

Dialogue with The Dispossessed

by Deborah M. Walsh

How many arrows does one man have?

I should have known -- should have guessed so many years ago, standing across that stone circle, eye to eye with Ailric, your father -- should have known his prediction carried more than mere conviction -- it carried certainty, the immutable stamp of Fate. And only one arrow ever really mattered, didn't it, Loxley? From the Guardian to me and then to you -- the Guardian again? No. Nothing so passive for you, my young wolfshhead. You were chosen, and you chose to accept the choosing. The Hooded Man came to the forest, and an ancient cycle began anew. It was many years turning, but not enough, I assure you, to suit me.

How many flagons of ale will it take to wash the vision from my eyes?

*Your cool acknowledgement, the surrender of your superior position -- you discarded your arrows, shattered your weapon! You could have fled -- they made it out, the boy and your wife, broke through the closing fist and ran -- why didn't you? Because you **knew** -- worse, you drew me there, me and my men, played a pantomime of resistance and then calmly delivered yourself into our hands. You knew you would die. You knew their pent-up fear and anger would explode in violence against your still-warm corpse. You knew, and still you stood, so still! against the reddening sky and smiled. Was Death so truly a welcome sight? Does she tread so lightly by your side?*

How many goblets of wine will it take to drown my fear?

*A hammer to shatter the turning wheel recoils, blunted, the haft a splintered limb. The wheel turns, the cycle continues, no beginning, and more importantly, no end. I could spit you head over the city gates, and still they'd believe you free. "That's **not** Robin Hood!" they'd cry, although the truth be plain. In their hearts you're whole, and in their mind's eyes your prowess grows ever greater. The minstrels and defrocked bards will carry your name far and wide and the people will await your return. They don't know, as you and I do, what a short life you lived, and how much you left undone.*

How many arrows does it take for a legend to die?

You were the Hooded Man, and I the Executioner -- roles to play in a drama without end. Eminent one player and enter another, it's all the same to the faceless mob. Give 'em a hero and listen to their cheers; strip him down to humanity and watch 'em turn their backs. But let him die before his time and the mob will hold him ever to their hearts. Martyrdom becomes you, it fits you to the skin. Your successor rules in the forest, commands the loyalty of your faceless, grubby peasantry. Hope is the coin by which he buys their loyalty. And for the Sheriff of Nottingham, the Keeper of the King's Law? Damnation's my only lot, and reviled will be my name forever.

The King was wrong.

It's not over. It'll **never** be over.

And I am weary of my part.