

ACT ONE

1) Overture

Some 2 minutes into the OVERTURE,
the CHRONICLER enters.

CHRONICLER

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I welcome you most humbly to history. You are about to witness a story of mayhem, majesty, and mirth. In essence, it's a tale of three people - Stephen and Matilda. Don't worry; you'll understand it all later.

(Singing.)

2) A Little Bit of History

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY.
COME JOIN US ONE AND ALL FOR
A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY.
WE'RE SO GLAD YOU'RE ON CALL FOR
A LITTLE BIT OF SCANDAL,
A LITTLE BIT OF PASSION.
NO PIPE DREAM HOLDS A CANDLE
TO THIS PLAY YOU PUT YOUR CASH IN.

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY.
COME JOIN US TO ENJOY HERE
A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY.
THROUGHOUT IT, WE'LL EMPLOY HERE
A WHOLESOME DOSE OF WAR AND BETRAYAL.
AS YOU WILL NOTE
THERE'S NO REMOTE
SO SIT, RELAX, AND HAIL THE SHOW.

As the LIGHTS rise to reveal the
set in full, the CAST enters.

ALL

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY.
COME JOIN US FOR A SPOT OF
A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY.
YOU'LL SEE AN AWFUL LOT OF
A LITTLE BIT OF ROMANCE,
A LITTLE BIT OF GLORY.

CHRONICLER

FROM BEING BUT A NO MAN'S
LAND THIS STAGE WILL SPROUT A STORY.

OF QUEENS AND KINGS. FEMALE PLAYERS

OF CROWNS RE-CROWNED. MALE PLAYERS

AND OTHER THINGS PLAYERS
TIME LOST AND FOUND.

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY. FEMALE PLAYERS

THE PAST SO ENTERTAINS ONE. CHRONICLER

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY. MALE PLAYERS

THE PRESENT JUST MIGRAINES ONE. CHRONICLER
BUT HISTORY CRIES OUT FOR SURVEYING.
SO THAT IN MIND
LET'S FACE BEHIND
AND PEER DOWN MEM'RY LANE... LIKE SO!

The CHRONICLER gestures. ALL SAVE
HIM exit.

(Spoken, as MUSIC continues.)
Now, ladies and gentlemen, it's the early 1100's. England
is ruled by a cool-headed king... Henry the First.

A MALE PLAYER (as KING HENRY I)
enters pompously and deposits
himself on the throne.

By his wife, King Henry has two children: a son, William...

The CHRONICLER holds up a faded
etching of Prince William.

And a daughter, Matilda... CHRONICLER

HE holds up a headshot of Matilda
brandishing a steely gaze.

A stringent ruler, King Henry brings peace to England and
sets the stage for son William to rule a rich and

CHRONICLER (CONT)

prosperous kingdom. However, in the year 1120, God sayeth "no" and the Prince drowns in the English Channel during a nasty shipping accident.

HE throws the etching of Prince William into the wings.

CHRONICLER

Distraught but undeterred, King Henry has only Matilda left to succeed him on the English throne. Married to the Holy Roman Emperor at age seven, widowed at age twenty-two, re-married to the Count of Anjou soon after, Matilda has zig-zagged her life around Europe, leaving a string of trampled and annoyed persons in her wake. The question is: Will the lords of England accept a woman as sovereign? Especially a woman such as she?

HE throws the headshot of Matilda into the wings. The MUSIC fades out.

CHRONICLER

It's now 1132: King Henry has called a meeting of the greatest lords and prelates of the land to demand they officially recognize his daughter's right of succession.

A FANFARE. The LIGHTS rise on the Throne Room. During what follows, various English lords will enter the Throne Room, bow to KING HENRY, and assemble around HIM.

Enter HENRY, BISHOP OF WINCHESTER: a clever fellow, regal and determined, clad in fancy Church garments.

CHRONICLER

First up: Henry, Bishop of Winchester. The second mightiest churchman in the kingdom. A master politician who thinks God is a good idea.

Enter STEPHEN OF BLOIS: a good-natured gentleman, pleasant and popular, dressed handsomely.

CHRONICLER

Second up: Stephen of Blois, Count of Mortain and Boulogne. The greatest landowner in England. Nephew of King Henry and brother of the Bishop of Winchester.

Enter ROBERT, EARL OF GLOUCESTER:
a stern-looking soldier, erect in
posture, dressed in knightly pomp.

CHRONICLER

Third up: Robert, Earl of Gloucester. A real bastard.

(Responding to the audience's reaction.)

No, honestly. He is the illegitimate son of King Henry and
a minor noblewoman.

Enter the remaining MALE PLAYER
and the FEMALE PLAYERS (NOBLES).
KING HENRY uh-hums for silence.

KING HENRY

My lords, every kingdom needs a stable line of succession
in order to survive the endless tottering of this topsy-
turvy world. Ours is no exception to this rule. Now, you
all know my daughter, Matilda...

CRIES OF AFFECTION for Matilda.

KING HENRY

Well, as my loyal vassals, I hereby command that you
recognize her as my rightful successor.

Muffled MOANS and GROANS.

KING HENRY

What was that?!

Sudden CRIES OF ASSENT.

KING HENRY

Good. You will now all sign this oath to that effect.

The CHRONICLER hands a large piece
of paper and a pen to the nearest
lord (say, HENRY OF WINCHESTER).
After a momentary hesitation,
HENRY signs the paper, then passes
it onto another lord, who signs it
and passes it on to yet another
lord, etc., etc., while KING HENRY
loudly barks:

KING HENRY

Come along now. Very good. Hurry up. We don't have all day!

When all assembled nobles have
penned their signatures to the
document, the last lord hands the
paper to KING HENRY.

CHRONICLER

So the deed is done! Alas, so is King Henry, for he has not long to live. Three years later, in December of 1135, he dies after overdosing on stewed eels.

With a cry, KING HENRY ignobly tumbles from the throne. A pause as ALL consider HIS corpse. The MUSIC rises anew.

CHRONICLER

On that note, we can start our play.

Joined by MATILDA, MATTY, and WILL, HENRY (BISHOP), ROBERT, STEPHEN, and the OTHER PLAYERS turn to us and sing.

2) A Little Bit of History (Continued)

ALL SAVE KING HENRY

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY.
IT'S TIME NOW TO ENGAGE IN
A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY.
WE'RE ENT'RING A NEW AGE.

MATILDA

(Charging to the front.)
IN IT YOU'LL SEE LOTS OF ME THERE!

THE THREE PLAYERS

(Indicating STEPHEN and MATTY.)
PLUS MORE OF HE AND SHE THERE.

KING HENRY

(Rising, grumpily.)
I WISH THAT I COULD BE THERE, TOO.

ALL watch KING HENRY stalk off,
then resume.

ALL SAVE KING HENRY

YES, HERE'S A BIT OF HISTORY FOR YOU.

THE THREE PLAYERS

SO SIT BACK WE DO IMPLORER YOU.

CHRONICLER

FOR CRITICS, WE ADORE YOU.

ALL SAVE KING HENRY

WE PROMISE NOT TO BORE YOU THROUGH.
A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY FOR YOU.

The LIGHTS fall. A SPOTLIGHT remains on the CHRONICLER. The OTHER CAST MEMBERS exit.

CHRONICLER

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. So it's 1135 and King Henry is goodly gone. It's time to inform the Empress Matilda of her succession. Visa in hand, I am off to the County of Anjou in northwest France.

The CHRONICLER gestures. A WEAK FANFARE. The LIGHTS rise on the Throne Room. The PLAYERS (as ANGEVIN NOBILITY) lay about casually. A bored lot, ONE yawns heavily, ANOTHER fights to stay awake, and TWO OTHERS are fast asleep. Surrounded by French flags, THEY wear berets.

CHRONICLER

Yes, ladies and gentlemen - Anjou. The home of soon-to-be Queen Matilda. However, the palace therein is not single occupancy. The Empress shares it with her second husband, Geoffrey Plantagenet, Count of Anjou. Troubadours of the day celebrate their sweet and tender love.

CRASH. BANG.

MATILDA'S VOICE

Geoffrey! Geoffrey?!

CHRONICLER

They lie.

The PLAYERS awaken from their slumber. The EMPRESS MATILDA thunders in. An awe-inspiring Amazon, MATILDA is a truly remarkable personality whose excellence is in constant competition with her arrogance. As SHE enters, A SMALL STUFFED ANIMAL dangles desperately from one of HER hands. Immediately, MATILDA proceeds to kick the helpless PLAYERS to attention.

MATILDA

Hey you! Siesta sops! Up, up, up! Where is Geoffrey? Where is my husband?

A PLAYER

Count Geoffrey is off on another campaign, Your Majesty.

ANOTHER PLAYER

Fear not, Sire, for he is safe and should return soon.

MATILDA

With any luck, one piece at a time. I don't give a damn about him. I just want Henry. Give me Henry.

(Pointing to a traumatized PLAYER.)

Where is Henry?

CHRONICLER

(To us.)

The Empress's three-year-old son.

ANOTHER PLAYER

His lordship and your son are on campaign together, Sire.

MATILDA

As I thought! Daddy, Daddy, Daddy, Daddy. The only word my three-year-old knows. He's like a nickelodeon stuck on the worst tune.

MATILDA looks at the STUFFED ANIMAL.

MATILDA

Meanwhile, I'm stuck, too, and with this damn silly thing. I bought it for my little one's birthday. What am I supposed to do with it now?

CHRONICLER

(To us.)

No comment.

Finally, MATILDA turns and notices the CHRONICLER.

MATILDA

What? Excuse me? Who the hell are you? I don't remember collecting you on the bottom of my shoe.

CHRONICLER

Your Majesty, I am but a humble messenger, with tidings from England.

MATILDA

Well, then, what have you been waiting for?

CHRONICLER

Silence.

MATILDA glares. The CHRONICLER coughs and recites:

CHRONICLER

Your Majesty, with the heaviest of hearts, I must inform you that your most excellent father, Henry, King of England, the most magnificent of sovereigns, is no longer of this world, but rather above it, now lying contentedly in the lap of Our Lord.

MATILDA and the PLAYERS stare.

CHRONICLER

He's dead.

MATILDA

Dead? That's horrible. That's terrible. That... means I can finally leave this landfill.

(To the ground.)

Thank you, Daddy.

(To us, waving.)

Hello, English! Don't even try to count your blessings now. Numericals, Inc. doesn't even make numbers that high. From here on in, you people have nothing to fear but fear itself... Well, that and the Dark Ages...

(MUSIC begins.)

But, apart from them, it's all Easy Street. City: Utopia. State: Of Bliss!

3) I'll Rule You A Lovely Reign

NIX THE FIRE
UPON YOUR PYRE
FOR A QUEEN
UNSEEN
IN GRACE AND BEAUTY
WILL RULE YOU A LOVELY REIGN.
A LOVELY REIGN.

NO, NO TO
MERCY BEAU COUP
FOR TO BRING
THE SPRING
IN IS MY DUTY.
I'LL RULE YOU A LOVELY REIGN.

EVERY FROWN
I'LL UPSIDE DOWN
THROUGHOUT YOUR LITTLE REALM.
MANDALAY
WILL SEEM BLASÉ
WITH THIS SWEETIE AT THE HELM.

TURN EACH TEAR
INTO A CHEER
FOR A TIME
SUBLIME

MATILDA (CONT)

WILL GRACE YOUR ISLE SOON.
YES, I'LL BOON EACH LITTLE BANE.
OH, MY SWEET DEARS, I'LL RULE YOU A LOVELY REIGN.

The PLAYERS spring to life and
choreographically fawn.

PLAYERS

HALLELU
AND PRAISE JESU
FOR IT SEEMS
OUR DREAMS
FIN'LLY WILL COME TRUE.
MATILDA WILL RULE HER REIGN.

MATILDA

YES, RULE MY REIGN!

PLAYERS

AFTER SLEEP
DREAMS SELDOM KEEP
BUT AT TIMES
GOD CHIMES
IN TO MAKE SOME TRUE.
MATILDA WILL RULE HER REIGN.

MATILDA

WITH PANACHE
I'LL ADD A DASH
OF CULTURE TO YOUR ISLE.
WITH ME IN CHARGE
PAIN LIVES AT LARGE
AND ANGUISH LIVES IN EXILE.

NIX EACH POUT
FOR I'LL PICK OUT
THAT DEAD FLY
THAT'S GLI-
DING IN YOUR TEACUP.
I'LL CHIC UP YOUR KINGDOM PLAIN.
YES, MY SWEET DEARS, I'LL RULE YOU A LOVELY REIGN.

The CHRONICLER brings in glamorous
traveling attire for MATILDA to
put on while the PLAYERS chirp:

PLAYERS

THE CLOCK IS
TICK-TOCKING,
THE FATES ARE
NOW KNOCKING,
SO PLEASE START
YOUR JOURNEY

PLAYERS (CONT)

ON PLANE, SHIP,
OR GURNEY,
OR BROOMSTICK,
IF NEED BE
FOR WITHOUT
YOU WE'D BE
LIKE FEET WITH-
OUT FROLIC
OR LAUGH WITH-
OUT ROLLICK.

SO HASTEN!
PLEASE HASTEN!
THESE HOURS
TO PACE IN
WITH WORRI-
SOME WAITING
ARE PAST TOL-
ERATING.
SO TELL TIME
TO SPEED UP.
ALL ENGLAND
IS KEYED UP.
WE NEED YOU
TO DEED YOU
A CROWN.

The PLAYERS gasp. MATILDA poses dramatically. SHE is gorgeously attired and ready to leave. Dazzling LIGHTS shine on HER.

MATILDA

HERE I COME
TO SAVE YOU FROM
YOUR CURRENT GHASTLY STATE.
HISTORY
WILL CHRISTEN ME
MATILDA THE REALLY GREAT.

PLAYERS

SHE'S SO GREAT, BOYS.

MATILDA

WAIT AND SEE
YOU'LL TREASURE ME
BECAUSE I
DEFY
WHAT MURPHY'S LAW SAYS.
WHAT MOIS SAYS IS MUCH MORE SANE.

MATILDA, PLAYERS

NAMELY THAT I/SHE WILL RULE YOU/US A LOVELY REIGN.

MATILDA

OH, MY SWEET DEARS, I'LL RULE YOU A LOVELY REIGN.

MATILDA and the PLAYERS exit.

CHRONICLER

Thus, Matilda the Loud is prepared to claim her new crown. However, back in England, a plot has been set afoot to deny her the throne.

HENRY OF WINCHESTER thunders in
with MALE PLAYERS (NOBLES) in tow.

HENRY

God save us! The last thing we need is that Franco-German steamroller as queen! I'll remind you that her father was no friend of the Church and I predict the Empress will be none better. Once enthroned, she will squash the rights of lords and clergy alike. We simply must find a more suitable monarch to rule in her stead.

ROBERT enters.

CHRONICLER

(To us.)

Robert, Earl of Gloucester. You remember. The bastard.

HENRY

Ah, my dear earl. We were just debating whom to crown as our next king.

ROBERT

I should have thought that issue had already been solved for us. If I recall, Your Grace, we all signed an oath to follow the royal line.

HENRY

The royal rope, you mean, for the Empress as queen would hang the realm and us along with it.

ROBERT

Perhaps so, but if I fall, Your Grace, it will only be to rise again ever higher.

ROBERT stalks off.

HENRY

(To the MALE PLAYERS.)

Don't worry about him, my lords. He'll travel our highway after we've paved it. In the meantime, I know a charming man who could be our next king: my brother Stephen. I'll ring him now.

The MALE PLAYERS exit. HENRY snaps HIS fingers. FEMALE PLAYER #1 enters and stands on one side of the stage with a pay-phone in hand. HENRY takes the receiver, produces a wallet, puts a coin in the box, and dials.

HENRY

(Into the phone.)

The royal palace at Boulogne, please.

(To us.)

The telephone. Wonderful invention. Saves so much tiresome exposition.

RING, RING! FEMALE PLAYER #2 sticks out a HAND holding a regular house phone on the opposite side of the stage. MATILDA of BOULOGNE (hereafter MATTY) enters nearby carrying a little baby (EUSTACE) in HER arms. A fulltime housewife, MATTY is a kind, soft-spoken, gentle soul with little interest in limelight. Her baby, EUSTACE, whom SHE will carry from time to time, cries without end. Indeed, he is doing so now. Trying to hear over his bawling, MATTY answers the phone:

MATTY

(Into the phone.)

Hello?

CHRONICLER

(To us, indicating MATTY.)

That lady there is Stephen's wife, also named Matilda. She is the Countess of Boulogne.

HENRY

(Into the phone.)

Hello, Matty. It's Henry. I need to talk with Stephen.

MATTY

(Into the phone.)

Yes, of course, Henry. I'll get him.

(Calling offstage.)

Stevie? Are you there? It's Henry!

EUSTACE: WAAAAAAA.

CHRONICLER

(To us, indicating EUSTACE.)
That baby there is Eustace, Stephen and Matilda's son. A
loud bundle of... joy.

EUSTACE: WAAAAAAAAA.

Annoyed by the crying, the
CHRONICLER glares at MATTY.
Embarrassed, SHE grins back. After
a beat, STEPHEN enters, having
come from a relaxing lie-down on
the family couch. As HE emerges,
MATTY smiles warmly at HIM, hands
HIM the phone, and swiftly exits.

STEPHEN

(Into the phone - a cheerful fellow.)
Hello, Henry. How are you doing? This isn't another one of
your collect calls, is it?

HENRY

(Into the phone.)
Never mind that. Listen, Stephen: We've just elected you
King of England.

STEPHEN

What? Elected me? King? Henry, I think we have a bad line.

HENRY

We have a perfectly good line. Do you want the job or not?

STEPHEN

Well, yes... I guess... but what about the Empress Matilda?
The rightful heir to the throne?

HENRY

What about her? She has a mouth like a garbage disposal and
a temper like a tornado. Her reign will turn us all into
understudies on the stage of politics. Now, Stephen,
please, before I have to put another penny in. Do you want
the job? Yes or no, Stephen? Yes or no?

STEPHEN

Well, Henry... No, I don't think... Yes, maybe... Or not...
No, wait... I think... No, no, the answer is...

A CLICK. The LIGHTS fall on HENRY.
HE needs another quarter.

HENRY

Goddammit!

Grateful, STEPHEN hangs up the phone. Thinking better of this, HE then takes it off the hook, waves the HAND away, and ponders. As HENRY and FEMALE PLAYER #1 exit, MATTY enters with EUSTACE.

MATTY

What did Henry want, Stevie?

EUSTACE: WAAAAAAAAA.

STEPHEN

Hm?... Oh, he called to tell me I've been elected King of England. Me.

MATTY

Oh. That's nice.

EUSTACE: WAAAAAAAAA.

Sheepishly, MATTY smiles at STEPHEN and exits.

CHRONICLER

Excuse me, Sire. Hello. You can talk to me.

STEPHEN

(Mostly to HIMSELF.)

Should I accept the English throne or should I not? An old man inside me cries out 'no,' but then a nearby child kicks him in the shins - that's 'yes.'

STEPHEN ponders. MUSIC begins.

CHRONICLER

What is it, Sire?

STEPHEN

This whole dilemma. It makes me think of my father.
(Singing.)

4) Take the Door

WHEN I WAS A BOY
THEY CALLED A CRUSADE.
MY FATHER, HE LEAPT
TO THE HOLY LAND'S AID.
AS HE KISSED ME GOODBYE
I CRIED OUT 'FATHER, WHY?
PLEASE DON'T GO.'

HE SAID: SON, YOU KNOW,
GOD GAVE ME THIS DOOR.

STEPHEN (CONT)

IN EACH LIFE HE'LL PRE-
SENT YOU A FEW AND NO MORE.
SO WHEN ONE BLOSSOMS OUT FROM THE FLOOR

YOU MUST OPEN THE DOOR.
TAKE THE DOOR, SON.
FATHER SAID TO TAKE THE DOOR.
HE MENTIONED DEATH AND TIME
AND MOUNTAINS YET TO CLIMB
AND STARS TO SHOOT FOR.
HE SPOKE OF DREAMS TO LIVE IN...
OF CHANCES GONE REGIVEN...
JUST BEYOND THAT DOOR.

SO FATHER WENT OFF
TO THE HOLY LAND'S AID.
HE MARCHED THROUGH THAT DOOR
WITH HIS COLORS ARRAYED.
AS HE LEFT WITH THE TIDE,
I JUST CRIED AND I CRIED
WITHOUT END.

I TRIED TO DEFEND
THOSE TEARS THAT I SHED.
BUT THEN FATHER AWOKE
IN THE BACK OF MY HEAD.
LIKE A SUNRISE, HIS VOICE ROSE AND SAID

YOU MUST OPEN THE DOOR.
TAKE THE DOOR, SON.
FATHER SAID TO TAKE THE DOOR.
HE MENTIONED AGE AND FROST
AND HOURS FOREVER LOST
AND MEM'RIES TO STORE.
HE SPOKE OF DAWNS TO RING IN...
OF KINGDOMS TO PLAY KING IN...
JUST BEYOND THAT DOOR.

A pause as STEPHEN remembers.
MUSIC continues.

CHRONICLER

So what happened, Sire? To your father?

STEPHEN

He died... in the Battle of Ramla.

CHRONICLER

Ramla? A small world, Sire. My father may have served under
yours. What was his name?

STEPHEN

Stephen.

STEPHEN (CONT)

(A beat.)

Now, sir, tell me, what should this Stephen do?

(Singing.)

SHOULD I TAKE THE DOOR, SIR?

SHOULD I BRAVELY TAKE THE DOOR?

WHICH PATH NOW SHOULD I CHOOSE?

CHRONICLER

WELL, LIVES DON'T COME IN TWOS.

STEPHEN, CHRONICLER

HEAD FOR THE DOOR.

CHRONICLER

ALL DOORS ARE MEANT TO OPEN.

STEPHEN, CHRONICLER

A NEW LIFE TO ELOPE IN

WAITS BEYOND THAT DOOR.

STEPHEN

TAKE THE DOOR. YES,

FATHER SAID TO TAKE THE DOOR.

HE MENTIONED PATHS TO PAVE

AND GUESTBOOKS TO ENGRAVE

STEPHEN, CHRONICLER

AND WORLDS TO EXPLORE.

STEPHEN

HE SPOKE OF SKIES TO FLY IN

AND YEARS STILL LEFT TO TRY IN

AND THAT GOLDEN DOOR.

STEPHEN, CHRONICLER

OPEN UP THE DOOR.

OPEN UP THE DOOR.

OPEN UP THE DOOR!

HENRY and the MALE PLAYERS
(NOBLES) burst in. MATTY (with
EUSTACE) follows.

HENRY

Excellent! Bravo! Congratulations, Stephen. We knew you'd
come around. You're as good as crowned.

CHRONICLER

And he's right! With barely a protest, Bishop Henry and his
allies garner the support of the prelates and nobles of the
land. On December 22nd, in the Year of Our Lord 1135,
Stephen of Blois is crowned King of England by the
Archbishop of Canterbury himself.

A SCRATCHY RECORDING of SACRED ORGAN MUSIC plays. The CAST begins to assemble for a homily by HENRY.

HENRY

My lords - my friends - my dear people of England - I am pleased to announce that we fortunate few are about to witness the dawning of a golden age...

EUSTACE: WAAAAAAAAA.

The MUSIC stops. HENRY glares. Shyly, MATTY exits with EUSTACE. The MUSIC starts anew.

HENRY

Now, as I was saying... From Heaven, God has sent a savior in the mortal guise of Stephen of Blois to guide us into the Promised Land, where...

A SCREECH. The MUSIC stops.

HENRY

Christ!

A backstage RACKET of noise. MATILDA thunders in.

MATILDA

You faithless fiends! You two-timing turncoats!

The CHRONICLER rushes towards HER.

CHRONICLER

(In a stage whisper.)

This is highly irregular, ma'am. You're still back in France.

MATILDA

(To the CHRONICLER.)

You? Again? Stop them! I won't stand for this deceit.

CHRONICLER

But what can I do, Your Majesty? It's history.

(Singing.)

A little bit of history...

MATILDA

(Interrupting.)

"History?" I'll go make some history of my own.

The LIGHTS dim menacingly. MATILDA faces front. In the darkness, STEPHEN, HENRY, and the PLAYERS exit.

5) We're Having A Little War

MATILDA

SO THEY'RE TRYING TO SWINDLE THIS DEAR MISS.
WELL, THOSE BASTARDS WON'T GET AWAY WITH THIS.
BY THE TIME THAT HOLLY'S FIT TO DECK
I'LL BE QUEEN AND HEADS HERE WILL BE SHORT A NECK.
TO GET MY THRONE BACK, WE SHALL HAVE A WAR NOW.
IT'S TIME TO SEE WHO GOD IS FOR NOW.

MATILDA storms out.

CHRONICLER

Thus, ladies and gentlemen, the war began. The war over the throne of England. The war between Stephen and Matilda.

(Singing.)

YES, WE'RE HAVING A LITTLE WAR, MY FRIENDS.
A SUPREMELY WASTEFUL YET SO TASTEFUL WAR.
FOR TOO LONG NOW WE'VE SOUGHT ONE.
IT'S BEEN YEARS SINCE WE FOUGHT ONE.
WELL, MY GOODNESS, IT SEEMS THAT WE'VE GOT ONE.
THANK THE LORD.
GRAB YOUR SWORD.

The PLAYERS march onstage, dressed in wartime attire; the MALE PLAYERS as GENERALS, the FEMALE PLAYERS as SOLDIERS.

CHRONICLER, PLAYERS

YES, WE'RE HAVING A LITTLE WAR, MY FRIENDS.
A DELIGHTFUL, THRILLING, GRAVEYARD-FILLING WAR.

MALE PLAYERS

HOW I PRAYED WE'D PURSUE ONE.

FEMALE PLAYERS

(To EACH OTHER.)

D'YOU RECALL HOW TO DO ONE?

CHRONICLER

MORE IMPORTANTLY, HOW TO LIVE THROUGH ONE?
COME ON, GUESS.

CHRONICLER, PLAYERS

LET'S PRAY 'YES.'

CHRONICLER

BOREDOM LIFE YIELDS
WHEN YOU HAVE FIELDS
THAT YOU CAN TILL AT EASE.

FEMALE PLAYERS

SCREW PLANTING SEEDS.
EACH TRUE MAN NEEDS
THE CHANCE TO KILL AT EASE.

MALE PLAYERS

IT'S THAT OLD ATTILA-TEASE.

CHRONICLER, ALL PLAYERS

OH, IT WILL BE GRAND
WHEN WAR SKIPS CROSS THIS LAND.
YES, WE'RE HAVING A LITTLE WAR, MY FRIENDS.
A SUPERB, BREATHTAKING, WIDOW-MAKING WAR.

FEMALE PLAYERS

TIME TO HITCH UP YOUR PANTS NOW.

MALE PLAYERS

GRAB YOUR BAND-AIDS AND LANCE NOW.

CHRONICLER

LET US JUMP TO THE NORTH COAST OF FRANCE NOW...

MUSIC continues. The CHRONICLER
gestures. MATILDA, clutching the
STUFFED ANIMAL, with a suitcase
marked "England or Bust," charges
towards the MALE PLAYERS, who
salute.

MATILDA

General, is the army ready to sail?

MALE PLAYER #1

We should be in England by twilight, Your Majesty. The news
there is most encouraging. The King of Scotland has invaded
and many barons have risen in support of your cause.

MATILDA

They had better! Those who are MIA will soon be RIP. When
my son and I enter London...

MALE PLAYER #2

Alas, Your Majesty, your son has joined his father to
recapture your father's lands in Normandy.

(Handing HER a letter.)

He wrote you this.

MATILDA

(Heartfelt disappointment.)

What? But he said... I have this present to...

(HER face freezes into stone.)

I don't give a damn. So Henry frolics with Daddy. They can go charge sand castles together. When I'm Queen of England, I'll give my son real castles to play with. Now let's get this blasted war on the road.

(Singing.)

EACH CANNON BLAST

I PRAY WILL LAST

IN PERPETUITY.

BRING ON THE LOOT.

THIS WAR WILL SUIT

'KING' STEPHEN TO A T.

JUST WAIT! I'LL SEE TO IT, HE

WILL TREAT WITH A GROAN

THE DAY HE STOLE MY THRONE.

MATILDA fumes out, as:

CHRONICLER, PLAYERS

YES, WE'RE HAVING A CIVIL WAR, MY FRIENDS.

A SUBLIME, UNEQUALED, HIDE-THE-WEAK-WILLED WAR.

MALE PLAYERS

GOD, WE CAN'T WAIT TO RUN ONE.

FEMALE PLAYERS

MAKE THIS WAR HERE A FUN ONE.

WILLIAM MARSHAL

(Sticking HIS head in.)

I'M SO YOUTHFUL I NEVER HAVE DONE ONE.

CHRONICLER, PLAYERS

OH, WILL MIRACLES NEVER CEASE?

WE'VE A WAR TO BRING AN END TO ALL THIS PEACE.

WAR IS SOMETHING TO TREASURE.

ONE OR TWO IS GOOD MEASURE.

HERE'S ONE MORE NOW FOR YOUR VIEWING PLEASURE.

OH, WE'RE HAVING A CIVIL WAR.

HAVING A CIVIL WAR.

HAVING A CIVIL WAR.

A DAMNED FULFILLING

TAKE-TOP-BILLING

KEEP-ON-KILLING

CHILLING WAR.

The LIGHTS rise on the Throne Room. The PLAYERS take their places therein: the FEMALE PLAYERS stand on either side of the

throne; the MALE PLAYERS
(GENERALS) await the King.

CHRONICLER

Let us now turn to the court of the newly crowned King
Stephen. How is he faring with his country at war?

HENRY thunders in with a telegram
in hand.

HENRY

Rebellions! Nothing but rebellions! That bastard swine
Redvers has held Exeter captive for three months now with
his moth-eaten army. Meantime, the King's forces dally
outside with the patience of Job and the guts of
Prometheus. Charge the damn place, I say.

STEPHEN and MATTY (with EUSTACE)
enter. HENRY and the FEMALE
PLAYERS bow. The MALE PLAYERS
salute.

STEPHEN

Should you be using words like 'damn,' Henry?
(Waving a bag of candy.)
Look what I've brought for everyone.

STEPHEN doles out candies; first,
to the PLAYERS; second, to the
CHRONICLER; and third, to HENRY.

STEPHEN

Two for you - two for you - two for you - two for you - two
for you -
(Reaching HENRY, patting HIS stomach playfully.)
Only one for you, Henry.

HENRY smiles uncomfortably.
STEPHEN sits on the throne. A
FEMALE PLAYER approaches with
papers in hand. STEPHEN begins
signing them... and signing... and
signing. Meanwhile:

HENRY

(Abruptly, dying to bring it up.)
Your Majesty, is it true that you've signed a peace treaty
with the King of Scotland?

STEPHEN nods absent-mindedly.

HENRY

Alas, Your Majesty, without a battle, no one wins.

STEPHEN

Au contraire, Henry - without a battle, everyone wins.

HENRY

In storybooks, perhaps. In reality, never. A treaty for peace is but a rain check for war.

(Noticing.)

Speaking of which, what are those?

STEPHEN

Pardons.

HENRY

For who?

STEPHEN

For whom.

HENRY

For everybody, it seems.

STEPHEN

(To ALL, annoyed with HENRY.)

Now, what's on the agenda today? Any news?

EUSTACE: WAAAAAAAAA.

MALE PLAYER #1

Good news, Your Majesty: Baldwin de Redvers has offered to surrender Exeter in exchange for a royal pardon.

HENRY

Never.

STEPHEN

You will tell Redvers that I happily grant him his request. Blood is meant for circulation, not shedding. Let no one ever say such logic ran contrary during my reign.

EUSTACE: WAAAAAAAAA.

MALE PLAYER #1 salutes and exits.

MALE PLAYER #2 steps up.

MALE PLAYER #2

More good news, Your Majesty: The Lord Marshal reports successful raids against rebel forces in Wiltshire.

STEPHEN

Good. Faithful Johnny. Bold action deserves a bold gift in return. Let the Lord Marshall know I award him the castles of Marlborough and Ludgershall.

EUSTACE: WAAAAAAAAA.

Irritated, ALL look censoriously towards MATTY. With a weak smile, SHE exits with EUSTACE. STEPHEN continues HIS signing.

HENRY

About the Lord Marshal, Sire... Is it wise to reward a magnate with such power in times of disloyalty?

STEPHEN gestures: Eight-year-old WILLIAM MARSHAL sticks HIS head out from behind the throne.

HENRY

What is that?

STEPHEN

It's a son, Henry. The Lord Marshal's son - William. Faithful Johnny sent him as a sign of camaraderie. We may kill the son should the father forsake our cause. What more proof of loyalty could you want from the man?

WILL emerges and sits on the floor near the throne. There HE begins to play with some toys. Touched, STEPHEN considers the lad with a fatherly smile. ROBERT enters.

CHRONICLER

(To us.)

Ah, Robert of Gloucester. You remember? The bastard?

STEPHEN

Hm? Oh, yes. Robert. In these troubled times, a king sorely needs a good soldier on his side. Now Henry here tells me that you are one of our greatest.

ROBERT

That I am one of the greatest? If Your Majesty wishes. I come to bring belated regards to you, Sire. I've been ill.

STEPHEN

Not in feeling, I hope.

ROBERT

A small case of treacheritis, Sire.

STEPHEN laughs. HENRY is appalled.

HENRY

Your Majesty, will you take such venom lightly from a...

STEPHEN

Now, Henry, we must convince the Earl our cause is just before insisting he flies our standard. His tardiness in this matter, I trust, is ethics, not evasion.

(To ROBERT.)

For that, Robert, you may leave, with my respect.

Stiffly, ROBERT salutes and exits.
HENRY scoffs and storms out.