

The Story of Big Klaus and Little Klaus

From the Yellow Fairy Book, Edited by Andrew Lang

In a certain village there lived two people who had both the same name. Both were called Klaus, but one owned four horses and the other only one. In order to distinguish the one from the other, the one who had four horses was called Big Klaus, and the one who had only one horse, Little Klaus. Now you shall hear what befell them both, for this is a true story.

The whole week through Little Klaus had to plough for Big Klaus, and lend him his one horse; then Big Klaus lent him his four horses, but only once a week, and that was on Sunday. Hurrah! How loudly Little Klaus cracked his whip over all the five horses! for they were indeed as good as his on this one day. The sun shone brightly, and all the bells in the church-towers were pealing; the people were dressed in their best clothes, and were going to church, with their hymn books under their arms, to hear the minister preach. They saw Little Klaus ploughing with the five horses; but he was so happy that he kept on cracking his whip, and calling out 'Gee-up, my five horses!'



'You mustn't say that,' said Big Klaus. 'Only one horse is yours.'

But as soon as someone else was going by Little Klaus forgot that he must not say it, and called out 'Gee-up, my five horses!'

'Now you had better stop that,' said Big Klaus, 'for if you say it once more I will give your horse such a crack on the head that it will drop down dead on the spot!'

'I really won't say it again!' said Little Klaus. But as soon as more people passed by, and nodded him good-morning, he became so happy in thinking how well it looked to have five horses ploughing his field that, cracking his whip, he called out 'Gee-up, my five horses!'

'I'll see to your horses!' said Big Klaus; and, seizing an iron bar, he struck Little Klaus' one horse such a blow on the head that it fell down and died on the spot.

'Alas! Now I have no horse!' said Little Klaus, beginning to cry. Then he flayed the skin off his horse, dried it, and put it in a sack, which he threw

over his shoulder, and went into the town to sell it. He had a long way to go, and had to

pass through a great dark forest. A dreadful storm came on, in which he lost his way, and before he could get on to the right road night came on, and it was impossible to reach the town that evening.

Right in front of him was a large farmhouse. The window-shutters were closed, but the light came through the chinks. 'I should very much like to be allowed to spend the night there,' thought Little Klaus; and he went and knocked at the door. The farmer's wife opened it, but when she heard what he wanted she told him to go away; her husband was not at home, and she took in no strangers.

'Well, I must lie down outside,' said Little Klaus; and the farmer's wife shut the door in his face. Close by stood a large haystack, and between it and the house a little out-house, covered with a flat thatched roof.

'I can lie down there,' thought Little Klaus, looking at the roof; 'it will make a splendid bed, if only the stork won't fly down and bite my legs.' For a live stork was standing on the roof, where it had its nest.

So Little Klaus crept up into the out-house, where he lay down, and made himself comfortable for the night. The wooden shutters over the windows were not shut at the top, and he could just see into the room. There stood a large table, spread with wine and roast meat and a beautiful fish. The farmer's wife and the sexton sat at the table, but there was no one else. She was filling up his glass, while he stuck his fork into the fish which was his favourite dish.

'If one could only get some of that!' thought Little Klaus, stretching his head towards the window. Ah, what delicious cakes he saw standing there! It WAS a feast!

Then he heard someone riding along the road towards the house. It was the farmer coming home. He was a very worthy man; but he had one great peculiarity—namely, that he could not bear to see a sexton. If he saw one he was made quite mad. That was why the sexton had gone to say good-day to the farmer's wife when he knew that her husband was not at home, and the good woman therefore put in front of him the best food she had. But when they heard the farmer coming they were frightened, and the farmer's wife begged the sexton to creep into a great empty chest. He did so, as he knew the poor man could not bear to see a sexton. The wife hastily hid all the beautiful food and the wine in her oven; for if her husband had seen it, he would have been sure to ask what it all meant.

'Oh, dear! oh, dear!' groaned Little Klaus up in the shed, when he saw the good food disappearing.

'Is anybody up there?' asked the farmer, catching sight of Little Klaus. 'Why are you lying there? Come with me into the house.' Then Little Klaus told him how he had lost his way, and begged to be allowed to spend the night there.

'Yes, certainly,' said the farmer; 'but we must first have something to eat!'

The wife received them both very kindly, spread a long table, and gave them a large plate

of porridge. The farmer was hungry, and ate with a good appetite; but Little Klaus could not help thinking of the delicious dishes of fish and roast meats and cakes which he knew were in the oven. Under the table at his feet he had laid the sack with the horse-skin in it, for, as we know, he was going to the town to sell it. The porridge did not taste good to him, so he trod upon his sack, and the dry skin in the sack squeaked loudly.

‘Hush!’ said Little Klaus to his sack, at the same time treading on it again so that it squeaked even louder than before.

‘Hallo! What have you got in your sack?’ asked the farmer.

‘Oh, it is a wizard!’ said Little Klaus. ‘He says we should not eat porridge, for he has conjured the whole oven full of roast meats and fish and cakes.’

‘Goodness me!’ said the farmer; and opening the oven he saw all the delicious, tempting dishes his wife had hidden there, but which he now believed the wizard in the sack had conjured up for them. The wife could say nothing, but she put the food at once on the table, and they ate the fish, the roast meat, and the cakes. Little Klaus now trod again on his sack, so that the skin squeaked.

‘What does he say now?’ asked the farmer.

‘He says,’ replied Little Klaus, ‘that he has also conjured up for us three bottles of wine; they are standing in the corner by the oven!’

The wife had to fetch the wine which she had hidden, and the farmer drank and grew very merry. He would very much like to have

had such a wizard as Little Klaus had in the sack.

‘Can he conjure up the Devil?’ asked the farmer. ‘I should like to see him very much, for I feel just now in very good spirits!’

‘Yes,’ said Little Klaus; ‘my wizard can do everything that I ask. Isn’t that true?’ he asked, treading on the sack so that it squeaked. ‘Do you hear? He says “Yes;” but that the Devil looks so ugly that we should not like to see him.’

‘Oh! I’m not at all afraid. What does he look like?’

‘He will show himself in the shape of a sexton!’

‘I say!’ said the farmer, ‘he must be ugly! You must know that I can’t bear to look at a sexton! But it doesn’t matter. I know that it is the Devil, and I sha’n’t mind! I feel up to it now. But he must not come too near me!’

‘I must ask my wizard,’ said Little Klaus, treading on the sack and putting his ear to it.

‘What does he say?’

‘He says you can open the chest in the corner there, and you will see the Devil squatting inside it; but you must hold the lid so that he shall not escape.’

‘Will you help me to hold him?’ begged the farmer, going towards the chest where his wife had hidden the real sexton, who was sitting inside in a terrible fright. The farmer opened the lid a little way, and saw him inside.

‘Ugh!’ he shrieked, springing back. ‘Yes, now I have seen him; he looked just like our

sexton. Oh, it was horrid!' So he had to drink again, and they drank till far on into the night.

'You MUST sell me the wizard,' said the farmer. 'Ask anything you like! I will pay you down a bushelful of money on the spot.'

'No, I really can't,' said Little Klaus. 'Just think how many things I can get from this wizard!'

'Ah! I should like to have him so much!' said the farmer, begging very hard.

'Well!' said Little Klaus at last, 'as you have been so good as to give me shelter to-night, I will sell him. You shall have the wizard for a bushel of money, but I must have full measure.'

'That you shall,' said the farmer. 'But you must take the chest with you. I won't keep it another hour in the house. Who knows that he isn't in there still?'

Little Klaus gave the farmer his sack with the dry skin, and got instead a good bushelful of money. The farmer also gave him a wheelbarrow to carry away his money and the chest.

'Farewell,' said Little Klaus; and away he went with his money and the big chest, wherein sat the sexton.

On the other side of the wood was a large deep river. The water flowed so rapidly that you could scarcely swim against the stream.

A great new bridge had been built over it, on the middle of which Little Klaus stopped, and said aloud so that the sexton might hear:

'Now, what am I to do with this stupid chest? It is as heavy as if it were filled with

stones! I shall only be tired, dragging it along; I will throw it into the river. If it swims home to me, well and good; and if it doesn't, it's no matter.' Then he took the chest with one hand and lifted it up a little, as if he were going to throw it into the water.

'No, don't do that!' called out the sexton in the chest. 'Let me get out first!'

'Oh, oh!' said Little Klaus, pretending that he was afraid. 'He is still in there! I must throw him quickly into the water to drown him!'

'Oh! no, no!' cried the sexton. 'I will give you a whole bushelful of money if you will let me go!'

'Ah, that's quite another thing!' said Little Klaus, opening the chest.

The sexton crept out very quickly, pushed the empty chest into the water and went to his house, where he gave Little Klaus a bushel of money. One he had had already from the farmer, and now he had his wheelbarrow full of money. 'Well, I have got a good price for the horse!' said he to himself when he shook all his money out in a heap in his room. 'This will put Big Klaus in a rage when he hears how rich I have become through my one horse; but I won't tell him just yet!' So he sent a boy to Big Klaus to borrow a bushel measure from him.

'Now what can he want with it?' thought Big Klaus; and he smeared some tar at the bottom, so that of whatever was measured a little should remain in it. And this is just what happened; for when he got his measure back, three new silver five-shilling pieces were sticking to it.

‘What does this mean?’ said Big Klaus, and he ran off at once to Little Klaus.

‘Where did you get so much money from?’

‘Oh, that was from my horse-skin. I sold it yesterday evening.’

‘That’s certainly a good price!’ said Big Klaus; and running home in great haste, he took an axe, knocked all his four horses on the head, skinned them, and went into the town. ‘Skins! skins! Who will buy skins?’ he cried through the streets.

All the shoemakers and tanners came running to ask him what he wanted for them. ‘A bushel of money for each,’ said Big Klaus.

‘Are you mad?’ they all exclaimed. ‘Do you think we have money by the bushel?’

‘Skins! skins! Who will buy skins?’ he cried again, and to all who asked him what they cost, he answered, ‘A bushel of money.’

‘He is making game of us,’ they said; and the shoemakers seized their yard measures and the tanners their leathern aprons and they gave Big Klaus a good beating. ‘Skins! skins!’ they cried mockingly; yes, we will tan YOUR skin for you! Out of the town with him!’ they shouted; and Big Klaus had to hurry off as quickly as he could, if he wanted to save his life.

‘Aha!’ said he when he came home, ‘Little Klaus shall pay dearly for this. I will kill him!’

Little Klaus’ grandmother had just died. Though she had been very unkind to him, he was very much distressed, and he took the dead woman and laid her in his warm bed to try if he could not bring her back to life. There

she lay the whole night, while he sat in the corner and slept on a chair, which he had often done before. And in the night as he sat there the door opened, and Big Klaus came in with his axe. He knew quite well where Little Klaus’s bed stood, and going up to it he struck the grandmother on the head just where he thought Little Klaus would be.

‘There!’ said he. ‘Now you won’t get the best of me again!’ And he went home.

‘What a very wicked man!’ thought Little Klaus. ‘He was going to kill me! It was a good thing for my grandmother that she was dead already, or else he would have killed her!’ Then he dressed his grandmother in her Sunday clothes, borrowed a horse from his neighbour, harnessed the cart to it, sat his grandmother on the back seat so that she could not fall out when he drove, and away they went. When the sun rose they were in front of a large inn. Little Klaus got down, and went in to get something to drink. The host was very rich. He was a very worthy but hot-tempered man.

‘Good morning!’ said he to Little Klaus. ‘You are early on the road.’

‘Yes,’ said Little Klaus. ‘I am going to the town with my grandmother. She is sitting outside in the cart; I cannot bring her in. Will you not give her a glass of mead? But you will have to speak loud, for she is very hard of hearing.’

‘Oh yes, certainly I will!’ said the host; and, pouring out a large glass of mead, he took it out to the dead grandmother, who was sitting upright in the cart.

‘Here is a glass of mead from your son,’ said the host. But the dead woman did not answer a word, and sat still. ‘Don’t you hear?’ cried the host as loud as he could. ‘Here is a glass of mead from your son!’

Then he shouted the same thing again, and yet again, but she never moved in her place; and at last he grew angry, threw the glass in her face, so that she fell back into the cart, for she was not tied in her place.

‘Hullo!’ cried Little Klaus, running out of the door, and seizing the host by the throat. ‘You have killed my grandmother! Look! there is a great hole in her forehead!’

‘Oh, what a misfortune!’ cried the host, wringing his hands. ‘It all comes from my hot temper! Dear Little Klaus! I will give you a bushel of money, and will bury your grandmother as if she were my own; only don’t tell about it, or I shall have my head cut off, and that would be very uncomfortable.’ So Little Klaus got a bushel of money, and the host buried his grandmother as if she had been his own.

Now when Little Klaus again reached home with so much money he sent his boy to Big Klaus to borrow his bushel measure. ‘What’s this?’ said Big Klaus. ‘Didn’t I kill him? I must see to this myself!’

So he went himself to Little Klaus with the measure. ‘Well, now, where did you get all this money?’ asked he, opening his eyes at the heap.

‘You killed my grandmother—not me,’ said Little Klaus. ‘I sold her, and got a bushel of money for her.’

‘That is indeed a good price!’ said Big Klaus; and, hurrying home, he took an axe and killed his grandmother, laid her in the cart, and drove off to the apothecary’s, and asked whether he wanted to buy a dead body.

‘Who is it, and how did you get it?’ asked the apothecary.

‘It is my grandmother,’ said Big Klaus. ‘I killed her in order to get a bushel of money.’

‘You are mad!’ said the apothecary. ‘Don’t mention such things, or you will lose your head!’ And he began to tell him what a dreadful thing he had done, and what a wicked man he was, and that he ought to be punished; till Big Klaus was so frightened that he jumped into the cart and drove home as hard as he could. The apothecary and all the people thought he must be mad, so they let him go.

‘You shall pay for this!’ said Big Klaus as he drove home. ‘You shall pay for this dearly, Little Klaus!’

So as soon as he got home he took the largest sack he could find, and went to Little Klaus and said: ‘You have fooled me again! First I killed my horses, then my grandmother! It is all your fault; but you sha’n’t do it again!’ And he seized Little Klaus, pushed him in the sack, threw it over his shoulder, crying out ‘Now I am going to drown you!’ He had to go a long way before he came to the river, and Little Klaus was not very light. The road passed by the church; the organ was sounding, and the people were singing most beautifully. Big Klaus put down the sack with Little Klaus in it by the church-door, and thought

that he might as well go in and hear a psalm before going on farther. Little Klaus could not get out, and everybody was in church; so he went in.

‘Oh, dear! Oh, dear!’ groaned Little Klaus in the sack, twisting and turning himself. But he could not undo the string. There came by an old, old shepherd, with snow-white hair and a long staff in his hand. He was driving a herd of cows and oxen. These pushed against the sack so that it was overturned. ‘Alas!’ moaned Little Klaus, ‘I am so young and yet I must die!’

‘And I, poor man,’ said the cattle-driver, ‘I am so old and yet I cannot die!’

‘Open the sack,’ called out Little Klaus; ‘creep in here instead of me, and you will die in a moment!’

‘I will gladly do that,’ said the cattle-driver; and he opened the sack, and Little Klaus struggled out at once. ‘You will take care of the cattle, won’t you?’ asked the old man, creeping into the sack, which Little Klaus fastened up and then went on with the cows and oxen. Soon after Big Klaus came out of the church, and taking up the sack on his shoulders it seemed to him as if it had become lighter; for the old cattle-driver was not half as heavy as Little Klaus.

‘How easy he is to carry now! That must be because I heard part of the service.’

So he went to the river, which was deep and broad, threw in the sack with the old driver, and called after it, for he thought Little Klaus was inside:

‘Down you go! You won’t mock me any more now!’ Then he went home; but when he came to the cross-roads, there he met Little Klaus, who was driving his cattle. ‘What’s this?’ said Big Klaus. ‘Haven’t I drowned you?’

‘Yes,’ replied Little Klaus; ‘you threw me into the river a good half-hour ago!’

‘But how did you get those splendid cattle?’ asked Big Klaus.

‘They are sea-cattle!’ said Little Klaus. ‘I will tell you the whole story, and I thank you for having drowned me, because now I am on dry land and really rich! How frightened I was when I was in the sack! How the wind whistled in my ears as you threw me from the bridge into the cold water! I sank at once to the bottom; but I did not hurt myself for underneath was growing the most beautiful soft grass. I fell on this, and immediately the sack opened; the loveliest maiden in snow-white garments, with a green garland round her wet hair, took me by the hand, and said! “Are you Little Klaus? Here are some cattle for you to begin with, and a mile farther down the road there is another herd, which I will give you as a present!” Now I saw that the river was a great high-road for the sea-people. Along it they travel underneath from the sea to the land till the river ends. It was so beautiful, full of flowers and fresh grass; the fishes which were swimming in the water shot past my ears as the birds do here in the air. What lovely people there were, and what fine cattle were grazing in the ditches and dykes!’

‘But why did you come up to us again?’ asked Big Klaus. ‘I should not have done so, if it is so beautiful down below!’

‘Oh!’ said Little Klaus, ‘that was just so politic of me. You heard what I told you, that the sea-maiden said to me a mile farther along the road—and by the road she meant the river, for she can go by no other way—there was another herd of cattle waiting for me. But I know what windings the river makes, now here, now there, so that it is a long way round. Therefore it makes it much shorter if one comes on the land and drives across the field to the river. Thus I have spared myself quite half a mile, and have come much quicker to my sea-cattle!’

‘Oh, you’re a lucky fellow!’ said Big Klaus. ‘Do you think I should also get some cattle if I went to the bottom of the river?’

‘Oh, yes! I think so,’ said Little Klaus. ‘But I can’t carry you in a sack to the river; you are too heavy for me! If you like to go there yourself and then creep into the sack, I will throw you in with the greatest of pleasure.’

‘Thank you,’ said Big Klaus; ‘but if I don’t get any sea-cattle when I come there, you will have a good hiding, mind!’

‘Oh, no! Don’t be so hard on me!’

Then they went to the river. When the cattle, which were thirsty, caught sight of the water, they ran as quickly as they could to drink.

‘Look how they are running!’ said Little Klaus. ‘They want to go to the bottom again!’

‘Yes; but help me first,’ said Big Klaus, ‘or else you shall have a beating!’

And so he crept into the large sack, which was lying on the back of one of the oxen. ‘Put a stone in, for I am afraid I may not reach the bottom,’ said Big Klaus.

‘It goes all right!’ said Little Klaus; but still he laid a big stone in the sack, fastened it up tight, and then pushed it in. Plump! there was Big Klaus in the water, and he sank like lead to the bottom.

‘I doubt if he will find any cattle!’ said Little Klaus as he drove his own home.