

*GOODY GREENEYE AND HER  
ASS*





**G**OODY GREENEYE was an old woman in the old, old times, and she dwelt not very far from the old English town of Exeter. She was called Goody Greeneye, though she was not good at all, but in fact a very bad and malicious crone who lived all by herself in a little hut on the edge of a forest; and no one who was wise ever went near that house willingly, either by day or night, for the people for miles around were afraid of her and believed her to be a very wicked and powerful witch. Indeed, it was whispered that troops of naughty elves obeyed her lightest word, and that at dusk every evening they could be seen flocking all around her hut, creeping over the roof which was of thatched straw, or in at the unglazed window, or under the rickety old door; and sometimes at night flames shot out of the solitary



chimney and filled the air with little fiery imps, sent up by Goody Greeneye's chants and charms. Indeed, it was commonly reported that the forest, on the edge of which stood her hut, was haunted, not only by pixies, and derrickes, and wishhounds, but also by terrible old women riding on broomsticks, who came from all parts of England and Wales, and even from Scotland and Ireland, to dance on the moor before Goody Greeneye's door. So it is not hard to imagine how afraid of her the good folk in the neighborhood were, and how they quaked when she threatened and scolded at them, which she did very often; for she had a bad temper, and it was probably made much worse by the life she led, and the dislike of her neighbors. Her house itself was certainly a poor little place; a hut with walls of clay and a roof of straw, with one chimney and one window that had neither a sash nor a pane of glass; and this hut had no floor but the earth, and no upper story, but just an attic at one end under the thatch of straw, and no stairs, but a post with notches cut for the feet. This was the only ladder she had to reach the corner under the roof where lay her straw bed; for a mattress or a couch she had not, nor did many of the

other peasants have them, for in those times there was poverty among the lower classes that we scarcely hear of now, at least, in our part of the world. Yet Goody Greeneye was no poorer than her neighbors, and many believed that she was much richer. She had quite a flock of hens, and she raised a few vegetables and herbs, and every market-day in Exeter, set out for town, clad in her rocket, a kind of large mantle of serge, or linsey-woolsey, with a deep fringe at the lower end, worn by the country women, and always red in winter and white in summer: West Country Rockets, they called them; certainly not much like the thing that we call a rocket now. Goody Greeneye, bundled up in this red rocket, would sally forth with her basket of eggs and her bunch of vegetables, and taking her seat in the market-place, she always succeeded in selling her stock, and always went home with the merry jingle of coins in her pocket; and though robbers were as thick on those moors as peas in a pod, no one ever ventured to rob the terrible witch. So it was that her pot often boiled when her neighbor's was empty, and she lacked neither fire nor food when others were starving and freezing; but for all that she had much to torment her. She was



so well hated, and did so many mean and spiteful things, that the peasants never did her a kindness, and the children either ran from her or mocked her; no one had a pleasant word for her, and I am afraid she did not deserve one.

Now, very near Goody Greeneye there lived an honest farmer with a troop of noisy, merry, healthy children, six boys and six girls; these youngsters knew the old witch well, and hated and feared her quite as much as the other people did, and though they were generally wise enough and agile enough to keep out of her reach, I am afraid they took a delight in teasing her, and making fun of her long nose, and of her chin which nearly met it. Of all the boys and girls, the eldest, Osmund, was the greatest tease, and being a hardy, daring boy he went farther and did more to vex Goody Greeneye than any of the others, and perhaps, therefore, he really deserved some of the punishment he got, though not quite all of it, I am sure; for it really was a very horrible one, as you shall hear.

There was an old gnarled apple tree growing in the corner of the witch's garden plot, and its branches hung temptingly low over the hedge; and when the fruit was ripening she kept a sharp eye

on it to save it from the young marauders of the neighborhood, who, in their greed for a ripe apple suddenly forgot their terror of the old hag. Indeed, these apples, for some mysterious reason, were the largest and fairest in the county, and their red cheeks were quite too inviting to be resisted. No one knew why such apples hung on such a miserable old tree, and the peasants always declared that they were the work of the goody's enchantment. How that may be, I know not; but certain it is that they were far too good to escape Master Osmund, and though he knew well enough that it was wrong to steal at all, and both wrong and mean to steal an old woman's fruit, yet he persisted in coming after those apples. The others, his brothers and sisters, were a little afraid, when the pinch came, to climb the tree, lest Goody Greeneye should catch them aloft and have them at her mercy; but Osmund was never afraid, and he was up in that tree again and again, filling his pockets and tossing the fruit to the timid ones on the farther side of the hedge; and try as she would, the old woman never could catch him. Before she could hobble down to the tree he was over the hedge at a bound, shrieking defiance back at her, and laughing her threats to scorn. He



deserved to be caught for stealing the apples, so we can hardly blame the old woman for her screams of rage, when she found herself robbed and mocked into the bargain. But, after all, she never lost very many apples, for she was keen enough to gather them herself, and the mischievous tricks of a boy were hardly enough to make her vow vengeance; but she did, and very cunning she was, too, about her way of getting it. Quite unexpectedly she changed her conduct toward the children, and especially toward Osmund, whom she now began to treat with great kindness. She smiled at him out of the window, and even laughed when she saw him trying to get the last apple that she had left to ripen on the tree. So kind did she become that they all began to be ashamed of their treatment of her and left off teasing her, and one by one ran off to play in other quarters, so that it seemed as if she had won by a little kindness the peace that she had never been able to get by threats or angry words. Matters went so smoothly that Osmund was heartily mortified at his own conduct, and now when he passed, he spoke to the dame as civilly as he could, although he still avoided her as a witch. Besides, he was growing to be a big boy, too big for such

tricks and trifles, and he was so tall, and straight, and strong, and handsome, that his parents were very proud of him, and all the boys in the neighborhood looked up to him as quite the champion of the place. But neither his size nor his strength saved him, for all the while old Goody Greeneye was planning and planning her revenge; and one fair morning her opportunity came, and she hailed it with delight.

It chanced that the old crone was sitting at the threshold of her miserable hut, trying, no doubt, to draw some of the aches and pains of old age out of her limbs in the warm sunshine of the beautiful summer day. But so dark and forbidding was her shrivelled face, with its hooked nose and fierce little eyes, that the sun seemed to forget to shine on her; and while every other object near was bright with noonday warmth, she looked dark, and shrunken, and ugly, and did not seem to get a bit of it. She had a beehive at her door and the bees were humming happily, and her hens were clucking not two yards from her feet, while in her hands was a little basket full of new-laid eggs; but she looked as brown and shrivelled as any old dried apple that had lain puckering on the shelf for a twelvemonth.



But, dear me, how she grinned, and smirked, and tried to look kind when she saw Osmund coming down the path by her gate. A handsome young fellow enough and one that might well please an old woman's eye, and he looked at her pleasantly, for he was in a very good humor, and he smiled and lifted his cap.

"Good day to you, Goody Greeneye," he said, with never a thought of the hate she bore him, for he had forgotten all about those days of apple stealing and other tricks.

"A fair day to you, Master Osmund, and good luck, too," purred the wretched old hag. "'T is long since you've passed this way, and the sight of a fine young fellow like you is good for old eyes. See here what a fine basket of eggs I have," she added, holding them out; "there are no such hens as mine—as I think you know!" and she gave him a meaning look, and laughed and chuckled to herself.

Osmund flushed red, for he knew well enough that he had stolen more than one egg out of those nests, just to torment Goody Greeneye.

"I was a bad boy, madam," he said, shamefaced.

"Tut, tut!" cackled the old witch, "never mind

that; I bore you no ill will for a boy's naughty tricks! Here, Master Osmund, take this egg and eat it at once, to let me see that you bear me no malice, either. Here's the very finest egg in my basket, and I know you are hungry after the day in the fields."

"Indeed, I am," said Osmund, foolish enough to be pleased at her flattery and her coaxing tone; "but really I am on my way home to dinner, and I won't rob you of another egg, Goody Greeneye."

He said this as an excuse, for he really did not care to eat food given him by a witch, even though he had stolen apples from her tree; but the old woman was far too cunning to let him escape.

"Nay," she said, "you must take the egg or I'll never forgive you, my master; and see what a fine white egg it is — nearly as big as a goose egg."

Ashamed to refuse again Osmund took the egg and slipped it into his pocket, but at this the old hag screamed and protested.

"No, no!" she cried, "eat it now, Osmund. Did I not save the best on purpose? and if you suck a raw egg it will make you as strong as a giant. Eat it, friend, for my hens lay famous eggs, and every one is better and wiser for eating them."



Strange to say, Osmund had hardly got the egg into his pocket before he was possessed with a wild desire to eat it; for you see the egg was a very curious egg, indeed, and therefore it took but little of Goody Greeneye's urging to make him take it out again. Breaking the shell at one end he ate the contents, while the old woman watched him with such a wicked grin of delight that, if the foolish youth had looked at her, he would have taken warning and stopped before it was too late. But the egg was so delicate and so very fresh and nice that Osmund made short work of it, and throwing away the empty shell, he thanked Goody Greeneye for her kind thought of him, and, being in something of a hurry, he bade her a kind good day and set off again at a round pace thinking that, after all, she was very much belied and was a very good old woman. Oh, if he could only have seen the old wretch dancing with joy on her doorstep, and shaking her fists at him! But even then he would never have dreamed of the dreadful thing he had done. He thrust his hands into his pockets, and whistling a tune, he started off across the moor toward his home, where dinner was spread for all his brothers and sisters and for himself, and he whistled as

sweetly as any robin — he had always been famous for whistling — and he was already almost out of sight of Goody Greeneye's hut and then — and then —

All at once, he began to have the most curious feelings. His head felt twice its natural size, and his ears began to sprout up in the air, like growing plants, and he grew so dizzy that he could not stand upright, but toppled over on all fours. He had worn a new doublet that morning, quite a fine affair, and now it seemed to fall away, and instead, he was covered with a rough, shaggy coat of hair; and a long leathery tail, with a tassel on the end of it, began to switch his legs, and his hands and his feet turned into hoofs. "Horror of horrors!" he thought, "what has come over me?" and he tried to scream for help, but he made the most shocking noise, in fact, he brayed — for, in the twinkling of an eye, the tall, strong, handsome Osmund had been turned into an ass! Then, just in the midst of his horror and amazement, he heard a mocking laugh, and Goody Greeneye suddenly appeared beside him, dancing with joy.

"Oh, ho!" she cried gleefully, "oh, ho, my fine ass! Here is just what I've needed so long, an ass



to take me to the Exeter market. What are you braying so loud for, Master Ass? Do you want some thistles, my beauty?"

Poor Osmund! He understood her false kindness now! The wretched old hag had given him an enchanted egg, and here he was a helpless ass, quite at her mercy. Blind with rage, he bellowed away at the top of his lungs, and planting his forefeet, let fly his hind legs in a fruitless effort to kick his enemy; but Goody Greeneye danced away, as nimble as only a witch can be, and laughed and laughed — until she had to hold her sides — at his rage and his efforts to kick her to pieces.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" she cackled, wiping the tears of laughter from her eyes; "if you could only see how awkward you are! A real, old-fashioned ass would have kicked me sky high in the time you have been raising nothing but dust. Chut! Master Ass, you're only fit to take me on your back," and with this she gave a leap — as lightly as a child of ten — and landed on Osmund's back.

You can imagine his fury at finding the horrid old wretch seated on his back, and he straightway set about getting her off, in the way he had seen real horses and asses try to unseat their riders: he

planted his forefeet harder than ever, and he ducked down his head and flung his hind legs so high he nearly turned a somersault; but all to no purpose. That wretched old goody held on firmly by one of his long ears, and began to beat him soundly with a long, thorny branch that she had plucked from a bramble-bush near by. She beat him so hard and the thorns pricked him so sharply, that he could endure it no longer, and he started off at a run as fast as he could, making straight for his home, for there surely, he thought, he would get help. But though he ran as never an ass ran before, and jumped ditches and cleared stone walls, he could not unseat that dreadful old witch; she sat as firm as a rock, jeering and laughing, her shrill cackling nearly driving him mad. And as he neared his home, his younger brothers and sisters came running toward him, and Osmund thought they had seen his trouble and were coming to help, never dreaming that they would not know him until he heard them speaking to the witch.

"O Goody Greeneye," the first one cried, "why do you ride so fast?"

"And where is our brother?" demanded the second. "Have you seen Osmund?"



"What a frightful, old, skinny ass, Goody!" exclaimed the third.

"A lean ass will run the faster to market, my dears," retorted Goody Greeneye, chuckling wickedly.

And at this Osmund brayed loudly, trying — oh, so hard, hard as we try in nightmare — to talk and tell his brothers and sisters of his fearful plight; but they only laughed at the noise, thrusting their fingers into their ears.

"Where is Osmund?" again demanded one of them. "He is late, so late to dinner. Hast seen him, Goody Greeneye?"

"Osmund is an ass!" declared the goody, more truthfully than they knew.

"The horrid old thing!" cried Osmund's brothers and sisters, "to speak so of our big, handsome brother. Away with you, you witch; away with that bag of bones you call an ass!" and they drove Osmund back from his own gate with sticks and stones, screaming and shouting in their anger, while Goody Greeneye, enjoying the whole scene as a huge joke, beat Osmund herself and turned his head toward her own hut.

"Trot!" she said, fiercely; "trot! You see what a welcome a man gets in his own home when he

comes back in a poor shape. Ah, ha! Master Osmund; you're my ass now, and mine you shall be. Trot, trot, trot!"

And trot he did, cut to the heart by the treatment of his own family, and quite unable to resist the force of the witch's enchantment. He started off over the moor with Goody Greeneye perched on his back, and in less than no time he found himself in her garden, tied to that same old gnarled apple tree, with a handful of thistles for his dinner!

Poor Osmund! He was punished now for the apples he had stolen. There he stood under that old tree with a stout bit of rope around his thin neck, and the rope was just loose enough to permit him to chew his thistles; and I can tell you that thistles were anything but filling, and Osmund had the sharp appetite of a hungry, healthy boy. He tried hard to slip his head out of the noose, or to break the cord that bound him; but all to no purpose. Goody Greeneye knew very well how to make a halter, and she was far too cunning to use anything but the stoutest and newest rope, so all Osmund's efforts only ended in nearly choking himself; and to stand there and kick and bray was