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ROB-IN-THE-HOOD

By V. C. ALEXANDER

Historical Note.—Robin Hood was so called because after he had been outlawed he came disguised to Nottingham to take part in an archery contest. The contest was won by the "Man-in-the-hood," hence the name. (Old Legend.) Robin Hood's real name was Robert Fitzooth, and by some writers he was claimed to be the real Earl of Huntingdon. Whether such a person as Robin Hood really lived is a matter of some discussion, but there is no doubt outlaws lived during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, who took refuge in Nottingham Forest.

JEANNETTE and David Stephens stood outside their father's shop in Nottingham, calling out his wares: "What do ye lack? What do ye lack?"

Many people passing would stop and buy something from the "twins," as they were called, though David was a full year older than Jeannette. But she was as strong as he, and some whispered, but did not dare to say it, that Jeannette was the better man of the two. Certainly she was just as strong, and took part in all the boys' pursuits. That she excelled David in archery was spoken of everywhere, and David, good-natured and indolent, did not care.

Master Stephens, their father, was a great man in Nottingham. Did he not own the largest haberdashery shop there, and was he not a friend of both the Sheriff and the Bishop of Hereford? No wonder people bought from him.

On this autumn day in the year of grace 1201, they stood at the door of the shop calling lustily: "What do ye lack? A ribbon? A kerchief?"

The street was crowded, and two men paused outside the shop. They watched Jeannette and David serving, a smile for every one; and none who paused to look at the girl's wares failed to buy under her charm. David was less persistent—a shrug and a smile if they did not buy, and he let them pass on.

The men approached David and asked to see his father.

"Yes, gentlemen, at once," and David

led the way through the shop to the back chamber, where Master Stephens was checking his store. He made a pleased exclamation as his visitors entered. The door closed on them, and the pleasant murmur of voices could be heard outside, though no words were distinguished.

David went back to his place by the booth. "What do ye lack?" he called out. "Methinks, Jeannette, they be fine looking gentlemen. What say you? What be their business with our father?"

"I care not," said Jeannette, with a toss of her pretty head. "I like not the looks of them."

David laughed. Jeannette disliked strangers coming, but with David it was just the opposite. Jeannette promptly forgot all about the visitors, but David wondered greatly, and was all agog with excitement when Master Stephens called him into the room after they had left.

"Wouldst like to have some adventures, my son," he asked, "on the king's service?"

"Deed, sir, I would dearly like to do that." David's voice was eager.

"Those friends of mine want some one to help them in a little enterprise they are undertaking. They like the looks of you—you are young and adventurous and you can keep a secret."

"That I can, sir," David replied.

"I know. I remember well the day robbers got to my shop and were torturing you to tell where my gold was, and would have killed you had I not appeared. That

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is why I ask you to do my friends' bidding, though 'tis not without a spice of danger, too. And mind ye, not a word of this to yon Jeannette. None must know where ye are going. To every one ye will say ye are going to Derby on business for me. Will ye not do this?"

Of course David would. He longed for adventure, though too lazy to look for it, and was glad when it came his way. The next day he started on his journey.

Jeannette begged him not to go. "I cannot tell why, but I like not the secrecy of this enterprise. You say our father says it is the king's business. So be it. But why not tell me where you are going?"

"'Tis time I had my own secrets," said David angrily. "I am old enough." And Jeannette could not get another word from him.

Very depressed in spirits the next day the girl stood alone at the shop door and cried: "What do ye lack?" As she cried a market woman came along carrying a basket of apples. She was followed by an army of boys, who, at a pre-arranged signal, surrounded her and upset her basket, scattering the apples far and wide.

Jeannette was just going to start forward, though what she could have done against so many boys was a mystery, when a beggarman raced into the middle of the fray and scattered the boys right and left, then he stooped and picked up the apples for the old lady.

Jeannette had noted that before the battle the beggar had been lame and old, now he was a young man and vigorous. "Rob-in-the-hood," she murmured, for who had not heard of the outlaw King John was trying to catch?

Other people, too, recognised him, and the cry of "Rob-in-the-hood" was taken up. Men and women came from the shops, and soldiers, and the sheriff himself, who had been buying nearby, cried, "Seize him, seize him!" Some few started forward, but Robin Hood, with a little laugh, knocked a fat man off his horse and galloped away.

Jeannette breathed a sigh of relief as she returned to the shop.

"I am glad he escaped," a buyer said to her, and Jeannette echoed the sentiment.

She told her father of the episode, but Master Stephens only said they should have caught him: outlaws must not be allowed. Jeannette knew better than to say anything else.

David had said he would be gone three days, but these lengthened into seven, and Jeannette was worried. She wished to ask her father where her brother had really gone, but she knew he would not tell her.

On the eighth morning, as she stood at the door calling out, "What do ye lack?" and wondering how she could discover where David was, the two strangers whom somehow Jeannette connected with David's disappearance came to the shop and asked for her father.

"He is inside; this way, gentlemen." They passed her with a "thank-you," but did not quite close the door as they entered, and Jeannette heard the remark after the greetings had been exchanged: "David is doing well; soon we shall have him."

Mechanically Jeannette called her wares. She *must* learn what they were talking about, yet she could not leave the stall, for immediately her back was turned boys would raid it. Jeannette could catch a word here and there—oh, if only she could hear it all! A girl friend came along, and Jeannette felt her presence was heaven-sent.

"Wilt take my place for a while—only a short while?" she asked. "I will give you a new ribbon." This friend loved new things and agreed willingly. "Only cry in my voice, 'What do ye lack?' over and over again." The friend was delighted. She had always longed to sell something, and gave a good imitation of Jeannette's voice.

Jeannette felt the ruse would hold good, anyway, it was her only chance to learn something about David. She tiptoed to the doorway and put her ear to the keyhole. One of the strangers was speaking.

"The plan cannot fail. That young son of yours makes a fine idiot and an outlaw. He can mingle with them without detection, and at night he can escape and let me have a report. None have questioned his coming and going; all think he is mad. Robert Fitzooth will be lured to that old castle at the edge of Nottingham Forest at midnight to-night. Here he will be bound and taken to a sea-port; we cannot trust him to any jail. Your son will return to-morrow, and the King will see that you and he are well rewarded."

"I am sorry for Robert Fitzooth," said Master Stephens. "He is kind to the poor and robs only the rich."

"Save thy pity. Had ye been rich he would have robbed ye."

"Maybe ye are right."

Jeannette heard the scraping of a chair and guessed the strangers were preparing to take their leave. She ran back to the shop, thrust a bright ribbon into the friend's hand, and started to call at the top of her voice, "What do ye lack? Here be some fine ribbons! What do ye lack?"

The friend ran away as the two strangers emerged from the shop, and passed Jeannette with a good-day. All through the hours, she pondered on the plot to capture Robert Fitzooth, known to Nottingham folk as Rob-in-the-hood, or the shorter "Robin Hood." She hated the thought that David should be mixed up with treachery, for treachery it would be to lure a man to the ruined castle and there trap him. If Robin Hood was to be captured it must be in a fair fight, and Jeannette was going to warn him somehow.

She thought and thought, and at last hit on a plan. That night, instead of going to bed, she let herself down out of a window, kept in the shade of the houses until she reached the edge of the town, crept through a gap in the thick hedge which at that spot took the place of the city wall, and started to run towards the forest.

Midnight was the hour the outlaw was to reach the castle, and Jeannette had plenty of time. She knew it well—often she and David had played there. The way was dark and there was a slight mist over everything. But it was easy enough for her to find the place even in the dark. It was hidden behind a high wall, but Jeannette knew of a breach. There was the flicker of a rushlight in a room on the first floor, whose loophole had been enlarged by the



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ravages of time, and as Jeannette watched she saw her brother's figure outlined by it. Was Robin Hood there with him? Were the sheriff and the soldiers waiting inside or out?

Jeannette was a good climber. She easily scaled the ivy-clad walls, and clung to the crumbling stones where an opening gave access to the room. She could see her brother walking up and down in an agitated state, while Robin Hood was sitting on a stool by the empty fireplace, playing with a bow and arrow, with the rushlight on the floor beside him.

Jeannette pulled herself into the room. The outlaw sprung to his feet, and David stopped pacing.

"Ssh!" Jeannette cried. "I have come to warn ye, master outlaw, the sheriff and his men are coming to the castle to seize ye—if they are not already here!"

"Thanks, mistress," said Robin Hood drily. "I have known of the trap for many days, but Robin Hood cannot be caught so easily. Yet I thank ye, all the same."

"Then why are you here, master outlaw?" Jeannette said in surprise.

"Why not? Forewarned is forearmed, and my merry men love a fight. Is this your brother, mistress? I thought so from the likeness. He is a clever lad, and I wish he would join my band. But he tells me—or rather he did not tell me, I guessed it—he is for the king, else he would not have spied on me. We of Sherwood Forest have to make short work of spies, and it is for that reason I have kept him with me all this evening. Little John especially likes not spies."

"Oh, David, why have you betrayed Master Hood? He has done us no harm, and he is good to the poor."

"Thank you, mistress. Your brother is young and would have adventures. He would have plenty should he wish to join us, but he is a peaceful citizen, and as such will remain. Fear not that any harm will come to him. Ye hear that whistle? Now for some fun."

Following the whistle came the clash of

arms and cries of men. Robin Hood with deft fingers tied the brother and sister together back to back, gagged them with some stuff from his pocket, and extinguished the rushlight.

"When ye are found, ye can say Robin Hood did it, and they will not blame ye," he said, as he disappeared out of the window.

The cries and noises increased, and Jeannette wondered whether the King or Robin Hood would win. She hoped the outlaw would, and so did David. He was already sorry for the part he had taken in trying to trap the outlaw, for he had only received kindness at his hands, and promised himself that when they were free he would see what he could do for him. If he could do nothing, he would at least never lift up his hand against him again.

Then the clamour died away, and a few moments later some one carrying a lantern came in through the window. They saw it was Robin Hood.

"Did I not say I should rout the sheriff? But it is hard work. He is close upon me." Robin Hood disappeared up the chimney, while the noise on the stairway outside proclaimed that the sheriff and his men were coming in through the door.

"Where be he? Where be he?" cried the sheriff, blustering and fuming, as his men thrust lanterns into the corners of the room.

As they were both gagged, neither David nor Jeannette could answer. The sheriff ordered their gags to be removed.

"Now then, where be that outlaw?"

Jeannette had to think quickly. She stooped down as if to rub her chafed legs, and gently bit David's hand. It was so sudden he cried out, and this gave Jeannette her chance to speak first.

"It was dark—I could not see, but methinks he has climbed on to the roof."

"Be that so, lad?" cried the sheriff.

"Yes," replied David.

"To the roof, to the roof!" cried the sheriff, while from below came the cry that Robert Fitzooth had been captured.

"To the ground, to the ground!" cried

the sheriff, and soldiers almost fell over themselves in their eagerness to see the wonderful prisoner.

For five minutes the noise below continued, then there was a clatter of horses' hoofs as the men rode away.

"I am sorry he was taken," said Jeannette, with a sigh. "He was good to the poor. Come, David, we had better be getting home."

"Well spoken, mistress," said a voice, and Robin Hood touched her arm. "Ye need not fear that Rob-in-the-hood will be captured. I would give much to see the sheriff's face when he finds that 'tis one of his own soldiers dressed in my clothes! But we must away. One of my men will take ye to the edge of the forest, and me ye will see anon." Robin Hood raised his bow arm in salute and disappeared out of the window.

Ten minutes later a tall, lanky figure with a dark lantern beckoned the children to follow him down the rickety stairway and through the forest. As soon as they reached the city walls he disappeared as if by magic, and David and Jeannette made their way through the hedge back to their home. David told as much of the story as he thought his family ought to know, and did his best to keep his sister out of it.

But the next day there was a great ado with the sheriff, who was made a laughing

stock of by the people of Nottingham for capturing one of his own men. He wanted to know what Jeannette was doing in the castle, and she told him as much of the truth as she thought fit. He was furious, and so were the Bishop of Hereford and the king's representatives, who made a proclamation that the haberdasher's shop was to be avoided by all true citizens; and Master Stephens said he had better shut up. But somehow Jeannette did not think he was angry with her.

Yet the proclamation had little effect on the good people of Nottingham. They bought more and more. One day a lame man came up to where Jeannette was crying, "What do ye lack?" and asked for a ribbon. She gave him a brightly coloured one and turned away, not wishing to take money from so poor a man.

He touched her arm and pressed a purse full of gold into her hands. "From Rob-in-the-hood," he murmured, and disappeared.

"It was Master Robin Hood himself," she told her father. "I only caught a glimpse of his face but I knew him. 'Tis he who tells the citizens of Nottingham to buy from us, and he is a greater power than the King."

"Ssh!" said the haberdasher, looking round and putting his finger to his lips. "But maybe ye are right."



SPIDER TRAPS

WE have all been familiar with spiders' webs ever since our extreme youth, but how many of us have ever seen one of the traps made by another species?

To make this the spider first of all digs a hole in the ground like a tube, a few inches deep and three-quarters of an inch wide. This she lines with silk and spins a silken cover for the top which is strengthened with tiny scraps of earth. The latter also helps to disguise the trap by looking like the surrounding ground. A number of threads leading from the spider herself to

the cover complete the arrangements and then she sits in the hole awaiting victims.

When an unwary fly alights on the top of the trap the threads communicate the fact like telephone wires to the spider. She then quietly ascends the tube and suddenly drives her fangs right through the cover and into her victim. Then the latter is pulled through the silk and down the hole and the spider, after repairing the cover, either lies in wait for another victim or else makes a meal off the first.

B. C. LAWLEY.