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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Robin Hood: The Jolly Tanner (9/10)

About this time there was living in Nottingham a jolly tanner whose name was Arthur-a-Bland. Never a squire in Nottingham could beat Arthur, or bid him stand if he chose to go on. With a long pike-staff on his shoulder he could clear his way so well he made every one fly before him.

One summer's morning Arthur-a-Bland went forth into Sherwood Forest to see the deer, and there he met Robin Hood. As soon as Robin saw him he thought he would have some sport, so he called to him to stand.

"Why, who art thou, fellow, who rangest here so boldly?" he said. "In sooth, to be brief, thou lookst like a thief who comes to steal the king's venison. I am a keeper in the forest; the king puts me in trust to look after the deer. Therefore I must bid thee stand."

"If you be a keeper in this forest, and have so great authority," answered the tanner, "yet you must have plenty of helpers in store before you can make me stop."



"I have no helpers in store, nor do I need any. But I have good weapons which I know will do the deed."

"I don't care a straw for your sword or your bow, nor all your arrows to boot," said Arthur-a-Bland. "If you get a knock on your pate, your weapons will be no good."

"Speak civilly, good fellow," said Robin, "or else I will correct thee for thy rudeness, and make thee more mannerly."

"Marry, see how you'll look with a knock on your head!" quoth the tanner. "Are you such a goodly man? I care not a rush for your looking so big. Look out for yourself, if you can."

Then Robin Hood unbuckled his belt, and laid down his bow, and took up a staff of oak, very stiff and strong.

"I yield to your weapons, since you will not yield to mine," said Robin. "I, too, have a staff, not half a foot longer than yours. But let me measure before we begin, for I would not have mine to be longer than yours, for that would be counted foul play."

"The length of your staff is nothing to me," said the tanner. "Mine is of good stout oak; it is eight feet and a half long, and it will knock down a calf—and I hope it will knock down you."

At these rude and mocking words, Robin could not longer forbear, but gave the tanner such a crack on the head that the blood began to flow. Arthur quickly recovered, and gave Robin in return such a knock that in a few minutes blood ran trickling down the side of

his face. As soon as he felt himself so badly hurt, Robin raged like a wild boar, while Arthur-a-Bland laid on so fast it was almost as if he were cleaving wood. Round about they went, like wild boars at bay, striving to maim each other in leg or arm or any place. Knock for knock they dealt lustily, so that the wood rang at every blow, and this they kept up for two hours or more.

But at last Robin was forced to own that he had met his match, and he called to the sturdy stranger to stay. "Hold thy hand, hold thy hand, and let our quarrel drop!" he cried. "For we may thrash our bones all to smash here, and get no good out of it. Hold thy hand, and hereafter thou shalt be free in the merry forest of Sherwood."

"Thank you for nothing!" retorted Arthur. "I have bought my own freedom. I may thank my good staff for this, and not you."

"What tradesman are you, good fellow, and where do you dwell?"

"I am a tanner, and in Nottingham I have worked for many years. If you will come there, I vow and protest I will tan your hide for nothing."

"Heaven have mercy, good fellow, since you are so kind and obliging," said Robin. "If you will tan my hide for nothing, I'll do as much for you. But come, if you will forsake your tanner's trade, to live here with me in the greenwood, my name is Robin Hood, and I swear faithfully to give you good gold and wages."

"If you are Robin Hood, as I think very well you are, then here's my hand," said the tanner. "My name is

Arthur-a-Bland. We two will never part. But tell me, where is Little John? I would fain hear of him, for we are allied, through our mother's family, and he is my dear kinsman."

Then Robin blew a loud, shrill blast on his bugle, and instantly Little John came quickly tripping over the hill.

"Oh, what is the matter? Master, I pray you tell me!" cried Little John. "Why do you stand there with your staff in your hand? I fear all is not well."

"Yes, man, I do stand here, and this tanner beside me has made me stand," said Robin. "He is a fine fellow, and master of his trade, for he has soundly tanned my hide." "He is to be commended if he can do such a feat," said Little John. "If he is so sturdy, we will have a bout together, and he shall tan my hide too."

"Hold your hand," said Robin; "for, as I understand he is a good yeoman of your own blood; his name is Arthur-a-Bland." Then Little John flung away his staff as far as he could, and running up to Arthur-a-Bland, threw his arms around his neck. Both were ready and eager to be friends, and made no attempt to hide their delight at the meeting, but wept for joy. Then Robin Hood took a hand of each, and they danced all round the oak-tree, singing: "For three merry men, and three merry men, And three merry men we be!

"And ever hereafter, as long as we live,
We three will be as one;

The wood it shall ring, and the old wife sing,
Of Robin Hood, Arthur, and John."