

The Lancashire Giant – Folktale

This is the story about a Lancashire boy which is often told in these parts. It's about a young fellow called Johnny.



Long, long ago, not very far from here, Johnny lived with his old mother in a little cottage, on the edge of a village. They had a few animals of their own and Johnny also worked for some of the other farmers nearby. Sometimes he looked after their sheep. Sometimes he collected the eggs. He was hard-working and honest and everybody liked him. But Johnny was unhappy because he wasn't very big and he wanted to be bigger. Every night he'd go to bed saying, "If only I was a bit bigger. Being just a little bit bigger would make a very big difference to me."

And his mother would say, "Johnny, the best things come in small packages. You're fine just as you are!"

But Johnny was unhappy. When he was bringing in the sheep, when he was moving the hay, when he was repairing a dry stone wall he'd think, "If only I was a bit bigger. Being just a little bit bigger would make a very big difference to me."

And the farmers would say, "You're fit and healthy and you're very good as you are!"

But Johnny wasn't happy. Whenever he met the Squire, Johnny would say,

"If only I was a bit bigger! Being just a little bit bigger would make a very big difference to me."

The Squire would say, "I've met the King, and he's not very big. In fact he's not as big as you."

Johnny was very pleased to hear that the King wasn't very big. But still he wasn't happy.

One evening at supper time his mother said, "Johnny if you really, really want to be bigger go and see your grandmother who lives out of the village, up the path and along the lane. She might be able to help you." So the next day Johnny walked out of the village, up the path and along the lane. He found his grandmother, in the woods, picking herbs to stir into her big black pot.

"Grandmother, I'm so unhappy. I want to be bigger. Can you make me bigger?"

"How much bigger do you want to be," she asked?

"Just a little bit bigger," said Johnny.

His grandmother loved him very much and she wanted to help him. "Well, I've got an idea. I'll bake you a special cake, a magic cake which should make you happier. But don't eat it all at once - just a few bites. Promise? Just a few bites! "



"Promise!" said Johnny. "And, thank you!" And he walked off down the road with the newly baked cake neatly wrapped in a napkin.

Mmmm! It smelled good and he began to feel hungry. It was time for some cake! First he took a nibble, then a bite, then a gobble, then a scrobble, and suddenly, he'd eaten the whole cake!

Not just a few bites, the whole cake! But he felt much better. He felt full up! Then he began to feel a bit strange. His legs felt heavy. His arms seemed longer. He walked on. His jacket seemed tighter than before. He stretched out his arms. RRRRRIP. The seam split right down the back of his jacket. RRRRRIP. His trousers split too, and all his buttons came off. Pop, pop, pop! "I'm growing big!" he shouted. "Not a little bit bigger, but a lot bigger."

Now he could look over walls and over chimney pots. He could see for miles. There was his mother waiting at the door of their cottage, worried about her Johnny.

"Oh, my boy, what has become of you?"

"Oh, mother, I've become big! Not a little bit bigger, but a lot bigger!"



The next day when they saw the new Giant Johnny the farmers in the village were delighted.

Now Johnny could lift great big loads of hay. He could lift stones as if they were feathers, without getting tired at all! The Squire was also delighted with Johnny's new size. "I have to go to London to see the King," he said. "And you shall come too."

The Squire paid for a whole new set of clothes for Johnny to wear - a handsome green velvet jerkin, red stockings and shiny black shoes with silver buckles. Off they went to London to the King's palace.



They arrived at the Palace gate and went into the royal garden. Johnny had never seen anything like it. The lords and ladies were all in their finest clothes, in a beautiful garden. It was all very grand!

And there seated on a big red velvet throne, was the King! The Squire and Johnny bowed together. "Your Majesty, may I present Giant Johnny!"

Now on that day, as it happened, there was a Royal Tournament under way at the Palace. Men in suits of armour with swords and lances were getting ready to pitch their skills against each other to find the strongest man among them. Johnny arrived just in time to hear the King's Champion ask if there were any challengers.

"Over here!" shouted the Lords pointing towards Johnny. Johnny looked around. "Who? Me?" he said. Johnny wasn't keen on fighting at all. But everyone was looking at him. So what could he do? He stepped forward into the arena. With a blast of a trumpet the competitors took their positions.

The King's Champion was a very impressive fighter who knew lots of moves. But as soon as he got near with his sword and his lance, Johnny just picked him up, turned him round and put him down at the other end of the arena! This went on for hours and hours: Pick him up - turn him round - put him down. Eventually the King's Champion was just plain worn out. "I quit!" he said, and sat down on the ground.

The crowd let out a mighty cheer. "Hurray for Giant Johnny from Lancashire!" they cried.

The King clapped and called for the royal purse. He counted out 20 gold coins and gave them to Johnny. "Giant Johnny, you are a true champion!"

It was a long journey back to Lancashire and Johnny and the Squire smiled all the way. There at the door of the cottage was Johnny's mother, so pleased to see them back. "You see these coins?" said Johnny. "These will make a very big difference to you and me."



"But first we will have a feast. We will have singing and dancing and games." And the whole village celebrated the homecoming of the Lancashire Giant - Johnny, the boy who wanted to be just a little bit bigger.

