

Ordeal

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Scenario—

It was the period of William the Conquer, and the society was gradually stable. At the same time, William I compiled the laws in Alfred time to set a rough standard for trailing. It called "Ordeal."

Louis and Howard are neighbors but not in good relationship. Louis is a nice person, who is very popular in the hundred in Yorkshire. Louis has a beautiful wife and no child, and he has a small farm and a few sheep. As to Howard, he is richer than Louis. He also has some sheep to make living. The lives in this hundred are ordinary and peaceful. Under the ruling of such a strong king, people do not have to worry about safety.

One day, Mrs. Louis is counting the sheep as usual, and she finds that two sheep are missing. She immediately assumes Howard is the thief, so she tells her husband right away. Louis is too angry to think carefully, and he goes to Howard's house asking him. They cannot deal with the incident themselves, and they turn to "the Hundred Court." The court decides to trail Howard by ordeal.

Act I

(Scene: Country side, two houses and two small farms.)

It is a beautiful morning, and Mrs. Louis is busy doing chores, hearing some noises from Howard's chicken. Recently, Howard's chickens are especially annoying. This time, Mrs. Louis cannot bear anymore.

Mrs. Louis God! Howard's chickens are really noisy! Darling, can you deal with that? (Yelling to Mr. Louis, she looks annoyed.)

Mr. Louis I don't want to deal with this stuff! He is the most unreasonable person in the world. (He moves from the living room to the garden.) Honey, can you check our adorable sheep and chickens? I guess they are hungry now. (He starts cutting grass.)

Mrs. Louis Alright! (She grabs a bag of chicken feeds, walking toward the farm. She feeds the chicken first, then the sheep.) Wait a second, am I dizzy? Johnny and Robert are missing! (She looks around and feels anxious.) Louis! Come here, Louis!

Mr. Louis Hey, hey, quiet ok? You will scare our dear animals. What's wrong? (He runs to the farm.)

Mrs. Louis Johnny and Robert are missing! God! The Sheriff is coming for investigation! For the Domesday Book! Our great king will send his servant soon to investigate the property we have. We cannot meet the standard of the tax this year!

Mr. Louis Who? Calm down, are you saying our sheep are missing?

Mrs. Louis Yes! Johnny and Robert! The two fattest sheep of all.

Mr. Louis Stop giving those animals names! Have you looked around? Maybe they are just nearby. (He looks around, trying hard to find any clues. Mrs. Louis walks closely to him and whispers.)

Mrs. Louis I think Howard is the one.

(Mr. Louis is too angry to think carefully, and he goes straight to Mr. Howard's house. His face is full of anger, and he walks with big steps.)

Mr. Louis Mr. Howard! This is Louis, please open the door. (He knocked the door quickly and hardly.)

Mr. Howard What's wrong? Hold on a second. (Some noise comes out from Howard's house, and for a while, the door opens.) May I help you? (He looks at Mr. Louis unhappily.)

Mr. Louis I strongly doubt that you steal my sheep!

Mr. Howard What? Are you kidding me? You hit my door like that just for asking me this stupid question? I have no time to fool around with you. I know you don't like me, but stop asking for troubles. (He turns his feet, being ready to shut down the door.)

Mr. Louis OK! You don't admit your guilt! Let's wait and see! We will meet in the court! (He shouts toward Howard. When Howard wants to say something, Louis leaves.)

Act II

(Scene: At the hundred court. Three main people: Sheriff, Howard and Louis. Although they are at the court, the place should be as simple as possible. 30 freemen are at the scene, including Louis' 16 compurgators and Howard's tithing group consists of 10 people.)

Sheriff Gentlemen, please be settled. This is the no. 68 case of the hundred court this term, and I am the sheriff of Yorkshire. I am executing my duty, the twice a year tourn. I am here to announce, the court begins. Mr. Louis, please make your oath first to our dearest Father.

Mr. Louis I swear to God that what I am going to say is true, no lies!

Sheriff Mr. Howard, it's your turn.

Mr. Howard I now swear to God I will be true to God, and all I am going to say belongs to the truth.

Sheriff The court shall begin. Mr. Louis, please go first.

Mr. Louis Dear sheriff, I am Louis, a farmer. One day, my wife found the two fattest sheep were gone, and the thief must be Howard! He knew that the land he bought was important to my family! My parents were buried there, but he insisted to build a house there and move my parents' bodies away! This time, he stole my sheep because his sheep are sick, and he is seeking replacement.

Sheriff Mr. Howard, your sheep are sick, is this the fact?

Mr. Howard Yes, my lord, that is true. However, even my sheep are ill; I still won't do this kind of dirty thing. The poor couples want to gain money from me via this case. They don't have evidence, and they have disturbed my peace. Please, your honor, return my quiet life and justice which are stolen by the couples!

Sheriff Mr. Louis, you accused that Mr. Howard stole your sheep. Do you bring your peers?

Mr. Louis Yes, your honor, they are here. (He says with a confident smile.)

Sheriff Good, compurgators, can you swear that Mr. Louis' words are no lies? (He turns to the compurgators, and he asks.)

16 Compurgators We are here to make oath that Louis is telling the truth. (16 people speak with one voice.)

Sheriff Mr. Howard, how about you? (He turns to Howard.) Where are your oath-helpers? (He looks around the court, but no one seems to be Howard's peer.)

Mr. Howard I don't have oath helpers. I am here with the tithing group only.

Sheriff I see. Mr. Howard's tithing group please comes to the front. Can you make oaths for Mr. Howard?

Three men of tithing group We refuse to do so. We are here because it is our obligation to bring him to the court.

Sheriff I see. You do not have any oath-helpers, and three of the ten refuse to swear for you. Have you done many bad behaviors?

Mr. Howard No, my lord, I just moved to this hundred half year ago, and I don't leave my house unless I

have to. Besides, some of the residents in my tithing group are Mr. Louis' friends. My sheep are sick, but only five of them, and I still have 20 left. I don't have to steal!

Mr. Louis You have already lost 5 sheep, and maybe you want to make up the lost by stealing my property. You are afraid that you can't turn in the taxes this term.

Mr. Howard That's not true! My property is enough for me to afford the tax. I do not need to act as a thief.

Sheriff People here, please make your decision. (Sheriff talks to the freemen at the scene.) Who should provide the evidences? I will give you 5 minutes to seek agreement. I will bring to trail after seeing the proofs.

People After our discussion, we think Mr. Howard should provide evidence.

Act III

(Scene: Outdoors. An open ground with a big pool contents water at the center. Sheriff, Mr. Louis, Mrs. Louis Mr. Howard 2 guards, Howard's tithing group and some audiences.)

Sheriff Mr. Howard, since your evidence is not strong enough, I decided to let God make his decision. I am here to announce Mr. Howard should be trialed by water! Before the trial, please make your oath that you will follow the outcome, both of you.

Mr. Howard and Mr. Louis I will follow everything that God wants me to do, and I will not have any complaint.

Sheriff My dear Father, please help the dull to clarify the truth. We will follow your instruction with no doubt. If the pure water accepts him and thinks he is not guilty, he will not float; however, if he floats, he is guilty, judged by God. Guards!

Guards Here, My Lord!

Sheriff Throw him into the pure water! Everyone is the witness.

Guards Yes! (They hold Howard and lift him up.) 1, 2, 3! (They throw him into the pool.)

Howard Oh! Please! Help! (He struggles in the water, screaming loudly. Everyone is looking at him without any movement. Howard is gradually tired, and he stops struggling and yelling.)

Louis Look, he is floating! (Louis is the first one to shout.) My dear Father, thank you for returning me justice!

Sheriff God tells us his decision. Guards, pull him out.

(The guards come forward and pull him out. Howard is lying on the ground, coughing painfully. One of the guards squats down, patting him to make him feel better, and the other guard walks back to his position.)

Howard Thank you. I am better now. (He stands up slowly. The guard walks back to the place next to his partner.)

Sheriff Attention please, I am now going to announce the judgment. Mr. Howard, since the pure water refuses to accept you, you are guilty! (Announce in a loud voice.) Do you have anything to say, Mr. Howard? (He looks at Howard.)

Howard No, my Lord, I swore I would not have second words. (Tear drops from his face.)

Sheriff How about you, Mr. Louis?

Louis Thank you, your honor, for returning me justice.

Sheriff Mr. Howard, I decide that you are to give the fattest three sheep to Mr. Louis as compensation. You have to finish this task in a week. Furthermore, you need to leave this place to return the grave of

Louis' parents as punishment.

Howard I will abide by your honor's judgment.

Act IV

(Scene: Same as the scene in Act I, but this time Howard's house is no longer there. Characters: Mr. and Mrs. Louis and Wilson.)

Mrs. Louis Honey, I feel so happy and it is so quiet after Howard moved away.

Mr. Louis Yes, darling, I am really glad that the guy finally left from our lives. To my surprise, his sheep are quite productive and even healthier than the two missing sheep. Our income has increased since then.

Mrs. Louis God is really blessing us. After I feed the chicken and check the sheep's condition, let's go to church. How do you think, honey?

Mr. Louis Of course, call me when you are ready. (Mrs. Louis waves her hands and walks out to the farm.)

Mrs. Louis Ok, babies, here you are. I know you are so hungry! Come to get your food. (She's talking to chicken.) I will let you enjoy your meal. (She walks toward the sheep.) Hi, dear! How are you today? My life is even better after Howard moved away! (She is talking to the sheep, dancing around them happily.)

(Mr. Louis runs fast towards his wife.)

Mr. Louis Honey! Come here! I found something. (Panting and then stops running.)

Mrs. Louis What's wrong? I am taking care of my babies. Why so nervous? (She walks slowly.)

Mr. Louis What is this? I found in the drawer. Wilson? When did you make the deal with him? Why, I don't know anything! (He is holding a piece of paper angrily. When his wife comes to his front, he shows the paper to her.)

Mrs. Louis Stop! Too many questions! I can't handle all at once. You ask when? Are you blind? It is written on the top of the paper. (She stuffs the paper back in her husband's hands.)

Mr. Louis Read the words! (He shouts angrily. His wife is scared, taking back the paper.)

Mrs. Louis Ok! You are too scary! "I, Mrs. Louis is willing to lend Wilson...two sheep, Johnny and Robert. Wilson must return the sheep two months later." Holy cow! I totally forgot! (She looks panicked.) What did we do to Howard? God, please forgive me, forgive us! (Mrs. Louis nearly cries.)

Mr. Louis My love, can you put something important in your mind? Instead of those stupid names of the animal! (He scolds his wife.)

(A voice appears from the front door.)

Wilson Is anybody home? This is Wilson to return the sheep I borrowed two months ago! (He drags two fat sheep, standing in front of Louis' house. He seems to look for something.)

(The couple stands still, and no one answers the door.)

The End.