



What the Goodman Does is Always Right

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Easy
11 min read

I will tell you a story that was told to me when I was a little boy. Every time I think of this story it seems to me more and more charming; for it is with stories as it is with many people—they become better as they grow older.

I have no doubt that you have been in the country and seen a very old farmhouse, with thatched roof, and mosses and small plants growing wild upon it. There is a stork's nest on the ridge of the gable, for we cannot do without the stork. The walls of the house are sloping, and the windows are low, and only one of the latter is made to open. The baking oven sticks out of the wall like a great knob. An elder tree hangs over the palings, and beneath its branches, at the foot of the paling, is a pool of water in which a few ducks are sporting. There is a yard dog, too, that barks at all comers.

Just such a farmhouse as this stood in a country lane, and in it dwelt an old couple, a peasant and his wife. Small as their possessions were, they had one thing they could not do without, and that was a horse, which contrived to live upon the grass found by the side of the highroad. The old peasant rode into the town upon this horse, and his neighbors often borrowed it of him and paid for the loan of it by rendering some service to the

old couple. Yet after a time the old people thought it would be as well to sell the horse or exchange it for something which might be more useful to them. But what should this something be?

“You will know best, old man,” said the wife. “It is fair day to-day; so ride into town and get rid of the horse for money or make a good exchange. Whichever you do will please me; so ride to the fair.”

She fastened his neckerchief for him, for she could do that better than he could and she could also tie it very prettily in a double bow. She also smoothed his hat round and round with the palm of her hand and gave him a kiss. Then he rode away upon the horse that was to be sold, or bartered for something else. Yes, the goodman knew what he was about. The sun shone with great heat, and not a cloud was to be seen in the sky. The road was very dusty, for many people, all going to the fair, were driving, riding, or walking upon it. There was no shelter anywhere from the hot sun. Among the crowd a man came trudging along, driving a cow to the fair. The cow was as beautiful a creature as any cow could be.

“She gives good milk, I am certain,” said the peasant to himself. “That would be a very good exchange: the cow for the horse. Hallo there! you with the cow,” he said. “I tell you what, I dare say a horse is of more value than a cow; but I don’t care for that. A cow will be more useful to me, so if you like we’ll exchange.”

“To be sure I will,” said the man.

Accordingly the exchange was made. When the matter was settled the peasant might have turned back, for he had done the business he came to do. But having made up his mind to go to the fair, he determined to do so, if only to have a look at it. So on he went to the town with his cow. Leading the animal, he strode on sturdily, and, after a short time, overtook a man who was driving a sheep. It was a good fat sheep, with a fine fleece on its back.

“I should like to have that fellow,” said the peasant to himself. “There is plenty of grass for him by our palings, and in the winter we could keep him in the room with us. Perhaps it would be more profitable to have a sheep than a cow. Shall I exchange?”

The man with the sheep was quite ready, and the bargain was quickly made. And then our peasant continued his way on the highroad with his sheep. Soon after this, he overtook another man, who had come into the road from a field, and was carrying a large goose under his arm.

“What a heavy creature you have there!” said the peasant. “It has plenty of feathers and plenty of fat, and would look well tied to a string, or paddling in the water at our place. That would be very useful to my old woman; she could make all sorts of profit out of it. How often she has said, ‘If we only had a goose!’ Now here is an opportunity, and, if possible, I will get it for her. Shall we exchange? I will give you my sheep for your goose, and thanks into the bargain.”

The other had not the least objection, and accordingly the exchange was made, and our peasant became possessor of the goose. By this time he had arrived very near the town. The crowd on the highroad had been gradually increasing, and there was quite a rush of men and cattle. The cattle walked on the path and by the palings, and at the turnpike gate they even walked into the toll keeper’s potato field, where one fowl was strutting about with a string tied to its leg, lest it should take fright at the crowd and run away and get lost. The tail feathers of this fowl were very short, and it winked with both its eyes, and looked very cunning as it said, “Cluck, cluck.” What were the thoughts of the fowl as it said this I cannot tell you, but as soon as our good man saw it, he thought, “Why, that’s the finest fowl I ever saw in my life; it’s finer than our parson’s brood hen, upon my word. I should like to have that fowl. Fowls can always pick up a few grains that lie about, and almost keep themselves. I think it would be a good exchange if I could get it for my goose. Shall we exchange?” he asked the toll keeper.

“Exchange?” repeated the man. “Well, it would not be a bad thing.”

So they made an exchange; the toll keeper at the turnpike gate kept the goose, and the peasant carried off the fowl. Now he really had done a great deal of business on his way to the fair, and he was hot and tired. He wanted something to eat, and a glass of ale to refresh himself; so he turned his steps to an inn. He was just about to enter, when the ostler came out, and they met at the door. The ostler was carrying a sack. “What have you in that sack?” asked the peasant.

“Rotten apples,” answered the ostler; “a whole sackful of them. They will do to feed the pigs with.”

“Why, that will be terrible waste,” the peasant replied. “I should like to take them home to my old woman. Last year the old apple tree by the grassplot bore only one apple, and we kept it in the cupboard till it was quite withered and rotten. It was property, my old woman said. Here she would see a great deal of property—a whole sackful. I should like to show them to her.”

“What will you give me for the sackful?” asked the ostler.

“What will I give? Well, I will give you my fowl in exchange.”

So he gave up the fowl and received the apples, which he carried into the inn parlor. He leaned the sack carefully against the stove, and then went to the table. But the stove was hot, and he had not thought of that. Many guests were present—horse-dealers, cattle-drovers, and two Englishmen. The Englishmen were so rich that their pockets bulged and seemed ready to burst; and they could bet too, as you shall hear. Hiss—s—s, hiss—s—s. What could that be by the stove? The apples were beginning to roast. “What is that?” asked one.

“Why, do you know—” said our peasant, and then he told them the whole story of the horse, which he had exchanged for a cow, and all the rest of it, down to the apples.

“Well, your old woman will give it to you when you get home,” said one of the Englishmen. “Won’t there be a noise?”

“What! Give me what?” said the peasant. “Why, she will kiss me, and say, ‘What the goodman does is always right.’”

“Let us lay a wager on it,” said the Englishman. “We’ll wager you a ton of coined gold, a hundred pounds to the hundredweight.”

“No, a bushel will be enough,” replied the peasant. “I can only set a bushel of apples against it, and I’ll throw myself and my old woman into the bargain. That will pile up the measure, I fancy.”

“Done! taken!” and so the bet was made.

Then the landlord's coach came to the door, and the two Englishmen and the peasant got in, and away they drove. Soon they had stopped at the peasant's hut. "Good evening, old woman."

"Good evening, old man."

"I've made the exchange."

"Ah, well, you understand what you're about," said the woman. Then she embraced him, and paid no attention to the strangers, nor did she notice the sack.

"I got a cow in exchange for the horse."

"Oh, how delightful!" said she. "Now we shall have plenty of milk, and butter, and cheese on the table. That was a capital exchange."

"Yes, but I changed the cow for a sheep."

"Ah, better still!" cried the wife. "You always think of everything; we have just enough pasture for a sheep. Ewe's milk and cheese, woolen jackets and stockings! The cow could not give all these, and her hairs only fall off. How you think of everything!"

"But I changed away the sheep for a goose."

"Then we shall have roast goose to eat this year. You dear old man, you are always thinking of something to please me. This is delightful. We can let the goose walk about with a string tied to her leg, so that she will get fatter still before we roast her."

"But I gave away the goose for a fowl."

"A fowl! Well, that was a good exchange," replied the woman. "The fowl will lay eggs and hatch them, and we shall have chickens. We shall soon have a poultry yard. Oh, this is just what I was wishing for!"

"Yes, but I exchanged the fowl for a sack of shriveled apples."

"What! I must really give you a kiss for that!" exclaimed the wife. "My dear, good husband, now I'll tell you

something. Do you know, almost as soon as you left me this morning, I began thinking of what I could give you nice for supper this evening, and then I thought of fried eggs and bacon, with sweet herbs. I had eggs and bacon but lacked the herbs, so I went over to the schoolmaster's. I knew they had plenty of herbs, but the schoolmistress is very mean, although she can smile so sweetly. I begged her to lend me a handful of herbs. 'Lend!' she exclaimed, 'I have nothing to lend. I could not even lend you a shriveled apple, my dear woman.' But now I can lend her ten, or a whole sackful, for which I'm very glad. It makes me laugh to think of it." Then she gave him a hearty kiss.

"Well, I like all this," said both the Englishmen; "always going down the hill and yet always merry. It's worth the money to see it." So they paid a hundredweight of gold to the peasant who, whatever he did, was not scolded but kissed.

Yes, it always pays best when the wife sees and maintains that her husband knows best and that whatever he does is right.



“What the good-man does is sure to be right!” Illustration by Maude and Miska Petersham, published in *Twenty-four Unusual Stories for Boys and Girls* by Anna Cogswell Tyler (1921), Harcourt and Brace.

This is a story which I heard when I was a child. And now you have heard it, too, and know that “What the goodman does is always right.”

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