

# JACK THE GIANT KILLER

BY GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH, OF CORINEUS THE TROJAN

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In the reign of the famous King Arthur, there lived near the Land's End of England, in the county of Cornwall, a worthy farmer, who had an only son named Jack. Jack was a boy of a bold temper; he took pleasure in hearing or reading stories of wizards, conjurers, giants, and fairies, and used to listen eagerly while his father talked of the great deeds of the brave knights of King Arthur's Round Table. When Jack was sent to take care of the sheep and oxen in the fields, he used to amuse himself with planning battles, sieges, and the means to conquer or surprise a foe. He was above the common sports of children; but hardly any one could equal him at wrestling; or, if he met with a match for himself in strength, his skill and address always made him the victor.

In those days there lived on St. Michael's Mount of Cornwall, which rises out of the sea at some distance from the main land, a huge giant. He was eighteen feet high, and three yards round; and his fierce and savage

looks were the terror of all his neighbours. He dwelt in a gloomy cavern on the very top of the mountain, and used to wade over to the main land in search of his prey. When he came near, the people left their houses; and after he had glutted his appetite upon their cattle, he would throw half-a-dozen oxen upon his back, and tie three times as many sheep and hogs round his waist, and so march back to his own abode.

The giant had done this for many years, and the coast of Cornwall was greatly hurt by his thefts, when Jack boldly resolved to destroy him. He therefore took a horn, a shovel, pickaxe, and a dark lantern, and early in a long winter's evening he swam to the mount. There he fell to work at once, and before morning he had dug a pit twenty-two feet deep, and almost as many broad. He covered it over with sticks and straw, and strewed some of the earth over them, to make it look just like solid ground. He then put his horn to his mouth,

and blew such a loud and long tantivy, that the giant awoke and came towards Jack, roaring like thunder: "You saucy villain, you shall pay dearly for breaking my rest; I will broil you for my breakfast."

He had scarcely spoken these words, when he came advancing one step farther; but then he tumbled headlong into the pit, and his fall shook the very mountain. "O ho, Mr. Giant!" said Jack, looking into the pit, "have you found your way so soon to the bottom? How is your appetite now? Will nothing serve you for breakfast this cold morning but broiling poor Jack?"

The giant now tried to rise, but Jack struck him a blow on the crown of the head with his pickaxe, which killed him at once. Jack then made haste back to rejoice his friends with the news of the giant's death.

When the justices of Cornwall heard of this valiant action, they sent for Jack, and declared that he should always be called Jack the Giant Killer; and they also gave him a sword and belt, upon which was written in letters of gold:

"This is the valiant Cornishman  
Who slew the Giant Cormoran."

The news of Jack's exploits soon spread over the western parts of England; and another giant, called Old Blunderbore, vowed to have revenge on Jack, if it should ever be his fortune to get him into his power. This giant kept an enchanted castle in the midst of a lonely

wood. About four months after the death of Cormoran, as Jack was taking a journey into Wales, he passed through this wood; and as he was very weary, he sat down to rest by the side of a pleasant fountain, and there he fell into a deep sleep. The giant came to the fountain for water just at this time, and found Jack there; and as the lines on Jack's belt showed who he was, the giant lifted him up and laid him gently upon his shoulder to carry him to his castle: but as he passed through the thicket, the rustling of the leaves waked Jack; and he was sadly afraid when he found himself in the clutches of Blunderbore. Yet this was nothing to his fright soon after; for when they reached the castle, he beheld the floor covered all over with the skulls and bones of men and women. The giant took him into a large room where lay the hearts and limbs of persons who had been lately killed; and he told Jack, with a horrid grin, that men's hearts, eaten with pepper and vinegar, were his nicest food; and also, that he thought he should make a dainty meal on his heart.

When he had said this, he locked Jack up in that room, while he went to fetch another giant who lived in the same wood, to enjoy a dinner off Jack's flesh with him. While he was away, Jack heard dreadful shrieks, groans, and cries, from many parts of the castle; and soon after he heard a mournful voice repeat these lines:

"Haste, valiant stranger, haste away,  
Lest you become the giant's prey.  
On his return he'll bring another,

Still more savage than his brother:  
A horrid, cruel monster, who,  
Before he kills, will torture you.  
Oh valiant stranger, haste away,  
Or you'll become these giants' prey."

This warning was so shocking to poor Jack, that he was ready to go mad. He ran to the window, and saw the two giants coming along arm in arm. This window was right over the gates of the castle. "Now," thought Jack, "either my death or freedom is at hand."

There were two strong cords in the room: Jack made a large noose with a slip-knot at the ends of both these, and as the giants were coming through the gates, he threw the ropes over their heads. He then made the other ends fast to a beam in the ceiling, and pulled with all his might till he had almost strangled them. When he saw that they were both quite black in the face, and had not the least strength left, he drew his sword, and slid down the ropes; he then killed the giants, and thus saved himself from the cruel death they meant to put him to.

Jack next took a great bunch of keys from the pocket of Blunderbore, and went into the castle again. He made a strict search through all the rooms; and in them found three ladies tied up by the hair of their heads, and almost starved to death. They told him that their husbands had been killed by the giants, who had then condemned them to be starved to death, because they would not eat the flesh of their own dead husbands. "Ladies," said Jack,

"I have put an end to the monster and his wicked brother; and I give you this castle and all the riches it contains, to make you some amends for the dreadful pains you have felt." He then very politely gave them the keys of the castle, and went further on his journey to Wales.

As Jack had not taken any of the giant's riches for himself, and so had very little money of his own, he thought it best to travel as fast as he could. At length he lost his way, and when night came on he was in a lonely valley between two lofty mountains, where he walked about for some hours without seeing any dwelling place, so he thought himself very lucky at last, in finding a large and handsome house.

He went up to it boldly, and knocked loudly at the gate, when, to his great terror and surprise, there came forth a monstrous giant with two heads. He spoke to Jack very civilly, for he was a Welsh giant, and all the mischief he did was by private and secret malice, under the show of friendship and kindness. Jack told him that he was a traveller who had lost his way, on which the huge monster made him welcome, and led him into a room, where there was a good bed to pass the night in. Jack took off his clothes quickly; but though he was so weary he could not go to sleep. Soon after this he heard the giant walking backward and forward in the next room, and saying to himself:

"Though here you lodge with me this night,

You shall not see the morning light;  
My club shall dash your brains out  
quite.”

“Say you so?” thought Jack; “are these your tricks upon travellers? But I hope to prove as cunning as you.”

Then getting out of bed, he groped about the room, and at last found a large thick billet of wood; he laid it in his own place in the bed, and then hid himself in a dark corner of the room. In the middle of the night the giant came with his great club, and struck many heavy blows on the bed, in the very place where Jack had laid the billet, and then he went back to his own room, thinking he had broken all his bones. Early in the morning, Jack put a bold face upon the matter, and walked into the giant’s room to thank him for his lodgings. The giant started when he saw him, and he began to stammer out, “Oh, dear me! Is it you? Pray, how did you sleep last night? Did you hear or see any thing in the dead of the night?”

“Nothing worth speaking of,” said Jack carelessly; “a rat, I believe, gave me three or four slaps with his tail, and disturbed me a little; but I soon went to sleep again.”

The giant wondered more and more at this; yet he did not answer a word, but went to bring two great bowls of hasty-pudding for their breakfast. Jack wished to make the giant believe that he could eat as much as himself. So he contrived to button a leathern bag inside his coat, and slipped the hasty-pudding into this bag, while he seemed to put it into his mouth.

When breakfast was over, he said to the giant: “Now I will show you a fine trick; I can cure all wounds with a touch; I could cut off my head one minute, and the next, put it sound again on my shoulders: you shall see an example.” He then took hold of the knife, ripped up the leathern bag, and all the hasty-pudding tumbled out upon the floor.

“Ods splutter hur nails,” cried the Welsh giant, who was ashamed to be outdone by such a little fellow as Jack, “hur can do that hurself.” So he snatched up the knife, plunged it into his stomach, and in a moment dropped down dead.

As soon as Jack had thus tricked the Welsh monster, he went farther on his journey; and a few days after he met with King Arthur’s only son, who had got his father’s leave to travel into Wales, to deliver a beautiful lady from the power of a wicked magician, who held her in his enchantments. When Jack found that the young prince had no servants with him, he begged leave to attend him; and the prince at once agreed to this, and gave Jack many thanks for his kindness. The prince was a handsome, polite, and brave knight, and so good-natured that he gave money to every body he met. At length he gave his last penny to an old woman, and then turned to Jack, and said: “How shall we be able to get food for ourselves the rest of our journey?”

“Leave that to me sir,” said Jack; “I will provide for my prince.”

Night now came on, and the prince began to grow uneasy at thinking where they should lodge.



“Sir,” said Jack, “be of good heart; two miles farther there lives a large giant, whom I know well. He has three heads, and will fight five hundred men, and make them fly before him.”

“Alas!” replied the king’s son, “we had better never have been born than meet with such a monster.”

“My lord, leave me to manage him, and wait here in quiet till I return.” The prince now staid behind, while Jack rode on full speed. And when he came to the gates of the castle, he gave a loud knock. The giant, with a voice like thunder, roared out: “Who is there?”

And Jack made answer, and said: “No one but your poor cousin Jack.”

“Well,” said the giant, “what news, cousin Jack?”

“Dear uncle,” said Jack, “I have some heavy news.”

“Pooh!” said the giant, “what heavy news can come to me? I am a giant with three heads; and can fight five hundred men, and make them fly before me.”

“Alas!” said Jack, “Here is the king’s son, coming with two thousand men, to kill you, and to destroy the castle and all that you have.”

“Oh, cousin Jack,” said the giant, “This is heavy news indeed! But I have a large cellar under ground, where I will hide myself, and you shall lock, and bar me in, and keep the keys till the king’s son is gone.”

Now when Jack had made the giant fast in the vault, he went back and fetched the prince to the castle; they both made themselves merry

with the wine and other dainties that were in the house. So that night they rested very pleasantly, while the poor giant lay trembling and shaking with fear in the cellar under ground. Early in the morning, Jack gave the king’s son gold and silver out of the giant’s treasure, and set him three miles forward on his journey. He then went to let his uncle out of the hole, who asked Jack what he should give him as a reward for saving his castle. “Why, good uncle,” said Jack, “I desire nothing but the old coat and cap, with the old rusty sword and slippers, which are hanging at your bed’s head.”

Then said the giant: “You shall have them; and pray keep them for my sake, for they are things of great use: the coat will keep you invisible, the cap will give you knowledge, the sword cut through anything, and the shoes are of vast swiftness; these may be useful to you in all times of danger, so take them with all my heart.”

Jack gave many thanks to the giant, and then set off to the prince. When he had come up with the king’s son, they soon arrived at the dwelling of the beautiful lady, who was under the power of a wicked magician. She received the prince very politely, and made a noble feast for him; and when it was ended, she rose, and wiping her mouth with a fine handkerchief, said: “My lord, you must submit to the custom of my palace; to-morrow morning I command you to tell me on whom I bestow this handkerchief or lose your head.” She then went out of the room.

The young prince went to bed very mournful: but Jack put on his cap of knowledge, which told him that the lady was forced, by the power of enchantment, to meet the wicked magician every night in the middle of the forest. Jack now put on his coat of darkness, and his shoes of swiftness, and was there before her. When the lady came, she gave the handkerchief to the magician. Jack with his sword of sharpness, at one blow, cut off his head; the enchantment was then ended in a moment, and the lady was restored to her former virtue and goodness.

She was married to the prince on the next day, and soon after went back with her royal husband, and a great company, to the court of King Arthur, where they were received with loud and joyful welcomes; and the valiant hero Jack, for the many great exploits he had done for the good of his country, was made one of the Knights of the Round Table. As Jack had been so lucky in all his adventures, he resolved not to be idle for the future, but still to do what services he could for the honour of the king and the nation. He therefore humbly begged his majesty to furnish him with a horse and money, that he might travel in search of new and strange exploits. "For," said he to the king, "there are many giants yet living in the remote parts of Wales, to the great terror and distress of your majesty's subjects; therefore if it please you, sire, to favour me in my design, I will soon rid your kingdom of these giants and monsters in human shape."

Now when the king heard this offer, and began to think of the cruel deeds of these blood-thirsty giants and savage monsters, he gave Jack every thing proper for such a journey. After this Jack took leave of the king, the prince, and all the knights, and set off; taking with him his cap of knowledge, his sword of sharpness, his shoes of swiftness, and his invisible coat, the better to perform the great exploits that might fall in his way. He went along over high hills and lofty mountains, and on the third day he came to a large wide forest, through which his road led. He had hardly entered the forest, when on a sudden he heard very dreadful shrieks and cries. He forced his way through the trees, and saw a monstrous giant dragging along by the hair of their heads a handsome knight and his beautiful lady. Their tears and cries melted the heart of honest Jack to pity and compassion; he alighted from his horse, and tying him to an oak tree he put on his invisible coat, under which he carried his sword of sharpness.

When he came up to the giant, he made several strokes at him, but could not reach his body, on account of the enormous height of the terrible creature, but he wounded his thighs in several places; and at length, putting both hands to his sword, and aiming with all his might, he cut off both the giant's legs just below the garter; and the trunk of his body tumbling to the ground, made not only the trees shake, but the earth itself tremble with the force of his fall. Then Jack, setting his foot upon his neck, exclaimed, "Thou barbarous and savage

wretch, behold I come to execute upon thee the just reward for all thy crimes;" and instantly plunged his sword into the giant's body. The huge monster gave a hideous groan, and yielded up his life into the hands of the victorious Jack the Giant Killer, whilst the noble knight and the virtuous lady were both joyful spectators of his sudden death and their deliverance.

The courteous knight and his fair lady, not only returned Jack hearty thanks for their deliverance, but also invited him to their house, to refresh himself after his dreadful encounter, as likewise to receive a reward for his good services.

"No," said Jack, "I cannot be at ease till I find out the den that was the monster's habitation."

The knight on hearing this grew very sorrowful, and replied, "Noble stranger, it is too much to run a second hazard; this monster lived in a den under yonder mountain, with a brother of his, more fierce and cruel than himself; therefore, if you should go thither, and perish in the attempt, it would be a heart-breaking thing to me and my lady; so let me persuade you to go with us, and desist from any farther pursuit."

"Nay," answered Jack, "if there be another, even if there were twenty, I would shed the last drop of blood in my body before one of them should escape my fury. When I have finished this task, I will come and pay my respects to you." So when they had told him where to find them again, he got on his horse and went after the dead giant's brother.

Jack had not rode a mile and a half, before he came in sight of the mouth of the cavern; and nigh the entrance of it, he saw the other giant sitting on a huge block of fine timber, with a knotted iron club lying by his side, waiting for his brother. His eyes looked like flames of fire, his face was grim and ugly, and his cheeks seemed like two fitches of bacon; the bristles of his beard seemed to be thick rods of iron wire; and his long locks of hair hung down upon his broad shoulders like curling snakes. Jack got down from his horse, and turned him into a thicket; then he put on his coat of darkness, and drew a little nearer to behold this figure, and said softly: "Oh, monster! Are you there? It will not be long before I shall take you fast by the beard." The giant all this while could not see him, by reason of his invisible coat: so Jack came quite close to him, and struck a blow at his head with his sword of sharpness, but he missed his aim, and only cut off his nose, which made him roar like loud claps of thunder. And though he rolled his glaring eyes round on every side, he could not see who had given him the blow; yet he took up his iron club, and began to lay about him like one that was mad with pain and fury.

"Nay," said Jack, "if this be the case I will kill you at once." So saying, he slipped nimbly behind him, and jumping upon the block of timber, as the giant rose from it, he stabbed him in the back; when, after a few howls, he dropped down dead. Jack cut off his head, and sent it with the head of his brother, whom he had killed before in the forest, to King Arthur,

by a wagon which he hired for that purpose, with an account of all his exploits.

When Jack had thus killed these two monsters, he went into their cave in search of their treasure: he passed through many turnings and windings, which led him to a room paved with freestone; at the end of it was a boiling caldron, and on the right hand stood a large table where the giants used to dine. He then came to a window that was secured with iron bars, through which he saw a number of wretched captives, who cried out when they saw Jack, "Alas! Alas! Young man, you are come to be one among us in this horrid den."

"I hope," said Jack, "you will not stay here long; but pray tell me what is the meaning of your being here at all?"

"Alas!" said one poor old man, "I will tell you, sir. We are persons that have been taken by the giants who hold this cave, and are kept till they choose to have a feast, then one of us is to be killed, and cooked to please their taste. It is not long since they took three for the same purpose."

"Well," said Jack, "I have given them such a dinner that it will be long enough before they have any more." The captives were amazed at his words. "You may believe me," said Jack; "for I have killed them both with the edge of the sword, and have sent their large heads to the court of King Arthur, as marks of my great success."

To show them that what he said was true, he unlocked the gate, and set them all free. Then he led them to the great room, placed

them round the table, and set before them two quarters of beef, with bread and wine; upon which they feasted to their fill. When supper was over, they searched the giants' coffers, and Jack shared the store in them among the captives, who thanked him for their escape. The next morning they set off to their homes, and Jack to the knight's house, whom he had left with his lady not long before. It was just at the time of sunrise that Jack mounted his horse to proceed on his journey.

He arrived at the knight's house, where he was received with the greatest joy by the thankful knight and his lady, who, in honour of Jack's exploits, gave a grand feast, to which all the nobles and gentry were invited. When the company were assembled, the knight declared to them the great actions of Jack, and gave him, as a mark of respect, a fine ring, on which was engraved the picture of the giant dragging the knight and the lady by the hair, with this motto round it:

"Behold, in dire distress were we,  
Under a giant's fierce command;  
But gained our lives and liberty,  
From valiant Jack's victorious hand."

Among the guests then present were five aged gentlemen, who were fathers to some of those captives who had been freed by Jack from the dungeon of the giants. As soon as they heard that he was the person who had done such wonders, they pressed round him with tears of joy, to return him



thanks for the happiness he had caused to them. After this the bowl went round, and every one drank to the health and long life of the gallant hero. Mirth increased, and the hall was filled with peals of laughter and joyful cries.

But, on a sudden, a herald, pale and breathless with haste and terror, rushed into the midst of the company, and told them that Thundel, a savage giant with two heads, had heard of the death of his two kinsmen, and was come to take his revenge on Jack; and that he was now within a mile of the house; the people flying before him like chaff before the wind. At this news the very boldest of the guests trembled; but Jack drew his sword, and said: "Let him come, I have a rod for him also. Pray, ladies and gentlemen, do me the favour to walk into the garden, and you shall soon behold the giant's defeat and death." To this they all agreed, and heartily wished him success in his dangerous attempt.

The knight's house stood in the middle of a moat, thirty feet deep and twenty wide, over which lay a drawbridge. Jack set men to work to cut the bridge on both sides, almost to the middle; and then dressed himself in his coat of darkness, and went against the giant with his sword of sharpness. As he came close to him, though the giant could not see him, for his invisible coat, yet he found some danger was near, which made him cry out:

"Fa, fe, fi, fo, fum,  
I smell the blood of an Englishman;

Let him be alive, or let him be dead,  
I'll grind his bones to make me bread."

"Say you so my friend?" said Jack, "you are a monstrous miller indeed."

"Art thou," cried the giant, "the villain that killed my kinsmen? Then I will tear thee with my teeth, and grind thy bones to powder."

"You must catch me first," said Jack; and throwing off his coat of darkness, and putting on his shoes of swiftness, he began to run; the giant following him like a walking castle, making the earth shake at every step.

Jack led him round and round the walls of the house, that the company might see the monster; and to finish the work Jack ran over the drawbridge, the giant going after him with his club. But when the giant came to the middle, where the bridge had been cut on both sides, the great weight of his body made it break, and he tumbled into the water, and rolled about like a large whale. Jack now stood by the side of the moat, and laughed and jeered at him, saying: "I think you told me, you would grind my bones to powder. When will you begin?" The giant foamed at both his horrid mouths with fury, and plunged from side to side of the moat; but he could not get out to have revenge on his little foe. At last Jack ordered a cart rope to be brought to him. He then drew it over his two heads, and by the help of a team of horses, dragged him to the edge of the moat, where he cut off the monster's heads; and before he either eat or drank, he sent them both to the court of King Arthur.

He then went back to the table with the company, and the rest of the day was spent in mirth and good cheer. After staying with the knight for some time, Jack grew weary of such an idle life, and set out again in search of new adventures. He went over the hills and dales without meeting any, till he came to the foot of a very high mountain. Here he knocked at the door of a small and lonely house; and an old man, with a head as white as snow, let him in. "Good father" said Jack, "can you lodge a traveller who has lost his way?"

"Yes," said the hermit, "I can, if you will accept such fare as my poor house affords."

Jack entered, and the old man set before him some bread and fruit for his supper. When Jack had eaten as much as he chose, the hermit said, "My son, I know you are the famous conqueror of giants; now, on the top of this mountain is an enchanted castle, kept by a giant named Golligantus, who, by the help of a vile magician, gets many knights into his castle, where he changes them into the shape of beasts. Above all I lament the hard fate of a duke's daughter, whom they seized as she was walking in her father's garden, and brought hither through the air in a chariot drawn by two fiery dragons, and turned her into the shape of a deer. Many knights have tried to destroy the enchantment, and deliver her; yet none have been able to do it, by reason of two fiery griffins who guard the gate of the castle, and destroy all who come nigh. But as you, my son, have an invisible coat, you may pass by them without being seen; and on the gates

of the castle, you will find engraved, by what means the enchantment may be broken."

Jack promised, that in the morning, at the risk of his life he would break the enchantment: and after a sound sleep he arose early, put on his invisible coat, and got ready for the attempt. When he had climbed to the top of the mountain, he saw the two fiery griffins; but he passed between them without the least fear of danger; for they could not see him because of his invisible coat. On the castle gate he found a golden trumpet, under which were written these lines:

"Whoever can this trumpet blow,  
Shall cause the giant's overthrow."

As soon as Jack had read this, he seized the trumpet, and blew a shrill blast which made the gates fly open and the very castle itself tremble. The giant and the conjurer now knew that their wicked course was at an end, and they stood biting their thumbs and shaking with fear. Jack, with his sword of sharpness, soon killed the giant. The magician was then carried away by a whirlwind and every knight and beautiful lady, who had been changed into birds and beasts, returned to their proper shapes. The castle vanished away like smoke and the head of the giant Golligantus was sent to King Arthur. The knights and ladies rested that night at the old man's hermitage, and next day they set out for the court.

Jack then went up to the king, and gave his majesty an account of all his fierce battles. Jack's fame had spread through the whole

country; and at the king's desire, the duke gave him his daughter in marriage, to the joy of all the kingdom. After this the king gave him a large estate; on which he and his lady lived the rest of their days, in joy and content.