

JACK AND THE RUFFIANS
By Laura Joye

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AUDITION -- for 2m, 3w, 12 flexible.

In this scene, Jack's cows die, the Ruffians take Jack's dad, and Jack discovers who has the magic beans.

(LIGHTS up on the Jacques' farm. JACK and COWS are milling about.)

STORYTELLER: The next day, Jack went out to milk the cows.

JACK: Hi, cows!

PRISSY: *(Enters, skipping.)* Isn't it a lovely morning, Jack?

JACK: Good morning! It sure is.

PRISSY: Look at the clouds. They're so fluffy today!

JACK: And so big! I'll tell you one thing, Prissy. Someday, I'm going up in the sky to touch those clouds.

PRISSY: You'd fall right through. Or get eaten by the giant.

JACK: Maybe. But right now, I have chores to do. Want to help me milk the cows?

PRISSY: I've got chores of my own back at home, Jack. *(Pets a cow.)* They look pale. You should tell your dad.

JACK: Yeah, they do.

PRISSY: Bye!

STORYTELLER: Prissy hadn't been gone long when, suddenly, one of the cows began to cough.

(COW 1 coughs, gags, dies dramatically.)

STORYTELLER: The next cow reacted badly to the scent of a nearby flower.

(COW 2 reacts and dies dramatically.)

STORYTELLER: The third cow suddenly flopped onto her back!

(COW 3 dies dramatically.)

STORYTELLER: It went on and on and on.

(COWS continue to die dramatically.)

STORYTELLER: Then, there was only one cow left.

JACK: Come with me, Bessie Sue! We've got to tell Mom and Dad!

(JACK and BESSIE SUE exit, JACK'S MOM and JACK'S DAD enter, carrying baskets that say "Butter" and "Cheese.")

STORYTELLER: Alas, something terrible was about to befall his father. This was no fault of the beans, or of Vlad. It's just called bad luck. And sometimes, luck is the worst. It sets you back. It ruins your dreams. It takes away your hopes, and destroys whatever faith you had left in this world!

RUFFIAN 1: *(Pokes head out.)* Hurry up! We're ready to make our grand entrance!

STORYTELLER: Some Ruffians from the far South were traveling through. They were a ruthless group of repulsive, revolting robbers. They also had an affinity for cheese.

(RUFFIANS enter. They cross paths with the JACQUES.)

RUFFIAN 3: Argh, that looks like mighty good cheese!

RUFFIAN 2: Argh, it tastes like mighty good cheese!

RUFFIAN 1: Argh, I don't want to live without it! Take it all, and the cheesemaker with you!

(A scuffle follows, and JACK'S MOM drops her basket. RUFFIANS force JACK'S DAD off.)

STORYTELLER: They tried putting up a good fight, but the Ruffians outnumbered them too badly, and Jack's dad was quickly whisked away to the South, never to be heard from again.

JACK'S MOM: My dear husband! *(To STORYTELLER.)*
Wait, I'll never hear from him again? But on page fifty-seven—

STORYTELLER: Shh! Don't tell them! *(Motions toward audience.)*

JACK: Mom! All the cows died mysterious deaths but Bessie Sue!

JACK'S MOM: Your father has been kidnapped!

(STORYTELLER hands out tissues to JACK, JACK'S MOM, BESSIE SUE, and possibly the audience.)

JACK'S MOM: *(Recovers.)* Get it together now. We have a lot to do.

JACK: Like what, Mom? We're in a terrible situation!
(BUYERS enter on their way to market.)

JACK'S MOM: And it's up to us to fix it! Yoo-hoo, neighbor!
We've got a little problem.

BUYER 1: Where's your cheese?

BUYER 3: Where's your butter?

BUYER 2: Did your cows run away?

BUYER 3: Oh don't say that, I'd cry if it were true!

JACK'S MOM: Then you better start crying.

BUYER 3: Why? What happened?

JACK'S MOM: Let me tell you.

(Dramatic MUSIC plays, while JACK and JACK'S MOM pantomime the Cows dying and Jack's dad being kidnapped. The BUYERS appear shocked.)

BUYER 1: That's terrible!

JACK'S MOM: Thank you, we're quite distressed. Now who's ready to come with me and rescue Mr. Jacques?

BUYER 2: Uh...I got a birthday party planned for my kid...

BUYER 3: I've got some bread baking in the oven.

BUYERS: *(As they are leaving.)* Good luck!

JACK'S MOM: It's up to us, Jack.

JACK: Why won't they help us? We sell the best cheese and butter there is in the world!

JACK'S MOM: Some folks just weren't brought up properly, Jack. Your father and I have taught you manners, haven't we? *(Rolls up sleeves.)*

JACK: Yes!

JACK'S MOM: And to help others in their time of need?

JACK: Of course!

JACK'S MOM: And to brush your teeth before bed?

JACK: Always! And to eat my vegetables!

JACK'S MOM: Good boy. Then I trust you to take good care of yourself and the cow while I'm gone.

JACK: Where are you going?

JACK'S MOM: To find your father.

JACK: You can't! It's too dangerous.

JACK'S MOM: Who else will? You've seen the people in this town.

JACK: I'll go!

JACK'S MOM: I need you to milk the cow and take care of the garden.

JACK: But—

JACK'S MOM: You do your job, and I'll do mine. We can do it! *(Poses as WWII's Rosie the Riveter.)* I'll miss you. Be good! *(SHE exits.)*

JACK: Mom!

STORYTELLER: And Jack and the cow sat down on a rock, all alone.

JACK: This is terrible, Bessie Sue.

PRISSY: *(Walks by, stops.)* What's wrong, Jack?

JACK: Boy, am I glad to see you!

PRISSY: Did something happen?

JACK: All our cows died mysterious deaths, and my dad was captured by ruffians! Now nobody will even talk to us.

PRISSY: I'm talking to you.

JACK: But can you rescue my dad? *(Pause.)* Didn't think so.

PRISSY: You go and rescue him!

JACK: Mom went. I'm supposed to take care of the cow.

PRISSY: That's a big job. Your parents must trust you a lot.

JACK: Guess so.

PRISSY: They'll be so proud of you when they come back to find you and your cow healthy as ever!

JACK: If they ever do come back.

PRISSY: Don't give up hope, Jack! There's always hope!

(CAROL and VLAD enter, and JACK, PRISSY, and BESSIE SUE hide. Carol now has long hair.)

CAROL: Want to see my beautiful Rapunzel hair?

VLAD: Not really. You've already shown it to me thirty-three times.

CAROL: Oh but it is so lovely! *(Asks audience.)* Don't you think?

VLAD: Do you realize what this means?

CAROL: Um...if I'm locked in a tower, a handsome prince could come and rescue me, like in all the stories?

VLAD: No. The wishes came true!

CAROL: Told you they would.

VLAD: First, your hair grew long.

CAROL: Very long. Jealous, anybody?

VLAD: Then the Jacques didn't come to market today! Their cows must have all perished.

CAROL: I wonder how I'll brush all this out.

VLAD: We sold lots of vegetables today, and I predict we'll sell even more tomorrow.

CAROL: It'll take a very long time.

VLAD: We'll make lots and lots and lots of money!

CAROL: And I can hire a personal hair stylist! It's perfect!

VLAD: You do what you want with your half. I'll be buying land with mine.

CAROL: Ew. Why?

VLAD: To grow more vegetables!

CAROL: So you can work more?

VLAD: So we can sell more, and make more money!

CAROL: Then I could hire two hairstylists!

VLAD: I'll be saving to buy an island. Then, I'll retire in luxury.

CAROL: Whatever.

VLAD: Give me the last bean.

CAROL: No way!

VLAD: Hand it over!

CAROL: Why? So you can make another silly wish?

VLAD: Ha! As if wishing your hair to grow out wasn't?

CAROL: I bought it; I'm keeping it.

VLAD: That's really not a good idea.

CAROL: I make wonderful wishes!

VLAD: Give it to the brains of the family.

CAROL: That's a terrible thing to say!

(THEY leave, bickering, and JACK stands up. RAY enters, whistling. PRISSY and BESSIE SUE come out from hiding.)

RAY: What's wrong with you, chap?

JACK: I think I just found out how our cows died, and why my dad went missing.

RAY: Whoa. What happened?

STORYTELLER: Jack recounted the story.

(JACK quickly pantomimes the story to RAY as dramatic MUSIC plays. This time including Jack's mom going off to rescue Jack's dad and Vlad and Carol's bit.)

RAY: You're having some kind of bad day.

JACK: I know. All I want to know is how they got those magic beans. I know it sounds crazy, but it's what they said!

RAY: Uh...I might be able to help you out with that.

JACK: You know this bean seller?

RAY: Kind of.

JACK: Where can I find him?

RAY: Uh. Here.

JACK: You mean...you sell these magic beans?

RAY: Yeah...

JACK: Great! How much do you want for one?

RAY: You're not mad at me?

JACK: It's not your fault they used the beans to carry out a terrible scheme and ruin my life.

PRISSY: Jack, your life isn't ruined.

JACK: Feels like it is.

PRISSY: You have yourself, your cow, and me!

(RAY clears throat.)

PRISSY: *(Cont'd.)* And him.

RAY: The name is Ray.

PRISSY: *(Whispering to JACK.)* See? We even have a ray of sunshine to brighten your day.

RAY: And magic beans.

JACK: Hey, you're right! What do you want for one of those? I don't have much... I have some string, and a button, and...and...and the cow.

RAY: The cow. For three beans.

PRISSY: That's awfully pricey.

JACK: And, I only need one bean to set this straight.

RAY: *(Shrugs.)* Supply and demand.

(STORYTELLER enters the scene, shows RAY the script, then exits.)

RAY: Excuse me. Apparently, I just want a drink of milk.

JACK: That's fair.

RAY: And here are your beans.

JACK: I only need one!

RAY: Take three. You never know. With a wish as big as the one you need to make, it might take all three.

JACK: All right then.

(JACK takes beans and goes center stage with RAY and PRISSY on either side of him.)

JACK: I wish that this whole mess is set straight: That Dad and Mom come home, and we get a new herd of cows to replace the old, and that all are brought to justice. *(Tosses beans over shoulder.)*

PRISSY: How do we know it worked?

RAY: They're my magic beans. They work.

PRISSY: While we wait, I'm going to take a nap.

JACK: I'm going to watch the beans.

RAY: Suit yourself.

(ALL lie down.)

STORYTELLER: Jack tried to keep his eyes open, watching the beans, waiting for something big to happen. But slowly, his eyelids drooped, and he was fast asleep. Meanwhile, Vlad and Carol were still arguing over who should have that last bean.

VLAD: I'll make a better wish than you!

CAROL: Fat chance!

VLAD: I won't be wishing for anything like hair.

CAROL: No, you'd only wish that your nose was smaller or something.

VLAD: Hey! Take that back!

CAROL: Oh, take back the bean? How can I? I already have it.

VLAD: Grr!

(CAROL and VLAD run off stage, bickering and fighting. BLACKOUT.)

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