

The Peace+Wielder
"The Wolf is the King"

TEASER

EXT. NORTHAMPTON MANOR (DANELAW, ENGLAND) - DAY

An Anglo-Saxon great hall - in stone - towers over the surrounding thatched houses of Danish settlers.

Both Danes and Saxons pass in and out of the manor church - door propped open on this misty fall morning - with decorations for a saint's day.

SUPER: "Northampton, border of the Danelaw, England. A.D. 1002"

EXT. NORTHAMPTON DANISH HOUSE - DAY

A Saxon girl, ELFYIFA (7), tugs a hood over her braids with an impish grin, then does the same for little FRIDA, her Danish friend. But Frida's mother, Gunhild, bends swiftly down, a Viking cross swinging from her neck.

GUNHILD

How many times have I warned you?
The forest is *mørk*. There are
wolves, Frida. And you, Elfyifa...

The bright-eyed girl stares fiercely back at the woman.

GUNHILD (cont'd)

Earl Alfhelm's daughter. If
anything happens, you will answer
for it. Understand? Stay on the
path.

Elfyifa grabs Frida by the hand, and pulls her away.

GUNHILD (cont'd)

The path!

EXT. NORTHAMPTON FOREST - DAY

The girls disappear into the mist, skipping out a tune.

ELFYIFA AND FRIDA

All the leaves are falling down, /
 Orange, yellow, red and brown. /
 Falling softly, falling softly as
 they do / All the leaves are
 falling down, / Orange, yellow, red
 and brown. / Falling softly over me
 and over you.

EXT. NORTHAMPTON DANISH HOUSE - DAY

Gunhild returns to her work. Another HOUSEWIFE joins her.

HOUSEWIFE

It's happening already. See? Your
 brother was right. Settle here
 among them, before long, our
 children will be Angle-ish too. My
 husband said, we go for *Danemark* in
 the spring. You should come with
 us, Gunhilda. In *Danemark*, you're a
 princess and so is Frida. Have you
 thought of that? Of whom she will
 marry?

GUNHILD

I have. England is Christian. It's
 no shame to follow *Hvítr Krístr*
 here.

HOUSEWIFE

No, here the shame is being Danish.

EXT. NORTHAMPTON FOREST - DAY (LATER)

The girls play hide-and-peek among ancient trees. Wolf eyes
 watch them, shining in the undergrowth.

Frida chases her friend, running right past a large wolf
 hidden in the ferns. Behind her, an ethereal, glowing,
 child-like figure, an ELF, lays a hand on the wolf's neck.

Suddenly, a faint SCREAM pivots the wolf's attention. As if
 on cue, the whole pack melts away into the forest.

Another SCREAM. The girls freeze, listening. Then Elfyifa
 seizes Frida's hand, and they run for the path.

EXT. NORTHAMPTON MANOR - DAY

Tools are strewn about and a cart overturned, but the village seems deserted. Even the doors of the great hall gape open. Elfyifa calls out, to no answer:

ELFYIFA
Papa... Wulfie?

Bewildered, she scans the fields. Empty. Then, Frida points to the church.

The high, rounded windows have an eerie orange glow.

FRIDA
Look! They're praying. For Saint
Brice's Day.

Elfyifa's eyes widen in horror.

EXT. NORTHAMPTON CHURCH - DAY

Wedged beneath the handle of the door, a massive gravestone has turned the entire church into a holocaust. Faint CRIES emerge from within.

ELFYIFA
Help me, Frida!

Elfyifa and Frida tug desperately at the stone, as the cries turn to RETCHING, but it will not budge. Not for two little girls.

Horses approach, blowing steam in the mist. The mud-splattered Saxon earl, ALFHELM, leaps down from his black charger, followed by his teenage son, WULFHEAH.

ELFYIFA (cont'd)
Papa! Where were you?

ALFHELM
Devils! We chased them as far as
the king's manor. Here, Elfie...

Elfyifa's father gently pushes her aside.

ALFHELM (cont'd)
Pray God we're not too late.
Wulfheah, take that side.

The men wrench the gravestone aside and jerk the door open. Only thick, dark smoke billows out.

WULFHEAH

But this is the sanctuary! What has
Athelred done?

At last, one horrific figure appears, burned almost beyond
recognition. She collapses, gasping, in front of the church.

GUNHILD

Frida... Frida!

The child rushes to embrace her mother, and finds it
impossible.

GUNHILD (cont'd)

I see... my death brings... great
evil to England.

(a shattered breath)

Tell Otto-Svein... the wolf is...
the king.

Her eyes close forever.

WULFHEAH

Father. Athelred must pay for this!

Carefully, Alfhelm removes Gunhild's cross, then kneels to
encircle both girls in his mail-clad arms. Over Elfyifa's
head, he meets his son's pleading gaze.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

INT. LONDON MINSTER (WESSEX) - DAY

KING ATHELRED, ostentatious in his robes and crown, hears Mass in the Romanesque cathedral. Behind him, like a backup band, stand his four Saxon sons: ATHELSTAN, the lead, then EGBERT, and boys EDMUND and Edwy, .

SUPER: "London, royal court in Wessex."

But they are all upstaged by Athelred's exquisite, and glaringly young, Norman QUEEN EMMA. The eyes of every man are on her as she curtsies -- ever so lightly -- to receive the Host with lush, open mouth.

Only ARCHBISHOP ALFRIC is unmoved, his trembling hand the effect of age alone as he places the wafer on her tongue. Passing the plate to another priest, he returns to the altar for the blessing.

ALFRIC

Summa pia gratia nostra...

EXT. LONDON MINSTER - DAY

A filthy messenger, EDRIC, ties his horse in the square and starts up the church steps. Yet even mud and horse dung cannot conceal his dark-eyed magnetism.

A glimmer turns the corner of his mouth as he hears:

ALFRIC (O.S.)

Deliver us from the savage race of
Danes which lays waste our realm.
Amen.

Pausing at the threshold, Edric crosses himself, lips moving. VOICES stir.

The royal family sweep through, richly-dressed Norman lords and ladies in their train. Edric falls to one knee. Right behind Emma, one Norman, HUGH STEWARD, winces with contempt, lifts a handkerchief to his nose.

EDRIC

King Athelred.

Athelred stops. Edric, by the right door, is nearer to Emma. He tries, and fails, to keep from admiring her.

ATHELRED
Well, is it done?

EDRIC
They're dead, sire... Lady Emma.

ATHELRED
All?
(scoffs)
That would be a miracle. But, come
now, um...

He turns to his clueless eldest son.

ATHELRED (cont'd)
Athelstan. Who's your horse thane
there?

ATHELSTAN
Edric. But --

ATHELRED
So, Edric, where exactly have those
demons been stamped out?

EDRIC
The border, from Northampton to
Lincoln, is cleared. You will soon
be safe throughout England, my
lord, from west to east and north
to south.

Emma gasps. Hugh Steward looks strangely pleased.

EMMA
You slew peaceful Danes in the
Danelaw? Why?

Edric feasts his eyes on Emma with feigned sadness.

EDRIC
Why did Beowulf slay Grendel's
mother, my lady?

She shakes her head.

EDRIC (cont'd)
Because one fiend can only breed
another, I fear.

Athelred, satisfied, tugs Emma's arm. They proceed down the
minster steps, out of earshot.

EMMA

Athelred, what is this? I... I waited to tell you... to be sure....

Her French accent softens every syllable, but only sharpens her fear.

EMMA (cont'd)

I am with child.

ATHELRED

Calm yourself, my sweet Emma.
(cups her cheek)
We'll have peace soon enough.

But she shakes off his hand, vehemently.

EMMA

No! No, my lord. You don't know the Northmen as I do. My brother the duke, my mother -- we are their kin. Once they came for your silver and gold, *oui*. But now... now, they will come for your blood.

He jerks her within inches of his face.

ATHELRED

Never dare to advise me, woman!

Shocked, she can do little more than nod.

ATHELRED (cont'd)

You're a peace-weaver. That means you keep your loom open, and your mouth shut.

Athelred drops her arm, and wheeling back to his courtiers, motions for Edric to leave Athelstan and follow him.

Emma, lost in her fur-trimmed mantle, stands alone in the square.

EXT. NORMAN COASTAL FORTRESS (NORMANDY, FRANCE) - DAY

A falcon soars high above a motte-and-bailey castle, then dives, SCREECHING, down upon its prey. Rising above the dunes with the prey in its talons, the carved prows of Viking ships appear, beached on shore.

SUPER: "Normandy, across the English Channel."

The falcon returns obediently to its master - RICHARD II, Duke of Normandy, who hands the prey to a servant and substitutes a dainty treat.

His guest, KING SVEIN of Denmark, reaches out to pet the bird and is met with a peck and an aggressive flapping of wings. Svein's scarred mouth cracks open in an impressive wide grin, belying the greying forked beard, bound in virile braids.

SVEIN

She's *kraftig*. Just the way I like them.

RICHARD

I have a sister like that. Emma. But, presently, she's married to Athelred.

Svein gives a short, croaking laugh.

SVEIN

One wife is enough at my age. But...

(pulls one braid)

... I have two boys, Harald and Knut.

RICHARD

As you know, my sisters must marry Christians, Svein.

He gives him a weighted look.

RICHARD (cont'd)

One of them would have to convert.

EXT. VIKING SHIP - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

A blonde boy, KNUT (8), leaps from bench to bench, dagger in hand, pretending to fight off attackers from every side.

A towering Viking, THORKIL, seeing the boy's game, jumps up and meets Knut's swing with a real sword. The dagger goes spinning away into the water, narrowly missing another Dane.

KNUT

Hey! That's not fair! Next time, Thorkil, it won't be so easy.

THORKIL

Fighting is never fair, Knut.

He tousles Knut's hair.

THORKIL (cont'd)
Remember that.

In answer, Knut dives overboard.

Thorkil, at first amused, grows increasingly worried as the boy does not appear. He turns to Svein, on the dunes above.

Suddenly, Knut surfaces behind Thorkil, dagger between his teeth, then shoves the point against Thorkil's back.

KNUT
I'll remember.

Thorkil whips around and sweeps the struggling boy up high, like a trophy.

EXT. NORMAN COASTAL FORTRESS - DAY

RICHARD
That one's spoiling for a raid.

SVEIN
Ja. When I heard about my sister, I swore on Odin's eye I would avenge her. But it's not enough to kill a few squealing English. Look.

From under his cloak, he draws a parchment scroll and gives it to Richard, who reads it swiftly.

RICHARD
Otto-Svein...?

SVEIN
My nickname. No one else in England would know it. The Christian emperor, Otto, was at my baptism -- not that I was consulted, seeing as I could only wail and piss myself. But I chose to follow the old gods, and there are many in *Danemark*, who, like me, will not be forced to kneel to *Kristr*.

A nod to Richard.

SVEIN (cont'd)
Not by the Emperor. Not even by my father, the *Blautand*.

RICHARD

You destroyed him, as I remember.

SVEIN

And I can do the same to Athelred.

Richard strokes the falcon. His gaze takes in the Danish fleet, and beyond, the Channel.

RICHARD

Your men will need a place to rest and repair ships... if you are to tear the English king to pieces.

SVEIN

So what are your terms?

RICHARD

I have only one condition. When you sit on the bench in Valhalla, my nephew will sit on the throne, in England.

Richard offers his hand.

EXT. NORTHAMPTON HALL - DAY

Alfhelm and Wulfheah stride through the massive wooden doors to their mounts tied out front. As Alfhelm puts his foot in the stirrup, Elfyifa rushes to his side.

ELFYIFA

Papa, wait!

He peels her arms from his waist.

ALFHELM

Now, Elfie, we've said our farewells. I told you, we'll be home soon. You know what to do while we're away....

Elfyifa nods seriously, then glances at Frida, whose haunted eyes peer from the doorway. Frida wears her mother's Viking cross.

ELFYIFA

Say nothing of Frida. Keep her hidden if the king's men should come.