

The Tale of Robin Hood and Little John.

Once upon a time, when King Henry the Second ruled the land, there lived within the green glades of Sherwood Forest, near Nottingham Town, a famous outlaw named Robin Hood. Robin Hood gathered around him others who had become outlaws, for killing the King's deer, or turned off their land so their farms could be added to the lands of a rich baron or abbot. These outlaws chose Robin to be their leader. They vowed that they would help the poor and the oppressed by taking money and riches from the wealthy. The people who lived near the forest told many tales of Robin Hood and his merry men.

This is the tale of how Robin Hood met Little John.

One morning as Robin Hood was walking along a footpath through Sherwood Forest, he came upon a wide stream spanned by a bridge made of a log. The log was only wide enough for one person to cross at a time. As Robin approached the bridge he saw a tall stranger approaching from the other side. Each quickened their pace in order to be the first to cross, but they arrived at the bridge at the same time. Robin was tall, but the stranger was taller, a full seven feet in height. The stranger was also broader and stouter than Robin.

'Ho' called Robin, 'stand back and let me cross as I was here first.'

'No', replied the stranger, 'you stand back for *I* was here first.'

'You obviously do not come from this part of the country, so you will not know that there is no-one in the forest who can shoot an arrow as swift and sure as I,' insisted Robin, 'so allow me to cross first.'

The stranger did not carry a bow or arrows, only a tall staff made of an oak branch. 'I cannot disprove your claim to shoot an arrow so swiftly or surely, for I do not have such weapons with me. But I can out-wrestle any man with a staff. So allow me to cross first.'

Robin Hood was amused by the stranger, and considered how ridiculous this stand off must appear, two grown men arguing like schoolboys! But not being one to ignore a challenge, he offered the stranger a chance to prove who was the better man worthy to cross the bridge first. Robin suggested that he cut himself a staff and they should fight, until either one of them was knocked off the bridge and into the stream below. Robin quickly cut himself a staff from the wood nearby, then they each stepped on to the bridge.

First Robin feinted a move to his side and delivered a blow to the stranger's head. But the stranger turned the blow deftly and in return gave a sharp blow of his own. So they stood for one hour, giving and receiving blows and gaining bumps and bruises, but neither would cry 'enough', nor seemed likely to fall into the stream. At last Robin struck such a blow upon the stranger's ribs that the stranger came within a hair's breath of falling, but he regained himself quickly and struck a blow upon Robin's head. This blow struck so fairly that Robin lost his balance and fell head over heels into the water.

‘Where are you,’ called the stranger, roaring with laughter at Robin’s plight. ‘Here,’ replied Robin as he hauled himself from the water, laughing at his own misfortune. ‘I must admit that you are a brave and strong fellow, and there is no-one between here and London Town who could do to me what you have just done. I have been well beaten by a worthy opponent.’

‘What is your name, good fellow, and what are you doing in Sherwood Forest?’ asked Robin Hood.

‘My name is John Little, and I am seeking Robin Hood to join his band of outlaws’ replied the stranger.

‘John *Little*,’ cried Robin, gazing at the tall man before him.

‘My name is often mocked, for I certainly am not a little man,’ sighed John Little

‘I am Robin Hood, and I welcome you to join my merry men and live here in the forest. I claim the right to rename you, and no-one will dare to mock you again,’ declared Robin Hood. ‘From now on you will be known as *Little John*’

Both men laughed at this joke and their friendship was sealed. Robin took Little John back to meet his band of outlaws. Little John and Robin Hood remained best of friends from that day onward.

An English Folktale

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