

Ole-Luk-Oie, the dream god

Hans Christian Andersen
DanishNordicScandinavian

Intermediate
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There is nobody in the whole world who knows so many stories as Ole-Luk-Oie, or who can relate them so nicely.

In the evening while the children are seated at the tea table or in their little chairs, very softly he comes up the stairs, for he walks in his socks. He opens the doors without the slightest noise and throws a small quantity of very fine dust in the little ones' eyes (just enough to prevent them from keeping them open), and so they do not see him. Then he creeps behind them and blows softly upon their necks till their heads begin to droop.



“Ole-Luk-Oie, the dream god.” Illustration by unknown artist, published in Hans Andersen’s Fairy Tales by Mrs. H. B. Paull (1899), Frederick Warren & Company.

But Ole-Luk-Oie does not wish to hurt them. He is very fond of children and only wants them to be quiet that he may tell them pretty stories, and he knows they never are quiet until they are in bed and asleep. Ole-Luk-Oie seats himself upon the bed as soon as they are asleep. He is nicely dressed; his coat is made of silken stuff, it is impossible to say of what color, for it changes from green to red and from red to blue as he turns from side to side. Under each arm he carries an umbrella. One of them, with pictures on the inside, he spreads over good children, and then they dream the most charming stories. But the other umbrella has no pictures, and this he holds over the naughty children, so that they sleep heavily and wake in the morning without having dreamed at all.

Now we shall hear how Ole-Luk-Oie came every night during a whole week to a little boy named Hjalmar, and what it was that he told him. There were seven stories, as there are seven days in the week.

MONDAY

“Now pay attention,” said Ole-Luk-Oie in the evening, when Hjalmar was in bed, “and I will decorate the room.”

Immediately all the flowers in the flowerpots became large trees with long branches reaching to the ceiling and stretching along the walls, so that the whole room was like a greenhouse. All the branches were loaded with flowers, each flower as beautiful and as fragrant as a rose, and had any one tasted them he would have found them sweeter even than jam. The fruit glittered like gold, and there were cakes so full of plums that they were nearly bursting. It was incomparably beautiful.

At the same time sounded dismal moans from the table drawer in which lay Hjalmar’s schoolbooks.

“What can that be now?” said Ole-Luk-Oie, going to the table and pulling out the drawer.

It was a slate, in such distress because of a wrong figure in a sum that it had almost broken itself to pieces. The pencil pulled and tugged at its string as if it were a little dog that wanted to help but could not.

And then came a moan from Hjalmar’s copy book. Oh, it was quite terrible to hear! On each leaf stood a row of capital letters, every one having a small letter by its side. This formed a copy. Under these were other letters,

which Hjalmar had written; they fancied they looked like the copy, but they were mistaken, for they were leaning on one side as if they intended to fall over the pencil lines.

“See, this is the way you should hold yourselves,” said the copy. “Look here, you should slope thus, with a graceful curve.”

“Oh, we are very willing to do so,” said Hjalmar’s letters, “but we cannot, we are so wretchedly made.”

“You must be scratched out, then,” said Ole-Luk-Oie.

“Oh, no!” they cried, and then they stood up so gracefully that it was quite a pleasure to look at them.

“Now we must give up our stories, and exercise these letters,” said Ole-Luk-Oie. “One, two—one, two—” So he drilled them till they stood up gracefully and looked as beautiful as a copy could look. But after Ole-Luk-Oie was gone, and Hjalmar looked at them in the morning, they were as wretched and awkward as ever.

TUESDAY

As soon as Hjalmar was in bed Ole-Luk-Oie touched with his little magic wand all the furniture in the room, which immediately began to chatter. And each article talked only of itself.

Over the chest of drawers hung a large picture in a gilt frame, representing a landscape, with fine old trees, flowers in the grass, and a broad stream which flowed through the wood past several castles far out into the wild ocean.

Ole-Luk-Oie touched the picture with his magic wand, and immediately the birds began to sing, the branches of the trees rustled, and the clouds moved across the sky, casting their shadows on the landscape beneath them.

Then Ole-Luk-Oie lifted little Hjalmar up to the frame and placed his feet in the picture, on the high grass, and there he stood with the sun shining down upon him through the branches of the trees. He ran to the water and seated himself in a little boat which lay there, and which was painted red and white.

The sails glittered like silver, and six swans, each with a golden circlet round its neck and a bright, blue star on its forehead, drew the boat past the green wood, where the trees talked of robbers and witches, and the flowers of beautiful little elves and fairies whose histories the butterflies had related to them.

Brilliant fish with scales like silver and gold swam after the boat, sometimes making a spring and splashing the

water round them; while birds, red and blue, small and great, flew after him in two long lines. The gnats danced round them, and the cockchafers cried "Buzz, buzz." They all wanted to follow Hjalmar, and all had some story to tell him. It was a most delightful sail.

Sometimes the forests were thick and dark, sometimes like a beautiful garden gay with sunshine and flowers; he passed great palaces of glass and of marble, and on the balconies stood princesses, whose faces were those of little girls whom Hjalmar knew well and had often played with. One of the little girls held out her hand, in which was a heart made of sugar, more beautiful than any confectioner ever sold. As Hjalmar sailed by he caught hold of one side of the sugar heart and held it fast, and the princess held fast too, so that it broke in two pieces. Hjalmar had one piece and the princess the other, but Hjalmar's was the larger.

At each castle stood little princes acting as sentinels. They presented arms and had golden swords and made it rain plums and tin soldiers, so that they must have been real princes.

Hjalmar continued to sail, sometimes through woods, sometimes as it were through large halls, and then by large cities. At last he came to the town where his nurse lived, who had carried him in her arms when he was a very little boy and had always been kind to him. She nodded and beckoned to him and then sang the little verses she had herself composed and sent to him:

How many, many hours I think on thee,
My own dear Hjalmar, still my pride and joy!
How have I hung delighted over thee,
Kissing thy rosy cheeks, my darling boy!

Thy first low accents it was mine to hear,
To-day my farewell words to thee shall fly.
Oh, may the Lord thy shield be ever near
And fit thee for a mansion in the sky!

And all the birds sang the same tune, the flowers danced on their stems, and the old trees nodded as if Ole-Luk-Oie had been telling them stories, as well.

WEDNESDAY

How the rain did pour down! Hjalmar could hear it in his sleep, and when Ole-Luk-Oie opened the window the

water flowed quite up to the window sill. It had the appearance of a large lake outside, and a beautiful ship lay close to the house.

“Wilt thou sail with me to-night, little Hjalmar?” said Ole-Luk-Oie. “Then we shall see foreign countries, and thou shalt return here in the morning.”

All in a moment there stood Hjalmar, in his best clothes, on the deck of the noble ship, and immediately the weather became fine.

They sailed through the streets, round by the church, while on every side rolled the wide, great sea.

They sailed till the land disappeared, and then they saw a flock of storks who had left their own country and were traveling to warmer climates. The storks flew one behind another and had already been a long, long time on the wing.

One of them seemed so tired that his wings could scarcely carry him. He was soon left very far behind. At length he sank lower and lower, with outstretched wings, flapping them in vain, till his feet touched the rigging of the ship, and he slid from the sails to the deck and stood before them. Then a sailor boy caught him and put him in the henhouse with the fowls, the ducks, and the turkeys, while the poor stork stood quite bewildered among them.

“Just look at that fellow,” said the chickens.

Then the turkey cock puffed himself out as large as he could and inquired who he was, and the ducks waddled backwards, crying, “Quack, quack!”

The stork told them all about warm Africa—of the pyramids and of the ostrich, which, like a wild horse, runs across the desert. But the ducks did not understand what he said, and quacked amongst themselves, “We are all of the same opinion; namely, that he is stupid.”

“Yes, to be sure, he is stupid,” said the turkey cock, and gobbled.

Then the stork remained quite silent and thought of his home in Africa.

“Those are handsome thin legs of yours,” said the turkey cock. “What do they cost a yard?”

“Quack, quack, quack,” grinned the ducks; but the stork pretended not to hear.

“You may as well laugh,” said the turkey, “for that remark was rather witty, but perhaps it was above you. Ah, ah, is he not clever? He will be a great amusement to us while he remains here.” And then he gobbled, and the ducks quacked: “Gobble, gobble”; “Quack, quack!”

What a terrible uproar they made while they were having such fun among themselves!

Then Hjalmar went to the henhouse and, opening the door, called to the stork. He hopped out on the deck. He had rested himself now, and he looked happy and seemed as if he nodded to Hjalmar as if to thank him. Then he spread his wings and flew away to warmer countries, while the hens clucked, the ducks quacked, and the turkey cock’s head turned quite scarlet.

“To-morrow you shall be made into soup,” said Hjalmar to the fowls; and then he awoke and found himself lying in his little bed.

It was a wonderful journey which Ole-Luk-Oie had made him take this night.

THURSDAY

“What do you think I have here?” said the Dream Man. “Do not be frightened, and you shall see a little mouse.” And then he held out his hand, in which lay a lovely little creature. “It has come to invite you to a wedding. Two little mice are going to be married to-night. They live under the floor of your mother’s storeroom, and that must be a fine dwelling place.”

“But how can I get through the little mouse-hole in the floor?” asked the little boy.

“Leave me to manage that,” said the Dream Man. “I will soon make you small enough.” And then he touched the boy with his magic wand, upon which he became smaller and smaller until at last he was no longer than a little finger. “Now you can borrow the dress of your tin soldier. I think it will just fit you. It looks well to wear a uniform when you go into company.”

“Yes, certainly,” said the boy, and in a moment he was dressed as neatly as the neatest of all tin soldiers.

“Will you be so good as to seat yourself in your mamma’s thimble,” said the little mouse, “that I may have the pleasure of drawing you to the wedding?”

“Will you really take so much trouble, young lady?” said he. And so in this way he rode to the mouse’s wedding.

First they went under the floor, and then through a long passage which was scarcely high enough to allow the thimble to drive under, and the whole passage was lit up with the light of rotten wood.

“Does it not smell delicious?” asked the mouse, as she drew him along. “The wall and the floor have been smeared with bacon rind; nothing could be nicer.”

Very soon they arrived at the bridal hall. On the right stood all the little lady mice, whispering and giggling as if they were making game of each other. To the left were the gentlemen mice, stroking their whiskers with their forepaws. And in the center of the hall could be seen the bridal pair, standing side by side in a hollow cheese rind and kissing each other while all eyes were upon them.

More and more friends kept coming, till the mice were in danger of treading each other to death; for the bridal pair now stood in the doorway, and none could pass in or out.

The room had been rubbed over with bacon rind like the passage, which was all the refreshment offered to the guests. But for dessert a pea was passed around, on which a mouse had bitten the first letters of the names of the betrothed pair. This was something quite uncommon. All the mice said it was a very beautiful wedding, and that they had been very agreeably entertained.

After this Hjalmar returned home. He had certainly been in grand society, but he had been obliged to creep under a room and to make himself small enough to wear the uniform of a tin soldier.

FRIDAY

“It is incredible how many old people there are who would be glad to have me at night,” said Ole-Luk-Oie, “especially those who have done something wrong.

“‘Good old Ole,’ say they to me, ‘we cannot close our eyes, and we lie awake the whole night and see all our evil deeds sitting on our beds like little imps and sprinkling us with scalding water. Will you come and drive them away, that we may have a good night’s rest?’ and then they sigh so deeply and say: ‘We would gladly pay you for

it. Good night, Ole-Luk, the money lies in the window.' But I never do anything for gold."

"What shall we do to-night?" asked Hjalmar.

"I do not know whether you would care to go to another wedding," replied Ole-Luk-Oie, "although it is quite a different affair from the one we saw last night. Your sister's large doll, that is dressed like a man and is called Herman, intends to marry the doll Bertha. It is also the dolls' birthday, and they will receive many presents."

"Yes, I know that already," said Hjalmar; "my sister always allows her dolls to keep their birthdays or to have a wedding when they require new clothes. That has happened already a hundred times, I am quite sure."

"Yes, so it may; but to-night is the hundred-and-first wedding, and when that has taken place it must be the last; therefore this is to be extremely beautiful. Only look."

Hjalmar looked at the table, and there stood the little cardboard dolls' house, with lights in all the windows, and drawn up before it were the tin soldiers, presenting arms.

The bridal pair were seated on the floor, leaning against the leg of the table, looking very thoughtful and with good reason. Then Ole-Luk-Oie, dressed up in grandmother's black gown, married them.

As soon as the ceremony was concluded all the furniture in the room joined in singing a beautiful song which had been composed by the lead pencil, and which went to the melody of a military tattoo:

"Waft, gentle breeze, our kind farewell
To the tiny house where the bride folks dwell.
With their skin of kid leather fitting so well,
They are straight and upright as a tailor's ell.
Hurrah! hurrah! for beau and belle.
Let echo repeat our kind farewell."

And now came the presents; but the bridal pair had nothing to eat, for love was to be their food.

"Shall we go to a country house, or travel?" asked the bridegroom.

They consulted the swallow, who had traveled so far, and the old hen in the yard, who had brought up five broods of chickens.

And the swallow talked to them of warm countries where the grapes hang in large clusters on the vines and the air is soft and mild, and about the mountains glowing with colors more beautiful than we can think of.

“But they have no red cabbage such as we have,” said the hen. “I was once in the country with my chickens for a whole summer. There was a large sand pit in which we could walk about and scratch as we liked. Then we got into a garden in which grew red cabbage. Oh, how nice it was! I cannot think of anything more delicious.”

“But one cabbage stalk is exactly like another,” said the swallow; “and here we often have bad weather.”

“Yes, but we are accustomed to it,” said the hen.

“But it is so cold here, and freezes sometimes.”

“Cold weather is good for cabbages,” said the hen; “besides, we do have it warm here sometimes. Four years ago we had a summer that lasted more than five weeks, and it was so hot one could scarcely breathe. And then in this country we have no poisonous animals, and we are free from robbers. He must be a blockhead, who does not consider our country the finest of all lands. He ought not to be allowed to live here.” And then the hen wept very much and said: “I have also traveled. I once went twelve miles in a coop, and it was not pleasant traveling at all.”

“The hen is a sensible woman,” said the doll Bertha. “I don’t care for traveling over mountains, just to go up and come down again. No, let us go to the sand pit in front of the gate and then take a walk in the cabbage garden.”

And so they settled it.

SATURDAY

“Am I to hear any more stories?” asked little Hjalmar, as soon as Ole-Luk-Oie had sent him to sleep.

“We shall have no time this evening,” said he, spreading out his prettiest umbrella over the child. “Look at these Chinese people.” And then the whole umbrella appeared like a large china bowl, with blue trees and pointed bridges upon which stood little Chinamen nodding their heads.

“We must make all the world beautiful for to-morrow morning,” said Ole-Luk-Oie, “for it will be a holiday; it is Sunday. I must now go to the church steeple and see if the little sprites who live there have polished the bells so that they may sound sweetly; then I must go into the fields and see if the wind has blown the dust from the

grass and the leaves; and the most difficult task of all which I have to do is to take down all the stars and brighten them up. I have to number them first before I put them in my apron, and also to number the places from which I take them, so that they may go back into the right holes, or else they would not remain and we should have a number of falling stars, for they would all tumble down one after another.”

“Hark ye, Mr. Luk-Oie!” said an old portrait which hung on the wall of Hjalmar’s bedroom. “Do you know me? I am Hjalmar’s great-grandfather. I thank you for telling the boy stories, but you must not confuse his ideas. The stars cannot be taken down from the sky and polished; they are spheres like our earth, which is a good thing for them.”

“Thank you, old great-grandfather,” said Ole-Luk-Oie. “I thank you. You may be the head of the family, as no doubt you are, and very old, but I am older still. I am an ancient heathen. The old Romans and Greeks named me the Dream God. I have visited the noblest houses,—yes, and I continue to do so,—still I know how to conduct myself both to high and low, and now you may tell the stories yourself”; and so Ole-Luk-Oie walked off, taking his umbrellas with him.

“Well, well, one is never to give an opinion, I suppose,” grumbled the portrait. And it woke Hjalmar.

SUNDAY

“Good evening,” said Ole-Luk-Oie.

Hjalmar nodded, and then sprang out of bed and turned his great-grandfather’s portrait to the wall so that it might not interrupt them as it had done yesterday. “Now,” said he, “you must tell me some stories about five green peas that lived in one pod, or of the chickseed that courted the chickweed, or of the Darning-needle who acted so proudly because she fancied herself an embroidery needle.”

“You may have too much of a good thing,” said Ole-Luk-Oie. “You know that I like best to show you something, so I will show you my brother. He is also called Ole-Luk-Oie, but he never visits any one but once, and when he does come he takes him away on his horse and tells him stories as they ride along.

“He knows only two stories. One of these is so wonderfully beautiful that no one in the world can imagine anything at all like it, but the other it would be impossible to describe.”

Then Ole-Luk-Oie lifted Hjalmar up to the window. “There, now you can see my brother, the other Ole-Luk-

Oie; he is also called Death. You see he is not so bad as they represent him in picture books. There he is a skeleton, but here his coat is embroidered with silver, and he wears the splendid uniform of a hussar, and a mantle of black velvet flies behind him over the horse. Look, how he gallops along.”

Hjalmar saw that as this Ole-Luk-Oie rode on he lifted up old and young and carried them away on his horse. Some he seated in front of him and some behind, but always inquired first, “How stands the record book?”

“Good,” they all answered.

“Yes, but let me see for myself,” he replied, and they were obliged to give him the books. Then all those who had “Very good” or “Exceedingly good” came in front of the horse and heard the beautiful story, while those who had “Middling” or “Fairly good” in their books were obliged to sit behind. They cried and wanted to jump down from the horse, but they could not get free, for they seemed fastened to the seat.

“Why, Death is a most splendid Luk-Oie,” said Hjalmar. “I am not in the least afraid of him.”

“You need have no fear of him,” said Ole-Luk-Oie; “but take care and keep a good conduct book.”

“Now I call that very instructive,” murmured the great-grandfather’s portrait. “It is useful sometimes to express an opinion.” So he was quite satisfied.

These are some of the doings and sayings of Ole-Luk-Oie. I hope he may visit you himself this evening and relate some more.

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