

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_220157

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No. 822-91 Accession No. 22601

Author D175
Dane

Title Saviours

This book should be returned on or before the date
last marked below.

THE SAVIOURS

By Clemence Dane

NOVELS

REGIMENT OF WOMEN
FIRST THE BLADE
LEGEND
WANDERING STARS
THE BABYONS
BROOME STAGES
THE MOON IS FEMININE
THE ARROGANT HISTORY OF WHITE BEN

With Helen Simpson

ENTER SIR JOHN
AUTHOR UNKNOWN
RE-ENTER SIR JOHN
OMNIBUS COLLECTION
RECAPTURE
VOLUME OF SHORT STORIES
FATE CRIES OUT

PLAYS

A BILL OF DIVORCEMENT
WILL SHAKESPEARE
THE WAY THINGS HAPPEN
NABOTH'S VINEYARD
GRANITE
MARINERS
WILD DECEMBERS
MOONLIGHT IS SILVER
COUSIN MURIEL
ENGLAND'S DARLING
HEROD AND MARIANNE

With Richard Addinsell

ADAM'S OPERA
COME 'OF AGE
THE SAVIOURS

THE SAVIOURS

Seven Plays on One Theme

BY

CLEMENCE DANE

With Music by
RICHARD ADDINSELL



WILLIAM HEINEMANN LTD
LONDON :: TORONTO

FIRST PUBLISHED 1942

• WAR ECONOMY
—

THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED INCOMPLETE
CONFORMITY WITH THE AUTHORISED
ECONOMY STANDARDS

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN AT THE WINDMILL PRESS
KINGSWOOD, SURREY

PREFACE

THESE seven plays are based on the légend which the British share with many other nations—the légend of a hero who helps his people to become strong and civilized, and then disappears. Bad times follow, and to comfort themselves the peoples spread the rumour that the hero isn't really dead, but will one day return and bring back with him the Golden Age. Charlemagne, Ogier and Barbarossa lie asleep in some cave of the hills, or, like our own King Arthur, in some enchanted island till the destined moment comes and they return in triumph.

Nothing will quite kill that belief. It seems only yesterday that the newspaper posters stunned us with their headlines—"Kitchener drowned." But people couldn't believe it. Within a week it was being whispered about the country that Kitchener was not dead but biding his time, and within the last few years the same légend has been woven about Lawrence of Arabia. It is as if the nation had a conviction of immortality, and recognized in its leader or hero of the hour its own indestructible spirit. In Britain the symbol of that spirit is King Arthur, of whom Merlin prophesied that he should yet come to help his people. "The Saviours" shows how that prophecy has been and will be fulfilled.

The radio is always a challenge to the stage dramatist, for it presents an entirely different set of problems: it bestows, new liberties and sets up new limits. The familiar command to the audience: "Think, when we speak of horses, that you see them!" has to be changed to "*hear* them!"—and that is not a little change. It implies a completely new mental approach. If the film play hints that the ideal dramatist is seen and not heard, the radio-play reminds him that, on the contrary, he has to plan for the entertainment of a **blind**

audience, and must rely on sound alone. So, as these seven plays were planned for radio audiences, I have not changed the stage-directions nor added any descriptions, seeing that these, obeying radio custom, are already in the text itself. But I must remind the reader that the music is necessarily missing, and that this music is not mere decoration or accompaniment, but a fair half of the whole scheme. Only those who have heard a performance will realize how maimed the text seems without that other half.

The plays owe a deep debt to the producer, Val Gielgud. His advice and interest first made the scheme possible, and he produced the series in the face of all the difficulties that must occur in war-time—curtailed rehearsals, lack of studio-space, actors in the army, delayed train services and blitzed studios. I should also like to thank the various players for their beautiful work. Unfortunately the shortage of paper makes it impossible to print the long cast lists, or to acknowledge more formally the help of the conductor and the orchestras.

CLEMENCE DANE.

THE SAVIOURS

(Seven plays on one theme)

	PAGE
MERLIN	1
THE HOPE OF BRITAIN	25
ENGLAND'S DARLING	60
THE MAY KING	90
THE LIGHT OF BRITAIN	126
REMEMBER NELSON	181
THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER	240

Light obeyed. Then the Swimmer divided
light from the darkness. Evening and morning
were the first day, were the first night.
Then on the second day, as again light spread
louder than Chaos, spread by the Will of the Swimmer,
I — I appeared.
God was alone no longer. I stood beside Him,
I, His first Yesterday, I, His first-born.

When He harnessed me to His plough,
when He sowed and I reaped the harvest of stars :
then His glance of a thousand years
gave me my name, Millennium, in His sight.
But on earth I have other names. v
When I was the sword keeping the apple-tree path,
then my name was the innocent yesterday.
When they hung up their harps on the willows and
wept,
wept for a sight of me, Zion was my name.

I am Hector remembered by the lost women of Troy,
I am the red, autumn money spent by the wind.
I am the spiral smoke when the fire burns low :
then the dreaming old warm their hands in my dust,
and call me ' the good old times',
and clutch at my substance in vain. I am not to be
held.

I am the sun-thrown shadow, lengthening out
purple and fine from the heels of today.
I am the outline of spring asleep
under the grasses, shaped like a man.

Each age wakes me anew from my sleep.
Each age gives me a name.
Merlin, Merlin they call me in Britain.

MERLIN

Here I stand, a gold-headed boy,
and answer again to my name.

VOICES (*in the distance*): Merlin ! Merlin !

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

The play begins. Now by my art
I roll back the fifteen hundred years
which veil from the Britons who watch
the Britons who act out the play.
And now I roll back the mist
of my Will in which I am hidden.

I stand on the mount named ' the Eagle Place'
and sometimes ' the View Place'.
Here Snowdon looks down upon cloud,
or is it the winter swans
beating over to England ?
Hear their mellow cry
Hear their flute and their trumpet!

THE SWANS

Who—who—who is so wild ?
Who—who—who is so white ?
Call—call—call to the hill:
" Shroud—shroud—all as we pass I "

Cloud—cloud—who is so high ?
Snow—snow—who is so light ?
Wind—wind—who is so strong
as we in our flight, we in our flight ?

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

I follow their wings. Down drifting I see
on the instep of Snowdon a castle set
like a bow on a shoe,

with courtyard, hamlet, meadow and lake:
 and between the lake and the meadow
 a half-built wall of defence, quaking again **into rubble**.
 Hear how the stones fall singly !
 They trundle down to the sedge
 while the masons lean on their tools,
 and a king and his queen,
 with their court and their men-at-arms,
 stand gaping, and wait for the crash.
 There is wonder on every face, on the king's face fear.
 Unheeded the red sun dies, and the swans arrow down.

THE SWANS :

Who—who—darkens the blue ?
 Who—who—quenches the light ?
 Call—call—call to the lake I
 Find—find—rest for the wing,
 rest after flight, rest in the night!

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

They drop to the gold-fringed water. We follow,
 alight:
 and the whole marsh quakes, and submerges
 the fern, the reed and the cotton.
 We wade ankle-wet through the ripples
 brackish and warm still from summer,
 spring from tussock to turf
 and on through the curdling grasses,
 up to the edge of the crowd.

On with me ! Nearer ! Come nearer !

Here circle the countryfolk,
 Dogs bark. The youngsters
 tiptoe to see between heads, over shoulders.
 Broad are the shoulders of Ulfin the knight.

Bowed are the shoulders of Magan the clerk.
 Unnoticed behind them I stand and jostle and peep,
 Merlin, a boy among boys,
 Merlin, a gold-headed boy.

The noise of a crowd increases. Boys' voices emerge followed by MERLIN'S laughter. The scene begins.

DINABUZ (*a boy*): Who's that giggling away?

BOYS' VOICES : It's Merlin !———Merlin !———
 Merlin I

DINABUZ : He'd better not laugh at me. And don't
 shoulder in—you, Gerin !

GERIN (*a boy*) : It's not me, it's Merlin.

ULFIN (*ayoung soldier*) : Quiet there, you boys !

MAGAN (*an old man*): We want to hear what King Vortiger
 says. We don't want to hear the little foxes yap.

ULFIN (*awed*): Magan, watch I Watch the wall heaving !

MAGAN : Witchcraft !

MERLIN *laughs*.

GERIN : Merlin's laughing at someone again.

DINABUZ : Keep away, Merlin !

GERIN : Oh, watch the wall!

VOICES, (*from the crowd*): The wall's bewitched.———
 There goes another boulder.

GERIN : I can't see. Dinabuz, you might let me up on
 your barrel.

DINABUZ : There's no room. It's my barrel. I rolled it
 here.

GERIN : Dinabuz, say what the king's doing !

DINABUZ : He's in a rage. He's hit one of the masons with
 the flat of his sword. Look out I You're pushing me off
 ny barrel.

GERIN : It's not me. It's Merlin. Who asked him to
 interfere ?

MAGAN : If you young men don't keep quiet you'll regret it. You'll regret it very much.

The BOYS are silent. MERLIN laughs.

DINABUZ {*frightened*} : Who's that old brute ?

GERIN : He's Magan, the King's clerk. You'd better be careful.

DINABUZ : Why ? He doesn't wear a sword. I'm not afraid of him.

GERIN : The King is. Magan knows everything. He can even draw you a map of the sky. And that handsome fellow with him is Ulfh. He's the King's man too. He's only four years older than us. They say he killed forty Saxons in his first fight. The Queen hates him.

DINABUZ : She doesn't hate any handsome man.

GERIN : Hold your tongue, or she'll have it cut out! Here, let's go away to the other side !

DINABUZ : Look ! There's Joram.

VOICES (*from the crowd*) : Joram !———Joram and his Druids !

ULFIN : Here comes Joram with his seven wise men! What will they prophesy now ?

MAGAN (*chuckling*) : They don't know yet. They're waiting for a signal from the Queen.

ULFIN : She will have told Joram just what to say.

MAGAN : Joram will say that, since the suitable sacrifice has not been found, Vortiger had better go back to Hengist and his Germans. Well, and why not ? King Vortiger gave Britain to Hengist and his men. At least they can give him shelter.

ULFIN : Vortiger's played it both ways too long. He can't be exiled king of Britain and yet have a foot in the German camp.

MAGAN (*very low*) : You know that—somebody—has landed ?

ULFIN (*shaken*) : Somebody ? Not Uther Pendragon ? Not the heir of Britain ? Not our own true king ?

MERLIN *now speaks, as a character in the scene.*

MERLIN *{softly}*: Silence is gold.

MAGAN *(startled)*: Who spoke behind us?

ULFIN: It's one of those youngsters. Keep back, you boys!

MERLIN *(with charm)*: Sir, make way for me!

DINABUZ *(angrily)*: Why for you, yellow-head?

MERLIN: Because the king needs me.

ULFIN *and* MAGAN *laugh. The BOYS shout derision.*

DINABUZ: Well, go to him! But don't try to push past me! *(Then, in an altered voice)*: Stop pulling at me! Here, I shall fall!

There is a crash, laughter and shouts. MERLIN laughs.

DINABUZ: It was Merlin. Let me get at him! Where is he?

MERLIN: I am here.

DINABUZ: Do you know who I am? I'm the son of the king's cup-bearer. We trace back to Brutus of Troy——

MERLIN: The dreams of Britain, the dreams and the shadows! When will she wake?

DINABUZ *(raging)*: And from Troy to the Garden of Eden. Now tell us your father's name!

THE BOYS: Merlin!——Merlin!——Who was your father, Merlin?

DINABUZ: How can he tell you his father's name when he never had a father?

ULFIN: Do you hear, Magan?

MAGAN: Found! What is your name, boy?

MERLIN: You may call me Merlin.

MAGAN: And your father's name?

MERLIN: I have no father.

MAGAN: Get to the king! Break a way through the crowd!

ULFIN: Now, good people, we're king's messengers—clear the path!

VOICES *(from the crowd)*: Is he found?——Is he found?——Is it the boy without a father?

ULFIN: Come to the king!

MERLIN (*softly*): Yes, I will come to the king. The boy without a father will wait upon the king without a country. I will take your hand, Ulfin the honest, and your hand, Magan the wise, and together we will pass through the parted crowd. Call home your thoughts, you two, from a king on the high seas, a king landing, a king and his men drawing near. Think my thoughts only, see only with my eyes as you lead me to the king who sold Britain to his wife's father.

ULFIN : Who is this boy ?

MAGAN : Who knows ? I know only that I am less wise than this boy who walks with us over the trampled grass to a beastly death.

MERLIN : The death will be by fire ; but it is, not my death. Open your eyes, Magan, for I know you have the sight! The woman with the crown, the bracelets, the winter-blue eyes, she is the Saxon 'queen. The flames are behind her. The huge man pulling at his loose lip—that will be Vortiger the Usurper, The flames are behind him. Open your eyes and see! Not you, Ulfin, you have not the sight. But the old man has. He sees.

MAGAN : I have the sight.' I see. There is no smell of burning. Their hair is not scorched. No breath of heat ripples the air. But, holding your hand, unfathered boy, my eyes are opened, and I see about them the flicker of their doom. Speak to them, Ulfin !

ULFIN (*shouting*): King Vortiger! King Vortiger! Your wall shall stand. Found, King Vortiger!

VORTIGER (*in the distance*): Who is it ?

ULFIN : The boy without a father ! Bid them make way !

VORTIGER (*nearer*): Clear a space and let them through!

There is a clash of steel. The crowd scatters. We hear a murmur of voices', including those of VORTIGER, his queen ROWENNA, and the priest JORAM.

MAGAN ; My king, we bring you the man without a father. Joram the queen's priest, we bring you paste and mortar for the king's wall.

JORAM : He must be proved fatherless or his blood will not serve the wall. And how shall We prove it ? No man is fatherless.

VORTIGER : Your name ?

MERLIN : My name in Britain is Merlin.

VORTIGER : Your father's name ?

MERLIN : If I could tell you, should I be here ?

ROWENNA (*a young and insolent voice*) : Joram is right. How can a man be fatherless ? But the poor lad will lie, for his mother's credit. Does every camp follower know the name of her child's father ?

MERLIN : I was born of a dream and a king's daughter. Why should I lie ?

ROWENNA : Send for that king's daughter ! It will be something to see a woman who can bear sons to a dream.

VORTIGER : Tell us the truth, Merlin !

MERLIN :

My mother lay in a tower of brass.
One square window let in the sky.
Out of the sky came a golden fire.
No other father has Merlin had;

s

ROWENNA :

Can fire kiss and make love ?

MERLIN :

Fire shall answer you that.

VORTIGER (*to MAGAN,*) :

By sorcery could the thing be ?

MAGAN :

There is much power in a dream.
When tears are wept in a dream we wake with stained
lids.

B

Of dreams are the nations, born.
 There is no wonder so wild
 that I, the wise clerk, dare say of it:
 " This dream could not be."

ROWENNA : Do you hear them, my girls ? In Germany bread comes from wheat, and men and women are born of men and women. But our British husbands look for manna and men—children to fall from the sky into their mouths and our laps. A boy without a father ? Well—a conquered people feeds on dreams. But I say again—my father Hengist feeds on the fat of England. He has conquered your dreams. Submit, then! Submit!

There is a shrill murmur of agreement from her women.

A WOMAN : She is right. Submit, and go home I

VOICES (*from the crowd, growling*): Never !———Never submit!———King, make your German Frau hold her tongue!

VORTIGER : You've married a Briton, sweetheart. Remember it!

ROWENNA : I remember that we Saxons gave you British your chance of co-rule. But you defied us, and we drove you out. That fight is over. The White Dragon of Germany has mastered the Red Dragon of Britain. But I tell you there is still room for us all and a welcome, if we submit. Submit ! Be ruled and safe ! Of what use to wander in this chattering land of mountain and mist, and defences that fall down ? Let us go back to good German comfort and my father Hengist ! I am sick of the dreams of beaten men.

MERLIN : Fear those dreams! Now, King Vortiger, men have broken into my play-hour and brought me here. Then tell me quickly what you need of me, for my toys wait !

JORAM : Your play-days are over, fatherless boy !

MERLIN : Who sent for me—the king, or this **queen's man?**

VORTIGER : Merlin, unlucky boy, I sent for you. You see this half-built wall. Once it encircles castle and hamlet I have here an impregnable fort. Look—cliffs are behind me, unclimbable, and there are but two roads to guard, the road that strikes south through the forest and on to the sea, and the London road winding east round the edge of the lake ! Both roads are mine once my wall is built. But my wall will not stand. Day by day the best masons in Wales labour on my wall ; but as the sun sets, so does the wall set, shake and quake. Then it falls to the ground, and the stones roll down to the lake-side.

MERLIN *laughs*.

JORAM : You're the only one who laughs here.

MERLIN : Oh no ! For a month now all Wales has laughed at King Vortiger and his crumbling wall.

VORTIGER : But Merlin, my wise men here tell me that if I draw blood from the breast of an unfathered man and mix it with my lime, my wall shall stand till the world's end. Now laugh, Merlin, for you shall build my wall !

MERLIN : I will not build your wall. It is not God's will that this castle shall stand, nor my blood be spilt for your safety. Your queen's priest lies. As your master-mason there laughs at the clumsy apprentices, so I laugh at these men's prophecies. Joram, I am your bad luck ! I am death to you, Joram ! By my own God I swear, I was born to ruin you. King Vortiger, if this priest cannot tell you why your wall falls down, and I can, then give me his life and the life of his seven men ! Is it a bargain ?

VORTIGER : My hand on this bargain.

MERLIN : Now Joram, traitor to Britain, tool, jackal, German spy—God, how I hate this German spy I—now say, before you seal these stones with my blood, why the wall falls down ! Answer me !

VORTIGER : Rowenna, bid your priest answer ! He was glib with the cure—now let him divine the cause !

ROWENNA : Answer him, Joram !

MERLIN: He cannot answer. Then answer this! What shall we find buried beneath this wall? Again no answer? Then—Vortiger, hold to the bargain!—then I will tell you. Level the rubbish, dig a little, and you shall come upon a lovely stone, honey-coloured marble, carved with thistle leaves.

VORTIGER: Dig!

There is a bustle, movement, the sound of pick-axes, and the voice of a MASON shouting orders.

THE PICK-AXES: Pick-tack! ————— Pick-tack! —————
Pick-tack!

THE MASON: Something is here I

MERLIN: The altar stone.

VORTIGER: What altar? What do you know?

MERLIN:

I am yesterday. I know what I know.

Here long ago

a Roman built for his god

a house in the heather.

It was well warmed from the cellar below.

The tile-floor pictured panther and cone,
and beribboned rod.

Time and weather

have conquered the god.

All is shattered, scattered and gone

excepting his altar-stone,

THE MASON: * Clear away the rubble! Strike again!

THE PICK-AXES: Pick-tack! ————— Pick-tack!

THE MASON: Bring spades! Here! Dig here! Another spade! Clear away the rubble! Bring water! Sluice down the stone I (*Triumphant*) A slab! Honey-coloured marble, carved with thistle leaves! A lovely stone!

MERLIN:

Time and the winter weather,

time and the summer heat

conquered the god. He is gone;

leaving under the peat,
tooted and roped in the heather,
bound by the cords of the heather,
his altar stone.

Now king, hold to the bargain ! Now let this thing which I
hate, this turd of malice, this clotted snake in the heather path,
let him say what lies under the stone !

VORTIGER : Answer him, Joram !

ROWENNA : Answer him now, before the sun drops by
another nail-paring behind Snowdon ! Answer, or I lift my
cloak from you ! Answer !

MERLIN : How can he answer ? What does he know ?
But I know the answer. Listen !

Lighter than laughter,
bright as a bird note,
twangling and trickling,
water is near.

Spray on the marsh frond,
dew on the cobweb,
a sprinkle of frost,
a sparkle of fire,

a tinkle of ice,
a chink of glass breaking,
flashing of prisms,
rainbows and harp-strings,

keener than sword-play,
cold as a cold heart,
pulsing in fountains,
water is here.

VORTIGER : Dig !

THE MASON : Dig I

THE PICK-AXES : Pick-tack I———Pick-tack 1

VORTIGER : By God, he has won his bargain I All about the stone the loam darkens as sweat darkens a shirt.

THE MASON : A spring ! A spring ! A pulsing spring ! It kicks at the stone. Stand back, lady, or you' will be awash to the ankle. Never was such a head of water held so near the surface. It shifts the stone. It leaps the stone like a hound after an otter. It slides down the hill like an otter pursued.

MERLIN :

The water sings to the sky.
The water laughs in the light.
The water brims over the dyke,
the water runs down to the lake.
Filling the cow-hoof puddles,
seeping and spreading it flows.
Water to water goes.
Now comes the red and the white.
Now comes the wonderful sight.

ROWENNA : Where ?

VORTIGER : What sight ?

MERLIN : What does the German see ?

JORAM :

I see red and white;
for I see a red sun set
arid I see a white moon rise ;
but I see no wonderful sight.

MERLIN : What does the queen see ?

ROWENNA :

I see red and white ;
for I see a red torch burn
and I see the night-fog rise;
but I see no wonderful sight.

MERLIN : What does the king see ?

VORTIGER :

I see the red and the white;
for there, on the lake's far edge,
there—there—in the anchored sedge
whence the night-fog sweeps with a broom
over the quicksilver ripple,
over the amber shallow,
smoothing the lake to iron,
I see two shadows fight
in a smother of foam.
One is red, one is white.
Wife, do you see what I see ?
Priest, do you hear what I hear—
a thrash of water and wings,
hisses and seething water,
madness of water, madness of wings ?

•ROWENNA : I hear nothing.

JORAM : I see only the wreathing of the mists, and behind it
the flag of sunset slowly furled.

MAGAN : This blind, deaf old-age ! Ulfin, be my ears and
eyes I What do you see, Ulfin ?

ULFIN (*doubtful*): I see—I see—a wheel of feathers and
foam.

VORTIGER : Two swans are fighting, one red and one
white. That's your wheel. Ah ! I have my eyesight yet.
When I was young, in the midday blue of heaven I once saw
two small stars shining. And this eve—bear me witness,
Merlin ! — I saw your wonderful sight before these young eyes
saw it. Ha, the red swan pulls free ! Look ! Look how he
heaves himself out of the water in his haste ! He skates over
the lake on his squat feet as if he had been shied. He's
beaten.

MERLIN : No !

VORTIGER : I tell you he's red and blind with his own blood. The white swan is after him. How can he get away ?

JORAM : The white's wan wins.

MERLIN : King, the red swan shall win, and I shall hold you to your bargain.

JORAM : He cannot win. He has been plucked and flayed. Look how the blood streams down.

VORTIGER : Not so fast! The red swan turns again. Now he swings round. Now he drives down upon the white. Now the white swan swings in turn; but he's slower, he's slower. Look, the red swan gets in a blow !

ULFIN : One of those wing buffets can break a man's leg..

VORTIGER : See them both, how they stand firm on the water as if the lake were an upturned shield.

ULFIN : Another blow !

JORAM : The red swan's beaten. The red swan flees.

ULFIN : Not he, he's circling to get behind. He's after the neck. Look, he's clamped to the other's back ! He has the neck between his bills. He grips him in a vice.

ROWENNA : I see nothing but foam and feathers.

ULFIN : He's forcing the head under water the cunning red devil!

VORTIGER : Hold him, red swan ! Hold him under till he drowns ! Ha, he can't keep the grip ! Look how the white neck twists and writhes ! Hold, red devil! Hold fast!

MERLIN : He holds. The white wings cease to thrash: the broken water abates : the circles widen about the battle space : the ever-listening ripples reach the shore, and still the red swan holds the white swan under. Watch, king ! Watch, queen ! Watch, priest ! Now—now—now he lifts at last his own proud head from the water. His feet move slowly like oars. What does he care now for that lump of torn white feathers ? He glides to the sedge where his mates are hidden, and the water-fog rolls up to meet him. He and his royal wounds are rapt into peace.

MAGAN : The sight is over. The tale is told. King, you should hold to your bargain.

VORTIGER : I keep my word. Merlin, you are welcome. It is my good luck that you have come to me, Merlin. Magan is for you, and Ulfen, with his fighting men. Magan, this boy shall have a chair at the council board and wear my livery. He must not run off to Hengist. We will give him—what have I left to give, Magan ? The long strip between Swanage and Land's End ? He shall have it, if only for showing me the best fight since Cons tans, my master—why talk of Cons tans ? That's all long ago. But Merlin, you may call yourself my friend. Here is my hand. But, dear Merlin, I was born and bred on a lakeside, and I tell you this battle of swans is not in nature at this season or at this hour. It has some message for me and for Britain, as meteors have a meaning, and spilt salt a message. You shall interpret, you and Magan.

MAGAN : I have the sight for tomorrow and the day after ; but my sight cannot travel with these birds of omen. Let the boy interpret!

ROWENNA : Yes, let the boy interpret! He has told us that beneath a wall a spring can be hidden—wonderful! He has told us that water runs down hill—wonderful! He has told us that when wild swans fight one must win and the other lose—most wonderful!

VORTIGER- : It is most wonderful, the wall, the stone, the water and the fight. I will know what it means. And when you have told me, Merlin, then I shall ask you other things. I shall ask you how I am to get back my kingdom from this woman's father. I shall ask you to teach me how to quiet her tongue. Dear, young, wise Merlin, how you and Magan shall help me!

MERLIN : King Vortiger, you are not to be helped, nor do the swans concern you. They are the shadows of kings and battles to come. For the swan bloody in his own blood, but conqueror, he is the Red Dragon of Britain. And the white swan is the White Dragon of Germany, whom you called

over to England. The White Dragon shall be routed, not by you, King Vortiger, but by a king yet to come. He is called the Heir of Britain, and his name is Uther Pendragon. After him comes Arthur, his son, whom they shall call the Hope of Britain. And long, long after comes Alfred, whom they shall call the Darling of Britain. Each shall drive out the White Dragon from overseas, and after them there shall be uneasy peace between the Dragons for a while.

VORTIGER : For how long a while ?

MERLIN : Thick, thick is the fog of the ages.

VORTIGER : Strain your eyes for me, dear young Merlin! I must know the end of Britain.

MERLIN : What can it matter to you—once-king who ran away and left us for a woman ? Nevertheless let Magan hold my hand! Let my heat warm your cold, dry, polished palm, old Magan ! Let my young knowledge throb into you ! Still! Be still as the night-lake, everyone who stands here ! Let no pick chink against stone ! Let no woman's skirt brush the gravel! There must be no coughing in this keen, terrible air which seeps through to us from the future time. A thousand March winds blow in it. Let them scour your hearts, fighting men ! O women of Britain, smell the Aprils in this air! Breathe deep of this air, for it is spiced with the roses of all the summers to come, and quiet with the snow-flakes of a thousand winters! Count the years, Magan! Does the fog roll back for you as they pass ?

Count, Magan ! Count—

a hundred and a hundred, and a hundred years !.

MAGAN :

A hundred and a hundred, and a hundred years.

MERLIN :

Count, King Vortiger ! Count!

VORTIGER :

A hundred and a hundred, and a hundred years.

MERLIN :

Count, men of Britain—they are marching spears !

THE MEN :

A hundred and a hundred, and a hundred years.

MERLIN :

Count, exiled women—they are falling tears !

THE WOMEN :

A hundred and a hundred, and a hundred years.

MERLIN : Now Magan, palm against palm, what does your sight see across the years ?

MAGAN : Iron ships ! Iron ships I The North Sea, the Middle Sea, the Black and the White Seas, all the waters that lie between the wreck of Troy and Vinland the Good are ruled by the iron ships and the Red Dragon of Britain.

ROWENNA : And the White Dragon ? What news of my people ?

MAGAN : Our Red Dragon has your White Dragon by the neck. He is plunged beneath the water hard by the nest. He is held under till he chokes. Then the Red Dragon forgoes his hold, and the White Dragon crawls ashore. He lies flat. His wings are outspread. His neck lies level along the ground. He gasps and chokes, but he is not dead.

VORTIGER : Is it peace between us then ?

MAGAN : I'm an old man. My sight fails. Tell an old man, Merlin, is it peace at last ?

MERLIN : For twenty years the Red Dragon sleeps, while the White Dragon renews his youth. Then again they rise up.

MAGAN : Into the sky ! Into the sky I I see iron ships flying in the sky. I hear the winds fighting together with a dreadful blast. I am deafened. I am blinded.

VORTIGER : Who wins ? Who-wins ?

ULFIN : The Red Dragon of Britain !

ROWENNA : The White Dragon of my people.

VORTIGER : Strain your eyes ! Who wins ?

MERLIN : With their claws they scratch and scabble at the firmament, and pull-down fiery stars. The red swan fights above his nest. The white swan is at his throat. They toss and wrestle in the air above the nest.

MAGAN : Is it victory for Britain ? Is it victory ?

VORTIGER : Is it victory ?

MERLIN : What is it to you, little man of "yesterday, you who sold Britain and bought a woman ? The fog thickens. I see no further.

VORTIGER : Cast your sight back, then ! Read tomorrow and no more ! Tell me, do I die on the throne of Britain ?

MERLIN : You should have asked me long ago. Now I have sent out my sight and my thought too far. I have spent my strength on this flight. What help can I give you ?

VORTIGER : I hold you *to* the bargain. I have bought your knowledge with the lives of Joram and his wizards.

ROWENNA : Joram is my man. His men are mine. None are to be touched, bargain or no bargain !

VORTIGER : I gave you Kent, and your father took from me the rest of Britain. But this is my Wales. Here I am king, and hold to my king's bargain. Ulfin, bind these men and do with them as the boy says !

JORAM : Queen ! Queen ! Protection !

ULFIN : Loose his grip from the queen's skirt !

MERLIN : Assemble your men ! Surround them ! Take them out by the south road to the wood !

ULFIN : Spearmen ! To right and left, close in ! Hold ! Bind !

There is a tramp of feet, clatter and scuffling.

MERLIN : Then wait for me and for—somebody—who will ask for me !

MAGAN (*softly*) : He that shall come ?

JORAM : Treachery, queen ! Treachery ! I smell treachery.

VORTIGER : Gag him !

JORAM : Beware— !

He is silenced and dragged away.

VORTIGER : Now, dear wonder-worker——

ROWENNA (*raging*): I have borne enough. I left my young people for an old crown-wearer who could not hold himself upright on his usurped throne. Yes, you gave Kent for me in your folly, and then you gave, not for me, but for protection, all Britain to my father. But then you flung away the fruits of the bargain, and forced me to flee with you to this blind-alley of a kingdom, to lodge with owls and bats and Welshmen in a tumbling castle of the wilderness. What gain have I had ? I have heard myself called traitor by my own people, and heard your people call me traitor. I have been chased across Britain, highway, byway, and ploughed field, robbed of my state, my horses, my jewels——

Her voice is drowned by the movements of ULFIN'S troops,

VORTIGER ignores her, as he speaks to MERLIN.

VORTIGER : Now, dear friend! You are rid of your enemies. Now and now—what happens to me ?

MERLIN : Of tomorrow I can tell you nothing.

VORTIGER : What is this ? After such promises—nothing ?

MERLIN : How can I ? I have never visited the hell of the false stewards.

VORTIGER : What is this ?

MERLIN : This ! You were the servant of good king Constans. He trusted you in death with his son. But you—you hired your Picts to murder the young king. They will remind you of that in hell. And when you had driven out the dead boy's brother, Uther Pendragon the heir, you clambered on to the great throne and sat there like a dog in his master's chair, licking your chops. Then, when your Picts turned on you—why ? Could you not pay them, or did you cheat them also ?—then you brought in Hengist and his Germans to hold you steady on the stolen throne. But Hengist had a daughter, eh, old besotted man ? She was beautiful.

ROWENNA : Am I also arraigned ?

MERLÍN : Ah queen, no-one denies that you are beautiful! Your golden plaits reach to the knee. Your skin is as rosy as the lining of a sea-shell. Small blame to you, Vortiger, if you sold Kent for this princess. And yet your son blamed you. Your love-making sickened your own son. Why else did he lead the Britons against your friends ? But your princess went to him—did you know it, Vortiger ?—and she poisoned your son in a friendly cup of wine. That wine you shall drink in, hell tomorrow and it shall burn your heart. You will remember also in hell how the aliens killed your Britons by treachery on the night of the Long Knives. But you they took and tossed in a blanket for their sport, and when they let you down you sold them the rest of Britain. Yes, you rode across Britain giving away the cities—Winchester to Hengist's butler, London to his cup-bearer—in dishonour you gave all before you were chased out of the land. And now, King Vortiger, they will not leave you even this wilderness. Hengist is marching hither. Look to the east, and flee into your castle, King Vortiger!

VORTIGER : There is no wall. What am I to do ?

ROWENNA (*screaming*) : The swans ! The red swans ! The red light upon the swans !

THE WOMEN : Fire ! Fire !

THE SWANS :

Who—who—who is so wild ?

Who—who—who is so light ?

Call—call—call to the hills :

"Flame—flame—grows from the grass."*

Dawn—dawn—who is so red ?

Sun—sun—who is so bright ?

Wind—wind—who is so swift

*s fire in the night, fire in the night ?

THE WOMEN: They have filled the dyke with wood.
 ———They have set fire to the dry wood.———The
 wind is wafting the fire back across the eastern road.——
 We are cut off.

VORTIGER: Make for the south road I

MERLIN: How can you take the south road? The barons
 of Britain march against you from the south. Uther Pen-
 dragon is here—three days landed. His army fills the woods.
 Hark! The trumpets of Britain.

VOICES (*from the crowd*): I see spears!———They flash
 red!———I see the Dragon banner of Uther.———
 The Red Dragon is lit by the flames.——Fire!

VORTIGER: Which way? I have no sword. Which way?

MAGAN: We die between two armies, between the Red
 Dragon and the White.

ROWENNA (*screaming*): The grass changes colour. The lake
 is red and white, red and white!

VOICES (*from the crowd*): Back!———Back to the
 castle I

ROWENNA: The skies rain blood.

VORTIGER: Out by the tower gate!

VOICES (*from the crowd*): The tower has fallen across it.
 ———The way is barred by flames.——Which
 way?——Which way?

VORTIGER: The lake! We must swim for it.

ROWENNA: I will not swim in blood and fire.

• VORTIGER: Merlin! Help us, Merlin! Merlin has
 vanished. Merlin!

ROWENNA: The near tower—falling! Falling!

There is a crash, screams, and the roar of flames.

VOICES (*from the crowd, dying away*): Merlin!———
 Merlin I———Merlin!

The scene ends.

MERLIN (*as narrator*): Watch the wretched folk! The lake
 rises hissing against them. They run from the water to the

flames, and from the flames back into the water. Uther Pendragon's men shoot their arrows, and about each is bound a fiery turf. The arrows fall among the women. Their long hair catches. Their sleeves and their skirts spurt light. They fling themselves upon the men. Sheeted in fire men and women together plunge into the lake. There they quench, blacken, drown. The castle, stones strain apart, the wood-work blazes, the skeleton roars to the sky : its towers are trumpets of flame. Even Uther Pendragon draws back, and the Germans dare not approach Rowenna's pyre. Long must the armies wait before the ashes cool. But I wait not to see their battle again, nor to watch the flight of Hengist; for I know that fire is God's servant, sweeping his paths. The German plague shall be swept away by His servant, with the rat-holes, the lousy walls, the choked privies, and the huts of the slaves. All evil shall be destroyed in that judgement-flame, and tomorrow the Heir of Britain shall rule in a clean land.

THE SWANS :

Who—who—cries from the blue ?

Who—who—orders the flight ?

Day—day—calls to the swan :

"Free—free—free is the path
on into light, on into light! "

THE HOPE OF BRITAIN

CHARACTERS

MERLIN

KAY

KING ARTHUR

CADOR *sirlbur s hinsmen*

GERIN ,

ULFIN

A MESSENGER

A WOMAN

MOD RED

Arthur's nephews

GAVIN

QUEEN WENHAVER

CONSTANS, *Cador's son*

CROWD

MERLIN (*as narrator*) :

I am Merlin the prophet, no man's son.

I go and come through the years as I choose.

I was first seen in Britain

when the Germans came from over the sea.

Vortiger bought them. He died of his bargain ;

for I saw Vortiger slain by Uther Pendragon,

and I saw Germany flee before Uther Pendragon.

Uther reigned.

Then with spells I taught King Uther to win

Igern, dearest of women.

Of their love was born
my darling, my own young king,
God's dream and our refuge, Arthur of Britain.

But Uther lay sick, and the Germans
hammered again at our ports.
How could a baby rule ?
I stole Arthur away by night.
Uther knew.
Then dying King Uther drove his sword Caliburn
into a churchyard stone,
and said, all heard it :
"He who tugs out this sword,
he is my son and your king.
Wait, for he comes ! "

Now is Uther Pendragon many years gone.
No man can loosen the spell-bound sword.
The Britons wait;
but year by year more Germans harry the towns,
and the princes, nobles and knights
gather at last in London,
in spite of the people's faith and the dead man's word,
to choose a new king.

Now I, Merlin, judge the time ripe,
and to London I bring young Arthur,
fifteen years old.
Now is the tournament held.
Crowds gather and watch the games ;
but Arthur watches the knights.
He is itching to ride a fine horse,
itching for fighting gear.
My cloak is sober, my beard is grey ;
but Arthur is golden-young.

Now a young knight, Kay the quarreller, sees us.
Now curtain up ! Now begin !
Kay calls to Arthur.

The scene begins.

K A Y (*in the distance*): Hi I Country boy ! You with yellow hair and your mouth half open—come here !

MERLIN (*as a character in the scene*): Arthur, he means you.

ARTHUR : Who is he ?

MERLIN : His name is Kay. His father served Uther Pendragon.

K A Y (*nearer*): Answer when a knight speaks to you ! What's your name ?

ARTHUR : Arthur.

K A Y : Speak up !

ARTHUR : My name is Arthur.

K A Y : Well Arthur, I left my sword at the inn beyond the churchyard. Fetch it, will you, there's a good lad ! Tell them that Sir Kay sent you ! You'll find me over by the tents. (*To his horse.*) Come up !

He clatters away.

ARTHUR : The lovely horse ! I felt its soft muzzle while that Kay chattered.

MERLIN : And now, Arthur ?

ARTHUR : And now, Merlin ?

MERLIN : Well, are you going to run his errands ?

ARTHUR : Why not? I like him. He's like a busy young crow. Kay, Kay—caw, caw ! I wonder, is that armour of his heavy ? Walk faster, Merlin, he's in a hurry for his sword ! I wish I had a sword, and wore heavy armour.

MERLIN : Do you like it here better than in Avalon ?

ARTHUR : I don't know. It seems a hundred years since they waved good-bye to us across the mere. Why has no-one crossed to the island since I lived there, except you ?

MERLIN : It is a fortunate island. You are the only living man who has crossed the mere to the Isle of Apples and returned again.

ARTHUR : I think I do like Britain better than Avalon. I like the roads and the shying horses, and the knights in armour, and all the talking. Here's the inn. No-one about ?

MERLIN : Everyone's at the tournament.

ARTHUR : But why are the doors bolted and the shutters up ?

MERLIN : Against thieves.

ARTHUR : Thieves ? Is there no-one to keep order in this town of London ? I'd clear out the thieves if I—

MERLIN : If you——? Go on !

ARTHUR : I don't know what I was going to say. (*He knocks again?*) No-one comes. Shall I break in ?

MERLIN : Better not!

ARTHUR : Then how am I to get Kay his sword ? Sir Kay, I mean. I wish I could live among men like him, men in armour, dozens, hundreds. I'd like to fight with them, and march with them, and eat with them, all at one round table. Where do we turn now ? I can't go back to Kay with empty hands. (*A bell rings.*) Hark ! That's a bell like our chapel bell, only louder.

MERLIN : The chimes of Paul's Church are sounding the hour. Service is over.. People will be coming out in a minute.

ARTHUR : What are those crosses and stones ?

MERLIN : Graves.

ARTHUR : There are no graves in Avalon.

MERLIN : There is no death in Avalon.

ARTHUR : Merlin ! Look ! A sword ! No, ho, *no*, Merlin, you're looking the wrong way ! There ! Driven into that tall pillar ! How could it have got there ? May I take it—for Kay?

MERLIN : You may—if you can. This is the famous sword Caliburn.

ARTHUR : The hilt fits my hand.

CALIBURN (*singing*):

Who holds me, holds Britain.

Who takes me, takes Britain.

Who casts me away, serves Britain.

ARTHUR : Did you hear ? Is this *jour* magic, Merlin ?

CALIBURN (*singing*):

Who holds me, holds Britain.

ARTHUR : Merlin, Caliburn itself is singing.

CALIBURN (*singing*):

In my peaceful sleep I hear

the story of the year :

cockerels crowing,

heifers lowing,

haymakers calling,

water falling

orderly through the locks.

I hear the barges pass.

I hear the thyme and the grass

cropped by the eager flocks.

Church bells ring from every steeple.

All is well with the people.

Who holds me, holds Britain.

ARTHUR : The singing stops.

MERLIN : Because you took your hand from the hilt. Try again.

ARTHUR : Yes, Kay must have his sword. Ha ! Did you hear ? As I clasped the hilt the music began again. We might be in Avalon, where the air is always singing. Look—it's shifting!

CALIBURN (*singing*):

Afar, afar

I hear the coming war.

H6ofs beat.

I hear feet
running away from fear.
The human sheep
huddle together.
They stumble and weep
as death draws near.
The cities are fiery fountains.
They flee to the mountains.
Their bed is the roofless heather.
My voice
is victory. Rejoice !
But who takes me takes Britain.

ARTHUR : This Caliburn is the most terrible sword in the whole world. Fire runs up my arm from the hilt of the sword. Merlin, help me !

MERLIN : I cannot help you, Arthur.

ARTHUR : I will have it ! None shall take this sword from me.

CALIBURN (*singing*):

Who casts me away, serves Britain.

ARTHUR: I have it. I have it.

CALIBURN (*singing*):

The hand is strong,
the heart is high.
The king is young,
and cannot die.
My destiny is in the dust,
yet do I never rust.
Hold me, and reign !
Cast me away again !
Who casts me away, serves Britain.

ARTHUR : Cast you away ? Never ! Merlin, here's & name

graved—Caliburn. (*Shouting*) This is my sword Caliburn. Why do the bells ring? Merlin, the churchyard's full of people. Have they gone mad? They're kneeling among the graves. Should I kneel with them? They're laughing and weeping. What is happening, Merlin? Why are your eyes full of tears? And here come the knights from the tournament field. Hoofs oh, a frosty road—I never heard that sound before. How it marries with the bells! Kay is heading them, on that dear horse. He wants his sword. Oh, must I give up Caliburn to Kay?

KAY (*shouting*): Where is he? Where is the king?

ARTHUR: Why is he waving and shouting? Is it because of the bells? Here, Kay! Here! Shall I hold your horse?

KAY: YOU?

ARTHUR: I went to the inn for your sword, but it was shut.

KAY: YOU?

ARTHUR: But here is a sword——

KAY: This is Caliburn.

ARTHUR: Yes.

KAY: Did you wrench this sword out of the stone?

ARTHUR: Yes. Are you angry? It was not my fault that the inn was shut.

KAY: Who helped you?

ARTHUR: No-one.

KAY: Two hundred knights—I myself—could not free the sword.

ARTHUR: Why is he kneeling upon the frosty grass, Merlin? Why are they all kneeling—knights and lords?

MERLIN: Stand back! Give him time! He knows nothing. My foster-son, my young lord Arthur, read the writing on this stone!

ARTHUR: "Whoso pulleth out this sword is born king of all Britain." But—I pulled out this sword.

KAY: You hear, you all hear! It is your own sword, King Arthur. (*Shouting*) God save Arthur the king!

The voices of CADOR and GERIN are heard.

CADOR AND GERIN : Make way !

KAY (*unheeding*): I spoke to you first, King Arthur. I knelt first. My father was steward to your father. Now let me serve you, King Arthur!

CADOR : Get off your knees, Kay, young fool! Make way for your betters !

MERLIN : Arthur, this is Earl Cador, your father's cousin.

CADOR : Who saw the boy free the sword Caliburn ?

GERIN : Who is this boy ?

MERLIN : And this is Gerin of Chester, your father's cup-bearer.

CADOR : Gerin, he has Caliburn.

KAY : He is the king whose coming Merlin prophesied, and I am his steward.

GERIN : Folly!

CADOR : But—he free'd the sword, Gerin. Could you? We could not.

GERIN : It has worked loose, and now by some chance——

KAY : It was fast this morning when I tried.

Everyone laughs.

KAY : Well, is there a man in London who has not hoped—and failed ?

GERIN : Caliburn or no, I say, and I will maintain it, Uther Pendragon had no lawful heir.

There is a clatter of armour as ULFIN presses forward.

ULFIN (*a man in the forties*): Make way for me ! I am Ulfin, Pendragon's own man. I say, and I will maintain it, that this boy is as like Uther when Uther was young, as one red rose to another.

MERLIN : Ulfin !

ULFIN : Who calls me ?

MERLIN : Have you forgotten me, Ulfin ? Have you forgotten how we burned Vortiger, and brought in King Pendragon, you and I and Cador ?

ULFIN : Merlin !

CADOR : Merlin!

MERLIN : Ay, Merlin they call me in Britain.

ULFIN : Princes, knights, Londoners ! This is Merlin, who vanished away when Pendragon died. Confirm it, Cador !

CADOR : This is Merlin the prophet.

GERIN : Well—and Merlin prophesied that the - son of Pendragon and Tgerna should rule Britain. But Igerna had daughters only. The boy died at birth.

ARTHUR : Merlin, who am I ? I will not cheat, Merlin. Is Caliburn not mine ?

MERLIN : You hear him ! Me will not cheat—no, not to be king.

CADOR : That was Pendragon's way. Arthur, I am Pendragon's cousin Cador. I would be for you if I had proof that you are his son.

MERLIN : Cador, is my eye-witness proof ?

CADOR : Proof enough for me.

ULFIN : And for me.

MERLIN : Then listen ! Listen, young king, and nobles and knights ! Stop the bells ! Be quiet there among the graves ! Merlin, whom you have all forgotten, will give Britain a king once more. Listen ! The child did not die.

The bells stop.

MERLIN :

I stole Arthur out of his mother's room.

Uther knew—he unlocked the gate.

Mis torch flamed in the night.

(To ARTHUR.)

You he kissed; then bade me 'god-speed', **and**
'hurry !'

Long was the ride through the darkness,
you in my arm's crook.

You lay with wide eyes till I charmed your sight;
then you lay watching my face,
and above me the fading stars.

Morning rose behind us.
 The rays of the sun pursued us.
 I gripped with my knees the flanks of the wind ;
 for the March wind was my riding-horse that dawn.
 I wreathed my hand in his mane, flowing back, ever
 back.
 It smelt of spring as it flowed,
 smelt of mole-hill and grass—
 bitter and clean is the scent of the grass
 when cattle crop with a tearing sound.
 To my horse's mane clung the steam
 that puffs from bird-nest and burrow.
 My horse's mane had caught up tangle-weed
 from the dune, and badger's bedding, «
 and dry sweet golden horse-dung, prickled with
 oats.
 My tongue tasted cowslip and apple-wood smoke.
 My horse neighed as he fled,
 and below us the white sea-mares
 reared, and raced after our shadow.

THE PEOPLE :

So far below ! So high !
 Was he afraid ? Did he cry ?

MERLIN :

Afraid ?
 Then your darling, your own young lord,
 Arthur, the king to be,
 grabbed with each fist at the whipping, invisible mane,
 turned in the crook of my arm,
 kicked free of the cloak-fold,
 and over my wrist as I clutched him
 gazed down on his kingdom of Britain.

THE PEOPLE ; On us, King Arthur ! On us !

ARTHUR : Merlin, I know what comes next 1 I have dreamed this dream. They called to me—people and counties and towns.

" Sweet! " fluted the birds of Kent,
"Pottles of strawberries, pottles of cherries,
for you, little king, to eat! "
(Merlin, I dreamed this dream.)

" Sit in your own high seat! "
Dunedin cried :
and Glasgow : " I'll serve you with cakes."

Dimly, through mist, Northumberland, Cumberland,
Westmorland, Durham, the daffodil lakes,
and the three high hills between Scotland and Trent,
Pendle, Ingle, and Penigent,
(Merlin ! I dreamed this dream,)
thundering southerly, petted me,
sending me down king's weather.

The moors cried : " Honey ! Honey !
Honey from all our heather ! "
Hereford promised me horses to ride.
Leicester promised me money.
Warwickshire promised to teach me powerful rhymes :
and Dorset to tell me tales of the good old times.
(Oh 1 I have dreamed this dream.)

Burton promised me beer,
Nottingham gloves of silk,
Suffolk sang : " Fair maids and foaming milk ! "
" Fleeces," bleated the long South Down,
" to keep King Arthur warm at the death of the
year."
Staffordshire cried : " I'll weave the cloak."

The Midlands mumbled through smoke :
" You shall have crocks and dishes."
And London mumbled through smoke :
" You shall have sceptre and crown."⁷
(Over and over again I dream this dream.)

Sussex knew of a draught of fishes,
a Chichester lobster, a Scsea cockle,
an Arundel mullet, a Pullborough eel.
Essex called : " Try my veal! "
And Wiltshire offered the moon, dripping wet from a
pond.

MERDIN (*quiet*) :

But we rode on and beyond
the voices of city and village
confusedly hailing Arthur, the king to be,
heading for Avalon till, from the pebble-ridges
echoed the rumble, tumble, drum,
the crash of the Devon combers
rolling home from the sea.

There the singing began.

Then the March wind eddied and ran
bucketing over the azure dapples,
spurning with crystal heel
the beech and the oak.
Down he drops with a rush,
down, and down, till I feel
marigold petals brush
the sole of my shoe,
and I wet the hem of my cloak
on the peaking lake ;
but we land at last, we two,
on the pasture-rim of the sedge,

lie and pant in a violet hedge
staring up at the bloom of apples,
till a girl of the singing valley runs to take
the boy from my arm to her own brown arms,
and he laughs, and I laugh to hear her sing :
" Safe in Avalon, held from all harms
is Arthur the young, while he learns to be king."

CADOR : Welt, I take your word for him, Merlin. I own him my cousin, Pendragon's son. But Gerin is right. He is too young to rule.

MERLIN : Youth is needed in Britain. Speak to them, King Arthur ! Tell your cousin and your chief men, and the people of London what sort of king is to reign Qver them.

ARTHUR : I——

CADOR : Why doesn't he speak ?

GERIN : This is a frightened schoolboy. Look at his white face !

K A Y : Now he's blushing.

ULFIN (*tenderly*) : A rose—a rose !

ARTHUR : I——

GERIN : He'll burst out crying in another minute.

MERLIN : Something must break, or break forth. Speak to them, King Arthur !

ARTHUR : Not to them! O God's Son, help the King's son ! I am to be a father to the young. I am to comfort the old. I am to break the wicked. I am to hold the people safe and love them, fight for them and die for them because I am theirs.

GERIN : Fine words !

ARTHUR : Cousin Cador, and Gerin, and all who look at me frowning, and shake your heads—I am young but I hold Caliburn. Then let us go into this church and let the priest crown me; for I am Arthur Pendragon and your gracious king.

CADOR : What are we to do ?

ULFIN : Kneel to the king !

CADOR : Gerin, what do you say ?

GERIN : lie's a good lad, but he's too young.

ARTHUR : Gerin, I need silence.

GERIN : He knows what he wants, at least.

The crowd quiets.

ARTHUR : Listen ! Above the people's breathing, through the rush of the wind, what is the sound ?

KAY : Galloping hoofs.

ULFIN : The anger of church bells far away.

GERIN : I hear nothing.

ARTHUR : Listen again !

GERIN : I hear them. Yes, I hear them now.

KAY : I see a rider on a spent horse. Lie's shambling up Ludgate Hill. People are running beside him.

VOICES (*from the crowd*): Ring the bells!———Danger !
———The pirates !———Close the city gates !———
News !———Ring the bells !

There is great clamour. Almost immediately the alarm bells begin to ring, and hoof-beats sound close at hand.

A MAN'S VOICE : Where's Earl Cador ? Help me down ! I'm half dead with galloping.

ARTHUR : Kay, bring him here ! Carry him, if you must ! Ulfin, Cousin Cador, Gerin, stand close ! (*To the man*) Now ! What news ?

THE MAN : 111 news. Pirates have burnt the coast towns. They are making for York.

ARTHUR : How many ships ? Who leads them ?

THE MAN : I was sent to Earl Cador. Who is this boy ?

ARTHUR : Tell your tale to me I I am the king.

THE MAN : The king ?

ARTHUR : Get your breath ! We have time. No need to crack your heart. Now—the news ! Quietly !

THE MAN : The German pirates have landed south of Durham. They are burning the villages and driving the cattle. I have killed three horses to get here—all for nothing.

Cador might have led us; but what can a boy do ?

ARTHUR : He is spent. Kay, have him taken to the inn and cared for : and see to the fine horse that carried him !

KAY : The inn will take in no stranger with this news clanging through London.

ARTHUR : They will take the king's guest. Now, Ulfin, first stop the silly bells, and open every gate ! Are we to crouch like field-mice behind our little ramparts, flat with fear, while they reap our fields ? Cador and Gerin, send messages to your counties that the fighting men march at once !

GERIN : Where do we gather ? Here ?

ARTHUR : Halfway to York.

GERIN : Then we meet them at York ?

ARTHUR : We must be there before them. We must drive them on to the moors and let snow and the winter bogs finish the work ; for—hear me, all of you ! This also is part of the coronation oath—the crowning can come later. No German man shall get a foothold in my kingdom. No longer shall their infamies trouble us. Never again shall they swear their false oaths of peace, nor-enjoy fellowship and honour. This I swear by the eternal grass under my feet, by the stones and hedges of Britain, by Thames and the Tower, and my sword Caliburn. Caliburn is witness.

A VOICE : God save King Arthur !

ARTHUR : He will save me, be sure, till my work is done. Kay, your horse for me ! So, into the saddle. Bring a horse for Merlin ! Cador and Gerin, ride beside me ! Ulfin and the rest follow—follow Caliburn !

VOICES (*from the crowd*): The king !———The king !

ARTHUR : See, I draw Caliburn, and Caliburn sings !

CALIBURN (*through the clamour*):

I am the Sword.

No-one may draw me but Arthur.

When I am needed

Arthur, calls me by name.

ARTHUR : Caliburn ! Caliburn ! Caliburn !

AS his voice dies away the noise and trampling of the crowd in turn fade.

The scene ends.

MERLIN (*as narrator*): Spin the wheel of years ! Spin I As a farmer chases rats from barn to barn, so Arthur chases the pirates in these years up and down Britain, over the hills, into the woods and caves, up to their necks into the sea, until the leaders and their great emperor are slain. Then he turns north against the Picts and those traitors who received the enemy. By Arthur's leave Cadur's men push ahead and fall upon the towns and villages north and west of the wood Celedon. There the dead lie in their hundreds, spread upon the rocks and sunk in the heather. The crows blacken the sky. Flies buzz. The trumpets sound, and Arthur and the sun rise together over the hill. He marches down into the valley, and beside him and close*behind him march Kay, Ulfín, Gerin and the rest. Arthur dismounts from his horse. His two nephews, the young pages Gavin and Modred, take the bridle and his cloak from him. Then he speaks to me.

The scene begins.

ARTHUR : So after ten years we meet Peace, the stranger. Nothing is left but traitors and the crows. Then let us walk in the wood, Merlin, while my scavengers do what has to be done!

MERLIN (*as a character in the scene*): Hard is Arthur the young.

ARTHUR : Try fighting gently against an enemy, and those who harbour him ! Come into the shade of the wood !

There is- a distant scuffle and a scream', then a WOMAN'S voice rings out.

THE WOMAN (*far away*) : Let me go ! King Arthur, have some pity ! What have the little children done ?

KAY : The prisoners have broken from their guards. A woman leads them. There's a child in her arms.

THE WOMAN (*nearer*): King Arthur, give us mercy ! Is it our fault that the enemy came ? Did it delight us when they swaggered into our villages and killed our men, and sat down in our houses ? They slept in our beds : they ate up our food : they took our goods and sent them to their own country. They were trampling beasts to us, King Arthur. And now you come—not to save, but to destroy us too.

KAY : Silence her !

ARTHUR : Kay, who gives orders here ? Let her speak !

THE WOMAN : We are homeless. Why do you punish us, King Arthur ?

CADOR : Let me tell her ! You villagers got easy terms for yourselves. You sat snug while the rest of Britain burned. Now you can pay.

THE WOMAN : No help came. What could we do ?

GERIN : You could have fled to the woods and starved, like the rest of us.

THE WOMAN : You are great lords. You do not starve.

ULFIN : Poor beasts ! But Gerin is right. Treachery must not be profitable.

KAY : Leave them to us, King Arthur !. The howling w^Till soon be over.

THE WOMAN (*frantic*) : Don't listen to them, King Arthur ! Listen to your own people !

GERIN : King Arthur, be careful how you weaken ! These women were friendly with the heathen.

THE WOMAN : From fear ! From fear !

ARTHUR : I hate the fearful.

THE WOMAN : Kill us, then ! But first take the child from my arms, King Arthur, and order it to be buried ! It died two days ago, but you have chased us day and night. They would not let me stop to dig a grave for her, King Arthur, little as she is. Look—little and naked !

ARTHUR : Merciful Christ !

MERLIN (*softly*): Now young Arthur speaks—now he speaks.

ARTHUR : Gently—take the baby from her ! Wrap it in my

cloak to be buried ! Send out messengers to stop the killing, and to succour the wounded I Give them food and clothes, and be pitiful! This is my order to you all. (*Further away*) Come, Merlin !

MERLIN (*unhurried*) : Wait! You're too quick for us. Your small servants are out of breath. Eh, Gavin ? Eh, Modred ?

There is a jingle of the horse's bridle as a young boy's voice answers:

MODRED : How do you know our names ? We were only sent to my uncle the king two days ago, when my mother was sure it was peace. We are my uncle's new pages, my brother Gavin and I.

MERLIN : Well ? You want something from Merlin ?

GAVIN : We were afraid to ask my uncle. Are we to come with you into the heavenly wood ?

MERLIN (*calling*): Arthur ! You must wait for us, Arthur !

ARTHUR : Must ?

MERLIN : Must! I am Merlin the master, and you are still my pupil, King Arthur of Britain. These smaller pupils want a holiday.

ARTHUR : Are they afraid of me that they come to you with their wants ?

MODRED : Gavin is ! At least he's afraid that you won't let him climb trees in his page's suit. But we could bring you back a young squirrel.

ARTHUR : Modred is always the spokesman, Merlin. Modred's the clever one.

MERLIN : And how old is Modred ?

MODRED : Sir, I'am soon thirteen.

ARTHUR : When I was fifteen they crowned me king, and gave me an enemy to fight. You have three years to go, my nephew.

MODRED : I know.

ARTHUR : You know ? What do you know ? Well, tie the horses to a tree, then you may run away and climb !

MODRED : Thank you, sir ! Gavin, don't run off I (*As he*

goes) I shall climb higher than you, Gavin. King Arthur wants a squirrel.

ARTHUR : That boy has the charm of the world. I shall make him my heir. Or else he shall share with Gavin, as my father Pendragon shared with his brother.

MERLIN : And when you marry ?

ARTHUR : Oh, so they have been at you, Howel and the rest I I know. Howel has two daughters, and Gerin a niece, and Cador a cousin.

MERLIN : Wenhaver ?

ARTHUR : That was the name. Cador has sent for her, he tells me. And then he tells me that the country needs a queen, and that she has eyes of Roman black, with broom-blossom hair.

MERLIN : A queen and an heir we must have. But to marry Wenhaver would bring bad luck to Britain. So much I may tell you.

ARTHUR : I will not marry anyone. I was brought here to fight and to give the country peace. Well, I have done what you trained me to do, and now I tell you plainly, Merlin, I have done enough. Let Cador of Cornwall, who is a strong man and a good man, hold the kingdom for these boys, Gavin and Modred, and in three years the clever one, Modred, can do as well as I did at fifteen. But I—I go back to Avalon.

MERLIN : One day.

ARTHUR :

Oh, little island, my home !

Are the plovers back to whistle
across the mole-scattered loam ?

With yellow reeds have they thatched
the greystone house again ?

Are all its eaves new-gilt,
or is the old brown-velvet patched
wherever the starlings built ?

O little isle, is it hot and sunny,
and do you long for rain ?
Are there bees in the carline-thistle ?
No, too early for thistledown seed ;
but the brook will be white as a bride with water-weed,
and the fields alight with June*

Close to the edge of the mere
the garden glows, the garden shows
carnation, martagon, gilly, rose.
O little isle, did they prune
your apple-trees well last year ?

I tell you I am going home now to the Isle of Apples and my playfellows, home to Morgan, Avalon's unageing mistress, who called to me as the water widened between us : " You will come back."

MERLIN : Yes, you remember the shape of the island, the sunshine, the flowers, the taste of cider running new and hard from the presses ; but tell me—can you remember the colour of Morgan's eyes ?

ARTHUR : Her eyes were heavy-Hdded.

MERLIN : What colour ?

ARTHUR : She looked at you sideways, through veils.

MERLIN : What colour ?

ARTHUR : Blue—grey—I have forgotten.

MERLIN : I will ask you another question. Her voice—high or low ?

ARTHUR : T——

MERLIN : A bird singing ? The chime of water ? A husky cry of the dark ? What was the music ?

ARTHUR : I have forgotten the music of Morgan's voice.

MERLIN : How tall was Morgan the Fay ?

ARTHUR : She did not look up when she kissed me.

MERLIN : You are taller now. And the shape of her mouth ?

ARTHUR : Why do you torment me ? It's all too long ago.

Well, I have myself, my kingdom and my victories. I have all I need.

MERLIN : Also you have Merlin.

ARTHUR : Untether the horses ! Let us gallop out into the open fields ! If I fight with a dream I shall win—it weighs so light, so light, after all, against my sword Caliburn.

MERLIN : But I am Merlin of the wood. You are my guest in it. You shall not go disheartened from my castle. Look, I have spread you a carpet of bugle, blue flowers, blue towers ! I have walled you with close-growing woodland, honeysuckle, ash-keys, beech and hazel. I have spread you a bed of bracken and powdery last-year's straw. The lamps of spurge shine green. The birds are lilting and flirting behind the wall of leaves. They shall sing for you this noon. I will cast a spell upon the nightingale for Arthur the young.

ARTHUR : The nightingale does not haunt so far north.

MERLIN : Yet nightingales shall sing ; for this is the wood of Caledon where I have a well, and a castle of air, and mastery. Listen to their song !

THE NIGHTINGALES :

We have seen lovers meet, seen lovers part
in our green wood.

Lovers make promises, yet they depart
from our green wood.

Their music and their misery is part
of our green wood.

ARTHUR : In Avalon the song is sweeter. Hark !

The voice of WENHAVER is heard, singing.

WENHAVER : •

I ran a mile to see the may
and hear the voice of June
when every bird has his tune.

The flies were stripe-and-spotted gold.
The grass was crystal cold
at break of day.

O little isle, is it hot and sunny,
and do you long for rain ?
Are there bees in the carline-thistle ?
No, too early for thistledown seed ;
but the brook will be white as a bride with water-weed,
and the fields alight with June

Close to the edge of the mere
the garden glows, the garden shows
carnation, martagon, gilly, rose.
O little isle, did they prune
your apple-trees well last year ?

I tell you I am going home now to the Isle of Apples and my playfellows, home to Morgan, Avalon's uhaigeing mistress, who called to me as the water widened between us : ⁶ⁱ You will come back."

MERLIN : Yes, you remember the shape of the island, the sunshine, the flowers, the taste of cider running new and hard from the presses ; but tell me—can you remember the colour of Morgan's eyes ?

ARTHUR : Her eyes were heavy-lidded.

MERLIN : What colour ?

ARTHUR : She looked at you sideways, through veils.

MERLIN : What colour ?

ARTHUR : Blue—grey—I have forgotten.

MERLIN : I will ask you another question. Her voice—high or low ?

ARTHUR : I——

MERLIN : A bird singing ? The chime of water ? A husky cry of the dark ? What was the music ?

ARTHUR : I have forgotten the music of Morgan's voice.

MERLIN : How tall was Morgan the Fay ?

ARTHUR : She did not look up when she kissed me.

MERLIN : You are taller now. And the shape of her mouth ?

ARTHUR : Why do you torment me ? It's all too long ago.

Well, I have myself, my kingdom and my victories. I have all I need.

MERLIN : Also you have Merlin.

ARTHUR : Untether the horses ! Let us gallop out into the open fields I If I fight with a dream I shall win—it weighs so light, so light, after all, against my sword Caliburn.

MERLIN : But I am Merlin of the wood. You are my guest in it. You shall not go disheartened from my castle. Look, I have spread you a carpet of bugle, blue flowers, blue towers ! I have walled you with close-growing woodland, honeysuckle, ash-keys, beech and hazel. I have spread you a bed of bracken and powdery last-year's straw. The lamps of spurge shine green. The birds are lilting and flirting behind the wall of leaves. They shall sing for you this noon. I will cast a spell upon the nightingale for Arthur the young.

ARTHUR : The nightingale does not haunt so far north.

MERLIN : Yet nightingales shall sing ; for this is the wood of Celedon where I have a well, and a castle of air, and mastery. Listen to their song !

THE NIGHTINGALES :

We have seen lovers meet, seen lovers part
in our green wood.

Lovers make promises, yet they depart
from our green wood.

Their music and their misery is part
of our green wood.

ARTHUR : In Avalon the song is sweeter. Hark !

The voice of WENHAVER is heard, singing.

WENHAVER : •

I ran a mile to see the may
and hear the voice of June
when every bird has his tune.

The flies were stripe-and-spotted gold.
The grass was crystal cold
at break of day.

ARTHUR : A girl's voice !

WENHAVER (*nearer*) :

Yellow was broom on the bush.
In the midday hush
nightingale sang:
and in the midnight hush
nightingale sang.

ARTHUR : Is that voice part of the spell ?

MERLIN : This is no spell of mine. Too late !

ARTHUR : What is too late ?

MERLIN : Arthur, Arthur, this is a power which breaks my spell, as the brush of a bird-wing tears a web. Come away with me, King Arthur, before all is lost! Celedon-is a wood in rebellion. My power slips from my fingers. Arthur the young, come away !

ARTHUR : Where has a girl heard the songs of A valon ?

WENHAVER (*close at hand*):

I made my bed beneath the may
when bloom forsook the trees
with every breath of the breeze.
A dream was near as I lay down
on thyme and bracken brown
at close of day.

Summer was mine with a kiss.
In the midday bliss
nightingale sang:
and in the midnight bliss
nightingale sang.

ARTHUR : Here come a boy and a girl. Oh, the boy's Modred ! And here's Gavin running ahead of them.

GAVIN (*breathless*) : Uncle, there was a lady in the wood.

She hurt her foot. We must take her back to Cador's tent on your horse. There she comes, leaning on Modred.

MERLIN : Arthur, my foster-son, my only dear among human creatures, here come Love and Death, hand *in* hand. Never go to meet them, Arthur !

GAVIN : She was caught in the bog. Modred helped her out. She is five years older than Modred. She is eighteen. Her name is Wenhaver.

MERLIN : If you leap on your horse now, Arthur, and ride away down the glade, my spells will be stronger than hers. You will escape and Britain will escape.

ARTHUR : Spells ? Am I a child ? Don't you see that she is limping ?

WENHAVER : I was craning after peppermint and asphodel on the edge of the bog, and it quaked suddenly and sucked in my shoe. Is this King Arthur ?

ARTHUR : Yes. Is this my cousin Wenhaver ?

WENHAVER : I am Wenhaver.

ARTHUR : I knew it. Black eyes—broom-blossom hair. There could not be two women with such eyes and hair. Boys, run back to your climbing ! Cousin Wenhaver, you are trembling. Your lips are white. Your hands are cold. Let me warm them !

WENHAVER : I was frightened. A bog is a hateful place.

ARTHUR : Fil spread my cloak on the turf. Sit and rest a little, and then we will put you on Merlin's horse !

WENHAVER : Merlin the spell-binder ? I'm more afraid of Merlin than the bog.

ARTHUR (*laughing*) : Merlin, do you hear her ? (*In a changed voice*) Merlin ? Merlin, where are you ? Why are you playing tricks ? There's no sign of him. Cousin, did you see him go ?

WENHAVER : I thought I saw the shape of a man as I came down the glade. Then I saw that it was only a shadow. Then I saw that it was not even a shadow, but a trail of old-man's-beard on the thorn-bush. Look, there it is still,

a grey gossamer from last year's trail! The wind is blowing it away under our eyes. Now there is nothing there, King Arthur. There is no-one in the hot and silent wood.

ARTHUR : No-one but Wenhaver and Arthur.

WENHAVER : Arthur and Wenhaver.

THE NIGHTINGALES :

We have seen royal strength meet royal grace
in our green wood.

Arthur and Wenhaver stand face to face
in our green wood,
and Merlin is a shadow out of place
in our green wood.

Do they love and do they kiss ?
Was ever in our wood such famous bliss
as now between these two ?

Is he dear and is she true ?
But ask the nightingale no more of this !
Should not the sweet be true ?

I have seen royal grace delight a king
in our green wood.
Of Arthur and of Wenhaver we sing
in our green wood,
and Wisdom's unremembered murmuring
in our green wood.

The scene ends.

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

Spin the wheel of the years !
In the flicker and din
I see events :
Wenhaver is crowned.
I see the Table Round.

I see cities of tents,
battles and junketings—spin !
The men are the king's,
guileless and stern.
The girls are made
to Wenhaver's pattern, all grace,
slender and cool as fern,
knowing each other's secrets, unafraid,
judging the men.

Each church has a straining steeple,
each town a new market-place,
each city a master-road.
London spreads like a wen.
Christmas is kept, and the people
wear shoes and have money to spend.
Ships in each port unload
fantastic cargoes of oranges, ermine and jade.

Spin the tale to an end !
Spin twenty years !
Spin !

There is a flourish of trumpets.

MERLIN (*as narrator*) :

Hear the clarion of France,
the challenge of Rome.
New wars begin.

Arthur crosses the sea with his band,
Gavin bearing his shield and lance;
but Modred, his dearest, his heart,
he leaves to govern the land
under the queen's hand.
" This," say the people, " is wise.

Arthur grows old and apart;
but Modred is young and strong.
Wenhaver also is young."

Spin the wheel! Once ! twice ! thrice !
The wars arc over, Arthur comes home.
He calls for his Merlin. Britain rings
with the cry.
The wind halloos to the sky :
"Arthur needs Merlin, Merlin !"
Down shoots a star. It is I
in the shape of an old, bent man,
eyes full of tears,
fond hands touching the king's
after long years.

The scene begins.

ARTHUR : After long years, foster-father and friend! Sit here beside me in the Queen's seat I This clatter of iron is Gavin, my nephew. (GAVIN *laughs*.) He was with me overseas. His brother—you remember the clever one ?

MERLIN (*as a character in the scene*): Modred ?

ARTHUR : Modred. I left him behind to keep Britain and my queen in order. They know nothing yet of the victory or my return. My queen Wenhaver says that I can't keep a secret; but Gavin and I shall have the laugh this time. My dear Wenhaver! Well, another week and we shall all be together—we who love each other.

MERLIN : It is true that I love you, King Arthur the young.

ARTHUR : Nobody has called me that since you vanished from my sight. Why did you leave me, Merlin ?

MERLIN : Does the cliff retire from a wave ? Does the leaf discard the tree ? You left *me*, Arthur. Once I had hair of gold; but in Avalon I gave you its gloss and colour. Once I was a man, but I gave you my strength, year by year, till

at last I went greyly, a quiver of the air, a trail of old-man's* beard in woody Celedon. But now you also are a grey man, King Arthur, and your mind has worn its own deep channels, and so, my once-pupil, we are visible once more to each other.

ARTHUR : I am always your pupil.

MERLIN : When you were my pupil I gave you a task to perform.

ARTHUR : To rule Britain. You are right to call it a task. A hundred and fifty knights sit at my round table, and each thinks himself king of Britain but for bad luck. Each has his train of other hundreds, and these have servants, and grooms, and every one of them knows that he could rule Britain better than I. And then there are the women. (MERLIN *laughs*.) Ah yes, laugh ! But before I take a fresh lesson from you, Merlin, I shall marry you to a woman of Britain.

MERLIN :

Marry with flesh and blood—I ?

I have hunted the sylph across and across
each ripple and drift of a mackerel sky.

I have slept with a troll in a cave
lit by snail-shine, bedded on ling.

Adam-dross—I ?

I have leaped up from Etna to covet a lightning flash,
while salamanders laughed and sprang
after me, high, high, high.

In a pool I heard a mermaid splash,
and as she sang

she gave me combings of her green hair.

I have plaited them into a ring,
this ring that I wear.

Marry with death and mud—I ?

ARTHUR : I don't believe a word of it, airy word-spinner
with a sham white beard that I could pull off with one jerk

of my mundane fist. Has anyone else ever tweaked your beard, Merlin? .

MERLIN : Remember that you're a middle-aged king nowadays, not a spoilt boy in Avalon ! Well, how did you manage your Britons ?

ARTHUR : I showed them good sport. First we pulled down the' castles that preyed on the high-roads ; then we smoked out the usurers and toll-keepers, and hanged the tax-gatherers who said they came from me : and after that I made a law. If a fool borrows, it's the other fool's risk. His plot of land, his cottage and his pig cannot be taken to pay the debt.

MERLIN : That law will soon be broken.

ARTHUR : Not while I live.

MERLIN : When you're dead they'll break it.

ARTHUR : Then I'll come back from my grave to enforce my law.

MERLIN : What can a grey ghost do ?

ARTHUR : A drift of vapour—must I come back so ? Then I will come in the dawn-mist rising from Romney Marsh, as the fleece of dew on the downs, as the night-wind roving through the woods. As sleep I will wrap my thought about the houses, whispering : " People, this is your land ! Land, this is your people ! High and low, rich and poor, all sit at the round table of Britain. I say, King Arthur the young says—the land and the people are one."

MERLIN : You put this to the nobles and merchants of Britain ? .

ARTHUR : Why not ?

MERLIN : You said that the lands they ruled and purchased were not their own but held in trust for the people ? That was a mad saying. How can they forgive that saying ? .

ARTHUR : It's true that they're restless. The war with Rome kept them busy, but already they are asking " what next ? " I lie awake wondering how to turn their swords

into ploughshares. Then I fall asleep, and I dream a bad dream. I've had it every night since I landed.

MERLIN : What is the dream ?

ARTHUR : I dream that I sit in my great hall with Wenhaver beside me, and through the window I see all Britain lying harvested. Then comes Modred with an axe, and begins to hew down the hall posts, and before I can cry out Wenhaver puts up her hand and pulls down the painted roof upon us all, so that I tumble to the ground, and my sword arm breaks. But with my left hand I catch up Caliburn and smite off Modred's head. Then the queen runs from me through ruins into the wood Celcdon, where she falls into a quaking bog of asphodel and peppermint, and is pulled under. But I go through wildernesses till I reach a lake of fire, and as its waves sweep me away I wake trembling. Well ? What do you think of it, Merlin ? Is it a warning ? Did Morgan send it out of Avalon ? And why is Morgan, and why is Avalon in my mind again after all these years ? Interpret !.

• MERLIN : Arthur the king, my boy Arthur, you are the wisest ruler the land has ever had. If—:

ARTHUR : If ?

MERLIN : It will not, could not—but if the dream could mean that your sister's son Modred—

ARTHUR : My clever one ?

MERLIN : —had seized the kingdom——(ARTHUR *laughs*.) Yes, laugh ; for if he were the most treacherous beast alive, still you are the strongest of all kings. You could regain Britain.

ARTHUR (*still laughing*) : How could Modred betray me—Modred, the charm of Britain ? Ah, you haven't seen him yet. You'll be won. Any man to whom he speaks is his possession,

MERLIN : And any woman ?

ARTHUR : Enough !

MERLIN : If Modred seized the kingdom and the queen——

ARTHUR : Enough ! You have grown childish with the years. I am sorry.

MERLIN : Arthur——

ARTHUR : Enough ! (*Slowly*). Not Wenhaver ! That is not to be believed—never, never ! Merlin, all souls could weaken away from me, but not my queen and soul.

MERLIN : King Arthur, I was your servant since the day you were born. I am the sole spirit of this great court, the sole man of all who watch us from a distance with beating hearts and pricked ears who has never lied to you. Listen now, and do not move, King Arthur ! Grip the lion-heads of the throne ! In your ear, Arthur—Modred has taken the queen. All Britain knows it.

ARTHUR : Wenhaver ! The eyes in the wood ! The jealous eyes I .

MERLIN : Grip the throne, Arthur ; for now I speak to all I (*Loudly*) King Arthur, this is the treachery of Modred. He has stolen from you your wife Wenhaver, and your kingdom of Britain. They call themselves king and queen. They march against you now, with German allies. Yes, and yes, the evil days are back ; for Modred has again called-in the aforetime enemy whom you and your father drove out. King Arthur, look through the window of your dream. Those are not poppies and cornflowers in the harvested wheat. They are the banners, the pennants, the gonfalons of Modred and his men of prey.

ARTHUR (*enraged*) : Caliburn ! Caliburn ! The name of my sword is Caliburn, and Caliburn is thirsty.

GAVIN : Hear me ! Modred is my brother, my dearest. But today I strip him from me like a glove that has dabbled in filth. I will have no truck with this sin of my brother Modred. Bear witness, if I find him I will kill him ! If I can take him alive I will hang him to the beam of this hall. I am for King Arthur. I am for the flower of kings.

ARTHUR : Enough, Gavin ! Men of Britain, here is a strange welcome. Now hear my orders ! We run to meet this welcome. Within the hour we march on them. We will smoke out this treachery—judge—punish—slay Modred and burn the queen. I draw Caliburn.

CALIBURN :

I am the Sword.
No-one can draw me but Arthur.
When I am thirsty
Arthur calls to me : " Drink I "

I am the Sword.
No-one can wake me but Arthur.
When he is angry
Arthur calls me by name.

ARTHUR : Caliburn I Caliburn ! Caliburn !

The marching and the song die away. The scene ends.

MERLIN (*as narrator*) : .

Now all I foreknew comes to pass.
Now the last fight begins
as the great reign ends.
Up and down Britain Arthur rages
at Modred's heels. Modred has fled
to Winchester. Arthur pursues him :
burns Winchester. Modred escapes.
Arthur is sick with his loathing. .
He must end Modred the traitor
or for wrath he cannot live.
Hate! Hate! Hate!
Never did two men hate
as Modred hated King Arthur,
as Arthur hated his sister's son.
Then Wenhaver comes to Modred,
the queen, his bedfellow, wringing her hands.

The scene begins.

WENHAVER : Lies ! Treachery ! It is not Gavin who leads
the armies, as you made me believe. It is the king himself,

alive and furious. You swore to me that he was killed at Rome.

MODRED : We foreshortened a hope.

WENHAVER : I did not hope for his death. I wanted him away for a little while, till I had worked your poison out of my heart. You bewitched me with spells. I shall be burned, Modred, for your treacheries. Arthur knows. Arthur knows. Were we mad ? What have we done ?

MODRED : Loved each other. Would you undo happiness ? Would you give these last two years back to the old man ?

WENHAVER, : If I could undo these two years——

MODRED : You would not do it.

WENHAVER : What do you know of my life with the king ? I had no ears for anyone but Arthur till you came. You changed Arthur as I watched—clever one, clever one ! You quenched the light in his eyes : you made his smile foolish : you lessened his height : you slowed his speech. You blinded us to each other, and I let you do it. Oh, to unsay spoken words ! Oh, to unthink disloyal thoughts ! When you said to me first, flattering me : " He is too old for you," then I should have gone to Arthur——

MODRED : —and said : " Modred loves me. Punish him ! " Or : " I love Modred, because there is only five years between us, and he makes me laugh."

WENHAVER : You have laughed me out of life, clever one ! All Britain knows what we have done. It is better to be dead than alive, now that all the world knows and hates us.

MODRED : If I am hated I can be hateful. I will no longer be chased up and down, even though I weaken him by my twistings and doublings. I shall send you to the Abbey at Carleon, and then I shall make my stand by the great mere. If I am killed, you will be hidden and safe. If I live I shall come to you fast enough. Then Modred and Wenhaver shall reign over Britain and forget an old man's legend. So now kiss me and wish me luck !

WENHAVER : I am a wretched woman.

MODRED : Kiss me and wish *me* luck—not him !

WENHAVER : Modred ! Modred !

MODRED : This touch is mine. This kiss is mine.

WENHAVER : You should have left me to drown in the bog of Celedon.

The scene ends.

MERLIN (*as narrator*) : This was the farewell of Modred and Wenhaver, who had parted Britain between them like a lover's crooked sixpence. No more is heard of Wenhaver. But Modred gathered his tattered army, and withdrew to the west. There Arthur with his spent remnant met him, and there the last battle was fought on the edge of the mere. There perished all who had been young and brave with Arthur. As the sun set over the field the dead lay against the stooks of corn, and the poppies and the blood were indistinguishable. None saved their lives but the camp followers and here and there a page boy with a masterless horse. But Modred lived and Arthur, and Cadbor's son, the boy Constans. Then I came creeping outwards from the mere, and I called to Arthur.

The scene begins.

MERLIN (*as a character in the scene*) : King Arthur !

ARTHUR : Is it Merlin ? My own blood blinds me. Help me, Merlin ! Caliburn will not sleep till I find Modred.

MODRED (*far away*) : Who calls Modred ? I live.

ARTHUR : Can you see him, Constans ?

CONSTANS : He moves among a great heap of dead men.

MODRED : Is it the king ? I come. Wait for me, Arthur !

ARTHUR : Merlin ! Constans ! Set me on my feet ! Now, Caliburn !

CONSTANS : Sir, you are all wounds, and the man is dying. Look how he stumbles ! He cannot run three yards.

MERLIN : Child, be silent! These are gods at war.

ARTHUR : Put my hand on the hilt of Caliburn ! This is the most terrible sword in the whole world. Fire runs up my arm from the hilt of this sword. Now, traitor! You shall not die of those streaming wounds! Here is your death wound. Take it!

They begin to fight.

MODRED : I take and I give.

There is the sound of crashing blows.

ARTHUR (*laughing*) : Clever one !

There is a clatter of armour as MODRED falls.

CONSTANS : Modred is dead'.

ARTHUR : No more climbing, Modred! But I stand. I stand. Never was such a red sunset. Turn my face to the mere, Merlin! Ah, in my dream I saw these waves of fire. Now, Caliburn!

CONSTANS : But there is no-one left to kill.

ARTHUR : Hush ! Caliburn sings.

CALIBURN (*singing*):

The hand is strong.

The heart is high.

The king is young

and cannot die.

Take me and reign !

Cast me away again !

ARTHUR : Who casts away all, serves Britain !

The sword splashes into the water. Far away women's voices are heard singing.

CONSTANS : Did you see ? A fiery **wave leaped up and** snatched the sword.

ARTHUR : They are singing in Avalon.

CONSTANS : A boat is crossing the mere.

ARTHUR : This boat is sent for me.

WOMEN'S VOICES :

Rest in Avalon, safe from all harm !
Rest in Avalon, Arthur the king,
safe from all harm !
Kingcups grown on the rim of the sedge
safe from all harm.
Lie at ease in a violet hedge,
cool and sunny,
cool and sunny,
staring up at the azure dapples,
safe from harm in the Isle of Apples!
Rest in Avalon, safe from all harm,
safe from all harm,
'all harm !

ARTHUR : Cador's son, my little cousin, I give you my kingdom. Defend my Britons till I come again, and keep the good laws I go to Avalon till these wounds heal. Merlin ! Morgan is in the boat, and I remember.

THE VOICES (*singing*):

Safe is Avalon, safe from all harm
is Arthur the young, is Arthur the king.

MERLIN : And as they sing the boat grounds gently. Now the king shakes off our help, and runs stumbling through the red ripples. The women catch him and lift him into the boat. Morgan beckons me also, but I stay by the shivering child. He holds my hand fast, and we watch the boat lightly rocking over the waves of fire. It is soon out of sight.

CONSTANS : Is he gone for ever ? What hope for Britain ? When will he come again ?

MERLIN : When ? I do not know, though I am Merlin. But this I know, little king. An Arthur will yet come to help his people.

The singing dies away.

THE PLAY ENDS

ENGLAND'S DARLING

CHARACTERS

MERLIN

A COWHERD'S WIFE

THE COWHERD

KING ALFRED

*Crowd of men and boys from Hampshire, Surrey, Sussex, Kent,
Essex, Wessex, Wiltshire, Mercia, and Berkshire,*

MERLIN :

Merlin, Merlin am I.

I dream and I prophesy.

When to Avalon Arthur passed

I turned my back upon fabulous Britain, my toy.

My dreams do not last.

All my joy

is in swift making

and swifter breaking ;

but sometimes the dream will not die.

I was remote in my tower of air,

many a year.

Many a dream slid by.

Then I heard a young voice cry :

" Merlin, remember Britain ! Merlin, I come
again."

Oh, then I was shaken by human desire and pain!

" Is it you ? Is it you, my king ? "

There came no answer, only the sound of spring

lifting to me, so light, so slight at first—

a purring whisper

in every hazel when catkins toss
their pollen down to the moss,
a tinkle of ice in the sedge,
whimper of Babylon willow,
sigh of the velvet osiers,
whip of sallow,
and dry in the wind, the crisp
creak of the wicker hedge,
spatter of berry husk
upon last-year fern
and this-year bracken-crozier,
foxes and mice in the dusk,
mole coming up with a burst,
and blindworm slipping through fallow
to the sunniest rut of the lane
where cart-wheels dare not churn
the drying clay,
squawk of a hungry nestling,
revel of dust and rain,
furious March with a tree-top wrestling,
or skirling weather-vane,
and fleeces of cloud by day
calling to cloud-like sheep—
" Brother, brother ! "
and nightly the Milky Way
calling to chalk-stream shallow—
" Brother, brother ! "

Then I also from centuries' sleep
arose crying—"Brother, brother ! "
and down to my foster-land I came.

I found all changed, even the ancient name
of the disenchanted isle.
My Britons call themselves Englishmen :
bleak are their looks,
on the women's lips no smile.

They are shifty, hunted, harsh,
a folk without God or books.
They huddle in forest and marsh,
and over the souring field
ever they watch the line of sky
for cow-horn helmet and gross round shield,
as their master, the Dane, goes by.

They have forgotten King Afthur, these children of the men who overran his Britain, which they call their England. But now England is taken from them in turn. All kingdoms have surrendered to the new invader except Wessex and the under-kingdoms, Essex; Sussex, Kent. Alfred is king of these lands ; but he has vanished. Some say that he is killed, some that he has fled to Rome.

Now come with me to a cowherd's hut on the edge of Selwood Forest. A handful of men armed with spear, bill-hook and rusty sword, lie asleep on trusses of hay. As the cowherd's wife clatters in with pails full of milk they stir, sit up, and talk, but not to me. Oh yes, I am there, crouched beside the fire in the centre of the hut; but how should they know that I am Merlin? I seem to them an old, blind minstrel; but they do not elbow me from the hearth because I sing of Alfred, their lost king and leader. The play begins with my singing.

The scene begins.

MERLIN (*as a character in the scene*) :

England's shepherd, England's darling !
Once in England he was a king.
Grey-eyed Alfred, wise as winter,
England's shepherd, England's king.

Gone is Alfred, none has seen him,
England's darling, England's king.
The fen betrayed him, the forest slew him :
or did he forsake us, England's king ?

Without our strong man is no England.
He was England, he was the king,
England's shepherd, England's darling.
Where is Alfred, where is the King ?

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : Wake up, all you men! Here's what milk we can spare.

A HAMPSHIRE MAN : We don't fight on goat's milk—not in Hampshire.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : You'll get nothing else in these parts, with Edington Camp not thirty miles as the crow flies. Drink up your milk and be thankful that we hid our goats in the wood before the Danes passed.

THE HAMPSHIRE MAN : Danes or no Danes, we've got a long tramp ahead of us, and maybe fighting. We've a right to be fed. We're Alfred's men.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : Well, go and grumble to Alfred,—if you can find him.

MERLIN :

Ask the greenwood—where is Alfred,
wise as winter, bold as spring ?
Leaves of autumn, leaves of autumn,
leaf-mould cover for England's king.

A SURREY MAN : An oatcake would be something.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : I give you what I've got. King Alfred himself would be glad of your leavings, if all we hear is true. He wouldn't grumble at good new milk. It's time you were gone, the lot of you.

THE HAMPSHIRE MAN : Is the sun up ?

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : If you want to get to the Egbert Stone without the Danes catching you, you won't wait for sunrise. There's a bare mile of Roman road before the Great Wood begins, and you'll show up on the sky-line like crows on a gallows-tree.

A SUSSEX MAN : We'll need a guide. I don't know these parts. I'm Sussex—seely Sussex.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : Any fool can tell that by your way of speaking. I've housed thirty Sussex men in the last three days—(to A MAN OF KENT)—and two from your country.

THE MAN OF KENT : And what's my country ?

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : Kent. And that friend of yours and his boy are from Essex.

THE ESSEX MAN : And proud of it. Any more of our sort passed this way ?

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : Sixteen—all making for the Great Wood and the Egbert Stone, and the sooner you follow them the better. Lap up your drink and go ! Here, clumsy, you're spilling it ! Hold out the drinking horn and let me pour ! Don't waste good milk—it's scarce enough !

THE MAN OF KENT : All the same, mother, I smell baking bread.

THE BOY FROM ESSEX (*shrilly*) : And I saw her kneading the dough last night.

THE HAMPSHIRE MAN : Are you going to bake for us, or are you not ?

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : Now listen to me ! I've got oat-cakes baking in the ash at this moment, but they're for my man when he comes in, and for no-one else. He's not going without his breakfast. He's been up all night watching while you snored. Every night for a week now I've had your likes littering my flag-stones, though I said to him : " When they reach camp they'll have to lie out with the rest. If King Alfred can sleep in a wet beech pit, they can."

THE ESSEX MAN (*eagerly*) : Is King Alfred in camp already ?

The word's gone round that he'll meet us there, to head the march on Edington.

THE BOY FROM ESSEX : Is it true that twenty thousand Danes are in camp at Edington ? We're not thirty.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE (*kindly*): Snap your fingers at them, lad ! My man says that the Great Wood has more Englishmen than acorns in it—men of Essex, men of Kent, Duke Odda and a thousand men of Devon, five hundred who've slipped south from the Midlands, sick of slavery, and half Somerset under their Duke. There's a chance yet if you hulkers strike quickly.

THE BOY FROM ESSEX : You talk about King Alfred ; but how about King Guthrum ? He'll be making his plans too, and with a hundred and twenty thousand Danes to help him.

THE MAN OF KENT : You run home if you're afraid of the Danes.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE (*angrily*):

Who's to blame him ?

Afraid of the Dane !

And does that shame him ?

Once there were three in this cot.

The sun rose as it rises now,

just as red, just as fine.

I kept the house and the garden plot

as I do now.

My goodman drove the plough,

as he does now.

But once a little lad and his dog

played in the sun.

He carried his father's lunch-pail down to the bog,
rain or fine,

brings me home primroses, short stalks hot
from his hand,

ten years ago in spring.
 That summer in leafy Selwood, my child is king,
 hunts the squirrels and knows where the wild bees hive
 under the eglantine,
 never cries at a sting,
 finds ripe strawberries—he was my only-born—
 runs to me when his hands are bramble-torn.
 Afraid of the Dane ?
 Yes—while he was alive !
 Now, never afraid again
 of anything.

The Danes land.
 They catch my baby alone
 in a rutted lane,
 steep dandelion-banks on either side,
 nowhere to hide,
 nowhere to dodge or run.
 One spear-thrust serves the dog and my only son.
 Out go their little lights—and mine, and mine.

THE COWHERD (*outside, far away*): Mother! Mother !
 (*Nearer*) Hey ! Mother !

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : That's my man at last. **Open the**
 door, someone ! My hands are full

THE ESSEX MAN : Open the door for her, boy !

THE BOY FROM ESSEX (*outside*): The wind's **pounding**
 against it like a great bear.

THE COWHERD (*in the distance*): All well, Mother ?

The wind howls into the room.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE (*calling*): Well enough! **Who's**
 that with you ?

THE COWHERD : A sick man.

THE MAN OF KENT : Looks like a Wessex man.

THE WESSEX MAN : He's Wessex right enough.- I come
 from those parts myself.

MERLIN : I am an old blind singer. Lend me eyes, kind woman ! What appearance has this man ?

A free-necked man, or a lord ?
Does he hold his yellow head high ?
Does he carry a leaf-shape sword ?
Has he youth, and a kingly eye ?

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : You're a good guesser. He's no serf, that's certain. But he's hanging on my master's arm, and he's rammed his fist to his mouth, gnawing his knuckles. My man can hardly get him along. (*Raising her voice*) What's wrong with him ?

There is a stir as THE COWHERD enters', with ALFRED.

THE COWHERD : Fever. Make a place for him by the fire !
(*Raising his voice*) And shut out the wind I

The door bangs. There is a clatter of feet.

MERLIN (*as narrator*) :

The feet have shuffled
across the floor.
I hear the muffled,
the unaccusing sigh
of a dog at a harsh door
waiting in vain;
or a man who will not cry
aloud in his pain,
but wears it patiently
as a grey king his cloak of sovereignty.
Hear me ! 1 prophesy !
Arthur has passed. Arthur will come again.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : Who is this stranger ?

THE COWHERD : He's a sick man, I tell you. He's come from Edington overnight.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : From Edington ? How did he get past the Danes ?

THE COWHERD : By the way of the bog.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE (*suspiciously*): He knows the bog paths, does he ?

THE COWHERD : What's that to you ? Sit you down here, sir ! Mother, give him food !

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : None to spare.

THE COWHERD : Have you given away my breakfast ?

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : No, but——

THE COWHERD (*in an urgent whisper*) : He's to have it, because there's nothing too good for him, understand ? He's—he's——

ALFRED (*in a warning voice*): I am nothing—nothing.

MERLIN (*in the scene, as the minstrel*):

Ask the fenland—who has seen him,

England's morning, England's spring ?

Echo answers—England ! England I

Where is Alfred, where is the king ?

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : If he were King Alfred himself he'd have to wait till my cakes were baked. But he can drink this.

THE COWHERD : Yes, drink it down, sir ! And now get him to the fire ! I tell you, I found him crawling on hands and knees outside, making for the Egbert Stone.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : So he should be, if he's a fighting man.

ALFRED (*gasping*): I've fought all the king's battles, fever or no fever.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : Much pain ?

ALFRED : Much pain.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE (*more gently*): Then it goes away suddenly. Then you're in——

ALFRED : Bliss.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : And you forget it, and are as strong as the rest till it comes on you again. But the threat of it's always with you.

ALFRED : Always with me.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : I know. My brother bore it thirty years before it killed him. There's no cure. Sit by the fire and watch my cakes for me ! The fit's passing, eh ? Yes, warmth helps. I know the signs.

THE COWHERD : What is the sickness ?

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : None knows, not even the priest. But it's torment while it lasts. Ask my brother ! Watch my cakes, sick man ! (*Clattering away*) Open the cupboard for me, someone. I've only got one pair of hands.

The cupboard is opened and shut. MERLIN plucks his harp as the men talk among themselves.

THE MAN OF KENT : Who is he ?

THE ESSEX MAN : The cowherd said he came from Edington.

THE MAN OF KENT : What was an Englishman doing, free, near the Danish camp ?

THE SURREY MAN : Look at the bracelet on his arm !

THE BOY OF ESSEX : I think he's a spy.

ALFRED *laughs*.

THE HAMPSHIRE MAN : Not much wrong with him if he can laugh.

THE COWHERD : No need to whisper and stare ! I tell you I know him. And what's more, it's time you were moving. Get your bundles !

The men begin to move. Through the stir the COWHERD'S WIFE speaks to ALFRED.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : Is the pain easier ?

ALFRED :

O heat ! O refuge ! O bliss I

I praise the Healer, for the pain passes.

I praise His fire that drew out the pain.
 I praise His dark that hid me.
 I praise His moon that lit my path.
 I praise His primroses, they were my guides :
 I praise their pallid ways:
 and I praise His dawn, I praise His dawn
 that showed me a friend's face.
 I praise Him ! I praise Him !
 O refuge ! O heat ! O bliss !

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : None the less, don't try to move for an hour! Stay by the fire and see that my cakes don't burn !

She clatters out.

THE MAN OF KENT (*nearer*): Why did he laugh ? That's what I want to know.

THE COWHERD : Because he's as good a man as any here—and better. I tell you I'm his——

ALFRED (*quickly*): Friend !

MERLIN :

England's shepherd, England's darling !
 Once in England there was a king——

ALFRED : Old singer, lend me your harp I I shan't break it.

MERLIN :

No-one can break my harp,
 old as it is, and wrought of such thin gold.
 Kings in their time have sought to pluck (he
 strings.
 They could not wake my harp ;
 but you shall take my harp.

Few men can weave my spell,
thin as it is', and frail as love and sin.
Some there will be who hail the life to come
yet cannot weave my spell;
but you believe my spell.

A man shall sing my song,
lord of my peace, re-captured by a sword.
Royal the month that breathes this word of joy,
unsinging ancient wrong.
You, you shall sing my song !

THE SURREY MAN : Hey, you ! We don't like strangers
who jeer at us. We want to know why you laughed.

THE HAMPSHIRE MAN. : DO you hear us ? Who's to prove
you're not a spy ?

ALFRED (*gaily*) : But I am a spy. I'm the king's own spy.

I come alive from Edington,
even I, even I.
I spent a night in the Danish camp,
I, the king's spy.
I sang to Guthrum their king—
he called me friend—
the song of the fallen English,
the song of the woeful English,
I sang the flight of Alfred,
and England's end.
He gave me the bracelet I wear on my arm
for my sweet lies :
and tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow,
I'll fling his-gold in his teeth,
and I'll flash my sword in his eyes.

MERLIN (*muttering*): Caliburn ! Caliburn ! Caliburn is
thirsty.

ALFRED (*wondering*): Caliburn ?

MERLIN (*triumphant*):

The hand is strong, the heart is high,
the king is young and cannot die——

ALFRED : Caliburn was the sword of old King Arthur, who sleeps in Avalon. I read of him—in a book. Can you read ?

THE SUSSEX MAN (AS MERLIN *laughs*): Listen to their Latin-y speech! He's a run-away monk turned minstrel. They're masterless dogs. They go anywhere.

THE ESSEX MAN : Monk or minstrel, he's fought before now.

THE SUSSEX MAN : Ask him who he is !

THE ESSEX MAN : You ask him !

THE SUSSEX MAN : You can if you want to know.

THE MAN OF KENT : I'm not afraid to ask him. Hey, stranger with the bracelet, who are you ?

ALFRED : A rattle of hail on the Danes' helmets, ice on their sails, slippery sleet on their decks. King Guthrum leads the summer Army. I'm the winter wind.

THE SUSSEX MAN : Whose man ?

ALFRED : Alfred's man.

THE SUSSEX MAN : We follow Alfred. We're from Sussex.

THE MAN OF KENT : Kent !

THE ESSEX MAN : Essex !

THE SURREY MAN : Surrey !

A WILTSHIRE MAN : Alfred's men all, come out against the Dane.

Singing.

The devil sent fever—
the devil sent famine—
the devil sent plague—
to Salisbury Plain.

THE ESSEX MAN :

We cooled his fever,
we fed his famine,
we cured his plague—
so the devil sent the Dane.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : Stamping and shouting—you think an énemy can be a good fellow 1 Ask me—ask any woman ! We could teach you to sing of the Dane.

ALFRED : I learned *my* song from a woman.

My mother has told me,
she was a baby, but well she remembers
how the Danes came.
They came in their ships,
dragon head, dragon tail,
oared like centipedes,
over the Northern wave.

We had no ships.
We had no oarsmen.
We had forgotten the wont of the sea.
Barnacles clung to our ships.
They lay awash with stale water.
We slept in our barns, we despised the sea.

The coasts were unguarded,
unlit were the beacons.
We were inland, fighting our
brothers.
The rich men spoiled us,
the law-men spoiled us,
we were drained of our blood
by the knight, the noble,
when the Dane came suddenly
over our tame sea.

THE MEN :

For the devil sends fever—
the devil sends famine—

MERLIN : Let him¹ speak !

ALFRED :

The waves fought for us,
the winds fought for us ;
but we, we English, denied our allies.
We surrendered our sands,
we surrendered our sea-towns.
In Kent, in Dorset,
Devon, Southampton,
they fell on us, fleets of a hundred and fifty.
They burned, they pillaged, they murdered, they
raped.

We English ran up and down
shouting for weapons,
shouting for leaders,
running like ants when the stone is upturned.
When we reached the Danes
they were back in their ships,
mocking us, drinking our wine,
holding our women,
rich with our treasure.
Twenty years long they sacked us,
ere I was born.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : Yours was a lucky mother. My
small one was speared by the Danes.

ALFRED :

At first they were swallows of war.
They came with the spring, they fled with the **autumn**,

fat with our corn they fled from our winter.
Bleak were our winters then.

'Our fields were broken,
our swine driven,
our herdmen slain.
The peace of the land
was the peace of frost,
the peace of famine,
the peace of women ;
but God's peace nowhere,
nowhere in Britain.

Then one winter the swallows lingered
in the eaves of Sheppey,
the eaves of Thanet.
Under the roofs of Norfolk, of Suffolk,
there they harboured,
there they nested;
while the kings of Britain fled.

THE MAN OF KENT : He means Mercia. Their kings always
jun. First King Berthwulf, then King Burhred.

A MERCIAN (*angrily*) : Wherp's your King Alfred been all
these months ?

THE WESSEX MAN : Biding his time. Why are we joining
the Devon and Somerset dukes in the Great Wood ? Because
they've had word from Alfred.

THE MERCIAN : Well, I know what I know.

THE WESSEX MAN : What do you know ?

THE MERCIAN : That we've come on a fool's errand.
Alfred's fled.

THE MAN OF KENT : It's a lie.

THE MERCIAN : He's for **Rome**. My wife's cousin is a
shipman at Swanage. He saw Alfred **go aboard**.

MERLIN :

England's shepherd, England's darling!
Grey-eyed Alfred, child of spring.
Grey-eyed Alfred, wise as winter——

THE MERCIAN : Grey-eyed ? Well, this lord had frosty eyes, and he wore a king's jewel. No doubt it was Alfred.

A BERKSHIRE MAN : I come from Wantage. My mother was the king's nurse. Alfred's eyes are blue.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : All babies' eyes are blue.

ALFRED : Black hair ?

THE MERCIAN : Black as pitch.

ALFRED : That was your own king of Mercia. He fled to Rome four years ago.

He laughs.

THE MERCIAN : The curse of the old gods on him !

ALFRED : He'd been a good man in his time—my father knew him at court; but—you must be young to hunt wolves.

THE MERCIAN (*cooling down*): You're right there. I'm a good Christian. I was dipped in holy water two years ago. The Danes still worship Wodin and Thor, and Fire-wolf Fends, and so I spit on them ; but the Fire-wolf gives his Danes a blessing, there's 'no denying that. They're strong beasts.

ALFRED :

They are wolves, but more cruel,
they are snakes, but more cunning,
they are bears, but stronger,
they are eagles, but swifter,
they are weasels, sucking our blood.

They took all England,
save only Wessex and Kent.
All England was desert
save only Wessex and **Kent**.

The towns smoked,
 the rivers were swamped,
 the farms were couch-grass and charlock,
 God slept, and His priests were dead.

The people ran to the Danes like dogs,
 yelping : " Take us for slaves I
 Give us meat that has rotted!
 Give us ditch-water !
 Give us a dung-hill to sleep on I
 Give us the peace of the serf! "

THE MAN OF KENT (*abashed*) : They were Midland men.

THE MER'CIAN : What could we do ? Our king had fled.

THE MAN OF KENT : Kent still fights.

THE ESSEX MAN : And Essex.

THE SURREY MAN : Surrey's never stopped fighting.

THE BERKSHIRE MAN : Ever heard of the battle of
 Ashendune ?

A L L : Ashendune ! Ashendune !

THE WILTSHIRE MAN : Aha ! Ashendune ! That's where
 the Danes ran the skin off their feet.

A L L : Ashendune ! Ashendune I

THE ESSEX MAN : I was there.

THE MAN OF KENT : So was I.

A L L : Sing of Ashendune ! Tell how the Danes ran !

ALFRED :

Ashendune ! Ashendune !
 We came to the Hill of the Ash.
 Ethelred prayed in his tent.
 He claimed from his Overlord
 protection for Wessex,
 protection for Kent,
 help for long England ;
 while Alfred, his brother,
 led us against the Danes.

Their armies covered the high ground :
we came up from the low.
There was midway a thornbush, a stunted tree,
shorn by the wind,
my own eyes have seen it.
Beneath it the circle of ground was bare,
whitened with bird-dung.
The Danes came shouting over the brow.
We hewed down the bush as we hacked at the Danes.
The ground was spattered with blood and teeth,
brains and haws, red on the white,
stumps of branches and men.
The cow-horn helmets rolled down the Hill of the Ash.

And there fell in that battle King Bagsac, Earl Osbern,
Earl Harold, Earl Frene,
Sidrac the father, Sidrac the child, both earls,
and the men of three hundred ships.
The Plain of the Ash was a table-feast for the ravens.
All night the Dane fled, all the next day we pursued
him.
Then, on the second eve,
darkness ended the fight.

But still we were few, and the Danes were many.
More wolves came, ever more wolves,
ever more Danes in their dragon ships.
Ethelred died. Alfred alone was left
to fight the devils, the Danes.
Unwilling he wore the crown.
He was the least of Ethelwulf's four sons.
His brothers were strong men, he was a boy.
He had no faith, he had no hope.
In his first year he fought nine battles.
Few we were against all the Danes.
In the second year he lost London.
In the third year the Midlands betrayed us—

THE MERCIAN (*angrily*):

Never our blame!

Our king and our dukes and our Witan
sold us, bound, to the Dane.

ALFRED :

Snug lay the Dane in England's heart.

He hollowed his bed as a weevil empties a nut,
outward eating. We were thrust back and back,
back through the woods, back through the barley.
Backward we trod the noiseless turf.

We smelt the thyme, we tasted the salt.

We toppled backward over the cliff,
crashed to the sands,

stumbled and rose, stumbled again,
crawling back to the sea.

Then the sea was our land.

Then we built ships.

In the fourth year we routed the foe at **ca**.

Six ships fled. One the King took.

In the fifth year they begged for peace ;

but broke their oath with an ambush—our **blame**,

Alfred's blame I He trusted a Dane.

In the sixth year he built more ships.

These ruled the sea while he shut up the **Danes**,
fuming like wasps in Exeter town.

Help was sent them from Vikingland,

dragons a hundred and twenty,

laden with food and arms,

laden with men.

This fleet our ships met,

sank them and drowned them off Swanage.

ALL : Sank them and drowned them off Swanage,

ALFRED :

Again they offered their peace,
gave their hostages, swore to depart.
Again he trusted their fly-blown oath,
Alfred the fool! It was Alfred's blame—

THE WESSEX MAN : Who blames the king blames Wesscx.

THE SURREY MAN : Blames Surrey !

THE SUSSEX MAN : Blames Sussex !

THE ESSEX MAN : Blames Essex !

THE MAN OF KENT : Blames Kent! Alfred's our overlord.

THE WESSEX MAN : I'm with you. God save our overlord !
God save Alfred !

A L L : Alfred ! God save King Alfred ! God save the
King! The King!

THE WESSEX MAN : He's led us before, and he'll lead us
again.

THE ESSEX MAN : Nine battles in the first year !

THE SUSSEX MAN : Exeter !

THE SURREY MAN : Swanage !

THE MERCIAN : Ashendune !

A L L : God save the King !

THE WESSEX MAN : What are we . dawdling here for ?
Sun's up, and the King's at the Egbert Stone. Come on, you
skulkers !

THE MAN OF KENT (*in the doorway, shouting*) : Cowherd I
Put us on the road to the Egbert Stone ! Show us the way to
the Great Wood ! You know the short cuts. Get us to
Alfred !

THE COWHERD : You can't mistake the road, but I'll go
with you past the boggy bit.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE (*eagerly*) : If you go that far you can
bring me back my load of turf. Wait, I'll empty out the
sack !

THE COWHERD : Hurry !

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : I'm coming—I'm coming.

THE COWHERD : Come on, the rest of you !

THE MEN (*leaving*): All together now—God save **King**
Alfred I———Alfred !———Alfred !

(*singing*):

The devil sent fever—
the devil sent famine—
the devil sent plague—
and the devil sent the Dane.
But we follow Alfred.
God sent Alfred—
God save Alfred—

A VOICE (*as the door slams*): God save the King !
ALFRED : "God save the King ! "

My good Overlord, here kneels Alfred,
England's shepherd, a king in England,
to claim protection and counsel
as is his right;
for this is the law between a man and his lord.
I come to you as to me my people.
I am *their* overlord.
They claim protection : I dare not fail them.
They come for wisdom : I must not fail them.
Thus it stands between them and me,
and thus it stands between me and You.

My good Overlord, remember well
I am not king of all England !
Wessex and Kent, these are my lordships,
Wessex my farm, and Kent my garden,
the best lands in England.

Great Overlord, You have hung up stars
thick as daisies in Kentish meadows.
I make lanterns for my rush-candles.
I fence them with lucid horn
that they burn steady on windy nights ;
but Your rush-lights are the sun and moon,
and Your horn-lantern is lucid heaven.

Good Overlord, You make the worlds.
You fling out worlds as I flung pebbles
into the duck-pond, long ago
in Wantage, where I was born.
You made also this round earth-pebble.
Long ago, Lord, You made my England.
Lord, forget not the land You made,
laughing, among Your angels !

Good Overlord, remember Your English oaks,
and how the finest grow in Kent,
the toughest wood in the world for ships,
and how the hare-bell grows under them,
and between the beech-pits the bluebell I
Remember also the soil You gave us,
the red clay, the chalk, the loam !
There is food in our rich earth,
drink in our mist.
Our rivers are full of fish.
There is game in our woods, and everywhere birds.
Good Overlord, all the wings in heaven
are less than the wings of our birds.
There are gulls, and water-fowl, hawk and eagle,
our red-breast robin, blackbird and thrushes,
jay, daw, tit, finch, wren.
In summer nightingale sings,
and in spring the cuckoo.
Overlord of angels, remember Your English birds !

Wente kind folk, Lord,
kind to Your birds and Your beasts.
Well we love peace.

You know how we followed the Wednesday god
till we found You wiser than Wodin,
stronger than Thor, kinder than Frey.
The Tuesday god gave his hand for the people
when he chained Fire-cub Fenris ;
but You gave Yourself for the people.
This the common folk know.
We forget not the Rood.
One day we will pay You for all the pain
The Bishop says that Your peace
passes our understanding
:since we are but clay,
sand, chalk and black earth.
None the less we long for Your peace.

As dew freshens our fields
:so*let Your peace water our lives !
When Edwin was overlord
:a woman could carry her child through the land.
None took her necklace, none touched her.

I will have it so again.
I will have back the churches,
:and the good roads,
:and the books,
:and understanding of the King's peace,
and the peace of the Overlord, past understanding,
as once in England it was.

What shall I do to make it so ?
Spare counsel; for that is my right I

Maker of men, You have made the English hard-
witted :
in shallow water we drown like sheep,
too sullen to clamber the bank,
battle-winners ; but still the Danes waste England
because of our sloth.

I order forts to be built.
I turn my back—nothing is built.
I plan long ships, and higher than ever were seen.
They shall have sixty oars.
What can the devils do against sixty oars ?
Well, I give horses, haul wood, pay workmen,
honour the shipwrights.
I turn my back—the ships are not built.

They *will not* burn bridges.
They *will not* dig traps.
They like the short cut and their fathers' road.
They heed not their king except they blame.
Yet stauncher than dogs, faithful as bitches
are my foolhardy men whom You made.
Now my own Lord, since such and not other You
made us,
and I did not choose to be king,
lead You me to lead them aright I

My brother prayed at the Hill of the Ash,
prayed in his tent while I fought the Dane.
Was that my sin, as my Bishop said ?
Then teach me a king's part!

The men of Wessex and Kent,
they gather by Egbert's Stone
in the Great Wood.
There they wait, knowing I live.

Great Overlord, when I reach my men,
do I pray or fight ? Do I pray or fight ?

I will not ask a sign.
Only the stiff-necked ask a sign.
But I ask for a quickened wit
to know my sign when it comes.
Wonder-worker, daily
I read in Your royal book.
I know the sign of red sunset, fine weather tomorrow,
and white sunset, Tain.
I know that the dance of the gnat means thunder,
and a green Christmas, fever.
These things I read in Your Book.

When my wife's cheek blossomed before we shared
word,
shared but a look, I knew the love sign.

I know the twitch of the covetous,
I know the wronged serf's white knuckle,
and the sign of famine, a bairn's pot-belly.
I know that ash and burnt doorpost
is the sign of the Dane.

And well I know that within the hour
Your signs will be all about me :
the toss of a straw by a knot-hole,
a squinting eye, a man's bracelet,
or my fever striking me down— (Not now—
not now—not now—not now !)
Or my fever striking me down.
Great Overlord, quicken my wit for the sign !
Do I hold my men ? Do I spur my men ?
Do I pray or fight ? Do I pray or fight ?

The door opens and shuts as the COWHERD'S WIFE returns.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE :

Will he let the cakes burn ?

Will he let the cakes Hum ?

He lies there dreaming while the cakes burn.

ALFRED (*dazed*) : The cakes ?

THE COWHERD'S WIFE :

Who'd be a woman ?

Ask all women.

Who'd be a woman?

Will you let the cakes burn ?

ALFRED : The signs are all about me.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : You let the cakes burn—

We hear her brushing up the hearth and shifting frewood,

THE COWHERD'S WIFE :

Menfolk, menfolk—

God help housewives !

Up before dawn, and I leave him snoring.

Ice in the pail—who breaks it ? I do.

Cows to be milked—who milks them ? I do.

Fires to be lit—who lights them ? I do.

Fowl to be fed—who feeds them ? I do.

Women do the churning,

women do the scouring,

weaving, salting.

Women brew.

I mend his mantle,

I knit his garters,

get his breakfast—watch the cakes, goodman—

but he lies dreaming while the cakes burn.

ALFRED : And I lie dreaming while the cakes *him*.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE :

Menfolk, menfolk—
God help maidens!

Thick lies the dew, for it's May-Day morning.
Songs to be sung—who sang them ? He did.
Kiss in the ring—who kissed me ? He did.
Vows to be sworn—who swore them ? He did.
Hearts to be broke—who broke them ? He did.

Women do the loving.
Women do the losing.
Laughing, shrugging,
women know.
He calls the music,
I pay the piper.
Haste the wedding—come to church, goodman—
but I'm left standing while the tears burn.

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

She is ugly and roughened with toil.
She is older than priest and king,
cold iron defeating my spell.
From her they spring,
these human men.
She is the core and the bed.
She is the soil.
Of her I foretell
nothing, prophesy
nothing. I only know'
that soon she will sigh,
laugh, give him his loaf of bread,
and then
she will let the king go.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : Here! Take your cake, ~~good-~~

man ! It's less burnt than the rest: and what do you care if it's half dough, eh, so long as I hold my tongue ?

ALFRED : I'll eat it as I go, and bless you with each mouthful.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : It's early yet. Give the day a chance to warm a little before you start.'

ALFRED : And let the cakes burn ?

He laughs, and goes out.

MERLIN (*in the scene*):

Is he gone ?

I feel the wind blow in through the open door.

I feel the sunshine slanting across the floor.

He is gone.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE (*gently*) :

Menfolk, menfolk—

God help menfolk 1

Head in the stars, their feet in puddles.

Time to be saved—who wastes it ? They do.

Gold to be got—who gets it ? They do.

Heaven to be won—who wins it ? They do.

Death to be met—who meets it ? They do.

But we do the dull things.

We do the scolding.

Mocking, mending,

we make the home.

We rock the cradle,

we bear the heartache,

mourn our menfolk—watch the cakes, goodman—

but they lie shrouded while the cakes burn.

The COWHERD clatters in.

THE COWHERD ^s. Gone ?

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : Just now I

THE COWHERD : But he doesn't know the short cuts.
Which way did he go ?

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : To right of the spindleberries.
But let him find his own way to the camp I You've enough to
do watching for the King.

THE COWHERD : He was the King.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : He was the King ? And you never
winked at me, you never nodded, you never whispered ?

THE COWHERD : What chance had I ?

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : You had the chance to shame
your own wife, and you took it. Don't stand there and gape
at me I. Go after him ! Who are you to keep the King
waiting ?

The door slams.

THE COWHERD'S WIFE : But oh, oh—he was here, Eng-
land's darling, hurt with his fever, heading for his battle, and
I let him think we grudged him a breakfast ! When he took
the milk from me I touched his hand. I might have kissed
it if I'd known. He sat just there. Well, at least we have the
harp to remember him by. (To MERLIN) He played on your
harp—on your harp and my heart-strings.

MERLIN :

Grey-eyed Alfred, England's morning,
child of sunlight, born of spring,
England's shepherd, England's darling !
Once in England there was a king.

The music dies away.

THE PLAY ENDS

THE MAY KING

CHARACTERS

MERLIN

BLANCHE OF KIRKLEYS

ROBERT LOXLEY (*Robin Hood*)

ROGER OF DONCASTER

TOM O' THE SHAW'S WIFE

WILL SCARLET

MUCH

LITTLE JOHN

THE SHERIFF OF NOTTINGHAM

AN ARCHER

A SECOND ARCHER

A THIRD ARCHER

AN OFFICER

TOM O' THE SHAW

THE FRIAR

CROWD

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

Merlin am I.

I dream. I read the stars.

I prophesy.

Wild over Britain a meteor

gloried awhile, and fledted away.

This **was** Arthur, a lord of **kings** in **his day**.

I saw his passing, and Alfred's end,
and the after wars
when ruinous Norman followed the Dane.

I foresaw the Conqueror
and William the Red, who had no friend,
and Henry the Clerk, whose chambering
the packing seas atone
when his dear son sinks in the restless water
for ever. Never, never for ever
shall the peace-king smile again.
I foreknew Stephen's reign
and the wrong of Henry's daughter,
and old Curtmantle's groan,
snared by his youngest, his darling son :
" Shame, shame on a conquered king ! "
That was the lovely deed of John.

But what to me are the heat and pride
of foreign princes, violent men ?
I have built for myself a cell,
an invisible living-room,
woven of upper air and hawthorn-bloom.
There I abide
deaf to all
but the one king's one call:
" Merlin, I come ! I come ! "

And little I lack
in my dreaming valley of elder-bush,
azure butterfly, moss and rush.
Down to my holy well
tingles a rusty brook with skirt of asphodel,
coral sundew and milkmaids callow.
And the seven-hued trail of pimpernel
rainbows up from bog through grass

hot in the sun and hard as metal
over the hill to the highway track.

There, in a basin shallow
with sparrow-droppings whitened,
perfumed, lightened
quietly by the ceaseless fall of petal,
stands an ancient thorn,
and the conquered English call it ' Merlin's Tomb '

The hiving years like bees
swarm, and are centuries.
Once—twice—thrice they pass,
and I out of my dreams awake
on a thriving May-Day morn
to bird-alarm, and laughter laden
chatter of youth and maiden
fetching the summer home.

VOICES : The may ! The may ! The may I

The voices of boys and girls are heard laughing^ talking and singing. The singers are led by two girls. One of them is BLANCHE of KirkUys.

BLANCHE *(singing)*:

Bring again your may !
Winter died the other day
and was buried in the wet,
under his pillow a violet,
with willow-herb and clover
to strew his grave over.
Summer and his queen
at the funeral were seen,
singing : " Good riddance 1
Winter has his quittance ! "

VOICES : The may ! The may ! The may !

MERLIN (*as narrator*) :

They are weaving with elder and birch,
bryony, reed and broom,
garland for grange and hall,
garland for parish church,
garland for booth and market stall
and winter stifled room ;
for this is the first of May—

VOICES (*singing*) : The may I The may ! The **may** !

MERLIN (*as narrator*) :

—and these are my English people,
blundering, noisy, unseeing, unhearing but gay.
I am weak with years.
I cannot charm thēir ears ;
but the voice of perfumed light,
gold field and silver field,
rising well, singing weald,
and stirring, murmuring night :
these calling voices compel them.
This spell they obey.

VOICES : The may I The may ! The may !

A GIRL :

Now every leaf in the forest is green.
Now the birds sing together.

MEN :

Now with fiddle and pipe and drum
bright as the shining weather
all along, down along Watling Street we come.

THE GIRL :

The King of the May has a Queen,
and a white silk handkerchief's tied between.

A MAN :

Rise up and take your may,
pretty maids all
who bring the summer home !

THE GIRL. :

We wish you a happy day,
merry men all
who bring the summer home.

ALL :

By moonlight, on May Day,
we bring the summer home.
By starlight, on May Day,
we bring the summer home.
By sunlight, on May Day,
we bring the summer home.

MERLIN (*as narrator*) : And now my valley is filled by townsfolk rifling the bushes ; but the May King and his Queen strike up the hill to me, invisible in my thorn. This May King, Robert Loxley, is a handsome fellow. He wears Lincoln green and carries a long bow. So do the three merry-men behind him, the giant Little John, Much the Miller's son, and tow-headed Will Scarlet. But the fellow at the May Queen's elbow is dressed like a Norman. He's Roger of Doncaster, a stranger hereabouts. The dark-eyed May Queen is a stranger also. The May King calls her Blanche.

The scene begins.

ROBIN : Blanche ! Blanche ! Hands off !

BLANCHE : But Robert, here's a great may tree covered with blossom.

ROBIN : Sweetheart, this is Merlin's thorn. If you break one twig you spoil the luck. (*As they laugh*) And laughing spoils the luck too, Roger of Doncaster! Quiet, everyone, while I speak the piece ! Merlin ! Merlin of the thorn ! Can you hear me ?

He waits. Only the wind answers.

ROBIN : Merlin, I'm the May King, Robert Loxley. Give all Englishmen good luck, Merlin, till May comes round again and another takes my place ! Now Blanche !

BLANCHE : Merlin, I'm the May Queen, Blanche of Kirkléys. Give all Englishwomen good luck, Merlin, till May comes round again and another takes my place !

ROBIN : And now Merlin, seeing that she and I are to be married come midsummer—

ROGER : Who says so ?

ROBIN : I say so, Roger of Doncaster !

ROGER : Does Madame Blanche say so ?

ROBIN : * Madame Blanche ' ! This is the new Englishman, who speaks nothing but bad French.

BLANCHE : Robert, why are you so quarrelsome ?

ROBIN : I hate a sham Norman.

BLANCHE : And I hate a trouble-making Englishman. (*Laughing*) No, Robert, I will not be kissed.

ROBIN :

Merlin, put her to shame !

Merlin, come out of your tower !

Here stands my giggling, don't-care sweetheart.

Show her your power !

Tell her who rules in the wood I

Norman or English blood ?

Merlin, the sun's red arrow
pierces your flowering bush.

Merlin, now is the hour !

Merlin—

A WOMAN'S voice interrupts.

THE WOMAN : No, no ! It's the first wish that counts, and I've been waiting all night. May Queen, young thing, pretty thing, you can get your wishes without troubling Merlin; but I'm an old woman.

ROGER : Take your hands off the lady's skirt!

THE WOMAN : I will. I will. No need to harry me.

ROBIN : Let her alone, Roger of Doncaster ! Now mother, what do you want ?

THE WOMAN : I want what I can't have. I want the one man who'd help me. I want to hear his horn cheering the forest again, and see his men stealing through the bluebells to my back-door with a bag of vittles or a bundle of stolen clothes. Often I've watched them coming and going in the moonlight like foxes till my old man called to me : " Come away, woman ! Don't try to see his face—safer fol him ! "

BLANCHE : Him ? Who ?

THE WOMAN : Robin Hood, who else ? Robin Hood and his men.

LITTLE JOHN : Little John, Much the Miller, Will Scarlet.

WILL SCARLET : Will Scarlet, Much the Miller, Little John.

MUCH : Much the Miller, Little John, Will Scarlet.

The three laugh.

LITTLE JOHN : Those were the days !

THE WOMAN : That was a man !

WILL SCARLET :

He walked the wood all-weather.

This yeoman was forest-wise.

LITTLE JOHN :

His arrows were trimmed with grey-goose feather
and peacock eyes.

MUCH :

Where leaves are long he had *no* peer,
and he hunted the King's deer.

WILL SCARLET :

In hungry season the poor were fed.
They had their daily bread
fetched from the merry green wood
by Robin Hood, by Robin Hood.

THE WOMAN : Ah, it was a bad day for the poor when Robin got his pardon.

MUCH : I know her now. She's the wife of the woodcutter in the old clearing.

ROBIN : Tom o' the Shaw ?

MUCH : Ah, you remember him ! Oldish—do any man a good turn ! How's Tom, mother Shaw ?

THE WOMAN : He's to die, Much. He's to die.

ROBIN : 'What's that ?

MUCH : Die ? What has he done ?

THE WOMAN : He killed a hart.

MUCH : The fool !

THE WOMAN : A fool ? He had three of us to feed. We've starved since they took him. Five months he's been lying chained on a cellar floor awash with sewer water. You pay two silver pennies for leave to sit on a bench, and where was he to find two pennies ? And now he's to be hanged.

ROBIN : When ?

THE WOMAN : Noon. We did pray he might lose but hit eyes or a foot ; but he's to die.

ROBIN : Merlin, were beasts dearer than men in Arthur's England ?

BLANCHE : There is a stir in the thorn-bush. The petals are falling.

WILL SCARLET : The trees are tossing in a sudden wind.

BLANCHE : Someone moves in the bushes.

THE WOMAN : Keepers I Now they'll hunt me for speaking against them.

ROBIN : We're here. No need to run, mother.

THE WOMAN (*as she runs out of the scene*) : They'll hunt me. They'll hunt me.

ROBIN : What scared her ?

BLANCHE : Look ! Look ! A grey beard—watching us !

There is a stir and crackle in the bushes as MERLIN parts them.

MERLIN (*as a character in the scene*) :

When Alfred was overlord
a woman could carry her child through the land.
Highway or forest, none touched her.

BLANCHE : Keep him away ! He came when you called upon Merlin.

MERLIN :

Nothing to fear !
Why do you stare at a poor, lean fellow
waked from his sleep in the spring of the year,
an old red mouse uncurled,
blinking his full black eye in the sun-stream mellow,
ready to flicker away to his hawthorn world
from the like of you ?
Why do you catch your breath, May Lord and **May-**
Lady ?
What harm can a dormouse do ?

MUCH : Why, it's the old hermit. It's Peter the wise. He's come and gone in Sherwood since time was. Look, he knows me well enough !

MERLIN : You are Much, the miller's son.

MUCH : There's no mill now. The King's men took away the mill-wheel and broke down the banks just as you foretold my grandfather. Ah, you can laugh, Norman Roger, but Peter Hermit knows what's coming to a man !

ROGER : Well, then, let him say what's coming to me !

MERLIN : An arrow.

ROGER : That's sweet hearing. How soon ?

. MERLIN : Not till your master, John Lackland, gives his crown to another.

ROGER : And when will that wonder come to pass ?

MERLIN : Upon Ascension Day, in a year not yet born.

BLANCHE : Robin, ask him what is coming to me !

MERLIN : A sick man.

LITTLE JOHN : And to me ?

MERLIN : The mot of a horn.

WILL SCARLET : And to me ?

MERLIN : The same.

MUCH : And to me ?

MERLIN : The same.

There is a brief silence.

ROBIN (*at last*): And to me ?

MERLIN : You will add one to one, Robin Hood.

BLANCHE (*sharply*) : Robin Hood ? Why do you call him Robin Hood ?

ROGER (*laughing*) : Well done, dormouse ! Ha Blanche, how do you like your outlaw ?

BLANCHE : Robert Loxley is Robin Hood, the banished man ? Why, Robin ? What had you done ?

ROBIN : What does it matter ? It's long ago. I was only seventeen.

BLANCHE : Robin Hood of all the tales ? Everyone knew them at the convent. You robbed the abbot, you bothered the Sheriff of Nottingham—

ROBIN : That's all to be forgotten, I tell you. I-m a loyal subject. I've made it up with the abbot and I dined with the Sheriff last Saturday.

BLANCHE : But what had you done to be banished ?

ROBIN : Stood up for my rights ! When King Richard was on crusade his brother John had all the power. He tormented us then as he torments us now. Hundreds fled from his justice to the woods. Some of them I led—and—well, you know the tales. But it was John Lackland we hated, not Richard Lion

Heart. When King Richard came home he found fifteen hundred of us with long bows and arrows of the best, mad to fight for him against brother John. So we were pardoned, and I was Robert Loxley again, and went to Court, and for reward was betrothed to—the King's little ward, Blanche of Kirkleys, ten years old. Remember that betrothal day ?

BLANCHE : I remember that day. It's seven years ago, but I remember. Well, I had more luck than some girls. Two have gone out of the convent to marry men they never saw, and old men too. But I told my brother : " If I'm not to see the man I marry I'll take my dowry to the convent." A girl has that much choice.

ROBIN : There's still time for the convent.

BLANCHE : No, you're not so old. But a banished man—they might have told me. But you knew, Roger ! You've known all along. Ah yes, you were always at keyholes.

ROGER : The temper is rising. Do you see this scar on my chin, Messire Hood ? She did that with a bodkin when I was her brother's page.

ROBIN : My name's Loxley.

ROGER : Hood or Loxley, I tell you this, my playmate ! You'd better keep him out of King John's way. The King has a fair memory for ill turns. The wife of a Loxley, on the other hand, by keeping in the King's way, could do her husband some good.

ROBIN : Here's something as filthy as its master.

ROGER : Is this said against the King ?

ROBIN : You'd like to catch me ? You shall not. Nothing is said against the King, or against the camp-scourings that he has brought overseas to plague us. But this *I* say, turn-coat I Dine with them, and you don't dine with me ! Hunt with them, and you don't hunt with me. You have the King's favour. Keep it ! We don't crave it here in Sherwood. There, that wanted saying. Now it's said. And stop waving that silly sword ! I'm not going to fight you.

ROGER : No ?

ROBIN : Oh no !

ROGER : You slander the King, but you daren't fight. Madame Blanche, witness it !

ROBIN : Lucky for me that she can witness it. Blanche, you've been bred among Normans, but you're betrothed to an Englishman, so here's the truth for you. We English were beaten at Hastings—

LITTLE JOHN : Got our own back at Tinchebrai—

ROBIN : Maybe, but we're still bruised underdogs. I'm Robert Loxley these days, not Robin Hood, and I do not lay a finger on this King's crony because I dare not.

ROGER : You hear him ?

ROBIN ; She hears, and she understands.

ROGER : We all understand. The tales of Robin Hood have—grown in the telling. Madame Blanche, let me take you back over the fields to Nottingham !

BLANCHE : I stay here.

ROGER : With the midsummer husbandj But this is only May Day. I have two months' grace. *(He moves off singing.)*

The creature of my heart
alters her pleasant mind
without a reason.
To own it is no treason ;

for though she were inclined
to love and part
thrice in a season,
still, still I could not blame.

As soon desire a flame
never to flicker
as my dear love with me
never to bicker.

MERLIN : There goes a nimble enemy.

BLANCHE : But he's jealous, you see, he's jealous of me. We were children together.

LITTLE JOHN : I'd slow his pace with an arrow if I had my way. But nobody listens to me.

ROBIN : Now Blanche, watch me make Little John happy ! Where's my hunting-horn, Little John ?

LITTLE JOHN : What do you want with it ?

ROBIN : Give it here and you'll see !

WILL SCARLET : Wind that horn and you'll have out half the villages !

ROBIN : Three blasts. To the north—(*winding his horn*)—sola !

MUCH : Every banished man in the woods will answer.

ROBIN : To the east—sola !

LITTLE JOHN : These are the old times back.

ROBIN : I told you I'd please him. To the west—sola ! Hark!

Far away comes an answering call,

ROBIN : Someone's heard. Hark again ! They're passing it on, from copse to glade, from crossroad to hilltop. " Robin Hood ! Come to him ! At the try sting-oak ! Come to Robin Hood ! " Those echoes have slept five years. Off you go, Little John ! Off you go, Will Scarlet ! Meet them at the oak, and tell them to fill the woods round the gallows on the causeway by noon ! Quickly now !

LITTLE JOHN : What's the quarry, master ?

ROBIN : Tom o' the Shaw. Are you going to let him hang ? Much, take this bag—there's twenty pieces in it. Get a word with the hangman—

MUCH : Old Kit Gamble. Ay ! He married my aunt.

ROBIN : Well, make your aunt keep him in his warm bed this morning and earn my twenty pieces. Off you go !

LITTLE JOHN (*going*) : It's not the way I'd handle it.

ROBIN (*calling after them*) : Lads ! When you see me you won't know me, remember that!

Their voices die away.

ROBIN : Now old thorn-bush, are you with us ? For I want your cloak. Here's mine. It's a fair exchange.

MERLIN : Age for youth—tatters and clouts for Lincoln green ? Yes, I'll change with you, Robin.

ROBIN : And give me your old, broken shoes and your palmer's hat.

MERLIN : You shall take what you choose of mine, and wear what you dare. I called that cloak of mine a cloak of darkness once. Times change. You will go invisibly through the crowds in Merlin's cloak because of your own skill and cunning. Yes, your spells are stronger than mine.

ROBIN : Well Blanche, do I make a reasonable beggar ? Don't stand there pulling your brows together I

BLANCHE : The risk ! The risk and the folly !

ROBIN : I like it. I've been a careful man too long. Give me a kiss ! Whatever happens you and I have seen a sunrise together and kissed at Merlin's thorn.

BLANCHE : And if they guess your part in this you're a banished man again. Then—think ! How do I stand ?

ROBIN : Don't you want me to save poor Tom ?

BLANCHE : Answer me ! Do I dwindle back to my convent to wait—how long—for a second pardon ? For I would not range the woods with you, Robin. I'm not bred to suffer wind and weather.

ROBIN : Blanche I Blanche ! Such anger ?

BLANCHE :

Oh my dear love—

but I speak not of love—

let it live as it will, die as it must,

a lighted feather that shrivels down into dust—

I say only—our way is planned.

We are to wed as others wed.

May we not go, your hand in my hand,
quietly on to the churchyard-end of all ?

ROBIN :

Now you shall have it clear.
I cannot rest,
not by night, not by day,
not in your arms, while simple folk are oppressed.
You are my love and my home,
and this is our month of May.
Yes, let the wedding bells ring !
Yes, let the feast be spread !
Yes, wolves only and starving cur-dogs roam !
But yesterday I was a man with a price on his head,
and the price is yet to pay.

MERLIN :

This is the voice of my king.

ROBIN :

Shall I eat ? Shall I think ? What merry long shall I
sing
while men and women hunger and fear ?
I have felt hunger and fear, and this they know.
This is their hope.
They look at me. No word ; but the call
is over-loud in my ear.
I am their need's thrall.
No willing of mine—I would not have it so ;
but I am bound with a rope.
I am held fast and must hear.

BLANCHE : But what do you want ? At the convent the poor were always fed. Charity is a duty. I was better than the Abbess herself at making salves and dressing wounds. I never grudged trouble. But you can't help every feckless beggar in the land.

ROBIN :

I can help Tom o' the Shaw.
He shall look up again to unbarred skies
with seeing eyes.
He shall run on both feet,
lightly, no limping, no chain,
run half as fast as the deer.
He shall believe in God's mother sweet
and sunshine's daily kindness,
and know that rain
falls clean on the face,
drinkable, clear,
not privy water trickling down from a drain
to lousy straw.
He shall have back his frightened wits again.
I can save Tom o' the Shaw.

BLANCHE :

Out of the millions, one man I
Oh, it's all pride and blindness !
You'll let your whole life go—
me, Loxley, the manor, the hearth fire,
money in the chest, cattle in the byre,
children, and Christmas coming with the snow.
For what ? For one man ! One !

ROBIN :

I know.

BLANCHE :

Risk all for a people—fine, fine !
For a countryside, or to save a splendid town,
oh, for one thriving village I'd say yes,
for anyone who was mine ;
but for a stranger to lay down,
for one silly cottager, one,

safety and love, that's mad.
He chose to bréak the law.
Will you lose everything ?

ROBIN :

Risk, not lose.

BLANCHE :

Dearest, you'll lose. You'll lose.

ROBIN :

What else can I do ?
Yes, I'm mad to let my luck go,
and souls are many as primroses in spring.
I know.

BLANCHE :

One man !
Not twenty thousand, not twenty, not two.
One!
Nor did you make the law.
Will you lose everything ?

RoBfN :

No ! I save Tom o' the Shaw.

VOICES (*singing far away*):

Bring again your may !
Winter died the other day
and was buried in the wet,
under his pillow a violet:
with willow-herb and clover
to strew his grave over.
Summer and his queen
at the funeral were seen,
singing : " *Good riddance !*
Winter has his quittance ! "

BLANCHE (*through the singing*) :

You must go your own way.
Win or fail, we are too far apart.
You risk too much. You give too much.
You ask too much, and you lose
everything. Well, as you choose !
I am not in your heart,
nor ever was in your heart.

A horn sounds.

ROBIN : Little John's signal.

BLANCHE : Go to him, then ! Who keeps you ? (*Calling*)
Wait for me—down in the valley there ! I'll help you carry
the garlands. Wait for me !

ROBIN : Blanche!

BLANCHE (*singing as she goes*):

Summer and his queen
at the funeral were seen,
singing : " Good riddance !
Winter has his quittance ! " .

ROBIN : But what else can I do ? (*The horn sounds again.*)
Farewell old thorn-bush !

His footsteps die away as the scene ends.

MERLIN (*as narrator*) :

What else can a king do ?

In the beginning this was the word
that the stars heard.
This is the word of the leaf on the tree,
of the water-drops,
of ash while the spark lingers
and the hour-glass as it fills.
One added to one made the **sea**,

one and one made the hills,
 piled the echoing beaches, multiplied crops,
 and set in each forest a bird
 whose singing never stops.
 One man is every man
 who labours under the sun.
 A king counts on his ten fingers :
 " One—and one—and one—"

Now I have my hilltop to myself again. The sun lessens as he climbs. The humming air is warm. I lie wrapped in my borrowed cloak of youth, watching far below the ant-heap of England piling up upon its own dust. I have talked with its little creatures : and now—which life shall I follow ? The girl zig-zags away, clutching her dowry as an ant clutches its grub. She will jostle her way to Court; but is she handsome enough for lewd John, or rich enough for Roger of Doncaster ? I would rather watch my other small creature rushing through the woods to his new adventure. The leaf-shadows dance upon the unearthly coat he has borrowed from me, and already he has forgotten the woman. Now I remember that I am Merlin, and I make for myself a perspective glass out of sunbeams and the willing air. Now I turn the wheels of my glass. The blue distance clears. I see growing to life-size the gallows on the causeway three miles away, and the sheriff's men, the town's officers with their axes, with their prisoner in the midst, and a lad measuring him for his grave. My cloak, with Robin wrapped in it, hobbles out of a glade as the sheriff fumes.

THE SHERIFF : The hangman is sick ? He has a fever ? The priest is with him ? Well, and if so are we to wait here all day ? Let one of the guards do the work and earn the fee. Why does that fellow hang back ?

THE ARCHER : I'm an archer. Hanging's not my trade.

ANOTHER : Nor mine !

A THIRD : There's laws enough in this country, but there's

no law that forces a man to hoist up his neighbour, and Tom o' the Shaw's been my neighbour these ten years.

A VOICE (*from the crowd*) : 'Let the foresters do their own dirty work !

FIRST ARCHER : I'll meet any man in fair fight, but if the King wants a poor fellow hanged for breaking a law his own father forgave us—

VOICES (*from the crowd*): Curtmantle !———Planta-genet!———Give us back Henry's law !———Let the King honour his father !

FIRST ARCHER : Let King John play hangman himself! %

SECOND ARCHER : The Sheriff himself would do well at the trade. See how his fingers twitch !

A VOICE : Ah, but the hangman has the rope, and he's snug in bed.

The crowd laughs.

ROBIN (*in the distance in a feigned voice*): Master Sheriff I Great Master Sheriff! I'll serve your turn if you'll pay me the hangman's fee.

SHERIFF : Who speaks ?

OFFICER : It's the beggar : there, on the far side of the brook. Look at him skipping from boulder to boulder! He's nimble for an old man.

ROBIN (*nearer*): What's the hangman's fee, great Master Sheriff?

SHERIFF : Thirteen pence and a new suit.

ROBIN : God bless you ! You put easy money in a poor man's pouch. I'll serve you. (*Close at hand*) Now—where's the hangman's tackle ?

VOICES (*from the crowd, joyously*) : No rope !———• No rope!

ROBIN : No rope ? Tom here has rope enough round his arms and legs to hang two men. Help me up into the cart, lad! I Tom, turn about while I get it off you! And what's this in your pocket. Whatever it is I claim it—Hangman's fee!—that's law and custom. Oho, a hunting horn! Let's try it I

TOM (*thick and dreary*): Hang me and be done with it! I know nothing about a horn.

ROBIN : But others know. Listen, Master Sheriff, and like it if you can !

SHERIFF : That's no beggar's voice. That's Robert Loxley's voice.

ROBIN : I dined with you last Saturday. Next time, Master Sheriff, you shall dine with me. (*He winds his horn.*) Look to the east, Master Sheriff!

MERLIN (*as narrator*) : And as they turn and look wildly about them, over the hill a Hundred and fifty men come riding, all in Lincoln green. At their head is a tall, blue-eyed tow-head—

VOICES (*from the crowd*): Will Scarlet!———Will Scarlet!

ROBIN : Here, Will! Here ! (*He winds his horn.*) Sheriff, look to the west!

MERLIN (*as narrator*): And shining over the plain come sixty men, their bows bent. At their head charges a lumbering, blundering cart-horse of a man, but swift.

VOICES (*from the crowd*): Little John!—Little John !

SHERIFF : Whose men are these ?

ROBIN : Not the King's men, nor your men, but mine, Master Sheriff! And we've come for Tom o' the Shaw.

VOICES (*from the crowd*): Robin Hood! Robin Hood's home again ! Robin Hood !———Robin Hood's home again.———Robin Hood !

The shouting fades away as the scene ends.

MERLIN (*as narrator*): The king counts one. ⁶ The King ' I call him ; though he little thought when he put on the May crown that he must wear it for life. But as he streaks off, lugging his woodcutter after him, the news of his return whistles down the four winds, and before the month is out ' one ' has become ' fifty '. Then the seasons add in their turn one to one, till before he knows it he has been ten years keeping free the forests of England.

In chase and ride
of Rockingham, Sherwood, Arden, Wyre,
and the nameless woods that lie between
Cherwell and Leire :
in those dim glades where squirrels run
over the tree-top road for miles,
and a man may journey in summertide
from Beaumanoir to Bardon Hill
in a twilight chill
and never feel the sun :
in Epping and Hainault, in Selwood and Dean
Robin is king each May.
He is the fall of manna on every spray,
creamy, warm.
He is a boy's light laugh at yesterday.
The English may-time smiles,
guarding the buds from harm,
so that a million small, harsh fruits may set,
and song-birds thrive.

But out of the woods it is winter yet,
and England shivers and wails ;
for here comes famine stalking,
and here comes ruin walking,
wielding a sword, and shod with nails,
the lord of the dead-alive,
all men's enemy, John.

John was the last of a litter, the pet
of a house divided by hate.
A father who loathed his son,
a wife who loathed her mate,
and the three fierce heirs of the doom,
all, all cheated themselves for a smile from John.
Young Prince John had charm.
Lackland the boy had grace.

Not that fair Plantagenet,
 he whole first wore the broom,
 had the gold-blossom fire of John.

Hee had lovers and friends at will.
 'Women came to his honey lure.
 He was a master of chess in peace and war.
 But tyrannous, hot and impure
 the waning Angevin star
 over him shone :
 and the devils that chamber in all his race,
 as from a doubled window-sill
 look out through the ageing eyes of John.

Hear how Robin's men talk of these devils ! Some fifty of them are gathered in the woods north of Staines. The fat friar who cooks for them is cramming the remnants of their supper into a bag to be dropped by night at a cottager's door ; for that is Robin's rule. But Much is in command, and there is no sign of Robin, Little John or Will. I hover in the shadow, for I love these children of the wood. I have deserted my silences these ten years to listen to their chatter, and they take me for what I seem, a grey lichen of a man, clinging to their youth. ' Old Thorn-bush ' they call me.

As he laughs the murmur of a small crowd is heard. It is dominated by the voices of MUCH and the FRIAR. The scene begins.

MUCH : Friar, don't pack away till sunset! Robin may yet come.

THE FRIAR : I'll believe that Robin's coming when I see him.

MUCH : Friar, shall I change your belief ?

THE FRIAR : Much, you can try.

MUCH : There, then I Take that!

There is a slap and a crash.

VOICES (from the crowd) : Over he goes.———Get up, Friar !———Hit back at him, Friar !

THE FRIAR (*groaning*): You great fool, you've made me bite my tongue half through.

MUCH : Teach you to talk against Robin !

THE FRIAR : I'm not talking against Robin. But I'd like to know why he's hobnobbing with lords and Londoners.

MUCH : Can't you guess ? You know that London's turned against the King. You know that half the barons of the kingdom are marching against him. 'Ah, Lackland thought himself safe when he gave away his crown to the Pope, as old Thorn-bush here said he would. But holy Church is sick of his greeds and his cruelties. He'll get no help from her. He sits at Windsor with only seven knights left out of all his—his—

MERLIN:—his superfluity of servants.

MUCH : The very word on my tongue ! Well then, if Robin rides south because of such news, you may be sure it's to do us some good. We're sure, anyhow. He's led us ten years.

FRIAR : All the same—

A. horn sounds far away.

MUCH : There he is ! Here, give me my horn !

He sounds an answering call.

MUCH : Now, spread the table again ! Get the drink that's cooling in the brook ! You new fellows, keep quiet till I tell him you've been taken into the band ! Here he comes.

FRIAR : Who's that behind him ?

MUCH : Little John and Will Scarlet! Never heard of 'em, have you ? Robin! Robin! Good that you're back, Robin!

There is a general cry of welcome as ROBIN enters the scene.

ROBIN : Now then, you starlings, these glades aren't Sherwood. Do you want the whole countryside to know where we're lying up? Lucky for you King's orders don't count any more or you'd have the Windsor rangers down on us. Well now, give us a bite and sup while I tell you the news—and its news to lift up your hearts. You're free, my

souls ! You can go home when you choose. I've been with FiteWalter-r-,

FRIAR : Who's he ?

MUCH : Hold your noise !

ROBIN : FitzWalter ? He's spokesman for the barons of England. I went to his tent in the darkness. His men are so cock-a-hoop that they keep no proper watch. In I wriggled. I tell you he jumped when I caught him by the throat. I said : " Have no fear, my lord, but you mustn't cry out ! " Then I squeezed a little for luck and let go. And at that he whispers, half choked : " Are you from the King ? " " No," I said, " from the forest, where three hundred men hide within sound of my horn, and all bowmen. And, what's more, I can bring down three thousand such from the north within a week." He says: " We have our own armies." " John hasn't," I said. " A thousand men could ease him out of this trap." He thought that over, then he asked me : " What does the forest want ? " So I laughed and said : " You know what we want. See that we get it ! " And with that I came away.

MUCH : What were you driving at, Robin ?

ROBIN : Listen ! The next day King John meets the barons at the counsel meadow, and they told him what he had to do. They say he rolled on the ground with rage; but he did it. See this parchment ? I bribed Fitz Walter's own clerk to let me have it. It's a blotted copy, but a true one. Read it, old Thorn-bush ! Read it out of the Latin into English ! I can't read, but I know what's in it.

MERLIN : " John, by God's grace King of England, Lord of Ireland, Duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, Count of Anjou, to the archbishops, bishops, counts, barons, justices, foresters, sheriffs, stewards, servants and all faithful subjects—greetings ! Know that, looking to God and for the good of our soul and those of our ancestors and heirs . . . and the amendment of our kingdom—"

ROBIN : Jump all that ! Come to our part !

MERLIN : The right of wards,—the right to marry—the rights of widows—

ROBIN : Further on !

MERLIN : " The citizens of London and all other cities and towns, shall have their ancient liberties and free customs. . . . No servants of the King or any other shall take a free man's horses and cart——"

ROBIN : Now it comes.

MERLIN : " No free man shall be arrested or held in prison, or deprived of his freehold, or outlawed, or banished unless by the lawful judgement of his peers and by the law of the land."

The crowd begins to cheer.

ROBIN : Wait! Wait!

MERLIN : " To no-one will we sell, to none will we refuse or delay right or justice. We will appoint as justices only such as know the law and mean to observe it well——"

ROBIN : And *now*—

MERLIN : " All evil customs connected with the forest shall be at once questioned *in* each county by twelve sworn knights of the same county, chosen by twelve honest men of the county, and shall within forty days be utterly abolished." And below is added : " And all who have been outlawed over forest matters from the time of our grandfather Henry I to our coronation may return peaceably to their homes."

Once more there is a murmur, not so much of excitement as of intense emotion.

VOICES (*from the crowd*): Home !—————Home !—————
Our homes !

MERLIN : " And it is our will that the men in our kingdom have and hold all the aforesaid liberties and rights for themselves and their heirs, or us and our heirs, in all respects and in all places for ever . . . given under our hand . . . in the meadow which is called Runnymede, between Windsor and Staines, on the fifteenth day of June in the seventeenth year of our reign."

VOICES (*from the crowd*): We'll go home.———We can go home.

MERLIN (*as narrator*): Listen to them ! The young men are shouting and throwing their caps in the air ; but the old men are weeping for joy, for they believe that the evil days are done. They babble the names of their wives and children. They see the future golden. Well, let them go home to one summer's pure bliss.

The shouting dies away as the scene ends.

MERLIN (*as narrator*): But the victory is to their children's children, not to them. Within the year this John breaks all promises. He turns against his own kingdom and wastes it with such fires, such tyrannies, such torments that they say of him : " Hell itself will be filthier for the presence of John." Robin's little band of faithfuls is driven north, and in spring, on the last day of April, Robin himself is nearly taken in an ambush. He comes to the trysting tree in Bradley Wood with a spear wound in his arm.

The scene begins.

ROBIN ; No harm, but it needs a dressing. I'm off to Kirkléys Abbey. It's no more than three miles, and the Abbess is a great hand at salves and bandaging—or so my sweetheart used to say.

MUCH : And we'll come with you.

ROBIN : You'd frighten the nuns. No, sleep while you can! It's past midnight. We must be on the move at cockcrow. The king's still marching north, and I'd as soon as not put another county between us. Lullaby, my pretty ones!

The scene ends.

MERLIN (*as narrator*): And off he goes, and his men sleep again, and I too seem to sleep. But in me vision stirs. I wrap myself in moonlight, and am as fugitive at the moon.

Through my closed lids I see beyond the heavy woods to the well-worked plain and small towers of Kirkléys. There are lights in the chapel, for the nuns are at their prayers, muttering and singing ; but their house is in darkness. In one window only does candle-flame burnish the open casement. In that lighted room a woman is singing, and a man's voice murmurs in the pauses of her song. The voices are years older, but I know them. The woman is Blanche of Kirkléys : the man with her is Roger of Doncaster.

BLANCHE (*singing*):

I do not sigh.

Not through me shall they know
that my love has been taken
away.

I hold my head high.

Not by tears will I show
that I am forsaken.
No word do I say.

If he be caught in another's net,
then I will quickly forget
my given kisses.

I am rich in other treasures.
He shall know what he misses
seeing me bought with new pleasures.

I do not sigh

though my love has been taken away.

MERLIN (*as narrator*) : Now Robin comes out of the woods, and goes heavily across the blind, white fields towards the lighted convent window. The bandage on his arm is dark.

The scene begins.

ROBIN : You above ! Will you send someone down to a wounded man who needs help ? *(There is no answer.)* Open the door, can't you ? You sinners above, I'll not give away your secrets ! But I'm a sick man. Fetch me to the Abbess ! She'll give me a helping hand. *(There is still no answer)* Can't you hear ? Then you shan't see either. *(An arrow twangs.)* Out goes your light.

BLANCHE *(above, - in a low voice)*: Get away quickly! Quickly, Roger !

'There is a rattle of holt and chain, and a door opens.

ROBIN : That's better. Open a little wider !

Footsteps echo on the flagstones as ROGER OF DONCASTER rushes past.

ROBIN : Who's this in a hurry ? Needn't bolt into the brambles, friend ! Conscience is after you, not I. I want the Abbess of Kirkléys. I have a pass-word to her.

BLANCHE *(close at hand)*: I am the Abbess of Kirkléys.

ROBIN : Blanche ? What are you doing in a nun's hood ?

BLANCHE : I am the Abbess of Kirkléys. Is this your arrow ?

ROBIN : How long have you been abbess here, May Queen?

BLANCHE : Five years, May King. Is this your arrow ?

ROBIN : Who was the man ?

BLANCHE : Lean on my arm, I'll help you to the sick-room I Up these"stairs I Careful, they twist, they turn !

ROBIN : Like our lives.

Their footsteps echo on the stone stairs.

ROBIN : Why are you not at mass, Blanche ?

The door is flung hack against a wall.

BLANCHE : Here is your room and your bed.

ROBIN : This prison !

BLANCHE : Why yes, Robin. A nun's cell is a prison to the worldly—or so we are taught.

ROBIN : You are better than I. But I have lived so long in the forest and slept so well under the heavenly lights that I hate a stone roof and stone walls. I must be going before sunrise. Blanche, put back your hood !

BLANCHE : No !

ROBIN : Don't make yourself so strange to me, my little sweetheart! I'm a homeless man. Give me a home in your heart again for half an hour !

Through the mutter of the mass comes the voice of a girl singing far away.

BLANCHE : Lie down on your bed ! Now let me see your arm.

ROBIN : Your nuns sing gay hymns.

BLANCHE : The milkmaids in the far woods are bringing the summer home. This is May morning, May King. The wound is deep.

ROBIN : Your little poking fingers have made it bleed again.

BLANCHE : It must have hot water and a sponging. Wait!

The door shuts behind her. The singing continues.

ROBIN : And the bolt is pushed home. This time Blanche makes sure of me; No bars to the window ? Ah, a ten-foot drop—no bars needed. Poor, pretty Blanche ! But it's safety for her, and her grey cloak is furred and warm. Women belong in houses. (*Calling*) Blanche, bring me a cool drink when you come !

BLANCHE (*in the distance, whispering*) : Not so loud ! Do you want a scandal in Kirkleýs ?

ROBIN : I'm parched and dizzy.

BLANCHE (*nearer*) : Are you longing for brook-water ? Ah, Robin, is there anything so cool as brook-water on a parched and dizzy day ? Once you made a loving-cup of your hands and scooped up a dwindling mouthful for me with a yellow petal floating on it. Half had gone before I got it to my lips. Are you longing for the brook by Merlin's thorn ?

ROBIN : Hurry!

BLANCHE : Hush 1 Lie back on your nun's bed and listen to the boys and girls bringing home the may I

THE GIRL (*singing far away*):

Now every leaf in the forest is green.

Now the birds sing together.

MEN (*singing far away*):

Now with fiddle and pipe and drum

bright as the shining weather

all along, down along Watling Street we come.

ROBIN : Blanche, you're a long while gone. My arm hurts.
Blanche 1 Blanche!

THE GIRL (*singing*):

The King of the May has a Queen,

and a white silk handkerchief's tied between.

ROBIN : Blanche, the handkerchief's red 1 You've left me too long. Blanche, do you hear the singing?

BLANCHE (*near*): I hear nothing. The door is shut between us. I'm the Abbess of Kirkleys.

ROBIN : Where are you? I can't see you.

BLANCHE : Yet I see you through the grating, Robin. You are clear enough in the dawn-light.

ROBIN : I'm lying in a pool of blood.

BLANCHE : Yes, you're lying in your blood.

ROBIN : Come to me! What's keeping you?

BLANCHE : I cannot come to you any more, Robin. I am the Abbess of Kirkleys.

ROBIN : Is this treachery? I am not so weak. I can get to my feet still.

BLANCHE : I am the Abbess of Kirkleys.

I could have been the mistress of a kindly grange,
the lady of my house, with serfs, barns,• nurseries.
You are my husband, Robin.
We were betrothed when I was ten years old.
We'd have had sons and daughters.
No, I'd have spared *you daughters ! I wanted
sons,
and to be the centre of my world,
the one, one woman among all the men;
but because of you I'm Abbess of Kirkléys.

ROBIN : You are a winter twilight. Your/ace behind the
grating is grey as a sky between bare twigs. Your eyes glitter.
The linen bands lie about your throat like snow.

BLANCHE : I am Abbess of Kirkléys.

I could have been the darling of a prince,
kissing for kingdoms, worn miniver and pearls,
had my train longer, my appointment richer
than the state of the lawful queen.
I could have been a fairer Rosamond,
born sons to be dukes, barons and cardinals,
and daughters to be counters in a bargain,
(I'd have born daughters if he needed them !)
marketable girls, with my tuned voice
and the King's grey stare.
I could have been the secret will of Europe,
and slept in marble beneath my canopy.
But because of you I am Abbess of Kirkléys.

ROBIN : I shall die.

BLANCHE : We all have to die. The lucky ones die as you
shall now, after a sweet life full of loves. England was in
love with you, Robin, for you gave back sons to poor
mothers. You saved harmless folk from many a horrible
death. Oh, you were what every boy desires to be, and every

girl's hope of a lover. Nor will the forest forget you; for you were King in May. And you were always free, free as that girl out in the meadows bringing the summer home. You've had a hard life, but a good one, Robin Hood, and I envy you; for I am only Abbess of Kirkleýs. Farewell I

ROBIN : My bow ! My arrows !

BLANCHE : You can't shoot through a grating. I go to my thanksgiving; but I have not left you without a guard. Roger of Doncaster is watching. He slipped past you, just now, in the darkness. You laughed at him once. Do you remember ? He remembers. Yes, I go to my thankful prayers. And in the morning I shall come back and find you fast asleep. Then I shall straighten your bed, and pull up the coverlet over you, and strew it with knots of may. Your grave shall be dug under a thorn if I can find one. And I shall find it; for the convent owns land hereabout, and I am Abbess of Kirkleýs.

ROBIN : Blanche!

Hen laugh dies away.

ROBIN : And Little John waits at the trysting-tree, with Much and Will Scarlet. How many days will they wait ?

THE GIRL (*singing in the woods*) :

Now in the wood the long leaves are green.

Now the leverets run in the corn.

Now over the wood the young moon is seen,
and the forester sounds his horn.

The winds blow soft as silk.

The may is white as milk.

Now in the wood the long leaves are green,
and the forester sounds his horn.

ROBIN (*weakly*): The forester sounds his horn. Little John!
He sounds his horn.

ROBIN : And for you, miller !
He sounds it again.

ROBIN : Now, Will Scarlet! Listen, and answer, for Mary-mother's sake !

He sounds it a third time,

ROBIN : Hark!

In the distance we hear three times the answering calls.

ROBIN (*counting*) : One ! Two ! Three ! They've heard. They're on their way. Now Roger, French Roger, come out into the moonlight! Stand and bargain I My bow's bent, and I'm not so weak as she told you. I'm climbing down.

ROGER (*below*) : You can't do it.

ROBIN : I can. She forgot the ivy. Ivy's a tree of the wood. Let me come down and we'll make a fight of it—you've always wanted this fight—and when I've beaten you I'll keep Little John from killing you. Is it a bargain?

ROGER : It's a bargain. Throw down your bow !

ROBIN : I'm weak enough without laughing at you. Throw down my bow ? Over the sill—down we come. Give your shoulder for my foot!

ROGER : No ! I step back. I'd have been glad to see you on a gallows ; but to have you dangling here between heaven and earth—that's just as fine a sight.

ROBIN : Keep off !

ROGER : Robin, you'll be dead before you drop.

ROBIN : A fair fight, Frenchman !

There is a clatter as he lands en the stones.

ROGER : My chance is my chance.

There is a cry and the sound of a body falling.

ROBIN (*groaning*) : Ah ! You got me in the side. This is the end of Robin.

There is silence.

ROGER (*whispering*) : Robin ! Are you alive ? Robin !

ROBIN : I thought you'd fun away. Where are you ? Ha—now I see you, on the hover, always on the hover. Better come in and finish me ! You move so slowly—are you afraid of me, even now ? (*With a change of tone*) You should be. My bow is bent, and I can still use it, wound or no wound.

Better run, Roger ! Run for the woods ! Run for your life ! I'll let you live till you reach the half-way hurdle if you run well. No, don't swerve ! I'll give you till the milestone—red and white as Blanche, your Blanche, my Blanche, where the morning sun touches it. Are you there ? So !

There is the twang of a bow, and a distant cry. Simultaneously LITTLE JOHN, WILL SCARLET *and* MUCH *enter, followed by* MERLIN, *as a character in the scene.*

LITTLE JOHN : Robin ! Robin ! He's stuck in the side.

ROBIN : I have killed my enemy.

WILL SCARLET : Who did it ? Did the nun trap you ?

LITTLE JOHN : Give the word, and we'll burn this place to the'ground, and every witch in it !

ROBIN : Are you breaking rules already ?

LITTLE JOHN : I've never asked a thing of you before. Now I ask this one thing.

ROBIN : We don't hurt women. Where's Merlin ?

MUCH : He means old Peter hermit.

ROBIN : Merlin !

MERLIN : Here !

ROBIN : Have you come running with the rest, old Thornbush ?

MERLIN : I am here.

ROBIN : Tell them ! " Once a woman could walk alone across England——" you know how it goes.

MERLIN : I know. " None took her necklace, none touched her."

ROBIN (*triumphant*): I have had it so again in my woods. And the poor were fed, and I broke the foreign laws. Now give me my bow, and watch ! Where my arrow strikes make a grave for me between grass and gravel ! Miller, mark the place !

There is a twang as he shoots.

ROBIN : How many yards ?

MUCH (*in the distance*) : Three hundred.

ROBIN : A fair shot.

LITTLE JOHN : Robin !

WILL SCARLET : Gone !

THE GIRL (*singing*) :

The King of the May has a Queen,
and a white silk handkerchief's tied between.

LITTLE JOHN : Run to the wood ! Stop the maying ! Robin Hood has shot his last arrow. What will poor folk do now ?

THE GIRL (*singing, far away*) :

By moonlight, in May time,
we bring the summer home.
By starlight, in May time,
we bring the summer home.
By sunlight, in May time,
we bring the summer home.

The music dies away.

THE PLAY ENDS

THE LIGHT OF BRITAIN

CHARACTERS

MERLIN

ROBERT DEVEREUX, EARL OF ESSEX

LETTICE, *his mother, the Countess of Leicester*

BERNADINO DE MENDOZA, *the Spanish Ambassador*

QUEEN ELIZABETH

MADAME DE CHATEAUNEUF, *wife of the French Ambassador*

THE LADY ARBELLA STUART.

LADY SCROPE

THE LORD OF BURLEIGH

SIR ROBERT CECIL, *his son*

THE EARL OF NOTTINGHAM

A SECRETARY

MRS. MONTAGUE, *the Queen's dresser*

SIR JOHN HARINGTON

AN USHER

THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

SIR ROBERT CARY, *the Queen's godson*

HUGH, *a singing boy*

Members of "Parliament, servants, crowd

MERLIN (*as narrator*) :

Listen ! Listen ! I have a tale to tell.

Listen ! Listen ! Listen ! Will no-one hear ?

I am a true voice murmuring in each ear.

Do you think this invisible whisper the mere
patter of rain on leaves :

or mice burrowing in, the uncarterd sheaves :
 the ringing heather-bell
 as over the heath a low wind sighs :
 or the rub of grasshopper thighs :
 or in each tent
 of the gracious linden trees
 the arrowy coming of bees,
 the cloudy humming, less tune than scent,
 of all the honey thieves ?

Not so. No ! No !

Each whisper that you have heard
 is indeed a living man's thought
 churning, labouring, turning,
 blown into shape by his breath,
 set down, annealed, word upon word,
 even as glass from the fire is gathered and wrought
 into the goblet crystalline
 which holds the hippocrene.

A spirit I, incapable of death.
 I am in Britain a voice which prophesies,
 and I speak to the future times by me foreseen.
 Indeed and indeed I pour you an ancient wine.
 Listen I Listen ! Listen ! My sayings are sooth.
 I am enchanted age calling to youth.
 I was—I am—Merlin the Wise.

Men remember King Arthur, my foster-son, because I said
 of him : " He shall yet return and help the English " : and
 I too was remembered awhile in the name of a spring or a
 thorn-bush—' Merlin's Well', ' Merlin's Tomb ' ! But even
 from such poor refuge I was driven at last by modern
 laughter, and my fate became that of all masterless spirits.
 The Jew imprisoned us in ring, bottle and lamp, the Greek
 in tree and fountain ; but the Briton is crueller still. Geoffrey

of Monmouth bound me fast: "Merlin's Prophecies" was his title and my prison. I have lain four hundred years forgotten in the pages of a book.

But now a boy's long and slender hand turns my leaves, and I am released. I waver at his side, unnoted as falling dew, and see first of all—and oh, how much there is everywhere to see!—the jewel he wears on his forefinger, a woman's face cut in a sardonyx. I know this woman; for I have foreknown the golden age of Queen Elizabeth, and this is her portrait. Then I know that the boy who dreams over his ring and my rhymes, seeking his fortune in both, is Robin Devereux, the young Earl of Essex.

He is lying in a boat roped to a landing-stage green with lichen. Loosestrife and bindweed thicken about it. Beyond the sedge there is a little summer pavilion; then the grass rides upward to a park of noble trees and the walls of Greenwich Palace. I would gladly drift over the summer-starred lawn till I reach the farthingales, ruffs and scarlet heels dancing together under the trees; but the young Earl of Essex does not budge. He has the Thames to rock him, the moon to dazzle him, and himself to himself. He wants no more.

The scene begins.

A SINGER' (*far away*):

Come to Court, come to Court, pretty boy !

Brush away the country mud

and wear fine linen !

'Twill do you good

with all the women.

Come to Court, come to Court, pretty boy !

Hurry ! While the sun shines

everyone is yours.

Hurry ! When the snow falls

they'll turn you out of doors.

Never lose, nor refuse present joy !
Twenty is the age to thrive.
You'll be well friended
until you wive;
then all is ended.
Come to Court, come to Court, pretty boy !

MERLIN (*as narrator*): As the song ends a gold-haired woman comes hurrying down to the water's edge, her dress under' the sober cloak noisy with jewels. For a moment I take her for the Queen herself; but as she lifts her mask I see that it is only the Queen's likeness, her cousin Lettice, Essex's mother, the Earl of Leicester's wife.

LETTICE (*whispering*): Robin ! Robin ! Where are you ?

ESSEX : Here, Mother, below the landing-stage. Careful ! The boards are rickety.

LETTICE : What a son ! Let no mother envy me ! I've hunted for you these two hours.

ESSEX : Mother, you're forbidden the Court. (*She laughs.*) What folly brings you here ?

LETTICE : Your folly, not mine. Why did you wander off ? Look at you, with the hay clinging to the pearls on your doublet ! Never mind, you're found ! And your father says——

ESSEX : Has he pushed up through the daisies after eight years ? No wonder your cheek is white.

LETTICE : I speak of your stepfather Leicester, as you very well know. Now my baby, don't quarrel with us tonight, when all our hopes are fixed on you !

ESSEX : Hopes ? Now Mother, let us get it clear ! I am the unluckiest earl in England, fatherless at ten years old, motherless at twelve——

LETTICE : Motherless ! Thank you for nothing.

ESSEX : Worse than motherless ! I went to school in rags, Mother, while you were at Court getting yourself a new husband.

LETTICE : Do you never forget——?

ESSEX : An unkindness ? Never ! And yet I do love you, Mother.

LETTICE : Poor ragged Robin ! But could I do better for you than give you the Earl of Leicester for a stepfather ?

ESSEX : The Court favourite ! The Court flatterer !

LETTICE : Your stepfather's had his day. Please the Queen, and he'll beg her to make you Master-of-the-Horse in his stead ! Our faction needs a handsome young man to play against Raleigh.

ESSEX : Why choose me ? She has not once spoken to me since the first : " Welcome to Court, you'g cousin ! "

LETTICE : She has looked at you often enough.

ESSEX : I am sorry for the Queen. Look at the moon, Mother, rising cold over the trees ! She's the Queen. How she must despise us from her lonely height !

LETTICE : My cousin the Queen is not so much above the skyline.

She laughs.

ESSEX : Hateful laughter !

LETTICE : Darling, abuse me ! I like it. It shows your spirit.

ESSEX : You flatter her, all of you. You lie, you cringe ; but I will not—never !—not to save my life. She is too noble for such tricks. She is too much moving, breathing England. *(To himself)* Or so I see her.' So she lives in my heart.

LETTICE : How does the old woman manage it ? Fifty-one, and lame, yet all you youngsters sing the same song. Well, she likes innocence, so go on and prosper !

ESSEX : Rather than see her with your eyes——

LETTICE : Try scolding her as you scold me ! It would be new.

ESSEX : Sooner than supple my way into favour as my stepfather does, or that swaggerer Raleigh——

LETTICE : —you'd rather be the Earl of Bramblebush, and live on hips and haws. I know. And you shall tell me so all

over again tomorrow. But tonight, my son, the actors are here, and all waits on you.

ESSEX : Actors ? Actors ?

LETTICE : The dumb show of *Endymion* is to be played after supper. Have you forgotten ? You are to be the shepherd asleep in the moonlight, and the Queen's maids will be dressed as the nymphs. They'll go on their knees to the Queen, calling her Diana, Cynthia, Phoebe, and such virgin-goddess names, and beg her to waken you as the moon did. The same man devised the masque in the old days at Kenilworth. Come and be dressed !

ESSEX : I'll not do it.

LETTICE : You agreed.

ESSEX : No Mother, no ! FR never do it. I'm not for sale or hire.

LETTICE (*ominous*): You'll fail us ? Now ? Do you mean this ?

ESSEX (*sullen*): Leave me alone, Mother !

LETTICE (*furious*) : You're a wilful devil. You're as head-strong as your father. He broke because he could not bend, and so will you. Ungrateful, ruinous boy——! I wash my hands of you.

ESSEX (*equally angry*): I hear voices. Quick, Mother, or you'll be seen ! Quick, before the whisper runs : " Leicester's second wife has dared to come to Court. Will he quiet her as he quieted his Amy Robsart ? "

LETTICE : Vile slander !

ESSEX (*bailing her*): Poison first. Then—flung down a flight of steps to make sure. Have you forgotten ?

LETTICE (*raging*) : You—you have forgotten who you are, to speak to me so. (*Naively, the storm over*) What are you doing now ?

ESSEX : Loosening the rope. Old Thames is my friend. He'll float me out of it.

LETTICE : Have it your own way ! Fil scheme no more for you.

She rustles away.

MERLIN (*as narrator*): She hurries away, an angry woman, looking back to see if she is indeed observed, and Essex has but time to fling himself down again on the hay-cushions before another woman comes into view between the loose-strife and the moon-paled sky. This time there is no mistaking the red-gold hair, the mouth compressed above secrets, *the* pride of bone and throat. Here comes Tudor and Plantagenet: here comes that Elizabeth whom her people 'call' the Light of Britain': and indeed she shines in the moonlight, for her dress is of white satin, jewelled, and her skin, fair as milk, looks the whiter because de Mendoza the ambassador, who walks beside her, is a true olive of Spain. He is a man in a rage. The Queen knows this, and is as gentle with him as the evening breeze, and as airy.

The scene begins.

DE MENDOZA: Madam, your prisoner is the King of Spain's man. He must be tried in his own country.

ELIZABETH (*softly*): Must?

DE MENDOZA (*swelling*): Must!

Music begins far away.

ELIZABETH: Music! Listen!

MERLIN (*as narrator*): She pauses by the landing-stage to pluck a head of loosestrife. Essex remains motionless, and thinks himself unseen. But as he draws a quick breath there is a glint of jewels, and this the Queen notes.

ELIZABETH (*dreamily*): Video et taceo.

DE MENDOZA: Majesty?

ELIZABETH: Rub up your rusty Latin, friend! I said: Video et taceo. I see but say nothing.

DE MENDOZA: What does your majesty see?

ELIZABETH: Ask the Thames I, I say nothing. (*The*

music swells.) Sweet! I first heard this tune at my sister's marriage with your master, the King of Spain. Ask, when you see him, if he remembers his suit of black and silver, and-how he whispered as we danced that he would protect me, poor, helpless girl that I was, against those enemies who sought my life! But today, when a man of this has sought my life, your master forgets old promises.

DE MENDOZA : Madam, my master asks only that he himself may punish this traitor, seeing that he is his own man.

ELIZABETH : The King of Spain shall have his man's head, if he wants it, but his body shall be left in England.

DE MENDOZA : My master——

ELIZABETH : I had not finished. I am only a woman. I am allowed two words to your one. I come now to the complaint against Drake. Tell my dear brother—sweetheart I must not say—that if in his voyage from Plymouth to Plymouth by the curved way of the world, this dragon of mine has helped himself here and there to other folks' supplies, he shall make restitution.

DE MENDOZA : Here is the list of burnt shipping. Here is another of plundered towns. Here——

ELIZABETH : Full restitution! (*In a sudden blaze*) But not until your king has satisfied me for his doings in Ireland. I first received offence. Let him first make amends! (*hashing herself*) Nor, tell him, shall my seamen any longer rot in his port prisons. My great father would not have borne it. Shall I? If every man of mine is not home by Christmas with good clothes on his back and his moneys returned to his pockets, then I clap every Spaniard in this country into jail. Tell your master so! What? I say nothing; but I see. Why is he building more ships? His Armada is already thrice the size of my fleet. Why is he building ships? Go home to him with that question from his—loving—sister-in-law! (*Subsiding*) For loving, in spite of his injuries against me, I do profess I am. Well! A summer journey to you! You may go.

DE MENDOZA : I dare not leave your majesty unattended.

ELIZABETH : When am I unattended ? Lift your voice by yet one note, and those out-of-earshot torches would dash themselves in your face. You will have seen it done to honest Protestants at your filthy burnings. Unattended ? Spaniard, I have but to crook my finger and defence will rise dripping out of Thames in a jewelled suit. I will show you. (*Calling*) Robin!

ESSEX (*a little way off*) : I come, Highness ! I come. (*Near*) What may I do to him ?

ELIZABETH : This is no river-god, Spaniard, scrambling up through the meadowsweet. This is a chance-found Englishman, free, as they all are, of my garden. Your master shuts himself up in a stone palace set in a desert, where his priests see him, but his people never. We are happier in England, where I shut out none, nor am shut out.

Oh my own people!

They make a spring-time for me where I go.

Their fields, their orchards, their wild moors conspire with every village-green to do me good.

Their rivers guard me—water-walls are strong.

The bristling sedge, a natural soldiery,
keeps watch: and every elm-tree lies in wait
to cast her branches down upon my foes.

If armies overran the Escorial
where would your king take refuge ? Among rocks,
starved peasants, huddled families where none
dare mourn a husband, sister, darling child,
fuel in the bonfires all ? Where could he go,
where cover him, poor Philip, from their hate ?

But every heart in England is my home,
my royal castle where I'm safe and warm.
Can Philip say so—in the Netherlands ?

DE MENDOZA : True, the Netherlands! Here also my master complains——

ELIZABETH : You may depart.

DE MENDOZA : But the Netherlands——

ESSEX : This is your way, sir.

DE MENDOZA : The Netherlands——

ESSEX : Hop, skip, jump !

DE MENDOZA : Majesty, I take my leave, and my master's.

His feet die away on the gravel path.

ESSEX : Don Desperado walks on the Prado.

ELIZABETH : Schoolboy, hold your tongue ! He's still in earshot.

ESSEX : I'd have beaten him at a nod from your highness.

ELIZABETH : That is not my way. You are young Essex ?

ESSEX : Your highness called me Robin. You cannot unchristen me.

ELIZABETH : Why are you not among the dancers ?

ESSEX : I dream better than I dance.

ELIZABETH : Then I'll leave you to your dreams.

ESSEX : You cannot. There's no moonlight without the moon.

ELIZABETH : So the dreams began when you came to Court ?

ESSEX : There again your highness is wrong. They began a year ago when my Lord of Burleigh delivered to me a sealed box of my father's private treasures. There were letters in it from your majesty, written to him in Ireland—angry letters, sweet letters, letters to—dream over.

ELIZABETH : Your father was a fool. Old letters are last year's leaves. Twenty-six years I have ruled England, and—believe it!—there have been twenty-six queens, all called Elizabeth.

ESSEX : That I understand.

ELIZABETH : Burleigh has not understood, nor Leicester, nor Walsingham. The Courts of Europe have not understood. Philip—never ! But Robin Devereux, Earl of Essex, seventeen years old——

ESSEX (*hotly*): Nineteen this summer !

ELIZABETH : Robin understands.

ESSEX : My blood understands. I am your own cousin. Sweet, dear highness, don't laugh! Put your wrist against mine. I'll not touch you, but—watch the pulse : it's the same beat! I also could use twenty lives and still be pressed for time. Oh majesty, if Drake sails again how can I not go with him? And yet if you send my stepfather to the Netherlands I want my chance of the fighting. Yet how can I bear not to stay at Court, if only to tread one day on Raleigh's heels? I hate Raleigh.

ELIZABETH : Between cousins—why? He's a bold gentleman.

ESSEX : He? He's garlic. He's a player. If his enemy were dying he'd edge in to watch the throes, then weep for him afterwards to show the world his tender heart. And he takes up your majesty's hand before you give it, and plants his kiss. You've never yet given me your finger-tips.

ELIZABETH : Is it dawn already?

ESSEX : Not for two hours.

ELIZABETH (*dryly*): Yet I heard a cockerel crow. Well, so much for your faded letters. What else was there in your father's box?

ESSEX : This book of riddles.

ELIZABETH : "Merlin's Prophecies—of the English Kings." Do you hope to find a fortune in it?

ESSEX : I'm the poorest earl in England. I'm bound to seek my fortune,

ELIZABETH (*briskly*) : So! All is planned! First we go to Court—simpler a little—"open our mouth, shut our eyes, and see what the Queen will send us." Eh? That's a mother's advice. Then stepfather says : "Wear fine clothes! Hire a great house—the Queen pays for all! Not in coin of the realm, the old woman's too close-fisted, but if you play her there are pickings." Step-father Leicester told you that for certain.

ESSEX (*ingenuous*): Not step-father Leicester.

ELIZABETH : Who ?

ESSEX : I have forgotten.

ELIZABETH : Tell!

ESSEX : You cannot make me tell you that.

ELIZABETH : You have said " cannot " three times to the Queen of England in as many minutes. And this ring that you wear on your finger—was that too found in the box ? Give it back to me !

ESSEX : I will go to the Tower, but I will not give you my ring.

ELIZABETH : It has my portrait on it.

ESSEX : Yes.

ELIZABETH* : It's very like.

ESSEX : Not *very* like. There is a likeness, as the moon up there is like that broken ripple in the water—no more of a likeness.

ELIZABETH : Then give me back my worthless ring !

ESSEX : No.

ELIZABETH (*exploding*) : By my father's soul——!

ESSEX : Listen!

A SINGER (*in the distance*) :

The moon was beautiful the other night
for young Endymion.

Full was her charm. She made the darkness white
as silver for Endymion.

Her virgin fingers tremble with delight
caressing young Endymion.

And all the while he dreams of noon-day heat
and how he'll pipe his darling to his side
and kiss the shepherdess, and yawn, and eat:
and hymn Apollo for her nut-brown sake
the summer through. " Endymion, awake !
A cloud unveils the bride ! "
He does not wake.

ELIZABETH : Music—music is vain. The torches are coming out like stars. They're in search of me, the dutiful torches. Come ! But Robin, before we go, give me back my ring!

ESSEX : No. Let me put back the briar for your highness I

ELIZABETH : Sweet briars. You put your hand to your mouth. Have they torn you ?

ESSEX : I am kissing my ring.

The scene ends.

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

Away they go,
white moth and silver moth*
drawn by the lamp of music. Now they dance
upon a lawn's green cloth
high and disposedly to please her Grace,
then lightly as the moderns do in France
and Cambridge ; for the boy breathes in her ear :—
" Try the new dance ! I know
you have the art to master anything
or anyone." Laughing she nods.

They dance, they dance, they dance.
The courtiers leer,
and Leicester laughs to see Sir Walter wroth.
The mother sends up worship to her gods.
Nightingales sing.
In the clear dawn the boy reels home, a king.

The river murmurs on.
Thames, you are England's clock
and you keep time.
Your ripples chime
the weeks, the months away,
and thrice your kingcups mock
our London mint.

Then swiftly, on a beacon's fiery hint,
 the white ships glide
 seaward to greet
 Philip's Armada, the invincible fleet.
 Drake hovers in the west
 with Hawkins, Frobisher, the immortal three.
 Elizabeth to Tilbury is gone
 to cheer her armies. Leicester's at her side.
 Her Captain-General of Cavalry
 is Essex, who has passionate service done
 in the Netherlands, and most where Sidney died
 at Zutphen. He's remembered in this hour,
 Sidney the uncomparèd, the flower
 that England wore a morning on her breast:
 and all his loves, the fame of all his merits
 the impetuous earl inherits.
 He rides like Arthur waked from Avalon.

The Queen, speaks to her men from a little hill near Tilbury church, riding bare-headed, her horse led by the Earl of Leicester, while the Earl of Ormond bears before her the Sword of State. Her troops shout themselves hoarse, and along with her they cheer her captains—Leicester, Williams, Ratcliffe, Essex.

VOICES (*from the crowd*): God save the Queen !———
 Long live the Queen !———God save the Queen !———
 Long live our captains !———Leicester!———Rat-
 cliffe !———Wales and Williams !———Essex !———
 Essex !———God save the Queen!———God bless
 her !———God save your Majesty !

MERLIN (*as narrator*): She smiles, raises her hand commanding silence—speaks——

ELIZABETH : My loving people——! I am come amongst you, not for my recreation and sport, but being resolved, in the midst and heat of the battle, to live or die amongst **you**

all: to lay down for my God and for my kingdom and for my people, my honour and my blood even in the dust. I know I have the body of a weak, feeble woman; but I have the heart of a king, and of a king of England too. Not Spain nor any prince of Europe shall invade us. Pluck up your hearts ! By your peace in camp and your valour in the field we shall shortly have a famous victory.

SOLDIERS' VOICES : Victory ! Victory ! Victory !

The cheering slowly dies away.

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

" Thou didst blow with Thy winds and they were scattered."

Then home comes the Queen to London, and all the land gives itself up to steeple-rocking, ear-splitting, frenzied joy. She ? She crumples in her hand her General's last letter ; for Leicester died while still they shouted " Victory ", and she mourns where she loved. But as her old companions age and wither she, in whom the spirit of twenty still burns, turns more and more towards Essex, till sixty and thirty-two wrangle as equals. He is hurrying to her now through the gardens of Hampton Court, while she sits at a window, conversing with Madame de Chateauneuf, the wife of the French Ambassador. Lady Scrope waits on her, and in the shadows a pretty girl plays upon the virginals.

The scene begins.

ELIZABETH : Do not forget my message to the French king I may not marry him ; but I can find him a bride.. Mark the music!

MADAME DE CHATEAUNEUF : The lady has skill.

ELIZABETH : And looks ! Regard her well I One day she will be even as I am, and lady mistress here. But I shall have been before her.

MADAME DE CHATEAUNEUF : Is she Madame Arbella ?

ELIZABETH : The same—my cousin, born in the kingdom, and so the more lawful heir. Your master would do the King of Scots a kindness if he married her; for if he does not Jamie and Arbella must fight it out between them : and how shall that help England ?

MADAME DE CHATEAUNEUF : Does she speak French ?

ELIZABETH : Arbella!

ARBELLA : Oh, majesty ! Did I play wrong notes ?

ELIZABETH : Speak to her, Madame !

MADAME DE CHATEAUNEUF : fividemment Ia Princesse a du talent. Comment ca s'appelle, l'instrument sur lequel elle joue?

ARBELLA : Madame, the virginal.

MADAME DE CHATEAUNEUF : Et ces petits morceaux de bois, que les nommez-vous ?

ARBELLA : Madame, the jacks.

ELIZABETH : Answer in. French !

ARBELLA : Oh, majesty, not in front of you ! My tongue would stumble just as my fingers do.

She plays a discord.

ELIZABETH : Tut ! That's not the tune. How does it go ? Where's the Earl of Essex ? Robin !

LADY SCROPE : The Queen calls for the Earl of Essex.

ELIZABETH : Look where he comes—? knight of the roses ! Robin !

ESSEX : The gardens are in such odour after the rain last night. i've brought your majesty an armful of roses to—to trample on.

ELIZABETH : Pish !

ESSEX : There would be time for a stroll before the Council meeting.

ELIZABETH : Too hot I

ESSEX : I could take your majesty by a cool path, royal underfoot with bugle——

ELIZABETH : And make me late for the Council. Robin, how does that tune go that you were singing under my

window, you and young Blount, the day you made fools of yourselves and fought your duel ?

ESSEX :

" Never lose, nor refuse——"

ELIZABETH (*picking it up*): Not so fast!

" Never lose, nor refuse present joy !

Twenty is the age to thrive——"

Watch my fingers, child ! (*Raising her voice*) Where's my gentleman with a bold face ?

LADY SCROPE : Fetch Sir Walter Raleigh! The Queen is asking for Sir Walter.

ESSEX (*sourly*) : And here, like water, he comes running.

ELIZABETH : Sir Walter, escort me and Madame de Chateauneuf to the rose-garden ! If we find her some roses we must strip off the thorns for her first. • (*Going*) We have one sort, Madame, a red and white mingled, which we call the Tudor rose.

Her dress rustles as she leaves the scene with RALEIGH and

MADAME DE CHATEAUNEUF.

ARBELLA (*to ESSEX*) : She has tumbled your flowers to the floor.

ESSEX : Go on playing !

ARBELLA : I'll gather them up first.

ESSEX : Do as I say !

ARBELLA : Oh, I may not even pick up a rose when I want, it !

ESSEX : Play, and do not look at me, then we can talk !

ARBELLA : I am forbidden everything. Yet she said—I heard her—that I should be lady mistress here one day.

ESSEX : That is why we are watched.

ARBELLA : My lord, I think the Queen is my friend. But she will not let me speak to anyone.

ESSEX (*quick in defence*) : Ah, when she was a young princess at her sister's court to look at anyone in friendship—as you look at me—was to send them to the block. We may not judge her. She lived ten years like the king in our Shakespeare's new play—"Is this a dagger which I see before me?"

ARBELLA : A new play ? When do we see it ?

ESSEX : He has written but that one scene. He read it over to me.

ARBELLA : You know him ?

ESSEX (*laughing*) : As I know all the players.

ARBELLA : We waste precious minutes. Tell me this before the Queen comes back ! If I were chosen and not the King of Scots——

ESSEX : Well, gentle rose ?

ARBELLA : Of England ! The rose of England I Would you be faithful to me as my Lord Leicester was to her, and guide me, and keep away my hateful grandmother ?

ESSEX : Go on playing !

ARBELLA : I must go. I have talked to you and she will see it in my face. I will get water for the roses.

ELIZABETH (*in the distance*) : Where is the Earl of Essex ?

ESSEX : Quick !

ARBELLA (*going*) : Oh my lord, I will be so good to you, if ever I come to my kingdom !

Her footsteps are heard hurrying over the floor. A door closes softly as ELIZABETH'S voice- is heard, nearer.

ELIZABETH : You have picked all the best of the roses. (*In the room*) Robin, what a look ! Is it because I took Raleigh into the garden ?

ESSEX : He steals a march where he can, and always has.

ELIZABETH : He does you no harm. He makes himself hated, for all his wit, while you, my Robin, never make yourself hated for all your unwitty rancour. But you must not be so jealous ! Am I jealous of that poor girl who might be queen after me if you could be a second Leicester. Robin,

Robin, let there be another! Make friends with Cecil! He is his father's true son. Burleigh—Leicester—the Queen—we were a trinity.

ESSEX (*amazed*): Essex—Cecil—Arbella?

ELIZABETH: When I'm gone—a trinity!

ESSEX (*kindling*): If your majesty would first name her your heir——

ELIZABETH: To name a successor is to toll my own death-bell. But Robin, for England's sake, make plans!

ESSEX: To have them trampled on, like my roses?

ELIZABETH: *My roses*, from *my garden*! And you sent a gardener to pick them—never went yourself.

ESSEX: Always watched I

ELIZABETH: Always pettish!

ESSEX: Must you set traps?

ELIZABETH: Make some difference between a tried and a false friend!

ESSEX: You and I—friends?

ELIZABETH: What is a friendship but the uniform consent of two minds?

ESSEX: I cannot always consent.

ELIZABETH: Ah, now you have pulled down your sulky blinds. What do you lack?

ESSEX: For myself—nothing.

ELIZABETH: Unfrown, then!

ESSEX: Nor smile to order!

ELIZABETH: God's blood, did your mother never teach you manners? No, for the Boleyns have none. For the third time—what's the matter?

ESSEX: Nothing.

ELIZABETH: What does a man think when he thinks of nothing?

ESSEX: Of a woman's promises.

ELIZABETH: I must not confute you.

ESSEX: Could not!

ELIZABETH: Could I not? Did you wait long for your

Garter ? When you married, in secret, were you long unforgiven ? Did I desire you to go to sea ? But you went to sea.

ESSEX (*hot*) : And pillaged Cadiz, and destroyed fifty-three ships.

ELIZABETH : And forgot to pay my seamen. I paid—as I promised. When have I failed my people, or my friends ? Answer me, Master-of-the-Horse, Master-of-the Ordnance—

ESSEX : The glorious greatness of a favourite ! The supposed happiness of a courtier !

ELIZABETH : The majestic music of a word-monger ! Speak prose !

ESSEX : I confess gratefully that your dear majesty has overwhelmed me with good things. But the burden is too heavy. I should be glad to lay down my burden.

ELIZABETH : So should I be glad to lay down mine. But I may not, nor shall you. I did not give you place and titles as I'd give a child a string of beads, to be worn and thrown aside when the ecstasy is out. I laid these burdens on you—at your own desire—to be carried till your life ends. Woe to you if you fail me !

ESSEX : You have failed *me*. My mother——

ELIZABETH : Oh, preserve me from a mother's son !

ESSEX : What grace does it do your highness, what shame does it do me that I, honoured by a great queen's trust, should see my mother hated and scorned ?

ELIZABETH : I have said that I will see her at a convenient time.

ESSEX : When is the-convenient time" ? For a month now she has come twice a week at your majesty's own appointment, and each time for this cause, that cause, no cause, she is told—the Queen cannot see her—the Queen has business—let her come again !

ELIZABETH : Is she here now ? Then bring her in and have done with it ! Lady 'Scrope ! Bring in the Countess of Leicester !

LADY SCROPE : At once.

Her dress rustles on the rushes as she goes.

ESSEX (*in a low voice*): Your majesty has a gift of healing where you have hurt.

ELIZABETH : Robin, you ask more than you know.

A door opens. There is a rustle of women's dresses.

LADY SCROPE (*a little, way off*): Your grace, here is the Countess of Leicester.

ELIZABETH : Let her come !

LADY SCROPE : Go up to the Queen!

ELIZABETH : Well, Cousin Lettice, we are to let bygones be bygones, are we, now you are a widow once more ? Then here's your queen's hand to kiss, if it does you any good.

LADY SCROPE : Gracious hand !

ELIZABETH : And here's your cousin's cheek to kiss if it does you any good. Get up ! Ha—bygones ! Why are you weeping, woman ? You never loved me.

LETTICE : Highness, these are grateful tears. My son is your counsellor. Your hand is on his arm.* You have made yourself—such pride for me—his more glorious mother——

ELIZABETH : Not so much of your mothers ! You have kept your looks. I hear you are taking a third husband. Well, you are welcome to Court. What is the time ?

LADY SCROPE : Madam—the stroke of noon.

ELIZABETH : Take away my cousin !

LETTICE : If your dear majesty will delight me by wearing this jewel——

ELIZABETH : These are drops of blood.

LETTICE : Rubies in the shape of a heart——

ELIZABETH : Unlucky. Keep your jewels, woman, for your next wedding!

ESSEX : Dear majesty, if you will wear my mother's gift you would honour her and me.

ELIZABETH : Must I wear your heart's blood, Robin ? Well, let it lie on mine, this small, hard heart! Pin it here, under the lace ! And the Council may come in. Tell my lord

Burleigh and the rest! Cousin Lettice, I say again, you are welcome to Court. Now be gone, all of you! (*There is a rustle of ladies' dresses.*) So, so, so! Out they teeter on their high heels. I am half an inch higher than your mother. Well, Robin, is the brow smooth? Dear Robin, do you believe now that I will do you good where I can?

ESSEX: Most dear, the rest flatter you, and I will not walk in step with them, or I would say—'this is more godlike than queen-like, to lift a woman into heaven with a look, with a word.'

ELIZABETH: I have lifted her back to Court. If she went higher she would meet two husbands. Here comes the Council.

There is a stir as the Council enters—BURLEIGH, CECIL, NOTTINGHAM.

ELIZABETH: Welcome, gentlemen! Shut the doors! Mr. Secretary, I would have your father sit. Sit, Burleigh!

BURLEIGH: Not while your majesty stands.

ELIZABETH: My Spirit, we value you not for your bad legs, but for your good head. Now Mr. Secretary, what is the day's business?

CECIL: We are to learn your majesty's pleasure upon two points—the appointment of the new lord deputy to Ireland, and our answer to Spain—[peace](#) or war.

ESSEX: War!

NOTTINGHAM: Should we not first talk of Ireland? Tyrone has laid siege to the fort on the river Blackwater. Until the new lord deputy is chosen all is confusion in Dublin.

ESSEX: If we make war upon Spain—

CECIL: If her majesty—

ELIZABETH: Settle the Irish first!

CECIL: To do that we need peace with Spain.

ESSEX: Of what advantage is a peace with Spain?

BURLEIGH: I will tell you, my lord. Because the King of Spain is weak enough to take our terms: because we lack

money to continue the war: because the English people is prone to sedition if taxed too high.

ESSEX : So we leave the Low Countries in the lurch ?

CECIL : If Spain makes them fair proposals, then we may forsake them without discredit.

ELIZABETH : So I think.

ESSEX : Majesty and my lords, if Spain is weak the more reason to continue the war. To desert our allies is a coward's thought.

ELIZABETH : Coward ? Such a word to the Lord of Burleigh ?

ESSEX : I mean no offence. He is an old man and I am a young one. What may be honourable in him would in me and those who follow me—

NOTTINGHAM : Who follow you, my lord ?

ESSEX : Young men, my lord.

NOTTINGHAM : Who has armed them ?

ESSEX : Armed ? Oh, I see your drift. You make it appear that I head a faction. Why, my lord, may not young men have their say and their leader ? You, you were a young man ten years ago when you met the Armada and taught Spain her lesson. But she has not learned it. She builds a new fleet. If we desert the Netherlands, then we hand Philip his prey—on a platter. If that be done there will be no free people left in all Europe save in these islands, and here not long. I say—my young men say—press the war home ! Let us make Spain a desert before they make England a desert ! It is expedient that one race should die for the world.

BURLEIGH : My son, take this book from my pocket !

CECIL : I have it, sir.

BURLEIGH : Open it ! Turn to the fifty-fifth psalm ! Bear it to the Earl Marshal !

ELIZABETH : What is this ?

BURLEIGH : I would have him read the third verse. I am too blind, but I know my text.

ELIZABETH : Read !

ESSEX (*reading*): "Bloodthirsty and deceitful men will not live out half their days—"

BURLEIGH : Remember it, my lord !

ESSEX : I am wronged.

ELIZABETH : My lords, forget Spain till tomorrow !

ESSEX (*aside to ELIZABETH*) : The Queen's tomorrow !

ELIZABETH (*aside*): Hold your tongue! (*Aloud*) My lords, we are here to choose the deputy. I can think of no better man than Sir William Knollys.

BURLEIGH : He should do well.

NOTTINGHAM : I have been for Knollys from the beginning.

ESSEX : At our last meeting we were all for Sir George Carew.

CECIL : My lord, Sir George is needed, as I told your lordship, for the Queen's service here at home.

ELIZABETH : Sir George shall not go.

ESSEX : But if your majesty has once approved him—

ELIZABETH : You have heard Mr. Secretary. He tells you that Sir George cannot now be spared. Sir William is the man.

ESSEX : My uncle——

ELIZABETH : We know he is your uncle, but he is still the man.

ESSEX : I need him here in England as much as Mr. Secretary needs Sir George.

ELIZABETH : We have debated this matter six months. An end must be made. You have all given me advice and I have well considered. My mind is made. Sir William Knollys goes to Ireland.

ESSEX (*exploding*): So ! The old fox wins !

BURLEIGH : Son Robert, help me to my feet!

CECIL : My lord, these words used to my father——

ESSEX (*raging*) : What words has he used to me ? I will not be blown upon as the only hinderer of peace in this country. What cure is it to bring a state from a doubtful war to an unsound or an unsafe treaty ? It is not the name of peace or

war, but the circumstances of either should make us try the one or embrace the other.

ELIZABETH : What has all this to do with Ireland ?

ESSEX : I am beset by enemies. I am accused and may not defend myself. " Bloody and deceitful men " — I am not one, nor are my companions who began the wars with me. You at home, self-loving men, desire ease, pleasure and profit; but the young men who follow me love torment, dangers and fame and the people's good more than their own weal. I love them for my country's sake; for they are England's best ancient armour of defence and weapon of offence. If we have peace, they have purchased it. If we have war, they must manage it. Why should I listen to you men of yesterday ? My young men cry : " War with Spain! Who stands between us and our end ? " Crooked minds and crooked carcasses.

ELIZABETH : Go to the devil!

ESSEX : Better the devil than a king in petticoats !

CECIL : Scandal! He turns his back upon the Queen's majesty!

ELIZABETH : My lord, I see that no one has as yet taught you manners. Take your lesson ! So—so !

She boxes his ears.

ESSEX (*raging*): A sword answers a blow. I wear one.

CECIL : Catch his arm ! Get between them !

ESSEX : This outrage passes any man's patience. I would not have borne it from your royal father's hands !

NOTTINGHAM : Back, my lord, back !

ESSEX : Let me go, fool! I have no duty here !

He stamps across the floor. A door slams violently. There is a general murmur of horrified apology.

BURLEIGH : O my dearest mistress!

NOTTINGHAM : He is beside himself.

BURLEIGH : Beloved mistress ! Give us one word !

ELIZABETH (*very quiet*): Video et taceo—I see and say nothing.

The scene ends.

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

Nothing ! The sky is purple, the air hot.
The thunder rumbles, but the storm holds off.
He broods at Wanstead. She has royal cares.
Not when she loses Burleigh, faithful * Spirit'
and mourns him as a daughter and a queen :
not when her rebels win a victory
in Ireland, one whole army blotted out,
(choice news for Philip, half-way home to hell!)
is Essex summoned. No ! She tells her court:—

ELIZABETH :

I'll break him of his will. The fool has played
upon me long enough. I mean to play
on him awhile. Ay, tell the Earl from me,
myself I value at as great a price
as he himself! No more, no more of Essex !

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

And he :—

ESSEX :

I am content to do her grace
the service of a clerk, but not a slave.
She chased me from her: let her bid me back !
What, when the vilest of indignities
is done unto me, must I sue for more ?
What, cannot princes err, subjects be wronged ?
I have had wrong——

ELIZABETH :

I'll pull down his great heart.

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

Neither will yield, no, not one royal inch.
But after months, because their age and youth

together are the alternated sun
 and rain of England's need, because apart
 each has a devil that tears with eagle beak,
 (oh, that dry ache in the side, that morning glaze
 of tears in eyelids blistered overnight,
 and oh, and oh, the dying-down of life
 when lovers hate !) because he's ravenous
 for contact, touch of eyes, the room refilled
 with heat, word, pause, perfume, their brushing
 sleeves,
 movement away, movement toward each other:
 because he must—or die—tell out each wrong
 that she has done him, as he'd un-give jewels
 too much delighted-in back to her palm,
 and with his fingers close her fingers home
 upon these gifts until each diamond edge
 entered the flesh : because he must—or die—
 pull down, deride, scorn, tear, whip, master, flay :
 he begs, in music, to be heard. He writes :—

ESSEX :

Madam, when I but think how I preferred
 your beauty above all, received no pleasure
 but in the increase of your favour to me,
 I wonder at myself what cause can be
 to make myself but one day absent from you ;
 but, thinking on the intolerable wrong
 that you, my mistress, did yourself and me
 against all rules of love and your own honour,
 then, then I swear I think all places better
 than where I am, since with me I must bear
 my false, beguiling pleasure's memory.
 Yet I say this, that I was never proud
 till you yourself sought to make me too base.
 Yet if your majesty forgives me not
 that as a man I have been more a subject

of natural beauty, yours, and seen you woman,
and loved that woman, and so forgot the king,
then bid me perish ; for away from you
how can I live ? Haste, paper, to her heart
whence only I am banished ! Say you come
from pining, languishing, despairing Essex !

MERLIN (*as narrator*) :

Then she, because his favour is her peace,
the days without him barren pebble-ridges ;
because her spirit and her old bones ache,
ache for the sunshine, with a sort of groan,
" Call him ! " she says. They meet at night, alone.
Two candles flicker in the panelled room.
The daddy-long-legs shrivel in the flame
marring the light. A bird calls in the reeds
of flowing Thames. A coney screams, but once,
weak in the vixen's hold. The man comes in.

A. door opens and shuts. Footsteps cross the floor.

The scene begins.

ELIZABETH :

Well, Robin ?

ESSEX :

Majesty, upon my knees——

ELIZABETH :

Why not upon your knees to living England ?
Kneel till you're king !

ESSEX ;

Rebellion ! Is this added
to the fantastic audit of my sins ?
I am not yet a traitor.

ELIZABETH :

No, not yet.

ESSEX :

Never!

ELIZABETH :

And yet I know not. I'm derided,
my sixty years of tasks in a hard school,
my hunger and my glory all made nothing,
by one young cousin who's—not yet—a traitor
to our shared blood. But Robin, in this blood
are drops and particles long since distilled
from dead men's veins, all traitors to each other.

ESSEX :

Never a traitor!

ELIZABETH :

Get up ! Come here to me
I love you. You should know it.

ESSEX :

•I know love.

ELIZABETH :

They fought at Bosworth field among the thorns,
the Red Rose and the White, my father's father
against his cousin, for this crown I wear.
Into the fight dashed Richard, crying : " Treason ! "
Treason it was, and treason won the day.
The crown of England rolled, the crown of England,
under a hawthorn-bush.

ESSEX (*still on his own wrongs*) :

Oh, for a glove
to fling——

ELIZABETH :

In my face ? And that same crook-back cousin
he snatched this crown from babies, easy smothered.
Anointed kings, girls like Arbella here,
(in whom I see my shade), Henrys and Johns,
all, all were cousin-murderers for my crown.

ESSEX :

Beaten like a schoolboy !

ELIZABETH :

How else clear your neck
of treason ? My blow turned the axe.

ESSEX :

No traitor !
I choke upon this ' traitor '. Treachery
in arms against pure love alone cries " Traitor ! "
I'm ill with grief and choler. Let me *go* !
Loved and not trusted, this is the threatened axe :
the stroke is formal.

ELIZABETH :

Robin, quiet! Be quiet,
and hear a tale my nurse, Kate Ashley, told me!
Once on a time——

ESSEX :

First blows, then sugar-plums !

ELIZABETH :

Once on a time a wanton fisher-boy
lived ragged in a hovel by the sea.
One day he caught a fish, a sea-king's daughter
bewitched, and lingering out her spell-bound years
between cross-tides, a prey to—fisher-lads.
She bargained for her life. " Sweetheart," said she,

" I can give wishes ! Sweetheart, fling me back,
and follow fortune home ! " Kind was her voice,
(or so they say), and the night musical
with airs of love, and he a moonstruck boy.

ESSEX :

Well?

ELIZABETH :

The dear lad went home with empty nets.

ESSEX :

What did he find ?

ELIZABETH :

A cottage trim and new,
and on the chimney-piece a crock of gold.

ESSEX :

Well?

ELIZABETH :

Not so well! My wanton fisher-lad
says, or his friends say for him : " Where's my wit ?
A sea-princess could easy give a farm."
Down to the shore he goes as the moon lifts
over a sea whose angry little waves
hiss at his feet, and calls : " My golden fish,
I want a farm ! " Then the fish answers him,
leaping to spy him from a silver crest:
" Your want is ended." Home he goes to find
stable and byre, fat stock and husbandmen
reaping his fruitful acres.

ESSEX :

Well?

ELIZABETH :

Ah well!

Within the week he's back upon the beach,
(swearing because the moon's behind a cloud),
and asks to be a gentleman with lands.
He gets them, goes to Court, envies the king,
comes fretting down the cliff-side while the wind
shrieks to the roarers, hears the golden fish
call, not so sweetly : " Will you climb again ?
Well, take your choice ! ", and finds himself in church.
The oil of the anointing trickles down
ill-smelling, and the royal crown's a weight——
Robin, a leaden weight! Men are his slaves ;
but time will not obey, nor the wind die,
nor the bees stop their humming in and out
of the council-chamber for him. Back he goes.
The waves' armada rides toward him, huge.
Bright anger cleaves the sky. He hears a voice :
" What now ? " He cries : " I must be all in all,
and so I shall have peace. Let me be God ! "
Then cries the weeping voice : " O fool, fool, fool!
Home to your rags again ! " Naked he stands.

ESSEX :

In this long trance——

ELIZABETH . (*bitter*):

Ah ! Wait your turn to speak,
stopping both ears !

ESSEX :

In this long trance of time
without you, I must sometimes move, look up,
speak but a word to let you know I live,
speak——

ELIZABETH :

Why then, speak !

ESSEX :

Oh, give me peace and pardon !

I have been sick in spirit unto death.

You are my sole physician. Here is home.

My heart speaks, not my lips. Patient I wait

till, in your deepest wisdom, gracious you

shall think the crisis past, and the time fit

to make me well again. I cannot speak

all that is in my heart, and yet to speak

would give my full heart ease. I am your servant.

The scene ends.

MERLIN *(as narrator)*:

Bliss to be friends again. Now the sun shines
and England sparkles, wreathes both names about
with garlands intertwined. This the Queen notes.

" Long may he live, the noble Earl of Essex,
the knight of chivalry, sweet England's pride ! "

This popularity, this heady wine !

Scarce reconciled, avid for every place,

he clamours now for Burleigh's dignity

which she denies him. Then he charges down.

The scene begins.

ESSEX :

I must believe you overthrow the office
rather than have *me* hold the place.

ELIZABETH :

My fool!

Vex me on all occasions if you choose,
despise my person, shrug me out of Court;
but never touch my sceptre !

ESSEX :

Scorned, abused

as ever!

ELIZABETH (*to herself, whispering*):

Govern me, my God ! Let soul
dominate flesh, reason the soul, faith reason !
Let nothing please me that displeasures Thee !
I am to guide the State, to guide the State.

. The scene ends.

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

Then he demands—glee fills his enemies——
that she shall make him deputy for Ireland,
Ireland, the ditch of honour, grave of hope.
Essex, who cannot tame himself, will tame
the viewless wind, tread quicksand, drink down fire,
outglare the cockatrice. Well, he is Essex,
the darling of the people and the Queen—
" Let him have rope—and see what he will do ! "
" Let him have rope,—and he may hang himself! "
Thus friends ! Thus enemies ! Thus—off he goes,
and no such host had ever left our shore
as Essex leads to Ireland. Seven months pass.

Now come to the Queen in her bedchamber at Nonsuch on a stormy Michaelmas morning. Dresses are laid out for her choice—wigs, paint, jewels, but no mirror; for she has not looked in the glass these twenty years. 'Lady Scrope waits upon her, maids of honour are in attendance and her trusted woman, Montague, dresses her as she dictates to a secretary hidden behind curtains.

The scene begins.

ELIZABETH : Continue my letter 'to- the Earl of Essex I
Where did I halt?

THE SECRETARY : " Seven months gone, and nothing done against Tyrone——"

ELIZABETH : I am there. Continue ! " If sickness be the reason for inaction, why not fight while the army was still in health ? If winter's approach, why were the summer months lost ? If spring came too soon, if summer was otherwise spent, if harvest prevented you in autumn, we must conclude that none of the four quarters of the year will be in season for you to conquer Ireland." *(To her dresser)* What is it, Montague ?

MONTAGUE : Will your highness try my new knitted stockings ?

ELIZABETH : What ? Silk-?

MONTAGUE : The first pair made in England.

ELIZABETH : Draw them on ? *(To the SECRETARY)* " You have had power and authority more ample than any have had or shall have." Silk stockings are pleasant to wear.

MONTAGUE : I'll put some in hand if your majesty pleases.

ELIZABETH : Do so ! I'll wear no more cloth stockings.

LADY SCROPE : Which dress, your majesty ?

ELIZABETH : The riding-habit.

LADY SCROPE : Dear mistress, it's not meet for one of your majesty's years to ride in such a storm.

ELIZABETH *(furious)* : My years ? Maids, get your habits !

There is a rustle of skirts and a door closes gently.

ELIZABETH : Now ! What was my word ?

THE SECRETARY : "—authority more ample——"

ELIZABETH : I am there, I am there. " Now, and for the third time we charge you, as you value our love, that you adventure not to come out of Ireland till Tyrone and all rebels are put down." *(There is a sudden noise, slamming doors, etc.)* Who comes clattering up my private stair ? Give me my dressing-gown ! Hold the door I *(A rush of footsteps)* Robin !

ESSEX (*the lover*) :

Dear Queen, noon sunshine to delighting eyes,
dazzle me not! Four days ago in Dublin,
now at your feet! Is that good horsemanship ?
Give me both hands !

ELIZABETH (*responding*) :

Kiss ! Victory ? (*Aside.*) A comb !
The rebels trapped? Well done! Well done!
(*Aside.*) A veil!
Sweet boy! True man! Were you spurred, eh,
hippogriff ?
Up from your knees ! Now, in ten words, the tale !

ESSEX (*in a dream*) :

After long storm——

ELIZABETH (*practical*):

How did you get Tyrone ?

ESSEX :

—how sweet to harbour here ! I'll stray no more.

ELIZABETH (*impatient*):

Where is Tyrone ?

ESSEX (*slowly*):

Highness, we wronged the man.

ELIZABETH :

Wronged that base bush-kern ?

ESSEX :

Trust my judgement of him !
We met at Bellaclinthe. I would not cross
the stream ; but he, gay gentleman, rode in
to his horse's belly. Thus we——

ELIZABETH :

—fought?

ESSEX :

We parleyed.

ELIZABETH :

Alone? Unnoted?

ESSEX (*superbly*):

Rulers must be private.

He spoke for his free people, I for mine.

ELIZABETH (*steely*):

When young Plantagenet, my ancestor,

met Stephen the usurper in mid-stream

England changed hands. You have changed—
courtesies.

ESSEX :

With not four thousand——

ELIZABETH :

—sixteen thousand troops !

ESSEX :

Y on green accurséd isle eats men.

ELIZABETH :

And treasure !

In seven months you've had of me, Endymion,

three hundred thousand pounds. How was it spent ?

ESSEX :

I have given you peace.

ELIZABETH (*dove-like*):

Coo-roo !

ESSEX :

What says your highness ?

ELIZABETH :

What pledges from Tyrone ?

ESSEX :

His word! His word!

ELIZABETH :

His spittle ! Who came home with you ? How many ?

ESSEX :

Some hundred men, John Harington, my knights.

ELIZABETH :

How many did you knight in seven months ?

ESSEX :

Not sixty.

ELIZABETH :

I made nine.

ESSEX :

I will reward
the men who follow me.

ELIZABETH :

White-headed boys !
You have them here ?

ESSEX :

At Lambeth, wearied out.
I posted on alone with Harington.

ELIZABETH :

My godson ! Hm ! An Irish tale is told I
This is to dance on shamrock. Calmly now !
You're travel-stained, and here am I half-dressed.
Go, change your clothes ! Wash off a little mud,
then kiss my hand again ! Adieu, sweet Robin !

ESSEX (*going*);

Most gracious mistress !

ELIZABETH (*honey sweet*) :

So ! Sweet Robin !

The door closes.

ELIZABETH (*harsh¹ and swift*) :

So!

Keep the door! Dress me quickly—the black and silver I
You have your wish, Scrope, no riding ! Send for Cecil !

LADY SCROPS : He's sent for.

ELIZABETH : Quick thought! Good servant! Now bring .
in Jack Harington !

The door is opened.

LADY SCROPE : The gentleman is to come in.

*Footsteps sound as HARRINGTON enters. The door is closed
once more.*

ELIZABETH : ' Sir Jack ' we must call him, Sir Jack the
fifty-ninth. Why did the fool bring you here ?

HARRINGTON : Highness, the general order——

ELIZABETH : None of mine ! (*With a scream of rage*) By my
father's soul, I'm no queen ! That man is above me. Who
gave him command to come back so soon ? I sent him on
other business.

HARRINGTON : Royal godmother, we are all your servants.

ELIZABETH : You are all idle knaves, and Essex worse.

LADY SCROPE : Sir Robert is here.

ELIZABETH : Let him in ! (*CECIL enters.*) Ah, my knight I

Look you, here's one that Essex made. Probe him, Cecil! He has heard treason spoken, though I believe he has done no more than listen. Godson—watch his eyes, Cecil!—has the Earl never said to you or in front of you : " Let us suddenly cross over to England in force and surprise the Queen at Nonsuch! " ?

HARINGTON (*uneasily*): No ! No !

ELIZABETH : Two " no's "—one " yes " ! (To CECIL) Essex has at Lambeth eight hundred men—armed.

CECIL : Disarmed now.

ELIZABETH (*on a deep sigh of relief*): So !

CECIL : When I saw the Earl ride by in such mad disorder I took instant measures to throw water on all bonfires.

HARINGTON : I dare swear——

ELIZABETH : Go home, Jack ! Your father served and loved me in trouble and in thrall, and so I save his son. But never come to Court again till I call for you !

HARINGTON : Merciful highness——!

ELIZABETH : Go!

There is a rush of retreating feet. The door is hastily opened and shut. Silence.

ELIZABETH : Cecil!

CECIL : Majesty ?

ELIZABETH : Is the guard doubled ?

CECIL : Trebled.

ELIZABETH : In the city ?

CECIL : Sabbath peace !

ELIZABETH : Tonight, after supper, let the Lord Keeper take the Earl of Essex into custody.

The scene ends.

MERLIN' (*as narrator*): Time passes.

As a man falls from a cliff-top, lands half-way down on a shelf of rock, and there lies, dizzy, bruised, but still alive—so Essex. He is imprisoned a year, admonished by the Council,

then set free. But he is forbidden the Court. He is overwhelmed by debt, powerless, shunned.

As a half-saved man struggles to regain the lost height, only to find no foothold, to slip again, clutching at roots and stones, and clings at last, helpless, by fingers and toes, dazzled from looking up, dizzy from looking down, so Essex. He writes to the Queen :—

ESSEX :

Like some dead carcass in a corner flung,
earth's basest creatures gnaw and tear my flesh.
The tavern-haunter knows the heart of Essex.
The frantic libeller deciphers Essex.
They print me, make me speak to all the world,
and shortly they will play me on the stage.
The least of these is death, and worse than death ; ,
yet worse it is that you, who ever keep
those you once loved from scorn, save only Essex,
reject my letters and refuse to hear me
or hear of me, and this you never did
to traitors even, and when was I a traitor ?
Well, you may tell your friends, I mean all those
who for my ruin thirst and gape, how you
have now the advantage, seeing I did rashly,
being in passion.

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

This she reads with sighs.

ELIZABETH :

Robin, your purpose is to rule my kingdom :
my purpose is to make you rule yourself,

ESSEX :

Am I not worth an answer ? Old affection——

ELIZABETH :

Affection's false !

ESSEX :

—cries out: ' No grace, no health
until I see you and this exile ends !^y
This is but one of many, many letters
I wrote you for my heart's ease, never sent.
How can I freely send to her who waits
to snare me : and to write as courtiers do
were base. I am not base. Yours am I yet;
though I think sometimes sweet it would be, sweet,
to come again in armour triumphing
into that presence whence you thrust me out——

ELIZABETH :

It must be proved which of us two shall reign.

MERLIN (*as narrator*): Yet she's weakening. Raleigh, Cecil and the rest shiver as they see her smothering the path for his return. But, as that man who clings to the cliff-side at last lets go and crashes to the nether rocks although the rope by which he could be saved dangles but half a foot above him, so Essex falls to ruin. Again he leads a conspiracy. At the head of his rebels he rides up Ludgate Hill and along Cheapside crying aloud:

ESSEX : A plot! A plot! England is sold to Spain by Cecil and Raleigh. Citizens of London, arm for England !

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

The City stares, appraises, and—rejects.
The gates are closed. Essex has failed again.
Arrested, tried, condemned—this time to death——
the proud man shrugs :—

ESSEX :

Well, I owe God a death.

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

He need not pay. Let him submit! One word,
the ring upon his finger sent the Queen
would save him from the axe. But no sign comes.
So the last week of life ebbs slowly out,
and morning dawns, the last. The desperate Queen
sits in her chamber playing idle tunes,
laughs, chats. None hears the whisper in the brain :—

The scene begins,

ELIZABETH (*to herself*):

Give me his life, O God ! Give me his life !
May I not save him ? He is thirty-four,
November child—the luckless month. ' Time is——
time was——' O king of kings, my flesh is frail,
my throne unstable, kingdom tottering,
my life uncertain : let him give one sign——
he need not ask his mercy, not in words—
one sign! (*Aloud*) Well, gentlemen, what next ?
Arbella,
how late is it ?

ARBELLA :

Nine, madam.

ELIZABETH :

Why do you shake ?
Bright looks, my girl! Now ! Here's a pretty tune.
(*To herself as she plays " Come to Court"*)
God, if I swell against Thee, pluck me down !
If in my own conceit—

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

Now they come in—
Nottingham, Cecil, Raleigh——

NOTTINGHAM :

Majesty!

ELIZABETH :

Speak I

NOTTINGHAM :

The late Earl of Essex—

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

Then she knows
that God has plucked her down.

The scene ends with a roll of funeral drums.

O sterile Time,
pity an ancient virgin ! Whet your scythe !
Two years of winter nights is long to weep.
Daytime she rides abroad, dances to show
all's well with England, or she sends in haste
to angry Parliament, and rights a wrong
done long ago behind her back, and smiles
when they come shouting to her chamber door :
" No more monopolies ! God save the Queen ! "

The scene begins.

ELIZABETH (*the voice has aged*) : The Commons ! These
troublesome husbands ! I've saved their pockets. Now they
come to thank me for knowing where the shoe pinches. You
spend the money, maids and gentlemen of the Court, but I
and my people have to find it. Nevertheless I will be bridal
for my Commons. Montague—Drake's pearls, the Indian
crown, the Armada emeralds I And, bring me a looking-glass !

LADY SCROPE (*giving orders*) :

A looking-glass !

SERVANTS :

A looking-glass I Run, run!

ELIZABETH (*calling*): Bring a true glass !

The SERVANTS' footsteps die away.

ELIZABETH :

Now I will tell you something.
I saw myself last night, not in a glass.
I saw myself, fearful, exceeding lean,
staring upon me in a light of fire.
In the night it was. Do you wake in the night
and see such sights ?

MONTAGUE:

Madam, the looking-glass.

ELIZABETH :

Is the glass true ?

A long silence.

O God! O God! O God!
Is this the virgin queen Elizabeth ?
Who swore I still was fair ? These starting eyes—
When I smiled last on Essex did he see
these hairs on the chin, these brownings like flat moles?
So his eyes sickened ! Stoop ! Does the breath stink
too?
" The pining, languishing, despairing Essex"—
this was his signature. He wrote his longings
for my kind eyes and fair, correcting hand,
my gracious—carcass ! O God ! O God ! O God I

LADY SCROPE :

Madam, you see yourself in strong May light,
all unattired ; but who else sees you so ?

ELIZABETH :

He, he-r-he saw me when he came from Ireland.
 Headlong and disobedient, home he came
 to the crooked carcass, tumbling out pell-mell
 the wrongs that I and all the world had done him.
 Oh my poor boy in his grave I How long, how long
 does dead flesh hold to the bone ? Two years or less ?
 He has been dead and I alive two years.
 My flesh still clings, else twixt my face and his—
 O God I O God !—there's not a stain to choose.

LADY SCROPE :

Think, dearest lady——!

ELIZABETH :

Dearest carcass—— !

LADY SCROPE :

Queen! -
 The sovereign player, painted to the part,
 noble as beauty in the people's eyes.
 They see you, what you are.

ELIZABETH :

A mask, a wig,
 black stumps——

LADY SCROPE :

The Queen of England's majesty
 to be adored, the spirit blinding through
 the unnoted flesh.

A door opens, and CECIL is heard entering, followed by other gentlemen.

CECIL (*loud, but at a distance*): Highness, the deputation
 from the Commons——

ELIZABETH : I will stand.

LADY SCROPE : Dear mistress, speak to them from your seat while they kneel——

ELIZABETH : Stand.

CECIL : Your majesty has not the strength.

ELIZABETH : Stand I Stand !

CECIL (*aside*) : Bring the Queen's chair !

ELIZABETH : Stand! My little Secretary, you must not bury me before I am dead. When you send your private daily letter to the King of Scots, say to my hungry cousin and heir : " The old woman will die in her own time, not ours." "

AN USHER : This way, sirs ! This way !

CECIL : The deputation from the Commons.

ELIZABETH : Ha ! Welcome, Mr. Speaker ! Welcome, gentlemen I

THE SPEAKER : Majesty, we kneel——

ELIZABETH : No words ! No words !

You come to give me thanks. This is a gift
beyond all words, because you love to give it.
Here is the ring with which you married me,
(and when it leaves my finger count me gone !)
so I must love you as a faithful wife
the master of her youth, and hold this jewel
dearer than all my jewels—I mean your loves.
Now of myself I will say this. Your wife
was never greedy, never a scraping grasper.
I never was a strait, fast-holding prince,
nor did I waste your goods ; but all you gave
I have bestowed again upon you all,
or on my ancient servants, when of us both,
kingdom and queen, they well deserved the kindness.
Then let those men beware, unworthy subjects
who have abused my bounty, turned to hurt
against my will, my will to do you good.
Since first I heard of it I have no rest

till all's reformed and evil-doers punished.
 As God shall judge me, so will I judge them,
 venturing my life against the practices
 of foreign malice and home enemies.
 For I am yours. And though in old time you had
 and may again have mightier princes sitting
 where now I sit, yet had you never any
 nor shall have any prince that loves you better.
 This, Mr. Speaker, tell the House from me ;
 and so fare well always ! But as you go
 "come to me, all of you, and kiss my hand !

THE SPEAKER :

God bless your majesty !

ALL :

God save the Queen 1

*Feet shuffle, pause and move on again as the members of the
 deputation pass before her.*

ELIZABETH :

Farewell! Farewell I Farewell! Farewell 1 Farewell!

LADY SCROPE :

She sways. She's ill. Get them away 1

ELIZABETH (*a last effort*):

Farewell!

The feet die away.

ELIZABETH (*exhausted*) :

Now let me rest ! Bring cushions I So 1 So ! So I

Why do you stand about me in a ring ?

Will you play 'drop-the-handkerchief' ? I'm parched.

Move ! Go about your business, all of you !

Farewell! Farewell! Is that my godson Carey ?

CAREY:

Dear royal kindness, when shall I see again
your smiling self?

ELIZABETH :

No, Robin, I'm not well.
Lights! Lights! When I was young, in all their
songs
I was ' the Light of Britain '. Out I go!

CECIL :

Get her to bed!

ELIZABETH :

And let me have my music!
They fumble in the gallery. Strike up!

The music begins.

CECIL (*softly*):

Persuade her majesty!

ELIZABETH (*overhearing*):

See what I see,
lying in my bed o'nights, before you drive me !

CECIL :

Spirits ?

ELIZABETH :

I will not answer you.

CECIL (*aside*):

And yet,
to please the people, she *must* go to bed.

CAREY:

How wondrously she smiles, contemning him !

ELIZABETH :

Man, little man, ' must' never was a word
to use with princes. Had your father lived
you dared not say so much ; but well you know
that I must die, and so you grow presumptuous.
Depart! Depart!

LADY SCROPE :

Seem to obey, Sir Robert!

ELIZABETH :

Where is my Admiral ?

NOTTINGHAM :

Here, at your side.

ELIZABETH (*secretly*) :

He'd have me mad, and tell the people so.

(*Aloud*)

Fetch me the singing-boy ! What's the name—Hugh ?

(*To herself.*)

Not mad !

*We hear the SINGING-BOY running down from the minstrels'
gallery.*

THE BOY :

She wants me. Let me pass !

ELIZABETH (*sweetly*) :

Boy Hugh!

NOTTINGHAM :

Make way for him I

THE BOY :

My lady !

ELIZABETH :

There's a tune
that I would have you play.

THE BOY :

What tune, my lady ?

ELIZABETH :

Moonlight was in it. Afterwards we danced.
But now I'm tied, I'm tied. My case is altered.
Robin !

CAREY :

Kind godmother I

ELIZABETH (*wailing*) :

No, no !

CAREY :

Your Robin ?

ELIZABETH :

I seek another Robin. Fare you well !

THE BOY (*singing*) :

There is an Enemy who goes
in black and white, and knows
only the colourless rose.

No savour, no merriment
in the dark is found,
yet sweet things root in the ground.

The violets have their scent
out of the earth,
and from the lark's bare tent
arises mirth.

ELIZABETH : The bells will crack with so much ringing. What news of their Armada ?

NOTTINGHAM : Scattered long since.

ELIZABETH : My fire-ships did it. Let my sea-men come to me and kiss my hand ! I will speak to them now. My people—I come among you as you see at this time, not for my recreation or disport——

CECIL : I have sent for her physicians.

ELIZABETH : —but being resolved in the midst and heat of the battle to live and die among you all. I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman——

CECIL : Try the pulse !

ELIZABETH : —but I have the heart of a king——

LADY SCROPE : My Lord Admiral, take her up in your arms !

ELIZABETH : —and a king of England too !

The scene ends.

MERLIN (*as narrator*): She is borne away. The hall empties. The musicians troop down from the gallery. One of them is the singing-boy, Hugh. He sees my book lying open beside the scattered cushions, and slips it into his pocket as he goes. I follow him for his beauty's sake, and because he has my book.

A month later he comes from the Queen's funeral home to the garden of his lodging on the south side of Thames. In the arbour a fellow-player, an older man, is watching the funeral barges. I look into this man's eyes, and if a spirit can know wonder, then I know it, and if a spirit can know peace, then I know it. I have served many sons of the morning, but here is the master of them all. I yearn towards him : I bewitch the night for him : I free the scent of the jessamine : I bid the moon enlarge her disc. Sweet, sweet is my master's voice, and as he talks to the boy his spell is woven and his magic works. Yes, he offers me a refuge within his spirit: he gives me leave

to learn his thought and borrow his voice. The boy never guesses. The boy is mocking him.

The scene begins.

THE BOY : Have you liked your holiday, idle Will ? It's always the same. I struggle in the crowds, and you wait here at your ease to pick the story out of me. It was a fine funeral. I've never seen such multitudes nor heard such lamenting.

MERLIN (*as the player*) : Was her effigy like the Queen ?

THE BOY : Like an old woman who was like the Queen ! But Will, did you hear that her wraith was seen two days before her death ? My Lady Guildford had left her asleep in her bed ; but as she goes to take the air, whom should she meet four rooms away but her very Majesty, in a white dress not worn these twenty years. My lady runs to her in great fear of blame ; but as she draws near—nothing ! When she gets back to the bed-chamber there lies the Queen, still asleep.

MERLIN (*as the player*) : Such tales will always be told when a great prince leaves the land.

THE BOY : Was she great ?

MERLIN (*as the player*) : She made men so. How long were you in the presence ?

THE BOY : The length of my song. Here's a book of prophecies I stole for you, from her own table.

MERLIN (*as the player*) : The dreamer Merlin ! Skimble-skamble stuff !

THE BOY : Ah, but look on the fly-leaf ! Look at the hand !

MERLIN (*as the player*) : Essex !

THE BOY : And she has written beneath it : ' His first gift to me \ Now it's my gift to you.

MERLIN (*as the player*) : And in return ?

THE BOY : Write me a man's part, Will ! A proper Hotspur !

MERLIN (*as the player*) : Dear lad, not for another two years. But something is shaping in my mind—the tale of a spirit

released from prison, an airy spirit——You could play such a part.

THE BOY : How should I have to look ?

MERLIN (*as the player*): Like yourself, gold-headed and eighteen ! Who told you that tale of the Queen's wraith ?

THE BOY : Old Chettle. Oh, and he complains against you in his new poem because you have written no lament for Queen Elizabeth!

MERLIN (*as the player*) : Why should I ? She has not died. (*Then as THE BOY laughs*) Listen ! I heard a cry.

THE BOY : A moorhen !

MERLIN (*as the player*): Two voices in talk.

THE BOY : It's only the river cheating you. In the evening each little wave sobs like a man running. Oh, come in ! It's supper-time.

MERLIN (*as the player*) : Listen !

ESSEX'S VOICE (*faraway*): Justly spued out of the realm !

ELIZABETH'S VOICE (*far away*): I defy all shadows.

THE BOY : Supper for the midges, too. I'll not wait. (*Singing as he goes*) " Come to Court, come to Court, pretty boy ! "

The song continues in the distance.

ELIZABETH (*nearer*): I am the Queen of England. You cannot hunt *me* down the wind. I have but to crook my finger and defence will rise dripping out of Thames in a jewelled suit. Robin ! Come to me I' Robin !

ESSEX (*nearer*) : " The most unthankful traitor that ever was in the land."

ELIZABETH (*close at hand*): We have been dreaming.

ESSEX (*close at hand*) : I dreamed that I went to Court, and had followers and a great house, and the Queen paid for all.

ELIZABETH : Where is the ring ?

ESSEX : I will go to the Tower, but I will not give you my ring.

ELIZABETH : Where are you ?

ESSEX : Asleep in the sawdust and the blood.

ELIZABETH : Come away ! That dream is over. Let us go to our own place.

ESSEX : Justly spued out of the realm——

ELIZABETH : I forbid you. I tell you we are not spirits in exile. Where we have fashioned, there we may inhabit: where our feet have trodden, there we still tread. We are dust; but we are the dust of England. We shall rise again from the dead with every breath of every spring. Why are you not among the dancers, Robin ? You dance better than you dream. Music! The stars are coming out like torches. They are in search of us, the dutiful stars. Give me back my ring!

ESSEX : No !

ELIZABETH : But the portrait was never like.

ESSEX : There is a likeness, as the moon up yonder is like the broken ripple in the water, but no more than that. Let me put back the briars for your highness !

ELIZABETH : Sweet briars. But you put your hand to your mouth. There's blood on it. Have they torn you ?

ESSEX : I have forgotten. I am kissing my ring.

The music dies away.

THE PLAY ENDS

REMEMBER NELSON

CHARACTERS

MERLIN
THE WAVES } (*as narrators.*)

COMMODORE HOSTE
LIEUTENANT DUNN
LORD NELSON

CAPTAIN SUCKLING
THE REVEREND EDMUND NELSON
AN UNKNOWN OFFICER
ADMIRAL LUTWIDGE
CAPTAIN ANDREWS
WILLIAM IV
LORD HOOD
LADY NELSON (*FANNY*)
MR. HERBERT, *her uncle*
JOSIAH NISBET, *Nelson's stepson*
GENERAL DUNDAS
ADMIRAL HOTHAM
ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JERVIS
SIR WILLIAM HAMILTON, *British Ambassador at Naples*
EMMA HAMILTON, *his wife*
ADMIRAL BRUEYS
THE REVEREND MR. COMYN, *a thaplain*
MR. CAMPBELL
MR. JEFFERSON
MRS. ST. GEORGE
LIEUTENANT LAYMAN
THE REVEREND DR. SCOTT
CAPTAIN FOLEY

CAPTAIN HARDY

CAPTAIN BLACKWOOD

LIEUTENANT PASCOE

DOCTOR BEATTY

Clergymen, a young man, friends of MRS. ST. GEORGE, seamen, crowd, etc.

His Majesty's Ships :

Amphion, Active, Volage, Cerberus, Dolphin, Agamemnon, Theseus, Vanguard, Goliath, Zealous, Orion, Audacious, Minotaur, Defence, Bellerophon, Majestic, Swijtsure, Alexander, Leander, Cullodon, Victory.

MERLIN (*as narrator*) : What becomes of the schoolmaster when his pupils outgrow him ? I know. For I am Merlin, the spirit of yesterday in Britain. No longer do my British cry : " This, Merlin foretold," or, when troubles come : " Now call upon King Arthur, as Merlin bade ! " At a window in Whitehall I saw the end of kingship as I knew it. I saw Cromwell's fist smash down the stone-wrought prayers of old England, while the people helped him. So I said : " I am proved a liar. Arthur is dust in Avalon and will never come again. Where shall I hide myself ? "

Then I remembered the shore which I enchanted long ago, full of sweet sounds that give delight and hurt not. Thither I fled. I lay on the yellow sands and drowsed away the centuries, till the walls of my fable began to pull, and sway, like a bubble pulling from its anchor. The sky was darkened by red rain, and the petrels pattered overhead, calling : " Peril ! Peril to the free air above and the free seas below I " A wind tore away all enchantments as it screamed in my ears : " Destroy England ! That done, Europe is at our feet. Fifteen million of people must give way to forty millions.

Let us be masters of the Channel for six hours, and we are masters of the world ! " Then, beyond the reef, the roarers bowled before them, like a hoop imperial, the name— ' Napoleon '.

So I knew that Britain was in mortal danger, and calling upon her yesterdays for help, and I remembered the sole magic left me by time and unbelief, the spell which children work, playing by the sea. From the sand I picked up an empty shell and held it to my ear, and heard at last and could obey the summons of the far-travelled waves.

THE WAVES :

Lissa ! Issa ! ThelsleofLissa !

Follow our whisper, Merlin I Follow
after us into each hollow
oily dapple, and toss the frills
of spindrift up to the sun !
Follow us, over, over
the heaving water-hills !
Snatch the glistening seaweed-streamer
out of the smother !
Hurry from crest to crest,
on, on !
Bridle and double-spur the years !
Time and tide shall carry you, dreamer,
into the sparkling, shallow,
isleted Adriatic, to Lissa,
ancient Issa, the fortress isle.

Now we breast
the ilex-garlanded rocks of Lissa
on a March morn
eighteen hundred years and eleven
since the wave-walking Christ was born.

A fine breeze comes
 rollicking up from the nor'-nor'-west
 with a spit and a hiss
 over the smooth seas :
 and one sea-mile
 off Roman Issa, Venetian Lissa,
 hear with our ears
 the British drums !
 See with our eyes the British ships ;
 and the little flags unfurling,
 crisping and curling,
 flicking and flacking out words !

Over the drum rolls we hear the ships of the squadron speaking.

The scene begins.

H.M.S. AMPHION : The frigate *Amphion* speaking. Clear for action ! Clear for action !

H.M.S. ACTIVE : The frigate *Active* answering. Signal received. Clear for action I

H.M.S. VOLAGE : The frigate *Volage* answering. Signal received. Clear for action !

H.M.S. CERBERUS : The frigate *Cerberus* answering. Sigrial received. Clear for action !

H.M.S. AMPHION (*to the audience*) : We are about to join battle with one of Boney's squadrons—three to one in men, two to one in guns. Captain Hoste of the *Amphion* is walking on the poop with two of his officers, while the squadron continues working to windward.

THE WAVES :

Red ensigns at their peaks,
 and Union Jack
 and ensigns blue and red
 at the stays.

We fountain, frill and pack
above their cleaving beaks,
and break again, and go our water-ways
as the Captain speaks.

HOSTE (*a robust and decided voice*) : Look, Mr. Dunn! The enemy's bearing down in two divisions—deuce take their impudence !

DUNN (*a jerky voice*) : Impudence ? Why, sir ?

HOSTE : Why ? Because that's how, six years ago, Nelson beat them at Trafalgar.

THE WAVES :

Trāfalgar ! Trāfalgar !
A pinned-up sleeve and a glittering star !
But Nelson met the French off Lissa
six years after Trāfalgar.

DUNN : You were at Trafalgar, sir ?

HOSTE : No, Mr. Dunn. I'd just been appointed to the *Amphion* here. She was the last gift of my poor Lord Nelson. He'd sent us off on an errand to the Dey of Algiers a week before Trafalgar, and when we got back it all was over.

THE WAVES :

Trāfalgar ! Trāfalgar !
A broken back and a fallen star !
But Nelson led his men off Lissa
six years after Trāfalgar !

HOSTE : I was one of his children aboard the old *Agamemnon*. A timid sort of fellow I was too—no head for heights. But he never ordered you to do what he wouldn't do himself. So one day Lord Nelson, Captain Nelson then, he says to me : " Well, sir, I'm going a race to the masthead. Shall I meet you there ? " No getting out of *that* ! (We'll be in gun-shot within ten minutes.) But he let me crawl up in my own time,

and when we met at the top he smiled at me and chatted, saying how easy anything was once you'd tried it out. Fear? What was fear? He'd never met fear, Nelson said, and why should I be less lucky than he? And indeed, Mr. Dunn, since that day I never have.

DUNN: A cousin of mine was on the poop with Lord Nelson at Trafalgar.

HOSTE: What—Captain Blackwood?

DUNN: No, sir, Pascoe, the Flag-Lieutenant. He has often told me how his lordship came to him and remarked: "Mr. Pascoe, I wish to say to the Fleet——"

HOSTE: No, no! That was later. First he said: "We will now amuse the *Fleet* with a signal."

DUNN: My cousin gave me to understand that his lordship said: "I will now give the Fleet a signal by way of a fillip."

HOSTE: "We will now amuse the Fleet with a signal"—that's what he said. Blackwood told me so himself. It occurs to me, gentlemen, that we might now amuse the squadron with a signal. Suppose we telegraph——Hm!

DUNN: "England expects——"?

HOSTE (*testily*): Yes, yes, to be sure, Mr. Dunn! We all know *that* signal. But his lordship once shifted his flag to the *Amphion*, because the *Victory* was too slow for him. Nelson's the name to conjure with here. So telegraph, if you please: "Remember Nelson!" And be quick!

THE WAVES:

The enemy nears.

And now *Amphion* on the starboard tack,
with *Active*, *Volage*, *Cerberus* astern,
prepares to open fire on the *Favorite*.

But ere the squadrons meet
the flags ascend. Flick-flack!

Heads turn.

There's wind-swept quiet as they spell it out.

" Remember Nei! " One shout,
and then the cheers, the echoing, rolling cheers.

Cheers and gunfire.

THE SHIPS :

Remember Nelson ! Remember Nelson !
Take your orders from Nelson the glorious !

NELSON'S VOICE :

Strike quick, and home,
and may we soon return victorious !
Strike quick, and home !

THE WAVES :

The voice ! The voice ! The voice !
The waters yearn to it, the streams rejoice :
and, underflowing, tug and turn aside
the all-but-pulseless tide.
The sleek sea-horses rear,
trampling the smooth stone-lilies
which pattern and diversify with white
the shifting* water-pavements malachite.
The sea of air
answers the voice of Nelson everywhere
with : " Nelson ! Nelson's here ! "

H.M.S. AMPHION : The most noble lord, Horatio Nelson, Viscount and Baron Nelson of the Nile, and of Burnham Thorpe in the county of Norfolk, Baron Nelson of the Nile and of Hilborough in the same county, knight of the most honourable Order of the Bath, Vice-Admiral of the White Squadron of the Fleet, and Commander-in-Chief of his Majesty's ships and vessels in the Mediterranean——

H.M.S. VOLAGE : Where the fighting is! Where else would Nei be ?

H.M.S. CERBERUS : Killed at Trafalgar in the moment of victory, buried at St. Paul's on Thursday the ninth of January, 1806. The body was placed on a funeral car or open hearse decorated with a carved imitation of His Majesty's Ship the *Victory*, and was lowered into the crypt at thirty-three minutes and a half past five o'clock precisely.

THE WAVES :

Trāfalgar! Trāfalgar!

Nelson died at Trāfalgar.

But Nelson meets the French off Lissa
six years after Trāfalgar.

NELSON'S VOICE : A glorious death is to be envied. Strike quick, and home !

MERLIN (*as narrator*): Men and guns obey this voice, and seven hundred and fifty musket-balls sweep the *Favorite's* fore-castle. Rolling smoke wraps the squadrons in curtains and coverlets of grey. But the smoke cannot blind the incessant roar of the guns, the roll and thud of the carriages, rattle of musketry, shrieks, curses, orders given in French and English, squeal of spfntcrs, the crashing, the banging, the screams of agony, and above it all the wind-loud Norfolk voice neighing in triumph :—

NELSON'S VOICE : My seamen are now what British seamen ought to be—almost invincible." They really mind shot no more than peas.

THE SHIPS : Nelson ! Nelson ! Remember Nelson !

Amid cheers and gunfire the scene closes.

MERLIN (*as narrator*) : Deafened, I put down the shell from, my ear, and the noise of battle ended like a flame blown out. But just as smoke from that quenched flame goes spiralling up, up, thinning as it spreads, to the farthest confines of the night sky ; so from the silence, there spiralled up echoes still crying ;

" Remember Nelson! " And these vestiges woke other voices, young and old, men's, women's, gentle voices, peasant, voices, all echoing : " Remember Nelson ! ", while the waves at my feet distinguished for me, with sobs, and sighs, and gigglings, the names of these eager ones.

CAPTAIN SUCKLING'S VOICE : So little Horatio wants to go to sea ?

MERLIN (*as narrator*): Who speaks ?

THE WAVES :

A straw that shows
how through parsonage windows a sea-wind blows,
stirring the dust,
rising to hurricane velocity
some day—who knows ?
Not Nelson's father, speaking after his kind,
plum-in-the-mouth and fussed,
totally unaware of the rising wind:
and not all-powerful uncle Suckling,
Captain of the *Razsonnabk*, now chuckling
over a nephew's precocity,
over the vain caprice
of the weak young breeze.

The scene begins.

SUCKLING : Any nephew of mine can have a welcome aboard the *Kaisonnable*. But why pick out poor weak little Horatio to rough it at sea ?

•NELSON'S FATHER : My dear brother, I am a poor clergy-⁸ man, and I have eight children to provide for. Horatio is full twelve years old.

SUCKLING : Well, send him along, and the first time we go into action if a cannon ball knocks off his head, he'll be provided for, eh, brother ?

NELSON'S FATHER : That's as Providence pleases.

SUCKLING : On the other hand, if Providence is soft-hearted, you may live to see him an Admiral. Ha, ha !

NELSON'S FATHER : I'd as soon expect to see his brother an earl.

Through their laughter a new voice speaks.

AN OFFICER'S VOICE : Little Horatio Nelson—I remember him. But, my dear Suckling, why didn't you send to meet the poor little fellow ?

The scene ends.

MERLIN (*as narrator*): Who speaks ?

THE WAVES :

A shade!

One of the unknown friends whom Nelson made
at any time, as women-folk make tea,
an officer encountered on the quay
when very young Horatio went to sea.

THE OFFICER (*to the audience*): Poor child! He was wandering about the quays shivering with cold. I knew his uncle, so I took him home and gave him something to eat, and once he was warmed-through he was as friendly as a homesick puppy. We heard all about his father the parson, and brother William, and sister Kate, and sister Ann, and the village. And when he left he made my wife a grand bow, and thanked me for " taking compassion " on him. Permit me—I'm the man who took compassion on Nelson of the Nile ! I never saw him again, but I shall always remember him.

He is interrupted by the voice of a much older man—

LUTWIDGE.

LUTWIDGE (*to the audience*): Remember Nelson ? I should think I do, the headstrong young devil ! I'm Admiral of the Red nowadays—Skeffington Lutwidge at your service. But then I was a young captain, fitting out the *Carcass* for a voyage

to the North Pole, and the one thing I bargained for was—no boys on board. But Nei badgered his uncle, and his uncle badgered me till I put him down as coxswain, more 'shame to me, though I'll own he was handy as a man. Once when we were stuck in the ice for four days he found us our passage out. But then what does he do but desert in the fog to hunt a polar bear? It was four hours before the fog cleared, and then we saw him, far away, trying to leap a crack in the ice to get at the brute.

NELSON'S VOICE (*far away*): I've used up my ammunition. But let me get one blow at this devil with the butt-end of my musket and I shall have him!

LUTWIDGE: Well, of course, we scared off the beast with gunfire, and afterwards I dressed my young gentleman down, I can tell you. Said I: "What do you mean by such conduct, Mr. Nelson? Fifteen years old and desert your watch? Never pout your sullen lip at me, sir! What possessed you?"

NELSON (*sweetly*): Sir, I wanted to kill the bear to bring home his skin to my father.

We hear LUTWIDGE'S answering laugh die away. Through it comes the voice of a ship—the Dolphin.

H.M.S. DOLPHIN (*to the audience*): Fight with a bear? Why, the boy I remember hadn't the strength to lift a musket! You can trust what I tell you. I'm His Majesty's Ship *Dolphin*. I brought him home from the Indies, discharged sick. I heard what none of you heard—Nelson's thoughts as he swung in the, hammock.

NELSON'S VOICE (*boyish*): Laid up—at seventeen! Done for! Damned fever! Damned feebleness! Damned, damned luck! And if I get my strength back how shall I ever catch up? Such a long way to the top of the tree! 'Admiral Nelson'—ha, what a fool! If I'm ever *Captain* Nelson I'll be lucky. But if I did command a fleet I'd keep my men fit or die. What I say is—It don't cost much to keep a *well* fleet healthy; but to make a *sickly* fleet healthy costs a pretty penny. I'd see they had vegetables in the soup. I'd give 'em oranges and

lemons—bells of St. Clement's—o God, my head does ache so dreadfully! O God,' give me a patron! If you're great enough you have the country for your patron. " Send for Nelson ! " say the news-sheets. Then the high-ups have to. That's the sort of influence I want. The country ! I wish I could open my eyes and be at home, or out on one of the Broads. It's no joke rowing on the Broads in winter, when the reeds are yellow. Norfolk—England—my country ! I do love my country. I will serve. I will fight. I will! I will—I *will* succeed.

The young voice of NELSON'S friend ANDREWS interrupts.

ANDREWS (*to the Audience*): Succeed ? I knew he'd,succeed when I was with him aboard the *Albemarle*. I'm his friend Andrews. He was always sea-sick, always catching cold—and always taking it out on the Danes, damned neutrals ! Remember how the Danish Admiral sent to ask who we were, and what guns we had ? Remember "the answer they got ?

NELSON'S VOICE : The *Albemarle* is one of his Britannic Majesty's ships. You are at liberty, sir, to count the guns as you go down the side. You can assure the Danish Admiral, sir, that if necessary they shall all be well served.

There is a laugh, and we hear, speaking with a slight German accent, the voice of WILLIAM IV.

WILLIAM IV (*to the Audience*): Stood no nonsense, any more than I do. But I took advice from young Nelson. Didn't think it possible, except for a dearest relation, to have felt what I feel for Nelson, and that's saying much when you consider that I'm the king of England these days. But when I first knew Nelson I was only Prince William Henry and I didn't count. Why, for me to recommend an officer was enough to put him back five years. You see, the Admiralty had a spite against me. My friend Nelson says I speak my mind too free.

NELSON'S VOICE : No, no, sir—I merely take the liberty of saying—for I've seen a few more years than yourself——

WILLIAM IV : Only seven !

NELSON : Still in some respects I may know more of man-

kind. I do urge a thorough knowledge of those you tell your mind to. People are not always what they seem.

WILLIAM IV : What they seem ! Ah, my lord, if you'd been what you seemed when I first saw you, that day you came on board the *Barfleur* ! No powder in your hair, old-fashioned flaps to your waistcoat—never saw such a mere boy of a captain.

NELSON : And you, sir, a great sturdy fellow, eyeing me sideways as if you'd never seen such a quiz in your life.

WILLIAM IV : But I changed my tone when Lord Hood introduced us.

The heavy, elder ly voice of HOOD joins in.

HOOD : If your Royal Highness wants to ask questions about naval tactics, Captain Nelson can tell you as much as any officer in the Fleet.

WILLIAM IV (*to the audience*) : Fancy having Flood say that of you—at twenty-four ! Do you wonder I admired Nelson ? A great mind, a great mind—we had much in common, Nelson and I. He wanted to command a battleship, you see : and I wanted to be First Sea Lord. I could have managed it, too. Ask Nelson!

NELSON'S VOICE : His Royal Highness is a *seaman*—which you would hardly suppose from his other—er—qualifications. He has good temper and great common-sense.

WILLIAM IV : Let the Admiralty put that in their pipe and smoke it!

NELSON (*slyly*) : But as for discipline, I could say to your Royal Highness what I say to my children—the first thing to bear in mind is to obey orders implicitly, and without attempting to form any opinion of their propriety.

WILLIAM IV : Hark at him, solemn as a judge ! Remember what you wrote after the Nile ?

NELSON (*with a chuckle*) : What did I write you then, my prince.?

WILLIAM IV : Read it ! Yes, read it out ! I've gone up in the world since your day. You're to do as I tell you !

NELSON : Sir, I find that most men thin—think—can't read my own hand—to obey orders is *all perfection*, (*Working himself up*) But to serve my King and destroy the enemy I consider as the great order of all, from which the little orders spring, and if one of these little orders militate [against it](#) (for who can tell exactly at a distance), I go back to obey the great order and object, to *down, down* with the damned enemy.

The voice of LADY NELSON (FANNY) interrupts.

FANNY : My love, you are so extreme.

THE WAVES :

This is the widow Nisbet, the perfect mother,
the perfect daughter,
but hardly, for Nelson, the perfect wife.

She is smooth as little waves are,
darkly lapping the giant ships,
trapping, holding, losing again
the image, not the star.

Fanny is sweet, sedate
and very cold ;
so she has taught him the proper names
for love ' as it's vulgarly called',
and these are ' respect' and ' esteem '
For hers is the middle way of life.

Her path is plain.
Straight as an arrow flight
it runs between
the well-to-do and the shabby,
the generous and the mean.
Her little soul is appalled
by all that makes 'him great.
There's never a tender smile to smother :
never a cry of delight

bursts, in spite of herself, from Fanny's lips
when Nelson flames
rocket-high over the lawless water,
voicing a dream of ships.

The scene begins.

NELSON :

A peerage or Westminster Abbey!

FANNY:

People will think you vain.

NELSON : So I am. If it be a sin to covet glory, then I am
the most offending soul alive.

FANNY : You misquote. The word is 'honour'—^c if it
be a sin to covet honour——'

NELSON : Glory—honour—it's the same thing.

FANNY : Are you sure ?

The scene ends.

THE WAVES :

Is it mere chance,
or does her no-desire
shrink in advance
from the sharp smell of fire ?
Was there, one night, a dream
of shivering alone.,
mourning the laurelled, exquisite honour gone
to feed the bonfire which none calls ' esteem' ?

WILLIAM IV'S VOICE: Never saw a lover so easy. You
never talk of her, never threaten to stab yourself if she dances
with another man. I don't understand either of you.

NELSON'S VOICE : Ah, Fanny! He thinks salt water and

absence will wash away love. Now I'm such a heretic as not to believe that faith. For behold, every morning I have six pails of water poured over my head, and instead of finding what seamen say to be true, it goes so contrary that you'll see me before the fixed time.

ANDREWS'S VOICE : It's a national loss that such an officer should marry;

WILLIAM IV : I agree with you, Captain Andrews. But one can hardly persuade a man that he is not in love when he himself *is* sure of it.

SUCKLING'S VOICE: My nephew Horatio was for ever fancying himself in love.

WILLIAM IV : If as anyone talked sense to the lady's guardian—what's the name ?—Herbert.

MR. HERBERT IS *answering*.

HERBERT'S VOICE : Who, me ? I may be Governor of Nevis but I couldn't govern Captain Nelson, even did I wish it. Why, in the late disputes, not only the planters but even his own Admiral was against him. But would he listen ?

NELSON : It is my duty to prevent trade with the enemy. I warn you, gentlemen, that enemy ships flying neutral colours will be seized—whoever owns the cargoes.

HERBERT (*to the audience*): Well, he saved England a pretty-penny, though he got nothing out of it but a wife and a stepson. For he called once, on some business, and when I ran down, half-dressed, to receive him, good God, if I did not find that great little man of whom everybody is so afraid, playing under the dining-room table with Josiah, my niece's little boy ! I called Fanny down and—so it began. Interfere ? Where could I find a better protector for youth and beauty ?

FANNY'S VOICE : Where could I find a better second father for Josiah ?

Wedding music begins.

WILLIAM IV'S VOICE : Nelson's wedding-day ! It's a great pity. Still, as I've offered to give away the bride we'd better be going. What will be, must be. That's what I always say.

A CLERGYMAN'S VOICE : Dearly beloved, we are gathered . . . to join together this Man and Woman——

NELSON'S VOICE : I, Horatio, take thee, Frances Herbert, to my wedded wife, to have and to hold——

FANNY : —to have and to hold——

HOOD'S VOICE : The Navy has lost one of its greatest ornaments.

NELSON : —for better for worse——

FANNY : —in sickness and in health——

THE CLERGYMAN : I pronounce that they be man and wife together.

HOOD : Had it not been for this marriage Captain Nelson would have been the greatest man in the service.

THE WAVES :

He has taken his own way.
He has not suppled his back
nor asked nor taken advice.
Now is a chance to repay
the man who is always right,
but never worldly wise.

So the master-minds decree
smiles at the next levee,
thereafter five years on half-pay.

" Do him no harm.
What does he lack ?
Something to occupy——?
Let him trim hedges !
Nothing to satisfy—— ?
Shoot wild duck in the Norfolk sedges I
They say the fellow's not much of a shot ?
Then, my dear sir, let him farm !
Why not?
The sea can do without Nelson,
and Nelson without the sea."

But in 'ninety-three
war is declared.

" Now where's the fellow ? We're unprepared,
and they say he can organize."

" Why yes, my lord,
if he has your good word,
let us remember Nelson."

NELSON'S VOICE : Fanny ! Fanny ! After cloud comes sunshine ! Yes, Father, the First Lord himself sent for me— and he apologized, he did indeed, because he could not give me a seventy-four. I am to have one as soon as available. Meanwhile he has given me *Agamemnon*. *Agamemnon* ! If you'd given me my choice I should undoubtedly have said *Agamemnon*. No, Fanny, I've not forgotten Josiah. He is to be among the midshipmen. " Where do we go ? " My dear Fanny, it's to me perfectly indifferent to *what* quarter of the world we go. With a good ship and good company we can come to no harm, and the finest sixty-four in the service is undoubtedly *Agamemnon*.

H.M.S. AGAMEMNON (*to the audience*): He is speaking of me, *Agamemnon*, his favourite ship. Three times he refused promotion rather than leave me. I took him to Spanish waters in 'ninety-three, and his little stepson, Josiah Nisbet, went with him.

The rather fretful voice of JOSIAH NISBET intervenes.

JOSIAH (*to the audience*): And at Cadiz I got him to a bull-fight. But my stepfather don't understand sport.

NELSON'S VOICE : We had what is called a fine feast, for five horses were killed, and two men very much hurt. If they'd been killed too, then it would have been quite complete. But it was the bulls and horses I felt for. How the women could sit it out was astonishing. It turned me sick.

H.M.S. AGAMEMNON : Yet he wasn't sick at the siege of Calvi.

THE WAVES :

Ah! Ah! Ah!

Bastia! Calvi! Ah,
the insane

Corsican campaign,
with British redcoats thick on every hill,
all sitting still I

The scene begins.

NELSON : Armies go so slow that seamen think they never mean to get forward. I cannot comprehend the General.

HOOD *is heard chuckling.*

HOOD (*aside*) : As Grenville says, we *have* no General; but some old woman in a red riband. Let me introduce you to each other. (*Aloud*) Captain Nelson—General Dundas i Now, General, what about taking Bastia ?

DUNDAS : After mature consideration, and a personal inspection of several days of all circumstances, local as well as others, I consider the siege of Bastia, with our present means and force, to be a most visionary and rash attempt, such as no officer would be justified in undertaking.

NELSON : J was always of the opinion and always acted up to it, and never had any reason to repent it, that one Englishman was equal to three foreigners.

DUNDAS : I will not risk it.

NELSON : But you have several regiments lying idle at St. Fiorenzo.

DUNDAS : Nor will I be pestered by the Fleet.

NELSON : You will not lend a couple of regiments ?

DUNDAS : Really, your lordship—this officer of yours——

NELSON : Not one ?

DUNDAS : No, sir ?

NELSON : Well, we are few, but of the right sort. Let us take Bastia !

HOOD *chuckles contentedly as the scene ends.*

THE WAVES :

So they take Bastia—
British seamen fighting ashore,
storming, ramming, battering
on a certain Captain Bonaparte's back door,
joyfully scattering
the enemy, five to one,
as they take Bastia.
That done—
Calvi!

NELSON'S VOICE : But I trust, my dear lord, it will not be forgotten that twenty-five pieces of heavy ordnance have been dragged to the different batteries and re-mounted, and all but three have been fought by my men.

HOOD'S VOICE : His men ! His men ! Always wheedling me for leave to pamper the fellows more than they're pampered already J

NELSON (*very fas/*) : The truth is, my dear lord, when I was on the beach, seeing how necessary it was to give encouragement to the transport people, I did give them some wine and provisions rather than any delay should be made. And they have worked so well (and having worked all day probably, and now ordered to work all night), that, if your lordship will allow me, I will discretionally continue ordering them wine as an encouragement. By the way——

HOOD : Ha ! Now for the after-thought I

NELSON : Reports get about, so it is best to say myself, I got a little hurt this morning—not much, as you may judge by my writing.

JOSIAH'S VOICE : Not much ! Only an eye lost.

NELSON : Never mind ! I sec very well with the other one. Oh, by the way, is that my stepson ? Ah, Josiah ! Now listen, Josiah—you are not to write alarums to your mother !

JOSIAH : I think I have the right to inform my own mother——

NELSON : Discretion I I will have discretion! Gabbling and chattering I

JOSIAH : Mother, he says I gabble and chatter! He says I'm indiscreet.

THE WAVES :

Down it all goes,
the list of petulant woes
tinged by the dangerous, sly
malice of only son and only child.
Josiah loves him so much,
he longs for his notice and touch;
but oh, how he hates the mild
unescapable rule.

JOSIAH : He's not my father. What right has he ?

THE WAVES :

Poor fool!
He is bound, he is fated to be
his mother's spy.

*

FANNY'S VOICE : Why should he not write to me about you ? The boy means well.

NELSON'S VOICE : Yes, yes, he's a good boy, and affectionate to me, though a little too warm in his disposition. Well, nothing will cool him so thoroughly as being at sea, where nobody has entirely their own way. So, Fanny, he's told you that I'm half-blinded by these fellows. Yes, they gave me a sharp slap in the face, for which I'm their debtor. But not, I hope, for long.

H.M.S. AGAMEMNON (*to the audience*): No, not long. For now comes the Toulon business, Nelson's first Fleet action, his great, quivering chance, when he and I (I'm his ship *Agamemnon*) captured the two French ships, *Ca Ira* and the *Censeur*. We could have got the whole fleet if Admiral Hot-
ham would have listened to my little captain.

NELSON'S VOICE : Let us leave our two crippled ships, the two prizes and the four frigates to themselves, and pursue the enemy.

The lazy voice of ADMIRAL HOTHAM *answers.*

HOTHAM : We must be contented. We have done very well.

H.M.S. AGAMEMNON (*JO the audience*): That drove him into frenzies.

NELSON'S VOICE : Well done ! Had we taken *ten* sail and allowed the eleventh to escape I could never have called it well done. Oh, to be an admiral myself and in command of the English Fleet! I cannot bear tame and slow measures. I should do much or be ruined. The French have come out again with orders to take, burn or drive us away. Now is our chance to do the like by them—but Admiral Hotham has no head for enterprise. Lord Hood should lead us! Why do they waste that wonderful old man ?

HOOD'S VOICE (*with deep resentment*): I have never seen nor spoken with the First Lord since my flag was struck. I look upon myself as thrown upon the shelf for ever.

NELSON : O miserable Board of Admiralty to force the first officer of our Fleet away from his command ! Whom will they send us next?

THE WAVES :

They sent him Jervis the martinet,
arduous knight of the sea,
shrewd, impeccable, tart,
feared, not loved, and yet
after one hour together Nelson and he
are heart to heart.

At the battle of Cape St. Vincent,
seventeen ninety-seven, St. Valentine's Day,
Nelson is lord of the fray,
with his patent bridge for boarding

anything twice a frigate's size,
 orders flung' to the skies !
 Nelson is throwing his singleton in the path
 of the vast *Santissima Trinidad*,
 Nelson, glory held like a cup to his lips,
 boarding the towering Don
San Nicolas, and on
 to the huger-yet *San Josefs* quarterdeck,
 with Spanish Captains kneeling,
 and the bargemen, Ferney, hoarding
 surrendered swords like faggots under his arm,
 while wreck after Spanish wreck
 into the neutral fog and away
 is stealing.
 Thus fell these ships.

Nelson has taken no harm.
 Round him stand
 Berry and old *Agamemnon*s, the brotherly band.
 One of them catches his hand.

Then *Victory*, passing, gives in salute
 three cheers.
 The ships follow suit:
 and when he appears
 on the *Victory's* quarterdeck, he is hugged by Sir John.

H.M.S. THESEUS (*to the audience*) : Now listen to me I I'm
 H.M.S. *Theseus*, and the worst ship's company in the Fleet.
 But Nelson takes us on—Sir Horatio now, and Rear-Admiral
 of the Blue, he brings Captain Miller with him. Well, there
 was not much said either side for the first few weeks, but then
 we wrote him a letter. This is what we said : " Success attend
 Admiral Nelson ! God bless Captain Miller ! We thank 'em
 for the new officers they've put over us. We're happy and
we're comfortable, and we'll shed every drop of blood in our

veins to support 'em." That's what we thought, and that's what we said. But we brought him bad luck in the night attack on Santa Cruz all the same. That's when he lost his arm.

JOSIAH'S VOICE : Oh Mother, that was horrible ! Such a heavy fire kept up from the citadel and the head of the Mole that we could not advance. And as my stepfather was climbing out of the boat he was struck.

NELSON'S VOICE : It's my right arm. Wait ! Don't let me lose my sword—your uncle Suckling's sword !

JOSIAH (*to the audience*): He picked it up with the other hand and then he fainted. I tied a handkerchief above the wound to stop the great gushing of the blood, and presently he came to.

NELSON : Let me sit up and look about me ! Great God—the *Fox* is sinking ! Row towards the men in the water ! Row ! Row !

JOSIAH (*to the audience*): And he got to his knees and began grabbing at the bodies with his left arm. We saved a boatload, and pulled off to the *Seahorse*, for it was nearer than *Theseus*. But by ill luck the Captain's wife was aboard.

NELSON : I'd rather die than alarm Mrs. Fremantle by letting her see me in this state. And besides, how can I face her when I can give her no tidings of her husband ?

JOSIAH (*to the audience*) : And he made us row on to our own ship, I shouting to Hoste as we drew near : " Hoste I Hoste I It's the Admiral—wounded. Have a chair swung from the yardarm ! "

NELSON : No, Mr. Hoste I No I The barge must return at once to pick up more men. Throw me a rope !

The voice of 'HOSTE is heard.

HOSTE (*to the audience*): And up he comes on the rope, hanging by one hand, with his right arm dangling and bloody. " Oh God, sit," I said, " lean upon me at least I "

NELSON : No, Mr. Hoste, let me alone I I have yet my legs left and one arm. Tell the surgeon to make haste **and**

get his instruments. I know I must lose my right arm, so the sooner it's off the better.

JOSIAH : The surgeon will wish to know if it's to be embalmed or——

NELSON : Throw it into the hammock with the brave fellow who was killed beside me I

HOSTE (*to the audience*): So they laid him on the table, and the job was done then and there—just below the shoulder.

NELSON : I shall never forget the coldness of the knife.

HOSTE (*to the audience*): It was a bad business. He had to go home at last. All the London sawbones had a go at that stump of his.

THE WAVES :

Now—now—now the agonies begin
of body and brain,
three months of sleepless pain.

Fanny is very kind.

Opium is kind, but vain.
Drugs cannot still this pain.

The King was kind.
Spencer, the First Sea Lord,
was kind as kind can be.

Never to use a sword !
Never to sail the sea !
Never again
to risk the world, and win 1

Well, Jervis was very kind.

The dry, precise voice of Lord St. Vincent (JERVIS) is heard.
JERVIS : My dear Admiral, mortals cannot command

success, but you and your companions certainly deserved it. I grieve for the loss of your arm, but I promise you Fil bow to the stump when next I see you.

THE WAVES :

Yes, yes, yes!

The men who know are kind,
and the fools don't matter.

And yet they chatter, chatter.

A BOY OF TWENTY : It's a pity such a rash man as Admiral Nelson should have a command. But I'm in hopes that the loss of his arm will hinder him from taking any command again in *this* war.

There is a laugh. NELSON'S VOICE *is heard*

NELSON :

One-armed, half blind,
just thirty-eight,
never, never again to serve the State 1

Fanny is very kind,
everyone's very kind.

Fanny is colder
than once she was ;
but that's because
I've been so long at sea,
twelve, when I went to sea.

Never to use a sword again—
never to walk the decks again—
what will become of me ?
I shall go out of my mind.

THE WAVES :

Throb, throb, throb
in the suffering brain !
Stab, stab, stab
in the mangled shoulder!

FANNY'S VOICE :

Well, yes, the pain
has pulled Horatio down.
He looks much older.
Pie used to be so brown.
I wish he wouldn't mope.
But we're enchanted
to have him home again.'
Everyone's been so kind.
And a pension granted,
seven hundred, or so we hope,
minus deductions, of course,
at source.

NELSON :

Everyone's very kind.

(*With a change of voice*)

It was the chance of war, and I have great reason to be thankful.

The voices of NELSON'S FATHER and WILLIAM IV interrupt.

NELSON'S FATHER : You have indeed, my dear Rear-Admiral, if your poor father may so term you. The name and services of Nelson have sounded throughout the city of Bath. Joy sparkles in every eye, and desponding Britain draws back her sable veil and smiles.

WILLIAM IV (*chuckling*) : Desponding Britain ? Ha ! Your good father's hit it. Five years of war: forty thousand British soldiers lost in the West Indies : driven out of the

Low Countries : this Corsican parvenu, this what's his name—Buona-parti—overrunning Italy : Spaniards joining in against us—it's a bad look-out. But my dear Sir Horatio, I do beg *you* to cheer up. What did *my* father say? Your country may ask another limb of you yet.

NELSON'S VOICE : It's true, Fanny. I had no pain last*night—no pain at all. It looks as if the ligature could come away at a touch.

FANNY'S VOICE : Yes, I think it will heal now.

NELSON : What church does my father attend when we're in London ?

FANNY : St. George's, Hanover Square.

There is a murmur of church prayers and a CLERGYMAN'S voice.

NELSON'S FATHER : Sunday, December the eighth, 1797—I shall add the date to my anniversaries.

A CLERGYMAN : An officer desires to return thanks to Almighty God for his perfect recovery from a recent wound, and also for the many mercies bestowed upon him.

WILLIAM IV : And now a word to the wise. Young Buonaparti's at Toulon. Quite an Armada there, they tell me. Now, what's Boney up to, eh ?

NELSON (*with certainty*): Egypt.

WILLIAM IV : Well, there you are !

NELSON : I ?

WILLIAM IV : You're to have the *Vanguard*, Jervis **hat** got the blockade of the Spanish Fleet on his hands, so it will be for you to find out where Boney's gone.

THE WAVES :

To and fro, to and fro,
 luck in, luck out,
 light come, light go,
 turn and turn about.
 This is the month of May,
 Mediterranean-blue,

and the date,
seventeen ninety-eight.
Nelson is writing his left-hand scrawl.

NELSON'S VOICE : Well, my dear Fanny, England will not be invaded *this* summer; but still it's an old saying that the Devil's children have all the luck. On the eighteenth the enemy Fleet were still at Toulon, and embarking troops. I was as sure of them as a cat at a mouse-hole. Then comes this accident of the storm. But I ought not to call what has happened to the *Vanguard* by the cold name of accident. I firmly believe it was the Almighty's goodness to check my consummate vanity. Figure to yourself a vain man, on Sunday evening at sunset, walking in his cabin, with a squadron round him, and with a very rich prize beside him ! Figure to yourself this proud, conceited man, on Monday morning when the sun rose, his ship dismasted, his ships dispersed, and himself in such distress that the meanest enemy frigate had been a very unwelcome guest! Well, I hope it has made me a better officer: I am sure it has made me a better man. I kiss with all humility the rod. But Fanny, Fanny, in the four days it takes me to get the *Vanguard* ready again, the enemy vanish. Where ? Where ? Well, I may get news at Naples when I see Sir William Hamilton. There's a man after my own heart. He does business in my own way.

THE WAVES :

Napoli I Napoli ! Napoli!
Nelson lies with his fleet off Naples.
The house of the English Ambassador
gleams in the sunlight,
beaconing, beckoning those at sea.

Hamilton ! -Hamilton ! Hamilton !
Nelson lies with his fleet off Naples.

The wife of the English Ambassador
dreams in the sunlight,
beaconing, beckoning those at sea.

Napoli! Plamilton! Napoli!
Grey Sir William is writing a letter.
Gay Lady Hamilton watches the ships.
Grey Sir William frowns over his letter,
Emma his wife has a smile on her lips.

The scene begins.

EMMA : Sir William, which of them is Nelson's ship ?

SIR WILLIAM : What did you say, Emma ? Oh—the *Vanguard*—the nearest! Excuse me, my love, I must finish this note to him. Take my glass and see what you can make out!

EMMA : Too far away. The figures on the decks are like ants. But if one of them were Nelson, wouldn't you know him ? I should. Send him some message from me—kind love, good wishes !

SIR WILLIAM : I had written it already. " Emma's most kind love attends you. You may be sure she joins me——"

EMMA : —heart and soul——

SIR WILLIAM : I have said so : "—in wishing you to crown your glory by the destruction of this boasted armament."

EMMA : Say we are watching him now, as you write !

SIR WILLIAM : " It is very tantalizing to see your ships, as we do, at a distance, and to have no communication with you——"

The scene ends.

THE WAVES :

But we communicate.

We carry to and fro, to and fro
the phosphorescent glow
of needless messages devised
to prick and stir,
challenge and spur,
to re-awake surmise.

We are impatience dancing in heavenly eyes
at red, heroic sunset and sunrise.
We are a turbulent flurry
of shawl and lace.
By day and starry night
we whisper, whisper of foam-white grace,
of unsurprised,
inviting arms, oblivion and delight.

We ebb and flow
between the man and his fate.
And all the while the land cries—Hurry ! Hurry !
And all the while the sea tolls—Wait! Wait!
Wait!
This is a man with work to do, work to do !
England is running her fatal race
with time and Bonaparte,
and the Corsican has the start.

NELSON'S VOICE : Dearest Lady Hamilton—I am so much distressed at not having had any account of the French Fleet that I am hardly in a situation to write a letter to an elegant body.

EMMA'S VOICE : Dear Nelson !

NELSON : But I must know your and Sir William's plans for getting away ; for if we art to be kicked in every port of the Sicilian dominions, the sooner we're gone the better. An English ship refused supplies ! Good God, how I feel it !
Well, may I find the enemy and throw my vengeance on

them. But—*no frigates*, the eyes of the Fleet I Thank God I'm not apt to feel difficulties, but was I to die this moment" want of frigates " would be found stamped on my heart.

THE WAVES :

Up and down, to and fro,
and luck is always out!
Syracuse, Passaro,
Candia, Alexandria,
back again to Candia.
Light come, light go.
Tide in, tide out.

Still no news.
Up and down, to and fro,
Passaro, Syracuse,
turn and turn about,
up and down, to and fro,
and luck is always out.

The Nile ! The Nile ! The Nile !
Culloden brings news from the Nile !
She has taken a prize.
From the Captain's lips
they have it—the French were seen
nearly a month ago,
making at speed and indeed
for the many-mouth'd Nile.
So now they know.

After four months up and down, to and fro,
ranging the coasts from Gibraltar to Crete,
twisting and turning,
dodging and yearning
after the prey,
twice and again
balked by the neutral mist and the snivelling rain
while the enemy slips

off to what rendezvous, where ?—
Now they know where they are.
Egypt's the goal—Nelson is always right.
Follow his star!
Now, God of the English, give them a wind !
For all the while
Bonaparte triumphs, and time goes by,
and the Fleet is a month behind.

But God is good to His ships.
He gives them a wind.
Now, now for a fight!
Crowd on all sail!
They'll be there in two days and a night.

August the first—and Pharaoh's Tower is in sight.
They are there.
Swift sure is sent ahead to examine the forts.
Alexander reports
the harbours crowded with enemy shipping.
But where are the men-of-war ?
Not far away,
not far;
for *Zealous* is signalling : " Enemy fleet I "
Oh, is it sweet, is it sweet
after such hope and fear,
after such pure despair,
to sail with the red sun dipping
into the not-yet-famous Bay
of Aboukir ?

The scene begins. The ships speak very fast against rolls of drums.

H.M.S. VANGUARD : I'm *Vanguard*, the Admiral's Flag-ship. I'm signalling to the Fleet—" Clear for action ! "

H.M.S. GOLIATH : I'm *Goliath* answering—"Signal received. Clear for action ! Clear for action ! "

H.M.S. ZEALOUS : *Zealous* answering—"Signal received. Clear for action I "

H.M.S. ORION : *Orion* answering——

H.M.S. AUDACIOUS : *Audacious* answering——

H.M.S. THESEUS : *Theseus* answering——

H.M.S. MINOTAUR : *Minotaur*——

H.M.S. DEFENCE : *Defence*——

H.M.S. BELLEROPHON : *Bellerophon*——

H.M.S. MINOTAUR, H.M.S. DEFENCE AND H.M.S. BELLEROPHON : Signal received. Signal received. Clear for action !

H.M.S. MAJESTIC : *Majestic* speaking—"Signal received."

H.M.S. SWIFTSURE : *Swiftsure*——

H.M.S. ALEXANDER : *Alexander*——

H.M.S. LEANDER : *Leander*——

H.M.S. CULLODKN : *Culloden*——

ALL THE SHIPS : All answering—answering—answering—"Signal received."

H.M.S. VANGUARD (*to the audience*) : I'm *Vanguard* speaking. Two hours have passed. The sun bathes my decks with blood as it sinks, and green Egyptian twilight fills the Admiral's cabin as he dines with his officers. For days he has barely touched food ; but now he eats and drinks.

NELSON : Gentlemen, charge your glasses to our brothers ! Forget none of 'em ! Foley, Louis, Thompson, Sam Hood, Gould, Peyton, Westcott, Hallowell, Miller, Darby, my dearest friend Troubridge—but we're all dearest friends, no secrets between us—oh yes, and Johnnie Ball and Sir James Saumarez ! They know—we all know what's to be done.

H.M.S. VANGUARD (*to the audience*) : For his practice had been, during our whole cruise, to have his captains on board the *Vanguard* to talk over his plans. They knew so exactly his intention's and ideas that signals became almost unnecessary.

NELSON : I shall attack the enemy's van and centre as they

lie at anchor. First secure the victory, then make the most of it!

THE WAVES :

Now listen, listen, listen,
as the tide labours and falls,
to other confident voices ;
for now we cross the Bay to flatter and kiss
the *Orient's* huge walls
as green they glisten, glisten.
The enemy fleet rejoices ;
for Brueys, their admiral is sure, is sure,
is utterly secure
that victory is his.

ADMIRAL BRUEYS'S VOICE : We are flanked by gunboats and frigates. We have a battery on the island in our van. We are so drawn up that there is no room to pass between any two ships.

THE WAVES :

To and fro, to and fro,
back again we flow.

NELSON'S VOICE : Where there's room for an enemy ship to swing, there's room for one of ours to anchor. Well, **let** us go to our stations.

Gunfire begins as the scene ends.

THE WAVES :

For now the excellent plan must be tested and tried,
the Admiral's game of chess played out
in moves of lightning and slaughter,
musketry fire, wreckage and rout.
But first the living cattle, the chickens and goats,
are wasted over the side.

Now is the last of the cat's-eye light;
 but dark itself is bright
 with never-quenchable fire from bellowing throats,
 grey Nile-dragons enraged,
 grappling, swinging, sounding, blundering, turning.
 Ship after enemy ship is engaged.
 They gorge
 with living bodies of men the shuddering water.
 Ship after enemy ship is taken.
 Hour after hour goes by.

Now, now, now—raked and gutted by shot,
 hamstrung, blinded, thunder-shaken
Bellerophon tackles the Flag-ship, twice her size,
 and sees the rising smoke and the after-cabin burning
 before she drifts away,
 skinning the enemy lines, out of the fight,
 seeking a sanctuary in the lee of the rankling bay.
 Behind her the Admiral's six-hung colours shout
 (not the Blue ensign, the White——
 Jervis's orders !) the battle-cry
 of ancient wars
 old as the heart of England—" God and St. George I "
 Night is a tattered curtain
 riddled by furious starts,
 and victory's certain.

There is a lull in the firing.

Wait! Wait! Wait!
 Another move from Fate.
 She plays a langridge-shot. Wait! Wait!

The firing bursts out again as the scene begins.

VOICES (*through the racket*): Nelson's wounded !——
 Struck on the head by a langridge-iron——They're
 carrying him to the cockpit——Get the surgeon!——
 Where's Jefferson?

NELSON (*in great pain*): No, no! I'll take my turn with **my brave** fellows. **Get** back to them, Jefferson: and somebody send me the chaplain! Send for Mr. Comyn!

COMYN *calls out in answer, in a pleasant, clerical voice.*

COMYN: Here, at your service. Let me support you!

NELSON: Pish!

COMYN (*quietly*): Here's a rolled-up cloak——

NELSON: Let me down on to it, then—because I can't see you, can't see anything!

COMYN: There! And if you could lean against me——

NELSON: Now listen to me, Mr. Comyn—if the worst happens you are to assure Lady Nelson of my—my remembrance! Don't forget! Now send for Captain Louis! I shall have no peace till I thank that brave, gallant fellow for coming up so nobly to the *Vanguard's* support. And where's Mr. Campbell? Send my secretary! Send for Mr. Campbell!

COMYN (*calling*): Mr. Campbell, the Admiral is asking for you.

The frightened voice of the secretary, CAMPBELL, answers.

CAMPBELL (*shuddering*): Is he blinded—again?

COMYN: We don't know yet.

NELSON: Is that you, Mr. Campbell? I can't see you. Mr. Comyn, enquire what they're doing on deck and report to me! Now Mr. Campbell, the dispatch to the Admiralty——

CAMPBELL: My hand shakes—the blood—I cannot endure—I must be excused.

NELSON: What's the matter with the fellow? Give *me the pen*! I can make shift to write two lines by feel. Who's 'touching me?

JEFFERSON: Jefferson, sir, at last, and ready to attend you. **Let** me examine the wound.

There is a sudden silence.

NELSON (*at last*): Well, Mr. Jefferson?

JEFFERSON (*in a low voice*): A flap of skin has been ripped **from the** forehead, and has fallen across the eye. The pain **must** be intense. But once it is dressed, if you will lay quiet, **there is no danger.**

A VOICE (some way off): Speak up 1

JEFFERSON (loudly) : He is in no danger.

His voice is drowned by a roar of delight from all parts of the cockpit.

VOICES (of the wounded):

Nelson !———God bless him !———Long live the Admiral!———God bless our Nei!

The cheering spreads, and is mingled with gun-fire. The noise intensifies. There are cries of " Victory ! " " Victory ! "

COMYN (returning, breathless): It's the *Orient*, my lord, the French flagship. They say she is in flames. They say it's impossible for her crew to control the flames. She'll blow up any minute.

Afore cheers and an answering crash, followed by the voice of the VANGUARD speaking to the audience.

H.M.S. VANGUARD : Well—I'm *Vanguard*, Nelson's flagship at the Nile, and battle's my trade, but I'll never want to hear *that* roar again, and the silence afterwards, and then the awful smack of her masts and yards falling back into the water. Nelson ordered out our one boat—the rest were shot to pieces—but we could only save seventy. There wasn't much fighting after that, though the firing went on till three. But next morning when we counted it all up, out of the thirteen enemy ships of the line we'd taken or burnt eleven.

NELSON'S VOICE : This is not victory—this is conquest. Notify the Fleet that, Almighty God having blessed his Majesty's arms with victory, I intend returning public thanksgiving for the same at two o'clock this day, and I recommend every ship doing the same as soon as convenient.

There is a rumble of prayers.

ALL THE SHIPS : They that go down to the sea in ships ; and occupy their business in great waters : these men see the works of the Lord : and His wonders in the deep.

H.M.S. VANGUARD : If the Lord had not been on our side, now may we say: if the Lord Himself had not been on our side, when men rose up against us——

H.M.S. ZEALOUS, H.M.S. SWIFTSURE AND H.M.S. GOLIATH:
They had swallowed us up quick : when they were so wrath-
fully displeased at us.

H.M.S. CULLODEN : Yes, the waters had drowned us, and
the stream had gone over our soul.

H.M.S. VANGUARD : But the Lord hath overthrown our
enemies, and dashed in pieces those that rose up against us.

ALL THE SHIPS : Therefore not unto us, O Lord, not unto
us ; but unto Thy Name be given the glory.

NELSON : O Almighty God, the Sovereign Commander of
all the world . . . we bless and magnify Thy great and
glorious Name for this happy Victory. . . . And, we
beseech Thee, give us grace to improve this great mercy to
Thy glory, the honour of our Sovereign, and, as much as in us
lieth, to the good of all mankind.

*There is an answering murmur as the scene ends, and a gay
tune strikes up.*

THE WAVES :

Napoli! Napoli! Napoli!
Nelson sails with his Fleet for Naples.
The house of the British Ambassador
gleams in the sunshine,
beaconing, beckoning those at sea.

Hamilton! Hamilton! Hamilton!
Nelson is nearing the Bay of Naples.
Sir William and gay Lady Hamilton
sit in the sunshine,
writing their letters to those at sea.

SIR WILLIAM'S VOICE : My dear sir, how happy are Emma
and I in the reflection that it is you, Nelson, our bosom friend,
that has humbled these proud robbers and boasters. Come
here, for God's sake, as soon as the Service will permit you. A
pleasant apartment is ready for you in my house, and Emma

is looking out for the softest pillows to repose the few wearied limbs you have left.

EMMA'S VOICE : Dear, dear Nelson, how shall I begin ? What shall I say to you ? I'm delirious with joy. Good God, what a victory ! I fainted when I heard the joyful news, and fell on my side, and am hurt. But what of that ? I could die in such a cause. No, I would not like to die till I see and embrace the victor of the Nile. If you were here now you would be killed with kindness. Sonnets, illuminations—rejoicings ! I send you two letters from my adorable queen. If you could hear her—but I will keep it all for your arrival. I hope it won't be long. Sir William is ten years younger since the happy news. Come soon I Come soon I God bless you, my dear, dear friend ! Oh, and my dress from head to foot is à la Nelson. Even my shawl is blue with gold anchors all over, and my ear-rings are Nelson's anchors. We are be-Nelsoned all over. Once more, God bless you ! Come soon !

THE WAVES :

This is the Emma touch.
She is noisy, garrulous, wild,
cries too easily, feels too much,
pleased as a child
with her Juno looks
and her chestnut hair unpent.

And the Hamiltons' house is all
sunshine and stilly heat.
Even the dust lies feather-warm on the books,
the harp, the Handel scores, the tambourine,
the crimson furnishings,
intaglios, fans, Etruscan rings,
the Spanish leather screen
and the head of Hercules
in the checkered hall.

There is joy in the air,
 verbal kisses and sweet
 laughter, and everywhere
 the heliotrope's hot scent
 as it turns to the morning flame.

This is the promised ease
 after long strife
 to any man whose hell is always cold—
 ' the coldness of the knife '—
 cold of the grey North Seas—
 the cold on Chatham quays
 when he was twelve years old—
 and the patience of his wife
 when Nelson talks too high, too bold.

The cripple stretches his meagre frame
 in the flattering streams—
 heliotrope and the sun !
 "Content! Content! "
 He's young again in dreams.
 The mischief's done.

There is a murmur of educated voices as the scene begins.
The thin drawl of MRS. ST. GEORGE dominates.

VOICES : Awkward for his friends, his living with the
 Hamiltons.———Yes, I know, there was Malta, and
 the blockade, and all that; but he shouldn't have mixed
 himself up in Italian politics—and letting them make him
 Duke of Bronte'!———The King wasn't at all pleased.
 ———And then coming home by land—trotting round
 foreign capitals with the Hamiltons.———I hear they
 weren't thought at all the thing.———You ask Mrs. St.
 George ! She ran across them.

MRS. ST. GEORGE (*drawling*): Lord Nelson thinks of noth-
 ing but Lady Hamilton, who is totally occupied with the same
 subject.

A FRIEND : Well, she's a handsome creature.

MRS. ST. GEORGE : Exceedingly en-bon-point.

ANOTHER FRIEND : But in that performance of hers—the attitudes——

MRS. ST. GEORGE : Ah yes, I will own she does then look highly graceful, even beautiful—but only then. As for Lord Nelson—besotted ! He thinks her influence with'the Queeri of Naples procured *him* this and that, and therefore she won the Battle of the Nile. I wonder what they will do now he's home and the glory has worn off a little ? I'm told that he wanted his wife to set up a joint establishment with the Hamiltons, but the drunken stepson Josiah prevented it. He reports all their doings to his mother. Have you ever come across the lawyer, Haselwood ? He says they are going to separate. He was breakfasting with them when it happened. A very sudden clash ; for he said Lord Nelson was in good spirits, and Lady Nelson no more silent than usual.

The scene begins.

NELSON : Fanny, have you thought any more of coming to the play tonight ? Our dear Lady Hamilton has gone to such trouble for tickets.

FANNY : I'm sick and tired of dear Lady I lamilton.

NELSON (*amazed*) : Fanny ! (*Then, sternly*) Take care what you say !

FANNY : Am I never to escape from her ? I don't care if she revictualled the whole Fleet. I can't endure her. Give her up or give me up, it's as you please ; but,—one ^{or} the other.

NELSON : Fanny, I love you sincerely, but I can't forget my obligations to Lady Hamilton, or speak of her otherwise than with admiration and affection,

FANNY : Affection ?

NELSON : Yes, affection I

FANNY : I have given you affection. I have done my duty by you—as I have by Josiah.

NELSON : I know it. I call God to witness I have nothing

against you. But Fanny, I also have done all in my power for you living, and when dead you'll find I have done the same.

FANNY : There is a third person present. Let us say no more ! But my mind is made up.

NELSON : And mine. Sooner than live the unhappy life I did when I was last in England, I'll stay abroad for ever.

The scene ends. The murmur of conversation begins again.

MRS. ST. GEORGE : And so they've parted. She gets twelve hundred a year, which will leave him short; for he's bought that place in Surrey, Merton. He's to share expenses with the Hamiltons. Well, if Lady Hamilton does the house-keeping, I pity his purse. But his keep will cost her little at the moment; for my brother-in-law Minto tells me that he's being sent off to hustle the neutrals in the north.

The murmurs die away as EMMA speaks.

EMMA'S VOICE (*agitated*): Oh, Sir William, Sir William, our Nelson's going to sea again ! Oh, Sir William, my heart is fit to burst quite with grief ! He is under Sir Hyde Parker, who thinks of nothing but eating. Hang him, I say, the sulky brute ! He will not let Nelson know his plans.

There is a laugh, and the young voice of LAYMAN picks up the story.

LAYMAN : Poor Sir Hyde ! Eh, Mr. Scott ?

SCOTT (*chuckling*): Poor Sir Hyde ! Poor old gentleman ! His lordship got round him, of course ?

LAYMAN : Round and round and round him !

SCOTT (*delighted*) : Fascinating little fellow !

LAYMAN : But that time, you know, he brought it about that Sir Hyde did literally feed from his hand; though his lordship always insisted that it was my doing. (*To the audience*) I'm Layman—one of the lieutenants on the *Elephant*. Well, as we were off the Dogger on our way to Copenhagen, I happened to remark to him that I'd once caught a remarkably fine turbot on that very spot.

NELSON'S VOICE: A turbot? Could we get one now, Mr. Layman ?

LAYMAN : What, tonight ?

NELSON : No time like the present, Mr. Layman. (*Brisk*)
Get out the lines !

LAYMAN (*to the audience*): Well, I thought he was mad ; but—orders ! Off I went to my fishing and had the luck to make a catch. Nelson was all smiles.

NELSON : Excellent! Order out a boat and take the turbot across to the Admiral, with my compliments !

LAYMAN : But your lordship, it's night, and the waves are uncommon high.

NELSON : Convey it to the Admiral!

LAYMAN : Really dangerous——

NELSON (*closing the discussion*): Have the turbot taken to the Admiral, Mr. Layman, without more ado !

LAYMAN (*to the audience*) : Well, we got it across, and if you'll believe it back came a most gracious note of thanks. Then I saw daylight, for we all knew how the Admiral loved the pleasures of the table. Next day Nei is asked across to the flagship to join in the conference.

NELSON'S VOICE : Sir Hyde has sent for me at last. Now we are sure of fighting, though our friend is a little nervous about dark nights and fields of ice. But we must brace up. These are not times for nervous systems. I want peace ; but it's only to be had through our invincible Navy. So let us get on with the business. The boldest measures are safest, eh Foley ?

LAYMAN (*to the audience*): Foley was his captain in the *Elephant*. The two had been walking on the quarterdeck during the whole action. I was coming up to report, and I confess I was forced to smile when a shot from the main mast knocked a few splinters about them at the word 'safest

The scene begins.

NELSON : Warm work t This day may be the last to any of us at any moment. But mark you, Foley, I would not be elsewhere for thousands.

LAYMAN : My lord, the flagship has signalled to discontinue the engagement.

NELSON : Acknowledge it only ! Is number sixteen still hoisted—to engage the enemy more closely ?

LAYMAN : Yes, my lord !

NELSON : Then keep it so ! Foley ! Did you hear what's shown on board the Commander-in-Chief ? Number thirty-nine ! Do you know what that means ?

FOLEY : Why, to leave off action.

NELSON : Leave off action ! Now damme if I do ! You know, Foley, I've only one eye. I've a right to be blind sometimes. Where's my glass ? Wait ! Let's have a look !

FOLEY (*to the audience*): And he clapped his glass to his blind eye.

NELSON : I really do not see the signal. Well > Foley, from now on we're fighting contrary to orders, and I shall perhaps be hanged. Never mind ! Let 'em !

FOLEY'S *gruff laugh answers him as the scene ends.*

THE WAVES :

At the Battle of Copenhagen, eighteen one,
these were his sports.
He flung these jests to the rowdy stars
and the Danish forts,
at the Battle of Copenhagen, eighteen one.

This was the finest and coldest
of all his victories,
as Nile was the finest and boldest,
and Trafalgar finest and best.
East and north and west
Ke was lord of all his seas.

Then home he comes from the Danish wars
and slips away to the lodging in Mary'bonc
to play with a child, at bears,

under the table and round the chairs
 as once he played with Fanny's son ;
 but now the child is his own,
 ' dearest Horatia ', Emma's child and his own.

MRS. ST. GEORGE'S VOICE : I wonder, does Sir William know about the love-child ? Oh, Sir William died last week, did he ? Some people are so fortunate : first the Peace of Amiens brings Lord Nelson home, and then one of the impediments dies. But did Sir William know ?

THE WAVES :

Here is a mystery.
 Never a breach between these friends
 till the story ends.
 But now—take one from three,
 and what will a dead man's judgement be ?

SIR WILLIAM'S VOICE (*far away*): I bequeath Emma's picture to my dearest friend, Lord Nelson, as a very small token of my regard* for the most noble, virtuous and loyal and truly brave character I have ever met with. God bless him, and shame fall on those who do not say amen !

NELSON'S VOICE : He died in our arms.

EMMA'S VOICE : Unhappy day ! Forlorn Emma !

NELSON : The world never lost a more upright and accomplished gentleman.

THE WAVES *speak against a music of many waters.*

THE WAVES :

Hamilton ! Napoli ! Hamilton !
 Long ago, and a dream at Naples !
 The house of the British Ambassador
 sleeps in the darkness
 beaconing, beckoning those at sea.

As the music dies away the voice of a ship rings out,

H.M.S. VICTORY (*to the audience*): Now I come into the story. I'm *Victory*, Nelson's flagship. We were together in those blue mid-'waters close on two years—the scare years when the English went to their beds every night with pistols under their pillows ; for Bonaparte was sitting at Boulogne with his nine-mile row of soldiers waiting his chance to invade us. But we kept their fleet bottled up at Toulon till Spain came in. That suited Bonaparte finely. If Villeneuve could give us the slip long enough to meet the Dons in the West Indies, then the combined fleets could double back and have the Channel to themselves, while Nelson was still hunting them. Well, at the beginning the plan worked. Villeneuve got clear through the Straits and into the Atlantic.

NELSON'S VOICE : And I cannot get a fair wind, or even a side wind. Dead foul! Dead foul! Where have they gone? The Channel? Ireland? If nothing is heard of them, though, I believe their object is the West Indies.

H.M.S. VICTORY : He is right, as usual. News comes in that the enemy fleet is carrying three thousand French troops across the Atlantic, that fifteen hundred Spanish are to join them at Martinique, and a thousand at Guadaloupe.

NELSON (*morose*): It will not be fancied that I am on a party of pleasure, running after their eighteen sail of the line with my ten, and that to the West Indies. Well—let us be off!

H.M.S. VICTORY : The run across the Atlantic took Villeneuve thirty-five days : we get there in twenty-four. Then what does that fool General Brereton do but send us positive information that Villeneuve has sailed for Trinidad? Off we pelt again, only to find when we get there that it's all a flam.

NELSON (*furious*): Damn General Brereton! He has lost me the French fleet.

H.M.S. VICTORY: But Villeneuve is scared. He doesn't like being in the same seas with our *Nei*, and on the eighth of June he turns tail and makes for home. Four days later we are

nosing his empty nest. Where have they gone this time ? No-one can tell us.

NELSON : My opinion is as firm as a rock that some cause has made them return to Europe. But there would have been no occasion for opinions had not General Brereton sent his damned misleading intelligence.

H.M.S. VICTORY : So then we turn round, and back we race after Villencuvv ; but on a more southerly course. We draw ahead, and before he sees Gibraltar from afar the Straits are once more guarded. Not that it comforted Nel,

NELSON : I am miserable. The name of General Brereton will not soon be forgot. How sorrowful this makes me. O General Brereton, General Brereton !

H.M.S. VICTORY : Well, we saved the Colonies. And when we got in the people at home showed us that they thought we'd saved them too.

NELSON : I went on shore for the first time, June the sixteenth eighteen hundred and three, not having left the *Victory* two years wanting ten days. Well, let the youngsters fill the scene in future. From now on I am a landsman, and make hay.

EMMA'S laughter is heard as the scene begins.

Emma, I shall give you all the hay belonging to me at Merton and Wimbledon Parish. You are down early.

EMMA : I wanted to share the morning with you—the seventh glorious morning together, together, together after two years.

NELSON : Your word is always ' glorious '.

EMMA : *Our* word! Have you seen the sunflowers—the biggest ever grown ? One disc is truly sun-size. You can warm your hands at it.

NELSON : But the autumn dew has the coldness of a knife. Don't you feel it through that thin flutter of yours ?

EMMA : I'm always warm. Someone's coming up the drive. My dearest Nelson, it's your Captain Blackwood. This is too

much of an early morning call. Well, aren't you going to meet him ? Why do you stand so stiff ?

NELSON (*slowly*): I'm'sure he brings me news of the French and Spanish Fleet. I think I shall yet have to beat them. (*Brisker*) The sooner the better. I don't like to have these things on my mind.

EMMA : Go away again ? You've not been with us seven days. Can't they let me have one week of you ?

NELSON : They will give me another week, I dare say.

EMMA : What is a fortnight—one fortnight—after two years at sea ? And you needing rest so bad. For *once* think of yourself!

NELSON (*sharply*) : Self is entirely out of the question.

EMMA : The child has hardly learned to know you again. It's cruel how they treat you.

NELSON (*remonstrating*): Emma ! Emma !

EMMA (*in tears*) : Don't be afraid ! I've never tried to hold you back, and I shan't now. But let *mcfeel*!

NELSON : Cheer up, cheer up ! There ! Brave Emma 1

The scene ends.

EMMA'S VOICE : Yes, he said it—" Brave Emma ! " And he patted me on the back and said that if there were more Emmas there'd be more Nelsons. Nobody believes it. They say I made it up. But he did say it: and he meant it, too; for I had his unbounded love, and his confidence and affection and esteem. I have lived with honour and glory, for when he wrote to me he thought aloud.

MRS. ST. GEORGE AND OTHERS :

A vulgar mind, and the easiness of a barmaid !—Lord Nelson was a little man without dignity.———She puffed the incense full in his face.———A pair of sentimental fools !———Her manner with men was beyond anything I ever witnessed.———*I call them Antony and Moll Cleopatra.*

H.M.S. VICTORY (*to the audience*) :

Who cares for these

beyond the grave ?

Let him be judged by ships and the open seas.

If there be praise to give

let seamen reckon his fame !

If blame must live

let women blame

the womanhood they share 1

We say—

who cares ?

If Nelson held her dear

we hold her dear.

For what he thought she gave

we bless her name,

her lesser name,

nor twitch one straying hair

entangled in his laurel-wreath away,

no, not one hair.

And I know what I'm talking about. You've heard echoes so far—echoes of voices long silent in the grave. But I'm still alive, thank you very much. I'm *Victory*, lying in Portsmouth Harbour this very Sunday—October the nineteenth nineteen forty-one. Only last May my cabin walls heard a voice say : " They've sunk the *Bismarck* ! "—yes, these same walls that heard Nelson's voice plan the Battle of Trafalgar. So now listen to my memories, will you ? It is still Portsmouth, and *Vm* waiting for Nelson. He'd been breakfasting at the George Inn, and they tried to get him away by the side entry and down back streets to escape the crowds. But wherever he turns there the people arc, kneeling *in* the road some of them, weeping, blessing, mobbing him with their love and wonder, calling after him : " Come back safe ! Come back soon ! " And as he gets on to his barge he turns to wave them farewell—farewell—farewell!

Distant cheering.

NELSON'S VOICE : I had their hurrahs before : now I have their hearts.

The cheering fades.

H.M.S. VICTORY : Three weeks later, the eve of his birthday—he was forty-seven—we joined the Fleet off Cadiz. They were ordered not to salute us, but the news went round, and next morning everyone came crowding over to welcome him—anyone and everyone who could scrape up an excuse. He wasn't the Commander-in-Chief—he was Nel. Then—my walls saw it, *my* walls heard it—he gathered his admirals and his captains in his cabin, Collingwood, Hardy, Fremantle, Codrington, Mansfield, Berry and the rest, thirty-six in all, the band of brothers, the pick of the seven seas. All their eyes were on him, all those brains were noting, figuring, retaining, all those backs were bracing to bear the burden he was piling on them, word by word, order by order. Success or defeat, life or death for England, freedom or slavery for the whole of Europe, it was to be their doing, either way. He begins :

NELSON : The business of a British commander-in-chief is first to bring an enemy fleet to battle on the best terms to himself—I mean that of laying his ships close on board the enemy as quickly as possible—and second to continue them there without separating until the business is decided. No day could be long enough to arrange a couple of fleets and fight a decisive battle according to the old system. Decisive is the word. It is annihilation that our country wants, and not merely a splendid victory of twenty-three to thirty-six—honourable to the parties concerned, but absolutely useless in the extended scale to bring Bonaparte to his marrow-bones : numbers only can annihilate. Now—for I have not the very smallest doubt that a very few days will see us in battle—I have determined to substitute for exact order an impetuous attack in two distinct bodies upon the enemy fleet. The weather-line I shall command : the lee-line I leave to Collingwood. Before I ask you what you think you shall hear in

detail how I plan the business ; but I will at once tell you what I think of it. I think such an approach will astonish and confound the enemy. They won't know what I'm about. It will bring forth a surprise and pell-mell battle, and that's what I want. Now—pull over the maps—thus we plan' it—*Royal and Belleisle*—

THE WAVES :

We know it, the cleaving voice.
 We have travelled the cold North Sea
 with the man in the moon,
 Norwich way, Walsham way, Yarmouth way,
 and shifted the mussel-shells from the brackish stream
 to the dyke
 where the sudden divers play
 hide-and-seek with perch and bream
 and ravening pike.
 We have heard the wind on the Norfolk marsh
 scything reeds on a winter day,
 drilling the mist to reach the hiding
 insolent noon.
 We hear again the masterful, harsh
 whip of the Norfolk wind in Nelson's voice,
 irresistible, overriding I

NELSON : Something must be left to chance. Nothing is sure in a sea-fight beyond all others. But in case signals can neither be seen nor perfectly understood, no captain can do very wrong if he places his ship alongside that of an enemy.

H.M.S. VICTORY : The Nelson touch I It was like an electric shock.

FOLEY'S VOICE : It's new.

HARDY'S VOICE : It's singular.

BLACKWOOD'S VOICE : It's simple.

HARDY : You fill us with confidence. It must succeed if ever they allow us to get at 'em.

H.M.S. VICTORY (*to the audience*) : Three weeks go by. It is **the** twenty-first of October, a fine morning, light airs in **heaven**, the seas dark and swelling. Nelson is at his desk by **dawn**.

The scene begins.

NELSON : My dearest, beloved Emma, my last writing before the battle will be to you and to Horatia. Horatia, my dearest angel, be a good girl! Mind what your governess says to you! The combined fleets of the enemy are now coming out, therefore I answer your letter, to mark to you **that** you are ever in your father's thoughts. (*He sighs. Then with a change of voice*) At daylight saw the enemy's combined fleet, from east to south-west. Bore away : made signal for order of sailing, and to prepare for battle. At seven——

A crispy youngish voice addresses the audience.

PASCOE : At seven—I'm Pascoe, senior lieutenant—at seven or a little after I was sent down with a message to him ; for I was acting as signal lieutenant, a step down. And I was in such'a rage about it that I meant to ask him for justice. **But** when I got to his cabin—all had been cleared : there was only his desk left. So I could see him kneeling at it, writing and muttering :—

NELSON : May the great God Whom I worship grant to my country and for the sake of all Europe a great and glorious •victory, and may no misconduct in any of us tarnish it, and may humanity after victory be the rule of the Fleet. For myself I commit my life to Him who made me, and may His blessing 'light upon my endeavours to serve my country faithfully. To Him I resign myself in the just cause entrusted me to defend. Amen. Amen. Amen. Who's there ? Oh you, Pascoe ! Well, what do you want ?

PASCOE (*to the audience*) : I knew what I wanted, but—how **could I trouble** him then ? **So I gave** him **Hardy's** message

and waited to go. But he peers at me with that dim blue eye which was always paining him.

NELSON : Anything else ?

PASCOE : No, sir.

NELSON : Good boy ! This day will be a fortunate one for you youngsters. Tell them I'm coming! (*He resumes,*) October the twenty-first eighteen hundred and five—in sight of the enemy fleet, distant about ten miles' (*murmuring*) whereas the eminent services of Lady Hamilton—Syracuse—supplies—Egypt—a legacy to my king and country—the only favours I ask——

PASCOE (*to the audience*): On my way up I come across Dr. Beatty and the secretary Dr. Scott talking with Blackwood.

BEATTY : Captain Blackwood, is it not possible to persuade his lordship to change his coat, or at least to cover the stars. The sharpshooters will be lying for him. I've begged Dr. Scott to speak to him.

SCOTT : You may do as you please, Dr. Beatty. I should not care to approach his lordship on such a matter.

BLACKWOOD : I will do what I can, but you know him—— (*to the audience*) And later I spoke to his lordship, but he took it very ill.

NELSON : Coat ? Coat ? This is no time to be changing coats ! Blackwood, I'll give those fellows such a dressing down as they've never had before. What would you call a victory, eh Blackwood ?

BLACKWOOD : Well, to capture fourteen ships would be a glorious result——

NELSON : Fourteen ? I shan't be satisfied with anything less than *twenty*. Well, I think I will now amuse the Fleet with a signal—just by way of a fillip, Mr. Pascoe ! Mr. Pascoe, I wish to say to the Fleet: " Nelson confides—no—England confides that every man will do his duty."

PASCOE : Might it be " expects ", your lordship ? " Expects " is in the signal book, " confides " has to be spelt.

NELSON : Make it so ! And when it is answered hoist the

signal for close action, and keep it up, do you hear? *Keep it up!*

BLACKWOOD : Well, my lord, time for me to go ! When I return I hope I shall find you well and in contemplation of your twenty prizes.

NELSON (*quietly*) : Good-bye, Blackwood ! I shall never speak to you again.

BLACKWOOD (*startled*) : My lord ?

H.M.S. VICTORY (*loud*) : England—expects—

NELSON : Ha ! They are reading it.

H.M.S. VICTORY : —that—every man—will—do—his—duty.

The Ships cheer.

NELSON : Now I can do no more.

Gunfire begins as the scene ends.

THE WAVES :

Britain is waiting for news.

When will they send us the news ?

Trāfalgar ! Villeneuve's out!

Fighting off Trāfalgar—victory ?—rout ?

Britain is waiting for news.

Bonaparte waits for the news.

Nelson is back with the Fleet.

" Villeneuve, give me the Channel !

Six hours' control of the Channel!

Europe will lie at my feet."

Bonaparte waits for the news.

Europe is waiting for news.

History's making at sea.

Is it success or defeat ?

Who will our masters be ?

Europe is waiting for news.

Trāfalgar ! Ragnarok ! Trāfalgar !

Europe is waiting for news.

H.M.S. VICTORY :

Loss to the fortunate Isle, eternal loss I
 Glory dulls from the sky.
 They are broken, the pilot wings of albatross
 that rode so high
 above the battle field of every sea.
 Oh loss I Oh loss ! Oh loss
 to the fortunate isle of Britain 1
 Oh heavy victory!

There is a crash of shot and a shout as the scene begins.

A VOICE: The Admiral! Look to the Admiral!

NELSON : They have done for me at last.

VOICES (*very fast*):

The Admiral's struck in the breast.——The Admiral's
 killed.——Struck !——Nelson's struck——
 Is he alive ?——Nobody knows.——Struck on
 the shoulder.——Struck on the breast——The
 spine——They've carried him to the cockpit.——
 That shambles ?——They say he's dying——dying
 —dying——!

*The thunder of the guns lessens. There is a vague background
 of groans and moans.*

NELSON : You can do nothing for me, Doctor. Go to the
 others !

BEATTY : We might ease you, sir, a little.

NELSON: I'm thirsty. No air! Fan——! Will no-one fetch
 i-lardy to me ?

H.M.S. VICTORY :

Not for an hour,
 not for a long and thirsty hour
 broken by loud hurrahs,
 loud cannon-roll, icy crying
 of the bleakly and the loudly dying.

HARDY'S voice is heard shouting through thi din.

HARDY ; Where is he ? Where have they laid his lordship ?

NELSON (*weakly*): Well Hardy, how goes the battle ?

HARDY : Very well. Ten ships have struck. Five of the van, though, have tacked and are bearing down upon us. But I've called two or three of our fresh ships around. We'll give 'em a drubbing.

NELSON : I hope none of our ships have struck ?

HARDY: No fear of that!

NELSON : I am a dead man, Hardy. It will be all over with me soon. Let Lady Hamilton have my things !

HARDY : My dear lord, you'll live to lead us again, eh Mr. Beatty ?

NELSON : Oh no, my back's shot through. Beatty will tell you so.

HARDY : I'm needed on deck, my lord. I'll be back as soon as I can.

hits footsteps die away. The noise of the battle swells and dies again. In a lull NELSON speaks.

NELSON : Beatty!

BEATTY : Your lordship !

NELSON : You know I'm gone. I know it. I feel something rising in my breast—here—which tells me so.

BEATTY : Is the pain—how is the pain ?

NELSON : So bad that I wish I were dead. And yet—one would like to live a little longer too.

HARDY'S voice is heard again in the distance.

HARDY : Glorious news, your lordship ! Glorious news ! (*Nearer, breathless*) Let me tell you this—you have gained a complete victory.

NELSON : I—low many taken ?

HARDY : Well, we are certain of fourteen or fifteen.

NELSON : I bargained for twenty. (*Loudly*) Anchor, Hardy! Anchor!

HARDY : I suppose Collingwood should take over.

NELSON : Not while I live. Help me to raise myself. I tell you while I live I'll anchor. Hardy, where are you ?

HARDY : Here, holding your hand.

NELSON : Take care of poor Lady Hamilton! Kiss me, Hardy ! Now I'm satisfied. Thank God I've done my duty.

HARDY : I must go now, my lord.

NELSON : God bless you, Hardy !

THE WAVES :

It ends, it ends.

The link of iron is broken, the story and.

They part for ever, the ancient brothers-in-arms,
the faithful friends.

NELSON : Hardy ! (*Though there is no answer he continues.*)
Hardy, don't let them throw me overboard ! Take me home !

*As he speaks the Burial Service is heard, very far away,
being sung at St. Paul's, against a voice reading. The murmur
and the music continue as background throughout the scene.*

THE VOICE : Deliver me from all mine offences——

NELSON : My daughter Horatia—a legacy to my country—

THE VOICE : —for if the dead rise not at all, why stand we
in jeopardy every hour. If after the manner of men thou hast
fought with beasts, what advantageth it thee if the dead rise
not ?

NELSON : Never forget—Horatia——

THE VOICE : That which thou sowest is not quickened
except it die; It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It
is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. So when this
corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall
have put on immortality——

NELSON (*a murmur*): Thank God—done—my duty.

THE VOICE : —then shall be brought to pass the saying
that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

*As the scene ends the music and the sounds of battle merge
with the opening Lissa scenes.*

ALL THE SHIPS (*confused, together*): Victory! Victory!
Victory I Victory!

MERLIN'S VOICE : My King has come again and saved his people. He passes and he comes again—again—again!

H.M.S. AMPHION AND THE OTHERS (*shouting*):

Take your orders from Nelson the glorious !

Strike quick, and home,

and may we soon return victorions!

Strike quick, and home !

HOSTE'S VOICE (*triumphant and very fast*): That's how we did the job in Nelson's day. And now we're doing it again. Victory I Victory!

THE SHIPS :

NELSON (*loud*):

Strike quick, and home !

THE WAVES :

Lissa ! Lissa ! Remember Lissa !

Nelson died at Trafalgar ;

but Nelson led his men off Lissa

six years after Trafalgar.

NELSON (*far away*):

Strike quick, and home !

THE WAVES :

Lissa ! Lissa ! Remember Lissa !

Remember Nelson—Nelson—Lissa !

THE PLAY ENDS

THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

CHARACTERS

MERLIN

The Writers

WACE, LAYAMON, MALORY, CAXTON, A CONTEMPORARY,
SHAKESPEARE, TENNYSON, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA

The Saviours

KING ARTHUR, KING ALFRED, ROBERT LOXLEY, QUEEN
ELIZABETH, ESSEX, NELSON

The Modems

GABRILO PRINSIP

MR. SMITH

MRS. SMITH

THEIR DAUGHTER

FRÄULEIN

UNCLE HARRY

A SCHOOLMASTER

EVANS

HAWKINS

BETHMANN HOLLWEG, *the German Chancellor*

THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR *in Berlin*

A GERMAN OFFICIAL

A YOUNG SAILOR

HIS MOTHER

HIS GIRL

LIL

LIL'S MOTHER

IVY

A GERMAN PERSONAGE

A SOLDIER

A YOUNG SOLDIER

HIS MOTHER

A CLUBMAN

A SECOND CLUBMAN

NEWSBOYS

A WOMAN

A GERMAN OFFICER

AN AMERICAN

EDITH CAVELL

A GIRL

HER FATHER

HER MOTHER

AN OLDER WOMAN

A BRIDE

HER YOUNG HUSBAND

CROWD

MERLIN (*as narrator*): My name is Merlin, Merlin. For thirteen hundred years the British have remembered me and King Arthur my master. Listen, and you may hear their poets chattering of us two !

WACE'S VOICE : Not all the tales are lies: not all the tales are true. Not all is fable, nor is all known concerning Merlin and his king. The story-tellers have muddled things. I say this, I, Wace of Jersey, myself a story-teller under the Normans.

LAYAMON'S VOICE : Once was a sage called Merlin. He said, and his sayings were true, that an Arthur should yet come to help the English. I'm Layamon the parish priest, who lived in King John's day, and wrote the noble deeds of Merlin and his master, so you may trust my word.

MALORY'S VOICE : And mine, for I'm Malory. I wrote the mort of Arthur, king of the past and future.

CAXTON'S VOICE : And I'm William Caxton who imprinted that book.

A CONTEMPORARY : All such books are but feigned and fable.

SHAKESPEARE'S VOICE :

The dreamer Merlin—skimble-skamble stuff!

TENNYSON'S VOICE : Arthur the king——

He perished by this people which he made,
though Merlin swore that he should come again.

THE ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA'S VOICE : Tennyson—Layamon—Malory—they're only poets. As that first man Said, the one from Jersey, they embroider the facts. But I'm the Encyclopaedia Britannica. I concern myself solely with facts. Merlin ? Hm ! The researches of scholars appear to point to the result that the legend of Merlin is a complex growth, combined from traditions of independent and widely different origin. Most probably there is a certain substratum

of fact beneath all. There may have been, there very probably was, a bard and soothsayer of that name.

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

Yes, yes, yes, I am Merlin the old ;
but when Britain the fortunate isle
was a traveller's tale new-told
to shorten the road
or the mounting score at an inn
down by the docks of Carthage and Tyre,
then I was Merlin the young.
Yes, yes, yes !
I am Merlin whom no man heeds.
My charms are broken reeds.
I am yesterday's deeds.

But when Britain the fortunate isle
was a jest of the early seas :
when the lay of the mistletoe-bride
was everywhere sung :
when rumours of jet and tin,
savages bright with woad,
sizeable river-pearls,
rosy boys and girls,
all such merchandize
as is cheaply bought, to be dearly sold
in the markets of Rome and Palmyre,
spread like a crackle of fire
up and down the sophisticate
Mediterranean quays,
then, then, then
I was Merlin the wise.
Then I was Britain's fate,
bone of her bone,
Merlin the spell-binder,
Merlin, tomorrow-finder.

Then I prophesied
to the cowering island-men,
to the people of Salisbury Plain
and Wicken Fen,
and to all the tribes of the trees,
that a king should arise
to be the German bane
and draw the Sword from the Stone.

This was Caliburn, the royal sword of Britain, spellbound in a shrine at Winchester. But when the Romans left Britain as a half-finished sentence at the end of their story and the barbarians had overrun us, burning the cities and emptying them of life, there came suddenly a nameless youth, who found the sword Caliburn rusted into a pillar of the ruined church, and he drew it easily. Then the harried Britons flocked to him, crying : " The unknown boy shall save us."

This was the first coming of King Arthur, who rose like a morning sun through the fogs of history. His standard was the British dragon, his battle-cry : "The red dragon leads the way." Hear his coronation vow 1

ARTHUR'S VOICE : I am Arthur, king of Britain. I am to comfort the old, to guard the young, to break the wicked, to unite the scattered tribes of the British, to hold them safe, die for them, and be theirs for ever.

MERLIN (*as narrator*): He kept his vow. In his fabulous day Britain mastered the foreign hordes, ruled the northern world, dealt justly, succoured the oppressed. And after the king passed through twilight to Avalon, his people bettered their own laws, fought for their own justice, and withstood their enemies because they believed that their king Arthur would come again to help them. And it is true that at need saviours arose—kings, priests, rebels, poets and fighting-men. Now whether these were my king himself I cannot tell. But this I know. When King Alfred had conquered the Danes, he

reasoned with his people in the voice of Arthur, old and worn with sickness and grief.

ALFRED'S VOICE : Now you shall have books. For he seems to me a very foolish man and very wretched who will not increase his understanding while he is in this world, and ever long to reach that endless life where all shall be made clear.

MERLIN (*as narrator*): Then, after many hundred years, as I lay in my deathless tower woven of air and hawthorn bloom, I heard a young voice cry :

ROBERT LOXLEY'S VOICE : No freeman shall be fined or bound, deprived of his freehold, outlawed or banished, unless by the lawful judgement of his peers. And all men of the kingdom shall have and hold their liberties and rights for themselves and their heirs in all respects and in all places for ever.

MERLIN (*as narrator*): Now this was the voice of a nameless marl bringing news to his fellows of the Great Charter signed at Runnymede. Yet for me it was my king, taking his oath of service. And again, after many years, I heard a woman heartening her soldiers at Tilbury, and her name was Elizabeth, the Tudor queen, who derived from Arthur.

ELIZABETH'S VOICE : Not Spain nor any prince of Europe shall invade us. Pluck up your hearts ! By your peace in camp and your valour in the field you shall shortly have a famous victory.

MERLIN (*as narrator*): Then I heard a proud voice cry lordly:

ESSEX'S VOICE : You at home, self-loving men, desire ease, pleasure and profit. But the young men who follow me love torment, dangers, pain, and the people's good more than their own weal. They are England's best armour of defence and weapon of offence. If we have peace, they have purchased it. If we have war, they must manage it.

MERLIN (*as narrator*): Now this was the voice of Essex, who could have led the English but for his pride ; for Arthur's

passion was in him. But the voice was silenced ; for not till two hundred years had passed did it ring out again—at Trafalgar.

NELSON'S VOICE : England expects that every man this day will do his duty.

MERLIN (*as narrator*): Then I said—"Here ends the struggle that began thirteen hundred years ago. Arthur has come again and again, and he has so helped his people that they rule the seas and hold the world quiet with a magic stronger than mine; for they ride without horses, fly through the air, and speak to each other across continents. Sleep well, my king, in the buttercup-meadows, and I too will rest, for they do not need us any more I Sleep well! Dream well! The story is over." So I abode in my tower of air, lying as quiet at first as the sword Galiburn sunk beneath the mere, and saw a hundred years and nine pass in fourfold flashes of green, blue, gold and white. And as the globe turned on its hinges the speech of the British people rose from continents and islands, ports, cities, steaming hinterlands and polar seas. The crying of the wretcfjed lessened, and the joyous murmur lulled me into a dream ; but after another while my own heart began to beat like a clock.

Nineteen fourteen—nineteen fourteen—
June—Serajevo—St. Virus's Day—
nineteen fourteen—

Then I dreamed of a toy town with a hundred domes and minarets rising above the cypress groves. Clockwork cars move in procession through the narrow streets, and crowds of peasants shout applause, stilled suddenly by thrice-repeated sounds, like cinders dropping from a grate.

Three pistol shots are heard.

VOICES (*far away*):

They've fired at the Arch-duke's car.—.—The Arch-duke's shot through the throat.—.—Both killed.—.—

It's that boy with the pistol—Gabrilo Prinsip.———Take him alive!———We shall all be killed.———Help the police I———Hold the murderer !

PRINSIP (*a young voice*): I shan't try to escape. Long live freedom!

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

Nineteen fourteen—nineteen fourteen—
June—Serajevo—St Vitus's Day—
nineteen fourteen.

The victims and the tools
alike are borne away.
Fools have avenged the elder crime of fools,
and the innocent blood spilt
in the lanes of Serajevo dries
in the hot June sun, and cries
aloud, and is heard.
The judgement long deferred
is suddenly given—"The innocent shall pay"

But the English sit at their breakfast tables
a thousand miles away.
Not theirs the guilt.
They are unperturbed
as they read the morning cables.

The scene begins.

MR. SMITH : What a shocking thing I

MRS. SMITH : What is, dear ?

MR. SMITH : One of these political assassinations.

MRS. SMITH : Where ?

MR. SMITH : Somewhere in the Balkans.

MRS. SMITH : Oh, the Balkans! Any other news ? I haven't seen the paper this morning.

THEIR DAUGHTER : Once Father gets hold of the paper nobody else ever does see it before lunch.

MR. SMITH : That is absolutely untrue. Wet or fine I have left this house at a quarter to nine for the last twenty years, as your mother very well knows.

THE DAUGHTER, : Then can I have the paper, Father? Because it's ten to nine now.

MR. SMITH : Take it I Take it ! Take the whole damned house !—Anything you want brought home, dear ?

THE DAUGHTER : Fräulein, where's Serajevd ?

FRÄULEIN (*a guttural voice*): Bosnia. Let me see ! Gott, O Gott!

THE DAUGHTER : What's the matter ?

FRÄULEIN : Do you know nothing ? This is the heir to the Austrian throne. Now there will be trouble.

THE DAUGHTER : Won't touch us.

FRÄULEIN : Yet it is better, maybe, not to go in Austria this year for the holiday.

THE DAUGHTER : Anywhere's all right in weather like this.

Tie scene ends.

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

And there's a month to run
before they pay.

Give them their last July !

Give them their perfect weather !

Let them remember the shadowless sun,
the open window breathing-in the rose
night after night,

the early swallow's flight

in the unquartered sky,

and un-forbidden walks across the heather,

or how they climbed some blue un-threatening height,

or that they once could lie

on smooth unguarded sands

all the out-lingered day,
and think and read, and argue as they chose,
nor pause to thank their English gods that they
are not as other lands !
They do not feel the hate
beating, thickening,
darkening, quickening
about them day by day..

GUTTURAL VOICES (*far away*): Der Tag ! Der Tag ! Der Tag!

The scene begins,

A SCHOOLMASTER : You know, you older boys ought to try to grasp the repercussions of this Serajevo business.

EVANS (*a boy of nineteen*): Well, sir, I can understand Austria's making the assassination an excuse -for annexing Serbia. And I can understand Russia saying to Austria " thus far and no further". But I can't understand what it's got to do with Germany, except as an excuse for a scrap.

THE SCHOOLMASTER : If I hadn't been in Germany so much I'd agree with you, Evans. But——

HAWKINS (*slightly younger than EVANS*) : Now he's going to tell us about his year at Heidelberg.

THE SCHOOLMASTER : What's that, Hawkins ?

HAWKINS (*smoothly*): I mean, sir, weren't they always duelling, sir, when you were at Heidelberg ?

THE SCHOOLMASTER : Well yes—youngsters, you know. But I assure you the older Germany hates militarism——

EVANS : Bismarck didn't.

HAWKINS : But why should the Germans attack the French just because Russia's mobilizing ?

EVANS : Allies of Russia, you cuckoo.

HAWKINS : But if Germany beat France in 1870, what more does she want ?

GUTTURAL VOICES (*Jar away*): Lebens'-raum!———.
Colonies I -?———Yellow peril I———A place in the
sun I

EVANS : They're jealous of us.

THE SCHOOLMASTER : The military circles, my dear boy I
Never the German people.

HAWKINS : But why should Britain be dragged in ?

THE SCHOOLMASTER : The Germans want to cut through
Belgium: we (*and they for that matter*) have guaranteed her
neutrality. '

HAWKINS (*intelligently*): But * they could scoop round
Belgium.

THE SCHOOLMASTER : Yes, well—strategy—diplomacy—
one has to trust the Government. Now, who can tell me the
names of the Cabinet ? No, *not* you, Evans !

HAWKINS (*hesitatingly*) : Asquith ?

THE SCHOOLMASTER : Yes, the Prime Minister. And who's
the Secretary for War ?

HAWKINS : I know who ought to be—Kitchener !

THE SCHOOLMASTER : Asquith again. And the Foreign
Secretary ?—Do you boys read nothing but the cricket
results ?—Sir Edward Grey. And who's at the Admiralty ?

EVANS : Churchill!

THE SCHOOLMASTER : Churchill I

The scene ends.

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

Churchill! Thus ends July.

On August the first Churchill dares to defy
Cabinet rulings. He mobilizes the Fleet.

On August the second the unsurprised
rumour-mongers repeat
everywhere that the Army is mobilized.

Late that Sunday night
the Londoners go, as they always do
when things go wrong, when things go right,
drifting along the Mall
where the moonlit Queen shines white
against the bloodstain-reds
of the traditional geranium-beds,
to linger at the Palace gate and sing
" God Save the King ! ",
and then, to show
we stand by France always,
in very broken French, the Marseillaise,
and " Britons never-never shall
be slaves," and then " God Save the King,"
over again : " God Save the King "—the King !

Monday the third ! The invisible clouds
blacken the sun for the holiday crowds.
Tuesday the fourth—the fatal day has dawned
of the fateful week.

" The Belgian Government determine to resist——"
the iron heel, the mailed fist.
Berlin is warned.
" The British Government protest, refuse——"
But let the German Chancellor speak,
and the Reichstag hear the news!

BETHMANN HOLLWEG'S VOICE : Gentlemen, we are in a
state of necessity, and necessity knows no law. . . . Our
troops have perhaps already entered Belgian territory.
Gentlemen, this is a breach of international law. . . . The
wrong—I speak openly—the wrong we thereby commit we
will try to make good as soon as our military aims have been
attained.

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

Then comes the infamous phrase :
" hack our way through "

GUTTURAL VOICES :

Der Tag! Der Tag ! Der Tag !

MERLIN (*as narrator*) :

No more, no more to do
in the Prussian city !
The British Ambassador, with profound regret,
demands his passports, yet
before he goes his ways
pauses to knock once more
in the name of peace and pity
upon the Chancellor's door.

THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR (*to the audience*): I found the Chancellor very agitated. He at once began a harangue.

BETHMANN HOLLWEG'S VOICE : The step taken by the British Government is terrible. Just for the word " neutrality"—a word which, in war time, has been so often disregarded—just for a scrap of paper Britain is going to war.

THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR (*to the audience*): I protested strongly . . . and said that, in the same way that he . . . wished me to understand that it was a matter of life and death to Germany to advance through Belgium, so I would wish him to understand that it was a matter of life and death to the honour of Great Britain that she should keep her solemn engagement . . . or what confidence could anyone have in engagements given by Great Britain in the future ?

BETHMANN HOLLWEG'S VOICE : But at what price will that compact have been kept? Has the British Government thought of that?

THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR (*to the audience*): I hinted to his Excellency as plainly as I could that fear of consequences can

hardly be regarded as an excuse for breaking solemn engagements.

A GERMAN OFFICIAL'S VOICE : The Ambassador has asked for his passports. That is the equivalent to a declaration of war.

ENGLISH VOICES : War I—————War !

GUTTURAL- VOICES : ' War !

MERLIN (*as narrator*) : The war to end war.

An outburst of gunfire. As it dies away the scene begins.

MR. SMITH : "—with full conviction, not only of the wisdom and justice but of the obligation to challenge this great issue——"

THE DAUGHTER (*interrupting*) : Father !

MR. SMITH : No, listen, dear! This is history. Ask your Uncle Harry !

UNCLE HARRY : You're right there.

MR. SMITH : I'm reading you the Prime Minister's speech. " We have a great duty to perform, a great trust to fulfil, and confidently we believe that Parliament and the country will enable us to do it."

UNCLE HARRY : Kitchener's been made Secretary for War.

MR. SMITH : And Parliament's voted a hundred million.

UNCLE HARRY : They'll want more than that.

THE DAUGHTER : Father won't have to go, will he ? Will he, Uncle ?

UNCLE HARRY : Of course not.

MRS. SMITH : Of course not. It's bound to be over by Christmas.

The scene ends.

MERLIN (*as narrator*) :

Yes, yes, yes !

The men are saying :

" All will be over by Christmas."

The women are praying :

" Let it be over by Christmas I "

" Four months," the catchword goes,
" or else four years."

Unerringly youth knows
that it will be four years.

The scene begins.

A YOUNG SAILOR : And so you see, Mother, our idea is to get married before I join my ship.

A MOTHER : There's plenty of time for getting married after it's all over.

A GIRL : You're wrong. You're wrong. There isn't plenty of time. Suppose he's killed.

THE MOTHER : Don't be so wicked ! Besides, you're both of you far too young.

THE YOUNG SAILOR : If I'm old enough to fight, I'm old enough to marry.

THE GIRL (*further away*): It's no good. They don't understand. Darling, I'm so terrified——

THE YOUNG SAILOR : I'll tell you what, my sweet, we'll just go quietly off to a registrar. We can fake the ages——

The scene ends.

There is a sound of bagpipes and of men marchings far away. It increases as the scene is played^ but is never very loud. A girl's voice is heard, shrill with excitement.

L I L : Ivy ! Ivy ! Come out of that quick I

LIL'S MOTHER : Lil's calling you, dear. I'll 'ave two and three quarter yards of the narrer, miss.

L I L : Ivy ! It's the London Scottish. Come out on the pavement ! Come on, Ma I You "can finish shopping afterwards. Look, 'ere they come ! My Arthur's in this little lot.

I V Y : London Scottish ? Why ? Thought Arthur was born in Balham.

L I L : 'E's got his right. 'Is grandmother come from

Aberdeen. 'E did 'esitate between them and the West Kents, but I like a kilt. Gordon joined up yet ?

IVY (*with dignity*): Gordon 'as responsibilities. He's told 'em they can have 'im at the end of the month and not before.

LIL'S MOTHER : Oh those young boys ! All those young boys ! I can't watch 'em. No, dear, I see nothing glorious in it. It breaks my'eart.

L I L ; There he is. Arthur ! Arthur ! 'E's seen us. Arthur !

The scene ends.

MERLIN (*as narrator*): Arthur ! The name quivered in the air, and I who had promised my king his earned rest, found myself crying across the centuries : " O saviour of the Britons, how can you sleep so sound ? Have you forgotten your people ? Does the east wind no longer carry a word to Avalon ? " But the only answer was the changing tune.

We hear the South Wales Borderers tramping past chanting

" The Men of Harlech "as the scene begins.

EVANS : I'm going in for a commission in the South Wales Borderers. Oh, please God it isn't all over by the time I get out ! Do you realize, young I law kins, that it'« only August the eighteenth, and already they've got the entire British Expeditionary Force safely over to France ?

HAWKINS : We've got a Navy, you see. Did you know we'd got a Navy ?

EVANS : " The nose of the bulldog has been slanted backwards, so that he can breathe without letting go."

HAWKINS : Who said that ?

EVANS : Who do you think ?

HAWKINS : Churchill ?

EVANS : Churchill ! Yes—Channel cleared and a hundred thousand men shifted across it in less than a fortnight. It's one up to the Navy.

The scene ends.

THE VOICE OF A GERMAN PERSONAGE: A hundred thousand men I We* are millions. Let us annihilate this contemptible little army!

DELIGHTED BRITISH VOICES : Contemptible 1 Contemptible ! Here come the Old Contemptibles, with Kitchener's orders in our paybooks.

A SOLDIER (*reading aloud*): " You are ordered abroad as a soldier of the King to help our comrades against the invasion of a common enemy. You have to perform a task "which will need your courage, your energy, your patience. Remember the honour of the British Army depends on your individual conduct! Be invariably courteous, considerate and kind I . . . Do your duty bravely ! Fear God ! Honour the King I "

A YOUNG SOLDIER'S VOICE : And mother darling, if by any chance I didn't come back, always say to yourself that it's worth it to both of us. Because this is the war to end war, and you can say : " My son helped to win it."

HIS MOTHER (*obediently*) : My son helped to win it—the war to end war.

WOMEN'S VOICES : My son !———My husband !———My brother !———My dear love won it—the war to end war.

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

O English breakfast rooms
of those vain tears
long dried,,
those outworn dooms,
how much will you remember
in twenty years,
over the *Times* or the *Mail* in twenty years ?

My vision wakes. I see an ageing grief
beyond the comprehension or belief
of the prosperous younger son.
He's ten years older now than the pride

of the home, the elder one,
the one who died.

It hurts old fellows when the youngsters say :
" But when your war was ended
how *could* you think it ended war for good ? "

The young can't feel the pulse of that September,
don't know which regiments defended,
at Mons, the long canal,
or where the Cloth-Hall stood
before they burnt Louvain.
They'll say : " Let's think—*did* Paris fall ?
What happened at Cambrai—
Arras—the Marne—the Aisne ?
Who was von Spee ? "

O years, break from your graves I
Restore the vanished scene,
the ruffled waves' kingfisher-sheen,
the distant Falkland Isles !
Renew the ended chase, display
a German fleet at bay,
(the range ten miles),
and Admiral Sturdee challenging von Spee—

Gunfire rumbles and dies away again as the scene begins.

A CLUBMAN: Where's the hall-porter? What are the newsboys calling ? I want all the evening papers. I say, listen, you chaps ! Great naval battle off the Falklands ! Four ships sunk—the *Scarnhorst*, the *Gncisenau*, the *Leipzig* and the *Nürnberg*. Von Spee went down with his ship. They say he was a brave man. A nine-hour fight!

A SECOND CLUBMAN : Well, that wipes out Coronel.

ARTHUR'S VOICE (*far away*) : This is not victory—this is conquest.

THE FIRST CLUBMAN : Rounds off nineteen fourteen very nicely. At this rate it ought to be all over by next summer.

The scene ends in a murmur of men's and women's voices.

VOICES :

All over by the spring !
All over by the spring !
Or summer—say !

I saw a zeppelin.
I saw a zeppelin
brought down in flames.
Hooray!

We're short of shells and everybody blames
the Gover'nment. Are we down-hearted—no !
Of course we'll win.
Of course we'll win.

Short-handed—closing down !
Twice my best man
has had to go.
Munitions ! Carry on as best we can !

Ypres ! Fest-hubert!
My boy was there.
They caught it at Fromelles.
My boy was there.
The charge at Neuve Chapelle I
My boy was there.

Remember how we met the Grenadiers
upon the greasy road that led to Armentières ?
And the East Lancashires
would hardly let us pass.

Remember the horses ploughing, and the snow
lying like chicken feathers on the grass,
the mounting larks sweet-shrilling overhead,
and the daisies, and the dead ?

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

Now, now, now
a whisper's heard,
a word's made flesh—the word
Anzac. Now, now, now the tales begin,
thicken, and swell to a story
unmatchable, unbelievable,
of victory in defeat, defeated victory inconceivable—
Australia's glory.

There were thirty thousand men at most.
Their leaders were Hamilton, Birdwood, Johnson,
Cox :
their heroes were Jacka and Quinn,
Malone, and Bridges
muttering in his pride :
" For nine months, anyhow,
I commanded an Australian division
before I died."

New Zealanders, Tasmanians take and retake the rocks
unforgettably named : Hill Q., Courtenay's Post,
Gun Ridge—there 'were three Gun Ridges—
Steele's Point, the Nek, Lone Pine,
and shout in huge derision :
" Australia will be there,"
and fling themselves upon the Turkish line.

Never had been
such living and such dying as' was seen
April the twenty-fifth, nineteen fifteen,
on bare Gallipoli;

for these men were landed on the burning beaches of
hell,
and climbed to the heights, and captured immortality
before they fell.

*Cries of " England ! Gott strafe England ! " emerge from
the battle.*

GUTTURAL VOICES :

This land we hate with a lasting hate.
We shall never forget our hate.
Hate by water——

NEWSBOYS' CRIES : *Lusttahiä* torpedoed off Ireland!
———Twelve hundred victims !———Many women and
children among the drowned——

A WOMAN'S VOICE (*low, rather monotonous*): I put my baby
on a raft, you see. I should have kept him in my arms. It
would have been warmer for him *in* my arms. But I put him
on one of the rafts.

GUTTURAL VOICES :

Hate by water and hate by land.
Hate of the heart, and hate of the hand.
Rich man's hate and poor man's hate,
seventy million people sick with hate——

A GERMAN OFFICER'S VOICE : The prisoner, Nurse Edith
Cavell, has confessed that she was instrumental in procuring
the escape of at least sixty English soldiers. She was perfectly
aware of the penalty she incurred. She will be shot at dawn
tomorrow.

AN AMERICAN'S VOICE : But a Red Cross nurse—and one
who has done such wonderful work ! When you realize that as
many Germans as English or Belgians owe her their lives——

THE GERMAN OFFICER : I have nothing to say.

THE AMERICAN : But at least allow us time to appeal——

THE GERMAN OFFICER : It will be quite useless.

EDITH CAVELL'S VOICE : The twenty francs will cover my little debts. And there is my dog—my dear old Jack. Please brush him sometimes and look after him.

THE AMERICAN : Consider how it will shock American opinion!

EDITH CAVELL : My love to you all. I'm not afraid. I'm quite happy.

THE GERMAN OFFICER : Nurse Cavell will be shot at dawn tomorrow.

EDITH CAVELL : I know now that patriotism is not enough. I must not have any feeling of bitterness or hatred against anyone.

ARTHUR'S VOICE (*far away*):

This is too high for me. I will give blood and sweat;
but such forgiveness, O gentle saint, not yet!
Forgive them, for they know not what they do ?
First let the world be rid
of all their deviltries, in mercy's name,
the cruelty, the lies, the bestial mirth !
If ever I forget
the wrongs of simple earth
upon my head the unremitted blame,
for they know what they did,
and they know what they do.

MERLIN (*as narrator*): The voice! The voice! Oh my king—in Avalon does the wind stir ? Come to us, King Arthur ! For the sword Caliburn is sunk beneath the mere, yet the song of the sword is loud in England, and the prophecy stands : " A saviour shall yet come to help the English."

ARTHUR (*nearer*): Caliburn! Caliburn! Caliburn is thirsty.

I freed the sword from the stone.
Caliburn I Caliburn !
I saved the land
with my sword Caliburn,
and cast it away again
for a better man to find.

I lie uneasily
in Avalon and yearn,
as the dangerous years go by,
for my sword Caliburn
and the isle, of my making.
I return. I return
at Easter, in the March wind
, with the early daffodil
and the April rain.
I am the king of the May. I come again,
and call to my own,
the men of my flesh and bone,
in the name of Liberty :
and as I teach, I learn.

Caliburn I Caliburn !
The storm is breaking.
Caliburn ! Caliburn !
The roots of the isle are shaking.
Now I call to my peers ;
for this was my own decree
that a man shall be judged by his **peers**—
" in the name of freedom, say -
have we done well or ill
in the thirteen hundred years ? "

The work is incomplete
that we have done.
We have fallen and fumbled

in straining up to the height,
and our feet
fail us often because they are common clay.

We have been petty and credulous, grumbled,
been greedy of gain,
then in dust and ashes we have repented,
and climbed again,
and fallen again, and risen again, again :
we have put our hand to the plough
only to turn aside.

But we were never contented,
nor sat overlong at the feast.
We have been merciful to man and beast.
We have been pioneers.
We rule our stubborn hearts as we rule our seas,
not easily.
But still ungrudging,
stumbling and trudging,
we opened a road for the world's delight,
and called it Liberty.

Judge us, O hurrying years !
Has it been greed and pride,
nothing but greed and pride
as the evil spirits say ?
Let us be judged by our peers !
I am the very Britain.
Who stands at my side ?

YOUNG VOICES (*one after another*): Canada!——
Africa !——Australia !——New Zealand!——
India !——The isles of the eastern world !——**TH**
isles of the western world !

The shouting becomes general.

ARTHUR'S VOICE : I told you long ago, the young men who follow me love the people's good more than their own weal. They are the Empire's best ancient armour of offence.

MERLIN (*as narrator*):

It shall not fade, the flower of England's face;
for now behind their fighting men,
(the land's best armour of offence),
the women take their place,
(the land's best weapon of defence),
the young and ardent women of the race.

The scene begins.

A GIRL : Happy New Year, Father—Mother 1

HER FATHER : Happy New Year ! *Better* New Year, you should say. What's the matter with the tea, Mother ?

HER MOTHER : It's the end of the ration, dear.

THE FATHER : Dishwater ! Well, it won't run to the usual cheque this year, you two ; but I did an arbitration yesterday—three guineas, that's a guinea for each of us. Give me the paper, dear girl!

THE GIRL (*eagerly*): Father, there's a New Year letter to the nation from Lloyd George that you've got to read.

THE MOTHER : You read it, dear, while I see to your father.

THE GIRL : " The sacrifices which the men—and the women also—are making at the front we all know. . . . They are still facing frost and mud, privation and suffering, wounds and death with undaunted courage, that mankind may be freed from the tyranny of militarism and rejoice in lasting freedom and peace."

THE FATHER : Very fine 1

THE GIRL : " No sacrifice that we who stay at home ate called to make can equal or faintly approach what is daily and hourly demanded of them . . . "

THE FATHER : And that wanted saying, too.

THE GIRL : " Let us see to it that we do not take our ease at the price of their sacrifice. There is nobody too old or too young or too feeble to play a part." Do you agree with that, Father, or don't you ?

THE FATHER : Of course I agree.

THE GIRL : Well then——

THE FATHER : Oh, is that what you're getting at ? Now understand once and for all, I allow no daughter of mine to work in a factory. Join your Mother's working-party ! Take over the vegetables——

THE MOTHER : What Father feels, dear, is—that if you released the kitchenmaid it would be just the same thing as——

THE GIRL : They want munitions.

THE FATHER : Munitions is a highly paid job. Leave it to the women who need the money!

THE GIRL : It's not a question of money.

THE FATHER : No, it's a question of breaking up the* home. That's what we're fighting for, to—to keep the home fires burning.

THE GIRL (*bitter*): You're not fighting. Jack is—you're not.

THE MOTHER : Your father did *man* than his bit in the Boer war.

THE GIRL : But this isn't the Boer War. This is everybody's war, and we're short of shells.

THE MOTHER : You needn't shout, dear.

THE GIRL : I'm not shouting, but——

THE MOTHER : We can't discuss anything if you get excited and hysterical.

THE GIRL :

Watch it, my girl, hysteria won't do!

Just say, quite quietly, that you're of age
and that you've got to go.

Inside yourself you know
you're free.

But gently I Give them time I They'll seen

Look, Father—look, Mother—I don't mean to be hysterical;
but I came of age last week, and I must do what I think right.
Girls—they're not the same as when you were young.

THE FATHER : Suffragette—latch-keys—no, thank God !

THE GIRL : Oh please; not that sort of tag—not *now* !
What do you want me to do ? Sit in the drawing-room and
practise my music. " Men must work and women must weep,
though storms be sudden and waters deep——" Is that what
you want me to do ?

THE MOTHER : It's not a question of what I or your father
want. You've made it perfectly clear that you'll go your own
way without any regard to our feelings. There's a sort of
hardness -about this war generation——

The scene ends.

AN OLDER WOMAN'S VOICE :

They weep behind the eyes,
not letting the tears flow.
But when the new-made phantoms go
up and down, up and down the street
night after night,
enemies of sleep,
and sometimes beat
feebly upon a panel, or rattle a latch
till fingers weak
with joy have slipped the catch
and swung the blind door back against the wall—
and then—and then—no-one's in sight.
It was the wind—a dream—that's all—
that's all.
Then who denies
that women weep ?

Or when the name, the name
takes its unbearably meek
single line of space on the roll of fame
in the village hall,
or on a flimsy sheet in a running hand,
running away like hour-glass sand,
shall they not weep ?

The scene begins.

A BRIDE : Dearest, you've got to rouse yourself. It's after **five.**

A YOUNG HUSBAND : Oh God I—already ? You dressed ?

THE BRIDE : Well, I'm coming with you to the station, of course.

THE HUSBAND : Do you think you'd better ? I'm not sure——

THE BRIDE : I'm coming with you to the station, of course. Don't, *please*, let's argue about that! Eat your breakfast! How long do you like your egg ?

THE HUSBAND : Four minutes.

THE BRIDE : I asked your mother—she said three-and-a-half. Watch the hour-glass while I pour out I That's one of our wedding-presents—did you know ?—from the Vicarage—antique. I don't suppose you remembered to thank them. And the tea-cosy's from old Nurse. Oh my darling, you will take care of yourself—yes, that's an idiotic thing to say, but—marmalade ? Where did I put the marmalade ? Don't hurry, dear I You've got another half-hour. I want you to have a good breakfast——

THE HUSBAND : Darling, the sand's run out.

The scene ends.

THE OLDER WOMAN :

Gone, gone for ever is the boy
out of her keeping,
and gone for ever the brief season of joy.

He goes to the Somrae. He is one
of the sixty thousand. She is left to her weeping,
and all her comfort is work—the work to be done.

For women are making munitions,
women are making munitions.
What else can save
the pitifully young, the true, the brave ?
This is a war to end war, and it will;
for who'll be left to kill ?
Already we have buried a generation
in the European grave.
But women are making munitions, munitions.

Your King and Country need you—that means *you* ;
and any kind of man's work anywhere
is mercy and salvation.
Carting, coaling, portorage, sowing and reaping—
we can go through with it.
Sex—what has sex to do with it ?
Women are making munitions.
And after-world conditions ?
Settle them afterwards, then !
Then let Labour intervene,
clear us out of the workmen's benches ;
but first we save our men,
men in the trenches, trenches,
winter of 'seventeen.

The sound of gunfire begins far away.

THE MEN :

We're eight days in, eight days out of the trenches,
eight nights in, eight nights out of the trenches,
regular as maxim fire.
And ten months lie between

us and leave and the crowded train,
and the smell of Victoria platform—home again !
" Oh—oh—*oh*, it's a lovely war ! "

ARTHUR'S VOICE :

Snow comes first,
then comes ice,
then comes sleet,
then comes rain,
then comes heat,
then comes thirst,
and somebody's caught in the wire
just beyond the trench.

Their shells burst,
ours are dud.
Lice—
rats—
stench—
latrines leaking—
every duckboard slippery with blood—
stiff men creaking
underneath the slats—
mud—mud—mud !
Has to be, so why complain ?
But the wallowing, swallowing mud's the worst.

THE MEN :

" Oh—oh—*oh*, it's a lovely war ! "

Gunfire overwhelms the singing, then dies away.

MERLIN (*in the scene*): O my king, you are wiser than I, and stronger. I cover my eyes. I cannot endure to watch. Yet you endure and watch. Will it ever end ?

ARTHUR : Not end, but pause. In the November of. next

year—nineteen eighteen—the war to end war will be over,
and they will make the peace to end peace. But you are the
prophet, not I.

Can you not foresee
the agonies to come,
all men by their own familiar gods betrayed,
the homes, the cities, nations divided,
the continents dismayed,
Ragnarok, Armageddon, the last Crusade ?

Well, if you cannot, let it be !

But Merlin, I come home

three years from now,

I or another one.

I have fulfilled my vow,

and all the people of my dear, dear land
will bring me home.

And they will give me peace

a little while, a little while,

but not release.

The war to end war is not yet begun.

O Merlin, I shall lie

among the great of the isle,

unknown, unknown 1

UNKNOWN SOLDIERS (*speaking in turn*):

They will not know my name.

I shall come from an unknown grave.

All they will know of me is what I gave.

From north and south I came,

from the east, from the west..

Australian desert—

Canadian snows—

Irish hillside—

Liverpool slum—

They will not know my home,
and this is best.

Was I a widow's son ? None knows, none knows.

I remember the mother who bore me,
and she would know
her son ; but oh,
my lips are dumb.

Yet shall the hour restore me
to those who held me dear,
and ever grieve.

They will cover my bones with soldier's gear.

They will shroud my dusty death
with the ancient flag. The Empire holds its breath
to watch me come
silently out of the station on my last leave.

I reach Whitehall.
Silently, silently they greet me,
my masters and my friends. The bugles blow.

ARTHUR :

Then silently, silently I go
on to the Abbey where the four queens meet me
as long ago
at Avalon they met me, long ago.

*The Last Post sounds. Across the closing notes- comes the
wail of a baby.*

MERLIN (as narrator): Then, in the silence, a baby cried.
All Britain heard it. Every news-sheet in the Empire reported
that, during the great silence, a baby cried.

The Unknown Warrior was passing. We knew that he stood for nearly three million men of the Empire, killed, wounded, or missing in **the** four years of war. But no-one as yet knew that **this** sacrifice had failed of its proclaimed purpose : that in less than twenty years the struggle would be renewed—darkness against light—slavery against freedom—devil against God.

But our nation was a tired nation : and some, who **had** borne least, were ready to say—"Darkness is a refuge. **The** slave's life is ordered for him. What if the children of **this** world are wiser than the children of light ? "

' But a baby cried in the silence and the waverers **were** answered. We fight for the child : we endure for the child ; for we know that the little thing, crying aloud amid **the** nation's grief, is himself the saviour who shall come **to help his** generation.

Great is his inheritance ; for his instincts are the hard-won knowledge of all who went before—love of God, love of **man**, love of justice, love of freedom, courage, imagination **and** laughter, and to these gifts the Unknown Soldier has added—sacrifice. But what the young child, tomorrow-helper, **will** learn and teach again to his people, we may not know ; **'though** today we watch him at his task.

It is Armistice day. A baby's cry breaks the silence ; **and the** mourners hail their saviour, England's Darling, **the Light of** Britain, the Hope of the World.

THE END

Covent Garden, "London.
November 1940—November 1941.

