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Dramatic Publishing

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK

**Dramatized
by
William Glennon**



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JACK AND THE BEANSTALK

A Play in Two Acts

CHARACTERS

JACK a rather shy teen-ager, hoping for adventure
PENELOPE* his cow
STRANGER Jack's fairy godfather
JUNIOR the Stranger's young assistant
DAME ISOBEL Jack's nemesis
MOTHER
GIANT
GIANT'S WIFE
HARP

***One or two actors.**

**A unit set depicts a wooded area on earth and a castle in
the land of the sky.**

ACT ONE

SCENE: *Scenery can be used to suggest a woodland, but the play needs only an arrangement of platforms against a sky cyclorama. With masking, the platforms can serve as a hiding place for actors and the beanstalk. Daytime, sunny.*

AT RISE: *The STRANGER enters, a good-humored gentleman dressed in a dashing, slightly bizarre costume. He moves about furtively, getting oriented, then signals off stage for his young assistant to join him. JUNIOR rushes in, a little anxious, larky and mischievous. The STRANGER signals silence, fingers over his mouth. JUNIOR complies, his whole hand in use. JUNIOR is right there, bright-eyed, as the STRANGER takes a map from his bag of props to check location, direction, the wind, whatever. They are, it seems, in the right spot. As he returns the map to his bag, the STRANGER spots someone off stage. Delighted but anxious not to be discovered, he leads JUNIOR to a hiding spot, possibly in back of the platforms, where occasionally they can look in on the scene. Just before they drop out of sight, JUNIOR speaks, somewhat startling the STRANGER.*

JUNIOR. I'll bet it's Jack.

STRANGER. Of course it's Jack! *(Pulls him into hiding.)*

(JACK enters carrying fishing gear and a shoulder basket. He looks about, very tense. Once assured of privacy he relaxes, casts his line into imaginary water off stage, then takes a book out of his basket, stretches out and starts to read. PENELOPE, his cow, enters looking for him, goes and nudges his foot with her head and moos. JACK is pleasantly surprised.)

JACK. Oh, hello, Penelope. *(Moo.)* No one followed you? *(PENELOPE shakes her head.)* Good. Got to be careful, you know. I'm always a little bit nervous when we're here. Seems Dame Isobel can sniff out our hiding places, no matter where. Well, she hasn't found this one yet. No one has. *(The STRANGER and JUNIOR give a quick look.)* 'Course I've finished all my chores, but with Dame Isobel you're supposed to go on forever. *(Moo.)* Yeah, she scares me, too. Oh, well. Back to our book. All right? *(Nod.)* Here we are. *(Reads.)* "As the sleek pirate ship, black against the tropical sky, sailed into the hidden harbor, the pirate captain called his faithful men together on deck. He laughed loudly, his white teeth flashing in the sun." *(He tries a laugh.)* I'd like to flash my teeth at Dame Isobel. *(Reads.)* "He laughed loudly, his white teeth flashing in the sun and spoke in a voice of thunder. 'Well, me hearty crew, that was indeed our greatest ad...ad...'" A long word, Penelope, a very long word. *(JUNIOR pops up and as JACK spells out the word, JUNIOR counts on his fingers. Off stage we hear a sound effect—wooden block, chime, whatever—to punctuate each letter.)* "A-d-v-e-n-t-u-r-e." *(The STRANGER pops up and gestures towards JACK.)* "Adventure! That was our greatest adventure!" I should have recognized that word, Penel-

ope, it's just about my favorite. (*The STRANGER and JUNIOR agree and duck out of sight.*) Adventure. Problem is, you can only find adventure in books. Right, Penelope? (*Sad moo.*) What I wouldn't give to sail out of this harbor, away from Dame Isobel, and really live it up. (*Long moo.*) Yes, I know, Penelope, but cows are just naturally contented, boys aren't. If my father were alive I'll bet I'd have lots of adventures. (*Dreamily spells it out again with JUNIOR up and counting and the sounds of punctuating.*) A-d-v-e-n-t-u-r-e. (*He stretches out.*)

(*The STRANGER and JUNIOR come out of hiding. The STRANGER signals, or tosses some glitter, and JACK and PENELOPE "freeze."*)

STRANGER. He's ready.

JUNIOR. Me, too.

STRANGER. Good. Here. (*Gives JUNIOR a pouch from his bag.*)

JUNIOR (*looking in pouch*). Sure they're nine of them?

STRANGER. See for yourself.

JUNIOR (*quick count*). Nine it is! On the button.

STRANGER. Or on the bean, so to speak. Ho. Ho.

JUNIOR. Ho. Ho. Have you magic-tized them yet?

STRANGER. Have I what?

JUNIOR. Magic-tized. That's what I call adding a little magic.

STRANGER (*smiling*). I think so, but just to make certain...

JUNIOR. Which is what we want to be...

STRANGER. I'll give them an extra one of my whoop-de-dos.

JUNIOR. Goody. I'm wild about your whoop-de-dos.

STRANGER (*takes a collapsible wand out of his bag and ceremoniously extends it*). Now, then.

JUNIOR. Sure Jack can't hear us?

STRANGER. No, he's napping.

JUNIOR. What about Pussyfoot?

STRANGER. Penelope. She's napping, too.

JUNIOR. Standing up?

STRANGER. Cows are clever.

JUNIOR. Yeah, I'm wild about them.

STRANGER. Now for the whoop-de-do. Extend thy hand.

JUNIOR (*extends pouch*). Fire when ready.

STRANGER (*intoning*). Take the magic I bestow and make it yours so you can grow. (*He taps the pouch with a flourish, but we hear a "raspberry" sound or a clunk of some kind. They look at each other puzzled. JUNIOR reaches over and pulls the last section of the wand out making it full length. The STRANGER chuckles.*) Too kind.

JUNIOR. It's nothing.

STRANGER. You know, Junior, you're getting better at this all the time.

JUNIOR. That's the general idea, isn't it?

STRANGER (*holds wand out*). Ready?

JUNIOR. Hit it!

STRANGER. Take the magic I bestow and make it yours so you can grow. (*A flourish and this time a suitable magic sound is heard and they're BOTH pleased.*)

JUNIOR. That oughta do it. How's this: there is really nothing to it, just wave your wand and whoop-de-do it?

STRANGER. I couldn't have said it better myself.

JUNIOR. Yeah. Got something in there I can write with, or better still scratch with maybe?

STRANGER. Whatever for?

JUNIOR. Want me to tell you or wanna be surprised?

STRANGER. Look, Junior, you're the pupil and I'm the teacher. You don't have secrets from me.

JUNIOR. That's the rule?

STRANGER. Well, if it isn't it should be.

JUNIOR (*helping himself to a quill from the bag*). This'll do. Seems sharp enough.

STRANGER. That's mine!

JUNIOR. I'm only going to borrow it.

STRANGER. Do you want to pass this test or don't you?

JUNIOR. More than anything. I just want it for a little scratching.

STRANGER. Any boo-boo at this point and you'll never have one of these for your own. (*Indicating wand. PENELOPE moos.*)

JUNIOR. I thought you said she was napping.

STRANGER. She is. She was. I don't know what happened. (*Shakes wand.*)

JUNIOR. There is really nothing to it, just...(*The STRANGER pulls him and they tiptoe out of sight.*)

JACK (*waking up*). What is it, Penelope? Why'd you wake me up? I was having a great dream. About to make Dame Isobel walk the plank. (*Moo.*) Oh, that's it. I've caught something! We'll haul it aboard this pirate craft, matey. (*Pulls in fish line and finds a large crab at the end of it.*) Well, whatda ya know.

(*At this point, DAME ISOBEL, JACK's nemesis, enters, unseen by JACK or PENELOPE. Spotting them she stops and advances slowly, unable to see the crab.*)

JACK. Remind you of anyone we know, Penelope? That crafty expression? That sidelong glance? Come on, you're not trying. It's the spitting image if I ever saw it. (*Moo.*) You got it!

DAME ISOBEL. Hello, Jack.

JACK. Dame Isobel! Dame Isobel?! (*Quickly hides the crab in his basket.*)

DAME ISOBEL (*menacingly sweet*). Well, well, well. Fancy finding you here. Of all places. Fishing, is it?

JACK (*tries his pirate laugh, very weak. Flashes his teeth. Weaker.*) No. I mean, I was, I mean I'm not I mean not now...

DAME ISOBEL. And who could blame you on such a pretty day? Why not run off to a brand new hiding place and have a good time? Stupid old Dame Isobel will never find it. Will she? (*PENELOPE moos.*) Shut up, Penelope, I'm not addressing you, I'm addressing our naughty little Jack.

JACK. All my chores were done...

DAME ISOBEL. Were they? I'm not so sure. Well, it doesn't matter, really. Your mother's decided to work harder today. Wants everything done properly. Good thing *she* has some sense.

JACK. No...please...I'll do my work...my mother has enough...

DAME ISOBEL. Must be fun to sneak off and fish. And daydream, too, I'll bet. Let your mother do the work. Well, if you ask me you're a lazy good-for-nothing and you'll never get anywhere except in trouble. (*Takes out a locket with chain attached.*)

JACK. But...I mean...I mean...

DAME ISOBEL. I mean...I mean...I mean. You don't know what you mean, do you, Jack? Well, I know what

I mean and what I mean is business. (*Sharply.*) This is the last repeat last time you sneak off to play. You and your mother owe me enough to keep you both busy forever. And I intend to. (*Moo.*) Shut up, Penelope. As of right now I'm doubling your workload, your mother's too, so you can scratch daydreaming from your schedule henceforth. Understand?

JACK. Not my mother. Nothing extra for her. I'll do it all.

DAME ISOBEL. Ho. Ho. Ho. (*"Sweet" again.*) Look, did you notice my new chain and locket?

JACK. That's my mother's.

DAME ISOBEL. Not any more. It's mine now. To help pay your debt. Fair's fair I always say.

JACK. You took it. She'd never give it to you.

DAME ISOBEL. I'm sure your mother will insist I have it, considering how you've been shirking your duties.

JACK. It was a gift from my father.

DAME ISOBEL. Oh? Does have a picture of him. See?

JACK. I know.

DAME ISOBEL. Looks like you. Rather ugly really.

JACK. You've...I mean...you can't...

DAME ISOBEL. What's in that basket?

JACK. What...what I caught...I mean...

DAME ISOBEL. For me. What you caught is for me, isn't it? You were fishing on my time, so what you caught is mine. (*She stamps her foot and JACK holds out the basket. She reaches in.*) A nice fish your mother can cook for my dinner. (*She screams and pulls the crab out attached to her finger.*) Get it off! Get it off! You wretched boy! (*JACK removes the crab. DAME ISOBEL drops the locket during her ordeal. Murderous.*) You knew there was a crab in there. You did that deliberately. (*The pain is too much.*) I need a doctor! That

crab almost bit my finger off! *(She grabs JACK by the shoulders and shakes him.)* You rotten little sneak. As soon as I attend to my finger, I'll attend to you! *(She shoves him and he falls.)* Pack up your fishing gear and get yourself back to the house on the double! You're going to be sorry you were ever born! Wait'll your mother hears about this! *(Out she goes, nursing her finger. Pause.)*

JACK. She sniffed us out again, didn't she? *(Moo.)* I guess we've run out of places to hide. *(Sees locket and picks it up.)* He certainly wasn't ugly. No way. See, Penelope? *(Moo. He looks at the picture for a moment.)* I wonder, Penelope. Would you do me a favor? Would you mind heading back home alone? I won't be long, but right now I'd kind of like to be by myself just for a minute or two. Understand? *(PENELOPE starts out in the same direction DAME ISOBEL took. At the exit she turns and looks back at JACK. A loud moo. And she does a little dance.)* Trying to cheer me up? *(Moo.)* Thanks. *(PENELOPE exits. There is a pause as JACK looks at the picture and smiles and then sighs.)* Gee, Pop, I wish you could tell me what to do.

(Another pause and sigh. Then he begins to gather up his gear and while his back is turned, the STRANGER enters and sits nearby watching him. JACK finally turns and sees him. The STRANGER smiles.)

STRANGER. Gotta minute? Or are you about to leave on the double? There's something here you might find interesting. *(Goes into his bag.)* I think. *(Draws out a book.)* Look.

JACK. Who are you?

STRANGER. Thought you'd never ask. A friend. Now, check this.

JACK (*looking*). "Jack's Book." Jack's book? Me?

STRANGER. You. Your book. Well, a journal, sort of. A notebook.

JACK. I don't get it.

STRANGER. Page the first. Jack is born. You probably don't remember that, so let's skip on over to...uh... birthday number four. Remember that?

JACK. I'm not sure.

STRANGER. Well, it's all right here. Noted down. Birthday number four. A big cake with...

JACK. Four carved animals on top! Two sheep and two cows!

STRANGER. Good for you!

JACK. My father carved them. I almost forgot.

STRANGER. And here, when you were seven, he carved a bird. (*JACK reaches into his basket and takes out the carved bird and happily shows the STRANGER.*)

JACK. He said I reminded him of a bird. Funny.

STRANGER. Yes, funny. And nice.

JACK. That's the last thing he ever carved.

STRANGER. And then, when you were twelve...

JACK. No, that's enough. After that, Dame Isobel.

STRANGER. I know.

JACK. We had to borrow money from her to survive. My mother and me.

STRANGER. Yes, I know.

JACK. And we've been trying to pay it back ever since. For years.

STRANGER. Hard work. I've been peeking in on you every now and then, making notes.

JACK. Look, here's my father, here in this little painting.

(Shows him the locket.)

STRANGER. That's him all right. Nice bright eyes, strong nose, flashing teeth, like you.

JACK. I don't know where he got it, but we've had it a long time. My mother put it in this locket.

STRANGER. He got it from me.

JACK. You painted it?

STRANGER. Yep. I was his special friend, too.

JACK. You were? You mean you knew him, saw him a lot?

STRANGER. Oh, yes. But he only saw me once. When he was almost grown up. And needed a little push in the right direction. Like you.

JACK. You mean I'll only see you once?

STRANGER. This is it.

JACK. This is crazy. I really don't get it. Who *are* you? More than a friend?

STRANGER. Could be. *(A brief sound of a harp is heard.)*

JACK. What's that?

STRANGER. Sounds like harp music.

JACK. Where's it coming from?

STRANGER. Maybe you'll find out. Right now we'd better get a move on. You know what I'd like to write in this book next?

JACK. No, what?

STRANGER *(taking carved bird and making it move about)*. Today Jack learned to fly. I think you're ready.

JACK. People can't fly.

STRANGER. Who said so? Today Jack learned to fly. Let's see, uh, "fly" means "rise up, soar, head for the sky." Doesn't it?

JACK. You need wings.