RUDYARD KIPLING

Short Stories: 2

FRIENDLY BROOK
AND OTHER STORIES

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Selected by

Andrew Rutherford

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FRIENDLY BROOK AND OTHER STORIES

Rudyard Kipling, son of John Lockwood Kipling, the author of *Beast and Man in India,* was born in Bombay in 1865. He was educated at the United Services College, Westward Ho!, and was engaged in journalistic work in India from 1882 to 1889. His fame rests principally on his short stories, dealing with India, the sea, the jungle and its beasts, the army, the navy, and a multitude of other subjects. His verse, as varied in subject as his prose, also enjoyed great popularity. Among his more famous publications are *Plain Tales from The Hills* (1888), *Life's Handicap* (1891), *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1892), *The Jungle Book* (1894), *The Day's Work* (1898), *Kim* (1901), *Just So Stories* (1902), *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906), and *Rewards and Fairies* (1910). Kipling, who was awarded a Nobel Prize in 1907, died in 1936.

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Preface

THESE two volumes of short stories* are selected from the following five collections, which have been made available to Penguin Books by Macmillan and Co. Ltd: *Traffics and Discoveries* (1904), *Actions and Reactions* (1909), *A Diversity of Creatures* (1917), *Debits and Credits* (1926), and *Limits and Renewals* (1932). These comprise the best of Kipling's prose fiction after 1900, apart from *Kim* (1901) and the short stories collected in *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906) and *Rewards and Fairies* (1910).

Kipling's fiction is characteristically a rich blend of invention with experience, his own or others'; and his autobiography, *Something of Myself* (1937), suggests origins for many of these tales. 'A Sahibs' War' and 'The Captive' both derive from his first-hand knowledge of British and Boer practice in South Africa; 'Little Foxes' was based on an anecdote told him by an officer who had been Master of the original 'Gihon Hunt'; 'Regulus' draws on recollections of his own schooldays at Westward Ho!; a barmaid seen in Auckland, and a petty officer's remarks overheard in a train near Cape Town, were the starting points for 'Mrs Bathurst'; his interest in Freemasonry ('In the Interests of the Brethren') dates from his induction to the multi-racial, multi-religious Lodge at Lahore in 1885; in a house at Torquay, formerly inhabited by three old maids, he and his wife had felt in 1896 'a growing depression which enveloped us both – a gathering blackness of mind and sorrow of the heart', which he attributed to the Spirit of the house itself, and recreated in the symptoms which afflict his characters in 'The House Surgeon'; while his experiences at Bateman's, their eventual home in Sussex, provided the technicalities of 'Below the Mill Dam' and the insights into rural life and character

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**A Sahibs' War and Other Stories* and *Friendly Brooke and Other Stories*.

which he drew on in stories like 'Friendly Brook', 'My Son's Wife', and 'An Habitation Enforced'.

Deeper emotional levels are suggested by Charles Carrington's official but less reticent biography, *Rudyard Kipling: His Life and Work* (1955). Behind the delicate pathos of 'They', for example, lies Kipling's grief at the death of his little daughter Josephine in 1899; and although 'Mary Postgate' was written before his only son was killed at Loos in 1915, our knowledge of his loss gives added poignancy to a story like 'The Gardener'. Such information, however, is not necessary for our understanding and enjoyment of the tales themselves; and further speculation would run counter to Kipling's own request (in 'The Appeal') that his art be judged impersonally, and his privacy respected posthumously as he made sure it was in his own lifetime:

If I have given you delight
By aught that I have done,
Let me lie quiet in that night
Which shall be yours anon:

And for the little, little, span
The dead are borne in mind,
Seek not to question other than
The books I leave behind.

This selection from five of the books he left behind presents the twentieth-century Kipling who developed from the more familiar prodigy of the eighties and nineties; and it illustrates the range, variety, and technical originality of his fiction of this period.* There are fewer tales of Empire than the popular stereotype of Kipling might lead readers to expect: as 'Little Foxes' demonstrates, he still held firmly the ideals and prejudices which had inspired much of his work in the previous two decades, but the general incompetence revealed by the Boer War diminished his confidence in Britain's ability to sustain her imperial role, while her very will to do so, or even to prepare to defend herself against hostile European powers, was being sapped, it seemed to him by decadence and political irresponsibility. Increasingly, therefore, he was preoccupied by the condition of England herself, as he rebuked her blindness, folly and complacency, and sought reassurance in groups, types, or individuals who might still redeem her backslidings. Simultaneously, he found himself involved in a fascinating process of discovery, for the countryside, its people and traditions, came as a revelation to him once he settled in Sussex: 'England,' he wrote to a friend in 1902, 'is the most wonderful foreign land I have ever been in.' Yet even while making it peculiarly his own, he was aware (as 'Below the Mill Dam' shows) of the baneful influence of inert tradition, and the need for technological advance. For socially parasitic intellectuals, especially those of 'the Immoderate Left', he felt the savage contempt expressed in 'My Son's Wife'; but his fable of decadence in 'The Mother Hive' goes beyond this sectional antagonism to diagnose moral-political sickness in a whole community, while the suspicion of democracy which he shared with so many major authors of the century is projected into an ambiguously Utopian future in 'As Easy as A.B.C.' Such public themes bulk large in Volume 1, as his preoccupation with the Great War does in Volume 2; but these coexist with more personal, more psychological, and more spiritual interests, especially in his later years. Individual human beings, their characters, their actions, their behaviour under stress, remain his main concern; and using a remarkable variety of settings and of *dramatis personae*, he offers stories on a characteristic range of themes – stories of revenge, seen sometimes as wild justice, sometimes as an almost pathological obsession; stories of forgiveness, human and divine; stories of the supernatural, to be taken now literally, now symbolically, but never trivially as mere spine-chilling entertainment; stories of hatred and cruelty, but stories also of compassion and of love; stories of work, of craftsmanship, of artistry; of comradeship and isolation; and stories of healing, sometimes physical, but more often moral, spiritual or psychological.

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*The poems which accompany the stories in these collections have not been included (though they are always thematically relevant), except in the case of 'MacDonough's Song', which is quoted and referred to in 'As Easy as A.B.C.', and must be regarded as an essential element of the story itself.

Technically, his fiction shows a comparable variety, but for modern readers the most interesting development is probably his evolution of that complex, closely organized, elliptical and symbolic mode of writing which ranks him as an unexpected contributor to 'modernism' and a major innovator in the art of the short story. This mode, with its obliquities and ironies, its multiple levels of meaning, and what have been described by Miss J. M. S. Tompkins as its 'complexities of substance and . . . of method', was first attempted in 'Mrs Bathurst' and 'They', but is to be found fully developed in his later stories, especially those dated from 1924 onwards in Volume 2 of this selection. Detailed discussion of this and other aspects of his artistry may be found in such studies as J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Art of Rudyard Kipling* (1959); C. A. Bodelsen, *Aspects of Kipling's Art* (1964); *Kipling's Mind and Art*, ed. Andrew Rutherford (1964); and Bonamy Dobrée, *Rudyard Kipling: Realist and Fabulist* (1967).

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Friendly Brook

(1914)

THE valley was so choked with fog that one could scarcely see a cow's length across a field. Every blade, twig, bracken-frond, and hoof-print carried water, and the air was filled with the noise of rushing ditches and field-drains, all delivering to the brook below. A week's November rain on water-logged land had gorged her to full flood, and she proclaimed it aloud.

Two men in sackcloth aprons were considering an untrimmed hedge that ran down the hillside and disappeared into mist beside those roarings. They stood back and took stock of the neglected growth, tapped an elbow of hedge-oak here, a mossed beech-stub there, swayed a stooled ash back and forth, and looked at each other.

'I reckon she's about two rod thick,' said Jabez the younger, 'an' she hasn't felt iron since – when has she, Jesse?'

'Call it twenty-five year, Jabez, an' you won't be far out.'

'Umm!' Jabez rubbed his wet handbill on his wetter coat-sleeve. 'She ain't a hedge. She's all manner o' trees. We'll just about have to – ' He paused, as professional etiquette required.

'Just about have to side her up an' see what she'll bear. But hadn't we best – ?' Jesse paused in his turn, both men being artists and equals.

'Get some kind o' line to go by.' Jabez ranged up and down till he found a thinner place, and with clean snicks of the handbill revealed the original face of the fence. Jesse took over the dripping stuff as it fell forward, and, with a grasp and a kick, made it to lie orderly on the bank till it should be faggoted.

By noon a length of unclean jungle had turned itself into a cattle-proof barrier, tufted here and there with little plumes of the sacred holly which no woodman touches without orders.

'Now we've a witness-board to go by!' said Jesse at last.

'She won't be as easy as this all along,' Jabez answered. 'She'll need plenty stakes and binders when we come to the brook.'

'Well, ain't we plenty?' Jesse pointed to the ragged perspective ahead of them that plunged downhill into the fog. 'I lay there's a cord an' a half o' firewood, let alone faggots, 'fore we get anywheres anigh the brook.'

'The brook's got up a piece since morning,' said Jabez. 'Sounds like's if she was over Wickenden's door-stones.'

Jesse listened, too. There was a growl in the brook's roar as though she worried something hard.

'Yes. She's over Wickenden's door-stones,' he replied. 'Now she'll flood acrost Alder Bay an' that'll ease her.'

'She won't ease Jim Wickenden's hay none if she do,' Jabez grunted. 'I told Jim he'd set that liddle hay-stack o' his too low down in the medder. I *told* him so when he was drawin' the bottom for it.'

'I told him so, too,' said Jesse. 'I told him 'fore ever you did. I told him when the County Council tarred the roads up along.' He pointed up-hill, where unseen automobiles and road-engines droned past continually. 'A tarred road, she shoots every drop o' water into a valley same's a slate roof. 'Tisn't as 'twas in the old days, when the waters soaked in and soaked out in the way o' nature. It rooshes off they tarred roads all of a lump, and naturally every drop is bound to descend into the valley. And there's tar roads both two sides this valley for ten mile. That's what I told Jim Wickenden when they tarred the roads last year. But he's a valley-man. He don't hardly ever journey up-hill.'

'What did he say when you told him that?' Jabez demanded, with a little change of voice.

'Why? What did he say to you when *you* told him?' was the answer.

'What he said to you, I reckon, Jesse.'

'Then, you don't need me to say it over again, Jabez.'

'Well, let be how 'twill, what was he gettin' *after* when he said what he said to me?' Jabez insisted.

'*I* dunno; unless you tell me what manner o' words he said to *you*.'

Jabez drew back from the hedge – all hedges are nests of treachery and eavesdropping – and moved to an open cattle-lodge in the centre of the field.

'No need to go ferretin' around,' said Jesse. 'None can't see us here 'fore we see them.'

'What was Jim Wickenden gettin' at when I said he'd set his stack too near anigh the brook?' Jabez dropped his voice. 'He was in his mind.'

'He ain't never been out of it yet to my knowledge,' Jesse drawled, and uncorked his tea-bottle.

'But then Jim says: "I ain't goin' to shift my stack a yard," he says. "The Brook's been good friends to me, and if she be minded," he says, "to take a snatch at my hay, *I* ain't settin' out to withstand her." That's what Jim Wickenden says to me last – last June-end 'twas,' said Jabez.

'Nor he hasn't shifted his stack, neither,' Jesse replied. 'An' if there's more rain, the brook she'll shift it for him.'

'No need tell *me*! But I want to know what Jim was gettin' *at*?'

Jabez opened his clasp-knife very deliberately; Jesse as carefully opened his. They unfolded the newspapers that wrapped their dinners, coiled away and pocketed the string that bound the packages, and sat down on the edge of the lodge manger. The rain began to fall again through the fog, and the brook's voice rose.

'But I always allowed Mary was his lawful child, like,' said Jabez, after Jesse had spoken for a while.

' 'Tain't so. . . . Jim Wickenden's woman she never made nothing. She come out o' Lewes with her stockin's round her heels, an' she never made nor mended aught till she died. *He* had to light fire an' get breakfast every mornin' except Sundays, while she sowed it abed. Then she took an' died, sixteen, seventeen, year back; but she never had no children.'

'They was valley-folk,' said Jabez apologetically. 'I'd no call to go in among 'em, but I always allowed Mary – '

'No. Mary come out o' one o' those Lunnon Childern Societies. After his woman died, Jim got his mother back from his sister over to Peasmarsh, which she'd gone to house with when Jim married. His mother kept house for Jim after his woman died. They do say 'twas his mother led him on toward adoptin' of Mary – to furnish out the house with a child, like, and to keep him off of gettin' a noo woman. He mostly done what his mother contrived. 'Cardenly, twixt 'em, they asked for a child from one o' those Lunnon societies – same as it might ha' been these Barnardo children – an' Mary was sent down to 'em, in a candle-box, I've heard.'

'Then Mary is chance-born. I never knowed that,' said Jabez. 'Yet I must ha' heard it some time or other . . .'

'No. She ain't. 'Twould ha' been better for some folk if she had been. She come to Jim in a candle-box with all the proper papers – lawful child o' some couple in Lunnon somewheres – mother dead, father drinkin'. *And* there was that Lunnon society's five shillin's a week for her. Jim's mother she wouldn't despise week-end money, but I never heard Jim was much of a muck-grubber. Let be how 'twill, they two mothered up Mary no bounds till it looked at last like they'd forgot she wasn't their own flesh an' blood. Yes, I reckon they forgot Mary wasn't their'n by rights.'

'That's no new thing,' said Jabez. 'There's more'n one or two in this parish wouldn't surrender back their Bernarders. You ask Mark Copley an' his woman an' that Bernarder cripple-babe o' theirs.'

'Maybe they need the five shillin',' Jesse suggested.

'It's handy,' said Jabez. 'But the child's more. "Dada" he says, an' "Mumma" he says, with his great rollin' head-piece all hurdled up in that iron collar. *He* won't live long – his backbone's rotten, like. But they Copleys do just about set store by him – five bob or no five bob.'

'Same way with Jim an' his mother,' Jesse went on. 'There was talk betwixt 'em after a few years o' not takin' any more week-end money for Mary; but let alone *she* never passed a farden in the mire 'thout longin's, Jim didn't care, like, to push himself forward into the Society's remembrance. So naun came of it. The week-end money would ha' made no odds to Jim – not after his uncle willed him they four cottages at Eastbourne *an'* money in the bank.'

'That was true, too, then? I heard something in a scadderin' word-o'-mouth way,' said Jabez.

'I'll answer for the house property, because Jim he requested my signed name at the foot o' some papers concernin' it. Regardin' the money in the bank, he nature-ally wouldn't like such things talked about all round the parish, so he took strangers for witnesses.'

'Then 'twill make Mary worth seekin' after?'

'She'll need it. Her Maker ain't done much for her outside nor yet in.'

'That ain't no odds.' Jabez shook his head till the water showered off his hat-brim. 'If Mary has money, she'll be wed before any likely pore maid. She's cause to be grateful to Jim.'

'She hides it middlin' close, then,' said Jesse. 'It don't sometimes look to me as if Mary has her natural rightful feelin's. She don't put on an apron o' Mondays 'thout being druv to it – in the kitchen *or* the hen-house. She's studyin' to be a school-teacher. She'll make a beauty! I never knowed her show any sort o' kindness to nobody – not even when Jim's mother was took dumb. No! 'Twadn't no stroke. It stifled the old lady in the throat here. First she couldn't shape her words no shape; then she clucked, like, an' lastly she couldn't more than suck down spoon-meat an' hold her peace. Jim took her to Doctor Harding, an' Harding he bundled her off to Brighton Hospital on a ticket, but they couldn't make no stay to her afflictions there; and she was bundled off to Lunnon, an' they lit a great old lamp inside her, and Jim told me they couldn't make out nothing in no sort there; and, along o' one thing an' another, an' all their spyin's and pryin's, she come back a hem sight worse than when she started. Jim said he'd have no more hospitalizin', so he give her a slate, which she tied to her waist-string, and what she was minded to say she writ on it.'

'Now, I never knowed that! But they're valley-folk,' Jabez repeated.

''Twadn't particular noticeable, for she wasn't a talkin' woman any time o' her days. Mary had all three's tongue.... Well, then, two years this summer, come what I'm tellin' you. Mary's Lunnon father, which they'd put clean out o' their minds, arrived down from Lunnon with the law on his side, sayin' he'd take his daughter back to Lunnon, after all. I was working for Mus' Dockett at Pounds Farm that summer, but I was obligin' Jim that evenin' muckin' out his pig-pen. I seed a stranger come traipsin' over the bridge agin' Wickenden's door-stones. 'Twadn't the new County Council bridge with the handrail. They hadn't given it in for a public right o' way then. 'Twas just a bit o' lathy old plank which Jim had throwed acrost the brook for his own conveniences. The man wasn't drunk – only a little concerned in liquor, like – an' his back was a mask where he'd slipped in the muck comin' along. He went up the bricks past Jim's mother, which was feedin' the ducks, an' set himself down at the table inside – Jim was just changin' his socks – an' the man let Jim know all his rights and aims regardin' Mary. Then there just about *was* a hurly-bulloo? Jim's fust mind was to pitch him forth, but he'd done that once in his young days, and got six months up to Lewes jail along o' the man fallin' on his head. So he swallowed his spittle an' let him talk. The law about Mary *was* on the man's side from fust to last, for he showed us all the papers. Then Mary come downstairs – she'd been studyin' for an examination – an' the man tells her who he was, an' she says he had ought to have took proper care of his own flesh and blood while he had it by him, an' not to think he could ree-claim it when it suited. He says somethin' or other, but she looks him up an' down, front an' backwent, an' she just tongues him scadderin' out o' doors, and he went away stuffin' all the papers back into his hat, talkin' most abusefully. Then she come back an' freed her mind against

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