

THE NORMANS IN LINCOLNSHIRE

Scene One : At King William's Castle.

The king is dividing his land up between his most trusted nobles. He calls William de Percy to him.

King Ah, William, my brave and honourable noble. How are you, my man?

Percy Well enough, your majesty, now that my leg wound has healed.

King Indeed, Will, indeed. Was it a peasant's pitchfork you were punctured with or something more sophisticated?

Percy I know not, lord, but it didn't half hurt!

King What are your plans, Perse? Are you going to stay in England and quash these Saxon rebels or are you going back to bonny Matilda in France?

Percy Whatever pleases you, my lord.

King Correct answer, Percy, my boy! And it definitely pleases me to think that you would be willing to help me show just who is boss around here. I trust you will accept certain areas of land in exchange for your services?

Percy To keep, sire?

King Don't be divvy, man. I can't be giving land away left, right and centre. No, I'll rent you certain regions from which I expect regular revenue. It's up to you how the money is raised. Of course any money surplus to requirements, shall we say, would obviously go into your own purse, Perse.

Percy I understand, sire but where are these lands?

King In the north. Part of Lincolnshire stretching south of Lincoln to the coast bordering my nephew Ivo Taillebois' land as well as the region north of York. These are not easy areas to handle, William, for the Saxon scum is still rebellious thereabouts. I want fine fortifications built in both regions before the year is out.

Percy No problem, majesty. Consider it done.

King That's the spirit. I need men like you to help me to bring some discipline into this heathen territory. Are you ready to take the oath?

Percy Indeed I am, sire.

King Kneel, Lord William de Percy, and speak words of homage to me.

Percy I become your man of the tenements that I hold of you.

King Now swear the oath of fealty.

Percy I am your man of life and limb and hereby swear you fealty.

King Arise then, valiant vassal, for there is no time to lose. I expect to hear of the completion of Lincoln castle within no time at all. I shall also be sending two clerks to both your regions shortly so that they can list for me the riches I have loaned to you.

Percy Your Highness, I beg to take leave of your presence immediately.

King Goodbye then, William. Don't forget to send me some rock from Skegness. Next!

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Scene Two

William has arrived in Lincoln and is talking to Roger d'Anjou about the progress of Lincoln Castle.

Percy How goes it, Roger?

Roger Fairly well, m'lord, under the circumstances.

Percy Circumstances? What circumstances.

Roger The Saxons were slightly peeved when we demolished a hundred and sixty six of their houses to make way for the castle.

Percy Well they have no right to be peeved. The cheek of the scum. What ever next? By Harold's severed leg, Roger, that's a fine keep up there. The bailey looks well stockaded, too.

Roger I'm sure the king will be pleased with our efforts

Percy I certainly hope so. It's pressure enough having his nephew as tenant -in-chief next to us.

Roger Ivo Taillebois, you mean. Yes, he's been around a few times checking on progress. It's amazing what power being standard bearer in battle can bring.

Percy That and being the king's nephew. Speak of the devil, isn't that him riding towards us now?

Roger Indeed it is, Sir William.

Ivo Good day to you, William. Welcome to this green, God-forsaken land.

Percy Many thanks, Ivo.

Ivo I was hoping you could ride with me to one of my manors, Spalding. The court is meeting today. It will give you a taste of things to look forward to on your own lands.

Percy I would be delighted, Ivo. At what time do we meet?

Ivo Whenever I decide it! One thing is for sure, there'll be no topping and tailing until after we have dined. If you would both care to follow me.

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Scene Three In Ivo's Manor House

Percy I am most impressed, Ivo. This manor house is splendid and Spalding itself seems to be thriving.

Ivo Absolutely. At the last count, the village was worth thirty pounds what with the salt houses and the market.

Percy I noticed some fine beasts grazing on your demesne on the way in.

Ivo Heriots each one. I've been fortunate enough to have four villeins die in the past month. Mind you, if they hadn't pegged it I would have taken those oxen anyway. Saxons don't deserve oxen of such quality.

Percy Four deaths in a month? Is it the plague?

Ivo Of course not man, it's just hard work. A bit of extra boonwork and they fall like fleas off a dog's back. Mind you, my reeve is a bit ready with the old staff.

Percy He beats them?

Ivo Of course he beats them. Start treating them like humans and they'll stab you in the back as soon as look at you. Scum, the lot of them!

Percy The king will be proud of you.

Ivo He will be when he receives the tallage from Spalding. Together with the relief and boons I've collected this year both I and the king have cause for celebration.

Percy It is easy to see how you have spent your boons, Ivo. This hall is majestic, to say the least. And the carving on the minstrel's gallery is exquisite!

Ivo How kind of you to notice but less of this small-talk, for it is time to eat. Marshal, the grace cup! Robert - you can act as taster for Sir William. I would not want our noble guest to be poisoned at my dinner table.

Percy I cannot believe that such exquisite dishes could have been spo^{ilt} by so selfish an action. The roasted peacock looks delicious.

Ivo Naughty but nice! Do try the cockintrice. I supervised the sewing of the pig to the cockerel myself.

Ivo Carver!Cockintrice for our g^est.Butler,more wine!

Percy Tell me,Ivo,what cases are being tried at the court today.

Ivo Oh,the usual assortment,no doubt.Butler,call Jack the tything man up here.

Jack You wanted me,my lord?

Ivo I did,so stop picking at your fleas and tell us what is in store at court later on.

Jack I've not brought my records ,sir,but offhand I think John the baker is up for being drunk on watch,Richard Little for letting weeds grow in his strips,John Smith for taking wood from the hedges.Em...o,aye,young Tom Black for stealing Mary Long's pig.Not much else sire.

Ivo Never mind,perhaps we can make up a few before the court meets.Get back to your bench.

Jack Yes,sir.

(Suddenly there is a commotion at the back of the hall.Spalding's constable,Peter Flatfoot rushes in ,breathless.)

Consta Sire;sire!
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Ivo Whatever is the matter,man?

Cons. It's the reeve,master,he's been found dead!

Ivo Dead? What do you mean,dead?

Cons. Behind some bushes on the common,sir.As dead as Harold at Hastings.Eyes whipped out an' all.A terrible sight!

Ivo Have you found the culprit yet,you half-wit?

Cons. No,sire.

Ivo Who found him?

Cons. Alice Durham,m'lord,the miller's daughter.

Ivo Right,I want her in court this afternoon as chief witness.Round up every man,woman and child in the village and make sure they're in court by three o'clock sharp.I'll not have murderers living off my land.Kill my reeve would they? I'll have every last one of 'em hung if no one owns up, by God I will.Well what are you waiting for,Flatfoot?Be off with you.

Percy Well,here's excitement indeed!

Ivo I hope you can stand the sight of blood and guts,William,because there'll be plenty before this day is out.

Percy I saw enough of it on Senlac Hill,Ivo,to protect me from squemishness for life.What do you plan to do?

Ivo I'll go through each case to be heard as planned.Then,when fines have been paid and punishments done,I'll call every wormy Saxon to the witness stand one at a time,freeman or serf,it makes no difference to me.I'll start with Alice Durham and try her as a witch if her answers do not please me.Thereafter I'll have them all up there,one at a time down to newborn child.If I have to hang all seventy eight of them,I will.I'll show them Norman justice.Butler,more wine!more wine!

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Scene Four The Manor Court.

Write your own final scene.Read pages 27 - 29 and p.21 in History Scene 2 beforehand to give you an idea of court procedure.

HP. JUNE '86