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Fairy Tales from Many Lands

Illustrated by

Arthur Rackham

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Fairy Tales From Many Lands



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY ARTHUR RACKHAM

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Contents

Foreword		iii
I	English: Jack the Giant-killer	1
II	Scottish: The Battle of the Birds	17
III	Welsh: Lludd and Llevelys	35
IV	Irish: Guleesh	44
V	French: The Sleeping Beauty	66
VI	Italian: Cesarino and the Dragon	83
VII	Portuguese: What Came of Picking Flowers	97
VIII	Japanese: The Adventures of Little Peachling	105
IX	The Fox's Wedding	108
X	The Tongue-cut Sparrow	110
XI	Russian: Frost	113

XII Serbian: The Golden Apple Tree and the Nine Peahens 123

XIII Belgian: The Last Adventure of Thyl Ulenspiegel 141



I

Jack the Giant-killer

When good King Arthur reigned, there lived near the Land's End of England, in the county of Cornwall, a farmer who had only one son, called Jack. He was brisk and of a ready lively wit, so that nobody or nothing could worst him.

In those days the Mount of Cornwall was kept by a huge giant named Cormoran. He was eighteen feet in height, and about three yards round the waist, of a fierce and grim countenance, the terror of all the neighbouring towns and villages. He lived in a cave in the midst of the Mount, and whenever he wanted food he would wade over to the mainland, where he would furnish himself with whatever came in his way. Everybody at his approach ran out of their houses, while he seized on their cattle, making nothing of carrying half a dozen oxen on his back at a time; and as for their sheep and hogs, he would tie them round his waist like a bunch of tallowdips.

He had done this for many years, so that all Cornwall was in despair.

One day Jack happened to be at the town hall when the magistrates were sitting in council about the Giant. He asked: 'What reward will be given to the man who kills Cormoran?'

'The giant's treasure,' they said, 'will be the reward.'

Quoth Jack: 'Then let me undertake it.'

So he got a horn, shovel and pickaxe, and went over to the Mount in the beginning of a dark winter's evening, when he fell to work, and before morning had dug a pit twenty-two feet deep, and nearly as broad, covering it over with long sticks and straw. Then he strewed a little mould over it, so that it appeared like plain ground. Jack then placed himself on the opposite side of the pit, farthest from the giant's lodging, and, just at the break of day, he put the horn to his mouth and blew, Tantivy, Tantivy.

This noise roused the giant, who rushed from his cave crying: 'You incorrigible villain, are you come here to disturb my rest? You shall pay dearly for this. Satisfaction I will have, and this it shall be: I will take you whole and broil you for breakfast.' He had no sooner uttered this than he tumbled into the pit and made the very foundations of the Mount to shake.

'Oh, Giant,' quoth Jack, 'where are you now? Oh, faith, you are gotten now into Lob's Pound, where I will surely plague you for your threatening words: what do you think now of broiling me for your breakfast? Will no other diet serve you but poor Jack?' Then, having tantalised the giant for a while, he gave him a most weighty knock with his pickaxe on the very crown of his head and killed him on the spot.



Jack then filled up the pit with earth, and went to search the cave, which he found contained much treasure. When the magistrates heard of this they made a declaration he should henceforth be termed

Jack the Giant-killer

and presented him with a sword and a belt, on which were written these words, embroidered in letters of gold:

Here's the right valiant Cornish man
Who slayed the giant Cormoran

The news of Jack's victory soon spread over all the West of England, so that another giant, named Blunderbore, hearing of it, vowed to be revenged on

Jack if ever he should light on him. This giant was the lord of an enchanted castle situated in the midst of a lonesome wood. Now Jack, about four months afterwards, walking near this wood on his journey to Wales, being weary, seated himself near a pleasant fountain and fell fast asleep. While he was sleeping, the giant, coming there for water, discovered him, and knew him to be the far-famed Jack the Giant-killer by the lines written on his belt. Without ado, he took Jack on his shoulders and carried him towards his castle. Now, as they passed through a thicket, the rustling of the boughs awakened Jack, who was strangely surprised to find himself in the clutches of the giant. His terror was only begun, for, on entering the castle, he saw the ground strewn with human bones, and the giant told him his own would ere long be among them. After this the giant locked poor Jack in an immense chamber, leaving him there while he went to fetch another giant, his brother, living in the same wood, who might share in the meal on Jack.

After waiting some time, Jack, on going to the window, beheld afar off the two giants coming towards the castle. 'Now,' quoth Jack to himself, 'my death or my deliverance is at hand.' There were strong cords in a corner of the room in which Jack was, and two of these he took, and made a firm noose at the end; and while the giants were unlocking the iron gate of the castle he threw the ropes over each of their heads. He drew the other ends across a beam, and pulled with all his might, so that he throttled them. When he saw they were black in the face, he slid down one of the ropes and, drawing his sword, slew them both.

Then, taking the giant's keys and unlocking the rooms, he found three fair ladies tied by the hair of their heads, almost starved to death.

'Sweet ladies,' quoth Jack, 'I have destroyed this monster and his brutish brother, and obtained your liberties.' This said he presented them with the keys, and so proceeded on his journey to Wales.

Jack made the best of his way by travelling as fast as he could, but lost his road, and was benighted, and could find no habitation until, coming into a narrow valley, he found a large house, and in order to get shelter took courage to knock at the gate. But what was his surprise when there came forth a monstrous giant with two heads; yet he did not appear so fiery as the others were, for he was a Welsh giant, and what he did was by private and secret malice under the false show of friendship. Jack, having told his condition to the giant, was shown into a bedroom, where, in the dead of night, he heard his host in another apartment muttering these words:

'Though here you lodge with me this night,
You shall not see the morning light:
My club shall dash your brains outright!'

'Say'st thou so?' quoth Jack; 'that is like one of your Welsh tricks, yet I hope to be cunning enough for you.' Then, getting out of bed, he laid a billet in the bed in his stead, and hid himself in a corner of the room. At the dead time of the night in came the Welsh giant, who struck several heavy blows on the bed with his club, thinking he had broken every bone

in Jack's skin. The next morning Jack, laughing in his sleeve, gave him hearty thanks for his night's lodging.

'How have you rested?' quoth the giant; 'did you not feel anything in the night?'

'No,' quoth Jack, 'nothing but a rat, which gave me two or three slaps with her tail.'

With that, greatly wondering, the giant led Jack to breakfast, bringing him a bowl containing four gallons of hasty pudding. Being loath to let the giant think it too much for him, Jack put a large leather bag under his loose coat in such a way that he could convey the pudding into it without its being perceived. Then, telling the giant he would show him a trick, taking a knife, Jack ripped open the bag, and out came all the hasty pudding. Whereupon, saying, 'Odds splutters hur nails, hur can do that trick hurself,' the monster took the knife, and ripping open his own belly, fell down dead.

Now it happened in these days that King Arthur's only son asked his father to give him a large sum of money, in order that he might go and seek his fortune in the principality of Wales, where lived a beautiful lady possessed with seven evil spirits. The king did his best to persuade his son from it, but in vain; so at last he gave way and the prince set out with two horses, one loaded with money, the other for himself to ride upon. Now after several days' travel he came to a market town in Wales, where he beheld a vast crowd of people gathered together. The prince asked the reason of it, and was told that they had arrested a corpse for several

large sums of money which the deceased owed when he died. The prince replied that it was a pity creditors should be so cruel, and said: 'Go bury the dead, and let his creditors come to my lodging, and there their debts shall be paid.' They came in such great numbers that before night he had only twopence left for himself.

Now Jack the Giant-killer, coming that way, was so taken with the generosity of the prince that he desired to be his servant. This being agreed upon, the next morning they set forward on their journey together, when, as they were riding out of the town, an old woman called after the prince, saying: 'He has owed me twopence these seven years; pray pay me as well as the rest.' Putting his hand in his pocket, the prince gave the woman all he had left, so that after their day's food, which cost what small store Jack had by him, they were without a penny between them.

When the sun got low, the king's son said: 'Jack, since we have no money, where can we lodge this night?'

But Jack replied: 'Master, we'll do well enough, for I have an uncle lives within two miles of this place; he is a huge and monstrous giant with three heads. He'll fight five hundred men in armour, and make them to fly before him.'

'Alas!' quoth the prince, 'what shall we do there? He'll certainly chop us up at a mouthful. Nay, we are scarce enough to fill one of his hollow teeth!'

'It is no matter for that,' quoth Jack; 'I myself will go before and prepare the way for you; therefore stop here and wait till I return.'