

Henry VIII and his six wives

Stage 2

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.

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.

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.'

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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?'

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 book.

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.'

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.'

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. 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.'