

# Girls in Chains

being the story of the

## Theft of the Famous Dursley Candlesticks

and

## the Mighty Chottapeg Ruby



and what befell

## Katie and Emily

### Poor Workhouse Girls In the Colony of New South Wales

October 20 2006



## About this Story:

This has always been one of the girls' favourite stories. It reads well aloud and there is the added cachet of seeing justice finally done to the girls and Dudley Dursley.

There is a naiveté about this story that is a feature of most of the stories. Widow Twankey is a pantomime figure, of course, and there are plenty of stereotypes in the guests at Dursley hall and among the servants. The treatment of children [and adults] in the Workhouse, the grinding drudgery of domestic servants and the vulnerability of the poor were very real in early nineteenth century England and although they are presented in a soft light here, the story does hint at the darkness behind the façade. The terrible reality of life for convict women is also hinted at. I'm guessing that many convicts felt as the girls did when they arrived in Australia: that here was a new chance for them to build a life away from the inequities of England.

Acute readers will pick up some little touches here and there. Captain Price, of course, is the brother of Fanny Price from *Mansfield Park*. Mabel Chottapeg reappears in *Girls in Veils* as the light hearted young widow of the Bishop of Calcutta.

The theme of redemption is always there in my stories - even for a villain like Dudley Dursely.

## Chapter 1: The Workhouse

This is a story that happened a long time ago- before there were any cities or towns in Australia and before people had mobile telephones or cars or computers. In fact, people in those days didn't have very much at all to live on and poor people were often hungry. It was sad and sorry time for many people and I'm glad I didn't live then.

In a big industrial city in England where it always seemed to be raining and cold there lived two little girls called Katie and Emily. They were poor orphan girls who lived in a Workhouse - a horrible, hard, grey stone place where poor children without parents could live. The girls in the Workhouse wore grey dresses with white aprons. They slept two girls to a bed and they had to snuggle up close to stay warm on those cold nights. In the mornings, they had to wash in cold water. It was a tough, grey, gloomy place.

The girls worked hard all day doing washing and ironing for the rich people who brought their dirty clothes to the workhouse in big wicker hampers. All morning they worked at big wooden tubs with a bar of soap and a washboard, scrubbing and cleaning socks, sheets and clothes and knickers; in the afternoon, they worked with big, heavy irons, making sure that the clothes were ironed nicely and looked perfect. There was no school in the Workhouse. Katie and Emily were up early and into bed late and I think that if they hadn't been such brave, good girls, they would have been unhappy and miserable.

But they weren't. They were always cheerful and hard working. They knew that some poor people didn't have anything to eat at all and at least they had porridge for breakfast, bread for lunch and cabbage soup for dinner. They didn't like doing the washing and ironing all day but they had lots of friends in the Workhouse and the Matron was a kind old lady who did her best to look after the girls. When she wasn't busy, she read the girls a story before bed. She came through their room at night to make sure that everyone was safe and warm in bed. If anyone was sick, she kept them in bed and gave them milk to drink. Poor Emily [who often had a cough] loved the old Matron and liked to help her with the sick girls.

At night, Katie and Emily dreamed of a life outside the Workhouse. They hoped that one day they would leave and go away to a place where it was warm and sunny and there were no great hampers of washing and no irons. The only way

girls left the Workhouse, however, was to go to be a servant in a rich person's home but many rich people didn't like Workhouse girls. They said they were clumsy and ugly. Sometimes a bad tempered looking lady came looking for a servant girl and they watched the poor Matron as she showed the grumpy woman around. It was an awful moment; when Katie and Emily saw those nasty looking ladies they thought that they would rather stay with their friends in the dismal Workhouse than be a servant in that person's house. It seemed that nothing would ever happen to make their sad world better.

Then one day, it all changed. There was great excitement because the Matron told them that someone was coming to look for servant girls for a grand house in the country a long walk from the Workhouse. All the little girls were excused from the laundry early that afternoon and dressed in their best uniforms. They waited in the dining room for the arrival of the visitor and when the Matron entered the room with a lady dressed all in black, the girls were just a little frightened. It was probably just another grumpy lady looking for a cheap servant.

But the visitor turned out to be a bright, merry woman with curly hair and an enormous smile. She looked at all the girls and Katie heard her say to the Matron: "I wish I could take them all home to Dursley Hall. The poor little things must miss having a home of their own."

"Ah, to be sure they do, Widow Twankey, and none of them could wish for a kinder Mistress than you, I'm sure."

"Now Matron," said the Widow, "You must know that I am only the Housekeeper at Dursley Hall. Lord Vernon and Lady Petunia Dursley are in London for most of the year but they come down to the Hall in the summer. Before they come I need two girls to help as Maids of All Work. Perhaps you have two sisters who could come together? I need girls who are gentle and good and don't complain much."

"That sounds just like Katie and Emily Bland, Ma'am," said the Matron. "I will ask them to come up here to meet you."

Katie had heard all this and her heart was thumping. She and Emily had lived at the Workhouse for three years and although they loved the kindly Matron, they dreamed of going somewhere else away from the laundry tub, the heavy irons, and the porridge and soup. When the Matron called their names, the girls

stepped forward and made a little curtsy - as country girls could do in those days. They looked up then into the twinkling eyes of the nicest lady they had ever seen. Her face was tired and rather worn but it was mischievous and gentle and loving. Katie and Emily couldn't help smiling and the lady in black smiled back.

"Yes, I am sure that these two young ladies will do very well, Matron. Girls, would you like to come to live at Dursley Hall with me?" asked the Widow.

"To be sure we would," said Emily.

"Certainly," said Katie.

"But, Ma'am," said Emily, "I wonder if you have cabbage soup for dinner?"

"Why no," said the Widow, "but if you would like some, I shall ask Cook to make a big pot just for you!"

"All the girls laughed at this and so did Katie and Emily. They were liking the Widow woman right from the start. An hour later, they had all their clothes tied up in two old tea towels and were kissing the Matron and all their friends goodbye. They shed some tears, too, as they closed the door on the Workhouse. It was a dismal place, most certainly, but it had been their home for three long years. This would be the start of a whole new adventure in their life.

## Chapter 2: Happy Days at Dursley Hall

Katie and Emily thought that they might be walking to Dursley Hall but when they left the Workhouse, they were met by a fine carriage cart with a handsome grey horse between the shafts and a jaunty Irish groom holding the reins. Widow Twankey introduced him to the girls as Patrick and the young man took off his straw hat and made the girls a low bow. With a flourish, he introduced the girls to Pilot - the noblest horse in all of England. The girls giggled: they had never received a bow from an Irishman before and they were soon sitting up beside him in the cart listening to his merry stories and jokes as they drove along the grey road out into the wonderful spring country side. It had been raining but the late afternoon was sunny and clear and cool. The girls were excited. They loved Widow Twankey at first meeting and Patrick was turning out to be as happy and friendly as they could wish.

Imagine their surprise when after an hour's traveling along the road, Widow Twankey stopped at an inn to buy Patrick a glass of beer and to buy a cup of tea for the girls. The girls had learned to make tea for the Matron but they had never had a cup of their own and I think that of all the nice things that happened that day, the cup of hot, fragrant tea was the very best. Soon, however, it was back on the cart; Pilot was whipped up to move faster and in another hour - just as it was starting to get dark and the girls were very tired by all the excitement, the cart turned off the road and began to climb up a low hill. That's where they had their first view of Dursley Hall.

I don't know what Katie and Emily expected but they certainly were surprised by the tall and beautiful home - almost a palace- standing on the banks of a little river. The cart took them around to the back of the house where there were stables and kennels, a pigeon roost, a dairy and a spring house - it was almost like a little village in itself. Widow Twankey took the girls into the house while Patrick went to take care of Pilot and soon they were in the Housekeeper's snug little parlour. The big dining room table in the servants' hall was being laid for dinner.

The girls were hungry but very shy. Widow Twankey took them to the bathroom and helped them to wash up. Then they came back to the table and Widow Twankey sat them down beside her as the other servants assembled. It was very scary. The most awful person was Mr Williams, the Butler, who wore black clothes like Widow Twankey. But he gave them a kindly smile and told them that he hoped they would be good girls. There were three housemaids named Bessie, Nessie and Jessie. They had lovely uniforms of black and white with nice mop hats. There were two footmen, [Ned and Ted] and a very large man, Mr Saddler, who ran the stables. There were gardeners and a game keeper and more servants than Katie or Emily could ever imagine that there were jobs for - even in a house as big as Dursley Hall.

Mr Williams said Grace and then the dinner began. The girls had never had such nice food. There was a shepherd's pie, lots of baked vegetables and then a ginger pudding with luscious, golden custard. If only they hadn't been so tired I think that the girls would have thought this the very best meal they had ever tasted.

Widow Twankey probably knew how they felt. The girls didn't have any pyjamas: at the Workhouse they had simply slept in the clothes they wore every day. Widow Twankey took them to the little room in the attic they would share and showed them the washstand. One of the housemaids had already brought a big can of hot water and for the first time ever the girls were able to have a wash without having to hurry along. Their beds were made with sheets and pillows and when they slipped into bed and Widow Twankey bent to take the candle, Katie couldn't help throwing her arms around her and giving her a big hug. Emily did the same: from the moment that Widow Twankey had taken them from the Workhouse it was the thing that both of the girls had most wanted to do.

Poor Widow Twankey. She had no little girls of her own and she hugged the girls back. She hoped - as you must - that the girls would become her very good friends and have the best time at Dursley Hall. Widow Twankey gave each of the girls a big kiss and then tucked them into bed. Once she had left the girls in the darkness, they were sound asleep before Widow Twankey was at the bottom of the steps.

And so began the happiest weeks of the girls' lives. Over the next ten weeks, I think that the girls probably worked harder than they had ever worked - even in the laundry of the workhouse. They were up early every morning to help

make the breakfast and then wash up afterwards. Once that was done, there was always cleaning and polishing to do - and on Mondays, of course, there were big hampers of washing and ironing to do. But somehow, no matter how hard they worked, they were never sad.

You see, they were learning so much. Widow Twankey taught them everything: how to light a fire in the fireplace; how to set the table, how to cut and arrange flowers, how to rub the big mahogany table in the dining room until it shone. She also taught the girls how to sew and for four weeks the girls stopped every afternoon for two hours to cut out and sew their own clothes and pyjamas. They learned to cook, as well, with the jolly cook, Mrs Muffin, teaching the girls to make soups and stews and puddings. They were good at all these things, too. Mr Williams praised the girls for their hard work. Mrs Muffin was so pleased with the way they tried so hard. And the more time they spent with Widow Twankey, the happier they were.

Most afternoons, they went for a long walk to the orchard to collect the earliest fruit: juicy apples, red strawberries and raspberries. They carried them home to Mrs Muffin who turned them into lovely cakes and puddings. In the evening, Widow Twankey taught the girls to read. Several other servants came to these classes as well and at first the girls felt a long way behind the stable boys and Patrick. But the girls tried very hard and soon they were able to read almost as well as the others.

Sundays was the best day of the week. After breakfast, all the servants walked to the village church [Saint Ethelbert's] behind Mr Williams and Widow Twankey and took up three whole pews. The front pew, of course, was reserved for the Dursley family itself and it was never occupied. [The family was not expected home before the end of summer.] Katie and Emily were used to saying their prayers with the good Matron in the Workhouse but this was different. There were hymns to be sung and then they sat and listened to a long sermon by the Rev'd Vinegar Thurble - a dry sort of gentleman with thick glasses and a shaky voice. Some of the servants used to yawn and fidget through the sermon but Katie and Emily never wished that it were shorter. After all, said Emily, it was the only time in the week when they were allowed to sit still with absolutely nothing to do. Tea on Sunday evening was always great fun because it was the cook's day off and the other servants had to take it in turns to make the tea. When it was Katie and Emily's turn, they took everything out into the lovely garden on a beautiful summer day and had a picnic tea. It was great fun.

### Chapter 3: Visitors.

And then, of course, all of this changed. Mr Williams told them that Lord Vernon and Lady Petunia Dursley were coming home to Dursley Hall at the end of the week. They would be bringing friends with them and Widow Twankey had to have Dursley Hall ready to receive them.

From that moment, the household was a whirl of activity. There was no time for picnics now - or even for lessons and reading. There were beds to make, rooms to sweep and clean and everything to air ready for the visitors. Mrs Muffin made pies and jellies and puddings; all the furniture was polished and dusted and everything shone beautifully. Chickens, turkeys and ducks were killed and dressed for the elegant dinner parties that Sir Vernon and Lady Dursley would host. Great baskets of fruit were gathered in and there were wonderful cheeses and ham and jars of pickles and jam. On the day before the master was expected, Widow Twankey took Katie and Emily into the garden and they cut great basketfuls of flowers; these were arranged in vases all over the house. The girls had never been so busy.

Throughout it all, the girls were both excited and a little frightened. They had enjoyed their time at Dursley Hall and had come to love Widow Twankey and all the servants. But Lord Vernon sounded a very grand person indeed and some of the servants [when Widow Twankey was out of the room] said that Lady Petunia was sometimes sulky and bad tempered. But the person everyone mentioned in whispers was the son of the house- Sir Dudley Dursley - who was nineteen years old and “very wild”. Even Widow Twankey who never said an unkind word about anyone said that Master Dudley was a “difficult” young man. The girls hoped that as new [and unimportant] servants that they would have little to do with the Dursleys.

On the evening before the Master and Lady Dursely were expected, Widow Twankey called the girls into the Butler’s Pantry where there was a heavy door with a big lock. From her pocket she produced a beautiful brass key and opened the door. There, on shelves behind glass doors were the most wonderful silver plates. Each of these had to be taken down and polished. There were silver plates and dishes and cruets - all very old and grand. The grandest of all, however, were the candlesticks.

There were ten of them and they were made of solid silver. They had a lovely dull gleam that old and precious things have and the girls had never seen anything so beautiful. And as they rubbed and polished the candlesticks, Widow Twankey told them their story.

“Yes, they are very old, as you can see. King Charles himself gave these candlesticks to the original Lord Dursely because of his bravery in supporting the king during his troubles. They have been in the family for six generations and they are worth a great deal of money. Lord Dursley would never sell them, of course - they are his most precious possession. They will have pride of place on the dining room table when he and Lady Petunia come home. Only Mr Williams and I are allowed to handle them so it is a great honour, Emily and Katie, to be allowed to polish them with me.

“Thank you, Widow Twankey, I’m sure,” said Emily. “Are you sure the candlesticks are safe here?”

“Oh very safe,” said the good widow as she put the last dab of polish on the last candlestick for Katie to clean off. “No one would be brave enough to steal them away.” When they were buffed and polished and made to sparkle, Widow Twankey called Mr Williams and he admired how nicely they were done. Then they were safely locked back into the plate cupboard and the girls went off to bed, excited and fearful at the same time at what the next day would bring.

On the very first night of the Dursley’s return, there was to be a grand dinner party for all the guests. There were ten visitors in all: Lord and Lady Bareacres from Scotland and Viscount and Lady Sodabread from Ireland were friends of Lord Vernon Dursley from the House of Lords. Lord Izzy and Lady Lizzie Lardbutt were friends of Lady Dursley. General Alexander and Lady Alexander had recently returned to England from Canada. Bishop Chottapeg from Calcutta had been invited to bring his lovely bride, the former Miss Mabel Dorcas. It was to be a grand party indeed.

Of course Sir Dudley Dursely was also of the company and the girls had the chance to watch him while they served afternoon tea in the conservatory. When the girls had taken around the scones, he took three of them and heaped them with jam and cream. Dudley was about nineteen years old. He was a very big boy with red hair like Lord Vernon but he had a nastier face than anyone the girls had ever seen - even in the Workhouse. Master Dudley wore very flash

clothes but his wonderful silk waistcoat couldn't hide his very big belly and his green coat couldn't disguise his very large bottom. The girls began to understand why the servants were all a little afraid of him. He looked, I must tell you, like a bully - which is exactly what he had been at school. The servants whispered that Dudley had been sent down from the best schools in England. He was now at Oxford University although he did not seem to spend much of his time reading his books, the servants said.

"I wonder why Lord Dursely asked all these people to come to stay for a party? Are they all good friends?" Emily asked Widow Twankey as they set the great dining room table with flowers and silver. The grand candlesticks shone so beautifully after the girls had polished them.

"Well, my dear, I shouldn't carry gossip- that's something I hate among servants- but I must tell you that I think Lord and Lady Dursley are hoping that these grand people will help Master Dudley find a career. Lord Bareacres and Viscount Sodabread are great men in the land and could give Master Dursley a place in the Parliament. General Alexander could give him a place in the army and Bishop Chottapeg might take him off to the church in India. The Lardbutts are supposed to be very wealthy and own lots of banks. Perhaps Master Dursley could make a fortune in one of the banks. I do hope that something can be found for him," said the Widow.

"Would Master Dursley like to work in a bank or in the church or in the parliament?" Katie asked.

Widow Twankey would have liked to have talked a great deal more but there were other servants about and she didn't want anyone to think that she were a gossip. "We'll talk about that later. Now perhaps we should talk more about taking that can of hot water up to the blue boudoir where the Bishop and his lady are so they can have a wash before dinner," said the Widow.

Poor Katie and Emily. The bishop had brought his own servant with him to the house party - a tall Indian gentleman who wore a turban and a large moustache. His name was Mustafa Smoke and when he wasn't organizing the bishop's bath water, this gentleman servant could be found in the back garden very busy with a cheroot. Mustafa did not think to organize a bath for the bishop's wife and so both Katie and Emily took a big bucket of hot water in each hand and climbed the servant's staircase to the top floor. They were careful not to spill a drop.

When they knocked on the door, it was opened by a sweet looking young lady who greeted them kindly. This was Mrs Mabel Chottapeg and the girls liked her immediately. The bishop was an old, grand gentleman with grey hair but his wife was young and pretty. Widow Twankey had assigned the girls to be her maids for the time of the house party. Bishop Chottapeg had already had his bath and had gone downstairs to have a drink of gin with Lord Vernon. While Emily poured the water into the big tin tub, Katie took Mabel's yellow silk gown down to the housekeeper's parlour to give it a quick iron. After Mabel had had her ash, Emily then helped Mabel to dress. Katie did her hair and made sure that she looked super.

To be truthful, Mabel was really quite frightened by all the grand ladies in the house and she loved talking to the two little girls. Once they had taken the buckets of water back down to the kitchen, the girls helped Mabel unpack. The girls were really excited to see so many lovely things. Mabel showed them her fine linen drawers, her silk stockings and then opened a special sandalwood box in which there was a wonderful necklace. On a long gold chain there was a single ruby - as big as a pigeon's egg! Katie and Emily could only squeal with delight - they had never seen anything more beautiful. It seems that a rich Indian Maharajah had given the necklace to Bishop Chottapeg in thanks for the bishop's curing his favourite cow. The bishop had given the necklace to his new bride, Mabel. Mabel allowed Katie and Emily to try on the necklace and admire themselves in the looking glass. She put the lovely necklace on last of all as she dressed. It looked magnificent!

Widow Twankey had planned a wonderful dinner with Mrs Muffin. There was vegetable soup, roast mutton and raspberry pudding with cream. Katie and Emily had the job in the kitchen of licking all the pudding bowls before Abigail, the scullery maid, did the washing up. Afterwards, the girls also got to take the cups of coffee to the drawing room where the ladies were sitting while the gentlemen had port and cigars. They listened to Lady Dursley telling Lady Bareacres and Lady Sodabread what a fine parliamentarian young Dudley would make if he could only find someone to help him along. Some of the ladies wore very fine jewels but no one had anything quite as beautiful as Mabel Chottapeg's ruby necklace.

The only thing that spoiled the evening was a horrible row that the girls accidentally heard while they were cleaning up in the dining room. Someone

[probably Lord Lardbutt] had spilt his raspberry pudding on the Persian carpet and Widow Twankey had given the girls a bucket of warm water and a cloth each to see what they could clean up. They were on their hands and knees under the table when Sir Dudley and Lord Vernon came in and shut the door. They were arguing noisily: Lord Vernon was so angry he could hardly speak and Sir Dudley seemed grumpy that his father was so bad tempered. It seems that Dudley had spent most of his money buying a racehorse named Radish. He'd spent the last of it betting on Radish to win a race at Ascot the very next day. Lord Vernon was furious.

"You may be my son, Dudley but you are an absolute disgrace. You've been chucked out of the best schools in England. Now you've been plucked from the University. What will become of you, you ungrateful boy?" Lord Vernon thundered.

At this moment Lady Dursely came into the room and closed the door. She was crying and anxious, pleading with Sir Dudley to be a good boy.

"If only Lord Lardbutt would give you a place at one of his banks," said Lady Dursley. "Lord Bareacres has just told me that he doesn't think you are suitable for a parliamentary job and I think he is right. It would be much too hectic for my boy. I am going to talk to that sweet Mabel Chottapeg to see if her husband, the bishop, will give you some place in India. He was telling me that he has great difficulty getting priests for his diocese. The tigers are so savage, it seems."

"Mother, I don't want a job in a horrible bank. I certainly don't want to go to India to work for some old bishop and be eaten by a hungry tiger. In fact, I don't want to work at all. Can't you just give me some more money? It's expensive to keep a racehorse. Besides, I owe rather a lot of money to some fellows and I need to pay it back immediately"

"No more money!" shouted Lord Vernon. "There is hardly any money left as it is. I've nothing to give you, Dudley."

"Well, you'll see! Tomorrow when Radish wins the big race at Ascot, then you'll be nice to me because I'll win lots of money."

With that he went out and slammed the door. Poor Lady Dursley cried in her husband's arms and it was five minutes before they could go back to their

guests. Five minutes later, Katie and Emily thought they might be safe to come out from under the table.

## Chapter 4: A Terrible Injustice is Done!

Sir Dudley left the Hall first thing the next morning and came home just as everyone was getting dressed for dinner. Katie saw him ride in through the stable gates while she was taking in some washing. [She had washed Mabel's beautiful silk stockings - Widow Twankey told her that she would certainly make an excellent lady's maid!] By the look on Sir Dudley's fat face, she knew that Radish hadn't won his race. Sir Dudley looked as if he had been crying and Katie thought it best not to look very closely at all.

The dinner that night was strained and awkward. Lady Petunia tried very hard to be cheerful and bright but Sir Dudley sat sullenly at one end of the table and Lord Vernon sat glowering at the other end. Bishop Chottapeg told then a very long, dull story about an adventure he had had with a monkey when he was baptizing an Indian baby but the story dragged on for so long that Lady Lardbutt [who was hard of hearing] got the story all muddled and thought that the bishop had baptized the monkey. Before she could ask how this might be, Sir Dudley had got up from his splendid ginger pudding and stalked out of the room. At least when he left, things became a little more relaxed but everyone decided to go bed early anyway. The next day they were all going fox hunting and needed a good night's sleep.

That night, after the dinner things were all cleared away and the servants had had a last cup of tea, the girls sat up with Widow Twankey and Katie and Emily told her what they had heard.

"Poor Lord Vernon," said Widow Twankey. "He is a proud man and it must break his heart that his only child is such a difficult, wild young man. We must pray for him."

And they did, kneeling on the floor of the Widow's little parlour. When this was done, Widow Twankey sent the girls upstairs where they washed quickly and slipped into bed.

They must have been asleep for several hours when they were awakened by the ringing of the bell in their little attic bedroom. The bell was the servant's bell; it was connected to the blue boudoir below where Bishop Chottapeg and Mabel were sleeping. Emily heard it first and even though her bed was nice and snug, she knew that the ringing bell meant that she was needed. Katie and Emily slipped into their dressing gowns and slippers and climbed the steps down to the blue boudoir.

It was a bright moonlit night but Emily quickly found a candle and lit it before heading down stairs. As they turned on to the balcony, Emily started.

"There's someone on the staircase ahead of us. I'm sure I saw someone - with a big bottom!"

"Emily," said Katie, "Don't frighten me. It's probably just Sir Dudley going late to bed."

They hurried on; when they had reached the blue boudoir, they knocked gently on Mabel's door. It opened immediately.

"Can I help you, Ma'am?" asked Katie.

Poor Mabel was very upset. "Oh Katie, Emily," she cried, "I don't know what to do. Have you moved the box with my necklace from the dressing table? It's gone!"

"No, Ma'am," said Emily. Katie went with the candle to check the table and the floor in case the box had fallen off. She could hear Bishop Chottapeg snoring but at that moment just as she was planning to go to get Widow Twankey and Mr Williams there was a horrible smashing of glass in the rooms below and a great banging that woke the whole house.

There was more breaking glass and then Mr Williams appeared in his nightshirt with a poker and another candle. "Call his Lordship!" cried Mr Williams. "We've been robbed! The plate room has been forced and the Dursley candlesticks have been stolen!"

"My necklace has been stolen too," cried Mabel. "Oh please help me!"

There was terrible confusion in the house as doors opened and slammed and people came up and down the staircase. Mr Williams - always a sensible man - sent one of the kitchen boys on a horse to run as fast as he could to the village to bring the old policeman, Mr Tapster, who kept the local gaol. Lord Vernon called everyone [servants and guests] into the drawing room and the girls and Widow Twankey alone were excused to make everyone a cup of tea. The last one to arrive was Sir Dudley looking very pleased with himself.

It was a horrible long while before the ancient sergeant of police arrived. Katie and Emily knew Mr Tapster well. He was a kind old gentleman who played the fiddle at church and the girls often brought him a little treat from the kitchen on Sunday mornings. When he finally arrived he looked very solemn and concerned. There were few crimes in the village and a real robbery was something very special.

“Now then, now then,” said the old man. “The first thing we need to do is search the whole house to see if this villain is still here and hiding. I want all the ladies to remain here while the gentlemen come with me. Now keep top eye open for the thieves and the things they have stolen; if they have been disturbed during the robbery they may have hidden Mrs Chottapeg’s necklace or the candlesticks somewhere. “

The girls were very busy building up the fire to keep the ladies warm and pouring cups of tea from the big pot that Widow Twankey had made. The search might have taken a long time [it was a very big house] but soon there were cries of “Look here!” and “AHA!” And then all the men came back to the drawing room with Lord Vernon carrying one of the candlesticks and Bishop Chottapeg carrying the sandalwood box in which the ruby necklace had been kept.

“Widow Twankey,” thundered Lord Vernon. “This candlestick was found in your bedclothes. Where are the other nine?”

All the ladies gasped. Widow Twankey! Who would have thought that she could ever steal anything?

“Your Lordship,” said Widow Twankey calmly, “I have served in this house for forty years. My mother and father and all my grandparents have been loyal servants of the Dursleys for two hundred years. I did not take the candlesticks and I don’t know where they are.”

“Katie and Emily Bland!” cried the Bishop. “Where is the ruby necklace? This box was found under your pillow.”

“Please, My Lord Bishop,” said Katie. “I don’t know how the box got there.” Katie and Emily began to cry and hugged Widow Twankey in fear.

“They’re obviously the thieves,” roared Sir Dudley. “I never liked that housekeeper and those two little ones look as nasty and as crooked as you could ever see. And they came from the Workhouse!” said Sir Dudley with a sneer.

“You’re nothing but a cruel bully!” cried Emily, jumping forward and punching Sir Dudley in the belly. “You leave my sister alone. And Widow Twankey is the best person in the whole world.”

“Help me! Help me!” cried Dudley. He was six times bigger than Emily but the cowardly boy burst into tears.

## Chapter 6: The Dismal Prison

And that was the start of the most terrible time in the girls' life. If it wasn't for Widow Twankey's cool bravery, I think that the girls would have been broken down with despair. That very night they were taken to Mr Tapster's prison and put together in a dismal stone cell. Two week's later, they were taken to court and an old magistrate who was a particular friend of Lord Vernon listened to all the evidence.

Mr Tapster told the court how one silver candlestick had been found in Widow Twankey's bed. He also told how the sandalwood box was found hidden under Katie's pillow. Sir Dudley came to court and told the Magistrate that Katie and Emily were not to be trusted and were from the Workhouse. The Magistrate listened to all this and asked if there was anyone who could give evidence for the girls or Widow Twankey.

The only people who came forward were the old Matron from the Workhouse and Mrs Chottapeg. The Matron told the Magistrate that Katie and Emily were good, honest girls who would never take anything that didn't belong to them. Mabel told the Magistrate that she trusted the girls. But then she had to tell the Magistrate that the girls had admired the necklace and had even tried it on.

Finally the Magistrate made the girls and Widow Twankey stand in front of him. He looked very angry and severe.

"Widow Twankey, there are nine silver candlesticks still missing. Katie and Emily, the ruby necklace is still not found. No doubt you are all three very wicked villains and you are terrible thieves. If you tell me now where the missing candlesticks and jewels are to be found, I might have mercy on you."

All three of them, starting with Widow Twankey and finishing with Emily, told the Magistrate that they had not taken the candlesticks or the necklace and so they could not return them. They were good honest people and they couldn't say how the things were in their rooms.

The Magistrate was silent for a long time and then he looked even more severe. “You have been found guilty of stealing. I sentence the three of you to transportation for Life to His Majesty’s colony of Botany Bay. There you will work in chains in a horrible place and if the kangaroos don’t eat you, you may be bitten by a koala bear. And may God have mercy on your souls!”

I won’t tell you how terrible the next few months were. The girls and Widow Twankey were taken to Portsmouth and held in a dark cold cell in the Women’s Prison. For Widow Twankey who had lived all her life in the comfort of Dursley Hall the prison was awful but for two little girls who had lived in a Workhouse, it really wasn’t so bad. [“At least,” Emily said, “you only had to do your own washing!”] The worst thing for Emily was the return of the cabbage soup; it was even worse than the workhouse soup! The Women’s Prison at Portsmouth was crowded, too, with lots of poor women sharing the cells.

At first the girls were frightened of the other prisoners. The girls knew that they had done nothing wrong but what about these other women and girls? They looked like a terrible group. Many of them were dirty and some of them smoked and swore awfully. But once you got to know them, the girls found that most of the prisoners were sad, lonely women who missed their families. Some of them had stolen little things - such as a handkerchief or bread to feed their children. Many of them were brave and decent people, too, and it wasn’t long before things began to change. It was Widow Twankey who led the ladies. She was cheerful, encouraging and always busy. She pestered the guards until they found her brooms, washing tubs, buckets and mops. The porridge in the morning was dreadful; Widow Twankey asked if she could make it herself and the poor guards [who were often very busy playing a game of cards] were happy to let her. The other prisoners noticed the improvement straight away and became more cheerful. Six weeks after they had arrived, one of the guards decided that if Widow Twankey would like to, she could take over the whole kitchen.

“On two conditions,” she said. “I must do my own marketing and I will need the assistance of two little girls to help me.”

The guard was happy to approve and of course Widow Twankey chose Katie and Emily as her helpers. With only two guards with them, they went out every morning to the market to buy vegetables and meat. At first this was just as much a sad time for Widow Twankey as being in the cells because people

looked at her prison clothes and stepped away from her in fear. “Hold your heads up, girls. There’s nothing to be ashamed of,” she told the girls again and again. “We haven’t done anything wrong! And one day we will prove to the world that we are innocent!” In the market, Widow Twankey bought the things she needed for real vegetable soup and because Emily was there to give her advice, there were no cabbages in the soup after that. She bought as much meat and fruit as the guards had money in their pockets and everyone began to eat better. The guards were handy when she went marketing because there was always a lot to carry!

When all the work for the day had been done, the girls had time to think and talk. The big question the girls always came back to was who had stolen the Dursley candlesticks and the ruby necklace. I’m sure that you know already but it took Widow Twankey a long time to agree with Katie and Emily that the thief must be Sir Dudley Dursely himself. Widow Twankey had served the Dursleys so long that she couldn’t believe that one of them could be so wicked but everything from that terrible night confirmed that it must have been Sir Dudley.

“He needed money,” said Katie, “We know that. And Radish his horse didn’t win at Ascot that day. If he had, Sir Dudley would have made all the noise in the world about it.”

“And I’m sure I saw his big bottom in the moonlight,” said Emily, “sneaking down the steps ahead of us as we went down to see Mabel Chottapeg.”

“There is no justice in this world for poor girls like us,” said Katie.

It was true. During the day, the girls were always cheerful because Widow Twankey had them cooking and cleaning and in the afternoons, she resumed teaching them - and anyone else who wanted to learn - to read. But at night when the heavy iron doors closed on the prison, sometimes they cried. It was winter - cold and gloomy and the girls cuddled together to stay warm. What a sad time it was.

“What do you think Botany Bay will be like?” Katie asked. “Will the kangaroos really eat us alive?”

“I wonder what they would be like in a soup pot?” asked Emily. “They’d have to be better than cabbages!” It was the kind of cheerful thought that kept

everyone smiling as they waited for the day for the fleet to set out for Botany Bay.

## Chapter 7: The Busy Blow Fly

Three months after the girls arrived in Portsmouth, there was a big stir in the prison; the ladies were told that their ships for Botany Bay were ready and they were soon to leave. There were many bitter tears then and even Widow Twankey was dismayed for just a little time. But the English winter was so cold and the days so short and gloomy with rain that they hoped that wherever they went, it would perhaps be warm and sunny.

The day before they were to set sail, the girls had a visitor. Visitors were rare indeed in the prison so you can imagine how surprised the girls were when they were called to come to see the prison chaplain soon after breakfast. There, waiting to see them, was Mabel Chottapeg.

The girls rushed to hug her and she seemed so pleased to see them. She kissed them both and laughed and cried all at the same time.

“Is there any news, Mrs Chottapeg, about the stolen necklace?” asked Katie.

“We didn’t take it,” said Emily. “Do you believe us?”

“Of course I do,” said Mabel. “In fact, I think Lord Vernon has decided that it wasn’t you either. Sir Dudley has been a heap of trouble since the robbery. He went with his parents to stay with Lord and Lady Lardbutt and my husband the bishop heard from a friend that Sir Dudley was suspected of stealing some diamonds from Lady Lizzie. It’s all been hushed up but he’s sure to be in lots more trouble.”

The best thing about Mabel’s visit was a big oak box she brought for the girls. In it was a whole host of things that they needed. There were lengths of dress fabric, needles and thread and pairs of scissors. There were buttons and pieces of lace, some new boots and laces and bars of soap. There were face washes and towels, balls of wool and knitting needles, sheets and clothes pegs, candles, paper, pencils and pens- and a deck of cards. The girls hugged Mabel for bringing the wonderful treasure. It would all be needed, Mabel said, where the girls were going.

Two days later, all the women and girls were marched through the city of Portsmouth to the port. It was a bleak, rainy day and the poor girls carried the big box that Mabel had given them between them; Widow Twankey carried the little bundles of clothes in which the girls kept their spare underwear with her own case. Some natural tears they dropped, but as Emily said, if Botany Bay could only be a little sunnier and warmer than England it wouldn't be too bad. The saddest thing was that the guards had come around with chains that morning and told them that everyone would have to be chained up for the walk through the town.

This made Widow Twankey furious. She bit her lip when the chains were put on her hands and she was determined not to cry while the guards could see her. The guards were sorry and ashamed - most of them had grown to love the girls and the good widow woman but they had their orders. I think that Katie and Emily were only able to be brave that morning because Widow Twankey was so cool and strong.

You can imagine how surprised the girls were when they caught their first sight of the *HMS Busy Blow Fly* - their home for the next four months. The ship was small compared with some of the noble ships in the port and I think for the first time the girls and Widow Twankey wondered how such a small sailing ship could go all the way to the other side of the world. Once on board, the horrid chains were taken off. The girls, Widow Twankey and seven other women were put into a horrible cabin under the deck. Most of the cabins were little more than cages formed by rows of iron bars. Their cell was cold and dark with only one little window opening onto the sea. There were hammocks for the ladies to sleep in and while there were no cupboards or drawers, Widow Twankey quickly organized the cabin so that it was spick and span. The cabin door was locked while the *Busy Blow Fly* was setting out but once it had cleared the harbour with a stiff breeze blowing them south, the Captain gave orders that everyone who wanted to could come up on deck. That's when the girls first met Captain Price and all the crew.

I won't tell you all the things that happened over the next four months because some of it is sad and most of it is boring. The girls were seasick for just a little while but soon became more settled. They quickly made friends with the other people in their cabin and the days settled down to be much the same. Most of the women on board were young and very sad to be snatched away from their families and sent to Botany Bay. The poor prisoners lined up on the deck every morning; Captain Price said Grace and led the ladies in prayers and then they

ate their breakfast. There was always porridge for breakfast, soup for lunch and pudding for dinner. Poor Emily! She was soon back to eating cabbage soup and as much as it reminded her of the Workhouse, Emily always ate her soup. Captain Price explained that on board ship it was very important to eat as many vegetables as you could. The girls were determined to arrive in the new colony fit and well and so they did as much as they could to follow Captain Price's advice.

When it was fine, the girls in their cell often sat out on the deck in the sunshine, knitting, sewing or telling yarns. Their faces became tanned and their cheeks grew cherry and bright. There were storms at sea sometimes and sometimes the girls saw great whales and seabirds such as the albatross. The good thing, however, was that it became warmer every day. After a month's sailing the girls were able to take off their woolen clothes and sunbathe on the deck. The reading lessons continued with Widow Twankey and soon all the girls and women in their cabin were joining in to learn to read and write. Even some of the crew turned up too and a little cabin boy named Fred always came when he saw Widow Twankey take out her big book. Most of the poor women had never had the chance to go to school and they wanted to learn to read more than anything. Some evenings, Widow Twankey went to see the captain and he would lend them his Bible or a big book of stories from Ancient Greece and Rome. Even the sailors who didn't have to work would gather round on the deck and listen to the stories. They were the best times on the voyage.

After two months of sailing down the African coast, the *Busy Blow Fly* came to port in Cape Town. Here, the ship would collect more fresh water and meat and nice fresh vegetables; even the cabbages had long ago been used up and most often the soup now was simple potato soup with rice. Cape Town was a beautiful place - mountains, busy port and people of all colours and nations loading and unloading the big sailing ships. The girls wished that they could see more of the city instead of being confined on board ship. You can imagine how excited they were then when Captain Price asked them to go ashore with him to collect the letters and newspapers that had arrived from England on boats much faster than the *Busy Blow Fly*.

Collecting the mail was only the first part of the holiday. Captain Price took them to a fine tea shop where they were able to have wonderful scones with jam and cream as well as a big pot of tea. When that was all eaten and gone, Captain Price took them to the markets. Piled on the ground were fruits and

vegetables the girls and Widow Twankey had never seen. Emily and Kate had her first taste ever of mangoes and watermelon; no matter how hard they tried, the wonderful juice seemed to get all over their hands and faces. Emily tried to eat a banana that Captain Price bought for her - and was surprised to find you had to peel it first! [It tasted much better after that.] Finally, they stopped for a long cold drink of lemonade at a shady café while Captain Price read the English newspapers.

When he was in port, Captain Price loved to dawdle over his newspaper and while he drank his lemonade and held up the paper, Katie had the chance to read the paper too. She was a good reader now and so was Emily but she was very busy at that moment getting another glass of lemonade for Widow Twankey and another slice of the most juicy watermelon for herself.

“Captain Price!” called Katie, “Sir, can you read me this story please!” She was pointing to a story in *The Times* on the back of the paper that Captain Price was holding up.

Captain Price read the story to all three of his guests:

## *Son of English Lord Convicted of Stealing Diamonds.*

***“A Rotten Scoundrel” says Magistrate.***

***Ashamed Mother weeps in court, “Spare My Boy”.***

*There was amazement in the Oxford Assizes when the court heard charges of stealing against Sir Dudley Dursley, only son of Lord Vernon and Lady Petunia Dursley of Dursley Hall in Oxfordshire.*

*The cunning rogue who was recently sent down from his university college for stealing from other students was convicted of stealing precious diamonds belonging to Lady Lizzie Lardbutt. The famous diamonds were stolen by Dursley when the Dursley family was staying as guests at the Lardbutt estate Big Bottom Manor in Warwickshire.*

*The Lardbutt's butler, Mr Horace Fife, told the court that he had found a fat, masked man in Lady Lardbutt's dressing room with the contents of her jewel case in a sack he was carrying. The robber attacked him but Fife wrestled the thief to the ground and with the help of several footmen, the villain was tied up and held until police could arrive. Only then was the robber's mask removed to reveal Sir Dudley Dursely.*

*The courts was told that a search of Dursley's rooms in Oxford had revealed a gold chain recently attached to a ruby necklace. This was believed to be the property of Mrs Mabel Chottapeg of Calcutta, India. Also recovered were two silver candlesticks, believed to have been the property of his father, Lord Vernon Dursley, and reported stolen nine months ago. Dursley is believed to have disposed of seven of the candlesticks and the ruby to pay gambling debts. The Police have now reopened investigation of the crime of theft of the property for which three servants were convicted and sent to Botany Bay.*

*Before the sentence was pronounced, Lady Petunia Dursley pleaded with the Magistrate to show mercy. She said that Dudley had been a good boy until he had been sent away to school. Passing sentence, the Magistrate, Sir Toby Fang, said that Dursley was a vicious and wicked scoundrel and that he was sure that he would eventually be hung for his crimes. He sentenced Dursley to be transported to Botany Bay for the remainder of his life.*

Widow Twankey burst into tears. "Poor Lord Vernon and Lady Petunia," she cried. "To think that a noble son of the family has been convicted of stealing!"

"Don't you see," said Katie, "We are the ones it says here who were convicted of the theft of the candlesticks and the ruby necklace. It says that the police are reopening the case. Perhaps we will be freed after all."

Captain Price listened while Katie told the whole story of how they came to be arrested and put in prison. Widow Twankey wept into her handkerchief when Katie got to the part about going in chains into the ship and Emily had to give her a big hug to make her smile even just a little. Captain Price thought for a long time, questioning the girls closely about the crime. He was silent and then he stood up and smiled at the girls. "I believe you," he said simply. "In fact, my older brother was at Oxford and I'm sure he mentioned to me a bounder named Dursley who stole his horse!"

“That would be him, Captain,” said Emily. “And I’m sure that poor horse was very sorry to leave your brother for a rogue like Sir Dudley Dursley who has such a big bottom!”

Captain Price promised to write that very afternoon to the Attorney General in London to alert him to the injustice. A full report to His Majesty’s Government could follow later. In the meantime, he would do all he could to make sure that the girls and Widow Twankey were well cared for.

For the first time since their arrest, the girls went to bed with happy hearts. Captain Price believed them; the police were going to investigate further. They all believed that before too long, they would be free. More than that, the horrible stain of being convict girls would be wiped away.

The next two months were spent at sea and every day seemed to bring stronger winds and colder seas. Captain Price didn’t forget his promise and on board the *Busy Blow Fly*, he tried to help the girls in every way. He even invited them to have lunch with him in the Captain’s cabin one day when he asked Widow Twankey to tell him the story again while he wrote a long report to the Attorney General.

In time it grew cold again. All the warm clothes they had put away were brought out again and Katie began to fear that New South Wales would be just as cold and dismal as England. Then the boat turned north and the warm days returned. The girls were tired of their life on board the *Busy Blow Fly* and as they neared Botany Bay, they became much more interested in their new home.

Captain Price told them that the colony was to have a new governor - in fact, he may arrive in Botany Bay just before the girls. When Emily asked about the ferocious kangaroos and the terrible koala bears Captain Price simply laughed. He thought that the girls would be able to handle any of the wildlife - although the snakes were much more dangerous than the ones at home! At night when the girls said their prayers with Widow Twankey, they prayed now for all the things they needed most: warm days, fresh fruit and a safe landing at Botany Bay. And Widow Twankey always prayed for Lord Vernon and Lady Petunia - and for Sir Dudley who must now be chained in a convict ship just like they were. Katie and Emily secretly hoped that the captain of his ship wasn’t as kind as Captain Price.

## Chapter 8: Girls at Government House

What excitement there was on the morning when land was sighted for the first time and everyone rushed to the deck to see the strange new country where they were to live for the rest of their lives. “If the Magistrate decides that we have been convicted unfairly”, said Widow Twankey often, “we can always go home to England!” But on the deck of the *Busy Blow Fly* that morning, England seemed so very far away. The land in the distance was low and blue and green. It was going to be a warm day and the girls were so looking forward to coming ashore. Everyone dressed up as well as they could; they wanted to make sure that they arrived in Botany Bay looking good.

As they neared their destination, Captain Price told them that the settlement was now at Sydney - and not at Botany Bay. When they finally sailed into Sydney Harbour, both the girls and Widow Twankey said it was the most beautiful place they had ever seen. The high cliffs, the deep, green water, the splendid sunshine, the little town in the cove and the harbour crowded with boats: it was magnificent. The wharf was lined with people waiting to meet the boat and even though the convict girls were not allowed ashore until early evening, it was so exciting.

There seemed to be a lot of convict men about - all of them wearing the striped clothes of the prisoners of the colony and busy on the wharves and the street beyond. But no one was wearing chains and it seemed that lots of people were laughing and happy. Some of the convict men were very busy having a smoke and telling yarns in the lovely evening light. They waved to the girls cheerfully. Then there was bustle and a lot of ordering about; the ladies were coming ashore at last. Because they were children, Katie and Emily decided to hang back and not to push as some of the more forward ladies did.

When they finally came down the gangplank, there were many men there to see the ladies arrive. One of them stepped forward as soon as Widow Twankey set foot on the wharf and lifted his hat.

“Good evening, my Dear, and would you be interested in marrying a gentleman farmer like me? I have four hundred acres and a hundred fat sheep; all I need to make me happy in life is a fine lady wife like you.”

Emily giggled and Katie didn't know what to say - and for a moment, she was frightened that Widow Twankey would accept his offer. But the good widow simply gave the gentleman a deep curtsy and said that she hadn't planned on getting married that afternoon but she was very honoured, to be sure. Katie was frightened that the gentleman would be sad and grumpy but he just made a bow to them all - and asked the next lady convict down the gangplank instead! The girls were hurried on through the streets by the guards and so the girls never learned whether the gentleman found a wife that afternoon.

Captain Price had come to see them off and he told them that there were so many more men in the colony than women that gentlemen were keen to marry any of the ladies as soon as they arrived. “And Emily”, he said, “you be careful or some gentlemen will be asking you! If some squatter with a hundred sheep comes along, he might turn your head!” The girls really giggled now.

They stopped giggling when they saw the awful barracks where they were to lodge that night. The girls had hoped that now that they had left the ship that they would not have to sleep in their hammocks again but they were squeezed in ten to a room again with the hammocks stretched across the whole room. Dinner was wonderful after the last few weeks on board ship, however: there was lamb stew and potatoes and apples and as much milk as they wanted to drink. And best of all, there was lots of water for a real scrub up. The bars of soap that Mabel Chottapeg had given them were brought out and Emily kindly offered them to any of the convict ladies who wanted to clean up. For the first time in many months the girls felt really clean. Other things that Mabel had given them also came out: a needle and thread was needed to make repairs and before they settled for the night, Widow Twankey had found a roll of calico and cut out a new pair of knickers for each of the girls. She would sew them up tomorrow in the lovely Sydney sunshine.

The next morning, the girls had had their breakfast and Widow Twankey had found some other things that they all needed: there was a washtub, a bar of

laundry soap, some clothes pegs and a washing line. Everything that they had except the light clothes they were wearing went into the tub and the girls got to work. They were almost finished their washing when there was a stir at the door and the guards rang a bell and all the ladies and girls had to come and stand in the dining room. There in front of them was the Lady Matron of the Women's Prison - together with a lady who had the sweetest, kindest face you can imagine. This lady was none other than Lady Macquarie - the wife of the new governor of the colony. When she was introduced, all the women convicts gave her a curtsy.

For Katie and Emily, this was a very sad moment. Both of them remembered well the afternoon in the Workhouse when Widow Twankey had chosen them to come to Dursley Hall. If only they could be lucky a second time. Lady Macquarie reminded the girls of Mabel Chottapeg. She had the same kind manner and happy smile. She slowly came through the dining room, looking carefully at all the women. She spoke kindly to many of them, asking whether they had enough to eat and if they were warm enough at night.

With such a grand person coming near them, Katie and Emily and Widow Twankey wished that they had tidied themselves up a little more. They had been washing and their hands were still wet and their aprons were splashed with soap suds. When she saw them, Lady Macquarie laughed gently.

"These are new convicts, Ma'am," said the Matron, "just arrived on the *Busy Blow Fly*"

"They look good, gentle people," said Lady Macquarie. "Do you think they would make good servants for me at Government House?"

"Oh, we know all about being good servants," said Katie eagerly. "We can clean and wash and sew and bake. And Widow Twankey makes wonderful apple pies and is so kind." Here Widow Twankey dropped a curtsy and Lady Macquarie smiled at her with her happy face.

Lady Macquarie then reached out and looked at the girls' faces. "They look like such good girls, Matron."

"It's a terrible case, Your Ladyship.," said the matron nastily. "They look like good girls, to be sure, but I must tell you that these two little girls stole a valuable ruby necklace and the jewel has never been recovered. They are

Workhouse girls as you must know. I believe they are really terrible, vicious girls! And the old one is no better - probably worse.”

Here Katie burst into tears. It was so unfair! They came to Botany Bay as prisoners and yet they had done nothing wrong at all. Now this horrible Matron was spoiling their chances of going to be the servants of this kind and gentle lady.

“Your Ladyship is right!” cried Emily sadly. “We are good girls, really. And Widow Twankey is the best lady in the world. Please give us the chance to show you how good we are.”

Emily started to cry now and so did Widow Twankey. She just loved these two little girls who were so good and so brave. “Matron, I think that these two girls and this old lady will suit me very well. Yesterday my cook got drunk and married a farmer and my maid just walked out to marry a gentleman she met on the docks. I don’t have any ruby necklaces to steal and anyway, these girls look like good little workers to me. “

Lady Macquarie walked on; she couldn’t know how excited and happy she had made the girls by her kindness.

And that was the start of a wonderful adventure at Government House for our three friends. When they reported for duty that afternoon [taken there by a kindly young guard who turned out to be country boy and kind and gentle despite his job] they found a neat, busy house where the governor of the colony and his lady lived. It was nowhere near as grand as Dursley Hall; apart from a gardener and some grooms and stable boys the girls and Widow Twankey were the only indoor servants. The last cook had been able to make wonderful dinners but she also became so drunk that many days the governor and his lady had to live on bread and jam. The kitchen garden was in a mess and whoever had been doing the washing and ironing had made an awful mess of it and burnt most of Lady Macquarie’s linen drawers. It was just the sort of place that Widow Twankey and the girls could brighten up.

And they did. The next twelve months went very quickly. In no time at all, Government House began to feel like a real home. The food improved for a start because Widow Twankey was, after all, a very good cook and housekeeper. The kitchen garden was soon providing all sorts of good things for the Governor’s table. The chooks in the hen house gave nice brown eggs -even

if Emily had to chase the snakes away sometimes to collect them. The Governor's laundry was smartened up too and now Lady Macquarie could go to church without a horrible burn mark on her best silk dress. The girls grew to love the Governor and good lady wife; they were wise, kind and always cheerful. After the terrible servants they had had before the girls, the Governor and Lady Macquarie loved the girls as well. Not only did the Governor enjoy the loyalty and goodness of the girls, he loved the wonderful changes they brought to his table. He had been a soldier all his life and he was used to the coarse food of soldiers in the field. He just loved having the good dinners and fresh vegetables and fruit that Widow Twankey and the girls provided.

More than anything, however, the girls and Widow Twankey loved the new land in which they lived. They pitied the poor convicts they saw in the streets and Sydney could be a tough and violent town on occasions but nothing could beat the beauty of the harbour and the golden sunshine that seemed to be always around them. The winter had been cool, to be sure, but there were none of the dreadful cold drizzly days that always hung about the Workhouse in England. Katie learned to swim in the harbour, diving off the rocks into the cold, clear water. Emily soon learned to do this too - and to row a boat. They loved walking in the bush and seeing the animals - the timid wallabies, the snorting wombats and the noisy kookaburras. And even once they saw a koala but instead of being savage and dangerous as the magistrate had threatened, the bear was snoozing in a gum tree and nothing seemed to wake him up.

The governor was often away from home: up very early and on his horse to go out to places far away from town. On those days the girls had to be up very early too to make the governor his porridge and cut some sandwiches for his lunch. On the very best days, Lady Macquarie went with her husband and then the girls often went too. They would pack a big picnic lunch and while one of the convict boys named Billy built a fire to boil a pot for a cup of tea, Katie and Emily would spread out a clean white cloth and put all the things for lunch in the shade for the Governor and his party to enjoy.

There were dangers in the bush. The girls never met a ferocious kangaroo or a savage koala but they often saw the shy black Aboriginal people in the bush watching them travel past. They knew that some of the settlers were cruel to the Aborigines and that the Aborigines sometimes fought white travelers with spears. They also saw the convicts who had been rowdy and troublesome, chained together and working to build the roads. They were sad and desperate looking men and Katie and Emily were glad that the governor always had a guard with him on those days. There were bushrangers on the roads too -

escaped convicts who robbed and hurt lonely travelers. Governor Macquarie had warned Widow Twankey that she and the girls were never to use the roads without some protection.

One day while the girls were out on the road to Penrith with the Governor and Lady Macquarie they saw the person they had come to fear most in the world. Governor Macquarie had stopped his carriage to talk to the surveyor who was building a road towards the Blue Mountains in the western distance. The convict gang who was actually doing all the hard work was pleased to take a break in the shade of a big gum tree. Emily saw him first and tugged on Widow Twankey's skirt, pointing to the biggest convict at the end of the gang. Instead of his beautiful waistcoat and green trousers, he wore the sad black and white of the convict but there was no missing that famous big bottom that Emily had seen on the stairs that night so long ago when their world had changed for ever. Sir Dudley Dursley was now a convict, chained at the ankle and carrying a shovel to spread the stone to make a road. His hair was long and untidy and he carried a horrid scar on his cheek - the result of a fight with another convict on the boat coming to Australia. He looked grumpy and cunning. Katie shuddered. Now that she saw how miserable Sir Dudley was, even she felt sorry for him.

Widow Twankey could not hold herself; she leapt out of the carriage and ran towards the gang. "Sir Dudley! Oh, Sir Dudley! It is so sad to see you like this! Your poor mother! How shamed she must be to see you as a convict villain!"

Sir Dudley leapt up as Widow Twankey approached. "You! You old bag! And the two horrible girls with you! I had hoped that you would be hung or dumped in the ocean by now. This is all your fault. If you had gone to prison cheerfully, I wouldn't be here now. My father never believed that you had stolen the candlesticks and watched me like a hawk after that. I think he alerted that stupid butler that a robber was in the house. You'll pay for this, watch if I don't strike you down!"

And here Dudley raised his shovel and tried to run at Widow Twankey to hit her. The chain on his leg stopped him from going very far and when the guards saw what was happening they rushed in and used their wooden batons to knock Dudley to the ground. Widow Twankey burst into tears. She wanted to comfort Sir Dudley; she remembered how he was as a little boy and she forgot all the wicked things he had done to her. The guards separated Sir Dudley from the

chain gang and secured him by a separate chain to the biggest gum tree. He was to be kept a secure prisoner until he calmed down.

“Officer,” said the Governor, “this man is obviously dangerous. Please watch him carefully - and teach him some respect for ladies.”

Poor Widow Twankey cried much of the way home to Sydney that afternoon. You see, she knew what happened to convicts who were violent and rude - and how Sir Dudley would be punished by the cruel guards on the road gang. She tried very hard to keep her sadness to herself and not to worry the Governor and Lady Macquarie with her concerns but the sight of her old master a convict and a villain was a terrible burden for her. Katie and Emily sat silently beside her, holding her hands as the carriage rattled slowly back to Sydney. Really, there was nothing to say that could make the sadness any easier to bear.

Life returned to normal at Government House for the girls and Widow Twankey. It was always too busy to be sad and I must say that only Widow Twankey really felt sad about poor Sir Dudley. The girls rather hoped that the guards would give him just what he deserved. When dinner was finished one night, however, and the girls and Widow Twankey had cleared away, the Governor called them all into his study. Lady Macquarie was sitting to the side of the desk looking very happy. There was a pile of letters on his desk; the girls knew that letters only came from England once every two months and when the mail came, there were always lots of letters for the governor that he must read and answer. The girls had seen the tall sailing ship with the mail from England come into the harbour that morning.

“Who was the man in the road gang, Widow Twankey, who tried to hit you with the shovel when we went to Penrith?” the Governor asked quietly.

“He was my old Master, Sir - Sir Dudley Dursley - although he doesn’t look like the son of a Lord now, does he?” Here, Widow Twankey began to weep quietly and Katie and Emily had to tell the story for her. They began right at the beginning and told the Governor and Lady Macquarie the whole story of the Workhouse, Dursley Hall and the robbery. When they were finished, Katie and Emily were crying too. “Captain Price on the *Busy Blow Fly* promised that he would write to the magistrates in England and tell them that we were innocent and that Sir Dudley had taken the candlesticks and the jewels but I think he must have forgotten us poor girls once he set sail again,” said Emily finally.

“You must have more faith in young Captain Price,” said the Governor. “Here arrived today for me from England is a letter from the Attorney General who writes to tell me that your convictions for theft have been put aside. He declares that you are innocent of all charges. I have another letter here from Captain Price explaining that on his way back to England he was detained for four months in India when everyone on board ship came down with the cholera. He is sorry that this has taken so long.”

“And I have a letter here from an old friend, Mabel Chottapeg in Calcutta and another one from Lady Dursely,” said Lady Macquarie. “Mabel writes to tell me that the police have finally recovered her ruby and Lady Dursely says she is so sorry that you were wrongly convicted and can you come back to England now and be servants again in Dursley Hall. She tells me here that no one kept her house as tidy as Widow Twankey and no one ironed her frocks as well as Katie and Emily.”

“Innocent!” cried Widow Twankey. “I knew that this would happen one day!” The girls hugged one another and Widow Twankey; they laughed and cried all at once. When they had calmed down for a moment, Lady Macquarie said a little sadly, “The only sad thing is that as you are going back to England I shall have to find some new servants for Government House. Perhaps there will be some more good girls back at the Convict Factory where I found you.”

“I beg your pardon, Ma’am,” said Katie, “I can’t speak for anyone but myself but I love it here in New South Wales. There’s nothing for me back in England but the Workhouse and washing at Dursely Hall.”

“Don’t forget the awful weather and the cabbage soup!” said Emily.

Widow Twankey was uncertain what to do for just a few moments but it didn’t take her long to decide. “I would give anything just now to be home in my parlor at Dursely Hall but Katie and Emily are right you know. There is so much we could do here if we were free to live as we want. I will write to her Ladyship to tell her how grateful I am that she has thought of us but that perhaps she might find someone else at the Workhouse to do her laundry. And besides, a farmer with a horse and ten sheep might just meet me on the wharf and make me a handsome offer.”

Everyone laughed. Governor Macquarie was so pleased to see the girls declared innocent. “All this time you have been working for me as convicts you should

have been free workers - and you deserve some wages. I can give you some land and enough money to start your own farm if you like.”

It was true. The Governor could make grants of land to free settlers and that’s what Katie and Emily and the Widow Twankey were now. But while they were celebrating, it was Katie who had an even better idea.

“Governor, the road we saw being built to the Blue Mountains. People using the road are going to need somewhere to stop and have a cold drink and a sandwich. Perhaps you could give us some land on the road - and enough stone to build an inn and some stables. If Widow Twankey could look after Dursley Hall, she can certainly look after an inn.”

And so it was settled. Three months later - once the girls and Widow Twankey had traveled the road and checked all the best spots- they selected one hundred acres just where the road started to climb into the hills. Governor Macquarie organised a team of convicts [including Sir Dudley Dursley] to cut the stone and transport it up the road. The convicts worked under a builder to construct a splendid inn which Widow Twankey decided to call The Dursley Arms Hotel. No one complained about the name except Sir Dudley who hated being reminded about his sad family back in England.

And in a final, terrible punishment, Governor Macquarie assigned Sir Dudley and two other convicts to work on the farm attached to the inn. They had to plough and sow and feed the pigs and plant the kitchen garden. Widow Twankey was always busy running the hotel and looking after her hungry guests; Katie had to supervise the kitchen where there was always the most wonderful soups and stews and roasts and puddings being cooked on the big kitchen range. It fell to Emily, then, to look after the convict workmen - and she could be as bossy and as hard to please as she liked. Apart from Sir Dudley there was a lively Scottish boy named Sandy who had been transported for stealing some whiskey for his grandmother and a cheerful Irish lad named Seamus whose only crime was to have pinched some apples for his old mother to eat. They had been working on the road gang too and when they were assigned to work on the farm they thought it was like heaven. They loved Emily and couldn’t do enough to please her. Seamus was excellent with the pigs and soon had the fattest porkers growing up ready for sausages and hams and sides of bacon. Sandy worked well with the sheep and apart from the roast mutton for the table there was wool to send to market in England. Best of all, Sandy

persuaded Emily to find him a puppy for the farm. Jessie, as you might imagine, was soon the best sheep dog in the colony.

No one could get anything but surly bad manners out of Sir Dudley. He had been beaten and punished on the road gang many times; Emily never did anything mean to Dudley and she always called him Sir Dudley - something that made Seamus and Sandy laugh every time they heard it. Slowly, ever so slowly, Sir Dudley began to change his ways. He was working hard for the first time in his life. He grew taller in the colony and his skin was soon tanned and healthy. There was no brandy to drink and no cigars to smoke and what with Widow Twankey's splendid cooking and all the hard work, he quickly lost his big bottom and grew stronger and fitter. He had to be polite to Seamus and Sandy: the first time he tried to be mean to them they threw him into a pile of horse manure in the stables.

Widow Twankey was busy but she found time to teach Seamus and Sandy to read and this proved to be the thing that finally made Sir Dudley a kinder person. One day when Widow Twankey couldn't come for the lesson, Sir Dudley took up the big book and began to help Seamus and Sandy. In time, he learned to smile and laugh. If you had seen Sir Dudley after a year at the Dursley Arms, you might not have recognized him as the vain, silly boy who had bought Radish the horse to race at Ascot.

Katie, Emily and Widow Twankey never returned to Dursley Hall although Sir Vernon and Lady Dursely pleaded with them to come home. When Widow Twankey wrote to tell them that Dudley was a servant on their farm and that he was growing into a nice person at last they wrote a most thankful letter - and sent ten pounds each as a way of saying sorry for the suffering the girls had endured so unjustly. With this money, the girls were able to buy some more acres and some fine Merino sheep from Captain Macarthur. Before too long, the value of their flock had grown and the Widow Twankey and the girls became comfortably well off.

And Sir Dudley? Once his time as a convict had expired he decided to head off to the new colony in Port Phillip where he opened a school for boys. The farmers of Port Phillip were rather pleased to have a real English aristocrat as a School Master and the school prospered. Today the school stands in wonderful grounds and the gracious old buildings are listed with the National Trust. Dursley House is the oldest boarding house in the school and on its centenary,

the school incorporated the Dursley Coat of Arms into its badge and raised the fees considerably.

I won't tell you all the adventures that the girls had at the Dursley Arms but there were many. One night they were raided by bushrangers - and would have been badly robbed, I'm sure, if Jess hadn't taken a big bite out of the leg of the fiercest bushranger and sent him howling off down the road as fast as he could go. The girls grew strong and tall and happy. When Widow Twankey finally accepted the hand of one of the many farmers who came to court, the girls were her bridesmaids when she was married at St John's Church in Parramatta. They lived on in New South Wales for many years but they never forgot their sad times in chains and no poor man or woman who came begging at the door of their hotel was ever turned away hungry.

Nor did they ever forget the goodness of Governor Macquarie and his lovely wife who believed their story and gave them back their hope and dignity. When Widow Twankey left the hotel, the girls decided to rename the inn and from that time it was called the Sir Lachlan Macquarie hotel. It's still there on the side of the road up to the Blue Mountains although much changed from its former fabric. The farm where Seamus and Sandy worked so hard is now a shopping mall and the inn is now a giant Leagues Club. The bistro restaurant is still called Katie's Kitchen and the large room where the poker machines are kept very busy is called Emily's Lounge. It's a happy tribute to the founders of the hotel so long ago in convict days.