

# **ROYAL HUNT**

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FADE IN

EXT. FOREST -- NIGHT

The New Forest of England in the south, an ancient place, huge and sprawling, circa 1200 AD.

HOOFBEATS DRUM. DOGS RUN.

ROBIN and MARIAN sleep propped against an oak tree, under blankets. Robin's bow and arrow lay across his lap.

Robin is 25 YO with tousled hair, a tattered green tunic, deerhide vest, puckered hose, hat with feather, and boots. He wears a long knife and silver hunting horn.

Marian is 24 YO, lithe, brunette. Dressed the same.

Robin and Marian wake.

ROBIN

Dogs! A hunting pack! And a horse!

MARIAN

Who rides by moonlight?

(hears horn)

Mother of Mercy!

An eerie ragged HUNTING HORN blares.

Robin boosts Marian into a tree. Marian reaches for Robin.

MARIAN

Jump! I'll --

Too late. HELLHOUNDS charge.

"Hellhounds" are ferocious dogs oddly silent.

Caught on the ground, Robin draws and shoots.

He shoots two Dogs with one arrow. Then is overrun by Dogs. His bow string is bitten through.

Robin whacks with his bow, slashes with his knife.

MARIAN (CONT'D)

Rob! Hoist your bow!

Robin raises his bow. Marian grabs it and swings him up.

The eerie-silent Dogs snap and jump.

ROBIN

Thank God for a stout bow and a strong  
wife --

The WILD HUNTSMAN enters.

The Wild Huntsman is a dark ragged figure on a black horse.  
With a hunting horn and sword.

Robin and Marian stare, paralyzed with fear.

The Huntsman blows his creepy HORN.

Dogs retreat. One dead Dog is left.

Huntsman and Dogs vanish in the darkness.

MARIAN

The Wild Huntsman. And his  
hellhounds. I thought they were  
just -- a legend.

ROBIN

That's what they say about us...

EXT. FOREST, ARGENT'S HUNTING CAMP -- NIGHT

SIR ARGENT is a 40 YO Knight, fit, Royal Forester of the New  
Forest. He wears good green clothes and a big official ring.

The hunting camp has GUIDES, SERVANTS, hobbled HORSES, and  
Dogs. The fire dies down as men roll in blankets.

An eerie ragged HUNTING HORN calls. HOOFBEATS DRUM.

The Wild Huntsman and his Hellhounds explode into camp.

Servants and Guides run. Hunting Dogs battle Hellhounds.

Sir Argent grabs a sword --

-- But the Wild Huntsman rides close and CHOPS him down (we  
don't see the beheading).

EXT. FOREST -- MORNING

Robin hops from the tree. Marian climbs down.

Robin checks tracks. Finds broken hobbles from their horses.

ROBIN  
Others may ride, but not us.

The dead Dog has its throat ripped out. Robin kicks it.

MARIAN  
It's not the beast's fault.

ROBIN  
It's her master I would abuse. You  
could have been torn to flinders.

MARIAN  
How be those dogs so silent?

ROBIN  
Bewitched?

MARIAN  
These be real dogs, Rob. Not the  
kind to turn into mice at dawn.

ROBIN  
Then I don't know. Kick up the fire.

Robin cuts steaks from the dead Dog.

MARIAN  
You'd eat a witch-cursed dog?

ROBIN  
I ate horse lungs on Crusade, and  
glad to get it.

Marian skewers the meat to grill it.

ROBIN (CONT'D)  
Our enemy is said to have only three  
dogs: one red, one white, one black.  
Never a full pack.

MARIAN  
And who lives to tell that tale?

ROBIN  
(looking at tracks)  
His horse runs unshod like a Saxon's.

MARIAN  
Witches can't abide iron.

ROBIN  
I would ask, why did the villain  
leave us our souls?

MARIAN  
Mayhaps the tree saved us. Oaks  
were sacred to the old gods.

ROBIN  
(nods at trail)  
We can track him. By day.

MARIAN  
I'm game, by day.

Robin and Marian follow the trail of the Wild Huntsman.

ROBIN  
Such a queer forest. Beeches and  
hawthorns and hollies and elms.  
Hardly a tree as loves a man.  
(sighs)  
I wish we were home in Sherwood.

MARIAN  
Every step brings us nearer.  
(watching trail)  
Our ghost didn't fade away. Or gallop  
up a moonbeam into the sky.

ROBIN  
I could dress in rags and ride the  
night and frighten people to death.

MARIAN  
You dress in rags the year round.

ROBIN  
Wish I'd shot the rider. If I can  
kill a ghost dog, I can kill its  
master.

MARIAN  
Hush. Talk of death is jinxy.  
(sees something, HISSES)

EXT. FOREST ROAD -- MORNING

Sir Argent lies dead in the road. Headless.

ROBIN  
Now we know what sought the Huntsman.

MARIAN  
And what he found.

They look around: no head.

Robin inspects. Finds a full purse on the belt and a fancy ring (Royal Forester's).

ROBIN  
Always unlucky to wear green. Huh.  
He's the Royal Forester.  
(holds up ring)

MARIAN  
No robber would leave that purse.

They find the scattered hunting camp. No men or animals.

Robin reads sign.

ROBIN  
Five or six servants fled. Some  
dogs. Horses. They might be nearby.

MARIAN  
I'll see what I round up.

ROBIN  
Don't stray...

Robin goes another way, following tracks.

A little later...

Robin uses tent poles and rope to make a drag for the body.

Marian returns with two found Horses.

Robin saddles one with the Royal Forester's fancy saddle.  
Lashes the drag poles to the saddle.

ROBIN (CONT'D)  
(nods at tracks)  
The Huntsman rode into a bog. We  
can't follow.

MARIAN  
Just as well. We needs fetch this  
poor soul to a sheriff.  
(beat)  
Then we needs find King Richard.

ROBIN  
On a day for beheadings.

EXT. KING RICHARD'S HUNTING CAMP -- MORNING

King Richard's hunting camp is a jumble put up hastily in the dark. Tents, wagons, HORSES, DOGS, SERVANTS, and GUARDS are spread over a clearing.

Sleepy Servants cook and wash. Guards doze on their feet.

Robin and Marian quit the forest.

Robin rides the keeper's horse. Marian rides another found horse. They stop.

ROBIN

Half the day gone, and most still  
abed?

MARIAN

Rob, what's your worst sin?

ROBIN

Eh? I dabble in all seven, but pride  
shines above the rest.

MARIAN

You and Richard have a lot in common,  
you know. That's why you squabble.  
But he's king.

ROBIN

Then he should act the part.

MARIAN

Rob...

ROBIN

Three thousand Saracens surrendered  
in good faith, Marian. Richard swore  
them protection -- lied in God's  
name -- then beheaded every one.

MARIAN

And now he holds Little John captive.  
Your friend's life in the king's  
hands, and it's your fault. Yes.  
You incited John to knock the king  
arse over elbow. "If the dog bites,  
the master pays."

ROBIN

(sighs)

So what do you bid me do?

MARIAN

Put aside your pride, Rob. This quest will take more than bravery. It will take humility. "The meek shall inherit the earth."

ROBIN

You suggest I crawl to King Richard?

MARIAN

Yes, though it pains me. Kiss his ring and his arse if need be. And slather on the honey. "Some problems can't be solved with a bow", says my husband. Who do you love more, yourself or your friend?

ROBIN

You're right, Marian. As usual.

MARIAN

It's great heart makes a hero.

ROBIN

'Haps you should plead our petition. You never lose an argument.

MARIAN

That's not true.

ROBIN

As you say.

Robin and Marian ride up to the King's Guards.

CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD

Robin Hood. Good God, you've got big balls.

(shakes head)

Hang your weapons and sit over there.

ROBIN

Where shall we find - Uh!

Marian PUNCHES Robin's kidney as he dismounts.

MARIAN

Thank you, Captain. You're most kind.

Robin and Marian sit by a cook fire. They're ignored while OTHERS get fed.



MARIAN (CONT'D)  
It's neither mete nor Christian to  
let guests hunger.

ROBIN  
We're hardly guests. More like  
lepers.

MARIAN  
I'm not going to sit here hungry.

QUEEN ELEANOR of Aquitaine comes out of a tent.

Queen Eleanor is Richard's mother, actually Dowager Queen.  
She's elderly and graceful like Katherine Hepburn.

Marian thinks she's just another noblewoman.

Queen Eleanor blinks at Marian in man's clothing.

MARIAN (CONT'D)  
Good morrow, madame. We are  
petitioners seeking audience with  
King Richard. We've come a long  
way.

QUEEN ELEANOR  
And you'll likely have a long wait.  
You know our king. "Hie, to the  
hunt!" Then all night singing bawdy  
songs and all day sleeping. Will  
you take wine?

(Historical note: King Richard and Queen Eleanor spoke only  
French, no English. But for clarity they'll speak English.)

ROBIN  
(mutters)  
The bloody Crusades all over again.

MARIAN  
Yes, please, milady.

QUEEN ELEANOR  
(to SERVANTS)  
Marie. Bring wine. And something  
to eat. You. Fetch stools.

Servants suddenly bustle to treat Robin and Marian like  
royalty. They get mulled wine and breakfast.

QUEEN ELEANOR (CONT'D)  
Now then, tell me. Who are you?

MARIAN

Sir Robert and Marian Locksley, Earl  
and Countess of Huntingdon, from  
Sherwood Forest.

QUEEN ELEANOR

And where were you married, Lady  
Marian?

MARIAN

Before the doors of St. Mary's Church  
in Edwinstowe, milady.

QUEEN ELEANOR

Have you any children?

MARIAN

We've not been so blessed yet, milady.

QUEEN ELEANOR

And why have you come?

Marian bounces the question to Robin, stuffing his face.

ROBIN

Uh, well, milady... My band was,  
uh, summoned by King Richard to  
besiege a castle up in the Pennines.  
I, uh, foolishly questioned our  
illustrious king and sparked an  
argument. A tiny disagreement. But  
my manservant took umbrage and, uh,  
buffeted the king. The merest tap.  
Our doughty king hardly felt it, I'm  
sure. But we decided to, uh, quit  
the camp, and Little John was --  
detained by Richard's guards.

QUEEN ELEANOR

And now you want your friend back in  
one piece. Men. Richard's version  
was very different --

KING RICHARD (O.S.)

(huge yawn)

KING RICHARD exits his tent, having just woken.

King Richard is 30 YO, a tall strong blonde with a blonde  
beard. He wears red smallclothes and a small circlet crown.

King Richard comes to get breakfast, then spots Robin Hood.

KING RICHARD (CONT'D)  
Behold the devil in green. Is there  
no forest our most prickly subject  
does not infest?

Richard is surprised as Robin kneels and kisses his ring.

ROBIN  
Your majesty, gracious Richard, fair  
king, please forgive my impudence.  
I've suffered the tortures of Hell  
since that black day my man laid  
hand to you. I've prayed to the  
Good Lord night and day and made  
pilgrimage here to prostrate myself  
and humbly beg forgiveness --

RICHARD  
And who might this be? Surely not  
the Scion of Sherwood, bold Robin  
Hood, King of Sherwood.  
(to Queen)  
Good morning, Mama.

Marian is shocked she didn't recognize the Queen. She kneels.

MARIAN  
The devil take my tongue! I am so  
sorry, your majesty! I beg --

QUEEN ELEANOR  
No fuss. Words from the heart ring  
true. Lord Huntingdon, pray continue.  
I would hear your plea.

ROBIN  
Your majesty. Ever thy servant, I  
have journeyed these many miles to  
offer my apologies. Do as you will,  
kill me if you must. I cannot live  
without thy forgiveness.

KING RICHARD  
(growing hot)  
Kill you? I should have all your  
Merry Men and Women rooted out like  
badgers. You and your upstart  
vagabonds are a living insult to  
royalty.

ROBIN  
I am deeply sorry, sire, for my many  
offenses. I've only tried to follow  
your example. I, uh -

MARIAN

The king makes the kingdom.

ROBIN

Aye. If England has indomitable warriors, it's because our king is the most righteous and fierce in Christendom.

KING RICHARD

That's true.

ROBIN

Saladin himself, emperor of the Saracens, proclaimed you his noblest opponent, who stood like a rock when lesser kings washed away. Who broke the siege of Acre. Who scourged heathens up and down the Holy Land. Who brought God's army within a stone's throw of Jerusalem --

KING RICHARD

And failed to capture it because miscreants deserted our holy campaign.

ROBIN

I, uh, failed to grasp its, uh, import at the time, sire.

KING RICHARD

"Coward" is a word we remember. "A traitor to honor" another.

ROBIN

Still, "A great man can't be insulted by a fool."

KING RICHARD

Bah. Your simpering sickens even my dogs. And you've not come to beg forgiveness nor to lavish praise. You only wish your giant friend back.

ROBIN

No, your majesty, I only --

KING RICHARD

The truth.

ROBIN

Yes, your majesty.

KING RICHARD

Gad, what a liar. You make my brother  
Sound like the Pope.

(beat)

Little John of the Horny Fist.  
Another who should be executed: drawn  
and quartered, disemboweled, burnt  
to ashes, and shoveled into the sea.

ROBIN

He saved your majesty's life on the  
battlefield.

KING RICHARD

T'was his duty, nothing more.

ROBIN

My liege, might you release Little  
John and take me in his stead? T'was  
my folly that brought him low.

KING RICHARD

There's a sacrifice worthy of a  
ballad. No, I don't need another  
headstrong stallion who seizes the  
reins. We had to behead those  
Saracens else they'd have taken up  
arms again. Is that not true?

ROBIN

It was -- was --

MARIAN

Speaking of beheadings, how goes the  
hunting, your majesty?

(huh?)

I ask because your royal forester  
was murdered. We found Sir Argent  
yester morn, ambushed by a night  
rider and hellhounds and decapitated.

KING RICHARD

This island... Trees and sheep and  
madmen, and always wet.

MARIAN

Robin could catch the phantom, your  
majesty. Bring to heel this fiend  
who's injured the king's official.

KING RICHARD

Is that true?

ROBIN

Set a thief to catch a thief.

KING RICHARD

Very well. Find this phantom and deliver him for punishment.

(Robin waits)

And we'll pardon your iron--fisted friend.

MARIAN

Your majesty, Robin could fare quicker with royal authority. Since you've lost a head forester, why not appoint a new one?

ROBIN

What, me? Are you mad?

MARIAN

Rob. You've been a butcher, a potter, a miller and a tanner. Isn't it time you were a king's forester?

(to King)

Has your majesty a clerk and quill?

King Richard waves at a CLERK and goes to dress.

A little later...

A clerk finishes a letter appointing Robin as Royal Keeper of the New Forest.

King Richard returns, dressed to hunt. Stamps the letter.

KING RICHARD

Wherefore suffer these travails, Locksley? Why chase one man the length of the land? Haven't you other friends?

ROBIN

Your majesty, for all the songs sing, I've precious few friends in one tiny band. Fame -- distances people.

KING RICHARD

We know it too well. A king has a thousand followers but no friends.

(beat)

Still, you needs know who's king and who's subject.

(to Captain)

Captain of the Guard. Scourge this outlaw. A dozen lashes laid on hard. Nay, a score.

Marian CHIRPS. Robin is shocked -- and furious.

Guards grab Robin, TEAR his shirt, and lash him to a tree.

ROBIN

I need no bonds, you bloody bastards.

Robin is bound anyway. Then WHIPPED, 20 hard lashes.

Robin seethes with anger and agony. Then blacks out.

EXT. FOREST TRAIL -- AFTERNOON

Marian rides and tows Robin's horse, him slung over the saddle. Robin revives.

MARIAN

How do you feel?

ROBIN

Like an acorn -- caught between --  
grindstones.

MARIAN

Some nuts even grindstones can't  
crack.

EXT. ROYAL FOREST HALL

Lyndhurst is a village surrounded by small fields and then forest. It's center-most village in the New Forest.

Forester's Hall is a rude building with a cramped Forest Office and a seldom-used Meeting Hall. PETITIONERS wait outside.

Robin, on the Keeper's Horse, and Marian ride up.

Two forestry clerks, SLOAN and COURTLAND, run out.

SLOAN is 40 YO, burly and bald. He wears a green shirt with a forester's bow-and-arrow emblem, skullcap, and hose.

COURTLAND is 20 YO, handsome, callow. Same uniform.

Robin dismounts, stiff from his whipping. His ripped shirt, tattered to begin with, hangs in rags.

SLOAN

What are you doing on the keeper's  
horse?

ROBIN  
I'm the new keeper. King Richard  
appointed me and then flogged me by  
way of christening.

Robin shows the royal letter. Weirded out, he slips on the  
Keeper's ring.

MARIAN  
How does it feel?

ROBIN  
Chill as death.

SLOAN  
Well, uh, welcome, your lordship,  
greetings. Would you care to refresh  
at the lodge?

ROBIN  
Lodge?

SLOAN  
Foxarbre is the royal keeper's home.

MARIAN  
Then I'll ride to the lodge and have  
dinner readied.

SLOAN  
Courtland, escort Lady Hood to the  
lodge.

ROBIN  
She's not Lady Hood. She's Lady  
Huntingdon. Marian Locksley. It's  
complicated.

MARIAN  
Call me Lady Marian.

SLOAN  
(eyeing Robin's rags)  
I don't know if you were told, but  
the royal keeper receives an annual  
salary of two horses, one saddle,  
five lances, one spear, one shield,  
and two hundred shillings of silver.

MARIAN  
Two hundred shillings?

ROBIN  
Five lances?



SLOAN

There's a good needlewoman in the village, is what I meant. The king's forester may also slay a deer every fortnight for his own table, or to sell.

ROBIN

Shoot the king's deer? Heaven forbid.

Marian rides off with Courtland as escort.

SLOAN

If you please, I'll show you our humble office.

ROBIN

What's an office?

Petitioners jabber.

PETITIONERS

Sir, my pigs...

Sir, I trucked bark...

Milord, my neighbor's cow...

Ignoring petitioners, Robin and Sloan enter.

INT. ROYAL FOREST OFFICE

The Forest Office has tables awash in parchments, scrolls, maps, books, and way too much paperwork.

Robin looks bewildered.

SLOAN

I'm Sloan, senior bailiff of the New Forest twelve years and more, and glad to see you here for the swainmote. It begins with Fence Month, but Sir Argent pronounced it an eyre also. Both commence in six days. Courtland updates the attachment rolls to reckon who's to be essoined and who amerced as the hundredmen report. Your foresters have brought pleas of vert and venison, but the Cistercians refuse to send their woodward because Sir Argent imposed cheminage on their mutton --

ROBIN  
God's love, desist. I don't care  
how you run the forest.

SLOAN  
How can you not? You're royal keeper,  
milord.

ROBIN  
Don't "milord" me. I hate that.  
Call me -- Sir Robert.

SLOAN  
And your title? The royal forester  
can be known as the Keeper, or Royal  
Keeper, or the Chief Man of the  
Forest, or Forest Warden, or Steward,  
or Marshal --

ROBIN  
Christ, I don't care. I'm only tasked  
with finding who killed the last  
keeper.

SLOAN  
Ah. Sir Argent's passing. He was a  
doughty knight --

ROBIN  
And who do they say killed him?

SLOAN  
A black knight with some old  
grievance? Who can say?  
(changing subject)  
We did hope the new forester could  
stem the thefts of forest property.

ROBIN  
Thefts? What do people steal?

SLOAN  
Everything a forest is made of: trees,  
bark, leaves, bushes, water, animals,  
mast. Chiefly, the land itself. An  
absent forester abets crime.

ROBIN  
Well, now you've got one appointed  
by King Richard.

SLOAN  
Ah, yes, the king.

ROBIN

What?

SLOAN

King Richard loves this forest so much he's sold off entire tracts. Sold the same tracts several times, in fact.

ROBIN

The bugger's always strapped for cash. He conquered Cyprus just to palm it off. Who's the local forester?

SLOAN

Oswin for Lyndhurst, Sir Robert.

ROBIN

Fetch him. I've questions a-plenty.

Sloan flips a penny to a BOY at the door. Boy runs off.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

How many foresters all told?

SLOAN

Nine for nine bailiwicks.

ROBIN

Nine? Sherwood only boasts six foresters. How big is this bloody place?

SLOAN

The Domesday Book counts the New Forest as twelve hundred ploughlands. Seven leagues a side, more or less.

ROBIN

Christ on the cross. You could hide a bleeding army. How the hell am I to find one man -- or one phantom?

SLOAN

Perhaps this will help, Sir Robert.

Sloan provides a map of the forest. Robin studies.

ROBIN

You said a forest court is to begin in six days? How long's it been since the last?

SLOAN  
Nineteen years, sir.

ROBIN  
Jesus. And the court'll gather  
witnesses to tell who owns what and  
who poaches what?

SLOAN  
In a word, sir.

ROBIN  
And the royal keeper was assassinated  
a week before't? Did Sir Argent  
plan to accuse any particular  
blackguards?

SLOAN  
Sir Argent was only keeper these  
past nine months, sir.

ROBIN  
Who was keeper before him?

OSWIN, a forester, enters.

Oswin is young, tanned. Wears a hunting horn and short sword.  
He has a Dog. He's shy.

OSWIN  
You wished t'see me, master?

ROBIN  
Yes, but call me Sir Robert. You're  
forester for the Lyndhurst bailiwick?

OSWIN  
Mum's actually the forester, sir.  
She inherited it after my da died.

ROBIN  
So you're deputy forester? Good.  
Show me on the map where this  
bailiwick wends.

OSWIN  
I don't know from maps, sir. I knows  
more metes and bounds.

ROBIN  
Where -- do -- you -- walk?

OSWIN

(picturing mentally)

I walk from Costiclos Pond along  
 Illurst Lodge to the old clay pits.  
 Thence to Butcher's Brook. Then I  
 turn above Brockenhurst and walk to  
 the Queen's Bower --

SLOAN

Butcher's Brook doesn't run to  
 Brockenhurst. That's Red Run.

OSWIN

(showing spirit)

Nay. T'is so Butcher's Brook.

SLOAN

Butcher's Brook is named for the cow  
 skeleton that lies by the beck, that  
 made folks think t'was poison.

OSWIN

It runs blood red in the autumn from  
 the maples at its headwater. Shows  
 what you know. A man who sits a  
 stool all day.

ROBIN

Men. Hoy. Oswin, have you seen  
 anything unusual on your walks? Do  
 you walk out at night? Have you  
 seen any -- mysterious riders?

OSWIN

No. I've -- heard tales.

ROBIN

Tales of what?

OSWIN

A friend of mine was out one night.  
 A'right, poaching. He heard hoof  
 beats and dogs but never any bayin'.  
 He hid and they didn't find 'im.

ROBIN

Where?

OSWIN

Not far from Burchenwood. Four miles  
 north.

(they wait)

Tha's all. Was it that rider 'as  
 caught Argent and -- chopped 'im?

ROBIN

So some say. But you've seen naught  
yourself? No tracks? No dog spoor?  
No hoof prints? Do you ever see the  
other foresters?

OSWIN

Nay, never.

Sloan produces a pay roster.

SLOAN

All nine foresters will attend the  
forest court.

ROBIN

That's good. Still, it's my task to  
know the forest. I intend to  
perambulate it.

SLOAN

Is that wise, Sir Robert? Considering  
what happened to Sir Argent?

ROBIN

Can you think of a better way to  
flush the Wild Huntsman?

Sloan and Oswin genuflect.

EXT. FOREST -- NIGHT

HOOFBEATS DRUM as the Wild Huntsman rides with his silent  
Hellhounds.

INT. KEEPER'S LODGE -- NIGHT

The Keeper's Lodge is a cottage for the Royal Forester.  
It's neat with a garden and outbuildings and livestock.

Robin and Marian eat dinner as SERVANTS stand at the wall.

MARIAN

So you plan to ride 'round the forest  
as bait.

ROBIN

No, I thought to troll you as bait.  
Who could resist such a tasty morsel?

(MORE)

ROBIN (CONT'D)

(looks around)

Must the servants watch? This table  
would seat all of us.

MARIAN

These are not your Merry Men.

ROBIN

For certes. The New Forest has only  
Morbid Men. None dare set foot  
outside of an evening.

MARIAN

There's one. The Wild Huntsman.  
And I've been thinking. Barring  
that he's a ghost, we already know  
somewhat about him.

ROBIN

Such as?

MARIAN

He's a man. Rides well. Keeps dogs  
and a black horse. Owns a sword and  
uses it.

ROBIN

So a knight.

MARIAN

So perhaps you don't want a circuit  
of the forest, but a circuit of  
castles. As royal keeper, each master  
must admit you.

ROBIN

Like Daniel into a lion's den. If  
we raise suspicion, the Huntsman's  
likely to go to ground.

MARIAN

Could you command every Knight to  
attend the forest court? To see  
them here?

ROBIN

I could, but I doubt they'd come.  
Not many love King Richard.

MARIAN

How far could the Huntsman ride of a  
night?

ROBIN

Far. This forest is cut with as many paths as London with streets. All the better for folks to steal everything between earth and sky, to hear the clerks talk.

MARIAN

Then perhaps best you bespeak each forester. They should know what transpires in their bailiwicks. If all be honest.

ROBIN

I can spot a lie if I look a man in the face.

MARIAN

Then we're set. Tomorrow at dawn we ride the New Forest.

ROBIN

Ride 'round Robin Hood's barn, as they say in Nottingham.

EXT. FOREST -- DAY

Robin and Marian, both dressed as foresters, ride.

TYBALT is their guide, grizzled and dour, with two Dogs.

Robin reads his map.

ROBIN

Cast a hook and catch a fish. East, John the Comely is out walking his bailiwick, according to his wife. Southeast, Gregory's quit, but his brother Darryl's ta'en his place.

MARIAN

Draws his wages, at any rate.

ROBIN

Aye. So, with Oswin, that's three foresters met.

MARIAN

How passing strange. In Sherwood you tear down pales. Here you erect them. You know not if you're hare or hound.



ROBIN

A man's what the land makes him. In  
Sherwood I'm king. In the New Forest,  
king's keeper.

Tybalt stops at a big dead tree.

TYBALT

This's where the king was killed.

MARIAN

Killed?

ROBIN

What king?

TYBALT

Rufus.

MARIAN

You mean... William Rufus? Son of  
the Conqueror? Didn't he die in a  
hunting accident?

TYBALT

Some say Walter Tyrell shot the king  
accidentally. Others say the forest  
took vengeance.

ROBIN

Vengeance for what?

TYBALT

Enforesting. This land belonged to  
Saxons, and they found much joy on  
it. But William and then Rufus pushed  
the people off their land: banished  
'em at spear point, razed crofts,  
burned chapels, poisoned the wells.  
All to run deer for royalty.

(beat)

Rufus came to shoot deer and was  
shot. This oak shadows the spot  
where he died. It blossoms every  
year on Christmas morn.

ROBIN

Kings do what they will.

MARIAN

That must be a hundred years a'gone.

TYBALT

Like yesterday to some.

Later...

Robin, Marian, and Tybalt ride along tree blazed with the King's broad arrow mark.

TYBALT (CONT'D)  
These marks --

ROBIN  
King's broad arrow. Marks the border  
of the forest.

Tybalt stops at a rise. Robin checks his map. A castle encroaches where forest has been cut back.

ROBIN (CONT'D)  
(checking map)  
If the forest border runs there,  
then someone -- Lord Kendon, Viscount  
of Chalmerson, looks like -- hagged  
these birches illegally.

TYBALT  
I wouldn't know. It's for foresters  
to bring charges.

ROBIN  
(marking map)  
This bailiwick is overseen by...  
Dysart. He must've seen the theft --  
if he ever comes out here.

MARIAN  
'Haps Dysart'll bring charges at the  
forest court.

ROBIN  
He'd better, or I'll find a new  
forester.

They turn back into the forest.

They hear AXES CHOPPING wood. And find...

... Four surly men and two boys are TREE BARKERS. They chop bark from giant oaks. Which girdles the trees and will kill them. They heap bark in a cart.

As the strangers approach, the Barkers hold axes and mattocks, menacing.

ROBIN (CONT'D)  
What are you men about?

BARKING LEADER

Barkin'.

ROBIN

I can see that. Where will you take the bark?

BARKING LEADER

Salisbury.

ROBIN

To a tannery? You have permission to gall these trees?

BARKING LEADER

They're bark--bound.

ROBIN

That's an old wife's tale. A tree can't be constricted by its own bark. And you cut to heartwood. These trees will die. And rining season's over anyway.

BARKING LEADER

We don't need permission. Those as once lived here had right of barkbote.

ROBIN

And who are they?

BARKING LEADER

The villagers of Tirnanset, Babred, and Caersil, for some.

Robin consults his map.

ROBIN

I don't find those villages.

BARKING LEADER

Not any more. They were razed by the king. Laid waste so royalty might ride to the hounds.

ROBIN

Well, today's your last day. For any harvesting, you needs apply to the bailiffs at Lyndhurst.

BARKING LEADER

So say you? Another usurping lord come late to claim the wide world?

Robin and Barker glare. Marian knees her horse between them.

MARIAN

Come on, Rob. We'll be late.

They ride off. Tree Barkers watch them go.

MARIAN (CONT'D)

Right or wrong, Rob, we'd be unwise  
to rile four sturdy men with mattoxes  
in a lonely grove.

ROBIN

True enow. But I mislike the churls'  
barefaced gall. Claiming authority  
from villages destroyed a hundred  
years ago.

TYBALT

Sixty villages all told.

ROBIN

Poppycock. There were never sixty  
villages from Wessex to Kent --  
(beat)  
Where were they bound? Salisbury?  
Why's that name familiar?

TYBALT

Hanging stones are there, a big ring  
of them.

MARIAN

Hanging stones? Stonehenge?

TYBALT

Tha's the place.

EXT. FOREST -- EVENING

Tired, Robin, Marian, and Tybalt turn down a beaten road.

TYBALT

There's a manor not far. Lord  
Fritham's. We can claim puture.

ROBIN

Puture... A forester's claim to  
food for himself and beasts. Is  
Lord Fritham Saxon or Norman?

TYBALT

Come with the invader.

ROBIN  
Ah. New neighbors, only been here  
six-score years.

MARIAN  
'Hasp we'd best array in skins and  
wode.

ROBIN  
I'll help paint your body.

EXT. FRITHAM'S MANOR -- EVENING

A big wooden mead hall surrounded by fields.

They dismount. A STABLEBOY takes their Horses. Wide doors  
stand open in summertime.

MARIAN  
Something smells delicious.

ROBIN  
I could eat one of Tybalt's dogs.

LORD "FRITZ" FRITHAM comes to the door, napkin under his  
chin.

Lord "Fritz" Fritham is 35 YO, a burly knight.

FRITZ  
Robert?

ROBIN  
Fritz!

Robin and Fritz back-slap and hug. Marian and Tybalt marvel.

INT. FRITHAM'S HALL -- NIGHT

Robin and Marian dine with Fritz and LADY FRITHAM.

LADY FRITHAM is a 32 YO sour prude.

FRITZ  
Robert! By God, I haven't seen you  
since you were captured! Pitch in,  
drink up! Oh, say. Remember that  
mad monk? Horace the Horrid? Called  
us all cowards?  
(MORE)

FRITZ (CONT'D)

Grabbed the bishop's gonfalon and  
raced for the Saracen lines with the  
Germans after him screaming? And  
then we dug in our heels? And the  
Saracens are laughing while they  
kill 'em all, and hoist Horace on a  
cross and fill him full of arrows,  
and us cheering them on? Remember  
that?

Marian looks at all the stuffed heads of deer on the walls.

MARIAN

(to LADY Fritham)

Your husband likes to hunt?

LADY FRITHAM

That's all he likes to do. That and  
waste good food and ale.

MARIAN

I... see.

(to Robin)

You never told me about this old  
chum.

ROBIN

(whispering)

Just a comrade-in-arms. I scarce  
said three words to Fritz in the  
Holy Land. But if he wants to fete  
us...

Men get drunk. TOSTIG arrives. His wife, MADGE, hangs back.

Sir Tostig is 25 YO, handsome and well-built.

Lady Madge is 24 YO and much like Marian.

Tostig stands at attention before Fritham.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

(tipsy)

You were at Acre. Sir -- Tostig.  
You led the charge out of ambush in  
that rill. You were grave wounded,  
but fought so brave we got away.

TOSTIG

God favors fools. Welcome, Sir  
Robert.

ROBIN

D'ya live near here? Where's your  
fief?

Awkward silence. Marian nods to Tostig's emblem painted on  
his gypon. It's Fritham's blaze with a white horse added.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

Oh, I see. You're --

TOSTIG

Lord Fritham is my liege.

FRITZ

Did you get our cattle back from the  
pindar?

TOSTIG

No, milord. He's chivvied them to a  
pound at Bramshaw. Insists we  
register a brand and pay thruppence  
a head to pan.

FRITZ

Damn his eyes, and yours. Ride there  
first thing in the morning and seize  
them. Thrash the wastrel if  
necessary.

TOSTIG

As you wish, milord. Do we sup?

FRITZ

What? Oh. Yes. Fetch your wife.

Tostig and Madge sit with Robin and Marian.

TOSTIG

My wife, Lady Madge. Sir Robert and  
Lady Marian of -- I'm so sorry.

ROBIN

Locksley Hall, Tostig, exists only  
in memory. I'm charmed, Lady Madge.  
My lovely wife, Marian Locksley,  
born Fitzooth.

MADGE

Welcome to the New Forest, Lady  
Marian.

MARIAN

Just Marian, please. I see your  
hands stained yellow. Is that  
dandelion juice?

MADGE

Swallow-wort. You break the stems  
to cure warts.

MARIAN

Does it work? I've heard it sharpens  
the sight... Etc.

FRITZ

(drunk)

What about the time the Bishop of  
Wherever comes around, but not wearing  
his surcoat, and demands that big  
blonde fellow surrender his jug, and  
the bloke breaks it over his head?  
Oh, we ran like rabbits. And just  
in time, for the Saracens sent a  
hail of arrows killed both where  
they stood. Oh, Robert, this is  
grand. We must hunt on the morrow.

ROBIN

Aye. And in my company, you can  
hunt where'er you please. S'one of  
the benefits of being royal forester.

FRITZ

What? You're joking. Sir Argent is --

ROBIN

Dead. Someone chopped his head off.

FRITZ

Christ on the cross, who did that?

ROBIN

We'll find out. That's why I've  
been appointed head forester.

MARIAN

By King Richard himself.

TOSTIG

King Richard?

FRITZ

Is this true?

(suddenly angry)

Then get out. Both of you. A royal  
forester dares break my bread? Get  
out. All of ye. Out.

ROBIN

Fritz!



FRITZ  
Begone afore I sic the dogs on you!

MARIAN  
We'd best go, Rob.

Before Robin can lose his temper, Marian tows him out. Tostig and Madge follow. The doors BOOM closed.

EXT. FRITHAM'S MANOR -- NIGHT

ROBIN  
That bastard. That bitch-son. That pumped-up little prick. He's got no right to pitch us out.

TOSTIG  
Fritz has no love for foresters.

ROBIN  
No excuse. It's churlish. It's --

MARIAN  
Likely God's jest. Who's plagued more foresters than Robin Hood?

MADGE  
Bide with us, pray. We've only a humble croft, but we'd be honored to shelter such renowned guests.

MARIAN  
Such gentle hosts would rend a stable a castle.

The four walk toward a cottage surrounded by gardens.

ROBIN  
I don't get Fritz's prejudice. Why's he death on foresters?

TOSTIG  
He's fond of hunting.

ROBIN  
Well, aren't we all? Wait. This manor is surrounded by the king's holdings for leagues in all directions. Where does Fritz hunt?

Tostig just looks: Duh...

EXT. TOSTIG AND MADGE'S COTTAGE -- DAWN

Robin staggers outside to piss. He's hung over.

Tybalt, their guide, arrives.

ROBIN

Tybalt. Where'd you disappear?

TYBALT

Sat up with the fewterer samplin'  
'is scrumpie, then slept in the  
stable. Rose before dawn to catch  
breakfast.

Tybalt holds up two bloody dead Rabbits. Robin URPS.

Tybalt exits to clean the rabbits.

Marian returns from the bushes. Tostig carries cordwood  
inside.

MARIAN

Tostig and Madge are doubly kind.  
They're poor as church mice. Tostig  
splits his own wood, Madge does all  
the cooking. Not a servant's hand  
to attend.

ROBIN

It must cost Tostig deep just to  
keep Knighthood. A horse is more  
expensive than a wife.

MARIAN

More docile, too.

Tostig comes out for more wood. Madge picks herbs.

ROBIN

Tos, a word? How far extends Fritz's  
resentment of foresters? Sir Argent  
was beheaded in the road. Could  
Fritz have ordered such a thing?

TOSTIG

Fritz? Never.

MADGE

We've heard diverse rumors. Who  
lopped his head off?

MARIAN

Lopped it off and stole it away.  
But what did you hear?

TOSTIG

T'was brigands, some say.  
Unchivalrous Crusaders who rob and  
kill innocents because of the horrors  
they've suffered.

ROBIN

What else?

MADGE

Breton pirates out to kidnap folk to  
France as slaves?

ROBIN

Wilder and wilder. Simple felons  
would leave the corpse its head.

MADGE

(to Marian)

Will you tarry the day? I'd love to  
share my garden.

MARIAN

I'd love to see it.

ROBIN

We needs find the local forester.

TOSTIG

Kenneth? I can take you to him.

MARIAN

Then may I stay? And see the gardens?

MADGE

And we can bake.

ROBIN

I'm powerless against one wife. Two  
could shunt God off his throne.  
Lead on, good fellow. Couldn't ask  
for better company to brace an ambush.

Robin and Tostig ride off with Tybalt.

Madge gives Marian a tour of her GARDEN.

MADGE

It's a mess. Too many plants to  
weed properly.

(MORE)

MADGE (CONT'D)

And this the month for drying. "Prune  
in the wane of the moon." I'm a  
neglectful earth mother.

MARIAN

No, it's lovely. Tell me their names,  
please.

MADGE

Belladonna. Yarrow and sage for  
divination. That's iris in purple--  
red, very rare. Chamomile to sleep.  
Vervain. Watch the cat, don't let  
her kill the butterflies. Let's  
see. Verbena to protect sailors  
against storms.

Madge holds out her hand with crumbs and attracts birds.

MARIAN

You have many -- dangerous plants.

MADGE

Even monk's hood and henbane have  
uses. Everything attends God's Master  
Plan.

MARIAN

I'm jealous. We can't keep a garden  
in Sherwood, the kine are so thick.

Madge picks up a basket of herbs and crocks.

MADGE

I have healing rounds. Care to  
accompany?

Marian and Madge walk a rutted path.

INT. PEASANT COTTAGE -- DAY

Madge knocks at the door. Marian follows.

CLODAY is a young wife. ALARICE is an old blind woman.

CLODAY

Oh, Lady Madge. Mother, two ladies  
to see you.

MARIAN

Scarcely a lady without a skirt to  
my name.

ALARICE

(mock horror)

Blessed be, child, what do you go  
about in? Come and sit by the fire.  
Lady Madge, whose new voice is  
pleasant as a nightingale's?

MADGE

Lady Marian of Sherwood Forest.

ALARICE

(takes Marian's hand)

Heavens, milady, you've the calluses  
of a bowman. Spend your life hunting  
and hawking?

MARIAN

More hunted than hunting.

MADGE

How's your cough, Alarice? Did that  
black clock help?

ALARICE

Yes, yes. The beetle drew all the  
poison. I thank you, dear. How  
many children have you, Lady Marian?

MARIAN

We've yet to be so blessed,  
Grandmother. Oft--times I fear I'm  
barren.

MADGE

Just as well. Get with child and  
your husband'll start rutting girls  
who've barely ta'en Communion.

ALARICE

God grants in His own good time.

MADGE

How else fare you, Alarice?

ALARICE

I'm old, plagued with ague and  
rheumatism, but above ground rather  
than below't.

MADGE

For ague, have a woodman cut the  
first branch of a maiden ash in your  
name.

MARIAN

For rheumatism, I can send eelskins  
for garters. The sheriff builds an  
eel pond at Lyndhurst.

ALARICE

An eel pond? That's news. I heard  
too the royal forester was beheaded?

MARIAN

True. No one's found the perpetrator.

ALARICE

Passing strange, so many beheaded  
these past months.

MARIAN

What?

ALARICE

Haps, haps not. Durwin from Falsanger  
went to cut wood and never come back.  
A boy found his bones scattered by  
wolves, but never a skull. Others've  
gone missing... Ailsa left one night,  
but probably with a man, for her  
father's cruel... Naldo, a carpenter.  
He was footloose, liked to stop and  
tell me news. But since last summer,  
he's never come 'round.

MARIAN

You've mulled this awhile.

ALARICE

I can't see, so I listen and remember.  
Folks have grown skittish of late,  
bolting their shutters and carving  
crosses in the wood. There's always  
been mischief--makers who imitate  
elves and devil--dancers, but...

MARIAN

Have you heard aught of -- the Wild  
Huntsman?

ALARICE

Long ago. T'was him took Rufus in  
these very woods. The son of the  
Conqueror, cut down in his prime,  
his death foretold by Merlin.

MADGE

"The father took the forest and the  
forest took the son."

EXT. WITCH'S CIRCLE -- NIGHT

In the forest, in the circle of nine posts stands a dolmen:  
a tall stone table. Below is a sacrificial stone: an altar.

A Witch Cult dances around a fire to eerie MUSIC.

CULTISTS

I would be saved and I would save!  
Amen! I would be loosed and I would  
loose! Amen! I would be wounded  
and I would wound! Amen! I would  
be born and I would bear! Amen! I  
would eat and I would be eaten!  
Amen! I would mourn, lament ye all!  
Amen! Devil, devil!

EXT. FOREST -- DAY

PEASANTS cut up an oak. Kenneth helps.

KENNETH is short and dark, dressed like a forester.

TOSTIG

Kenneth. This be the new royal  
keeper, Sir Robert.

KENNETH

(just nods)

ROBIN

(unrolls map)

Kenneth, can you mark me the metes  
and bounds of your bailiwick?

KENNETH

I don't read maps, milord.

ROBIN

I'm a good listener. Describe it,  
please.

KENNETH

S'hard to describe to a stranger,  
sir.

TOSTIG

I can help. I've ridden most of it.

KENNETH

Well now... If you skirted Eyeworth  
Wood where't strikes Hampton Ridge,  
tha's the forest's north bound.

TOSTIG

So then it's south past Wolmer Post  
at Hatchet Green to meet the road at  
Downton Common... Etc.

Kenneth and Tostig piece the route. Robin marks his map.

ROBIN

At last to Ibbesley on the river?  
Another forester lives there. John  
O'Gaunt.

KENNETH

I don't know him.

ROBIN

Never met him? Your bailiwicks  
adjoin.

TOSTIG

This is the biggest walk in the  
forest. And in some places alder  
and willow are impassable. And bogs  
and sedge can suck a man down. None'd  
ever find your bones.

ROBIN

Have you discovered any encroachments?  
Charges to introduce at court?

KENNETH

Court, milord?

ROBIN

The forest court. It commences with  
Fence Month, day after tomorrow.  
You've no attachments?

TOSTIG

We're a law-abiding bunch, Robert.  
Most offenses are settled in the  
sheriff's circuit court.

ROBIN

Fair enough. Thankee, Kenneth.

Tostig and Robin ride off.



ROBIN (CONT'D)

Strange Kenneth knew not about the court. Someone must have sent word.

TOSTIG

Your scribblers are all at odds with the death of Sir Argent, I'd say. And Kenneth's not inquisitive.

ROBIN

Well enow. A curious mind is a curse. And speaking of curses, I hope we can untangle Madge and Marian's tongues.

TOSTIG

A happy wife makes a happy house. You two must stop by again.

ROBIN

Yes, it's good talking and riding with you.

TOSTIG

And racing.

ROBIN

Racing? Hey!

Tostig boots his horse and races off laughing. Robin chases.

EXT. TOSTIG AND MADGE'S COTTAGE -- DAY

Madge and Marian work dyeing. Robin and Tostig dismount.

ROBIN

Marian. We must away to make the forest court on the morrow.

MARIAN

Rob, might I linger? Madge invites me to work on her garden. If I return, I'll only languish like Rapunzel in the keeper's lodge. I can join you in a few days, I promise.

ROBIN

Stay if you will, turtledove. I can deny you nothing. Certes I'll have little time to spoil you.

Robin mounts. Madge tucks comfrey in Robin's boot.

MADGE  
For a safe journey.

TOSTIG  
I'd escort you back to Lyndhurst,  
but I've duties to discharge.

Robin kisses Marian and rides off.

MADGE  
You know, Marian, there's one sight  
you must see. It's not far, two  
days' ride.

MARIAN  
Two days? Won't that carry us far  
from the forest?

MADGE  
This sight is worth it. A locus for  
spiritualism. You'll never see it's  
like.

INT. FOREST HALL -- DAY

Plank tables and benches now fill the room.

PEASANTS and FORESTERS and FOREST WORKERS gossip and wait.  
Sloan and his Clerks sit at a table.

Robin sits at table with FOUR KNIGHTS, local officials  
appointed to run the forest court.

PEOPLE outside frolic on an unofficial holiday.

BAILIFF  
Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye! By order  
of his righteous majesty, King Richard  
the Lionheart, and the authority  
vested in his justice, the Chief  
Forester Sir Robert Locksley, Earl  
of Huntingdon, I pronounce this forest  
eyre officially open! Heed these  
words... Etc.

COURT KNIGHT  
A good showing, eh, milord?

ROBIN  
I wish we didn't begin on a Friday.  
And I'm glad you four will judge the  
charges. I'm no good at it.

COURT KNIGHT

As you say. As verderers we're familiar with the king's letters patent.

ROBIN

What's the king's letters patent?

COURT KNIGHT

(queer look)

What he's reading... Might I ask how you come to be royal keeper?

ROBIN

I'm -- a friend of the king. I mean, I've never been to a forest court before --

(shuts up)

SLOAN

We shall hear pleas of the forest. Call Laura of Swinsley Ford.

BAILIFF

Laura of Swinsley Ford!

No reply. Sloan calls the next case.

SLOAN

Call Cibber of Swinsley Ford.

BAILIFF

Cibber of Swinsley Ford!

No reply. Sloan moves on.

SLOAN

Ackerly of Exbury?

BAILIFF

Ackerly of Exbury, stand hither!

THREE PEASANTS approach. An ELDER PEASANT is their spokesman.

SLOAN

You are?

ELDER PEASANT

Kieron of Swinsley Ford, head of the hundred. These be Richmond and Talbot. We testify Laura of Swinsley Ford died two winters past in her sleep.

SLOAN  
She trespassed against venison by  
having it in her croft.

ELDER PEASANT  
It were offal sir, heart and lights.  
She were a widow and someone give it  
her to make an umble pie.

SLOAN  
Who gave it to her?

Peasants shrug. Everyone turns to Robin.

SLOAN (CONT'D)  
Your wish, milord?

ROBIN  
Uh, an old woman was accused of forest  
thievery when it was only deer guts  
good for dogs?

SLOAN  
So it appears, milord. Your decision?

ROBIN  
Dismissed?

SLOAN  
The charge was made, milord. It  
can't be dismissed.

COURT KNIGHT  
In mercy.

SLOAN  
Amerced.

Sloan makes a note and passes it to Clerks.

ROBIN  
Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. How many  
charges are there?

COURT KNIGHT  
Hundreds. It's been nineteen years  
since the last court.

Robin slips out the door.

EXT. FOREST HALL

PEOPLE mill, selling chickens, gaming, kids running.

Six foresters loll in the shade, on call. Oswin, DYSART,  
BRAM OF BRAMSHAW, JOHN THE COMELY, DAG OF DIGBEN, ZACHARY.

ROBIN

Good day, Oswin. You are?

FORESTERS

Dysart.  
Bram of Bramshaw.  
John the Comely, they call me.  
Dag of Digben.  
Zachary.

ROBIN

Six of nine. Not to punish the  
present, but where are the slackers?  
Where's Kenneth? I bespoke him just  
yestereve.

(foresters shrug)

Nor Darryl, nor John O' Gaunt. Oh,  
Dysart, you walk the east. Hear  
aught of King Richard?

DYSART

I heard he gathered a mort of money  
and sent it with some Knights to  
France to buy horses and supplies  
for his summer campaigns. Only they  
spent it all on whores.

(all laugh)

ROBIN

"Like people, like priest." Have  
any of you seen anything queer?  
Dangerous? Frightening?

FORESTERS

Well, it never profits to stray by  
night. Devils walk about. So do  
will o' the wisps who'll lure you  
into a bog. Friendly women. That's  
a trap set by Satan. Black dogs.

ROBIN

The devil I seek is the Wild Huntsman.

(silence)

(unrolls map)

Look. Here the mischief started.  
Along the road that splits the  
bailiwicks of Kenneth and John  
O'Gaunt.

(beat)

Oh. I just noticed. The spot where  
Argent fell lies only a league from  
Fritz Fritham's manor...

EXT. STONEHENGE -- DAY

Still in forest, Madge and Marian ride horses.

MARIAN  
You still haven't told me -- Oh.

MADGE  
This be the place. Stonehenge.

Stonehenge LOOMS, surrounded by forest, eerie and spectacular.

(Stonehenge may have been surrounded by forest in the Middle Ages.)

Madge marvels. Marian is creeped out, clutches her bow and an arrow ready to nock.

MADGE (CONT'D)  
Feel the enchantment? How the stones  
crackle with vigor?

MARIAN  
Who comes here?

MADGE  
Tribes from all over are drawn to  
the stones as moths to flame.

MARIAN  
And think what happens to moths...  
Someone worked long and hard to carve  
these.

MADGE  
Not men. Giants. And Merlin fetched  
them hence.

MARIAN  
King Arthur's wizard?

MADGE  
Aye. After King Arthur burned  
Vortigern in his wooden tower, he  
wanted a war monument. Merlin told  
of blue stones standing in a ring in  
Ireland, quarried by black giants in  
Africa for Maeve, Queen of the Ogam.  
Merlin flew them here on the night  
wind.

(beat)  
Uther Pendragon is buried here, and  
so too Arthur.

(MORE)

MADGE (CONT'D)

(beat)

It's a temple to Diana, also named Albina, for which our land is named Albino.

MARIAN

I -- didn't know that.

MADGE

Like a mother, these stones can heal. Water poured over them and caught in a brass bowl is thrice pure.

(beat)

Albina's son was Lucifer.

MARIAN

Lucifer? Speak not of the devil. Not here.

MADGE

Lucifer is no devil. His name means "light". What other lord for a world so evil?

MARIAN

Evil? This world was created by a loving God for the Virgin and her son Jesus.

MADGE

The moon has a dark side we can't see. So does God. So too Lucifer.

MARIAN

Talk of devils smacks of witchcraft. Witches sacrifice babies and drink their blood. They rob cows of butter. They lay curses --

MADGE

Witches dance to feed crops and bring families to fruit.

(beat)

Even Jesus played at magic as a child. Struck his playmates dead and resurrected them, turned them into goats and back.

MARIAN

I wish I were home in Sherwood.

MADGE

Where you and Robin live in trees like green woodpeckers?

MARIAN

We've a manor in the forest.  
Huntingdon Hall.

MADGE

Robin said it existed only in memory.

MARIAN

It's -- a long story. We only came  
to the New Forest at the behest of  
King Richard. "Seek the king when  
the moon is full, and he'll grant  
you a wish."

MADGE

Like as recite the Lord's Prayer.  
Don't expect much from Richard, for  
he's not rightful king of England.

MARIAN

What?

MADGE

Richard springs from the blood of  
the Conqueror. William usurped this  
kingdom and laid half to waste.  
Would God anoint such a man king?

MARIAN

Kings do as they will.

MADGE

The Fates scourge the Conqueror's  
kindred. William never found peace.  
"Rivers of blood have I shed." Rufus  
volunteered to die.

MARIAN

Volunteered?

MADGE

Rufus dreamed of blood spouting from  
his chest so high it shut out the  
sun. A naked man on a black goat  
said a demon would steal Rufus's  
soul. Yet Rufus went willingly to  
hunt, and was sacrificed by an arrow.  
(beat)

Henry's only son drowned. The lion's  
whelp to fishes of the sea. Stephen  
and Matilda feuded. The second Henry  
made a martyr of Thomas a'Becket.  
Richard battled his father lifelong  
and now battles his brother.

(MORE)



MADGE (CONT'D)

Yet none ever gave a fig for England.  
A house built on a cracked foundation  
totters and falls.

MARIAN

If Richard's not rightful king, who  
is?

MADGE

I -- misremember.

Madge and Marian get their Horses. Madge picks up a flint  
arrowhead for Marian.

MADGE (CONT'D)

An elf bolt. Fairies hunt here.  
Give't to Robin as a fancy.

Marian's reluctant, thinks it may be a curse, but keeps it.

MADGE (CONT'D)

'Haps t'will keep the Wild Huntsman  
at bay.

INT. KEEPER'S LODGE -- DAY

Marian enters and kisses Robin.

MARIAN

Sweetheart, I must tell you about my  
visit with Madge. She's most curious --

ROBIN

Women. Talk, talk, talk.

Robin scoops up a giggling Marian and carries her to bed.

Later...

Robin and Marian dine.

MARIAN

How fares your forest court?

ROBIN

Bickering and inanity, finger-pointing  
and foolery, and me useless as balls  
on a priest.

MARIAN

Do you recall?

(MORE)

MARIAN (CONT'D)

We're not here to ape at royal  
keeping. We're to find the Wild  
Huntsman.

ROBIN

True. And I've yet to see the  
forest's western reaches, where our  
troublesome friend might hide. Along  
with a Saracen army. I bespoke  
Kenneth, a bucket head. I needs  
brace John O'Gaunt at Ibbesley. No  
one's seen him since Easter when he  
picked up his pay.

MARIAN

And guesses get you what?

Robin rises to go. Takes his bow and quiver.

ROBIN

You're right. Let us ride.

(beat)

Though one of my foresters did utter  
that Sir Argent rode about and asked  
the same questions...

EXT. FOREST -- DAY

Robin and Marian ride.

ROBIN

So tell me of your visit with Madge.

MARIAN

It was fun -- until she came on queer.  
Took me to see the hanging stones.  
Spun a tale about how Merlin and  
giants carved the rocks for some  
saint named Albina and that's why  
the devil rules this world, so all  
we see is evil.

ROBIN

Sounds like Cathar claptrap.

MARIAN

Whose?

ROBIN

Addlepates on the Continent who call  
themselves Christian.

(MORE)

ROBIN (CONT'D)

All doom and gloom. They hold the world is evil, so you mustn't bear children. Then they host orgies in their church.

MARIAN

Madge is childless too. Imagine two women who practice healing, and both barren.

ROBIN

Oh, and the year 1200 will bring Judgment Day. Cathars hold all numbers are magical.

MARIAN

Three is a magic number.

ROBIN

So's four, and seven, and twelve. I've nine numbers in my name, a talisman. Folk call our Merry Men a coven because we're thirteen. Christ had twelve apostles. No one accuses Him of sorcery.

MARIAN

Actually, Madge did.

ROBIN

Hoy.

Robin dismounts at a narrow cross rail. Finds brown apple squeezings, pomace.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

Smell? It's pomace. Apple squeezings.

Robin finds more pomace where the cross trail continues.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

A bait trail. Deer'll follow pomace for miles.

MARIAN

So someone's luring deer -- where?

ROBIN

From the king's land into some lord's private park -- Hello.

Hanging over the trail is a stick with crow feathers. Robin pulls it down.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

This's a sewell. It flutters, makes deer shy and turn onto the narrower path --

MARIAN

Where they find pomace.

ROBIN

Someone's damned clever. And why aren't my foresters foxing these bastards?

MARIAN

All the more reason to brace John O'Gaunt.

ROBIN

And someone else.

A coarse MAN WITH BUCKETS carries two empty buckets. He wears a big butcher's knife on his belt. Hailed, he keeps walking.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

Good morrow. Where fetch you those buckets?

MAN WITH BUCKETS

After fish.

ROBIN

In the forest?

MAN WITH BUCKETS

Minnows in the stream. Bait to catch bass in the river.

ROBIN

If you're at the river, why not sink a minnow trap?

Man with Buckets just walks out of sight.

MARIAN

Friendly.

ROBIN

So friendly I could box his ears. He knows fish. I wonder what he knows about deer.

EXT. IBBESLEY -- DAY

A small village along the river. PEASANTS work the fields.  
One is IBBESLEY WOMAN, who's willing to talk.

Robin and Marian ride up.

MARIAN

Good morrow. We seek John O'Gaunt,  
the forester --

IBBESLEY WOMAN

John's a'gone, milady.

ROBIN

Gone where?

IBBESLEY WOMAN

No one knows. He left by night.  
Packed his wife and children and  
cook irons and ticking and just went.

ROBIN

For Christ's sake, he's a king's  
forester. He can't just gallivant  
like a gadfly.

MARIAN

He collected his pay at Easter. So  
when did he depart?

IBBESLEY WOMAN

T'were a month'r more ago, milady.  
The moon were wanin'.

ROBIN

And no word where he went? Gad, I  
could spit.

INT. JOHN'S COTTAGE

A small empty cottage. Robin and Marian find nothing.

MARIAN

Queer no one's moved in. A good  
roof's always wanted.

Ibbesley Woman joins them.

IBBESLEY WOMAN

Folks think it haunted. John were a-frighted.

ROBIN

Frighted of what?

IBBESLEY WOMAN

Something he met in the forest.

ROBIN

What to fear but surly peasants?

IBBESLEY WOMAN

Folks upriver are queer. Surly and dirty and unChristian, the lot. Those downriver too, and across't.

ROBIN

But none to fear?

IBBESLEY WOMAN

No, no. John O'Gaunt feared no man. But spirits, now.

ROBIN AND MARIAN

Spirits?

IBBESLEY WOMAN

A ghost. Of a deer.

EXT. FOREST

Robin and Marian ride.

ROBIN

(mimicking)

"People upriver are queer. People downriver are queer. And people across the river are queer." And all terrified of a white stag. God's love.

MARIAN

Could there be such a thing?

ROBIN

I've seen deer by the thousands. Nary a white one.

MARIAN

I saw a white squirrel once. The skin.

ROBIN

I saw a relic once. The skull of  
Saint John the Baptist as a child.  
What, he grew to manhood without a  
skull? The only white stag I've  
ever seen was on a shield or a wall  
hanging.

MARIAN

Those be unicorns. Where shall we  
spend the night? I don't fancy  
sleeping in the woods.

ROBIN

Fritz's fief.

MARIAN

We got pitched on our ear last time.

ROBIN

This time I go as royal forester.  
I'll rack Fritz if't behooves me.  
I'll knock him flat and beat out the  
truth.

MARIAN

Can you hold till after supper?

INT. FRITHAM MANOR -- EVENING

Robin and Marian enter the hall. A SERVING GIRL runs up.

SERVING GIRL

Milord, milady -- Lady Dilys is at  
chapel. I'll fetch her.

Serving Girl runs off.

MARIAN

Odd time for devotions. Thinks  
herself a nun?

Lady Dilys comes.

LADY DILYS

Lord Fritham is ill. We can't put  
you up. You must go.

MARIAN

What?

ROBIN

We need nothing fancy --

LADY DILYS

No, it's impossible. Fritham won't vouchsafe his guests shabby accommodations. Go to Tostig's cottage. He'll take you in.

ROBIN

I'm the King's Keeper on royal authority --

LADY DILYS

There's naught we can do. Good day.

Lady Dilys shoos them out and SLAMS the doors.

Robin and Marian walk toward Tostig and Madge's cottage.

MARIAN

(seething)

That dough--faced idolater. That simpering simpleton.

Tostig oversees PEASANTS pressing cider. A peasant shovels out brown apple squeezings: pomace (what Robin found on the trail).

TOSTIG

Back so soon?

ROBIN

And still not welcome.

MARIAN

That sheep-faced bitch knows as much of Christianity as those -- What did you call them, Rob?

ROBIN

Cathars.

Unnoticed, Tostig jolts at the word "Cathar".

INT. TOSTIG AND MADGE'S COTTAGE

Madge greets them with a bloody Chicken in hand.

MADGE

No room at the inn? Lady Dilys lies close with Our Lord?

MARIAN

The shameless whey-faced hussy --



MADGE

Dilys has little use for the living.  
She can name all the saints but none  
of her children. Pray, abide with  
us.

Tostig brings fresh cider and pours.

TOSTIG

Drink up. It's the last till Harvest  
Home.

(sips, frowns)

Oog. Just as well. This'll sour  
your bowels.

ROBIN

Tos, is Fritz really ill?

TOSTIG

If he is, someone else rides with  
his hounds.

ROBIN

He's out hunting?

TOSTIG

Fritz does nothing else. You've  
seen the racks in his hall. Remember  
why we named him "Fritz"? Because  
that German at Acre said all Frisians  
are mad for hunting boar and bear.

ROBIN

Does Fritz have claim to a private  
park here in the New Forest?

TOSTIG

Aye, but it's scanty.

ROBIN

And the bastard thought just because  
I'm royal forester, I'd cramp his  
free-ranging?

TOSTIG

Never threaten a man's livelihood.

ROBIN

Has Fritz mentioned a white stag?

MADGE

White stag? Is there such a thing?

TOSTIG

Who spoke of that?

ROBIN  
Peasants at Ibbesley. Dozy as  
rabbits. They probably spy mermaids  
in the river.

Tostig and Madge exchange glances. Marian sees. Robin  
doesn't.

TOSTIG  
Cider needs pressing. Madge, can  
you come?

MADGE  
Robin, Marian, why not rest a while?  
Play chess if you like.

Tostig and Marian exit.

MARIAN  
What's put a bee in their bonnets?

ROBIN  
Tostig is steward. He must have a  
thousand chores. Where's that chess  
board? I haven't played since we  
left Sherwood.

Time passes. Robin and Marian play chess.

Madge returns alone, red-eyed from weeping.

Madge cooks. Plucks herbs hanging from the rafters, including  
a lot of valerian (sleep-inducing herb).

MARIAN  
May I help?

MADGE  
(sniffly)  
No, no. Play.

MARIAN  
(whispers to Robin)  
They've had a fight. Over us?

ROBIN  
(shrugs)

Tostig returns and does busy work without talking.

The four sit to dinner in awkward silence.

Madge gives Robin and Marian their own loaf of (drugged)  
bread.

MADGE

Herb bread, baked just for you.

Robin wolfs it. Marian finds it bitter but eats it. Tostig gets drunk and belligerent.

MARIAN

The cock is lovely.

TOSTIG

(drunk, angry)

It ought to be. Lucky to get meat at all. Others feed off the fat of the land while we live on bread and beer. I went on crusade to win my fortune and came home poorer than I left. Fritz's fief would founder without me, but I'm paid less than his falconer. And we're the blood of the land, not Fritz and the other invaders.

ROBIN

Not the Normans again.

TOSTIG

Cowards and usurpers. King Harold was brave. Shot in the eye, he kept fighting until the invaders cut off his head and his prick and carved out his guts. Evil men doing the devil's work.

ROBIN

I'd forgot they cut off Harold's head.

MARIAN

How are you "the blood of the land"?

MADGE

Ytena was home to Boudicca's Iceni. Caesar's soldiers had to fight for every tree. Even then the Old Ones just pushed deeper into the forests. We're their descendants: old--fashioned and hardheaded and superstitious.

MARIAN

Where was home?

TOSTIG

Here. Ytena. "The Land of the Jutes."

Robin and Marian suddenly YAWN (drugged).

ROBIN  
Beg pardon. I -- can't stay awake.

MADGE  
I'll make up your pallets.

Robin and Marian stumble. Madge rolls pallets on the floor.

MARIAN  
(drugged)  
I want to -- thank you -- Madge --

MADGE  
(shamed, guilty)  
Hush, hush. Sleep.

Madge kisses Marian. She and Robin collapse on pallets.

MARIAN  
S'the queerest thing --

ROBIN  
(drugged)  
They -- certainly are.

Tostig bars the DOOR: THUNK! Robin and Marian sleep.

Later...

Smoke roils. Robin and Marian wake COUGHING.

ROBIN (CONT'D)  
What's -- happening -- Marian, arise!  
We're afire!

Fire sweeps across the dried herbshanging from the rafters.

Robin drags Marian to the door. It's jammed (outside).

ROBIN (CONT'D)  
The door's -- blocked!

MARIAN  
Lift -- the bar!

Robin fumbles of the door bar, but it's missing.

ROBIN  
The bar's -- gone! But the door's  
jammed!

MARIAN

Tostig and -- Madge will suffocate  
in the loft!

ROBIN

They must be out -- the door bar --

Robin tries to shoulder the door, but fails.

Pulling his long knife, Robin HACKS at the wattle-and-daub  
wall. He hacks through.

Robin stuffs Marian through, then crawls himself --and gets  
stuck.

EXT. TOSTIG AND MADGE'S COTTAGE -- NIGHT

Marian tries to drag Robin through the hole.

ROBIN

I'm -- stuck!

Tostig rushes up and yanks Robin outside to safety.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

Tos, thankee. But how did you get  
out?

TOSTIG

No time. Fritz's manor's afire.

Robin and Marian stagger to their feet -- but collapse.

ROBIN

What's wrong with me? I feel I've  
been drunk for a week.

MARIAN

Poisoned -- by the smoke. Mal-aria,  
bad air, saps your strength. Ow.  
My stomach aches.

Even trashed, Robin's curiosity makes him crawl to the door.

ROBIN

What the hell -- blocked the door?

Robin opens the door easily. FLAMES CRACKLE inside. He  
slams it.

Robin and Marian see Fritz'S manor burns.

ROBIN (CONT'D)  
Sparks from the house -- set the  
cottage ablaze?

MARIAN  
Poor Fritz and -- his family.

ROBIN  
How the hell -- did Madge and Tos  
get out -- but not warn us?

MARIAN  
Hark.

Not far off, HOOVES BEAT and DOGS BARK.

ROBIN  
The Wild Huntsman!

A sinister figure comes riding hard. Dogs race to keep up.

FRITZ  
My hall! God have mercy!

It's Fritz and his Hunting Hounds. Fritz falls off his Horse.

FRITZ (CONT'D)  
Dilys! Jay! Oh, God! Maxine! My  
hall! Have pity, Lord!

MARIAN  
If only the sun would rise and put  
out the fire.

ROBIN  
Watch him! He's going to -- Catch  
him!

Distraught, Fritz starts to run into the burning hall. Robin  
goes to grab Fritz --

-- But Tostig grabs Robin.

TOSTIG  
Robert! No!

ROBIN  
Unhand me!

Stronger, Robin pulls free of Tostig and tackles Fritz.  
They drag Fritz back.

FRITZ  
I want to die with them! Let me go!  
Oh Lord, let me die!

EXT. FRITHAM MANOR -- DAWN

Robin and Tostig stare at ruins. Robin lacks his hat.

ROBIN

Your own cottage burned and you didn't  
see it?

TOSTIG

I saw't too late.

ROBIN

Where the hell were you?

TOSTIG

When Madge and I saw the light, the  
flames, we ran to the windows hoping  
Fritz and Lady Dilys might jump.  
Sparks flew everywhere.

ROBIN

Why didn't you wake us?

TOSTIG

I couldn't rouse you. We shook you,  
yelled your names. I even booted  
your ribs, but you were dead to the  
world.

ROBIN

Where'd you leave the door bar?

TOSTIG

The bar? Beside the door --

ROBIN

Nay, or I'd have found it and battered  
down the door. Tos, by Samson's  
arm, I couldn't budge that door an  
inch.

TOSTIG

You must've pushed on the wall.

ROBIN

I wasn't that drunk.

TOSTIG

You drank more smoke than a scarecrow  
at harvest. We lost everything.  
Poor Madge. Her beautiful garden.

ROBIN  
You've got your lives. We all do,  
thank the Virgin.

EXT. WITCH'S CIRCLE -- NIGHT

A Witch Cult dances around a fire to eerie music, shouting wild arcane phrases.

INT. PEASANT COTTAGE -- DAWN

Fritz lies on a rude bed, very sick, gray and sweating.  
Every muscle is tight as a drumhead (from lockjaw: tetanus).

Madge, Marian, and a WISE WOMAN stand idle. Robin peeks.

ROBIN  
How fares he?

MARIAN  
We've tried everything: lavender and  
sage, bleeding from the left side,  
poultices, even "bestera, bestia,  
bay". Apoplexy and now lockjaw.  
The sun enters Cancer, a good time  
for choleric folk, but ...

ROBIN  
Apoplexy causes lockjaw?

MARIAN  
A murrain of the brain, Rob. We  
don't understand it.

Robin nods at Marian to step outside.

EXT. PEASANT COTTAGE

Robin and Marian step outside to talk.

ROBIN  
Your brain-murrain must be catching.  
Tostig and Madge couldn't wake us,  
even kicking and pinching. And they  
never saw their cottage burn.



MARIAN

The light from the manor must've  
been blinding. Poor things. They  
lost everything.

ROBIN

Not so much you could't whittle in a  
week. Tos wore his helm and sword  
to the fire. His horse was stabled.  
I lost my tackle and my damned hat  
and my spare string.

MARIAN

Madge lost her garden. Flowers and  
herbs she slaved to collect.

ROBIN

Plants grow back.

MARIAN

Poor Fritz. His family in Heaven  
and him left behind. The knowledge  
kills him.

ROBIN

He should live for revenge. Someone  
set that fire. Likely the Wild  
Huntsman.

MARIAN

Rob, why did the Huntsman spare us  
that first time? We were treed, yet  
he called off his hellhounds.

ROBIN

I wasn't royal forester then. He  
sought bigger game.

MARIAN

You think?

ROBIN

Officials die in this forest. Sir  
Argent left his head in the road.  
The keeper before him just up and  
quit, I was told. Scared off like  
John O'Gaunt.

MARIAN

And what thought we? If the Huntsman  
be real, and not some phantom, he's  
a Knight like Fritz or Tostig. Yet  
they've both suffered.

ROBIN  
There's evil aplenty in Ytena.

The Wise Woman comes to the door.

WISE WOMAN  
Lord Fritham speaks.

INT. PEASANT COTTAGE

Madge hovers over Fritz. Robin bumps her aside.

ROBIN  
Fritz. Why hunt at night?

FRITZ  
(suffering)  
White -- deer. Like Christ Himself --  
walking the woods.

ROBIN  
You hunted the white stag?

FRITZ  
(crying)  
A miracle trophy. Like -- none other.  
But -- a trap.

ROBIN  
Trap?

FRITZ  
Satan's -- lure. A disguise. God's --  
punishment. My family -- to flames.  
Dilys -- Jay --

Something SNAPS and Fritz collapses. Everyone genuflects.

MARIAN  
He shan't wake again.

Everyone thinks: Just as well.

EXT. FOREST -- EVENING

Robin and Marian reach a fork in the trail. Marian turns  
one way, but Robin another.

MARIAN  
Lyndhurst is this way, is't not?

Robin pores over his map. He rubs his head, missing his hat.

ROBIN

T'is a sin to stand in God's view  
with a bare head... I propose a  
roundabout route. Fritz's huntsman  
said they rode hill and dale hunting  
that white stag.

Robin points to an old blaze on a tree.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

These old blazes mark a private park,  
maybe an original grant from the  
Conqueror. Fritz suspected the white  
stag yards up here.

MARIAN

(peeking at map)

In the bailiwick of John O'Gaunt.  
Who fled in the night.

ROBIN

Are you game?

Marian pulls an herb from a pouch, gives Robin some. They rub it on their shoulders.

MARIAN

Agrimony. Madge gave't me before  
the fire. Banishes evil spirits.

They ride between the blazes into the mysterious park.

Later...

The park is overgrown. They duck branches, snag on brush.

ROBIN

Remember the trail laced with pomace  
and hung with sewells? They could've  
driven deer to this park.

MARIAN

The manor has a cider press. Think  
you Fritham baited the trail?

ROBIN

Why channel deer into someone else's  
park?

MARIAN

Fritz only held a patch. This park  
is neglected. Who owns it?

ROBIN

A lord named York, an old Norman  
long past hunting.

MARIAN

Saxons would think it no sin to  
trespass. If we find this white  
stag, you won't shoot it?

ROBIN

I just want to see it. Even a mute  
can answer questions.

They ride in eerie silence. The trail descends.

The trail is barricaded by brush wedged between trees. Robin  
plucks white belly hair from atop the barricade.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

Belly hair. It's a deer leap. Deer  
vault in but can't jump out.

Above the trail hang loops of rope.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

Buckstalls to tangle antlers.

MARIAN

Crafty, whoever they be.

ROBIN

Poachers is who they be. T'is a  
forester's job to root them out, but  
ours ran off.

MARIAN

A live coward.

ROBIN

Leave the horses.

Robin and Marian dismount. Robin waggles a new-made bow and  
four arrows. Marian has no weapon but a knife.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

I could wish for my Spanish yew curing  
in Sherwood. Ash hangs dead in the  
hand.

MARIAN

Handy enough in your hands.

They descend a winding trail. Robin examines horse droppings.

ROBIN  
Four, five days old. Fed on winter  
rye and apples.

MARIAN  
Fritz's horses eat better than his  
serfs.

Robin finds plentiful deer poop.

ROBIN  
This valley's lashed with deer. And --  
Robin lobs a rock. A SNAKE slithers off.

ROBIN (CONT'D)  
And adders, so watch your step.  
They stalk. Through leaves see a white patch (gravel pit).  
They duck and study.

#### EXT. HIDDEN VALLEY

The trail ends at a gravel pit. Caves line the walls. Two  
caves are blocked with wicker gates. White sticks (deer  
bones) litter the ground.

MARIAN  
Caves?

ROBIN  
Old mines, methinks. Tin or lead.  
Odd. There are no mines tallied in  
the Domesday Book.

MARIAN  
Are those gates blocking the caves?

ROBIN  
It seems. But what are the withies?

MARIAN  
(gasps)  
A gate. It moved.

ROBIN  
Watch our back trail.

Robin creeps forward while Marian stays.

Before a screened cave, Robin picks up a white "stick", finds  
they're deer bones. Peeks through the gate --

ROBIN (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ!

-- and jumps as a dozen Dogs (Hellhounds) leap at the gate. Almost silent. Dogs snap and slaver but only SQUEAK like puppies. (Their vocal cords were cut.)

MARIAN (O.S.)

What --

ROBIN

God almighty!

Robin startles. Marian surprised him.

MARIAN

Pardon.

ROBIN

I told you to watch our back trail.

MARIAN

I wondered what you'd found. And I can watch from here.

ROBIN

I found -- enough hellhounds to gnaw us to gristle.

MARIAN

The Wild Huntsman's pack. Mother Mary have mercy. Why don't they bell?

ROBIN

I don't know. Can you hex a dog to silence?

Marian notices white bones.

MARIAN

Scores of deer died here.

ROBIN

Lured into this valley. Now we know why.

MARIAN

This mystery grows more infernal and less supernal by the hour. No one - phantom, witch, nor man -- could herd these brutes alone.

ROBIN

A mort of help to weave these gates  
and butcher deer and haul water --  
(recalls)  
That insolent bastard with the  
buckets. Claimed he sought minnows.  
Wore a butcher's knife. He's a lackey  
of the Huntsman.

MARIAN

We should fly before dark. If the  
Huntsman or his henchmen --

ROBIN

Let me spy the next cave.

Robin and Marian approach the other gate cave.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

Smells of deer musk.

MARIAN

They pen deer to feed the dogs?

ROBIN

My guess -- Oh.

Robin and Marian peek. In the cave cowers a WHITE DEER: an albino.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

Christ on the cross. It's real.

MARIAN

The poor thing is terrified.

ROBIN

I would be too. Which saint went so  
deep in a cave he heard lost souls  
wailing in Hell?

MARIAN

Lord, all of them. Help me pull  
this out.

Marian grabs the gate to open it. Robin stops her.

MARIAN (CONT'D)

I'll not leave one of God's creatures  
in the clutches of Satan.

ROBIN

They'll know we were here. But why  
keep a white deer penned, then let  
it run the woods? What purpose?

MARIAN

Evil. And whate'er their purpose,  
whoe'er they be, if we free the deer,  
we bollix their plan.

A distant HORSE WHINNIES.

ROBIN

Folk wonder why we don't keep horses  
in Sherwood. Hide. If we see who  
tends the dogs, we can follow them  
home.

MARIAN

If they see us and loose the dogs,  
we'll be torn to pieces.  
(pulls at gate)  
Help me.

They tug the gate open, but the White Deer stays inside.

Birds fly skyward on the trail.

ROBIN

Circle wide. 'Haps we can reach the  
horses.

EXT. FOREST TRAIL

Robin and Marian trot, winded, and find their panicked Horses.

Robin fusses to untie reins. Marian slashes them -- and  
freezes.

MARIAN

Rob!

The White Deer runs toward them in blind panic.

ROBIN

Mount and --

Hellhounds rush in eerie SILENCE.

Robin nocks an arrow, aims (for the dogs, we think) -

MARIAN

You've only four arrows!

-- but Robin shoots the White Deer instead.

It tumbles. Some starving Dogs swarm and devour it.



Three Dogs rush Robin and Marian.

As Dog 1 leaps, Robin JABS his bow down its throat, strangling the animal but losing the bow.

Marian gains the saddle. Kicks and slashes at Dog 2.

Dog 3 knocks Robin against his pitching Horse. Robin falls with the dog atop.

HOOVES STAMPS around his head as the dog tries to bite Robin.

Robin struggles, pulls his knife, slashes the dog's throat. He's soaked in blood.

Marian kicks Dog 2 flying.

MARIAN (CONT'D)

Rob!

ROBIN

I'm alive! Ride!

Marian takes off. Robin scoops dead Dog 2 across the saddle, mounts, rides.

Farther on...

Robin and Marian slow the Horses. Robin is soaked in blood.

MARIAN

You look like the Angel of Death.

ROBIN

Dog's blood.

MARIAN

You'll contract the rabies. Why did you bring that wretched thing?

Robin dumps the dead Dog and hops down.

ROBIN

I want to know.

MARIAN

The pack might pursue. E'en the Huntsman himself. We needs make distance.

ROBIN

A moment.

Robin pries open the dead Dog's jaw and examines. Then the neck. Finds a white scar on the dog's throat.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

Nothing. No, wait -- Ah. Some  
bastard's cut the dogs' voice boxes.  
(beat)

Oh. I never saw't on that first dog  
because my arrow tore its throat.  
God's love, it's a poacher's dream.  
Dogs that don't bell on the chase.

MARIAN

And keep silent when penned and  
hidden. Come on.

They ride. SPLASH through a stream. Horses DRINK.

Robin and Marian dismount and drink. Robin washes off blood.  
Marian examines his scratches.

MARIAN (CONT'D)

We should have snipped that dog's  
hair to bind these gouges.

ROBIN

They're nothing. Someone clever  
worked hard to fashion phantom dogs.

MARIAN

T'was worth the effort. Our  
mysterious enemies terrorize the  
forest. None dare speak. And people  
who stumble on secrets flee or die.

ROBIN

But why corral a white stag?

MARIAN

They think it magical? Oh, that  
poor beast, devoured. So beautiful  
and frightened.

ROBIN

And cursed by birth. A hunter would  
spy it in a trice. It'd never survive  
a season.

They mount and ride.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

Keep an eye peeled for an ash coppice.  
I needs whittle another damn bow.

INT. ROYAL FOREST OFFICE -- DAY

Robin, more tattered than ever, arrives with Marian. Sloan drops what he's doing.

SLOAN

Sir Robert. We feared you were lost.

ROBIN

Better not to be found in this forest.  
What news?

SLOAN

News? Uh, King Richard is back.

ROBIN

Back? He sent men to wage war in  
France.

SLOAN

His majesty's returned to the New  
Forest to hunt this fabled white  
stag everyone speaks of. He's vowed  
to bring it down --

MARIAN

What mean you, "everyone speaks of?"  
It's a secret.

ROBIN

There is no white stag. I slew it.

SLOAN

You what?

MARIAN

If the king hunts, he may be in  
danger.

ROBIN

(scoffs)

Richard doesn't visit the jakes  
without a dozen doughty Knights to  
wipe his arse. Saladin and his  
Saracens couldn't kill the bugger,  
and believe me, they tried. Sloan,  
come ye hither.

Robin unfolds his smeary map. Sloan attends.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

Marian and I have been hunting on our own. Every forester reports all's well except John O'Gaunt and Gregory. Gregory's fief at the east can hide no secrets, but something stinks to the west. We found the Wild Huntsman's workings here. John O'Gaunt bolted for his life --

SLOAN

The Wild Huntsman's --

ROBIN

Hush. Just north lies the bailiwick of Kenneth of Cobbetton. That good worthy reports no trouble, but he knows damned little about forestry. You've met Kenneth. Describe him.

SLOAN

Kenneth is tall, curly, goes reddish about the jowls in summer --

Robin slaps his map -- BANG!

ROBIN

That whore. Devil of the Damned, I knew the bastard lied. The Kenneth I met was short and dark. No wonder he shunned the forest court.

SLOAN

But all the foresters were paid at Easter. In person.

ROBIN

Were they? Fetch the pipe roll.

Sloan fetches the pipe roll (pay book). Searches.

SLOAN

That's odd. Sir Argent paid Kenneth with his own hand.

ROBIN

Not odd at all. You clerks know Kenneth's face. This impostor hung back until you quit the counting house, then asked Argent for his coin. Argent didn't know him.

MARIAN

So everyone thinks all's well in the northwest ward.

(MORE)

MARIAN (CONT'D)

(beat)

Tostig vouched for Kenneth.  
Introduced him, you said.

ROBIN

Aye, and Tos must know Kenneth, being  
steward to Sir Fritham's estate. So  
Tos lied.

MARIAN

To cozen what?

ROBIN

Who can say? But the sole of my  
foot itches.

Marian tows Robin outside.

EXT. ROYAL FOREST OFFICE

MARIAN

If we search that bailiwick, we'll  
find too much. Do you forget the  
Wild Huntsman? And his hellhounds?  
And henchmen?

ROBIN

I could wish for my Merry Men.  
Together we could overthrow Jerusalem.  
Looks like the two of us, as usual.

MARIAN

(looks at sky)

We'd barely reach its skirts before  
dark. And it's no place to camp by  
night.

ROBIN

First thing the morrow, then. We'll  
beard the lion in its den and tug  
its whiskers.

MARIAN

God guard us from tooth and claw.

EXT. FOREST -- NOON

Robin is up at tree, scouting. Marian waits on a horse.

Moving on, Robin points out an old overgrown road.

ROBIN

Regard. An old road. We'll leave the horses. Loosen the girths and slack the reins. They can find their way home if we don't come back.

MARIAN

If we don't come back?

ROBIN

If we don't come back this way.

They tie the horses loosely (so they can pull free if the riders don't return) and enter the old road.

MARIAN

This is a road?

ROBIN

Was. Brush grows thicker along a road, for it gets more sunlight. And those beeches in a line all grew in the same season. And roadbed narrows at that ridge --

MARIAN

How long ago?

ROBIN

A hundred years or more, to judge by the trees.

MARIAN

A century ago. When --

ROBIN

When William chopped off Harold's head, yes.

Robin waggles his bow, frowns at his four arrows.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

A stiff bow and four arrows fit for firewood.

MARIAN

In your hands, a magic wand.

Silently Robin and Marian penetrate the mysterious woods.

Once they spot a WOLF who moves off.

EXT. ABANDONED VILLAGE -- AFTERNOON

Ruins of an old village, overgrown stones and cellar holes.

Robin and Marian genuflect.

ROBIN

A village.

MARIAN

Ghost of a village.

ROBIN

Odd place for it. No river. No pond. No manor house.

MARIAN

(counting)

Six and twenty homes. Near two hundred people. Hardly a hamlet. Where did they go? And why?

ROBIN

Most likely whipped out by William's soldiers at enforestment.

MARIAN

It's true nothing remains. Not a single chimney, no forge, no bread oven. It must've been burned and pulled flat.

Robin studies tracks.

ROBIN

Men. Dogs with pointed claws. A horse unshod. From the south.

MARIAN

So from anywhere. That private park or Ibbesley or the King's Road.

ROBIN

Mark where they go.

MARIAN

Up the ridge.

Robin and Marian climb. Duck down. See posts in a circle.

MARIAN (CONT'D)

Posts in a circle? A palisade?

ROBIN  
Listen for a cricket.

Robin slithers forward. Marian waits.

A CRICKET CHIRPS: Robin's call. She creeps forward.

EXT. WITCH'S CIRCLE -- EVENING

In the circle of nine posts stands a dolmen: a tall stone table. Below is a sacrificial stone: an altar.

ROBIN  
There's no one here, but brace  
yourself.

FLIES BUZZ. Robin touches a stain: tacky blood.

Marian turns - and GASPS.

Inside each post is carved a inch. In each niche is a grisly Human Head. Except one niche is empty.

MARIAN  
Nine. Three a number of power, and  
thrice three triply so.

ROBIN  
(points at empty niche)  
Save one.  
(points at fresh head)  
That must be Sir Argent. He's the  
arrogant look of a Norman Knight.  
One must be the real Kenneth of  
Cobbetton, his body gone to wolves.

MARIAN  
So here's why the village was burnt.  
Devil worship.

ROBIN  
That dolmen's probably the oldest  
thing in the New Forest, the moss is  
so thick. Men in skins worshipped  
here.

MARIAN  
Someone's revived their pagan ways.  
These posts are new.

ROBIN  
Witches and warlocks.



MARIAN

One more head to collect. That ninth  
head will conjure mighty magic --

Robin and Marian realize King Richard is to be the sacrifice!

MARIAN (CONT'D)

A sacrifice on Midsummer's Day. A  
magic day. Like King Rufus, cut  
down on Lammas Eve --

ROBIN

Hits!

VOICES sound: people coming.

Robin and Marian hide under bushes.

Witch Cultists arrive.

Ordinary men carry pitchforks. Women carry brooms. And  
oddly, picnic baskets.

Among them are Tree Barkers, Man with Buckets, false Kenneth.

They GOSSIP and wait like any church congregation. Robin  
and Marian, surrounded, stay hiding.

Night falls...

CULTIST 1

She comes.

Sound: An ancient EERIE SONG, a cappella.

Witch Queen comes.

(It's Madge.) She wears a black robe trimmed with ermine,  
amber necklace, bronze knife on a silver chain belt. She  
carries a ram's shoulder bald painted white. Her face is  
blue with wode (like Mel Gibson in "Braveheart").

Robin and Marian watch from cover: Robin angry, Marian upset.

MADGE

By Lucifer, let there be light!

Men light torches.

CULTIST 2

"A girdle o' gold, a saddle o' silk,  
a horse for me, as white as milk."

Witch Queen greets the congregation by nicknames. Touches  
each Cultist with a ram's bone.

MADGE

Greetings, all. Graymalkin.  
 Beelzebub, Ashtaroath, and Asmodeus.  
 Rumpelstiltskin. Hob, Ket. Circe,  
 Astarte, Rhiannon. Lucca and Mercury.  
 Incubus. Aurora, Persil, Robin  
 Goodfellow. Merry meet!

Worshippers lay a tablecloth over the bloody altar, use food  
 to parody Communion.

MADGE (CONT'D)

I will take the bread of Hell, and  
 call upon the name of the Devil.  
 Blessings.

CULTISTS

May the body of our lord Satan  
 preserve my soul to life everlasting.  
 Amen.

Cultists eat.

Hiding, Robin presses his hungry stomach to keep it from  
 rumbling.

Supper finished, a FIDDLER dons a goat mask. Witch Queen  
 leads a Snake Dance with everyone holding hands in a twisted  
 circle.

MADGE

Antecessor, carry us to Blockula!  
 Horse and hattock, horse and go,  
 horse and pellattis, ho, ho!

CULTISTS

Hola!  
 Thout, thout, turn about!  
 Har, har, devil here, devil there!  
 (line parts and rejoins)  
 Merry meet, merry part!

MARIAN

(hiding)  
 Saint Mary, pray for us.

Cultists call-and-return while dancing.

MADGE AND CULTISTS

I would be saved and I would save!  
 Amen! I would be loosed and I would  
 loose! Amen! I would be wounded  
 and I would wound! Amen! I would  
 be born and I would bear! Amen!  
 (MORE)

## MADGE AND CULTISTS (CONT'D)

I would eat and I would be eaten!  
 Amen! I would mourn, lament ye all!  
 Amen! Devil, devil!

EERIE MUSIC gets faster. Dancers are ecstatic.

Robin jumps when Marian whispers.

## MARIAN

We should flee. They won't hear us.

## ROBIN

They may have guards posted on the  
 paths.

## MARIAN

We needn't fight. We can outrun  
 deer.

## ROBIN

You can. What of King Richard? And  
 where's the Wild Huntsman?

Robin and Marian dither too long. MUSIC STOPS.

## MADGE

The Ogdoad sing praise with us! The  
 Twelve dance on high! Hola, hail,  
 hola, hi!

## CULTISTS

Amen!

Dancers, warmed up, wriggle, anticipating sex.

## MADGE

(lusty laugh)  
 Emen hetan, hetan emen! "Here is  
 there, there is here." Fall, children.  
 Fall and be fertile. Children  
 conceived this night will rule the  
 new dawn as kings and Queens.

Cultists fuck like rabbits.

Robin and Marian are almost rolled on by a thrashing Couple.  
 Robin draws a knife to scribe a circle of protection in the  
 dirt.

Sated, Cultists relax.

## MADGE (CONT'D)

Rest, children.

(MORE)

MADGE (CONT'D)  
Glory to thee and to our Father in  
Hell. Abide upon His bosom, for the  
greatest test awaits. Rest...

ROBIN AND MARIAN  
(mouth "greatest test?")

RUNNER (O.S.)  
To arms! To arms! The quarry is  
snared! The Wild Huntsman bids you  
come! The hunt is afoot!

ROBIN  
Christ's sweet tree.

MADGE  
Arm! Take up tools and run to the  
hunt! Ferry the false king to our  
altar!

MARIAN  
What do we, Rob?

A distant HUNTING HORN blares.

ROBIN  
Up! Run for our lives! And the  
king's!

Robin and Marian rise and run. Cultists HOWL.

A furious chase ensues through moonlit forest with torches.

MARIAN  
It all fits, but so uncanny.

ROBIN  
It's built over the forest -- like a  
thunderhead. We just didn't see  
until too late -- damn me to Hell.

MARIAN  
It's not too late.

ROBIN  
It will be. Midsummer Night is --  
Witches' Night.

MARIAN  
Under a full moon.

They run, pursued, sometimes hide. One danger is crashing  
into trees and branches, another is tripping.

Robin tumbles headlong. Rising, finds he has one arrow left.

MARIAN (CONT'D)  
 "One shall do the work of many."

A HUNTING HORN sounds, closer.

Gasping, Robin and Marian reach the outskirts of King Richard's hunting camp. But the Cultists got there first and surround the camp.

Robin and Marian duck down.

ROBIN  
 Christ. Richard's dogs must be  
 muzzled as they close on deer.

MARIAN  
 They hold back. Now's our chance.

Cultists ARGUE about how to attack.

Robin and Marian knock aside Cultists and burst into Richard's camp.

EXT. KING RICHARD'S SECOND HUNTING CAMP -- NIGHT

Robin and Marian tumble into camp. Richard's Knights knock them flat. Would stab Robin --

MARIAN  
 Stop! We're friends of the king!

ROBIN  
 Robin Hood, the king's keeper. Rally  
 'round the king. He's endangered.

KNIGHT  
 What danger?

ROBIN  
 Madmen seek the king's life. Thrice  
 ten villains with farm tools. Where's  
 Richard?

KNIGHT  
 His majesty hunts. He's vowed not  
 to eat until he's ta'en the white  
 stag with his own hand.

MARIAN  
 White stag?

ROBIN

There isn't any white stag. I slew  
the creature.

KNIGHT

The beast exists, for I saw it this  
very night.

MARIAN

The whole world's gone mad.

ROBIN

Never mind. Attend the king.

Robin, Marian, and Knights trot to find King Richard.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

Why does the king hunt at night?  
It's foolish.

KNIGHT

Kings do as they please.

They see torches. King Richard stands with three Knights  
and several LOCAL GUIDES (secret cultists).

KNIGHT (CONT'D)

To arms. Assassins seek the king's  
life. Warn the king.

ROBIN

(pointing to locals)  
Them. Drive them hence.

Found out, threatened by Knights, local Guides flee.

Robin and Marian meet King Richard and ten Knights.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

Sire. Your majesty. Pray quit these  
woods immediate. Madmen seek your  
assassination.

King Richard stares, pie-eyed, drunk.

KING RICHARD

(drunk)  
Speak.

ROBIN

You're surrounded by a witch coven,  
dangerous folk.

KING RICHARD

Poppycock.

MARIAN

Sire, they seek to sacrifice the  
false king to their bloody god.  
Begging your pardon.

KING RICHARD

You're drunk. We seek a white stag,  
a fit trophy for a king. God calls  
us to the hunt.

A HUNTING HORN BLARES nearby.

ROBIN

You're called as the hunted. List  
you not your own trumpet? A traitor  
winds like Gabriel to guide in your  
enemies.

KNIGHT

It's true, my king. All our guides  
have run off.

KING RICHARD

We will not abandon our quest --

ROBIN

Dice with your life. Give Prince  
Lackland your throne.

MARIAN

Rob, why wait the assassins?

KNIGHT

God's blood. There it is.

At the edge of light stands the legendary white deer.

ROBIN

Balls. That's not a deer. Sire --

Robin grabs King Richard's arm. Knights grab Robin.

KNIGHT

Not a deer? Are you mad? Perhaps  
you're the assassin.

KING RICHARD

It's death to touch the royal person.

ROBIN

That's not a deer. I already killed  
it. And it doesn't run right.

MARIAN  
It's true. He did kill the animal.  
Still, there can't be two?

Drunk, King Richard staggers after the white deer.

Knights restrain Robin and Marian.

MARIAN (CONT'D)  
They don't believe us. He won't  
listen.

ROBIN  
Does anyone? I've half a mind to  
let the fool walk into ambush.

MARIAN  
He'll chase that deer right into  
their arms.

ROBIN  
That's not a fucking deer!

Furious, Robin kicks, punches free, grabs his bow and single  
arrow, runs.

ROBIN (CONT'D)  
Marian, stay where it's safe.

Robin runs a wide circle around the drunken king. The "white  
deer" flickers. Robin nocks on the run.

A blur of wicked faces are Cultists slinking to ambush.

ROBIN (CONT'D)  
(to himself)  
A bad bow, a punk string, a crooked  
arrow. Might's well aim for the  
moon...

The "white deer" flits ahead. Robin shoots it dead.

Robin grabs the carcass, runs to King Richard, dumps it.

ROBIN (CONT'D)  
There's your trophy. Bait for a  
king.

CLOSE ON: it's a Hellhound with the shredded white deerhide  
tied on its back and around its chin.

The HUNTING HORN blares very close.

Cultists burst from the dark to attack. Knights push King  
Richard into a circle of protection.



HUNTING HORN PEALS a short blast.

Cultists stop.

MADGE

Peace. Marian, Robin, a truce.

Robin and Marian walk toward the Cultists.

Madge, the Witch Queen, walks up. The Wild Huntsman on his horse appears behind.

MARIAN

(betrayed)

Madge.

ROBIN

Call off your pagans and devil dogs,  
Madge. Call off -- him.

Madge looks east: sunrise is soon.

MADGE

The Lionheart must die. At dawn of  
Midsummer's Day.

ROBIN

No.

MARIAN

Why Richard? Why this day?

MADGE

On Midsummer Day druids sacrificed  
kings to the sun. And who better  
than blonde Richard, a sun king to  
give to the sun.

(beat)

Many a brave king volunteered to be  
stabbed through with bronze swords.  
So did King Rufus volunteer at Lammas,  
though he dreamt of blood nine times  
before. So has Richard volunteered.

ROBIN

Richard might be falling-down drunk,  
but he won't bare his neck to the  
sword.

MARIAN

Only Our King of Heaven sacrificed  
himself, going without complaint to  
the cross. Put your worship there.

MADGE

Richard came willingly, to chase the white stag.

ROBIN

And your cronies spread word so he'd hear of it. Thus he volunteers to die? Balderdash.

MARIAN

If Richard is not the true king of England, as you say, how is he worthy of your bloody altar?

MADGE

For a lamb, Richard suffices.

MARIAN

I ask again. If Richard is not rightwise king, who is?

Madge shakes her head, refusing to answer.

ROBIN

And how many more must die? Kenneth of Cobbetton walked his ward and saw your Black Mass, didn't he? So died. John O'Gaunt glimpsed something and fled like a hare. Sir Argent asked questions and found death. Eight all told, some unnamed.

MADGE

Eight who offended the forest. They cut sacred groves or slashed the bosom of the earth. Their skulls bear witness and their souls pay penance.

ROBIN

How adroit exactly eight offenders, and one more to make nine. If the forest resents foresters, my head should adorn a post.

MADGE

There was never danger of that.

ROBIN

Danger enough. You clung not for friendship but to spy us out.

MADGE

Not true.

ROBIN

You and Tostig burned your own cottage  
around our ears.

MADGE

A mistake. Tostig worried when you  
spoke of Cathars and then the white  
stag.

Flashback: Tostig and Madge argue. Tostig blocks the door  
with a bar and torches the cottage. Madge weeps. They go  
to torch the manor. As Robin and Marian crawl free of the  
burning cottage, Madge pleads, and Tostig unblocks the door  
and helps them.

ROBIN

A poor Knight couldn't buy a ship's  
passage home, but must trek overland.  
Tostig passed through France and met  
Cathars. Was seduced by their wild  
ways.

MADGE

Tostig was outraged by the Crusade.  
Noblemen ordered hundreds slaughtered  
to rake pennies from the dust.

ROBIN

Weren't we all? It's been two years  
since his return that all this  
witchery's begun.

MADGE

Been revived. It was always here,  
but sometimes slept. You needn't  
die.

MARIAN

You laced our bread with poisonous  
herbs.

MADGE

Valerian root to induce sleep.

Flashback: Madge plucks herbs, kneads into dough, then serves  
the bread to Robin and Marian. Marian makes a face.

MARIAN

The bitter taste.

ROBIN

You burned Fritz's hall to halt his  
hunting the white stag?

MADGE

Fritz chased it without ceasing.  
T'would have ruined our plans if he  
killed it.

ROBIN

So Fritz must burn. I remember now.  
As Fritz charged the flames, Tostig  
tried to stop me. Not to save me,  
but to burn Fritz.

Flashback: Fritz runs at the fire. Robin goes to catch him,  
but Tostig restrains Robin.

MARIAN

Lady Dilys didn't deserve to burn.  
Nor her children. And one who heals  
can harm. I wondered why a vital  
man like Fritz wasted like an  
unsuckled child. You gave him  
lockjaw.

MADGE

I bled him with a knife from the  
garden, plunged in dung and charged  
with prayer. But he deserved to  
die.

Flashback: Madge pulls a knife from manure in her garden.  
Uses the same knife to bleed Fritz as Marian watches.

ROBIN

"Justice is mine", saith the Lord.  
It was all there, but I too much a  
dunce to see't. I watched Tostig  
press cider and never saw pomace.  
Saw he wore his helmet and sword to  
the fire so they wouldn't burn in  
your cottage.

Flashback: Tostig hands Robin cider while a Peasant shovels  
pomace.

Flashback: At the fire, Tostig wears his helmet and sword to  
save them from the fire.

MADGE

(in tears)

We can spare your lives if you'll  
quit Richard's service. Please.

MARIAN

(in tears)

We're sorry.

Truce over, Madge walks back to the Cultists.

ROBIN  
How much did you know?

MARIAN  
Little more than you, but I feared  
the worst.

The eerie HUNTING HORN blares.

Cultists and the Wild Huntsman attack.

CULTISTS  
(battle cries)

Robin shoves Marian behind a tree. Marian shoves back.

MARIAN  
Save the king!

Outnumbered Knights with swords fight crazy-mad Cultists  
with farm tools.

The Wild Huntsman charges King Richard, raising his sword  
high.

Drunk, King Richard stumbles.

Robin hooks his bow over the Huntsman's arm --

-- Yanks him from the saddle --

-- BREAKING his neck as he falls.

Robin guards the fallen King.

ROBIN  
(calling)  
The Huntsman is dead! Dead! Begone,  
disciples of the devil!

CULTISTS  
(roar in agony and  
outrage)

MADGE  
(wails)

Robin turns at her wail --

-- As Madge slashes him with her bronze knife.

Tangle-footed by the King, Robin gets slashed.

Madge will kill him --

-- Until Marian swings Robin's bow like a baseball bat and flattens Madge.

ROBIN

Marian!

MARIAN

(sobs)

Madge!

EXT. FOREST -- DAWN

Cultists are chased off by bloody Knights.

Madge is slapped awake. Her hands are bound. Her blue face paint runs.

Men gather around the dead Wild Huntsman.

Robin pulls off the helmet. It's Tostig.

KING RICHARD

He has a familiar cast.

MADGE

He should. My husband served in your crusade, harlot, and fought bravely, yet you awarded him nought. His family owned all these lands, yet he must carve before a foreigner sworn to a usurper. For you are not rightful King of England.

KING RICHARD

And who should be?

MADGE

King Harold was the last true king, betrayed at Senelac. The crown belongs to his heirs.

KING RICHARD

(thinks)

Harold had three sons by Edith Swan's Throat...

MADGE

Bastards. Harold's brother was heir.

KING RICHARD

Brother... Who cozied the King of Norway to invade York? He was exiled as a traitor. The whole Viking army was destroyed at Stamford Bridge, and Harold's brother Tostig with them.

ROBIN AND MARIAN

Tostig!

MADGE

Great-great-grandfather to my Tostig, rightful king of England.

ROBIN

Curse God and die. All this killing for a throne of gilded wood.

MADGE

For the soul of Albina and who should serve her.

KNIGHT

What shall be done, sire?

KING RICHARD

But one fate for a regicide.

Knights grab Madge and draw swords. Marian WAILS.

ROBIN

Take her away!

King Richard nods. Knights drag Madge behind a tree.

A SQUISH sounds: a beheading.

A Knight returns with a bloody sword and Madge's head. King Richard nods. Knight pitches the head into brush.

Robin pulls off his forester's ring, gives it to King.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

Your majesty, we found your killer.  
Free our friend Little John.

KING RICHARD

(hungover and tired)  
*Deus volt.*

The only sound is Marian WEEPING.

FADE TO BLACK