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Jack and the Beanstalk: A Book of Nursery Stories

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I

Jack and the Beanstalk





Jack and the Beanstalk

Once upon a time there was a poor widow who lived in a cottage in the country, a long distance from London. She had an only child named Jack, and owned one cow whom she called Milky-white. And all that they had to live on was the milk that the cow gave them, and which Jack carried to the market every day to sell.

One morning Milky-white gave no milk. The poor woman was in despair.

'What shall we do?' she cried. 'I have not money enough to buy a bit of bread for another day: nothing remains but my poor cow, and she must now be sold or we shall starve.'

'Cheer up, Mother,' said Jack. 'I'll go and get work somewhere.'

'You've tried that before, Jack,' said his mother, 'and nobody would keep you.'

For although Jack was a good lad, his wits went wool-gathering, and he often forgot what he was supposed to be doing.

So his poor mother sadly sent him to market to sell Milky-white, and he took the cow's halter in his hand and set off.

'Be sure to get a good price!' his mother called after him.

Jack had not gone far along the road when he met a queer-looking little old man, who said to him:



'Well, Jack, where are you going?'

'I am going to market to sell Milky-white,' replied Jack, 'and then we'll have some money to buy food.'

'You look just the sort of boy to make a good bargain,' said the little man. 'Tell me, do you know how many beans make five?'

'Two in each hand and one in my mouth,' answered Jack, as sharp as a needle.

'That's right!' chuckled the old man, 'and here they are,' and he pulled five strange-looking beans out of his pocket. 'As you are so good at sums, I'll do a deal with you. You give me Milky-white, and you can have my beans.'

'What!' cried Jack. 'My lovely cow for your common beans!'

'But they are not common beans,' said the little old man, looking queerer than ever. 'They are magic beans. If you plant them tonight, in the morning they will have grown right up to the sky.'

Jack could hardly believe his ears.

'Did you say right up to the *sky*?' he asked.

'Right up to the very sky,' repeated the old man. 'And as fair play's a jewel, if they don't, you can have your cow back again.'

'All right,' said Jack, and the next moment he found himself alone

on the road with no Milky-white and no halter, and the five beans in his hand.

His mother was watching for him when he reached home.

'You've been very quick,' she said. 'So you sold Milky-white? How much have you brought back?'

'You'll never guess, Mother,' said Jack.

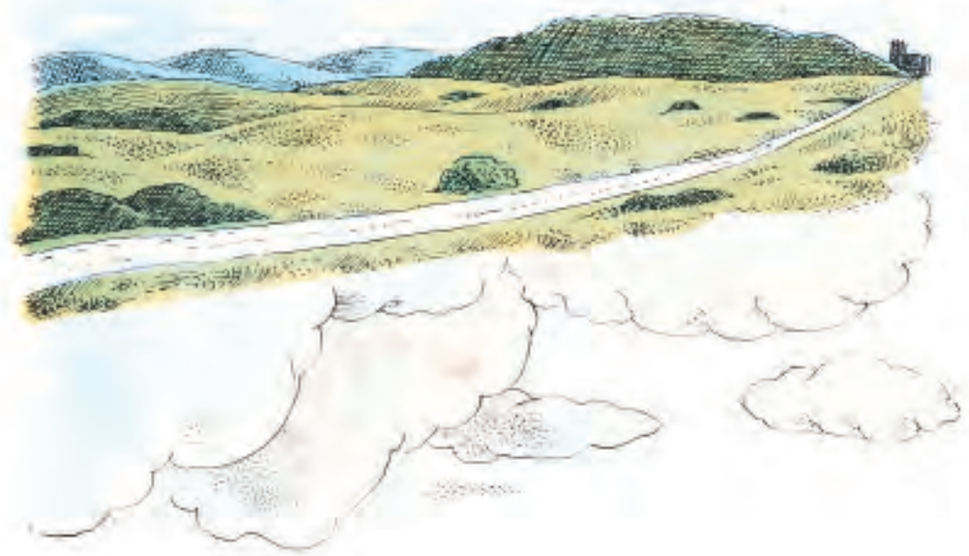
'Five pounds . . . ten pounds . . . fifteen . . . twenty?'

'I knew you'd never guess, Mother. I've got five magic beans . . .'

But his mother was so angry and disappointed that she would not listen to any more of Jack's story. Instead she boxed his ears, sent him supperless to bed, and threw the beans out of the window.

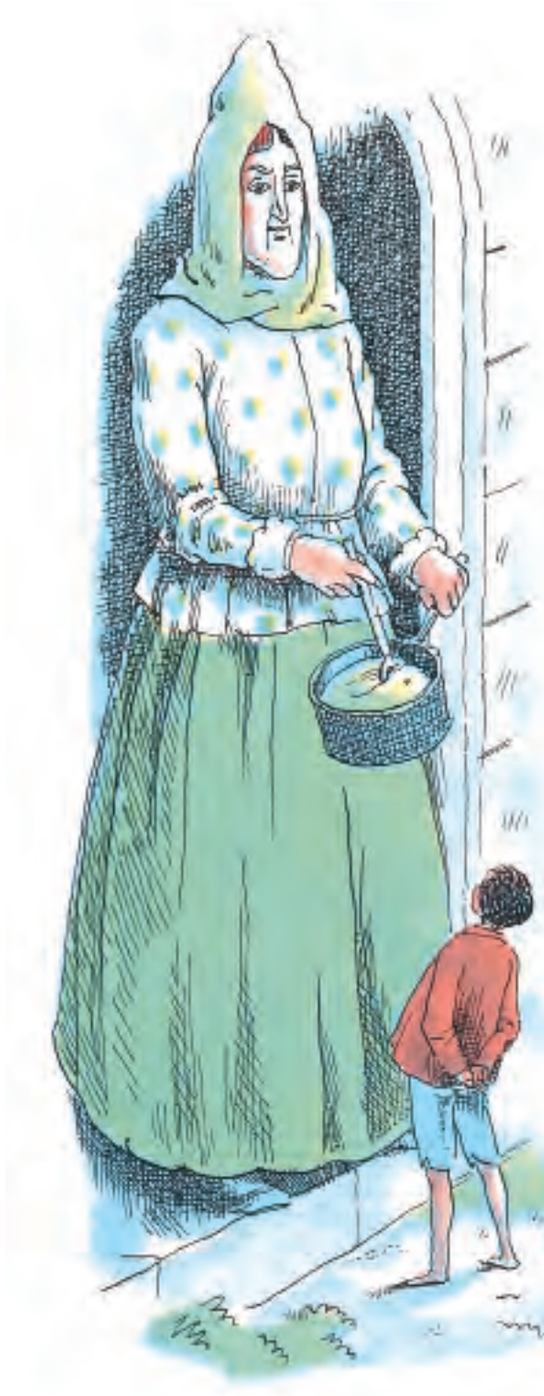






Early in the morning, when Jack got up, he found that his room looked very strange. The sun did not seem to be able to shine in properly through the window: something was shading the light. Jack ran down the stairs and out into the garden, and there he found that the five beans which his mother had thrown out the night before had taken root and sprung up like a great tree. They had strong, thick stalks, which were so entwined that they were like a ladder, and though he looked up he could not see the top of this strange beanstalk, for it seemed lost in the clouds.

Jack called his mother, and told her he was going to climb to the top of the beanstalk. Up he went, climbing and climbing and climbing until he reached the sky. There he saw a white road stretching before him as straight as could be, and he set out to walk along it.



He walked on and on, and on and on again, until he came to a great tall house, with a great tall woman standing on the door-step, stirring a huge black pot of porridge.

'Good morning, mum,' said Jack, who was very hungry, having had no supper the night before, and no time for breakfast that morning. 'Could you kindly give me some breakfast?'

'Breakfast!' cried the great tall woman. 'If it's breakfast you're wanting it's breakfast you'll most likely be yourself! My man is an Ogre, and there's nothing he likes better than boy—a fat boy grilled on toast. You'd better be off before he comes home.'

'Oh, please, mum,' said Jack, 'do give me something to eat. I've had nothing to eat since yesterday morning, and I may as well be grilled as die of hunger!'



The Ogre's wife, who was not altogether bad, took Jack in and gave him a good meal of porridge and milk. He had hardly finished when the whole house began to shake, and thump, thump, thump—the Ogre was coming.

'Gracious,' said the Ogre's wife, 'it's my old man! Whatever shall I do with you? Here, come along quick and hide in the oven,' and she pushed Jack inside her huge oven just in time.

The Ogre was enormous. He had three sheep tied on to his belt, and he threw them on the table and said:

'Here, wife, broil me a couple of these for breakfast. But what's this I smell?' and he began to prowl round the kitchen, muttering to himself:

'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.'



'Nonsense,' said his wife. 'You only smell the bones of that boy you had for dinner yesterday, and which I'm boiling down for soup. Come, begin your breakfast, the sheep won't be long now.'

So the Ogre sat down to breakfast. When he had finished the two sheep, he fetched from a big chest three bags of shining gold pieces, and began to count them. Soon his great head nodded, he fell asleep and the house rocked with his snores.

Then Jack slipped out of the oven, and as he tiptoed past the Ogre he snatched up one of the bags of gold, and ran all the way back to the top of the beanstalk along the straight, white road, and threw down the heavy bag while he climbed down after it, and found it, of course, in his mother's garden.

Then Jack and his mother knew that the beans were really magic, and that the little old man had not deceived Jack after all.

They lived on the bag of gold for some time, until the day came when there was only one more gold piece in the coffer, so Jack made up his mind to go up the beanstalk once more, and see what he could see.

The next morning he rose up early, and climbed and climbed and climbed up through the clouds to the top of the beanstalk as he had done before. There again was the white road stretching before him as straight as could be, and he set out to walk along it.

Sure enough, at the end of it was the great tall house, and the Ogre's wife was standing at the door.

'Good morning, mum,' said Jack, as bold as brass. 'Would you kindly give me something to eat?'

'Go away,' said the Ogre's wife crossly. 'The last time I gave a boy like you some breakfast he made off with a bag of gold. Why, I believe you are the same boy!'

'That's very strange, mum,' replied Jack, 'I wouldn't be surprised if I could tell you something about that, but I'm too hungry to say a word.'



The Ogre's wife was so filled with curiosity that she let him into the kitchen once more, and gave him a big bowl of porridge. Hardly had he finished it when the house began to tremble, and thump, thump, thump, they heard the Ogre coming.

Everything happened as it did before. In came the Ogre, after his wife had quickly shut Jack up in the oven, with three fat calves strung to his belt. He threw them on the table.

'Quick, wife!' he roared. 'Roast these for my breakfast! I hope the oven is hot?' and he went across to open the oven door.

But the Ogre's wife cried out in a hurry:

'Roast! That will take far too long if you are so hungry! I shall boil them—see how brightly the fire glows!'

So the Ogre left the oven door alone, but he began to prowl round the kitchen, growling:

'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.'

That was what he always growled when he was angry.

'Rubbish,' said his wife. 'You only smell the bones of that boy you had for dinner yesterday, which I am keeping to grill for you tonight.'

So the Ogre sat down to his enormous meal, and when he had finished he called: 'Wife, bring me my magic hen!' So she brought in a small black hen, which she put down on the kitchen table in front of the Ogre.

Then he said to the hen, 'Lay,' and it at once laid a golden egg. And he said, 'Lay,' again, and there was another beautiful, shining,



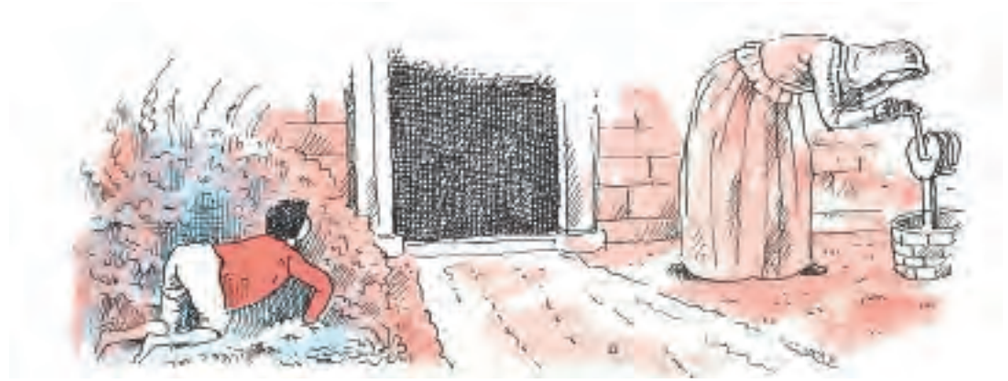
golden egg. Then the Ogre's head began to nod, and the house rocked with his snores.

Jack made up his mind that he would have that hen, come what might. He crept out of the oven, seized the hen, and was off out

of the door like lightning, but he had forgotten that hens cackle after they have laid an egg, and her cackle woke the Ogre, but by then Jack was well down the long, white road. He got safely to the top of the beanstalk, and climbed down it faster than ever before to show his mother the wonderful hen. Then he said, 'Lay,' and it laid a golden egg, and did this as often as Jack commanded it.

Jack and his mother lived very comfortably on the golden eggs laid by the magic hen, until one day Jack thought he would have another adventure at the top of the beanstalk. So one morning he climbed up through the clouds again, and there was the white road stretching before him, and he set out to walk along it.





But this time he knew better than to ask for breakfast, for the Ogre's wife would be sure to recognize him. So he hid in some bushes near the great house, and when the Ogre's wife came out to draw some water from the well, he slipped in through the door and hid himself inside the copper. He had not been there long before the house began to shake, and thump, thump, thump, he heard the Ogre coming.

This time he had three fat oxen tied to his belt, but his wife had hardly begun to cook them before the Ogre started up and began to shout:

'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.

I smell him, wife, I smell him!' he cried.

'Well, if you do,' said she, 'you may be sure it's that good-for-nothing boy who stole your bag of gold and your magic hen. He'll be in the oven for sure,' and she opened the oven door, but Jack wasn't there, only some joints of meat cooking and sizzling. So she laughed and said, 'Why, of course, it's the boy you caught last night. How forgetful I am!'

The Ogre sat down and began to eat his breakfast, but he wasn't satisfied, and kept getting up to search the cupboards and behind the doors, but luckily he never looked inside the copper.

When he had finished his enormous meal the Ogre called out: 'Wife, bring me my golden harp!'

And she fetched a little harp and stood it on the table before him. Then the Ogre leant back in his chair and said, 'Sing!' And the golden harp sang beautiful songs to him, and it went on singing long after the Ogre had fallen asleep.

Then Jack crept out of the copper, and tiptoed to the table, and caught up the harp and dashed off with it through the door. But the harp cried out, 'Master, master!' and the Ogre woke up and saw Jack disappearing, and rushed after him. Jack tore along as fast as he could, and luckily had a good start, for the Ogre's stride





was twice as long as Jack's, but even so when Jack came to the top of the beanstalk the Ogre was close behind. Jack flung himself into the branches and began to climb down as fast as he could, while the harp continued to call, 'Master, master!' Half-way down

Jack felt a fearful lurch of the beanstalk and nearly fell out of it, and he knew the Ogre was following him down. So he slithered down the rest of the way and, nearing the bottom, called to his mother: 'Mother, Mother, bring an axe, quick, bring an axe!' and his mother ran out with an axe in her hand just as Jack got to the bottom, and there were the Ogre's legs coming through the clouds. But Jack seized the axe and chopped the beanstalk in two just in time. The Ogre came crashing down to the ground and broke his neck.

Then Jack showed his mother the golden harp, which sang most sweetly, and what with that and the golden eggs laid by the magic hen, they both lived happily ever after.



2

The Story of the Three Bears