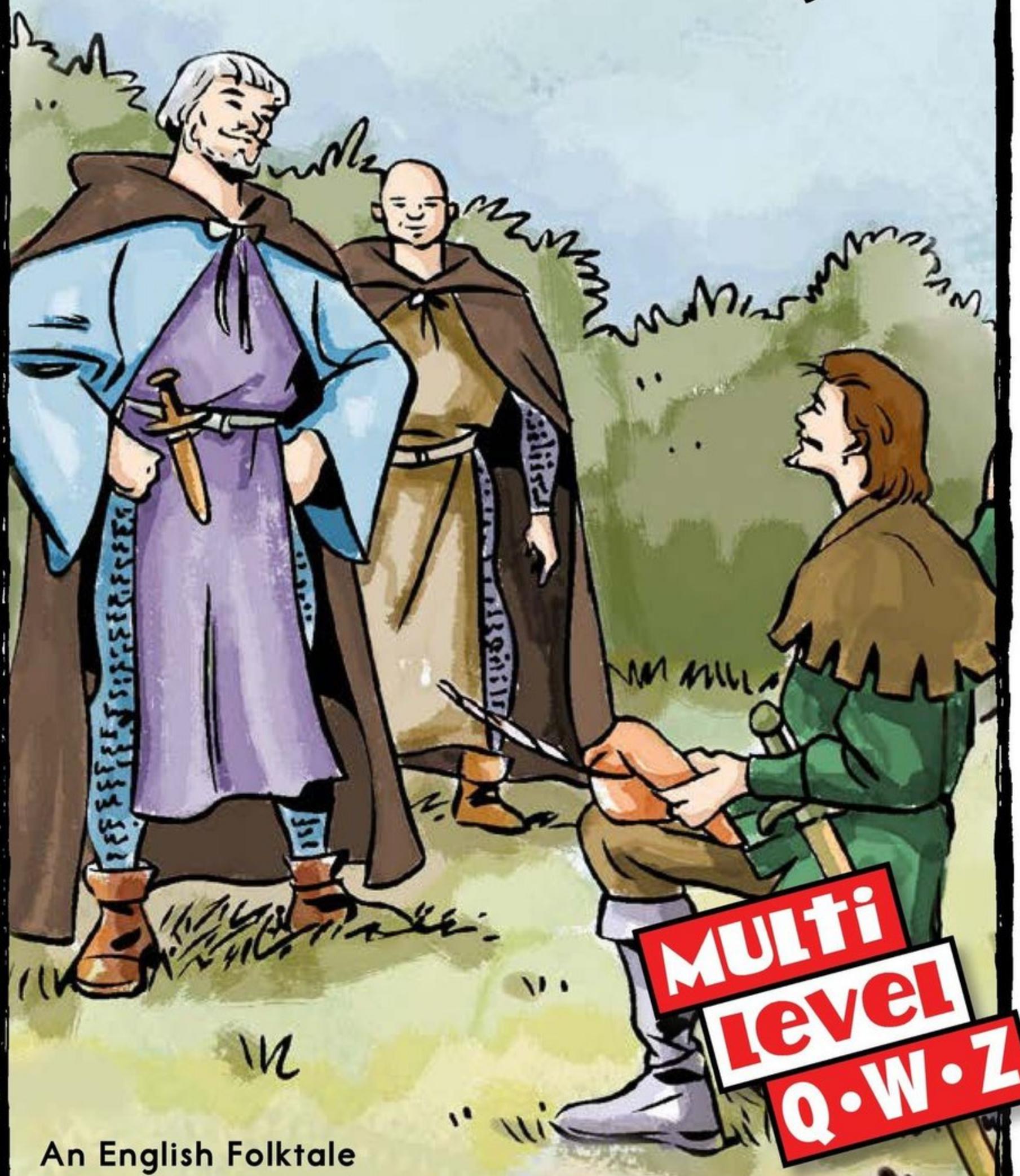


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Robin Hood and the King



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An English Folktale
Adapted by Katherine Follett
Illustrated by David Cockcroft

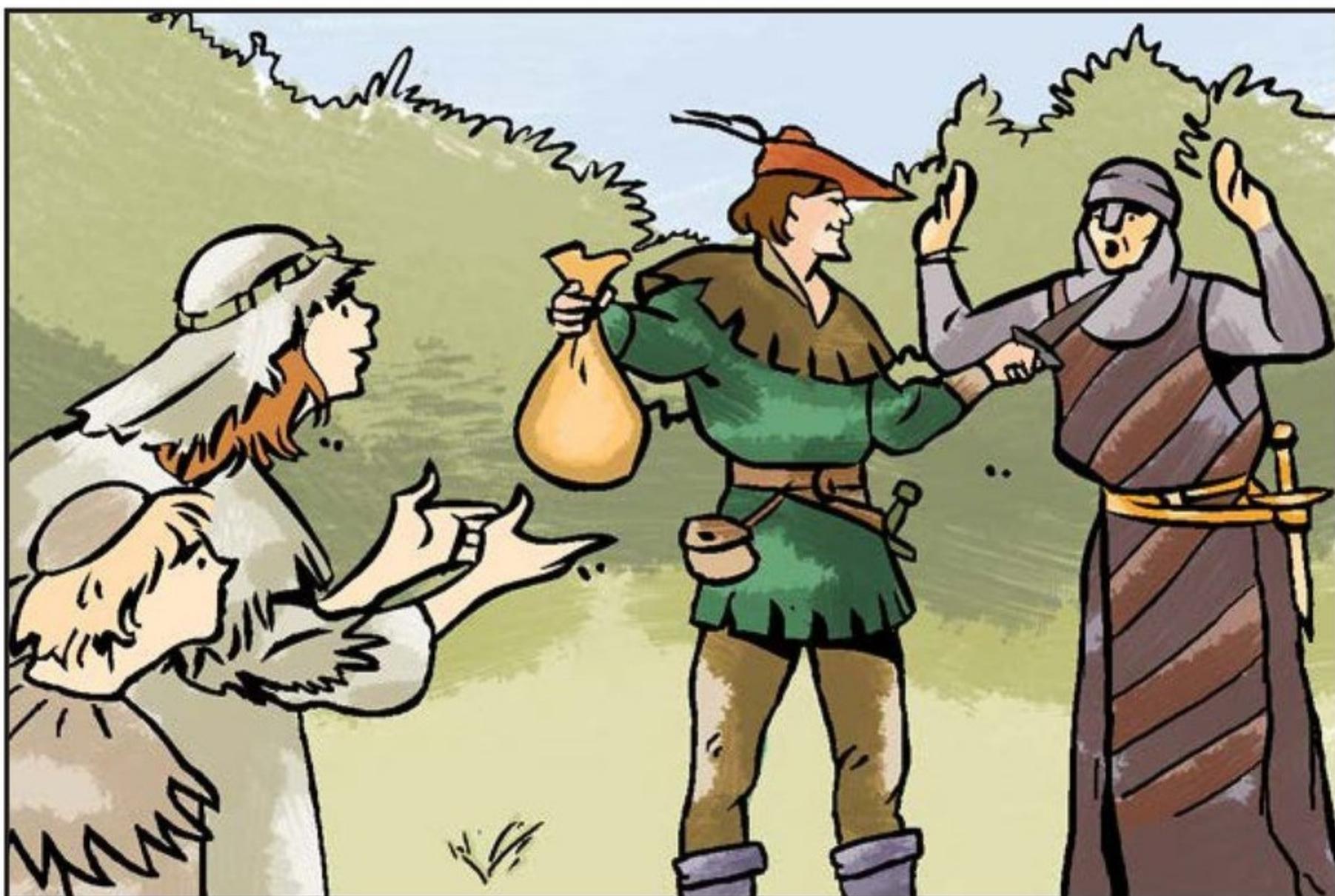
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Introduction

Robin Hood and his band of Merry Men took **refuge** in Sherwood Forest. The outlaws camouflaged themselves in green, the better to ambush the wicked lords who **sought** passage through the wood.

King Richard of England was off at war, and greedy lords ruled the land to their own advantage while he was away. Robin Hood and his band robbed these wicked rich men and gave the money back to those in need. The **corrupt** lords wanted to hang Robin, but they could never catch him. Robin thought the grasping lords were the real thieves; they were the ones who abused their positions of authority, leaving the common folk of England starving and homeless.

The bloodthirsty lords put a price on the heads of the Merry Men, and the **bounty** on their **brazen** leader, Robin Hood, was especially high. But the wicked lords soon found that the English people loved and admired Robin Hood and his band so much that no price was high enough to purchase the life of the people's hero. Even the king himself, when he returned from war, could not help but respect this **cunning** outlaw who continued to deceive and outmaneuver the corrupt lords, slipping through their fingers like sand whenever they thought they had him in their clutches.



King Richard

Many years earlier, King Richard the Lionheart had left England to lead the Third Crusade to the Holy Land to recapture the city of Jerusalem from the forces of Saladin. After many victories in battle, he successfully negotiated a peace treaty with Saladin, the leader of the Saracens, whose skill in battle and **chivalrous** manner he well admired.

Receiving word while away in that distant land that all was not well back in England, Richard immediately took ship to return home. Unfortunately, his ship was wrecked in a storm, and he was captured and imprisoned while making his way home by a dangerous route. Two more years passed before King Richard was released and was finally able to return to England to put his country to rights.

Although King Richard was busy catching up on the affairs of state after his return from war in distant lands, the change in pace and the routine nature of his tasks at court left him restless. Signing a royal order for importing cheese did little to satisfy his thirst for adventure. King Richard resolved to make a tour of his kingdom to see for himself how the lords had governed during his long absence.

When he learned that the king was come again to England, the Sheriff of Nottingham grew angry and fearful. He never once had thought that King Richard would return alive from the Crusades! Then one day, word arrived that the king was coming to visit Nottingham Castle as part of his inspection of the kingdom. The sheriff did not sleep that night as he wondered how much the king knew about the injustices he had committed in the king's name.



When King Richard arrived at Nottingham Castle, he listened closely while the sheriff told many lies about Robin Hood and the Merry Men. Finally the king said, "Methinks I have heard of this same Robin Hood and his men. I have also heard somewhat of your conduct in these affairs, Sheriff," he added with a frown and a stern look. "Nevertheless, we promise to look into this matter. These outlaws must be taught to respect the king and the rule of law." And with a wave of his hand, King Richard dismissed the sheriff, who went home feeling uncertain about his fate.

Later that day, King Richard paced the battlements. "I wish I could but look upon Robin Hood just once," he said to his trusty companion, a knight who had served him for many years.

"If I could but see him and his men shoot and wrestle and perform all the feats of skill about which tales are told—but I cannot simply march into Sherwood. If they heard that the king was coming, they would think

I wanted only to arrest and hang the lot of them. They would flee deep into the forest **ere** I could get a glimpse of them."



King Richard spoke kindly, for he delighted in all sports and admired those who excelled in them. Robin Hood and his band were famous as the finest archers, wrestlers, and sword fighters in the land, which was only natural considering that they spent their days in the forest practicing these arts. They used their skills to take back from the greedy lords what rightfully belonged to the poor people of England.

"In **sooth**, I would give fifty, nay, a hundred gold coins to see Robin Hood and his Merry Men of Sherwood," he said.

"My **liege**, I'll tell thee how to see him," laughed the knight. "Don the robes of a **portly abbot** and travel through Sherwood Forest with a pouch full of gold coins. Then you needn't fear missing Robin Hood in the forest, and he'll be sure to **oblige** you with a feast so he can relieve you of your gold." This was how Robin Hood lured the wealthy lords deep into the forest while they were traveling, exhausted and hungry, away from the luxuries they were accustomed to on their vast estates. No greedy noblemen with protesting bellies could refuse a feast in these circumstances, even if they suspected that the banquet was offered by an outlaw.



"'Tis brilliant! I'll do it!" cried King Richard, slapping his knee. "Aye, it will be a grand jest."

The Feast

So the king and seven of his knights dressed themselves as an abbot and seven **friars**. They traveled along the road toward Sherwood Forest, disguised in hooded robes, with the king on a horse, some of his knights riding alongside him, and the rest following in a wagon. They set out at first light in the cool and quiet air. They followed the road as it wound through the gently rolling countryside. As the Sun climbed higher in the clear blue sky, they felt themselves warming pleasantly through as the rich fields and meadows sprang to life all around them.

At the edge of the forest, the disguised king filled his lungs deeply with delight. "By my bones," he said, "but the honest countryside is the best place to live, after all! What castle or nobleman's court can compare to the outdoor life for a sporting man?"

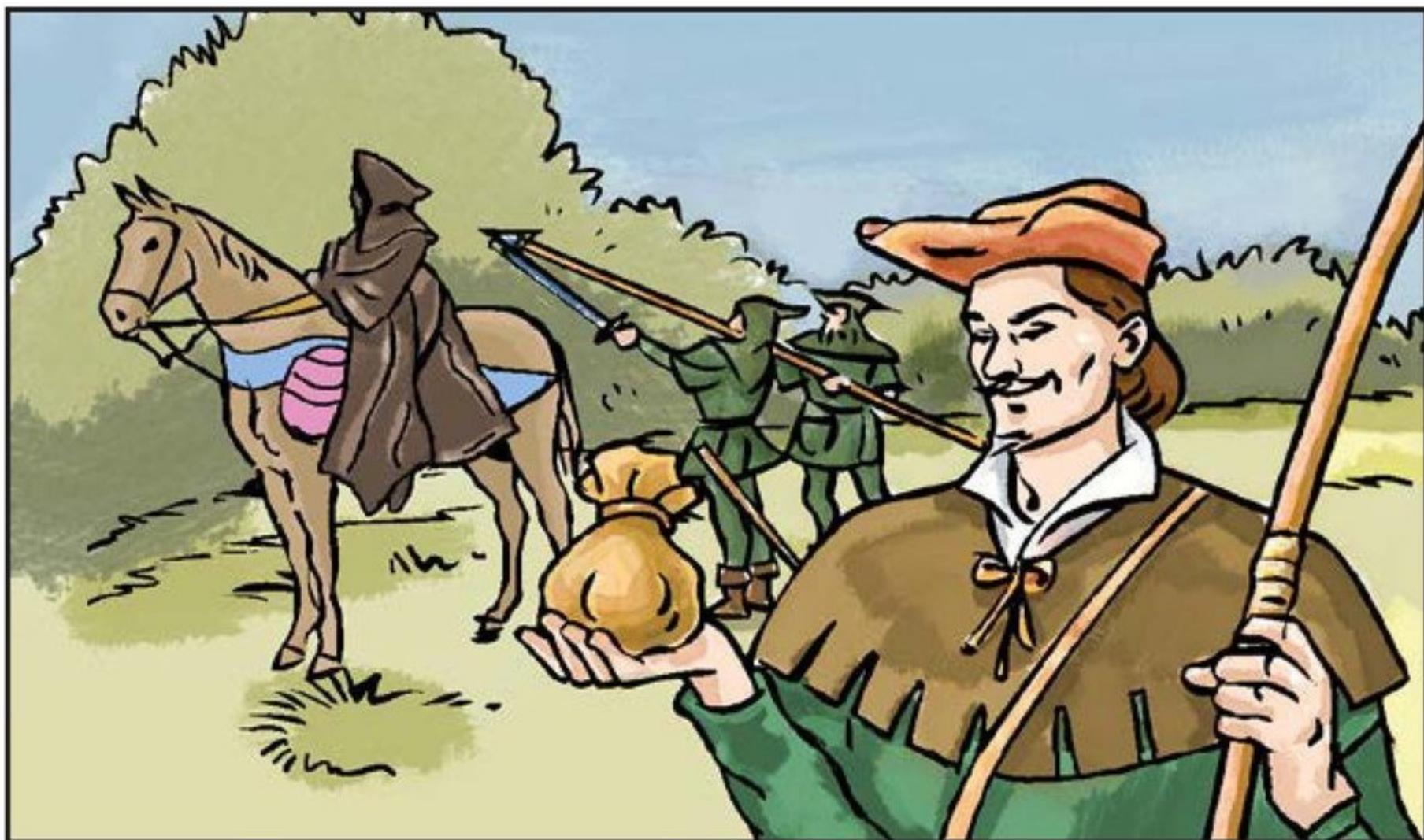
They followed the road into Sherwood Forest itself, watching each bush and tree closely for any sign of Robin Hood. They were no more than three miles into the forest when a lone figure suddenly stepped out of the thick greenery before them. The imposing stranger walked forcefully into the middle of the road and quickly put his hand on the neck of the pretend abbot's horse.



"Hold!" cried Robin. "Good Morrow to you one and all. There is a toll for traveling the road this day. Any who wish to pass in peace and safety may do so, for a modest fee."

"Who is it bids me hold?" said the pretend abbot. "I am but a poor monk, good sir! We are on a **pilgrimage** and cannot tarry from our journey at the pleasure of one man."

"Never fear, my dear abbot," laughed Robin, "for you face not one man alone." Robin lifted his hand, and instantly a dozen sturdy men stepped out of the bushes and shadows to stand at his side.



"My name is Robin Hood. We be **yeomen** of the forest, my lord abbot, and make our home here in Sherwood. Thanks to the tyranny of our overlords, we have no means of support other than the aid that fat nobles and goodly churchmen such as yourselves can give. And so, for the sake of charity, we must ask you to pay the **tithe** to help those in need."

Robin Hood and his men searched the "holy men" at swordpoint and easily found the pouch of gold; but the Merry Men returned one-third of the gold to the abbot because it was not their custom to leave any man in need. Robin Hood was pleased with these churchmen because they did not resist or even scold him.

"Stay with us a while as our guests before we send you safely on your way again," said Robin.

“I keep no **consort** with rebels,” said the pretend abbot. “Have I not heard the nobles and bishops cry out that you are a villain and a **ruffian** who has declared war upon England and its rightful lords?” he asked.

“Nay, not true!” replied Robin curtly. “We are loyal subjects of King Richard and would gladly shed our blood in his defense. We only oppose the corrupt clergy and barons of the land who unjustly squeeze the poor. But thou seemest an honest priest, and I would have you taste our greenwood hospitality ere you depart. Come, and we shall give you a feast worth all your coin.”

“I have a sharp appetite for a feast,” said the king. “But even more, good fellow, I would see the fine archery and wrestling and swordplay that you are famed for.”

“Agreed, sir. By my faith, thou shalt see the very best we can do,” answered Robin, “but, Holy Father, why not remove thy hood and enjoy this sweet evening air?”

“Nay, I cannot,” answered the king. “My brothers and I have vowed not to let our faces be seen ere we complete this journey.”

“Very well, then,” said Robin Hood. “I interfere with no man’s vows.”



So Robin led the pretend abbot's horse down a winding path with his men escorting the monks behind. The Merry Men brought the monks to the meeting tree, an ancient, enormous oak that glared down at the intruders. Next to it stood a broad clearing with many long tables set in the center. Robin raised his horn to his lips and sounded a deep, clear note. Immediately, several companies of men came running into the glade from all sides. They were cunningly dressed in forest green, and each carried a bow in his hands and wore a sword at his side. Every man paid his respects to Robin before taking his customary place at one of the tables.

Robin and his men served a splendid feast of roasted **venison**, pheasant, and fish, all cooked to perfection over a roaring fire. There were meat pies and **tankards** of ale. It was a pleasure to see the smiles upon the faces of the hungry yeomen around each table. And Robin never once suspected that he was entertaining the king.

The king was very impressed with the delicious food that the Merry Men seemed to produce out of nothing but the resources of the forest. He had no idea that outlaws could be so well fed and content while dwelling among the beasts of the wood.

After the feast was over, the band cleared the dishes and organized the sports. The first contest was a wrestling match in which the strength of the men was surpassed only by their agility. Indeed, each pair was so evenly matched that the king wondered if the Sun would rise before any man would fall. The same was true of the sword fighting that followed. The king had not seen such skill, even at war, and he could see his own men, still disguised in their robes, itching to join the contest. Finally, as the dawn stained the edges of night with pink light, Robin Hood announced the final contest. Each of the Merry Men would demonstrate his skill with a bow.



The Archery Match

The archery target was a mark that only the most skilled archers could hit, made of a tiny garland of leaves and flowers dangling from a stake a great distance away.

"Hearken, gentlemen," said Robin Hood, "you will each have three shots, and any man who fails to place his arrows within the garland will receive a blow to the side of the head as hard as I can give."

"Forsooth, can anyone hit inside that tiny garland at such a distance?" asked the king in amazement. He could barely make out the outline of the target in the shadowy early-morning light.

"Aye, just watch, friend abbot," answered Robin Hood proudly.

First came David of Doncaster, who shot and lodged all three arrows within the garland while the astonished king observed. Then Much, the miller's son, also lodged all his arrows inside the garland. These truly were the finest archers in all of England, and the king had not yet seen Robin Hood, who was superior to them all. Then Wat the Tinker drew his bow, but a gentle breeze blew his last quill off course, causing it to barely miss the mark.

"Come **hither** and take thy punishment," called Robin Hood, pretending to roll up his sleeves. The king supposed that Wat would receive only a tap, having missed by so little. Instead, he got a blow that knocked him to the ground.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed his companions.

"Oh, ho!" laughed King Richard. "I am glad I am not in this contest." But he was impressed with the way Robin Hood's men obeyed him. *They show more discipline in following his commands than my servants do following mine*, he thought.

The shooting went on, and most of the men shot their arrows within the garland, but a few missed and received tremendous punches that sent them rolling like barrels down a hill.



The last to shoot was Robin Hood. His first shaft struck so hard that it split off a piece of the stake upon which the garland was hanging, and his second lodged a scant inch from the first. But the third arrow he shot was not feathered properly, and it swerved to one side and missed the stake completely.

Then all the company roared with laughter, for they seldom saw their master miss.

"Go and take thy punishment, Master," said Much.

"Aye, Robin," called out Will Scarlet. "And pray it be only half as rough as Wat's was."

"Very well," said Robin Hood, "I shall surrender my arrow to our guest and receive from him my punishment."



Robin was being somewhat crafty in this decision. Although he did not mind hard knocks, he did not **relish** the thought of being sent sprawling in front of his band. He knew it was his **fortitude** that kept them going when life in the forest weighed heavily on their courageous shoulders. He was gambling that the arms of a churchman would be as soft as pillows, for abbots were notorious for their **indolence**. But the pretend abbot bared an arm so thick and muscular that the men stared and gasped. King Richard was an active king, and years at war had made him incredibly strong. Robin Hood gulped but placed himself squarely in front of the king, who struck a blow that would have knocked out an ox. Down went Robin Hood, rolling over and over on the ground while his men howled with laughter.

“Well,” said Robin Hood, sitting up, blinking rapidly, half dazed, “ere today, I thought no one in England could strike such a blow. Who are ye, sir? Methinks thou art not a churchman.”

King Richard Reveals Himself

King Richard threw back his hood, and Robin immediately recognized his king. If he had been a disloyal man as well as an outlaw, he would have trembled like a flame in the breeze, but Robin had always remained loyal to his **sovereign**. Indeed, he believed that stealing from the greedy lords and returning the gold to those in need was the greatest service he could perform for King Richard and for his country.

“The king!” cried Little John, falling upon his knees. The rest of the Merry Men immediately took off their hats and knelt as well.



“The king!” echoed Robin Hood after a moment of astonishment. Robin Hood had never bowed before any lord, but there was no shame in his voice when he knelt before the king.

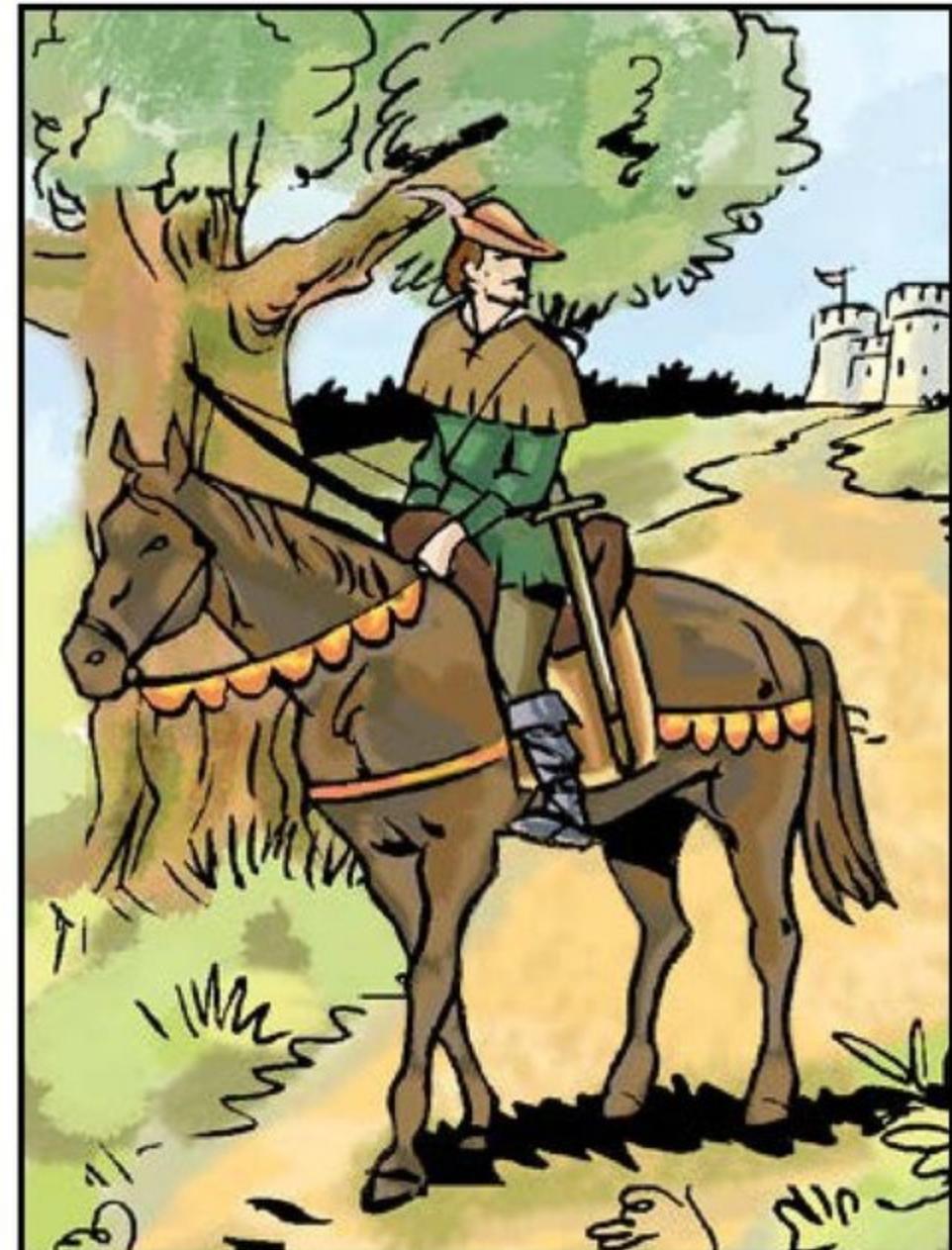
"Your Majesty," he said, "ye have no subjects in all England more loyal than me and my Merry Men. No evil have we done except to the greedy and rich who have abused thy subjects. We beg thy pardon if we have done wrong, and we beg for thy protection, as we always serve thee faithfully."

The king was astonished that an outlaw should speak so well and with such **conviction**, and he was impressed that Robin Hood hadn't fled in fear of being arrested. He realized Robin was one of his most loyal subjects, courageous and noble even beyond what the legends depicted. King Richard also knew that Robin was the best archer in England, and he wanted him by his side.

"I shall forgive all thy lawbreaking and order the nobles to leave thee at peace," he said, "if with me to my court thou wilt come and serve me there. Pray you, bring Will Scarlet and Wat the Tinker to become knights in my court. As for Little John, henceforward he shall be the new Sheriff of Nottingham, since the old one saw fit to abuse his authority. The rest of thy men I shall appoint royal rangers. 'Tis undeniable they can protect Sherwood Forest better than anyone, and they have done good deeds in providing for the common people."

"With all my heart," replied Robin Hood, and a great roar went up from the Merry Men. They adored their king, and though they loved the outlaw life, they had always hoped that one day their good deeds would be recognized by the throne.

So Robin Hood departed the forest and went to the king's court, where he served King Richard well. His men became rangers of the forest and never had to fear punishment from their new sheriff. But Robin Hood was never far from his loyal men. He often disguised himself as a greedy noble, laden with gold, and rode through Sherwood Forest. Only after his men had waylaid him did he reveal himself, congratulating them on their work and, of course, leaving the gold with them to be distributed to anyone in need. With Robin Hood at court, Little John in Nottingham, and the Merry Men protecting the countryside, the common folk of England never had to suffer under the rule of wicked lords again.



Glossary

abbot (<i>n.</i>)	the leader of a group of monks (p. 9)
bounty (<i>n.</i>)	great wealth offered as a reward (p. 5)
brazen (<i>adj.</i>)	boldly defiant (p. 5)
chivalrous (<i>adj.</i>)	honorable and courteous (p. 6)
consort (<i>n.</i>)	company (p. 13)
conviction (<i>n.</i>)	a strong belief or opinion (p. 21)
corrupt (<i>adj.</i>)	dishonest in order to gain something (p. 4)
cunning (<i>adj.</i>)	able to use cleverness to trick others (p. 5)
ere (<i>conj.</i>)	before (p. 8)
forsooth (<i>adv.</i>)	in truth; indeed (often used to express doubt) (p. 16)
fortitude (<i>n.</i>)	strength; endurance (p. 19)
friars (<i>n.</i>)	Christian monks (p. 10)
hearken (<i>v.</i>)	listen (p. 16)
hither (<i>adv.</i>)	here (p. 17)
indolence (<i>n.</i>)	sloth; laziness (p. 19)
liege (<i>n.</i>)	a lord to whom one owes faithful service (p. 9)
oblige (<i>v.</i>)	to do something as if it were a favor (p. 9)

pilgrimage (<i>n.</i>)	a journey to a shrine or other sacred place (p. 11)
portly (<i>adj.</i>)	fat (p. 9)
refuge (<i>n.</i>)	a place of safety, comfort, or protection (p. 4)
relish (<i>v.</i>)	to enjoy (p. 19)
ruffian (<i>n.</i>)	a violent, lawless person (p. 13)
sooth (<i>n.</i>)	truth (p. 9)
sought (<i>v.</i>)	looked for (p. 4)
sovereign (<i>n.</i>)	the supreme ruler of a nation, especially a king or queen (p. 20)
tankards (<i>n.</i>)	tall metal drinking cups with handles and hinged lids (p. 15)
tarry (<i>v.</i>)	to remain temporarily (p. 11)
tithe (<i>n.</i>)	a small portion of one's income given as an offering to a church or charity (p. 12)
venison (<i>n.</i>)	deer meat (p. 15)
yeomen (<i>n.</i>)	a class of people in England who were free and owned their own land (p. 12)

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An English folktale
adapted by Katherine Follett
from an original retelling
by Bertha E. Bush
Illustrated by David Cockcroft

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