

The Headless Lamb

Hampton Court trembled with excitement. Servants hustled from kitchen to ballroom carrying platters piled high with freshly roasted lamb, rabbit and boar. Four oblong tables, draped in white cotton cloths, formed a square in the cavernous ballroom. Members of the King's court occupied the seats around the square with the Dauphin of France, the esteemed guest, seated at the head next to the English monarch, King Henry VIII. The Queen, flushed face, bustled in to the room accompanied by her ladies-in-waiting and hurried to her seat. She stopped short, drew a quick breath. The Dauphin seemed very relaxed in her chair, sipping wine from her goblet. Anne's eyes flicked from the French Royal to her husband. She curtsied, as if all was in order, then strolled across the room nodding to the men and women of court who stood as she passed by. A male servant pulled out a chair and motioned for her to sit, directly opposite from the two male royals. Anne arranged her skirt letting it fall over the sides of the chair and felt her husband's glare as penetrating as the summer sun. She looked up, with grace, and smiled. After all, she was the Queen.

The head of the roasted lamb, a delicacy, took center stage on the serving table placed in the middle of the square. Decorated with apples and oranges and sprinkled with deep purple prunes the head, seated on a large pewter platter, inhibited the view of the Queen to her King, so Anne shifted in her seat. She inhaled deeply. Her breasts, as round as the sweet juicy oranges on

the platter, lifted above the bodice of her green velvet gown. She leaned forward and fluttered her eyes. She wanted to remind Henry of her body, the body he once so desired. But Henry's eyes were focused on the silver platters spread across the table piled high with the lamb's golden carcass, with crispy pieces of rabbit and chunks of succulent boar. Creamy custards and puddings in dark brown crockery formed the perimeter around the meat and Anne knew the King would not call her to his bedchamber until he had his fill, if he would call her at all.

With manners learned in the French Court where she'd been raised and wanting to please the Dauphin, Anne lifted a perfectly browned chicken leg to her mouth and bit off an infant sized morsel. Her delicate pink lips remained closed as she chewed. She reached for the white cloth napkin her Lady in Waiting, Pamela, offered and dabbed her mouth as she would a baby's, if only she had one. She smiled remembering when she had tried to teach Henry to do the same, but he laughed at her daintiness. "A sleeve will do just fine," he'd said, then threw her across the bed and had his way.

Anne eyed the orange segments that decorated her plate. She would rather feel the sweet juice on her tongue than the greasy skin of the bird, but she knew the King expected everyone to indulge in the meat and she desperately needed to please him. She brought the leg to her lips again and took another tiny bite. Pamela leaned in close and whispered. "The King is staring at you." Anne lifted her eyes above the drumstick and caught Henry's sneer. He tore off a piece of meat from the rabbit's breast and chewed open mouthed. With grease dripping down his jowls, he pointed to the headless lamb. Anne cocked her head, as a puppy does listening to her master. He pointed again but Anne still did not catch his meaning. She lifted her chicken leg to show him she was consuming the meat, but saw the look of disgust on his face. She took another bite, to

please him, and he laughed. A hearty, loud, guttural laugh. The entire court turned toward their king. With all eyes on him, Henry lifted a huge roasted mutton leg, stood, and pointed to the head of the lamb, then bowed to the Queen. Anne sat erect. She stared at the lamb's head. Her eyes cut to the platter holding the full body of the animal, then again to its head and she brought her delicate hand to her throat.