The Chinese Farmer

In a village in China, which was neither very big nor particularly small, there lived a farmer – not poor but not rich, not very old but no longer that young. The farmer had a horse. And as he was the only farmer in the village who had a horse, the people who lived in the village said: "Such a beautiful horse. He's so lucky!"
The farmer always had the same response: "Who knows?"

One day, a very normal day, nobody knew why, but the farmer's horse broke out of its paddock and ran off. The farmer saw it galloping away, but he was unable to catch it. That evening, the people of the village stood at the fence of the empty paddock. Some of them grinned, gloating a little and said, "Oh, the poor farmer, now his only horse has run away. He doesn't have a horse anymore, the poor man."
The farmer heard this and responded, "Who knows?"

A few days later, the beautiful horse could be seen again standing in the paddock owned by the farmer. It was running back and forward frolicking with a wild mare that had followed it from the mountains. The neighbours were very envious, and they said, "The farmer's so lucky!"
All the farmer said was, "Who knows?"

One beautiful summer day, the farmer's only son climbed onto the horse's back with the intention of riding. Soon he was no longer alone, as half of the village had turned up and were looking at him riding proudly on the beautiful horse. "Oh, he's got it good!" many of them said. But the horse was suddenly scared by something, causing it to rear up. The farmer's only son fell off and broke his leg in several places all the way up to his hip. The neighbours screamed out, "Oh, the poor farmer. His only son! Will he ever be able to walk properly again? Such bad luck!"
The farmer just replied, "Who knows?"

A little while later, the entire village was awoken early one morning by the sound of wild clattering in the streets. The emperor's soldiers were riding into the village to get all the young men out of bed to take them to war. The farmer's son could not go with them. Many of the villagers sat in their homes and said, "He's so lucky!"
But the farmer murmured, "Who knows?"

And the moral of the story is...
"Who knows?"

(Chinese legend, cf. Kaléko, Mascha (1983): *Heute ist morgen schon gestern. Gedichte.* Munich: dtv. pp. 66/67)

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