

The Knicht o the Riddils

Lang, langsyne, the war a keing an his queen in Alba, bydin thegither in mukkil content. But the wae days war no ferr ahint, for whan the queen gied hir man a laddie-bairn, here did she no dee in the daein o't. She did that, an suin the Keing wes that dowie an lanesum in his hert that he buid ti tak anither wyfe for ti keep him cumpanie. Fair she wes, an the Keing cam ti loue hir weill in tyme.

Eftir a wee whylie, the saicont wyfe gied hir man a son tae, an the twa laddies grew up thegither as richt cronies, an thay war the best o freins for monie a lang year. But here, ae day, the Queen said til hirsell:

“It is no ma ain son, Alasdair, that wul ring owre this kinrik whan his faither dees. Na, it isna! It wul be Cormac, the son o the Keing's first wyfe, for he is the alder, an awthing wul faw ti him. An whit geir wul ma ain laddie hae? Naething ava, for shuir!”

An frae this day on, didna the Queen growe the mair cankert wi ilka day that passed, an she gaed aboot wi a face on hir that wad soor milk? An it wesna that lang or she beguid ti think on weys o gittin quut o his guidson, sae that hir ain son micht be keing in his steid. Sae ae nicht, she says til hir kimmer:

“This knicht, ye wul mak reddie a waucht for ma guidson, Cormac, wi puzzin in't, an Ah sal rewaird ye wi a neivefu gowd.”

An the kimmer, for aw she wes sweir ti dae it, fell in wi this skame.

But here it turnt oot that Alasdair haird his mither's ill wurd an telt the haill thing ti Cormac, an wairned him no ti drink the wyne the Queen wad gie him. Cormac thenkit his brither an made shuir he didna lay a fingir on whit his guidmither brocht him that forenicht.

But whan the Queen saw, the neist day, that Cormac wes as gleg an weill as ever, she gaed again ti the kimmer an said:

“Nou Ah'l speik but the aince. The-nicht, mak you ready anither drink for ma guidson, an pit intil't a feller puzzin, an Ah sal gie ye a gowpenfu gowd for yeir truibil!

An again, the kimmer fell in wi whit the Queen askit.

But aince again, did Alasdair no hear awthing that wes said? An again he wairned Cormac, sayin:

“The-nicht, sit you in the shaidaes ayont the ingil neuk, an pour a pilkkil o the Queen's sair drink intil a wee bottil Ah sal gie ye, an we sal see whit we sal see.”

An whan at nichtfaw, the Queen, smirtlin at him, haundit him a tass o wyne ti drink, Cormac did awthing that Alasdair haed bidden him. Syne he said til his brither:

“Alasdair, ma brither, Ah dout Ah maun quut this steid, for Ah im nae langir sauf here. Guid fortuin be wi ye, an fare ye weill, for Ah’l be on ma road this verra nicht, i the wee smaw oors.”

But Alasdair loued Cormac weill an wadna be sindert frae him, sae he said:

“Ah’l cum alang wi ye, brither, for we hae spent aw oor days thegither in mukkil content. An we ir no feinisht yit, for we wul seek oor fortuin in the warld thegither, an whitever the tane sal wun, the tither sal share, aw oor leevin days.”

An sae it wes that the perr o thaim gaed quaeitlyke, intil the mirk o the nicht an rade awa frae thair faither’s touer.

Nou thay haedna ridden ferr inti the forest ayont the houss whan Cormac says:

“Alasdair, ma brither—the’r nae kennin richt whuther the wyne the Queen gied me wes puzzint or no. See you, here the smaw bottil in ma poutch. Juist you cowp a wee jirbil o the wyne inti yeir horse’s lug, an lat us see whit befaws.

Sae thay did juist that, an the horse nichert, taen nae mair nor twa-thrie steps, an syne whit soud it dae, but founder, an faw down stane deid ablo a mukkil aik tree.

“See,” said Alasdair, “Here wes Ah no richt aboot the Queen, ma mither? Ah can read hir lyke a book! But nou Ah sal finnd it ill ti keep up wi ye on yeir horse, wi me be-in on fuit lyke.”

“Howt man!” Cormac aunsert, “Yeir horse wes nae mair not a rikkil; o auld banes. It haed haen its day. Mynes wes a praisent frae ma faither an he is a mukkil strang beiss, sae he is, an yung forby. He can cairrie the baith o us fyne. Up ye git than, brither!”

Sae for a guid whyle, baith the lads traivelt on thegither on the ae horse. An syne, Cormac spak aince mair.

“Alasdair, ma brither, Ah can haulie credit whit we hae seen the-nicht. Coud the trulie be puzzin in the wyne. Mebbe yeir horse dee’d juist throu be-in auld. Shuirly ma guidmither wadna ettil ti kill me, for hae Ah no been lyke hir ain bairn, aw thae year.? Lat us pit it ti the test again, an drap you a jirbil o the wyne inti the lug o this horse, tae, an lat us see whit befaws!”

An Alasdair did juist that, an whit soud befaw, but that the horse taen juist twa-thrie steps afore it, an foundert an die’d tae, ablo a mukkil elm tree in the forest.

“Sae,” said Alasdair, “wes Ah no richt? Shuirly Ah wes! An nou, hou dae we gang forrit? A forest this thick is nae place for stravaigin whan it is pitmirk derk. Lat us byde whaur we ir or the morn’s mornin!”

An thay did juist that, sleepin in quaeitness an content or the dawin.

Whan thay waukent, whit soud thay see but twal houdie craws aw eydent pykin an ryvin awa at the corp o the deid horse whaur it lay anaith the brainches o the mukkil elm tree. An wunner o wunners, as suin as the twal craws haed etten a pikkil o the horse's corp, did thay no faw doun deid, wi thair legs in the air, anaw? Thay did that!

“Weill nou, here a thing ti wunner at!” said Cormac. “At the back o ma mynd, Ah hae an unco thocht. Lat us gether up thir deid craws an tak thaim alang wi us. Mebbe the wul be a toun at the end o the forest, an lat uas see whit befaws!”

Sae Cormac an Alasdair gethert up the corps o the deid craws, an gaed on thair wey, on throu the trees o the forest or thay cam oot at its ferr edge ti see fornent thaim, the waws o a smaw toun. Inti the toun gaed the brithers, an throu the streets o it or thay wan til a bakstar's shop.

“Juist you byde here the-nou,” said Cormac, “for Ah maun gang inby!”

An wi that, he gaed in ti converse wi the bakstar.

“Guid day, frein,” says Cormac. “Ah hae been chauncie aneuch ti claucht thir twal craws, an ma brither is rael pairtial ti craw pie. Wad ye be sae guid as ti mak twal wee pies for us, an for that, Ah wul pey ye a haill gowd piece, sae Ah wul?”

The bakstar wes geyan weill pleased wi sic a guid bergain frae sic a braw gentilman, an he set ti wurk at aince, blawin up his fyre ti haet his oven, an poukin aff the fethers aff the burds ti mak thaim reddie. Afore lang, he haed made pie crust an in nae tyme ava, the twal pies war reddie in a skeep, an the twa brithers war on thair road again ti see whit neist, fortuin wad bring.

Awa throu the wee toun thay gaed, joco an licht-hertit, stappin but the aince for ti buy sum breid an a morsil kebbok wi thair lest pennie piece. An on the ither syde the toun, whit soud the be but—another mukkil forest. Bi nou, it wes the forenicht an gray derk, sae it seemed best ti the brothers that thay soud eat thair breid an sleep the nicht awa. But haulie war thay weill feinisht thair supper, whan wha soud cum breingin at thaim throu the mirk o the forest but a gang o kettrens? Fower an twantie o thaim the war, shuirlie, an the heid kettren spak rochlie ti the brithers, sayin:

“Gie us yeir poutches ma braw chiels, or we wul shuirlie kill the baith o ye! Steir yeirsells nou, for we haena mukkil patience at the best o tymes!

“Caw cannie, nou, freins,” said Cormac. “We canna gie ye siller the-nicht, for o siller we hae nane ti gie. We ir but puir traivlars that haes spent oor lest pennie on meat ti dae us on the road. That wes less nor an oor syne, an it wes littil aneuch we gat. But whit littil we hae, ye ir walcum ti tak, an guid luck ti ye.

An Cormac haundit owre the twal crae pies ti the fower an twantie kettrens, an at aince the ketterens set tae, ti gorblin thaim up. An even whyle thay war still chowin the pies, in a glisk, ilkane fell doun deid ablo the brainches o a mukkil birk.

Syne, Cormac an Alasdair taen frae the deid kettrens aw the gowd an siller thay haed, an the war mukkil o it! Syne thay turnt asyde ti finnd anither steid ti sleep awa the nicht content, or the neist day's dawin. An wi the sun i the mornin, thay set furth again on thair traivel, an cam aerie til a fyne houss, that stuid on the ferr syde the trees. An the houss haed heich touers an braw gairdens spreid roun aboot it, aw set oot wi bricht flouers an fountains, the lyke o whilk thay haed never seen in aw thair days.

Gairdin the yetts o this steid the war an auld carl, an whan Cormac an Alasdair spiered wha micht be aucht sic a grand haudin, the auld ane hirpilt up an said:

Dis it no belang the Knicht o the Riddils? Shuirlye it dis! Thay caw him sae, for he lykes naething better nor ti jalouse a guid riddil. He is a guid maister an kyndlyke. Gret launds an walth he awns, an forby, he haes a dochter that bonnie, hir lyke is no ti be fund oniewhaur in the haill warld, an he loues hir weill. Mynd ye, it is no afore tyme she gat a man o hir ain, but hir faither wul gie hir anelie ti the man that wul spier him a riddil that wul fikkil him. Whit wi him kennin aw the riddils in the warld areddies, the'r no mukkil howp for the puir quyne Ah'm thinkin."

An at that, Cormac drew Alasdair ti ae syde, an says he:

"Alasdair, ma brither, Ah mint ti ask this knicht a riddil o ma ain. Ah sal tell him that Ah'm traivlin for ti seek ma fortuin, wi ma sairvant at ma back, sae git you ahint me, an lat us see whit befaws."

An Cormac, wi Alasdair at his back, gaed owre again ti the auld man an said:

"Auld yin, Ah'm the verra man wi a riddil for yeir maister, an lang wul he be in aunserin it, Ah can tell ye. Can Ah cum inby nou, an ma sairvant alang wi me?"

"Shuirlye ye can dae that, ma braw laddie," said the auld caird, an he made for ti open the yett. Syne he sent for a draigil ti tak Cormac an Alasdair ti the Mukkil Haw, whaur sat the Knicht o the Riddils, his dochter asyde him. An athout a dout, she wes trulie the fairest lassie in the weidth o the haill warld.

Cormac telt the Knicht that he haed a grund riddil for him, the lykes o whilk he wad never hae haird afore nou, an the Knicht leuch, sayin:

"Ir ye sae shuir, ma bauld laddie? Ah'm a dab haund at the riddils, Ah can promise ye. But spier awa, an Ah winna be lyke masell gin Ah dinna gie ye the aunser afore ye ir richt duin speikin."

"Mebbe ye wul," said Cormac, "an mebbe ye winna, for ma riddil is a byordnar ane! Tak tent nou, whyle Ah tell it ti ye!"

"Ane killed twa, an twa killed twal, an twal killed fower an twantie an twa wan awa. Hou micht that be, div ye think?"

The Knicht o the Riddils thocht, syne he raxt his hairns an he thocht mair. But nae aunser coud he finnd. Nane ava! Sae he keepit Cormac an Alasdair in kyndness or he haed mair tyme ti warsil wi the riddil. But even eftir thrie days an nights, he wes still fikkilt. Eftir aw, hou coud he ken aboot the twa horses that Alasdair haed killed, or that twal craws haed dee'd frae eatin the puzzint horsemeat? An that Cormac an Alasdair haed wun sauf awa frae skaith? The Knicht, shuirlye, coud never finnd oot aw thae things. The war nae wey he *coud* ken.

Houanever, on the third nicht o the Knicht's warslin, his bonnie dochter gaed ti Cormac for ti fleitch him ti tell hir the aunser ti sic an unco riddil, that hir faither haed never haird the lyke o in aw his leevin days. An the lassie wes that bonnie that Cormac's hert fair meltit, sae that he telt hir awthing, an sent hir back til hir faither.

It wesna verra lang, ye can be shuir, afore the Knicht sent for Cormac an gied him richt awa the aunser til his riddil! An syne, he said:

“Sen Ah hae fund the kie ti yeir riddil, Ah'l be as strecht wi you as ye hae been wi me. Here a chyce for ye, ma braw lad! Ye maun chuisse whuther ye wul hae yeir heid dung aff this verra day, or whuther ye wul be putten oot ti sea in a seipin boat, wi naither oars, nor meat an drink. Chuisse weill nou, for it is juist a quaisten whuther ye dee quick or slaw!”

But Cormac stuid up ti the Knicht an said:

“Douce, douce, Sir Knicht. Fyne ye ken ye war fikkilt bi ma riddil an that ye wad never hae fund the aunser gin yeir dochter haedna wun roun me, wi hir be-in sae bonnie. Ye wul rue aw the hairs o yeir heid gin ye send me ti ma daith. Mebbe ye soud spier at yeir dochter whit *she* thinks?”

At this the Knicht swithert an haed a saicont thocht til himsell:

“Ah maunna be owre thrawart! Ma lassie seems taen up wi this Cormac an he is a braw wycelyke fallae, an bauld an weill-faured forby, sae he is. He haes stuiden up ti me an it is in ma mynd that he wad be as guid a man for ma lassie as Ah im ever lyke ti finnd. An for aw that Ah ken, she micht be a geyan auld wumman afore anither man wul can fikkil me, gin Ah'm spared ti see the day. Forby, he wad be cumpanie for me bi the ingil neuk in the lang wunter nichts.”

Sae the Knicht o the Riddils gied his bonnie lassie ti Cormac an thair waddin splore lestit a year an a day, an gret wes the luiv atwein thaim. Syne, at the end o the year an a day, whit did Cormac dae, but send Alasdair hame til his faither's kinrik, wi wurd that Alasdair micht cum in for it himsell? He did juist that, for he haed nae need o onie ither kinrik. He hae yin o his ain an a bryde he loued weill. Sae in the hinner end, baith the brithers haed lands ti thairsells an ilkane spent the lave o his days weill content.

