

Wee Eck & Big Erchie

A Scots comedy in one act

Written by Ron Nicol

Spotlight Publications

Wee Eck and Big Erchie

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Based on Hans Christian Andersen's 'Little Claus and Big Claus'.

CHARACTERS

Wee Eck, a poor farmer

Big Erchie, his rich and successful neighbour

Euphemia, the Farmer's wife

The Minister

The Farmer

The Tanner

The Souter

Wee Eck's Granny (a dummy)

The Hostler

Big Erchie's Granny (a dummy)

The Doctor

The Herd

Nominally 4m 1f 5m/f, but with doubling and trebling the play can be performed by a cast of five and a dummy; the Tanner, Souter, Hostler, Doctor and Herd can be male or female.

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As the lights are brought up, Eck enters R and Erchie enters L

Eck Well, hello there, Erchie.

Erchie Erchibald, if you please.

Eck Oh, Erchibald, if you please, is it? Well, it's grand tae see ye, Erchibaldy!

Erchie That's enough o' that, Eck! The name's Erchibald.

Eck Well, you canna help that, Erchie. It's no ma fault. It's your parents ye've tae blame for that. Your father must've had a gey sense of humour, I'm thinking. Still, it's grand tae see ye, though.

Erchie I canna say it's grand tae see *you*, Eck!

Eck How ungracious of you, neighbour. They say manners maketh the man, but I fear you're sadly lacking in that commodity. You keep the better side o' your nature weel hidden, Erchie. What's it you're efter?

Erchie I've been wanting tae speak aboot oor arrangement.

Eck What arrangement's that, then?

Erchie Horses. You'll mind I've the four horses an' you've only the one.

Eck Aye, an' a braw horse she is too.

Erchie She's an auld cuddy! A broken-doon bag o' bones.

Eck Sssh! Dinna let her hear ye. Awfy sensitive is ma auld mare. It'll hurt her feelings.

Erchie Dinna talk tae me aboot feelings. It's *ma* feelings you've hurt.

Eck You havenae any feelings.

Erchie Take care how you insult me, Eck, you might live tae regret it.

Eck I dinna doubt that for a meenit, Erchie. They say you're the maist unforgiving o' men.

Erchie Who says?

Eck Och, I hear it said. Here an' there. There an' here. Jist aboot everywhere, in fact.

Erchie Gossip 'n' lies, gossip 'n' lies! Dinnae tak ony notice o' tittle-tattle.

Eck I nivver pay attention tae idle talk, Erchie, an' neither should you. You'll mebbe hear something aboot yoursel you'll wish you hadnae.

Erchie That's as it may be, Eck, but I've been hearing tales aboot *you*. It concerns oor arrangement.

Eck The horses. That arrangement?

Erchie Aye. You'll mind you gie me a lend o' your auld cuddy six days a week, an' on Sundays I gie you a lend o' those four braw horses o' mine.

Eck You call *that* an arrangement?

Erchie Still complaining, Eck? We've been ower this afore. It's only fair we get equal shares in a' the horses.

Eck Equal you call it? How so?

Erchie Weel noo, is one poor cuddy six days a week no the same as four braw horses one day a week?

Eck It is no! There's seven days i' the week. Six times one is six an' four times one is four, four frae six is twa – so you owe me twa days.

Erchie Noo wait a wee meenit. If I gie ye a lend o' my four horses *twa* days a week that'd come tae eight. One horse five days comes tae five, five frae eight's three, so *you'd* owe *me* three days! Mebbe I should jist gie ye a lend o' three horses on a Sunday.

Eck Haud on there, haud on! Three ones are three, an' six ones are six, three frae six is three, so *you'd* owe *me* three days! See if you'd *six* horses, or you were to gie me one o' yours...

Erchie That's enough o' that! I've four horses cause I'm richer than you! That's why I'm kent as *Big* Erchie, an' you're just *Wee* Eck. Mebbe *you'll* hae four horses when you're as rich as me. But that's no so likely, is it Eck?

Eck Alexander, if you please. Get tae the point noo, Erchie. What d'ye want wi' me?

Erchie Weel noo, I've been hearing tales aboot ye, Eck.

Eck Gossip 'n' lies, gossip 'n' lies! Tak nae tent o' tittle-tattle, Erchie.

Erchie I have tae. It seems ye've been telling folk you own *all* thae horses!

Eck Och, weel noo, I've no exactly said I *own* them...

Erchie Folk've heard you gollering "Gee up, a' my horses!" Is that true?

Eck I might've said something o' the kind - once or twice. (*Pause.*) Mebbe a few times.

Erchie So tell me, when you drive the horses, whit d'ye say?

Eck I say 'Gee up, *horses!*' Or I might've said 'Gee up, *ma* horses!' Or mebbe – only once or twice, mind - 'Gee up, *a'* ma horses!'

Erchie You canna say that! Only one of them's yours!

Eck Weel, it's like this, Erchie. Every Sunday when folk pass by on their way tae the kirk, a' dressed up in their Sunday best, I canna help thinking what a fine figure of a man I must look, driving *five* braw horses, so I canna help cracking my whip an' gollering 'Gee up, a' ma horses'.

Erchie I've said, you cannae call a' thae horses yours.

Eck You dinnae unnerstaund, Erchie. Jist for the one day a' thae horses as good as belong tae me. It feels so grand I canna help saying 'Gee up, a' my horses!'

Erchie Say that once mair an' I'll gee your horse up for you an' no mistake!

Eck I'll no say it again. (*Pause.*) Well, mebbe one last time. 'Gee up, a' ma horses!'

Erchie That's twice! I'm warning ye, say it again an' I'll hit your *one* horse so hard it'll drap doon deid!

Eck (*desperately tries to resist, but can't help it and whispers*) 'Gee up, a' my horses!'

Erchie I warned you!

Eck Ye're making a big mistake, Erchie. Just see if ye're no...

Wee Eck exits, leaving Erchie fuming

Erchie Well, I warned him. I'll learn him tae say a' thae horses are his. 'Gee up a' my horses' indeed! I'll make sure he's nae horse at a', an' serve him right. Big Erchie, that's me, biggest farmer for miles around. He'll aye be Wee Eck, cause he'll never get the better o' me. No till the kye come hame. Noo, I'm aff tae find ma axe – an' his auld cuddy...

He exits L laughing. The light fades briefly and is restored as Eck enters R with a huge bulging sack, grumbling to himself

Eck Nae horse at a' noo! Nothing but the hide. Big Erchie's done fer my puir auld cuddy. Still, I'll be able tae sell the hide in the mercat an' mebbe mak a wee bit siller for masel. I could dae wi' it, right enough. Aye, but this hide's heavy, an' no mistake. It's a fair raik tae the mercat, an' there's a storm coming.

A sudden burst of wind and rain

There it's, an' I'm ower late tae reach the toon afore nightfall.

The lights fade dramatically. With a thump, of course!

Oops! That's night fallen a'ready! Wait jist a wee meenit! What's that ower there? A light. A fermhouse! I'll beg for shelter, an' they'll mebbe let me stay the night.

He exits L as the lighting fades briefly and is restored to reveal the farmhouse interior. There's a table and two chairs, and a large chest US. There should be a window US. Euphemia enters with the Minister. She's carrying a platter of fish and a plate of meat, while he carries a bottle of wine and two glasses. They put these on the table which is covered with a large tablecloth, and sit companionably

Minister You're sure your husband won't be back?

Euphemia No for a few hours yet. Have nae fear.

Minister But he hates me.

Euphemia It's nothing personal, Minister. He hates *all* clergymen. Meenisters, priests, deacons, vicars, even parish clerks, he hates them all. Especially meenisters. He canna bear the sight o' a meenister. It's like a disease, you ken. One glance at a meenister an' he flies intae an awfy rage. Jist a *glimpse* o' a meenister an' he's beside himsel.

Minister Perhaps I should be on my way...

He half rises, but Euphemia grabs his arm and pulls him back into his chair

Euphemia Sit ye doon, Reverend. Why d'you think I invite you to call when he's no here?

Minister I come merely to pay my respects, of course.

Euphemia Of course. (*Putting on her grandest voice.*) Weel noo, I've cooked the maist delicious repast as what I could manage. What'll you hae? Roast beef? Fish?

Minister Fish! My favourite dish.

Euphemia A wee drap o' wine?

Minister Of course, dear lady... (*Daring.*) ...dear - Euphemia.

Euphemia (*simpering*) Oh, you naughty Reverend! You shouldna. Really!

She playfully slaps the Minister's hand, and he simpers in his turn

Minister Your husband shouldn't leave you on your own. Who knows what might happen.

Euphemia Well, you ken what they say.

Minister (*alarmed*) Who says? What do they know? What do they say?

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Euphemia You know - while the cat's away the mice will play.

Minister (*relieved*) Oh. That. Naughty Euphemia.

He playfully slaps Euphemia's hand, but not gently enough

Euphemia Ow!

She jerks her hand away and slaps his hand hard

Minister Ow! Euphemia!

Knocking at the door. Euphemia and the Minister panic

Euphemia It's my husband! Quick! You'll have tae hide!

Minister Where? Where?

Euphemia Under the table!

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Plot Summary

Penniless Eck lives by his wits, making money with a series of crafty ploys involving such characters as an amorous wife, her jealous husband and an ardent minister. When envious Erchie tries to copy Eck's get-rich-quick schemes he fails miserably and determines to dispose of his rival. Based on Hans Christian Andersen's classic tale of "Little Claus and Big Claus" and written in broad Scots, the ever-escalating competition between the two bitter adversaries provides uproarious and hilarious entertainment. With doubling and trebling the ten characters can be played by a cast of five and a dummy.

Running time: 35 minutes