

SOLOMON JOHN GOES FOR APPLES AND CIDER

by Lucretia P. Hale
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Solomon John agreed to ride to Farmer Jones's for a basket of apples, and he decided to go on horseback. The horse was brought round to the door. Now he had not ridden for a great while; and, though the little boys were there to help him, he had great trouble in getting on the horse.

He tried a great many times, but always found himself facing the wrong way, looking at the horse's tail. They turned the horse's head, first up the street, then down the street; it made no difference; he always made some mistake, and found himself sitting the wrong way.

"Well," said he, at last, "I don't know as I care. If the horse has his head in the right direction, that is the main thing. Sometimes I ride this way in the cars, because I like it better. I can turn my head easily enough to see where we are going." So off he went, and the little boys said he looked like a circus-rider, and they were much pleased.

He rode along out of the village, under the elms, very quietly. Pretty soon he came to a bridge, where the road went across a little stream. There was a road at the side, leading down into the stream, because sometimes wagoners watered their horses there. Solomon John's horse turned off to, to drink of the water. "Very well," said Solomon John, "I don't blame him for wanting to wet his feet, and to take a drink, this hot day.

When they reached the middle of the stream, the horse bent over his head.

"How far his neck comes into his back!" exclaimed Solomon John; and at that very moment he found he had slid down over the horse's head, and was sitting on a stone, looking into the horse's face. There were two frogs, one on each side of him, sitting just as he was, which pleased Solomon John, so he began to laugh instead of to cry.

But the two frogs jumped into the water.

"It is time for me to go on," said Solomon John. So he gave a jump, as he had seen the frogs do; and this time he came all right on the horse's back, facing the way he was going.

"It is a little pleasanter," said he.

The horse wanted to nibble a little of the grass by the side of the way; but Solomon John remembered what a long neck he had, and would not let him stop.

At last he reached Farmer Jones's, who gave him his basket of apples.

Next he was to go on to a cider-mill, up a little lane by Farmer Jones's house, to get a jug of cider. But as soon as the horse was turned into the lane, he began to walk very slowly, —so slowly that Solomon John thought he would not get there before night. He

whistled, and shouted, and thrust his knees into the horse, but still he would not go.

“Perhaps the apples are too heavy for him,” said he. So he began by throwing one of the apples out of the basket. It hit the fence by the side of the road, and that started up the horse, and he went on merrily.

“That was the trouble,” said Solomon John; “that apple was too heavy for him.”

But very soon the horse began to go slower and slower.

So Solomon John thought he would try another apple. This hit a large rock, and bounded back under the horse’s feet, and sent him off at a great pace. But very soon he fell again into a slow walk.

Solomon John had to try another apple. This time it fell into a pool of water, and made a great splash, and set the horse out again for a little while; but he soon returned to a slow walk, —so slow that Solomon John thought it would be tomorrow morning before he got to the cider-mill.

“It is rather a waste of apples,” thought he; “but I can pick them up as I come back, because the horse will be going home at a quick pace.”

So he flung out another apple; that fell among a party of ducks, and they began to make such a quacking and a waddling, that it frightened the horse into a quick trot.

So the only way Solomon John could make his horse go was by flinging his apples, now on one side, now on the other. One time he frightened a cow that ran along by the side of the road, while the horse raced with her. Another time he started up a brood of turkeys that gobbled and strutted enough to startle twenty horses. In another place, he came near hitting a boy, who gave such a scream that it sent the horse off at a furious rate.

And Solomon John got quite excited himself, and he did not stop till he had thrown away all his apples, and had reached the corner of the cider-mill.

“Very well,” said he, “if the horse is so lazy, he won’t mind my stopping to pick up the apples on the way home. And I am not sure but I shall prefer walking a little to riding the beast.”

The man came out to meet him from the cider-mill, and reached him the jug. He was just going to take it, when he turned his horse’s head round, and, delighted at the idea of going home, the horse set off at a full run, without waiting for the jug. He called out “Whoa! Whoa!” but the horse would not stop.

He went galloping on past the boy, who stopped, and flung an apple at him; past the turkeys, that came and gobbled at him; by the cow, that turned and ran back in a race with them until her breath gave out; by the ducks, that came and quacked at him; by an old donkey, that brayed over the wall at him; by some hens, that ran into the road under the horse’s feet, and clucked at him; by a great rooster, that stood up on a fence, and crowed at him; by Farmer Jones, who looked out to see what had become of him; down the village street, and he never stopped till he had reached the door of the house.

Out came Mr. And Mrs. Peterkin, Agamemnon, Elizabeth Eliza, and the little boys. Solomon John got off his horse all out of breath.

“Where is the jug of cider?” asked Mrs. Peterkin.

“It is at the cider-mill,” said Solomon John.

“At the mill!” exclaimed Mr. Peterkin.

“Yes,” said Solomon John; “the little boys had better walk out for it; they will quite enjoy it; and they had better take a basket; for on the way they will find plenty of apples, scattered all along either side of the lane, and hens, and ducks, and turkeys, and a donkey.”

The little boys looked at each other, and went: but they stopped first, and put on their india-rubber boots.

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