

DONIZETTI

ANNA BOLENA

English Setting by Donald Pippin

The royal apartment in Windsor Castle is splendidly and brilliantly illuminated but there is no sign of festivity. Ominous gossip has already circulated: Anne Boleyn, Queen of England, wife of Henry VIII, recently mother of a child who has been named Elizabeth, is nearing the end of her brief reign.

She herself is aware that her marriage has gone painfully awry, but she has not guessed the full extent of the pending horror. She does not know that Henry has already picked her successor and is even now hunting for a means to get rid of her. Least of all does she suspect that her rival, the targeted successor, is none other than her closest friend, Jane Seymour, the one person in whom she has total trust.

For a king such as Henry, harsh, tyrannical, absolute, it is not difficult to find a pretext for doing what he wants to do. Furthermore, Anne, unlike most operatic heroines, is not entirely innocent. In Henry's eyes, her most serious crime has already been suggested -- her failure to produce the son and heir that he so passionately desires, coming up instead with a decidedly second rate substitute. Imagine! Queen Elizabeth! Could England survive the indignity?

But Anne is guilty in her own conscience as well, for a different reason. Before she became Queen, even while Henry was courting her, she was in love with Richard Percy and engaged to marry him. Pushed by her ambitious brother, and admittedly dazzled at the prospect of royal marriage and a throne, she cast aside that love, turning a blind eye as well to the unhappy fate of her discarded predecessors, Katherine of Aragon, Henry's first wife, from whose downfall she might have picked up a clue as to what could some day happen to herself. A fateful decision that she has had ample time to regret.

At the time of their marriage, it suited Henry's purposes to have Richard Percy, her jilted fiancé, banished on a trumped up charge of treason. But he now looks upon this first and only love of his wife in a quite different light -- not as a stain upon his honor, not a threat, but an opportunity to be exploited. What if he grants Percy full pardon, invites him back to England, and overwhelms him with a shower of kindness and generosity? By throwing Percy and Anne together, it will surely be a mere matter of time before catching the vulnerable couple in a compromising situation. But why be finicky? If need be, such a situation can be easily fabricated. The courts can be counted on to humor a king, and under the law of the land, Anne will automatically receive the death penalty for the crime of

adultery. The church, no doubt, will nod approval, and who would dare suggest that the king is acting unjustly?

While this brilliant scheme is building in Henry's fertile imagination, Anne, though bewildered by the fog of tension and foreboding that hangs heavy in the air, is nonetheless resolved to maintain her dignity as Queen and, despite all, to fulfill her role as a dutiful wife. Jane Seymour, her unsuspected rival, already torn with misgiving for her own role in this unfolding catastrophe, shudders at the prospect of facing the friend whom she is soon to betray and plunge into a pit even deeper than she dares imagine. The subdued courtiers speak in whispers.

One person alone is totally oblivious to anything amiss. Naive young Smeton, a page and court musician, is in love with Anne and aware of nothing else. Certainly he does not suspect that when he tries to cheer her up with a song about first love, innocent love, he is twisting a dagger in her heart.

ACT ONE

Scene: The royal apartment in Windsor Castle, in the late hours of the night.

TENORS: But where's the king?

BASSES: Who knows? You well may wonder.

TENORS: The queen? . . .

BASSES: Though sick at heart, she hides it well.

TENORS: An outward smile . . .

BASSES: Though tears within.

BOTH: Her star's already faded.
The king, a flighty weathervane,
Turns as the breezes blow,
Whichever way the spring breezes blow.

Wretched queen! Wretched queen!
Destined for further woe. *(They leave.)*

(Jane Seymour enters, in great anxiety.)

JANE: Weeping, they say she called for me,
Begged for a meeting in private.
Why? Could she have found me out?

In terror my heart is pounding.
To face the victim of my deceit --
But how can I look her in the eye?
Lord, make me deaf to cries of guilt,
Or allow my love to die.
Deaf to remorse, Lord, render me,
Or allow my love to die.
Allow my love, allow my love to die, dear Lord.

(Anne, followed by Smeton and maids in waiting, enters and surveys the scene.)

ANNE: All so subdued, sad and somber!
What a change from before!
You, I remember light and full of laughter.
Now you barely manage a meager smile on your lips . . .

JANE: Who would be so callous, to laugh and banter
When our dear beloved queen is so unhappy?

ANNE: Unhappy? I am indeed, and know not why --
Constant agitation,
Long days of grim foreboding . . .
Nights of sleepless sorrow . . .

SMETON: (I weep for her.)

JANE: (I tremble . . . each word an arrow that pierces.)

ANNE: Smeton! My lad!

SMETON: Your Highness!

ANNE: Sing me some verses, one of your own ballads --
They never tire me.
Make our hearts less weighted
While we await the King.

JANE: (Spared, for the moment!)

ANNE: Ladies, come, do be seated.

SMETON: (O love, inspire me!)

Force not a look of merriment.
Nor don the mask of pleasure.
Fair both in sun and shadow,

A tear does but refresh your beauty.

**Silver, with mist enshrouded,
Radiant the dawn though clouded.
Pale is the moon and ghostly white,
Yet lovely in her lonely flight.**

**Pensive and sad, you turn away,
Hiding the tears that hover,
Recalling the unworldly innocent
Who smiled upon a lover
Not so long ago.**

**Take off the crown of majesty;
Let go the pomp and splendor.
Kneeling before you, in total surrender,
Find again that first true love in me.**

First love of youth so . . .

ANNE: **No more! Oh, stop it! . . .**

JANE: **Your Highness!**

SMETON: **What's wrong?**

CHORUS: **(Painful the love best forgotten.)**

ANNE: **(Little he knows how close he came --
Love that I dare not remember!
Snuffed out, yet still burning is the ember
Of that first and only flame.**

**Headstrong, I knew no better
Than turn like a windblown feather.
Now weighted down with heavy heart,
I weep, and my days are but pageantry,
A crown of shallow fame,
A hollow surface of polished flattery,
A dull and pointless game
Where I'm compelled to play a part,
A game where I'm compelled to play a part.)**

(turning to the others) Ah, but the night is nearly gone;

See how the the lamp burns lower.

JANE: Dawn is at hand; 'twill soon be light.

ANNE: You lords and ladies, go now.
No need to wait; there's little hope
The king will come tonight.

(to Jane Seymour) You take my arm.

JANE: What troubles you?

ANNE: Could you but read my heart!
Though a friend so dear,
Ever warm, sincere,
Even you know not my sorrow.
For the weight I bear
No one else can share;
All alone I lie awake and sigh.

Should a regal throne entice you,
Or the lure of gold and glory,
Think upon my doleful story
And be wiser, be more hesitant than I.

Friend, be wiser , etc.

JANE & SMETON: (No, here I dare not probe or pry.)

CHORUS: (Sleep and rest might yet rekindle,
Might revive her languid eye.)

(All leave, except for Jane Seymour.)

JANE: Sharp are her words like daggers,
And they stab at my heart.
Am I discovered?
Did I reveal my secret?
Or do my eyes
Tell the world I am guilty?

But no! She kissed me,
And embraced me like a sister,
Not once supposing
That she fondled a serpent.

**If I could turn time backward,
Or run away from the abyss,
Undo my error, cancel the record!**

**Ah! My course has been settled:
Onward and onward
Till the day of judgment.**

The king . . . here at last . . . (*King Henry appears.*)

HENRY: Your hands are trembling.

JANE: (*disconcerted*) Yes . . . trembling.

HENRY: Is she within?

JANE: At rest now.

HENRY: Not I!

**JANE: And what of me, sir?
I can't continue!
This meeting must be final.
When it is over,
Farewell forever.**

**HENRY: How right you are! No more of this.
Hereafter we shall love in the open,
Hide it from no one.
My kingdom, my people --
They all shall know I adore you.**

**JANE: I couldn't . . . I couldn't . . .
To face day by day disdain and disapproval . . .**

**HENRY: I offer renown and glory!
I speak from past experience,
For surely Anne was toasted by all England.**

**JANE: Yes, after marriage . . . then only.
After a royal wedding.**

HENRY: This you call love? Feeble and frail!

JANE: Is yours so all-prevailing?

HENRY: A kingdom! What more do you ask for?

JANE: A love I dare acknowledge!

HENRY: Status? Well . . . So be it. I promise,
You shall have no peer nor rival;
My treasure is all yours!

Envied and respected,
Aglow with royal splendor,
Light from mine reflected,
Glory shall you know as known by none.
Far above, in higher circles,
You shall dazzle like the sun;
You shall dazzle, outshine the sun;

JANE: Till we marry, I fear you trifle.
Otherwise, disgrace and scandal.
Matrimony, I've firmly concluded,
Is a custom not yet outmoded.

Yet for us the altar's a dream we must stifle.
Claims undisputed,
Barriers come between us that we dare not despise,
A barricade none dare despise.
Were the king indeed devoted,
Reputation and my honor he would prize.

HENRY: Opportunist!

JANE: Your Highness! Not I!

HENRY: A schemer!

JANE: With scorn and ridicule,
You insult and malign me.

HENRY: Without a shred of feeling!

JANE: I, sir?

HENRY: You love the royal title;
The throne you find appealing.
Myself at best abhorrent.

JANE: I, sir? Never! No! No! Never!

HENRY: An echo recurrent, recurrent.
Anne did also pretend to adore me;
Of her passion she reassured me.
So enraptured, so madly smitten . . .
But she fancied even more the crown of Britain.

She enjoyed her triumph briefly,
For her reign did barely start
When another, yes, another girl naively
Offered, offered me a true and loving heart.

JANE: Not a gift, and not an offer;
Rather, say my heart was stolen.
And the king would have me suffer
Worse than wretched Anne Boleyn.
Sooner or later, in despair and broken hearted,
I shall weep with greater cause:
I in turn shall be discarded,
But without the nuptial clause.

HENRY: You would leave me?

JANE: I must, sir.

HENRY: I need you!

JANE: I must hurry.

HENRY: Then listen . . . I swear it:
At the altar we shall be married.
Claim it all: a throne, crown and scepter.

JANE: And what . . . of Anne?

HENRY: A harlot!

JANE: Your Highness!

HENRY: Her deceit deserves no mercy.

JANE: Ah! So guilty?

HENRY: No one more so.
Her heart she offered, though given to another.

Hypocrite before she married,
Afterwards a hypocrite, both hypocrite and whore!

JANE: A prior lover?

HENRY: The score I'll settle.

JANE: By what means?

HENRY: I'll say no more.

JANE: What means?
No! I dare not question further,
For my conscience is heavy weighted.

But I pray that you not hurt her,
That you stop short of brutal force.
I would not be elevated
To be haunted by remorse,
By dark remorse.

HENRY: Ah, rest assured and banish worry,
For my word you can rely on,
And I promise when we marry
Love will run a smoother course.

The scene changes to the castle park at daybreak. Percy, home from exile at the king's invitation, still much in love with Anne, waits to greet the king as he heads off for hunting, and to thank him for this unexpected kindness. Rochefort, Anne's once ambitious brother, now also sadder and wiser, warns him that the royal welcome he is receiving may not be what it appears to be.

Scene: the royal park surrounding Windsor palace. It is morning. Rochefort, Anne's brother, and Richard Percy, the love of her life, meet and embrace.)

ROCHEFORT: I'm dreaming! So you're back in England.
Dear, dear Percy!

PERCY: A royal summons from Henry,
And total pardon!
I've hurried here to greet him
As he is off for hunting,
Hoping to thank him.

After a lonesome exile
Once again to inhale our native air!
For others, exaltation!
For me, despair.

ROCHEFORT: Percy, my friend!
So weighted down with grief and loss
Is so unlike you.
How you have altered!

PERCY: More than on the surface;
The change you see is paltry.
For the pain lies rooted deep in my heart.
Friend, I must summon courage:
How is your sister?
Speak, do not not keep me guessing.

ROCHEFORT: Queen of the land!
But that is her only blessing.

PERCY: I've heard it said in whispers . . .
She, sad, neglected . . .
The king inconstant . . .

ROCHEFORT: I ask you:
Does sated love survive?

PERCY: I wonder . . . I wonder . . .
Yet shorn of hope, starved and ragged,
Love lives on forever.

ROCHEFORT: You must speak softly.

PERCY: What more have I to fear now?

Ever since the day we parted,
I have wandered, illusion shattered,
Blindly followed a course uncharted,
A living death across a lonesome sea.

Hope and light for me had faded;
Life and love and all that mattered
Lost or vanished, and crumbled to ashes,
All I wanted was to die.

ROCHEFORT: Coming back, are you not merely
 Pouring salt on open gashes?

PERCY: Absent minded, heavy hearted,
 Like a vagrant, I go unguided . . .
 Yet . . . Though embattled and bombarded,
 When the blows of cruel fortune land severely,
 Even then I still see clearly
 She has suffered more than I.

(The sound of hunting horns is heard.)

ROCHEFORT: Ha! The king is in the saddle.
 Speak low! Be careful what you say.

(The hunting party enters.)

CHORUS: The bold horn wakes the morn,
 And Harry is out for hunting.
 The horses snort to spur the sport,
 The hounds are off and running.

 The woods rejoice at the merry noise.
 Ola! The hunt's underway.
 The horses snort to spur the sport,
 The fox we'll bring to bay.

PERCY: Could Anne be among them?

ROCHEFORT: Ah!

PERCY: She approaches?

ROCHEFORT: Control yourself.
 Ah, Richard! Friend Percy!

PERCY: Anne! Anne!
 Radiant morn, o day of summer
 When my love awakened and flowered!
 Tongue-tied, weak and over-powered,
 Still I tremble, still I tremble, all afire.

 Oh, return one sparkling moment
 Of those hours we strolled on together.
 One alone allays my torment --
 Nothing more would I require.

ROCHEFORT: Friend, speak low. Consequences could be dire.
(The king enters; also Anne, accompanied by her ladies in waiting. Percy positions himself so the king must see him.)

HENRY: *(to Anne)* Up bright and early!
Your need of rest was but meager.

ANNE: In my desire to see you
My fatigue disappears;
I awake fresh and eager,
Though lately the days are many
Since I've had the pleasure
Of rising with my Lord.

HENRY: Heavy the cares of state,
Constant the pressure . . .
Yet toward you my mind was always turning.
Nor for a single moment did I relax
My wakeful, watchful eye.
Percy, you've come?

ANNE: (Wonder of wonders! It's Richard!)

HENRY: Let me look at you.

PERCY: (I tremble!)

HENRY: Prompt, in good season.

PERCY: A single day's procrastination
Or delay of an hour
To kneel and pour out my gratitude and obligation
For someone else would be remiss --
For me, no less than treason.
The hand that signed my exile
Gives me back my native country,
Home of my ancestors.
That hand I kiss . . .

HENRY: Another hand deserves it.
Swearing the charge unfounded,
Loud in your praises,
A friend declared you guiltless --
Someone close, long acquainted
Since childhood games . . .

She painted in glowing colors
Your true merit . . .
Need I name names?

PERCY: Anne!

ANNE: (O heart, be strong, do not betray me!)

PERCY: Queen of kindness! And you remembered.
Because you cared, this wrong is righted.
You . . .

ANNE: (*in confusion*) Not myself, but all the nation
Rose to your defense united.

HENRY: If I retracted the charge of treason,
She alone, *she* was my only reason.
All the nation, all the nation little mattered.
World opinion I defied!
Her persuasion turned the tide.

PERCY: (*kneeling before Anne*) Queen of kindness!

ANNE: (God help us!) Arise, sir! Arise, sir!

ROCHEFORT: (Blind to danger! I warned him.)

HENRY: (*to Hervey*) (Stay alert.)

HERVEY: (*to Henry*) My Lord . . .

QUINTET:

ANNE: (How he melted! His eyes are water,
Tears of agony that reveal a soul tormented,
His despair might be prevented,
Yet I dare not even try.
Fatal, fatal even to try.

HENRY: (*to Hervey*) Have them guarded -- that is an order.
My dilemma can soon be ended.
Leave them never unattended;
Stay alert, and play the spy.

HERVEY: *(to Henry)* Faithfully your court reporter,
Ever watchful,
My attentions will not be scanted.
Night and day around them planted,
Not a gesture escapes my eye.

PERCY: *(to Rochefort)* Hard for me, but for her still harder.
In my exile she lamented.
Overjoyed, the rift is mended,
Fire rekindled, and hope is high.
Fire rekindled, hope soars on high.

ROCHEFORT: *(to Percy)* Helter skelter, and for a woman!
All are watching with stare unstinted.
On your face your joy is printed;
Learn to bluff and learn to lie.
Your joy too transparent,
Learn to bluff and learn to lie.

CHORUS: What's to come? The king looks human;
On his face a smile is planted.
This I would not take for granted;
Underneath, he's shrewd and sly.

HENRY: *(to Percy)* Safely to our country landed,
Trials and tribulations ended,
Here at court you'll live well tended.
Here you will see
Past mistakes repaired and mended.

PERCY: Shy by nature, unobtrusive,
Wishing only to stay reclusive,
I'm unsuited . . .

HENRY: No, no! I've spoken.
Rochefort! You play the host.
To the hunt, the hour advances!
Anne, you attend him.

ANNE: (This is what I feared the most --
Beware! Beware!)

HENRY: Off for hunting!

ROCHEFORT: *(to Percy)* (On your face your joy is printed.
Learn to lie, or all is lost.)

Gentle locket, do my tears
Tell the story I must conceal
Of a soul consumed by sacred fire?

Stealing glances, my heart grew bolder,
Led by hope and goaded by desire.
Yet my secret I've never told her --
Love I dare not even now reveal.

Noise from outside . . .
A footstep . . . and whispers in the hall.
Too long I lingered!

(He hastily hides behind a screen, as Anne and her brother Rochefort enter.)

ANNE: Brother, brother! You go too far!
 Let it rest; do not force me.

ROCHEFORT: But why so cautious?
 To see an old friend for but a moment
 Is hardly courting disaster.
 A greater risk you're running
 By resolute refusal.
 His hurt and anger
 Could overturn good judgment.

ANNE: Poor man! So I alone
 Allured him back to England . . .
 Ah, well . . . go bring him.
 Stay posted at the door.
 Be sure that no one enters
 Except my loyal corps.

ROCHEFORT: Depend on me. *(He leaves.)*

SMETON: *(For me no exit!)*

ANNE: Ah, far too yielding, I weakened . . .
 I should be firm, refuse him flatly . . .
 All useless! My heart is deaf to reason.
 Ill-advised, well I know it,
 But I'm a coward . . .
 Here he comes . . . I tremble . . . I shiver . . .

PERCY: *(entering)* Anne!

ANNE:

**Oh, Richard!
Be brief, we've but a moment.
Whisper, be cautious . . .**

**Do you return to chide me?
Charge that I've played you falsely?
If justice you want,
Know that I have paid dearly for it.
Too ambitious, I wear the crown I craved,
Now a crown of thorns.**

PERCY:

**When I see you so unhappy
My anger softens.
My forehead, too, is furrowed;
Grief leaves its traces.
Love, all's forgiven!
When near you, the past is distant;
My inner storm grows quiet.
The ship comes home to harbor.**

ANNE:

**Wretched man! Why do you cling
To vain illusions?
You're aware that I'm a wife,
That I am queen?**

PERCY:

**Ah! Rub it in!
If only it were not so!
No, no! Be Anne, my own Anne,
Plain and simple,
Anne as I knew before.
Look at me:
Am I not Richard same as always?
The man who has always loved you?
Can the king say the same?**

ANNE: (*crushed*) He abhors me . . . what more can I say?

PERCY:

**He abhors you; my love's forever,
Now and always, in joy and sorrow,
Now and always, a love unswerving,
Now and always, love unswerving.**

**Run from the husband so gross and undeserving,
Whose devotion was merely a day.
Linger not until tomorrow;
Leave the tyrant, come away.**

Oh, come with me, Anne! . . .

ANNE: Vows I've taken that can't be broken.
Vows horrendous, and yet still holy,
Sacred and holy, though horrendous.
Though each day I rue my folly,
Though fear and horror surround my throne,
Words of love must die unspoken;
If you love me, leave me alone.
Leave me alone, I implore you!
Speak not of love.

PERCY: Dearest, I adore you! Dearest! . . .
Hard and cruel!

ANNE: Wild and reckless!
Leave me . . . go . . . for my sake, hurry.

PERCY: No! No, never . . .

ANNE: We have no future.
None can scale the wall that stands between us.

PERCY: Soar above it.

ANNE: Before the day dawns,
You must leave your land of birth.

PERCY: No! My choice is clear:
I'll sleep in your arms,
Or beneath the earth.

ANNE: Leave me.

PERCY: No.

ANNE: I beg you.

PERCY: Come with me!

ANNE: Ah, say no more! Too much tormented,
Terror-stricken, I kneel before you.
Yield to tears and prayer, I implore you.
Go this minute across land and sea.
Find a life serene, contented;
Love again, think not of me.

PERCY: At your feet, a man demented,
I would die without misgiving,
But I draw the line at leaving;
From my love I cannot flee.
Only here am I contented;
Here alone my life must be.

ANNE: These walls have ears . . .
Spies are paid to watch and listen.

PERCY: I shall go, but you must promise
Once again to see me. Promise!

ANNE: No! Never!

PERCY: No more? No more?
To that, my sword must speak the grim reply.

ANNE: Drop the weapon.

PERCY: No!

ANNE: No bloodshed!

SMETON: *(suddenly reappearing from behind the screen in the mistaken belief that Percy is about to attack Anne)*

You scoundrel!

ANNE: God have mercy!

PERCY: *(to Smeton)* Stay, or you die!

ANNE: Stop, I beg you! I beg you!
Myself, myself you tear down,
Crush and destroy.
Someone's coming . . . My head is swimming . . . *(She faints.)*

ROCHFORD: *(rushing in)* Ah, my sister!

SMETON: The queen has fainted.

ROCHFORD: Here comes the king.

HENRY: Ha, a locket! Her picture!

SMETON: Oh, God! Oh, God!

HENRY: I can hardly believe what I see.
Worse than treason! Rank betrayal!
Here's the proof you can't deny.

PERCY: Smeton . . . her lover! . . .

SMETON: I shake in terror . . .

PERCY: Painful! Painful!

SMETON: Anne, in danger? . . .

ANNE: (*coming to*) Ah, where am I?

HENRY: All the proof I need.

ANNE: Ah, where am I? My noble Lord . . .

ENSEMBLE:

ANNE: Within your eyes, dark and sullen,
I read a dreadful conclusion.
Though mine with tears are swollen,
Your unspoken charge I deny.
No, no, no, no! Condemn me not,
Condemn me not, my Lord.
Overcome by confusion,
Grant me a moment to reply.

HENRY: A vile abomination!
Armed with the proof I needed,
Your tears will go unheeded.
Futile to waste your breath;
You can expect no compassion,
Only, only a gruesome death.
Prepare to die, prepare to die!
To prison first, and then to death.

SMETON & ROCH. (Ruined, because I blundered!
Anne, vilified and slandered!
Unknowing, the queen has fallen,
Through me, through me, ensnared in the web.
Better that I were dead.)

JANE SEYMOUR: (Near this unhappy woman,
I look within and wonder:
Have I made a fatal blunder?
Oh, where has my passion led?
Callous, I grow inhuman,
My claim to virtue dead.)

PERCY: (So I've a happy rival!
While I bemoan and suffer,
She entertains a lover
Who tumbles from her bed.
The woman's a devil,
A false and deceitful devil --
What foolish tears I've shed!
Gone is my will for survival,
Now trust and faith are dead.)

(Throughout, both Anne and Henry repeat their previous words.)

HENRY: Drag them to separate prison cells,
Each incommunicado.

ANNE: Prison!

HENRY: Yes.

ANNE: Oh, hear me!

HENRY: Off with you!

ANNE: A single word . . .

HENRY: I've spoken.

ANNE: Your Highness!

HENRY: Off with you!
Drag them to separate prison cells.

OTHERS: (Her fate is sealed, she dies.)

ANNE: A word, sir! Oh, hear me, hear me!

HENRY: In Council. Not I, but justices
Will hear your evidence.
In court, there your verdict lies.

ANNE: Justices! For Anne!

JANE: I pray for her.

ANNE: For Anne! Justices! Ah!

Signed and sealed, my fate is certain,
Sentenced by my own accuser.
Under tyrants, law is loser;
Learn from one whose star now fell.
Death will lower soon the curtain,
But my tale is yet to tell.

QUARTET:

Signed and sealed, my fate is certain;
Golden hopes and dreams are over.
No persuasion, no maneuver
Can divert the blow that fell.
Would that death could ease my burden;
Heaven here has turned to hell.

HENRY: [Signed and sealed, your fate is certain;
This no power on earth can alter.
No recourse for those that falter;
Crown and throne are sacred still.
For your death I'll bear the burden;
Resolute, I'll have my will.]

CHORUS: For his shameful crimes committed
'Tis the innocent that fall,
The small and innocent that fall.
[Law mistreated, truth defeated,
Tyrants before have bullied Britain.
The king upon the throne now seated
We declare the worst of all.]
For his shameful crimes committed
'Tis the innocent that fall,
The small and innocent that fall

ACT TWO

Anne, accused of adultery and now awaiting trial, is confined in a closely guarded room, with only a few of her loyal attendants. Her former friends seem to have forsaken her, including the one whom she most longs to see -- Jane Seymour.

Scene: a chamber in the tower of London, where Anne, surrounded by her ladies, is held prisoner.

LADIES: Gone are they all, the friends of yore,
 The court that wooed and flattered.
 Set is her sun to rise no more;
 The faithless flock has scattered.

 And Jane Seymour, her dearest friend,
 Returns no more to call.
 Her truest, closest, dearest friend --
 Unkindest cut of all.
 She comes no more to call . . .

ANNE: Friends so devoted!
 Mid blows of bitter fortune, agony and terror,
 My sole consolation.
 Hope, so you tell me,
 Lies only in the will of heaven,
 The life hereafter.
 On earth, the night approaches.
 My ruin is total.

(Hervey enters.)

ANNE: Hervey, what message?

HERVEY: Your Highness, words that I grieve to utter!
 The Council orders, and I merely deliver.

ANNE: Be brief, but tell me.

HERVEY: Your ladies all are summoned
 To appear in session.

LADIES: Summoned!

ANNE: He stops at nothing;

The king will have his way.
He wants to hurt me --
A stab that wounds the heart.

HERVEY: The truth you wanted . . .

ANNE: We have no choice
But bow to the will of the king,
However cruel.
Dear friends, to me so tender,
Go serve as witness for me.
Guiltless report me.

LADIES: Long day of sorrow!

ANNE: (*embracing them*) Speak kindly. (*They leave with Hervey.*)

(*alone, kneeling*) Thou from whom my heart has no secrets,
To thee I turn for solace.
If shame so great I merit,
Be thou my judge.
Thou, thou be my judge, o father.

(*As she sits weeping, Jane Seymour enters quietly.*)

JANE: She weeps tears of anguish . . .
Oh, how? How meet her eye with mine?

ANNE: (*still unaware of her presence*) Ah, yes!
I stole the crown from Catherine of Aragon;
Repayment is overdue.
Like her, I am to suffer.
Lord, thy decree is just,
But the burden is heavy, heavy . . .

JANE: Oh, my beloved Queen!

ANNE: Seymour! You've not forgotten!
And you return at last . . . Rise!
So pallid . . . your hands are trembling.
Why so? Some new misfortune,
New woes you come to tell me.

JANE: Horrendous! The utmost!
Good news is out of season.
But hear, attend me . . .

Though weak the case against you,
You were lost from the start.
At any price, the king would break
Those cursed bonds of wedlock,
Bonds that tie you in marriage.
But he sends you an offer:
Though not your royal title,
Your life you can save --
He allows you to live.

ANNE: And how, pray? Tell me how.

JANE: I tremble to say it, yet say I must:
Yield to the charge, plead guilty.
He breaks the marriage
And you are spared the scaffold.

ANNE: This you advise?

JANE: Destruction, disaster and death pursue you.
That is your one salvation.
You have no choice.

ANNE: This the advice you offer!
You, Jane Seymour?

JANE: Ah! Save your life!

ANNE: To buy my life with coin so debased?
And even you . . .
You, whom I've called my friend.

JANE: To live in shame, or die in shame!
Your Highness!
Oh, yield! Give in to reason.
That is the king's advice.
The wretched woman, your sad successor,
Currently loved by Henry,
She, even she implores you.

ANNE: Who is that woman?
Do you know her? Oh, name her!
She dares advise me to be a traitor to myself?
Go tell her I am still the Queen.
Answer! Who is she?

JANE: Torn asunder by misgivings,
Of all most wretched.

ANNE: Get out! Leave me!

JANE: Ah, no! Forgive me! Please forgive me.

ANNE: Dare you ask it! Leave me! Leave me!

JANE: Grant me pardon.

ANNE: You, my successor! My rival!
You? You? Seymour, my rival!

JANE: Grant me pardon.

By remorse each day devoured,
I was callow, fascinated,
Drawn unwilling, overpowered,
I was taken, too unwary.
And I love him -- I blush to own it.
Ah! My daily torment, the cross I carry.
Though in sorrow, in shame, I suffer,
Ah, my passion is greater than I.
Though that flame I would try to smother,
No! The fire refuses to die.
Though in tears of shame I suffer,
Ah, my passion is greater than I.

ANNE: (*interjecting*) Leave me . . . Go . . . No further!
Seymour, my rival!

(*finally*) Stand up . . . Stand up . . .
One only I find guilty;
He alone who enkindled that fire.

Go less wretched, my pardon granted;
Anne is filled with hate no longer.
Blind with grief, I raved and ranted,
Helpless victim of my anger.

Now to heaven my spirit is moving;
There, a beggar, I'll plead for grace.
Unto God my spirit's moving;
Unto Him I'll plead for grace.

I would leave you as ever loving,
And of rancor, no tiny trace.

JANE: Pardon hurts; the wound is deeper
Than the scorn that I so dreaded.
Grief I sowed, and now am reaper;
Toward what downfall am I now headed?

You that have good cause to hate me
Make me want to hide my face.
Of the torments that await me,
First to come is your embrace,
Your warm embrace.

ANNE: So unhappy! So remorseful!
No, not guilty . . . No, not guilty . . .
Unto God my spirit's moving;
There I, too, shall plead for grace.

JANE: You that have just cause to hate me
Make me want to hide my face.

The court is now in session. As Anne and Percy, along with Smeton and Rochefort, Anne's brother, go on trial, the king stands outside the court chambers. It would never do for the public to suspect that he is in any way seeking to influence the outcome. Besides, the case is in safe hands.

Scene: Outside the chamber of peers.

BASSES: But which defendant came up first?
Court has been long in session.

TENORS: Smeton.

BASSES: And did he save his skin
And make a full confession?

TENORS: His testimony no one knows;
He's still inside the ring.

TUTTI: From one so young I fear the worst;
Youth, often prone to error.
But how to prevent him from giving in
Either to hope or terror?
Caution's the password we propose
When the accuser is the king.

(Hervey enters)

Ha! Hervey comes.

HERVEY: *(to guards)* Escort them in. Anne comes with Percy.

CHORUS: What news? What happened?

HERVEY: Smeton confessed.

CHORUS: Oh, thoughtless youth!
Of what did he accuse her?
Speak up! Speak up! Oh, tell us!
Of what did he accuse her?

HERVEY: Charges of lust that turn me pale.
Crime, vile and black as ink.
Long may she plead, but to no avail;
That is the news I bring.
Be off with you! Here's the king.

Come from the Council? You leave the chambers?

HENRY: Now that the trap is baited,
I can be elsewhere.
When he would catch the quarry,
The hunter stalks on tiptoe.

HERVEY: Gullible Smeton! Snared like a rabbit.

HENRY: The blind, misguided fool returns to his prison,
Convinced that by confessing,
He played the noble hero
And saved the life of Anne, his trollop.
Speak of the devil . . .

(Percy and Anne enter, guarded.)

HERVEY: She approaches; Percy, too, goes to trial.
They both are guarded.

HENRY: Difficult. *(He starts to leave.)*

ANNE: Oh, stay! Stay, Henry!
I implore you to hear me.

HENRY: The court will hear you.

ANNE: Before your feet I fall.
Cut my throat and sever my veins,
But do not expose me, o Highness,
To a mockery of justice.
My rank is royal;
I would have it respected.

HENRY: Were you so protective of your exalted rank?
Queen, wed to Henry, you lowered yourself to Percy.

PERCY: The lowly Percy!
Your disdain's rather odd.
You, too, went stooping down to his level
And stole away his beloved.

HENRY: You dare suggest? . . .

PERCY: I dare speak plainly. So hear me:
For soon I shall be standing
Before a court more sacred, more majestic,
More majestic than yours on earth.
I swear before it,
I swear Anne in no way offended . . .
Far from compliant, she rejected my pleading;
Instead, indignant, she burned with rage . . .

HENRY: So that a moment later
She could lie with her page.
Smeton confessed, and further,
My witnesses confirm it.

ANNE: Liars! Liars! Liars!
This vile, malignant slander does not deserve an answer.
Sir, the corrupter to Smeton was not I.
You, sir, deceived him,
You misled him, you ensnared him.

HENRY: These accusations convict you.

ANNE: I challenge, I defy
Your pretension to power.
You can dole out death, but not dishonor.
One crime I acknowledge:

I cast aside a noble heart, that of Percy;
In its stead, chose a throne.
Yes, I am guilty,
For I pursued the hollow glory
Of royal splendor.

PERCY: Oh, joy to hear it!
You made a mistake in judgment,
Not where it matters.
My faith in you remains strong as ever.
Uplifted by your own courage,
My future holds no terror.
But you shall live;
You shall not perish.

HENRY: Are you so sure?
Both, both must die!
Die for defiance of royalty.
Who saves you now from the scaffold?
Who saves you from the scaffold?
Who? Answer me.

PERCY: We call on justice . . .

ANNE: On justice!
Long silenced in the court of Henry.

HENRY: Justice indeed was muted,
Nor did you raise loud objection.
My former queen uprooted --
You took her place when she fell.
But justice will sleep no longer;
Yes, justice will reawaken.

PERCY: Then you should heed it.
Then you should heed it as well.
Revenge for a wedding bed betrayed
You claim as a right divine.
By that same token, I claim no less,
For under God, she is mine,
My promised bride.

HENRY: A promise!

ANNE: Ah! What to say?

HENRY: **You mock me? You scorn me?**

PERCY: **My claim preceded yours,
And I shall take what is mine.**

HENRY: *(to Anne)* **Were you betrothed before me?
Sworn to him before me?**

ANNE: **I? I?**

PERCY: **By all that's sacred! By all that's holy!**

HENRY: **To him?**

ANNE: **(Alas!)**

TRIO:

PERCY: **Since tender years of early youth,
We two were as one, united.
Though devastated, my love endured
When hope was crushed and blighted.**

**Still is the bond unbroken,
Though tested by torment and trial.
My loving arms, still open,
Wait to receive you again.
My arms are open -- be mine again.**

ANNE: **Proof of a greater constancy
Never was granted woman.
Oh, cursed be that day of vanity
That led to love's denial.**

**Then I betrayed a true man,
And justly I'm now punished.
My royal dream has vanished,
Turned into fear and pain.**

**For a throne I betrayed a true man;
All too justly am I punished.
My royal dream has vanished,
Now turned into horror, fear and pain.**

HENRY: **They play for pity,
A stratagem I am unlikely to swallow.**

**Traitorous couple! Depend on me:
Hope for you both I've banished.
Plainly guilty, expect repayment to follow,
With no compunction.**

**Your tales of woe are wasted;
My arm is strong, my hand is steady.
Prepare for the worst;
My final blow I've planned already.
You'll plead in vain.**

Have the guards lead them off to the Council.

ANNE: **No indulgence? No compassion?**

PERCY: **To the Council with courage!**

HENRY: **England shall have a queen respected,
Loved by all, an inspiring example.
Then Anne Boleyn shall be flouted, rejected,
Scorned and hated by woman and man.**

ANNE & PERCY: **Tell her not that your gift is a gamble;
Say not a word of the axe or the scaffold.
Warn her not of the road we traveled;
Shield her well from the story of Anne.**

(They are led off.)

HENRY: (alone) **Married to Percy!
Percy preceded Henry.
Married to Percy!
No . . . They mock me. No . . . They flout me.
A piece of fiction,
Plotted to save her from that horrendous law
That sends to perdition my unfaithful wife.
Suppose it true,
We crush her by a law no less horrendous,
Her daughter also.
Both of them tainted,
They shall die together.**

(Jane Seymour enters.)

JANE: **Your Highness.**

HENRY: Enter Seymour, now at last my queen.

JANE: No, no, sir! A tortured conscience,
Guilt drives me to your feet.

HENRY: Your conscience?

JANE: Incessant, relentless, atrocious!
I come from Anne.
I saw her, and her tears drew my own.
On her take pity, on me as well.
I would not have her die on my account;
I cannot!
This time forever, farewell, my king.

HENRY: More than your king, oh far more!
A man in love, your lover!
Vows we have shared,
And soon before the altar
Vows even yet more binding.

JANE: Vows ill-considered, doomed to disaster!
On the day of judgment, hell and damnation!
Let me absolve my guilt
In some sequestered cloister,
Fasting and praying, far from the living.
There I shall bow in silence,
And only heaven will hear my sighs.

HENRY: Delusion!
What daydream has spawned this unrealistic romanza?
You don't suppose, by leaving,
Anne will be saved?
I loathe her more than ever!
And most of all for causing you to suffer
To such a point your love for me's extinguished.

JANE: No! Not extinguished.
Ah! Love devours my heart . . .

By that eternal fire of love
Burning in me too brightly,
By that remorse, that agony,
Horror that haunts me nightly,
Hear, oh hear my prayer.

Let Anne not die, oh spare her!
Let tears prevail, and lift from me
That heavy weight I bear.
Oh, let my tears prevail!

HENRY: There, there . . . You women! Soft . . . Calm yourself.

(The Council door opens.)

News from the Council . . .

JANE: Oh, hear me! My tears bear witness . . .
My pain and agony . . .

HENRY: Nonsense, nonsense! Calm yourself.

(Hervey returns.)

HERVEY: The Peers are unanimous:
Marriage dissolution,
And for the wife found guilty,
Death by execution;
Also for those accomplices
Who assisted in the crime.

HENRY: Justice! Justice!
Of all virtues most sublime!

JANE: All are watching how you judge her;
Lo, the eyes of earth and heaven!
None are perfect, but all too human;
Be not first to cast the stone.
Sir, let only the pure angels touch her;
Mercy outweighs the might of the throne.

None are perfect, all are human;
Be not first to cast the stone.
Mercy best becomes the throne.

CHORUS: Only hands of angels touch her;
Be not the one to first cast the stone.

Percy and Rochefort, confined to a cell in the tower of London, both condemned to die, receive an unexpected offer of clemency from the king -- one that comes with a price.

Scene: a prison chamber in the Tower of London.

PERCY: You, too, condemned to die,
 Though in no way guilty!

ROCHEFORT: Brother of Anne . . .
 Is that not guilt enough?

PERCY: Oh, the gaping chasm!
 The abyss I've dragged you into!

ROCHEFORT: My fall was my own doing.
 Callous, driven onward by a blind ambition,
 I tempted Anne;
 I pushed her to the throne.

PERCY: Oh, my friend!
 Your wretched state makes mine all the more so.
 If I could only hope that you were safe,
 I'd go to death less bitter,
 Knowing you had made it out of his clutches.

ROCHEFORT: We must face death unflinching.
 Someone approaches . . .

(Hervey enters)

HERVEY: I bring a happy message
 Straight from the king.
 He, ever kind and clement,
 Has spared your lives.

PERCY: Clement! So indulgent! But Anne?

HERVEY: On her the hand is heavy;
 The Queen must die.

PERCY: On her! What does he think me!
 I who am guilty go unpunished,
 While she must die --
 She, entirely blameless.
 Go back and tell him . . .
 And tell him . . . that I refuse
 His despicable gift.

HERVEY: Refuse it! And you?

ROCHEFORT: Say I accept . . . the scaffold.

PERCY: Stay alive; for me, endure.
Leave this land so oppressed and haunted.
Seek a haven, a sanctuary
Where the guiltless can walk undaunted.
Breathe an air benign and pure,
Where you are free to pray for us
And our sad tale relate.

Lone survivor, suffer longer
To tell our story.
Ah, remember Anne's fall from glory,
And mourn her fate.
Stay alive to tell our story;
Live to remember, and mourn our fate.

ROCHEFORT: Ah, my friend! No less determined,
I am no less brave than you.

HERVEY: Make your mind up.

ROCHEFORT: You heard me. Death!

PERCY: Death!

HERVEY: Separate them.

ROCHEFORT: Farewell then forever.

PERCY: Live, friend. You must endure.

ROCHEFORT: No, no! I've chosen.

PERCY: My brother.

ROCHEFORT: Together!

PERCY: Together!

ROCHEFORT: Death!

PERCY: With courage.

ROCHEFORT: Death!

PERCY: **With a friend so true beside me,
From despair, I rise recovered.
Only sad because you suffered;
Your distress became my own.**

**Unafraid, we scorn the coward.
As the final hour advances,
We shall cast no backward glances,
Both desire and fear outgrown.**

**As we face the great unknown,
All desire and fear are gone.**

The nightmarish ordeal has been more than Anne can bear. With certain death now close at hand, her shattered mind wavers back and forth, from sweet fragments of the past disturbed by menacing shadows that leap out of the dark region of her delirium, to sudden all too clear glimpses of the gruesome reality of what is to come.

Scene: Anne's prison chamber. In disarray, lost in a world of her own, absorbed in far-away thoughts, she is surrounded by ladies who watch with sad but helpless concern.

CHORUS OF LADIES: **Who can behold her with eyes unwatered?
Her heart in agony, her mind disordered . . .
Signs of a sorrow too great to bear.**

**{One moment motionless,
All life suspended,
She then moves rapidly
Like one demented.**

**Now wan and colorless,
She stares half-sleeping;
Then shyly and timidly
A smile comes peeping.**

**Diverse and numberless,
Her moods are legion --
Thoughts rising shadowy
From some dark region
Of her delirium, of her despair.}**

Who can behold her with eyes unwatered?

Her heart in agony, her mind disordered . . .
Signs of a sorrow too great to bear.

ANNE:

My ladies weeping . . .
Why stare so sadly?
Be happy . . . I'm getting married.
The king . . . my bridegroom . . .
He's waiting . . . Flowers adorn the altar . . .
Hand me my veil; all in white I shall meet him.
And on my forehead place a garland of roses . . .
Not a word, though, to Percy!
The king won't have it.

CHORUS:

(Time best not remembered.)

ANNE:

Why? Why so tearful?
Which of you spoke of Percy?
He mustn't see me.
Don't, oh don't let him find me!
But useless! He approaches,
He accuses, he rebukes me!
Ah! He chides me! Accuses! Ah!
Ah! Love, forgive me! Love, forgive me!
I am so, so unhappy . . .

Take me from this jail,
From this last degradation.
You will save me? You're smiling?
You've found me! You've found me!
I shall not die here abandoned.
No, no, no, no!
You are smiling . . . My dear! My Richard! Oh, joy!

Oh, guide me home again
Where skies are warmer,
Where roses bloom again
And waters murmur.
There we wandered, you and I,
Caring not the way.

Joy, alas, too fugitive!
Gone, though unfaded.
Oh, could I but relive
That bliss I traded,
Relive to love again,
If only a day!

CHORUS: Who can behold her with eyes unwatered?
 The signs of sorrow too great to bear . . .

(From outside, the beat of muffled drum)

ANNE: The fateful drum . . . Who approaches?
 Hervey! With sentry!

HERVEY: *(entering, with guards)* Fetch them!
 Go and get the prisoners,
 And have them brought before me.

ANNE: Ah! A last reunion!
 Torn from delirium!
 God! To this you restore me?
 Ah! To see them shackled?
 Is it for this you restore me?

(Percy, Rochefort and Smeton are brought in.)

PERCY & ROCHE. Anne!

ANNE: My brother! And you, Percy!
 You die, you die for my sake.

SMETON: *(casting himself at her feet)* Unknowing, I alone destroyed you!
 Curse me, despise me!

ANNE: Smeton!

PERCY: You monster!

SMETON: Too true, too true!
 A monster, write the word on my gravestone.
 The king was crafty; the bait I swallowed,
 Made accusations, believing
 Thus I could save you.
 Led by insane illusions,
 I lied, started boasting.
 Hope drew me onward,
 Dreams I have nurtured and for a year kept secret.
 Curse me and hate me, despise me!

ANNE: Smeton! Come closer . . .

Rise up! You're kneeling?
Fie! You must tune your strings.
Why does your lute so jangle?

ROCHEFORT: Sister!

PERCY: So shaken . . .

CHORUS: Again the dark prevails.

ANNE: The strings are broken.
They snap, dull and tonelessly,
With the feeble thud
Of a sick heart dying . . .
Of my own heart now shattered,
That sobs a final prayer to God eternal.
Will you pray also?

PERCY: Long day of despair!

CHORUS: Delirium!

ANNE: So near the end of mortal care,
Come, close my eyes, o Almighty,
And turn my fevered earthly fears
To hope of final rest.

CHORUS: Be merciful, o heaven,
And on her woes take pity.
Above, beyond these fleeting tears,
Enfold her to thy breast.

(From outside, cannon fire and festive music.)

ANNE: {Who disturbs me?
Where have you put me?
What is happening?}
Festive music? Celebration?
What is it? Why that music?
Say, where am I? What has happened?
Oh, speak!

SMETON, PERCY & ROCHE.: Wild applause,
Cheers and shouts of rejoicing for the new queen!

ANNE: Be silent! Oh, spare me!

Don't say it! Don't say it!
The day lacks but one crowning feature,
The blood of Anne,
Blood that must soon be shed.

CHORUS: **God, relent, lift the weight of her burden,**
Ease the blow aimed to fall on her head,
Upon her head.

ANNE: **Partners pernicious!**
Oh, pair with fangs and talons!
No, not with rancor, no!
May my heart not harden . . .

As the grave opens wide to receive me,
Let my last words convey peace and pardon.
Heaven, my witness, in turn may forgive me.
God, enfold me!
Oh, take thy child in hand.
Let me leave them not with malice,
Not with rancor, no, no! *(She faints)*

SMETON, PERCY, ROCHEFORT:

Blood of the guiltless this hour stains the land.

The End

