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JACK AND THE BEANSTALK

Once upon a time, there was a boy named Jack who lived with his mother in a small and humble house. They did not have much money, but they loved each other very much and always tried to move forward together. Their greatest treasure was a cow that gave them milk every day.

One day, Jack's mother became very sad because there was no food left in the house.

—Jack, she said with worry, —we will have to sell the cow at the market. It is the only thing we have left.

Jack looked at the cow with sadness, because he cared for her very much. But he knew he had to help his mother.

—All right, Mother, he answered. —I will go to the market and come back soon.

Jack left home, leading the cow beside him. As he walked along the road, he met a strange man who smiled in a mysterious way. In his hands he carried some large, shining beans.

—Good morning, boy, said the man. —Where are you going with that cow?

—I am going to the market to sell her, Jack replied.

The man looked at the cow and then showed him the beans.

—I will give you these magic beans in exchange. They are very special.

Jack opened his eyes wide.

—Are they really magical? he asked.

—Of course they are, answered the man. —If you take good care of them, you will see something wonderful.

Jack thought for a moment. The beans looked ordinary, but the man spoke with such confidence that in the end he decided to trade the cow for them.

—All right, said Jack. —I will make the trade.

And so he went back home with the beans in his hand.

When his mother saw that Jack had returned without the cow and without any money, she was very surprised.

—Jack! she cried. —Where is the cow?

Jack showed her the beans with excitement.

—I traded her for these magic beans.

His mother looked at him in disbelief.

—Beans! she said very angrily. —We needed food, and you brought this!

She was so upset that she took the beans and threw them out the window.

Jack felt sad. He did not want to make his mother angry. That night he lay in bed thinking about what had happened, and he fell asleep with a heavy heart.

But the next morning, something amazing happened.

When Jack looked out the window, he saw a huge green plant rising from the ground all the way up into the sky. Its stalk was thick, its leaves were large and bright, and it seemed to reach the clouds.

—Mother, come and see! Jack shouted.

His mother came running out and stared in amazement.

—It cannot be! she said. —The beans really were magical!

Jack looked up high above and felt very curious.

—I am going to climb it, he said.

—Be careful, his mother replied. —We do not know what is up there.

But Jack was brave, so he began to climb. He climbed and climbed up the great plant, higher and higher, until he passed through the clouds. Up above he found a strange and quiet place.

There was a wide path, a great field, and far away there stood a giant castle.

—What a strange place, Jack said softly.

Carefully, he walked to the castle and knocked on the door. After a short while, a very large woman appeared. She was a giant's wife.

—What are you doing here, child? she asked.

Jack answered humbly:

—I am very hungry. Could you please give me something to eat?

The woman looked at him with pity.

—Poor boy, she said. —Come in quickly. But you must hide if my husband comes, because he does not like to see children nearby.

Jack went inside, and the woman gave him bread, cheese, and milk. He had hardly finished eating when a loud noise was heard.

—Thump, thump, thump! the whole castle seemed to shake.

The woman opened her eyes wide.

—It is the giant! she whispered. —Hide at once.

Jack ran and hid inside a great cupboard.

The giant came in with heavy steps and sniffed the air.

—I smell a boy, he growled. —I smell a boy in here.

—You must be mistaken, said his wife. —There is no boy here.

The giant sat down at the table and began to eat a huge supper. After that, he took out bags full of gold coins and began to count them.

—One for me, another for me, and another for me, he muttered happily.

But before long, the giant fell asleep in his chair and began to snore so loudly that the windows shook.

Jack slipped quietly out of the cupboard.

—What a great deal of gold, he thought.

He took one of the bags and ran to the door without making a sound. Then he went back to the beanstalk, climbed down quickly, and carried the gold home.

His mother could hardly believe it.

—Where did you get this? she asked in surprise.

Jack told her everything he had seen in the castle. Thanks to those coins, they had food for a while and were able to live better.

However, after some time, the money ran out. Then Jack decided to climb the beanstalk again.

—I will only go once more, he said. —Perhaps I will find something that can help us.

Once again he climbed up to the castle. The giant's wife recognized him.

—You have come back, she said with worry. —That is very dangerous.

—I know, Jack answered. —But I need help.

The woman let him in again and once more hid him when the giant arrived.

—I smell a boy, the giant growled as soon as he came in. —I smell a boy in here.

—Surely you are tired, his wife answered. —Sit down and eat.

After supper, the giant called for something special.

—Hen! he shouted. —Lay me a golden egg!

Then a marvelous hen appeared. She sat upon the table and laid a shining golden egg.

Jack opened his eyes wide.

—Amazing, he thought.

When the giant fell asleep again, Jack came out of his hiding place, took the hen very carefully, and ran away as fast as he could. Once more he climbed down the beanstalk and carried the hen home.

From that day on, the hen laid golden eggs for them, and Jack and his mother lived much more comfortably. But Jack still felt curious about the castle in the clouds.

—You should not go back, his mother said. —We already have enough.

But Jack thought that would be the last time.

He climbed once again to the castle, and the giant's wife hid him again. But that day the giant seemed more alert.

—I smell a boy, he repeated loudly. —This time I am sure.

Then he called:

—Harp! Play for me!

At once a magic harp appeared and began to play beautiful music all by itself. Jack was filled with wonder.

When the giant fell asleep, Jack stepped out quietly and took the harp. But the harp, as soon as it felt itself being carried away, cried out:

—Help! Help! Someone is stealing me!

The giant woke up at once.

—You again! he roared when he saw Jack.

Jack ran with all his strength. He rushed out of the castle, reached the beanstalk, and began to climb down as fast as he could. The giant came after him, climbing down too.

—Mother! Jack shouted from above. —Bring me an axe!

His mother ran out with an axe in her hands. When Jack reached the ground, he grabbed the axe and began to chop the great plant.

—Faster! his mother cried.

Jack chopped and chopped with all his strength. The stalk began to crack.

—Crack! Crack!

The giant was still climbing down when the enormous plant bent and fell with a tremendous crash. Down came the giant with it, and he never returned again.

Jack and his mother breathed with relief.

—Now we are safe at last, she said.

Jack smiled.

—And now we will not have to worry anymore.

With the hen that laid golden eggs and the magic harp, Jack and his mother lived happily for many years. They never forgot that one day, some simple beans had changed their lives forever.

THE END

