

Robin Hood and Little John



When Robin Hood was about twenty years old,
With a hey down, down, and down;
He happen'd to meet Little John,
A jolly brisk blade, right fit for the trade,
For he was a lusty young man. 5

Though he was call'd Little, his limbs they were large,
And his stature was seven foot high;
Wherever he came, they quak'd at his name,
For soon he would make them to fly.

How they came acquainted, I'll tell you in brief, 10
If you would but listen awhile;
For this very jest, amongst all the rest,
I think it may cause you to smile.

For Robin Hood said to his jolly bowmen, 15
'Pray tarry you here in this grove;
And see that you all observe well my call,
While thorough the forest I rove.

We have had no sport for these fourteen long days,
Therefore now abroad will I go;
Now should I be beat, and cannot retreat, 20
My horn I will presently blow.'

Then did he shake hands with his merry men all,
And bid them at present good-by:
Then, as near a brook his journey he took, 25
A stranger he chanced to espy.

They happened to meet on a long narrow bridge,
And neither of them would give way;
Quoth bold Robin Hood, and sturdily stood,
'I'll shew you right Nottingham-play'.

With that from his quiver an arrow he drew, 30
A broad arrow with a goose-wing.
The stranger reply'd, 'I'll liquor thy hide.
If thou offerest to touch the string.'

Quoth bold Robin Hood, 'Thou dost prate like an ass,
For were I to bend but my bow, 35
I could send a dart, quite thro' thy proud heart,
Before thou couldst strike me one blow.'

'Thou talkst like a coward,' the stranger reply'd;
'Well arm'd with a long bow you stand,
To shoot at my breast, while I, I protest, 40
Have nought but a staff in my hand.'

'The name of a coward,' quoth Robin, 'I scorn,
Wherefore my long bow I'll lay by,
And now, for thy sake, a staff will I take,
The truth of thy manhood to try.' 45

Then Robin Hood stept to a thicket of trees,
And choose him a staff of ground oak;
Now this being done, away he did run
To the stranger, and merrily spoke:

'Lo! see my staff it is lusty and tough, 50
Now here on the bridge we will play;
Whoever falls in, the other shall win,
The battle, and so we'll away.'

'With all my whole heart,' the stranger reply'd,
'I scorn in the least to give out;' 55
This said, they fell to't without more dispute,
And their staffs they did flourish about.

At first Robin he gave the stranger a bang,
So hard that it made his bones ring:
The stranger he said, 'This must be repaid, 60
I'll give you as good as you bring.

'So long as I am able to handle my staff,
To die in your debt, friend, I scorn.'
Then to it each goes, and followed their blows,
As if they'd been threshing of corn. 65

The stranger gave Robin a crack on the crown,
Which caused the blood to appear;
Then Robin, enraged, more fiercely engaged,
And followed his blows more severe.

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So thick and so fast did he lay it on him,
With a passionate fury and ire;
At every stroke, he made him to smoke,
As if he had been all on fire.

O then into fury the stranger he grew,
And gave him a damnable look, 75
And with it a blow, that laid him full low,
And tumbled him into the brook.

‘I prithee, good fellow, where art thou now?’
The stranger, in laughter, he cried;
Quoth bold Robin Hood, ‘Good faith, in the flood, 80
And floating along with the tide.

‘I needs must acknowledge thou art a brave soul,
With thee I’ll no longer contend;
For needs must I say, thou has got the day,
Our battle shall be at an end.’ 85

Then unto the bank he did presently wade,
And pulled himself out by a thorn;
Which done, at the last, he blowed a loud blast
Straightway on his fine bugle-horn:

The echo of which through the valleys did fly, 90
At which his stout bowmen appeared,
All clothed in green, most gay to be seen,
So up to their master they steered.

‘O, what’s the matter?’ quoth William Stutely,
‘Good master you are wet to the skin.’ 95
‘No matter,’ quoth he, ‘the lad which you see
In fighting, hath tumbled me in.’

‘He shall not go scot-free,’ the others reply’d,
So straight they were seizing him there.
To duck him likewise: but Robin Hood cries, 100
‘He is a stout fellow, forbear.

‘There’s no one shall wrong thee, friend, be not afraid;
These bowmen upon me do wait;
There’s three score and nine; if thou wilt be mine,
Thou shalt have my livery straight. 105

‘And other accoutrements fit for a man;
Speak up, jolly blade, never fear:
I’ll teach you also the use of the bow,
To shoot at the fat fallow-deer.’

‘O, here is my hand,’ the stranger reply’d, 110
‘I’ll serve you with all my whole heart;
My name is John Little, a man of good mettle;
Ne’er doubt me, for I’ll play my part.’

‘His name shall be alter’d,’ quoth William Stutely, 115
‘And I will his godfather be:
Prepare then a feast, and none of the least,
For we will be merry,’ quoth he.

They presently fetched him a brace of fat does,
With humming strong liquor likewise; 120
They loved what was good; so, in the green wood,
This pretty sweet babe they baptize.

He was, I must tell you, but seven foot high,
And, may be, an ell in the waist;
A pretty sweet lad; much feasting they had;
Bold Robin the christening graced, 125

With all his bowmen, which stood in a ring,
And were of the Nottingham breed;
Brave Stutely comes then, with seven yeomen,
And did in this manner proceed:

‘This infant was called John Little,’ quoth he; 130
‘Which name shall be changed anon:
The words we’ll transpose; so wherever he goes,
His name shall be called Little John.’

They all with a shout made the elements ring;
So soon as the office was o’er, 135
To feasting they went, with true merriment,
And tippled strong liquor gillore.

Then Robin he took the pretty sweet babe,
And clothed him from top to the toe 140
In garments of green, most gay to be seen,
And gave him a curious long bow.

‘Thou shalt be an archer as well as the best,
And range in the greenwood with us;
Where we’ll not want gold nor silver, behold,
While bishops have ought in their purse.

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‘We live here like ’squires, or lords of renown,
Without e’er a foot of free land;
We feast on good cheer, with wine, ale, and beer,
And everything at our command.’

Then music and dancing did finish the day;
At length, when the sun waxed low,
Then all the whole train the grove did refrain,
And unto their caves they did go.

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And so ever after, as long as he liv’d,
Although he was proper and tall,
Yet, nevertheless, the truth to express,
Still Little John they did him call.

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