

The Storie o Caermoulis

Ae tyme in the Western Isles thare bade a walthie man bi name o Grigorie that haed twa braw dochters. He loued thaim baith that weill, he wadna allou thaim ti gang owre the houss door athout a strang gaird, for in thae days, the kintriesyde wes thrang wi outlaws an kettrens.

Houanever, it fell that ae day whan thay warn frae the houss, a gentilman an his sairvant rade up ti thaim an spiert at thaim anent the gairds that war staunin tae, neirhaund. Says he,

“Ma leddies, is aw yon your men staunin owre thare?”

The auldest dochter, whas name wes Mysie, wesna verra weill pleised at this an aunsert him,

“Ay, thay ir that, but whit’s that ti you, Sir? Ah’m thinkin, ye ir a wee thing forritsum, sae ye ir. We dinna even ken yeir name.”

Says he, “Ma name is Caermoulis, an it’s no lyke me ti be forritsum, but Ah wes that taen up wi yeir bewtie, Ah juist cuidna help addressin ye.”

Nou Mysie haed a guid consait o hirsell an she lykit the sound o this fyne. Sic wurds war maet an drink til hir an hir hert fair meltit whan she haird thaim, sae it wesna verra lang or thay war crakkin thegither lyke auld freins, sae that Caermoulis fand out awthing he wantit ti ken about hir. It turnt out that Caermoulis leevd in a stane keep no that ferrr awa, an i the feinish, he gaed hame alang wi the twa dochters, whaur he met hir faither an gat leive ti pey court ti Mysie. Frae that day on, he aften veisitit hir at hir hame, tho hir sister haedna mukkil tyme for him. The war sumthing about him she didna tak til.

Ae day, Caermoulis says ti Mysie: “Mysie ma jo, Ah wad be rael gled gin ye wad cum an see me sum day in ma ain houss, for we never hae a richt chaunce ti be thegither bi ousells here. Ma haudin is no ferrr awa an it wadna tak ye lang ti finnd yeir wey thare.”

Nou Mysie wesna shuir about this, but she says til him,

“Ma faither, ye ken, wad never lat me gang out his sicht athout a gaird, but he is for gaun ti the mainland this Setterday, an Ah cuid aiblins mainage ti veisit ye than.”

Sae a tryst wes gried for the neist Setterday, i the eftirnuin, an Caermoulis telt hir the richt gait ti tak, an rade awa brankin til his ain keep. But eftir he wes gaen, Mysie wes fasht in hir mynd about gaun hir lane til a strange lyke place ti meet in wi a man she didna ken aw that weill, whan aw said an duin. Sae she pat on sum auld raggitie claes an made hirsell up lyke a gaun-about bodie, sae that naebodie wad hae kent hir. Syne she slippit out the back yett o the houss ti gang an see aforehaund, whitlyke wes this keep o Caermoulis’s.

Whan she wan thare, here it wes a gey dourlyke place in the hert o a wuid, but she gaed up til the houss door an chappit on it twa-thrie tymes. The yett wes aff the snek an whan naebodie wes lyke cummin, she gaed inby, an thare afore hir, wes a mukkil caudron on a swey, fou o wattir bylin awa on the ingil. An whan she keikit intil the pat, she saw bits o a human corp hotterin i the het wattir. Whitna glif she gat! She verra neir lowpit out hir skin.

Neist she made ti try the haunil o a door in the kichen, but it wes lokkit tae. Houanever, whan she kuist hir een about hir, she lit on a hankil o roustie auld kies lyn on the kitchen taibil. She tryit thir kies in the door, an shuir aneuch, ane o thaim fittit the lock. The door led intil a chaumer fou o men's claes o aw shapes an kynds, an frae ilka coat, Mysie cut a swatch o claithe an stappit thaim in a poutch. Anither door led frae the kitchen intil anither chaumer, an in thare she fand weimen's claes o aw kynds, an frae ilka gown she cut a swatch an pat thaim inti a poutch anaw.

In the mids o the kichen fluir the war a bole wi a trap-door that led doun til a stane fluir. She gaed doun the steps an aw at aince, she fand hirsell up til hir knees in cauld bluid. Syne she hard a vyce frae the derk neuks o the vault sayin:

“Ai dear Leddie Mysie myne, binna you sae bauld,
or yeir warm hert's bluid suin turn this cauld!”

Whan she hard thir wurd, Mysie flew up the stairs as fest as hir legs wad cairrie hir, up intil the licht, an she wes airtin for the outer door, whan she saw Caermoulis an his sairvant harlin the corp o a wumman bi the hair o the heid along the fluir, frae the haw intil the kitchen. She haed nae tyme ti win awa, sae she hid hirsell ahint a door that wes wyde ti the waw.

A mukkil nurrin hound follaed the cannibal intil the kitchen an it gied a loud bowf, kennin that Mysie wes thare. “Wheisht, Luath!” says Caermoulis, an he taen a sherp gullie, cut aff ane o the deid wumman's haunds an threw it til the dug. But the dug haed haen its denner---he wesna richt hungirie an clappit doun ti dover bi the ingil.

Syne Caermoulis sat hirsell doun in a chair an said til his sairvant,

“The Leddie Mysie wul be cummin here for ti pey us a veisit neist Setterday. Ye'd better git this place redd up, Jock! It's no wycelyke. We wadna want hir ti tak fricht as suin as she sets hir fuit owre the houss door. Dae ye ken, Jock, Ah fancie Ah finnd the whuff o fresh bluid about the place? The'r sumbody here, Ah'm shuir!”

But Jock said, “Na, na, Maister, the'r naebodie here but our twa sells. Naebodie ava! Ah'm thinkin ye'r smellin the fresh bluid frae the haund ye gied ti Luath. It's aye lyn on the fluir. The wumman's no lang deid yit.

But Caermoulis wes sweir ti credit this.

Ah still hae a notion the'r sumbody about the place. Juist in case, the-nicht, we'l mak doun the bed ahint the houss door ti mak siccar naebodie can win out.’

Sae thay baith lay doun ahint the door, an in a littil wee whyle, thay war sound asleep snorkin an snorin, eftir ae thair trauchil that day. As shuir as Mysie wes shuir thay war weill awa, she taen up the deid wumman's haund aff the fluir an pat it in hir poutch. Syne, quaet as a mouss, she opent the houss door an lowpit out hie in the air owre the tap o Caermoulis an his sairvant. At this, Caermoulis hauf waukent up out his sleep an mummilt that shuirlye sumbodie haed wun out, but the sairvant said, "Howt!" it wes juist a burd flichterin outby. Whit ither?

Ye can be shuir Mysie didna stap ti pick flouers on the road. As suin as she haed wun hame, she chynged out hir auld clouts, an the neist day, she arranged for a big pairtie o hir freins ti cum til the houss about the tyme that Caermoulis cam for ordnar ti veisit hir. He wes a wee thing pit out whan he saw aw the fowk in the houss, but whan the supper wes set, he wes rael joco an seemed gled aneuch ti sit doun at the brod along wi the ither guests.

Whan the supper wes richt feinisht, the cumpanie settilt doun for a bit ceilidh an it wes gried that oniebodie that cuidna pype or lilt, wad tell a tale. The forenicht gaed in, an sangs war sung an tales war telt, or it cam Mysie's turn. Sae she stuid up an said,

"Ah'm nae singer an the best Ah can dae the-nicht is ti tell ye anent this unco dreime Ah haed lest nicht."

An she glowert owre at Caermoulis.

"This concerns *you*, Caermoulis."

Caermoulis cockit up his lugs at this.

"In ma dreime, it seemed ti me that Ah wes cled lyke a gangril bodie, an that Ah gaed up ti yeir keep. Ah gaed inti the houss an whit did Ah see but a mukkil caudron bylin on the ingil wi bits o a human corp soumin about in it.

"Ah cuid haulrie credit this an thocht Ah'd better hae a keik inti sum o the chaumers in the place. Ah fand a hankil o kies on the kitchen taibil an ane o thaim fittit a chaumer aff the kitchen. Ah gaed inby an fand a gret nummer o men's claes an in anither chaumer, the war a fek o weimen's claes. Ah cut a swatch o claith frae ilka coat an frae ilka gown ti bring hame wi me. See, here thay ir here! An she held up the swatches o claith.

"Syne Ah gaed doun a stey stair frae the kitchen an fand masell up ti the knees in cauld bluid, wi a vyce cryin at me:

'Ai dear Leddie Mysie myne, binna you sae bauld
or yeir warm hert's bluid suin turn this cauld!'"

At this, Caermoulis docht byde quaet onie langir an interrupted hir,

“Weimen’s dremes an weimen’s thochts is ferlifu. Ah’l hear nae mair o this. Jock, saidil the horses an we’l ryde awa frae here!”

But Mysie wadna lat him gang an she gaed on,

“Whan Ah wan back ti the heid o the stair abuin the puil o bluid, Ah saw you an yeir man harlin, bi the hair o the heid, the corp o a wumman alang the fluir. Ye snekkit aff ane o hir haunds an threw it til a mukkil hound neir whar Ah stuid. Ah taen up the haund an brocht it hame wi me, an see, here it is!”

An Mysie held up the haund afore thaim aw. At that, Caermoulis an his sairvant made ti rin for it, but thay war gruppit an bund wi raip. An at aince, thay bure Caermoulis awa ti be brunt in his ain keep, an his sairvant ti be drowned.

In thae days the war haurd herts.