

Harlette De Falaise



Born: 9 Jun 1003 FRA

Married: Robert the Magnificent

Died: 23 Apr 1078 FRA

Parents: Fulbert De Falaise & Doda

Herleva (c. 1003 - c. 1050) also known as **Arlette**, **Arletta**, and **Herlève**, was the mother of William I of England. She had two further sons, Odo of Bayeux and Robert, Count of Mortain, who became prominent in William's realm.

Family Background

The background of Herleva and the circumstances of William's birth are shrouded in mystery. The written evidence dates from a generation or two later, and is not entirely consistent. The most commonly accepted version says that she was the daughter of a tanner named Fulbert from the small Norman town of Falaise, where they lived. Translation being somewhat uncertain, Fulbert may instead have been a furrier, embalmer, or a person who laid out corpses for burial^[1].

It is argued by some that Herleva's father was not a tanner but rather a member of burgher class^[2]. The idea is supported by the fact that her brothers appear in a later document as attestors for an under-age William. Also, the Count of Flanders later accepted Herleva as a proper guardian for his own daughter. Both facts would be nearly impossible if the father (and therefore her brothers) of Herleva was a tanner, little more than a peasant.

Relationship with Robert the Magnificent

According to one legend, still recounted by tour guides at Falaise, it all started when Robert, the young Duke of Normandy saw Herleva from the roof of his castle tower. The walkway on the roof still looks down on the dyeing trenches cut into stone in the courtyard below, which can be seen to this day from the tower ramparts above. The traditional way of dyeing leather or garments was for individuals to trample barefoot on the garments which were awash in the dyeing liquid in these trenches. Herleva, legend goes, seeing the Duke on his ramparts above, raised her skirts perhaps a bit more than necessary in order to attract the Duke's eye. The latter was immediately smitten and ordered her brought in (as was customary for any wench that caught the Duke's eye) through the back door. Herleva refused, saying she would only enter the Duke's castle on horseback through the front gate. The Duke, filled with lust, could only agree. In a few days, Herleva, dressed in the finest her father could provide, and sitting on a white horse, rode proudly through the front gate, her head held high. This gave Herleva a semi-official status as the Duke's mistress.^[citation needed]

She later gave birth to his son, William, in 1027 or 1028, and probably a daughter, Adelaide, in 1030.

Marriage to Herluin de Conteville

The love affair of Robert and Herleva didn't last; the Duke lost his romantic interest in her. However, her "official" liaison with the Duke had elevated her from a commoner status. With the Duke's consent Herleva later married Herluin de Conteville in 1031.

From her marriage to Herluin she had two sons: Odo, who later became Bishop of Bayeux, and Robert who became Count of Mortain. Both became prominent during William's reign. They also had at least one daughter, who married William, lord of La Ferté-Macé.^[3]

Herleva probably died around 1050, in her forties.^[4]

Information from online research at: [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com)