

# **JACK, THE BEANSTALK AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

**By Jerry Rabushka**

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## CHARACTER LIST

The Narrator (m/f)  
The Social Worker (f)  
The Critic (m)  
Jack  
His Mother  
The Cow (m/f)  
Bean 1 (m/f)  
Bean 2 (m/f)  
Bean 3 (m/f)  
The Bean Stalk (m/f)  
The Giant  
An Elf (m/f)  
A Policeman

(Beans one and three are very small parts and may be doubled.)

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## JACK, THE BEANSTALK, AND SOCIAL SERVICES

by  
Jerry Rabushka

NARRATOR: (**prim and proper, getting ready to tell a tale**) Once upon a time, there lived, in of all places, Springfield, Missouri, a young boy and his mother who-

WORKER: (**brusque, interrupting**) Where's his father?

NARRATOR: What do you mean?

WORKER: (**introducing her/himself**) Marlene Hemmenhawen, Missouri Division of Social Services. (**demanding**) Where's the boy's father?

NARRATOR: (**not prepared to answer**) Well, I don't know. We never took it into consideration. In fairy tales, no one has both original parents, so we just took it for granted that his father passed away.

MOTHER: (**bitter**) He left me. He ran off with some old woman who lives in a shoe.

JACK: (**spoiled, and annoying**) You told me he was dead.

MOTHER: No, I said I *wished* he were dead. Now be quiet, Jack.

JACK: (**whiny**) I want my daddy!

WORKER: I demand you tell me where this man is. He needs to pay child support.

MOTHER: The last address I had was Ten-And-A-Half E-E Avenue. They've moved since.

WORKER: Come now. Very few families live in a shoe. It can't be that hard to find.

MOTHER: This is Springfield, ma'am.

JACK: (**whiny**) I want my daddy!

MOTHER: Your daddy is a lowdown good for nothing-

NARRATOR: (**trying to regain control, though rarely successful at it**) If I remember correctly, the Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe has quite the large family. He's probably a very good provider, particularly since *she* doesn't know what to do. Chances are you drove him to it, Mrs...uh...what is your last name?

MOTHER: I don't know. Everyone calls me Jack's Mother.

WORKER: Well, continue. We'll get to the bottom of this eventually.

NARRATOR: Jack and his mother were very poor.

WORKER: That's because she's too lazy to work.

MOTHER: There are no jobs in my field.

WORKER: What *is* your field?

MOTHER: Welfare recipient. So if I get a job, I lose my job. Anyway, we're poor. I tried putting Jack in foster care, but I'm too fit a parent.

JACK: Mom, I want a Nintendo! I want a DVD player!

MOTHER: Didn't you hear the man? We're poor!

NARRATOR: One year in particular...

CRITIC: (**abruptly interrupting**) What year?

NARRATOR: Who are you?

CRITIC: I'm the critic. I'm here to make sure the story makes sense and all the pieces fit together. I need to establish a sense of time.

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NARRATOR: I'll establish that it's time for you to be quiet.

CRITIC: (**insistent**) What year are we in?

NARRATOR: We're in *once upon a time* time. In Europe that's somewhere between the year 1200 and 1503, but since we've moved this tale to the United States, let's say... (**thinks just a bit**) the early to mid Nineteenth Century.

MOTHER: In which case there is no Division of Social Services and I can beat my child to a pulp. Whenever I please.

WORKER: There's no woman living in a shoe, either. Your story is phony.

JACK: I want my daddy!

MOTHER: I can't find your daddy.

JACK: Then I want a Nintendo.

NARRATOR: Will you let me continue!

JACK: (**bratty**) I want a Nintendo!

MOTHER: Jack!

JACK: (**screaming**) I want one!

MOTHER: (**screaming back**) Be quiet or I'll tell your father!

WORKER: (**aha!**) I thought you said you didn't know where he was.

MOTHER: I'll find him if this keeps up.

NARRATOR: (**tired of this**) Jack had a much older sister who got married and moved away.

CRITIC: Where did she go?

NARRATOR: We're not telling, for her sake. Now – one year in particular, there was a great famine across the land.

CRITIC: I don't recall Missouri ever being hit by a famine.

NARRATOR: It was intellectual. It had nothing to do with food, and they've never recovered. Nonetheless... one year there was a great famine...

CRITIC: You just said that.

NARRATOR: I'm trying to establish mood. Let me finish. (**starts again**) One year....

EVERYONE: There was a great famine.

WORKER: We're going to take the child away and send him to Ireland, where he can eat potatoes.

NARRATOR: No, we're not.

MOTHER: I've been a very enterprising woman. I've been turning my cow's milk into cheese by leaving it out in the hot sun for days at a time. But now with the famine, there's not enough for the cow to eat.

NARRATOR: Hence, the cow stopped giving milk.

CRITIC: (**snooty**) Hence?

NARRATOR: (**matter of fact**) Hence.

CRITIC: What kind of mood can you establish with hence?

NARRATOR: If you'd get thyself hence, we'd *all* be in a better mood.

COW: I was in a perfectly good mooooooooooood.

MOTHER: I was, too, until you stopped giving milk.

COW: It's very hard to give milk when there's nothing to eat. First I thought you were just being cheap, but then I went to the farm next door and found out that the grass really *isn't* greener on the other side of the fence.

JACK: It was for my *father*, obviously.

MOTHER: Have you ever smelled your shoes?

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JACK: Ewww!

MOTHER: That's how your father's living.

JACK: Eeewww! **(to WORKER)** He better not want custody.

COW: Stop! It's about me. Finally.

NARRATOR: Not for long. **(like a parent to a child)** You know what happens to cows that don't give milk.

COW: **(unconcerend)** Not really, no. This is the first time we've run into this cow-plication.

MOTHER: Jack, you're going to have to sell the cow.

JACK: But it's my favorite cow!

MOTHER: Mine too.

CRITIC: It's the only cow you have.

MOTHER: You've been having a cow ever since we started. Now Jack, take the cow to the market and sell it. We'll get a few bucks for it and maybe we can make it through the famine.

WORKER: How is money going to help you if there's no food to buy?

CRITIC: Good point.

MOTHER: **(to JACK)** And don't spend it on Nancy Drew novels like you did the last time.

WORKER: Why don't you just butcher it?

CRITIC: Butcher a Nancy Drew novel? What more could you do?

WORKER: The cow, you dolt! Butcher the cow!

COW: Excuse me?

WORKER: Butcher it! You'll have enough meat for weeks!

MOTHER: Kill our cow? Never!

WORKER: **(frustrated)** It's a cow!

JACK: We can't kill our cow!

MOTHER: But we can sell it to the butcher so *he* can kill it, and then we'll buy back the meat with the money he pays us for it. It's much more humane.

COW: I'm not going. I'm not leaving, period.

NARRATOR: Now, you know what we talked about before we started.

COW: I'm a cow. I wasn't paying attention. I was chewing my cud. With this famine going on, there isn't much cud to chew. I didn't realize my life might be in the balance.

CRITIC: I don't know why you gave the cow any lines. It ruins the reality.

COW: We're in Springfield, Missouri somewhere within a span of 100 years telling a fairy tale that would be better located just outside of Buckingham palace, or better yet, Transylvania. We've got women living in shoes, errant fathers, a meddlesome social worker, and-

WORKER: I beg your pardon!

COW: Well you won't get it. You're annoyingly meddlesome, and I'm pretty sure you're operating under a very stingy personal interpretation of Missouri state law. The reality was ruined long before I uttered a syllable. So don't blame this on me.

CRITIC: I don't know what to say.

NARRATOR: Good. Hold on to that. Now Mrs... Uh... what *is* your last name?

MOTHER: **(grumpy)** I already told you I don't know. I don't have a last name, or a first. I'm Jack's Mother. I assume my first name is Jack's and my last is

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Mother. Someone at the welfare office should have my official name, if they're keeping as good a track of me as they want me to think.

NARRATOR: (*frustrated, but hiding it just a bit*) Will one of you please sell this cow? Now?

JACK: It'll have to be me. It's two o'clock. Mom won't go anywhere till her stories are finished.

COW: I'm not moooving.

NARRATOR: You're going, beefcakes. Now git.

COW: I'd like to know what you're going to do for heat without cow pies for fuel.

WORKER: You're throwing pies into the fireplace during a famine?

MOTHER: How thoughtless of me. I'll let you have one when you make a home visit.

NARRATOR: (*continuing*) Jack took the cow to market...

JACK: Actually we went to the state fair in Sedalia.

MOTHER: He was gone for a week.

COW: We got caught up in a cattle drive.

CRITIC: What year is this, anyway?

NARRATOR: We don't know. We're anywhere between 1820 and 2003. We just flow with historical convenience, and with what ever costumes are available in the prop room. It worked for Xena, and it works for us.

MOTHER: Well it's a week I didn't have to feed him. How much did you get for the cow?

COW: You can't put a price on my life.

MOTHER: Maybe not, but butchered, you'll go for about 3 bucks a pound. How much did you get, Jack?

JACK: I got something better than money!

MOTHER: Tim McGraw tickets?

WORKER: (*real chatty*) Hey, have you heard that new album he just recorded?

MOTHER: You mean...

WORKER: Exactly! When you have me over for cow pies, we'll have to put it on.

MOTHER: Great! (*laughs with WORKER, then stern, to Jack!*) Now Jack, what did you bring?

JACK: Beans.

NARRATOR: Beans?

WORKER: Beans?

MOTHER: Beans?

CRITIC: Navy, black, or anasazi?

MOTHER: No one cares what kind they are. I'd like to know how I'm going to feed a family of two on a handful of beans.

JACK: (*enthusiastic*) They're magic beans!

MOTHER: Bosh!

WORKER: (*authoritatively*) You're belittling him.

MOTHER: Of course I am. He sold a cow for three beans. He deserves to be belittled. And spanked! When your head's turned.

JACK: (*defensive*) The guy in Sedalia said they were magic.

MOTHER: (*scolding*) He worked the carnival, didn't he?

JACK: (*happy*) Yep. He put me on the roller coaster. Then he put me on the whirl-a-gig. Then I puked all over him and after that he gave me the beans.

CRITIC: Where's the cow?

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JACK: Oh, they fed her some hay and she's giving milk like nobody's business. She won first prize at the fair and some farmer walked off with a hundred thousand dollars. Meanwhile, I got magic beans. There's no famine in Sedalia.

WORKER: Then why don't you move to Sedalia?

MOTHER: Why don't you butt out of my life? I have roots here, ok? Now Jack, I'm sorry to say this, but... you really blew it. We have no cow, no milk, and thanks to your inefficient haggling skills we have no money for food, rent, gas, electric, phone, cable, AOL, DSL, DVD, or HDTV. Just wait until I tell your father!

NARRATOR: And with that, Jack's mother took the beans and threw them out the window! On the south side of the house, where they got a lot of sunlight. She also sent Jack to bed without any supper...

WORKER: I knew it. Child abuse.

JACK: Mom's cooking is child abuse.

NARRATOR: ...while she snuck out to Longhorn and had herself a good ol' time.

JACK: Did you really do that, mother?

MOTHER: Well...I've been hiding some money under the mattress for a rainy day. There's no famine at Longhorn.

NARRATOR: The beans, being magic, of course, had plans of their own.

BEAN 1: Where the heck are we?

BEAN 2: They call this soil? Anyone ever heard of (*shouting*) nitrogen?

BEAN 3: Water! Water!

BEAN 1: I'm bored. Oh, and ewww! Worms!

BEAN 2: Well at least we're out of that kid's pocket.

BEAN 3: Does he ever wash his clothes?

CRITIC: Not likely. He's a stinkin' kid.

NARRATOR: When suddenly, bean number 2 was beset by a fast and furious growth spurt.

BEAN 1: Move it, number 2. You're taking up my space.

BEAN 2: I can't help it. I'm growing. And growing. And growing. This is getting outa hand.

BEAN 3: You wanna get that thyroid checked?

NARRATOR: And when Jack woke up the next morning, the first thing he noticed was-

JACK: Mom's still out partying.

NARRATOR: The second thing he noticed was-

JACK: There's nothing to eat!

NARRATOR: Will you look out the window!

JACK: I'm hungry! I want an omelet.

NARRATOR: *Had* Jack looked out the window, as per the script, he'd have noticed a giant beanstalk where his mother callously threw the beans just the night before. And had he looked out the window, he'd have burst out with-

JACK: Oh, right, like I'm going to climb up *that*.

CRITIC: You're anticipating the story line. You're assuming that climbing it is in the offing. You might try watering it or fertilizing it rather than climbing it, though that would just make the situation much more cumbersome.

NARRATOR: Will someone please shut him up?

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WORKER: If I had an umbrella, I'd hit him over the head with it.

BEAN 3: I'd help, but I'm just a bean.

JACK: Actually, I *am* going to climb that.

WORKER: You are? It's not safe!

JACK: Well my mother isn't here to stop me, and I'm only 8 years old, so I'm still rather impulsive. Climbing is in my blood. Besides, once I get past four leaves I'll be too high for you to catch me.

WORKER: (**threatening**) I'll have you put in foster care!

JACK: It beats living in a shoe with my father!

NARRATOR: (**in story telling mode**) And with that, Jack jumped outside and proceeded to climb up the beanstalk.

BEANSTALK: Ow! Stop it! Get off me!

JACK: Can it! I'm underweight.

CRITIC: Oh, that's so childish. Anthropomorphizing the beanstalk and having it howl in pain.

NARRATOR: Excuse me?

CRITIC: You're giving it human qualities when it's a plant. A large plant, but a plant nonetheless.

JACK: (**to the stalk**) Stay still! (**to everyone**) It's trying to throw me off!

BEANSTALK: I should. You're a lousy climber and your shoes stink.

JACK: How tall are you, anyway?

BEANSTALK: That's personal.

WORKER: Young man, you get down here this minute!

NARRATOR: Jack looked down...

JACK: Yikes!

NARRATOR: And finally disappeared above the clouds.

WORKER: Good. Ornerly little brat.

CRITIC: (**to WORKER**) Then it would appear *your* job here is done.

WORKER: What do you mean?

CRITIC: No mother, no Jack, and no cow. Your existence on this stage is meaningless without desperate, troubled lives in which to intrude.

NARRATOR: Not really. You see, soon after Jack disappeared, his mother came straggling home.

MOTHER: (**singing, in a silly mood**) Oh, what a beautiful morning, oh what a beautiful-

WORKER: (**stern**) Where have you been?

MOTHER: Longhorn. I told you that.

WORKER: Longhorn closes at ten. Eleven on the weekends. It's now nine a.m. Now where have you been?

MOTHER: I couldn't afford dessert and I've been washing dishes for eight hours.

WORKER: Well, your son scampered up that ugly plant.

MOTHER: Oh, I see. No sympathy for *me*.

WORKER: Child abandonment!

MOTHER: It was worth it for the fried cheesecake.

WORKER: Did you hear me? Jack's gone.

MOTHER: He's gone?

WORKER: Gone.

CRITIC: Gone.

NARRATOR: Gone.

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COW: See? Sell me up the river and now you're left with no children and a giant stalk.

WORKER: Therefore I'm terminating your welfare benefits and cutting your food stamps in half.

MOTHER: You wouldn't!

WORKER: I must! Child out of the home. You're not providing care, and you're eating half as much.

MOTHER: The food stamps don't do me any good, considering there's a FAMINE in the land. Does that thing grow any beans or is it just a giant leafy stalk?

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