



# *Jolly Calle*

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Swedish

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*Easy*

*22 min read*

Once upon a time there was a boy called Jolly Calle who was always as happy as happy could be.

He was a poor boy and quite alone in the world, for he had lost both his father and mother. If anyone pitied him on account of this misfortune he would answer:

“Well, at any rate I had a father and mother once, and I remember them both quite well. I remember being whipped by my father, and my mother wiping away my tears and kissing me. I am quite sure they are both in heaven now, for all the loving care they gave me here on earth, and I ought not to wish my parents back again out of heaven, ought I? Just think of those who can’t remember ever having set eyes on their parents! You may be sorry for them if you like!” And then Calle would laugh.

When it rained Calle was always in the best of spirits.

“There is nothing so merry as the rain,” he would say. “Look at all the funny little drops sparkling and hopping about, and one gets so nice and wet all over too!”

In stormy weather he would laugh, and let the wind catch him in the back and send him flying along the road.

"I say, what fun ! ' he would say. "Now I am travelling by train for nothing!" But when the sun shone Jolly Calle would smile quietly.

"Ah, the Lord be praised for his glorious sunshine! " he would say. " Is it not too lovely for anything to feel just as if a bit of blue sky and sunshine had crept into your heart ? "

Jolly Calle had never been taught any trade, for his parents had never been able to afford it; neither could he play on any instrument, and as for learning, he had none at all. He did not want to starve, still less to beg, so he took an old shoe- brush and polished up his shoes, for he was determined to go out into the world to try his fortune; and when he saw how his shoes shone it occurred to him that there were indeed many pairs of shoes in the world which might require brushing, so he stuffed his brush into his pocket and went forth along the high road which led out into the wide world.

When he had gone a little way he came to a field where the waving corn was already standing high.

It was so lovely to look upon that Calle turned aside into a narrow path, which ran like a ribbon through the corn-field, and as he went along he drew an ear of wheat between his fingers and sang :

"Just look upon my corn-fields, see ! for me there'll be no lack ;  
In winter time such piles of loaves will make the oven  
crack."

"What are you shouting, you noisy fellow?" called out a gruff voice behind him. It was the farmer who owned the field. "Your corn-field, indeed," he said angrily. "It is I who have ploughed and sown, and it is I who will reap the corn, and grind the flour, and eat the bread, not a crumb of which shall you taste ! "

"I am not talking of bread, I am talking of the corn-field," said Jolly Calle, taking off his cap to the harsh old man ; "and I still think, for the present at any rate, the corn-field belongs to me. You have had the trouble of ploughing and sowing it, and I am much obliged to you, for now I can dance right through it and see waves chase each other over the rippling corn, and that doesn't cost a farthing." And so saying he ran off.

After walking all day he came towards evening to a big town, upon entering which he stationed himself at a street corner with his shoe-brush and waited to see if any of the passers-by would ask him to brush the dust off their shoes, but they all seemed to have much too much to think of, and went hastily by without so much as turning their heads.

“Perhaps in this case it would be just as well to give them a gentle reminder,” thought he; and as a soldier happened to pass just at that very moment, Jolly Calle spat upon his brush and said in a tone as if the colonel himself were commanding :

“Shoes brushed?”

The soldier halted on the spot and let Calle polish his top-boots. Then a little damsel came tripping along, so neat and trim.

“What a nice little pair of feet!” said Calle softly behind her back. ” The only pity is they should go about in such dirty shoes.” Thereupon the little damsel turned round, stretched out her foot, and let Calle black her shoes.

Next a scholar came walking by who seemed neither to hear nor see.

“So the gentleman would like his shoes brushed said Calle, and fell upon his knees right in front of the learned man’s legs, and in the same absent-minded way as he had been walking before the scholar now as absent-mindedly stood still and let Calle brush his boots.

Thus Calle had a word for every one who passed by, and as he received a trifle from all those whose boots he brushed he soon had his pocket full of pence.

Then he brushed his own shoes once more till they shone like a black-a-moor’s skin; as they were the only elegance he possessed he thought he might afford himself that little piece of vanity. Then he set his red cap jauntily on one side and went on to see something of the town which pleased him mightily ; there were so many magnificent buildings and fine mansions, but there was one mansion more beautiful than all the rest.

It stood with its pillars and statues and stately staircases in the middle of a rose garden and was surrounded by a railing with gilded lance-heads running all around the top.

“My eye!” said Jolly Calle, as he stood grasping the railings and looking in upon the stately mansion. “This is something like! This house of mine is certainly far and away the finest in the whole town.”

“What is this nonsense you are talking?” asked a haughty footman, who was standing stiff as a marionette at the entrance. “Your house, indeed! This mansion belongs to the richest man in the town, Master Nabob. It cost a hundred thousand pounds just as it stands.”

“That was a mighty deal of money,” said Calle, scratching his ear. “If Master Nabob has had such a lot of expense on my account I am really greatly obliged to him. Give him my compliments and tell him I am extremely pleased.”

“You are certainly a little queer in the head,” said the lackey. “Master Nabob built this mansion for his honour’s own gracious satisfaction and pleasure. He has, I assure you, never even heard of you, or done anything whatever just to please you.”

“That maybe,” answered Calle, “but all the same he has had all the trouble and all the expense, whereas I have nothing but the pleasure of seeing how fine and elegant it all is. I suppose we may be allowed to look at the house at any rate.”

But the lackey did not reply, he turned on his heel and walked away with a dignified air. After standing awhile, gazing in at the palace and sniffing up the scent of the roses, Jolly Calle went on further till he came at last to a big market-place where vendors of fruit and vegetables were selling their wares.

Here all was life and bustle. A big fountain was playing in the middle of the square, and all around it the market people had set up their stalls in long rows and spread their awnings, for the sun was burning hot.

Here there were baskets full of the finest pears and apples and whole barrows full of yellow plums and ripe peaches. Big purple grapes lay upon green leaves between golden melons and red cherries, and alongside the fruit were masses of sweet-scented flowers, roses and clove pinks, mignonette and stocks.

Jolly Calle expanded his nostrils and opened his mouth wide to take in as much as ever he could of all these delicious scents, and then buying a handful of plums he leaned against a stall to eat them. Whilst he stood there he watched the customers coming and going between the stalls.

These were mostly dames and damsels of high degree followed by their serving-women carrying the baskets. They would stand now at this stall now at that, picking and choosing and filling their baskets with all the things they liked best.

Beside Calle stood a number of other lads, who like him had also bought fruit and were busy eating, taking stock meanwhile of all the pretty maids who tripped along to make their bargains.

Suddenly Calle heard them whisper: "Here she comes, here she comes." And out from amongst the stalls stepped the most beautiful damsel.

She was dressed in a red silk petticoat and a green velvet bodice embroidered with silver. On her head she wore a black veil, and in her hand she carried a large fan covered with silver spangles, with which she kept fanning herself. But if her clothes were beautiful, she herself was more beautiful still, and she stepped along like a queen, smiling and nodding in every direction.

"What do you say to her?" asked the lad standing beside Calle, giving him a poke in the ribs. "Have you ever seen anyone so beautiful before? We call her the crown jewel, for she has not her match anywhere. But such poor fellows as you or I will never have so much as the honour of tying her shoe laces."

"We shall see," thought Calle, and just as the lovely lady was passing close beside him he fell on his knees and called out:

"My lady, my lady! there is dust on your shoes!" before she could answer he had whipped out his brush and had begun to polish one of her shoes. She lifted the hem of her skirt a little and put forward first one foot and then the other, and when she saw how bright and shining her shoes were she smiled graciously and patted Calle on the shoulder.

"You are a treasure of a lad," she said. "See how nice and bright you have made my shoes!"

And then she passed on.

“Did you see ?” said Calle, turning to the boy at his side; I not only tied her shoe laces, but I even polished her shoes, and she patted me on the shoulder into the bargain and called me a treasure of a lad.”

“Oh, well!” said the other, “it is true you have knelt in the dirt at her feet, but you need not think you will sit beside her as her bridegroom; that you will never do.”

“Nor do I want to either,” said Calle. “Do you think that she who wears silver brocade and has the eyes of the whole town upon her would be an easy customer to deal with ? No, indeed! such a crown jewel I have no wish to possess. But I grant you, beautiful she is to look at and no mistake! Her eyelashes threw quite a shadow across my hands, and never have I seen such beautiful eyebrows or such white teeth; why, they looked sound enough to bite off the head of a nail!” And so saying Calle walked off.

When he had been a day or two in the town he had a mind to go on further into the world, so he started off along the highway. After a time he came to an inn. Here he went in and asked for a bowl of curds and whey, for he was thirsty after his long tramp.

He was given a seat near the door, and whilst he sat and waited for the curds he looked about him.

Outside on the high road stood six wagons drawn by oxen, and over the waggons were spread leather coverings, beneath which were rows and rows of sacks.

“Whom do all those waggons belong to?” Jolly Calle asked the boy who set down the curds before him.

“They belong to Master Nabob,” answered the boy; and “Master Nabob himself is sitting over there in the best seat, eating fruit soup out of a silver bowl.” Calle looked up towards the upper end of the room, and there sure enough sat Master Nabob himself.

He wore white breeches trimmed with gold braid and a red frock-coat covered with ever so many orders and medals which he had received for well, nobody knew exactly why he had received them ! He was eating prunes

as large as mice and drinking sweet wine, but he looked as if he were swallowing the most bitter physic. His complexion was pale green, his cheeks sunken, and you would have thought by the look in his eyes that he had just been told something most disagreeable.

Meanwhile Jolly Calle sat shovelling the curds into his mouth with a wooden spoon, and with every mouthful he swallowed he patted his stomach and said :

” Well, that was wonderful, that was wonderful!”

Then Master Nabob looked up from his fruit soup and asked: “What is wonderful? ‘

“Only this, your honour, that never in all my life has anything tasted so sour or so good as these curds and whey here.”

“Would you not prefer my fruit soup with prunes ? ‘ asked Nabob.

“Dear me, no!’ answered Calle; “for if you eat something very sour you can always be ready for something sweet afterwards, but if you eat something very sweet, then you might feel you have had too much of a good thing.”

“You are no fool,” said Nabob.

When they had finished eating and had risen from the table they each gave something to the boy who had waited on them. Nabob gave him a very small coin and Jolly Calle one somewhat bigger.

“H’m, you are a rich fellow, you are,” said Nabob, glaring at Calle.

“No, indeed, but after those sour curds I couldn’t stand the sight of such a sour look as the one you’ve just had from the serving-boy,” answered Calle.



“Nothing pleased him.” Illustration by Charles Folkard, published in *Jolly Calle and Other Swedish Fairy Tales* by Helena Nyblom (1912), J.M. Dent and Sons

After dinner they both sat in the garden of the inn. Master Nabob ordered out for himself any number of bottles with good drinks, and black coffee and tobacco, and then he stretched his legs in their white gold-braided breeches upon a chair in front of him and prepared to enjoy life. But one drink was too strong, another was too weak, and the coffee too had a poor flavour, which made Master Nabob turn green in the face with annoyance. Neither was the tobacco to his liking; in short, nothing pleased him, and he kept calling to the serving-men and ordering them about till they flew like frightened hens backwards and forwards between the box hedges.

Jolly Calle had seated himself in an arbour, where the white jasmine was in full flower, and a lime-tree afforded him welcome shade. He ordered a mug of ale, lighted his short pipe, and sat with his elbows on the table looking up through the leaves of the trees at the blue summer sky, and he felt so merry and jolly that he began to laugh aloud. When Master Nabob heard him laughing from where he sat surrounded by all his bottles, he sent a lad to Calle to ask him if he was sitting there laughing at him, for if so, he was not going to put up with that.

“My compliments to Master Nabob!” answered Calle, “and tell him I don’t think he is at all amusing.”

After a while Calle began to laugh again, for the sunshine was so bright and the sky so blue he simply could not help himself.

“What in the name of fortune is the fellow laughing at ?” yelled Nabob. “Go and ask him why he is laughing; it plagues me.”

When the serving-lad came again with Master Nabob’s message, Calle replied:

“My compliments to Master Nabob, and tell him I am not laughing at anything.” With this answer the rich man had to be content; but in a short space Calle completely forgot his sour neighbour and began again to chuckle and chuckle till he was simply bubbling over with laughter.

“I can’t stand this,” shouted Nabob, “I won’t stand this ! Go and tell that fellow he annoys me. Tell him he shall have a thaler from me if he will only stop laughing.”

Now when the lad brought this message Jolly Calle became really angry. He flung the thaler down till it rang upon the table.

“If I cannot sit here in peace I shall not stay. I shall take myself off, and that without more ado. The high road at any rate is free to every one.” And so saying he strode out of the garden.

It was a warm day, and after he had walked on some distance he heard a great rumbling of wheels on the high road behind him. It was Master Nabob coming along in his gilded coach, and followed by his six ox- wagons laden with all his money.

When Nabob caught sight of Calle he beckoned to him, and calling to his coachman to stop he asked Calle if he would care to drive with him.

No, indeed ! Calle did not care at all. On such a beautiful day he much preferred to walk along the road-side and sniff the scent of the new-mown hay in the meadows and listen to the larks singing than sit in a stuffy coach with an old man who smelt of dinner and wine. And this he said right out, whereupon Master Nabob smiled a sour smile. Then all at once a new notion came into Nabob’s head. He began to scold and abuse the coachman for not stopping quickly enough, although the carriage was going already at a funeral pace. Then he opened the door of the coach very carefully, and after he had been helped out by his footman he asked Calle in a really polite tone if he would allow him to accompany him a short way along the road and let him have the honour of leaning on his arm.

“With all my heart,” answered Calle, who could not for the life of him understand what this all meant.

Nabob gave his coachman orders to drive on and wait for him at the edge of the wood, and then he walked on along the road, leaning on his gold-topped mahogany walking stick, with his arm through Calle’s.

“My dear friend,” began Nabob, ” I have a great desire to make your further acquaintance.”

“Oh, by all means,” answered Calle, “that is easily done.”

Nabob fixed his green eyes upon him. “A strange thing!” he muttered; “A strange thing! I have never in my life seen anyone like you.”

“That’s very odd,” answered Calle. “I always thought there were thirteen to the dozen of my sort.”

“H’m ! ‘ said Nabob. ” I saw you first when I was sitting behind my green silk curtains, and you were standing at the gate looking in at my mansion. You were not a bit envious, I remember ! ‘

“Why should I be,” answered Calle. “You have all the trouble and the expense of the house, and I have nothing but the pleasure of looking at it, so it is easy to understand which of us is the happier.”

“I had fruit soup with prunes while you ate curds with a wooden spoon,” continued Nabob, “and you would not change places with me.”

“No, truly, seeing you did not relish it,” replied Calle, “I had no need to envy you.”

“And there I sat surrounded by all those bottles of mine,” said Nabob, his voice trembling, “yellow bottles, red bottles, green bottles, strong black coffee and big cigars, and I could not endure to hear you laugh. As you sat there with your mug of ale and your clay pipe, under the lime tree, I felt envious for the first time in my life, so envious that it gave me quite a pain in my chest. You see, Calle I presume I may call you Calle? You see I have everything in the world that a man can desire, and yet I am never happy.

I have a house and gardens, woods and broad acres, servants and horses, and a great pile of gold, yet it feels as empty inside me as in an old sack. When I travel I must always take my gold with me. I drive in a gilded coach with six ox- wagons full of money behind me, but when I hear the rumbling of all those waggons it irritates me so I feel positively ill. I can procure all that man can buy for money, and up to now I thought money could buy everything. But when you who are so poor would not stop laughing for a whole thaler, well, then indeed a strange feeling came over me and I began to think, Is there really something one cannot buy for money?”

“Can you buy sunshine for money?” asked Calle. “Can you buy health for money? Can you buy good temper for money?”

“That’s it, that’s it!” burst out Nabob, showing all his shaky old teeth. “Good temper! that’s what you possess, and it is just that which I must and will have a share of, at all costs.”

“And what will you give me for it?” asked Calle laughing.

“You shall have a hundred thalers a thousand thalers! You shall have one of my ox-waggons full of gold!”

“That is not enough,” said Calle. “You are offering poor pay.”

“Let us say three wagons then,” said Nabob, with a sigh, “three ox-wagons full of money for a little bit of good temper.”

“Poor pay, poor pay!” answered Calle.

“Then take four five!” groaned Nabob; “I must have your good temper, cost what it may.”

They had now reached the edge of the wood, where the gilded coach and the ox-wagons loaded with money stood waiting.

“Calle, my good fellow!” said Nabob, “you shall have all my six ox-wagons, my gilded coach, and those rogues of a coachman and footman into the bargain all, all shall be yours, if only, my dear lad, you will let me have your good temper!”

“No, I cannot,” said Calle, “I really cannot. To turn sick at the sight of God’s good gifts, to feel pain in your inside at the rumbling of your wagons full of treasure no, that I could not stand at any price! But see how dusty your fine patent-leather shoes have got from walking along the high road! Put your foot on a stone and I will brush them for you.”

So Nabob put up first one foot and then the other upon a stone, and Calle brushed his shoes till they shone.

“What have I to pay?” said Nabob, feeling for his purse with a trembling hand.

“Oh, nothing ! nothing at all ! ” answered Calle. “Rich folk cannot afford to pay for such trifles.”

“Just tell me one thing before you go,” begged Nabob. His yellow face had become still yellower.

“Tell me this one thing, my dear Calle. Why are you so happy?”

“Why am I so happy?” Calle repeated with a laugh. “Why, just because I am alive you see!” And so saying he hopped over the stile, waved his red cap, and disappeared, hidden like a strawberry in the wood.

But Nabob remained standing beside his ox- wagons, with his purse still open in his hand.

“He has gone,” he said blankly. “Just imagine, he has actually gone!”

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