

## **The Two-Headed Giant That Hated Being Big**

By Jack Emberly

The valley had been peaceful once. But that was before Westville's last giant settled on Misty Mountain.

***"It's not like we weren't expecting one, Jake."*** That's what Gramps said. He used to tell stories about giants carting off someone's beast or raiding their vegetable garden - when the village had vegetable gardens. They raise beasts now for the Beastly Foods and Other Products Factory. Gramps has nothing good to say about anything made in that factory, especially the beast crisps. Westville makes lots of those, and plenty of other beastly stuff as well. Gramps says the crisps aren't real food. ***"Eat enough of it, Jake, and you'll get sick, just like the folks in Westville."***

I'm sure that's true. Westville folks sure aren't the picture of health. I said they should try one of our tomatoes. Gramps says that'll be the day. ***"There ain't a soul in Westville, Jake, remembers what a tomat'r tastes like, and doesn't care."***

Most giants are greedy and selfish, as you know, and not one in the history of giants 'til now, by my reckoning, has had any manners. Gramps told me when the Beastly Foods and Other Products Factory opened, -that's where most folks in Westville work- an old-fashioned giant – like the ones in story books - broke in and ripped open every box of beast crisps that was supposed to be trucked to Eastville. Talk about greedy! That giant ate every single crisp in the place!

That caused lot of problems for Westville. Folks got really hungry and some were laid off work until the plant was up to full production again. Folks in Eastville weren't happy either because they were addicted to Westville's beast crisps, and not having them on a daily basis made them cranky.

Gramps still laughs about that. ***"No use telling 'em to change their diet, Jake,"*** he said. ***"Fact is, they wouldn't even change their brand. Eastville folks don't like the beast crisps they make themselves, and won't eat them, even though they're basically the same darn thing. Eastville folks prefer the color and shape of Westville's beast***

***crisps. If they didn't there wouldn't be as many stinky trucks racing back and forth between Westville and Eastville all day and all night."***

Of course, those trucks carry more than beast crisps. Every village in the valley makes beastly vegetable and fruit crisps, too. They used to eat real potatoes here, but not any more. Westville had spuds called Yukon Golds- and Eastville had "russets".

***"Craziest thing, Jake,"*** Gramps says, ***"Eastville folks hate russets, so they sent them to Westville. Westville folks, on t'her hand, wouldn't eat a Yukon gold potat'r if you paid 'em."***

It was the same with the fruit. For example, Westville grew King apples and trucked them off to Eastville, and Eastville sold red delicious apples to Westville. Then the potatoes started to rot in the ground, and the apples shriveled up on the trees. People everywhere started to panic.

***"I guess you could say, Jake,"*** Gramps said, ***"the factories saved their bacon. Some clever fella figured out how to turn blotchy potat'rs into crisps. Eastville folks just can't get enough of the ones with ridges. Westville folks won't eat anything that doesn't have ruffles."***

Naturally, the dried up fruit was made into beastly fruit crisps. But, not all of it. In Westville, some became Loopy Fruit Cereal, and Slithery Fruit Gummy Beasts. Eastville folks love those beastly things just as much as Westville folks crave Eastville's Flying Fruit Gummy Beasts, and Triangular Fruit Cereal.

I should tell you one last thing about that giant that broke in to the Westville Beastly Foods and Other Products Factory. Fortunately, it wasn't a big giant. Not like the one we've got now. We just call the new one, 'GIANT'. He's not just big... he's a GIANT WITH TWO HEADS!. Folks have given both of those heads names. The first head is Peak, and the second is called Climo. Now, it wouldn't be polite, or correct to speak of GIANT as Peak, or Climo. So, everybody calls him plain old, GIANT.

Gramps says GIANT wasn't always a big problem for the valley. He might steal a beast or two, now and then, and maybe some tomatoes and carrots to make a stew. That would annoy the villagers, but the giant wasn't doing this every day, and since everybody had plenty of beasts, nobody made a fuss about losing one or two.

*“That was when GIANT was quite small, Jake,” Gramps says. “The real problems started when he suddenly got too big for his britches. It was then that he became known officially, as GIANT.”*

Gramps says folks started to see the change just about the time all the vegetables began to shrivel up, and the Beastly Foods and Other Product Factories were built. Soon, GIANT was so big he didn't care who saw him. All he cared about was satisfying his appetite. That's what he tried to do most of the time. But, it didn't work. GIANT'S stomach was a bottomless pit, Gramps says, and filling it occupied most of his days and nights. Gramps says GIANT just couldn't eat enough, even though he raced up and down the valley, cleaning out all the beastly factories, on a regular basis, and stomped through every village gobbling up anything he could find.

That's not all he did. Once, I heard a woman in Eastville say she watched GIANT rip every blanket, sheet and towel off her clothesline. She figured he needed to piece together some bigger clothes after she watched him “pop the buttons off his overalls.” One fellow Gramps talked to said he saw GIANT drop two big beasts into Peak's mouth once – and watched smoke pour out of Climo's as Peak chewed. **“It was just as thick as the smoke that spews from all the Beastly Foods and Other Products Factories combined,”** that fellow told Gramps. He didn't hang around after that because GIANT picked up two huge rocks, ground them together, and bellowed, **“I'LL MAKE FLOUR OUT OF YOU FOR MY BREAD!”**

After that story got around, people hid in their cellars whenever they heard GIANT coming. The ground shakes like an earthquake, you know, and when it stops you see footprints big as fish ponds fill with water as dirty as the waste that comes out of the Beastly Foods and Other Products Factory at night. Gramps says that's the stuff that killed the fish in the brook behind the factory, and might be what causes the boils and bumps on people's heads around here.

Anyhow, all that's left when the dust settles after GIANT leaves, is the stink of Climo's acidic breath, which smells just about the same as the factory smoke. If you live in the village it's almost impossible to breathe these days because of the stinky air. Most of the trees around hereabouts are dead because of it, according to Gramps.

That's why me and Gramps don't do down there very often. Why would we? We don't eat Factory Crisps. We have a well that gives us clean water, a little stream in back that still has fish in it, and a vegetable garden full of tomatoes, and carrots and every other kind of vegetable you can think of. Just name one, we've got it. It's humungous, and everything in it is 100 percent natural, pesticide free, and delicious.

About the 'delicious' part, it's not just me saying that and I can prove it. What if you gave someone who had never eaten a fresh vegetable a big, juicy red tomato, cucumber, and carrot. What would happen when they ate them? Well, that's exactly what Gramps and me found out one day. We took those exact vegetables up into the hills where Giant lives, and waited for him to show up. This was scary. I nearly shook my boots off when GIANT started to grind up two huge boulders, and bellow, "**I'M GOING TO...**"

Gramps wasn't afraid, though. He waved his hands and shouted back, "***We don't mean you any harm, GIANT. We just came to give you... a present.***"

I'll never forget the surprised look on Climo's face. He looked at Peak and said, "They want to give us a present, Peak," as if he never got one in his life, even at Christmas. Just then, I handed him a big, plump tomato. Right away, Climo popped it into Peak's mouth. A second later, teardrops formed in Peak's eyes, and then more of them in Climo's. One of those teardrops splashed down near Gramps and me, and darn near drowned us both.

What did it all mean? We knew the answer right away. GIANT just could not believe how good that tomato tasted, and was overjoyed to learn that some food still had flavor. The same thing happened with the cucumbers, and again, with the carrots. When we left Misty Mountain, Peak smiled, and Climo whispered oh, so gently, "Thank you, friends... for everything." I almost started to cry myself, especially when Climo's face brushed my own, but his breath smelled as sweet as mountain flowers. It was all because of those wonderful vegetables in his tummy, instead of those beastly foods he'd been eating for so long.

That's when Gramps and me knew what we had to do. There wasn't a minute to lose. We made our garden a lot bigger, big enough for a hundred of Gramps and me.

If GIANT ever came to our house looking for something to eat, -and we knew he would after tasting that tomato - he 'd see a big, brightly painted sign that read, "**THESE VEGETABLES ARE FOR THE GIANT**", and a little sign in another part of the garden that says, "**Jake and Grampa's Vegetables-thanks for your cooperation.**"

And when our new spring and summer vegetables were ready to be enjoyed, guess who showed up? Peak and Climo, of course. We had an old bathtub in the back yard that we didn't use much any more. GIANT built a big fire pit and balanced it on a couple of rocks in the middle. Then he filled this make-shift stew pot with vegetables and made a beastless stew. GIANT said he never enjoyed such a meal in his life. He ate the whole stew, you know – least ways, Peak ate it, but Climo kept licking his lips the whole time. It sure smelled good. Gramps and me would have liked a little bowl too, but you know giants. I guess, even those you get to know a bit can be stingy when it comes to food. Anyhow, when GIANT was satisfied he layed down on the ground and started snoring. I don't know what folks thought about that. It wasn't quite as loud as an earthquake, but it was close.

Giant came back to visit Gramps and me after that and have a meal, of course. It seems like once you've had real food you never want anything else, and this was the only restaurant in town, so to speak. After a while, Gramps and me even got a little bowl of stew ourselves. I'm sure it's because GIANT'S appetite just wasn't what it once was. In fact, it seemed manageable. You see, GIANT had actually grown smaller over time, and the color had come back into his cheeks, all of them.

Of course, no one in Westville had any idea these changes were happening and I'm sure when they heard footsteps walking past the village – pretty heavy still - they hid in their basements and prayed there'd be something left of the Westville Beastly Foods and Other Products Factory when they faded.

After about our fourth visit from Peak and Climo, Gramps and me were pretty comfortable having them around. GIANT could tell a pretty good story when he loosened up a bit. We even had a few laughs. Know any giant jokes? Here's one: what do you call a giant with two heads? Give up? Sir!

We relaxed, too. We knew if Giant was eating most of his meals at our house, he wouldn't be raiding villages in the valley as much, maybe not at all, some day.

We hoped the road he was on now would become permanent so that would happen. I told Gramps I didn't know why it all didn't happen sooner.

Gramps said it was because GIANT didn't know any better when he was at his worst, but he was willing to change if someone showed him the way. Gramps had his own way of saying that. He said, "***Jake, Peak and Climo never wanted to be big and mean as they were. It scared them as much as you and me, but they didn't know what to do about it. They were sort of like the fella who doesn't know the way forward, and can't see the way back...stuck in the middle between hot and buzzard.***" I'm not sure what that means exactly, but it sounds about right.

Anyhow, how to unstuck Peak and Climo seemed to be the big question at that point. So, after giving it a lot of thought, Gramps and me put something together that we hoped would make life better for GIANT, who isn't really such a bad guy. With any luck it will help all the folks in the valley as well. We set this new present of ours in a bag which we handed to our two-headed friend after his last visit. "***This is for you,***" Gramps said. "***We hope you know what to do with it.***"

A tear ran down all their cheeks. "Thank you, our wonderful friends," said Peak. "You'll never know what you've done for us," said Climo. But, I think we do. Maybe you do, too.

The end, or should I say, the beginning?