



Yallery Brown

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English

Intermediate

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Once upon a time, and a very good time it was, though it wasn't in my time, nor in your time, nor any one else's time, there was a young lad of eighteen or so named Tom Tiver working on the Hall Farm. One Sunday he was walking across the west field, 't was a beautiful July night, warm and still and the air was full of little sounds as though the trees and grass were chattering to themselves. And all at once there came a bit ahead of him the pitifullest greetings ever he heard, sob, sobbing, like a bairn spent with fear, and nigh heartbroken; breaking off into a moan and then rising again in a long whimpering wailing that made him feel sick to hark to it. He began to look everywhere for the poor creature. "It must be Sally Bratton's child," he thought to himself; "she was always a flighty thing, and never looked after it. Like as not, she's flaunting about the lanes, and has clean forgot the babby." But though he looked and looked, he could see nought. And presently the whimpering got louder and stronger in the quietness, and he thought he could make out words of some sort. He hearkened with all his ears, and the sorry thing was saying words all mixed up with sobbing—

"Ooh! the stone, the great big stone! ooh! the stones on top!"

Naturally he wondered where the stone might be, and he looked again, and there by the hedge bottom was a great flat stone, nigh buried in the mools, and hid in the cotted grass and weeds. One of the stones was called the "Strangers' Table." However, down he fell on his knee-bones by that stone, and hearkened again. Clearer

than ever, but tired and spent with greeting came the little sobbing voice—"Ooh! ooh! the stone, the stone on top." He was gey, and mis-liking to meddle with the thing, but he couldn't stand the whimpering babby, and he tore like mad at the stone, till he felt it lifting from the mools, and all at once it came with a sough out o' the damp earth and the tangled grass and growing things. And there in the hole lay a tiddy thing on its back, blinking up at the moon and at him. 'T was no bigger than a year-old baby, but it had long cotted hair and beard, twisted round and round its body so that you couldn't see its clothes; and the hair was all yaller and shining and silky, like a bairn's; but the face of it was old and as if 't were hundreds of years since 't was young and smooth. Just a heap of wrinkles, and two bright black eyne in the midst, set in a lot of shining yaller hair; and the skin was the colour of the fresh turned earth in the spring—brown as brown could be, and its bare hands and feet were brown like the face of it. The greeting had stopped, but the tears were standing on its cheek, and the tiddy thing looked mazed like in the moonshine and the night air.

The creature's eyne got used like to the moonlight, and presently he looked up in Tom's face as bold as ever was; "Tom," says he, "thou 'rt a good lad!" as cool as thou can think, says he, "Tom, thou 'rt a good lad!" and his voice was soft and high and piping like a little bird twittering.

Tom touched his hat, and began to think what he ought to say. "Houts!" says the thing again, "thou needn't be feared o' me; thou 'st done me a better turn than thou know'st, my lad, and I'll do as much for thee." Tom couldn't speak yet, but he thought; "Lord! for sure 't is a bogle!"

"No!" says he as quick as quick, "I am no bogle, but ye 'd best not ask me what I be; anyways I be a good friend o' thine." Tom's very knee-bones struck, for certainly an ordinary body couldn't have known what he'd been thinking to himself, but he looked so kind like, and spoke so fair, that he made bold to get out, a bit quavery like—

"Might I be axing to know your honour's name?"

"H'm," says he, pulling his beard; "as for that"—and he thought a bit—"ay so," he went on at last, "Yallery Brown thou mayst call me, Yallery Brown; 't is my nature seest thou, and as for a name 't will do as any other. Yallery Brown, Tom, Yallery Brown's thy friend, my lad."

“Thankee, master,” says Tom, quite meek like.

“And now,” he says, “I’m in a hurry to-night, but tell me quick, what’ll I do for thee? Wilt have a wife? I can give thee the finest lass in the town. Wilt be rich? I’ll give thee gold as much as thou can carry. Or wilt have help wi’ thy work? Only say the word.”

Tom scratched his head. “Well, as for a wife, I have no hankering after such; they’re but bothersome bodies, and I have women folk at home as ‘ll mend my clouts; and for gold that’s as may be, but for work, there, I can’t abide work, and if thou ‘lt give me a helpin’ hand in it I’ll thank—”

“Stop,” says he, quick as lightning, “I’ll help thee and welcome, but if ever thou sayest that to me—if ever thou thankest me, see’st thou, thou ‘lt never see me more. Mind that now; I want no thanks, I’ll have no thanks;” and he stampt his tiddy foot on the earth and looked as wicked as a raging bull.

“Mind that now, great lump that thou be,” he went on, calming down a bit, “and if ever thou need’st help, or get’st into trouble, call on me and just say, ‘Yallery Brown, come from the mools, I want thee!’ and I’ll be wi’ thee at once; and now,” says he, picking a dandelion puff, “good-night to thee,” and he blowed it up, and it all came into Tom’s eyne and ears. Soon as Tom could see again the tiddy creature was gone, and but for the stone on end and the hole at his feet, he’d have thought he’d been dreaming.

Well, Tom went home and to bed; and by the morning he’d nigh forgot all about it. But when he went to the work, there was none to do! all was done already, the horses seen to, the stables cleaned out, everything in its proper place, and he’d nothing to do but sit with his hands in his pockets. And so it went on day after day, all the work done by Yallery Brown, and better done, too, than he could have done it himself. And if the master gave him more work, he sat down, and the work did itself, the singeing irons, or the broom, or what not, set to, and with ne’er a hand put to it would get through in no time. For he never saw Yallery Brown in daylight; only in the darklins he saw him hopping about, like a Will-o-th’-wyke without his lanthorn.

At first ‘t was mighty fine for Tom; he’d nought to do and good pay for it; but by-and-by things began to grow vicey-varsy. If the work was done for Tom, ‘t was undone for the other lads; if his buckets were filled, theirs were upset; if his tools were sharpened, theirs were blunted and spoiled; if his horses were clean as daisies, theirs were splashed with muck, and so on; day in and day out, ‘t was the same. And the lads saw Yallery Brown

flitting about o' nights, and they saw the things working without hands o' days, and they saw that Tom's work was done for him, and theirs undone for them; and naturally they begun to look shy on him, and they wouldn't speak or come nigh him, and they carried tales to the master and so things went from bad to worse.

For Tom could do nothing himself; the brooms wouldn't stay in his hand, the plough ran away from him, the hoe kept out of his grip. He thought that he'd do his own work after all, so that Yallery Brown would leave him and his neighbours alone. But he couldn't—true as death he couldn't. He could only sit by and look on, and have the cold shoulder turned on him, while the unnatural thing was meddling with the others, and working for him.

At last, things got so bad that the master gave Tom the sack, and if he hadn't, all the rest of the lads would have sacked him, for they swore they'd not stay on the same garth with Tom. Well, naturally Tom felt bad; 't was a very good place, and good pay too; and he was fair mad with Yallery Brown, as 'd got him into such a trouble. So Tom shook his fist in the air and called out as loud as he could, "Yallery Brown, come from the mools; thou scamp, I want thee!"

You'll scarce believe it, but he'd hardly brought out the words but he felt something tweaking his leg behind, while he jumped with the smart of it; and soon as he looked down, there was the tiddy thing, with his shining hair, and wrinkled face, and wicked glinting black eyne.

Tom was in a fine rage, and he would have liked to have kicked him, but 't was no good, there wasn't enough of it to get his boot against; but he said, "Look here, master, I'll thank thee to leave me alone after this, dost hear? I want none of thy help, and I'll have nought more to do with thee—see now."

The horrid thing broke into a screeching laugh, and pointed its brown finger at Tom. "Ho, ho, Tom!" says he. "Thou 'st thanked me, my lad, and I told thee not, I told thee not!"

"I don't want thy help, I tell thee," Tom yelled at him—"I only want never to see thee again, and to have nought more to do with 'ee—thou can go."

The thing only laughed and screeched and mocked, as long as Tom went on swearing, but so soon as his breath gave out—

“Tom, my lad,” he said with a grin, “I’ll tell ‘ee summat, Tom. True’s true I’ll never help thee again, and call as thou wilt, thou ‘lt never see me after to-day; but I never said that I’d leave thee alone, Tom, and I never will, my lad! I was nice and safe under the stone, Tom, and could do no harm; but thou let me out thyself, and thou can’t put me back again! I would have been thy friend and worked for thee if thou had been wise; but since thou bee’st no more than a born fool I’ll give ‘ee no more than a born fool’s luck; and when all goes vicey-varsy, and everything agee—thou ‘lt mind that it’s Yallery Brown’s doing though m’appen thou doesn’t see him. Mark my words, will ‘ee?”

And he began to sing, dancing round Tom, like a bairn with his yellow hair, but looking older than ever with his grinning wrinkled bit of a face:

“Work as thou will
Thou ‘lt never do well;
Work as thou mayst
Thou ‘lt never gain grist;
For harm and mischance and Yallery Brown
Thou ‘st let out thyself from under the stone.”

Tom could never rightly mind what he said next. ‘T was all cussing and calling down misfortune on him; but he was so mazed in fright that he could only stand there shaking all over, and staring down at the horrid thing; and if he’d gone on long, Tom would have tumbled down in a fit. But by-and-by, his yaller shining hair rose up in the air, and wrapt itself round him till he looked for all the world like a great dandelion puff; and it floated away on the wind over the wall and out o’ sight, with a parting skirl of wicked voice and sneering laugh.

And did it come true, sayst thou? My word! but it did, sure as death! He worked here and he worked there, and turned his hand to this and to that, but it always went agee, and ‘t was all Yallery Brown’s doing. And the children died, and the crops rotted—the beasts never fatted, and nothing ever did well with him; and till he was dead and buried, and m’appen even afterwards, there was no end to Yallery Brown’s spite at him; day in and day out he used to hear him saying—

“Work as thou wilt

Thou 'lt never do well;
Work as thou mayst
Thou 'lt never gain grist;
For harm and mischance and Yallery Brown
Thou 'st let out thyself from under the stone."

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