

NO LAUGHING MATTER

Ian Butters 2020

As I thumb back through the pages to those early schoolboy stages.
To those fun filled days of carefree youth I think of now and then.
With the final school bell sounding, I'd be through the gate and bounding
to the leafy bushland near my home with Robin's merry men.

For I knew they were depending on my will to keep defending
this green patch of Sherwood Forest with its rippling little creek;
where the Sheriff's men raised taxes with their swords and battle axes
from the gentle folk of Nottingham, the destitute and weak.

And so, it was that fateful day as I raced home from school to play
my role in Sherwood Forest at the bottom of my street.
For I know the Sheriff's men would strive to capture Robin Hood alive
and it was my clear duty to defend his green retreat.

So, I had very carefully laid a bow and arrow that I'd made
from privet branches tightly strung with dark brown kitchen string.
High in a tree above the trail which led to Sherwood's Holy Grail
all ready to defend the realm of Richard – England's king.

And as I perched high in my tree, the bow and arrow on my knee,
whilst listening for the tell tale beat of hoof beats from the south,
a kookaburra bashed its beak against a branch above the creek
to kill the lizard it had caught still wriggling in its mouth.

Then somehow, though my memory's blurred – I still don't know how it occurred
I fantasised this jackass was the evil Sheriff's spy.
And it was clearly up to me, as Robin's trusted deputy,
to guard the forest glades and bid this wicked bird goodbye.

With that I aimed my arrow right to give this snooping bird a fright
expecting it would flee the bush and head back whence it came.
But to my horror and dismay my arrow flight had gone astray
and sadly, while I'd no intent – there's no one else to blame.

The bird was struck below the beak and fell down limply in the creek
where it lay spent and motionless and snagged among the reeds.
And sobbing I climbed from my tree and knelt down slowly on one knee
for what I'd done was shameful – just the worst of evil deeds.

For I lived at Turramurra where the laughing kookaburra
announced with cackles of delight that dawn was on its way.
And the Gould League of Bird Lovers cared for all birds, even plovers,
and I'd joined the League with my classmates at school that very day.

Now I felt my world had ended and I'd surely be suspended.

It was likely that my classmates would not speak to me again.
For my foolish indiscretion needed full and frank confession
if I'd ever be forgiven for the bird that I had slain.

Then kneeling down in sorrow with my fears about tomorrow,
and wondering how I'd face the world and bear this sin of mine,
there came a little splutter and a splashing and a flutter.
The kookaburra in the creek was sending me a sign.

And as I stared in disbelief through tearful eyes, red rimmed with grief,
the kookaburra flapped its wings and slowly rose on high.
I felt as if I'd been reborn – no longer would I need to mourn.
My prayers had all be answered by St Francis in the Sky.

And so, I stumbled slowly home, a contrite figure all alone.
I knew my days with Robin Hood were well and truly gone.
I'd fill my afternoons till dark by playing cricket in the park,
for Robin could replace me with his sidekick, Little John.

With passing years, I now select a target that's more circumspect.
And while life's prayers are seldom served upon a silver platter,
that fateful day I was remiss – though aiming with intent to miss,
for the kookaburra's near demise was sure no laughing matter.