

INT. ST. FRIDESWYDE'S PRIORY CHAPEL - DAY

The crown of England rests on the lap of a careworn prince.

In a simple chapel, RICHARD Plantagenet, Earl of Cornwall, sits on a bench and waits. Though he looks no older than his fifty-five years, he sees with the eyes of a wearied man.

Henry Plantagenet, KING of England, stands before his younger brother. Barefoot and bare-headed. In a rough habit of hessian. He looks proud of his humble attire.

PRIOR

Are you sure, majesty? In your heart, are you sure?

A tonsured PRIOR frets and worries.

KING

Where is your faith, master prior? You have seen me hold vigil. Give alms to the poor. Put on the garb of the penitent.

PRIOR

But the curse! The curse!

KING

Is a curse on kings. Not on priors. Go now. Open up the crypt.

Richard gives the reluctant prior the nod. Off he goes.

The King grabs his crown from Richard's lap.

KING

Ha! As if I should fear the saints of heaven?

The King crowns himself to his own satisfaction.

RICHARD

God forbid, brother. But what of the barons of England?

KING

(scowls darkly)

Bah to the barons! The whole business with Louis was just to buy them time. Wasn't it?

RICHARD

(disinterested)

It's what your son said all along.

KING

No matter. Now that your son has come to his senses. *Finally...*

The King sees Richard not all that bothered.

KING

The barons of England will come to heel.

RICHARD

And Earl Simon?

KING  
Earl Simon will go to hell!

EXT. ST. FRIDESWYDE'S PRIORY - MOMENTS LATER

A crypt door opens out onto stone steps -- which rise to the grounds of a chapel -- amongst lawns and blossoming trees within stone priory walls. Early springtime in England.

WARENNE (O.S.)  
It all happened long before the  
Conquest.

A thirty-something baron tells a tale. Earl WARENNE is red-cheeked and chubby with something of the English country gentleman about him.

WARENNE  
Frideswyde was a maiden who took  
the fancy of the King of Mercia.

Warrenne speaks to his fellow noblemen WILLIAM, Earl of Pembroke, and his brother SIR GUY.

WARENNE  
He sought to impose himself on her.  
She prayed his lust might cease.  
And so God struck him blind.

William and Guy both have the look of unearned privilege. And both appear bored beyond bother.

WARENNE  
But she did pity her King. She  
prayed his vision be restored. And  
God in his mercy did so.

Sir Guy glances over to the chapel door.

WARENNE  
But. Now it is said that any king  
who visits her shrine shall be  
struck blind forever. That is the  
curse of Saint Frideswyde.

William Pembroke yawns a mighty yawn.

WARENNE  
I must say I like my saints to be  
martyrs in faith. What say you,  
Pembroke?

GUY  
I say this is a ghastly town.

Sir Guy sees Oxford spires beyond the priory walls.

GUY

I hate its so-called students.

WILLIAM

Ah. But the King has plans for the students...

Oh? Warenne knows not of such plans.

GUY

Henry, you are the very image of humility!

King Henry steps out of the chapel with Richard and Prior.

William and Guy bow like hams to the unshod and ragged-looking monarch.

WARENNE

May God grant you safety, my liege.

Earl Warenne bows to his King more modestly.

KING

Thank you, Warenne. Oh, I'm glad you're here.

The King halts at the top of the crypt staircase.

KING

I want you go to your castle at Rochester.

WARENNE

I have just come from Rochester.

KING

And now I want you to go back. Gather your men at once.

WARENNE

May I ask why?

KING

(as if obvious)  
Your arms are in my disposition.

The King speaks the truth. Warenne cannot deny.

William and Guy cannot help but snigger.

EXT. OXFORD STREET - DAY

The door of a lodging-house flies open. A tonsured young SCHOLAR is pushed out by a heavy-set OFFICER.

SCHOLAR  
My father is a baron of no mean  
estate!

OFFICER  
Then you'll have somewhere to go,  
won't you?

Behind, a SECOND OFFICER drags a SECOND SCHOLAR out.

SECOND SCHOLAR  
No! I am no traitor! I condemn the  
King's advisers, not the King!

The man clutches precious-looking books to his chest.

SECOND SCHOLAR  
*Rex non potest peccare.* You do  
understand the argument?

The officer pauses. He seems to understand.

SECOND OFFICER  
Gertcha!

He hurls the scholar out onto the earthen street. Books and  
all. Argument of muscle.

The officer goes back inside.

The scholar dusts himself down. Gathers his treasured texts.  
Strides away with a look of vengeance.

Across the street -- and above -- and beyond the glass of a  
second-floor window -- a face looks down upon events.

Twenty-four-year-old EDWARD Plantagenet sees well through the  
pane. With a curious and frosty expression.

THOMAS COOK (V.O.)  
Made with the most expensive  
ginger, your majesty.

INT. OXFORD CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

In a cosy fire-lit chamber, the King nibbles a slice of new-  
baked cake.

THOMAS COOK awaits the royal judgment.

William of Pembroke and Sir Guy look on. So too Richard of Cornwall. Servants and guards also present.

The King likes the taste of the cake.

KING  
Superb, Thomas.

The King gives his cook a gold coin.

THOMAS COOK  
Oh, majesty.

Thomas withdraws in pleasure -- past jealous-looking guards -- as the King's companions set about the cake.

GUY  
Henry. About the new decorations at Windsor? As I said, Philippe is available for commission.

KING  
As soon as all this Montfort business is settled.

RICHARD  
You not having cake, Edward?

Prince Edward strides over from the window. He's impeccably dressed and notably tall for his 13th century age.

EDWARD  
Those scholars will go straight to the barons' army. Why do you not see it, father?

WILLIAM  
Be glad your father can see at all.

Edward has no idea what William means.

GUY  
I say it again. Henry, you were spared the maiden's curse because you too will be a saint.

KING  
(affected)  
Sir Guy, you should not say such things.

EDWARD  
And my father should not trust in providence alone against Simon de Montfort!

KING

But we do not. Sweet son and heir,  
you know as well as I. Outside the  
walls of this town, our finest  
lords do gather in arms.

Behind, a servant admits a KING'S MESSENGER.

KING

Mortimer and The Marchers. The  
magnates of the North! The power of  
England! I don't think we need  
worry about a few noisy students.

The messenger strides up to the King.

KING'S MESSENGER

Majesty! News from London.

INT. OXFORD CHAMBER - LATER

In the glow of a fireplace, Earl Richard cries hot tears.

RICHARD

My fishponds! My fishponds!

GUY

We always said Montfort would use  
his stinking London mob.

RICHARD

They could have just burnt the  
palace. Why did they have to fill  
my fishponds?

Edward stares into the flames. Seriously cold.

EDWARD

It is a city of criminals.

(beat)

First they dishonour my royal  
mother, and now this...

WILLIAM

Declaration of war?

KING

That is exactly what it is.

EDWARD

Father, I advise a change of plan.  
Let us go to London and visit upon  
that town a lesson in fealty that  
will never be forgot!

Richard likes the idea. William is not so sure.

WILLIAM  
Majesty. I advise we...

EDWARD  
I know how to deal with rebellious  
cities! I was taught by my Governor  
in Gascony. Remember?

William remembers. All remember.

KING  
We shall march to Northampton as  
planned.

EDWARD  
But father! We must avenge...

KING  
Peace, my son. We are well advised.

WILLIAM  
Come now, Edward. Only last night  
you praised our strategy. Remember?

Edward remembers. All remember.

GUY  
We shall goad the whelp. And from  
his den the lion will stir!