



BLOOD FOR THE FURROWS JAMIE M STEAD
A TALE FROM THE RYNGWOODE

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Come in, come in. Such a storm today.

Let me get some more logs on the fire, get you warmed up and dried.

No heroic knights in today's tale I'm afraid. Today, true horror is born, a horror which may or may not be still with us now, somewhere deep within the Ryngwoode...



They say beware of Greeks bearing gifts, but sometimes it's those receiving the gifts we need to be wary of.

Winter had been brutal. The scars from the ice and snow ran deep, even as spring approached.

The harvest had been lacking for two summers now. The animals had sired no young, the trees had borne no fruit. Regular raids from outlaws had left the stores almost empty. As mother winter shook off her blanket another raid was inevitable.

Each year, at the start of the sowing season, an effigy was fashioned from the last of the previous harvest, to be buried in the fields and ploughed back into the land. Its spirit returning to whence it came and bringing forth a strong crop for the year to come.

Rain would soak the land. The sun would shine bright. And without fail, every year, the crops would be bountiful. Nearby trees would bloom with fruit, ripe for the picking. The animals would fatten, give birth, and provide the village with all the meat and milk it required. The river would teem with fish, swimming as if their only purpose in life was to be caught in the fishermen's nets.

But now the old gods had failed them. Maybe it was time to try the new god, the supposed one true God. Maybe he would heed their call.

If the village had ever had a name it's been long lost to time. Hidden in a valley, and far from the nearest town, the villagers could maintain the old ways without judgement. But this also meant no patrols to protect them from passing outlaws. How the criminals had found them was simply bad luck. A trait that now appeared to beat through the village's very heart.

The elders had decided to send forth a party to the nearest town, a few days walk away. There they would donate what little they had to the church and request the priest journey back with them to bless their land. Maybe the hands of this god which the rest of the country worshipped could dig deep and make their lands fertile again.

The party left on foot, chosen from the youngest and strongest of the village, hiding what little money they had about their person, and praying to whatever gods may listen that they would make it to the town safely.

The remaining villagers took to the fields, preparing the land as best as they could for the work ahead of them. The ground was tough and hard to turn. The oxen, weak and malnourished, struggled to pull the plough. The soil slowly began to part, breaking like powder, lacking the water it needed to bind. It felt pointless, but they knew they needed to be prepared.

One by one, the farmers fell to their knees, grasping at the soil, screaming to the heavens for rain. They had to trust that the priest would come and bless their lands, that whatever ritual was performed would appease mother nature.

Days passed, with those still able digging the fields by hand. Two of the oxen had collapsed and had been slaughtered, their sacrifice allowing the farmers to continue as best as they could. The other oxen were alive, barely, and lacking the energy to even stand, never mind pull the plough.

Mothers starved so their children could eat. The old took to their beds to preserve their energy, some never to leave. The young shared the food equally so they could carry on preparing the fields. Not once did anyone fight or argue over what little they were given.

Ulf stood watching the hills. His tall, broad stature betrayed his true age. Though his lack of hair and long white beard gave away the truth. His blue tunic stood out in contrast to the dull, dying landscape surrounding him. It had only been days but he already missed his son like it had been years.

As village leader he had felt he had to make the journey to the town himself, but his son, Sigurd, had convinced Ulf to stay and let him go in his stead. The older man had tried his best to keep busy, to assure everyone that things would get better. He refused food, insisting others needed it more than him, but in return they insisted he take it, as he had kept their village alive this long.

He wanted to believe help would arrive soon, but something in the back of his head told him he would never tend these fields again. His heart hoped otherwise.

Anlaf, the cider maker, handed out the last slice of apple pie made by his wife, Una. A tiny morsel for everyone able to join the communal meal that day.

Every Friday, Una would bake multiple pies to share with the whole community. The smell would drift through the village, teasing all the workers waiting for their supper. Gradually the apples started to get smaller, and so too did the pies. Una would keep back the best apples for Anlaf and herself, until eventually there were no apples to pick.

Una baked her last pie, went to bed, and never awoke. Anlaf knew his time would come soon and he would see Una again, somewhere in another realm. Enjoying apple pie and cider together once more.

Everyone in the village had a story like this. Of loss and hunger. But also of faith in the old ways, the ways their ancestors brought with them from across the sea. Turning to the new god was a last attempt to save what they had.

Figures appeared on the horizon, each atop a horse. Ulf wasn't sure if they were real or figments of his imagination. Bandits perhaps. The joke would be on them, there was nothing left to take and the payment of death would now be a blessing for the starving villagers.

He beckoned to the others and pointed to the top of the hill where the figures had stopped, dismounting from their horses.

"Father!" one of the figures shouted, running down the hill. Ulf breathed a sigh of relief as a tear welled in his eye. It was his son, Sigurd. *Thank you*, Ulf said to himself. To any god or gods that were listening. *Thank you*.

Tall and broad, like his father, but with long red hair in braids and his beard in a plait, Sigurd looked well. Whatever happened next, at least the journey itself appeared to have been a success.

Four had left the village, but five returned, making their way down the hill. Ulf approached their guest, and by the cross around his neck could tell their prayers had, at least in part, been answered.

The man was short, and it was obvious under his brown, hooded tunic that he was well fed. Gold rings sparkled on his fingers, in contrast to the simple wooden cross hanging from his neck.

“Welcome my dear priest, welcome,” said Ulf, taking the man’s hands into his own. “Please come, take a seat. Can I get you a drink, some food perhaps?”

“Thank you my good man, thank you, but please do not fuss,” replied the priest. “Your son has explained everything, and I know how little food you must have. Your fellow villagers here carried back all they could from my church’s stores, and I gift these horses too. I will eat only once you have all eaten. First you must be nourished before we all pray for your lands on the morrow.”

The returning villagers unloaded the provisions from the horses and took them to the village hall to set about preparing a feast for the whole community. Everyone would indeed be nourished.

“Please, good man... Ulf, I think your son told me,” said the priest.

“Yes. I am the village... elder, I suppose. Being far from any lord or manor we look after ourselves. But please, carry on, you were saying?”

“I was hoping you could show me around the village. It would be good to meet your people and see the fields for myself. God can work wonders, but ours will be but a few voices amongst many that He will be listening to. With no nearby church, tell me, where do you pray?”

“We, ah, we pray within the fields themselves, or often congregate on the edge of the nearby woodland, in the shelter of the trees.”

“Ah, out in the open, like Jesus himself,” said the priest, “*Spiritus est Deus, et eos qui adorant eum, in spiritu et veritate oportet adorare*. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. John chapter 4, verse 24.”

“Indeed,” replied Ulf. “Please, bear with me while I set the young ones to work preparing food for tonight’s festivities. We shall pray, feast like kings, and come morning hope for a sign that we have been heard from above. Feel free to take a walk through our humble settlement and I’ll come join you anon.”

The priest was watching a young mother fashioning a small figure from straw when Ulf caught up with him.

“I see you make good use of every part of the crop.”

“Oh indeed,” replied Ulf, “we waste as little as possible out here. Straw not only feeds and beds the animals, but makes for fine playthings for the children, and can be used in a multitude of ways for religious ceremonies.”

“Ah yes, we often make straw crosses and wreaths to decorate the harvest festival in the church. God provides and we find a way to expand on the uses,” said the priest.

“Forgive me Father, I have yet to ask your name.”

“Eustice of Nottingham. But now *Father* Eustice, no longer of Nottingham,” he said, with a small chuckle. “And you, Ulf, you say you are the village elder?”

“In age if not in title,” laughed Ulf. “We have no strict hierarchy here. We keep to ourselves, we have no lord, other than that which is above of course, and other than yourself the only non-villagers we see are roving bandits every now and then.”

“If you have no lord, no earthly lord that is, then you have no protector? No one to deal with the bandits? No one to collect taxes?”

Ulf had hoped the conversation wouldn't turn to such matters so soon. “Our forefathers managed to keep to themselves for such a long time that I think we became forgotten, what with war and rebellion countrywide. Lords changed with the moon, as my Grandsire told it. Once the country was settled under one king it was assumed more important matters were at hand than the meagre taxes our village would raise. I'm sure after your visit we can come to some kind of arrangement regarding a regular tithe for the church.”

Ulf hoped that would keep the priest quiet and was quick to change the subject.

“Please Father, follow me, I will give you a tour of our modest settlement and you can see for yourself how desperately we need the hands of God to fertilise our lands once more.”

The two men walked slowly through the village, a collection of around twenty houses plus a few barns for storing grain and other goods, with a large hall in the centre. To the north lay the fields, with the shadow of what was once a thriving orchard to the east, and to the west grazing land for the animals, now empty bar for the dust blowing in the gentle breeze. The only sign of life was the river at the south of the valley, flowing aplenty with water but lacking in fish.

“I get a good sense of community here, despite what has befallen you,” said the priest.

“Oh, very much so,” replied Ulf. “We are a very strong community, each with their role to play. Everyone knows if they need their clothes repaired then Estrid is the one to see. Yngvar can repair any item of wood, be it a chair or a bow. And Jorund and Katla, the twins who came to find you with Sigurd, they know exactly what berries and mushrooms to pick,

and more importantly what to leave. Building, cooking, hunting...whatever the task there is someone who's forefathers and foremothers passed the knowledge down to them, and they in turn will pass it onto their offspring too. Hopefully."

"I'm sure after today the village will once again prosper, my good man," said Father Eustice.

Hanging from every window and doorway were small straw effigies, which caught the priest's eye. "I see many of these figures hanging around the village, but a lack of crosses. Leftovers from the previous harvest festival are they?"

"Oh those things, yes, many are still hanging from the harvest festival." Ulf chose his words carefully. "As I said before, many are made as playthings for the children. They like to hear the stories of the old... legends. That one there is Woden, and hanging from the doorway over there, the one with a hammer, that's Thunor. Going back to my forefather's forefathers the stories have been told with the little straw figures, passed down through the years. And of course, each harvest festival we take the last of the straw and make a small effigy that gets ploughed back into the ground the following year. I feel this year we may need an even bigger effigy to bring the fields back to life. Hardly something that is unique to us I suspect."

"Not at all," replied Father Eustice. "Just the... figures, the effigies, they could be viewed by the church as heretical. But as you say, if they are simply used for stories then I see no problem there."

"I assure you Father, we would never wish to offend the church. I fear we have had more pressing matters to think about than taking down any prior decorations." Ulf hoped to change the subject once more.

“Of course, of course. Apologies my good man, I did not mean to belittle the situation of your village. God will help all his children as best as he can, and through me He shall bring back your prosperity, and then we can see about bringing yourselves into the fold of our parish.”

“I hope and pray for our prosperity, but for now I would settle for one good meal,” laughed Ulf.

The two men continued their walk through the village, Ulf introducing Father Eustice to a mother who had barely eaten in weeks so that her children could eat. Children who were forced to walk miles each day to forage for the closest fruits and berries they could find. The priest prayed for her and told her things would now be okay, that God will take them into his hands and all will share in the night’s feast.

In the next house was an old woman, alone except for the body of her husband who had passed on a few days prior. His body was covered with sacks in the pen where he used to shear their sheep. No one had the energy to bury him, so there he lay, slowly rotting while she prayed to join him.

“We’ve been lucky that the river, though starved of fish, is so close. Without that I fear more would have died sooner,” Ulf told the priest.

In every home they saw at least one villager close to death, the rest of their families barely able to look after them. Death’s shadow grew slow, but was gaining speed every day.

“I’ve also noticed a number of these stone carvings throughout the village, and a few in the surrounding area on the journey here,” Eustice said, pointing to a large stone in the shape of a man, covered in runes.

“Ah yes, another example of our roots, carved many a moon past by our forefathers, a reminder of home across the sea for them. Come, let me take you to their resting place.”

The two men left the village and entered the fields where a young girl was burying a straw man in the dirt. Her yellow hair shone like gold against her green dress. Her lips dry and cracked, her arms and legs just skin and bone.

“Spirits of the field, take this sacrifice and in return let father’s crops grow once more,” she said with a broken voice.

“Even the children do what they can to help,” Ulf told the priest as they walked past the girl.

“I hope your prayers and sacrifice are not in vain, priest,” said the girl, sounding wise beyond her years.

“Sacrifice? The food and horses I have brought are far from such a thing as I have plenty, I only wish there was more I could bring, more I could give, aside from my time and prayers.”

“Everything will be okay, Ingerid, I promise,” Ulf assured the girl. “Come Father, the graveyard is this way, close to the trees.”

The girl stood and watched the two men walk across the field, towards the trees. As they reached the treeline she kicked more dirt over the straw man before stabbing the ground with her shovel, splitting the effigy in two.

Dragging the heavy shovel behind her, she slowly walked to the other side of the field where other children were already starting to dig a large hole.

“For such an old settlement I would have expected more graves,” said the priest.

“Our local burial practices have... changed over the generations. Some of my forefathers are here, in this ground. Others were laid to rest within the woodland itself. There will be many who left and died elsewhere, either naturally or in war. I hope their souls are at rest, wherever they may be.” Ulf looked thoughtfully across the valley. “My own father was cremated on this very field. Sent on to the next life as fire and ash. He hated the thought of being buried underground. Instead his ashes were scattered here, and the following harvest was one for the ages. His spirit carried on farming we all say.”

“I see a few freshly dug graves, I assume these were all from the recent troubles?”

“In a way,” replied Ulf. “Those two there were taken from us by bandits, the bastards. Young, strong lads both. Brothers too, to make it harder on their mother. We were all proud of them for standing up to those thieves, but they lost their lives and the bandits still took their fill of our stores. These others were the last to be buried, just days ago, while some of us still had the energy to do so. Others lay around the village awaiting their time to be laid to rest, as you’ve seen.”

Father Eustice looked over the simple graves, and then back towards the village. The field between looking dry and cracked and ready to die. The villagers and the land were truly connected.

“Please, allow me to say some prayers for the departed. If you need to head back to get something to eat I understand, I’m sure the food will be prepared by now,” said the priest.

As Ulf headed across the fields towards the village, he looked back and could see the priest, head down, hands clasped together, deep in prayer. *Gods save us from what has happened, and gods forgive us for what we still need to do*, thought the old man.

As the sun began to set, the villagers all congregated in the main hall, a feast larger than they had seen in some time lay out along a central table. Many were eager to dig in, but for some the sight of food made their stomachs cramp even more.

“Welcome, welcome,” said Ulf as everyone entered. “Please, find a seat and make sure you have a full plate and a full tankard. Our thanks and prayers go out to Father Eustice who traveled for days to help us, bringing the food you see before you. With his help we hope the land will listen to our pleas and the harvest will be bountiful once more, and none shall have to suffer as we have these past few years.”

Ulf gestured towards Father Eustice, who proceeded to stand.

“I will do my best,” said the priest, “but as with all my work it will ultimately be in God’s hands. He will dig deep from up on high and fertilise these lands once more, I’m sure. I know you are all eager to dig into the feast before us, so I will make this prayer short. We call to heaven, to God our father. Have mercy upon the people here before you, for they have suffered deeply. They tend to your land with great care, please return that land to its former glory so they can continue to cultivate that which you have sent to be farmed. This feast will nourish all here, and for that we give thanks. Amen.”

A quiet murmur of “Amen” spread across the hall before turning into the sound of the famished eating and drinking.

Ulf could see a slight look of disappointment on the priest's face. “Take no offence Father, I’m sure everyone is thankful to your god, but hunger has taken its toll, many without the vigour to even talk. This feast will bring that back to them.”

“My god?” questioned the priest. “You said ‘your god’...”

“Did I?” replied Ulf. “Ah, I simply meant in respect to you being the one to talk to him directly... for us. Please, join in the feast. Without you and the food you brought for us we would not have this before us, or the hope to once more grow such fare for ourselves.”

Father Eustice looked around, seeing the old slowly taking their fill, and the young filling their bellies like ravenous dogs unsure of their next meal. Perhaps God would listen, perhaps he would bring these lands back to their former glory. Years of war, uncertainty and upheaval had taken its toll on the very soil of the land itself. He knew the history of this land better than most, reading every document he could in the monastery vaults when he was younger. Accounts of invasion, of rebellion. Even after all this time it was a wonder anything survived here, but God had been on their side in the end, he truly believed. And God would prove himself here.

“Here Father,” said a young boy, “please take this drink.”

The priest looked down at the tankard, a strange purple liquid inside.

“Thank you child, I’m not sure I’ve seen such a drink before.”

“A village speciality,” said Ulf. “Made with berries that only grow within the woodland itself. Arnbjörn here’s mother is an expert at brewing it. This is our last batch, but you would honour us by accepting it, and bring hope we can soon brew some more when the land allows.”

Father Eustice took the tankard to his lips as everyone in the room looked on. Pausing, he looked at Ulf, and then around the room.

“To your good health and fortune. May God protect you.” And with that the priest took a sip.

The room cheered.

The drink was sweet. One sip wasn't enough. It was intoxicating, yet didn't appear to be alcoholic. Down in one went the rest of the drink, the sticky purple juice running down the sides of the priest's face.

"I don't suppose you have much more of this, do you, my good fellow?" the priest asked Ulf.

"We have a small batch saved for just this occasion, but I beg you please, slow down. Though not alcoholic, it is.... rich on the stomach. Too much, too quick and you'll regret it. Now please, join us in this feast. Without you we would not all be here sharing in it." Ulf raised his cup, filled with a spiced cider also saved for this special occasion. "To Father Eustice, to each and every one of you here now. Long may the fields sprout wheat, long may the trees bear fruit, long may the cattle sire young, and long live the king, whoever the fuck he is! Wassail!"

"Drinkhail!" The room replied.

"Wassail!"

"Drinkhail!" The room replied, even louder.

Father Eustice went to pick up his bread. Bringing it to his mouth he realised he couldn't move. The bread was still there on his plate, unmoved.

Drip.

He opened his mouth, shouting. But no sound emerged.

Drip.

He screamed, mouth closed.

Drip.

His limbs were heavy. All he could do was move his eyes, looking down at the purple juice dripping onto the table from his chin.

“Dear God, what devilish trick is this?” Is what he would have said, could he speak.

His vision started to blur, a black mist fading in over his eyes. Everyone around him still eating and drinking. Shouting and singing and dancing. Why was no one helping him? Figures jumped on the table in front of him, stripping themselves naked, chanting in a language he didn’t recognise.

The singing was getting louder and louder. Drums started banging. Louder. And louder. And louder. And as his vision faded so too did his hearing. Leaving loud but muffled sounds.

The pale naked figures began to paint themselves black. Marking themselves violently, as if possessed by a primal rage. Running their blackened hands down their faces in a dance that could only be performed to music sent by the devil himself.

The priest's eyes darted around the room. The young and the old screaming with manic laughter. Food and drink thrown around with abandon.

Then he noticed one figure, all in black, standing at the edge of the hall. The son. Sigurd. He mouthed what looked to be the words “Thank you” at the priest and then left.

The priest’s eyes finally gave in to the darkness. As his eyes closed the last thing he saw was a man made of straw walking towards him from across the hall.

Father Eustice awoke. His heavy eyes burning in the sharp morning light. His head feeling groggy. Where was he? What had happened the previous night? Was it all a bad dream?

He could feel his limbs once more, but struggled to move. He tried to shout, but something was in his mouth. A rope, gagging him. His eyes darted around as his vision started to clear. He was in the middle of the large field north of the village.

Looking around he could see his head was encased in a helmet of some kind. Not a helmet. A mask? A mask made of straw.

He looked around as far as he could. His head. Body. Legs. Arms. All encased in straw. He tried to move, but it was impossible. He could just about see the ground below him, his feet appearing to float. Had he been crucified? No, he could see ropes, tying him to a pole.

Shapes started to appear on the horizon before him, dark figures flickering against the haze of the rising sun. Moving closer and closer. Chanting. He tried to move, but it was no use. He was firmly encased within this suit of straw and tied tightly to the pole. *Oh God*, he thought, *they are going to burn me!*

The figures came into focus. Their skin still painted black from the night before, all wearing outfits made of straw. Each with a mask in the shape of an animal's head. Wolves, deer, hare, oxen.

"Blood for the furrows!" He heard, as the chanting became clear. "Blood for the furrows!"

He was to be a sacrifice. It was clear to him now. *Dear God above*, he prayed to himself, *forgive these simple people for they do this through desperation. Hunger has driven them to this. Do not punish them for simply wanting to live.*

"Blood for the furrows! Blood for the furrows!"

The figures surrounded him. Both young and old. Mothers with their children, babies swaddled to their backs. The healthy helping the infirm, all in straw masks. The entire

village was there before him. And directly in front stood an old man with the head of a wolf. Ulf.

“Oh gods of our forefathers, hear us now! Every season we return to the earth that which you gave us. We have disappointed you and so give you the ultimate sacrifice, that of a child of the false god. Accept this sacrifice as we return him to the earth, and from his blood bring forth the harvest we need to survive!”

“Blood for the furrows! Blood for the furrows!”

Blood? The earth? Then it dawned on the priest, it wasn't fire that would take his life.
Oh dear God, what fate awaits me?

Suddenly Father Eustice could feel something pulling him from behind.

The ground became sky and with a crunch he hit the ground, on his back but still trussed to the pole. As pain shot up his spine, in agony he once more tried to scream.

Now he was moving, being dragged slowly over the soil. He craned his neck to see an ox pulling him towards a group of the villagers. As he got closer he could see they were standing around a large hole. His muffled screams fell on deaf ears.

Figures moved around him, then he felt his body moving sideways, sliding into the hole. In the ground around him he could see a broken skull and various bones, some still wrapped in gold chains. Skeletal hands covered in rings that sparkled in the early morning light. He realised he wasn't the first. Whose were these bodies? Bandits? Missing lords?

A small figure blocked out the sun at the edge of the hole he lay in, throwing the first of the soil on top of him. As his eyes adjusted he could see it was a child, dressed in green, golden hair exploding from the mask of a rabbit.

Screaming was pointless, he knew that now. No one could save him, he had to prepare to finally meet God. As the soil started to rain down on him he closed his eyes and silently prayed.

Dirt fell through the gaps in the straw mask, filling his nostrils and covering his eyes. The rope finally fell from his mouth, only to be replaced by soil. He could feel the weight on his chest, making it harder and harder to breathe. As the weight on his body grew, the weight on his mind eased. Soon he would be one with God's earth and ascend to meet the creator. Once more he would join his family, lost to him many years past.

Darkness fell and he awaited the light to guide him.

Struggling, the oxen pulled the plough over the field. Though now fed and watered, both animals still lacked energy. Ulf guided them back and forth, ploughing the straw man into the field from whence it came. Muffled screams could be heard rising from the freshly cut furrows. Within moments blood started to moisten the dry soil.

"Blood for the furrows," Ulf shouted.

"Blood for the furrows! Blood for the furrows!" came the response, as the villagers sowed the first seeds of the season.

Up and down the field the oxen dragged the plough, cutting deeper and deeper, feeding the land with more blood. Behind them each villager took it in turns to sow more seeds with constant chants of "Blood for the furrows!"

Once all the seeds were sown, the villagers stopped, creating a circle where the priest had been buried.

“The ritual is complete,” Ulf announced, taking off his mask. “The furrows have been fed with blood. The seeds have been sown. The gods have their sacrifice and it is now in their hands to show us if they are pleased and will give us a bountiful harvest, or continue to punish us.”

“Father,” a voice called. Ulf looked round to see his son running towards them from the treeline. “I found them! In the woods. The bandits.”

“Take your time son, catch your breath.”

“Their camp, I found it. It’s not too far into the woods, in the old clearing where we grazed pigs. When I left they were all asleep, a heavy night of ale by the looks of it. Now is our chance.”

Ulf thought for a second. Did the villagers have the energy for a larger sacrifice? Could they afford not to take this chance while they had it?

“It’s a sign, a sign from the gods,” he said, replacing his mask. “Not only will today’s sacrifice bring us a full harvest, but it will bring an end to those that have taken from us what was not theirs to take. Everyone! Grab whatever you can, a pitchfork, a rake, an axe. Young or old, we all go and put an end to these bandits now. We take back our land and we take back our forest. What say you, my good folk?”

“Aye,” said the crowd.

“I said: What. Say. You?” Ulf repeated, louder.

“Aye!” came the response, twice as loud. “Blood for the furrows! Vengeance for the gods!”

And with that each and every person from the village, young and old, took whatever they could find to use as a weapon. Babies still strapped to their mother’s backs. The old

and infirm still helped along by the young and strong. An army of straw animals, marching across the bloodied field to sow vengeance upon those that had wronged them.

Never to return.

For years the village remained empty.

As new settlements sprang up nearby, stories spread of the village with no name, of a horror that befell the residents. Killed by bandits. Taken by wolves. Swallowed by the very ground they tended.

Each year the trees bore fruit. The fields swayed in the breeze with the thickest of crops. And every now and then some fool would come across the remains of the village and attempt a harvest. And all who tried would say the same thing. That the ground itself screamed with each cut.

The blossoms bloomed. The sun shone. The leaves fell. The snow laid. The years repeated.

War spread across the land. Unity brought peace, but fear of enemies from overseas drove people to large, fortified cities on the coasts. The trees from the nearby woodland edged closer, and closer, eventually enveloping the remains of the village and all other nearby settlements, also now abandoned. All became one, within those trees.

For what the Ryngwoode takes, the Ryngewoode never returns.

The End