

The Tournament of Tottenham  
Translation from Middle English by LM Zaerr  
April 2022

We crave stories about conquerors,  
All those fables of fighting folk.  
So here's *The Tournament of Tottenham*.  
Don't leave those hardy bumpkins behind,  
Hawkyn and Harry and Tomkyn and Terry,  
All of them grim and gutsy.

At a festival in Tottenham one fine day  
Men came from all the countryside,  
From Islington, Highgate, and Hackney,  
All the sweaty workers.  
Hawkyn hopped, Dawkyn danced, Tomkyn trumpeted,  
And they were all true drinkers.

Till day was done and sunset came,  
When they should settle their accounts.  
Perkyn the Potter pushed through the crowd and said,  
"Randolf the Reeve, you have a daughter, adorable Tyb.  
So I want to know which of all these champions  
Is worthy to wed her."

Up jumped those fellows with their long staffs.  
They roared, "Randolf the Reeve, this boy is raving.  
Boldly he claims Tyb, but we are richer than he is,  
And we have more cattle and grain."  
Perkyn said, "I told Tyb I'll marry her, and I will,  
Whether its next week or tomorrow."

Randolf the Reeve said, "Let's not bicker.  
I won't let my daughter marry a loser. Let her marry well.  
We'll hold a tournament next week,  
With farming flails for weapons.  
And the mightiest man  
Will wed her with honor.

"Whoever hits hardest in the tournament, he'll win the prize.  
He'll win my daughter, Tyb,  
And Coppeld, my chicken from Kent,  
And my brown cow.  
I'll spare no expense.

He'll have my gray mare and my spotted sow."

Many brave boys said they'd give it a go.  
Then they went home to gear up,  
And for a week they worked on their outfits,  
Till the day of deeds dawned.  
For armor, they wore mats,  
And black bowls on their heads to block battering bats.

They sewed on sheepskins so they wouldn't burst.  
Each one wore a black hat instead of a crest,  
A wicker shield like a harrow on their chest,  
And a flail in their hand, for fighting their best.  
They rode forth boasting who would best defend his body.  
Whoever didn't have a battle horse got himself a mare.

You don't often see such a splendid cavalcade,  
All those mounted men milling onto the field.  
Tyb sat high on a gray mare,  
On a sack full of seeds so she would sit soft.  
They led her to the entrance, but the noisy shouts scared her,  
And she wouldn't go on till she had her hen in her lap.

Tyb wore a cheerful belt, borrowed for the day,  
And a garland on her head made of round bones,  
And a bright "sapphire" brooch engraved with the holy cross.  
They didn't pinch pennies on her outfit.  
Jolly Gyb goggled and gripped his gray horse so hard  
That she let fly a fart.

"I swear," Harry boasted, "I won't hold back in the battle!  
If I meet Bernard riding Bayard-the-Blind . . .  
Everyone stay out of my way, or I'll bash you."  
"Well said!" yelled Hawkyn.  
And Dawkyn declared, "If I meet with Tomkyn,  
I'll steal his flail."

Hud vowed, "Tyb, you will see who wins the prize.  
I'll batter them all for your love.  
Wherever I fare in the field, they'll fear me.  
My coat of arms is famous.  
It shows a sieve and a rake, studded with a burning dragon,  
With three quarters of a cake in each corner."

Hawkyn vowed, "Even though I have the gout,  
I warn all of you rushing around,  
I've ridden through two or three times,  
And all who see me will fear when I start fighting.  
I won't ever withdraw . . .  
Unless Tyb calls me back, or I fall off my filly."

Then Terry swore,  
"No young boy will risk his body more than me.  
When they hit hardest, I'll take Tyb by the hand  
And lead her away. I am fully armed.  
My shield shows a dough trough and a bread shovel,  
A seatless saddle, and a wool fleece."

Dudman swore by the holy straw,  
"While I have my mare, you won't get her like that.  
For she is well-shaped and nimble as a doe.  
There's no better horse around here.  
She'll carry me from Islington to Hackney,  
But not a half mile more."

"My God," said Perkyn, "your words are cold roast.  
I'll do better, without any boast.  
I'll seize five of the finest horses  
And I'll give them all to Tyb.  
Well, boys, I will fight and not flee,  
For I am full of jollity and can taunt you the best."

They swore their vows and rode forth,  
With flails and horns and wooden trumpets.  
There were all the "knights" of that land,  
Dressed however they wanted, with bright banners:  
An old rat skin, an upside-down plow head,  
And a bell with moons painted on it.

It was no children's game when they clashed together.  
Everyone in the field pounded on his pals.  
They swung hard and never stopped,  
And fought till their horses were sweating, with few words spoken.  
They split flails in two, smashed up shields,  
Shattered bowls and dishes, and broke many heads.

Cart-saddles clanked, and canes clattered.

Many of the winnowing-fan shields broke.  
Some men had injured heads, and some broken skulls,  
And they were badly injured by whipping flails.  
The boys were so worn out they couldn't fight on horseback,  
But limped around in the field.

Perkyn sagged exhausted.  
"Help, Hud, I'm dying in this crowd.  
I'll give 40 pennies for a good, stout horse  
To get me out of this mess. I'll pay anything."  
He jumped up like a snail and grabbed a horse by the tail.  
He stole Dawkyn's flail and seized his mare.

Perkyn won five horses, and Hud won two,  
And they were thrilled they had done so.  
They wanted to present the horses to Tyb,  
But the horses were too tired to walk and stood still.  
"Just great!" said Hud. "I'd give a hunk of cheese  
If Tyb had all these and knew they came from me."

Perkyn writhed through the crowd.  
He wrestled among those weary boys.  
He threw them down to the ground and thrust on.  
Then he saw Terry sneak away with Tyb and ran after him.  
Perkyn dragged him off of his horse, and gave him a taste of his flail.  
"Whee tee-hee!" said Tyb and laughed. "You're a tough guy."

The men struggled till it was almost night.  
The women of Tottenham came to watch,  
With burning straw and dried hemlock and rushes for light,  
To fetch home their husbands.  
Some hauled them home on harrows.  
Others dragged them on doors or hatches or hurdles or fodder racks,  
And some had wheelbarrows.

They gathered around Perkyn  
And awarded him the prize.  
Tyb and he rollicked home laughing,  
And they spent the night together agreeably.  
Perkyn liked it so well that he married Tyb,  
And her bridal party had fought in the tournament.

Many fighters came to the wedding feast.  
Some came limping, some tripping on rocks.

Some leaned on a staff, and some on two.  
Some had wounded heads and some sore shoulder bones.  
Hawkyn and Harry and Tomkyn and Terry were all wiped out,  
And so were all the "knights" when they gathered.

They were served a rich feast.  
Every fifth person got a cock's egg.  
And so they had fun all day long and went to bed in a jumble.  
They were full of good spirits.  
In every corner of the house,  
you could hear six men belting out a song.