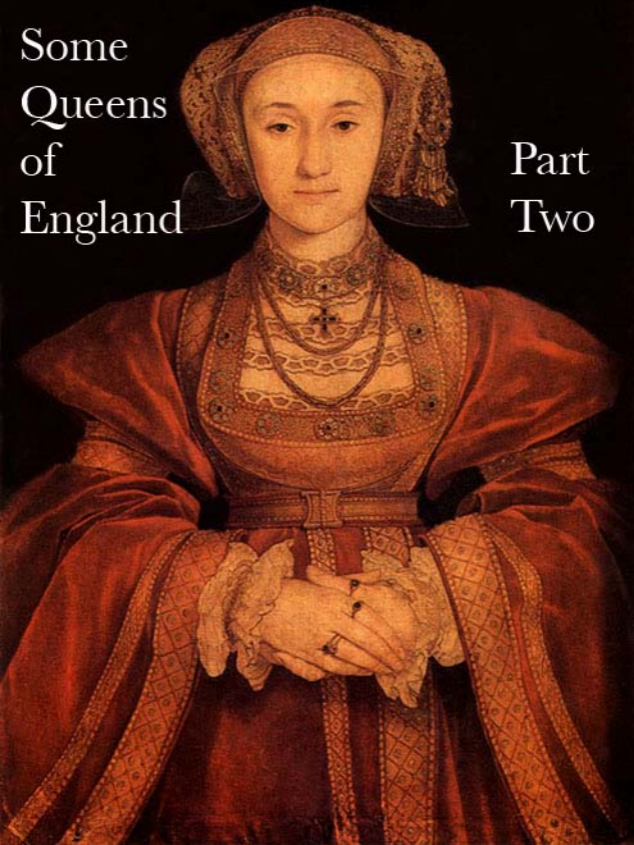


Some
Queens
of
England

Part
Two



Some Queens of England

or

The Tudor Comedy

Part Two

Dramatis Personae:

King Henry VIII
Mary,
Elizabeth, and
Edward, his children.
Thomas Cromwell, chancellor
Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury
Bartholomew, and
Horace, attendants
The Duke of Norfolk
The Duke of Suffolk
The Duke of Buckingham
The Duke of Northumberland
Ambassador
Anne of Cleve
Rowena, nurse to the royal children
Catherine Howard
Charlotte, her maid
Hans Holbein, painter
Bishop of Winchester
Earl of Surrey
Sir James, a lord
Sir Arthur
Lord Pembroke
Lord Chichester
Lord Hastings
A Shepherd
Ellinor, his lass
Catherine Parr
Edward Seymour, duke of Somerset
A messenger
A physician
A clown
A nurse

Ladies in waiting, lords, servants and guards from the Tower.

The stage is Westminster, London and thereabouts from 1539 to 1547.

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Act I, Scene 1.
Henry sitting in a chair.

Henry Jane, o Jane, little dove, why did you have to depart? Was it because you were not strong enough to match my potentiality? Or were you too lovable to be true? Do all lovable sweet and humble little princesses like you have to perish for their docility's sake? Weakness is the consequence of lovability and the other side of its supremely precious medal: a woman's lovability is her frailty, and the more she is loved, the sooner she will break. Fate, I curse thee for the bitter cynical lesson thou hast initiated me in! My Jane, my princess, I want thee back! (*enter princess Elizabeth*)

Elizabeth Father, are you asleep?

Henry Who asks if I am asleep?

Elizabeth No, you are not asleep.

Henry Elizabeth! What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be in bed?

Elizabeth Yes, I should, and I would, if I could sleep, but I can't.

Henry But what are you doing here, then?

Elizabeth I wanted to show you my new embroidery. Here you are! (*shows it to him*) I can do much better, but, however, this can not be undone.

Henry (*examines the embroidery with admiration*) Elizabeth, my child, this is precious! How excellently well you have stitched this piece of cloth!

Elizabeth And, as I said, I will stitch even better in the future! Good night, father!

Henry Good night, my daughter. (*exit Elizabeth*)

That daughter of mine gives me quite some pleasure occasionally. She is only five years old, and yet her tongue is as eloquent as a lady's. She will be a queen some day. Ten times I see her before an eye of her sister Mary's disdainfully encounters mine for half a second with a glare of darkness from her soul. (*enter Cromwell*) Yes, what is it, Cromwell?

Cromwell Your Majesty, Hans Holbein is back from Germany.

Henry (*rising, eager*) Is he? Has he drawn the picture?

Cromwell He has, my liege.

Henry Well, where is it? Why have you not brought it before my eyes?

Cromwell It is on its way, Majesty. If it is convenient you will see it presently.

Henry "If", you say? Do you not know your King? (*pushing him aside*) Away! Let me see the portrait! Where is it?

Cromwell (*calling*) Bartholomew! (*enter Bartholomew*)

Bartholomew Yes, my lord!

Cromwell Bring in the portrait!

Bartholomew Yes, my lord! Presently!

Henry Have you employed Bartholomew?

Cromwell Only for tonight, Majesty.

Henry Don't you know he is my first page?

Cromwell Yes, but...

Henry You are becoming presumptuous, Thomas Cromwell! Take care of taking your self more liberties in the future, Cromwell, or I will take better care of you!

Cromwell Yes, Your Majesty.

Henry Where is the portrait? Why is Bartholomew lagging?

Cromwell He said he would come presently, Sire.

Henry Don't you sirrah me, Thomas Cromwell! What makes you apply such grossness and insolence? Do you long for the Tower?

Cromwell (*kneeling*) Your Majesty heard wrong, Your Majesty. I said not "sirrah" but "Sire". They are two different words, Sire.

Henry Nevertheless I heard you say "sirrah". There is no excuse for it. Where is the portrait?

Bartholomew (coming with the portrait) Here is the portrait.

Cromwell Yes, here is the portrait.

Henry You don't have to repeat it, Cromwell. I can very well see for myself that the portrait is here. Bartholomew, do not follow this gentleman's desires ever again.

Bartholomew No, Sire.

Henry Good. Depart. (*exit Bartholomew*)

So this is the portrait of Anne of Cleve. But – can it be true? Has this picture been drawn by a mortal hand? Is there in the world a woman like this? Cromwell, leave me alone. (*exit Cromwell*) I am stupefied by the overwhelming glory and beauty of this lady in Germany. How is it possible that such an angelic beauty has all these years lived in Europe without me having marked her presence? And how is it possible that such a divine virgin, in grace and complexion surpassing all my previous wives, exists at all in this world full of human creatures, as if she was one of them? I must marry her. Only an ass would hesitate. Cromwell! (*enter Cromwell*)

Cromwell Yes, my liege.

Henry I have decided to marry Anne of Cleve.

Cromwell Good, my liege.

Henry Don't smile so complacently, like a pimp who's making a fortune on his business. I have decided to marry her, not you on my behalf, whether you arranged our connection or not. – Court her for me, proceed with the common procedure, and make ready all the traditional preparations.

Cromwell Yes, my liege.

Henry And, Cromwell, before you leave, allow me to inform you, that this time, by bringing this lady to my knowledge, you have finally reached terra firma. Off you go.

Cromwell (kneeling in gratitude) My liege...

Henry I said, off you go. (*exit Cromwell, deeply affected*)

He will be my favourite lap dog now for the rest of my life. (*enter Horace*)

Yes, Horace? What is your wish?

Horace My lord, my lord of Suffolk is returned from France.

Henry From France? What was he doing in France?

Horace He was sent there with a letter for king Francis.

Henry Oh, yes, now I remember. Is he here? Suffolk, I mean? (*enter Suffolk*)

Suffolk Yes, my liege, I am here.

Henry Well, did Francis agree to cooperate? (*Suffolk is silent.*) You are silent, man! Did the Frenchman understand my proposition?

Suffolk Evidently he did not, your majesty.

Henry Did I not express it clearly enough, or why didn't he understand it?

Suffolk The French king understood it wrong. I am sure your proposition was as clear as daylight.

Henry How then could he fail to understand it correctly?

Suffolk (very serious) He was full of laughter, my liege.

Henry Did he laugh? Why?

Suffolk He probably understood it wrong, as I said, your majesty.

Henry I can not understand it. My proposition was as simple and clear as snow and water. And he laughed at it. What's so funny about it? – Depart, Suffolk! (*exit Suffolk*)

What is there to laugh at in a king's wish to see another King's troop of pretty court-ladies? All I wanted was another wife like Jane. But never mind, I have found Anne of Cleve instead. And by golly! She is the finest and most inspiring lady in Europe at this moment, I am sure! And I shall marry her! By God, how happy she will make me! I am a bad king perhaps, but the world knows I am not a bad lover. (*exit*)

Scene 2. The Court.

Suffolk We have waited here long enough. Is it true that the German lady has landed in England?

Henry Speak not so of my future wife, Suffolk! And remember that she will be your Queen!

Cromwell For a royal lady you can never wait long enough.

Henry Well said, Cromwell.

Horace (to Bartholomew) Have you seen Holbein's portrait?

Bartholomew (to Horace) Yes, she is a beauty.

Suffolk (aside) For two hours I have been standing here, waiting for a lady who promised to be here ages ago. I am not getting impatient, but my legs begin to grow weary of standing. *(to all)* I thought I heard something outside. *(Several lords hurry to the window.)*

Henry Is it my Queen? Is it Anne? Is it she?

Norfolk It is a woman at least

Suffolk coming out of a carriage.

Cromwell It must be Anne of Cleve, then.

Henry My heart is scurrying. My sweat is rising.

Norfolk Yes. She has an ambassador to lead the way.

Henry She is here! At last I may see the divine beauty! *(He rises from the throne and walks to the door.)*

Horace (to Bartholomew) The King is eager.

Bartholomew (to Horace) Maybe he will make a delightful show of it.

Horace (to Bartholomew) Let us hope so! I hear the ambassador's steps.

(enter ambassador)

Ambassador Your Majesty! *(kneeling)* I have the honour of bringing to you the fairest of fairies, the princess Anne of Cleve. *(enter two of Anne's ladies.)*

Henry I see only dull German maids. *(enter two more of them)*

Still I see no princess. *(enter Anne of Cleve)*

Is there no end to these dismal faces? *(enter two more ladies)*

Away, ladies! Where is your mistress? I want to see the Beauty, not baggy old cowish geese! Anne, where are you? *Exit by the door the ladies were entering.)*

Anne Is this the King of England?

Buckingham I am afraid so, my lady.

My lords, greet the princess Anne of Cleve.

All (kneeling, except Cromwell) Welcome to England, your highness.

Cromwell (kneeling) And especially so Cromwell wants you to feel.

Suffolk Horace, go and fetch back the King.

Horace Yes, Sir! *(exit)*

Anne I thank you all for your most graceful welcome. But where is your King?
(enter Henry with Horace. Henry looks at her perplexed.)

Henry (aside) Is this the Anne of Cleve Holbein painted?

Anne (kneeling) Although you seem a bit distracted at the moment, I commend myself to His Royal Majesty.

Henry (aside) No, it is not. *(to Anne)* My lady, you are an impostor.

Anne (shocked) What?

Henry (to the ladies) My ladies, where is the real Anne of Cleve? I have not seen her other than on a portrait yet.

Anne (to her ladies) Apparently we have landed in the wrong court. Come, my ladies, let's go back to Germany.

Henry (*scrutinizing her*) Wait for a short moment! Bartholomew!

Bartholomew Yes, your majesty.

Henry Go and fetch the portrait!

Bartholomew Yes, your majesty! (*exit*)

Henry In a short while we shall know whether Anne of Cleve is or not.
(*enter Bartholomew*)

Bartholomew Here is the portrait.

Henry Show it to the lady who thinks she is Anne of Cleve.
(*Bartholomew shows it to her*)

My lady, if you are Anne of Cleve, tell me who painted this portrait.

Anne I recall his name was Hans Holbein. His name is the finest in German art today. Dürer is a fop who tries to be a painter, while Holbein is a painter.

Henry You know the painter, but are you also acquainted with the lady of the portrait? If you are, tell me who she is.

Anne Why, it's me.

Henry All the people in this hall, get out! Disperse, all and sunder! Leave me alone with my failure as a wooer! Anne, stay here with me.

(*exeunt all except Henry and Anne of Cleve.*)

Henry I fell for a picture, for a humble painter's exquisite view of an ordinary lady's graces. I have been misguided by art to court an ordinary German wench, a simple woman without anything at all. I might as well have paid my respects to the first lady in the nearest corridor, the first girl in the first street outside Windsor, or any lass in the country. Only artists can seduce the minds of men so fatally: influenced by an artist, any man is sure to fall in love with any woman. All men, beware of artists! They will turn your inward eyes and turn you all to doting idiots!

But since Anne now has come from Germany for the sake of me, it seems that I can not let her down. – Anne, will you forgive my shameless demeanour thus far?

Anne If my lord commands me so, I shall obey him.

Henry Will you marry me?

Anne If you want me to.

Henry I do want to marry you. You are nothing more than a common lady in my regards, but a common lady is better than none, and especially so when she is so well served and so eager to serve with her lady's services as you apparently are, Catherine.

Anne My name is Anne, your majesty, and although I am not quite willing to marry a thing, forgive me, a king like you, I don't find anything against it either. But, King Henry, there is one condition which I must name.

Henry I have agreed to it already.

Anne But listen first. I want to be able to dissolve our union whenever I would think it meet to do so.

Henry Why?

Anne Because if our marriage becomes a burden to you I don't want to lose my head like your previous Anne, or end in total misery, like another of your late wives.

Henry Whatever you want you shall have, Anne. All I want is you. Cromwell! Suffolk! Buckingham! Bartholomew! (*enter the said personages and Anne's ladies*) Arrange our marriage! We shall marry tomorrow! (*lifting up Anne*) Anne, I dare express to the whole world my love for you. You look like any woman, yet you have charmed me more than any woman. Or perhaps any woman could charm me like you; I don't know. All I know is that I am charmed by this woman.

Anne King Henry, put me down!

Henry And so I shall, for now all the world knows that you are my love. Come, Anne! Come, my court! Let's now all have a banquet, with a ball at the same time!
(*exeunt omnes*)

Scene 3.
(*enter princess Mary*)

Mary I am a young woman, but my heart is as weary of the bitter sauce of life as my mother's on her death-bed. No one knows my black melancholy, no one is acquainted with my sordid self, and they are lucky not to be. For all the worms that consumed my mother's soul is my inheritance, and gladly I would abstain from displaying it.

My mother. What was she? Her name was Catherine. No one knows it today. Everyone forgot it willingly the day she was more brutally murdered than any criminal, the day she was banished from court, the day her royal spirit was bereft of her by brutal force for no other reason than humiliation, the day no one would defend the Queen of England, the day when her name was forbidden to be spoken any more and immediately forgotten by everyone except me. I never saw her die. I was kept away from her death-bed. To me she is not dead. Her indescribable humiliation has haunted me ever since my father effected it. In my mind her misery is constantly still alive. She is crying for me every night.

But who is coming here? My little sister Elizabeth! Her mother's memory is today as vitiated as my father's only royal consort's.

Elizabeth Mary, sweet sister, how do you do?

Mary Why do you call me sweet sister?

Elizabeth Because you are my sweet sister. All sisters are sweet.

Mary Are they indeed? What makes you think I am so sweet?

Elizabeth The fact that you are my elder sister.

Mary (hugging her) Elizabeth, o Elizabeth, how grateful I am for your presence here! What a solace and delight you are to my dark broodings, what a pretty little angel you are in this dark hell! I love you, Elizabeth. Always remember that, even when I am cruel to you. I love you.

Elizabeth Why should you be cruel to me?

Mary Why should men be cruel to women and any beings cruel to each other? God alone knows that, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth Don't you rather think Satan is responsible for all cruelty?

Mary Indeed he is, Elizabeth, indeed he is. But God alone knows why Satan is, that is, if any of them is at all. But let's not speak religious nonsense. There isn't on earth a topic of conversation more confusing. Besides, we must not forget we are of different faiths.

Elizabeth But we both believe in God.

Mary Do we? Yes, I suppose we do. But tell me, Elizabeth, what have you been doing today?

Elizabeth I have been stitching.

Mary Have you been eager at it? Are you making any progress?

Elizabeth I am, sweet sister. Look! (*She shows an embroidery.*)

Mary You are an expert already, my child. Do you know, Elizabeth, that your mother and I were nearly the same age?

Elizabeth I do not understand you.

Mary I am as old as your mother was.

Elizabeth Then I must be as old as your mother was, since I was born much older than yourself.

Mary Stupid child! Your head is empty!

Elizabeth If it is empty, how could it then be heavy? It even aches sometimes.

Mary You are a child, Elizabeth! That is why I love you. Only children are ignorant about love, only children do not return love with hatred. Never grow up, Elizabeth. Remain a child.

Elizabeth What was that? How could I possibly fail to grow up?

Mary Don't listen to me, Elizabeth. Never listen to dark miserable women. Enjoy your childhood. (*Elizabeth plays.*) Yes, play, Elizabeth. Play with your possessions, play with the universe of your childhood, enjoy yourself while you can. Idle away your time until you grow up, for then you'll have time for idleness and happiness no more. Play until you discover yourself, have fun until the first blow of maturity hits you, play until you learn you had a mother who had a mother who all were most miserable indeed. Enjoy your blissful ignorance of the world, be happy with your own secret world of beautiful illusions, enjoy your lack of knowledge while you can. The day will come when someone tears the curtain off, when all people change into monsters before your sight, when all your love, hope and faith is blown out by the merciless hatred and humiliating imperiousness of the world, as a small candle-light despite its defencelessness is blown out by the thunderstorm. Yes, play, Elizabeth, play while you can, for one day life will play with you. – Who is coming? My father's latest button-hole.

(*enter Anne of Cleve*)

Anne Princess Elizabeth, shouldn't you be in bed at this hour?

Elizabeth Yes, I should, but I do not want to.

Anne There are many things in life, Elizabeth, which you must do whether you like it or not, and usually it is quite refreshing to do them, once you manage to get out of the worst habit comfortable laziness. So go to your chamber, young girl! (*Elizabeth does not show much enthusiasm.*) Lady Rowena! (*enter lady Rowena*) Guide princess Elizabeth to her bed-chamber, and see to it that she is put to bed.

Lady Rowena Yes, your royal highness.

Elizabeth (to Rowena) But why must I when I do not want to?

Rowena (to Elizabeth) You simply must. (*exit with Elizabeth*)

Anne Were you keeping her up, princess Mary?

Mary No. I am innocent.

Anne I believe you are. All catholics are innocent in these days. She is an intelligent child, don't you think so, Mary?

Mary Why do you say that all catholics are innocent these days?

Anne But they are. Persecuted people are always innocent. There are no people more innocent than the Jews. The protestants today are the villains, for they persecute the catholics, at least in this country.

Mary If my father heard you he would eject you.

Anne The sooner the better. He is a monster.

Mary Do you really think so?

Anne Of course. I have seen worse monsters, though.

Mary Are there really worse monsters than he?

Anne I can tell you the world is full of them. Every man is more or less a monster.

Mary If that is what you think of men, why did you marry?

Anne I had to marry. It suited my family and Europe. But I am not really married.

Mary What do you mean?

Anne I have tied him to my finger. Our marriage is almost a fraud. But you mustn't spread this further.

Mary I am used to burying secrets.

Anne If the King and I can not love each other I may leave him.

Mary It's a strange union.

Anne It's the ideal union for a woman.

Mary You may be right. You are wise, step-mother, wiser than Anne Boleyn.

Anne Please do not call me your step-mother. As long as I am here at court to serve a king's caprices, I am your loving mother.

Mary (embracing her) Yes, I believe you are. But I must go to bed now. Good night, my second mother.

Anne Good night, my English daughter. (*exit Mary*)

My husband's two daughters are from two different worlds. One is a catholic lady belonging to the severity of royal Spain; the other, still a child, is a girl almost born in the country. They will probably both be queens some day, for their brother was born sick. But if they become queens, what fate will two such extremely incongruous ladies bestow on England? (*exit*)

Scene 4.

Henry Anne, I wish you to dine with me today.

Anne As your majesty pleases.

Henry As your majesty pleases! I am sick of that phrase! Have you nothing better to say?

Anne If my words displease your majesty I shall be quiet.

Henry Nonsense! You shall not be quiet as long as you are my wife! Why are you so unsociable, Anne? You are not like a wife and Queen at all. You are like a shy lady in waiting! Why are you so, Anne?

Anne God made me what I am, and there is nothing I can do about it.

Henry I made me what I am, and there is nothing God can do about it! Come, Anne! Prove that you are a lady! Be a little womanly! Come, accompany me to the dining-hall! (*They go to the dining-hall.*)

Scene 5. The dining-hall.

Henry Is the table laid? Good! Let's sit down, Anne! You shall sit here, and I shall sit here. Is it not a beautifully furnished table? Have you ever seen more glorious food, a greater cornucopia of fresh fruit, more delicious red bottles of wine, or felt a finer more irresistibly appetizing bouquet in the air? Sit down, Anne, do not stand dreaming. Have you ever dreamt of a more perfectly well roasted turkey? Only food like this is good enough for the Queen of England and her honourable husband. Eat, Anne! Let the wine wash your throat, and the table, if it suits your mood. Throw the bones behind you, and try to hit the ceiling with them, like I do, when I am not too tired. A banquet has been served to you, Anne, and only a royal fool can resist a royal banquet! (*Anne pours herself some wine.*) Is that all? Half a glass of wine, and food not even covering a quarter of the plate? You offend me, Anne! How can you insult an old monarch so?

Anne Our stomachs are different, Henry. You fill yours and I fill mine according to their size and hardiness. I am not yet used to the barrels of food which constitute your diet.

Henry In those words, Anne, you expressed not our difference but the fact that you do not want to be like me. I am after your love, Anne, and you know it, but every time I try to approach your feelings and spirit you retire, saying you are different, you are not yet quite used to England, you have much yet to learn, and all sorts of other kinds of balderdash. Why are you so, Anne? Why don't you want to open your heart, your mind, your self to me?

Anne What do you think of your country, king Henry?

Henry What's that got to do with us?

Anne I seldom have questions to trouble you with, but now I have one. Tell me, what do you think of England?

Henry But your question has nothing to do with our topic of conversation. What do I, Henry, king of England, think of England? What a silly question to ask!

Anne You charged me with offending silence, king Henry. As soon as I open my mouth you charge me with lack of sense. What do you want, king Henry? Silence or talk?

Henry I hate your silence.

Anne Then answer my question. I believe it's the second or third I've ever offered you.

Henry You are odd, Anne, but I'll try to satisfy your query. What do I think of... hem... well, it's an island, and a good island to dwell on. What is it more? Hem. Well, I like it in a way. Hem. – Anne, I really don't know how to answer that question.

Anne You mean you don't know what to think of England, you say. How much do you think of England?

Henry Not much.

Anne You don't think of England, in other words.

Henry Not much.

Anne And that's the king I am married to. Do you know why I came to this country, your majesty?

Henry You came to marry me, I suppose.

Anne No, I came here to marry a King.

Henry And who am I if not that King?

Anne You are what a King shouldn't be: a crowned man who doesn't think of his country.

Henry You insult me, Jane!

Anne Jane? Who is Jane?

Henry You have angered me, Jane! You have disappointed me, Jane! – forgive me, Anne. You are not the woman I want. Get out of this court, Anne! I'll divorce you!

Anne No one is forcing you to remain in my presence, your majesty.

Henry (*rushing out in fury*) Cromwell! (*exit*)

Anne I meant every word of what I said. This man is not a king, wherefore I will gladly leave this unroyal stage. (*exit*)

Scene 6. Enter Cromwell.

Cromwell Who am I? I am the most well-contented man in England these days, second only to the King. And with what of a glorious sudden have I risen! I am next to the King now in power, only because I know how to make a royal match. I was the man who decided to bet on the quiet horse Anne of Cleve, only I could have engendered the ingenious idea of making the finest painter of men in Europe draw her picture, and only I, finally, could have prepared and organized so eloquently the King's final meeting, wedding and everlasting union with the virtuous and wise Anne of Cleve. I arranged the marriage which put the King on his feet, and consequently he has put me on mine. Good business and fair play is the way to all the happiness and harmony which life can give.

Henry (*from behind*) Cromwell!

Cromwell But I hear a bull roaring. Who has let loose a bull in these precious China halls?

Henry (*enter*) Cromwell! You are a traitor!

Cromwell (shocked at first, can't believe it) Who? Not I? Surely you can't mean me?

Henry Don't act sillier than you are, you worthless nincompoop!

Cromwell (kneeling, understanding it's serious after all,) Your majesty, say not so.

Henry You have wedded me to a bitch, a cow, a witch and shallow filly!

Cromwell Your majesty, there must be some mistake...

Henry Yes, an awful mistake has been committed: I have trusted you. I am no longer your majesty but your relentless judge! Guards!

Cromwell Your majesty, my liege, my supreme commander, hear me first!
(*enter guards*)

Henry Take away this man and behead him.

Cromwell I beseech your majesty!

Henry Everything you say may be taken down and used as evidence against you.

Cromwell But...

Henry But what? Pray, but me no buts! All things must come to an end, Cromwell, and so must your ambitions.

Cromwell You sound like a nightmare.

(*enter Suffolk and Norfolk. They stop as they enter, taken aback by the scene.*)

Suffolk What's this?

Norfolk Cromwell is surrounded by guards.

Suffolk Will he be taken away? (*enter Horace behind them*)

Horace The King's marriage has failed.

Suffolk No! Not again!

Henry Take him away, guards!

Cromwell (kneeling again. He is not to be moved.) For the second time I kneel to your majesty, praying for my innocence. Your majesty, you are unjust in sentencing me to death, for I have done nothing except my duty!

Suffolk People grow sensible when they fear death. (*enter Cranmer*)

Cranmer Is it true that Cromwell has lost the King's favours?

Norfolk Look for yourself.

Horace The King has married once too much.

Henry It was not your duty, Cromwell, to fool me into marriage with a mare, but to grace me with a Queen.

Cromwell And so I have, God help me! If Anne of Cleve is not a Queen good enough for England, then I am not a subject good enough to walk on England's sacred earth!

Suffolk For once he is speaking the truth.

Norfolk Poor Cromwell. No one ever liked him.

Henry Take him away, guards! Drag him away if necessary, for I can stand this scene no more! Away, lords! Stare not at your exhausted monarch so!

Cranmer What will you do next, my liege?

Henry I will divorce her! Look to it, Thomas Cranmer! (*the others are retiring*)

Cranmer I will, my liege. (*exeunt all but Henry*)

Henry Love, love, love! It drives me crazy! One more wife has bitten my back, one more of life's constant disappointments has moved me further from life, from love, from all joy and bliss and fortune. Love! I will pursue thee forever! Life is nothing without thee, I am nothing but a dullard without your energetic company, fit for nothing but senility! All I want is love, but, oh, how I hate false love! (*crying*) You fall in love only to find your love is false, but I shall continue like that until I am dead, for love is the only cure and contrary to loneliness, and loneliness is nothing but the one way road to evil and the dead end of death. Love, I don't mind if you drive me to madness or hell, as long as you keep driving me on!

(*exit*)

Act II Scene 1.

Maid Oh, Catherine, the King loves you!

Catherine Howard Hush! Do not speak such words. They are dangerous. If anyone overhears you...

Maid He will propose to you any day!

Catherine I am afraid of him. Every time he crosses my path and looks at me I tremble.

Maid Soon, Catherine, you will be a Queen, a holy mother of England! You will be loved by the famous king Henry VIII, he will kiss you and fondle you, he will flatter you and adore you passionately in his bed. Oh Catherine, how I envy you!

Catherine Give me that mirror. (*the maid gives her the mirror.*) Who am I? My name is Catherine Howard. I am a lady at the court of king Henry VIII. I am looked upon by him, spied on by his servants and much rumoured about by all lords and bishops around the King. Is it true that the King likes me? I have no idea. All court-ladies are constantly watched by our sovereign when he has divorced or lost another wife. He has divorced two and killed one. For the sake of his wives he has murdered two secretaries of state and one archbishop. I fear him. I do not want his love, I do not want to be at court, I do not want to be Catherine Howard. But I am Catherine Howard, and there is nothing I can do about it. – What makes you think the King loves me?

Maid He whispers with his lords whenever he sees you, sometimes he points his finger at you, and there is always a gleam in his eye when he looks upon you.

Catherine I fear him.

Maid Love is nothing to be afraid of, sweet lady Catherine. Love is every woman's duty, whether she likes it or not, and the more she is loved, the better. Every woman has to be loved, and that is every woman's tragedy. Forgive me, Catherine. I talk too much.

Catherine No, not at all. I love the company of your speech, though it may harm me if anyone listens. (*someone giggles*)

Who giggled? (*the maid is petrified with fear*) Look behind the tapestry! (*the maid lifts the gobelin. A girl is seen.*)

Catherine Princess Elizabeth!

Elizabeth I heard everything you said.

Maid If you carry it any further...

Catherine Hush, Charlotte.

Elizabeth What is love, lady Catherine?

Maid Love is what you should know nothing about.

Catherine Hush, Charlotte. Love, Elizabeth, is something which, when you learn what it is, you wish you had never learned it.

Elizabeth I don't understand that, Catherine. How could one possibly want to do without a certain piece of knowledge when all knowledge is good?

Catherine Listen to that girl, Charlotte! All knowledge is not good, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth That I don't understand either. Everyone except you has told me that all knowledge is good. Why do you hold a different view from all the others?

Catherine (to the maid) You can't speak with children, for they are too sensible: they have unconsciously more sense than grown-ups.

Elizabeth You confound me, Catherine. You do not answer my questions.

Catherine Because I can not answer them. Go and ask from somebody else answers for your queries. (*exit Elizabeth*)

Maid You disappointed her.

Catherine So do all grown-ups with children.

Maid I hope you didn't make her cry.

Catherine I hope she doesn't keep our conversation in her memory for long. Hoo! It is cold in here! Let's leave this room and go out to the fire in the hall.

Maid But I can light the fire in here.

Catherine No. Let's go out. The fire there is greater and more fascinating.

(exit maid before Catherine)

(aside) The King loves me. Shall I continue to be afraid of his love, or shall I expect something of it? *(exit)*

Scene 2. The studio of Hans Holbein.

(Hans is busy about his work. Enter Anne.)

Anne Dear Hans, I came to bid you good-bye.

Hans (turning around and kneeling) Your highness!

Anne I am not high any more, Hans. I am returning to Holland.

Hans The divorce is over?

Anne Yes, the King is expert at quick disposals of wives. Is there anything you would like me to bring with me to Holland?

Hans It is kind of you to think upon it. No, I have no one to love in Holland, since Erasmus died long ago.

Anne I might visit the Emperor later on. Shall I send him your respects?

Hans Please do.

Anne And thank you for the portrait.

Hans It was nothing.

Anne It was all my life. It gave me all and took it all away from me. Thanks to your art, my whole life went into that portrait.

Hans I hope you don't regret it.

Anne I believe the King alone regrets it, but he will soon be diverted otherwise.

Hans Farewell, good princess. Please give all my love to Germany and Holland.

Anne That I will. Good-bye.

Hans Good-bye.

Scene 3. The King's Court.

King Henry I hate this world, this life, this sceptre and this crown, but I love this court. Hey, joker! Come here and show me your mind's latest inventions!

Suffolk You are gay today, your majesty.

Henry If you put the finger on the hole, the punctured wine-barrel will cease to flow. *(The clown comes to the King.)*

Clown You called for a joker. I am not a joker.

Henry What are you then, if not what you are, for everyone can see that you are a joker?

Clown I am ridiculous seriousness foolishly dressed up.

Henry And why is seriousness ridiculous? Do we not all know that life is a most serious battle, which one has to command the forces of or be defeated by? Why is it ridiculous to take serious life seriously?

Clown You try to be serious. It isn't fit for a clown.

Henry Am I a clown?

Clown A clown is somebody who amuses people. You amuse the world.

Henry Do you think I am amusing?

Clown Anyone is amusing who rises above the others. Anyone is amusing who has a decent part to play.

Henry Is my part in this play decent?

Clown Almost.

Henry Away, clown! You are making fun of this old fatigued monarch!

Clown Well, you asked me to! I only did my job!

Henry And what am I doing if not my job? Is my job serious enough to be ridiculous enough to be derided by you?

Clown Yes, because you are not doing your job.

Henry What am I doing here then?

Clown You are just sitting and entertaining and trying to do a decent job out of your wives, while they just can't match you.

Henry I never matched myself, and neither did my four wives. Our matches were always made by others. Those were the ones who failed, since they never could find the right one for me.

Clown Failures are always matchless.

Henry Sorry, I can't match you any more. You go too far beyond me.

Clown That's precisely what I mean. You are too matchless to ever be matched by anyone who executes failures.

Henry (to Suffolk) What on earth does he mean, Charles?

Suffolk Search me. I don't think he knows himself.

Henry Yes, let's not go too deep into his wandering mind. Get away, clown. Your jokes are too difficult for our wits.

Clown Nay, it's your wits that are too difficult to be executive about your failures.

Suffolk That's enough, clown. The King is too soft in the head for your enigmas.

Clown Definitely, since he can not even solve his own.

Henry What do you mean?

Clown That's the most difficult question of all. My job is to stay out of all serious meanings.

Henry You are a stranger on this stage. You do not belong here. Out with you, old antiquated fool! (*aside*) I need something better than an old grotesque masqueraded philosopher to cheer me up. Suffolk!

Suffolk Your majesty!

Henry No, not you, Bartholomew!

Bartholomew Your majesty!

Henry What was her name, you know who I have in mind, that pretty little lady...

Bartholomew Lady Catherine Howard?

Henry Yes. Go and fetch her. (*exit Bartholomew*)

(*aside*) All I can give is intimacy. A royal sovereign must not be intimate with men. Consequently he has no alternative but women. (*enter Bartholomew with Catherine*) Catherine?

Catherine (*kneeling*) Your majesty.

Henry Do not bow. Do not blush. Look into my face. I hate being called anyone's majesty. Rise and sit beside me. I want company in this dreary age. (*Catherine rises and sits beside him.*) That is better, my sweet. Call me Henry. Or uncle Henry, if you find me too old to be pleasurable. Do you like my court, Catherine?

Catherine I find it very exciting to be at court, your majesty.

Henry Exciting? Why?

Catherine Everyone is so afraid of you.

Henry Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! (*He guffaws wildly. To everyone present, still merry:*) Are you frightened of me, my lords and ladies? Ha-ha-ha! Well, you must be, considering all the heads I chopped off in my younger years! But believe me, dear assembly of eloquent scare-crows, I will chop off no more! You have nothing to be afraid of. The English Nero is tamed by now. (*to Catherine*) But you are not frightened of me, are you?

Catherine I do not know.

Henry You shouldn't be. You will become my little protégée. I will protect you, that means. Do you know any dances?

Catherine I do.

Henry Then we shall dance. Come everyone, to the ball-room!

Suffolk But your majesty...

Henry What objections have you against my pleasures, brother?

Suffolk Remember the warnings of the physician...

Henry Physicians! Physicians are no better than witchcraft! They exist only to limit our freedom! Come, Catherine. I will dance with you.
(exit Henry, Catherine, and the better part of the court.)

Suffolk *(to Northumberland)* The King does not bother to keep his senses any more.

Northumberland Did he ever?

Suffolk At least he tried to.

Northumberland That was long ago. He lost his senses when he deserted his first wife, which was his only sensible match.

Suffolk Don't say that in public.

Northumberland Everyone in the public says so.

Suffolk I mean, don't let the King hear it.

Northumberland Of course not.

Suffolk But we can't let him loose on the floor.

Northumberland What on earth do you mean?

Suffolk His senses are far gone, when he believes himself young enough to dance, which he hasn't done for five or seven years.

Northumberland Grant him some enjoyment. He won't have much left anyway. And the less sensible he becomes with the years, the more amusing it will be to see him continue acting his folly. *(exit)*

Suffolk I like the King. I would not like to see him fall off the throne. *(exit)*

Scene 4. The ball-room.

Henry Music! Dancers! Prepare yourselves! Make yourselves ready! My court shall dance again, like it used to do! Come, all! Listen to this sprightly tune!
(They dance. Henry falls.)

All *(in dismay)* Oh! *(Some help him up. He is panting and exhausted.)*

Henry Leave me alone! Let me dance alone! Kate, my little partner, where are you? *(Kate stands by him.)* Come, let's go and sit by yonder table. I can not dance. My swollen toes are in the way. We shall talk instead. I have eaten too much today. *(Courtiers, ladies and Bartholomew help him to the table. He sits down. Catherine sits down opposite to him.)*

I am happy, Catherine, because the chair did not break. I am always afraid that chairs will break under me one day. The times are so unstable. *(Dries his front.)* Whew! So much water gushes forth for so little! Don't you think, Catherine, – this is one of my most private thoughts, – don't you think that we speak a horribly shallow language? We make use of so little words, endow our speeches with so little imagination and speak but shallowly with each other, that I am brought to engender an earnest wish for a great poet to come soon and better our language. Is not such a thought agreeable, Catherine?

Catherine What thought, your majesty?

Henry I long for such a poet. I wish he lived today, in this very age, so that I could talk with him, learn a better language and enjoy his company, from late nights to early mornings.

Catherine I did not know the King of England was imaginative.

Henry All kings are, Catherine, or else they would hardly sit long on the royal stool. You need imagination, Kate, to cope with the severest loneliness, the royal loneliness. But what are we sitting here idling about? Let us play cards!

Catherine Cards? I do not play cards.

Henry Then you shall be taught the honourable art at once. Look! This is a pack of cards.

Catherine I see.

Henry Look and learn. This is the ace of diamonds. This is the ace of spades. This is the ace of hearts. This is the ace of... (*curtain*)

Svne 5. The Court.

(*Henry entering the court with Catherine.*)

Henry Catherine, you must let me marry you one day.

Catherine Whenever you want.

Henry (*to the assembled court*) My lords, how fare you all?

All Only well, your majesty.

Henry To hear that cheers me enough. Any news?

Suffolk None, my liege.

Henry Then let us all be merry. (*enter a messenger*) Oh, there seems to be some news despite our beautiful weather. What message do you bring, messenger?

Messenger Your majesty, king James of Scotland...

Henry Oh, I am tired of these wars of mine. Well, what about this James of Scotland?

Messenger He craves for mercy and peace.

Henry I will conquer Scotland first.

Messenger He is tired of war.

Henry Naturally, who isn't? So am I. But what else is there to do? A politician who does not war will be bored and accused of sloth. Tell old Jimmy we'll have to fight it out or go out like candles. (*aside*) His light will soon go out whether I war or not; that is why he begs me to show a little mercy. But Scotland is too inviting to be left alone with her misfortunes. – Out, messenger, and inform James of my ruthless disposition and intention to go on with the war until we reach an end. (*exit messenger*)

And now, my court, let us be merry. My lords and my ladies, I hope you all know who this Catherine is?

Suffolk My lord, all we know about her is that she is some kind of court-lady.

Henry Then, Suffolk, Charlie boy my best friend, know and inform the court of the fact that she will be their next Queen of England.

Bartholomew (*aside to Horace*) I bet you five to one she will be gone within five years.

Horace (*aside to Bartholomew*) I bet you ten to one she will be gone within thirty months.

Bishop of Winchester Did I hear you right, your majesty? You intend to marry yet again?

Henry You heard me right, Winchester, if that is what you heard.

Suffolk (*to Norfolk*) The King is getting old. Will he never cease this mad chase for earthiness and this cruel play with human beings?

Norfolk It's the only sport he has left. His body can't take any other and will probably have to abstain from the last one soon enough also. Let's grant him his last sport.

Henry But, my dear lords and ladies, you seem to be more perturbed and shocked by this novel engagement than happy and glad for my sake. Is this the way to celebrate a King's affiancing? Rejoice, o subjects, for the King is happy again!

Suffolk (to the lords) Well, my lords, what are you waiting for? Express your true feelings! Who is not happy when the King is happy?

Earl of Surrey (aside to Horace) Send for the musicians. There will probably be a banquet later on.

Suffolk (kneels before the King) Your royal majesty, God knows how profoundly moved we all are by the freshness of your new feelings and by the beauty of your becoming bride. God knows how happy we all are and England with us. Our joy is too total to be adequately expressed.

Henry Rise, Suffolk, Charlie boy. It is a pity I can not raise you in your rank, since you are a duke already and part of my royal family, but be certain that you have risen in my esteem.

Bishop of Winchester When will the wedding be?

Henry So eager at it, Winchester? No sooner engaged than married, is that your way of having it? You may marry us today, if you want. But no, today we must have a banquet. We'll have to wait a day or two, maybe a week. But where is the music? Music! Come here! Tune this national joy, and let the world hear it! *(enter musicians)* Come, my court, my lords and ladies! We shall have a banquet anon. *(exeunt)*

Act III Scene 1. The country.

(Enter a shepherd and his lass. They sit down under an oaken tree.)

Shepherd Here is a nice spot. Good enough, don't you think, Ellinor?

Ellinor Indeed I do think so, my pretty Hamnet.

Shepherd What shall we discuss?

Ellinor I prefer being quiet. There are more serious things than empty discussions.

Shepherd Don't you like amiable talk?

Ellinor Yes, but not unnecessarily, not in this blissful heart of mother Peace, Dame Nature.

Shepherd Do you think we might violate her with our talk?

Ellinor She exists to be violated but not with idle talk.

Shepherd What on earth do you mean?

Ellinor Why don't you just have a guess.

Shepherd Ellinor! You can't be serious!

Ellinor Why not? What else are we earnest lovers for? And what else is Nature for?

Shepherd But look! Who comes here?

Ellinor He looks like some nobleman.

Shepherd He is a nobleman indeed! Just look at his broad figure!

Ellinor He resembles the King.

Shepherd That was the tongue of your imagination. The King is more slender and stately.

Ellinor He used to be. That was long ago. Since then he's been married four times.

Shepherd I thought it was five.

Ellinor Well, his marriages keep accelerating. But that's no business of ours. Let's ignore the gentleman and make love.

Shepherd You are right, my innocent pigeon. The gentleman is coming this way with his family. Let's move to the other side of this protecting tree and thus keep out of their way, shall we?

Ellinor Yes, let's! *(They move over behind the tree and are no longer seen.)*

Shepherd My dove!

Ellinor My love!

(Enter king Henry with Catherine Howard, princess Mary, princess Elizabeth, and some lords.)

Elizabeth Why are we not out here in the countryside more often? Listen to the swallows in the air, the skylarks in heaven, the chaffinch in the trees and the tragic song of the lapwing in the field! Why, father, do we not go for excursions like this more often? I hate being imprisoned in the city, and I think everyone does who occasionally knows the country. Why, father, do we have to stifle in the city?

Henry My child, I promise we shall visit the country every time you choose in the future.

Elizabeth Sweet wonderful father, you shall be kissed for that! *(She kisses him on his chin. All laugh.)*

Catherine Don't you enjoy the country, Mary?

Mary I love the country, but it frightens me by its wild freedom, so I love London and Westminster more.

Elizabeth Mary is always like that. She never enjoys anything perfectly. There is always something she would rather have than the best. *(laughing)* Mary, sweet good sister, show some cheer! Be happy with us, just for today!

Mary But I am happy, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth Then show it! *(runs along before the others)* Ha-ha-ha! Oh nature, here I am, your own little natural naughty child Elizabeth! Ha-ha-ha! *(she runs out from the scene.)*

Henry (to Catherine) It is a joy to see my daughter so happy.

Catherine Are you not equally pleased to see me quite happy?

Henry Of course I am, Catherine. *(to Mary)* Mary, go and play with Elizabeth. Keep her from doing some mischief. She always does when she is alone. I don't want to lose her. *(aside)* She is my only daughter.

Mary If you wish it, father. *(exit after Elizabeth)* Elizabeth!

Henry (to himself) The country pleases my disposition and keeps my bad temper at some distance. Nature soothes my soul and predilects my spirits in good directions. I wish I were married to Nature. I wish all the grace and charm of Nature was incarnate in one woman whom I were married to. *(He is immersed in his own thoughts.)*

Catherine (talking meanwhile with one of the lords) Oh? So your mother died in Shrewsbury?

Lord She did, my Queen.

Catherine And what did she die of?

Lord No one ever knew. She just suddenly died. Some attribute her death to witchcraft.

Catherine Are there many witches in Shrewsbury?

Lord There are indeed, madame. They come by night, hunt virgins with wicked dreams every Saturday and urge good-looking men to rape virtuous ladies with horrible frequency.

Catherine How exciting!

Henry What are you two talking about?

Catherine The witches of Shrewsbury. It's a fascinating topic to discuss. Sir James, initiate his majesty in our mystery.

Sir James Yes, my sovereign, Shropshire is full of witches.

Henry And so is the country, I believe.

Sir James What do you mean?

Henry A witch is a lady whom you can't befriend. She evades you, she is rather mystic and untouchable than humanly sociable. Therefore the greatest of witches is Nature. In every tree, every bush, every bird and every abject animal there is a mystic witch, for you can't easily communicate with any of them.

Sir James But to that there is an explanation.

Henry I disbelieve you.

Sir James Nay, do not, your majesty. Nature is frightened of man. Man hunts her deer, eats her noblest animals, fells her majestic trees and scars her earth with his plough and even burns down her forests occasionally. So naturally Nature tries to evade further frictions with man. Naturally she isn't easily befriended.

Henry But isn't that the very reason why witches become witches? A witch is an ordinary lady to begin with. One day misfortune seizes her: she is ravished. Nay, start not, dear company, bear my honest language, please, and hear me to the end! She is no longer respectable, honourable or good for decent courting. Trying to bear her shame she abandons herself to loneliness and unwholesome grieving: she becomes a mystic, secluded, unpopular creature, until one day someone understands she is a witch.

No witch has been more ill-treated than Nature. No witch has walked a more horrible path to her tragic state than the finest of madams, our universal Nature. Like you said, my lord, we have burnt her forests and chased her animals to death, built our cities on her grave and sacrificed her sanctities for the sake of building our roads; what we have done to her has driven her into a mystery, into a strange and tropic witch. All witches are tragic phenomena, and the greatest of them all is Nature. But since she is our very own mother, her influence is all-embracing, and we can never escape it, and her reaction must be natural. Thus, one day or other, sooner or later, my guess is that all humanity will encounter a terrible vengeance from her mother's side, which will only be natural but as fatal to man as man has been to Nature.

Sir James I can not argue with you, my liege.

Henry And yet, hear me to the end, that is why both she and we will survive. A witch is something immortal. Her sufferings are impossible for mortals to estimate. God alone knows how much the heart of life has suffered from the pangs of history, but those her very sufferings, hardships and deadening blows urge her forward, renew her strength and is the basic reason why she ever continues, why a new spring always returns after winter, why grass, bushes and novel trees always spring forth again on the burying-ground of her past. Nature is eternal, because no one has suffered like her. That's the glorious, mysterious, tragic and beautiful secret of nature. Did you follow me, gentlemen?

A lord Almost, your majesty.

Another Long live king Plato!

Henry Nay, Sir Arthur, my name is Henry. Never confuse me with greater kings.

Lord Pembroke Why, my lord, did you not offer your own name for your son instead of Edward? We would have loved to see another Henry like you as your successor.

Henry You should have conceived that idea when he was baptized, my lord Pembroke. Whether you like it or not you shall in the future have an Edward the Sixth, not another Henry the Sixth.

Sir James We don't follow, my liege.

Henry There have been better Edwards in history than Henries but unfortunately more Henries than Edwards. I try with my son to make up the inequality. But come, my lords, let's spur our horses on and be back at Windsor before dusk overtakes and seizes us all. Sir James, collect our princesses, – oh, here they come. (*enter Mary and Elizabeth*)

Elizabeth Mary twisted her ankle.

Henry I hope you didn't twist yours.

Elizabeth I certainly didn't. May we return here tomorrow?

Henry Why?

Elizabeth I found a lovely brook by the copse down there.

Henry But there are brooks everywhere.

Elizabeth None like this one.

Henry Are you sure?

Elizabeth Quite sure.

Henry Well then, we shall return tomorrow, for your sake, Elizabeth. Sit up, my princess! (*a lord alights and helps Elizabeth up on the King's horse.*) Are you well, princess Mary?

Mary Quite well, your majesty.

Henry Then off we go. Forward, my horse, my brave and excellent Sultan! (*gallops away before the others.*)

Sir James The King's humour rallies in the country.

Pembroke Let's hope he will ride out more often in the future.

Sir Arthur Let's hope so indeed. (*to Catherine*) May I escort you, madame?

Catherine You may indeed, Sir Arthur! (*They ride out, Catherine and Sir Arthur first. The others follow. Mary rests behind.*)

Mary Another day spent, another day lost, another day which might have been better had I been better. Perhaps I am a witch. God save me from such a destiny! Oh, if only I knew how to live! (*exit after the others.*)

(*Hamnet and Ellinor reappear behind the tree.*)

Ellinor It was the King.

Hamnet Yes, you were right.

Ellinor We have seen His Royal Majesty today, his family and Number Five. Will people believe us if we tell the story?

Hamnet I don't know. Perhaps they will. But we need not tell the truth.

Ellinor What shall we tell?

Hamnet I am good at inventing stories.

Ellinor So am I, but our stories have to correspond.

Hamnet Let's tell our tales in the pub together, both contributing to each other's relations as we go on. Thus we will make it seem like a whole.

Ellinor Hamnet, I adore you!

Hamnet And I worship you. But why did the King think only of witches and forget all about the good existence of elves?

Ellinor Witches are perhaps more dramatic, while elves suit us better, since they are more natural than dramatic and tragic.

Hamnet Our element is comedy.

Ellinor The King looks like a comic tragedy.

Hamnet All his marriages have been comic tragedies.

Ellinor So let us leave this scene and leave the King's comic tragedy and go to our natural comedy, where we belong.

(*They walk out together, arms around each other.*)

Scene 2. The Court.

One lord to another How goes the war with Scottish James?

The other I think the frequency of old Jamie's losses will kill him off soon.

The first The King is progressive, then?

The other No. He will die with the war unfinished, like all kings do. (*enter Catherine*)

The first Look.

The other At what?

The first The Queen.

Good morrow, your royal highness!

The other Have you had charming dreams this passed night?

Catherine I have indeed, my lords. (*goes over to lord Pembroke*)

Lord Pembroke, I presume? Will you escort me to the dining-hall?

Pembroke I certainly will, my royal queen. And from thence to practically anywhere.

Catherine You please me, my lord of Pembroke! (*they sail out*)

Lord Chichester The Queen has greatly graced our lord of Pembroke lately.

Lord Hastings So she has. Let us hope for some topic of conversation to come out of it.

Chichester It already has, my dear lord Hastings. The people long to see this wife deposed; they want their King to excel himself.

Suffolk My lords, unfortunately your conversation has touched my ear. The King loves his wife. Do not ruin his happiness by cultivating your ugly gossip and making it publicly known.

Chichester The Duke doesn't like us.

Hastings So we shall dislike him.

Chichester Is he married?

Hastings He is, but there is no more loyal man in England to his love and duties. But lo, here comes the King. (*enter Henry*)

Chichester He is getting fatter every day.

Hastings He would be more apt in the role of Falstaff.

Henry Good morrow, my court! Good morrow, everybody! Here I am again, your jolly old king, as majestic as ever! Be happy, my court, for my humour is pleasant today, and it may not be so forever. Laugh, my court, for happiness, like joy, festivity, pleasantries and fun is only to be laughed at! Oh, this damned belly-ache! How dreadfully it consumes my bowels! Oh! (*takes a chair*)(*Lords hurry to his aid.*)

Sir James Your Majesty, are you quite fit?

Henry (recovering) Certainly I am quite fit! What else! I have never loved a wife more indefatigably than this night, and never have I had a finer breakfast than this morning, so why shouldn't I be fit! My bowels play games with me, that's all. Where is Catherine?

Chichester I believe, your majesty, she was escorted to the dining-hall.

Henry To the dining-hall? Without me? By whom was she escorted?

Hastings By my lord of Pembroke, Sire.

Henry To the dining-hall, at once! She shall be escorted nowhere but by me! Suffolk!

Suffolk Yes, my liege.

Henry Do you know anything about this?

Suffolk I hear much talk but observe only innocence.

Henry No need for jealousy then?

Suffolk Certainly not.

Henry Although she is young and I am so much older?

Suffolk Beware, your majesty. Young blood is without faith, but old hearts last the longer for their reliability in faith.

Henry What on earth do you mean?

Suffolk The only danger ahead is your own ungrounded jealousy.

Henry Thank you. Follow me!

Suffolk Certainly, your majesty. (*exeunt the King and Suffolk. The court begins chatting.*)

Catherine Parr I love this tragic king. He is old and weak and laughable, a poor crowned buffoon frustrated by many women, laughed at in secret and backbitten by all the world. If only he would marry the right lady one day, a lady that could take reasonable care of him! But men do not listen to women. That is their tragedy. They are rather misguided by themselves than guided by women, like this old fat ridiculous shadow of a man who could have been a King.

Norfolk Catherine Parr!

Catherine Parr Yes, your grace? What will your grace?

Norfolk What are you doing here at court?

Parr Just visiting my brother. Besides, I have been invited here by a friend.

Norfolk Have you met with the King?

Parr Not yet.

Norfolk I shall be happy to arrange a meeting between you, if you want to.

Parr Your grace, you are most generous.

Norfolk No, not generous, but courteous. I know your family to be a good and honest and reliable one since of old, and the court needs people like that to outdo occasional vermin.

Parr No comment, my lord.

Norfolk I would think not. Welcome, Catherine. (*touches her arm in friendship and takes courteously his leave.*)

Parr I am made happy. This Duke is an old friend of our family; how strange that he should meet me here and recognize me!
(*re-enter King, Catherine, Suffolk and Pembroke. Princess Mary appears to the right of the scene.*)

Henry (quietly) What were you doing in the dining-hall? Haven't you eaten today?

Catherine No, I haven't.

Henry Why didn't you eat, then, in the dining-hall?

Catherine I had eaten already.

Henry In so brief a moment's time? Come, come, Catherine, you act suspiciously.

Catherine So do we all occasionally, your majesty, don't we?

Henry I guess we do. My dear assembled court, in a few moments we shall have a ball and thereafter an opulent banquet. What say you to that, my lords?

All Hurray!

Suffolk We rejoice, your majesty.

Pembroke So we do indeed.

Henry What do you mean by "we", Pembroke? But come now, all. We shall all give the construer of this play a reason for stating *exeunt all*, not that I know why, but we shall see! Come now, all! (*exeunt all, to the sound of music*)

Scene 3. The ball and the banquet.

Music whirls, wine is streaming, all are laughing, and gaiety rules the stage.

Henry Up and jump, my court! You haven't jumped enough yet! Whirl to the music! And let the wine decide the rhythm. Up, Catherine! Dance with lord Pembroke!

Catherine I would rather dance with you or with Sir Gordon Foxtrot.

Henry Dance with lord Pembroke, I said! I want to see you dance with lord Pembroke. (*to Suffolk*) If I try to dance I shall break my legs. (*sees Mary standing in a doorway, taking no part in the festivity*) Mary! What are you standing there for? Come, my princess, you are still young, fresh, beautiful and fair; you shall dance with the others.

Mary Please, father, leave me alone.

Henry You are strange, Mary. You have always been strange. I shall leave you alone if you wish, but only for the moment. (*to Suffolk*) She is ill, that girl. She has always been ill. She thinks too much of her mother. That's her illness. (*to Mary*) Mary, you should stop thinking of Catherine of Aragon.
(*Everything immediately comes to a standstill. All stop and stare. All are petrified by the sound of the name.*)

Norfolk (whispering to a lord) That name has not been spoken since it vanished six years ago.

Henry Why are you all staring at me? Musicians, what happened to your music? Why are you so silent, all? (*rising from the table*) I read in your eyes fear and wonder. What is there to fear or to wonder at? Did I speak a magic word? Catherine of Aragon, what is that word to you? It's just a word. A dead word. Do you fear a word, my silly subjects? Do you wonder at my pronunciation of a dead word? I am not afraid of you. I am not afraid of anyone or anything, for my conscience is dead. It died with Sir Thomas More. He was the only one who dared to be any reasonable conscience in this Tudor establishment of only scandals and waste. What are you whispering about, my lords Chichester and Hastings? You are new at court, aren't you? Let's hear your voices! Speak up, gentlemen, I pray you! Let me hear your accusations, your objections to my life of lust, your demands for improvement of this degenerated monarch.

Catherine Parr (aside) Oh, this poor king!

Henry You are still staring at me in terror. Am I such an awkward embarrassment or such a good actor? Am I such a funny king? Why don't you all laugh if I am? Come now, laugh, my court! Laugh at a good joke! There is no better joke than an unkingly monarch. (*all begin to cheer again*) I like your delighting smiles. Dance again, ladies and gentlemen; music, return to the stage; without music no stage is alive. Fill all your chalices with wine, and empty them carefully. Abandon yourselves all to pleasure again; in brief, let's be merry. Mary! I want to dance with you. (*Mary is gone.*) Mary! Where is she gone? Then, my lady, (*turns to Catherine Parr*) I will dance with you.

Catherine Parr Me, Sir?

Henry Yes, Sir, you, Sir. If you Sir the King, I shall Sir you, madame. Come, on the floor, madame. (*He carries Catherine Parr away on the floor. All rejoice. Henry stops, fatigued.*) I am afraid, madame, that my limbs are too old for your company. You'll have to dance with someone younger than I. Bartholomew! (*Bartholomew comes in the middle.*) Dance with this pretty lady. The king needs a replacement, because his gout forbids him to carry away any more wives and court ladies. He can't deceive himself any more. My lady, I hope you'll excuse me.

Parr I certainly will, king Henry.

Henry Farewell, queen Incidental.

Catherine! Where is my one and only Queen gone?

Pembroke She is dancing, your majesty.

Henry With whom?

Pembroke With someone, probably.

Henry I would think so too. She wouldn't dance alone, would she, Pembroke, you genius? Farewell, court, for this moment. I'll just go out for a glass of water. (*stumbles out. He is quite exhausted.*)

Catherine Parr What was your name?

Bartholomew Bartholomew, madame.

Parr Oh yes, Bartholomew. You have a delightful king in this country.

Bartholomew Are you from abroad?

Parr Oh no. I just wanted to fill out the blank verse.

Bartholomew But there is no blank verse.

Parr Oh, isn't there? Well, as I said, you have a delightful king.

Bartholomew We have indeed.

Horace But we are afraid there isn't much left of him.

Parr But he is grander than ever.

Horace That's just the problem. The larger he grows, the emptier the inside, the hollower his life, and the shorter his remaining distance.

Parr Is he aware of it?

Bartholomew He tries to conceal it by his flesh and fails pathetically.

Parr So do all people that grow fat. But his inside will save him.
Horace I hope you are right, madame.
(*The dancing continues, the lights gradually go out, the music retires with the light, and the stage ends in darkness.*)

Scene 4. Henry solus.

Henry How do you cope with tiredness? When you are flung off the lovely merry-go-round, how do you do to get in again? I don't know. Besides, I'm weary of it. I am weary of all joy, of poisonous wine, of my eternally swelling belly. I can't love any more. I can't drink much any more. I try to love my wife, but she is disgusted with me. What am I to do? Does anyone know how one's youth is brought back? If there is anyone who knows how age is enlivened, I will offer him my crown. (*takes off his crown*) Is there anyone? No? Then I'll put it on again. It chafed my head once; now I am grown so thick-headed that not an axe could possibly tickle it. I wish I could love my wife. I wish I weren't old.

Once I rode, wrestled, fought and excelled everyone in all sports. Once I bothered to study Plato, Plutarch, Machiavel and the driest of them all, Aristotle. Those days are gone now, and only Martin Luther vies with me in languishing stagnation: in addition we are swelling both in equal fatness. Those days were my best when we two fought and never tired of it intellectually. Politics forced me to accept his more concrete and carnal coarse philosophy, and that became the end of all the spiritual progress of our age. We were both swallowed up in the most human bog of self-complacency and lazy comfortableness, which both must lead to inhumanity and ignorance, which though the entire humankind most enthusiastically does applaud, since that's the broad way made for ordinary people, the incumbent mass of death's majority, the vulgar commonness, which dominating course has been my own in spiritual apathy all since my little Jenny died.

(*enter Mary*)

Mary, what are you doing here? Aren't you having fun with the rest of my kingdom?

Mary I don't know how to have fun.

Henry You are not serious, Mary. Certainly I have seen you laugh sometimes, Mary.

Mary Laughter is an expression; joy is a feeling. They are two different things. But that is not what I came here to discuss.

Henry What came you to discuss?

Mary Mother Catherine asked me to come.

Henry What does she want?

Mary She is waiting for you in the hall. I don't know what she wants.

Henry Katie! (*exit in haste towards the hall*)

Mary There he went, my old father, the murderer of my mother. May God serve him now with what he has earned. (*exit in the opposite direction*)

Scene 5. The hall.

(*Catherine and Pembroke are alone. They rest in each other's arms. Soon they begin to kiss and fondle each other. This goes on for quite some while before Henry enters, without at first seeing them.*)

Henry This is where Mary said my wife would be waiting for me. But where is she? I see her nowhere. Kate, my blessed darling, whom I would love so passionately if I could, where are you? My pet, my pretty fairy! She answers me not. Maybe she isn't here. But she must be here, for Mary doesn't ordinarily lie.
(*calling*) Kate!

(Kate and Pembroke are interrupted by his calling. The King suddenly discovers them. Catherine is all dishevelled.)

Ha! So there you are! *(Pembroke rises instantly.)* There you are, Pembroke! I was just looking for you! Have you seen my wedded lady Catherine Howard lately? I expected her to be here. Where is she?

Pembroke (stammering and pointing at Catherine) She tried to seduce me!

Henry I am not interested in your petty affairs with dirty sluts, Pembroke. What I wanted was to know where my honourable Queen is.

Pembroke (still pointing at Catherine, stammering desperately) It is she!

Henry Surely, Pembroke, you don't want me to believe, that this dirty disorganized whore, with which you are playing, and which you undoubtedly have found in the heart of dirtiest London, is the Queen of England, my wife and worshipped lady? *(Pembroke faints.)*

Catherine (trembling) Forgive me, great Henry.

Henry Forgive what? I know you not. Isn't this kind of work your business? Hence, unroyal quean! You do not belong in Westminster. I have never seen you in my life before, and I shall never see you again! Hence! *(He drags her up violently and kicks her, felling her to the floor.)* Who are you by the way? A woman? A human creature? An animal creature? A fraud? No, you are not even a fraud. You are the lowest kind of living being: you are nothing but dirt. *(spits upon her body)* Catherine, I hereby leave you to the rats. *(exit, after one last look)*

(Catherine lies sobbing for a while. By and by she sits up, wet with tears, tries to organize her hair, and so on, all the while crying.)

Catherine (finally) Forgive me! Forgive me! Forgive me! Forgive me! Forgive me! Boohoo! *(crying desperately)*

(Lord Pembroke rises, collects himself, and walks out, as if nothing had happened, without even noticing Catherine's prostrate figure.)

(Suddenly enter princess Elizabeth.)

Elizabeth I heard some voices from here.

(Suddenly enter guards. Catherine looks up.)

Catherine! *(tries to run to her, but is stopped by the guards.)*

First guard This is no place for you, child. Run along!

Elizabeth But she is my second mother!

First guard The greater the reason why you should run along. *(leads her out.)* Come now, be a good girl. *(locks the door after her, which she begins pounding.)*

Second guard By order of His Majesty the King you are hereby charged with the severe crime of adultery. Catherine Howard, Queen of England, rise, when you are being spoken to! *(She will not.)* Take her out!

Catherine I am not guilty of what I unwillingly neither performed nor wanted!

First guard Tell that to the dogs. The King himself is your prosecutor, and he does not need any witnesses. I am afraid, my lady, that nothing more can save you now. *(She is forced up and taken away.)*

(The poundings of princess Elizabeth continue still, until they eventually calm down and cease altogether.)

Scene 6. The Tower.

Catherine Howard in her prison. She is praying.

Catherine (looking up) Shall I be saved? Will the King relent? Is there any hope for me? Oh, Queen of Queens, please help the most wretched queen in history! What shall I pray? What shall I offer God to make him rescue me? O death! I fear thee! I hate thee and damn thee for all that you are! Death! Cursed, dreadful, horrible pit of nothing

into which all must fall in the end! What shall I do to avoid thee? I would do anything. Anything! I defy thee, death! God, if thou art real, free me from the illusion of death! For if death is real, then there can be no God. Life, life, fickle glimmering life, what art thou? Why do you have to take back what you give all babies and mothers? What did I do to get punished with the loss of life before I had had time to apply it? I was not born to become a queen. The King made me a queen. I am an ordinary girl, who wanted to grow a common and respectable woman, but cruel king Harry altered my life's happy course. Cruel king Harry! Thy cruelty shall live in people's and all women's minds for ever and ever and ever! King Harry is death! England, beware of king Harry, for he is death! O death, I fear thee so! Booohoo! (*falls to the floor, crying desperately.*)

(Enter Cranmer, Suffolk and guards.)

Cranmer Look at her girlish little figure! So young and so guilty! I never saw a woman like that. Don't you feel, Suffolk, like a devirginator when you behold this frail young woman in this desolate prison like this?

Suffolk I do indeed, your honour.

Cranmer I wish I could help her in some way, but even her powerful uncle the Duke of Norfolk can do nothing, and I am only a religious implement in the steadfast hand of our bombastic king Henry. I was here once before, you know, then in the business of comforting the late Anne Boleyn. Alas, she was not as abject a creature as this one is. She remained a lady until the end. Excuse me, your royal highness...

Catherine (looking up) What do you want? (*glances wildly at them*)

Cranmer Take courage, my lady, and rise from this dusty floor. What makes you wallow in so abject a state?

Catherine The King brought me thus.

Cranmer Hush, girl. You know very well the King didn't. You alone did, for no one else has been here but you.

Catherine I am mad; that's why I crawl in this dust. Did you not hear me scream presently? I scream every day. I will scream every day until I die. I hate nothing except death. Wheeeeeeeeeee! (*suddenly runs up, screaming, and makes for the open prison door. She is mercilessly stopped by the guards.*)

Cranmer Easy, easy, guards! Remember that she is a woman. We are not here to harm you, my dear child. Comfort thee. Calm yourself. Take it easy. Have you not prayed for mercy?

Catherine I do every morning, every evening, every night and every day.

Cranmer Then mercy is sure to come. Shall I keep you company? Will my learned prayers be of extra comfort to you?

Catherine I doubt your honesty, archbishop. I can not think a man of any good. You surely are both stinking with the sole desire to take me by force here on the middle of the floor in safety without witnesses in order to before I'm dead get out of me a last chance of some pleasure. Isn't that the only cause of women's lives: the dirty pleasures of men?

Cranmer My lady, you commit a serious mistake. My love is only for my God.

Catherine What God? There is no God of love.

Cranmer There is a God omnipotent in the most quiet and mysterious of ways. He is an element more subtle, fine, essential and impalpable than air, more exquisite and more invisible than any scientist or alchemist is able to explain or trace, but all the same his ether is ubiquitous wherever there is life and therefore even here. If this ethereal substance did not rule the world, there would not ever have existed anything called life. But through this ether everywhere, in every sea and atmosphere and earth, God recreates all life forever. This God is my life and yours, and through his power, which is love alone, am I with you in here in order to assuage your sufferings.

Catherine Your love of God is your excuse for hating and humiliating all humanity. Your love of God enables you to partake in the execution of the scapegoats and the victims for the King whenever this may suit the King's capriciousness. You are no better than a pagan wizard or an ancient high priest claiming human sacrifices for his god of blood-thirst and perversion! I wish you both to hell with all authorities of England! For my part there is no God but death!

Suffolk She is demented.

Cranmer I fear so, yes. But we must understand it. So young!

Suffolk How old?

Cranmer Almost nineteen.

Suffolk And the axe is waiting for her neck. Methinks this England is a bit too harsh in power of initiative and dramatization. The effect means more to us than the result.

Catherine What are you staring at, animals? I hate all men! Phew! (*spits*) Out, devils! Give all my hate to king Henry! Out, I say, or I'll vomit!

Suffolk We can not speak with her.

Cranmer No, we can't. But we have to fulfil what we came for. (*to Catherine*) Calm yourself, my child, just for one moment!

Catherine Try to be calm yourself, when you're next for the gallows.

Cranmer We came to give you the truth.

Catherine I know the truth. What is it more than death?

(*Cranmer gives a sign to the guard. The guard brings forth a document.*)

Guard Catherine Howard, former wife of king Henry VIII, has been tried and found guilty of gross adultery. She is to be beheaded within the walls of the Tower on the morning of the...

Catherine (shouting) My death is God's death!

Cranmer Let's leave her.

Suffolk I am sick.

Cranmer Guards, proceed ye. I am afraid there is nothing more we can do.

(*Suffolk and guards go out.*)

Farewell, wretched queen, and may God have mercy upon you.

Catherine God has no mercy with any woman. He is a man himself, and he has ordained manhood to everlasting seduction of womanhood to death for all eternity. He doesn't give a damn about women, he has never cared for them, and he has never understood them.

Cranmer My lady, I forgive your blasphemies.

Catherine My bishop, you are the blaspheming part who imagines that an innocent victim can be comforted. Before the doomed, all speech of life and God is nothing but the grossest of all blasphemies.

Cranmer I fail to understand that.

Catherine Do you? When one day you are yourself tormented unto death by hypocritical comforters acting in the name of holiest religion as a pure excuse for death and thereby only make your pain and death the worse, archbishop, even you will understand.

Cranmer If that is a prophecy, I quake at your infernal cunning.

Catherine It is more certain than a prophecy, archbishop. Comfort yourself instead of me, if you have the power.

Cranmer (shaken) Farewell, my poor young lady. (*leaves.*)

(*As the door is closed behind him, darkness promptly falls on the stage.*)

Scene 7.

Elizabeth What has happened to Catherine?
Mary Be comforted, Elizabeth. Our mother for a year is dead.
Elizabeth Dead? Why is she dead?
Mary Why? Because she was Catherine.
Elizabeth Why is she dead because she was Catherine?
Mary You ask too many questions, Elizabeth. When you grow older you'll understand the vanity of asking them all.
Elizabeth What do you mean?
Mary Nothing.
Elizabeth But why is she dead? What does it mean?
Mary Go and play, Elizabeth. You'll be happier that way.
Elizabeth But...
Mary (aside) She has emptied her mind. Now she is satisfied.
Elizabeth But I will find out all about why Catherine had to die. *(exit)*
Mary Brave girl. She will be struck by the truth of her own mother's death first. *(enter Catherine Parr)*
Catherine Isn't it a wonderful weather today?
Mary Where? What did you say? Oh, lady Catherine! Forgive me! I did not hear your entering.
Catherine I thought you were contemplating the weather, standing thus by the window.
Mary Oh no, I was merely thinking of life.
Catherine Are you still troubled by Catherine Howard's death?
Mary What woman isn't?
Catherine (comforting her) I am not.
Mary Have you had a talk with the King yet?
Catherine I have.
Mary Will you return to the country now?
Catherine No. I will stay here.
Mary Why? Has anything happened?
Catherine Nothing much.
Mary You have a secret.
Catherine None which everyone does not know.
Mary Tell me what somebody like me doesn't know.
Catherine Might it be my age?
Mary No lady's age is a well-kept secret.
Catherine Might it be that I am engaged?
Mary Even I have been engaged, but that was no secret.
Catherine Might it be that I am engaged to the King?
Mary Lady Catherine! You are not serious!
Catherine Do you joke about serious matters?
Mary I can not believe it. I refuse to believe it. *(calling)* Elizabeth! Elizabeth must know. No one will be more elated by this than she. Elizabeth! *(exit in search of Elizabeth)*
Catherine I am a happy woman. I loved this king from the beginning, and I will love him to the end. All he ever needed was a plain woman to take care of him. He has found her now, and she has no doubts whatsoever that she is his last Catherine. *(enter Elizabeth and Mary)*
Elizabeth Lady Catherine! How happy I am to learn that you shall be our next second mother!

Catherine And how happy I shall be to take finally care of ye as your first mother. I will not be second mother to anyone, but indeed I shall be a simple mother to all, and especially to your father.

Elizabeth Do you know any good tales, lady Catherine?

Catherine I do indeed. Which one will you hear?

Elizabeth The one about the Ogres in the Black Forest.

Catherine I shall relate it tonight, if you behave for the rest of the day.

Elizabeth That I promise.

Catherine You are a good girl, Elizabeth. But, young ladies, thinking of the weather, have you been out at all today?

Elizabeth No, not at all.

Catherine Let's go out then, eh, shall we? The sun is shining, and it would be a shame to let her shine out there alone. (*exeunt*)

Act IV Scene 1.

(*The King solus. Enter Norfolk.*)

Henry How goes my fleet, Norfolk?

Norfolk Your majesty, it is becoming a pride to England indeed.

Henry That gladdens me, Norfolk, for that is what I want it to be. I have always longed for the sea, Norfolk. I love the sea. And I believe all Englishmen like me have the same longing feeling in their breasts for the singular endlessness of the sea. I want all Englishmen to set out on the sea, Norfolk. That is why I am building this fleet, and when I am dead, Norfolk, for I shall be dead soon, the fleet shall be continued. The fleet shall be continued forever, Norfolk!

Norfolk Naturally, your majesty.

Henry For, Norfolk, there is no crueller foe than the sea. You build ships only to cast them to the foe. She is cruel, Norfolk. And that is why the fleet shall be continued on forever, for we will not submit! Nay, Norfolk, we shall not submit to nature or the sea. Not ever, Norfolk!

Norfolk Of course, your majesty.

Henry (rising) Take me to Bristol.

Norfolk Now, your majesty?

Henry Yes, Norfolk. I want to see this fleet of mine. (*Norfolk helps Henry out.*)

Catherine (outside) Where do you think you are going?

Henry (outside) Only to Bristol.

Catherine Bristol? Never! You are going nowhere, Henry! You aren't well yet. If you go for a journey now you'll catch another cold and be indisposed again for another month! (*Henry and Norfolk enter again where they left. They walk backwards, being driven back by Catherine, who is entering also.*)

You shall stay at Westminster, Henry, where you are safe and well, until your health is definitely restored. And I will make you some toddy. (*exit*)

Henry (complaining) What a merciless tyrant she is!

Norfolk (jokingly) Why don't you just chop off her head?

Henry Nay, Norfolk, those days are gone. Instead one day times will find it proper to behead some royalty, and I regret that it will never be myself. Besides, I need a tyrant like this Catherine to keep an eye on me, to soothe my painful memories of my horrible life and dreadful misbehavings. After all, Norfolk, you'll have to admit that I once was a graver tyrant than even she is now. And her tyranny, besides, is only beneficial. We shall go to Bristol another day, Norfolk, when Catherine allows us to. (*enter a messenger*)

But here is a messenger. My Scottish messenger, I believe. Speak, messenger.
What news?

Messenger Majesty, I bring some tragic news.

Henry I am prepared for the worst. Have we lost another battle?

Messenger No, your majesty, but his majesty the king of Scotland is dead.

Henry Is that all?

Messenger Yes, your majesty.

Henry Then that's all. You can go.

Messenger Yes, your majesty. (*exit*)

Henry King James is dead. Did you hear that, Norfolk? He finally broke under his burden. Too many wars, too many misfortunes, and too much of Scotland finally broke the old king. What say you to that, Norfolk?

Norfolk Who will succeed to his throne?

Henry You are quite right, Norfolk. I quite forgot about that. Messenger! Come back! We forgot something! (*re-enter messenger*)

Messenger Yes, your majesty?

Henry Who will succeed his majesty the dead king of Scotland?

Messenger His daughter, your majesty, princess Mary.

Henry How old is she?

Messenger She is merely a new-born baby, your majesty. (*exit*)

Henry What say you to that, Norfolk? My old Scottish foe is dead and has left his sorrows to a baby.

Norfolk You might conquer Scotland now, my King.

Henry No. That would be a foul thing to do. I will leave my wars to my son. When he is old enough to war, Mary Stuart will be old enough to defend herself. But the best prospect would be if they married each other and united our irksome nation. No enemy can visit Britain, but our constant trouble will be ourselves. If we constantly fight each other, whether we call ourselves Scotsmen, Irishmen, Welshmen, Cornishmen or Gaels, we will never emerge as a prominent nation but constantly remain no better than Turks or catholics. In that case we will ever be defenceless against barbarity. On the other hand, we should be capable of reaching some prominence, our language being the clearest, simplest, most logical and most expressive in Europe next to Italian. But there is no hope for Italy, that part of the world being hopelessly bound in catholic superstition. So, Norfolk, I end my wars with parsimonious Scotland and leave that rugged land in peace.

Norfolk You are noble, my king.

Henry No. I am just an ordinary gentleman. By the way, I would like to see my son. Edward! (*enter Edward*) Edward, my son, how do you do?

Edward Well, father, I haven't coughed today yet.

Henry That's good to hear, my son. I hope you will never cough again. (*Edward coughs.*) But what is it I hear? Away, my son! I will speak with you again when you feel better. (*exit Edward, coughing*) Poor fellow. What do the physicians say?

Norfolk They hide the fact well that they are worried.

Henry That grieves me. Poor Jane! Alas, wicked destiny! For the sake of an heir I sacrificed my only decent and truly devoted wife, and this is how destiny awards me: an heir incurably sick! Alas! But that's how the world goes. Nothing remains in the end but frustrations.

Catherine (outside) What did you say, Henry? (*entering*) Am I not a decent and truly devoted wife?

Henry You are indeed, Catherine.

Catherine Why then did you speak of your only decent and truly devoted wife as if she was long since dead?

Henry It wasn't about you I spoke, my dear.

Catherine Who was it then?

Henry Forgive me, Catherine, and forget it. I was merely mumbling in my beard.

Catherine I hope so indeed! *(exit)*

Henry She is like a hawk, Norfolk. Whenever she sees a rat on my tongue she dives down to it with horrible decision and consumes it. And her ear never abandons my speech for the faintest moment. She is cruel to me frequently, but I don't bother, for I am old. Age does not mind much about cruelty, for the aged knows that however cruel the world is, none's cruelty has excelled his own, for his personal cruellest of crimes is the very worst of all: he has withheld himself from living. You are almost old yourself, Norfolk. Do you agree?

Norfolk Almost.

Henry A good answer, Norfolk. You'll answer for that in heaven. *(enter Catherine with a cup)* Ah, here comes my toddy.

Catherine Drink it whilst it's hot. *(gives the cup to Henry, and then exit)*

Henry A pleasant perfume finds my nostrils. Do you envy me, Norfolk?

Norfolk I do, Sir.

Henry Then you shall drink with me. Catherine!

Catherine *(entering)* Yes?

Henry Make a cup for Norfolk also. He is almost as old and spent as I am. Won't you, Catherine?

Catherine I will if you please. *(exit)*

Henry There, Norfolk. You will be rewarded for your envy. Few men are. *(tastes his toddy, coughs)*

Norfolk Is it hot?

Henry It's a little too hot, yes. I shall have to warm my fingers with the cup before I warm my heart with its contents. Here she comes, Norfolk.
(enter Catherine with a toddy for Norfolk)

Catherine There you are, my duke of Norfolk.

Norfolk I thank you, lady Catherine, sincerely for your benevolence.
(exit Catherine)

Henry Do not flirt with her, Norfolk!

Norfolk But I do not, your majesty.

Henry You had a gleam in your eye when you looked upon her. Such a gleam is dangerous.

Norfolk You must be joking, your majesty.

Henry I never joke except on serious matters.

Norfolk But I assure you...

Henry And I believe you. Come now, drink your toddy.

Norfolk Cheers, your majesty.

Henry And good health to you, Norfolk. *(they drink)*
(enter Catherine suddenly)

Catherine Does it taste good?
(both gentlemen get the stuff in their throats.)

Henry and Norfolk Cough! Cough!

Catherine Oh, I am sorry. I shouldn't have interrupted you. Please forgive my disturbance. *(exit)*

Henry *(recovering gradually)* Is she gone?

Norfolk *(recovering)* I think so. Yes, she is.

Henry She quite startled me.

Norfolk And so she did with me.

Henry It's not easy to be a husband these days.

Norfolk It never was.

Henry You see what I mean. After five marriage failures, I finally succeeded in marrying the worst of them. And still she is the best.

Norfolk At least you haven't been too unlucky. Whatever objections your wives might have had against your sports, one of them is still alive, and she loves you after all.

Henry But let's drink up now and then be off for our afternoon sleep.

Norfolk Don't tell me you are tired.

Henry I am always tired. Who wouldn't be after having consumed five wives and can't get through the sixth?

Norfolk Just don't complain while you still have her. I'll join you in your beauty sleep.

Henry Good, my friend. Let's dream together of the love we still have somewhere to look forward to.

Norfolk A good idea, your majesty. *(they drink)*

Scene 2. The Court.
(the court is assembled)

Sir Arthur Where is the King today? The court is not the same without him.

Lord Hastings No one is the same without him.

Norfolk He will come, I assure you all. He has to get dressed, that's all. The greater his flesh, the more time it takes dressing.

Sir Arthur Is he happy in the company of his wife?

Hastings No, but they say she is happy in the company of him.

Sir Arthur That is something unique.

Hastings Yes, isn't it? I bet she is his first happy queen.

Sir Arthur As long as he doesn't suffer for it, all is well.

Hastings But concerning his matrimonial joy we know nothing.

Sir Arthur That is true. May we learn some news therefrom soon!

Hastings Yes, I am eager at it too.

Chichester Hallo, my lords! How do you like the new queen?

Hastings We all like her, for she seems to last.

Chichester Is it true that she has mastered the King?

Sir Arthur It might well be true, for the King hasn't been angry since he married.

Chichester Where is he, by the way?

Sir Arthur We all wonder.

Suffolk *(aside)* There is one thing I dislike about this court. It's so unnatural, unhuman and civilized. It's so artificial and absurd an institution. But the lords and ladies in it enjoy it well, and that's the point. But yet, they all seem to be like puppets, like insipid actors on a stage following no definite parts. They are spiritless all and care only about the course of the stream, as if mainstream was the only choice, ignoring the fact that only dead fish float mainstream. None of them is a personal individual. In the old days, when Sir Thomas More and Cardinal Wolsey dominated all, there was none at court who was not an individual. *(enter Bartholomew)* Yes, Bartholomew?

Bartholomew The King is sick.

Suffolk Sick again? Of what, this time?

Bartholomew No one knows, your grace.

Suffolk Then it could be serious. Does it seem to be serious?

Bartholomew Quite serious, your honour.

Suffolk *(aside)* The King ill? I never expected that could happen. It sounds like an impossible absurdity. The most unserious monarch in the world fallen seriously ill – it sounds like a paradox.

Hark ye all! The King is indisposed today and will probably not appear at court. So forgive me if I retire. (*retires*)

Hastings The King ill?

Chichester It sounds like an absurdity.

Sir Arthur He has had too much to drink, no doubt.

Horace My lords, if you forgive me, the King is not ill from gluttony or misbehaviour. This time he is ill.

Chichester You amaze us, courtier. What do you mean?

Hastings No use asking him. He is gone.

Chichester He is like a sneaking weasel, that fellow: he pops out from nowhere, frightens us with his sharp and cunning eye, to disappear without a trace before you have had time to mark his words.

Hastings Look! Here comes the Duke of Suffolk entering once more! (*enter Suffolk*)

Suffolk My lords! Attention, please! The fact is now established, that the King is seriously ill. He asks you all to pray for him tonight. (*exit*)

Horace (*aside*) The old wine-barrel of the king is finally exhausted. (*exit*)

(*The court gradually dissolves under wild gossip and much excitement.*)

Scene 3. Enter Elizabeth.

Elizabeth My father. They say he is dying. Why, then, may I not see him? Why is everyone so odd nowadays? (*exit*)

(*enter Mary*)

Mary The old fat goat is finally lying on his death-bed. Will I be Queen some day? That is a probability, for little brother Edward is as weak and as sick as his dying father. (*exit*)

(*enter Elizabeth and Catherine from opposite directions*)

Elizabeth Lady Catherine! (*she rushes to her and is embraced*) My father! How is my father?

Catherine Calm yourself, Elizabeth. He will see you anon. Come! (*exeunt*)

Suffolk (*entering*) The King's last minutes are hastening away. Will princess Mary take over one day? I fear her more than I ever feared king Henry, for she is a catholic! May prince Edward's constant illness leave him in peace, and may God preserve his life for at least an ordinary man's age! (*exit*)

(*enter Suffolk on one side, Catherine and Elizabeth on the other*)

Suffolk My lady, are you not with the King?

Catherine I went to fetch princess Elizabeth. Henry wanted her being to please him once more.

Suffolk Come then, but hurry on! (*exeunt to the right*)

Scene 4. The King's bed-chamber.

Henry My soul is troubled. All my life I have lived for betterment, for my own betterment and for the betterment of the environment. I have tried to nourish my spirit by seeing the world improving, but now my spirit is dead. Never in history has England stood on a higher level, and neither has the rest of the world for that matter. But what am I? Why does this sight not gladden me, which I have lived for and hoped for all my life? I leave a splendid nation for my son to take over; why am I not pleased by this? Why can't you reach pleasure when you can seek it?

My spirit is dead. There is nothing left in me but memories. There is nothing left in life for me to do but to bid farewell. What would I do if I suddenly were young

again? Would I ride again to war? Would I marry again? No. I do not think I would. For the spirit, being once dead, is always dead, whether its embodiment is dead or alive, young or old, fresh or rotten. My spirit is used, my life is consumed; death, I wait for thee with stalwart indifference, for your approach I now know is as natural as my entire life has been.

Archbishop!

Cranmer Yes, your grace.

Henry Hasn't Catherine returned yet?

Cranmer No, Sire.

Henry And where is Mary and Elizabeth? Have they already forgotten their wicked father, the killer of their mothers?

Cranmer I am positive they will not, your majesty. *(retires to his chair)*

Henry Oh, a horribly defective father I have been! That is the only thing I will regret unto my death. If they were here, Mary and Elizabeth, I would apologize. I apologize... *(faints)*

Cranmer *(to the King's physician)* How is he?

Physician He is weak and beyond all hope for recovery but will not die yet.

Cranmer Give me notice when he awakes. *(enter Catherine and Elizabeth)*

Catherine *(to Cranmer)* He is still alive, I hope?

Cranmer He is, my lady. He just asked for you.

Elizabeth Father!

Cranmer Hush, my child. You can not play with your father now.

(Elizabeth buries her head in the bed. Catherine seats herself beside her husband.)

Where is prince Edward?

Catherine He is on his way.

(enter Edward with nurse. Behind him his uncle the Duke of Somerset.)

Henry *(awaking)* Catherine!

Catherine Take it easy, my dearest. They are all here.

Henry I see not Mary. Where is Mary?

Catherine Mary will be coming soon.

Henry I want to... apologize... to her... *(dies)*

Catherine Henry!

Physician The King is dead. *(Catherine cries bitterly.)*

Somerset *(to Edward)* You are the King now, boy.

Edward But... my father...

Somerset He is dead.

Cranmer Yes, the King is dead. May God deign to receive his not altogether pure but neither altogether graceless soul.

All Amen.

Catherine Nurse, take Elizabeth out.

Nurse Yes, my lady.

(All go out save Catherine, who remains by the side of her husband.)

Scene 5.

Somerset The King is dead. Long live the King! *(all hail Edward)*

Edward Nay, hail me not. I am but a weak creature. My health forbids me good guidance of you, the almighty God will probably not permit me to remain long in my office, but despite all complications brought on my state I shall do my best, and, with the support of my uncle and Protector here, my mother's loved brother, I will at least try to be good as a prince. *(all cheer and hail)*

Somerset The archbishop of Canterbury has a message to bring.

Cranmer My lords, my people, my ladies and honourable gentlemen, we have all lost a great and majestic king, perhaps not universally loved, but indeed universally acknowledged. His loss is irreparable, but his work lingers and will be carried on. I beg you all to remember this year, this occasion, this king's decisive death, for he was not an ordinary king. He was a king of William the Conqueror's kind, more related to the valiant Richard Cordelion than to his own father, who prepared his course. Remember him, gentlemen, recall to your minds now and then the moments he spoke unto you and graced you, the moments he honoured you and his country, the moments he made those impressions which aren't easy to forget and which I believe never will be forgotten. Keep him alive in your minds, do it for the sake of future generations, for I sincerely believe that no one possibly could throw him less than a joy to remember. Let your children laugh at his banquets, tame those ladies that must by the stories of his marriages, and conquer the seas by continuing his finest work: his act of building ships. Ladies and gentlemen, we have all lost a monarch whose like we shall never see again. That, in brief, was the essence of my message.

Young king Edward, who are not crowned yet but who soon shall be, thee I command with the authority of your father's church to learn simply what your father ultimately learned: to be a good king. You learn it best by studying your father.

Finally, my Lord Protector, I turn unto you. An era has passed, and a new one is approaching. What it will be like depends on you and me, and the King, when he is ready for his task. I hope no strife will break up England, like it tragically has done so many times before; that we shall understand each other without embarrassment or any misunderstanding, and, above all, without any withheld arguments. For the first step towards enmity is taken when you withhold important information; automatically its voidness waxes until it becomes a cancer and kills the state. The avoidance of that, my dear Protector, is one of our many common duties, and personally I see no reason why we shouldn't accomplish them. I hope you are of the same mind.

That, my lords, ladies, gentlemen and secretaries of state, was all I had in mind. I hope you could follow me. (*retires*)

Somerset We are touched by your speech, your grace, especially by the beginning. I do entirely agree with you on all your points of discourse and think that nothing shall be able to split our friendly cooperation. Together with our sovereign here I take it for granted that we shall safely, like a Roman triumvirate, carry our nation across whatever seas of troubles and storms of fights that might expect us, and it's my sincerest belief that what's awaiting us is even better than the past. Hark, oh gentlemen! Sing ye the King's praise, and the praise of our country. Sing ye...

All Hurray! Hurray! Hurray! God save the King, safeguard him and maintain him, for many fruitful years to come! God save the King! Hurray! (*All cheer.*)

Suffolk Nothing remains now but music to lead all this wonderful spectacle into a merry dance.

A lord Musicians! Take your positions! Ladies and gentlemen, prepare yourselves for a ball! (*Music. People gradually find partners and dance.*)

Good, my lords! Let's celebrate the day, the sunshine, the new age, spring, nature, everything, and our princely king. Long live king Edward the Sixth!

All Long live king Edward the Sixth!

(*Edward leaves the stage, coughing, with Somerset and others, while the dancing whirls on.*)

End of Part Two.