

# Jack the Giant-killer

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## I

When good King Arthur reigned with Guinevere his Queen, there lived, near the Land's End in Cornwall, a farmer who had one only son called Jack. Now Jack was brisk and ready; of such a lively wit that none nor nothing could worst him.

In those days, the Mount of St. Michael in Cornwall was the fastness of a hugeous giant whose name was Cormoran.

He was full eighteen feet in height, some three yards about his middle, of a grim fierce face, and he was the terror of all the country-side. He lived in a cave amidst the rocky Mount, and when he desired victuals he would wade across the tides to the mainland and furnish himself forth with all that came in his way. The poor folk and the rich folk alike ran out of their houses and hid themselves when they heard the swish-swash of his big feet in the water; for if he saw them, he would think nothing of broiling half-a-dozen or so of them for breakfast. As it was, he seized their cattle by the score, carrying off half-a-dozen fat oxen on his back at a time, and hanging sheep and pigs to his waistbelt like bunches of dip-candles. Now this had gone on for long years, and the poor folk of Cornwall were in despair, for none could put an end to the giant Cormoran.

It so happened that one market day Jack, then quite a young lad, found the town upside down over some new exploit of the giant's. Women were weeping, men were cursing, and the magistrates were sitting in Council over what was to be done. But none could suggest a plan. Then Jack, blithe and gay, went up to the magistrates, and with a fine courtesy—for he was ever polite—asked them what reward would be given to him who killed the giant Cormoran.

“The treasures of the Giant's Cave,” quoth they.

“Every whit of it?” quoth Jack, who was never to be done.

“To the last farthing,” quoth they.

“Then will I undertake the task,” said Jack, and forthwith set about the business.

It was winter-time, and having got himself a horn, a pickaxe, and a shovel, he went over to the Mount in the dark evening, set to work, and before dawn he had dug a pit, no less than twenty-two feet deep and nigh as big across. This he covered with long thin sticks and straw, sprinkling

a little loose mould over all to make it look like solid ground. So, just as dawn was breaking, he planted himself fair and square on the side of the pit that was farthest from the giant's cave, raised the horn to his lips, and with full blast sounded:

“Tantivy! Tantivy! Tantivy!”

just as he would have done had he been hunting a fox.

Of course this woke the giant, who rushed in a rage out of his cave, and seeing little Jack, fair and square blowing away at his horn, as calm and cool as may be, he became still more angry, and made for the disturber of his rest, bawling out, “I’ll teach you to wake a giant, you little whipper-snapper. You shall pay dearly for your tantivys, I’ll take you and broil you whole for break—”

He had only got as far as this when crash—he fell into the pit! So there was a break indeed; such an one that it caused the very foundations of the Mount to shake.

But Jack shook with laughter. “Ho, ho!” he cried, “how about breakfast now, Sir Giant? Will you have me broiled or baked? And will no diet serve you but poor little Jack? Faith! I’ve got you in Lob’s pound now! You’re in the stocks for bad behaviour, and I’ll plague you as I like. Would I had rotten eggs; but this will do as well.” And with that he up with his pickaxe and dealt the giant Cormoran such a most weighty knock on the very crown of his head, that he killed him on the spot.

Whereupon Jack calmly filled up the pit with earth again and went to search the cave, where he found much treasure.

Now when the magistrates heard of Jack’s great exploit, they proclaimed that henceforth he should be known as—

**JACK THE GIANT-KILLER.**

And they presented him with a sword and belt, on which these words were embroidered in gold:

Here’s the valiant Cornishman

Who slew the giant Cormoran.

Of course the news of Jack's victory soon spread over all England, so that another giant named Blunderbore who lived to the north, hearing of it, vowed if ever he came across Jack he would be revenged upon him. Now this giant Blunderbore was lord of an enchanted castle that stood in the middle of a lonesome forest.

It so happened that Jack, about four months after he had killed Cormoran, had occasion to journey into Wales, and on the road he passed this forest. Weary with walking, and finding a pleasant fountain by the wayside, he lay down to rest and was soon fast asleep.

Now the giant Blunderbore, coming to the well for water, found Jack sleeping, and knew by the lines embroidered on his belt that here was the far-famed giant-killer. Rejoiced at his luck, the giant, without more ado, lifted Jack to his shoulder and began to carry him through the wood to the enchanted castle.

But the rustling of the boughs awakened Jack, who, finding himself already in the clutches of the giant, was terrified; nor was his alarm decreased by seeing the courtyard of the castle all strewn with men's bones.

"Yours will be with them ere long," said Blunderbore as he locked poor Jack into an immense chamber above the castle gateway. It had a high-pitched, beamed roof, and one window that looked down the road. Here poor Jack was to stay while Blunderbore went to fetch his brother-giant, who lived in the same wood, that he might share in the feast.

Now, after a time, Jack, watching through the window, saw the two giants tramping hastily down the road, eager for their dinner.

"Now," quoth Jack to himself, "my death or my deliverance is at hand." For he had thought out a plan. In one corner of the room he had seen two strong cords. These he took, and making a cunning noose at the end of each, he hung them out of the window, and, as the giants were unlocking the iron door of the gate, managed to slip them over their heads without their noticing it. Then, quick as thought, he tied the other ends to a beam, so that as the giants moved on the nooses tightened and throttled them until they grew black in the face. Seeing this, Jack slid down the ropes, and drawing his sword, slew them both.

So, taking the keys of the castle, he unlocked all the doors and set free three beauteous ladies who, tied by the hair of their heads, he found almost starved to death. "Sweet ladies," quoth Jack, kneeling on one knee—for he was ever polite—"here are the keys of this enchanted castle. I have destroyed the giant Blunderbore and his brutish brother, and thus have restored to you your liberty. These keys should bring you all else you require."

So saying he proceeded on his journey to Wales.

### III

He travelled as fast as he could; perhaps too fast, for, losing his way, he found himself benighted and far from any habitation. He wandered on always in hopes, until on entering a narrow valley he came on a very large, dreary-looking house standing alone. Being anxious for shelter he went up to the door and knocked. You may imagine his surprise and alarm when the summons was answered by a giant with two heads. But though this monster's look was exceedingly fierce, his manners were quite polite; the truth being that he was a Welsh giant, and as such double-faced and smooth, given to gaining his malicious ends by a show of false friendship.

So he welcomed Jack heartily in a strong Welsh accent, and prepared a bedroom for him, where he was left with kind wishes for a good rest. Jack, however, was too tired to sleep well, and as he lay awake, he overheard his host muttering to himself in the next room. Having very keen ears he was able to make out these words, or something like them:

“Though here you lodge with me this night,

You shall not see the morning light.

My club shall dash your brains outright.”

“Say'st thou so!” quoth Jack to himself, starting up at once, “So that is your Welsh trick, is it? But I will be even with you.” Then, leaving his bed, he laid a big billet of wood among the blankets, and taking one of these to keep himself warm, made himself snug in a corner of the room, pretending to snore, so as to make Mr. Giant think he was asleep.

And sure enough, after a little time, in came the monster on tiptoe as if treading on eggs, and carrying a big club. Then—

WHACK! WHACK! WHACK!

Jack could hear the bed being belaboured until the Giant, thinking every bone of his guest's skin must be broken, stole out of the room again; whereupon Jack went calmly to bed once more and slept soundly! Next morning the giant couldn't believe his eyes when he saw Jack coming down the stairs fresh and hearty.

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“Odds splutter hur nails!” he cried, astonished. “Did she sleep well? Was there not nothing felt in the night?”

“Oh,” replied Jack, laughing in his sleeve, “I think a rat did come and give me two or three flaps of his tail.”

On this the giant was dumbfounded, and led Jack to breakfast, bringing him a bowl which held at least four gallons of hasty-pudding, and bidding him, as a man of such mettle, eat the lot. Now Jack when travelling wore under his cloak a leathern bag to carry his things withal; so, quick as thought, he hitched this round in front with the opening just under his chin; thus, as he ate, he could slip the best part of the pudding into it without the giant’s being any the wiser. So they sate down to breakfast, the giant gobbling down his own measure of hasty-pudding, while Jack made away with his.

“See,” says crafty Jack when he had finished. “I’ll show you a trick worth two of yours,” and with that he up with a carving-knife and, ripping up the leathern bag, out fell all the hasty-pudding on the floor!

“Odds splutter hur nails!” cried the giant, not to be outdone. “Hur can do that hursel!” Whereupon he seized the carving-knife, and ripping open his own belly fell down dead.

Thus was Jack quit of the Welsh giant.

#### IV

Now it so happened that in those days, when gallant knights were always seeking adventures, King Arthur’s only son, a very valiant Prince, begged of his father a large sum of money to enable him to journey to Wales, and there strive to set free a certain beautiful lady who was possessed by seven evil spirits. In vain the King denied him; so at last he gave way and the Prince set out with two horses, one of which he rode, the other laden with gold pieces. Now after some days’ journey the Prince came to a market-town in Wales where there was a great commotion. On asking the reason for it he was told that, according to law, the corpse of a very generous man had been arrested on its way to the grave, because, in life, it had owed large sums to the money-lenders.

“That is a cruel law,” said the young Prince. “Go, bury the dead in peace, and let the

creditors come to my lodgings; I will pay the debts of the dead.”

So the creditors came, but they were so numerous that by evening the Prince had but twopence left for himself, and could not go further on his journey.

Now it so happened that Jack the Giant-Killer on his way to Wales passed through the town, and, hearing of the Prince’s plight, was so taken with his kindness and generosity that he determined to be the Prince’s servant. So this was agreed upon, and next morning, after Jack had paid the reckoning with his last farthing, the two set out together. But as they were leaving the town, an old woman ran after the Prince and called out, “Justice! Justice! The dead man owed me twopence these seven years. Pay me as well as the others.”

And the Prince, kind and generous, put his hand to his pocket and gave the old woman the twopence that was left to him. So now they had not a penny between them, and when the sun grew low the Prince said:

“Jack! Since we have no money, how are we to get a night’s lodging?”

Then Jack replied, “We shall do well enough, Master; for within two or three miles of this place there lives a huge and monstrous giant with three heads, who can fight four hundred men in armour and make them fly from him like chaff before the wind.”

“And what good will that be to us?” quoth the Prince. “He will for sure chop us up in a mouthful.”

“Nay,” said Jack, laughing. “Let me go and prepare the way for you. By all accounts this giant is a dolt. Mayhap I may manage better than that.”

So the Prince remained where he was, and Jack pricked his steed at full speed till he came to the giant’s castle, at the gate of which he knocked so loud that he made the neighbouring hills resound.

On this the giant roared from within in a voice like thunder:

“Who’s there?”

Then said Jack as bold as brass, “None but your poor cousin Jack.”

“Cousin Jack!” quoth the giant, astounded. “And what news with my poor cousin Jack?” For, see you, he was quite taken aback; so Jack made haste to reassure him.

“Dear coz, heavy news, God wot!”

“Heavy news,” echoed the giant, half afraid. “God wot, no heavy news can come to me. Have I not three heads? Can I not fight five hundred men in armour? Can I not make them fly like chaff before the wind?”

“True,” replied crafty Jack, “but I came to warn you because the great King Arthur’s son with a thousand men in armour is on his way to kill you.”

At this the giant began to shiver and to shake. “Ah! Cousin Jack! Kind cousin Jack! This is heavy news indeed,” quoth he. “Tell me, what am I to do?”

“Hide yourself in the vault,” says crafty Jack, “and I will lock and bolt and bar you in; and keep the key till the Prince has gone. So you will be safe.”

Then the giant made haste and ran down into the vault, and Jack locked, and bolted, and barred him in. Then being thus secure, he went and fetched his master, and the two made themselves heartily merry over what the giant was to have had for supper, while the miserable monster shivered and shook with fright in the underground vault.

Well, after a good night’s rest Jack woke his master in early morn, and having furnished him well with gold and silver from the giant’s treasure, bade him ride three miles forward on his journey. So when Jack judged that the Prince was pretty well out of the smell of the giant, he took the key and let his prisoner out. He was half dead with cold and damp, but very grateful; and he begged Jack to let him know what he would be given as a reward for saving the giant’s life and castle from destruction, and he should have it.

“You’re very welcome,” said Jack, who always had his eyes about him. “All I want is the old coat and cap, together with the rusty old sword and slippers which are at your bed-head.”

When the giant heard this he sighed and shook his head. “You don’t know what you are asking,” quoth he. “They are the most precious things I possess, but as I have promised, you must have them. The coat will make you invisible, the cap will tell you all you want to know, the sword will cut asunder whatever you strike, and the slippers will take you wherever you want to go in the twinkling of an eye!”

So Jack, overjoyed, rode away with the coat and cap, the sword and the slippers, and soon overtook his master; and they rode on together until they reached the castle where the beautiful lady lived whom the Prince sought.

Now she was very beautiful, for all she was possessed of seven devils, and when she heard the Prince sought her as a suitor, she smiled and ordered a splendid banquet to be prepared for his reception. And she sate on his right hand, and plied him with food and drink.

And when the repast was over she took out her own handkerchief and wiped his lips gently, and said, with a smile:

“I have a task for you, my lord! You must show me that kerchief to-morrow morning or lose your head.”

And with that she put the handkerchief in her bosom and said, “Good-night!”

The Prince was in despair, but Jack said nothing till his master was in bed. Then he put on the old cap he had got from the giant, and lo! in a minute he knew all that he wanted to know. So, in the dead of the night, when the beautiful lady called on one of her familiar spirits to carry her to Lucifer himself, Jack was beforehand with her, and putting on his coat of darkness and his slippers of swiftness, was there as soon as she was. And when she gave the handkerchief to the Devil, bidding him keep it safe, and he put it away on a high shelf, Jack just up and nipped it away in a trice!

So the next morning, when the beauteous enchanted lady looked to see the Prince crestfallen, he just made a fine bow and presented her with the handkerchief.

At first she was terribly disappointed, but, as the day drew on, she ordered another and still more splendid repast to be got ready. And this time, when the repast was over, she kissed the Prince full on the lips and said:

“I have a task for you, my lover. Show me to-morrow morning the last lips I kiss to-night or you lose your head.”

Then the Prince, who by this time was head over ears in love, said tenderly, “If you will kiss none but mine, I will.” Now the beauteous lady, for all she was possessed by seven devils, could not but see that the Prince was a very handsome young man; so she blushed a little, and said:

“That is neither here nor there: you must show me them, or death is your portion.”

So the Prince went to his bed, sorrowful as before; but Jack put on the cap of knowledge and knew in a moment all he wanted to know.

Thus when, in the dead of the night, the beauteous lady called on her familiar spirit to take her to Lucifer himself, Jack in his coat of darkness and his shoes of swiftness was there before her.

“Thou hast betrayed me once,” said the beauteous lady to Lucifer, frowning, “by letting go



my handkerchief. Now will I give thee something none can steal, and so best the Prince, King's son though he be."

With that she kissed the loathly demon full on the lips, and left him. Whereupon Jack with one blow of the rusty sword of strength cut off Lucifer's head, and, hiding it under his coat of darkness, brought it back to his master.

Thus next morning when the beauteous lady, with malice in her beautiful eyes, asked the Prince to show her the lips she had last kissed, he pulled out the demon's head by the horns. On that the seven devils, which possessed the poor lady, gave seven dreadful shrieks and left her. Thus the enchantment being broken, she appeared in all her perfect beauty and goodness.

So she and the Prince were married the very next morning. After which they journeyed back to the court of King Arthur, where Jack the Giant-Killer, for his many exploits, was made one of the Knights of the Round Table.

## V

This, however, did not satisfy our hero, who was soon on the road again searching for giants. Now he had not gone far when he came upon one, seated on a huge block of timber near the entrance to a dark cave. He was a most terrific giant. His goggle eyes were as coals of fire, his countenance was grim and gruesome; his cheeks, like huge flitches of bacon, were covered with a stubbly beard, the bristles of which resembled rods of iron wire, while the locks of hair that fell on his brawny shoulders showed like curled snakes or hissing adders. He held a knotted iron club, and breathed so heavily you could hear him a mile away. Nothing daunted by this fearsome sight, Jack alighted from his horse and, putting on his coat of darkness, went close up to the giant and said softly: "Hullo! is that you? It will not be long before I have you fast by your beard."

So saying he made a cut with the sword of strength at the giant's head, but, somehow, missing his aim, cut off the nose instead, clean as a whistle! My goodness! How the giant roared! It was like claps of thunder, and he began to lay about him with the knotted iron club, like one possessed. But Jack in his coat of darkness easily dodged the blows, and running in behind, drove the sword up to the hilt into the giant's back, so that he fell stone dead.

Jack then cut off the head and sent it to King Arthur by a waggoner whom he hired for the purpose. After which he began to search the giant's cave to find his treasure. He passed through many windings and turnings until he came to a huge hall paved and roofed with

freestone. At the upper end of this was an immense fireplace where hung an iron cauldron, the like of which, for size, Jack had never seen before. It was boiling and gave out a savoury steam; while beside it, on the right hand, stood a big massive table set out with huge platters and mugs. Here it was that the giants used to dine. Going a little further he came upon a sort of window barred with iron, and looking within beheld a vast number of miserable captives.

“Alas! Alack!” they cried on seeing him. “Art come, young man, to join us in this dreadful prison?”

“That depends,” quoth Jack: “but first tell me wherefore you are thus held imprisoned?”

“Through no fault,” they cried at once. “We are captives of the cruel giants and are kept here and well nourished until such time as the monsters desire a feast. Then they choose the fattest and sup off them.”

On hearing this Jack straightway unlocked the door of the prison and set the poor fellows free. Then, searching the giants’ coffers, he divided the gold and silver equally amongst the captives as some redress for their sufferings, and taking them to a neighbouring castle gave them a right good feast.

## VI

Now as they were all making merry over their deliverance, and praising Jack’s prowess, a messenger arrived to say that one Thunderdell, a huge giant with two heads, having heard of the death of his kinsman, was on his way from the northern dales to be revenged, and was already within a mile or two of the castle, the country folk with their flocks and herds flying before him like chaff before the wind.

Now the castle with its gardens stood on a small island that was surrounded by a moat twenty feet wide and thirty feet deep, having very steep sides. And this moat was spanned by a drawbridge. This, without a moment’s delay, Jack ordered should be sawn on both sides at the middle, so as to only leave one plank uncut over which he in his invisible coat of darkness passed swiftly to meet his enemy, bearing in his hand the wonderful sword of strength.

Now though the giant could not, of course, see Jack, he could smell him, for giants have keen noses. Therefore Thunderdell cried out in a voice like his name:

“Fee, 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!"

"Is that so?" quoth Jack, cheerful as ever. "Then art thou a monstrous miller for sure!"

On this the giant, peering round everywhere for a glimpse of his foe, shouted out:

"Art thou, indeed, the villain who hath killed so many of my kinsmen? Then, indeed, will I tear thee to pieces with my teeth, suck thy blood, and grind thy bones to powder."

"Thou'lt have to catch me first," quoth Jack, laughing, and throwing off his coat of darkness and putting on his slippers of swiftness, he began nimbly to lead the giant a pretty dance, he leaping and doubling light as a feather, the monster following heavily like a walking tower, so that the very foundations of the earth seemed to shake at every step. At this game the onlookers nearly split their sides with laughter, until Jack, judging there had been enough of it, made for the drawbridge, ran neatly over the single plank, and reaching the other side waited in teasing fashion for his adversary.

On came the giant at full speed, foaming at the mouth with rage, and flourishing his club. But when he came to the middle of the bridge his great weight, of course, broke the plank, and there he was fallen headlong into the moat, rolling and wallowing like a whale, plunging from place to place, yet unable to get out and be revenged.

The spectators greeted his efforts with roars of laughter, and Jack himself was at first too overcome with merriment to do more than scoff. At last, however, he went for a rope, cast it over the giant's two heads, so, with the help of a team of horses, drew them shorewards, where two blows from the sword of strength settled the matter.

## VII

After some time spent in mirth and pastimes, Jack began once more to grow restless, and taking leave of his companions set out for fresh adventures.

He travelled far and fast, through woods, and vales, and hills, till at last he came, late at night, on a lonesome house set at the foot of a high mountain. Knocking at the door, it was opened by an old man whose head was white as snow.

“Father,” said Jack, ever courteous, “can you lodge a benighted traveller?”

“Ay, that will I, and welcome to my poor cottage,” replied the old man.

Whereupon Jack came in, and after supper they sate together chatting in friendly fashion. Then it was that the old man, seeing by Jack’s belt that he was the famous Giant-Killer, spoke in this wise:

“My son! You are the great conqueror of evil monsters. Now close by there lives one well worthy of your prowess. On the top of yonder high hill is an enchanted castle kept by a giant named Galligantua, who, by the help of a wicked old magician, inveigles many beautiful ladies and valiant knights into the castle, where they are transformed into all sorts of birds and beasts, yea, even into fishes and insects. There they live pitiably in confinement; but most of all do I grieve for a duke’s daughter whom they kidnapped in her father’s garden, bringing her hither in a burning chariot drawn by fiery dragons. Her form is that of a white hind; and though many valiant knights have tried their utmost to break the spell and work her deliverance, none have succeeded; for, see you, at the entrance to the castle are two dreadful griffins who destroy every one who attempts to pass them by.”

Now Jack bethought him of the coat of darkness which had served him so well before, and he put on the cap of knowledge, and in an instant he knew what had to be done. Then the very next morning, at dawn-time, Jack arose and put on his invisible coat and his slippers of swiftness. And in the twinkling of an eye there he was on the top of the mountain! And there were the two griffins guarding the castle gates—horrible creatures with forked tails and tongues. But they could not see him because of the coat of darkness, so he passed them by unharmed.

And hung to the doors of the gateway he found a golden trumpet on a silver chain, and beneath it was engraved in red lettering:

Whoever shall this trumpet blow

Will cause the giant’s overthrow.

The black enchantment he will break,

And gladness out of sadness make.

No sooner had Jack read these words than he put the horn to his lips and blew a loud

“Tantivy! Tantivy! Tantivy!”

Now at the very first note the castle trembled to its vast foundations, and before he had finished the measure, both the giant and the magician were biting their thumbs and tearing their hair, knowing that their wickedness must now come to an end. But the giant showed fight and took up his club to defend himself; whereupon Jack, with one clean cut of the sword of strength, severed his head from his body, and would doubtless have done the same to the magician, but that the latter was a coward, and, calling up a whirlwind, was swept away by it into the air, nor has he ever been seen or heard of since. The enchantments being thus broken, all the valiant knights and beautiful ladies, who had been transformed into birds and beasts and fishes and reptiles and insects, returned to their proper shapes, including the duke's daughter, who, from being a white hind, showed as the most beautiful maiden upon whom the sun ever shone. Now, no sooner had this occurred than the whole castle vanished away in a cloud of smoke, and from that moment giants vanished also from the land.

The giant Galligantua and the wicked old magician

transform the duke's daughter into a white hind.

The giant Galligantua and the wicked old magician transform the duke's daughter into a white hind.

So Jack, when he had presented the head of Galligantua to King Arthur, together with all the lords and ladies he had delivered from enchantment, found he had nothing more to do. As a reward for past services, however, King Arthur bestowed the hand of the duke's daughter upon honest Jack the Giant-Killer. So married they were, and the whole kingdom was filled with joy at their wedding. Furthermore, the King bestowed on Jack a noble castle with a magnificent estate belonging thereto, whereon he, his lady, and their children lived in great joy and content for the rest of their days.

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