

Tom Totherhouse

by Sir George Webbe Dasent
from *Popular Tales from the Norse*

Once on a time there was a Goody who had a deaf husband. A good, easy man he was, but that was just why she thought more of the lad next door, whom they called 'Tom Totherhouse'. Now the lad that served the deaf man saw very well that the two had something between them, and one day he said to the Goody:

'Dare you wager ten dollars, mother, that I don't make you lay bare your own shame?'

'Yes I dare', said she; and so they wagered ten dollars. So one day, while the lad and the deaf man stood thrashing in the barn, the lad saw that Tom Totherhouse came to see the Goody. He said nothing, but a good while before dinnertime he turned toward the barn-door, and bawled out 'Halloa!'

'What! are we to go home already?' said the man, who hadn't given any heed to what the lad did.

'Yes, we must, since mother calls', said the lad.

So when they got into the passage, the lad began to hem and cough, that the Goody might get Tom Totherhouse out of the way. But when they came into the room, there stood a whole bowl of custards on the table.

'Nay, nay, mother', cried out the man; 'shall we have custards to- day?'

'Yes, that you shall, dear', said the Goody; but she was as sour as verjuice, and as cross as two sticks.

So when they had eaten and drank all the good cheer up, off they went again to their work, and the Goody said to Tom:

'Deil take that lad's sharp nose, this was all his fault; but now you must be off as fast as you can, and I'll come down to you in the mead with a snack between meals.'

This the lad stood outside in the passage and listened to.

'Do you know, father', he said, 'I think we'd best go down into the hollow and put our fence to rights, which is blown down, before the neighbours' swine get in and root up our meadow.'

'Aye, aye, let's go and do it', said the man; for he did all he was told, good, easy man.

So when the afternoon was half spent, down came the Goody sneaking along into the mead, with something under her apron.

'Nay, nay, mother', said the man, 'it can't be you any longer; are we to have a snack between meals too?'

'Yes, yes, that you shall', she said; but she was sourer and wilder than ever.

So they made merry, and crammed themselves with bannocks and butter, and had a drop of brandy into the bargain.

'I'll go off to Tom Totherhouse with a snack--shan't I, mother?' said the lad. 'He's had nothing between meals, I'll be bound.'

'Ah! do; there's a good fellow', said the Goody, who all at once got as mild as milk.

As he went along the lad broke a bannock to bits, and dropped the crumbs here and there as he walked. But when he got to Tom Totherhouse he said:

'Now, just you take care, for our old cock has found out that you come too often to see our Goody. He won't stand it any longer, and has sworn to drive his axe into you as soon as ever he can set eyes on you.'

As for Tom, he was so frightened he scarce knew which way to turn, and the lad went back again to his master.

'There's something wrong', he said, 'with Tom's plough, and he begs you to be so good as to take your axe, and go and see if you can't set it right.'

Yes, the man set off with his axe, but Tom Totherhouse had scarce caught sight of him before he took to his heels as fast as he could. The man turned and twisted the plough round and round, and looked at it on every side, and when he couldn't see anything wrong with it he went off home again; but on the way he picked up the bits of broken bannock which the lad had let fall. His old dame stood in the meadow and looked at him as he did this for a while, and wondered and wondered what it could be her husband was gathering up.

'Oh, I know', said the lad, 'master's picking up stones, I'll be bound; for he has marked how often this Tom Totherhouse runs over here; and the old fellow won't stand it any longer; and now he has sworn to stone mother to death.'

Off went the Goody as fast as her legs could carry her.

'What in the world is it that mother is running after now?' asked the man, when he reached the spot where she had stood.

'Oh', said the lad, 'maybe the house at home is on fire!'

So there ran the husband behind and the Goody before; and as she ran she screeched out:

'Ah! ah! don't stone me to death; don't stone me to death! and I'll give you my word never to let Tom Totherhouse come near me again.'

'Now the ten dollars are mine', bawled out the lad; and so they were.