



# Tonight's Bedtime Story

Fairy Tales for Sleepy Children

presents

## Jack And The Bean-Stalk

*From "The Fairy Book" by Miss Mulock*



In the days of King Alfred, there lived a poor woman, whose cottage was in a remote country village, many miles from London. She had been a widow some years, and had an only child named Jack, whom she indulged so much that he never paid the least attention to anything she said, but was indolent, careless, and extravagant. His follies were not owing to a bad disposition, but to his mother's foolish partiality. By degrees, he spent all that she had—scarcely anything remained but a cow. One day, for the first time in her life, she reproached him: "Cruel, cruel boy! you have at last brought me to beggary. I have not money enough to purchase even a bit of bread; nothing now remains to sell but my poor cow! I am sorry to part with her; it grieves me sadly, but we cannot starve." For a few minutes Jack felt remorse, but it was soon over; and he began asking his mother to let him sell the cow at the next village; teasing her so much, that she at last consented. As he was going along he met a butcher, who inquired why he was driving the cow from home? Jack replied, he was going to sell it. The butcher held some curious beans in his hat; they were of various colors, and attracted Jack's attention; this did not pass unnoticed by the man, who, knowing Jack's easy temper, thought now was the time to take an advantage of it; and, determined not to let slip so good an opportunity, asked what was the price of the cow, offering at the same time all the beans in his hat for her. The silly boy could not conceal the pleasure he felt at what he supposed so great an offer: the bargain was struck instantly, and the cow exchanged for a few paltry beans. Jack made the best of his way home, calling aloud to his mother before he reached the door, thinking to surprise her.

When she saw the beans, and heard Jack's account, her patience quite forsook her: she tossed the beans out of the window, where they fell on the garden-bed below. Then she threw her apron over her head, and cried bitterly. Jack attempted to console her, but in vain, and, not having anything to eat, they both went supperless to bed. Jack awoke early in the morning, and seeing something uncommon darkening the window of his bedchamber, ran downstairs into the garden, where he found some of the beans had taken root, and sprung up surprisingly: the stalks were of an immense thickness, and had twined together until they formed a ladder like a chain, and so high that the top appeared to be lost in the clouds. Jack was an adventurous lad; he determined to climb up to the top, and ran to tell his mother, not doubting but that she would be equally pleased with himself. She declared he should not go; said it would break her heart if he did—entreated and threatened, but all in vain. Jack set out, and after climbing for some hours, reached the top of the bean-stalk, quite exhausted. Looking around, he found himself in a strange country; it appeared to be a barren desert—not a tree, shrub, house, or living creature was to be seen; here and there were scattered fragments of stone; and at unequal distances, small heaps of earth were loosely thrown together.

Jack seated himself pensively upon a block of stone, and thought of his mother; he reflected with sorrow upon his disobedience in climbing the bean-stalk against her will, and concluded that he must die of hunger. However, he walked on, hoping to see a house, where he might beg something to eat and drink. He did not find it; but he saw at a distance a beautiful lady, walking all alone. She was elegantly clad, and carried a white wand, at the top of which sat a peacock of pure gold.

Jack, who was a gallant fellow, went straight up to her; when, with a bewitching smile, she asked him how he came there. He told her all about the bean-stalk. The lady answered him by a question, "Do you remember your father, young man?"

“No, madam; but I am sure there is some mystery about him, for when I name him to my mother she always begins to weep, and will tell me nothing.”

“She dare not,” replied the lady, “but I can and will. For know, young man, that I am a fairy, and was your father’s guardian. But fairies are bound by laws as well as mortals; and by an error of mine I lost my power for a term of years, so that I was unable to succour your father when he most needed it, and he died.” Here the fairy looked so sorrowful that Jack’s heart warmed to her, and he begged her earnestly to tell him more.

“I will; only you must promise to obey me in everything, or you will perish yourself.”

Jack was brave, and, besides, his fortunes were so bad they could not well be worse—so he promised.

The fairy continued: “Your father, Jack, was a most excellent, amiable, generous man. He had a good wife, faithful servants, plenty of money; but he had one misfortune—a false friend. This was a giant, whom he had succoured in misfortune, and who returned his kindness by murdering him, and seizing on all his property; also making your mother take a solemn oath that she would never tell you anything about your father, or he would murder both her and you. Then he turned her off with you in her arms, to wander about the wide world as she might. I could not help her, as my power only returned on the day you went to sell your cow.”

“It was I,” added the fairy, “who impelled you to take the beans, who made the bean-stalk grow, and inspired you with the desire to climb up it to this strange country; for it is here the wicked giant lives who was your father’s destroyer. It is you who must avenge him, and rid the world of a monster who never will do anything but evil. I will assist you. You may lawfully take possession of his house and all his riches, for everything he has belonged to your father, and is therefore yours. Now farewell! Do not let your mother know you are acquainted with your father’s history; this is my command, and if you disobey me you will suffer for it. Now go.”

Jack asked where he was to go.

“Along the direct road, till you see the house where the giant lives. You must then act according to your own just judgment, and I will guide you if any difficulty arises. Farewell!”

She bestowed on the youth a benignant smile, and vanished.

Jack pursued his journey. He walked on till after sunset, when to his great joy, he espied a large mansion. A plain-looking woman was 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, and said it was quite uncommon to see a human being near their house; for it was well known that her husband was a powerful giant, who would never eat anything but human flesh, if he could possibly get it; that he would walk fifty miles to procure it, usually being out the whole day for that purpose.

This account greatly terrified Jack, but still he hoped to elude the giant, and therefore he again entreated the woman to take him in for one night only, and hide him where she thought proper. She at last suffered herself to be persuaded, for she was of a compassionate

and generous disposition, and took him into the house. First, they entered a fine large hall, magnificently furnished; they then passed through several spacious rooms, in the same style of grandeur; but all appeared forsaken and desolate. A long gallery came next; it was very dark—just light enough to show that, instead of a wall on one side, there was a grating of iron which parted off a dismal dungeon, from whence issued the groans of those victims whom the cruel giant reserved in confinement for his own voracious appetite. Poor Jack was half dead with fear, and would have given the world to have been with his mother again, for he now began to doubt if he should ever see her more; he even mistrusted the good woman, and thought she had let him into the house for no other purpose than to lock him up among the unfortunate people in the dungeon. However, she bade Jack sit down, and gave him plenty to eat and drink; and he, not seeing anything to make him uncomfortable, soon forgot his fear and was just beginning to enjoy himself, when he was startled by a loud knocking at the outer door, which made the whole house shake.

“Ah! that’s the giant; and if he sees you he will kill you and me too,” cried the poor woman, trembling all over. “What shall I do?”

“Hide me in the oven,” cried Jack, now as bold as a lion at the thought of being face to face with his father’s cruel murderer. So he crept into the oven—for there was no fire near it—and listened to the giant’s loud voice and heavy step as he went up and down the kitchen scolding his wife. At last he seated himself at table, and Jack, peeping through a crevice in the oven, was amazed to see what a quantity of food he devoured. It seemed as if he never would have done eating and drinking; but he did at last, and, leaning back, called to his wife in a voice like thunder:

“Bring me my hen!”

She obeyed, and placed upon the table a very beautiful live hen.

“Lay!” roared the giant, and the hen laid immediately an egg of solid gold.

“Lay another!” and every time the giant said this the hen laid a larger egg than before.

**H**e amused himself a long time with his hen, and then sent his wife to bed, while he fell asleep by the fireside, and snored like the roaring of cannon.

**A**s soon as he was asleep, Jack crept out of the oven, seized the hen, and ran off with her. He got safely out of the house, and finding his way along the road he came, reached the top of the bean-stalk, which he descended in safety.

**H**is mother was overjoyed to see him. She thought he had come to some ill end.

“Not a bit of it, mother. Look here!” and he showed her the hen. “Now lay;” and the hen obeyed him as readily as the giant, and laid as many golden eggs as he desired.

**T**hese eggs being sold, Jack and his mother got plenty of money, and for some months lived very happily together; till Jack got another great longing to climb the bean-stalk, and carry away some more of the giant’s riches. He had told his mother of his adventure, but had been very careful not to say a word about his father. He thought of his journey again and again, but still he could not summon resolution enough to break it to his mother, being well

assured that she would endeavour to prevent his going. However, one day he told her boldly, that he must take another journey up the bean-stalk; she begged and prayed him not to think of it, and tried all in her power to dissuade him. She told him that the giant's wife would certainly know him again, and that the giant would desire nothing better than to get him into his power, that he might put him to a cruel death, in order to be revenged for the loss of his hen. Jack, finding that all his arguments were useless, ceased speaking, though resolved to go at all events. He had a dress prepared which would disguise him, and something to colour his skin; he thought it impossible for any one to recollect him in this dress.

A few mornings after, he rose very early, and, unperceived by any one, climbed the bean-stalk a second time. He was greatly fatigued when he reached the top, and very hungry. Having rested some time on one of the stones, he pursued his journey to the giant's mansion, which he reached late in the evening: the woman was at the door as before. Jack addressed her, at the same time telling her a pitiful tale, and requesting that she would give him some victuals and drink, and also a night's lodging.

She told him (what he knew before very well) about her husband's being a powerful and cruel giant, and also that she had one night admitted a poor, hungry, friendless boy; that the little ungrateful fellow had stolen one of the giant's treasures; and ever since that her husband had been worse than before, using her very cruelly, and continually upbraiding her with being the cause of his misfortune. Jack felt sorry for her, but confessed nothing, and did his best to persuade her to admit him, but found it a very hard task. At last she consented, and as she led the way, Jack observed that everything was just as he had found it before: she took him into the kitchen, and after he had done eating and drinking, she hid him in an old lumber-closet. The giant returned at the usual time, and walked in so heavily, that the house was shaken to its foundation. He seated himself by the fire, and soon after exclaimed: "Wife, I smell fresh meat!"

The wife replied it was the crows, which had brought a piece of raw meat, and left it at the top of the house. While supper was preparing, the giant was very ill-tempered and impatient, frequently lifting up his hand to strike his wife for not being quick enough. He was also continually upbraiding her with the loss of his wonderful hen.

At last, having ended his supper, he cried, "Give me something to amuse me—my harp or my money-bags."

"Which will you have, my dear?" said the wife, humbly.

"My money-bags, because they are the heaviest to carry," thundered he.

She brought them, staggering under the weight: two bags—one filled with new guineas, and the other with new shillings; she emptied them out on the table, and the giant began counting them in great glee. "Now you may go to bed, you old fool." So the wife crept away.

Jack from his hiding-place watched the counting of the money, which he knew was his poor father's, and wished it was his own; it would give him much less trouble than going about selling the golden eggs. The giant, little thinking he was so narrowly observed, reckoned it all up, and then replaced it in the two bags, which he tied up very carefully and put beside his chair, with his little dog to guard them. At last he fell asleep as before, and snored so loud, that Jack compared his noise to the roaring of the sea in a high wind, when the tide is

coming in. At last Jack, concluding all secure, stole out, in order to carry off the two bags of money; but just as he laid his hand upon one of them, the little dog, which he had not perceived before, started from under the giant's chair and barked most furiously. Instead of endeavouring to escape, Jack stood still, though expecting his enemy to awake every instant. Contrary, however, to his expectation, the giant continued in a sound sleep, and Jack, seeing a piece of meat, threw it to the dog, who at once ceased barking, and began to devour it. So Jack carried off the bags, one on each shoulder, but they were so heavy that it took him two whole days to descend the bean-stalk and get back to his mother's door.

When he came he found the cottage deserted. He ran from one room to another, without being able to find any one; he then hastened into the village, hoping to see some of the neighbours, who could inform him where he could find his mother. An old woman at last directed him to a neighbouring house, where she was ill of a fever. He was greatly shocked at finding her apparently dying, and blamed himself bitterly as the cause of it all. However, at sight of her dear son, the poor woman revived, and slowly recovered health. Jack gave her his two money-bags; they had the cottage rebuilt and well furnished, and lived happier than they had ever done before.

For three years Jack heard no more of the bean-stalk, but he could not forget it, though he feared making his mother unhappy. It was in vain endeavouring to amuse himself; he became thoughtful, and would arise at the first dawn of day, and sit looking at the bean-stalk for hours together. His mother saw that something preyed upon his mind, and endeavoured to discover the cause; but Jack knew too well what the consequence would be should she succeed. He did his utmost, therefore, to conquer the great desire he had for another journey up the bean-stalk. Finding, however, that his inclination grew too powerful for him, he began to make secret preparations for his journey. He got ready a new disguise, better and more complete than the former; and when summer came, on the longest day he awoke as soon as it was light, and without telling his mother, ascended the bean-stalk. He found the road, journey, &c., much as it was on the two former times. He arrived at the giant's mansion in the evening, and found the wife standing, as usual, at the door. Jack had disguised himself so completely, that she did not appear to have the least recollection of him; however, when he pleaded hunger and poverty, in order to gain admittance, he found it very difficult indeed to persuade her. At last he prevailed, and was concealed in the copper. When the giant returned, he said furiously, "I smell fresh meat!" But Jack felt quite composed, as he had said so before, and had been soon 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 exceedingly terrified, 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. However, nothing happened; for the giant did not take the trouble to lift up the lid, but sat down shortly by the fireside, and began to eat his enormous supper. When he had finished, he commanded his wife to fetch down his harp. Jack peeped under the copper-lid, and saw a most beautiful harp. The giant placed it on the table, said "Play!" and it played of its own accord, without anybody touching it, the most exquisite music imaginable. Jack, who was a very good musician, was delighted, and more anxious to get this than any other of his enemy's treasures. But the giant not being particularly fond of music, the harp had only the effect of lulling him to sleep earlier than usual. As for the wife, she had gone to bed as soon as ever she could.

As soon as he thought all was safe, Jack got out of the copper, and seizing the harp, was eagerly running off with it. But the harp was enchanted by a fairy, and as soon as it found itself in strange hands, it called out loudly, just as if it had been alive, “Master! Master!”

The giant awoke, started up, and saw Jack scampering away as fast as his legs could carry him.

“Oh you villain! it is you who have robbed me of my hen and my money-bags, and now you are stealing my harp also. Wait till I catch you, and I’ll eat you up alive!”

“Very well; try!” shouted Jack, who was not a bit afraid, for he saw the giant was so tipsy he could hardly stand, much less run; and he himself had young legs and a clear conscience, which carry a man a long way. So, after leading the giant a considerable race, he contrived to be first at the top of the bean-stalk, and then scrambled down it as fast as he could, the harp playing all the while the most melancholy music till he said, “Stop,” and it stopped.

Arrived at the bottom, he found his mother sitting at her cottage-door, weeping silently.

“Here, mother, don’t cry; just give me a hatchet; make haste.” For he knew there was not a moment to spare; he saw the giant beginning to descend the bean-stalk.

However, it was too late—the monster’s ill deeds had come to an end. Jack with his hatchet cut the bean-stalk close off at the root; the giant fell headlong into the garden, and was killed on the spot.

Instantly the fairy appeared, and explained everything to Jack’s mother, begging her to forgive Jack, who was his father’s own son for bravery and generosity, and who would be sure to make her happy for the rest of her days.

So all ended well, and nothing was ever beard or seen of the wonderful Bean-stalk.

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