This compromise was unacceptable for Emma, who wished to retain power and influence. With Harthacnut nowhere in sight, she reached out to her other son, the one from her marriage to Ethelred, Edward, who was still in Normandy. This outreach to Edward is likely the reason for Godwinson switching his support from Harthacnut to Harefoot. It is important to remember that Godwinson did very well out of Cnut's invasion, he having been elevated far beyond his station – the last thing he would want is the return of the previous royal family, for Edward would surely seek retribution on those who benefited from his father's and brother's deaths. This culminated in the banishment of Queen Emma to Flanders.

Harrold Harefoot dies suddenly on the 17th March 1040; the English nobility reaches out to Harthacnut and offers him the crown. He accepts, however his reign is a disaster. Bitter, he has Harefoot's corpse excavated and thrown into a river. He began to impose monstrous taxes of £21,000 and enforced collection through his housecarls; the two dispatched to Worcester meeting with such furious opposition, that they were hounded into a church and killed. In retaliation, the king ordered the people of the city killed and the lands ravaged – this action caused even his greatest allies to turn against him. With this background of rapidly diminishing popularity, Harthacnut took a surprising action – he invited his half-brother, Edward, over from Normandy. Upon arriving, he was sworn in as king, the two ruling together. It has been speculated that this was, in fact, orchestrated by Godwinson, who still held great power, in an attempt to temper Harthacnut's poor rule. This experiment in co-kingship was short-lived however, for in 1042, while attending a vassal's wedding feast, Harthacnut collapsed. While his death was certainly suspicious, the ascension of Edward to sole king was smooth.