

Jack and the Beanstalk

Once upon a time there was a poor widow who lived in a little cottage with her only son, Jack. Jack was a silly, thoughtless boy, but very kind-hearted.

One morning the old woman told her son to go to the market and sell their cow. So Jack started out, but on the way he met a butcher with some beautiful beans in his hand. The butcher told the boy they were of great value and persuaded the silly lad to swap the cow for the beans.

Well, of course, when Jack came home with nothing but a handful of beans to show for their cow, his mother shed many a tear. At that Jack realized his foolishness and felt terrible. "At least," he thought, "I may as well sow the beans." So he planted them in the garden and went sadly to bed.

The next day he got up at daybreak and went into the garden. To his amazement he found that the beans had grown up in the night, and their stalks climbed up and up like a ladder disappearing into the clouds!

"It would be easy to climb it," Jack thought.

So he began to climb, and went up and up the stalk until he had left everything behind—cottage, village, even the church tower. At last he reached the top and found himself in a beautiful country, finely wooded, with lush meadows covered with sheep. A crystal stream ran through the pastures, and nearby stood a fine, strong castle. While he was standing looking at it, an ancient lady came walking along.

"If you please, ma'am," said Jack, "is this your house?"

"No," said the old lady. "That is the castle of a wicked giant who keeps wonderful treasures inside. It is said that someday a young lad will come from the valley below to challenge the giant

and win the treasures for his poor mother. Perhaps you are the one. But the task is very difficult and full of peril. Have you the courage to undertake it?"

"I fear nothing when I am doing right," said Jack.

"Then," said the old lady, "you are one of those who slay giants. If you can get into the castle, you may find a hen that lays golden eggs, and a harp that talks, as well as two bags full of gold. If you can get them, they will be a great comfort to your poor mother."

So Jack marched forward and knocked at the castle gate. The door was opened in a minute or two by a frightful giantess, with one great eye in the middle of her forehead. At once she grabbed Jack and dragged him inside.

"Ho, ho!" she laughed terribly. "I've been needing somebody to clean the knives, and shine the boots, and make the fires. You will be my servant. But I must hide you whenever the giant is home, for he has eaten up all my other servants, and you would be a dainty morsel too, my lad."

Well, Jack was very much frightened, as you can imagine, but he struggled to be brave and make the best of things.

"I am quite ready to serve you," he said, "only I beg you to hide me from your husband, for I should not like to be eaten at all."

"That's a good boy," said the giantess. "It is lucky you did not scream when you saw me, or he would have heard you and eaten you for supper, as he has done with so many others. Come here, child. Go into my closet. He never looks in there, and you will be safe."

She opened a huge door that stood in the great hall, and shut him in. But the keyhole was so large that it admitted plenty of air, and he could see everything that took place through it. By and by he heard a heavy tramp on the stairs, like the lumbering along of a great cannon, and then a voice like thunder cried out:

Fe, 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.

"Wife," cried the giant, "there is a man in the castle. Let me have him for supper."

"You have grown old and stupid," said the lady in her loud tones. "You smell only the dinner I have cooked for you. There, sit down and have a good supper."

So the giant sat down at his table. Jack watched him through the keyhole and was amazed to see him swallow a whole roast pig in one bite. Then he drank a whole barrel of ale in one gulp.

When the supper was ended he asked his wife to bring him his hen that laid the golden eggs. The giantess went away, and soon returned with a little brown hen, which she placed on the table before her husband.

“Lay!” said the giant, and instantly the hen laid a golden egg.

“Lay!” said the giant, and she laid another.

“Lay!” he repeated, and again a golden egg appeared on the table.

After a while he put the hen down on the floor, and called on his wife to bring him his moneybags. The giantess went and soon returned with two large bags over her shoulders, which she set down by her husband. The giant took out heaps and heaps of golden pieces, and counted them, and put them in piles, till he was tired of the amusement. Then he swept them all back into their bags.

“I think I will take a nap,” he said to his wife. “But first, bring me my harp, for I will have a little music.”

So the giantess went away and returned with a beautiful harp. The framework sparkled with diamonds and rubies, and the strings were all of gold.

“Play!” said the giant, and the harp played a very soft, sad song.

“Play something merrier!” said the giant, and the harp played a merry tune.

“Now play me a lullaby,” roared the giant. The harp played a sweet lullaby, and its master fell asleep.

Jack stole softly out of the closet and peeped into the huge kitchen to make sure the giantess was not looking. Then he crept up to the giant’s chair and quietly gathered the bags of money, and the wonderful hen, and finally the magic harp. Then he ran as fast as he could—but just as he got to the door, the harp called out, “Master! Master!”

And the giant woke up!

With a tremendous roar he sprang from his seat, and in two strides he reached the door.

Jack was very nimble and fled like lightning. The giant came on

fast and stretched out his great hand to catch the boy. But Jack darted away, and ran for the top of the beanstalk, and climbed down through the clouds as fast as his feet would move.

He gave a great sigh of relief when he reached his own garden, only to look up and behold the giant climbing down after him!

“Mother! Mother!” cried Jack. “Make haste and bring me the ax!”



His mother ran to him with a hatchet, and Jack began to chop away. But the giant was getting closer and closer.

“Mother, stand out of the way!” Jack yelled. With one last blow he cut the tree stem through and jumped back from the spot.

Down came the giant with a terrible crash, and broke his neck, and stretched dead from one end of the garden to the other.

Well, of course, Jack’s poor old mother was scared out of her wits, for it wasn’t every day that a giant came crashing down in her garden. But Jack told her all about his adventure, and showed her the bags of money, and how the wonderful hen could lay golden eggs, and how the magic harp could play and sing.

Jack’s mother was glad to have such treasures. But she was even more grateful to have her son back safe and sound, and proud of him for his courage.

“Yesterday I worried that you were only a foolish and thoughtless boy,” she said. “But today you’ve shown how brave you can be. Now I know you are destined to climb the ladder of fortune, just as you climbed the beanstalk.”

So together they buried the wicked giant and then went inside to count their blessings.