

SIDE 1 - HENRY MONO.

HENRY. My life, when it is written, will read better than it lived. Henry Fitz-Empress, first Plantagenet, a king at twenty-one, the ablest soldier of an able time. He led men well, he cared for justice when he could and ruled for thirty years, a state as great as Charlemagne's. He married, out of love, a woman out of legend. Not in Alexandria or Rome or Camelot has there been such a queen. She bore him many children – but no sons. King Henry had no sons. He had three whiskered things but he disowned them. You're not mine. I deny you. None of you will get my crown. I leave you nothing and I wish you plague. May all your children breech and die.

(moving unsteadily toward the door)

(stopping, glaring up)

You dare to damn me, do you? Well, I damn you back. God damn you. All my boys are gone. I've lost my boys. Oh Jesus, all my boys.

SIDE 2 - ELEANOR MONO.

Men coveted this talon once. Henry was eighteen when we met and I was Queen of France. He came down from the North to Paris with a mind like Aristotle's and a form like mortal sin. We shattered the Commandments, on the spot. I spent three months annulling Louis and in spring, in May not far from here, we married. Young Count Henry and his Countess. But in three years' time, I was his Queen and he was King of England. Done at twenty-one. Five years your junior, General.

No doubt the picture of your parents being fond does not hang in your gallery – but we were fond. There was no Thomas Becket then, or Rosamund. No rivals – only me. And then young Henry came and you and all the other blossoms in my garden. Yes, if I'd been sterile, darling, I'd be happier today.

SIDE 3 - HENRY AND ELEANOR

(ALAIS exits)

HENRY. She is lovely, isn't she?

ELEANOR. Yes, very.

HENRY. If I'd chosen, who could I have picked to love to gall you more?

ELEANOR. There's no one.

(moving to the holly boughs)

Come on; let's finish Christmasing the place.

HENRY. Time hasn't done a thing but wrinkle you.

ELEANOR. It hasn't even done that. I have borne six girls, five boys and thirty-one connubial years of you. How am I possible?

HENRY. (joining her in hanging holly) There are moments when I miss you.

ELEANOR. Many?

HENRY. Do you doubt it?

ELEANOR. (rumpling his hair) That's my woolly sheep dog. So wee Johnny gets the crown.

HENRY. I've heard it rumored but I don't believe it.

ELEANOR. Losing Alais will be hard, for you do love her.

HENRY. It's an old man's last attachment; nothing more. How hard do you find living in your tower?

ELEANOR. It was difficult in the beginning but that's past. I find I've seen the world enough. I have my maids and menials in my courtyard and I hold my little court. It suits me now.

HENRY. I'll never let you out. You led too many civil wars against me.

ELEANOR. And I damn near won the last one. Still, as long as I get trotted out for Christmas Courts and state occasions now and then – for I do like to see you – it's enough. Do you still need the Vexin, Henry?

HENRY. Need you ask?

ELEANOR. My strategy is ten years old.

HENRY. It is as crucial as it ever was. My troops there are a day away from Paris, just a march of twenty miles. I must keep it.

ELEANOR. (surveying the holly) I'd say that's all the jolly-ing this room can stand. I'm famished. Let's go in to dinner.

HENRY. (extending his arm) Arm in arm.

ELEANOR. (taking his arm and smiling at him) And hand in hand. You're still a marvel of a man.

HENRY. And you're my lady.

SIDE 4 - RICHARD & HENRY

RICHARD. Listen to the lion.

HENRY. Don't spoil it, Richard.

RICHARD. How's your bad leg?

HENRY. Better, thank you.

RICHARD. And your back and all the rest of it? You're getting old. One day you'll have me once too often.

HENRY. When? I'm fifty now. My God, boy, I'm the oldest man I know. I've got a decade on the Pope. What's it to be? The broadsword when I'm eighty-five?

RICHARD. I'm not a second son. Not now. Your Henry's in the vault, you know.

HENRY. I know; I've seen him there.

RICHARD. I'll have the crown

HENRY. You'll have what daddy gives you

RICHARD. I am next in line.

HENRY. To nothing.

RICHARD. Then we'll have the broadswords now.

HENRY. This minute?

RICHARD. On the battlefield.

HENRY. So we're at war.

RICHARD. Yes, we're at war. I have two thousand men at Poitiers.

HENRY. Can they hear you? Call and see who comes. You are as close to Poitiers as you're going to get.

RICHARD. You don't dare hold me prisoner.

HENRY. You're a king's son so I treat you with respect. You have the freedom of the castle.

RICHARD. You can't keep me here.

HENRY. Until we've all agreed that John comes next, I can and will.

RICHARD. The castle doesn't stand that holds me. Post your guards.

(He exits.)

SIDE 5 - RICHARD & ELEANOR

RICHARD. Let me kiss the nasty scratch and make it well.

ELEANOR. Yes, do. Come let me hold you.

RICHARD. You're more beautiful than ever. There is much that's beautiful in evil when it's absolutely pure. You are so foul you're fair. You stand there looking like a saint in pain when you brought us the knives to do your work.

ELEANOR. That's not true.

RICHARD. You did bring these things.

ELEANOR. Not for this.

RICHARD. Here – you want him dead, you do it.

ELEANOR. You unnatural animal.

RICHARD. Unnatural, Mummy? You tell me, what's nature's way? If poisoned mushrooms grow and babies come with crooked backs, if dogs go mad and wives kill husbands, what's unnatural? Here stands your lamb. Come cover him with kisses; he's all yours.

ELEANOR. No, you're not mine. I'm not responsible.

RICHARD. Where do you think I learned this from? How old was I when you fought with Henry first?

ELEANOR. Young...I don't know.

RICHARD. How many battles did I watch?

ELEANOR. But those were battles, not a knife behind a door.

RICHARD. I've never heard a corpse ask how it got so cold. You've got a mind: you tell me, what was on it when you had your soldiers point their crossbows at him?

ELEANOR. That was in the field.

RICHARD. I don't care if it's in the dahlia bed. What were you thinking, Eleanor?

ELEANOR. Of you.

RICHARD. Of your unnatural animal?

ELEANOR. I did it all for you.

RICHARD. You wanted Father dead.

ELEANOR. No, never that.

RICHARD. You tried to kill him, didn't you?

ELEANOR. Yes.

RICHARD. Why? What did you want?

ELEANOR. I wanted Henry back.

RICHARD. You lie.

SIDE 6 - GEOFFREY & PHILIP

(As the lights rise, PHILIP is preparing for bed. He turns as GEOFFREY, calling his name, comes skidding into the room.)

GEOFFREY. Philip, Philip – is John here?

PHILIP. Here? In my room?

GEOFFREY. Come on, Philip; this is me.

PHILIP. I've been expecting him.

GEOFFREY. If the whole thing breaks tonight; then we've reached the end of it.

PHILIP. If that's a warning thank you.

GEOFFREY. What if it's an offer?

PHILIP. "What if" is a game for scholars: what if angels sat on pinheads?

GEOFFREY. What if I were king?

PHILIP. It's your game, Geoff; you play if.

GEOFFREY. All of England's land in France, from Normandy down to the Spanish border, once I'm king.

PHILIP. All that. What could I do that's worth all that?

GEOFFREY. By morning I can be the chosen son. The crown can come to me. But once it does, once Henry's favor falls my way, the war begins.

PHILIP. We have so many wars. Which one is this?

GEOFFREY. The one that Richard, John and Eleanor will make. I'll have to fight to keep what Henry, in his rage, is going to give me.

PHILIP. Yes, you will.

GEOFFREY. That's why I need you, Philip. Will you fight with me against them all?

PHILIP. Against them all?

GEOFFREY. Don't tell me it's a risk. I wouldn't hand you half of France to fight an easy war.

PHILIP. I wouldn't want you for an enemy.

GEOFFREY. Are we allies, then?

PHILIP. We were born to be.

GEOFFREY. I should say something solemn but I haven't time. I'm off to Father with news that John's a traitor. After that –

SIDE 7 - JOHN & HENRY

HENRY. (*Entering with ALAIS. To ALAIS*) I'd appreciate a little quiet confidence. I have enough nits picking at me.

JOHN. Father, have you got a minute?

HENRY. What for?

JOHN. If you had a minute, we could talk.

HENRY. I'm busy now. Have you seen Philip?

JOHN. Look: you know that hunting trip we're taking for my birthday?

HENRY. Well?

JOHN. Forget it. I'm not going.

HENRY. Why not?

JOHN. I'm just not.

HENRY. But, John, the trip's all planned.

JOHN. (*moving to go*) I'll go get Philip for you.

HENRY. You did have a good time last year, didn't you?

JOHN. I loved it.

HENRY. What's wrong, lad?

JOHN. You're busy.

HENRY. True enough but –

JOHN. You've got more important things to do.

HENRY. I can't make things all right if I don't know what's wrong.

JOHN. You're giving Richard everything.

HENRY. You think I'd do that?

JOHN. You don't love me any more.

HENRY. Don't pout – and stand up straight. How often do I have to tell you?

JOHN. When's my coronation?

HENRY. When I say so.

JOHN. That's no answer.

(He starts off.)

HENRY. John.

JOHN. Tell her how much you love her. You're a wonder with the women.

SIDE 8 - ALAIS & PHILIP

ALAIS. You order me? It's been how long since you've seen me? If I wasn't useful you would not even remember my name.

PHILIP. Stop this, you will do as I command.

ALAIS. You rant and bellow exactly like Henry. You're just not as good at it as he is.

PHILIP. Don't you dare. You insolent...

(His anger has increased to the point that he raises his hand to strike her.)

ALAIS. *(standing proudly)* Is this what you have become? Go on – take out your anger on me. Isn't that what I'm for? You are my King yet I held you when you were swaddled. I used to pretend that you were my child. I rocked you, so beautiful and sweet. Tell me when a boy is crowned a King does he always lose himself and become as brutal as a feral dog?

PHILIP. It's a necessary tool when fighting feral dogs. A skill I was taught.

ALAIS Louis wasn't like that.

PHILIP. Our father was helpless. But I had many teachers. My time with Richard was well spent. There's a man who will destroy a village just because he is bored. How do you expect me to behave? Should I ask Henry out for a friendly game of jeu de mail? We are Kings. Our games have larger boundaries.

ALAIS. *(She shakes her head.)* You are both so alike. Am I doomed to love and hate you both equally? You both keep me prisoner. Yes I can move about but I'm just like Eleanor – confined by the heart.

PHILIP. Eleanor's in prison because she tried to kill Henry not because she loved him.

ALAIS. Your age is showing my young lord. Love is the turnkey. Eleanor loves Henry, Henry loves me, I love Henry, Henry loves Eleanor. Richard, Geoffrey and John love power. This is the story that the chroniclers will tell. Now go. Go back to France without me. Do not ignite a war. Let their family destroy from within.

PHILIP. Am I to take advice from you?

ALAIS. My advice is pure and shouldn't be dismissed. I've watched the wanton bloodshed of this holiday. Dear brother, I do not want you to be drowned in a conflict that you cannot win. Leave as you first planned and enjoy their destruction from afar.

PHILIP. And have Henry think I'm weak?

ALAIS. Time is your friend, my youthful King. They will tear each other apart like peasants fighting over a scrap and you will win without a single blow. But, believe me they will join together if they perceive a threat from elsewhere.

PHILIP. *(smiles)* You have learned more from Eleanor than you know.

(He leans down and kisses her on both cheeks and exits.)

(ALAIS starts to cry and crumples onto her chaise.)

SIDE 9 - PHILIP & HENRY

PHILIP. (*indicating the glasses, his and Richard's*) See – two glasses. I did hope you'd come.

HENRY. Good; we can't leave negotiations where they are. I've seen more royal rooms. I keep looking for your father in you.

PHILIP. (*pouring brandy*) He's not there.

HENRY. I miss him. Has Richard or the Queen been here to see you?

PHILIP. Does it matter? If they haven't yet, they will.

HENRY. I want to reach a settlement. I left you with too little earlier.

PHILIP. Yes; nothing is too little

HENRY. I am sorry you're not fonder of me, lad. Your father always said, "Be fond of stronger men."

PHILIP. No wonder he loved everyone.

HENRY. They'll offer you whole provinces to fight me.

PHILIP. Shocking. My advice to you is discipline your children.

HENRY. I came here to offer peace.

PHILIP. Piss on your peace.

HENRY. Your father would have wept.

PHILIP. My father was a weeper.

HENRY. Fight me and you'll lose.

PHILIP. I can't lose, Henry. I have time. Just look at you. Your strong arms – they'd crush me like a leaf of lettuce. But each year they get a little weaker. The sand goes pit-pat in the glass. I'm in no hurry, Henry. I've got time.

HENRY. Suppose I hurry things along? What if I say that England is at war with France?

PHILIP. Then France surrenders. I don't have to fight to win. Take all you want – this county, that one. You won't keep it long.

HENRY. What kind of courage have you got?

PHILIP. The tidal kind: it comes and goes.

HENRY. By God, I'd love to turn you loose on Eleanor. More brandywine?

PHILIP. You recognize it?

HENRY. They were boiling it in Ireland before the snakes left. Well, things look a little bleak for Henry, don't they? You'll say yes to Richard when he comes; arms, soldiers, anything he asks for.

PHILIP. I'd be foolish not to.

HENRY. And withdraw it all before the battle ever started.

PHILIP. Wouldn't you, in my place?

HENRY. Why fight Henry when his sons will do it for you?

PHILIP. Yes, exactly.

HENRY. You've got promise, lad. That's first-class thinking.