



Marian

Ella Lyons

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When Marian Banner moves to the glittering city of Nottingham with her father, Sir Erik the Fortunate, her entire life changes. She is no longer allowed to run about the countryside in trousers and braids, climbing fences and shooting turkeys, but is thrust into a life of dresses and jewels and dancing lessons, none of which Marian is particularly pleased about. Her dark mood changes when she meets a tiny whip of a girl called Robin Hood. Robin is fierce and brave, and wants more than anything to become a knight, regardless of her gender. Together they explore the city, becoming fast friends along the way.

As time passes, their friendship into something bigger and scarier and far more wonderful. But then Marian's father is killed in service to the king and she catches the king's eye.

Can Robin save her one more? Or will Marian discover how to save herself?

Marian Details

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From Reader Review *Marian* for online ebook

Shira Glassman says

Review originally posted on The Lesbrary. One way to describe this is that it's a kiddie version of Heather Rose Jones's *Daughter of Mystery* – both are costume dramas featuring a traditionally feminine lesbian with a nurturing personality and a lesbian swordfighter living in a world where it's not customary for women to participate in combat, both feature father figures who a main character is both attached to and in opposition to, and both feature court intrigue – just to name a few similarities. So if you like the *Alpennia* books, rejoice because now there's a young adult novel with a similar flavor.

The pitch for *Marian* is that it's a f/f Robin Hood retelling, but I feel that does the book a disservice as the actual story is entirely new and original, only using the Robin Hood names as a springboard and small elements of the legend as landmarks that pop up in unexpected places. What we get is *Marian*, a teenaged girl who moves to the “big city” (for medieval, rural definitions of big) when her knighted father starts to rise in political power. She's a bit of a fish out of water and bewildered about how to deal with snobby noblewomen and the king noticing her beauty, and the only person she feels truly comfortable around is the farm girl Robin. They eventually get separated by fate but come together again once *Marian* is eighteen and the stakes are higher.

I really enjoy when I can feel the chemistry between characters who are an endgame romance, and *Marian* delivers there, mostly because of dialogue between *Marian* and Robin that felt lifelike and natural to me (other than the repeated use of ‘cracking’ as a slang term by too many characters in too short of a span of pages, although that might just be my American-ness showing—forgive me.) I liked how subtle the girls' connection is—it almost made me feel like I was just a femslash fan rather than someone purposely reading a f/f novel, which made the inevitable “it's canon” scene even more satisfying. In other words if you are one of those people who wanted *Anne Shirley* and *Diana Blythe* or *Jane Eyre* and *Helen Burns* to be in love, this book will put you back in that place and then *give you what you want*.

I thought it was really good writing that the author establishes *Marian* – and her father and their changing life situations — as a fully rounded character before ever introducing Robin as a love interest. By the time Robin shows up I was totally invested in *Marian* and her hopes and her traumas. Incidentally, I was puzzled as to why there was a pound and a half of foreshadowing about everyone in town coming down with fever but then *Marian's* father's died a different way.

I never noticed Little John and King John having the same name before because the original legend doesn't really make it relevant. But in this story, they interact and are in the same scene enough times that I noticed and I wanted to say that it was neat to see that in historical fiction of any kind—two people with the same common name. One doesn't often run into that in fiction for the obvious reason that it might confuse the reader, but I think it's neat because it's *super* realistic.

A quote I liked, discussing the villain of the piece – King John, of course:

“His Majesty is always paying attention to you.”

“His Majesty is always paying attention to himself.”

To be honest the reason I'm giving this four stars instead of five is that I feel like the romantic resolution was

a bit abrupt. I feel like the book's climax was the climax of Marian's story rather than the climax of the Marian/Robin romance. Also, there's a moment when Marian *assumes* some bottles which could have been a lot of very scary things are the medicine she needs for someone, and she's right, and that part made me smirk a little.

But other than that, it's a totally captivating read with a well-rounded cast and evocative scenes, and definitely worth checking out.

Trigger warning for attempted but foiled sexual assault – another similarity with *Daughter of Mystery*, actually.

Jaylee says

Marian is either a prequel to the classic Robin Hood story we all know, or it's the first installment of a series. The book closes at the beginning of a story, not the end of one. I think that may frustrate some readers, and feel this book needs to be marketed differently to avoid that, so I'm telling you that upfront. [EDIT: According to the author, this *is* the first book of a series.]

The story, however, is very well-done. The writing is lovely, with sensory details that bring the world to life and made me want to attend a Renaissance Faire (haha). The girls act very young for their age at the beginning of the book, when I *think* they're supposed to be sixteen, which frustrated me quite a bit since no sixteen-year-old acts the way they do. But in the scope of the book, you get to see Marian and Robin grow up from naive children to adults who understand the complexities of the world. I really liked that element of it, and that journey.

The romance is so nice, too, with all the innocence and excitement and delight of first love and it's just... it fills you with warm fuzzy feelings. It's so *nice*. I got so much secondhand joy from this book it's ridiculous. There were a few genuine laugh-out-loud moments, though mostly it was high-pitched giggling and squealing into a pillow.

The Robin Hood in this book is at the beginning of her story, and does nothing we associate with the classic Robin Hood. So... a queer retelling of Robin Hood this is absolutely not.

But as a sweet, fun historical fiction(?) / medieval coming of age f/f story acting as a prequel to the classic Robin Hood tale - this is an A+ book that I definitely recommend.

Onna says

This was an amazing take on Robin Hood. I was sad how abruptly it ended. It was sweet and short and I would totally read another part of their story if it ever was one.

Mel says

“A girl can do plenty of things besides get married and pop out babies.”

“Of course she can,” Marian said. “And if you don’t want to have a husband, you shouldn’t.”

One of the aspects I love most about this lesbian retelling of Robin Hood is its refreshing view on women and gender roles. From such minor things as the mention of a female blacksmith to the two female main characters Marian and Robin, who are both independent and strong-headed girls, this book was an utter delight to read.

When she is fourteen years old, Marian, having grown up in a small village, is forced to move to Nottingham where her father is one of King John’s knights. Thrown into a completely different world where she is expected to become a lady, she meets Robin. Robin with such beautiful curly red hair like fire and green eyes like the forest. Right from the start Marian is completely smitten with this farmer’s daughter who longs to be a knight herself one day. They become friends and spent a lot of time together.

Had it really only been a few weeks since Robin had come crashing into her life with her fiery hair and her bright eyes? It seemed so much longer. In a lot of ways, Marian felt as though she’d known Robin for her whole life. There was something elemental in her, something about her that fit Marian like a key in a lock.

This book is divided into two parts; the first showing how Marian moves to Nottingham, befriends Robin and falls in love with her, the second taking place three years later because, unfortunately, fate strikes again and they are separated.

I liked the first part more because there is so much time spent on developing the characters and the setting. There is a palpable sense of time and place and I just sat there and marvelled at everything that was shown to me. The innocent and lovely friendship between the two girls and then their shy, blooming love is wonderful to read about.

The second part not only changes with regard to the pacing and feels a bit rushed – especially towards the end – but Marian is a lot less confident than the girl she was before. It’s not that her character development doesn’t make sense. She is trapped in the castle with the king and there has to live up to a lot of social expectations – but what was such a joy to me before is dulled here. That’s not to say the second half of the book is bad (although I do wish the ending was fleshed out more) it just doesn’t quite live up to the standard set by the first.

I want to add a warning here because the storyline features attempted rape and sexual assault. Both scenes are short and don’t go very far but if you are sensitive to the subject or triggered by such content, please take care of yourself. To be honest, I am a bit peeved myself about this because I’ve been reading a lot of books lately where this kind of content was just sprung on me and I really wish we could lose this narrative and trope once and for all. Being as this is a retelling of Robin Hood these scenes do fit into the book but I’d rather they weren’t there.

Still, *Marian* is a fantastic read and one I heartily recommend. Not only are the characters well-crafted and the historical setting lovely, the romance between the girls is sweet and made me happy. I might check out more books by the author.

Tags: lesbian, homage to Robin Hood
Content Warnings: attempted rape, sexual assault
Rating: B, 4 stars
Blog: Review for All About Romance
Disclosure: ARC in exchange for review

Anam Ali says

It was going so bloody well and I was really enjoying the story when all of a sudden the author was all 'that's it, that's all you gonna get, the story is over now, *finite* my friend, *adios amigos*' and suddenly in less than a chapter it was The End™. What TF?! (*^*/)

Amber says

This feels like a startup to a Robin Hood retelling, but unless you're really paying attention you won't notice. It also the ending makes it kinda feel like it isn't finished.

Alexa says

Hm. I loved most of this, but towards the end I wasn't sure. Still, I this was a good F/F retelling.

M. Hollis says

"Between them, their hands curled near each other, and Marian wished for the boldness she'd felt the night before when she'd taken Robin's hand in hers. It was an easier thing to do when Robin was asleep, when she wouldn't laugh at her. Or pull away. Or look at her in the horrified, disgusted way Marian sometimes imagined she might."

This book is a rewriting of Robin Hood where we see the story from Marian's POV and where Robin is a redhead fiery girl. I love retellings as a whole already, but gay retellings with two girls falling in love? Just sign me up.

Marian is a sweet and nice character who goes through some really harsh stuff without losing her compassion for people. On the other side, we have the fierce Robin who is always throwing sarcastic words around and ready for a fight. From their first interactions I could feel their love story was going to be awesome and I'm glad to say I was right. There are some very nice kissing scenes in this book.

There were also some plot twists and the story went to different ways that I wasn't expecting and surprised me in a good way. It's good to see fleshed out characters who aren't just the protagonists.

The only thing that confused me at first was how fast everything happened at the end... but the author reassured me when I asked about it. It may have involved me screaming about how I need more gay scenes.

I think lots of people will enjoy reading this story as much as I did.

Chiara says

A copy of this novel was provided by the author for review.

The beginning of *Marian* completely sucked me in. I always love it when I know I'm going to enjoy a book from the first page, and with *Marian* it was practically from the first word. This was mainly because the writing style was lovely, and incredibly easy to engage with.

Although, I was somewhat surprised that over half of *Marian* was about Marian and Robin as fourteen year olds. I don't usually gravitate towards the lower end of YA, and the blurb for *Marian* didn't indicate that it centred around such a young protagonist, so it was pretty unexpected. I'm not entirely sure why Marian and Robin were so young when they met, except for the 'we haven't seen each other in years' thing that came in the second part of the novel. I honestly would have preferred them to be older, because I feel like the intense connection and romantic feelings they had for each other would have probably been a bit more investment worthy (the kissing scene was kinda hella awkward because they were so young).

I liked the fact that Robin wasn't introduced from page one, because it allowed me as a reader to get to know Marian as a character without a love interest. Knowing that she was hardworking (and not afraid to get her hands dirty – literally), and loving (her relationship with her best friend was adorable, and I wanted more of it), and an incredible musician really fleshed out her character. That's not to say that Marian lost all of her Marian-ness when she met Robin, but it can be great to get to know someone before they fall in love.

As for falling in love ... the ship was quite adorable. I was excited for Marian and Robin to grow up together, and the fact that this didn't happen was quite disappointing. I suppose that would have been far too 'happily ever after', especially since this is the first book in a series! Even so, I hope the girls get to relearn each other in the next book. I think the angst will be high, and the falling in love (again) part will be swoon worthy and sweet.

As this is a retelling, not everything is recognisable. But the little things that were made me so happy. *Robin Hood* has never been a super favourite of mine, but seeing the nods to the original tale in *Marian* were fun, and I'm excited to see what other similarities come in the next book!

Overall, *Marian* was a quick, sweet, and lovely retelling with an f/f romance at its heart. I'm incredibly keen for the next book, because I want to see where the story goes and how it continues to incorporate the original tale, as well as seeing Marian and Robin grow as characters. And having a ship sail, of course.

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trigger warning: loss of residence via fire, loss of life via fire, robbery, death of a parent (in battle), and sexual assault in this novel

Danika at The Lesbrary says

So... Is this a prequel? When I heard "lesbian Robin Hood", this wasn't what I expected. There aren't really any of the elements that I associate with Robin Hood. If there wasn't a character called Robin Hood, I wouldn't have guessed it was a Robin Hood retelling.

This is also more of a novella: only 135 pages. It feels like the first half of a novel.

I liked the characters, and it's a good story, but it just didn't meet the "lesbian Robin Hood" description for me.

Nicole Field says

From the very first pages, I loved this book and I especially loved the character of Robin.

Ella Lyons makes the story of Robin Hood her own with a story from Marian's perspective and a female Robin Hood.

Marian Banner is the only child of King John's banner man. As such, this bestows upon her a certain amount of stature. However, for most of the year she lives with a farmer and his family in Abyglen. When she is moved to Nottingham, nothing about her life is as she wanted it to be. She feels pulled away from all of the people she knows and loves, doesn't get to see her father anywhere near enough, and hates the sudden commitments of being a proper young lady.

If the friendship between Marian and Robin seemed to come on too quickly, I found that to be easily and readily explained by the fact that Robin is familiar as a farmer's daughter in a time when everything familiar has just been taken away from her. I kind of liked that Robin was an abrasive tomboy.

I also liked the way she softened at various times of the novel. She is not a character I would like to get on the bad side of; a character with flaws. I loved her.

But this also isn't the typical story of Robin Hood Robbing the Rich to Feed the Poor. If anything, she does that off screen. Robin takes kind of a background to Marian's stealing of medicines and money from where she ends up living in quarters of her own inside the King's castle. I kind of wish we'd seen more of the story being twisted for this new version's ends.

The ending came way too fast. I thought that the whole way through, getting closer and closer to the end of the book and wondering how everything was going to get wrapped up. The ending, when it came, felt as though the story had been stopped mid-scene. I could have followed these characters for a story that was twice as long. The pacing of the whole story was absolutely perfect, though, up till that end point.

Molli Moran says

More like 3.5 stars. A fresh take on Robin Hood, this is a f/f historical romance with a great deal of heart, sweet moments, and was really enjoyable.

Rebecca says

Robin Hood: you've never seen it like this before

This time around, Robin is a girl. Why wear bows when you can fire them instead?

And Marian, our leading lady: far from a maid, adventure forbade; longing for more, finding life a bore

Oh, the constraints of society!

I'm not very familiar with this classic, but I rather enjoyed this diverse retelling as roles are reversed. This time, Robin is a girl and a lesbian romance blossoms between her and Marian. I must admit, I'm not a big fan of younger YA and didn't expect the girls to be as young as they were. For that reason, I liked part two better as the girls are older, but not the fact that they'd lost touch. While different, both girls are headstrong, a quality I love in characters. I wish I'd felt more captivated by the story, but it ended too soon for me and read more like a novella, especially with how it ended abruptly. A pleasant introduction to this world, but I hope there's more to follow for fans.

Cait Califa says

(received an advanced readers copy in exchange for an honest review)

you can read my full review here: <https://brujabooks.wordpress.com/2016...>

Marian is being marketed as lesbian retelling of the legend of Robin Hood. But as the title suggests, this story belongs to Marian. Marian isn't just Robin Hood's love interest in this book and it's a nice change to take the familiar story in, through the eyes of Marian rather than Robin.

Marian is a young country girl, new to Nottingham and trying to adjust to life as a lady after her knight father's social status is unexpectedly elevated.

Robin Hood is the daughter of a farmer. As so, Marian is drawn to Robin because she is something familiar.

The two girls quickly become friends. Robin expressing her desire to become a knight and Marian voicing her frustrations with expectations of court life. The two banter back-and-forth, comfort each other, and enjoy each other's company while navigating the different expectations placed upon them.

Marian's other relationships in the book, I found just as enjoyable to read as her relationship with Robin.

Her relationship with her father, her childhood best friend, John Little, to all the various people at court were all entertaining and expressed aspects of Marian's personality that should be recognizable, ie: her caring nature and lack of interest in the opulence her title bares.

One of my favorite things, throughout the novel is various caretakers being relieved when Marian returns home and hasn't gotten herself into trouble, as that is what they expect her to be doing with her free time.
#Marianthetroublemaker

I also found the scenes that Marian shares with King John to be especially well done. Because while King John spends a lot of his scenes giving things to Marian, from spare some gold coins to extravagant ruby

jewels, each scene has a tense atmosphere. The reader can feel Marian's discomfort with his attention as easily as they feel her ease in the interactions she has with Robin. It was very well done.

Overall, I found the characters and their dialogue entertaining, the settings aptly described (at one point I could smell Nottingham), the relationships endearing and interesting. The pacing was excellent throughout and up until the end, where I felt abruptly pulled out of story for just a moment because I was like, wow, it's done...

I'm hoping for another installment of Marian. I could easily read another book (or two) with these characters.

Marian truly delivered. Seriously, check it out.

Emily says

I did it. I read this book. I knew about this book before it came out, and have been skeptical ever since. I've read a very large majority of traditionally published Robin Hood books, and consumed plenty of other media as well. The immediate draw for this book is the idea of a lesbian retelling. "Yes! That's me!" was my initial response. And then... Well, then I realized that I was in for a gender-swap, which (unpopular opinion) I have never enjoyed. It brings back horrifying memories of *Scarlet*, which was a complete mistake to read. In short, Robin Hood gender-swaps have never worked for me. In this case, I decided to give it a go.

I would give this book two stars, but I was honestly entertained by it. I liked it. I read it as quickly as I could, although my investment in the story always ended when I took a break.

While I read it, it felt like *deja vu*. So much *deja vu*. The first half of the book, Marian and Robin are only fourteen and fifteen, which was a shocker, and brought back long buried memories of *Young Marian's Adventures In Sherwood Forest*. Then you've got your two medieval fantasy girls, with one red-headed and obviously more butch, which *cough* *Of Fire and Stars* *cough*. And then of course, *Scarlet* just for the gender-swap.

This book has zero merit as "historical fiction". It is medieval fantasy through and through, but it is not historical fiction. Phrases such as "dear old dad" crop up in the dialogue, which was physically painful. Peasants and serfs are just poor, and can do anything if they only tried hard enough and believed in themselves; they absolutely don't have any obligation other than to themselves. And the poorest of the poor have multiple rooms in their homes and separate bedrooms. Everyone also had a last name? Not even last names that made sense, but characters referred to as "Mrs. Fresle" and "Mr. Bossard". I won't talk about given names, although I easily could.

And finally, if I had to read "God save him" one more time after ANYONE mentioned the king, I would have thrown my Kindle. Stop.

I wanted very much to enjoy this book and take it seriously. I did enjoy it, but only after I made the decision to let my usual standards for Robin Hood fiction fly away.

I couldn't take it seriously, though. Not even a little bit.
