

Lazy Jack

Jack lived with his mother in a wee cottage; they were very poor. Jack's mother worked very hard all day, cooking the meals, cleaning the cottage, digging the peat for the fire, milking the cow, in fact she never stopped. But Jack – well he just liked to sleep. He wasn't a bad lad, but he was very lazy. One day his mother just got a bit fed up and told him it was time that he went out to earn some money. As you can imagine, Jack wasn't too keen on this idea, but he always did what his mother told him and so off he went to look for work.

He fancied working outside on a farm, but as he walked through the village he had to pass the King's palace. The King had a daughter who never smiled and, as you can imagine, the King was really worried about it. He employed doctors and specialists of all kinds to try to cure the problem and finally, in desperation, he put up a poster outside the palace to say that anyone who could make the princess laugh could have her hand in marriage. Many men had tried, but in spite of silly songs, silly dances, jokes or custard pies, nobody had succeeded. Jack didn't see the poster and he walked determinedly on until he found a farmer who offered him a job.

Jack worked hard all week and at the end of the week he got his wages – a little silver sixpence. Jack had never seen money before and didn't know what to do with it – so he put it in his ear! Of course, as he skipped along the road home the sixpence fell out.

“Oh Jack,” said his mother “you are silly. Don't you know that you don't put money in your ear? Next time you get your wages, put it in your pocket.”

The next week Jack worked hard again and at the end of the week he got his wages; but this time the farmer didn't give him a sixpence - he gave him a lovely big jug full of rich, creamy milk. His mother had said to put it in his pocket – but it didn't fit! So he poured one half into one pocket and the other half into the other pocket. Then, with milk pouring all down his legs and into his boots, he squelched down the road.

“Oh no,” said his mother “Jack you are silly; you don't do that with milk. Next time carry it on your head.”

The next week Jack worked hard again and at the end of the week he got his wages; but this time he got a big pat of rich, creamy butter. Jack put the butter in his hat and his hat back on his head. It was a very hot day and as he walked along the road home, the butter began to melt. It ran all down his head,

dripped off his chin and all down his clothes. His mother took one look at him and said:

“Oh no Jack; you are silly. Don't you know not to do that with butter? Next time take it to the river, wrap it up in leaves, cool it in the water and then come home quickly.”

The next week Jack worked hard again and at the end of the week he got his wages; but this time it wasn't butter, it was a tiny wee black and white kitten. Well kittens don't like being wrapped in leaves and they are terrified of water, so the kitten fought and struggled and scratched Jack's hands and face before jumping over his shoulder and running away. His mother took one look at him and said:

“Oh no Jack, you are silly. Don't you know not to do that with a kitten? Next time make a lead from string and let it walk behind you.”

The next week Jack worked hard again and at the end of the week he got his wages; but this time he got, not a kitten but a piece of ham on the bone. He found a piece of string, tied it to the bone and set off along the road. And it followed him! But all the animals and birds swooped down on the ham and ate every last piece of meat. What was left wasn't even fit for soup. His mother took one look at him and said:

“Oh no Jack, you are silly. You don't do that with ham. Next time carry it home on your shoulders.”

The next week Jack worked hard again and at the end of the week he got his wages, but this time the farmer said:

“I'm sorry Jack, you've been a great worker but that's the end of the harvest and I don't have any more work for you. I am going to give you a special wage though – I'm going to give you a donkey.”

Well Jack really struggled to get that donkey onto his back, but finally he made it and he set off along the road home.

It was really hard work carrying that donkey and Jack was getting slower and slower. He managed to get as far as the King's palace but it just so happened that the princess was looking out of the window. She took one look at that silly man with a donkey on his back and she began to smile, then she began to giggle, then she began to laugh. She laughed so much that tears were pouring down her cheeks. The King heard the laughter and was so delighted that he ran

out to Jack and asked if he would like to marry his daughter. Jack said he didn't mind if he did. Luckily the princess thought that Jack was rather nice and he made her laugh, so they got married. Jack's mother was sent for to live in the palace and so she didn't have to do anymore work – unless she wanted to. As for Jack and the Princess, well they lived a long and happy life together and it was full of fun and laughter.

As told by Bea Ferguson

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