

*The Sometime Husband of Three Katherines, Two Annes and One Jane: Play
and Critical Essay.*

By

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A Thesis submitted to
The University of Birmingham
for the degree of
M Phil (B) Playwriting

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College of Arts and Law
University of Birmingham
September 2010

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Abstract

The Sometime Husband of Three Katherines, Two Annes and One Jane is a retelling of the Six Wives of Henry VIII story through memory and confrontation with the past. Kate, Katherine, Kitty, Anne and Anna are brought out of their graves into the modern world by Jane, who is trapped in an underground vault with an unpredictable Henry. As they travel through London they come into contact with us and are in turn entranced and appalled at the extent of change and the discovery of what they have become. They each value their freedom differently; Katherine believes she is bound by duty, Kate is on a personal quest to find her fourth husband, Anne and Kitty are desperate to make the most of their escape, and Anna attempts to make herself fit. Back in the vault Jane is about to give up waiting when the others arrive. On discovering that it was Jane who freed them, they are less than pleased. Each woman attempts to reconnect with Henry, drawing on their pasts and what they have learnt on their journey, but Henry resists their efforts to explain, or even forgive. They leave him, and are seen, months later, preparing to perform to a modern audience at the Tower of London.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the many historians and writers whose books have provided me with the knowledge and information I needed to complete this thesis and play: Lewis Einstein, Robert Hutchinson, Eric Ives, Susan E. James, Anne Laurence, David Loades, Lacey Baldwin Smith, David Starkey, John Stevens and Alison Weir.

I am grateful to the University of Birmingham for their research funding for this project, without which I would have struggled to acquire much of the information and aesthetics I needed to complete it.

It is a pleasure to thank my supervisors Steve Waters and Stephanie Dale for their encouragement, advice and dedication throughout the year. Particular thanks to Steve Waters for pointing me in the right direction. Also my director Gwenda Hughes for offering another perspective at a crucial stage in the process and supporting me through the Playwrights Workshop.

I would like to thank all those on the M Phil Playwriting Course this year for their feedback and support academically or otherwise,

and Rebecca Emmett for her friendship, guidance and perspective.

Lastly, I wish to thank my parents, family and friends for their continuing support, funding and enthusiasm.

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‘The Sometime Husband of Three Katherines, Two Annes and One Jane’

Critical Essay

Research and Considerations.

Katherine of Aragon, Tossed

Anne Boleyn, Chopped

Jane Seymour, Expired

Anne of Cleves, Dumped

Katherine Howard, Stumped

Kateryn Parr, Retired

It is – and was then – a remarkable fact in itself that a man should have six wives, yet what makes it especially fascinating to us is that these wives were interesting people in their own right.¹

My original intention for writing a play about Henry VIII’s wives is essentially encapsulated in Weir’s statement. Their story is undeniably a fascinating Drama, frequently exploited through fiction, television soap opera or costume drama, film, biography or theatre. However, I wanted to take them out of the context they have been put in by history and subvert the traditional, chronological story. It is something of an irony that these six, very different women are grouped together merely because of one role they aimed, or failed, to fulfil. I wanted to exploit this grouping because they were never all together at once in the

¹ Alison Weir, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (London: Pimlico, 1992) p.1

same time and place. But we see them grouped together repeatedly, working as a set, in biographic compilations and drama serials, but even if the story is about them they take secondary roles.

I began with learning about them as people, building up my knowledge of their personalities, lives and relationships to each other and to their husband. In the play I wanted to explore their individual memories and regrets based on the history that we know. The truth of history is always compromised by omission and invention and basing a play on real individuals requires both creation and imagination when filling in these historical gaps; especially from a period when airing opinions publically could result in a death sentence and personal correspondences were destroyed or confiscated.

Michael Frayn refers to the problem of transforming historical people into protagonists in the postscript of his 1998 play *Copenhagen*:

The great challenge facing the storyteller and the established historian alike is to get inside people's heads, to stand where they stood and see the world as they saw it, to make some informed estimate of their motives and intentions – and this is precisely where recorded and recordable history cannot reach. Even when all the external evidence has been mastered, the only way into the protagonists' heads is through the imagination.²

The risk lies in the celebrity of my characters. Facts about them are known and repeated in various forms amid constant academic debate. In re-presenting them within the dramatic world I was creating, I had to construct story, action and conflict as well as character and use my research as a basis for supporting these dramatic devices instead of letting it overshadow them. In *The Madness of King George III* (1991), Alan Bennett says how

² Michael Frayn, 'Postscript', *Copenhagen* (London: Methuen, 1998) p.99

historical truth becomes a ‘casualty’ to Action to establish conflict and heighten the risks for specific characters: ‘the play only works if the antipathy between father and son...is sharpened and the Prince made less sympathetic’.³

Creating these characters involved researching their social history, the role of women in Tudor England, specifically in marriage, and observing how each woman adhered to or broke away from the expected role of wife and consort. None of these women stayed within these restraints, though some did better than others in knotting themselves back into them. Essentially, ‘marriage was crucial to a woman’s identity’,⁴ an identity which has prevailed as we still refer to them as the wives of Henry – even though he only acknowledged Jane Seymour and Kateryn Parr when he died – and it is this identity they need to face up to and deal with in the play. The fact that marriage according to the common book of prayer was ‘first, for the procreation of children; second, for a remedy against sin and to avoid fornication; and third, for the mutual help and comfort of the partners’⁵ establishes their role within their historical context according to a society regulated by religion. Their violation of these policies provides an insight into each woman’s personality and beliefs. How well could one support her opinion against such cultural and societal rules? Their lives show us the result.

Genre.

The original drama of Henry VIII’s life with his women contains themes of love, sex, scandal, marriage, politics, war, divorce and murder and could be classed as a tragedy, a

³ Alan Bennett, ‘Introduction’, *The Madness of King George III* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995) p.xi

⁴ Anne Laurence, *Women in England 1500-1760: A Social History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994) p.41

⁵ Anne Laurence, *Women in England 1500-1760: A Social History*, p.41

legend, a horror story, a cautionary tale or mystery, or combinations of most if not all of these. These themes probably have much to do with the continuing fascination with this often-revised story and its value as entertainment.

Though I have selected this historical story this is not a History Play. Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* cannot even be classed as a History play in the traditional sense. The definition of the History Play is complicated by questions of what history is. The original story itself fits within many different genres which is both liberating and contradictory. But if history is about life, then these contradictions are inherently part of it. Because I want to depart from the chronological history from Henry VIII's viewpoint, there is a certain amount of revision in writing the play. These women are largely made up of their contemporaries, mostly male, writing about them. There is evidence of taking sides, demonising and constructing these women according to laws and judgment of the period. And this is the evidence we use to write about them now. Little is offered about what these women thought or felt, very little survives about ambition or motivation, instead it is largely speculation.

But I think it is important to challenge where and how history is placed, whether it can be trusted: 'Napoleon is said to have called history "a fable agreed upon"...[and] Mark Twain declared that "the very ink with which all history is written is merely fluid prejudice"'.⁶ The question of Authority also surfaces: Who has the authority to claim and write about these people, whether in the theatre or not. An issue remains with some male historians objecting to female perspectives of their specialism. In relation to the women who were the wives of Henry, David Starkey claims:

⁶ Robert Leonard Carneiro, *The Muse of History and the Science of Culture* (Birkhäuser, 2000) in Google Books <http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=F3d2YJX818UC&lpg=PP1&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false> [Accessed 29-06-10] p.13

One of the great problems has been that Henry, in a sense, has been absorbed by his wives. Which is bizarre. But it's what you expect from feminised history, the fact that so many of the writers who write about this are women and so much of their audience is a female audience. Unhappy marriages are big box office...wives complicate the story of Henry.⁷

I think it is true that there is a great female audience for such a story, but this should not discount a female perspective of this history, particularly in giving these 'complicating wives' a voice. Henry himself would probably be devastated at the knowledge that for most it is his wives who make him famous. The great appeal of writing about this period and these women is playing with the speculations only this time putting the women into greater focus.

In writing from an alternative perspective and bringing historical characters into the modern world my aim is to bring a new energy to their story. *Herstory* as a theory of exploration and presentation of female perspectives was introduced 'to reveal women's role in history and to give women a sense of tradition of which they were and are a part'.⁸ In this concept of creating theatre, women writers describe the practice of 'feminising history' as an 'act of survival'.⁹ As survival is something Henry's wives fought for and are still fighting for in the play, survival becomes a central theme. Can they survive as a group and can they survive against their husband's effort to survive? This relates to the concept of maintaining a tradition for women that *Herstory* works for. In the play Survival is underlined by Anne:

Among everything that is worth competing for, be it life, role, spirit, freshness, not many of us survive when the story is about men surviving. In the end the power was

⁷ June Purvis, "David Starkey's History Boys" *The Guardian*, April 2nd 2009

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/apr/02/david-starkey-henry-viii> [Accessed 29-06-10]

⁸ Gabriele Griffin and Elaine Aston, *Herstory: Plays by Women for Women Volume 1*, ed. By Gabriele Griffin and Elaine Aston (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991) p.8

⁹ Gabriele Griffin and Elaine Aston, *Herstory: Plays by Women for Women Volume 1*, p.7

theirs, so even if Anne Boleyn is remembered, it is not really me. (Sladen: Draft 3, 2010, p.89)

Furthermore, in coming together it is only after they have lived, so my characters have become ghosts and the reasons for their return are bound up in their past, so they cannot be at peace until something is reconciled. Such a device can be powerful in conveying outrage or incomprehension as to why they are in this state. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the ghost of Hamlet's father is a plot device to set in motion the following developments of the play, a common device of Revenge Tragedy when Shakespeare was writing. In my play the plot is reconstructed around a famous historical story, and is character driven as the dialogue and progression is largely informed by their memories which they must confront to find peace. The play does have elements of a 'Ghost Story' in its exploration of sought-after peace and in finding the right place to 'end'. Location as well contributes to this genre; the churches and graves and the state of Kateryn Parr wrapped in effigy skin which she tries throughout to shed. Yet its use of this class of storytelling is not conventional and other conventions and themes are drawn in.

Structure.

A play doesn't have to function within a genre, and that is one of the virtues of theatre. But, in all plays, the plot is expressed through structure, in which the narrative is organised into segments of space and time. Like emplotment, structure is not just a convenient way of organising material, but is a conveyor of meaning.¹⁰

Originally, I had problems with the play's progression because the scenes were too self-contained within their location, disallowing proper progression instead of presenting

¹⁰ David Edgar, *How Plays Work* (London: Nick Hern Books. 2009) p.99

‘something partial and unresolved, opening a door onto what follows as much as closing it on what has transpired’.¹¹ By redefining the structure of the scenes and how they are put together, I have attempted to increase the pace and energy of the play. Dividing the plot into a Three Act structure has helped me to place emphasis within each part in an effort to achieve smoother transitions from one scene to another.

The structure of my play is concerned with setting and space. Space is symbolic. We begin in Act One with each wife in her own grave, the site of her unrest. Act Two tracks their physical and emotional struggle through London and their interaction with what is new, contrasted with discussions of what is past. The National Portrait Gallery is a location device where they each come face-to-face with themselves, looking into a mirror to see how we see them, again causing them to question who they are. Act Three is Windsor and Henry. The vault, a small concentrated space that must be broken into, (See Appendix A) is seen throughout, showing the relationship between Jane and Henry. Having one scene between them in each act contrasts the freedom the other five wives are experiencing as Jane becomes more constrained. So, the structure of the play is ‘a stretched time cycle with a changed space’,¹² the characters move from their own enclosed spaces outside into a new, modern world and then somewhere concentrated and intense. Then, they themselves choose the place they will go to next and all but Kateryn Parr are no longer confined by space.

Research.

The appeal of Henry’s wives is that they are part of my history and their lives and fates were so diverse. In learning about these women I have developed a higher value of them, which I think is vital in this process of rewriting them. More information is available about some

¹¹ Steve Waters, (in press) *The Secret Life of Plays*, (Nick Hern Books, 2010) p.19

¹² David Edgar, *How Plays Work*, p.101

than others. Jane Seymour and Anne of Cleves have very little outside compilation biographies as their marriages were rather short-lived. But the machinations of making these marriages happen is illuminating in itself, and relates to the subsequent and preceding wives. Katherine Howard instantly stood out to me because she is so dismissed by posterity. She does however have her own biographies, one which concluded with a quite poignant reality:

But even in doing her husband wrong, Catherine is strangely inconsequential...There is a certain inevitability in the tragedy that occurred, but somehow one feels that the shallow motives, the juvenile desires, and petty and vain considerations of the Queen had little to do with the final calamity – the end would have been the same, history would have been unchanged, had she never lived or died. Possibly no worse verdict can be passed upon a human life.¹³

This is startling when passed on someone supposedly so ingrained into our history, yet is validated when Katherine Howard is the name that is forgotten. Kateryn Parr is the one I think I have learnt the most about and whose life offered the most surprises. Neither the bluestocking nor the nursemaid she is said to be, Henry's final queen was a survivor in every sense of the word and should not be pushed aside just because she outlived him. Her marriage lasted longer than the three preceding queens and to see that Kateryn's story must end when Henry's does has provoked me into giving her a more prominent role in the play.

To bring them back as ghosts, I needed to complete on-site research, finding them in the places they are buried and identifying the height of tourism in each. Actually finding all six of these women was both revealing and moving. The locations and graves themselves indicate the status of each woman when she died: Jane is with Henry in his vault at Windsor Castle, Katherine of Aragon is kept in exile at Peterborough Cathedral, Kateryn Parr is

¹³ Lacey Baldwin Smith, *A Tudor Tragedy: The Life and Times of Catherine Howard* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1961) p.205

hidden away at a castle in the countryside because she married again, and Anne of Cleves is privileged in Westminster Abbey while Katherine Howard and Anne Boleyn are confined within the Tower of London. In identifying these locations, I then had to find a way of representing them on stage. I did not want the settings to be naturalistic, as the characters move from place to place, but I chose to indicate representations of certain places, like the grandeur of Westminster Abbey to contrast with other, more humble settings. Also the confined space of the underground vault is taken from the image recorded when it was opened up and I think is important in offering a reality of this environment.

The Vault. Four coffins: In the centre is Henry VIII's, damaged and broken. To his left is Jane Seymour's coffin intact and to his right another with a baby's coffin placed on top of it. These last two remain unopened throughout. The ground is covered in rubble and wood. (Sladen: Draft 3, 2010, p.37)

Part of my research was concerned with finding out what we think we know about these women and how it responded to my research. I drafted a questionnaire (See Appendix B) saying that I was as much interested in what people didn't know as what they did and whether what we consider general knowledge is real. Answers I received revealed what information I needed to provide and informed the dialogue spoken by the people the characters come into contact with.

Writing a play with a large cast of principal and famous characters was a challenge for me as a playwright. One of the first questions I had to answer was how to differentiate between them, as three Katherines, two Annes and one Jane as we know them. Originally they were presented in the formatting of the script with their initials. But I felt it was essential to stress their Christian names as part of their identity. The three variations of 'Katherine' indicate age and character, and they are referred to as Katherine, Kitty and Kate by the others

throughout. This conveys a sense of status and class, from Katherine as an Infanta to Kitty, barely more than a child on the periphery of the upper-classes. 'Kateryn' is how Henry's sixth queen signed her name and its bold abbreviation into Kate suits her character and function. Anne Boleyn could be nothing other than Anne and as Anna says to Katherine when she asks whether it is Anne or Anna, she replies that 'It is both, it is either.' (Sladen: Draft 3, 2010, p.79) The point of defining Henry in the play as 'VIII' refers to identifying the women as a number, and corresponds to the title of the play, a reversal of the traditional telling of 'The Six Wives of Henry VIII.'

Process and Development: Trialling a Husband.

Original Idea: *A Sixth of the Eighth (VI/VIII)*.

One of my earliest thoughts was to write about Anne Boleyn, the one I found most appealing and who seemed most prominent. I considered bringing her into the present, but would it be a modern retelling of the story? Who would she interact with, and how might the character of Henry be dealt with? But it became clearer that I could not tell her story without also drawing in Katherine of Aragon and Jane Seymour. And if these three are best known, why do the other three seem like such secondary characters?

To exploit their grouping, I wanted to explore their relationship to each other with their central link being absent. Originally Henry was not to feature in the play, but would be present in the argument and conversation. The point is to prove that they were individuals in their own right, that they were human, and not just devices of the history that Henry made. These women were used and abused; some instigated revolution and transformed the state of the country; some had children; some had or wanted other men, and they want to share it without Henry there. One of my earlier ideas was that Kateryn Parr could bring them together, perhaps in the framework of a dinner party to celebrate the fact that she outlived their husband.

In the dinner party scene in Act One of *Top Girls* (1982), Caryl Churchill brings historical and fictional women out of their own contexts of history into the present to 'provide a historical context for the new woman'.¹⁴ Although these characters discuss their own lives, they refer to issues which correspond directly to Marlene in the present and thus the overriding theme of the play. In putting Henry's wives together in a similar context, the main issue connecting them is already recognized so even if they were to explore why they

¹⁴Bill Naismith, 'Commentary', *Top Girls: Methuen Student Edition* (London: Methuen Drama, 1991) p.xxix

failed and Kateryn Parr survived they remain very much within their own context. Alternatively, April de Angelis' *Playhouse Creatures* (1993) is set within the historical context of the characters, 'approximately 1670'. The play focuses on a group of real women, the first five English actresses, all debating that role and de Angelis gives this group a collective voice as well as individual voices and a viewpoint on attitudes towards them. In looking at how these women interacted and the dynamics of the group, their privacy as a set of characters is essential to the workings of the play as most of the action takes place separately from those outside the group, though there is an evident pressure coming from outside. This outside pressure was something I needed to work into my own play, offering my characters something new and strange to react to outside what is familiar to them.

Although I did not continue further with the dinner party, the characters remained relatively insular in the first sketches of the play where dialogue was essentially historical fact rather than character objectives and emotions. In my pitch, I reported that I was struggling with finding a reason to bring them together. I considered a History conference where some of them were guest speakers, or a question and answer panel with the public. In using alternative ways to tell the story, through their own re-enactment and discussion, I wanted to bring these six women out into a public place, to perform their lives for us and set the story straight. This public place was the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square which in the summer of 2009 was the platform for artist Antony Gormley's live artwork 'One and Other', where members of the public were invited to 'represent humanity' for an hour each. 2009 was also the five-hundred-year anniversary of Henry VIII's accession to the throne. As a public forum where these women could address us, what would they do to show themselves as human and to represent themselves as a form of art?

Who can be represented in art? How can we make it? How can we experience it?...Whether you see the plinth as a protest or pole-dance platform; studio or stocks;

playpen or pulpit; as a frame for interrogation or for meditation, it has provided an open space of possibility for many to test their sense of self and how they might communicate this to a wider world.¹⁵

Questioning how art can be represented complemented the idea of my characters exploiting dramatic techniques as a way of conveying their testimonies, thereby utilising the meta-theatrical device of a play-within-a-play. However, the pitch described all the wives assembling at the Tower of London to discuss and rehearse their hour and then their evaluation of it afterwards. The audience would never actually see their performance, because the drama was to centre on them assembling and having to work together. But this removed them from the public eye and in rehearsing they would only be performing for themselves. The play-within-a-play would act only as a further distancing technique, contradicting the possibilities of bringing them out into the open and interacting with us in our world and for us to interact with them in a new way.

Drafts.

The situation may be an extreme one, but the *emotional* reality is what counts, and it is that which we can identify with.¹⁶

In the first scenes for the play I began in the Tower of London with Anne and Kitty waiting for the others to arrive. At this point in the process, they all knew what they were doing and why, and had a knowledge of the history that followed them. This decision was based on the fact that they were preparing something for performance and could then comment on how they had been represented in fiction. However, it became clearer to me in later drafts that

¹⁵ Antony Gormley, October 2009, www.oneandother.co.uk [Accessed 24-06-10]

¹⁶ Rib Davis, *Developing Characters for Script Writing* (London: A & C Black, 2001) p.80

discovering history and changes to marriage and women's rights would bring out more of their characters and justify their desire to set the record straight.

Into the first complete draft of the play I introduced 'ME', a device allowing the wives to tell their stories. The plinth no longer seemed large enough, so they were coming together to teach us through this character about their lives, declaring how wrong history is, validating themselves as individuals and debating the role of 'Quene'. ME became the element outside the women's reality, representing the modern world and its knowledge about them. Yet the result of such a device was that the play was taking on a novelistic tone, bound up in exposition and although there was a playfulness in the variety of theatrical forms, songs and Chaucerian style tales, rewriting Shakespeare and alluding to fairytales with their archetypal female characters, the play still did not bring them fully into the present. The telling and showing of their lives was an element I did enjoy exploring but even though the characters could comment on how stories are told, undermining the authority of these accounts, it robbed them of deep personal emotion and humanity.

Also from this draft emerged the beginnings of the quest element, the idea of a journey in the first part of the play where Kate, Anne, Kitty and Anna travelled through London towards one location where Katherine, Jane and ME were waiting and the rest of the play would proceed. But the play barely touched on why these characters wanted to come together, or why some of them wanted to remain silent and others desperate to speak. A basic presentation of character was given in monologue form, where a sense of feeling about each wife's personal history was explored from historical fact. The challenge of the play's basic idea was 'to show us a story, about women from the past, in present tense action'¹⁷, instead, the play acted as a somewhat harsh retelling of the facts, with the characters present

¹⁷ Stephanie Dale, *Supervision Report*, University of Birmingham, Selly Oak, 5th December 2009

only as dramatic devices, and not really characters at all, with conflict coming from bitchiness and tentative friction in the representation of truth.

Because the first part of the play utilised different settings in each scene (Westminster Abbey, the National Portrait Gallery) the second half, set in one place, was dense with information without variety of tone. Therefore the quest element came to a halt halfway through the play. Also, Jane and Katherine were not part of the group for very long, in fact the women never really exploited their grouping as I had first intended. Furthermore, what was lacking was a temporal frame, partly a result of their insularity, meaning that any risks were severely underplayed. At the moment, merely telling their story in their own words to a modern outsider was not enough of a risk as they were never pushing outside their comfort zone. Feedback from the group after reading this first draft highlighted that the audience was indeed learning a lot, but that I should keep the characters moving and develop the idea of a journey, so they might be physically as well as emotionally motivated and changed.

Consequently I was encouraged to think about the nature of ghosts who have been wronged by history and their desperate need for absolution. Unlike the ghost in *Hamlet*, who acts as the catalyst and must relate the manner of his death and his rage to Hamlet to revenge for him, I was bringing my characters back to go through this process of recognising their own feeling about being unfinished and wanting to do something to change it. The overall objective of the group was to find the peace they wanted but this action needed to be launched by something or someone else. Thus, I revised the role of Henry in the play. Though he still would not appear, he would initiate their quest by telling Kate where his wives were buried and imploring her to bring them to his grave to give him peace. As a catalyst I think this was a progressive device, hinting at Henry's own unrest and that they were still answerable to him despite being dead. However, character motivation and individual objectives were still not thoroughly framed: they will go because he asked them

and there was no anger at being obligated into this task. One character development that I played with at this point was putting Kateryn Parr's fourth husband into the play and for her to discover what happened to him.

Kate His name was Thomas. I thought he would be here, but he's not.

Katherine What was he to you?

Kate (*She almost doesn't say.*) He was my husband. After Henry.

Pause

I thought I could...that this was my chance...to find him.

Anna I remember that scandal.

Kitty Scandal!

Kate I married him too soon. (*To Anna.*) I forgot you knew.

Katherine Who are you then? Your real name.

Kate Seymour. He's Jane's brother actually.

Kitty Thomas Seymour? I know him. He's in the Tower with me. God on earth, the world just gets smaller and smaller. He's never mentioned you though.

Kate What...what happened to him?

Kitty Head. Chopped. Off.

Long pause.

Kate So he is..like you then? A prisoner. (Sladen: Draft 3, 2010, pp.80-81)

This discovery would give Kate her own story to travel through the play, prompting her to accept the quest, increasing her feelings of guilt towards Henry for marrying Seymour so soon after he died, and her desire to find him now.

As a result, Seymour appeared in the second draft of the play, also a prisoner at the Tower of London. In the course of the journey, Kateryn would learn about Seymour's execution and where he was buried, ultimately choosing to go back to the Tower at the end. Seymour also acted as a dramatic device in telling Kitty the legend of Bluebeard and drawing parallels between this story and Henry, often termed "England's Bluebeard", as a means of clarification of the play's themes. This scene was also a means of bringing out Kitty's character, establishing her as a teenager and relatively unconcerned about her present state, except for being bored by it.

Throughout the process I have struggled with action in the play. I think this comes down to a combination of wanting to fit everything I had learnt into the narrative instead of selecting what would serve the action and its progression, and the question of the catalyst driving it in the first place. The problem was how to give the historical evidence contemporary energy, so that action was physical as well as dialogue driven. In *The Grace of Mary Traverse* (1985) Wertebaker has ensured that the energy in the play comes from the characters and their wants and needs. As an audience, you are invested in these characters because you witness them acquire knowledge and change before your eyes. Although set in an historical period, Wertebaker has taken 'great freedom with reported fact'¹⁸ in creating her narrative. Furthermore, the use of modern language grounds the play within a contemporary context, inviting audiences to draw comparisons between the two time periods. Churchill also uses modern language in *Top Girls*, the overlapping dialogue providing pace and energy. I still needed to put my characters at risk in the present, setting them into contemporary London and making them conflict with it rather than having them only living the past. Furthermore Henry's motives for setting them on their quest is a risk that they all need to take, stemming from their individual attitudes towards him and

¹⁸ Timberlake Wertebaker, *Plays One* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996) p.66

answering the question of Why they would go, for him or for themselves? Ultimately, I needed to consider again ‘Where is the sense of urgency? The characters are in the present and yet most of their conversation is about the past. How can the play use the present?’¹⁹

The element of space and location became more central to the drama as I brought the women out into London. In being summoned by Henry they have to negotiate their way through the capital to get to him. This was when I started to revise their knowledge of the modern world and although they were now discovering things rather than reacting to things they already knew, there were still inconsistencies. There were also problems with how much the women knew about each other; Kateryn and Anna would have known the end of the story, and Kitty would have informed Anne of what had happened between their two deaths. In a way I had made it difficult for myself placing some characters within scenes. Katherine of Aragon would know very little of the story and without this knowledge she was more difficult to implement into the scenes and I was not monopolising enough on her uncovering and reacting to these revelations.

To overcome this, the women came into contact with members of the public, meeting people outside their group and giving them the opportunity to respond to what people know about them, also a method of exposition. This was something that I have worked on more and more in my final draft of the play though I think it could still have done more to reveal and to represent us as a phenomenon that they were reacting to. In the second draft I introduced a chorus who represented the people of today and created the city around them, speaking Henry’s words for him. I was still fighting at this point with how to incorporate the role-playing and songs into the journey. Having the chorus I used them, but it did not work in the same way because really, it was for the wives to retell the story. In the end, I was

¹⁹ Stephanie Dale, *Supervision Report*, University of Birmingham, Selly Oak, 17th March 2010

worrying too much about what the chorus were doing, instead of concentrating on the six individual women and developing their dramatic characters and functions.

Workshop.

I found each opportunity given for actors reading and reacting to extracts from the play an extremely useful and revealing process throughout writing and redrafting. The workshop highlighted some essential concerns of plot and content. Gwenda Hughes, my director stressed that my characters needed to be doing and not musing, particularly when they were in fact saying very little. Furthermore, she highlighted that each scene still needed a centre of intention and an element of risk. Also, the world of the play was undefined and I needed to explore what the rules of their ghost world were, what they think and feel about it. Many of these issues had been ongoing throughout the redrafting process especially where it was lacking in action with long scenes complicated by the forms of communication and diversionary games. At this point in the redrafting, I was wondering if the telling of the Bluebeard legend went on too long and slowed the action down from the very start. This was verified by the workshop, where it took up at least half of the time given. Even though it did show elements of Kitty's character, this would better be explored with characters more central to the main group.

The conflict between the women and London itself was not enough and the quest element seemed to have been forgotten. From the workshop and various responses, it became clear that I needed to clarify what my characters did know and that differential knowledge was a key method of keeping the audience involved. At that moment, everything was very detached. It would be more of an emotional journey for my characters if they were uncovering things as they go. This would charge them up for confronting Henry and

implement a feeling of anger which the play really needed, as they discovered their place in history in relation to Henry and what we think we know about them. Also, the catalyst was still not big enough and had no pay-off because Henry did not appear, so the reasons why they took up the task could not be properly defined and could not establish a centre of intention for the play.

Final Draft: *The Sometime Husband of Three Katherines, Two Annes and One Jane*

It took me a long time to put Henry into the play. I was concerned that it would remain his story if he was there. But there is a possibility that telling him to go to Hell is something that many might like to say to him, so why not his wives, and because ‘the play is so centrally about these women it would not harm the thesis to make the villain enter in and it is a huge narrative hook – what will they do when they see him, will they still feel for him’.²⁰ What was also essential was reminding my audience what happened to each wife and contrasting how they feel about their lives and fates with Henry’s feelings and memories. His treatment of Jane contributes to this, his supposed favourite who he refuses to name because he is too preoccupied blaming his other wives for his present state. He demonstrated Jane’s status when he buried her in the vault he was having prepared for himself, but in the end it has done nothing for her. He is forgetting her because there is no passion to remember, he barely registers the memory of the son they had together. For Jane, forever silent and obeying, finding her own voice lets her act against him, calling his other wives to Windsor to set them all free, even if it is under selfish motivations. Thus the action is instigated and can be sustained through revelation.

²⁰ Steve Waters, *Supervision Report*, University of Birmingham, Selly Oak, 16th June 2010

In writing the play it has become apparent that revelation comes in doing as well as in speech, as Gwenda Hughes had stressed in response to the workshop script. In *The Madness of King George III*, Bennett stresses the importance of characters doing when referring to the mad ramblings of the king.

Since what he is saying is irrational it cannot affect the outcome of things, and so is likely to be ignored; thus an audience will attend to what is being done to the King but not to what he is saying...though what the King is saying is never quite drivel, the volume of it has to be taken down to allow other characters to speak across him, subject taking precedence over regal nonsense.²¹

The problem with my drafts up to this point was the communication of information which needed to be made active. Before beginning my final draft, I revisited some plays set in history, looking at story and how the characters speak. Bringing my characters into the present provokes conflict, and they become anachronisms who need to interact and communicate with us, otherwise why not just leave them in their own time and place. In *Top Girls* the historical characters in Act One settle easily into their environment, allowing the restaurant to set the rhythm of the scene, whereas the environments that my characters find themselves in remain foreign. Implementing this new London and exposing these wives to a modern world is something that I think I have never really got right, in its presentation and their reactions. In “Travelling Show” when they are walking through the city, my aim was to convey a sense of the pace and energy of London through words, delivered in quick succession:

The wives stand separately across the stage. During the dialogue they attempt to move towards each other. The city moves on around them.

²¹ Alan Bennett, ‘Introduction’, *The Madness of King George III*, p. xix

Anna Crossing the City, it is like

Kitty Crossing swords

Kate Crossing words

Anne Crossing wits.
I love it.

Anna I am too old for it

Katherine I hate it
The noise

Kate Like some sort of acceleration that we can't keep up with...

Kitty I want it to be more

Kate Something lower, angrier

Kitty Move!

Anna Tell yourself it is not real, it cannot be real

Anne This is a place of celebration

Kitty Escape

Kate Colour, richness

Katherine Control

Anna Foreign (Sladen: Draft 3, 2010, p.84)

The wives are communicating their reaction and a different pace is set for this scene but I have struggled with grounding the extremes of this environment as much as I think the play needs it. Furthermore, this single scene revealed a lack of contrast in other parts of the play where dialogue was still too wordy and overbearing on the action and so I had to clarify and edit dialogue down to achieve action and feeling. Also coming face to face with their

tourists at the Tower of London runs the risk of being too much of a contrivance; but somehow I need to convey this information so perhaps them educating and being educated by us would be an interesting experiment, providing exposition and setting everything up for the quest.

Another issue was the use of language. Gwenda Hughes said that there was ‘something nice about historical characters speaking our language, already it is a method of bringing them into our world’.²² Kitty’s language was always more modern, but it grated against the language the other characters used. Throughout the process, I wanted Kitty to use modern language, to really distinguish her tone and character from the others. In contrast, the language in the rest of the play was an uncomfortable combination of poetic, modern and historical language and very little to do with individual voice or defined character speech. Dialogue as a revelatory device must contrast between character to create friction and tension, instead it was dense with poetry and required stripping lines down to convey meaning.

What I had to work on was clarity between character personality and nationality. In letting go of the poetic language and making speech more direct and of course bringing in their anger, these characters can communicate with us in numerous ways, as

So much of the work of playwriting is unfolding characters, complicating and thereby ‘deepening’ stereotypes. The presentation of character in theatre is about individuating voices and actions that separate one figure from another, and creating the illusion of inwardness. Yet character only emerges through interaction.²³

The task I had given myself was of developing six characters, each requiring her own struggle and function within the group. (See Appendix C) When the speech was protracted

²² Gwenda Hughes, *Personal Communication: Playwright’s Workshop*, 2010

²³ Steve Waters, *The Secret Life of Plays*, pp.99-100

and dense each character sounded the same but modernising the language I think made it easier to inject more diversity and friction into the dialogue. Kitty shouts out bold statements to conceal her fear and guilt, refusing to acknowledge her own faults and Anna's uncertainty in voicing her opinion verses the need for certain things to be stated identifies her from Katherine's wistful and pained repetitions of 'If I could...' while Kate and Anne struggle for control as Jane struggles to find her voice. In refining the way they used language, I could refine the characters themselves.

The characters were one of the play's most crucial problems. They were all too hard and I had hidden proper, raw emotion beneath poetic language. In redefining the language, this became clearer and I was able to identify more deeply each character's struggle. I revised the individual monologues, cut from the first draft, as a means of posing an issue that each wife would confront; guilt, identity, love and hate, fear, abuse, and constraint. I think that monologue is an effective way into character, for me as a playwright and for an audience. As a dramatic form it gives each woman a voice and the skill must come in interpreting and translating the historical facts and deciphering what an audience needs to know. In characterising Anna, Kitty and Kate, more exposition was needed, but I had to incorporate individual character and their wants and needs within these speeches. Katherine's monologue is the only one interrupted by another character. Whereas the other wives speak to us, Katherine goes through a different kind of thought process prompted by another person with modern views on marriage and love. This stranger provides the questions that perhaps Katherine should be asking herself, and in this scene she is forced to answer them aloud.

Katherine You must fight for what you believe.

Woman Did you fight for your husband?

Katherine For myself. I wish I could be able to get him back somehow....Was he a victim? Is that the answer to him? Perhaps he was forced into his choices by others, by my enemies, by what he was. There must be a reason, more than that, more than that whore. I could never get him back again.

Woman Why do we get married? Love doesn't last.

Katherine A future. Duty.

Woman Duty!

Katherine Because we are told. We are destined to be wives and mothers, it is the most important feature of our sex. And because it keeps us for God.

(Sladen: Draft 3, 2010, p.74)

I also brought Jane's character further into the play; whereas before she had very little to do, now the catalyst comes from her, establishing her character further in terms of how she overcomes the state she is in by successfully opposing Henry for the first time. So Henry finds his way physically into the play, growing weaker as the women grow stronger. An unreliable historian, he still needs to convey key information to the audience, about each wife and his attitude towards her. Jane is significant here because she has heard it all before and can question when Henry is wrong or right.

In the end, the emphasis is that the women have to need each other, even if they don't want to be part of this group. Can they form their own unity out of what we have placed them into? Even Anna, so sure that she did not need this freedom, gains something by telling Henry directly how she feels about him and herself. The final scene reveals what the characters have forged out of their grouping and also what they have learnt about us. From what they have seen and heard of us in the modern world, they have decided what they think we need to learn. In a way they remain stuck reliving their lives, going over and over it, rehearsing it, performing it; however they are able to present themselves in their own, different way. The aim of this scene is also to highlight the theme of knowledge and how it

is used in storytelling, as well as methods of fusing fact into fiction, as they exploit their identity as characters, and women.

One of the recurring questions which has been thrown out to me about this play from my director, supervisors and audiences is ‘Why Now?’ The story of Henry VIII and his wives will always be ongoing, so many themes and so much mystery all centred around human nature and power. The fact that this melodrama is real only extends our fascination with it. As Alan Bennett’s *History Boys* say “History is just one fucking thing after another.” We use our history to learn, in theory, and you can even change it through theatre. There is an opportunity to ask ‘What if..?’ and I think that is what my play explores. I was worried about becoming too preachy and at one point in the process was so subtle I barely told my audience anything. I had to keep being reminded that it is important to tell the audience things and not presume that they know it. One potential hurdle to tackle was possible uncomplimentary categorisations, eg. “Feminist”, “Political”, but primarily I wanted to explore the humanity of these women, transforming them into characters and putting them into today’s world which immediately says something about social, cultural, political and gender issues, then and now. Putting them in a context with today allows for the irony of these women being disgusted by us when we are so transfixed by them and attempts to undermine the reasons why we are. Perhaps the question should be something else that I have endeavoured to explore.

Why Are We So Obsessed with the Wives of Henry VIII?

Appendix A

The Vault at Windsor Castle.



Figure 1. The underground vault of Henry VIII and Jane Seymour, Charles I and infant child of Queen Anne, pen and ink drawing by Alfred Y. Nutt, 1888

For descriptions of the vault see Robert Hutchinson, *The Last Days of Henry VIII* (London: Phoenix, 2006) pp.270-3

Image taken from: The Royal Collection and Rory Matthews, 'Henry VIII: A 500th Anniversary Exhibition', *The Royal Collection*, <http://www.royalcollection.org.uk/microsites/henryviii/MicroObject.asp?item=7&themeid=1074&object=8890327&row=7> [Accessed April to September 2010]

Appendix B

Questionnaire

1. Name the six wives of Henry VIII
2. How did they die? – More details than just the rhyme if you can!
3. If they lived now, what do you think would have happened to them? How would he have got rid of each of them? What would have happened to their children?
4. Write 2 facts you know about each wife.
5. Why do you think Henry VIII and his six wives remain? What makes them still so interesting?
6. What is your opinion of Henry VIII?
7. What do you think his wives would say to him, if they could now?
8. What would you say to him??
9. What might the six wives think of each other?
10. How would you categorize the story of Henry VIII and his six wives? You may think it might be more than one...
Tragedy, Comedy, Farce, Fairytale, Cautionary Tale, Horror Story, Mystery, Legend, Other

Appendix C

Character Profiles

Kate, Mid thirties

What does she need: To realise that she shouldn't feel guilty for wanting to love and for wanting to survive.

-She wants to relieve her guilt by asking for God and Henry's forgiveness

-She believes God has given her power to change what happened, a chance to redeem herself to eventually find peace.

-She thinks this is an opportunity to find Thomas Seymour and in some way communicate with him. She is willing to give up her freedom for him.

Function:

-As leader (She has to work against Anne to keep this role).

-To keep the play on track and to keep them going. To convince each wife as much as she needs it.

-In her discoveries about Seymour she changes and it becomes even more imperative for her to reach Windsor if there is any chance of finding him.

-She does as she is told: Jane has passed the baton onto her and she takes it up.

-To fill in information to a certain extent, particularly for Katherine. But there are still some things she does not know and must find out.

Katherine, Early fifties

What does she need: To realise that she is allowed to hate Henry for what he put her through and to come to terms with the fact that he is not the man she believed he was.

-She wants to find out what she is to him, to ask him if he regrets his decision. Does he have any remorse? She wants to understand him.

-Curiosity and resentment: Who are these other women and why did Henry choose them.

-She needs to battle with her pride and overcome the fact that she has to embrace Anne and Kitty as part of the group.

Function:

-As matriarch: offering point of view on issues of divorce and motherhood.

-To slow them down, she is still feeling something physical which keeps interrupting. Her pain is a reminder to all of them that they are obliged to complete this task.

-To provide information about her husband as a younger, different man.

Kitty, Mid teens

What does she need: To accept that she needs to come to terms with the fact that she was abused, not just by Henry. She needs to see how people take advantage of her.

-She lives in the moment and doesn't really think ahead.

-Motivated into the task by the prospect of relieving her boredom and because she is happy to follow on. She doesn't want to get left behind.

-She thinks that the others hate Henry and so is prepared to hate him too, without really considering her own reasons for it.

-She expects the other women to protect her, but they abuse her too by exposing her to Henry. She is someone that Kate could mother, that the others could teach, but she resists them. She doesn't know her place in the group but tries to integrate herself into it as much as possible.

-Her loyalties fluctuate between the other characters.

-She needs to grow up.

Function:

-As a comic element and change of tone.

-She follows.

-How does she react to being one who is forgotten?

-To acknowledge and overcome her fear of Henry.

-She has no-one but this group. She doesn't know where to go at the end. So she follows again.

Anne, Mid thirties

What does she need: To be absolved of the responsibility put on her by Henry, and by us, and to challenge her fame.

-She feels strong enough to confront Henry. She wants to be certain that he thinks about her still.

-She wants to know what to do with the love that she has for Henry.

-She needs to discover her self-worth and justify herself.

Function:

-To rival Kate as leader and create conflict.

-She wants to enjoy her freedom, to do this on her own terms. She slows them down.

-To come into contact with literature about them and to learn facts about the others in this way, rather than getting it directly from them. She wants to be well educated. She wants to prove the worst fate.

-To draw in the audience, exploiting being the most 'famous'

Anna, Forties

What does she need: The chance to admit her feelings about her marriage and to validate herself even if she was rejected. She was more than the fourth wife of Henry.

-She doesn't think she is needed or wanted. She goes because of duty, but also the need to belong to something, even if it doesn't fit properly.

-Henry treated her well, so she is willing to return the favour.

-Curiosity about meeting her predecessor.

-She shows grace in obedience.

Function:

-She is neutral and has little bias.

-To throw off the title of 'token' and to prove she is an individual member of the group. To remind us that she does matter.

-To keep them going, she can back up whoever to get where they are going.

-To experience Henry's anger and cruelty when he attacks her, something she did not experience when she was alive.

Jane, Late twenties

What she needs: To act against her husband and make something happen.

-She acts out of selfishness, she is not doing this for the others but for herself first.

-She wants to get rid of Henry in the same way he got rid of them. She wants to leave him behind.

-She resents that he disturbed her and brought her back to suffer with him. She needs his other wives to find out why: Are they the ones keeping her from peace?

-She wants to be identified.

Function:

-As instigator.

-To bring them all together, which is so unlikely.

-To show how Henry has degenerated in death both physically and mentally.

-She remains separate from the rest of the group. She did not complete the journey with them; her reality is much more confined.

VIII

-He is consumed by his past just as they are. He cannot get them out of his head, even those he is desperate to forget.

-It doesn't occur to him that he needs to be forgiven

Function:

-To convey information about his life and his wives and to give conflicting accounts.

-As a narrative hook and dramatic device drawing the women together as a unit.

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*The Sometime Husband of
Three Katherines,
Two Annes and
One Jane*

By Anna Sladen

Characters

Kate Mid thirties

Katherine Early fifties

Kitty Late teens

Anne Mid thirties

Anna Forties

Jane Late twenties

VIII Fifties

Beefeater

Woman 1

Girl

Little Girl

Woman

Busker

Crowds/Tourists/Londoners/Figures

A Note on Staging

The stage is on two levels. The underground vault in which Jane and VIII are buried can be seen throughout, beneath the rest of the action that takes place above it. In Act Three the vault is opened up and the characters are able to move up and down between the two levels.

One

Four areas of the stage.

Area 1: The Vault. Four coffins: In the centre is Henry VIII's, damaged and broken. To his left is Jane Seymour's coffin intact and to his right another with a baby's coffin placed on top of it. These last two remain unopened throughout. The ground is covered in rubble and wood.

Area 2: Sudeley Castle

Area 3: Peterborough Cathedral

Area 4: Tower of London

“Beginnings”

Darkness.

A Woman screams.

....

St. Mary's Church, Sudeley Castle. Kateryn Parr's tomb.

On top of a tomb lies the effigy of Kateryn Parr. A stained-glass window made up of three panels shows Thomas Seymour, Kateryn Parr and Henry VIII. The effigy begins to shake. Kate bursts out of the effigy skin. She stumbles away from the tomb and tries to peel the skin off but it sticks to her.

Kate Kate. I'm Kate. (*She touches her stomach.*) I'm empty. Thomas, is it you? I'm listening.

She listens, but silence. Then words appear on the side of the tomb: “The Heart is at Peterborough” followed by “Take it to the Tower”.

It's not you, is it...If I go to Peterborough will I find out who sent me? Which being is it, a husband? God..? (*She speaks to the image of Seymour in the window.*) I'm not mad am I? Where did you go? (*She puts her hands over her heart, tries to feel it beating. She can't.*) Where did I go?

The words "Meet Me where I am Interred" flash up on the tomb.

I'm woken by breezes and ripples in the earth and then sounds that make you shake.
I'm listening for you. Where are you, Thomas?

In the stained-glass window, the image of Thomas Seymour disappears, leaving Kateryn and Henry VIII.

Henry? I didn't listen for you.

....

Sudeley Castle, the Museum.

Seven figures without faces, a King in the centre: It is Henry VIII and his wives. Kate enters, still trying to peel off the effigy skin. She faces the figures.

Kate The Heart is at Peterborough. So I am...I am...

If this is Henry, why are we all together? We were never together. But they're not real.

She touches the figure of Kateryn Parr. The figures hold out their tokens. A rose for Katherine Howard, a ring for Anne of Cleves, Anne Boleyn's necklace, a pomegranate for Katherine of Aragon, a letter for Kateryn Parr. Jane Seymour's hands are empty but she holds them out. The faceless figures speak.

Figures Mind

 Heart.

 Head.

 Wit.

 Stranger.

 Womb.

Kate takes the tokens from each figure.

Kate If it is you, Henry, then I can do that, I can find these women and give them back their expression and their possessions and bring them to you. As God is God, he will make me work for my peace of mind. (*To the Figure of herself.*) Do you know what will happen in the end?

Silence.

....

Peterborough Cathedral. Katherine of Aragon's grave.

A narrow marble slab on the ground. A vase of flowers. Above it, her name glows.

Kate enters. She sees the glowing words. She knocks on the slab. She pulls it open, as if it weighs nothing and gets a smack in the face as Katherine tries to pull it back over herself.

Kate I expected sharp words and not sharp nails.

Katherine Let me remain in my former estate. I am not...not listening to you. There was screaming all through when it should have been quiet. I recognise these cycles. There are people moving and then there is stillness and it goes around and around.

Kate Night and day. I've seen them again since I was forced out of marble and stone. Did you know I was coming?

Long pause

Katherine What are we?

Kate Have you forgotten? (*Pause.*) We are not alive. We are dead but we are not gone. You are my mother's friend, my mother's Queen. The first wife of my husband and I was his last.

Katherine Wait. I must—

I cannot—

She clutches at her chest.

Do you feel..anything? I have stabbing pains.

Kate I can't feel anything there.

Katherine My husband...Did he receive my letter? I wrote to him about our daughter, I asked him to care for her. Have you brought me his reply? (*Sees the writing above her.*) What does it say?

Kate 'Katherine Queen of England'. Do you know that this is your grave? I know you can't...These slabs cover us, keep us from real things.

Katherine I am still in England, it is not Spain?

Kate You would not be Queen of England if it was.

Katherine So I must continue to speak in your language. (*Pause.*) I feared I was forgotten, but I am here as a Queen.

Kate You can't stay here though, we have to go to London. The Tower.

Katherine Is Henry still alive? Where is he?

Kate He isn't still alive. We've all been dead for... I think it's a long time.

Long pause.

Katherine I do not know where I am.

Kate I know. It's not our England outside this church.

Katherine Who does it belong to?

Kate I don't know.

Katherine Is it purgatory?

Kate It's a pause. But we have been called. A task has been set.

Katherine I am not called.

Kate We all are, by him. By Henry, he calls us to him.

Katherine All?

Kate All his wives.

Katherine All. How many wives did my husband find?

Kate ...Six.

Katherine And I suppose all his many mistresses are called as well.

Kate (*holds out the pomegranate*) Recall your responsibility.

Katherine What are you saying?

Kate Something is happening and we have to do as we are told. You can't lie here, pretending to be resting in peace when you are not. I know you're not.

Katherine You know this do you? What else do you know about me? Just because you say you had my husband too does not make us equal. I will keep moving forward through to Paradise.

Kate You're not moving, you're stuck. Get up. Please.

Katherine Are they all such, are they all like you, these other wives? And what else is there? Will I find something in being pulled back?

Kate You already have, haven't you? You already know you are shown here as a Queen and that your husband is calling for you. Would you not go to him?

Katherine But you say that we are not alive. We can do nothing.

Kate He's calling for you Katherine. He wants you back.

Katherine Do I want him back... (*Pause.*) I have not used my feet for so long.

Kate You'll get used to them.

Katherine And what else? Will I know how to be like myself if I am not living?

....

“Prisoners”

Darkness

A woman screams

Jane Head

 Wit

....

The Chapel of St. Peter ad Vincula, Tower of London

Kitty is in the chapel. She is dressed very plainly, no hood and no jewels. Anne is lying beneath the Altar. She lifts up the cloth and peers out from underneath at Kitty.

Anne Was that you?

Kitty No, not this time.

Anne Death is anything but quiet.

Anne disappears beneath the Altar again.

Kitty How many times is that now? At least a hundred. *(She sees that Anne has gone.)*
 Anne, come back. I'll be the one screaming if you keep disappearing under there.
(Pause.) Don't you want to moan with me about how boring it is to be here?
 Anne? What are you doing?

Anne I'm drafting an alternative Death Speech.

Kitty Again? How many is that now?

Anne comes out from under the Altar. She is dressed the same as Kitty.

Anne If I counted them, it might tell us how long I've been here like this.

Kitty I don't know why you bother, you'll never get a chance to say it.

Anne More honesty this time. Perhaps even an explanation.

Kitty Rather than 'Die, Henry, die, you heartless, lying fuck'?

Anne Did I say that?

Kitty Screamed it, actually.

Anne Oh yes, I did. One of those horrific, despairing moments...Not much dignity in those words though.

Kitty Who cares about dignity?

Anne I do. You wouldn't say that to him if he was standing right in front of you now, Kitty Howard.

Kitty I would.

Anne I remember when you first came here. You howled for years, non-stop. Choking on dry tears. *(Pause.)* You wouldn't say a word.

Kitty Perhaps that's what he said.

Anne Who?

Kitty The man who screamed a minute ago.

Anne That was a woman.

Kitty They're still dead. *(Pause.)* Do you want to play?

Anne Not especially.

Kitty I'll do Henry, you do Jane. Your favourite.

Anne Go on then.

Kitty Kick him up the bum.

Anne Scratch out her eyes

Kitty Carve him into a new shape, stab him with loads of thorns

Anne Boil her alive in the king's favourite pie

Kitty Strip him of his gold and his manhood and chop it into pieces and pound all he's worth—

Anne It's not working, Kitty. I don't enjoy it like I used to. I never enjoyed it. Oh God, I can't believe I've let myself be reduced to this..

Banging above them.

First screaming and now this.

Kitty Maybe they have started pounding manhood into mincemeat. Let's hear it then, this speech.

Anne Ok, but it's not the one. I don't think it's the clearest way to get the point across. *(She stands as if addressing a crowd.)* I'm not guilty. But judged anyway. And I don't deserve to be here, wasting away like this. Not like Miss Kitty Howard, who was guilty of everything..

Kitty Shut up.

Anne Touchy subject, you must be guilty.

Kitty Leave me alone.

Anne I thought you wanted to swap stories again.

Kitty No.

The banging gets louder.

Anne The time has come. The ravens of the Tower have left and God's Judgment has arrived in their place. How long do you think it will take for the world to end?

Kitty It doesn't matter, we'll be here forever.

Anne It shames me to think I'll have to make my answers in this old this garb. I feel so unprepared for this moment. I stopped watching for it and I should have been waiting.

More banging. Kate bursts in through the window, glass shatters over them. She has a map of London and seems to have picked up a lot of dirt on her travels.

Kate Ladies.

Silence.

Kitty You've broken our window. How did you do that?

Kate With work I wasn't prepared for. Didn't you hear me trying to get in? Breaking in and out of stone, I never knew I had so much strength.

Anne You're not a prophecy. You're not here to signal the end of the earth.

Kate Of course I'm not. I'm here for you. If you're who I think you are.

Anne Who do you think I am?

Kitty Be very careful how you answer that.

Kate holds out Anne Boleyn's necklace.

Anne That's mine. Where did you get it?

Kate It is only a replica. But I thought you might like even a fake returned to you, you wouldn't be Anne Boleyn without it. And how are you these days, Kitty? (*She gives her the rose.*) Sorry, it got rather squashed.

Kitty I don't remember you.

Kate I'm Kate. Number six. I'm the last one.

Anne What, you're all those things at once..

Kitty The last what?

Kate Wife.

Kitty Oh, you came after me. How do you know you're the last one, he could have had another three after you.

Kate Well...I outlived him.

Kitty Should have been me, really...

Kate Could you have held on for another four years?

Kitty Four years! He never gave up, did he?

Anne What did he die of? And don't say it was old age or a broken heart.

Kate Among other things..

Kitty Was it his pusy leg, God, I can still smell it.

Anne Did you die naturally?

Kate Sort of.

Kitty You look..almost perfect.

Kate *(Indicating the covering of effigy skin and dirt.)* Apart from all this.

Kitty Compared to us. At least you've got nice things to wear.

Kate Have you seen the people walking around outside? They're covering even less than you two. Women showing their legs, men without their hats. All carelessness and exposed limbs. Barely a jewel or expensive fabric. But the guards still stand. Such disparity is baffling. And Katherine was positively disturbed. She keeps holding her chest as if she's about to faint.

Anne Katherine.

Kate Oh. Yes, did I not say..?

Anne What didn't you say?

Kate Katherine and I are here together. She's outside. She didn't want to come in.

Kitty Katherine who?

Anne Did she send you in here to check on the state of my decay? So Queen Katherine needs to see me in my eternal suffering.

Kate We came together in all our eternal suffering—

Anne Well, thank you for coming to visit. You can leave now.

Kitty No, stay with us. Anne, let her stay.

Kate I have to go anyway. Do you want to come with me?

Kitty We can't go past the walls of the Tower.

Kate Have you ever tried?

Kitty Not really. We just thought...

Anne We're prisoners, chained, we can't get out.

Kate But I got in.

Anne Yes, you did.

Pause.

Kitty Where are you going?

Kate Shall we get out of here, and then I'll explain.

Anne You haven't explained much so far.

Kate We're going to Windsor, Katherine and I. That's where he's buried. He wants us there. You as well.

Kitty Who?

Kate Henry.

Kitty He wouldn't want that. Because of what we did.

Anne Why does he want us there?

Kate I don't know, exactly. I was told to get Katherine and come to the Tower, to get you. So here I am.

Anne Who gave you that power? Why you?

Kate I was listening.

Anne We've been listening. Longer than you, number six.

Kate Just think, he's called us all at once, he must need something from us.

Kitty Whatever it is, he's not getting anything from me.

Anne It depends how he asks. Shall we go then?

Kate You're coming?

Anne Of course I am. Any woman would want to meet her rivals, wouldn't she, look them in the eye. And I want to know what could possibly prompt him to call us back. To look him in the eye.

Kate I've barely had to persuade you.

Anne It's a chance for freedom, Kate the Sixth.

Kate Don't call me that, please. I'm just Kate.

Anne And I'm just Anne. Or I was before people threw words at me and they stuck.

Kitty Look, if we're going let's stop talking about it and just go. I can't stand it in here anymore.

Anne You're right, we should go.

Anne and Kitty move towards the door.

Kate We need to go this way, out the window.

Anne I'd much rather use the door, you're filthy.

Anne opens the door...

....

The Vault.

Jane becomes visible.

Jane Six little girls. Six young ladies. Six wives.

Six stories. Six fighters. Six lives.

She listens.

....

“Living History”

Tower Green, Tower of London

Katherine is alone, beside the memorial. She sits on top of it. Kate, Kitty and Anne join her.

Gradually, as they talk, tourists come over, thinking it is a piece of drama, taking photographs, joining the circle.

Anne Here she is, the Spanish Katherine.

Katherine Mistress Anne. I never thought to see your face again. Your eyes are not glowing now.

Anne Any particular reason why you chose to sit here?

Katherine It was quiet.

Anne A grassy spot. The stream of blood has been grown over.

Katherine I'm sorry?

Anne Good. This is where I died. That monument has my name on it, didn't you see?

Katherine I did not look at it. *(Pause.)* What do you mean, you died here?

Anne *(She puts on the necklace.)* You know what it means. I died on a scaffold and not in a bed.

Katherine And for what?

Anne attempts a small laugh. She turns away from them.

Kate I told you this, Katherine.

Katherine Yes. You did. I like to hear it from Mistress Anne's lips.

Anne And here it is marked. My name bejewelled on a monument.

Kitty Look, there's my name as well. They've jewelled me up as well. *(She looks around her.)* Is this really it? It looks so different, there are more buildings, more people. And look. *(She point above them.)* Buildings made of..of windows. Is this still London or is it somewhere else?

Kate It is both.

Anne What are all these people? They're certainly not condemned to die, they're far too carefree. What do they think this place is?

Kate It's no longer a place for executions, they're not here for that. I don't even think this is a prison anymore.

Anne So why am I still here if it's not?

Kitty I wouldn't be going to watch executions. And that's not just because I got stumped myself. I can think of much better things to do that don't involve any bladed objects.

Katherine You died here also? What is your age?

Kitty What's yours? (*She notices the crowd forming around them.*) Anne, who are these people and what are they doing?

Anne Well, they seem to be staring.

Kate At us?

Kitty Can they tell who we are? Do they know we're...not as alive as them?

Kate I hope not, they might send us back to our graves.

Kitty I don't want to go back, I want come with you.

Katherine Is this the cousin, this girl, the cousin of Anne Boleyn?

Kitty I'm Kitty.

Katherine Kate told me about you, what you did.

Kitty What did I do?

Katherine You insulted my husband.

Kitty Did I?

Katherine Did you also bewitch him like your cousin, play with his affections? You made him unhappy.

Kitty You don't know that.

Katherine Do not speak to me.

Kitty Well I'm saying words and you're listening to them, so I must be speaking to you.

Katherine Just like your cousin. I refuse to carry on with this, this wicked, this false shrew. We have nothing to keep us together.

Kate Ladies, we have to try. Kitty, behave yourself, you know who this is. Anne, can't you..?

Anne What makes you think I have any influence?

Kitty Not one of you is my mother, you can't shut me up.

Katherine I would not be your mother. I am better than that.

Kitty He'd completely forgotten about you by the time I got into his bed. Oh, we did spend a lot of time there, you know. He was very, very happy.

Kate Kitty.

Kitty We'll ask him, shall we, who made him happier.

Katherine I would never ask him that, I know what was between us was superior to anything he pretended with you, with any of you. My tomb says I am a Queen. Queen of England. There are no words such as those in this place. At least with this knowledge I can force myself to continue.

Anne Still hanging onto to the title then, Princess Dow-Ager.

Long pause. Kitty sulks. A Beefeater approaches.

Beefeater What's this, an old wives' gossip?

Kitty Do I look old to you?

Beefeater You look like a bunch of sourpusses to me. What's the matter, don't your costumes fit or something? With a face like that, no public's going to want to take your picture.

Katherine Take what?

Beefeater All hail your paying audience.

Kitty Paid, for us? What are we doing?

Beefeater Who are you playing?

Girl It's the Six Wives of Henry VIII. They were talking about Anne Boleyn.

Anne They are talking to Anne Boleyn. Perhaps I should introduce my comrades? Kate the Sixth, I only met her today, Miss Kitty Howard and my old adversary Katherine, with whom I have been reunited.

Girl You don't look like Anne Boleyn. You're not dressed right.

Anne Please don't remind me of that. I've become a plain Jane and I can't bear it.

Beefeater We haven't got a Jane Seymour have we?

Katherine And should never have. My husband never once looked at her. He was looking at a concubine and her sister.

Anne Do you refer to my sister as a concubine?

Katherine You may call her that if you wish, but I was talking of you.

Kate Anna, from Cleves, she is the other one who is missing.

Beefeater Divorced Beheaded Died, Divorced Beheaded Survived. That's the lot, so play the parts.

Anne Is that our conclusion? You've already told the end of the story with that, what's the point?

Kitty Which is the best part?

Beefeater The survivor, I'd say. Or one who meets a sticky end.

Kate So we're just performers to you? Women in costume.

Beefeater You're the wives of Henry VIII.

Katherine I will sit out and watch. The court and the stage are for Henry. Henry plays the champion and I support him from the front row.

Anne I understand it now. We replace the scaffolds as entertainment.

Beefeater It's a bit difficult to chop people's heads off these days. We're not allowed to do that anymore.

Anne What about burning?

Beefeater No.

Kitty Hanging?

Beefeater No, we have none of it now. We just have a lot of very full prisons.

Kitty So what does 'E R' mean, on your uniform?

Beefeater Very funny, you know I get asked that every day. That's what, the fiftieth time..

Kitty Tell me, and then maybe I can tell everyone else before they ask you.

Beefeater It means Elizabeth Regina, for Queen Elizabeth II.

Katherine The second Elizabeth, who was the first?

Beefeater *(For the sake of the gathering crowd.)* Queen Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen and the last of the infamous Tudors. Good Queen Bess ruled England for forty-five years. Daughter of Henry VIII and his second wife Anne Boleyn. She came here to the Tower as a prisoner, under her sister, Bloody Mary.

Pause.

Anne This means Elizabeth and I were here together once. Trapped inside the same stone walls. Do you think she came to find me when she was here? *(Pause.)* Our daughter, imprisoned and then a Queen. What a reversal of her mother's story.

Long pause.

Katherine Bloody Mary?

Beefeater Died childless, burnt a lot of Protestants.

Katherine Heretics. This is my Mary? A Queen also.

Kitty She hardly ever spoke to me, except to tell me what I was doing was wrong. Indecent. She said I didn't behave like a Queen. She used to look at me and Henry and scowl.

Katherine Henry never had a son that survived?

Kitty Did Edward not survive then?

Beefeater Edward did survive, he was nine when he took the throne. *(Laughs.)* Henry's longed-for son is one of the most forgettable kings of England.

Kate He was nine, you just said it yourself. All his life he was overwhelmed by impending responsibility. Any young boy would be.

Beefeater I don't think Henry would have been very impressed, after all that work.

Katherine And which mistress did he belong to?

Kate Jane's son.

Katherine Jane Seymour? Kateryn, why did you not tell me this before? About this boy, about Mary. You only said the fate of each of the other wives, I remembered the pattern.

Anne Tossed Chopped Expired, Dumped, Stumped Retired.

Katherine Do not say that. Why did no-one tell me that Mary ruled after her father? Did you know the son?

Kate Yes, I knew him, spoke to him.

Katherine *(To Anne)* Did you know about him?

Anne Kitty told me.

Katherine That plain and simple little thing had a son...I can't- I won't have it. And you?

Kate No. Henry and I had no children.

Katherine What about my son? All our children, did he just forget them? We were married for over twenty years. Did he ever love her as he loved me? I loved his friends and my enemies and I gave him many children. If it pleases God to take them from you then you must let him..

Woman 1 Jane Seymour was his favourite though.

Anne A favourite? She was nothing. She didn't know how to form an opinion.

Kate Whereas we formed too many.

Katherine You?

Woman 1 What did you do?

Kate I almost suffered the same fate as Anne. I was nearly beheaded.

Woman 1 I thought the young one was beheaded, the one who had loads of affairs.

Kitty Loads is a bit of an exaggeration, you know..and he didn't have to kill me.

Katherine You do not think adultery is treason?

Beefeater Not anymore..

Kate I'm Kateryn Parr. I was named after Katherine because my mother was one of her ladies.

Beefeater She had lots of husbands as well. Going for Henry's record.

Kate I only had four. Henry would have had me put to death. His anger was brought out against me by my enemies – his and mine. He would have sent me to the scaffold and I would have lost my head on a bed of straw. And I would be buried here with the others, a prisoner forever. He even signed the warrant for my arrest. I saw it myself. Just in time.

Woman 1 *(To the Beefeater)* Is that right?

Beefeater Not such a model wife, eh.

Kate It had little to do with being a bad wife. He was old then and he was in pain. He was unsure..

Anne But would you have had a Frenchman and his sword to do the deed, I think not.

Beefeater *(For his audience.)* Yes, ladies and gentlemen, Anne Boleyn, the first Queen of England ever to be executed was given the mercy by her husband of a skilled swordsman. She died boldly. She gave a speech of courage and asked the crowd to pray for the King who had condemned her to death.

Anne And I paid the executioner £20. How knowledgeable you are, sir. Don't forget the delay, sir, of thinking myself prepared and then having to wait an extra day to become Queen Anne Lackhead. And don't forget to say that my body was buried in an arrow chest, my head wrapped in a rag, or that as I waited and prayed to die boldly, as you say, my heart nearly burst out of its bosom. And please don't forget that there were others...there were others, even a brother...

Pause. Anne goes to the monument. Their audience waits.

Kate Anyway...

Katherine Yes, Kateryn, why did you almost die?

Kate I had tried to educate Henry about the religious state of this country. He was reluctant to move forward. I could get quite..passionate in my speech.

Anne What changed? He used to enjoy passionate speeches. Did he grant you more mercy than me? How much did he fight for you to begin with and how much did you earn that mercy?

Kate I asked forgiveness and I shut my mouth.

Anne *(Laughs)* You didn't defend your opinions then. The passion drained out of you in the face of death. Not so radical as I thought.

Kate He could still be merciful then, if one was humble. It did save my life.

Anne Your mortal life, perhaps. Sorry Kate, a name on a death warrant against two severed heads will never win.

Kate It's true, of course, that being the first English Queen to be executed is something worth being famous for, but there are all sorts of breeds of suffering.

Pause

 Time ran out. He didn't last much longer and I couldn't change anything after that.

Kitty Can I have my turn now? To tell them what happened to me.

Katherine They know what happened to you.

Anne *(Picking up a book on the ground)* What is this?

Woman 1 It's about Henry and his wives.

Kitty We're in a book?

Woman 1 You're in lots of books. Too many to choose from.

Katherine Who writes these books

Beefeater Lots of different people. Historians, novelists, screenwriters.

Anne Scholars. Men.

Woman 1 And women. That one's by a woman.

Anne Where can I get one?

Kate Why do you like our story? Because of him?

Beefeater Because it's excessively dramatic, isn't it.

Woman 1 He didn't care what happened to people. He just dumped them, got rid of anyone.

Girl And he was fat and moody.

Katherine He was not always like that. He was never supposed to be a king. But he could be so amorous. You could not know his grace and his loves. There was so little calm in him, everything was movement and energy.

Kate So different as an old man. Privacy was more important than pageantry then.

Katherine You must think of what his other women were and how they changed him.

Woman 1 If all that happened today then there would be documentaries all over the place. Channels 4 and 5 would be getting in there. They'd become celebrities, but in a different way to what they are now.

Beefeater He really missed out on all the right media, didn't he? All those divorces would be very expensive for him. Great stuff for the tabloids, eh.

Kitty Are you saying that if I lived now, he wouldn't be allowed to kill me?

Woman 1 Knowing Henry he might murder you anyway..

Katherine How well do any of you know him?

Anne It wasn't just for alleged adultery that I was executed. You heard Kate saying how close she came to dying as a traitor. It's about what a woman should be, and what she is in reality. It's about how dangerous, how powerful she is.

Kate That she, particularly a Queen, should keep her mind limited. Or not cuckold her husband.

Pause.

Katherine These thoughts, these words are so wrong. I have tried not to imagine other ways of ending. Divorce is not *nothing*, and you speak of it not seeing the sin in it, the wrong in it. It is not standing for yourself, it is not being a wife, the wife you are.

Beefeater Queen Katherine speaks—

Katherine Be silent. You insult me. And stop this continual flashing of lights, each one makes me blind. I want to go.

Kate We will, this is not how I like to learn. Anne, does it say in that book where Anna of Cleves is buried?

Beefeater She's at Westminster Abbey.

Kate Is she? Another name I know. But the city is a maze that I can't find my way into, let alone out of. I've got a map, if you could show me how to get there..?

Kate and the Beefeater look at the map. The tourists begin to drift away. A Tower of London Guidebook is left behind. Anne picks it up and starts to follow the crowd, the history book is still in her hand.

Kate Where are you going? We've wasted time already.

Anne You've had your turn, now it's mine. I want to see how well I've survived.

She goes.

Kate If we're competing for survival, then surely I win.

Kitty I thought we were competing for fame...

One of the tourists comes up to Kitty and takes a photo right in her face. The camera flashes.

....

“Strawberries”

Kitty Nothing was said of me, except loads of affairs. But they would rather it be about my marriage affairs? People like hearing about dirty old men. And scandal stamped on his heart. So open up your ears. He liked me plump. He said he liked my soft skin, my rosy cheeks, he said I was tender meat, his favourite kind, that

he would eat me up in one juicy bite, not so chewy as the others. And he'd had to do plenty of chewing in the past. He would catch me...panting beasts, like a hunt, limbs and flushed skin, suffocating under him...rushing blood. He fucked youth, and then at the end, on a scaffold, I was Youth, fucked.

So many hands, everywhere...how were there so many hands. They seek you out, these men with their hands. Soft...and sharp poking fingers. The music teacher, he caught me by the puss. Caresses, not gentle. Brutal. Even bruising sometimes. Other times, they made me laugh so loud he would stuff his fingers in my mouth. They said I should love being adored, they all did, and they seemed to know it and I believed it. I should be moulded in a bed, cupped in secrecy and opened up. Culled and peppered. That's what I was for. I believed them. Practice makes perfect, doesn't it. In a bed or on a block. I couldn't know where I would end up, who would be allowed to bed me. Before I was married, I had a pretend husband, Francis. The name didn't even mean that much, not really. It made it more of a game if we used nicknames when we were naked together and when he fed me strawberries...and when he used me like my real husband did. I didn't want to feel guilty, I didn't think it would matter, but it mattered more than me. My real husband never fed me strawberries, he fed me the possibility of Queen. Really, who doesn't want to be a Queen?

I go over and over what I would say. But then I get stuck. Fat Husband. Pig Husband. He was meant to beat me to the grave. A huge heft of meat in a box. And we're going to open it up...?

....

“Remember My Name”

The Vault, Windsor Castle

Jane sits on her coffin. Her dress and appearance are immaculate. She checks VIII is not listening and then moves away from his coffin so he cannot hear.

Jane What are we waiting for? For Jane's torment to end.

I need to see her face, the one who sent him back to me. And ask her why she is not here with me, ask her how she managed to escape an eternity with him. Who could be at peace with him? Perhaps it is the lack of light and the smell of earth that make him seem so unlike greatness.

VIII stirs in his coffin.

VIII Kate. Kate!

He appears. He is horribly decayed, a rotten mess compared to Jane.

What's that face? It's Kitty, is it?

Jane No.

VIII Katherine.

Jane With so few names to choose from...

VIII An Anne then.

Jane No.

VIII Who is left?

Jane Those are your other wives. I am the one you keep leaving out.

VIII Not the one who covers me in kisses? Kiss me, madam. Show me I am your only husband.

Jane Will you remember my name, if I do?

VIII I don't need to remember it. I don't want to speak it. Not the names of my curses. Kiss me.

Jane Henry is the name of my curse.

VIII There was one of them who answered back, a pair of piercing eyes and a tempest of words from a sharp tongue, but I struck out quicker, Ha! Come here.

She does not move.

There is no hole for you to hide in, not even your coffin, you know I'll get in there with you. Come here, to me.

She obeys. He stares at her closely and then touches her all over, not gentle. She lets him, it happens all the time.

Look at your perfection. So clear. So unbroken. (*Pause.*) Tell me, am I still as flawlessly preserved as you?

Jane Of course you are.

VIII Of course I am. Only the damned who lie in the putrid earth of sinners crumble beyond recognition. They will never meet the God in Heaven.

Jane So you've said before.

VIII As God on earth, I would know.

Jane Who is God on earth now, it's not you?

Footsteps are heard overhead. The roof groans.

VIII Everyday this damned noise. One day the roof will come down and crush me.

Jane One day.

VIII It's the Succession, I didn't do enough to change it. It's all those men I had whispering in my ear and telling me what to do. I see him, jabbing his finger in my eye, trying to get to my soul. The Lord was not satisfied with me as the head of his church. I did not fully exercise my right. I should have done more. Ha, why else would he keep me here, with you and these other..whoever they are? These nobodies, these nothings. I should be strolling through the Kingdom with the best of men, with a plucky little virgin on my arm. All curses banished forever. My limbs supple, my youth restored, my mind enriching and my self golden.

Jane Henry. Can I tell you what I dream?

VIII You should share mine. This is what you want for me.

Jane Yes...

VIII goes to Jane's coffin, looks inside as if he has lost something.

VIII There is one missing. I had two women who shared my dreams and they should both be here, relieving my waiting. But she is not. (*He goes and taps on the coffin*

on the other side of his.) A good lady, a useful lady, a lady Parr. Yes, good Kate, that was a true wife. I wanted her buried here, see, this is her gap. But she is missing, why is she missing?

Why am I abandoned?

Jane I have no answers for you.

VIII Answers are something you cannot give. You have no name.

Jane I have a name.

She starts to get up. He pulls her back and keeps his hands on her.

VIII Don't move.

Jane I want to rest.

VIII I tell you when you can rest.

Jane I miss the silence. Those years of silence.

VIII What about my silence? Think of my peace of mind.

Jane To think of my peace, I have to think of yours.

....

“Last.”

Kate Kate the Sixth, that's what I am to them. No-one knows who I am. I know the ending, but I don't enjoy it. It doesn't end with me, it ends with him. Because he was not just a husband but a king and who wants to hear about the life of a widow? Four husbands. I wonder if they just suppose that Henry was my last one. I'd rather let them suppose it than tell them who he really was. Than tell them why I'm really here.

I'm tired of working, tired of struggling and surviving. But I have to do it. I have to be the one who fits us together. I just have to keep telling myself that I'll find what I want. And what I want..is to find out what happened to Thomas. Maybe he will be in this same state as I am. And maybe I will find out that this is all death

really is, and we won't be separated anymore. I didn't listen for Henry, I didn't want him. But I needed him, didn't I, to get me out. Damn him. I belonged to another man when I died and yet still he can obligate me into running to his side. Why can he do that? Why isn't it Thomas' words that I can hear? Why can't I see his face? I've just kept losing him, over and over again. Death isn't relief, it's worse than lonely. Loving someone obscures everything else, and you can't see properly, you can't hear properly, you can't believe well enough and then you feel ashamed for wanting something you should never have wanted. And Thomas is what I want. He is what I am lying awake for, who I can't embrace death for. And because of this, God doesn't want me. I wanted more than I was granted, and now I am suffering.

Two

The Vault as before.

The rest is London

“Name-Dropping”

Big Ben chimes the quarter.

Kate, Anne and Kitty are queuing outside Westminster Abbey. Anne has a bag of books. She is showing the others. A little girl watches them.

Anne They're about us. To keep us entertained and well informed. Don't worry Kitty, there are plenty of pictures, you don't need to worry about all those words.

Kate You stole them though.

Anne They had plenty. I was reading one but it was taking me such a long time, so I decided just to take it and read it at my leisure.

Kate We're not on leisure time.

Anne I'm out of the Tower now and I don't know how long I'm going to be wandering around, waiting. It might be another thousand lifetimes before I'm free and I want something to do.

Kitty You've got me.

Anne Yes, that's why I want them.

Kitty Whore

Anne Bitch

Kitty Traitorous Hell.

Anne You want information about our prison, Kitty, here it is. Experience the tourist's Tower of London while I look for a picture of this Anna of Cleves.

She gives her the Tower of London Guidebook.

Kitty What's a tourist?

Katherine Truth-seekers.

Kate Story-seekers. You've just met a whole group of them.

Anne Paying story-seekers.

Kitty *(Looking through the guidebook.)* This isn't just about us though. I don't want it. I only care as long as I'm in it.

Anne That's your name right there.

Kitty Yeah, and that's your face. Where's my picture? *(She throws the guidebook over her shoulder.)* Where are we going after we've been to see Henry?

Katherine After?

Kitty What do we do after that, where will we go?

Kate We'll have to wait. And see.

Anne I like her not. That's what he said when he first laid eyes on her. I can picture it, see the stance, hear the bold, irate delivery.

Kitty He was pretty mean about her, you know. Anna was ok.

Katherine What is she like?

Kate Oh, she's nice, polite. Quiet.

Kitty You'll see in a minute why he wanted me so badly.

Katherine He was drawn far off course to find contentment. I believe he was never content again.

Pause. The lights fade on them as if they have gone inside.

Jane Stranger

....

Westminster Abbey

Two grey blocks (monuments). In between them is a short dark brown door, without a handle. What is written on the door is unreadable. Across from these is a set of low railings marking out a rectangle. Inside them is a crown laid on a bed of roses. This is the joint monument of Elizabeth I and Mary I.

Kate, Katherine, Kitty and Anne enter. Anne makes a point of using the picture in the book.

Kitty Wait a minute. This can't be right. I mean, look at it in here. How did Anna get here when I've ended up in the chapel of the doomed? She couldn't even do anything.

Kate She was a nice person though, from what I remember.

Kitty She wouldn't dance either. I think she had about three left feet and a big nose.

Katherine You were defending her only minutes ago, keep your thoughts to yourself.

Katherine and Kate move away.

Kitty Why doesn't she like me?

Anne Why would she?

Kitty Can't she have fun? She's far too sensitive.

Anne Katherine never could handle the truth. (*She drops the book. As she bends to pick it up, she stops, seeing what is on the page.*) Elizabeth.

The brown door lights up and the writing glows: "Anne of Cleves / Queen of England / Born 1515. Died 1557"

Katherine Another Queen of England.

Kate Follow the names in lights. I can't open it, someone's removed the handle. (*She bangs on the door.*) Anna?

Katherine Can you be sure that she is awake?

Kate Of course she is. Why wouldn't she be?

Kitty It doesn't look like she gets a lot of visitors, no-one's bothered about her. Look, they just keep walking past. They're not even looking at us.

Kate *(Knocking.)* Come on, Anna.

The door opens and Anna appears. Anne looks at her once and then moves away from them all.

 Good, you are there. It's Kateryn Parr, remember me?

Katherine Does she speak English?

Kate I thought she spoke a bit.

Kitty She'll remember me. Smile, Anna, the waiting is over. Nothing, let's just go.

Katherine Maybe she did not hear the screaming.

Kitty You heard that? We thought it was just us. We thought someone was losing their head.

Kate I'll lose my head in a minute. We don't have time for this, we've already had to wait for Anne, got stuck in a hundred queues and nearly lost Kitty on the Thames. Anna, let me just say that I'm not going to accept any refusals from you. Even if you don't understand what I'm saying I will drag you to Windsor and present you to Henry myself, in pieces if I have to.

Pause

Anna I am thinking that I did not refuse anything. *(Pause.)* Of course you have not told me anything.

Kate Thank God.

Kitty We're going to see Henry.

Anna Henry. Why?

Kitty Well, I'm going to spit in his face. This is my chance to tell him what happened to me is all his fault.

Katherine You are both indecent and insulting.

Kate I think much of the fault was yours actually.

Anna You are going to see him to accuse him? Why do I need to go?

Kate No, that's not what we're doing. Kitty's just trying to stir things up. He wants us to go to him.

Katherine He is calling for us. It is our duty to answer.

Anna I do not need to go. I think I will stay...

Kitty But Kate says we won't go without you.

Anna I do not need to go. I have no...

Katherine Your attendance is all that we call for at the moment.

Anna I am only attending when I am invited.

Kate Well, we've brought you your verbal invitation. Remember I'm not accepting any refusals. (*She pulls Anna out and closes the door of the tomb.*) Where's Anne?

Kitty Wandered off.

Kate Oh, ladies, your children were so much easier to manage.

....

Westminster Abbey

Anne has found the tomb of Elizabeth and Mary.

Anne Wake up, Elizabeth. Child. Old woman. Do you remember me? (*She leans over the railings, picks up the crown.*) If we faced each other again now, with our eyes wide open, you would be my elder. How far you do surpass me. In age, in wisdom, in death. (*Pause*) Please wake up. Let me hear your voice.

Silence

I want to know you. Don't show me I am not worthy.

She retreats from the railings, dropping the crown. She tries to walk away, but she can't. She goes back to the tomb.

Are you calling me back?

And Mary is here too. Two sisters sharing this space, are you smiling to each other?

(Pause.) Can I share with you?

Anne climbs over the railings and lies down inside them.

Wake up, little Elizabeth.

....

“Consort”

Parliament Square.

Katherine and Anna. Katherine is feeling those stabbing pains.

Katherine What have they done to our country?

Anna I think it is not my country.

Katherine But it is a country we adopted. How long were you married to my husband?

Anna Not very long. A few months. It felt like only days.

Katherine Only a few months? Barely a marriage at all.

Anna No, of course. It was not given much of a chance to fall apart on its own.

Katherine He never did love you.

Anna I got a lot from him. I was looked after. He gave me houses, he called me his sister.

Katherine He gave you things, he gave houses for a discarded lady. Did you know, he had his own sisters?

Anna I had my own brother.

Katherine grasps at her chest.

Have I hurt you?

Katherine No.

Anna Why do you hold yourself like that?

Katherine It is God reminding me of myself. Do you feel nothing at all?

Anna Not like that.

Kitty arrives.

Kitty I think Kate thought I was going to move in in there. I wouldn't want to stay there. She says she's found Anne though. She was asking someone to open up one of the tombs and she got mad when they refused. Threatened him with her bag of books. So Kate's trying to calm her down. (*To Anna.*) You don't like Kate, do you?

Anna I don't– I am–

Kitty You looked like she was the last person you wanted to see.

Anna I was not expecting to see anyone.

Kitty You remember that time you came to court for Christmas and I had become the Queen and you had become nothing very much?

No reply, but she knows

You hated me then.

Anna No, I...

Kitty Well, maybe not hated. But you didn't like me.

Katherine You were invited back to the court? I was never invited back to the court.

Anna I just did not understand. It was a marriage and it was political and then it was just you..because you were pretty and I was not and because you were...understanding things that I did not.

Kitty You know what men really want, love affairs, not political affairs. Otherwise they end up with women like you two.

Katherine I am not...listening.

Katherine moves away slowly, unsteady.

Anna Should we go with her?

Kitty You can if you want. She's treating me just like her daughter did.

Anna Is that true? What you are saying about love affairs.

Kitty Why do you think he married the rest of us?

Anna I cannot say..

Kitty Because he wanted to have sex.

Anna And what did you want?

Kitty Me? I don't know, I suppose...I wanted to be the Queen. Didn't you?

Long pause

Anna I never really got my chance. *(Pause as she considers whether to continue.)* My mother, she did not tell me things..

Kitty Well neither did my mother.

Anna She, like mine, she wanted you to be unknowing?

Kitty Well, she couldn't really tell me things when she was dead. Not many people told me things. But I don't think Anne's mother told her much either, and she knows almost everything – but don't tell her I said that. I lived with my aunt, who was the definition of bitch, and she'd rather have slapped me round the face than tell me anything at all.

Anna I am wondering...how you did... What was it like with him?

Kitty What was it like?

Anna What was it like, with him?

Kitty You want me to make your dead cheeks blush?

Anna No, please, that part of being a wife, I did not know what it was.

Kitty What did he do with you?

Anna In the bed? He lay by my side, he kissed my hand, he....

Kitty Did he get on top of you?

Anna No. Is that what happens?

Kitty Sometimes.

Anna A man is using his wife?

Kitty Using and moving. Or fucking and sucking.

Anna I do not understand.

Kitty It's a bit late now, don't you think, to be asking me. Why don't you ask Henry about it when you see him?

Anna What can I say to Henry? He is my brother now.

Kitty Don't worry then, I'll do all the talking.

Anna Are you really going to spit at his face? I think he could still hurt you. If you can still feel things he can still feel them too.

Kitty I don't feel anything, I can't. And I'm going to do more than spit. I'll set fire to him. I'll set fire to the whole church if I have to.

Anna Why does he want us back?

Kitty Who cares?

Kitty exits.

....

“First.”

Katherine is sitting alone in Parliament Square.

Katherine What do I remember? It is myself, cold and in rags. A princess in rags, then a Queen in rags and old skin and her heart in tatters. And then it is him, as a boy, ten years old, at our first meeting when no-one knew they were looking into the

eyes of a king. In the beginning, I lived, I survived only on hope. Hope gave me a name, the best husband, it let me love at the start, but in the end it wore me thin.. Years of waiting for others to make decisions about where I should go, of what I might mean. And I am still waiting for some of those answers. What do I mean? I lost all my children, so I cannot be a mother. The one who survived I lost worst of all. If you have seen your children taken by death, you have an idea of where they go, but she is lost forever when she is taken away from you, still living.

A woman sits beside her.

Woman Alright.

She starts to eat a pastry. Katherine watches her then takes out the pomegranate.

Sorry, I just thought, spare seat. Are you waiting for someone?

Katherine Always my husband.

Woman I've been waiting for mine forever. He's not coming back though.

Silence

Katherine Do you have a knife?

Woman Sorry, don't carry one around usually. What is that?

Katherine A pomegranate.

Woman Not the best thing to get on the move.

Katherine On the move?

Woman Where are you going, with your husband?

Katherine We are not together. We are very apart. He tossed me aside, changed his values. He is buried with another woman.

Woman Buried? He's dead then?

Long Pause

Marriage vows are a pile shit. Aren't they. They don't mean anything anymore.

Katherine I do not believe that.

Woman No? I don't think they've done us much good.

Katherine You must fight for what you believe.

Woman Did you fight for your husband?

Katherine And for myself. I wish I could be able to get him back somehow.

Woman You believe in ghosts?

Katherine I am dead.

Pause

Woman So you're both dead.

Katherine Was he a victim? Is that the answer to him? Perhaps he was forced into his choices, by my enemies, by what he was. There must be a reason, more than that, more than that whore. I could never get him back again.

Woman Why do we get married? Love doesn't last.

Katherine A future. Duty.

Woman Duty!

Katherine Because we are told. We are destined to be wives and mothers, it is the most important feature of our sex. And because it keeps us for God.

Woman What does he know? I've got three boys, no husband, I work six days a week. Maybe I've even fallen asleep at my desk, I'm so tired, dreaming about some middle-aged dead woman who can't get over her husband. Well, you know what, there's no such thing as fairytales.

Katherine I believed in one once. Its champion is a person you would never understand. But you have already passed judgement on them.

Long Pause

Did my husband get what he prayed for? That young boy I saw, so full of promise, so anxious to do right by me and then so cruelly cast me aside. Would his brother have put me away with the same madness if he was king? And if Henry was not a king, what then. We would never have kissed, embraced, shared

those losses and those prizes. These boys might never grow up to be Kings, or men. Then their Katherines might never become a beaten heart.

Big Ben Chimes the hour. 1 o'clock.

....

“A Girl and a Boy”

St. George's Chapel. The Vault.

VIII sits, crying with frustration.

VIII Why me, why Henry? Reduced to this, this torment. I'm still a young man, a handsome man – look at my calves. Perfect calves, still. After fifty-five years growing them and wearing them now they're barely used. There's nobody to praise them, no poet. No wife.

Jane Am I not your wife then?

VIII And my beard, I feel it growing thin. Am I still feared? I used to inspire such dread, men would tremble. How can I see them afraid if I'm here? (*Pause, then suddenly he changes.*) Did I tell you about the girl I had, who was my wife. Which one you may ask, for I had a few, Ha!

He waits. Jane reluctantly plays the game.

Jane Which one is it Henry?

VIII Are we into double-figures yet?

Jane What did you have Henry?

VIII Wives, and some mistresses, but only one girl. I had a horse and a bossy widow. And a plain one, such a becoming piece of calico, nothing to say, so tame.

Jane She must have had some words.

VIII She was a fool.

Jane She is.

VIII I can't even remember what she looked like...

Jane Nobody thought

VIII Nobody thought she had much beauty. But I could believe in her compassion. She was small..small in..in

Jane Small in spirit.

VIII Spirit. My short rest.

Jane What was her name?

VIII Oh, Departure is my chief pain.

Silence.

I was the spare and I needed a spare. Oh, Arthur help me, help me brother. Tell me I was right about her. Were we both in Spain? She was wholly yours before she was mine, so she was never really mine.

Jane You're moving backwards.

VIII If a man should marry his brother's wife, they shall be heir-less.

Jane Yes, I remember. I remember Katherine then. Her reaction, the hurt. (*Pause.*) This girl of yours, you loved her?

VIII Loved, yes. Loved having her. I loved how she made me feel, inside, outside. This one was just right. Ha, Youth and Beauty. But I sent her off for the chop.

Jane I suppose I should thank you for not chopping me to pieces yet.

VIII Chop-chop.

Jane These wives insulted you. What's the point in thinking about them? When will you talk to me about me?

VIII When you do something worthy of talk.

Jane What about my son?

VIII Yes, yes let's talk about my son... (*He is trying to remember the name.*)

Jane Edward.

VIII Edward, Henry and Kate.

Jane Not Kate.

VIII Kate and Kitty and Anna. Edward and Elizabeth and Mary.

Jane Why didn't you call him Henry after yourself?

VIII Henry died.

Jane Wrong mother, you keep going back to Spain. You were scared the same thing would happen, weren't you?

VIII And then his mother had a girl.

Jane Oh God. When I was alive, at least there was a feeling of belonging somewhere.

VIII I'm so alone.

Jane You? You've never been alone.

VIII I don't want to be here.

Jane But you are here.

Jane hovers beside the baby's coffin. Pause.

VIII That's not him. That's not Henry.

Jane I know. This child is nothing of ours. Sometimes I wish it was and then I realise how selfish that is. To keep a child from living..

VIII Only God has that right.

....

“Heads or Tales”

National Portrait Gallery

No portraits are recreated on stage, only blank frames or canvases. There is a bench in the centre of the room.

Anna holds up a blank piece of canvas

Anna This is me, you see. A brief sketch. I was not drawn to this place, but I stayed here. And I am still here. *(Pause.)* There is nothing for me to say to him, we did not understand each other and I was never properly his wife. But I have been pulled into this group, it has been found for me. I am told where to belong, put somewhere. Because we all must be put somewhere, to make things easier.

She holds the canvas up, as if looking in a mirror. Silence as she studies it.

It is the same face. But looking through someone else’s eyes makes it terrifying, makes it dangerous, makes it... count. You see how you are seen. It is always a lie. I cannot say if this is me, I do not think I know.

Kitty screams.

Kitty Where the fuck am I?

Anne You’re right there screaming in my ear. Can’t you ever shut up!

Kitty Don’t you say that to me. Everywhere I go, no-one has any idea who I am. All they talk about is you, you and your stupid head. And look. Here it is again on the fucking wall. No sign of me. Ooo, Anne Boleyn’s so famous, we’ll write books about her and draw pictures of her and dedicate headboards to her. And let’s not forget Kate, this huge life-size portrait of Kate. Who cares about Kate? I don’t. I came before her, I must be more important. So where am I? I do exist, you know.

Anne *(Indicating the books.)* Katherine Howard has never been positively identified...

Kitty What does that mean?

Kate If there is a portrait, no-one can tell that it’s you.

Kitty But I was the Queen.

Life's so unfair.

Anne Well, I'll fuck off then, shall I? Look, I'll make it all better. (*She takes her portrait off the wall.*) I'm completely erased. No need to care about me, but best be nice to Kate or she'll throw you to the dogs without a thought like I will.

Anne exits.

Kitty I hate her sometimes. You wouldn't do that to me, would you Kate?

Kate It depends how well you hold that tongue.

Kitty You can hold it for me if it means that much to you. I can batter Henry without it.

Kate Look into his eyes and say that.

Kitty looks at Henry VIII's portrait.

Still feel sure?

Kitty Absolutely.

Anna You seem to dislike each other so much. Is this only from today, or have you always felt like this?

Kitty Anne of Cleves, Anne of Cleves, she makes everyone happy when she shuts up and leaves.

Anna You are turning on me now?

Katherine I was told your name was Anna.

Anna It is both, it is either.

Pause

Katherine I would arrange this room so differently, if I could.

Kate You would rearrange the world, Katherine. If you could.

Katherine It would be the three of us. Henry, Mary and myself. As it was first, as it is best.

Kitty And what about the rest of us?

Katherine I do not want to be worried about the rest of you.

Anna But I am worried. What are we doing here? You came to me and said we did not have much time, you did not give me time to think. But she is here looking at paintings and Kitty is making everybody upset. I am thinking that we only get further away from Windsor than closer.

Kitty Anna of Cleves, Anna of Cleves, everyone knows you're ugly and have no clue how to please..

Anna There are kinder ways to make your displeasure clear.

Anna moves away from them.

Kitty I'm just making fun, I don't mean it.

Silence.

Kate Do you ever—

I'm experiencing that dreadful feeling when there is a face you know you need to remember, you should have it memorised and be able to conjure it up forever, but it blurs every time you try to see it. Do you forget the faces of the people you loved?

Katherine I will not admit to it. It is frightening to lose like that.

Kate Yes. Frightening.

Katherine Who is it?

Kate His name was Thomas. I thought he would be here, but he's not.

Katherine What was he to you?

Kate *(She almost doesn't say.)* He was my husband. After Henry.

Pause

I thought I could...that this was my chance...to find him.

Anna I remember that scandal.

Kitty Scandal!

Kate I married him too soon. *(To Anna.)* I forgot you knew.

Katherine Who are you then? Your real name.

Kate Seymour. He's Jane's brother actually.

Kitty Thomas Seymour? I know him. He's in the Tower with me. God on earth, the world just gets smaller and smaller. He's never mentioned you though.

Kate What...what happened to him?

Kitty Head. Chopped. Off.

Long pause.

Kate So he is..like you then? A prisoner.

Kitty Well, yeah.

Pause.

Kate Does he...Has he ever talked about our child?

Kitty No, I don't think so. I can't remember. He's a bit of chaser though, isn't he, a chaser and a charmer. He knows some really, really dirty jokes. Likes to tickle me, even though I can hardly feel it. Men and hands, that what it is...Shame there aren't more girls like me in the Tower for him to—

Pause. Kate takes out the letter she has been carrying.

Kate I'll have to ask Anne.

Kitty Anne doesn't like him.

Kate Doesn't she?

Pause.

Kitty What's that?

Kate Something he wrote to me.

Kitty A real love letter. Can I see it?

Kate I'm wondering if it's all just pretend..

Anne enters, with more bags...

Anne More fiction, ladies.

Katherine You are a thief again.

Kitty Have you found any books about me yet?

Anne These aren't books. Consider where we are. It's all pictures, portraits and some costume. (*She empties the bags of all the books, key-rings, postcards etc.*) Some of these books are the size of Bibles.

Katherine And you have been using your time to read about yourself?

Anne No, Katherine. I've read about the blackened heart they found in your dead body, you were opened up and stitched back together. No wonder you're sore. I've learnt that Kate was indeed almost put to death. And how sadly inconsequential Kitty Howard is and was. There you are, Kitty, an explanation of why my head is bigger than yours. I've been using my time wisely, to learn about all of you.

Anna Why not ask us ourselves?

Anne Lies all round, wherever you find them. (*She is now wearing a Kateryn Parr mask.*) Guess who.

Kate Take that off.

Anne You can have mine. (*She holds out an Anne Boleyn mask.*) I know it's your secret desire to be like me. You tried to change your husband, but you gave up. You tried to get beheaded, but you backed out. See what it's like to wear my face for a while. No need to look into my eyes if you're wearing them.

Kate folds up the letter and stuffs it away. She stands and rips the mask from Anne's head.

Kate We're going.

Anne Don't you want to take advantage of your freedom..

Kate We are not free. We are under obligation. Still.

Anne You wanted to come here.

Kitty She did! She was looking for Seymour.

Pause

Anne Really?

Kitty She was married to him.

Kate We can talk about that another time.

Kate exits, followed by Katherine and Anna. Anne stops Kitty from following. Kitty rifles through the souvenirs and books. She picks out a mask of Jane Seymour and puts it on.

Kitty I'll be Jane. I bet she's the only one who is properly dead.

Anne What makes her think she can control the pace and tell me what to do?

Kitty She began it all, didn't she?

Anne What the hell has she got to say to Henry? (*She starts to put the things back into the bags.*) How do you feel about Seymour then? Guilty?

Kitty Why would I feel guilty?

Anne If she is the woman in his memory, he should feel something like guilt for the way he carries on with you. She's well rid of him.

Kitty How do you know he cares, or even remembers. It's easy to forget things.

Anne No, Kitty, it's a relief to forget things because they dwell on you forever. I've forgotten nothing. And he won't have forgotten her.

Kitty But he never ever talks about her.

Anne She is buried in his eyes. I thought there was something. Sometimes you can fool yourself into forgetting. But only sometimes.

Kitty Well I don't feel guilty. Why should I feel guilty about anything?

Kitty exits. Anne looks at Henry VIII's portrait.

Anne Are you fooled, husband, about me? I pray to God you still can't get me out of your head.

....

“Travelling Show”

London. A red phone box, Underground signs.

The wives stand separately across the stage. During the dialogue they attempt to move towards each other. The city moves on around them.

Anna Crossing the City, it is like

Kitty Crossing swords

Kate Crossing words

Anne Crossing wits.

I love it.

Anna I am too old for it

Katherine I hate it

The noise

Kate Like some sort of acceleration that we can't keep up with...

Kitty I want it to be more

Kate Something lower, angrier

Kitty Move!

Anna Tell yourself it is not real, it cannot be real

Anne This is a place of celebration

Kitty Escape

Kate Colour, richness

Katherine Control

Anna Foreign

Katherine Coarse, grey

Kitty Rain

Anne An aggressive pattern of living

Anna This is a nation of lions

Kate Excuse me, I need..I have to get through. I have to find...

Katherine Growling, sickening...stabbing, stabbing...

 The pain is the same

Kate Excuse me–

A car horn sounds. Kate screams.

Anne I must keep up with this pace – I must overtake it. I must be more.

Kate Katherine, come back. Anne?

Katherine Sick, violent, confused...stabbing, stabbing

 The pain is worse

Katherine collapses.

 This is not

 Not the way

 Not how I...

A crowd gathers around her, obscuring her from view.

Kitty What's happening?

Anne She's a waste of time.

Kate Let me through!

Kitty Is she alright?

Anne How will she be any use at all...She always slows things down. And she'll get everyone on her side, all these people, all of you.

Kitty No she won't. They can see, they might be able to help her.

Anne Do you expect them to help you? They don't see you as anything, no-one ever did. They can forget to see you or not see you at all.

Kitty How do you know what they see?

Anne fights her way through to Katherine. Anna follows but Kitty goes into the phone box and sits inside. She starts to pick the petals off the rose that Kate gave to her. The little girl appears. She comes over to Kitty with the Tower of London guidebook and drops it in front of her. Kitty gives her what is left of the rose.

Crowd Should we call an ambulance?

Kate There is no need to call on anything. We've done nothing wrong.

Crowd She doesn't look right, she might need to go to a hospital.

Anna We can take care of her. Inside there.

They help Katherine into the entrance to the nearest Underground, leaving Kitty in the phone box. The crowd around begins to disperse. Inside, a Busker is playing near them.

Katherine Too loud

Kate At least it's covered.

Anne We're never going to get to Windsor at this rate.

Kate Don't tell me that. It's all of you who keep wandering off. I'm trying to keep us together.

Anne Perhaps I'll just go on my own then.

Kate You can't.

Anne Give me a reason.

Kate We're a group.

Anne We're all each other's misfortune, that's all.

Katherine You have to wait. I think it will pass. I don't understand..

Anne This is freedom you're feeling. Let me get on with mine.

As she tries to leave Anne knocks the Busker's money pot over. He stops playing.

Busker Watch out!

Anne I never watch for long before I move.

Busker Don't take your bad mood out on me, I'm trying to keep this money, not send it flying.

Anne Well keep it. I hope it does such an inferior much good.

Busker Maybe if you got out of my way..

Anne Music for gold. Music as foreign as the city. You wish to find profit for bland entertainment.

Busker Look, you don't have to listen, you can just move on. I could get you in trouble, you know.

Anne Trouble. Yes, musicians seem to get me into trouble when I can't control my tongue. Like last time with that glum twenty-year-old. He could offer a melody but never the innocence of four other men. And neither could I. I watched him die. I watched them all die.

Kate Anne, what are you doing?

Anne I was responsible.

Busker What's with your eyes? They're burning.

Anne We clash too harshly with this world. We have already been cursed and damned over and over again while and it's all changed, above and around us. The crimes don't need a death sentence, the Queens don't need a king...

Anne starts to choke. She puts her hands on her neck, feels the necklace. She pulls it off.

Katherine This is wrong...

 Brutality growing, it only grows

 It is, this is...

 God's brutality

Manifestations of God's brutality

In the phone box, the little girl starts to sing:

Little Girl 'Oranges and Lemons,
Say the Bells of St. Clements
You owe me five farthings,
Say the Bells of St. Martins
When will you pay me,
Say the Bells of Old Bailey
When I grow rich,
Say the Bells of Shoreditch
When will that be,
Say the Bells of Stepney
I'm sure I don't know,
Say the great Bells of Bow
Here comes a candle to light you to bed
And here comes a chopper to chop off your head
Chop Chop Chop the last man's dead.'

Silence.

Kitty The candle kept having to be relit. In the end, I was practicing in the dark. Standing, kneeling down, leaning forward, placing my neck on the block, counting to five, leaning back, standing up. And then again.

The little girl laughs.

You can see me, can't you? Do you know who I am?

The little girl shakes her head.

Anne Stop this. Stop this chaos and pull some sort of veil over this disgust, this guilt. But no-one can tell me to stop.

The screaming starts again, it reverberates around the tunnel. Kitty hears it and covers her ears. The little girl laughs again, not understanding. The screaming stops.

Kitty Somebody must hate us.

Silence.

Katherine I am too tired, Kate, I have finally lost..my fire.

Kitty runs into the underground.

Kitty Did you hear it? It's horrible. And she was laughing at me. I can't..I don't like it.
Maybe we should go back to the Tower, Anne, we know it's safe there.

Anne I'm not going back.

....

“Beauty Marks”

Anne Goggle-eyed whore. Witch Bitch Concubine French Great-whore Evil-whore
Tempest Temptress Antagonist, but Modish Stylish Fashionable Passionable,
Woman. I know you want to be told of my intimate details, but I will not say. I
am captured within pages now, pictured in both words and images. Find traces
and form speculations and I shall fit myself into them. Some character called
Anne Boleyn. My body was left beneath an altar that seeks to disguise sin and
transform it into pain and guilt? What about the pain of those who were not guilty
when they died? I can't say their names aloud, those loyal servants. Perhaps
innocence needs a new definition.

What is the colour of inner turmoil, is it blackness, darkness? Might I find
something to be ashamed of? Something that is not responsibility for the death of
my brother..or of other men. I want to feel shame for something frivolous,
something ridiculous. I once was made up of skin and bone and passion and hope
and love and thought. What a waste it can all be at the end. Where does that
feeling go, such strong feeling when you are told it is now unwanted...A love that
endured, endured all of him, does it last? And where did his go, it wasn't to her,
how could our passion even translate? Among everything that is worth competing
for, be it life, role, spirit, freshness, not many of us survive when the story is
about men surviving. In the end the power was theirs, so even if Anne Boleyn is
remembered, it is not really me.

Anne drops her necklace in the Busker's money pot.

....

“Token”

Train. Anne joins the others in the carriage. They are all holding onto their seats as if they might be thrown off them. Anna is trying to look after Katherine.

Anna If only we could do something for her. Do you know why she still suffers like this? How can it be when we have no more feelings in our bodies?

Anne I can feel every crumbling speck of my body. Clearly you have been spared it.

The train stops.

Kate Anna, I forgot to give you your ring.

She takes out the ring and gives it to Anna. The train starts moving again.

Anna This is mine?

Kate In a way.

Anna Why do you never explain things?

Kate What?

Anna You keep things so close to you.

Kitty She's right. You've got to learn to share.

Kate This isn't about sharing—

Anna Then what is it about? Your last husband?

The train stops.

Kate No.

Kitty Do you want to ask Anne about him yet?

Kate No.

Anne Anne doesn't want to talk about him.

The train starts moving. Anne takes out the books again. She divides them into two piles.

Kitty When did you get so many?

Anne Those are about me. And the others are about everything else. You might be tired of it, but I want to learn everything.

Kate Me too. (*She reaches for a book.*) I don't want any more cruel surprises.

Kitty pulls out a little doll from a bag. Then she lies down on the floor of the train.

Anna What are you doing?

Kitty I don't like the way it moves and it sounds too loud. I'm starting to feel..strange inside. I don't feel safe anymore.

Anna You feel afraid.

Kitty Never.

Anne There's almost nothing about Jane Seymour. I said she had nothing to say for herself, didn't I. Defeated by childbed fever and that's it.

Katherine What about that son of hers?

Anne What about him. We know everything there is to know.

Anna Will we see Jane? I won't know what to say when I meet her.

Anne There isn't that much for you to say. (*She shows Anna the measurement for her pages in the biography.*) That's you.

Anna I was not married for long, I would not expect more than that...Perhaps I should have had my head cut off to be enough to compete with you.

Kitty shuffles further down the carriage, curling up with the doll. Anna holds out the ring to Kate.

I do not want this. I do not need it. If all I am is a token for this group, then I am thinking that ring is all you need. You force me to be part of it, but you do not take me seriously. You tell me why you need me.

Katherine Because of him.

The squeal of brakes. The train stops. Katherine takes the ring from Anna. She looks at it and then puts it on. Long pause.

Anne That sound in the tunnel, is it something you have heard before?

Anna No. I've never heard that terrible sound before today.

Katherine Why didn't you hear it?

The train goes.

Anna I don't know that. But it was a woman.

Katherine Yes, I know.

Anna If it is our husband who wants us why is a woman screaming?

Long pause.

Anne Why did I not think of that? I knew it too and then Kate burst in and said it was Henry who wanted us. I just didn't see it. How did I get it so wrong?

Kitty So we might not have to go to Windsor at all.

The train stops suddenly.

I feel sick

Kate No, we do. We have to go.

The train goes.

Kitty Why?

Kate To get out of this, this state we're in. To stop Katherine hurting, to stop us waiting and waiting, maybe for nothing. True, it sounds like a woman, but there were other signs from Henry. I saw them.

Anna It is her, isn't it?

Katherine We have come this far, all this way only to stare into an empty coffin.

The train stops.

Kitty I feel sick but there's nothing inside me to get out.

Kate Someone knows we're coming, I swear it. It must be him.

Anna You are not listening to me!

The train starts moving. Kate starts to rip at the books.

Kate This isn't what you should be thinking about. Together, we know all of their contents, and more. Why does it matter who is the most well known, who had the worst life, who suffered the most. There's something at the end of this, there must be. And we all need it. We all need to experience it. Perhaps no person's soul ever goes anywhere. Perhaps we are all just wandering. Perhaps this is all that death is. But he needs us and we needed him, to get us out. We can find out why.

Anne starts to pack everything back into the bags before Kate destroys them all.

Katherine I do not want more experiences. I no longer want to have to open my eyes or listen to any footsteps above me. I want an end.

The train stops. Silence.

Kate You are closer to it now than you were when I opened up your grave. We're so close.

Three

“A Cock among Hens”

The Vault and St. George’s Chapel above it. In the Chapel is a stained-glass window made up of four panels. These show Edward VI, Henry VIII, Jane Seymour and Kateryn Parr.

Jane Here it is. The Womb. While he lies and tries to drift into sleep I sit and I wait. If I hear him stir, I tremble. I fear. What if they don’t come? (*She picks up the baby’s coffin and holds it close.*) Are you a daughter or a son, little one? I wouldn’t know what to do with you, if you were living.

I am just a woman now. I don’t have a name, according to him, who should wake up with it on his tongue like I do with his. I can’t get my thoughts away from him. Where is he now? Which part of his life is he caught up in now? Somehow I’ve turned into the cheated wife, whose husband is so bound up somewhere else, somewhere where his other women live.

VIII is awake.

It’s been too long. I’ll never leave. Did you see him like I did, when he appeared and brought me back here? Foul and so haunted..bruised and fragile skin. And when he touches me now..looks at me now...

VIII You would leave me?

Jane Would–

VIII Foul, haunted. You would? (*He takes the baby’s coffin from her. He looks as if he might crush it.*) A bastard in a box, is it yours?

Jane We’ve never known whose child it is.

VIII Did you bring it here? You chose to lie in death with that carcass of your shame, rather than serve me and give me sons of my own.

Jane I never had such a thing. I was yours.

VIII You have children by your brother, you bewitched your belly with my son inside it. You deformed him to curse me. I never wanted you.

Jane That wasn't me.

VIII It was always you.

Jane It was Anne Boleyn who deceived you. Why can't you say her name now when you can curse it for days! She destroyed your hope and she died for it. You asked me to marry you that day, you told me I was your salvation, your country's too. Please remember.

VIII I remember you. I saw your treasonous plots, I saw you looking at other men and deceiving me with your daughters.

Jane You must know who I am—

VIII I saw the truth in your eyes when you lied to me. It is because of you that I am here. It haunts me. The thought of you lifting your skirts for a servant, for any other man..

Jane You know I didn't.

VIII Why am I cursed then?

Jane Tell me you know my name. Tell me you remember sitting with me, holding me when I was dying. Thanking me for giving you a son and praying that I would live to give you another. Tell me it wasn't just a bad dream, Henry. What is my name?

VIII Surely you know your own name.

Jane I want to know that you know it!

VIII Shut up! Remember my warning. Remember Anne Boleyn.

Jane Now you can say it. Anne Boleyn. She may as well be here in this tomb for all the hatred that you spit at me. Laughing and shouting and flashing those eyes. They're all you see now? Why shouldn't they all be here for you to hate instead of me. You have no reason to hate me.

VIII You don't give out reasons.

The roof above them shudders as Anne, Kitty and Anna enter the chapel above them. VIII raises the baby's coffin above his head.

I'll crush the life out of England before I am defeated.

Jane Leave the baby. Leave it.

VIII Would you leave me? Would you go and leave me here?

Jane I can't leave.

VIII But you would.

Jane You let all your other wives leave you, why can't I?

Pause. The roof above them shudders again as Kate and Katherine enter the Chapel above them.

I thought I did, once. Why can't I leave your side like you left mine? You, with your devastating fear of death and disease..terror to be lying, sweating, infection inside of you, swallowing you up. You left me, why can't I leave you when you are suffering? I gave you what you had always wanted, your boy, your hope. Where is your feeling—

VIII goes mad, kicking at his coffin, hitting the walls.

VIII This is my feeling!

Jane But it is not for me..

VIII It's because of you.

Jane Where is your sorrow for me?

VIII releases the baby's coffin, comes in close.

VIII Ha! You are nothing more than my Hell.

Silence.

Jane weeps, nursing the baby's coffin. The other wives assemble above the vault. They stand on the slab. The walls of the vault shudder. VIII retreats to his coffin.

VIII It is England falling at my feet? Curse you, Anne, you have brought it down.

He disappears inside his coffin. The walls stop shuddering. Silence and stillness and then the five women above the vault stamp in unison. The sound reverberates around the vault.

Five wives Departure is my chief paine
 I trust ryght wel of retourne agane

They stamp again.

 Departure is my chief paine
 I trust ryght wel of retourne agane

They stamp.

 Departure is my chief paine
 I trust ryght wel of retourne agane

They stamp. The marble slab cracks. The image of Kateryn Parr in the stained-glass window vanishes.

Jane No, not now...

Anne That was too easy.

Pause as they wait. Kate looks into the vault. The next is rushed, overlapping.

Kitty Is it empty?

Anna What can you see?

Kate Not much, it's dark.

Anna Another dark room with only one way in.

Kate Wait. I can see something. Someone.

Katherine Is it him?

Kate I think it's a woman.

Jane Leave me alone. (*Shouting up to them.*) Leave me alone.

Kitty Can't we just leave?

Anne No, I want this. Come out Jane.

Jane Close it up. We won't come out. Close it.

Anne We'll come in then.

Jane You can't.

Anne Get out! Don't hide behind death, you've fallen back on that excuse for too long.
We all have.

Jane I don't want to look at your faces, I can't. I don't want you to look at me.

A banging comes from VIII's coffin. Jane lets go of the baby's coffin and climbs up as far as she can towards the gap above her.

 Help me?

They pull her through the broken slab into the chapel. Jane tries to regain her dignity. She pushes herself away from them.

Silence.

 Is this a type of revenge?

Anne You tell me.

Anna Anne, wait. Remember what it is like to have your tomb opened up and invaded.

Pause.

Jane Are you the one from Cleves? The one who came after me.

Anna I am. I have a lot of respect for you.

Jane For what? I have none for any of you. I've heard your stories a hundred times.
(*Pause.*) Here you are, and then the girl, not so beautiful in the end. And
Katherine, my mistress and Queen.

Katherine This is what I was once. Who am I now?

Jane You were always my mistress and Queen. That only leaves Kate. You were the
one I wanted to see most of all. The one responsible for sending him back to me.

Kate How did I send him back to you?

Jane In a state worse than death.

Kitty ...Does he..do you know what he's going to do to us?

Jane No, I never know what he will do.

Katherine He brought us here. You do not know his reasons?

Jane They are not his reasons, they are mine.

Katherine You did this?

Jane Of course I did.

Anne We were brought here under the cry of a rival.

Kate How could it be you?

Jane I was at peace. I wasn't on this earth any more. When he died he woke me up.

Katherine Years and years and years of only him.

Kitty Have you started to hate him?

Jane No. No not hate.. There was a moment when I thought I might get out, but he made me hide. I've rarely seen him so livid. Someone opened that hole up, they came in, they placed two coffins beside Henry's, one was a child's. I think they came more than once but..it's impossible for me to be sure. I thought they might come back again, and when they did I would leave. But they never came back. I heard them sealing the vault with that marble, locking me in.

Kate I thought you believed only in serving and obeying.

Jane He curses and he moans. As if I can give him any answers. He can pound at the walls with anger because he is unfinished, but I have to endure it silently. He goes over and over everything that happened. All he did. The women he bedded, the men he had destroyed. That's how I know about all of you. In all his ravings you were there.

Kate Did you start with me?

Jane He talked about you as his only true wife, other than myself. I hoped that would mean you could be persuaded to do what he said. If you thought he said it.

Anna It was you, the screaming. But I do not understand why it is us who you have no respect for that you called to your side.

Jane I want peace. I can't take—
If I'm exposed to another minute of it... (*Pause.*) I let you believe it was his cry, because I knew you would come if it was him, if it was him offering you freedom. And I was right.

Kate Did you think it was just for freedom, or do you know our other reasons?

Jane No. I'm sorry, but I didn't care about that. I wanted an ending.

Katherine So do I. A proper, right ending to my life.

Anne While you were so desperate to leave him, didn't you consider that we might all have something to say? That we need something too?

Jane I think we all have to offer him peace first. And then we might have our own.

Kate You are motivated by selfishness and yet you still want to put him first..?

Jane That's why you came, isn't it? He always has to come first. And if she serves him well, she receives.

Kitty But if he didn't know we were coming won't that make him...angry. That we've come back.

Kate But he has to come out. This can't be it, otherwise what are we doing here apart from opening your door and letting you out.

Kitty Kate, please don't let him out. Please. He could still...He can still hurt me. He said he would kill me with his own hands. Don't let him out.

Katherine He does not care about you.

Kitty He will, I know he will. It's Henry, who won't forgive us for anything. He would have cracked my neck and dragged me into the Tower himself, buried me naked under the floor. With nothing to answer to, what he'll do to me if he sees me again is a thousand times worse. I can't face him.

Anne Yes you will.

Kitty I won't.

Kate Kitty, it's time to grow up. I've been patient with you until now, we've all been patient. Letting you make your little comments, pretending to be fearless. We have to stop pretending.

Long pause.

Kitty *(To herself)* Here comes a candle to light you to bed, and here comes a chopper...to chop off your head..

Kitty begins to sing to herself. The others talk over her. Below them in the vault, VIII emerges slowly from his coffin.

Anna Is he hurting you? Is that what made you do this?

Jane Only with the strength of his words.

Katherine If I could..fight these pains I would face him.

Anne Kitty, stop your noise and get that arse you so proud of into his lap.

Kitty stops singing. Pause.

We need something to tempt him. Someone he can reduce to a cowering mess. You're clearly terrified of him. That will bring him out cock first.

Kitty Don't touch me. Kate, don't let her.

Kate Sorry, Kitty.

Kitty You can't do this to me. Katherine, please. Anna?

Katherine We are not your friends.

Anna For all your words against him I am thinking you are full of lies.

Kitty I'm sorry. I thought you all hated him..I just wanted to show you I could too.

Kate So make use of it.

Kitty What if he hurts me?

Anne Nothing can happen to you, you're already dead.

Kitty Really?

Anne Well, I suppose we'll see.

All except Jane drag Kitty to the broken slab. She resists but they push her inside. She falls in.

 We will see.

Kitty is alone in the vault with VIII. He does not recognise her. Above them in the chapel, the others wait.

VIII And what is this? A little mouse. A little mouse who opened up a tomb to let the sun back in. Little golden head. Have I been sent some fresh white meat? Come, little fish, little bird, and give us a peck. (*He pounces.*) Who is my lady? Who is my little lady?

Kitty Let me go! I want to go back.

VIII Don't fight me, I've had little girls killed. That's the price for stealing back my youth, I take hers away. I lost the goodness of the feeling, I was forgetting....But you, you, you bring it all back.

Kitty I'll go back to the Tower, I'll stay there forever, please.

VIII Here we are underground. Just you and me, between little blocks of wood. I haven't played for such a long, long time.

Kate (*From above*) Kitty? Are you alright?

VIII You have more ladies upstairs? Are they as pretty as you?

Kitty I..don't know..

VIII They can wait a little longer then.

He peers at her, touching her as he did with Jane. Kitty tries to pull away.

 There's nowhere to go. Not even your coffin because you know I'll follow you all the way in.

Kitty Let me go..

VIII Where, where can we go?

Kitty They're waiting...for you..they're all here..

VIII *(Pause)* Let's not keep them waiting...

Kitty *(Calling up)* Get me out. Get me out.

They pull Kitty back into the chapel.

Anne Is he coming?

Kitty can't speak. They wait as VIII pulls himself out. He appears.

Silence.

Katherine This is not him. This is not him, this rotten, this damned corpse. Jane, is this all a lie? I cannot see the man I thought he was.

VIII A little bird told me you'd be here. I've seen your faces before, you are like doubt. Like anger and my danger.

Anne Or perhaps your regrets.

VIII My regrets don't live in your form.

Anne We are the ones regretting.

VIII You. I see you.

Anne And I see you.

Pause

Do you know me?

VIII I know your eyes.

Anne And my face?

VIII Yes.

Anne And my body?

VIII Little..duckys.

Anne And how did I die?

VIII A woman's death...

Anne Not a woman's death.

 A traitor's death.

Blood starts to run from Anne's neck.

 A lover's death.

 A man-made death.

Pause

 Do you know me?

VIII I do. Mine own sweetheart, mine own—

Anne You see how I am stained.

VIII I do.

Anne And these women. You know them too?

VIII I do.

Anne Name them.

Long pause. Then VIII turns to Anna.

VIII What is this face..of Cleves. The manufactured sibling.

He turns to Kate.

 Kate. Is it Kate? A theologian in woman's form.

He passes Jane. He faces Kitty.

 Little bird, a rose without a thorn, a lie. A Little Kitty.

He faces Katherine.

 Katherine.

Katherine Henry. My husband—

VIII Do not tell me what I am.

Katherine I remember you as a child and now I see you here. Before it all began, when it all could have been different.

VIII I have been trying to get rid of the sound of your voice my whole life. You could look after a child but you failed with a man.

Katherine A child has no need for such vicious hatreds, such cruel sports..

VIII I wasn't a child. I was a king.

Katherine Men should never become kings.

VIII Kings are what men are.

Katherine Treated badly by kings was Queen Katherine. I sacrificed happiness and my honour and I suffered, because my husband knew how to force pain in like a knife. And still you hurt, you drive it in.

Kitty Stop..

VIII Who was your husband?

Katherine He was you.

VIII I pity him.

Anne Self-pity isn't worn well on a king.

VIII I am sorry for all your words because they are wasted. These words mean nothing to me.

Katherine They do to me...

VIII sees the ring on Katherine's finger. He takes it off her.

VIII You're sour, old. It was so simple to think then that the others would only get better. They were all easier to get rid of after you, Lady Katherine. Pieces of string get shorter and thinner and easier to break.

He throws the ring into the vault.

Anna Or perhaps it was you who was easier to break, Henry. And some of us got wiser.

VIII Wiser, these women were tricks. Who are you?

Anna But he just told me.

Jane He forgets things. Almost as soon as they leave his mouth.

VIII You never got wiser, only younger and...tricky little...devious child to make a cuckold– cuckold out of me. To make me into the humour of that French king who pretended to pity my honour and virtue. Make me a joke? Turn your ripe lips into my humiliation? Rub it in my face, that perfect uncorrupted youth that was just a lie, make me believe in lies.

He strikes out and grabs Anna around the neck.

Anna I did not..I did not do it

VIII Just like you, Katherine Howard, to drivel excuses at my ears.

Kitty (*Whispered*) I didn't mean it. I didn't mean it.

Kitty backs away, she won't own up.

VIII You're meant to look after my pleasures. You're meant to follow.

Anna But..you would not let me..

VIII I'd have you stretched. I'd give the executioner a blunt axe to hear you shriek with terror. I would have your lips torn. I'd cut out all your treacherous wombs and nail them to the scaffolds. Bodily torture is nothing compared with the mind's..and yours would be eaten by crows, your head rotting, meshing with the heads of your men. The king wills it.

Kitty (*Screaming as if he is inflicting this pain*) God, let me out

Anne Our wombs are already nailed upon plinths, framed in tombs, and famed for doing nothing or for doing you wrong. Is there no disparity between us now? Look at that woman's face, she is not youth or a temptress. She does not warrant those words.

VIII stops. He suddenly realises it is not Kitty he is holding.

VIII Which one is it?

Jane The manufactured sibling.

VIII Sister? My sister.

He releases Anna.

Anna Not a Katherine Howard. You did not have enough feeling for me to hate me like that.

Kitty Not like that, not like that! God, please let me out..don't turn me inside out, don't cut me up...I can't explain..I can't change it. I'm not clever, I'm not...I can't

Kitty cries, heavy sobs. They wait, but she can't stop.

Katherine Are those really tears? Real water coming from your eyes. How..?

Anne No more choking on nothing. Something has shattered.

Katherine I wish that I could...

Kitty There was a little girl and she was laughing.. I don't know who I am..I..I'm just a girl who was killed. They told me I could be a Queen the wife of an emperor they said, they told me to follow so I followed they told me you wanted me and then they left me. They left me like everyone always has they told me I had no right to life. I don't want to be nothing, nothing but that..I didn't get to grow up, I didn't get to learn. I didn't mean to hurt you.. I'm sorry I didn't love you..I just wanted...

The little girl laughed at me...I don't understand anything.

Silence.

VIII A little girl laughed at me. She flirted and she danced. And she laughed.

Kate Do you feel better after your catharsis, Kitty?

Kitty I feel empty.

Anne You are lucky then.

VIII Empty. Emptiness is next to godliness. If my soul is absent and he doesn't have it, it is lost.

VIII begins to pace around them. His wives talk over him.

VIII

Jane I hate to say that I need help from you, but you have to get me out. Take my place or, or, I don't know. I envy you all for being without him for so long.

There is a head and a heart and a stranger. Stranger. What is her name, what is her name? Her name is not the same as mine. Royalty is a blessing. A blessing and a curse..we all found that out...

Katherine We have not really been without him.

Pause.

Jane You've just your own lifetimes to remember. I've got all of yours and all of his. I can't bear this eternity anymore.

Why me? Why Henry? Reduced to this torment. Me, a young man, a handsome man, a giant. There's nobody to praise me. No-one is praising me!

Anne How dare you compare your suffering to mine. You have no idea how honoured you are, lying in there beneath a royal chapel. With your husband even if it is him. And where am I, where are the rest of us? Do you even know?

Jane Of course I know, I got you here didn't I?

Kitty But you don't even want us here. Why should we help you?

Jane Would any of you take my place. Would any of you stay here?

Silence.

Anna I should not have come here today, I should have stood up and walked away before we left London. I should have gone back to the Abbey the moment I left. My life is done and I am only here because yours are not. You Henry, and your wives. Today I have felt a lot of things. Suspicion and then guilt for not accepting my duty. But it is not mine. And I have just experienced your hatred and fear, all for someone else. I do not care anymore that you don't want me, Henry. I have not cared for a long time.

Anne We can't change the way we died, and that is what our deaths are about. (*Pause.*)
What about you, Kate? You try to shred your guilt by pulling off your death skin.
But what is your guilt about, Kateryn the survivor?

Pause.

Katherine Is it Thomas?

VIII approaches Kate. He stands close and pulls at the skin on her face. Long pause.

VIII (*Quiet*) Seymour?

Kate Guilt can grow from the smallest things. Grow into wars if left for hundreds of
years. You forget where it came from.

VIII You know where yours comes from.

Kate Yes. I know. (*Pause.*) My guilt is about Thomas. I married him within a month
of..my king's death. I would have married him before that and Henry knew it. All
I ever did was lose him, over and over again. True contentment is wrong, isn't it,
something unpermitted. It's true, that the mind's struggle is worse than the
body's. Your mind tells you you should be able to stop the pain.

VIII This is why you're not here, with me.

Jane So we are sisters then. Did you have any children with my brother?

Kate I had one.

Anne It couldn't possibly have been a son.

Kate A daughter.

*A pause and then VIII starts to laugh. As he does, the image of Edward VI vanishes from the
stained-glass window.*

VIII A girl by a fortune-hunter. Ha! In truth I kept you from very little.

Kate But I would go back to him. If I could. In the end I'm here for him and not you.

VIII I did not want you here.

Jane You said she should be here looking after your misery.

VIII *(laughs)* Perhaps I did. But that was when she was my wife. Not the wife of a greedy fool.

Kate You can take it as your victory, Henry. I died from giving birth to the daughter I loved and wanted. If that is comedy to you, then so be it.

VIII I wondered if you would. A very brief thought crossing my mind near the end. Nothing would stop you, would it, Kate.

Jane What about Thomas, what happened to him?

Kate He was executed.

Jane And? What else..?

VIII What else? Dead and even more helpless than you were. Death is mocking you. After doing me wrong it is right that you come to beg, but beg you do not.

Katherine Such transformation. I am close to your very beginnings, Henry, I saw you grow and change when that crown touched your head, and I can speak with the sight of all our lives at the end. It seems that your pity and compassion barely bestowed on me were lifeless in the years you refused to share with me. You have been exposed. I have tried not to see it, not to listen. This portrait of you that has been painted I refused to believe until this moment.

VIII Get inside your nunnery.

Before he can turn away, Katherine spits in his face.

Katherine You are not king anymore. And your women are getting over you. It is you who is feeling Death's mocking. You have crumbled. *(Pause.)* I have searched through my religion but I cannot find a way for you, for any of you, to be forgiven. Even today, when I have seen your faces, heard your voices and your stories...you are not my prayers.

Jane Prayers are not enough.

Katherine But for Henry, I wish I could say that time has made me hate you properly, but I thought I knew what you were. I do not. And never want to know.

VIII I felt only the vaguest spasm of guilt over you Lady Katherine. And time away from you has not improved its depth.

Anne And me? What is your feeling for me after all this time?

VIII I wasted ten years on you.

Pause. Anne comes close to him, and then holds his face in her hands and looks into his eyes.

Anne You did not think of them like that. They were too long for you but not enough for me. You can scare Kitty with terrible curses, laugh at Kate's attempted survival, but why this silence when you look into my eyes?

VIII I'm trying to remember..a lover.

Anne And when you remember her, tell her what she is supposed to do with everything that was between you, before you killed your lover and your friends. She is lost, you see. Losing her resolve with each bitter minute. She barely tries to comprehend that it is possible to love and hate a person at the same time.

VIII does not speak. Silence. Anne moves away from him.

Each body here you have uncovered, opened up our secrets but not listened to our voices. *(She suddenly throws a book at VIII. Then another.)* Perhaps you will listen to these. People, men and women, trying to give explanations of our lives, loving us, loathing us. Lying to us. They know better what we have become. They tell me I was too fresh, too powerful for the times that I lived. *(She throws a full bag at him.)* Read about us, your greatest part, and tell us how you feel, what you think.

VIII Don't curse me, I curse you *(He struggles to say her name.)* Anne Boleyn.

Anne If I could get out of this death state I would stand guard over Elizabeth forever. Do you know about our daughter, the bastard who became a Queen, the daughter of a woman condemned as a whore. Look at her. *(She shows him an picture of Queen Elizabeth I.)* She is mine.

Katherine And my daughter ruled. She was also a Queen of England.

VIII So what if they were. Didn't you think that I might have had something to do with that?

Katherine If it was you who made it possible for our daughter, then you did right, Henry. I feel it as if you have done something for me. Like Anne, I would stand guard over my daughter, as I was not allowed to do when she was alive. As you would not let me.

Anne We are going to leave you here, Henry. We are going to go where we want to go and damn the king or the God or whoever tries to send us back to the places we were put in by someone else.

Pause.

Jane Can I come with you, or are you going to make me stay here?

VIII Who are you?

Jane I am Jane Seymour.

VIII There's a woman down there, you look like her. She can never leave me.

Jane But I am not her.

The image of Jane Seymour in the stained-glass window vanishes.

Katherine It is your decision now, Mistress Jane.

Kitty Where would I go?

Anna Wherever you wanted to go.

Kitty I don't know. There's nowhere.

Kate Is the chapel so awful, in the Tower?

Kitty I'm not going back there. I died there.

Kate I mean is it bearable if you're with someone else? Someone you care about. If I go back there, to Thomas, I will become a different type of prisoner. I don't know if I am able to do that.

Anna You want to go there, to him? Stay with him?

Kate That's all I wanted.

Anne I've never been there with a person to care for in that way, so I cannot tell you if it is bearable. But you can still leave that place, if you change your mind.

Kate But he can never leave. Not like you two.

Pause.

VIII What? What? You're leaving me here? Going back to your other men, fucking up my eternal reputation?

Jane You chose to be here. We did not.

VIII What if I've changed my mind.

Jane We don't want to have to worry about your dreams and your pleasures and your changing mind.

VIII It should be you all stuffed into that box of bricks down there. And I should be using you as a stairway out of this earth.

Kate We will never escape like we really want to, like we expected to. I really thought we might. I'll still pray to God, but I know we're here on this earth forever.

Anne Defeat, Harry, cold and damning.

Katherine Get back into your box.

VIII Ha, God will prove you wrong.

VIII goes back into the vault.

Silence.

Katherine Now he is a man who runs away.

Anne There are still too many unanswered questions and too many unlived years.

Kitty Maybe we could get them back again.

Jane You want to go back in there with him?

Kitty On second thoughts..

Kate This wasn't everything I had wanted.

Anne It wasn't what any of us wanted. It seems that only Jane has got the thing she wanted.

Kate I hope it will get me to Thomas.

Jane You are so lucky to have something to go to. I don't have anything.

Anna You did leave something behind, if only for a short time. Edward is at Westminster Abbey also.

Jane Edward. I suppose that makes sense, doesn't it. But he's such a stranger to me. Is he awake too?

Anne Not yet. We'll wake them all up.

Katherine What about your daughter? Will you go to find her?

Kate I have to find out what happened to her first.

The lights fade on six figures.

....

“Endings”

The image of Henry VIII in the stained-glass window shatters. The vault remains in darkness.

Six women at the Tower of London. In the Chapel of St. Peter ad Vincula. Each is dressed in the Tudor costume that defines her. They are preparing for another show. Everything they have acquired on their journey is scattered around.

Kitty Whose story is it today?

Anna A Tragic Tale of Survival. Lady Kate's love affair.

Kitty *(Fixing a rose in her hair)* A melodrama. She's finally written it then.

Anne Finally. How many months has it taken her. Such a perfectionist.

Jane I think it's such a shame that we can't do this outside the Tower. You know this is a place full of traitors and thieves.

Katherine The best audience, so we have seen. They wish to learn.

Kitty Speaking of, Kate, how's Thomas?

Kate He's fine.

Kitty I think it's really mean of you not to let us see him.

Kate I can't think why you would want to, Kitty.

Anne Congratulations in finding a husband to subdue. He's in the perfect place, confined beneath our feet.

Kate This is my husband you're talking about. And it's not like that. It's a lot easier these days to keep an eye on his..conduct, that's all.

Katherine I thought that it was our role to talk about our husbands. I propose next time it is the legend of Arthur we perform.

Kitty The one that was or the one that might have been?

Katherine Something between the two. *(She starts to cut up the pomegranate.)*

Kate Have you been catching up on your history, Kitty?

Kitty I certainly have. I could do guided tours.

Katherine Plenty of blood here.

Anne *(Rubbing her hands in the pomegranate juice)* I'll be the king shall I? Might as well begin with it all, blood, sweat and tears.

Katherine Don't forget to save some for the birth.

Kitty Please don't talk about that.

Kate You don't think it is too graphic, do you? I just want it to be truthful.

Anne The truth is somewhat obscene.

Anna Are we not playing ourselves for this one?

Anne Jane's playing Seymour.

Jane I'm not.

Anne All you have to do is put on a mask and no-one will know you're actually a woman.

Jane I can't play a man, I don't have the right..strength of mind.

Kitty Exactly, Thomas had the wrong strength of mind.

Kate Stop it.

Anna Jane, I will take your part if you really do not want it.

Jane No, no. It's fine. I can at least try, I suppose. You can have my part if I find that it doesn't fit.

Anna That is respect, indeed.

Kate A prayer ladies, for six women to say entering performance. And then we can finish my story.

Katherine We do not pray the same. Kate we go through this every time.

Kate I'm sorry, Katherine, in all this excitement I just forget.

Anne A request then.

They gather.

Kate O Almighty God, we are here to celebrate and congratulate and honour ourselves on being who we are, be that the six wives of, the six ravens or just six women. We most humbly ask that our enemies watch and listen with open eyes, ears and minds. Each one of us has a place, we were a sixth of one man and we are caught in a rhyme. Perhaps between the six of us we can form something else now, we can be ourselves, like ourselves. We are players and we are going to compose. We are going to carry on.

They leave the chapel.