

Jack and the Beanstalk

Traditional English

Once upon a time there lived a poor widow and her son Jack. One day, the widow called her son, and told him with tears in her eyes, “Jack, we are so poor we have nothing left. Our only possession is our little milk cow. Tomorrow, I want you to take the cow to market and sell her, for she is our last hope.”

Jack was sad because he loved that milk cow. But he knew his mother was right. The next morning, he reluctantly led the cow off to market. On the way, he was stopped by a strange-looking peddler.

“Good morning Jack,” said the peddler. “Where are you going with that cow?”

Jack was very surprised that the peddler knew his name, but he was always a polite young man, so he answered, “I am going to market to sell her for she is the only possession we have, and soon we will starve.”

“I would like to buy your cow,” the peddler replied. “I would take good care of her.”

“How much money will you give me?” asked Jack.

“I have no money,” answered the peddler. Jack was just about to turn away.

“Wait, wait!” cried the peddler. “I may have no money, but I have these.” He opened his hand to reveal five beans lying on the palm of his hand.

“Beans!” cried Jack. “I’m not going to exchange my cow for five beans!”

“Aha, but these are not ordinary beans,” said the strange peddler. “These are magic beans. They will bring you luck.”

“Done,” said Jack, thinking that luck was just what he needed. He handed the cow over to the peddler, and ran home to show his mother the beans. But when the widow saw what he had done, she was furious with Jack. The widow didn’t believe in luck. She took the beans from Jack and threw them angrily out of the window. Then she sent Jack to bed without any supper.

The next morning, when Jack awoke, he thought that it must still be night. But when he looked out of the window, he saw that where the beans had fallen the night before, there was now an enormous beanstalk growing, which stretched all the way up into the clouds. Its trunk was so wide that when Jack put his arms around it, his hands could not reach each other.

This beanstalk is so high that if I climb it I should be able to see right across the country, thought Jack. If I can see that strange-looking peddler, I might be able to go after him and persuade him to give me back my cow. So Jack started to climb.

He climbed and he climbed and he climbed, for what seemed like hours, but he could see no sign of the peddler. *Just a bit higher*, he thought to himself. *Just a bit higher*. Suddenly he found he had climbed so high he had climbed right through a cloud and reached the top of the beanstalk. But here there was another surprise for Jack. At the top of the beanstalk there was a whole different world, sitting on the cloud. There was a road that lead away from the beanstalk, and at the end of the road in the distance Jack could see a huge, grand castle. Now Jack was a boy that liked adventure, so he climbed off the beanstalk until he was standing on the road, and then he set off towards the castle. As he got nearer and nearer to the castle it seemed to grow bigger and bigger until Jack was convinced that the castle must belong to a giant. Even so, when he reached the enormous doors, he was brave enough to put out a hand and knock. The door opened almost immediately, and Jack found himself looking up into the face of a giantess, who although she was big and ugly, looked kind.

“Good morning,” Jack said. “I woke early and had a long and thirsty climb. I was wondering if you could give me something to eat.”

“Goodness me!” said the giantess. “Of course I can, come in. But I warn you, if my husband catches you here, he will eat you up. He likes the taste of people.”

Jack was a little nervous at this, but he was also very hungry, so he went with the giantess who took him into the great, golden kitchen and gave him an enormous breakfast, with slices of bread as thick as Jack’s arm. Jack ate and ate, and he had just finished, when he heard thundering footsteps outside the kitchen door, and he heard a huge voice bellowing,

“Fee, fi, fo fum,
I smell the blood of an Englishman.
Be he alive or be he dead,
I’ll grind his bones to make my bread!”

“Mercy me, it’s my husband!” said the giantess, and she picked Jack up and hid him in a big golden jug that was sitting on the table. Jack peered over the rim of the jug. He saw the giant, who was as tall as a tree and very ugly, come into the kitchen carrying under his arm two enormous bags of gold coins. He sat down heavily in a golden chair at the table and began to eat the breakfast that his wife put there for him on a great golden plate. He ate and he ate and he ate, slurping and slobbering, and then he suddenly lifted his head and sniffed with his two great nostrils. Then he shouted:

*“Fee, fi, fo fum,
I smell the blood of an Englishman.
Be he alive or be he dead,
I’ll grind his bones to make my bread!”*

“Settle down,” said his wife. “There are no Englishmen here. All you can smell is the cow I have roasting in the oven.”

This seemed to satisfy the giant, who sat down and started to pick his teeth. Jack waited, as he could see the giant’s eyes beginning to close. Soon, the giant’s head nodded and he was asleep. Jack waited a bit more until the giantess had gone out of the kitchen, and then quick as a flash he jumped out of the jug, grabbed the two bags of gold from under the sleeping giant’s arm, and ran as fast as he could out of the castle. He ran and ran down the road until he reached the beanstalk, and he swung his legs over the edge of the ground. As he did so, he heard a bellow of rage that was the giant waking up and discovering his gold had gone. Jack quickly climbed down the beanstalk and showed the gold to his mother. She was amazed and happy. Now they were rich!

Soon, with the money Jack stole from the giant, the widow repaired the house, bought new cows for milk, hens for eggs, and seeds for the garden. She bought Jack and herself new clothes and they always had good food to eat. Jack was very happy. But he was still curious about the land where the giants lived, and so, a few months later, he climbed up the beanstalk again and set off towards the castle.

This time, the giantess was not very pleased to see him. “Oh, it’s you,” she said. “You caused me a lot of trouble last time. What did you have to go and steal his gold for? I know it’s not like he’s not got plenty, but still...” she trailed off. Jack gave her his nicest smile.

“Oh all right,” she said. “You can come in and have a meal.” She led Jack into the kitchen and just as before, he sat and ate the good food. But moments later he heard those thundering footsteps in the hall and the giant bellowing:

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I’ll grind his bones to make my bread!”*

“Oh hush,” called the giantess. “You smell nothing, only the wild herbs I am chopping at the table,” and she picked up Jack and popped him into the oven which luckily, was not working.

The giant burst through the door and Jack saw him throw himself into the same chair and put his great, golden boots up onto the table. He was carrying in his hand a pretty white goose, and soon he put the goose onto the table too and he said to the goose, “Lay!” The goose gave a squawk and promptly laid an egg of solid gold. “Lay!” said the giant again, and the goose produced a second gold egg. “Lay!” said the giant again, and the poor goose laid a third egg, still of solid gold. In the oven, Jack’s eyes grew round. What a prize that was, a goose who could lay a golden egg! Again, Jack waited until the giant had nodded asleep and the giantess had gone into the pantry, and then he wriggled out of the oven, scooped up the goose under his arm, and raced back down the beanstalk to show his mother. Again, she was delighted with Jack’s special find. She and Jack settled down to live in even more luxury.

However, about a month later, Jack grew restless again and once more climbed the beanstalk. This time the giantess would not let him in.

“You get out of here, you little thief!” she yelled at Jack.

Jack skipped out of her way and she slammed the door. But Jack was undeterred. This time he crept round the castle walls until he found the kitchen window. Climbing up, Jack peered through. This time, the giant was already sitting at the kitchen table, eating a great carcass of wild boar. Beside him on the table was a golden harp

that was playing by itself. It was playing the most wonderful music and singing so sweetly that Jack was entranced. He stood on his toes to hear it better. At that moment the giant suddenly stopped eating and roared,

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“I did see a little boy scampering around earlier,” admitted his wife. “But I sent him away.”

“You should have brought him in and cooked him for my supper,” grumbled the giant.

Jack stayed crouched on the windowsill until this time both the giant and the giantess fell asleep, lulled by the music the harp was playing. Then Jack lifted the latch on the window and squeezed through. He crept over to where the harp now stood silent on the table, and then snatched it and put it under his arm. Immediately the harp began to sound.

“Master, master!” it cried. “Someone is trying to steal me!”

With a great bellow, the giant woke just to see Jack jumping out of the window with the harp safe under his arm. The giant roared again and grabbed a huge axe. He ran after Jack, making bit swipes with his axe as if he was trying to swipe off Jack’s head. But Jack was fast. He ran down the road to the beanstalk and threw himself down onto the stalk. But the giant followed him! As fast as he could, Jack climbed down the beanstalk with the giant in pursuit. Jack reached the ground first, and he called, “Mother! Mother! Throw me an axe!” Jack’s mother came running and was horrified to see the giant’s massive legs appearing out of the cloud and the giant making his way down the beanstalk. She threw Jack the axe, just in time. Jack began to chop and chop at the beanstalk, and before the giant reached them he chopped it right through. The beanstalk came crashing down to the ground and the giant with it. He hit his head on a rock and was killed instantly. Jack showed his mother the golden harp that sang such beautiful music and she was delighted. She and Jack burned the base of the beanstalk and then they lived happily together. Jack never again returned to the land of the giants.

The End