

LETTER

Anne Boleyn (1507–1536), Queen Consort of England (1533–1536)

to Henry VIII (1491–1547), King of England (1509–1547)

Anne Boleyn married Henry VIII in January 1532/1533 and she celebrated her coronation as Queen of England on 1 June 1533. In September of that year, she gave birth to the Princess Elizabeth. After three miscarriages over the next three years, Henry began pursuing Jane Seymour. In April 1536, Henry accused Anne Boleyn of high treason and, on 2 May 1536, had her committed to the Tower of London. She wrote the following letter while imprisoned and awaiting her trial, scheduled for 15 May.

Tower of London, 6 May 1536

Your Grace's displeasure and my imprisonment are things so strange unto me as what to write or what to excuse I am altogether ignorant. Whereas you send unto me (willing me to confess in truth, and so to obtain your favour) by such a one whom you know to be my ancient professed enemy; I no sooner receive this message than I rightly conceive your meaning. And if, as you say, confessing a truth indeed may procure my safety, I shall with all willingness and duty perform your command.

But let not Your Grace ever imagine that your poor wife will ever be brought to acknowledge a fault when not so much as a thought ever proceeded. And to speak a truth, never prince had wife more loyal in all duty and in all true affection than you have ever found in Anne Boleyn; with which name and place I could willingly have contented myself, if God and Your Grace's pleasure had so been pleased. Neither did I at any time forget myself in my exaltation, or received queenship, but that I always looked for such an alteration as now I find, the ground of my preferment being no surer foundation than Your Grace's fancy, the least alteration whereof, I knew, was fit and sufficient to draw that fancy to some other subject.

You have chosen me from a low estate to be your queen and companion, far beyond my desert or my desire. If then you find me worthy of such honour, good Your Grace, let not any light fancy, or bad counsel of my enemies, withdraw your princely favour from me; neither let that stain, that unworthy stain of a disloyal heart towards Your Good Grace, ere cast so foul a blot on your most dutiful wife, and the infant princess your daughter.

Try me, good king, but let me have a lawful trial; and let not my sworn enemies sit as my accusers and judge. Yea, let me receive an open trial, for my truths shall fear no open shames; then shall you see either my innocency cleared, your suspicion and conscience satisfied, the ignominy and slander of the world stopped, or my guilt openly declared. So that whatsoever God or you may determine of me, Your Grace is at liberty, both before God and man, not only to execute worthy punishment on me as an unfaithful wife, but to follow your affection, already settled on that party for whose sake I now am as I am, whose name I could some while since have pointed to, Your Grace not being ignorant of my suspicion therein.

But if you have already determined of me, and that not only my death but an infamous slander must bring you the enjoying of a desired happiness, then I desire of God that He will pardon your great sin herein, and likewise my enemies, the instruments thereof; and that He will not call you to a strict account for your unprincely and cruel usage of me at His general judgment-seat, where both you and myself must shortly appear, and in whose just judgment I doubt not; whatsoever the world may think of me, my innocency shall be openly known, and sufficiently cleared.

My last and only request shall be that myself may bear the burden of Your Grace's displeasure and it may not touch the innocent souls of those poor gentlemen, who, as I understand, are in strait imprisonment for my sake. If ever I have found favour in your sight, if ever the name of Anne Boleyn has been pleasing in your ears, let me obtain this last request, I will so leave to trouble Your Grace any further with my earnest prayers to the Trinity to have Your Grace in His good keeping, and to direct you in all your actions.