

The Twa Heuchie-backit Men

The war aince twa-heuchie-backit men that war freins. Thay war cawed Rab an Tam. Ae Setterday forenicht, Tam veisitit Rab in his wee houss an thay haed supper an drank whuskie thegither, an haed a richt guid crack anent the ongauns in the clachan. Thay leuch thegither owre a whein auld tales bi the licht of the peat ingil. Syne, as it wes amaist midnight, Tam said he maun gae hame, an eftir biddin guidnicht til his frein, he set out owre the riggs atwein the twa sheilins.

Nou, in ane o thir riggs, bi a green knowe, the war ane elf-ring. Tam kent it weill an haed jaloused that whyles, the fairie fowk daunced an sang in it. Sae he wes naething ferlit this nicht whan he hard the soun o muisic cummin frae the steid he wes passin. He stappit ti listen, an at that verra meinit, the muin cam oot frae ahint a cloud an lit up the wee feigurs that war dauncin in the ring. An Ai whit grace thay daunced wi, an whit sweet vyces thay haed! The wee fowk war dauncin til the muisic o a rhyme on the days o the week.

“On Sunday we rest an play,” thay sang
“On Monanday we wash aw day,
On Tysday we sowe oor seed,
On Thursday we.....”

Tam haed a quick ear, an saw at aince that thay haed forgotten ti mention Wodinsday. An athout thinkin, he cryit out:

“On Wodinsday we bak our breid.”

The fairies war delichtit an taen this up bedein, an dauncin wi mair virr nor ever, thay aw sang:

“On Sunday we rest an play,
On Monanday we wash aw day,
On Tysday we sowe our seed,
On Wodinsday we bak our breid ,
On Thurday we gether graith,
On Fredday we weave our claith,
On Setterday we daunce, an daunce, an daunce!”

An as thay sang out thir lest wurd, thay breinged out the ring, gruppit Tam an poued him back in wi thaim. He sang an daunced alang wi thaim the rest o the nicht an, for aw his heuchie back, he fand he coud daunce as weill as the lichtest fairie. The green gress anaith his feet felt as saft as a cloud o fethers, an the roch respin vyce o him soundit as clear an sweet as his fairie freins.

Whan the dawin cam, the fairies taen Tam bi the haunds intil the green knowe whaur thay bade. He wes gled ti gang wi thaim an he taen pairt in thair wark an play. An whan it cam tyme for him ti gang hame til the warld outby, the auldest fairie said til him,

“Tam ye hae been a richt guid fere the whyle ye hae been wi us. We hae lykit ye weill an we wad lyke for ti dae sumthing for ye that wul aye bring ye in mynd o us---a wee taiken o freinship lyke. Think weill nou! Whit rewaird wad ye lyke?”

Nou the war ae thing Tam haed sair wantit aw his days. He wantit for ti be the same as ither men. He greined ti walk heich an strecht an hae a sklef back.

“Tak awa ma humf!” he pled on thaim.

The wurd war nae suiner out his mou or his wush wae grantit. He kent a wee tingil in his back an the humf cryned awa ti naething in a glisk. Tam wes fair owre the muin. He strechtent his shouthers for the first tyme in his lyfe an an birlt an lampit owre the riggs ti tell his graund news til his guid frein, Rab. Rab wes diggin in his gairden.

“Whaur hae ye been aw this lest year syne?” demanded Rab, gey crabbit lyke.

“Wi the fairies,” aunsert Tam. “An luik, see whit thay hae duin for me!” An he birlt roun tipper-taes sae that Rab nicht see his strecht back. Did ye ever see the lykes o that?”

Syne he telt his frein, aw about the fairie rhyme, an hou he haed sortit the wurd o it for thaim, an hou the fairies haed peyed him back in freinship.

“Is this no a wunnerfu tale, ma frein?” he spierit, an whan he haed feinisht. “Ah’m richt quut o ma humf for guid.”

But Rab haed ane ill syde til his naitur, an wes saicretlie jaeluss o his frein’s guid fortuin. Sae he held his tung an said naething ti this.

“Man, ir ye no gled ti see me back?” askit Tam, gey chawed. Ah’m gled ti see *you*.

He raxt out his haund, but Rab didna tak it an never lat on he haird him speak. He juist cairrit on wi his howkin, wurkin out in his mynd hou *he* nicht benefit *tae*, frae helpin the fairies.

The neist Setterday nicht, Rab gaed strecht til the field whaur Tam haed telt him the elf-ring wes ti be fund. An thare he watcht an waitit, an shuir aneuch, he haird the fairies liltin, an saw thaim dauncin in the ring.

“On Sunday we rest an play,” thay sang,
“On Monanday, we wash aw day,
On Tysday we sowe our seed,
On Wodinsday we bak our breid,
On Thursday we.....”

Nou Rab haed nae ear for muisic an rhythm, naither wes he as gleg i the uptak as his frein, Tam. Sae he didna tak tent that the fairies war singin the rhyme richt an haedna left out onie o the days o the week, an he stertit ti cry out, “On Thursday we.....” eftir thay haed feinisht the Thursday line. This threw thaim aw intil a richt fankil, an thay haed ti stert aw owre again. But this tyme the war a difference.

“On Sunday we rest an play,
On Monanday we wash aw day,
On Tysday we sowe our seed,
On Wodinsday we bak our breid,
On Thursday we gether graith,
On Fredday we weave out claith,
On Setterday we DIRD! - an SKELP! - CLOUR!”

An as thay sang out thir lest wurds, thay flew out at Tam lik sae monie houlets, gruppit him, harlt him inti the elf-ring an gied him sic a sair lounderin, he haurlie kent whaur he wes about. At lest, eftir aw the dirdum, thay left him alane, fair daivert, aw cuivert wi clours an out o braith, lyin pechin on the grund.

Whan he fand the strenth ti git up, the war a reid lift in the east, the sun wes rysin owre the edge o the hills an the war nae fairies in sicht. In the crammasie dawin, Rab raxt his haund roun until his back in the waesum howp that the fairies micht hae been guid til him eftir aw. But Ochone, OCHANEE!” No onlie wes his aim humf aye thare, the war anither humf thare anaw – the neibor o his ain. The fairies haed gien him the ane thay haed taen frae Tam’s back. An this wes the sair fairin Rab gat for herborin bane in his hert.