

Thoughts at the Bottom of the Beanstalk



once upon a time there was a little boy named Jack who was about to climb his very first beanstalk. He had a fresh haircut and a brand-new book bag. Even though his friends in the neighborhood had climbed this same beanstalk almost every day last year, this was Jack's first day and he was a little nervous. So was his mother.



early in the morning she brought him to the foot of the beanstalk. She talked encouragingly to Jack about all the fun he would have that day and how nice his giant would be. She reassured him that she would be back to pick him up at the end of the day. For a moment they stood together, silently holding hands, gazing up at the beanstalk. To Jack it seemed much bigger than it had when his mother had pointed it out on the way to the store last week. His mother thought it looked big, too. She swallowed. Maybe she should have held Jack out a year... Jack's mother straightened his shirt one last time, patted his shoulder and smiled down at him.



She promised to stay and wave while he started climbing. Jack didn't say a word. He walked forward, grabbed a low-growing stem and slowly pulled himself up to the first leaf. He balanced there for a moment and then climbed more eagerly to the second leaf, then to the third and soon he had vanished into a high tangle of leaves and stems with never a backward glance at his mother. She stood alone at the bottom of the beanstalk, gazing up at the spot where Jack had disappeared. There was no rustle, no movement, no sound to indicate that he was anywhere inside. "Sometimes," she thought, "it's harder to be the one who waves good-bye than it is to be the one who climbs the beanstalk."



She wondered how Jack would do. Would he miss her? How would he behave? Did his giant understand that little boys sometimes acted silly when they felt unsure? She fought down an urge to spring up the stalk after Jack and maybe duck behind a bean to take a peek at how he was doing. "I'd better not. What if he saw me?" She knew Jack was really old enough to handle this on his own. She reminded herself that, after all this was thought to be an excellent beanstalk and that everyone said his giant was not only kind but had outstanding qualifications.



"It's not so much that I'm worried about him," she thought, rubbing the back of her neck. "It's just that he's growing up and I'm going to miss him." Jack's mother turned to leave. "Jack's going to have lots of bigger beanstalks to climb in his life," she told herself. "Today's the day he starts practicing for them... And today's the day I start practicing something too: cheering him on and waving good-bye."

ONCE UPON A TIME...