

Great Claus and Little Claus

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Easy

24 min read

In a village there once lived two men of the same name. Both of them were called Claus. But because one of them owned four horses while the other had but one, people called the one who had the four horses Big, or Great, Claus and the one who owned but a single horse Little Claus. Now I shall tell you what happened to each of them, for this is a true story.

All the days of the week Little Claus was obliged to plow for Great Claus and to lend him his one horse; then once a week, on Sunday, Great Claus helped Little Claus with his four horses, but always on a holiday.

“Hurrah!” How Little Claus would crack his whip over the five, for they were as good as his own on that one day.

The sun shone brightly, and the church bells rang merrily as the people passed by. The people were dressed in their best, with their prayer books under their arms, for they were going to church to hear the clergyman preach. They looked at Little Claus plowing with five horses, and he was so proud and merry that he cracked his whip and cried, “Gee-up, my fine horses.”

“You mustn’t say that,” said Great Claus, “for only one of them is yours.”

But Little Claus soon forgot what it was that he ought not to say, and when any one went by he would call out, "Gee-up, my fine horses."

"I must really beg you not to say that again," said Great Claus as he passed; "for if you do, I shall hit your horse on the head so that he will drop down dead on the spot, and then it will be all over with him."

"I will certainly not say it again, I promise you," said Little Claus. But as soon as any one came by, nodding good day to him, he was so pleased, and felt so grand at having five horses plowing his field, that again he cried out, "Gee-up, all my horses."

"I'll gee-up your horses for you," said Great Claus, and he caught up the tethering mallet and struck Little Claus's one horse on the head, so that it fell down dead.

"Oh, now I haven't any horse at all!" cried Little Claus, and he began to weep. But after a while he flayed the horse and hung up the skin to dry in the wind.

Then he put the dried skin into a bag, and hanging it over his shoulder, went off to the next town to sell it. He had a very long way to go and was obliged to pass through a great, gloomy wood. A dreadful storm came up. He lost his way, and before he found it again, evening was drawing on. It was too late to get to the town, and too late to get home before nightfall.

Near the road stood a large farmhouse. The shutters outside the windows were closed, but lights shone through the crevices and at the top. "They might let me stay here for the night," thought Little Claus. So he went up to the door and knocked. The door was opened by the farmer's wife, but when he explained what it was that he wanted, she told him to go away; her husband, she said, was not at home, and she could not let any strangers in.

"Then I shall have to lie out here," said Little Claus to himself, as the farmer's wife shut the door in his face.

Close to the farmhouse stood a tall haystack, and between it and the house was a small shed with a thatched roof. "I can lie up there," said Little Claus, when he saw the roof. "It will make a capital bed, but I hope the stork won't fly down and bite my legs." A stork was just then standing near his nest on the house roof.

So Little Claus climbed onto the roof of the shed and proceeded to make himself comfortable. As he turned round to settle himself, he discovered that the wooden shutters did not reach to the tops of the windows. He could look over them straight into the room, in which a large table was laid with wine, roast meat, and a fine, great fish. The farmer's wife and the sexton were sitting at the table all by themselves, and she was pouring out wine for him, while his fork was in the fish, which he seemed to like the best.

"If I could only get some too," thought Little Claus, and as he stretched his neck toward the window he spied a large, beautiful cake. Goodness! what a glorious feast they had before them.

At that moment some one came riding down the road towards the farm. It was the farmer himself, returning. He was a good man enough, but he had one very singular prejudice—he could not bear the sight of a sexton, and if he came on one he fell into a terrible rage. This was the reason that the sexton had gone to visit the farmer's wife during his absence from home and that the good wife had put before him the best she had.

When they heard the farmer they were frightened, and the woman begged the sexton to creep into a large empty chest which stood in a corner. He did so with all haste, for he well knew how the farmer felt toward a sexton. The woman hid the wine and all the good things in the oven, for if her husband were to see them, he would certainly ask why they had been provided.

"O dear!" sighed Little Claus, on the shed roof, as he saw the good things disappear.

"Is any one up there?" asked the farmer, looking up where Little Claus was. "What are you doing up there? You had better come with me into the house."

Then Little Claus told him how he had lost his way, and asked if he might have shelter for the night.

"Certainly," replied the farmer; "but the first thing is to have something to eat."

The wife received them both in a friendly way, and laid the table, bringing to it a large bowl of porridge. The farmer was hungry and ate with a good appetite. But Little Claus could not help thinking of the capital roast meat, fish, and cake, which he knew were hidden in the oven.

He had put his sack with the hide in it under the table by his feet, for, we must remember, he was on his way to

the town to sell it. He did not relish the porridge, so he trod on the sack and made the dried skin squeak quite loudly.

“Hush!” said Little Claus to his bag, at the same time treading upon it again, to make it squeak much louder than before.

“Hollo! what’s that you’ve got in your bag?” asked the farmer.

“Oh, it’s a magician,” said Little Claus, “and he says we needn’t eat the porridge, for he has charmed the oven full of roast meat, fish, and cake.”

“What?” cried the farmer, and he opened the oven with all speed and saw all the nice things the woman had hidden, but which he believed the magician had conjured up for their special benefit.

The farmer’s wife did not say a word, but set the food before them; and they both made a hearty meal of the fish, the meat, and the cake. Little Claus now trod again upon his sack and made the skin squeak.

“What does he say now?” inquired the farmer.

“He says,” promptly answered Little Claus, “that he has conjured up three bottles of wine, which are standing in the corner near the stove.” So the woman was obliged to bring the wine which she had hidden, and the farmer and Little Claus became right merry. Would not the farmer like to have such a conjurer as Little Claus carried about in his sack?

“Can he conjure up the Evil One?” inquired the farmer. “I shouldn’t mind seeing him now, when I’m in such a merry mood.”

“Yes,” said Little Claus, “he will do anything that I please”; and he trod on the bag till it squeaked. “You hear him answer, ‘Yes, only the Evil One is so ugly that you had better not see him.’”

“Oh, I’m not afraid. What will he look like?”

“Well, he will show himself to you in the image of a sexton.”

“Nay, that’s bad indeed. You must know that I can’t abide a sexton. However, it doesn’t matter, for I know he’s

a demon, and I shan't mind so much. Now my courage is up! Only he mustn't come too close."

"I'll ask him about it," said Little Claus, putting his ear down as he trod close to the bag.

"What does he say?"

"He says you can go along and open the chest in the corner, and there you'll see him cowering in the dark. But hold the lid tight, so that he doesn't get out."

"Will you help me to hold the lid," asked the farmer, going along to the chest in which his wife had hidden the sexton, who was shivering with fright.

The farmer opened the lid a wee little way and peeped in. "Ha!" he cried, springing backward. "I saw him, and he looks exactly like our sexton. It was a shocking sight!"

They must needs drink after this, and there they sat till far into the night.

"You must sell me your conjurer," said the farmer. "Ask anything you like for him. Nay, I'll give you a bushel of money for him."

"No, I can't do that," said Little Claus. "You must remember how much benefit I can get from such a conjurer."

"Oh, but I should so like to have him!" said the farmer, and he went on begging for him.

"Well," said Little Claus at last, "since you have been so kind as to give me a night's shelter, I won't say nay. You must give me a bushel of money, only I must have it full to the brim."

"You shall have it," said the farmer; "but you must take that chest away with you. I won't have it in the house an hour longer. You could never know that he might not still be inside."

So Little Claus gave his sack with the dried hide of the horse in it and received a full bushel of money in return, and the measure was full to the brim. The farmer also gave him a large wheelbarrow, with which to take away the chest and the bushel of money.

"Good-by," said Little Claus, and off he went with his money and the chest with the sexton in it.

On the other side of the forest was a wide, deep river, whose current was so strong that it was almost impossible to swim against it. A large, new bridge had just been built over it, and when they came to the middle of the bridge Little Claus said in a voice loud enough to be heard by the sexton: "What shall I do with this stupid old chest? It might be full of paving stones, it is so heavy. I am tired of wheeling it. I'll just throw it into the river. If it floats down to my home, well and good; if not, I don't care. It will be no great matter." And he took hold of the chest and lifted it a little, as if he were going to throw it into the river.

"No, no! let be!" shouted the sexton. "Let me get out."

"Ho!" said Little Claus, pretending to be frightened. "Why, he is still inside. Then I must heave it into the river to drown him."

"Oh, no, no, no!" shouted the sexton; "I'll give you a whole bushelful of money if you'll let me out."

"Oh, that's another matter," said Little Claus, opening the chest. He pushed the empty chest into the river and then went home with the sexton to get his bushelful of money. He had already had one from the farmer, you know, so now his wheelbarrow was quite full of money.

"I got a pretty fair price for that horse, I must admit," said he to himself, when he got home and turned the money out of the wheelbarrow into a heap in the middle of the floor. "What a rage Great Claus will be in when he discovers how rich I am become through my one horse. But I won't tell him just how it happened." So he sent a boy to Great Claus to borrow a bushel measure.

"What can he want with it?" thought Great Claus, and he rubbed some tallow on the bottom so that some part of whatever was measured might stick to it. And so it did, for when the measure came back, three new silver threepenny bits were sticking to it.

"What's this!" said Great Claus, and he ran off at once to Little Claus. "Where on earth did you get all this money?" he asked.

"Oh, that's for my horse's skin. I sold it yesterday morning."

"That was well paid for, indeed," said Great Claus. He ran home, took an ax, and hit all his four horses on the

head; then he flayed them and carried their skins off to the town.

“Hides! hides! who’ll buy my hides?” he cried through the streets.

All the shoemakers and tanners in the town came running up and asked him how much he wanted for his hides.

“A bushel of money for each,” said Great Claus.

“Are you mad?” they all said. “Do you think we have money by the bushel?”

“Skins! skins! who’ll buy them?” he shouted again, and the shoemakers took up their straps, and the tanners their leather aprons, and began to beat Great Claus.

“Hides! hides!” they called after him. “Yes, we’ll hide you and tan you. Out of the town with him,” they shouted. And Great Claus made the best haste he could to get out of the town, for he had never yet been thrashed as he was being thrashed now.

“Little Claus shall pay for this,” he said, when he got home. “I’ll kill him for it.”

Little Claus’s old grandmother had just died in his house. She had often been harsh and unkind to him, but now that she was dead he felt quite grieved. He took the dead woman and laid her in his warm bed to see if she would not come to life again. He himself intended to sit in a corner all night. He had slept that way before.

As he sat there in the night, the door opened and in came Great Claus with his ax. He knew where Little Claus’s bed stood, and he went straight to it and hit the dead grandmother a blow on the forehead, thinking it was Little Claus.

“Just see if you’ll make a fool of me again,” said he, and then he went home.

“What a bad, wicked man he is!” said Little Claus. “He was going to kill me. What a good thing that poor grandmother was dead already! He would have taken her life.”

He now dressed his grandmother in her best Sunday clothes, borrowed a horse of his neighbor, harnessed it to a cart, and set his grandmother on the back seat, so that she could not fall when the cart moved. Then he started off through the woods. When the sun rose, he was just outside a big inn, and he drew up his horse and

went in to get something to eat.

The landlord was a very rich man and a very good man, but he was hot-tempered, as if he were made of pepper and snuff. “Good morning!” said he to Little Claus; “you have your best clothes on very early this morning.”

“Yes,” said Little Claus, “I’m going to town with my old grandmother. She’s sitting out there in the cart; I can’t get her to come in. Won’t you take her out a glass of beer? You’ll have to shout at her, she’s very hard of hearing.”

“Yes, that I’ll do,” said the host, and he poured a glass and went out with it to the dead grandmother, who had been placed upright in the cart.

“Here is a glass of beer your son has sent,” said the landlord but she sat quite still and said not a word.

“Don’t you hear?” cried he as loud as he could. “Here is a glass of beer from your son.”

But the dead woman replied not a word, and at last he became quite angry and threw the beer in her face—and at that moment she fell backwards out of the cart, for she was only set upright and not bound fast.

“Now!” shouted Little Claus, as he rushed out of the inn and seized the landlord by the neck, “you have killed my grandmother! Just look at the big hole in her forehead!”

“Oh! what a misfortune!” cried the man, “and all because of my quick temper. Good Little Claus, I will pay you a bushel of money, and I will have your poor grandmother buried as if she were my own, if only you will say nothing about it. Otherwise I shall have my head cut off—and that is so dreadful.”

So Little Claus again received a whole bushel of money, and the landlord buried the old grandmother as if she had been his own.

When Little Claus got home again with all his money, he immediately sent his boy to Great Claus to ask to borrow his bushel measure.

“What!” said Great Claus, “is he not dead? I must go and see about this myself.” So he took the measure over to Little Claus himself.

"I say, where did you get all that money?" asked he, his eyes big and round with amazement at what he saw.

"It was grandmother you killed instead of me," said Little Claus. "I have sold her and got a bushel of money for her."

"That's being well paid, indeed," said Great Claus, and he hurried home, took an ax and killed his own old grandmother.

He then put her in a carriage and drove off to the town where the apothecary lived, and asked him if he would buy a dead person.

"Who is it and where did you get him?" asked the apothecary.

"It is my grandmother, and I have killed her so as to sell her for a bushel of money."

"Heaven preserve us!" cried the apothecary. "You talk like a madman. Pray don't say such things, you may lose your head." And he told him earnestly what a horribly wicked thing he had done, and that he deserved punishment. Great Claus was so frightened that he rushed out of the shop, jumped into his cart, whipped up his horse, and galloped home through the wood. The apothecary and all the people who saw him thought he was mad, and so they let him drive away.

"You shall be paid for this!" said Great Claus, when he got out on the highroad. "You shall be paid for this, Little Claus!"

Directly after he got home, Great Claus took the biggest sack he could find and went over to Little Claus.

"You have deceived me again," he said. "First I killed my horses, and then my old grandmother. That is all your fault; but you shall never have the chance to trick me again." And he seized Little Claus around the body and thrust him into the sack; then he threw the sack over his back, calling out to Little Claus, "Now I'm going to the river to drown you."

It was a long way that he had to travel before he came to the river, and Little Claus was not light to carry. The road came close to the church, and the people within were singing beautifully. Great Claus put down his sack, with Little Claus in it, at the church door. He thought it would be a very good thing to go in and hear a psalm

before he went further, for Little Claus could not get out. So he went in.

“O dear! O dear!” moaned Little Claus in the sack, and he turned and twisted, but found it impossible to loosen the cord. Then there came by an old drover with snow-white hair and a great staff in his hand. He was driving a whole herd of cows and oxen before him, and they jostled against the sack in which Little Claus was confined, so that it was upset.

“O dear,” again sighed Little Claus, “I’m so young to be going directly to the kingdom of heaven!”

“And I, poor fellow,” said the drover, “am so old already, and cannot get there yet.”

“Open the sack,” cried Little Claus, “and creep into it in my place, and you’ll be there directly.”

“With all my heart,” said the drover, and he untied the sack for Little Claus, who crept out at once. “You must look out for the cattle now,” said the old man, as he crept in. Then Little Claus tied it up and went his way, driving the cows and the oxen.

In a little while Great Claus came out of the church. He took the sack upon his shoulders and thought as he did so that it had certainly grown lighter since he had put it down, for the old cattle-drover was not more than half as heavy as Little Claus.

“How light he is to carry now! That must be because I have heard a psalm in the church.”

He went on to the river, which was both deep and broad, threw the sack containing the old drover into the water, and called after him, thinking it was Little Claus, “Now lie there! You won’t trick me again!”

He turned to go home, but when he came to the place where there was a crossroad he met Little Claus driving his cattle.

“What’s this?” cried he. “Haven’t I drowned you?”

“Yes,” said Little Claus, “you threw me into the river, half an hour ago.”

“But where did you get all those fine cattle?” asked Great Claus.

“These beasts are sea cattle,” said Little Claus, “and I thank you heartily for drowning me, for now I’m at the top

of the tree. I'm a very rich man, I can tell you. But I was frightened when you threw me into the water huddled up in the sack. I sank to the bottom immediately, but I did not hurt myself, for the grass is beautifully soft down there. I fell upon it, and the sack was opened, and the most beautiful maiden in snow-white garments and a green wreath upon her hair took me by the hand, and said to me, 'Have you come, Little Claus? Here are cattle for you, and a mile further up the road there is another herd!'

"Then I saw that she meant the river and that it was the highway for the sea folk. Down at the bottom of it they walk directly from the sea, straight into the land where the river ends. Lovely flowers and beautiful fresh grass were there. The fishes which swam there glided about me like birds in the air. How nice the people were, and what fine herds of cattle there were, pasturing on the mounds and about the ditches!"

"But why did you come up so quickly then?" asked Great Claus. "I shouldn't have done that if it was so fine down there."

"Why, that was just my cunning. You know, I told you that the mermaid said there was a whole herd of cattle for me a mile further up the stream. Well, you see, I know how the river bends this way and that, and how long a distance it would have been to go that way. If you can come up on the land and take the short cuts, driving across fields and down to the river again, you save almost half a mile and get the cattle much sooner."

"Oh, you are a fortunate man!" cried Great Claus. "Do you think I could get some sea cattle if I were to go down to the bottom of the river?"

"I'm sure you would," said Little Claus. "But I cannot carry you. If you will walk to the river and creep into a sack yourself, I will help you into the water with a great deal of pleasure."

"Thanks!" said Great Claus. "But if I do not find sea cattle there, I shall beat you soundly, you may be sure."

"Oh! do not be so hard on me."

And so they went together to the river. When the cows and oxen saw the water, they ran to it as fast as they could. "See how they hurry!" cried Little Claus. "They want to get back to the bottom again."

“Yes, but help me first or I’ll thrash you,” said Great Claus. He then crept into a big sack, which had been lying across the back of one of the cows. “Put a big stone in or I’m afraid I shan’t sink.”

“Oh, that’ll be all right,” said Little Claus, but he put a big stone into the sack and gave it a push. Plump! and there lay Great Claus in the river. He sank at once to the bottom.

“I’m afraid he won’t find the cattle,” said Little Claus. Then he drove homeward with his herd.

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