

The Wedding Night of Anne Boleyn

My husband, the King, is to come to me tonight. It has been seven long years since my quest began, since I determined that if I were strong, clever, and patient enough, I might supplant dowdy, pious, barren Catherine of Aragon as Queen of England. Tonight, my destiny will be fulfilled. No one but me ever understood that it was never the riches I craved. It wasn't the jewels or the titles, and certainly not finally getting warmth and acceptance from my grasping, ambitious family. It was always the power, and the safety my new title would afford me.

I had not figured in the plans of my dangerously ambitious father, Thomas Boleyn, a slithering snake always looking for a foothold to climb the ladder of influence and wealth. His marriage to my wellborn mother, Lady Elizabeth Howard, got his foot on the first rung. He changed the family name from Bullen to the more elegant Boleyn. That caused mirth among some of the highborn families. Until, that is, they looked into my father's cruel, feral eyes. Then any laughing was done in private.

Did my mother love him? Who knows? It wouldn't have made any difference. Women were chattel to be bought, sold or traded as much as any other animal the man of the house might

own. A woman with desire, an opinion or a hint of independence was banished from Court and, if she survived, rarely seen again.

A woman's powerlessness came to me first thanks to my future enemy, Cardinal Woolsey. It was because of my first experience with what I naively believed to be true love, Lord Hal Percy, son of the Earl of Northumberland. Hal was handsome, jovial, and when he pulled me behind a screen or into an empty room, his kisses made me weak in the knees, wanting him to press closer into me so that there were no barriers between our young bodies.

Though I had already been betrothed to Jamie Butler, an Irishman with a mouth full of protruding teeth and the mind of a dolt, and Hal was betrothed to Mary Talbot, we both felt our strong commitment to each other would conquer any impediments. We pledged undying love, entered into a secret engagement, and had clandestine wedding ceremony, followed by an ecstatic honeymoon night. When Woolsey found out, he informed on us to Northumberland, Hal's heartless father.

Hal was ordered to marry Mary Talbot immediately. He did so, and never looked at me again. I played in my mind over and over his declarations of undying love, our night of love, his pledge that his love would last forever. That was when I learned that the fluids emitted during the act of love were not the glue which would bind two people, merely something which would quickly evaporate and disappear. And words whispered at night were gone in the morning light. A bitter lesson and one that began to sharpen my instincts and harden my heart.

As if Hal's rushed marriage to Mary Talbot wasn't enough, Woolsey went even further. I was banished from Court. My lifelong hatred of the Cardinal began at that moment. His message: Remember woman, you are only a piece of property, not entitled to fall in love, but be

kept in readiness for when your father wants to barter you to some nobleman, be he old, toothless and drooling, or preferring to take his pleasure with young men of the court.

My father dragged me home, and once there pulled me by my hair to the pig pen where he beat me mercilessly with a stick, all the while kicking at me, until we both heard the bone in one leg crack. When his frustration was spent, he pushed me into the slippery pig shit. At that moment I was no more to him than one of his pigs to be sold or slaughtered as he pleased.

After several years I was summoned back to Court. All had been forgiven and to my delight, Henry began to seek out my company. My father wanted me to share the King's bed quickly as my sister Mary had done. My sister, Mary, was the great hope of my father. With her blonde hair, white skin, rosy cheeks, and light brown eyes flecked with honey, she was the one to cajole the King out of the properties and positions so important to my father. .

Not me, never me, the little dark one who looked like a gypsy changeling with black hair, black eyes, and dark olive complexion. I had a mole on my neck some said was an extra teat where the devil came to suckle. I also had six fingers on my right hand. Not a complete finger, of course, but a little stump which I was adept at hiding under long sleeves. My father barely noticed me so intent was he on Mary's ascent at Court.

But I was studying and learning all the time. Mary had two children by Henry; first, a daughter and then a son who looked so much like Henry there was little doubt of his parentage. Henry was hesitant in acknowledging this son, also named Henry. King Henry became more and more enamored with me; my father more and more frantic that I share Henry's bed. But this little dark gypsy changeling defied both of them. I had my own plan. I began my game of flirting, then

withholding, returning the King's gifts meant to seduce, and having little, meaningless intrigues at Court meant to make Henry jealous.

I've kept the King waiting all these years. Henry, who could bed any woman he wanted, and who had bedded many, wanted only me. He could have anything or any woman in the world, but he couldn't have me. It made him crazy with desire. It was a dangerous game I played, but the end prize was worth the danger.

I've watched during these years as fathers brought their daughters to Court, from frightened 13-year-olds who hid in the shadows hoping to escape notice, to older widows who looked at the King lasciviously, hoping to fan his desire. Henry would nod to his steward if someone took his fancy. The chosen would then disappear from the banquet hall, only to reappear in the morning to the disappointment of her family, the youngest ones in tears at what had been done to them, the older ones visibly frightened at what would be done to them now, or who they might be offered to next. Especially when they realized that Henry would again seek out Anne Boleyn.

As Henry began to plan how we could be wed, he faced great obstacles. There was a special dilemma with Mary's son. Henry could not now acknowledge the boy as his because once the King wanted to marry me, admitting his carnal knowledge of my sister would have made our relationship incestuous, a belief held by many members of the Court. Foolish as that sounds, it was a real impediment, and it gave me great mirth to see how it vexed the perfect Mary and my scheming father. Henry would do nothing to hurt his chances of possessing me.

Henry was frantic for a legitimate son and heir. Though Henry had sons by two mistresses, Queen Catherine, couldn't deliver living sons, only bloody, half-formed creatures

which slithered out of her old, useless womb. He was anxious to rid himself of her. All efforts within the Catholic church were, however, in vain.

Henry was getting impatient with me. I had to give him something. I started by letting him kiss my paps. He called them his little duckies. He would get excited to frenzy and spend himself on my beautiful velvet gowns. I let the ladies of the chamber see these gowns. Not openly, of course, but I made sure they were conspicuous. The whole Court was sure I was his mistress in every way. This was my proof that the king had not yet entered me.

Tonight is what I have planned for, and waited for all these years. The king was convinced I was chaste. My lovers at court dared not speak differently.

I wondered if the King, now that he has leave to possess me completely, would be like the lover I had when I lived at the French Court, a beautiful man with a smooth, tight body. Thoughts of him still flitted through my mind late at night. He removed my clothing slowly, kissing me softly on the lips, the neck. My paps, which were erect, responded to his touch with a jolt that reached down to my womanhood. He introduced me to the complete joy of coupling with a man. Even now, all these years later, thoughts of him cause my hand to wander down my body trying to replicate that intense pleasure. If I had one unfulfilled wish left, it would be that Henry would bring me such pleasure.

My mother pinned a small pouch of chicken blood to my petticoat. She told me to make sure to pour it on the sheet after copulation. Henry must continue to believe me virginal.

My ladies in waiting had dressed me in a silk chemise. They lay me in bed where I waited for my King. Henry came in and removed his red robe. It was a new robe with the A and H symbol of our love embroidered in gold. He made sure I saw that. He got into the bed and we

turned to each other. My king, my husband, my lover. I raised my arms so that he could come closer for the kisses of his Queen, his wife, his lover now and forever.

But when I raised my arms, he rolled on top of me. He fumbled with his wool dressing gown so that it was pulled up and lay painfully bunched across my stomach. He began pulling at my silk chemise. After a time, the royal hand slid from my shoulder, past my waist, and under my silk petticoat. I thought, I hoped, it would be to stroke me as the French lover had done. But when I didn't feel him, I realized he was checking himself, his readiness. I wasn't ready. He'd done nothing but repel me since coming to my bed.

When he felt ready, he jammed himself into me. I couldn't help but cry out from the sudden pain. Henry thought it the cry of a maiden being deflowered. That seemed to spur him on. He finished quickly.

After a few silent minutes, Henry got up. He put his robe back on, the one with the golden A and H embroidery. He came back to the bed, leaned down and kissed my forehead. "Good night, darling," he said. I reached for him, but only managed to grab his sleeve. "Henry, come and lie with me," I said. Without answering me, he turned and walked out of my chamber.

I felt the wetness beneath me. I put my fingers down and brought them up to look at. There was no need for the chicken blood; Henry had made me truly bleed. And so, this was the wedding night for which I had waited seven years.

It doesn't matter. I, Anne Boleyn, am now truly Queen of England. The title is mine; Henry is mine. No one will ever hurt me again.