



English Fairy Tales

Ten beloved tales from England, collected by
Joseph Jacobs

CLASSIC STORY SHELF · THE ACTIVE HOME

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The Three Little Pigs



Once there were three little pigs who set out to build houses of their own. The first little pig built his house of straw, because straw was quick and easy. The second little pig built his house of sticks, because sticks were quick too. But the third little pig built his house of bricks, stone by stone, even though it took all day and made his trotters ache.

'You are working too hard!' laughed the first two pigs, and they danced off to play. 'You will be sorry when the wolf comes,' said the third little pig, and he went on laying bricks.

Sure enough, along came the big wolf. 'Little pig, little pig, let me come in!' he called at the straw house. 'Not by the hair of my chinny-chin-chin!' said the pig. 'Then I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in!' And he huffed, and he puffed, and the straw house whooshed away like a dandelion — but the first little pig was already running on his tippy-toes to his brother's stick house.



The wolf huffed and puffed at the stick house too, and down it tumbled — but both little pigs scampered out the back and ran as fast as their legs would carry them to the brick house, and slammed the good strong door. The wolf huffed at the brick house, and he puffed, and he huffed, and he puffed

again, until his cheeks hurt — and the brick house did not move one bit.

So the wolf tried to be clever. He told the third pig about an apple tree, hoping to catch him outside — but the pig went early, tossed an apple far away, and ran home while the wolf chased it. He told the pig about a fair — but the pig went early again, and rolled home inside a butter churn, which frightened the wolf terribly as it rumbled past.

At last the wolf climbed onto the roof to slide down the chimney. But the third little pig had hung a big tub of water in the fireplace, just in case. Down came the wolf — SPLASH! — right into the water. Out he jumped, wet and sputtering, and he ran away over the hills and never bothered the three little pigs again. And the first two pigs helped their brother plant a garden, and promised that next time, they would build things properly too.

Lesson: Work done carefully and well keeps you safe. Taking time to do a job properly is always worth it.

Words to know: **bricks** — hard blocks of baked clay used to build strong walls · **churn** — a barrel with a lid and a paddle, used to turn cream into butter

The Three Bears



In a cottage in the woods lived three bears: a great big Father Bear, a middle-sized Mother Bear, and a tiny little Baby Bear. One morning Mother Bear made porridge for breakfast, but it was too hot to eat, so the three bears went for a walk in the woods while it cooled.

While they were gone, a little girl named Goldilocks came walking through the woods. She saw the cottage, and she knocked at the door — but nobody answered, so she peeked in, and then, without being invited at all, she walked right inside.

On the table stood three bowls of porridge.
Goldilocks tasted the great big bowl — too hot! She
tasted the middle bowl — too cold! She tasted the
tiny little bowl — just right — and she ate it all up,
every spoonful.



Then she sat in the great big chair — too hard! She
sat in the middle chair — too soft! She sat in the tiny
little chair — just right — but CRACK! The little
chair broke into pieces, and down she tumbled.

So Goldilocks went upstairs, feeling rather tired.
The great big bed was too hard, the middle bed was
too soft, but the tiny little bed was just right, and in
two winks she was fast asleep.

Just then the three bears came home. 'Somebody has been eating my porridge!' growled Father Bear. 'And somebody has eaten mine all up!' squeaked Baby Bear. 'Somebody has been sitting in my chair, and has broken it!' he cried. Then upstairs they found her. Goldilocks woke up, saw three bears looking at her, jumped out of the window, and ran home as fast as her legs would go. And she never went into anybody's house again without knocking and waiting to be asked.

Lesson: Other people's homes and things are not ours to use. Knock, wait, and only go in when you are invited.

Words to know: **porridge** — a soft, warm breakfast food made from oats cooked in milk or water · **invited** — asked to come in or join in

Jack and the Beanstalk



Jack lived with his mother in a small cottage, and they were very poor. One day his mother said, 'Jack, we have nothing left but our cow. Take her to market and sell her, so we can buy bread.' On the way, Jack met a funny little man who offered him five magic beans for the cow. 'Magic beans?' said Jack. 'Done!' — and he ran home to show his mother.

His mother was not pleased at all. 'Beans! Silly boy!' she cried, and she threw them out of the window. But in the morning, what a sight! A beanstalk as thick as a tree had grown up, up, up into the clouds. Jack climbed and climbed, and at the very top he found a road, and a castle as big as a hill.

At the castle door stood the giant's kind wife, who gave Jack breakfast but whispered, 'Hide, quickly — my husband is coming!' Stomp, stomp, stomp came the giant: 'Fee-fi-fo-fum!' But he only ate his enormous breakfast and brought out his hen. 'Lay!' he said — and the hen laid an egg of solid gold. Then the giant fell asleep, and Jack tiptoed out with the hen, and climbed down the beanstalk as fast as he could.



How happy his mother was! The golden eggs meant bread and cheese and coal for the fire. But Jack climbed up once more, and this time the giant brought out a harp made of gold that could sing all by itself. When Jack picked it up, the harp cried,

'Master, master!' and the giant woke with a roar and came after him — stomp, stomp, stomp!

Jack slid down the beanstalk like a fireman down a pole. 'Mother, the axe!' he shouted, and he chopped and chopped at the great stalk. Creak — crack — CRASH! Down fell the beanstalk, and down fell the giant after it, right into the farmer's haystack with a WHOOMP that shook the whole field. Up he climbed out of the hay, dizzy and cross and covered in straw, and he stomped all the way home to the sky and never came troubling Jack again.

And Jack and his mother kept the hen and the singing harp, and shared their good luck with all their neighbours, and lived comfortably and kindly for the rest of their days.

Lesson: Be brave and quick-thinking — but remember that Jack's luck began with a trade his mother never agreed to. Courage works best with honesty.

Words to know: **beanstalk** — the tall climbing stem of a bean plant · **harp** — a musical instrument with strings that you pluck

Henny-Penny



One fine day Henny-Penny was pecking in the farmyard when — BONK! — an acorn fell from the oak tree right onto her head. 'Goodness gracious!' cried Henny-Penny. 'The sky is falling! I must go and tell the king!' And off she hurried.

On the way she met Cocky-Locky. 'Where are you going?' said Cocky-Locky. 'To tell the king the sky is falling!' said Henny-Penny. 'May I come too?' 'Certainly!' And on they went, and Ducky-Daddles joined them, and Goosey-Poosey joined them, and Turkey-Lurkey joined them, all in a flapping, quacking line, to tell the king the sky was falling.

By and by they met Foxy-Woxy. 'Where are you all going?' said Foxy-Woxy, with a sly smile. 'To tell the king the sky is falling!' they all said. 'Then I will show you the shortcut,' said Foxy-Woxy, and he led them along a winding path toward a dark hole under the roots of a tree — the front door of his very own den.



But just as Henny-Penny was about to follow him in, Turkey-Lurkey stopped. 'Wait,' he gobble-gobbled. 'That hole smells of fox, and there are fox footprints all around it. Kings do not live in holes!' And Ducky-Daddles peeped and said, 'And there is no sky falling anywhere. The sun is shining and the clouds are behaving beautifully.'

'Run!' cried Henny-Penny — and flap, waddle, gobble, scurry, they all ran home to the farmyard as fast as they could go, while Foxy-Woxy stood at his front door with no dinner at all.

Back under the oak tree, Henny-Penny looked up. BONK! Another acorn bounced off a branch and landed at her feet. She picked it up and looked at it properly this time. 'Not the sky,' she said. 'Just an acorn.' And from that day, Henny-Penny always checked what had bonked her before she told the whole farmyard.

Lesson: Check before you panic! A bump is not always a disaster — look carefully, and do not follow a stranger's shortcut.

Words to know: **acorn** — the small nut of an oak tree · **shortcut** — a quicker way to get somewhere

The Old Woman and Her Pig



An old woman was sweeping her house when she found a crooked sixpence. 'What shall I do with this little sixpence?' she said. 'I will go to market and buy a pig!' And she did. But on the way home, the pig would not jump over the stile. He sat down in the lane, and he would not budge, and it was getting dark, and the old woman did not know what to do.

'Dog, dog,' she said, 'nudge my pig, so the pig will jump over the stile and I can get home tonight.' But the dog would not.

'Stick, stick,' she said, 'tap the dog, so the dog will nudge the pig.' But the stick would not. 'Fire, fire,'

she said, 'warm the stick.' But the fire would not. 'Water, water,' she said, 'cool the fire.' But the water would not. 'Ox, ox,' she said, 'drink the water.' But the ox would not.



She asked the butcher to call the ox, but the butcher would not. She asked the rope to tickle the butcher, but the rope would not. She asked the rat to nibble the rope, but the rat would not. At last she came to the cat. 'Cat, cat,' she said, 'chase the rat, so the rat will nibble the rope, and the rope will tickle the butcher, and the butcher will call the ox, and the ox will drink the water, and the water will cool the fire, and the fire will warm the stick, and the stick will tap the dog, and the dog will nudge the pig, and the

pig will jump over the stile, and I will get home tonight!'

'If you get me a saucer of milk,' said the cat, 'then I will.' So the old woman went to the cow in the field. 'Cow, cow, give me some milk for the cat, and we will all get moving!' The cow looked at the hay in the haystack and said, 'Bring me a wisp of hay and I will.' So the old woman fetched the hay, and the cow gave the milk.

Then the cat lapped the milk and chased the rat, and the rat nibbled the rope, and the rope tickled the butcher, and the butcher called the ox, and the ox drank the water, and the water cooled the fire, and the fire warmed the stick, and the stick tapped the dog, and the dog nudged the pig — and the pig jumped over the stile, and the old woman got home that night after all.

Lesson: Big jobs get done one small step at a time — and a kind 'please' with something fair to offer works better than giving up.

Words to know: **stile** — a set of steps for climbing over a fence or wall · **sixpence** — an old British coin

Lazy Jack



Jack lived with his mother, and he was so lazy that he did no work at all — until one day his mother said, 'Jack, you must earn our living, or we shall have no dinner.' So Jack hired himself to a farmer for a penny. But he put the penny in his pocket with a hole in it, and lost it on the way home. 'Silly boy!' said his mother. 'You should have carried it carefully in your hand.' 'I'll do so next time,' said Jack.

Next day Jack worked for a dairyman and was paid with a jug of milk. Remembering his mother's words, he carried it carefully in his hands — and spilled every drop before he got home. 'Silly boy!' said his

mother. 'You should have carried it on your head.'
'I'll do so next time,' said Jack.

The next day's pay was a big round cheese. Jack put it on his head, and the sun was warm, and by the time he got home the cheese had melted and dripped all down his ears. 'You should have carried it gently in your arms!' said his mother. So the next day, when he was paid with a tom cat, Jack carried it gently in his arms — and the cat scratched and wriggled and ran away. 'You should have tied it with a string and led it along!' said his mother.



The next day Jack was paid with a leg of mutton. He tied it with a string and led it along — through the mud and the puddles, until it was quite spoiled. 'Oh,

Jack!' cried his mother. 'You should have carried that on your shoulder!' 'I'll do so next time,' said Jack.

The very next day, Jack was paid with a donkey. Well — a donkey is not easy to carry on your shoulder, but Jack was strong, and he heaved and pushed and lifted until the donkey was lying across his shoulders with its legs in the air. As he staggered past a grand house, a young lady looked out of the window. She had been sad for a long, long time, and nobody could make her laugh — but the sight of Jack carrying a donkey was so funny that she burst out laughing, and laughed until she was quite well again.

Her father, the squire, was so delighted that he invited Jack to stay, and in time Jack and the young lady became the best of friends and were married, and Jack's mother came to live with them. And Jack was never in quite such a muddle again — well, hardly ever.

Lesson: Good advice only helps if you use it for the right job. Think about the thing in front of you, not just the last mistake.

Words to know: **mutton** — meat from a sheep · **squire** — the main landowner of a village in olden days

Johnny-Cake



An old man and an old woman lived in a little cottage, and one morning the old woman baked a fine Johnny-cake and set it in the oven. But when she opened the oven door, out jumped the Johnny-cake, and away it rolled across the floor and out of the door, calling, 'Run, run, as fast as you can! You can't catch me — I'm Johnny-Cake, I am!'

The old man and the old woman ran after it, but it rolled too fast. It rolled past a barn, where a bear called, 'Stop, Johnny-Cake, I want to eat you!' 'I've outrun an old man and an old woman,' sang Johnny-Cake, 'and I can outrun you!' And it did. Then a wolf tried, and two well-diggers in the field tried, and two

threshers with their flails, and every one of them was left puffing behind.



At last Johnny-Cake came to a river, and there on the bank sat a fox. 'Stop, little cake,' said the fox. 'You look delicious.' 'I've outrun everyone,' sang Johnny-Cake proudly, 'and I can outrun you!' 'What was that?' said the fox, putting a paw to his ear. 'I am rather deaf. Come a little closer and say it again.'

Johnny-Cake rolled closer. 'A little closer,' said the fox. 'I do so want to hear.' Johnny-Cake rolled right up to the fox's nose — and SNAP! went the fox's jaws! But Johnny-Cake was round and quick; he bounced off the fox's nose, hop, hop, hop, across the

stepping stones in the river, and left the fox on the far bank with nothing but a wet nose and a sneeze.

And Johnny-Cake rolled home again, all the way to the little cottage. 'Well!' said the old woman. 'There you are.' And she popped him back in the warm oven to finish baking, and this time he stayed where he was — mostly because rolling all that way had made him rather tired, and the cottage smelled so nice.

Lesson: Being fast and clever is not enough — beware of flattery and tricks that ask you to come just a little closer.

Words to know: **threshers** — farm workers who separate grain from its stalks · **deaf** — not able to hear well

Tom Tit Tot



Once there was a woman whose daughter was very fond of blackberry puddings — so fond that one day she ate five puddings at one sitting. The woman was cross, and when the king came riding by, she boasted loudly, 'My girl has spun five skeins of flax today!' because she was too ashamed to say what her daughter had really been doing. 'Five skeins in a day!' said the king. 'Then she shall marry me, for I need a queen who loves spinning.' And he took the girl to the castle.

Every morning the king gave her a room full of flax and said, 'Spin this by night, as you love spinning.' The poor girl sat down and cried, for she could not

spin at all. But on the first evening there came a knock at the window, and in hopped a strange little black imp with a long tail. 'What will you give me if I spin it for you?' he whispered. The girl gave him her necklace, and WHIRR! By morning, it was all spun.



The second day she gave him her ring. But on the third day she had nothing left to give. 'Then promise me this,' said the imp, grinning. 'If you cannot guess my name within a month, you must give me your golden spinning wheel, and spin for me instead of for the king.' The girl promised — what else could she do? And every day after that, she guessed and guessed. 'Is it Bill? Is it Ned? Is it Mark?' But the imp only danced and shook his head.

The month was nearly gone when the king came home from hunting and said, 'Queen, you will laugh. Deep in the woods I saw a funny little imp dancing round a fire, spinning and singing: Nimmy nimmy not, my name's TOM TIT TOT!'

That evening the imp came hopping in for the last time. 'Well, mistress, what is my name?' 'Is it Solomon?' said the queen, pretending to think. 'No!' 'Is it Zebedee?' 'No!' cried the imp, dancing with glee. 'Then,' said the queen, 'it must be TOM TIT TOT!' The imp gave a great shriek, whirled round twice, and flew out of the window into the dark — and the queen kept her golden wheel, and never pretended to spin five skeins in a day, ever again.

Lesson: Boasting and pretending lead to trouble. Being honest about what you really did is much safer.

Words to know: **skein** — a length of thread or yarn wound in a loose bundle · **flax** — a plant whose stems are made into thread for linen cloth

The Magpie's Nest



Once upon a time, all the birds gathered together and asked Mrs. Magpie a favour. 'You build the finest nest of any bird,' they said. 'Please teach us how it is done.' 'Gladly,' said Mrs. Magpie. 'Watch carefully, and I will show you every step.' And she began with two strong twigs.

'First,' she said, 'I lay the twigs across like this.' 'Oh, I see!' said the thrush. 'That's how it goes, is it? I know all about it now!' And away flew the thrush — which is why thrushes still build their nests with a few twigs and stop there.

'Next,' said Mrs. Magpie, 'I press soft mud around the twigs to make them strong.' 'Mud! Of course!' said the swallow. 'That's the part I wanted!' And away flew the swallow — which is why swallows build their nests of mud under the eaves of houses.



'Then,' said Mrs. Magpie, 'I weave more twigs round and round to make the walls.' Just then the owl blinked her big eyes. 'Round and round. Hmm, yes, I think I've got it,' she hooted, and away she flew into the dark wood — which is why owls do not really build nests at all, but move into old holes in trees and make the best of them.

One by one, the other birds flew off too, each one sure they had learned enough: the blackbird, the

sparrow, the finch, and the dove, who took the very first step and nothing else — which is why a dove's nest is just a few twigs laid flat, and a wonder it holds together at all.

At last Mrs. Magpie finished weaving and began the very best part — the soft lining of feathers and hay that keeps the eggs warm and safe. But when she looked up, only the littlest, quietest birds were still watching. 'So that's it, is it?' she said. 'Nobody stays to the end of the lesson!' And that is why, to this very day, all the birds build their nests in different ways — because not one of them, except a patient few, ever stayed to hear how the magpie finished.

Lesson: Listen all the way to the end before you say 'I know!' Half a lesson gives you half the skill.

Words to know: **eaves** — the edges of a roof that stick out over the walls · **lining** — a soft layer inside something

Molly Whuppie



Molly Whuppie was a clever little girl who had lost her way in the deep forest. At last she saw a light, and she knocked at the door of a great big house. The door was opened by a giant's wife. 'This is a giant's house,' she whispered, 'but come in and have some supper, and hurry away before he comes home.' Molly had only just finished her bread and milk when — THUMP, THUMP — came the giant's footsteps, and she hid behind the door.

'Fee-fi-fo-fum!' roared the giant, but he soon settled down to his supper, and Molly was shown to a little bed. In the middle of the night, when the whole house was snoring, Molly crept out, lifted the giant's

magic sword down from the wall — very quietly, a tiny bit at a time — and ran all the way home through the forest. In the morning, everyone marvelled, and Molly was thanked and praised for her daring.



Not long after, Molly went back to the giant's house. 'I know you!' cried the giant when he caught sight of her this time, and he shut her in the pantry while he went to fetch his great club. But Molly was cleverer than that. The pantry window was big, for it was made for a giant — so out she scrambled while he was still stomping about the kitchen, and on her way she swept his purse of gold off the table and ran all the way home.

The third time, Molly went for the giant's magic ring, which he wore on his great thumb. She waited until he was fast asleep after an enormous dinner, then she tickled his nose with a feather until he sneezed — WHOOSH! — and the ring flew right off into her apron. But the sneeze woke him! 'MOLLY WHUPPIE!' he bellowed, and the chase was on, through the forest, over the hills, all the way to the river.

Across the river stretched the Bridge of One Hair, thin as a spider's thread. Molly, light as a leaf, ran across it in a twinkle. But the giant was far too heavy. He put one enormous foot on the bridge — and stopped, and wobbled, and shook his fist. 'Woe to you, Molly Whuppie,' he shouted, 'if you ever come back again!' 'Perhaps I will!' called Molly, laughing, 'when I need another adventure!' And she never did — because three was quite enough.

Lesson: Quick wits beat great size. Molly was small, but she thought fast, stayed calm, and knew when three adventures were enough.

Words to know: **whuppie** — an old Scots word — part of Molly's name, said like WHUP-ee · **marvelled** — looked with wonder and amazement

About this book

The ten English fairy tales in this book were collected by Joseph Jacobs and published in 1890. They are in the public domain. These retellings, and the illustrations, are original to The Active Home.

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