

ROBIN HOOD: A MUSICAL ADVENTURE

Words and music by Storytime Soundtracks

IN MERRY ENGLAND, a long time ago, there lived within the green glades of Sherwood Forest, a famous outlaw whose name was Robin Hood.

No archer ever lived who could shoot a faster arrow, and his friends were the merriest bunch that ever made a home in the greenwood. They had all sworn to protect each other, and passed their time in games of archery and swordplay. Winter and summer they slept under the stars, and they knew the secrets of the forest better than anyone. All the band were outlaws, but they were loved by the country people roundabout, for a visit from jolly Robin would always leave a poor man feeling richer.

SONG

*Robin's Longbow made of Yew
Shave it, bend it, wax it too,
Tie the flax strings, fix and glue,
Robin's Longbow, strong and true!
Robin's Longbow >-----> strong and true!*

[CHAPTER 1: SHERWOOD FOREST]

How did Robin come to live in Sherwood Forest? Now, there's a tale!

When Robin was a strong lad of eighteen he set out from Barnsdale to travel to Nottingham, to be the youngest contestant in the Great Archery Tournament. The prize was a gold medallion and the chance to work as the Master of Longbowmen, in service to the Sheriff of Nottingham. Robin had thought of nothing else since he was a young boy and his chance was finally here! His yew bow was waxed and polished, and he knew every notch and groove in each of his arrows.

Every year for the past four, an unknown archer dressed in blue had won the tournament. He'd kept his face hidden under a hood and then disappeared before claiming his prize. Robin longed to meet The Blue Archer and to try his skill against this mysterious champion. He was sure that he could win, and he imagined the glory of walking onto the podium and the praise he would receive from the Sheriff.

The journey to Nottingham was two days' walking. The first day of his journey was fine and bright, and when he settled down for the night, there was plenty of dry wood for his fire, and a cool clear stream nearby, where he quenched his thirst.

Young Robin woke up full of excitement on the second day, and started walking with a brisk step and a merry whistle.

As Robin reached the outskirts of Sherwood Forest, he could hear a woman crying and a man shouting. He pulled an arrow from his quiver and darted from tree to tree to get closer without being seen. In a clearing up ahead, he could see three men dressed in red and gold and sitting on horses, which were positioned head to tail in a triangle. In the middle of the triangle there was a woman sitting, wailing on the ground. A round-bellied monk stood next to her, trying to shield her. Her bags had been emptied and the contents were scattered all over the muddy ground.

The tallest man dismounted and approached the frightened woman. "Hand over your money!" he said as he grabbed her arm.

"But sir, these are her last pennies! Can't you show her some mercy?" said the friar.

"No exceptions! What's to stop everyone asking for the same? No, hand over the money, or we will have to tell the Sheriff you were trying to run away!"

Robin was shocked - these were the Sheriff's men! Why were they stealing from this poor woman? Something felt very wrong. He knew that it was a crime to stop the Sheriff's men from carrying out orders, but he couldn't just stand there and do nothing!

The woman let out a desperate cry and Robin raised his bow and arrow, wanting to distract the Sheriff's guards. He shot his arrow high into the trees and a branch fell so that it clipped the hind leg of one of the horses, which reared up and bolted into the forest with its rider unable to stop it. Then he shot at the ground in front of the hooves of the second rider's horse, which also reared and bolted through the forest. The tall guard had drawn his sword and was looking all around in fear when Robin revealed himself.

"Let her go," he said quietly to the third guard. "The Sheriff never needs to hear that you have shown mercy to this woman."

Just then, one of the King's deer burst into the clearing, a huge stag with fearsome antlers. It was charging straight at the guard. Just before it reached him, Robin hurled himself at the guard and knocked him out of the way so that the Stag charged past them into the forest. The guard was stunned but sprang back onto his feet and pointed his sword at Robin.

"Look here!" shouted Robin, "I have saved your life! In return I am asking you to let this woman go!"

"What is your name?" asked the guard.

"I am Robin Hood, Sir," he answered.

"Then, Robin Hood, I am arresting you on the charge of preventing the collection of taxes. You will be brought to justice by the Sheriff of Nottingham."

"You'll have to catch me first!" Robin shouted, and ran at full pelt into the dense woods. Letting go of the woman, the guard leapt back onto his horse to give chase. As Robin ran, he fired arrows into distant treetops so that birds flapped noisily into the air and confused the guard's horse. The guard followed the sounds of the birds, while Robin darted blindly into the undergrowth, losing his footing and slipping into a muddy ditch. He lay there, not daring to breathe as the horse's hooves thundered around.

At last, the Sheriff's guard seemed to give up the search, and the noise of the horse disappeared into the distance. Only then did Robin creep out of his hiding place.

All the joy and excitement had drained out of him. His plans for a great victory and a noble life at the castle were in ruins. He wandered aimlessly around, trying to imagine what he could do next.

After a while, he came upon the monk and the woman he had rescued. They had managed to escape while the guards chased Robin.

"Thank you, Robin Hood," said the woman.

"You did a good deed, my boy," said the Monk. "The Sheriff has become mad with greed and power. But by taking a stand against him, I am afraid that your name and your face will not be welcome in Nottingham. You are now an outlaw."

"An outlaw?" the word fell on Robin like a stone, "But what will I do for food and shelter?"

"There are many outlaws living in the forest. My name is Friar Tuck, of Fountain Dale. My mission is to help the poor folk of Nottingham and provide food and drink for those outlawed in the woods. This lady is Eleanor; she is skilled in medicine and in music, but even she couldn't make a living under the Sheriff's rule. She is now outlawed beside you. I can't offer much, but I can find you each a soft bed of rushes to sleep on and make you a hearty stew before bedtime."

And so Robin Hood came to live in the greenwood that was to be his home for many years to come; for he was an outlaw according to the laws of the land, even though he had saved more than one life that day.

During his first year in the forest, there gathered around him many others who had been cast out for one reason or another. Their numbers grew with every new measure the heartless Sheriff took against his own people. The Sherwood folk looked out for each other. Every time they found someone hungry they would

feed them, every time they found someone cold they would clothe them and every time they found someone sick they would heal them. Robin worked hardest of all to change the fortunes of the poor, and soon stories of his good deeds were being told throughout Nottingham. The Sheriff became more and more jealous of the popularity of his lawless rival and swore to bring Robin Hood to justice.

Robin and his outlaws vowed to protect one another and they enjoyed good company, Friar Tuck's delicious cooking, the sweet music of Eleanor Dale and the peaceful shade of the forest.

SONG

*There's many a forest in the world
Where leaves grow and fall;
But Sherwood, merry Sherwood,
Is the fairest wood of all,
Is the fairest wood of all.*

[CHAPTER 2: LITTLE JOHN]

“WILL SCARLETT YOU CLUMSY CLODHOPPER!” roared Friar Tuck as Will's ball landed in the stew, covering the Friar with the contents. Robin hid his laughter as the Friar chased Will around his cooking pot, threatening to clout him with his wooden spoon.

Robin looked round fondly at his friends, who now felt like family. There was Eleanor, gathering sage, lavender and feverfew to heal aches and pains. There was Will, the youngest and most energetic outlaw, always inventing games and getting under people's feet. There was the Friar, who was always busy preparing the next meal for as many hungry mouths as there were. And more than twenty others all helped to build and sustain their lives in the forest.

Much the Miller came and sat near Robin. “Robin,” he said, “we've heard news of tax collectors entering the forest trying to catch folk to send to the castle prisons. Can we get rid of them?”

“Hunting for the hunters!” said Robin, “Just the sport I like! You stay here in the greenwood while I go and look for them; but listen for my horn call; I might need your help.”

With his bugle horn on one shoulder and his bow on the other, Robin took a road on the far side of the forest that dipped down towards a broad, fast flowing stream. Across the stream was a narrow bridge made of a log of wood. He strode towards the bridge, but as he came close he saw a tall stranger approaching from the other side. Seeing him, Robin quickened his pace, thinking he could head him off, but the stranger made a rush towards the bridge at the same time.

"Stand back!" Robin called out.

"No, you stand back", bellowed the stranger

"Another step and I will show you why Robin Hood is the most famous archer in all England!"

"Ha!" said the stranger. " If you even touch the string of that bow you hold in your hands, I will show you a bruise all the colours of the rainbow."

"Nonsense!" said Robin, "You'd never even reach me!"

"What a coward!" answered the stranger, "With your arrows ready while I have nothing but a plain wooden staff to meet you."

"A coward!" exclaimed Robin "Never in my life have I been called that! Very well, I will lay down my bow and find a stick sturdy enough to beat yours!"

"Feel free!" said the stranger; and he relaxed against his staff to wait for Robin.

Robin Hood stepped quickly into the trees and cut a straight oak branch, six feet in length, and came back trimming away the stems and leaves from it. The stranger waited for him, leaning upon his staff, and whistling merrily. Robin secretly watched him out the corner of his eye, and thought that he had never seen a larger man. Robin was tall, but the stranger was taller by a head and a

neck, seven feet in height. Robin was broad across the shoulders, but the stranger was twice as broad round the waist.

"Never mind," said Robin to himself, "I'll show this big oaf how quick and strong I can be". Then he shouted, "Get ready! Here I come! The last fellow standing on the bridge is the winner."

"I hope you can swim!" cried the stranger, whirling his staff above his head.

Robin and the tall stranger twirled and jabbed and leapt and ducked, but neither of them seemed likely to give in or to fall off the bridge. Now and again, they stopped to rest, and in those moments marvelled that they had never seen another with such skill with a staff. At last Robin caught the stranger with such a blow that a cloud of dust rose from his jacket. The stranger came within a hair's-breadth of falling off the bridge, but he righted himself quickly and jabbed back, giving Robin a crack that made him hop on the spot. Then he took his chance to thwack Robin on the back of his knees, so that his legs collapsed and he fell head over heels with a splash!

"How's the water?" shouted the stranger, roaring with laughter.

When he came up for air, Robin was laughing too, "Lovely! I needed a bath!" he spluttered, wading to the bank, with the little fish darting around him.

"Give me your hand," said the stranger, pulling a wet Robin up the bank. Robin thanked him and put his bugle to his lips and blew a loud call that echoed down the forest paths. The men laughed together and Robin said "I have never met anyone who could swat me like a fly as you have."

"And I", said the stranger, "have never met a braver fighter, or a better loser."

They could hear the distant rustling of twigs and branches and suddenly twenty outlaws, all clothed in Lincoln green, burst from the trees, with young Will Scarlett at their head.

"Master Robin," cried Will, "you're wet from head to toe!"

“Yes,” answered Robin, "this fellow tumbled me into the water and my head's buzzing like a beehive."

"Get him!" cried one of the outlaws, but Robin quickly stepped between them and laughed, “No need friends, he is a good man and we won’t hurt him. Now listen here, will you join us? You’ll have three suits of Lincoln green each year, and a share of any good fortune we might find. You’ll eat famous feasts from the best forest fare and you will be my right-hand man, for I’ve never met such a fighter in my life! Speak! Will you be one of my merry band?”

"I don't know about that," said the stranger with a frown. "If you're as bad with a bow and arrow as you are with an oak staff, then I’m better on my own; but if anyone here can shoot better than me, I'll think about joining you."

"Well!" said Robin, "there’s a bold challenge! Will Scarlett, fetch me a piece of white bark, four fingers wide, and fix it to that oak over there” - he pointed to a tree a hundred paces away - “Now, stranger! Hit that mark and you can call yourself an archer."

"I can, and I will!" answered the big man, as Will Scarlett ran to put the target in place.

Then, while all the band sat on the grassy bank to watch him shoot, he picked up a huge bow, pulled an arrow to his cheek and let it fly, sending it so straight that it split the white bark in half.

"A good shot indeed," said Robin with a bow to the stranger. "I can’t better it... but I might break it!"

He picked up his bow at lightning speed, took aim and released his arrow. With the noise of breaking wood, it split right down the middle of the stranger’s arrow, which fell in splinters to the ground leaving Robin’s in its place.

"Ah!" cried the stranger, "I’ve never seen a shot like that in all my life! I am happy to call you my friend, and my skills are at your service!"

"Then I too have made a friend today," said Robin happily, "What's your name my good man?"

"Back home I'm known as John Little," answered the stranger.

There was a lot of laughter from the band on the bank, as John Little was a very unlikely name for this enormous fellow.

"I like it!" Robin Hood chuckled, "Come then, let's prepare a feast in honour of our new friend, Little John!"

So, turning their backs upon the stream, they plunged into the forest, retracing their steps until they reached the glade where they lived in the depths of the wood. Here they had built huts from bark and the branches of trees, and had made long couches of sweet rushes, fragrant herbs and soft feathers. In the middle was a great oak tree, and underneath its shade was a seat of green moss where Robin Hood always sat. The rest of the band was gathered around in a clearing, roasting pheasants and partridges. When the feast was ready they all sat down, but Robin asked for Little John to sit on his right in the place of honour, as he was now second only to Robin among the outlaws of Sherwood Forest.

SONG

*Then bold Robin Hood drew forth his horn
And blew it both loud and shrill
And quickly he saw Little John
Come running o'er the hill.*

[CHAPTER 3: MEETING MARIAN]

The Sheriff had had enough of Robin Hood. Every day that rascal roamed the forest as free as a bird made a mockery of his authority. He set a huge reward for whoever could capture Robin Hood and bring him to the castle to face imprisonment. He ordered sketches of Robin's face to be drawn by the court painters and hung on buildings all over Nottingham.

The thought of this fortune sent the whole town into a flurry of excitement. The gossiping townspeople agreed among themselves that it was an impossible task and the only person who might be able to do it was the Unknown Archer, who always appeared hooded in blue at every archery contest. The Blue Archer could hit any target, moving or still, near or far. This was the only person who stood a chance, they said.

Months passed and there was no word of Robin Hood's capture. The Sheriff sat in his turret of the castle like a vulture in his nest, becoming angrier and angrier: "Still no one comes forward. I hold all Nottingham men to be cowards!" he stormed. "If nobody in Nottingham dares to win Two Hundred Pounds, I will send elsewhere, for there must be fearless men somewhere in England."

The Sheriff started writing furiously and shouted to his steward, "Mork! Send a message to the Tinker of Banbury. I will double the reward! The Tinker's famous strength and skill will surely overcome that scoundrel, Robin Hood."

A raven-haired girl was listening outside the high turret window and caught the sheriff's words. She was working to remove some nesting birds that were annoying the sheriff with their singing. She had a head for heights and didn't need ladders to climb, as she was as sure-footed as a mountain goat. Her name was Marian and since her father had not been able to pay the high taxes on his land, she had been set to work at the castle while her father and brothers were imprisoned by the Sheriff. She usually worked in the stables, mucking out the horses and putting down fresh straw. But she often asked her friend James the Steeplejack to swap jobs as she liked to be high among the clouds and he did not.

When Marian heard that the reward for Robin Hood had not yet been claimed, she ran to the stables to tell James:

"James - the reward! It would be enough to pay the taxes for both our families and release them from prison!"

"I know, Marian," said James, "But what could we do about it? Robin Hood is the best archer in the country. He has dozens of loyal supporters with him and

anyone who's gone hunting for him has been sent home with a thousand bruises. I have no skills with a bow and nor do you. How would we capture him? No one has a chance, except perhaps for the Blue Archer."

"You're right James, but just think. If only there was a way to catch Robin Hood and earn that reward, we would be free again."

James sighed and shrugged and then moved on to feed the horse in the next stable.

Marian paused just for a moment and then walked with determination to the back of the stable where there was a corner piled high with meadow grasses. Sweeping the grasses aside, she felt around on the floor until she found a little notch in the wood. She curled her fingertip around it and pulled it upwards. There, in a hole under the floor was some carefully folded bright blue fabric. Marian quickly pulled it out and hid it at the bottom of a saddlebag.

That night after 11, Marian crept across the castle courtyard to her favourite hiding place - a scullery off the old kitchen. The Old Kitchen had not been used for many years. The Sheriff had demanded the kitchen be moved closer to his apartment, since he said the food was too cold when it reached him. The Old Kitchen was usually deserted and the scullery was only used by Marian. There she pulled out the blue material from her saddle bag. She slipped it on over her head and was transformed into... The Blue Archer! Nobody, not even her family knew that she was so skilled with a longbow, as she practised in secret every night at midnight. She had never revealed her identity to a single soul. She reached behind a wide wooden chest and produced her longbow made from oak and a quiver of arrows. She tried the strings and tested the weight of the bow. She pulled the blue hood down low over her face.

"Tonight", she thought, "*I will capture Robin Hood.*"

SONG

Who is brave and has no fear? Marian! Marian

Who can outrun any deer? Marian! Marian!

Who can climb the highest heights?

Who has Robin in her sights? Marian! Marian! Marian!

[CHAPTER 4: CHASE THROUGH THE WOODS]

It so happened that the Tinker of Banbury was close at hand, stopping overnight at the Boar Inn in Nottingham Town. Mork, the Sheriff's steward, woke him from his snoring slumber, issued him with the Sheriff's summons and told him about the doubled reward for the capture of Robin Hood. The Tinker was known for feats of strength and skill with a staff and for five years he had held the midlands champion belt for wrestling. He shook himself awake, picked up his staff and longbow and headed into the woods at a run with a plan to catch Robin Hood by surprise.

Meanwhile, Marian was scaling the tree tops, moving swiftly between the high branches. She moved so lightly and carefully that she made no more sound than a squirrel or a bat. She felt exhilarated by the cool wind on her face and the moonlight picked out the glittering movement of her long dark hair. Her ears were sharpened by the silence of the night, and she thought she could hear a distant noise of thumping and the snapping of twigs, so she climbed down to peer through the leaves in the direction of the sounds. Suddenly, the Tinker thundered underneath, running towards the heart of the forest and Robin's oak tree. He was chanting under his breath:

(Chanted)

*Catch Robin, trap Robin, make Robin pay
Gold will be mine by the end of the day!*

Marian darted back to the top of the trees and started leaping between branches, trying to outpace the Tinker. When her path was unclear she used her longbow as a bridge or embedded her arrows in the trees as hand and foot holds. Being lighter and more agile, she took the lead over the Tinker, who was loudly fighting his way through the tangled bushes behind her, and she headed towards the distant glow of a fire, deep in the heart of Sherwood Forest.

Finally, coming to the clearing where Robin Hood lived, she chose the highest oak tree as a lookout so that she could see how to accomplish her mission to capture Robin and hand him over to the Sheriff.

She was astonished to see a large gathering of townspeople in ragged clothes forming a rough line in front of a man and a woman. The woman was administering medicine to each person in the queue. To some, she would wrap a cut in a clean bandage with soothing, anesthetic herbs. To others, she gave nourishing soups with remedies to stop their aches and pains. The man next to her was dressed head to toe in green, with a jaunty cap and a scarlet feather. He was handing over bags of food and coins and he joked merrily with each of the townsfolk so that they left him with warm smiles on their faces. The doctor was Eleanor Dale and the man in green was Robin Hood. Marian found that she was in tears with the beauty of these kind deeds when in the next second, the Tinker burst into view with a bow and arrow aimed directly at Robin Hood!

Robin realised that it was all over. But suddenly, with a whoosh and a CRACK, the Tinker's arrow was hit from out of his hands and went spinning off into the trees! This gave Robin enough time to whip his bow to his side and point an arrow straight back at the Tinker.

“What are you doing here, Master of Banbury?” he asked.

“Mercy, Robin Hood, I was under a summons from the Sheriff himself!”

“I will not harm you, but you must do this for me - head back to the castle at Nottingham and tell the Sheriff that Robin Hood is alive and well and sends him his best regards. When you've done that, you must never return to the Greenwood.”

“Yes, good Robin Sir, I... I will... and I won't!” and the Tinker turned and ran back into the woods.

Robin looked around, “Which one of you fellows saved my life?” he said.
“Come here, we must celebrate together!”

Marian didn't dare reveal herself, but a voice suddenly came from behind her. Little John had followed the path of the arrow back to its shooter. He was standing behind Marian, who had her back turned to him.

“I have found your lucky charm Robin, it is none other than the Blue Archer!” said Little John. “Haven’t you wanted to meet him since you were a lad?”

Marian stepped into the light of the fire. Her eyes glowed in the flickering light and she stood strong and proud.

“I’m sorry to disappoint you, Robin Hood, but I am not a he, I’m a she.”

But Robin wasn’t disappointed at all. He had never seen anyone so fiercely beautiful in his life and he exclaimed in delight “I’m pleased as parsnips to meet you, fair archer! What is your name?”

“Marian”, she said. “I came here to capture you and then receive a reward, but I can see that the work you do here is worth much more than any ransom. I will have to find some other way to rescue my family from the castle prisons.”

“Sit and eat with us and tell us all about it.” said Robin.

So that evening ended as many others did in the greenwood, with a good story and a lot of good cheer. Friar Tuck was so excited to meet the Blue Archer that he created a midnight feast in Marian’s honour. He carved parsnips in the shape of arrows and tied beans in the shape of longbows. He even treated them to his secret, personal supply of honey, made by the King’s own bees. Will Scarlett was so over excited that he danced for two solid hours and ended the evening face down, asleep, in a platter of cabbage.

Marian felt at home as she never had before. But she knew that by sunrise, she had to be back in the stables, or make the decision to be an outlaw forever.

SONG

*Marian, Marian won't you stay,
Marian, Marian, just another day.
Marian you will never be alone
Marian, Marian with the forest as your home.
Marian...*

[CHAPTER 5: THE ARCHERY TOURNAMENT]

Before anyone at the castle was awake, Marian snuck into the stables as the first light touched the top of the castle wall. With a heavy heart, she had decided to return, as she knew that her family would be punished if she ran away. Robin Hood had promised that he and the outlaws would help her and her family at the first opportunity.

In the early morning light she saw the shame-faced Tinker entering the Sheriff's quarters and heard the Sheriff's furious rage when he was told that Robin Hood had escaped again.

No one saw the Sheriff for two days as he sat in his room, grinding his teeth and thinking about Robin Hood. "If I could somehow persuade Robin Hood to come to Nottingham," he thought, "I would teach them all that nobody makes a fool of *me!*"

Then it came to him in a flash: the archery contest! It was due to take place in a week, and this time, he would use Robin's pride to lure him to the castle.

Straight away, he sent messengers all through the county and beyond, to proclaim, "Everyone who can draw a bow is invited to the Royal Nottingham Archery Contest! The winner will receive an arrow of pure gold, and will hold the title: 'The Greatest Archer in the Land'."

When Robin Hood heard this news, he called all his band about him:

"Listen to this! Our friend the Sheriff of Nottingham has his contest next week, and the prize this year is a golden arrow. Wouldn't it be sweet to take that off his hands?" he said, with a wicked smile.

Then Much the Miller spoke up and said, "But Robin, it's a trap! The Sheriff thinks you won't be able to resist such a prize and title!"

"Well, well!" Robin said, rubbing his hands with a grin. "Such a grand trap just for me!"

He thought for a long moment, then stood up abruptly and started striding towards the glade where they had their little huts and their few possessions. "Little John, come with me! We might be able to win the Sheriff's contest and do some good too. Let's pay our friend Marian a visit and on the way I'll tell you what I have in mind..."

MUSICAL INTERLUDE (passage of time - 5 days or so)

Nottingham Town was a grand sight on the day of the contest. The sunshine gleamed on the bright stone of the churches and on the well-scrubbed houses. On the Sheriff's orders, the beggars had been rounded up and put in prison so that they wouldn't ruin the spectacle. The shopkeepers had all set up stalls, each with colourful decorations to catch the eye of the spectators as they made their way to the contests. They yelled out advertisements for their wares:

"Finest wool in the midlands! Soft and smooth!"

"Beans, beans, good for the heart!"

"Gaaaaaaaarlic! Gaaaaaaaarlic!"

All along the green meadow beneath the town wall stretched rows and rows of benches for the spectators, who were dressed in their best, most dazzling clothes. The castle guard in full uniform was positioned at every few paces in the crowd.

At the end of the farthest row, nearest the target, was a raised throne decorated in ribbons and scarves and garlands of flowers. This was for the Sheriff himself.

At the other end of the shooting range was a striped tent with poles bearing many-coloured flags and streamers. The archers gathered inside this tent and a herald told them the rules of the tournament:

"Shoot from your own mark, which is one hundred and fifty yards from the target. In the first round every archer shall have a turn. In the second round, only the 10 best archers will shoot. In the third round, the 3 best will take their last shot, and the best of those three will claim the prize."

Then the herald sounded three blasts on a silver horn and the archers all stepped forward.

There was a great hubbub from the sidelines, with the whole crowd shouting encouragement to the archers. The guests wore ribbons with the colours of their favourite archers and there was a sea of blue ribbons worn by supporters of the Blue Archer. Those who felt daring wore a green ribbon, as they hoped to catch sight of Robin Hood.

The Sheriff was seated on his decorated platform in robes of purple with sea-green silk tights, a purple velvet cap and a heavy golden chain about his neck. He peered at the archers in agitation, trying to find Robin Hood among them; but no one was wearing the Lincoln Green of the forest folk.

"Nevertheless," he said to himself, "I know he will appear once we come to the last ten. Robin Hood could never resist the title of The Greatest Archer in the Land."

And now the archers shot one by one, and the people of Nottingham had never seen such fine archery. When an arrow found its way to the target, the crowd stood and cheered so that the sound shook the castle walls. There was a ripple of excitement when the last shot of the first round was taken by an archer who stepped forward dressed in blue and hit the target with an easy grace. When the ten contestants in the second round were announced, six of these were already famous throughout the land. Gilbert o' the Red Cap, Adam o' the Dell, Dickon Cruikshank, Lesley of Hertford, Hubert o' Cloud, and Sarah of Doncaster. Two others were from Yorkshire, another was from London and the last was the hooded stranger dressed in blue with a gold trim.

"Now," said the Sheriff to Mork the Steward, "do you see Robin Hood among those ten?"

"I'm not sure, Your Worship," said Mork. "Six of them I know well. Then of the Yorkshire archers, one is too tall and the other too short to be the outlaw. Robin's hair is red-gold and the London archer has hair as white as snow, and is blind in one eye. As for the stranger in blue, we have never known the identity of the blue archer, but that is an oak bow and Robin's bow is made of yew."

"Well," said the Sheriff, "We shall keep a close watch on this archer in blue!"

After another impressive round of shooting, there were three left in the competition: Gill o' the Red Cap, Adam o' the Dell, and the Blue Archer.

Gilbert stepped forward and drew out a smooth arrow with a broad feather and fitted it deftly to the string. The arrow flew straight and hit the target squarely, a finger's-breadth from the center. "Gilbert! Gilbert!" shouted all the crowd. "An excellent shot!" cried the Sheriff, rubbing his hands together. Perhaps Robin Hood would be arrested *and* lose the contest - what a day's work that would be!

Then Adam o' the Dell shot, carefully and cautiously; his arrow lodged close behind Gilbert's and he raised his hand in defeat. No one spoke as the archer in blue walked to the mark, and stood there, perfectly still. The crowd counted five before the oak bow was raised. Holding it drawn for a moment, the Blue Archer loosed the string. The arrow flew so straight that it sent a gray goose feather spinning off Gilbert's arrow and the arrowhead lodged in the very centre of the target. The crowd went mad with delight before the Sheriff silenced them with a raised finger.

"An exceptional shot, stranger. You are worthy of the title The Greatest Archer in the Land. And now... SEIZE HIM!", shouted the Sheriff, and all along the walls the castle guard rose and rushed towards the range.

But just then there was a collective gasp as the crowd had seen a tall figure in Lincoln green perched on the top of the striped tent. The figure was holding a yew bow and doffed a green cap with a scarlet feather in the direction of the Sheriff. In one swift move, the yew bow was drawn and an arrow sailed through the air from over 200 yards towards the target. The crowd followed the arc of the arrow as it came down upon the target, knocking the other arrows away and finding its home in the centre of the bullseye.

“Robin Hood!” they said excitedly, “it’s Robin Hood!”

“AFTER HIM!” shouted the Sheriff, and all of the palace guards ran towards the figure in green, who was already running headlong towards the forest.

SONG

Fly, Robin, Fly!

The Sheriff’s Men are on your tail!

Fly, Robin, Fly!

They’ll throw you in the castle jail,

Fly, Robin, Fly!

[CHAPTER 6: THE SHERIFF OF NOTTINGHAM]

Now the Sheriff and all of his guards hurtled over the shooting range, past the tent and towards the forest. “This time we’ll have him!” shouted the Sheriff, straggling behind under the weight of his velvet robes and gold chain.

The guards at the front were following the flash of green through the trees with their swords raised and ready. But the further they went into the forest, the harder it was to keep track of their target. He seemed to be leaping up into trees and fast pulling away from them. They had never seen anyone move so quickly through woodland. “This way!” shouted the guard at the front. “No! I’ve still got him in my sights, it’s this way!” cried another.

A hundred paces in front of the guards, Robin Hood’s green cap was starting to slip from the silken head of its wearer. At last it fell, and with it, a tumble of long dark hair! The long range archer was not Robin, but Marian! She didn’t stop for a second as she had none to spare, and left the cap where it fell. She dived and swooped, under and over the tangled bushes, heading all the time to a place of safety at the heart of the forest.

Meanwhile, back at the tournament, and with no guards to reckon with, the blue archer claimed the golden arrow and headed towards the castle with a crowd of supporters cheering in a line behind. Once inside the castle walls, the Blue Archer removed the blue hood and there was Robin Hood’s laughing face.

“Good people of Nottingham!” Robin cried, “so many of you live in fear of the Sheriff and his taxes. Today we will turn the tide on the Sheriff and make him feel as poor, tired and hungry as you all have felt. We will free those who have been unfairly imprisoned and we will carry what food and drink we can back to Sherwood Forest, where you are all invited to our forest feast!”

At that, the crowd gave a huge cheer!

“Follow me to the prisons first. Then we’ll go to the kitchens and we’ll see what can be done to teach the Sheriff a lesson he’ll never forget!”

Back in the forest, Marian had nearly reached her destination and was shedding the Lincoln green suit, having hidden her own clothes underneath. She hurled herself into the clearing where Robin’s oak tree stood and doubled over, panting. When she had recovered, she reached behind the oak tree for a basket of herbs and knelt on the ground to continue picking them. The outlaws had removed all signs that they had ever lived in this clearing and as the guards stumbled one by one into the open space, they halted, confused to see a girl, alone, gathering herbs.

“Robin Hood,” the captain wheezed, waving the green cap with the scarlet feather, “Where is Robin Hood?”

“Is he not in Nottingham, Sir, for the Archery Contest?” said Marian.

“Yes he was... but he is now back in the forest and we had him just a moment ago!”

“I’m afraid I haven’t seen him, Sir, I have been gathering medicines for the Sheriff’s horses,” she said, innocently.

The Sheriff blundered into view:

“Have you got him?!” he demanded, and then looked at Marian, bewildered.

“Well... he’s not here, fools, keep looking!”

Just at that moment, a volley of 30 arrows whistled from the tops of the surrounding trees, all heading towards the great oak. The guards looked up and around, and in every tree above them sat a different outlaw, each grinning and each wearing Robin's Lincoln green. They gave a hoot of laughter before disappearing. The guards set off in all directions to try to follow the outlaws, but the Sheriff's eyes had fallen on a large piece of parchment which had been carried by an arrow and was fixed to the great oak. It read:

(Spoken)

If you're seeking Robin Hood
Then let me make it clear
I was the archer dressed in blue!
You will not find me here.

I'm standing on the castle walls
An arrow in my hand,
Crowned by the Sheriff of Nottingham
Best Archer in the Land!

The Sheriff howled in fury and spun around, shrieking at his guards, who were mostly out of earshot:

“Back!! Back to the castle!”

After fighting his way back through the forest, the Sheriff's purple velvet robes were in tatters. His sea-green silk tights were ripped up the seams. He had lost his guards, who were pursuing the outlaws and were being led in circles through the woods. Still, he ran panting and red-faced towards the castle, his rage giving him renewed determination to find Robin Hood.

He found the castle grounds strangely quiet and the streets emptied of all people. He thought he could hear smothered giggles coming from behind walls and shutters.

The castle gates were closed and he was furious to find that no one was there to open them for him. He knocked on the small sentinel's doorway to the side and an enormous face peered back at him.

“Open! In the name of the King!” roared the Sheriff.

“Who is it?” asked the voice.

“Who?... Who..?...It's the SHERIFF OF NOTTINGHAM!” he spluttered.

The door swung open onto the Sheriff's foot (“OW”) and he was confronted by a giant man, about seven feet in height and almost twice his width. He was dressed in the standard uniform of the castle guards but the Sheriff was sure he hadn't seen someone of this size before.

“Welcome, Sheriff,” said the big man. “How may I help you?”

“Help me?” asked the Sheriff, hopping in pain, “Well... I... I've come to capture the outlaw Robin Hood!”

“Oh well. Yes. A good idea, sir. He's caused quite the commotion in Nottingham today. You see, he was disguised as a Blue Archer and he's been feasting in the kitchens.”

“To the kitchen!” yelled the Sheriff, charging towards the great stone kitchens. As he ran through the entrance, he suddenly found that he couldn't stop. The stone floors had been spread in a thick layer of butter and the Sheriff went head over tail, sliding over the floor, buttering himself like a slice of bread. He finally managed to grab a sturdy table leg and skidded to a halt, whereupon he looked round to discover that there wasn't a single scrap of food left in the kitchen, the pantry or the larder.

The large guard fished the Sheriff off the floor with a long-handled broom and helped him to his feet. The Sheriff tried to regain some dignity by slicking back his hair with his buttery hands. “Oh dear.” said the guard, “It looks like he's left the kitchen. We should probably check the treasury.”

“The jewels!” shrieked the Sheriff, “he’d better not have touched the King’s jewels!”

He skidded and slid across the castle courtyard until he reached the treasury, which was normally closely guarded. Inside, as he feared, all of the chests were empty.

The Sheriff started to panic - “They’re gone! What will I say to the King?”

“Mmmm. Difficult question, sir.” said the cheerful guard, “Do you tell him about this first, or about all the escaped prisoners....”

“AAAAARGH!” the Sheriff cried, and he ran, tripping and slipping down the steps to the dungeons.

Down in the dungeons, the fiercest prisoners remained behind bars, but the beggars and Marian and James’s families were nowhere to be found. The Sheriff clutched at his chest, which was heaving with fury as he walked past each empty prison cell. At the end of the row, there was a gleam of gold. He rushed into the cell to see what it was and there lay the golden arrow with a piece of parchment underneath. On it was written:

(Spoken)

Too late, cruel Sheriff, I’ll soon be gone,
For you’ve been tricked by Little John!

Behind him there was a clanking of metal and he turned to see Little John, who had been pretending to be the guard, shutting the heavy iron door of the cell. There was someone hiding behind Little John in the shadows of the passage who now came forward with a key and, with a swift movement, locked him in:

“Robin Hood!” Screamed the Sheriff.

Robin looked the Sheriff of Nottingham straight in the eye and then winked, pocketed the key and he and Little John whistled merrily all the way out of the passage and all the way back up the stone staircase, with the Sheriff’s howls of rage echoing behind them.

In the forest, the bedraggled guards were gradually making their way back to the castle. They found no food in the kitchens - even the cook had disappeared - but they did discover the King's jewels in the butter churns.

[CHAPTER 7: THE FOREST FEAST]

When Robin Hood and Little John arrived back at the heart of the forest, they were met by Marian who rushed forward to give them both a hug.

"I'm so glad you're alright," she said to Robin, and she led him towards her family, who thanked him with tears of gratitude.

All around them, preparations for the great feast were underway. Some of the outlaws were kindling the fire for roasting meats. Will Scarlett and his friends were throwing balls at wooden skittles. The castle cook was complimenting Friar Tuck on his seasoning of the turnip mash when the Friar tripped over a skittle, tumbled backwards into a giant pork pie and covered himself in pastry. Other outlaws were spreading soft moss upon the ground and laying deerskins over the top for their friends to sit on. There were many townsfolk hugging the released prisoners and encouraging them to sit gently and have some food and drink. After they had all eaten a hearty meal, any person carrying an instrument made a band and struck up the merriest jig and all the guests danced with Robin and Marian at their centre, spinning and whirling with joy.

When the dancers started to tire, Eleanor Dale came forward with her harp and sang in a beautiful voice songs of love, of war and of glory and all listened without movement or sound. So she sang until the great round silver moon rose and shone down over their forest home.

(Spoken)

And this is where our story ends
Of Robin and his merry friends,
Gathered round the ancient oak
As night sky spreads its velvet cloak.

SONG

*There's many a forest in the world
Where leaves grow and fall;
But Sherwood, merry Sherwood,
Is the fairest wood of all,
Is the fairest wood of all.*