

# Robin Hood's Holiday

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Robin Hood was camping in a national park in California, staying in a communal hut where sunlight came through mesh-covered windows and the beds were arranged like hospital cots. The other campers kept inviting him to join their games in the sun, but he never felt well enough. He was searching for restoration. He wished the sun's rays could sterilise his body of its maladies, as they seemed to do for others. Instead, he preferred quieter things—sitting in the shade, drinking, and talking endlessly about his own wellness.

On days like this, when the trees sang with pulsating greens in the mirage-like light, the inclination for solar worship was easy to understand. Flowers turned to the source of all life on Earth. Gold was the sweat of the sun, son of suns, Helios riding his chariot across the sky. All the shiny black plates tilted in prayer to the sun. Light itself was good, opposing the darkness. Near-weightless light, luminous clarity of thought—reaching beyond all illusory borders.

The park was more tropical than anything Robin had known. Vistas of Arcadian greens had an instinctive effect; the human eye can register more shades of green than any other colour. There were also pools of acid-yellow liquid that looked like natural thermal springs, pumping up thick sulphuric sludge. It was hard to tell what they were. They might have been toxic waste dumps. Walking past the ominously bubbling ooze, a friend invited Robin to a party at a nearby villa.

After a few hours, the party moved into the garden, perfectly temperate after sunset. Nothing was making sense to Robin Hood; he couldn't understand what anyone was talking about. As he stared at a stone ornament shaped like a figure eight, just as he realised it was a snake eating its own tail, he overheard someone say:

"We used to believe the Sun revolved around the Earth until the heliocentric theory, but now it makes more sense to believe the Sun revolves around us again—because we no longer need the Sun to power our hallucinations."

He was comfortably beginning to lose his mind. It felt like a dream—so lifelike, but unreal.

"The new sun will orbit us so we can choose how it will illuminate our world, and in our mind we already know the projection it casts."

In the next moment, he felt completely untethered. It was the sensation of time racing backwards, and in a near-instant rewind at a thousand frames per second, a window opened—what must have been a couple of hundred years into the past. In the mind's-eye vision of that past, there was nothing but nature. Back to the Arcadian vista of greens.

Close to Robin, something scurried across a grassy clearing.

As he realised it was a squirrel, it fell through an opening in the ground. Just as it disappeared, his perspective jolted—he was seeing through the squirrel's eyes.

The squirrel was falling to the bottom of a vast dark cave, landing beside a shallow pool. Though trapped, it found small snake-like bugs in the water to eat, and began navigating a network of streaming arteries. Robin watched this unfold for what seemed like weeks as it adapted to the darkness—eating bugs, drinking cave water, and sleeping in dry corners. It gradually sensed its way toward light, to an exit from the underground world. The tunnel widened, leading to a cathedral-sized arch above a clear pool.

By the poolside, two people argued over land and mineral rights. The argument ended with one man stabbing the other. As a cloud of red spread through the pool towards the veins of the earth, Robin's perspective shifted again—now into the knife-wielding man, who hurriedly left the cave entrance and ran into the undergrowth.

By the time he regained composure, he came upon a crowd of formally dressed people gathered around a strange building. The structure had mechanisms at its base that allowed rooms to be moved and reorganised. The man, his knife now discarded, began blending into the crowd.

Everything was laid out much like the party, two centuries ahead. A long table stood in the centre, smaller tables ringed it, and along the edges were prop walls held upright with creosoted beams. The walls were hung with large classical paintings of agrarian scenes, from which jagged, stalactite-like objects protruded outward.

The man sat at the long table, and food began to arrive. Some candles were lit, but they only burned for a few minutes before going out, like trick candles. A fresh-faced man with a grimace and tailcoat sat at the far end. Robin recognised him as uncannily similar to the person talking about heliocentrism at the present-day party. An older woman sat beside the man—Robin's host body—and spoke across him to someone else. He drifted in and out of their conversation while trying to light the candles.

The woman asked the grimacing man a question. He replied,

"I was born in poverty, and you can find the most temperance only in poverty."

She laughed. Robin didn't understand the joke, and neither did the man whose perspective he was inhabiting. The candles burned with tiny flames, flickering out before re-lighting.

The man spotted a friend and went to sit with her. Robin still

didn't know why the man was there or what the gathering was for. They talked and ate, and the friend revealed scars down her arms and chest as she moved. She noticed his glance and explained—she'd recently had liposuction to remove fat. The scars were from where her loose skin had been pulled together.

He was happy for her. She seemed content. Then she revealed the candles on the table were made from the fat removed from her body. That must have been why they kept going out—it wasn't the ideal fuel. She described the process. The hospital had returned her fat without issue, but turning it into candles had been more difficult.

It struck Robin that the weather was imperceptible and calm, like being inside—identical to the garden two centuries in the future. He realised this must be the same spot the villa would one day be built. Then he noticed his mind's-eye vision had long since ended. He was back at the party in the present. The last conversation had been happening simultaneously in both times. It was like a film image moved over another until it perfectly aligned.

The party was winding down. Everyone was drunkenly glowing. Robin was feeling less manic as he wondered if he was a ghost returned to the land of the living. The friend had prepared good food, and now, as the night tapered off, people drifted back for more.

Insects circled the candlelight, casting slow exaggerated shadows on the tablecloth. Guests traded seats like a slow game of musical chairs, redirecting their affections. Copernicus was now murmuring to himself about the processing power of igneous rock and the transmutation of information into energy.

Robin found a small, ornate bowl filled with what he thought were nuts and began nibbling. His mouth filled with a strong, bitter taste, and he spat them out. Someone told him they were sedative tablets. But he'd swallowed enough of the chalky substance to send him to sleep under a sheet, just as dawn broke over the garden.