

Jack and the Beanstalk

Chapter 1:

Once upon a time there lived a poor widow with her son, Jack. Their cottage was at the base of a mountain, below an unscalable cliff. They had little, only an old milk cow by the name of Milky White and were dependent on her milk to survive. One day, the cow gave no milk. The widow didn't know what to do. "What shall we do? What shall we do?" she said to Jack, not actually expecting a solution to their dilemma. Jack wasn't the brightest of boys. He was good hearted, but not bright.

"We could sell Milky White," he said, "and use the money to start a business, a small shop or food stand at the market. I would help. I'm big enough now."

An excellent suggestion, she thought, reassessing her opinion of her son. "Will you take Milky White to the market to sell?" It was a long walk to the market for the poor widow.

"Of course, Mother. Gladly," said the boy, overjoyed at both her trust in him and the prospect of a trip to the market.

"Be careful, my son. Milky White is all we possess. You must obtain a good price."

"I will, Mother. You may depend upon me." Jack said, with self pride.

Jack went for Milky White, a rope in his hand. "Come Milky White," he said, "we're going to the market, you and I."

They hadn't gone far when he met a man, a funny, little, old, man. "Hello Jack," said the man.

"How do you know my name?" asked Jack.

"Oh, but I know all about you, my boy. I even know you're off to sell this fine cow."

"Why, yes I am." Jack preened, thrusting out his chest. "I'm off to the market to sell Milky White."

"But, why go to the market, when I can offer you such that you'll never find there?"

His curiosity aroused, Jack asked, "But, what could you have that I couldn't find in the market?"

"These," the old man said, holding out his hand.

"But," said Jack, profoundly disappointed with what he saw, "they're just beans, just five plain old beans."

"There's nothing plain about these beans," protested the man. "These, lad, are magical beans."

"Go on! There's no such thing as magical beans," but, curious, Jack asked, "What do they do?"

"They will grow a stalk such as you've never seen, stout enough for you to climb. It'll stretch to the sky. You'll be able to climb to the top of the cliff behind your house."

"But, why should I want to climb the cliff? What would I find there?"

"Riches, my son. Riches beyond imagination: gold and jewels; a hen that lays golden eggs."

"A hen that lays golden eggs?"

"Yes, my boy, golden eggs-gold through and through."

"And if I climb to the top, they'll be there for the taking?"

"Oh, no, Jack. Nothing in life is that easy. All are the possessions of a giant. He guards them."

"A giant? How could I prevail against a giant?"

"Could not a bright, quick witted, boy such as you, out smart a giant? They are dull creatures, the size of their brains not equal to their height and girth. A bright boy," the old man said again, stressing those words, "could find a way. And, just think, a hen which lays golden eggs-gold through and through."

Golden eggs-gold through and through. Jack was thinking about just that. "All right," he said, handing the old man the rope which held Milky White, "I'll do it. Give me the beans."

Smiling, the old man dropped the beans into Jack's hand, then left, leading Milky White back in the direction from which he'd come. Jack didn't think to ask again how the old man had known his name. Carefully closing his hand upon the beans, he ran all the way home.

"Mother- Mother, come look," he shouted as he ran into the cottage. "Look what I have. Look what I was given for Milky White."

The boy was back much too soon. He couldn't have gone all the way to the market. The poor widow was concerned. Had it been a mistake to trust something so important to Jack? Had it been a mistake to trust him with their lives? Without money from the sale of Milky White, they would surely die.

She had never seen the boy so excited. "Look Mother," he said, running to her. "Look what Milky White brought." He opened his hand, showing his mother the beans-just five beans.

"Beans? You traded our cow for beans-just five beans?" Snatching the beans from his hand, she threw them out the window, where they landed at the base of the cliff; then, sitting down in a chair beside the bare table, she began to cry. No food would be on the table that night-or any other night. "You've killed us, Jack. Through your stupidity, you've killed us."

"But, Mother," he said, while looking out the window, trying unsuccessfully to spy the beans, "they were magical beans."

"You fool. Magical beans do not exist."

They went to bed hungry. No food of any kind was in the house. She didn't punish the boy. What was the need? Without money for the cow, they were dead, anyway.

Jack slept fitfully that night. He was such a fool. Of course his mother was right. Magical beans did not exist.

Chapter 2:

But he awoke the next morning to such a sight. The beans, where his mother had thrown them next to the cliff, had spouted; and sprouted, they had grown. Oh, how they had grown. Entwined, wrapped round and round each other, they stretched to the sky, their leaves forming steps, stairs, if you will, up the side of the cliff.

Saying nothing to his mother, Jack ran outside, to the base of the stalk. *If the old man had told the truth about the beans, maybe he'd told the truth about the gold, about the hen which laid golden eggs-gold through and through.* Jack began climbing.

An unbelievably long climb, it was well past mid day before Jack arrived at the top. He was famished. He'd had nothing to eat that morning, nor the night before. In the distance, he spied a castle, a great castle.

Even from a distance he could tell it was huge. Maybe a giant did live there. Maybe that part of the tale was true as well. No matter. He couldn't go back. He hadn't the strength to climb back down; and no supper would await him, should he return. Girding his loins, he set out for the castle-for whatever fate awaited him there.

Evening by the time he arrived, Jack walked through the open gate. No one seemed about. Spying a great door, he walked up to it and knocked, knocked on it with a stick because his hand made so little noise on the thick door.

At first nothing; then he heard steps, great, thundering, ground shaking, steps. The door opened. A woman, dressed in an apron, holding a big wooden spoon, stood at the door, a woman, not the ogre he had expected, but a giant of a woman nevertheless, tall as a tree.

"Who's there?" she cried. "Who's knocking at my door? Who bothers me while I'm cooking dinner?" She hadn't seen him. He came up no farther than her knees.

Jack covered his ears with his hands, but her voice reverberated inside his head. One word she'd said in particular, he heard, clearer than all the rest-dinner. "Please," he said, tugging on her apron, "I'm hungry. Could I please have something to eat?"

Looking down, she spied him, "A boy? What are you doing here, boy? Don't you know my husband is a great ogre. He eats little boys."

At that moment, Jack didn't care. He'd never been so hungry. If he could just have something to eat, he'd gladly become a meal for the giant. "Please, good woman," he said in his most pitiful, little boy, voice, "I'm so hungry. Could I please have something, a scrap from your table-something you might throw to the dog?"

"Come in, boy-but quickly. My husband returns at any moment. If he finds you, you will be his meal."

Jack followed her to the kitchen. He'd never seen so much food. Whole calves turned on spits inside an open hearth. The giantess tossed him a hunk of bread from a great loaf, a loaf bigger than he, and poured gravy onto a plate as big as their table back home. "Here, boy. Eat quickly, if you value your life."

Sitting on the edge of the plate, dangling his feet over the side, Jack sopped up the gravy with his bread. It was delicious, and not just because he was hungry. The giantess was an excellent cook. Before he was through, before he'd had enough, he heard a door slam. The floor of the castle shook. Pots and pans hanging on the walls of the kitchen rattled. A great voice roared:

"Fe, 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 giantess snatched Jack up off the table throwing him into a great crock pot (everything in the kitchen was huge) putting on the lid afterward, saying in a whisper, as if anything she spoke could be considered a whisper. "Quiet. Not a word out of you."

When the giant came into the kitchen, he said, "Where's the Englishman. I smell one. I know I do."

"Silly," answered his wife. That's just what's left over from the boy you ate last night."

"It smells like a fresh one. I can smell his blood."

"That's just the blood pudding I made from his blood."

Apparently satisfied, the giant sat down to eat. Jack raised the lid of the crock, watching as the giant consumed huge quantities of food, eating whole beeves as Jack would chicken drumsticks. "I wish I had another boy to eat," Jack heard the giant say. "Nothing tastes so good as a fat. tender, boy."

Jack was glad he was thin and tough.

Once the giant had finished eating, his wife brought him ale, hogsheads of ale. Barrels were his tankards. He quaffed down the ale, one barrel after the other. "My gold," he said, once he'd finished eating. "I want to count my gold. Bring it to me."

Bags of gold, she brought him, piling them before her husband, then left the room. It was more gold than Jack thought existed. Huge bags, they were, but the coins-stolen from men-were of normal size.

From beneath the raised lid of the crock pot, Jack watched the giant count the coins, separating them into piles. Before long, however, the heavy meal the giant had eaten and the quantity of beer he had drunk began to have an effect.

Yawning, the giant rubbed his eyes. His head began to nod, lowering itself closer to the table with each nod, until it came to rest on piles of gold. The giant began to snore, a loud, ear splitting, prodigious, snore.

After pushing back the lid, Jack crept from the pot, knocking the lid onto the floor, where it landed with a clang; but he had no need to be quiet. No noise he made could have been heard above the giant's snores. He climbed up the table, the only way he could-up the giant's leg. It was risky, but the giant never stirred.

Gold covered the table, gold piled almost as high as Jack's waist, gold enough to buy a kingdom. Jack picked up some of the coins. He'd never even seen a gold coin before. His was a poor province. Except for a silver coin or two, all he'd seen had been made of copper. He and his mother could live for years on just one coin.

One wasn't enough for Jack, though. He wanted them all; but how would he carry them? He had no sack; the giant's bags were too large; his his pockets were full of holes; he would need his hands to climb back down.

Jack had to settle for a few, ones he could stuff into his cheeks, carrying them as a chipmunk carries his nuts. Six coins he took-only six-three stuffed in each cheek. With his booty, he climbed back to the floor, once again down the giant's leg. The giant, never stirring, continued to snore.

AndThe kitchen door was open; the door to the courtyard, ajar. Jack left the castle, headed for the vine, slept beneath one of its leaves to keep off the dew. He had to wait for morning to climb down. It was too dangerous climb down at night; besides he was tired.

In the morning, he was awakened by a great roar from far off, from the direction of the castle. Perhaps the giant had discovered the theft. With much haste, Jack stuffed the coins back into his mouth-he'd taken them out to sleep-and began his climb down the beanstalk-for home.

Chapter 3:

Despondent, Jack's mother had fallen asleep in the chair and had awakened to find Jack gone. She saw the beanstalk. She couldn't help but see that. Jack had been right. The beans had been magical after all; but what good was a beanstalk which stretched to the sky? No beans even grew on it. Where was Jack? Had he climbed up it? Would he ever come back? He didn't. Not that night, he didn't. *He's dead-or run away. My son is gone.* "The poor widow lay on her bed, planning never to rise again. She was still there when Jack returned the next day.

Jack rushed into her room. "Muh..." he said as he spit out the coins. He'd forgotten to take them from his mouth. They spewed out, landing on her bed. "Look, Mother. Look what I've brought you. It's gold, Mother, gold, real gold."

AndAt first, the widow couldn't comprehend what Jack was saying. Resigned to dying, she had given up, never expecting to see her son again. Her eyes had been closed when he had spewed out the coins. "Look, Mother," Jack said, picking up two of the coins, "gold. We're rich." And they were rich. Six coins of gold were a fortune, enough to last a lifetime for the mother and son.

Even when he held them up to her face, she couldn't believe what she was seeing. Gold? She had never seen gold. It didn't look like money to her. Coins should be dull-brown-not bright and shiny like these. Why didn't the boy just go away and let her die, she'd already accepted that she would? Gold? He must be mad. Where would poor, dull, Jack find gold? "Go away, boy. Leave me in peace. Let me die. We have no money."

"But we do, Mother," he said, pressing the coins into her hand. "Feel them, Mother. Feel how smooth they are. See how shiny they appear. It's gold, Mother. It's really gold. We're rich. We shall never want."

"Gold? Where would a boy like you acquire gold? Did you steal it? Stealing was a hanging offense.

"Well," answered Jack, perplexed, "not exactly." Was it stealing to take from a thief? It was obvious the giant had stolen the gold; besides, was it stealing to take from a giant? Did the laws of man apply to such creatures? He told his mother about the giant, about his castle high upon the cliff. No road went to the castle. The beanstalk was the only way. The castle wasn't even a part of their province. How could its laws apply there?

And"But, you could have been killed, Jack. The giant might have eaten you."

"Without money, Mother- you said we would have died. What risk did I take, if we were already dead? Besides the giant and his wife are quite stupid, no match for a

bright lad such as I.

"Is it really gold? Are you certain it's really gold?"

"It must be, Mother." Jack explained how the giant coveted the coins. Why would he have them, were they not gold?

At last convinced, the widow said, "You've saved us, my son. We can buy that business we wanted, a much better one than the sale of Milky White would have purchased."

"But, Mother. Why should we purchase a business when untold riches exist at the top of the cliff? I can climb the beanstalk whenever we have need of money. Why should we labor when there's no need?"

"No, Jack. You are not to climb the beanstalk again. The danger is too great. No reason exists. We have all we need."

No matter how much he argued, Jack could not prevail. Tales of riches, gold and jewels—even the story of a hen which laid golden eggs—gold through and through—couldn't convince his mother to allow him to climb it again. "Swear you won't. Swear before God you won't," she demanded, adding in a lower voice, "unless I give you permission." A mother had to keep her options open.

Jack swore. He swore before God, an oath which couldn't be foresworn.

Using the gold, Jack's mother purchased a business at the market—and another cow, one which gave milk. The business didn't prosper, though. Ignorant to the ways of business, both mother and son were easily cheated; besides Jack cared nothing for work. He dreamed of riches, piles of gold and jewels. He dreamed of a hen which laid golden eggs—gold through and through.

Soon, all they had was the cow. It gave milk. It was enough for them to live, no worse off than before; but they had been rich; for a while, they had been rich. "Jack," his mother said, "one more trip. Do you think you could make one more trip?"

"Of course, Mother!" Jack was eager to be off. He dreamed constantly of the giant's castle, of gold and jewels, of the hen which laid golden eggs—gold through and through. Did it really exist? Everything else the old man had said was true. Could that not be true as well? With such a hen, he would have no need to make further trips. Just say, *lay*, and the hen would produce a golden egg; that's what the old man had said.

Chapter 4:

Jack set off up the beanstalk, this time carrying a bag. *I'll bring back more than six coins this trip*, he determined.

Again, he arrived at the castle; again at the door, he knocked; and, as before, the giant's wife answered his knock. "What do you want, boy? Don't you know my husband is a ogre? He loves to eat little boys such as you."

"But, please, good woman, I'm so hungry. Just a scrap of food, please, then I'll be off."

"The last time I fed a boy, some of my husband's gold disappeared. He beat me because of it." Looking at Jack suspiciously, she asked, "You aren't that boy, are you?"

"Oh, most certainly, it was not I. I've never been here before." *The old man was right*, thought Jack. *Giants are quite dull. No match for a bright boy such as I.* Please, good woman, just a scrap of food, and I'll be off."

"Come in, then," she said, leading him to the kitchen where she fed him. He'd only just begun when he again heard the giant come into the castle:

"Fe, fo, fi, fum.
I smell the blood of an Englishman.
Be he alive-or be he dead,
I'll grind his bones to make my bread."

"Where is he?" he asked his wife. "Where is the boy? I smell a boy."

"No, my love. There is no boy. It's just the beeves I have roasting on the spit."

"It smells like boy to me."

"But, you know we haven't had a boy to eat for months. You just want one so badly that you're imaging you smell one."

Not convinced, the giant tore through the kitchen, opening cabinets and jars, but didn't find Jack. His wife had hidden him in the oven, which-fortunately for Jack-wasn't in use. The giant never thought to look for him there. When the giant left the room, his wife opened the oven, "Go quickly," she said, "before he returns."

Turning her back, she left the kitchen, herself. But, Jack-instead of leaving-scampered into the crock pot, his hiding place the time before, pulled the lid over and waited. The giant had already searched there once. Surely, he wouldn't again.

When the giant returned, he again sniffed the air, but he had already searched

for the boy he smelled. Perhaps, it was his imagination. Again, he ate and drank prodigiously, whole beeves and hogsheads of ale. Again, he said, "I wish I had me a boy to eat-a fat, tender, boy." Jack wasn't yet fat-nor tender-but he wasn't so scrawny and tough as before.

After the meal, the giant said, "Bring me my hen. I want my hen which lays the golden eggs-gold through and through."

It did exist. Jack saw it. Whenever the giant said, *lay*, the hen laid a golden egg. The giant placed each in a bowl, continuing until the bowl was full. A magical hen, there was no limit to the eggs it could lay, golden eggs-gold through and through. *I must have it*, thought Jack.

As before, once the giant had fallen asleep, Jack crept from the pot, climbed up the giant's leg, onto the table where he grabbed the hen. It squawked; the giant stirred, raising his head. Jack thought he was doomed, destined to become a meal for the giant. Letting go of the hen, he hid behind the bowl until the giant was once again sound asleep. The risk of taking the hen was too great. The way it eyed him, he knew it would squawk; so Jack quickly gathered up some of the eggs, placing them in his bag,

He wanted the hen. More than anything, he wanted the hen, but he was afraid-afraid he would awaken the giant. Were he to escape with the hen, he would need a plan. Then he had an idea. *I'm a bright boy. I can outwit a giant*, but he couldn't do it alone. He would need something-or someone-to distract the giant; then he could take the hen which laid golden eggs-gold through and through.

"Look, Mother," he said, after returning home. "Golden eggs-gold through and through. The giant has a hen which lays golden eggs."

"But, silly boy. Why didn't you bring the hen, instead of the eggs? With the hen, we would never want for gold. You would never have to return to the giant's castle for more."

"I tried, Mother. Honest, I did; but when I grabbed the hen, it squawked, awakening the giant. I only just hid in time."

Picking up one of the eggs, Jack's mother tapped it against the table. It was gold, solid gold-gold through and through. "Oh, Jack," she said. "We must have that hen. Just think, a hen which lays golden eggs-gold through and through. Oh, Jack. You must return. Bring me that hen. You're a bright boy. You can do it, my son," she said, thinking not of the danger, but of the hen which laid golden eggs-gold through and through.

"You may depend upon me, Mother. I shall do it. I shall bring back the hen. I have a plan. A bright boy such as I can outwit the giant."

Chapter 5:

On a nearby farm, lived two boys, brothers, one Jack's age, one younger. Jack went there the next day, taking two of the golden eggs with him. "Look," he said, taking an egg from his pocket. "See what I have, a golden egg-gold through and through."

The boys had never seen so much as a gold coin, much less an egg, a golden egg-gold through and through. "It's worth a fortune, Jack," said Harold, the older boy. Harold coveted the egg. His father, a stern taskmaster, worked him on the small farm from dawn to dusk. With the egg, he could leave, escaping to London town.

Jack saw Harold shift his hoe in his grasp. He knew what he was thinking-knew he must speak quickly. "This is but one," he said, "laid by a hen which lays golden eggs-gold through and through. If only we had the hen."

"A hen?" said Harold.

"A hen?," repeated, Robert, his brother. "A hen which lays golden eggs-gold through and through? How can that be?"

"I've seen it," said Jack. "Look." Taking the other egg from his pocket, he rapped it against a stone. It is gold, solid gold-gold through and through."

"The hen? Where is the hen?" chirped both Harold and Robert together.

"There's danger," said Jack. "Only the bravest of boys could succeed-and the brightest, bright like me."

Each of the boys considered himself brave. Harold had contemplated murder to procure Jack's egg. What could be more dangerous than that? And bright? Each knew he was brighter than Jack.

Jack told the boys about the beanstalk, about the giant's castle at the top of the cliff, about bags full of gold, about the hen which laid golden eggs-gold through and through.

"But, a giant," said Harold.

"A giant," said Robert. "How could mere boys such as we prevail against a giant?"

"I," answered Jack, puffing out his chest, "have prevailed, not once, but twice. Two times I have gone, climbing up the beanstalk to the top of the cliff. Two times I have entered the giant's castle. Two times, I have taken gold from under his very nose. It is quite simple when you're a bright boy such as I."

If Jack can do it, so can I, thought Harold.

If Jack can do it, so can I, thought Robert.

"Let's do it," said both.

"Amazing," said Harold, when he saw the beanstalk.

"Amazing," said Robert. "It really does reach to the sky."

Each boy carried a bag. Each planned to obtain the hen for himself. "Come," said Jack, leading the way. "It's a terribly long climb." Jack also carried a rope.

During the climb, the ground disappeared, hidden by clouds. Neither could they see the top. Becoming frightened, Robert wanted to go home. Smaller than the others, the stalk was difficult for him to climb. "Please," he said. "Let us go back."

That will never do, thought Jack. One will not be enough. I need both to distract the giant. "Just a little farther, Robert, lad. Remember, a hen which lays golden eggs-gold through and through; besides, if you go back, you go alone. Here, let me help." Reaching down, Jack pulled Robert up to the next leaf. Jack had seen the look in Harold's eye. He knew Harold would go on.

Robert didn't know whether he could make it back down on his own, so he continued with the help of Jack and Harold.. Eventually, the boys reached the top. They spied the castle in the distance. "See. I told you true. The giant's castle; there, you see?"

All Jack had told them-so far-was true: the beanstalk; the land above the clouds; the giant's castle; but the castle was huge, no doubt occupied by a giant. "Let us go back," pleaded Robert. Gold, even a hen which laid golden eggs-gold through and through-wasn't worth confronting a giant, not a giant which might eat little boys.

"No," said Jack. He was too close. But a little longer, and he would have the hen.

"No," said Harold. He, too, wanted the hen.

All Robert wanted was his mother. Working on the farm no longer seemed so bad. "Please, let us return home."

"Leave him," said Harold. "We don't need the little coward. But, you," he said to his brother, "will get no gold."

"No. We do need him. He's part of the plan. Without him, we might not succeed. Without him, we might not obtain the hen." Placing his mouth next to Harold's ear, he whispered, "We need him to distract the giant, should he awake."

"But, Robert?"

"If all goes well, we'll all escape, but, if not, it means fewer to share. Remember," said Jack, "gold, piles of gold, and a hen which lays golden eggs, gold through and through."

Harold did remember. "Come Robert. You must come also." He took one of

Robert's arms. Jack took the other. The three marched off toward the giant's castle.

Chapter 6:

When the boys had arrived at the castle's back door, after handing Robert a stick, Jack said, "Use this to rap on the door."

"Me? Why me? I'm the smallest of us three."

"That's why," said Jack. "You're too small to make a meal for the giant; besides, the giant's wife may remember me. Nothing to worry about, anyway. She's kind. She'll feed you. You'll see."

Robert stood at the door, the stick in his hand. "Knock," both Jack and Harold gestured to him from their hiding place on the other side of the door. Robert's legs were shaking. He'd never been so frightened, but he knocked on the door, nevertheless.

It was soon opened by the giant's wife. Spying the boy, she said, "Are you the boy who came here before? Are you the boy who stole my husband's gold?"

"N-no," stammered Robert. He'd never seen someone so huge. "I'm hungry. Puh-please, may I have something to eat?"

"I feed no more boys," said the giant's wife. Each time I have, it's earned me a beating." Reaching down, she picked up Robert in one hand. "You're not big, small and scrawny, but my husband loves to eat little boys. I guess you'll have to do."

Meanwhile, Jack and Harold, unseen by the giantess, distracted as she was by Robert, had scampered into the castle, running to the kitchen, where they hid in the crock pot. She never saw or heard them. Coming in soon afterward, she placed Robert in a cage which hung in the kitchen. "There you'll stay, boy. We'll see if my husband wants you for his dinner."

When the giant came home, again he said:

Fe, Fi, Fo, Fum.
I smell the blood of an Englishman.
Be he alive-or be he dead,
I'll ground his bones to make my bread.

"Where is the boy? I know I smell one this time."

"And, there he is," said his wife, "in the cage."

The giant looked at Robert. "But, he's so small and scrawny." Taking the boy out of his cage, he took off the boy's clothes. "Look," he said. "He doesn't even have his

growth yet. You know I don't eat boys so young."

"How should I know? I never looked; and they all look small to me. I guess you'll just have to wait-until he grows up some."

"But, that might not be for years. I'm hungry for a boy, now."

"This one, anyway," said his wife, "is all skin and bones. He wouldn't yet be worth cooking. Give him some time. He might fatten up nicely." When the giant agreed, she stuck Robert back in the cage.

The previous scene repeated itself. The giant ate and drank, then called for his hen which lays golden eggs-gold through and through.

Jack and Harold watched from the crock pot while the giant commanded the hen to lay, filling up another bowl-a giant sized bowl-with golden eggs.

Untold riches, thought Harold. I must have that hen. Perhaps Jack will have an accident. Perhaps he'll fall on the way down. Jack wasn't thinking similar thoughts. According to his plans, neither of the other two would ever leave the castle. First, though, he would have to rescue Robert. His plans included him.

The giant had again fallen asleep. He was snoring, putting up a might roar. When the boys climbed out of the pot, they could barely hear Robert, who, seeing them, yelled, "Help! Let me out of here. Free me from this cage."

"Quiet," Jack signaled, holding his finger to his lips. He took the rope out of his bag. "Catch this and tie it to cage. I'll climb up and set you free."

Jack threw up the rope. Robert caught the end on the second try, tying it to the front of the cage by the door. Jack climbed up. "Before I release you, you have to promise to grab the hen, placing it in the bag."

"Why me? I'm the smallest of the three. Why not one of you?"

"That's why," said Jack. "He's less likely to see you. You have the best chance of success; besides, we'll be there, Harold and I."

That's what Jack had said before, back at the castle door. "I-I don't know." Robert no longer trusted Jack.

"Do you want out?" Robert nodded yes. "Then, you must do as I say." Robert nodded again. What choice did he have?

Releasing the latch, Jack freed Robert. Both boys climbed down. Having looped the rope around a cage bar, Jack retrieved it.

The giant was still fast asleep at the kitchen table. He hadn't heard them over his snores. The hen sat beside the bowl of golden eggs.

Once on the floor, Harold asked, "What do we do now?" He wanted the hen. Oh,

how he wanted the hen; but he had no plan; and he was afraid of the giant.

"We'll simply climb up on the table and grab the hen. I'll tell you the plan after we climb to the top of the table."

"What about the giant? Won't he awaken?"

"Oh, no. I've stolen from him twice. He's never caught me. Listen to his snores. He would never hear any noise we'd make." Jack didn't bother to add that a thunderclap might not awaken the giant, but that one chirp from the hen would; and Harold didn't think to ask why Jack needed them in the first place, or why he hadn't already stolen the hen.

He was only thinking about how the hen would make him rich, and thinking about how he might be rid of Jack so he wouldn't have to share with him. Although the hen would have produced an unending supply of gold, more than either of the boys could have ever spent, each boy wanted it for himself, and each was willing to do anything to accomplish that, even murder.

Robert just wanted to go home. He'd had enough of giants and their talk about eating little boys.

AndThe giant was lying across the table, his head, turned to one side, resting on hands, which were folded, one on top of the other, in front of him on the table. The boys climbed up the side of the giant opposite the direction his head was turned. The wind from his snores would have blown any of them off the table.

Robert was so frightened that it took urging-along with an occasional blow-from the other two to keep him climbing. At last, the boy's reached the table top, where they stood behind the giant's enormous head. Harold started to run to grab the hen, but Jack stopped him. "No, you might frighten it. First, let Robert crawl over and loop the rope around its neck. That way, if it tries to escape, we'll have it."

"Why Robert? I could do it."

"Robert's smaller. The hen might not find him so threatening. Let him rope it first, then you can put it in your bag." Jack handed the rope to Robert. He'd made a loop in one end. "Slip it over the hen's neck-but slowly. Move slowly. Don't frighten it."

At least the hen was in the middle of the table, away from the giant. Robert didn't like standing so close to the giant's head. He was afraid that he would awake at any minute, turn, and swallow him in one bite (Actually, it would have taken two or three.

Taking the rope in one hand, Robert began crawling toward the hen, which cocked its head, watching him. Harold followed, some paces behind Robert. Jack, with the other end of the rope in his hand, circled around until he was on the opposite side of the hen, away from the giant, standing at the edge of the table above a chair which was

pulled up beside the table.

When he was close enough, Robert slipped the noose over the hen's head, scooting back away from it as soon as he had. Harold jumped for the hen, grabbing for it to put it in his bag. The hen squawked; the giant awoke.

The giant roared. Robert froze, unable to move. Pecked by the hen, Harold dropped it, looking around for someplace to run. They'd climbed to the top of the table, up the leg of the giant. Obviously, going down that way, was not an option. He could see nowhere to run. He scampered for the edge of the table. Although a fall from that height might kill him, it seemed a better prospect than facing the giant. He never made it. The giant grabbed him with one hand and Robert with the other.

It was just as Jack had planned. While the giant was occupied with the other two boys, he dropped from the table to the nearby chair, pulling the hen after him with the rope. After quickly placing the hen in a bag, he dropped to the floor. It was quite a drop, but he wasn't hurt. With a bag full of squawking chicken over his shoulder, he ran for the door-to find it blocked by the giant's wife. "Not so fast, lad," she said, placing her big foot in his way.

Jack swerved, but felt himself grabbed from behind. Bent over, the giant had dropped Robert to the floor to pick up Jack. Jack had the chicken; besides, he was older, bigger, and plumper than Robert. Two things Jack hadn't counted on: the giant's wife's blocking the door; and the giant having enough sense to drop one of the boys he already had.

Robert, on the other hand, finding himself on the floor, saw an opening and ran for the door. Finding it ajar, he ran outside, scampering into some bushes alongside the castle.

The giant saw him disappear into the bushes, but he had two bigger boys in his hands; and two boys in hand were worth more than one boy in the brush; so he let Robert go.

After handing Jack to his wife to hold, he pulled the clothes off Harold. The boy had his growth. He would do nicely; but he would fatten up much better without his nadders. Boys always did.

Placing Harold on the table, he used his fingernails to snip off his goolies, pinching them off, sack and all, between his thumb and forefinger. After dropping Harold's nads onto a plate on the table, he traded boys with his wife, who plastered Harold's groin with a healing salve, which closed the wound straight away. She stuck him in the cage-the one that had held Robert.

Jack had watched it all. He'd watched the ogre strip the clothes off Harold, then pinch his gonads off with his fingernails. Now, the giant had him-and was tearing off his

clothes. What had gone wrong? He'd planned it all so well.

He felt the giant pinch his nadgers between his thumb and forefinger. The giant pulled; and they were gone. His goolies were gone.

The giant handed Jack to his wife. She put salve on his groin and placed him in the cage with Harold, latching the door behind him. "Ah," Jack heard the giant say, "these two will fatten up nicely."

"Yes," said his wife, "without their nadgers, they always do."

Jack rubbed his groin. It no longer hurt. The wound had healed; but, below his willie, he was smooth. His goolies were gone. They lay on a plate on the table.

Chapter 8:

Robert never stopped running. He ran all the way to the beanstalk, looking over his shoulder, expecting to see the giant about to overtake him, but he saw nothing of the giant. Still, when he arrived at the stalk, he jumped onto it, scampering from leaf to leaf, not stopping until he reached the bottom. There, he saw Jack's mother.

"Where's Jack?" she asked.

"He's caught. Th-the giant caught him-him and Harold, too. Not waiting to explain, he ran off for home. He had to tell his father. Once home, he told his father about everything: the beanstalk; the giant-how he had captured Harold and Jack; the hen which lays golden eggs-gold through and through.

"Gold? Golden eggs-gold through and through?"

"Yes, Father. I saw it lay a bowlful-a giant bowlful of golden eggs. We tried to steal the hen, but the giant awoke and captured Harold and Jack."

"What happened to them?"

"I don't know, Father. I ran. I ran home as fast as I could. The giant was awful, Father, huge and fierce-and his wife said he ate little boys. I thought he was about to eat me, so I ran. I kept looking back, afraid he would follow, but he didn't. He's probably eaten Harold. Jack, too, probably. Oh, Father. I thought he was going to eat me. I was so frightened." Robert began to cry.

Robert's father thought about his lost son-briefly-but he was mostly thinking about the hen, a hen which lays golden eggs-gold through and through.

He rounded up his neighbors, telling them about his lost son, but not about the hen. He did tell them about other riches the giant might have, riches which would be theirs, should they kill the giant.

And it was all to no avail. No man could climb the stalk. Whenever a man would try, no matter how small he might be, the leaves would bend, dumping him onto the ground. Boys could climb. The leaves would support them, but not men. Neither could the stalk be cut down. Magical, it was impervious to any blade.

Robert's father tried to persuade him to go back-to try once more to steal the hen; but nothing, neither threats or the promise of wealth, could persuade Robert to climb the stalk again. The giant had once had him in his hand-had held him up to his face. No fate, no threats his father could make, could be worse than the prospect of being eaten by the giant.

The word of the giant's wealth, even word of the hen which lays golden eggs-gold through and through-spread throughout the land. Boys-either on their own-or

encouraged by their fathers, continued to climb the stalk. None ever returned.

Epilog:

Jack and Harold had been in the cage for over a month. With nothing to do but eat, both had become quite fat. Other cages, with other boys, hung from the ceiling-cages full of boys with no nadders.

The giant's wife came into the kitchen. Jack heard her speak to another, to someone whose voice sounded familiar. It was a little man-the man who had traded him the beans. "Well. Hello, Jack," he said. "I see you found your way here."

Then to the giantess, he said, "I see they're fattening up quite nicely."

"Oh, yes," said the giantess, "We eat the first one tonight. Would you care to stay for dinner?"