



0. THE FALL of CARDINAL WOLSEY - Story Preface

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Henry J. Haley, born in 1874, created this watercolor depicting "The Fall of Cardinal Wolsey." The image is online via Cornell University Library. Click on the picture for a better view.

When Henry VIII first has the idea to persuade the sitting Pope, Clement VII, to grant him a divorce from Catherine of Aragon - effectively annulling her second marriage to Henry VII's second son - the King turns to Cardinal Wolsey.

Although he is widely despised in his own country, Wolsey has power within the Church. He has a major problem, however, when it comes to interfering with Catherine of Aragon's life and position as Queen of England.

Catherine's nephew is Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor. Clement, the Pope, is heavily influenced by Charles the Emperor. The Pope will only go so far to displease him. If Clement grants Henry a divorce from Catherine, he will greatly displease the Emperor.

Wolsey is unable to persuade Clement to take the action Henry needs. This, in Tudor England, is not helpful for the once-powerful Cardinal. Knowing that his wealth and power have largely come to him by way of the King, Wolsey is not surprised when he ultimately loses power.

In November of 1530, after he has already lost his home and most of his wealth, Wolsey is looking forward to a more-meager way of life in York. However, Henry has other plans for his former First Minister. Wolsey is arrested, near York, and accused of treason. He learns he must face trial in London.

During his journey south, Wolsey dies at Leicester Abbey on the 29th of November. His death spares him the anguish of an even-greater public humiliation.

What does Wolsey's downfall mean for Thomas Cromwell? The answer is actually opposite of what we might expect.

As Wolsey goes through his humiliations, including being stripped of his possessions and forced to leave his home, Cromwell remains loyal. Even in the face of a likely charge of treason against Wolsey, Cromwell remains loyal.

Cromwell owes a great deal of his own growing power and prestige to Wolsey. He never abandons the man he calls his "master."

Because Wolsey lives in the spotlight, Cromwell's loyalty to the Cardinal is the subject of talk in high places. The idea of working with a loyal fixer who is able to achieve results appeals to the King.

He turns to Cromwell for help with the Anne-Boleyn issue.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-FALL-of-CARDINAL-WOLSEY-Wolf-Hall>

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Media Stream



Clement VII

Portrait of Pope Clement VII, an oil-on-slate created by Sebastiano del Piombo around 1531, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Cardinal Wolsey

Image described above, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Charles V

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Wolsey Arrives at Leicester Abbey

In 1859, Charles West Cope (1811-1890) imagined this scene of Cardinal Wolsey, arriving at Leicester Abbey, as he traveled south to London to stand trial for various alleged offenses. (Click on the image for a better view.)

It would prove to be the last stop on Wolsey's life journey. He died at Leicester Abbey on the 29th of November, 1530.

Not much is left of the Abbey today. Founded in the 12th century, the Augustinian religious house suffered ruin not long after Wolsey's death.

By 1538, the impact of the English Reformation—resulting in the dissolution of the country's monasteries—hit the Abbey. Not only was the monastery dissolved, the abbey buildings were destroyed. Those building materials were reused in other structures around the town of Leicester.



An individual with the nickname “Not from Utrecht” took this picture of the Abbey ruins as they appeared on the 15th of May in 2010. The nave of the old abbey church is on the left; the old cloister is on the right. (License, to use the photo, is via [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).)

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Cardinal Wolsey - Arrested for Treason

Clip from "[The Tudors](#)" (2007) - last episode, first season, broadcast on BBC Two - starring Sam Neill as Cardinal Wolsey. Copyright, Sony Pictures, all rights reserved. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

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