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PUCK OF POOK 'S HILL

《普克山的派克》

北京师联教育科学研究所 编



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Puck of Pook's Hill

by Rudyard Kipling

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WELAND'S SWORD

Puck's Song

See you the dimpled track that runs,
All hollow through the wheat?
O that was where they hauled the guns
That smote King Philip's fleet!

See you our little mill that clacks,
So busy by the brook?
She has ground her corn and paid her tax
Ever since Domesday Book.

See you our stilly woods of oak,
And the dread ditch beside?
O that was where the Saxons broke,
On the day that Harold died!

See you the windy levels spread
About the gates of Rye?
O that was where the Northmen fled,
When Alfred's ships came by!

See you our pastures wide and lone,
Where the red oxen browse?

O there was a City thronged and known,

Ere London boasted a house!

And see you, after rain, the trace

Of mound and ditch and wall?

O that was a Legion's camping-place,

When Caesar sailed from Gaul!

And see you marks that show and fade,

Like shadows on the Downs?

O they are the lines the Flint Men made,

To guard their wondrous towns!

Trackway and Camp and City lost,

Salt Marsh where now is corn;

Old Wars, old Peace, old Arts that cease,

And so was England born!

She is not any common Earth,

Water or Wood or Air,

But Merlin's Isle of Gramarye,

Where you and I will fare.

The children were at the Theatre, acting to Three Cows as much as they could remember of Midsummer Night's Dream. Their father had made them a small play out of the big Shakespeare one, and they had rehearsed it with him and with their mother till they could say it by heart. They began when Nick Bottom the weaver comes out of the bushes with a donkey's head on his shoulders, and finds Titania, Queen of the Fairies, asleep. Then they skipped to the part where Bottom asks three little fairies to scratch his head and bring him honey, and they ended where he falls asleep in Titania's arms. Dan was Puck and Nick Bottom, as well as all three Fairies. He wore a pointy-cloth cap for Puck, and a paper donkey's head out of a Christmas cracker - but it tore if you were not careful - for Bottom. Una was Titania, with a wreath of columbines and a foxglove wand.

The Theatre lay in a meadow called the Long Slip. A little mill-stream, carrying water to a mill two or three fields away, bent round one corner of it, and in the middle of the bend lay a large old Fairy Ring of darkened

grass, which was the stage. The millstream banks, overgrown with willow, hazel, and guelder-rose, made convenient places to wait in till your turn came; and a grown-up who had seen it said that Shakespeare himself could not have imagined a more suitable setting for his play. They were not, of course, allowed to act on Midsummer Night itself, but they went down after tea on Midsummer Eve, when the shadows were growing, and they took their supper - hard-boiled eggs, Bath Oliver biscuits, and salt in an envelope - with them. Three Cows had been milked and were grazing steadily with a tearing noise that one could hear all down the meadow; and the noise of the Mill at work sounded like bare feet running on hard ground. A cuckoo sat on a gate-post singing his broken June tune, 'cuckoo-cuck', while a busy kingfisher crossed from the mill-stream, to the brook which ran on the other side of the meadow. Everything else was a sort of thick, sleepy stillness smelling of meadow-sweet and dry grass.

Their play went beautifully. Dan remembered all his parts - Puck, Bottom, and the three Fairies - and Una never forgot a word of Titania - not even the difficult

piece where she tells the Fairies how to feed Bottom with 'apricocks, green figs, and dewberries', and all the lines end in 'ies'. They were both so pleased that they acted it three times over from beginning to end before they sat down in the unthistly centre of the Ring to eat eggs and Bath Olivers. This was when they heard a whistle among the alders on the bank, and they jumped.

The bushes parted. In the very spot where Dan had stood as Puck they saw a small, brown, broad-shouldered, pointy-eared person with a snub nose, slanting blue eyes, and a grin that ran right across his freckled face. He shaded his forehead as though he were watching Quince, Snout, Bottom, and the others rehearsing Pyramus and Thisbe, and, in a voice as deep as Three Cows asking to be milked, he began:

'What hempen homespuns have we swaggering here,
So near the cradle of the fairy Queen?'

He stopped, hollowed one hand round his ear, and, with a wicked twinkle in his eye, went on:

'What, a play toward? I'll be an auditor;

An actor, too, perhaps, if I see cause.'

The children looked and gasped. The small thing - he was no taller than Dan's shoulder - stepped quietly into the Ring.

'I'm rather out of practice,' said he; 'but that's the way my part ought to be played.'

Still the children stared at him - from his dark-blue cap, like a big columbine flower, to his bare, hairy feet. At last he laughed.

'Please don't look like that. It isn't my fault. What else could you expect?' he said.

'We didn't expect any one,' Dan answered slowly.

'This is our field.'

'Is it?' said their visitor, sitting down. 'Then what on Human Earth made you act Midsummer Night's Dream three times over, on Midsummer Eve, in the middle of a Ring, and under - right under one of my oldest hills in Old England? Pook's Hill - Puck's Hill - Puck's Hill - Pook's

Hill! It's as plain as the nose on my face.'

He pointed to the bare, fern-covered slope of Pook's Hill that runs up from the far side of the mill-stream to a dark wood. Beyond that wood the ground rises and rises for five hundred feet, till at last you climb out on the bare top of Beacon Hill, to look over the Pevensey Levels and the Channel and half the naked South Downs.

'By Oak, Ash, and Thorn!' he cried, still laughing. 'If this had happened a few hundred years ago you'd have had all the People of the Hills out like bees in June!'

'We didn't know it was wrong,' said Dan.

'Wrong!' The little fellow shook with laughter. 'Indeed, it isn't wrong. You've done something that Kings and Knights and Scholars in old days would have given their crowns and spurs and books to find out. If Merlin himself had helped you, you couldn't have managed better! You've broken the Hills - you've broken the Hills! It hasn't happened in a thousand years.'

'We - we didn't mean to,' said Una.

'Of course you didn't! That's just why you did it.

Unluckily the Hills are empty now, and all the People of the Hills are gone. I'm the only one left. I'm Puck, the oldest Old Thing in England, very much at your service if - if you care to have anything to do with me. If you don't, of course you've only to say so, and I'll go.'

He looked at the children, and the children looked at him for quite half a minute. His eyes did not twinkle any more. They were very kind, and there was the beginning of a good smile on his lips.

Una put out her hand. 'Don't go,' she said. 'We like you.'

'Have a Bath Oliver,' said Dan, and he passed over the squashy envelope with the eggs.

'By Oak, Ash and Thorn,' cried Puck, taking off his blue cap, 'I like you too. Sprinkle a plenty salt on the biscuit, Dan, and I'll eat it with you. That'll show you the sort of person I am. Some of us' - he went on, with his mouth full - 'couldn't abide Salt, or Horse-shoes over a

door, or Mountain-ash berries, or Running Water, or
Cold Iron, or the sound of Church Bells. But I'm Puck!

He brushed the crumbs carefully from his doublet and
shook hands.

'We always said, Dan and I,' Una stammered, 'that if it
ever happened we'd know ex-actly what to do; but - but
now it seems all different somehow.'

'She means meeting a fairy,'said Dan. 'I never believed
in 'em - not after I was six, anyhow.'

'I did,' said Una. 'At least, I sort of half believed till we
learned "Farewell, Rewards". Do you know "Farewell,
Rewards and Fairies"?''

'Do you mean this?' said Puck. He threw his big head
back and began at the second line:

'Good housewives now may say,

For now foul sluts in dairies

Do fare as well as they;

And though they sweep their hearths no less

('Join in, Una!')

Than maids were wont to do,

Yet who of late for cleanliness

Finds sixpence in her shoe?

The echoes flapped all along the flat meadow.

'Of course I know it,' he said.

'And then there's the verse about the rings,' said Dan.

'When I was little it always made me feel unhappy in my
inside.'

""Witness those rings and roundelays", do you mean?"

boomed Puck, with a voice like a great church organ.

'Of theirs which yet remain,

Were footed in Queen Mary's days

On many a grassy plain,

But since of late Elizabeth,

And, later, James came in,

Are never seen on any heath

As when the time hath been.

'It's some time since I heard that song, but there's no good beating about the bush: it's true. The People of the Hills have all left. I saw them come into Old England and I saw them go. Giants, trolls, kelpies, brownies, goblins, imps; wood, tree, mound, and water spirits; heath-people, hill-watchers, treasure-guards, good people, little people, pishogues, leprechauns, night-riders, pixies, nixies, gnomes, and the rest - gone, all gone! I came into England with Oak, Ash and Thorn, and when Oak, Ash and Thorn are gone I shall go too.'

Dan looked round the meadow - at Una's Oak by the lower gate; at the line of ash trees that overhang Otter Pool where the millstream spills over when the Mill does not need it, and at the gnarled old white-thorn where Three Cows scratched their necks.

'It's all right,' he said; and added, 'I'm planting a lot of acorns this autumn too.'

'Then aren't you most awfully old?' said Una.

'Not old - fairly long-lived, as folk say hereabouts. Let me see - my friends used to set my dish of cream for me o' nights when Stonehenge was new. Yes, before the Flint Men made the Dewpond under Chanctonbury Ring.'

Una clasped her hands, cried 'Oh!' and nodded her head.

'She's thought a plan,' Dan explained. 'She always does like that when she thinks a plan.'

'I was thinking - suppose we saved some of our porridge and put it in the attic for you? They'd notice if we left it in the nursery.'

'Schoolroom,' said Dan quickly, and Una flushed, because they had made a solemn treaty that summer not to call the schoolroom the nursery any more.

'Bless your heart o' gold!' said Puck. 'You'll make a fine considering wench some market-day. I really don't want you to put out a bowl for me; but if ever I need a bite, be sure I'll tell you.'

He stretched himself at length on the dry grass, and the children stretched out beside him, their bare legs waving happily in the air. They felt they could not be afraid of him any more than of their particular friend old Hobden the hedger. He did not bother them with grown-up questions, or laugh at the donkey's head, but lay and smiled to himself in the most sensible way.

'Have you a knife on you?' he said at last.

Dan handed over his big one-bladed outdoor knife, and Puck began to carve out a piece of turf from the centre of the Ring.

'What's that for - Magic?' said Una, as he pressed up the square of chocolate loam that cut like so much cheese.

'One of my little magics,' he answered, and cut another. 'You see, I can't let you into the Hills because the People of the Hills have gone; but if you care to take seisin from me, I may be able to show you something out of the common here on Human Earth. You certainly deserve it.'