

Live Bravely: A Medieval/Renaissance Pastiche Play
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Robby Van Arsdale

Joshua 1:9

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be
discouraged,
for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

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Address
529 Rogue Air Drive,
Shady Cove, OR 97539

Phone
(423) 615-9396

Cast of Characters

<u>Sir Herbert:</u>	A young knight taking over protection of Fortemburg after his father's passing.
<u>Dame Mathilda:</u>	Sir Herbert's mother, and the de facto leader of the town.
<u>Brother Duncan:</u>	A religious man who runs the church. A kind and slow-paced ascetic.
<u>Elanor:</u>	Willem's sister. She doesn't like dairy farming and prefers to make cheese.
<u>Willem:</u>	Elanor's brother. He took over the dairy farm after their parents retired.
<u>Perrin:</u>	A grizzled blacksmith. Prone to pessimism.
<u>Maria:</u>	A seamstress and healer. Matter-of fact.
<u>Tabitha:</u>	A young baker. Tends to look on the bright side.
<u>Ash Joiner:</u>	A carpenter. Bette's husband. A little absent-minded and prone to groan-inducing humor.
<u>Bette Joiner:</u>	Ash's wife. Helps manage the woodshop. She runs a tight ship.
<u>Catharine Joiner:</u>	The Joiner's daughter. She has big dreams and likes wandering the woods.

(MORE)

Cast of Characters (cont'd)

<u>Jesse:</u>	A huntswoman. An outsider within the town, she lives in the woods.
<u>Poppy:</u>	A minstrel/bard/fool. Poppy keeps the history of the town and writes poems/songs.
<u>Gerald:</u>	A peasant. He keeps the gardens for the knight. He has more in common with Harriet than he cares to admit.
<u>Harriet:</u>	A peasant. She keeps the animals for the knight. She has more in common with Gerald than she cares to admit.
<u>Ishmael:</u>	A peasant. He keeps nothing in particular and tends to be a bit lazy.
<u>Sir Uberritter:</u>	A marauding knight come to make trouble.
<u>Rosalyn:</u>	The emissary of the king.
<u>King:</u>	He's undercover as Royce, and he's looking forward to meeting you. All of you.
<u>Cow:</u>	Cow

SUNDAY

Scene 1

Joshua 1:9 "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

A note on props: anachronisms are acceptable. Folding chairs, unrealistic tools, and expedient costumes are the name of the game. Evoke a mood and leave the rest to imagination.

ENTER Cow RIGHT

Cow is just a human wearing all black with a latex glove inflated and attached to a belt. Horns? Ears? Mask? Gum to chew as though cud? All discretionary.

ENTER Elanor LEFT

Elanor is walking backwards, as though searching in all directions. She gives a start when she turns around to see the cow right next to her.

ELANOR

Ahh! Oh----It's just you. Willem! A cow got out!

Waiting, Elanor hears nothing.

Willem! Your cow is over here! Help?

The cow stands impassively. Elanor attempts to coax it across the stage toward her. Nothing. She crosses to the opposite side, stage RIGHT, giving the cow a wide berth.

Oh no! It's . . . uh . . . a cow-eating tiger? It's coming closer, and I think it smells you! You should definitely run *that way*, towards the farm, to get away from the tiger!

EXIT Cow slowly to the RIGHT

No, no no! Don't hurt me!

ENTER Willem LEFT

WILLEM

I heard screaming. Elanor, are you okay?

ELANOR

No, I am definitely not. Your nasty cow just nearly killed me.

WILLEM

A cow was over here? How'd she get out? I thought I repaired that fence. Hm.

ELANOR

Are you not listening to the words I'm saying? I was nearly trampled. Look! I'm bleeding! Probably!

She holds out a limb. Willem doesn't look.

WILLEM

Was it Bess, or Tess? Bess wouldn't wander this far. Maybe it was Jess . . .

Elanor grabs Willem and shakes him.

ELANOR

I could have died.

WILLEM

How would you have died? It's a cow.

ELANOR

It was Jess! Your scariest cow! She flung her hooves and bellowed and trampled past me!

WILLEM

Elanor, you've got to learn some simple things about dairy farming. We've got three cows: Bess, Tess, and Jess. I don't know why you have trouble telling them apart. The only one worth being afraid of is Jess.

ELANOR

I already told you that's who it was!

WILLEM

Well, that's probably true. She's the only one who would wander this far, but it's easy to turn her around. She may be mean, but if you're braver than she is, she'll back down. Really, if you want to be a dairy farmer, you need to learn these things.

ELANOR

You're the dairy farmer. I'm a cheesemsmith. And you'd better go get your cow before she wanders through town again.

WILLEM

Wait, so she went . . . she's walked . . . oh, no no.

EXIT Willem RIGHT

ELANOR

If you weren't my younger brother, I would kick you and all your cows out of the house! Ha! Got the last word. I win again.

(pause)

And I'm talking to myself.

She slowly turns to face the audience. While Elanor (and many other actors) will interact TO the audience, the difficulty is making them feel interacted WITH without actually letting them have space to interact.

(to the audience)

Don't look at me like that. You don't know. You would have been scared too. I'm not a coward.

EXIT Elanor LEFT

Scene 2

ENTER Poppy and crowd (Perrin, Tabitha, Maria, Catharine, Bette) LEFT

POPPY

Welcome to Fortemburg. You'd better listen up and gather 'round, you rotten rutabagas! I'll tell you a tale of adventure so chilling it will feel like I'm pouring ice into your underpants.

Brave Sir Herbert ruled this tiny town
With enormous muscles and a tiny frown.
One day, Sir Herbert took a little walk
And someone stopped him for a little talk.
"Excuse me sir, but do you not agree
That this old pine is quite a nasty tree?"
The tree had eaten fourteen kids that day,
And "it is nasty, yes," he had to say.
But Sir Herbert found that rushing in
Caused the nasty branches to close in,
He backed away and chose to use his mind,
The only tool he had to beat that pine.

What did he do?

Brave Sir Herbert chose to disappear
With sloppy wig and paint to hide his years.
A knight no longer: now he was a treat
That wretched pine tree thought that it could eat.
It grabbed him up but soon to its surprise
Brave Sir Herbert gained the real prize.
Fourteen children, head to toe in sap,
One by one he pulled them from the trap.
Only when the final child was free

(MORE)

POPPY (cont'd)

Did the brave knight turn to face the tree:
 "How's it feel, you carnivoric pine?
 Get out of town, 'cause Fortemburg is mine!"

Of course, he ripped it from its roots with his mighty hands and threw it in the river, and all fourteen children are alive today because of him.

The assembled crowd all cheer, all excepting Perrin the blacksmith.

PERRIN

Hogwash!

POPPY

Alas! A detractor! What would you know about it, sir?

PERRIN

It was my tree, Poppy. And the only child that ever got stuck in there was you, somehow, multiple times.

POPPY

But you deny that Sir Herbert saved my life?

The crowd turns, expectantly.

PERRIN

I would rather replace my hands with snakes than say anything bad about Sir Herbert.

POPPY

Three cheers for the old knight! Hip-hip!

PERRIN

Hooray!

*ENTER Cow RIGHT
 Cow stands behind Poppy.*

POPPY

Hip-hip!
 (pause)
 I said hip-hip!?

TABITHA

What's a cow doing here?

POPPY

You wound me! I may look like one, but I am *not* a cow.

ENTER Willem RIGHT

WILLEM

There you are, Jess. Come on home, now. Come on. Ok, does any one have a bit of extra rope I can use? She's stubborn today, I don't know.

TABITHA

You know who could solve this problem? Sir Herbert!

PERRIN

That pipsqueak? He's nothing like his father.

WILLEM

I mean, I could do it.

MARIA

(ignoring Willem)

Let's at least give him a chance, Perrin.

WILLEM

I just need a rope?

MARIA

You just wait there, Willem. We'll be back with the knight.

EXIT Poppy et. al LEFT

WILLEM

I guess . . . we just wait here? Jess? Hey, Jess! Oh, alright then.

EXIT Cow and Willem RIGHT

Scene 3

ENTER Dame Mathilda following Sir Herbert RIGHT

DAME M

I won't listen to your whining anymore, Herbie. I'm right, and that's the end of it.

Sir Herbert sighs dramatically. (Obviously don't say yellow if he's not wearing yellow, please)

Oh, don't give me that attitude. You know I'm right: yellow is your color!

SIR H

It's not about the color, mom. It was never about the color.

DAME M

Then what are we arguing about? Is this about your father again? Oh, you'll be a great knight.

SIR H

I just don't feel like I'll do a good job. I don't think I can do what dad did. He was big and scary, and everybody loved him.

DAME M

Listen to me, Herbie.

SIR H

Don't call me that.

DAME M

You may be a big, important knight, but I will always be your mother. You will be the knight of this town and take up the mantle of your father.

SIR H

I don't know if I can!

DAME M

Why would you say such a thing!?

Dame Mathilda begins to overdramatically cry.

SIR H

Mom. Mom! What are you doing?

DAME M

I'm weeping! Can't you see that?
(cries more violently)

SIR H

He was different from me. I can't be him. Everybody expects me to be just like Dad, but I'm not brave!

Dame M is clutching him, now, wailing.

SIR H (cont'd)

Oh, alright. I'll do it. I'll go be knightly for you.

She immediately turns off the waterworks.

DAME M

Good. I'm glad you came to your senses. Now, these were your father's before he passed away, God rest his soul. If you put these on, everyone will take you seriously.

Some elements of the outfit should be outlandish or especially oversized. Perhaps the hat drapes down over Herbert's eyes. When he spins around, you can see he has put on a big fake mustache.

SIR H

Tada! It is I, the old Sir Herbert!

DAME M

Oh, you look so handsome! What a good disguise. Just like your father.

SIR H

Mom, don't pinch my cheek! I'm a knight! You're dislodging my mustache! You never dislodged any of dad's disguises.

He takes off the mustache and puts it in his pocket.

DAME M

I can't wait until Lady Cherubeth comes to visit. She'll be practically green with jealousy. Her son isn't half so clever as you. Oh! I know, I'll invite her over straightaway.

*She laughs a devillish cackle and leaves.
EXIT Dame M RIGHT*

Herbert is left alone in the room. He practices his knightly poses and authoritative voice. He can "announce" himself and practice entering. He can strike stately poses and puff up his chest. The words and order don't matter. He stops talking when the others come in and just postures and bows silently while they talk.

SIR H

(an example of what to say)

Ahem. I am a knight----THE knight of Fortemburg. I am Sir Herbert, knight of Fortemburg. Excuse me, sir, do you know who the knight is? I am the knight of Fortemburg, Sir Herbert the Sly, master of disguise! Sir Herbert the Good-looking! Stop, you criminals! I'm the knight and I'm here to thwart you. Aha! Surprised? It's me, Herbert, the knight of Fortemburg! Surely you've heard of me! Herbert the Fair! Herbert the Proud! Brave, brave Sir Herbert!

*ENTER Poppy, Perrin, Tabitha, Maria, Catharine,
Bette LEFT*

Herbert hasn't heard them come in.

BETTE

Do you think this is normal behavior for a knight, or have we caught him at a bad time?

POPPY

I don't know what it is, but I'm loving it.

SIR H

Sir Herbert-he's uncanny! Always prepared! No foe could ever sneak up on him!

PERRIN

We may have made a mistake in coming here. This is no knight.

TABITHA

Well, give him a chance.

PERRIN

Tabitha, look at him.

He has been shadow boxing. He looks awful at it.

SIR H

(in a high-pitched voice)

Sir Herbert, look out behind you!

(now full of bravado)

Ha! No one could sneak up on Sir Herbert! Hi-yah!

He spins around and takes in the crowd. He composes himself and there passes an awkward moment.

Hello, everyone. I'm not normally so . . . it's the yellow, you see. It's not my color.

CATHARINE

Well, it looks good on you.

SIR H

Why are you here?

POPPY

Brave sir knight, a terrible disaster in the village: a luckless bovine, gnarled with horns and dripping in slime has wandered into our streets. Only a knight as brave and as strong as yourself could possibly turn it away!

BETTE

What?

MARIA

The cow, remember?

SIR H

But what do you need?

POPPY

A fibrous sinew of sufficient strength to capture the ravenous beast!

BETTE

What!?

MARIA

I guess the rope? Right? We need a rope.

SIR H

I can get you a rope.

EXIT Sir Herbert RIGHT

POPPY

In fortune bold, the brave knight shows us how
When all despair, Sir Herbert tames a cow!

PERRIN

Huzzah.

*ENTER Sir Herbert RIGHT
He's carrying a cord or rope.*

TABITHA

Away we go to the village!

*Several grab Herbert and push him ahead.
EXIT all LEFT*

Scene 4

ENTER Willem and the cow RIGHT

WILLEM

I sure hope Sir Herbert shows up with that rope soon.

*ENTER Sir Herbert, Poppy, Tabitha, Perrin, Maria,
Bette, and Catharine LEFT*

CATHARINE

Oh, mom: Will he do it? It's so thrilling!

BETTE

I don't know, Catharine. She certainly looks ferocious.

TABITHA

Oh, don't worry about it. Willem, this cow isn't
anything to be afraid of, is it?

WILLEM

No, she's a big sweetie. Aren't you, Jess? She kicked the barn over yesterday, but honestly she's so nice.

PERRIN

She kicked the barn over? No chance; he's toast.

MARIA

Everybody! Quiet! Let the knight work!

SIR H

I don't actually know if----

MARIA

Nonsense!

She shoves him forward.

The cow stands now at the middle of a semi-circle of people who all react together as the knight circles and jumps and bobs around her.

(If Poppy can't play I'll be sad) Poppy gets out their instrument and strums uncomfortably fast to increase the tension.

Herbert's hopeless. He's making no headway until the cow moves and spooks him. He falls down. The music stops.

PERRIN

Well, folks. Looks like we still need a knight. This one's no good.

TABITHA

We don't really get a choice, Perrin.

MARIA

I hate to say it, but a choice between this knight and no knight----

PERRIN

I'd take no knight, actually.

BETTE

Honestly, I've wasted my morning.

PERRIN

You know his Father would have been able to handle this cow with two hands tied behind his back. Just walk up to her and blow on her real hard and she'd fall down. He's just not brave enough.

POPPY

Ol' Sir Herbert's feet were never rushed.
The old knight's teeth were never brushed.
But for all the things he never did,
He never should have had a kid.

SIR H

Well----I'll do it. Just you watch! I'm brave enough!

ENTER Uberritter LEFT

With one swift motion, he plucks the rope from Herbert's hand, hands one end to the actor playing the cow, and spins the cow (holding the rope) so that the cow ends up thoroughly bound up and tipping into Willem at stage right.

UBERRITTER

Your cow, sir!

TABITHA

Wow!

MARIA

Who are you?

UBERRITTER

I'm the sensation of South Summiton, the wonder of West Warrick, and the novel of North Nop. I'm the unstoppable Sir Ulric Uberritter!

He strikes a pose.

POPPY

(snickering)

I'm sorry, sir: your name again?

UBERRITTER

Sir! Ulric! Uberritter!

He pulls his pose again. (Or a pose at each word?)
(to Poppy)

You think my name is funny, huh?

POPPY

I'm sorry. You work with what you're born with.

UBERRITTER

Tell me, what's the name of this scummy little town?
I'm here to add it to my list.

BETTE

Fortemburg.

UBERRITTER

It doesn't match my pattern. I've got North, West, and South. Oh, well. It doesn't matter. I can be the fury of fair Fortemburg. I just need to smash your knight.

BETTE

I'm sorry, what? Smash our knight? What do you mean?

UBERRITTER

Yeah, to utterly wipe the floor with him. I'll challenge him to a contest, win, and take the town from him. Now, who is your knight?

Herbert, who has been standing essentially motionless this whole time, slowly backs away.

EXIT Herbert RIGHT

POPPY

Brave Sir Herbert! He's the one who was wrestling the cow, before you showed up.

UBERRITTER

Brave, huh? Not likely. Bravery is being able to face a foe in physical combat and not back down, and *win*. I've heard a lot about Sir Herbert, how big he was, how strong. All lies! That pipsqueak couldn't win in a staring contest because he's too weak to hold his eyes open! And now that he's gone, this is my town. You there: what do you do?

He points at Tabitha, and everyone else takes a step back.

TABITHA

Who, uh---me? I-I'm Tabitha, the baker.

UBERRITTER

You'll make me a cake to celebrate my victory. And you?

MARIA

Maria, the seamstress.

UBERRITTER

Get me a cape or something. You?

PERRIN

I'm the blacksmith, Perrin.

UBERRITTER

I'll need a trophy. Next!

BETTE

I'm Bette, and this is my daughter Catharine. My husband, Ash, is a carpenter.

UBERRITTER

Good. I'll need a big fancy chair to sit on for the feast. Well? What are you all waiting for?

He laughs, viciously.

*EXIT Tabitha, Maria, Perrin, Bette, and Catharine
LEFT*

*Uberritter rounds on Poppy and puffs up, menacing.
And how about you?*

POPPY

(nervous out of their mind)

Hello, I'm Poppo Pweapo Popop Pew I'm Pop. I'm Pop. I'm Poppy. You have very scary nose hairs coming out of your nose. Has anyone ever told you that?

UBERRITTER

Write a song about me. Make it memorable.

POPPY

(chanting weakly)

Hmmm Uberritter, a real go-getter, yelled at birds and called it twitter ...

EXIT Poppy following Uberritter LEFT

WILLEM

Huh. Well, things could be worse. Come on, Jess. Jess? Wait, my cow Jess has a spot on her nose. You're Tess. That means . . . my meanest cow is at home alone with my sister! Oh no!

(snap from panic to calm)

I'm sure she'll be fine. Come on, Tess. Let's go home.

EXIT Willem and cow RIGHT

Scene 5

ENTER Elanor LEFT

ELANOR

Gah! Willem and his cows. Why are they so great, anyway? He loves them almost as much as mom and dad ever did. When they moved to South Summiton, I wish

(MORE)

ELANOR (cont'd)
they had taken the cows with them. Then I wouldn't have
to deal with them. I just . . . don't know what to do.

ENTER Brother Duncan RIGHT

BROTHER DUNC
Hello, Elanor. It's a lovely day, isn't it?

ELANOR
Hey.

BROTHER DUNC
You sound deflated. What's wrong?

ELANOR
It's these cows, you know? Willem loves them, and when
I was almost run down this morning, he left me for the
cow.

BROTHER DUNC
Really? That doesn't seem like him.

ELANOR
He just loves the cows more than me.

BROTHER DUNC
Oh, that definitely doesn't sound right. I think,
maybe, it's about more than the cows.

ELANOR
What? What could be more than the cows?

BROTHER DUNC
Think about it. The farm belonged to your parents
before they retired.

ELANOR
Now it belongs to us. And I wish they would come back
for it.

BROTHER DUNC
And Willem? He misses your parents too, doesn't he? He
would like to honor their memory.

ELANOR
Then he should care about me, not about cows!

BROTHER DUNC
Well, what do I know?

ENTER Sir Herbert RIGHT

SIR H

Oh, Brother Duncan. How's the church?

BROTHER DUNC

It's good.

SIR H

The cemetery?

BROTHER DUNC

It takes care of itself.

SIR H

Trees? They're good, too?

BROTHER DUNC

Listen, are you alright, Sir Herb----

Herbert jumps to Brother Duncan to put his finger on the priest's lips.

SIR H

Shhhh! Don't say that.

ELANOR

What, say Sir Herb----

Herbert shushes her this time, and looks around cautiously to see if anyone heard.

SIR H

I'm hiding. There's some angry knight in the village who thinks he can beat me in some sort of crazy contest.

ELANOR

Can he?

SIR H

Oh, definitely he can.

BROTHER DUNC

Well, that's good then.

SIR H

Ungood! Bad! Very not good!

BROTHER DUNC

I don't understand. I thought you were somehow preparing a strategy or waiting for an opening to rush in and save the day. Your father always used to.

SIR H
Ugh.

BROTHER DUNC
Really?

SIR H
Sorry; I've just heard enough about dad for a day.
(he adopts a voice like Poppy's)
"Old Sir Herbert was so great,
we really liked him. He was great.
Have we mentioned he was great?
He's really really really great."

BROTHER DUNC
I think the two of you have a very similar problem.

SIR H
You're struggling against a vicious knight?

ELANOR
I'm struggling against a cow.

SIR H
I just tried to catch one of your cows!

ELANOR
And?

SIR H
I lost.

BROTHER DUNC
Cows, knights. I just think that if you're brave and
face your difficulty, you'll maybe learn something that
has nothing to do with them. Good luck.

ELANOR
Thank you, Brother Duncan. See you soon.

EXIT Brother Dunc LEFT

SIR H
What was your problem? Cows, you said?

ELANOR
Yeah. And specifically that I'm terrified of them.

ENTER Cow LEFT

*The cow has a spot on its nose. It looks and acts
much angrier than the previous cow (even if it's
the same performer, which would also be great).*

SIR H

Well, don't look now, but . . .

Elanor sees the cow and both she and Herbert jump.

ELANOR

Why did you jump?

SIR H

Instinct.

ELANOR

Do you think you could . . . you know. With the cow?
Like your dad always did?

SIR H

(exasperated)

Why can't you all handle your own problems!?

ELANOR

Sorry!?

SIR H

It's just the second time today someone has asked me to solve their problem, and I just . . . cant. I can't even solve my own problems.

ELANOR

Well, she can't stay out. And besides, Willem said that Jess, the scary cow, was definitely the one in town. Bess always stays home, so this must be Tess. Right?

SIR H

I'm sorry, what have you named your cows? How can you tell them apart?

ELANOR

I can't.

(to the cow)

Hey, go home! Go home, you walking milk bucket!

(to Herbert)

It's not working. She's getting closer----do something!

SIR H

I don't know what to do! What do you do!?

ELANOR

I, uh----Mom always used to sort of, uh, and then "Hey, I love you but the world isn't ready to love you too. Go home!"

While talking, Elanor puffs herself up as big as possible and turns on the cow, taking a small step or two towards it. She shows no sign of cowardice and the cow slows and looks at her, totally unsure.

SIR H
What else did she say?

ELANOR
"I'm warning you, child. If I don't find you home by the time I get there, there's no oats tonight!"

The cow backs up a few steps, turns, and jogs away home.

I can't believe that worked.

SIR H
You mean you were just guessing!?

ELANOR
(ignoring him)
I haven't felt that close to mom in a long time. Wow. It's like she was here with me.

ENTER Willem LEFT

WILLEM
Was that our cow I saw, thundering back down the road?

ELANOR
Yes! And you'll never believe: I turned her around using mom's old trick!

WILLEM
The old "I love you but the world isn't----"

ELANOR
Exactly! You always said to be braver than the cow and she wouldn't bother me, and you were right! And besides, it was okay because you had Jess and so I knew I was okay.

WILLEM
Actually, that was definitely Jess. She had a spot on her nose? I'm so proud of you!

SIR H
You mean that was the cow that knocked down the barn?

WILLEM
Of course! Uh, Elanor? Are you okay?

Elanor looks weak and spins, toppling trust-fall style into Willem, who holds her like a triangle against him. It will look funny when she talks to him essentially upside down.

ELANOR

I miss mom and dad a lot.

WILLEM

Oh. Come here.

(hugs)

I miss them too. But I feel closer to them when I take care of the cows, don't you? And maybe, when they come back for Christmas, they'll find the place all warm and cozy and they'll be proud of us, and they'll feel okay that they moved south.

Willem leads Elanor away.

ELANOR

I like that. I just wish I had understood it sooner. I was so mad at the cows for so long, like they were the thing keeping us apart----I don't know.

WILLEM

Oh, it's okay.

EXIT Willem and Elanor LEFT

SIR H

Huh. So, she used her mom's old trick----maybe I could do that. No, because I can't pull my dad's tricks. He was big and scary: a seasoned knight. I can't even fit in his stupid jacket and hat.

Herbert strips off the ill-fitting clothing.

Who was I joking? I'm not a knight. Dad used to chase off monsters and tear trees out of the ground. If that's what it takes to be a knight, I haven't got it. I can't be my dad. And I don't want to be my dad.

Herbert pulls from his pocket the fake mustache.

Oh. What if I don't have to be? I can use his trick ...

He puts the mustache on.

... without really being him. I have a plan.

EXIT Sir Herbert RIGHT

Scene 6

ENTER Uberritter LEFT

UBERRITTER

Popo! Where's my goblet!?

He lifts out an arm and waits. After what seems like two or three seconds too long, Poppy comes running in with a glass, out of breath.

ENTER Poppy LEFT

POPPY

Here it is. Surprise! It's empty.

UBERRITTER

Why bring it, then?

POPPY

You sounded really mad. I panicked.

UBERRITTER

Listen to me, and listen carefully. I took this town. I own you. Get me something----anything----to drink!

Poppy carefully and slowly spits in the cup and hands it to Uberritter. Ulric picks up the cup and wordlessly throws it as far as he can.

I'm the sensation of South Summiton, the wonder of West Warrick, and the novel of North Nop. I'm the unstoppable Sir Ulric Uberritter! And you dare to give me spit to drink?

POPPY

If the old Sir Herbert were here, he would have laughed at my joke.

UBERRITTER

Wait. Old Sir Herbert? You mean that pipsqueak wasn't the fearsome knight of Fortenburg that I've heard so much about?

POPPY

No! Of course not. That was his son, Herbert junior.

UBERRITTER

You mean to say that where the kid is small, his dad was----

POPPY

Mustached!

UBERRITTER

No, you . . . you were supposed to say big or something. I say small, you say big. Right? Let's try again. Kid is young, dad is?

POPPY

Big! No? I'm sorry. I'm trying to learn the pattern. Again, again! I can do this.

UBERRITTER

Ugh no. But you're saying that Sir Herbert Senior is super fearsome?

POPPY

Oh, if he were here. Hey, Catharine! Tell me about Sir Herbert!

ENTER Catharine RIGHT

CATHARINE

Yeah, what?

POPPY

Tell me about Sir Herbert.

CATHARINE

Well, he's young and small and doesn't have a mustache.

POPPY

No, Old Sir Herbert.

CATHARINE

Oh, Old Sir Herbert! He was the best knight. He once picked up a bear and carried it out of town under one arm.

POPPY

Do you remember that old song about Sir Herbert?

CATHARINE

Do I ever!

Poppy gets out an instrument and begins to strum one chord. Poppy shouts "hey," and all the other village members that we've met jump out one at a time to join him with a rhythmic "hey" on each strum. When everybody has appeared, Poppy picks a very high note and practically yells "Ohhhhhh"

ENTER Bette, Tabitha, Maria, and Perrin from all over.

ALL

Hey!

POPPY

Ohhhhhh----

UBERRITTER

No no no! Shut it down! Why? Why would you do this?
This is weird!

Everybody hushes up.

But then----from the sidelines: a voice.

SIR H

(offstage singing the tune Poppy began)

I know a man unstoppable and braaaaaave-----

ALL

Old Sir Herbert!

ENTER Sir Herbert RIGHT

He's wearing a mustache. He has puffed out his jacket with a pillow and pulled his hat down low over his head. He's making a voice.

SIR H

It is I----Sir Herbert the Brave!

There passes a tense moment as everyone looks to Uberritter for his response. He says nothing, but he has started to look a little shaky.

Who, my good fellow, are you!?

UBERRITTER

I am Sir Uberritter, the sensation of South Summiton,
the ----

SIR H

More like the shame of South Summiton!

UBERRITTER

The uh, the wonder of West Warrick!

SIR H

More like the wack-o of West Warrick!

UBERRITTER

(very distraught now)

The novel of North Nop!

SIR H

Probably the nobody of North Nop. I don't think you're nearly that famous.

UBERRITTER

Well, I don't think you're really that brave.

SIR H

Then you're willing to face me in a test of true bravery?

UBERRITTER

Anything! I've hugged porcupines, jumped off enormous cliffs, and stayed twenty minutes in a room in the dark! I'm the bravest man in the world.

SIR H

Excellent! Then whoever is willing to drink the contents of this cup is going to be the knight of this town.

He holds up the cup that Poppy spit in. There's a long pause. He steps once toward Uberritter, holding up the cup. Ulric steps back. Two forward steps, two steps back. There's another pause.

UBERRITTER

You first!

Herbert brings the cup to his lips.

POPPY

Old Sir Herbert, no! I spit in that!

SIR H

I've ripped trees from the ground and carried bears on my back. You think this scares me?

He throws it back. Everybody cheers. Uberritter has a terrified look. He runs.

EXIT Uberritter LEFT

POPPY

Wait! Wait everyone! I thought Old Sir Herbert passed away years ago. Were you all just lying to me? He's right there.

Herbert strips the mustache and hat off, revealing his actual face. (If it's not too much trouble, the coat as well).

SIR H

Poppy! Calm down, it's me! Young Sir Herbert!

POPPY

Oh! Oh, of course. You were all panicked but I knew the whole time.

BETTE

Really fantastic work!

MARIA

That nasty knight expected all sorts of free stuff from us.

BETTE

Chairs and cakes and capes and more!

TABITHA

But you've saved the town, just like your father always did.

SIR H

Oh, thanks you guys. But really, it was nothing.

CATHARINE

I thought it was terribly brave.

POPPY

How did you even do it?

SIR H

Do you remember when you got stuck in that pine tree, years ago?

POPPY

Yeah, it ate me and many other children.

SIR H

You remember how dad couldn't get you out of the tree because you were scared of him, so he dressed up like me? Well, I couldn't scare Ulric Uberritter, so I dressed up like dad. It's just dad's old trick, reversed. Dad dressed young to not scare. I dressed old to scare.

TABITHA

A fantastic plot!

CATHARINE

Very cool. A cheer for Sir Herbert! Hip hip----

ALL
Hooray!

POPPY
Hooray indeed! Hey, Tabitha: did you make that cake?

TABITHA
I did!

POPPY
Did you eat that cake?

TABITHA
Not yet!

POPPY
A cheer for Tabitha! Hip hip hooray!

*Exit Poppy, Tabitha, Maria, Bette, and Catharine
RIGHT*

PERRIN
Sir Herbert, I---- I don't know what to say. You really impressed me. I just hope you can forgive all those nasty things I said earlier.

SIR H
You're forgiven, of course. And you don't have to explain. You and dad were always friends. I'll never be able to replace him.

PERRIN
Your father would have been proud of you. You were very brave today.

SIR H
See, that's a curious thing I learned. If all your problems look like an angry cow, you don't have to be very brave, not really. Just braver than the cow that's staring at you.

PERRIN
That's strange and lovely.

They hug.

SIR H
Cake?

PERRIN
You'll have to get there before I finish it.

*ENTER Rosalyn RIGHT
She catches Sir H while Perrin charges off*

EXIT Perrin RIGHT

ROSALYN

Excuse me?

SIR H

Lots of visitors to our little town today. How can I help you?

ROSALYN

I've come with a letter from the capitol for Sir Herbert.

*She hands him the letter when he says "that's me."
It would be nice if it had a big red circle on it
as the "seal."*

SIR H

That's me. Hold on, this has the royal seal.

ROSALYN

I was sent by the king himself. I'm here early so you have time to prepare for the king's visit. He'll be here by the week's end, and he wants to have a feast with Fortemburg.

*Still engrossed in the letter, Sir H begins to
stumble off LEFT*

SIR H

Mom! The king is on his way! Here!

ROSALYN

(to the audience)

The king is coming. Are you prepared?

EXIT Rosalyn RIGHT

Props

Rope (from RIGHT, Herbert)

Goblet (from LEFT, Poppy)

Mustache (Herbert's pocket)

Pillow/stuffing (from RIGHT, Herbert)

Letter (Rosalyn's pocket)

FRIDAYScene 1

Luke 14:23 "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.'"

ENTER Jesse RIGHT

JESSE

Hello? Catharine? Anybody?

(seeing Perrin's shop)

Woah! Why is this . . . why is Perrin's shop burned down? Hello? Anybody!?

ENTER Tabitha LEFT

She's in a hurry, carrying a basket

TABITHA

Oh, hello, Jesse.

EXIT Tabitha RIGHT

JESSE

What? No, but Tabitha, hey! TABITHA!

ENTER Tabitha RIGHT

Where is everybody?

TABITHA

Up at the manor house, I'd guess. Getting ready for the king.

JESSE

Why is Perrin's shop a smouldering wreck? The king is coming? Here!? Why are you so calm? I leave town for three days. Three days.

TABITHA

Oh, that's right. You're not in town very much. Well, back on Sunday, when that scary Knight Uberritter tried to take over the town--

JESSE

What?

TABITHA

Sure! But Sir Herbert scared him away. Anyhow, that's when we learned the the king was going to visit. After that, we've been trying to deal with strangers from out of town and a possible plague outbreak, it wasn't though, when yesterday an accident in Perrin's shop led

(MORE)

TABITHA (cont'd)
to his whole smithy burning down! Quite a shame if you ask me. But it will all work out, I'm sure.

JESSE
I miss a lot when I go into the woods, don't I? Well, where's Perrin now?

TABITHA
In the basement of the manor house.

JESSE
Why's he staying in the basement?

TABITHA
Staying!? My dear, he's imprisoned there.

JESSE
What for, imprisoned? He's a grump sometimes, but what could he possibly do that would cause this?

TABITHA
Well, he wouldn't make shackles for Dame Mathilda to lock up the suspected criminals, of course. So that's why he's in there with them.

JESSE
(slower, realizing)
Tabitha, how many people are in the basement?

TABITHA
Well, let's see. It's Perrin for not making the shackles, Poppy and the stranger for suspected theft, Brother Duncan for not paying his taxes, and the Joiners for hiding a thief, maybe. So that's . . .

She counts on her fingers.
Seven?

Jesse hears this and, agitated, darts shakily first one way, and then the other. Then she freezes near mid-stage again.
What are you doing?

JESSE
I don't know. I'm thinking. You dropped a lot of information on me all at once. I think . . . I'm going to talk to Dame Mathilda, just to see what can be done.

TABITHA
Good luck! I've got chores to run. The king is almost here.

EXIT Tabitha RIGHT

JESSE

What I wouldn't do for her chipper attitude. Alright, Jesse. You can do this. You know what's right and wrong, and this is very wrong. You've gotta go talk to Dame Mathilda, that's all.

(big sigh)

Alright. Let's go save the day.

EXIT Jesse LEFT

She will need to be RIGHT for her next entrance.

Scene 2

ENTER Dame M, Ishmael, Harriet, and Gerald LEFT

Dame M's directing Ishmael, Harriet, and Gerald as the three carry a table on-stage, however awkwardly. They're struggling. They only get it partway on-stage before Mathilda has them set it down. It ends up near stage LEFT.

DAME M

Careful! Don't let the corner of the table break off! Or the legs! Ishmael, lift your end! Be careful of the legs! Come on, Harriet, this way, this way a little more. Perfect. Set it there.

ISHMAEL

Okay, now the table is upstairs. It's time for a nap, right?

HARRIET

Why do we even want the table up here, anyway?

DAME M

This is the nicest room in the house, Harriet. The king expects a lovely meal and we'll give it to him. We'll show him what Fortemburg is really like.

GERALD

If he wants to know what Fortemburg is really like, he'd have to eat in town at Tabitha's bakery. Or at the Joiners' house. Somewhere normal.

DAME M

Gerald, are you trying to make me mad? Of course we will give the king the best of everything this town has to offer.

ISHMAEL

And this room is it? Awesome. Time for a nap.

Ishmael proceeds to lie on or under the table.

DAME M

Ishmael, get up. It's time to prepare the table for a meal. The best cups and dishes are in the kitchen. And I'm sure there's a tablecloth around here somewhere. It is not nap time until this table looks fit for a king, do you understand?

GERALD

Sure thing, Dame Mathilda.

HARRIET

We'll get it ready for you, for sure.

DAME M

Excellent. I'm going to go check on the wheel of cheese Elanor promised me. I'll be right back, and this table had better look regal. Do I make myself clear?

ISHMAEL

Of course.

EXIT Dame M RIGHT

Does anybody have any idea what she's talking about?

HARRIET

I guess we just go get the dishes from the kitchen and put them on the table?

GERALD

There was something about a cloth, too?

ISHMAEL

I will bravely and selflessly volunteer to sweep the floor, so that I don't have to climb the stairs a bunch of times.

GERALD

Okay, Ishmael.

EXIT Harriet and Gerald LEFT

ISHMAEL

Hey, guys!? Grab me a broom on the way?

ENTER Gerald LEFT

He's carrying a broom with an "excuse me, what?" look on his face.

GERALD

It's always *right* there. Right on the other side of the door.

ISHMAEL

Thank you.

EXIT Gerald LEFT

Ishmael begins to sweep and talk to the audience.
Kind of cool that the king is coming to our little town. I've never seen a king before. I wonder what he'll be like. Maybe he'll be big and handsome with a horse that knows how to read. Maybe he'll own, you know, several hats. But he wears one for each meal of the day. Oh, that's fancy.

ENTER Harriet LEFT

She's carrying two or three dishes.

HARRIET

Which one, do you think? She said to get the fanciest ones from the kitchen.

Ishmael stops sweeping to walk over and examine the dishes.

ISHMAEL

Oh . . . I don't know. Which one do you think would go with his lunch hat?

HARRIET

What?

ISHMAEL

I'm trying to imagine what he's like, and I have no idea. I haven't ever met a king before.

HARRIET

I imagine he's like Sir Herbert, but older.

ISHMAEL

So, like Old Sir Herbert?

HARRIET

Older.

ISHMAEL

Old Sir Herbert is so old he passed away from being old.

HARRIET
Yeah, older.

*ENTER Gerald LEFT
He's carrying a big cloth.*

ISHMAEL
Well, I don't know which dish an old person would like, either. Maybe he'll like this left one? Who knows what the king is like?

*Ishmael crosses back and starts to sweep.
Harriet sets the dish in the center of the table.
Gerald begins to spread the cloth over the table,
putting the dish underneath.*

EXIT Harriet LEFT

GERALD
I bet the king is like Dame Mathilda, but with a great big beard. And maybe . . . multiple hats.

ISHMAEL
I thought so too!

GERALD
Yeah! And they're fancy. Extremely fancy, with big feathers, and maybe they're made of gold.

Ishmael is quiet for a second.

ISHMAEL
Gerald, why would anybody fancy want to come to Fortenburg?

GERALD
Sorry? What's wrong with our town?

ISHMAEL
Nothing's wrong with it, but I just wonder why anybody fancy would want to come here.

*ENTER Harriet LEFT
She's carrying two chairs. She sets them behind
the table, towards stage rear.*

GERALD
I don't get it.

ISHMAEL
I'll try to explain. Fortenburg isn't special. There are blacksmiths and dairy farms and churches just like ours in other towns.

GERALD

But he is coming.

ISHMAEL

But why?

HARRIET

Oh, wait, that is weird. I never thought of it before.
Why is the king coming to Fortemburg?

*All three of them stare off in different
directions toward the ceiling, trying to think.*

GERALD

He wants to see the church?

ISHMAEL

He doesn't know what it's like. Why would he want to
see our church?

HARRIET

To meet Dame Mathilda?

ISHMAEL

He could have asked her to travel to the capital.

GERALD

Because he likes our town?

ISHMAEL

That's ridiculous!

HARRIET

Well, we don't know any more than you do!

ISHMAEL

I wish Dame Mathilda were here. She could tell us why
he's coming.

ENTER Dame M RIGHT

DAME M

Oh. Oh, no, this won't do. Why are the dishes under the
cloth?

GERALD

Uh . . . they're not supposed to be?

HARRIET

We thought they would stay cleaner that way.

DAME M

Dishes on top of cloth. And find something beautiful to go in the center of the table. The king is almost here.

Ishmael, Gerald, and Harriet jump to putting the dish/es on top of the cloth again.

Now, scoot!

EXIT Ishmael, Gerald, Harriet LEFT

Dame M walks the chair back to its proper place, smooths the tablecloth, and sighs.

This is an important moment to prolong a bit. The feeling of this will be repeated and intensified twice more. It shouldn't be glossed over.

Everything will be perfect for the king. I can do this. I'm ready. Ok, Mathilda. Big deep breath.

Rosalyn! Come take a look!

ENTER Rosalyn CENTER (if you don't have a center door, RIGHT)

ROSALYN

Yes? What . . . what is the table doing upstairs?

DAME M

Isn't it perfect? Up here, he can be away from the noise and the people. It's the nicest room in the house, so I've had it prepared for his dining room.

ROSALYN

Why are there . . . two chairs? Did you think he and I would be the only people eating?

DAME M

Well, I . . .

ROSALYN

If he wanted to see me, he wouldn't travel all the way to Fortemburg. We would have just stayed in the capital. No, no. This isn't right. And he's almost here. We have to fix this.

DAME M

I don't understand.

ROSALYN

Okay, let me spell it out again. The king is coming to visit Fortemburg. Fortemburg, not me. This room is too small. There has to be enough space for everybody to sit at the table.

DAME M

But we'll have to move all the preparations!

ROSALYN

So move the preparations.

DAME M

But we'll have to make a lot more food!

ROSALYN

So make a lot more food! I don't understand what's so difficult about this. When I told you on Sunday that the king was coming to visit Fortemburg, what did you think I meant?

The two women just look at each other.
Make it happen. You don't have a lot of time. The king is almost here.

EXIT Rosalyn CENTER (or RIGHT)

Dame Mathilda is stunned for a moment.

DAME M

Okay. I can make this work. I have to. Ishmael! Harriet, Gerald! Come back!

ENTER Ishmael, Harriet, and Gerald LEFT
One of the three is carrying a big bouquet of flowers/a beautiful vase/something lovely.

ISHMAEL

You sound like you've got bad news. Is it more work?

DAME M

I need you three to move everything. We'll need more space, as it turns out. The king won't be dining alone.

ISHMAEL

Don't take it so hard, Dame Mathilda. After all, you're not the one carrying the table.

GERALD

Come on, Harriet.

The three clean the table and the chairs away.

DAME M

Alright. Let's try again.

EXIT Dame M, Harriet, Gerald, and Ishmael LEFT

Scene 3

ENTER Dame M, Harriet, Gerald, and Ishmael LEFT

The three are carrying the table, still covered by the cloth. They'll set it on stage LEFT again.

HARRIET

Where do we put it?

DAME M

Just here, in the dining hall. We need the cloth and dishes and chairs. More chairs this time.

GERALD

More chairs? Who all's eating at this dinner?

DAME M

(exhausted)

It seems like everyone is, Gerald. Now, you all stay here. Last time I went to get cheese. This time I'm going to get the cheese smith. I'll be right back.

EXIT Dame M RIGHT

HARRIET

More dishes?

GERALD

More chairs.

EXIT Harriet and Gerald LEFT

When they return, they will set up the dishes and chairs they bring back with them.

ISHMAEL

Why would the king want to eat with all of us? This day gets more and more puzzling. Now, where is that dust cloth?

Ishmael crosses to CENTER and looks around the room, searching.

ENTER Harriet, with dishes, LEFT

Harriet, have you seen the dust cloth?

HARRIET

(not hearing)

What's that you say?

ISHMAEL

A cloth, for dusting.

HARRIET

I don't know? Just use your hat.
(or handkerchief if that's too silly)

ISHMAEL

Oh, perfect!

Ishmael begins to dust the walls.

ENTER Gerald, with chairs, LEFT

EXIT Harriet LEFT

TWO CHAIRS

GERALD

You know what's been bothering me?

ISHMAEL

Oh, me too!

GERALD

Yeah? Let's say it together. Ready? Three, two, one:
(simultaneously)

How many chairs does she actually want?

ISHMAEL

(simultaneously)
Why would the king want to eat with me?

GERALD

What?

ISHMAEL

Why would the king want to eat with us?

GERALD

Oh, your question's way better.

ENTER Harriet, with more dishes, LEFT

ISHMAEL

Because, the way I see it, even if he knows that Fortenburg exists, somehow, there's no way he knows about me, or you.

HARRIET

But Dame Mathilda said we should set up chairs for everybody.

GERALD

And how many chairs is that!? More than two!???!

EXIT Gerald LEFT

HARRIET

Why are you worried about it, Ishmael?

Ishmael stops dusting the walls.

ISHMAEL

The way I see it, I'm not exactly worthy of hanging out with the king, am I?

HARRIET

What's wrong with you? Why wouldn't the king like you very much?

ENTER Gerald, with chairs, LEFT

FOUR CHAIRS

ISHMAEL

Well, I'm very lazy. And other people in this town are selfish or impatient or mean, and I just can't figure out why we all deserve to eat with the king.

Gerald and Harriet stop to look at each other for a bit. Ishmael crosses and comes back with chairs while they're thinking.

EXIT Ishmael LEFT

GERALD

Ahhh . . .

HARRIET

What if he . . .

ENTER Ishmael, with chairs, LEFT

SIX CHAIRS

ISHMAEL

(as though the conversation continues)

I mean, that's the first thing I've lifted all day. I haven't earned an invitation to eat with the king.

GERALD

I don't know. I give up thinking about it.

EXIT Gerald LEFT

ISHMAEL

What do you think, Harriet?

HARRIET

Well, it's tricky. Because, like you said, we definitely haven't earned it.

ISHMAEL

But we still got the invitation.

HARRIET

Maybe it's not a question of who is worthy or not?
Maybe everyone's worthy.

ENTER Gerald, with chairs, LEFT

EIGHT CHAIRS

ISHMAEL

I don't think that can possibly be the answer.

EXIT Ishmael LEFT

HARRIET

He asks tricky questions today, huh?

GERALD

Yeah, I didn't think about any of this stuff.

HARRIET

Do you think Dame Mathilda knows the answer to any of this stuff? Or Sir Herbert?

GERALD

I guess so.

ENTER Ishmael, with chairs, LEFT

TEN CHAIRS

ISHMAEL

That's ten. Please say that's enough, I'm exhausted. I couldn't carry another chair.

Ishmael collapses into one of the chairs while Harriet and Gerald set up the two he's brought.

HARRIET

I don't know. It looks good. We would have to ask.

ENTER Dame Mathilda, Willem, Elanor, Tabitha, Maria, and Sir Herbert RIGHT

DAME M

Alright, everyone. Herbert, you sit there, and then . .
 . Yes, okay, No, you too Ishmael. Everyone find a seat.
 And one extra. Okay.

SIR H

What's going on?

*Dame M takes a big, deep breath. This is breath
 number two.*

DAME M

Everything's going to be perfect. I fixed it. It's
 perfect.

SIR H

Mother, what's happening?

*Dame M crosses to knock on rear or to peer
 off-stage.*

DAME M

(to villagers)
 You're all invited to the dinner with the king.
 (calling)
 Rosalyn, are you here?

*There's a big eruption of noise as everyone starts
 talking. The hubbub ceases as Rosalyn walks in.*

ENTER Rosalyn CENTER (or RIGHT)

Well? How have we done?

ROSALYN

Ah-- it seems . . .

DAME M

Lovely? Ready for the King's arrival?
 (pause)
 Perfect?

ROSALYN

Isn't it too few people?

*Everyone sitting at the table suddenly looks quite
 uncomfortable.*

DAME M

Whatever could you be talking about?

ENTER Jesse RIGHT

*(she will have had to cross around since her last
 exit)*

JESSE

Dame Mathilda, we need to talk.

ROSALYN

Who's she? Doesn't she live in town?

DAME M

She lives in the woods. Jesse, what could you possibly want at this extremely terrible time?

JESSE

What have you done with the Joiners? Where are they?

DAME M

Shush!

ROSALYN

Wait, are there more people who aren't here? I thought I was so clear before.

DAME M

Rosalyn, it's alright, we're working it out. Everything will be perfect for the king.

ROSALYN

You're unbelievable. I said, and I am quoting: there has to be enough space for everyone at the table. The king is coming, and you're not ready. Get ready.

*Rosalyn crosses the stage to absolute silence.
EXIT Rosalyn LEFT*

DAME M

Don't you dare. Don't any of you dare.

There's a long pause while Dame Mathilda composes herself.

Okay. If you all could help carry everything outside, we'll need more space than we have in the manor house. Some extra chairs, an extra table. Anything you can lay your hands on. Scoot. And Herbert, come here.

Everyone grabs a chair or two, the table, the dishes--all of it.

EXIT Harriet, Gerald, Ishmael, Tabitha, Maria, Willem, and Elanor RIGHT

SIR H

Mother, --

Dame M holds up a hand to halt him while everyone is leaving. Once everyone is gone, she turns to Jesse.

DAME M

Jesse, you are invited to a dinner. I would be honored if you would accept.

JESSE

Mathilda, if you think for one moment that I'll eat while my friends are locked in your basement--

DAME M

Please, Jesse, I am dealing with it. I will meet you outside and we will have a meal.

JESSE

Okay? Alright.

EXIT Jesse RIGHT

DAME M

Herbert, I need you to go downstairs . . . and bring back the Joiners, Perrin, and Duncan. Please apologize to them. Explain if you can. If not, just bring them.

SIR H

What about . . .

DAME M

No. We can't know who stole that bag of gold, but it's one of those two.

He gives her a troubled look.

Herbert, I am doing the best that I can. I am your mother, and I am asking you to do this thing. Please.

SIR H

Okay, mom.

EXIT Sir H LEFT

DAME M

One step at a time. I don't understand anything, but we're getting there one step at a time. Okay, there's work to do.

EXIT Dame Mathilda RIGHT

Scene 4

ENTER Sir H LEFT

SIR H
Hey, folks. Sorry about things. How are you holding up?

ENTER Ash RIGHT

ASH
Your mother with you?

SIR H
No, it's just me.

ASH
Boy, was she mad.
(calling behind him)
It's okay. It's just Sir Herbert.

ENTER Bette, Catharine, Duncan, Perrin, Poppy, and the King RIGHT

BETTE
Are you going to let us out yet? We haven't done anything wrong.

SIR H
Well, good news and bad news.

PERRIN
The good news better be that you're letting us all out.

BROTHER DUNC
Son, we know it's not your fault, but this really isn't the way things should be done.

CATHARINE
Please, Sir Herbert.

SIR H
Would you let me get a word in?! I'm trying to tell you: I've come down here to let you out. You're all invited to the feast with the king.

PERRIN
I don't understand. Feast? Why are we invited?

SIR H
The emmissary from the king learned that some of the townspeople were absent, and she was mad. Apparently, everybody in the town belongs at the feast. Now, will you please let me let you out?

BROTHER DUNC

You don't have to ask me twice.

They all begin moving LEFT, but Sir H steps in and divides the group, cutting Poppy and the King away, pushing them back RIGHT.

SIR H

Except.

The other five turn around.

ASH

I'm guessing this is where the bad news comes in?

SIR H

Mother made it very clear. And I wish I could, honestly, I do, but--

BETTE

Now hold on, mister.

CATHARINE

Mom--

BETTE

No, Catharine. I am quite angry. Herbert, you are being obtuse. Why can't Poppy and Royce come with us?

SIR H

Listen, Bette. I'm doing my best, but you know my mother has a point. One of them is a thief, and we don't know. We can't know which one it is! So they have to stay here! We can't put a thief at the same table with the king.

KING

Wait. That's it?

SIR H

That's basically it.

KING

Okay.

(beat)

Let Poppy go. Leave me.

CATHARINE

Royce, are you saying . . .

KING

I'll take the guilt. If Perrin angered Mathilda by not making a chain, I'll take that. If the Joiners messed

(MORE)

KING (cont'd)
 up by inviting me into their house, I'll take that. If Duncan messed up by not paying his taxes, I'll take that. And whatever happened with this stolen money, I'll take the guilt.

SIR H
 I don't quite understand.

KING
 It sounds like the king chose Fortemburg to visit, right? Well, you all belong together. You're all Fortemburgonians, no matter where you came from, how old you are, or what you look like. Poppy belongs just as much as anyone.

POPPY
 But: I haven't done anything to deserve to meet the king.

KING
 It doesn't sound like you have to do anything, actually. He's coming here to meet you whether you're worthy or not. So it sounds like you're worthy just like you are.

SIR H
 Are you sure about this?

KING
 I'm the outsider here. Listen, how often in your life will you get a chance to eat with your king? Go! Don't waste your chance locked up in this basement.

SIR H
 Okay. Um . . . alright. Let's go. Royce, thank you.

The group all murmurs thank you. The situation is still a little guilty--they've just been given a gift they don't quite understand.

EXIT Sir H, Bette, Ash, Catharine, Perrin, and Brother Duncan LEFT

POPPY
 No, I still don't get it. Why would you do this?

KING
 You forget. I live in the capital, so I know what the king is like. He's not like you imagine him at all. And he would be so disappointed if he didn't get a chance to meet you, Poppy.

POPPY
Me?

KING
Yeah, because he **loves** you. He loves everyone in Fortemburg. Why do you think he traveled all this way, why he **chose** to have every single one of you at the feast? So, don't worry about whether you **belong**, or whether you're **worthy** of seeing the king. He loves you and he wants you there.

POPPY
I don't think I can. I'm just . . . Poppy. I don't do anything in this town. Everybody else has a job, but what am I? I'm the odd duck out. I don't belong in this town. This is a weird. I think I'll stay down here with you.

KING
(laughing)
No! That's no good. You've got to be **brave**. It's a weird thing, I know, but the bravest thing is to see what other people love in you and to learn to love you too. Be brave, Poppy. You belong.

Poppy just looks at him blankly. He just laughs again, harder this time.
Come on. Give it a chance. Be brave?

POPPY
(Sullenly)
I will try it. You are okay down here, alone?

KING
I'll be fine.

POPPY
You know, one time I got lost in this basement for hours. Don't get lost.

KING
. . . it's not that big a basement, Poppy.

POPPY
It was bigger then. Thank you, Royce.

*EXIT Poppy LEFT
EXIT King RIGHT*

He will need to be LEFT for his next entrance.

Scene 5

ENTER Dame Mathilda RIGHT

ENTER Harriet, Gerald, Ishmael, and Jesse RIGHT
They are carrying two tables. This could be an enormous problem for moving across the stage once they're in the way. Manage it.

DAME M
Alright, everyone. Let's set up here.

ISHMAEL
Outside?

DAME M
(exasperated)
He said he wanted to see Fortemburg, right? So let's give him the middle of town.

ENTER Maria, Tabitha, Willem, and Elanor RIGHT
They are carrying two chairs each.

EIGHT CHAIRS

GERALD
How many chairs do you think we'll need?

DAME M
Enough chairs so everybody has a seat. If I don't own enough chairs, we'll need more chairs. Don't ask me why. More chairs, more dishes, more food. *Fetch!*

EXIT Harriet, Gerald, Ishmael, Jesse, Maria, Tabitha, Willem, and Elanor RIGHT
Dame Mathilda is left on stage alone. She wanders the stage alone, straightening chairs.

I have tried to make everything perfect. Haven't I done my best? And it has never been good enough? And now, the king arrives in who knows how much time. Minutes? Hours? And nothing is ready. My whole house will be emptied into the street, people running back and forth, a whole situation. And this is the impression he'll have of us. A kind of hilarious disaster zone!

ENTER Harriet and Ishmael RIGHT
They're each carrying two chairs.

TWELVE CHAIRS

ENTER Jesse, Gerald, Maria, Tabitha, Willem, and Elanor RIGHT
They're carrying the cloths, dishes, and some food each. One has the centerpiece from earlier.

HARRIET

Dame Mathilda, there's no more chairs, ma'am.

DAME M

There's no more chairs in the whole of my house?

GERALD

No food neither. You prepared for a two person meal, and this is all of it.

Dame M starts to hyperventilate like she's about to cry. Jesse steps over to comfort her.

JESSE

We'll think of something, won't we? Come on, folks. Surely there are more chairs in town.

ENTER Perrin, Duncan, Catharine, Bette, Ash, Poppy, and Sir H LEFT

ASH

Did someone mention chairs? I make chairs.

A big cheer goes up, and the two groups rush to embrace each other. Dame Mathilda hangs back and looks austere/grumpy.

JESSE

You're alright?

CATHARINE

We're fine, it's fine.

PERRIN

Is the king here, yet?

MARIA

Not yet. I wish he would just get here already!

BETTE

What a disaster if he does: the table looks bare, the place is a mess, and there aren't even enough chairs for all of us.

ASH

Well, I have chairs. Let's just grab enough from my woodshop.

ELANOR

I have more cheese, if we could use it.

TABITHA

And there's bread in the bakery. Come on, people. Let's get to it.

JESSE

Come on, everybody. Let's all pitch in! The king is coming!

ALL

(except Mathilda)

The king is coming!

EXIT Tabitha, Maria, Gerald, Perrin, Ash, Bette, and Catharine LEFT

EXIT Elanor, Willem, Brother Duncan, Jesse, Ishmael and Harriet RIGHT

There passes a quiet moment. The three remaining on stage stand near the front.

DAME M

Herbert.

SIR H

I know you asked me to keep Poppy in the basement.

DAME M

The king is coming, Herbert.

SIR H

And Poppy will be here to meet him.

DAME M

I asked you to do one thing. I wanted a perfect Fortemburg for the King.

SIR H

Mom, nobody's perfect.

*ENTER Duncan, Jesse, and Ishmael RIGHT
They're carrying food and dishes.*

*ENTER Ash, Bette, and Catherine LEFT
They're each carrying two chairs.*

Sir H and Dame M continue to have a staredown as Poppy hides behind Herbert. They don't say anything as the clatter continues behind them.

DAME M

Herbert, what if Poppy is a thief?

SIR H
Poppy is not a thief.

DAME M
How can you know?

*ENTER Tabitha, Maria, and Perrin LEFT
They're carrying food and dishes.*

*ENTER Elanor and Willem RIGHT
They're carrying a wheel of cheese (how I will do
this is beyond me. Maybe I will papier-mache a
cheese shape).*

SIR H
The stranger told me . . . he . . .

POPPY
Royce took responsibility. He said whatever was keeping
us locked away, he would take the responsibility for
all of it.

DAME M
And why would he do that?

POPPY
He said I belong!

*The arranging in the background comes to an end.
The table is ready. There are enough chairs for
everyone, including the emissary and the king.*

Things fall still and quiet.

SIR H
Mother, the king said he wanted to see Fortenburg.
Well? Here it is.

*The entire town is arranged behind them, ready.
Most everybody is standing behind the table. Now
there are two stages: behind table and in front of
table, and most everyone will stay behind table or
seated at it, for the most part.*

*Dame Mathilda walks along the table, inspecting it
and the villagers.*

DAME M
Find a seat.

*Everyone scrambles into a chair, and when everyone
is seated, she turns to call to LEFT
I think it would look good for Poppy to go to
table rear. Poppy should save a seat for Mathilda.*

Deep breath number three.
Okay. If this isn't perfect, I give up.

Rosalyn! Fortemburg is ready for the king!

ENTER Rosalyn LEFT

*She's carrying a bag (it has the crown in it).
Table fore:*

ROSALYN

Is this everyone?

DAME M

Yes.

ROSALYN

(looking around again)

Are you sure it's everyone? The king is almost here.

DAME M

Oh, come on. You keep saying 'the king is almost here,' but when exactly is he getting here?

ROSALYN

You keep saying 'this is Fortemburg,' so why isn't everybody here!?

DAME M

Listen to me: this has been an exhausting day. You have asked me for such unreasonable things that I might as well explode. And I've done them. Well, now I've got the baker and the blacksmith, a monk, a minstrel, and myself. This is everyone, and I have made it perfect.

ROSALYN

No, Mathilda. You don't get to decide what's perfect. The king wants everyone.

DAME M

What part of everyone am I not understanding?

ROSALYN

Maybe I'm not saying it clearly enough?

(big, important pause)

He loves everyone in Fortemburg. Why do you think he traveled all this way, why he wants every single one of you at the feast? So, don't worry about whether you belong or whether you're worthy of seeing the king. He loves you and he wants you there.

POPPY

(standing up)

Hey! That's what Royce said! That's exactly what Royce said!

ROSALYN

(to Poppy)

Royce?

POPPY

He's the stranger. He's not here.

ROSALYN

(To Mathilda)

Mathilda? . . . Where's Royce?

DAME M

(disgusted)

Oh, no. He's not from here. And he might be a thief. In fact, he accepted responsibility for being a thief, for not paying taxes, for everything. If there is one person on the face of this earth who does not deserve to be at this feast, it's that out-of-town nobody.

There's a pause.

Sir H stands up.

SIR H

Mom. She said everybody. No excuses, no changes, no thought required. The king wants everyone.

DAME M

(breaking)

I don't know what I'm doing. I'm trying so hard, but everything is so strange and it doesn't make sense. I just wanted everything to be perfect for the king.

Sir H rushes to his mother's side and holds her up. Rosalyn closes to her, too. She sniffles for a second and, if there is a key, she pulls it out and hands it to Herbert.

Okay. If it's what the king wants. I don't understand, but. It's like you said. I don't get to decide what's perfect. I'm . . . I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry, everyone. I don't know what to do.

Poppy motions Mathilda to the seat adjacent.

POPPY

I do. Dame Mathilda! You belong with us.

EXIT Sir Herbert LEFT

Everyone takes a seat, but Poppy remains standing.
I've been working on a poem for this.

Fortemburg's a little town
And I know all the people
From old Sir Herbert's manor house
To Brother Duncan's steeple

But knowing people doesn't mean
That you will get along
And so I've always felt as though
I'm just a little wrong

ENTER the King and Herbert LEFT
I learned today that I can be
Quite proud of who I amly
And now that I am with you folks
I see that you're my fam'ly

KING

I'm so grateful to be here with you. Not least because
I almost didn't make it.

ROSALYN

Oh, good. I was starting to get worried.

Rosalyn hands the bag with the crown in it to the King. Obviously, the audience doesn't know it's a crown, so cut me some slack for writing the spoiler directly into the stage directions.

He will walk to far stage RIGHT where a seat at the head of the table has been left. He'll open up the bag and put the crown on his head.

KING

Surprised?

Everybody erupts. People stand up, look flabbergasted, and sit down again. People are throwing their hands up in the air. It's quite animated and very loud.

Okay, okay everybody! I know you've got questions. Yes, it was me the whole time. Why did I do it? Because you're worth something to me, and I wanted to get to know you face to face before you thought of me as the king and not a friend. And I've never been so lucky in all my life as to get to know Fortemburg, and to be your friend.

DAME M

But, your highness-- I'm so sorry . . .

KING

Not another word, Mathilda. I love you still. How could you know what I meant when I said I wanted everybody at my feast? It's strange. It's incredible. And it's true.

(turning to the audience)

I want everybody at my feast. You. And you. Everyone. I know you may look around and think you're different and you don't belong, that you don't deserve it. But it's okay! Just be brave and remember that the bravest thing is to accept my love when you don't think you can. So. You're invited to my feast. It's easy to get there, in a way. All you have to do is say yes.

(to the table)

Are you all willing to feast with me?

ALL

Yes!

KING

Mathilda, would you ask grace for our meal?

Everyone around the table bows their heads.

DAME M

Of course.

God, we come to you and admit that we have no idea how big your love really is. We can try to make a table big enough for the people you love and we'll always fall short, because your love covers everyone.

(big, deep breath)

Everyone. Please, God. Come and bless us as we join together. Amen.

LIGHTS DOWN
CURTAINS

THAT'S A WRAP

Props

18 Chairs, 2 Tables, 1 Basket, 1 Bag

Basket, Bread (from LEFT, Tabitha)

Broom (from LEFT, Gerald)

Dishes (from LEFT, Harriet et al)

Cloth (from LEFT, Gerald et al)

Hat or Handkerchief (Ishmael)

Bag, Crown (from LEFT, Rosalyn)