

# Girls in Green



The exciting story of Katie and Emily de Bland  
who join the brave band of outlaws lead by

Robin Hood.

by

Grandad.

November 2005

## About this Story:

Katie was only five years old when I wrote this story for her; Emily would have been only three. It's very much a story for young children without any nuance or sophistication. The girls support their friend, Widow Twankey, have adventures with villains and support the good king to bring peace back to the kingdom. There are plenty of stereotypes here and some bad fat jokes. I've pinched elements of the story from Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves and other elements are taken from pantomime.

The girls loved this story read aloud. It can just be done in twenty minutes before bed and the happy ending is very comforting. As Uncle Lachlan would say of the villains at the end of the story, "It serves them right!"

## **Chapter !:**

### **The Wicked Sheriff of Nottingham**

This is a story about an exciting adventure that happened many years ago - long before there was television or computers. In those simple days, rich people lived in castles and most people lived in wooden houses with straw roofs and big gardens. The King of England was a kind and gentle man whom everyone loved. His name was King Richard and he was an honest man whose soldiers were brave and honourable fellows.

But one day, this good king went on a long journey. He left his younger brother, John, as King in his place until he returned and it wasn't long before this brother showed what a cruel and nasty man he was. Richard had been generous, giving money to poor people and caring for the church and old people and little children and stray dogs. King John was greedy and demanded more and more taxes from his poor people. The new king's friends did just what they liked, robbing people and putting anyone whom they didn't like into prison. The cruelest and meanest of the king's friends was called Sir Gervase Maledict. He was the Sheriff of Nottingham and everyone all around Nottingham hated the cruel Sheriff. These were sad times and the prisons in Nottingham were full of poor people. Everyone just hoped and prayed that good king Richard would come home soon.

Now in one little village near to Nottingham there lived a poor Widow. Her name was Dame Millicent Twankey but everyone called her the Widow Twankey. She was old, I suppose, and I don't think she could have managed her farm if it had not been for the help of her neighbours, Miss Katie and

Miss Emily de Bland. Katie and Emily were two little girls who had a farm of their own but they were never too busy to lend a hand to the poor Widow.



Widow Twankey.

They came to see her every afternoon after their own farm chores were done and they would help her on the farm and in her little house. They would gather the eggs from the hens, carry water for the pigs and scrub the kitchen floor. Emily would chop the firewood and Katie would dig over the vegetable garden. With all the jobs done, Widow Twankey would pour the girls a nice glass of milk and they would settle down in the warm kitchen to have a nice piece of bread and honey for tea. The Widow was a wonderful cook and always had something nice to give the girls for tea.

The Widow knew some great stories too and she would tell the girls tales of brave knights, ferocious dragons and fair maidens in distress. Their favourite stories were about kind King Richard and the happy days in the kingdom before Richard went away and his cruel brother became the king. Some of the stories were about the brave bandit, Robin Hood, who lived in Sherwood Forest.

"He's the bravest, truest man in the kingdom!" said Widow Twankey. "He loves King Richard and he robs from the rich to give to the poor." The girls loved the stories of Robin Hood but wondered whether they could be true. Was anyone brave enough to resist the wicked king?

Katie and Emily had their own little farm beside a deep, swift river. Each of the girls had a cow. Katie's cow was named Blossom; Emily's cow was named Petal. Each girl thought that her cow was the best in the whole world and

her milk was the sweetest. The girls had lots of chickens that gave wonderful brown eggs and a splendid rooster named Chanticleer who would crow every morning at dawn to wake up the sun.

The girls had three fine pigs named Anselm [the boar], and Matilda and Gladys, the sows. There were some gentle sheep, lots of fine ducks and some fat geese. Twice each day Katie and Emily would milk their cows. Every second day they would take the cream from the milk and churn some butter. The girls made the best custard and drank a lot of the milk themselves; some they made into cheese and some they fed to their pigs. They had a big kitchen garden where the girls grew turnips and spinach and shiny red apples and pears.



Katie's chickens. They gave wonderful brown eggs.

Every year, Anselm would give Matilda and Gladys a splendid litter of piglets and in time, the girls would have pork chops for dinner and bacon to sell. There was a field of wheat that gave the best corn for fine flour. Cutting the wheat in the autumn was hard work but the girls loved this as the best time of the year. Harvest was a time for parties and dances and fun. Every Monday, Katie did the washing while Emily made a big batch of cakes to sell. And every Tuesday, the girls would be up very early and off to market in Nottingham.



Two of Matilda's piglets. Delicious!

Every week there were things from the farm to sell: fresh eggs, cheese, some lovely cakes, milk and perhaps some fruit and vegetables. Before dawn, they harnessed their old horse, Pilot, to the cart and loaded it with good things to sell. Then they called on Widow Twankey and added her things to the load, then the Widow herself would sit in the back of the cart and the girls would walk the three miles into Nottingham to be ready for the market.

The journey to the market town on Nottingham took the girls past a deep forest - Sherwood Forest. The forest was the home of Robin Hood - but the girls never saw him or his band of Merry Men. "Perhaps this is just a story," Katie thought. "All the same, it would be nice if it were true."

At the market town, everyone came to their little stall because they had the freshest eggs and the nicest vegetables and the best cheeses. All of Emily's cakes would sell quickly and by morning tea time, the girls and the good Widow had usually sold everything they had brought. There would be money then to buy some cloth to make a new dress or some ribbons or a fry pan. Some money had to go into the jar so that the girls could pay their taxes to the King. King Richard had not taken very much of their money at all but King John was greedy and the girls saw more and more of their money going into the jar to pay the king.

One Tuesday morning, there seemed to be a lot of soldiers in the market square. One of them - a big, ugly man - kept walking past their stall and once he tried to take an apple without paying.

"Hey! You owe me some money for that apple, Mister!" yelled Emily.

The soldier just laughed and walked away. Emily chased him but he wouldn't pay: he even threw the apple core on the ground. "Just you wait, darlin'," said the rough soldier. "We'll see who has to pay in a moment!"

Emily went back to the stall fuming with anger. "I don't like the sound of that," said Widow Twankey. "We all pay our taxes but now the Sheriff seems to want more and more. I haven't anything more to pay."

As the morning was finishing and the girls and Widow Twankey were tidying up their stand, there was a buzz in the market. Some more soldiers had come to the side of the market square and there on his horse was Sir Gervase himself- the Sheriff of Nottingham. One of the soldiers blew a trumpet and everyone in the square was quiet.

"Listen to me!" the Sheriff called. "King John needs more taxes and so my soldiers are going to come through the market and collect some more. Don't anyone try to do anything silly or you will soon find out how hard and mean I can be!"

"More taxes," said Katie. "But we need this money to buy another pig!"

"And I need this money to mend the hole in my roof!" said the Widow.

The nasty soldier who had taken the apple came back to their stall and stood with his hands on his hips. He gave the girls a nasty smile. "The Sheriff has told me to come and collect the taxes from you three. I think you must owe about ten shillings each."

"Ten shillings!" said Widow Twankey. "But that's more than I've got. I've only got five shillings."

"That's your problem, girlie!" said the soldier. "Either you pay, or it's off to prison with you."

Poor Widow Twankey started to cry. Katie and Emily would gladly have paid the Widow's taxes as well as their own but they only had ten shillings themselves. The soldier snatched it out of Katie's hand. The Sheriff himself had ridden over to see what was happening and he barked an order

at the soldier. "If the old bag can't pay her taxes to King John, she'll have to go to prison. Put her in chains!"

And here the gruff soldier grabbed Widow Twankey by the arm and tried to haul her away. It was more than Emily and Katie could bear and they jumped forward.

"Here, you leave that lady alone, you cruel bully. How brave you are when you're pushing around old ladies!" said Katie.

"Don't interfere with me!" said the soldier. "I'm collecting these taxes for King John."

"He isn't even the rightful King," said Emily before she could think. "When good King Richard comes back..."

"Arrest those two as well!" yelled the Sheriff. "They can all go to prison - until King Richard comes back!" He said this with a terrible laugh and the soldiers laughed with him.

Now Katie and Emily had no intention of going off to prison. Katie dived right under the Sheriff's horse and dashed through the market. Emily grabbed Widow Twankey's hand and pulled her out of the way: while the soldiers rushed after Katie, Emily and the Widow ran the other way. The soldiers started shouting and all the market people began to shout too. They had seen what happened and they wanted to help. They loved the girls and the Widow and they weren't going to allow them to be taken off to prison without a fight.

One of the farmers had brought his pigs to market and he chose that moment to let them go - right in front of the soldiers who were closing in on Katie. One of the farmers picked up a nice big cow pat and threw it straight at the Sheriff - it hit him in the back of the head. His fine clothes were covered in cow poo. How everyone laughed! Farmers turned over their barrows and a load of turnips spilled out behind the Widow and Emily. The girls and the Widow ran as fast as they could and a kind priest who had watched the action from the door of his church rushed them inside and hid them behind the altar. The soldiers prowled around the streets for a long time and it was dark before the priest told them that they were safe to go.

It was late by the time they got home. One of the other farmers had rescued Pilot and the wagon and hidden it from the soldiers but you should have seen the state of their little farm when they got home! The barnyard was empty. Blossom and Petal were gone. So were Anselm and Gladys and Matilda and all the chickens. Pasted to the door was a big notice:

The former occupants of this farm, Katie and Emily de Bland, are being sought by the Sheriff of Nottingham. All their property has been taken to pay their taxes to King John. This is what happens to people who disobey the Sheriff!

The girls began to cry. They had lost their beloved animals and their farm. They were wanted by the soldiers who would take them to prison. It was a horrible moment but Widow Twankey tried to comfort them. She took them on to her farm - where they found the same terrible ruin. The sign at the Widow's farm said:

The old bag who lives here is being sought by the Sheriff. Reward offered for her capture!

"Old bag indeed!" squealed the Widow. "I'll show them!" But then the horror of what was happening to them took over. The Widow began to cry; so did the girls. They were hungry, and frightened and tired. The three of them huddled in the empty barn and spent a very sad and lonely night.

## Chapter 2:

### Robin Hood the Outlaw

The next morning, Katie and Widow Twankey were woken up by Emily. "Do get up!" she said. "We're wasting precious time. We've got to get going," she said urgently.

"Where are we going?" asked Katie. "We've lost all our farm animals. My beautiful Blossom - our fine fat pigs. All our chickens. What are we going to do?"

"We're going to Sherwood Forest, of course" said Emily. "There's only one person can help us now - and that's Robin Hood!"

"Robin Hood?" said Widow Twankey sadly. "But he's only in my stories. I don't think .."

"Come on," said Emily. "We can't just sit and wait here for the soldiers to come back and catch us."

It was true and once again the girls harnessed old Pilot and set out for the Nottingham road. This time when they reached the edge of the forest they left the road and took the little path that lead deep into the dark wood. Soon the path gave way completely and Pilot had to stumble around tree roots. There was no way of knowing where they were.



The path into the wild wood.

Katie had been thoughtful enough to pack a picnic lunch; she had some juicy apples, a bottle of beer and a piece of ham for each of them to eat. At about lunch time they stopped and ate their simple meal. No sooner had they finished, than they began to hear noises in the woods - as if someone were following them. "Emily," said Katie. "I'm frightened."

Soon, the girls began to hear more strange noises - like an owl hooting. Now Katie and Emily loved owls but they were not used to hearing them call in the morning. The sounds grew louder and louder and the girls became more and more anxious. Widow Twankey tried to be brave but she was just as scared as the girls.

And just when they thought that they would turn around and try to find their way home, something remarkable happened. Down from the trees above them dropped three young men, all dressed in smart green clothes. Each one was carrying a bow and arrows and a sword and a big wooden stick. The girls gave a little squeal but the men were polite; they stepped forward and took off their hats and bowed to the Widow Twankey.

"Good morning, Mother, and can you please tell me what you might be doing in my fine woods on this lovely summer morning?" asked the tallest of the strangers. Widow Twankey couldn't help but notice that he was a good looking young man and he looked very fetching in his tight green pants.

"Oh Sir, Sir," cried the Widow. "Please spare us. I am a poor Widow woman named Dame Millicent Twankey, and these are my little friends, Miss Katie de Bland and Miss Emily de Bland. The wicked Sheriff of Nottingham has chased us from the market and stolen all our cattle and sheep and chickens. And if Robin Hood doesn't help us, we will have to beg in the streets and starve until good King Richard comes to rescue us all. Can you please tell us where to find Robin Hood?"

The three young men laughed out loud! "So, Mother, you were the poor souls the wicked Sheriff chased in the market yesterday. We heard all about that yesterday afternoon. Good for you for getting away. And you've come to the right spot. I am Robin Hood, at your service, Ma'am!" He took off his hat and bowed gallantly again to all the girls.

"OOOH!" said Widow Twankey. "I hadn't expected Robin Hood to be so very young and handsome." She dropped a little curtsy - and so did Katie and Emily. They were liking Robin Hood very much. It seemed odd that only minutes ago they had been so frightened.

One of the young men [who introduced himself as Will Scarlet] took Pilot by the bridle and led him along. One of the others [who introduced himself as Piers Ploughman] picked up Katie and put her on the back of the wagon with Widow Twankey. He swung Emily up on his shoulders. It was a lovely ride for her but Piers kept forgetting how low the branches were on some of the oak trees and Emily was almost knocked off twice.

After a while, they found another path and then they began to hear strange noises again. There was a cow lowing sadly, some pigs snorting noisily and a rooster calling. And then they came out into a clearing in the forest where there were huts and gardens and a collection of animals all in roughly made pens.



Fr William - the brave priest.

Robin Hood blew his horn and everyone came running out of the huts to greet them. There must have been about ten young men altogether. All of them were dressed in lovely green clothes - everyone, that is, except Father William - the priest who had hidden them the day before. "I thought I might see you ladies again," he chuckled.

Katie and Emily and Widow Twankey shook hands with everyone. There was a wonderful welcome but suddenly the girls were much more interested in something else.

One of the lowing cows in the pen had broken through the rails and trotted right up to Emily, her head down and her bell jangling.

"Petal!" said Emily. "The Sheriff didn't get you after all!"

Not to be outdone, Blossom ran up too to Katie. Soon the girls were hugging their darling cows and laughing and crying all at the same time.

"The wicked Sheriff came with his soldiers to your farm to arrest you yesterday afternoon," said Robin. "As soon as you left the church to come home, Father William came here to tell us what had happened. The Sheriff's men stole all your animals but he was foolish enough to try to take them back to Nottingham by the road that runs right past the forest. We stopped him and rescued your good cows, your kindly sheep, your fine fat pigs, your chickens and your ducklings. And, Madam, I think that the Sheriff stole your

last five shillings. Here it is back again. And ten shillings for you, I think, Katie and Emily!

The three ladies all gave a little bow. They were so happy to see their cows and animals that they forgot for a moment that they could no longer go back to their pretty farm.

"Sir," said Katie, "I'm sure we are very pleased to have found you - and to be reunited with Blossom, and Petal and Anselm, and Matilda and Gladys and all the poultry, but what can we do? Where can we live now?"

"Can you run and swim and ride a horse? Can you shoot a bow and arrow? Can you fight with a sword?" asked Robin Hood.

"Well, we can run and swim," said Emily. "And we could ride a horse, I'm sure. And as for the bow and arrow, I suppose we could learn."

"What else can you do?" asked Robin Hood.

"I can make apple pies," said Widow Twankey. "And I can cut sandwiches and make cheese on toast."

"Madam, you are very welcome!" said Will Scarlet. "Perhaps you girls can keep these cows quiet. They've been mooing all morning."

"That's because they need to be milked," said Katie. "If you find me a bucket, I'll do it directly."

\*\*

And so began the happiest days of the girls' lives. They had all their farmyard animals and their friends among Robin Hood's merry band. The next day he and several of the men went back to the farms and locked and sealed the doors so that no one could go inside and carry away any of Katie and Emily's china or linen. "One day," said Robin Hood, "when King Richard comes back, you can come back to the farm. In the meantime, we'll watch out for it in case anyone tries to take it from you."

The girls did all their usual things now: they were up early to milk Petal and Blossom and they gathered the eggs and made splendid cheeses and pates

but instead of taking them to market, Robin Hood's band seemed to eat every last thing. There were other things to do as well. The girls had to learn to ride. Katie was given a sweet little pony named Dobbin. The outlaws had stolen Dobbin from a rich merchant who had strayed near the forest on his way to Nottingham. Emily was given a frisky young mare named Eloise. It wasn't long before the girls could ride at speed and even do all the brave things that Robin and his men could do - leaping off their horses and back on again. The girls just loved riding - it was the most fun.



Emily's pony, Eloise.

The first thing that Robin did was find new clothes for the girls. They were given the same fine green shirt and pants that the men wore. It was coloured the same green as the forest so that they could hide in the trees without being seen by the Sheriff's soldiers. The girls also learned to shoot with a bow and arrow. This took a lot of practice but I think that the girls were really very good at this by the time they were finished their lessons. They also learned to fight with the sword and the long, heavy stick known as a staff. The girls learned all the special calls of the forest so that they could alert one another if there were danger. Someone was always on lookout on the road and although the Sheriff sent soldiers many times to try to find them in the forest, they never succeeded. It was an exciting life and the girls grew strong and tough and brave. They loved living in the forest with their friends.

Almost every day, Robin Hood and some of the men would go off to do some outlaw work. They always watched the road and sometimes traveled a long way at night to capture one of King John's treasure wagons or a wagon belonging to a rich merchant. These were always very well guarded and it

was dangerous work but the band was so brave that they nearly always succeed. When they returned to the forest with their captured treasure, Robin Hood would call everyone together to discuss what would happen next.

Father William was always the one who knew best what to do. Once, when Robin had captured a big bag of coins being taken from Nottingham to London, Fr William could tell him: "I know just where this treasure has come from. The Sheriff's soldiers have taken this from the poor people of the village on the other side of Nottingham. Some of the people have been beaten by the cruel soldiers. I saw them do it. We can take the money back to them tonight."

And they did. Katie and Emily went along and when the merry band arrived at the village, they could see that the Sheriff's soldiers had been there. One house had been set alight and the poor people who couldn't pay their taxes were huddled in the church porch. Robin was angry when he saw this. He called everyone into the church and emptied the bag of treasure, giving the money to the poorest people.

"God bless you, Sir!" said an old lady. "If only King Richard were here, it wouldn't be necessary for you brave men and girls to risk your lives to see justice done."

Katie and Emily were sure that this were true. If only King Richard would come home, all would be well.

## Chapter 3:

### Exciting Times in the Forest!

Once they had learned how to fire their bow and arrows and fight with a sword, the girls often went out on the outlaw raids with Robin. It was dangerous but exciting work. Katie and Emily were very happy when they had their first real fight with one of the Sheriff's soldiers. It happened to be the nasty man who had stolen the apple from their market stall so many months ago. He and two of his friends had gone out to bully some poor farmers and they had left their return to Nottingham too late in the afternoon. They had stolen some geese and a big cheese from the farmers and some bottles of beer; the reason they were late was that they had stopped to drink some of the beer.



Katie dressed for a night attack with her bow and arrows.

A little boy from the farm where the soldiers had been had come running to the forest to tell Robin what had happened. Returning the stolen property was just the sort of thing Robin and his men loved to do. Katie and Emily, Robin and three of the men were hiding in a big oak tree right near the road; the three soldiers were riding their horses noisily along the path, waving

their bottles of beer and singing saucy songs. The geese were tied by the feet to the saddle of one horse. Will Scarlet signaled to the girls: this was their chance to share in the fighting.

When the soldiers rode under the oak tree, the girls and all the merry men fell out of the tree on top of the soldiers, knocking them off their horses and on to the ground. The poor geese made a terrible noise and I think the soldiers thought that they were being attacked by at least fifteen men.

"Surrender, you shameless thieves!" yelled Emily. "You've been captured by Robin Hood!"

Katie had her sword out and when one of the soldiers tried to get up off the ground, she whacked him on the bottom with it. "I know you, you rascal!" she roared. "You stole an apple from my market stall once. You're nothing but a cowardly bully!"

"Please don't hurt us" the bullies wailed. "We're not the worst of the Sheriff's soldiers."

"Where did you get this cheese? Whose geese are these?" Robin cried.

At this, the cowardly bullies started to cry. "Emily and Katie," said Robin, "will you please try to collect these poor geese and the cheese while we teach these bullies a lesson."

The girls were used to looking after geese and the poor birds soon calmed down when the girls gently lead them away from the road. That night, the girls walked across the fields to take the cheese and the geese back to the farmers. The soldiers had drunk the beer so that couldn't be returned but Robin found two shillings in the pocket of the biggest bully and the girls took that too to the farmers. How those poor farmers cried and blessed the little girls for their kindness!

As for the bullying soldiers, Robin and Will tied blindfolds around their eyes so they couldn't see, then they were lead deep into the forest to the outlaws' camp. The soldiers' uniforms were stripped off them and put aside. Then the bullies were bundled into big sacks and put back on their horses. Late that night, Fr William led the horses back along the road to Nottingham and tied the horses up at the gate of the castle. When the castle woke up

that morning, imagine the embarrassment of the bullies when they were pulled naked and shivering out of the sacks in front of all their friends and the Sheriff! I think that they would rather have been captured by Robin Hood than teased and laughed at by their friends.

That same day, Katie and Emily took the soldier' uniforms and washed them with all the things that needed washing. Widow Twankey and the girls always did the wash on Mondays and soon the clearing where the merry band lived was festooned with shirts and socks and knickers and sheets - and three splendid uniforms from the Sheriff's own guard.

It was Emily who had the idea of using the uniforms in what was the most daring and clever of all of Robin's adventures. Widow Twankey had gone into town on Tuesday to the market to buy some green cloth to make a new suit for one of the merry men. While she was looking at the vegetables and wondering whether she should take back some nice apples as a treat, a large fat man in a white coat and a big white hat came pushing past everyone.

"Get out of the way, everyone! I'm the cook at the castle and I need a bushel of the best apples. My master is going to have a visit from Lord and Lady Lardbutt on Friday. They are very good friends of King John and I have to make some fine apple pies for the feast that the Sheriff will give. It's his birthday and all the town will be celebrating!"



The cook took the best apples that he could find. Then he took a quart of the best cream and a sack of fine sugar. He didn't pay for a thing! "Send the bill to the castle!" he said with a sneer "and see if you get paid!"

"Oh, please, Sir," said Widow Twankey very nicely. "What will you do for a cheese? I can supply you with the very best cheese there is around here - rich and golden and tasty. And, of course, for a friend of King John I won't charge you. I've sold all my good cheeses today but I have an excellent one at home saved for special occasions just like this one."

Now the cook had a pocket full of money to buy all the things he needed for the feast but the more he stole, the more money he could keep for himself. If he could get a nice cheese for the feast without paying for it, so much the better.

"Sir," said Widow Twankey, "I'll bring you the cheese tomorrow morning to the castle kitchen. For whom shall I ask?" She seemed so shy and demure that the silly cook was fancying that the old lady was sweet on him!

The cook,[who was liking Widow Twankey more and more], said, "Tell the guards at the gate that Mr Trencher, the cook, is expecting you. Mention my name and you'll come straight through the doors!"

Widow Twankey gave a little curtsy and she was off. Safely back in the forest, she told Robin and the girls what she was planning. "I'll take one of Emily's excellent cheeses to the castle. I'll hang about and find out what I can about the visit by Lord and Lady Lardbutt. We might be able to capture them and steal their treasure."

It was a capital idea. The only person who didn't like the idea was Emily who hated to part with her best cheese to give to the Sheriff. Robin laughed and said that they might just come to the Sheriff's birthday party -even without an invitation.

The next day, Widow Twankey dressed in her best bonnet and set off for town with the cheese in a basket on her arm. When she got to the castle, the soldiers at the gate were very saucy and rude - until the Widow mentioned the cheese she was carrying for the Sheriff's party. They all

wanted to taste it and she was very lucky that the cook himself arrived at this very moment or I think that the cheese would have been scoffed before it even got to the kitchen. Once Mr Trencher had rescued her, she went through the big gate into the castle grounds and then to the great kitchen where the feast was being prepared.

Mr Trencher got them a cup of tea and sat down to boast. "Yes, I'm the boss of the whole feast!" he said proudly. "We're having a whole roast pig, a roast peacock, pies and sausage rolls. And pudding! Lord and Lady Lardbutt love their pudding - and so does the sheriff. Then we will have your excellent cheese." Put out on the table, the cheese did indeed look very special. Emily always said that it was the wonderful milk that Petal gave that made it so special.

"But what will you do for beer?" asked Widow Twankey. "I happen to make the best beer in the kingdom - as well as the best cheese."

"Now would that be free of charge too?" asked the cook.

"To be sure," said the Widow. "Are you thirsty at the castle? What say I bring you ten barrels on Friday morning?"

"That would be wonderful," said Mr Trencher. "I'm not supposed to say because the Sheriff is so worried about outlaws like Robin Hood but Lord and Lady Lardbutt are traveling late on Thursday night to trick the outlaws. And once the feast at lunchtime is over, the Sheriff is going to celebrate his birthday by touring the dungeons and putting more people in prison. It will be so jolly!"

Safely back in the forest, Widow Twankey told her story. Robin knew just what to do. He had robbed a convoy of the king's soldiers taking barrels of beer and wine to Nottingham some months ago. The merry men had drunk most of the beer and wine -they liked to have a drink at night with their dinner- so there were now plenty of empty barrels. "Katie! Emily!" said Robin. " I hope you have a clean set of nice green clothes because on Friday, we are going to the Sheriff's party!"

## Chapter 5:

### An Unexpected Guest at The Sheriff's Birthday Party

At first, everything went according to plan. Robin and his men waited in the trees on Thursday night and just before midnight, along came a rich wagon with a guard of three soldiers. The soldiers were tense and frightened as they neared the forest and a high, bossy voice came from the wagon, urging the driver to move faster. Robin signaled with his owl hoot; Katie and Emily hooted back. There was a full moon that night but it was very dark under the trees. Just when the bossy voice had finished, there was a terrible squeal. Will Scarlet had crept up behind the wagon and slipped inside. It was the signal. The merry men dropped from the trees and called on the soldiers to surrender; Katie and Emily tumbled into the wagon with their swords drawn and found Lord and Lady Lardbutt hiding under a blanket.

"Leave us alone, you scoundrels!" squeaked Lord Lardbutt. "We have an escort of brave soldiers who will die fighting to defend us!"

"Yes," said Lady Lardbutt. "And we are very particular friends of King John so you had better treat us nicely!"

Robin and the girls laughed. The brave soldiers who would die to defend their masters were now tied up and on the ground, having given in without a fight. Emily made the Lardbutts get out of the carriage while she checked their luggage. "Katie," she said, "there are jewels here and some lovely silk clothes."

"That's my party frock!" wailed Lady Lardbutt. "And leave my jewels alone!"

"Leave the silly billies," said Robin. "I think we'll let them keep their fancy clothes. The clothes won't fit anyone here; there's no one in the forest so

fat as they are anyway. What we will take is their chest of treasure and their fine horses and carriage."

"We'll have to walk!" said Lord Lardbutt.

"A walk will do you good!" said Robin. "Off you go, or you'll be late of the party."

Lord and Lady Lardbutt set out, the three poor soldiers tied up behind them, to walk all the way to town. The treasure chest became the property of Robin Hood. There were some poor children in Fr William's church who needed new clothes and toys for Christmas; the treasure would be just what they needed.

The next day the real adventure began. At morning tea time, Robin loaded up the wagon with old Pilot in front and ten big barrels on the back. In two of the barrels there was some delicious beer; in the others, there were eight of Robin's merry men. Widow Twankey drove the wagon, with Katie and Emily disguised as little boys beside her. It was a long drive to the castle, through the fields and over the river bridge and down the streets of Nottingham. At the castle, soldiers came out to stop them and Widow Twankey was bright and breezy.

"Now, Mother," said one of the soldiers not unkindly, "where do you think you're going with those barrels of beer?"

"Why sir," said the Widow, "Mr Trencher, the Cook, has ordered ten barrels of beer for the Sheriff's birthday party. He told me to be sure to bring ten so that he could treat all the soldiers afterwards."



All the beer that Widow Twankey took to the Sheriff

"Beer, is it?" said the soldier happily. "Well roll right in. The party will be starting soon enough."

The wagon rolled through the gate and over the drawbridge and deep into the castle courtyard. Widow Twankey drew up her wagon at the kitchen door and Mr Trencher the Cook came out to meet her. He called some of the scullery boys to unload the beer and it was stacked in the kitchen ready for the party. Widow Twankey made sure that the barrels were right way up and that the two barrels with the real beer in them were right at the front.

"Now my dear Mr Trencher," said Widow Twankey, "what say I stay and help you with the beer. I've brought my two young nephews, Hugh and Lou, to help me draw the beer and serve it."



Mr Trencher, the fat cook in the castle

"An excellent idea," said the Cook. "You can begin by drawing me off a sample now."

Widow Twankey went to the first barrel and inserted a tap. Soon, there was luscious, foamy beer filling a pot and Mr Trencher had knocked it all back in one slurp. "No wonder he's so fat," thought Emily.

The morning went along quickly and the girls were very busy. They had to remember to speak in a deep low voice like boys but actually it was a lot of fun. Mr Trencher first made them fill up all the pots of beer. Then they had to cut the ham for the sandwiches and finally, Mr Trencher took them to where he had cooked the birthday cake for the sheriff. "I want you to clean up this mess," said Mr Trencher. "You will have to lick the bowl where I made the chocolate cake and lick all the ladles I have used to make the cake!"

This was the best work and the girls were sorry when it was over. The feast was being served and everyone in the castle was carrying in food to the sheriff's banqueting table.

Something happened about this time which the girls might have forgotten but it became very important in what happened later that day. A man with a shabbily stained cloak came to the door and begged for some bread to eat. Mr Trencher told him to go away or he would call the soldiers but once the

cook had turned away to do something else, Katie and Emily ran forward to help. They knew what it was like to be without a home and hungry and they always tried to help strangers in need. Emily found him a stool to sit on near the fire and Katie cut him a big slice of ham. They sat with the man and chatted about the sadness in the kingdom - of the poor people in the dungeons and their little farm now taken from them. The stranger listened carefully. Once he had finished the ham, Katie got him a big slice of cheese and a glass of milk. The stranger enjoyed his simple meal and things became so busy after that that Emily and Kate quite forgot him.



The stranger at the feast: who was he?

Soon it was time for the feast. The cook served the meat and Widow Twankey pulled the beer and soon the whole of the first barrel was finished. Widow Twankey didn't forget the soldiers on the gate and she made sure that they had plenty to eat and drink. Katie and Emily dressed as Hugh and Lou were kept very busy taking the dinner around. There was a whole roast pig, a peacock, a haunch of venison, some sausages, chicken pies and lots more. The Sheriff ate and drank and so did his friends. No one ate more than Lord and Lady Lardbutt who were asked many times to tell the story of their escape from Robin Hood.

"There were at least fifty terrible outlaws," Lord Lardbutt said, "and every one of them was fierce and bloodthirsty. We killed about fifteen of them and wounded twenty others but they eventually over powered us! "

"Two of the biggest and fiercest fought me to the ground until I gave them my treasure chest!" said Lady Lardbutt while Emily was serving her a big pile

of sausages. "I cut the ears off one and poked out the eyes of the other before they over powered me."

Katie and Emily wanted to giggle because they were the fierce outlaws who had stolen the treasure from the Lardbutts - and their ears and eyes seemed pretty safe and sound. The girls went back to the kitchen and Widow Twankey winked at them. It was the signal to alert Robin and the men that it was time to come out of the barrels. Emily, pretending to get some more beer, went from barrel to barrel tapping on the lid of each.

At the same time, Katie dropped a whole chicken pie on the floor at the entrance to the great dining hall. Mr Trencher and all the kitchen staff ran forward to try to clean it up. For a moment, the coast was clear in the kitchen and Robin and his men emerged from the barrels with their bows and arrows and their swords drawn. Three of the merry men were wearing the uniforms pinched from the bullying soldiers who had stolen the cheese and the geese from the farmers.

Now here was where Widow Twankey was very, very clever. She had saved a whole bucket of beer to the end and went to the gate of the castle with the men in disguise. "Boys," she said, 'the Sheriff has sent this lovely bucket of beer out to you and asked me to tell you that you should have the afternoon off to go and have a snooze. These soldiers will take over your guard duty now. Just leave your swords and spears here for them."

"Why, thank you Mother," the soldiers cried and they happily left their post and went off with the bucket of beer. The soldiers waited only a minute before they closed the gates and locked them. Now, no one could come in or out. They sped back to the great hall to be part of the fun.

After the whole of the second barrel of beer had been drunk, Lord Larbutt got to his feet and even though he was very drunk, raised his glass. "Ladies and gentlemen, it is the Sheriff's birthday! Happy birthday, Sheriff! Now we are going to drink the health of the Sheriff and good King John. And then we are going down to the dungeons to tease the poor people the Sheriff has arrested. What jolly fun that will be!"

"I don't think so!" cried Robin Hood, running into the hall with his sword drawn. "For England and King Richard!" The merry men, Katie and Emily streamed into the hall shouting with him. Ladies screamed. The Lardbutts

were terrified and jumped under the table. The Sheriff called for his guard but they were locked outside the castle gate now. He drew his own sword and sprang forward. Emily was the closest and her sword was up. It was a brave fight. When Emily looked like being hurt by the Sheriff, Katie sprang in and rescued her. The Sheriff roared with anger. "How dare you raise a hand to me! I act for King John!" He swung his sword and knocked Katie's sword out of her hand. Before any of the men could do anything, the Sheriff had his sword to Katie's throat.

At this moment, something absolutely astonishing happened. The stranger whom Katie and Emily had fed in the kitchen stepped forward and pushed the Sheriff's sword away. It was the bravest thing to do. Everyone stared in amazement.

And then the stranger unfastened his cloak and let it fall to the ground. Under his cloak, the stranger wore the royal clothes of the King of England.

"It's the King!" cried Robin Hood. "The real King! Brave King Richard has come home to us!"

There was complete silence in the hall as everyone fell to their knees in front of the king. Katie and Emily couldn't stop themselves from looking at the King's kind and gentle face and he smiled back at them broadly. He came forward to where they were kneeling and took Robin by the hand and lifted him up - then Katie and Emily. In a moment, everyone was cheering wildly with happiness. The only people who looked unhappy were the Sheriff and Lord and Lady Lardbutt. Even the rest of King John's friends were pleased to see the King.



Brave King Richard

"I have come back to my kingdom to find that my truest subjects are outlaws in the forest and good men and women are locked in cruel dungeons. Sir Gervase Maledict, I relieve you of your office as Sheriff of Nottingham. In your place, I appoint Robin Hood." Robin knelt in front of the king who tapped him on the shoulder with his sword. "I now create you Sir Robin of Locksley. I must have Robin and Katie and Emily with me when I go up to London. Until Robin returns, you, Widow Twankey, can be the Sheriff."

The Widow blushed and curtsied. "I promise I'll do right, Your Majesty!" said the Widow.

The King now turned to the girls. "My dears, I believe we were just about to eat pudding. I think that there are some poor prisoners in the dungeons who would like some pudding. Could you take the old Sheriff to his own dungeons and lock him in with these two fat fools."

Katie and Emily curtsied to the King. They tied up the wicked old Sheriff and Lord and Lady Lardbutt with wire and escorted them to the deep

dungeons, their swords drawn. You can imagine how excited all the poor people were to be released and asked to join the King - the real King - for pudding.

The news that King Richard had returned spread through the country like a storm. As soon as it was known that the King had come back, people greeted him like a hero. Everywhere he went, poor people were released from prison and the mean men and women whom King John had appointed were driven from office. Katie, Emily, Fr William and Robin rode with the king all the way to London. Wicked King John decided that he had better have a long holiday in France and scarpered away before his brother could capture him. Almost no one was sad to see him go.

When Robin and the girls returned from London, they took up their little farm again and moved Blossom and Petal, the gentle sheep, the fat pigs and all the chickens back to the farmyard. The King came to visit and gave them a splendid present for their kindness to him - a new, bigger farm with a beautiful manor house. He created them Lady Katie de Bland and Lady Emily de Bland. Every winter the girls and Widow Twankey came up to London for a special party with the king where they dressed in their green clothes for old times' sake. They loved their new manor house and felt very grand to be created Ladies but more than anything they loved having Petal and Blossom home again. Every Tuesday still they went back to the market with Widow Twankey to sell their wonderful cakes and cheeses and vegetables. Now the forest was safe and everyone was pleased that the dear old king was home again among his people.