

The Iron Giant

By Ted Hughes

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The late Ted Hughes, former poet laureate of England, wrote this modern fairy tale in 1968 (which went on to inspire the popular 1999 Warner Brothers animated feature). This illustrated edition, featuring the complete text, special effects such as foldouts and die-cuts, and striking full-color artwork on every page, offers the perfect family read-aloud.

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Editorial Review

Review
"**The Iron Giant** is a story so gripping that when you begin to read it aloud, everyone stops to listen, young children and old people alike. And once you know it, you never forget it. A classic is something utterly strange and original, and yet as deeply familiar and necessary as your own hands. **The Iron Giant** is like no other story in the world, and thirty years after its first publication, we need it as much as ever." -- Philip Pullman, author of **The Golden Compass** and **The Subtle Knife**

"A wonderfully inventive story with the vivid language and startling images of the poet. It has music, momentum, and magic. What else can you ask for?" -- Norton Juster, author of **The Phantom Tollbooth**

"High-spirited and entertaining... **The Iron Giant** is a tall-tale hero in a parable for today." -- *The Horn Book*

"One of the greatest of modern fairy tales." -- *The Observer* (England)

About the Author
TED HUGHES (1930-1998) was an eminent English poet who was named poet laureate in 1985. He was married to Sylvia Plath.

LAURA CARLIN is a graduate of the Royal College of Art in London. Her work has appeared in publications such as The Guardian and Vogue, and has garnered numerous accolades and honors including the Quentin Blake Award for illustration two years running. She teaches part-time at several universities and is currently involved in setting up London's first-ever illustration gallery.

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Chapter 2

The Return of the Iron Giant

One evening a farmer's son, a boy called Hogarth, was fishing in a stream that ran down to the sea. It was growing too dark to fish, his hook kept getting caught in weeds and bushes. So he stopped fishing and came up from the stream and stood listening to the owls in the wood further up the valley, and to the sea behind him. Hush, said the sea. And again, Hush. Hush. Hush.

Suddenly he felt a strange feeling. He felt he was being watched. He felt afraid. He turned and looked up the steep field to the top of the high cliff. Behind that skyline was the sheer rocky cliff and the sea. And on that skyline, just above the edge of it, in the dusk, were two green lights. What were two green lights doing at the top of the cliff?

Then, as Hogarth watched, a huge dark figure climbed up over the cliff top. The two lights rose into the sky. They were the giant figure's eyes. A giant black figure, taller than a house, black and towering in the twilight, with green headlight eyes. The Iron Giant! There he stood on the cliff top, looking inland. Hogarth began to run. He ran and ran. Home. Home. The Iron Giant had come back.

So he got home at last and, gasping for breath, he told his dad. An Iron Giant! An Iron Man! A giant!

His father frowned. His mother grew pale. His little sister began to cry.

His father took down his double-barreled gun. He believed his son. He went out. He locked the door. He got in his car. He drove to the next farm.

But that farmer laughed. He was a fat, red man, with a fat, red-mouthed laugh. When he stopped laughing, his eyes were red too. An Iron Giant? Nonsense, he said.

So Hogarth's father got back in his car. Now it was dark and it had begun to rain. He drove to the next farm.

That farmer frowned. He believed. Tomorrow, he said, we must see what he is, this iron giant. His feet will have left tracks in the earth.

So Hogarth's father again got back into his car. But as he turned the car in the yard, he saw a strange thing in the headlights. Half a tractor lay there, just half, chopped clean off, the other half missing. He got out of his car and the other farmer came to look too. The tractor had been bitten off -- there were big teeth marks in the steel.

No explanation! The two men looked at each other. They were puzzled and afraid. What could have bitten the tractor in two? There, in the yard, in the rain, in the night, while they had been talking inside the house.

The farmer ran in and bolted his door.

Hogarth's father jumped into his car and drove off into the night and the rain as fast as he could, homeward.

The rain poured down. Hogarth's father drove hard. The headlights lit up the road and bushes.

Suddenly -- two headlights in a tall treetop at the roadside ahead. Headlights in a treetop? How?

Hogarth's father slowed, peering up to see what the lights might be, up there in the treetop.

As he slowed, a giant iron foot came down in the middle of the road, a foot as big as a single bed. And the headlights came down closer. And a giant hand reached down toward the windshield.

The Iron Giant!

Hogarth's father put on speed, he aimed his car at the foot.

Crash! He knocked the foot out of the way.

He drove on, faster and faster. And behind him, on the road, a clanging clattering boom went up, as if an iron skyscraper had collapsed. The iron giant, with his foot knocked from under him, had toppled over.

And so Hogarth's father got home safely.

BUT

Next morning all the farmers were shouting with anger. Where were their tractors? Their earth-diggers? Their plows? Their harrows? From every farm in the region, all the steel and iron farm machinery had gone.

Where to? Who had stolen it all?

There was a clue. Here and there lay half a wheel, or half an axle, or half a mudguard, carved with giant toothmarks where it had been bitten off. How had it been bitten off? *Steel* bitten off?

What had happened?

There was another clue.

From farm to farm, over the soft soil of the fields, went giant footprints, each one the size of a single bed.

The farmers, in a frightened, silent, amazed crowd, followed the footprints. And at every farm the footprints visited, all the metal machinery had disappeared.

Finally, the footprints led back up to the top of the cliff, where the little boy had seen the Iron Giant appear the night before, when he was fishing. The footprints led right to the cliff top.

And all the way down the cliff were torn marks on the rocks, where a huge iron body had slid down. Below, the tide was in. The gray, empty, moving tide. The Iron Giant had gone back into the sea.

SO

The furious farmers began to shout. The Iron Giant had stolen all their machinery. Had he eaten it? Anyway, he had taken it. It had gone. So what if he came again? What would he take next time? Cows? Houses? People?

They would have to do something.

They couldn't call in the police or the army, because nobody would believe them about this Iron Monster. They would have to do something for themselves.

So, what did they do?

At the bottom of the hill, below where the Iron Giant had come over the high cliff, they dug a deep, enormous hole. A hole wider than a house, and as deep as three trees one on top of the other. It was a colossal hole. A stupendous hole! And the sides of it were sheer as walls.

They pushed all the earth off to one side. They covered the hole with branches and the branches were covered with straw and the straw with soil, so when they finished the hole looked like a freshly plowed field.

Now, on the side of the hole opposite the slope up to the top of the cliff, they put an old rusty truck. That was the bait. Now they reckoned the Iron Giant would come over the top of the cliff out of the sea, and he'd see the old truck which was painted red, and he'd come down to get it to chew it up and eat it. But on his way to the truck he'd be crossing the hole, and the moment he stepped with his great weight onto that soil held up only with straw and branches, he would crash through into the hole and would never get out. They'd find him there in the hole. Then they'd bring the few bulldozers and earth-movers that he hadn't already eaten, and they'd push the pile of earth in on top of him, and bury him forever in the hole. They were certain now that they'd get him.

Next morning, in great excitement, all the farmers gathered together to go along to examine their trap. They came carefully closer, expecting to see hands tearing at the edge of the pit. They came carefully closer.

The red truck stood just as they had left it. The soil lay just as they had left it, undisturbed. Everything was just as they had left it. The Iron Giant had not come.

Nor did he come that day.

Next morning, all the farmers came again. Still, everything lay just as they had left it.
And so it went on, day after day. Still the Iron Giant never came.

Now the farmers began to wonder if he would ever come again. They began to wonder if he had ever come at all. They began to make up explanations of what had happened to their machinery. Nobody likes to believe in an Iron Monster that eats tractors and cars.

Soon, the farmer who owned the red truck they were using as bait decided that he needed it, and he took it away. So there lay the beautiful deep trap, without any bait. Grass began to grow on the loose soil.

The farmers talked of filling the hole in. After all, you can't leave a giant pit like that, somebody might fall in. Some stranger coming along might just walk over it and fall in.
But they didn't want to fill it in. It had been such hard work digging it. Besides they all had a sneaking fear that the Iron Giant might come again, and the hole was their only weapon against him.

At last they put up a little notice: DANGER: KEEP OFF, to warn people away, and they left it at that.

Now the little boy Hogarth had an idea. He thought he could use that hole to trap a fox. He found a dead hen one day, and threw it out on the loose soil over the trap. Then toward evening, he climbed a tree nearby and waited. A long time he waited. A star came out. He could hear the sea.

Then -- there, standing at the edge of the hole, was a fox. A big, red fox, looking toward the dead hen. Hogarth stopped breathing. And the fox stood without moving -- sniff, sniff, sniff, out toward the hen. But he did not step out onto the trap. Slowly, he walked around the wide patch of raw soil till he got back to where he'd started, sniffing all the time out toward the bird. But he did not step out onto the trap. Was he too smart to walk out there where it was not safe?

But at that moment he stopped sniffing. He turned his head and looked toward the top of the cliff. Hogarth, wondering what the fox had seen, looked toward the top of the cliff.

There, enormous in the blue evening sky, stood the Iron Giant, on the brink of the cliff, gazing inland.

In a moment, the fox had vanished.

Now what?

Hogarth carefully, quietly, hardly breathing, climbed slowly down the tree. He must get home and tell his father. But at the bottom of the tree he stopped. He could no longer see the Iron Giant against the twilight sky. Had he gone back over the cliff into the sea? Or was he coming down the hill, in the darkness under that high skyline, toward Hogarth and the farms?

Then Hogarth understood what was happening. He could hear a strange tearing and creaking sound. The Iron Giant was pulling up the barbed wire fence that led down the hill. And soon Hogarth could see him, as he came nearer, tearing the wire from the fence posts, rolling it up like spaghetti and eating it. The Iron Giant was eating the barbed fencing wire.

But if he went along the fence, eating as he moved, he wouldn't come anywhere near the trap, which was out in the middle of the field. He could spend the whole night wandering about the countryside along the fences, rolling up the wire and eating it, and never would any fence bring him near the trap.

But Hogarth had an idea. In his pocket, among other things, he had a long nail and a knife. He took these out. Did he dare? His idea frightened him. In the silent dusk, he tapped the nail and the knife blade together.

Clink, Clink, Clink!

At the sound of the metal, the Iron Giant's hands became still. After a few seconds, he slowly turned his head and the headlight eyes shone toward Hogarth.

Again, Clink, Clink, Clink! went the nail on the knife.

Slowly, the Iron Giant took three strides toward Hogarth, and again stopped. It was now quite dark. The headlights shone red. Hogarth pressed close to the tree trunk. Between him and the Iron Giant lay the wide lid of the trap.

Clink, Clink, Clink! again he tapped the nail on the knife.

And now the Iron Giant was coming. Hogarth could feel the earth shaking under the weight of his footsteps. Was it too late to run? Hogarth stared at the Iron Giant, looming, searching toward him for the taste of the metal that had made that inviting sound.

Clink, Clink, Clink! went the nail on the knife. And

CRASSSHHH!

The Iron Giant vanished.

He was in the pit. The Iron Giant had fallen into the pit. Hogarth went close. The earth was shaking as the Iron Giant struggled underground. Hogarth peered over the torn edge of the great pit. Far below, two deep red headlights glared up at him from the pitch blackness. He could hear the Iron Giant's insides grinding down there and it sounded like a big truck grinding its gears on a steep hill. Hogarth set off. He ran, he ran, home -- home with the great news. And as he passed the cottages on the way, and as he turned down the lane toward his father's farm, he was shouting, "The Iron Giant's in the trap!" and "We've caught the Iron Giant."

When the farmers saw the Iron Giant wallowing in their deep pit, they sent up a great cheer. He glared up toward them, his eyes burned from red to purple, from purple to white, from white to fiery whirling black and red, and the cogs inside him ground and screeched, but he could not climb out of the steep-sided pit.

Then under the beams of car headlights, the farmers brought bulldozers and earth-pushers, and they began to push in on top of the struggling Iron Giant all the earth they had dug when they first made the pit and that had been piled off to one side.

The Iron Giant roared again as the earth began to fall on him. But soon he roared no more. Soon the pit was full of earth. Soon the Iron Giant was buried silent, packed down under all the soil, while the farmers piled the earth over him in a mound and in a hill. They went to and fro over the mound on their new tractors, which they'd bought since the Iron Giant ate their old ones, and they packed the earth down hard. Then they all went home talking cheerfully. They were sure they had seen the last of the Iron Giant.

Only Hogarth felt suddenly sorry. He felt guilty. It was he, after all, who had lured the Iron Giant into the pit.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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