

There is a great bellow from behind the closed door, a terrible roar, like a bull will give when a mastiff has fastened on his throat and he drops to his knees. It is the noise of a man mortally wounded. 'No! No! No!'

Jane whirls around at the cry, jumps to her feet and sways indecisively. The court falls completely silent, and watches her, as she sits back down on her throne and then rises up again. Her brother speaks quickly to her and she obediently goes to the door to the privy chamber, but then she steps back and makes a little gesture with her hand, stopping the guards from opening it. 'I can't,' she says.

She looks across at me, and I go to her side. 'What should I do?' she asks.

There is a single loud sob from inside the room. Jane looks quite terrified. 'Should I go to him? Thomas says I must go to him. What's happening?'

Before I can answer Thomas Seymour is at his sister's side, his hand in the small of her back, literally thrusting her towards the closed door. 'Go in,' he says through his teeth.

She digs in her heels, she rolls her eyes towards me. 'Shouldn't Lord Cromwell go in?' she whispers.

'Not even he can raise the dead!' Thomas snaps. 'You've got to go in.'

'Come with me.' Jane reaches out and grabs my hand as the guard swings the door open. The messenger stumbles out and Thomas Seymour pushes us both in and slams the door behind us.

Henry is on his knees, on the floor, hunched over a richly padded footstool, his face buried in the thick embroidery. He is sobbing convulsively like a child, hoarse-voiced as if his grief is tearing out his heart. 'No!' he says when he catches his breath, and then he gives a great groan.

Cautiously, like someone approaching a wounded beast, Jane goes towards him. She pauses and bends down, her hand hovering above his heaving shoulders. She looks at me, I nod, and she pats his back so lightly that he will not feel it through the wadding of his jacket.

He rubs his face one way and another against the knots of gold and sequins on the footstool; his clenched fist thumps the stool and then the wooden planks of the floor. 'No! No! No!'

Jane jumps back at this violence, and looks at me. Henry gives a little scream of distress and pushes the footstool away and flings himself face down on the floor, rolling from one side to the other in the strewing herbs and the straw. 'My son! My son! My only son!'

Jane shrinks back from his flailing arms and kicking legs but I go forward and kneel at his head. 'God bless him and keep him, and take him into eternal life,' I say quietly.

'No!' Henry rears up, his hair stuck with herbs and straw, and screams into my face. 'No! Not into eternal life. This is my boy! He is my heir! I need him here.'

He is terrifying in his red-faced frustrated rage but then I see where the footstool cover has scratched his face, torn his eyelid, so blood and tears are running down his face, I see the desperate child that he was when his brother died, when his mother died only a year later. I see Henry the child who had been sheltered from life and now had it breaking into his nursery, into his world. A child who had rarely been refused and now suddenly had everything he loved snatched from him.

'Oh, Harry,' I say and my voice is filled with pity.

From *The King's Curse*. For information on all of Philippa Gregory's historical novels and extracts from other books, go to www.philippagregory.com.