HANK THE COWDOG

LOST IN THE DARK UNCHANTED FOREST
PODCAST SERIES 1, EPISODE 4

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Based on
Hank the Cowdog
Book #11, Lost in the Dark Unchanted Forest
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104-1 EXT. DARK UNCHANTED FOREST/HACKBERRY TREE - DAY 104-1

HANK (V.O.)
It’s me again, Hank the Cowdog.

The straining sound of vines.

HANK (V.O.)
Well, well, well, well, well. So there we were, the witchy little old Madame Moonshine and me, dangling in a mess of vines deep inside the Dark Unchanted Forest. That was a big enough problem all on its own, but Madame Moonshine also just informed me that down below us were two bloodthirsty coyotes whose ravenous growls let tell they’d be hungry for just about anything that fell out of the sky, especially us.

A pair of deep, belly emptying growls.

HANK
Uh Madame, when were you planning on telling me about these coyotes?

MADAME MOONSHINE
Oh, after the singing. I think it helped break the news, don’t you?

HANK (V.O.)
I couldn’t say it did, because at that very moment, I saw ‘em. Two scraggly gray heads with yellow eyes poked out of the bushes and literally licking their chops.

A salivating tongue swipe followed by snapping jaws.

HANK
Madame, I’ve had a little experience with these two guys. They’re a couple of nasty brothers named Rip and Snort that run the Skull Canyon Gang.

MADAME MOONSHINE
Do you suppose they would eat one or both of us, if given the opportunity?

HANK
Absolutely, both. Yes ma'am, in a New York minute. They aren't the brightest bulbs in the shed, but I'm sorry to report that they're double-tough and always hungry.

Snort cranes his head up and lets out a salivating laugh that lives up to his namesake. He speaks in a thick accent imported directly from the Australian outback.

SNORT
Hey, check it out, Rip, check it out. Now, Snort sees two birds in that tree. Before, Snort only saw one of them birds, but now I see two.

RIP
Uh.

HANK (V.O.)
As you can tell, Snort was quite fond of referring to himself in the third person and Rip, well, let's just say he favored one syllable answers.

SNORT
That little bird looks like an owl don't you reckon? But now that big bird has a funny look. He's funny lookin' don't you reckon?

RIP
Uh.

SNORT
I take first dibs on that big bird, Snort'll eat him up first.

RIP
UH UH!

SNORT
Ah now Rip, settle down mate, we can share that big bird, we'll eat him up first.

RIP
Uh.

MADAME MOONSHINE
Well it sounds as though they want you to go first.

HANK
It sure does. Let me talk to them. I happen to be fluent in their language. It's your basic coyote dialect, which is a branch off the tree of Universal Doglish.
(to the coyotes)
Uh, afternoon guys. Hello down there. How do you reckon the weather's gonna be?

SNORT/RIP
UH?

The coyotes huddle for a moment on the ground passing whispers back and forth. A light rain begins to fall.

HANK (V.O.)
As the coyotes whispered what I'm sure was an enlightening, world reckoning conversation, a light rain began to patter on the leaves. Sadly, not enough rain to drive these two crazies away.

SNORT
That you Hunk?

HANK
Yup sir, the same old charming devil you've done business with many times before, Snort. Hot dog, it's great to see you again.

Rip whispers to Snort, which encourages a wheezing laugh.

SNORT
My brother Rip here says, not so great for you, Hunkbird, not if we eat you up Hunkbird.

HANK
A fair point. You do realize though, I am not actually a bird.

SNORT
We don't care mate. Snort reckons you're up in that tree. Birds are up in that tree.
(MORE)

SNORT (CONT'D)
That makes you a bird dog. We'll eat you up I reckon.

MADAME MOONSHINE
Hank?

HANK
Don't worry Madame, I think I'm making progress with the quiet one.

MADAME MOONSHINE
It's raining.

HANK
Good, good. Love rain! These pastures could use more moisture, don't you think, boys?

MADAME MOONSHINE
My newly wet foot is slipping out of the vine.

HANK
That's great news, me too...wait...no, geez, that's bad news. EEK!

A squeaking SLIP!

HANK (V.O.)
I looked down, or up I guess, and saw my foot was slipping too! And then, to make matters worse, I heard the second most terrible thing you can ever hear, Rip and Snort tuning up their voices. That could only mean one thing...

Rip and Snort have begun warming up their voices, which sounds like a bizarre mix of scales and growls.

MADAME MOONSHINE
Oh dear, are they about to sing?

HANK
Yes Madame, they're tuning up to sing the Coyote Sacred Hymn and National Anthem. It's an old coyote tradition. When they're done singing, they eat.

MADAME MOONSHINE
Oh dear.

Down below, Snort throws back his head and belts out a howl that leads to the first verse of the Anthem.

SNORT
(singing)
Oh...I just a ruthless coyote, I like howling at the moon, I like to sing and holler, I'm crazy as a loon...

HANK (V.O.)
And that's the first most terrible thing, coyote singing. It was a bad song made worse by the vocalists.

SNORT
(singing)
OWWWWW, I'm just a ruthless coyote, I like howling at the...

HANK
Madame, we've got to work fast. Now, I know it's risky to use your backwards power, but maybe if you try again and reverse the scene on these jokers it will sweep them up into the trees.

MADAME MOONSHINE
Perhaps. It could be a wonderful plan.

HANK
Of course it is. Don't forget, you're running around with the Head of Ranch Security here ma'am.

MADAME MOONSHINE
No need for that reminder.

HANK (V.O.)
Madame squeezed her eyes shut to concentrate. Her beak started to open, but then came...

MADAME MOONSHINE
Oh dear...I've forgotten the words.

SQUEAKING VINES!

HANK (V.O.)
AH! I must have dropped a half a foot in my vines. Close enough to hear Rip's teeth a-gnashing.

Snarling teeth *SNAP* shut like a trap.

HANK
Hurry up Madame! Just say something! *

MADAME MOONSHINE
I do not like being rushed! It could backfire.

HANK
But if we don't do something quick, we won't have any backs left to fire! *

Another vine slips loose!

MADAME MOONSHINE
Oh! Hank, the vine!

HANK
Quick, quick!

MADAME MOONSHINE
Okay okay okay okay okay. *
(Quick breath)
Topsy-turvy, rickets scurvy, barley rye and wheatly, backwards power, sweet and sour, reverse this scene completely!

A slight WOOSH passes through the forest and is gone.

RELATIVE QUIET.

HANK (V.O.)
(Whispered)
As I dangled in anticipation, I could see Madame Moonshine sneak one eye open. And then, a sound I could only describe as worster than the firster, one you'd never want to hear.

From below, the howling song starts up again.

MADAME MOONSHINE
Did it work?

HANK
No ma'am. You just made it so they sing the words in reverse.

SNORT/RIP
Duties or job want not I, School Sunday or church no, coyote ruthless a just I, fool nobody's ain't me but...

HANK (V.O.)
To be honest, maybe the song was better backwards.

Another squeaking slip!

MADAME MOONSHINE
AH! HANK!

HANK (V.O.)
Madame Moonshine's vine slipped again. *

Rip and Snort growl and snap like crocodiles.

HANK
Hold on Madame! I have one more idea!

MADAME MOONSHINE
I hope it's not your last.

HANK
On the count of three, we'll push ourselves out of these vines.

MADAME MOONSHINE
Count of three, yes.

HANK
When you hit the ground, jump to your feet. Your power ought to work again, right?

MADAME MOONSHINE
One would hope so, wouldn't one?

HANK
And then you make a wish!

MADAME MOONSHINE
A wish! Yes! *

HANK
Okay, ready, one, two...

MADAME MOONSHINE
A wish for what? Wait, WAIT! You never told me what wish!

The creaking vines keep slipping as Hank rushes through the directions.

HANK
You wish for Rip and Snort be hungry for *anything* other than us!

MADAME MOONSHINE
That won't work! It has to be something. I need to wish for them to be hungry for something specific. What could it be? Hank! Hank. Hank, why are you smiling?!

HANK
Cat.

MADAME MOONSHINE
What?!

HANK
Make 'em hungry for nothing but cat.

A *SHARP SNAP* as the vine breaks!

HANK/MADAME MOONSHINE
AHHHHHHHHHHHH!

WAM!

A *YELP* from the coyotes.

HANK (V.O.)
We hit the ground so hard Rip and Snort liked to jump out their skin. That gave us just enough time to get in position.

HANK
Get on your feet, Madame!

MADAME MOONSHINE
Oh gosh, oh gosh, oh gosh, oh gosh...

HANK (V.O.)
About that time Rip and Snort realized what had befallen on their heads and started circling.

Growling leads to the *SHINK* of toothy smiles breaking across Rip and Snort's pointed faces.

SNORT
Now we have a big supper eh?

RIP
Uh.

HANK
Hurry, Madame, your words! *

MADAME MOONSHINE
Yes, yes, oh dear, the words. What were they?

Rip lunges at Hank with a gnashing *YAWP*.

HANK
Madame!

MADAME MOONSHINE
Power power, rain and shower, spider webs and this and that, Make these ruthless savages hungry for a...bat!

HANK
BAT?! NO, NOT A BAT! A CAT! A CAT! *

MADAME MOONSHINE
Did I? Oh goodness. I do not like this pressure!

HANK (V.O.)
A wall of gleaming yellow eyes, long white teeth and raised hackles was headed straight for us.

HANK
Madame!

HANK (V.O.)
Snort leapt for Madame Moonshine and scooped her up in his mouth.

MADAME MOONSHINE
CAT! CAT! Oh my goodness, HUNGRY FOR A CAT!

SNARLS mix with tumbling fumbles.

HANK (V.O.)
Rip jumped right in the middle of me. I thought of fighting back, but I don't know if it would've done much good. Those guys' idea of fun was to beat up on badgers and get sprayed by skunks.

Hank lets out a *YELP* amidst the tussle.

HANK (V.O.)
You could bite 'em, kick 'em, scratch 'em, throw dirt in their eyes, chew on their ears, spit in their coffee and all it'd do is make 'em a *little* bit madder.

Rip makes a *CHOMP*!

HANK (V.O.)
I could see all thirty-seven of Rip's teeth. They were just about the longest, sharpest teeth I'd ever seen, and I did not like the way they decorated that smile. He flicked out his tongue, swept it around to the right side of his drooling lips, and then took it all the way back across his mouth and mopped up the left side. *

HANK
Now Rip, don't you go doing anything you might regret later. *

RIP
UH!

HANK (V.O.)
That grunt felt more threatening than the others. And turns out it was. Do you know what that mangy, yellow eyed cannibal did next? He tried to fit the whole top of my head in his mouth!

The SOUND of Rip trying to fit Hank's head in his mouth is like a person trying to eat a whole loaf of bread, covered in peanut butter, all at one time.

HANK (V.O.)
Fellers, I thought my lights were fixing to go out for the very last time. *
But suddenly...

A ***MASSIVE WHIRLWIND*** blows through the forest. Dried leaves spin up in a flurry and limbs creak against the gale force winds.

SILENCE as the forest settles.

HANK (V.O.)
That's when I saw it. Snort looked more confused than usual, which was already always VERY confused. He * spat Madame Moonshine out of his mouth like a bad bar of soap.

SNORT
PLUFF!

MADAME MOONSHINE
Ouch! Beg your pardon!

Madame Moonshine ruffles her feathers to get the slobber off.

HANK (V.O.)
And Rip looked like my head could've been a stack of cow patties wrapped in Loper's undershorts.

Rip releases Hank's head and makes a disgusted face.

RIP
Uhhhhhh.

HANK (V.O.)
That didn't keep him from giving it a few more licks just to be sure.

He licks the top of Hank's head a few times, but each is met with an increasingly sickened scowl.

SNORT
Ay Rip, Snort dun't want this old owl.

RIP
Uh.

SNORT
Snort's hungry for...BAT?

HANK
(aside)
Come on.

RIP
Uh-uh.

SNORT
No. Snort's hungry for...CAT.

DING! Hank springs to his feet.

HANK
A cat? Yes, C-A-T, very good, Snort, that sounds delicious, don't it?

SNORT
Rip and Snort don't want Hunkbird and that little old owl. Rip and Snort want to eat cat!

Hank moves to Madame Moonshine.

HANK
(whispered)
Madame are you okay?

MADAME MOONSHINE
I have never been treated like this before! The brute, the oaf, the unspeakable wretch!

HANK
(to Snort)
Uh, she means that in the nicest way, boys.

Snort snaps his jaws at them.

HANK (CONT'D)
Now, just hold on there pal. What kind of cat are you hungry for? You don't want a skinny, little bitty meow, meow cat, do you?

RIP/SNORT
Uh.

SNORT
Rip and Snort want to eat a big, great, fat cat, the greatest, biggest, fattest cat in the whole world I reckon!

HANK
That's the cat we're talking about, wonderful taste, boys. That's asking a lot, gotta tell you, but if that's what you want then we're gonna see if we can find you one. *

SNORT
You betta find one Hunkbird, or Rip and Snort here'll put a big hurt on you, Hunkbird.

HANK
I'd expect nothing less from you boys. Let me consult with my partner.

Hank turns to Madame Moonshine with desperate eyes.

HANK (CONT'D)
Madame, can you use your powers one last time and help me find Little Alfred?

Madame Moonshine scowls at the coyotes.

MADAME MOONSHINE
I won't spend one more minute with those beasts.

HANK
Please Madame, my boy needs our help.

MADAME MOONSHINE
Fine, but only because the boy is your friend.

Madame Moonshine begins to murmur.

HANK (V.O.)
Madame leaned her head back and closed her eyes. The wind kicked up and a strange fog crept in from nowhere I could figure.

A magical mist wisps in.

MADAME MOONSHINE
Oh vapors, oh foggy darkness, oh penetrating powers!

A hollow wind fills the space.

MADAME MOONSHINE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I see him. I see him now! He's huddled in a shallow cave...frightened, alone, wet and cold...and crying. And down below...

HANK
What? What is it?

MADAME MOONSHINE
Oh no...

POOF!

The vision cloud evaporates as quickly as it formed. Madame Moonshine has a look of fear in her giant eyes.

HANK (V.O.)
And like that, the fog was gone and there was nothing left but Madame's giant, open eyes, and they were filled with fear.

HANK
Madame? What was down below?

MADAME MOONSHINE
A hungry beast.

HANK
A cat? A bobcat?

MADAME MOONSHINE
Yes. We must hurry. Follow me.

Madame Moonshine spreads her wings and sails deeper into the forest.

HANK
All right, boys, this way! Follow us for an all-you-can-eat cat supper! *

Hank dashes into the woods after Madame Moonshine.

Rip and Snort let out great howls. They sprint after the pair and are quickly swallowed up by the dark, dreary forest.

104-2 EXT. DARK UNCHANTED FOREST - DAY 104-2

Flying, flapping feathers *WHOOSH* past and are trailed by a litany of Hank's "OOFS" and "OUCHES."

MADAME MOONSHINE
We must hurry!

HANK
OOF...AH...OOF. *

MADAME MOONSHINE
What on Earth are you doing, Hank? If you're going to run through a forest, you have to look straight ahead. Even a dog should know that.

HANK
I know, but one rule I've always lived by is to never turn my back on cannibals. You take your eyes off these two for one minute and...HEY!

HANK (V.O.)
I looked back and Rip and Snort had stopped to scratch a hole in the dirt.

HANK
Fellas, hey, we gotta get a move on if you want a piece of this big cat. *

SNORT
Na. No more movin'. Rip and Snort are too hungry to move. We nap. *

HANK
Nap? What kind of bloodthirsty killers are you?

SNORT
We nap. Hunk'll go get that big cat and bring it back.

HANK
That won't work! This is not a delivery service situation here boys. Even if I wanted to, which I don't, there's no way I could get the bobcat back here. *

SNORT
That's Hunk's problem.

HANK
No, no, no. Boys hey...I need your help. *

SNORT
No help. Nap.

HANK
No nap! Boys! I need... boys! *

Hank turns back in frustration. He makes it back to a waiting Madame Moonshine.

MADAME MOONSHINE
What are they doing?

HANK
Napping. Ha, I mean you just can't win with cannibals. *

MADAME MOONSHINE
Well what will you do about the beast? *

HANK
I'll have to figger that out when we get there. Let's go.

Hank sprints into the woods as Madame Moonshine zips past overhead. A *CRACK* of thunder booms.

104-3 EXT. DARK UNCHANTED FOREST NEAR NORTHUP CREEK - DAY 104-3

The rain falls harder now. Madame Moonshine flaps to a stop atop a log as Hank comes lumbering after.

HANK
(out of breath)
Madame, are we close?

MADAME MOONSHINE
Shhh. Listen.

Through the rain the rhythmic current of a creek running through a limestone bed runs strongly.

MADAME MOONSHINE (CONT'D)
A creek. I think he's just over that ridge.

HANK
Wait. Oh no.

A type of CHANTING rises in the distance.

MADAME MOONSHINE
What's that sound?

HANK
It’s the buzzards.

104-4 EXT. NORTHUP CREEK/SHALLOW CAVE - DAY 104-4

WALLACE/JUNIOR
OH WEE OH, OOOOOH OH.

The chant is reminiscent of the March of the Winkies from The Wizard of Oz, except punctuated by buzzard screeching.

The *SOUND* of water rushes down the creek as the rain continues to fall harder and harder.

HANK (V.O.)
We crept to the edge of ridge and peeked through the bushes.

Hank and Madame Moonshine can be heard creeping in the bushes to spy on the situation. The buzzard chant continues.

WALLACE/JUNIOR
OH WEE OH, OOOOOH OH.

HANK (V.O.)
That awful chanting was coming from an oak tree near the creek. It was Wallace and Junior, a father/son pair of buzzards, and as usual, they had arrived on the scene to serve as omens of misfortune.

MADAME MOONSHINE
There’s the boy!

HANK (V.O.)
Little Alfred was across the creek, which was starting to swell up from the rain. He was tucked up under a ledge of limestone in a shallow cave. Several feet below him, was Sinister the Bobcat. That killer cat was just sitting, dead still, staring at the boy, the way Pete the Barncat might watch a mouse.

WALLACE
Stop playing around cat! Get him!

HANK
Why that mangy buzzard...

JUNIOR
B-but P-pa, he's just a l-little b-b-b-boy!

WALLACE
Son, when you grow up, if you ever do, you'll find that this is a hard old tough world out here, and we take whatever we can git and don't ask no questions.

JUNIOR
Y-yeah, b-but...

WALLACE
You cain't serve two masters, Junior. You're either workin' for your stomach or you ain't workin' at all, so just hush up.

MADAME MOONSHINE
Hank. What's your plan?

HANK
I, um, I...

MADAME MOONSHINE
You have to get the boy. He looks terribly scared.

HANK
I know. It's...it's just I...

WALLACE
Go on, Kitty. Me and my boy here don't approve of what you're fixing to do, no we don't, but still and yet we'll be happy to clean up the...Ahhh!

Falling and flapping.

HANK (V.O.)
Between all that squawking, Wallace got excited and slipped off his limb. He crashed down right next to Sinister, who, fast as lightning, wheeled around and leapt for that dirty bird.

Wallace flaps and sputters in defense. Sinister snarls and swipes at Wallace. *

WALLACE
Junior, git yourself down here! This cat's fixing to...AHHHH!

JUNIOR
H-h-help, m-m-murder!

HANK (V.O.)
At the last second, Wallace jumped in the air and caught an updraft. He flapped hard for some altitude and managed to get away just as Sinister snapped off a few tail feathers.

SNAP!

WALLACE
OUCH!

POOF!

HANK (V.O.)
Sinister spit out those feathers but didn't take his eyes off Wallace 'til he found his perch.

WALLACE
I ought to go back down there and thrash you good, you smart-alecky cat. You're just lucky Junior...
(aside to Junior)
Which by the way, Junior, it's shameful the way you neglect your poor old daddy who's worked and slaved and scrimped and saved. I ought to have throwed up on that cat.
(to Sinister)
You hear me cat! You just come back over here and I'll show you how much damage a buzzard can do!

Sinister lets out a low growl as he pads back to the boy.

HANK (V.O.)
Sinister made his way back to his stalking spot below Alfred. It's spooky the way those cats can sit there without moving a hair, staring and staring with their big old cat eyes. You know what they're gonna do, you just never quite know when they're gonna do it.

The buzzard chant has picked up again as Wallace and Junior bob on their limb.

WALLACE/JUNIOR
OH WEE OH, OOOOOH OH.

Sinister, still crouched, has gone silent, only the sound of the rain can be heard. Until a slight voice calls out.

ALFRED
Mommy? Mommy! *

MADAME MOONSHINE
Hank, you have to go now. You don't know when the beast will pounce. *

HANK
I know, I know...I just don't, I don't... *

MADAME MOONSHINE
(stern)
Hank.

HANK
I don't know if I can do it, Madame. I tangled with that bobcat once before, and heck, I was lucky * to get out alive. Look, I know I * talk a good game, and I know people think I'm the head honcho in charge, but I...I'm scared. *

MADAME MOONSHINE
Hank, I know you're scared, but weren't you the one that, all alone, went into the Dark Unchanted Forest on this great mission?

HANK
Yes.

MADAME MOONSHINE
And weren't you the one that got us out of our bind in the tree and tricked those vicious coyotes?

HANK
Yes and...yes.

MADAME MOONSHINE
But most of all, isn't that your boy down there that needs you?

HANK
Yes he is.

Hank takes a deep breath.

HANK (CONT'D)
Madame, you may want to step back a few miles. *

Hank throws his head back and unleashes the loudest ***HOWL*** he can muster. He splashes into the creek bed with...

HANK (CONT'D)
HERE I COME SON!

END EPISODE.