

Anna Bullinger and the household of faith
By Deanna Smid

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Characters:

Anna Bullinger
Britta Schmid
Regula Zwingli
Rudolph Gualther
Henry Bullinger
Anneli
Margarethe
Elisabeth
Heinrich
Hans Rudolph
Christof
Hans
Diethelm
Veritas
Dorothea
Felix
Anna Zwingli
Young Anna Zwingli
Old Mr. Bullinger
Old Mrs. Bullinger
Henry Lavater
Josiah Simler
Polish tutor
Lec (Polish student)
Karol (Polish student)
John Hooper
Huguenot

Setting: Ulrich Zwingli has died in battle, but his family is not left alone. Anna and Henry Bullinger, Zwingli's successor, have taken in Anna Zwingli and her daughters Regula and Anna. Anna and Henry have eleven children themselves, and they also care for Henry's aged parents. They have also taken in Henry's many students. Their home operates, too, as a safe haven for Christians who are escaping persecution in other places. When John Hooper reaches the home, running from persecution in England, he meets the large family, which tells him some of their history. The Bullinger's faithful servant, Britta, undercovers an elopement plot, which the women of the household must thwart.

Scene 1: Bullinger's house. Loud knocking is heard. Britta enters, moving from one side of the stage to the other. The loud knocking continues.

Britta: [*as she walks, shouts*] Just a moment! [*then as an aside*] My old bones don't move as quickly as they once did. [*knocking continues. Britta continues, as an aside*] Someone must be in quite the lather. [*she briefly steps offstage and enters with Hooper, who is disheveled and anxious.*]

Hooper: Have I reached the home of Rev. Bullinger, leader of the Reformed church in Zurich?

Britta: You have indeed, sir.

Hooper: I must speak with him at once!

Britta: I'm afraid he is currently out of the house, sir. Would you like to wait for him?

Hooper: No, no, there is no time. [*frenzied*] I must see Bullinger!

Britta: [*trying to calm him*] Sir, sir, don't make yourself upset. You are safe in the home of Henry and Anna Bullinger. The Reverend will be back soon enough.

Hooper: [*still frenzied*] I must speak with him!

[*Anna enters, wielding an umbrella as a weapon*]

Anna [*to Britta*]: Britta, what is this commotion? Are you alright?

Britta: Of course, ma'am. This gentleman knocked at the door, looking for your husband. He seems quite overcome.

Anna [*to Hooper*]: Dear sir, welcome to our home. My name is Anna Bullinger, and I understand you are looking for my husband?

Hooper: Yes, I must speak with him at once!

Britta: Anything you can say to him, you can say to her.

Anna: Britta is quite right, Mr....?

Hooper: Hooper.

Anna: Hooper? Isn't that an English name?

Hooper: [*guardedly*] Yes, I am English.

Anna: Henry told me that we might be expecting refugees from England. Are you one of them, sir? Do you, perchance, have a letter?

Hooper: I do have a letter, ma'am, but I'm to show it to Reverend Bullinger.

Anna: I understand.

Hooper: But I can tell you that I am indeed a refugee from England. I was no longer safe in my own country, so Archbishop Cranmer sent me here for refuge and to study with the great Rev. Bullinger.

Anna: You are safe now, Mr. Hooper, and my husband and I welcome you to the city. Do you have a place to stay while you are here?

Hooper: I'm afraid I don't, and what's worse, my wife is planning to join me as soon as she can escape England.

Anna: That's no trouble at all. You and she shall join our household!

Britta: [*worriedly*] Ma'am, do you think that is a good idea?

Anna: Of course, Britta. What are two more members of our family...?

Hooper: My wife is pregnant, too.

Anna: ...Three more members of our family?

Hooper: We think it's twins.

Anna: ...Four more members of our family?

Britta: Well, if you're sure. I'll see if I can find a spot for them to sleep.

Hooper: [*in relief*] Dear lady, you are an angel!

[*Henry Bullinger enters suddenly*]

Henry: I agree! She is my angel-wife.

Anna: [*blushing*] Oh Henry.

Britta: Welcome home, sir.

Henry: Thank you, Britta. And I see that we have a visitor. Welcome, sir. It looks like you have travelled a long distance.

Anna: He is a refugee from England, Henry, and his pregnant wife is hard on his heels.

Henry: Then I bid you an even heartier welcome! Are you Hooper?

Hooper: Yes, sir. Here is a letter of introduction from Archbishop Cranmer. [*He passes a letter to Henry. Henry stuffs it in a pocket*].

Anna: Henry, Hooper and his wife are going to live with us while he's here in Zurich.

Henry: But of course!

Britta: Since he's going to be a part of the family, should he meet everyone?

Anna: Would you like to, Hooper, or are you too tired from your long journey?

Hooper: Madam, I am so blessed and thankful to be here, I have new hope, new life, and new vigor. Let me meet your little family.

Britta: Little! [*snorts*]

Anna [*calling out*]: Children! Students! Everyone! We have a new guest staying with us! Come and meet him!

[*A few moments pass, during which the sound of many footsteps is heard*]

[*Enter Regula Zwingli, Rudolph Gualther, Henry Bullinger, Anneli, Margarethe, Elisabeth, Heinrich, Hans Rudolph, Christof, Hans, Diethelm, Veritas, Dorothea, Felix, Anna Zwingli, Young Anna Zwingli, Old Mr. Bullinger, Old Mrs. Bullinger, Henry Lavater, Josiah Simler, Polish tutor, Lec, Karol, in no particular order*]

Anna: Ah, there you all are! Hooper, meet my family.

Hooper: [*in amazement*] Is that all of them?

Britta: [*drily*] For now.

Hooper: And they all live here?

Anna: Of course!

Britta: We have quite the collection here.

Anna: Henry, why don't you start the introductions?

Henry: These are my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Bullinger. [*They nod*] And this is Anna Zwingli.

Hooper: Anna Zwingli, widow of Ulrich Zwingli?

Anna Zwingli [*quietly*]: The very same. These are my children, essentially adopted by Henry and Anna. [*she gestures to young Anna Zwingli and Regula*]

Young Anna Zwingli [*screeches, like a young child*]: Our papa was killed dead! And we were really poor after that. But we're fine now, because we live with the Bullingers.

Regula [*to her sibling*]: Do you have to tell everyone the whole story?

Anna Zwingli: It's alright, Regula. [*to Hooper*] This is my eldest remaining daughter, Regula.

Regula: [*to Hooper*] Very pleased to meet you.

Henry: And now our own children: [*He lists them all in turn*]: Anneli, Margarethe, Elisabeth, Heinrich, Hans Rudolph, Christof, Hans, Diethelm, Veritas, Dorothea, and Felix.

Felix: [*screeches, like a young child*] We have a story, too!

Dorothea: [*screeches*] It's very exciting!

Veritas: [*comforting Hooper*] But nobody dies in this story.

Anneli: [*To siblings*] We don't have to tell the story to every new guest!

Margarethe: And we're too old for stories, don't you think?

Diethelm: It wouldn't be fair if he didn't know the story. Everyone else does.

Hans: I could act it out for you, sir.

Christof: Hans, you look for any excuse to put on a play.

Hooper [*aside, to Henry*]: You let them put on plays?

Henry [*loudly*]: Of course they act out plays. Why, I've even written one myself.

Anna: Children, you can tell Mr. Hooper the story, but only if he's not too tired.

Felix: Are you too tired, Mr. Hoppy?

Dorothea: It's not Hoppy, it's Super, right Mr. Super?

Hooper: Sure. And I'm not too tired to hear a story.

Hans: I'll be mama. Hans Rudolph, you can be the guard. Heinrich, would you be Britta?

Britta: Can't I be Britta?

Heinrich: No, Britta. I have to be you. This is a play, after all.

Elisabeth: Should Dorothea and Felix be the babies?

Dorothea: We're not babies!

Elisabeth: Hans, you can just pretend to hold babies.

Hans: No problem! Everyone, take your places. [*Hans stands centre stage, Hans Rudolph stands on one side of the stage, and Heinrich stands on the other side*].

Heinrich: I have to start. [*Assumes an "acting" stance*]. My name is Britta, and I'm the servant of the Henry and Anna Bullinger family.

Britta: Bravo!

Heinrich: Oh no, Master Henry has fled for his life from the city of Bremgarten. Poor Mistress Anna is left behind with two babies, and now thirty Roman Catholic soldiers have taken over the house. [*Heinrich runs over to Hans*] Mistress Anna!

Hans: [*assumes "acting stance"*] Yes, I am Anna Bullinger. What is it, Britta, my faithful servant?

Heinrich: Mistress, we have to flee the city for our lives. Take up the babies and run!

Hans: But what about the house, Britta?

Heinrich: I will take care of the house, mistress. You should join your husband. Here, take your babies and run. [*Heinrich passes imaginary babies to Hans*]

Hans: I must flee the city! Away! [*Hans moves towards Hans Rudolph*]

Hans Rudolph: Halt! Who goes there?

Hans: [*aside*] Alas, it is the guard of the city gates. [*to Hans Rudolph*] Kind sir, I must leave the city.

Hans Rudolph: No one can leave the city tonight.

Hans: But I must go at once.

Hans Rudolph: It is forbidden!

Hans: But surely you have the key, and it would a simple matter to open the gate.

Hans Rudolph: I do have the key [*brandishes the key, gloatingly*], but I will not open the gate.

Hans: [*shifts the “babies” to one side, then grabs the key. The two tussle over the key for a while, and then Hans rips it from the grasp of Hans Rudolph.*] Aha!

Hans Rudolph: [*Falling to the ground, groaning*] I guess I am no match for the strength of a desperate woman.

Hans: And now I can leave the city and rejoin my beloved husband.

[*Hans Rudolph stands up, and all three actors bow to the assembled family*]

[*everyone on stage applauds*]

Britta: Well done!

Hooper: [*to Anna*] Did that actually happen?

Anna: Well, more or less, yes. The children like to dramatize it a bit.

Henry: You have had your fun, children, but the introductions are not yet complete. Mr. Hooper, these are my students, Rudolph Gualther, Henry Lavater, and Josiah Simler. I understand that you will be joining them in their studies.

Rudolph: Welcome.

Henry: Pleased to meet you.

Josiah: I hope you enjoy your stay with us.

Henry: And these children are visiting us from Poland, together with their tutor.

Lec: Hello, sir.

Karol: Very pleased to meet you.

Lec [*to tutor*]: Teacher, the Zwinglis had a good story,

Karol [*to tutor*]: ...and the Bullinger children had a little play. What can we do?

Tutor: Why don't you sing a song? Which one is your favourite?

Lec: Something by Dr. Beza!

[*Lec and Karol sing Psalm 116. The rest of the cast join in and sing verse 1 and 9 together*]:

I love the Lord, the fount of life and grace
He heard my voice, my cry and supplication,
Inclined his ear, gave strength and consolation,
In life, in death, my heart will seek his face.

I am, O LORD, thy servant, bound yet free,
Thy handmaid's son, whose shackles thou hast broken.
Redeemed by grace, I'll render as a token
Of gratitude my constant praise to thee.

Karol: [*to tutor*] But everyone joined in! It wasn't just from us.

Tutor: That's what happens when you sing a Psalm—everyone sings with you.

Hooper: It was lovely. We have nothing like that in England right now.

Anna Bullinger: Mr. Hooper, you must be exhausted. Why don't you go with Henry, who will show you where to wash up. And it's almost time for dinner. Children, everyone, go and wash up for dinner!

[*All of the cast exits, except for Regula, Rudolph, and Britta. Britta sees that Regula and Rudolph are looking conspiratorial, so she hides behind something ridiculous, like a small piece of furniture*]

Regula: Oh Rudolph!

Rudolph: Oh Regula!

Regula: How I love you, my dearest.

Rudolph: And I you, sweet darling!

[*Britta looks confused*]

Regula: My handsome love muffin.

Rudolph: My beautiful buttercup.

[*Britta looks disgusted*]

Regula: What have you decided to do?

Rudolph: Have you asked your mother about us?

Regula: I do not dare. She will tell us that we are too young to wed.

Rudolph: True, true. And if we speak with her, she may try to separate us.

Regula: We have to run away.

Rudolph: But my studies!

Regula: Once we are married we can return. Rev. Bullinger will be sure to take you back, and then no one will be able to separate us.

Rudolph: I guess you're right.

Regula: When should we run? Today?

Rudolph: I think we must. I can no longer hide my overwhelming love for you.

Regula: My bags are packed.

Rudolph: And mine could be ready in a matter of moments.

Regula: While everyone is preparing for dinner, we can slip away.

Rudolph: Meet me back here in five minutes.

Regula: Even those five minutes away from you are too long.

Rudolph: My darling!

Regula: We must hurry. [*they both exit*]

Britta: [*emerging from hiding*] Oh my. I must tell Mrs. Bullinger and Mrs. Zwingli [*she hurries off stage*].

Scene 2: Britta, Anna Bullinger, and Anna Zwingli enter.

Britta: [*to the two women*] They were standing right over there [*gestures to where Regula and Rudolph were standing*].

Anna Bullinger: And you are sure you heard them make plans for today?

Anna Zwingli: What is that girl thinking?

Anna Bullinger: We must stop them.

Anna Zwingli: What if they change their plans, or if they deny it all?

Britta: We should hide to see if they meet here as they planned. [*All of the women hide, as ridiculously as Britta did in the previous scene*].

[*They wait for an uncomfortably long time*]

Anna Zwingli: [*in a stage whisper*] Britta, are you sure?

Britta: [*in a stage whisper*] Yes!

Anna Zwingli: You know you have no filter, Britta.

Anna Bullinger: [*in a stage whisper*] Quiet! I think I hear them now.

[*Regula and Rudolph enter, dressed for travel, carrying a bag each*]

Regula: Our plan is working, dear heart.

Rudolph: Sweetums, I long to be married to you.

Regula: And soon we shall be! [*they embrace, then jump apart in shock as the three women emerge from their hiding places*]

Britta: Stop!

Anna Zwingli: Regula, what are you thinking?

Anna Bullinger: Rudolph, I expected better from you.

Regula: We are in love.

Rudolph: And we are going to get married. You can't stop us.

Anna Zwingli: Why would we?

Anna Bullinger: Well, they are quite young.

Regula: Too young? Is there a right age for marriage?

Britta: I suggest 31, at least.

Anna Zwingli: Why didn't you speak to me, Regula?

Regula: I was sure you would say no!

Anna Bullinger: But why?

Regula: You three are so...old! Would you understand our romance?

Rudolph: [*looking a bit uncomfortable*] Well, ah, we might have been a bit carried away.

Britta: You think they don't know romance? Look at this! [*She pulls a large package of paper out of a pocket*]

Anna Bullinger: [*looking comically dismayed*] Oh Britta, you didn't.

Regula: What is that?

Britta: This is the marriage proposal from Henry Bullinger to one Anna Adlischweiler.

Rudolph: He proposed by letter?

Britta: Oh yes. Take a look. [*she passes the letter to Rudolph*]

Rudolph: [*paging through the 14-page letter*] Let's see: in the fourteen pages he explains that he is a good and honourable man, he details his financial expectations, and says that he is in love with her. This letter sounds more like a treatise than a love letter. Listen to this: "Yes, you are young, and God did not give you such a body, and did not create you so that you remain an eternal madam and do nothing so that fruit comes from you."

Anna Bullinger: I was a nun at the time, so he had to convince me to leave the convent so that I could marry him.

Regula: [*reading over Rudolph's shoulder*] He ends with, "Read my letter three or four times, think about it, and ask God so that he tells you what his will is in this matter."

Britta: Mr. Bullinger was only twenty-three years old at the time.

Anna Bullinger: I agreed, of course, but it was a few years before we married.

Regula: But why are you showing this to us, Britta?

Anna Zwingli: We have been married, my dear, and we understand love.

Anna Bullinger: We know that our children will want to marry at some point.

Britta: You're not the only one with romance in your hearts and eyes. Have you seen the way Josiah and Elisabeth look at each other?

Anna Zwingli: Just talk to us, dear children. We will support you, if it is the Lord's will.

Anna Bullinger: So you can put away your cloaks and your bags and join the family for supper.

Rudolph: And marriage?

Anna Bullinger: Of course! We ask only that you both be “sound, hardworking, and [...] clean [...], fearing God, honourable toward God, and all people... Watch the time for doing what needs to be done, not being slothful, and praying without ceasing, loyally. And protect yoursel[ves] from bad company and enjoy staying home.”¹

Britta: In addition to all of that, always remember to make sure that “you have enough shirts...and do not let your shoes fall apart, give them to be cleaned, and be domestic.”²

Anna Zwingli: Oh Britta, you are always so practical.

Rudolph: Thank you, all, for your advice and understanding.

Regula: Yes, thank you, mama, Mrs. Bullinger, and Britta.

Anna Bullinger: Let us all go in for dinner. [*They all leave*]

[*As soon as the stage is empty, loud knocking is heard at the door. Britta enters and opens the door*].

Huguenot: [*in a thick French accent*] *Bonjour*. I am looking for Monsier *Henri* Bullinger. It is *tres* important.

Britta: Mr. Bullinger is just sitting down for dinner, sir.

Huguenot: I must speak with him. I am a Huguenot, just escaped from persecution in France. I need a safe place to hide, and I would like to learn from Monsier Bullinger.

Britta: Well, come inside, then. [*Huguenots walks forward. Britta shouts in the direction Anna Bullinger exited the stage.*] Mrs. Bullinger! We have another one! You’d better set another place for dinner.

Exeunt

¹ This quotation comes from the only extant letter written by Anna Bullinger.

² From the same letter