



## Curthose

Jack Lawton

### CHARACTERS

HENRY I: King of England

ROBERT 'CURTHOSE': Henry's elder brother

CASTLE SENTRY

### SCENE 1

#### **Castle Chambers.**

*An elderly man, **Robert**, sits on the edge of an opulently furnished bed. He grips the covers tightly with both hands at either side.*

*The doors open and a stiff looking **Sentry** enters stage left.*

**Sentry** Stand for the King!

**Robert** (*Spitting*) Ha! He'll be waiting a long time for that

(*Beat*)

I'm old boy, I'll stand when I damn please.

*(Pause)*

That's refraining to mention (yelling) that I  
can't stand the rotten swine! Piss on his crown!

**Sentry** *(Quivering)* I-I really must insist My Lord

*(Straightens)* and mind your insolence! You could be-

*The doors creak open and **Henry I, King of England** enters.*

**Henry** My Brother has never been able to guard his tongue, I

had hoped age would mellow him but it seems all it's  
done is make him weak at the knees.

*(Beat)*

You've done well lad, please give us the room.

**Sentry** *(Bows)* Your Grace

*The **Sentry** leaves.*

**Robert** You're enjoying it all then are you? Playing at king?

must be nice having your arse kissed by all those  
hangers-on and lickspittles.

**Henry** *(Laughing)* That was always closer to your notion of

rulership, no? Or perhaps that is giving you undue  
credit.

*There is silence as the two brothers size each other up. **Robert** remains  
seated. **Henry** begins to approach.*

***Robert** rises with surprising energy and moves to meet **Henry**, his fists clenched at either side.*

**Henry** (*Smiling*) Brother!

*(Beat)*

I'm pleased you're not so frail as you suggested.

No wonder you were able to go running off on us.

*He reaches out to touch **Robert's** arm.*

Truly I have missed you brother, it has been too long.

***Robert** recoils*

**Robert** Well...

*(Beat)*

You've remained free to visit.

**Henry** I was not fortunate to inherit a stable kingdom, God has seen fit to keep me at my labours.

**Robert** Horseshit.

*(Beat)*

Let's not pretend you bear any more love for me than I

You.

*(Pause)*

Were that true I would not be fettered and left to

die in this wretched castle.

**Henry** (*Laughing*) Fettered? You do love making a martyr of yourself Robert.

***Henry** gestures at the room around them.*

There are few men in Europe who live as finely as you

do. Have I denied you anything?

*Robert lurches closer to Henry, their foreheads almost touching.*

**Robert** My freedom you little worm! You deny me my freedom

and my fucking dignity every second I breathe.

*Robert's fists are shaking.*

*Henry steps back.*

**Henry** (*Exasperated*) Such a performance.

*(Beat)*

God give me strength.

*(Deep Sigh)*

I Love you brother, truly and deeply I do.

*(Beat)*

But you're not a serious person, Father knew it and

I know it. You're a quarrelsome, insolent lay about

and a drunken sot besides.

**Robert** I'll not be bloody slandered by a boy who calls

himself a king! I'm a hero of the same church you pray

to.

**Henry** (*Scoffs*) Hero

*(Beat)*

Nobody ever said you weren't adept at violence, they

needed your sort in Jerusalem I suppose.

*(Beat)*

Just a pity you couldn't have remained there. It would

Have solved everyone a lot of trouble.

***Robert** lunges and begins to raise a fist.*

**Henry** (*Raising voice*) Stop!

***Robert** freezes.*

Out of love I suffer your incessant tongue wagging but  
think to lay a hand on me and I'll have your eyes put  
Out.

***Robert's** mouth hangs open, he remains still and meekly relaxes his posture.*

(*Pause*)

(*Laughing*) Settle down!

***Henry** grabs **Robert's** shoulder and giving it an  
affectionate squeeze.*

You really think I'm capable of such barbarity? You're  
my brother. But please

*He tightens his grip and pulls **Robert** closer.*

Don't test me.

*He releases his hold. **Robert** backs away.*

**Robert** Are you going to tell me why you bothered to come all

The way down here? Can the ruling be so  
easily put aside for you to torment an old man?

**Henry** I suppose I had hoped to clear the air.

(*Beat*)

For all the good that seems to have done.

(*Beat*)

(Sigh) There are only a few of us left.

**Robert** (Spitting) I wonder why that is.

**Henry** Why? Because life moves forward Robert. Father fell from his horse, the pox took young Richard, the girls are married away and I'm hoping I can make peace with family I have left.

**Robert** You stand there and dare to mock me with that affectation of ignorance.

**Henry** Speak your mind brother, it's clear something is troubling you but forgive me for I understand you not.

**Robert** (Nodding) Fine I'll humour you.

(Beat)

Life moves on does it? Death and disease come for us all? An arrow happens to misfire and strike our Brother-

**Henry** What on earth are you talking-

**Robert** (Yelling) -Paving the way for your royal ascent whilst I get stepped over and locked away!

(Pause)

**Henry** Are you done?

***Robert** curtly nods. He shakes with barely contained rage. **Henry** steps closer, unafraid.*

You're making this very difficult for me Robert, as your brother I offer you leniency but as your king that that can only extend so far.

(Beat)

Rid your mind of these fancies and never speak them  
Again.

*Robert opens his mouth to speak.*

Just this once

(Beat)

Don't let your temper get the better of you. I want  
Animosity to cease. I came to make you an offer.

*Robert relaxes, shoulders slumped.*

**Robert** (Spits) What offer?

**Henry** A position at court, a chance to restore your dignity  
and live out your remaining years in service to the  
Kingdom.

**Robert** I'll not whore myself to you so that I can die in  
a slightly livelier prison.

*Henry pauses for a few seconds to regard the answer.*

**Henry** Regretful

*He turns to leave.*

**Robert** Hold on- Henry!

*Henry turns back to Robert and looks at him silently.*

Please.

(Beat)

I'll be dead soon. Just let me be off, I'll make for  
Jerusalem and you'll never hear word of me again.

**Robert** *sinks to his knees, bowing his head.*

I beg you. I humble myself before you bro- My King.

**Henry** *(Smiling)* It took some time but you finally learned

to mind yourself.

*(Beat)* Alas, I fear you waited too long for your show of

Humility.

**Robert** *sheepishly raises his head.*

If only you could have put on such a performance when I

arrived.

*(Beat)* No I'm afraid you've proved that you're still

too tenacious in your old age.

*(Beat)*

Guards!

*Two Sentries enter, flanking Henry at either side.*

Keep my brother under close watch until he proves he

Can be trusted again.

**Robert** *rises to his feet.*

**Robert** You miserable fucking coward!

*(Beat)*

I place a curse on you and yours!

*(Beat)*

Murderer!

*(Beat)*

Kinslayer!



*(Beat)*

Fucking animal!

*(Pause)*

**Henry** You and that temper, what was it father used to call you? Short stocking? Little Boot?

*(Pause)*

Put out his eyes.

BLACKOUT.

END.