THE BALLAD
of
MATTY GROVES

Adapted and Composed by

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Matty Groves — Tenor
A handsome young rapscallion in his 20s–30s from a neighbouring township; possibly noble. A bit of a trouble-maker, and looking for fun.

Lord Barnet — Bass-Baritone
The domineering Lord and the Lady's husband, in his 40s–50s. Ambitious and possessive, and not unlike Henry VIII.

Lady Barnet — Soprano
The young, newly-wed wife of Lord Barnet, in her 20s–30s. Definitely noble and definitely unhappy.

Handmaid — Mezzo-Soprano
The proper handmaid to Lady Barnet, any age. Originally a footpage in the ballad, she overhears the two lovers and runs to tell the Lord.

Matty's Friend — Baritone
One of the Lord's men, he chooses to stay loyal to his friend. 20s–30s.

Captain of the Hunters — Baritone
The upstanding right-hand to Lord Barnet, he is honourable and strong of character. Any age.

Chorus of Townsfolk — SATB
The motley crowd of village-folk, and the parish of the church in scene 1. Finely dressed for a feast-day. All ages, children to elderly.

Chorus of Huntsmen — TB *(Cross cast: Chorus of Townsfolk)*
The Lord's hunting crew, a rowdy pack of men of dubious virtue.

Old Fellow — Baritone *(Cross cast: Matty's Friend, or Captain of the Hunters)*
A crochety and nosey member ofthe Chorus of Townsfolk who chastises Matty Groves.

Young Woman — Mezzo-Soprano
A handsome membe of the Chorus of Townsfolk who propositions Matty Groves.

INSTRUMENTATION

Percussion
(Finger cymbals, Suspended Cymbal, Tambourine, Frame Drum, Gran Casa)

Guitar

Soprano
Alto

Tenor
Bass

Piano / Organ

Violin 1
Violin 2
Viola
Violoncello

ACT I

Morning. Northern England, the town of Barnet Castle. In the Churchyard.

Enter the Chorus of Townsfolk. A merry swirl and bustle. Enter Matty Groves.

Chorus of Townsfolk.
High, high, holi-day,
The best day of the year,
When all good souls go down to church,
The holy word to hear.

Interjected with the chorus, Matty Groves speaks with churchgoers.

Old Fellow. Matty Groves? Here in Barnet-town?
Matty. Why should I not be? I am where my will takes me, and it takes me here to Barnet-town.
Old Fellow. Then counsel your will the wiser. Your exploits will find little forgiveness here.
Matty. Forgiveness? Why must I seek forgiveness, when I have done no harms?

[Chorus.]

Young Woman. Matty Groves, it is a fine sight to see you here in Barnet-town. Which fair face brings you here this day?
Matty. A fairer one than any lady here, madam.
Young Woman. You mean the Lady of Our Grace?
Matty. Who else?
Young Woman. Then hope I see you after mass.
Matty. Alas, dear lady, your hopes shall not be met, for mine are placed elsewhere.
Young Woman. Well, should elsewhere prove untrue, a fine hope may be met in a nearer place. Adieu, Matty Groves.

[Chorus.]

The Chorus of Churchgoers gaggle outside the church. Enter Lady Barnet. She catches Matty's eye, and they are drawn together, away from the crowd. The Handmaid notices, confusedly.

Exit the crowd offstage into the church, save the Handmaid, who hides. Music of the organ and congregation from offstage.

Chorus. [Concurrent with dialogue.]
Why fum'th in sight the gentiles' spite,
In fury raging stout?
Why tak'th in hand the people fond
vain things to bring about?
The kings arise, the lords devise,
In council met thereto.
Against the lord, with false accord,
Against their Christ they go.

Matty. The Lady Barnet.
Lady Barnet. Little Matthew Groves; how now, sirrah?
Matty. Well, lady.
Lady Barnet. Full long have I sought your sight.
Matty. And does the quarry satisfy the hunt?
Lady Barnet. O, well it does, sirrah.
[Pause.] Ask you not how I am?
Matty. How are you now, lady?
Lady Barnet. Unwell, little Matty.
Matty. Unwell, lady?
Lady Barnet. Aye, unwell. For the hart I seek is not as I would have it.
Matty. And how would you have your hart?
Lady Barnet. For one night, Matty, I would have it caught within mine arms.
Matty. *[Pause]* By the ring on your finger, you are Lord Barnet's wife.
Lady Barnet. And what if I am Lord Barnet's wife? He is gone to the King's hunt, and my chambers are cold.

Lady Barnet.
Betide my life, betide my death,
This night I will sleep with you.
Matty.
And for thy sake, I'll hazard my breath,
So deep is my want for you.

Matty. My Lady, we must away. The parish cannot find us here. My Lady!
Lady Barnet. Matty…

Churchbells.

Lady Barnet. The noon bell rings… 'Tis true, we must away. This night, in the bosom of the darkness, shall we meet in my Lord's castle. Adieu, Matty Groves.

Enter the congregation from the church. Matty and the Lady discretely rejoin the crowd.

[Chorus.]

The crowd disperses, revealing the stunned Handmaid from within their midst.

Handmaid. My Lady, with this knave? She, with

this errant, lusty knave! To spoil the good name of Barnet with village mud! O, that is treachery. And yet, she is my lady… and she, her great Lord's wife. Well, although I am my Lady's maid, I must be Lord Barnet's hand.

And if the bridges be broke
And the roads washed all away,
My Lord Barnet shall hear of this
Before the break of day,
Before the break of day!

Exit the Handmaid away from the church, running.

ACT II

Dusk. Souther England, in Lord Barnet's hunting camp.

Enter the Chorus of Hunters with their hunting quarry. They sing, sit, and pass skins and tankards of ale. Lord Barnet is heard singing off stage.

Hunters.
Pastime with good company,
I love and shall untill I die,
Youth must have some daliance
Of good or ill shall none deny.
Then who can say
But mirth and play
Is best of all.
For my pastance
Hunt, sing, and dance,
And sound your call.

Lord Barnet.
There's a lusty liquor which
Good fellows used to take-a,
Let every man drink off his can,
…And so my ditty endeth…. Hic!
Being barrell'd up they call't a cup
Of good old dainty stingo.
Let's drink the barrel to the dregs
Of good ol' juice of barley!

Enter Lord Barnet with a slain doe, singing and drinking. He is deep in ale.

Captain. Hail to the Lord Barnet! Never before have I seen one ride with such valiance, such bravery and fearless strength!

Hunters. None but the King surpassed him! Huzzay!

Lord Barnet. King? What of the King? Did I not fell two more than he today? What has he that I do not have in equal, or surpassing? Are not my lands fair, my men loyal? Is not my young bride fairer even than our new Queen?

Captain. True, my lord; but let not the stingo loose your tongue too much, lest it run faster than the King's hounds on the hunt. Hark, who comes?

Enter the Handmaid while the Hunters return to carousing. The Captain approaches, hears a few words, then brings her to the lord.

Captain. My lord, a maiden, run all the way from Barnet-town. She seeks a private council, sir.

Lord Barnet. Let her speak! What news, what news, my little Lady's hand? What news do you bring to me?

Handmaid. My Lord, I fear it fits not this forest air. I beg you grant me your ear alone.

Lord Barnet. I said speak.

[The Handmaid hesitates.]

Captain. My lord—

Lord Barnet. Well? Are any of my bridges broke, or any of my men been false? Speak!

Handmaid. None of your bridges broke, my lord, nor none of your men false been. *[Pause.]* But your Lady, my Lady, she is a-bed with Matty Groves.

Lord Barnet. *[Pause.]* If this be a lie, little handmaid, a lie that you tell to me, a new pair of gallows shall we make straight, and hanged you shall be.

Handmaid. If this be a lie, my lord, you need not rig a gallows, but hang me upon the nearest tree

Lord Barnet. Rouse up any sleeping man, rouse and sleeping man. O saddle your horses, saddle your steed! For Matty Groves, Matty Groves, Matty Groves must be dead by morn!

Lord Barnet and the Merry Men begin packing, drinking, and arming themselves.

Merry Men / Lord Barnet.
Saddle your horses,
Saddle your steed,
Matty must repent this deed!
Make no sound,
Blow no horn,
Matty must be dead by morn!

Exit Lord Barnet and the Merry Men, leaving behind Goodfellow from their midst. He holds a hunting horn.

Goodfellow. O little Matty Groves, my dear friend! A wicked entraps you now, entraps you now! Then upon my life… upon my life… upon my life I'll sound this horn, that you may escape this great lord's might.

Exit Goodfellow.

ACT III

The Little Hours. Barnet Castle, in the Lord and Lady Bernard's bedchambers.

Light up, dim. A window, through which stars can be seen, and which turn to dawn as the scene progersses. From afar, the sound of a hunting horn rings thrice, being violently shorn off on the third ring.

Enter Matty, dishevelled and thinly clad, in a panic, followed closely by the similarly dressed Lady Barnet.

Matty. O hark! Hark hark hark, dear lady, your lord is near! Your lord is near! Should he find me in your arms, in your arms— O! should he find me caught within your arms—

Lady Barnet. Matty… Hush, my hart, O hush, my hart. 'Tis but a shepherd boy driving sheep unto the fold.

Matty. The horn!

Lady Barnet. The shepherd's, in the pinfold. O lie, O lie, lie still little Matty Groves, and keep my back from the cold.

Lady Barnet pulls him back toward the bed [off-stage].

O hush, O hush, O hush, my heart,
And let me close thee hold.
Lie still, lie still, lie still, little Matty,
And keep my back from the cold.

Matty gives in and follows her back to bed.

In the darkness, Lord Barnet slips in and sits. His sword is drawn. As dawn approaches, enter Matty alone. He goes to the window, and looks upon the hills.

Finally, he notices the lord.

Lord Barnet. Well, little Matty Groves, how do you like my bed? How do you like my sheets, sir? How do you like my fair young bride, who lay in your arms, and sleeps?

Matty. Well do I like your bed, sir; and well do I like your sheets. Much better do I like your fair young bride, who lay in my arms and sleeps.

Lord Barnet. Get up, get up, little Matty Groves, and put your clothing on. It shall ne'er be said in fair England I slew a naked man.

Matty puts on his clothes and draws his sword. Enter Lady Barnet as Matty and the lord begin to duel. It is close-matched, and Matty knicks the Lord. With a surge of wrath, the lord re-engages Matty, beats him back, and hacks off his head.

The lady screams and embraces Matty's dead body. The lord wrenches her head away and stares her down.

Lord Barnet. Well, my fair young bride? Which now do you like the best, Matty Groves or me?

Lady Barnet. O… O, well do I like your cheek… O, well do I like your chin; but better, O but better, better better better do I love Matty than you and all your kin—

The Lord kills her. The Hunters burst through the door.

Captain. 'Zounds… You have slain the lady.

Lord Barnet. Woe, woe unto you all! You were never born for my good; why did you not stay my hand when I waxed so wroth? Woe, woe woe woe!

Captain. My Lord. Bade you not us stand without? How could we stay your hand, when you forbade us so? Ay, we came for the vagrant Matty Groves. But now, you have slain the Lady, but you have slain our Lady. And for that, you must be hanged..

Lord Barnet. Hanged? Hanged, tomorrow?

So cursed be my hand,
And cursed be my bride, my bride!
So cursed be.
O, better loved she Matty Groves

[Pause.] A grave. A grave dig you now, to put these lovers in. But lay me not with them.

The lord suddenly kills himself. The Hunters stand in shock. The morning bells ring from afar.

Captain. Hear you now the bells? They ring in the dreadful morn. Come, and dig us now a grave to put these lovers in. And another for our Lord. May God forgive them all.

The lights go down. Music.

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