



## Billy Beg, Tom Beg, and the Fairies

Sophia Morrison

To cite this article: Sophia Morrison (1908) Billy Beg, Tom Beg, and the Fairies, *Folklore*, 19:3, 324-327, DOI: [10.1080/0015587X.1908.9719837](https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.1908.9719837)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.1908.9719837>



Published online: 14 Feb 2012.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1



View related articles [↗](#)

## BILLY BEG, TOM BEG, AND THE FAIRIES.

(Translation.)

Nor far from Dalby, Billy beg and Tom beg, two hunchback cobblers, lived together on a lonely croft. Billy beg was sharper and cleverer than Tom beg, who was always at his command. One day Billy beg gave Tom beg a staff, and quoth he :

“Tom beg, go to the mountain and fetch home the white sheep.”

Tom beg took the staff and went to the mountain, but he could not find the white sheep. At last, when he was far from home and dusk was coming on, he began to think that he had best go back. The night was fine, and stars and a small crescent moon were in the sky. No sound was to be heard but the curlew's sharp whistle. Tom was hastening home, and had almost reached Glen Rushen when a grey mist gathered, and he lost his way. But it was not long before the mist cleared and Tom beg found himself in a green glen, such as he had never seen before, though he thought he knew every glen within five miles of him, for he was born and reared in the neighbourhood. He was marvelling and wondering where he could be when he heard a far-away sound drawing near to him. “Aw,” said he to himself, “there are more than myself afoot on the mountains to-night; I'll have company.”

The sound grew louder. First it was like the humming of bees, then like the rushing of Glen Meay waterfall, and last it was like the marching and the murmur of a crowd. It was the fairy host. Of a sudden the glen was full of fine horses and of little people riding on them, with the lights on their red caps shining like the stars above, and making the night as bright as day. There was the blowing of horns, the waving of flags, the playing of music, and the barking of many little dogs. Tom beg thought that he had never seen anything so splendid as all he saw there. In the midst of the drilling and dancing and singing one of them spied Tom, and then Tom saw coming towards him the grandest little man he had ever set

eyes upon, dressed in gold and silver, and silk and satin, shining like a raven's wing.

"It is a bad time you have chosen to come this way," said the little man, who was the king.

"Yes; but it is not here that I wish to be," said Tom.

Then said the king: "Are you one of us to-night, Tom?"

"I am surely," said Tom.

"Then," said the king, "it will be your duty to take the pass-word. You must stand at the foot of the glen, and as each regiment goes by you must take the pass-word; it is 'Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.'"

"I will do that with a heart and a half," said Tom.

At daybreak the fiddlers took up their fiddles, the fairy army set itself in order, the fiddlers played before them out of the glen, and sweet that music was. Each regiment gave the pass-word to Tom as it went by—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and last of all came the king, and he too gave it—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. Then he called in Manx to one of his men:

"Take the hump from this fellow's back," and before the words were out of his mouth the hump was whisked off Tom beg's back and thrown into the hedge. How proud now was Tom, who so found himself the straightest man in the Isle of Man. He went down the mountain, and came home early in the morning with light heart and eager step. Billy beg wondered greatly when he saw Tom beg so straight and strong; and when Tom beg had rested and refreshed himself he told his story, how he had met the fairies, who came every night to Glen Rushen to drill.

The next night Billy beg set off along the mountain road, and came at last to the green glen. About midnight he heard the trampling of horses, the lashing of whips, the barking of dogs, and a great hullabaloo, and behold the fairies and their king, their dogs and their horses all at drill in the glen as Tom beg had said.

When they saw the humpback they all stopped, and one came forward and very crossly asked his business.

"I am one of yourselves for the night, and should be glad to do you some service," said Billy beg. So he was sent to take the pass-word—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. And at daybreak the king said, "It is time for us to be off," and up came regiment after regiment, giving Billy beg the pass-word—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. Last of all came the king with his men, and gave the pass-word also—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.

"AND SUNDAY," says Billy beg, thinking himself clever. Then there was a great outcry.

"Get the hump that was taken off that fellow's back last night, and put it on this man's back," cried the king, with flashing eyes, pointing to the hump that lay under the hedge.

Before the words were well out of his mouth, the hump was clapt on Billy beg's back.

"Now," said the king, "be off; and if ever I find you here again, I will clap another hump on to your front!"

And on that they all marched away with one great shout, and left poor Billy beg standing where they had found him, with a hump growing on to each shoulder. And he came home next day, dragging one foot after another, with a wizened face, and as cross as two sticks, with his two humps on his back, and if they are not off they are there still.

SOPHIA MORRISON.

Peel.

NOTE. [With regard to this story Miss Morrison writes: "I picked it up from an old man about two years ago. He had heard it in his youth on board his herring lugger from an old Manxman. I wrote the yarn first in Manx, then turned it into English. It bears some resemblance to an Irish story of Croker's, but where the hunchback in the Irish yarn sings 'Monday, Tuesday' over and over again, once out of tune, the first hunchback in the Manx yarn says all the days of the week except Sunday, and the second hunchback says that day with dire results to himself. In Manx mythology fairies are antago-

nistic to the Christian faith, and cannot bear the sound of holy names."

A number of variants of this tale are given by Clouston in *Popular Tales and Fictions*, i. p. 352 *seq.* Crofton Croker's Irish story, alluded to above, is probably the best known. It may be noted that the fairies sing (in Irish) "Monday and Tuesday" again and again to an imperfect air, and the first hunchback earns their gratitude by adding "Wednesday," at the same time completing their air. The air, as well as the Irish words, is given by Croker. The second hunchback spoils the melody by adding "Thursday."

Miss Busk's Italian version is similar, the days being Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. The nearest parallels to the Manx story are the Spanish version and the Breton story given by Keightley. In the Spanish tale the fairies sing "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, three"; the first hunchback adds "Thursday, Friday, Saturday, six," while the second spoils it by putting in "Sunday seven." In the Breton story Thursday and Friday are added by the first, and Saturday and Sunday by the second. Thus it appears that only in the Manx and Spanish stories is the addition of Sunday the fatal word which breaks the charm.—ED.].

---

#### GHOST-RAISING IN WALES.

The possibility of raising spirits, or to cause them to appear, was once believed in in Wales, even in recent times; and Shakespeare, in his *Henry the Fourth*, Act iii. s. 1, makes the Welshman, Glendower, say:

"I can call spirits from the vasty deep."

Wizards and others who practised magical arts were supposed to be able to summon spirits at will.

About three years ago, when I was allowed to search the library of "Harries Cwrt-y-Cadno," a most popular Welsh conjuror who lived in Carmarthenshire about two generations