before I entered. I said to myself, “Let me hear what my

court's like when I'm not there." I listened to you all. And I believe we have now in England what no king of this island has ever had before, a beginning of those things that take a nation upstream to greatness. Quick minds, critical, witty, and yet willing to say, "Yes, this is good," when something good flashes out. A philosopher who has some fun in him, and a poet who can write lines that catch at the heart. We have not had this before. We have had a dull court. Religious and dutiful and dull. And the change has come with this my Nan, who stands embarrassed before you, and wants to quiet me. Come and quiet me with a kiss on the mouth, Nan, for you've brought me a nest of singing birds here, and for the first time I begin to believe I may go down as a great king, after a great reign, and over a great nation. Since you don't come to kiss me I go to kiss you.

[He does so]

This is what I've always wanted, you know, to feel a stirring of minds about me, to feel that my age will not go back into death without leaving a little something for men to recollect. . . . I wish I could spend my time here, and not with legates and ambassadors and politicians, good and bad. I've been with such a set all day, and all year, and the years before—and as if that were not enough here comes another set of them, and I must send away these larks my lover has gathered and go back to the quarrel among rats and hogs.

[WOLSEY and CROMWELL appear in the half-light]

Come in, gentlemen. Come in, my good Cardinal, you who labor while I sleep. The May flies are about to depart and we must go to work.

[A general exodus begins, to make way for the business session]

Wyatt, it's good poetry. It will need more than one reading.

WYATT

Then I'm afraid it needs another writing.

[He goes]

HENRY

Maybe, maybe. Try it, try it. More, it's more than four years since we sat on the palace roof together and considered the motions of the stars.

MORE

They haven't changed much, Your Majesty.

[He follows WYATT]

HENRY That's the saddest subject I know, astronomy. But very good for kings. It teaches them that kings and subjects are no different.

NORFOLK It's a lie, Majesty. The kings can coin money and the subjects can't.

HENRY Under heaven that means nothing, Norfolk.

NORFOLK Over hell it means a good deal. And I'm old enough to feel pretty close to hell. And I resent the king coining money when I can't! Especially when he cuts down the silver by half, and doubles the number of shillings in a pound!

[*He goes*]

HENRY You know, he has hold of something there. It was not quite honest, but I needed the money and I had to do it.

BOLEYN Good night, my lord.

HENRY Good night, my treasurer. Here's one man who knows how desperately I had to do it. Good night, good night.

[*The last of the courtiers go, leaving only Henry, Anne, Wolsey and Cromwell*]

ANNE I'll leave you two to conspire.

HENRY Stay, my dear, stay. Help me with whatever it is.

WOLSEY What I have to say is for Your Majesty's private ear.

HENRY I have no private ear—not from Nan.

WOLSEY [*Shifting quickly*] To be frank, it could go till tomorrow. I'm sorry I interrupted. Shall we call the court back?

HENRY Come, come, what barrel of herrings is this you don't want to broach before Nan?

WOLSEY My king, let us have the poets again—

HENRY On pain of my displeasure—what did you come here to say?

WOLSEY [After a moment's hesitation] For the preservation of your good fortune—and that of England—I must endure your displeasure.

HENRY [Angry] It has been your habit lately to slight my wife and overlook her presence and counsel! Speak now—and before her!

WOLSEY Why, if I must, I shall. Our messenger returned from Rome today. We have the last word from that quarter.

HENRY Oh?

WOLSEY And not one we can welcome.

HENRY What is it?

WOLSEY The Pope will not annul your marriage to Katharine.

HENRY But he must.

WOLSEY He will not. He makes it quite definite and final.

HENRY But what reason can he give?

WOLSEY The reason he gives is unimportant. The true reason is that he is a prisoner, and cannot grant it.

HENRY What kind of prisoner?

WOLSEY An actual one. He was just about to annul your marriage to Katharine. He had quite sufficient ground for it—she was your brother's widow, and that's enough. But now the Emperor Charles has invaded Italy and captured the Vatican. He can give orders there and does. And the Emperor Charles is Katharine's nephew, and he doesn't want his aunt divorced from you. Pope Clement has been forbidden to favor us in the matter.

HENRY How do you know this?

WOLSEY From my agents in Rome. . . . Times will change, of course. There will be another pope; there will be another emperor. But there can be no divorce this year.

HENRY
There must be a divorce this year. Nan is with child—and her child must be heir to the throne.

WOLSEY
I warned you when you first contemplated this marriage—

ANNE
It was you who came first to me, demanding me for King Henry!

WOLSEY
There was no thought of marriage at that time.

ANNE
You are a man of the church! You speak for the church!

WOLSEY
I am King Henry's minister. I speak for what can be done. I speak against what cannot.

HENRY
You will somehow get this divorce for me.

WOLSEY
My king, you and I have worked together on this. We've tried everything we could lay hands or wits on. [To ANNE] For two years, Lady Anne, step by step, with patience and cunning and the best skill there is about us, we have tried to bring about the divorce from Katharine. Henry went to her and asked directly for it. He told her, which is true, that from the beginning he and she had been living in mortal sin. She refused him. As for me, I have marshaled cardinals and bishops like storm troops to assail the Pope's position. I have tried from every angle, from every direction, with money, influence, and temporal power. I have run my head against this wall like a bull in a stone barn—till there's blood dripping in my eyes and I'm worn out. And when we were about to win—when the wall was crumbling and going down before us—the Emperor broke into Italy and made the church his vassal. In that situation I'm powerless. And so is Henry.

ANNE
What are we to do?

WOLSEY
Live as you were. Live as you are. Wait.

ANNE
Children don't wait for these changes among the dynasties. They come at their own time, convenient or inconvenient. They don't wait.

WOLSEY
I know no other answer. Am I dismissed, my lord?

HENRY
Yes.

[WOLSEY *and* CROMWELL *bow and go out stage right*]

I hoped to win suddenly and have good news for you some morning, but it hasn't come. This comes instead. . . . Am I forgiven, Nan?

[*He puts his hand over hers*]

ANNE Is anything ever forgiven?

HENRY Is that your answer?

ANNE How do I know what you've agreed with Wolsey? In all your pacts with kings and princes of the whole earth, I've never known you to tell the truth—never!

HENRY But I've told it to you!

ANNE I thought you had. I've tried to take the place you wanted me to take—and do what must be done—because I had promised, and you had promised. But what I feared has come about—

[HENRY *leaps to his feet*]

HENRY God in Heaven damn this spotted bitch! To be called a liar by my own bitch! Damn you!

ANNE I've heard you lie to too many. You've never yet told truth when a lie would serve! And we had a bargain, remember. I said, "If you will make me queen I will marry you!" But our marriage was at night and in secret; the church does not hold it valid; I am not the queen, and my child will not inherit the throne! Was this planned? It's like many plans I've known you to make!

HENRY I'll strangle you yet! I'll make an end of you!

ANNE No doubt.

HENRY You've lied at times! And to me! What's all this sudden passion about lying?

ANNE I could have said, "I love you, I love you, I love you!" I didn't say it. Because I don't. And whether you love me I don't know. You've been

unfaithful to me often enough—and I've known where and with whom!

HENRY

If I have you've spoiled it for me, with your damned mocking face watching me through the walls! You spoil everything for me! Faithful—what kind of faith do you want of me? To be impotent in every bed but yours? Well, that's happened, too! They've laughed at me in their beds—more than one. Laughed at their king—and he impotent—with all but you! It's as if you were a disease in me—so that I'm in a fever when you're with me and a fever when you're absent—and it grows worse with the years that should burn it out! What more can I give, in faith or anything I have?

ANNE

What you promised! What you gave your pledged word to do?

HENRY

[*Gently*] Anne—I have tried. Not always the right way, perhaps, but my best.

ANNE

You see—if I have a child before this divorce is granted—well, you are still as you are, untouched, but I'm not.

HENRY

I know, Anne. And it's unfair. But it's not what I meant. I meant it all quite honestly—quite as I said. I like what you've done with the court. I want you for my queen. I've lied to all the others, but not to you. . . . Why must she anger me? Why am I tied to this alabaster face and this pinched-up mouth and these slanted eyes?

[*A shadow moves at stage right and Cromwell's voice is heard*]

CROMWELL

May I come in, Your Majesty?

HENRY

[*Angry*] Who is it? Who disturbs me here?

CROMWELL

I am the lord Cardinal's secretary, Your Majesty. My name is Cromwell.

HENRY

Stay out! No—come in.

[*CROMWELL approaches*]

You were just here.

CROMWELL

Yes, Majesty.

[*He bows*]

HENRY Well, what do you want? Has the Cardinal forgotten something?

CROMWELL He forgets nothing, my liege, except his duty to his king.

HENRY I'm in no mood for riddles.

CROMWELL I mean that Your Majesty may have your divorce, and the Lady Anne be crowned queen, and the child to come made heir apparent very simply. It needs only the will to do it.

HENRY Whose will?

CROMWELL The Cardinal's. He has something else in mind. He's playing his hand to get himself made pope in Rome. He's not thinking of you or your divorce.

HENRY You have been dismissed once—now once again!

ANNE What makes you say this?

CROMWELL I know it.

HENRY I've worked with Wolsey. This man is mad or fanatic—

ANNE If the Pope will not grant the divorce—and can't grant it—how can any of these things you say be done?

CROMWELL Forgive me, Your Majesty. I am not a fanatic, not a madman. All my life I have been an earnest student at the inns of court. I have read the laws of England, something which few seem to have bothered to do. There is a law of this land that makes it treason to acknowledge any higher authority than the will of the king. The church in England must grant the king a divorce if he wishes it. To maintain that the Pope may govern the king in such a matter—or in any matter—is traitorous and punishable by death. Say this to Cardinal Wolsey. He will turn white to the roots of his beard. For he too knows of this law. . . . To bring about all these things you wish, the king has only to appoint a new primate who will legalize his divorce and a new marriage.

HENRY

That would mean excommunication and a complete break with Rome. If there is such a law.

CROMWELL Yes, Majesty. But there is such a law. Of that you may be sure. It is called the law of praemunire.

HENRY I have always been a defender of the faith. And of the church. That is my greatest strength with my people. I can't change there.

CROMWELL Allow me to say a word on that subject, Your Grace. As matters stand you are but half a king. We are only half-subject to you. If you were truly king in England could a foreign prelate call you to account? England is only half-free. You are only half-free. What the king of England wants he should have, without hindrance from abroad.

HENRY [*Dryly*] I fear such independence might be purchased very dearly.

CROMWELL Dearly? You have sometimes found yourself in need of money, Your Majesty.

HENRY Well?

CROMWELL At one stroke you could obtain your divorce and make yourself the wealthiest monarch in Europe. The monasteries of England are richer than the gold mines of the new world. Quarrel with Rome, set yourself at the head of the English church, and these riches are yours.

HENRY You are a man without scruple, Master Cromwell.

CROMWELL Entirely without scruple, Your Majesty. I have learned my trade, as you know, under Cardinal Wolsey. For your information I have brought with me a list of the church properties which the Cardinal has already condemned for his own use. And an itemized history of how and where he obtained the furnishings for his palace at York—as well as the titles to the estate. Cardinal Wolsey is a richer man than you, Your Majesty.

HENRY For the third time, you are dismissed, Master Cromwell. . . . But I shall be able to find you if I need you?

CROMWELL Yes, Your Majesty.

ANNE I should like to see those papers.

CROMWELL [*Smiling grimly*] Yes, Your Majesty.

[*He hands the papers to Anne and goes*]

ANNE [*After a pause*] Do you think he tells the truth?

HENRY There would be little point in his coming to us unless he told the truth.

ANNE Is there such a law?

HENRY I've never heard of it, but he convinces me there is.

ANNE [*Who has the papers before her*] The Cardinal seems to have stolen an immense amount of money.

HENRY Doubtless.
[*He rises, pondering*]
Doubtless he stole more than I knew. Though I'm not exactly innocent in the matter. We sometimes went halves.

ANNE Are you also a pupil of the Cardinal's?

HENRY I am the son of Henry the Seventh. I studied under a real master—my father. Whatever crookedness was lacking in the world when my father was born he invented before he left it. No other king of our island ever stole so widely, so successfully, so secretly—or died so rich. And the central principle he taught me was this: always keep the church on your side.

ANNE Then he didn't steal from the church?

HENRY Oh, yes. He stole from everybody. But not enough to turn it against him. I've stolen from the church too. But not enough to turn it against me. So far.

ANNE If this law exists—you could have the divorce, we could be married legally—and you could be richer than your father.

HENRY I'm thinking of just that.
[*He takes a turn or two up and down as he speaks*]

And of my father's advice. And they pull me two ways. . . . I'm your prisoner, Nan. Little as I like it, I'm your prisoner, and I mean to make you my queen. You've never told me you loved me. But if you were my queen—it would happen. You would say it and it would be true. . . . And now a hatch opens. As if in the floor. It may be I could make you my queen at once. And make myself wealthy beyond hope—but I'd have to make the church my enemy.

ANNE And you love me—not quite enough.

HENRY Suppose I set out to make myself head of the church. I shall be opposed by many who are now my friends. They will be guilty of treason and I shall have to kill them. Those whom I like best—those who have some integrity of mind—will speak first against me. They must die. Parliament and the nation can then be bludgeoned into silence—but a lot of blood will run before they're quiet. Most of my people will hate me—and even more will hate you. Yes, I can make my Nan queen—but we must consider the price. In how much we dare be hated. Are we willing to pay it?

ANNE I am.

HENRY You are new at this work, of course. You don't know quite what it means. To see blood run. If you knew, I wonder if you'd still wish it.

ANNE I am with child.

[HENRY *comes back to his chair*]

HENRY The altar at St. Paul's will stand ankle-deep in blood. The shopkeepers will mop blood from their floors. . . . But it must be done if we're to marry. Well, so be it.

ANNE Must so many die?

HENRY Many must die. And it will look as if I had done this for money. Like my father.

ANNE He killed for money?

HENRY It was his main source of income—to attain a well-lined noble for

treason, do away with him, and take what he had. It brought in millions. I've been trying not to think of that.

ANNE Don't think of it.

HENRY It will bring in the money anyway. And—the money would be useful. If only you could love me a little—no, not a little—with your whole heart . . . then—it wouldn't matter what happened—or what's thought of me.

ANNE [*Putting out her hand*] Sometimes—no. If you were ever honest—if you were ever true. . .

HENRY [*Taking her hand*] Yes?

ANNE But you never are.

[*The lights go out*]

Act Two

SCENE 2

A great sunburst window brightens first, then we see York Palace. NORFOLK and CROMWELL enter to the window and listen to the sounds of cheering without. A few voices cry:

VOICES Long live the new queen! Long live Queen Anne!

A VOICE Long live Queen Katharine! Long live—

VOICES Down with him! He took foreign money! Long live Queen Anne!

NORFOLK It seems to me the shouting for Queen Anne was somewhat sparse along the streets—not what you'd expect for a royal wedding and a coronation. You should have paid them a bit and we'd have heard something really spontaneous.

CROMWELL They were paid.

NORFOLK How many of them?

CROMWELL A thousand apprentices.

NORFOLK How much were they paid?

CROMWELL One groat each.

NORFOLK A groat? Man, that won't buy a whole drink of good liquor! They should have had a silver penny apiece and they'd have shaken the foundations! They'd have rung the bells! They'd have jumped out of windows! Anyway, they'd have thrown their caps in the air! The rabble I saw must have had the mange. Their headgear was stuck tight on their skulls and when they yelled it was more like a growl.

CROMWELL For a half-crown each, or a whole one, they wouldn't cheer Queen Anne—not as they'd like to be cheering Queen Katharine.

NORFOLK Why man, have you lost faith in money? And in King Henry? They'll go along with Henry in time. Give him a few years and he'll make them love this queen as much as the first.

CROMWELL Those that were yelling loudest were calling her a whore.

NORFOLK Those were paid, too, Cromwell. Those were paid, too—and probably more. By the Spanish ambassador. Or by our friend Wolsey. I'm pretty sure they were paid more than you paid, because what they shouted came straight from the heart.

[The cheering begins again]

VOICES God save Queen Anne!

[HENRY and ANNE enter from the right and pause to listen to the cheering]

ANNE Wasn't it rather flimsy applause?

NORFOLK Nonsense, Your Majesty. It was what you always get in London when the folk are truly moved. It goes too deep for noise. They just stand there and weep.

ANNE Uncle, uncle, you're an unprincipled old sinner. There were no tears. They didn't even bother to uncover.

HENRY Let's be thankful for the friends we have, my dear. Will you be happy here?

ANNE I've never known there was anything so perfect in England.

HENRY There isn't, anywhere else. This must have been his library.

CROMWELL Yes, it was. He worked in this room.

HENRY And so, will you be happy?

ANNE Who else will live here?

HENRY Only you.

ANNE

There's room for so many.

HENRY There'll be no apartment here for anyone save you. Not even for me unless you ask me.

ANNE I've never had a place that was mine.

CROMWELL There's someone here.

[The lights come up a little at stage right, and we see an old man bowed over papers at a table. He looks up. It is Cardinal Wolsey, much changed]

WOLSEY Ah, forgive me. Go on with whatever you have in hand, you young people. I'm only finishing an inventory for the new owner.

CROMWELL His Majesty waits for you to rise, Cardinal Wolsey.

WOLSEY You must forgive me. I can rise only with assistance. My legs are not for dancing, any more. But the inventory's ready, and now I write my name.

[He writes]

ANNE I'm afraid we disturb you here.

WOLSEY It's better that you should. The palace is much too beautiful for an old man. It needs youth in it. Here's the paper. I'm sorry that I can't rise and bring it to you—or kneel before you. I can only reach it out.

ANNE *[Going to him]* I've been your enemy—but I can't take it from you.

WOLSEY Take it. Take it. My life is broke square in two. I have no use for it now, and you have. So take it.

[She doesn't put out her hand]

Or I'll leave it here.

[He lays the paper down] It's yours.

HENRY We thought you had left for Esher.

WOLSEY It was my intention to be gone when you came, my lord, but some friends of mine were here, and they wished to see you, and they

persuaded me to stay.

HENRY
Some friends of yours?

WOLSEY
And of yours. Sir Thomas More, Bishop Fisher, and John Houghton,
Prior to the Charter House in London.

HENRY
They are here?

WOLSEY
Yes. Will you see them?

HENRY
We thought to escape conferences this one day, but
[*He looks at Anne*]
kings and queens are never excused. Let them come in.
[*WOLSEY claps his hands and THREE MEN enter from stage right. Henry
welcomes them as they come in*]
Welcome, Sir Thomas More! Welcome, Bishop of Rochester!
Welcome, Prior John Houghton! I know what you come to say, but
welcome!

MORE
It's good of you to see us, Your Majesty.

HENRY
Make it plural, More. Our Majesties are both seeing you. We have
come from the coronation.

MORE
It's about that we wish to speak, my lord. But Bishop Fisher is the
eldest and most learned among us. I ask him to speak first.

FISHER
I have known you from a child, King Henry. I was present when you
took your first three steps. You know I would not willingly say any
word displeasing to you. I have not opposed your divorce. I have not
opposed your new marriage or the coronation of Queen Anne. Such
things are sometimes necessary in the conduct of a state. But you also
ask that every religious in England swear fealty to you as spiritual head
of the church. And I cannot accept your guidance in spiritual matters.

HENRY
But if I were not head of your church there could be no divorce and no
marriage to Anne. Anne could not be crowned. Her child could not
succeed me.

FISHER
I know that. And still I cannot accept you as my spiritual guide.

HENRY Do you accept the church of Rome?

FISHER Yes.

HENRY Is the Pope moved by spiritual considerations?

FISHER Your Majesty, I accept the spiritual authority of the church. I cannot accept your usurpation of that authority.

HENRY Then—though I'm very sorry to lose my friend—I'm afraid you are guilty of treason and will die for it.

FISHER If it were only I, my king, it wouldn't matter. But there are thousands of my order and of similar orders who cannot take this oath. Must they all die?

HENRY If they wish to die, they may. If they insist, they will.
And I'll tell you why!
You have no right to question me, but I'll answer!
I had no mind to cut adrift from Rome
when this thing started. But I was driven to it—by Rome—
and now the cable's cut, and we're adrift
unless we anchor to something! Church and all,
we're adrift! And I see no anchor but the king,
and it happens I'm the king!
John Houghton, why are you here?

HOUGHTON I could sign everything that's asked, Your Majesty,
except the act that constitutes the king
head of the church I serve.

HENRY You will sign it or die.

HOUGHTON Then all my Charter House dies with me.

HENRY Have you not seen I have no alternative?
Rome denies my divorce. If I go and take it
I deny Rome's authority, and set up
an authority of my own! It's Rome or the king!
I had to choose—and now you must! Sir Thomas?

MORE I have watched you govern for many years, King Henry.
It's a tyranny—and not a tyranny.

HENRY I thank you.

MORE You keep no standing army. You use your power unjustly, illegally often, but your way is never to go beyond what the people's will supports—or will support. You're very shrewd in judging what you dare do. It's as if you had an extra sense—the king's finger—and you kept it on the pulse of your subjects—on your whole kingdom—and knew—before they knew—where they were going—and how far in the year. Only this time I don't follow you at all. How can you hope your people will go with you when you rob their mother church, devour her children, slip your cuckoo eggs into the nest, and ask that we sit and say nothing's happened?

HENRY You're a great man,
Sir Thomas More, but it may be there's some truth in that about the king's finger. They'll go with me.
The people will.

MORE Tell me why.

HENRY It's—they don't like Rome.
They want to be free of Rome. They'll take me rather than some foreigner overseas. This wasn't true ten years ago. It's beginning to be true only now. This year.

MORE It may be true. I don't know.
I've known these things to happen before with you.
Not quite like this. Not on this scale.

HENRY It will happen. Must you still
refuse to sign?

MORE I must follow my own conscience.
I have no king's finger. I can't sign.

FISHER And I can't.

HOUGHTON Nor I, my lord.

HENRY I'm very sorry.

MORE We may go?

HENRY Yes, gentlemen. You move away from this world of your own will.

MORE Your Majesty, it will go on without us.

HENRY No doubt of that. Farewell, then. Go with them, Norfolk.

NORFOLK Yes, Majesty.

[MORE, HOUGHTON, and FISHER bow and go out stage right, accompanied by NORFOLK]

WOLSEY Tom, will you help me up?

CROMWELL Yes, sir.

[He helps WOLSEY to his feet]

WOLSEY Good-by, Your Majesties.

HENRY Good-by, Wolsey.

ANNE [Low] Good-by.

[CROMWELL helps WOLSEY out stage right]

HENRY And that answers the last of them that dare speak. The rest will die silent. [He turns to her] Anne?

ANNE Yes.

HENRY Now I've done all you asked of me.
all you asked

when we first danced together.

And more.

For you said nothing about a place of your own
back there at our beginning.

ANNE

Yes. You've done more.

HENRY

I think there's never been
in all this world
a king who gave so much to find his way
to the heart of her he loved.
Over many years,
winter and summer, I have fought and chopped
and hacked and stabbed my path through the jungle of laws
and events and churchly rules—
and the flesh of friends—
to come to this day.
To come to this day when I can say it's done,
and I have earned her love.
For all these days,
Sweet, we have lain together, and kissed and drawn
apart from the world into a world of our own,
but not once, not once have you said,
"I love you."
Surely now—surely
my Nan will say it now?

ANNE

[*After a pause*] Yes, I do love you.

HENRY

So.
Then that's not it. Not what I wanted.

ANNE

What did you want, my lord?

HENRY

Why—I don't know.
Only—I still don't have you. You're not mine.

ANNE

Is it something I could say?

HENRY

Why, yes, I think it is, if you wished to say it.
But you don't. Perhaps it's better.
Let it go. Let us look at the palace.

ANNE Yes, let us look at York Place—
and find your rooms for you.

HENRY You'll want me here?

ANNE Yes.

HENRY You're sure?

ANNE Yes.

HENRY Nan?

ANNE My lord?

HENRY Did someone say to you—sometime—
“Never be all his,
never melt to him—never forget to hate him
at least a little—for that way you'll lose him”?

ANNE I've said it to myself.

HENRY Do you say it now?

ANNE Yes.

HENRY I see. That's what I feel. That you're never mine.

ANNE Isn't it better so?

HENRY Because you might lose me?
No—don't answer that. Let's look at the rooms.

ANNE Yes.

HENRY And yet . . .
I think I'm not as I was.
I think I've earned your heart—all your heart—

over these years.

Yet keep it if you wish.

Only—Nan, Nan,

last night while I lay thinking of you,

and couldn't sleep, and cursed myself for not sleeping,

I found myself writing the words of a lyric,

a little poem,

and trying the music for it in my mind.

It was a poem that grew from three words I heard

once, from this same Sir Thomas More who must die,

three words, "Always, never, sometimes."

I rose and wrote the poem down, and the music,

and as I wrote I said to myself:

"Do I mean what is said by this music,

or by these words?"

And now I ask myself, "Do I mean them now?"

Here I stand, a king, with the woman I love,

planning murder for her sake,

planning to rob, lost in a copse of lies,

sweating, falling over boulders,

without a star. It's a king's life. A king lives so.

Yet the music I wrote and remember says something simple and sweet

and the words are undressed truth.

Something within me drove me to write them

out of the undergrowth of sweat and lies,

looking for a star. It's that way always.

I haven't meant to do ill.

I've meant to do well.

I have known that good was better than evil,

when I've known which was evil, which was good,

but what test is there—what star, what beacon of fire?

Is it the church, held in thrall?

Is it the Christ?

Withdraw your guards,

make no wars,

strike no man down who strikes you,

and how long will you be there, you or your nation?

I found it better to let all that go and write a lyric with music,
writing to one I loved, a bitch who does not love me,
but writing truly, thus, out of myself:

Waking at night, I go to my window,
 Scanning the stars in a portion of sky,
Fixing on one that hangs yonder—and over
 The street of the house where you lie.
 If you sleep, do you dream,
 If you dream, is it of me?
The clock strikes; I hear your voice in the chimes,
 Repeating your words
 When I ask if you love me:
 “Always, never, sometimes.”

ANNE I didn't say it.

HENRY No, Sir Thomas More said it. But you might have.
Writing's like that. You never write down what happened.
But what you write comes closer to what's true
than what did happen, or was said.

ANNE I love you.

HENRY Nan!

ANNE I love you. Now I know. I love you.

HENRY I think you mean this.

ANNE I've said it, and it's true.
These men who were to die, Henry—
Sir Thomas More
and all the others—they must live.

HENRY That was all done for you, sweet.

ANNE Yes, but we must let them live.

HENRY Our marriage may not be valid,
nor my divorce from Katharine,

nor the succession to your issue,
if they refuse to swear, and live—

ANNE

It doesn't matter.

It doesn't matter about the divorce—or the marriage—
or having this palace. Let them swear or not swear
as they like. Let Katharine keep her throne, and Mary
inherit. You love me, and I love you,
and I can say it.

HENRY

Why can you say it?

ANNE

Because of the poem—
and the things you put in it—
and the things you are—
when we speak, and are close together.
I've been afraid to say it, afraid to be it,
but now—
Let it come, whatever it brings. I'm deep in love.
With one I hated.
Who took me anyway. Took me from my first love.
With you.

HENRY

I thought you'd never say it.
Oh, if it's true, and you'll lie in my arms and love me,
then I can be the king you've wished me to be,
the king I've wished to be,
just, generous, magnanimous to enemies,
royal enough to treat all men royally,
only I'll need you to help me.

ANNE

If I can.

HENRY

It's not because of the palace?
Never a fair woman but loved silks
and oriel windows and coronets.

ANNE

No, dear, it's you,
and hearing your thoughts,

and being close to you,
and thinking of the men that must not die.

HENRY

Then it's a new age. Gold
or some choicer metal—or no metal at all,
but exaltation, darling. Wildfire in the air,
wildfire in the blood!
Have you room in your heart for much loving?

ANNE

All you have.

HENRY

For now you'll have no rest.

ANNE

I want none. Here.

[She opens her arms. He kisses her and they stand embraced]

HENRY

I was a pirate till I met you, Nan.
No girl could call me hers,
her minion.
But I'm yours.
Is it some trick of the way you turn your eyes
suddenly, and smile?
Sometimes I think it's that.
Is it the triangle of eyes and mouth,
and the way they go together
like no others?
Is it your lips?
Let me see.
[He kisses her]
Now I think it's your lips.
Or is it that little trill of speech you brought
from France—
hesitating over a word,
and bewitching it with a laugh?
Is it your brows?
[He kisses her brows]
Is it the delicacy of all you are,
the flower face,

and the minuscule breasts that I cup in my hands,
and the tiny dancing feet
like a figurine's
but tireless to dance with?

ANNE
Never mind my size—
I've been teased about it.

HENRY
There's one way to decide—
I'll kiss you all, feet to crown—
and it won't take long,
it's not far to go!

ANNE
Not now.
No, it's because I was hard to get, King Henry.
But for whatever it was, I'm happy—
to have it as it pleases you.
And, as for you,
I know what it is about you.

HENRY
What about me?

ANNE
There's everything in you.
Good and bad.
There's so much in you, you hardly know who you are.
You're a world. With one
you're a man about courts, a fantastic,
with another
you're an authority on religion,
monastic, grim, savage, learned,
then again
a pedant, running with ink, ink on your fingers,
ink in your hair—if you cut yourself you bleed ink.
With another a sportsman,
talking shafts, or deer, or pheasants,
or the habits of eels.
Then you're a lover of old manuscripts
and libraries, an illuminator of Chaucer.

Or a despot, or a king, a magnifico. Sometimes.
Or a host, or a poet—
or a merry guest, or a dancer, or a devil.
God what a devil you can be!
You hardly know who you are.

HENRY I know with you.

ANNE But for all of these—
I kiss you. For the devil, too.

HENRY Kiss me for all of them,
for each one separately,
and then again, twice as many, for myself.

[She kisses him, lips, eyes, and brow. CROMWELL returns, stage right]

CROMWELL Forgive me, Your Majesty.

HENRY We're reversing a policy, Cromwell.
The oath to the Act of Succession is not required.
Let them swear or not swear, as they please.

CROMWELL But, Your Majesty—there are men sentenced—many—

HENRY Lift the sentences. Go now, and leave us alone.

CROMWELL Yes, Majesties.

[He goes, stage right]

HENRY And now—it's your palace.
I have no place here till I'm asked.

ANNE Then I ask it.
You won't need an apartment here.
My place is yours.
Whatever I am is yours. Or what I have.
Put your arms round me.

HENRY Yes, sweet.

[He puts his arms round her]

ANNE

I want to be yours only.

HENRY

I have been yours only—these many years. And now,
for the first time—

[He kisses her. The lights go out]

you are mine, too.

Act Two

SCENE 3

A bedroom in York Palace. Anne Boleyn lies in bed with an infant beside her. Elizabeth Boleyn, Madge Shelton, and Norfolk are in the room. Madge and Elizabeth bend over the child.

ELIZABETH What beautiful little hands! What a beautiful face!

ANNE I think I shall call her after you, mother.

ELIZABETH Hush!

ANNE Well, he must know sooner or later. It may as well be soon.

NORFOLK The king's at the door now, in case you wish to know.

ELIZABETH He must come in, of course.

ANNE Not yet—not yet! Make some excuse. Not quite yet.

ELIZABETH My dear, it's her father—the king.

ANNE She is beautiful.

ELIZABETH Yes, she is.

NORFOLK (*At the door*) It seems all's ready, Your Majesty.

[HENRY *enters and stands at the door, looking at the bed*]

HENRY Nan, sweet—

ANNE Yes, Henry?

HENRY Do I come too soon? Will it tire you to speak?

ANNE No, Henry. I'm glad to see you.

[HENRY *comes into the room, staring at the child*]

HENRY I won't say much. Nor stay long. I just want to look at you two—the most precious freight ever a bed carried. My queen—and my prince—my son.

ANNE My lord—

HENRY Hush. Rest, my dear, and get strong. I shall call him Edward. It's been a lucky name for English kings. A lucky name and a great name. Oh, little lad, little lad, may you better them all for fortune and fair renown!

ANNE My lord, we—

HENRY All my life as a king I have asked only one thing of heaven—that it grant me a son to carry on what I leave. And now heaven has given me more than I asked, for this is a handsome, bold boy's face, and already there's wit behind those eyes—

ANNE Her name's to be Elizabeth.

HENRY Whose—name?

ANNE We have a little daughter . . . and her name's Elizabeth.

HENRY A daughter! Why did no one tell me?

NORFOLK They're all afraid of you, my lord. I offered to go. What can he do to an old man, I said, beyond the usual disemboweling? But they said no, wait.

HENRY They were wrong. Whatever happens we must look our hap in the face. Why, girl, don't look so down. If we can have a healthy girl together we can have a healthy boy together. We shall get one yet.

ANNE I'm sorry, Henry. As if it were my fault.

HENRY It's no fault of anyone. There must be girls as well as boys. She has a sonsie sweet face. . . . I like her no less than I did—not a groat less. Get better, lass; eat well and get on your legs quickly. We'll have a good life, we'll let this beauty grow a foot or two, and then we'll have our son—and so nothing's lost. Norfolk, I'm off for the hunting. Come with me.

NORFOLK

I, my lord?

HENRY

Aye—come with me and talk treason! It amuses me! Nan, sweet, nurse the moppet and—remember me.

ANNE

Yes, my lord.

HENRY

Give me a kiss—

[He kisses her]

I'm off.

ANNE

Will you kiss our little one, Henry?

HENRY

When she's a shade older, my dear—when she's in petticoats, and can run. Why, I'll kiss her now!

[He does so]

Come, Duke—and be thinking of a jest for the road.

God keep all here—

[The lights go out]

Act Two

SCENE 4

Shows Henry sitting as in the Prologue to the act, pen in hand.

HENRY

There is a load every man lugs behind him,
heavy, invisible, sealed, concealed,
perfumed,
a package of dead things he drags along,
never opened
save to put in some horror of the mind—
some horror of his own doing—to seal up
and rot in secret. He pretends
there's no such thing. He tries to walk
as if he had no burden. The stench is covered
with purchased scents and flowers.
The deeds in this bag,
man and king, he utterly cancels, denies, forgets,
for they would prove him an idiot,
criminal,
subhuman.
Yet they are his.
He did them, and put them there.
And they are mine.
I did them, and put them there.
All men have done the same—
or done the like. And will.

Have you done so much better,
you out there in the future,
you whom I see with the thousand eyes, looking back
on my secret ways?
If you have, then you're young and unlucky—
it's still to come.

Or else you're old and unlucky—
it never was.

With kings as with men
there is the mask and tongue among your friends
with a ready smile and word,
and there is the hog behind the eyes, the rat
behind the tongue, the dog that runs before
and brings you after—
or lags, and holds you back.

And you obey them,
the hog, the rat, the dog.

Man, woman, and child, you have obeyed them always,
and I have. The carrion and the beast
decide where we shall love, and when leave off
to love another;
not our high purpose, our resolve, our brain,
but the vermin underneath,
the unacknowledged boar, the hidden wallow,
the invisible decay.

Whatever she did, I had done first.

For when I knew for the first time she was all mine,
then, having loved her many years,
suddenly I loved her only a little,
and could look at others.

And then I loved her not at all—

And her lips were an over-eaten plate,
and my body would not answer hers,
and when I felt my child move beneath her skin
I had no liking for it, and turned away.

Was this her blame or mine?

Or was there blame?

Act Two

SCENE 5

A room in York Place. The lights come up stage right to show Jane Seymour crocheting at a window. A SERVANT enters, bringing her a letter and a leather purse.

JANE Yes?

SERVANT It's from the king, if it please you. Both these.

JANE From—?

SERVANT I'm to wait for an answer.

JANE Is this a purse of gold?

SERVANT I think it is, mistress.

JANE I would not have the king think me ungrateful, but I have no need of gold, and no wish for it. And I think it would be better if I were not to know what is written here.

[She gives back letter and purse]

SERVANT Am I to tell him this?

JANE If you will.

[The lights go out on the scene]

Act Two

SCENE 6

The king's hunting pavilion. A SERVANT is tying a bracer on Henry's arm. NORFOLK is reading to him out of a huge volume.

HENRY What does he say about the bracer?

NORFOLK “*In a bracer a man must take heed of three things: that it have no nails in it, that it have no buckles, that it be laced without aiglettes.*”

HENRY These three every fool knows. What else?

NORFOLK Nothing.

HENRY Throw the book away!

[NORFOLK *starts to hand the book to a servant*]

Throw it, I said! Am I a king, or not a king?

NORFOLK How far am I to throw it, Your Grace? My arm is not what it was.

HENRY Keep it. Here's a glum bird that portends no good.

[CROMWELL *enters from stage left*]

Portend, blackbird, portend.

CROMWELL I come to tell Your Majesty that you have perhaps left me in charge too long. The Commons and the Church are both out of hand. Nobody swears to the Act of Succession. It's a matter of open debate whether Katharine or Anne is your queen, and whether Mary or Elizabeth shall succeed you.

HENRY I intend to reign another forty years. And to have sons. And not by Katharine or Anne. Not by Katharine or Anne! You hear! Let them fight it out.

CROMWELL Queen Anne has sent Jane Seymour away from court.

HENRY

Where?

CROMWELL It's not known where.

HENRY Has she harmed her?

CROMWELL That I don't know. But Jane was sent away, guarded.

HENRY I must go.

[He starts to walk away with the bracer still on his arm, carrying a bow]

SERVANT Your Majesty—shall I take this off?

HENRY Aye—tear it off—cut it off!

[He pauses, impatient]

No, leave it! I must go.

[He starts out, tossing the bow away, CROMWELL hurrying after him. The lights go out]

Act Two

SCENE 7

The lights come up on full stage, showing the nursery of the child Elizabeth at York Palace. There is a crib and a chair or two. The rest is suggested by projections on the rear curtain. Elizabeth Boleyn and Henry Norris are at the cradle, watching the child. Mark Smeaton is singing a lullaby, and playing on a stringed instrument. Anne and Madge Shelton are listening.

SMEATON *[Singing]*

I had a little nut tree,
Nothing would it bear,
But a silver nutmeg,
And a golden pear.

NORRIS *[Going to Anne]* Shall we dance to it?

ANNE Surely.

[During the next stanza they take a few steps together]

ELIZABETH Hush! Don't wake her.

SMEATON *[Singing]*

The king of Spain's daughter
Came to visit me,
And all for the sake
Of my little nut tree.

ELIZABETH She's asleep.

NORRIS Whether to escape the singing or for delight in it, no man knows.

ANNE It was well sung. But you could keep the king of Spain's daughter out

of it, after this. I've had enough trouble with the king of Spain's daughter.

SMEATON Next time I will.

[NORFOLK *appears at stage right*]

NORFOLK The king's here, my chicks.

ANNE The king of Spain?

HENRY [*Entering behind NORFOLK, with CROMWELL*] No, lassie, the king of England.

ANNE I thought the king of Spain more likely.

HENRY Yes. We stayed long at our hunting.

ANNE The princess has grown. Would you care to look at her?

HENRY Indeed I would.

[NORRIS *and* SMEATON *have bowed and retreated.* HENRY *looks into the cradle*]

She looks like you.

ANNE And you.

HENRY And me. She'll never be hung for her beauty.

ANNE I think she's beautiful.

HENRY She gathers a court, I notice.

[*He looks about*]

We must see you for a moment, Cromwell and I.

ANNE Mother, will you take Elizabeth back to her room? Mark and Norris will carry the cradle.

ELIZABETH Yes, dear.

[SMEATON *and* NORRIS *carry the cradle off to stage right.* ELIZABETH *and* MADGE *follow*]

Softly now.

SMEATON

I sang her to sleep. I'll take care not to wake her.

ANNE

[*Speaks after they are gone. Henry, Anne, Cromwell, and Norfolk are on stage*] Yes, King Henry, there was some question you wished to discuss with your queen?

HENRY

Two gentlemen of my court,
Edward and Thomas Seymour, came to me
an hour or two ago, demanding of me
where they could find their sister.

ANNE

Does this frighten you?

HENRY

They are my friends.
I have especial cause
at this moment not to offend them.

ANNE

Yes, I think so.

HENRY

Where is Jane Seymour?

ANNE

In Northumberland. And a very good place for her.

HENRY

Her brothers have made it plain
that they resent the slur you cast on her
in sending her from court.

ANNE

I don't care for her.
She has the face of a sheep. And the manners.
But not the morals.
I don't want her near me.

HENRY

You will bring her back.

ANNE

No, I think not.
If you want her near you, why, find a suite for her
in your own palace. This York place is mine.
You gave it to me for my own. And while
it's mine, Jane Seymour must lie elsewhere.

HENRY

Lassie—well—

Speak to her, Norfolk.

NORFOLK
The truth is, girl, you're on slippery ground.
More and more the common folk cry down your name.
There used to be a penalty for speaking against you.
There's none now.
And the people take advantage of it,
in the church, in the government, wherever they meet.
You have no defenders.

ANNE
Am I at the mercy of the people?

NORFOLK
We're all at the mercy of the people.
Sooner or later, what they want they'll have,
unless you're willing and able
to do unlimited murder on them.

ANNE
I gave my voice for mercy.

NORFOLK
It happens you stand for something they don't want.
They're for having the old queen back.

HENRY
Speak to her, Cromwell.

CROMWELL
If things go as they're going
the Commons will revolt, Your Majesty.
The divorce will be invalidated,
and your marriage also.
We've slackened our hold, and the dogs are at our throats,
yours and mine! Not the king's.

ANNE
Why yours?

CROMWELL
I've worked hard at suppressing monasteries
and squeezing money out of them.
You—and the king's love for you—
have sliced off England from the mother church.
We shall never be forgiven, you or I.
Nor your child.
She will not rule. Not as things go now.

HENRY And so, my dear,
 be a little less absolute in what you'll have
 and not have.

ANNE Jane Seymour will not couch here.

HENRY She will live here, among your women,
 and you'll accept her.
 I've sent for her to come.

ANNE There are ways of making
 a woman so unwelcome . . .
 [*She pauses*]
 No, she may come—
 and we'll make her welcome.
 But More and Fisher and Houghton must not live,
 and all who refuse to sign the Act of Succession
 must die with them.
 Elizabeth must succeed you. See to that
 and Jane will be accepted here. We made
 this bargain before. And some of it you've kept.
 Now keep the rest.

HENRY This part I can't keep.
 These men are my friends.

ANNE By the year when I loved elsewhere,
 but must have you because you were the king—
 by the years when I loved no one
 but bore your weight because the earth was empty—
 by the year when I must carry your child
 without loving you, because you were royal—
 my child must be royal, too!

HENRY Let me off from this, Nan. I can't kill these men.

ANNE You've killed before!

HENRY One learns a little. Never since Buckingham

have I touched a man in high place,
one I respected,
or whose death might become a symbol.
If you love me, Nan,
forget the succession.

ANNE

I love you now.
I shall go to my grave loving you, no doubt,
and hating you.
But if you remember how it all came about,
and how your word's dishonored,
how can you look in my eyes and say our daughter
will not succeed?

HENRY

Because I cannot look on these deaths.
In all honesty!
Other deaths, but not these!
Could you sign these death warrants?

ANNE

Oh, King of England, King of England,
you blind king!
I'd sign ten thousand to die
rather than warm that white-faced serpent you love
and disinherit my blood!

[Henry stands silent before her; then speaks slowly]

HENRY

It would need unlimited murder, as Norfolk said.
Unlimited, pitiless murder. It would mean tearing
the world apart!
Look at me, Nan—you know me—
as I know myself.
Is it fitting I should be head of a church?
It's laughable—it can't be serious,
and yet it is. If I impose myself there
I'm king and they dare not answer,
and there I am—king and pope in one. To legalize a divorce,
and a child, and a marriage!

ANNE

Our dead marriage.

But you will demand it, Henry, and take it!

Make yourself head of the church, stand by me as
my husband, and father Elizabeth, the heir!

And if it costs heads and blood and fires at Smithfield
let the blood run and the fires burn!

It's that, or else it's my blood, and Cromwell's—
and Elizabeth's.

Cromwell knows that, your butcher-cleaver man knows that!

Send him out to implement these deaths

and let it be done quickly,

let there be no mistaking,

no leniency, no mercy!

High or low, they will sign—or depart without entrails!

And you will keep your word to me, unloved
though I may be!

I wish I were loved, but I'm not,

and so I shall be queen of this island, and

Elizabeth shall be queen!

[*A pause*]

HENRY

No.

But you're beautiful when you're angry.

Now if we had a son . . .

[*He steps toward her*]

Help me to prove that I can father kings—

ANNE

What do you mean?

HENRY

For Elizabeth, no.

For her I will not commit these murders.

But if we had a male heir . . .

[*He steps closer to her*]

Your son and mine—

ANNE

I can be angrier than you've seen me yet,
and not beautiful!

I know where your heart is! It's not with me!

HENRY

What has the heart to do
with the getting of kings?

I am not young—I am not true—

I'm bitter and expert and aging and venomous—
not to be trusted.

It's your misfortune that you love me
now that I no longer love you.

Yet at this moment I want you—because of your anger
and the flash of blood in your face—
and, if you give me a prince, things may change—
even I may change!

[He comes still closer]

ANNE

No. Not unless you kill them—
More and Houghton and Fisher
and all who will not sign—
not unless Elizabeth is your heir.

HENRY

[To Cromwell] Put them to death, then. Go out and do it.

[CROMWELL and NORFOLK go out]

See, now. I rob and murder at your order.
And commit sacrilege.

ANNE

You do what you wish to do
and call it my deed.

[He puts his arms round her]

I hate you. I hate your desire.
And mine.

[She pulls away from him]

HENRY

Things could change.

Even I. I loved you once.

I saw that fire in your face.

Give me a son.

[He takes her in his arms again. The lights go out. After a moment three violins are heard playing the air of a song somewhere in the darkness]

Act Two

SCENE 8

King Henry is sitting in his closet at window, writing and humming the song to himself as he writes it down. CROMWELL enters.

HENRY You're late, sir—and we have much to do.

CROMWELL I have ill news.

HENRY What news?

CROMWELL The queen is brought to bed of a son, and it's born dead.

HENRY [*Not comprehending*] A son. Born dead.

CROMWELL Yes.

HENRY I don't trust you in this.

CROMWELL I didn't trust anyone else. I went to see it. And it's a son. And dead.

HENRY Leave me. I won't work today.

CROMWELL Yes, master.

[He goes]

HENRY A son. Born dead. Like the sons of Katharine.
Born—and a son—but cursed with the curse of God
because I've had her sister—
or because . . .
well, for whatever reason,
it was dead.
Oh, my God, help me! What do you want of me?
Was this girl not to your mind? Not ever?
Or am I
not to your mind?

But I am the king, God's chosen,
potent and virile. I am a man. The woman's failed me.
I must look elsewhere.

[The lights fade. The music of the song plays again]

Act Two

SCENE 9

The lights come up on Henry, sitting at the table, stage left. The three singers stand before him.

HENRY Sing the song tenderly—
 no, you're young, you wouldn't know about tenderness.
 Sing it lightly, softly, to the lady who sits reading.

[The lights come up on Jane Seymour, who sits with a book in hand. The SINGERS go toward her]

JANE Yes?

HENRY They are about to sing to you, Jane.

JANE I thank Your Majesty.

SINGERS Waking at night, I go to my window,
 Scanning the stars in a portion of sky,
 Fixing on one that hangs yonder—and over
 The street of the house where you lie.
 [ANNE BOLEYN *enters, unseen by the others, and listens*]
 If you sleep, do you dream,
 If you dream, is it of me?
 The clock strikes; I hear your voice in the chimes,
 Repeating your words
 When I ask if you love me:
 “Always, never, sometimes.”

[As the song ends Henry catches sight of Anne in the shadow. She drops him a little mocking curtsy]

HENRY Come near me, Anne.
 [*She does so*]

You think me happy, Anne, but I'm not happy.

ANNE

Play out your play.

[She goes out]

HENRY

Sing the song again.

[As the song begins the lights go out]

CURTAIN

Act Three

PROLOGUE

Anne Boleyn is seen sitting in her cell in the fur-trimmed gown, as at the beginning of the play. She has her tablet and stylus and begins to write.

ANNE

From the day he first made me his,
to the last day I made him mine,
yes,
let me set it down in numbers,
I who can count and reckon, and have the time.
Of all the days I was his and did not love him—
this; and this; and this many.
Of all the days I was his—
and he had ceased to love me—
this many; and this. In days.
[*She writes*]
It comes to a thousand days—
out of the years.
Strangely, just a thousand.
And of that thousand—
one—
when we were both in love. Only one
when our loves met, and overlapped and were both mine and his.
When I no longer hated him—
he began to hate me,
except for that day. And the son we had—
the one son—born of our hate and lust—
died in my womb. When Henry was hurt at the jousting.
Then Henry looked in my face and said,
“This marriage is cursed like the other.
I’ve known it all along.
There’s a curse on it.”

And he turned and left me.

Have you no hate in your heart, Anne?

You had hate enough when you were young!

Hate him now, and curse him, and it won't matter
what he does—or has done! I can't hate him.

It's as he said long ago:

You love where you love.

You can't change it. And this great fool and bully,

I'd take him now

if he came and put out his hand

and said one word.

*[The lights dim, remaining on Anne's face, then coming up on
stage left]*

Even when they came . . .

Act Three

SCENE 1

The little, barred window has disappeared and instead we are in the castle at York. At stage left Norris, Smeaton, and Madge Shelton are seated at a card table. Anne is at the cradle, stage right, bending over it to sing a lullaby.

ANNE Sleep, little coddling,
 Sleep, sleep warm,
Your mother's in a taking,
 There will be a storm.

 Sleep, little hatchling,
 Sleep, little squirrel,
Your father's losing money,
 There will be a quarrel.

MADGE Can you pick up your cards, Nan?

ANNE Play for me, will you, Madge? Never mind, I can leave her.
 [She rises and goes to the card table. NORFOLK comes in from stage left, followed by CROMWELL.]

 We have visitors. We are honored, gentlemen, but why were you not announced?

NORFOLK *[To Cromwell]* Norris and Smeaton.

CROMWELL Yes, I know the names.

NORFOLK I have a warrant for your arrest, niece. I could have let others bring it, but I thought I could do it more gently than some.

ANNE What . . . am I to be arrested for?

NORFOLK Also any gentlemen found in your chamber are to be taken with you.

ANNE But—why? What for? I am the queen.

NORFOLK [*Embarrassed, looking at a paper*] For—it says for adultery. With these—and three others.

ANNE But—this is—

NORFOLK Niece, it's pure nonsense. But here it is.

CROMWELL You will take a few things and come.

ANNE But the child?

CROMWELL You will leave her with your women.

ANNE Then—what women may I take with me?

CROMWELL You will be furnished with attendants at the Tower.

SMEATON We go to the Tower, too?

CROMWELL You go to the Tower.

[The lights flick out and come up on Henry, sitting at his table as in Act Two]

Act Three

SCENE 2

CROMWELL *comes in and bows to* HENRY.

HENRY What have you done?

CROMWELL She's safe in a room without windows.

HENRY We can't keep her there. We have no evidence. There's no precedent for the trial of a queen.

CROMWELL No evidence? Smeaton admits adultery with her.

HENRY What?
[*He leaps to his feet*]
Smeaton!

CROMWELL And there will be others.

HENRY Where is Smeaton?

CROMWELL In the Tower.

HENRY He's been tortured?

CROMWELL Would that impugn his evidence?

HENRY I've sometimes wondered.

CROMWELL There will be others.

HENRY I want to be just. I must be just in this. Smeaton! Tell me. Is this true?

CROMWELL The truth is what the judges will find, what the king will decide.

HENRY You'll go too far with this verbal juggling some day! What I want to know is, did this happen?

CROMWELL

He confesses it.

HENRY Under what torture?

CROMWELL Only a rope around his brows. No more.

HENRY God knows she could. Any woman could. And I've given her cause. But you have reasons for wishing her guilty, you know! You're not an impartial judge. You need a scapegoat to blame for the robbery of the church!

CROMWELL My lord—

HENRY And I need a scapegoat! I'm no impartial judge! I'd want to find her guilty, and you know that, you play on that!

CROMWELL My lord, if you wish to accuse me—

HENRY I accuse both of us! I want to marry elsewhere! There was a time when getting rid of Anne wouldn't have helped. I'd have had Katharine round my neck again. But now Katharine's dead. And if Anne were dead I'd be free! And you saw this and so you put the temptation before me! Liar, butcher, sewer rat! And yet she may truly be guilty.

CROMWELL So Smeaton says.

HENRY [*After a pause*] Let her be tried. Let Norfolk sit over her as judge. Let her own uncle be the judge. Let her be tried by a group of peers. And if she speaks in her defense I wish it to be where I may hear her speak—without being seen.

CROMWELL Yes, my lord.

[*The lights go out on Henry and Cromwell, come up on . . .*]

Act Three

SCENE 3

Anne at her cell window. After a moment we see that there are three men standing before her: Norfolk, Cromwell, and Kingston, the keeper of the Tower.

NORFOLK I'd have preferred to see you alone, Anne, that's true, but there are reasons why I couldn't.

ANNE You may send the others out, I think.

NORFOLK The point is, they won't go. Kingston won't go because he has orders that nobody's to see you alone. Cromwell won't go because he doesn't want anything said to you—or by you—that he doesn't hear. And I don't dare to be alone with you here, because I'm your judge, and it would be thought I was in collusion with you.

ANNE I'm glad to see you even on these terms, Uncle Norfolk. I've had little company. I'd ask you to sit, but my cell's poorly furnished.

NORFOLK Thank you, we do nicely.

ANNE I could have some chairs, perhaps?

KINGSTON I'm sorry, Your Majesty.

ANNE No?

[She smiles]

Well, it's you who stand, not I.

NORFOLK What I came to ask is whether I can help you in any way.

ANNE Would you?

NORFOLK If I can.

ANNE There are three things I've wanted very much. One is to walk out and

look at the sky—a few minutes every day. I get such a longing to see the sky. And . . .

NORFOLK Yes?

ANNE I'd like to see one or two friends—only one or two—if they could come here. Somebody could be with us—but I'd like to see them.

NORFOLK Yes.

ANNE And my Elizabeth. Couldn't she visit me—or even stay here? She'd be company for me—she's three now—and the days are so horribly long.

NORFOLK Kingston?

KINGSTON These things have all been thought of, my lord.

ANNE Oh?

KINGSTON And all forbidden.

ANNE By whom?

KINGSTON By him who thinks of everything.

ANNE By Henry?

[*Kingston doesn't answer*]

By the king?

NORFOLK [*After a pause*] He is not allowed to answer, my dear.

ANNE Yes. By Henry. I understand. But why it's all taken so seriously and black-browed, that I don't understand at all. Nobody can actually believe that I'm guilty. Or actually find me guilty.

NORFOLK My dear, do you think you could bring yourself to live quietly somewhere—out of the kingdom—such a place as Antwerp—and not claim your rights here further?

ANNE I could be quiet. I'd be glad to be quiet. You're offering me something. If I resign my queenship—and the succession?

NORFOLK

Suppose you made it easy—to annul your marriage? Could you do that?

ANNE What would it mean for Elizabeth?

NORFOLK She'd go to Antwerp with you.

ANNE And it would go back to what Henry wanted in the first place. I'd be a mistress—a discarded mistress with an unfathered child. No. I'd have to refuse that.

NORFOLK But—if you do—won't the peers have to find you guilty, Anne?

ANNE Even though I'm not?
[*He is silent*]
And you?

NORFOLK I'd have no choice. I must impose a sentence commensurate with the guilt they find.

ANNE I'd have to die then?
[*He is silent*]
By the headsman?
[*He is still silent*]
I can't believe it.

NORFOLK It's not certain, of course. I'm not sure. Speak well at your trial, girl. You can do it, none better. None as well. Make them listen. That way there may be hope.

[*The lights dim*]

ANNE At my trial?

NORFOLK Yes. Make it difficult for him. Speak—as if he were there.

[*The lights go out. The little barred window appears, then Anne. She is alone in her cell*]

Act Three

SCENE 4

The lights come up on Norfolk seated as a judge at stage left, a clerk below him writing the proceedings of the trial. He writes in a large book that lies on his knees, using an inkhorn that sits on the floor. Henry Norris is in the witness chair. Cromwell, standing, acts as prosecutor. A group of peers are faintly seen above and behind Norfolk.

CROMWELL I ask you this question for the last time, Henry Norris, and I warn you that there is mercy in this court only for those who tell truth. What were your relations with the queen?

NORRIS Speaking truly, Master Cromwell, I can say only what I have said before—that I have always honored Her Majesty, Queen Anne, for her wit and presence and her conduct of the court, and also for her known and unquestioned virtue. Whoever has slandered her enough to say that there was ever a breath of wrong between her and me—he lies, no matter who he is, or where.

[As Norris speaks we see Anne seated listening as the defendant in the trial. Then, on the opposite side of the stage, we see that a curtain, or arras, is hung along the wall, and that King Henry sits concealed behind it, hearing the trial]

CROMWELL Your guilt is open and known, sir. You will find it useless to deny it.

NORRIS You have brought no witnesses against me. I am unjustly accused in this star chamber and quite guiltless—and I believe the queen to be quite as guiltless as I am.

CROMWELL Remove Henry Norris and bring Mark Smeaton in again.

[A BAILIFF comes forward to lead Norris out]

NORRIS

Lord Norfolk, this is no just procedure! Do you continue to lend it your countenance?

NORFOLK Every man to his own conscience, lad.

NORRIS God keep me from yours!

NORFOLK That he will do.

NORRIS The one witness the prosecution has found is a loose-mouthed woman of sinister reputation! The queen has denied her guilt! The five men accused with her deny their guilt and hers—in spite of torture, bribes, and promises of acquittal!

[HENRY rises in his place, uneasy]

NORFOLK Let us proceed with the case. The next witness.

[NORRIS is led out. SMEATON is brought in. He is pale and broken. The mark of a rope appears on his forehead. He sits and looks down]

CROMWELL Swear him.

HENRY [A BAILIFF takes a Bible to Smeaton, lays his hand on it. sits]

BAILIFF Do you swear to tell the truth at this trial?

SMEATON Yes.

[The BAILIFF takes the Bible away]

CROMWELL Again I warn you, Mark Smeaton, that there will be mercy only for those who tell truth. What were your relations with the woman who sits here, the former Queen Anne?

SMEATON My lord, I have told only the truth. So far as I know she is innocent. I am innocent.

CROMWELL Do you wish to spend another half hour with the executioner?

SMEATON No.

CROMWELL Then truthfully. Did you have carnal relations with Queen Anne?

SMEATON My lord, you don't want the truth—

CROMWELL Did you have carnal relations with Queen Anne? And this time have a care of yourself. I shan't ask you again!
[*A silence*]
Answer!

SMEATON [*Looking desperately round the court, then again at the floor*] Yes.

CROMWELL Did you answer yes?

SMEATON [*Low*] Yes.

CROMWELL He confesses it. [*To the clerk*] Be sure this is written [*To*] You had
SMEATON relations with the queen at sundry times and places?
SMEATON Yes.

CROMWELL Why, now you begin to talk like a man. Now we begin to think well of you, and you shall be treated like a man. Take him to his cell and let him rest. Let us have Norris again!

ANNE [*To NORFOLK*] My lord! My lord of Norfolk!

NORFOLK Yes, Lady Anne.

ANNE May I question this man—Mark Smeaton?

NORFOLK Why do you wish to question him?

ANNE You know this is not a trial, Uncle Norfolk! It's like an evil dream, with no witnesses, no defense for the accused, no sifting of evidence, no waft of air from outside, and yet I'm being tried here for my life—and five men are being tried! Since no man speaks for me or examines for me, let me speak and examine for myself!

CROMWELL Take him to his cell.

NORFOLK Lord Cromwell examines for you.

ANNE He! He brought me here! He is my accuser!

NORFOLK

Why, let her question Mark Smeaton.

[SMEATON *is brought back*]

ANNE Thank you, my lord. Mark, look at me.
[*He looks at her; then away*]
I know well you've been tortured, but you know it's not true—what you've said about you and me. Why do you say it?

SMEATON [*Low*] It is true.

CROMWELL [*To the clerk*] Write that. He says it is true.

ANNE Mark, you poor lad, I've been at the other end of the process, and I know the wiles they use on the rats and rabbits they catch in their trap. I know why you've changed your mind and say now that I'm guilty. They've promised you your life if you'll say it. But they won't keep their word, Mark. After you've testified they'll find you guilty and worthy of death.

[SMEATON *is silent*]

CROMWELL He's said it three times now. We have our evidence.

ANNE Isn't it better, if we're to die, that we die with the truth on our lips? You can't save me or save yourself, but you will save something if you refuse to utter a falsehood with the last breath you have. It's a pernicious falsehood, and its influence will go on forever. It's the word you will be remembered for.

SMEATON [*Desperate*] It's not a falsehood! It's true! I'm guilty! I was guilty with the queen! Let me go! Let me go! I was guilty! The queen was guilty! Let me go free!

CROMWELL Take him to his cell.

ANNE Who do you say it for, Mark? For Cromwell, here, this hollow-ground death's man? He's promised life to uncounted monks and men—and seen them hastily buried. It's his trade. He's done it for me—to my shame!

SMEATON She came to my bed! I swear it!

ANNE Mark, Mark!

CROMWELL Take him out!

[The BAILIFF leads MARK SMEATON toward the exit, but before they can go HENRY has risen in his chair suddenly, tipping it over backward, and making enough noise to startle the court. He strides into the scene, his eyes on Smeaton]

ANNE Ah! He who sees everything, who knows everything! The king!

[At his entrance, though he takes no note of them, the peers all rise and bow. CROMWELL bows]

HENRY *[To Smeaton]* Give your testimony again! You say the queen came to your bed. When? How many times?

SMEATON *[Not looking up]* Many times.

HENRY When was this?

SMEATON I don't remember.

HENRY You will remember! Call it to mind, man, or you'll speak with those who can jog your memory! When did this happen? Where?

SMEATON At York place.

HENRY You lie. It could never have happened at York place—for you slept in a room with two others!

SMEATON No, no, it was at Windsor!

HENRY Fool! She went to Windsor only with me. Can you find no better lie!

SMEATON It was many places! She came to my bed! It was wherever you like, whenever you like! Oh, God help me, let me go! Let me go free! I'll say whatever you like!

HENRY Did Cromwell promise you your life if you said this?

CROMWELL

My lord!

HENRY

[*Knocking pen and book from the clerk's hand*] Cease this pen-scratching! Answer me! Did he say you would live?

SMEATON

Yes.

HENRY

He lied to you. You're to die, musician. Say what you like you're to die! Speak now without lying, for it gains you nothing!

SMEATON

Why am I to die?

HENRY

You're to die in any case, whatever's said from here on. And now that you know that, what happened between you and the queen?

SMEATON

[*Coming to himself*] Between the queen and me? Nothing. She was kind and pleasant and just. I wouldn't hurt her. But they've broken me with ropes and irons—and wooden wedges.

HENRY

Take him out.

[*A BAILIFF leads SMEATON out*]

And yet it could be true. [*To Anne*] You were no virgin when I met you first. You told me as much. You knew what it was to have men.

ANNE

Have you stepped into your own trap, my lord? Any evidence you have against me you yourself bought and paid for. Do you now begin to believe it?

HENRY

[*Looks at her steadily for a moment, then turns*] I was a fool to come here!

ANNE

Why did you come?

HENRY

Because I wanted to know!

[*He faces her again*]

Because I wanted to know! And still I don't know!

And no man ever knows!

ANNE

Whether I was unfaithful to you?

HENRY

Yes! Just that! Whether you were unfaithful to me while I loved you!

But I'll never know! Whether you say aye or no I won't be sure either way! Fool that I am! That all men are!

ANNE
There are fools and fools, King Henry. Do you have a moment to hear my side of it?

HENRY
No.

ANNE
Go then.
But when you speak of fools—you've shut me up here to be tried for adultery and treason toward you. I'm tried as if in a coffin—and those with me—in a coffin—the lid closed—no evidence—no voice—no air to breathe—no cell mates for us but torture—or lies—or false promises.
You've done this because you love elsewhere—you want to forget me utterly, go on, have sons—and it's easy with me—it's only a death—not like that dreadful years-long tug of worlds you had to go through with Katharine.
So you do this—and I know it—but now you come here to make sure whether there were truly adultery, because that would touch your manhood—or your pride!
And you sit and listen, a cat in a corner, watching the pet mouse run before it dies.
And then you come out—to make sure!
And, oh fool of fools, even so, my heart and my eyes are glad of you!
Fool of all women that I am, I'm glad of you here!
Go, then. Keep your pride of manhood. You know about me now.

HENRY
Nan—

ANNE

Mind, I ask no pity of you—
for I'm as proud as you—though my heart has played me this trick—
and puts me here and you there—
but I would like to ask you, what kind of court is this
where the peers sit along the wall like painted figures,
saying nothing, and the judge fears the prosecutor,
and the truth isn't wanted?
Are you so afraid of me? Am I such a danger?

HENRY This court was set up for a purpose.
You know that.
You've seen such courts.

ANNE Yes.

HENRY You were given a choice.

ANNE When?

HENRY A man you know
came offering you a choice.
I think you recall it.

ANNE There was some suggestion
the marriage could be nullified.
I said no to that.
The suggestion came from you?

HENRY It came from me.

ANNE I'd have to say no again.

HENRY But think still once more
about it, Nan. I have no wish to harm you.
I am much moved by what you said. I'd rather
a year cut out of my life than do you wrong.
After those words of yours.
Did you say—
Did you say truly, you were glad of me here?

ANNE

I won't say it again.
But I did say it.
And it was true.

HENRY

Then,
let's do this all gently, Nan,
for old times' sake.
I have to prove that I can father a king
to follow me.
That was why I left Katharine—
why I turned to you.
It's why I must leave you now and turn to someone else,
but it can be done all simply and gently,
without this court or the headsman.

ANNE

How?

HENRY

If I'm to marry again
you must somehow free me. Divorce won't do,
because that would leave Elizabeth the heir.
Nullification of our marriage—that—
if you would agree to it, and sign away
all rights, and live at some distance—
that would do it.

ANNE

Why must you leave a king to follow you, Henry?
Why not a queen?

HENRY

This country's never been ruled by a queen.
I doubt that it could be.
You and I,
we'll not have a son now.
God has spoken there.
I must have my king's sons elsewhere.
And it grows late.
I'm not young as I was.

ANNE

And what do you want of me?

HENRY

Go quietly. Sign the nullification.
Live abroad with Elizabeth. You'll be cared for.
Leave me free.

ANNE
No.
Once we danced together, and I told you
any children we had
would be bastards. You promised me
to change that—now you dance out of your promise
and reduce to bastards again. Well, I won't do it.
We were king and queen, man and wife together. I keep that.
Take it from me as best you can.

HENRY
You do leave no choice.

ANNE
Would you let this grind on
the way it's going?

HENRY
You would, if it served your purpose.

ANNE
I?

HENRY
I remember
your saying, "Let them die," upon a time.
You've forgotten it, no doubt.

ANNE
No, I did say it.
These things look different from the other end.
If I'd known then what I feel now—
I couldn't have done it.

HENRY
No.

ANNE
I've been your wife.
Could you do it to me?

HENRY
Yes. If you stood in my way.
Defiantly. As you do.

ANNE
You're not old. You've been long a king.
But you're still young and could change.

You said—on that one day when we loved each other—
you remember—that one day when I loved you
and you loved me—that you would change—would seek justice—
would be such a king as men had hoped you'd be
when you came to the throne?

It's not too late for that.

Only if you harden in your mind toward me,
and say, it's nothing, like the other rats and rabbits
let her be cut and torn and buried—
then I think

it will be indeed too late.

The king—the great king
you might have been, will have died in you.

HENRY

Now I'll tell you truly.

I do want to begin again.

And I can't with you.

You brought me into blood—that bloody business
of the death of More and all the pitiful folk
who were like him and wouldn't sign.

Your hand was to that. It's bloodstained.

ANNE

And yours? Not yours?

Will you give back what you stole from the monasteries,
and the men executed?

Will you resume with Rome?

When you do that I'll take your word again.

But you won't do it.

And what you truly want—

you may not know it—

is a fresh, frail, innocent maid who'll make you feel
fresh and innocent again,
and young again.

Jane Seymour is the name. It could be anyone.

Only virginal and sweet. And when you've had her
you'll want someone else.

HENRY

It's not true.

ANNE
Meanwhile, to get her,
You'll murder if you must.

HENRY
[*Angry*] Why, then you've decided. And so have I.
Norfolk!

[*He starts away*]

ANNE
[*Flashing out*] Before you go, perhaps
You should hear one thing—
I lied to you.
I loved you, but I lied to you! I was untrue!
Untrue with many!

HENRY
This is a lie.

ANNE
Is it? Take it to your grave! Believe it!
I was untrue!

HENRY
Why, then, it's settled.
You asked for it. You shall have it.

ANNE
Quite correct.
Only what I take to my grave you take to yours!
With many! Not with one! Many!

HENRY
[*To Norfolk*] She's guilty! She dies!
Proceed with this mummerly.

[*He turns*]

NORFOLK
May we have your signature, my lord?

HENRY
Lend me your pen.
[*He takes the clerk's pen from his hand, pulls a paper from his pocket, and sits to write. The lights dim on all those present save Henry and Anne*]
She lies, she lies. She was not unfaithful to me.
And yet—if she were—
She could—any woman could—
and yet she lies!

If she lies, let her die for lying!

Let her die.

[*He writes*]

Oh God, oh God,

sometimes I seem to sit in a motionless dream,
and watch while I do a horrible thing
and know that I do it,
and all the clocks in all the world stand still—waiting.
What is she thinking in this halted interval
while no mote falls through the shaft of sunlight
and no man takes a breath?

ANNE [To herself, as the lights dim on Henry] I've never thought what it was like to die.

To become meat that rots. Then food for shrubs,
and the long roots of vines.

The grape could reach me.

I may make him drunk before many years.

Someone told me the story
of the homely daughter of Sir Thomas More
climbing at night up the trestles of London Bridge
where they'd stuck her father's head on a spike—
and climbing down with it, and taking it home.

To bury in the garden perhaps.

Even so, it was death. And I ordered it.

And Bishop Fisher, the old frail man.

And Houghton.

And the thousands.

They lie there now. And the roots find them.

—That was my dream! I remember—

poor homely Margaret

climbing into the darkness above the bridge
and hunting among the stinking and bloody heads
of criminals, till she found her father's head,
and pulling it from the spike,
holding on with one hand, crying, almost falling,
his beard matted and hard with blood.

Then she must clasp the horrible thing against her breast,
and climb down in the dark, holding by one hand,
slipping, near falling, unable to see for tears.

“Where is your father’s head?” they asked her.

“In earth,” she said proudly. “How far do you pursue a great man after
his death?”

And they haven’t found it, still. . . .

Would they fix my head up on London Bridge?

No. Even Henry would object to that.

I’ve been his queen. He’s kissed my lips.

He wouldn’t want it. I’ll lie in lead—or brass. Meat. Dead meat.

But if my head were on the bridge he wouldn’t climb to take it down.

Nobody’d climb for me. I could stay and face up the river,

and my long hair blow out and tangle round

the spikes—and my small neck.

Till the sea birds took me,

and there was nothing but a wisp of hair

and a cup of bone.

Sir Thomas More made a jest before he died.

He spoke to the headsman at the foot of the scaffold—

“Friend,” he said, “if you’ll help me to get up,

I’ll see to the coming down.”

I must think of something to say when the time comes.

If I could say it—with the ax edge toward me.

Could I do it? Could I lay my head down—

and smile, and speak? Till the blow comes?

They say it’s subtle. It doesn’t hurt. There’s no time.

No time. That’s the end of time.

I wonder what will come of my little girl

when she must go on alone.

HENRY

[*Rising, the paper in his hands*] Shall I tear this?

ANNE

No.

Go your way, and I’ll go mine.

You to your death, and I to my expiation.

For there is such a thing as expiation.

It involves dying to live.

HENRY

Death is a thing the coroner can see.
I'll stick by that.

ANNE

A coroner wouldn't know you died young, Henry.
And yet you did.

HENRY

[*Turning away*] Burn these records!

[*He kicks the clerk's book, which lies on the floor, and goes out.
The lights go out on the scene*]

Act Three

SCENE 5

The lights come up on Henry, who sits writing in his accustomed place. There are papers before him, and a number of pens, also an inkhorn. A penknife lies with the pens.

HENRY

I've worked all night.

There's light in the window.

They say you need less sleep as you grow older.

Or more.

One or the other. This night I've had none.

[He puts out a hand]

Yet my hand's steady as a tree.

And the writing's firm as a boy's.

This is the morning she's to die. I'd almost forgotten.

That would have shaken me, ten years ago.

Not now.

[He lays the quill down]

I need a new pen.

[He takes up the penknife and begins to cut a new quill with practiced hand. The boom of a single cannon is heard]

Nan is dead. Well, so much for Nan. That's over.

[He pares tranquilly at the quill. Suddenly there's blood on the paper and on his hands. He rises, throws down the knife and quill, stanching the blood with a handkerchief]

And so your hands are steady, are they?

[He needs and finds another kerchief]

Open the bag you lug behind you, Henry.

Put in Nan's head.

Nan's head,

and her eyes, and the lips you kissed.

Wherever you go they'll follow after you now.

Her perfume will linger

in every room you enter, and the stench
of her death will drive it out. . . .

Get on with your work.

[He sits, wraps a kerchief about his hand, dips the new pen, and writes]

These are not empty things you do.

[As he bends over his table Anne is seen standing opposite him. Her hair is piled on top of her head, and the fur collar turned down. There is a ring of blood about her neck. HENRY looks up]

It's Nan.

No doubt I'll sometimes see you when I'm alone.

It's not over yet between us, is it?

Strangely enough

it will never be over between us, or in our world,

Nan girl. More than that—what we did,

thinking we did it for ourselves—our hate and our passion—

these were somehow arranged for us by our masters—

by the people of this kingdom—

or made use of by them.

You thought you did what you wished.

I thought, no, I was the cleverer—all went as I wished.

But truly it all went as the people wished.

We were the puppets and they dangled us

to a tune they were playing.

[She smiles]

Why do you smile?

That's not quite true, is it? That's my sophistry again.

I can hear you saying that the blame is ours, that for what we do we
pay, that nothing's ever forgiven.

Perhaps.

But one thing we do know—it will never be ended,
never be put back the way it was.

Nothing can ever be put back the way it was.

The limb that was cut from Rome won't graft to that trunk again.

What we were will be permanent in England,

however it came about,

whether your will,

or mine,
or theirs.

CURTAIN

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Numerous character references in stage directions have had their fonts fixed.

[The end of *Anne of the Thousand Days* by Maxwell Anderson]