

Jack and the Beanstalk: Part 1

by **Joseph Jacobs** *from English Fairy Tales*

There was once upon a time a poor widow who had an only son named Jack, and a cow named Milky-white. And all they had to live on was the milk the cow gave every morning which they carried to the market and sold. But one morning Milky-white gave no milk, and they didn't know what to do.

"What shall we do, what shall we do?" said the widow, wringing her hands.

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

"We've tried that before, and nobody would take you," said his mother; "we must sell Milky-white and with the money do something, start a shop, or something."

"All right, mother," says Jack; "it's market-day today, and I'll soon sell Milky-white, and then we'll see what we can do."

So he took the cow's halter in his hand, and off he starts. He hadn't gone far when he met a funny-looking old man who said to him: "Good morning, Jack."

"Good morning to you," said Jack, and wondered how he knew his name.

"Well, Jack, and where are you off to?" said the man.

"I'm going to market to sell our cow here."

"Oh, you look the proper sort of chap to sell cows," said the man; "I wonder if you know how many beans make five."

"Two in each hand and one in your mouth," says Jack, as sharp as a needle.

"Right you are," said the man, "and here they are the very beans themselves," he went on pulling out of his pocket a number of strange-looking beans. "As you are so sharp," says he, "I don't mind doing a swap with you—your cow for these beans."

"What!" says Jack, "wouldn't you like that!"

"Ah! you don't know what these beans are," said the man; "if you plant them overnight, by morning they grow right up to the sky."

"Really?" says Jack; "you don't say so."

“Yes, that is so, and if it doesn’t turn out to be true you can have your cow back.”

“Right,” says Jack, and hands him over Milky-white’s halter and pockets the beans.

Back goes Jack home, and as he hadn’t gone very far, it wasn’t dusk by the time he got to his door.

“What back, Jack?” said his mother; “I see you haven’t got Milky-white, so you’ve sold her. How much did you get for her?”

“You’ll never guess, mother,” says Jack.

“Good boy! Five pounds, ten, fifteen, no, it can’t be twenty.”

“I told you you couldn’t guess. What do you say to these beans; they’re magical, plant them overnight and _____”

“What!” says Jack’s mother, “have you been such a fool, such a dolt, such an idiot, as to give away my Milky-white, the best milker in the parish, and prime beef to boot, for a set of paltry beans. Take that! Take that! Take that! And as for your precious beans here they go out of the window. And now off with you to bed. Not a sip shall you drink, and not a bite shall you swallow this very night.”

So Jack went upstairs to his little room in the attic, and sad and sorry he was, to be sure, as much for his mother’s sake, as for the loss of his supper.

At last he dropped off to sleep.

When he woke up, the room looked so funny. The sun was shining into part of it, and yet all the rest was quite dark and shady. So Jack jumped up and dressed himself and went to the window. And what do you think he saw? Why, the beans his mother had thrown out of the window into the garden had sprung up into a big beanstalk which went up and up and up until it reached the sky. So the man spoke truth after all!

The beanstalk grew up quite close past Jack’s window, so all he had to do was to open it and give a jump on to the beanstalk which was made like a big ladder. So Jack climbed and he climbed and he climbed and he climbed and he climbed and he climbed until at last he reached the sky. And when he got there he found a long broad road going as straight as a dart. So he walked along and he walked along and he walked along until he came to a great big tall house, and on the doorstep there was a great big tall woman.

“Good morning, mum,” says Jack, quite polite-like. “Could you be so kind as to give me some breakfast.” For he hadn’t had anything to eat, you know, the night before and was as hungry as a hunter.

“It’s breakfast you want, is it?” says the great big tall woman, “it’s breakfast you’ll be if you don’t move off from here. My man is an ogre, and there’s nothing he likes better than boys broiled on toast. You’d better be moving on, or he’ll soon be coming.”

“Oh! please mum, do give me something to eat, mum. I’ve had nothing to eat since yesterday morning, really and truly, mum,” says Jack. “I may as well be broiled as die of hunger.”

Well, the ogre’s wife wasn’t such a bad sort, after all. So she took Jack into the kitchen, and gave him a chunk of bread and cheese and a jug of milk. But Jack hadn’t half finished these when thump! thump! thump! the whole house began to tremble with the noise of someone coming.

“Goodness gracious me! It’s my old man,” said the ogre’s wife, “what on earth shall I do? Here, come quick and jump in here.” And she bundled Jack into the oven just as the ogre came in.

He was a big one, to be sure. At his belt he had three calves strung up by the heels, and he unhooked them and threw them down on the table and said: “Here, wife, broil me a couple of these for breakfast. Ah, what’s this I smell?”

Fee-fi-fo-fum,
I smell the blood of an Englishman,
Be he alive, or be he dead
I’ll have his bones to grind my bread.”

“Nonsense, dear,” said his wife, “you’re dreaming. Or perhaps you smell the scraps of that little boy you liked so much for yesterday’s dinner. Here, you go and have a wash and tidy up, and by the time you come back your breakfast will be ready for you.”

So the ogre went off, and Jack was just going to jump out of the oven and run off when the woman told him not. “Wait until he’s asleep,” says she; “he always has a snooze after breakfast.”

Well, the ogre had his breakfast, and after that he goes to a big chest and takes out of it a couple of bags of gold and sits down counting them until at last his head began to nod, and he began to snore until the whole house shook again.

Then Jack crept out on tiptoe from his oven, and as he was passing the ogre he took one of the bags of gold under his arm, and off he runs until he came to the beanstalk, and then he threw down the bag of gold which, of course fell in to his mother’s garden, and then he climbed down and climbed down until at last he got home and told his mother and showed her the gold and said: “Well, mother, wasn’t I right about the beans? They are really magical, you see.”

So they lived on the bag of gold for some time.

Questions

1. Do you think it was a good idea to trade the cow for the beans? Why or why not?
2. What are three adjectives that describe Jack as a person?
3. What are three adjectives that describe ogre as a person?
4. What do you think about Jack taking the ogre's gold?

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. wringing
2. chap
3. ogre
4. tremble
5. snooze

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1. "What shall we do, what shall we do?" said the widow, **wringing** her hands"
 - a. washing; cleaning
 - b. waving; flapping
 - c. hiding or burying
 - d. twisting or squeezing

2. "Oh, you look the proper sort of **chap** to sell cows"
 - a. height; size
 - b. man or fellow
 - c. rancher; stockman
 - d. peddler or salesman

3. "My man is an **ogre**"
 - a. monster; giant
 - b. funny person; clown
 - c. farmer or grower
 - d. oddball or unusual one

4. "the whole house began to **tremble** with the noise of someone coming"
 - a. shudder or shake
 - b. fall apart; break
 - c. scream or yell
 - d. weep or cry

5. "Wait until he's asleep,' says she; 'he always has a **snooze** after breakfast."
 - a. pastry or dessert
 - b. walk or stroll
 - c. sleep; nap
 - d. game with darts