Jack and the Beanstalk

On the edge of a village stood a cottage that leaned slightly to one side. Inside lived a widow and her young son, Jack.



One morning, Jack opened the cupboard. He tipped the biscuit tin upside down and collected the crumbs in his palm.

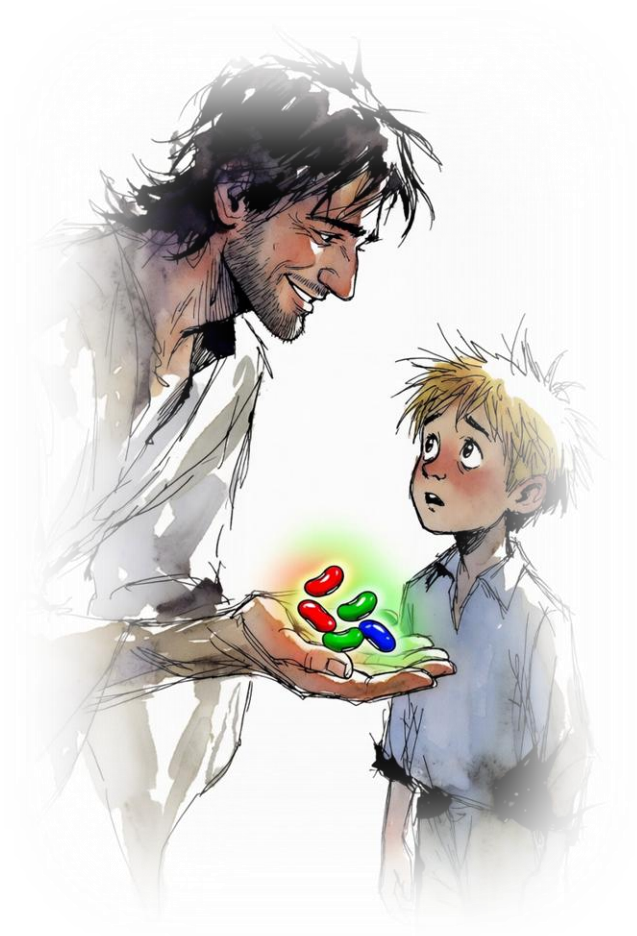
Jack glanced at the empty chair beside the fire where his father once sat.

He turned and saw his mother at the door. In her hand, she held a thick rope. Her face looked tired and worried, as though she had been thinking about something difficult for a long time.

Jack's mother looked outside at Daisy, the family's cow. "Take her to market," she said gently. "We can't afford to keep her anymore. Get the best price you can."

Wind blew through the gaps in the shutters.

Jack nodded.



In the garden, Jack pressed his forehead against Daisy's warm body. She had provided milk for years. Now it was time to say goodbye.

Jack took one last look at his mother standing in the doorway and headed down the village lane towards the market.

On the road, a stranger stepped out from the hedgerow. He wore a long white coat and carried five smooth beans in his palm.

"Look at these beans," the man said. "They're magic."

Jack frowned. "What do they do?"

"They're magic beans. You'll see."

"That's not much of an answer," Jack replied, remembering his mother's warning not to trust strangers.

The man's eyes widened and he smiled.

"I'll give you all these magic beans for your cow," the man said.

Jack could walk on to the market and sell Daisy. She was the best of cows, and her milk had always been abundant and sweet. Selling her would be a great loss, but the money would help Jack and his mother survive the long winter ahead.

Still the beans sparkled in the sunlight. Red. Yellow. Green. Blue. They seemed too strange and wonderful to ignore. He had never felt such desire. Never felt such a longing.

When Jack returned home, he showed his mother the beans.

“You traded Daisy for a handful of beans?” she scolded. “Oh Jack, you foolish boy! How will we manage? How will we survive the winter now?”

She snatched the beans from his hand and threw them out of the window and sent Jack to bed hungry and ashamed.

That night, the ground trembled beneath the cottage, and Jack dreamed of storms, adventures and faraway places. Little did he know that something powerful was pushing through the soil outside. Something strange that he had never seen before.

By morning, a giant beanstalk had burst from the garden. Thick and twisting, it climbed into the clouds.

“Where does it go?” Jack’s mother whispered, staring up into the sky where it disappeared into the cloud, high above.

Jack stared in amazement. What was up there, he wondered. Where did it lead?

Without another thought, he leapt forward and began to climb. “Come down! Come down!” Jack’s mother called.

Soon the village disappeared below him, and his mother’s voice faded away. The wind grew colder and the thick clouds swallowed him whole before finally thinning again.

His arms ached. His hands burned. Still, he climbed until at last he reached solid ground far, far above the sky.



In the distance stood a vast stone castle. Jack followed the path until he reached a doorway, three times taller than the door to the cottage where he lived.

He knocked. And waited.



Presently, a giant woman opened the door.

“You shouldn’t be here,” she warned. “My husband is not kind. If he finds you, he

will grind your bones and make bread of them. Go away before he returns."

"I won't stay long," Jack pleaded. "I'm hungry. Can you give me something to eat. Anything."

She saw the hunger in the boy's face and let him inside. There she placed a bowl of porridge on the table. "Quick," she said. "And then be on your way."

He had just finished eating when the walls began to shake, and the sound of boots could be heard getting closer and closer.

THUD! THUD! THUD!

"Quick! Quick!" the woman said. "Hide behind the logs next to the fire. Don't move. Don't say a word!"

The door burst open.

The giant stormed in and roared so loud all the beams of the house shook:

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!

The giant looked around the room. He sniffed the air and rubbed his face with his hairy fingers.

The giantess stood in front of the pile of wood. "Your supper's ready. Your favourite roast beef."

The giant grumbled and looked around the room one more time. Then sat down.

The giant munched and chewed and from his hiding place, Jack could see his big teeth, his mouth stuffed with meat. The noise was worse than a dozen pigs at a food trough.



After eating, the giant dragged out a sack from a cupboard and spilled the clinking gold coins onto the table. His eyes lit up as he ran his hands over them. “Mine. All mine,” he said. “How rich I am. How powerful I am.”

The giant felt them under his palms and beneath his sausage-like fingers. Again and again, he picked up the coins one by one and held them to the light. Big round shadows cast on the wall as the golden coins glowed in the firelight.

The giant narrowed his eyes and fell silent, quiet as a shadow, lost in his own secret thoughts and wonder.

Jack watched intently from his hiding place.

Along the walls stood more chests and sacks. They were not the savings of a farmer. There were too many. Where had he gotten such wealth? Jack wondered**.**

Finally, the giant fell asleep in the armchair beside the fire and snored so loudly the room itself seemed to shake with the sound.

The giantess was nowhere to be seen, and in the flickering light of the fireplace and the still flame of the candle, quietly Jack crept forward, lifted a gold sack beside the

armchair and sneaked out of the door and ran as fast as his legs could carry him. His heart pounding. His breath gasping.
Down, down the beanstalk he climbed.

When he got home, Jack showed his mother the golden bag and poured the coins out on the cedar wood table. They glowed in the moonlight.

“Oh Jack, Jack,” she said. “We’ll never go hungry again, and we’ll have enough money to fix the roof and the windows and buy another cow.”



In the spring of the following year, Jack remembered the castle far away. He dreamed of it every night and wondered if he could go back again. If the giant would catch him

and grind his bones into bread. If he could snatch another bag of gold and run away, just like before.

One sack had changed everything. And so, one day in spring, when the flowers peeped through the earth, the violets and the snowdrops, he climbed the giant beanstalk again. Up and up. Far into the clouds as the village disappeared below him and until the voice of his mother calling him "Jack! Jack! Come back. Come home!" faded away.

Jack came to the door of the castle and knocked. The door opened and the giantess looked down at him. "You should run," she said. "He swore revenge on the thief who stole his gold."

Just at that moment the ground shook.

THUD! THUD! THUD!

The giant bellowed…

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.

"Come inside," the woman said. "Quickly. Hide behind the logs near the oven, and do not move."

The giant's feet could soon be heard on the old wooden floorboards.

THUD! THUD! THUD!

"Where is he!" the giant demanded. "I smell the blood of an English boy. I'll grind his bones to make my bread."

The giant looked under the table, behind the sofa, and in all the cupboards. He stamped up the stairs and searched in the bedroom. Under the sheets and under the

bed and inside the wardrobe. “Where is he?” he barked, as the giantess busied herself with making food at the hob.

Finally, when he believed no one other than the giantess was in the house, the giant sat down at the dinner table and tore chunks from a freshly baked loaf. In between palming bread into his mouth from his big dirty hands and slurping the soup from a ladle-size spoon, he picked meat from between his teeth with his black-nailed fingers and wiped the fingertips on his trousers.

“Bring me my hen,” the giant demanded.

The giantess went outside and brought in a beautiful white hen whose feathers shone like newly painted gloss. The hen’s eyes sparkled like pearls, and she held her head backwards as if looking from a throne.

“Lay,” the giant commanded.

At once the hen laid a golden egg, bright and glowing in the room.

The giant picked it up and held it to the light. His eyes narrowing on the golden egg as if lost in another world. Secret and silent as a stone.



Jack saw it from behind the cupboard, a perfectly shaped oval, shining in the light. Gold could run out, Jack thought. But what if he could get the hen? What if it could lay golden eggs forever? What if he could take it and run away, just like before? His mother would never have to worry again.

Finally the giant fell asleep beside the fire, in the armchair with the golden egg in his hand. He snored so loudly the windows rattled and the candle flame flickered on the table.

When the giantess was no longer in the parlour, Jack crept quietly from behind the drawers and picked up the hen from beside the armchair.

Jack crept on his tiptoes and closed the door of the castle and with the hen under his arm, he ran as fast as he could. All the way to the beanstalk and climbed down quickly without ever looking up.

“Oh, Jack, what have you brought?” his mother said, when she saw the hen on the table.

The next day, the hen lay by the fireside on an old blanket. Jack picked her up and underneath there was a golden egg. “Come, mother!” he said. “Come and see!”

“Oh Jack,” Jack’s mother said. “We will never be poor again. What a strange and brave boy you are!” From that day on, the hen laid a golden egg every day.

And so, summer came, and then the autumn.

Winter passed without fear. The cupboard stayed filled. The cottage stood steady. Yet Jack still dreamed of the castle above the clouds.

What else was up there, Jack thought. What if I could go again. What if there was more treasure?

So, Jack climbed a third time. Like before he knocked on the door. Like before, the woman warned Jack to hide quickly as the sounds of the giant came closer.

THUD! THUD! THUD!

Jack hid behind the stack of wood at the back of the stove. The smoky fire made his eyes smart, but he held still, because he knew there was yet more treasure inside the castle.

After eating, the giant brought forth a golden harp and placed it on a table.

“Play,” he commanded. “Play my favourite melodies.”

The harp played bright and beautiful music that filled the hall, like wind moving through summer leaves. The giant closed his eyes and listened. He was thinking of all his gold. All the money he had stolen from all over the kingdom. In no time he fell asleep in the armchair.

Birds came to the windows to listen, and the giantess stopped her work and sat down and looked up with her eyes filled with tears.

The music reminded her of childhood days spent in gardens with her family, long before she had lived in the lonely castle. For once in a long time, she was free from the castle. Free from the giant. Free to travel back in time where she was herself.



When the giantess left the room, Jack crept from behind the oven and lifted the harp from the tabletop. He made for the door, tiptoeing.

Suddenly the harp cried out. “Master! Master! He’s taking me! Stop, thief! Thief! Thief!”



The giant woke with a roar. The windows shook with the noise and the flame in the fire wildly flickered. “I smell the blood of an English boy!” he snarled. “I’ll grind his bones to make my bread!”

Jack ran as fast as he could to the beanstalk. Behind him he heard the roaring giant.

THUD! THUD! THUD!

And calling out:

“I’ll grind your bones to make my bread!”

Jack slid down the beanstalk as the giant followed, hand over hand, tearing leaves loose as he descended.

“Mother! The axe! Fetch the axe,” Jack called when he reached the bottom.

Jack’s mother hurried outside with it. The giant was getting closer, bellowing:

Fee Fi Fo Fum

The vine trembled under the weight of the giant. Branches came tumbling down.

“Quick!” Jack said. “He’s getting closer.”

As Jack’s mother was about to strike the beanstalk, the giant growled, “I’ll grind your bones.” His face was red with anger. His yellow teeth bared and his mouth open like a cave.

Jack and his mother looked up. The giant was a fearsome, loathsome sight. His hands gripped the vines, and he shook them so violently the whole beanstalk trembled.

The giant’s head shot back and forth. His voice boomed like thunder.

But suddenly he was stopped. Halted in his rage.

He was caught in the vines. Trapped. The bendy branches wrapped around his legs and arms and body. He shook his fist, but it was no use. He writhed and shouted. But the more he did, the more the beanstalk creaked and swayed back and forth.

Until …
Snap …



The beanstalk broke. Not a single axe blow. Not a single strike.

And the giant fell from on high and struck the earth with a force that made the ground shake and brought up dust.



Silence followed.

The giant lay motionless. He was gone at last, and Jack and his mother were free from the terrible giant.

As he fell asleep that night, Jack heard the harp music, floating through the cottage.

Jack’s mother stood in the doorway, listening to the sweet melodies. The soft sounds carried her back in time to when she played in the garden as a child. Running from her father, pretending to be a fox, and her mother on the swing, giggling and her eyes full of delight.



Many Jacks, Many Stories

All around the world, similar tales exist. They are sometimes called, “The Boy Who Stole the Ogre’s Treasure.” In Tolkien’s story *The Hobbit*, the dragon Smaug guards an immense amount of stolen gold, deep in his lair. Smaug is boastful, proud, and thinks he is invincible. His arrogance, however, brings about his end when the dwarfs, assisted by Gandalf the wizard, enter the secret lair and take gold from Smaug.

What do you think about this version of *Jack and the Beanstalk*? Talk about your ideas with a friend, your mum and dad, or a brother or sister. What does it mean?

Understanding the Story

1. What was Jack’s life like at the beginning of the story? How did it change by the end?
2. Why did Jack trade the cow for the magic beans? Do you think he made a good choice?
3. How many times did Jack climb the beanstalk? What did he bring back each time?
4. Why do you think the giantess helped Jack even though she knew it was dangerous?

Characters

5. What do you think of the giant? Is he completely bad, or is there anything sad about him?
6. Do you like Jack? Was he brave, clever, naughty, or all three? Why?
7. What role did Jack’s mother play in the story? How did she help Jack at the end?
8. How did the giantess feel when she heard the harp music? Why do you think she cried?

Magic & Symbols

9. What do you think the magic beans represent?

10. Why do you think the stranger gave Jack the beans? Could he be someone special?

11. What might the golden harp symbolise? Why was it special?

Right and Wrong

12. Was it wrong for Jack to steal from the giant? Why or why not?

13. Is it ever okay to take something that doesn't belong to you? When might it be wrong?

14. The giant stole his treasure from others. Does that make Jack's actions better or worse?

The Ending and Lessons

15. How did the beanstalk break? What do you think about the way the giant died?

16. What lesson do you think the story is trying to teach us?

17. How did Jack change from the beginning to the end of the story?

18. What do you think Jack and his mother learned?

Personal Reflection

19. What are some "giants" in real life? (Things that feel big, scary, or difficult)

20. Have you ever faced a "giant" (a big problem)? How did you overcome it?

21. If you had a magic bean, what would you wish for and why?

22. What would you do if you found a giant beanstalk in your garden?

Creative- Try one of the following:

- If you could change one part of the story, what would you change?
- Write a letter from the giantess to Jack.

- Draw what you think the giant's castle looks like inside.

Colour in the picture below

