

The Creative Process of an original play

DEATH FINDS A KING

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THESIS

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By

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2000

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, David:

You were content to let me shine, that's your way.  
So I was the one with all the glory, while you were the one  
with all the strength.  
Did you ever know that you're my hero?  
I can fly higher than an eagle,  
For you are the wind beneath my wings.  
Thank you, thank you, thank God for you, the wind  
beneath my wings.

Georges Delerue "Wind Beneath My Wings"

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(20 November 2000)

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## INTRODUCTION

### I. Sources of Inspiration

The focus of this thesis is on the process of creating the history play Death Finds A King. In the fall of 1999 I took a “Problems in Theatre” course with Dr. Charles Pascoe. This heightened my awareness to the unmistakable differences between writing for an individual reader and crafting a dramatic story that would be performed by actors in front of a live audience.

Early in my graduate studies program at SWT I conceived two different ideas for historically based plays. The first notion dealt with Edwin Booth and his theatrical family. This dramatic premise matured during my independent program with Dr. Pascoe into the two-act play, A Matter of Choice. This play had a staged reading at Southwest by student actors in November 1999 and a second reading at an Austin Scriptworks Associate Member Salon by professional actors in February 2000.

My second idea was to write a play about Henry I of England, but then I uncovered the historical event of the mysterious death in England's New Forest of his older brother, William II of England, and I was hooked. I am an insatiable mystery reader and write reviews on mystery books for the San Antonio Express-News. The idea of an unresolved mystery set in the early Middle Ages looked custom tailored to my interests.

The dramatic premise for Death Finds A King evolved in spring 2000 during a “Problems in Theatre” course with Dr. John Fleming. The syllabus for

the independent study detailed a discussion of history plays. We began with traditionally structured linear plays such as James Goldman's A Lion in Winter and Robert Bolt's A Man for All Seasons. We then examined less traditionally structured, non-linear plays such as Romulus Linney's Childe Byron and The Sorrows of Frederick, Peter Shaffer's The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Steve Martin's Picasso at the Lapin Agile and Arcadia by Tom Stoppard. The class culminated in my writing a one-act play, The Ruby. As part of the New Play Program The Ruby was performed in the Studio Theatre at Southwest Texas State University for four nights, September 20-23, 2000.

## II. Synopsis

William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy, defeated the English nobility at the Battle of Hastings in 1066 and was crowned king. In 1087, William died in Rouen, but not before he gave his favorite son, William Rufus, his English lands. William II of England ruled for thirteen years before his death in the New Forest. The mystery that surrounds his death at sunset on August 2, 1100 still remains a puzzle. This play is one interpretation of that event.

Death Finds A King is set in England's New Forest, which is situated approximately twenty miles north of Winchester. The king arrives at his hunting lodge Castle Malwood - some historians say it was called Brockenhurst (Barlow 420), others Castle Malwood (Grinnell-Milne 30) - with a contingent of Norman nobles for a fortnight of red stag hunting during August's fat season or "grease time."

William II is quietly making arrangements to marry a Scottish noblewoman and he confides this and his concerns about his younger brother, Count Henry, to his trusted and loyal friend Lord FitzHaimo. At present, the English, the Scots and the Welsh nobility appear content under his rule. Yet, there are rebellious undercurrents festering just below the surface.

A Norman rebellion is coalescing for its leaders, the de Clare brothers. Gilbert and Roger de Clare are co-conspirators to place Count Henry, the youngest son of William the Conqueror, on the English throne. They see Count Henry as potentially more generous to their acquisitive temperaments than his older brother. Yet, the de Clare's chances to usurp William's crown without open rebellion are at a critical point. They must take action before the oldest brother, Robert, Duke of Normandy, returns from the Crusades with his new bride. Upon Robert's return to his duchy of Normandy, any action taken against William would meet with immediate reprisals or an attempt to establish his primogeniture claim to the English throne.

On William II's last day of life two monks try to warn him of impending danger. The first monk has Lord FitzHaimo deliver his warning in the guise of a dream. The second monk comes as a messenger from Abbot Serlo of Gloucester just as the king is setting out on this unusually late afternoon hunt. The Abbot may have discovered that some Norman nobles planned to kill the king. He attempts to warn the king without incriminating himself or bringing injury to his monastery by hiding the warning in the form of a dream.

Confident in his position, William ignores both the warning dreams and the concerns of his loyal friend Lord FitzHaimo and rides into the forest on the afternoon of August 2<sup>nd</sup> never to return.

### **III. Research**

For a history play research serves as a catalyst. It yields ideas or perspectives on an epoch's events and personalities that might be included in the evolving drama. It is the details uncovered during the research process that provides a foundation for the spine of the play and the characters that will tell the dramatic story.

In writing a history play the beginning point for me started with general or broad-based research that cultivated a sense of the period, customs and the other historical events of that era. When my research supported the original premise I proceeded to delve further.

Some of the important historical events of the period included the following. King Harold usurped the English throne and William, Duke of Normandy, attacked England because he maintained he was the rightful heir to King Edward. On his deathbed, William I of England split his kingdom between the two oldest surviving sons, Robert and William. Robert, the eldest son, received the prestigious prize of the Dukedom of Normandy. William, the Conqueror's favorite son, gained the less valuable lands of England. To Henry, the youngest son, he gave £5,000 (Barlow 49), which in today's monetary terms equals a princely sum. Later, Henry also laid claim to his mother's dower lands in England

From here, I began to sift through topical books and periodicals to unearth the slivers of information that lead me to discover who these men and women were and how they have been perceived by writers through the centuries. Bibliographies helped to redirect my investigation throughout the preliminary research process and invariably sent me in pursuit of a new source, a new historian or a new opinion. For me, writing a history play is an exciting challenge that is inherently enriched with the constant process of exploration and discovery. Each new theory or supposition ignited my imagination and prompted me to ask, "what if?"

## THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

### IV. Early Drafts and Crafting the Play

I think the best visual description of the way I work is to envision an hourglass. As a method image, I see two cones lying on their sides touching at their apexes. The conceptual development of a play begins at the wider end of the first cone. For me it is a historical personality or event that captures my imagination. The exploratory research into the personalities and events of a given time period is open-ended. I try to explore all the possibilities that fueled my original questions.

This image of an hourglass is an illustration of the growth and development that my play must travel through if it is successfully to dramatize, entertain or hold an audience's interest. The open ends and the touching apexes help me to visualize a sound dramatic work by augmenting the picture of the traditional structure of a dramatic work, which consists of, a beginning, middle and an end.

The hourglass approach empowers a writer to begin with a broad premise, personality or event and refine it down to its essence. Refinement of the general or broadly drawn dramatic details leads into the apex of the first cone. Application of Aristotle's six fundamental elements of drama which consist of plot, action, characters' motivations and goals, ideas or thoughts, diction or language, music and spectacle helps to further distill and elucidate the dramatic piece. Emergence into the second cone initiates the reverse

process by a careful layering in of the individual, story-specific, historical details, subtexts, character motivations, attitudes and dramatic issues that will mold the dramatic elements into a sound play.

### ***Beginning***

The Ruby served as a discovery vehicle for Death Finds A King. The story of The Ruby deals with two of William and Henry's sisters at the time of their mother's, Queen Matilda, death. Constance and Agatha are deeply concerned about their futures. If only they had some money of their own they might broaden the severely limited choices available to them. Ultimately, they decide to try and find their mother's ruby. They are unaware that William and Henry have resolved upon the same plan of action.

I learned a lot about the two brothers when I wrote The Ruby for it explored the world of knights, Normans and men. The world that these two men lived in held a harshness, which was doubly forbidding for women. In trying to examine the personalities of William and Henry I learned more than I had anticipated. William and Henry's world and that of their sisters was separate and very unequal. When the brothers entered their sisters' world new facets of their personalities surfaced. Constance and Agatha succeeded in showing me new traits, attitudes and characteristics of these two royal brothers.

Initially, I had planned to cast Henry in the role of protagonist. The preliminary title for this full-length play was Friend or Foe. The choice of title was based on a premise to explore Henry's relationship to his older brother. But each time I wrote a scene, Henry's attitude and motivation felt contrary to

what I sought to tell and wanted to write. I tried writing out short scenes to explore events or characters that I might want to include in the play but I just didn't seem able to construct dramatic characters that held any interest for me. It was the reverse situation of Luigi Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author. I had an event I wanted to dramatize except I couldn't find the characters to tell my story. Henry's voice was harsh, ambitious, manipulative, devious and greedy. Finally, I had to accept the fact that I did not like Henry. The play had stalled, sputtered and stopped.

I write drama to an inner feeling about a character or an event. Yet men and women forged historical events. So for my plays, it is the people and who they may have been that inspire and give my story life. Thus, to have a main character that I did not like placed an insurmountable barrier squarely in my path. I could go no further without a new character who would drive the play forward to its inevitable conclusion and make it stage worthy.

The man who the monks called greedy and evil but who managed to hold together a kingdom ripped apart at the death of his father re-emerged slowly as a much stronger personality. Here was a man who was far less handsome than his younger brother and due to his red countenance, or his bad temper, was dubbed with the name "Rufus" by later historians. He was a soldier who did not adhere to the accepted practice that for every night a new woman shared his bed. He was so gallant on the field of battle that it is rumored he served later historians as a model for stories of King Arthur.

William was a man of contrasts, contradictions and aspirations. I liked this gruff, brash older brother or *le roux* as his contemporaries called him. He became my dramatic voice.

I believe what playwright Jeffrey Hatcher wrote: “The real gold in a good idea is seldom found in the initial spark. It’s found in the dramatist’s *development* of the idea” (68). That instigated new research on William II and his death. As I read the established historians and their accounts as to what happened that August afternoon in the New Forest, the absence of any solidly reliable facts served to highlight obvious omissions. Especially interesting was the paucity of details from historians of that time period. They apparently were already masters of the “Pinteresque” technique of evocative silence. Such an example is found in The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, “Thereafter, on the morning after Lammas, King William at the hunt was shot dead with an arrow by one of his own men, and after brought to Winchester,[. . .]” (237). William II of England was unpopular with the church, but when a king has been killed to write simply, “by one of his own men” seems to be the epitome of obvious omission. Now, the game was afoot.

The historical event I choose serves to set the parameters of my play. It is a style of play that Jeffrey Sweet calls “event-structured.” It is: “one that gets its shape not from the journey of its central character or characters, but from some larger occurrence. The characters peopling the work are viewed in relation to this larger event” (33). Sweet cites two examples to support his

idea. The pertinent one for my purposes is Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee's Inherit the Wind, which was written around a historical event.

Now I had the chief character, a “what if” to try to answer, and some loose parameters from the event itself, but to begin to construct a drama I needed one more vital piece of information. I wanted to have an image of the final scene sketched out. It is a critical piece for me in building the dramatic action of the play. Once I have the ending I can refocus my research and begin to shape the dramatic elements that will go into my play. Now, I know where I am headed and the exciting journey of creating my play begins.

### ***Middle***

Once I've decided on the last scene of my play and have my characters waiting in the wings I start to write out discovery scenes. They are usually French scenes or action units that I may or may not include in the play. The scenes may be composed to accomplish a variety of ends. It may be to show how I see a character, to move the play forward, to show how the antagonist acts, to help clarify the protagonist's goal or to experiment with different techniques to provide exposition.

In these French scenes or short sketches, I arrange who I want to be in the scene, why, and identify each character's goals within the scene. Also, I record any phrases or bits of dialogue that I hear the characters saying to each other. These notes, scenes, action units and miscellaneous dialogue I write down in a notebook. My five-by-eight notebook allows me to "free write" when I have an idea and not be restricted by a lack of space.

Thinking of a drama in action units or French scenes is beneficial to my creative process because it diminishes the daunting task of creating all of the scenes in a full-length play from start to finish. These smaller fragments break the story down into manageable units. By initially writing down these scenes without any regard to a particular order I allow myself to "free think" about actions, characters or motivations and not be hindered by artificial parameters. Afterwards, I can choose the scenes that will function best in my

piece and which gives me the moments I need to drive the play forward to the conclusion.

I transfer severely edited versions of my earlier scenes onto index cards. I think the use of index cards makes it easier to arrange and rearrange the order of your scenes as you construct your dramatic piece. Altering the order of events can reveal a new focus or facet that might have gone unnoticed otherwise. Later, the index cards will make writing the individual scenes easier because the cards comprise the nugget or core of a particular scene. That way, when I write a scene I can concentrate on the dialogue or adding in other elements that I want to include in the scene.

When I reach the midpoint of my hourglass process, at the conjunction of the apexes, I have identified the essential scaffolding for my dramatic piece. I have narrowed down all the information into the key components I want to include in my play. These fundamental elements must pass through the filter of the apexes and enter the final stage of creation, the first draft of the play.

## ***End***

The hourglass approach helps push the play's progress out from its principal elements already identified and culminate in the writing of the play's first draft. The scene notes, character profiles and the research have all been organized and assimilated so that when I sit down to write the first draft whole thoughts and action units can be orchestrated into complete scenes.

I like to write as many whole scenes as I can since it helps me maintain the continuity and forward motion of the play. As the first draft is written the story expands out from the scene nuggets. Now, new directions, dialogue, themes or motivations are layered into each of the scene. In some instances, the first draft is another "free write" opportunity where the synergy from all the parts molds into the drama maturing before me. It is in the rewriting stage, about halfway through the last cone, that the heart of the play will finally be disclosed.

Like with any artistic creation, a play is organic and is rarely if ever "finished" in the absolute sense. There is always a clearer way to show something, a snappier line of dialogue or richer subtext to be woven into a scene, but after some point the playwright has to let the creation go. In the life of a play, it has reached the widest part of the second cone and its final rite of passage is in performance.

The New Play Program at SWT allowed me to experience the joy, frustrations, and education of producing The Ruby. I think this aspect of the

development process is critical for any playwright seriously interested in writing for the theatre. Writing is a solitary activity and in most forms is enjoyed as a solitary pastime. Yet a play is a theatrical creation to be performed in front of a live audience.

Ultimately, a performance in front of a live audience has been honed and re-created through collaboration. The writer created the blueprint, but a staged performance has been edited, refined, reshaped and, in many instances, rewritten. SWT's Assistant Professor Claude File is fond of saying that theatre is not dependent or independent but rather it is interdependent. A successful play must be greater than the sum of its parts if it is going to offer more than what an audience anticipates.

Ironically, once the staged reading or production is over the refinement and rewriting process begins all over again for me. I learn something every time I hear my play read out loud by professional actors. Seeing and hearing a play I wrote is an incredible summit to reach after all the work. I would liken it to seeing yourself on a video as you learn a new dance movement.

Someone can tell you what needs work or what was done correctly but hear your play read by actors and you will "see" the flaws and facets of the play as though for the first time. A nuance, a pause added, a tone of voice that reveals more of a character, each instance allows me to "re-see" my play.

Afterwards, I head back to my computer to edit, refine and reapply my hourglass process to make it an even better play.

V. The Text of DEATH FINDS A KING

Death Finds A King

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## CHARACTERS

### KING WILLIAM II OF ENGLAND

William is the second son of William the Conqueror. Shy with strangers because of a slight stutter but gruff and confident as a warrior. A likeable scoundrel, 43.

### COUNT HENRI

Youngest son of William the Conqueror. Landless in a society that measured a man's worth in land. Ambitious and frustrated, 32

### ROBERT fitzHAIMO

William's oldest and most loyal friend, mid - late 40s.

### GILBERT De CLARE, EARL OF TONBRIDGE

Norman lord, calculating and ambitious. Younger brother of Roger, 31.

### ROGER De CLARE

Norman lord, oldest brother of Gilbert Hungry for power, 37

### WALTER TIREL, LORD OF POIX

Brother-in-law to Gilbert and Roger de Clare; a quiet, pious man, late 20s.

### ANSGAR

An English peasant and farmer, proud and honest in an unjust world, 44.

### ELFRIDA

Wife of Alfred, early 30s.

### GIFFORD De AQUILON

The Chief Hunter, a Norman knight who organizes the king's hunt, 36

### IVO

Servant who serves the king, 30-40.

### WULFSTAN

Ivo's cousin and attendant to the king, 30.

## TIME

August 1100.

## PLACE

The setting is medieval England. There are two locations One is the king's hunting lodge named Castle Malwood. The second is the New Forest located north of Winchester.

### Death Finds A King

#### Act One:

Scene One.....Late afternoon, August 1, 1100

Scene Two.....Early afternoon, August 2, 1100

#### Act Two

Scene One.....Late afternoon, August 2, 1100

Scene Two.....Early evening, the same day

## ACT I

### Scene 1

As the lights come up the stage is empty.  
It is late afternoon in a small clearing that  
is cut by a footpath in the densely  
wooded New Forest.

ANSGAR (O.S.)

Berta, Heerrreee you pretty thing you. Come to your master.

(ANSGAR, worn from searching, enters the  
clearing and looks around, searching. He is wary  
and on guard as he calls out.)

ANSGAR

Berta, you fat-bellied, lump of pork on four legs, where are you? I'm not going to  
remain in this forest much longer. When the wolves find you you'll make a tasty  
dinner. Beerrttaa. By all the saints' teeth, you would think craftsmen could create  
a stronger latch for a gate.

(ANSGAR crosses and strains to listen. Waits,  
then begins search again )

ANSGAR

You puffed up old sow. If the king or a Norman baron catches me in this forest I'll  
be sliced up in more ways than you can think of. Come out here before I'm  
discovered.

(Softly with affected warmth)

Beerrttaa come here. Berta, enough I must leave before I am discovered. Come  
here to your master before the bad Normans find you and serve you for--

(ANSGAR freezes, then in a stage whisper)

ANSGAR (cont'd)

a Norman banquet.

(ANSGAR hears men approaching. He searches for a hiding place, spots one and slips behind a scrubby bush. Voices grow louder. Enter KING WILLIAM, confident and boisterous and ROBERT fitzHAIMO, enjoying the king's good humor. All the men are dressed for hunting and WULFSTAN, the king's attendant, carries the men's bows and quivers of arrows.)

WILLIAM

(Satisfied)

What a good day to hunt. Out-of-doors away from the affairs of the court.

ROBERT

Aye, your Majesty we had good luck. The beaters sent many a strong stag to fall beneath your bow. Gifford promises tomorrow will be as bountiful. He will send the beaters into the north part of Stricknag Wood.

WILLIAM

Good, good, tomorrow promises much. I look forward to the dawn.

ROBERT

I am hesitant to bring up matters of state, but . . . have you spoken to your brother?

WILLIAM

(to Wulfstan)

Find Count Henri. Tell him to join me.

WULFSTAN

Aye, Your Majesty.

(WULFSTAN exits.)

WILLIAM

No, I haven't. I will tonight. Now I have need of your counsel on another matter. I have been thinking about taking a wife.

ROBERT

That's wonderful my lord. That will bring peace to the land. Many were growing concerned.

WILLIAM

My older brother's recent marriage reminds me, that I too should have an heir. I would wish for a marriage to a woman who will help forge a bond between Normans and English. A son born of our union would insure my blood flows through the next king.

ROBERT

An excellent idea. At present, if something should happen to you the line of ascent is unclear. You know what Henri would-

WILLIAM

*Oui.* My younger brother is . . . eager to take my place on the English throne, or Robert's in Normandy. I know his hunger grows. So a wife for an heir. I only wish that sssshe. . . .

ROBERT

Sire, I have heard rumors.

WILLIAM

(Instantly alert)

What have you heard?

ROBERT

I've made inquiries into the matter on your behalf.

WILLIAM

Why chase after wishes? Sssshe's, by the holy face of Lucca, Sssshe's a nun Sssshe's taken vows. There is no choice for me, I must look elsewhere.

ROBERT

The information I have received verifies that Lady Edith left her Aunt Christina's abbey in Wilton and is in Scotland with her brother the king. All may not be, as you think. I believe it is worth sending messengers north.

WILLIAM

Do you trust this information?

ROBERT

My sources would have no reason not to share the truth with me To them it is merely idle gossip about a daughter who was forced to hide beneath the veil by her aunt. But I have heard that Lady Edith rejected the path of church life.

WILLIAM

(Hope dawns on his face.)

Do you think it might be true? That sssssshe might be free to wed me?

ROBERT

If you wish I will send an ambassador to confirm my information I know it would bring you happiness.

WILLIAM

I . . . I . . . I'm being foolish to think about the Lady Edith, she has long ago given her heart. Ssshe is fully-grown now, I . . . damnit, why does the mere thought of her tie my tongue? I have only to think of her and I feel as though I cannot gather my sssscattered thoughts.

ROBERT

My Lord, I would have to say your affliction is as great as your father's was for your mother the queen. William the Conqueror gave his heart once and you are cut from the same cloth. It would seem yours belongs to the lovely Lady Edith.

WILLIAM

Am I so easy to read? Ah, the prospect of good news from Scotland would make me hurry home from Aquitaine.

ROBERT

You go then?

WILLIAM

As soon as his messenger arrives The young Duke of Aquitaine seeks to secure his place in heaven with the Crusades in Jerusalem Luckily for me, he needs money just as badly as Robert did to arm his knights

ROBERT

I understood you would remain a fortnight to hunt?

WILLIAM

I don't wish others to know of my plans. When his messenger arrives I ride for Winchester and sail to Poitiers. Robert, Aquitaine will be easier to hold on to than Normandy. And, an even greater prize.

ROBERT

Count Henri should be told your decision about Normandy.

WILLIAM

Do not press me. I know I must, but I do not welcome his tantrum.

ROBERT

I only advise not to wait too long. Henri may hear whispers of your plan and . . . and create mischief. We both know he has joined Robert against you before.

WILLIAM

I know all too well my spoiled brother's weaknesses. Yet, I keep hoping.

ROBERT

An older brother's support is important.

WILLIAM

But, beware all the same?

ROBERT

I grant I may be too careful at times. But I worry that some of our Norman barons might move against you and attempt to place Henri on the throne.

WILLIAM

Then all the more reason for me to take a wife.

ROBERT

*Qui*, I'm overly cautious, but I feel that things are not as they appear to be.

WILLIAM

I will heed your words and be vigilant.

ROBERT

My suspicions may only be these tired old bones feeling their age.

WILLIAM

I promise. I will take caution. Now, how about spending Michaelmas in Poitiers?

ROBERT

You think it possible?

WILLIAM

I do. So, you see, my little brother may be less angry than you think. A promise of other estates may soften the insult Henri will see. Estates of greater value. But enough, I am the king and little brother will take what I give him.

ROBERT

Is that the Count?

WILLIAM

(Teasingly)

Sharp eyes for such an old man.

ROBERT

(A smile in his voice)

Thankfully, some parts of this weary body still work.

WILLIAM

What foolishness, you'll probably outlive me.

ROBERT

I sincerely hope not my lord.

(COUNT HENRI, proud with his own self-importance; GILBERT DE CLARE, Earl of Tonbridge, carries a calculating air. WULFSTAN follows.)

HENRI

(Flippant tone with a touch of sarcasm)

I didn't keep you waiting, did I?

WILLIAM

Not long enough to bother. I thought perchance that you were already at Malwood, pursuing some womanly pleasures before supper.

HENRI

There is little of that here to capture my attention. No, I must forgo the usual pleasantries until we return to Winchester.

WILLIAM

Poor brother, such a hard life. Hunting great red stags by day and eating and drinking all night. The English maids may be relieved to know they don't take your fancy.

HENRI

What English maid could? They are dirty and smell of the dung heap. No thank you.

ROBERT

Your majesty, we should continue to Malwood.

WILLIAM

Earl Tonbridge, where is your brother? I thought him with you.

GILBERT

No sire, a messenger arrived and asked for him.

WILLIAM

Lord Roger does not seem much interested in hunting as of late, why is that?

GILBERT

I think he seeks bigger game.

WILLIAM

Well, I feel sure he will find it here. I have been assured that some of the largest stags abide in these woods. Tomorrow we will seek them out for your brother.

GILBERT

I thank you, your Majesty for my absent brother. I know he will welcome the chance for new game.

HENRI

Earl Gilbert, I feel Roger will soon lose his malady. Fresh air and the hunt will correct what ails him.

WILLIAM

My brother is right. We will find Lord de Clare a stag worthy to brag of on the morrow.

GILBERT

Thank you, your Majesty. I will tell Roger of his good fortune when I see him. I think it best I wait a short time to see if he travels behind us.

WILLIAM

If you wish. We're off for Malwood. I have been promised stag and succulent pig to whet our appetites. I grow hungry thinking on such things

HENRI

Aye brother, the thought of the food and wine that awaits us is warming.

(WILLIAM, ROBERT and HENRI exit from the clearing. ANSGAR sticks his head out to escape, but hides when he sees GILBERT.)

GILBERT

Roger is that you?

(ROGER enters. His face is set in anxious lines.)

ROGER

There you are.

GILBERT

I waited for you. What happened? Gifford told me a messenger arrived. Tell me.

ROGER

We are doomed. All our plans are for naught. We will be discovered and the king will not be as forgiving as he once was.

GILBERT

Stop. Tell me, slowly. What are you talking about? Was it from the archer?

ROGER

Of course it was, you idiot. Why else would I be so concerned?

GILBERT

Whatever do you mean? He wrote me not three days ago that he would be in Winchester by today.

ROGER

That is what I am trying to tell you. Our plans are finished. The man has met with an accident and is still in Normandy. What will we do now?

GILBERT

Slow down, Roger, tell me word for word what the messenger told you.

ROGER

Don't tell me to calm myself. Time is a wicked enemy, it steals too much from us.

GILBERT

By all the saints, don't go off on that stupid path again. You are not getting old. You have plenty of time.

ROGER

You can say that, but years pass too quickly to my liking. You have time to wait, I don't. We must take action before I'm too old to enjoy the fruits of our efforts

GILBERT

(His tone is authoritative.)

Roger, stop this rambling. Tell me what the messenger said. Is he still at Malwood?

ROGER

Don't speak that way to me. I'm the older brother. I'm the one who's trying to gain us more land. I'm the one-

GILBERT

Yes Roger, now, when will the archer arrive? Did he write of a date?

ROGER

A fortnight at least. Devil take the man, that is too long. In a fortnight Duke Robert will be back in Normandy and for all we know the King will be on his journey to Aquitaine. This was our best time to strike. To delay will dash our hopes to nothingness.

GILBERT

That was the soonest the archer could arrive?

ROGER

Yes, I told you. Now what?

GILBERT

I'm not sure, let me think what we should do. Our friends may grow restless with too much waiting, but each step must be carefully considered.

ROGER

Consider all you want to but we must do something.

GILBERT

Brother, think.

ROGER

What about Gifford?

GILBERT

The Chief Hunter? How can he help us?

ROGER

He knows where all stand for the hunt. His position is nearest the king

GILBERT

Are you trying to concoct some hare-brained plan? Gifford de Aquilon is loyal to King William. What an idiotic thought!

ROGER

It is not idiotic! Threats have worked for us before, why not now? He has a new bride of recent months, why don't we-

GILBERT

Think what you're saying.

ROGER

I am thinking. Why should I listen to what you say? I'm the oldest son. I'm the one who should be giving orders. You should follow what I say, not the other way round.

GILBERT

Roger, you know I'm better at this game than you. You've said so yourself upon many occasions. Your strength is in action, mine in thinking and planning. Why are you behaving in such an odd manner?

ROGER

(Sulky)

Well, I am the eldest. Time grows short with all your "thinking." We must act. Now.

GILBERT

Patience my brother, patience.

ROGER

I don't have any left.

GILBERT

The king will not be as ready to forgive us a second time.

ROGER

Well, what about . . . no one would think anything of a hunting accident. They would credit such a death to evil spirits or as retribution on a Norman. You know how superstitious the English are.

GILBERT

Three deaths in the same family, in the same forest? You don't think anyone will think it's unusual? Even the bishops who despise him as a blasphemer might consider it more than fate.

ROGER

Why? If it's handled smoothly? We place Count Henri on the throne before Duke Robert returns to Normandy. King William himself captured the throne within a fortnight of his own father's death.

GILBERT

(Thoughtfully)

Hum, . . . you might be correct in what you say. Too much of the same meal and a person grows bored with it.

ROGER

*Exactement.* Now, what do you think of my idea?

GILBERT

I will think about it. What did the blacksmith say?

ROGER

The eight arrows are almost made.

GILBERT

They are dipped with the herb Eudo gave you?

ROGER

Aye. I gave the blacksmith the herb with a strong warning how to handle it.

GILBERT

We must be vigilant. The King made remark upon you.

ROGER

What did he say?

GILBERT

Nothing of import. But do not forget that we must be mindful of our actions. There are those that watch us.

ROGER

Robert fitzHaimo?

GILBERT

He is but one. Now, have you spoken with Eudo?

ROGER

I spoke with him last night while he and Count Henri played dice. Why? What are you thinking?

GILBERT

Nothing. Yet we may have to make alternate plans.

ROGER

Death must find the king.

GILBERT

Silence. You and Henri may trust the forest for keeping secrets, I do not

ROGER

(In a softer voice)

What do you intend?

GILBERT

Ask Eudo to come to my chambers before the banquet tonight.

ROGER

Is that wise to use him? In his position as the king's steward? Most know he and Henri are friends. If he were to let something happen to the king at supper he would surely be accused of the king's death.

GILBERT

There are other poisons that can be used to suit our purpose and other people. Poison might find its way into the king's food other than by Eudo's hand. We could cast guilt on some ignorant English peasant.

ROGER

(There is admiration in his tone.)

What devious idea has rooted in your thoughts?

GILBERT

Later. We must leave for Malwood and our destiny.

ROGER

Aye, I'll follow. I hope Count Henri stands with us.

GILBERT

He does. It's a king's throne we offer to our friend.

(GILBERT and ROGER exit. After a few beats of silence ANSGAR slowly emerges from his hiding place. He crosses and looks after the departing men. Then looks around the clearing. Starts to exit when he hears someone coming. He hides again. Enter ELFRIDA, a scowling face hides her fear.)

ELFRIDA

Berta, where are you? Ansgar, where are you? Are you close? Just call out softly to me, please. I told you the New Forest is filled with demons and witches. There have been many deaths in this forest, please call to me. Don't be mad at me, I wasn't the one who left the latch off the gate. I don't know how many times I've told you to keep the gate latched so Berta wouldn't escape. Now look what you've done.

(ANSGAR jumps out at ELFRIDA from behind the bushes. ELFRIDA is frightened and runs to leave.)

ELFRIDA

Help, help, the demons are after me.

(ANSGAR rushes after and stops her.)

ANSGAR

Halt you silly woman. It's me and I did not leave the latch off the gate. You did. You were the last one in the pen to feed the damned sow?

ELFRIDA

I did not. I can't believe you would make me look in this cursed forest for that stupid pig.

ANSGAR

Berta is not a stupid pig. Don't you understand, woman? Berta will fetch us our winter supplies. I can sell her at the market in town and the money will keep us warm and our bellies filled through the winter.

ELFRIDA

Why can't we live in Winchester? I don't like living so close to this forest. Winchester has more to do and see. My family and my friends live there.

ANSGAR

All the more reason to live here if you ask me.

ELFRIDA

That's awful, how can you say that? My family's always welcomed you. They have treated you as a son, they have--

ANSGAR

--Enough! We must find Berta. Besides, Winchester has grown too large for my tastes. It was a fine town years ago. Have I told you when I was a small boy of ten my father took me to Winchester? I saw the great English King Harold ride through the streets. What a fine king he was, until those cursed Normans lead by that bastard Duke of Normandy conquered us.

ELFRIDA

Not again. I've heard this story so many times my head pounds from the telling of it. That was nigh on to 40 years ago you old fool, and yes, I remember you told me how ghastly it was. The Normans burned down villages and killed anyone in their path. But this is the year of our Lord 1100, and the 13<sup>th</sup> year of William II. Things change, you can't live in the past.

ANSGAR

Why are you frightened of these woods?

ELFRIDA

It's a cursed place. Evil spirits, demons and witches live in the rocks and trees.

ANSGAR

It's evil only to the accursed Normans. We're safe enough.

ELFRIDA

And what if the Normans find us. You know what they do to poachers, cut off hands, gouge out eyes, and cut off feet, ugh. Let us leave this horrible place!

ANSGAR

Hush woman. We must find Berta. If the Normans find her she'll be served up for supper and you and I will starve this winter.

ELFRIDA

There is nothing we can do now. It grows too dark to see our way. Come home, it's cold.

ANSGAR

Afraid of demons or is it the wolves that frighten you?

ELFRIDA

Husband, stop talking about wolves. The witches will send them down on us.

ANSGAR

Better an English wolf than a Norman dog.

ELFRIDA

Let's go. I am cold and hungry.

ANSGAR

I know how to warm up cold bones. Come here I'll show you warmth.

ELFRIDA

By all that the saints hold dear, is that all you can think of? Next time remember to latch the gate.

ANSGAR

I did not leave the latch off the gate. You're the one who forgot-

ELFRIDA

Husband. What should we do about Berta?

ANSGAR

(Resigned)

Nothing tonight. It'll be an early dawn for me.

ELFRIDA

And if the Normans find her?

ANSGAR

If she's stupid enough to be caught by Normans then she deserves to be roasted on their fire.

ELFRIDA

You've had us out here the whole day looking for her and now we leave?

ANSGAR

Wife, what can I do in the dark? It grows dangerous to be in these woods

ELFRIDA

You said you didn't believe in ghosts

ANSGAR

Foolish woman. The danger comes not from ghosts, but Normans. You were almost discovered by some Norman lords and the King. Right before you came-

ELFRIDA

The king was here? How do you know it was the king? It couldn't have been the king. You're still a free man. You're making this story out of whole cloth just like all the other tales you tell.

ANSGAR

I swear, on all that's holy it was the king and his younger brother, Count Henry.

ELFRIDA

You don't speak French. How do you know who it was? Come, husband, the cold bites at me.

ANSGAR

It was the King and Count Henry I tell you. I know a little of their language.

ELFRIDA

As if you could truly understand their words! Make haste, the path grows faint under the night's cover.

ANSGAR

I know I heard the baron say *le roi*, which is their word for king. The word *morte*, which means death. He said them together, in one breath.

ELFRIDA

The Fairies have bewitched you.

(Tone changes from hard to softly enticing.)

Come, we must leave before we are as lost as Berta. Besides, you promised to warm my cold bones this night.

(ELFRIDA takes ANSGAR's hand They exit )

ANSGAR (O.S )

I know what I heard woman. Don't confuse me. They said the words king and death as a single thought. I know enough of their confounded language to know what I heard and understand . . . .

( BLACKOUT )

( END OF SCENE)

## Scene Two

As the lights come up WILLIAM is seated at the table with documents in front of him  
ROBERT fitzHAIMO stands beside William  
It is the next day at Malwood. It is more hunting lodge than castle. The room is sparsely furnished with rough-hewn furniture. There is a table with six chairs, 3 larger chairs are in front of a fireplace. The entranceway to the chamber is wide. A door stands between the entranceway and the room.

ROBERT

Are you sure Your Majesty feels well enough to discuss affairs of state?

WILLIAM

I'm fine. Something I ate didn't agree with me, that's all. Nothing to worry over. When will call me by given name of William? I have given you leave to do so. You stand too long on ceremony.

ROBERT

Thank you, but I didn't want to presume on your favor.

WILLIAM

I should have my other barons learn from your example. They seek only to take.

ROBERT

A sin of the covetous man, my lord. I would have greater peace if we were in Winchester.

WILLIAM

(Signs a document with a flourish)

There is no danger. Here, I can take care of courtly matters and hunt. Not true of Winchester.

ROBERT

I'm concerned I do not worry enough. You must take care. Some men's ambitions push them beyond mere greed.

WILLIAM

Yet notice how silent they grow with land. They are like jackals and wolves, always hungry for more.

(WILLIAM makes a face as though he's in pain.)

ROBERT

Are you all right? Would you like me to call your Chamberlain?

WILLIAM

No. I'm fine. It's just a twinge now and again. Poor Chamberlain stayed with me most the night when my sickness first attacked. I'll soon be myself, let him sleep awhile.

ROBERT

My lord, I must tell you of a visitor that came with the dawn.

WILLIAM

What visitor would interrupt your slumber at such an hour?

ROBERT

A monk traveling from another land slept the night in the forest. Before the sun had begun its climb into the sky, he journeyed to Malwood to tell you of a terrible vision he beheld as he slept. He came, he said, to warn you.

WILLIAM

He is a monk. His nightmares are fanciful.

ROBERT

He said he saw you enter a church. Then you seized the cross in your teeth and gnawed on its arms and legs. The cross suffered this for a time but then kicked you with such might as to cause you to fall to the floor. Then-

WILLIAM

(Smiling)

There is more?

ROBERT

When you fell to the floor a great flame of billowing smoke issued from your mouth and rose up to reach the stars.

WILLIAM

(Laughing)

What can you expect from a monk? To get money he dreams like a monk. Give him 100 shillings and be done with it.

ROBERT

But my lord, should you not heed his warning?

WILLIAM

My friend, if I listened to all the churchmen who have such dreams I would be a poor man.

(calls out)

Ivo!

(IVO enters)

IVO

Yes, your majesty, how can I serve you?

WILLIAM

(Pulls out a pouch on his belt and counts out coins)

Take 100 shillings to the monk who waits in Lord fitzHaimo's chambers.

IVO

Aye, your majesty.

(WILLIAM finishes counting and hands them to IVO. IVO exits.)

ROBERT

Are you certain that's the best course?

WILLIAM

Let us get on with business and forget his foolish tale.

ROBERT

As you wish. I know I persist, but did you speak with Count Henri last night? Before the illness took you?

WILLIAM

No, but I will do so this day.

ROBERT

I worry that others will hear of your decision and twist it to their advantage.

WILLIAM

You're right. There are too many of my Norman barons that would use my brother's vanities to secure their own ends.

ROBERT

Unfortunate, but men's ambitions shape destiny.

WILLIAM

There are days when I remember the foolish pranks Henri and I played on Robert. Our second brother Richard, the one who died while hunting in this very forest always ignored our foolishness. He stayed out of the mischief Henri and I got ourselves into. Like that time we threw a bucket of water on Robert from the castle balcony. We stood our ground when raging brother Robert charged up the stairs ready to beat us down. I'm not sure Henri and I would be here today if father hadn't stopped the fight. That's the way I thought it would always be between me and Henri. But, time changes a man.

ROBERT

Time is a hard mistress.

WILLIAM

He was spoiled by Mother. Now by the endless women who practically lift their skirts when he walks by them. I don't begrudge my brother his countenance. Many women have found that a man's face can deceive.

(A new idea occurs to him)

I have it. I will tell him about my marriage plans first.

ROBERT

My lord?

WILLIAM

(His face takes on a devilish look.)

I will send him to Scotland and ask him to travel in all haste.

ROBERT

Count Henri? The same man who travels escorted by an entourage that rivals your own?

WILLIAM

I will tell my brother how I burn to know Lady Edith's answer.

ROBERT

You jest? Do you not?

WILLIAM

(Smiles broadly)

Aye, but what a joke on Henri.

ROBERT

(Shakes his head)

Only for a short time, I fear

WILLIAM

Ah, the mere thought of Henri being discomforted by having to ride horseback for three or four days warms me with laughter.

ROBERT

Why do you wish to send him to Scotland? Would it not be better to keep him here under your watchful eye? His history is to get into mischief when he is away from court.

WILLIAM

You speak truly. Yet there are sound reasons for sending Henri. If I send a knight, King Edgar of Scotland might see it as an offense and reject my request of marriage. If I send my brother, it will show the king that I hold him in high esteem. Second, it will remove Henri far from Winchester and London while I'm in Aquitaine. It will serve to halt any trouble that may be festering and put him some distance from the de Claire brothers. Thirdly, if there is any man who is a good judge of women, my little brother is most certainly king of that.

(Musingly)

I must be diligent on my manner of speech when I meet her

ROBERT

Your . . . manner of speaking is less stumbling.

WILLIAM

Perhaps sssshe will undo the spell ssshe cast on me so many years ago When I ssaw her I could not sspeak By the devil's black heart, sssshe sssstole my breath and my voice.

ROBERT

Then choosing Lady Edith is sound reasoning my friend and a good decision. I am forced to ask again, when will you tell him about the Norman lands being returned to your brother? That decision will most certainly anger him.

WILLIAM

I'm the king and I gave my word to hold the lands in trust while my brother foolishly went off to fight in the Crusades. My strategem almost worked in gaining me Normandy. But, he returns with a wealthy bride whose dowry will pay off his loan.

ROBERT

It may change upon his return. His countrymen have had four years of your rule. You brought them order and peace, something they did not have under Duke Robert's rule.

WILLIAM

Who can tell, maybe the Norman barons will stand with me against the Duke in the future. But for now, all the lands must be returned. Henri must accept my decision.

ROBERT

Tread with caution, sire, he may strike out for what he will see as a deception.

WILLIAM

Ah, there I can offer another prize. Aquitaine.

ROBERT

A great prize indeed.

WILLIAM

*Oui.* The young Duke of Aquitaine is so eager to march off to Jerusalem that he sent a messenger.

ROBERT

The messenger came? When?

WILLIAM

Early this morning. But I will delay my departure. Let the young cub bubble in his eagerness for a while. Then, when I arrive, he will readily fall in with my conditions.

ROBERT

You wait?

WILLIAM

For a few days. Then to Aquitaine.

ROBERT

That is good news. But should you tell Henri about his loss of Norman lands and your future marriage, at one time? Too much, my lord, even for a loving brother.

WILLIAM

(Mischievously)

What, you say my youngest brother is not the soul of honor, integrity, and loyalty?

ROBERT

I meant no dishonor-

WILLIAM

And none taken. We are friends and both know Henri's character. No, I will tell him about the marriage today and then about the Norman estate after we return to Winchester. I do not wish him to suppose the loss of lands and his journey north sprang from the same thought.

ROBERT

That might deter him and the de Claires from any rebellious action. It is wise to split Henri and the de Claires. They grow too close for my liking.

WILLIAM

Best to separate my ambitious brother from the even more ambitious de Clares. For now, he's chosen my side of the sea. But I've seen how my little brother uses chance as a weapon.

ROBERT

Might it be time to bring some selected English nobility to court? Say some Scottish lords?

WILLIAM

Good advice. They have proven themselves warriors on the battlefield. The English nobility at Hastings almost won. I remember father speaking of them as valiant adversaries. They are a brave people, but stubborn.

ROBERT

They have stood by you when the French and Norman barons would have placed Duke Robert on the English throne. That says something for their loyalty.

WILLIAM

That may be, but I don't think I will bare my throat to an English knife.

ROBERT

(Smiling)

No, nor I.

WILLIAM

I believe, as did my father, that if I govern with strength they will follow. The English are like children, lost without a father to show them what is to be done.

ROBERT

I wish Count Henri shared your thoughts. He has a harsh opinion of anything English. Even to the English servants that serve in your court. He only permits French servants to wait on him.

WILLIAM

He will learn. My friend, I am not blind to my brother's faults.

(IVO enters and bows.)

IVO

Your Majesty, Lord Poix asks entry.

WILLIAM

Send him in. Have ale and bread sent to me. I grow hungry. Go and tell the Chief Hunter that I am feeling myself and will hunt after supper.

(IVO bows and exits )

ROBERT

Are you strong enough? Why not wait until the morrow?

WILLIAM

I grow restless with staying inside. That is one part of being king I do not like. I like my realm best outside the castle walls. But must serve both.

(WALTER enters with IVO.)

IVO

Your ale and bread arrives shortly.

WILLIAM

*Bon*, I grow hungrier.

IVO

Aye, Your Majesty.

( IVO exits.)

ROBERT

If I may beg my lord's pardon I would like to see the monk before he leaves.

WILLIAM

Go if you must. But bring no more foolish tales.

ROBERT

Yes, my lord.

(ROBERT bows and exits.)

WILLIAM

Well, Lord Poix are you pleased by your visit to my island?

WALTER

(Nervous and unsure)

*Oui*, your majesty. My brother-in-laws did not go wrong in describing this country as beautiful.

WILLIAM

It is, is it not? Now, tell me what brings you so far from your home?

WALTER

Earl Tonbridge asked me to come and see him on family matters. Yet so far, I have only dealt with hunting and feasting. Quite a tale I will tell my wife. I must thank you for inviting me to hunt in your forest.

WILLIAM

What do you think of my New Forest?

WALTER

You have fine game filling it. Is this the forest . . . ?

WILLIAM

Yes, the same. The English peasants say spirits fill these woods.

WALTER

Spirits, my lord?

WILLIAM

Aye. Witches and demons some say, but I have seen none such. I suspect my gamesmen have spread the tales to keep the local poachers out

WALTER

It would seem to be working.

WILLIAM

*Oui*, and most times successful. I had heard you were a fine archer. Now I see it is true.

WALTER

Thank you for such generous praise.

WILLIAM

Praise indeed, I only say what is the truth. You have brought down two stags in two days of hunting. God granted you a sharp eye.

WALTER

I have been blessed. I have heard your older brother, the Duke, has an even sharper eye.

WILLIAM

Perhaps. Do you think you could take another?

WALTER

We hunt this day? I understood that you did not feel -

WILLIAM

I feel much myself now.

(IVO enters carrying a tray. There is bread, cold meat and beer on the tray. IVO crosses, places it on the table and sets table, pours the beer, etc.)

WILLIAM  
You think you can do justice in this matter?

WALTER  
I will indeed, my lord.

(ROBERT enters.)

WILLIAM  
What did your monk say to his king's bounty?

ROBERT  
He continued to caution. He said his dream was a clear message from God.

WILLIAM  
Nonsense, he dreams like a monk. Hunger and thirst drive him. That's what gives him nightmares.

WALTER  
My lord, may I take your leave to find the Earl and discover what his plans are?

WILLIAM  
Yes, tell him we will hunt today, after supper

WALTER  
Aye, my lord I will.

(WALTER exits.)

IVO  
Would my majesty care for anything else?

WILLIAM  
Go find Count Henri and send him to me.

IVO  
Yes, your majesty.

(IVO exits.)

ROBERT  
You will speak with him about the marriage?

WILLIAM  
Aye, it is time for that at least.

ROBERT  
Then I shall leave you my lord.

WILLIAM  
Do not rush off. I may have need of your guiding words.

ROBERT  
Treat him gently. He will be uncertain of his fate.

WILLIAM  
I will Perchance I will tell him of Aquitaine

ROBERT  
A little honey on dry bread?

WILLIAM  
Yes. But I am the king.

ROBERT  
All the more reason to cover it thickly. I over heard him speak of his birthright to the throne. He makes claim to his birth in the purple.

WILLIAM  
Father gave me England. If he had wanted Henri to rule he would have chosen him. No, I am king by birth and by right.

ROBERT  
Yes, my lord. I for one am grateful for your father's choice. I wish only to advise you of your brother's disposition He will not take the news well.

WILLIAM  
That I know.

(HENRI enters.)

HENRI

Good day brother. How are you feeling?

(WILLIAM stands and crosses to table. Takes bread and a mug of beer. Offers ROBERT some.)

WILLIAM

Good enough to eat. We will hunt this day.

HENRI

That is good news brother.

WILLIAM

I wanted to speak with you. Earlier my plans were unclear, but now they have resolved themselves.

HENRI

(Excitedly)

You mean the estates in Normandy? Yes, we must hurry before Robert returns. Lands at last, lands of my own. I will no longer be a supplicant at my brothers' houses.

WILLIAM

No, . . . those plans still are undecided.

HENRI

(Alert)

What then? Does Lord fitzHaimo need to be here? Can't you do anything without him?

ROBERT

My lord, I will leave.

(WILLIAM realizes this conversation would best be kept private. WILLIAM gives ROBERT a nod.)

WILLIAM

You will be nearby?

ROBERT

I'll await your command in my chambers.

(ROBERT gives slight nod and a bow to WILLIAM  
and a bow to HENRI. ROBERT exits with a  
backward glance at WILLIAM.)

WILLIAM

He is a wise counselor and friend and has served us both loyally.

HENRI

A good man for some things, but we are brothers. Now, if you do not wish to speak about the estates you have promised me, what matter, other than my landless position, could possibly be of equal importance?

WILLIAM

I seek your counsel.

HENRI

I hoped you would. I agree Robert has more land than he can rule. So a small estate to me before our older brother returns and I will be in position to watch him.

WILLIAM

Henri, remember I gave my pledge when he mortgaged his lands to me that should he repay the loan, he would have all of his lands back.

HENRI

He won't miss one estate. He has more than he can possibly rule now. You've made his inability to rule quite clear over the last four years. No Norman with any sanity left would want Robert back. What ruler mortgages off all of his lands to fight in the Crusades? He is feckless while he sinks his kingdom into chaos.

WILLIAM

Henri, it is his kingdom.

HENRI

It should've been mine.

(HENRI stops abruptly. HENRI'S whole attitude and tone changes to conciliation )

WILLIAM

Dangerous words, little brother. Next you will seek my kingdom with Robert's help.

HENRI

I told you, I've changed. Robert always had everything.

WILLIAM

He is the eldest.

HENRI

And he was always mother's favorite.

WILLIAM

Do not forget, you were not far behind.

HENRI

That's untrue. She always cared more for Robert. She went against Father to aid his schemes. She never did that for me . . . or you.

WILLIAM

That 's past. We must move forward. Robert's taking of a wife may temper his actions.

HENRI

(Under his breath)

And beget an heir for Normandy

WILLIAM

Now, why I desire your counsel is in the matter of marriage for me.

HENRI

(Stunned)

Marriage? For you? When? With whom?

WILLIAM

Patience. I desire that you travel north to Scotland and meet with King Edgar. I would wish you to request the Lady Edith's hand in marriage.

HENRI

Lady Edith? To wed you?

WILLIAM

(Stands and begins to pace)

Yes.

(HENRI smiles then starts chuckling. WILLIAM is puzzled then hurt by HENRI's response.)

WILLIAM

It is time that I took a wife. Lady Edith is an excellent choice. Our union would bind England and Scotland together as one kingdom.

HENRI

My pious brother? The man who takes no wench to warm his bed? Who shows no interest in the fairer sex?

(HENRI laughs outright.)

Would my brother even know what to do with a wife?

WILLIAM

I am not amused. I will take a wife and I have chosen Lady Edith. I want you to ride north, seek out her brother and ask for her hand in marriage. I value your comments on the personage of Lady Edith, sssince I have not ssseen her for many years.

HENRI

Her personage? My brother is willing to marry some horse-faced English woman, sight unseen? It will truly be a union of state. You have no need to worry what she may look like. You can couple in the dark.

WILLIAM

Henri! You may be my brother but I will not listen to ssssuch gross words against the Lady Edith.

HENRI

My, my, have I touched upon a tender place?

WILLIAM

Enough. I want you to leave on the morrow for Sssscotland.

HENRI

(Taunting)

My, what haste you put in my journey. You make me eager to see the lady for myself. But, I would make speed if I knew what estates you will give me in Normandy.

WILLIAM

I will give you land that is yours, but-

HENRI

But what! What does my brother stumble to say?

WILLIAM

By God's face, you will have land But it will come from Aquitaine

HENRI

Aquitaine? No! You promised me estates in Normandy.

WILLIAM

I promised you land, I did not say from where. I've pledged to return Robert's land, if he could pay the mortgage. Unfortunately, for both of us, he has married a bride whose dowry can easily cover the payment. It was a gamble and we've lost.

HENRI

You said I would have Norman estates. I've stood beside you against many Normans who sought to capture your throne. I stood beside you against Robert.

WILLIAM

You also stood with Robert against me.

HENRI

Is this my punishment? To leave me landless, like a parasite forced to live off the bounty of others. Master of nothing. You have broken your bond to me.

WILLIAM

I gave my pledge to Robert. If, and I say again, if he repays the debt, then I am bound by my honor to return all his lands.

HENRI

You broke your word to me, how can you speak of honor. A true king, a king born in the purple would not break his bond.

WILLIAM

(Growing angry)

A true king? A "true king" would not bed every wench in the kingdom. A true king would not take arms against one brother and then side with the other. A true king and leader would not try to crush a whole people.

HENRI

You're wrong! I am a leader. I take my pleasures when I want. I would crush this race of English dogs. They are shiftless, lazy and dirty. They live and breed like their animals. They have no value except as slaves to the Normans.

WILLIAM

No, they are not slaves. The English are a race of children that need to be guided. Don't be so eager, little brother. Leadership carries a heavy price

HENRI

A strong leader can carry it. I demand you honor your promise to me.

WILLIAM

(A new edge in his voice)

You demand?

HENRI

(Realizes he may have gone too far.)

I'm only stating that if you do not give me Norman lands, you are breaking your pledge to me.

WILLIAM

I am not. I promised you an estate Why not Aquitaine?

HENRI

You promised me an estate in Normandy.

WILLIAM

If you are so eager for Norman lands then deal with Robert. Why do you stay here? You don't like the people, you grow bored with life in England and you say you want only Norman lands?

HENRI

If you don't welcome my presence then I'll go to Normandy. But only when I have estates of my own. Not before.

WILLIAM

Greed is an ugly dragon, little brother. Remember what I told you long ago.

HENRI

Me? Who speaks of greed? Who holds the church's sees for the revenue they bring in? Who does Ranulf Flambard exact blood money for? I am not the one who is a greedy man.

WILLIAM

Enough! You leave for Sssscotland on the morrow.

HENRI

Send me away. Ignore your promise to me. But one day, you'll regret your decision.

WILLIAM

(Angry)

You dare to threaten me? Leave me before my temper wins the better of me.

HENRI

Yes brother.

(Under his breath, in mocking tones)

That sssstutter will truly make an impression upon the lady.

(Lights down on WILLIAM. HENRI stamps away  
and into the hallway. GILBERT enters hallway.)

GILBERT

My lord, I understand there will be a hunt after supper?

HENRI

By the death of our Lord, what does that matter to me?

GILBERT

What is amiss?

HENRI

The king has ordered me to Scotland on a foolish errand. Marriage, him, ha!

GILBERT

The king is considering marriage? When?

HENRI

The stupid fool. What woman would find him attractive? He's tightfisted, a red-faced liar and breaker of oaths.

GILBERT

(Alarmed)

Count Henri, watch your words. Any can hear what you say.

HENRI

I don't care who hears me. I speak what is already known. I cannot believe it. He leaves me landless. After all I've done for him.

GILBERT

I thought he promised you an estate in Normandy?

HENRI

*Exactement*, now he plans on giving all of Robert's lands back. He gives me nothing.

GILBERT

(Calculating)

Not good for a king.

HENRI

He is not a true king. Or a leader.

GILBERT

A man must be a king to rule and not a king a man.

HENRI

(Anger subsiding and aware of Gilbert's words.)

I was born to be a king.

GILBERT

Yes, my lord. He's not a king born into the purple.

HENRI

How can he break his pledge to me? By the holy face of Lucca, send me to Scotland will he! Where is Lord Roger?

GILBERT

My older brother speaks with Gifford, the Chief Hunter. He sought to make clear some choices.

HENRI

Choices. What choices? I have no choices as long as my brother rules. How I wish . . . .

(Stops abruptly)

God is against me.

GILBERT

But there are others-

HENRI

Forget it. I must make ready for the hunt, then to Scotland.

GILBERT

May I accompany you?

HENRI

To Scotland?

GILBERT

To your chambers my lord, where we can speak on private matters.

HENRI

Nothing matters. May the devil take his soul.

GILBERT

My lord, let us go and discuss this matter.

HENRI

Discuss? Discuss what? What can we do? He broke his covenant with me. How could he? My own brother!

GILBERT

Calm yourself my lord.

HENRI

No. I will not abide this traitorous act. I have suffered enough at his hands.

GILBERT

This way, Count Henri-

HENRI

Later Gilbert. I must think.

GILBERT

But-

HENRI

Leave me be.

(HENRI stamps off.)

GILBERT

(Looking after him, a satisfied smile on his face.)

I think the Count will soon find his fortunes changed. To his advantage . . . and mine.

( BLACKOUT )

( END OF ACT )

## ACT II

### Scene One

WILLIAM, ROBERT, WALTER, GILBERT,  
COUNT HENRI are in the king's chambers  
as he finishes dressing for the late afternoon  
hunt.

ROBERT

My lord, are you sure you feel well enough for hunting?

WILLIAM

*Oui*, I feel my old self, again.

(Calls out)

Ivo, where are my boots? I hope his cousin is a better attendant Ivo.

GILBERT

A new attendant, my lord?

WILLIAM

Ivo said he knows the forest and can speak that confounded English Remember when we hunted last? And Gifford discovered that poacher?

GILBERT

*Oui*, never have I seen such behavior, uncouth, rude and disrespectful.

WILLIAM

As long as I rule England I must have someone with me who can speak the native tongue. Ivo claims his cousin can speak it and read it.

ROBERT

A wise precaution my lord.

HENRI

(Under his breath)

The master serves the slaves.

(GILBERT catches the words and looks at  
HENRI. WILLIAM continues dressing unaware.)

WILLIAM

Lord de Clare, do the beaters await our departure?

GILBERT

Gifford is assembling the men and dogs as we speak.

WILLIAM

Good, I want to be rid of this place.

(IVO enters.)

WILLIAM

There you are man, where are my boots?

IVO

Your majesty, a monk has just arrived. He carries a message from Abbot Serlo of Gloucester.

WILLIAM

Is it important? I want to go hunting.

IVO

The monk says it is of great urgency your majesty. Would you like me to read it?

WILLIAM

Read it. Then be gone for my boots.

IVO

Yes, your majesty.

IVO

*Your most royal personage and King of the English I send  
humble greetings.*

*I felt honor bound to send you this message of warning.  
One of my monks, a good man of high reputation saw you  
in a dream.*

*In this dream he saw the Lord Jesus, sitting on his throne in  
heaven, and was humbly approached in supplication by a  
radiant virgin.*

*She spoke thus, 'Lord Jesus Christ, the savior of mankind,  
for whom you shed your precious blood on the Cross, look  
mercifully, we beseech you, on your people who groan  
under the yoke of William. Avenger of all wickedness, most  
just of all judges, deliver me, I pray you, from William and  
set me free from his hands, for he does all that he can to  
pollute me and afflicts me savagely.'*

WILLIAM

Enough. Is that all the Abbot has time for?

GILBERT

What rubbish!

HENRI

He wastes our time.

ROBERT

(Concerned)

Read on man, what else does the Abbot write?

IVO

Do you wish me to continue your majesty?

WILLIAM

Yes, by God's face finish the bloody thing It is time for the hunt.

IVO

*Oui, your majesty.*

*'...set me free from his hands, for he does all that he can to  
pollute me and afflicts me savagely.'*

WILLIAM

(Irritated)

You've read that part. Get on with it.

IVO

(Quietly continues)

*To which the lord replied. 'Be patient, and wait a little while, for before long I will exact from him the full penalty.'*

*My royal majesty, the monk understood the vision to contain a harsh message for you. That the church's complaints against the depredations, unnatural vice and other intolerable crimes charged against you by the church have reached the ears of our dear Lord. And his wrath will be visited upon you by his messengers.*

(There is a beat of silence. Then WILLIAM breaks into jeering laughter.)

WILLIAM

Can you believe what my abbots send me? Lord Poix, as you are a visitor what think you of this letter?

WALTER

I don't know the abbot. Has he written of monk's dreams before?

GILBERT

Our abbots are lead by dreamers.

ROBERT

My lord, Abbot Serlo felt it was urgent you receive this. It must carry some message of import.

GILBERT

Mere foolishness. No worthy churchman should write such confusing drivel

HENRI

Are you ready brother?

WILLIAM

Henri, you claim to hold these churchmen in high esteem what do think you of them now?

HENRI

I have held other men in high esteem and been disappointed.

GILBERT

Foolish prattle my lord. Let us be off to the hunt.

WILLIAM

What churchman can write me such folly? Why does he place such attention to snoring monks? I am no such fool Ivo, fetch my boots. I want to be off.

IVO

Yes, your majesty.

(IVO exits.)

WILLIAM

(With bravado)

Does the abbot take me for an Englishman? Let them put off their journeys and business because some old woman sneezed or had a dream! Not me! By the holy face of Lucca, where are my damned gloves?

ROBERT

Would my lord excuse me? I would find this messenger and question him.

WILLIAM

Do as you please. But it only serves to waste time

ROBERT

Perhaps my lord, but we still wait on your boots.

WILLIAM

Dammit, you're right.

(Yells)

Ivo, where are my boots?

(ROBERT exits.)

HENRI

(Snappish)

Brother may I take my leave?

WILLIAM

Bored? Eager to be in the field?

HENRI

Oh yes. More time riding before the morrow.

WALTER

The morrow?

HENRI

I travel to Scotland in haste. His majesty sends me as envoy to the Scots King Edgar.

WALTER

I have heard it is a wild land.

HENRI

At least my Lord Poix, you and he have lands. May I depart brother?

WILLIAM

It is always more is it not little brother? Yes, you may leave.

(HENRI crosses to exit but stops as ROGER enters flushed in the face and hurried in his actions. He carries a quiver of six arrows.)

ROGER

Your Majesty, I wish to give you something for the hunt today

WILLIAM

What?

ROGER

The last time we hunted I saw arrows crafted by such a fine hand I decided that you must have those arrows. I discovered the blacksmith who crafted them and had him make six for you.

(ROGER holds out the arrows to William.)

GILBERT

Look at the feathers that grace the shaft.

ROGER

Look at the points your majesty. Sharp and hard, made to cut to a stag's heart.

(WILLIAM takes the arrows and examines them  
with an expert's eye.)

WILLIAM

Fine, very fine. Thank you Lord de Clare. But such expertly crafted arrows will be  
wasted on me.

ROGER

Oh, no sire.

WALTER

Your majesty, you are too  
modest.

GILBERT

My lord, they are not  
wasted

WILLIAM

Enough false praise. I know too well my abilities with a bow. It is only right that  
the deadliest shot should get the sharpest arrows.

(WILLIAM gives WALTER two arrows, and keeps  
four for him. ROGER shoots a quick look at  
GILBERT.)

HENRI

My apologies to Lord Poix, but should you give the sharpest arrows to another?

WILLIAM

I'm the king and I will do as I like By God's teeth, I will go without the bloody  
boots.

(WILLIAM stands. IVO enters with a pair of  
boots )

WILLIAM

Where have you been? Out catching the calf for the damned leather?

IVO

My apologies sire. They were finishing the last of the eyelets.

WILLIAM

Never mind. Help me on with them. Go on all of you, I will follow shortly.

WALTER

Are you sure my lord?

WILLIAM

Yes, yes, go. Tell Gifford I want a good place this day

GILBERT

Aye, I will my lord.

HENRI

The best for the king.

(HENRI and WALTER exit. GILBERT and ROGER follow but stop out of earshot from WILLIAM. WILLIAM appears to be watching IVO put on and lace up his boots.)

GILBERT

What are you about Roger?

ROGER

It is as I told you. You watch our brother-in-law, he may serve us yet

GILBERT

(Realization)

Yes, I see your plan. I'll handle Walter. What of Gifford de Aquilon? Will he assist us?

ROGER

Do not worry. I will oversee him at the hunt.

GILBERT

I'll be glad when this day is done. All these changes to a plan are troubling.

ROGER

(Whispering)

Your poison in the food failed. My plan will work, dear brother.

GILBERT

Eudo was frightened. What can you expect?

ROGER

So, we use Gifford. As Chief Hunter he stands closest to the king. A mis-spent arrow? Clearly an accident. No one will suspect otherwise.

GILBERT

I pray you are right.

(GILBERT and ROGER exit. Ivo finishes lacing up the boots.)

WILLIAM

The brothers de Clare seem overly close these last days. Have you noticed?

IVO

*Qui.* Like wrinkled, old women with all their whispering.

WILLIAM

Have you or anyone heard their words?

IVO

They guard those carefully. But I will make it my task to find out what they say.

WILLIAM

Thank you, Ivo. You will be generously rewarded. Here is some on account.

(WILLIAM gives IVO some coins.)

IVO

Thank you, your majesty. You're a good master.

WILLIAM

Not in all men's minds.

IVO

They do not know you, sire. Their eyes only behold the king, not the man.

(WILLIAM stands and stamps feet.)

WILLIAM

I'm off.

(Thoughtfully)

I wonder why these strange letters of dreams, demons and crucifixes spewing fire.

IVO

The words of monks who have had too little sleep. They would have such dreams.

WILLIAM

(Dismissive)

You're right. On the morrow, I fear another battle with Count Henri.

IVO

Yes, sire.

(WILLIAM exits.)

( BLACKOUT )

( END OF SCENE )

## Scene Two

It is early evening in the forest as ANSGAR looks through the bushes. He carries a pouch of grain that he shakes occasionally.

ANSGAR

B-e-r-t-a, come here. Aren't you cold and lonely in such a big forest? I brought your favorite food.

(Shakes the pouch.)

Hear? That's rich grain calling to you. *(Pause)* Wife, where are you? I can't look for this dumb sow alone.

(ELFRIDA enters. She looks bedraggled and disheartened.)

ELFRIDA

I'm here, husband. How much longer must we search? Berta is gone. If the wolves haven't eaten her then the Normans have.

ANSGAR

Don't say that. How can we know unless we search? I have not seen anything to show me that . There are no bones or blood to show me she's not alive.

ELFRIDA

The witches probably have her and they've removed all signs.

ANSGAR

(Looks around nervously)

By God's teeth, stop talking of witches and ghosts.

ELFRIDA

I'm tired. We've been looking all day now. Berta is gone and you must accept it my husband. No length of time looking will find what is not there to be found.

ANSGAR

You go. I will look further. I know I can find her. She is most likely badly frightened and will run at the sound of voices.

ELFRIDA

So I am to walk back to the cottage, by myself, in this cursed forest? How can you ask such a thing of me husband? I have been a good wife to you; I have birthed three healthy children, I-

ANSGAR

Enough. These woods are not cursed, and the only thing that is bewitched is your tongue! Now, stop your silly babbling and help me look for Berta

ELFRIDA

I am not babbling. I know about the stories they tell of these woods. They are cursed by witches and evil spirits.

ANSGAR

It's mid-day. Such things only come out in the night.

ELFRIDA

(Half-heartedly)

Berta, come here Berta. Berta send us a sign so we can go home. My husband is a foolish old man who thinks nothing of wasting the day, walking around this bewitched forest looking for you. After he left the latch off he thinks to cover his mistake by calling your name and –

ANSGAR

By God's splendor I did not leave the latch off. You did. Now, leave and go home. If Berta hears your wailing she's sure to stay hidden away.

ELFRIDA

I'm not wailing. I'm helping.

ANSGAR

(Resolved)

Wife, go back home, hitch the horse to the cart and return for me

ELFRIDA

You desire me to do all that, by myself?

ANSGAR

I'll meet you in Sticknage woods, on the road that leads to Romsey and Winchester.

ELFRIDA

What are you about, husband?

ANSGAR

I'll look for Berta and meet you at the road's clearing on the west side where the carts stop to rest.

ELFRIDA

But what about the witches?

ANSGAR

Go wife. They won't bother you. Their numbers are too large already

ELFRIDA

How can you say such horrible things?

ANSGAR

Go. You don't want to look for Berta, so what good are you?

ELFRIDA

I did too look for that stupid pig.

ANSGAR

Berta is a sow. Go before my temper changes.

ELFRIDA

(To herself)

I can't believe you are sending me home alone, through these devil woods, where anything could happen to me I who have nursed you through your illnesses, given you fine, healthy children.

(ELFRIDA exits, mumbling. ANSGAR continues looking. A few beats and ANSGAR stops and listens. The SOUNDS OF APPROACHING HORSES AND BARKING DOGS. ANSGAR looks frantically for some place to hide. He hides as ROGER and GIFFORD, THE CHIEF HUNTER enter.)

GIFFORD

No, my lord, what you ask is beyond what I will do. I will not. No matter what threats you throw in my face.

ROGER

But you have such a lovely young bride. It would be a shame if something happened to her at such a tender age.

(GIFFORD stops and faces ROGER.)

GIFFORD

You cannot mean what you say. I would hunt you all the way to Jerusalem if you harm her. No. You speak treason.

ROGER

Only while William sits on the throne. Count Henri would be most generous.

GIFFORD

(Turns away as if to leave.)

You're crazed. What makes you think I won't tell the king of your plans?

ROGER

There are many deaths that can be befall a lovely woman.

GIFFORD

(Steps menacingly towards Roger, but holds himself in check, barely.)

You're a bastard.

ROGER

Most assuredly. But that changes nothing.

(GIFFORD slowly brings his temper under control and considers his limited choices )

GIFFORD

(Takes a deep breathe)

What do you want?

ROGER

You stand the nearest to the king and you set the other hunters on their places. Send Lord Robert and Count Henri to the farthest places in the glade Then Earl Tonbridge. Place Lord Poix near the king as you intended.

GIFFORD

But what--

ROGER

--Think of the bounty that awaits you. Beautiful cloths to cover your bride's young body.

GIFFORD

My bride is honorable, she would not wish me to-

(WILLIAM, WALTER, HENRI, ROBERT, and GILBERT enter talking. SOFT SOUNDS OF HORSES and in the background.)

WILLIAM

Where will you have us Chief Hunter?

ROGER

I was just asking the same question. Yes, where would you have us stand?

GIFFORD

(Slowly)

The beaters will commence at the north end of Stricknage wood. The sound will grow great just before the stags enter the glade. Most will run south. Lord Robert would you go to the west area with Count Henri. My man will show you where.

ROBERT

Count Henri, do you not wish to stand closer to the king?

HENRI

Today, it would be better to be far away.

WILLIAM

Good hunting, Henri. And remember, patience.

HENRI

Not easily found, my brother.

ROBERT

May your arrow be swift and deadly, my lord.

WILLIAM

And yours, Robert.

(HENRI and ROBERT exit )

GIFFORD

Earl Tonbridge, you will go with my man to the north side.

WILLIAM

Roger, where is your attendant? Do you not hunt?

ROGER

Your majesty, I had thought to stand with the Chief Hunter, so he might show me the best manner of shooting. I have had poor luck of late.

GILBERT

What a good idea Roger. You have been off the mark these last few days.

ROGER

I thought so.

WILLIAM

(Shrugs)

If you wish it. Where do you want Lord Poix and I to stand?

GIFFORD

My lord, if you would stand here at the east side of the opening. Lord Poix, would you stand over there?

WILLIAM

*Bon*, we will see who shoots the deadliest arrow this day.

WALTER

Yes, your majesty.

WILLIAM

Ha. To your place Lord Poix and we will see whose arrow brings down the stag. Use those new arrows. I want to see meat on the table on the morrow. Where is Wulfstan?

WALTER

I believe he returned to your mount, my lord.

GIFFORD

Your majesty, I must take up my place and commence the hunt. May I seek your absence?

WILLIAM

Aye. Good hunting, Gifford.

GIFFORD

(Starts)

*Oui*, my lord. I will do my best.

WILLIAM

(Teasing)

And today you have a pupil.

(GIFFORD looks at ROGER. GIFFORD, ROGER, WALTER, and GILBERT exit. WILLIAM straightens his tunic, shifts his bow, then looks around as though he heard something. The SOUNDS of DOGS and HORSES grow fainter, as though moving away.)

WILLIAM

Wulfstan, is that you?

(WILLIAM spots movement in the bushes and moves quickly to catch whatever it is. There is a struggle and WILLIAM emerges holding on to ANSGAR. WILLIAM speaks in French and ANSGAR in English until Wulfstan arrives. Then all characters speak in English. The sounds of BARKING DOGS slowly grows louder.)

WILLIAM (cont'd)

Qui êtes-vous? Que faites-vous dans ma forêt? D'où venez-vous et comment êtes-vous arrivé ici?

ANSGAR

Please, your majesty. I'm not a poacher. I'm trying to find a lost sow. She wandered into these woods. I'm not poaching, I swear

WILLIAM

Par la Barbe de St. Luc, Parlez! Je vous prie! Mais, si vous braconnez sur mes terres je vous punirai sur le champ.

(Yells out)

Wulfstan, venez, ici.

ANSGAR

(More agitated)

Please your majesty. I've done nothing wrong. I'm not a poacher. I'm an honest man. Please. Listen to me. They plan to kill you. You must believe me. *Le roi mort.*

(WILLIAM shakes ANSGAR. The SOUNDS of BARKING DOGS grow louder.)

WILLIAM

*Wulfstan! Ici, immédiatement.*

(WULFSTAN runs in.)

WULFSTAN

*Oui, mon roi.*

ANSGAR

Help me. I'm not a poacher. I was only looking for my pig. She ran away and is lost in the forest. I've done nothing wrong.

WULFSTAN

Hush, you whining English dog. What are you about in the king's forest?

ANSGAR

I'm here to find my sow. She escaped from the pen I'm not a poacher. I swear.

WULFSTAN

Silence.

(Turns to William)

My lord, the English peasant says he's here looking for his pig.

WILLIAM

His pig? In my forest?

WULFSTAN

He says it escaped from his pen.

WILLIAM

What's in this forest is mine.

WULFSTAN

(To Ansgar)

King William says it's his, if it's in his forest.

ANSGAR

(Agitated)

No. It's my pig. I'm an honest man. I will take only what belongs to me. That sow will buy my family food and heat against the winter cold. Tell the king if I can take my pig, he'll have one less Englishman begging at his door.

WULFSTAN

(Shrugs)

My lord, he says he needs the sow for the coming winter. He says the pig means one less English cur howling at your door.

(WILLIAM looks from the frightened ANSGAR to WULFSTAN. William senses it is the truth. Sounds of dogs and men's voices grow louder.)

WILLIAM

Tell the peasant to find his sow and depart. But if he takes any thing else, he will be severely punished.

WULFSTAN

You're lucky English. Our most royal majesty has granted you permission to take your sow. But if you take anything that is not yours, you will have your hands cut off and your eyes gouged out

ANSGAR

(Haltingly)

*Merci, le roi.*

(Normal tone)

Thank you. I promise. Only the sow. Tell the king he is a great man. He has brought peace to England. God's blessings on him and his family.

WULFSTAN

He says thank you, my Lord.

WILLIAM

Let him go. I hear the dogs. The hunt is begun. My stag comes to meet his death.

(WULFSTAN shoves ANSGAR to the ground.)

WULFSTAN

Be gone you English dog.

(ANSGAR wiggles out of reach, stands, then turns back to face WILLIAM.)

ANSGAR

Tell the king, tell the king his life's in danger. I heard two Norman knights plotting to kill him.

WULFSTAN

(Incredulous)

Tell the king that? Are you crazed? How do you know? You don't speak our language.

(WILLIAM has put an arrow in his bow. He turns to look at ANSGAR.)

ANSGAR

Tell him.

(To William.)

I heard *mort* and *le roi* said in the same breath. Tell him. His life is in danger.

WILLIAM

What is he saying? The king and death.

ANSGAR

(to Wulfstan)

Tell him, you Norman bastard. You can save his life.

WILLIAM

(Irritated)

What a churl, take him to the guards. Have them throw him out of my forest.

(WULFSTAN starts toward ANSGAR.

ANSGAR runs off. Wulfstan shrugs and turns back to William. ANSGAR realizes he's trapped by the approaching beaters. ANSGAR climbs a tree. The sounds of BARKING DOGS grow louder.)

WILLIAM

What was he talking about?

WULFSTAN

Nothing my lord, just the ramblings of an old man.

WILLIAM

Lost children. Ah, here he comes. Look how magnificently the stag runs. Yes, that's it, good, come closer, closer . . . to your death.

(WILLIAM raises his bow, carefully looks down the shaft of the arrow and fires. Lights down on WILLIAM and WULFSTAN. Lights up on GIFFORD and ROGER. GIFFORD stands with an arrow ready in his bow. The sounds of BARKING DOGS is loud on all sides.)

ROGER

Look, there's the king. He's taking aim at that stag. Are you ready?

GIFFORD

No. I told you. I will choose the time.

ROGER

What better time than now. Don't be a fool. Think of all that will be yours, the riches, the land. Look, the king missed. The stag is only wounded. Shoot man, shoot.

(GIFFORD raises his bow and takes aim.)

ROGER

Not the stag, you idiot. The king, shoot the king.

GIFFORD

(Angry)

No. I will not shoot the king. What you ask is dishonorable. Worse it is treasonable.

ROGER

You stupid imbecile. Now, is our only chance!

(ROGER points. He acts as though he is watching the stag run by where they stand.)

ROGER (cont'd)

Shoot man. See how the sun blinds the king's sight. There! Lord Poix missed the stag. What are you doing?

(GIFFORD lowers his bow and turns to leave.)

GIFFORD

I will forget what you asked of me. Leave me.

ROGER

No! Not when I am so close to changing my destiny. You spineless fool. Shoot or it will be the worse for you.

GIFFORD

No.

WILLIAM (O.S.)

Gifford, Shoot the devil!

(GIFFORD turns to the voice. ROGER slugs GIFFORD. They struggle but ROGER rips the bow and arrow from GIFFORD. Before Gifford can do anything. ROGER takes aim and fires. The SOUNDS of BARKING DOGS are at the loudest.)

GIFFORD

(Yells out from the ground)

No! By God's birth, don't shoot the king.

(ROGER shoots the arrow. GIFFORD stands up and shoves ROGER out of his way )

GIFFORD (cont'd)

May the Devil take your soul! You've hit him.

(GIFFORD runs off.)

ROGER

Your bride is a widow. She just doesn't know it yet.

(Lights down on ROGER. The sounds of BARKING DOGS slowly diminishes Lights up on the body of WILLIAM. WILLIAM lies on the ground an arrow through his heart. WULFSTAN kneels beside him, whimpering and frightened. GIFFORD rushes in. Followed by WALTER.)

WALTER

What has happened?

WULFSTAN

The king has been shot! Oh, no the peasant was right I should have heeded his words. What am I to do?

WALTER

Calm yourself, man.

WILLIAM

(Weakly)

In God's name grant me absolution for all my sins . . . .

(ROGER comes in. WULFSTAN is wildly looking around.)

ROGER

What has happened? Is the king hurt?

GIFFORD

(Shoots Roger a wary look)

No, he still lives.

WILLIAM

(Weakly)

Grant me absolution for all my sins . . . .

WALTER

We must send for a priest.

ROGER

Attendant, bring Count Henri here.

WULFSTAN

But my lord, shouldn't we--

ROGER

--Go, I say!

(WULFSTAN, shaken, exits.)

ROGER

We must wait for Count Henri. He is the king's brother and will advise us

GIFFORD

I will get the men-at-arms.

WILLIAM

(Weaker)

For all my sins that were committed without rancor or . . .

(GIFFORD bends down to WILLIAM and gives him some water from his water jug.)

GIFFORD

Rest my lord, your brother comes.

WILLIAM

(Very weak)

Help me. A priest . . .

GIFFORD

(To Roger)

I must attend to the dogs.

ROGER

No, wait until the Count arrives.

GIFFORD

I must keep the dogs away. They'll smell the blood.

WALTER

By the grace of God how could this have happened?

(COUNT HENRI, and GILBERT enter with WULFSTAN. HENRI sees WILLIAM on the ground, stops then slowly walks over to look down at him. WILLIAM moans.)

HENRI  
He still breaths life?

WILLIAM  
Henri? Grant me. . .

(WILLIAM dies. There is shock, uncertainty  
and fear on the faces of the men. HENRI  
looks slowly and carefully at the men, seeking  
an answer.)

HENRI  
Who?

ROGER  
Lord Poix, isn't that one of the arrows the king gave you?

WALTER  
(Sees the arrow for the first time.)  
What are you saying?

HENRI  
(Looks at Gilbert then Roger)  
Isn't that one of the arrows my brother gave you?

WALTER  
I didn't shoot the king. I stood nowhere near him. I stood over by the aspen.  
See? Too far away. He was too far from where I stood. It had to have been  
another. Not I.

(HENRI takes a step towards WALTER )

HENRI  
Attendant, call the guards. Lord Poix --

GILBERT

(Steps between the two men.)

--Excuse my boldness, Count Henri. I feel certain that if the arrow is my brother-in-law's it was misfired and accidentally hit the king. He should not be punished for such a misfortune.

WALTER

But I did not shoot the king.

HENRI

(To Gilbert)

What is it you suggest?

GILBERT

I would offer that my brother-in-law leaves immediately and rides for France. It was an accident, but the king's loyal followers might not hear the truth before they take action against him.

HENRI

(In a voice of new authority)

Good counsel Lord Tornbridge. My brother, the king, has been killed by a hunting mischance.

WALTER

But I wasn't close enough to the king to bring him injury. I didn't shoot him.

GILBERT

Walter, I advise you to depart now, before this dreadful news travels farther. Take my horse, he is a fast mount. Take Wulfstan with you to the coast, he speaks the language.

WULFSTAN

I will not leave my master. I must get my cousin to help me carry him back to Malwood and then to Winchester for burial.

GILBERT

Do as you're told, attendant. Get the horses and ride to the coast with Lord Poix. Return only after you have fulfilled your task.

WULFSTAN

But my lord, should I not--

HENRI

--I do not tolerate insolence from servants.

WULFSAN

*Oui*, my lord. I will do as you request.

(WULFSTAN stands slowly and backs off,  
then turns and exits.)

WALTER

Count Henri, I didn't shoot the king. I swear on all that is holy.

GIFFORD

Count Henri, I must look after the dogs

ROGER

Gifford, gather together the dogs and beaters and take them back to Malwood. Prepare those at the castle for the horror that follows

GIFFORD

Count Henri?

HENRI

Do as Lord de Clare asks.

GIFFORD

Yes, my lord.

(GIFFORD exits )

HENRI

(Coldly)

Lord Poix, I would take Lord Tonbridge's counsel. My brother's favorites will seek revenge for this crime.

GILBERT

Walter, do you have all you need? Monies? You cannot return to Malwood. Here take what I have. I will send your belongings after you

WALTER

I didn't shoot the king.

GILBERT

It was an accident I'm sure. But I'm worried for your safety. Leave this place for my sister's sake if for no other reason.

WALTER

If? You can't mean that--

ROGER

--Walter, there is the attendant with your horses. It would be best if you were off. Now.

WALTER

I will go. But, try to discover the truth. I cannot live with the shame of such an injustice against my honor.

HENRI

Lord Poix, I would hurry my departure. Word of this will travel quickly and you must sail for France on the dawn.

GILBERT

God's speed, brother-in-law.

ROGER

*Oui*, God's speed.

(WALTER reluctantly exits.)

HENRI

I can't believe my eyes. He lies on the ground dead. What fortune is this?

GILBERT

God's vengeance visited upon the blasphemous king. This arrow was shot either by the Devil seeking his own or by a righteous God.

HENRI

It would be foolish to waste such a gift.

ROGER

Robert has not yet arrived in Normandy, what better chance can you have?

HENRI

(Suddenly coming alive)

We must make haste to Winchester and the royal treasury.

ROGER

Aye, I will gather our mounts. Word of this will travel like fire through dry grass.

(ROBERT, shock on his face, runs on, stops  
and moves toward WILLIAM's body like a man  
in a trance.)

ROBERT

No, it can't be. It is only be a wound, isn't it?

GILBERT

Lord fitzHaimo, it is sadly true. An accident. Walter's arrow missed a running stag and pierced the king's heart. A misadventure.

ROBERT

How could God be so cruel?

GILBERT

It was God's own vengeance that shot the arrow into our king's heart.

ROBERT

No. He was a good king and a good friend.

HENRI

I know you felt deeply for my brother and my sorrow is as great or greater than yours. Yet you must help us at such a dangerous time. We must protect this kingdom from chaos. We must ride for Winchester and secure the treasury.

ROBERT

But, we can not leave him lying upon the earth. We must carry him with us

GILBERT

There is not time. We must think of the living. The dead can cause no harm.

ROBERT

You go. I'll stay with him and travel with him to the church at Winchester.

HENRI

Lord fitzHaimo, you are truly a loyal friend. I would hope for your support during England's future and what must be faced

GILBERT

My lord, let my brother stay until the cart comes to carry his body. We must make haste to Winchester. We must not lose all you and the king have won for our kingdom.

ROBERT

My heart is too heavy. It is hard to think of any but the loss of my friend.

HENRI

Come, my brother's body will be well tended.

ROBERT

It seems so cold an end for a man so full of life.

GILBERT

A thoughtful and generous gesture for our king, but Count Henri will need your guidance and counsel in the days to come.

HENRI

Come with me to Winchester. You must help me convince the others of this terrible event.

ROBERT

(Wavering)

I can't abandon him in this glade.

GILBERT

Come Lord fitzHaimo, we must ready ourselves for the journey to Winchester

(GILBERT guides ROBERT slowly off. HENRI turns to ROGER.)

HENRI

Ride to Scotland in all haste. Tell King Edgar that I wish to marry his sister, Lady Edith. When he agrees, return to the court.

ROGER

Should I not ride with you?

HENRI

Your brother will protect your interests. I must marry the Lady Edith to make firm my claim on the English throne. I charge you with this important duty. Do not fail me.

ROGER

I have not failed you yet my lord.

(HENRI turns to leave.)

ROGER (cont'd)

My lord, what of the king's body?

HENRI

We'll send a cart back from Malwood.

(HENRI exits. ROGER looks around then gives WILLIAM a push with his foot to make sure and smiles.)

ROGER

You should have listened to the monk. Now the fires of hell will consume your soul and I'll be wealthy beyond my dreams. May your soul rot in the Devil's pit.

(ROGER exits smiling. There is silence. The sound of someone approaching and ELFRIDA enters.)

ELFRIDA

Husband where are you? Please come to me. I'm frightened. There were all these dogs and men beating the bushes. They frightened me as I waited for you. Please be safe. I will be a better wife to you.

(Calls out)

Ansgar? Ansgar?

(ANSGAR climbs down from the tree.  
ELFRIDA sees the body and screams.)

ELFRIDA (cont'd)

Help! Help! There is a dead man here. Oh, no the witches will take me for sure. I'm a good wife. I did nothing wrong. I'm a poor woman looking for her foolish husband. He's lost in these woods. Don't take me. Oh, no, no, no

ANSGAR

Quiet wife. Do you want the king's men to find us? Hush your moaning and crying.

ELFRIDA

Ansgar. Oh, God be praised You are safe from harm. I was so worried.

ANSGAR

I'm fine. What are you doing here? I told you I'd meet you on the Winchester road.

ELFRIDA

(Angry)

Fine thing. You send me to a place to await you where a great army of men and dogs came upon me They tried to frighten me and ordered me to leave. But I said I waited for my husband. Finally, they departed, but only after many harsh, bitter words were thrown upon me They were awful, they--

ANSGAR

--Quiet wife. Did you bring the cart?

ELFRIDA

Aye.

ANSGAR

Bring it closer. You must help me lift the king into it

ELFRIDA

The king? The Norman bastard? No, no I will not. You wish to place us both in danger.

ANSGAR

He discovered me.

ELFRIDA

The king? What did he do? Why do you wish --

ANSGAR

He discovered me and he let me go. He told me that I could take my sow. Strange, but I'm saddened by this Norman's death.

ELFRIDA

(Hesitantly)

I found Berta.

ANSGAR

You did? Then we will have food for winter.

ELFRIDA

She was dead. I couldn't tell if it was wolves or Normans.

ANSGAR.

These woods are cursed this day.

ELFRIDA

I put Berta in the cart. I thought we might have something for the winter.

ANSGAR

Help me lift our king. He'll lie beside the dead sow. We go to Winchester.

ELFRIDA

Winchester? Why? Leave his body here, husband. Why must we take it?

ANSGAR

Don't ask so many questions woman.

ELFRIDA

Have you thought--

ANSGAR

--Enough! Back the cart up to where I stand.

(ELFRIDA exits. Then she backs a cart part way onto the stage.)

ELFRIDA

Ansgar, have you lost your wits? Are you crazed? Carry off the dead king? How will we explain his being in our cart? What if we're discovered? They'll think we killed him! How will we explain? What will we --

ANSGAR

--Wife! Curb your tongue to silence and help me.

(ELFRIDA grumbles under her breath.  
ELFRIDA and ANSGAR carefully lift  
WILLIAM's body onto the cart.)

ANSGAR (cont'd)

May God guard us on this strange journey A dead king has no friends or foes.

ELFRIDA

Husband, we must leave this place before the Normans return. They will surely cut off our hands, gouge out our eyes and that's only if they let us live. Steal a king? The devil has bewitched you. Hurry.

ANSGAR

The Normans are the ones who left their king unattended. No Englishman would show such disrespect for their sovereign. Did I tell you about the time in Winchester when--

(ELFRIDA crosses to edge of staging area.)

ELFRIDA

--Not again! Come. I want to leave this cursed place.

(ELFRIDA exits. ANSGAR starts to follow )

ANSGAR

It was magnificent. King Harold was a big man. He sat straight and tall in the saddle on that fine morning. The English nobles rode beside him. Their shields glittered under the sun, their lances held high as they rode north out of the city. . .

(ANASGAR pushes the cart off stage as he exits.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF PLAY)

## **VI. Intentions, Reflections and Conclusions**

The playwright may initiate the sequence of events in the play, but once a play is in production it emerges as a new entity. A play does have a life and voice that is distinctly its own.

The opportunity to hold staged readings for new works was inaugurated by Dr. John Fleming in the Department of Theatre in the spring 2000. This new program has the potential to create an extraordinary opportunity for novice playwrights. This venue will allow them to hear their works and receive feedback from the audience. I feel extremely honored to have been a part of the premiere production of the New Play Program. It was a priceless gift to be awarded.

I believe any additions to help playwrights experiment with new works will help the entire theatre department. For what are actors, costume designers and lighting crews without a play? These valuable people need a goal and the playwright provides the vehicle to reach it.

The experience of graduate school has provided me new insights into my writing and forged a deep determination to continue writing for the stage. Writers speak of "finding their voice" in their writing. I always felt I had a voice in my journalism and non-fiction articles, but I could not find the vehicle to tell the stories that bubbled up in my imagination. Now I have my answer. My plays are not avant-garde, experimental, or even cutting edge in theatrical terms, but they are what I enjoy writing. It is an old adage, but still true, that it

is not the destination, but the journey that brings the reward. It is my sincere hope and commitment to continue polishing my craft of playwriting so that in the future I will once again hear my words spoken on stage before a live audience.

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## VITA

Modrea King Mitchell-Reichert was born in Lake Forest, Illinois on May 9, 1949. After graduating from Lake Forest Academy in 1967 Modrea entered Cazenovia Junior College located outside of Syracuse and graduated in 1969. She worked for a few years before continuing her education at Plymouth State College of the University of New Hampshire and graduated Summa Cum Laude with a B.A. degree in History in 1973.

Her interest and enjoyment in theatre continued although it was as actor, stage manager and assistant director at theatres in Southboro, Massachusetts, Sarasota, Florida and now in San Antonio, Texas. She has published articles and reviews in Theatre Survey, Palo Alto Review, San Antonio Express-News, Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazine and Our Ageless Times. Her short story "The Secret" was published in the 1995 in the anthology, A Fountain of Words.

Finally, the chance to work towards her Masters in Theatre Arts was made possible so she entered Southwest Texas State University in Fall 1998

This thesis was typed by the author.

