

Ole-Luk-Oie, the Dream-God

by

Hans Christian Andersen

(1842)

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HERE is nobody in the 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 table or in their little chairs, he comes up the stairs very softly, for he walks in his socks, then he opens the doors without the slightest noise, and throws a small quantity of very fine dust in their 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. But Ole-Luk-Oie does not wish to hurt them, for he is very fond of children, and only wants them to be quiet that he may relate to them pretty stories, and they never are quiet until they are in bed and asleep. As soon as they are asleep, Ole-Luk-Oie seats himself upon the bed. 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 the good children, and then they dream the most beautiful stories the whole night. 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 the little boy named Hjalmar, and what 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 flower-pots 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 school books.



“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 false number in the 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, but we cannot,” said Hjalmar’s letters; “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 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 as 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 only talked 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 commenced singing, 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, just 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 "Buz, buz." They all wanted to follow Hjalmar, and all had some story to tell him. It was a most pleasant sail. Sometimes the forests were thick and dark, sometimes like a beautiful garden, gay with sunshine and flowers; then 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 them 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 also, so that it broke in two pieces. Hjalmar had one piece, and the princess the other, but Hjalmar's was the largest. 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 set to him,—

"How oft my memory turns to thee,
My own Hjalmar, ever dear!
When I could watch thy infant glee,
Or kiss away a pearly tear.
'Twas in my arms thy lisping tongue
First spoke the half-remembered word,
While o'er thy tottering steps I hung,
My fond protection to afford.
Farewell! I pray the Heavenly Power
To keep thee till thy dying hour."

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, and 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 travelling to warmer climates. The storks flew one behind the other, 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 the last of the row, and was soon left very far behind. At length he sunk 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 hen-house, with the fowls, the ducks, and the turkeys, while the poor stork stood quite bewildered amongst 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.”

Then 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, or 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 hen-house; and, opening the door, called to the stork. Then 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 turned quite scarlet in the head.

“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 got here?” said Ole-Luk-Oie, “Do not be frightened, and you shall see a little mouse.” And then he held out his hand to him, in which lay a lovely little creature. “It has come to invite you to a wedding. Two little mice are going to enter into the marriage state tonight. They reside under the floor of your mother’s store-room, and that must be a fine dwelling-place.”

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

“Leave me to manage that,” said Ole-Luk-Oie. “I will soon make you small enough.” And then he touched Hjalmar with his magic wand, whereupon he became less and less, until at last he was not longer than a little finger.

“Now you can borrow the dress of the tin soldier. I think it will just fit you. It looks well to wear a uniform when you go into company.”

“Yes, certainly,” said Hjalmar; 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 Hjalmar. And so in this way he rode to the mouse’s wedding.

First they went under the floor, and then passed 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 phosphorescent 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 can be nicer.”

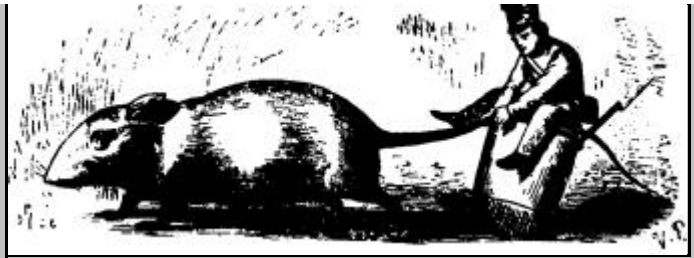
Very soon they arrived at the bridal hall. On the right stood all the little lady-mice, whispering and giggling as if they were making game of each other. To the left were the gentlemen-mice, stroking their whiskers with their fore-paws; and in the centre of the hall could be seen the bridal pair, standing side by side, in a hollow cheese-rind, and kissing each other, while all eyes were upon them; for they had already been betrothed, and were soon to be married. More and more friends kept arriving, till the mice were nearly 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 they produced a pea, on which a mouse belonging to the bridal pair had bitten the first letters of their names. 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 little 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 hot 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 on 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,” he replied, “although it



is quite a different affair to 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 card-board doll's 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.

"What merry sounds are on the wind,
As marriage rites together bind
A quiet and a loving pair,
Though formed of kid, yet smooth and fair!
Hurrah! If they are deaf and blind,
We'll sing, though weather prove unkind."

And now came the present; 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.

Then they consulted the swallow who had travelled 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 like 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 have often 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 wicked 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 travelled. I once went twelve miles in a coop, and it was not pleasant travelling at all.”

“The hen is a sensible woman,” said the doll Bertha. “I don’t care for travelling 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

 “M 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,” 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 the other.”




“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, but I am older than you. I am an ancient heathen. The old Romans and Greeks named me the Dream-god. I have visited the noblest houses, and 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

 “OOD 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 is just as ugly and frightful, so that it would be impossible to describe it." 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 perceive he is not so bad as they represent him in picture books; there he is a skeleton, but now 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 mark-book?"

"Good," they all answered.

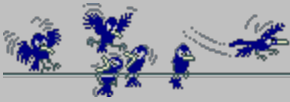
"Yes, but let me see for myself," he replied; and they were obliged to give him the books. Then all those who had "Very good," or "Exceedingly good," came in front of the horse, and heard the beautiful story; while those who had "Middling" or "Tolerably good," in their books, were obliged to sit behind, and listen to the frightful tale. They trembled and 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, "if you 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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