



Swansea Jack and the Beanstalk

As the crowds drifted away from the market at the end of a long and humid day, Jack fell into step with his neighbour on the road home. Rhodri was a good lad, but he'd twice failed to make village idiot through being over-qualified.

"Hey Rhod. What'cha up to?" Rhod treated him to a grin that was more gap than tooth. "Well, mam said Gertrude wa'n't milkin' no more, so we better be sellin'er. An' I got a really good deal but!"

He tossed a small pouch in the air. It fell back in his hand with a conspicuous lack of *clink!* Fearing the worst, Jack gave him a playful nudge.

"'ere, you 'aven't gone an' traded 'er f'r a bag of beans, 'ave you?!" he joked.

"'course not. 'M'not stupid," Rhod replied, looking hurt. "Traded 'er f'r a bag'a magic beans, di'n't I though!"

"Oh no ... " "Yeah! An' even better! The man what gave me the beans said 'e knew this Nigerian prince as well, see ... "

"Ah ... " "... an' 'e needed to move 'is money away from this evil tax-man, right? 'e just needed a bank account to put it in for a l'il bit, an' if I let 'im use mine, 'e'd give me thousan'za pounds!! Isn't at great?!"

Jack gasped hopefully at a straw. "Yeah, but you 'aven't got a bank account, Rhod."

"Oh no, I don't." *Hallelujah, there was a light at the end of the tunnel...* "But it was too good a chance to miss, so I gave him mam's."

.... pity it turned out to be an oncoming train.

"Ri-i-ght.... ummm... ever thought of leavin' 'ome, Rhod? Maybe joinin' the army but?"

"No fear! People try an' kill ya!!" "Ye-e-eah ... " Jack slung an arm around his neighbour's shoulders. "Might find there's a bit of that goin' about..."



"Beans??!!! &!\$*#!-in' BEANS??!!! You stupid, **stupid** boy!!! ..."

Jack winced as he lingered in the lane, listening to Mrs Evans. Duw, that woman had a pair of lungs on her. He ducked as a handful of ballistic beans shot past his ear.

"... an empty bank account!! Do you 'ave any idea?!! Do you?!! We're ruined! **ROOOO-INNNED!**!"

A rumble of thunder sent Jack indoors, as the rain that had threatened all day started to fall in big fat drops.

The next morning, Jack opened the curtains and was presented with a scene straight out of a fairy tale. (No, not the one where Snow White eats the apple. No, nor the one where Cinderella loses her glass slipper. Seriously? You don't see where this is going...?)

Spiralling up, up, up into the clouds and out of sight was a massive green beanstalk. Twisting offshoots and tendrils were already overtaking his garden and enveloping his house.

Now the voice of reason in Jack's head said that just because it had shot up hundreds of feet overnight, it still didn't mean it'd grown from magic beans. That'd be silly. They were just some kind of mutant strain, that was all.

On the other hand ... what's a lad to do when faced with an almost-definitely-not-magical beanstalk



Although the tendrils gave lots of hand and foot-holds, it was still a long, long way up and Jack was exhausted when he finally emerged above the clouds and saw a lush green land stretching away into the distance. Reaching out with one wobbly leg, he was relieved to find the ground was good and solid, and gratefully face-planted onto the grass. After taking a few minutes to catch his breath, he hauled himself upright and struck out towards a structure that he could see on the horizon.

As he drew nearer, he could see that it was a castle. Now big castles weren't new to him - you could hardly throw a stone in Wales without hitting one - but something about this one seemed disproportionately huge. Standing on the drawbridge, Jack finally realised what was bothering him. While the gates stood more than two hundred feet high, what really worried him was the smaller door set into the gates, clearly for day-to-day use. It was more than fifty feet in height.

Jack squeezed through a crack in the woodwork and found himself in an enormous stone-flagged hallway. He edged worriedly past a pair of boots which had been left just inside the door. A measuring glance told him the feet that went into these boots must be longer than Jack was tall. He gulped.

Distantly, he could hear faint singing and music of the plinkety-plinkety-plonk variety. He followed the sound and came to a massive wooden door. Jack wriggled underneath and stopped short, scarcely daring to breathe....

Seated at a colossal wooden table, with his chin resting on his hands, was a giant. His attention was fixed on a small white duck which was picking its way across a metal xylophone. As it struck the notes, it warbled along, slightly off-key... "What 'll I do-oooo, when yo-ooo-oooo are fa-aaar a-wehkk!" A loud quack coincided with a golden egg rolling out onto the table. Jack's eyes widened.

Moments later, the giant's head dropped onto the table and he began to snore, so the duck hopped off the xylophone and also settled down to sleep.

Jack swarmed up the table leg, skirted carefully past the slumbering giant and tiptoed across to the duck.

"Psst..." "Wahhkk!!" the duck bolted awake and the giant stirred with a snort. Jack and the duck both froze for a beat till the giant's breathing evened out again.

"Wahhkk you want?" quacked the duck. "Is that really gold?" whispered Jack in awe, pointing to the shining egg. The duck preened.

"Yup. 24-carat. I'm an amazing bird, me. I can tap dance while playing the xylophone and I know all the words to every Frank Sinatra song ever."

"Wow," breathed Jack. "You 'ave got to come with me. We'll make a fortune!" "Holy-moly," declared the duck, doing a web-footed shuffle. "Broadway here I come! ... Start spreadin' the news!! ... I'm leavin' to-daaaay!!!!"

"Shutupshutupshutup!!" Jack frantically tried to shush her, but it was no use.

"... I wanna be-eee a part of it, Noo Yawwwk, Noo wahhkk!!" Another egg hit the table with a resounding *thunk!*

Jack bolted. The giant jerked awake and peered around. He sniffed. Then sniffed again. He leaned down and snuffled nearer the table top. Finally he picked up the gravy boat to reveal Jack hiding behind it.

"Fee-fi-fo-fum!!" he roared. "I smell the blood of an Englishman! Be he alive or ... " 'ere, 'ang on, 'ang on..."

The giant stumbled to a halt, his brow furrowed in confusion. "Wot?" "Can't be smellin' the blood of an Englishman," Jack argued. "I'm Welsh, me." He patted the feathers on his Wales shirt proudly.

The giant's lips moved as he absorbed this new piece of information. Finally he

shrugged. "Same fing." "Same thing? Same thing?!! Well obviously you weren't at Euro16." "Wot's a yoo-row? ... N'mind.... Fee-fi-fo-fum!!" he started again. "I smell the blood of a Welshman. Be he alive...." "No, no, no, that won't work either." "Wot now?" asked the giant petulantly. "Doesn't scan, bach. It needs to go 'I smell the blood of a tum-ti-tum...', see?" The giant took a deep breath and began again. "Fee-fi-fo-fum!! I smell the blood of a tum-ti-tum. Be he ... " "No, y'don't say tum-ti-tum," Jack explained patiently. "Y'just need somethin' that fits the rhythm. Like ... uh... 'ow about Swansea Man? That'll work." A muscle flexed in the giant's jaw.

(Had he been blessed with a better vocabulary, he might have reflected at this juncture on how much simpler life used to be; things trespassed, you went fee-fi-fo-fum and then you ate them. They didn't stand about correcting your pentameter. But since 90% of his vocabulary consisted of 'wot?' ...) The giant rotated his neck till it cracked and ground out... "Fee-fi-fo-fum!! I smell the blood of a ... Swan-zee-man...?" Jack gave him a thumbs-up. "Be he alive or be he dead, l'llgrindhisbonestobakemybread!!!" he finished in a rush before Jack could interrupt again. Grinning, he pinned Jack to the table with one meaty paw.

"... And nowww the end is near... and so I faaace.. the final curtainm.!!"

"Not helpin'!" Jack snapped at the duck. "Quick!! Change to a lullaby!!" The duck segued without missing a beat...

"... so make it one for my baay-beee. And one mo-rrre .. for the roaaaaad.."

As if on cue, the giant's eyelids began to droop and soon he was fast asleep. Jack slid out from under the giant's hand and lay there for a moment, breathing hard. The duck waddled over and butted him with her beak.

"So c'mon, is it Broadway? Maybe Vegas? Oooh, oooh, I could appear with Celine Dion! I believeeeve that my heart will go o-oo mmmmpff-mmmf.."

Jack let go his grip on her beak and hissed "Will you be quiet! There's no Broadway. No Vegas!"

The duck snapped her beak a couple of times and scowled at him. "But you said we'd make a fortune!" "Yeah, sellin' your golden eggs!" "Oh." The duck's head drooped for a moment, then she drew herself up indignantly. "He," she stressed, indicating the sleeping giant, "he likes my singing."

Suddenly Jack could see his meal ticket flapping away. "Your singin' is lovely, but," he babbled. "Really. Mebbe just a lit-tle bit off-key sometimes..."

The duck fixed him with a reproachful eye. "Listen sunshine. I'm a talking duck. I lay solid gold eggs. You think anyone cares if I don't nail every note?" She flooked off to sit beside her xylophone and sang pointedly, "Who wants to be a millionaire?... I don't!!"

"No!" Jack stole a panicked glance at the giant and dropped his voice to a whisper. "No. Please come with me.. er ... what's your name?"

The duck adjusted her feathers and stretched her neck.

"Delilah." "Really? As in ... 'I saw the light on the night that I passed by her window'...?" "I'm sorry?" "It's a song." "It's not one of Frank's", she said, dismissing it. "No. It's Tom Jones." "Never heard of him." "Never heard ...?" Jack spluttered. "But ... but..." his voice dropped to a reverential hush... "it's Sir Tom Jones! My, my, my Delilah, we'll need to expand your repertoire when we get back to Wales." She tossed her head and sniffed. "You can certainly try."



As quietly as they could, they sneaked out of the castle. This wasn't especially quietly, as Delilah insisted that Jack brought her xylophone. He'd suggested taking the keys off and wrapping them separately, an idea she had greeted with as much enthusiasm as a recipe for orange sauce. So with Delilah under one arm and the xylophone stowed carefully in his back-pack, they headed back to the beanstalk, with Jack trying not to jostle the xylophone and Delilah offering up more nuggets of wisdom à la Frank on the way.

"There may be trouble a-heeead.."

.... and there was. Jack was so busy stealing frantic glances over his shoulder, he failed to see the tendril snaking across the ground in front of him.

"Waahhkkk!!!" "Ping-pong-ting-claannng!!!!" As far as they were from the castle, they still clearly heard the bellow of rage when the giant woke. The ground shook as he thudded in their direction.

Thinking fast, Jack shoved Delilah inside his shirt as he swung onto the beanstalk. Faintly, from somewhere around the level of his chest, he could hear " ... you've got me-eee ... under your skin-nnnnnn. ... "

Slithering down as fast as he could, Jack was almost thrown from the trunk when the giant flung himself onto it. Faster and faster he went, but he could hear the giant closing on him, along with Delilah's recital of oldies but goodies

" ... I've got a crush on yo-oooo, sweetie pi-i-iiiiie.. "

"Please don't talk about crushes!" Jack implored her, eyeing the still considerable distance to the ground. Then he spotted a familiar face peering up at him.

"Rhod! Rhod!!! Cut the beanstalk down now!!!"

One of the good things about being several numbers short of a full bingo card is that you don't concern yourself with life's little conundrums, like "won't that kill you?" In seconds, Rhod had snatched up an almighty axe (look, if I want there to be an almighty axe lying conveniently around, there just is, okay?) and he set to work on the base of the beanstalk. The vibrations nearly dislodged Jack several times but he continued to drop hand-over-hand until he was close enough to jump the final distance.

Safe on the ground, he slipped his back-pack off, hauled Delilah out of his shirt and snatched up another axe that

was sitting on his log pile (Yes. Another axe. Live with it). Together, he and Rhod attacked the beanstalk with a fury, but when he looked up, he could see the giant's feet. They redoubled their efforts and the trunk began to creak and sway. The giant stopped, clinging to the trunk in fear, and squealed "No-o-oooo!!!" Jack shouted up "Go back to your castle an' leave us alone!" "Gonna cut the beanstalk down!!!"

wailed the giant. "Yes, I am..." "No-oooo-ooooooo!!!!!!!" ".... but not till you're clear. Promise."

The giant gave it one last go. "Duck??" "The duck stays 'ere. G'on now."

The giant sighed and gingerly climbed back up the beanstalk, sniveling as it wobbled and weaved. Finally, in the distance, they heard a grumbled: " 'm'clear."

Four more strokes, and the beanstalk succumbed with an almighty crash. "Whoops there goooo-es another rubber tree-eee plant"

What she lacked in botanical accuracy, Delilah made up for in timing. "Waaaahhkk!..." another golden egg thudded into the grass and rolled gently to a halt by Jack's left foot.

Silence.



Jack braced himself. There'd be no talking his way out of this. "So whaddya reckon to the score last night then but?" asked Rhod.

Jack's mouth fell open. I have a solid gold egg at my feet. The duck that laid it sings. In fact, to borrow a line from Shrek, it's getting her to shut up that's the trick. And we've just chopped down a beanstalk half a mile high, that didn't even exist yesterday, to stop a giant coming down and turning me into a ciabatta roll.

So obviously he's going to want to talk about the rugby....

Jack scooped up Delilah with one hand and pocketed the egg nonchalantly with the other. (Well yes, of course he planned to help out the newly-bankrupted Evanses, but secretly. And just the one egg-worth. I mean, it's all fine and dandy to be neighbourly but there's no need to go overboard, is there?)

"A travesty, that's what it was, Rhod. That was never a try!"

The two lads strolled back to the house, trading imprecations on the eyesight and parentage of referees, while Delilah looked around with great interest. Oh this was so exciting! She just had to immortalise her new home in song ...

"Myyyyyy kind of towwwn...." " ...?" " ... she waved her wing at Jack in a 'gimme' gesture. He told her.

She sulked for three days.

"And then you go and spoil it all by sayin' somethin' stupid like Abercwmcoedpenyllanrhyderywmysfach"

The End