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Jack and the Bean Stock

by Marilee Jackson

Characters

MOTHER GOOSE
JACK
JACK'S MOTHER (BO PEEP)
PEDDLER
GIANT (PETER PIPER)
GIANT'S WIFE
GOLDEN HEN
MAGIC HARP (CINDERELLA)

SCENE 1

BEFORE RISE: MOTHER GOOSE
is standing in front of closed curtain, holding storybook and calling out names. As each name is called, a face peeks out from between curtains. Main characters double as Mother Goose characters only in this opening scene. Since only their faces peek out from curtain, they do not give away their costumes or their identities.

MOTHER GOOSE: Bo Peep? Bo Peep, where are you?

BO PEEP (*Peeking through curtain*): Here I am.

MOTHER GOOSE: Report to the Nursery Rhyme book. And don't forget your staff.

BO PEEP: Yes, Mother Goose. (*Exits*)

MOTHER GOOSE: Cinderella?

Where is Cinderella?

CINDERELLA (*Peeking out*): I'm sorry, Mother Goose. I was looking for my glass slippers.

MOTHER GOOSE: You've lost them already? Dear, dear. Report to the French Fairy Tales book, please.

CINDERELLA: Yes, Mother Goose. (*Exits*)

MOTHER GOOSE: Peter Piper?

PETER (*Peeking out*): One peck of pickled peppers! (*Exits*)

MOTHER GOOSE: Where's Jack?

JACK (*Emerging from behind curtain, carrying candlestick*): I'm Jack.

MOTHER GOOSE: You belong in the English Fairy Tale book. And don't forget your ax.

JACK (*Confused*): My ax?

MOTHER GOOSE: Of course. Imagine Jack and the Beanstalk without an ax! (*She exits through curtain.*)

JACK (*Scratching head*): Wait a minute. I think you've got the wrong Jack. I'm Jack Be Nimble. (JACK'S MOTHER *enters.*)

MOTHER (*Briskly*): Oh, there you are. It's almost time for our story to begin. Where is your ax?

JACK: I don't have an ax. I have a candle. (*Frowning*) Who are you?

MOTHER: Your mother, of course.
Come along. We'll get an ax from
the prop manager. (MOTHER
GOOSE *sticks her head through
curtain.*)

MOTHER GOOSE: Places,
everyone, places! (*Exits*)

JACK: Oh, dear. I'm telling you, I'm
not the Jack who belongs in this
story!

MOTHER: Well, you're the only
Jack here, so you'll just have to do
the best you can. Jump into the
storybook with me, Jack. Hurry!
(*They exit.*)

* * *

SETTING: *Inside Jack's house.
Table and chairs are center.
Window is upstage. Milking stool
and bucket are in one corner.*

AT RISE: MOTHER *is crying into
her apron and JACK is looking
confused.*

MOTHER: Oh, Jack. What shall we
do? Milky White has stopped giv-
ing milk. And with no milk to take
to the market, we have no way to
earn money for bread.

JACK: You mean that cow behind the
house? Maybe she just needs a
little encouragement. Let me try.
(*Picks up bucket and stool and
exits. Moo-ing sounds are heard,
and then bucket and stool come
flying across stage from direction
JACK exited. JACK returns,
rubbing bottom.*) She didn't want
to be encouraged.

MOTHER: You must take Milky
White to the village and sell her.
Or, perhaps you can make a good
trade.

JACK: A trade?

MOTHER: You know . . . trade . . .
beans? Jack and the *Beanstalk*?
(*Winks meaningfully*)

JACK (*Screwing up his nose*): But I
don't like beans.

MOTHER (*Handing him rope*):
Here's a rope in case she's stub-
born. Off you go. (MOTHER *exits*.
JACK *exits, then reenters, pulling
on the rope. Backstage, someone
pulls the other way, and after a few
seconds of push and pull, the per-
son backstage lets go of rope and
JACK goes flying backward, still
holding rope.*)

JACK: It seems Milky White doesn't
like the idea of going to the market
either. Now what do I do? (*He sits
on the apron of the stage, swinging
legs, and suddenly notices his feet,
the toes of which are sticking out of
his shoes. To audience*) I may not
have a cow, but I have my cowhide
shoes, which, as you probably
noticed, I have outgrown. Perhaps
they're worth a trade.

MOTHER (*Offstage*): Jack! Haven't
you left yet?

JACK: Going, Mother! (*Takes off
shoes. Curtain*)

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SCENE 2

SETTING: *In front of curtain on
apron.*

BEFORE RISE: JACK *enters, drag-
ging rope, which disappears
offstage. PEDDLER enters, push-
ing a cart.*

PEDDLER: Hello, Jack. Have you
brought your cow?

JACK: Oh, you mean Milky White.
She wouldn't come.

PEDDLER: But how can I trade you,

if you don't have a cow?

JACK: Well, I may not have a cow, but I have something just as nice. My cowhide shoes. *(He pulls rope, to which his shoes are attached, onstage.)*

PEDDLER: Well, I was really expecting a cow, but I suppose the shoes will do just as well.

JACK: And what will you give me in exchange?

PEDDLER: A handful of beans. *(He pulls beans from pocket, displays them.)*

JACK: Don't you have any corn? I hate beans.

PEDDLER *(Shrugging)*: Sorry. Beans are all I have.

JACK: I don't think my mother would be very pleased with me if I came back with only a handful of beans. Can't you do any better than that?

PEDDLER: Hm-m-m. What would you say to an entire bag of beans?

JACK: No, I don't think so.

PEDDLER *(Explaining)*: But these aren't just ordinary beans. They are *magical* beans. If you plant them tonight, a gigantic beanstalk will grow by morning, and it is that beanstalk that will make your fortune.

JACK: And how do I know that they are truly magical beans?

PEDDLER: Because it says so on the bag. See? *(Reaches into cart, pulls out bag reading, MAGIC BEANS)* Magic beans.

JACK: Well, then, I guess it must be true. All right. Here are my shoes. *(Hands over shoes)*

PEDDLER: And here are the beans.

(Hands over beans) Goodbye, Jack, and good luck! *(Exits. JACK stands looking at bag of beans, then exits through curtain.)*

* * *

SETTING: *Jack's house.*

AT RISE: JACK and MOTHER are onstage.

MOTHER *(In disbelief)*: You brought back *what*?

JACK: Magic beans.

MOTHER *(Shaking head)*: Oh, Jack. What a foolish boy you are! *(Pointing off)* Off to bed with you, and no supper!

JACK *(Protesting)*: But, Mother . . . the peddler said . . .

MOTHER: Never mind what he said. And as for these beans—*(Empties bag out window. Lights out and a short musical interlude to indicate passage of time, during which JACK and MOTHER exit. When lights come up again, a beanstalk is now in view outside window. MOTHER enters with broom, spots beanstalk, drops broom.)* Jack! Jack, wake up!

JACK *(Entering, rubbing eyes)*: What is it, Mother?

MOTHER *(Pointing out window)*: Look! A beanstalk. A giant beanstalk! You must climb it and find out where it leads!

JACK *(Nervously)*: Who, me?

MOTHER: Of course, you.

JACK: But I'm afraid of heights.

MOTHER: What? *(Pulls him aside. In a loud stage whisper)* Jack, you have to climb the beanstalk. That's the way the story goes. *(Suddenly)* I have it! We'll tie a blindfold around your eyes. When you get to

the top, you can take it off.

JACK: I guess that'll work. But I'm hungry! I went to bed without any supper, and that beanstalk looks like a long climb.

MOTHER: Hm-m-m. We haven't any food. . . Wait! I know! There are a few beans left in the bag. I'll make you some bean soup. I'll put some in a thermos, and when you get to the top, you can eat it.

JACK: But I don't like—(She gives him a warning look.) Never mind. (Curtain)

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SCENE 3

SETTING: *Giant's house on top of beanstalk. Table and chairs are center. There is a large nest with a giant pepper shaker next to it in one corner.*

AT RISE: JACK is outside window with blindfold on. He carries thermos. He is feeling his way around, and falls through window into house. GOLDEN HEN is sitting on nest in one corner and MAGIC HARP, with girl's face, is in other corner.

JACK: Where am I?

HEN: If you take off your blindfold, you might find out. (JACK removes blindfold.)

JACK (Looking around): Who said that?

HEN: I did. Wait a minute. Here it comes again. (HEN bobs up several times, clucks, and pulls out golden egg.) That makes 32.

JACK (Amazed): Say, that's a golden egg! You lay golden eggs?

HEN (Proudly): Nothing but.

JACK: And you've laid 32 golden

eggs?

HEN: That's just since breakfast.

JACK: Breakfast! What a happy thought. (He starts to open his thermos.)

HEN: Not around here it isn't. Not if the giant smells you.

JACK: What giant? (Looks around) Say, do you have any pepper? (HEN hands him pepper shaker.)

HARP: You'd better hide. He'll be coming soon.

JACK (Looking around): Who said that?

HARP: I did.

JACK: A talking harp?

HARP: What's so amazing about that? I sing, too. Would you like to hear something?

HEN (Groaning): No, please, not now. (Hurriedly) Uh-oh, I think I hear them coming. (Loud footsteps are heard.)

JACK: Them? You mean there are two giants?

HARP: Of course. He has a wife.

HEN: You'd better hide. Or else you'll be breakfast!

JACK: You mean the giant eats. . .

HEN (Matter-of-factly): His wife is a terrible cook, so he's always hungry and always has a bad temper.

GIANT (Offstage):

Fee, fie, foe, fum,

I smell the blood of an Englishman.

(JACK hides under table, taking pepper with him. GIANT and his WIFE enter. GIANT is carrying bags labeled GOLD.)

WIFE: Don't start that again. There's nobody here but us. And we know whose fault that is!

GIANT: Where's my breakfast? (Sits

at table; puts bags on table, begins counting coins)

WIFE: Calm down, it's coming. (*She puts bowl in front of GIANT.*)

GIANT (*In dismay*): Oatmeal? Again?

WIFE: Oatmeal is good for you. It will make you grow.

GIANT: I don't need to grow!

HEN: Oh, oh! Here comes another one . . . (*Jumps, clucks, produces another egg*) That makes 33.

GIANT (*Grumbling*): What good is a magic hen when you can't get a single omelet or egg salad sandwich out of her?

HEN (*Looking offended*): Humph. As if I care to be a common hen.

GIANT (*Counting gold*): One, three, eighty-one, twenty! (*Starts with a new bag. JACK sneezes.*) What was that?

WIFE: What was what?

GIANT (*Loudly*): Fee, fie, foe, fum, I tell you, I smell an Englishman!

WIFE: Nonsense. You can see there is no one here but us, the hen, and the magic harp. (*JACK sneezes.*)

GIANT: I tell you, I heard something! Fee, fie, foe, fum. . .

WIFE: I heard it, too. It sounds as if it came from. . . (*Lifts tablecloth to reveal JACK with pepper shaker, sneezing again*) Why, it's a little boy! How did you get here?

GIANT: Never mind that! He's just in time for breakfast. And I'm hungry!

JACK (*Looking alarmed*): Hungry, you say? Maybe you'd like to try some of my soup. My mother makes a delicious bean stock. (*He comes out from under table, uncapping his thermos.*)

GIANT (*Inhaling deeply*): Oh, what a wonderful aroma! Bean stock, you say?

JACK: Bean stock, bean soup, it's all the same. Help yourself.

WIFE: May I try it, too?

JACK: Of course. (*GIANT and WIFE take turns tasting soup.*)

GIANT and WIFE (*Ad lib*): Ooh, delicious! What soup! (*Etc. They begin to doze.*)

HARP: Look. They've fallen asleep. This is your chance, Jack.

JACK: My chance?

HEN (*Matter-of-factly*): To steal the gold.

JACK (*Appalled*): Steal the gold? I can't do that. Stealing is wrong.

HARP: Well, that's a fine thing. You've come all this way and the giant and his wife have fallen asleep, and you don't intend to steal the gold? What kind of Jack and the Beanstalk are you?

JACK: But that's what I keep trying to tell everyone!

HEN (*Urgently*): You must *do* something. The story must go on!

JACK: Well, I can't steal. Perhaps I could make a trade? (*Touches hat*) My hat. I notice the giant doesn't have one.

HARP (*Agreeing*): And the giant has more gold than he can use.

HEN: He won't even miss it. He can't count, you know.

HARP: You'd better hurry. If he wakes up, he may decide he's hungry for something more substantial than bean soup. Like you. (*GIANT snores loudly, as if ready to wake up.*) Quickly, Jack! Take the gold.

I'll sing a lullaby. "Rock-a-bye, giant, in the beanstalk . . ." (*Keeps humming. JACK puts hat on table and takes one bag of gold.*)

JACK: I guess it's goodbye, then.

HARP (*Matter-of-factly*): Oh, we'll be seeing you again.

JACK: Not if I can help it. This gold is more than enough to take care of my mother and me for a long time. Besides, I'm not very fond of climbing beanstalks. (*Ties blindfold over his eyes*) Goodbye!

HARP (*Singing*): "And down will come giant, beanstalk and all." (*Curtain*)

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SCENE 4

SETTING: *In front of Jack's house. May be played before curtain.*

AT RISE: JACK and MOTHER are sitting in rocking chairs.

JACK: Isn't life peaceful, Mother?

MOTHER: It certainly is. But think how nice it would be if we had that hen you told me about. The one that lays the golden eggs. Why, we would never have to worry again.

JACK: But, Mother, the hen belongs to the giant and his wife.

MOTHER (*Insistently*): Well, I want it. You must climb the beanstalk and bring it back to me.

JACK: But what if the giant wants to keep her?

MOTHER (*Flatly*): Then you must strike another bargain.

JACK: But we have nothing to offer him. Unless . . .

MOTHER: Unless?

JACK: I just remembered what the peddler said. He said the way to my fortune was the bean stock. That's

it, Mother! He meant your soup.

MOTHER (*Excitedly*): Of course! I'll send an entire pot of bean stock.

JACK: That's good. The giant is always hungry.

MOTHER: I'll make it right now. Get ready, Jack. You must leave first thing in the morning. (*Curtain*)

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TIME: *The next morning.*

SETTING: *Giant's house.*

AT RISE: HEN and HARP are in their usual corners. JACK appears in window. His blindfold covers one eye. He is carrying big kettle.

JACK (*Speaking to audience from window*): As you can see, I'm getting a little braver. And I managed not to spill a drop of soup on the way. (*Looks around*) I wonder where everyone is.

HEN: Well, that's a fine way to talk. Don't I count?

HARP: And don't mind me, I'm just the heavenly voice that kept the giant asleep while you made your escape.

JACK: Was he upset?

HEN: *Very* upset.

JACK: I suppose he noticed that his gold was gone?

HARP: Oh, no. In fact, he counted it wrong again. He thought he had an extra bag.

HEN: He was upset because the soup was gone, and he had to eat oatmeal for supper again.

HARP: I told you we'd be seeing you again. I suppose you came for the hen? (*GIANT'S WIFE enters with bowl of oatmeal.*)

WIFE: Breakfast, dear. Come and get it while it's hot!

GIANT (*Offstage*): I'm coming, I'm coming. (*He enters wearing JACK's hat.*) What's that? What do I smell? Fee, fie, foe, fum, I smell . . . bean soup, yum, yum, yum!

JACK (*Climbing through window*): Hello, Mr. Giant. And you are right. You do smell bean soup. Lots of bean soup.

GIANT: Oh, goody! Bring the bowls! Bring the spoons!

JACK: Wait. I do have a small favor to ask you. I brought the soup in hopes that you would make me a trade for the golden hen.

HEN (*Protesting*): What? My valuable gift of laying eggs for a mere pot of soup? Now you've really ruffled my feathers!

GIANT (*Considering*): Hmm. I really have little use for gold.

WIFE (*Musing*): And we can't eat golden eggs.

HARP: And that soup does smell delicious.

HEN: Say, whose side are you on?

HARP: It was just an observation. Although, your constant clucking has become a bit of a nuisance.

HEN: And what about your singing? You're always out of tune. Oh, oh! Here comes another one! (*Jumps, clucks, and produces another egg*)

WIFE: She is truly a wonderful hen.

GIANT: I wouldn't trade her for anything, except . . .

JACK (*Hopefully*): Except?

GIANT (*Enthusiastically*): That wonderful bean stock! (*Takes the soup*)

HEN: Wait! You mean, just like that? No adventure? No desperate escape through the window, with me clucking and the giant yelling, and

the wife screaming . . . ?

HARP (*Rolling eyes*): Please, you're so dramatic.

HEN: Just you wait. You won't feel that way when Jack returns for you.

JACK: Oh, I won't be back. This hen will take care of our needs forever, and Mother will be satisfied.

HARP (*Sarcastic*): Don't count on it.

JACK: Come along, Mother Hen.

HEN: I'm coming. (*They climb out window. HARP leans out, calls.*)

HARP: Wait. You can't go without a farewell song. (*Singing to tune of "She'll Be Coming 'Round the Mountain"*) "Oh, we'll all have chicken and dumplings when she comes, oh, we'll all have chicken and dumplings when she comes."

HEN (*Alarmed*): Cluck! Cluck! (*Curtain*)

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SCENE 5

SETTING: *Jack's house.*

AT RISE: HEN *sits on table*, JACK *and MOTHER are sitting around.*

HEN: Cluck, cluck, cluck—43.

MOTHER (*Ecstatic*): The magic beans have really brought us good luck. We are richer than I ever dreamed possible.

JACK: Then you're happy, Mother?

MOTHER: Oh, yes!

JACK: I'm glad. I hope the giant and his wife are not missing their hen. Of course, they still have their magic harp.

MOTHER: Magic harp?

JACK (*To audience*): Oh, no.

HEN: I told you.

MOTHER: What magic harp?

JACK: Oh, just a little harp that sings the giant to sleep.

MOTHER: A singing harp? A magical singing harp?

JACK: Oh, no. Are you thinking what I think you're thinking?

MOTHER: And why shouldn't we have the harp? Isn't that why we grew the magic beanstalk? Didn't the peddler say it would bring us our fortune?

JACK: But we already have a fortune. Why can't we be content?

MOTHER: Just one more time, Jack! And when you return, I will cut down the beanstalk and that will be the end of our story!

JACK: Cut down the beanstalk?

MOTHER: Of course. When the giant discovers his harp is gone, he will be angry, and he will come looking for it. We can't have that, now, can we? I will begin the soup. The harp is worth at least two pots of bean stock. Don't you think? (JACK gives a dismayed look. *Curtain*)

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SCENE 6

AT RISE: JACK *appears in window of Giant's house with blindfold around his neck.*

JACK: Well, here I am again. And ever so much braver than when this story began.

HARP: So I see. I suppose you've come for me.

JACK: True, but this will positively be my last visit.

HARP: I know. We'd better hurry.

JACK: Shouldn't I at least leave the giant a note or something?

HARP: Just leave the soup. It will distract him and perhaps he won't notice I'm missing right away. At least we'll get a good head start.

JACK: If you say so. (*He attempts to bring in the two kettles but they tip.*) Oh, no, I spilled the soup!

GIANT (*Offstage*):

Fee, fie, foe, fum. . . .

HARP: Run! (JACK *grabs* HARP; *they climb out window. Curtain*)

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SCENE 7

AT RISE: MOTHER *is leaning out window of Jack's house. She is looking up at beanstalk.*

MOTHER: Hurry, Jack! (HARP *comes down first. MOTHER helps her through window.*)

HARP: I think I broke a string!

HEN: Always harping about something. Cluck, cluck. (JACK *enters.*)

JACK: The giant and his wife are coming down the beanstalk. They're right behind me!

MOTHER (*Raising ax*): Stand back, Jack.

JACK: No, Mother, stop! If you chop down the beanstalk, the giant and his wife will take a terrible fall!

HEN: Too late to worry about that. The beanstalk isn't strong enough to hold them anyway. Here they come . . . (*Shouting and big crash are heard. Lights flicker on and off.*)

JACK (*Leaning out window*): Are you all right?

GIANT (*Looking around*): Where are we?

WIFE: What are we doing here? (MOTHER GOOSE *enters with PEDDLER following.*)

MOTHER GOOSE: I'll teach you to ruin a perfectly good book! What is all this nonsense about bean stock? There's no soup in the story.

PEDDLER: It wasn't my fault. I traded Jack for the beans. And I told him the *beanstalk* would lead to his fortune. Not the *bean stock*.

JACK: They sound the same. It was an honest mistake. And besides, this story needed some changes.

MOTHER GOOSE: Whatever do you mean?

JACK: I think fairy tales should set a good example for children. A little boy who steals to become rich? A mother who is greedy? A giant who eats little boys? Really, Mother Goose. You ought to be ashamed!

MOTHER GOOSE: I never thought of it that way. But then, how shall we end this story?

JACK: I say we end with a fine dinner.

GIANT: Fee, fie, foe, fum, bean soup coming, yum, yum, yum!

MOTHER: There's been enough bean soup in this story! How about a nice chicken dinner with all the trimmings?

HEN: Cluck, cluck, I beg your pardon?

JACK: Make that roast beef, Mother.

MOTHER: And for dessert, how about some nice cold milk and oatmeal cookies?

GIANT (*Chagrined*): Oatmeal? (*Curtain*)

THE END



Production Notes

JACK AND THE BEAN STOCK

Characters: 3 male, 5 female.

Playing Time: 20 minutes.

Costumes: Jack's Mother, Giant's Wife, and Mother Goose wear long, old-fashioned dresses and aprons. Mother Goose also wears lace-up boots, bonnet, spectacles, and carries big book. Jack and Giant wear peasant-like tunics and trousers; Jack carries rope in Scene 2. Peddler, the same except his tunic has a pocket containing bag of beans. Hen wears bright yellow costume and has a hidden pocket to carry golden eggs. Harp wears long white tunic.

Properties: Candlestick, rope, broom, blindfold, bags of coins labeled GOLD, bowl of oatmeal, kettles of soup, ax.

Setting: Scene 1, 5, 7, Jack's house.

Table and chairs are center, window is upstage. Milking stool and bucket are in corner. Scene 2, played before curtain. Beanstalk, outside of Jack's window. Scene 3, 6, Giant's house on top of beanstalk. Table and chairs are center. There is a large nest with giant pepper shaker next to it. Scene 4, front of Jack's house; may be played before the curtain.

Lighting: Lights out in Scene 2 to indicate passage of time.

Sound: Musical interlude in Scene 2, Sound of footsteps in Scene 3, loud crash in Scene 6.

Jack's poor little mother was furious when he came home with five beans and no cow. She hurled the beans out the poor little cottage's poor little window where, to the bafflement of her poor little wits, the beans germinated, took root, and grew overnight into a huge, twisted beanstalk that seemed to reach the sky. Jack, being a boy, just had to climb it. At the top, he stepped off onto a wide path paved with gold bricks and lined on both sides with beautiful primroses. "I can move a million shares of stock in a microsecond, causing the entire stock market to rise or fall while all the little people are still trying to reach their brokers. Why, I caused the biggest crash in market history by pressing a single button. I remember it was on May 6, 2010 and . . ."