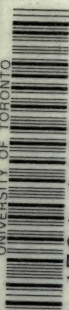


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SHERWOOD

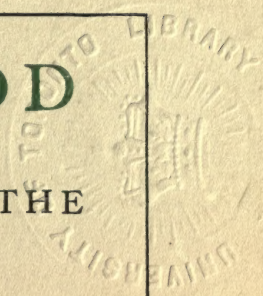
ALFRED NOYES



"IT WAS THE KING COME HOME FROM THE CRUSADE"—Page 133

200
1912

SHERWOOD
OR
ROBIN HOOD AND THE
THREE KINGS



A Play in Five Acts

BY
ALFRED NOYES

ILLUSTRATED IN COLORS
BY SPENCER BAIRD NICHOLS

*"Sherwood, in the Twilight,
is Robin Hood Awake?"*

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
NEW YORK
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
PUBLISHERS



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 September, 1911

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

ROBIN	Earl of Huntingdon, known as "Robin Hood."
LITTLE JOHN	} Outlaws and followers of "Robin Hood."
FRIAR TUCK	
WILL SCARLET	
REYNOLD GREENLEAF	
MUCH, THE MILLER'S SON	
ALAN-A-DALE	
PRINCE JOHN.	
KING RICHARD, Cœur de Lion.	
BLONDEL	King Richard's minstrel.
OSBERT	King of the Fairies.
TITANIA	Queen of the Fairies.
PUCK	A Fairy.
THE SHERIFF OF NOT- TINGHAM.	
FITZWALTER	Father of Marian, known as "Maid Marian."
SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF	A Fool.
ARTHUR PLANTAGENET	Nephew to Prince John, a boy of about ten years of age.
QUEEN ELINOR	Mother of Prince John and Richard Lion-heart.
MARIAN FITZWALTER	Known as Maid Marian, be- trothed to Robin Hood.
JENNY	Maid to Marian.
WIDOW SCARLET	Mother of Will Scarlet.
PRIORRESS OF KIRKLEE	

Fairies, merry men, serfs, peasants, mercenaries,
an abbot, a baron, a novice, nuns, courtiers,
soldiers, retainers, etc.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Robin Hood	<i>Cover</i>
	FACING PAGE
“It was the King come home from the crusade”	<i>Frontispiece</i>
“What weary souls by grace of Robin Hood This night shall enter Dreamland”	20
“A happy bridegroom with the happy bride” . . .	144
“He cannot enter now. The gates are closed against him.”	222

ACT I

ACT I

SCENE I. *Night. The borders of the forest. The smouldering embers of a Saxon homestead. The SHERIFF and his men are struggling with a SERF.*

SERF

No, no, not that! not that! If you should blind
me

God will repay you. Kill me out of hand!

[*Enter PRINCE JOHN and several of his retainers.*]

JOHN

Who is this night-jar?

[*The retainers laugh.*]

Surely, master Sheriff,
You should have cut its tongue out, first. Its cries
Tingle so hideously across the wood
They'll wake the King in Palestine. Small wonder.
That Robin Hood evades you.

SHERIFF

[*To the SERF.*]

Silence, dog,
Know you not better than to make this clamour
Before Prince John?

SHERWOOD

SERF

Prince John! It is Prince John!
For God's love save me, sir!

JOHN

Whose thrall is he?

SHERIFF

I know not, sir, but he was caught red-handed
Killing the king's deer. By the forest law
He should of rights be blinded; for, as you see,
[*He indicates the SERF's right hand.*]
'Tis not his first deer at King Richard's cost.

JOHN

'Twill save you trouble if you say at mine.

SHERIFF

Ay, sir, I pray your pardon—at *your* cost!
His right hand lacks the thumb and arrow-finger,
And though he vows it was a falling tree
That crushed them, you may trust your Sheriff, sir,
It was the law that clipped them when he last
Hunted your deer.

SERF

Prince, when the Conqueror came,
They burned my father's homestead with the rest

SHERWOOD

To make the King a broader hunting-ground.
I have hunted there for food. How could I bear
To hear my hungry children crying? Prince,
They'll make good bowmen for your wars, one
day.

JOHN

He is much too fond of 'Prince': he'll never live
To see a king. Whose thrall? — his iron collar,
Look, is the name not on it?

SHERIFF

Sir, the name

Is fled away, and in another hour
The ring would have been broken. He's one of
those

Green adders of the moon, night-creeping thieves
Whom Huntingdon has tempted to the woods.
These desperate ruffians flee their lawful masters
And flock around the disaffected Earl
Like ragged rooks around an elm, by scores!
And now, i' faith, the sun of Huntingdon
Is setting fast. They've well nigh beggared him,
Eaten him out of house and home. They say
That, when we make him outlaw, we shall find
Nought to distraint upon, but empty cupboards.

JOHN

Did you not serve him once, yourself?

SHERWOOD

SHERIFF

Oh, ay,
He was more prosperous then. But now my cup-
boards
Are full, and his are bare. Well, I'd think scorn
To share a crust with outcast churls and thieves,
Doffing his dignity, letting them call him
Robin, or Robin Hood, as if an Earl
Were just a plain man, which he will be soon,
When we have served our writ of outlawry!
'Tis said he hopes much from the King's return
And swears by Lion-heart; and though King Rich-
ard
Is brother to yourself, 'tis all the more
Ungracious, sir, to hope he should return,
And upset your rule. But then — to keep
Such base communications! Myself would think it
Unworthy of my sheriffship, much more
Unworthy a right Earl.

JOHN

You talk too much!
This whippet, here, slinks at his heel, you say.
Mercy may close her eyes, then. Take him off,
Blind him or what you will; and let him thank
His master for it. But wait — perhaps he knows
Where we may trap this young patrician thief.
Where is your master?

SHERWOOD

SERF

Where you'll never find him.

JOHN

Oh, ho! the dog is faithful! Take him away.
Get your red business done. I shall require
Your men to ride with me.

SHERIFF

[To his men.]

Take him out yonder,
A bow-shot into the wood, so that his clamour
Do not offend my lord. Delay no time,
The irons are hot by this. They'll give you light
Enough to blind him by.

SERF

*[Crying out and struggling as he is forced back
into the forest.]*

No, no, not that!
God will repay you! Kill me out of hand!

SHERIFF

[To PRINCE JOHN.]

There is a kind of justice in all this.
The irons being heated in that fire, my lord,
Which was his hut, aforetime.
*[Some of the men take the glowing irons from the
fire and follow into the wood.]*

SHERWOOD

There's no need
To parley with him, either. The snares are laid
For Robin Hood. He goes this very night
To his betrothal feast.

JOHN

Betrothal feast!

SHERIFF

At old Fitzwalter's castle, sir.

JOHN

Ha! ha!

There will be one more guest there than he
thought!

Ourselves are riding thither. We intended
My Lady Marian for a happier fate
Than bride to Robin Hood. Your plans are laid
To capture him?

SHERIFF

[*Consequentially.*]

It was our purpose, sir,
To serve the writ of outlawry upon him
And capture him as he came forth.

JOHN

That's well.
Then — let him disappear — you understand?

SHERWOOD

SHERIFF

I have your warrant, sir? Death? A great Earl?

JOHN

Why, first declare him outlawed at his feast!
'Twill gladden the tremulous heart of old Fitzwalter

With his prospective son-in-law; and then —
No man will overmuch concern himself
Whither an outlaw goes. You understand?

SHERIFF

It shall be done, sir.

JOHN

But the Lady Marian!
By heaven, I'll take her. I'll banish old Fitzwalter
If he prevent my will in this. You'll bring
How many men to ring the castle round?

SHERIFF

A good five score of bowmen.

JOHN

Then I'll take her
This very night as hostage for Fitzwalter,
Since he consorts with outlaws. These grey rats

SHERWOOD

Will gnaw my kingdom's heart out. For 'tis mine,

This England, now or later. They that hold
By Richard, as their absent king, would make
My rule a usurpation. God, am I
My brother's keeper?

[*There is a cry in the forest from the SERF, who immediately afterwards appears at the edge of the glade, shaking himself free from his guards. He seizes a weapon and rushes at PRINCE JOHN. One of the retainers runs him through and he falls at the PRINCE'S feet.*]

JOHN

That's a happy answer!

SHERIFF

[*Stooping over the body.*]

He is dead.

JOHN

I am sorry. It were better sport
To send him groping like a hoodman blind
Through Sherwood, whimpering for his Robin.

Come,

I'll ride with you to this betrothal feast.

Now for my Lady Marian!

[*Exeunt all. A pause. The scene darkens.*]

SHERWOOD

*Shadowy figures creep out from the thickets,
of old men, women and children.]*

FIRST OLD MAN

[Stretching his arms up to Heaven.]

God, am I

My brother's keeper? Witness, God in heaven,
He said it and not we — Cain's word, he said it!

FIRST WOMAN

[Kneeling by the body.]

O Father, Father, and the blood of Abel
Cries to thee!

A BLIND MAN

Is there any light here still?

I feel a hot breath on my face. The dark
Is better for us all. I am sometimes glad
They blinded me those many years ago.
Princes are princes; and God made the world
For one or two it seems. Well, I am glad
I cannot see His world.

FIRST WOMAN

[Still by the body and whispering to the others.]

Keep him away.

'Tis as we thought. The dead man is his son.
Keep him away, poor soul. He need not know.

SHERWOOD

[*Some of the men carry the body among the thickets.*]

A CHILD

Mother, I'm hungry, I'm hungry!

FIRST OLD MAN

There's no food
For any of us to-night. The snares are empty,
And I can try no more.

THE BLIND MAN

Wait till my son
Comes back. He's a rare hunter is my boy.
You need not fret, poor little one. My son
Is much too quick and clever for the Sheriff.
He'll bring you something good. Why, ha! ha!
ha!

Friends, I've a thought — the Sheriff's lit the fire
Ready for us to roast our meat. Come, come,
Let us be merry while we may!, My boy
Will soon come back with food for the old folks.
The fire burns brightly, eh?

SECOND OLD MAN

The fire that feeds
On hope and eats our hearts away. They've
burnt
Everything, everything!

SHERWOOD

THE BLIND MAN

Ah, princes are princes!
But when the King comes home from the Crusade,
We shall have better times.

FIRST OLD MAN

Ay, when the King
Comes home from the Crusade.

CHILD

Mother, I'm hungry.

SECOND WOMAN

Oh, but if I could only find a crust
Left by the dogs. Masters, the child will starve.
We must have food.

THE BLIND MAN

I tell you when my boy
Comes back, we shall have plenty!

FIRST WOMAN

God pity thee!

THE BLIND MAN

What dost thou mean?

SECOND WOMAN

Masters, the child will starve.

SHERWOOD

FIRST OLD MAN

Hist, who comes here — a forester?

THE BLIND MAN

We'd best

Slip back into the dark.

FIRST WOMAN

[*Excitedly.*]

No, stay! All's well.

There's Shadow-of-a-Leaf, good Lady Marian's
fool

Beside him!

THE BLIND MAN

Ah, they say there's fairy blood
In Shadow-of-a-Leaf. But I've no hopes of more
From him, than wild bees' honey-bags.

[*Enter LITTLE JOHN, a giant figure, leading a
donkey, laden with a sack. On the other
side, SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF trips, a slender fig-
ure in green trunk-hose and doublet. He is
tickling the donkey's ears with a long fern.*]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Gee! Whoa!

Neddy, my boy, have you forgot the Weaver,
And how Titania tickled your long ears?
Ha! ha! Don't ferns remind you?

SHERWOOD

LITTLE JOHN

Friends, my master
Hath sent me to you, fearing ye might hunger.

FIRST OLD MAN

Thy master?

LITTLE JOHN
Robin Hood.

SECOND WOMAN

[*Falling on her knees.*]

God bless his name.
God bless the kindly name of Robin Hood.

LITTLE JOHN

[*Handing them the sack.*]

'Tis well nigh all that's left him; and to-night
He goes to his betrothal feast.

[*All the outcasts except the first old man exeunt.*]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*Pointing to the donkey.*]

Now look,
There's nothing but that shadow of a cross
On his grey back to tell you of the palms
That once were strewn before my donkey's feet.
Won't ferns, won't branching ferns, do just as
well?

SHERWOOD

There's only a dream to ride my donkey now!
But, Neddy, I'll lead you home and cry — HO-
SANNA!

We'll thread the glad Gate Beautiful again,
Though now there's only a Fool to hold your
bridle

And only moonlit ferns to strew your path,
And the great King is fighting for a grave
In lands beyond the sea. Come, Neddy, come,
Hosanna!

[*Exit SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF with the donkey. He
strews ferns before it as he goes.*]

FIRST OLD MAN

'Tis a strange creature, master! Thinkest
There's fairy blood in him?

LITTLE JOHN

'Twas he that brought
Word of your plight to Robin Hood. He flits
Like Moonshine thro' the forest. He'll be home
Before I know it. I must be hastening back.
This makes a sad betrothal night.

FIRST OLD MAN

That minds me,
Couched in the thicket yonder, we overheard
The Sheriff tell Prince John . . .

SHERWOOD

LITTLE JOHN

Prince John!

FIRST OLD MAN

You'd best
Warn Robin Hood. They're laying a trap for
him.

Ay! Now I mind me of it! I heard 'em say
They'd take him at the castle.

LITTLE JOHN

To-night?

FIRST OLD MAN

To-night!
Fly, lad, for God's dear love. Warn Robin
Hood!

Fly like the wind, or you'll be there too late.
And yet you'd best be careful. There's five score
In ambush round the castle.

LITTLE JOHN

I'll be there

An if I have to break five hundred heads!

*[He rushes off thro' the forest. The old man
goes into the thicket after the others. The
scene darkens. A soft light, as of the moon,
appears between the ferns to the right of the
glade, showing OBERON and TITANIA.]*

SHERWOOD

TITANIA

Yet one night more the gates of fairyland
Are opened by a mortal's kindly deed.

OBERON

Last night the gates were shut, and I heard weeping!

Men, women, children, beat upon the gates
That guard the City of Sleep. They could not sleep.

Titania, must not that be terrible,
When mortals cannot sleep?

TITANIA

Yet one night more
Dear Robin Hood has opened the gates wide
And their poor weary souls can enter in.

OBERON

Yet one night more we woodland elves may steal
Out thro' the gates. I fear the time will come
When they must close for ever; and we no more
Shall hold our Sherwood revels.

TITANIA

Only love
And love's kind sacrifice can open them.
For when a mortal hurts himself to help

SHERWOOD

Another, then he thrusts the gates wide open
Between his world and ours.

OBERON

Ay, but that's rare,
That kind of love, Titania, for the gates
Are almost always closed.

TITANIA

Yet one night more!
Hark, how the fairy host begins to sing
Within the gates. Wait here and we shall see
What weary souls by grace of Robin Hood
This night shall enter Dreamland. See, they
come!

*[The soft light deepens in the hollow among the
ferns and the ivory gates of Dreamland are
seen swinging open. The fairy host is
heard, singing to invite the mortals to enter.]*

[Song of the fairies.]

The Forest shall conquer! The Forest shall
conquer! The Forest shall conquer!
Your world is growing old;
But a Princess sleeps in the green-wood,
Whose hair is brighter than gold,

SHERWOOD

The Forest shall conquer! The Forest shall
conquer! The Forest shall conquer!
O hearts that bleed and burn,
Her lips are redder than roses,
Who sleeps in the faëry fern.

The Forest shall conquer! The Forest shall
conquer! The Forest shall conquer!
By the Beauty that wakes anew
Milk-white with the fragrant hawthorn
In the drip of the dawn-red dew.

The Forest shall conquer! The Forest shall
conquer! The Forest shall conquer!
O hearts that are weary of pain,
Come back to your home in Faërie
And wait till she wakes again.

[*The victims of the forest-laws steal out of the thicket once more — dark, distorted, lame, blind, serfs with iron collars round their necks, old men, women and children; and as the fairy song breaks into chorus they pass in procession thro' the beautiful gates. The gates slowly close. The fairy song is heard as dying away in the distance.*]



“WHAT WEARY SOULS BY GRACE OF ROBIN HOOD
THIS NIGHT SHALL ENTER DREAMLAND”

—Page 19

SHERWOOD

TITANIA

[*Coming out into the glade and holding up her hands to the evening star beyond the tree-tops.*]

Shine, shine, dear star of Love, yet one night more.

SCENE II. *A banqueting hall in FITZWALTER'S castle. The guests are assembling for the betrothal feast of ROBIN and MARIAN. Some of ROBIN HOOD'S men, clad in Lincoln green, are just arriving at the doors. SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF runs forward to greet them.*

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Come in, my scraps of Lincoln green; come in,
My slips of greenwood. You're much wanted
here!

Head, heart and eyes, we are all pent up in walls
Of stone — nothing but walls on every side —
And not a rose to break them — big blind walls,
Neat smooth stone walls! Come in, my ragged
robins;

Come in, my jolly minions of the moon,
My straggling hazel-boughs! Hey, bully friar,
Come in, my knotted oak! Ho, little Much,

SHERWOOD

Come in, my sweet green linnet. Come, my
cushats,
Larks, yellow-hammers, fern-owls, Oh, come in,
Come in, my Dian's foresters, and drown us
With may, with blossoming may!

FITZWALTER

Out, Shadow-of-a-Leaf!
Welcome, welcome, good friends of Huntingdon,
Or Robin Hood, by whatsoever name
You best may love him.

CRIES

Robin! Robin! Robin!
[*Enter* ROBIN HOOD.]

FITZWALTER

Robin, so be it! Myself I am right glad
To call him at this bright betrothal feast
My son.

[*Lays a hand on* ROBIN'S *shoulder.*]

Yet, though I would not cast a cloud
Across our happy gathering, you'll forgive
An old man and a father if he sees
All your glad faces thro' a summer mist
Of sadness.

ROBIN

Sadness? Yes, I understand.

[22]

SHERWOOD

FITZWALTER

No, Robin, no, you cannot understand.

ROBIN

Where's Marian?

FITZWALTER

Ay, that's all you think of, boy.
But I must say a word to all of you
Before she comes.

ROBIN

Why — what? . . .

FITZWALTER

No need to look
So startled; but it is no secret here;
For many of you are sharers of his wild
Adventures. Now I hoped an end had come
To these, until another rumour reached me,
This very day, of yet another prank.
You know, you know, how perilous a road
My Marian must ride if Huntingdon
Tramples the forest-laws beneath his heel
And, in the thin disguise of Robin Hood,
Succours the Saxon outlaws, makes his house
A refuge for them, lavishes his wealth
To feed their sick and needy.

SHERWOOD

[The SHERIFF and two of his men appear in the great doorway out of sight of the guests.]

SHERIFF

[Whispering.]

Not yet! keep back!

One of you go — see that the guards are set!
He must not slip us.

FITZWALTER

Oh, I know his heart
Is gold, but this is not an age of gold;
And those who have must keep, or lose the power
Even to help themselves. No — he must doff
His green disguise of Robin Hood for ever,
And wear his natural coat of Huntingdon.

ROBIN

Ah, which is the disguise? Day after day
We rise and put our social armour on,
A different mask for every friend; but steel
Always to case our hearts. We are all so
wrapped,
So swathed, so muffled in habitual thought
That now I swear we do not know our souls
Or bodies from their winding-sheets; but Custom,
Custom, the great god Custom, all day long
Shovels the dirt upon us where we lie

SHERWOOD

Buried alive and dreaming that we stand
Upright and royal. Sir, I have great doubts
About this world, doubts if we have the right
To sit down here for this betrothal feast
And gorge ourselves with plenty, when we know
That for the scraps and crumbs which we let fall
And never miss, children would kiss our hands
And women weep in gratitude. Suppose
A man fell wounded at your gates, you'd not
Pass on and smile and leave him there to die.
And can a few short miles of distance blind you?
Miles, nay, a furlong is enough to close
The gates of mercy. Must we thrust our hands
Into the wounds before we can believe?
Oh, is our sight so thick and gross? We came,
We saw, we conquered with the Conqueror.
We gave ourselves broad lands; and when our king
Desired a wider hunting ground we set
Hundreds of Saxon homes a-blaze and tossed
Women and children back into the fire
If they but wrung their hands against our will.
And so we made our forest, and its leaves
Were pitiful, more pitiful than man.
They gave our homeless victims the same refuge
And happy hiding place they give the birds
And foxes. Then we made our forest-laws,
And he that dared to hunt, even for food,
Even on the ground where we had burned his hut,

SHERWOOD

The ground we had drenched with his own
kindred's blood,
Poor foolish churl, why, we put out his eyes
With red-hot irons, cut off both his hands,
Torture him with such horrors that . . .
Christ God,
How can I help but fight against it all?

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Ah, gossips, if the Conqueror had but burned
Everything with four walls, hut, castle, palace,
And turned the whole wide world into a forest,
Drenched us with may, we might be happy then!
With sweet blue wood-smoke curling thro' the
boughs,
And just a pigeon's flap to break the silence,
And ferns, of course, there's much to make men
happy.
Well, well, the forest conquers at the last!
I saw a thistle in the castle courtyard,
A purple thistle breaking thro' the pavement,
Yesterday; and it's wonderful how soon
Some creepers pick these old grey walls to pieces.
These nunneries and these monasteries now,
They don't spring up like flowers, so I suppose
Old mother Nature wins the race at last.

SHERWOOD

FITZWALTER

Robin, my heart is with you, but I know
A hundred ages will not change this earth.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[With a candle in his hand.]

Gossip, suppose the sun goes out like this.
Pouf!

[Blows it out.]

Stranger things have happened.

FITZWALTER

Silence, fool! . . .
So, if you share your wealth with all the world
Earth will be none the better, and my poor girl
Will suffer for it. Where you got the gold
You have already lavished on the poor
Heaven knows.

FRIAR TUCK

Oh, by the mass and the sweet moon
Of Sherwood, so do I? That's none so hard
A riddle!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Ah, Friar Tuck, we know, we know!
Under the hawthorn bough, and at the foot
Of rainbows, that's where fairies hide their gold.

SHERWOOD

Cut me a silver penny out of the moon
Next time you're there.

[*Whispers.*]

Now tell me, have you brought
Your quarter-staff?

FRIAR TUCK

[*Whispering.*]

Hush! hush.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Oh, mum's the word!

I see it!

FITZWALTER

Believe me, Robin, there's one way
And only one — patience! When Lion-heart
Comes home from the Crusade, he will not brook
This blot upon our chivalry. Prince John
Is dangerous to a heart like yours. Beware
Of rousing him. Meanwhile, your troth holds
good;

But, till the King comes home from the Crusade
You must not claim your bride.

ROBIN

So be it, then. . . .
When the great King comes home from the
Crusade! . . .

SHERWOOD

FITZWALTER

Meanwhile for Marian's sake and mine, I pray
Do nothing rash.

[*Enter WIDOW SCARLET. She goes up to ROBIN HOOD.*]

WIDOW SCARLET

Are you that Robin Hood
They call the poor man's friend?

ROBIN

I am.

WIDOW SCARLET

They told me,
They told me I should find you here. They told
me!

ROBIN

Come, mother, what's the trouble?

WIDOW SCARLET

Sir, my son
Will Scarlet lies in gaol at Nottingham
For killing deer in Sherwood! Sir, they'll hang
him.
He only wanted food for him and me!
They'll kill him, I tell you, they'll kill him. I
can't help

SHERWOOD

Crying it out. He's all I have, all! Save him!
I'll pray for you, I'll

ROBIN

[*To FITZWALTER, as he raises WIDOW SCARLET
gently to her feet.*]

Sir, has not the King
Come home from the Crusade? Does not your
heart
Fling open wide its gates to welcome him?

FITZWALTER

Robin, you set me riddles. Follow your con-
science.
Do what seems best.

ROBIN

I hope there is a way,
Mother. I knew Will Scarlet. Better heart
There never beat beneath a leather jerkin.
He loved the forest and the forest loves him;
And if the lads that wear the forest's livery
Of living green should happen to break out
And save Will Scarlet (as on my soul I swear,
Mother, they shall!) why, that's a matter none
Shall answer for to prince, or king, or God,
But you and Robin Hood; and if the judgment
Strike harder upon us than the heavenly smile

SHERWOOD

Of sunshine thro' the greenwood, may it fall
Upon my head alone.

[*Enter the SHERIFF, with two of his men.*]

SHERIFF

[*Reads.*]

In the king's name!

Thou, Earl of Huntingdon, by virtue of this writ art hereby attainted and deprived of thine earldom, thy lands and all thy goods and chattels whatsoever and whereas thou hast at divers times trespassed against the officers of the king by force of arms, thou art hereby outlawed and banished the realm.

ROBIN

That's well.

[*He laughs.*]

It puts an end to the great question
Of how I shall dispose my wealth, Fitzwalter.
But 'banished'?—No! that is beyond their
power

While I have power to breathe, unless they banish
The kind old oaks of Sherwood. They may call
it

'Outlawed,' perhaps.

SHERWOOD

FITZWALTER

Who let the villain in
Thro' doors of mine?

CRIES

Out with him! Out with him!
[*The guests draw swords and the SHERIFF retreats
thro' the doorway with his men.*]

ROBIN

Stop!
Put up your swords! He had his work to do.
[WIDOW SCARLET *falls sobbing at his feet.*]

WIDOW SCARLET

O master, master, who will save my son,
My son?

ROBIN

[*Raising her.*]
Why, mother, this is but a dream,
This poor fantastic strutting show of law!
And you shall wake with us in Sherwood forest
And find Will Scarlet in your arms again.
Come, cheerly, cheerly, we shall overcome
All this. Hark!
[*A bugle sounds in the distance. There is a
scuffle in the doorway and LITTLE JOHN
bursts in with his head bleeding.*]

SHERWOOD

LITTLE JOHN

Master, master, come away!
They are setting a trap for thee, drawing their
lines
All round the castle.

ROBIN

How now, Little John,
They have wounded thee! Art hurt?

LITTLE JOHN

No, no, that's nothing.
Only a bloody cockscomb. Come, be swift,
Or, if thou wert a fox, thou'dst never slip
Between 'em. Ah, hear that?
[*Another bugle sounds from another direction.*]
That's number two.
Two sides cut off already. When the third
Sounds — they will have thee, sure as eggs is eggs.
Prince John is there, Fitzwalter cannot save 'ee.
They'll burn the castle down.

ROBIN

Prince John is there?

LITTLE JOHN

Ay, and my lord Fitzwalter had best look
Well to my mistress Marian, if these ears

SHERWOOD

Heard right as I came creeping thro' their lines.
Look well to her, my lord, look well to her.
Come, master, come, for God's sake, come away.

FITZWALTER

Robin, this is thy rashness. I warned thee, boy!
Prince John! Nay, that's too perilous a jest
For even a prince to play with me. Come, Robin,
You must away and quickly.

ROBIN

Let me have
One word with Marian.

LITTLE JOHN

It would be the last
On earth. Come, if you ever wish to see
Her face again.

FITZWALTER

Come, Robin, are you mad?
You'll bring us all to ruin!

[He opens a little door in the wall.]

The secret passage,
This brings you out by Much the Miller's wheel,
Thro' an otter's burrow in the river bank.
Come, quick, or you'll destroy us! Take this
lanthorn.

If you're in danger, slip into the stream

SHERWOOD

And let it carry you down into the heart
Of Sherwood. Come now, quickly, you must go!

ROBIN

The old cave, lads, in Sherwood, you know where
To find me. Friar Tuck, bring Widow Scarlet
Thither to-morrow, with a word or two
From Lady Marian!

FITZWALTER

Quickly, quickly, go.

*[He pushes ROBIN and LITTLE JOHN into the
opening and shuts the door. A pause.]*

Oh, I shall pay for this, this cursed folly!

Henceforth I swear I wash my hands of him!

*[Enter MARIAN, from a door on the right above
the banqueting hall. She pauses, pale and
frightened, on the broad steps leading down.]*

MARIAN

Father, where's Robin?

FITZWALTER

Child, I bade you stay

Until I called you.

MARIAN

Something frightened me!

Father, where's Robin? Where's Robin?

SHERWOOD

FITZWALTER

Hush, Marian, hark!

[*All stand listening.*]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*Stealing to the foot of the stairs and whispering to LADY MARIAN.*]

Lady, they're all so silent now. I'll tell you
I had a dream last night — there was a man
That bled to death, because of four gray walls
And a black-hooded nun.

FITZWALTER

[*Angrily.*]

Hist, Shadow-of-a-Leaf!

[*The third bugle sounds. There is a clamour at the doors. Enter PRINCE JOHN and his retainers.*]

JOHN

[*Mockingly.*]

Now this is fortunate! I come in time
To see — Oh, what a picture! Lady Marian,
Forgive me — coming suddenly out of the dark
And seeing you there, robed in that dazzling white
Above these verdant gentlemen, I feel
Like one that greets the gracious evening star
Thro' a gap in a great wood.

SHERWOOD

Is aught amiss?
Why are you all so silent? Ah, my good,
My brave Fitzwalter, I most fervently
Trust I am not inopportune.

FITZWALTER

My lord,
I am glad that you can jest. I am sadly grieved
And sorely disappointed in that youth
Who has incurred your own displeasure.

JOHN

Ah?
Your future son-in-law?

FITZWALTER

Never on earth!
He is outlawed —

MARIAN

Outlawed!

FITZWALTER

And I wash my hands
Of Huntingdon. His shadow shall not darken
My doors again!

JOHN

That's vehement! Ha! ha!
And what does Lady Marian say?

SHERWOOD

MARIAN

My father
Speaks hastily. I am not so unworthy.

FITZWALTER

Unworthy?

MARIAN

Yes, unworthy as to desert him
Because he is in trouble — the bravest man
In England since the days of Hereward.
You know why he is outlawed!

FITZWALTER

[To PRINCE JOHN.]

Sir, she speaks
As the spoilt child of her old father's dotage.
Give her no heed. She shall not meet with him
On earth again, and till she promise this,
She'll sun herself within the castle garden
And never cross the draw-bridge.

MARIAN

Then I'll swim
The moat!

FRIAR TUCK

Ha! ha! well spoken.

[38]

SHERWOOD

MARIAN

Oh, you forget,
Father, you quite forget there is a King;
And, when the King comes home from the Cru-
sade,
Will you forget Prince John and change once
more?

[Murmurs of assent from the foresters.]

JOHN

Enough of this.
Though I be prince, I am vice-gerent too!
Fitzwalter, I would have some private talk
With you and Lady Marian. Bid your guests
Remove a little —

FITZWALTER

I'll lead them all within!
And let them make what cheer they may. Come,
friends.

[He leads them up the stairs to the inner room.]

My lord, I shall return immediately!

[Exeunt FITZWALTER and the guests.]

JOHN

Marian!

MARIAN

My lord!

[39]

SHERWOOD

JOHN

[*Drawing close to her.*]

I have come to urge a plea
On your behalf as well as on my own!
Listen, you may not know it — I must tell you.
I have watched your beauty growing like a flower,
With — why should I not say it — worship; yes,
Marian, I will not hide it.

MARIAN

Sir, you are mad!

JOHN

Listen! You cannot mean to waste your youth,
Your youth, your priceless youth in these dull
brawls.
Remember — even you have but one life,
One fleeting life to waste, and you stand here
Now, at the cross-roads of your fate. The world
Lies at your feet; and it is in your power
To use it for your pleasure, or throw it away
Like dross!

MARIAN

I do not understand you.

JOHN

Listen!

Come to the court with me; and you shall reign

SHERWOOD

Queen over every maiden in the land
By loveliness alone. But I will add
All that a king can give. Your dainty hand
Shall sway all England like one sceptral rose.

MARIAN

Sir, and your bride, your bride, not three months
wedded!

You cannot mean

JOHN

Listen to me! Ah, Marian,
You'd be more merciful if you knew all!
D'you think that princes wed to please themselves?

MARIAN

Sir, English maidens do; and I am plighted
Not to a prince, but to an outlawed man.
Sir, let me pass.

JOHN

One word! Marian, one word!
I never meant you harm! Indeed, what harm
Could come of this? Is not your father poor?
I'd make him rich! Is not your lover outlawed?
I'd save him from the certain death that waits him.
You say the forest-laws afflict your soul
And his — you say you'd die for their repeal!

SHERWOOD

Well — I'll repeal them. All the churls in Eng-
land
Shall bless your name and mix it in their prayers
With heaven itself.

MARIAN

The price?

JOHN

You call it that!

To let me lay the world before your feet,
To let me take this little hand in mine.
Why should I hide my love for you?

MARIAN

My lord,

I'll hear no more! I pray you let me pass.

JOHN

One word — suppose it some small sacrifice,
To save those churls for whom you say your heart
Bleeds; yet you will not lift your little finger
To save them! And what hinders you? — A
breath,
A dream, a golden rule! Can you not break it
For a much greater end?

MARIAN

I'd die to save them.

[42]

SHERWOOD

JOHN

Then live to save them.

MARIAN

No, you will not let me;
D'you think that bartering my soul will help
To save another? If there's no way but this,
Then through my lips those suffering hundreds cry,
We choose the suffering. All that is good in them,
All you have left, all you have not destroyed,
Cries out against you; and I'll go to them,
Suffer and toil and love and die with them
Rather than touch your hand. You over-rate
Your power to hurt our souls. You are mistaken!
There is a golden rule!

JOHN

And with such lips
You take to preaching! I was a fool to worry
Your soul with reason. With hair like yours —
it's hopeless!
But Marian — you shall hear me.

[*He catches her in his arms.*]

Yes, by God,

Marian, you shall! I love you.

MARIAN

[*Struggling.*]

You should not live!

SHERWOOD

JOHN

One kiss, then! Devil take it.

[*Enter FITZWALTER above.*]

MARIAN

[*Wresting herself free.*]

You should not live!

Were I a man and not a helpless girl

You should not live!

JOHN

Come, now, that's very wicked.

See how these murderous words affright your
father.

My good Fitzwalter, there's no need to look
So ghastly. For your sake and hers and mine
I have been trying to make your girl forget
The name of Huntingdon. A few short months
At our gay court would blot his memory out!
I promise her a life of dazzling pleasures,
And, in return she flies at me — a tigress —
Clamouring for my blood! Try to persuade her!

FITZWALTER

My lord, you are very good. She must decide
Herself.

JOHN

[*Angrily.*]

I'll not be trifled with! I hold

SHERWOOD

The hand of friendship out and you evade it.
The moment I am gone, back comes your outlaw.
You say you have no power with your own child!
Well, then I'll take her back this very night;
Back to the court with me. How do I know
What treasons you are hatching here? I'll take
her
As hostage for yourself.

FITZWALTER

My lord, you jest!

I have sworn to you.

JOHN

No more! If you be loyal,
What cause have you to fear?

FITZWALTER

My lord, I'll give
A hundred other pledges; but not this.

JOHN

By heaven, will you dictate your terms to me?
I say that she shall come back to the court
This very night! Ho, there, my men.

[*Enter JOHN's retainers.*]

Escort

This lady back with us.

SHERWOOD

FITZWALTER

Back there, keep back. Prince or no prince,
I say she shall not go!

[*He draws his sword.*]

I'd rather see her
Begging in rags with outlawed Huntingdon
Than that one finger of yours should soil her
glove.

JOHN

So here's an end of fawning, here's the truth,
My old white-bearded hypocrite. Come, take her,
Waste no more time. Let not the old fool daunt
you
With that great skewer.

FITZWALTER

[*As JOHN's men advance.*]

By God, since you will have it,
Since you will drive me to my last resort,
Break down my walls, and hound me to the forest,
This is the truth! Out of my gates! Ho, help!
A Robin Hood! A Robin Hood!

[*There is a clamour from the upper room. The
doors are flung open and the foresters appear
at the head of the steps.*]

SHERWOOD

FRIAR TUCK

[*Coming down into the hall and brandishing his quarter-staff.*]

How now?

Who calls on Robin Hood? His men are here
To answer.

FITZWALTER

Drive these villains out of my gates.

FRIAR TUCK

[*To PRINCE JOHN.*]

Sir, I perceive you are a man of wisdom,
So let me counsel you. There's not a lad
Up yonder, but at four-score yards can shoot
A swallow on the wing. They have drunken deep.
I cannot answer but their hands might loose
Their shafts before they know it. Now shall I
give

The word? Ready, my lads!

[*The foresters make ready to shoot. JOHN hesitates for a moment.*]

JOHN

My Lady Marian,
One word, and then I'll take my leave of you!

[*She pays no heed.*]

Farewell, then! I have five-score men at hand!
And they shall be but lightning to the hell

SHERWOOD

Of my revenge, Fitzwalter. I will not leave
One stone upon another. From this night's work
Shall God Himself not save you.

[*Exeunt JOHN and his men.*]

FRIAR TUCK

[*As they go out.*]

My Lord Fitzwalter!

I have confessed him! Shall I bid 'em shoot?

'Twill save a world of trouble.

FITZWALTER

No; or the King
Himself will come against me. Follow them out,
Drive them out of my gates, then raise the draw-
bridge

And let none cross. Oh, I foresaw, foretold!
Robin has wrecked us all!

[*Exeunt the foresters and FITZWALTER.*

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *remains alone with*
MARIAN.]

MARIAN

[*She flings herself down on a couch and buries her
head in her arms.*]

O Robin, Robin,

I cannot lose you now!

SHERWOOD

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*Sitting at her feet. The lights grow dim.*]

Ah, well, the prince
Promised to break the walls down. Don't you
think

These villains are a sort of ploughshare, lady,
And where they plough, who knows what wheat
may spring!

The lights are burning low and very low;

So, Lady Marian, let me tell my dream.

There was a forester that bled to death

Because of four gray walls and a black nun

Whose face I could not see — but, Oh, beware!

Though I am but your fool, your Shadow-of-a-
Leaf,

Dancing before the wild winds of the future,

I feel them thrilling through my tattered wits

Long ere your wisdom feels them. My poor
brain

Is like a harp hung in a willow tree

Swept by the winds of fate. I am but a fool,

But Oh, beware of that black-hooded nun.

MARIAN

This is no time for jesting, Shadow-of-a-Leaf.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

The lights are burning low. Do you not feel

A cold breath on your face?

SHERWOOD

MARIAN

Fling back that shutter!
Look out and tell me what is happening.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[Flinging back the shutter.]

Look,
Look, gossip, how the moon comes dancing in.
Ah, they have driven Prince John across the
drawbridge.

They are raising it, now!

*[There are cries in the distance, then a heavy
sound of chains clanking and silence.
SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF turns from the window
and stands in the stream of moonlight, point-
ing to the door on the left.]*

Look! Look!

MARIAN

[Starting up with a cry of fear.]

Ah!

*[The tall figure of a nun glides into the moonlit
hall and throwing back her hood reveals the
face of QUEEN ELINOR.]*

ELINOR

Lady Marian,
Tell me quickly, where is Huntingdon hiding?

SHERWOOD

MARIAN

Queen Elinor!

ELINOR

Oh, pardon me, I fear
I startled you. I donned this uncouth garb
To pass through your besiegers. If Prince John
Discover it, all is lost. Come, tell me quickly,
Where is Robin?

MARIAN

Escaped, I hope.

ELINOR

Not here?

MARIAN

No!

ELINOR

Come, dear Lady Marian, do not doubt me.
I am here to save you both.

MARIAN

He is not here.

ELINOR

Ah, but you know where I may find him, Marian.
All will be lost if you delay to tell me

SHERWOOD

Where I may speak with him. He is in peril.
By dawn Prince John will have five hundred men
Beleaguering the castle. You are all ruined
Unless you trust me! Armies will scour the
woods
To hunt him down. Even now he may be
wounded,
Helpless to save himself.

MARIAN

Wounded!

ELINOR

Dear child,
Take me to him. Here, on this holy cross,
My mother's dying gift, I swear to you
I wish to save him.

MARIAN

Oh, but how?

ELINOR

Trust me!

MARIAN

Wounded! He may be wounded! Oh, if I
could,
I'd go to him! I am helpless, prisoned here.
My father . . .

SHERWOOD

ELINOR

I alone can save your father.
Give me your word that if I can persuade him,
You'll lead me to your lover's hiding place,
And let me speak with him.

[*Enter* FITZWALTER.]

Ah, my Lord Fitzwalter!

FITZWALTER

The queen! O madam, madam, I am driven
Beyond myself. This girl, this foolish girl
Has brought us all to ruin. This Huntingdon,
As I foresaw, foresaw, foretold, foretold,
Has dragged me down with him.

ELINOR

I am on your side,
If you will hear me; and you yet may gain
A son in Robin Hood.

FITZWALTER

Madam, I swear
I have done with him. I pray you do not mock
me;
But if you'll use your power to save my lands
I shall be deeply grateful. I was provoked!
Prince John required this child here —

SHERWOOD

ELINOR

Oh, I know!
But you'll forgive him that! I do not wonder
That loveliness like hers —

FITZWALTER

Ay, but you'll pardon
A father's natural anger. Madam, I swear
I was indeed provoked. But you'll assure him
I've washed my hands of Huntingdon.

MARIAN

And yet
His men are, even now, guarding your walls!
Father, you cannot, you shall not —

FITZWALTER

Oh, be silent!
Who wrapt me in this tangle? Are you bent
On driving me out in my old age to seek
Shelter in caves and woods?

ELINOR

My good Fitzwalter,
It has not come to that! If you will trust me
All will be well; but I must speak a word
With Robin Hood.

FITZWALTER

You!

SHERWOOD

ELINOR

Oh, I have a reason.
Your daughter knows his hiding place.

FITZWALTER

She knows!

ELINOR

Oh, trust them both for that. I am risking much!
To-morrow she shall guide me there. This bird
Being flown, trust me to make your peace with
John.

FITZWALTER

But — Marian!

ELINOR

She'll be safer far with Robin,
Than loitering here until your roof-tree burns.
I think you know it. Fitzwalter, I can save you,
I swear it on this cross.

FITZWALTER

But — Marian! Marian!

ELINOR

Your castle wrapt in flame! . . .
There's nought to fear,
If she could — Marian, once, at a court masque,
You wore a page's dress of Lincoln green,

SHERWOOD

And a green hood that muffled half your face,
I could have sworn 'twas Robin come again
In his first boyhood, my sweet slender page!
Wear it to-morrow — go, child, bid your maid
Make ready — we'll set out betimes.

MARIAN

[*Going up to her father.*]

I'll go,
If you will let me, father. He may be wounded!
Father, forgive me. Let me go to him.

ELINOR

Go, child, first do my bidding. He'll consent
When you return.

[*Exit MARIAN.*]

My dear good friend Fitzwalter,
Trust me, I have some power with Huntingdon.
All shall be as you wish. I'll let her guide me,
But — as for her — she shall not even see him
Unless you wish. Trust me to wind them all
Around my little finger.

FITZWALTER

It is dark here.
Let us within. Madam, I think you are right.
And you'll persuade Prince John?

SHERWOOD

ELINOR

[As they go up the steps.]

I swear by this,
This holy cross, my mother's dying gift!

FITZWALTER

It's very sure he'd burn the castle down.

[Exeunt.]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

*[Coming out into the moonlight and staring up
after them.]*

The nun! The nun! They'll whip me if I
speak,

For I am only Shadow-of-a-Leaf, the Fool.

[Curtain.]

ACT II

ACT II

SCENE I. *Sherwood Forest: An open glade, showing on the right the mouth of the outlaw's cave. It is about sunset. The giant figure of LITTLE JOHN comes out of the cave, singing.*

LITTLE JOHN

[Sings.]

When Spring comes back to England
And crowns her brows with may,
Round the merry moonlit world
She goes the greenwood way.

[He stops and calls in stentorian tones.]

Much! Much! Much! Where has he vanished now,

Where has that monstrous giant the miller's son
Hidden himself?

[Enter MUCH, a dwarf-like figure, carrying a large bundle of ferns.]

MUCH

Hush, hush, child, here I am!
And here's our fairy feather-beds, ha! ha!

[61]

SHERWOOD

Come, praise me, praise me, for a thoughtful
parent.

There's nothing makes a better bed than ferns
Either for sleeping sound or rosy dreams.

LITTLE JOHN

Take care the fern-seed that the fairies use
Get not among thy yellow locks, my Titan,
Or thou'lt wake up invisible. There's none
Too much of Much already.

MUCH

[*Looking up at him impudently.*]

Well, it would take
Our big barn full of fern-seed, I misdoubt,
To make thee walk invisible, Little John,
My sweet Tom Thumb! And, in this troublous
age

Of forest-laws, if we night-walking minions,
We gentlemen of the moon, could only hunt
Invisible, there's many and many of us
With thumbs lopped off, eyes gutted and legs
pruned,
Slick, like poor pollarded pear-trees, would be
lying
Happy and whole this day beneath the boughs.

SHERWOOD

LITTLE JOHN

Invisible? Ay, but what would Jenny say
To such a ghostly midge as thou would'st be
Sipping invisibly at her cherry lips.

MUCH

Why, there now, that's a teaser. E'en as it is
(Don't joke about it) my poor Jenny takes
The smallness of her Much sorely to heart!
And though I often tell her half a loaf
(Ground in our mill) is better than no bread,
She weeps, poor thing, that an impartial heaven
Bestows on her so small a crumb of bliss
As me! You'd scarce believe, now, half the nos-
trums,

Possets and strangely nasty herbal juices
That girl has made me gulp, in the vain hope
That I, the frog, should swell to an ox like thee.
I tell her it's all in vain, and she still cheats
Her fancy and swears I've grown well nigh three
feet

Already. O Lord, she's desperate. She'll ad-
vance

Right inward to the sources of creation,
She'll take the reins of the world in hand. She'll
stop

The sun like Joshua, turn the moon to blood,
And if I have to swallow half the herbs

SHERWOOD

In Sherwood, I shall stalk a giant yet,
Shoulder to shoulder with thee, Little John,
And crack thy head at quarter-staff. But don't,
Don't joke about it. 'Tis a serious matter.

LITTLE JOHN

Into the cave, then, with thy feather-bed.
Old Much, thy father, waits thee there to make
A table of green turfs for Robin Hood.
We shall have guests anon, O merry times,
Baron and knight and abbot, all that ride
Through Sherwood, all shall come and dine with
him
When they have paid their toll! Old Much is
there
Growling at thy delay.

MUCH

[Going towards the cave.]

My poor dear father.
Now, there's a sad thing, too. He is so ashamed
Of his descendants. Why for some nine years
He shut his eyes whenever he looked at me;
And I have seen him on the village green
Pretend to a stranger, once, who badgered him
With curious questions, that I was the son
Of poor old Gaffer Bramble, the lame sexton.
That self-same afternoon, up comes old Bramble

SHERWOOD

White hair a-blaze and big red wagging nose
All shaking with the palsy; bangs our door
Clean off its hinges with his crab-tree crutch,
And stands there — framed — against the sunset
sky!

He stretches out one quivering fore-finger
At father, like the great Destroying Angel
In the stained window: straight, the milk boiled
over,

The cat ran, baby squalled and mother screeched.
Old Bramble asks my father — what — what —
what

He meant — he meant — he meant! You should
have seen

My father's hopeless face! Lord, how he
blushed,

Red as a beet-root! Lord, Lord, how he
blushed!

'Tis a hard business when a parent looks
Askance upon his off-spring.

[Exit into the cave.]

LITTLE JOHN

Skip, you chatterer!

Here comes our master.

[Enter ROBIN HOOD.]

Master, where hast thou been?

SHERWOOD

I feared some harm had come to thee. What's
this?

This was a cloth-yard shaft that tore thy coat!

ROBIN

Oh, ay, they barked my shoulder, devil take them.
I got it on the borders of the wood.
St. Nicholas, my lad, they're on the watch.

LITTLE JOHN

What did'st thou there? They're on the watch,
i' faith!

A squirrel could not pass them. Why, my name-
sake

Prince John would sell his soul to get thy head,
And both his ears for Lady Marian;
And whether his ears or soul be worth the more,
I know not. When the first lark flittered up
To sing, at dawn, I woke; and thou wast gone.
What did'st thou there?

ROBIN

Well, first I went to swim
In the deep pool below the mill.

LITTLE JOHN

I swam
Enough last night to last me many a day.
What then?

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

I could not wash away the thought
Of all you told me. If Prince John should dare!
That helpless girl! No, no, I will not think it.
Why, Little John, I went and tried to shoot
A grey goose wing thro' Lady Marian's casement.

LITTLE JOHN

Oh, ay, and a pink nosegay tied beneath it.
Now, master, you'll forgive your Little John,—
But that's midsummer madness and the may
Is only half in flower as yet. But why —
You are wounded — why are you so pale?

ROBIN

No — no —
Not wounded; but Oh, my good faithful friend,
She is not there! I wished to send her warning.
I could not creep much closer; but I swear
I think the castle is in the hands of John.
I saw some men upon the battlements,
Not hers — I know — not hers!

LITTLE JOHN

Hist, who comes here?
[*He seizes his bow and stands ready to shoot.*]

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

Stop, man, it is the fool. Thank God, the fool,
Shadow-of-a-Leaf, my Marian's dainty fool.
How now, good fool, what news? What news?
[*Enter SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF.*]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Good fool!
Should I be bad, sir, if I chanced to bring
No news at all? That is the wise man's way.
Thank heaven, I've lost my wits. I am but a leaf
Dancing upon the wild winds of the world,
A prophet blown before them. Well, this even-
ing,
It is that lovely grey wind from the West
That silvers all the fields and all the seas,
And I'm the herald of May!

ROBIN

Come, Shadow-of-a-Leaf,
I pray thee, do not jest.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

I do not jest.
I am vaunt-courier to a gentleman,
A sweet slim page in Lincoln green who comes,
Wood-knife on hip, and wild rose in his face,
With golden news of Marian. Oh, his news

SHERWOOD

Is one crammed honeycomb, swelling with sweetness

In twenty thousand cells; but delicate!

So send thy man aside.

ROBIN

Go, Little John.

[LITTLE JOHN *goes into the cave.*]

Well, Shadow-of-a-Leaf, where is he?

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

At this moment

His hair is tangled in a rose bush: hark,

He swears, like any kitten! Nay, he is free.

Come, master page, here is that thief of love,

Give him your message. I'll to Little John.

[*Exit into the cave. Enter MARIAN, as a page in Lincoln green, her face muffled in a hood.*]

ROBIN

Good even, master page, what is thy news

Of Lady Marian?

[*She stands silent.*]

Answer me quickly, come,

Hide not thy face!

[*She still stands muffled and silent.*]

Come, boy, the fool is chartered,

Not thou; and I'll break off this hazel switch

SHERWOOD

And make thee dance if thou not answer me.
What? Silent still? Sirrah, this hazel wand
Shall lace thee till thou tingle, top to toe.
I'll . . .

MARIAN

[*Unmuffling.*]

Robin!

ROBIN

[*Catches her in his arms with a cry.*]
Marian! Marian!

MARIAN

Fie upon you,
Robin, you did not know me.

ROBIN

[*Embracing her.*]

Oh, you seemed
Ten thousand miles away. This is not moon-
light,
And I am not Endymion. Could I dream
My sweet swift Dian would come wandering
through
These woods by daylight? Even that rose your
face
You muffled in its own green leaves.

SHERWOOD

MARIAN

But you,
Were hidden in the heart of Sherwood, Robin,
Hidden behind a million mighty boughs,
And yet I found you.

ROBIN

Ay, the young moon stole
In pity down to her poor shepherd boy;
But he could never climb the fleecy clouds
Up to her throne, never could print one kiss
On her immortal lips. He lay asleep
Among the poppies and the crags of Latmos,
And she came down to him, his queen stole down.

MARIAN

Oh, Robin, first a rose and then a moon,
A rose that breaks at a breath and falls to your
feet,
The fickle moon — Oh, hide me from the world;
For there they say love goes by the same law!
Let me be outlawed then. I cannot change.
Sweetheart, sweetheart, Prince John will hunt me
down!
Prince John — Queen Elinor will hunt me down!

ROBIN

Queen Elinor! Nay, but tell me what this
means?
How came you here?

SHERWOOD

MARIAN

The Queen — she came last night,
Made it an odious kind of praise to me
That he, not three months wedded to his bride,
Should — pah!

And then she said five hundred men
Were watching round the borders of the wood;
But she herself would take me safely through them,
Said that I should be safer here with Robin,
She had your name so pat — and I gave way.

[*Enter QUEEN ELINOR behind. She conceals
herself to listen.*]

ROBIN

Marian, she might have trapped you to Prince
John.

MARIAN

No; no; I think she wanted me to guide her
Here to your hiding place. She wished to see you
Herself, unknown to John, I know not why.
It was my only way. Her skilful tongue
Quite won my father over, made him think,
Poor father, clinging to his lands again,
He yet might save them. And so, without ado
(It will be greatly to the joy of Much,
Your funny little man), I bade my maid
Jenny, go pack her small belongings up

SHERWOOD

This morning, and to follow with Friar Tuck
And Widow Scarlet. They'll be here anon.

ROBIN

Where did you leave the Queen?

MARIAN

Robin, she tried
To kill me! We were deep within the wood
And she began to tell me a wild tale,
Saying that I reminded her of days
When Robin was her page, and how you came
To Court, a breath of April in her life,
And how you worshipped her, and how she grew
To love you. But she saw you loved me best
(So would she mix her gall and lies with honey),
So she would let you go. And then she tried
To turn my heart against you, bade me think
Of all the perils of your outlawry,
Then flamed with anger when she found my heart
Steadfast; and when I told her we drew nigh
The cave, she bade me wait and let her come
First, here, to speak with you. Some devil's trick
Gleamed in her smile, the way some women have
Of smiling with their lips, wreathing the skin
In pleasant ripples, laughing with their teeth,
While the cold eyes watch, cruel as a snake's
That fascinates a bird. I'd not obey her.

SHERWOOD

She whipped a dagger out. Had it not been
For Shadow-of-a-Leaf, who dogged us all the way,
Poor faithful fool, and leapt out at her hand,
She would have killed me. Then she darted away
Like a wild thing into the woods, trying to find
Your hiding place most like.

ROBIN

O Marian, why,
Why did you trust her? Listen, who comes here?
[*Enter* FRIAR TUCK, JENNY *and* WIDOW SCAR-
LET.]

Ah, Friar Tuck!

MARIAN

Good Jenny!

ROBIN

And Widow Scarlet!

FRIAR TUCK

O children, children, this is thirsty weather!
The heads I have cracked, the ribs I have
thwacked, the bones
I have bashed with my good quarter-staff, to
bring
These bits of womankind through Sherwood For-
est.

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

What, was there scuffling, friar?

FRIAR TUCK

Some two or three
Pounced on us, ha! ha! ha!

JENNY

A score at least,
Mistress, most unchaste ruffians.

FRIAR TUCK

They've gone home,
Well chastened by the Church. This pastoral
staff

Mine oaken *Pax Vobiscum*, sent 'em home
To think about their sins, with watering eyes.
You never saw a bunch of such blue faces,
Bumpy and juicy as a bunch of grapes
Bruised in a Bacchanalian orgy, dripping
The reddest wine a man could wish to see.

ROBIN

I picture it — those big brown hands of thine
Grape-gathering at their throttles, ha! ha! ha!
Come, Widow Scarlet, come, look not so sad.

WIDOW SCARLET

O master, master, they have named the day
For killing of my boy.

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

They have named the day
For setting of him free, then, my good dame.
Be not afraid. We shall be there, eh, Friar?
Grape-gathering, eh?

FRIAR

Thou'lt not be there thyself,
My son, the game's too dangerous now, methinks.

ROBIN

I shall be there myself. The game's too good
To lose. We'll all be there. You're not afraid,
Marian, to spend a few short hours alone
Here in the woods with Jenny.

MARIAN

Not for myself,
Robin.

ROBIN

We shall want every hand that day,
And you'll be safe enough. You know we go
Disguised as gaping yokels, old blind men,
With patches on their eyes, poor wandering beg-
gars,
Pedlars with pins and poking-sticks to sell;
And when the time is come — a merry blast
Rings out upon a bugle and suddenly

SHERWOOD

The Sheriff is aware that Sherwood Forest
Has thrust its green boughs up beneath his feet.
Off go the cloaks and all is Lincoln green,
Great thwacking clubs and twanging bows of yew.
Oh, we break up like nature thro' the laws
Of that dark world; and then, good Widow Scar-
let,

Back to the cave we come and your good Will
Winds his big arm about you once again.
Go, Friar, take her in and make her cosy.
Jenny, your Much will grow three feet at least
With joy to welcome you. He is in the cave.
[FRIAR TUCK *and* WIDOW SCARLET *go towards*
the cave.]

FRIAR TUCK

Now for a good bowse at a drinking can.
I've got one cooling in the cave, unless
That rascal, Little John, has drunk it all.
[*Exeunt into cave.*]

JENNY

[To MARIAN.]

Mistress, I haven't spoke a word to you
For nigh three hours. 'Tis most unkind, I think.

MARIAN

Go, little tyrant, and be kind to Much.

SHERWOOD

JENNY

Mistress, it isn't Much I want. Don't think Jenny comes trapesing through these awful woods For Much. I haven't spoke a word with you For nigh three hours. 'Tis most unkind, I think.

MARIAN

Wait, Jenny, then, I'll come and talk with you. Robin, she is a tyrant; but she loves me. And if I do not go, she'll pout and sulk Three days on end. But she's a wondrous girl. She'd work until she dropped for me. Poor Jenny!

ROBIN

That's a quaint tyranny. Go, dear Marian, go; But not for long. We have so much to say. Come quickly back.

[*Exit MARIAN. ROBIN paces thoughtfully across the glade. QUEEN ELINOR steals out of her hiding place and stands before him.*]

You here!

ELINOR

Robin, can you Believe that girl? Am I so treacherous?

ROBIN

It seems you have heard whate'er I had to say.

SHERWOOD

ELINOR

Surely you cannot quite forget those days
When you were kind to me. Do you remember
The sunset through that oriel?

ROBIN

Ay, a god
Grinning thro' a horse-collar at a pitiful page,
Dazed with the first red gleam of what he thought
Life, as the trouveres find it! I am ashamed,
Remembering how your quick tears blinded me!

ELINOR

Ashamed! You — you — that in my bitter grief
When Rosamund —

ROBIN

I know! I thought your woes,
Those tawdry relics of your treacheries,
Wrongs quite unparalleled. I would have fought
Roland himself to prove you spotless then.

ELINOR

Oh, you speak thus to me! Robin, beware!
I have come to you, I have trampled on my pride,
Set all on this one cast! If you should now
Reject me, humble me to the dust before
That girl, beware! I never forget, I warn you;
I never forgive.

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

Are you so proud of that?

ELINOR

Ah, well, forgive me, Robin. I'll save you yet
From all these troubles of your outlawry!
Trust me — for I can wind my poor Prince John
Around my little finger. Who knows — with me
To help you — there are but my two sons' lives
That greatly hinder it — why, yourself might
 reign
Upon the throne of England.

ROBIN

Are you so wrapped
In treacheries, helplessly false, even to yourself,
That now you do not know falsehood from truth,
Darkness from light?

ELINOR

O Robin, I was true
At least to you. If I were false to others,
At least I —

ROBIN

No — not that — that sickening plea
Of truth in treachery. Treachery cannot live
With truth. The soul wherein they are wedded
 dies
Of leprosy.

SHERWOOD

ELINOR

[*Coming closer to him.*]

Have you no pity, Robin,
No kinder word than this for the poor creature
That crept — Ah, feel my heart, feel how it beats!
No pity?

ROBIN

Five years ago this might have moved me!

ELINOR

No pity?

ROBIN

None. There is no more to say.
My men shall guide you safely through the wood.

ELINOR

I never forgive!

[*Enter MARIAN from the cave; she stands silent
and startled.*]

ROBIN

My men shall guide you back.

[*Calls.*]

Ho, there, my lads!

[*Enter several of the outlaws.*]

This lady needs a guide
Back thro' the wood.

SHERWOOD

ELINOR

Good-bye, then, Robin, and good-bye to you,
Sweet mistress! You have wronged me! What
of that?

For — when we meet — Come, lead on, foresters!
[*Exeunt the QUEEN and her guides.*]

MARIAN

O Robin, Robin, how the clouds begin
To gather — how that woman seems to have
brought
A nightmare on these woods

ROBIN

Forget it all!

She is so tangled in those lies the world
Draws round some men and women, none can
help her.

Marian, for God's sake, let us quite forget
That nightmare! Oh, that perfect brow of yours,
Those perfect eyes, pure as the violet wells
That only mirror heaven and are not dimmed
Except by clouds that drift thro' heaven and
catch

God's glory in the sunset and the dawn.

MARIAN

It is enough for them simply to speak
The love they hold for you. But — I still fear.

SHERWOOD

Robin — think you — she might have overheard
Your plan — the rescue of Will Scarlet?

ROBIN

Why —

No — No — some time had passed, and yet —
she seemed

To have heard your charge against her! No,
she guessed it.

Come — let us brush these cobwebs from our
minds.

Look how the first white star begins to tremble
Like a big blossom in that sycamore.

Now you shall hear our forest ritual.

Ho, Little John! Summon the lads together!

[*The outlaws come out of the cave.* LITTLE
JOHN *blows a bugle and others come in from
the forest.*]

Friar, read us the rules.

FRIAR TUCK

First, shall no man

Presume to call our Robin Hood or any
By name of Earl, lord, baron, knight or squire,
But simply by their names as men and brothers:
Second, that Lady Marian while she shares
Our outlaw life in Sherwood shall be called
Simply Maid Marian. Thirdly, we that follow
Robin, shall never in thought or word or deed

SHERWOOD

Do harm to widow, wife or maid; but hold,
Each, for his mother's or sister's or sweetheart's
sake,

The glory of womanhood, a sacred thing,
A star twixt earth and heaven. Fourth, whom-
soever

Ye meet in Sherwood ye shall bring to dine
With Robin, saving carriers, posts and folk
That ride with food to serve the market towns
Or any, indeed, that serve their fellow men.
Fifth, you shall never do the poor man wrong,
Nor spare a priest or usurer. You shall take
The waste wealth of the rich to help the poor,
The baron's gold to stock the widow's cupboard,
The naked ye shall clothe, the hungry feed,
And lastly shall defend with all your power
All that are trampled under by the world,
The old, the sick and all men in distress.

ROBIN

So, if it be no dream, we shall at last
Hasten the kingdom of God's will on earth.
There shall be no more talk of rich and poor,
Norman and Saxon. We shall be one people,
One family, clustering all with happy hands
And faces round that glowing hearth, the sun.
Now let the bugle sound a golden challenge
To the great world. Greenleaf, a forest call!

SHERWOOD

[REYNOLD GREENLEAF *blows a resounding call.*]

Now let the guards be set; and then, to sleep!
To-morrow there'll be work enough for all.
The hut for Jenny and Maid Marian!
Come, you shall see how what we lack in halls
We find in bowers. Look how from every branch
Such tapestries as kings could never buy
Wave in the starlight. You'll be waked at dawn
By feathered choirs whose notes were taught in
heaven.

MUCH

Come, Jenny, come, we must prepare the hut
For Mistress Marian. Here's a bundle of ferns!
[*They go into the hut. The light is growing
dimmer and richer.*]

LITTLE JOHN

And here's a red cramoisy cloak, a baron
[*Handing them in at the door.*]
Dropt, as he fled one night from Robin Hood;
And here's a green, and here's a midnight blue,
All soft as down. But wait, I'll get you more.
[*Two of the outlaws appear at the door with deer-
skins, etc., SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF stands be-
hind them with a great bunch of flowers and
ferns.*]

FIRST OUTLAW

Here's fawn-skins, milder than a maiden's cheek.

SHERWOOD

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Oh, you should talk in rhyme! The world should
sing
Just for this once in tune, if Love were king!

SECOND OUTLAW

Here's deer-skins, for a carpet, smooth and meek.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

I knew you would! Ha! ha! Now look at
what I bring!

*[He throws flowers, etc., within the hut, spray
by spray, speaking in a kind of ecstasy.]*

Here's lavender and love and sweet wild thyme,
And dreams and blue-bells that the fairies chime,
Here's meadow-sweet and moonlight, bound in
posies,

With ragged robin, traveller's joy and roses,
And here — just three leaves from a weeping wil-
low;

And here — that's best — deep poppies for your
pillow.

MUCH

And here's a pillow that I made myself,
Stuffed with dry rose-leaves and grey pigeon's
down,
The softest thing on earth except my heart!

SHERWOOD

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*Going aside and throwing himself down among the ferns to watch.*]

Just three sweet breaths and then the song is
flown!

[MUCH looks at him for a moment with a puzzled face, then turns to the hut again.]

MUCH

Jenny, here, take it — though I'm fond of comforts,
Take it and give it to Maid Marian.

JENNY

Why, Much, 'tis bigger than thyself.

MUCH

Hush, child.

I meant to use it lengthways. 'Twould have
made

A feather-bed complete for your poor Much,
Take it!

[*The outlaws all go into the cave.*]

MARIAN

O Robin, what a fairy palace!
How cold and grey the walls of castles seem
Beside your forest's fragrant halls and bowers.

SHERWOOD

I do not think that I shall be afraid
To sleep this night, as I have often been
Beneath our square bleak battlements.

ROBIN

And look,
Between the boughs, there is your guard, all night,
That great white star, white as an angel's wings,
White as the star that shone on Bethlehem!
Good night, sweetheart, good night!

MARIAN

Good night!

ROBIN

One kiss!
Oh, clear bright eyes, dear heavens of sweeter
stars,
Where angels play, and your own sweeter soul
Smiles like a child into the face of God,
Good night! Good night!

[MARIAN goes into the hut. The door is shut.

ROBIN goes to the mouth of the cave and
throws himself down on a couch of deer-
skins. The light grows dimly rich and
fairy-like.]

SHERWOOD

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*Rising to his knees.*]

Here comes the little cloud!

[*A little moonlit cloud comes floating down between the tree-tops into the glade. TITANIA is seen reposing upon it. She steps to earth. The cloud melts away.*]

How blows the wind from fairyland, Titania?

TITANIA

Shadow-of-a-Leaf, the wicked queen has heard
Your master's plan for saving poor Will Scarlet.
She knows Maid Marian will be left alone,
Unguarded in these woods. The wicked Prince
Will steal upon her loneliness. He plots
To carry her away.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

What can we do?

Can I not break my fairy vows and tell?

TITANIA

No, no; you cannot, even if you would,
Convey our fairy lore to mortal ears.
When have they heard our honeysuckle bugles
Blowing reveillé to the crimson dawn?
We can but speak by dreams; and, if you spoke,

SHERWOOD

They'd whip you, for your words would all ring
false
Like sweet bells out of tune.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

What can we do?

TITANIA

Nothing, except on pain of death, to stay
The course of Time and Tide. There's Oberon!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Oberon!

TITANIA

He can tell you more than I.

[*Enter* OBERON.]

OBERON

Where's Orchis? Where's our fairy trumpeter
To call the court together?

ORCHIS

Here, my liege.

OBERON

Bugle them hither; let thy red cheeks puff
Until thy curled petallic trumpet thrill
More loudly than a yellow-banded bee

SHERWOOD

Thro' all the clover clumps and boughs of thyme.
They are scattered far abroad.

ORCHIS

My liege, it shall

Outroar the very wasp!

[*Exit.*]

OBERON

[*As he speaks, the fairies come flocking from all sides into the glade.*]

Methinks they grow
Too fond of feasting. As I passed this way
I saw the fairy halls of hollowed oaks
All lighted with their pale green glow-worm
lamps.

And under great festoons of maiden-hair
Their brilliant mushroom tables groaned with
food.

Hundreds of rose-winged fairies banqueted!
All Sherwood glittered with their prisms goblets
Brimming the thrice refined and luscious dew
Not only of our own most purplest violets,
But of strange fragrance, wild exotic nectars,
Drawn from the fairy blossoms of some star
Beyond our tree-tops! Ay, beyond that moon
Which is our natural limit — the big lamp
Heaven lights upon our boundary.

SHERWOOD

ORCHIS

Mighty King,
The Court is all attendant on thy word.

OBERON

[With great dignity.]

Elves, pixies, nixies, gnomes and leprechauns,

[He pauses.]

We are met, this moonlight, for momentous coun-
cils

Concerning those two drowsy human lovers,
Maid Marian and her outlawed Robin Hood.
They are in dire peril; yet we may not break
Our vows of silence. Many a time
Has Robin Hood by kindly words and deeds
Done in his human world, sent a new breath
Of life and joy like Spring to fairyland;
And at the moth-hour of this very dew-fall,
He saved a fairy, whom he thought, poor soul,
Only a may-fly in a spider's web,
He saved her from the clutches of that Wizard,
That Cruel Thing, that dark old Mystery,
Whom ye all know and shrink from —

[Exclamations of horror from the fairies.]

Plucked her forth,
So gently that not one bright rainbow gleam
Upon her wings was clouded, not one flake
Of bloom brushed off — there lies the broken web.

SHERWOOD

Go, look at it; and here is pale Perilla
To tell you all the tale.

[*The fairies cluster to look at the web, etc.*]

A FAIRY

Can we not make them free
Of fairyland, like Shadow-of-a-Leaf, to come
And go, at will, upon the wings of dreams?

OBERON

Not till they lose their wits like Shadow-of-a-Leaf.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Can I not break my fairy vows and tell?

OBERON

Only on pain of what we fairies call
Death!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Death?

OBERON

Never to join our happy revels,
Never to pass the gates of fairyland
Again, but die like mortals. What that means
We do not know — who knows?

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

If I could save them! —
I am only Shadow-of-a-Leaf!

SHERWOOD

OBERON

There is a king
Beyond the seas. If he came home in time,
All might be well. We fairies only catch
Stray gleams, wandering shadows of things to
come.

TITANIA

Oh, if the king came home from the Crusade!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Why will he fight for graves beyond the sea?

OBERON

Our elfin couriers brought the news at dusk
That Lion-heart, while wandering home thro'
Europe,
In jet-black armour, like an errant knight,
Despite the great red cross upon his shield,
Was captured by some wicked prince and thrust
Into a dungeon. Only a song, they say,
Can break those prison-bars. There is a minstrel
That loves his king. If he should roam the world
Singing until from that dark tower he hears
The king reply, the king would be set free.

TITANIA

Only a song, only a minstrel?

SHERWOOD

OBERON

Ay;

And Blondel is his name.

[*A long, low sound of wailing is heard in the distance. The FAIRIES shudder and creep together.*]

TITANIA

Hark, what is that?

OBERON

The cry of the poor, the cry of the oppressed,
The sound of women weeping for their children,
The victims of the forest laws. The moan
Of that dark world where mortals live and die
Sweeps like an icy wind thro' fairyland.
And Oh, it may grow bitterer yet, that sound!
'Twas Merlin's darkest prophecy that earth
Should all be wrapped in smoke and fire, the woods
Hewn down, the flowers discoloured and the sun
Begrimed, until the rows of lifeless trees
Against the greasy sunset seemed no more
Than sooty smudges of an ogre's thumbs
Upon the sweating forehead of a slave.
While, all night long, fed with the souls of men,
And bodies, too, great forges blast and burn
Till the great ogre's cauldrons brim with gold.

[*The wailing sound is heard again in the distance.*]

SHERWOOD

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

To be shut out for ever, only to hear
Those cries! I am only Shadow-of-a-Leaf, the
fool,
I cannot face it! Is there no hope but this?
No hope for Robin and Maid Marian?

OBERON

If the great King comes home from the Crusade
In time! If not,— there is another King
Beyond the world, they say.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Death, that dark death!
To leave the sunlight and the flowers for ever!
I cannot bear it! Oh, I cannot tell them.
I'll wait — perhaps the great King will come
home,
If not — Oh, hark, a wandering minstrel's voice?

OBERON

Who is drawing hither? Listen, fairies, listen!
[*Song heard approaching thro' the wood.*]

Knight on the narrow way,
Where would'st thou ride?
'Onward,' I heard him say,
'Love, to thy side!'

SHERWOOD

'Nay,' sang a bird above;
'Stay, for I see
Death in the mask of love,
Waiting for thee.'

[*The song breaks off. Enter a MINSTREL, leading a great white steed. He pauses, confronted by the fairy host. The moonlight dazzles him.*]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Minstrel, art thou, too, free of fairyland?
Where would'st thou ride? What is thy name?

MINSTREL

My name
Is Blondel.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Blondel!

THE FAIRIES

Blondel!

MINSTREL

And I ride
Through all the world to seek and find my king!
[*He passes through the fairy host and goes into*

SHERWOOD

*the woods on the further side of the glade,
continuing his song, which dies away in the
distance.]*

[*Song.*]

'Death? What is death?' he cried.

'I must ride on,
On to my true love's side,
Up to her throne!'

[*Curtain.*]

ACT III

ACT III

SCENE I. *May-day. An open place (near NOTTINGHAM. A crowd of rustics and town-folk assembling to see the execution of WILL SCARLET.*

FIRST RUSTIC

A sad May-day! Where yonder gallows glowers,
We should have raised the may-pole.

SECOND RUSTIC

Ay, no songs,
No kisses in the ring, no country dances
To-day; no lads and lasses on the green,
Crowning their queen of may.
[*Enter ROBIN HOOD, disguised as an old beggar,
with a green patch on one eye.*]

ROBIN

Is this the place,
Masters, where they're a-goin' to hang Will
Scarlet?

FIRST RUSTIC

Ay, father, more's the pity.

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

Eh! Don't ye think
There may be scuffling, masters? There's a many
That seems to like him well, here, roundabouts.

SECOND RUSTIC

Too many halberts round him. There's no
chance.

ROBIN

I've heard the forest might break out, the lads
In Lincoln green, you wot of! If they did?

FIRST RUSTIC

There's many here would swing a cudgel and help
To trip the Sheriff up. If Robin Hood
Were only here! But then he's outlawed now.

SECOND RUSTIC

Ay, and there's big rewards out. It would be
Sure death for him to try a rescue now.
The biggest patch of Lincoln Green we'll see
This day, is that same patch on thy old eye,
Eh, lads!

THIRD RUSTIC

What's more, they say Prince John is out
This very day, scouring thro' Sherwood forest
In quest of Lady Marian!

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

[*Sharply.*]

You heard that?

THIRD RUSTIC

Ay, for they say she's flown to Sherwood forest.

SECOND RUSTIC

Ah! Ah? That's why he went. I saw Prince
John!

With these same eyes I saw him riding out
To Sherwood, not an hour ago.

ROBIN

You saw him?

SECOND RUSTIC

Ay, and he only took three men at arms.

FIRST RUSTIC

Three men at arms! Why then, he must ha'
known

That Robin's men would all be busy here!
He's none so bold, he would not risk his skin!
I think there'll be some scuffling after all.

ROBIN

Ay, tell 'em so — go, spread it thro' the crowd!

[*He mutters to himself.*]

SHERWOOD

He'd take some time, to find her, but 'fore God
We must be quick; 'fore God we must be quick!

SECOND RUSTIC

Why, father, one would never think to see thee
Thou had'st so sound a heart!

FIRST RUSTIC

Ah, here they come!
The Sheriff and his men; and, in the midst,
There's poor Will Scarlet bound.

THE CROWD MURMURS

Ah, here they come!
Look at the halberts shining! Can you see him?

FIRST RUSTIC

Ay, there he is. His face is white; but, Lord,
He takes it bravely.

SECOND RUSTIC

He's a brave man, Will.

SHERIFF

Back with the crowd there, guards; delay no time!

SOME WOMEN IN THE CROWD

Ah, ah, poor lad!

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

[*Eagerly.*]

What are they doing now?

I cannot see!

FIRST RUSTIC

The Sheriff's angered now!

SECOND RUSTIC

Ay, for they say a messenger has come
From that same godless hangman whose lean neck
I'd like to twist, saying he is delayed.
'Tis the first godly deed he has ever done.

THIRD RUSTIC

The Sheriff says he will not be delayed.
But who will take the hangman's office?

ROBIN

Masters,

I have a thought; make way; let me bespeak
The Sheriff!

RUSTICS

How now, father, what's to do?

ROBIN

Make way, I tell you. Here's the man they
want!

SHERWOOD

SHERIFF

What's this?

ROBIN

Good master Sheriff, I've a grudge
Against Will Scarlet. Let me have the task
Of sending him to heaven!

CROWD

Ah-h-h, the old devil!

SHERIFF

Come on, then, and be brief!

ROBIN

I'm not a hangman;
But I can cleave your thinnest hazel wand
At sixty yards.

SHERIFF

Shoot, then, and make an end.
Make way there, clear the way!
[*An opening is made in the crowd. ROBIN stands
in the gap, WILL SCARLET is not seen by the
audience.*]

CROWD

Ah-h-h, the old devil!

[106]

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

I'll shoot him one on either side, just graze him,
To show you how I love him; then the third
Slick in his heart.

[*He shoots. A murmur goes up from the crowd.
The crowd hides WILL SCARLET during the
shooting. But ROBIN remains in full view,
in the opening.*]

SHERIFF

[*Angrily.*]

Take care! You've cut the cord
That bound him on that side!

ROBIN

Then here's the second!
I will be careful!

[*He takes a steady aim.*]

A RUSTIC TO HIS NEIGHBOURS

'I faith, lads, he can shoot!
What do you think — that green patch on his eye
Smacks of the merry men! He's tricking them!
[*ROBIN shoots. A louder murmur goes up from
the crowd.*]

SHERIFF

You have cut the rope again!

[107]

SHERWOOD

A CRY

He has cut him free!

ROBIN

All right! All right! It's just to tease the dog!
Here's for the third now!

*[He aims and shoots quickly! There is a loud
cry of a wounded man, then a shout from the
crowd.]*

THE CROWD

Ah-h-h, he has missed; he has killed
One of the guards!

FIRST RUSTIC

What has he done?

SECOND RUSTIC

He has killed
One of the Sheriff's men!

SHERIFF

There's treachery here!
I'll cleave the first man's heart that moves!

ROBIN

Will Scarlet,
Pick up that dead man's halbert!

SHERWOOD

SHERIFF

Treachery! Help!

Down with the villain!

ROBIN

[Throws off his beggar's crouch and hurls the Sheriff and several of his men back amongst the crowd. His cloak drops off.]

Sherwood! A merry Sherwood!

CROWD

Ah! ha! The Lincoln Green! A Robin Hood!

[A bugle rings out and immediately some of the yokels throw off their disguise and the Lincoln green appears as by magic amongst the crowd. The guards are rushed and hustled by them. Robin and several of his men make a ring round WILL SCARLET.]

SHERIFF

It is the outlawed Earl of Huntingdon:

There is a great reward upon his head.

Down with him!

[The SHERIFF's men make a rush at the little band. A KNIGHT in jet black armour, with a red-cross shield, suddenly appears and forces his way through the mob, sword in hand.]

SHERWOOD

KNIGHT

What, so many against so few!
Back, you wild wolves. Now, foresters, follow
me,

For our St. George and merry England, charge,
Charge them, my lads!

[*The FORESTERS make a rush with him and the
SHERIFF and his men take to flight.*]

ROBIN

Now back to Sherwood, swiftly!
A horse, or I shall come too late; a horse!

[*He sees the knight in armour standing by his
horse.*]

Your pardon, sir; our debt to you is great,
Too great almost for thanks; but if you be
Bound by the vows of chivalry, I pray you
Lend me your charger; and my men will bring
you

To my poor home in Sherwood. There you'll
find

A most abundant gratitude.

KNIGHT

Your name?

ROBIN

Was Huntingdon; but now is Robin Hood.

SHERWOOD

KNIGHT

If I refuse?

ROBIN

Then, sir, I must perforce
Take it. I am an outlaw, but the law
Of manhood still constrains me — 'tis a matter
Of life and death — a helpless maiden's honour
Depends on it!

KNIGHT

Take it and God be with you!
I'll follow you to Sherwood with your men.

[ROBIN *seizes the horse and exit. He is heard galloping away.*]

[*Curtain.*]

SCENE II. *Sherwood Forest. Outside the cave.*

JENNY, MARIAN and WIDOW SCARLET.

MARIAN

This dreadful waiting! How I wish that Robin
Had listened to the rest and stayed with me.
How still the woods are! Jenny, do you think
There will be fighting? Oh, I am selfish, mother;
You need not be afraid. Robin will bring
Will Scarlet safely back to Sherwood. Why,
Perhaps they are all returning even now!

[III]

SHERWOOD

Cheer up! How long d'you think they've been
away,
Jenny, six hours or more? The sun is high,
And all the dew is gone.

JENNY

Nay, scarce three hours.
Now don't you keep a-fretting. They'll be back,
Quite soon enough. I've scarcely spoke with you,
This last three days and more; and even now
It seems I cannot get you to myself,
Two's quite enough.

[*To WIDOW SCARLET.*]

Come, widow, come with me.
I'll give you my own corner in the hut
And make you cosy. If you take a nap
Will Scarlet will be here betimes you wake.

[*Takes her to the hut and shuts her in.*]

There, drat her, for a mumping mumble-crust!

MARIAN

Come, Jenny, that's too bad; the poor old dame
Is lonely.

JENNY

She's not lonely when she sleeps,
And if I never get you to myself
Where was the good of trapesing after you
And living here in Sherwood like wild rabbits?

SHERWOOD

You ha'nt so much as let me comb your hair
This last three days and more.

MARIAN

Well, comb it, Jenny,
Now, if you like, and comb it all day long;
But don't get crabbed, and don't speak so crossly!
[JENNY *begins loosening MARIAN'S hair and
combing it.*]

JENNY

Why, Mistress, it grows longer every day.
It's far below your knees, and how it shines!
And wavy, just like Much the Miller's brook,
Where it comes tumbling out into the sun,
Like gold, red gold.

MARIAN

Ah, that's provoking, Jenny,
For you forgot to bring me my steel glass,
And, if you chatter thus, I shall soon want it.

JENNY

I've found a very good one at a pinch.
There's a smooth silver pool, down in the stream,
Where you can see your face most beautiful.

SHERWOOD

MARIAN

So that's how Jenny spends her lonely hours,
A sad female Narcissus, while poor Much
Dwines to an Echo!

JENNY

I don't like those gods.
I never cared for them. But, as for Much,
Mistress, that poor boy has the nicest mind
You ever dreamed. He speaks so beautiful!
It *might* be just an Echo from blue hills
Far, far away! You see he's quite a scholar:
Much, more 'an most (That's what he calls the
three

Greasy caparisons — much, more 'an' most) !
You see they thought that being so very small
They could not make him grow to be a man,
They'd make a scholar of him instead. The Friar
Taught him his letters. He can write his name,
And mine, and yours, just like a missal book,
In lovely colours; and he always draws
The first big letter of JENNY like a tree
With naked Cupids hiding in the branches,
The sweetest little boys you ever saw!
(And, just to show he has the nicest mind,
He always draws the leaves and boughs across,
So that you only see their heads and legs —
Mistress, I don't believe you hear one word

SHERWOOD

I ever speak to you! Your eyes are always
That far and far away.

MARIAN

I'm listening, Jenny!

JENNY

Well, when he draws the first big M of yours,
He makes it like a bridge from earth to heaven,
With white-winged angels passing up and down;
And, underneath the bridge, in a black stream,
He puts the drowning face of the bad Prince
Holding his wicked hands out, while a devil
Stands on the bank and with a pointed stake
Keeps him from landing —

Ah, what's that? What's that?

MARIAN

O Jenny, how you startled me!

JENNY

I thought

I saw that same face peering thro' the ferns
Yonder — there — see, they are shaking still.

[*She screams.*]

Ah! Ah!

[PRINCE JOHN *and another man appear advancing
across the glade.*]

SHERWOOD

JOHN

So here's my dainty tigress in her den,
And — Warman — there's a pretty scrap for you
Beside her. Now, sweet mistress, will you deign
To come with me, to change these cheerless woods
For something queenlier? If I be not mistaken,
You have had time to tire of that dark cave.
Was I not right, now? Surely you can see
Those tresses were not meant to waste their gold
Upon this desert. Nay, but Marian, hear me.
I do not jest.

[*At a sign from MARIAN, JENNY goes quickly inside the cave.*]

That's well! Dismiss your maid!
Warman, remove a little.

[*His man retires.*]

I see you think
A little better of me! Out in the wood
There waits a palfrey for you, and the stirrup
Longs, as I long, to clasp your dainty foot.
I am very sure by this you must be tired
Of outlawry, a lovely maid like you.
Nor do I think much of the love that drags
A maid like you to share such outlawry.
Oh, you should float in silk thro' palaces!
You know not half the wonders that await
Your coming.

[*He draws nearer.*]

SHERWOOD

MARIAN

Wait — let me think!

JOHN

Ay, think of gardens,
Not wild like this, but rich as Paradise,
With bowers of Eden bloom for whispering lovers,
And sounds of sweet stringed music wafted through
them

And pulse of dancing feet in kingly halls,
Lit with a hundred lamps when twilight comes.
We two shall listen. Then I'll take your hand,
Lead you thro' splendours Egypt never knew
When Cleopatra kissed Mark Antony!

[He draws nearer.]

MARIAN

Wait — I must think, must think.

JOHN

Give me your hand!
Why do you shrink from me? If you could know
The fire that burns me night and day, you would
not

Refuse to let me snatch one cooling kiss
From that white hand of yours.

MARIAN

If you be prince,
You will respect my loneliness and go.

SHERWOOD

JOHN

How can I leave you, when by day and night
I see that face of yours, and in my dreams
Possess those lips. Oh, I will not pretend
I do not love you, do not long for you,
Desire and hunger for your kiss, your touch!
I'll not pretend to be a saint, you see!
I hunger and thirst for you, only to touch
Those beautiful gold ripples, only to hold
Your body's trembling beauty in these arms,
Once. Ah, you'd feel my love, you'd answer it!

MARIAN

You are mad!

JOHN

Ay, mad for you, to quench this fever,
To bury my burning face in your deep hair,
Mad for the clasp, the kiss! Body and soul
I am broken up with love for you. Your eyes
Flash like the eyes of a tigress, and I love them
The better for it. Ah, let me hold you, sweet,
Give me your hand! Ah, do not shrink from me!
[*JENNY comes out of the cave, hands MARIAN a
bow. She leaps back and aims it at JOHN.*]

MARIAN

Back, you wild beast, or by the heaven above us,
I'll kill you! Now, don't doubt me. I can shoot

SHERWOOD

Truly as any forester. I swear
Prince or no prince, king or no king, I'll kill you
If you should stir one step from where you stand.

JOHN

Come, come, sweet Marian, put that weapon down.
I was beside myself, was carried away.
I cannot help my love for —

MARIAN

I'll not hear
Another sickening word: throw down your arms,
That dagger at your side.

JOHN

Oh, that's too foolish,
Marian, I swear —

MARIAN

You see that rusty stain
Upon the silver birch down yonder? Watch.
[*She shoots. Then swiftly aims at him again.*]
Now, throw your weapon down.
[*He pulls out the dagger and throws it down, with
a shrug of his shoulders. One of his men
comes stealing up behind MARIAN.*]

JENNY

Ah, Mistress Marian,

SHERWOOD

There's one behind you! Look!

[*The man springs forward and seizes MARIAN'S arms.*]

JOHN

[*Coming forward and taking hold of her also.*]

So, my sweet tigress,
You're trapped then, are you? Well, we'll waste
no time!

We'll talk this over when we reach the castle.
Keep off the maid, there, Warman; I can manage
This turbulent beauty. Ah, by God, you shall
Come! Ah? God's blood, what's this?

[*MARIAN has succeeded in drawing her dagger
and slightly wounding him. She wrests her-
self free.*]

MARIAN

Keep back, I warn you!

JOHN

[*Advancing slowly.*]

Strike, now strike if you will. You will not like
To see the red blood spurting up your hand.
That's not maid's work. Come, strike!

[*ROBIN HOOD appears at the edge of the glade
behind him.*]

You see, you cannot!
Your heart is tenderer than you think.

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

[*Quietly.*]

Prince John!

JOHN

[*Turns round and confronts ROBIN.*]

Out with your blade, Warman; call up the rest!
We can strike freely now, without a fear
Of marring the sweet beauty of the spoil.
We four can surely make an end of him.
Have at him, lads, and swiftly, or the thieves
Will all be down on us.

[ROBIN *draws his sword and sets his back to an oak. The other two followers of PRINCE JOHN come out of the wood.*]

ROBIN

Come on, all four!

This oak will shift its roots before I budge
One inch from four such howling wolves. Come
on;
You must be tired of fighting women-folk.
Come on! By God, sir, you must guard your head
Better than that,

[*He disarms WARMAN.*]

Or you're just food for worms
Already; come, you dogs!

SHERWOOD

PRINCE JOHN

Work round, you three,
Behind him! Drive him out from that damned
oak!

ROBIN

Oh, that's a princely speech! Have at you, sir!
[*He strikes PRINCE JOHN'S sword out of his hand and turns suddenly to confront the others. JOHN picks up a dagger and makes as if to stab ROBIN in the back. At the same instant, bugles are heard in the distance. The red-cross knight flashes between the trees and seizing JOHN'S arm in his gauntleted hand, disarms him, then turns to help ROBIN.*]

KNIGHT

What, four on one! Down with your blades, you curs,
Or, by Mahound!—
[*The three men take to flight. JOHN stands staring at the newcomer. The FORESTERS appear, surrounding the glade.*]

JOHN

[*Muttering.*]

What? Thou? Thou? Or his ghost?
No — no — it cannot be.

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

Let them yelp home,
The pitiful jackals. They have left behind
The prime offender. Ha, there, my merry lads,
All's well; but take this villain into the cave
And guard him there.
[*The foresters lead PRINCE JOHN into the cave.*]

JOHN

[*To the Foresters.*]
Answer me one thing: who
Is yonder red-cross knight?

A FORESTER

No friend of thine,
Whoe'er he be!

KNIGHT

[*To ROBIN.*]
I need not ask *his* name.
I grieve to know it!

ROBIN

Sir, I am much beholden
To your good chivalry. What thanks is mine
To give, is all your own.

KNIGHT

Then I ask this!
Give me that prisoner! I think his life is mine.

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

You saved my own, and more, you saved much
more

Than my poor life is worth. But, sir, think well!
This man is dangerous, not to me alone,
But to the King of England; for he'll yet
Usurp the throne! Think well!

KNIGHT

I ask no more.
I have more reasons than you know.

ROBIN

So be it.

Ho! Bring the prisoner back!

[*The FORESTERS bring PRINCE JOHN back. He
stares at the knight as if in fear.*]

Sir, you shall judge him.

This prisoner is your own.

KNIGHT

Then — let him go!

FORESTERS

What! Set him free?

ROBIN

Obey!

[*They release PRINCE JOHN.*]

[124]

SHERWOOD

KNIGHT

Out of my sight;

Go!

PRINCE JOHN

What man is this?

KNIGHT

Quickly, get thee gone!

[PRINCE JOHN *goes out, shaken and white.*]

ROBIN

We'll think no more of him! It is our rule
That whomsoe'er we meet in merry greenwood
Should dine with us. Will you not be our guest?

KNIGHT

That's a most happy thought! I have not heard
A merrier word than dinner all this day.
I am well-nigh starved.

ROBIN

Will you not raise your visor
And let us know to whose good knightly hand
We are so beholden?

KNIGHT

Sir, you will pardon me,
If, for a little, I remain unknown.
But, tell me, are you not that Robin Hood
Who breaks the forest laws?

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

That is my name.

We hold this earth as naturally our own
As the glad common air we breathe. We think
No man, no king, can so usurp the world
As not to give us room to live free lives,
But, if you shrink from eating the King's deer —

KNIGHT

Shrink? Ha! ha! ha! I count it as my own!

[*The FORESTERS appear, preparing the dinner on a table of green turfs, beneath a spreading oak. MARIAN and JENNY appear at the door of the hut. JENNY goes across to help at the preparations for dinner.*]

ROBIN

Ah, there's my Lady Marian! Will you not come
And speak with her?

[*He and the KNIGHT go and talk to MARIAN in the background.*]

LITTLE JOHN

[*At the table.*]

The trenchers all are set;
Manchets of wheat, cream, curds and honey-cakes,
Venison pasties, roasted pigeons! Much,
Run to the cave; we'll broach our rarest wine

SHERWOOD

To-day. Old Much is waiting for thee there
To help him. He is growling roundly, too,
At thy delay.

MUCH

[*Going towards the cave.*]

Ah me, my poor, dear father!

JENNY

I've dressed the salt and strawed the dining hall
With flowers.

[*Enter FRIAR TUCK with several more FORESTERS
and WILL SCARLET.*]

ROBIN

Ah, good Will Scarlet, here at last!

FRIAR TUCK

We should ha' been here sooner; but these others
Borrowed a farmer's market cart and galloped
Ahead of us!

ROBIN

Thy mother is in the hut,
Sheer broken down with hope and fearfulness,
Waiting and trembling for thee, Will. Go in,
Put thy big arm around her.

[*WILL SCARLET goes into the hut with a cry.*]

SHERWOOD

SCARLET

Mother!

FRIAR TUCK

You see,
My sons, you couldn't expect the lad to run!
There is a certain looseness in the limbs,
A quaking of the flesh that overcomes
The bravest who has felt a hangman's rope
Cuddling his neck.

ROBIN

You judge him by the rope
That cuddles your slim waist! Oh, you sweet arm-
ful,
Sit down and pant! I warrant you were glad
To bear him company.

FRIAR TUCK

I'll not deny it!
I am a man of solids. Like the Church,
I am founded on a rock.

[*He sits down.*]

ROBIN

Solids, i' faith!
Sir, it is true he is partly based on beef;
He grapples with it squarely; but fluids, too,
Have played their part in that cathedral choir

SHERWOOD

He calls his throat. One godless virtue, sir,
They seem to have given him. Never a nightin-
gale

Gurgles jug! jug! in mellow tones than he
When jugs are flowing. Never a thrush can pipe
Sweet, sweet, so rarely as, when a pipe of wine
Summers his throttle, we'll make him sing to us
One of his heathen ditties — *The Malmsey Butt,*
Or *Down the Merry Red Lane!*

FRIAR TUCK

Oh, ay, you laugh,
But, though I cannot run, when I am rested
I'll challenge you, Robin, to a game of buffets,
One fair, square, stand-up, stand-still, knock-down
blow
Apiece; you'll need no more. If you not kiss
The turf, at my first clout, I will forego
Malmsey for ever!

ROBIN

Friar, I recant;
You're champion there. Fists of a common size
I will encounter; but not whirling hams
Like thine!

FRIAR TUCK

I knew it!

SHERWOOD

JENNY

[*Approaching.*]

Please you, sirs, all is ready!

FRIAR TUCK

Ah, Jenny, Jenny, Jenny, that's good news!

[WILL SCARLET *comes out of the hut with his arm round his mother. They all sit down at the table of turfs. Enter SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF timidly.*]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Is there a place for me?

A FORESTER

Ay, come along!

FRIAR TUCK

Now, Robin, don't forget the grace, my son.

ROBIN

[*Standing up.*]

It is our custom, sir, since our repast
Is borrowed from the King, to drain one cup
To him, and his return from the Crusade,
Before we dine. That same wine-bibbing friar
Calls it our 'grace'; and constitutes himself
Remembrancer — without a cause, for never
Have we forgotten, never while bugles ring

SHERWOOD

Thro' Sherwood, shall forget — Outlaws, the
King!

[*All stand up except the knight.*]

CRIES

The King and his return from the Crusade!

[*They drink and resume their seats.*]

ROBIN

You did not drink the health, sir Knight. I hope
You hold with Lion-Heart.

KNIGHT

Yes; I hold with him.

You were too quick for me. I had not drawn
These gauntlets off.

But tell me, Lady Marian,
When is your bridal day with Robin Hood?

MARIAN

We shall be wedded when the King comes home
From the Crusade.

KNIGHT

Ah, when the King comes home!
That's music — all the birds of April sing
In those four words for me — the King comes
home.

SHERWOOD

MARIAN

I am glad you love him, sir.

ROBIN

But you're not eating!
Your helmet's locked and barred! Will you not
raise
Your visor?

KNIGHT

[*Laughs.*]

Ha! ha! ha! You see I am trapped!
I did not wish to raise it! Hunger and thirst
Break down all masks and all disguises, Robin.
[*He rises and removes his helmet, revealing the
face of RICHARD CŒUR DE LION.*]

ROBIN

The King!

[*They all leap to their feet.*]

OUTLAWS

The King! The King!

ROBIN

But oh, my liege,
I should have known, when we were hard beset
Around Will Scarlet by their swarming bands,
And when you rode out of the Eastern sky

SHERWOOD

And hurled our foemen down, I should have known
It was the King come home from the Crusade!
And when I was beset here in the wood
By treacherous hands again, I should have known
Whose armour suddenly burned between the
leaves!

I should have known, either it was St. George
Or else the King come home from the Crusade!

RICHARD

Indeed there is one thing that might have told you,
Robin — a lover's instinct, since it seems
So much for you and Marian depends
On my return.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Sire, you will pardon me,
For I am only a fool, and yet methinks
You know not half the meaning of those words —
The King, the King comes home from the Cru-
sade!

Thrust up your swords, heft uppermost, my lads,
And shout — the King comes home from the Cru-
sade.

*[He leaps on a seat, and thrusts up the King's
sword, heft uppermost, as if it were a cross.]*

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

Pardon him, sire, poor Shadow-of-a-Leaf has lost
His wits!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

That's what Titania said you'd say,
Poor sweet bells out of tune! But oh, don't leave,
Don't leave the forest! There's darker things to
come!

Don't leave the forest! I have wits enough at
least

To wrap my legs around my neck for warmth
On winter nights.

RICHARD

Well, you've no need to pass
The winter in these woods —

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Oh, not *that* winter!

ROBIN

Shadow-of-a-Leaf, be silent!

[SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *goes aside and throws him-
self down sobbing among the ferns.*]

RICHARD

When even your cave
Methinks can scarce be cheery. Huntingdon,
Your earldom we restore to you this day!

SHERWOOD

You and my Lady Marian shall return
To Court with us, where your true bridal troth
Shall be fulfilled with golden marriage bells.
Now, friends, the venison pasty! We must hear
The Malmsey Butt and *Down the Merry Red
Lane*,
Ere we set out, at dawn, for London Town.

ROBIN

Allan-a-dale shall touch a golden string
To speed our feast, sire, for he soars above
The gross needs of the Churchman!

RICHARD

Allan-a-Dale?

WILL SCARLET

Our green-wood minstrel, sire! His harp is ours
Because we won his bride for him.

RICHARD

His bride?

REYNOLD GREEN-LEAF

Was to be wedded, sire, against her will
Last May, to a rich old baron.

RICHARD

Pigeon-pie —

And Malmsey — yes — a rich old baron — tell!

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

Sire, on the wedding day, my merry men
Crowded the aisles with uninvited guests;
And, as the old man drew forth the golden ring,
They threw aside their cloaks with one great shout
Of 'Sherwood'; and, for all its crimson panes,
The church was one wild sea of Lincoln green!
The Forest had broken in, sire, and the bride
Like a wild rose tossing on those green boughs,
Was borne away and wedded here by Tuck
To her true lover; and so — his harp is ours.

ALLAN-A-DALE

No feasting-song, sire, but the royal theme
Of chivalry,— a song I made last night
In yonder ruined chapel. It is called
The Old Knight's Vigil.

RICHARD

Our hearts will keep it young!
[ALLAN-A-DALE *sings*, SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *raises*
his head among the ferns.]

[*Song.*]

I

Once, in this chapel, Lord
Young and undaunted,
Over my virgin sword
Lightly I chaunted,—

SHERWOOD

' Dawn ends my watch. I go
Shining to meet the foe! '

II

' Swift with thy dawn,' I said,
 ' Set the lists ringing!
Soon shall thy foe be sped,
 And the world singing!
Bless my bright plume for me,
Christ, King of Chivalry.'

[SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF rises to his knees amongst
the ferns.]

III

' War-worn I kneel to-night,
 Lord, by Thine altar!
Oh, in to-morrow's fight,
 Let me not falter!
Bless my dark arms for me,
Christ, King of Chivalry.'

IV

' Keep Thou my broken sword
 All the long night through,
While I keep watch and ward!
 Then — the red fight through,
Bless the wrenched haft of me,
Christ, King of Chivalry.'

SHERWOOD

V

' Keep, in thy pierced hands,
Still the bruised helmet:
Let not their hostile hands
Wholly o'erwhelm it!
Bless my poor shield for me,
Christ, King of Chivalry.'

Lynds?

VI

' Keep Thou the sullied mail,
Lord, that I tender
Here, at Thine altar-rail!
Then — let Thy splendour
Touch it once . . . and I go
Stainless to meet the foe.'

[SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *rises to his feet and takes a
step towards the minstrel.*]

[*Curtain.*]

ACT IV

ACT IV.

SCENE I. *Garden of the King's Palace.* *Enter*
JOHN *and* ELINOR.

ELINOR

You will be King the sooner! Not a month
In England, and my good son Lion-Heart
Must wander over-seas again. These two,
Huntingdon and his bride, must bless the star
Of errant knighthood.

JOHN

He stayed just long enough
To let them pass one fearless honeymoon
In the broad sunlight of his royal favour,
Then, like a meteor off goes great King Richard,
And leaves them but the shadow of his name
To shelter them from my revenge. They know
it!

I have seen her shiver like a startled fawn
And draw him closer, damn him, as I passed.

ELINOR

They would have flitted to the woods again
But for my Lord Fitzwalter.

SHERWOOD

JOHN

That old fool
Has wits enough to know I shall be king,
And for his land's sake cheats himself to play
Sir Pandarus of Troy. ' 'Tis wrong, dear daughter,
To think such evil.' Pah, he makes me sick!

ELINOR

Better to laugh. He is useful.

JOHN

If I were king!
If Richard were to perish over-seas!
I'd —

ELINOR

You'd be king the sooner. Never fear:
These wandering meteors flash into their graves
Like lightning, and no thunder follows them
To warn their foolish henchmen.

JOHN

[Looking at her searchingly.]

Shall I risk
The king's return?

ELINOR

What do you mean?

SHERWOOD

JOHN

I mean

I cannot wait and watch this Robin Hood
Dangle the fruit of Tantalus before me,
Then eat it in my sight! I have borne enough!
He gave me like a fairing to my brother
In Sherwood Forest; and I now must watch him,
A happy bridegroom with the happy bride,
Whose lips I meant for mine.

ELINOR

And do you think

I love to see it?

JOHN

Had it not been for you
He would have died ere this!

ELINOR

Then let him die!

JOHN

Oh, ay, but do you mean it, mother?

ELINOR

God,

I hate him, hate him!

SHERWOOD

JOHN

Mother, he goes at noon
To Sherwood forest, with a bag of gold
For some of his old followers. If, by chance
He fall — how saith the Scripture? — among
thieves
And vanish — is not heard of any more,
I think Suspicion scarce could lift her head
Among these roses here to hiss at me,
When Lion-Heart returns.

ELINOR

Vanish?

JOHN

I would not
Kill him too quickly. I would have him taken
To a dungeon that I know.

ELINOR

You have laid your trap
Already? Tell me. You need not be afraid!
I saw them kiss, in the garden, yesternight;
And I have wondered, ever since, if fire
Could make a brand quite hot enough to stamp
My hate upon him.

SHERWOOD

JOHN

Well, then, I will tell you —
The plan is laid; and, if his bag of gold
Rejoice one serf to-day, then I'll resign
Maid Marian to his loving arms for ever.
If not, we dance together at the masque
To-night, and while she wonders at his long
Delay, I'll mould her body and soul to mine.
But you must help me, mother, or she'll suspect.
Do not let slip your mask of friendliness,
As I have feared. Look — there our lovers
 come
Beneath that arch of roses. Look, look, mother,
They are taking leave of one another now,
A ghastly parting, for he will be gone
Well nigh four hours, they think. To look at
 them,
One might suppose they knew it was for ever.

ELINOR

Come, or my hate will show itself in my face:
I must not see them.
[*Exeunt PRINCE and ELINOR. A pause. Enter*
 ROBIN HOOD *and* MARIAN.]

ROBIN

So, good-bye, once more,
Sweetheart.

SHERWOOD

MARIAN

Four hours; how shall I pass the time?
Four hours, four ages, you will scarce be home
By dusk; how shall I pass it?

ROBIN

You've to think
What robe to wear at the great masque to-night
And then to don it. When you've done all that
I shall be home again.

MARIAN

What, not before?

ROBIN

That's not unlikely, either.

MARIAN

Now you mock me,
But you'll be back before the masque begins.

ROBIN

I warrant you I will.

MARIAN

It is a month
To-day since we were married. Did you know it?
Fie, I believe you had forgotten, Robin.

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

I had, almost. If marriage make the moons
Fly, as this month has flown, we shall be old
And grey in our graves before we know it.
I wish that we could chain old Father Time.

MARIAN

And break his glass into ten thousand pieces.

ROBIN

And drown his cruel scythe ten fathom deep,
Under the bright blue sea whence Love was born:

MARIAN

Ah, but we have not parted all this month
More than a garden's breadth, an arrow's flight:
Time will be dead till you come back again.
Four hours of absence make four centuries!
Do you remember how the song goes, Robin,
That bids true lovers not to grieve at parting
Often? for Nature gently severs them thus,
Training them up with kind and tender art,
For the great day when they must part for ever.

ROBIN

Do you believe it, Marian?

MARIAN

No; for love
Buried beneath the dust of life and death,

SHERWOOD

Would wait for centuries of centuries,
Ages of ages, until God remembered,
And, through that perishing cloud-wrack, face
 looked up
Once more to loving face.

ROBIN

 Your hope — and mine!
Is not a man's poor memory, indeed,
A daily resurrection? Your hope — and mine!

MARIAN

And all the world's at heart! I do believe it.

ROBIN

And I — if only that so many souls
Like yours have died believing they should meet
Again, lovers and children, little children!
God will not break that trust. I have found my
 heaven
Again in you; and, though I stumble still,
Your small hand leads me thro' the darkness, up
And onward, to the heights I dared not see,
And dare not even now; but my head bows
Above your face; I see them in your eyes.
Love, point me onward still!

 [*He takes her in his arms.*]

 Good-bye! Good-bye!

SHERWOOD

MARIAN

Come back, come back, before the masque begins!

ROBIN

Ay, or a little later — never fear:
You'll not so easily lose me.

MARIAN

I shall count
The minutes!

ROBIN

Why, you're trembling!

MARIAN

Yes, I am foolish.
This is the first small parting we have had;
But — you'll be back ere dusk?

ROBIN

[*Laughing.*]

Ah, do you think
That chains of steel could hold me, sweet, from
you,
With those two heavenly eyes to call me home,
Those lips to welcome me? Good-bye!

SHERWOOD

MARIAN

Good-bye!

[*He goes hurriedly out. She looks after him for a moment, then suddenly calls.*]

Robin! Ah, well, no matter now — too late!

[*She stands looking after him.*]

SCENE II. *Sherwood Forest: dusk. Outside the cave, as in the second act.* SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF runs quickly across the glade, followed by PUCK.

PUCK

Shadow-of-a-Leaf! Shadow-of-a-Leaf! Shadow-of-a-Leaf!

Don't dance away like that; don't hop; don't skip
Like that, I tell you! I'll never do it again,
I promise. Don't be silly now! Come here;
I want to tell you something. Ah, that's right.
Come, sit down here upon this bank of thyme
'While I thine amiable ears'— Oh, no,
Forgive me, ha! ha! ha!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Now, Master Puck,
You'll kindly keep your word! A foxglove spray
In the right hand is deadlier than the sword
That mortals use, and one resounding thwack

SHERWOOD

Applied to your slim fairyhood's green limbs
Will make it painful, painful, very painful,
Next time your worship wishes to sit down
Cross-legged upon a mushroom.

PUCK

Ha! ha! ha!

Poor Shadow-of-a-Leaf!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

You keep your word, that's all!

PUCK

Haven't I kept my word? Wasn't it I
That made you what these poor, dull mortals call
Crazy? Who crowned you with the cap and
bells?

Who made you such a hopeless, glorious fool
That wise men are afraid of every word
You utter? Wasn't it I that made you free
Of fairyland — that showed you how to pluck
Fern-seed by moonlight, and to walk and talk
Between the lights, with urchins and with elves?
Is there another fool twixt earth and heaven
Like you — ungrateful rogue — answer me that!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

All true, dear gossip, and for saving me
From the poor game of blind man's buff men call

SHERWOOD

Wisdom, I thank you; but to hang and buzz
Like a mad dragon-fly, now on my nose,
Now on my neck, now singing in my ears,
Is that to make me free of fairyland?
No — that's enough to make the poor fool mad
And take to human wisdom.

PUCK

Yet you love me,
Ha! ha! — you love me more than all the rest.
You can't deny it! You can't deny it! Ha! ha!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

I won't deny it, gossip. E'en as I think
There must be something loves us creatures, Puck,
More than the Churchmen say. We are so teased
With thorns, bullied with briars, baffled with stars.
I've lain sometimes and laughed until I cried
To see the round moon rising o'er these trees
With that same foolish face of heavenly mirth
Winking at lovers in the blue-bell glade.

PUCK

Lovers! Ha! ha! I caught a pair of 'em
Last night, behind the ruined chapel! Lovers!
O Lord, these mortals, they'll be the death of me!
Hist, who comes here?

SHERWOOD

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Scarlet and Little John,
And all the merry men — not half so merry
Since Robin went away. He was to come
And judge between the rich and poor to-day.
I think he has forgotten.

PUCK

Hist, let me hide
Behind this hawthorn bush till they are gone.
[*Enter the foresters — they all go into the cave
except SCARLET and LITTLE JOHN, who
stand at the entrance, looking anxiously
back.*]

LITTLE JOHN

I have never known the time when Robin Hood
Said 'I will surely come,' and hath not been
Punctual as yonder evening star.

SCARLET

Pray God
No harm hath fallen him. Indeed he said,
Count on my coming.

LITTLE JOHN

I'll sound yet one more call.
They say these Courts will spoil a forester.
It may be he has missed the way. I'd give

SHERWOOD

My sword-hand just to hear his jolly bugle
Answer me.

[*He blows a forest call. They listen. All is
silent.*]

SCARLET

Silence — only the sough of leaves!

LITTLE JOHN

Well, I'm for sleep: the moon is not so bright
Since Robin left us.

SCARLET

Ha! Shadow-of-a-Leaf, alone?
I thought I heard thy voice.

LITTLE JOHN

Oh, he will talk
With ferns and flowers and whisper to the mice!
Perfectly happy, art thou not, dear fool?

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Perfectly happy since I lost my wits!

SCARLET

Pray that thou never dost regain them, then,
Shadow-of-a-Leaf.

SHERWOOD

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

I thank you kindly, sir,
And pray that you may quickly lose your own,
And so be happy, too. Robin's away,
But, if you'd lost your wits, you would not grieve.

SCARLET

Good night, good fool.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

I will not say ' Good night,'
Wise man, for I am crazed, and so I know
'Tis good, and yet you'll grieve. I wish you both
A bad night that will tease your wits away
And make you happy.

[*The OUTLAWS enter the cave. SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF beckons to PUCK, who steals out again.*]

PUCK

Shadow-of-a-Leaf, some change
Is creeping o'er the forest. I myself
Scarce laugh so much since Robin went away!
Oh, my head hangs as heavily as a violet
Brimmed with the rain. Shadow-of-a-Leaf, a
cloud,
A whisper steals across this listening wood!
I am growing afraid. Dear fool, I am thy Puck,

SHERWOOD

But I am growing afraid there comes an end
To all our Sherwood revels, and I shall never
Tease thee again.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Here comes the King!

[*Enter* OBERON.]

Hail, Oberon.

King of the fairies, I strew ferns before you.
There are no palms here: ferns do just as well!

OBERON

Shadow-of-a-Leaf, our battles all are wasted;
Our fairy dreams whereby we strove to warn
Robin and Marian, wasted. Shadow-of-a-Leaf,
Dear Robin Hood, the lover of the poor,
And kind Maid Marian, our forest queen,
Are in the toils at last!

[*He pauses.*]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Speak, speak!

OBERON

Prince John

Hath trapped and taken Robin.

SHERWOOD

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Is not Richard
King of this England? Did not Richard tempt
Robin, for Marian's sake, to leave the forest?
Did he not swear upon the Holy Cross
That Robin should be Earl of Huntingdon
And hold his lands in safety?

OBERON

Only fear
Of Richard held the wicked Prince in leash.
But Richard roamed abroad again. Prince John
Would murder Robin secretly.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Wise men
Fight too much for these holy sepulchres!
Are not the living images of God
Better than empty graves?

OBERON

One grave is filled
Now; for our fairy couriers have brought
Tidings that Richard Lion-heart is dead.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Dead?

SHERWOOD

OBERON

Dead! In a few brief hours the news will reach
The wicked Prince. He will be King of England,
With Marian in his power!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

No way to save them!

OBERON

We cannot break our fairy vows of silence.
A mortal, Shadow-of-a-Leaf, can break those
vows,
But only on pain of death.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Oberon, I,
Shadow-of-a-Leaf, the fool, must break my vows!
I must save Robin Hood that he may save
Marian from worse than death.

OBERON

Shadow-of-a-Leaf,
Think what death means to you, never to join
Our happy sports again, never to see
The moonlight streaming through these ancient
oaks
Again, never to pass the fairy gates
Again. We cannot help it. They will close
Like iron in your face, and you will hear

SHERWOOD

Our happy songs within; but you will lie
Alone, without, dying, and never a word
To comfort you, no hand to touch your brow.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

So be it. I shall see them entering in!
The time is brief. Quick, tell me, where is
Robin?
Quick, or the news that makes Prince John a king
Will ruin all.

OBERON

Robin is even now
Thrust in the great dark tower beyond the wood,
The topmost cell where foot can never climb.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Cannot an arrow reach it? Ay, be swift;
Come, lead me thither.

OBERON

I cannot disobey
The word that kills the seed to raise the wheat,
The word that — Shadow-of-a-Leaf, I think I
know
Now, why great kings ride out to the Crusade.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Quickly, come, quickly!

SHERWOOD

[*Exeunt* OBERON *and* SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF.
PUCK *remains staring after them, then vanishes with a sob, between the trees.* LITTLE JOHN *and* SCARLET *appear once more at the mouth of the cave.*]

SCARLET

I thought I heard a voice.

LITTLE JOHN

'Twas only Shadow-of-a-Leaf again. He talks
For hours among the ferns, plays with the flowers,
And whispers to the mice, perfectly happy!

SCARLET

I cannot rest for thinking that some harm
Hath chanced to Robin. Call him yet once more.
[LITTLE JOHN *blows his bugle. All is silent.*
They stand listening.]

SCENE III. *A gloomy cell. ROBIN bound.*
PRINCE JOHN *and two mercenaries. A low narrow door in the background, small barred window on the left.*

PRINCE JOHN

[*To the Mercenaries.*]

Leave us a moment. I have private matters

[160]

SHERWOOD

To lay before this friend of all the poor.
You may begin to build the door up now,
So that you do not wall me in with him.

*[The two men begin filling up the doorway with
rude blocks of masonry.]*

So now, my good green foot-pad, you are trapped
At last, trapped in the practice of your trade!
Trapped, as you took your stolen Norman gold
To what was it — a widow, or Saxon serf
With eye put out for breaking forest laws?
You hold with them, it seems. Your dainty soul
Sickens at our gross penalties; and so
We'll not inflict them on your noble self,
Although we have the power. There's not a soul
Can ever tell where Robin Hood is gone.
These walls will never echo it.

[He taps the wall with his sword.]

And yet

There surely must be finer ways to torture
So fine a soul as yours. Was it not you
Who gave me like a fairing to my brother
With lofty condescension in your eyes;
And shall I call my mercenaries in
And bid them burn your eyes out with hot irons?
Richard is gone — he'll never hear of it!
An Earl that plays the robber disappears,
That's all. Most like he died in some low scuffle
Out in the greenwood. I am half inclined

SHERWOOD

To call for red-hot irons after all,
So that your sympathy with Saxon churls
May be more deep, you understand; and then
It would be sweet for you, alone and blind,
To know that you could never in this life
See Marian's face again. But no — that's bad,
Bad art to put hope's eyes out. It destroys
Half a man's fear to rob him of his hope.
No; you shall drink the dregs of it. Hope shall
die

More exquisite a death. Robin, my friend,
You understand that, when I quit your presence,
This bare blank cell becomes your living tomb.
Do you not comprehend? It's none so hard.
The doorway will be built up. There will be
No door, you understand, but just a wall,
Some six feet thick, of solid masonry.
Nobody will disturb you, even to bring
Water or food. You'll starve — see — like a rat,
Bricked up and buried. But you'll have time to
think

Of how I tread a measure at the masque
To-night, with Marian, while her wide eyes
wonder

Where Robin is — and old Fitzwalter smiles
And bids his girl be gracious to the Prince
For his land's sake. Ah, ha! you wince at that!

SHERWOOD

Will you not speak a word before I go?

Speak, damn you!

[*He strikes ROBIN across the face with his glove.*

ROBIN remains silent.]

Six days hence, if you keep watch
At yonder window (you'll be hungry then)
You may catch sight of Marian and Prince John
Wandering into the gardens down below.
You will be hungry then; perhaps you'll strive
To call to us, or stretch a meagre arm
Through those strong bars; but then you know
the height

Is very great — no voice can reach to the earth:
This is the top-most cell in my Dark Tower.
Men look like ants below there. I shall say
To Marian, See that creature waving there
High up above us, level with the clouds,
Is it not like a winter-shrivelled fly?
And she will laugh; and I will pluck her roses.
And then — and then — there are a hundred
ways,

You know, to touch a woman's blood with
thoughts

Beyond its lawful limits. Ha! ha! ha!
By God, you almost spoke to me, I think.
Touches at twilight, whispers in the dark,
Sweet sympathetic murmurs o'er the loss
Of her so thoughtless Robin, do you think

SHERWOOD

Maid Marian will be quite so hard to win
When princes come to woo? There will be none
To interrupt us then. Time will be mine
To practise all the amorous arts of Ovid,
And, at the last —

ROBIN

Will you not free my hands?
You have your sword. But I would like to fight
you
Here, with my naked hands. I want no more.

PRINCE JOHN

Ha! ha! At last the sullen speaks.
That's all
I wanted. I have struck you in the face.
Is't not enough? You can't repay that blow.

ROBIN

Bury me down in hell and I'll repay it
The day you die, across your lying mouth
That spoke of my true lady, I will repay it,
Before the face of God!

PRINCE JOHN

[*Laughing.*]

Meanwhile, for me
Till you repay that blow, there is the mouth
Of Marian, the sweet honey-making mouth

SHERWOOD

That shall forestall your phantom blow with balm.
Oh, you'll go mad too soon if I delay.
I am glad you spoke. Farewell, the masons wait.
And I must not be late for Marian.

[*Exit thro' the small aperture now left in the doorway. It is rapidly closed and sounds of heavy masonry being piled against it are heard. ROBIN tries to free his hands and after an effort, succeeds. He hurls himself against the doorway, and finds it hopeless. He turns to the window, peers through it for a moment, then suddenly unwinds a scarf from his neck, ties it to one of the bars and stands to one side.*]

ROBIN

Too high a shot for most of my good bowmen!
What's that? A miss?

[*He looks thro' the window.*]

Good lad, he'll try again!

[*He stands at the side once more and an arrow comes thro' the window.*]

Why, that's like magic!

[*He pulls up the thread attached to it.*]

Softly, or 'twill break!—

Ah, now 'tis sturdy cord.

— I'll make it fast.

But, how to break these bars!

SHERWOOD

St. Nicholas,
There's someone climbing. He must have a head
Of iron, and the lightness of a cat!
Downward is bad enough, but up is more
Than mortal! Who the devil can it be?
Thank God, it's growing dark. But what a risk!
None of my merry men could e'en attempt it.
I'm very sure it can't be Little John.
What, Shadow-of-a-Leaf!

[SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *appears at the window.*]

'Fore God, dear faithful fool,
I am glad to see you.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Softly, gossip, softly,
Pull up the rope a little until we break
This bar away — or some kind friend may see
The dangling end below. Now here's a tooth-
pick,
Six inches of grey steel, for you to work with,
And here's another for me. Pick out the mortar!

[*They work to loosen the bars.*]

Wait! Here's a rose I brought you in my cap
And here's a spray of fern! Old Nature's keys
Open all prisons, I'll throw them in for luck,
[*He throws them into the cell and begins work-
ing feverishly again.*]

So that the princes of the world may know

SHERWOOD

The forest let you out. Down there on earth,
If any sees me, they will only think
The creepers are in leaf. Pick out the mortar!
That's how the greenwood works. You know,
'twill thrust

Its tendrils through these big grey stones one day
And pull them down. I noticed in the court-yard
The grass is creeping through the crevices
Already, and yellow dandelions crouch
In all the crumbling corners. Pick it out!
This is a very righteous work indeed
For men in Lincoln green; for what are we
But tendrils of old Nature, herald sprays!
We scarce anticipate. Pick the mortar out.
Quick, there's no time to lose, although to-night
We're in advance of sun and moon and stars
And all the trickling sands in Time's turned glass.

[*With a sudden cry.*]

Richard is dead!

ROBIN

Richard is dead! The King
Is dead!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Ah, dead! Come, pick the mortar out,
Out of the walls of towers and shrines and tombs!
For now Prince John is king, and Lady Marian

[167]

SHERWOOD

In peril, gossip! Yet we are in advance
Of sun and moon to-night, for sweet Prince John
Is not aware yet of his kinglihood,
Or of his brother's death.

ROBIN

[*Pausing a moment.*]

Why, Shadow-of-a-Leaf,
What does this mean?

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Come, pick the mortar out;
You have no time to lose. This very night
My Lady Marian must away to Sherwood.
At any moment the dread word may come
That makes John King of England. Quick, be
quick!

ROBIN

She is at the masque to-night!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Then you must mask
And fetch her thence! Ah, ha, the bar works
loose.

Pull it!

[*They pull at the bar, get it free, and throw it
into the cell.*]

Now, master, follow me down the rope.

[*Exit ROBIN thro' the window.*]

SHERWOOD

SCENE IV. *Night. The garden of the King's palace (as before), but lighted with torches for the masque. Music swells up and dies away continually. Maskers pass to and fro between the palace and the garden. On the broad terrace in front some of them are dancing a galliard.*

[PRINCE JOHN *enters and is met by* QUEEN ELINOR, *neither of them masked.*]

ELINOR

All safe?

PRINCE JOHN

Ay, buried and bricked up now, to think Alone, in the black night, of all I told him. Thank God, we have heard the last of Robin Hood.

ELINOR

[*She puts on her mask.*]

You are sure?

PRINCE JOHN

I saw him entombed with my own eyes! Six feet of solid masonry. Look there, There's the young knight you've lately made your own.

SHERWOOD

Where is my Lady Marian? Ah, I see her!
With that old hypocrite, Fitzwalter.

[*They part.* PRINCE JOHN *puts on his mask as
he goes.*]

A LADY

But tell me

Where is Prince John?

A MASKER

That burly-shouldered man
By yonder pillar, talking with old Fitzwalter,
And the masked girl, in green, with red-gold hair,
Is Lady Marian!

THE LADY

Where is Robin Hood?

I have never seen him, but from all one hears
He is a wood-god and a young Apollo,
And a more chaste Actæon all in one.

MASKER

Oh, ay, he never watched Diana bathing,
Or, if he did, all Sherwood winked at it.
Who knows? Do you believe a man and maid
Can sleep out in the woods all night, as these
Have slept a hundred times, and put to shame
Our first poor parents; throw the apple aside

SHERWOOD

And float out of their leafy Paradise
Like angels?

LADY

No; I fear the forest boughs
Could tell sad tales. Oh, I imagine it —
Married to Robin, by a fat hedge-priest
Under an altar of hawthorn, with a choir
Of sparrows, and a spray of cuckoo-spit
For holy water! Oh, the modest chime
Of blue-bells from a fairy belfry, a veil
Of evening mist, a robe of golden hair;
A blade of grass for a ring; a band of thieves
In Lincoln green to witness the sweet bans;
A glowworm for a nuptial taper, a bed
Of rose-leaves, and wild thyme and wood-doves'
down.

Quick! Draw the bridal curtains — three tall
ferns —

Across the cave mouth, lest a star should peep
And make the wild rose leap into her face!
Pish! A sweet maid! But where is Robin
Hood?

MASKER

I know not; but he'd better have a care
Of Mistress Marian. If I know Prince John
He has marked her for his own.

SHERWOOD

LADY

I cannot see

What fascinates him.

MASKER

No, you are right, nor I.

[*They part. An old lady comes up to him.*]

OLD LADY

Is not Maid Marian beautiful? I think
She seems a greenwood spirit that has strayed
By accident into our courtly world.

MASKER

Yes, yes; you are right; she is most beautiful.
But she must have a care of good Prince John.

OLD LADY

Oh, that King Richārd would come home again.

[*They part.*]

PRINCE JOHN

Come, Lady Marian, let me lead you out
To tread a measure.

MARIAN

Pray, sir, pardon me!

I am tired.

[172]

SHERWOOD

FITZWALTER

[Whispering angrily to her.]

Now, Marian, be not so ungracious.
You both abuse him and disparage us.
His courtiers led the ladies they did choose.
Do not displease him, girl. I pray you, go!
Dance out your galliard. God's dear holy-bread,
Y'are too forgetful. Dance, or by my troth,
You'll move my patience. I say you do us wrong.

MARIAN

I will do what you will. Lead, lead your dance.
[Exeunt JOHN and MARIAN.]

FIRST MASKER

[To a lady, as they come up from the garden.]
Will you not let me see your face now, sweet?

LADY

You hurt my lip with that last kiss of yours.
Hush, do not lean your face so close, I pray you;
Loosen my fingers. There's my lord.

FIRST MASKER

Where? Where?
Now, if I know him, I shall know your name!

LADY

That tall man with the damozel in red.

SHERWOOD

FIRST MASKER

Oh, never fear him. He, too, wore a mask!
I saw them —

[*They pass out talking.*]

SECOND MASKER

[*Looking after them.*]

Saw you those two turtle-doves?

SECOND LADY

Yes.

SECOND MASKER

Come with me, I'll show you where I caught them
Among the roses, half an hour ago.

[*They laugh and exeunt into the gardens. The music swells up and more dancers appear.*]

[*Enter ROBIN HOOD, still in his forester's garb, but wearing a mask. He walks as if wounded and in pain. He sits down in the shadow of a pillar watching, and partly concealed from the throng.*]

THIRD LADY

Remember now to say you did not see me
Here at the masque.

THIRD MASKER

Or shall I say that I
Was out in Palestine?

[174]

SHERWOOD

[*They pass. Enter little ARTHUR PLANTAGENET. He comes up to ROBIN HOOD.*]

ARTHUR

Are you not Robin Hood?

ROBIN

Hush, Arthur. Don't you see I wear a mask
Like all the rest to-night?

ARTHUR

Why do they wear
Masks?

ROBIN

They must always wear some sort of mask
At court. Sometimes they wear them all their
lives.

ARTHUR

You are jesting, Robin. Now I wanted you
To tell me tales of Sherwood. Tell me how
You saved Will Scarlet.

ROBIN

Why, I've told you that
A score of times.

ARTHUR

I know, I want to hear it
Again. Well, tell me of that afternoon

[175]

SHERWOOD

When Lion-heart came home from the Crusade.
I have often thought of that. It must have been
Splendid! You weren't expecting it at all?

ROBIN

No, not at all; but, Arthur, tell me first
Have you seen Lady Marian?

ARTHUR

Yes, I saw her
Treading a measure with my Uncle John!

ROBIN

Stand where you are and watch; and, if you see
her,
Beckon her. Then I'll tell you how the King
Came home from the Crusade.

ARTHUR

First, let me tell you
Just how I think it was. It must have been
Like a great picture. All your outlaws there
Sitting around your throne of turf, and you
Judging the rich and poor. That's how it was
Last night, I dreamed of it; and you were taking
The baron's gold and giving it to the halt
And blind; and then there was a great big light
Between the trees, as if a star had come

SHERWOOD

Down to the earth and caught among the boughs,
With beams like big soft swords amongst the ferns
And leaves, and through the light a mighty steed
Stepped, and the King came home from the
Crusade.

Was it like that? Was there a shining light?

ROBIN

I think there must have been, a blinding light.

ARTHUR

Filling an arch of leaves?

ROBIN

Yes!

ARTHUR

That was it!

That's how the King came home from the
Crusade.

ROBIN

But there — you've told the story!

ARTHUR

Ah, not all!

ROBIN

No, not quite all. What's that?

SHERWOOD

[*The music suddenly stops. The maskers crowd together whispering excitedly.*]

ARTHUR

Why have they stopped
The music? Ah, there's Hubert. Shall I ask
him?

ROBIN

Yes, quickly, and come back!
[ARTHUR runs up to a masker. Several go by
hurriedly.]

FIRST MASKER

The King is dead!

SECOND MASKER

Where did it happen? France?

FIRST MASKER

I know not, sir!
[ARTHUR returns.]

ARTHUR

Robin, they say the King is dead! So John
Is king now, is he not?

ROBIN

Ay, John is king!
Now, tell me quickly, use your eyes, my boy,
Where's Lady Marian?

SHERWOOD

ARTHUR

Ah, there she is at last,
Alone!

ROBIN

Go to her quickly, and bring her hither.
[ARTHUR *runs off and returns with* MARIAN.]

MARIAN

Robin, thank God, you have returned. I feared —

ROBIN

No more, dear heart, you must away to Sherwood!
Shadow-of-a-Leaf is waiting by the orchard
With your white palfrey. Away, or the new king
Will hunt us down. I'll try to gain you time.
Go — quickly!

MARIAN

Robin, your face is white, you are wounded!
What's this — there's blood upon your doublet!
Robin!

ROBIN

Nothing! Go, quickly!

MARIAN

Robin, I cannot leave you.

[179]

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

Go, Marian. If you ever loved me, go.

MARIAN

You'll follow?

ROBIN

Oh, with my last breath I will,
God helping me; but I must gain you time!
Quickly! Here comes the King!

MARIAN

Oh, follow soon!

[*Exit.*]

[ROBIN sits down again, steadying himself against
the pillar.]

[JOHN appears at the doors of the palace, above
the terrace, a scroll in his hand.]

JOHN

My friends, the King is dead!

MASKERS

[*Taking off their masks, with a cry.*]

Long live King John!

JOHN

[*Coming down amongst them.*]

Our masque is ended by this grievous news;

[180]

SHERWOOD

But where's my Lady Marian? I had some word
To speak with her! Not here! Why —

ROBIN

*[Still masked, rises and confronts the King, who
stares at him and shrinks back a little.]*

All the masks
Are off, sire! No, perhaps they wear them still.

JOHN

Who is this?

ROBIN

One that was dead and lives. You say
Your brother, the great King, is dead. Oh, sire,
If that be so, you'll hear a dead man speak,
For your dead brother's sake. You say the King
Is dead; but you are king. So the King lives!
You are King of England now from sea to sea,
Is it not so? Shout, maskers, once again,
Long live the King!

MASKERS

Long live the King!

ROBIN

You see
What power is yours! Your smile is life, your
frown

SHERWOOD

Death. At a word from you the solid earth
Would shake with tramp of armies. You can call
Thousands to throw away their lives like straws
Upon your side, if any foreign king
Dare to affront you.

[*He draws nearer to JOHN, who still shrinks a little, as if in fear.*]

Richard, you say, is dead,
And yet, O King, I say that the great King
Lives!

[*He strikes JOHN across the face. JOHN cowers and staggers back. The MASKERS draw their swords, the women scream and rush together. ROBIN turns, sword in hand, to confront the maskers.*]

Back, fools; for I say that the great King
Lives. Do not doubt it. Ye have dreamed him
dead

How often. Hark, God in heaven, ye know that
voice.

[*A voice is heard drawing nearer thro' the distant darkness of the garden, singing. All listen. JOHN'S face whitens.*]

[*Song.*]

Knight, on the narrow way,
Where would'st thou ride?
'Onward,' I heard him say,
'Love, to thy side.'

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

'Tis Blondel! Still vaunt-courier to the King,
As when he burst the bonds of Austria! Listen!

[*Song nearer.*]

'Nay,' sang a bird above,
'Stay, for I see
Death, in the mask of love,
Waiting for thee.'

MASKERS

[*Resuming their masks and muttering to one another.*]

Can the King live? Is this John's treachery?
Look,
He is crushed with fear!

ROBIN

Listen! I'll go to meet him.
[*Exit into the garden.*]

MASKERS

It was the song of Blondel! The same song
He made with Richard, long since! —
Blondel's voice!
Just as we heard it on that summer's night
When Lion-heart came home from the Crusade.

SHERWOOD

[*The Song still drawing nearer.*]

'Death! What is Death?' he cried.

'I must ride on,
On to my true love's side,
Up to her throne!'

[*Enter BLONDEL, from the garden. He stands, startled by the scene before him.*]

MASKERS

Blondel! Where is the King? Where is the
King?

BLONDEL

Did ye not know? — Richard, the King, is dead!

MASKERS

Dead!

JOHN

Dead! And ye let the living dog escape
That dared snarl at our sovereignty. I know
him,

Risen from the dead or not. I know 'twas he,
'Twas Robin Hood! After him; hunt him down.
Let him not live to greet another sun,
After him!

SHERWOOD

MASKERS

*[Drawing their swords and plunging into the
darkness.]*

After him; hunt the villain down!

[Curtain.]

ACT V

ACT V.

SCENE I. *Morning. Sherwood Forest (as before).* LITTLE JOHN and some of the outlaws are gathered together talking. Occasionally they look anxiously toward the cave and at the approaches through the wood.

[*Enter two foresters, running and breathless.*]

FIRST FORESTER

The King's men! They are scouring thro' the wood,

Two troops of them, five hundred men in each
And more are following.

SECOND FORESTER

We must away from here
And quickly.

LITTLE JOHN

Where did you sight them?

SECOND FORESTER

From the old elm,
Our watch-tower. They were not five miles
away!

SHERWOOD

FIRST FORESTER

Five, about five. We saw the sunlight flash
Along, at least, five hundred men at arms;
And, to the north, along another line,
Bigger, I think; but not so near.

SECOND FORESTER

Where's Robin?

We must away at once!

FIRST FORESTER

No time to lose!

LITTLE JOHN

His wound is bitter — I know not if we dare
Move him!

FIRST FORESTER

His wound?

LITTLE JOHN

Ay, some damned arrow pierced him
When he escaped last night from the Dark Tower.
He never spoke of it when first he reached us;
And, suddenly, he swooned. He is asleep
Now. He must not be wakened. They will take
Some time yet ere they thread our forest-maze.



"A HAPPY BRIDEGROOM WITH THE HAPPY BRIDE"—Page 143

SHERWOOD

FIRST FORESTER

Not long, by God, not long. They are moving fast.

[*MARIAN appears at the mouth of the cave. All turn to look at her, expectantly. She seems in distress.*]

MARIAN

He is tossing to and fro. I think his wound Has taken fever! What can we do?

FRIAR TUCK

I've sent
A messenger to Kirklee Priory,
Where my old friend the Prioress hath store
Of balms and simples, and hath often helped
A wounded forester. Could we take him there,
Her skill would quickly heal him.

LITTLE JOHN

The time is pressing!

FRIAR TUCK

The lad will not be long!

[*ROBIN appears tottering and white at the mouth of the cave.*]

SHERWOOD

MARIAN

[*Running to him.*]

O Robin, Robin,
You must not rise! Your wound!

ROBIN

[*He speaks feverishly.*]

Where can I rest
Better than on my greenwood throne of turf?
Friar, I heard them say they had some prisoners.
Bring them before me.

FRIAR TUCK

Master, you are fevered,
And they can wait.

ROBIN

Yes, yes; but there are some
That cannot wait, that die for want of food,
And then — the Norman gold will come too late,
Too late.

LITTLE JOHN

O master, you must rest.
[*Going up to him.*]

MARIAN

Oh, help me,
Help me with him. Help me to lead him back.

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

No! No! You must not touch me! I will rest
When I have seen the prisoners, not before.

LITTLE JOHN

He means it, mistress, better humour him
Or he will break his wound afresh.

MARIAN

O Robin,
Give me your word that you'll go back and rest,
When you have seen them.

ROBIN

Yes, I will try, I will try!
But Oh, the sunlight! Where better, sweet, than
this?

*[She leads him to the throne of turf and he sits
down upon it, with MARIAN at his side.]*

The Friar is right. This life is wine, red wine,
Under the greenwood boughs! Oh, still to keep
it,

One little glen of justice in the midst
Of multitudinous wrong. Who knows? We yet
May leaven the whole world.

*[Enter the outlaws, with several prisoners, among
them, a KNIGHT, an ABBOT, and a FORESTER.]*

These are the prisoners?

You had some victims of the forest laws

SHERWOOD

That came to you for help. Bring them in, too,
And set them over against these lords of the earth!

[*Some ragged women and children appear. Several serfs with iron collars round their necks and their eyes put out, are led gently in.*]

Is that our Lincoln green among the prisoners?
There? One of my own band?

LITTLE JOHN

Ay, more's the pity!
We took him out of pity, and he has wronged
Our honour, Sir; he has wronged a helpless maiden
Entrusted to his guidance thro' the forest.

ROBIN

Ever the same, the danger comes from those
We fight for, those below, not those above!
Which of you will betray me to the King?

THE FORESTER

Do you ask *me*, sir?

ROBIN

Judas answered first,
With 'Master, is it I?' Hang not thy head!
What say'st thou to this charge?

SHERWOOD

THE FORESTER

Why, Friar Tuck
Can answer for me. Do you think he cares
Less for a woman's lips than I?

FRIAR TUCK

Cares less,
Thou rotten radish? Nay, but a vast deal more!
God's three best gifts to man,— woman and song
And wine, what dost *thou* know of all their joy?
Thou lean pick-purse of kisses?

ROBIN

Take him out,
Friar, and let him pack his goods and go,
Whither he will. I trust the knave to thee
And thy good quarter-staff, for some five minutes
Before he says 'farewell.'

FRIAR

Bring him along,
Give him a quarter-staff, I'll thrash him roundly.
[*He goes out. Two of the foresters follow with
the prisoner. Others bring the ABBOT be-
fore ROBIN.*]

ROBIN

Ah! Ha! I know him, the godly usurer
Of York!

SHERWOOD

LITTLE JOHN

We saw a woman beg for alms,
One of the sufferers by the rule which gave
This portly Norman his fat priory
And his abundant lands. We heard him say
That he was helpless, and not one poor coin
To give her, not a scrap of bread! He wears
Purple beneath his cloak: his fine sleek palfrey
Flaunted an Emperor's trappings!

ABBOT

Man, the Church
Must keep her dignity!

ROBIN

[*Pointing to the poor woman, etc.*]

Ay, look at it!
There is your dignity! And you must wear
Silk next your skin to show it. But there was One
You call your Master, and he had not where
To lay his head, save one of these same trees!

ABBOT

Do you blaspheme! I pray you, let me go!
There are grave matters waiting. I am poor!

ROBIN

Look in his purse and see.

[196]

SHERWOOD

ABBOT

[*Hurriedly.*]

I have five marks

In all the world, no more. I'll give them to you!

ROBIN

Look in his purse and see.

[*They pour a heap of gold out of his purse.*]

ROBIN

Five marks, indeed!

Here's, at the least, a hundred marks in gold!

ABBOT

That is my fees, my fees; you must not take them!

ROBIN

The ancient miracle! — five loaves, two small
fishes;

And then — of what remained — they gathered
up

Twelve basketsful!

ABBOT

Oh, you blaspheming villains!

ROBIN

Abbot, I chance to know how this was wrought,
This miracle; wrought with the blood, anguish
and sweat

SHERWOOD

Of toiling peasants, while the cobwebs clustered
Around your lordly cellars of red wine.
Give him his five and let him go.

ABBOT

[*Going out.*]

The King
Shall hear of this! The King will hunt you down!

ROBIN

And now — the next!

SCARLET

Beseech you, sir, to rest,
Your wound will —

ROBIN

No! The next, show me the next!

SCARLET

This Norman baron —

ROBIN

What, another friend!
Another master of broad territories.
How many homes were burned to make you lord
Of half a shire? What hath he in his purse?

SCARLET

Gold and to spare!

SHERWOOD

BARON

To keep up mine estate
I need much more.

ROBIN

[*Pointing to the poor.*]

Ay, you need these! these! these!

BARON

[*Protesting.*]

I am not rich.

ROBIN

Look in his purse and see.

BARON

You dogs, the King shall hear of it!

ROBIN

[*Murmuring as if to himself.*]

Five loaves!

And yet, of what remained, they gathered up
Twelve basketsful. The bread of human kindness
Goes far! Oh, I begin to see new meanings
In that old miracle! How much? How much?

SCARLET

Five hundred marks in gold!

[199]

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

[*Half rising and speaking with a sudden passion.*]

His churls are starving,
Starving! Their little children cry for bread!
One of those jewels on his baldric there
Would feed them all in plenty all their lives!
Five loaves — and yet — and yet — of what re-
mained,
The fragments, mark you, twelve great basketsful!

BARON

I am in a madman's power! The man is mad!

ROBIN

Take all he has, all you can get. To-night,
When all is dark (we must have darkness, mind,
For deeds like this) blind creatures will creep out
With groping hands and gaping mouths, lean arms,
And shrivelled bodies, branded, fettered, lame,
Distorted, horrible; and they will weep
Great tears like gouts of blood upon our feet,
And we shall succour them and make them think
(That's if you have not mangled their poor souls
As well, or burned their children with their
homes),
We'll try to make them think that some few roods
Of earth are not so bitter as hell might be.
Are you not glad to think of this? Nay — go —

SHERWOOD

Or else your face will haunt me when I die!
Take him quickly away. The next! The next!
O God!

[Flings up his arms and falls fainting.]

MARIAN

[Bending over him.]

O Robin! Robin! Help him quickly.
The wound! The wound!

[They gather round ROBIN. The outlaws come back with the captive FORESTER, his pack upon his back.]

FRIAR TUCK

[To the FORESTER.]

Now, get you gone, and quickly!
What, what hath happened?

[FRIAR TUCK and the outlaws join the throng round ROBIN. The FORESTER shakes his fist at them and goes across the glade, muttering. The MESSENGER from Kirklee Priory comes out of the forest at the same moment and speaks to him, not knowing of his dismissal.]

MESSENGER

All's well! Robin can come
To Kirklee. Our old friend the Prioress

SHERWOOD

Is there, and faithful! They've all balms and
simples
To heal a wound.

FORESTER

[*Staring at him.*]
To Kirklee?

MESSENGER

Yes, at sunset,
We'll take him to the borders of the wood
Where he can steal in easily, alone.
All will be safe.

FORESTER

The king's men are at hand!

MESSENGER

Oh, but if we can leave him there, all's safe;
We'll dodge the king's men.

FORESTER

When is he to go?

MESSENGER

Almost at once; but he must not steal in
Till sundown, when the nuns are all in chapel.
How now? What's this? What's this?

[*He goes across to the throng round ROBIN.*]

SHERWOOD

FORESTER

[*Looking after him.*]

Alone, to Kirklee!

[*Exit.*]

SCENE II. *A room in Kirklee Priory. A window on the right overlooks a cloister leading up to the chapel door. The forest is seen in the distance, the sun beginning to set behind it.*

[*The PRIORESS and a NOVICE are sitting in a window-seat engaged in broidery work.*]

NOVICE

He must be a good man — this Robin Hood!
I long to see him. Father used to say
England had known none like him since the days
Of Hereward the Wake.

PRIORESS

He will be here
By vespers. You shall let him in. Who's that?
Can that be he? It is not sundown yet.
See who is there.

[*Exit NOVICE. She returns excitedly.*]

SHERWOOD

NOVICE

A lady asks to see you!
She is robed like any nun and yet she spoke
Like a great lady — one that is used to rule
More than obey; and on her breast I saw
A ruby smouldering like a secret fire
Beneath her cloak. She bade me say she came
On Robin Hood's behest.

PRIORESS

What? Bring her in
Quickly.

[*Exit NOVICE and returns with QUEEN ELINOR
in a nun's garb. At the sign from the PRI-
ORESS the NOVICE retires.*]

ELINOR

Madam, I come to beg a favour.
I am a friend of Robin Hood. I have heard —
One of his Foresters, this very noon
Brought me the news — that he is sorely wounded;
And purposes to seek your kindly help
At Kirklee Priory.

PRIORESS

Oh, then indeed,
You must be a great friend, for this was kept
Most secret from all others.

SHERWOOD

ELINOR

A great friend!

He was my page some fifteen years ago,
And all his life I have watched over him
As if he were my son! I have come to beg
A favour — let me see him when he comes.
My husband was a soldier, and I am skilled
In wounds. In Palestine I saved his life
When every leech despaired of it, a wound
Caused by a poisoned arrow.

PRIORESS

You shall see him.

I have some skill myself in balms and simples,
But, in these deadlier matters I would fain
Trust to your wider knowledge.

ELINOR

Let me see him alone;

Alone, you understand. His mind is fevered.
I have an influence over him. Do not say
That I am here, or aught that will excite him.
Better say nothing — lead him gently in,
And leave him. In my hands he is like a child.

PRIORESS

It shall be done. I see you are subtly versed
In the poor workings of our mortal minds.

SHERWOOD

ELINOR

I learnt much from a wise old Eastern leech
When I was out in Palestine.

PRIORESS

I have heard
They have great powers and magic remedies;
They can restore youth to the withered frame.

ELINOR

There is only one thing that they cannot do.

PRIORESS

And what?

ELINOR

They cannot raise the dead.

PRIORESS

Ah, no;
I am most glad to hear you say it, most glad
To know we think alike. That is most true —
Yes — yes — most true; for God alone, dear
friend,
Can raise the dead!

[*A bell begins tolling slowly.*]

The bell for even-song!
You have not long to wait.

[206]

SHERWOOD

[Shadowy figures of nuns pass the windows and enter the chapel. The sunset deepens.]

Will you not pray

With me?

[The Prioress and Queen Elinor kneel down together before a little shrine. Enter the Novice.]

NOVICE

There is a forester at the door.
Mother, I think 'tis he!

PRIORESS

[Rising.]

Admit him, then.

ELINOR

Leave me; I will keep praying till he comes.

PRIORESS

You are trembling! You are not afraid?

ELINOR

[With eyes closed as in strenuous devotion.]

No; no;

Leave me, I am but praying!

[A chant swells up in the chapel. Exit Prioress.]

ELINOR continues muttering as in prayer.]

SHERWOOD

Afraid — to paint

A picture of agony on a distant face,
To see with every stroke here, the strange lines
Gathering on Marian's face — a little face!
It grows now, grows between me and the sky;
Big as the sky, and I shall watch the lines
Crawl over it, of suffering, torture, horror.

[*Enter ROBIN HOOD, steadying himself on his bow, weak and white. She rises and passes between him and the door to confront him.*]

ELINOR

Ah, Robin, you have come to me at last
For healing. Pretty Marian cannot help you
With all her kisses.

ROBIN HOOD

[*Staring at her wildly.*]

You! I did not know
That you were here. I did not ask your help.
I must go — Marian!

[*He tries to reach the door, but reels in a half faint on the way. ELINOR supports him as he pauses, panting for breath.*]

ELINOR

Robin, your heart is hard,
Both to yourself and me. You cannot go,
Rejecting the small help which I can give

SHERWOOD

As if I were a leper. Ah, come back.
Are you so unforgiving? God forgives!
Did you not see me praying for your sake?
Think, if you think not of yourself, Oh, think
Of Marian — can you leave her clinging arms
Yet, for the cold grave, Robin? I have risked
Much, life itself, to bring you help this day!
I have some skill in wounds.

*[She holds him closer and brings her face near to
his own, looking up into his eyes.]*

Ah, do you know
How slowly, how insidiously this death
Creeps, coil by tightening coil, around a man,
When he is weak as you are? Do you know
How the last subtle coil slips round your throat
And the flat snake-like head lifts up and peers
With cruel eyes of cold, keen inquisition,
Rivetting your own, until the blunt mouth sucks
Your breath out with one long, slow, poisonous
kiss?

ROBIN HOOD

O God, that nightmare! Leave me! Let me go!

ELINOR

You stare at me as if you saw that snake.
Ha! Ha! Your nerves are shaken; you are so
weak!

SHERWOOD

You cannot go! What! Fainting? Ah, rest
here

Upon this couch.

*[She half supports, half thrusts him back to a
couch, in an alcove out of sight and draws
a curtain. There is a knock at the door.]*

ELINOR

Who's there?

PRIORESS

Madam, I came
To know if I could help in anything.

ELINOR

Nothing! His blood runs languidly. It needs
The pricking of a vein to make the heart
Beat, and the sluggish rivers flow. I have brought
A lance for it. I'll let a little blood.
Not over-much; enough, enough to set
The pulses throbbing.

PRIORESS

Maid Marian came with him.
She waits without and asks —

ELINOR

Let her not come
Near him till all is done. Let her not know

SHERWOOD

Anything, or the old fever will awake.

I'll lance his arm now!

[*The PRIORESS closes the door. ELINOR goes into the alcove. The chant from the chapel swells up again. QUEEN ELINOR comes out of the alcove, white and trembling. She speaks in a low whisper as she looks back.*]

Now, trickle down, sweet blood. Grow white,
fond lips

That have kissed Marian — yet, she shall not
boast

You kissed her last; for I will have you wake

To the fierce memory of this kiss in heaven

Or burn with it in hell;

[*She kneels down as if to kiss the face of ROBIN, within. The chant from the chapel swells up more loudly. The door slowly opens. MARIAN steals in. ELINOR rises and confronts her.*]

ELINOR

[*Laying a hand upon ROBIN's bow beside her.*]

Hush! Do not wake him!

MARIAN

[*In a low voice.*]

What have you done with him?

SHERWOOD

ELINOR

[*As MARIAN advances towards the couch.*]

He is asleep.

Hush! Not a step further! Stay where you are!

His life

Hangs on a thread.

MARIAN

Why do you stare upon me?

What have you done? What's this that trickles
down —

[*Stoops to the floor and leaps back with a scream.*]

It is blood! You have killed him!

[*ELINOR seizes the bow and shoots. MARIAN falls.*]

ELINOR

Follow him — down to hell.

King John will find you there.

[*Exit. The scene grows dark.*]

MARIAN

[*Lifts her head with a groan.*]

I am dying, Robin!

O God, I cannot wake him! Robin! Robin!

Give me one word to take into the dark!

SHERWOOD

He will not wake! He will not wake! O God,
Help him!

[*She falls back unconscious. SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF, a green spray in his hand, opens the casement and stands for a moment in the window against the last glow of the sunset, then enters and runs to the side of ROBIN.*]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*Hurriedly.*]

Awake, awake, Robin, awake!

The forest waits to help you! All the leaves
Are listening for your bugle. Ah, where is it?
Let but one echo sound and the wild flowers
Will break thro' these grey walls and the green
sprays

Drag down these deadly towers. Wake, Robin,
wake,

And let the forest drown the priest's grey song
With happy murmurs. Robin, the gates are open

For you and Marian! All I had to give
I have given to thrust them open, the dear gates
Of fairyland which I shall never pass

Again. I can no more, I am but a shadow,
Dying as mortals die! It is not I

That calls, not I, but Marian. Hear her voice!
Robin, awake! Farewell for evermore.

[*Exit lingeringly through the casement.*]

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

[ROBIN is dimly seen in the mouth of the alcove.
He stretches out his hands blindly in the dark.]

Marian! Why do you call to me in dreams?
Why do you call me? I must go. What's this?
Help me, kind God, for I must say one word,
Only one word — good-bye — to Marian,
To Marian — Ah, too weak, too weak!

[*He sees the dark body of MARIAN and utters a cry, falling on his knees beside her.*]

O God,

Marian! Marian!

My bugle! Ah, my bugle!

[*He rises to his feet and, drowning the distant organ-music, he blows a resounding forest-call. It is answered by several in the forest. He falls on his knees by MARIAN and takes her in his arms.*]

O Marian, Marian, who hath used thee so?

MARIAN

Robin, it is my death-wound. Ah, come close.

ROBIN

Marian, Marian, what have they done to thee?
[*The OUTLAWS are heard thundering at the gates with cries.*]

[214]

SHERWOOD

OUTLAWS

Robin! Robin! Robin! Break down the doors.

[*The terrified nuns stream past the window, out of the chapel. The OUTLAWS rush into the room. The scene still darkens.*]

SCARLET

Robin and Marian!

LITTLE JOHN

Christ, what devil's hand
Hath played the butcher here? Quick, hunt them
down,
They passed out yonder. Let them not outlive
Our murdered king and queen.

REYNOLD GREENLEAF

O Robin, Robin,
Who shot this bitter shaft into her breast?
[*Several stoop and kneel by the two lovers.*]

ROBIN HOOD

Speak to me, Marian, speak to me, only speak!
Just one small word, one little loving word
Like those — do you remember? — you have
breathed
So many a time and often, against my cheek,
Under the boughs of Sherwood, in the dark

SHERWOOD

At night, with nothing but the boughs and stars
Between us and the dear God up in heaven!
O God, why does a man's heart take so long
To break? It would break sooner if you spoke
A word to me, a word, one small kind word.

MARIAN

Sweetheart!

ROBIN

Sweetheart! You have broken it, broken it! Oh,
kind,
Kind heart of Marian!

MARIAN

Robin, come soon!

[*Dies.*]

ROBIN

Soon, sweetheart! Oh, her sweet brave soul is
gone!
Marian, I follow quickly!

SCARLET

God, Kirklee

Shall burn for this!

LITTLE JOHN

Kirklee shall burn for this!
O master, master, you shall be avenged!

[216]

SHERWOOD

ROBIN

No; let me stand upright! Your hand, good
Scarlet!

We have lived our life and God be thanked we go
Together thro' this darkness. We shall wake,
Please God, together. It is growing darker!
I cannot see your faces. Give me my bow
Quickly into my hands, for my strength fails
And I must shoot one last shaft on the trail
Of yonder setting sun, never to reach it!
But where this last, last bolt of all my strength,
My hope, my love, shall fall, there bury us both,
Together, and tread the green turf over us!
The bow!

[SCARLET hands him his bow. He stands against
the faint glow of the window, draws the bow
to full length, shoots and falls back into the
arms of LITTLE JOHN.]

LITTLE JOHN

[Laying him down.]

Weep, England, for thine outlawed lover,
Dear Robin Hood, the poor man's friend, is dead.
[The scene becomes quite dark. Then out of the
darkness, and as if at a distance, the voice of
SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF is heard singing the fairy
song of the first scene. The fairy glade in
Sherwood begins to be visible in the gloom

SHERWOOD

by the soft light of the ivory gates which are swinging open once more among the ferns. As the scene grows clearer the song of SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF grows more and more triumphant and is gradually caught up by the chorus of the fairy host within the woods.]

[*Song of SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF.*]

I

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered!
The Forest has conquered!
The world begins again!
And O, the red of the roses,
And the rush of the healing rain!

II

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered!
The Forest has conquered!
The Princess wakes from sleep;
For the soft green keys of the wood-land
Have opened her donjon-keep!

III

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered!
The Forest has conquered!
Their grey walls hemmed us round;
But, under my green-wood oceans,
Their castles are trampled and drowned.

SHERWOOD

IV

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has con-
quered! The Forest has conquered!
My green sprays climbed on high,
And the ivy laid hold on their turrets
And haled them down from the sky!

V

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has con-
quered! The Forest has conquered!
They were strong! They are over-thrown!
For the little soft hands of the wild-flowers
Have broken them, stone by stone.

VI

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has con-
quered! The Forest has conquered!
Though Robin lie dead, lie dead,
And the green turf by Kirklee
Lie light over Marian's head,

VII

Green ferns on the crimson sky-line,
What bugle have you heard?
Was it only the peal of the blue-bells,
Was it only the call of a bird?

SHERWOOD

VIII

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has con-
quered! The Forest has conquered!
The rose o'er the fortalice floats!
My nightingales chant in their chapels,
My lilies have bridged their moats!

IX

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has con-
quered! The Forest has conquered!
King Death, in the light of the sun,
Shrinks like an elfin shadow!
His reign is over and done!

X

The hawthorn whitens the wood-land;
My lovers, awake, awake,
Shake off the grass-green coverlet,
Glide, bare-foot, thro' the brake!

XI

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has con-
quered! The Forest has conquered!
And, under the great green boughs,
I have found out a place for my lovers,
I have built them a beautiful house.

SHERWOOD

XII

Green ferns in the dawn-red dew-fall,
This gift by my death I give,—
They shall wander immortal thro' Sherwood!
In my great green house they shall live!

XIII

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has con-
quered! The Forest has conquered!
When the first wind blows from the South,
They shall meet by the Gates of Faërie!
She shall set her mouth to his mouth!

XIV

He shall gather her, fold her and keep her;
They shall pass thro' the Gates, they shall
live!
For the Forest, the Forest has conquered!
This gift by my death I give!

XV

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has con-
quered! The Forest has conquered!
The world awakes anew;
And O, the scent of the hawthorn,
And the drip of the healing dew!
[*The song ceases. TITANIA and OBERON come
out into the moon-lit glade.*]

SHERWOOD

OBERON

Yet one night more the gates of fairyland
Are opened by a mortal's kindly deed.
But Robin Hood and Marian now are driven
As we shall soon be driven, from the world
Of cruel mortals.

TITANIA

Mortals call them dead;
Oberon, what is death?

OBERON

Only a sleep.
But these may dream their happy dreams in death
Before they wake to that new lovely life
Beyond the shadows; for poor Shadow-of-a-Leaf
Has given them this by love's eternal law
Of sacrifice, and they shall enter in
To dream their lover's dream in fairyland.

TITANIA

And Shadow-of-a-Leaf?

OBERON

He cannot enter now.
The gates are closed against him.

TITANIA

But is this
For ever?



“HE CANNOT ENTER NOW.
THE GATES ARE CLOSED AGAINST HIM”—Page 222

SHERWOOD

OBERON

We fairies have not known or heard
What waits for those who, like this wandering
Fool,
Throw all away for love. But I have heard
There is a great King, out beyond the world,
Not Richard, who is dead, nor yet King John;
But a great King who one day will come home
Clothed with the clouds of heaven from His Cru-
sade.

TITANIA

The great King!

OBERON

Hush, the poor dark mortals come!
[*The crowd of serfs, old men, poor women, the
children, begin to enter as the fairy song
swells up within the gates again. ROBIN
and MARIAN are led along by a crowd of
fairies at the end of the procession.*]

TITANIA

And there, see, there come Robin and his bride.
And the fairies lead them on, strewing their path
With ferns and moon-flowers. See, they have en-
tered in!

[*The last fairy vanishes thro' the gates.*]

SHERWOOD

OBERON

And we must follow, for the gates may close
For ever now. Hundreds of years may pass
Before another mortal gives his life
To help the poor and needy.

[OBERON *and* TITANIA *follow hand in hand thro' the gates. They begin to close. SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF steals wistfully and hesitatingly across, as if to enter. They close in his face. He goes up to them and leans against them sobbing, a small green figure, looking like a greenwood spray against their soft ivory glow. The fairy music dies. He sinks to his knees and holds up his hands. Immediately a voice is heard singing and drawing nearer thro' the forest.*]

[*Song — drawing nearer.*]

Knight on the narrow way,
Where wouldst thou ride?
'Onward,' I heard him say,
'Love, to thy side!'

'Nay,' sang a bird above,
'Stay, for I see
Death in the mask of love
Waiting for thee.'

SHERWOOD

[Enter BLONDEL, leading a great white steed.
He stops and looks at the kneeling figure.]

BLONDEL

Shadow-of-a-Leaf!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[Rising to his feet.]

Blondel!

BLONDEL

I go to seek

My King!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[In passionate grief.]

The king is dead!

BLONDEL

[In yet more passionate joy and triumph.]

The great King lives!

[Then more tenderly.]

Will you not come and look for Him with me?

[They go slowly together through the forest and
are lost to sight. BLONDEL'S voice is heard
singing the third stanza of the song in the
distance, further and further away.]

'Death? What is Death?' he cried, etc.

I must ride on!'

[Curtain.]





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Noyes, Alfred
Sherwood

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