

## Scene Six

### *Tom's troubles begin*

*A group of Palace Courtiers are fussing over an ornate throne, fluffing up the cushions and polishing the gold and wood.*

- First Courtier**                    *(shocked)* The manners of the young master!
- Second Courtier**                Snatched those chicken legs off the plate like he was a boy off the street!
- Third Courtier**                 And stuffed them in his pockets for later! That's what *I* heard....
- First Courtier**                    His manners have always been *impeccable!*
- Second Courtier**                His father's *insisted* on it!
- First Courtier**                    Something's come over him!
- First Courtier**                    What can be the matter?

*More Courtiers again begin to assemble, each entering at the beginning of their line. They are setting up a mid-afternoon snack for the King: bowls of fruit and trolleys of cakes. The two guards also come back on.*

- Fourth Courtier**                What *can* be the matter...
- Fifth Courtier**                    Have you heard the latest?
- Sixth Courtier**                 *(from another direction)* The latest?
- Fifth Courtier**                    Prince Edward is ill.
- Second Courtier**                Ill?
- Fifth Courtier**                    He's gone *mad*, someone said. The boy doesn't know who he is any more....
- Courtiers (in unison)**         How strange....
- Guards (in unison)**            How strange.....

*The Lord Chancellor enters, surrounded by more courtiers. He goes over to the guards.*

- Lord Chancellor**                You don't know anything about this, do you....

**Guards (unison)** Us, Sir?

**Lord Chancellor** You two were the last to see the boy in his...*normal* condition.

**First Guard** Perhaps it was the chicken legs he had....

**Lord Chancellor** The chicken legs?

**First Guard** I thought they smelt a bit strange....

**Second Guard** They might have gone off!

**Lord Chancellor** Nonsense. They were so fresh the chicken was practically still clucking!

**First Guard** Clucking, Sir?

**Second Guard** Very well, Sir.

**First Guard** As you say, Sir.

**Guards (unison)** Nonsense!

*A cry goes out:*

**Sixth Courtier** The King! Make way for the King!

*A flourish of trumpets, offstage.*

*On comes **King Henry VIII**, bloated and ill; he is supported by his wife, **Catherine Parr**. Also in attendance are **Dr Phipps** and the **Royal Physician**.*

*The **Guards** and **Courtiers** stand to attention. The **king** is placed centre stage on the throne.*

**King** Now then....Physician....tell me what make of it all...

**Royal Physician** Well...if your majesty will forgive me...I need to be reminded...about the exact nature of the boy's condition....

**King (with a sigh)** This afternoon I called for my son to be brought to me. He seemed – how would you say, Dr Phipps?

**Phipps** In a daze, your majesty. His nurse diagnosed a mild fever.

**Physician** That woman does *fuss* him....

**King** He failed to recognize me! Me, his own father! I took him to Catherine....

**Catherine Parr** ...and the boy claimed he wasn't the Prince of Wales...

**King** ...but that he was a pauper, of lowly birth! A common piece of vermin from the street!

**Physician** It sounds....a most extraordinary delusion, your Majesty.

**King** I asked him a question in Latin. He knows Latin well, and answered the question well. Then I spoke to him in French – and the boy looked at me blankly, saying he had never heard the language!

**Catherine Parr** I have often talked with him in French. He speaks the language almost fluently!

**King** Physician....people are saying he is mad....What *can* be the cause of all this?

*The physician is somewhat at a loss for an answer.*

**Physician** Are we *certain* it wasn't those chicken legs....supposing they *had* gone off...We should try them on someone else....to see if the effect is the same...

**Lord Chancellor** Ah, yes! *You* perhaps....

**Physician** *(suddenly worried)* I, Lord Chancellor....

**King** *(cutting him off)* Or are you going to throw in the towel, as you usually do, and just say you don't know what the problem is but perhaps the boy merely needs some *rest*.

**Physician** *(backtracking)* That's *exactly* what I was about to suggest! A *rest* would *definitely* be in order....

*The Lord Chancellor nods mutely in agreement; Dr Phipps shakes his head in frustration.*

**King** *(anger rising)* Yes, and that's *just* what you said to the boy's mother, moments after she had delivered him. "Get some rest, my dear lady, get some rest." The rest *she* got was God's eternal rest! If I hadn't listened to you then, she might still be alive!

**Physician** Your majesty....I assure you...

**King** Catherine knows about children. What do *you* say?

**Catherine** Give him some fresh air. Take him hunting at Windsor!

**King** A – ha! A *real* solution at last! Get him out of the schoolroom for a while....you overwork him, Dr Phipps....

**Lord Chancellor** I've told him that myself, Sir!

**King** Music and poetry is all very well, but there's time enough for that when he's better....in the meantime, healthy exercise is *bound* to cure him. But – until he *is* better – hear this: anyone who speaks about his illness will be speaking against the peace and order of the realm. They will pay the standard penalty for treason!

*He is getting too worked up, and calls for a drink; a servant – one of the courtiers – supplies some water.*

**King** A drink, a drink....water....support me....

*The Royal Physician approaches but **Henry** waves him away.*

**King** Not you....*Catherine*....

*Catherine Parr approaches him and supports him; he recovers himself.*

**Catherine Parr** My Lord....you mustn't let this terrible business trouble you....

**King** He is my son....and England's heir...God will not allow his condition to be permanent.

**Lord Chancellor** Your instructions will be carried out immediately, Sir.

**King** (*bitter*) Of course they will....(*coughing*) Even if he's dying...  
The King's will is law...

*The physician again leaps to support him but is brought up sharply by a cry from one of the courtiers, announcing the entrance of **Tom Canty** – who everyone of course thinks is Prince Edward, despite poor Tom's protestations to the contrary – with **Lady Fleming** and the **Earl of Hertford**. Tom is now dressed in royal finery.*

**Sixth Courtier** (announcing) His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales!

*The courtiers bow or curtsy as appropriate; Catherine Parr curtsies.*

**King** Oh, stuff and nonsense to your bowing! The boy needs to be left in peace, not be fawned over by you all day....go and do something *useful*....get him something to *eat*, why don't you!

*He shoos them away; they scurry off, and soon only the King, Tom, Hertford, Lady Fleming and Catherine Parr are left on stage.*

**King** Now....tell me, Lord Hertford....is my son....getting better....

**Hertford** He is, Sir. In fact....I was just making it clear to him....as you yourself said....that your majesty's will is law...

**King** Ah....and so it is....and so, Edward, one day the law will be *your* will, too....

**Tom** Yes, Sir....

**King** I know that you will govern England wisely. Here....why don't you sit down...

*The King struggles off his throne, letting Tom sits in it, briefly enjoying its opulence and luxury as the King continues talking.*

**King** Hmm.... You seem quite at home there! Perhaps your memory is returning....Come on, Catherine. I feel in need of a nap. This afternoon has been so busy....I will leave Lord Hertford to keep instructing Edward as to my wishes....

*The King and Catherine leave. Hertford bows deeply as they go.*