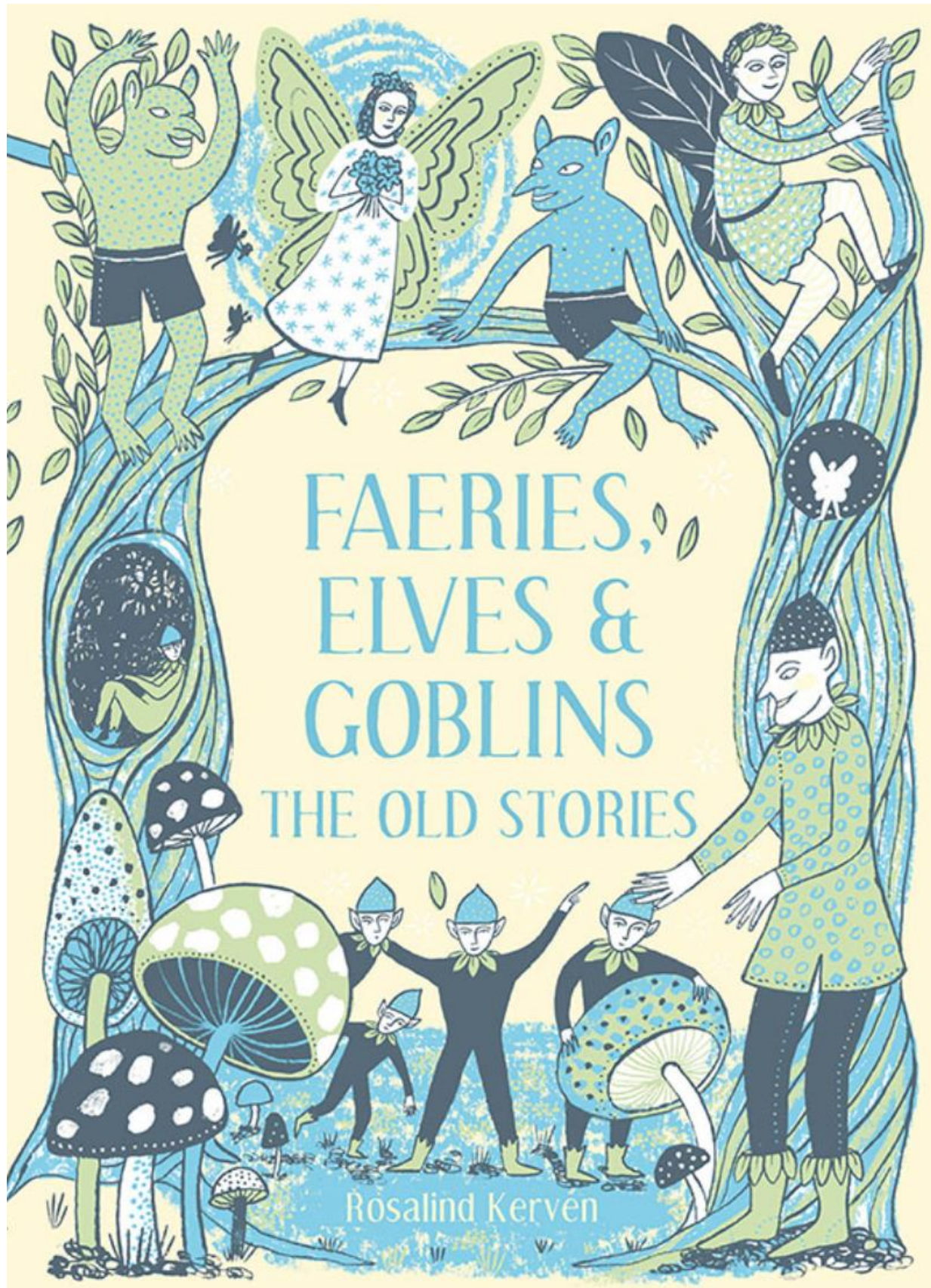




FAERIES, ELVES & GOBLINS

THE OLD STORIES

Rosalind Kerven



Faeries, Elves & Goblins

In this collection of traditional tales, bestselling author Rosalind Kerven presents 25 stories which bring the British folklore heritage vividly to life, weaving together mystical tales of faery royalty, mischievous goblins, helpful house elves, changelings and enchantments from across Britain and Ireland.

The tales are interspersed with spotlight features on faery folklore, including faery morals, the curious faery tribes, spells and dealings between faeries and mortals. There are also fascinating quotes drawn from medieval manuscripts and oral folklore. Each story is attributed to a particular region and accompanied by detailed notes.

With charming illustrations from favorite classic illustrators throughout, including Arthur Rackham, this book reminds us of the enduring appeal of folklore for all generations.

Rosalind Kerven has written over 60 highly acclaimed books, many of which have been translated into numerous languages. She is the author of *English Fairy Tales and Legends* and *Arthurian Legends*.



Other books of traditional stories by Rosalind Kerven:

English Fairy Tales and Legends

Arthurian Legends

The Secret World of Magic

Northumberland Folk Tales

The Fairy Spotter's Handbook

The Enchanted Forest

King Arthur

Aladdin and Other Tales from the Arabian Nights

The Giant King (Norse)

Enchanted Kingdoms (Celtic)

The Mythical Quest

Coyote Girl

Volcano Woman

The Weather Drum

The Rain Forest Story Book

In the Court of the Jade Emperor: Stories from Old China

The Woman who went to Fairyland

Earth Magic, Sky Magic: Native American Stories

King Leopard's Gift

The Tree in the Moon

The Slaying of the Dragon: Tales of the Hindu Gods

Legends of the Animal World

Faeries, Elves & Goblins

THE OLD STORIES



ROSALIND KERVEN

BATSFORD

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'In th'olde days...
Al was this land fulfild of Fayerye,
The Elf-queen, with hir joly companye,
Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede'

– Geoffrey Chaucer, England, 14th Century

Note

'Faery' and 'Elf' are interchangeable terms:
both refer to the full range of spirits described in this
book.

'Goblin' is usually taken to refer to the more
malevolent Faery races.
For brevity, **'Faery'** is used here for all general
discussion.

A universal quality of Faeries is that they are immortal,
death being unknown to them.

Thus in stories about Faeries it is traditional
to refer to normal human beings as **'Mortals'**.

Of Faeries, Elves and Goblins



There was in every hollow
A hundred wry-mouthed Elves.

– Davydd ab Gwilym, Wales, fourteenth century



ou may call them Good People, Strangers, The Gentry, Honest Folk, People of Peace, Tiddy Ones, Mother's Blessings, Them That's In or simply Themselves; but never speak their true names.

They are older than history and bittersweet as memories. They dwell under the ground, inside the hill, through the passage, beneath the water and beyond the mist.

They are both male and female, young and old. They are all immortal. They may grow tall as kings or stay small as sucklings. They are of the earth yet unearthly. Some are beautiful, angelic and light as gossamer; others are wizened, moth-eaten, prickly and old. They dress in caps and feathers, breeches and gowns: green, red, white or the colours of dust. They spin and weave, bake bread, work metal. Their music is like honey spiked with sorrow.

They are passionate, vengeful and cunning, yet neither good nor evil. They are secretive and sly, creators of illusion,

shape-shifters. They fly with a magic cap or powerful words, astride twigs and stems, or dizzily on gusts of wind. They can fade, turn invisible and vanish.



Hob Thrush

· *England* ·

Hob Thrush



here was once a woman who had so much housework to do that she wished there were twice as many hours in the day. Her husband was a busy man too, and truth to tell it was mostly his fault that the woman was so overloaded. For every evening he came home from the fields covered in mud, which he dropped all over their little cottage, so that she had to sweep and scrub for ages to get rid of it. Moreover, they had a large brood of hungry, scampish children, so there were endless clothes to launder and darn; not to mention meals to cook and clear away. Of course, the woman loved her family dearly, but she couldn't help being constantly tired and irritable.

One fine spring morning she got up at dawn to make an early start on her never-ending chores. A thrush was singing merrily in the lilac tree outside the front door, so she allowed herself a moment's indulgence to step outside and hear it. 'Thank you, bird,' she said. 'What a pity there's no time to listen any longer.' And with a sigh she went back into the kitchen, to start her work.

But what a surprise awaited her, for the kitchen was already spic and span! The flagstone floor was clean enough to eat off; the children's toys and books were neatly stacked in a corner, the mats were shaken out; the dirty clothes had

been washed, dried, ironed and folded; the fire was already lit and the kettle on the range was coming up to the boil; the brass candlesticks on the mantelpiece had been polished until they gleamed; and to top it all, the table was laid for breakfast with a large loaf of fresh-baked bread and a big pat of newly churned butter.

The woman's eyes almost popped out of her head. Just then, her husband came down to join her. 'Did you do this?' she cried. 'Oh, how kind you are to help me!'

But her husband shook his head in bewilderment. 'No, it wasn't me. You know I couldn't get the house in order however hard I tried.'

'Then one of the neighbours must have taken pity on me,' said the woman thoughtfully. 'I wonder who? Now I feel bad about always grumbling, because they've all got more than enough work of their own.'

After breakfast, she popped round all the other cottages in the village to find out who her benefactor was. But no one owned up. 'I'm almost as busy as you,' each one insisted. 'Much as I'd like to help you, I'm afraid I just don't have time.' Then, as the woman turned to go, each neighbour made exactly the same suggestion: 'Have you thought: it might not be a person at all? It might be a Hob or a Brownie – a house Faery.'

The woman went home and told her husband and children what the neighbours had said. They were all very excited! Since the woman had heard a thrush singing just before she first discovered his handiwork, they decided to call their mysterious helper 'Hob Thrush'. Then they all agreed – even the children – to be on their best behaviour and not to interfere.

That night the woman went to bed in a state of nervous anticipation; and the next morning she was rewarded with

another sparkling clean kitchen. And so it went on, day after day.

Mindful that house Faeries expect a high standard of behaviour from the people they help, the woman was careful never to take advantage of Hob Thrush. She continued to work as hard as ever. The only difference was that now she was able to do certain things that she hadn't had time for before, like baking cakes and making jam; and she could rest in bed easy in her mind, knowing that whatever she hadn't been able to get through that day would be finished perfectly overnight.

She felt great affection for the invisible Hob who had made her life so much happier. To show her gratitude, she always left out a treat for him before she went to bed - a glass of milk or elderberry wine, and a good slice of fruitcake or a dish of mashed potatoes. To her delight, it was always gone when she came downstairs in the morning.

Of course, the children were desperate to know what Hob Thrush looked like, but they resisted the temptation to spy. Then one night, the woman's husband was called out by a friend to help him with a sick cow, and by the time he got home it was well after midnight. As he crept upstairs, he heard noises coming from behind the kitchen door: someone singing, and a soft scraping and rattling. Peeping through the keyhole, at last he saw Hob Thrush.

He was just as they had imagined: a tiny, tiny man with a wizened face and shining, berry-dark eyes. He had pulled all the plates off the dresser and was busy polishing the wood behind them - now that was something the woman never had time to do! There was a big grin on his face and a dance in his movements. But one thing shocked the husband, and that was Hob Thrush's clothes. His green jacket, breeches

and hat were all worn almost to tatters, and his stockings and shoes were full of holes.

The husband leaped upstairs, woke his wife and told her what he had seen.

‘Aha!’ she cried, ‘now I know exactly how we can say a proper “thank you” to Hob Thrush. I’ll make him a brand new suit, fit for a prince!’

The next day she rushed through her chores, leaving only a few odds and ends for the Hob to finish. Then she fetched her bag of scraps and sewing basket and started stitching him a beautiful brown velvet jacket and matching breeches, with a scarlet felt cap and some green knitted stockings. It took her all week. As soon as they were finished, she laid the clothes out beside her nightly offering of wine and cake and went to bed so excited she could scarcely get to sleep.

In the morning the clothes were gone, but the wine and cake were untouched.

And, sad to say, the family never had any help from Hob Thrush again.



Midwife to the Faeries

· *Wales* ·

Midwife to the Faeries



n a farm in a quiet green valley, there lived an old woman and an old man called Bet and Huw, with no one to keep them company except for a flighty young serving maid called Elin.

This Elin was a terrible dreamer, and she was always coming up with daft ideas. One evening, she took it into her head to leave a dish of bread and milk, and a big bowl of warm water on the kitchen hearth. In the morning, just as she had hoped, the bread and milk had gone, the water had been poured away; and on the table there was a bright gold coin.

‘Look!’ she cried to her mistress, ‘The Faeries came in here while we were asleep: they ate the supper I left out for them and bathed their babies in the bowl! They’ll be our friends for ever now!’

Bet and Huw were furious and forbade her to tempt the Faeries into the house again. But the foolish maid didn’t care, for she knew that the fields down by the river were full of their dancing rings. The next night, as soon as her work was done, she went down there to watch for them.

Very soon the evening mist came rising from the ground; and with it came the Faery dancers, weaving and swaying into twisting lines and circles, twirling their white robes about and tossing their long hair. Behind them, all in step,

marched a little band of fiddlers and pipers, playing the strangest, sweetest music.

They saw Elin at once and swept her up with them, laughing and singing as they spun her round. The stars moved far across the sky while they danced, until she was too exhausted to take another step. Then they laid her gently onto the dewy grass and left her there to sleep.

Old Bet had spied upon her from the farmhouse and seen everything that had happened.

‘You fool!’ she scolded. ‘Haven’t you heard how the Faeries steal away young girls they take a fancy to?’

Elin just tossed her head. ‘That’s nonsense! I’m not scared.’

‘Those who have dealings with the Faeries,’ said Old Bet darkly, ‘should use magic charms to stop them from getting too close. By day you should always carry something metal: a knife would do just nicely; one small enough to fit into your pocket. And by night you should sleep with a branch from the rowan tree laid across your bed. Metal and rowan wood are two things the Faeries cannot abide; they will not touch you while you have them.’

‘Maybe ...’ said Elin. But she had a faraway look in her eyes.

Time passed. One morning Old Bet and Old Huw got up late. There was no sign of Elin, so they cooked their own breakfast and cleared away the dishes themselves. Still the maid didn’t appear. So Bet went up to the little attic bedroom where the girl slept, thinking maybe she was ill, and gave a loud knock upon the door. When no answer came, she flung it wide open.

Well, what a shock she got! The bed was cold and empty, and the rowan branch, intended for protection, was tossed

carelessly into the corner on the floor. Old Bet took one look; then she hurried downstairs again, shouting to Huw at the top of her voice: 'Oh what a carry-on, oh what a to-do! Lord have mercy on that foolish girl - she's got herself stolen away by the Faeries!'

A year and a day later, there was a terrible storm. Rain bucketed down, the wind roared and lightning flashed as if the very sky were on fire. There was a great clap of thunder, and as it died down a loud, urgent knocking rattled the door. Old Huw went to open it.

There on the step stood a Faery man! His skin and his thick, curly hair were both pale as moonlight, and he was no taller than a very young child. 'You'd best come in for a bit of shelter,' Huw offered uncertainly.

But the Faery man shook his head. 'It's your wife I want,' he said.

Old Bet came bustling out to see what was going on.

'Come with me,' said the Faery man. Without waiting for an answer, he grabbed her arm and pulled her after him into the night.

Just round the corner, a silvery horse was waiting. The Faery man hoisted Old Bet up onto its back, then jumped up behind her. The horse began to gallop through the storm so fast, that Bet felt as if she were flying. Shapes and shadows flashed past on either side, but she had no idea where they were going.

At last the horse slowed and they began to ascend a narrow path that wound steeply into the mountains. This ended at a hard rock face, which suddenly gaped open like a gate as they reached it and admitted them into a long tunnel. Gradually, it broadened out into an enormous, gloomy cave, full of shadows and cobwebs.

The craggy walls were dripping with damp and crusted with moss. The only warmth came from a smoking fire in a rusty grate. Old Bet gazed around in wonder and horror. This must surely be Faeryland! But what a disappointment – it was nothing like she had imagined.

The Faery man dismounted from his horse and disappeared into the gloom. Bet slipped down too – and suddenly heard a loud groan coming from a murky corner. She crept towards it and saw a rough bed formed from hacked-off branches and dead bracken. An unkempt girl in a raggedy dress was lying on it, writhing with the pains of childbirth. As she got closer, Old Bet almost jumped out of her skin; for who should the girl be but *Elin*!

It only took a moment for Old Bet to get over her dismay, for there was clearly no time to waste! Fortunately she had given birth to seven babies of her own, and had also helped many other women in the family way. She leaned over, patted the girl's cheek reassuringly, stoked up the fire, found a cauldron of water and put it to heat on the flames. No sooner was everything ready, than a tiny, exquisitely beautiful, snow-pale baby boy came into the world. Old Bet had him cleaned up and lying in Elin's arms in no time, with the ramshackle bed made comfortable and neat again.

'Well!' gasped Old Bet when everything was done. 'Thank goodness you're still alive, my dear, though I can't bear to think what happened to bring you to this shameful state. Whoever is that nasty little man? Don't tell me that this child is *his*?'

'Yes, Mistress,' said Elin, with her old mischievous smile. 'But don't worry, everything's right and proper. In case you hadn't realised, he's the Faery King! He's married me and made me his Queen! Aren't I lucky? And isn't our palace wonderful?'

‘Oh dear,’ thought Old Bet, ‘she’s gone completely soft in the head! But I’ll have to make the best of things and just get on with it. I suppose this so-called ‘King’ has brought me here to help Elin recover and teach her how to look after the baby.’

So she heated more water and gave the baby a bath, then showed Elin how to nurse him, rock him to sleep and lay him gently in the rough, oaken cradle that stood beside the bed.

After a while, she heard footsteps behind her. Turning, she saw the Faery King, holding a small silver pot. He lifted the lid to reveal a curious, bright-green ointment, which he put into Bet’s hands.

‘In future, each time you bathe my son, rub this into his eyes,’ he said. Then he frowned at her. ‘But make sure none gets anywhere near your own eyes, woman, for it contains the strongest kind of magic.’

Old Bet did as she was told, though she wasn’t really interested in petty rules. She stayed in the cave for many days, caring for Elin and her Faery child; but also watching carefully for a chance to find out what this ‘magic’ was for. At last, when there was no sign of the Faery King and Elin was fast asleep, Old Bet opened the pot and smeared a little ointment into one of her own eyes.

What a marvel, what a change!

At once she saw the squalid cave transform into a vast, magnificent palace! It had white marble floors, silken drapes and furniture fashioned from pure gold. The air was fragrant with flowers and echoed with exquisite music. Beyond arched windows, Old Bet glimpsed rolling meadows and sparkling waterfalls. As for Elin, her filthy rags had turned into fine, silken robes, and a silver crown lay beside her on a plump feather bed.

Old Bet stared and pinched herself; but still the wonderful vision shone bright. Yet this was the strangest thing of all: when she shut the eye with the magic ointment in it and just looked out of the other eye, the gloomy cave and everything in it appeared exactly as before.

Now Old Bet understood that, to those who had the magic sight, Faeryland was indeed a glorious place. Yet she dared not talk about it, not even to Elin; for she knew the Faery King would be furious if he discovered she had disobeyed him.

‘So before that happens,’ she thought, ‘I’d better be on my way home.’

She told Elin she had to leave because Old Huw would be worrying about her; and no sooner had she spoken than the Faery King appeared again. This time, thanks to her magicky eye, Old Bet could see him in his true form, and he was indeed both noble and very handsome.

‘You have taken good care of my Queen and our baby,’ he said solemnly. ‘Here is my silver horse to carry you home, laden with two big packs: a gift from the Faery People to you. But do not open them until you arrive, or everything they contain will disappear.’

You can imagine how glad Old Huw was when his wife arrived home safe and sound. At first he found it hard to believe what she described of her adventure. However, when they opened the bags the King had given her, and found them full to the brim with Faery gold, he quickly realised it was all true.

Old Bet was greatly relieved to be home; yet she found it difficult to settle down. For she was still greatly bothered by the magicky sight in one of her eyes. It made her see Faeries and their bits and bobs of magic everywhere: