Robin Hood's Little House on the Prairie

It's a stretch to think of Robin Hood on the Great Plains. Dakota warriors could do magic tricks with a bow and arrow, but somehow the hero of the Sherwood Forest would be a foreigner in a landscape without trees. The plains just ain't the place for Robin Hood.

But let's try. Think of him emerging, angel-like, from a broad field of 12-foot hybrid corn in yet another Field of Dreams. Suddenly, there he is in green leotards. Friar Tuck is with him, and Little John, and his entire merry band.

Still a stretch? Maybe we can take Sherwood Forest out of Robin Hood, even if we can't take Robin Hood out of Sherwood Forest. Which is not to say it hasn't been done. Here's the story.

Robin of Locksley, our hero, was born in a novel by Sir Walter Scott, an Englishman--a Scot actually--who published dozens of novels in the early decades of the 19th century. That novel, Ivanhoe, did much to make the Middle Ages popular. After all, romantic lore--adventure, love, and war—is a can't-miss combo.

What I'm suggesting is that once upon a time Robin of Sherwood was as great a hero in Siouxland as he was in merry old England.

Hark.

Years ago, a Norwegian bachelor farmer--or someone kin thereof--a man named Old Sheldon, knocked on the door of a distressed young mom. Think of him as a guardian angel in bibs, a straw hat, maybe a corncob pipe or a chunk of chaw in his grizzled cheek. His nose is beet red, and when he doffs that hat he's bald as a buzzard, two handfuls of old-man hair sprouting hither and yon.
Old Sheldon carries a bag, and when that distressed young mom lets him, he shuffles by her and dumps out the contents.

First, a word about this young mom. Her husband just learned the affliction he's been fighting is not going away. When they were married, he risked life and limb in bitter cold to save a neighborhood, riding through a blizzard the likes of which we only rarely see. Both hands and feet were frozen. He never regained the strength he once had. They were told not to expect a miracle.

What's more, the young mom is pregnant. She already has a little one, is fighting off an awful bout of morning sickness just like the ravages she lived with the first time around. Besides, this pregnant wasn't convenient, wasn't something she would have chosen, because she can’t help be worried about how the family is going to eat.

This young mom is plain miserable. That's exactly how she described herself the day Old Sheldon toted that bag in. She was "particularly blue and unhappy"--her words. She was blue, downright miserable.

So, Old Sheldon flips that bag and dumps out the contents on the floor of her cabin, an entire collection of Sir Walter Scott's Waverly novels, as popular as Harry Potter back then, throughout the English-speaking world.

And now this: chances are, that distressed mom is someone you know. Her name was Laura Ingalls Wilder, who would have to get somewhat older before she would, like Sir Walter Scott, write a whole sack full of novels. But, as you well know, she sure as heck did.

I don't know that we think enough about guardian angels. How about a nomination for Old Sheldon? When he stuck that straw hat back on his bald head, it likely didn’t cover the halo.
Or how about this? There's a pile of Scott novels on the floor of the cabin. Laura Wilder forgets her morning sickness because out of the cracks between those old books, a cover or two or three open mysteriously so that, in camo leotards and a goofy little hat, this skinny medieval archer becomes the Jolly Green Giant, a quiver full of arrows up on his back for that bow he's got over his shoulder.

It's Robin of Sherwood Forest. You bet it is. Robin of Locksley, a guardian angel right here on the Plains, a hero.

For Laura Ingalls Wilder, a turning point, just what the doctor ordered.