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SF PERUSALS

The Lion in Winter

by James Goldman



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THE LION IN WINTER was first presented by Eugene V. Wolsk, Walter A. Hyman and Alan King with Emanuel Azenberg at the Ambassador Theatre in New York City on March 3, 1966. The performance was directed by Noel Willman, with scenery and costumes by Will Steven Armstrong. The cast was as follows:

HENRY . . . . . Robert Preston
ALAIS . . . . . Suzanne Grossman
JOHN . . . . . Bruce Scott
GEOFFREY . . . . . Dennis Cooney
RICHARD . . . . . James Rado
ELEANOR . . . . . Rosemary Harris
PHILIP . . . . . Christopher Walken

CHARACTERS

HENRY II – King of England
ALAIS – a French Princess
JOHN – the youngest son
GEOFFREY – the middle son
RICHARD LIONHEART – the oldest son
ELEANOR – Henry's wife
PHILIP – King of France

SETTING

Henry's castle at Chinon, France

TIME

Christmas, 1183

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The historical material on Henry's reign is considerable insofar as battles, plots, wars, treaties, and alliances are concerned. This play – while simplifying the political maneuvering combining a meeting of the French and English kings in 1183 with a Royal Court held at Windsor in the following year into a Christmas Court that never was – is accurately based on the available data.

The facts we have, while clear enough as to the outcome of relationships – such things as who kills who and when – say little if anything about the quality and content of those relationships. The people in this play, their character and passions, while consistent with the facts we have, are fictions.

The play, finally, contains anachronisms in speech, thought, habit, custom and so on. Those the author is aware of – the way, for instance, Christmas is celebrated – are deliberate and not intended to outrage the historical aspects of the script.

ACT I

Scene One

ALAIS's *chamber. It is a small and graceful room, containing just a bench, a chest and a chair. Late afternoon light steams in through a window.*

As the curtain rises, **ALAIS CAPET**, *dressed for a state occasion, is removing a small crown from her exquisite head. She is twenty-three, serenely beautiful, and though glaring at him at the moment, unmistakably in love with* **HENRY PLANTAGENET**. *He has just turned fifty, an age at which, in his time, men were either old or dead. Not* **HENRY**. *Though arthritis comes occasionally and new battle wounds don't heal the way the old ones did, he still is very nearly all he ever was. He is enjoying that final rush of physical and mental vigor that comes to some men not before the end but just before the start of the decline. He wears, as always, plain and unimpressive clothes.*

As **ALAIS** *takes off her crown,* **HENRY** *turns to her and, with the beginnings of impatience, speaks.*

HENRY. You must know that's a futile gesture. Come along.

ALAIS. No. I'll stay here and you can send reports.

HENRY. It's going to be a jungle of a day: if I start growling now, I'll never last.

ALAIS. You'll last. You're like the rocks at Stonehenge; nothing knocks you down.

HENRY. In these rooms, Alais, on this Christmas, I have all the enemies I need.

ALAIS. You have more than you think.

HENRY. Are you one? Has my willow turned to poison oak?

ALAIS. If I decided to be trouble, Henry, how much trouble could I be?

HENRY. Not much. You don't matter to the others; only me.

ALAIS. How great a matter am I?

HENRY. Alais, in my time I've known contessas, milkmaids, courtesans and novices, whores, gypsies, jades and little boys, but nowhere in God's Western world have I found anyone to love but you.

ALAIS. And Rosamund.

HENRY. She's dead.

ALAIS. And Eleanor.

HENRY. The new Medusa? My good wife?

ALAIS. How is your Queen?

HENRY. Decaying, I suppose.

ALAIS. You haven't seen her?

HENRY. No, nor smelled nor touched nor tasted. Don't be jealous of the gorgon; she is not among the things I love. How many husbands do you know who dungeon up their wives? I haven't kept the great bitch in the keep for ten years out of passionate attachment. Come. I've heard she's aging badly; let's go and look.

ALAIS. Would it be troublesome if I betrayed you?

HENRY. We've no secrets, Eleanor and I. How can you possibly betray me?

ALAIS. I could give away your plans.

HENRY. You don't know what they are.

ALAIS. I know you want to disinherit Richard.

HENRY. So does Eleanor. She knows young Henry's dead. The Young King died in summer and I haven't named an heir. She knows I want John on the throne and I know she wants Richard. We are very frank about it.

ALAIS. Henry, I can't be your mistress if I'm married to your son.

HENRY. Why can't you? Johnny wouldn't mind.

ALAIS. I do not like your Johnny.

HENRY. He's a good boy.

ALAIS. He's got pimples and he smells of compost.

HENRY. He's just sixteen; he can't help the pimples.

ALAIS. He could bathe.

HENRY. It isn't such a dreadful thing to be a Queen of England. Not all eyes will weep for you.

ALAIS. Will yours?

HENRY. I don't know. Very likely.

ALAIS. All I want is not to lose you. Can't you hide me? Can't I simply disappear?

HENRY. You know you can't. Your little brother Philip's King of France now and he wants your wedding or your dowry back. I only took you for your dowry. You were seven. Two big knees and two big eyes and that's all. How was I to know?

ALAIS. Let Philip have the dowry back. It isn't much.

HENRY. I can't. The Vexin is a little county but it's vital to me.

ALAIS. And I'm not.

HENRY. It's been my luck to fall in love with landed women. When I married Eleanor, I thought: "You lucky man. The richest woman in the world. She owns the Aquitaine, the greatest province on the Continent – and beautiful as well." She was, you know.

ALAIS. And you adored her.

HENRY. Memory fails. There may have been an era when I did.

(arranging a wisp of her hair)

Let's have one strand askew; nothing in life has any business being perfect.

ALAIS. Henry, I was brought up to be dutiful. I smile a lot, bend easily and hope for very little. It is useful training and it's made a lot of hard things possible. But, Henry, not this thing.

HENRY. I've had them summoned and I'll have you by me. With the headdress or without it.

ALAIS. Oh, what difference does it make who's king?

HENRY. What difference?

ALAIS. Have you found religion, Henry? Are you going to look down from the clouds and see who's sitting in your place?

HENRY. I've got to know before I die. I've built an empire and I've got to know it's going to last. I've put together England and I've added to it half of France. I am the greatest power in a thousand years. And after me comes John. If I can't leave this state to John, I've lived for nothing.

ALAIS. John doesn't care for you at all.

HENRY. We love each other deeply.

ALAIS. None of them has any love for you.

HENRY. Because we fight? Tell me they all three want the crown, I'll tell you it's a feeble prince that doesn't. They may snap at

me or plot and that makes them the kind of sons I want. I've snapped and plotted all my life: there is no other way to be a king, alive and fifty all at once.

ALAIS. I'm going to fight for you.

HENRY. Oh, fine.

ALAIS. When I was sixteen and we started this depraved relationship, I left everything to you. I lap sat, drank my milk and did what I was told. Not any more. Your cherub's twenty-three now and she's going to fight.

HENRY. With mace and chain?

ALAIS. With anything that I can think of.

HENRY. That's exactly what I need: another mind at work. Try; you can hear the thinking through the walls. There's Geoffrey, humming treachery. And Richard, growling out for gore. And Eleanor, she's thinking heavy thoughts like molten lead and marble slabs. My house is full of intellectual activity.

ALAIS. Add mine.

HENRY. Alais, Alais – I don't plan to give you up. I don't plan to give up anything. I'll make alliances and bargains, threaten, beg, break heads and hearts, and by the time this fine Christmas holiday is over , I'll make an heir of John, a petty prince of Richard and I'll still have you.

ALAIS. When can I believe you, Henry?

HENRY. Always; even when I lie.

How much is it safe to hope for?

HENRY. Everything.

ALAIS. But with so many enemies –

HENRY. I know – and some of them are more canny folk than I, or more cruel or more ruthless or dishonest. But not all rolled in one. The priests write all the history these days and they'll do me justice. Henry, they'll say, was a master bastard.

(extending his arm)

Come; let's go downstairs and meet the family.

She moves to join him.

Dim and blackout.

Scene Two

A Reception Hall, immediately following. It is a bright and spacious room. There is a bench, a large refectory table and a massive chair. A pile of holly boughs lies stacked in a corner.

The young Plantagenets – **RICHARD**, **GEOFFREY**, *and* **JOHN** – *are entering as the lights rise.*

RICHARD LIONHEART, *at twenty-six, looks like his legend.*

He is handsome, graceful and impressive. He has been a famous soldier since his middle teens, and justly so; war is his profession and he is good at it.

GEOFFREY, *Count of Brittany, is twenty-five. A man of energy and verve, he is attractive, charming and the owner of the best brain of a brainy family.*

JOHN, *at sixteen, does indeed have pimples. He is a charming-looking boy in spite of them, sweet-faced and totally adorable.*

They are bowing each other into the room when we see them.

JOHN. After you.

GEOFFREY. No; after you.

RICHARD. No; after you.

JOHN. *(delighted with himself as he enters the room)* Oh, have it your way; after me.

RICHARD. *(following in, along with* **GEOFFREY***)* You do keep growing, Johnny.

JOHN. *(agreeing cheerfully)* In every way but upwards. Look: holly.

(beginning to hang the holly boughs)

I love Christmas.

GEOFFREY. Warm and rosy time. The hot wine steams, the Yule log roars and we're the fat that's in the fire. She's here, you know.

JOHN. Who?

RICHARD. Mother.

GEOFFREY. Since this morning.

RICHARD. Have you seen her?

GEOFFREY. Haven't you?

RICHARD. We're not as friendly as we were.

GEOFFREY. Does she still favor you?

RICHARD. Does she or doesn't she?

JOHN. If I'm supposed to make a fuss and kiss her hairy cheek, I won't.

RICHARD. What you kiss, little prince, is up to you.

JOHN. I'm Father's favorite; that's what counts.

RICHARD. You hardly know me, Johnny, so I beg you to believe my reputation: I'm a constant soldier and a sometime poet and I will be king.

JOHN. Just you remember: Father loves me best.

ELEANOR. *(sweeping in)* The way you bicker it's a wonder that he cares for any of you.

ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE *is sixty-one and looks nothing like it. She is a truly handsome woman of great temperament, authority and presence. She has been a queen of international importance for forty-six years and you know it. Finally, she is that most unusual thing: a genuinely feminine woman thoroughly capable of holding her own in a man's world.*

Geoffrey – but I do have handsome children. John – you're so clean and neat. Henry takes good care of you. And Richard. Don't look sullen, dear; it makes your eyes go small and piggy and your chin look weak. Where's Henry?

RICHARD. Upstairs with the family whore.

ELEANOR. That is a mean and tawdry way to talk about your fiancée.

JOHN. My fiancée.

ELEANOR. Whosever fiancée, I brought her up and she is dear to me and gentle. Have we seen the French King yet?

GEOFFREY. Not yet.

ELEANOR. Let's hope he's grown up like his father – simon pure and simon simple. Good, good Louis; if I'd managed sons for him instead of all those little girls, I'd still be stuck with being Queen of France and we should not have known each other. Such, my angels, is the role of sex in history. How's your father?

JOHN. Do you care?

ELEANOR. More deeply, lamb, than you can possibly imagine. Is my hair in place? I've given up the looking glass; quicksilver has no sense of tact.

RICHARD. He still plans to make John king.

ELEANOR. Of course he does. My, what a greedy little trinity you are: king, king, king. Two of you must learn to live with

disappointment.

HENRY. *(entering, with* **ALAIS***)* Ah – but which two?

ELEANOR. Let's deny them all and live forever.

HENRY. Tusk to tusk through all eternity. How was your crossing? Did the Channel part for you?

ELEANOR. It went flat when I told it to; I didn't think to ask for more. How dear of you to let me out of jail.

HENRY. It's only for the holidays.

ELEANOR. Like school. You keep me young. Here's gentle Alais.

(as **ALAIS** *starts to curtsy)*

No, no; greet me like you used to.

(hugging her)

Fragile I am not: affection is a pressure I can bear.

HENRY. I've had the French King sent for. We'll state positions and I'll make the first of many offers. He'll refuse it, naturally, I'll make a better one and so on through the holidays until I win. For the duration of this joyous ritual, you will give, to your father, your support.

RICHARD. Why will I?

ELEANOR. Out of duty, dear.

(to **HENRY***)*

Tell me, what's Philip like? I hear he's quite impressive for a boy of seventeen –

HENRY. *(as* **PHILIP** *enters)* My Lord.

ELEANOR. Oh – and you are. I'm Eleanor, who might have been your mother. All the others here you know.

PHILIP CAPET *is indeed impressive. He is tall, well-proportioned and handsome without being at all pretty. His manner is open, direct and simple and he smiles easily. He has been King of France for three years and has learned a great deal. He bows.*

PHILIP. Queen Eleanor – Your Grace.

HENRY. My Lord. Welcome to Chinon.

PHILIP. Sir.

HENRY. Your grievances, as we have understood them, have to do with Princess Alais and her dowry.

PHILIP. Sixteen years ago you made a treaty with us. It is time its terms were executed.

HENRY. We are willing to discuss it.

PHILIP. Our position comes to this: that you will either hold the marriage or return the Vexin. Alais marries Richard or we'll have the county back at once.

HENRY. That's clear, concise and well presented. My position is – Well, frankly, Philip, it's a bit of a tangle. Once I'm dead, who's to be king? I could draw papers till my scribes drop but once I die, unless I've left behind me three contented sons, my lands will split three ways in civil war. You see my problem?

PHILIP. Clearly; but it's yours, not mine.

HENRY. Two years ago the Queen and I, for reasons passing understanding, made Richard the overlord of the Aquitaine. That makes Richard very powerful. How can I give him Alais, too? The man she marries has you for an ally.

PHILIP. It's their wedding or the Vexin back. Those are the terms you made with Louis.

HENRY. True, but academic, lad. The Vexin's mine.

PHILIP. By what authority?

HENRY. It's got my troops all over it: that makes it mine. Now hear me, boy. You take what memories you have of me and mark them out of date. I'm not your father's friend, now; I'm his son's opponent.

PHILIP. I'm a king: I'm no man's boy.

HENRY. A king? Because you put your ass on purple cushions?

PHILIP. Sir.

He turns on his heel and starts to go.

HENRY. Philip, you haven't got the feel of this at all. Use all your voices: when I bellow, bellow back.

PHILIP. I'll note that down.

HENRY. This, too. We are the world in little. A nation is a human thing. Surely, if we're civilized, it must be possible to put the knives away. We can make peace. We have it in our hands.

PHILIP. I have tutors of my own. Will that be all?

HENRY. Oh, think. You came here for a reason. You've made demands of me. Now don't you want to ask me if I've got an offer?

PHILIP. Have you got an offer?

HENRY. Not yet – but I'll think of one.

PHILIP *starts off again.*

Oh, by the way...

At the doorway, **PHILIP** *turns.*

You're better at this than I thought you'd be.

PHILIP. *(smiling)* I wasn't sure you'd noticed.

(He exits.)

HENRY. Well – what shall we hang? The holly or each other?

ELEANOR. You can't read your sons at all. That isn't anger they're projecting; it's anxiety.

HENRY. I read them. I know Richard's moods and Johnny's faces and the thought behind the pitch of Geoffrey's voice. The trouble's at the other end; they don't know me.

(turning to his sons)

There is a legend of a king called Lear with whom I have a lot in common. Both of us have kingdoms and three children we adore and both of us are old. But there it stops. He cut his kingdom into bits. I can't do that. I've built this house and it will stand.

RICHARD. Would you say, Father, that I have the makings of a king?

HENRY. A splendid king.

RICHARD. Would you expect me, Father, to be disinherited without a fight?

HENRY. Of course you'll fight. I raised you to.

RICHARD. I don't care what you offer Philip. I don't care what plans you make. I'll have the Aquitaine and Alais and the crown. I'll have them all.

JOHN. You're going to love my coronation.

RICHARD. I won't give up one to get the other. I won't trade off Alais or the Aquitaine to this

(indicating **JOHN***)*

– this walking pustule.

No, your loving son will not.

He exits.

JOHN. Did you hear what he called me?

ELEANOR. Clearly, dear. Now run along; it's nearly dinnertime.

JOHN. Did I say something wrong? I'm always saying something

wrong. All right, I'll eat, I'll eat.

He exits.

ELEANOR. And that's to be the king.

GEOFFREY. And I'm to be his chancellor. Has he told you? John will rule the country while I run it. That's to say, he gets to spend the taxes that I get to raise.

ELEANOR. How nice for you.

GEOFFREY. It's not as nice as being king.

HENRY. We've made you Duke of Brittany. Is that so little?

GEOFFREY. No one ever thinks of crowns and mentions Geoff. Why is that? I make out three prizes here – a throne, a princess and the Aquitaine. Three prizes and three sons; but no one ever says, "Here, Geoff, here Geoff boy, here's a bone for you."

HENRY. I should have thought that being chancellor was a satisfying bone.

GEOFFREY. It isn't power that I feel deprived of; it's the mention that I miss. There's no affection for me here. You wouldn't think I'd want that, would you?

He exits.

ELEANOR. Henry, I have a confession.

HENRY. Yes?

ELEANOR. I don't much like our children.

(to **ALAIS***)*

Only you – the child I raised but didn't bear.

ALAIS. You never cared for me.

ELEANOR. I did and do. Believe me, Henry's bed is Henry's province: he can people it with sheep for all I care. Which, on occasion, he has done.

HENRY. Still that? When Rosamund's been dead for seven years?

ELEANOR. Two months and eighteen days. I never liked her much.

HENRY. You count the days?

ELEANOR. I made the numbers up.

(to **ALAIS***)*

He found Miss Clifford in the mists of Wales and brought her home for closer observation. Liking what he saw, he scrutinized her many years. He loved her deeply and she him. And yet,

my dear, when Henry had to choose between his lady and my lands –

ALAIS. He'll leave me if he has to; I know that.

ELEANOR. Poor Alais.

ALAIS. There's no sport in hurting me; it is so easy.

ELEANOR. After all the years of love, the hair I've brushed and braided and the tears I've kissed away, do you think I could bring myself to hurt you?

ALAIS. Eleanor, with both hands tied behind you.

She exits.

HENRY. She is lovely, isn't she?

ELEANOR. Yes, very.

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

ELEANOR. There's no one.

(moving to the holly boughs)

Come on; let's finish Christmasing the place.

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

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

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

ELEANOR. Many?

HENRY. Do you doubt it?

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

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

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

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

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

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

ELEANOR. And I damn near won the last one. Still, as long as I get trotted out for Christmas Courts and state occasions now and

then – for I do like to see you – it's enough. Do you still need the Vexin, Henry?

HENRY. Need you ask?

ELEANOR. My strategy is ten years old.

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

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

HENRY. *(extending his arm)* Arm in arm.

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

HENRY. And you're my lady.

ELEANOR. Henry, dear, if Alais doesn't marry Richard, I will see you lose the Vexin.

HENRY. Well, I thought you'd never say it.

ELEANOR. I can do it.

HENRY. You can try.

ELEANOR. My Richard is the next king, not your John. I know you, Henry. I know every twist and bend you've got and I'll be waiting round each corner for you.

HENRY. Do you truly care who's king?

ELEANOR. I care because you care so much.

HENRY. I might surprise you. Eleanor, I've fought and bargained all these years as if the only thing I lived for was what happened after I was dead. I've something else to live for now. I've blundered onto peace.

ELEANOR. On Christmas Eve.

HENRY. Since Louis died, while Philip grew, I've had no France to fight. And in that lull, I've found how good it is to write a law or make a tax more fair or sit in judgment to decide which peasant gets a cow. There is, I tell you, nothing more important in the world. And now the French boy's big enough and I am sick of war.

ELEANOR. Come to your question, Henry; make the plea. What would you have me do? Give out, give up, give in?

HENRY. Give me a little peace.

ELEANOR. A little? Why so modest? How about eternal peace? Now there's a thought.

HENRY. If you oppose me, I will strike you any way I can.

ELEANOR. Of course you will.

(as they start, grand and stately, for the wings)

Henry?

HENRY. Madam?

ELEANOR. Did you ever love me?

HENRY. No.

ELEANOR. Good. That will make this pleasanter.

Dim and blackout.

Scene Three

ELEANOR'*s chamber, some time later. A plain and pleasant room, it holds a chair, a table and a low wood chest. Soft tapestries give warmth and color. As the lights rise,* **ELEANOR** *is seated at the table wrapping Christmas presents. She looks up as* **RICHARD** *appears.*

RICHARD. All right. I've come. I'm here. What was it you wanted?

ELEANOR. Just to talk. We haven't been alone, the two of us, in – How long is it, lamb? Two years? You look fit. War agrees with you. I keep informed. I follow all your slaughters from a distance. Do sit down.

RICHARD. Is this an audience, a goodnight kiss or an ambush?

ELEANOR. Let us hope it's a reunion. Must you look so stern? I sent for you to say I want your love again but I can't say it to a face like that.

RICHARD. My love, of all things. What could you want it for?

ELEANOR. Why, for itself. What other purpose could I have?

RICHARD. You'll tell me when you're ready to.

ELEANOR. I scheme a lot; I know. That's how a queen in prison spends her time. But there is more to me than that. Can't I say I love a son and be believed?

RICHARD. If I were you, I'd try another tack. I have no dammed-up floods of passion for you. There's no chance I'll overflow.

ELEANOR. You are a dull boy.

RICHARD. Am I?

ELEANOR. Dull as plainsong: la, la, la, forever on one note. I gave the Church up out of boredom. I can do as much for you.

RICHARD. You'll never give me up; not while I hold the Aquitaine.

ELEANOR. You think I'm motivated by a love of property?

RICHARD. I think you want it back. You're so deceitful you can't ask for water when you're thirsty.

ELEANOR. If I'm so devious, why don't you go? Don't stand there quivering in limbo. Love me, little lamb, or leave me.

RICHARD. *(not moving)* Leave you, madam? With pure Joy.

ELEANOR. Departure is a simple act. You put the left foot down and then the right.

JOHN. *(entering, in high spirits, followed by* **GEOFFREY***)* Mother –

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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