

ROBYN HOOD AND HER MERRY WOMEN

By Celeste Bonfanti

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SYNOPSIS: In this fast-paced and funny one-act, we meet the thoroughly modern Lady Robyn of Locksley—the infamous Robyn Hood—and her merry band of women: Little Jane, Sister Tuck and the like. Nothing the evil Sheriff of Nottingham can do seems to dissuade Robyn and the gang from their own particular brand of justice, the redistribution of wealth in favor of the poor and downtrodden at the expense of the rich and powerful. With the help of Robyn’s charming love interest, Master Marvin, audiences will delight in watching the Sheriff get his just deserts. There is plenty of direct interaction with the audience and endless opportunity for flexible casting in this 21st-century feminist update of the classic legend.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(3 females, 2 males, 2-4 either, 3-20+ extras;
doubling possible, gender flexible)*

ROBYN HOOD (f)	Fearless leader of a Merry Band of Thieves in Sherwood Forest. (79 lines)
SHERIFF OF NOTTINGHAM (m).....	Enforcer of the King’s law and Robyn’s nemesis. (35 lines)
MARVIN (m).....	A somewhat nervous young man. (27 lines)
LITTLE JANE (f)	A traveling fighter. (30 lines)
SISTER TUCK (f)	A nun living in Sherwood Forest. (35 lines)
NARRATORS (m/f)	Tellers of the tale. <i>NOTE: The dialogue for the NARRATORS was purposely written in chunks to enable each company to cast as many or as few NARRATORS as desired.</i> (51 lines)
THE MERRY WOMEN (f)	Members of Robyn’s band of thieves. (<i>Ad lib only</i>)

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This play allows for flexible casting. There may be any number of Narrators and Merry Women, and ad lib is encouraged. Narrators may be either male or female.

The simpler the staging, the better. The play can be easily performed without a set of any kind.

COSTUMES

Robyn, Little Jane and the Merry Women should be costumed in loose tunics allowing for easy movement, tights and boots. Some Merry Women may be noticeably poor and possibly barefoot.

The Sheriff's costume should be more formal: doublet with a gold chain of state, tights, boots and a plumed hat.

Master Marvin, too, should be dressed a cut above the women, in a doublet, tights, boots and a velvet hat.

Sister Tuck's costume can consist of anything from a formal nun's habit to a simple black belted robe and veil. She must have a gold or silver cross or crucifix, and preferably have a rosary attached to her belt.

PROPS

- 3 Money Pouches
- 2 Staves
- Scroll

PRODUCTION HISTORY

ROBYN HOOD AND HER MERRY WOMEN was written for and first performed by the **Live Wire Youth Theatre** in Kendal, Cumbria, England with the following cast:

NARRATORS Amy Williams, Madeleine Johnson and Karen Berry
 ROBYN HOODElva Robinson
 SHERIFF OF NOTTINGHAM.....Jed Reading
 MASTER MARVIN Neil McGovern
 LITTLE JANEAnna Macbeth
 SISTER TUCKCatherine Heffernan

This play is dedicated to the matchless
Lady Antonia Fraser,
whose version of the Robin Hood legend I hereby lovingly spoof
and to
Deb Chapman
whose desperate quest for ways to amuse her charges while nannying
gave rise to the concept of a female Robin Hood.

AT RISE: *CURTAIN RISES on Sherwood Forest. Enter NARRATORS.*

NARRATORS: Greetings, good people. How are you this fine day? *(Pause for response.)* It is our happy duty to spend but a short time with you now to, as it were, set the record straight.

You may have noticed an unusual quirk in the title of the piece we now present...

(ALL NARRATORS.) Robyn Hood and Her Merry Women.

Have any perceptive folk out there noticed it? *(Pause for response.)*

Correct! Now, we all know you've had more versions of the Robin Hood legends than you've had hot dinners. Every time you turn around, there seems to be another. *(Other NARRATORS turn around)* If they're not leaping off the library shelves at you, then they're flashing from the TV or the movie screen.

Well, let us say without further ado that OUR version is the TRUE one.

Let there be no mistake about that.

Over a thousand years or so, plenty of details seem to have gone down the drain. And it's a devil of a job to fight the propaganda.

Now... we know that it may be difficult for you to accept some of the lesser-known elements of our tale. But we remain confident that open-minded, free-thinking people such as yourselves are more than up to it.

Enter ROBYN, impatient.

ROBYN: All right, all right, enough of the chin wagging! Let's get on with it, for heaven's sake! Do you want to keep them here all day/night?

NARRATORS: Sorry. Ahem! Ladies and gentlemen, without further ado, may we present to you...Lady Robyn of Locksley!

ROBYN: Oh, no! We'll have none of that "lady" jazz here! You're in *my* territory now, the Forest of Sherwood. *I* make the rules here, and Rule Number Six clearly states that we operate on a strictly first name basis. (*To audience.*) Hello and welcome, one and all. I'm Robyn. Spelled with a "y," I needn't remind you. (*Shouts offstage.*) Hey! Merry women! Come on out and meet the people who are paying your wages today!

Enter MERRY WOMEN, from various directions.

NARRATORS: The members of Robyn's merry band have been making their home in the Forest of Sherwood for quite some time now.

And, as you may have noticed, they're all ladies.

ROBYN AND WOMEN: *Women!*

NARRATORS: Sorry. I keep forgetting.

ROBYN: "Ladies" wear tall, pointy hats with gauzy bits floating off the ends, and they're constantly getting into trouble with fire-breathing dragons or wicked wizards and expecting some poor schmuck of a knight to go tearing off into the sunset to save them. (*Agreement from WOMEN.*) We have no room for such pathetic creatures here! (*Agreement.*) Why, there's not a woman in this band who has so much as seen a tall, pointy hat in nine...ten months now! (*Agreement.*) And as for dragons...I only wish a nice, fat one would make an appearance in this part of Sherwood. A diet of the king's deer and wild boar is all right as far as it goes, but variety, as they say, is the spice of life!

Agreement and cheers.

NARRATORS: I have a wonderful recipe for roast dragon over wild rice. I really must give it to you sometime.

As you see, the merry band is composed entirely of, ah... *WOMEN*. Very few gentlemen are ever seen in Sherwood.

ROBYN: Gentlemen! Fie! A worthless breed. Always putting on airs and acting as if they own the place. Well, wealth doesn't mean *this much* to me! (*Snaps fingers.*) As far as I can see, money always seems to find its way into the wrong hands. Namely, gentlemen's hands. And a more dishonest and shady bunch you're not likely to find in a hundred years! (*Agreement.*)

NARRATORS: In fact, as I recall, only two gentlemen even make an appearance in our tale.

And one, we hesitate to mention.

You must mean....

Enter SHERIFF OF NOTTINGHAM.

SHERIFF: The Sheriff of Nottingham at your service, you miserable thief!

WOMEN incite the audience to boo him as NARRATORS fade upstage.

ROBYN: Watch your tongue, you pompous fool. You have no evidence against me or my women.

SHERIFF: "Women"! Ha! A woman's place is in the home!

Laughter from WOMEN.

ROBYN: If for no other reason than to save the gentlemen from poisoning themselves on undercooked meat or drowning themselves in good ale. You chauvinistic porker! If you have anything important to say, let's have it.

SHERIFF: I do indeed have something important to say. The list of charges against you, Robyn Hood, is as long as my arm.

ROBYN: You mean nearly as long as your nose!

Laughter from WOMEN.

SHERIFF: Enough! There are no less than sixteen counts of poaching the king's wild game here in Sherwood! Sixteen!

ROBYN: Nonsense!

SHERIFF: Don't try my patience! Everyone knows you live in the forest. What, pray tell, do you live on?

ROBYN: Why, my dear sheriff! We're strict vegetarians! We wouldn't dream of touching a thick, juicy venison steak, or a tender haunch of roast boar, or a few fat rabbits, or....

SHERIFF: Liar! Thief and liar! You hunt this forest to feed your band of renegades! The king shall hear of this when he returns to England!

ROBYN: I, too, will have a few tales for our good king, Sheriff! I think His Grace would be very interested to know what passes for justice in these parts. *(Agreement.)*

SHERIFF: And what is *that* supposed to mean?

ROBYN: You know precisely what it means. Driving poor, starving people to steal in order to stay alive, filling the prisons with good folk whose only crime is trying to feed their families...! *(Agreement.)*

SHERIFF: And I suppose you consider yourself one of these poor, starving unfortunates?

ROBYN: Not !! You know well that I was nobly born. Yes, some of these women *(Indicates WOMEN.)* were driven into the forest by desperate poverty. But not I. I simply see for myself that the people need someone to look after them. *(Agreement.)*

SHERIFF: "Someone to look after them"! Ha! Is that what you call these antics? The list of charges against you does not end with poaching, Robyn. You are also charged with a dozen counts of robbery!

ROBYN: Robbery? That's a sheriff's word! I prefer to think of it as...a redistribution of wealth.

SHERIFF: Redistribution...?

ROBYN: Yes! The wealthy do not *deserve* their ill-gotten gains. The hard-working poor *do*. I see to it that the money finds its way into the right hands, that's all. (*Agreement.*)

SHERIFF: Well, I doubt that His Grace the King will see things in such a light. Thieving is thieving. It's that simple. And everyone knows you are to blame for the many robberies which have taken place in these parts.

ROBYN: Well, Sheriff...where's your proof?

SHERIFF: *Proof?* I'm the Sheriff of *Nottingham*, you silly wench! I don't need *proof!* (*He is instantly surrounded by WOMEN.*) Ahem! Don't you try to threaten me, you vagabonds! Go home to your husbands! (*WOMEN jeer and push SHERIFF around.*) Unhand me! Hooligans!

ROBYN: (*Laughs.*) What was that about not needing proof?

SHERIFF: Enough!

ROBYN: Look, Sheriff. I don't think you're in a very strong position here. All in all, I think the best thing you can do is to get a move on back to Nottingham. Don't you?

SHERIFF: I will decide when it's time to...!

ROBYN: And, um...since we wouldn't want you to be over-burdened on your journey...how about handing over your gold, hmmm?

SHERIFF: Handing over my gold...! Are you mad?

ROBYN: Not last time I checked.

SHERIFF: You can't rob me!

ROBYN: Why not?

SHERIFF: *I'm the Sheriff of Nottingham!*

ROBYN: So you are. And as you have observed, I am an *outlaw*. So are *they*. (*Indicating WOMEN. Agreement.*) And it looks as if you're pretty well outnumbered. Wouldn't you agree? (*Agreement from WOMEN.*) So, what do you say? The gold...?

SHERIFF: (*After a pause, furiously produces money pouch.*) Well, I'll let you go with a warning this last time. (*Jeers from WOMEN.*)

ROBYN: My, that's big of you.

SHERIFF: But I will have my day! And when I do, Sherwood Forest will be free at last from your marauding band! Mark me! (*Tosses pouch to ROBYN.*) You won't get away with this, Robyn Hood!

WOMEN jeer and bully him as SHERIFF exits. WOMEN crouch at one side as NARRATORS move downstage.

NARRATORS: *(Laugh.)* Well! Looks like you've bested the Sheriff of Nottingham yet again, Robyn!

Yes. How many "last warnings" do you make this?

Oh, around about thirty, I should think! *(All laugh.)*

So much for the first gentleman we tend to see in these parts. What about the other one?

ROBYN: Ah, well...he's a different kettle of fish! You must mean... *(Enter MARVIN, without seeing others.)* ...Master Marvin.

NARRATORS: How did you meet him, Robyn?

ROBYN: *(Laughs.)* It was rather unfortunate, actually. I mean, look at him. Adorable, yes. But he looks just like all the other gentlemen we pester and rob. How was I to know he'd be any different?

WOMEN spring forward, yelling and seizing MARVIN. NARRATORS move back upstage.

MARVIN: Help! Help! Thieves! Vagabonds! Outlaws! *(Looks at them.)*
Ladies???

WOMEN: *Women!!!*

MARVIN: Sorry!

WOMEN yell and push him around.

ROBYN: What have we here, what have we here? *(All talk at once.)*
Quiet. *(Looks MARVIN up and down appreciatively as WOMEN make way for her.)* Well, well, well.... And who might you be?

MARVIN: I am Master Marvin. Who are you?

ROBYN: Oh, surely you must know! To hear the Sheriff of Nottingham talk, one would think our fame had spread to the ends of the earth!

MARVIN: Are you...are you Lady Robyn of Locksley?

ROBYN: No. I'm plain old Robyn Hood. With a "y," please, always with a "y."

MARVIN: A pleasure to meet you. (*Prepares to kiss her hand.*)

ROBYN: The pleasure's all mine. (*Pumps his hand hard, causing him to shake the feeling back into it.*) So, what brings you to Sherwood? Don't you know it's dangerous?

MARVIN: Of course I do. I might be beset by a band of thieves. (*Smiles.*)

ROBYN: You're not afraid?

MARVIN: Well, yes. A little. But now I've met you...I just find it so fascinating that you live this way.

ROBYN: (*Defensive.*) Why? Because I'm a woman? Because I should be home tending the fire and minding the children and baking stupid cakes?

MARVIN: No. Because I admire you.

ROBYN: ...What...?

MARVIN: I admire you. You have the courage to live the way I'd like to.

ROBYN: Are you pulling my leg?

MARVIN: No, of course not. Everyone knows the people are suffering with His Grace the King fighting overseas. You and your band do something about it. And you must know, the Sheriff of Nottingham is fit to be tied. (*Grumbles from WOMEN.*) He says he'll see you hang, even if you are a la... a woman.

ROBYN: I'm not afraid of that old windbag.

MARVIN: Perhaps you should be. That old windbag is planning to trap you, Robyn.

ROBYN: Not the old let's-have-an-archery-contest-to-lure-Robyn-to-Nottingham-trick again...?

MARVIN: (*Amazed.*) Well...yes....

ROBYN: (*To WOMEN.*) Do you believe this...? (*Jeers from WOMEN.*) He must think I was born yesterday. (*To MARVIN.*) Don't you worry your pretty little head about me, Marvin. I know how the sheriff's weasely little mind works. And I have no intention of showing off for his amusement. I'm perfectly happy here in Sherwood.

MARVIN: You must be.

ROBYN: Look, Marvin. You look pretty wealthy. Care to make a contribution to the S.F.W.R.F.?

MARVIN: Uh...what's the S.F.W.R.F.?

ROBYN: The Sherwood Forest Wealth Redistribution Fund.

MARVIN: (*Laughs and hands her his money pouch.*) Oh! Sure! See that it goes to a worthy cause.

ROBYN: Oh, it will. Say, you're a decent guy. How about giving up this gentleman jazz and joining the band? It might be kind of fun having a guy around. You can do the mending and the washing up. (*Agreement.*)

MARVIN: Robyn, I would love nothing better than to join your band. But...I cannot. (*All protest.*) No. Sleeping on the ground night after night, fighting off the wolves and living off the land requires great bravery...nerves of steel...a quick wit.... I don't bring anything useful to your merry band.

ROBYN: Nonsense! Can you cook?

MARVIN: Alas, no.

ROBYN: Can you sew?

MARVIN: Alas, no.

ROBYN: Well...can you kiss?

MARVIN: Pardon...?

ROBYN kisses him as WOMEN howl with mirth.

ROBYN: Not bad! (*More howls from WOMEN as MARVIN recovers from his shock.*) Are you sure you won't join us?

MARVIN: Robyn, I may be of more use to you in Nottingham. I can keep an eye on the sheriff for you and let you know when he's plotting trouble.

ROBYN: Good thinking, Marvin. You're all right...for a guy. (*WOMEN agree.*) And thanks for your donation. I've got my eye on a widow and her children. Christmas just may come early for them this year. (*Tosses MARVIN's pouch and catches it again.*)

MARVIN: Goodbye, Robyn! Be careful!

ROBYN: Oh, don't worry about *me*. *You're* the one who needs to be careful. You never know where thieves and brigands might be lurking.

WOMEN laugh. ROBYN kisses MARVIN again to more howls and he exits, grinning. NARRATORS move back downstage.

NARRATORS: A nice fellow, Master Marvin.

ROBYN: The best.

NARRATORS: A pity he won't join the band.

ROBYN: Well, you know what men are like. They get used to the little comforts: feather beds, regular meals, that kind of thing. It's not for nothing that we call them the weaker sex. (*Agreement.*)

NARRATORS: Robyn.... How about telling us about a few of your merry women?

Yes. How did they end up joining the band?

WOMEN gather at the side. As ROBYN talks the NARRATORS join them.

ROBYN: Very well...as you know, I'm a regular whiz with a stout staff. (*One woman throws her a staff.*) A handy piece of wood can save your neck, if you know how to use it properly. And wood is one thing we have plenty of in Sherwood. (*Agreement.*) Well, one day we were, you know, making merry, skinning rabbits and plucking pheasants, etc. etc....and along came the most amazing woman. (*Enter LITTLE JANE with staff.*) Hey! You there!

LITTLE JANE: (*Looks over both shoulders, then at ROBYN.*) Who...me...?

ROBYN: No, the rooster beside you. Of course, you, who do you think?

LITTLE JANE: There's no need for that.

ROBYN: I'll speak as I like. What's your business in Sherwood?

LITTLE JANE: Who wants to know?

ROBYN: Who wants to...? *Answer!*

LITTLE JANE: Well, what's it to do with you?

ROBYN: *Everything* in Sherwood concerns me, my fine friend!

LITTLE JANE: All right, then. At the moment, I'm wondering whether or not to give you a clout, actually.

ROBYN: (*Laughs with WOMEN.*) Oh, that's rich! *You give me* a clout! *Me*, the ruler of Sherwood Forest! Well, come on, then! Let's see how you fare!

LITTLE JANE: All right, you little show off! (*Gasps from WOMEN.*) Are you ready?

ROBYN: I was *born* ready!

WOMEN cheer ROBYN on as she and LITTLE JANE fight with their staves. A pause.

LITTLE JANE: Not bad, am I?

ROBYN: Get ready to eat your words, stranger!

They fight. A pause.

LITTLE JANE: Had enough?

ROBYN: No chance!

They fight. A pause.

LITTLE JANE: Get ready—here it comes!

ROBYN: Here what comes?

LITTLE JANE: This!

She defeats ROBYN, knocking her to the ground. WOMEN gasp.

ROBYN: *(Picks herself up.)* You are a fighter after my own heart, my girl! Welcome to Sherwood! *(Clasps LITTLE JANE's forearm.)*

LITTLE JANE: As we're friends, perhaps you can tell me.... Where might I find the famous Robyn Hood everyone is talking about? I'd like to meet her. *(WOMEN laugh.)* What's so funny?

ROBYN: Oh, nothing.... It's just that you don't have far to look! *(WOMEN laugh.)*

LITTLE JANE: You don't mean.... *You are Robyn Hood...?*

ROBYN: None other.

LITTLE JANE: But I thought she'd be an old woman by now! *You* robbed the Sheriff of Nottingham? *You* rob from the rich and give to the poor and so on?

ROBYN: Why is that so hard to believe?

LITTLE JANE: Well, your fame has spread to the ends of the earth! *(WOMEN nudge each other and murmur in admiration.)* I've never met a living *legend* before.

ROBYN: Well, there's a first time for everything. What do they call *you*?

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