

Conversations  
with  
QUEEN ALIÉNOR

A Three-Act Play

by Jini Jones Vail



Other books by Jini Jones Vail:

*Rochambeau: Washington's Ideal Lieutenant*

*Summering in France's Loire Valley*

# Conversations with Queen Aliénor

## A Three-Act Play by Jini Jones Vail

This three-act play centers around ongoing conversations with my twenty-nine generations-into-the-past grandmother Aliénor, Queen of France and later Queen of England.

We (Aliénor and I) meet in six locations, all of which are meaningful to each of us. In each location our conversations meander from where we are, what time zone we are in and why that location was important to each of us, regardless of the differences of centuries, countries, and continents. In no time at all we find we have conquered time travel and have much to share. We are not afraid to show each other how much we care, granddaughter for grandmother and vice versa. It is amazing how many times we find similarities in our disparate lives. Even so, some events we discuss are way out of each other's purview due to our eight-hundred-year generation gap. We share sad times, difficult times and happy-to-the-skies times!



The author, dressed here as Aliénor, with her daughter, Amy, prepares to do the first reading of scene one for a private audience. Present were a New York Times writer and a photographer for a subsequently published article on the front page of the Connecticut section of the New York Times.

cover photo: © Manuel Cohen

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### *Dedication and Thanks*

*To my husband, John Lester Vail, for the drive to Fontevraud, for my last look at Aliénor.*

*To my daughter, Heather Dyer Woodring, for help with the final edit.*

*To my daughter, Amy Elise Dyer, for playing my part in the first reading of Act I, Scene I.*

*To my son, Richard Hemenway Dyer III, for the cover design.*

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### Prologue

This three-act play centers around ongoing conversations with my twenty-nine generations-into-the-past grandmother Aliénor, Queen of France and later Queen of England.

We (Aliénor and I) meet in six locations, all of which are meaningful to each of us. In each location our conversations meander from where we are, what time zone we are in and why that location was important to each of us, regardless of the differences of centuries, countries, and continents. In no time at all we find we have conquered time travel and have much to share. We are not afraid to show each other how much we care, granddaughter for grandmother and vice versa. It is amazing how many times we find similarities in our disparate lives. Even so, some events we discuss are way out of each other's purview due to our eight-hundred-year generation gap. We share sad times, difficult times and happy-to-the-skies times!

The seeds for this play were sown in France in 1987 as I was following in the footsteps of my great grandmother who lived in the 12th century, Aliénor, d'Aquitaine, Queen of France and then Queen of England. My mother had given me a book in the late 1970's that Aliénor mentions in the first scene. It is entitled *Descendants of Blood Royal*. Therein, my maternal ancestors are listed generation-by-generation, name-by-name, going back to the Plantagenets and beyond. My interest was piqued by the inclusion of Henry II, Plantagenet whose wife was Aliénor of Aquitaine.

It was not until 1993 that I conceived of the idea to have a conversation with this elusive Aliénor. The more I knew of her, the more I wanted to talk with her. So, I began to write some dialogue between Aliénor and myself. It came easily and quickly took on a direction of its own. However, I had to put it aside for nine years due to the time constraints of teaching high school French and other more pressing events. This summer, 2002, I picked it up again. I must admit that if the successes of Aliénor's life had never happened, I probably would not have been so endeared to her memory. Her accomplishments and strong character traits, from my point of view, were:

- She was a formidable leader, taught by her father and grandfather in Aquitaine as a young girl. i.e., the ability to handle her people, keep them happy and content while continuing to revere her, and her unrelenting self-sacrifice to a greater cause.

- She married two kings and lived beyond them both.
- She had ten children by two husbands and survived most of them to the age of eighty-two.
- Her closeness to her son, Richard, Lionheart. Her persistence, when he was imprisoned abroad, in raising his ransom against all odds.
- Her determination to marry her children and grandchildren to heads of state, even necessitating a trip to Spain in her eighties.
- Her love of adventure and travel.
- Her beauty and statuesque figure.
- Her bravery, sanity and hope maintained while imprisoned by her husband, Henry II, for over a decade in Salisbury, England.
- Her image in so many churches and cathedrals that we can still see today in Europe and the US.
- Her participation in the Second Crusade and all it entailed.
- Her sense of the theatrical and dramatic.
- Her love of music and poetry.
- The way she endured her husbands' foibles:

**Louis VII, King of France (1120-1180):** his weak, hermit-like personality, his unworldliness, his ineptness to rule or lead his army, his unpreparedness on becoming king - most of these character faults were not entirely his fault since he was not meant to be king, but a cloistered monk, until his elder brother fell from his horse and died.

**Henry II, King of England (1133-1189) :** his hubris, his blind-headed bullshiness where his sons were concerned with regard to inheriting the crown, his love affair with Rosamond, his paranoia concerning Aliénor and their sons plotting against him - which in the end became a reality.

- Her long life (1122-1204).

In reading the writings of Marguerite Yourcenar, the first woman inducted into the *Académie Française*, I found an à propos quote which nails down the plausibility of my subject and the supposed impossibility of breaching

several hundred years to speak to my ancestor. In *Reflections on the Composition of Memoirs of Hadrian*, by Grace Frick, Yoursenar states: "Time itself has nothing to do with the matter. It is always surprising to me that my contemporaries, masters, as they consider themselves to be over space, apparently remain unaware that one can contract the distance between centuries at will." I am attempting to do just this in my work, *Conversations with Queen Aliénor* ~ the intervening 800+ years disappear in a flash when she and I begin to dialogue.

I have tried to build the character of Aliénor using "original stones," as Marguerite Yoursenar put it, wherever possible and fleshing her out in terms of myself and my understanding of her and her times. I feel that I have truly begun to know her, having read dozens of accounts of her life both in French and in English, and researched original extant documents made available to me at the archives of Fontevraud. I have joyfully spent much time in France tracing her footsteps. As much as I was able, I saw what she saw and imagined what she felt and did while in those same locations.

Jini Jones Vail  
T.B.T.G. 11/11/2002

## CONVERSATIONS WITH QUEEN ALIÉNOR

### Act 1, Scene 1

*(Following each scene are back scenes to be used as mini back scenes for extra actors behind the two main characters, to depict and expand on the scene's dialogue.)*

#### A Pillar of Smoke Rises and Queen Aliénor Arrives

Place: Jini's garden Watertown, CT

Time: Early autumn 2012

"To a Water-lily" by Edward Mac Dowell is playing

Opening poem is to be read by the narrator:

Sitting on the iron bench  
Musing in her garden, Jini sips  
A cup of roasted dandelion root.

Her Rebecca-at-the-well bends  
To pour pure water into the lily pond.  
Jini lifts her gaze without seeing

Gathering mist rise from the nearby stream  
Beckoning her with puffs and cloudy billows  
Mounting slowly but surely skyward.

Yawning from beneath earth's crust as if  
Venting steam, the early morning sun  
Lights the flame before Cyprus Italien.

Becoming a translucent pillar of light.  
It hovers ever higher through the smoky,  
Smoldering thickness; yet where's the fire?

Is it primeval birth into cool morning air?  
Rainbow droplets fall into sodden lilies  
While the rising rainbow glistens in Jini's hair.

Lo! A human form dwells within the color wheel.  
A gauzy silhouette emerges from the mist, and  
Aliénor alights upon the grass before her eyes.

*(Queen Aliénor in 12th century garb appears in her gold lame gown and star-studded sky-blue cloak, wearing a jeweled gold crown. She alights tentatively onto the grass beside the pond in front of Jini, her granddaughter of 29 generations into the **future**. Aliénor looks around to get her bearings as Jini, in jeans and a long man's shirt comes forward to greet her grandmother of 29 generations into the **past**. They had a brief encounter at Jini's church. Jini recognizes her Lady Grandmother in a heartbeat. Jini, totally non-plussed, finds her voice.)*

J: Oh, my goodness, my Lady Grandmother, is this really, really you? Are we really together at last? I am not simply seeing you in my mind's eye?

A: Yes, my dear granddaughter into the future! Our minds met long ago, but today we meet for the second time in full person-to-person material bodies. Such an amazing feat. Could we be the first to conquer time travel?

J: I am at a loss for words standing here before you. Should I curtsy? *(She makes an unsteady curtsy, trying to emulate those she has seen in movies.)*

A: Goodness no, my dear. *(She takes Jini's hands and steadies her.)* Please rise.

J: When I extended the invitation to you, I was not at all sure we could pull it off.

A: Pull what off, my mantle? *(Aliénor points to her long, flowing cloak.)* Do you in fact even have one? If you do, I do not see it.

J: No, I mean I shall have to remember not to use so many quips and slang expressions as I usually do with my 21st century friends. *(Laughing, but trying not to embarrass her grandmother while turning to sit.)* Let us sit here and be comfortable as we accustom ourselves to this new experience.

A: I shall gladly follow your lead. My knees are a bit weak right now with all the excitement. *(She seats herself regally on the matching iron bench near Jini.)*

J: Since it is a cool morning, would you like a coffee, latte, or would you prefer to try my roasted dandelion root tea with ice?

A: I will have the latte, cream, no sugar, *s'il vous plait*. As you see, I did my homework before coming. I learned how to order coffee or tea in your world. I will take mine, how do you call it, "High test," if you do not mind? Please make it with ice. I am all steamed up from my travel.

J: While I am inside, please make yourself comfortable and look around our garden.

*(Jini goes inside the house to prepare the iced drinks and returns with a tray full of cookies as well.)*

A: Many merci's, my dear. *Moi, j'adore*, this new trick of adding identical little pieces of floating ice to your drink! Another incredible invention of the future! *(She exclaims as she swirls her coffee in her glass listening to the clinking of the ice.)* Well, Jini, I must say that our meeting has me dazzled! Imagine, me, here in America at the beginning of the third millennium talking with you, my granddaughter of 29 generations and 800 years into the future! It is a veritable miracle! Since my life on earth ceased in 1204, I have been trying to keep abreast of world events as best I could. Keep in mind that *tempus fugit*, time flies, for me even faster now than it did while I was living in the 12th century. Either way, I never have enough time to keep up with my reading!

J: I know what you mean. I guessed you were a reader! *Moi, aussi*. I'm a reader and the perpetually curious type. So, when I saw your *gisant*, sculpted recumbent figure, on your sepulcher at Fontevraud, I noticed that you had a book in your hands, a symbol of the eternal reader! You have been a voluminous reader forever!!! And that's no joke!

While we are on the subject of your reading forever, for lo these many years people have been guessing as to what book you hold in your hands on your tomb. I have guessed it is the 12<sup>th</sup> century love story of Tristan and Iseult, or is it pious reading, like the prayer book?

A: Oh my, you are pinning me down on that one, aren't you? It is the latter of course. Remember that I spent several years living with the sisters at Fontevraud. They would never send me to my heavenly rest with a steamy love story.

J: I think I will still have to read between the lines on that one. Grand-mère, you said you would tell me today how you came here and why you chose to accept my invitation to visit me here at my home in Watertown, Connecticut.

A: *(Shifting in her seat to set down her latte on the glass-topped table between them.)* Yes, *avec plaisir*, Jini. I am delighted to share that with you, my dear future granddaughter. Let me see if I can re-construct the circuitous route that eventually led me to you. I feel so fortunate I finally made it a priority to research the lives of my many descendants. I have been thinking of doing it for hundreds of years! First, I randomly decided on the year 2004 since it was exactly eight hundred years from my death into the future. I will commence with how I found your name. I was reading through the membership list of the D.F.R.

J: You mean the D.A.R.? I'm a member of that group. Such a kick! While most of us are researching our ancestors in the distant past, you're tracking down descendants in the distant future! Ooh la la!!!

A: True, rather amazing isn't it, except that I was referring to the D.F.R. - The Daughters of the French Revolution. To be exact, I was scrolling down the list when my eye settled on your entry. Strange coincidence how your name happened to jump off the page!

J: Pardon me, I didn't know I was listed there. Maybe one of my descendants has, or will, become a member. Oh, I am so confused about time when we talk.

A: Yes, you are correct in that deduction. Your stepdaughter's daughter will become a member of the D.F.R. She is the keystone which led me to you. It was, in fact, just last week that I spied your name in her upline, although it seems like a moment ago. Since I arrived here, time is playing tricks on me too! I sometimes forget whether I am in my time zone or yours! Please correct me if I err an era. We've been talking non-stop since our meeting, hopping back and forth between your time zone and mine and sharing so much of our lives with one another. I find myself literally spinning!

J: My dear Grand-mère. I am thrilled and honored that you chose me, for whatever reason. I just love spending time with you, no matter in whose time zone. Let's not forget we are here, in the now, enjoying our iced coffee. *(They both take another long, cool sip and sigh.)* What was it about my name that led you to stop when you saw it?

A: Serendipity! Your second wedded name, Vail, intrigued me. To me, Vail denotes valor and chivalry. When I saw it, I conjured up visions of brave knights, and I was lost in a reverie of my Courts of Love in Aquitaine. *(Aliénor leans across the table towards Jini in excitement.)* Then I cross-referenced your maiden name and found a sizable entry in the Second Millennium journals of my husband, Henry II Plantagenet's downline, entitled, Descendants of Blood Royal. I knew I was on to something when I read that you were in the habit of returning again and again to France to study me!! Frankly, I am extremely flattered that I am remembered this long after my demise. Perhaps it pays to be twice Queen of two different countries, mother of 10, and grandmother of 51. That is why they call me the grandmother of Europe!

J: Grand-mère, I knew it had to be on my Plantagenet side! What is written in that book about me? I am totally unaware of such a book. Is it still in print?

A: No, but I just happen to have a copy of it in my saddlebag. I'll find it for you. *(She fiddles in her bag and finally pulls out a red, leather bound volume embossed with gold.)* Here it is! Now we are beginning to stand on even ground, you and me. You had a head start learning about me. Now, it is my turn to learn about you. *(Aliénor opens to the page indicated by a gold bookmark and hands Jini the book.)*

J: Soon enough Grand-mère. Let me check this out! *(After reading several minutes...)* It shows my genealogy with direct links to you and Henry II through your son, King John. I had no idea it would be important enough to be written anywhere! My mother always told me I was a late bloomer! Okay. You finished the cross-referencing. You learned we shared a common bloodline. Curiosity about your 2nd and now into the 3rd millennium granddaughter really piqued your interest! Who isn't curious about the future? But that doesn't mean we can project *ourselves* into *that* future with the blink of an eye! What happened next?

A: All I know is that I was deep in thought about who you might be and what your life might be like, and, the next thing I knew, I was sitting in New Hope Anglican church on the altar, next to you and your Knight, John of the Mimosa.

J: *(interrupting)* Yes, my husband is known as 'John of the Mimosa.' My Sexta Fiera literary group gave him that title at the time of my debut presentation for them. I decorated my formal high tea table with the huge bouquet of fresh Mimosa flown in from the South of France. Sorry, please do continue.

A: I felt right at home, mistaking him for one of my knights at my court of Poitiers. I was, however, astonished at his state of peculiar dress in a public place. I recall missing the familiar scent of incense and the white miter of the bishop. That's when I leaned over to John to inquire about the bizarre circumstances in which I found myself. Remember? That was when you entered the conversation to inquire about *my* peculiar dress! At first, I dared not ask your name nor tell you mine for fear I was in the wrong place and the wrong time zone. But, I did, and you answered, and I knew I had traversed eight centuries to come to you!

J: Wow! That was the moment when I realized who you were and how far in time and space you traveled to arrive here in Watertown, Connecticut, USA. I have witnessed miracles in that church in the past, but never one like this! Truth be told, your visit answered an unspoken wish, which, because of its total impossibility, has been locked in my heart since I first knew your name. *(Aliénor leans over to squeeze Jini's hand. They exchange a look of amazement. No sooner had they found each other, when they lost their connection and Aliénor vanished.)* So that was our first attempt. This time we are better able to maintain our contact. I thought I had lost you forever! I was panicked to have come so close and then to have lost you into thin air!

A: The impossible has happened, so let us enjoy every precious minute we have been granted. I know from my study that you are in your sixties - as young a sixty-year-old as I ever saw, I might add! I admire how active you are with your writing, Tai Chi, gardening, kayaking, entertaining, travel and all. In my day most grandmothers of your age had been cooling in their graves since the age of 35! I, however, am one of the rare exceptions of my time, living to the ripe age of 82. But all that in perspective, I am just as impatient and curious as you are. I have many more questions to pose to you, but I will exercise self-control and try to be patient, neither of which is second nature to me.

J: Patience is *not* one of my strong points either!

A: From what I have already learned, I think we will discover our lives are rife with similarities despite our obvious differences of station and time warp. Jini, could you be a dear and fetch me another of those iced lattes, no sugar? I am parched with all this talking and excitement. *(The two women settle down again in earnest, with great anticipation.)*

J: Where shall we go from here? We *could* start with our husbands, always a fascinating subject, *n'est-ce pas*? Tell me about your second husband, Henry II. He always fascinated me! How and when did you meet him? That was not clear in the accounts I read.

A: Hmmm, let me think back. I met him in Paris just before my first husband, Louis VII, launched the Second Crusade to Asia Minor. He and his father, Geoffrey, made a brief visit to court. I do not recall if his mother, Mathilde was present as well. Yes, that was when our paths first crossed.

J: Go on, please. Why was he memorable? Finally, can I hear it from your own lips? *(Jini says this with a giddy, high-pitched laugh.)*

A: One could tell immediately that he was a man of great promise. He was not yet king at that time, of course. He became king of England two years after we married. Granted, he was younger than me by eleven years. He was just so tall *(She indicates that he came up to her mid forehead.)*, had a shock of thick, tousled, red, hair, was more than a little rough around the edges in his appearance and demeanor. He already had a reputation as a warrior in the Plantagenet tradition. His great grandfather, you know, was William the Conqueror. By the way, whilst on the subject, do you know how the name Plantagenet came into being? It is rather amusing. As the story goes, Henry's father, Geoffrey, was accustomed to wearing a sprig of the Broom plant in his cap. Over time his appellation became synonymous with this decoration, and his family adopted the plant name as their surname. He was, thereby, the first Plantagenet. Thus, we have *Planta*, signifying, plant, and *genet*, meaning the Broom flower. *Planta-genet* becomes Plantagenet *Et voila!* There you have it!

J: What was it that attracted you to Henry, Grand-mère, if you'll excuse such a personal question?

A: Well, I think it was his imperfect, rough-hewn appearance, his way of making direct eye contact. Later, upon our return from the Crusade, after my annulment from Louis...

J: *(Interrupting again)* Hold on, I thought you were divorced. For all intents and purposes, I guess you were, but, in terms of the Catholic church, an annulment was less scandalous. Am I right? How did you manage that? You already had two daughters!

A: It was not easy. In the end, I gained my freedom on the grounds of consanguinity. And after all the haggling was completed, I made my way back to Poitiers to resume my life at court as the single ex-queen of France, still Duchess of Aquitaine. My life was about to take two full turns simultaneously. I was not alone for long. Henry pursued me to Poitou. Ah, *Oui, je me souviens, bien.* Yes, I remember it well *(pausing, in a moment of reverie)*. It was his impudent manner of barging his way into my personal life, even into my chambers whilst I scarcely knew him! Oh, he was persistent all right. He was the antithesis of Louis. By contrast, I welcomed his total manliness. *(She hesitated, looked out the window and took in a deep breath.)* There was no question what he wanted from me! Two things ...

J: The first one needs no explanation but the second?

A: After my person, it was my personal holdings, my beloved Aquitaine that he lusted after. Or was it vice versa? That question will always haunt me. As you certainly know from your reading, after the annulment, Louis, not being a strategist, had returned my dowry to me. Aquitaine was mine again; mine alone. I was a prize in more ways than one, my dear Jini!

J: Grand-mère, I beg you, tell me of your first years with Henry. Were they happy?

A: Yes, divinely so! For me, it was a new-found heaven on earth. Not only was I back in Aquitaine, land of my childhood, and home of my warm-spirited Provençale Court, but at last I had found a spouse with whom I had a sense of being evenly yoked. The love we shared was sensual, deep and committed. The life's work we commenced was forged under common goals. We vitalized and inspired each other effortlessly. However, romance aside, the business of unifying his domains and mine after he became king was monumental. My people were reluctant to accept him at first. Even though he had been born in Anjou and grew up speaking French, he was English. To them he was an outsider. They were not pleased to be foisted under the English crown. But I knew that eventually, because of their love for me, they would grow to revere him too.

J: Did you spend most of your time at court? I know how much you treasured being there...the music, the poetry, the troubadours... all those sunny, warm days melting into sensuous nights under the *midi*, summer skies.

A: We were never at court long enough for my taste. There was always a pocket of discontent here or there. In order to maintain order and cohesiveness in our lands, we needed to respond quickly to unrest. As a result, we were often *en route*, on the road to neutralize some distant village fracas. He was frequently away on his own on family business as well. Today, my dearest grandchild of modern times, you say you feel like you are chained to the wheel of your automobile. Well, we used to complain that we were born, lived and died in the saddle or sedan chair, neither of which was very comfortable! This was certainly true for Henry and me. And more lamentable, we rarely went on these "business" trips together!

And during those early years, I was often confined to the birth chamber making sure the family line would continue.

J: It's hard to keep a marriage together when you're always going in opposite directions, isn't it?

A: Precisely, you can well imagine the conflict one would feel if, for example, one was celebrating at a banquet with Bernard de Ventadour singing his haunting troubadour ballads in one's honor, and one was given word of a disturbance in the north and at the same time, of an uprising of vintners in Cahors to the east. It meant tearing oneself away from the revelry,

preparing the inevitable retinues for two journeys. Weeks would pass. Then, later, when we rejoined at court, how sweet it was to be back in Henry's strong arms again. It's strange, I know, but now, looking back, I can forget the infernal quarrels between us, all the years of misplaced allegiances, and remember only how close we once were. In our early years together, we truly loved one another. We nourished one another and thrived in our intimacy. I did love that man. Maybe I still do. But listen to me. How I do ramble on.

J: No need to apologize... I am quite content nursing my coffee while listening to your escapades with Henry. It's much more interesting than my comparatively simple life here in America.

A: I need to sit back and rest whilst you tell me more of your history. Why not start with your first marriage to Richard. You know I am fond of that name, it being the name of my favorite son, Richard, whom they call Lionheart.

J: Okay, Grand-mère. You may recall I met the red-haired Richard of my youth in the grandest city in America in the early 1960s. I was working on Fifth Avenue, in New York City at Air France in Public Relations, a not-so-subtle connection with my roots, and Richard was a second-year medical student at Cornell on the upper east side. He used to pick me up after work on the corner of Fifth and 53rd Street on his Vespa motor scooter. I felt so chic in my Saks Fifth Avenue knife-pleated black silk skirt and my white sharkskin shell from Bendel's. I would hop on behind him, and we would wind our way through the inching rush hour traffic and into Central Park. I felt special, as if protected by my invincible chevalier, my 20th century version of your Henry in many ways.

A: Jini, how very romantic. I am trying to imagine you astride the Vespa, holding tightly on to Richard's waist and burying your head in indentation of his back. Reminds me of riding double on Henry's black stallion along the beach south of Bordeaux. It was shortly after our marriage. Night was falling. I closed my eyes and listened to the splashing of the horse's hooves in the shallow water. Felt the cool spray on my bare feet. It was heaven.

J: Yes, I believe it! I felt the same as you when Richard's two horsepower Vespa reached Central Park. As the traffic thinned out, I nestled my head between his shoulder blades and felt the wind whipping my hair across my face. My senses took over - with my eyes shut I barely heard the muffled sounds of the taxis, breathed in the unmistakable odors of the city mixing with the fragrance of the country. Those were unforgettable moments frozen in time for me. Speaking of the park, let me tell you about a celebration supper we had there during our courtship. It makes me feel all warm and fuzzy to think of it. Well, one particularly fine day I picked *him* up at his dorm, in my little, white, French, Simca Océane convertible, and we headed across town from Olin Hall for an undisclosed destination. I told him it was to be a surprise.

First, we pulled up at the Brasserie Restaurant in the Seagram's Building, just off Park Avenue. I ran in and picked up our surprise. I returned with a large wicker basket festooned with tricolor ribbons. I am sure at that point he

guessed it was filled with comestibles. There was no disguising the herbed fragrance wafting up through the blue and white checkered tablecloth cover. I proceeded to drive us to Central Park, found our favorite niche near 68th Street and spread out a most delectable Provençale picnic! I remember everything we savored that night, Grand-mère: tarragon chicken, ratatouille, French bread, wine and cheese. For dessert, a chocolate mousse. Thank God for happy memories we can re-run at will. Isn't the mind a wondrous thing? Fascinating, isn't it, our both being drawn to the ruddy, bearded, red-haired type-...men driven by their own strong sense of purpose in their field, so to speak.

A: Aah, yes, you mentioned that your Richard also had reddish, curly hair. Happily, for us in some ways wasn't it? Come to think of it, most of the men in my family were ruddily complected and copper topped. Back to your point, I mean, being married to men who had such strength of determination. Henry, passionate towards the acquisition of territory, had an overpowering need to control succession to the throne.

J: And my Richard, for his albeit altruistic quest of practicing medicine and experimenting with new inventions, while always wanting to be at the epicenter of his world.

A: I observed Henry as a busy planner, like your Richard, ever pre-staging his next move to annex land or to maneuver key people to attain his goals. When you think of it, being wed to a successful, striving man has its pluses and its minuses. In order to make the union last, the wife of such a man must needs succumb to his agenda or step aside. Often a wife such as the latter is booted out of the way, as was I to my tower in Salisbury, England, for some fifteen tedious, wasted years. And in your case, my dear, woman-to-woman, were you a "yes" wife to the end?

J: Well, yes, in a way. While the children were growing up, we were both caught up in the perpetual motion of our busy lives. In fact, we worked in concert for years like a perfectly oiled machine. We cared for the children, worked on our abodes, entertained, traveled and carried out our family duties with ease. Life was good! I sense that Richard was in a way like Henry. He could barely find time to sit down and smell the roses.

A: Yes, I concur. Henry was just like that. His mind raced onward to endless future plots and plans, probably even in his sleeping hours. Then, with great fanfare, he would arise and charge onward, enlisting the aid of whomever was in the vicinity.

J: Tell me about it!! *(She added with emphasis.)* I remember nights during his tenure in Cornell Medical School when suddenly, still in deep sleep, Richard would pick up my arm and start to examine it as if I had an injury and needed a cast. His chosen field was Orthopedics. Even in sleep he found little rest. True relaxation was not in his vocabulary.

A: I knew from the time our sons were old enough to spar with one another, that our strength was in our unity. Yet, many outside forces were bent on toppling us

and our kingdom. Henry's solution to family continuity was to crown our youngest son, Henry, as a babe-in-arms. He thought this would insure Plantagenet control of the right of succession to the throne. I advised my husband from the inception that this plan was useless. But he would hear nothing of my rationale. By that time, he had already begun to rely on the voices of those around him more than on mine. I believe this was his first mistake, and mine, also, for allowing it.

J: Didn't this all transpire about the time Thomas Beckett was rising in favor on Henry's right hand?

A: Oh, yes, Jini – a very astute observation. It was a fatal downturn for the throne when Henry turned his back on Mathilde, his mother, our children and me. Mathilde was very wise in affairs of state. She knew from the beginning, that her son's friendship with Thomas, was ill-fated. Thomas was quick to reveal his greed. She warned my husband that if he were to promote him to Archbishop, their alliance would not survive. How prescient she was! How perceptive was my mother-in-law? I would say that from then on, we were on a course of self-perpetuating, self-destruction.

What a waste of a beautiful family and a noble kingdom!

J: I sympathize with you in every way Grand-mère! A family divided against itself cannot stand, whether it is a family of kings and queens or commoners. Division knows no rank. I can see that Henry had convinced himself that he could no longer believe that you had his best interest at heart.

A: Paranoia is indeed an evil spirit, as destructive as any well-placed arrow.

J: My mother, Anne, and your mother-in-law, Matilde, were of one mind in this respect. Mother always advised me that, "One must keep one's own counsel." Henry would have done far better had he not been taken in by Beckett in the first place. Results of this sort are broadly felt when a kingdom is at stake.

A: When trust in a relationship breaks down, all manner of ill wishing advisors rush in to fill the resulting void. The new faces look so believable as one seeks help while drowning. Following the murder of the archbishop Beckett in the cathedral and Henry's tightening liaison with Rosamonde, my course was set. I knew I must muster all the support I could get from my sons to fight Henry and save our royal domain. And for all that effort, Henry banished me to my tower in Salisbury.

J: I have often thought of you cooped up in that cold, damp place for those fifteen long years. How did you keep your sanity?

A: With correspondence and handwork. It was not until Henry died that I was able to leave the tower permanently and be restored to my family. It was a terrible price to pay. But, we women manage to find the inner strength to carry on, don't we?

J: "You've got it, Toyota."

A: Toy who? Something to do with children's playthings?

J: No, just a familiar car advertisement from the late 70s. Pardon me for sending you off on another track. What I mean is, right on --- exactly! At any rate, my life took on a new direction at the age of 49. I returned to college as a grad student in French Literature. I found a teaching job, taught every day, took classes at night and lived a full life. I was catching up on all those years when I had to put my love of all things French on the back burner. Not as bad as your captivity, but one of sorts.

A: What does that mean? This term, back burner? Where was it? On the Bar-B-Que in the garden? I read so much about how Americans love cooking on the backyard burner. How do you like your French, medium or well done? *(By this time Aliénor was having a good chuckle.)*

J: I prefer it rare! *(Jini joined in with a high-pitched laugh.)* But listen, really, Grand-mère, this has nothing to do with the backyard Bar-B-Que! What I meant was I had put my interest in French aside while raising my family. We refer to that as putting something on the back burner - to maintain the flavor, keep it warm while we deal with other things.

A: Forgive me, my sweet. So, tell me how you met your dearly beloved John of the Mimosa?

J: Yes - *Volontiers!* Gladly! We had been near neighbors for some 25 years, but rarely crossed paths even during my several years as a divorcee and the years during which he cared for his ailing wife.

A: How very New England of you! How, then did your paths finally meet on a new level?

J: Grand-mère, it's a sweet, sweet, story. I was grubbing in my garden one day, on my hands and knees, dirty and sweaty, when I saw his red vehicle stop in the driveway. He was headed for his sister Mad's backyard to do an errand. Mad lived at the top of my driveway, then, you know. I looked up, and he got out and began to walk in my direction. We fell into each other's arms, and we've have been there ever since.

A: Now, go on, describe your John to me as I did my Henry. I want every detail now.

J: *(Jini sitting back, crosses her legs and sucks on a piece of ice.)* Well, let me see. He's a little taller than Henry, I think. He's about my height. His hair is reddish blondish, now graying at the temples. He's handsome, loving, has dancing blue eyes. Oh, and he wears glasses.

A: Never! *(Screwing up her face and chewing on her last sliver of ice as politely as possible.)*

J: What's the matter? Are you OK?

A: Yes, Jini, fine thanks. It's the vision of 'John of the Mimosa' in glasses. I never saw a knight wear glasses!

J: Oh, John looks cute in glasses. They suit him, but then, I am used to them - hardly see them myself. He has a solid build, sturdy and muscular. *(She points to her non-existent arm muscle.)* He would make a great knight except he can't ride horseback! I always call him my "knight in shining armor." He is a "can do" man, an optimist and an overcomer par excellence! Best of all, he is my best friend in all the world! But then you have met him yourself, although briefly. He loves me for who I am, and he lets me be me!

*(Jini finishes her drink, leaning her head back on the bench with a long, contented sigh.)*

*The scene closes as they bid each other bon voyage and safe travel back to their respective time periods. They fall together into a long, embrace of au revoir, whispering, "Until we meet again, my dearest."*

*They have made a pact to meet on a date and in a place pivotal for both Aliénor and Jini. Since their Connecticut meeting was such a success, they decide to meet next at the Romanesque Basilique Sainte-Marie-Madeleine on a majestic hilltop in the ancient village of Vézelay in the Province de Bourgogne.*

## **Conversations with Queen Aliénor continued:**

### **Act 1 Scene 1 (Mini backsets)**

1. Behind Jini and Aliénor in Jini's garden there are gymnasts who, in the fog of the morning are rolling hoops, holding hoops for each other to jump through. Some are somersaulting, others doing cartwheels. They happily perform their gymnastics of all kinds. Add piano music of Edward Mac Dowell, "To a Waterlily" from Woodland Sketches. There is a video by pianist Hal Freedman of same.

2. DAR and DFR members are in 2 different locations. DAR members are in the genealogical library in Hartford, CT searching for a connection to their past ancestors, i.e., Queen Aliénor. They, including Jini, are scouring through their up lines into the distant past to make the unbroken connection to the Queen.

*(Use split screen effect here to include the former paragraph and the next.)*

At the same time, DFR members are in the ancient archives at the Royal Abbaye de Fontevraud, France, where Aliénor is buried. Aliénor and others are scouring through their downlines into the distant future, to find a viable connection to a bona fide 21<sup>st</sup> century relative for Aliénor to visit.

There are several young and old men and women (or boys and girls) carrying heavy loads of large and thick genealogical tomes, lugging them to the large book tables to be perused. Jini sits at the head of the DAR table and Aliénor sits at the head of the DFR table. There is a lot of discussion and dissent about who finds the best path to the prize in each case. Objections are raised on both sides as to which line to follow, which line would bring them to the desired result.

## **Conversations with Queen Aliénor**

by Jini Jones Vail

### **Act 1, Scene 2**

(Following this scene is the list of mini back sets to be used as mini scenes for extra actors behind the two main characters, to depict and expand on the scene of current dialogue.)

#### **The Final Fling of Queen Aliénor and husband, King Louis VII of France**

The Crusade that Bombed—in terms of France, Christianity and their marriage

Place: Basilique-Sainte-Marie-Madeleine: Vézelay, Bourgogne Province, France

Time: March 31, 2014

Background: Queen Aliénor and Jini agreed on this date to meet as it is the anniversary of the day of the preaching of the Second Crusade in Vézelay, Bourgogne Province, France. Aliénor was here on that original, fateful day in 1146, and Jini spent time at the Basilique de Vézelay during her graduate study summer in 1988. She was much inspired by the beauty of the Basilique and the historical events that took place here over eight centuries ago. This is a perfect rendezvous for Aliénor and Jini.

Today Aliénor recalls the anniversary of the preaching of the 2<sup>nd</sup> crusade at Vézelay 1146. The multitude was assembling all around the small village with tents, knights, horses and all the followers necessary to support the send-off of thousands of Christian pilgrims who would march on crusade to the Holy Land. The crusade served as a turning point in her life, more precisely, in her wedded life with her first husband, Louis VII, King of France. And again, with her son, King Richard 1<sup>st</sup>, at the start of the Third Crusade. This place brings back floods of memories.

Jini remembers the summer of 1988 when she studied at the University of Bourgogne at Dijon. While there she visited the Romanesque Basilique-Ste.-Marie-Madeleine of Vézelay. She was overcome with awe as she surveyed the valley below and tried to imagine how her grandmother, Queen Aliénor, must have felt when she was here listening to St. Bernard de Clairvaux preach the Second Crusade. Jini

recalls her private crusade, more like a simple pilgrimage, she and her son, also Richard, made to Santiago de Compostela, Spain in 1993.

*Conversation between Aliénor and Jini is picked up briskly as though the two had not been parted since their Watertown, Ct meeting. Aliénor and Jini travel back across the centuries to the year 1214, ten years after the death of Aliénor. They are in Vézelay, standing precisely where St. Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux, rallied the crowds to take up the cross. It is here that Aliénor and her husband, King Louis of France, approached the separation point in their personal lives. Breaking tradition, Aliénor would journey with Louis too the Holy Land.*

A: My dear Jini, another rendezvous for us! This time I welcome you to France!

*(Grandmother and granddaughter kiss in the French fashion on both cheeks, embracing fondly, then sitting on the nearby wall that encircles the Romanesque Basilique Ste.-Marie-Madeleine. From the promontory where they sit, they can view the broad valley below.)*

J: Grand-mère, the view is gorgeous! *(Jini spins around, giddily happy!)* Did you know I spent time in Bourgogne in the summer of 1988 as a graduate student at the University of Dijon? Our group took a daytrip here to Vézelay which I shall never forget. I am so pleased you wanted to meet here. I was totally awed by the mega-event in which you participated right on this very spot. I get goose bumps up and down my spine to think how momentous was the occasion on March 31, 1146, when St. Bernard of Clairvaux preached the 2<sup>nd</sup> Crusade right here! If my memory serves me correctly, St. Bernard was much beloved by your people as the most visible representative of the Catholic Church in France. There must have been countless want-to-be-pilgrims to hear his plea to take up the Christian pilgrims' cross and the sword against the infidel in the Holy Land. How do you recall that day?

A: Very well, like it was yesterday. The peace and quiet of today belies the undercurrents that filled the air and my heart as I stood here eight hundred years ago! You say *you* get goose bumps! Imagine living that experience! I was here with King Louis and St. Bernard, surrounded by hundreds of barons, nobles, priests, knights, courtiers, advisors, commoners and peasants all assembled on this high ground, and filling the surrounding valley below, where we are facing now. *(Aliénor swept her arm from the far left to the far right as though to include the entire landscape.)* The response to the call transcended all classes. The people of the kingdom turned out in droves! St. Bernard opened his mouth and all of Christendom listened! Even though I rarely felt welcome in his company, I was breathless with excitement. The faithful answered the call from every city and village across France. The enormous response gave us the affirmation we needed to carry on with the plan to make the crusade to free the Holy Land from Saladin. It felt like the right thing to do at the time. Still, I was dubious.

J: Do I sense some faint reluctance in your voice?

A: Well, yes, you are most perceptive. It is a long story, but briefly, let me say that when Louis spoke of the crusade at first, I began to think in different terms than we did that day at Vézelay. My thought process went like this: if Louis leads the crusade, and it will likely be of two to three years duration, I shall be required to remain in France to handle our affairs while he is away. That is what usually happens in cases like this.

And on the other hand, no kingdom should be left unattended by its sovereigns. There was much mending of fences to be done in Aquitaine especially since my people there did not respond well to Louis's form of governing. He did not know my people of the *midi*, meaning south, nearly as well as I did. In sum I was fully prepared to take over the reins of state in Louis's absence. In fact, I would have relished the idea.

Besides all this, Louis and I had been arguing and were not on the best of terms, especially since I had not given him the requisite baby boy! (*Aliénor cups her hands below her abdomen.*)

Our discord was compounded by another compelling reason why I would have preferred to stay behind. Our newly born daughter, Marie, needed her mother. If I went away for some indefinite number of years, she would not know me when I returned. This possibility ate away at my heartstrings.

J: How was this resolved? I know you went on crusade in the end—something must have convinced you to override these two compelling reasons to stay behind.

A: (*She gazes into the distance and then at the beautiful entrance to the Basilique as though her thoughts were ions from here.*) Oh, yes, I wish I could say that it was my decision, but in reality, I was ordered to take up the cross and follow my husband, Louis. In English, it is called Hobson's Choice—meaning *no choice at all!* I had to hide my resentment and agree to go. Louis was becoming paranoid concerning everything I set my mind to do. My motives were questioned continually. It was one of the hardest things I ever did. My heart was not in it. The only redeeming factor was that I would see my Uncle Raymond, Prince of Antioch, at the end of the journey. I do not need to linger on the downside of the crusade, as there were some amusing parts as well.

J: All right, since you mentioned it, let's turn to the brighter side of the march since you committed to it and knowing you as I am beginning to do, I know you must have made the best of it. I hope you do not mind telling me more about the crusade that followed and your part in it. I read that you and your entourage dressed like Amazons. In fact, who exactly were Amazons and what did you do to make yourself look like them? The only time I ever heard of Amazons was in my *Wonder Woman* comic books growing up. Am I on the right track?

A: (*laughing*) I am not sure I ever saw a comic book but let me explain how I was blessed with this idea. As we were planning the lengthy trip from France to Jerusalem in the Holy Land, I knew it would not be wise for me to go on such a trip dressed as the queen, in my own identity. I would be curtailed both in my activity and in my learning. I wanted very much to experience everything with my people. And I do so love to playact, to wear costumes, and, in a word, as I have heard you say, be “outrageous.” This journey was to be a trip of a lifetime, a life-changing experience. I sensed this from the beginning. Have you ever had a feeling like that, Jini?

J: Yes, I think I can relate to that. It was just before my first trip to France in 1958 with a group of students when I sailed from Montreal, Quebec for Le Havre—I was en route to live with a family in the Territoire de Belfort in Northeastern France. As I lifted my arm to wave to my parents on the quai I had a premonition that this trip would change the course of my life, and it did! For me that trip engendered one of my favorite sayings in French, “*Le français m’ouvre le monde.*” French truly did open the world to me! I sense that your life was never the same either, after the crusade, that is. Am I right? Pardon me for getting ahead of your story, but I am certainly curious to know how it turned out for you and Louis.

A: Absolutely! It had to do with my relationship with my husband. And it started long before we departed on crusade. But, more on that subject after I tell you all about the Amazons, regarding your earlier question on the subject. I love talking about them. It would be an Amazon adventure for me and my women.

According to Greek mythology they were women warriors, fierce fighters who carried bows and arrows, were brave and rarely lost in battle. They were of extraordinary beauty— their hair flowed long and free, secured only by a tight band across the forehead. Amazons were famous for the iron bracelets they wore to deflect arrows, and the girdle of magic proportions, granting the wearer superhuman strength.

Preparing for months, my ladies of the wardrobe did their best to duplicate Amazon garb down to the smallest detail. We, the twelfth century Wonder Women, wore graceful Grecian robes which streamed out behind as we galloped astride our trusty steeds. No more side saddle bumbling around for my Amazons. Upon dismounting we cordoned up our waists with golden rope. We all dressed the same with the exception of my golden tiara that delineated me as Queen of the Amazons. All these preparations gave me some stomach for the venture.

J: I love it! I only wish I could have seen you that early morning of June 11, 1147 as you left St. Denis in Paris sporting those racy costumes. I suppose you turned a few heads! I would have enjoyed seeing Louis at the head of the line carrying the sacred cross and banner, followed by hordes of men in white with the scarlet cross on their chests, all shouting, “To Jerusalem! To Jerusalem!”

A: The outset was incredible to witness, indeed, as we numbered in the thousands. Unfortunately, the auspicious send-off belied the hardships that were to befall us as the journey progressed. We were nine gruesome months on unfamiliar, dangerous roads over mountains and across deserts before arriving at the palace of my paternal uncle, Raymond, Prince of Antioch. Even my Amazon retinue lacked luster as they followed me onto the palace grounds.

J: I am trying to imagine what it would be like to face a journey such as yours on horseback, one that would have to be endured for at least a year *one way*!

My only rejoinder to your story is that back in 1953 I did a, quote-unquote, “long distance” horseback ride with my friend, Prudy, when we were about fifteen. It was a huge adventure for us in those days mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. But our trip pales in light of your long trek. We rode all day to arrive at a planned campsite that had been set up by our two fathers.

Her dad, a restaurateur, brought a cooler full of steaks and all the trimmings for a luscious steak dinner followed by roasted marshmallows on sticks over the ruby red embers of our campfire and, of course, a breakfast fit for a king.

My dad, a builder and a boy scout leader, cut wood to last two days and made a fire ring where we cooked our dinner. He set out large coolers of iced lemonade and water as well.

Our fathers also erected a tent for us. I guess, now that I think back on it, back in 1952, we girls in far western New York State were treated like princesses. At least we felt that way since none of our friends had horses nor caring fathers like ours. Our camp-out was like a miniature snapshot of yours! And we did not run into any warlike hordes of unfriendlies as did you.

But your cross-Europe-into-Asia journey was the real thing and truly awesome. My Lady Grandmother, weren't you saddle sore (*she said as she rubbed her backside*) most of the trip? Or did you get used to being in the saddle day after day?

A: Not that I recall. We were accustomed to being the saddle in those days. I think I said we Amazons rode astride. Well, in truth we had the advantage of riding side-saddle or astride, which helped ward off saddle sores.

J: Grand-mère, did you cross many hostile kingdoms en route? How did Louis, the former monk, deal with these many new faces? Certainly, some of them did not follow the knightly rules.

Before you respond, I recall reading that when a crusade, especially a royal one, such as yours, makes the trip from western Europe on pilgrimage to the Holy Land,

that the Pope promises safe passage when crossing into foreign kingdoms. It was meant to be a kind of gentlemanly tradition. Am I right?

A: You are right. That is a detail I would not expect you to know. Brava!

J: I know for certain that when your son Richard went on the Third Crusade, he had a rude awakening on his return trip.

A: I got involved in that one, dearest. Wait till I tell you about it. You will be amazed! In a nutshell, without all the gruesome details, I am pleased you asked. And trust me, I will fill you in later.

It started with a misunderstanding in the East when Richard was involved in a few fracas with some of the crusaders in his party. They happened to be men of great power who left early to return home to Europe. It was as if they held grudges against Richard, perhaps unfairly. They went ahead of Richard and his men and laid in wait for him, hoping Richard would fall into their trap where he could be dealt with on their terms. Do you think you could wait until our next meeting for all the stinging details? I am going to suggest now that we meet for our next tête-à-tête near the epicenter of what lay in store for my son when he arrived in Europe.

J: Why of course chère Grand-mère. I can wait for the rest of the story too unfold where it happened.

A: Well, my dear, back to the first crusade, since you ask, yes, we crossed hostile kingdoms, and yes, my king deliberately skirted battles, as was his style. I would have preferred that he face his adversaries and demonstrate his power, as we went so others would fear us, make way for us. Regretfully, Louis made poor choices when it came to finding safe routes to follow. Adding to our misfortune, we were shunned by certain of the princes with whom we had hoped to find refuge. In fact, some tried to rob us, even to kill us!

We were held up in Byzantine Constantinople by the Emperor Manuel who attempted to divide our numbers, seriously weakening our defenses. His plan was to send off our first contingent, conjuring up false pretenses. I advised Louis to hold off until the last of our huge entourage arrived.

If the Emperor had succeeded in his sinister plan, we would have been only one half of our fighting force and thus open to assault. Louis was quick to repulse my advice, if he listened to it at all. This time he finally paid heed. I was so relieved to be away safely.

J: Were there other difficulties along the route after that as well?

A: Most assuredly. Louis proved himself to be a tireless horseman. He successfully fended off the Turks on two occasions, but toward the end of the march a nearly

disastrous battle broke out on a mountaintop in heavy snow. After riding across deserts, we came close to meeting our maker when accosted by a surprise attack in the night on Mount Cadmus in Northern Turkey. Louis had sent word ahead for the vanguard to wait near the peak for the rear guard to arrive.

Once again, it was a question of the importance of coalescing our forces. We were tired, wet, and cold in the snowstorm that night. My protector, from Aquitaine, Geoffrey de Rancon, was the leader. He was to halt at a certain point for us to join him before descending from the heights toward improved weather conditions. There we would make camp for the night. Geoffrey and his men reached the appointed spot and drew up their tired and hungry palfreys to assess the situation. They waited, saw no sign of us, then made the disastrous decision not to wait, but to move on, disobeying Louis's orders. They thought it wise at that time to arrive as soon as possible at the proposed campsite and to prepare the tents and fires to welcome the weather-worn numbers.

J: Something tells me this was a bad decision and heaven knows, even I, who am not a soldier, know that one must follow orders to the bitter end.

A: True enough, but this time the forward guard broke orders and descended the mountain without even seeing the rest of us well at the rear in the dark and snowy night. Just at that moment, when the forward guard disappeared down the route, we were fiercely attacked by waiting Turkish Muslims. It was a slaughter. We lost many men in horrible conditions. The enemy was swift and deadly, and we were caught unaware with no back-up to rescue us. Louis and I were fortunate to escape detection and survived. Many were not so lucky.

Fortunately, we managed to escape with our lives, traversing Europe and into the Levant, Eastern Mediterranean, even resorting to ships for the last leg to Antioch. Nothing turned out the way my husband intended. By the time we reached Antioch, our horde was greatly depleted in numbers, likewise, our physical and mental resources. In short, we had not met our goal of preparing safe passage for Christians on pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

J: You mean to say your crusade was a failure? *(Jini jumped down from the stonewall, turning to give Aliénor her hand to follow suite.)*

A: In a word, yes, not only politically, but personally. When I look back on the long trip, I remember the sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach about the growing gulf between Louis and myself. The distance grew greater in the lengthening days and months as Louis never came to see how I was faring on the route and barely spoke to me. After several days as guests of my uncle, tempers grew short, especially on the part of my husband.

J: How's that, Grand-mère? I thought you were having a blast with your uncle. As I recall from my reading, you and Raymond, of a similar age, had been chums growing

up in Aquitaine. Am I right? *(The two women turned their backs on the view and began to stroll toward the Basilica door)*

A: Yes, and that is just the point. My husband took an instant dislike to Uncle Raymond, completely misunderstanding our relationship. You see, my dear, Uncle Raymond was the prototypical knightly troubadour. Tall, handsome, and as brave as they come, yet witty and fun loving, too. Moreover, he was my favorite uncle whom I had not seen in years! I loved him dearly; God rest his soul. I regret to say that he came to an ugly end not long after our departure. *(Aliénor stops and turns sadly toward Jini, looking for solace, then slowly lowers her head. Aliénor takes a deep breath and perks up as they enter the wide doorway, its curved outline covered with sculptures.)* But, all that aside, dear one, you have traveled enough in the South of France to understand the nuance of which I speak. We from Aquitaine, have a totally different approach to life from those of the north, near Paris, where Louis was reared. Raymond and I were more like what you call kissing cousins. We were openly affectionate, one toward the other. All that show of affection means only that we care for each other as close family does.

*(The two women turn once again toward the sloping hills, broad green fields and tended vineyards for another look at the peace and beauty of this place. The Basilique could be seen from a great distance, recognizable by its one lonely tall tower. The second tower was never built)*

J: Oh, now I get the drift. It reminds me of the difference between the northerners and the southerners in America. The Southerners are gushy and demonstrative, like you. They fall all over one another as if they haven't seen each other for years! They greet each other with shrieks and hugs. Remember, I went to college in the south. After spring break, you could hear the decibels rise as everyone sees their friends again. It's the long, lost sister response punctuated with rib-breaking squeezes and jaw clenches followed by hours of southern drawl catch-up. Northerners have no idea how to react around this kind of behavior! I admit that I grew to love the southern drawl and sweet friendliness when greeting each other. Long live the south, whether in America or France. We northerners cannot help but be attracted to their warmth.

A: Yes, that's exactly it. *"Mais, attention!"* In my case, the King became insanely jealous of our effusive, albeit innocent, salutations, and for no reason. And, by the way, Uncle Raymond was happily wedded. An ugly tension grew between Louis and Raymond that was all out of proportion, Jini. It was like the waves that expand ever outward from a stone that is tossed into a pond; once begun there was no turning back. Louis decided that since our marriage had not been blessed with a son meant it was incestuous due to consanguinity. Initially, I was so happy to reach Antioch, to fall into the arms of my beloved uncle, to discover that his adopted country was such a beautiful place, that many of the people we met spoke my native *"langue d'oc"* It

was like being home again. This unexpected conflict between Louis and Raymond befell me off-guard.

J: It pains me to hear that, Grand-mère. Such a bummer! It must have been hard for you.

A: You do not know how I suffered emotionally. It was almost more than one could bear. One *had* to spend time together, take meals at the same table. Raymond *was* our host, after all. We needed him desperately at that point. We had come a long way with little rest, had been attacked brutally toward the end, lost much in the way of men and supplies. In a word, we were in need of recuperation in a safe place. Our troops needed respite and re-provisioning as well. Raymond also, had been anxiously awaiting our arrival since he, too, needed certain supplies that we were bringing to him from the West. Well, to put it succinctly, dear, the king carried on like a cuckolded husband and would agree to no strategy with Raymond in overcoming our common enemies.

J: (*Jini precedes Aliénor into the nave of the basilica, turning around briefly to admire the long view through the towering, rounded Romanesque arches to the open entrance.*) Just look at the beautifully sculpted capitals on the pillars. I am trying to imagine how lovely the columns must have been when they sported the multi colors of paint from your day. Such a beautiful space! (*Jini turns to face Aliénor, more serious once again.*) How ever did you manage to keep things together in Antioch?

A: To maintain a semblance of peace I found myself becoming the go-between for the two of them. They would not speak to each other. The king felt betrayed, and Raymond felt misunderstood. Remember, we had come to the East for one purpose, the least of which was for me to revisit my Uncle. Our stated goal was to make safe passage for Christians to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. For years, Christians were systematically ambushed and slaughtered on their way through Asia Minor to Christian Holy sites. And we were failing miserably!!

J: Oh dear, Grand-mère, if you only knew what is going on there now! The Holy War has never really subsided completely in all these years.

A: Yes, dear child, I *do* know. And it makes me weep. Like you, I try to keep up on my reading. At the same time, I look back to see that our crusade was literally ineffectual in the troubled history of that area so sacred to Christians, Jews and Muslims alike. As foreigners in that land, we fought battle after battle, against a larger foe. The Turks, Syrians, Saracens, all Muslims, were defending both their religion and their homeland and had no concept of what we were about. They even called us "the infidel." In our minds it was *they* who were the infidel! Will there never be peace?

J: After eight hundred fifty years we are still fighting that battle. No matter what you did then, or we do now, the Holy Land remains a volatile hot bed of unrest. \*See note at end of scene.

A: More is the pity; we would *never* have made that disastrous trip had not the king needed to assuage his sin. *(She sits down on a rush seat chair. Jini sits beside her and takes the hand of her grandmother to comfort her.)*

J: What are you talking about? What sin?

A: Oh, by God's teeth, I forgot to tell you! The king carried with him the heavy burden of having allowed an entire church full of his subjects to die a miserable death by fire. I thought everyone knew about that. There had been an uprising in the small town of Vitry in Bourgogne. When all else failed, Louis sent in soldiers to quell the rebellion. Ultimately the poor people of that town took refuge in their church. The soldiers surrounded the church and by mistake a fire ensued which then trapped the townspeople inside their place of worship as it burned to the ground! It was never Louis's intent to have it end that way. Things just got out of hand, dear. *(Jini puts her arm around Aliénor, both heads bowed in sorrow.)*

J: Can you believe it? Not to make you feel any better of course, but a similar event happened here near the end of the 20th century! *(Aliénor raises her head to turn toward Jini in surprise.)* Sounds like the Branch Davidian debacle at Waco, Texas. Many innocent women and children were burned alive when our President stepped in to put an end to the supposedly subversive religious cult's activities. Grand-mère, the more we talk, the more I see that things have not changed over the millennia, that people are the same today, even though hundreds of years separate us. Are we doomed as humans to re-commit the same sins over and over again? Can we not learn from history? Why must we repeat the same mistakes as though we cannot read or comprehend the lessons of the past?

A: I wish with all my heart that I knew the answer. *(The queen shakes her head and then retains her regal composure.)* You are aware Louis grew up in a monastery, a godly, prayerful young man. But he was never the same after Vitry. He was overwhelmed with the guilt that he had caused such a heinous thing to happen to his people. So, after much discussion with his spiritual teachers, he decided to "take up the cross." He would call for a Crusade to Jerusalem ostensibly for the reasons I gave a minute ago, but deep down inside it was for much more personal ones. He deeply felt the need to do penance for what he did to those poor trapped people in Vitry. He took it quite personally due to his heightened sense of personal ethics. Did your president do something similar? Was he tortured in his heart like my Louis? Like Louis did he find it impossible to chase the lingering, sweet, yet acrid odor of burning flesh from his olfactory senses? Did he put on the hair shirt as self-punishment?

J: Our president at the time was William Jefferson Clinton. And to answer your question, no, Clinton did *nothing* similar to what Louis did to assuage his sin, and there were many during his tenure as our leader. The consensus is that he had no conscience.

Instead of following the golden rule, he created his own standard of personal conduct as he went along, caring little for those whom he harmed. He sent his Attorney General, Janet Reno, to do damage control for Waco. She was ineffective in this task. The questions raised at Waco are still unresolved. There was no crusade to mitigate Clinton's misdeeds. On the contrary, he tried to deflect them by bombing a tiny country in Africa. But that is a story for another day, Grand-mère.

A: Our Crusade came to an abrupt end when Louis sent me home on a ship, alone. We met in Rome where we had a visit with the Pope who lulled us into thinking that perhaps our marriage had a chance. Nine months later our second daughter, Alix, was born and we were home at last. By then I had come to my senses and knew I could no longer live as Louis's wife, or queen, for that matter. We went through months of negotiations and ultimately, I prevailed. Louis agreed. I won my annulment on the grounds of consanguinity in 1152 at age 30 and was re-instated as Duchess of Aquitaine. It was all I could have wished, my freedom and my lands restored to my name. I felt as if a great weight had been lifted from my shoulders.

J: Brava, my Lady Grandmother! But what of your two daughters fathered by Louis? Marie and Alix?

A: Aye, there's the rub; they remained with Louis. It was as if they were state property. I was forced to give them up, my little darlings, although we kept in touch as they grew up. It was a heavy price to pay in that respect. I was sad indeed to leave my daughters in Louis's care, that word is simply a euphemism as I am sure he did little for them in terms of care. He, like all kings, only wanted a male child.

J: That unfortunately is the price to be paid by a Queen Mother when marriage is ruptured.

A: There was one more thing that I never saw again, that was the beautiful rock crystal vase I gave Louis as a wedding present when we married in 1147. Light diffused through the crystal turned into shimmering strands of rainbow hues. Not long after gifting it to Louis, he gave it to his favored Counselor, Abbot Suger of Saint Denis, as I stood by in shock and horror.

J: But alas, it is not lost to us, your downline family. Believe it or not, I am familiar with that magnificent vase. It sits in the Louvre Museum in Paris opposite the crown of Napoleon. I was thrilled beyond compare when I discovered it there in the early 1990's. Hard as it must have been to see your husband give away your most special wedding gift to him, perhaps, in so doing it has been preserved for posterity. Suger, I believe, had it mounted on a gold-over-silver base encrusted with deep filigree and

semi-precious gemstones. It is a glorious artifact to behold, knowing that it was once in your hands.

A: *(She cuts in to finish the description of her vase.)* The history of the piece goes even further back in our family as it belonged to my father and to his father before him. Did you remark that the neck of the vase is covered with a honeycomb pattern of twenty-three rows of tiny hollowed-out hexagons? It resembles ancient Sasanian glassware dating back centuries to Islamic and Byzantine designs.

J: Naturally you know all these details, but since I recently learned more of the history of the famous vase of yours, I am reiterating it to see if you agree as you are the last word on the subject. The Louvre has not been able to consult with you as have I just now, on the veracity of the current research on your vase. If I am taking advantage, please forgive me. As you well know, I am fascinated with history, especially where you are concerned. I have hit the jackpot on this subject. Many merci's for your input. I have digressed, yet again. Our discussions are surely limited in time, and I would not have missed your description of your crystal vase for the world. Where were we? Ah...and Louis? Was that the end of his influence in your life?

A: Gracious no! Many years later he played an adversarial role when he and my sons sided against me. We were two powerful royal families, both English and French whose lives became intertwined like two balls of yarn under a cat's paw!

J: So, looking back, the crusade was your last fling with Louis and your undoing at the same time. How ironic that you and Louis had set out with optimism on a joint effort of such importance for France and the Christian world and returned rent in two, bemoaning both the failure of the crusade and of your personal lives. I do not think many royal couples were allowed to split in those days, until the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the sad case of England's Princess Diana and Prince Charles. If a royal couple had no male heirs, more often the queen was murdered. You were lucky!! And so were we, your downline.

A: Agreed on that one, Jini. I was fortunate to come through it alive. Looking back now, I can see how much European history was altered by my life as Louis's Queen of France and later as Henry's Queen of England, finally handing over my rich Aquitaine, once French, to the English. By wedding Henry, I ignited a mutual hatred between the two countries that was not resolved until the late 1400's. In point of fact, the bad seeds that were planted between Louis on one hand and Henry and myself on the other, continue to flourish up to your era, my dear American Granddaughter.

J: On that very subject, when I was in graduate school pursuing French language studies, I wrote a thesis stating that it was you, not Helen of Troy, who "launched a thousand ships!" My French professor did not cotton to the idea.

A: Cotton to the idea? I do not see the relevance. Pray, what is the meaning of this phrase dearest?

J: Sorry, just one of our Americanisms that simply means that my professor did not agree with my theory. I was not willing to cave on his evaluation. I still stand behind that theory. I imagine that you have never thought about comparing yourself to Helen of Troy. Have you? You were too busy just leading your life and trying to forge ahead in your complicated world.

A: Correct you are. I never dreamed that anything I did could be connected with Helen of Troy of all people. But, on closer inspection, again with the aid of hindsight, I realize that I may have caused the rift between France and England that continues today. It seems to be an underlying thread that stretches from my time to yours.

J and A: *(They look at each other and start with a smile that turns into a full laugh.)*

A: You give me a real cause to laugh. Now we are spanning even centuries to include Helen of Troy. Such a long line of similarities from Helen to you, in today's world! *(Aliénor holds her stomach and howls at the ridiculousness of such a connection through time and space!)* My dear, one must really watch out what one says and does or one might start a never-ending world war!

J: Think about it for a minute, when your marriage to Louis was annulled and you were able to retain your Aquitaine that stretched from northwestern France to the Pyrenees, the French lost an enormous chunk of territory, leaving France bereft of resources once acquired through you. I am sure Louis regretted losing your lands until the day he died.

When you turned around and swiftly, adeptly married Henry of England, you were fortunate to have your dower lands under your control once again. Per some French people with whom I spoke in Aquitaine, they still harbor ill feelings toward you for handing Aquitaine over to the English. Look at the Hundred Years War...more battles fought between the French and English.

Even today, outside of Aquitaine, my French friends are skittish about the English. The rift appears to me to have lodged in the DNA of the very blood of the two countries. I know there have been times, as in World War II, that the two countries did stand together after a much blood was shed in England without France's aid, but that was a fragile truce that barely stands the test of time.

A: Yes, in general I fear I must agree with your findings. I understand that as recently as the Iraq War, when the French refused to send as much aid as the English-speaking peoples wanted. Some Americans refused to eat French Fries or French Toast. Imagine that?

That is going a bit too far for two old friends. Such are the changing times we have both inhabited. As a queen, I find it difficult to understand what “the people” are thinking and why. I guess I never will, but I must say, I am pleased and much better informed, having talked with you on this subject.

And Jini, I meant to ask you, didn't you and your son, Richard whom we now name Rusty because of his curly, rust-colored hair, go on your own pilgrimage, to Spain? You must have a tale to talk about that one too!

J: That we did. I nearly forgot to mention it. That trip is the closest parallel in my life to yours to the Holy Land, albeit miniscule by comparison. I had read everything in sight concerning the thousands and thousands of pilgrims whose routes merged at the Pyrenees to cross over into Spain. I studied their maps crisscrossing Europe, beginning as early as the 800s. I became fascinated, like so many others regarding the draw to Santiago de Compostela for lo these last twelve hundred years. What was it all about and why did so many feel led to take up their personal cross to trek so far on foot? One of my friends' son even did it on a bike. Still, that is a long trip through thick and thin, heat of day and cold of night.

A: As to taking up the cross on Crusade, the pilgrims pledge for many reasons. Mostly, I would say, they go to assuage their sins, sins of a lifetime. Even small sins become heavy if carried as a lifetime burden. In making the pilgrimage, the contrite hope for, long for, forgiveness of their sins. Many walk barefoot wearing sackcloth for the hundreds of miles to the feast of St. James.

J: This is all true today as well. I proposed the trip to my son, Rusty, and he said he wanted to share that journey with me. So, in the summer of 1993, two days after accepting an invitation from the Count Michel and Countess Madeleine de Rochambeau to visit their family château near Vendome, Rusty and I set out to lighten our loads in Compostella, Galicia, Spain.

Truth be told, I had fantasized about making the journey on a white horse, reminiscent of the painting by American artist, Winslow Homer, of a young girl riding a white horse side-saddle, crossing a peak in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, USA. But the real inspiration was your father, Duke of Aquitaine, whom I knew had gone on that same pilgrimage. I wondered too, if you had accompanied him. If you had, I wanted to emulate you on your white palfrey.

A: Oh, you dreamer with the wide imagination! Yes, my father made the pilgrimage and died on that same trip. I was left at Ombrière, our home in Bordeaux. My sister, Petronila, and I often wondered if our dear father, the 10<sup>th</sup> Duke of Aquitaine knew he was dying when he left us in Bordeaux. That was our last time setting eyes on him. Next, we received the message that our father had passed from this earthly life into the next. This happened, so they said, just before arriving at his goal, the Cathedral in Santiago. In case, you did not know, he was buried there, not far from the church, near his destination. Did you see his grave when you were there?

J: I did not know until just now that he died there and that I might have visited his grave. That fact escaped me at the time. But I was, all the same, near him, even nearer to him than I had expected to be. Our plan was to follow in your footsteps as closely as possible, to see, feel and experience all that you did in your life on earth.

There were so many pilgrims at Compostela that hot, summer Sunday when Rusty and I arrived. They say the pilgrim numbered in the millions. It was the feast day of St. James. My friend, Mado, in Tours, had told me that when the feast day falls on a Sunday, that is the best time to visit. The President of Portugal and the King of Spain and their wives were sitting on the altar in the sanctuary of the cathedral when we entered the crowded nave.

As we walked up to the door of the church, I knew to look for the place beside the central Gloria entrance where all pilgrims who had made the long trek to the place of penance, would place their fingers into the well-rubbed brass handprint before passing into the place of worship. It was a special moment in time to pay homage in this way as so many thousands of others before me had done over the twelve hundred intervening years of pilgrimages.

I understand that your father, William X, Duke of Aquitaine, died suddenly on Good Friday of all days, of food poisoning, having nearly arrived at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. I am sure you have wished many times over, that he had remained in the place of safety, at your home, L'Ombrière. You grew up under his love and tutelage and were surely shocked to hear of his untimely demise. I can feel your pain for that terrible loss even now.

A: *(Aliénor inclines her head to pause for a moment of reflection.)* Thank you, my dearest, one always misses one's parent, no matter how many years have passed.

J: *(She looks around at the beautiful surroundings in this National Heritage Romanesque church in Vézelay where they sit, a place of worship built in the time of Aliénor and her family between 1120-1150.)*

*(Jini stops to gaze at the variety of Intricately- carved capitals and gently rounded arches above their heads.)*

My Lady Grandmother, we were so engrossed in the subject of the church at Compostela just now, that I nearly forgot we are still here in Vézelay. Gloriosky! Glory be to God!

A: Look over there, Jini. *(Aliénor points to an opening in the woods nearby.)* The sign directs visitors to the beginning of the walking trail to Santiago. How about that?

A: We had better put on our Amazon winged sandals if we are considering making that journey, Jini.

Now, let us turn our thoughts to the future. I look forward to more of these intimate exchanges at our next meeting. It is a wonder to me that we find so much to share, moving easily from my past to yours.

*(Jini and her grandmother rise and stroll away from the basilique to look back at the entrance. Aliénor gazes one last time at the valley surrounding the basilica preparing to leave.)*

J: It is getting late. The sun is dipping below the horizon here at Vézelay. The low rays of the setting sun are making puddles of blue and red across the stone wall of the Basilique. There is a sudden chill in the air. Our time together is nearly over.

A: So it is with some sadness that I look back on my last fling with Louis, sorry that we were not better suited for each other. My dear father, who chose the son of King Louis VI for me would have been full of sorrow to know of our split. Who knows, had we been able to tough it out together, as you say, Jini, and had a son or two, to retain the French throne, the course of European history, even American history, might have been entirely different.

J: Yes, Grand-mère, quite different. But aren't we blessed to be able to look back and view these events together from a vantage point of hundreds of years into the future, you and I? I do love you so, granny! *(The queen and her granddaughter lean close and fall into a long embrace with happy tears escaping their eyes.)*

*(With waves to each other they part saying...)*

A: À la prochaine... *(As she blows a kiss.)*

J: À bientôt, my Lady Grandmother *(As she, too blows a kiss.)*

### Act 1, Scene 2 : mini backsets

Back drop of the church of Vézelay, Romanesque architecture.

1. Aliénor and her ladies dress as Amazons (see Wonder Woman for outfits.) Long flowing hair, wrist bracelets of iron, golden girdles, gold hair or head bands etc. They are dressing each other excitedly, then they edit the church to mount their horses talking of the excitement of traveling dressed in this way, so different from the style of the day, long gowns belted, flowing long sleeves that dip nearly to the ground. They could enter wearing the typical dress of the day and then change on stage. Brushing each other's hair and talking of the traveling on horseback, riding astride for the first time. Frowned on by the men folk, it was considered unladylike to ride astride. Amazons rode astride and so would they. They were strong, ready

to fight any battles en route to the Holy Land. Painted horses, two dimensional, could be then mounted by these young women and then they ride off stage.

2. Aliénor and her sister pray inside the church, kneeling at the altar, praying for safe trip to the Holy Land. A. and Petronila then bid each other farewell with tears and P. holds A.'s first-born baby, in her arms. They will be gone more than three years on crusade. Their lives will never be the same.

3. Another farewell for Aliénor and her sister. It is to pray for safe trip for their father, who later dies on the trip to Santiago.

## Conversations with Queen Aliénor

Jini Jones Vail

### Act 2, Scene 1

#### Aliénor Re-enters the World Stage in Her Third Age!

**Place: Demel's Tearoom, Vienna, Austria**

**Time: Early Spring 2015**

Background: In 1192 at age 68, Aliénor has been tasked with amassing a huge ransom to free her son, Richard Lion heart, King of the English, from his money-mongering captor, Holy Roman Emperor, Heinrich VI. She then travels from England across Europe into Heinrich's Empire to surrender the ransom to the Emperor. Heinrich has broken a Holy Law of the church by capturing King Richard who had pledged his life to take up the cross and to join the Third Crusade to Jerusalem. As a bona fide crusader, Richard should, under church law, be allowed safe passage through Europe both to and from the Holy Land.

Most mothers would not show preference for one offspring, but Aliénor did. She unabashedly favored her Richard! She always backed him, protected him and aided him in any way necessary. The crusade was not altogether successful—full of errors, fatal encounters with Saladin (noted Moslem General), and the loss of many of the King's men protecting Jerusalem. Without securing Jerusalem but promising to return to do so in three years, Richard left having agreed to a truce with Saladin. The good news was that under this truce Christians were to keep a narrow strip of land along the Mediterranean. Most importantly, Christian pilgrims were to be granted safe passage to the holy city of Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, back in his kingdom, King Richard's brother, John, was conspiring with French King Philippe-Auguste to usurp portions of Richard's Normandy. Richard had to return home to settle the difficulties with his brother.

In December 1192 at the close of the failed Third Crusade, Richard was en route home. He and his small band of men had suffered through weeks of seriously foul weather while crossing the Mediterranean. They wanted to avoid the Holy Roman Empire at all costs, knowing there would be lookouts along the coast hoping to capture the King of the English and bring him to the Holy Roman Emperor, Heinrich VI, for a huge reward. Unfortunately, the wind tossed them onto the Istrian Coast just where they did NOT want to be!

Richard's actions in *Outre Mer* (a French term meaning "overseas," but at the time of the Crusades, referred to Tripoli, Antioch and Jerusalem) preceded him to Europe. A rumor, purposely spread by the French Bishop of Beauvais, falsely accused Richard of killing Conrad of Montferrat, Cousin of Austrian Duke Leopold V, vassal of Emperor Heinrich.

Richard and his small retinue of twenty knights were surrounded in Austria and imprisoned by Leopold in Durnstein, fifty miles west of Vienna: thus, the choice of Vienna for this meeting today between Aliénor and Jini.

**For Aliénor:** Today is the queen's first return visit to Austria since 1194 when she delivered her son's huge ransom in person. She was that kind of mother! That kind of queen! Aliénor is eager to see her granddaughter again, this time in Europe. Memories of her only time in Austria and the German States as they were known in her day, began to find their way into her cerebral cortex as she wended her way to Demel's. She pushed the sad ones aside and her heart filled with happy anticipation.

**For Jini:** Jini has made four trips to Austria. Most trips included Vienna, to see Herbert, her ersatz brother through a Fulbright student exchange. When in America to study at Princeton University, Herbert's home base was with her family. When in Vienna, she was escorted by Herbert to concerts, museums and historic points of interest. She always dined well in Vienna under the tutelage of Herbert and drank the new wine each spring. Her memories are all good ones whether in snowy times in the mountains or on early spring days like this one in Vienna. This visit, she recalls having skied with friends in the Austrian Alps at Kitzbuhel and Saalbach-Hinterglemm. Today she returns to Vienna. It is a lovely, late winter's day bordering on spring, sunny and cool. Old Vienna is awash with spring flowers.

For this visit with Aliénor, Jini chose Demel's within Vienna's Inner Ring Strasse, a stone's throw from the Hofburg Imperial Palace for her third meeting with her *arrière, arrière*, Grandmother. Demel's Tearoom is a place of refinement for quiet, reflection and relaxed conversation.

On her way to Demel's, Jini walks through the city garden of Vienna. She lingers a moment to admire the statue of Johann Strauss, dressed in gold, playing his violin, so familiar from past visits. She is greeted by the call of the European Mourning Dove whistling her comely lament that portends the tale Aliénor would soon relate to her. Doves on the continent sing a different song, a mournful one, all the more compelling than American doves. She quickens her pace toward Demel's with excitement in her heart and enters the tearoom looking for a table. She spots Aliénor who has "dressed down" for the occasion in a black, white and royal purple Channel suit so as not to create a fuss in town. It would not do to be recognized! Jini is wearing a new pair of patent leather, Austrian stacked heel pumps and a lavender silk dress with a sky-blue chiffon scarf that flutters as she makes her way between the tables toward the waiting Queen Aliénor.

J: Salut, best greetings, my dearest Grand-mère! I see you have found our meeting place. How I have looked forward to seeing you! How wonderful to meet here in one of my favorite haunts. I am sure Demel's was not in existence during your time in Austria. It is vintage, but not *that* old!

A: Jini, my dearest granddaughter, I could hardly wait to lay eyes on you again. You look splendid. The mountain air must have brought roses to your cheeks. How was the skiing?

*(Aliénor stands and comes forward to embrace Jini. They exchange the French bises and the now familiar to the queen, American hug.)*

J: *(As she takes the chair next to Aliénor and places her purse that matches her elegant shoes on the empty chair.)* Great skiing! Well, well! We meet again. Aren't we lucky to be able to connect from time to time in places that mean so much to us both?

A: When you say that we meet from "time to time," I am sure it is with the "double entendre" in mind. We have mastered it, from your "time" to my "time" and vice versa, via "time travel," haven't we?

J: *Ah, oui!* That we have! We have done the impossible, *n'est-ce pas?* We have managed to scrunch time and extend travel to meet our whim. I say it is incredible, but true! *(They both laugh with the shared glee of their accomplishment.)*

A: Yes, but I feel somewhat reticent and a little shaky here in this city, partly as it is huge, and the hustle bustle is noisy and too hectic for my liking. The other reason I am sure you can guess—this country brings back dark memories. But I must say your choice of this tearoom is much to my liking. It is certainly charming.

J: I am so glad you approve, my Lady Grandmother. *(Jini bows her head in place of a full curtsy, not wanting to draw attention to herself in public.)*

A: I do indeed. In fact, as I am settling in, I find that I like the feeling of yesteryear here, the slower pace, the antique tables and chairs, the tall windows with lovely lace curtains puddling on the floor. I am glad to say that once I stepped inside, I left the street sounds behind and was greeted with a peaceful atmosphere. It is far from the madding crowd. Good choice, my dear.

J: Grand-mère, did you notice the tempting display of pastries and sweets as you were ushered to our table? I love to take a look at the delicacies before sitting down so I know which one to choose with my tea. It is not at all like Starbuck's in America. That is new world, 21<sup>st</sup> century style in the comfort of huge, overstuffed chairs and minimalism, whereas here it is old world sumptuous décor. I am glad there are still some treasure spots like this one for us to enjoy.

A: No matter where we meet, chérie, we are spoiled indeed to arrive in yet another charming location. You must tell me first about your skiing in the high Austrian Alps. No one even thought of skiing in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Normally, in winter we avoided the high altitudes and mountain passes unless it was an extreme emergency. We avoided travel and even battle in winter for the most part. Do tell me of your experience on those treacherous sounding narrow boards you call skis.

J: Well, I tried my dubious downhill skiing skills the first day out, to be in the company of my friends. We did not realize that a blizzard was blowing our way until we reached the top of one of the most popular ski trails at Kitzbuhel. I was thrilled to be there. But, as I started downhill the snow began swirling like a huge, dense cloud all around us. My friends, who were far more experienced than I, had no problem skiing in those conditions and soon left me behind.

A: Ooh la la, my dearest, was that a sudden change in weather conditions and you were not an expert skier? In the name of heaven, how did you manage on that mountain peak?

J: I had to make the most of it and find my way out without injury. So, I started slowly down the trail in the thickening, blinding snowfall. Very quickly I found that I could not tell if I was skiing down or uphill. I could barely see my hand before my face. What an unexpected, weird sensation! Grand-mère it is truly a miracle that I am here with you today. That snowfall became so thick that I needed to halt my precipitous downward plunge in order to take stock of my worsening situation before it was too late.

A: Good gracious, my dear girl, however did you extricate yourself from that disaster waiting to happen? You were caught on that upper slope with nowhere to go. Weren't you frightened?

J: Actually, yes, I was fighting panic. This type of weather condition is known as a "white out." As a result, I was caught in the predicament of not knowing if I should try harder to continue my descent, ever so slowly, or to wait for help from the ski patrol. Mostly I just wanted to remove myself from the center of the slope so that those superfast skiers whizzing past me on either side would not run me down.

It is beyond my comprehension, how they could see well enough to ski that fast in those conditions! They obviously knew the terrain, and I did not. I came to a stop. I navigated my way to the edge of the trail. The snow was getting deeper and deeper, soft, fluffy snow, too deep to walk down on foot. I decided there was no place for me to go, but up. So, I slowly sidestepped my way back to the top of the chairlift. There was an attendant in a cabin there, fortunately. I went to him for help. I hoped that he could stop the chair just long enough for me to hop on and ride safely back down! This is unheard of! But I did it, and thanks be to God, I made it out of the high-altitude blizzard in one piece.

A: Oh, I am so gratified to know that you are safe and that we did not have to cancel our meeting in this lovely place because you were buried in deep snow on an alp or suffered a broken limb! That was a close one! God be thanked!

J: Merci bien for your concern, Grand-mère. If it is not asking too much, would you mind telling me some of the heart-rending circumstances surrounding your son, Richard's, capture, imprisonment and ransom? We have all afternoon. Do not spare the details. I am all ears!

A: Certainly, my precious dear one. I remember it all as though it were yesterday. But, where to begin this incredible story!

*(Aliénor sits back and stares at the crystal chandelier above their table for a moment to collect her thoughts.)*

As you know, we both have sons named Richard... Well, my son found himself in quite an untenable predicament this time. First, to fill you in, my son Richard and his small band of men had been shipwrecked on their way back from The Third Crusade and were forced to abandon ships in the northern Adriatic Sea and from thence to find a land route. They had no choice but to cross enemy territory in December when the roads and high-altitude passes were covered in ice and snow. They went for days on horseback without food and were afraid to stop in small villages as word had spread that the King of the English was passing through en route to England.

*(Jini interjects)* Please hold that thought, my Lady Grand-mère. Let's make our order. That is, if you have decided, *(The waitress approaches and is loitering.)* then we can talk uninterrupted.

J: *(She turns to the waitress and says:)* I think I will order the apricot pastry with Crème Patissiere and a pot of Assam black tea. The apricot pastry caught my eye in the display case as I walked in. *(Then, turning to Aliénor she asks:)* Are you ready to order? If you are not sure we can walk over and take another look if you wish. It is an easy way to choose. The waitress will accompany us.

A: Yes, let's take a closer look. Perhaps then, I can choose. *(The two women get up and walk to the pastry displays.)*

J: Check out the cakes and tortes. There are all kinds. They all look so luscious to me. Of course, I love anything chocolate. This way we need not bother with translation but can simply point to the ones that appeal by sight.

A: I think I never saw so many tempting creations! I know this is not the Hotel Sacher, famous for the two-layer chocolate Sacher Torte, but I think I am safe in ordering a similar one of Demel's tortes. *(Aliénor points to a beautiful cake of many layers.)* That one is calling my name. How about that one? As a royal family, naturally we dined very well, but beyond our kingdom, we had little if any choice

and certainly never sipped tea in such fine style eight centuries ago even in the German states. Well, the circumstances were rather dour back then as we were on a “business trip” you might say. *(The two women exchange a knowing look, unable to suppress a smile at the pun, then return to their table.)*

*J: (stifling a smile)* Of course, please excuse me; it is not a laughing matter. Nonetheless I like your choice of words – “business trip,” as we might term it today.

*A: (The Queen makes her order and adds:)* Oh, yes, I shall have the Jasmine tea, please, as I adore the fragrance, and may I expect to see some blossoms floating in my cup? *(The waitress assents to her wish.)*

J: Jasmine was one of my mother’s favorites, too.

*(With the order made, they relaxed and look into each other’s eyes to make sure they are really together again, and both women respond with a hand squeeze across the table and broad, loving smiles.)*

J: Who was Richard accused of murdering in that far away land?

*A: (Aliénor ponders for a minute then responds.)* It turns out that this murder of which you speak was a false rumor. Sadly enough, this is the reason that Richard was hunted en route across the Holy Roman Empire that most unfortunate winter.

Here is the story as I recall it. Let me preface the explanation by saying that it was a complicated mass of confusion after the long siege of the port city of Acre. Conrad of Montferrat, recently named King of Jerusalem (uncrowned) had raised the banners of Jerusalem, England, France and Austria’s ducal flag over the conquered city. Later the Austrian colors were torn from the ramparts of Acre. The rumor was perpetuated that it was Richard who did the deed of the flag as well as the murder of Conrad that followed. They say that after the battle, Austrian Duke Leopold V and my Richard quarreled as the former felt he was treated unfairly following the Christian capture of Acre. Leopold returned home ahead of Richard and lay in wait for him.

As fortune would have it, on their way home, soon Richard was captured by the same Duke Leopold and imprisoned in the tower of Durnstein, high above the Danube River, only fifty miles west of where we sit now. For Leopold, there was only retribution to be paid by his former ally, Richard. Alas! Alack! Whether he actually committed these odious things or not or whether he ordered an underling to carry them to fruition may never be known to us. In this case, dear Jini, I ask you to hold off coming to a conclusion as to his guilt or innocence until I finish the entire tale.

J: I sense your pain in those early days, not knowing the truth. The story rings in my ear as incompatible with the character and honesty of the Richard I know. Yet

Richard and you knew that surely there would be an enormous price to pay for this perceived perfidy, be it true or false.

A: Yes, and it would be paid. I would see to that myself. Greed has its way with us. Greed can cover a multitude of lies. The kidnappers' price had to be paid, then and there. Of that there was no doubt! My son, his kingdom, and I paid sorely!

J: I understand the sum was more than double that of the gross national product of one year for the kingdom of England as we tally it today. A ransom such as that today would be unthinkable. But, for a head of state, be he king or president? Perhaps not.

A: And the work of raising the sum fell to me. I was the only one who could begin to achieve such a sum and even I was unsure if I could do it. I had to raise the ransom or lose my son and my kingdom, *then in his name*. On the other hand, if I lacked the strength, power of persuasion, and the resources, I would be *coincé!* (dead ended!)

J: When this all happened, you were in your retirement at the Royal Abby of Fontevraud in France. At any rate, there you lived in near perfect peace far from the world's fractious doings for the foreseeable future. But, upon receiving word that Richard had been captured and was in custody of Duke Leopold and later by the Holy Roman Emperor, you were yanked into the harsh reality of that incomprehensible event to accomplish this one last deed to save your family from ruin: to rescue your son and preserve your country.

A: *À propos*, let us remember that when a knight such as Richard takes up the cross to march on crusade, he makes a sacred oath with God and the Christian church. He is then to be given safe conduct en route to Jerusalem and back. This is the code agreed to by of the countries and principalities through which the pilgrims travel to and from the Holy Land. Are you aware of this oath?

J: Now that you point it out, yes, I am aware of it, having learned of it when reading about the preaching of the second crusade at Vézelay, where you and I met last time. That was when you and your first husband, King Louis VII set out for the Holy Land. I recall that the safe passage decree was crucial to your passing through so many countries en route. Without assurance of safe passage, the entire crusade, or any ensuing crusade, could be stymied at the outset, or halted as in the account you are giving of Richard's return from the Third Crusade.

A: It is important to know that Leopold V, Duke of Austria as well as Heinrich VI, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire both violated this sacred trust by capturing, imprisoning and demanding ransom for our King Richard. It was deplorable and shameful conduct!

J: I heartily concur. I read history all the time with major concentration on your time, your customs, your family and the crusades. Yes, I realize the import of this

agreement now violated with abject disregard for chivalry and decent comportment of a fellow knight.

A: Well, I bring up the agreement in our discussion and pose this question. Have you thought how the Pope would react to such disregard of Christian law?

J: Yes, it follows that the Pope would be most displeased. Tell me please, what was the outcome of this broken rule and how it was to affect Leopold and Heinrich.

A: Both were excommunicated by Pope Celestine III. It served them right to be so humiliated for their greed and ill-placed pride. Strangely enough, it was that very Pope who originally had decreed that knights who took up the cross on pilgrimage were to be protected!

J: People around the world today are still talking about Richard's supposed failed crusade. These rumors soon turned the tide against the Christian pilgrims in toto. (*She pauses a moment and then adds:*) How well I know. The result of that scandalous rumor continues to fuel the ongoing rift between Muslims and Christians. Richard encountered, even fought Muslims-a-plenty on crusade. They have not forgotten even with the passage of over eight hundred years. Am I right on this? We still feel the ill effects of the crusades around the world as we speak.

A: We both know that history is re-written over the years to fit the agendas and schemes of those in power. This is a perfect, but pathetic example going back to a rumor carried back to Europe from the Holy Land.

J: I must concur. Of course, you have the advantage of the long overview, your unique perspective of how history repeats itself unless we learn from the past, the true past.

A: And while we are talking about propagated historical error, I would like to set the record straight concerning my son, Richard. He was a normal heterosexual, not the pansy portrayed in your American film, *Lion in Winter*. That was abominable in my view. I was horrified when I heard about it. There is an American author who shall remain nameless, who has refuted this misnomer once and for all in her account on Richard's ransom. I take this opportunity to commend her diligent research that proved beyond a doubt that my son was one of God's normal males. Look how many centuries it took to bring the truth to light in this case!

J: Touché! I must say that I am more than pleased as well to have read of her research on the subject. After all I am a direct descendant of you and your entire family, and I can now stand on that author's study of original sources to refute the rumors spread by a flimsy film, and even better, on your words, the words of his mother, my dearest Grandmother. Period!

On a lighter note, I recall what Richard was to have said on his deathbed while sharing his last words with a trusted friend. The friend said: “Richard’s achievements would be long remembered, certainly for one hundred years.” And your Richard replied: “Only a hundred?”

A: (*Aliénor laughs*) Jini, what you say really happened! Let us remember what Richard accomplished in his short reign, not the false negatives.

J: Well, of course, and we are proof that as of some eight hundred years since his death, we, members of the world population, are still amazed at his bravery, his incredible perseverance in the face of enormous odds, and his devotion to you, his dear, dear, mother! He was aptly named, Lionheart.

A: Here! Here! Let’s drink a toast with our teacups. Or better yet, let’s see if they serve champagne here.

J: I am glad we set all the rumors to rest by revealing the truth in our precious time together! I second your proposal for a fine glass of the bubbly. I shall call our waitress.

A: Yes, it is a propitious moment in my story to make a toast with champagne in hand. There she is. Oh, miss, would you show us your champagne list please?

J: While we wait for our bubbly, do you feel like going on with how Richard was captured and imprisoned in Austria?

A: *Volontiers*, my dear. This is how it happened. It was December of 1192 that he and his men, including his close friend, Morgan, from Wales, and his sixteen-year-old squire, Aselin, along with a few Templar knights for protection, were tramping across the Holy Roman Empire incognito trying to avoid capture or worse.

J: Everything was against their passing through undetected I would say. The group most likely stood out as foreigners and would naturally attract attention.

A: Quite true. They were aware of this, so when they found a simple inn in which to rest, they sent the youth, Aselin, out for badly needed supplies. He was the only one in their retinue who spoke limited German.

J: How did it go? Did he pull it off and come home with the bacon?

A: Well, not exactly. Remember it was midwinter. Poor Aselin drew attention at first, because he was wearing long, heavy, gloves, the kind that only kings wore. And even more blatantly, he paid with gold coins from a large pouch, and as a good will token, offered an impressive ruby ring to prove he could pay.

J: Oh, oh. That was a big mistake! But how could Aselin have known, he was only doing what he was tasked to do.

A: This transaction alerted a townspeople who went straight to the local Count Englebert to advise him of spotting the young sailor, a stranger in the area. Had Aselin hidden the pouch under his coat, not given up the flashy ring, they might not have been found out.

J: How did they make Aselin tell them where the rest of his party was?

A: They tortured poor Aselin. In due course they found the King and his party, and all were taken to Count Englebert at his court in Gorz.

J: Was this Englebert a fair man, or was he hasty and wanting his own share of the ransom from the Emperor who was his overlord?

A: Interesting that you should pose that question. Englebert turned out to be a fair man. His reasoning was that since Richard had taken up the cross and sworn the oath to defend Christendom, he was therefore to be given safe passage to and from the Holy Land. So, as a man of his word, he passed Richard over to Duke Leopold.

J: A ruler with a conscience. Imagine that!

A: When you think of it, chances were slim that Richard could evade Emperor Heinrich's notice.

J: While all this was going on you had no idea where your son was or if he was safe. Oh my, the plot thickens like cold pea soup

A: No, dearest, I had not an inkling. In point of fact, I was, at that time, living the pensive life with the nuns at the Royale Abbaye de Fontevraud in France.

J: Okay, let me get this straight. Richard and his merry band of men were seeking safe conduct to pass through the domain of the evil Emperor when they finally gave up the ghost, were recognized thanks to the faux pas of a young squire and were caught although briefly, by Englebert. Sounds like a familiar scenario. It reminds me of when Marie Antoinette and King Louis XVI and their family were trying to flee France, and were recognized and stopped, and ultimately sent to prison, thus proving it is almost impossible for a king to hide.

A: Where is our Champagne? I will wave to the waitress. Please go on. Yes, you have the story right to this point.

J: The story of Marie Antoinette and King Louis proves that one little misstep, and the ruse is up. Sadly, that happened with King Louis stepped out of his carriage to speak to a local peasant in the small town of Varennes. They were almost at the

Belgian border where friendly soldiers planned to escort them to safety. Like Aselin, King Louis, in spite of disguise, was perceived by the rural population as out of place and was recognized. In King Louis's case, his untimely capture led to the demise of the King of France and his family. In your case, it led to the capture and near death of the boy, Aselin, and ultimately to the long imprisonment of your beloved Richard.

J: So, who was Richard's eventual captor?

A: It was the same Leopold von Babenberg, Duke of Austria, with whom Richard had argued in the Holy Land.

J: How strange that they should come face to face in the German lands! It was indeed a small world, even more so back then.

A: Exactly. It was most unfortunate for my son. I found Leopold to be a selfish, power-driven, ruler. When he discovered that it was truly King Richard who had fallen into his hands, he could hardly wait to even his score with him. At first Leopold did not alert his Emperor that he had caught a big fish! He wanted to figure out how much he could gain in ransom by secretly holding the King while bargaining with his overlord. A dangerous, dishonest, business.

J: If I may interject, an uncanny coincidence occurred recently to me. It was just last week in Connecticut that friends of mine returned from a cruise on the Danube. Knowing of my interest in Richard and his family, they could hardly wait to tell me that they had passed by one of Richard's prisons, obviously in full view of the Danube. It was Durnstein. Not far from Vienna. I believe that was Richard's first place of confinement. They said it was very high above the river with a single tower jutting skyward from a ruined castle.

A: Yes, that was indeed his first prison, although brief, under Englebert. Again, I find it fascinating that tour leaders still point it out after all these years. It is refreshing to hear of people in your time, Jini, who still care about the fate of my son.

J: Sorry for the interruption, but at this point in your tale, it was Leopold who held the golden egg in his possession *n'est-ce pas*?

A: Quite so; lamentably so. To make things complicated it seems, as we discovered later, that both Leopold and his Emperor, Heinrich VI, had another card up their sleeve that they did not long wait to play. Since their treasuries were low, due in part to his and Heinrich's recent trip to the Holy Land (He was also there at the time of Richard), they would strive to recuperate as much cash as possible.

J: Pray tell. How did this play out? And how did poor Richard end up as Heinrich's prisoner? Do not leave out any details, My Lady Grandmother.

A: Eventually Leopold gave up his captive to his Emperor. He had no choice.

J: Understood. Then you must have been contacted for the funds. Right?

A: *Ooh la la. Bien sur.* They had a two-part plan. They began to bargain with me to raise an outrageous ransom, but they would play me against France's King Philippe-Auguste to see which of us would offer the higher sum to release Richard.

J: And what was that all about? I am ignorant of the underlying reasons.

A: All too simple in fact. If King Philippe were to offer more than I can raise, then Heinrich would have to hand dear Richard over to his staunchest enemy, Philippe of France. It was a given that if Richard was handed over to him, we would never see him again. He would likely rot in a dark dungeon or suffer a worse fate.

J: Wasn't Philippe the son of your first husband, Louis V11? Such a tangled web we weave.

A: Yes, my dearest. And now we are on the subject, you are beginning to comprehend the thinly veiled desires of my youngest son, John, as well. John, you see, bless his heart, had colluded with our long-time foe, Philippe, especially during this tenuous time when Richard had left his throne vulnerable while on crusade. Sorry I failed to mention that Richard and Johnny have been at odds for years. John even would have wished his brother dead in the Holy Land so that he might inherit the kingship sooner.

J: My goodness, that old deadly sin called greed has reared its ugly head. I knew that there had been deep-seated rivalry between your family and that of your former husband, King Louis. Why is it that even an all-powerful King, must lust for still more? Philippe and his father were successful in dividing your family against itself from way back as I recall. It was biblical in proportion was it not?

*(Aliénor and Jini are so involved with the telling of the Queen's story and the history leading up to Richard's abduction that they have completely forgotten their champagne. At last, with tall flutes in hand, they raised their glasses to the success of their meeting.)*

J: I think we need a break from this depressing scenario. I am so sorry you had to leave the peace of Fontevraud to bear all this yourself.

A: *Santé, bien chère!*

J: *Santé, à la tienne! (They clink champagne glasses and take some time to taste their cakes and sweets. Then, after relaxing a while, Jini continues.)*

J: Now I begin to understand the background of this feud between reigning families and why Leopold and Heinrich acted as they did. With no time to recuperate from

the stunning news of Richard's capture, you had to immediately turn to sorting out the complications of raising the ransom.

A: That is the gist of it in a nutshell. Woe was me! But I had no time to feel sorry for myself. A queen's job is never done. Once a queen, always a queen as you can well see.

J: You poor dear, you had to shoulder the pain of knowing your beloved son was not only far away, literally beyond reach in a prison that was impenetrable, but that he was likely being treated poorly.

A: You have grasped the gravity of my situation. Right now, before going on with my story, let us think on sweeter things. It will do us good.

J: Having tea here with you reminds me of the first time I came here with my ersatz Austrian brother, Herbert, on one of my prior visits to Vienna years ago. On that note, let us raise our glasses to each other, to our long line of shared relatives, and may we continue to meet and to tell each other stories of our past. Prosit! Let us raise our glasses once more to our shared upline and downline of which we first spoke in my garden in Connecticut. Chin chin and Salut! Chugalug and bottoms up and all that!

A: Perfection itself!! When I am with you, I am always happy, and my spirits are lifted to the skies! Now it is your turn to relate some of *your* Austrian stories to me! Mine is too long for one sitting.

J: Well, my Austrian brother showered me with concerts and tastings in many of the best restaurants in the capital city that he loved so much. Herbert had lived with our family as an exchange student in Hornell, New York, where I grew up. He had been awarded a Fulbright Scholarship for two years at Princeton University. He was a bright young man and rather handsome, too!

A: Wasn't he a fortunate one as well? He must have been an outstanding student, a man with an inquiring mind and a thirst for learning. Am I right?

J: Yes, you are. I guess exchange programs in foreign countries for bright students have been going on since time began. Our family was happy to give him a home away from home for over two years. In fact, the exchange was truly two ways. Since Herbert and his mother lived in central Vienna, my mother and I visited them as soon as we could. Herbert took great pride on our first visit, squiring us around his Vienna. And as you might have guessed, I remember vividly my first visit here to Demel's with him.

A: Pleasant memories? *Oui?*

J: *Bien sur*. A few years later, during a three-month grand tour of Europe with my mother, Anne Elizabeth Aulls Jones. The grand tour was my college graduation gift from my parents—the trip of a lifetime, driving over hill and dale in our 1959 Citroen ID19! As much as I love horses, I am glad our horses were under the hood for that extended trip.

A: It appears to me that old Vienna has retained its beautiful old buildings and is a very elegant capital from the Hofburg Palace to the government buildings, theatres, music halls, museums – all with magnificent artwork as well.

J: Let's see, where was I? Oh yes, speaking of music, Vienna is the home of some of the best music in Europe. Herbert escorted my mother and me to my first operatic performance; it was presented at the Hofburg Palace no less! It was "Die Fledermaus" by Johann Strauss II, and I was mesmerized by the music, the costumes, the setting in the palace theatre and the comedic sections of the story. Another visit to Austria, Herbert took me to Salzburg to see the birthplace of Mozart and attend concerts there as well. Naturally we took in the splendor of Schonbrunn Palace on the outskirts of Vienna, patterned after Louis XIV's Palace of Versailles near Paris.

A: To accompany these incredible sights, I imagine you ate well when you visited Herbert.

J: Got your hat? Herbert ordered *at least* two different main courses for my Mother and two more for me, so we could sample the traditional Austrian, old world cuisine. I must say we were not disappointed! That is what we call packing it in!

Enough of my story, please do go on about how you reacted and what you did when you knew that Richard was being held deep in the Germanic lands.

A: I remember it perfectly. Yes, I can tell you what it was like for me when I found that Richard was in prison. First, it was the most devastating news imaginable for a mother to receive. An anointed king held by an anointed emperor was inconceivable! At the time, as I said, I was living the cloistered life at Fontevraud. I realized that my son had fallen prey to a malicious ruler who wanted nothing but revenge and bags of silver and gold. At the same time, I had just received welcome news that Richard's wife, Berengaria, who had been with him in the Holy Land, had returned separately via Sicily and was safe. So, of necessity, I set in motion a long series of communications and haggling to try to set him free.

J: Good to know where he was and that he was safe for the time being. On the other hand, what a gruesome prospect with no end in sight hindered greatly by the time it took to send messages and receive responses in those days.

A: I began by sending notes via high-ranking loyal men of state in my stead as negotiators for his release. Normally I thought nothing of waiting two months for an

answer to a letter within our realm. But, under these circumstances, when I sent a missive addressed to a recipient on the continent, I would easily be relegated to a four-month hiatus before receiving a reply.

J: I think that would make me a nervous wreck! You know of course since we have been meeting, how communications have improved in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Could you ever have imagined such a leap in progress, now able to have instant messaging across the world?

A: No, I dare say the new methods of email, Skype, Facetime, iPhones, iPads and all, are staggering for me to filter into my old brain. The fastest messages in my day, if all went well, including weather conditions, the mail only moved as fast as a fresh horse could run.

J: That term is not a misnomer in your case. The phrase, a king's ransom, is used loosely today to signify a sum so large that no exact figure can be used to describe it.

A: I summoned all my old contacts, all those who loved and respected Richard, all the bishops and clergy, to my aid. Of course, it goes without saying that we had to levy new taxes to fill the gap. We were already in poor financial condition having recently sent off the crusaders with all the means we had at hand. That was about four years prior. Yes, he had been gone for that long!

J: It is difficult for me to relate to *my* son being gone that long with little or no word.

A: Next was to locate Richard's place of incarceration in the Germanic lands. This was finally determined.

J: I have heard the stories of how the court musician, *trouvère* Blondel, found his king's prison by traveling widely over the Holy Roman Empire where Richard was supposed to have been last seen. One day, it is said, as he was singing or whistling songs known only to himself and his king, he heard a continuing response to the song. He knew it could only be his King Richard!

A: A nice legend, but this story is only a story. It never happened! I learned of the location of his captivity through normal channels, from my personal scouts.

J: Well that positively de-bunks that story!

A: One more myth put to rest. The Holy Roman Emperor, Heinrich VI finally let me know where Richard was held, and I did get reliable word back via the first of our close attendants who had been able to pay my son a visit. The close friend was Guillaume de Longchamp, Bishop of Ely, Richard's chancellor. He gave us to believe that Richard was permitted certain freedoms, all at the whim of his captor. In fact, Richard actually celebrated his thirty-sixth birthday whilst in captivity. He was able to receive clergy and bishops from time to time as well. It gave him a glimmer of

hope. And thanks be to our gracious God in heaven, he was given some time in the fresh air. He even went hawking once with Duke Leopold, his first captor at Durnstein and he was allowed to attend church. After all, he was not your everyday prisoner. He was a king!

After our first communication, we found that Richard had been transferred from place to place, then ultimately to Emperor Heinrich for closer supervision. Leopold did not want to let Richard out of his control but had no choice. Leopold was the Emperor's vassal after all and had to succumb to his wishes.

J: I realize that there were several extensions of talks and extra requirements before the terms were met. In addition to the large monetary sum there was added a necessity of some sixty highborn hostages, acceptable to Heinrich that you had to bring with you. These hostages were to be handed over to Emperor Heinrich for a certain length of time, even years before they could be released. The Emperor also demanded that certain marriageable hostages would be duty bound to wed whomever the Emperor chose.

These last requirements demanded of you by Heinrich seem outrageous to me. I know it was very difficult for you in your late sixties to round up the funds and to engage all those people willing to submit themselves to this type of captivity for their king and for you, most of all for love of you! What a sacrifice on the part of so many! Your task was one unequalled throughout history, either before your time or following. I salute you for your amazing accomplishment.

A: Amen! Let's raise our glasses for another toast before going on to more of your experiences in Austria, my dearest Jini. I have talked enough to burn your ears. I will hold you in suspense before relating the denouement of Richard's release.

*(Jini wants to digress one more time before learning more about of Richard's time of incarceration.)*

J: Precious Lady Grandmother, let's now shift gears and prepare ourselves for spur of the moment time travel. After all we are experienced time-travelers, wouldn't you say Grand-mère? Just think of it! We have already flipped our conversation from Vienna in 2015 to Kitzbuhel in 1982, then to the Vienna Woods 1192 and instantly back to Vienna in 1959 and again in 1192. I am out of breath hanging and by a thread, eager to hear the unravelling of Richard's predicament high above the Danube.

So, now it is off to a new destination. It is Saalbach-Hinterglemm, Austria. Since I prefer to travel on my stomach, not literally of course, but figuratively, let me suggest, for later on this evening, a hotel restaurant there that I sampled during my ski trip when I was there. By the time we arrive and have looked around the charming town, our stomachs will be growling for food. I know you will approve. What do you say?

A: Why not? We are on a roll as you say in your century. Our growling stomachs can lead the way! Let us continue our adventure in another part of Austria! *D'accord*, dear girl! I entrust the travel plans to you!

J: My Lady Grandmother, if you are ready, let's remove ourselves, as only we can do, to Saalbach-Hinterglemm, where over dinner I shall relate an amusing anecdote regarding my alpine sojourn. You will have a chance to sip fine Austrian wine at a Four-Star restaurant owned by relatives of friends in Connecticut. My brief episode in the alps, some distance west of Vienna, will bring laughter to your lips and joy to your heart. All in all, our detour westward will serve as a short respite from the terrifying tale of your ransom-toting trip to Austria.

Shall we tweak our noses to music as Elizabeth Montgomery did the 1960s on an American TV show called "Bewitched"? Ready? Finger beside your nose and time traveling we go! Repeat after me now~ Deedle. deedle deet deet! Here we go the western side of Austria, much nearer to your Richard's last prison. Deedle, deedle deet deet! Hold my hand Grand-mère!

*(They grasp hands as together they entone, "Allons-y! Deedle, deedle, deet deet!"  
(They disappear into thin air!)*

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(Following this scene is the list of mini back sets to be used as mini scenes for extra actors behind the two main characters, to depict and expand on the scene of current dialogue.)

### **Act 2 Scene 1 (mini back sets)**

**1.** The famous pastry shop in Vienna, Demel's interior (this is an actual tearoom of wide renown) – as elegant, fancy and full of sweets as anyone can imagine. Pastries, cakes, cookies, and tarts, some in glass cases and others on top of the cases on footed, three- and four-pedestal cake plates, decorated with a wide variety of flowers made of spun sugar. The tearoom is decorated in old world style of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with long draperies on tall windows, elegant chandeliers hanging from the sculpted ceiling, and large bouquets of flowers. There are mirrors on the walls with sculpted, gold frames and delicate and fancy tables and chairs. Some men come in to choose a pastry to eat with their morning or afternoon tea or coffee while they read their newspaper. Well-dressed people of all ages, a few mothers with young children, some teens walk into the shop to be welcomed politely and to make their choices. Some are shown to small tables to sit and order goodies with tea or demi tasse, opening up their pocketbooks of silk and some bedecked in jewels to pay for their tasties. All in good spirits. Can use six or seven clients in the Demel's and a few waiters or waitresses.

2. Later in the scene we are outside Vienna just prior to King Richard's capture. Backdrop of rural Austria, a small town. Country people who live and work there bustling around. A youth, about fourteen, traveling with Richard comes shyly into town alone. While Richard and his men wait elsewhere, the young Aselin had been sent to buy supplies for the group. He is the only one in the group who can speak some German. He goes into a few shops to buy foodstuffs for Richard and his band of several men. He talks with a few townspeople and he carries more and more things he has purchased. People are beginning to notice him. He does not fit in. He is wearing beautiful winter gloves, like those only a king would wear. He also pays in gold coin. Not the normal thing for a youth to do... all alone in town where everyone knows everyone. He is stopped and questioned, then carried off to prison and tortured. Eventually, although he has been very strong and holds off on talking about who he travels with, he finally breaks and tells his captors he is indeed with the king of the English who is being hunted in Austria at that time as the king is returning from the crusade. Then Richard and his men are imprisoned, too. His first prison is Durnstein in 1192 – a castle on the tall hill with a single remaining tall tower. Still seen today in ruins high above the Danube River.

## Conversations with Queen Aliénor

Jini Jones Vail

### ACT 2, SCENE 2

#### King Richard 1st Pledges ‘Obeisance’ to Holy Roman Emperor, Heinrich VI

**Place:** Saalbach-Hinterglemm, Austria

**Time:** Later in the afternoon, Spring 2015

**Background:** Close on the heels of their visit to Demel’s in Vienna, on the same day, Aliénor and Jini choose to visit Saalbach-Hinterglemm in the alps of Western Austria via time travel that they had now mastered. Here the two closely related women with a huge generation gap, finish the saga of Richard’s final rescue and finish by sharing a rollicking, fun afternoon with Jini on the mountain high above Saalbach.

Location: Saalbach-Hinterglemm, Austria, is a picturesque village at the base of some of the best ski mountains in the country. They meet at the Jini’s friend’s family-owned hotel/restaurant. In contrast to Vienna, the architecture is Austrian alpine with balconies painted with mountain wildflowers. In real time it is later that same afternoon, well before dusk. This location is much nearer the last place on incarceration of Queen Aliénor’s son, King Richard, and the place where Queen Aliénor surrendered the immense ransom with which she freed her son in 1194. He has been held since 1192.

Jumping back in time somewhat from the end of Scene 1, to 1193 when Aliénor arrives with the ransom, to a year later filling in the details of Richard’s trial and belittling of Richard before Emperor Heinrich VI, a requirement of the Emperor before Richard would be freed. Aliénor’s story continues at Speyer where King Richard is ordered to pay homage to the emperor.

J: *(Jini welcomes her esteemed grandmother in a new location; they stroll along village streets talking, as usual.)* Well, hello! *Re-bonjour!* We made it! Here we are in the charming village of Saalbach-Hinterglemm. It is quiet this afternoon, but I remember my first visit here around the time of the Winter Olympics in the early 1990s when there were many, many skiers and tourists bustling in the streets where we now stand. Let’s enter the restaurant of this hotel where I had an outstanding midday meal on my one-day side trip here. Follow me.

*(The maitre d’hôtel leads them to the best table in the house overlooking the ascent to the ski slopes. They have seen the charming old town on foot and are now glad to sit down for a hearty alpine meal. Jini recommends the root vegetable potage with green peppercorns followed by traditional Weiner Schnitzel that she relished here earlier.*

*Jini has already chosen a light desert but will order after the main course to see if Aliénor wishes it as well. It is a huge snowball made of vanilla ice cream rolled in freshly grated coconut, dripping with warm chocolate sauce. They settle in with glasses of wine from eastern Austria.)*

A: This town is charming! Such a contrast to Vienna, capitol and seat of government at the opposite side of the country. I think I prefer the relative quiet and informality of Saalbach. You do not think it is a little early to dine?

J: It is, but, since I am a “foodie” and travel “on my stomach,” I thought that after our stroll in town we might indulge ourselves with an early dinner. I guess I am a little like Herbert, hoping to tempt you with some of the local dishes. No pressure to take a large meal. I knew you would like it here as I do. It is a fine time of year to be here and enjoy the atmosphere with the locals and recreational skiers who come here for the beauty and challenge of the alpine slopes. Saalbach is a gem!

A: A most healthy approach. What a good way to combat “time travel lag.” Is there such a thing? On our walk around the village, I filled my lungs with the cool, fresh mountain air, and I feel re-energized. Don’t you?

J: After the city, we needed the boost of fresh mountain oxygen. As promised, I will tell you my story of Saalbach for a change of pace before returning to the finale of your ransom expedition. I thought you would appreciate it more if we were in the place where my alpine adventure started while being closer to the climax of yours.

J: *(Jini who loves nothing more than storytelling, begins her first-hand account of our adventure of her recent day at Saalbach.)* The second day of my ski trip last week, was, again, not a good day to ski the high trails, so a fellow skier and I decided to look up some friends of friends in the ski town of Saalbach-Hinterglemm. It is a gorgeous string of connected mountains where skiers come from around the world for excellent conditions and long, steep trails. My Connecticut friend has relatives who own a ski “hutte” within hiking distance from the base where we are. We decided to surprise them by not skiing down to their “hutte” but hiking up to it for a change of pace. When we started out it was clear and sunny, and the trail was wide with only a few downhill skiers racing down. We kept to the hiking portion of the trail and enjoyed our two-hour climb.

When we reached what we were told was the “hutte,” we were seeking, we approached the door to knock. As we neared the mountain cabin, we heard sounds of laughter and singing. No one heard our knock, so we went in.

We were amazed at the welcome we received. Evidently the roomful of revelers represented many nations, but they spoke the same language of fun, dance and song. Before we had a chance to think, we were taken by the hand and drawn into the room and into the frivolity of the dance. The music was a live, local band of fiddles, accordions and singers.

When we finally had a chance to speak, we found that the owners were indeed the relatives of our friends in Connecticut. They hugged us and offered mugs of gluhwein (hot mulled red wine with spices and cloves), and soon we were accepted as part of the happy group! I enjoyed meeting the relatives of my friends from my home state. They were a jolly bunch! One did not need a partner, so we fit in rather well.

This is not the end of the story. Time flew by so quickly when we were having such fun mingling with the people. After a while, I looked out the small window and realized that dusk would be falling soon, and we must return to town before dark or lose our way. Besides that, it had started to snow.

As we were saying our goodbyes and thanks, our host said he would help us to descend the mountain much faster than we had climbed it. He gave us each an old fashioned curved-runner sled. The only problem was that, unlike the old sleds of my youth, there was no steering mechanism. It was too late. He called out, "Just lean and dig in your heel to make a turn."

I had more questions, but by then he gave us each a big shove and we were off. The snow was falling in large flakes all around, so visibility was going to be tricky to say the least.

A few minutes down the slick trail a couple of skiers came up behind us. We recognized them from the "hutte" crowd. They were in good spirits, and obviously used to this sort of thing. One skied up behind each of us, straddled our sleds, causing us to gather speed quickly, then gave us an even bigger push downhill into the ever-blinding snowfall.

We were in good spirits, as you can imagine after all that gluhweine and dancing, but we soon noticed that this sled thing might be problematic at best. On our right side was a steep downhill gulley with an icy stream bed at the bottom. How could we avoid going off the trail when we came to a curve?

Vision was iffy as the snowfall became heavier and heavier. We were having fun, laughing all the way, but sometimes it took all we had to dig our heels into the snow hard enough while leaning into the turns, to avoid the drop off! It was a hairy trip down, but we made it safely!

J: Grand-mère, I see you enjoyed my scary, fun-loving story as much as I like telling it.

A: Indeed, my chérie, I did. I can just picture the "hutte," the dancing and jovial atmosphere, but the trip down the hill on those primitive sleds was a hoot, pun intended!!! Get my joke? "hutte," hoot? No owl ever had so much fun as you did that day. I see now that you had a very long way down the mountain on that dangerous

mode of transportation!! I shudder to think how it would have ended if one of you had landed in the icy stream!

J: I simply wanted you to see this mountain so you could appreciate the extent of our sled ride! I cede the floor to you now

A: I do so much want you to hear the rest of my story of Richard and the ransom, too. The worst and the best are yet to come. Let's revert back to December 1192, and into the next long year of Richard's captivity.

J: Yes, I agree. Once again let us return to that period of which you speak, the deepest, darkest, post-crusade Holy Roman Empire.

*(Aliénor continues as promised to relate the ransom story to its conclusion.)*

A: Now, where was I, yes, I will fast rewind to Speyer, Holy Roman Empire March 1193. It is a few months since Richard was captured by Leopold, Duke of Austria. The Duke, vassal to the Emperor, has dutifully but reluctantly handed King Richard over to Emperor Heinrich in Speyer, his Imperial Palace on the Rhine River. Once in control of the situation, Heinrich planned a formal trial for my son. It took place during Holy Week, as we are experiencing ourselves today here in Vienna and Saalbach.

J: Just out of curiosity, how many years ago was this from today?

A: Nearly 825 years ago. Bless my soul!

J: I had no idea Heinrich would give Richard the opportunity of a trial. That seems uncharacteristic of Heinrich, greedy breaker of the Christian law protecting crusaders. But go on, please. My apologies.

A: Here are the charges levied against our king of the English as they call my son. There were lesser infractions mentioned, but these three were the most serious crimes for which he was tried.

First, being allied with the usurper King of Sicily.

Second, as murder of Conrad of Montferrat, cousin of Duke Leopold of Austria, recently named King of Jerusalem.

And third, of conspiring with Saladin, First Sultan of Egypt and Syria, a Sunni Muslim of Kurdish origin who led his troops against the Christian Crusaders. Apparently, Richard and Saladin agreed that Jerusalem would remain in Muslim hands but that the Christians would be free to travel a narrow strip along the coast from Tyre (now in Lebanon) to Jaffa.

Richard decided he must depart Outre Mer at that point. He had been away from his kingdom too long and knew that his younger brother, John, whom he had placed in charge, was colluding with the French King, Philippe, against him. He truly had to return before he lost more of his lands.

J: That is good reasoning, but the timing was terribly wrong as it turned out. Isn't it true, Grand-mère, that in most things, especially in war, that timing is the governing factor?

A: *Bien sur!* In poor Richard's case, only hindsight would illuminate how poorly planned was his retreat. But at the time there were too many factors in play to see it clearly. In reality his luck had run out. Even though he had come to an agreement with Saladin, it does not erase the fact that in the clash of Christians versus Muslims, it is said that there were many milled on both sides.

My son was able to speak on his own behalf at his trial, shedding light on the truth pertaining to all three accusations to the complete satisfaction of those present, including bishops, diplomats, and governors. Only Heinrich stood betrayed. From what Richard told me, there were many more for him than against in the great hall that day. So, he was tried by a court of his peers and affirmed not guilty by them!

J: Naturally, I am pleased to hear that Richard was given the freedom to explain his side of the story. But tell me, why was it that so many in the Holy Roman Empire had originally believed him to have acted contrary to what they had known of his character previous to the Crusade?

A: This goes back to something I mentioned earlier. It was due to a false rumor that was spread near the end of Richard's time in Outre Mer. Remember that French Bishop Beauvais was the one Richard credited with starting this rumor? One had to know Beauvais to understand why he did it. He was in league with French King Philippe and the temporary English King John, my youngest. Philippe and John were in cahoots to discredit, even wrest away from him, the kingship of the Angevine Empire. My dearest, when Richard was finished those in attendance stood up and clapped for him shouting: "King Richard has been wrongly accused!"

J: How good it is to see a dangerous rumor proven false by the wrongly accused stating the truth in person. Beauvais must have been red-faced.

A: He was, by all accounts, as well as Heinrich, who was mortified at having been found out.

J: Sterling good news that must have been! It was a though the sun burst out in the midst of a thunderstorm.

A: When I heard of this trial and the favorable outcome for Richard, my hopes rose. But the malevolence does not end here with the trial, although by all rights, it should have. Sadly for us all, Richard was kept in prison by that cruel man for another year!

J: What an outrage. You must have been crushed to hear this. Without raising a hand, the Muslims were as much as avenged by Richard's own.

A: I will spare you most of the details of the year that followed. Finally, Richard was incarcerated at the Castle of Trefals not far from Speyer. Fortune was on my side, for I managed to collect the ransom. I needed the time to do that anyway as it turns out. This done, I and the carts and wagons of silver and gold were on the way toward the stipulated handover to Heinrich.

J: Wasn't Heinrich double dealing behind your back? I understand that he was forging another deal for Richard's ransom with Philippe and John. Heinrich played one side against the other to see who would pay him more.

A: It was a dreadful time. Heinrich and I finally agreed to meet in Germany at his seat of government. It was the winter of 1194. Then Heinrich stated that he would refuse all offers and keep Richard until Michaelmas, September 29, 1194 – I was in pure agony to hear this!

J: At last, you set out for the approved meeting place. It was a most challenging midwinter journey as I noted in my reading. Not the least of the challenges, you crossed the Rhine river in winter, and what a chore that must have been.

A: Indeed! I had been traveling for about a month with the Archbishop of Rouen and the hostage entourage. Cold and weary we arrived at Cologne. Upon arrival, Heinrich was not waiting for us. The news was most upsetting. We would be delayed a fortnight instead of meeting with Richard in Speyer, we were to travel on to Mainz. Surely this would be the last of our zigzag trip. The entire caravan boarded ships to sail further down the Rhine.

J: Meanwhile Richard, who was waiting in tenter hooks at Speyer, was also met with disappointment, as he was handed a message from the emperor with the same news. He would meet you in Mainz on Candlemas, February 2<sup>nd</sup>. The suspense was building, dear mother of the English King, my dearest Grand-mère.

A: I had heard Heinrich called "Swain of the Devil," and I believed it to be a proper sobriquet for him as I set out for yet another leg of our cross-country journey. By then our hostages and our treasure had been turned over. And still we did not have my son. By then I was thinking of new names for the German Emperor. After our arrival in Mainz, we got word that he had made new demands: more hostages and more money! Beyond all that, he demanded that Richard pay homage to him as his vassal before being delivered into my waiting arms.

When I finally did set eyes on my son, he was pale as the moon and thin, but in fairly good spirits until he heard the news of the extra demands. He responded: "When ice burns and fire freezes!"

J: That is what I would call the last straw that might get caught in one's craw. How did you resolve this last agony?

A: I bade him swallow his pride. That he must concede to this one last thing in order to be freed. He was needed desperately at home to set his kingdom in order. I begged him not stand on his honor just now as his moment of freedom was at hand. After much agonizing Richard agreed to bow before the Emperor and pay fealty to him as his vassal though in his heart of hearts, he did not mean it in the least!

A: So, on February 4, 1195 my dearest son, Richard, was free at last!

J: Yes, dear Grand-mère! We can now put to rest the momentous story of your rescue of King Richard, my forebear. I hope when you were safely returned to France and to the Abbaye, you were able to give thanks to our one true God for having delivered your son, my ancestor, the king of the English, back to his homeland, back to his people. And I want to add that I am also ever so grateful that you were finally able to return to the peace and quiet of your precious Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud.

A: I did give thanks when we were safely on our own soil. Thus, do I close my story of Richard and his ransom by saying that all the requirements were met: the ransom collected and presented by me to Emperor Heinrich. Pursuant to this, we returned home in good spirits and plenty of renewed Plantagenet vigor. I wasted no time in summoning John. It was easier than I had anticipated persuading him that he **MUST** support our family as one unit from then on if he ever hoped to inherit the kingdom. He admitted his wrongdoing and was remorseful. We Angevins were united once again and agreed to set aside the whole debacle.

J: How the course of history might have been changed had you not been able to accomplish this goal! I shudder to think of an alternative end to Richard's incarceration. But that was not to be, and as a result I am proud to say that I share with you the long line going back to Charlemagne enhanced by you and your determined bravery to save your son.

A: Amen and amen!

J: I know it has been a long, long day for both of us, but there is another subject I would like to broach before we part this evening. I am sure you have been thinking of it as you related the history of Richard's imprisonment. It is like the elephant in the room that needs to be addressed! It is your capture by Henry well before Richard's bad luck on return from crusade.

A: Alas, sweet bone-of-my-bone daughter, you are very perceptive. It is the undercurrent that I do not generally like to discuss, even to remember. But with you, I do not mind bringing it to light.

J: I know that your relationship with Henry had worsened over time until a breaking point was reached in 1174. That was a good twenty years before the event of Richard's return from the crusade of which we have been speaking.

A: This account goes way back to when our sons were still wet behind the ears. Henry could not bear to see me wielding power on my own, even in my dower lands, my Aquitaine. It often caused him to lose his self-control from a slow boil to a complete eruption. I liken it to being worse than Vesuvius. Sometimes I had returned to Aquitaine to keep government there in check since my subjects in the south, always reticent to obey Henry's unreasonably harsh commands, were more likely to assent to my rule. This crumbling situation was coupled with Henry's discomfort with the growing demands on him from our sons. He had insisted on having our young son, Harry, crowned king to ensure succession, but that one came back to bite him. As young Harry grew older, he wanted more and more freedom to assert his rule while his father was yet king. Jini, do you have the stomach to listen to another tale of woe over our delicious dinner tonight?

J: I do if you do. I count on hearing it from your lips, that is if you can bear the telling without turning your stomach before our dessert arrives. I leave the decision to you.

A: I have wanted to explain it to you since our first meeting, dear one, but I hesitated to bring it up with our time so short.

J: Now is the hour, our last one before our parting for another year. Please continue.

A: Well, the rift was growing steadily in those last years leading up to 1174. Henry was getting it from all sides. First it was the astonishing and horrible death of his best friend, Samuel A. Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury. It happened in the Cathedral itself. It was a horror from all points of view! Henry carried the guilt of this crime on his shoulders whether from real or perceived guilt of the crime carried out by his underlings. Then he turned from having casual affairs, one-night stands with low class females, to flaunting a long-standing affair with Rosamonde, a noble young girl whom he took into his bed and decided to keep, right under my nose.

J: How did you manage to maintain your dignity when everyone knew of Henry's devotion to her. It seems like you have more than one crisis to deal with during that time. It must have torn you apart!

A: I could but search deep inside myself and find my station as queen to be sacrosanct. I knew my husband had no compunctions restraining him from completely usurping my place in not only our marriage bed, but in our reign over England. Both were crumbling before my very eyes. I was being shuffled to the side

little by little and finally, altogether when I was arrested on my way to Chinon and ultimately to what I called my tower in Arum, old Salisbury, England. I was transferred to other places of containment as well.

I recalled the undoing of my sister, Petronilla years before when she lost the love of her beloved husband, and finally her mind, in total despair. I determined not to let this happen to me. I would not give in to my husband and let him take away my very soul behind walls, far from my children. I was accused of treason for setting our sons against him and his kingship. It was a time of complete rupture in our family. I was not allowed to communicate with anyone outside my prison for many years. I was like the cast off, no account wife, mother and queen. Henry tried his best to turn me into an inconsequential non-person.

J: Was it true that you were invited to join your family for the Christmas Court one year?

A: Yes, and then I was relegated to my prison where I got no news and saw no one but those few who served me there in poverty.

A: That was Henry's last gesture of sympathy if I can call it that. I was returned to my jail for more long years of loneliness and struggle to maintain my health. I felt as though Henry had stowed me away in prison where I was never to be seen again by my loved ones, where I was to be one of *les oubliés*, the forgotten ones. I stitched and sewed until I was blue in the face, but that activity may have saved me in the end. I clung to the hope that I would see my children again. Then I received the long-awaited message that I was to be released. I knew that the only way I was to be freed would be due to the death of my husband, the king. It finally happened on July 6, 1189. Henry was dead, and I could resume my life as a free woman at long last. During the fifteen-year captivity, I had outlived his cruelty and exited the tower with my sanity.

J: There are no words to say how you must have felt or how I feel now having heard it from you in person. What a trial, but what a triumph. You lived to tell the tale and to return to real life once again as Queen of the English and Duchess of your beloved Aquitaine. You would live to see your children and your lands again. Despair dissolved into hope at long last!!

A: One might say that I lived so I could set my son, Richard, free lo, those many years later. He needed me, and I had survived an almost interminable period of suffering to emerge in strength to reign as queen once more.

One must never underestimate the power of a king over his people, over his wife. But, on the brighter side, one must never underestimate the power of a queen or a woman to survive under the worst of circumstances.

J: You are a true overcomer! I am humbled to hear your awesome words in person. I love you all the more for all you have endured. My heart goes out to you for having the courage to reveal your feelings to me. I realize now that we have reached a level of mutual trust. I treasure that trust. I feel your frustration, your agony and I applaud your stolid resignation to survive being caged in for so long. Up to today I relied solely on the accounts of others regarding your captivity. Yours is the only account that matters. *(With tears of love and compassion swelling in her eyes, Jini reaches over to embrace her grandmother. They are lost in each other's arms contemplating the exquisite value of their mutual understanding.)*

A: My dearest darling I, too, treasure our new-found sense of empathy. Yes, I survived two extended incarcerations: my fifteen years under Henry's lock and key and Richard's two and a half years of a mother's fears under Heinrich's control. My children and I emerged stronger because of these trials. I try not to think of the lost time stolen from our precious lives on earth, but instead, am thankful to our heavenly Father for giving me time to be once again with my family for the time allotted us together in this crazy world.

J: There are many lessons to be learned from your strength, your perseverance, mostly that hope will survive in our hearts and in our lives if we give it a chance.

A: And now a toast before we part. *(They raise their glasses to touch with a clink and then sip)* A capital idea! *Salut!* May continued good fortune be your shield, precious Granddaughter, until we meet again.

J: *Vaya con dios*, my beloved Lady Grandmother!

A: And *carpe diem* to you, my dearest—till next we meet in Normandy, France at Château-Gaillard, Richard's *chef d'oeuvre!*

*(Having shared many personal stories today, Aliénor and Jini embrace tenderly with kisses on both cheeks as they prepare to depart Austria where they have spent the better part of the afternoon in a Viennese tearoom and the dinner hour at a three-star restaurant in Saalbach-Hinterglemm. Both are pleased with their reminiscing and more than a little teary at their parting. There will be plenty of time to digest all the family stories the two women have revealed before their next meeting. They promise to see one another face-to-face again the following year in France, at King Richard's Château-Gaillard.)*

(Following this scene is the list of mini back sets to be used as mini scenes for extra actors behind the two main characters, to depict and expand on the scene of current dialogue.)

## **Act 2 Scene 2 (mini back sets)**

Location: Saalbach, Austria in the contemporary time. Can show young girls and boy

1. Girls are wearing dirndls of pinks and blues and whites with matching aprons. Boys are in lederhosen and high decorated knee socks. They are dancing the local folk dances of Western Austria. Local um-pa band music and happy atmosphere. Musicians are dressed in similar fashion. Mountains covered with snow and Austrian style chalets dot the mountainside. They celebrate almost every evening for the locals and the tourists – like J. and A. J. and A. have just hiked up from the town of Saalbach to visit a mountain ski *hutte* owned by a friend of Jini's brother in CT. They walk into the "*hutte*" and hear the music, see the drinking and dancing and join in. When dusk comes, they exit the *hutte* to be given each an old-fashioned sled to go sailing down the mountain, a new experience since they have never ridden on a sled such as this with no stirring mechanism, and they are excited and a little scared as they take the sleds and start the fast ride down the mountain trail. The skiers give them a big push and they are off into the blinding snowstorm. Need several dancers and musicians in the *hutte* along with J. and A. accordions etc. and Oom pah pahs.

2. Next, we return to the story of captured King Richard and find him in a castle of the Holy Roman Emperor, Heinrich who demands that Richard bow to him in obeisance. A. has just arrived with a huge ransom to pay the Emperor to free her son, Richard after 2 ½ years of captivity. A band of 30 hostages from England are a part of ransom. Can show A. bearing a silver tray of gold items, coins and followed by two bishops in tall, mitre hats carrying similar ransom in large bags. There is haggling and argumentative talk between the Emperor and Richard before final terms are met. Finally, Richard, who does not want to bow to the Emperor, is kneeling on one knee and bowing his head to the floor to the Emperor who sits high on a throne. Then, he is free at last and there is celebration.

## Conversations with Queen Aliénor

Jini Jones Vail

### Act 3, Scene 1

(Following this scene is the list of mini back sets to be used as mini scenes for extra actors behind the two main characters, to depict and expand on the scene of current dialogue.)

#### Seine River Cruise Aboard the Mighty Battleship Gaillard

**Place:** Château-Gaillard, Upper Normandy, Sein Valley, France

**Time:** A Sunday in late summer of 2016

**Background:** After freeing her son, Richard, Queen Aliénor returned to Fontevraud for R&R. Richard wrested lost sections of Normandy, and in particular, the Vexin, from his younger brother, John, who had been supposedly guarding them for him while he was in the Holy Land. Upon Richard's release from prison, John agreed to return to the Angevin family tent and to no longer side with French King Philippe-Auguste. Would John honor this pledge?

**For Aliénor:** This is a red-letter day for the Queen in more ways than one. It was her first visit to Château-Gaillard. And it was her favored son, Richard, who had built Gaillard in record time of one year, beginning in 1197 and completing the daunting task in 1198 according to surviving records. Richard had designed and built his *château fort* to outflank all others in France, maybe anywhere! It was the largest, strongest, and most innovative fortification of any period in Europe. It is believed that Aliénor's family never spent a Christmas Court here. So, it can now be presumed she has never laid eyes on Château-Gaillard until today.

Aliénor is happy to make a day trip in her own country this time to meet with her Granddaughter in Jini's twenty-first century (2016). They will meet at the site of the Château-Gaillard overlooking a tight bubble turn in the Seine River. Undoubtedly, she knows that it now lies in ruins.

**For Jini:** She has most happy memories of a 1995 summer trip in France. She had headed out of Paris into Normandy with a friend to trace the footsteps of the French Impressionists while at the same time, searching for her ancestor, Richard Lionheart. En route they stopped to explore the ruins of Château-Gaillard National Historic Site. Today, looking back twenty years to her first visit, Jini anticipates not

only another reunion with her grandmother, but a second chance to experience the heights of Gaillard and to learn more about how it was built by Richard in record time and what became of the splendor of the place after Richard's untimely death.



To rendezvous today at Château-Gaillard is Aliénor's choice. She and Jini pledged to meet in the innermost bailey atop the precipice of Château-Gaillard.

A: *Vale!* Here I am Jini, over here... *(Queen Aliénor calls with her hand in the air, waving her granddaughter over to where she stands in the lee of the tallest remaining part of the edifice.)*

J: Grand-mère! *J'arrive!* Oh, my goodness. I am in totally in awe of this place, this stunning location! You can really choose them!

A: *Allô, allô!* So happy to be in your presence today! It pleases me so very much to see you. We shall have much to share this day!

J: *Je t'embrasse très fort!* I have been dreaming of being reunited with you in this place for months. What a grand choice you made for us this time. Why am I not surprised?

A: Yes, I chose it for us, but Richard chose it first with his keen intelligence concerning warfare strategy at the close of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. I compliment him! This is my first time here. I have held this place in my imagination forever, hoping to see it for myself. You must recall that our family, or what remained of it maintained the tradition of gathering the clan at Christmastime. We called it the Christmas Court. I hoped that once built, we would spend a Christmas fête here. But that was not to be. It never happened. So, in light of all that, I must agree with you; I also am in complete and total awe of this location!

J: *(The two women gravitate toward each other over the rough surface of the ruins with open arms.)* My dear one, we are in another high place, this time overlooking

the Seine River as it makes a double back twist below us on its way from Paris to the Atlantic.

A: And you, dearest blood-of-my-blood, bone-of-my-bone, are looking ebullient!

*(Aliénor and Jini come together in a long, warm hug of complete mutual adoration. By now they really had begun to know one another, had exchanged intimate life stories and looked forward to another time of sharing, comparing and contrasting over hundreds of years of time travel.)*

J: *Mais oui*, and why shouldn't I be? This is indeed a most propitious occasion. I must say I am glad I wore a shawl today. In the town below it was quite warm, but up here it is much cooler and windy, too! *(She looks around to gather her sense of place.)* My oh my, from our vantage point she is like a true ship of state.

A: Did you say "she"? Were you giving Château-Gaillard a feminine character? When I hear you say that it brings to mind what Richard said to me when he had completed the task of building this massive structure—referring to his accomplishment on the one-year anniversary he pronounced, "She is my fine yearling daughter."

J: I guess it came to me naturally and just rolled off my tongue. Things happen like that when we are together.

A: I suppose that after the concentrated fast pace of the building project, he felt as though he had given birth to it. You and I know full well about giving birth and what one must endure for the desired outcome. Only in this case, it being a quote from my Richard, I know he would have wanted a male heir. So, I am puzzled as to why he referred to his creation as a "she."

J: Well, let's think on that one and pick up the subject a little later.

A: This sunny summer day brings out the best in the sparkling river below dominated by the gleaming white of the castle ruins.

J: It is a riveting sight. I am so excited! I have returned to one of my most treasured discoveries in France with you! It seems to bear out in reality that every summer I travelled to France, there were amazing discoveries waiting for me. It was fate, or, better said, God's hand, that opened them to me. In fact, I have experienced so many of these "Not-By Chance Meetings" as I call a collection of my writings. The title reflects a recurring theme in my life. Another collection I have written, is named: "My Spiritual Journeys in France." My first visit here was categorized as both of these: It was both a "Not by Chance Meeting" and a spiritual journey.

A: Come, dearest. Let's find a seat over there by that crumbling wall. There we can sit and lean against the warm stone and find respite from the wind. I do not know

about you, but to reach this height, and our meeting point, I had to climb a goodly, steep path. I could use a bit of a rest.

J: How have you been since we last met? You are looking in fine fettle.

A: Oh, my I am doing rather well actually. (*Aliénor steps stately toward the seat and sits gracefully beside Jini.*)

J: My Lady Grand-mère, I have been meaning to ask you if I may call you Nanna? For me it is a more endearing name, the same as I called my maternal grandmother, Marguerite Ellen Cox Aulls, when she was alive. She lived a long life as you did. She was ninety-nine when she succumbed. And even more germane to the subject, it is on her side that we share our genealogy. I hope you do not think me presumptuous in asking. After all you are a queen, and I am but a commoner with a sterling background.

A: *Au contraire, chérie*, I would love it if you called me Nanna. I would be honored.

J: Still another prescient coincidence pertaining to this subject of nannas and queens, just the other day before leaving to meet you, I was attempting to organize my voluminous writings and came across an essay I wrote some fifteen years ago in honor of my first nanna. I titled it: "My Nanna, My Queen." Can you believe it? Once more, it is a strange web we weave!

A: I guess nothing should surprise us anymore.

J: Nanna, just thinking, and I know that is dangerous, but while I have you near, what do you think Richard had in mind when he chose this place?

A: Well, I can only guess, but I cannot be far wrong. First, as king, he must have had the protection of his kingdom in mind. This location affords a supreme lookout in all directions in the case of spotting an advancing enemy army. As an engineer and quasi architect of military outposts, he could not have chosen a more perfect location. In terms of defense, Château-Gaillard is strategically placed along the busy, ingress to the French seat of government in Paris and egress from France proper into Normandy. Aye, there's the rub that stuck in French King Philippe-Auguste's craw!

J: Yes, Richard nailed it alright. I was thinking the same thing. From here one can see an enemy advancing on the water or on land. The area around is nearly flat, so visibility ranges widely from this height.

A: Do you recall that one of Richard's titles was Duke of Normandy? As such, his primary responsibility was to keep his people safe. Gaillard served as his greatest deterrent to invasion by the French King. The promontory on which we sit rises one hundred meters above the river on this very defensible cliff that projects outward

toward the water. (*Aliénor waves her hand toward the river side of the bastion.*) On the landward side, (*Aliénor then moves her hand toward the plateau of flat ground on the opposite side of the ruins*) there is only one exit from the rocky spur via the less defensible level area.

J: That is the first duty of the President of the United States as well. To keep us safe. Only today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we no longer build château-fort. We build nuclear bombs and bomb-dropping drones; as a result, capitol buildings and territorial lines can be easily breached by air. Think of how we lost our twin towers in New York City. We are still fighting wars over racial differences and national borders; we still have not achieved civility among nations. But that is another very long debate for another time.

A: The key reason Richard built this stronghold would be specifically to ward off his longstanding enemy, King Philippe-Auguste who had his eye on annexing Normandy. Since Philippe was apt to attack at any time, Richard needed to build his defenses as rapidly as possible. Thus, the rush to complete Gaillard in one year. Most châteaux-forts took years to build. Richard could little afford himself that leisure.

J: In doing so he set a record, not only for the size and complicated, innovative design but for the speed of construction. That record was never surpassed, right? Oh, I nearly forgot the machicoulis he initiated at Gaillard. (*Jini points up to one of the towers nearby.*) What a frightening means of killing off invaders one by one as they passed under the overhanging tower-surrounds over the entrances and elsewhere. When I taught high school French, I spent time describing the châteaux-forts and naming all the effective means they had created to undermine and eliminate their enemies. My students were mesmerized by the spill holes called machicoulis through which the defenders poured boiling oil or rocks on the heads of the invaders! Scary!

A: Right you are. And while we are on the subject of erecting this edifice, let's mention some of the innovations, other than machicoulis, that my son used at Gaillard. One was the five meter-thickness of the walls. He incorporated a system of three concentric walls with the inner bailey at the center. The "keep," or inner sanctum, was inside the innermost walls and was tall with lookouts all around. An enemy would have to breach a series of deep ditches and high, impregnable ramparts before reaching this inner sanctum. Not all men of high station had the funds or the manpower to build such a virtually impenetrable structure.

J: As I am looking around and at the map we were given, I see that the main entrance was not in direct line with the narrow isthmus that guarded the approach. Instead, it appears to be off center, also a construction strategy. This must have made it easier to repel the entry of a large army from rushing the gate straightaway. There was a *port-levant*, or draw bridge, at the entrance, too. All the better to keep out the invaders.

A: Out of necessity and abundant caution Richard built his castle as an example of the latest in technology and style entering the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

J: What you are saying is that, in a word there was not another château-fort in existence that could match his baby girl!

Nanna, here is something else to contemplate: I have been puzzling over the naming of the château. The word Gaillard has not been used before in the name of a fortress has it?

A: Not of which I am aware, dear. The word has several meanings in the French language as you probably know. It can mean “hale and hearty,” but that is fairly weak as a title. It can mean “saucy old man,” which might refer to Richard himself, not old in our eyes today, but he might have thought of himself as aging. However, he built this in a brief period of relative peace while he must have had a sense of attaining one of his long-range goals, while Philippe was always breathing down his neck.

No, I do not think these are the meanings he found. Perhaps the definition, “strapping,” but that is similar to the “hale and hearty” definition and is neither here nor there. We may never know why he chose that adjective to describe his huge castle.

J: When I see the word written I think automatically of the adjective, gallant. I somehow think that Richard had something more esoteric in mind though.

By the way, before we go on, you have probably noticed the *travaux* (men working) signs here and there. There seems to be a noble effort to re-construct the château. Apparently, since I was here about twenty years ago, the Government of France has decided to channel funds to restore the castle. This news is encouraging for you and me as well, of course. It means that those in power regard Gaillard as worthy of preservation as an historic site. Three cheers for the French! Had you heard of this restoration effort?

A: No, I have not. I am thrilled to learn of it now. How do you keep up with all these esoteric details Jini?

J: I read French journals and newspapers, and I have my friends in France who send me articles on my favorite subjects.

Are you rested enough to move on?

A: Sounds, good. Yes, let’s walk around.

J: Let us head toward the west facing point of the château. When I was here before, much of the ruins were cordoned off work zones or for special guided tours. My friend and I arrived after hours, so we did not see everything.

A: Agreed. *(The two women get up, stretch and walk off following a guided tour group toward the west facing outer bailey.)* I want to experience more of this astounding place.

J: Nanna, I have a map of the basic floor plan. *(She opens the map and shows it to Aliénor.)* This will help us to make head and tail of the place. We have to use lots of imagination since it has been partially demolished by Richelieu many years after Philippe finally did manage to take it over. That was after Richard's death, however. What a nightmare that would have been for Richard! His worst-case scenario realized in spite of all his precautions.

A: After Richard's untimely death, John became king but was a poor manager of most details large and small having to do with ruling a kingdom and keeping it intact.

A: I see now. At the top of the plan is the Inner Bailey where we are. The chapel is here. *(She points to a shapeless pile of stone.)* If we look up, we see the tallest section called the keep. That is where Richard and his family and closest knights find the greatest protection. The last bastion. The keep would have housed the royal family. *(Aliénor looks up at the keep and points to many windows that gave onto the river.)* From there one would have had a perfect view of the sunset over the water. Or, more to your point, to serve as a lookouts for enemy ships.

Back to the defenses, as I know, Jini, that they interest you. Let's say there is an invading army approaching. First, they would have to access the narrow isthmus that connects the promontory of Gaillard to the nearby plateau. Then, they would have to deal with the sharp uphill grade, several deep ditches and one forty-five-foot deep, water-filled moat, access the drawbridge, negotiate the immovable portcullis that protected the entryway, if possible. And, supposing they survived all that, they still had to crash the remaining gate, dodge boiling oil and heavy rocks raining down on their heads.

That done, the soldiers would have to scale or penetrate the thick, rounded outer walls, to enter the outer bailey. All this while braving arrows and other projectiles. From here they would repeat much of aforementioned trials. Perhaps they would have to turn back well before gaining entrance to the middle or inner bailey or getting anywhere near the keep. All this hassle before even getting close to the king and his men. The keep is, without a doubt the safest place. It has the advantage of being the tallest for lookouts as well as being the hardest to scale and breach. All this detail is common knowledge to the 12<sup>th</sup> century warrior. I am not just showing off. This is really the way we built royal fortifications in my day.

J: Just look at the tall walls that surround the inner bailey. They look like waves of tall columns with alternate-facing slit-pierced openings for archers. It is far easier to shoot an arrow out of these slits than to find the small hole when shooting from outside. I read that Richard planned these walls as columns because the arrows and stone projectiles might easily bounce off in different directions like tennis balls would upon hitting a rounded surface. I recall that the Castle of Angers in the Loire Valley had very broad exterior columns that serve the same purpose and were built much later. In a word, the architectural design aided in the security system, big time!

A: Before we go on, I want to give you a couple of quotes referring to the walls of Gaillard: One from Philippe, King of the Franks, who upon his first glimpse of the fortification he spat: "If its walls were made of iron yet would I take them." To that, Richard, King of the English, retorted: "By God's throat, if the walls were made of butter yet would I hold them securely against Philippe!"

J: This sounds like what is going on today between candidates for President of the United States. We no longer use mounted messengers or sluggish word of mouth since the advent of instant messaging called "tweets" to toss false statements and criticisms back and forth between vying candidates. Think how much faster one can fling slings and arrows to crush the morale and shred the reputation of one's opponent. At first, I was stunned that these methods would be used by those running for the top job in the U.S. I thought they were above such low down tactics. I was wrong. The whole thing is mind boggling, but more than that, demoralizing.

A: But my dear, as I see it from your description, not much has changed. Whether king or kid, the fight goes on. Technology but enhances the speed of pain inflicted. You in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, just like us, so many hundreds of years before, have forgotten the golden rule!

*(Jini returns to the map.)* Notice how the château is shaped like a boat with a prow at or point at each end? Let's walk toward the nearer point, closer to where we are in the inner bailey. I think we can find a lookout where the outer walls are missing, a place to stand at the head of the outer wall. (They walk toward the northwest and find an open, grassy spot where much of the Inner Bailey walls have fallen into ruin.)

A: Is this the place you were seeking? The Seine is below us to our left, wending its way from the City of Light to the sea. I love looking at it from this height. I am trying to put myself in Richard's boots, to see it as he once did. With the restoration going on it is possible to see the whole layout much more clearly than you must have in 1995.

J: Uh hum. I am putting it all together now. From here, at the northwestern end of the castle we have a clear view following the Seine toward the sea. Notice how the river snakes around? Here is the spot I remember standing with my friend on my

first visit here....just where we are standing now. *(Jini puts her arm around Aliénor's shoulder as her excitement mounts with the spectacular view below.)*

Do you feel the strong westerly breeze swirling up from the brackish river flow? It is not that far from full salt water. Let's stand together facing into the wind as did the stars of the movie, "Titanic," with the music swelling. Imagine that we are the stars, Kate Winslet and Leonardo DiCaprio on the bow of the *Titanic* with our arms wide-spread, facing into the wind, hair blowing, high above the Atlantic; the only small difference is that we are leaning into the wind at the bow of Château-Gaillard high above the right bank of the Seine. I love it! Don't mind me, I often fall right into the trap created by the film writers and find myself transported by sight and sound into the story. Can you feel the connection? The similarity? The thrill?

A: I love the wind and the feeling of sailing over the waves. Jini, my dearest one, I am getting the hang of it as you might say. I am leaning into the wind. I am with you in this. The view is breathtaking!

J: One more observation while we are at the prow of the Gaillard ship. Please permit me, dearest Nanna, to put myself in Richard's shoes for a moment if I might. For Richard this mighty edifice must have been more than stone and mortar. It was, I surmise, a symbol of his power, his control over Normandy as Duke of Normandy and King of the English. And, more than all that, I sense that he built it to prove his superiority over King Philippe-Auguste of France. When he stood here as we are now, surveying his domain, I sense his pride of accomplishment over his ever-encroaching enemies. I regret with all my heart that you had to experience the demise of your dear son, Richard, in 1199 and then the fall of Château-Gaillard in 1204 just prior to your own passing. Like you, I prefer to remember Richard at his peak of power, possibly standing in this exact spot where we are standing, beating his chest with pride facing into the wind.

A: You have a marvelous way of transporting yourself back over the years to stand in his shoes, as you put it. In this way, you have shown me how my son thought from a different angle as much mother-for-son as Queen Mother for King son.

J: For me this is an easy leap. In the days when I was a French teacher in Southern Connecticut, I had a long drive home along a beautiful river. After a day of being immersed in the French language, and teaching the high school students the aspects of the châteaux-forts and the means of military protection and assault employed in your time, I used to think of myself, while driving, as a head of state, directing my car as my very own 'ship of state'. There I go again, but I do have a broad sense of imagination. All this by way of comparing my time driving my car along the curving river in my ship of state, to our moments riding the wind high above the Seine River and, by extension, to Richard standing here musing to himself and his masterpiece, his Ship of State.

A: Wow, as I hear you say sometimes. Wowie! Whew, I am impressed with the depth of your thought process! I like the comparisons you draw. You have put me in my son's shoes beside you. It is getting tight in here!

J: With this God-given gift I am able to write about you and your life, your family connections and all. On days at my desk at home when I am interrupted from my writing, I have to be literally wrenched from your century back into mine. I kid you not!

A: Let's continue with our exploration of Richard's stronghold.

*(They walk from the front to the rear of the castle grounds, reminiscing and looking back in their mind's eye to Richard's building project that so startled his world.)*

*(Suddenly, Jini cries out in excitement as if remembering something she had not thought to tell her grandmother!)*

J: Nanna, my dearest Nanna, I have it!

A: You have what? What is it my dear? You frightened me with the persistence in your voice.

J: It just came to me. I mean about Richard's name for his Château to beat all châteaux! There is one more possible definition I recall finding in my research, but I dismissed it out of hand or out of mind that is until this instant! In my ancient French dictionary, there was a definition marked "Historical." It had to do with a nautical use of the word, Gaillard as used in the past. There is a "*gaillard d'avant*" and a "*gaillard d'arriere*." The first refers to the forecastle below the bow of a ship; the second, to the quarter deck, toward the stern.

A: Well, bless my soul! Go on, please!

J: I think that our dear Richard was thinking of his fortress in terms of a ship. Yes, a SHIP! Nanna, remember not minutes ago I asked you to spread your arms in the wind as though you were standing on the prow of a SHIP? It seemed natural for us to think of standing at the front of the château as we did, as being similar to standing on the prow of a ship. And if you recall, the opposite end of the promontory here is defined by a similar triangular arrangement of the towers, also coming to a point at the stern of his so-called ship of state, Château-Gaillard!

Richard's clues were right there in front of our eyes. He chose his location with perfection, near and parallel to the Seine. He chose his design like a huge ship, the likes of which had not been created in his time. Yes, Nanna, he designed his fortress like a double-ended ship that could sail either way, a ship that could not be blocked or arrested in the water. If she were attacked, when the time came, she could escape in the opposite direction throwing her attackers in confusion. Keep in mind his use

of the feminine when he spoke of her. Perhaps our Richard had flights of fantasy just as I do. It takes one to know one, they always say. *(Jini covers her mouth with her left hand and gives a short, double whoop of discovery!)* Wahoo! Wahoo!

A: Oh, my goodness from your mouth to God's ear. Daughter! Of course! It is as plain as the nose on my face, yet I never saw it. You have done it. You have loosed the Gordian knot. You have successfully insinuated yourself into my Richard's mind, eight centuries plus later.

J: I believe you are right. In fact, when I think of the multitude of accounts, I have read over the last twenty years, not one author has deigned to discover this important information.

A: It is not easy I agree but let us try. We are on a voyage of discovery. I am really getting into it too! We are on a roll!

J: *(Jini continues in another vein as she has a flash back to a portrait of her son Richard on her desk at home)* I have one more note to add to our time of discovery. I just thought of a large portrait of my son, Richard, that I keep on my desk in my library. It depicts my son on the peak of Mount Greylock, Massachusetts. His feet are planted securely on the pinnacle of a huge boulder, and his arms are spread wide in the "V" for victory at having successfully scaled the peak. At that brief moment in history, he was an "overcomer" as was your son on completing his triumphal fortress.

A: Aha! Yet another stunning comparison between our sons! I wish I had had the possibility of freezing my son's final accomplishment on photo paper as you do today. It would have meant so much to me to have pictures of my Richard as he, like most of my offspring had the misfortune to be called to heaven well before myself. More's the mothers' pain.

*(Aliénor turns back to the map.)* Have you noticed that the small town of Petit Andelys is near the foot of the precipice? *(She points in that direction.)* We can see it readily from the overlook. In fact, I see a tall, slender, pointed church spire in the small town below. What church is that? Have you looked it up in the Michelin green guide?

J: I am on it now. This is the oldest church in the area. It is Saint-Sauveur. I shall read the short description. The church's ground plan is the Greek Cross, and the architecture is early Gothic. The chancel is late 12<sup>th</sup> century. That would be in Richard's time. It says that when building the castle, he also built Saint-Sauveur for the 3,000 workers he engaged to build the fortress. He gave them their own church to attend. I guess there was no church nearby back then. So, voila! Richard was a "Can Do Man" just like my husband, John. And, both Richard and my husband would have agreed that a church was a necessary ingredient for a huge ongoing job like this one. I like Richard's style!

A: Here, here on that! Oh, and lest I forget, I have an update for you on a Bishop you may recall from the intrigue of Richard and the ill rumor that was perpetuated following his departure from the Holy Land, I nearly forgot to tell you. Remember the Bishop of Beauvais who carried that false rumor? Fate took care of him after Richard completed his Castle. Richard had him incarcerated in a deep dark dungeon at Gaillard! How about that one?

J: Another here! Here to that one! Due punishment for a dastardly deed that literally caused Richard's own incarceration. Turnabout is fair play?

A: Richard finally got his revenge. The Pope sent a legate to have him released, but alas, it could not be negotiated. Richard did not bargain with the Pope, so Beauvais was left to rot there and was never seen again.

J: I hope you will permit me just another short digression to explain how John became a "Can Do Man."

A: I am all ears. I learned this expression from you!

J: During the Cuban missile crisis my John enlisted in the Sea Bees of the U.S. Navy. Their motto is "Can Do" since these men were sent on ship or even off ship in the water, to do the dangerous and difficult jobs the regular Navy and Army were not equipped to do. John was a hands-on mechanic and Master Electrician in the Navy. His family is gifted with mechanical abilities. Since we have been married, I can attest to that fact. If a problem arises in our 200 plus year old home or surrounding property, he loves to take it on against all odds. He figures out a plan of action and jumps right in and very successfully I might add. For John, no job, no problem is too difficult to solve. Your Richard would have counted him as an indispensable asset when building Gaillard.

A: Sounds like a reasonable assumption. I wish I could get to know your talented husband, John, better. If we only had time.

J: When we visited Christ Church in Watertown on our first encounter together, didn't I introduce you to him at the altar of the church where we were wed? I have a clear memory of that.

A: Why of course you did. I recall his sparkling blue eyes. Please forgive me. How could I forget your John? It is so difficult to remember all the fabulous things we have done together, and meeting your John was certainly one of those. *(Aliénor leans over to look at the map.)*

A: The map also shows there is another town of similar name, Grand Andelys, nearby. Come to think of it, the two small towns are often lumped together under the appellation, Les Andelys. These days they are famous because of the Château

that rises above them and, because of the re-building, is fast becoming a tourist attraction.

J: *(Putting the map away)* I am beginning to feel a little chilly. I see that the late afternoon fog is slowly rolling in. Look, Nanna, while we were talking the fog crept in on cats' feet and we have not even been aware of it.

A: *(She walks toward the edge nearest them, to look around.)* Really? I see it now. It is just as you say. There are billows of fluffy white moving in below us on this side.

Here, may I take your arm? Let's look over the opposite side closer to the river. I am curious to see if we are being surrounded by this magical white mist. *(The two women, being careful not to stumble over the loose stones, walk across the top of the outer bailey to the other side.)*

J: Aha. Just as I thought. The fog is closing in on this side as well. It is beautiful isn't it? We are almost encircled with ethereal white fog.

A: The best part is that we are high enough way up here to be in the clear. It is beginning to look like an elegant white fox collar snuggling up to keep us warm. My sweet child, isn't this fun?

J: My goodness yes, and the sun is still visible in the sky above. What an amazing sensation.

A: We are truly favored to be together in this beautiful place today. I wonder if my son ever experienced this phenomenon when he was in residence at Gaillard? If so, he must have thought he was close to God, even blessed by God. *Oui, certes!* I feel that way now too.

J: Now we can roam around on our own, just admiring the width and breadth of this formidable structure.

Dearest Nanna, I believe the fog is a signal to bring our time together to a close until we meet next time.

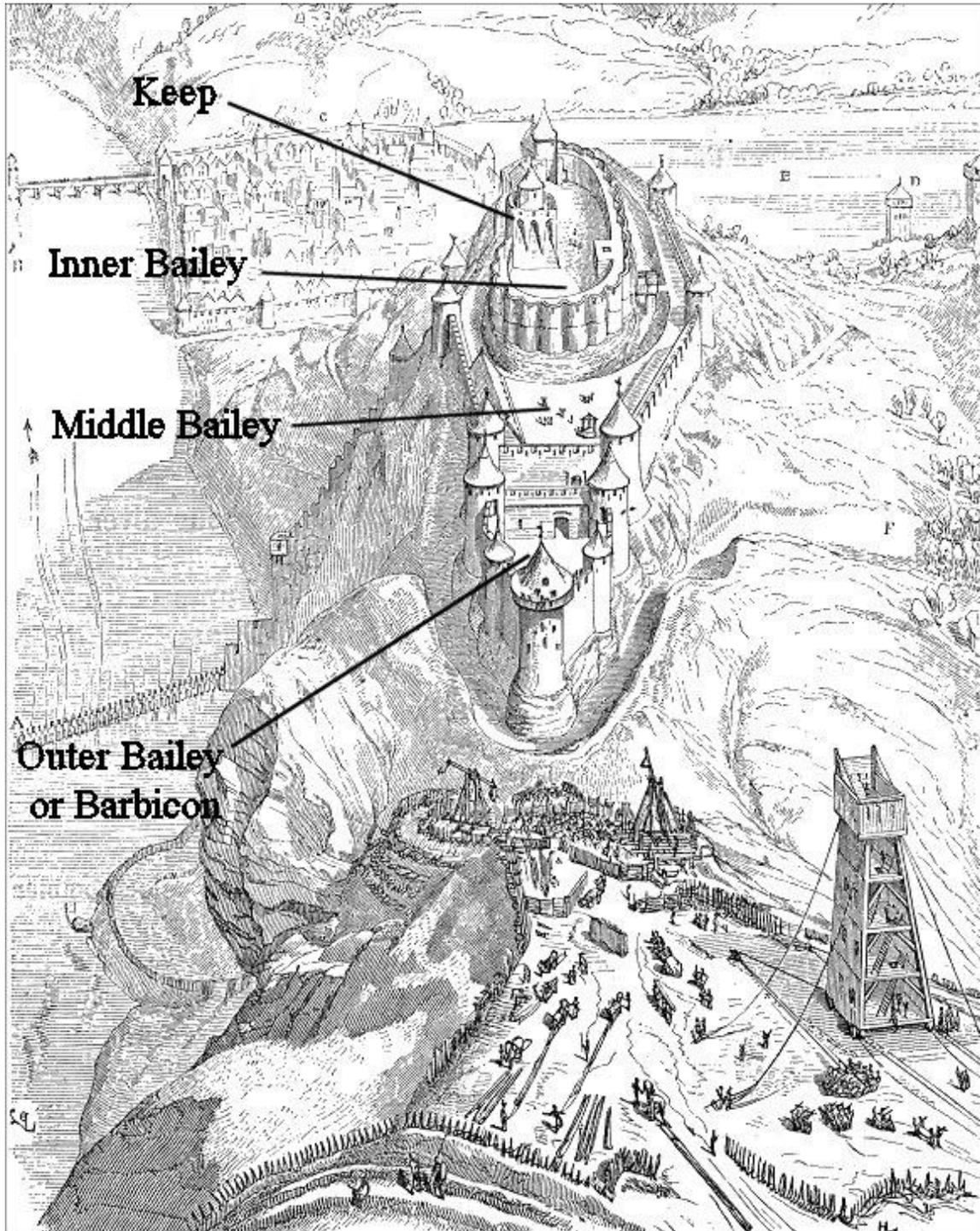
A: Dear one, let our next meeting be your choice once again. Do you have a time and place in mind? One that is meaningful to us both?

J: I have been thinking about it. Yes, I do. Let us meet at your beloved Fontevraud next year. And while we are there, it being so nearby, I choose to make a side trip to my favorite Château-Chinon on my way to meet you.

A: Agreed, *(Pronounces Aliénor with gusto!)* I could not be happier about your suggestion. *(As the scene closes, one hears music. It is the uplifting song of the early 1900's "Cruising Down the River.")* Jini takes both of Aliénor's hands in hers, and they

*begin to twirl, dancing in circles joyfully singing the song together from the heights of Gaillard.)*

Close of Act 3, Scene 1





St. Sauveur Church near Château-Gaillard

(Following this scene is the list of mini back sets to be used as mini scenes for extra actors behind the two main characters, to depict and expand on the scene of current dialogue.)

### **Act 3 Scene 1 (mini backsets)**

1 Backdrop: A field in Chalus, France. King Richard can be seen many years after his ransom was paid by his mother, Queen Aliénor. He is dying in a makeshift battle tent in the middle of a field in Chalus, France, a part of his kingdom. He is lying on a cot dying in his mother's arms. He has been mortally shot by a cross bow in the hands of an enraged local man. He sees Richard trespassing. In truth Richard is searching for gold he wants to appropriate for his treasury. He must make up for lack of funds. He has been in a land-grabbing war with King Philippe of France before and after the disastrous 3<sup>rd</sup> crusade. Richard is hoping to fend off Phillippe who wants to usurp his holdings in Normandy. And Richard has just built the largest château-fort in France in record time of about one year. He is proud of it as it stands for his strength and the dominance of England in W. Europe.

2. Back drop of Château-Gaillard that I have shown above. It is a cloudy day, low hanging, foreboding clouds, in panorama shot over ruins of the château. The fog is mounting all around the château, as Aliénor and Jini are still touring. This is A's first visit to her son's magnificent fortress and J's second trip. They have had a blast visiting the château ruins and leaning about the re-building and re-construction of Richard's castle in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They are tired after a day of climbing and touring, but now, at Jini's beck and call they both stand at the prow of Gaillard to feel the wind in their faces. The wind is gathers force, coming in directly from the Atlantic Ocean following the winding snake of the Seine River. They two women lean into the wind, spread their arms like the two stars in the movie, "Titanic." One could show the two actors as well as A. and J., all four, gleefully leaning into the wind with arms outspread on the prow of the ancient castle/ship.

**Conversations with Queen Aliénor  
Jini Jones Vail**

(Following this scene is the list of back scenes to be used as mini scenes for extra actors behind the two main characters, to depict and expand on the dialogue.)

**Act 3: Scene 2**

**A Fond Farewell at Fontevraud: The Last Time Jini saw Aliénor**

**Place: Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud, France**

**Time: Summer 2017**

**Background:**

As promised, Queen Aliénor and her granddaughter, Jini, meet near summer's end as promised, at the Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud, the Necropolis of the Plantagenets. It is the burial place of Aliénor, Queen of France and then of England; her second husband Henry II, King of England; their son, Richard Lionheart, King of England; and Aliénor's daughter-in-law, second wife of her son John, King of England, Queen Consort Isabella d'Angoulême. Jini's refuge for in-depth Plantagenet family research during her ten consecutive summers in France. Fontevraud is a fitting place for Aliénor and Jini to meet for the last time and a perfect place to bid their fond farewells.

A national historic site, the Abbaye has undergone much renovation in recent years and is now known as the Cultural Center of Western France and provides a meeting place for religious, historical, horticultural and cultural groups as well as providing a venue for medieval concerts.

**For Aliénor:**

She has a final rendezvous with Jini at the Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud where Aliénor lived out her last years at the convent and village of the same name. The Abbaye was established by her ancestors and supported by herself over her lifetime. The village of Fontevraud is located about an hour south of Tours, France, not far from the Château-Chinon, formerly the royal château over which she and her second husband, King Henry II, held sway.

Queen Aliénor is returning from a morning of falconry in the hills high above Chinon Castle. She has come from there directly to the Abbaye to greet Jini. It is a very hot day. Their conversation flows back and forth from centuries past at Fontevraud to 2017, the present.

**For Jini**

She has just completed a tour of the Abbaye's ancient kitchens. The two women meet in the great room just above the refectory where the nuns take their meals. Jini has visited the library and archives several times as a graduate student perusing ancient, extant documents pertaining to Aliénor. The location is familiar to her, even held dear, over years of return visits. A big change is in store when she tours the ancient kitchens, suddenly seeing a glimpse of them as they were in Aliénor's time. By now, Aliénor and Jini have mastered the art of jumping back and forth in time according to will.

*J: (excitedly exchanging warm embraces and air kisses)* Oh Grand-mère, how happy I am to be reunited with you at my favorite place in all of France, Fontevraud! Did I mention that I originally came to the sweet village of Chinon in that long ago summer of 1989 knowing you had spent much time in the Château-Chinon when wed to Henry II. I recall looking up from the street near the bridge that spans the Vienne River to see what looked like the ruins of an enormous fortress. And by the way, did you know they are restoring the royal apartments there too, like Château-Gaillard? Anyway, just before lunch that day I happened to meet a local lady who was attending the weeklong gathering of people commemorating eight hundred years since your Henry's death.

*A: (She shakes her head in puzzlement.)* Why should I be surprised? Eight hundred years is but a drop in the bucket as you say. I wonder what they found to remember about him? Oh, but do continue, I find this quite interesting. Where did it lead, having met this local woman who loved French history, especially that of my King Henry?

*J:* Well, I simply bumped into her on the street in Chinon. We talked for a few minutes, and she invited me to join her for the rest of the morning lecture which I gladly did. I think she was a professor of history, so I felt comfortable befriending her. I joined the conference and was so fortunate to be there when the central area of Fontevraud was all torn up. The four Plantagenet sepulchers, including yours, were moved to make room for excavations. The first time I saw you, you were lying in dust with sunlight on your face. After the lecture there was a lunch break of about two hours, to be followed in the afternoon by a tour of the rest of the Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud. Of course, Grand-mère, I know it was not a coincidence that I stumbled upon this friendly lady in the narrow streets of old Chinon! There is no such thing as a coincidence. I know you believe as I do on this. She led me to you!

To get straight to the point, the lecture was fascinating. At the close of the morning scheduled talk, she invited me to lunch at her home. She drove me to her house in Lerné, the hometown of the 15<sup>th</sup> century writer, François Rabelais, who was born there. He wrote the stories of Gargantua. My graduate courses at the University of Southern Connecticut in New Haven CT were concentrated strictly on French

literature. So, as you can well imagine, I was very pleased to see the birthplace of one of the authors I had studied.

Lerné is a small town just outside Chinon. My new friend was a history professor and widow. I soon found that her husband had a large collection of fine wines. My hostess asked me if I wanted to see the wine cellar as she needed to choose a wine for our lunch, and, of course, I said I would. She walked to a large armoire in the living room and opened the door. To my surprise she stepped through and beckoned me to follow. It was reminiscent of C.S. Lewis' story, *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*. I had no idea where we would end up. When we exited the armoire, we were at the top of a long, steep staircase that led down to the wine cave. She told me it was rather sad that she was not a connoisseur of wines as her husband had been, but said she would choose a bottle, and by chance she picked a good one that we enjoyed on her terrace with a nice meal. It turned out to be a fine way to meet someone who resided in Chinon, and with whom I could share my interest in King Henry and you. Wouldn't she be amazed that we are so near her today.

A: You were indeed fortunate to meet such a fine lady to wit, a cultured lady who has a penchant for history like yourself. Have you continued to keep in touch with her?

J: No, we finally lost touch, I am sorry to say. But at any rate, I have returned to Chinon a few times in the following summers as I mentioned, for research and for their annual Medieval Festival. Shall we sit down before this window? I do not want to get ahead of ourselves. We have much to cover since we last met at Château-Gaillard that my daughter, Amy, calls Château-G. Remember our last, auspicious visit, one full of meaning and memories for us both?

A: By all means my dear. But first, since we have not met for some time, how are you, my dearest granddaughter? Well, I trust? You certainly look fit.

J: Very well, thank you. I am energized to see you in our old stomping grounds. You and I now share much history especially here in this medieval town of Fontevraud, don't we? But you, you look exhausted! Have I interrupted something?

A: No, not really, dear. This morning we had quite a time hunting with the falcons at the confluence of the Loire and the Vienne Rivers, not far from here. Are you familiar with the area? Our small group rode out at an early hour from here to ride into the hills over Chinon. We worked our horses and our birds of prey vigorously up there on the heights. And, as the morning progressed it became very hot as you know. I feel like a drenched cat climbing out of a well.

J: Yes, I do know the area of which you speak. Here, drink this cooling glass of *citron pressé* of freshly squeezed lemon juice mixed with plenty of cool water and sugar for sweetness. It always did the trick for me when I was out riding my gelding, Red

Sabre Genius, in summer. I turn beet red, like you look now, and simply collapse when while exerting myself in the heat.

A: I don't feel *that* bad, Jini. But *do* allow me to sit in this embrasure alcove by the open window till I catch my breath. The stone window seat feels cool. Is it my age or am I grossly out of shape? I used to be able to ride all day with my hawkers, summer and winter. I am planning to go out again tomorrow. Must keep active! Dearest, do fetch me a fan, will you? (*Aliénor points to a nearby table where a collection of fans is stacked in a bowl.*)

J: By the way, did you know that I was touring your famous kitchens here at Fontevraud before you arrived?

A: No, I had not realized you were interested in something so mundane as our kitchens.

J: *Au contraire*, you know how unique they are in design? How many kitchens do you know that are round, have vaulted ceilings and several chimneys, even in historic dwellings in France? I still cannot understand how they work so well. The cooking fires are set at ground level and the chimney openings are high above. Oh, I just got a vision of a similar technique used in the American Indian teepee - a simplistic version, to be sure, but all in all the same in theory. Both are based on the simple fact that smoke rises and will exit wherever it can find an opening. Did you know that you can still see traces of black smoke on the walls here as though they were used yesterday?

Wait until I tell my gourmet, foodie friends who love their huge eight-burner, gas-fired stoves with electric chimney fans in pristine spic and span kitchens back home in Connecticut.

A: I hope you do not fail to tell them how tasty the food is here in spite of the fact that our kitchens look so primitive to your 21<sup>st</sup> century eye.

J: My son, Rusty Dyer, has a teepee in his back yard in fact. It is a facsimile of this same design and made of the same materials as the ones the American Indians used four hundred years ago in America. I have a feeling that his teepee, built for the education of his two children, Sophia and Jamison, will not last nearly as long as your kitchens have. But it will serve as a unique educational tool.

A: I admit that I have never entered these kitchens; they were and continue to be off limits for a queen like myself. After all it is always very smoky, I am told. Therefore, I do not think the exhaust system of which you speak functions all that well for your American Indians nor for us! The vitals are simple fare here but are superbly prepared by the nuns. Did you find a fan? I am dripping!

J: Oui, sorry, Grand-mère. Here! Summer can be so hot. I, too, am having trouble acclimating although I do think you have just as hot temperatures in France as we do in Connecticut. I, too, am fainting from the heat! Did you know that they have just finished redesigning and restoring Fontevraud's gardens, so they resemble the gardens you knew?

A: Later, darling, after the sun has sunk low in the sky, we can stroll together in the herb garden outside the famous kitchens. But now, come, dear, let's sit awhile and talk while we cool down. The parching heat is stifling. The *citron pressé* helps.

J: But tell me, how do you stand wearing all those heavy riding clothes on such a sweltering day? Oops! I should eat my words. I guess I should not be surprised as I recall my days at riding camp on Lake Champlain. On horse show days that always fell on the hottest weekends, and like you, I wore all the accoutrements of an elegant horsewoman—wool gabardine breeches, shirt with the stand-up collar, held together with my stock, English wool tweed jacket, leather gloves and velvet crash helmet. I am perspiring just thinking of it.

A: It's a question of what you are accustomed to, my dear Granddaughter, Jini. We dress much the same in the different seasons, just wearing lighter clothing in summer. We are fully covered most of the time. It is the custom, not like your generation with your bare midriffs and short shorts.

J: *(Jini interjects with insistence, politely, but firmly rejecting the suggestion that her generation showed their bare midriffs with brash looking hip-hugger shorts or short leather pants.)* Never in my born years did I dress like that!

A: *(Aliénor continues calmly with a smirk on her lips.)* Naturellement, when we ride out, we, like you, protect our arms and legs. When we reach the open fields in mid-morning to flush out the game birds and other game, we protect our skin from the drying wind and the heat of rising sun. I am feeling a trifle better now. Truth be told, as you can see, today I wore my long riding skirt, only slightly cooler than pants, and rode side saddle.

J. My friend, Mado, in Tours, has a dovecote. She raises and cooks her own small game birds. It was at her house that I acquired a taste for such delicacies.

A: As a matter of fact, my falconer, Oman, whose ancestor I brought back from the Crusade, was quite successful today, much more so than myself. We shall have a feast tonight, my pet. In fact, heron is to be featured. Incidentally, Jini, have I ever told you the story of how the first Oman came to be my personal falconer?

J: No, Grand-mère. *(Shifting uncomfortably on the hard, stone window seat.)* I hope you will tell me now, though. Are you comfortable?

A: If you will, dear, hand me that purple velvet cushion, would you? That's better. Well, it started with that infamous journey to the Holy Land. Remember how my entourage and I traveled incognito across Europe and into Asia Minor as Amazons? How I was the first French queen to accompany her husband, the king, on a crusade? How I was the first queen to ride astride? I felt strong and invincible on the first half of that historic venture.

J: Oh, Grand-mère, please don't stop there. I'm on pins and needles!

A: Good gracious, girl, whatever do you mean? Shall I call an assistant to help you off them?

J: (*Shaking her head and laughing.*) No way - that was just a manner of speaking. I'm not REALLY on pins and needles - I just meant that I'm eager for you to continue and that the suspense is killing me! Not real needles!

A: Thank goodness! I thought for a moment my *couturière* had left some sharp instruments on the window seat! Very well. To continue then Louis was such a milksop! He was a coward of the first order! I cannot believe how I was duped by his endearing, devout demeanor, mistaking him for the valiant young king-to-be of whom I had always dreamed? By the time we reached Antioch I knew full well that whenever there was a battle brewing, he would take great care to circumvent it, literally! Some warrior he turned out to be! But of course, you know the story from our meeting at Vézelay.

While in Antioch at my Uncle Raymond's palace, my uncle and I went out hunting together. Louis had no desire to join us whatsoever. He rarely did. Raymond had just finished training a young falconer who was to join his household. This young man, Oman, spent the day with us. His confident, relaxed manner of handling the hawks did not go unnoticed by me. I complimented Uncle on his fine choice of a young hunting master. On the last day of our stay my uncle was generous beyond my dreams. He insisted that I take his newly found treasure, Oman, back to France with me as a parting gift.

J: I see you did not decline the offer.

A: No, Jini, I did not. That would have been bad manners indeed. And, besides, I liked the boy and could see his skills would only increase in years to come.

Oman remained with me for years. In a sense, we have grown old together. Oman and his progeny trained all my falcons, goshawks and eagles to be obedient, accurate and deadly. Furthermore, no matter how far I have traveled from my beloved Aquitaine, he or his namesake has been at my side ever true. Since I entered the convent to live out my final years, he has taken up residence right here in the village, and that pleases me immensely. Whenever the weather permits, we ride out

together. Falconry is a fine sport, Jini, and marvelous exercise too, and beyond that, it produces tasty suppers! It may be the secret to my longevity!

J: Didn't I read that you have a very special white falcon?

A: Yes, indeed. I feel so confident holding her on my right arm. She is well trained, and she is worth her salt. When we are in the field my gyrfalcon sits quietly on my wrist waiting for my signal. I but tap my wrist, and she flies out to catch her prey. In flight she is a beauty to behold, rising and suddenly dropping like a stone with precision, striking her objective. She never misses! Meanwhile, between strikes I keep her happy by feeding her bits of rabbit with my other gloved hand.

J: She sounds like a majestic hunter. I only know that the art of hunting with a falcon is an ancient one.

A: Correct. That it is. My gyrfalcon is larger than the more common peregrine falcon. She was bred to be all white and is incredibly beautiful to watch doing what she does best.

J: *(J. and A. walk through the large, open room where the musicians played near the Plantagenet effigies, within hearing distance of the effigies. J. and A. continue their quiet reminiscing while circling the sleeping gisants.)* While I think of it, I meant to tell you, when my husband, John of the Mimosa, and I were in France we came directly to Fontevraud for a marvelous concert of early Spanish music performed on original instruments. The musicians played in the Royal necropolis chamber where you still lie recumbent. The strains of the beautiful strings and voices wafted over us as well as you and your family that magical night. Don't you love the upgrading the Abbaye so that they now host all manner of symposiums and musical events? The Abbaye is recognized since 1975 as a complex of religious buildings they now call "Le Centre Culturel de l'Ouest". Fontevraud is so large that it has been referred to as a monastic city that has, interestingly enough, always been managed by an Abbess.

I am trying to recall; wasn't the Abbaye founded as far back as 1101 by Robert d'Abrissel? That was only twenty-one years before your birth. Surely your family knew of it.

A: Certainly, we did, and it was supported by early members of the English royal family, the Plantagenets – the family of my husband, Henry. The Abbaye was originally intended as a mixed or double monastery. That is to say, it was for men and women. Most unusual. Later the men and women were separated into different dwellings but still managed by an Abbess. Unique in those days.

J: Then, after your release from Henry's prison, you chose to reside here as you had supported the abbey for years, right? And now with a far broader purview, it is a cultural center. How do you feel about that?

A: I heartily approve if it brings attention to my most favorite charity. The influx of visitors from abroad as well as from all Europe serves to sustain the history of my, excuse me, *our*, family. I am well pleased. So, you brought your John here in 1997 wasn't it?

J: In a sense, yes, and he enjoyed the music that evening and was properly impressed seeing you in your alter-self encased in stone. I had told him so many of my stories of my coming here on super-hot summer days and being given the key to the archives to make notes until my heart's content. John could finally begin to see the reality of my passion. We saw you and your family's tombs in their final resting places in the center of the spacious room.

A: Let's go down there after my bath. We shall reserve our tour of the royal necropolis, our most sacred space for last. I shall not be long. *À bientôt.*

J: Here comes your lady in waiting. I shall descend below to await you there.

*(A short time later they meet again. Aliénor is dressed in a fine white, gauzy, gown with gold dropped belt and matching decorations around the neck and long, sweeping sleeves.)*

A: Ah, that was refreshing.

J: *(Jini is wearing a below-the-knee designer dress in shades of pale blue and green. She wears comfortable shoes in the skimmer style.)* You look much refreshed my lady grandmother. Shall we walk in the garden in the shade over this way?

A: I never tire of walking here in the shade of the plane trees. There is always a slight breeze. You, know, I was looking back as we are wont to do when together, on a progression of similar events in my life with Louis and Henry. I have recognized similarities in the two marriages specifically on how we related to each other. What I have discovered in our lives I have seen repeated by other royal couples.

J: I am curious to know what you mean.

A: Without going into every detail, let me start with part one, my first marriage. In the early years of wedded life Louis and I got along quite well considering our differences. We made allowances for each other, respected each other as our love grew. Louis asked me for advice, and I gave it willingly. After all, even though my mother died when I was very young, my father, William X, Duke of Aquitaine, prepared me well to become a ruler of Aquitaine, much larger than France at the time. On the other hand, Louis was on the track to become a priest when his elder brother died suddenly, moving Louis into position to become King of France. It is, therefore, fair to say, that he was ill suited for the job. He welcomed my advice as we were launched into the lofty position of king and queen. Gradually Louis began to place his trust elsewhere, pushing me aside. The third person in our marriage was

Abbot Suger, born a peasant, but who showed talent as the restorer and abbot of the prestigious, royal Cathedral of St. Denis, one of the first Gothic Cathedrals. I spoke of him earlier if you recall, at our second tryst at Vézelay. Suger rose to become advisor to King Louis and de facto ruler of France while Louis was on crusade. Therefore, Suger was one of the most powerful men in the kingdom. Louis listened to him—even regarding personal affairs—not to me.

Louis also relied on Bernard de Clairvaux, leaving me no room. With the advent of these two overpowering, power-seeking men, I was pushed further into the background. As we know, I did not produce a male heir for Louis, so that drew us still further apart. At the end of the disastrous crusade, Louis had me shackled and sent me back to Italy by sea, a prisoner. Given one more opportunity to birth a male heir, we met with another disappointment. Our wedded life crashed and burned as you say in the American vernacular.

Part two of this comparison brings me to my early life with Henry. At first, our marriage was happy. Then, voila, a mirror image of my first marriage began to unfold as Henry decided he no longer wanted nor needed me nor my assistance. He found a new friend, Thomas Becket, a man born of a merchant family who began as a clerk. He was like an older brother to my husband. They were inseparable. Henry appointed him to higher and higher positions until he made him Archbishop of Canterbury. By 1166 I had born Henry the five requisite male heirs plus three girls. Yet I counted for little and was left foundering in the dust behind Henry and the powerful Becket. Like Suger, in France, thanks to my husband, Beckett became one of the most powerful men in England. From thence forward, we went full bore into a power struggle. For all intents and purposes, we were no longer a united couple, but sworn enemies. Henry, being king, held power over me and threw me into a dark tower where I no longer could oppose him.

This is the bare bones description of my demise with my two husbands. Naturally there were many more events and arguments that grew of these relationships, but the overall picture is similar. I wonder if this is a common occurrence, this ugly power struggle between royal couples. Very sad indeed!

J: Believe it or not, I just read an account of the life of Catherine of Aragon, Queen of England. After what you just told me, I am not shocked that she underwent a similar degradation leading to estrangement in her marriage to King Henry VIII in the 1500s. Incredible, but true. She and Henry were deeply in love for many years during which time they did not have a male heir, and guess what? Then Woolsey stepped in as Henry's adviser, gradually placing a wedge between them to the great detriment of Catherine. I am guessing one could find many such examples in the lives of royal couples. Lesson learned: To marry a king is detrimental to the longevity of wedded life as well as to a lady's health and freedom. Look at the wives of Henry VIII as more evidence. And, while we are on the subject, did you ever notice that it is always the fault of the queen when a male heir is not forthcoming?

A: Point well taken, I learned that the hard way. But to sum up all this from my point of view, I was fortunate to have my marriage to Louis annulled and to be able to move on to Henry. Or was I? Indeed, I was. I became the grandmother of Europe. Today you call that being a baby machine. That was the duty of all the women in my family. We took it on without question. As for part two, on the downside, I did not fare all that well since I landed in prison for fifteen years. Outcome? Lesson NOT learned!

But I did emerge as Queen of England and was then able to function on my own to aid my family in keeping our kingdom intact, difficult as it was, the time of my passing on April 1, 1204. Not bad for a dowager Queen.

J: I was thinking of a subject we have not broached. It is your family tradition of Christmas Courts. I find it to be full of mystery how you decided where to hold your Christmas court each year since, as I can surmise, you seemed to choose a different location each year. I ran across a list of Henry's Courts—most intriguing.

A: It was no real mystery. It was *de rigueur* to make the rounds of our courts in order to pass the kiss of peace at each one and to see that the nobles came to re-pledge their *obeisance* before Henry on a regular basis. There was always business to conduct. Naturally we chose a court that was not only commodious, and of course the castle had to be in good repair. As you know, when we went on progress from place to place, we carried most of the tapestries and other furnishings with us.

J: This is a tradition very foreign to us commoners. Even the kings and queens, of whom there are fewer and fewer these days, continue to move from court to court, seemingly on a whim but do not need to haul all their furnishings. Now they have enough wherewithal to furnish each abode permanently and bring along the extra hired workers, leaving a core number in each court to maintain the place until the next royal visit.

A: I know that today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century there remains an insatiable interest in royals, their lives, their weddings, their newborns, their clothing, their castles, even their love lives. Why is this?

J: Well, with worldwide newspaper reportage and 24/7 TV coverage we all learn what is transpiring in most of these royal families even if they are ruling without much power, in faraway countries. Most were overthrown in revolutions like the French, for example. We all take great pleasure in peeking into the private lives of the rich and famous. I am sure you have noticed. Today, the royals cannot escape the ever-seeking eye of the camera. Privacy is a thing of the past for us all, actually!

A: Yes, but it was so different in our day. Certainly, we levied taxes when we needed money. Some royals even back in our time stole from the people, bled them to death to line their won purses, just for their own pleasure. I never believed in that kind of cruelty. I learned from my father, William X, Duke of Aquitaine, that we must treat

our people with fairness to maintain a workable balance between the haves and have-nots.

Looking back before my captivity, when Christmas rolled around each year, I was usually pregnant. Henry was not home all that often, but when he came to my bed, I conceived! It was like clockwork. I was either already pregnant at Christmas or became pregnant shortly after leaving the birthing bed around that time of year. I gave birth eight times between our first son William's birth in 1153 and the birth of our last son, John, in 1166. And that is not counting my two daughters, Marie and Alix, born from my first marriage to Louis.

J: Wowie!! Dear Nanna, I am trying to catch my breath, thinking of all those pregnancies, all those royal babies in such a short time. And you retained your health! Incredible in those days with so many women dying in childbirth.

A: I give thanks for my enduring state of good health. I remember thinking during that period of my life, that my Christmas present each year from Henry was another child.

J: I know I am straying slightly from our subject of Christmas Courts, but I cannot help but think of the consequences of all those pregnancies...ten children born healthy. According to my calculations there were 5 girls and 5 boys, only one of whom died very young, that was your first child with Henry, William, who died at age 3. How you must have mourned that early death.

A: Indeed, I did. We pinned so many hopes on our first son. Go on.

J: Let me see. Where was I? Oh yes, and fifty-one grandchildren. Quite a brood. My, but you were fertile. Your daughters, Matilda and Aliénor, surpassed even you in fecundity, each producing a dozen progeny. So many reasons to be proud.

A: There would have been more progeny if Henry had stayed home. He traveled our lands constantly. Do not forget that in our time, as a Queen it was my bounden duty to produce heirs: males to inherit the throne, and females to send off to foreign lands to wed into other royal families. What better way to placate enemies than to become relatives?

J: Sadly, the follow-up is that you lived to see eight of your ten children die, a fate any parent dreads. Only Joanna and John out lived you. In your day, boy babies often grew up to die in battle and girl babies often grew up to die in childbirth. It is still so today. Although modern medicine has conquered many of the childbearing dangers, we are still at war. We continue to send our sons and now even daughters, off to battle. WOE to us as mothers who have no control over what battles we fight.

A: Not so fast, my dear. JOY is us! Do not forget how my progeny led me to you nor lest we forget what fun we have shared in comparing stories about our children. We

both survived childbirth without problems and rejoice in our downlines. You are one of my children, too! Now it is my turn. Let me count. From your two marriages you have three children and ten grandchildren, right? *(Jini nods)* Not bad either, I might say. I know you cherish each and every one. *(Aliénor hesitates and looks pensive.)* Little do our children know how much we pray for every good thing to come to them in their lives and how much we worry about setbacks even when they become parents themselves.

J: But wait, I must mention here that in our family there was a deep sadness with regard to the birthing of children. It was not my child, but John's. While John was wed to his first wife, their first son was healthy and hardy thanks be to God. However, the birth of their second son was fraught with heartbreak. At first the baby seemed normal, but one day later he succumbed for no apparent reason. No good explanation was given, not by nurses nor by doctors.

A: Oh, my heart goes out to your John, having to go through such pain with no answers to bring the least comfort.

J: I know John carries the spirit of this lost son in his heart to this day. His wife's health was never as robust as before. She died young as a result. It was a most painful time for John. One never fully recovers from the loss of a child. I think you know this too, dearest Grand-mère.

*(The two mothers, both feeling John's pain, sink into each other's arms with tears in their eyes and sit in unspoken reverence to children who predecease their parents.)*

A: *(Aliénor sits up, slowly dabs her eyes with her handkerchief, clears her throat and continues on the subject of Christmas Courts and her captivity.)* I had already spent many a Christmas, nearly sixteen to be exact, with one exception, locked up in one dungeon or another—bleak, cold and miserable, missing my family. My imprisonment began in Aquitaine believe it or not. Henry raged at me for setting his sons against him. I raged at him after many years of infidelities and bastard babies, not to mention when he would not renounce Rosamond Clifford. I had enough of all that. The great sadness for me was that he would no longer listen to my sage advice, even in areas of my expertise. I was caged in my own Aquitaine, then shipped off to England and moved to various prisons. I wondered how the children were, if all were healthy and prospering, especially as they matured. A lot can happen in that many years. I had no idea what was transpiring outside my walls at Salisbury Castle.

Henry kept me in complete darkness as far as news of family and country were concerned. He was thorough on that I must say. It was almost insufferable, but I decided at the outset that I would not let him take my mind, my memory or my goodness of heart. He could lock me up and throw away the key, but he could not steal my mind. In fact, in self-defense I steeled myself by building a wall around my heart to protect it from his cruelty. It was a super challenge, but I survived.

J: It is beyond my thinking to imagine how you fared from day-to-day for so many years with no news of the outside world. That was certainly cruel and unusual torture.

A: I admit that most of the time I knew not if Henry lived or died. I only knew that I had to survive him. By force of will and with the support of a couple of ladies in waiting, a cook and her husband, I was alone most of the time with only my personal maid, Amaria, and saw no one. They were all sworn to secrecy. I would not endanger their lives in any way by forcing them to speak. When I say grin and bear it, I know the true meaning.

J: My dearest Nanna, words cannot express my sorrow at your forced captivity for such an extended time. It was inhumane to the nth degree! *(Jini leans toward Queen Aliénor to hold her in a close, loving embrace.)*

A: But enough of this digression, let's get back to the Christmas Court question you posed. The best event for me was when it was announced that in 1184, ten years into my long estrangement from my family, that I was summoned to attend the Christmas Court. First, Henry convened the King's Council at Westminster on November 30th that I was to attend. From thence we removed to Windsor.

It was a good news, bad news scenario. The good news was that I would be allowed some freedom, freedom to breathe in the fresh air and feel the sun, if there was some in winter, and freedom to be re-united with my children for the first time in years! I did my best to look well and dressed in what I had on hand. I dared not hope that this might be my freedom at last.

The bad news, alas, was that Henry was cantankerous the entire time. My sons: Richard, Geoffrey and John were most contentious with each other and with their father as they were before I was snatched away a decade earlier! They had been wreaking havoc in Normandy and Poitou. Mostly, it came down to their inheritances. Henry demanded that I name certain lands to each one. I was incensed and would not comply. Jealousy was rampant amongst them. Nary a one would be content with his due. Further, Henry demanded that I quell the tide and bring the Kiss of Peace to the entire family that Christmas. He must have been desperate to invite me. I say: "Blessed be little."

And the worst news was that I would ultimately have to return to my dungeon. The gathering of our family that Christmas was to be played out on a theatrical stage before our kingdom, to show our subjects that we were of one accord. The play went on as scheduled when it came to our public appearances. A total ruse!

J: What a downer for your re-entrance into the outside world. But all that aside, I assume there was feasting, music, dancing and celebration as usual that Christmas.

Everyone must have had to put on a happy face to cover up the sadness of the last ten years.

A: Gracious yes, how I enjoyed the musicians after those years of silence. It was not the same as my troubadours of Aquitaine, but pleasant all the same. I recall even getting up the courage to dance to some of my favorite English country dances. My spirits were raised a few notches. I decided to make the best of my free hours to spend time with my few children who were at the court that year.

There was plenty of news when I arrived. Rosamond had died in 1176. No comment. My ex-husband, King Louis, had died in 1180. Again. No comment. The most crushing news was that my eldest surviving son, Henry, Duke of Normandy, died in 1183. By crowning our son, Henry, at such a young age, my paranoid husband, Henry, hoped to preserve the Angevin lineage. The plan backfired as we both realized the burden of coming kingship was too heavy a load for our son. This all occurred while I was in prison. I could do nothing.

J: All those deaths, and to find out all at once. That must have hit you hard, just when you were working at holding up your chin in front of the entire court. But think of how heart-warming it was for you to spend time with John and Matilda who were present that holiday! I imagine that to see Matilda was quite unexpected as she had married into the royal family of Saxony, in Germany as we know it. As I understand it, when a royal daughter is wed to a head of state in another country, normally she does not return home.

A: You understand that correctly. Normally that was the case. You cannot imagine how thrilled I was to see Matilda, her husband and their children. She was just under thirty at that time and had most of her twelve children by then. They all accompanied their parents, to Windsor. When I pressed each grandchild to my heart, I felt it skip a beat for joy! I would indeed be happy. Of course, Richard and John were at odds with their father. Too hard to sort out in a brief visit. We all tried to set aside complaints and differences while we were fortunate enough to be together as a family once more.

J: I have been pondering all those Christmas journeys over the years of your marriage to Henry, mostly in far-flung castles in your kingdom. I read some figures recently on Henry's presence at Christmas Courts over the thirty-six years of your marriage. We know you were absent from many of these celebrations, but supposedly he kept twelve of these in England, twelve in Normandy, six in Anjou, two in Aquitaine, one in Brittany, and one in Ireland. *Ai Ai Ai ! (Jini exclaimed!)* All this complicated, long-distance, uncomfortable, expensive travel because of the lack of communications – i.e. no computers, iPhones, instant messaging, faxing and, nor Facetime. I suppose this was the only way of keeping in touch with his people; call it oversight.

A: Hark! I daresay that our Facetime in real time normally promotes better outcomes than your Facetime today via flat screens. Results: thin and shallow in my view.

J: I just know that when I think of all those wagons transporting all those goods and accoutrements from place to place it is totally overwhelming. The overall purpose is admirable, face-to-face time.! Oh well, enough of my rambling!

A: Facetime as you call it, even the methods of arriving face-to-face, and our paltry means of purveyance were all we had at our disposal in those days.

J: But thanks be to God there was a light at the end of that long, long tunnel of captivity. You and Richard both had to tolerate it. Both of you emerged in relatively good health. For that you both deserve accolades.

A: One does not know that until one reaches the light. Little did I know that there would be life after my seemingly endless imprisonment. I began the next chapter in my life after the death of my husband, full of new challenges that only I, as re-instated Queen of England, could handle. Remember, Henry and I originally ruled from the borders of Scotland to the borders of Spain. That is a huge empire. I had to step back into the seat of power to take over all duties seamlessly.

J: Dearest Nanna, now, as our time together runs out, I want to mention that I, too, had a type of captivity in my later years, beginning about age seventy. It was during my second marriage that I began to lose my eyesight. Luckily for me it was mostly in one eye. Then when my good eye began to diminish, I could no longer drive my car, having to admit with great difficulty, that I could no longer read the street signs and had blind spots before my eyes that appeared suddenly without warning. I had to surrender my freedom to come and go as I wished. I could no longer jump into the car on a whim to bring a bouquet of flowers to a friend, run to the grocery store for a forgotten item, drive to my daughter's homes to have some one-on-one time together, or to meet my son for a coffee at Starbuck's, and on and on. The door slammed shut on me, and it was hard to accept. Like you, I had no choice in the matter. The good news I hasten to mention is that my dear John did all he could to fill the gap and drives me to many, many places every week. I am so grateful to him. If not for John, my prison would have had real bars.

A: Oh, dearest Jini, I knew you had eye problems, but I had no idea what you might have had to sacrifice as a result. You seem to get along quite well. Rarely do I notice you having trouble seeing; your loss of eyesight most assuredly brings on a loss of freedom.

J: That freedom is lost to me forever whereas, thanks to God, your imprisonment came to an abrupt end when Henry died in Chinon in 1189.

A: I did not want you to feel sad for me for the ending was worth the wait. I emerged from isolation intact! Alleluia!

J: Nor do I want you to pity me. When I feel cornered and stymied, I just go to my computer, fire up my memory and creative juices and start to write. My writing gives me wheels and serves as my transportation. I, too, am freed at last!

*(The women stroll briefly through the herb garden with fragrances wafting over them. They each pick a leaf from a favorite herb, press it in their fingers and lift it to their noses in delight – each one recalling how she has loved this fragrance from her years in gardens and at table. They walk around the cloisters area to see the beautiful flowers still in bloom. They move into the necropolis chamber where Aliénor’s partial family grouping lies in effigy. They enter the large, cool nave of the Abbey Church.)*

A: We are alone here. There is only the soft sound of our feet on the cool stones. Let us walk hand in hand beneath the immense multi-footed columns that surround the catafalques where my family and I lie frozen in stone for eternity. I am feeling cooler now in this place. You, too?

J: *(Jini follows her Lady Grandmother toward the nearest recumbent figure.)* Oh, yes. I welcome the cool, stillness of this sacred space.

*(The two women are alone in the royal burial chamber. They are as silent as the stone figures. Jini follows Aliénor as she circles the grouping of four family members. Aliénor trails her hand over the painted stone, now much faded, surrounding the first sarcophagus, that of Isabella d’Angouleme. There is no railing around the sleeping figures to keep tourists at bay. It will be built later. Out of reverence, Aliénor and Jini fall silent, each descending into her thoughts of times past and of what is to come. Finally, Aliénor speaks.)*

A: I have clouded feelings as I look upon my family in this way. I feel the distance that separates us now, yet still remain connected by the hip to each of them. I must say that I regret not being able to know Isabella as well as I would have wished. She joined the family too late for that. She was my son John’s second wife as Queen Consort of England. They were wed in 1200 in a period of much upheaval. Richard and I had recently returned from his imprisonment by the Holy Roman Emperor; then, as you know, Richard built the grand Château Gaillard and died by 1199. John, who long wanted to be king finally got his wish.

*(Aliénor points to Isabella’s effigy.)* My John married Isabella when she was very young. As I mentioned, it was his second marriage, and she produced four children in their time together. John, my youngest, died in 1216 and she in 1246. Of course, being much younger than John, she lived on to remarry and give birth to nine more children.

Isabella is buried here because, in her last years she lived at Fontevraud much as I did. We both found refuge here. That much we shared. I have compassion for her as I know that the poor dear must have had a difficult life with John. One thing for sure, we shared a dislike for the Kings of France.

*(Aliénor moves over to stand by Richard's recumbent figure. She stands by his feet peering up toward his face.)* My Richard should have lived much longer, God be blessed, but for his gluttony for gold and other riches to finance his interminable battles against French King Philippe. I cannot help thinking that God finally put a stop to his overwhelming sense of pride. I know I should not judge him so harshly for I loved him the most of all my sons. As you see he is lying at the feet of his father, King Henry. That was intentional. Richard wanted it so. I believe he had pangs of regret over having taken sides with his brothers against his own father. It must have weighed heavily on his heart toward the end. So, there he is paying *obeisance* to his father even in death.

*(Aliénor moves to the figure of her husband, Henry, who lies on her left. She is on his right, a not-so-subtle sign of her superiority over him in death if not in life.)*

A: Of this foursome, Henry died first, and he had made it clear that he wished to be interred here. *(With her left forefinger Aliénor gently traces the curve of Henry's cold, hard, chin and then slowly moves to cup his forehead with the same hand before stepping back to assess the royal foursome including her own sleeping figure. Aliénor and Jini maintain the reverent silence for a few long moments.)*

J: As I am looking down on your effigy, Nanna, and then, looking up at the real, live you, clearly standing here before my eyes, it is as if a flash bulb is blurring my vision. I can barely distinguish the difference between you and your sculpted figure. This is a photo that cannot happen, that is not real! The two visages are identical.

A: As they should be. What is the problem?

J: I guess I was not prepared for this moment. Is this when time and space melt into one? *(Jini fingers the book in Aliénor's sleeping hands. Then she traces her cold face with love, trying to overcome the 800-year generation gap that she and Aliénor have conquered over their time together. Jini looks upon the warm, flesh and blood visage of her dearest Grand-mère. Her faith is restored.)*

A: I see you are checking me out. Which is which?

J: You are one and the same, no question. My heart is overflowing with love and adoration for you and yours, dearest Nanna. For you and OURS, that is. They are long gone, but not forgotten, and with luck another eight hundred years will pass before interest in your family who made such waves in the world grows dim. Richard was shortsighted when he said that he would be surprised if he were to be remembered in a hundred years. Remember that?

This is indeed a tender moment that we share. I could never have dreamed when I was a research student in Fontevraud that I would someday stand here beside you, sharing as we are and talking of my uplines and your downlines. I barely find words to express my deep emotion.

*(They step back from the dormant recumbents.)*

A: I know the dear ones we see lying here are but earthly representations of what we all were in our lives, but I also believe that our souls have long since fled to our Heavenly Maker. May we rest in peace. *(She crosses herself.)*

J: Nearing the close of our unique and fruitful meetings, I fully espouse our brand of conversations. I find them realistic, completely satisfying and happily edifying in the fullest degree. In fact, I recommend trying it with an ancestor whom one has admired so fully as I, you, over many years. What is wrong with wanting to know more about a long-gone ancestor? What is wrong with wanting to share similarities and differences in person, in real time?

For me this has been a blossoming of reverence and a fulfilling highlight in my wrongly named “declining years,” only to discover that indeed these years of writing and communicating with you have proven *not* to be declining years at all! Conversely these years have proven to be surmounting years of great satisfaction and understanding in having found you, my dearest Lady Grandmother. Who would not cherish that experience?

My elder daughter, Heather, revealed to me this week in fact, that you are my “imaginary friend” as though she were speaking of me as a child who did not know better and would soon grow out of it! Preposterous, I say!

A: *(somewhat indignant)* For that suggestion of Heather’s I should surprise her here and now by paying her a visit at her computer to prove her wrong once and for all. We cannot let this heresy continue. Are you with me on this?

J: Hey, wait a minute. I am not sure I want to share you with her, even though I love you both!

A: Do I see jealousy rearing its ugly head here at our final meeting? Of all things. I never expected this of you, Virginia Anne!

J: *(Upon hearing her full name like her father used on a serious occasions, she backs off.)* Well, maybe, just a little. But you are *my* discovery, I found you. Well, maybe next time?

*(Spoken by the narrator: As dusk begins to fall, and the streaks of sunlight retract slowly but surely through the ancient windows of the Abbaye, they know time is*

*running out on their precious moments together. They must make the break, even though the bonds of love they feel have grown strong between them, they must separate. Do they have more to say, more to share, more to reveal to each other? Of course, but we may never know if they meet again. Perhaps a future descendant of Jini's downline, one with an inquiring mind, like hers, will once again, be inclined to disturb the age-old papers concerning Aliénor and her family at the Abbaye de Fontevraud. This is their final, tearful parting for them both. We know them well now. We know that feelings run deep between Aliénor and Jini after their six encounters of deep, personal exchanges.)*

J: Dearest Nanna of my heart, I am the one to leave this time. You are at home here. It is I who must make the effort to depart thought it is the hardest thing I have ever had to do. *(She grasps the hand of her Grandmother, not wanting to let it go.)*

A: I know you will carry on with your life and have much to look forward to in your coming years. You will be busy as wife, mother, grandmother and friend, too.

J: I wish you the very best in the time God has granted you, either in your waking or slumbering as you are here. I will think of you as I kneel at my daily priere Dieu.

A: It was truly a miracle that I found you! I remember my first glimpse of you in your church, followed by our first real conversation in your garden. I do feel so sad to see our glorious experiment come to an end.

J: Dear, oh dear. *(Says Jini wringing her hands.)* What are we doing? I must apologize. I never meant to create a rift between us over who found whom. You are so important to me, not just for my writing, but for my sense of family.

A: That's more like it. Apology accepted.

J: No hard feelings?

A: None.

J: Okay. I have managed to lift you off from the pages of moldering history books and brought you to life in a way that no other author or relative in your downline has thought to do! Doing so has brought me untold pleasure born of adventures in fantasy, evolving into real life dances in real time! That statement brings to mind a piece I wrote some years ago called: "Gotta Dance." I just HAD to seek you out on paper to experience a life-assuring dance together as no other Granddaughter has been able to do with a long-gone Nanna!

Aliénor, I salute you once again. I admire you for your tenacity to your deeply held principles and your steadfast allegiance to perpetuating your kingdom, nearly brought down by two husbands and various sons, but saved by your efforts. I applaud you for your femininity, capacity for fairness as a ruler, for your successful

childbearing and strong sense of the importance of motherhood. Long may we continue our dance into more and more shared history whenever and wherever it leads!

A: My fondest Jini, in this your closing monologue you have given voice to my thoughts as well! Well said, my dear authoress of a Granddaughter! I applaud you as well. We both shall live on in perpetuity through your assiduous research and writings! I pray that your granddaughter Sophia, and grandson, Jamison, who have shown early on, a love of theatre, will bring our shared story to the stage one day. We will be there in the wings urging them on!

J: Now, my beloved Nanna, we must part. We must say our fare thee wells. I hesitate as my eyes are filling fast with salty tears, my highly esteemed Lady Grandmother, my Queen. *(Jini pulls a deep curtsy.)*

A: *(Taken aback by the reverent obeisance of her granddaughter, Aliénor pronounces:)*

Verily, I am a queen,  
And thus, you a commoner  
But never have I seen  
A more uncommon commoner than thou!

*(Aliénor extends her hands and grasps those of her Granddaughter, lifting her upright. She then claps her hands in thanks and praise.)*

J: Here we are side by side in the same time zone at the close of our six face-to-face meetings. We have often said that we have conquered time and place. So, with that concept in mind let us close the curtain on our miraculous, beautiful-to-the-zenith times together hither and thither, bouncing at will from your time into my time. Now, for our swan song, let everyone who has traveled with us join voices with this song that simply popped full-blown into my head on this last day of my recording our intergenerational adventures on paper. Many will recognize this song with lyrics by Eric Little and music by Leo Dence penned in 1924. Let's reach back to 1929 and sing along with Rudy Vallee who made this song popular. *(The tune begins so all may hear on stage and in the audience.)*

"Your time is my time.  
My time is your time.  
There's no time like our time.  
There's no one like you!"

A and J: *(At once, in synchronicity, they sing the song together, gesturing to their hearts and, pointing to each other, as they sing the last line.)*

J: *Et Vive La Reine Aliénor!*

*(Both fighting back tears.)*

A: Let us say *au revoir* – for we shall meet again...  
I shall never forget you!

J: Nor I, you! *Au revoir* my dearest Nanna.

*(The original music with Rudy Vallee is heard wafting into the theatre. Jini and Aliénor pick up the tune, then dance together singing “Their Song” jubilantly, and ending by pointing at each other on cue “There’s No one Like You!” And, finally turning from the audience, they part, throwing kisses toward each other as they walk separately into the gathering mist of time.)*

*(Their repartee, once vibrant and compelling, drifts into thin air as jinni backs away from the Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud. Even the final song: “My Time is Your Time” can barely be heard and is dimming in the distance. Jini, with startling realization that her visits and conversations with her Nanna, Queen Aliénor, have come to an end, looks around, finds an old bench and sits down to contemplate all the wonderful and amazing times she and her Lady-Grandmère from the 12<sup>th</sup> century have shared.*

*As she looks back, she can no longer see Aliénor or any trace of her flowing gown and streaming blue and gold mantle. Was this something like a Brigadoon sighting? Would they all go to sleep for one night and wake up 100 years later? 800 years earlier? Was it all a dream? Maybe, as Heather has intimated, Queen Aliénor was only her imaginary friend after all. No, this was not a Brigadoon appearance, it was the real thing. She has seen her Grandmother, talked with her face to face, touched her hand, even danced with her, and best of all, she has shared real life experiences with her in real time. She is sure of it. She turns to see Lucien (Mado’s husband) waiting for her in his old Renault by the curb. Maybe things like this could only happen if you really believed, like Peter Pan. But no, it was nothing like that either. She had spent real time with her long-gone Grandmother of 29 generations into the past. Her heart begins to pick up the beat of “My time is Your Time,” and she breaks into a radiant smile and tells Lucien she had had a most lovely afternoon in Chinon where he left her— in fact, the best ever!)*

### **Act 3, Scene 2 (mini back sets)**

(For extra actors behind the main characters, to depict and expand on the scene of current dialogue.)

1. Chinon – Medieval Fair, minstrels, clowns, musicians (probably one of best back sets). I have posters of the annual fair. Narrow streets of Chinon, people in medieval dress doing all sorts of things they would have done in the streets there. Jugglers, fire throwers (from out of their mouths) different sellers in the streets – fruits and veggies, leather makers, armor makers, flower stalls, a little like Bruegel’s paintings, or those of Hansi, the Alsatian artist. People going about their daily lives. Artists, farriers, entertainers of all types, musicians, acrobats, dancers in medieval costume, steaming pots of soups and stews, weavers.
2. Chinon lunch with local lady who loves Henry II, stepping through armoire into basement wine cave.
3. Famous Fontevraud Kitchens at work preparing feast. Could use this theme as background painted scenery with J and A strolling in the gardens talking.
4. Christmas Court musicians, dancing. Aliénor and Henry’s Angevin family at table arguing. Their sons battling over dinner about who will inherit what territory. No sign of agreement; Henry at the head of table frustrated. A. helpless, wishing she was back in her prison at Salisbury.
5. This one is a must!!! Royal Necropolis 4 figures lying in state, frozen forever, tourists all over (or totally empty necropolis as in the play) Early Spanish music, concert on original instruments and plenty of voices as well.
6. Time: “My Time Your Time” music playing with lyrics. Clocks ticking all over town. In France and in USA. *(This one is a must to finalize the Conversations.)*  
*Find sheet music for the song, show cover.*

### Afterword

There are still a few items of interest regarding my connection with Queen Aliénor that I would like to share with my readers.

Even though I had followed the footsteps of my Grand-mère often when in France, I would soon find her in America. In December 1992, a decade prior to writing the first scene of my play, I traveled to New York City with my friend, Roberta and her former husband, Kenny. Our destination was the Cloisters Museum in Fort Tryon Park on the Upper West Side. We were thrilled to attend a concert of the Medieval singing group, The Waverly Consort. At that time, Roberta was a member of the Everyman's Guild in Connecticut. She not only sang, but also led the medieval dancing that enhanced their performances.

I joined Roberta and Kenny on one of their frequent forays to New York City for many reasons other than to indulge myself with my favorite early music. Foremost for me, was to set eyes on my elusive ancestor, Queen Aliénor of Aquitaine, at the museum. I found her post haste. Near a Romanesque archway, typical of Aliénor's time period, her head juts out at the corner of the apse and nave as a part of the simple, relatively unadorned capital of a tall, round column. Aliénor's husband, Henry II, King of England is sculpted at her left side. Both heads bear substantial crowns. In the original edifice, in Langon, France, the chapel I see here at The Cloisters, her figure head and half-length body would have stood twenty-three or more feet above the stone floor. At the Cloisters, they are about seventeen-feet above the floor.

The Waverly Consort performed music of Aliénor's time, ca 1200. I was in ecstasy just being at the Cloisters, much of which had been imported stone-by-stone from SW France, not far from her home in her Kingdome of Aquitaine. The Christmas program opened with the Nativity and closed with the "Te Deum laudamus: Thou sitteth at the right hand of the God in the glory of the Father."

After the concert was over, I returned for one more quick glance at Aliénor. I had just begun my tracing of her path in France. I did not know where it would lead, but I knew she and I had some things in common. After all, isn't that normal for a grandmother and granddaughter?

The next follow-up concerns the literary group of which I was a member for a long time, open only to Watertown Women. The group is well over 100 years old. Every year each member is responsible for an original presentation of her own choosing. I always like the fact that we were not like most "book clubs" who were assigned books to read whether it was to one's liking or not. So, in 2003 I chose to read Act 1, Scene 1 of my play. My daughter, Amy, would take the part of Jini and I, the part of Aliénor. I chose to dress in 12<sup>th</sup> century garb. Amy wore jeans. My French friend,

Mado, a couturière, designed the period-correct accoutrements for me. Amy and I sat in matching chairs in our living room.

A little background: At this time (a decade later, near the close of 2002), I was taking a writing class with Frances Chamberlain of the New York Times. She learned of my literary club and of my plan to present the first scene before the literary group. She asked if she might visit me on the day of my presentation. After speaking with our President, I said it would be fine. As it turned out, she arrived with a photographer who shot a number of pictures. Shortly thereafter, the photos of Amy and me as well as a shot of the entire room of twenty members and ten of my invitees, appeared in the Connecticut Section of the New York Times front page, full bottom half. Images are included with this manuscript. In this way everyone had a taste of Aliénor's and my meeting and a feel for our conversations. It is indeed a refreshing approach, a new angle on how to meet one's upline ancestor. Not surprisingly, I am a member of the DAR. It all fits into my M.O.

Following the good luck cover story in the New York Times, I donned my Aliénor gown once again, still contemplating writing the full version of my "Conversations with Queen Aliénor". En route to learn more about my grandmother of twenty-nine generations into the past, I asked my husband, John, to take a photo of Amy as me, and myself as the Queen. With this photo I would personally mark the day we did the reading for my literary group. It would serve to remind me my research had just begun in earnest.

Dear reader, I ask you to tag along as I show you another photo that puzzles me to this day. I do not recall who took this picture. The person who took this photo outside the archives at Fontevraud, obviously framed it with the archivist and me on the bottom right, not in the center. I ask: Why not center us? What was the photographer focusing on? Certainly not us.

Then, I made a copy of this image in my printer and pressed print. I was glad to see that the unknown person had documented one of my many visits to Aliénor's archives and resting place. It was surely a work visit as I was dressed casually.

Then, as my printer slowly spit out the print, I saw something that had not shown up in the first small picture. Behind me, in the foreground of the convent buildings at my back, were two white, upright smudges. These anomalies were hanging in midair! What were they and why were they not on the original photo? I have included the small original photo and also the second larger print for you to see and decide what you will.

Jini Jones Vail, May 7, 2021 Author

