

## **Big Peter And Little Peter**

by Sir George Webbe Dasent  
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Once on a time there were two brothers, both named Peter, and so the elder was called Big Peter, and the younger Little Peter. When his father was dead, Big Peter took him a wife with lots of money, but Little Peter was at home with his mother, and lived on her means till he grew up. So when he was of age he came into his heritage, and then Big Peter said he mustn't stay any longer in the old house, and eat up his mother's substance; 'twere better he should go out into the world and do something for himself.

Yes; Little Peter thought that no bad plan; so he bought himself a fine horse and a load of butter and cheese, and set off to the town; and with the money he got for his goods he bought brandy, and wine, and beer, and as soon as ever he got home again it was one round of holiday-keeping and merry-making; he treated all his old friends and neighbours, and they treated him again; and so he lived in fun and frolic so long as his money lasted. But when his last shilling was spent, and Little Peter hadn't a penny in his purse, he went back home again to his old mother, and brought nothing with him but a calf. When the spring came he turned out the calf and let it graze on Big Peter's meadow. Then Big Peter got cross and killed the calf at one blow; but Little Peter, he flayed the calf, and hung the skin up in the bath-room till it was thoroughly dry; then he rolled it up, stuffed it into a sack, and went about the country trying to sell it; but wherever he came, they only laughed at him, and said they had no need of smoked calfskin. So when he had walked on a long way, he came to a farm, and there he turned in and asked for a night's lodging.

'Nay, nay', said the Goody, 'I can't give you lodging, for my husband is up at the shieling on the hill, and I'm alone in the house. You must just try to get shelter at our next neighbour's; but still if they won't take you in, you may come back, for you must have a house over your head, come what may.'

So as little Peter passed by the parlour window, he saw that there was a priest in there, with whom the Goody was making merry, and she was serving him up ale and brandy, and a great bowl of custard. But

just as the priest had sat down to eat and drink, back came the husband, and as soon as ever the Goody heard him in the passage, she was not slow; she took the bowl of custard, and put it under the kitchen grate, and the ale and brandy into the cellar, and as for the priest, she locked him up in a great chest which stood there. All this Little Peter stood outside and saw, and as soon as the husband was well inside Little Peter went up to the door and asked if he might have a night's lodging.

'Yes, to be sure', said the man, 'we'll take you in!'; and so he begged Little Peter to sit down at the table and eat. Yes, Little Peter sat down, and took his calfskin with him, and laid it down at his feet.

So, when they had sat a while, Little Peter began to mutter to his skin:

'What are you saying now? can't you hold your tongue', said Little Peter.

'Who is it you're talking with?' asked the man.

'Oh!' answered Little Peter, 'it's only a spae-maiden whom I've got in my calfskin.'

'And pray what does she spae?' asked the man again.

'Why, she says that no one can say there isn't a bowl of custard standing under the grate', said Little Peter.

'She may spae as much as she pleases', answered the man, 'but we haven't had custards in this house for a year and a day.'

But Peter begged him only to look, and he did so; and he found the custard-bowl. So they began to make merry with it, but just as they sat and took their ease, Peter muttered something again to the calfskin.

'Hush!' he said, 'can't you hold your jaw?'

'And pray what does the spae-maiden say now?' asked the man.

'Oh! she says no one can say there isn't brandy and ale standing just under the trap-door which goes down into the cellar', answered Peter.

'Well! if she never spaed wrong in her life, she spaes wrong now', said the man. 'Brandy and ale! why, I can't call to mind the day when we had such things in the house!'

'Just look', said Peter; and the man did so, and there, sure enough, he found the drink, and you may fancy how merry and jolly he was.

'What did you give for that spae-maiden?' said the man, 'for I must have her, whatever you ask for her.'

'She was left me by my father', said Peter, 'and so she didn't cost me much. To tell you the truth, I've no great mind to part with her, but, all the same, you may have her, if you'll let me have, instead of her, that old chest that stands in the parlour yonder.'

'The chest's locked and the key lost', screamed the old dame.

'Then I'll take it without the key, that I will', said Peter. And so he and the man soon struck the bargain. Peter got a rope instead of the key, and the man helped him to get the chest up on his back, and then off he stumped with it. So when he had walked a bit he came on to a bridge, and under the bridge ran a river in such a headlong stream; it leapt, and foamed, and made such a roar, that the bridge shook again.

'Ah!' said Peter, 'that brandy-that brandy! Now I can feel I've had a drop too much. What's the good of my dragging this chest about? If I hadn't been drunk and mad, I shouldn't have gone and swopped away my spae-maiden for it. But now this chest shall go out into the river this very minute.'

And with that he began to untie the rope.

'Au! Au! do for God's sake set me free. The priest's life is at stake; he it is whom you have got in the chest', screamed out some one inside.

'This must be the Deil himself', said Peter, 'who wants to make me believe he has turned priest; but whether he makes himself priest or clerk, out he goes into the river.' 'Oh no! oh no!' roared out the priest. 'The parish priest is at stake. He was on a visit to the Goody for her soul's health, but her husband is rough and wild, and so she had to hide me in the chest. Here I have a gold watch and a silver watch in

my fob; you shall have them both, and eight hundred dollars beside, if you will only let me out.'

'Nay, nay', said Peter; 'is it really your reverence after all'; and with that he took up a stone, and knocked the lid of the chest to pieces. Then the priest got out, and off he set home to his parsonage both fast and light, for he no longer had his watches and money to weigh him down.

As for Little Peter, he went home again, and said to Big Peter, 'There was a good sale to-day for calfskins at the market.'

'Why, what did you get for your tattered one, now?' asked Big Peter.

'Quite as much as it was worth. I got eight hundred dollars for it, but bigger and stouter calves-skins fetched twice as much', said Little Peter, and showed his dollars.

"'Twas well you told me this', answered Big Peter, who went and slaughtered all his kine and calves, and set off on the road to town with their skins and hides. So when he got to the market, and the tanners asked what he wanted for his hides, Big Peter said he must have eight hundred dollars for the small ones, and so on, more and more for the big ones. But all the folk only laughed and made game of him, and said he oughtn't to come there; he'd better turn into the madhouse for a better bargain, and so he soon found out how things had gone, and that Little Peter had played him a trick. But when he got home again, he was not very soft-spoken, and he swore and cursed; so help him, if he wouldn't strike Little Peter dead that very night. All this Little Peter stood and listened to; and so, when he had gone to bed with his mother, and the night had worn on a little, he begged her to change sides with him, for he was well-nigh frozen, he said, and might be 'twas warmer next the wall. Yes, she did that, and in a little while came Big Peter with an axe in his hand, and crept up to the bedside, and at one blow chopped off his mother's head.

Next morning, in went Little Peter into Big Peter's sitting-room.

'Heaven better and help you', he said; 'you who have chopped our mother's head off. The Sheriff will not be over-pleased to hear that you pay mother's dower in this way.'

Then Big Peter got so afraid, he begged Little Peter, for God's sake, to say nothing about what he knew. If he would only do that, he should have eight hundred dollars.

Well, Little Peter swept up the money; set his mother's head on her body again; put her on a hand-sledge, and so drew her to market. There he set her up with an apple-basket on each arm, and an apple in each hand. By and by came a skipper walking along; he thought she was an apple-woman, and asked if she had apples to sell, and how many he might have for a penny. But the old woman made no answer. So the skipper asked again. No! she hadn't a word to say for herself.

'How many may I have for a penny', he bawled the third time, but the old dame sat bolt upright, as though she neither saw him, nor heard what he said. Then the skipper flew into such a rage that he gave her one under the ear, and so away rolled her head across the market-place. At that moment, up came Little Peter with a bound; he fell a-weeping and bewailing, and threatened to make the skipper smart for it, for having dealt his old mother her death blow.

'Dear friend, only hold your tongue about what you know', said the skipper, 'and you shall have eight hundred dollars.'

And so they made it up.

When Little Peter got home again, he said to Big Peter:

'Old women fetch a fine price at market to-day. I got eight hundred dollars for mother; just look', and so he showed him the money.

"Twas well I came to know this', said Big Peter.

Now, you must know he had an old stepmother, so he took and killed her out of hand, and strode off to sell her. But when they heard how he went about trying to sell dead bodies, the neighbours were all for handing him over to the Sheriff, and it was as much as he could do to get out of the scrape.

When Big Peter got home again, he was so wroth and mad against Little Peter, he threatened to strike him dead there and then; he needn't hope for mercy, die he must.

'Well! well!' said Little Peter, 'that's the way we must all trudge, and betwixt to-day and to-morrow, there's only a night to come. But if I must set off now, I've only one thing to ask; stuff me into that sack that hangs yonder, and take and toss me into the river.'

Well! Big Peter had nothing to say against that, he stuffed him into the sack and set off. But he hadn't gone far on his way, before it came into his mind that he had forgotten something which he must go back to fetch; meanwhile, he set the sack down by the road side. Just then came a man driving a fine fat flock of sheep.

To Kingdom-come, to Paradise. To Kingdom-come, to Paradise.

roared out Little Peter, who lay inside the sack, and that he kept bawling and bellowing out.

'Mayn't I get leave to go with you', asked the man who drove the sheep.

'Of course you may', said Little Peter. 'If you'll only untie the sack, and creep into it in my stead, you'll soon get there. As for me, I don't mind biding here till next time, that I don't. But you must keep on calling out the words I bawled out, else you'll not go to the right place.'

Then the man untied the sack, and got into it in Little Peter's place: Peter tied the sack up again and the man began to bawl out:

To Kingdom-come, to Paradise. To Kingdom-come, to Paradise.

and to that text he stuck.

When Peter had got him well into the sack, he wasn't slow; off he went with the flock of sheep, and soon put a good bit of the road behind him. Meantime, back came Big Peter, took the sack on his shoulders, and bore it across the country to the river, and all the while he went, the drover sat inside bawling out:

To Kingdom-come, to Paradise. To Kingdom-come, to Paradise.

'Aye, aye', said Big Peter; 'try now to find the way for yourself'; and with that, he tossed him out into the stream.

So when Big Peter had done that, and was going back home, whom should he overtake but his brother, who went along driving the flock of sheep before him. Big Peter could scarce believe his eyes, and asked how Little Peter had got out of the river, and whence the fine flock of sheep came.

'Ah!' said Little Peter, 'that just was a good brotherly turn you did me, when you threw me into the river. I sank right down to the bottom like a stone, and there I just did see flocks of sheep; you'd scarce believe now, that they go about down there by thousands, one flock bigger than the other. And just look here! here are fleeces for you!'

'Well', said Big Peter, 'I'm very glad you told me.'

So off he ran home to his old dame; made her come with him to the river; crept into a sack, and bade her make haste to tie it up, and toss him over the bridge.

'I'm going after a flock of sheep', he said, 'but if I stay too long, and you think I can't get along with the flock by myself, just jump over and help me; do you hear?'

'Well, don't stay too long', said his wife, 'for my heart is set on seeing those sheep.'

There she stood and waited a while, but then she thought, perhaps her husband couldn't keep the flock well together, and so down she jumped after him.

And so Little Peter was rid of them all, and the farm and fields came to him as heir, and horses and cattle too; and, besides, he had money in his pocket to buy milch kine to tether in his byre.