

Gudbrand

Folk-Lore And Legends: Scandinavia

Scandinavian

Easy
8 min read

Author's note: This story is from Norway.

There was once upon a time a man who was called Gudbrand. He had a farm which lay far away on a hill, and he was therefore known as Gudbrand of the Hillside. He and his wife lived so happily together, and were so well matched, that do what the man would his wife was well pleased, thinking nothing in the world could be better. Whatever he did she was satisfied. The farm was their own, and they had a hundred dollars which lay in a box, and in the stall they had two cows.

One day the woman said to Gudbrand.

“I think it would be well to take one of the cows to town and sell it, and so we shall have some money at hand. We are such fine folk that we ought to have a little ready money, as other people have. As for the hundred dollars which lie in the chest, we must not make a hole in them, but I do not see why we should keep more than one cow. We shall, too, gain something, for I shall then have only to look after one cow, instead of having to litter and feed two.”

This Gudbrand thought was right and reasonable, so he took the cow, and set off to town to sell it. When he arrived there he could find no one who would buy the beast.

“Well, well,” said he, “I can go home again with the cow. I have stall and litter for her, and the road home is no longer than the road here.”

So he began to go homewards again.

When he had gone a little distance he met a man who had a horse he wanted to sell. So Gudbrand thought it was better to have a horse than a cow, and exchanged with him. He went on a bit further, and met a man walking along driving a fat pig before him, and he thought it would be better to have a fat pig than a horse. So he exchanged with the man. He went on a bit further, and met a man with a goat. A goat, he thought, was better than a pig. So he exchanged with him. He went on a good bit further till he met a man who had a sheep, and he exchanged with him, for he thought a sheep was always better than a goat. He went on again, and met a man with a goose. So he exchanged the sheep for the goose. Then he went a long, long way, and met a man with a cock. So he gave the goose for the cock, for he thought to himself—

“It is better to have a cock than a goose.”

He walked on till late in the day, and then as he was getting hungry he sold the cock for twelve shillings, and bought something to eat, for, thought Gudbrand of the Hillside—

“It is better to save one’s life than have a cock.”

Then he walked on homeward till he came to the house of his nearest neighbour, and there he looked in.

“Well, how did you get on at the town?” asked the neighbour.

“Only so and so,” said the man. “I cannot say I have had good or bad luck,” and then he began and told them all that had happened.

“Well,” said the neighbour, “you will catch it when you get home to your wife. Heaven help you! I would not stand in your shoes.”

“I think things might have been much worse,” said Gudbrand of the Hillside; “but whether things have gone well or badly, I have such a gentle wife that she never says anything, do what I will.”

“Ah,” said the neighbour, “I hear what you say, but I don’t believe it.”

“Shall we make a bet?” said Gudbrand. “I have a hundred dollars lying at home in a chest, will you lay as much?”

The neighbour was willing, so the bet was made. They waited till evening, and then set out for Gudbrand’s house. The neighbour stood outside the door, while Gudbrand went inside to his wife.

“Good evening,” said Gudbrand, when he was inside.

“Good evening,” said his wife. “Heaven be praised. Is it you?”

Yes, it was he. His wife then asked him how things went at the town.

“Oh, but so-so,” said Gudbrand, “not much to boast of. When I came to the town I could find no one to buy the cow, so I exchanged it for a horse.”

“Thanks for that!” said the wife; “we are such fine folk that we can ride to church the same as other people, and as we can keep a horse we might as well have one. Go and put the horse up, children.”

“But,” said Gudbrand, “I have not got the horse. After I had gone a bit further I exchanged it for a pig.”

“Well, well,” said his wife, “that was good. I should have done the same. Thanks for that! now I shall have meat in the house to put before folk when they come to see me. What could we do with a horse? People would only have said that we had got too proud to walk to church. Go along, children, and put the pig in the sty.”

“But I have not got the pig either,” said Gudbrand. “When I had gone on a bit further I exchanged it for a milch goat.”

“Bless me,” said the wife, “you do everything well! When I think of it, what could we have done with a pig? Folk would only have said we eat up all we had. Now we have a goat we shall have milk and cheese, and we shall have the goat too. Run, children, and put up the goat.”

“But I have not got the goat,” said Gudbrand. “I went on a bit, and exchanged it for a fine sheep.”

“Well,” said the wife, “you have done just what I should have wished—just as if I had done it myself. What did

we want a goat for? I should have had to go over hill and dale after it. Now we have a sheep I shall have wool and clothes in the house, and food as well. Go, children, and put up the sheep.”

“But I have not got the sheep either,” said Gudbrand. “I went on a while, and then I exchanged it for a goose.”

“You shall have thanks for that,” said the wife, “many thanks! What would we have done with a sheep? I have no spinning-wheel nor distaff, and I should not care to bother about making clothes. We can buy clothes, as we have always done. Now we shall have roast goose, which I have so often wished for, and I shall be able to stuff my little pillow with the down. Go and bring in the goose, children.”

“But,” said Gudbrand, “I have not got the goose either. When I had gone a bit further I gave it in exchange for a cock.”

“Heaven knows,” said his wife, “how you thought all this out so well! It is just what I should have done myself. A cock! why it is just the same as if you had bought an eight-day clock, for the cock crows at four o’clock every morning, so we shall be able to get up in good time. What could we have done with a goose? I don’t know how to cook it, and I can stuff my pillow with moss. Run and fetch the cock in, children.”

“But,” said Gudbrand, “I have not got the cock either. When I had gone a bit further I got hungry, and so I sold the cock for twelve shillings so that I might live.”

“Thank God you did so,” said his wife; “whatever you do you do it just as I should have wished. What could we have done with a cock? We are our own masters, and can lie in bed in the morning as late as we please. Thank Heaven you have come back again safe. You do everything so well that we can well spare the cock, the goose, the pig, and the cow.”

Then Gudbrand opened the door.

“Have I won the hundred dollars?” said he, and the neighbour was obliged to own that he had.

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