

God for Harry, England, and Saint Joan! – Synopsis

Act 1

Richard and Rachel are in discussion about a new production. Richard is an American businessman who has recently arrived in the area and has become the patron of the local drama company. Rachel is the artistic director of the company. They decide to put on Shakespeare's Henry VI Part I.

Harry, son of Richard's predecessor as patron, is scornful of the choice of play. Joan, his girlfriend, with whom he is about to go to university, is attracted to the prospect of playing Joan of Arc in the play. She suspects that Richard is only getting involved to impress Alice, the new lady vicar, and she shares her suspicions with Harry and with Anna, Rachel's sister. Harry is indifferent, as he is looking forward to university, and trying to forget his mother's scandalous behaviour with the last vicar. Rachel urges Anna to be discreet so as not to upset her new patron.

Alice interrupts her sermon preparation to give Joan a candid personal view of Joan of Arc and appraisal of Shakespeare's portrayal of her. Richard tries to talk Harry into supporting the production. Joan meets Joan of Arc in a dream and is inspired by her lyrical account of her calling and mission [**Song 1**] to play Joan of Arc not just in the forthcoming production, but in real life.

Act 2

Harry recalls his meeting with Richard, and makes a bet with Joan that Richard and Alice will be together before they go up to university. Joan denounces America and says that an American has no place leading a local English community. Harry interprets this as Joan scheming to discredit Richard in order to win her bet with him. Joan tries to tell Harry about her dream, but he will not listen to her.

Joan then bursts in on Rachel as she is showing Richard and Alice the theatre. She moves swiftly from the announcement in the play that Joan of Arc has taken Orleans to a denunciation of the American culture represented by Richard. Rachel is appalled; Richard and Alice take it as a joke and play along with it.

Rachel goes to Harry and complains about Joan's behaviour. Harry interprets Joan's behaviour as a crude attempt to help her win her bet, and is pleased to hear that it backfired. He is still puzzled though as to why Joan is so concerned about the situation in the local community when she is about to go to university, and waxes lyrical about this [**Song 2**] after Rachel has left.

Joan talks to Anna about her dream; Anna, unlike Harry, listens to her. Joan explains her conclusion that Americans need to be removed from England just as the English needed to be driven out of France in Joan of Arc's day. Anna is alarmed by such talk, both for its racist overtones, and for the impact upon her sister's plans. She expresses her anxiety and divided loyalties in a soliloquy. [**Song 3**]

Rachel speaks to Richard and Alice to try and limit the damage of Joan's outburst. Both of them are good-humoured about the incident. The experience has clearly brought them closer together.

Joan and Alice meet to rehearse Joan's big speech. Alice repents abjectly as Burgundy before Joan's speech. Joan suggests that she should repent similarly of her involvement with Richard, and Alice indignantly rejects this. She lectures Joan on how to seek out God's will in prayer, instead of relying upon dreams. Joan laments in soliloquy the lack of help for her cause and prays to Joan of Arc to intercede for her. **[Song 4]**

Act 3

Anna tells Harry about Joan's dream and where it is leading her. Harry still insists Joan is motivated by her bet, but decides to talk to Joan about the dream. He confronts Joan with his determination to focus upon university. Joan counters by accusing him of taking refuge in dreams himself instead of facing up to his family's failings. They argue but Harry soothes Joan with a love song. **[Song 5]**

Rachel explains the role of Talbot to Richard and asks to see him play one of Talbot's scenes with Joan. She reassures him that Talbot is the "good guy" in the play. Richard has heard about Joan's attempt to make Alice reject him, and he throws himself into the role with some energy. Both Joan and Richard continue in the same vein as their characters once the rehearsal is over, and Rachel has to intervene to keep the peace. **[Interval]**

Rachel expresses her anxiety to Anna about the growing tension within the cast. Anna feels torn between wanting to support her sister and wishing to keep Joan's confidence. She compromises by reassuring her sister in general terms without letting on all she knows.

Richard and Alice discuss the scene where the shepherd claims to the Duke of York to be Joan's father. Their discussion of the scene helps them to find common cause against the "enemy" Joan. They are joined by Joan and Rachel, and after the scene is rehearsed, there is an argument over whether it should be cut out of the production. Joan successfully appeals to Alice's sense of historical accuracy, to the annoyance of Richard and the perplexity of Rachel, and reports her "victory" to Harry and Anna.

Act 4

Joan has another dream in which Joan of Arc appears to her. Joan of Arc rebukes Joan for trying to remove Richard when she knows that there is no-one ready to take his place. **[Song 6]** Richard then approaches Joan and pleads with her not to turn Alice against him. Harry telephones his mother and is encouraged by her to focus upon university.

Alice confronts Richard with her worries about his theology and sense of justice and truth. They rehearse the scene where the failure of York to bring help in time leads to Talbot's death. Richard insists on cutting the scenes with Talbot as he is a "loser",

and this further deepens the rift between himself and Alice, who asks him if he would cut the crucifixion from the gospels.

Anna reports the stress and anxiety her sister is experiencing to Joan. She urges Joan not to foster division between Richard and Alice. Joan shrugs her shoulders as if Fate or Necessity is taking its course in tragic style. She eventually admits however that she now has misgivings as a result of a second dream, and is persuaded to accompany Rachel to speak with Alice. The interview goes badly, with Alice indicating that she does not see how she can continue to be involved.

Act 5

Richard appears alone. He curses his ill Fortune, and wonders why a French play, rather than a Scottish play, should be his undoing. **[Song 7]** He is joined by Anna, who hints at a softening on Joan's part, and encourages Richard to take advantage of this, for her sister's sake.

Joan meets with Harry and anticipates victory in their bet, but without great enthusiasm. Harry notices Joan's lack of triumph at the outcome. Richard arrives and follows Anna's advice by abjuring the excesses of his countrymen and making a heartfelt plea for acceptance into the community. Joan is moved by this.

Rachel visits Alice again. They speak at cross purposes, as Rachel is concerned about unity at all costs, whereas Alice wants unity based upon specific principles. Joan arrives, and helps to resolve this impasse. Richard then joins the three of them on a signal from Joan, and a reconciliation is concluded. Harry and Anna finally rejoin the others, and there is a party to welcome Richard fully into the community. **[Song 8]**