

CRUSADER

by

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INT. CASTLE - PRINCE'S CHAMBERS - DAWN

The chambers of royalty. All is tassels and garlanding, hardwood furniture expertly crafted.

The windy SCREAMS of a child are heard. ELIZABETH, 30s, rushes through the room. Plain in appearance, but kind.

She hurries to the source of the cries: WILLIAM, 3, trying desperately to pull free from the claws of a nightmare. Elizabeth rocks the boy gently in her arms.

ELIZABETH
Shh, be at peace, my son.

A door opens and in rushes JEAN, the nurse: 50s, blinking sleep from kind old eyes. She bows when she sees Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)
The Prince is fine, Jean.

Jean exits with a bow. William, still half-asleep, blinks back tears.

WILLIAM
Daddy?

ELIZABETH
Shh, darling. You'll wake your brother. Babies need their sleep.

WILLIAM
Where's Daddy?

Elizabeth sighs, and looks out a nearby window.

ELIZABETH
He's protecting us from the Celts who have risen up against us. But when he is done, he will return.

She smiles as she speaks of her husband: her one great love.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)
Now sleep, and when you awake, perhaps he will have returned.

EXT. FOREST - SAME TIME

The trees stand silent, mist and fog hanging on the branches.

A deer appears, grazing. Then the deer jerks upright. The animal bolts into the trees as THE ENGLISH ARMY, some 5,000 strong, crests a nearby hill. Veterans all, hard and fierce.

EXT. CREST OF HILL - ENGLISH ARMY

Two MEN on battle-horses lead the army:

RICHARD, 30s, sits easily in full battle array and short sword. Clean-shaven, eyes are deep, almost fathomless pools of peace and wisdom. Elizabeth's husband, father to the princes.

The other man: BALDRIC, Richard's brother. Older, and a polar opposite: dark and flashing eyes, similarly armored but bearing a heavy broadsword.

BALDRIC

Tell me again why we're in this god-forsaken place instead of at home?

RICHARD

Come now, Baldric: a little change is good for you.

Next to Baldric are a few elite GUARDSMEN: his bodyguards and personal retinue. ALEXIUS, the Captain of Baldric's guards, sits upon a warhorse that suddenly shuffles nervously.

EXT. VALLEY

Below the English, CELTS materialize between the trees. Tattered, clad in leather, no metal armor in sight. But they are fierce-looking, each grimly clutching a weapon.

EXT. CREST OF HILL

Richard surveys the scene.

RICHARD

Quarter will be accepted.

BALDRIC

Crush them today, and we end this conflict forever.

Richard shakes his head.

RICHARD

Crush them, and their sons will rise up to replay this same scene. They have fought bravely, and quarter will be given.

He wheels his horse and gallops down the line of the troops. Baldric watches Richard go, his eyes narrowing slightly.

BALDRIC

(to Alexius)

Signal for quarter.

Alexius, captain of Baldric's elite bodyguards, nods. A nearby STANDARD BEARER waves a flag, signalling for quarter.

Richard gallops down the line. He holds his sword aloft, and the army shouts for a king they will live and die for.

VALLEY

The Celts SCREAM charge up the hill.

HILLTOP

Richard watches the charge. Then he faces his army.

RICHARD
GOD AND COUNTRY!

ARMY
GOD AND COUNTRY!

RICHARD
Bowmen forward!

BOWMEN step forward as Richard makes the sign of the cross, then holds his sword aloft.

He waits, waits, waits as the Celts continue up the hill. A few of their warriors draw short bows and let fly. Several dozen of the English army fall screaming to the earth. Still, Richard holds his hand aloft.

RICHARD (cont'd)
Ready charge!

Richard drops his arm at last, and a devastating storm of arrows deluges the hillside, impaling hundreds of the Celts.

RICHARD (cont'd)
Charge!

The army thrusts forward, led by Richard, Baldric, and the horse-borne KNIGHTS. INFANTRY follow, running down the hill and screaming mad, wordless battle cries.

Richard and Baldric are first to the fray.

Richard fights with finesse and economy, dispatching an enemy with every graceful swing. Baldric's fighting is more savage, relying on force and overwhelming rabidity.

The carefully orchestrated attack shatters into melees.

A CELT appears to Richard's left. Richard kills him, but another appears on his right and hamstringing his horse.

Richard rolls and comes up fighting. Rushed by two Celts at the same time, his sword flashes as he kills them.

As the dead men fall, Richard plucks a dagger from one of their belts and throws it left-handed behind him.

The dagger whips through the air, narrowly missing Baldric's bodyguard, Alexius, who has also been unseated in the battle.

It goes over the Knight's shoulder, and impales the throat of a Celt who was about to kill Alexius from behind.

Alexius sees it. A moment passes between these two men. Alexius nods minutely, a battle-ground thanks.

Then both return to the business of staying alive on a field slick with bloody mud.

EXT. FIELD - DUSK

The battle over. Bodies strewn indiscriminately, mangled in obscene death embraces. Richard prays over a fallen comrade. Baldric watches Richard stand and move to the men.

BALDRIC

We are triumphant, brother!

Richard looks at the carpet of bodies all around. His expression: this is no triumph.

RICHARD

Have we found their leader?

Baldric nods, and holds out a beautiful sword of black iron.

BALDRIC

While you were tending to the wounded.
He was mortally injured, but gave us
his sword.

Richard takes the weapon. Crossing himself, he utters a short prayer, then continues surveying the scene with weary eyes.

BALDRIC (cont'd)

Have you nothing to say?

RICHARD

Aye. Would to God this had never come
to pass.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Pyres blaze among the trees, the dead consumed in flame. Celebration can be heard from afar. Victory.

Richard sits at the base of a tree, lost in thought. He spots a lone flower that somehow escaped destruction. A sign, perhaps: life in the midst even of death. Richard plucks it.

BALDRIC (O.S.)

I knew I would find you here.

Baldric is leaning against a tree. Unlike Richard, he has found time to clean himself and now stands resplendent in Kingly garb. He nods to the flower.

BALDRIC (cont'd)
First spoils of the conquest?

Richard places the flower beneath the folds of his tunic.

RICHARD
A gift for a lady.

BALDRIC
So you've heard?
(off Richard's look)
Seems some of the men found a nearby village that somehow survived the Celts' slaughters. The village women have *volunteered* to serve as... entertainment. Some of them are actually quite lovely.

He pats Richard on the shoulder.

BALDRIC (cont'd)
Come. Present your flower to one of them, and take hers in return.

Richard stares at Baldric for a long moment, then stands.

RICHARD
I think not.

BALDRIC
(laughing)
Your wife is far away. Besides, such a woman as she could never expect perfect fidelity.

RICHARD
"Such a woman"?

BALDRIC
Come, Richard, Kingly pride aside, you must admit she is plain and -

Richard's sword audibly slashes the air itself before coming to a last-moment stop in front of Baldric's throat.

Baldric stares at the keen blade: the dark sword of the Celts.

BALDRIC (cont'd)
Apologies if I have offended you.

The sword doesn't waver a millimeter.

RICHARD
If you had offended me, I would not have drawn my blade.

BALDRIC

Then I beg pardon for any offense I
might have given to Her Highness.

And just like that, Richard's blade is sheathed.

RICHARD

There are many forms of beauty,
Baldric. There is outer beauty, given
by God and so not worthy of pride. Or
there is the kind that is purchased
with silks and berries and so worth
even less.

His eyes grow misty as he thinks of Elizabeth, his wife.

RICHARD (cont'd)

But there is another kind: the kind
that glows not without, but within.
Plain? No, my Queen is the brightest
star in the firmament.

Baldric laughs, a mocking, derisive laugh.

BALDRIC

And for that, you draw your sword
against me? Against me?

Baldric whips out his sword in a murderous slice that aims to
take Richard's head off. He is every bit as fast as Richard.

Richard ducks at the last moment, allowing Baldric's sword to
sink deep into a tree.

Richard, sword in hand, stands ready for Baldric's next move.
No fear, no surprise. Permanent battle-readiness.

When Baldric's attack comes, the very earth seems to shake.
The battle we saw earlier was too large to fully comprehend.
This fight is intimate... and a marvel of expertise.

The two men wheel and dance, repeatedly coming within inches
of death. Both seem evenly matched, but eventually Richard
loses his advantage to the fury of Baldric's blows.

Richard narrowly ripostes a thrust, then backs off to avoid
dismemberment by the return thrust, and stumbles over a root.

He falls, and Baldric seizes the moment, whipping his sword
downward in a move meant to cleave through Richard's head.

The point of the blade stops only a hair's breadth from
Richard's unblinking right eye.

BALDRIC (cont'd)

You always lose, Richard.

RICHARD

No doubt that is why Father instructed you to look after me.

Baldric smiles, offering his hand to Richard, who takes it. And in that instant the entire fight is transformed: not a final struggle between hated enemies, but an ongoing and apparently good-natured show of sibling rivalry.

BALDRIC

Would you have done it? If I had not apologized?

Richard shrugs as he sheathes the Celtic blade.

RICHARD

She is my life.

Baldric seizes Richard's right hand, peeling off his brother's blood-crust-ed bracer and exposing Richard's forearm.

An enormous, long-healed burn scar in the shape of a cross stands in stark relief against Richard's skin.

BALDRIC

And God? What is His place?

Richard replaces the bracer.

RICHARD

God gave her to me - gave me my life - and for that I thank Him, and serve Him always.

INT. RICHARD'S TENT - NIGHT

Only a single candle lights the cavernous space of the King's tent .Large, but Spartan in its lack of creature comforts. Richard shoves supplies a pack as Baldric enters.

BALDRIC

Not going to wait until tomorrow?

RICHARD

I have a wife and a son I have not seen in an age, and another son I have never seen at all.

BALDRIC

And how do you plan to enter the city unannounced?

RICHARD

The same way I win my battles, Baldric: foresight and planning.

He smiles as he says it, and we get the feeling that this is a standard answer whenever Richard does something amazing.

RICHARD (cont'd)
 I know every stone of my castle; I
 could remake every key by memory. Do
 you not think I can enter without
 others knowing?

He smiles... but then his eyes narrow in disgust as he sees
 the man who has entered behind his brother: JAMES "THE
 BASTARD" PIOUS, 20s, is dressed as a priest, but his
 predatorial gaze reveals his belief only in self-gain.

BALDRIC
 (off Richard's look)
 James is here at my request. If you're
 going off in secret in the middle of
 the night, you might as well go with
 God's blessing.

Richard just slits the side of the tent and exits. Not a word.

EXT. TENT

Baldric and James leave through the same gash, watching
 Richard flit ghostlike through the trees, heading home.
 Baldric speaks, as though in answer to a question:

BALDRIC
 Because our father was insane.

JAMES
 My Lord?

BALDRIC
 That's the reason he gave Richard the
 greater part of his Kingdom.

His eyes, hawklike, track Richard's progress as his younger
 brother is swallowed by the darkness. He smiles.

BALDRIC (cont'd)
 And also because Richard is the
 greater King.

JAMES
 Certainly not greater than you.

BALDRIC
 Your words invite envy.

JAMES
 No, my lord. Your father divided the
 kingdom. A kingdom divided against
 itself cannot stand, so I merely
 counsel you to act prudently to save
 this land.

Baldric considers this as he gazes into the darkness.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

Richard gallops toward his castle, visible in the distance. A REAL kingdom of the middle ages: smaller than you'd expect, but its high walls keep its inhabitants safe.

INT. PRINCE'S CHAMBERS - NIGHT

Elizabeth reads a story to young William, Prince Heir to Richard's throne. GODWIN, six months old, the baby Prince, sleeps in a bassinet, rocked by Jean, the old nurse.

Everyone looks up as they hear footsteps. The door swings open. William looks to his mother.

ELIZABETH

Yes, dear, it's your father.

WILLIAM

Daddy!

William runs to Richard, who laughs and sweeps the boy into his arms. He showers his son with kisses, then:

RICHARD

Is my son the only one who joys to see me?

Elizabeth rushes to Richard. He crushes her to him. Elizabeth smiles as she draws her husband to the bassinet.

ELIZABETH

Come and meet your son.

Richard swings William onto his shoulders, then walks to the baby's cradle. Jean, who has kept rocking the child throughout, bows her head.

JEAN

Highness.

RICHARD

Jean, considering the fact that you changed my soils as a babe, I doubt I am a "Highness" in your mind.

Jean lifts her gaze. Her eyes, too, are bright with tears: the King's family are not the only ones happy for his return.

JEAN

So happy you are back, Highness.

VOICE (O.S.)

Though not for long, I fear.

Richard stiffens as we realize that there is one more person in the room. SIMON, a KNIGHT TEMPLAR, moves out of the shadows.

He moves with the thundering grace of a mammoth. A massive war-hammer hangs at his side, a cross etched into his silver mail.

RICHARD

Can you not grant me five minutes
alone with my family?

SIMON

Your pardon, My Lord. I was charged to
find you as soon as possible, and I
suspected you might bypass the
formalities of a triumphant entry into
the city.

Simon smiles wryly.

SIMON (cont'd)

It appears I was right.

He goes to the door, saying as he closes it behind him:

SIMON (cont'd)

I will wait in the throne room.

Richard turns to to his youngest son. He smiles and coos, and the baby awakes and...

RICHARD

He smiles!

ELIZABETH

Of course he does. A son will always
know his father.

Richard laughs with joy.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

(quietly; with love)

And the father his child.

Richard picks the baby gingerly up, then holds him high in the air above his head. He sings a small couplet:

RICHARD

So beautiful my baby! So lovely my
boys!

He is home.

INT. THRONE ROOM

Richard sits on a simple throne, Elizabeth at his side. Simon Templar stands before them.

RICHARD

You do me no service, asking this.

SIMON

I know. But the call has come, and my Master bids you take up the cross, and reclaim the Holy City.

RICHARD

More war. More killing. Does it never end?

SIMON

It is not merely Rome that asks this, my old friend. It is the Archbishop here, as well.

(beat)

And I.

RICHARD

I would have thought you had your fill of bloodshed.

SIMON

Jerusalem is in the hands of the heathen. Your kingdom is safe, but Christ's tomb remains in the hands of devils and despoilers.

Simon grips Richard's hand, displaying the cross etched into the King's right arm. He also pulls forth Richard's left arm, where another cross is burned in equal fashion.

SIMON (cont'd)

God has touched you, he calls you.

Richard jerks his arm away.

RICHARD

God did not do this. My father did it. An insane king left his youngest child on a mountainside to die. I was three months old, and I somehow survived four days in the elements. So he proclaimed that I was God's own, and branded me.

He grows angry as he says all this, but Elizabeth gently grips his arm, infusing him with her own calm. Simon stands.

SIMON

(as he leaves)

Consider it, my King.

Elizabeth moves to a window, peering out at the city below.

ELIZABETH

He spoke true: God has called you.

RICHARD

Elizabeth -

ELIZABETH

I do not speak of the atrocities your father visited upon you.

She waves at lights of the city and castle below.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

This is your doing. A city and a country that is safe, whole. You have been given much, my Lord.

She turns to face him.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

And from he to whom much is given, God also requires much.

Richard joins her at the window.

RICHARD

I've spent my life safeguarding a city I've hardly seen.

ELIZABETH

Faith is things which are not seen, which are true. This is your city, and you are a man of faith.

She kisses him.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Go with God. Know that I miss you, ache for you, but would have you nowhere else but in His service.

Richard looks into his wife's eyes.

RICHARD

You've never understood me. I'm no man of faith, just a man in love, trying desperately to be what his wife mistakenly thinks he is.

Elizabeth smiles.

ELIZABETH

And what is faith, but trying to live up to the Savior's hope in us?

Richard turns back to the city.

RICHARD

I'll leave as soon as the nobles have been assembled.

INT. HALL

Richard leaves the throne room. Baldric waits in the hall, shadowed by his guards, Alexius at their head as always.

RICHARD
You came after me?

BALDRIC
(shrugging)
The people care not when I enter the city. Putting off my own entry until tomorrow would only have meant one more night of squalor.

RICHARD
Does that mean you won't come with me to liberate the Holy City?

BALDRIC
Squalor can be acceptable... as long as spoils follow.

Baldric laughs, but his eyes are deadly serious.

RICHARD
Who now is lord of the Turkamen?

Baldric shrugs.

BALDRIC
Who can tell? They feud and fight so that it is impossible to know who leads. But I do know the name of their most promising general...

INT. ROOM - DAY

Floor to ceiling books and scrolls: the room of an ascetic or a scholar. That is why the MAN sitting on a carpet in the middle of the floor is such a surprise. Though hunched over a scroll, though studying with lit by intelligence, this man is no mere scholar.

BALDRIC (V.O.)
... His name is Ameer.

AMEER, early 30s, built powerfully, even movements as small as turning a page marked by the economy of motion of a warrior. A SERVANT BOY, 12, enters and stands silently.

AMEER
(Arabic; subtitles*)
Speak.

[*NOTE: whenever dialogue is in *italics*, it means the people are speaking Arabic, subtitled.]

SERVANT BOY

Your father calls you, effendi. The Christians prepare to attack, and he wishes you to lead our armies.

AMEER

Tell my father I come.

EXT. CASTLE - DAY

Richard rides at the head of an army of thousands. The air rings with the cries of his people, come to wish him well. Baldric, astride his own horse, goes largely unnoticed by the people who shower praise on Richard.

At the castle's gate stands the ARCHBISHOP. Richard dismounts, and kneels before him, kissing the old priest's ring.

ARCHBISHOP

Rise, my son.

Richard does, standing humbly before the man of God.

ARCHBISHOP (cont'd)

Look upon me.

Richard complies. The Archbishop tries to look appropriately somber, but cannot. He smiles, a twinkle in his eye: the Archbishop has been and continues to be a father to Richard.

He opens his arms, and Richard steps into the old man's embrace. The crowd ROARS its approval.

ARCHBISHOP (cont'd)

Reclaim the Holy Lands, my boy.
And come back safe.

Richard raises his sword, and the crowd falls silent.

RICHARD

(to his army)

God gives us His blessing! We shall prevail!

The crowd screams its approval! Richard spots Elizabeth in the battlements, the baby Godwin in her arms and young Prince William by her side. Richard waves to her.

She smiles. Waves back. Weeping and proud. She holds aloft the flower that Richard found in the battlefield of the Celts. She kisses it, and puts it within her robes, near her heart.

Richard turns and leads his army forth.

CUT TO:

EXT. TURKISH COUNTRY - BATTLE - DAY**SUPER: "ONE YEAR LATER"**

Screams of pain rend the air: battle in full swing. Richard and Baldric ride at the head of their forces, dealing death and pain to all who would confront them.

The battle is clearly being won by the English, with the small TURKAMEN CONTINGENT quickly being wiped out.

EXT. NEARBY HILL

Ameer, the warrior-scholar and leader of the Turkish forces, sits astride a beautiful horse, watching the battle below.

He is surrounded by a group of VIZIERS (the equivalents of princes, barons, etc.), all watching the battle below.

AMEER

Their leader is skilled.

VIZIER

Surely not enough to be a threat.

AMEER

No, not a threat.

The viziers seem relieved at Ameer's pronouncement. Until:

AMEER (cont'd)

He is death.

VIZIER #2

But he is too far from his home, his force is too small. He will never enter Jerusalem.

AMEER

This King is strong. He may do so.

The viziers mutter, surprised at Ameer's frankness.

AMEER (cont'd)

Why murmur? I say only truth, and remembering that truth is what will allow me to fight and to conquer.

He peers down upon the last of his countrymen below, as they are rounded up and dealt with.

AMEER (cont'd)

This man is a genius, and I fear him as I fear no man but myself.

EXT. ENGLISH ARMY CAMP - NIGHT

Richard walks among the ranks. The men sharpen weapons, prepare their armor for the next battle. Behind Richard walks Simon, the Knight Templar, blood-stained and grim.

Baldric and his guard, Alexius, approach.

RICHARD
The lists?

Baldric smiles as he hands Richard a scroll.

BALDRIC
Hardly any casualties at all. On our side, at least.

Richard frowns as he reads.

RICHARD
Still too many.

BALDRIC
Too many? Christ's blood, Richard, you won't be happy until we've taken Jerusalem without a drop of blood being spilt on either side.

RICHARD
What of it? Each soul is precious, every fallen comrade is a friend.

INT. RICHARD'S TENT - NIGHT

Richard is writing a letter: Elizabeth's name can be seen. Pouring out his heart to the light of his life. He dips quill in ink. As the quill falls to touch the parchment, we

CUT TO:

EXT. FIELD - BATTLE - DAY

... And now the quill is Richard's sword, coming down for a different reason, rending a TURK SOLDIER in a wicked slash that brings Richard around to dispatch another man.

EXT. HILLSIDE

Ameer, surrounded by viziers and generals, watches as Richard's force decimates the Arabian line.

Ameer's eyes narrow as he peers down, looking for...

AMEER
THERE!

One of the Viziers joins him.

VIZIER
My lord?

AMEER
*There is a thinning on their flank. We
 can turn this lost battle into a
 victory if we send a force there.*

VIZIER
But there is no one else to send.

Ameer nods at the assembled generals and viziers.

VIZIER (cont'd)
You would have us go?

AMEER
*As you said yourself, my brother:
 there is no one else to send.*

He kicks his horse's flanks and gallops down the hill. After a moment, the generals and viziers all follow him to the fray.

EXT. FIELD - BATTLE

Richard surveys the battle from his horse. The line crumbles where Ameer and the princes have attacked. Richard scans his own forces, looking for a solution.

RICHARD
 (to his standard bearer)
 Signal the first Century to withdraw
 and attack the east flank.

Richard readies to join the battle where he is most needed as Baldric rides up, arms and steed blood-spattered. Some of his bodyguards have been killed, but Alexius is still there.

BALDRIC
 Where are you off to, my brother?

RICHARD
 The east flank is in danger.

BALDRIC
 How? Our spies told us of no
 reinforcements, so who attacks now?

RICHARD
 A great many well-dressed soldiers.

Baldric understands instantly.

BALDRIC
 Their Generals.

Richard nods.

RICHARD

If we can break that charge, then
perhaps I will see my sons again
before they are men.

The first CENTURY, soldiers beckoned by the standard bearer, fight their way to Richard and Baldric. Richard motions them to follow him and Baldric to the flank.

SERIES OF SHOTS - THE BATTLE

Chaos incarnate.

Ameer whirls, his scimitar biting through flesh and leather; no one can touch this master swordsman...

Richard and Baldric fight side by side, a fluid team...

Alexius ruthlessly cuts down all who dare approach Baldric...

Richard and Baldric separate, drawn into separate skirmishes.

RICHARD:

Dispatches a TURK, wheels his horse, and comes face to face with Ameer, who is also astride his charger

The two men size one another up instantly. A moment where each recognizes the other. The sounds of battle fade...

Ameer raises his scimitar in salute. Richard raises his sword - the dark blade of the Celts - in a like gesture.

They charge. Both men's swords flash, blood flies as both expert warriors find their marks, but both wounds are superficial. The kings wheel their horses around.

Another charge. This time Richard isn't trying to wound Ameer: he slashes the hindquarters of Ameer's horse. Ameer wheels his horse again, not aware of the wound inflicted on his steed.

The two men charge...

Ameer's blade aloft, face a study in intensity...

Richard's face is stone, not happy to kill even an enemy...

Then Ameer's horse trips, weakened by Richard's thrust. Ameer falls, but casts himself at Richard, unseating him as well. Both men slam into the blood-mud below in a grim death-lock.

They struggle to their feet, swords flashing again. Richard soon shows himself to be the better swordsman. Ameer is great, but Richard is simply that good.

Ameer's sword flies into the melee around them. Richard's sword is at the Turk's neck.

AMEER
(broken English)
You... fight... well...

Richard nods, respect even in this killing moment.

RICHARD
You fight bravely.

Ameer nods in return, both to accept the compliment and to acknowledge his impending death. Richard raises his sword, to kill the one man who could possibly stop his army from reaching Jerusalem...

A long, agonizing moment...
Richard's sword drops...

But not to kill Ameer. Rather, it falls from Richard's fingers. Why? Richard looks down and finds the answer: A SPEAR has impaled him, passing between his lower ribs. An errant attack in the chaos. Richard falls face-down in the mud.