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Opening extract from

Bigger and Better

Written by

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Barrington Stoke

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BIGGER AND BETTER

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Kaye Umansky

With illustrations by
Ben Whitehouse

Barrington Stoke

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For Hannah and Martha

Chapter 1
My First Tiddly

I've always been big. Well, I'm a Giantess. I'm supposed to be.

Everything around me is big. I live in a big castle. I'm married to a big husband with a big name to match – Bigsy. We eat big meals at our big kitchen table. We have a big cat. All our friends and family are big.

With all this bigness around me, you may be surprised to hear that I'm fond of small things. Sea shells. Kittens. Butterflies. I

collect thimbles and I keep them on the kitchen windowsill. Small things are my weakness.

That's why I let Jack get away with what he did.

I had never seen a Tiddly in the flesh until the day he turned up on the doorstep. Tiddlies are what we Giants call the little people who live in the land below the clouds.

Tiddly Land. It's a foreign country. I've never been there. Now and then, one of us Giants climbs down via a mountain to throw his weight around a bit and see what's up for grabs. Bigsy's done it a few times. So has Hujo, my brother. But not me. I don't have a head for heights. Or the right clothes. You can't climb down mountains in a cardigan and slippers.

Anyway. I'm rambling. Back to Jack.

It was the cat who spotted him. The milkman had been and I went out to bring in the milk. There was Buster, long and low to the ground with his tail twitching. His eyes were fixed on something behind a carton of cream.

I shooed him away, moved the carton to one side – and there he was. My first ever Tiddly!

"Whoah!" he said, and he flung up a tiny arm to protect himself. "Don't eat me, yeah?"

Eat him? Why would I eat him? He was so ... *dinky*! I loved his squeaky little voice and his cute little legs. I loved his baggy shorts. I loved his little cap, which, for some reason, he wore backwards. I loved everything about him.

"I wouldn't dream of it," I said.

He flinched and clapped his hands over his tiny ears. My voice must have sounded like a foghorn to him.


Cream
of
Cream

“What are you doing here, little fellow?” I said. In a whisper.

“Climbed up the beanstalk, didn’t I?” he squeaked.

“Did you?” I said. “What beanstalk?”

“That big one.” He waved an arm. “Back down the road. Grew overnight, didn’t it?”

Did it? This was news to me. Mind you, I don’t get out much.

“Why go climbing up beanstalks?” I asked. “Don’t you like it down in Tiddly Land?”

“Not right now,” he said. “My mum’s mad at me, ain’t she?”

“Is she?”

“Yeah. Just told you that, didn’t I?”

Why did he end everything he said with a question?

Mind you, I had plenty of questions of my own.

"Why is she mad?" I asked. "Your mum?"

I couldn't believe anyone could be mad with that sweet little face. Not for long, anyway.

He shrugged. "Sold the cow for magic beans, didn't I?"

"Did you?"

"Yeah," he said. "Then this, like, *massive* beanstalk grew? So I climbed it for a laugh."

"Well, good for you," I said. "Was it fun?"

He looked at me with pity on his face.

"I don't *think* so," he said. "It took, like, for *ever*."

"I bet," I said. "That's a big old climb, for someone your size. What's your name, dearie?"

"Jack, innit?"

'Jack Innit,' I thought. 'Hmm. Unusual.'

"Well, I'm Violet," I said. "Vi for short. Will you come in and have a bite to eat?"

"Sure you won't eat me?" he asked.

"Quite sure!" I said. "The very idea! I'm a vegetarian."

"OK then, cool."

"All right if I pick you up?" I asked.

"OK. Just don't squash me, yeah?"

So I picked Jack up and carried him down the hall and into the kitchen. Buster wound round and round my feet, trying to trip me up. It was clear he had the little fellow marked

down as a kitty snack. I shooed him out and shut the door.

With great care, I put Jack down on the table. He hopped up onto the pepper pot, which was just the right size for a seat for him. He took off his little cap and fanned himself. He had lovely hair. Curly.

Now, I can't say my motives were 100% good at this point. The thought had occurred to me that Jack would make a wonderful addition to my collection of little things. I wouldn't trust the cat around him, mind, or Bigsy. I'd have to keep him secret, in a box. Or in my old doll's house, up in the loft. I could take him out every so often, for a private chat. Let him stretch his little legs.

"So," I said. "What's it like, down below? In Tiddly Land?"

"All right," he said.

"Go on," I prompted. "Tell me all about it."

He gave a shrug. "Just a place, innit?"

On second thoughts, the private chats might get boring if that was all he had to say.

"What do you fancy to eat?" I asked. All growing boys are interested in food.

"I dunno," he said. "What you got?"

"I can do you bread and cheese. Or a bacon sandwich." Bigsy loves bacon. I've always got plenty in.

"Bacon, then," he said. "With ketchup."

I put a rasher into the frying pan and cut a slice of bread. I cut off the crusts, and cut it into 4, then 8, then 16. I was having fun, making tiny sandwiches. It reminded me of the tea parties I had for my toys when I was small. Well, smaller.

My little visitor was staring round. “So,” he said. “Lived here long?”

“Long enough,” I said. “Ever since I married Bigsy.”

“Who?”

“Bigsy, my husband.”

“What, him?” Jack pointed to the painting on the wall.

In the painting, Bigsy has on his best loin cloth, and he’s waving his club in the air and roaring. It was painted by the famous Giant artist Vincent Van Gross, as a prize for Bigsy when he won the Strongest Giant contest by hauling a buffalo over a mountain using only his teeth. He was all muscle then. He’s put on a bit of weight since.



He's very hairy, is Bigsy. Van Gross has done a good job of showing all the bits of food and chicken bones caught up in his chest hair.

"That's him," I said, with a little sigh.

"No way is *that* vegetarian," said Jack. "Where's he at now?"

"Down at the Three Ogres for a lunchtime pint," I said. "Don't worry, he'll be ages."

Famous last words. No sooner were they out of my mouth than the floor began to shake and a sound I knew well came to my ears.

It was Bigsy, back from the pub, bellowing his favourite song. Well, the only one he knows all the words to.

"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!"

"Oh, *man*!" Jack said, and a look of pure horror came on his sweet little face.

Well, Bigsy's singing is terrible.

"Don't panic," I said. "He's back early. I'll put you in the oven. You can hide there until it's safe to leave."

And I picked him up and popped him in. Only just in time.