

## The Clown and Trout

McWho was your average Scottish man, broad of chest and shoulder, taller than a rowan tree and strong enough to lift the stone of scone. He could swear in Gaelic, in Scot and English, plus if you'd ask him, he'd swear he was born amongst the misty Isle of Skye just under the cullions, slightly left of Glen Brittle.

Raised within the hills and mountains of the highlands, he grew fast of feet and lean from stolen beef who shared the same dark sweet waters of the glens. Salmon also, on occasion jumped into his arms, whom by accident gave him his cunning and wit.

He was master to some, slave to none despite many trying to force him away from his life of freedom. No path, track or cave was a stranger to him, no maiden a mystery. He was welcomed and toasted by those of the kilt and claymore for his wild tales and game for a challenge, hated and despised by those of the musket and red cloth plus many a lord but nay their ladies! For as one Lord stated

“By god, he just slips from our fingers like he has the skin of a salmon, always a step ahead of our men like he has the eye's of an eagle, and darn fleet of feet like the stag. All we ever hear of him is his abominable laughter, deep and menacing like a bemused bear, if I ever catch him.....”

If all knew half of what he had done in his life, they would know he had travelled wide, had had more adventures than drams in a 50-year-old bottle of Glenlivet, and had got out of more scrapes than near fights on the streets of Inverness during its hay days. Plus seen more wondrous sights than any would deem possible within the ancient woods and lofty peaks of the highlands on a yearly basis.

As he approached me one night in the Clown and Trout, his face shrouded in the shadows, I knew all of the above and snippets of more, yet I did not fear or revere him as he sat down opposite me as quiet as night and lean over my way.

“I hear you can make words,” he whispered in an accent not forceful but deep and humorous in spirit.

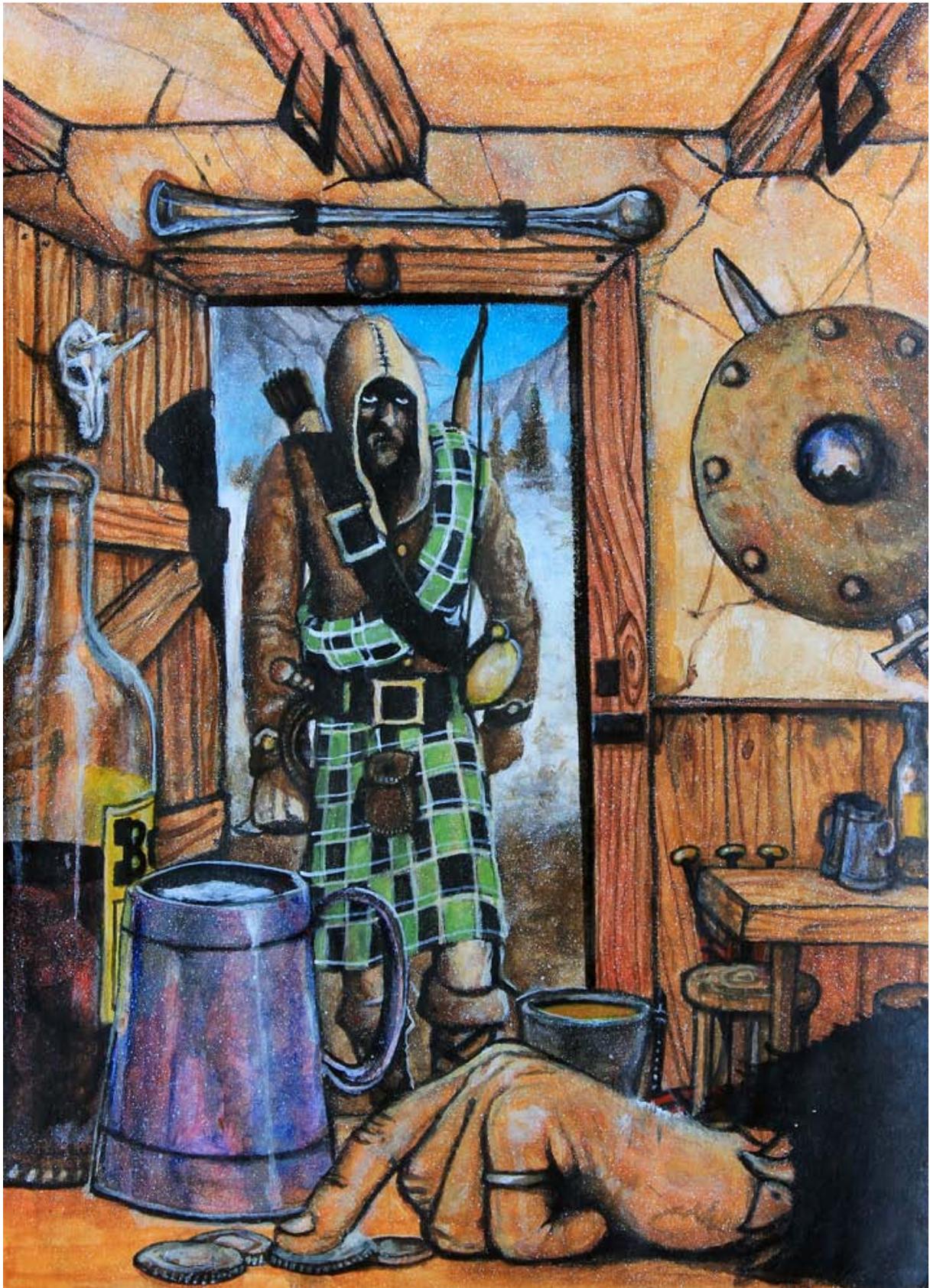
“Ai, I've written some” I replied after a slight pause while my mind raced around the possibilities of such an enquiry from this man.

He sat back, pulled his hood back, and his face beamed into view, sharp and precise, chiseled into leanness by the life he had led. His eyes I noticed first, drawn to like a lady dressed in red within a monochrome world. They were clear like virgin ice and green like the long lush grass of the hills. The tight muscles of his neck and shoulders proved very well how quick this gentle giant could move. But for now, his stance and the grin on his face, broad and innocent gave me some inclination as to his intentions.

“I have tales to tell and I want you to put them on paper”

And there it was, all laid out like my lunch on the inn's table, his whole life I presumed laid out bare to me, to my questions and of course, his willingness to share that life and record it, for posterity, for all or just him?

Before that night, I had thought I had led an adventurous life. However, in the preceding months and years I was taken to some strange places, some I had heard of but many I had not. I heard of gossip, scandals and history, most of which would never find their way, nor in this civilized and governed world be allowed into the books. I felt like my life thus far had been led in the dark and his tales, whether true



of false, allowed me to wake each morning into a world full of colour, somewhere different, new, places full of excitement.....

One day about 2 years after this first meeting, he suddenly finished speaking to me, put his mug down, stood up and simply said goodbye to me. Then he smiled that rascal smile again, pulled his hood over his head and vanished from my sight never to be seen again. I did often ask about him, but no one was willing to relay this information or as might have been more the case, had not seen or heard anything of him. He had simply vanished like the free spirit he was to pastures new on another adventure – Or at least that is what I like to think.

Perhaps you have heard whispers of his whereabouts, seen his shadow upon the heather, or heard his laughter echoing along the glens. Perhaps you've even read his tales, as I am sure was his wish and they remind you of someone.....a tall Scottish man of strength and laughter, whose constant companions were, or are a whip and bow.

Oh yes, I never mentioned them before did I, but let us now and who better to reveal their mystery than the grand Scottish gent himself, like an old thick blanket on cold nights allow him to draw you in with his warm years.

---

## The Girl and the Bow

I remember the day well when he told me of his bow, it was a bright spring day where we met on the heather'ed glen, our backs and humour warmed by the sun on our backs and the whiskey in our stomachs. His manner, his smile and his usual pleasant deep accent would lead those who did not know him so well to think that this was going to be one of his usual good humoured tales. Not so, a good tale I had no doubt it would be but for a second, as I presume his mind raced over some grizzly detail, his eyes betrayed him, as if for a fraction the bright day we were in turned into darkness full of a raging storm. But like I said the tale started good and I couldn't help but be drawn in.....

*Love a good spring storm, the thunder, the tense suspense it throws at you. That was the day before I found the bow or.....Ah your see. In the morning after, the clouds still hung like huge boulders above the peak, twisting and moving slow, dark and foreboding, threatening above our heads. The winds were low and the sun shone like a beacon between the huge clouds gaps revealing areas of bright grass and heather which reveled in the wet, in amongst areas of dull darkness.*

*My brother and I were resting or he might say hiding after the last cattle raid, which didn't go too well due to a few youngsters we were slowing the school of the moon to. Along with us came my bro's mate, called George or later known as Steamer when he took up the pastime of making whiskey. Never knew how he managed to keep his camp a secret from the taxmen, farted like a bugler and the reason I never took him on a raid, be like having a whole gang of pipers going off. But any way, ye, we all went fishing on this day as apparently George said that after a heavy storm was the best time for it. He is a tad dopy like a stuffed haggis but I still went along, just to see, just to get away from the peat fire for a while.*

*It wasn't hard to know where the river was, could hear it from miles away as the downpour from the day before collected and burst its way down it. Always amazed me how those tiny drops falling from the sky could turn into huge thrashing serpentine river beasts roaring like demented old women on a kick the drunken old man session. We apparently were heading to the stag falls, a*

*place I thought in the rivers present rage, was not the best place to venture and with all of us in a hung over state, if it could take and keep the souls of a herd of stags what would it do with us.*

*Oh well, in for a dram and a bull, it was the pool under the falls I knew George was taking us, good for a moon lit dip in calmer times with a maiden or two. Yet now I venture there with two smelling guys – just gotta think of the fish I guess, been awhile I've had anything other than oaks and beef, which I am soooo sick of.*

*Plan was like most things, simple. After we'd skidded down the rivers bank just beyond the falls, tie rope either side of the river over the pool, tie onto the rope, scurry out into the pool, and catch the fish. Ye like I said, simple.....*

*Darn if simple isn't the best plan to have sometimes, wouldn't of got into this mess if I'd just stayed home with fire and bottle, but then again.*

*We neared the river just above the falls, it is not a high falls only about a man's height but it is wide. Usually would see the jagged black rocks along its sides, but today just white water speeding like a sweat covered spooked stallion pass us over the edge into the pool beyond. The noise it made was louder than normal, even covered George's backside explosions, which is saying something.*

*The spectacle of the falls in other times, say under a hot sun while enjoying a picnic with a maiden...or two would have been heaven sent as the dark peat waters fell like thick treacle over the rocky edge to swirl and gurgle by the pool before being kicked off down the river. Today that spectacle was the same but dew and rivulets streamed like spider legs down the river bank under the falls, everything just seem to be larger, faster, made more so by the low dark clouds still above us. Even so, we tied the rope off on our side then tied it around George who ventured into the river down from the pool where its rage was less. With my brother and me pulling on our end and George using sticks, battling the river was like moving a stubborn bull, one second it would obey and the next it would smoothly step to the left and tumble all the men with ease – Jesus and all this for fish.*

*Got the rope attached and our selves, and even managed the walk out in to the river. All was OK so far. In normal current, the river would only be about a few feet deep but here we were up to our chest in this steaming water and standing on the edge of a pool that would be even deeper, but apparently, that is where the fish are. And their we were, the rope straining under the weight of us straining to stand and the waters never ending force straining to push us down stream, like the wind picks up leaves and toss them away like feathers. Tempers were also straining as my brother and his mate proceeded to have a "serious" discussion right in the middle of a mad river, with me between them. Oh bollocks to this I thought and stepped towards the pool, which as it turned out we were closer to then we thought and I went down and immediately back as the cascade of the current throttled me.*

*The rope stopped me after some distance whereby my body did an involuntary dance as the current pulled and pushed until the rope gave and I flew, ye literally flew down stream. Bang – into a*

boulder, over and over I tumbled instinctively throwing my arms out and up to grab anything, something, just like I would if falling down a snow covered mountain, but this time it was more falling along instead of down. Bang another boulder, this time winding me as I frantically try to gain the surface and air. Round and round my body gets tossed by the current like it was only a stick as the light starts to fade and all I feel is the empty cold blackness engulf me. I could scream, but no one would hear me, I could get out, but the stream of water will not let go of me as the darkness increases and the noise of its force and its paralyzing cold fades to leave just blackness.

Time had no meaning to me or the wonder of the recent trip I had down the river as I opened my eyes to see stars, hundreds if not thousands of stars, laced by the dark outlines of tree branches. The river I could hear was like a mellow memory of the angry beast I had ventured into, what, perhaps a few hours ago. I did not know where I was and as my sense came back like a welcome guest, questions rallied to my head like spikes. Like why my clothes were dry and how did I get this far from the river? Never once thought if I was dead, dreaming or something, funny that as perhaps I should have done.

In amongst the spikes and the welcome guest, my ears started to register something unusual, something you would not expect in the middle of the night, in the middle of nowhere. A Childs screams.

My eyes followed the lace of branches down towards where the screams came as the branches grew, multiplied by the dark outlines of the branches trunks, then the tree become a wood, a very dark wood, a large seemingly impenetrable wood whose only feeling of life came from the scream within its depths.

Of course, I had to investigate; it could be one of the young'uns from the settlement, perhaps out to help find me, that's what I guessed at the time. Only, as I moved amongst the tree's closer to the aligning screams, I knew this was not one of our local woods of pine. These trees were wide of girth and twisted looking more like the woods of the lowlands. I couldn't of been carried that far by the river? Anything's possible I guessed and at that moment, walking slow and cautious amongst these woods was quieter than those at home whose pine needles would have made more noise and disabled me from following the screams. However, these darn wide trees's seemed to bend the sound and I ended backing up a few times until like when a door opens in a dark room, the young'un suddenly came into sight, laying on the floor, one arm behind her back helping her sit up with the other over her mouth as she starred to my right, at what I did not know.

As I moved towards her, I saw out of the corner of my eye a form raise from the ground. For a fleeting moment I thought it could be a friend, relative until that sound burst from its mouth, a sound I will never forget, a shrill or bark I don't know but of such volume it spoke miles of the forms intent and that it was not human. It moved with a speed that defied lights speed towards the girl just as her scream reached a high strong pitch and curled into a tight ball as the form stopped above her bellowing like a deranged lunatic, that is until I introduced it to a Glaswegian kiss right on the nose. Usually that was enough to keep the strongest of men occupied for a few moments but this thing just brushed it off like an unwanted fly. Still, the few seconds was enough

*for me to lift the girl and pelt hell for leather towards a faint light I saw flare up just as the form moved towards the girl.*

*Light, must make the light as heat spreads within me like rats on a boat as my heart beats faster and deeper as the forms strange screams rise like an orchestras within the woods from everywhere, except thankfully towards my front and the light, a light that seemed further away then nearer. Strange wood or not the twisted dead growths of it littering the floor seemed to disappear as I plummeted along, where normally I should of tripped and fell, I knew instinctively to jump and just as well as I could feel the hot presence of the form right at my back. Then I felt the hot rush of something scrape by my cheek followed by the sound of the form tumbling as it had tripped on a stump. Regardless of what had made it fall, I did not care, only that it gave me more time to escape whatever it was, with a bundle of whoever, through a strange wood to a light – and all this for fish!*

*Oh, man if only I could rewind the last day, some adventures are just thrilling but this madness is, well madness. fifty minutes ago I entered the wildest adventure I'd had so far, still not sure if it was real or make believe but I have no daunt that's its reality for now as I lean out of the cave within which I found the light. Looking back into it, I see the girl all hushed up and curled up against the oldest looking man I have ever seen. Must of been over 100 years old and going by the tale he told me, if not as tall as some of mine – but not this one – he could well be much more than that.*

*Apparently I'd walked into one big piece of shit this time within a land far from my own – ye how the heck did that happen, heard about the small people behind rocks when I was young, but this is something else – whatever, I was in the dark land of were-wolves or some such things. The girl was someone important who needed to be kept alive; the last element of innocence in this mad world...apparently and the old guy was her guardian, savior, knight in shining bloody armour. But guess what, the poor dear is too old to do it any longer and I'm the replacement sent by someone and guess what I have to help me protect this perfect girl with from a mountain heap of bad wolves.....a damn bow, but not just any old bow, I am reliably informed, it's a black yew short bow, arrows and all with points of hooked silver, more silver then I've seen since entertaining that lords lady a year back.*

*Sweet memory that is but far from the object I held now, the bow. Must admit it feels much different to the one's we have back where I should be. The strings really thin, too thin I would think for a bow of this strength, but that's another thing, I can't guess what strength it is as it does not take any effort to pull it back whereas the arrow I tested with it a moment ago is still vibrating out of a tree I aimed at. The force it left the bow with was magical and I imagine would fly a lot further. Plus, and this is the strange thing, the arrow changed direction to where I was looking.....cool.*

*The girl came to my side, still weeping some but otherwise OK with a sort of acceptance of me that I really did not understand, heavily bearded and stinking of home grown whiskey as I was (note to self, don't go anywhere while hung over again, get in to heap of shit). The old man didn't move*

*and considering that he'd died about five minutes ago I did not expect him to, but in this wonderful world, who knows what may happen. All I supposed to do now was take the girl to a house along a path that anybody could follow in daylight but that is another thing, there is no daylight in this world – great – I hated to guess that there was no whiskey either.*

*Ever since gaining the cave, I had not heard or seen any more of these were-wolves but the old guy, as full of nice information as he was, eagerly informed me that the woods was full of them. That they dwelt within the tree's knotted roots and were what was left of a distant human civilization, bla, bla, bla and the usual end of world human destroying thing. I wished they were distant because as the girl led the way, I knew that others would appear, others that I would have to kill with the only weapon that could until we reached this house whose surrounding grounds the were-wolves could not step upon, so just like the principle back home – no women allowed in the bar.*

*The first five minutes or so were fine, I still could not see much except for blackness, began to realize how mining mules felt like being led as I was by someone who knew the way, from and into more nothingness. The only thing I did know was that I hoped that this load of other wolves only numbered about 25 as that was all the arrows I had but so far so good.*

*Oh no, mentioned the dreaded words as the static shapes and forms of the wood started to move all around us just as the vibration of howls arose in the black. Couldn't worry about the forms behind or to my side right now, the one's in front seemed numerous enough.*

*"Where's the house?" I screamed, to be answered by the pointing of an arm to the left of me. Oh fabulous, right into the midst of a particularly large gang of moving masses, then again it made the need for aiming with the bow redundant, just let loose and stare at the biggest mass in front. Easy peasy lemon squeezy, as they say, except they are not here and the mass is getting nearer while lord knows where the house is.*

*"Can't see it, where is it" I screamed again at the nimble figure dashing like a fairy in front of me.*

*"Not far, out of the woods" I heard as I let loose another arrow. Two gone, nowhere near enough left.*

*Heck was that a light in front, not solid or bright like a fire but a radiating light like seen above a town at night. Whizz, whizz, two more flew both reducing the mass in front but not the noise of their roar. Did wonder for a moment what they look like in the light, but thought "probably best not to know" as the masses closed in, the light grew brighter and the arrows whizzed from the black bow.*

*Quite suddenly, the trees ended and by the glow of the light ahead could see that the open space we entered was covered by something resembling thick grass, and yes a fence of some sort not far from us now, a fence that was not very high. I do hope what they said about the were wolves not being able to step beyond it was true. Thankfully there were no more in front, only behind us meaning I now had to turn to hit the howling pain in the asses when I saw just how many there were, all*

*colliding together to make what looked like an ugly twisted disease ridden ulcer on the land. Whizz, whizz went more arrows finding their mark easily, if this was red coats I would laugh with glee, but not now, not today or should I say tonight.*

*Turning back to the fence, I saw people the other side of it, normal looking people gesturing for us to hurry, some I saw had bows like mine, but also I saw the girl tiring now with head bent low and arm drooping. So close yet the fence still felt so far. I turned back to the mass of beast and whizz the arrows flow, quiet and sure but not seeming to do much to the beasts numbers, if only I had a musket. No, would not be much good in this instance but the noise it makes would make me feel it was.*

*Turned back to the light, the fence and salvation to see that the girl was almost at the fence, and could now make out the people's faces. Those nearest the girl had their arms reaching out for her and the bowmen ready and waiting to send a flood of silver arrows. I resisted a smile of triumph as the smelly hot breath of the mass flowed passed by my ears and into my brain and turned one last time only to feel empty air where the arrows should have been. "Turn and run you moron", my thoughts screamed but it was too late, way too late. I lift the bow like a spear and thrust it towards a ball of fur and red teeth until something like a boulder pelted into me and blackness engulfed me.*

*Next I knew I woke to see a fussy light, like everything was out of focus with a ringing in my ears that was only just laudable over a pounding in my head. Felt like my head was vibrating in and out, in and out with the speed of a herd of deer stomping all over my body. Oh god I had to get up and tried to but something, someone stopped me.*

*"Wow bro, take it easy you need to take it easy. How do you feel, you look like shit"*

*The confusion did not help my aching head as I tried to get round the fact that my brother was near me and as my vision cleared, I saw I was back in our little stone house and smelt the familiar mixture of peat and whisky, normally revolting but quite welcoming now.*

*"I've felt worse" I answered "what happened?"*

*"What happened? You botched up our fishing trip, that's what happened" my brother said as he picked up something behind "but you found a nice looking bow"*

*Well at least that answered one question, "dream or real" as I saw him bring the black bow into view.*