



FUM Makes the Charm

Many years ago, oh, let's say five thousand, more or less, there lived in the south of England, in what is called Dartmoor, tribes of people who had never thought to make anything out of metal, much less plastic. They had stone houses, stone spear tips, stone axes, and stone arrowheads. They raised the biggest stones in circles and

lines and squares and all sorts of formations that nobody today quite understands the meaning of, and maybe they didn't either. If you are one of those people that think people in those long-off days were much kinder and gentler than people are today, you are being far too romantic. Of course they didn't have guns or tanks or airplanes, but there were plenty of rocks lying around, and when one tribe wanted to have a war with another tribe, they threw rocks at each other, always trying to see who could throw the biggest lump at his enemy. You have probably already guessed that the time these ancient people lived in is now called the Stone Age. The Stone Agers lived in tribes on the moor, a landscape of rocky hills and lowlands of peat and swamp. It was not a great place for farming, which they hadn't invented

anyway. The rivers that ran through the moor teemed with fish, and there was plenty of wildlife, in addition to the sheep and cattle that the tribes raised. So the people ate fish and meat and, using the bones for needles, made clothes out of the animal skins.

In the tribe, which mostly lived in the little rock village of Grimspound, there were two very important people. The first and most important was the chief of the tribe, a great warrior whose proper name was Brokotockotick, but because that was a long name (and if you'd never heard of cuckoo clocks, really hard to pronounce), his subjects called him Brok behind his back. The second important person was the tribe's mystery man, who lived a short way outside the village. He didn't have a fancy name; he was simply called Fum,

which nobody had trouble pronouncing. Fum, despite his simple name, was sort of a combination of Lord Chancellor and Lord Chief Justice. He was also the only doctor in the village and the Poet Laureate. This meant that whenever the chief had a birthday or won a battle or his wife had a new baby, Fum was called upon to compose a song to celebrate the occasion. Since writing had yet to be invented, Fum had to make up these songs in his head and sing them by memory, which was no mean trick as some of them ran to two hundred verses or more. (At this point, we need to make note of the fact that although Fum was the most famous singer of his day, he was not by any means the first. Actually, the first Stone Ager who sang made everybody jump. In fact, he seemed so amazing and wonderful, so unlike everybody

else, that they took him out to the top of a high hill and chopped his head off with a flint ax—just for a warning to other people not to be too clever. Fortunately, by the time Fum came along, people no longer killed off artists, unless they were simply too dreadful to endure.)

In addition to his civic and cultural duties, Fum also fashioned things from flint—arrowheads and spearheads and other useful items. But the thing about Fum that made him a mystery man was his uncanny ability to make charms out of flint to frighten off the Bugaboos who lived in the swamp. He claimed that these charms were very difficult to make and that he could only make them when the Thunder Spirit was with him. (People thought this was wonderfully mysterious, but it was actually just clever advertising. Fum had seen the

Thunder Spirit only once or twice and would just as soon never see him again.) There was no money yet, so people who wanted a charm paid for it with a live sheep, and if they wanted an extra-strong charm, they would have to bring two sheep.

One day Fum was trying to make a flint brooch, which Chief Brokotokotick wanted to give his wife for a present, but the work wasn't going well. He'd already ruined several perfectly good pieces of flint when a young warrior named Phuttphutt appeared at his doorway, which was really only a piece of hide hanging from the rock ledge above the entrance to his rock workshop.

"You're supposed to be the wise man of the tribe," Phuttphutt said, without as much as a how-de-do. "I want to know why it is that Brok is chief of this tribe and not me."

Fum was so startled that the rock hammer in his hand slipped and shattered yet another piece of flint. “What do you mean, Phutt?” (Everyone called the young warrior “Phutt,” both in front of his face and behind his back.)

“You remember that in our last great battle I killed fourteen men and wounded ten more.”

“Of course I remember,” said Fum. “You may recall that I composed quite a handsome song to celebrate the fact.”

“Then perhaps you remember also that when the survivors ran for their lives, I was the one who took a white moleskin war waistcoat from the body of the chief and a silver fox petticoat that belonged to the dead chief’s wife.”

“Quite true,” said Fum.



“Well, tell me, then: who wears them now?”

“Why, Mr. and Mrs. Brokotockotick wear them,” said Fum.

“Exactly. Brok took them from me. Indeed, he grabbed all the best things and left the second best for me. He claimed it was his right. And what I want to know is why.”

“Because he is stronger than you.”

“Nonsense,” said Phutt. “I am stronger, I am younger, and my muscles are bigger. I belong to the Order of the Grey Heron Feather, just as he does.” (Here he indicated the grey heron feather stuck behind his ear, which was the only thing he wore besides his bearskin. The feather was awarded only to warriors who’d killed more than fifty enemies, so Phutt was quite proud of belonging to the Order of the G.H.F.) “In the last battle,”

Phutt continued, “he killed only seven men and a boy. That shows I’m a better warrior than old Brok.”

“Hmm,” said Fum. “Maybe a better warrior, but not a stronger man. He’s got a more powerful will. He was born to rule; you were not. If you want to be at the top of the tree in this tribe, you’ve got to be as hard-hearted as a wolf. That’s where he beats you, my boy. You’re too soft.”

Phutt considered this for a moment. “You’re right,” he said. “So what you must make me is a charm that will give me a hard heart—the harder the better.”

“Hmm,” Fum said, “it can be done, but you’d better think about it.”

“If it can be done, just do it,” said Phutt.

Fum shook his head. “If I make you such a charm, there’ll be no more peace in the tribe until you are chief.”

“If your charm is strong enough that won’t take long. You know how hard Brok’s heart is. You only have to make mine twice as hard and—”

“There’s something else,” Fum said. “It’s true you’ll be chief, but you’ll lose the affection of the tribe. Brok is headman, but he’s not the favorite man. They don’t shout for him as they do for you. The children don’t weave garlands of foxgloves for him, nor do the women make him necklaces of wolves’ teeth, as they do for you.”

“Bah!” cried Phutt. “Who wants children bothering ’round him or necklaces of wolves’ teeth? I want my white moleskin war waistcoat and power . . . unlimited power!”

Like the best mystery men, Fum was a lover of

peace, so he tried to change Phutt's mind, but to no avail. Finally, he thought of a way out of the difficulty.

“As a matter of fact,” Fum said, “such a charm would be frightfully expensive.”

“How expensive?” asked the warrior.

“Oh, far more than you could afford,” said Fum, thinking he had solved the problem.

“How much?” Phutt demanded.

I have to make the cost ridiculously high, thought Fum, and so he said, “Thirty-two sheep and thirty-two lambs,” heaving a sigh of relief, for he felt sure that Phutt would never pay — even if he could — such a price as that.

Phutt looked very thoughtful, so Fum went on, “What's the good of a hard heart, my boy? A soft heart

wins much more pleasant things. And to be head of a tribe like this isn't a bowl of whortleberries. I've got an idea. I'll make you a fine charm for catching white moles. You'll catch so many that soon your wife will be able to make you a white moleskin war waistcoat that will fit you better than that old thing the chief is wearing; besides, I've heard that the moths have gotten into it and it's no longer . . .”





But Phutt wasn't listening. "This charm will make my heart twice as hard as Brok's?" he asked.

"It will, and so you'll have twice as many difficulties as Brok."

"And I'll be twice as able to deal with them."

With this, Fum gave up trying to influence the stubborn warrior, who went home to count his sheep and lambs. It turned out that he had exactly thirty-two

sheep and thirty-two lambs. His total flock was just enough to pay for the promised charm. So the delighted Phutt went to see the mystery man the very next day.

“But that is your entire flock!” said Fum. “You won’t have anything left.”

“You’re not as clever as you pretend to be,” said Phutt. “When my heart turns hard, I’ll have as many sheep as I want. Cows, too. Anything I want, for that matter. Now, when shall I have the charm?”

Fum sighed. “In a month—if all goes well. But you have to understand, flint is a tricky stone—you never know if it will split the way you intend.”

“I’ll be back in a month,” said Phutt. “And when you hand me the charm, my thirty-two sheep and thirty-two lambs will be driven into your fold.”

Off he went, and Fum took a stone, planning to give it a few trial whacks, when an amazing thing happened. At the first blow, the flint split into three pieces, the center of which was a bright black heart with a hole right through it. Fum was astounded. He had earned thirty-two sheep and thirty-two lambs with one blow of his ax. It gave him a very eerie feeling. He knew that such a thing did not happen by chance. It could only mean that the great, dreaded, and mischievous Thunder Spirit had helped him. His first impulse was to throw the Flint Heart into the river, but the Thunder Spirit might swoop down and burn him to a crisp if he were to do that. (It had happened once long ago to a mystery man named Sminth who had had the nerve to quarrel with the Thunder Spirit. All that was left of Sminth was a bit of charcoal about the size of a coconut.)



There was nothing for Fum to do but go to his doorway and call to Phutt, who was still within earshot.

You can imagine how surprised Phutt was to see the Flint Heart. He hadn't been gone a minute. He couldn't help but feel that Fum had cheated him out of thirty-two sheep and thirty-two lambs, and he didn't hesitate to say so.

"You may take it or leave it," Fum replied. "And frankly I'd rather you'd leave it. As sure as my name is Fum, you're going to regret it if you don't."

"We'll see," said Phutt. He strung the Flint Heart on a leather boot string, hung it around his neck, and, went to look at himself in the pond outside Fum's doorway. But instead of his own reflection in the water, he was alarmed to see the face of a dark and terrible phantom staring back at him. The phantom wasn't ugly,

but it was strange, with eyes the copper color of the sky before a storm. Its hair was rose and blue and a dazzling flame color; it twisted and tangled over the phantom's forehead in a fury of fire. Phutt staggered back from the reflection, only to see above him in the sky the terrifying shape that had thrown its image into the pond.

“Look!” Fum said, racing out his doorway and pointing. “The Spirit of the Thunder! Listen. It speaks!”

And out of the sky came a peal of many thunders. The awful music rattled and roared across the horizon. The rocky hills caught the noise and flung it backward and forward among them.

“Now you've done it,” said Fum. “I wouldn't be you for all the sheep in Dartmoor.”

But after the first shock, Phutt recovered and

smiled and nodded. “That’s enough, Thunder Spirit,” he called to the sky. “We’re not deaf, you know.”

Fum’s mouth dropped open. How dare Phutt be rude to the Spirit of the Thunder? He expected to see the arrogant warrior reduced to a lump of charcoal, but apparently, the Thunder Spirit rather enjoyed the spectacle of a human bug who dared to talk in such a sassy manner. It broke out into a peal of laughter that made the very ground shake, then, gathering up its garments, swept away through the storm.

In a moment the sky turned blue again, but not nearly so blue as Fum, who went back into his workshop to tackle the brooch for Mrs. Brokotoctotick. Meanwhile, Phutt hurried toward Grimspound, eager to test out his new powers.