



Synopsis

First Act

For some time King Henry VIII of England (*Enrico*), in love with another woman, has kept his distance from his wife Anne Boleyn (*Anna*), and the courtiers are troubled. Among them, Jane Seymour (*Giovanna*), who is one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting, is herself in love with Enrico, but she strives to feel no sense of remorse towards Anna. The Queen, afflicted and restless, asks a court page Mark Smeton (*Smeton*) to sing for her. He intones a mournful romance, which only makes her feel melancholy. The King does not come to his wife and, as the night is far advanced, everyone withdraws. Only Giovanna remains. Enrico comes to her through a secret door and confirms his love for her. Giovanna is torn between her loyalty to Anna and her love for Enrico, but the King has now decided: Giovanna must be his at all costs and, to get rid of his wife, he will accuse her of committing a very serious fault and their marriage will soon be dissolved.

Rocheport, Anna's brother, and Richard Percy (*Riccardo*), who has returned to England after years of exile, meet in Windsor Castle. Riccardo, recalled by Enrico, asks for news of Anna, whom he still loves and towards whom he nourishes a feeling of rekindled hope, as he has been told that the King no longer loves her. Rocheport advises him to be cautious. The sounds of hunting can be heard in the distance, which means that the King, the courtiers, and Anna will all soon arrive. Percy thanks the King for allowing him to return to his homeland, but Henry minimizes, saying that he was not the instigator of the pardon, but rather that it was Anna, who, feeling embarrassed, receives Percy's kiss on the hand.

Smeton enters furtively and observes with loving abandon a locket portrait of Anna which he always carries around with him. Hearing a noise, he hides behind a curtain. Rocheport is trying to convince his sister to receive in private, at least for a few minutes, Percy, who is still in love with her. Finally, Anna gives in, Rocheport leaves, and Percy enters. Anna tries to curb his passion and urges him to leave England, but Percy is too much in love to obey her. So, drawing his sword, he threatens to kill himself. Anna lets out a cry, and Smeton tries to stop Percy. A frightened Rocheport enters and informs them that the King is about to arrive accompanied by Hervey, an officer of the guards, Giovanna and the courtiers. Enrico accuses Anna of treason. Smeton tries to defend her, but as he approaches the King, his locket portrait of Anna falls on the floor. Convinced that this is a proof of betrayal, Enrico orders Hervey to arrest everyone: Percy, Rocheport, Smeton, and Anna.

Second Act

In a room next to the one where Anna is being held in custody, the Queen's ladies-in-waiting bemoan her sad fate. Anna, pale and afflicted, thanks them, but at that very moment Hervey enters and, on the order of the King, orders everyone to leave so as to isolate the Queen even more. Giovanna, gripped by remorse, comforts Anna and suggests that she herself could take the blame for the betrayal as the only possible way to avoid the Queen's pain of death. Anna indignantly refuses, but Giovanna insists. Anna, struck by this generosity, wants to know the name of her rival, but when she realizes that her rival is no other than Giovanna, she has a feeling of repulsion. A little later, Anna relents and forgives Giovanna, convinced that the true culprit is in fact Enrico, who has won the young girl's inexperienced heart.



The courtiers anxiously await the judges' verdict. Shortly afterwards, they are informed by Hervey that Smeton has confessed, confirming the Queen's horrible guilt. Enrico leaves the Council chamber, while Percy and Anna enter escorted by guards. Anna begs Enrico to spare her the shame of a court trial and begs him to kill her himself. The King, disregarding Percy's passionate plea, is adamant and takes advantage of Smeton's accusation. Anna forcefully asserts that it is he, Enrico, who is the betrayer and that he has extracted from Smeton the confession of a crime that had never been committed. She confesses her regret for having preferred him to the noble and disinterested Percy, declaring herself his true spouse on the strength of a promise that she once made. Percy rejoices on hearing this impassioned confession, but the King remains firm in his decision, insisting that both of them are sentenced to death. Anna and Percy are removed from the room, and the King confirms to Giovanna that she will now be Queen. Hervey announces to the courtiers that they have all been sentenced to death and that only the King has the power to grant them pardons.

Hervey announces to Percy and Rochefort that the King has pardoned them, while Anna will have to die. They refuse to continue to live, but after a quick farewell they are led away by the guards. The Queen's ladies-in-waiting, who have remained close to her up to now, are troubled by Anna's signs of insanity, alternating silent immobility with smiling agitation. In the grip of visions and delusions, images flow through her mind: her wedding with the King, the abandonment of Percy, his pardon, and the castle where she was born and lived long happy days. Escorted by Hervey, Percy, Rochefort, and Smeton enter. The page prostrates himself at her feet, begging her forgiveness, but she does not understand and asks him to play the harp, as a last prayer of hope. In the distance, jubilant voices are heard acclaiming Giovanna as Queen. Anna now understands and, after uttering a last word of forgiveness, faints.