

THE LIVING WOOD

Based on the 1947 novel by Louis de Wohl

Genre: Historical Epic / Drama

Tone: Epic and sweeping, with moments of gritty realism, wry humor, and profound spiritual wonder - *House of David* meets *Ben-Hur*.

Logline: A Celtic princess is abandoned by her Roman husband as ambition pulls him toward power, forcing her into exile, where she raises her son amid political chaos and religious persecution. As Rome fractures and her son rises to become Emperor, her quiet faith shapes his destiny - leading to a divine turning point that transforms the empire and her final journey to uncover the True Cross itself.

Estimated Runtime: One Hour, 55 Minutes

The story begins around a crackling campfire, with **HELEN**, her son **CONSTANTINE**, and loyal companions, advisor **HILARY**, centurion **FAVONIUS**, and optio **RUFUS** huddling around it. Hilary begins to recount the legend of the Living Wood, passed down by Helen's father, the Celtic **KING COEL**.

In a dreamlike, mystical sequence reminiscent of The Lord of the Rings prologue, Hilary narrates in a voice-over: When Adam and Eve lost paradise, the Archangel Michael gave Seth a seed from the Tree of Life, who then planted it in Adam's mouth as he lay dying. That seed grew into a sacred tree. Centuries later, the tree stood in King Solomon's court and was told its true origins by the Queen of Sheba. When King Solomon cut down and buried the tree, it was forgotten for generations... until it grew again, only for Roman soldiers to cut beams from it for a cross on a hill outside Jerusalem, unaware of its legacy. Hilary narrates: "The Tree of Life will encompass the Roman world only when the cross is found again. For it has disappeared - and no one knows where it is. One day, Helen, the Living Wood, will be found."

Title: THE LIVING WOOD fades in.

Decades earlier, a young Helen, a proud and fiery daughter of the mystical tribal King Coel, stands on a misty and sharp, jagged cliff overlooking the sea. Lost in fog, the Roman Tribune **CONSTANTIUS** approaches, armored and grumbling about the British weather. Their chance meeting begins with hostility, shifts to curiosity, and quickly turns to playful banter. Unafraid and quick-witted, Helen guides the lost Roman back to her father's timber hall.

There, amid a boisterous meal with King Coel and his Council of Elders, Constantius and Helen become drawn towards one another while King Coel notices and weaves tales of the Living Wood into the conversation. The following morning, Helen and Constantius ride away on horseback to the Roman camp. Noticing their peer Constantius returning with a lady, his colleagues tease him, and he ends up in a fight, only to be called in for discipline, of which it's declared Constantius must serve as a delegate for King Coel to ease tensions between Rome and his tribe.

This becomes an opportunity for Constantius and Helen to spend more time together, and they ultimately marry. A warm montage follows - the birth of their son Constantine, King

Coel's prophecy that the boy "will own all the land he rides upon", and Constantine's upbringing as a warrior, mentored by the steadfast Favonius. Life in Britain seems stable until a sealed summons from Rome forces Constantius away, leaving Helen and young Constantine behind, with their separation stretching into painful years.

Ten years later, Britain erupts into rebellion when the usurper **CARAUSIUS** seizes power with the help of the treacherous **ALLECTUS**. Helen's household comes under threat when Allectus and his men surround it. A brutal confrontation ensues, with Allectus being beaten down, and Helen, Favonius, Constantine, Rufus, and Hilary escape into the forests near King Coel's court. There, nearby Helen, King Coel passes away in the woods, with his final words echoing the old legends. The group then becomes a core of resistance, sending secret messages to Rome, conducting ambushes, and waiting for liberation.

As time passes, Helen's resilience is tested as she evolves from a proud tribal princess into a protective mother and a woman of curious faith. When Rome finally recognizes Carausius' power, Allectus assassinates him in cold blood, only to find a letter in his dead hand, declaring Rome is coming to reclaim Britain.

Constantius, who has been in Rome for a while, climbing the political game, is now a Caesar and an established military mind. A montage ensues of the Roman military invading Britain, quickly routing Allectus' forces, and restoring Britain. When Constantius himself arrives, the messenger **CURIO**, whom Helen had sent to Rome to deliver secret messages, confronts her and brings a devastating message: that he has taken a new wife and that they intend to live at their former compound. Helen receives the message with stoic dignity and takes her son and their small band of friends on a journey across the British countryside.

One evening during their journey, they make camp, and it is here that Hilary reveals the rest of the legend to Helen, telling her that she and her son are destined to find the Living Wood.

Constantine, now a young man, departs for military service in the East under Caesar **GALERIUS**, and back in Britain, Helen's world crumbles further when the Emperor Diocletian brutally persecutes the Christians, many of whom are friends of Helen. Hilary tells Helen he is a secret priest, and invites Helen to come with him to a secret morning Mass, only for the service to be disrupted by a Roman raid. Hilary and Helen both escape, only to be met by a thief on the road, who then kills Hilary while he is protecting an enclosed golden goblet.

A grief-stricken Helen musters up the courage to approach and confront her former husband, Constantius, and meets him in his camp. What began as a tense meeting cools and becomes emotional; Helen demands that Constantius reverse the persecutions, and learns he has already begun. Two more surprises are dropped during this meeting: Constantius is now an Emperor, but his health has significantly deteriorated, and he doesn't have long to live. The meeting ends with hints of their old affections, and Constantius requests Constantine's presence.

At a Roman officer party in the far eastern edges of the Empire, Constantine and his peers enjoy themselves at the party, with Galerius present. Constantine pretends to be drunk and requests permission from Galerius to return home to his father, and it's granted. When Constantine exits at night, he hurries back to a hideaway house and meets Favonius.

Together, while being pursued by Galerius' troops, they make their way back to Britain across the entire Empire, along with a small band of men, using deception, decoys, and speed to stay ahead.

When they finally reach Britain, they briefly reunite with Helen at the same misty cliffs where she once met her husband and then head off to York, where Constantine's father is. Constantine and Constantius meet, with Helen also present. Here, the dying emperor names Constantine his successor and nullifies the anti-Christian edicts for good. It is an emotional meeting, a "mea culpa" moment from Constantius, righting the wrongs of his life and legacy.

Years later, in 312 AD, the Emperor Constantine marches towards Rome against his rival, **MAXENTIUS**. The night before the battle, he shares a tender, vulnerable moment with his mother in the campaign tent, tormented by his failures as a husband and father that mirror his own father's life. Helen, now an older lady but one of strong Christian faith, consoles him. It is on this night that he receives a dream from Heaven, with the Archangel Michael appearing and presenting him with a sword and shield emblazoned with the Chi-Ro symbol and saying, "In this sign, you shall conquer."

Before dawn, Constantine orders the symbol painted on his soldiers' shields, and the final march to Rome begins. On the other side of the battle, Maxentius orders his troops to damage the Milvian bridge over the Tiber River and sets up row-boats tied together as a fallback bridge. When Constantine, Favonius, Rufus, and the rest of his men approach the battlefield, a fiery cross appears in the sky, giving renewed purpose and motivation to Constantine and his men. Constantine's military claims victory in a chaotic rout of Maxentius' men above the row-boats, resulting in Maxentius drowning. Following the battle, Constantine finds a dying Favonius, mortally wounded from the fight. Favonius dies clutching a captured enemy standard - the golden eagle.

Thirteen years later, in 326 AD, an aging Helen prays in her father's forest when a messenger arrives with urgent news from Constantine - that Constantine's own son and wife have conspired against him and must be dealt with. Helen travels to Rome with **BISHOP OSIUS**, confronts a guilt-driven, despairing Constantine in his chamber, and learns she is too late; that both Constantine's son **CRISPUS** and **FAUSTA** have been killed under his orders.

In the meeting, an emotional Helen becomes resolute and emboldened, challenging Constantine to accept responsibility, move beyond despair, and serve God. In doing so, she realizes her own calling - to find the Living Wood, the True Cross itself, upon which Christ was once crucified.

Granted every resource of the Empire by Constantine, Helen journeys to the Holy Land to retrace Jesus' steps. In Bethlehem's Shepherds Fields and the cave of the Nativity, she stands where angels once sang and where the Lord was once born. She visits Bethany and the Mount of Olives, where a kind local boy named **SIMON** (who has a withered arm) directs her to the tomb where Lazarus was raised from the dead and where Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount. In a powerful moment, Helen stands on the hill with Simon and her maid, overlooking Jerusalem with a pondering heart.

She approaches Jerusalem through the very gates Christ approached on Palm Sunday, where she meets **BISHOP MACARIUS** of Jerusalem. While Bishop Macarius is steeped in his own tasks, he agrees to assist Helen in her search for the True Cross. As they search, frustration mounts through montages of digging across hills, questioning elders, Jews and Christians alike for clues to its location.

Finally, the young boy Simon appears once again, points to a distant hill where the Roman Temple of Venus stands, and suggests the cross should be underneath it. Helen orders the temple to be torn down, and Roman workers do just that, digging deep into the earth. Three Crosses emerge. Not knowing which is which, Bishop Macarius suggests that the workers assist an ill woman in touching each one and let God reveal. The first two yield nothing, but on the third, she is miraculously healed. Helen advises Simon to touch the third cross as well, and his withered arm is restored. Overcome with emotion, Helen embraces the wood, clutching the Tree of Life pendant her father gave her. The Living Wood, once long buried and forgotten, has been found - bringing redemption for Helen, her son, and the Roman world.