

# Jack and the Beanstalk

**As recorded by Edwin Sidney Hartland**

There lived a poor widow, whose cottage stood in a country village a long distance from London, for many years.

The widow had only a child named Jack, whom she gratified in everything. The consequence of her partiality was that Jack paid little attention to anything she said, and he was heedless and extravagant. His follies were not owing to bad disposition but to his mother never having chided him. As she was not wealthy, and he would not work, she was obliged to support herself and him by selling everything she had. At last nothing remained, only a cow.

The widow, with tears in her eyes, could not help reproaching Jack. "Oh! You wicked boy," said she. "By your prodigal course of life you have now brought us both to fall! Heedless, heedless boy! I have not money enough to buy a bit of bread for another day. Nothing remains but my poor cow, and that must be sold, or we must starve!"

Jack was in a degree of tenderness for a few minutes, but soon over. And then becoming very hungry for want of food, he teased his poor mother to let him sell the cow, to which at last she reluctantly consented.

As he proceeded on his journey he met a butcher, who inquired why he was driving the cow from home. Jack replied he was going to sell it. The butcher had some wonderful beans of different colors in his bag which attracted Jack's notice. This the butcher saw, who, knowing Jack's easy temper, resolved to take advantage of it, and offered all the beans for the cow. The foolish boy thought it a great offer. The bargain was momentarily struck, and the cow exchanged for a few paltry beans. When Jack hastened home with the beans and told his mother, and showed them to her, she kicked the beans away in a great passion. They flew in all directions, and were extended as far as the garden.

Early in the morning Jack arose from his bed, and seeing something strange from the window, he hastened downstairs into the garden, where he soon found that some of the beans had grown in root and sprung up wonderfully. The stalks grew in an immense thickness and had so entwined that they formed a ladder like a chain in view.

Looking upwards, he could not descry the top. It seemed to be lost in the clouds. He tried it, discovered it firm and not to be shaken. A new idea immediately struck him. He would climb the beanstalk and see to whence it would lead. Full of this plan, which made him forget even his hunger, Jack hastened to communicate his intention to his mother.

He instantly set out, and after climbing for some hours reached the top of the beanstalk, fatigued and almost exhausted. Looking round, he was surprised to find himself in a strange country. It looked to be quite a barren desert. Not a tree, shrub, house, or living creature was to be seen.

Jack sat himself pensively upon a block of stone and thought of his mother. His hunger attacked him, and now he appeared sorrowful for his disobedience in climbing the beanstalk against her will, and concluded that he must now die for want of food.

However, he walked on, hoping to see a house where he might beg something to eat. Suddenly he observed a beautiful young female at some distance. She was dressed in an elegant manner, and had a small white wand in her hand, on the top of which was a peacock of pure gold.

She approached and said, "I will reveal to you a story your mother dare not. But before I begin, I require a solemn promise on your part to do what I command. I am a fairy, and unless you perform exactly what I direct you to do, you will deprive me of the power to assist you, and there is little doubt but that you will die in the attempt."

Jack was rather frightened at this caution, but promised to follow her directions.

Your father was a rich man, with a disposition greatly benevolent. It was his practice never to refuse relief to the deserving in his neighborhood, but, on the contrary, to seek out the helpless and distressed.

Not many miles from your father's house lived a huge giant who was the dread of the country around for cruelty and oppression. This creature was moreover of a very envious disposition, and disliked to hear others talked of for their goodness and humanity, and he vowed to do him a mischief, so that he might no longer hear his good actions made the subject of everyone's conversation.

Your father was too good a man to fear evil from others. Consequently it was not long before the cruel giant found an opportunity to put his wicked threats into practice, for hearing that your parents were passing a few days with a friend at some distance from home, he caused your father to be waylaid and murdered, and your mother to be seized on their way homeward.

At the time this happened you were but a few months old. Your poor mother, almost dead with affright and horror, was borne away by the cruel giant's emissaries to a dungeon under his house, in which she and her poor babe were both long confined as prisoners. Distracted at the absence of your parents, the servants went in search of them, but no tidings of either could be obtained. Meantime he caused a will to be found making over all your father's property to him as your guardian, and as such he took open possession.

After your mother had been some months in prison the giant offered to restore her to liberty, on condition that she would solemnly swear that she would never divulge the story of her wrongs to anyone. To put it out of her power to do him any harm, should she break her oath, the giant had her put on shipboard and taken to a distant country, where he had her left with no more money for her support than what she obtained from the sale of a few jewels she had secreted in her dress.

I was appointed your father's guardian at his birth, but fairies have laws to which they are subject as well as mortals. A short time before the giant assassinated your father I transgressed. My punishment was a suspension of my power for a limited time, an unfortunate circumstance, as it entirely prevented my assisting your father, even when I most wished to do so.

The day on which you met the butcher, as you went to sell your mother's cow, my power was restored. It was I who secretly prompted you to take the beans in exchange for the cow. By my power the beanstalk grew to so great a height and formed a ladder. The giant lives in this country. You are the person appointed to punish him for all his wickedness. You will have dangers and difficulties to encounter, but you must persevere in avenging the death of your father, or you will not prosper in any of your undertakings.

As to the giant's possessions, everything he has is yours, though you are deprived of it. You may take, therefore, what part of it you can. You must, however, be careful, for such is his love for gold that the first loss he discovers will make him outrageous and very watchful for the future. But you must still pursue him, for it is only by stratagem that you can ever hope to overcome him and become possessed of your rightful property, and the means of retributive justice overtaking him for his barbarous murder.

One thing I desire is, do not let your mother know you are acquainted with your father's history till you see me again. Go along the direct road. You will soon see the house where your cruel enemy lives. While you do as I order you I will protect and guard you. But remember, if you disobey my commands, a dreadful punishment awaits you."

As soon as she had concluded she disappeared, leaving Jack to follow his journey. He walked on till after sunset, when to his great joy he espied a large mansion. This pleasant sight revived his drooping spirits. He redoubled his speed and reached it shortly. A well-looking woman stood at the door. He accosted her, begging she would give him a morsel of bread and a night's lodging. She expressed the greatest surprise at seeing him and said it was quite uncommon to see any strange creature near their house, for it was mostly known that her husband was a very cruel and powerful giant, and one that would eat human flesh if he could possibly get it.

This account terrified Jack greatly, but still, not forgetting the fairy's protection, he hoped to elude the giant, and therefore he entreated the woman to take him in for one night only and hide him where she thought proper. The good woman at last suffered herself to be persuaded, for her disposition was remarkably compassionate, and at last led him into the house.

First they passed an elegant hall, finely furnished. They then proceeded through several spacious rooms, all in the same style of grandeur, but they looked to be quite forsaken and desolate. A long gallery came next. It was very dark, just large enough to show that instead of a wall on each side there was a grating of iron, which parted off a dismal dungeon, for whence issued the groans of several poor victims whom the cruel giant reserved in confinement for his voracious appetite. Poor Jack was in a dreadful fright at witnessing such a horrible scene, which caused him to fear that he would never see his mother, but be captured lastly for the giant's meat. But still he recollected the fairy, and a gleam of hope forced itself into his heart.

The good woman then took Jack to a spacious kitchen, where a great fire was kept. She bade him sit down and gave him plenty to eat and drink. In the meantime he had done his meal and enjoyed himself, but was disturbed by a hard knocking at the gate, so loud as to cause the house to shake. Jack was concealed in the oven, and the giant's wife ran to let in her husband.

Jack heard him accost her in a voice like thunder, saying, "Wife! Wife! I smell fresh meat!"

"Oh! My dear," replied she, "it is nothing but the people in the dungeon."

The giant seemed to believe her, and at last seated himself by the fireside, whilst the wife prepared supper.

By degrees Jack endeavored to look at the monster through a small crevice. He was much surprised to see what an amazing quantity he devoured, and supposed he would never have done eating and drinking.

After his supper was ended a very curious hen was brought and placed on the table before him. Jack's curiosity was so great to see what would happen. He observed that it stood quiet before him, and every time the giant said, "Lay!" the hen laid an egg of solid gold. The giant amused himself a long time with his hen.

Meanwhile his wife went to bed. At length he fell asleep and snored like the roaring of a cannon. Jack, finding him still asleep at daybreak, crept softly from his hiding place, seized the hen, and ran off with her as fast as his legs could possibly allow him.

Jack easily retraced his way to the beanstalk and descended it better quicker than he expected. His mother was overjoyed to see him.

"Now, mother," said Jack, "I have brought you home that which will make you rich."

The hen produced as many golden eggs as they desired. They sold them and soon became possessed of as much riches as they wanted.

For a few months Jack and his mother lived very happy, but he longed to pay the giant another visit. Early in the morning he again climbed the beanstalk and reached the giant's mansion late in the evening.

The woman was at the door as before. Jack told her a pitiful tale and prayed for a night's shelter. She told him that she had admitted a poor hungry boy once before, and the little ingrate had stolen one of the giant's treasures, and ever since that she had been cruelly used. She, however, led him to the kitchen, gave him supper, and put him in a lumber closet.

Soon after, the giant came in, took his supper, and ordered his wife to bring down his bags of gold and silver. Jack peeped out of his hiding place and observed the giant counting over his treasures, and after which he carefully put them in bags again, fell asleep, and snored as before.

Jack crept quietly from his hiding place and approached the giant, when a little dog under the chair barked furiously. Contrary to his expectation, the giant slept on soundly, and the dog ceased. Jack seized the bags, reached the door in safety, and soon arrived at the bottom of the beanstalk.

When he reached his mother's cottage he found it quite deserted. Greatly surprised, he ran into the village, and an old woman directed him to a house, where he found his mother apparently

dying. On being informed of our hero's safe return, his mother revived and soon recovered. Jack then presented two bags of gold and silver to her.

Her mother discovered that something preyed upon his mind heavily and endeavored to discover the cause, but Jack knew too well what the consequence would be should he discover the cause of his melancholy to her. He did his utmost therefore to conquer the great desire which now forced itself upon him in spite of himself for another journey up the beanstalk.

On the longest day Jack arose as soon as it was light, ascended the beanstalk and reached the top with some little trouble. He found the road, journey, etc., the same as on the former occasions. He arrived at the giant's house in the evening and found his wife standing as usual at the door.

Jack now appeared a different character, and had disguised himself so completely that she did not appear to have any recollection of him. However, when he begged admittance, he found it very difficult to persuade her. At last he prevailed, was allowed to go in, and was concealed in the copper.

When the giant returned, he said, as usual, "Wife! Wife! I smell fresh meat!"

But Jack felt quite composed, as he had said so before, and had soon been satisfied. However, the giant started up suddenly, and notwithstanding all his wife could say, he searched all round the room. Whilst this was going forward, Jack was much terrified, and ready to die with fear, wishing himself at home a thousand times. But when the giant approached the copper and put his hand upon the lid, Jack thought his death was certain. Fortunately the giant ended his search there without moving the lid, and seated himself quietly by the fireside.

When the giant's supper was over he commanded his wife to fetch down his harp. Jack peeped under the copper lid, and soon saw the most beautiful one that could be imagined. It was put by the giant on the table, who said, "Play," and it instantly played of its own accord. The music was uncommonly fine. Jack was delighted and felt more anxious to get the harp into his possession than either of the former treasures.

The giant's soul was not attuned to harmony, and the music soon lulled him into a sound sleep. Now, therefore, was the time to carry off the harp, as the giant appeared to be in a more profound sleep than usual. Jack soon made up his mind, got out of the copper, and seized the harp, which, however, being enchanted by a fairy, called out loudly, "Master, master!"

The giant awoke, stood up, and tried to pursue Jack, but he had drunk so much that he could not stand. Jack ran as quick as he could. In a little time the giant recovered sufficiently to walk slowly, or rather to reel after him. Had he been sober, he must have overtaken Jack instantly. But as he then was, Jack contrived to be first at the top of the beanstalk. The giant called to him all the way along the road in a voice like thunder, and was sometimes very near to him.

The moment Jack down the beanstalk he called out for a hatchet. One was brought him directly. Just at that instant the giant began to descend, but Jack with his hatchet cut the beanstalk close off at the root, and the giant fell headlong into the garden. The fall instantly killed him.

Jack heartily begged his mother's pardon for all the sorrow and affliction he had caused her, promising most faithfully to be dutiful and obedient to her in future. He proved as good as his word and became a pattern of affectionate behavior and attention to his parent.