

LITTLE CLAUS AND BIG CLAUS

In a town there once lived two men who had exactly the same name, Claus, but the one owned four horses and the other only one horse; so as to be able to tell them apart, the one who had four horses was called Big Claus, and the one with only one horse, Little Claus. Now we are to hear how they both fared – for this is a true story!

All week long Little Claus had to plough for Big Claus and lend him his one horse; then Big Claus would help him with all four of his, but only once a week – and that was on a Sunday. Huzza! how Little Claus cracked his whip over all the five horses; they were as good as his on that one day. The sun shone so delightfully, and all the bells in the church tower rang out to call people to church, people were dressed to the nines and walked with a hymnbook under their arm to hear the vicar preach, and they looked at Little Claus, who was ploughing with five horses, and he felt so happy and content that he cracked his whip once more and shouted: ‘Giddy-up, all my horses!’

‘You mustn’t say that,’ Big Claus said, ‘after all, only one of the horses is yours!’

But when someone else passed on the way to church, Little Claus forgot that he mustn’t say it, and called out ‘Giddy-up, all my horses!’

‘Well, now I really must ask you to stop doing that!’ Big Claus said, ‘for if you do so once more, I will strike your horse such a blow on the forehead that it will fall down stone-dead, and that’ll be the end of that!’

‘I won’t say it again, truly I won’t!’ Little Claus said, but when some more people came past, and nodded good day, he felt so happy and content that he cracked his whip yet again and shouted: ‘Giddy-up, all my horses!’

‘I’ll giddy-up your horses all right!’ Big Claus said, and grabbed the tethering mallet and gave Little Claus’s horse such a blow on the forehead that it fell down, stone-dead.

‘Ah, now I haven’t got a single horse any longer!’ Little Claus said and started to cry. Then he flayed the horse, took the hide and let it dry well in the wind, put it in a bag that he heaved onto his shoulder and set off for the town so as to sell his horsehide.

He had such a long way to go, had to pass through a large, dark forest, and a terrible storm started to blow up; he lost his way completely, and before he found the right path again it had become evening, and it was much too far to reach the town or return home before night fell.

Close to the road lay a large farm, the shutters had been put up, but a chink of light could still shine out just above them. I can probably stay the night there, Little Claus thought, went over and knocked at the door.

The farmer’s wife opened the door, but when she heard what he wanted, she said that he was to go away, her husband wasn’t at home, and she didn’t take in any strangers.

‘Well, in that case I’ll have to lie outside,’ Little Claus said, and the farmer’s wife shut the door on him.

Close by there was a large haystack, and between it and the house a small shelter had been built with a flat straw roof.

‘I can lie up there!’ Little Claus said when he saw the roof, ‘it’ll make a lovely bed, I hope the stork won’t fly down and bite me in the legs.’ For there was a live stork up on the roof, where it had its nest.

Little Claus now clambered up onto the shelter, where he lay down and settled himself until he was really comfortable. The shutters didn’t meet at the top, so he could see right into the living room.

There a large table had been laid out with wine and roast meat and such a lovely fish; the farmer’s wife and the parish clerk, and no one else, were sitting at the table, and she poured out for him and he prodded the fish, for fish was something he was very fond of.

‘If only there was room for one more!’ Little Claus said, and stretched his head over towards the window. Good Lord, what a lovely cake he could see there too! Oh, it was nothing less than a feast!

Now he heard someone on horseback riding along the road towards the house – it was the wife’s husband on his way home.

He was such a nice man, but he had the strange illness that he simply couldn’t stand the sight of parish clerks; if he clapped eyes on a parish clerk, he grew completely furious. That was also why the parish clerk had passed by to say good day to the wife when he knew that her husband wasn’t at home, and why the wife served the most delicious food she had for him; when they now heard her husband approaching, they became so frightened that the wife told the parish clerk to hide in a large empty chest standing in the corner; he did so, for he knew of course that the poor man couldn’t stand the sight of parish clerks. The wife swiftly hid all the delicious food and wine in her baking oven, for if her husband had caught a glimpse of it, he would definitely have asked what was going on.

‘Ah yes!’ Little Claus sighed up on the shelter when he saw all the food disappear.

‘Is there anyone up there?’ the farmer asked and looked up at Little Claus. ‘Why are you lying there? Come inside into the living room with me instead!’

Then Little Claus told him how he had got lost, and asked if he could stay the night.

‘Of course!’ the farmer said, ‘but first we must a little sustenance!’

The wife received both of them in a friendly fashion, laid out a long table and gave them a large bowl of porridge.

The farmer was hungry and started to tuck in with a hearty appetite, but Little Claus couldn’t help thinking of the lovely roast meat, fish and cake he knew were hidden in the oven.

He had placed his sack with the horsehide under the table, for we know of course that was why he had left home in the first place, to sell it in the town.

The taste of the porridge didn’t appeal to him at all, and so he trod on his bag, and the dry hide in the sack gave a load creak.

‘Quiet!’ Little Claus said to his sack, but trod at once on it again, making it creak even louder than before.

‘What on earth have you got in your bag?’ the farmer asked.

‘Oh, it’s a magician!’ Little Claus said, ‘he says we’re not to eat porridge – he’s conjured the oven full of roast meat and fish and cake.’

‘What’s that you say!’ the farmer exclaimed, and quickly opened the oven where all the lovely food was that the wife had hidden, but that he now believed the magician in the bag had conjured up for them. The wife didn’t dare say anything, but placed the food on the table at once, and they both tucked in to the fish and roast meat and cake. Now Little Claus trod on his bag again, so that the hide creaked.

‘What’s he saying now?’ the farmer asked.

‘He says,’ Little Claus said, ‘that he has also conjured up three bottles of wine for us; they’re standing in the corner by the oven!’ Now the wife had to bring out the wine she had hidden, and the farmer drank and became very merry – he would dearly love to have a magician like the one Little Claus had in his bag.

‘Can he also conjure up the devil?’ the farmer asked, ‘I’d like to see him, for now I’m in such a cheerful mood!’

‘Yes!’ Little Claus, ‘my magician can do anything I ask. Isn’t that right?’ he asked and trod on the bag so it creaked. ‘Did you hear him answer yes? But the devil is so hideous he’s not worth looking at!’

‘Oh, I’m not the slightest bit afraid, what does he look like, then?’

‘Well, he’ll look like the spitting image of a parish clerk!’

‘Ugh!’ the farmer said, ‘that’s really horrid! I ought to tell you both that I can’t stand the sight of parish clerks! but that’s all the same now, for since I now know it’s the devil, I’m better able to deal with it! I’ve plucked up enough courage! But don’t let him get too close to me.’

‘Now I’ll ask my magician,’ Little Claus said, trod on the bag and held his ear to it.

‘What does he say?’

‘He says you can go over and open the chest that’s standing in the corner, and you will see the devil sitting there twiddling his thumbs, but you’ll have to keep a tight hold of the lid so he can’t escape.’

‘Will you help me hold it!’ the farmer said and went over the chest where his wife had hidden the real parish clerk, who was sitting inside and was very scared.

The farmer lifted the lid slightly and peered in under it: ‘Ooh! he cried, and leapt backwards. ‘Yes, I saw him, he looked exactly like our parish clerk! It was really frightful!’

That called for a drink, and they carried on drinking until late at night.

‘You must sell that magician to me,’ the farmer said, ‘ask whatever you want for it! I’ll give you a whole bushel of money on the spot!’

‘No, I can’t do that!’ Little Claus said, ‘just think how useful that magician can be to me!’

‘Ah, but I so dreadfully want to have him,’ the farmer said, and kept on pleading.

‘Alright then,’ Little Claus finally said, ‘since you have been so kind as to give me shelter for the night, it’s all the same to me – you shall have the magician for a bushel of money, but it must be a topped bushel.’

‘That you shall have,’ the farmer said, but you must take the chest over there with you, I don’t want to have it another moment in the house, one never knows if he’s still sitting inside it.’

Little Claus gave the farm his sack with the dry hide inside, and was given a whole, topped bushel of money for it. The farmer even gave him a large wheelbarrow on which to transport the money and the chest.

‘Goodbye!’ Little Claus said, and off he went, with his money and the large chest in which the parish clerk was still sitting.

On the other side of the forest there was a deep river, the water moved so swiftly downstream that one could hardly swim against the current. A large new bridge had been built across it, Little Claus stood on the middle of it and said in a loud voice, so that the clerk inside the chest could hear it:

‘Ah, what am I to do with that stupid chest? it’s as heavy as if it was full of stones! I’m getting very tired of pushing it, so I’ll dump it here in the river – if it floats home to me, that’s fine, and if it doesn’t, it’s all the same to me.’

He now picked up the chest with one hand and lifted it slightly, as if he was going to fling it down into the river.

‘No, stop!’ the parish clerk in the chest cried out, ‘just let me come out!’

‘Ooh!’ Little Claus said, and pretended to be afraid. He’s still inside! I must get it out into the river fast so he can drown.’

‘Oh no, oh no!’ the parish clerk shouted, ‘I’ll give you a whole bushel of money if you don’t do that!’

‘Well, that’s a different matter!’ Little Claus said, and opened the chest. The clerk crawled out at once and pushed the empty chest out into the water, and went to his home, where Little Claus was given a whole bushel of money – he had of course already got one earlier from the farmer, so now his wheelbarrow was completely full of money!

‘Just look, I was very well paid for that horse!’ he said to himself when he was back home in his own living room, and had tipped out all the money into a large heap in the middle of the floor. ‘It

will annoy Big Claus when he finds out how rich I've become from my one and only horse, but I don't exactly intend to tell him myself!

So he sent a boy over to Big Claus to borrow a bushel measure.

'I wonder what he wants that for!' Big Claus thought to himself, and he smeared some tar on its underside so that a little of what was being measured would stick to it, which it did, for when he got his measure back, three new silver eight-shillings were hanging from it.

'What's this?' Big Claus said, and ran over at once to his little namesake: 'Where have you got all this money from?'

'Oh, that's for the horsehide, I sold it yesterday evening!'

'That was a fine price you got for it!' Big Claus said, hurried off home, took an axe, and struck all his four horses a mighty blow on the forehead, flayed them, and set off with them to the town.

'Hides! hides! who wants to buy hides!' he cried out through the streets.

All the shoemakers and tanners came out and asked him what he wanted for them.

'A bushel of money for each of them,' Big Claus said.

'Are you mad?' they all said, 'do you think we have money by the bushel?'

'Hides! hides! who wants to buy hides!' he cried out again, but to all those who asked him what the hides cost he answered: 'a bushel of money'.

'He's trying to make a fool of us,' they all said, and then the shoemakers took their belts and the tanners their leather aprons and started to give Big Claus a hiding.

'Hides, hides!' they sneered at him, 'yes, we'll give you a hide that can spit red pigs! out of the town with him!' they cried, and Big Claus had to run away as fast as he could, he had never had such a hiding before.

'Right!' he said, when he got back home, 'Little Claus is going to pay for this, I'll kill him for this!'

But back home at Little Claus's the old grandmother had died; she had admittedly been very bad-tempered and nasty towards him, but he was extremely sad even so, and he took the dead woman and laid her in his warm bed to see if she would come back to life; he would let her lie there the whole night, he himself would sit in the corner and sleep on a chair, he'd done that before.

As he was sitting there that night, the door opened and in came Big Claus with his axe; he knew where Little Claus's bed was, went straight over to it and brought the axe down on the dead grandmother's forehead, for he thought it was Little Claus.

'So there!' he said, 'now you won't make a fool of me any more!' and then he went home again.

'What a bad and evil man he is!' Little Claus said, 'to want to kill me; it was a good thing the old woman was already dead, otherwise he would have taken her life!'

He now dressed the old grandmother in her Sunday best, borrowed a horse from his neighbour, hitched it to the cart and placed the old grandmother on the seat farthest back, so that she wouldn't fall out when he drove fast, and then off they trundled through the forest; when the sun came up, they had reached a large inn, there Little Claus came to a halt, and went in to get some sustenance.

The innkeeper had loads and loads of money, he was also a very good man, but hot-tempered, as if there was pepper and tobacco in him.

'Good morning!' he said to Little Claus. 'You're in your Sunday best bright and early today!'

'Yes,' Little Claus said, 'I'm off to town with my old grandmother, she's sitting out there in the cart, I can't get her inside. Couldn't you go out to her with a glass of mead, but you'll have to speak rather loudly, for she's a bit hard of hearing.'

'Yes, of course I can,' the innkeeper said, and poured out a large glass of mead which he went out with to the dead grandmother, who had been placed in the cart.

'Here's a glass of mead from your son!' said the innkeeper, but the dead woman didn't say a word and sat there completely still.

‘Didn’t you hear me,’ the innkeeper shouted at the top of his voice, ‘here’s a glass of mead from your son!’

He shouted the same thing once more and then yet again, but when she didn’t budge an inch he grew angry and threw the glass of mead straight in her face, so the mead ran right down her nose, and she fell backwards in the cart, for she had only been placed there and not fixed securely.

‘What’s this!’ Little Claus shouted, leapt out of the door and seized the innkeeper by the chest, you’ve gone and killed my grandmother! Look, there’s a large hole in her forehead!’

‘Oh, it was an accident!’ the innkeeper cried and clasped his hands, ‘it all comes from me being so hot-tempered! Dear Little Claus, I will give you a whole bushel of money and have your grandmother buried as if she were my own, as long as you don’t say anything about this, for otherwise they will cut off my head, and that’s so horrid!’

And so Little Claus was given a whole bushel of money, and the innkeeper buried the old grandmother as if she were his own.

When Little Claus returned home with all the money, he immediately sent his boy over to Big Claus, to ask him if he could borrow a bushel measure.

‘What’s all this?’ Big Claus said, ‘haven’t I killed him! I must go and look for myself,’ and he went over himself with the bushel measure to Little Claus.

‘Where on earth have you got all that money from?’ he asked, and opened his eyes wide to be able to see all the latest money.

‘It was my grandmother you killed, not me!’ Little Claus said, ‘I’ve sold her for a whole bushel of money!’

‘That was a fine price you got for her!’ Big Claus said and hurried home, took an axe and immediately killed his old grandmother, placed her up in the cart, drove into town to where the pharmacist lived and asked him if he wanted to buy a corpse.

‘Who is it, and where have you got it from?’ the pharmacist asked.

‘It’s my grandmother!’ Big Claus said, ‘I’ve killed her so as to get a bushel of money!’

‘Good Lord!’ the pharmacist said. ‘You’re giving yourself away! don’t say anything like that, for you’ll end up losing your head!’ And now he really told him what a terrible thing he had done, and what a bad person he was, and that he ought to be punished; Big Claus was so frightened that he ran out of the pharmacy out to the cart, whipped up the horses and rushed off home, but the pharmacist and all the people thought he was mad, so they let him drive wherever he wanted.

‘You’ll pay for this!’ Big Claus said, when he was back on the road, ‘Yes, you’ll pay for this, Little Claus!’ and as soon as he was home he took the largest sack he could find, went across to Little Claus and said, ‘now you’ve fooled me again! first I killed my horse, then my old grandmother! It’s all your fault, but you’re never going to fool me again,’ and he took Little Claus by the waist and stuffed him down into his sack, then took him by the scruff of the neck and shouted at him: ‘Now I’m going to go and drown you!’

There was a long way to go before he reached the river, and Little Claus wasn’t all that light a burden. The road passed close by the church, the organ was playing and people were singing so beautifully inside; then Big Claus put down his sack with Little Claus in it close to the church door, and thought it might be a very good idea to go in and hear a hymn before proceeding: Little Claus couldn’t escape anyway and everybody was in the church – so he went in.

‘Ah me! ah me!’ Little Claus sighed inside the sack; he twisted and turned, but it was impossible for him to loosen the rope; at that moment an old, old cattleman with snow-white hair and a large stick to lean on happened to be passing; he was driving a whole drove of cows and bulls in front of him, they ran into the sack that Little Claus was in, and it fell over.

‘Ah me!’ Little Claus sighed, ‘I’m so young and yet already bound for heaven!’

‘And I’m a poor man,’ the cattleman said, who is so very old and I can’t get there yet!’

‘Open the sack!’ Little Claus shouted, ‘crawl in here and take my place, then you will get to heaven at once!’

‘Yes, I’d so dreadfully like to do that,’ the cattleman said and opened the sack, and out leapt Little Claus.

‘You can take care of the livestock then,’ the old man said, and he crawled into the sack, which Little Claus then tied up, and set off with all the cows and bulls.

A little while later, Big Claus came out of the church, shouldered his sack, and really felt it had become so light, because the old cattleman only weighed half as much as Little Claus. ‘How light he’s become to carry! that must probably be because I’ve been listening to a hymn!’ and he went on to the river, which was large and deep, threw the sack with the old cattleman out into the water and called out to him – for he thought it was Little Claus – ‘Take that! now you won’t make a fool of me again!’

Then he set off home, but when he came to where the roads crossed, he met Little Claus, who was driving all his cattle.

‘What’s all this!’ Big Claus said, ‘haven’t I just drowned you?’

‘Oh yes!’ Little Claus said, ‘you threw me in the river almost half an hour ago!’

‘But where have you got all that fine cattle from?’ Big Claus asked.

‘It’s sea-cattle!’ Little Claus said, ‘I’ll tell you the whole story, and thanks very much for drowning me, now I am very much on top, am really rich, believe you me! I was so afraid when I lay in the sack, and the wind whistled about my ears when you threw me down from the bridge into the cold water. I sank at once to the bottom, but I didn’t hurt myself, for down there the loveliest soft grass grows. That was what I fell onto, and the loveliest maiden, in snow-white garments and with a green garland in her wet hair, took me by the hand and said: “Are you Little Claus? Here’s some cattle to start off with! a few miles along the road there is another whole drove that I will make you a present of!” Now I could see that the river was a great highway for the sea-folk. Down on the river bed they walked and drove straight out of the sea and inland right to where the river ends. It was so delightful, with flowers and the freshest grass, and the fish that swam in the water slipped past my ears like birds to here in the air. What fine folk there were and what cattle grazing in ditches and on mounds!’

‘But when did you come up here at once to us again,’ Big Claus asked. ‘I wouldn’t have done that when it was so agreeable down there!’

‘Well,’ Little Claus said, ‘that’s precisely where I was so cunning! You recall that I’ve just told you this: The sea-girl said to me that a few miles along the road – and by road she means of course the river, for she can’t go anywhere else – there is another whole drove waiting for me. But I know where the river winds, first this way, then that, and that’s a long detour, so a way of shortening the route, if one is able, is to come up onto the land and drive the cattle across it back to the river, that means I save about half the distance and can get back to my sea-cattle more quickly!’

‘Oh, you’re a lucky man!’ Big Claus said, ‘do you think I too will get sea-cattle if I get down to the bottom of the river!’

‘Yes, I think it’s very likely,’ Little Claus said, but I can’t carry you in a sack all the way to the river, you’re too heavy for me, but if you get to the river by yourself and then crawl into the bag, I will throw you out with the greatest of pleasure.’

‘Thank you so much!’ Big Claus said, but if I don’t get sea-cattle when I’m down there, I’ll give you a hiding, believe you me!’

‘Oh no! don’t be so unkind!’ and then they went down to the river.

When the cattle, which was thirsty, saw the water, it hurried as fast as it could to get down to the water to drink.

'Just look at the hurry they're in!' Little Claus said, 'they're really eager to get down to the bottom again!'

'Come on, help me first!' Big Claus, 'for otherwise I'll give you a hiding!' and he crawled into the large sack that had been lying over the back of one of the bulls. 'Place a stone in it, for otherwise I'm afraid I won't sink,' Big Claus said.

'It'll be alright!' Little Claus said, but he placed a large stone in the sack, tied it up firmly, and then gave it a push: Splash! there Big Claus lay out in the river and immediately he sank to the bottom.

'I'm afraid he won't find the cattle!' Little Claus said, and set off home with all his possessions.