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# Rewards and Fairies

by Rudyard Kipling

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## A Charm

Take of English earth as much

As either hand may rightly clutch.

In the taking of it breathe

Prayer for all who lie beneath -

Not the great nor well-bespoke,

But the mere uncounted folk

Of whose life and death is none

Report or lamentation.

Lay that earth upon thy heart,

And thy sickness shall depart!

It shall sweeten and make whole

Fevered breath and festered soul;

It shall mightily restrain

Over-busy hand and brain;

it shall ease thy mortal strife

'Gainst the immortal woe of life,

Till thyself restored shall prove

By what grace the Heavens do move.

Take of English flowers these -

Spring's full-faced primroses,

Summer's wild wide-hearted rose,

Autumn's wall-flower of the close,

And, thy darkness to illumine,

Winter's bee-thronged ivy-bloom.

Seek and serve them where they bide

From Candlemas to Christmas-tide,

For these simples used aright

Shall restore a failing sight.

These shall cleanse and purify

Webbed and inward-turning eye;

These shall show thee treasure hid,

Thy familiar fields amid,

At thy threshold, on thy hearth,

Or about thy daily path;

And reveal (which is thy need)

Every man a King indeed!

## Introduction

Once upon a time, Dan and Una, brother and sister, living in the English country, had the good fortune to meet with Puck, alias Robin Goodfellow, alias Nick o' Lincoln, alias Lob-lie-by-the-Fire, the last survivor in England of those whom mortals call Fairies. Their proper name, of course, is 'The People of the Hills'. This Puck, by means of the magic of Oak, Ash, and Thorn, gave the children power

To see what they should see and hear what they should hear,  
Though it should have happened three thousand year.

The result was that from time to time, and in different places on the farm and in the fields and in the country about, they saw and talked to some rather interesting people. One of these, for instance, was a Knight of the Norman Conquest, another a young Centurion of a Roman Legion stationed in England, another a builder and decorator of King Henry VII's time; and so on and so forth; as I have tried to explain in a book called PUCK OF POOK'S HILL.

A year or so later, the children met Puck once more, and

though they were then older and wiser, and wore boots regularly instead of going barefooted when they got the chance, Puck was as kind to them as ever, and introduced them to more people of the old days.

He was careful, of course, to take away their memory of their walks and conversations afterwards, but otherwise he did not interfere; and Dan and Una would find the strangest sort of persons in their gardens or woods.

In the stories that follow I am trying to tell something about those people.

## COLD IRON

When Dan and Una had arranged to go out before breakfast, they did not remember that it was Midsummer Morning. They only wanted to see the otter which, old Hobden said, had been fishing their brook for weeks; and early morning was the time to surprise

him. As they tiptoed out of the house into the wonderful stillness, the church clock struck five. Dan took a few steps across the dew-blobbed lawn, and looked at his black footprints.

'I think we ought to be kind to our poor boots,' he said. 'They'll get horrid wet.'

it was their first summer in boots, and they hated them, so they took them off, and slung them round their necks, and paddled joyfully over the dripping turf where the shadows lay the wrong way, like evening in the East.

The sun was well up and warm, but by the brook the last of the night mist still fumed off the water. They picked up the chain of otter's footprints on the mud, and followed it from the bank, between the weeds and the drenched mowing, while the birds shouted with surprise. Then the track left the brook and became a smear, as though a log had been dragged along.

They traced it into Three Cows meadow, over the mill-sluice to the Forge, round Hobden's garden, and then up the slope till it ran out on the short turf and fern of Pook's Hill, and they heard the cock-pheasants crowing in the woods behind them.

'No use!' said Dan, questing like a puzzled hound. 'The dew's drying off, and old Hobden says otters'll travel for miles.'

'I'm sure we've travelled miles.' Una fanned herself with her hat. 'How still it is! It's going to be a regular roaster.' She looked down the valley, where no chimney yet smoked.

'Hobden's up!' Dan pointed to the open door of the Forge cottage. 'What d'you suppose he has for breakfast?'

'One of them. He says they eat good all times of the year,' Una jerked her head at some stately pheasants going down to the brook for a drink.

A few steps farther on a fox broke almost under their bare feet, yapped, and trotted off.

'Ah, Mus' Reynolds -Mus' Reynolds'-Dan was quoting from old Hobden, - 'if I knowed all you knowed, I'd know something.' [See 'The Winged Hats' in PUCK OF POOK'S HILL.]

I say,' - Una lowered her voice -'you know that funny feeling of things having happened before. I felt it when you said "Mus' Reynolds."'

'So did I,' Dan began. 'What is it?'

They faced each other, stammering with excitement.

'Wait a shake! I'll remember in a minute. Wasn't it something about a fox - last year? Oh, I nearly had it then!' Dan cried.

'Be quiet!' said Una, prancing excitedly. 'There was something happened before we met the fox last year. Hills! Broken Hills - the play at the theatre - see what you see -'

'I remember now,' Dan shouted. 'It's as plain as the nose on your face - Pook's Hill - Puck's Hill - Puck!'

'I remember, too,' said Una. 'And it's Midsummer Day again!'

The young fern on a knoll rustled, and Puck walked out, chewing a green-topped rush.

'Good Midsummer Morning to you! Here's a happy meeting,' said he. They shook hands all round, and asked questions.

'You've wintered well,' he said after a while, and looked them up and down. 'Nothing much wrong with you, seemingly.'

'They've put us into boots,' said Una. 'Look at my feet - they're all pale white, and my toes are squidged together awfully.'

'Yes - boots make a difference.' Puck wriggled his brown, square, hairy foot, and cropped a dandelion flower between the big toe and the next.

'I could do that - last year,' Dan said dismally, as he tried and failed. 'And boots simply ruin one's climbing.'

'There must be some advantage to them, I suppose,' said Puck, or folk wouldn't wear them. Shall we come this way?'

They sauntered along side by side till they reached the gate at the far end of the hillside. Here they halted just like cattle, and let the sun warm their backs while they listened to the flies in the wood.

'Little Lindens is awake,' said Una, as she hung with her chin on the top rail. 'See the chimney smoke?'

'Today's Thursday, isn't it?' Puck turned to look at the old pink farmhouse across the little valley. 'Mrs Vincey's baking day. Bread should rise well this weather.' He yawned, and that set

them both yawning.

The bracken about rustled and ticked and shook in every direction.

They felt that little crowds were stealing past.

'Doesn't that sound like - er - the People of the Hills?' said Una.

'It's the birds and wild things drawing up to the woods before people get about,' said Puck, as though he were Ridley the keeper.

'Oh, we know that. I only said it sounded like.'

'As I remember 'em, the People of the Hills used to make more noise. They'd settle down for the day rather like small birds settling down for the night. But that was in the days when they carried the high hand. Oh, me! The deeds that I've had act and part in, you'd scarcely believe!'

'I like that!' said Dan. 'After all you told us last year, too!'

'Only, the minute you went away, you made us forget everything,' said Una.

Puck laughed and shook his head. 'I shall this year, too. I've given you seizin of Old England, and I've taken away your Doubt and Fear, but your memory and remembrance between whiles I'll keep where old Billy Trott kept his night-lines - and that's where he could draw 'em up and hide 'em at need. Does that suit?' He twinkled mischievously.

'It's got to suit,' said Una, and laughed. 'We Can't magic back at you.' She folded her arms and leaned against the gate. 'Suppose, now, you wanted to magic me into something - an otter? Could you?'

'Not with those boots round your neck.'

'I'll take them off.' She threw them on the turf. Dan's followed immediately. 'Now!' she said.

'Less than ever now you've trusted me. Where there's true faith, there's no call for magic.' Puck's slow smile broadened all over his face.

'But what have boots to do with it?' said Una, perching on the gate.

'There's Cold Iron in them,' said Puck, and settled beside her.

'Nails in the soles, I mean. It makes a difference.'

'How?'

'Can't you feel it does? You wouldn't like to go back to bare feet again, same as last year, would you? Not really?'

'No-o. I suppose I shouldn't - not for always. I'm growing up, you know,' said Una.

'But you told us last year, in the Long Slip - at the theatre - that you didn't mind Cold Iron,' said Dan.

'I don't; but folks in housen, as the People of the Hills call them, must be ruled by Cold Iron. Folk in housen are born on the near side of Cold Iron - there's iron 'in every man's house, isn't there?

They handle Cold Iron every day of their lives, and their fortune's made or spoilt by Cold Iron in some shape or other. That's how it goes with Flesh and Blood, and one can't prevent it.'

'I don't quite see. How do you mean?' said Dan.

'It would take me some time to tell you.'

'Oh, it's ever so long to breakfast,' said Dan. 'We looked in the

larder before we came out.' He unpocketed one big hunk of bread and Una another, which they shared with Puck.

'That's Little Lindens' baking,' he said, as his white teeth sunk in it. 'I know Mrs Vincey's hand.' He ate with a slow sideways thrust and grind, just like old Hobden, and, like Hobden, hardly dropped a crumb. The sun flashed on Little Lindens' windows, and the cloudless sky grew stiller and hotter in the valley.

'AH - Cold Iron,' he said at last to the impatient children. 'Folk in housen, as the People of the Hills say, grow careless about Cold Iron. They'll nail the Horseshoe over the front door, and forget to put it over the back. Then, some time or other, the People of the Hills slip in, find the cradle-babe in the corner, and -'

'Oh, I know. Steal it and leave a changeling,'Una cried.

'No,' said Puck firmly. 'All that talk of changelings is people's excuse for their own neglect. Never believe 'em. I'd whip 'em at the cart-tail through three parishes if I had my way.'

'But they don't do it now,' said Una.

'Whip, or neglect children? Umm! Some folks and some fields never alter. But the People of the Hills didn't work any changeling tricks. They'd tiptoe in and whisper and weave round the cradle-babe in the chimney-corner - a fag-end of a charm here, or half a spell there - like kettles singing; but when the babe's mind came to bud out afterwards, it would act differently from other people in its station. That's no advantage to man or maid. So I wouldn't allow it with my folks' babies here. I told Sir Huon so once.'

'Who was Sir Huon?' Dan asked, and Puck turned on him in quiet astonishment.

'Sir Huon of Bordeaux - he succeeded King Oberon. He had been a bold knight once, but he was lost on the road to Babylon, a long while back. Have you ever heard "How many miles to Babylon?"'

'Of course,' said Dan, flushing.

'Well, Sir Huon was young when that song was new. But about tricks on mortal babies. I said to Sir Huon in the fern here, on just such a morning as this: "If you crave to act and influence