

Girls Who Grew Up to Change the World



Lady Godiva

(990Ad-1067)



In Medieval England, the people of Coventry were suffering under heavy taxes. Their lord, Leofric, was forcing everyone to pay money towards growing the king's army. As a result, they were poor and unhappy.



But Leofric's wife, Godiva, cared for the people. She couldn't bear that they survived miserably on bread and water, while she and her husband had everything they wanted.



She pleaded with her husband to lower the taxes. She'd seen what had happened in Worcester when taxes had been too high: the people had murdered the tax collector and in retaliation the king had ordered their entire town destroyed.



‘Please,’ she asked again. ‘Lower the taxes.’

‘Never,’ he told her. ‘You’d have to ride naked through the streets on a horse before I’d even consider it.’



And that's exactly what she did. On a snow-white horse, with only her long veils of golden hair to cover her body, Godiva galloped through the centre of Coventry.



Out of respect for her, all of the towns-people remained inside with their windows and doors shut. When one man opened his window to sneak a look at Lady Godiva, he was struck blind.



Leofric was amazed. True to his word, he repealed the heavy taxes and had a religious experience, which led to the founding of a monastery.



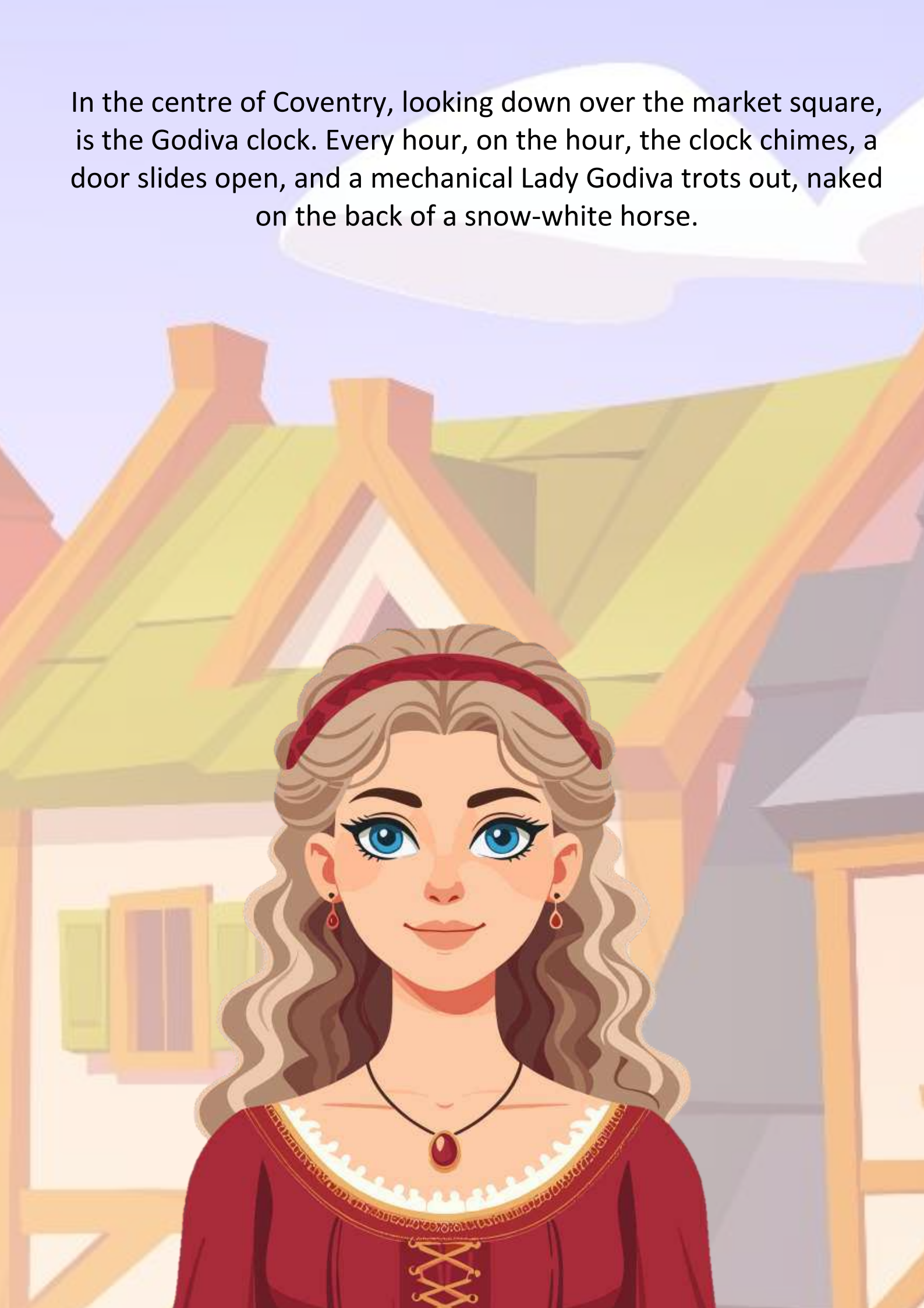
Godiva's generosity didn't stop there. After her husband died, she used the money she inherited to give gifts to various religious institutions, including the arm of St Augustine, a priceless relic that had come from Rome.



She has not been forgotten. Countless pieces of art, songs and films have been made about Lady Godiva's selfless journey through the streets of her own.



In the centre of Coventry, looking down over the market square, is the Godiva clock. Every hour, on the hour, the clock chimes, a door slides open, and a mechanical Lady Godiva trots out, naked on the back of a snow-white horse.





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