

The Legends of
Robin Hood & Little John

*after Howard Pyle's "The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood"
& Paul Creswick's "Robin Hood and His Adventures"*

a historical reenactment in three falls

by Jeff Goode
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(A clearing in the woods. A narrow bridge over a muddy pond. Enter ROBIN HOOD, and LITTLE JOHN with his wife FANNY on his arm.)

LITTLE JOHN

See this bridge, this pond, Master Robin? Does it not remind you of the place where you and I first met?

ROBIN HOOD

Aye, there was a battle to remember.

LITTLE JOHN

Robin came from the one side, and I from the other--

FANNY

Aye, Little John, I know the story backwards and forward. The legend of your first meeting is told in every inn and pub from here to Coventry.

ROBIN HOOD

Then why don't you tell it, Fanny? You know the story well. And Little John and I shall act it out as we remember it.

LITTLE JOHN

Aye, my Fanny can spin a good yarn.

FANNY

Shall I tell it? Then let the players take their places, for here it is.

(Robin Hood and Little John exit back into the woods.)

"This is the story of how Robin Hood met Little John, as it is told throughout the country, and in the villages and towns of England."

(Enter Robin Hood.)

"Up rose Robin Hood one merry May morning when all the birds were singing blithely among the leaves, and strode away through the leafy forest glades seeking new

adventure, and unwary travelers to waylay for their gold. He wandered for a long time, until he came to a place where the road dipped toward a broad, pebbly stream spanned by a narrow bridge made of a log of wood. As he drew nigh this bridge, he saw a tall stranger coming from the other side."

(Enter Little John.)

ROBIN HOOD

(aside) I say! A tall stranger.

(Robin Hood springs onto the bridge.)

ROBIN HOOD

(belligerently) Stand thou back and let the better man cross first!

LITTLE JOHN

(merrily) Nay, then stand back yourself, for I know I am the better man.

ROBIN HOOD

(laughing) I see you are as witty as you are wide.

LITTLE JOHN

If I am a wit for stating the obvious, then how your sides will split when I tell you that this bridge is too narrow for us both. One must go back.

ROBIN HOOD

Go back then, friend, by all means. I will not stay you.

LITTLE JOHN

You are a wit yourself, friend, but I have no time to jest with you, for my wife is expecting me home.

ROBIN HOOD

Then I will not hinder you, come, give me your money, and you shall be on your way.

LITTLE JOHN

I shall be on my way in any case. Who are you to prevent me?

ROBIN HOOD

I am Robin Hood.

LITTLE JOHN

I care not a fig who you are, stand aside or I will throw you into the brook.

(Little John towers over Robin Hood, glowering down upon him.)

FANNY

"Robin observed the stranger and thought that he had never seen a lustier or a stouter man. Broad was Robin across the shoulders, but broader was the stranger by twice the breadth of a palm, while he measured at least an ell around the chest. Tall was Robin, but taller was the stranger by a head and a neck, for he was seven feet in height."

ROBIN HOOD

Seven feet in height! I have held my tongue ere now, but you go too far, Fanny, this is not the story.

FANNY

This is the story as I have heard it a thousand times, good Robin.

ROBIN HOOD

Where have you heard such a fable?

FANNY

Everywhere, good Robin. In towns, in taverns, and at table I have heard the story told this way.

ROBIN HOOD

At table?

FANNY

Aye. At table, at bed... Wherever Little John cares to tell it.

(Little John grins, caught.)

ROBIN HOOD

You are no more seven feet tall than I am the Sheriff's malt horse.

LITTLE JOHN

I am almost seven feet tall.

ROBIN HOOD

And I am almost a Spaniard for I was born on nearly the same continent.

FANNY

If this is a thing of contention between you, 'twere best we leave off the telling of it.

ROBIN HOOD

Nay, good Fanny, I would hear this fiction to its end, for I love a good fairy tale.

FANNY

Very well.

"When Robin Hood had taken measure of the stranger, he spoke again."

ROBIN HOOD

You've never heard the name Robin Hood?

LITTLE JOHN

Aye, I have, but I confess my wife's cooking strikes more fear in my heart than your reputation ever could.

ROBIN HOOD

(getting angry) Yield me up your purse, thou bison, or I shall see if an arrow in your ribs strikes anything in your heart.

LITTLE JOHN

I will tan your hide till it be as many colors as a beggar's cloak, if you dare so much as touch a string of that bow in your hands.

ROBIN HOOD

You prate like a fool, for I could send this shaft clean through your proud heart quicker than Friar Tuck could say grace over a pint of ale at noontime.

LITTLE JOHN

And you prate like a coward, for you stand there with a good yew bow to shoot at my heart, while I have nought in my hand, but a plain oaken staff to meet you with.

ROBIN HOOD

Now, by the faith of my heart, never have I had a coward's name in all my life before. I will lay by my trusty bow and my arrows, and if you dare abide my coming, I will go and cut a cudgel to test your manhood withal.

LITTLE JOHN

Aye, marry, will I abide your coming, and joyously, too.

FANNY

"Then Robin Hood stepped quickly to the side of the road and cut himself a good staff of oak-- "

ROBIN HOOD

(to Fanny) I don't remember fighting with staves.

FANNY

Do you wish to tell the story?

LITTLE JOHN

Pray, Robin, forbear your interruptions, stick to the story.

ROBIN HOOD

Nay, and I would the story would stick to me.

(Fanny hands Robin Hood a staff.)

ROBIN HOOD

I will baste your hide right merrily, my good fellow. Lo, here is my good staff, lusty and tough. Now stand my coming, and meet me if you dare; then we will fight until one or the other of us tumble into the stream by dint of blows.

LITTLE JOHN

Marry, that meets my whole heart.

(They fight.)

FANNY

"Never did the Knights of Arthur's Round Table meet in a stouter fight than did these two. In a moment Robin stepped quickly upon the bridge where the stranger stood; first he made a feint, and then delivered a blow at the stranger's head that, had it met its mark, would have tumbled him speedily into the water; but the stranger turned the blow right deftly, and in return gave one just as stout, which Robin also turned as the stranger had done. So they stood, each in his place, neither moving a finger's breadth back, and many blows were given and received by each, till here and there were sore bones and bumps, yet neither thought of crying 'Enough!' or seemed likely to fall from off the bridge. For one good hour, they fought..."

ROBIN HOOD

An hour!

LITTLE JOHN

(sheepish) It seemed like an hour.

ROBIN HOOD

I am not going to fight you for an hour to uphold these lies.

LITTLE JOHN

I am grateful for that, Master Robin. Fanny, may we skip ahead to where I throw him into the pond?

ROBIN HOOD

Where you what??

(But before Robin can recover, Little John is upon him, and with a flurry of blows...)

FANNY

"At last, with a dexterous blow, the stranger sent Robin tumbling heels over head into the water."

(...he heaves him off the bridge and into the water. Robin Hood clammers up out of the pond, dripping wet.)

ROBIN HOOD

Give me your hand, I must needs own you are a brave and a sturdy soul, and, withal, a good stout stroke with the cudgels. For never I trow is there a man betwixt here and Nottingham Town could do the like to me that you have done.

LITTLE JOHN

And you take your drubbing like a brave heart and a stout yeoman.

ROBIN HOOD

Now hark ye, good youth, will you join with me and be one of my band? You shall eat sweet venison and quaff the stoutest ale, and mine own good right hand man shall you be, for never did I see such a cudgel player in all my life before. Speak, will you be one of my good Merry Men?

LITTLE JOHN

Now, truly will I be your man henceforth and for aye.

ROBIN HOOD

Then have I gained a right good man this day. What name do you go by, good fellow?

LITTLE JOHN

Men call me John Little whence I came.

ROBIN HOOD

Nay, fair little stranger, I like not your name and fain would I have it otherwise. Little are you indeed, and small of bone and sinew, therefore shall you be christened Little John, and I will be your godfather. So come my Merry Man and we will go and christen thee with a keg of mead at the Inn of the Blue Boar.

(Fanny storms into the scene, as herself, coming upon them.)

FANNY

John Little! Where are you a-going when your wife awaits you at home with your dinner half cold on the table?

LITTLE JOHN

My fair Fanny, I meant no harm by it.

FANNY

And what a rogue is this that keeps you from your supper?

(She takes Robin Hood by the ear.)

FANNY

Answer me, villain, or I shall heave you into this brook.

LITTLE JOHN

Nay, and he has seen enough of this brook for one day. Come good, Fanny, and we shall all to the Blue Boar to tell how this came to pass.

(They start off together, but Robin Hood breaks away from the other two.)

LITTLE JOHN

Now you see, good Robin, in the end the story is something embellished in its particulars, but the gist of it is the same.

ROBIN HOOD

Ha! I wonder how you do not blush to hear such nonsense repeated, Little John. I am embarrassed for you, since you have no shame yourself. And Fanny, you are a loving and faithful wife to encourage your husband in this fantasy, but for love of these gentle folk, our bewildered audience, pray tell the story again as it really happened.

FANNY

As you would have it, good Robin. Take your places.

(Robin Hood and Little John prepare to start again.)

"This is the story of how Robin Hood met Little John, as it is told throughout the country, whenever Robin Hood is present, and as I have heard it many times from Robin Hood himself."

(Enter Robin Hood.)

"One bright morning in May, Robin Hood, dressed in a green suit, with bow unstrung, and a fresh color blowing on his cheeks, came out of the wood upon the highroad."

"He stood erect, quietly alert, and with his brown eyes watchful of the road. He then moved softly along until he came to where but last year the brook had sprawled and scrambled across the road. Now a fine wooden bridge had been built at the word of Prince John who had complained much at having wetted his feet when he passed by the spot eight months ago."

"Robin smiled as he looked at the bridge, half sadly, half in reverie. He paused to admire the neat work; then slowly walked over the bridge still thinking deeply. Suddenly he

plumped himself right into the arms of a tall, ungainly man, who had crossed from the other side.

LITTLE JOHN

(entering) Ungainly? Ungainly!

ROBIN HOOD

I make it no secret that I think your health would be better served by occasional bouts of abstinence. You are a very glutton, Little John.

LITTLE JOHN

And this is a fine way to discourage me from my vices, by publishing them abroad in your gossip.

ROBIN HOOD

If it will put an end to your pouting, I will retract the word "ungainly"... *(to the audience)* ...as a matter of opinion best left to the individual members of the audience to decide.

LITTLE JOHN

Thank you.

FANNY

"The youth sprang back; then planted his lithe body exactly in the center of the bridge."

LITTLE JOHN

(roars) Give way, fellow. Make room for your betters, or I will throw you into the brook!

ROBIN HOOD

(merrily) I will indeed make room for my betters, when I see them. Are they at hand, and are you their page boy? Pray, bid them come out of hiding for I long to meet my betters.

LITTLE JOHN

They stand before you now!

ROBIN HOOD

What, invisible? They are indeed my betters if they can master that trick. Oh! I perceive you mean yourself. Ha ha, you are a merry fellow. Pray let me pass.

LITTLE JOHN

(pushing him back) First you must pay the toll.

ROBIN HOOD

Since when has this been a toll bridge?

LITTLE JOHN

Since this morning and my wife bade me go out and earn my keep. And if I come home empty-handed, she shall give me a proper thrashing.

ROBIN HOOD

Well, I am sorry to hear it, but 'twere better you should receive your thrashing at her hands than at mine. For she may beat you out of love, and I would do it only for the sport of watching you bleed.

LITTLE JOHN

(angered) Now will I trounce you right well, stripling.

(Little John attacks with his quarterstaff. Robin Hood steps back and fits an arrow to his bow.)

LITTLE JOHN

Nay, by my body, but this is ungenerous of you, forester. I have only a stick and you have a bow! If we are to fight, surely you might fight fairly.

ROBIN HOOD

Nay, by my inches, friend, but how can we fight fairly with staves when you are so much the bigger? If you would not have me call you a coward, let us both have swords, then only the better man at arms shall have the advantage.

LITTLE JOHN

I don't remember this.

FANNY

Here is your sword, Little John.

(She gives him a sword. He goes back to the scene.)

ROBIN HOOD

Make ready, friend. Now take tune from me. One, two--

LITTLE JOHN

Three!

(Little John lunges. They fight. Robin Hood lands a surprise blow to the chops.)

LITTLE JOHN

By my life, but you can hit hard! For so small a man that was a right hearty blow. Fall to, spitfire. I am ready.

(They fight again.)

FANNY

"Back and forth they went, now thrusting, now parrying. Some times Robin Hood pressed the attack and sometimes he fell back under the larger man's blows. But neither man could gain the advantage for long, for they were as evenly matched as any two cavaliers in England. For an hour and a half they fought..."

LITTLE JOHN

An hour and a half??

ROBIN HOOD

Did I say that?

FANNY

Sometimes you make it two hours. Depending on the company. And the vintage.

ROBIN HOOD

(a bit embarrassed) Well, perhaps I exaggerated.

LITTLE JOHN

An hour and a half!!!!

ROBIN HOOD

(sharply) You are one to talk! You made it an hour.

LITTLE JOHN

Which proves I have some dash of modesty left in me. But I see you are a very windbag when it suits you.

ROBIN HOOD

Alright, enough. Shall we skip ahead to where you throw me into the pond?

LITTLE JOHN

Please!

(And they are at it again. But suddenly...)

FANNY

"At last, with a deft feint, Robin Hood sent the stranger tumbling heels over head into the water."

(Much to Little John's surprise, Robin Hood heaves him into the water.)

ROBIN HOOD

(gloating) Does that refresh your memory now, you great blow hard?! You did not throw me into the pond! I threw you in!

LITTLE JOHN

This is unsporting of you, Robin!

FANNY

Little John! Robin! May we please finish the story?

(Little John clambers out of the pond and shakes Robin Hood's hand.)

ROBIN HOOD

You fought most skillfully and bravely, friend. Tell me your name.

LITTLE JOHN

My name is John Little.

ROBIN HOOD

"Little", John? There is nothing about you that is little, John. Come, give me your hand. If you are to be one of my company, then you must have a new name, an alias that will confuse the Sheriff. And this shall it be: Henceforth let you be known as Little John. What say you to that?

LITTLE JOHN

How shall I join your company and take a new name when I do not even know yours?

ROBIN HOOD

Ah, good point, then let me tell you. It is... Robin Hood.

LITTLE JOHN

Robin Hood! *(eagerly shaking his hand)* Then I am right sorry that I waylaid you. And had I known you at the first we both would be something less bruised. By my inches, but I would like to join with you and your company.

ROBIN HOOD

Enter our company, then, Little John; and be welcome. The rites are few; but the fee is large: for we shall ask unswerving loyalty of you, and you must give a bond that you will be faithful even unto death.

LITTLE JOHN

I give the bond, with all my soul and on my very life.

ROBIN HOOD

Then come, and I and my Merry Men will drink a toast to you at the Inn of the Blue Boar.

(Fanny storms into the scene.)

FANNY

John Little! Where are you a-going and your dinner half cold on the table?

LITTLE JOHN

My fair Fanny, give me leave to explain.

(She takes him by the ear.)

FANNY

Make good your excuses or I shall heave you into this brook.

LITTLE JOHN

Fanny, ow, Fanny, ow ow!

ROBIN HOOD

Nay, good Fanny, spare him the brook for he has been acquainted with it ere now.

FANNY

And who are you?

ROBIN HOOD

I am Robin Hood, and if you will with us both to the Blue Boar, we will tell how all this came to pass.

(They start off together, but Little John breaks away from the other two and pouts.)

ROBIN HOOD

What ails you, Little John?

LITTLE JOHN

I wonder that I have called you friend these many years when this is the falsehood you spread behind my back.

ROBIN HOOD

Falsehood? I marvel that you can look me in the face after the pack of lies you have authored on this very theme.

LITTLE JOHN

I spake nothing but truth, so help me God.

ROBIN HOOD

Oh, come! There is not one word true in your account save that we met on a bridge and there was somehow some wetness involved. Fanny, will you help me dissuade your husband of his delusion. Was this not how our first meeting fell out? For you were there.

LITTLE JOHN

Aye, Fanny, you were there. Tell this drunkard how it came about that I threw him into the pond.

ROBIN HOOD

Drunkard am I?

(He pushes Little John. They shove each other. Fanny takes them both by the ear.)

FANNY

Will you agree to an armistice if I tell which of you is in the wrong?

BOTH

Yes.

(She lets them go.)

BOTH

Provided he is wrong.

FANNY

Well, then you shall both be happy. To your places.

(They start again.)

"Then this is the story of how Robin Hood first met Little John, as I remember it, being there."

"It was an inky black September night when Robin Hood was wandering homeward along an unfamiliar road, after a long night at the Blue Boar."

(Robin Hood staggers in.)

ROBIN HOOD

Where am--?

(Robin Hood trips on the edge of the bridge and falls down. He feels the wood.)

ROBIN HOOD

I say, a bridge.

(He edges out onto the bridge groping blindly in front of him.)

(From the opposite side, Little John staggers in. He also stops at the end of the bridge. Then, tapping with his staff like a blind man, he makes his way out onto it.)

(Robin Hood hears the tapping and puts his ear to the ground.)

FANNY

"As he crouched down upon the dark bridge, he happened to encounter a stranger who had also lost his way in the night."

(Little John moves toward Robin Hood, and accidentally whacks him with his staff.)

ROBIN HOOD

Ow!

(Robin Hood jumps back, rubbing his head. Little John bends down to feel what he hit, but Robin is not there anymore.)

LITTLE JOHN

(warily, still crouching) Who goes there?

ROBIN HOOD

I am Robin Hood. Who are you?

LITTLE JOHN

The notorious thief?

ROBIN HOOD

(jumping back) The Notorious Thief? Do you mean to rob me in the night?

LITTLE JOHN

Do you mean to rob me in the night?

ROBIN HOOD

I asked you first.

LITTLE JOHN

Why would I rob you? I am not a thief.

(Robin Hood draws a little closer to Little John, who he perceives to be very short, since Little John is still crouched down on the bridge.)

ROBIN HOOD

Then why do you call yourself "The Notorious Thief"?

LITTLE JOHN

I do not call myself any such thing. I am called John Little.

ROBIN HOOD

Ah, now there's a fitter name for you, John Little. (*patting him on the head*) Nay, and for a man of your size 'twere best to call you Little John and leave no doubt.

(Little John rises to his feet.)

LITTLE JOHN

Do you make a jest of me?

(Robin Hood pokes the tall man in front of him to see if he's real.)

ROBIN HOOD

(bending down to "Little" John) Who is your friend, Little John?

LITTLE JOHN

(bellows) I am your Little John! And you make sport of me, I shall cudgel you.

ROBIN HOOD

And you do, I shall quicker put an arrow through your heart than you can say... *(can't think of anything)* "Don't put an arrow through my heart."

LITTLE JOHN

(cowering) Do you mean to shoot me, then?

(Robin Hood aims several places, then squints across at Little John, but he still can't see him.)

ROBIN HOOD

Nay, I am as like to shoot myself in this darkness. *(draws sword)* But stand you back or I will pepper you nonetheless.

LITTLE JOHN

(wields his staff) Nay, stand you back.

ROBIN HOOD

Come no closer!

LITTLE JOHN

You come no closer!

ROBIN HOOD

Stay back!

LITTLE JOHN

Stay!

(They both swing their weapons at the empty air in front of them.)

FANNY

"Robin Hood parried and thrust. Little John struck blow after blow against the warm night air, but neither one could gain the upper hand. For a good three or four minutes they fought..."

(Finally, the two exhausted combatants cease fighting. They each grope in front of them to see if their opponent is still standing. They listen for sounds of movement.)

ROBIN HOOD

(leaning forward) Are you dead?

LITTLE JOHN

(startled) AH!!

(They startle each other and jump back for a moment, then...)

ROBIN HOOD

Come, give me your hand. You are a fine match with a sword.

LITTLE JOHN

And you take your cudgeling most courageously.

(Both pause, confused.)

ROBIN HOOD

Your voice is familiar to me. Have we not met, ere now?

LITTLE JOHN

I would remember that, for I have a memory like an iron cage.

ROBIN HOOD

Well, I have need of such wits if I am to outsmart the Sheriff. Will you join my company and be one of my Merry Men?

LITTLE JOHN

Marry, will I.

(Fanny enters the scene.)

FANNY
John Little!

(Robin Hood and Little John are both startled, and leap into each other's arms.)

ROBIN HOOD
Good lord, a bear!

LITTLE JOHN
No, it's my wife. Tell her you haven't seen me.

(Robin Hood edges toward Fanny who bellows again.)

FANNY
John Little!

ROBIN HOOD
(startled) Ah!

FANNY
Is that you, John?

ROBIN HOOD
I haven't seen him.

(She grabs him by the ear.)

ROBIN HOOD
Ow.

FANNY
And who are you? Some marauder come to waylay young ladies on the dark road.

ROBIN HOOD
Young? Ow, ow.

FANNY
Begone, you viper. Help! Help!

(She kicks him on the ground. Little John finally takes pity on his cries for help.)

LITTLE JOHN
Peace, Fanny, I am here.

FANNY
(to Robin Hood) So you haven't seen him?

(She kicks him some more.)

ROBIN HOOD

I haven't seen him. I can't see him.

FANNY

Take that, cur.

LITTLE JOHN

Hold, Fanny!

(She takes him by the ear.)

FANNY

And where have you been, and your dinner two hours cold on the table?

LITTLE JOHN

Not off carousing at the Blue Boar, that much is certain.

ROBIN HOOD

Aha! That is how I know you. The Blue Boar! I thought you had a familiar slur in your voice.

FANNY

Pox on you, John Little!

(She throws him down.)

LITTLE JOHN

(to Robin Hood) She is a sweet-tempered lass when you know her.

ROBIN HOOD

Sweet-tempered?!? Why man, she is a very hellcat.

LITTLE JOHN

That's no hellcat, 'tis my wife!

ROBIN HOOD

My condolences.

(Little John takes a swing at Robin Hood, but slugs Fanny. She, enraged, regains her feet and decks the first man she comes to, which happens to be Robin Hood. Big fight.)

(In the brawl that ensues, they all fight each other, either intentionally, or by mistake. Fanny holds her own against both of them, and sometimes Little John and Robin Hood defend each other against her.)

(Eventually, they fight their way onto the bridge and Fanny heaves them both into the water.)

FANNY

Do you remember it now, gentlemen?

ROBIN HOOD

(laughing merrily as he climbs out of the water) Aye, marry, it all comes back to me now.

LITTLE JOHN

I shall not thank you for this good pummeling, dear Fanny, but I will bear it gratefully since it has patched our friendship again.

ROBIN HOOD

Aye, it seems we each misremembered some part of the story. Even you, Fanny.

FANNY

I? Show me one thing that I have misremembered!

LITTLE JOHN

This last blow, my pet. You remember Robin, it was like this:

(Little John and Robin Hood reenact the final move, but this time, as they lose their balance, they flail with their arms and accidentally jostle Fanny, knocking her into the water with them. They laugh.)

~~ FIN ~~