

EXCERPTS FROM A *MAN FOR ALL SEASONS*
SCREENPLAY BY ROBERT BOLT

THE TOWER

Margaret: Father, "God more regards the thoughts of the heart than the words of the mouth," or so you've always told me.

More: Yes.

Margaret: Then say the words of the oath, and in your heart think otherwise.

More: What is an oath then, but words we say to God? Listen, Meg. When a man takes an oath, he's holding his own self in his own hands like water. And if he opens his fingers then, he needn't hope to find himself again. Some men aren't capable of this, but I'd be loath to think your father one of them.

Margaret: I have another argument.

More: Oh, Meg.

Margaret: In any state that was half-good, you would be raised up high, not here for what you've done already.

More: All right.

Margaret: It's not your fault the state's three-quarters bad.

More: No.

Margaret: If you elect to suffer for it, you elect to be a hero.

More: That's very neat. But look now: If we lived in a state where virtue was profitable, common sense would make us saintly. But since we see that avarice, anger, pride and stupidity commonly profit far beyond charity, modesty, justice, and thought, perhaps we must stand fast a little, even at the risk of being heroes.

Margaret: But in reason! Haven't you done as much as God can reasonably want?

More: Well, finally it isn't a matter of reason. Finally, it's a matter of love.

THE COURT

Judge: Master Secretary Cromwell, have you the charge?

Cromwell: I have, my lord.

Judge: Then read the charge.

Cromwell: That you did willfully and maliciously deny and deprive our liege Lord Henry of his undoubted certain title: Supreme Head of the Church in England.

More: But I have never denied this title.

Cromwell: At Westminster Hall, at Lambeth, and again at Richmond, you stubbornly refused the oath. Was this no denial?

More: No, this was silence. And for my silence, I am punished with imprisonment. Why have I been called again?

Judge: On the charge of high treason, Sir Thomas.

Cromwell: For which the punishment is not imprisonment --

More: Death - comes for us all, my lords. Yes, even for kings he comes.

Judge: The death of kings is not in question, Sir Thomas.

More: Nor mine, I trust, until I'm proven guilty.

Duke: Your life lies in your own hands, Thomas, as it always has!

More: Is that so, my lord? Then I'll keep a good grip on it.

Cromwell: So, Sir Thomas, you stand on your silence?

More: I do.

Cromwell: But, gentlemen of the jury, there are many *kinds* of silence. Consider first the silence of a man when he is dead. Let us suppose we go into the room where he is laid out and we listen. What do we hear? Silence. What does it betoken, this silence? Nothing. This is silence pure and simple. But let us take another case. Suppose I were to take a dagger from my sleeve and make to kill the prisoner with it. And my lordships there, instead of crying out for me to stop, maintain their silence. That would betoken! It would betoken a willingness that I should do it. And under the law, they would be guilty with me. So silence can, according to the circumstances *speak*. Let us consider now the circumstances of the prisoner's silence. The oath was put to loyal subjects up and down the country, and they all declared His Grace's title to be just and good! But when it came to the prisoner, he refused! He calls this "silence." Yet, is there a man in this court - is there a man in this *country* - who does not know Sir Thomas More's opinion of this title? Yet, how can this be? Because this silence betoken - Nay, this silence was not silence at all, but most eloquent denial!

More: Not so. Not so, Master Secretary. The maxim is "*Qui tacet consentire.*" The maxim of the law is "Silence gives consent." If, therefore, you wish to construe what my silence betokened, you must construe that I consented, not that I denied.

Cromwell: Is that in fact what the world construes from it? Do you pretend that is what you wish the world to construe from it?

More: The world must construe according to its wits. This court must construe according to the law.

...

Judge: Sir Thomas More, you have been found guilty of high treason. The sentence of the court--

More: My lords! When I was practicing the law, the manner was to ask the prisoner before pronouncing sentence, if he had anything to say.

Judge: Have you anything to say?

More: Yes. Since the court has determined to condemn me - God knoweth how - I will now discharge my mind concerning the indictment and the King's title. The indictment is grounded in an act of Parliament, which is directly repugnant to the law of God and His Holy Church, the supreme government of which no temporal person may, by any law, presume to take upon him. This was granted by the mouth of our Savior, Christ Himself, to St. Peter and the bishops of Rome whilst He lived and was personally present here on earth. It is, therefore, insufficient in law to charge any Christian to obey it. And more than this, the immunity of the Church is promised both in *Magna Carta* and in the King's own coronation oath.

Cromwell: Now, we plainly see you are malicious!

More: Not so. I am the King's true subject. I pray for him and all the realm. I do none harm. I say none harm. I think none harm. And if this be not enough to keep a man alive, then in good faith I long not to live. Nevertheless! it is not for the supremacy that you have sought my blood, but because I would not bend to the marriage!

Judge: You have been found guilty of high treason. The sentence of the court is that you be taken from the court to the Tower of London until time and place will be appointed for your execution!