

Robin Hood

king of Sherwood

CORNERSTONE BOOK PUBLISHERS



Robin Hood: King of Sherwood
© copyright 2010 I.A. Watson

An Airship 27 Production
www.airship27.com

Published by
Cornerstone Book Publishers
New Orleans, LA
www.cornerstonepublishers.com

Interior Illustrations © 2010 Rob Davis
Cover illustration © 2010 Mike Manley

Editor: Ron Fortier
Associate Editor: John Bruening
Production and design: Rob Davis.

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. No part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the copyright holder, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review.

ISBN 978-1-934935-65-1
1-934935-65-4

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Robin Hood

KING OF SHERWOOD

By I. a. watson



Contents

I.....	4
II.....	14
III.....	26
IV.....	36
V.....	49
VI.....	60
VII.....	74
VIII.....	83
IX.....	96
X.....	105
XI.....	117
XII.....	127
XIII.....	136
XIV.....	148
XV.....	157
AFTERWORD.....	168
ON HISTORY.....	174

I

There were outlaws in Sherwood Forest.

Everyone knew it. The thick woodland was home to masterless men and runaway serfs and those who'd fled wild when their villages had been cleared to make the lords' hunting parks. They preyed on passing travellers, on the forest hamlets, and on each other.

That was why rich caravans moved through Sherwood with caution. Outriders checked the trail ahead, ready with horns to sound alarm at the sight of bandits. Foresters with hounds walked the flanks. Hired guards, some of them mounted, travelled beside the carriages.

The Fitzwarren caravan was forty strong, although a score of them were only attendants. Four of the party were women, for this group was heading in pilgrimage to Kirklees Priory. The numbers were not uncommon for a rich train. Sometimes the wolfsheds attacked with a hundred men.

Nobody really expected trouble. Kirklees was only half a day away and the Prioress was expecting them. The April morning was dry and fair, the track firm, the sun bright. It was a day for a holiday ride, not for sudden terror. Besides, while a hundred masterless thugs might eventually overpower even a well-prepared properly guarded caravan it would cost them half their number. Thieves were cowards and there was easier prey to be had.

The train stopped to water the horses at the edge of a shallow river. There was a mill there, the great wooden wheel turning lazily in the mill-race. The outriders waited beside it, playing at dice with the miller's son. From their expressions they weren't winning. The miller's boy dared a hidden wink at the young lady in the carriage before it moved on.

"You shouldn't encourage them," the older lady beside the maiden chided.

“Have you learned nothing?”

The young woman’s brows furrowed. “That boy? I did nothing, Mother. I was just admiring the view. This is lovely countryside. He decided to wink at me. I didn’t provoke it.”

Across the carriage from mother and daughter, the pair’s maids exchanged resigned glances. Their mistresses had been intermittently bickering for three days’ journey now. Lady Mary Fitzwarren was far too sensitive about attentions paid to her youngest daughter – although maybe she had cause. The girl was too proud and defiant to surrender to her mother’s nagging.

“‘Just looking’ was enough, Matilda. A lady in public should be demure, her eyes cast down. You are not some common peasant chit hanging around the local inn. You’re an heiress of Sir Richard at the Lee, daughter of a proud crusader family.”

“I know full well who and what I am, Mother. You remind me of it six times an hour.”

“And well I should. You’ll not play these tricks at Kirklees, Matilda. The Prioress there runs a strict rule.”

“Yes, Mother. That’s why I’m only bringing *one* wagon-full of dresses for my stay there.”

Lady Fitzwarren didn’t catch the irony in her daughter’s voice, or else she chose to ignore it. “You’ll attend to the Prioress, or I’ll have her put you on bread and water. You’ve caused enough trouble for your poor father already. If it weren’t for your glances, we wouldn’t be in this mess we are now.”

The girl’s temper flared. “We’ve had this argument before, Mother. I did nothing – *nothing* – to encourage the Prince’s advances. You and Father were happy enough to parade me before him when he came to stay. You picked out my gown. You loaned me your own jewellery. You wanted me to make an impression on him. Well, evidently I did.”

Lady Fitzwarren snorted ruefully. “That you did, Matilda Fitzwarren.”

“So what was I supposed to do?” her daughter challenged. “Lie back and think of England? Was it my patriotic duty to let that sweaty-handed lecher pin me to my bed? Was it?”

“Of course not, Matilda,” the older woman denied. “It’s not as if he were the King,” she added as an afterthought.

“So what *was* I supposed to do when he crept into my chambers?” demanded Matilda Fitzwarren. “I’m still waiting for a good answer to that one. Politely ask him to leave and to please not bribe the servants again? I tried that. Cry ‘Death before dishonour!’ and plunge my dagger into my breast? That would rather spoil Father’s wedding plans for me when he works out which grand alliance he really wants. Great lords really do prefer their brides to be breathing.”

“Now you’re being silly, Matilda!”

“And you’re not answering my question again. When the second most powerful man in England sneaks into your bedchamber demanding your virtue what exactly does etiquette demand?”

Lady Fitzwarren didn’t really have a good answer. There wasn’t one. “Something...something that didn’t involve stunning him with a chamberpot,” she answered at last. “You’re lucky you didn’t get us all sent to the Tower of London.”

The ladies’ maids exchanged a surreptitious look of approval. There’d been quite a dent in that bowl. Constanza and Aliss were impressed.

The girl was unrepentant. “Weaselly John would never admit that a woman had turned him down. He denied it had ever happened.”

“He might deny it publicly, but he won’t forget,” Lady Fitzwarren promised. “Your father, our whole family, will suffer for it, you mark my words. And your father will never forgive John’s insult.”

Matilda’s cat-green eyes flashed. “First he tries to ravish me, then he tries to buy me!”

“You didn’t have to tell your father about John’s visit,” Lady Fitzwarren argued. “Then he wouldn’t have had to confront the Prince – when the Prince could stand again. And the Prince wouldn’t have offered that... that obscene bargain. And your brother wouldn’t have challenged De Loris.”

Matilda bunched her fists. “Adam hasn’t the brains of a plank of wood!” she hissed. “I never *asked* my brother to go defending my honour against the slurs of John’s toadies.”

“What did you expect him to do?” her mother chided. “He’s a silly hot-headed fool, I agree, but young De Loris was casting aspersions on your chastity and character.”

“De Loris provoked a fight and he got one. Adam walked straight into it. De Loris’ only mistake was in assuming my idiot brother was as slow with his blade as he is at thinking.” The scuffle had been more brawl than duel. The expected joust had become an unseemly tumble in the mud. Then farce had turned to tragedy.”

“It served John’s purpose well enough,” Lady Fitzwarren said sourly. “One of his retainers stabbed and like to die, under your father’s hospitality. Stabbed by a son of the household. It swept away all hint of scandal about the Prince’s behaviour. And if De Loris does not survive...”

“Adam will be charged,” Matilda sighed. The anger ebbed from her to be replaced by gnawing frustration. The injustice of it all churned her stomach.

“A hefty fine at the least,” Lady Fitzwarren estimated. “Worse, if his highness wants to press things for malice.”

Matilda slammed her hand down on the window-sill of the carriage. “So why, when it was you and Father who put me in Prince John’s sight,

when it was Weaselly John who crept into my bedroom, when it was Adam who put a knife into that idiot De Loris, am I the one getting the blame for this? Why am I sent to exile in Kirklees Priory?"

"To learn control," her mother told her. "Self-discipline. You're a grown woman now, Matilda, not some wild scrubby child climbing all over the grange. Your encounter with the Prince should have taught you that much, at least. Your father is working to make you a good match but until then we'll all feel much safer with you confined behind the walls of a nunnery."

A new thought suddenly came to the young woman. "You don't expect Prince John to try and... harm me, do you? I mean, he wouldn't..."

"As you said, John is a powerful man, and you've hurt his pride. Your father would protect you, of course he would, but it could put him up against an enemy too great to withstand. It'll take all his influence to save Adam from imprisonment or banishment. Better if you're out of sight and out of mind with the white sisters,"

Matilda blinked across at Constanza and Aliss's faces. She was missing something. A nasty suspicion began to breed in her thoughts. "Mother... does father expect John to demand my company to free Adam from the charges against him? Is that the trap Adam led us into?"

"Your father knows his own counsel best, Matilda. It's not seemly for a young woman of breeding to harbour such nasty thoughts. God grant Kirklees will teach you some obedience and some peace. God grant it keeps you safe."

Matilda caught her mother's hand. "Are you saying there *is* some danger? But John must behave himself. Any scandal and the King will delight to humiliate him with it and devise some punishment. It's not too long since John and Richard fought to inherit the crown and there's no love lost between them."¹

Lady Fitzwarren's face changed. "Matilda, Richard sails from Dover today. The King has answered the Pope's call to crusade and has taken the cross."²

¹ At the time of Henry II's death in 1189, only two of his legitimate sons survived, Richard the Lionheart and his younger brother John. Richard had warred against his father and John was said to be Henry's preferred heir, but Richard had both the political support and military capability to ensure that John's resistance to his claims was short-lived.

² After Saladin captured Acre and Jerusalem in 1187, new Pope Gregory VIII proclaimed a Third Crusade to recapture the Holy Land. Richard became King of England in July 1189 and remained at home only long enough to gather funds and an army to respond to the Pope's call. He left England in early 1190 and met with Philip II of France in Marseille to travel to the Crusades together. Although Richard was King of England for eleven years, he spent less than half a year of that time in England.

Matilda couldn't believe it. "King Richard is gone?"

"What do you think all those extra taxes were about?" her mother challenged. "Your father had to squeeze the peasants hard just to make the scutage³ in lieu of going back to Jerusalem with the king."

"And you didn't think to mention any of this to me until now? Who is royal steward until Richard returns?" Her mother's face betrayed the answer. "Not John! Oh, come, Mother, Richard wouldn't do that."

"John has his supporters, dear. There are Lords Seneschal and Marshals and High Sheriffs and things appointed across England but John is here and Richard's not. How long before he manages to grab the throne?⁴ I don't pretend to understand all the politics of it – that's your father's business – but the short of it is that Richard's gone, John's in charge, and you're going to Kirklees Priory."

"And good riddance to me?" scowled Matilda. "Maybe I should have laid back and let Weaselly John have his way. Adam would be free and I could have been installed at Windsor by now."

"Matilda!" snapped Lady Fitzwarren, shocked.

"Not really, Mother," the girl snorted. "I couldn't bear it, those spidery hands all over me. Ugh! Just the thought of it..."

Constanza, Matilda's lady-in-waiting, interrupted the exchange. "Excuse me, miladies," the portly old nurse intervened, "The carriage has stopped."

The Fitzwarren women looked out of their windows and realised that the caravan had ground to a halt. "What's going on?" Lady Fitzwarren demanded of the captain of the guard. "What's the delay?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out, milady," Loren de Weynold replied. The commander of the guards seemed in a bad temper, but he forced himself to speak respectfully to his lord's wife. "There's a wagon shed its load on the bend up ahead, there's hay all over the road, and the driver is some kind of blithering simpleton."

Matilda craned her head out of the carriage to see. Sure enough, there was a peasant cart on its side, one wheel still spinning. The wain had managed to catch a rut on the side of the track and bounce over. It had been piled so high that it must have been top heavy.

³ Scutage, or the Knight's Fee, was a payment made by a noble to the king instead of having to serve in a military campaign which their feudal duties would otherwise demand.

⁴ Actually King Richard appointed Lord Chancellor William Longchamp, the Bishop of Ely, and Hugh de Puiset, the Bishop of Durham, to run things in his absence as his Justiciars. However, Longchamp soon sidelined de Puiset and then Prince John undermined Longchamp until the Bishop of Ely was eventually forced to flee England, leaving John in control.

“Get it cleared, then,” Lady Fitzwalter demanded. “I don’t want to have to travel at night.”

“We’ve plenty of time, milady,” the captain assured her. “If I can just convince that imbecile to let me unstrap his horse. Well, what he calls his horse.”

Matilda could hear the peasant’s mumbling, a thick country accent that rendered his speech nigh-unintelligible. He lurched towards de Weynold with a pronounced limp.

“Just get that by-the-Lady thing moved, idiot!” the captain roared at him, but the carter waved his good arm and tried to urgently explain something in his fumbled language.

Lady Fitzwarren’s patience had already been tested by her daughter. This was too much. “Send that man here to me,” she demanded. “I’ll speak to him and set him right.”

“He smells, milady,” de Weynold objected.

It was too late. The carter limped over to the carriage, spewing out words that almost seemed to make sense, pointing animatedly at the wagon and the nag between its traces.

“I think he’s worried that his horse will be hurt,” suggested Matilda. “Or maybe it is hurt and he wants to help it. That horse is probably his most precious possession.”

“Now listen here, my good man,” Lady Fitzwarren said in a loud slow voice, as if it would help a native Anglo-Saxon speaker to follow Norman French, “We need to move your cart so we can get on. Move..your...cart.”

The carter nodded frantically then shook his head equally frantically. He leaned right up to the carriage till he was face to face with Lady Fitzwarren – then flashed a dagger to her throat.

“Nobody move!” he called out. “Nobody move and the lady comes to no harm.”

Matilda’s hand darted to her sleeve where she hid her own knife. “Don’t,” the outlaw warned, twisting the blade at her mother’s neck. He shot her a sudden grin and gestured to the blade. “*This* is my most precious possession.”

“You are surrounded by fifty armed men,” Lady Fitzwarren warned him, exaggerating for effect. “Any one of them could shoot you dead.”

“But not fast enough to guarantee I don’t cut your weasand as I die,” the bandit replied. There was little trace of the thick accent he’d affected, and no limp. In fact, beneath the grime his face was young and regular.

Loren de Waynold froze, unsure what to do in this unexpected stand-off. He chose caution and gestured for his soldiers to hold their places.

“A robber,” scorned Matilda Fitzwarren. She glared at the young

wolfshead. "A robber and a coward."

The outlaw looked hurt. "Coward? I've just slipped in amongst fifty armed men, any one of whom could shoot me dead. Don't you think that's just a little bit brave?"

"You have a knife at my mother's throat. I think that's abominable."

The outlaw had the grace to wince a little. "Well, I'm committed now," he pointed out. "It's probably a bit late for an apology and you let me go. Besides, I have seven men in the bushes, and if I back down now they're going to tell our leader that I'm a complete failure. And Handsome Jack doesn't like failures."

The captain of the guard had drawn his sword but he halted his approach again as the wolfshead threatened his lady anew. The outlaw opened the door of the carriage so he could wrap an arm around Lady Fitzwarren to prevent her escape.

Matilda edged towards her dagger again.

"Really, don't," the outlaw begged her. "I don't want to hurt this lady. You don't want her hurt. We have common ground. That hidden knife, that's going to bring us to a place neither of us wants to be. Please drop it out of the carriage nice and slowly."

Matilda glared at him. He smiled appealingly. She scowled back and dropped her dagger out of the window.

"Now, captain," the outlaw called, "in a moment I'm going to whistle and some rough-looking types are going to come down out of the trees. You're going to make sure none of your men does anything heroic like shoot at them or sound a horn or loose the dogs. You know why, so I don't have to make horrible threats and so on. Just let those men go through your baggage carts and they'll be on their way."

"The things in that second cart are for Kirklees Priory!" objected Matilda.

"They eat well at Kirklees," the outlaw replied. "We're hungry."

"A lot of people are hungry," scorned the girl, "but they don't steal."

The outlaw whistled. Half a dozen ragged bandits slunk out of the treeline and cautiously came down the path.

"It worked?" one of them asked. "He actually did it?"

"He did it!" a second one agreed. "And he's not even dead."

The thieves shouted for the soldiers to throw down their weapons and gathered the captives together by one of the wagons. The men-at-arms were roped together with professional ease, *de Waynolt* with them.

The oldest of the bandits took charge with the confidence of long experience, directing the others to search saddlebags as well as the baggage carts. It became clear that the thieves intended to take the horses.

"And how do you expect us to get to Kirklees Priory?" demanded Matilda.

“You could walk,” shrugged the outlaw holding her mother hostage. “It’s supposed to be good for the soul. Think of it as a pilgrimage. Or a penance.” He looked over at the girl again. “You’re not going to be a nun, are you?” he shuddered.

“That’s none of your business,” Matilda answered. “That’s between God and me.”

“Well, you shouldn’t be,” the outlaw told her. “You’re too pretty to be a nun.”

“Rob us if you must, wolfshead,” snapped Lady Fitzwalter, “but do not address my daughter in that fashion!”

“Why not?” demanded the thief. “Who is she?”

“I am Matilda Fitzwarren,” asserted the girl, “and this is my mother, wife of Sir Richard Fitzwarren of Leaford and Velysdale. That’s Sir Richard at the Lee, a former crusader, one of the king’s own thanes.”

The outlaw’s eyebrows rose. “One of the king’s own thanes,” he repeated, slightly mockingly. “Well then, that changes everything.”

“You’ll let us go?” demanded Lady Fitzwarren.

“I’ll take you for ransom,” replied the thief. “You must be worth a shilling or two.”

“You will do no such thing!” screeched the lady. She turned her head sharply to remonstrate with the bandit and nearly slit her own throat.

“Milady,” her maid warned, “be calmed. Your heart.”

Constanza had spotted the signs because she had seen them before. Lady Fitzwarren’s face became as pale as a ghost. She slumped back limply into the outlaw’s arms.

“What’s going on?” he demanded, nonplussed.

“She’s having a heart seizure,” Matilda told him accusingly. “Get away from her so we can attend to her properly.”

“She’s had these before?”

“Yes. Now stand aside.”

The outlaw shook his head. “I was only pretending to be an imbecile. If I take my knife from her throat then I’m a dead man. So are all my comrades. This could be a trick.”

Matilda glared at him as if she’d like to see him buried up to the neck beside an ant hill. “I swear by the Holy Rood this isn’t a trick. But if you insist on a hostage, hold your blade to me and let Constanza care for my mother.”

The outlaw quickly considered and consented. Matilda was a much prettier hostage anyhow. He pulled her down out of the carriage to give the ladies-in-waiting room to do whatever it was they were doing. It seemed to involve the loosening of stays.

Now Matilda was pressed up against him and he couldn’t help but become aware of her body. She was tall for a woman, with Saxon-red hair

filleted in a net of seed pearls. She was slender and graceful, even with a knife to her throat. She was beautiful.

"Don't get ideas," she told him. "The last man who did got a broken head."

"I'm not that kind of robber," the outlaw told her. "You are safe with me."

"Says the man with the knife to my neck."

"That's just business. There was no way we could take your caravan without trickery and a hostage. You're making a rich pilgrimage to a richer priory where the nuns live in luxury while their tenants starve. Anything you're carrying is fair game." The outlaw sighed. "You are not."

"But you'll hold us for ransom?" Matilda challenged. "That's what you threatened."

The older man directing the plunder heard their talk. "Ransom, aye," he agreed. "You'll be our guests in the greenwood until your menfolk pay for your return. It'll be a fair old payday when they buy back you and your mother."

"Just her, Stutely," the younger outlaw answered. "Her mother's ill. We can't drag her to the woods and camp her on the turf. She'll be a nuisance at best and if she dies we'll be murderers. We'll just take Matilda here. She's ransom enough."

A whole spectrum of responses flashed through Matilda's mind: relief that her mother was to be spared; gratitude that her captor had some sensitivity and mercy; concern that she was to be taken hostage; worry that she was to be carried into the wilderness at the mercy of brutal masterless men; anger that she had no way of crippling the insolent youngster that held her.

The older lady-in-waiting looked up from reviving her mistress. "If you're carrying off Lady Matilda then you must also take me," insisted Constanza.

The young outlaw glanced up at the old nurse, regarding her girth. "If we're carrying you away we'd need to steal one of the wagons," he observed. "And we'd need to loot a lot of extra provisions."

"Don't be rude!" snapped Matilda. "She's only protecting me."

The outlaw spoke quietly into her ear. "I'm only protecting her. Look, you're a great lady and your father or your betrothed will pay for you to be returned safe and unspoiled. Unless that large lady attending your mother has a rich protector she's not as safe in a bandit camp. So I don't want my lads getting the idea we should take her along, right?"

"Right," breathed Matilda, her heart beating a little faster as she realised just how dangerous her situation was. It was dire indeed when her best protection was the man holding a weapon to her jugular. "Constanza, Mother needs you. I shall be safe."

“Then take Aliss,” Constanza insisted.

“Aliss is terrified,” Matilda pointed out. “Aliss is better with you. I’ll be alright. Go to Kirklees. Send word to the Sheriff of the shire. Send word to Father. Tell him to find these bandits and hang them all high.”

“Better yet, tell him to send ransom,” Matilda’s outlaw countered. “He’ll get word of our demands from our leader, Handsome Jack.”

“Do not fear, milady,” the captain of the guard called out before a bandit shoved a rag gag into his mouth, “We shall find you and see you safe.”

“She’s safe if you bring the money,” the outlaw told him. “Honestly, it’s really simple.” He turned to the soldiers. “And speaking of simple, let me say what’s going to happen next. Me and my comrades here will take your horses and weapons and all the best stuff from your wagons. We’re going over to those trees there and we’re walking away. You’re not going to follow us because we’re also taking the Lady Matilda, and if you come after us we’ll slice her throat.”

The young woman suppressed a tremble. She couldn’t let her fear show. She was only a hostage now because she’d arrogantly announced herself. Her mother had been right in part about her being too bold.

“Now we don’t want to slice Matilda’s throat,” the thief went on. “Slitted throat means no ransom. You don’t want us to open her gullet either. That’d upset your lord and who’d take the blame? So the best thing is don’t follow us. We know the forest and we’re amazing at woodcraft and we can spot a tail a mile away. So just don’t. Look to your Lady Fitzwarren and we’ll see that no harm comes to her daughter. Unless you don’t pay. Everybody clear?” The outlaw snapped his fingers. “Good. Then we’ll be on our way. We thank you for your assistance and bid you all a good day.”

He assayed a formal bow to the ladies in the carriage, then dragged Matilda off into Sherwood.

II

The trek was long, much further than Matilda was used to walking. By mid-afternoon she was sweating hard and seriously regretting not demanding a change of footwear before she had been kidnapped. After the second hour of trudging along poacher's paths into the depths of the forest, she broke her self-imposed silence.

"How much further?"

The outlaw halted and grinned at her. "Because we're going to give away our hideout secrets to somebody who wants to see us hanged," he suggested.

The girl scoffed. "What am I going to say? We walked past a bunch of trees, and then a bunch of other trees, and then we turned left by some more trees? I just want to know how far we're to travel."

"A fair way," the thief admitted. "We really need to put some distance between us and that captain of yours before we think about joining our main group. No matter how much booty I came back with, Jack wouldn't be happy if I led the forest wardens to his den."

Matilda had thought of leaving behind objects that might help foresters pick up her trail, but the main problem with that was that she didn't really

have a lot to drop. "So how far?" she persisted. "These slippers weren't really designed for forest hikes."

The outlaw peered up at the sun through the tree canopy. "We'll travel until sunset," he judged. "Then we'll camp overnight and rejoin Handsome Jack tomorrow."

"You don't have a pavilion, do you?" Matilda realised that for the first time in her life she'd be camping outdoors, on the ground.

"We have blankets," the outlaw replied. "Your blankets, actually. On the horses. It's only fair that we lend you some."

She glared at the outlaw as he returned to his march. "What's your name?" she demanded. "So that we'll know what to put on the reward posters."

"Robin Hood," the young outlaw told her.

She hadn't really expected a reply. "Is that your real name?"

"It is now. Robin Hood of Sherwood."

"And you don't mind telling me, knowing that you'll be hunted from here to Nottingham for carrying me off?"

Robin shrugged. "I'd like to be famous. Before I'm hanged."

Matilda snorted. "I'll see what I can do. About both."

The outlaw trotted companionably beside her, not at all bothered by the threat of capital punishment. Matilda tried ignoring him again for a while, but eventually had to break her silence.

"The captain and the other soldiers," she asked, "why didn't you kill them?"

"I'm a thief, not a murderer. And too many bodies attract too much attention from the Sheriff's men. And I needed somebody to bear a message back to your father."

"My father is going to flay you alive," Matilda pointed out.

"Well, there's not a lot of point flaying me if I'm dead," Robin supposed.

They walked some more. The forest was colourful with wood anemone and celandine coming to bloom. Birds sang and squabbled in the canopy overhead. Matilda might have enjoyed the beauty of her surroundings if not for the company.

At one point the trail dipped down to a river valley and the outlaws forded a stream on a set of wobbly stepping stones. Aware of the smirks of the men accompanying them, Matilda distained Robin's hand and balanced across by herself. Further on they passed a ruined hut, long since burned. They met no one.

"Am I really safe with you?" Matilda asked Robin suddenly. "I mean, as a maiden?"