

Fractured Fairy Tale ‘Little Red Robin Hood’ by Joseph Jones - ENGL 218 Spotts

My story is a brief one, and no, you have not heard it before. Or maybe you heard the incomplete version. It is tied with my father, Robin Hood. He was a little man, aptly called the fox, sly and cunning but playful and roguish. I looked up to him in every way, though he was often far away, which is where my story begins.

It was Summer. My parents had decided we should live further from Nottingham, way out in the country where a band of soldiers was less likely to surprise us. I enjoyed it, though for a young girl it grew rather boring at times, as father was always in Sherwood with the other outlaws. We lived in a beautiful house bordering the forest. Our closest neighbor was an old woman by the name of Tyke, someone I took a great liking to and with whom I spent many evenings, hearing her spin tales of the forest. She said that Sherwood meant luminous wood. It was bright with the fey, some of whom still existed in and around the country. I didn’t know at the time, but they were much more common than I had thought.

And so the days grew hotter, until at last it was almost unbearable to stay inside. Large swaths of rain would offer brief respite, but then the sun would shine and the humidity would be just as unbearable. Seeing as Tyke hadn’t visited us in several days, I thought it best to visit her.

Obtaining permission from my mother, I grabbed a small yew bow shaped to my hand by my father, a basket of cool eggs from the cellar, and hot bread from the oven. The road wasn’t long, and as I had made the trip several times alone, I had no fear of missing my way following the trail back home in the dark. Thus I stayed long with the old woman, tending to her. She had merely fallen ill with a slight fever, but was far too weak to carry herself. We talked for a while and I promised to return the next day, despite her warning that many creatures come out at night that are not seen in the day. I was confident I could dispatch them. My quiver was full of arrows my father and I had fletched together, and with his presence at my back I felt that the night was rather welcoming. But upon entering the bushes and hearing leaves rustle and weighty twigs snap, I of a sudden felt removed from the moment, and the night seemed colder, the moonlight more flighty, and the eyes boring into my back more sinister.

I was walking yet had to stop to catch my breath and glance around. It was then at that moment that a large shadow rose up behind me, silhouetted by the moon. A wolf, standing on its hind legs. I was frightened, my expression was scared yes, but the pulsing of my heart blocked out what I was thinking, it took the strength from my legs just to be able to keep my heart beating. I was very, very still. I tell you, that to die is easily thought of. But the moments before death stretch on and on.

I couldn’t move, even though that was all I was trying to do as the wolf’s paw reached closer to raise my chin, exposing me to the full stroke of the moonlight, my breath heaving through lungs held tight by my ribs. I couldn’t talk, I couldn’t scream. That is when the wolf spoke.

He told me that I was a foolish child. I hadn’t ever considered that before. I suppose it was normal for a girl of my age. I asked if he might take me home. He responded that he

couldn't. I had already passed into the fey. Looking back, I could see I had blundered off the path in my carelessness. The wolf and I stood in a faerie ring, the pale mushrooms reflecting moonlight off their wet caps, though there had been no rain. He said I was one with the fey now, and suggested I change form to better enter their world. I consented, and within moments my limbs grew paws, my hair wrinkled into grey fur, and he and I were running through the woods faster than any man could follow. I left behind my little red hood and the bow made for my hand. But with me I took a fletching from my little arrows. Something of home to take along.

I loved my new life. As a wolf, I could do whatever I wished. I settled into my form, roaming dark gulleys, tracking the mighty stags through the forest, playing in the thickets and clearings of Sherwood. At times I would see my father's men, hands on great yew bows, passing through the trees. I stayed quiet. They would not recognize me, and I could do nothing for them. However, as winter approached and game grew scarce, we made more and more passes at one another. Several times I was shot at, but my lean legs carried me beyond their swift arrows.

I took to attacking caravans of people as they journeyed from Nottingham. Wagons with soldiers and families traveling in the bite of winter. Perhaps it was my memories of my hate for the soldiers of the town that caused me to worry at them while my kin made off with supplies. I had taken to eating those who were in graves, seeing as they had no use for their bodies and I had very much use for mine. I felt no compunction at eating a living person either, for my father had killed many soldiers in his own time defending his forest hideaways from the Sheriff's incursions.

The snow lay thick and deep, and I had dropped on the side of the road, spreading my legs stiff. The soldiers, noting the arrow fletching in my fur, presumed me dead. One deigned to stoop and throw me into the weeds. A broad man, strong enough to throw my large frame a stone's toss. I cared not for him, my goal being the man behind him. A leap over his head carried me into the latter man's face, knocking him over. Gripping the bundle he carried in his hands, I bounded over the ridge and deep into the forest, leaving screams and scrambling men in the snow behind me. However, I had not grown so callous as to lose all hope for life, and when I opened the cloth bundle to reveal a baby, I was most surprised. I had not birthed children of my own, and the wee thing set my heart pumping again. I was at first tempted to raise it as my own, but seeing as I had no milk, I knew I could not care for the babe.

It took me three days to decide to return the infant. Its cries grew weaker and weaker, and no amount of warmth would make it happy. I trotted northward, towards Nottingham, and eventually ran into a group of fifteen soldiers watching the dormant undergrowth warily. However, they all jumped when they saw me, and several notched arrow to string, though I knew they could not hit me. I lay the baby down, eyes pinched and red, sleeping half in, half out of the world. It again began crying. And then I was off and away to a safe distance. The soldiers approached slowly, looking down at the baby as though it weren't their own flesh and kin. They looked up at me, staying a cautious distance away, then back at the infant. They paused, breath rising thick and steamy in the evening air. Pointing at me, some one of them cried that I was the witch dog. I was rather hurt, and I believe they could see that. Several took a step back in fear.

Others said that a wolf bringing back a baby twas not natural, and that twas not a baby at all, but a fey touched. Looking amongst each other, they all agreed that the mother need not ever know, for the babe was a witch's spawn. And so one raised his sword. The man killed it. I did nothing.

Eyeing me with fear and suspicion the men trudged back northward, leaving the bloody bundle on its crust of snow. Twilight was not far off. The sun lit the clouds with dark, cold purples and soaring pinks and red. Though its light was brilliant, it gave no warmth.

It was here that I left the pack, looking for my sweet family, though I knew not what I should do once I got there. Something had changed inside me, and rather than pumping strong, my heart felt rather like the pith of an almond cut by the sharp seed inside.

Grandma Tyke's house was buried in the snow. Climbing up on the roof, I could see no embers burning in the chimney. Only a small patch of ground was clear. A wooden cross and a light grave in the frozen earth. I could smell her. I knew she was there. I still dug her up.

She held her hands pious fashion over the empty hole in her chest where her heart would have been. She was smiling, and I knew that her heart had been laid to rest in someplace holy, not that remote patch of Sherwood. I cradled her in my mouth, saliva dripping, and swallowed her whole. It was not my intention to eat her, but a way to bring her closer to me. Blame me if you will.

The moon rose, so round, so white, so much like a mushroom I could hardly take in the amount of horizon on which it sat. I ran through the forest, light and flitting, aught but a cold wind that brushed by in the dark. The fire was burning bright in my home, occasional sparks floating up and out of the chimney. A horse was in the shed behind the house. I could smell it. I was downwind, but the beast whickered and stamped its feet. My mother had just put a pan of bread in the oven, I could smell it. I drew closer, and the horse nickered again.

The door opened, my father stepped out, squinting as the moon returned from behind a friendly cloud. I seemed to have grown smaller, and I involuntarily cried out. I whimpered, holding my hands to my face.

My father paused, eyes widening, mouth opening, he called my name.

"Lydia!" And then again, "Lydia!"

I stood in a faerie ring, white mushrooms nestling at my toes. My pale pink toes. I cried, I opened my arms to him. But then his face pallored, he shook, and I wiped the blood from my lips. Looking down, my hands were smeared with blood. It was dripping off my chin, the moon shimmering off my face. My father pulled an arrow from his back, stringing his great yew bow in one swift motion. "No, papa!" I screamed, but the arrow passed right through my breast. I fell out of the circle, my form contorting into a wolf's limber frame once again.

I do not know much beyond that, I only have a clear head on such nights as these, when the full moon rises and all of Sherwood Forest is shadowed. My parents never made me a grave. I was never spoken of. Perhaps that is why you have not heard of me. But I am always here. I will walk you the dark road home. Travel safely, my friend.

-From the ghost of Lydia Hode, spoken with in the forest highway near Nottingham, England