

THE WISE MEN OF GOTHAM

by

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EXT. ROBIN'S HOUSE - MORNING (1205)

A dilapidated medieval hovel in Gotham, Nottinghamshire.

The wooden front door scrapes open. ROBIN, early 30s, sly but likeable, slips out onto the path, pulling on his jerkin, a piece of stale rye bread in his teeth.

He tugs at the bread, it does not tear. He releases it from his teeth and inspects it. Something catches eye across the field. He frowns, bemused.

Across the field a figure skips and dances in wild abandon, drawing closer. It is BYNCKIE, mid-20s, who has an intellectual disability with facial dysmorphia (e.g. Down's Syndrome). She is unkempt and dirty, but very happy. She claps her hands and sings, forgetting tune and words, as she skips straight past Robin and into town.

BYNCKIE

(singing)

Sumer is icomen in, lee-di-dee dah
do. Groweth seed and lah-dah-dee
and spring a-doo di-dah. Sing
cuckoo! Cuckoo! Cuckoo!

Robin watches Bynckie pass by with mounting interest, hearing the unfamiliar song. He makes up his mind, takes aim at a chicken and slings the heel of bread at it. It SQUAWKS. He strides to the gate in pursuit of Bynckie.

The gate sticks and Robin loses his balance, tipping head over heels into the road.

He rights himself, glances around to make sure no-one saw.

EXT. MAYOR'S HOUSE - MORNING

A small crowd has gathered around Bynckie as she speaks excitedly to SIMON, the bumbling mayor and JOAN, his formidable wife. Townsfolk stare on with bovine simplicity.

Robin arrives, peeking through the crowd. GWEN a guileless milkmaid smiles at him adoringly. He ignores her pointedly.

AGNES

What sayth she?

JOAN

Says the King cometh here to
Gotham!

General laughter. Bynckie turns to the sound.

BYNCKIE
Aye. The King! The King!

GWEN
What? Of England?

AGNES
A fine thing that would be!

HOB
Hast seen the King, Bynckie? Didst
sup with him yesternight?

Guffaws from Hob's friends.

BYNCKIE
(derisive)
No. The King will not abide a
fool. He does not see 'em. I spoke
with his men.

Hob founders. The crowd hesitates.

ROBIN
Were they knights you spoke with?

BYNCKIE
I know not, but you may ask 'em
yourself. They come upon Gotham
even now, scouting for the King on
his progress.

She points down the road, beaming happily. Sure enough, two
riders are visible near the horizon. The crowd jostles.

JOAN
Faith! What an honour!

TOWNSFOLK
Wondrous! Heavens be praised! Our
little town! Imagine! The King
here! What a day for Gotham! Oh
how nice! [ad lib]

ROBIN
Have you all gone mad?! Are you
bereft of your wits?

Their enthusiasm waivers.

JOAN
What do you mean?

ROBIN

A passage of the King will be no
end of trouble to a small town
like ours.

JOAN

Why?

SIMON

Yes, why?

ROBIN

We'll have to feast him.

AGNES

Oh surely. We must.

ROBIN

And his train. Every night. Give
of our finest produce. Buy more in
from Nottingham I shouldn't
wonder.

Murmurs of growing dissatisfaction.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

He'll take it all as his right.
You surely have not forgotten the
new taxes already? He's not known
for paying his debts.

MATILDA

We'll be ruined!

ROBIN

Our road will be listed as a
public Highway, and you know what
that means?

JOAN

Tell us.

ROBIN

Highwaymen!

Cries of dismay.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

God forbid he should build an
hunting lodge here.

HOB

I think it would be a very nice
place for an hunting lodge.

TOWNSFOLK

NO!

GWEN

What must we do, Robin?

AGNES

He'll help none but himself.

MATILDA

Alas! They are here already!

SIMON

Shall we chase 'em off with fire?

ROBIN

Would you have us all slain? No!
Go off, all of you. Disperse. And
look busy!

The crowd disperses, leaving Simon, Joan and Robin. A shadow falls over them. They look up. Above loom SIR ENGEHARDT, a hearty knight, and SIR TIMM, a devout knight.

SIR ENGEHARDT

What ho! Well met there!

JOAN

My lord! Welcome to Gotham!
(nudging Simon)
Tell 'em who you are.

SIMON

What? Oh. I'm the mayor.

JOAN

My lords, do you truly come
scouting for the king?

SIR TIMM

We do.

ROBIN

(leaving)
Adieu and good luck.

SIR TIMM

We come to purge this land of
sinners and wastrels in his name.
(brandishes his mace)
Show us your ne'erdowells and
straightway shall they be hanged.

Robin returns promptly.

ROBIN
What's this now?

SIR ENGEHARDT
Haha! Sir Timm you are fervent.
(to Simon, indicating
Bynckie)
You have had word perhaps from
this idiot wench we encountered
upon the road. I trust the folk
here have more wit than she! Haha!

Joan and Simon gape at the knights. Robin glances from
the knights to Bynckie and back.

ROBIN
Haha, m'lord! Haha! No indeed,
there's no head more full of
brains in Gotham than is mistress
Bynckie's. The wisest! The most
learned of us! Come, we must show
you our humble town!

Simon and Joan exchange surprised looks. Robin strides off.

SIR TIMM
Dear lord, none but yokels for
miles around.

Sir Enghardt shrugs his sympathy.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Robin tramps along the road, the knights following on
horseback. Simon and Joan trail, with Bynckie behind. Robin
spots GILBERT, a fat man, riding towards them with a sack
of oats slung across his donkey's shoulders.

ROBIN
Gilbert! You are cruel to that
animal! Must he carry your bulk as
well as your oats?

GILBERT
Marry. If I lead him, I'll not get
to market on time.

ROBIN
Then put the oats over your own
shoulder. That way he carries you,
but you carry the oats.

GILBERT
... but-

ROBIN

Truly. It would be kinder for him.

Gilbert looks embarrassed and confused, but heaves the oats onto his own shoulder.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

There! He'll thank you for it.
Farewell!

Gilbert rides on one way, Robin leads the knights the other. Everyone but Robin frowns with confusion.

EXT. ROAD BY A FIELD - DAY

The band arrive at a barn where a group of townsfolk mend a barn door. Robin glances up at the knights, then leaps onto the barn door. The townsfolk stare at him, astonished.

ROBIN

Ready. Lift up.

The townsfolk exchange glances, but made self-conscious by the presence of the knights, they obey. Robin balances precariously. Robin points toward a field of rye.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

Off we go!

HOB

Here, Robin-

ROBIN

(urgently)

Do you want to be thought fools by these honourable men? Onward, into the field!

Dazed, the townsfolk obey. They rush into the field, carrying Robin on the barn door like pall-bearers.

The townsfolk thunder around as Robin totters and waves his arms, commanding them where to run. Birds start up out of the crops, which the six townspeople trample horribly.

The knights, Joan and Simon watch. A cart full of wheels of cheese rolls slowly up the hill and halts as it's driver, HUGH, the dour dairy-farmer, and Gwen, his daughter spot the chaos in the field.

SIR ENGEHARDT

(to Simon)

My good man. I am not familiar with farming practices...

Simon puffs out his cheeks, baffled.

JOAN

Oh! Its... to scare the birds.
They eat the crops.

The barn door returns to the road. Robin leaps down.

ROBIN

It's our own innovation! You see
this way I can get about the field
without stepping on the crops!

Beat.

Robin notices the cheeses. He bolts over to the cart.

Hugh and Gwen turn to see Robin pulling cheeses off the
cart and rolling them off down the road.

HUGH

Here! My cheese! Wait a minute!

ROBIN

Never fear, Hugh, I'll help you.

Hugh and Gwen leap down off the cart. Hugh runs to
intercept the escaping cheeses. Gwen rushes to Robin.

GWEN

Dear Robin, what's your meaning?

ROBIN

What? Has your father not taught
you this? Let me show you!

Robin embraces Gwen in a dance. She gasps and stares at him
as he jigs a few steps with her - together they take a
cheese and roll it down the road.

JOAN

This is all very traditional.

Simon and Joan rush forward and try to help. Joan tries to
gather cheeses while Simon helps Robin roll them away.

Hugh glances up from the stack of cheeses he has collected.
He sees Robin jiggling with Gwen and rolling cheeses.

HUGH

Scoundrel!

Hugh charges at Robin. Robin sees him coming and escapes
under the cart. Hugh chases him, but can't catch him. They
rush around the pile of cheese that Hugh has made.

Insensed, Hugh grabs a cheese and pitches it at Robin. Robin dodges the first and ducks the second. Hugh throws more. Robin avoids several cheeses, turning his maneuvers into a dance. The cheeses roll away down the road.

Hugh squares his shoulders and heaves a cheese with deadly accuracy. Robin, caught up in his own dance, takes the cheese square between the eyes. He reels, dazed.

Hugh makes a leap forward for Robin and catches him by the sleeve. Gwen interposes to protect Robin. Joan and Simon rush forward to help.

Robin recovering, darts through Joan's legs and grabs Simon. Robin hops and twists until all five topple over into in a heap on the ground with their legs intertwined. Hugh finds himself trapped across from Robin.

HUGH (CONT'D)

Of all the stinking-

ROBIN

Of all the stinking cheeses, good Hugh, you make the finest! Such a craftsman I have never known!

Beat.

HUGH

Hm. Thankee. But-

SIR TIMM

By sweet Saint Bart, what is this?

ROBIN

Oh! Ha. We must pause in our work until we can untangle ourselves.

Joan, Gwen and Simon laugh nervously. As each of them tries to extract themselves from the tangled heap, Robin deftly hooks their feet and keeps them trapped. All five seem to be struggling to free themselves.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

Hugh, will you tell m'lord why you rolled the cheeses off down the road?

Hugh's eyes bulge. Everyone looks at him.

HUGH

Oh. Uh - Aye. It- it's the, uh - the quickest way to get 'em to market.

Robin nods enthusiastically. The others follow suit.

ROBIN
The market's in Nottingham. Which
are my legs?

GWEN
I think that one...

ROBIN
Maybe if I -

SIMON
How about -

GWEN
Sorry, could I just -?

They all struggle, ad-libbing. The knights turn away.

ANGLE ON THE KNIGHTS ON THEIR HORSES

The knights confer privately.

SIR ENGEHARDT
Sir Timm. I am quite convinced
that this town is peopled with
lunatics.

SIR TIMM
My thoughts precisely, Sir
Enghardt. How shall we proceed?

RETURN TO ROBIN ON THE ROAD

Robin glances nervously at the knights. He turns back to
his captives and finds Bynckie standing over him.

BYNCKIE
You are a wicked fellow, Robin.

ROBIN
Avaunt, you loon. You'll mar all.

BYNCKIE
Ye've not been honest with your
friends. I can tell.

ROBIN
Ye'll tell nothing. Hence!

ANGLE ON THE KNIGHTS

SIR ENGEHARDT

This is no fit place for a gentleman, much less his majesty! We must go swiftly and at once, and never, NEVER return to this blasted place!

SIR TIMM

(Indicating Robin and Bynckie)
Something transpires.

They turn to see Robin shooing Bynckie away. Robin glances over at them, anxiety showing in his face. He tries to cover it, making a show of trying to free his legs.

SIR ENGEHARDT

Sir Timm, I perceive a rat!

Sir Engehardt dismounts, marches over to the tangled heap.

SIR ENGEHARDT (CONT'D)

You are yet in confusion as to the identity of your own limbs?

JOAN

It is... most unusual my lord.

SIR ENGEHARDT

Perhaps I may be of assistance.

He draws his sword. He touches one of Robin's legs with the point. Robin stares, suddenly nervous.

SIR ENGEHARDT (CONT'D)

This one, for instance.

Sir Engehardt draws back to stab. The point start to descend -

- Robin leaps free and stands. Beat.

SIR ENGEHARDT (CONT'D)

Ha! The villain is revealed! You see he has been making fools of you!

HUGH

The devil! And the mayor to help him!

JOAN

Now just a minute! It were you-

ANGES
 (shoving Hob)
 Ye've made me look an ass!

HOB
 Me?!

SIR ENGEHARDT
 SILENCE! I am taking this deceiver
 into custody.

Robin glances at each of the knights, then runs away.

They chase him. Sir Timm cuts him off on the road. He runs back. Sir Engehardt pursues him until he hides under the barn door.

The townsfolk lift the barn door. Robin is revealed. Sir Engehardt stabs at him with his sword but Robin leaps on top of the door. The townsfolk run away from Sir Engehardt still carrying the door, with Robin on it.

The knights corral the townsfolk. Finally Robin is spilled onto the ground. From which--

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD THROUGH THE FIELDS - MOMENTS LATER

Sir Engehardt ties Robin's wrists.

SIR ENGEHARDT
 The King's peace is restored! This town shall be a fine stop on his progress once this troublemaker has been roundly hanged!

The townsfolk are horrified. They watch sadly as the knights lead Robin away.

SIR TIMM
 We shall not be so easily cozened, Sir Engehardt.

SIR ENGHARDT
 No, indee-

They stop their horses. Directly in their path Gwen sits on top of a large three-legged kettle in the middle of the road. They all stare. The townsfolk start to gather.

SIR ENGEHARDT
Maiden. What dost thou, sitting
thus upon thine kettle?

GWEN
D'you not see? I am not witless -
it is a heavy kettle. I will not
carry it home on my two legs, when
it can much better carry me on its
three.

Beat.

GWEN (CONT'D)
(urging kettle on)
Get up, now. On. Home. On.

Beat. A CUCKOO CALLS from a nearby bush. It calls again.

MATILDA
Hark! A cuckoo. Should we trap
him, we may keep summer all year
round!

HOB
Oh! Yes! Smartly now, folk. 'Tis
in that bush.

MATILDA
Fence him in! Here's the fencing
stuff.

A group of townsfolk grab wood from the barn-makers and
start to build a fence around the bush.

AGNES
How now, you wicked eel!

Agnes runs around holding an enormous live eel.

HUGH
We have yet some cheeses not sent
to Nottingham! Lend a hand!

He starts rolling cheeses away down the road.

Simon is on top of the barn door being carried around the
field. He yells directions to his carriers.

AGNES
Nay! A-hanging's too good for you.
I shall drown you in the lake you
naughty eel!

The cuckoo fence is almost complete.

HOB
Beware it should fly before we
have fenced around!

GWEN
Ya! On, good kettle!

Robin looks up at the knights.

ROBIN
You are right, my lords. I was a
burden. Taking and not giving.
Look how they thrive without me
already. The King will be well
received, and if wisdom be as
contagious as madness, he will
leave a wise man indeed.

The knights look around in horror.

SIR TIMM
Says he true? Is madness
contagious?

HOB
The cursed bird has flown!

MATILDA
Foolish Hob! You did not build the
fence high enough!

SIR TIMM
Let us stay here no longer.

SIR ENGEHARDT
Villain: you may rot in this mad
town of yours. Let no man who has
his wits set foot in Gotham - Town
of Fools!

They kick their horses and gallop away leaving Robin with
the townsfolk.

The chaos calms as the riders get further off. Then stops.
The townsfolk look at each other. They cheer and embrace
one another.

Robin stands alone. A hand touches his shoulder. It is
Bynckie. He regards her warily.

BYNCKIE
Ropes can be tricky.

She indicates his hands. He holds up the ropes. Her face
lights up as she sets about untying them.

ROBIN
You are not angry with me?

HUGH (V.O)
Angry? Ha!

Joan, Simon, Hugh, and Gwen gather around.

GWEN
Prodigal as you are, your
neighbors shall not hang you.

He glances from Gwen to Bynckie, a little lost. He slides his hands from the ropes. Bynckie trots off with the rope.

JOAN
Come. We shall have a day of
festivities.

HUGH
I will go find my cheeses.

Joan, Simon and Hugh go off. Gwen lingers by Robin, shy.

Robin takes her hand. She looks up, pleased but not surprised.

They see the knights in the distance. Robin frowns.

ROBIN
Farewell noble knights.

Robin and Gwen see the townsfolk rejoicing. Someone is playing a DRUM and Hob and Bynckie are dancing.

Gwen follows Robin's melancholy look.

GWEN
For one with so much wit, perhaps
this does seem a town of fools.

Robin glances at her, then out at the two receding horsemen. Then, brightening a touch-

ROBIN
I ween there are more fools pass
through Gotham than remain in it.

Beat. They watch the riders. The DRUM is joined by a FLUTE.

Gwen beams at Robin and drags him off to dance with the townsfolk.

THE END