

The king of Jerusalem
(ONLY LANGUAGE REMAINS)

A play by Gilad Evron

Translated from the Hebrew by Evan Fallenberg

Cast of characters:

Baldwin

Sibylla, his sister

Guy de Lusignan, her husband

Gaston, the loyal manservant

Marie, his wife

Reynald, Lord of Oultrejordain

A maidservant

Four menservants/soldiers

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1. In the Beginning

(Darkness. The sound of a baby crying. The crying stops and is replaced by noises made by a nursing baby, along with the murmur of a mother delighting in her infant. These sounds are followed by wind and distant shouting and the crowing of a rooster.

Light rises center stage on Baldwin sitting on a chair, his eyes shut. Three men dressed in cloaks that mask their faces grasp long poles. Gaston stands facing Baldwin. He signals the three men and they start barking like dogs. Baldwin opens his eyes. He tries to rise but the three men stop him, using their poles. He struggles wildly against them and they fight to put him back in his place. Baldwin has the bewildered gaze of a trapped animal with no understanding of what is happening. He closes his eyes. Gaston crows like a rooster. The three men bark like dogs. Baldwin opens his eyes, his gaze more lucid this time. He looks like someone fishing about in his mind, trying to understand what is going on around him. Gaston bows.)

Baldwin: I. Who am I?

Gaston: You are the king.

(Silence.)

Baldwin: Which king?

Gaston: Baldwin, King of Jerusalem.

(Silence.)

Baldwin: Are you making fun of me?

Gaston: No, sire.

(Silence.)

Baldwin: Where am I?

Gaston: In the palace of the kings of Jerusalem. You are ill, sire. They are your caretakers. They are ill, too, which is why they can care for you. There is no danger of infecting them. You are have leprosy, sire.

Baldwin: Is that a serious malady?

Gaston: It is a terrible malady. You will die of it.

(Silence.)

Baldwin: When?

Gaston: Only God knows. Your arms and legs will drop off and your brain will die.

Baldwin: I recall nothing....

Gaston: That is due to the disease .Each time you lose your memory I remind you of the past.

Baldwin: Does it happen often?

Gaston: Yes, sire. You lose your memory and I bring it back to you.

Baldwin: And who are you?

Gaston: I am Gaston, armor-bearer, manservant, any role you wish, sire. At your service, sire. You must wake up.

(Baldwin refers to the hooded men.)

Baldwin: They frighten me.

Gaston: They are your caretakers. On occasion, you try to break free, but this is forbidden, sire. They must restrain you.

Baldwin: What kind of king is he who must be restrained?

Gaston: A king who is ill; a king who forgets that he has a contagious disease.

(Silence.)

Baldwin: And now what?

Gaston: The decision is yours.

Baldwin: What did I do the other times?

Gaston: You sank into despair and I attempted to lift you out of it.

(The sound of a baby crying can be heard. Baldwin is gripped with fear.)

Gaston: That is only the sound of a baby, the son of your sister, Sibylla. He is crying because the Lady Sibylla has other, more important matters to attend to.

(Music can be heard.)

Gaston: She's full of life, your sister. Her fluttering gown, trills and frills. She is with her husband, Guy.

Baldwin: Guy?

Gaston: He has dazzling curls!

(The music fades into the sound of wind blowing. Baldwin is gripped with fear again.)

Gaston: That is the wind. The blowing wind, the movement of air as it passes through the cypress trees in the palace courtyard...

(A rooster crows in the distance. Gaston amplifies the crow with a crow of his own.)

Gaston: And that is the crowing of a rooster, a species of bird that does not fly and whose female – the chicken – lays eggs. Humans eat eggs. They eat chickens, too.

(He gestures to the light on the floor.)

Gaston: This light is from the sun setting yonder, in the west, beyond the hills of Jerusalem, into the sea - between the sea and the desert. This is your kingdom, sire.

Baldwin: Why do you raise my hopes, Gaston? Why have you woken me?

(Silence.)

Baldwin: Is this the first time I have asked that question?

Gaston: This is my role. I'm yours, sire. Shall you die, the big barons will step in. They have sharp beaks, red eyes, sure of themselves, just them, only them. Nothing will be left after them, sire. Only dust. They are already waiting outside. Prince Reynald, even Guy, not to mention your sister...

Baldwin: I want to leave, Gaston. I am already half gone.
Help me. I implore you.

(Gaston shakes his head. Baldwin gets up suddenly, reaching for the sheath of a sword next to the chair.)

Gaston: Stop him!

(Baldwin's legs can't hold him and he collapses to the floor. The three hooded servants encircle him so that he disappears from view.)

2. Sibylla and Guy, the first time – the structure of memory

(Light rises on Marie off to the side of the stage, as she stirs a large pot and speaks angrily to Gaston.)

Marie: I told you you should find some potbellied knight to serve, one who smiles at everyone – even one who limps. Five kids you’ve got, and you – who are you? Driving princes away from the doorstep! You fathead, getting yourself in trouble with the barons, offending priests. A disgrace. He could die any day now, and what will become of us? I’ve told you: make yourself small! Be a worm! Look at him.

Gaston: He can hear you.

Marie: He’s not with us anymore.

Gaston: He is. He hears what I say. I teach him. If they think he’s no longer with us they’ll toss us out. What do they care about some mindless heap of flesh? Good morning, sire!

(The hooded servants withdraw, exposing Baldwin. His legs dangle to the side at an odd angle.)

Gaston: Good morning!

(Gaston barks but Baldwin doesn’t react. Enter Sibylla and Guy. Marie withdraws to the side. Gaston bows to the two, his tone servile but his posture defiant. Sibylla is stunned.)

Sibylla: His legs...

Gaston: The disease, milady.

Sibylla: The eyes... Does he know who I am? Can he hear me?

Gaston: You must ascertain that for yourself.

Sibylla: Baldwin? My Baldwin? Can you hear me?

(Baldwin does not react.)

Sibylla: I have not visited you because I cannot bear to see you crumbling like this...

(Silence.)

Sibylla: I am Sibylla. Your sister... Your Sibylla.

Guy: It is futile. He cannot hear you.

Sibylla: Oh, but perhaps he can?

Guy: Do not humiliate yourself.

Sibylla: Humiliate?

Guy: It is undignified for you to grovel or blame yourself. And futile.

Sibylla: I see no indignity in addressing my own brother.

Guy: You are making an unseemly impression with that groveling tone of yours. Anyway, he does not hear you, that much is clear.

Sibylla: Groveling tone? Why don't you make an effort and try to rouse him? Once he enjoyed your singing very much. And you are an excellent dancer as well.

Guy: It is embarrassing.

Sibylla: Because of them?

(She gestures dismissively toward Gaston and Marie, but Guy points to Baldwin.)

Guy: Because he's no longer with us.

Sibylla: You are indebted to the man for your very position!
He was furious when I chose to marry you, but
despite his anger and shame he did as I wished and
agreed to let us marry. So sing for him, Guy. Sing
your gratitude. I want to hear you. Now!

(Guy hesitates, testing Sibylla's intentions, and decides that she is serious. He bows lightly before Baldwin, then he begins to sing.)

Guy: If this be not love, then what emotion is this flowing
through me? If it is, my good Lord, then why is
my soul tormented? If this be not love, then what
emotion is this flowing through me? If it is, my good
Lord, then why is my soul distraught?

(Guy stops singing and turns to Sibylla.)

Guy: I believe that the measure of my humiliation should
satisfy your needs, my dear.

(Sibylla turns sharply to Gaston.)

Sibylla: I have heard that Prince Reynald has come to
Jerusalem.

Guy : I have seen that lanky vassal Prince Raymond
slithering about outside as well.

Sibylla: How can my brother receive them? He is no
longer with us. He is an empty shell of a man. It
is heartbreaking. I must begin to mourn...Oh, my
Baldwin...

(Sibylla bows her head and appears to be crying.)

Baldwin: A handkerchief, Gaston.

(Gaston approaches Sibylla with a handkerchief in hand, while Sibylla regards her brother with astonishment.)

Baldwin: Your tears are unnecessary, Sibylla.

Sibylla: I am crying for myself. Because of you. . Why did you let me stand here babbling and believing you a living dead man? Why did you let Guy sing and prance about before you? You know me. You know who I am...

Baldwin: Gaston has told me.

Sibylla: What did he tell you?

Baldwin: He has told me about you. Who you are.

Sibylla: But you yourself do not know who I am? You do not remember how we played alone in the courtyard? How we tracked caravans of ants? Do you not remember?

Baldwin: And the wind blew through the cypress trees in the palace courtyard. And the crowing of roosters...

Sibylla: See here...do not mock me. And Guy? Do you remember him? We came to inquire after your health, to see that you are well. To pray for you.

Guy: I am pleased to find you in full possession of your faculties, my lordship.

Baldwin: In full possession of my faculties? Guy, are you a man of courage?

Guy: Yes, I believe I am, and there is proof of it if my friends can be trusted. I came to the Holy Land as a loyal crusader, to sacrifice my soul in the name of the cross against the Moslem infidels.

Baldwin: You love frills and ornamentation, don't you?

Guy: I believe that that which can should be expressed beautifully.

Baldwin: You are a handsome man as well. Those curls...those curls...

Guy: That which nature grants us naturally should be no source of pride. In my opinion, that which is fashioned and wrought is worthy of praise, though I will not deny that my form brings me satisfaction.

Baldwin: It is only natural. Are you willing to demonstrate your courage and stab me here, in the neck? Here, right here. Slit this vein.

Sibylla: Baldwin, what nonsense!

Baldwin: That way you will shorten the time.

Guy: The time to what, sire?

Baldwin: To the days of your joyous rule. When I will be no longer. Why wait? Unsheathe your sword, Guy. No man will condemn you.

Sibylla: You are surrounded by well-wishers who desire to make your life more agreeable. Here, the barons have come to you...

Baldwin: Good Sibylla, do not masquerade as an imbecile! The barons have gathered to ascertain whether, as you said, I have become an empty shell of a man. I wish to confirm officially that indeed I have. Take a knife, Guy, and pierce this shell. Help me. Cut, I say, cut. Help me.

Sibylla: I want you to live, Baldwin.

Baldwin: If you do not have the courage to kill, then how will you rule? How will you find the authority to murder if you cannot bloody your hands?

(Baldwin slams his head into the chair. A hooded servant holds his face from behind and controls his movements. Sibylla and Guy are taken aback by the sight and they hurry out. Gaston places himself in front of Baldwin who gazes straight ahead. He is cautious, because he does not know how to interpret Baldwin's gaze. A hooded servant holding a plate of food, enters. She pulls away her hood and appears as a young woman.)

Gaston: Food, sire. Food!

(He opens his mouth like a mother coaxing her infant in order to get Baldwin to open his own for the maidservant. Baldwin remains impassive.)

Gaston: Mmmmm, your majesty, mmmmm. We shall not give up. We won't let you die. If not for your sake, then for ours. All right, sire? Mmmmm!

(Baldwin's eyes close. He does not react. Mary at the side rubs fingers and thumb. Gaston turns to her, and hands her a few coins. She gestures impatiently towards Baldwin.)

Marie: What a baby! Why are you stuck with him? You pompous fool!

(Marie leaves. Gaston tries again to evoke a reaction from Baldwin. He barks, he crows like a rooster, but with no results. The maidservant and another hooded servant begin binding Baldwin's legs, giving the impression that his legs are being removed from his body. The process is visible to all until the servants finish their work and tighten the straps that bind Baldwin's body to the chair.)

3. Baldwin's secret transition from nothing to a little

(A legless Baldwin is strapped to the chair, his eyes are shut. The hooded maidservant is trying to feed him once again, but his mouth remains clamped shut.)

Gaston: Faster, faster...

(The maidservant shrugs.)

Gaston: The barons are waiting outside. Make him eat! He must wake up. Quickly!

(Baldwin's mouth remains closed. The maidservant laughs at Baldwin's refusal to eat.)

Gaston: Don't give up! Keep at it! He must eat!

(From outside comes the sound of a ball being rolled. Baldwin opens his eyes.)

Baldwin: I just ate.

Gaston: That was another day, sire.

Baldwin: Who are you?

Gaston: I am Gaston.

Baldwin: What are you?

(Silence.)

Gaston: People are waiting for you outside.

Baldwin: **(To the maidservant)** Who are you?

Gaston: She is your maidservant.

Baldwin: Laughter, look at that. She's laughing.

Gaston: Life amuses her, sire. How nice that life can still amuse.

(Baldwin looks at his legs.)

Baldwin: My legs...

Gaston: Your disease, sire.

(The wind blows, and a rooster can be heard crowing from afar.)

Baldwin: Wind. Eggs...right? I'm good at this! And that?
What is that noise?

(He hears the sound of an object being bounced on a hard surface.)

Gaston: Prince Reynald, Lord of Oultrejordain, awaits permission to enter, your majesty. In the meantime, he is playing ball with members of his entourage and with Monsieur Guy. He is a man of action. That is his ball rolling around the paved courtyard.

Baldwin: Tock, tock, tock **(in imitation of the sound of the ball rolling).**

Gaston: It is not advisable to keep him waiting.

Baldwin: Is he frightening?

Gaston: Not to a man like you.

Baldwin: Send him away.

Gaston: You invited him.

Baldwin: I did not. You invited him.

Gaston: In your name, sire.

Baldwin: I am the king. Send him away.

Gaston: If you do not receive him the consequences will be disastrous.

Baldwin: What am I supposed to say? What do you want me to say to him, Gaston?

Gaston: Whatever you choose, sire.

Baldwin: Whatever I choose? Why did you even invite him?

Gaston: You invited him. You wished to find out what he is building in the stables of his fortress in Kerak, on the other side of the Jordan River.

Baldwin: What is he building there?

Gaston: No one knows. He will speak and you will make your position clear.

Baldwin: I have no position.

Gaston: You will listen and you will choose one, sire.

Baldwin: What does it mean to choose a position? To choose! Do I choose anything?!

(Silence.)

Gaston: In the past you did. In general you disapproved of his ways, but whenever he was attacked by the Moslems you rushed to his side to defend him.

Baldwin: I do not find him very impressive. He seems not to be a grand personage.

Gaston: Prince Reynald?

Baldwin: This Baldwin. Me. Me! He is fickle. Nothing special. Tock, tock, tock.

Gaston: You need not...

Baldwin: Need not what?

Gaston: Disguise the fact that your memory has returned, sire

Baldwin: I remember nothing!

(Gaston calls outside.)

Gaston: Bring the prince of Oultrejordain to the king.

4. Baldwin becomes a king. Reynald for the first time, and the great journey

(Enter Reynald of Châtillon dressed in Middle Eastern opulence. He is followed into the room by an armored soldier carrying a ball wrapped in cloth and a bolt of cloth affixed to the top of a long pole. Reynald makes a sweeping bow before Baldwin.)

Reynald: Greetings and prayers to the king!

(Baldwin does not answer. Reynald looks to Gaston.)

Reynald: Can he hear me?

Gaston: His hearing comes and goes. Comme si, comme ca.

Reynald: Greetings!

(Baldwin does not react.)

Reynald: So what do we do now?... You've grown fatter, Gaston. You're thick. Enjoying the good life of the royal court, eh? The gatekeeper!

Gaston: I fulfill my duties.

Reynald: You were a warrior, Gaston, and now you wipe the chin of this half-man.

Gaston: I have no cause for complaint.

Reynald: You were a coward. And a liar and a chatterbox. But you were a lot of fun. I've missed you. For a while, I even entertained the idea of bringing you back to me.

Gaston: The king needs me.

Reynald: You've become a perfect idler, a wastrel... But you're always there to collect on payday. You've fathered too many children. How many do you have already – twenty?

Gaston: Five remain.

Reynald: All of them from that fat wife of yours? Here we have it: the faithful husband. But a man cannot make do merely with caring for a leper... he's looking at me. Can he see?

Baldwin: I hear you, seigneur.

(Reynald catches himself. His countenance is reserved, and he bows with precision.)

Reynald: Your highness! A myriad of blessings be upon you! Best wishes for your speedy recovery, et cetera, et cetera.

Baldwin: The clothing.

Reynald: The clothing?

Baldwin: Your clothing. An overture.

Reynald: Sir?

Baldwin: Trills and frills, much ado about nothing. The flavor of nutmeg. Nice, eh? Original design, isn't it? Nutmeg! Turn around, let us have a look.

(Reynald gets the impression that Baldwin is mocking him and is infuriated.)

Reynald: I am this land. I am this earth, the rocks. I am the people.

Baldwin: Why are you so angry? Your clothes are beautiful. That's all I was saying.

Reynald: I am here at the king's request. My ass is still sore from the ride.

Baldwin: You came quickly to see whether I was already dead, eh?

(Again, Reynald looks about him as if in search of an explanation for the king's behavior. Baldwin raises his chin to expose his neck.)

Baldwin: Do you see the vein throbbing here...?

Gaston: Sire!

Baldwin: No one will help me. They only vex me!

Reynald: A thick vein, a strong vein. A sharp eye. You are still with us, sir. I am pleased!

Baldwin: Still with us? Most of the time I find myself completely engulfed in a fog out of which I must burst forth only to recognize with horror that I am here, it is I, this nauseating scrap of flesh, and the place in which I find myself is alien to me and frightening and I must learn it, identify it, and believe that it exists as Gaston tells me it does. He forces me to struggle, to communicate with people. I ask you, seigneur, what reason is there to continue?

(Silence.)

Reynald: Are you asking me? Is that a question?

Baldwin: Yes, seigneur.

Reynald: Because there is no man worthy of replacing you, sir.

Baldwin: Any man will be better than I.

Reynald: Your heirs? Shall we prepare them? How about Prince Raymond of Tiberias, that pompous ass? Or your sister and her husband, Guy? Ashes in the wind. No, this land cannot remain without a shepherd, sire. Even without a change in the throne, your disease is stirring things up. Do not give in.

Baldwin: What do I care? “The land!” “Shepherd!” I asked you about me. Me! Why, seigneur? Why continue? I have not received an answer.

(Silence.)

Reynald: Are you testing me, your highness?

Baldwin: I am fighting here, seigneur. For my own life!

(Silence.)

Reynald: Rejoice, sire. Don’t allow yourself to sink into the stupidity of self-pity. Look at me – you will have no heirs to continue after you. Nor will I, my seed is frozen. Rejoice, because you are now free to reach the essence. You have no continuation. Most people hope their children will accomplish what they were too lazy to. Like him... **(He points to Gaston.)** Not us. We do not allow ourselves to waste time. It would be impossible to sum us up in a single sentence. Not you, sire. Rejoice. Forget your rotting body and do. Dig deep into yourself and act. Your role is you. What is that skin stretched so taut across your body, and those muscles in which there is not even the memory of a movement? This feeble skeleton – what is it compared to you? Become your own spirit, create your own role. Your imagination. That which lies before Jerusalem, lies before you!

(All the while, his soldier tosses the ball onto the floor. He bends down and unknots the cloth in which the ball is wrapped until the contents are visible. It is the head of a man. Gaston, down stage and the young maidservant, off to the side, are taken aback and flinch.)

Reynald: The head of the Saracen Guard of the sultan’s caravan.

Baldwin: Here is the tock, tock, tock.

Reynald: They walk around beneath my fortress as though the land already belonged to them. That is what our agreements with them have come to. They grow stronger, their eyes filled with cunning, waiting in their large, empty expanses for Saladin to summon them from Egypt and Syria. They will rid the land of us and obliterate us by the tens of thousands, and what shall we do to stop them?

Baldwin: Tock, tock, tock.

Reynald: Come with me, little king. Let's depart on that longest journey of them all, to the battle that will put to rest the question of the sultan. Come. Leave behind that ridiculous shell of yours, that cursed body. Isn't that what you want? Come to me. Come. Come and I will show you...

(He steps up to Baldwin and quite simply begins removing the straps on the harness that hold him firm in his chair. Gaston and the hooded guard react. The guard rings the bell furiously. Reynald's soldier tugs at a string holding the roll of cloth at the top of the crucifix and unfurls a map that reaches to the floor.)

Reynald: What do I have to fear? Nothing will infect me with this disease. I am too swift. I'm too terrible. Gaston, why do you instill fear and dread? Have you forgotten who I am? **(Turning to Baldwin.)** How do you wish to ride? On my back?

Baldwin: Yes, on your back.

(Reynald lifts Baldwin and carries him on his back. Baldwin's flowing garment covers his missing legs. Reynald gestures to the map hanging from the crucifix.)

Reynald: To the floor!

(The soldier drops the map to the floor. Reynald steps onto it.)

Reynald: I am your legs. A king needs to set foot on his land.
This is your realm.

(The soldier continues unrolling the map and it quickly becomes clear that it is far larger than it originally seemed to be. The soldier lifts the cloth during the extensive description in order to create a visual world that serves as an example for what is being described.)

Reynald: And here is my realm, above the Dead Sea. My fortress, the immense fortress of Kerak. Do you remember those walls, your highness?

Baldwin: The walls? Yes.

(The soldier holding the pole taps the floor with it.)

Reynald: Let us enter the great stables. What a ruckus! What an uproar! Builders from Germany, carpenters from France, tailors from Burgundy, specialists from Venice, ropemakers from...

(The soldier continues to tap the floor.)

Reynald: The seigneur is in the grip of madness! What is he doing? What is he building there? Are those ships? In the name of the crucified one, what is the use of ships in the middle of the desert? What do ships of war have to do with the deadened sea below? What kind of mad fantasy is this?

(The soldier pantomimes an uproar on the stage.)

Reynald: Embrace me, Baldwin, embrace me. Let's bring the camels in to The stables and load them with parts of the ships.... Where to? Where? No one knows. Only you and I. Lo, the caravan descends to the southern sea, the Red Sea, their sea – the Arab Mohammedans

– and the planks of our ships slide about. Back and forth, back and forth. Whee! Whee! Whee! Just like you, Baldwin. I am your camel. And now the caravan reaches the sea, and not a soul is on the shore, only the blue sea. And the sun sparkles. That is where we assemble the ships of war.

(The soldiers waves pole on which the cloth is wound, giving the feeling of huge billowing sails.)

Reynald: And there, the warriors embark, with Gaston alongside. Why not? We'll shake the idleness out of him, thin him down, wake him up. They will be girded with their armor and their murderous rage and their wild passion for this expanse of land. Flooded with happiness. O Little King, what joy!

(Gaston, on the periphery, expresses worry.)

Gaston: I am not...I am not...!

Reynald: Into the water, five ships! Five monsters lapping at the waves.

(The soldier produces the sound of waves with the cloth and his mouth.)

Reynald: And here, from the beaches, you can see only the dazzling sun on the water, only the sun exploding on the soldiers' armor and blinding all. They will disembark at every port they come to, and they will burn them all to the ground. They will plunder every ship they encounter and hurl its men into the cold sea, drowning them in the clear water. I have seen it! Cold! Different! Sail with me, Baldwin, here, we have set sail. But do not be misled: all this is merely a diversion, for the truth is over there...look there, to that place...

(On cue, the soldier moves the cloth and place it on the floor, where it forms a geographical surface in the middle of which the severed head pokes out darkly.)

Reynald: What do you see, my child. A crumbling prince. A hallucination? In the hills, not far from the seashore – a day’s ride – you will find the beating heart of Saladin, but that heart is no heart at all. It is an enormous black stone; the holy stone of the city of Mecca to which they pray and make pilgrimage and mash their brows, and lo, our own Gaston and the warriors will encircle it, but instead of bending their knees in prayer they will raze the place to the ground!

(Reynald encircles the severed head with Baldwin on his back, while Gaston, visibly upset, reacts from the side.)

Gaston: I am not there. How could I be? I have work here. And then there’s Marie, and the children...

Reynald: And they demolish the great mosque and spread salt on the ground. Carthage, too, was razed! And Hannibal died! And Saladin, even if he is in Damascus or Cairo, will vanish like a light morning wind. For what is his power, my king? What is his title? Protector and preserver of the holy places! If we strike here, at the beating heart, if we besiege the city and burn the stone, we shall destroy his status. He will no longer be able to unite the Moslems against us. For what could such a wretched man demand, a man who failed to protect the holiest of holy sites? In that city, we shall be victorious. Allah himself will give up.

(All at once he lets Baldwin slip from his back onto the floor, and legless Baldwin leans on his arms so as not to fall. Silence.)

Reynald: You are silent, little king! Very good.

Baldwin: Tock, tock, tock.

Reynald: Sir?

Baldwin: I was so happy just now. You embraced me. We set sail. What a blue sea, Reynald, eh?

Reynald: We shall stir up the waves on every shore.

Baldwin: What a shrewd heart you have, you blaze with excitement...the desert, so much sand, eh? But there's no point in bringing Gaston along. He's grown so fat. Look at him. And the sea makes him ill.

Gaston: My stomach...the heat...

Baldwin: He will retch.

Reynald: Fine. He can stay back and sip his soup.

Baldwin: And why five ships? Won't three suffice? Perhaps two? So much wood. And the 'black stone' and the 'beating heart' – don't you think we can cut back on some of the images?

(Silence.)

Reynald: I hear you!

Baldwin: Why not build something else? A camel station beneath your fortress. The caravans passing through would pay a little tax...

Reynald: The thoughts of a fly on a dungheap, blind faith that all will be well. All will be well! And the moon will smile on the earth. You want to stand before the sultan with that kind of nonsense?

(Baldwin can no longer support himself on his hands and he falls on his side, near the severed head.)

Reynald: The king is no longer in full possession of his faculties!

Gaston: Why do you say that? He, he will sit up in just a moment. He'll come back. He is still with us!

(An hooded guard rushes to his side. He carries him back to his chair. He puts the harness on him, which holds him in place.)

Baldwin: I hear you, Prince Reynald, Lord of Oultrejordain. Come close, prince, close, close...

(Reynald approaches while Baldwin is still being strapped into his chair.)

Baldwin: I implore you, Reynald, in the name of my love for you – this brash idea you have dreamed up, this calamity you will bring down upon us. I implore you, you must desist. If you attack Mecca now, the Mohammedans will not be able to let it pass. Leave eternity to God. When you penetrate Mecca you penetrate their eternity, and they will be obliged to penetrate ours in return. It is impossible to live that way. For me, Reynald, uproot this weed of your wondrous imagination. I implore you...

Reynald: He who is guided by fear can never be in full possession of his faculties...

Baldwin: Silence! What insolence! Even from within my putrefaction I fought throughout this land against the Saracens. I saved your own life! Come here. Come, come...

Reynald: I shall return to my land, sir.

Baldwin: You speak of joy, but you are dying within it. Perhaps you should have fathered children. Why didn't you, Reynald? You would have looked at them and learned something about the laziness of time. You would have played in the sand instead of conquering it.

Reynald: I don't have to listen to those who would hold me back

Baldwin: My Reynald, look at your clothes – at these wondrous robes you have concocted for yourself from memories of Europe and the elaborate, flamboyant Orient. Someone can mistaken you for a Muslim. You are turning against yourself.

Reynald: Air!

Baldwin: Stop! Listen to me, Reynald!

Reynald: There are those who act and those who chatter and brush dust from their clothes at the side of the road.
Air!

Baldwin: I forbid you to leave your territories and attack the Sultan!

Reynald: Your highness is lord here in Jerusalem, and I in Kerak, in Oultrejordain. Air! Air!!

(Reynald turns and leaves swiftly, his soldier at his heels. Baldwin remains, tense, in place, then relaxes and slips from his chair, held only by the harness and straps. Gaston returns to center stage.)

Baldwin: Let him destroy everything. Soon my arms will be gone as well. I have desire, but no strength...

Gaston: I thank you, sire. Had you not intervened I might already have been on a ship at sea.

Baldwin: I looked deep into his eyes. I smelled his breath. This is a man alive, full of limitless passion, longing to act, one who believes wholeheartedly. He gives me strength... I enjoyed myself so much, Gaston... You must tell about me. You must tell how I stood up to him. Gaston.

Gaston: I am no writer...

Baldwin: You will tell, so they will know. Write about me!

Gaston: But sire...

Baldwin: He said you were a liar and an idler.

Gaston: Vulgar slander!

Baldwin: But a liar? That's good. That way you will know how to exaggerate and add details when you tell about me. A writer is a liar... Summon Sibylla. Now. Now.

(Exit Gaston. Baldwin's body goes limp, like someone no longer being watched – even by Gaston. The hooded maidservant enters, picks up a long piece of cloth and begins wrapping Baldwin's hands in them. A second hooded guard helps her. At the same time another hooded guard gathers the cloth that served as Reynald's map and battle plan.)

5. Sibylla and Baldwin for the second time.

Variations on the theme of love.

(Enter Sibylla. Baldwin is sitting limply, the lengths of cloth dangling from his hands to the floor. Gaston enters and places a chair in the room. Sibylla seats herself. Baldwin gazes at her at length. His silence causes Sibylla discomfort. Guy enters side stage. Baldwin does not notice him.)

Baldwin: My Sibylla.

Sibylla: I thought you did not recognize...

Baldwin: I kiss you. I kiss your brow, that wrinkle of embitterment you have, your curls.

Sibylla: You frighten me, Baldwin. I look at you and it seems I am gazing at my own skeleton.

Baldwin: But I hear that you've been dancing. That you are happy. Sometimes I can hear the music. (He tries to hum the music.) That is good, the heart dances. Even I still have a few pleasures: the smell of fresh rain. The drip-drip-drip of drops in the drain spouts. Drip-drip-drip. But you must prepare yourself, my Sibylla. You have a role to fulfill when I am gone, for I will not be of this world much longer.

(Sibylla shakes her head as one who refuses to accept matters.)

Baldwin: How, for example, will you and Guy stand up to the Lord of Oultrejordain? He will wage a major war. Think of your son in the world of Reynald. How will you stand up to him? Tell me, Sibylla.

(Sibylla is tensed and gestures Guy to approach. Baldwin notices him.)

Baldwin: I didn't call for him!

Sibylla: Why speak of calamity and war? Lord of Oultrejordain and Guy played ball in the courtyard. They were just amusing themselves.

Baldwin: I heard them. Tock, tock, tock. Sibylla dear, did you have a look at the balls Reynald used for the game? Did you peek under the wrappings?

Sibylla: Prince Reynald admires Guy deeply. They have an understanding between them.

Baldwin: But I do not admire him, my Sibylla.

Sibylla: Reynald?

(Silence)

Baldwin: No. The Lord... Guy!... Well, I didn't want him here! He cannot stand up to Reynald. He will not stop him...

Sibylla: Why stop him?

Baldwin: Nor will he have the wisdom to cool the Moslems' passion when they are hot for revenge. This man, Reynald, is red from blood!

Sibylla: What are you talking about, Baldwin?

Baldwin: You must divorce him, my dear Sybilla.

Sibylla: Divorce Guy?

Baldwin: We shall find a new candidate worthy of this place. You will remarry.

Sibylla: But Guy is my husband.

Baldwin: I never wanted him.

Sibylla: He was my choice.

Baldwin: You forced him upon me and I conceded, out of weakness. I hoped the man would grow. And why upset you? I saw how he held sway over you.

Sibylla: No one holds sway over me.

Baldwin: Why not? It's quite natural. His long beautiful hair...why not? The muscles of his backside intoxicated you. Your nostrils quivered.

Sibylla: Do not make me into a mare in heat!

Guy: I prefer to relate this rudeness of yours to your sickness, sire. The tendency to scorn a person for his appearance is intolerable when he is a cripple... or sick with leprosy. But it is intolerable as well when directed upon one who was blessed by nature with good appearances as I was. I'm neither a fool nor devoid of emotions. On behalf of my wife and of myself, I must demand an apology, sire.

Baldwin: This rudeness is mine. Mine. I beg your forgiveness. But what really do you know about this world, Guy? What does your honor understand beyond your honor? This place doesn't need a man whose main quality is to charm people and evoke love. Forgive me, but there is no other way, my Sybilla.

Sibylla: I am not yours! What effrontery! And what did you think? That I would agree? I. I prefer the recklessness of my own heart to the calculations of yours.

Baldwin: None of this should be taken personally...

Sibylla: Everything is personal, just like your rotting body. It is I who will have to part my legs and let in your new choice. ‘Worthy!’ You have used my love for you like a rag!

(She and Guy flees. Gaston remains in the shadows. Silence.)

Baldwin: ‘Rag’. What images rage brings forth! Did you hear her, Gaston? Now I’ll have to be ruthless, mean. There will be tears.

Gaston: Monsieur Guy does have beautiful hair.

Baldwin: The rubbing of flesh, the mingling of tongues. That lust leads her like an animal in heat... as it led me. And me. But with me, very little has remained other than a confused memory. Memories of passion. You should have made up more memories.

Gaston: My loyalty was to the truth, sire...

(Baldwin suddenly silences Gaston by crowing like a rooster.)

Baldwin: You have left me with the ‘truth’? Self pity, Gaston? Pissing! I need to piss! Go to prepare the child. Now it’s the child’s turn.

(Gaston exits)

6. Body's needs.

(The maidservant enters holding a basin. She kneels before Baldwin, untying the knots of his trousers, raising the cloth covering his private parts. First comes the sound of urine spraying in the basin. He finishes and she removes the basin.)

Baldwin: Remove your hood.

(The maidservant removes the cover from her head. Baldwin gazes at her beautiful face at length. She reaches under the clothing and masturbates him. Baldwin closes his eyes. When she finishes she puts his clothing back in place. Baldwin opens his eyes and looks at her, while she wipes his perspired face.)

Baldwin: There is not enough light? The air is thick, or is that my eyes? Your eyes, only the translucent spark in them still. That beauty is about to disappear.

(He kisses her forehead with deep gratitude. She turns and ties his hands backward. At the same time a cappella singing can be heard.)

7. What have God and a small child to do with one another?

(Enter Gaston.)

Gaston: She is here.

(Enter Sibylla. In a state of agitation.)

Sibylla: My son. They have taken my son.

Baldwin: I took him.

Sibylla: You?

Baldwin: Yes, I.

Sibylla: Why has he been taken? Is he here? What is being done with my son?

Baldwin: Those are matters between God and me.

Sibylla: What has God to do with my child? Is he ill?

Baldwin: Calm yourself. He is in good health.

Sibylla: He was taken from his room. Soldiers filled the corridor. Guy. I also can't find Guy...

(The music swells. Gaston kneels.)

Sibylla: What is that? Why did he make that sign?

Baldwin: Calm yourself, Sibylla.

Sibylla: Have you made him heir to your crown? Is that what this ceremony is? Why the child? Guy and I are the heirs.

Baldwin: Really...

Sibylla: What harm have I done you? What does the child have that I do not? Am I evil? Evil?

Baldwin: Not evil. Good.

Sibylla: You are my brother. At night? Behind my back?
Why? Stop them!

Baldwin: My dear Sibylla, there is no person I love more than
you...

Sibylla: How could kinship beget such hatred?

Baldwin: Not hatred, my dearest Sibylla...

Sibylla: You hate the thought that you cannot control me,
that after your death I will behave according to my
own will.

Baldwin: My Sibylla...

Sibylla: Mine! Mine! Because this is what torments you.
That I am not yours...

Baldwin: This is futile...

Sibylla: Because life will continue when you've gone and
you have no control over it. Because I refuse to be a
puppet whose strings are pulled by you from the grave.

*(Baldwin moves his head and grunts. The hooded maidservant enters in
a rush to wipe his face, but Baldwin holds her at bay with a sharp move
of the head.)*

Baldwin: Nothing is for me anymore. Me? My will?! Where
is Sibylla? I do not see you. I do not...

Gaston: Sire?

Baldwin: My will?! May this land burn to shadow and ash, let
this world end with me! End! But I am lifted from my
bed, my mouth is wiped, I am strapped to this chair,
and this chair and I have become one! I have a role
to fill, and my role dictates that you and Guy shall

not rule. You are irresponsible and your husband is a puppy without a tail! What will the crown do for you? Will it curl your locks more? Play a tune at a ball? Grant you good judgment, discretion? It is all an amusement. Meaningless, violent, blind glee. You did not wish to divorce him, that empty vessel! Fine. You shall not be king and queen.

(The singing comes to a conclusion. Sibylla is stunned by Baldwin's attack.)

Sibylla: Very well...then I shall be only a mother...I shall make do with being a mother. I will embrace my son and take him back when the prayers have finished. There, they are finishing. He will be brought to me and we shall go.

(A menservant signals Gaston.)

Gaston: The child is ready.

Baldwin: Very good. Take him.

Sibylla: Now what? What? The child. Give me my son.

Baldwin: He is no longer here.

Sibylla: My son! Where have they taken him? Bring back my son!

(She tries to pass but Gaston stands in the way.)

Sibylla: Baldwin...Baldwin? Let me pass! Why are you...?

Baldwin: Curse me, Sibylla. Do not pity me.

Sibylla: Where has he been taken?

Baldwin: Very far away.

Sibylla: Away from me? From me? How could...?

Baldwin: To a place where he will receive an education fit for a ruler.

Sibylla: From me?

Baldwin: Do not worry. He will be raised and trained and educated. The day will come when you will be proud of him.

Sibylla: When may I visit him?

Baldwin: You may not.

Sibylla: Never...?

Baldwin: When I die, the regent of the kingdom, whoever I'll nominate, he will decide.

Sibylla: You cannot stop me, Baldwin. This very evening I shall set out in his tracks.

Baldwin: Sibylla.

Sibylla: To every place he is brought, I shall go. Barefoot, I shall go. beaten and cursed, I shall go after him.

Baldwin: My Sibylla, have mercy on us both. Desist.

Sibylla: Never.

Baldwin: How dare you?! How, suddenly, have you turned into a loyal mother? And barefoot, no less! The child was nursed for you! His cries were muffled so as not to disturb you! He was carried in perfumed arms so that you might plant your lips on him! You do not even know him! We two both know how children are treated in this place. We are those children!

Sibylla: I shall not desist.

Baldwin: Very well. Guard! Detain her. Lock her in her chambers! I detained Guy. Her as well.

(Sibylla is removed forcefully from the room.)

Sibylla: You have taken him from me so that he will be yours! Yours! Because you have none of your own! You have none and never will have any! You stink of rotting flesh.

(Baldwin and Gaston remain alone. Silence.)

Baldwin: Are you here?

Gaston: I am, sire.

(Silence.)

Baldwin: I cannot see, Gaston. I could not see her... My eyes...and I so wished to embrace her! Stupid girl. There is something of her mother's wickedness in her.

(Gaston has nearly receded into the darkness.)

Baldwin: I admit it: I enjoyed myself, I enjoyed battering her. I enjoyed the rage... Well, there are some things more important than the both of us... Do you hear me at all? Are you there...?

(Gaston disappears completely in the darkness. Only Baldwin's face is illuminated.)

Gaston: Yes, sire.

Baldwin: Maybe I just got carried away by words, each word resting on the back of the one before. Words – they are all that's left to me. Words still inflame me,

(His face is engulfed in total darkness.)

8. Metamorphosis

(At the side of the stage Marie quickly places five small bundles on the floor. Gaston enters, adjusting and his clothes as one who has just awoken. He does not understand the meaning of Marie's energetic actions. She reacts.)

Marie: Let me see your sandals. Give me your foot, show me.

Gaston: Are these bundles for a journey?

Marie: They are for the children. We've waited too long...
the sole of your sandal won't hold out...

Gaston: I just woke up. Or maybe I didn't...

Marie: You can pinch yourself. Me, I feel the pain even in my dreams. How many asses can we take from the stables? Your word must still be worth something there. Just make sure we don't get one that bites the riders' feet, because the children will be riding, too.

Gaston: What are you doing, Marie?

Marie: I am taking action. Unlike you, who sleeps.

Gaston: It's still night. Steam is rising from the walls.

Marie: Have you heard nothing? Who would have believed it? The gatekeeper has become as blind as his master.

Gaston: Marie!

Marie: Lady Sibylla's chambers. Master-husband Guy burst in with his golden-haired escorts, the ones he brought with him from France, and threw out the guards, nabbed her ladyship and left Jerusalem on horseback. I've heard they're galloping down to Ascalon. Where is Ascalon? Who on earth knows...? And

in the stables people say that your lunatic prince, Reynald, is done with. Finished. All were killed facing Mecca. Their skulls stuck on lances. Where is Mecca? Who on earth knows...?

(Gaston moves about silently. Marie follows after him.)

Marie: I know a few things about this land, and this is a sign that a page has turned in its book, don't you think? Why do you say nothing? If Lady Sibylla, his own sister, does not heed his command – in the same house, on the other side of the wall, rolling out of here with her curly-haired husband as if it was all a game, an early morning joke – then who will heed him anymore? Who among the great barons will kneel before him? Anyway, he is barely there at all.

(She points to the bundles she has prepared.)

Marie: That's what we need - asses. Asses, Gaston. Even just a single ass! The time has come to move on.

(Enter hooded guard wheeling a cart with Baldwin inside. Baldwin is swathed in cloth like a mummy, only his head sticking out. The guard sets the cart to rest.)

Baldwin: Gaston?

Gaston: My wife, Marie, is here too, sire... Your face is merry.

Baldwin: My mood, too, strangely enough. I expected Mademoiselle Melancholy to pay me a visit, but I am completely clearheaded. Very nearly happy. Happy. Imagine.

Gaston: You should have sent someone to wake me, sir. Prince Reynald is dead...

Baldwin: Reynald? He is back. He alone. He succeeded to cross the desert. This savage ignited the Sultan. What a terrible and admirable man, Gaston.

Gaston: Yes, sire.

Baldwin: I have already ordered him and all the barons to descend to Ascalon, to line up outside the walls and lay siege to the city.

Gaston: Will he come? Bother himself?

Baldwin: I shall bother myself so they shall, too. He will too.

Gaston: In your condition...

Baldwin: My condition is in excellent condition! For she has rebelled, my sister! She and that husband of hers! The sultan must not see us sinking our teeth into one another like wild beasts! Are you listening, Gaston?

Gaston: I'm here, sire.

Baldwin: My heir, the child, Sibylla's son, is in the court of Monsieur Ibelin. Tonight, after Sibylla disappearance and Reynald's reappearance the hunt began: the barons may report in Ascalon but they will send murderers to butcher the child...

Gaston: I am having trouble following you, sire.

Galdwin: Poor Gaston. How could you remind me who I am with that lack of imagination of yours? You'll understand. You shall see... but for the time being I am unable to protect him there. In any event he is too young and delicate. I would ask that you set out to protect him... You were a soldier with Prince Reynald. An officer!

Gaston: I was.

Baldwin: I will give you soldiers and horsemen, I will send word to Monsieur Ibelin and he will be most happy to host you. You will assist him in erecting a wall around the boy.

(Enter soldier with a suit of armor. He holds it up as though asking Gaston to admire it, or even put it on.)

Baldwin: If I could, I would kiss you, Gaston, like the friend I never had... Devotion worthy of tears of gratitude...

Marie: Oh, tears that positively burn!

Gaston: Marie!

(Gaston allows the soldier to bring the armor to his breast. He fingers it.)

Marie: Oh sire, what are you bringing down upon us? We are simple people...

Baldwin: Let go of that fairy tale of the simple man, the little man. Little! I detest the simple, the little!

Gaston: She...forgive her...

Marie: Why should he go? Its been years since he was an officer. He is fat! I say – check and see if the asses are tied up in the stables! Run between the drops, make yourself scarce. I say – scarce!

Gaston: How dare you, to his face!

Baldwin: Why not? She sees what everyone sees. What is left of my title? It is as feeble as my body. I, too, ask why take action. If not for me, then for whom? That child there? That trembling little leaf surrounded by snakes? Help me, Madame. To stop the oncoming clash against the Sultan? I do not know. I will not be

here. I am very nearly gone. Perhaps for yourself?
For your children?

Marie: It is for my children that I say: dribble spittle on your chin, stick a hump on your back, cross your eyes, act crazy as a loon. Make yourself scarce, I say.

Baldwin: You must choose, Gaston. People must choose. I am tired. Now I am finished...

(The hooded guard removes him from the room. Marie notices how Gaston's appearance has changed since donning the armor.)

Marie: Oh, what a cunning man, what a snakelike soul! And you're still getting aroused from that armor!

Gaston: Big mouth. Even in front of the king you couldn't control yourself?

(Silence.)

Marie: I'm overwhelmed, choked. Better I shouldn't speak!

(Silence.)

Gaston: I'm sorry. I heard you the two of you, stunned that I have no opinion of my own, waiting to see who will win this match. I have become a complete fool, Marie...

Marie: I would be doubly foolish if I told you to come with me and then you felt like the exhausted servant of the family that has sprouted around you, hiring out your services for pennies, traipsing about between roads and dirt and masters you do not honor. I can see the empty look on your face. I won't say another word. I have said it all. Enough!

(She departs. The lighting changes. The soldier returns and aids Gaston as he tightens the armor.)

9. A cool night's death

(Gaston finishes donning the armor with the help of the soldier. The soldier hands him a sword and leaves the stage. Sound of water dripping from a fountain is heard. A dark figure sits at the side of the stage. Stifled laughter is heard. It is Reynald.)

Reynald: Tock, tock, tock...

(Reynald's face turns and is caught by the light.)

Gaston: His lordship is at the court of Ibelin?

Reynald: Ah, the clarity of night. The sweetness of dates. The air is cool.

Gaston: That's quite far from your fortress at Kerak.

Reynald: And you? I saw the horsemen at the entrance. I thought the great man himself was here, but alas, it is only his armor-bearer.

(Silence.)

Reynald: Well, Gaston, old friend. You aren't going to tell me why this place merits a representative of the king?

Gaston: I do what is expected of me.

Reynald: Your secrecy breeds suspicion. But everything is out in the open, isn't it Gaston? Allow me to make a guess, in wary secrecy: Baldwin sent you to protect his young scion, to guard his short innocent life in this sleepy estate.

Gaston: Why 'short,' sir?

Reynald: Why indeed?

Gaston: I am here and the boy is well-protected in the inner chambers.

Reynald: Too late.

Gaston: Not at all.

Reynald: But the air is cold and there are icicles in the water.

(Reynald suddenly draws his sword and places it next to him. Gaston is taken aback and becomes tense. The sound of the dripping water intensifies.)

Reynald: Tell me, Gaston, how will you stop time? How will you stop the barons from running amok? How can a corpulent armor-bearer, accustomed to fried eggs and runny noses of children, stop a movement that he has not even noticed? You oaf!

(Gaston is stunned and tense. He suddenly draws his own sword. Reynald bursts out laughing.)

Reynald: Come now, Gaston. Who are you sharpening knives against here? Perhaps against the dripping water there?

Gaston: Against the water of a fountain at night? There is no need to raise fears.

Reynald: Perhaps, for example, a group of barons toiling over the bath of a young child? Perhaps they are scrubbing the pale scion to the bone? What do you think, Gaston?

(Gaston listens irritated to the sound of the dripping water.)

Gaston: The child is playing in his room. No need to be alarmed.

Reynald: And maybe there are men with sleeves rolled up so as not to dip their clothing in freezing water. Maybe you'll find there Ibelin himself, the boy's teacher and guardian. And perhaps, the emissary of Sibylla, the boy's own mother, the rebel. Won't you go and see?

(Gaston is tensed, and stays motionless.)

Reynald: What a gang. Arrogance, self-righteousness and fanaticism. Nothing, but ego, believe me. Ego: the backbone of history. How sad. The boy cannot escape. The stars will freeze in his eyes.

Gaston: It's only dripping water. Just drops.

Reynald: Is it? Listen carefully. Sometimes they even push his head under the water. But only a little. They do not wish to be blamed for this small death. No, that is the weak body of that poor boy. A passing shadow that died in his youth. Flowers for the heir to the throne! Listen to the strangled flow. The boy is shivering, his soul is departing from his body. Why are you stuck here, with me? Why, Gaston?

(Gaston rises, anxious with fear. He is not sure how to interpret the sounds and cannot make up his mind what to do.)

Reynald: Gassss, Gassss, Gaston. You could have stopped them with your horsemen. But you allowed my chattering to stop you. It still does. You could have intervened but you were paralyzed, incapable of acting. For a wile you wanted to change the world, but in the end you stand puzzled in front of dripping water, wondering in front of dissolving bubbles. Not knowing if and what is there. Did you actually believe you could touch the real thing? Well, *I* am the real thing. I am the reason behind the drops. I am the fact. Come to me! Come, come, Gassss, Gassss, Gassss...? Ah, you bore me!

(Reynald turns away at once and departs. Gaston remains rooted in place.)

10. Outside the wall of Ascalon. The head. The lips.

(Baldwin's head is floating in the darkness, held up by a wooden plank serving as a shelf under his chin. The rest of his body is invisible and his eyes are blind. Gaston turns to the king, exhausted.)

Baldwin: Did you make it to Ascalon, Gaston? Are you here?

(Gaston is in no hurry to respond.)

Baldwin: Either no one is here or the news is bad.

Gaston: I made it there, sire. Too late.

Baldwin: Where? What? I cannot hear you...

Gaston: To the child. The heir to the throne. He is too weak, sire, his body too feeble. He will not last.

Baldwin: That bad?

Gaston: The veins are visible under his delicate skin. He trembles at every gust of wind.

Baldwin: I had hoped he would grow stronger.

Gaston: The shadows frighten him, they delude him. He cries for no reason.

Baldwin: He is still crying?

Gaston: He does not comprehend what his eyes see. He gets lost even in a closed courtyard...

Baldwin: Those are the facts?

Gaston: As I saw them, sire.

Baldwin: As you always described them, beforehand?

Gaston: Yes, sire.

(Silence.)

Baldwin: Perhaps you saw prince Reynald there as well?

Gaston: No.

Baldwin: Because he is here to place Sybilla, my rebel, under siege. He and all the other barons. Raymond, too, and... did you not see them encircling the child with their scheming eyes? His body is feeble, you said?

Gaston: His muscles are flaccid, he has no future.

Baldwin: Are you telling me the truth?

Gaston: Please, sire, I beg you not to doubt my loyalty.

(Baldwin laughs. His head falls to the side at a nearly impossible angle.)

Baldwin: If I doubt you then I will no longer be able to see a thing from my sealed pit. But I still derive pleasure from the irony, that's true. This is mine. Because now, if the child is done for then I shall have to return to Sibylla, the mother. What a scenario! What sordidness! The world turns upside down and I am mired in the domestic issues of my family. Has she already returned? She and that nothing of a husband of hers, Guy? Where are they? I will blow a fart in their honor. Between us, I do not even know whether I am breathing or farting.

Gaston: I heard that a meeting was arranged with her outside the walls of Ascalon.

Baldwin: Soon here. Here. But all those rampaging barons stood by me, did you see? To crush her! I can Tock, tock, tock, eh Gaston?

Gaston: Pardon me...

Baldwin: I can give an order to have them put to death. Sibylla and Guy. Here, before me. Soon.

(He suddenly crows like a rooster. Gaston is startled.)

Baldwin: A rooster, no? People eat eggs.

Gaston: Sire?

Baldwin: I am good today. The sun is setting in the sea.

Gaston: In the sea...

Baldwin: You. Who are you?

(Silence.)

Gaston: I am Gaston.

(Baldwin bursts out in a laugh that. Gaston perceives that people outside are coming.)

Gaston: Lady Sibylla and Monsieur Guy de Lusignan.

11. Outside the walls of Ascalon. Irony.

(Enter Sibylla and Guy. Sibylla is dripping with jewels. Part of her dress is made from human hair. She draws back in horror at the sight of Baldwin. There is a tense silence.)

Sibylla: He...he called for me. Can he hear?

Gaston: Yes, madame.

(Silence.)

Sibylla: Is he even alive?

Baldwin: You look wonderful, Sibylla.

Sibylla: He can see?... Is that all that's left of you, Baldwin?

Baldwin: My head. My mouth. And that is very upsetting because I am in need of legs and kneels to bow down before you and give you my blessing.

Sibylla: You're laughing at me.

Baldwin: Laughing? I'm in stitches, rolling in the aisles. In fact, you can roll my head as well. Tock, tock, tock.

Sibylla: Just so you know, we did not suffer, if that's what you had in mind. We made sure to enjoy ourselves. I had a dress made from Guy's curls and he even arranged dances for the horsemen at night in Ascalon. We drank. We refused to give in then and we refuse to now as well.

Baldwin: Very courageous of you. The sultan keeps his eye on this land and what does he see? Dancing. Dance for me, Guy. Is he here? Have him dance.

Guy: May his highness forgive me, but the blind man cannot enjoy the limber movements of the dancer.

And if I may be permitted to say so, even the wise man is blind if his heart is closed to beauty.

Baldwin: Scathing words! I apologize, and again I kneel before you, my head bowed. Once again I shall grovel before you ceremoniously, as dictated by the irony...

Sibylla: I do not understand what are you talking about.

Baldwin: My child, I do so wish to kiss you, to feel your hair. Is it still so soft? I miss you! I missed you...and you came out against me!

Sibylla: It was your fault, you are to blame! And I cried copiously, for your information.

Baldwin: You will yet have more to cry for, my dear Sibylla. The biggest effort a mother can make is still ahead of you.

Sibylla: Why do you insist on frightening me?

Baldwin: It's the boy. The boy will die. He cannot live.

Sibylla: What boy?

Baldwin: Your own.

Sibylla: Why? You yourself took him from me, to raise him, to distance him...

Baldwin: He will not last. Even if he grows strong of body, he will not escape from all those who plot against him.

Sibylla: Who is plotting against him?

Baldwin: Such naïveté! All those who stand outside this tent: the masterful barons with their decisive opinions, those architects of the future, smiling with the surety that they are acting on behalf of eternity and not for their own gain, those quick-acting scoundrels, that mob!

Sibylla: What have they got to do with the boy? Save him!

Baldwin: I cannot. Thanks to you.

Sibylla: Me?

Baldwin: Here is the irony, my Sibylla. Here is my failure, my illness, mine, forgive me. They wish to crown you and your Guy instead of the boy...

Sibylla: But he is the heir... you yourself...

Baldwin: By law, after the boy and I die, the title returns to you. By law, you two shall be king and queen of Jerusalem. This is how you shall reign: your feet shall step upon your son's face who fell ill, coughed, was stabbed or poisoned, turning over in his grave. And the one leading the way to your coronation will be none other than your energetic patron, Reynald.

(Baldwin grunts.)

Baldwin: Forgive me, but those barons chose you not for your virtues but for your lack of them.

Guy: Needless insults, sire. Facing you we acquired a lot of experience.

Baldwin: They chose you because you can be molded like clay. They can lead you to untold madness without your knowing it. For just as clay dries you will be powerless to stop it; you will merely crumble...how this anger draws these words from me; such images upon my tongue choke me. And I wanted to embrace the two of you. Protect you!

(Baldwin grunts again.)

Guy: Is the king in full possession of his faculties?

(Baldwin coughs with difficulty.)

Baldwin: Were the king possessed of his limbs, of a body as healthy as his soul and as lucid as his mind, he would be an adversary and ally as worthy as the sultan himself. But I am not...

(Again he falls silent, bereft of strength.)

Gaston: Sire? Baldwin: I am still here. Here...is that the wind, the cypress trees outside?
Tock, tock, tock... my Sibylla, listen to me. Is Guy still here as well?

Guy: As taut and lithe as ever.

Baldwin: Well! People can change. I did. Try a little gravitas, my child. Do not be too hasty. Always look behind the cloths.

Sibylla: The shrouds?

(Baldwin's head droops.)

Gaston: Sire?

Baldwin: Present. Present. I have not given up. Do not be drawn into war, I beseech you... Refuse, because it has already begun, that is why they are making you king and queen of Jerusalem....Tock, tock, tock.

(Once again, Baldwin's head falls to the side.)

Sibylla: Is he still alive?

Baldwin: Joy...joy...

Sibylla: What is he saying?

Guy: I think it is proper and fitting that we entertain him. Shall we dance?

(Sibylla accepts Guy's extended hand. Music can be heard, and they dance before Baldwin. They conclude their short dance and bow graciously to Baldwin, who does not react.)

Sibylla: I will feel more secure behind the walls of Ascalon.
The siege will drag on until someone figures out how
it should be ended.

(Sibylla and Guy turn and exit. A dark figure can be seen at the side of the stage. It is Reynald.)

Gaston: Sire?

Baldwin: Who are you?

(Silence. A gurgle of laughter can be heard from Baldwin's throat.)

Gaston: I was startled for a moment.

Baldwin: Who am I?

(Silence.)

Gaston: The king of Jerusalem.

Baldwin: Are you making fun of me?

Gaston: No, sire.

Baldwin: How can I know that you are telling the truth?

(Silence.)

Baldwin: You are unable to prove that I am who I am?

Gaston: No, sire. I can prove nothing.

Baldwin: That is a problem.

Gaston: Yes, sire.

(Silence. Another gurgle of laughter from Baldwin.)

Baldwin: You toil, you work yourself up and in the end what
do you get? Dancing! Well! So what have we
accomplished? All this effort... tell a story about me,
will you, Gaston?

(Silence.)

Baldwin: So that I won't disappear, all right? Now I am in your hands.

Gaston: Yes, sire.

Baldwin: Do not cry.

Gaston: I am not crying.

Baldwin: That is good.

Gaston: Good.

Baldwin: Who am I?

(Silence.)

Baldwin: How do we get out? I don't know how to get out.

(Silence.)

Baldwin: I still have language. Lips, a tongue. A tongue. Who are you...?

(Baldwin's head flops to the side and he groans. Reynald rises to his feet. He removes his cloak and inspects the place as would a director. Gaston continues to attend to Baldwin.)

Gaston: Sire?

(Groaning.)

Gaston: I am Gaston.

(Groaning.)

Gaston: I can continue telling you stories. To keep you in the picture, sire.

(Reynald draws near.)

Reynald: I loved him, too.

Gaston: He still wants to hear, to know.

(Gaston barks like a dog and crows like a rooster.)

Gaston: Eggs. People eat eggs, sire.

Reynald: Whatever he was, or was not, you have a hand in that.
You should be proud!

Gaston: He is still with us. He wishes to hear. Sire? Eggs.
The wind. The sun on the sea...

(He barks again.)

12. Festive news

(Enter Sibylla and Guy. Reynald greets them. He gestures beyond Baldwin to Gaston.)

Reynald: The stupidity that follows grief. The very image of woe, my friends. You, too, should take this opportunity to make a show of emotion.

Guy: Grief?

Reynald: More self-reflection, perhaps.

Sibylla: Well, I do feel emotional. He was my brother.

Reynald: Precisely.

Guy: We are all human beings.

Reynald: So it would be a good idea, if there are spectators, for them to be made aware of the human element.

(They stand for a moment in silence. Gaston speaks to Baldwin's head, introducing all those present.)

Gaston: Princess Sibylla and her husband, Guy, sire. Lord Reynald.

Sibylla: This disheveled creature, who is he?

Reynald: The king's manservant and armor-bearer.

Sibylla: Is he crazy? He should be.

Reynald: He continues to describe the world to his master. He is very devoted. But never mind him, the ceremony that awaits you is far more important.

Sibylla: The coronation!

Reynald: If not in actual fact, then according to right, milady, sir. You are the king and queen of Jerusalem.

(He bows ceremoniously to the two.)

Sibylla: How exciting...!

Guy: Frightening, even.

Sibylla: We may do whatever we want.

Reynald: Within certain limitations...

Guy: Which we establish.

Reynald: Indeed, sir.

(Guy approaches Gaston and kicks his bottom. Gaston falls to the floor.)

Reynald: I would refrain from making use of your special liberties until after your coronation in Jerusalem.

(She takes Guy's hand and bites it hard. Guy writhes in pain, stroking her head and moving it away. He extends his hand to her.)

Guy: My wife, the queen.

Sibylla: My beloved, the king.

(They exit. Silence. Reynald turns to Gaston, who is still lying on the floor.)

Reynald: How will you describe for the king this transfer of the crown? Will you choose to tighten the imagery, say, the refraction of light on the lady's excessive gold jewelry? Or maybe you will choose the path of emotional manipulation – how quickly the true king can disappear from their eyes – or perhaps you will opt for psychology: how did they suppress the dead child so that they could step on him on their way up? However, I actually suggest you emphasize their naïveté, for when they reach the wall of blood and they must swallow their own eviscerated stomachs, they will feel as though they have been deceived. Where are the butterflies, ribbons and dancing they

were promised? Naïveté, Gaston. I want you to know, so that at the very least you will be able to tell of one man who knew about the wall of blood and chose it, that that is the only way; that only by blood and iron can this land be defended. Write about me, Gaston. Even as a footnote to the person of the king. It will honor me even to occupy the margins of a truly great man.

(Exit Reynald.)

13. The clinical diagnosis is irrelevant

(Marie enters and puts at the side five bundles and small children's sandals. She is embarrassed to see Gaston talking to Baldwin's head.)

Gaston: Here once again, your highness, is my good wife, Marie. She is growing old but is still attractive.

Marie: Who are you talking to?

Gaston: The master.

Marie: But he is no longer...

Gaston: His ears are open. First, the coronation ceremonies in Jerusalem... He hears everything.

Marie: Gaston...

Gaston: You see? I am carrying on. He must know what is happening.

(Silence.)

Marie: Is it the grief? The frustration? What is it?

Gaston: The drip-drip-drip of drops in the drain spouts.

(Silence .)

Marie: We must get away, Gaston. They'll take their revenge on you. You'll be humiliated. Nobody will dare to employ you. You are trouble!

(Silence.)

Marie: Do you recount everything to him?

(Silence.)

Gaston: No.

Marie: You make me angry!

(Marie gently touches his face.)

Marie: At least you are good at telling stories. If he believed you...

14. Buttons, laces, needles

(Enter Sibylla, who is now dressed completely excessively, with Guy's hair the main element and a multitude of jewels which reflect light in every direction. She holds a sewing kit and does not notice anyone.)

Sibylla: Buttons, laces, ribbons, needles – why can't they invent some kind of device you just pull closed and that's that? Suzette! Lily! Lily!!... Is there no one here?

(She notices Marie.)

Sibylla: Who are you? Sew down there... there.

(After a short hesitation, Marie takes the sewing kit.)

Marie: I'm Marie, milady...

(Marie bends down to her dress and begins stitching it.)

Sibylla: Where is everyone? I call to them and hear only an echo in the air.

Marie: They have fled, milady...

Sibylla: Suddenly I can hear the cypress trees, the wind. I never noticed Them before... the stables are empty, servants slip away behind doors; make sure they see the pattern in the hems. Suzette. What impudence! Do you know what she said to me? That this pattern was cut from the child's embroidered sheets when he was still a baby. My son, who died and I am guilty. I was furious! I wanted to punish her, but she is no longer here and there are no soldiers. People are talking war, but no one tells me anything. Do you think I have grown too fat? And perhaps it is dangerous for us here? What do you say?

Marie: It is very dangerous. And too late.

Sibylla: Why? What have I done?

Marie: Nothing, milady. The world carries on even if you are not involved.

Sibylla: I know nothing.

Marie: This man will explain it to you all... Gaston!

(Marie turns her backwards. In a very different light Baldwin's head can be seen floating above the shelf, his mouth wide open. Gaston at its side.)

15. The Karnei - Hittim Battle

(Sibylla recoils overwhelmed.)

Sibylla: Baldwin...? Can you hear me?

(Silence.)

Sibylla: Are you screaming? Is that a scream, your mouth?

(Silence.)

Marie: Tell her Gaston. Get up. Get up.

(She helps Gaston to his feet.)

Sibylla: If Guy was here... But he took off in a hurry for the north. All the barons of the land gathered there, and it is difficult for Guy because he always suspects they don't respect him, and since everyone in Jerusalem has been seeping out through the cracks and disappearing...

Marie: Tell her. Do not hide anything from her. Go on.

Sibylla: What? What? Don't frighten me.

Marie: Tell her what's happening. You know how. You are good at it.

(Silence.)

Gaston: Imagine your husband, Guy, in his tent, at sunset in the hills above the Sea of Galilee.

Marie: That's it!

Gaston: The setting sun arouses terror, milady, for all around and down to the sea is the sultan. One cannot see the vast army, perhaps it is those dark specks? Perhaps? Perhaps, merely a landscape of fears?... Allow the night to descend upon them, milady.

Sibylla: Yes, yes, I hear you.

Marie: Go on. Go on!

Gaston: In the tent a vicious debate is taking place: whether to remain at Karnei Hittim next to the spring, or to push forward and move down to the Sea of Galilee. You are acquainted with those sluggish lords but you would not recognize them, for their flesh is scorched and lacerated by sun and wind, and their eyes burn from lack of sleep and body salt. And stench, and fatigue, and in the middle, your husband shakes out his golden hair.

(Gaston imitates Guy's mannerism.)

Sibylla: Yes, that's it, exactly.

Gaston: He tries to imagine himself as important, tries to convince himself that by law he is the supreme commander. Imagine it, milady...

Sibylla: He wants it so. He is trying so hard...

Gaston: But his stomach convulses, because he is unsure among these men of war. And he tries to raise his chin because that is how he imagines himself to look more decisive, and he can breathe more freely once the decision is taken not to leave the spring. That stand is taken even by Lord Reynald. So if even a threatening man like Reynald prefers to remain by the spring, then the world seems to be in place and Guy can relax a bit. He is pleased. He confirms the decision not to move as if it had been his own. He, too, is a man among men.

Sibylla: His smile. The heart melts.

Gaston: The men sleep curled up all around. The crickets can be heard once again, as tedious as ever. But in the middle of the night Lord Rocheford comes to the tent...

Sibylla: Who? Who is that? I do not recall.

Gaston: Do not tax your brain, milady. Just another brave man you met Once and forgot. And Guy, who fell asleep like a stone, openmouthed, awakens. Who goes there? And Why? He hears from Lord Rocheford that this display of caution by the spring was for no purpose other than to humiliate him and portray him in the eyes of all as a coward. As one not suited to the role, less than a man. And Guy curls up once again, exhausted, and in this rush of fatigue and this feeling of abasement, he changes his mind.

Sibylla: He cannot think under such pressure. Poor Guy...he is unsuited...

Gaston: And in the early morning, stars still in the sky, the order is given, and the other barons are astonished, but it is too late to stop and argue, soldiers summoning them to their flags, and the turmoil of tightening the straps of the armor, and the whinnying of the horses, and men piss in every direction, and many have no chance to drink, and the long column begins to wend its way down the wadi between the hills. Milady, can you picture the scene? The trap has been set.

(The cloth behind them begins to move, a bas-relief of writhing people. Human teeth sink into the cloth from behind, and gradually the movement increases, giving the impression of acts of violence.)

Gaston: The sultan attacks the snaking column in the wadi that leads down to the Sea of Galilee. He strikes from every side, from above the hills. Arrows, stones, burning thistle on the hills that create a fire that descends and burns, and the men are asphyxiated by the smoke, and the sun, don't forget the sun, milady. The sun crushes everything that lies beneath it, and the sea becomes a sweat-drenched cloud. Enter your husband's blistering armor, milady, to the terrible weight of limbs, and the wretchedness and pettiness that weigh even more. Enter his shame, which pains him more than anything else: that is what he is, disappointed with himself. Why? Why?

Sibylla: Do not continue. Have mercy on him... please, mercy...

Gaston: After two days in battle his breathing is ragged, his voice singed, blood pools and dries beneath thick waves of flies, sweat blinds the eyes all the time and the world seems like an inferno, death is preferable, only to end all this, and water, water, something to drink, to live or die, the mind is deranged...are you still breathing, milady?

(Silence falls behind the cloth. A few faces still protrude and clench the cloth in their teeth.)

Gaston: Only Prince Raymond escaped, he slipped away with his iron horsemen. All those who were not killed were rounded up by the sultan.

Sibylla: And Guy? Guy?

Gaston: He, too, along with Lord Reynald and others of our barons, and they were all brought as prisoners to the sultan's tent. He himself quenched the tired barons' thirst with ice water from Mount Hermon. With his own hands he lifted mugs to their mouths...

Sibylla: Guy's, too?

Gaston: Yes. It was only to Lord Reynald that he did not provide water.

Sibylla: No?

Gaston: The Sultan unsheathed his rounded sword above Reynald's head and in one fell swoop decapitated him.

(The teeth in the cloth disappear. Behind the cloth can be heard the sound of a head rolling.)

Gaston: Tock, tock, tock.

(Sibylla is stunned. Her jewels tremble and the light fades gradually. Marie is busily occupied with tying the bundles at the side of the stage.)

Marie: He's a great storyteller, isn't he? I get carried away – it's as if I'm there.

Sibylla: And what now?

Gaston: I do not know, milady. The sultan is working his way toward us. He is already on his way to Jerusalem.

(Gaston turns to Marie to help her prepare her bundles.)

Sibylla: So what is the meaning, sir? I beseech you. What is the meaning?

Gaston: It is the end.

Sibylla: And you? What about you?

Marie: We are leaving, milady. We have five children and we must look after them.

Sibylla: And that is the end of the story?

Marie: It is no longer our concern.

Sibylla: But you were not there, at Karnei Hittim, sir. You do not know what happened there.

Gaston: I was not there.

Marie: But what suspense!

(Gaston turns to a box and places it next to Baldwin's head.)

Sibylla: And what about me? Perhaps I will come with you...?

Marie: That won't work. Not at all. We're hitting the road.

(Gaston takes Baldwin's head and places it inside a box.)

Sibylla: You're taking my Baldwin with you?

Gaston: He is mine.

Marie: Gaston will tell his story and we'll charge money, a kind of a sideshow. If all goes well, people will pay us. Isn't he a great storyteller? The king himself, your honored brother, taught him. We'll show his head to the spectators during the performance. He looks real, doesn't he? There's suspense, there are tears, there's everything you could want.

Gaston: It's only a story.

Marie: What's important is that they'll pay.

(Marie and Gaston pick up the bundles and the box and exit. Sibylla remains at the edge of the stage, fingering her jewels, as the descending light shines and sparkles upon them until darkness falls.)

The End