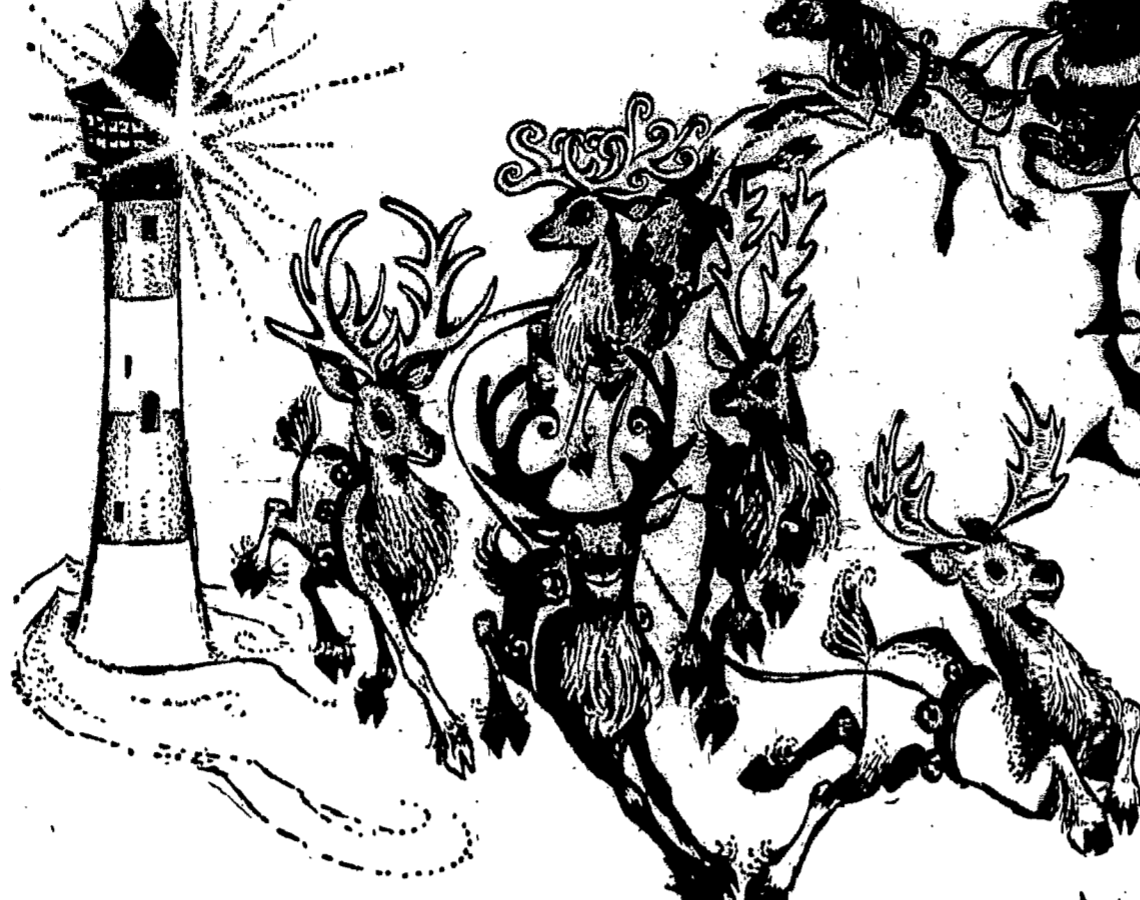


A 'GRANDFATHER TODD' OF OLD CAPE COD CHRISTMAS STORY



LITTLE MISS STITCHES SEWED UP the WITCHES

by JOSEPH E. HANSON

Illustrated by Barbara Remington
Mr. Hanson is the author of the popular "Grandfather Todd of Old Cape Cod," book for the 7 to 10 year olds, and a delightful book to read aloud to small children. (Watch out for your attic after your children read this book.)



It was Christmas Eve on Cape Cod, and all the children were waiting for Santa Claus. The night was dark, without stars, and very cold. A light snow had fallen on the beachplum and the bayberry. The magic old windmill looked like a frosty snowman. And across the dark sea the bright beam of Highland Lighthouse shone like a lovely star.

In the Church of St. Peter the Fisherman, which nestled among the pines in Whale Pond Hollow, a choir of many voices was singing, "Silent Night, Holy Night." There was, indeed, a heavenly peace.

In the quaint Cape Cod cottages the children were ready for bed, after setting out crackers and milk for Santa Claus beside the open fireplaces where the stockings were hanging and waiting.

Grandfather Todd, in the Cranberry Goose cottage, was sitting before a blazing log fire with the children, Kate and Gregg, beside him.

It was past their bedtime, but because he was lonesome and did not want to see them scurry off to bed and leave him alone, Grandfather Todd winked at them and asked, "Would you like me to tell you a Christmas story?"

"Oh, yes, please!" said Kate and Gregg together.

Grandfather Todd gently gathered them into his arms, tickled them with his whiskers, lit his pipe and began the Christmas story.

"It happened a long, long time ago on Cape Cod," he said.

Once upon a time there was a little village which was called Lobster Cove. Many fishermen lived there with their wives and children, their cats and dogs, their chickens and geese, and their fishing nets and lobster pots.

"It was a pretty place, a happy place, except for ONE thing," said Grandfather Todd.

"What?" asked the children in surprise.

"Santa Claus NEVER came there on Christmas Eve," said Grandfather.

No, never! He never left a single toy for any of the children in Lobster Cove. Not a single doll. Not even a train or a drum. Not so much as a bag of candy.

It was the strangest thing, and it made all the children very sad. Tearfully the children asked, "Why does Santa never visit us?" But nobody knew the answer. It certainly was not because they were naughty children. Indeed, no! Everyone knew that they were among the best-behaved children on the Cape. Why, then, did Santa stay away on Christmas Eve?

This went on for many years, and no one would ever have known the reason if it had not been for Little Miss Stitches, the dressmaker, who lived by herself in a cottage on the edge of the town.

She was a dear, dear little dressmaker and everyone loved her. There was one thing about her that people always talked about. Imagine! She always carried a Cricket in her Thimble. The Cricket made himself at home in Little Miss Stitches' Thimble, and chirped all day long while she was sewing.

Dear, dear Little Miss Stitches had the kindest face and the bluest eyes, and the daintiest fingers. If you peeked in at her through the picture window of her house you would see her pinning up a frock on a dress form, or cutting out a pattern on a piece of muslin, or just running up a seam on her sewing machine.

Then, one night, when Little Miss Stitches had been sewing quite late and was very tired, she stepped out on the porch for a breath of fresh air. As she looked upward she saw the arms of the windmill turn round and round. This was very strange, because there was no wind.

"The windmill is spooked," she said to the Cricket-in-the-Thimble. Then, quite suddenly, she saw three WITCHES come riding out of the old windmill on their brooms. They sailed up into the night sky and across the face of the full moon.

"Dear me, I must be dreaming," said Little Miss Stitches as she went back to the house. She returned to her sewing and thought no more about it. After all, the witches had done her no harm.

That was all very well, but about two months later, on Christmas Eve, Little Miss Stitches was again sewing by candle-light. It was almost midnight, and her blue eyes were very tired. So she stepped out into the crisp, frosty air and said, "It is indeed a Holy Night."

Almost immediately she heard a strange noise. It sounded like sleighbells and galloping hooves. She looked up and was astonished to see Santa Claus in his sleigh, drawn by six reindeer.

"How strange!" thought Little Miss Stitches. "Santa never, never comes to Lobster Cove. I must be dreaming."

The sleighbells grew louder and louder. Miss Stitches was curious, so she hid in the shadows of her house and watched. In a few moments Santa and the reindeer stopped overhead, just above the place where Miss Stitches was hiding.

She heard Santa Claus say to the reindeer, "Hi, Prancer! Hi

Vixen! Maybe we will make it this time. They do not seem to be about. Perhaps they will let us through to the children. Hi, Ho, giddy-yap!"

As Little Miss Stitches watched, the reindeer galloped toward the sleeping town and the waiting children.

"Oh, dear!" said Little Miss Stitches craning her head upward to watch. "What does it mean? Who are THEY who are trying to stop Santa?"

Suddenly, she knew, and was horrified. It was very frightening. Out of the old windmill flew the three witches riding on their brooms, their black cloaks streaming in the wind.

They flew right at the reindeer, shrieking and waving their brooms. "Begone!" cried the witches. "Away with you or we'll bewitch you forever. You can't come here! This is our town!"

Round and round the reindeer the witches flew, screaming and shouting, until the poor animals were frightened out of their wits. Miss Stitches heard Santa Claus say, "It's no use! They won't let us through to the children. Whoa! Turn back!"

The Reindeer were very angry. But just then Prancer and Vixen, the leading reindeer, became quite infuriated with the witches. Disobeying Santa they charged the witches with their horns. The witches tried to dodge, but they were not quick enough.

The two reindeer caught the witches' cloaks on their horns and ripped them to shreds. The witches, terribly angry, trashed and beat the reindeer with their brooms, driving them off. The frightened reindeer were forced to gallop away. They had tried, but failed again to reach the children at Lobster Cove.

Sadly, Little Miss Stitches went back into the house. "Now we know," she said to the Cricket. "It was the witches all the time. They were the ones who prevented Santa Claus from coming to the village. Oh, dear what can we do?"

Little Miss Stitches went back to her sewing, with two salty tears in the corners of her blue eyes.

As for the witches, they were terribly angry. Their cloaks were in shreds. Humiliated and bitter, they screamed for vengeance. But they could not fly about with their legs sticking out of their torn cloaks. They had to do something about it.

The biggest witch said, "Come on! We'll make HER sew us new cloaks," pointing down at the candle-lit cottage where Miss Stitches was working. Laughing like demons, the witches flew down, and knocked three times on Little Miss Stitches' door.

"Who's there?" asked Miss Stitches. "Open up!" said the witches. "We're customers."

Miss Stitches opened the door and the three witches flew in. "Oh, dear!" said Miss Stitches, looking at them with the experienced eyes of a dressmaker. "You ARE a mess. Your cloaks are all ripped. And what skinny arms and legs you have!"

"Never mind our arms and legs," said the biggest witch. "We want you to make us new cloaks."

"Never?" cried Miss Stitches in alarm. "You are wicked and mean. I saw what you did tonight. Go away! I hope you catch pneumonia in your ripped cloaks. It will serve you right!"

The medium-sized witch said, "We'll bewitch you if you refuse."

"I don't care," said Little Stitches. "Please go away."

The witches laughed. Then the smallest witch seized the Thimble with the Cricket in it. "We'll eat your pet Cricket if you don't make us new cloaks," said the witch, making believe she was going to take a bite.

"Oh, no!" cried Miss Stitches. "How could you be so cruel?"

"It's up to you," said the witch. "Either you make us new cloaks or we'll eat your Cricket piece by piece."

What could poor Miss Stitches do? She had to agree. She could not let them devour her pet Cricket. She began to sob.

"I'll do it," she said. Let me take your measurements."

She got out her tape measure and scissors. The witches were tall, medium, and short. They stood still while Miss Stitches measured them.

"You will need three and a quarter yards apiece," said Miss Stitches.

"We want the best," said the witches. "The finest silk."

Little Miss Stitches went over to her pattern file and selected a cloak pattern. Then she unrolled a bolt of silk. But first she did magic things with it which the witches did not see. "I'll fool the wicked witches," she said to herself. Then she measured nearly four yards for each of the witches.

"Lay aside your brooms!" said Little Miss Stitches. "Let me pin these up on you. Stand still."

The three witches laid aside their magic brooms, which was a very foolish thing for witches to do. But they had to have their black cloaks.

Miss Stitches wrapped the material tightly around each of the witches. Then she took sharp pins and pinned up the witches. Of course she stuck each of them with a pin, just for good measure.

"Ouch! Ouch! Ouch!" cried the witches.

"Stand still," said Miss Stitches, "or the seams will be crooked."

"You've covered our heads. We can't see!" roared the witches.

"Be still!" said Miss Stitches, sewing as fast as she could.

"And the place for our arms? Where are they?" asked the witches, who were now all sewn up in the fabric.

"I'll cut out the armholes and necklines later," replied Little Miss Stitches, making her needle fly. "Be still!"

"We can't see!" screamed the witches.

"We can't move!" cried the witches.

Little Miss Stitches knotted the last thread and burst out laughing.

"You've tricked us!" cried the witches. "Give us back our brooms!"

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed Miss Stitches. Then she took the three brooms and thrust them into the fireplace. She lit a match to them and they burned fiercely. When the witches smelled the broom-smoke they cried out, "You have destroyed our magic brooms!"

Miss Stitches was happy.

Little Miss Stitches laughed and laughed till the tears ran out of her eyes. The witches lay on the floor kicking and struggling.

When the brooms were all burned up Little Miss Stitches took some of the ashes and sprinkled them over the three witches, saying:

"Ashes to ashes, and dust to dust, wicked witches turn to RUST."

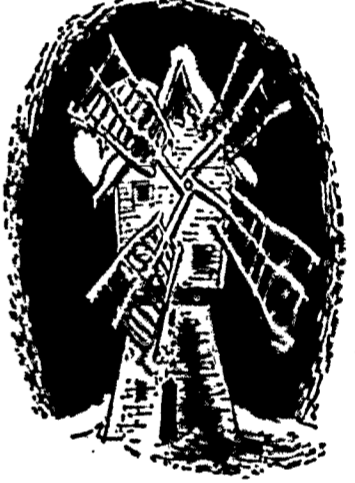
And, magically, just like that, there were no more witches. Nothing remained but three little piles of brown rust on the floor.

The whole village soon heard what had happened. They all came and decorated Miss Stitches' house with holly and mistletoe, Christmas bells, tinsel, and colorful lights. And one dear old lady made her a plum pudding, with a sprig of holly in the center.

All the children in the village sat down and wrote letters to Santa Claus, telling him that the witches were destroyed. And, surprising enough, Santa came down the next night, a little late of course, but who minded that in the midst of so much happiness.

The choir sang "Silent Night, Holy Night," and the people of the village marched in procession to the Church and knelt down beside the shepherds to adore the New Born King.

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