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Dick and the Beanstalk

by

Walter de la Mare

(from his *Collected Stories for Children* [1947])

In the county of Gloucestershire there lived with his father, who was a farmer, a boy called Dick. Their farm was not one of the biggest of the Gloucestershire farms thereabouts. It was of the middle size, between large and small. But the old house had stood there, quiet and peaceful, for at least two hundred years, and it was built of sound Cotswold stone. It had fine chimney stacks and a great roof. From his window under one of its gables Dick looked out across its ploughland and meadows to distant hills, while nearer at hand its barns, stables and pigsties clustered around it, like chicks round a hen.

Dick was an only son and had no mother. His father—chiefly for company's sake—had never sent him to school. But being a boy pretty quick in his wits, Dick had all but taught himself, with his father's help, to read and write and figure a little. And, by keeping his eyes and his ears open wherever he went, by asking questions and, if need be, finding out the answers for himself, he had learned a good deal else besides.

When he was a child he had been sung all the old rhymes and told most of the country tales of those parts by his mother, and by an old woman who came to the farm when there was sewing to be done, sheets to be hemmed, or shirts to be made. She was a deaf, poring old woman, but very skilful with her needle; and he never wearied of listening to the tales she told him; though at times, and particularly on dark windy nights in the winter, he would at last creep off rather anxious and shuddering to bed.

These tales not only stayed in Dick's head, but lived there. He not only remembered them, but thought about them; and he sometimes dreamed about them. He not only knew almost by heart what they told, but would please himself by fancying what else had happened to the people in them after the tales were over or before they had begun. He could not only find his way about in a story-book, chapter by chapter, page by page, but if it told only about the inside of a house he would begin to wonder what its garden was like—and in imagination would find his way out into it and then perhaps try to explore even further. It was in this way, for example, that Dick had come to his own conclusions on which finger Aladdin wore his ring, and the colour of his uncle the Magician's eyes; on what too at last had happened to the old Fairy Woman in *The Sleeping Beauty*. After, that is, she had ridden off on her white ass into the forest when the magic spindle had begun to spread the deathly slumber over her enemies that was not to be broken for a hundred years. He knew why she didn't afterwards come to the Wedding!

And as for Blue-beard's stone-turreted and many-windowed castle, with its chestnut gallery to the east, and its muddy moat with its carp, under the cypresses, Dick knew a good deal more about that than ever Fatima did! So again, if he found out that Old Mother Hubbard had a *cat*, he could tell you the cat's name. And he could describe the crown that Molly Whuppie was crowned with when she became Queen, even to its last emerald. He was what is called a *lively* reader.

Dick often wished he had been born the youngest of three brothers, for then he would have gone out into the world early to seek his fortune. And in a few years, and after many adventures, he would have come back again, his pockets crammed with money, a magic Table on his back or a Cap of Invisibility in his pocket, and have lived happily with his father ever afterwards. He had long been certain too that if only he could spruce up his courage and be off if but a little way, even if only into one of the next counties, Warwickshire or Wiltshire, Monmouthshire or Somerset, adventures would be sure to come. He itched to try his luck.

But there was a hindrance. His father would hardly let him out of his sight. And this was natural. Poor man, he had no daughters, so Dick was his only child as well as his only son. And his mother was dead. Apart then from his farm, the farmer had but one thought in the world—Dick himself. Still, he would at times give him leave to jog off alone to the

nearest market town on an errand or two. And going alone for Dick was not the same thing as not going alone.

Sometimes Dick went further. He had an uncle, a very fat man, who was a mason at Moreton-in-the-Marsh, and an old widowed aunt who had a windmill and seven cats at Stow-on-the-Wold. He would visit them. He had also been to the Saffron Fair at Cirencester; and had stayed till the lights came out and the flares of the gingerbread stalls and Merry-go-rounds. But as for the great cities of Gloucestershire—Gloucester itself, or Bristol; or further still, Exeter, or further the other way, London (where his old friend and namesake Dick Whittington had been Lord Mayor three-and-a-half times)—Dick had never walked the streets of any of them, except in his story-books or in dreams. However, those who wait long enough seldom wait in vain.

On his next birthday after the one on which he had gone to the Saffron Fair, his father bought him for a birthday present a rough-coated pony. It was hog-maned—short and bristly; it was docktailed, stood about eleven hands high, and was called Jock. His father gave Dick leave to ride about the country when his morning's work was done, 'just to see the world a bit', as he said, and to learn to fend for himself. And it was a bargain and promise between them that unless any mischance or uncommon piece of good fortune should keep him late, Dick would always be home again before night came down. Great talks of the afternoon's and evening's doings the two of them would have over their supper together in the farmhouse kitchen. His father began to look forward to them as much as Dick looked forward to them himself. Very good friends they were together, Dick and his father.

Now one winter morning—in the middle of January—of the next year, Dick asked leave of his father to have the next whole fine day all to himself. The weather had been frosty, the evening skies a fine shepherd's red, and everything promised well. He told his father he wanted to press on further afield than he had before—'beyond those hills over there'. And as the days were now short, he must be off early, since there were few hours after noon before dark. His father gave him leave, but warned him to be careful of what company he got into and against any folly or foolhardiness. 'Don't run into mischief, my son,' he said, 'nor let mischief run into you!' Dick laughed and promised.

Next day, before dawn, while still the stars were shining, he got up, put on his clothes, crept downstairs, ate a hurried breakfast and cut himself off a hunch of bread and meat in the larder to put in his pocket. Then he scribbled a few lines to his father to tell him that he had gone, pinned the paper to the kitchen table, and having saddled up his pony set out due north-west into the morning.

There had been a very sharp frost during the night. It was as though a gigantic miller had stalked over the fields scattering his meal as he went. The farm ruts were hard and sharp as stone, and, as they jogged along, Jock's hoofs splintered the frozen puddles lying between them as if they were fine thin glass. Soon the sun rose, clear as a furnace, though with so little heat yet that its beams were not strong enough even to melt the rime that lay in the hollows and under the woods.

Now on the Friday before this, Dick had come to a valley between two round hills, and had looked out beyond it. But it had been too late in the day to go further. He reached this valley again about ten o'clock of the morning, and pushed on, trotting steadily along between its wooded slopes, following a faint overgrown grass-track until at last the track died away, and he came out on the other side. Here was much emptier, flatter country, though not many miles distant snow-topped hills began again. These hills were strange to him, and he had no notion where he was.

The unploughed fields were larger here than any he was accustomed to, and were overgrown with weeds. In these a multitude of winter birds were feeding. The hedges were ragged and untended, and there was not a house to be seen. Dick got off Jock's back and took out his lunch. Uncommonly good it tasted in the sharp cold air. And as he ate—sitting on a green knoll in the thin pale sunshine—he looked about him. And he saw a long way off what at first sight he took to be a column of smoke mounting up into the sky. He watched it awhile, marvelling. But there was no show of fire or of motion in it. It hung still and glimmering between the frosty earth and the blue of space. If not smoke, what could it be? Dick pondered in vain.

Having hastily finished his bread and meat, and feeling much the better for it, he mounted again and set off as fast as Jock could carry him in its direction. About three o'clock in the afternoon he drew near. And he found himself at last in a hollow where was an old tumbledown cottage, its thatch broken, its chimney fallen, its garden run wild. And growing within a few paces of this old cottage—towering up high above it, its top beyond view—was a huge withered tangle of

what looked like a coarse kind of withy-wind or creeper. It went twisting and writhing corkscrew-fashion straight up into the air and so out of sight. Dick could not guess how far, because the sunlight so dazzled his eyes. But when he examined this great growth closely, and its gigantic pods of dried-up seeds as big as large kidney-shaped pebble-stones that still clung to its stem, he decided that it must be beans.

Never had he seen anything to match these beans. Who could have planted them, and when, and for what purpose? And where was he gone to? And then, in a flash, Dick realised at last where he himself was, and what he was looking at. There could be no doubt in the world. This was *Jack's* old cottage. This was where Jack had lived with his mother—before he met the friendly butcher on his way to market. And this huge tangled ladder here—which must have sprung up again as mightily as ever after Jack had cut it down and the Giant had fallen headlong—was Jack's famous Beanstalk.

Poor old woman, thought Dick. Jack's mother must be dead and gone ages and ages ago. And Jack too. He spied through the broken wall where a window had been. The hearth was full of old nettles. The thatch was riddled with abandoned bird-nests and rat-holes. There was not a sound in earth or sky; nor any trace of human being. He sat down on a hummock in the sun not far from the walls, and once more gazed up at the Beanstalk; and down again; and in his mind Dick went through all Jack's strange adventures. He knew them by heart.

The turf at his foot had been nibbled close by rabbits. His seat, though smooth, was freckled with tiny holes, and it rounded up out of the turf like a huge grey stone. Near at hand, ivy and bramble had grown over it, but there showed another smaller hummock in the turf about three or four paces away. And as he eyed it he suddenly realised that he must be sitting on the big knuckle end of one of Jack's Giant's larger bones, probably his thigh bone, now partly sunken and buried and hidden in the ground. At thought of this he sprang to his feet again, and glanced sharply about him. Where, he wondered, lay the Giant's skull. Then he took another long look at the vast faded Beanstalk, and another at the bone. It was still early afternoon, but it was winter; and at about four o'clock, he reckoned, the sun would be set.

The more Dick looked at the Beanstalk, the more he itched to climb it—even if he got only as high as the cottage chimney. Farther up, much farther up, he would be able to see for miles. And still farther, he might even, if his sight carried, catch a glimpse of Old Bowley—a lofty hill which on days when rain was coming he could see from his bedroom window.

And he began arguing with himself: 'Now, surely, my father would never forgive me if he heard that I had actually discovered Jack's Beanstalk, and had come away again without daring to climb an inch of it!' And his other self answered him: 'Aye, that's all very well, my friend! But an inch, if it bears you, will be as good as a mile. What of *that*?'

What of *that*? thought Dick. He went close and tugged with all his might at the tangle of stalks. A few hollow cockled-up bean seeds peppered down from out of their dry shucks. He ducked his head. Once more he tugged; the stalks were tough as leather. And he began to climb.

But he made slow progress. The harsh withered strands of the bean-bines not only cut into his hands but were crusted over with rime, and his hands and feet were soon numb with cold. He stayed breathless and panting, not venturing yet to look down. On he went, and after perhaps a full hour's steady climbing, he stayed again and gazed about him. And a marvellous scene now met his eyes. His head swam with the strangeness of it.

Low in the heavens hung the red globe of the sun, and beneath him lay the vast saucer of the world. And there, sure enough, was Old Bowley! Jack's cottage seemingly no bigger than a doll's house showed plumb under his feet. And an inch or so away from it stood Jock, no bigger than a mole, cropping the grass in Jack's mother's garden.

Having come so high, Dick could not resist climbing higher. So on he went. Bruised with the beans that continually rattled down on him, breathless and smoking hot though powdered white with hoarfrost, at last he reached the top of the Beanstalk. There he sat down to rest. He found himself in a country of low, smooth, but very wide hills and of wide gentle valleys. Here too a thin snow had fallen. In this clear blue light it looked much more like the strange kind of place he had sometimes explored in his dreams than anything he had ever seen down below. And, far, far to the north, rising dark and lowering in the distance above the blur and pallor of the snow, showed the turrets of a Castle. Dick watched that Castle; and the longer he watched it, the less he liked the look of it.

Still, where Jack had led, Dick soon decided to follow. And best be quick! Thinking no more whether or not he would be able to get home that night, and believing his father would forgive him for not this time keeping to the bargain between them, since it was certain Dick would have plenty to tell him in the morning, he set off towards the Castle as fast as he could trudge. The frozen snow was scarcely an inch deep, but it was numbing cold up here in this high country; and the crystals being dry and powdery he could not get along fast.

Indeed, Dick did not reach the great Castle's gates under their cavernous, echoing, stone archway until a three-quarters moon had risen bright behind him. It shone with a dazzling lustre over the snow—on the square-headed iron nails in the gates, and on the grim bare walls of the Castle itself. A rusty bell-chain hung high over his head beside the gates. Dick stood there eyeing it, his heart thumping against his ribs as it had never thumped before. But having come so far he was ashamed to turn back. He gave a jump, clutched at the iron handle with both hands, and tugged with all his might.

He heard nothing, not a sound. But in a few minutes—and slow they seemed—a wicket that had been cut out of the timbers of the huge gate, turned on its hinges, and a leaden-faced woman, her head and shoulders muffled up in a shawl, and, to Dick's astonishment, only about nine feet high, looked out on him and asked him what he wanted.

Following Jack's example, Dick told her that he had lost his way—as indeed he had, though he had found Jack's! He said he was tired out and hungry, and afraid of perishing in the cold. He implored the woman to give him a drink of water and a crust of bread, and perhaps to let him warm himself if only for a few minutes by her fire. 'Else, ma'am,' he said, 'the only thing I can do is to lie down under the wall here and maybe die. I can go no further.'

Not the faintest change showed in the woman's long narrow bony face. She merely continued to peer down at him. Then she asked him his name. Dick told her his name, and at that her eyes sharpened as if she had expected it.

'Step out there into the moonlight a little,' she told him, 'so that I can see your face. So it's *Dick*, is it?' she repeated after him. "'Dick"! And you have come begging, eh? I have heard that tale before. And how, pray, am I to tell that you aren't from the same place, wherever that may be, as that villainous Jack who came here years and years and years ago with just such a tale as you have told me, and then ran off, first with my great-grandfather's moneybags, then with his Little Hen, and last with his Harp? How am I to know *that*? Why!—from what I've heard—you look to me as like as two peas!'

Dick stared up in wonder into her face. Jack's Giant, he thought, could not have been nearly so far back as the story had made out if this woman was only his great-granddaughter. He himself would have guessed a round dozen of *greats* at least. It was a mystery.

'Jack?' he said, as if he were puzzled. 'And who was Jack, ma'am? There are so many Jacks where I come from. Nobody of mine. What became of him, then?'

'Ah,' said the woman, 'you may well ask that. If my great-grandfather had caught him he would have ground his bones to powder in his mortar, and made soup of what was left. He was in the flower of his age, was my great-grandfather then, but he never came back. Never. And a kinder gentler soul never walked! "*And who was JACK*," says he!' she muttered to herself, and Dick little liked the sound of it.

'Well, I wonder!' said he, wishing he could hide his face from the glare of the moon. 'I mean, I wonder if your great-grandfather ever found his Harp again. Or his Little Hen either. There are plenty of hens where I come from. And harps too, as I have heard. It sounds a dreadful story, I mean; but what could that bad boy you mention have wanted with a harp?'

'Aye,' said the leaden-faced woman, blinking once but no more as she stared at him. 'What?'

'Anyhow,' said Dick, 'that must have been more years ago than I could count. And if I *were* Jack, ma'am, or even his great-grandson either, I couldn't be the size I am now. I should have grown a grey beard as long as your arm, and be dead and done with long ago. I am sorry about your great-grandfather. It is a sad story. And I don't know *what* end that Jack mustn't have come to. But if you would give me only a sip of water and a bit of bread and a warm by the fire, I wouldn't ask for *anything* more.'

'Nor did Jack, so they say,' said the woman sourly; and looked him over, top to toe again.

But she led him in none the less through the great gates of the Castle and down into the kitchen, where a fire was burning on the hearth. This kitchen, Dick reckoned, was about the size of (but not much bigger than) a little church. It was warm and cosy after the dark and cold. A shaded lamp stood burning on the table, and there were pewter candlesticks three feet high for fat tallow candles on the dresser. Dick looked covertly about him, while he stood warming his hands a few paces from the huge open hearth. Here, beside him, was the very cupboard in which in terror Jack had hidden himself. The shut oven door was like the door of a dungeon. Through a stone archway to the right of him he could spy out the copper. A chair stood beside the table. And on the table, as if waiting for somebody, was a tub-sized soup tureen. There was a bowl beside it, and a spoon to fit. And next the spoon was a hunch of bread of about the size of a quartern loaf. Even though he stood at some distance, it was only by craning his neck that Dick could spy out what was on the table.

He looked at all this with astonished eyes. He had fancied Jack's Giant's kitchen was a darker and gloomier place. But in Jack's day there was perhaps a fire less fierce burning in the hearth and no lamp alight; perhaps too in summer the shadows of the Castle walls hung coldly over its windows. Not that he felt very comfortable himself. Now that he had managed to get into the Castle, he began to be anxious as to what might happen to him before he could get out again. The ways and looks of this woman were not at all to his fancy and whoever was going to sup at that table might look even worse!

She had taken off her shawl now, and after rummaging in a high green cupboard had come back with a common-sized platter and an earthenware mug—mere dolls' china by comparison with the tureen on the table. She filled the mug with milk.

'Now get you up on to that stool,' she said to Dick, bringing the mug and a platter of bread over to him. 'Sit you up there and eat and drink and warm yourself while you can. My husband will be home at any moment. Then you can tell him who you are, what you want, why you have come, and where from.'

Dick quaked in his shoes—not so much at the words, as at the woman's mouth when she said them. But he looked back at her as boldly as he dared, and climbed up on to the stool. There, clumsy mug in one hand and crust in the other, he set to on his bread and milk. It was pleasant enough, he thought to himself, to sit here in the warm eating his supper, though a scrape of butter would have helped. But what kind of dainty might not this woman's husband fancy for *his* when *he* came home!

So, as he sipped, he peeped about him for a way of escape. But except for the door that stood ajar, some great pots on the pot-board under the dresser, and a mouse's hole in the wainscot that was not much bigger than a fox's in a hedgerow, there was no crack or cranny to be seen. Besides, the woman was watching him as closely as a cat. And he decided that for the present it would be wiser to keep his eyes to himself, and to stay harmless where he was.

At last there came the sound of what Dick took for footsteps, from out of the back parts of the Castle. It was as if a man were pounding with a mallet on a tub. They came nearer. In a moment or two the kitchen door opened, and framed in the opening stood the woman's husband. Dick could not keep from squinting a little as he looked at him.

He guessed him to be about eighteen to twenty feet high—not more. Apart from this, he was not, thought Dick, what you could call a fine or large-sized giant. He was lean and bony; his loose unbuttoned leather jacket hung slack from his shoulders; and his legs in his stockings were no thicker than large scaffolding poles. There was a long nose in his long pale face, and on either side of his flat hat dangled dingy straw-coloured hair, hanging down from the mop above it.

When his glance fell on Dick enjoying himself on his stool by the kitchen fire, his watery green-grey eyes looked as if they might drop at any moment from out of his head.

'Head and choker! what have we here, wife?' he said at last to the leaden-faced woman. 'What have we here! *Hm, hm.*'

Before she could answer, Dick spoke up as boldly as he knew how, and told the young giant (for though Dick could not be certain, he looked to be not above thirty)—he told the young giant how he had lost his way, and chancing on the withered Beanstalk had climbed to the top of it to have a look round him. He told him, too, how grieved he had been to hear that the woman's great-grandfather had never come back to the Castle after he had chased the boy called Jack away, and how much he wondered whether the Little Hen was buried, and what had become of the Harp. Dick went on talking

because it was easier to do so than to keep silent, seeing that the two of them continued to stare at him, and in a far from friendly fashion.

'I expect it played its last tune,' he ended up, 'ages and ages before I was born.'

'Aye,' said the woman. 'That's all pretty enough. But what *I* say is that unless the tale I have heard is all fable, this ugly imp here must be little short of the very spit of that wicked thief himself. Anywise, he looks to me as if he had come from the same place. What's more——' she turned on Dick, 'if you can tell us where that is, you shall take my husband there and show it him. And he can look for the grave of my great-grandfather. And perhaps,' and her thin dark lips went arch-shaped as she said it, 'perhaps if you find it, you shall learn to play a tune on his Harp!'

Dick, as has been said, liked neither the looks nor the sound of this woman. She was, he decided, as sly and perhaps as treacherous as a fox. 'I can show you where *I* came from easily enough,' he answered. 'But I know no more about Jack than I have—than I have heard.'

'Nor don't we,' said the woman. 'Well, well, well! When he has supped you shall take my husband the way you came, and we shall see what we *shall* see.'

Dick glanced at the giant, who all this while had been glinting at him out of his wide and almost colourless eyes. So, not knowing whether he followed his great-grandfather's habits, or how long his wife would remain with them, he thought it best to say no more. He smiled, first at one of them, and then at the other, took a sip of milk, and rank greasy goat's milk it was, and said, 'When you are ready, I am ready too.' The difficulty was to keep his tongue from showing how fast his heart was beating. At this the giant sat down to table and began the supper his wife had prepared for him. Spoon in hand he noisily supped up his huge basin of soup, picking out gingerly with his fingers, and as greedily as a starling, the hot steaming lumps of meat in it. He ate like a grampus. His soup finished, he fell to work on what looked like a shepherd's pie that had been sizzling in the oven. Then having sliced off a great lump of greenish cheese, he washed it all down with what was in his mug. But whether wine, ale, cider, or water, Jack could not tell.

Having eaten his fill, the young giant sat back in his chair, as if to think his supper over. And soon he fell asleep. Not so did the woman. She had seated herself on the other side of the hearth in a great rocking-chair, a good deal closer to him than Dick fancied, and she had begun to knit. Like the clanking of fire-irons her needles sounded on and on in the kitchen, while the young giant, his mouth wide open, now and again shuddered in his slumbers or began or ceased to snore. Whereas if Dick even so much as opened his mouth to yawn, or shifted his legs out of the blaze of the fire, the woman's slow heavy face turned round on him, and stared at him as if she had been made of stone.

At last, much to Dick's comfort, the young giant awoke and stretched himself. He seemed to be in a good humour after his nap, and not sulky or sharp as some people are. 'What *I* say,' he said with a laugh on seeing Dick again, 'what *I* say is, there's more than one kind of supper!'

'Ha, ha, ha!' echoed Dick, but not very merrily. The giant then fumbled for a great club of blackthorn that stood behind the kitchen door. He put on his flat hat again, wound a scarf of sheep's wool round his neck, and said he was ready. Never had Dick, inside a book or out, heard before of a giant that wore a scarf. He clambered down from his stool and stood waiting. Her hand over her mouth, and her narrow sallow face showing less friendly than ever, the woman took another long look at him. Then she turned to her husband, and looked him over too.

'Well, it's a cold night,' she said, 'but you will soon get warm walking, and won't need your sheepskins.' At mention of *cold* her husband stepped back and lifted the curtain that concealed the kitchen window. He screened his eyes with his hands and looked out.

'Cold!' he said. 'It's perishing. There's a moon like a lump of silver, and a frost like iron. Besides,' he grumbled, 'a nap's no sleep, and I don't stir a step until the morning.'

The two of them wrangled together for a while and Dick listened. But at last after drawing iron bars across the shutters and locking him in, leaving him nothing to make him comfortable, and only the flames of the fire for company, they left him—as Dick hoped, for good. But presently after, the woman came back again, dangling a chain in her hand.

'So and *so!*' she said, snapping together the ring at the end of it on his ankle. 'There! That kept safe my old Poll parrot for many a year, so it may keep even *you* safe until daybreak!'

She stooped to fix the other end of the chain round a leg of the great table. Then, 'Take what sleep you can, young man,' she said, 'while you can, and as best you can. You'll need all your wits in the morning.'

Her footsteps died away. But long afterwards Dick could hear the voices of the two of them, the giant and his wife, mumbling on out of the depths of the night overhead, though he himself had other things to think about. After striving in vain to free his leg from the ring of the chain, he examined as best he could with the help of his stool the locks and bolts of the shutters over the windows—stout oak or solid iron every one of them. He reckoned the walls of this kitchen must be twelve feet thick at least and the bolts were to match.

And while more and more anxiously he was still in search of a way out, he heard a sudden scuffling behind him, and a squeak as shrill as a bugle. He turned in a flash, and in the glow of the fire saw what he took to be a mouse that had come out of its hole, though it was an animal of queer shape, lean and dark, and half as large again as a full-sized English rat. Next moment, a score or more of these creatures had crept out of the wainscot. They gambolled about on the kitchen floor, disporting themselves and looking for supper.

By good fortune, when the squeak sounded, Dick had been standing on his stool by the window. He held his breath at sight of them, and perhaps had held it too long, or the giant's pepper had got into his nose, for he suddenly sneezed. At which a jubilee indeed went up in the kitchen. And if, in spite of his chain, by a prodigious leap from the stool to the table he had not managed to land on it safely, it might well have been the last of him. Luckily too, the margins of the table jutted out far beyond its legs, so that though the sharp-nosed hungry animals scabbled up the legs in hopes to get him, they could climb no further.

Now and again, squatting there, through the long hours that followed—half-hidden between the giant's tureen and mug—Dick drowsed off, in spite of these greedy noisy rodents, and in spite too of the crickets in the outer cracks of the oven, which kept up a continuous din like a covey of willow-wrens. He was pestered also by the cunning and curiosity of a wakeful housefly, though others like it, straddling as big as cockroaches on the walls in the dusky light of the fire, remained asleep. It must be a fusty airless place, Dick thought, that had flies in winter. And so he passed a sorry night.

It was five by the clock when the giant and his wife came down again, Grackel still grumbling, and she pressing him to be gone. At last he was ready. She looked him up and down. 'What's to be done is best done quickly,' she said to him. 'You can get breakfast at a tavern maybe. And leave your aunt's watch behind you, husband. It will be safer at home.'

The giant sullenly did as his wife had bidden, drew out of his pocket a fine gold watch, its back embedded with what looked to Dick like sapphires and emeralds and other precious stones, and laid it on the table.

'That looks a fine watch,' said Dick, shivering in his breeches, for he was stiff and cold.

'Aye, so it is,' said the woman, and she put it away on a shelf in the cupboard. 'Now look you here, Grackel,' she added, when they had all three come together to the gates of the Castle, 'if you are not home before sundown the day after to-morrow, I shall send for your uncles, and they shall come and look for you.'

Dick raised his hat to the woman as he left her there by the Castle gates, but there was so much mistrust of him in her eye that he feigned he had done so only in order to scratch his head, and he couldn't manage even to say the Good-day that was in his mouth.

So he and the giant went off together into the snow, shining white in the light of the moon. The moon was still far from her setting. But they had not gone much above a mile—one of Dick's miles—before the giant began to be impatient at the slow pace he had to move in order that Dick might keep up with him, even though for every stride *he* took Dick trotted three. So at last he stooped down in the snow and told Dick to climb up over his back on to his shoulders. Up went Dick like a cat up a tree, clutched on to his coarse yellow hair, and away they went.

Perched up on high like this, a good twenty feet above the snow, and tossing along on Grackel's shoulders, the giant's great bony hand clutched round his knees, Dick thought he had never seen a more magical sight than these strange hills

and valleys sparkling cold and still in the glare of the moonlight. No, not even in his dreams. He might have been an Arab on the hump of his camel in the desert of Gobi.

It was easy for the giant to find his way. For though there were many prints of wild creatures and of long-clawed birds in the snow, Dick's footmarks were clearer than any. Now and then they passed a great clump of trees—their bare twigs brushing the starry sky—which looked like enormous faggots of kindling wood. And in less than a quarter of the time that Dick had spent on his journey to the Castle, they came to the top of the Beanstalk. And Dick shouted in the giant's ear that he wanted to be put down.

'Here we are,' he shouted, when he was on his own feet again. The giant in the last few minutes had been ambling on very warily as if he knew he was on dangerous ground. As soon as Dick had stamped life into his legs again, he pointed to the huge tangle of frosty bine and withy that jutted high above the edge of the abyss. 'See there!' he shouted at the top of his voice, in the sharp frosty air. 'That's the Beanstalk. Down *there* is where I come from. But I doubt if it will bear *you*.'

He almost laughed out loud to see with what caution Grackel crept out on hands and knees to peer out over the brink at the world below. But the giant could see nothing in the sombre shadow of the moon except the dried-up Beanstalk twisting and writhing down below him into space. 'Hm, hm,' he kept stupidly muttering.

And Dick understood at last how it was that the Beanstalk had never been discovered before. These giants, it seemed, were by nature a stupid race. So scared was Grackel at last at sight of the abyss that his teeth began to chatter like millstones, and his face was as white as a sheet. Dick rejoiced. It seemed he would never dare even to set foot on the Beanstalk.

Grackel peered round at him. 'So this,' he said, 'is where my great-grandad climbed down when he was chasing after that thief and vagabond Jack! I can't see to the bottom of it!'

Dick shook his head. 'No, nor, I suppose, could he! Though why you should be so fond of your *wife's* grandad I can't think!'

'Aye,' said the giant leering at him, 'and supposing she and I are first cousins and he was grandad to both, what then?'

'Well,' said Dick, 'I know nothing of that. But Jack or no Jack, this is not only the only way down I know, but it's the way I climbed *up*. Once, I suppose, it must have been green and fresh and full of sap. Now it's all dried-up and withered away. And every yard I climbed I supposed it would come tumbling down over my head.'

'Aye,' said the giant. 'But what did you want to come *for*?'

'Oh, just to see,' said Dick, as airily as he could. The giant with a sigh rose to his feet.

'Well,' he said, 'I'm not so weighty as was my great-grandad, not at least according to his portrait in the gallery. And if he managed to climb down in safety when this ladder was young and green, what is there to prevent my doing the same, now that it is old and tough and dry?'

With that, he thrust his long lean arm over the edge and, clutching the tangle of withered shoots, violently shook the Beanstalk. It trembled like a spider's web in all its fibres, and Dick could hear the parched seeds clattering down from out of their pods towards the earth below.

'Well,' said he, looking up at the giant in the moonlight, 'what may be, may be. My only fear is that once down there, you may find it impossible to get back again. Or supposing it breaks in the middle?'

Grackel stared into his face, and then at the snow. 'He's thinking of the Little Hen,' thought Dick to himself, 'and the Harp.'

'Yes, it would be a dreadful thing,' Dick repeated, 'if it broke in the middle.'

'Aye,' leered the giant, 'and so it would! But what about my great-grandad? It didn't break in the middle with him.' Dick

made no answer to this. He held his peace.

'We'll have no more words about it,' said the giant. 'I'm never so stupid as when folks talk at me. You shall go first, being no more than an atomy, and I will follow after. I'll wait no longer.'

And with that, he flung his cudgel over the edge and began to pull up his wristbands. Dick listened in vain to hear the crash of the cudgel on the earth below. He feared for poor Jock.

There was no help in waiting. So Dick began to climb down the Beanstalk, and the giant followed after him so close with his lank scissor-legs that Dick had to keep dodging his head to avoid his great shoes, with their shining metal hooks instead of laces. Beans seeds came scampering down over Dick's head and shoulders like hailstones. It was lucky for him they were hollow and dry.

'Now,' said Dick at last, when they reached the bottom and he had seen the cudgel sticking up out of the ground beyond the broken wall. 'Here we are. This is where I come from. This is England. And you will want to be off at once to look for your great-grandfather's grave. Now that way is the way you should go. I go this. My father is expecting me and I must get home as soon as I can.'

It was so he hoped to slip away. But Grackel was at least too crafty for that. He stood leaning his sharp elbows on the broken roof of the cottage, leering down at Dick so steadily that he was mortally afraid the giant might notice the bulge of his great-grandad's leg-bone in the rabbit-nibbled turf of the garden.

'No, no, my young master,' said he at last. 'Fair and easy! Good friends keep together. You have had bite and sup in my house, now you shall give me bite and sup in yours. And it may be your father has heard of that Jack. The cackling of my great-grandad's Hen, let alone the strumming of his Harp, must have reached a long way among stubby hills in a little country like this! England!'

The rose and grey of daybreak was stirring in the eastern sky. Dick, though angry, reasoned with the giant as best he could, but the great oaf could not be dissuaded from keeping him company. It was bitter cold in this early morning, and Dick longed to let his father know that nothing was amiss with him.

'Well,' he said at last, 'I have told you nine times over that no travellers come this way. It is over there the big cities are.' And he pointed west. 'But if come you must, why come! And I can only hope my father will be pleased to see you.'

He put two fingers into his mouth and whistled. There came an answering whinny. And from a lean-to or out-house behind the cottage where it had found shelter during the night and a bite or two of old hay to munch, Jock answered his summons. This time Grackel had no reason to complain of Dick's lagging behind. Jock cantered away up the valley with his young master on his back, and the giant like a gallows strode on beside them.

When they came at length to a drift of woodland near the farm, Dick dismounted; and, having pointed out the chimneys of the farmhouse in the hollow below, he told the giant to hide himself among the trees, while he went to prepare his father for the guest he had brought home with him. So Grackel edged down as best he could among the trees, and Dick, leading Jock by his bridle, went on to the house.

In spite of the cold, the back door was ajar, and on an old horsehair sofa beside the burnt-out fire Dick found his father fast asleep, the stable lantern with which he had been out in the night looking for his son still burning beside him. Dick called him softly and touched his hand. His father stirred, muttering in his dreams; then his eyes opened. And at sight of Dick a light came into them as if he had found an unspeakable treasure.

Safely come home again, Dick was soon forgiven for being so long away. As quickly as he could he told his father his adventures. But when the farmer heard that the giant was actually in hiding not more than a quarter of a mile away from the house, and greedy for bed and board, he opened his eyes a good deal wider.

'Is that so?' he said at last. 'Twenty-foot in his shoes and all! Lorramousy! Well, well! And his great-grandad and all! That don't seem so *very* far back, now do it? Still, if there he is, my son, why, there he *is*; and we must do the best we can. And I don't see myself,' he added, glancing at Dick's troubled face, 'being what and where you were, you could have

done much else. But who'd have guessed it, now? Who *would*? That Bean-stalk!

'The worst of all, father,' said Dick, 'is that woman up there. She'd freeze your blood even to look at her. What *she* wants is the Little Hen. And if *she* came down...!'

'Fox or vixen, one thing at a time, my son,' said the farmer. 'Your friend out in the cold, if we keep him waiting, may get restless. So we'll be off at once to see what we can do to keep him quiet. The other must come after.'

The shining of the wintry sun lay all over the frosty fields when they went back together to the giant. And sour and fretful they found him. He only scowled at the farmer's polite Good-morning, grumbled that he was famished and wanted breakfast. 'And plenty of it!' he muttered, leering at Dick.

The farmer eyed him up and down for the twentieth time, and wished more than ever that Dick could have persuaded him to stay in his own country. He liked neither his pasty peevish face nor his manners. And his blood boiled to think of Dick tied up like a monkey to the leg of a table. Still, it had always been the farmer's rule in life to make the best of a bad job. With worry, what's wrong waxes worse, he would say. So he decided then and there to lodge the giant for the time being in his great barn; and to keep him in a good temper with plenty of victuals. The sooner they could pack him off the better. But they must be cautious.

So Dick and his father led the giant off to the barn, the sheep-dogs following behind them. They threw open the wide double doors, and stooping low, Grackel went in and stretched his long shins in the hay at the other end of it. After which they shut-to the doors again and hastened off to the farm to fetch him breakfast.

By good chance there was not only a side of green bacon but a cold roast leg of mutton in the larder that had been prepared for dinner the day before, though then the farmer had no stomach for it. With this, a tub of porridge, half a dozen loaves of bread, a basketful of boiled hens' eggs and a couple of buckets of tea, they went back to the barn. Two or three journeys the giant gave them before he licked the last taste out of his last broken honey-pot, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and said he had had enough. Indeed, he had gorged himself silly.

'My son tells me', bawled the farmer, 'that you have had a broken night. *His* friends are *my* friends. Maybe you'd enjoy a nap in the hay now. Make yourself easy; we'll be back anon.'

They closed behind them the great doors of the barn again, and went off themselves to breakfast, staying their talk and munching every now and again to listen to what sounded like distant thunder, but which, Dick explained to his father, was only the giant's snoring.

For the next day or two their guest was good-humoured and easy-going enough but, like some conceited people far less than half his size, he was by nature both crafty and stupid. And since he had now found himself in lodgings where he had nothing to do, no wife to make him mind and keep him busy, and he could eat and guzzle and sleep and idle the whole day long, he had little wish to be off in search of his great-grandfather, and none to go home again.

He knew well, the cunning creature, that even if his wife sent out his uncles in search of him and they discovered the Beanstalk, neither of them would venture to set foot on it. It would be certain death! For these were ordinary-sized giants, while he himself was laughed at in his own country for a weakling and nicknamed Pygmy Grackel. But this Dick did not know till afterwards.

When evening came, and the farm hands had gone home from their work, Grackel would take a walk in the fields, though Dick's father, after once accompanying him, did not do so again. He had kept the great bumpkin out of the meadows and the turnips because it was lambing season. But it enraged him to see Grackel's clod-hopper footprints in his winter wheat, and the ricks in his stackyard ruined by Grackel's leaning upon them to rest. And it enraged him even more when the giant crept up to the farmhouse one midnight to stare in at him as he lay in his bed, and kicked over the water-butt on his way. The great lubber grew more and more mischievous.

In less than a week both Dick and his father were at their wits' end to know what to do with their guest. The good woman who cooked for them had to toil continually the best part of the day to prepare his food. A couple of ducks and three or four fat hens he accounted no more than a snack; he would gollop up half a roasted sheep for supper and ask for more.

Indeed his appetite was far beyond his size, and he seemed to think of nothing but his belly.

Apart from this too, and the good home-brewed ale and cider they had to waste on him, he lay on their minds like a thunder cloud. And when he had eaten and guzzled to gluttony, as like as not he would grow sulky and malicious. He could do more damage in five minutes than an angry bull in half an hour. And when in a bad humour he would do it on purpose. Besides, tongues soon began to get busy about him in the villages round about. The shepherd complained that his lambs began to be missing; the ploughman's wife that her two small children had not been out of doors for a week. It was reported that the farmer had caught a cruel and ravenous ogre in his fields, and had chained him up in his barn. Some said it was not an ogre but a monster that trumpeted like an elephant and had claws like a bird.

Though the great doors of the barn were usually kept shut on the giant all day until dusk, and the farmer had stuffed up every hole he could find in its roof and timbers—and Grackel was as sensitive as any female to draughts—the roar of his snoring could be heard a full mile away, and when he laughed—which luckily was seldom—it was like a house falling down. At least so it seemed, though perhaps Dick made worse of it than was the truth. He had not yet seen Grackel's uncles.

There was at any rate no hope of keeping the giant secret. For some reason too there was always a host of birds—rooks, daws, starlings and the like, hovering about the barn. The horses and cattle, and even the pigs, were never at peace while the giant was near; but pawing and lowing and neighing and wuffing the whole day long. And well any pig *might* wuff, since Grackel could devour him at a meal.

The result of all this was that the farmer would now often find strangers lurking in his fields. They had come in hope to get a glimpse of the giant. And whether they succeeded or not, talk of his size, his appetite, his strength and his fury spread far and wide. Worse even than this: two small urchins from a neighbouring village had managed by hiding themselves in a ditch until it was evening to creep up close to the barn and, peeping through a hole in the wood where a knot had fallen out, found themselves peering into the great staring still watery eye of the giant fixed on them as he lay in the hay on the other side. Cold as stone with terror, they had rushed away home to their mothers, been seized with fits, and one of them had nearly died.

Dick could hardly get a wink of sleep for thinking of the giant and how to be rid of him. To see the trouble and care in his father's kindly face filled him with remorse. He searched his story-books again and again but could find no help in them. Nor could he discover any advice, not a single word, about giants in *The Farmer's Friend* or *The Countryman's Companion*—books which belonged to his father.

On the next Sunday afternoon his father walked off to the vicarage, six miles away by the field paths, to ask the advice of the old parson. He was the most learned man the farmer knew. But though the old gentleman listened to him very attentively, and was sorry for the trouble he was in, his chief fear was that the giant might find his way to the church. Once in, how without damage could he be coaxed out again?

There were giants in days of old, he told the farmer, who lived for centuries; and at a hundred or more were as hale and lusty as an ordinary man of less than forty. One such in Carmarthenshire had stolen all the millstones for thirty miles around and amused himself by flinging them into the sea. There had been a dearth of meal for months. Giants can be as cunning as a fox, the parson told the farmer, and as surly as a bear, and are great gluttons. But this the farmer knew already.

At last, one night, a little less than a fortnight after he had climbed the Beanstalk, having fallen asleep after hours of vain thinking, Dick suddenly woke up with so bright a notion in his head that it might have been whispered to him straight out of a dream.

There could be no waiting for the morning. He went off at once to his father's bedroom, woke him up, and, having made sure the giant was not listening at the window, shared it with him then and there. And the farmer thought almost as well of the notion as Dick did himself. They sat together there, Dick hooded up in a blanket at the foot of his father's bed, and for a full hour talked Dick's plan over. To and fro and up and down they discussed it, and could think of nothing better.

So as soon as light had begun to show next morning, Dick mounted his pony, and keeping him awhile on thick grass to

muffle his hoofs, he galloped off by the way he had gone before.

This time he had brought with him an old pair of leathern pruning gloves and climbing irons, and he reached the top of the Beanstalk before noon. He arrived at the Castle gates while it was still full daylight. Till this moment all had gone well with him, though he had hated leaving his father alone to all the troubles of the day.

But now, as Dick was on the point of leaping up to clutch the rusty bell-chain, a distant bombilation fell on his ear—such a rumbling and bumbling as is made by huge puncheons of rum being rolled about over the hollow stones of a cellar. He had not listened long before he guessed this must be the voices of Grackel's uncles colloquing together. At sound of them he shook in his shoes. What was worse, they seemed to be in an ill humour. But whether it was anger or mere argument in their voices, there was nothing in the music of them that boded much good for Dick!

At last they ceased, and Dick (who was by now bitterly cold, for an icy wind was whiffing round the Castle walls) decided to give a tug at the bell only just strong enough for a single ding. He then hid himself behind a buttress of the wall. The woman presently looked out of the wicket in the great gates. And Dick, peeping, and seeing that she was alone, showed himself and came nearer.

'Aha,' she called at sight of him, 'so you have come back! Aye, and a fortnight late! And where, my fine young man, is my husband? Answer me that! *Grackel!*' she wailed aloud, as if beside herself, 'Where are you? Where *are* you, Grackel?

'Not here, eh!' she went on, watching Dick out of her black eyes as closely as a cat a bird. 'So you have come back to...'—and with that she pounced on him. She gripped him by the slack of his coat, and stooped low over his face. 'Eh, eh, eh! So now I have you, my fine young man!' Her teeth chattered as she spoke. 'Step you in, and you shall see what you *shall* see!'

Dick had scarcely breath left to speak with. He thought his end was come at last. And then, suddenly, the woman drew back, let go of him, turned her head away and began to cry.

Then Dick knew that what had seemed only anger was chiefly grief, that she supposed her husband must be dead and would never come back to her. And he rejoiced. His plan was turning out even better than he had hoped for. As best he could he tried to comfort the poor woman. He took the long hand that hung down beside her, and assured her that her husband was in the best of health, better far than when he had started, and in such ease and comfort at his father's farm that nothing would persuade him to go on his travels in search of the Little Hen and the Harp, or induce him to come home again. 'It's no use your crying,' he said. 'That won't bring him back!'

At last the woman dried her eyes and began to listen to him. She took him into a little room this side of the kitchen, hung with smoked carcasses of beasts for the table, a room, which, though cold, was secret.

'I kept on telling your husband,' Dick said, 'that he need but send you word that he is well, that he is comfortable. I thought of you, ma'am, and kept on. For though I haven't a wife myself, I know they want news of their husbands. So would my mother of my father, if she had not died when I was four. And perhaps she does even now. But your husband has grown fatter and won't stir out of the house even to take a little exercise. He eats and eats, and at mention of *home* only flies into a rage.

"But," I said to him, "your wife will be weeping for you to come!" And all he answered was to bawl for another bucket of cider. So I came along by myself and am nearly dead-beat and starved with the cold.'

All this Dick said, and, it being chiefly lies, he said it much too boldly. But the woman was overjoyed at his news and believed him. Her one thought now was to get her husband home again, and to keep her wrath against him till then.

She told Dick she would go at once and wake her husband's uncles. 'They are taking a nap,' she said. Then he himself could go along with them, and they would soon persuade her husband to come home. 'And if he won't, they'll make him,' she said.

But this plan was by no means to Dick's liking. He asked the woman how long the giants would be sleeping and in what room they lay. 'I am too tired to talk to them just now,' he said, 'frozen. I couldn't bear the din they make. Leave them at

peace awhile and take me into the kitchen, ma'am, else I shall soon perish of cold. Give me some food and a mug of milk, and I'll tell you a better plan—a far better plan—than that. But quietly!

Now by good fortune the giants were napping in a room at the other end of the Castle where they were accustomed to play cards—*Dumps*, *Frogbite*, and other old games. And Dick sat up once more on his stool by the kitchen fire, and after refreshing himself, he explained to the woman his plan.

'What I want to say, ma'am, is this,' he said. And he told her that the people of his country were utterly weary of having her idle husband loafing about in their villages and doing nothing for his keep. 'Down there, we are all little like me,' he said, 'and though my father—who wouldn't hurt a fly—has done his utmost to put your husband at his ease, to feed him and keep him happy, it is all wasted. He has no more thanks in him than a flea.

'He wanders about, scares the women, frightens the children, steals from the shops, and shouts and sings at dead of night when all honest folk are asleep in their beds. And now the King's soldiers are coming, and as soon as they catch him, ma'am, they will drag him off to some great dismal underground dungeon, and he will never see daylight again. For little though we may be, there's a cage in my country that would hold nine or more giants together, and every one of them twice as big as your husband, and every one of them loaded groaning up with chains. You see, ma'am, we don't mean them any harm, but can't keep them safe else. So I came to tell you.' He took another slow sip of his greasy buttermilk, and glanced back into the fire.

'Then again,' he went on, 'if these two uncles of your husband's, who you say are big heavy men, ventured to go my way home, and that must be ten thousand feet from top to bottom, they would only come to grief. They would topple down and break every bone in their bodies. And even if they did climb safely down and came into my country, what good would that be to them? I agree, ma'am, that in mere size and shape they are much larger than we are where I come from. But for wits and quickness and cunning—why, they are no better than rabbits!

'Just think, ma'am, though I have no wish to hurt your feelings, with your husband gone and all, how a mere boy of my size and not much older, came sneaking again and again into this huge Castle of yours, and ran off with your great-grandad's treasures three times over without losing a hair of his head. I agree it was not fair dealings, between equals, as you might say. I agree that that Jack borrowed the Harp without leave. But boy to giant, ma'am, you can't but agree he had his wits about him and was no coward.

'Besides, down there we have great cannon and what is called gunpowder, which would blow fifty giants to pieces before they could sneeze. I mean,' cried Dick, 'there would be a noise like that,' and he clapped his hands together, 'and the next minute there wouldn't be a scrap of your husband's uncles to be seen. Except perhaps for a button here and there for a keepsake ten miles off. You must give me something to prove I have seen you.'

Dick spoke with such a zest and earnestness that this poor woman began once more to be afraid that she would never see her husband again, alive or dead, for she dearly loved him even though he had given her his word of honour and not kept it. She would talk to him about that, all in good time.

'Now see here,' said Dick at last, 'your husband has been gobbling and guzzling so much that he is almost too stupid now to understand good sense when he hears it. It's true I could make a fortune out of him by leading him round from town to town and charging a piece of silver for every peep at him. But I haven't a heart as hard as that, ma'am; and if you want your husband back, there is only one thing to do.'

So after they had talked the matter over a little longer the woman fetched out from her bosom on a ribbon a locket in which was a twine of her husband's hair when he was a little boy. The hair though very coarse was almost as pale as gold. And in the back of the locket was a glass in which, said the woman, you could see your dearest friend. But she herself did not much believe in it, because when she looked into it she could see only herself.

So Dick peeped in, and there he saw what looked very much like his father. His cheeks grew red and he smiled into the locket; and his father seemed to give him a look back. 'And what,' Dick said to the woman, turning the locket over, 'what is this milky side for?'

'Oh, in that,' said the woman, 'you can see what you are dreaming about. But it's nothing but black dreams come to me.'

Dick looked; and sure enough, the milkiness cleared away in a moment, and he saw a tiny image there of Jack's Beanstalk, but fresh and green. He slipped the bauble into his jacket pocket and told the woman that it would do very well for a proof to her husband that he himself had seen and talked with her. 'For you see,' he said, 'if I had nothing to show him, he might not believe me.'

And the message the woman sent Grackel was that she had heard with joy he was happy in the place he had come to, that he must remember to behave himself, and that his uncles would not come out in search of him so long as she knew he was safe. All she desired was to have but one more glimpse of him, and that he should come back if but for one night, because a feast was preparing, the feast they had every year on his long-lost great-grandfather's birthday.

'He'll remember that,' the woman said to Dick. 'And tell him that his uncles and his nephew and his cousins and his neighbours and his friends from afar off will all be at the feast, and will never forgive him if he is absent. Tell him I haven't missed him so much as I thought I should. Tell him I cried a little when I thought he was dead, and laughed when I knew he was safe. If he thinks I don't much want him back, back he will come. If he settles for good in your country, I am a lost woman.'

'Ah,' said Dick, 'leave that to me. But what am I to have for my trouble?'

The woman offered him a bag of money. There it was in the cupboard.

'Too heavy,' said Dick.

She brought out her family's Seven-League boots.

Dick laughed. He could almost have gone to bed in one of them. She showed him her husband's drinking cup.

Dick laughed again. He said it was too big for a wash-basin and not big enough for a bath. 'Besides,' he said, 'it's only silver.'

At last the woman, as Dick hoped she would, remembered her husband's watch—the watch that had belonged to one of his aunts. This of course was but a little watch compared with the giant's father's watch, which was safe upstairs. Dick's mouth watered as he took hold of the chain and lifted the watch out of the woman's hand. What he had supposed were sapphires and emeralds were not common stones like these at all. There was a toadstone, a thunderstone, an Arabian crystal and a blagroom—though Dick didn't then know the names of them.

'But I had hoped,' he said, eyeing it and pretending to be disappointed, 'that it was not a mere pocket watch, but a watch with a little magic in it. I think perhaps, after all, I should get more money by taking your husband round to show him off at some of our country fairs. You see, as I keep on saying, he doesn't want to come back.'

But the woman showed him with her finger that if he pressed a secret spring at the edge of the watch near the guard-ring he could make time seem to go much slower—whenever, that is, he was truly happy; and that if he pressed the secret spring on the left he could make time seem to go much quicker—say, when he was feeling miserable, or was tired or waiting for anything or anybody. And not only this; there was a third spring. 'If you press that,' the woman said, 'you can't tell what will happen next.'

Dick was mightily pleased with the watch, and just to test it, pressed the left-hand spring. And it seemed not a moment had passed by when there came a prodigious stamping and thumping and clattering from out of the back parts of the Castle, and he knew that Grackel's two uncles had woken up. So loud was the din they were making that it sounded as if a volcano had broken out, and it scared Dick more than he liked to show. So—though he pretended to be in no hurry—he let the spring go, fixed the chain round his waist, and slipped the watch in under the front of his breeches.

'If your husband isn't with you again by sundown to-morrow evening,' he told the woman, 'then send his uncles after me. The Beanstalk, of course, *might* bear them; and even though they might never come back again, they would at least have a chance to make an end of *me*.'

'If you come along with me now,' said the woman, 'you shall have a peep at them, and they won't see you. But quietly! They have ears like the east wind!'

So, treading mimsey as a cat, Dick followed after the woman, and she led him up a flight of stairs so steep he might have been climbing a pyramid, and took him into a gallery overlooking the room in which the giants sat. Dick crept forward, and, leaning out a little between the bases of the balusters of the gallery, peeped down. They were intent on a game that looked like common dominoes, though the pieces or men they played with were almost as big as tombstones. In no story-book he had ever read had Dick chanced on the like of these giants. They sat like human mountains at their game, and the noise of the dominoes was like Pharaoh's chariots. And when one of them, laying down a domino on the table, mumbled, *Double!*, it was like the coughing of a lion. Dick didn't need to watch them long. But as soon as he was out of earshot of them again, he burst out laughing, though it was only feigned.

'It's a good thing,' he said to the woman, 'I thought of what I told you. They are fine men, your husband's uncles, and no beanstalk I have ever seen would bear even half the weight of either. I'll keep the locket safe, you can trust me, ma'am, and if my father will let me, perhaps I might come back with your husband to the feast.'

The woman was by nature mean and close, but seeing how little by comparison Dick would be likely to eat and drink, she said he would be welcome. So he bade her goodbye and off he went.

It was pitch-black night when he got home again, but his father was waiting up for him. They were so anxious for the giant to be gone that they couldn't stay till morning. They went off together with a lantern to the barn, and having gone in, shouted at the top of their voices in Grackel's ear. They managed to wake him at last, and gave him his wife's message. He was so stupid after his first sleep, and he had eaten so vast a supper, that they might as well have been conversing with a mule. Even when he understood what they were saying, he sat blinking, morose and sullen at being disturbed.

'And how can I tell', said he, 'that what you say is true? A fine story, a pretty story, but I don't believe a word of it.'

But when Dick told him of the feast that was being prepared, that all his wife wanted was to see him once again, that else his uncles might come to look for him; and when at last he showed the giant his wife's locket—then Grackel believed what was said to him (though Dick kept the watch to himself). And the very next morning the two of them set out together for the Beanstalk. And the farmer, eyes shining and all smiles, saw them off.

It was a morning fine and bright. A little hard snow had fallen in the small hours and lay on the grass like lumps of sago. The ponds were frozen hard as crystal. And as he cantered along on his pony—the giant's lank legs keeping pace with him on his right side like the arms of a windmill—Dick was so happy at the thought of at last getting rid of his guest that he whistled away like a starling as he rode.

And Grackel said, 'Why are you whistling?'

""Why?"" said Dick. 'Why, to think what a happy evening you are going to have, and how pleased your wife will be to see you, and what a feast they are making for you up there. I could almost smell the oxen roasting for the cold meats on the side table; and there must have been seven score of fat pigs being driven in for the black puddings.'

This only made Grackel the more eager to press on.

'And now,' said Dick, when in the height of the morning they came to the foot of the Beanstalk, which was masked thick with hoarfrost smouldering in the sun, 'here we part for a while. When you are come up to the top, give a loud *hullabaloo*, and I shall know you are safe. Then I shall ride off home again, and I will come to meet you here the day after to-morrow, about two.'

Now, though it was a great folly, Dick had not been able to resist bringing Grackel's watch with him. He had hooked the chain round his waist under his breeches, and the watch bulged out like a hump in the wrong place. By good luck the

giant was on the further side away from the watch, so that he had not noticed this hump. But now that they were at a standstill, and all was quiet, he detected the ticking.

And he said, 'What is that sound I hear?'

And Dick said, 'That is my heart beating.'

'Why is it beating so loud?' said Grackel.

'Ah,' said Dick, in a doleful tone, 'it must be for sadness that you are going away, even if only for a little while! We have had our little disagreements together, you and me, about the sheep and the snoring and the cider. But now we are friends, and that is all over. Isn't there any little keepsake you could give me by which to remember you till you come back?'

At this the giant drew in his lips, and none too eagerly felt in his pockets. He brought out at last from beneath the leather flap of *his* side pocket a discoloured stub of candle in a box.

'It's not much to look at,' he grumbled, 'but once it's lit it will never go out till you say, *Out, candle, out!* even if it's left burning in a hurricane for a hundred years.' Dick kept this candle until the day he met his sweetheart and lit it then. It may be lighting his great-grandchildren to sleep this very evening. But that came afterwards.

'There,' said Grackel, 'take great care of it, and you shall give it me back when we meet again. Aye, and then I am sure to be hungry. So have plenty of hot supper waiting for me in my house—legs of pork soused in apples, and kids in batter, and drink to wash it down! And get in for me too some more hay and blankets and horse-cloths. I could scarcely sleep a wink last night for the cold.'

Dick nodded and laughed, and the giant began to climb the Beanstalk. Dick watched him till first he was as small to look up at as an ordinary man, and next no bigger than a dwarf, and not long after that he was out of sight. About an hour or so afterwards, for Grackel being lean and sinewy was a nimble climber, Dick heard a rumbling in the higher skies. He knew that it was the giant's hullabalooing, and that he was safe. Then as quick as lightning he set about gathering together a great heap of the last year's bracken and dead wood and dry grass, and piled it round the parched-up roots of the Beanstalk. Then he felt in his pocket for his flint and tinder-box that his father had laid out for him overnight. He felt—and felt again; and his beating heart gave one dull thump and almost stood still. In the heat and haste of getting away he had left them both on the kitchen table!

Dick hauled out Grackel's watch to see the time. It was seven minutes to twelve. It would now be impossible for him to get home before nightfall and back again much before morning. It was a long journey, and the way would be difficult to follow in the dark. And how was he to be certain that the giant, having come to the Castle and found that his watch was gone, would not climb down the Beanstalk again to fetch it? Dick pressed the right-hand spring of the watch, for though he was in great trouble of mind, he wanted to think hard and to make the time go slowly. And as, brooding on there under the Beanstalk, he stared at the second hand, though it was not much bigger than a darning needle, it was jerking so sluggishly that he could have counted twenty between every beat. The sun, that was now come to the top of his winter arch in the sky, and was glistening like a tiny furnace on the crystal of the watch, danced in his eyes so fiercely that at last he could scarcely see.

'Why,' thought Dick suddenly, 'the glass magnifies. It's a *burning-glass!*'

Instantly, after but one sharp upward glance towards the top of the Beanstalk, he took out his pocket-knife and heaved up the watch lid. The glass was as thick as half the nail-width of his little finger. He held it close down over the dried-up leaves and bracken in the full beams of the noonday sun. And in a few moments, to his great joy, a faint twirling wreath of grey smoke appeared on the buff of the bracken frond. Then there came a black pin-prick circle that rapidly began to ring out larger. Then a little red appeared at the edge of the circle. And at this Dick began to puff very very softly, still tilting the glass into the direct rays of the sun. The frond began to smoulder, and the smoulder began to spread, and now Dick blew with all his might.

Presently a thin reek of vapour appeared, and the bracken broke into flames. And when once these parched-up leaves and grasses had fairly taken fire, the Beanstalk itself was soon ablaze. The flames—and theirs was a strange music—

roared loud in the wintry air—red, greenish, copper and gold—licking and leaping their way from strand to strand up and up, while a huge pale-umber tower of smoke rose billowing into the blue air of the morning.

Dick gazed at the flames in delight and terror. Never in all his born days had he seen such a bonfire. Even Jock, who had been quietly browsing by the ruinous cottage walls, turned his dark eyes at sight of this fiery spectacle, lifted his head and whinnied. Indeed, the flaming Beanstalk must have been visible to all Gloucestershire's seven neighbour counties round. And the fire burned up and up, and the pods and red-hot bean-seeds came hailing down, with wisps of fire and smoke. And the roaring gradually grew more and more distant, until at last the blaze up above was dwindled to little more than a red spark, like a tiny second sun, far far up in the vacancy of the heavens. And then it vanished and was gone.

And Dick with a deep sigh, partly of regret and partly of relief, knew that Jack's old Beanstalk was gone for ever. At least this might be so, though he had been wise enough before he had begun gathering together the fuel for his fire to put two or three of the dry bean-seeds into his pocket. Some day he meant to plant them; just to see.

He broke the ice over a little spring that was frozen near the cottage, took a sip or two of the biting cold water underneath, and dabbled his hot cheeks and eyelids. Then he whistled for Jock, and jumped into the saddle. Yet again he dragged out Grackel's watch, pressed down the left spring, and with one last glance up over his shoulder, set off for home. And pleased beyond all words was his father the farmer to see him.

[End of *Dick and the Beanstalk* by Walter de la Mare]