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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Robin Hood: How Robin Hood Went Back To The Greenwood (7/10)

"Hast thou any good cloth that thou wilt sell to me now?" said the king.

"Yes, three and thirty yards," said Robin.

"Then I pray thee, Robin, sell me some of it for me and my company."

"Yes, I will," said Robin. "I should be a fool if I did not, for I trow another day you will clothe me against Christmas."

So the king speedily cast off his coat, and donned a garment of green, and so did all his knights. When they were all clad in Lincoln green and had thrown aside their monks' grey habits, "Now we will go to Nottingham," said the king.

They bent their bows, and away they went, shooting in the same band, as if they were all outlaws. The king and Robin Hood rode together, and they shot "pluck-buffet" as they went by the way—that is to say, whoever missed the mark at which he aimed was to receive a buffet from the other; many a buffet the king won from Robin Hood, and good Robin spared nothing of his pay.

"Faith," said the king, "thy game is not easy to learn; I should not get a shot at thee though I tried all this year."

When they drew near Nottingham, all the people stood to behold them. They saw nothing but mantles of green covering all the field; then every man began saying to another: "I dread our king is slain; if Robin Hood comes to the town, he will never leave one of us alive. "They all hastened to make their escape, both men and lads, yeomen and peasants; the ploughman left the plough in the fields, the smith left his shop, and old wives who could scarcely walk hobbled along on their staves.

The king laughed loud and long to see the townsfolk scurry off in this fashion, and he commanded them to come back. He soon let them understand that he had been in the forest, and that from that day for evermore he had pardoned Robin Hood. When they found out the tall outlaw in the Lincoln green was really the king, they were overjoyed; they danced and sang, and made great feasting and revelry for gladness at his safe return. Then King Edward called Sir Richard Lee, and there he gave him his lands again, and bade him be a good man.



Sir Richard thanked the king, and paid homage to him as the true and loyal knight he had always been. So Robin Hood went back to London with the king, and dwelt at court. But before many months had gone he found all his money had melted away, and that he had nothing left. He had spent over a hundred pounds and now had not enough to pay the fees of his followers. For everywhere he went he had always been laying down money both for knights and squires, in order to win renown. When he could no longer afford to pay their fee, all the new retainers left him, and by the end of the year he had none but two still with him, and those were his own faithful old comrades, Little John and Will Scarlet.

It happened one day some young men of the court went out to shoot, and as Robin Hood stood with a sad heart to watch them, a sudden great longing for his old life in the greenwood came over him.

"Alas!" he sighed, "my wealth has gone! Once on a time I too was a famous archer, sure of eye and strong of hand; I was accounted the best archer in merry England. Oh, to be back once more in the heart of the greenwood, where the merry does are skipping, and the wind blows through the leaves of the linden, and little birds sit singing on every bough! If I stay longer with the king, I shall die of sorrow!"

So Robin Hood went and begged a boon of the king.

"My lord the King of England, grant me what I ask! I built a little chapel in Barnsdale, which is full seemly to see, and I would fain be there once again. For seven

nights past I have neither slept nor closed my eyes, nor for all these seven days have I eaten or drunk. I have a sore longing after Barnsdale; I cannot stay away.

Barefoot and doing penance will I go thither."

"If it be so, there is nothing better to be done," said the king. "Seven nights—no longer—I give thee leave to dwell away from me."

Thanking the king, Robin Hood saluted him and took his leave full courteously, and away he went to the greenwood.

It was a fair morning when he came to the forest. The sun shone, the soft green turf was strewn with flowers that twinkled like stars, and all the air rang with the song of birds. The cloud of care and sorrow rolled away from Robin's spirit, and his heart danced as light as a leaf on the tree.

"It is long since I was here last," he said, as he looked around him. "I think I should like to shoot once more at the deer."

He fitted an arrow to his bow, and away it sped to its mark, and down dropped a fine fat hart. Then Robin blew his horn. And as the blast rang out, shrill and sweet and piercing, all the outlaws of the forest knew that Robin Hood had come again. Through the woodland they gathered together, and fast they came trooping, till in a little space of time seven score stalwart lads stood ready in order before Robin. They took off their caps, and fell on their knee in salutation.

"Welcome, our master! Welcome, welcome back to the greenwood!" they shouted.