Robin Hood and Little John

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When Robin Hood was twenty years old
He happened to meet Little John,
A young brisk blade right fit for the trade,
For he was a lusty young man.

Well, how they did meet, I'll tell you in brief,
If you'll but listen a while,
For this very jest amongst all the rest
I think it may cause you to smile.

Bold Robin Hood said to his jolly men,
"Pray tarry you here in this grove
And see that you all observe well me call
While through the forest I rove.

Then he shook hands with his merry men all
And bid them at present goodbye,
Then, as near a brook his journey he took,
A stranger he chanced to espy.

They happened to meet on a long narrow bridge
And neither of them would give way.
Said bold Robin Hood and sturdily stood,
"I'll show you right Nottingham play."

"You speak like a coward," the stranger he said,
"As there with your long bow you stand.
How, I protest, could you shoot at me breast
While I have but a staff in me hand."

"The name of a coward," said Robin, "I scorn."
And found him a staff of green oak.
This being done, away he did run
To the stranger and merrily spoke.

"Ah, just see me staff it's lusty and tough,
Now here on the bridge we will play.
Whoever falls in the other shall win
The battle and then we'll away."

Now Robin, he gave the stranger a bang

So hard it made his bones ring.
The stranger he said, "this must be repaid;
I'll give you as good as you bring."

The stranger gave Robin a crack on the crown
Which caused the blood to appear.
Then Robin, enraged, more fiercely engaged
And followed with blows more severe.

O then, in a fury the stranger he flew,
Gave Robin a damnable look
And with a bold blow that laid him full low
He tumbled him into the brook.

"O, where have you gone and where are you now?"
The stranger he laughed and he cried.
Quoth bold Robin Hood, "I'm here in the flood
And I'm floating along in the tide."

Then Robin he waded all out of the deep
And pulled himself up by a thorn
And just at the last he blew a loud blast
Straightway on his bugle horn.

The hills they did echo, the valleys did ring
Which caused his brave men to appear
All dressed in the green so bold to be seen
Straight up to their master did steer.

"There's no one will harm thee. Be not afraid,
These bowman upon me do wait.
There's three score and nine and if you'll be mine
My livery you can wear right straight-"

"O, here is my hand," the stranger replied,
"I'll serve you with all of my heart
My name is John Little, a man of good mettle
Ne'er doubt me, I'll play out my part."

"This man's been called John Little," said Robin
"His name shall be changed anon.
The words we'll transpose so wherever he goes
His name shall be called Little John."

A brace of fat deer was quickly brought in,
Good ale and strong liquor likewise;
The feast was so good in all the greenwood
Where this seven foot babe was baptised.

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Then music and dancing did finish that day
At length when the sun waxed low,
Then all the whole from they withdrew
And into their caves they did go.

Child #125
from Bonnie Bunch of Roses
ballad from before 1509, perhaps 1300.
tune given in Bonnie Bunch or Roses collected by Ewan MacColl
from Hughie Graham of Galloway
SOF

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