



The Birth of a Nation

by Christian Lanciai

(1986, translated 2017)

Dramatis personae:

Godrith Saxwolf, messenger

Mallet de Graville, Norman

Harold Godwinson, Earl of England

Edith, his cousin and beloved

Earl Godwin, his father

Edward the Confessor, King of England

Edith, his Queen, Harold's sister

Aldyth, daughter of King Elgar of Wales

Torstig, Gurth and Haco, Harold's brothers

William, Duke of Normandy

Mathilda, his wife

Bishop Udo of Bayeux, William's brother

Alfred, Bishop of York
Stigand, Abbot of Westminster
Harold Hardrade, King of Norway
Hugues Maigrot, Norman monk and diplomat
A servant
An old Saxon chief
Other leading Saxons
A Norman priest
A doctor
Norman barons and counsellors
A Norwegian squire
Norwegian warrior
An English courier
English soldiers
Norman soldiers
Anglo-Saxon priests

The scene is England and France up until 1066.

Act I scene 1. A forest in England.

Godrith Halt, if you are a man!

Mallet de Graville Halt yourself, whoever you are!

Godrith Friend or foe?

Graville Foe to anyone who doesn't befriend me.

Godrith You speak like a Norman.

Graville And you speak like a true Saxon blackguard.

Godrith What are you doing in England?

Graville I am on a mission by Duke William of Normandy.

Godrith What does he want of England?

Graville He desires the throne after your King Edward the Confessor, who is old and frail as the last of his family.

Godrith Would a Frenchman make himself King of England?

Graville My good man, everyone knows, and you as well, that William of Normandy is the King's closest of kin, being married to Mathilda, a relative of Alfred the Great.

Godrith. But he is only a Frenchman himself and what is worse: a viking.

Graville My good man, are you not all vikings here in England? Did not our ancestors speak the same language as you?

Godrith Maybe, but also the Danes spoke your language when they burned our homes and cut our throats.

Graville That was long since, and nowadays the Danes make our most loyal servants, and in a few generations no one will know anymore who in England is of Danish and who of Saxon stock.

Godrith You speak as if you already was a lord of England. You might as well get it straight that we Saxons will never accept Normans in England.

Graville It sounds to me that you clearly never was in Normandy, my good man. What is your name?

Godrith They call me Godrith.

Graville A good name for a good Saxon. I am Mallet de Graville, special envoy of the Duke of Normandy.

Godrith You are probably nought but a spy.

Graville My good Godrith, if you had been to Normandy you would have appreciated our culture there with the most beautiful churches and monasteries with schools and accomplished artists.

Godrith I must ask you, Mr. Norman Dane, not to brag about your churches to the King. He has a propensity for pious ideas, and we pay taxes enough already for his churches.

Graville Do you have a reason for discontent?

Godrith No, not as long as we have a Saxon King. But if we get a stranger for a King we will not be easy to deal with.

Graville Are you always that bluntly outspoken? Have you no master?

Godrith Yes, I serve Earl Harold Godwinson.

Graville Is he not the strongest man of the realm after the King?

Godrith Yes, and he will never let any French usurpers into the country.

Graville Is he married?

Godrith No, but he is engaged.

Graville With whom?

Godrith The fair Edith.

Graville So. And is there no one on level with him? How about his brothers Torstig and Gurth?

Godrith They are his likes except in nobility. But they are all three determined to have their brother Haco released, who you are keeping as hostage prisoner in France without right.

Graville He will be released as soon as Harold comes across to fetch him and becomes our Duke William's man.

Godrith He will never be anyone's man except the King's. He will rather fight and die.

Graville For what? For this England without fortresses and castles for any defence? For this peasantry impoverished by the King, who made a third of the country church property? For this church wavering and tottering from the decay of antiquity and stagnation? For your monarchy, which is finished after Edward the Confessor? My good Godrith, as Englishmen you have nothing to stand up for and defend. Your weakened and impoverished people had to suffer foreign kings from Denmark, and it would be no challenge at all for William of Normandy to establish his reign here as invincibly as Canute the Great of Denmark only by promising to respect your old laws and privileges. A rebellion on your side would be powerless, for he would build fortresses all over the country. And the clergy would rather follow us and Rome, who gives them money, than to stand alone in poverty. You have no chance against the development of progress.

Godrith We would fight anyway with Harold for our freedom.

Graville Would he then be king? Is not his mother Danish?

Godrith He would defend our freedom. You would only oppress it.

Graville Oppress? What kind of a word is that? The only oppression in this world, my good man, is the lack of order by undisciplined freedom and anarchy.

Godrith Go to hell, foreigner! (*leaves*)

Graville No, my friend, that is not acceptable. With such barbaric insults you uneducated primitivists will never reach anywhere! (*leaves in the opposite direction*)

Scene 2. In the dark of the forest.

Harold (awakening) Are dreams to believe in and follow or just to despise and forget?

I saw a large plain in front of me flooded with triumphant daylight, and I desired to embrace the whole world in love and joy. But then I fell down into a grave, and that grave was without bottom. I shut my eyes not to see the terrible fall, and since everything thus went black the fall was interrupted. Carefully I opened my eyes. All around me then were dead men's bones. There were thousands of

skeletons, and they started to move around me, and they all grinned at me. And they giggled as one voice among them said: "Harold Godwinson, now you belong to us forever, who dared to scorn the dead!" Thus he spoke, and it was a terrible voice. And they all joined in: "Now you belong to us!" And they yelled at me and danced around me, until I had enough and rose. Then I saw their leader. It was a dark and stately figure, but on his head a clearly saw a mitre. I saw the name of the phantom which was War, and when I recognized him as the War his mitre changed into the rudder of a ship. And the plain, which now was dark, changed into a sea, and that sea was of blood. There all the skeletons swam around, they were warriors and monks, and they yelled at me; "Harold is now damned!" and "Don't you fear the bones of the dead?" And a terrible voice cried directly up to my face: "Nothing are you, who feared the bones of the dead!"

And then came the storm turning the bloody sea into a raving turmoil of disaster. Two stars then appeared on the sky. One was pale but very stable, while the other was clear but uneasy, and a voice said: "Harold, there is your star," pointing at the pale star, and another voice said: "Behold the star that lighted the cradle of the victor!" And the second uneasy star became even brighter until it made the pale star disappear altogether. And then I understood that everything was finished. But it was only the dream that was finished.

I awoke and found that I had fallen asleep here by your side. What could be the meaning of such a dream, Edith? It was so strong and clear that I will never be able to forget it.

Edith Forget it, Harold. Your life is more important than your duty. Whatever its meaning could have been, it was without meaning to what you mean to me.

Harold You are wonderful, Edith. You are more than like a sister to me.

Edith Still I am just a distant relative.

Harold Don't mention the word relative.

Edith Why not, Harold?

Harold Yes, why? Because that word means we can never have each other. The church forbids marriage between relatives.

Edith But William of Normandy was allowed to marry his cousin.

Harold Yes, but only by the pope's exemption. He is more to the pope than we are. In the eyes of the pope the English church is almost lost.

Edith Your sister, my godmother, asked me to come to court tomorrow. Will we meet there?

Harold Certainly. But why are you summoned to court? It can't be...

Edith I am afraid so.

Harold Woe is me! It's my own fault, who refused to conceal to the world how much you mean to me. Your company means everything to me, and in order to separate us they mean to confine you in a monastery. My God! How could any religion presume to preside over the religion of the human heart, the only religion that never lies or pretends? How could anyone be a criminal who is only guilty of love? (*embraces her*)

Edith We can never be free in our love. Let me then love you the more from behind my walls in the monastery, where no one can confine my love.

Harold Yes, only thus we may be lovers, since my fidelity to England bars me from the freedom of my elder brother Sven, who made a marriage of love and spited the convention. If Sven had not fallen I could have fallen. Now I must not fall for the sake of Sven and England.

Edith But if you sometime fall you could only belong to me.

Harold Yes, Edith, if not before I will be yours when I am dead. No one can take me away from you after that.

Edith Whatever you do, not even while you are alive.

Harold But if my father insists on my marrying another?

Edith Then you will only love me through her.

Harold Of course. We are the slaves of destiny, but we will cheat on it.

Edith Destiny shall never conquer us, but we shall conquer destiny.

Harold Come, my Edith. So far we are free and happy, like England still is free, for you have still not been confined in your monastery nor I in the service of the King. We shall not misuse the freedom that still belongs to us. Postpone your monastic vows as long as possible.

Edith My vows to you are the only valid ones.

Harold What vows have you taken?

Edith Never to deceive you with Christ. (*kisses him*)

Harold As long as we are out in the wild there is hope. Only the walls exclude the hopeful joys of light, where we will be happy and free until the sun goes down.

Edith If it sets on us it will never rise again.

Harold You are right. If it sets on us it will never rise again for England.

A servant Harold, your father summons you to court.

Harold Again?

Servant Also the King.

Harold Then I have no choice. I must release myself from you to fall into the chains of duty.

Edith Still I am not lost to you.

Harold You are not lost to me as long as I live. I never give up hope.
Edith England is lucky to have you.
Harold And we are unlucky to have the church, who forbids our union and demands your confinement.
Edith No church can confine our love. It is more eternal than the church.
Harold I think so too.
Edith Go to your father, then. I will expect you there.
Harold You shall be my only source of light at court.
Edith Do we dare to depart?
Harold Only to reunite. *(they embrace and kiss)*
Edith Until tomorrow.
Harold Until tomorrow. *(They separate.)*

Scene 3. Westminster

Godwin Hail, sweet home, the most idyllic existence in our world, the peaceful naivety of England,, who never thought evil of any enemy until you were raped! You are the fairest garden in the world with your parks of roses and hyacinths, sand you were never lovelier than now when ruled by harmless priests, a third of the realm being owned by a weak effeminate church in constant decay, when your King is old and childless and sublime in the senility of his megalomaniac foolishness! He considers himself a saint, but he is only holy in the vanity of his simplicity. Can he really heal the sick by his hands? Let him believe so since he so gladly wants to, but he will not be cured himself by his grandiose imagination. He will only cultivate his senility. *(enter Harold)*

But lo! my son, the very man I wanted to speak with! My dear beloved and blessed and most accomplished son! Yours is the future. England is fallen, and only you can save her.

Harold What's wrong, father? Why so apprehensive words?
Godwin I am worried about the future. Have you ever seen a more solid security more safely established in our country than now?
Harold We are all aware, that we never had it better.
Godwin Save our welfare, Harold!
Harold What do you ask of me, father?
Godwin Marry!
Harold (can't believe his ears) Should I marry?

Godwin Listen, my son! I am only thinking of the future. The King is senile and childless and is not fit for politics, and you are closest to his throne, my oldest living son, while your sister is the King's Queen. When Edward the Confessor dies the power of all England will be in the hands of scary quivering prelates who are only good for going down on their knees. After Edward someone has to assume power with a firm hand if England is to survive as a nation. Only you can unite England after the end of Edward the Confessor.

Harold And you yourself, father?

Godwin I myself am dying. I will not survive Edward. That's why I am worried. You see in front of you a dying man – take it easy, I am not dead yet, - whose last will is to save England.

Harold (down on his knees) Tell me what to do for England, and I will do it.

Godwin My son, rise. I never doubted your good will and your political competence. After the death of me and Edward there is only one who could raise the banner of rebellion and disturb the unity of the realm, and that is our rival Leofric's son Elgar, your enemy. Make peace with him.

Harold It would be easier to make peace with an eternal tempest.

Godwin There is a way. Propose to his daughter.

Harold His daughter?

Godwin His daughter Aldyth.

Harold Are you commanding me to a political marriage?

Godwin My son, your marriage will be to England. If you do not marry into the family of Elgar, you will not be married to Mercia and Wales, which belongs to England. Elgar's daughter is the only one who could secure for you the entire united England as it now is as a monastery and bulwark against all the rest of the world's barbarity.

Harold Father, I need no wife. England needs men. I will rule England better with my men than with apron-strings keeping you stuck in bed.

Godwin My son, Aldyth is not just a woman. She is Elgar's daughter! Elgar has Mercia and Wales in his hand. Your marriage to his daughter is the only way out of the dissolution, chaos and civil war which the void after the loss of Edward must lead to!

Harold If anyone threatens to violate the peace of England after Edward's death I will encounter that violator with fighting men and not with flattering posies.

Godwin It's the first time in your life you are not immediately obeying me. What is behind? Don't you trust my political instinct?

Harold You are wiser than anyone else.

Godwin Are you in love with another?

Harold Father, even if I loved another I would rather defend England with men than with women.

Godwin My son, you can't fool me. An eye looking down has something to hide, and you are hiding a love which I know nothing about. Are you aware that that private love of yours could mean the political downfall of England?

Harold (looking his father in his eyes again) I love only England, and I could not betray that love with any woman.

Godwin My son, a politician has to be married to a woman,. Or else he will only be a fleeting idealist at peril of perishing with the nation, like Edward the Confessor.

Edward (entering in the same moment) What is going on here?

Godwin I was just talking to my son in an effort to guide him out of his wayward wanderings on straying paths of love to lead him back to his senses.

Edward Ha! You thought as much, Earl Godwin! You always thought you could fool me, but that you could never do! What do you think brought me here right now as you stood here speaking ill of your sovereign to your son?

Godwin (ironically) Could it have been God?

Edward Who else! He wanted me to catch you red-handed, just as you, second only to me, were abusing the only one to whom you owe everything!

Godwin (ironically as before) Do I then not owe any thanks to God?

Edward You even mock me! What am I to do with you, spiteful enemy in disguise? I am too pious to have you executed, and you are too proud to usurp my power.

(Occupies the throne with the Queen. Edith remains beside)

Godwin My King, we are both old and just a hair's breadth from death. Let's make peace sometime while we are still alive.

Edward Only you have ever disturbed my peace.

Godwin Only by conquering new rebellious subjects to you.

Edward By constantly advancing the power of you and your sons at the cost of my own.

Godwin Did not I once make you King?

Edward And made me childless by marrying me to your barren daughter.

Queen (rising) You banished me to the monastery!

Edward Are you raising your voice against your husband?

Queen My liege, now you are unfair!

Edward Did I not myself overhear as I entered how this my faithful Earl after my death will bestow my title and power on this awkward Harold?

Edith With respect, my liege, you have no right to insult your closest of kin.

Edward And what right have you to say anything to all this, you bitch? Didn't I tell you to get thee into a nunnery?

Queen Don't abuse my goddaughter. She alone is innocent in this country.

Edith And your brother Harold, my Queen.

Godwin (*suspects one thing and another, has studied the looks of Edith and Harold*) And what is your motive, noble virgin Edith, to protect my son against the arrows of others?

Edith He is a human being.

Godwin Is he not more than that?

Edith Only God is more than that.

Godwin What about Christ, then, in whose name all kings are kings by the grace of God?

Edward There he goes again claiming the royal title for his sons. Don't bother, Earl Godwin. After me the descendant of Alfred the Great, William of Normandy, will be my successor.

Godwin (*paralysed*) What are you saying, you old creep?

Edward That in spite of all your efforts during your long life, you and your family will have no power after my death.

Godwin And what do we get instead? Intolerable Frenchmen as Viking bullies? Extortionist Jews? Harlots and parasites? You have of course personally sent invitation cards to each one of them in all Normandy and earnestly asked them to take our country away from us? Is that what you want, you crowned knave of a villain?

Harold Take it easy, father. He is only teasing you.

Godwin Yes, and far beyond all reasonable and tolerable limits! When he and I are dead, Harold, all my life's efforts to leave a decent England behind me will have been unmade by his sanctimonious invitation to the Vatican to bring hell to the English. When he and his church are finished with us there will be no more Saxons left in this country, for they will all be exterminated by obsequious hypocrisy, corruption and scandals! This man is a crowned scandal of a fool and the greatest in the history of England! Don't you realize yourself, Edward Confessor, that you have betrayed your own country, if what you say is true? How will you ever find peace in your grave after this?

Edward Watch the ravings of my ambitious Earl, who secured for himself all power in this country by his intrigues and political marriages for his sons and still never can be satisfied. When I am dead he will laugh at my grave and spit William of

Normandy in his face and shame all England to the Church forever. You are pagan Earl Godwin., You should read the Bible.

Godwin And you are the apex of Christian self-complacency, infallibility and conceit. People like you should be locked up and kept in custody forever till your whole tribe has gone to perdition in hell with all popes in history!

Edward Mark well how he blasphemes!

Queen Father, don't work yourself up. You know you can't stand personal conflicts.

Godwin Shut up, daughter! All that's missing is your defending your failure of a husband, who kept you all your life in a virgin cage! I married him to you to give England and you heirs and children and not to let him shame his country and his crown!

Edith Dear godfather...

Godwin And get you gone to a nunnery! We don't want any more twisted imbeciles here in Westminster! I know full well what you have done to my son! He will never be himself again, and he will never be able to defend his country any more, since all he is good for now is thinking of you!

Harold Father, the virgin Edith is the very soul of England.

Godwin That's exactly what I am saying! You are as mad as my impotent son-in-law here!

Edward Old man, I never thought you could turn against your King!

Godwin By my unsullied English heart and soul, no one can turn against you, poor pathetic dumbbell, for you are past all hope. No one would find it worth saying a single word against such a hopeless stranger to reality as yourself. By my soul, you are a humbug!

Edward Enough! I have tolerated your constant bullying once too much!

Godwin And I regret that I never condescended to touch one hair on your empty head. Now it's too late, since you are bald and already no more than a living ghost. If someone tried to strike you he would only strike thin air.

Edward You could never strike me, since I was childless and harmless, but you did strike my brother, since he could beget progeny.

Godwin May I be hit by lightning if I ever struck a man outside the battlefield or when it was not my duty to do so! (*collapses*)

Harold My father, you are going too far!

Edith He shouldn't go so hard on it.

Queen (rushes to Godwin's side) Father, what's the matter?

Edward Leave him be. Even a volcano will eventually calm down.

Harold What's the matter with him?

Edith Ease his collar.

Queen I fear the worst.

Harold Father, speak to us!

Edith (hides his face with her hands) Why must you politicians always quarrel!

Queen Behold, he returns!

Godwin (with utmost difficulty) Take me home. I had a fit.

Harold Father!

Godwin I am lost. Harold, marry Aldyth, for England's sake. Edith, find a monastery until the danger is past.

Edward (rising, exuberant) He dies! He dies! I knew it! God struck him! He killed my brother! When he denied it God hit him with the lightning! I knew it! I am always right! No one can fool me!

Queen Shame on you, Edward!

Godwin Calm down. He will soon follow me. Then there will be silence over England, when the ravens will feast on the corpses of that England which will be torn asunder by the civil wars instigated by the Church.

Edward He blasphemes even as he is dying!

Godwin (pointing at Edward) Behold the malicious joy that will be England's ruin!

Edward You are powerless, Godwin, and your sons will be powerless after me!
(moves to the exit. To some guards:) Bring out the corpse when it has cooled down.
(leaves)

(Edith is crying, Harold watches her dumb with grief, and the Queen is crying by the breast of Godwin.)

Godwin My children, incipit tragoedia. (dies)

Harold (to Edith) We will never have one another now, since my father's last will is my law.

Edith (rising sadly) If you'll never have me, you'll never have England either. (rushes out)

Queen My brother, don't take it seriously. I lived my whole life as a Queen in a monastery, and I know that also Edith in her monastery will be faithful to you.

Harold May I then be able to answer her loyalty. But now with my father gone I belong to my destiny and its predestined politics. I am his chief and now the most powerful man in the realm heir, but I never felt more powerless.

(The light wanes and ends in darkness as the curtain falls.)

Act II scene 1. A countryside between England and Wales.

Harold (on horseback) My lady, you are free.

Aldyth (on horseback) Are you serious? Do you intend to crown your ultimate victory in Wales by declining your most precious prize?

Harold We will only rule over free men. Slaves and hostages are for foreigners abroad. Here we desire to be civilized.

Aldyth You make me wonder, Harold Godwinson. What is it then to be civilized? Is it to resign from politics? Did not your father ask you to marry me from political reasons?

Harold My lady, you are already married.

Aldyth But Griffith is dead. You killed him yourself. Nothing stands between me and you any longer.

Harold Except the ideal virtue and honour. I never want to gain you by violence or for politics.

Aldyth That commends you. But will you then instead abandon me to any rapists of your English subjects?

Harold My lady, in my realm you will never lack protection. But who comes here?

Aldyth He looks like a Norman. (*Graville arrives on horseback*)

Graville (enters) My lord, my sincerest congratulations to your decisive victories, which now have pacified all Mercia and Wales.

Harold My lord, I only performed my duty. But I don't know you. What does a Norman want from an Englishman?

Graville My lord, I carry a message of joy from the north.

Harold From the north?

Graville Yes, from your enemy Elgar.

Harold Has he sent you?

Graville No, but by holy brothers I have learned that he died from his wounds after his defeats against you.

Harold So he is dead?

Graville Stone dead to your honour, which many brothers can testify. You have no enemy anymore in England.

Harold My lord, you forget yourself. This lady is daughter of the man at whose death you are rejoicing.

Graville (with a curtsey, removing his hat) My lady, my sincerest regrets and condolences.

Aldyth Hypocrite! (*rides off*)

Harold She will never be a friend of yours, I am afraid.

Graville Was that the fair Aldyth, the last flower of the Celtic kings?

Harold Yes, and the Celts never forget an insult.

Graville I trust your good English diplomacy, my lord with the golden tongue, as your father called you. You can surely make her reconciled with the Norman lack of knowledge of Celtic family relationships.

Harold You worm about like an eel, Monsieur de Graville. What do you really want?

Graville I actually only wanted to deliver an invitation from the Duke William of Normandy, whom I serve. As you well know your brother Haco is in our hands in France, and William will not release him until you yourself get across and collect him.

Harold If the release of Haco demands my presence I will arrive presently. But if Haco is not released there will be war.

Graville That's exactly why Duke William asks you to come, since he like you wants no war. He never wants to attack England.

Harold He wouldn't dare. No one ever attacked England, and England has only visited the continent with her culture and civilization.

Graville But it came to you from Rome. There has always been an exchange between the continent and England of culture and civilization. We desire that exchange to continue. I came to England to open negotiations with you from Duke William. Now it's your turn to come to us in Normandy.

Harold Just one question: is your duke interested in the crown of Edward the Confessor?

Graville That's a question you can only ask of Duke William.

Harold Tell him that I will gladly come across but only to collect my brother, and we are willing to pay what ransom he would demand. But he must leave off all claims for the crown of England, if he has any, since it never will be his. Just look around and testify to your duke about my people. They are mine, and they love me. They are free and tolerate no masters not chosen by themselves to lead them. This is a nation of free people where iron dukes like your ambitious William only can cause blundering havoc. Also King Edward the Confessor has decided to award his crown to the king of the people Harold Godwinson for his labours for the unification of England. William of Normandy has as little to do in England as my brother Haco had any business in France.

Graville I shall deliver your message, but I doubt William's intentions will cool down as a result. Rather will any resistance only inflame the energy of his wrath.

Harold I never want to fight him, but he shall always find me ready to speak with him.

Graville He will look forward to your arrival. Thus I bid you welcome to France and Normandy, victorious Harold Godwinson! (*rides away*)

Harold I will surely come to you without weapons but armed with right. But to our country foreigners only came with weapons and without right. (*rides off*)

Scene 2. Westminster

Harold My liege, my foster-father in my real father's stead, I have come to you in Westminster seeking your allowance to fulfil my holy vow to my mother to travel over to Rouen in Normandy to have my brother Haco released by the Duke's grace to take him back to his motherland England.

Edward Noble Harold, the magnanimous vanquisher of Mercia and Wales, you rightly called me your father in Godwin's stead, for without you England would have no backbone. You are truly like a son to me, and after your popular victories in Wales I view your family more graciously than ever. Your brother Torstig remains an unreliable rogue and firebrain, and your father quarrelled with me as long as he lived, but we don't have to see Torstig, and your father is forgiven since he is dead. Your brother Gurth is a rising star like yourself for the people and future of England, and naturally we therefore miss your last brother as much as you do yourself.. We wish with all our heart to have him close to our hearts again.

But the enterprise you ask of me is precarious. Some longer time ago I viewed the ambitious hothead William of Normandy as my possible successor, and I even took him into my considerations. We don't know how seriously he took this in, but the risk is he took it for granted in his self-love that he alone would be king of England after me. He could see you as a competitor for this position, while I nowadays openly rather see you as my successor than anyone else, and could therefore by your landing in Normandy prove your mortal enemy.

Harold His special envoy Mallet de Graville assured me that I would be entirely successful with the duke and that he longs for me like a brother, since we are in fact cousins

Edward Very distant cousins. So you trust a Frenchman like Mallet de Graville?

Edith Don't go, Harold!

Edward What now? My goddaughter! Didn't I tell you to stick to your monastery? What are you doing here, and with what right do you interfere in politics?

Edith Harold! Let your brother Gurth travel instead to have Haco released. Duke William would have no reason to harm or fear him.

Harold Would I then cowardly stick to my home?

Edith You are more needed here! England can't afford risking your welfare.

Harold Who has counselled you thus?

Edith My intuition!

Edward (after a moment's silence) Usually a woman's intuition is despised, which the despiser afterwards always learns to regret. Let's not despise this womanly intuition but rather take good note of it instead. I am actually inclined to not reject her counsel as unwise. Not even God knows what that tricky duke of Normandy could treat us with for some deceit. He is descended from the Danes, and they were masters only in deceit. We have no reason to put any trust in him, and I believe the pope is making a mistake in doing so, but we are powerless against his loneliness. Is Gurth around here somewhere?

Gurth (stepping forth) At your service, my liege.

Edward What do you think about dame Edith's misgivings?

Gurth That no one has advanced with anything wiser. Harold has every reason to expect any treason from Duke William, since it is well known to everyone that William desires to be king of England while England would prefer king Harold. If I went on the mission to bring Haco home instead of Harold William would immediately understand that Harold and England will not bow to Normandy. And such a lesson would be very opportune for curing William's presumption and the general French opportunism.

Harold And if he as a consequence would not let Haco go but also capture you?

Gurth Has not Mallet de Graville promised you the release of Haco by the duke?

Harold He only gave that promise to me personally and to no one else, presumably because William wants to meet with me and no one else. I am also interested in meeting William and no one else. You are all well acquainted with how my successes in Wales and Mercia chiefly were obtained not by bloody battles but by gentle diplomacy. I also think the English matter of succession could be resolved by peaceful diplomacy, if only I could talk with our cousin personally. That is actually the main reason why I am so eager to go myself down to a different continent from the only safe one: my ambition is to win over William for the cause of England and

make him our ally and friend for England and our family for a hopefully continuous future.

Edward If you succeed you have earned the crown of England.

Harold I never failed in any of my previous enterprises.

Edith Harold, don't go!

Edward Only this single woman speaks against you, who loves you the most, whom you love the most and whom you can never make your own. The sacred voice of virginity and innocence out of eternity forbids your enterprise. Dare you oppose it?

Harold Edith, I swore an oath to my mother.

Edith Only to be able to desert England.

Harold No, she enforced it out of me to see her son before her death. She refuses to accept losing Haco as she lost Sven, her firstborn.

Edward Who is strongest – the mother or the virgin? Which word carries the greater weight? I cannot decide the matter.

Harold An oath is an oath, and if I obey the constructive advice of Edith I break my word. I am aware of the risks of the journey, but I refuse to believe that it could lead to any harm except possibly to myself.

Edith You plunge England into disaster! A sworn oath leads only to worse oaths that have to be broken. Even Jesus teaches us not to commit ourselves to oaths.

Edward My goddaughter, when you claim that Harold plunges England into disaster by going off you make yourself guilty of some exaggeration, since by going he actually risks his life for the best of England. This your word, Edith, makes Harold's vow to his mother more binding than your advice. The bond between mother and son is stronger than the political views of a nun when she completely lacks any political experience. Go, Harold, and good luck. I can't see any hindrance to both of you coming back safe and well.

Edith He will be back with Haco but without his soul.

Gurth Brother, she prophesies. Mark her word. Send me instead.

Harold My brother, we can't afford losing you with Haco. I would rather lose my soul than you and Haco.

Gurth And if you lose all three? Wouldn't it be better in that case that England at least could keep you and your soul? I don't trust William.

Harold Then it's good that you are not going. I always trust anyone until he betrays me, including foreigners.

Gurth You are too noble for me.

Harold Nothing can stop me. We'll see each other again together with Haco.

Edward We believe in you, Harold. Go in peace.

Gurth Good luck, brother.

Harold Thanks. I know I cannot fail.

Edward Let us now discuss the details. (*The men go out.*)

Edith He goes, for he is too good to believe anything evil about William of Normandy or the Church. But Duke William is a puppet of the Church, and I know how infernal the church can be, for I have been imprisoned in its virgin cage. Men may know their politics and wars and control them, but they know nothing about the power of the Church, which is the supreme evil and greatest danger of all. And I, being bound by oaths to the Church, owes her my obligation of silence, whatever I may know.

Scene 3. Rouen.

William My wife, we shall soon have a visitor who might decide our future.

Mathilda What's up now, you miserable adventurer?

William How would you like to get a new kingdom besides the dukedom you already have?

Mathilda Which kingdom do you intend to steal?

William Only England, if it works.

Mathilda You are French, William, and cultivated as such and not some wild islander.

William Don't you desire your own country? Wasn't Alfred the Great your ancestor? Do you deny his heritage?

Mathilda William, your pride will ruin everybody's life except your own. That's why I'll rather be your friend than your enemy. If you give me England I can just accept it without complaining.

William That's my girl! He is wise who keeps silent in politics, for he has the power, but who speaks the truth about it will lose it. But here is my messenger. Welcome home, Mallet de Gravelle! What did you get in England?

Gravelle Can we speak freely with the duchess present?

William (watches her) She has promised to remain silent.

Gravelle Well. The country is open and has neither fortresses nor any army. The English nation can be crushed in just one battle. We must not underestimate the English, though. And foremost of them is Harold Godwinson.

William My so called cousin, who challenges my right to the English throne. How is he? What kind of a man? Did you bring my invitation?

Graville He is downright honesty and righteousness. He thinks no evil of any man until that man himself proves himself to be his enemy. He is well accomplished and has a developed sense of justice and virtue.

William A bore, in other words. Can he fight?

Graville He has never lost a battle, and he treats his beaten enemies with such magnanimousness that they have to become his friends.

William A dangerous man. Did you get him here?

Graville He accepted my invitation and promised to come. He said that he was eager to see you.

William He also wants to make me his friend. Well, he will have to beat me first. He thinks no ill of me. There is my advantage: he doesn't know if I am his enemy. Thus I have the chance to quench him without war and only by cunning. We'll see what's strongest, his nobility or my cunning. How is his relationship with the Church?

Graville He lacks that vital support by the Church which you have, my lord.

William Then the game is set from the start. He has no chance. He stands alone against all the limitless resources of black magic of the Church. He isn't even aware of my absolute superiority from the beginning. It's almost pitiable. All I need is my trick to be working.

Mathilda Your trick, William?

Graville Wasn't she supposed to keep silent?

William I trust her, de Graville. I rule her as I rule my warriors: with chastising violence. She knows she is dependent on my love and that she can't get it from another. Wife, I already arranged for Harold, the moment he sets his foot on our shore, to be taken prisoner by the wild Guy de Ponthieu, so that I then may come to his rescue. That way Harold will owe me thanks forever and view me as his saviour. Thus I will be given the upper hand on him from the start and can start manipulating him wherever I want.

Mathilda Good luck then.

William (to Graville, meaningly) What did I tell you? For some real love woman will agree to just anything. We are fortunate not to know anything about English virtue here in France. But who is making that noise out there? *(enter a servant)*

Servant An English messenger asks for immediate audience.

William If he comes from Harold of England so let him in at once. *(exit servant)*

(to Graville, meaningly) The game seems to be working.

(enter English messenger) We have waited long for Harold Godwinson. Will he come?

The messenger (Godrith) Good day, master Mallet de Graville! We meet again.

William Do you know this Englishman, Graville?

Graville Yes, it is Godrith, a close friend both of mine and of Harold Godwinson's.

William What do you know about Harold, boy?

Godrith Your grace, we came with two ships across the English channel to visit you. On our way we had bad weather and were driven north to the mouth of the river Somme, where we landed. We could never have expected to be so unwelcome. We had hardly dried until we were nastily attacked by the count of Ponthieu and his ruffians, and Earl Harold himself was brutally thrown into the count's prison. Is that how you receive and treat guests in France who are polite enough to accept pains to take an inconvenient invitation seriously?

William (rising, indignant) What is this? What an impertinence! What scandalous treason! How dares the count of Ponthieu to undertake such villainy? It's a shame!

Godrith That was Earl Harold's reaction also and almost tore the count's castle down with his hands if he was not allowed to send me as a messenger to you. And here I am. What do you intend to do about it?

William This is very awkward, Graville. What do you think?

Graville The count of Ponthieu is a hotlivered man with a strong defence whom you never really knows what he is doing. And what's worse: he has no obligations to you. He is vassal to no one, and his lands are independent of Normandy. You can't demand anything of him.

William You heard what Monsieur de Graville said, Godrith. This is indeed very worrying.

Godrith My lord, Earl Harold came expressly on your and Monsieur de Graville's invitation here to France and was promised safe conduct. What on earth do you mean? Have you just lured him into a trap, and are all your promises only treason and deceit?

William He suspects us, de Graville.

Graville Yes, I am surprised at your suspiciousness, Godrith!

Godrith Only on this side of the Channel. *(to the duchess)* My lady, I appeal to you as a woman. Can you as a lady of honour tolerate that guests are treated this way?

Mathilda My good man, I am of Saxon blood like you, but unfortunately I have been subdued by a wild Norman who can't tolerate anything except submission. I have nothing to say in the matter.

William Our lady has spoken.

Godrith I must insist on the Earl's release and that given promises are kept. Or else King Edward the Confessor must complain to the pope.

William Of course we will do what we can, but it isn't much. The count of Ponthieu is a terrible man who can't stand imposture unless they are carefully soft like ladies' silken gloves. We will get your Earl out of prison but can't say when.

Godrith You had better hurry before King Edward learns what has happened.

William (advances and takes his hand) My friend, you have my word that we will do everything in our power to get Harold out. If needful we will even use force. Harold is like a brother to me, and the way in which he has been treated is a shame to France. I only ask you to trust us.

Godrith (kneels and retires) I trust no one except Earl Harold. He will immediately be informed of what has been said here between us. *(leaves)*

William What do you think? Did he see us through?

Graville No. He is as honest an Englishman as Harold and can think no evil of anyone until treason is an obvious fact. We can take it easy.

William That's not what we shall do, Graville. Your mission now is to worsen this affair as much as possible. Raise all possible obstacles for the release of Harold. Guy de Ponthieu has to mess with us as much as possible. Is that clear?

Graville Perfectly.

William Go off at your business. *(exit Graville)*

Well, Mathilda, was the show to your liking?

Mathilda You really mobilize from the beginning all possible means of deceit and treason just to reach your goals. And when you have reached them and everyone is lying dead around you, what will you say then?

William Then I will blot out history and write a new one beginning with me.

Mathilda Will I have no part in it?

William (kissing her) Without the help from you and the Church all my efforts would be as vain and worthless as those of Harold.

Scene 4. Ponthieu.

Harold Unhappy hour for England! Your honour abroad, o England, is nothing worth but filth and cadaver, for honour is not to be found abroad. There is only treason and calculating destruction, evil intrigue and an abyss of dishonourable foul play. William, what is your game? What do you try to gain by your treason? Don't tell me that you are not responsible for the activities of Guy de Ponthieu: only you stand above him. What happened here was planned by you. What do you want? Is power then so rotten that only treason can deserve it?

Godrith Sir, it was not possible to speak with them. The duchess kept only silent, and the others spoke only treason and deceit.

Harold We ended up in hell. We should never have believed a foreigner.

William (listening outside with his brother bishop Udo of Bayeux) He has lost all illusions. Shall we let him go on raving?

Udo I think he is grilled enough to be ripe for the test.

William (locking up and entering) Brother Harold, you are free.

Harold (rising) With whom have I the honour?

William Your brother William of Normandy. And this is my brother bishop Udo of Bayeux, who has been helpful in your release. (*enter the bishop*) And here is your brother Haco, who is also free. (*Haco is entered. He falls to his brother's feet.*)

Haco Brother!

Harold (with his hand on his shoulder) Dear little brother!

William Well, Harold Godwinson, have I fulfilled my promises?

Harold If you are serious and nothing else excludes us from daylight, you have indeed, if only you immediately let us return to England.

William Why such a hurry? Don't you trust us?

Harold What further ill can you do to us?

William Are you accusing me and count Guy of any impudence? I have only shown you my first act of kindness. Allow me to show you more.

Harold Your first was quite enough for a lifetime.

William Poor earl, you have turned distrustful.

Harold I have played all the way with open cards, but you Normans have bluffed and cheated all the way from the start and have still not shown your cards.

William (after a pause) Your demand is fair. You shall see my cards. Men, leave us alone! (*Udo and Haco remain.*) You too, bishop.

Udo Don't you need the Church for a witness?

Harold Concerning England, the Church should stay out of politics.

Udo You can't lock the pope out of England! (*leaves*)

Harold That priest makes me shudder.

Haco Should I leave as well??

Harold No, stay, Haco, if our 'brother' here has nothing against it.

William I would prefer him to stay.

Harold Well, William of Normandy, what is your game?

William (takes a seat) My friends, many years ago your King Edward and I met here in Bayeux. He was then not yet king, but we became friends, and I promised to help

him if he ever would reach for the throne of England. I helped him to it. He thanked me by promising me that I would have that throne after him if I survived him.

Harold He had no right to give such a promise since he himself had no legal right to it.

William You are right. The rightful heir was Atheling, who died, and today the legal heir to the throne of England is a weak boy called Edgar who is not accountable. The throne will be vacant after Edward, who has no children of his own. And he has the right to give his throne to whomever he chooses. He chose me long ago, and I have never forgot it.

Harold King Edward has no legal right to appoint an heir himself. If there are no legal heirs, the successor is appointed by the people's assembly, which you have no right to declare invalid.

William I claim that there is a legal heir to the throne of England. Canute the Great of Denmark was a much loved king in England, and I am his rightful heir. My consort Mathilda is in her turn straight descendant of Alfred the Great. There you have two obvious heirs to the English throne.

Harold And if the people's assembly of England prefer me?

William Then you have to become a republic first, but the last republic died 1100 years ago. Harold, you are not stupid. You know you have no chance. You are both at my mercy, and I could starve you to death if you don't co-operate. I respect the most powerful man of England, Harold, but he could be even more powerful as earl by my side. I will not only be king of England but also of Scotland and Ireland, of the Orkneys and Shetlands, of Iceland and Denmark if it's God's will. And nothing shall stop me. I demand nothing of you, Harold, except your promise to swear me allegiance when I arrive at Dover. If I am not given the throne of England without spilling blood, the first blood spilt will be yours and then Edward's and Gurth's and Edith's and Aldyth's and your sister's and mother's and all but your brother Torstig's, who is on my side.

Harold Have you bought Torstig?

William No, I persuaded him. He is allied both with me and with Harold Hardrade of Norway, the brother of Olav the Saint. Be sensible, Harold. Bow to me, and you will have the entire world on your side. Fail me, and you will have the whole world against you including the only sanctifying Church with all its believers. You and your fathers were never anything but earls. Your mother was as much related with Canute the Great as I, but that is your only royal mark.

Harold If you claim the English throne by Canute the Great, I can make the same claim. The difference is, that the people are with me while they will be against you.

William No, Harold, the difference is that I am related with Canute by my father while you only are related with him by your mother. Am I correct?

Harold You are correct formally but not morally. My people will never accept you as king without resistance. And even if you come conquering with an army you will never defeat them as individuals and you will never win their hearts.

William With your help I could. (*silence*)

Think carefully. You have life and death to choose between. If you say no you and Haco will be the first to lose your heads as a consequence, and with you out of the game it would be easy to persuade the brittle Edward, who is dying any moment. You have the night to think it over. If you accept you will have my loveliest daughter Adeliza for your wife at once, if your unmarried sister Thyra marries someone of my barons, so that our agreement is confirmed in the flesh to become as valid as the blood of all loving humanity. If you don't accept you are an idiot turning your own family and kingdom into great disaster. Think carefully (*leaves*)

Udo (outside) Well, brother, did he swallow the bait?

William He has no choice. He has to. But I don't think he will if not to vomit it out again as soon as he is at home back in England. He must give us his oath of fidelity, but nothing can make him keep it. Therefore we now need your church: it will be our insurance against his unavoidable apostasy. (*leaves with the bishop*)

Haco Well, brother, will you crawl into the muck of the traitor?

Harold I have to, brother, for the sake of England. Only I will be able to defend our people's freedom rights in England against the tyrant of Normandy. I must give him a false vow of fidelity to be able to get back to England with you to defend our country.

Haco They have deceived us and broken their promises and committed treason. You have then no other choice than to repay them with the same faked performance. That was not exactly what you had expected here from your cousin, was it?

Harold Edith was right.

Haco What did she say?

Harold She said that I would lose my soul here in France. I have already lost everything here except that. Let's see what they will manufacture to bereave me even of that.

Scene 5. Bayeux.

Haco You don't look well, Harold.

Harold I had a difficult night.

Haco It shows.

Harold No wonder. Fortunately everything will soon be over with. Only a farewell to William remains. Then we are free from the nightmare.

Haco But it is still not finished.

Harold No, the worst remains – the awakening. Go before me, Haco, and tell William that I am on my way. (*Haco leaves.*)

In all my life I strove to do what is right and what is good. Striving to do right only brought me over here to this hell on the continent of mad intrigues and inhuman ambitions. I was immediately caught in the web, since I only wanted to do the right thing, and find myself constantly more entangled the longer I stay. Can then the right exist in the world only as constantly harassed, tortured, persecuted and oppressed? What a hell is not the conditions of existence for the right if its existence must as a consequence of necessity then imply diabolical wringing of laws, illicitness, infernal calculation and violence? As a politician then you can only resign, detach yourself from the world and all its inhumanity, if you are honest, for honesty in this world is against the injustice of reality like a flea to a stampeding crowd of elephants. – Now to the final drop of bitterness of the chalice of wormwood. Stand firm, my soul, against all the inhuman pressures of inhumanity. (*enters*)

William We have been waiting, cousin. We thought you were in a hurry to get home.

Harold I had some prayers to perform. But why are you so many here? Have you collected all your priests to arrest me? I happened to hear that you made the Black Tower ready for a lifetime prisoner.

William Who told you that?

Harold Haco happened to hear it from a crow that quarrelled with him.

William You are jumping to conclusions. We have no intention to detain you nor any Englishman. You are as free as your brother and every Englishman on the European continent.

Harold In that case we are freer than any continental European.

William You try to be funny. There is only one thing we would ask of you before you leave.

Harold Which is?

William To confirm your oath.

Harold What oath?

William The one you swore yesterday. Have you already forgotten it? Then it should really be verified.

Harold You ask me to betray England.

William (smiling) Remember the Black Tower and how powerless England is without you and your brother. Swear the oath and you will be free.

Harold What shall I swear?

William I ask of you to swear in front of all these witnesses, bishop Udo of Bayeux and all our priests and papal legates, to confirm the promises you gave me yesterday, namely to swear me allegiance as king of England after the death of King Edward, to marry my fairest daughter Adeliza and to send your sister Thyra from England to marry one of my noblest lords. Step forth, my brother Udo, and dictate the oath to our cousin!

Udo (stepping forth) You shall swear to do everything in your power to fulfil your agreements with Duke William of Normandy by your soul, your life and your God, and as confirmation of your oath you shall lay your hand on this coffin of relics.

Harold (shutting his eyes, quietly) I have no choice.

William (as quietly back to him) No, you have no choice.

Harold (lays his hand on the coffin) I swear.

Udo By your soul, your life and your God.

Harold By my soul, my life and my God.

William Well done, cousin. I am satisfied. You are free. Open the coffin to him!

(Some priests suddenly remove the cover of the coffin.

A great number of skulls and human bones are exposed.)

William (triumphant) You have now sworn the oath by all the holiest relics of France!

Harold (backing off) The bones of the dead!

William Yes, cousin, all the holiest bones and skulls of all the holiest saints of France!

Harold What have you done to me?

William I only gave you your freedom with your brother.

Harold (aside) Horrendous nightmare now starting to come true! This is only the beginning. Here the bones of the dead begin to assemble. – Cousin, Duke William, we shall meet in England.

William That we shall indeed.

Harold (aside) I have sworn an oath that is sacred to the Vatican and to the world and which is quite valid legally forever and irretrievably. And no one will ever consider that this oath was enforced by extortion. This duke has used the Church for a means for blackmail and a black treason without comparison, and the Church has blindly endorsed it. Only I observe the full width of this treason and am thereby hopelessly bereft of that church for credibility and moral support. My Church, my religion, Lord Jesus, how could you do this to me?

William (to Udo) What's he mumbling about?

Udo He seems not quite well. I hope we haven't driven him too far and out of his senses.

William No risk. He is a warrior.

Udo Now he leaves.

William He will recover.

Harold (on his way out, to Haco) This was a heavier cruelty than if we both had been imprisoned and starved to death.

Haco But you saved England.

Harold I hope so, Haco, *(takes his brother by his shoulder,)* I sincerely hope so.

Scene 6. A chapel on the English east coast.

Father Alred My heart is filled with unrest, and the future is loaded with clouds. Harold lingers in France, and no one knows what's happening there. I fear that evil times will soon come knocking at our door. *(Knocks at the door. Harold enters weather-worn and in disarray.)* Harold!

Harold So you recognize me, father, although I am dead.

Alred (touches him) You are no ghost.

Harold Next to it, father. We have been through hell on the other side of the channel.

Alred I felt something was amiss. But you are crying, my son. Your whole apparition is most like something of a virgin that has been raped.

Harold You can see through a human soul even when he hasn't got any.

Alred You speak in riddles.

Harold (falling on his knees) Father, I have betrayed England!

Alred You don't mean that.

Harold I was forced to swear an oath of fidelity to William of Normandy as king of England after Edward!

Alred Forced!

Harold In the presence of all the holy prelates of the church and all the holy relics of the saints!

Alred How could they force you?

Harold They would not release Haco and myself otherwise.

Alred I see. William is in close contact with the pope, and to him all means are allowed. He has overwhelmed you by a demonstration of the church power but thereby abused it. What did they make you swear?

Harold Allegiance to William as king of England, promise of marriage to his daughter and my own sister Thyra as wife to one of his barons.

Alred And for this he summoned the priests of the country and the bones of the dead to make the oath ineluctable?

Harold Yes.

Alred That oath is invalid. It's your duty to break it. I hereby absolve you from an oath which you were forced to swear under threat against your and your brother's life.

Harold Then we will have all France and the church as mortal enemies.

Alred Only politically. My son, it's more important to mind what is right than to obey politics, no matter how overwhelming political pressures may be and how violated beyond all hope rights may be. William of Normandy has blasphemed by using the Church for extortion. The duty of a true pope would be to excommunicate him.

Harold The pope will not do that. And the bones of the dead keep following me.

Alred You have been the subject of a cruel practical joke. Nothing else.

Harold William was serious about it.

Alred Then his cruelty is out of bounds. *(sighs)* My son, history plays cruel games with us. We know we are in the right, but no one will understand us. The truth of the Church is in its power and will bury the correct truth alive. You must break your oath, it's your duty as a human being and as an Englishman, and it will make the Church and the world your enemy. We are completely isolated on our island, and all we can do is to defend it. That's the only advice I can give you. That's all you can do..

Harold One man capable of showing understanding is more worth than all humanity.

Alred You were always like a son to me. I know you.

Harold You were always closer to me than my own father.

Alred Harold, don't fear the bones of the dead. They are powerless against life.

Harold That doesn't help my sleep. The Church consists of the dead, and all the world's dead is a more terrible army to resist than all the living ones. For you are never as alone as in the company of the dead. I feel them wailing and groaning around me every night.

Alred That is only your imagination.

Harold I wish it were! How many have to die because of me? Can you tell?
Alred At worst the flower of England's youth. But it's not for your sake. It's for William's ambition.
Harold But I stand between his ambition and the bones of the dead of the future, and I am assailed by both.
Alred My son, take it easy, and take it as a man.
Harold It's easier said than done.
Alred You have no choice, my son. You have to make the best of it.
Harold The best of it is my own death.
Alred If you die England will lose its independence.
Harold (smiling) You see. However you turn it around, it will only make it worse.

Act III scene 1. Westminster.

Edith I felt that you had arrived.
Harold Here I am, Edith, crucified, dead and buried by politics and the Church but resurrected in England.
Edith England's fate in your absence has been like yours in alien countries.
Harold You know what happened to me?
Edith I know it all by Alred, your confessor, who sees me as your main angel of protection. We are more than related, Harold, we are more than engaged and more than husband and wife. We are like twins, for I feel what happens to you abroad, and when you languish I languish even more. I almost died while William subjected you to spiritual torture. And the country writhes in pains with your own. Edward has suddenly become twenty times older and more pessimistic, and in the north the banner of rebellion has been raised by Derby, Lincoln, York and Nottingham and exiled your brother Torstig. No one knows where he is.
Harold Is it the sons of Elgar who now again claim the liberation of Mercia?
Edith It seems like it.
Harold I almost expected it. But I have come home to stay. All the horrors of the world will from now on be banished from our British isles as long as I live. Will the King be able to see me?
Edith He is expecting you.
Harold He mustn't wait. (*enters the throne hall and kneels to the old ailing King.*)
Edward Is it Harold? You come in the last moment in time to see me die and England perish.

Harold My father and King, our heritage can still be saved.

Edward Yes, you could always try. Did you not get any wiser then by your visit to the established roguery? Didn't you learn from them not to be idealistic anymore?

Harold All your prophecies came true, and all your premonitions were confirmed.

Edward Still you seem to yet be alive. How did you escape?

Harold I was forced to swear an oath giving over all power of England to William at your departure. He claimed that you once promised him the throne if he were to survive you.

Edward That was before I was king and before I knew the laws of England. I had no right to promise another a throne that wasn't mine. But that false and foolish promise made William mad for life and will be the doom of England and may decide its fate forever. If William becomes King of England the English will never get rid of royal arbitrary autocracy. Under me they were freer than under any other monarch. Under William they will be less free than slaves. And you, noble Harold, at least dare to spite that destiny and fight for the rights of the people against a history that saw no people's rights in a thousand years. Only on Iceland people enjoy legalised freedom today, for there they have no king. Promise me one thing, Harold.

Harold Anything.

Edward If you succeed in defeating William the maniac, never crown yourself a king. Protect the people's rights and their rights of assembly instead, for the day will come when all people will make themselves free again. And then they will curse all kings and only remember those who gave them their freedom. I believe Iceland is showing the way for the future civilization. Only there the word is free today. Everywhere else it is censored and tied down by the crushing fetters of the Church and politics that tolerate no discussion. I have spoken. Go now to your mission. As soon as the rebels in Mercia hear that you are back you'll see that all their rebellions will fizzle off, for only your freedom is greater than theirs. Only you can give them a greater freedom than they can themselves. For they know, that you stand for that sacred right, which in the name of human justice will spite and crush all mundaneness of the Church and worldly politics. William of Normandy is a madman who can't see what he is doing when he wants to rob England of their freedom. He then halts a process of development prosperous to all humanity which could have redeemed all the world. But even if he succeeds his position will not hold. Sooner or later people's rights will anyway break all dams and flush all arbitrariness straight out into the sea, where all kings and popes will sink like stones to never be able to surface again.

Harold My King, your dreams and visions sound almost self-destructive in their défaitism.

Edward The only self-destructive one is William of Normandy, who believes he could win any country by violence. By violence you can only lose whatever you set out to win. That's what the whole world must learn. But it hasn't learnt it in a thousand years, and it will not learn it in another thousand years. You shall not yet see an old king die, but as you return from Mercia you will see it. Go now and receive the honours and compliments of your people.

Haco (entering) Representatives of the people are waiting to decide the issue of succession with Harold.

Edward Who are they?

Haco Archbishop Alred of York and all the chiefs of the realm.

Edward Go to them, Harold, and speak with them, but leave me from now on out of politics. I will have nothing more to do with it. Do what you will with the country, but keep me out of it. The real ruler of England has never been me or any other mighty king but only God who alone decides everything. I now resign my fate and that of England into his hands. Avert it if you can. (*retires*)

Harold Let the people's representatives in, Haco.

(*Haco enters a company of feudal chiefs and priests with the Archbishop Alred of York at their head.*)

Alred Urged by the turbulence of time and the worrying state of our country, we have joined ourselves to choose a king successor after Edward, whose health has reached a stage of permanent deterioration with no possible improvement in sight. The realm stands hard at risk of universal dissolution, and from abroad there is a threat of some invasion from the continent by tyrants. Earl Harold Godwinson has visited the continent and made his all too close acquaintance with their tricks and critical intentions. You all know the oath that he was forced to swear under some pressure instigated solely to inspire fear. Duke William of Normandy make claims to our country and intends to by invasion come and get it. What a crisis of this sort demands is a firm leadership and king of some qualifications. Have we any other one to choose but Harold Godwinson?

Harold My friends, I must present all possible objections. The legal heir to the throne of England is neither me nor William but Edgar son of Atheling of Cedric's house. The oath that I was made to swear in Normandy and which in European eyes binds me to by all means support duke William to be king of England makes it unfit that I would be chosen king, since this would certainly be taken as a challenge and

affront to all of Europe and the Church. I also know that not all countrymen support me. In Mercia the party of the sons of Elgar is much stronger than my cause.

Alred These objections are of course most opportune, but we have already considered them. Atheling's son Edgar is unfit to rule, you know it, he lacks both maturity and sense enough and never will amount to anything. He cannot even rule himself. It's tragical, but that is how it is. He and that Rufus son of William's can join hands as equally impossible and hopeless children.

An old chief Answering your second objection, Harold Godwinson, I wish to see the other way around, observing that your actual coronation would be such a challenge to Duke William and his bullies, that you would make the perfect king under the circumstances. You as chosen by the people would show William how much we despise his dirty tricks and most irregular intrigues. We want to make him feel aware of what a crook and criminal he is, which we can only do if we the people in our right choose you and no one else for our King although we know what oaths you swore him.

Harold You don't know William if you can imagine he is capable of feelings of repentance and remorse. He simply has no shame.

Alred And to your third objection I would answer, that with you as King all Mercia would readily lay down their arms. You wouldn't even have to mount a horse. They remember you, and that's enough for having them turned right. It would be just a diplomatic trifle with you for our one and future king.

Old chief Hail Harold Godwinson, King of all the English!

The others Hail, Harold Godwinson!

Alred You see, Harold, no one is against you. Our kingdom is at peril, and therefore we are all with you until our last man. We only ask of you one matter.

Harold What?

Alred Make up to your brother Torstig. He is now in Oxford, and he is the only one in the entire country whom we are not entirely sure of. We know he has had connections with both Harold Hardrade in Norway and Duke William.

Harold Is he suspected of high treason?

Alred Not yet, since he hasn't proved it yet. But he feels like failed and lost after Mercia opposed his leadership. A man who feels he has failed can commit any misdeeds out of pure despair.

Harold Leave Torstig to me.

Alred One more thing.

Harold Well?

Alred A king chosen by the people must always for the good of all follow the advice of his chiefs, his people's representatives and his priests whatever their advice may be. Will you abide by this duty, to always listen to us?

Harold Absolutely.

Alred Then, my good gentlemen, I think we can afford to be satisfied.

(They retire while paying their respects.)

Haco Well, Harold, it all seems to be settled now.

Harold All we have to do is to wait for William's declaration of war and to mobilize.

Haco And Torstig?

Harold I fear he could be a more dangerous counterpart than even William of Normandy.

Scene 2. Edward on his death-bed.

The evening of January 5th 1066. Westminster Abbey, "The Painted Chamber".

Edward is in a large bed on an elevated platform with red canopy.

Harold by the foot-end, Queen Edith, Harold's sister, on the left side.

on the right side Archbishop Alred and Stigand, the young abbot of Westminster.

On the platform also all the chiefs of the realm including Harold's brother Gurth.

The King eventually awakes and catches his Queen by the eye.

Edward Always so good and beautiful, my dear beloved. Do not think that I could not love you. There, on the other side, we shall be united as we never were over here.

Queen To be married to a saint was to me a higher pleasure than to have a husband.

Alred He is awake.

A chief Talk to him, Alred. We only lack his own consent on the issue of succession. We should have it confirmed.

Stigand (approaching) My liege, who do you recommend yourself for your successor? Everyone has spoken on the issue except you. We lack your final word as the King.

Chiefs (among themselves) He must say Harold.

Alred Consider, my King, that Edgar of the Athelings is too young and weak.

(Edward nods in affirmation.)

A Norman priest If your own royal line goes extinct, who could better introduce a new era and royal line than your cousin William, Duke of Normandy?

The chiefs (among themselves) A Norman? Never! Throw out that priest! A foreigner? Never!

(Harold blushes, puts his hand on his sword but says nothing.)

Edward (after some while of suspense) I see that your hearts are with Harold. So be it!

(He appears to go to sleep as if he were dead.)

A doctor makes his way up to him as the Queen starts wailing.)

Doctor Air! Give him air! Let him breathe!

(The chiefs retire, the doctor opens the King's collar,

He appears still to be panting, Harold approaches the head of the King.)

Edward (suddenly rising on his elbows, speaking loud and clear) O God! *(All are electrified.)*

O God! If this vision be true, allow me to give it expression before it vanishes!

(staring in front of him, after some pause of suspense:)

It was by the river Seine one and thirty years ago that I met with two monks, who prophesied that great sorrows would fall to England. Here they are again!

(Great excitement and wonder in the cathedral. After some pause:)

So they spoke by the river Seine: "When you are dead God will abandon England to enemy armies, and all will be ruin and blood and evil misery." Then I said: "Can nothing avert the catastrophe? The people at Nineveh did succeed in giving God and Jonah second thoughts." They answered: "Nothing can save England from that disaster, but when the Tree of Life is cleft in twain, and one part abandons the stem in search of its roots and finds them, it will burst out in green growth and give much fruit, and then the curse now longer will harrow England." Thus they spoke, and now I see them here in front of me to confirm the approaching fulfilment of the prophecy!

(Edward falls silent, but his visions seem to continue, for he slowly reaches forth his right arm as if to beg with his hand a vision to vanish, while he cries out in pain:)

Sanguelac! Sanguelac! I see the lake of blood! The Lord comes down from the mountains with sword in hand! He comes as a warrior with his front frowning in discontent to make war! Darkness rises from the earth wherever he touches the ground!

(with his last powers) Blood gushes forth from the earth to form the sea of Sanguelac!

(He dies. Harold catches his falling body into his arms.)

Alfred (in awe) The King is dead. Long live the King.

The others (mumbling) The King is dead. Long live the King.

Stigand (with a wry smile) Men, I trust you cannot fear a sick old man's demented dreams?

(In the face of everybody, except Alred and Harold, fear becomes only the more imminent.)

Scene 3. Normandy.

William Who is he?

Servant I don't know, but he looks like a wild Saxon. He wouldn't give his name. "Just tell your master," he said, "that I come with a royal crown for him."

William Let him in. *(the servant admits Torstig.)*

My brother-in-law! What has happened? Why are you here alone?

Torstig Hail William the First, King of England! Edward the Confessor is dead, and your cousin Harold Godwinson has usurped the throne.

William What do you mean?

Torstig My brother is now king of the English, until you take over his power.

William No. Such an impudence is not possible.

Torstig It's a fact.

William And you, his brother, comes here to betray him?

Torstig Your wife and my wife are sisters and heirs to Alfred the Great.

William That is true. But who brought Harold to such treason after the oaths he swore to me?

Torstig Only himself, his ambition and his absolutism.

William You mean to say he crowned himself?

Torstig Over the dead body of Edward the Confessor.

William Did Edward know that Harold would make himself king after him?

Torstig Yes.

William And Edward allowed this to happen in spite of his promises to me thirty years ago?

Torstig The old man resigned and would have nothing to do with it.

William So that is how it is! Harold, for you obviously nothing is sacred and least of all the Church and all the holy saints! You swore the most sacred of oaths just to get away without trouble! What a real politician! *Torstig!* Get out into the other hall and stay there until I ask for you again, and tell Mallet de Graville to come to me. *(Exit Torstig)*

I never thought of you, Harold, that you could be more cunning than I. All my tricks and intrigues at your visit here were then nothing to your British obstinacy.

And with you for a king England is a strong fortress, which I could hardly raise many French barons up against. (*enter Graville*)

Graville, Harold Godwinson's brother informs me that Edward is dead and that Harold high-handedly has made himself king in his place and thus broken all his sacred oaths to me. Why do you think his younger brother seeks to betray him?

Graville The good Torstig is well known for his brutal methods in politics. He was the earl of northern England under King Edward and made himself impossible as a politician. He made everyone his enemy. They expelled him, and he now wants something in return for the power he lost. By offering England to you he imagines he could have that position as your closest man that Harold rejected.

William So that's his motive: just greed, like everyone else. Everyone betrays anyone just for the sake of power. I betrayed Harold as my guest, Harold has now repaid me, the people rejected Torstig, so Torstig betrays Harold and England. Then he has only left to betray us as well.

Graville Only the fact that Torstig so promptly informed us of what has happened in England is a major political service, that should be awarded. The sooner we act now, the better. You must mobilize immediately.

William You ask me to immediately go out to my barons to tell them: hoist your sails, for we shall now conquer England! Do you think it's that simple? I think I now know our friend Harold. He never gives up, and his English are the same. An invasion and a war on foreign soil have few chances of success with Harold well prepared and with all his wild peasantry fit for fight. My barons will call such an enterprise sheer lunacy and will all fail me at once.

Graville Your brother-in-law Torstig appears to have good connections with Norway and Denmark.

William Exactly. Get Torstig back here. (*Graville goes to fetch Torstig.*)

My first knife in your back was a failure, Harold. My second will strike not only you but all England. (*enter Graville with Torstig*)

My brother-in-law, we must declare war on England, but a war against England can only be won if we fight it on two fronts. I give to you as a mission to get king Sven of Denmark and king Harold of Norway to attack England before we do. Tell Sven and Harold, that their chance to reconquer England is now, when Norman dogs are setting out to bite her toes. England will have no chance against all three of us. What do you think of it?

Torstig I don't think Denmark will be interested, but any adventurous enterprise will be of interest to Harold Hardrade.

William Try Denmark also all the same. The more that attack England at the same time, the better the chances to bring about her fall.

Torstig I can warrant that we will at least be two nations against one.

William In that case at least three.

Torstig Which would be the third one?

William The greatest and richest of all powers on earth.

Torstig (doesn't understand) I don't understand.

William The Church will pay for and legalise the slaughter of England and legalise the annihilation of the heretic nation. Am I right, Mallet de Graville?

Graville I advise you, though, to secure yourself of having the right on your side by sending Harold a peaceful ultimatum. You should give him a chance of peace, even if he has to reject it. If he rejects it the Vatican must condemn him and bless you, and then all Europe will help us with the invasion, since England is rich and worth plundering. The Church knows that and all Europe.

William I am lucky to have you, Graville. Or else I would have been as honest, righteous, open, vulnerable and tragic as my poor cousin Harold Godwinson.

Scene 4. Norway.

An open terrace with a wonderful spring view over a fiord.

Harold Hardrade My friend, you tempt me. I am not convinced. You haven't told me everything. I am not as stupid as you think. Something tells me you haven't got your linen clean. I have fought out many wars throughout the world to reach the unassailable position I hold now as undisputed ruler king of Norway after the defeat and fall of my admired brother Olav Haraldsson the saint. When he succumbed at Stiklastad in battle and was martyred I was only fifteen years but had as many wounds as he himself in that apocalyptic battle. In the Holy Land I was victorious in eighteen battles beating mahometans and was one of the first Scandinavians to behold Jerusalem from inside. I confirmed imperial power in Constantinople by developing the regiment of the Varangians to a unit of invincibility in discipline, perfection and accomplishment, and I was not allowed my freedom to return to Norway until after that. I fought in Russia, on the Mediterranean, on Sicily and Palestine for Norway only to live up to my big brother's paragon in following and making myself worthy of his consummate ideal example. This suggestion of an enterprise which you entice me with gives me the feeling that it all was wasted what I did for Norway.

Torstig Not so, my king. Your career is starting now. You alone are worthy of the rule of not just Norway but of Denmark and England as well. You alone can match and even outdo and surpass Canute the Great in greatness, power, excellence and wisdom. You alone are fit and qualified enough in your maturity for this crusade. King Sven of Denmark, whom I met before my coming here, is just a spoilt besotted idler who is only interested in cultivating his bad habits. He is hardly even worth defeating and kicked out of his corrupted country. Norway was oppressed by his forefathers, and now it is Norway's turn to finally retaliate.

Harald You are right that Denmark hardly even would deserve to be wiped out as a most vicious nation of depravity, but Harold Godwinson has done no harm to us, and I respect him.

Torstig Still the population of all western England consists nearly only of descendants of Norwegian Nordic Vikings, and you would in them find a support which would immediately give over all of England in your hands. Canute the Great and his inheritance and kingdom is expecting you in England.

Harald And why would you betray Duke William of Normandy?

Torstig He has no right to England. If he conquers England it would mean long centuries of foreign and episcopal oppression and exploitation of a free and noble nation. I am Harold's brother, and although I cannot agree with his assuming right to call himself the king of England, I am as much of an Englishman as he. If nothing can stop William of Normandy he will be England's bane by crushing, conquering and killing England just to have his realm of vanity established there. I offer you the chance of getting there before him and anticipating him. Your right to England's realm is much superior to William's, who is but a duke and actually owes his allegiance to the king of France.

Harald You tempt me sorely. I have always been victorious, and I worked hard to reach where I am now, it was a tough and long climb up the mountain of success to reach some level of establishment of a secure and powerful position, but you show me now a higher peak to reach. Shall I risk everything then just for one more effort for a further vanity of a temptation? Do you think your brother can't defend his land against Norwegian intruders?

Torstig England is bankrupt and can't defend itself. There is no fortress and no real army, and no one expects a Norwegian invasion from the north. Edward the Confessor has wasted his wealth and the resources of the country on religious nonsense, why the Church is richest in the country and controls a third of all its revenues, which will collapse like an empty house of cards before the violence of war. You have nothing to lose and everything to win.

Harald How is my namesake Harold in war?

Torstig Determined but hesitant, energetic but slow, bold but pensive, certain of his cause but careful, magnanimous but naïve.

Harald And he expects an invasion in the south?

Torstig William's declaration of war should reach him presently.

Harald It could be the crown of all the Viking enterprises: a united north with all Scandinavia and the British isles under my sceptre as a continuation of the labour of Olav the saint. It all depends on Harold Godwinson. If he can defend himself all will be lost including me with Norway. If we could defeat him all Europe would tremble as never before and quake before the ultimate and overwhelming power of the Norsemen. Then no emperors would have anything to say against the king of Norway.

Torstig You have everything to win and nothing to lose.

Harald What was it that Einar Tambarskälver said to Olav Tryggvason at the battle of Svolder now sixty-six years ago? "Better to listen to the string that broke than never to tighten a bowstring." That's the greatness of the Vikings and their tragedy. Let it hold or break. Your adventure is a challenge that I can't resist, infernal tempter! Its possibilities are limitless, but I wonder if you yourself are quite aware of what you are doing.

Torstig Like yourself I am inspired and attracted by the boundless possibilities of our enterprise.

Harald And it's not just power greed?

Torstig I despise all power in the world, but he would be a fool who does not avail himself of it when it comes by.

Harald You are right. Power is the most manly and exciting sport of life and nothing else. If you win you should be careful how to use it well, and if you lose you must be a good loser. (*Harald taps Torstig friendlyly, and they go inside as dusk grows darker.*)

Scene 5. Westminster.

Harold Advance, good monk of Normandy, and tell me all that your duke William has to say!

Hugues Maigrot Thus speaks William, chief of the Normans, heir to the throne of England: shocked with dismay he has heard that you, who swore him allegiance as his subject, crowned yourself monarch without any right in the world. Such a

presumption must fill the whole world with abhorrence. Still he is willing to forgive you this sole mistake in your life if you immediately obey your conscience and fulfil your oaths. Send over your sister immediately, so that she may marry one of his barons. Surrender the fortress of Dover to him, and march immediately to the coast with your armies to join his, and give over the royal heritage to him, your lord. You shall then be his closest man, his daughter shall be your wife, Northumberland shall be your province, and the saints will be your eternal protectors.

Harold I am sorry, my friend, but my sister Thyra passed away seven days after I had been elected king: she can no longer be anyone's wife, since I gather not even William himself would marry a grave. Neither can I myself marry his daughter, since you can see for yourself my already lawfully wedded wife, Queen Aldyth of Wales and Mercia. That I swore William an oath is true, but that oath was sworn under compulsion under threat of imprisonment and death for me and my brothers. That oath the Church has forgiven me and declared invalid, with the same right as when the vows of fidelity of a virgin to her husband are invalid if the man and the vows have not been accepted by her parents. I was forced to swear the future of England to a stranger who was unfamiliar with the laws of England and even without England being notified about it! The monarchy of England has always been founded on the will of the people and never by arbitrary manipulation or bargaining. A king of England can only be crowned by the rights of the people, which has crowned me. I have no power to give it over to anyone else, and if I would die that right would return to the people and never to a Norman.

Maigrot In that case, you lousy traitor, son of a bandit and traitor to the Church, blasphemer, perjurer and opportunistic manipulator, William will come here in person with sword and steel, with knights and armies, to castigate your godlessness, crush your people and your arrogance in alliance with the archangel Michael as his confederate!!

Harold If he brings violence here we shall muster all our defence to repel his invasion.

Maigrot Blasphemer! Heretic! Perjurer! Arch traitor! Villain! Thou shalt be cursed by the pope in Rome to eternal damnation!

Harold Get thee gone and cry out your nonsense and insults in hell where perhaps someone might listen to you. We don't seem much interested here. (The monk leaves in fury.)

Aldyth Don't be upset, my king. Be not affected by the baseness and mean pettiness of ill-minded people.

Harold It was not the bones of the dead that appalled me in France as much as the shock to find people capable of being so unworthy so as to use so sacred means to force someone to such a godless oath.

Aldyth You must now discuss the matter with your soldiers. I retire. I will be back when you need me and where I belong: in the bed of love.

Harold I am afraid, dear queen, that the evil from the east for the moment has turned me impotent. But be ready when love again is allowed to breathe in the pauses of the hurricanes of evil. (*The Queen leaves.*)

Gurth Torstig has been with William.

Harold I know.

Gurth He has also travelled to uncle Sven, king of Denmark.

Harold I know.

Gurth He has asked uncle Sven to support William against us.

Harold (calmly) Yes, I know. Sven had a letter from me before our brother reached him. Sven has responded and sent Torstig away.

Gurth What did our uncle answer?

Harold That William would have to manage alone.

Gurth He could have taken our side.

Harold Indirectly that's what he did. He has sent us fifty ships for additional protection against foreign fleets.

Gurth There's our uncle!

Harold But we must now prepare ourselves.

Gurth A mobilization will be expensive, and you have recalled many taxes.

Harold It's not money that we need, Gurth. What we need is good morals.

Haco And that's what you have given the people.

Gurth How has he rearmed his people with morals?

Haco Have you not seen his latest coin?

Gurth No? (*Haco shows him one.*) What does it say?

Haco Only one word: Peace, Harold's motto.

Gurth With that one word the English people will with gratitude sacrifice their last coin for their freedom.

Harold But, fellows, we stand in the service of our people as labourers with an obligatory responsibility. We must not fail. And therefore from now on we must not sleep until we fulfilled our labour for the peace of our people. (*exeunt*)

Act IV scene 1. Normandy

Maigrot There I was standing before him stating the facts and delivering your just demands, reminding him of his sacred oaths and all, and they just laughed at me. "If he wants to marry my sister, just let him come over, and he will be married to his grave," while he bragged about his self-assumed title of king like just another Nero. He was absolutely intolerable, and all his lackeys laughed me to scorn publicly there in Westminster.

William Let him go, Graville.

Graville You may leave, brother Hugues Maigrot.

Maigrot And then I delivered your declaration of war with a vengeance so that all Westminster was shaken by my words and all the upstart's lackeys got the shudders and pissed in their pants. I saw indeed how it was pouring out between their legs! And I called them by their proper names, crybabies, childish bastards, idiotic pot-herbs, conceited nincompoops, imbecile dumbbells and godless crooks, I scorned them all with a vengeance!

William Throw him out, Graville.

Graville The Duke said that you may leave.

Maigrot So now they are frightened enough when you are coming across to beat them all up and flay them with your bare hands. And then... (*Graville drives him out.*)

Graville You commissioned our worst diplomat.

William That was on purpose. I couldn't take the risk that Harold would accept my terms.

Graville Maigrot alone has succeeded in arming all England up to their teeth, and all the British coasts are now watched day and night.

William Any news from the traitor Torstig?

Graville He assaulted the south coast with your Norman ships, then he pulled eastwards into Humber where he hoped to find people of his mind, but he was mistaken, and now he has probably sailed to Scotland to join up with Harald Hardrade of Norway.

William Does England know that Hardrade is coming?

Graville England will probably never know it until Hardrade strikes and hard.

William And then we will already be in Kent. Hardrade will do the hard work for us. Then we come to beat an already worn out decimated army, if any.

Graville A splendid strategy that will certainly work.

William We must only also get some barons to go with us. Let's go to the council.

(They go to the council table where already many Norman nobles are seated.)

Graville Gentlemen, it is now for us to decide on the war against England or not. Our commissioned diplomat has returned and almost run the gauntlet on his way by the usurper and his bandits. Harold's spite is an insult to all Christendom. That is why it is important that we all join together against Harold.

A Norman (rising) And where shall William find his soldiers? Where will he find his ships? He gave almost his entire fleet over to that buccaneer Torstig, who probably never will bring them back. And how many of us are willing to at all be part in such a reckless adventure?

Another Not me.

A third And not me.

A fourth You don't send good money after bad.

A fifth Let William conquer that miserable rainy island for himself! The continent will never have any use or luck of it.

The first May I demand a voting! How many will not join the venture? (*counts the votes*) And how many will? (*counts*) I find that two thirds of the council are against an invasion of England. (*is seated*)

Graville Gentlemen, you don't see your own good. We have sent a priestly messenger to Rome who has told the pope about the perjury of Harold, the messenger has returned, and I have here (unfolds a document) the pope's ban on Harold and England and on everyone who does not assist in wrecking the heretic nation. All Europe will demand the liquidation of England. All Europe will join us to punish the cursed renegade of a nation. Harold has no ally in the world, and behind his back also Norway partake in the crusade against him under the command of the invincible King Harald Hardrade, brother of the Norwegian saint Olav.

A Norman Harold has one ally: Conan of Bretagne, who claims the duchy of Normandy.

Graville (calmly triumphant) Conan of Bretagne is dead.

The councillors (astonished) Dead? How?

Graville Like his father he died of some sort of poisoning. And his heir has joined our allies.

Udo of Bayeux My friends, heaven itself offers victory into our hands! Haven't you seen the great portent in the sky, the fearful comet, overturning reckless nations and foreboding great changes in the world order! The comet commands us to annihilate the presumption of England! A heretic like Harold may not live! He has sworn falsely by all the holy bones of France!

William Gentlemen, I promise you great riches when we come to England. It is many times greater than Normandy, and its population is much smaller than ours.

There are vast properties to acquire. In addition their defence is weak, King Edward plundered the country to give it all over to the Church, who owns a third of all the land and property, and the Church is on our side. The only resistance we might meet with in England are a few obstinate beggars except Harold himself, who is the only man in England who can fight. And he will probably already be disposed of by Harald Hardrade as we arrive.

A Norman This is worth considering, gentlemen. In England there is land and living space at large and enough unexploited riches to allow every Norman in Normandy to get rich and build his own castle. Everything indicates that England will be an easy match.

Graville We have no choice, since the pope himself commands us. He calls it a crusade, a holy war, which it is every Christian's duty to be part of. And I know, that if this holy crusade succeeds, then there will be many more in the future to even richer countries, like Constantinople, Egypt and the Holy Land.

William We have the honour to open a new historical era on the urgent demand of the pope. We have no right to turn him down.

Udo of Bayeux God wills it!

The Councillors (looking at each other) We adjourn the matter.

A Norman There are too many details to discuss for us to be able to whole-heartedly commit ourselves at once.

William With or without your support the invasion is on. May anyone who dares, stay at home to become an object of ridicule to the whole Christian world. Who stays at home can count on being bereft of his titles when we have brought home the enterprise, since there will be no room for cowards amongst us.

Graville Voting!

First Norman (rising) How many are for it? (*counts the votes*) Against? (*No vote.*) I find a majority in support of the enterprise and that a minority has laid down their votes. No one dares oppose it any longer.

William I knew you would realize your own good! The pope will be proud of us. Our bones might in time become more sacred than those that Harold was sworn by. Ha-ha-ha! (*common amusement*)

Scene 2. Stamford Bridge near York, September 25th 1066.

Torstig Well, Harald Hardrade, did you see enemies so frightened?

Harald These Englishmen are really pitiable in their frightened pettiness. I believe by my soul we frightened them away from all the eastern coast!

Torstig We have England in a vice, and we have only to turn the screw, we here from the north and William from the south, and England will be quashed like a walnut!

Harald I had many evil dreams on my way here, the norms warned me of a sea of blood and shame without end, and my own brother Olav visited me.

Torstig What did he say?

Harald He spoke as clearly as ever while he lived. He only spoke of death. "How presumptuous is not life, and how humble is not death!" he said.

Torstig What did you say to that?

Harald I could not understand him, so I awoke. I decided not to put my trust in the vagueness of dusky dreams but only concentrate on reality. I have done so since, and so far we have hardly lost a single man while these stalwart Englishmen only have run like rabbits and fainted like women.

A squire My lord! A mighty army is approaching us from York!

Harald Friends or enemies?

Torstig It must be friends. Harold can't know yet that we are here.

Squire I fear it is not friends, since they prepare for battle against us.

Harald Let's go out and find out. *(they go out)*

It seems to be your brothers the Anglo-Saxons, Earl Torstig.

Torstig I can't believe it. How could they come here so quickly? They must have marched from London on record time, and they must have had guards posted here by the coast of Yorkshire who could sound the alarm and spread it efficiently.

Harald There is a lonely man on horseback coming to negotiate. What's his message?

Torstig He calls for peace. Let me speak with him.

Harold (from a distance) I am looking for Earl Torstig!

Torstig He is here! What's your business with him?

Harold He is offered all my previous earldom and all his previous position and property which he owned in Edward the Confessor's days, if he makes peace with us.

Torstig And what has the King of England to offer Earl Torstig's best friend and ally King Harald Hardrade of Norway?

Harold Seven feet of land or as much as is needed for his grave.
Torstig Then we will rather fight about the honour of victory and stay alive.
Harold (after some pause) Is that your final word?
Torstig It's our final word, until we meet in battle! (Harold rides back.)
Harald Who was that man?
Torstig My brother Harold Godwinson of England.
Harald Himself! And you allowed him to get away?
Torstig He dared to risk his life to give me a chance. I would rather see him kill me than that I would kill him. The last crime an Englishman can commit, Harald Hardrade, is to kill his brother.
Harald He was not very tall, but still he made an impression. What would you call him, Torstig? Brave? Noble? Commanding? Proud?
Torstig I don't know. I always envied him. What would you call him yourself?
Harald Honest. (*goes to prepare for battle. Torstig follows.*)

Scene 3.

(Battle has begun and is reaching its height. Battle alarms and cries. Great casualties on both sides, and the outcome is uncertain. Suddenly a great outcry among the Norwegians:)

A Norwegian Our King is fallen!

Torstig (appearing) What has happened?

Norwegian Our poet King was hit by an arrow going straight through his throat. He couldn't even sing his death song. Fallen is our great warrior king! Fallen is the brother of Olav the Saint! Fallen is the chief among all poets! (*leaves*)

Torstig So, Harald hit the grass. But I am alive. Still we haven't lost the battle. Fight on, cursed dogs! Avenge your king, if his life can't be saved! Fight for your own lives and don't bother about the dead! – Who's there? (*Harold appears.*) My brother!

Harold Torstig, my brother, save what can be saved, and make peace! I give you mercy.

Torstig And the Norwegians?

Harold Safe retreat.

Torstig You offer me a life as a dishonoured former traitor by your side? You mock me.

Harold It's your only chance.

Torstig I would rather die.

Harold Why this desperate demented decision?

Torstig So that you and all England may follow the infamous Torstig down into his ignominious grave! (*attacks him. They fight.*)

Harold Torstig, you traitor! You alone cast your nation into this catastrophe! Cease your madness!

Torstig Not until I may fall by your hand. (*attacks him*)

Harold What do you mean?

Torstig You always beat me, Harold, with your superior honesty, which always proved to me how worthless I was to you morally. I will force you to kill me just to make you as worthless and dishonoured as myself. (*attacks him*)

Harold I never wished you any harm.

Torstig And I never succeeded in doing you any harm. But now I will by making you the murderer of your brother! (*attacks him*) Why don't you run away, brother, cowardly and infamously, as when I left England?

Harold You don't know what you are doing!

Torstig I know all too well what I am doing. Here the flower of England's power will hit the grass, so that William of Normandy then can settle by a ready-made table without anyone being able anymore to defend your beloved England!

Harold Is it madness or wickedness, accursed brother?

Torstig (attacks furiously) Both!

Harold Traitor! (*kills him*) My brother!

Torstig (smiling) I succeeded!

Harold Your smile is the devil's scorn of my whole life! My brother, o my brother, why did you do this to me? (*crying and embracing his dead brother*) May God see to it that I may not survive your death!

Gurth (entering) My brother, we have prevailed. The Norwegians give up.

Harold It's too late.

Gurth Why?

Harold Look!

Gurth Torstig!

Harold With him all the power of England is gone.

Gurth It's true that we suffered hard casualties, but now the Vikings will never come back to England. The three hundred years' war against their looting invasions has ended by this your final victory. That has been promised to me by Harald Hardrade's son Crown Prince Olav.

Harold Let the Norwegians go home. No one will make trouble with them anymore. They have today lost perhaps the best of all their kings, who was tricked into perdition by an English traitor, who was your and mine brother.

Gurth Don't worry about that, Harold.

Harold For the first time in my life, Gurth, I no longer want to live.

Gurth When we celebrate our victory in York you will come to better thoughts.

Harold I doubt it. (*enter courier*) I know you. Do you bring news from Westminster?

Courier I have galloped all the way and killed three horses. The Normans have landed at Pevensey and are burning the coast!

Gurth That's all we needed.

Harold (*looks down; after a pause*) We have now only one more thing to do, Gurth.

Gurth Which is?

Harold Our duty. (*mounts his horse*) Collect the remains of our crippled men, Gurth. Now we have an enemy to encounter. Here we only slaughtered our friends and for that only got slaughtered ourselves. (*rides away*)

Gurth (*to himself*) My brother, I fear you will never smile again.

Fifth Act – the battle of Hastings.

Scene 1. William's camp

William I think Harold will try to take us by surprise. Well, he already failed. We have waited for him for days. He will find us ready and in perfect order with an iron discipline to receive his deceit with. Are all the ships burnt, de Graville?

Graville Every one. No possibility remains now for anyone to return to Normandy.

William That is good. It's for making it clear to everyone that we will stay here until Doomsday. What do you make of our enemies' manoeuvres, Graville?

Graville They seem to hesitate and not quite know what to do, like a horse flinching faced by fire. I guess they didn't expect us to be so many, so well armed and so well prepared. They themselves seem not to be so many, not well armed and not very fit for battle.

William They have probably rushed with speed and stress from York in a desperate effort to take us by surprise without thinking of the risk of exhaustion. The battle at York appears to have been bloody.

Graville Harald Hardrade did his best.

William Pity he didn't do better still. I would fain have been without that obstacle on my way to London. What is that hill they now seem to have chosen as their strategic base?

Graville A peasant told me its name was Senlac.

William Sanguelac? A fitting name! Not just a lake of blood but some sea of blood for the English we shall turn that hill into! It's time we get going immediately. First of all we must create some division in Harold's army. Get me that fanatic monk Hugues Maigrot. He will go with you to Harold to perform some provocation.

Scene 2. Harold's camp.

Harold From here we can well defend ourselves and England. They could hardly pull or push us down from a hill like this.

Gurth A monk and nobleman are coming here.

Harold New wormmouths sent from William. Send them away. We have nothing to say to them except with arms and fire as long as they remain here armed on the wrong side of the channel.

Maigrot We demand to speak with the King.

Gurth You can't reject some peaceful parlementaires.

Harold Let's hear then what they have to say.

Maigrot Your legal rightful King William of Normandy offer you, Earl Harold, all Northumberland if you obey your oath renounce the crown.

Harold You heard it before, that I have no right to give away a crown whose owner only the people have a right to choose. You come here violating our laws by only opening your mouth.

Maigrot William is prepared to immediately sail back to Normandy with his entire fleet and army if you, Earl Harold, allow our holy father in Rome, Alexander the Second, to decide who has a legal right to the throne.

Gurth (to Harold) William has himself destroyed his entire fleet to make it impossible for anyone to return.

Bishop Alred (stepping forth) This, my pious brother, is for me to answer. Never has it been heard of that the pope in Rome should have any say on the English issue of succession. We have never received any kings from Rome, only bishops.

Maigrot If you answer with such insolence I only have one more thing to say, which is, that it's the pope himself who sends the word that you, Harold Godwinson, is accursed and hereby excommunicated from the universal only sanctifying Church

of the world! You are accursed for your perjury, and accursed be the ground that your people work with for the sake of your perjury, and cursed be the heaven and weather over England forever for the sake of your inexcusable perjury! The bull of excommunication is in William's camp in writing by the pope's own hand, and it is the duty of the Duke to read it out aloud and publicly to all communities on this for your sake cursed island! (*Harold's soldiers look at each other with worried fear.*)

Gurth You damned pretending rat of plague, keep your catholic plague away from this unsullied blessed island, which was clean and pure before you came out with your hired Norman masses of mass murderers of our people! Have we not just heard how he came here to offer peace and riches and safe conduct and retreat and anything that we could wish, while all the time he kept the bull of excommunication in his back pocket, a mean and vicious writing formulated by a priest in Rome who never set his foot in England! What can such a priest know of our laws and our church traditions? Answer me, if you are men, but I doubt that you are.

Harold's soldiers He is right. The pope has no mundane authority to settle such an issue. This monk has no clean linen and is only up to mischief. He had better go straight back to France. (*All grow infuriated against Maigrot, who gets frightened.*) Go home to France and settle with your nuns, you pimp of impotence!

Graville My lords and gentle Englishmen, the pope's damnation rests on you just for the sake of only one man. Leave him, and the curse will only be his own. Or else it will for sure strike all your people and your country.

Though has William one last offer to present: let it be settled who is to be King of England by a private combat between William and Harold! Let the blood of one man settle the division!

Gurth Never shall a private combat be allowed to settle destinies of thousands! That would be an insult to our people, of whom all have equal rights to be as much a king as you and Harold! If you want it settled thus, let then the victor meet another challenger, let the victor of that combat meet the next, and so on, until there is only one man left alive in England.

Graville You have a most peculiar sense of justice.

Gurth You must agree that it is logical.

Harold Mallet de Graville, who has been our friend and guest here in England, which hospitality he used to spy on our defence and status by command of William, you behold among us here a great good company of merry Englishmen of whom not one is unwilling to die in battle for his country against your invading Normans. That joyful willingness to fight can no one take away from them save death. Tell William that he has to kill me and my entire people first before he can be king of England.

Then, when has taken all our lives and killed all Englishmen, he may be king as much as he may like it over all our graves, if he considers that amusing.

Graville Very well, usurper, so you force us to take arms. You alone enforce this war, you lousy perjurer! Remember, that you most of all will have against you all the bones of all the dead, especially the saints, of whom you already made the acquaintance.

Maigrot And all the hands of all invisible saints will lead the armies of the living against you, accursed and blasphemous heretic! Tremble, quake and fear the abyss of eternal plague and fire, damned perjurer! (*Graville and Maigrot leave quickly.*)

Gurth Go to blazes, stupid scarecrows!

Haco That's the language of bad losers.

Harold And we shall not make it worse by idling more words on them. My brothers, this conflict is about much more than England's crown.

Gurth It's also about England's future.

Harold Above all, it is we who are defending man's right to freedom, independence, human rights and human values.

Gurth (indicating the Normans) To them such abstractions don't exist.

Harold So it is now our duty to educate them therein.

Scene 3. October 14th 1066.

William (speaking to his men) My lords, I have not brought you across the sea only for my own sake. My gains here will be your gains. If I succeed in conquering the country you can share it. All I demand of you today is that you do your utmost in battle, and all escape and rest is forbidden. Whoever I see stealing a rest or showing his back shall by my sword be as much an object of my revenge as all the English scoundrels over there. And it is your duty to take out your revenge on them as much as my own! You all have Danish ancestors, who have fallen here to their obnoxious swords, who never knew their own best. They fight you only from stupidity, and may they answer for that stupidity! You Frenchmen know what milksops await you over there: never even for a good cause have the English ever had any success in any war. Our ancestors the Danes mowed them like grass. Are we less than our ancestors, and am I less worthy than Canute the Great? It's our duty to slaughter that rabble who are in our way over there, and it's my personal duty to cut down that bloody villain Harold Godwinson, whose family murdered the last English king's only brother Alfred to rob power for themselves. And above all: the Church is with

us and blesses our enterprise! How could we fail in our sacred crusade when the infallible Church itself order us to conquer in our just cause? We will gloriously prevail, but the most glorious among us will be those who will fall for our cause. They shall have that salary in heaven which the surviving victors shall find in the treasuries of this rich country!

All Hurray! Glory to our Duke! Hail King William!

Harold (speaking to his men) My friends, our plight today is to fight for our freedom. It will be no easy matter, it will be our lives' toughest work, for our enemy is great in number, well equipped and well trimmed. We fight for our humanity against machines. Already have these invasion berserks partitioned our country between themselves. They have come here to rob us of our lands, our culture, our traditions and our identity. They have come to make themselves our lords and masters and to command us to what goes against us, to give us another law to follow than our own and to give us another language to speak than our mother tongue. No matter how much power, money and property the Norman William has promised his soldiers, what I promise you is more worth the labour it demands to fight for: freedom, law and justice and the earth that belonged to our fathers. You have all heard spoken of the tyranny we suffered when the Danes came. Now the Danes are here again to introduce the same tyranny again but worse, for now they come not just with their bullies and berserks but also with their French priests, who will treat you as if you were heathens. Instead of common sense they will introduce superstition and dogmas, and instead of people's rights and traditions they will establish their doctrine of infallibility, they come disguised in clergy's suits to rape our women and take away our children, which we can't accept. Every inch which we eventually give up today from this battlefield of the land that belongs to us is a concession to the robber and despoiler. We must therefore strain ourselves today more extraordinarily than even how we won at York. There we fought our likes, but here we fight established evil. What was like a sport by York is here a bloody serious business of limitless importance, since the entire future, life and freedom of our people is at stake. We can't allow our sovereignty slip out of our hands! I will myself fight hardest of you all, wherever our lines will waver I'll be there and keep it all together, where we will suffer the severest attacks I'll be with you, and wherever you may fall I'll raise you up to newer life again. We must not die today! We must only fight for our lives. I have spoken. (*His soldiers salute him with hurrahs.*)

Gurth You look gloomy, brother.

Harold Is it obvious?

Gurth All too obvious.

Harold It was not intentional. Well, they did not see it anyway.

Gurth I hope so. But what depresses you?

Harold The truth, my brother. I have already been king too long, when I from my own experience as king already know, that in every conflict evil always has to be the victor.

Gurth You must not say so.

Harold It must prevail to have its vanity revealed, for all conflicts are the jugglery of vanity, and evil is the king of vanity. In its vanity is evil though just a necessary evil in its victory which always is but temporary. In all conflicts the victim, the good loser is always the ultimate victor, but it can take centuries between the burial and the resurrection.

Gurth My brother, you know, that in the hearts of this nation and people you already conquered and will always conquer, no matter what will happen here today.

Harold Thank you, my brother.

(A cry: the Normans are attacking! – and battle begins.)

Darkness – alarm. Suddenly a cry: “The Duke is dead!”
Chaos among Normans and Frenchmen. Flight and panic is increasing.

Scene 4. In the middle of battle quagmire.

William (without horse and without helmet, dirty and bloody, runs about among his own)

I live, you imbeciles! Here you see one who has never forgiven a coward! If you run away, I will slaughter you more efficiently than the English! Turn around, for hell’s sake! Stand and fight!

Some soldiers He lives.

Others (spreading the message) He lives. *(The fleeing start turning back.)*

Graville It gladdens me to see you still alive.

William De Graville, do you see over there? The English have tried to surround us but thereby exposed their right flank. Now we have the chance. If we can occupy those forts in the west we have them in our grip. To your business, de Graville! Ride to Fitz Osborne and command him to attack with the cavalry! *(De Graville rides off.)*

Now, England, your last moment is come! You have outstretched your right arm too far, so now we can separate it from the body! With the cavalry as battering-ram and spring-board a new regime will now enter history to establish itself forever!

Scene 5. Among the English lines.

Harold We managed well so far. We must only concentrate on the defence and refrain from any attack. If we pursue those who flee we split the advantages of our established positions.

Haco (observes some praying women) Over there our wives are waiting to welcome back the surviving victors.

Harold Or to go out looking for them among the corpses. Or to be raped by other victors than their men. Have you thought of something, Haco?

Haco What?

Harold If we fall, who will then cry for us?

Haco No one. As cursed by the church not even history will give one tear for any comment. Maybe it will just strike us out and ignore and forget that there ever existed Englishmen. But lo, the Norman cavalry is beaten back. We hold our positions.

Harold (cries) Stay where you are, my men! Don't pursue them! Repair your fortifications instead while you have time! There will be new attacks!

(ordinary speaking voice) Do you know what day it is today, Haco?

Haco No?

Harold It is my birthday. It always used to be my day of fortune. As long as I lived I never failed in anything. If God is willing even this day might be fortuitous.

Haco Strange.

Harold What?

Haco I happen to know, that 14th October is also William's birthday.

Harold You don't say!

Haco What could it mean astrologically, that two chiefs born on the same day meet in battle on that very day?

Harold Your words hit me like daggers in my inside.

Haco How come?

Harold I recall an old dream. Two stars appeared on the sky. One was pale but very stable, while the other was clear but uneasy, and a voice said: "Harold, there is your star," pointing at the pale star, and another voice said: "Behold the star that lighted the cradle of the victor!" And the second uneasy star became even brighter until it made the pale star disappear altogether.

Haco, I am afraid that dream ends here, while a horrible reality instead will take over.

Haco Also Edward the Confessor had similar visions. Will you then become like him? No, Harold, it's our privilege to rather die for our dreams than to accept a reality with no place for dreams.

Harold Yes, Haco, the dreams are always there, but reality is never consistent. Even if we die our dreams will remain. The dreams of the dead have greater power than the bones of the dead.

Haco Back to battle! (*The battle continues.*)

Scene 4. At the Normans.

A soldier We can't manage this.

Another We haven't been able to take one single enemy position, and soon it's dusk.

The first The Duke is wounded and has had three horses killed under him.

Another Why the hell did we come here? We only get a continuous bloody thrashing and may not even live to tell about it.

Udo of Bayeux What now, my good brothers? Abandon the Duke if you want, but fail not the Lord who is more than man! This is a holy crusade preached by the pope, and who fails its holy cause is a renegade who must be cast into hellfire forever! The day is not yet over! Still there are reserves of the duke and the church!

The first Where are they?

Second Can't see them.

Third We waited for them all day.

Fourth You preach better at home in your church. Preachers of war will never make sense.

Udo My boys, you are lost if you give up before you are dead. Are you not soldiers? Must you not obey orders until you are dead? Cowards are exclusively forbidden by the Duke. You cannot flee anyway. You have nowhere to escape, unless you feel like swimming back to France. Only Charon has a boat to take you over, but no one knows where he will set you off. Fight or die! (*leads another attack*)

Soldier We'll die anyway.

First Priests are worse murderers than any hangman.

Second When they preach war there is always world war, and the only ones to survive them are themselves.

Third It seems like the bishop did this only because they thought it would be fun to take part in this bolting witch-dance to perdition and Armageddon.

Second Common suicidal destruction just for the pleasure of the priests. As celibates they have no other pleasures to indulge themselves in.

First And we have to pay for it with our lives. It's almost not fair.

Second But we have nothing to lose. Now Normandy is advancing again, so let's just follow the stream.

First Yes, I guess we have no other choice. *(They follow the bishop)*

Scene 7. With the English.

Harold Now the Normans are in for a last push as daylight is waning and dusk will lower the curtain.

Haco So they attack with their last reserves and their deepest despair. Harold, I must now be your shield, since you need both hands to swing your axe, and you are the last one who may fall. England will never fall if not with you.

Harold I would rather have wished that you if anyone would survive me. But what is life worth for the survivors if this day would end in defeat? Happy those in that case who were allowed to fall and die.

Haco They attack in thousands.

Harold (grips his axe firmly) Now, my arms, you have to hold harder and better than the arms of Moses under the siege of the Egyptians!

(great war alarum. The scene falls into darkness.)

Scene 8. With the Normans

William Don't shoot at them! Can't you see how their arrows just rebound from their armours? Shoot in the air instead, and let the arrows hit them behind their walls from the heaven above! Like this! *(Shoots an arrow in the air, which hits an Englishman from above.)*

Let Godwinson's banner be your mark over there! Soon they will be powerless when they have to avert the arrow showers from above with their shields, while we take them aback or straight or by their sides!

Scene 9. With the English.

Gurth The Normans have invented a new way of war.

Haco We are powerless. The moment we turn our eye to the sky we get an arrow in our face. We can't protect ourselves against both heaven and earth!

Harold Stand firm, my fellows! If we only can hold out until nightfall we are saved! We must not flinch now when we have managed all day!

Gurth Hold out, brave men!

Haco The helmets can't take the arrow points. War breeches are no good against arrows.

Harold For the peace and freedom of England! Still all can be saved! Just hold out, clench your teeth, and defend the earth of freedom of your fathers!!

Haco Harold! Watch out! Mind your head!

Harold What? *(looks up and gets an arrow straight into his eye.)*
My brother! Now you are avenged! *(falls)*

Haco The battle is lost.

Gurth Let's protect his body with our own dead bodies, when they fall.
Here are many dead bodies. No one shall ever know his body from all the others.
(relieves Harold of all that could identify him and separate him from other soldiers.)

Gurth We fall with him.

Haco He has never fallen, and he shall never fall. *(falls)*

William A dukedom for him who takes the banner!

Graville There is only one man defending it. Spare him.

William Too late.

Graville The sun is setting, and England's banner has fallen. Who was its last defendant?

Gurth (dying) Govern now, William, with your joy of destruction, your triumphant malignity and the heinousness of your church of infamy, until the world is smothered by your universal self-destruction. *(dies)*

William Harold Godwinson's brother.

Graville Congratulations, king William the First of England, to your successful conquest of a nation.

William We have conquered. Now we can start writing history. But who comes here?

Graville A few Saxon priests to do you homage.

William Behold, they kneel, and with them all England kneels to me. Arise, pious priests! We are no less children of the Church than yourselves. Do not think that we

have come to disturb you in your worship. No, we have only come to defend your Church Against the heretic Harold. And here on this very place we shall build a great cathedral to memorize all the brave Normans who have fallen today for our holy cause.

Alred of York We come not to beg for any gifts or privileges but only to solicit the dead body of our benefactor Harold, so that we may bury him decently in our own church at Waltham. (*William grows sullen.*) To ensure the care of his body we emptied our coffins of the gold there was. Look, here you have all we own if only we may have the body of our son.

William We don't accept gold for a traitor's body. Not even if his own mother came and offered all his weight in gold she would not have our allowance to bury him. Let the black birds of prey revel in his rotten carcass which the Church once and for all has cursed!

Edith (approaching) Great Norman, in the name of all ladies of England I allege that you make yourself unworthy of your victory by thus violating the memory of a dead man who only defended the homes and children of England's mothers!

William Who are you, lovely maid? Are you Harold's wife or sister?

Graville She was Harold's betrothed, whom distant relatives forbade to marry in Church. They were loyal subjects to the Church and kept inviolably clean. If you defy her you will have the entire Church of England and its people all against you, since she is in sacred service of the Church. You promised me land and property. I am willing to relinquish them if only Harold has a decent burial. You will never else get rid of him.

William Well, take him then, obnoxious virgin! Seek him out and dig him down, if you can find him! Here are thousands of unidentifiable corpses to choose between, and they are all disfigured and unrecognizable. Look for your Harold till you die. Wash the features of each muddy body and try to see if you can recognize your lover while he lived who now is masked by death's complete corruption! All are equally deformed and dirty, and most of them have their faces cleft in twain or flayed or thick with congealed blood. You may search for as long as you like, but I can't recommend it. You will never recognize him. (*Edith walks away crying.*) Let her go. She will search enough, but she will die of broken heart before she finds him, since every new dead face she turns will tear her heart asunder, thrusting heartlessly her being with the spear of truth.

Alred (to his followers) We have nothing to solicit from this Norman. We shall anyway give Harold something of a grave in our own church with or without his body. (*The priests leave.*)

Graville I will leave you to support and help the virgin Edith in her heavy task.
(*leaves*)

William Yes, leave, you fool, to hang to your skirts of crying nuns!
(*alone*) As verily as I have conquered on this day shall never Harold Godwinson obtain a decent grave, not even if his corpse is found! Without a coffin he shall lie with all his followers to rot in open daylight with all those that here were sacrificed for his obnoxiousness! May his reward be merciless unrest forever above ground, (*clenching and shaking his fist to heaven,*) and may his unidentified anonymous cadaver stay unknown wherever it may lie and go on guarding these hard coasts, which he found it so necessary and worth such a madness to defend!

(The night is total.)

Note on the names

Since there is a confusion of names in this, many names being of mixed nationalities and families, this should be sorted out. Harold Godwinson's brothers were Sven (Sweyn), Torstig (Tostig, Toste,) Haco (Håkan) and Gurth (Curt). King Harald Hardrade's real name was Harald Hårdråde, but since the letter Å does not exist in English, I had to call the king Harald Hardrade (as he usually is called in English literature) and Harold's brother Håkan Haco, as Lord Lytton calls him. William of Normandy has many names, like Wilhelm and Guillaume, and there are many other name confusions as well. Anyway, I have stuck to only one English name for every person in this in an effort to avoid further confusion.

This English translation of the Swedish original, written under difficult circumstances in October 1986, is to be regarded as preliminary, since this translation was made in just five days under difficult circumstances in India and without proof-reading, so there might be changes later on, but only minor ones.

Other works in English by the same author:

“Some Queens of England” – the Tudor story.

<https://issuu.com/lanciai/docs/henry>

“One Man’s Right” – the strange case of Charles Stuart

<https://issuu.com/lanciai/docs/charles>

“Dead Poets” – the Byron, Shelley, Keats saga.

<https://issuu.com/lanciai/docs/shelley>

The Coup” – the scandals of the prisoner of Zenda in Ruritania

https://issuu.com/lanciai/docs/the_coup

There will be more.