

They Met Robin Hood
&
Robin Hood to the Rescue!

They Met Robin Hood & Robin Hood to the Rescue!

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They Met Robin Hood



"THEY WENT BACK TO THE WOODS, KINDLED A FIRE, CLEANED THE FISH AND ROASTED THEM ON TWIGS OVER THE HOT EMBERS."

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CHAPTER ONE

OSMUND LAY on his back in bed, indulging in daydreams. He had no clock or watch by which to tell the time, but he could guess it pretty accurately by the light. When he first opened his eyes and sat up, broad awake to greet this most important day, the sun had not yet reached the projecting branch of the great pine tree which he could see from the window. So Osmund judged that it was not yet quite five o'clock and he stretched out a sunburnt hand and turned over the hourglass which stood on a rough stool beside him. His brothers, Eadgar and Stephen, were still asleep so there was no one to talk to, and Mother had bidden him not to dress until she called him—he had a long day before him and must rest as long as possible, she said.

At first the daydream was all glorious. Osmund saw himself speeding along under the trees, greeting anyone he might meet with knightly courtesy. Here he made a digression to wish he were a Knight: a real Knight like Father, with beautiful golden spurs and a full suit of chain armour, galloping on a noble steed over the burning desert in pursuit of wicked Saracens. When he returned to England, Sir Aelfric would doubtless avenge the base oppression of his neighbour, Fulk de Brent, and would regain his own manor and Castle at Southwell. Osmund sighed and returned to the prospect of the day's adventure.

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He was to be entrusted with the important mission of doing service to the overlord for their holding. His mother, the Lady Etheldreda, had taken refuge at Welbeck Abbey when driven from her husband's manor at Southwell, and she held her present tenancy from the Abbot, on the usual conditions. Leagues of forest land intervened however, between her present dwelling and the Abbey. The kind monk had indeed given over this distant grange for her use in order that she might be hidden from her enemy in the leafy recesses of the wood.

Osmund muttered over the words which he must pronounce kneeling bare-headed at the Abbot's feet, his hands between those of his patron.

“Hear, my lord! I become liege man of yours for life and limb and earthly regard and I will keep faith and loyalty to you for life and death, God help me.”

He must be sure to remember to lay aside his little dagger before swearing fealty. It was so solemn—Osmund wondered how the great lords and barons could repeat these words to the King and then revolt against him. Even his own sons had fought bitterly against the late King Henry! Eadgar said that all the troubles which had fallen of late upon England, were a scourge sent by God in punishment of the false oaths which men swore with so little scruple, and Osmund quickly said a prayer that he might be true to his oath. Circumstances might arise which would make it very difficult, for it was well known that many men in the first positions in the Kingdom were little better than their Norman pirate forebears and preyed shamelessly on the lesser folk. Many a poor man, aye, and even boy! had been imprisoned and cruelly beaten to make him reveal where his lord's jewels and treasures were hidden. The Abbey had its treasures and there were people in the country wicked enough to attack a holy Abbot! However, it was no use worrying about such a thing beforehand. Osmund felt confident that God would give

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him the grace to die for his loyalty to the good Father Abbot if it were necessary. The thought was rather a gloomy one and he soon began to have misgivings lest he should not accomplish his mission as gloriously as he had pictured to himself. He wished he could ride on a beautiful white charger, with his long sword hanging on his left side, like the hero, Bernard de Balliol, whose exploits he greatly admired. Of course, Eadgar should really have done service as he was the eldest, but Eadgar was so moony and absent-minded that he lost his way in the wood as soon as he was out of sight of the house. Strange that such a clever, book-learned person should be so stupid about everyday things! Eadgar never knew the time, nor which way the wind was, nor when the field should be sown! No doubt he was very wise and always had a quotation from Holy Writ on the tip of his tongue, and he could tell splendid stories too, about saints, and knights and battles. All the same, Hild, though she was a girl and a year younger than Osmund, was more companionable. Eadgar always wanted to read or talk—he never listened to anybody else and spent hours making syllogisms which the others found very dull.

Presently Osmund heard Hild's voice out in the garden—she was up and dressed already, and he longed to join her, and jumped up instantly when Mother presently knocked on the partition wall which separated the loft rooms in which they all slept. Down below was the "solar" or living room, which in this humble dwelling replaced the Castle hall, and which was reached by a short flight of stone steps from the yard. The kitchen was next it and down on the ground floor slept the woodman and his wife and the hinds. These last got no wages except a "luck-penny" to spend at the two great yearly fairs.

Osmund had left all his clothes ready overnight. Since they had been fugitives from their own Manor the family had felt the pinch of poverty. Osmund wore a plain tunic like the peasants, only that he had a shirt under it. His legs were clothed in cloth

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“chausses,” which were something between loose stockings and tight trousers, and for his feet there were his old leather shoes, very much patched, which pulled up over the ankles. His mother had made him some beautiful new ones of purple velvet, cut from a gown of her own, to put on when he reached the Abbey.

Old Goody Alice was always in terror that the boys would break their legs as they came down the ladder-stairs, Eadgar blundering along with a book in his hand, and Osmund descending in two wild bounds. Even Stephen declined to hold on by the rope hand-rail any longer! This morning Osmund only paused to wash hastily at the basin set in a little angle of the wall with a jug of cold water beside it. It was the duty of the person who emptied the jug to fill it up again at the spring, but Osmund decided that as the next user would be Stephen it would not be necessary to show so much consideration for a younger brother. So he tipped the basin into the projecting spout which carried it outside the house wall, flung the towel on the floor, and leaped down the steps into the garden.

Hild was tethering the hens which had broods of chickens—this was one of her daily tasks. She ran towards him with a protesting fowl squawking under her arm.

“Oh, Osmund, I have had such a good idea! Old Job wants you to take his dues to Father Abbot, and it’s a hen and sixteen eggs, and they are ever so heavy, so I thought you might ask Mother to let me come too, and I’ll carry them—truly I will!”

She added the last words beseechingly, for Osmund was shaking his head.

“You can’t,” he said firmly. “You’re a girl.”

“I don’t see why that need make any difference,” grumbled Hild. “I’m not a bit afraid. I tell you what, Osmund, I’ll promise not to argue and to let you decide which path to take.”

“I should think so, indeed! But most of the way there won’t be any path——”

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“And Mother said herself the other day, that a woman with a babe could walk scatheless from somewhere-or-other to the sea—and if we did meet a wolf, I can climb a tree as quickly as you can.”

“Oh, the forest is pretty well cleared of wolves if it comes to that——”



“YOU CAN’T,” HE SAID FIRMLY. “YOU’RE A GIRL.”

“Well, then!” cried Hild, interrupting again. “You know how you hate hens, brother.”

“I don’t see why I need take Job’s, either! Did Mother say I was to?”

“No, she hasn’t seen him yet.” Hild went back to the clutch of chickens which were lamenting their mother’s absence by cheeping with astonishing loudness: tying a string to one of the hen’s legs, she fastened the other end to an apple-tree. Osmund looked on, frowning heavily.

“But don’t you *see*, Hild, doing service is a man’s job. It means the promise to send men armed, all ready to fight, if the overlord goes to war—maidens can’t go to war.”

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“They do!” retorted Hild promptly. “They go to the Crusades and that is a holy war.”

“How you do argue!” exclaimed Osmund. “It’s really childish—you *know* you can’t come. Mother said she was anxious about letting me go—even Eadgar isn’t to come with me. I shall have all sorts of hardships!”

He spoke with some pride and Hild, who had not any very clear idea what hardships were, looked at him enviously.

“I think you are very unkind, Osmund,” she cried. “Robin Hood isn’t like that! He lets Maid Marian roam the greenwood with him, and he spares any train of travellers that has a woman in it for her sake and that of Our Lady St. Mary.”

“When I’m a mighty outlaw like Robin Hood, you shall come too,” said Osmund consolingly.

He was very fond of his sister, but she vexed him just now. The very idea that one could go on an adventure like a Knight Errant with a little girl of ten, running after one with a hen! Osmund hoped fervently that Mother would not want him to take the hen—it would be so inglorious! Lady Etheldreda was sending a jewel in lieu of fee. It was sewn up in a soft leather bag and hung round Osmund’s neck by a string.

Old Job was one of the Royal Warreners and it was his duty to look after that part of the forest which was devoted to the preservation of rabbits, hares and such small game. He was a free man with a little farm of his own which he held from the Abbot. In those days, rent was usually paid in kind, which was sometimes very inconvenient. Osmund began to feel the glory of the day clouded over already.

“It will spoil everything if I have to carry a great fat hen with me,” he lamented. “Why can’t Job send his grandson with it? It’s too bad to ask me.”

“Perhaps our mother will say it is too great a burden for such a little boy,” returned his sister maliciously. When she saw how

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vexed he looked, she was sorry, and running to Osmund, she gave him a hug, and said:

“I didn’t mean that. Perhaps you could slip off quickly before Job sees you. And I *won’t* be cross about not going with you, if you will tell me everything you have seen and heard when you come back.”

“I’m sure I wish it was over, Hild,” answered Osmund in a burst of confidence. “I hope I shall do everything all right, and not be awkward and bring shame on our mother’s training.”

“Don’t forget to wipe your mouth before you drink at meals,” cautioned Hild. “Here is my best kerchief—you may have it, brother. But you needn’t be afraid—you have really quite as nice manners as Eadgar—even if you aren’t so wise.”

At this moment the Lady Etheldreda called and both children raced into the hall where a meal was ready for the young traveller. His mother decided that he need not grant the Warrener’s request unless he wished, though she was careful to add that the old man had been kind to them and had kept them supplied with fresh game during the winter.

“Only for Job we should have had nothing but salt meat to make broth for little Sibell when she was ill,” put in Eadgar, who had a habit of coming out of his studies quite unexpectedly. Osmund wished his brother had not made this remark. He looked hard at his mother, and then sighed.

“Which would be the knightliest way?” he asked.

“The kindest way is ever the knightliest,” said his mother, and she blessed her boy on his broad sunburnt forehead.

Little Stephen ran out, loudly hallooing: “Job! Hi Job! Brother will take thy hen!”