

The Tale of The Cotswold Lion

a play Written by the Golden Stag Players
based on a Scenario by Aldith Angharad St. George
and the Golden Stag Players
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Dramatis Personae

AT THE QUEEN'S COURT

	Original Cast
Queen Elizabeth I	Rose de Le Mans
The Earl of Leicester	Wulfric of Creigull
The Russian Ambassador	Juan Santiago
The Spanish Ambassador ¹	Iricus le Ferur
The French Ambassador	Kæll of the Broken Tower
Ladies of the Court	
Katherine Ashley	Anne of Ockham
Elizabeth Knollys	Teresa le Marchant
Geraldine, Countess of Kildare	Margrethe Astrid Ravn
Herald	Michael of Worcester

AT THE TAVERN

The Host	Robyn McClaren
Nine-fingered Steve, The Guide ²	Eoin of Fell Hold
Eleven-fingered Jack, The Village Idiot	Charles "Bonefinder" Ravenstone
Assorted Townsperson (Wat of the Cotswolds)	Fionnbharr O'Cathain

PROLOGUE

Something involving Hirsch & coping.

Possibly, assuming we have the jugglers as our warmup act, coming out and saying something about GSP and 10 years, and rather than haranguing the audience with talk, I'd also entertain, start to juggle and immediately blow it, dropping the balls ... then look at them, look at the audience, look at them, look at the audience, "Cope!", grab them and walk off ...

¹ Spanish ambassador speaks with a bit of a lisp – this can be overdone, so be careful ...

² Based on "Crocodile Hunter" from Animal Planet ...

ACT I.

Scene 1 - Anteroom to Court:

(French and Spanish ambassadors on one side of room, delegation from the Cotswolds (Host, Wat, Idiot) on the other side of the room ...; French ambassador has a cup-and-ball, and keeps missing ...; Spanish ambassador is playing with mini-abacus – ticks off another item for each miss ...)

Spain: Four thousand six hundred and seventy seven. You missed again, señor.

France: Pardonez the merde out of moi, monseigneur. It has been three weeks since I made my lord King's offer to Her Majesty, and I have to pass the time here somehow, don't I? And besides, I do not remember requesting that Her Majesty provide me with a scorekeeper!

Spain: *(With scorn)* Well that is good, since you have consistently failed to ... *(looking at audience)* **score** *(back to France)* at all in those three weeks, señor!

(Leicester enters, parts them, walks between ...)

Leicester: *(Coughing)* So, it's war then, my lords. Again?

(Spain and France bow, and step back)

(To Cotswolds) Good day, gentlemen.

(Cotswolds delegation jump up ..., Spain and France are staring knives at Leicester's back)

Wat: Well met, my Lord of Leicester.

Leicester: So, what business brings you to Gloriana's court?

Idiot: Who? We have a Queen Gloria?

Host: *(Smacks him on back of head ...)* No, Queen Elizabeth!

Idiot: Then, who's Gloria?

(Everyone ignores that last line)

Wat: *(Kissing up)* Your Excellency, the Queen does nothing without your counsel. We crave your assistance, on behalf of the Cotswolds. As you know, because of the monopoly in Calais, the Yorkies have been bribing the staplers, and we can't get our wool through.

Leicester: So, what do you expect me to do?

Wat: England's reputation is at stake, sir, for as you know, there is no finer wool than that of the Cotswolds.

Wat/Host: *(Like a jingle)*
All nations affirm up to the full
In all the world there is no better wool!³

Idiot: Wool!

Leicester: And if you had the Queen's support in this ...?

Wat: Aside from the obvious revenues that the Queen will accrue, I am sure we can make this worth your while,
My Lord Earl.

(Hands over bribe ...)

Leicester: I'll see what I can do.

(Voice off stage (herald ...))

Voice: Gather all for court ...

(Exeunt)

Scene 2 – Court:

(When the scene starts, the Queen is on her throne, Ladies Katherine, Elizabeth, Geraldine are all in the room, in place next to the Throne. Leicester arrives. French/Spanish Ambassadors, Cotswold delegation, any other 'court' members enter from 'Antechamber' door.)

(Conversation starts between Queen, her ladies, and Leicester ... the court doesn't hear it – it's all sotto voce. The 'between the court members only' conversations occur several times in the scene.)

Queen: *(To Leicester)* So, my lord, what business today?

Leicester: Your Majesty must now play peacemaker, for France and Spain are at war. *(Gestures at the ambassadors)*

Queen: Again?

Katherine: *(Leans forward)* Perhaps Your Majesty could soothe the waters between them.

Elizabeth: Or be the storm that sinks them both.

(Laughter ...)

³ The Wars of the Roses, Elizabeth Hallam, page 202. The original couplet (possibly Chaucer?) reads:

“Alle naciouns afferme up to the full
In al the world ther is no bettir wolle.”

Leicester: There indeed would be England's advantage, for then would Your Majesty be Queen of All.

Queen: *(Points to Cotswold delegation, asking Leicester)* Who are these people?

Leicester: The delegation from the Cotswolds, Your Majesty.

Elizabeth: I wonder if they are bringing you the head of the Cotswold Lion?

(Laughter from all but Geraldine)

Geraldine: *(squeak!)* What's the Cotswold Lion? Is it very dangerous?

Katherine: Only if you're a blade of grass.

(Laughter – all but Geraldine)

Geraldine: I don't get it.

Elizabeth: *(To Katherine)* Mistress Ashley, you have to make allowances for young Geraldine – she's Irish. *(To Geraldine)* It's a joke – the Cotswold Lion is a sheep!

Queen: She'd have understood if she were Scottish!

(More laughter)

Queen: Robin, bring them forth.

(Crosses over to the delegation)

Leicester: Goodmen, Her Majesty would speak with you.

(The delegation comes forward, kneels ...)

Wat: Your Most Awful Majesty, we of the Cotswolds beg your gracious intervention to right a most grievous wrong.

Queen: Cotswold Lion laying waste to the countryside, again?

(Laughs from court members, uneasy looks from delegation, unsure if they should laugh or not.)

Wat: *(Laugh like "yeah, heard it", look at audience while doing it)* Your Majesty, it seems just that those who produce the wool should have leave to export it. To support our case, we bring you gifts!

Queen: The generosity of the Cotswolds is known to us. We are well pleased.

(Someone from Cotswold comes forward with a bag and a sheepskin.)

Queen: We shall take counsel with our advisors and will consider this matter. We will send word as to our decision. You have Our leave to depart.

(Plaintive/angry looks from the delegation at Leicester – they were expecting him to speak on their behalf, he gestures that all is ok, the delegation exits)

(Herald enters from Antechamber, has a black fur and a card with a name on it ...)

Herald: Presenting the Ambassador from the Emperor of all the Russias *(Herald stares in shock at name as written in his notes ... looks up ...)*, I think this is Greek!

(Russian ambassador enters ... and says own name)

Russian: Rustilov Gregorov Dimitrevich, Grand Duke of Chernobyl.

Herald: The Ambassador from Ivan the Terrible, King of all the Russias.

Geraldine: *(sotto voce)* How many are there?

Elizabeth: Not counting Poland?

Leicester: Your Majesty, your fame and beauty has spread even to the furthest reaches of the earth!

Queen: Yes, but ... Russia?

Geraldine: Is that his hat, or his hair?

Katherine: Maybe he's just happy to see her!

Elizabeth: That's what they all say ...

(Queen gives ladies a dirty look ...)

Russia: Old Russian proverb: As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far place. Yet also, all ages are submissive to love.

(Everyone stares, befuddled ...)

Queen: Uh, yes. Indeed ...

Russia: Old Russian Proverb: The husband is the brain, the wife -- the soul.

Queen: Really! How ... charming ...

Russia: His word is as good as a tied knot.

Leicester: Let me guess, “Old Russian Proverb”?

Russia: Da! You can’t build a house without corners, you can’t talk without proverbs.

(Gets fur from herald, hands to Queen)

Russia: I bring you betrothal gift from Czar Ivan, I bring you sable furs.

(French and Spanish ambassadors start edging closer, hackles rising ...)

Queen: This is it?

Russia: Oh, no – is only sample – on barge, three bales!

Queen: *(Eyes go wide!)* Oh, thank you! That should keep me warm on a cold winter night.

(Spain and France step forward ... during the next exchange the ambassadors all shove the others out of the way when it’s their turn to speak ...)

Spain: But Your Majesty, what about the gift of gold from España?

France: Or the gift of pearls from France?

Spain: I, Don Ricardo Martín de Cordoba, have traveled far, from the court of El Rey Filipe de España, on behalf of my sovereign, to sue for your hand in marriage. And spent quite a bit of money *(totaling on abacus)*.

France: *(Interjecting ...)* El Rey is so stingy he can’t let a penny out of his grip until it cries for mercy. I, on the other hand, Jean Luc Canard, le Comte de Sancerre, represent Charles de France, and his brother Henri, Duc d’Anjou, who are well known for their generosity!

Russia: Hmmph. Every fox praises his own tail.

Spain: Your Grace, you know, my master desires a union of our peoples. A blending of our assets would increase productivity and the profits of both realms. The King is impressed with the Queen’s bottom line. *(Giggles from Queen’s ladies, she smacks with fan ...)* And above all, The hath the only five star credit rating in Europe.

Queen: We thank you for these noble sentiments.

France: Who cares about five stars on a worthless piece of paper? Duke Henri is only interested in the two stars that shine in Your Majesty’s eyes. His dearest wish is that you ally your magnificence with that of the Royal House of France. So, my mission is very simple, to return with your answer, oui or no? But of course, it is oui, no?

Queen: We ...

Leicester: No!

France: Oui?

Queen: No! We ... have not made our decision yet.

Spain: Your Majesty, soon I must return to the sunny shores of Barcelona. Perhaps, Your Majesty, I may take my master Your acceptance of His proposal?

Russia: To a bird the twigs are dearer than a golden cage.

Queen: My lords, such a weighty matter deserves careful consideration. I cannot choose my husband as an ordinary woman may, my desires must fall second to the needs of my people. I must therefore take counsel with my advisors. Do you then bide awhile, and we will give our answer anon.

France: A non?

Leicester: Anon!

Elizabeth: And on and on and on ...

(Ambassadors and herald bow, exeunt to the Anteroom)

Queen: This is all so tiresome.

Leicester: None of their masters is suitable as Your husband, Your Majesty. The solution is obvious!

Geraldine: It is?

Leicester: You should not marry any of them.

Queen: I'm coming to that conclusion myself.

Leicester: Rather, you could marry ME!

Queen: Oh, but I could never marry you, Robin, I'm far too fond of you for that!

(Awkward pause ...)

Katherine: What's to be done with the ambassadors? Can't they be discouraged?

Queen: *(To Leicester)* No one is to be entirely discouraged.

Leicester: Then why don't you just send them away?

Queen: Yes, but on what pretext?

Geraldine: I know, we could send them on a quest!

Queen: Oh, what a good idea, Geraldine, and they can hunt the Cotswold Lion!

(Everyone sniggers ...)

Queen: Robin, this won't work without your help. I would not have any of these gentles succeed in their quest.

Leicester: Nor would I.

Queen: I would look favorably upon the man who places a few obstacles in their path.

Leicester: I understand, completely! Excuse me, I have some ... um ... small matters to attend to.

(Leicester exits to Anteroom. Queen motions Katherine over to her ...)

Queen: That should occupy them for awhile.

Katherine: This will be the first time Leicester has been away from your side for several years.

Queen: Oh, that won't do ... Can I trust him while he's away?

(Look at each other ...)

Both: No ...

Queen: I need someone I can trust to be my eyes and ears.

(Looks pointedly at Kat)

Katherine: Unexpected travel plans are a dancing lesson from God.

Queen: Russian proverb?

Katherine: Nope, I just made that up!

Queen: Go! *(Small laugh, wave her out.)*

(Exeunt, ladies following the Queen)

Scene 3 – Anteroom:

France: I think that went very well.

Russia: All that glitters is not gold.

Spain: Is that a Russian proverb, too?

Russia: Da!

Spain: That does not add up quite right.

(Leicester enters from Throne room)

Leicester: You gentlemen may as well hie yourselves home, Her Majesty will have none of you!

France: We do not thank *you* monseigneur!

Spain: It seems to me you did not give good value for my investment, señor!

France: *(To Spain)* **Your** investment? *(To Leicester)* But I paid you to help **me**!

Russia: When money speaks, truth keeps its mouth shut!

Leicester: I have only your best interests at heart.

Russia: Don't teach me to dance, I am clown myself!

(Everyone stares at him ...)

Leicester: Believe me gentlemen, the way to the Queen's heart is not through fancy words and glittering coin, but through noble deeds and chivalrous actions!

Spain: Chivalry? What sort of chivalry would serve to impress Her Grace?

Leicester: Well ... no. I don't believe you're capable ...

France: I am offended. I am perfectly capable!

Leicester: Of ... what exactly?

Russia: Do not praise yourself while going into battle, praise yourself when coming out.

Leicester: I do not believe that you could possibly ... succeed in this, where so many have failed before.

Spain: Ah, but they did not have the puissance and prowess that I possess.

France: Poissance? What have fish got to do with it?

Russia: *(Looking at Leicester's codpiece)* Neither fish nor meat.

France: Wait a minute, monsieur, what exactament do you mean, about impressing the Queen with noble deeds?

Leicester: Well, if **I** were going to impress the Queen, which of course, I do, I would go on a quest.

Spain: A quest? What sort of quest?

Russia: Be afraid to live, but don't be afraid to die.

Leicester: Exactly. There is much danger.

France: I tweak the nose of terror!

Leicester: But many rewards for he who succeeds.

Spain: Rewards are certainly to be sought. A quest by itself is worthless. Tell me more.

Leicester: It pains Her Majesty so, to see her subjects suffer from the depredations of the ferocious Cotswold Lion.

All Three Ambassadors:
The Cotswold Lion?

Leicester: Indeed, a most fearsome beast. Ravaging the countryside and killing the poor, helpless, peasants!

France: Formidable! (*french pronunciation*)

Spain: Madre de dios! I will save these peasants and restore Her Majesty's net worth!

Russia: The task fears its master!

(Ambassadors exit, Leicester looks at audience smugly, exits)

(End of Act I)

ACT II. The Tavern:

(As the Act opens, the Host is polishing/cleaning goblets, Wat is sitting at a table, Jack, the Village Idiot is sitting on the floor rocking back and forth ...)

Wat: Another beer.

Host: I've had to do everything myself since Peg the waitress ran off to York.

Idiot: If she can make it there, she can make it anywhere.

Wat: This wouldn't have happened if we had gotten the Wool Export Charter.

(Katherine, Elizabeth and Geraldine enter, one of them carrying a "Wench Wanted" sign, approach Host ...)

Katherine: Prithee, humble innkeeper – a moment of your time ...

Host and Geraldine:
Huh?

Elizabeth: *(Explaining to the Host and Geraldine)* She means, "Hey, you!"

Katherine: We've come to assist you with your staffing problem.

Host: But, I only need one serving wench, it's a small town.

Katherine: *(Dropping a purse of money on the counter, with an audible 'clink')* You're getting three.

Wat: Aren't you ...

Elizabeth: *(Pulls coin out, presses it into his hand ...)* No, we've never met ...

Wat: Riiight. *(Putting coin away)*

Idiot: I've never been met either!

(The ladies turn and look at him (not being used to him))

Katherine: Perhaps if you washed. *(To host)* Let's discuss the terms of our employment.

(Host and ladies step to the side, discuss privately, put aprons on.; Leicester enters ...)

Leicester: *(Aside)* Those foreigners ... that old "High Road" bit works every time ... *(chortle)*

(Leicester talks to the folk in the inn ... obviously doesn't recognize court ladies, if he even sees them)

Leicester: Well met, oh, honest townsfolk!

Wat: *(To idiot)* Is he talking to us?

Leicester: The Queen requires the services of this charming, rustic village.

Host: Why should we help you? We bribed you at the court and it didn't get us anything.

Leicester: I can ensure that your service will be remembered when the wool contract comes up for renewal.

(Wat and Host look at each other, look back at "serving women" for confirmation – they nod, Katherine throws Wat a coin ...)

Wat: What do you want us to do?

Leicester: In a little while three foreigners will come to town, on a quest.

Host: What could they possibly hunt around here?

Idiot: I once saw the Cotswold Lion!

(Host and Wat roll their eyes ...)

Leicester: Exactly.

Host: There *is* no Cotswold Lion!

Wat: Sure, there is ... *(nodding)* I'm sure we can find one for you ...

(Host and Wat look at each other, point to an eye, point down to the fool, who sticks his finger in his eye)

Idiot: Ow!

(Host and Wat nod ...)

Leicester: It is vital that the foreigners do not succeed in this task.

Wat: I'm sure we can manage to ...

Idiot: Fleece them?

(Wat kicks/hits him, he rolls ... gets up, grabs broom and leans on it ...)

Leicester: I need some pretext to keep me here in disguise. I could be your accountant.

Host: I have enough people stealing from me already.

Leicester: Then perhaps ... I could seat the patrons?

Host: It's when they can't stand up that I worry.

Leicester: Some help in the kitchen?

Host: No, we slop the pigs outside.

Idiot: Yeah, and they fight real mean, too ...

Elizabeth: Perhaps you have somebody to sweep the floors?

Host: But that's what he does! *(Pointing to idiot)*

Katherine: You're fired.

(Katherine crosses to idiot, pulls broom out from under him, of course he falls ... after he gets up, he ends up wandering to the front of the stage, sits with feet dangling ... he listens to conversations that follow and periodically comments ...)

(Katherine tosses broom to Elizabeth, who tosses to Geraldine, who tosses to Host)

Host: *(Hands broom to Leicester)* You're hired.

(Leicester has no idea what to do with broom ... holds it wrong, etc.)

Leicester: How ... quaint.

(Leicester removes his jacket, Geraldine puts an apron on him)

Leicester: *(Flirting with Geraldine)* You're a pretty one. I have influence with the Queen, and if you please me I could position you in her chamber.

(Leicester starts to kiss her hand, but at the last moment she flips hands so he kisses his own)

Leicester: What's your name, sweetling?

Geraldine: Ger ...

Elizabeth: *(quickly)* Meg!

Leicester: Meg. That's a pretty name. *(to Elizabeth)* How about you, lovely?

Geraldine: *(Crossing behind Leicester, not understanding)* Meg?

Leicester: Meg as well? That's convenient. *(to Katherine)* And you?

Elizabeth: *(to Katherine, nudging and indicating Leicester)* Meg!

Leicester: All three named Meg! How do you tell which one the innkeeper is summoning?

Geraldine: Not Meg!

Katherine: *(hastily)* Nut Meg! That's her nickname. I'm Long Meg, and this is ... uh ...

Elizabeth: *(sarcastically)* Short Meg?

Katherine: You have a better idea?

Host: *(to Leicester)* Boy! *(Leicester doesn't realize he's talking to him)* Boy! *(Still no response, taps him on the shoulder ...)* Boooy ...

Leicester: Oh, were you addressing me?

Host: *(sighs)* Run to the bakery down the street, and bring me back two penny loaves.

Leicester: What does a bakery look like?

Host: It has a sign – “The Pinched Loaf”.

Leicester: Riiight.
(Starts for front door ...)

Host: That's the door for the patrons – use the back door!
(Leicester turns around for the back door ... starts to put on cloak, host grabs it from him)

Leicester: How degrading.
(Exits – back door)

Elizabeth: *(sotto voce)* Mind the pigs ...

Katherine: *(also sotto voce)* The other pigs.
(From offstage, pig squeals, ladies cross to look out 'back door' and ...)

Leicester: Ahhh! Get away! Shoo! Bad dog!

Geraldine: I don't think he heard you.

(People in tavern start going about business ...; Ambassadors arrive through "front door")

Russia: I have the teeth, but there is nothing to eat!

Idiot: I know what you mean! I have a bladder, and nothing to drink!

France: I am surprised it took us so long to get here.

Spain: This country is certainly more expansive than I thought.

France: Did you say expensive?

Spain: Si, that, too.

(Wat comes over ...)

Wat: Gentlemen, allow me to take your cloaks.

(They agree, take them off and hand them over. Wat stands there with one hand out. Spaniard nudges the Frenchman, who tips Wat. He takes the cloaks and leaves the tavern, winks at the audience as an aside.)

Spain: Miss, some service. *(Flash coin)*

(Ladies push Geraldine toward their table)

Geraldine: *(To other ladies)* What kind of girl do you think I am? *(To ambassadors)* What can I get you gentlemen?

Russia: A hungry hen dreams of millet.

Geraldine: I'll have to check the kitchen. *(Runs back to kitchen ...)*

(Kat and Elizabeth come over with three bowls of stew ...)

France: What is this?

Katherine: Mutton stew.

France: But we haven't ordered yet!

Katherine: You were going to order mutton stew.

France: We might have ordered something else.

Elizabeth: There isn't anything else. (*Out to audience, this is going to become a running gag ...*) Welcome to the Cotswolds.

Russia: (*Hesitant and questioning/reluctant ...*) The appetite comes during the meal.

(*Geraldine comes back with mugs of beer*)

France: *(Standing)* Gentlemen, a toast to Charles the Neuf. The most elegant, dashing, best dressed monarch of all Europe. Beloved of his people. Beloved of his tailors. Gives employment to jewelers and embroiderers everywhere. When his brother ascends to the throne of this land, then everyone will dress appropriately to his station. Such a marvel - England will know how to dress at last.

Idiot: Now if we could just do something about the Scots.

(France sits down, wind taken out of his sails by idiot's line ...)

Spain: **My** King rules not merely a Kingdom, but an empire. Each day the King fights his way valiantly through a mountain of paper. One time, Secretary Idiarquez brought me in to the royal presence, and there he was, Felipe el Rey d'Españe, and I watched him for four hours while he signed document after document, charter after charter, decree after decree. Yo, el Rey! Yo, el Rey! Yo, el Rey! *(Build to crescendo on that, standing, with tears in eyes on last one ...)* And his signature was perfect every time. It brings a tear to my eye even now. *(Sitting)* It was glorius.

France: How *(pause)* inspiring. *(To Russia)* Tell us of your king.

Russia: I remember the first time I meet Czar Ivan, I think to myself: "Whether you smack the owl against the pole or with the pole whack the owl -- it's all the same; the owl is dead."

(Pause ... puzzled looks ... Wat returns, wearing the French Ambassador's cloak as if it were his own ...)

France: What a lovely cloak. I have one like that ...

Wat: Greetings, noble sirs. I am Wat the Farrier. For a small fee I will shoe your horses.

(Russia pays him a coin. Wat leaves the table and circles around upstage. Geraldine circles around the other side, drops bill off. Spaniard picks up bill, France drops a coin or two on the table. Wat comes back around and grabs coins and exits through front door.)

(Leicester enters front door, carrying bread)

Host: Servants enter through the back door!

Leicester: But I don't think your dog likes me.

Host: Dog?

Idiot: The ones we make bacon out of!

(Leicester notices ambassadors, pushes bread off to Geraldine, leers at her ...)

Leicester: I can think of some *other* buns I would rather be squeezing.

Geraldine: Ew! *(She exits back door)*

Leicester: *(To Audience)* She wants me.

(Leicester sits at table with ambassadors; Geraldine runs out back door, other ladies follow)

Leicester: Your pardon, gentles. What brings you to our quaint village?

Idiot: A coach!

Spain: We are on a quest! We seek the Cotswold Lion!

Leicester: The Cotswold Lion! Surely not! The Cotswold Lion is too fierce a creature for even such brave men as yourselves.

Russia: To fear death is not to live.

(Wat enters, wearing a different cloak (or same one reversed),. comes around upstage, sits down at table ...)

France: With my new hunting outfit, how could I possibly fail?

Spain: I will face down the lion as if it were a recalcitrant taxpayer.

Leicester: Brave words indeed, but I still think you underestimate the task.

Wat: Perhaps with the assistance of a skilled local guide ...

France: Such as yourself, monsieur?

Wat: Oh, no ... but for a fee, I could locate one.

(They flip him a coin, he beckons the host over ...)

Host: What about Bill Smith, the Miller?

Wat: No, he got run over by a cart.

Host: Ok, how about Joseph Miller, the Smith? He was successful on his last hunt.

Wat: Yeah, but they were geese. How hard was that? They were in a pen!

Idiot: What about Steve?

Host and Wat:
Nine-fingered Steve?

Leicester: Nine-fingered Steve?

Host: Shhhh! (As in "You're a local, dummy ...")

Spain: Describe for us this nine-fingered Steve.

France: Oui, what sort of figure does he cut?

Wat: He hates to waste his time ... perhaps if you were to send a token of your sincerity ...

(Spain nudges France, who nudges Russia, who nudges Spain, who almost nudges Leicester, nudges France back, who nudges Russia ...)

Spain: * Sigh* (Actually say the word "Sigh")

(Drops coin on table)

Wat: *(Takes coin, signals Idiot ...)* Jack, fetch your brother!

(Idiot reaches for coin, gets 'kicked' out the door by Wat)

Wat: *(to Ambassadors)* I trust you have sufficient weapons and armor?

Russia: You need a sharp axe for a tough bough.

France: Armor, avec taffeta?

Wat: Don't worry, gentlemen, leave the details to me ...

Spain: But, that wasn't in our budget!

Wat: I am sure you nobles will find my terms quite reasonable ...

(All hand him a coin or two; Idiot and Steve enter)

Idiot: *(to Steve)* So, the herald says, "20 pence, same as in town."

(Steve laughs ...)

Wat: *(Stands up, twirls cloak around so it's inside out and puts it back on, bows back to them)* Good gentles, I have the honor of presenting to you the foremost huntsman of the Cotswolds, the renowned Nine-fingered Steve. *(Bows, holds hand out for a tip; Steve slowly steps forward scratching ...)*

(Russia gives him a coin)

Spain: Why do they call you "Nine-Fingered" Steve?

Steve: It's quite simple, really. (*Counting trick ... comes out to nine, holds up both hands (ten fingers showing)*)

(*Spanish ambassador follows along on abacus ...*)

Steve: You should see my brother – he's got eleven!

Idiot: It's true, I'm a human oddity!

(*Idiot does counting trick, comes out to eleven; both of them show both hands (ten fingers each) to audience*)

Spain: Something here does not quite balance.

(*Steve shakes abacus, drops back on table ...*)

Steve: I was just sittin' down to me tucker! What do you blokes want?

Leicester: They wish to hunt ... The Cotswold Lion!

Steve: The Cotswold Lion! By Crikey, that's the most dangerous beast in these parts! Best get yer rest, you've got a tough day ahead!

France: But it's only six o'clock!

Steve: Look, mates, who's the expert here?

Russia: The morning is wiser than the evening. God gives to those who get up early.

Spain: (*To Host*) Are rooms included with the meal?

France: (*To Spain*) Shouldn't we stay somewhere more fashionable? Or at least more clean?

Russia: One may make up a soft bed, but it will still be hard to sleep in.

Host: I am sure something can be arranged. (*Signals to Wat*)

Wat: Let me introduce myself, I am Wat the Hospitaller. I hear you gentlemen are in need of lodging?

(*They pay Wat, follow him out the door ...*)

Leicester: Now that they're gone, we can plan for the morrow.

(*Everyone huddles, freeze. Exeunt*)

(End of Act II)

ACT III. The Tavernyard (in front of the tavern):

(Leicester enters from the tavern, followed by Ladies, Host. Leicester strides to center stage, pointing at people, sends people to do things, everyone is ignoring him – Katherine is actually directing people and they're following her direction, but Leicester doesn't notice ...:)

Leicester: Listen to me, and everything will go exactly as discussed last night. You, go over there. You, go get the armor. You, over there – go get the lion suit from “Wat’s Costume Shoppe”. You, move there.

(Katherine sends Geraldine to costume shop; Geraldine exits to the costume shop; Host into tavern; Steve and Idiot enter:)

Idiot: *(to Steve)* So SHE says, “Don’t worry, it’s nothing a land crab in the codpiece won’t fix ...”

Steves: Crikey!

(Geraldine returns with sheep suit; Host enters with a basket full of kitchen implements (armor) ... Geraldine comes up to Leicester)

Leicester: I ordered a lion suit!

Geraldine: But this was all he had!

Leicester: This will have to make do. So, who can we get to play the lion?

(Big look around (everyone) – stop at idiot. Everyone looks back at Leicester, looks back at the idiot. Look at Katherine, who points at Leicester. This should be done from the waist so it's VERY obvious what everyone is doing. Everyone circles Leicester so he can't be seen from audience ... he gets dressed up in sheep costume. Everyone backs up from him when done.)

Idiot: And they call *me* an idiot!

Leicester: Why does it have to be me?

Katherine: Well, my lord, only your brilliance can ensure the success of this enterprise.

Leicester: But, I don’t want them to succeed.

Katherine: Exactly!

Geraldine: Oh, look! Here come the ambassadors!

(Leicester starts looking around ...; Elizabeth taps him on the shoulder to get his attention)

Elizabeth: The brave hunters.

Katherine: Shouldn't you be leaving?

Leicester: I hope Her Majesty appreciates my noble sacrifice!

(Leicester takes off ...; the ambassadors arrive)

Spain: Where is my suit of armor? *(Someone points to basket of implements)*

France: *(Sees basket of implements)* This? I am supposed to wear this? I cannot possibly be seen in such an unfashionable ensemble! It is positively German!

Russia: *(Resignedly)* No use reproaching the mirror if your mug is crooked.

Wat: I am Wat, the Armorer.

(Holds out hand for payment)

Spain: Did we not pay you for this last night?

Wat: That was Wat the Weaponsmith.

(All of them dig up a coin ...)

France: Very well, gird it upon me.

(Ladies help armor them up – they stand there – Spain and Russia resigned, France poses ...)

(Armoring occurs, Spain and Russia look over at France ... nudge, nudge ...)

Russia: The devil is not as frightful as he is painted.

Spain: Señor, I am not so sure.

(Steve sees “tracks”)

Steve: Time's a-wastin'. I see tracks! Cotswold Lion's been through here! *(Bends down, tastes “track”)* And they're fresh!

Elizabeth: *(sotto voce)* Size 10 boot?

(Steve starts to run off, the ambassadors start to walk off after him, he returns gets behind the last of the ambassadors ...)

Steve: You've gotta move fast if you wanna catch up with *this* beast!

(Shoves them off stage ...)

(Ladies, Idiot, Wat, and Host are still on stage)

Katherine: Why don't we go ... help.

(Kat points to box that 'armor' was in, Elizabeth and Geraldine grab it, Ladies exit into Tavern, with Host.)

Wat: How else can I get money from these guys?

Idiot: I'm huuungry ...

Wat: *(Lightbulb goes off ...)* Ah ha!

(Wat exits)

Idiot: I'll follow you.

(Wat pretends to throw a ball, which Steve follows but can't find ... he wanders off to the front of the stage to watch the action ...)

(Most of the rest of the act looks a bit like a keystone cops movie – people on/off stage quickly, a line here and there, but a lot of sight gags ...)

(Leicester enters, panting ...)

Leicester: Those fools, I've lost them already.

(Exits ... Steve and ambassadors enter)

Steve: We're right on his tail! Keep yer eyes peeled, he's a crafty devil!

(France looks like he's about to gag – think about "peeled eyes" ... Steve and ambassadors exit ...)

(Leicester wanders back through, pauses for a moment, takes off again. Ladies enter, Katherine and Elizabeth each have boots on stick (one boot per stick), Geraldine has a broom. They sweep up after Leicester, and put down new tracks into tavern ... they run off after Leicester.)

(Idiot comes from front of stage, carefully walks in tracks into the tavern.)

(Wat enters with something like a cigarette tray from the 30's/40's and a sign from it, sign says "Wat's Cotswold Oysters". He waits behind it. Ambassadors and Steve come on stage from hunt.)

Spain: Isn't this mutton?

Wat: *(Make this big, direct to audience)* It's the Cotswolds ...

(Ambassadors and Steve buy something to eat, take back off on hunt. Wat exits.)

(Idiot enters from Tavern walking backwards in tracks, halfway across stage; Leicester enters, circles around Idiot – with a flower and a mirror – alternates between sniffing flower and looking at himself/flirting with self in mirror – doesn't see Idiot; Idiot circles around Leicester doesn't see him; Leicester exits. Idiot sees NEW tracks, jumps over to those and follows them offstage ...)

(Ladies enter, Geraldine carrying broom, the others carry a boot on a stick – they split off, leaving tracks in different directions (one into the tavern, the other off stage), leaving the stage. Idiot comes on following tracks on stage, hits split, falls over backward. Geraldine starts sweeping one of the sets of tracks up (the one into the tavern), helps Idiot stand up.)

Idiot: Thank you!

(Follows the other track that wasn't swept up, hopping on one foot, exits offstage.)

(Steve and ambassadors come back on.)

Steve: Keep together lads, the Cotswold Lion is a canny critter, he's likely to pick us off one by one.

(Ambassadors startled, look over shoulders in different directions, back to back to back, back up, bump into each other:)

Ambassadors: The Lion!

(They run off in three different directions (one to either side of stage, other through tavern door)

Steve: I need a cold one.

(Heads into tavern.)

(Leicester saunters on stage. Looks around, goes out to audience, smarms some lady, and sits on her lap. Spain comes in ... looks for Lion, goes out into audience looking, and looks right past Leicester, and makes his way back on stage not having found him. Exits ...)

(Steve and Host come on from Tavern.)

Steve: Crikey, can you believe these blokes?

Host: Look at the money we're making.

Steve: Look at all the money Wat's making!

Host: Yes, but he's BAD at dice. *(Hint, hint)*

(Shake heads and go back into tavern ...)

(Russian ambassador comes on stage by himself, looks around, stage is empty, looks at audience:)

Russia: One man in a field is not a warrior.

(Russia exits ... Leicester enters from audience crosses stage, reading a copy of the program, laughing ...)

(Geraldine enters with broom, starts sweeping, realizes she's alone, looks around ...)

Geraldine: Now what do I do?

(France enters ... sees Geraldine, bows, drops his 'weapon'.)

France: Pardonez-moi, mademoiselle. *(Trips over 'weapon', swears)*

Geraldine: Oooh! Is that French?

France: No, I think it is a sprained ankle.

Geraldine: May I rub it for you? I have some rose ointment.

(Exit into tavern, just before she goes through door, Geraldine looks out at audience over shoulder and raises eyebrows/winks.)

(Spain and Russia come on, towing the idiot who has a bag over his head, ropes around his upper body so arms are pinned.)

Spain: Success, success! We are victorious!

(Wat enters, hearing the hue and cry ...)

Wat: *(Pulls rope and bag off of idiot ...)* Oh, that's the idiot, we catch him all the time!

Idiot: Moo?

Russia: Not everything is a mermaid that dives into the water.

Idiot: *(Nodding knowledgeably)* Baaa!

(Wat unties idiot ...)

Wat: I am Wat the Ropemaker. Rental fee on this fine woolen rope is ... *(holds out hand)*

Spain: Woolen rope?

Wat: *(to audience)* It's the Cotswolds.

Idiot: Is that where I am?

(France comes out with Geraldine on one arm, cup and ball in other hand, plays with cup and ball Geraldine manually sinks the ball, France looks at audience smugly and poses ...; Steve and Host wander in behind France and Geraldine; Spain looks at France:)

Spain: Score!

Steve: Cor, that's a beautiful catch!

(Leicester wanders on stage ... doesn't notice anyone's there (looking at lady he smarmed in audience, perhaps). Everyone stops, sees him. He gets to center of stage. The three ambassadors circle and threaten with weapons. Leicester cowers. Everyone cheers.)

(Queen arrives with Katherine and Elizabeth, sans aprons.)

Queen: What's keeping Geraldine?

Geraldine: *(Rips off apron, takes place behind the Queen)* Affairs of state, Your Majesty!

(Everyone bows to Queen ...)

Everyone: Your Majesty!

Ambassadors: Look, I've caught him! *(Words to that effect for each of them)*

Queen: Silence! You can't *all* have caught him. How shall I decide amongst you?

(Leicester is cowering so that the Queen doesn't notice that it's him in costume ...)

Idiot: Perhaps you could send them on a Quest to test their mental and physical abilities ...?

Spain: Your Grace, surely I have shown the most fiduciary responsibility in the pursuit of this assignment. Let me just tally up the accounts for you. Despite the remarkably expensive townsfolk, I managed to single-handedly thwart the dangerous monster.

France: No, Your Majesty, it is I who have shown the most valour.

Geraldine: I thought it was velvet?

France: Despite being wounded grievously, I thrust my way into the thick of things, I plunged forward through the brush, brandishing my mighty weapon. *(Brandishing cup and ball ... people ducking ...)*

Geraldine: And dropped it *(pause)* twice.

France: And made short work of this demon.

Geraldine: Very *(pause)* short ...

Queen: And you, Grand Duke, what have you to say?

Russia: Your Majesty, looking at a tree see it's fruit, looking at a man, see his deeds. Where there is courage, there is victory. The truth will surface.

Queen: So, let us see this fearsome beast.

(Steve points at/picks up Leicester and pushes toward Queen)

Steve: Oy, here's what they were all chasin'.

(Leicester stands up, stops cowering, sort of grimaces at the Queen (oh, I'm sooo embarrassed) ...)

Queen: Oh, that's just Robin. I captured him years ago! *(Pulls him behind her)* So, none of you really succeeded. I cannot accept any of your masters' proposals ... at this time.

(Ambassadors look disappointed.)

Queen: However, I do wish to recognize your heroic deeds.

Katherine: *(Sotto voce to Geraldine)* So, how heroic was it?

Elizabeth: *(Sotto voce)* I suppose there's a certain bravery in trying something for the first time.

Queen: Upon our return to London, I will bestow knightly honors upon you all.

Host: Your Majesty, would you reconsider the export license?

Queen: Please send a delegation to Our court. And this time, make sure you address it directly to Us. *(Looking at Leicester ...)*

Idiot: *(To Geraldine)* Can I have my broom back?

Queen: Come along Robin, and please make yourself presentable. You smell of swine.

Leicester: It's the Cotswolds?

(Queen, Ladies, and Leicester exit ...)

Russia: Queer where a crooked path will sometimes take you.

Spain: You know, I actually understood that.

(Host comes up to ambassadors, and hands them a LARGE bill)

Host: Gentlemen, your bill.

(LARGE Bill unrolls ... Ambassadors look astounded, don't know what to do, turn purses inside out – all of them are empty. Host hands them the “Wench Wanted” sign and an apron. Idiot clutches broom. Host points them all into the tavern. They exit, leaving Steve and Wat on stage.)

Steve: *(To Wat)* A game of dice?

Wat: Maybe later, I have a bit of unfinished business.

(Steve goes into tavern; Wat puts wig on, walks out to audience, goes to Flieg (Frederick of Holland), introduces himself:)

Wat: Hello, I'm Wat the Harlot!

(Offers hand to Flieg)

~ finis ~

Misc. Notes:

Proverbs used by Russian Ambassador are from a collection by Viscountess Tatiana Nikolaevna Tumanova, and used with her permission.

French Ambassador thinks he's suave, but is more "anti-suave"...

Village Idiot is smarter than everyone takes him for ... which is why some of his comments are so funny.

Notes for program:

Queen Elizabeth I, The Earl of Leicester, Katherine Ashley, Elizabeth Knollys, Geraldine, Countess of Kildare were all real people. The rest are made-up. Any resemblance to anyone real or otherwise is purely coincidental. The ambassadors are based on the fact that ambassadors from the heads of state of countries all across Europe were sent to plead the suits of their masters – i.e., to try to convince Elizabeth to marry one of them ... it didn't work. The relationship between Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Leicester is fairly well documented ... she led him on, he was infatuated with her, but nothing ever happened.

No lions were harmed in the making of this play ...

The Fable of the Cotswold Lion is based on references (cited below, as well as others) found in literature of the middle ages regarding a "Cotswold Lion" – the lion is actually a sheep or ram, which is the joke. To be as "fierce as a Cotswold Lion" is to be sheepish ...

The Oxford English Dictionary cites the following under "Cotswold":

- 1327 Petit. *ibid.* II. 182/1 Unze Sakes & Sys cloves de le meliour Leyn de Coteswold a l'oepe nostre dit Seignour.]
- 1537 Thersites in Hazl. *Dodsley* I. 400 Now have at the lions on Cots'old.
- 1548 Halle Chron. 196 Liberte for certayn cottesolde shepe to be transported vnto the countre of Spayne.
- 1553 Udall *Royster D. (Arb.)* 70 Then will he looke as fierce as a Cotssold lyon.
- 1593 Shakes. *Rich. II, ii. iii. 9.* 1598 -- *Merry W. i. i. 92* How do's your fallow Greyhound, Sir, I heard say he was out-run on Cotsall.