

Jack & the Beanstalk

A traditional tale of boy versus Giant – with added Rat and Squirrel

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Jack & the Beanstalk

A traditional tale of boy versus Giant – with added Rat and Squirrel

Dramatis Personae (19; 8M, 8F, 3E)

Fairy of Information – aka FoI

Jack Spriggins (aged somewhere between 7 and 35) – a plucky lad

Widow Spriggins (Jack's mother, age not admitted)

Beauchamp (pron. *Beecham* – a much-loved cow)

Pedlar – a pedlar

Rose}

Lily}

Marigold} – Chorus of Friendly Flowers

Passing Squirrel – a squirrel (who passes briefly by)

Mrs Giant – a giantess, wife of the Giant (see below)

Giant – a giant

Kitchen Rat – a rat who haunts the Giants' kitchen

Philosopher}

Lawyer}

Priest} – a trio of thinkers not doers

Hen – a talking golden-egg-laying hen

Harp – a golden, talking harp

Police Officer – a man or woman charged with the enforcement of the law

Father Christmas – a benign white-bearded old man

Prologue

FoI: Lords, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, welcome! Be pleased now to lend us your ears and your eyes and your full attention as we take you to a time long ago and a place faraway; to a time when giants and ogres were quite commonly to be seen (and not driven too extinction by human activity); and when *magic* – true, wonderful, unpredictable magic – still played its part amid the humdrum of the daily round.

And who am I, you may well be asking yourselves. I am the Fairy who will guide you and inform you as we present our tale from such times. My friends call me 'The Fairy of Information': FoI, in short. What are you to call me?

(With an inclusive beam at the audience) And tonight you, good audience, you are all my friends.

And so without more ado: Our tale begins with a poor family... A *small* family...

Scene 1

Outside the house of Jack and his mother.

FoI: Just a poor young boy: Jack: Jack Spriggins; and his widowed mother: Widow Spriggins. Poor they are indeed! – for ‘poor’ in olden times meant you had *next-to-nothing*; so poor indeed that they can neither afford to buy seed to sow nor bread to eat. To buy food they must sell something. But what?

(Enter Upstage Widow briskly, followed by a whining Jack. Jack has a lasso wrapped around his waist as a belt.)

Jack: We can’t sell Beauchamp! [pronounced *Beecham*]

Widow: We have to.

Jack: But she’s my favourite!

Widow: Jack: she’s a *cow*.

Jack: Why can’t we sell Agnes?

Widow: She’s your aunt. You don’t sell aunts. And she wouldn’t bring us a string of beans if you did. No, Jack: Beauchamp’s no longer in her milking prime. Sell her at market for the best price you can. Otherwise...

Jack: Otherwise...? **(Shrugs)** What’s the worst that could happen?

Widow: Starvation.

Jack: I’m starving already, Mother. What’s for lunch?

Widow: No, Jack: you’re not *starving*: you’re *hungry*. But in a few days yes, you’ll starve.

Jack: And lunch?

(Widow shrugs and shows open hands, indicating nothing.)

Jack: **(Sights)** All right then. **(Calling Off)** Beauchamp...! Beauchamp?

(Exit Upstage Widow.)

Jack: Walkies, Beauchamp...!

Beauchamp: (Off) Moo.

(Jack unwinds from his waist and throws Off the lasso which, it comes clear, catches Beauchamp's head.)

Jack: Come on – we're going to Market. You'll like it: it's fun...

Beauchamp: (Off) Moo -oOoo!

Jack: Lots to see and do...

Beauchamp:(Off) Mooooooo.

Jack: And buy... Not that you and I have any money. And there'll be other cows there, for sure... Maybe even a prize bull!

(Enter Left with a monstrous moo and at a charge Beauchamp – a storm of black and white which pulls Jack, holding hard the lasso, Right at speed.)

Scene 2

A roadside somewhere

(Sitting Centre a pedlar, dressed in a strange green gown and tugging a long, ragged beard.)

Pedlar:

*(Singing) I sit by the road
And I watch and I wait
For a boy, a poor boy,
Sent hither by Fate.*

*For this passing lad
I do have a surprise;
And he'll stop and he'll do
What I say if he's wise.*

(Enter Left Jack, holding the lasso – stretched taut by (Off) a wayward Beauchamp.)

Pedlar:

*Here on the ground,
The cold, stony ground,*

*I'm ready to sell
A treasure I've found.*

*Ugly and strange,
Yes, I crouch like a toad;
But hear what I say
As you pass on this road.*

Jack: Were you singing to me?

Pedlar: I have many more verses where those came from. You would like to hear...?

(Jack shakes his head emphatically.)

Beauchamp: (Off, with negative inflection) Moooooo!

Pedlar: But you got the gist?

Jack: I heard the word 'treasure'.

Pedlar: You *will* have treasure, Jack. Trust me.

Jack: How do you know my name?

Pedlar: I call every boy 'Jack'. It's simpler.

Jack: Oh. And I guess you call every girl...

Pedlar: Æthelflæd.

Jack: **(Bemused)** Really?

Pedlar: Of course I call every girl 'Jill'! I haven't got time to call them Æthelflæds.

Jack: And do you promise every boy and girl treasure?

Pedlar: Only those who have cows to sell.

Jack: I have a cow to sell!

Pedlar: **(Disingenuously)** You *do*? **(Looking Off)** Oh, so you do. **(Strokes chin thoughtfully.)** I'll buy her.

Beauchamp: Moooo....

Jack: You will?

Pedlar: I will.

Beauchamp: Moooo....

Jack: You won't change her name?

Pedlar: What is her name?

Jack: Beauchamp. It means 'fair field'... **(With a distant tone)** ...for every field she grazes she makes beautiful.

Beauchamp: **(With elegiac wistfulness)** Moooooooooo...-ooo...

Pedlar: For as long as she lives then, she shall be called *Beauchamp*.

Beauchamp: **(Dubiously)** Moo?

Jack: May I see first the treasure – before I hand her over?

Pedlar: The treasure?

Beauchamp: MooOoo.

(Jack nods. The Pedlar opens his bag. Jack looks inside with a puzzled expression.)

Jack: I see no treasure.

Pedlar: Because you have no faith. I have never seen a unicorn – but that doesn't mean they do not exist.

(Pedlar takes from the bag a smaller bag.)

Jack: And that contains the...?

Pedlar: **(Nodding)** Treasure.

(From this smaller bag the Pedlar takes a yet smaller bag.)

Beauchamp: **(Puzzled)** Moo-oo?

Jack: Is the...?

(Pedlar nods, and takes from the yet smaller bag an even smaller bag. This could continue for some bags more until finally the Pedlar presents a minute bag.)

Pedlar: There. Now the cow...

Jack: Beauchamp.

Beauchamp: Mooo.

Pedlar: Beauchamp is mine.

Jack: But the treasure? All you have given me is this very small bag.

Pedlar: Look inside, faithless one.

(Jack looks inside. Seeing nothing he turns the bag upside down. Out fall five small black objects.)

Pedlar: Careless lad! See...? On the ground?

(Jack stoops down and picks up the objects – seeds, as it transpires.)

Pedlar: There... there is your treasure.

Jack: Seeds?

Pedlar: Magical seeds. **(He takes hold of the lasso and tugs.)**

Jack: Magical seeds?

Pedlar: Plant them... and you'll see.

(Jack sits and examines the seeds sceptically; and puts them in the bag with a shrug. The Pedlar, holding the lasso firmly, dashes Right and exits. Splurge of black and white and fusillade of mooing as Beauchamp enters Left and exits Right in the twirling of a tail.)

FoI: Jack leaves Beauchamp and hurries back to his mother – Widow Spriggins, you will remember.

Scene 3

Outside the Spriggins' hovel

(Enter Upstage Widow Spriggins. She takes her place on her moaning stool, shelling peas, perhaps. And perhaps the shelled peas could fly randomly and with surprising velocity around her.)

FoI: Widow Spriggins waits hopefully outside her house. She has been inside since her last scene to do some tidying, but she generally prefers to moan outside the front door where folk can hear her properly.

Widow:

*Oh woe, woe, threefold woe!
What shall we do, where shall we go?
No food in the land, and we're all alone.
What can we do but whimper and groan?*

*All is grief and labour and toil:
Nothing will grow in our parched soil.
Daily chores breaking my back;
My only hope my sole son...*

(Enter Right Jack.)

Widow: Jack! You're back.

Jack: And I have sold poor Beauchamp.

Widow: For?

Jack: Treasure.

Widow: Treasure?

Jack: Treasure.

(Jack holds out the small bag.)

Widow: **(Puzzled)** How much treasure can you fit in that bag?

(Jack opens the bag. Widow Spriggins looks inside.)

Widow: What's...?

Jack: Beans.

Widow: Beans?

Jack: Magic beans.

Widow: Magic beans? In what way are they...?

Jack: Magic. Not certain yet – but I have been assured on good authority that they are indeed magic.

Widow: What good authority?

Jack: A strange old man with a straggly beard sitting by the road.

Widow: You gave our only cow to an old man sitting by the road?

Jack: A *strange* old man, yes. With a straggly beard.

Widow: For a couple of beans?!

Jack: Five beans – five magic beans, yes. **(Reflects)** You don't think I've been...

Widow: *Had.* Of course you have been – *had, tricked, scammed, outwitted* – and taken for a ridiculous ride.

Jack: And so that pedlar by the way...

Widow: Has our cow for a handful of worthless beans. **(Breaking down)** Oh Jack! Jack! **(She throws some peas into the air and eats one or two.)** Jack!

Jack: Don't, Mother...!

Widow: Jack...! Jack...!

FoI: Poor Widow Spriggins was in despair. She and Jack now had lost their cow for a few beans...

(Widow and Jack look at the beans.)

FoI: Beans which angry Jack cast on the ground.

(Jack flings the beans to the ground in tearful chagrin.)

Jack: Take that, beans! [Join the useless peas!]

FoI: All the distraught Widow Spriggins could say was...

Widow: Jack...! Jack...!

Jack: Please, Mother...! Wailing *Jack, Jack's* not going to...

Widow: Jaaaaaaaack...!

Jack: I'll be in my room – if anyone wants me.

(Exit Left Jack. Widow looks ahead with blank despair. Pause)

Widow: Oh Jack!

(Exit Right wailing Widow. Enter Flowers, who perform enchanting and mysterious dance.)

Scene 4

Jack's bedroom

(Jack mopes abed.)

FoI: Jack went to his bedroom and, despite the wailings from his mother (which went on through most of the night), he fell asleep. In his sleep he dreamed; but dreamed not of Beauchamp or the beans or the Pedlar. He dreamed of a giant: a foul and fearsome giant, huge and hairy, bristly and beastly, foaming at the mouth with raging frenzy...

(Enter Right Giant as described. Giant circles Jack's bed rambling inarticulately. Exit Right Giant. Jack awakes.)

FoI: How relieved was Jack to wake and find that it had all been just a frightening dream!

(Jack looks towards the window with a puzzled frown.)

Jack: It feels like morning... yet... why is it still so dark?

FoI: When he looked through the window – as always he did when he awoke in order to see the day's weather – there was no weather to behold: occluding the view from the window was a dense front of dark green foliage. You can imagine his amazement...

(Jack takes a few steps back in amazement.)

FoI: But you don't have to imagine: just watch.

(Jack's eyes grow as big and round as they can, his jaw drops, his tongue emerges pinkly...)

Jack: Whaaa...?! **(He stumbles and falls backwards.)**

Widow: **(Off)** What is it, Jack?

Jack: I'll tell you when I know, Mother; I shall tell you when I know. **(With manful, understated bravery)** And then I'll be down for breakfast.

Widow: (Off) There's no breakfast.

Jack: Oh.

FoI: Jack bravely approached the window again, leant out, grasped a giant leaf, pulled himself onto what was in fact – or at least in fable – an unbelievably big beanstalk.

(Jack begins his climb.)

Scene 5

On the beanstalk

(Flowers on stage. Enter from below Jack. Flowers watch him and comment as he climbs.)

Jack: (Gasping) There's no other explanation...

Rose: No other explanation. Is there, Marigold?

Jack: This must be... a Giant Beanstalk...

Lily: Obviously.

Jack: Grown from one of those seeds I threw out...

Marigold: Of course. Elementary botany, Jack.

Jack: But does this stalk stretch all the way to Heaven? Does it?

Flowers: Climb it and see! Climb it and see!

Marigold: We'd join you...wouldn't we, Lily?

Lily: If we didn't have roots, good Marigold.

Rose: To name just one impediment to flowers scaling beanstalks.

(Jack begins to climb.)

FoI: The stalk did not reach Heaven. But as he reached the top he did arrive in a very strange world...

Scene 6

Atop the beanstalk

FoI: You expect characters in stories to say at this point 'Where am I? But in real life how often does anyone say aloud 'Where am I?' ...

(Jack looks around, wondering but silent.)

Jack: Where am I?

FoI: ...when you find yourself at the top of a beanstalk, looking at a huge castle ahead of you? Unless you meet a Passing Squirrel.

(Enter Right Passing Squirrel, eating from a packet of nuts. Jack hails him.)

Jack: Where am I, Passing Squirrel?

Squirrel: **(Pausing momentarily)** Same place as I am. **(With a sardonic toss of the head)** *Obviously.* **(Exit Left.)**

Jack: I thought squirrels were polite rodents. **(Looking Right)** But look: I see a castle before me. No doubt someone there can enlighten me. **(Exit Right.)**

FoI: Jack went to the castle. It was an enormous castle; and the wooden door to the castle was, Jack thought, unnecessarily vast. He could not reach the huge brass knocker – but there was no need: Jack simply crawled underneath the massive door beams like the tiny mouse he wasn't.

Scene 7

The kitchen of the Castle, equipped with suitably giant culinary equipment
(Jolly Mrs Giant is about kitchen business. She is the wife of the Giant who owns the castle.)

Mrs Giant: *Fum, fo, fi, fee,
Tea for two and two for tea.*

(Jack creeps into the kitchen, hiding behind the giant pots and pans.)

*What would you like to eat today?
What's your fancy? Just you say.*

(Beholding the food Jack emits a hungry but frightened whimper. Mrs Giant looks around curiously before resuming her happy culinary pottering. Enter Upstage Rat, who accosts Jack, making him jump.)

Jack: Whoa!

Rat: Shhhh!

(Mrs Giant looks around again. Jack and Rat wait until she is back at her tea preparation.)

Rat: **(Whispering)** What are you doing here?

Jack: Just... looking around.

Rat: *Just looking around?* Do you know where you are?

Jack: **(Shrugs and nods.)** In a kitchen?

Rat: Not just any old kitchen: a Giant kitchen. **(With a soupçon of pride)**
That's why I'm so big.

Jack: Then I've come to the right place: I've a massive hunger.

Rat: **(Sighs)** That's as maybe...

Jack: **(Rubbing his stomach)** That's as is.

Rat: But you're not supposed to enter the kitchen area: it's not hygienic.

Jack: Who are *you* to talk?

Rat: I'm a Kitchen Rat. I know these things.

Mrs Giant:

*Fum, fo, fi, fee,
Tea for two and two for tea.*

Jack: Who is...?

Rat: She's a giantess.

Mrs Giant: *What tasty treat shall I prepare?*

Jack: I'd never have guessed.

Mrs Giant: Did someone speak? **(Looking around)** Is anyone there?

(Jack and Rat lie lower.)

Rat: **(In a deliberate and even more careful whisper)** If she sees you...

Jack: Yes?

Rat: You'll be in trouble.

Jack: So will you: you're a rat.

Rat: **(With sardonic intonation à la Passing Squirrel)** *Obviously.*

Jack: Aren't there any traps... poisons... for unwelcome rodents like you?

Rat: **(Cockily)** I can look after myself.

Jack: So you're one big clever rat?

Rat: You should meet the cockroaches.

(Mrs Giant trills happily and scarily.)

Rat: Follow me if you know what's good for you. Come...

(Jack and Rat creep together behind a large copper pot. Mrs Giant puts two dishes on a tray.)

Mrs Giant:

*Fum, fo, fi, fee,
One for you and one for me.
But watch the cake! – or you'll get fat...*

(Hearing something...) What was that? I smell a rat!

(Mrs Giant, wielding a large wooden mixing spoon, takes up the chase. Kitchenware knocked everywhere. The Rat, being an experienced chatee, gets away with a parting...)

Rat: *Bonne chance!* **(Exit Upstage rapidly.)**

Jack: **(Looking to the escaping Rat with wonder)** A Rat that speaks French. Now I've seen everything.

(Mrs Giant comes up behind Jack and hoists him by his collar. He squeals. Mrs Giant drops him. He yelps.)

Mrs Giant: Whoooo...?

Jack: Just a poor boy, Your Hugeness.

Mrs Giant: Whyyyyy...?

Jack: That's what I'm asking myself.

Mrs Giant: Whennnnn...?

Jack: Just now.

Mrs Giant: Whattttt...?

Jack: And I mean no harm.

Giantess: Let me finish at least *one* intimidating question, won't you?

(Jack opens his mouth for a moment, then closes it and nods obligingly.)

Mrs Giant: What would you be doing in my kitchen?

Jack: Eating.

Mrs Giant: Eating?

Jack: That's what I *would* be doing... since you ask.

Mrs Giant: *My* food?

Jack: **(Sadly)** I didn't bring any lunch. **(More sadly)** And I haven't had breakfast. **(Even more sadly)** Nor tonight will I have any...

Mrs Giant: **(Interrupting, with a sudden access of pity)** Mm. You do look hungry...

Jack: It's because I *am*. Mother says I'll soon be starving. At the moment I believe I'm what they call 'famished'.

Mrs Giant: Would you like some bread? Or lemon cake? Or apple crumble?

Jack: Is there a healthy option?

Mrs Giant: Radishes? Raw onions? Pigs' trotters and tails?

Jack: That'll do me.

(Mrs Giant fetches a giant saucer on which are trotters etc. and puts it before Jack.)

FoI: Jack was tucking in to his first trotter when a rumbling and a trembling shook the kitchen floor and ceiling and walls and windows and what have you.

(Kitchenquake)

Mrs Giant: Quick. Move!

(Jack eats at double speed.)

Mrs Giant: I don't mean, *eat quickly*. I mean, get out of the way quickly. My husband is coming. If you think *I'm* big...

(Enter heavily and noisily and terrifyingly Giant. [First appearance of Giant outside Jack's dream.] Jack scrambles behind a pot – still munching.)

Giant: *Fee, fi, foh, fum
I smell the blood of an Englishman.
Be he alive, or be he dead,
I'll grind his bones to make my bread.*

(Mrs Giant feigns preoccupation with high tea preparation.)

Mrs Giant: Is that you, dear?

Giant: *This is me - as you may see;
But someone else is come for tea.
I smell him now, I sense his fear;
There's surely some rat hiding here.*

Mrs Giant: *You're right, my dear: you always know.
There was a rat: I saw him go
Behind the oven where we've placed
The tempting cheese – with poison laced.*

Giant: Enough of verse, my giantess!

Mrs Giant: Why now? Does it make you like me less?

Giant: No, my jolly mountain fair...

Mrs Giant: Then prose or verse, what dost thou care...
So long as food and drink be there?

Giant: **(With a suspicious pause, in grumpy prose)** Are you trying to distract me?
With gratuitous rhyme and hypnotic metre?

Mrs Giant: (Disingenuously) Noooo.

Giant: So that I don't go searching for the Englishman...?

Mrs Giant: Or boy... (Realising that this could be a giveaway) Or rat... Or *English* rat. (Rambling uneasily) Or French-speaking rat of dubious extraction. Whatever the intruding case... all shall be forgotten once you settle down to your tea.

Giant: What *is* for tea?

Mrs Giant: A surprise. Give me just a few moments to make everything just so.

Giant: You've already had many moments.

Mrs Giant: I'm a perfectionist. Why don't you go and play with some of your gold coins, there's a good ogre.

Giant: (Dreamily rapturous) Gold coins!

Mrs Giant: And I'll call you when all's ready.

Giant: Gold coins!

(Exit Giant, eyes gleaming with gold-lust. Jack emerges.)

Mrs Giant: If he sees you...

Jack: (Nodding) He'll grind my bones to make his bread. May I have another trotter?

Mrs Giant: I think you should be on your way.

Jack: Does he eat all visitors? Or just those male and English?

Mrs Giant: If you said you were French...

Jack: *Oui?*

Mrs Giant: You may get away with it.

Jack: *Pourquoi?* (Perhaps finding and donning a garland of giant onions à la française)

Mrs Giant: He doesn't like garlic.

Jack: What's the French for 'Don't eat me: you wouldn't enjoy it'? **(Looking around)** I could try asking the Rat...