

Henry VIII and His Six Wives

BY JANET HARDY-GOULD

Learn English Through Story

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By JANET HARDY-GOULD

Level 2

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Story Introduction

King Henry the Eighth of England was famous for many things, but he was also famous because he had six wives. He was not a kind husband. People say that when he was looking for a new wife, careful fathers took their daughters away from the palace. They did not want the King to choose their daughter to be the next Queen, because some of his Queens had very short and unhappy lives.

Why did King Henry divorce two wives, and kill two others? What were his queens really like?

Catherine Parr, the sixth wife, lived on after the King's death. One day she goes back to the palace of Whitehall and finds a box of old letters written to the King — one from each of the first five wives. She sits down to read them to her young maid, Margaret. The first letter is from the daughter of the King of Spain, Katherine of Aragon, who was Henry's wife for twenty-four years. She died alone and sad and friendless . . .

Chapter One

King Henry is dead

My name is Catherine Parr. A month ago I was the Queen of England, the wife of King Henry the Eighth. Henry died and we buried him last week in St George's Church, Windsor. Two days ago, on 16th February 1547, I went back to the palace of Whitehall, which was once my home. I wanted to take my letters and books and bring them back to my house.

Margaret, my new maid, came to the palace with me. She's very young and doesn't know a lot about the world. She has only just come up to London from her home in Somerset. Perhaps I was like her when I was twelve. I, too, was always asking questions and wanting answers immediately.



Two days ago I went back to the palace of Whitehall.

When we arrived at the palace, it was cold and dark. We walked into Henry's room. I sat down in one of Henry's large chairs in front of his wooden writing desk and looked at the pictures around the room. Next to me there was a big picture of Henry, when he was young. He was very handsome then, not like the fat old man he was later. I thought his blue eyes were watching me. I turned to Margaret and said:

'You see that picture of the King? That's what he was like when he was young - tall and strong and handsome. People say that he never got tired. He could go out riding all day, changing his horses nine or ten times, and then he could dance all night. He was clever, too; he could speak five languages. Will people remember him like that, or will they only remember him because he had six wives?'

'Did he really have so many wives?' said Margaret.

'Yes, of course. I thought that everyone knew that.'

Margaret looked away and said, 'We didn't get much news from London at home, and my family's house is a long way from the nearest village.'

'It doesn't matter,' I said, smiling. 'One day, I'll tell you the story of my husband Henry's life.'

On the desk in front of me there was a wooden box with a large gold H on the top. I opened it slowly and took out some old letters. Each letter was in different writing and some of them were old and yellow. One letter had a picture of a large bird on it. It was from Henry's second wife, Anne Boleyn.



*'That's what the King was like when he was young
— tall and strong and handsome.'*

'Margaret!' I said. 'I've found some letters from Henry's other wives. There's also a beautiful gold necklace and a small piece of hair.' I looked at another letter. 'Here's one old letter from his first wife, Katherine of Aragon. She was married to him for a very long time.'

'She only had one child, didn't she?' said Margaret.

'Yes, only Princess Mary is still alive. There were five other children, but they were all born too early and died.'

Again I looked at the letter with the picture of the bird on it. 'Have you heard of Anne Boleyn, Margaret?'

'Yes, my mother talked about her. She said she was a very bad woman.'

'Well, that's what some people say. Anne was the mother of Henry's second daughter, Princess Elizabeth. Look,' I said. 'This one is from Katherine Howard, Henry's fifth wife. Both Anne and Katherine were beheaded in that terrible prison, the Tower of London.'

'Why did the King send them to their deaths?' asked Margaret. She looked afraid.

'They had many enemies, who told the King that they had lovers. Perhaps the stories were true, I don't know. But the King believed them.'

I looked at another letter. 'This one is from Jane Seymour. She was the third wife and the mother of Henry's only living son. He is now our King, Edward the Sixth.'

'Was Jane Seymour beheaded too?' asked Margaret.

'No, poor Queen Jane died soon after Edward was born.'

I looked at the last, short letter. 'Look, a letter from Anne of Cleves, Henry's fourth wife.'

'Did she have any children?' asked Margaret.

'No,' I laughed. 'Henry thought that Anne was very ugly and he didn't want her to be the mother of his children.'

Margaret was silent. Then she said, 'King Henry sounds like a terrible husband.'

'He wasn't all bad, Margaret. There were good times, too. He was clever at so many things - horse-riding and tennis, writing and playing music. He wrote many beautiful songs, and he had a wonderful singing voice. But it's true that he wasn't very kind to his wives.'

Margaret looked at the box. 'So why did he keep these letters from them?' she asked.

'Oh, you ask so many questions, Margaret! I don't know. Perhaps each letter says something important.'

I looked up and saw that it was nearly dark. It was time to go home to Chelsea Manor. I put the letters back inside the box.

'Come, Margaret, we must go now.'

'But can't we read the letters?' she asked.

'We'll take them with us and read them tomorrow.'

Chapter Two

Katherine of Aragon

We got up early the next morning and went to my favourite room. It has a wonderful view of the large gardens and the River Thames at the bottom.

'Did you sleep well, Margaret?' I asked.

'No. I dreamed that King Henry came back to life and sent me to the Tower of London.'

'Why did he do that?'

'Because in my dream I read the letters and he was angry with me. Perhaps it will be bad luck if we read them,' said Margaret, worried.

'Don't worry,' I said. 'It was only a dream. He can't do anything now. He's dead.'

I went over to the wooden box and opened it. 'We'll read the letter from Katherine of Aragon first,' I said.

'She was Spanish, wasn't she?' said Margaret.

'Yes, she first came over to England to marry Henry's brother Arthur, but he died. She then married Henry and was his wife and queen for twenty-four years.'

'What a long time! What happened to her? Did she go to the Tower of London too?'



*'Katherine of Aragon was Henry's wife and queen
for twenty-four years.'*

'No, Henry divorced Katherine because he wanted a son, and she only gave him a daughter, Princess Mary. Years before, Katherine did have a son - Henry, Prince of Wales, but he died when he was only seven weeks old. The King wanted a son very much. He was in love with Anne Boleyn, but he also wanted a new wife - a younger woman to give him sons.'

'Poor Katherine! Divorced after twenty-four years for a younger woman!' Margaret looked at the letter in my hand. 'Can we read the letter now, my lady?'

'Yes, let's sit down by the window and read it together.' 'But I can't read,' said Margaret, looking at the floor. 'That's all right, I'll read it for you.'

We sat down and I began to read it slowly ...

Windsor

28th July 1531

Dear Henry

When you left Windsor last week, you didn't say goodbye. I feel lonely and unhappy without you. When will I see you again? Please come back soon.

You know that I am your true wife. We have been married for more than twenty years in the eyes of God.

I have given you a daughter. Princess Mary. God took from us our other children. I wanted so much to give you a son, but God's plan for us was different, and we cannot change that.

I pray for you every day and ask for you to come back to me. I have never been untrue to you, Henry, and have always been a good wife, and a good mother to our daughter.

I am still your Queen. There is only one Queen of England, and that is me. I know that you are with Anne Boleyn, but you will never be happy with her. I am the daughter of a King, and she is not. You must not divorce me. The Pope and the Catholic Church will never agree to this. I am sending you a necklace with a gold cross. Henry, when you look at it, remember me and remember the Catholic Church.

Your Queen Katherine of Aragon

'So what happened to Katherine?' asked Margaret. 'Did she ever see the King again?'

'No, never. He divorced her. She lived a lonely life with only a few friends, and died a broken and unhappy woman about ten years ago.'

'What about the Catholic Church? Did the Pope agree to the divorce?'

'No, he didn't. So Henry broke with the Pope and the Catholic Church, and that's how the Church of England began. The King became Head of the Church, and the Pope and the Catholics were very angry. It made a lot of trouble both in England and Europe.'

'And all because of Anne Boleyn?' said Margaret.

'Not only that. You see, it was very important for the King to have a son, to be King after him. There has only ever been one Queen in England, and that was a terrible time, with a lot of fighting and killing. Henry didn't want that to happen again after his death. So he knew that he must have a son, not just daughters. And that's really why he divorced Katherine and married again.'

'And was he sad when Katherine died?'

'Sad? Oh no! He dressed in yellow and danced all night with his new Queen.'

Margaret looked inside the box and found the gold necklace. She held it to her neck. 'Poor Katherine,' she said softly. 'King Henry was a terrible husband to her.'



*'The King dressed in yellow and danced all night
with his new Queen.'*

Chapter Three

Anne Boleyn

Margaret carefully put the necklace back into the box, then looked at me.

'So then the King married Anne Boleyn,' she said. 'Was Anne very special? Was she really very beautiful?'

'Some people say that she was, and others say that she wasn't. But she had beautiful long black hair, and the most wonderful black eyes. When men looked into her eyes, they fell in love with her.'

'Tell me more about her,' said Margaret.

'Well, Henry was in love with her for about seven years before they married.'

'Seven years!'

'Yes, it took a long time to divorce Katherine, and Anne wanted to marry the King and be his Queen. She didn't want to be just his mistress, like the other girls.'

'Did the King have a lot of mistresses?' asked Margaret. Her eyes were round with interest.

'Oh yes,' I said, smiling. 'Kings can do what they like, you know. But people say that Anne was very clever. She said no to the King, again and again, and so he had to marry her to get what he wanted.'

'And how long were they married?'

'Less than three and a half years.'



'People say that Anne Boleyn was very clever.'

'Is that all?' said Margaret. 'King Henry broke with the Pope to marry Anne, and they were only married for three and a half years!'

'Yes, Henry soon became tired of her. He wanted a son, but she only gave him a daughter, Princess Elizabeth. She nearly had another baby, but she had a miscarriage after only a few months. They could see that it was a boy. Henry was very, very angry, and three months later Anne was in the Tower of London. Henry was already interested in Jane Seymour, you see.'

'So poor Anne went to the Tower because she didn't give the King a son?'

'Well, there were other things. Anne was a strong and sometimes difficult woman. She talked a lot. She liked to tell Henry what to do. In the end Henry became bored of this. Remember, he was the King of England.'

'Did she really have lovers?'

'Well, some people say—'

Just then there was a noise outside. I looked out of the window and saw a man on a horse. He had grey hair and was wearing fine clothes. It was my Uncle William. A minute later he came into the room.

'Hello,' I said, kissing him. 'I'm so pleased to see you.'

'Dear Catherine,' he said. 'It's wonderful to see you, too. And who is this?' he said, turning to Margaret.

'I'm Margaret, my lady's new maid.'

'I'm very pleased to meet you,' he said, smiling. 'So,' he went on, 'what's the news?'

'Oh, we were just talking about Anne Boleyn,' I said.

'That black-eyed witch!' said Uncle William.

'Was she really a witch?' asked Margaret.

'Well, she was a strange woman,' said Uncle William. 'She had six fingers on one hand. I saw them myself.'

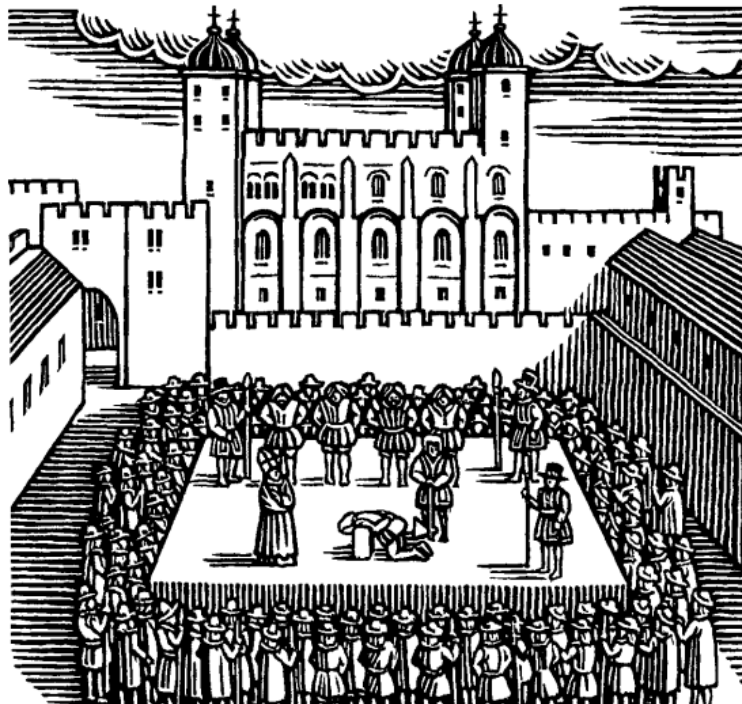
Witches always have six fingers. Anne Boleyn was a wild and dangerous woman - but men liked her.'

'So she did have lovers, then?' said Margaret.

'Of course she did!' said Uncle William. 'There were five of them - all wild young men. They were all beheaded before the witch, and a good thing too!'

'Oh, Uncle,' I said, 'how can we be sure that they were all her lovers? One of them was her brother!'

'Well, perhaps he wasn't her lover,' said Uncle William.



'They were all beheaded before the witch — and a good thing too!'

'But I remember all those wild parties in the Queen's rooms. There was dancing and laughing all night sometimes. She was a bad woman, I'm sure of it.'

'I think that Henry believed the stories about Anne because he wanted another wife,' I said. 'A wife to give him a son.'

Little Margaret was listening to us with great interest. 'So nobody was sorry when Anne died?' she said.

'No, many people were pleased,' said Uncle William. 'She had a lot of enemies.' Then he looked at both of us. 'But why are you talking about Anne Boleyn? That's very old news.'

'I found this old box of Henry's at Whitehall Palace,' I said. 'Inside there were letters from each of Henry's wives, and Margaret wanted to know all about them.'

'Where's the one from Anne Boleyn?' said Uncle William. He opened the box on the table. 'I want to read what she wrote to her dear husband. Ah, here it is. 18th May 1536 - that's the day before she was beheaded.'

He began to read the letter aloud ...

Tower of London

18th May 1536

Dear Henry

This is my last letter to you. Tomorrow I am going to die. When you open this letter and read it, I will be dead and buried.

During the last few weeks my life has been very hard.

I have been very afraid and very lonely. I have walked around my room, thinking of you. I wanted you to take me away from this terrible prison. But now I know that I am going to die, I feel calm.

They tell me that you have spoken angry words about me. You say I have had a hundred lovers, not just the five poor men who have died because of me.

But I did not have lovers, Henry. Not one, and you know it. I was a true wife to you, but you listened to my enemies, and that is why I am here.

I ask one last thing. Please be kind to our daughter Elizabeth. Do not be angry with her, because of me. She is so very young, not yet three years old. I am sending a gold necklace to give to her. It will help her to remember me.

I have only a little neck, so it will not be difficult for the French sword to cut through it tomorrow.

Tonight I will pray for God to forgive you.

Your wife Anne Boleyn

'And was Anne beheaded the next day?' asked Margaret.

'Yes,' I said. 'With a sword. That's how they do it in France.'

'How terrible!' said Margaret, holding her neck.

'Well, I know that Henry did the right thing,' said Uncle

William. 'Anne Boleyn was no good. She wasn't a real Queen. Not like Katherine of Aragon.' He stood up. 'I must go,' he said. 'This is all very interesting, but I came here to talk to your brother. I'll go and find him. Goodbye for now, ladies.' He smiled and left the room.

'Where's the necklace?' asked Margaret.

'I can't find it,' I said, looking in the box. 'Perhaps Henry gave it to Princess Elizabeth. Perhaps she looks at it sometimes and thinks of her mother.'



'Perhaps Henry gave the necklace to Princess Elizabeth.'

Chapter Four

Jane Seymour

People say that Princess Elizabeth is very clever,' said Margaret. 'Is that true, my lady?'

'Yes, it is. She's only thirteen years old, but she can read and write in four languages already.'

Margaret's face was sad. 'I only know one language,' she said. 'And I can't read or write it.'

'But you have a mother and father who are alive,' I said quickly. 'You don't have enemies who watch you all the time, or who want to send you far away to marry a stranger - perhaps an old man who drinks too much, and keeps a mistress!'

'Will that happen to Princess Elizabeth?' Margaret asked, her eyes round.

'Perhaps. Who knows? A princess doesn't always have an easy life, you know.' I laughed. 'But Elizabeth is clever. I think she'll get what she wants in life. Now, let's go outside, while the sun is shining. We'll take the next letter with us.'

We walked down through the garden to the river. There we sat on a seat and watched the boats.

'So Jane Seymour was the third wife,' said Margaret. 'When did the King marry her?'

'Just ten days after Anne's death.'



'Jane Seymour was quiet and careful.'

'That was very quick!'

'Yes, Henry always knew what he wanted. And he usually wanted things immediately.'

'And was Jane the same as Anne Boleyn?'

'No, Jane was very different. She was quiet and careful. Before she married the King, she was never alone with him. Her brother Edward was always with her when the King came to visit. And Henry was pleased to see that. He didn't want another wild and dangerous wife like Anne.'

'How do you know so much about the King and his other wives?' asked Margaret.

'I have lived for many years in palaces, Margaret,' I said, smiling. 'And palaces are full of people, coming and going, talking in corners, telling secrets. If you listen, it's not difficult to learn things.'

'So was Jane a nicer person than Anne?'



'Palaces are full of people, coming and going, talking in corners, telling secrets.'

'I think she was. She was very kind to Henry's daughters, Princess Mary and Princess Elizabeth. She was like a mother to both of them. Jane was clever too, and she quickly learnt to listen to Henry. She didn't try to tell him what to do. And with her brown hair and white face, she also looked very different to Anne Boleyn.'

'And what about the King at this time? Was he still handsome?'

'Oh no, he was beginning to get fat and his face was just like a big potato! Not like the picture in Whitehall Palace.' 'But was he happy?' asked Margaret.

'Yes, I think he really loved Jane. And of course, she also gave him a baby boy, who is now our King Edward.'

'A son at last for the King! But what happened to Jane? Did he get tired of her too, or was she the one who died?' 'Yes, she died soon after Edward was born.'

'How sad! She gave the King a son and then she died.' 'Let's read the letter now.' I opened it and a piece of brown hair fell out. I showed it to Margaret.

'What soft hair,' she said, touching it. 'Is it Jane's?' 'Yes, I think so.' I began to read ...

22nd October 1537

Dear Henry

The doctors and my women tell me that I shall feel better tomorrow, but I can see in their faces that it is not true.

I cannot sleep or eat, and a fire burns in my body day and night. I know that I shall soon be dead.

But I have given you a son, Henry, and I can die happy, knowing that Edward will be King after you. I will never see the day when he becomes King, but I pray that God will give him a long and happy life.

Please look after dear Edward and tell him all about me. Here is a piece of my hair - a small present from a dying mother to her baby son.

I am too ill to write more and must say goodbye. Your loving wife and queen Jane

I put the letter away, and looked at Margaret. 'She had a very difficult time when the baby was born, you see. It took three days and two nights before the baby arrived. Poor Jane was very tired and ill. She died twelve days later, very soon after this letter.'

'How terrible,' said Margaret. She touched the piece of Jane's hair again. 'And was the King sad?'

'Oh yes. He was very unhappy. He shut himself away in the palace for weeks. All England was sad, and every church in the country said prayers for poor Queen Jane. She was buried at Windsor, and Henry is now buried next to her.'

Just then Uncle William came up behind us.

'Ah, Uncle,' I said. 'Let's go in and have some lunch.'

Chapter five

Anne of Cleves

After lunch we sat and talked for a while. Uncle William was very interested in the letters.

'So which letter are you going to read next?' he asked. 'The one from Anne of Cleves,' I replied.

'Oh yes, Henry's ugly wife. When I first saw her, I thought she looked just like a horse! And the King thought that too!'

'A horse?' said Margaret. 'So how did she become the King's wife?'

'It's a long story. Do you want to hear it?'

'Yes, please,' said Margaret, smiling.

'Well, after poor Queen Jane died, Henry was very sad and lonely. He wanted a new wife, and he wanted a second son. Children can die at any time, and Edward wasn't strong. So everybody looked for a beautiful young woman to be the new Queen. Then someone told Henry about Anne of Cleves, a German Princess. They said that she was beautiful, young, and clever. And at that time the King wanted to please the Germans, because he was angry with the French. That all changed later, of course.

'Henry couldn't go and see Anne for himself, so he sent his artist Holbein to paint a picture of her. Holbein painted a fine picture of Anne and sent it back to Henry. Henry immediately fell in love with the beautiful woman in the picture and decided to marry her. So Anne sailed to England, and on her way to London she stopped for the night at a small town called Rochester. Henry couldn't wait for Anne to arrive in London so he travelled secretly to Rochester to meet her. She knew nothing about this.



'Holbein painted a fine picture of Anne of Cleves.'

'When Henry arrived at her house, he wasn't wearing his fine clothes and he didn't look like a king. He knocked on the door and went into her room. Oh dear! Poor Henry was very surprised. This wasn't the beautiful woman in the picture. She had a sad face and a long nose, and she wasn't very interested in this strange man. He didn't tell her his name, and she didn't understand that this was her new husband. What a terrible mistake!

'Poor Henry went away to put on his fine clothes, and came back looking like a real king. Anne now saw that this strange man was her new husband. Henry kissed Anne and said his name. Poor Anne smiled at him, but she couldn't speak any English so she stayed silent. After a few minutes Henry left. He was really unhappy. His new wife wasn't beautiful, and she couldn't say a word to him!'

'Oh dear,' said Margaret. She was enjoying this story very much. 'What happened next?'

'Well, Henry decided that he really didn't want to marry Anne. Where was the beautiful young woman in the picture? He wanted her! But he couldn't change things. He had to marry ugly Anne.'

'And did the King learn to love her?' asked Margaret.

'No, he didn't. He wanted to divorce her.'

'And did he?'

'Yes, after six months.'

'How did he do that?'

'Well, he learned that in her country Anne was engaged at one time to marry another man.'

'And so he divorced her?'

'Yes, poor Anne was only Queen for six months.'

'And they didn't have any children, did they?'

'No, Henry didn't sleep with Anne.'

'But what happened to her? Is she still alive?'

'Oh yes. But let's read her letter and see what she says.' 'Perhaps it's a love letter,' said Margaret.

'If it is, I'm sure that she never got a reply!' said Uncle William, laughing. He opened the letter and began to read.

Palace of Richmond

20th July 1540

Dear Henry

You are a very good brother to me! Thankyou forgiving me five hundred pounds a year and the Palace of Richmond. I spend hours walking round the gardens here - the trees and flowers are wonderful.

I have decided that I shall not go back to my country. I have thought about it carefully, and I know now that England is my real home. I feel so happy here. How can I leave all my dear English friends and my beautiful garden?

Come and visit me soon, dear brother.

Your loving sister Anne

'She sounds really happy,' said Margaret, surprised.

'I think she is,' said Uncle William. 'She didn't make trouble for the King about her divorce, so he was pleased with her. And then, of course, he was free to marry his next wife.'

'The fifth one,' said Margaret. 'And who was she?'

'Catherine will tell you all about her. I must leave you now, ladies.' He stood up, and came to kiss me goodbye.

'Goodbye, Uncle,' I said. 'Come again soon.'

'Oh, I will. I'd like to read the rest of those letters.' He looked at Margaret. 'Be good, young lady.' He smiled at us both and left the room.



'I spend hours walking round the gardens here.'

Chapter Six

Katherine Howard

I took the last letter out of the box and held it in my hand while I answered Margaret's questions. She wanted to know everything.

'And who was the King's fifth wife?' she asked. 'Katherine Howard.'

'Why did the King want to marry again?'

'He still wanted to have another son, you see. A brother for Prince Edward.'

'And how did he meet Katherine?' asked Margaret.

'She was one of the ladies at Queen Anne's palace, so Henry knew her already. She was only eighteen. Henry fell in love with her immediately. He called her "his beautiful flower" and sent her many expensive presents -gold and jewels and fine dresses.'

'But did she want to marry him?'

I smiled. 'If the King of England wants to marry you, how do you say no? Henry was very much in love and he wanted to marry her immediately. The Howard family is an old and famous one, and they were very happy for Katherine to marry the King.'

'Was he happy with his new Queen?'

'Yes,' I said. 'At first. She was young, beautiful, and exciting. Very different from Anne of Cleves.'



'Henry was very much in love with Katherine Howard.'

'And did she learn to love the King?'

'Who can say? But I don't think so. Henry was forty-nine, thirty years older than her. He was very, very fat and heavy. His face was more like a potato than ever, and his eyes were always half-closed. He had a very bad leg and often couldn't walk - and he was always angry when his leg hurt.'

Margaret looked at the letter in my hand. 'I don't think that I would like to marry a fat old man with a bad leg who couldn't walk!' she said.

I laughed. 'But the King's wife, remember, was also the Queen of England, the first lady in the country.'

'Yes, that's true,' said Margaret. 'And did they have a son?'

'No, they didn't. They weren't married for very long. Before Katherine married Henry, she had lovers. Henry didn't know this. He thought that he was Katherine's first lover. And about six months after Katherine married Henry, she began to see another man called Thomas Culpeper. He was tall and handsome. Katherine wrote love letters to him, and they met secretly at night.'

'What a dangerous thing to do!' said Margaret.

'Katherine wasn't very clever, I'm afraid.'

'And people saw her and began to talk about it, and somebody told the King . . .'

'One of his friends wrote it all down in a letter, and put the letter into Henry's hand when he was in church.'

'Oh dear,' said Margaret. 'So then ...' Already she knew what happened next.

'Yes,' I said. 'Henry was wildly angry. He talked, people say, about taking a sword and cutting off her head himself. But he sent Thomas Culpeper to prison, and soon after he sent Katherine to the Tower.'

'Like Anne Boleyn, years before,' said Margaret.



'Katherine met Thomas Culpeper secretly at night.'

'Let's see what her letter says,' I said, opening it. 'The writing is very untidy - I think she wrote this in a hurry.'

Tower of London

11th February 1541

Dear Henry

Please forgive me! I didn't want to make you unhappy and angry. Believe me!

It's true that when I was a young girl, I was friendly with different young men. I was so young and stupid. I also spent a lot of time with Thomas Culpeper when I was your wife. But believe me, Henry, I didn't know what I was doing. Remember, I am

only twenty years old now. You are so much older than me, and you understand much more about the world.

Please, Henry, please, please help me! Don't send me to my death! I am so afraid here in the Tower - I pray day and night that you will come and take me away. How can you kill your beautiful flower? They tell me that in two days' time they will cutoff my head ... Henry,

I don't want to die! Please let me live a little longer... please! Just a few weeks ... a few days ... Please, Henry, please ...

Your unhappy wife Katherine Howard

When I finished reading the letter, Margaret was silent. Perhaps she could hear Katherine Howard's cries and see her white face.

I put the letter away, and Margaret looked at me.

'There aren't any more letters, are there?' she said.

'No, 'I said. 'That was the last letter.'

Chapter Seven

Catherine Parr

We sat silently for a while. Outside it was beginning to get dark. Margaret looked at the floor, then at her hands, then at the floor again. I waited. I knew what she was thinking. Then suddenly she looked at me, and the questions came all at once.

'How could you do it, my lady? How could you marry that terrible man? Weren't you afraid? Why didn't you hide ... or ... or run away?'

I smiled at her. 'Listen to the full story, and then perhaps you'll understand. I was very different to Henry's other wives. I was thirty-one years old and Henry was my third husband. My first two husbands were old men too. They both died and I didn't have any children with them. But Henry didn't really want a wife, Margaret. He wanted a friend, and a nurse, and a mother for his three children.'

'Oh, I see,' said Margaret slowly. 'He wanted someone to look after him. So how did it all happen, then?'

'It began at a party at Hampton Court Palace. I remember it very well. While I was dancing with my friend Thomas Seymour, I turned round and saw Henry. His blue eyes were watching me. He was too ill to dance, but later that evening he asked to talk with me. I was a little afraid. I knew so many different stories about him. He was one of the most famous kings in Europe, and he was also famous for killing people who made him angry - Anne Boleyn, Katherine Howard, and many, many others. And of course, he was also very fat and ugly!



'How could you marry that terrible man?'

'After that evening he began to send me presents, and he asked me to visit him at Hampton Court Palace.

'At this time I was friendly with Thomas Seymour. He was a fine young man and I was in love with him. We talked about getting married. Then I got a letter from King Henry. He wanted to marry me. What could I do? I loved Thomas, but my family wanted me to be the Queen of England. And in the end, I had to marry Henry.'

'But were you happy?' asked Margaret.

'Well, sometimes I was. I loved being Queen. I had beautiful clothes and expensive jewels. But it was also very difficult at times. Henry was often ill with his bad leg, and when his leg hurt, he became angry and shouted at me. Once he nearly sent me to the Tower. I said something about the Church of England, and he didn't agree with me and got very, very angry. He didn't say anything then, but a few days later his soldiers came to take me away.'

'Oh no!' said Margaret. 'What did you do?'

'I cried and cried. I told him that I agreed with his every word, and that he was my teacher and I was only a stupid woman. And then I cried some more, and said I didn't understand anything about the church. I only talked to help him forget his bad leg.'

'And was that true?' asked Margaret.

'Of course not! But I had to say something, and after that we were friends again.'

'So you didn't love him.'

'No, I didn't, but I learned to like him some of the time. He was a clever and interesting man - and he was the King of England!'

'And what about his three children?'

I felt sorry for them. They had a difficult and lonely life. I tried to be a good mother to them all. I was friendly with Princess Mary, played games with Elizabeth and young Edward, and helped them with their studies in different languages. Of course, Henry and I didn't have any children together.'



Catherine Parr

Suddenly there was a knock at the door. 'Come in!' I called. A young man walked into the room. He was holding some beautiful red and gold flowers.

'These are for Catherine Parr,' he said.

'For me?' I said. 'Who are they from?'

'There's a note here.' He gave me a piece of paper, smiled, and left the room.

I read the note quickly.

Dear Catherine, you are my true love. You are my flower. I think of you every hour. I wait for you. Tom.

'What does it say?' asked Margaret.

'I can't tell you,' I laughed.

'But who are the flowers from?'

'Thomas Seymour.'

'Oh, the young man who wanted to marry you before. Does he still love you? Are you going to marry him?'

'I don't know, Margaret. Henry only died three weeks ago.' I was silent for a minute, and then I said, 'It's true, I still like Thomas. I often think about him. Some people say he's only interested in two things: women and money. But I don't believe them. He has enemies, you see, because he comes from a famous family. Jane Seymour was his sister, so Thomas is one of King Edward's uncles.'

'Will Edward be a good king, do you think?' asked Margaret.



'These are for Catherine Parr,' the young man said.

'Yes, I think so. He's a very clever child. He often writes me letters in different languages, and he's only nine years old. But I'm worried about him because he's often ill. England needs a strong king. Henry was a bad husband, but he was a strong king of England. If Edward dies, who knows what will happen?'

It was dark outside now. I looked at Margaret and said, 'So, now you have heard all about King Henry and his six wives, and one day you can tell the story to your children and your grandchildren.'

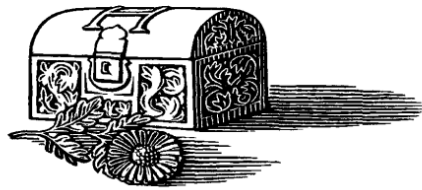
'I think that people will always remember King Henry because of his six wives,' said Margaret. She opened the box and took out the letters. She looked at them, putting them back one by one into the box.

'Divorced - beheaded - died - divorced - beheaded.' She closed the box and looked at me. 'And still alive!'

We both laughed.

'What are you going to do with the letters, my lady?'

'Nothing, Margaret. It will be our secret.'



Catherine Parr married Thomas Seymour in May 1547, a few months after Henry's death. They were married for fifteen months. Catherine had a baby girl called Mary, but six days after the baby was born, Catherine died. After her death, Thomas Seymour tried to become Princess Elizabeth's lover. He was beheaded because of this.

King Edward was often ill, and he died just before his sixteenth birthday. Then Mary, Katherine of Aragon's daughter, became Queen. She was Queen for five years. She married Philip of Spain, but did not have any children. Mary was a strong Catholic and she killed many people who were not Catholics.

Next, Elizabeth, Anne Boleyn's daughter, became Queen. She was Queen of England for forty-five years. This was the time of Shakespeare and Sir Walter Raleigh. Elizabeth was a very great Queen, but she never married, and had no children. Henry married six times because he wanted a son - and he wanted his son and his son's sons to be Kings of England after him. But when Queen Elizabeth died, King Henry's family came to an end, and a Scottish King became King of England.

— THE END —

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