

Stories in the Doric from the Monastery of Fable

The Felshee

By *Sanners Gow*

I wiz sittin ae forenicht on the steps o the remembrance tower at Canker's Knowe last summer lookin doon ower Macduff and beyond intae the Firth, it wiz like a picter postcard. The sea hid the colour o carnation milk and nae a breeze disturbed it. It wiz a fine saft nicht as I sat there wi my notebook writin a story as usual fin a voice speired ma if I wiz sketchin. I looked up and saw a man maybe in his late twenties lookin up at ma.

"Na ma loon I couldna sketch tae save ma life!" And lookin ower the Firth I said "Though wi sic a bonny view I wish I could!" He laughed and agreed how bonny wiz the view. I tellt him I wiz writing wee stories about Macduff and the North East. He seemed interested an speired ma fit kind o stories?

"Well ony wee strange tales about folk-lore or ghosts or sic like written in the Doric."

This really teen his attention and he sat doon aside ma. Wi a thoughtful look ontae his face he said "Div ye want tae hear a really strange story about Macduff?"

Always on the ootlook for tales my luggies gave a bit o a waggle and of coorse I says "Aye!" He teen fae his inside pooch o his jaicket a photograph and handed it tae me. It wiz about the size o a standard postcard. There wiz a great boorach o geets standin and some sittin in a familiar place. A puckle o the them were dressed up fancy clyes like they were in a period drama ithers were dressed in aalfarrant clyes maybe o the twenties. I flipped ower the photo and on the back written in faded ink it said 'Christmas party 25th of December 1922 at Macduff Town Hall. Well there's far the 'familiar' bit came I thocht I'd recognised it. I handed it back. "That's a cracker o a photo min. I bet naebody in it his got a sair heed the day?"

He jist smiled and nodded. Then pyntin tae some o the fowk in the photo he began tae name them. As he wint throwe the names he'd ivvery noo an then pynt backwards wi his thoom at the remembrance tower and tell ma far this een or that een wiz killed in the second war. I thocht tae masel 'Noo this lad kens his local history.' I could think o fyowe o my aal school pals fa wid like a wee news wi this lad. This is aa very weel kennin names but it wiz the next bit that teen the ween fae ma sails. He said that jist tae the left o the photo oot o shot there wiz trestle tables an benches far the bairns hid jist feenished aitin soup, tatties and breid made by the wifies fae the soup kitchen up in High street. Aa the geets hid been given an orange for their puddin. The meal hid been peyed for by the Macduff Toon Council as a gift tae the bairns. Many o them hid lost their faithers in the Great War. He spoke the Doric richt enough but wi that safter accent o a man that's been abroad for many years. That kind o accent is pretty common among deep sea sailors or military men that hid tae get themsels understood. Onywee he gid on giein me even mair details aboot that party so many years ago even pointin oot that the wee bitties o something lyin scattered aboot the fleer bein peelins fae the oranges. This lad could spin a tale richt enough.

The bairns in the photo dressed up in period clyes hid been actin a Christmas Carol fae Dickens and ither wee plays fae Grimm's fairy tales, they'd been affa gweed. I'll write the rest o the story as he tellt it. I jotted it doon usin my ain form o shorthand and only noo an

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then getting him tae repeat something as I fell ahin.

“Aifter the party abody wint their ain wye hame. It wiz mid aifterneen so I’d a wee wander about the hairbour. There wisna muckle gyan on so I decided tae wun my wye hame. Instead o cuttin ower tae Tarlair street far I bade I thocht tae masel I’d hud up Duff street then head ower hame on time for supper.

Gyan up the street I saw lichts on in Craighdu Hoose. It wiz usually aa shuttered up because the fowk that owned it bade doon sooth somewye. At least that’s fit the locals said and only on very rare occasions did they bide there. As I drew level wi Craighdu I saw a laddie about the ages o masel playin in the front gairden o the hoose wi a widden top. He could fairly mak it stot and kept it spinnin wi a short bit o stick gien it a tap noo-an-then. He wiz affa posh dressed in tweeds, nae like me wi an aal hand-me-doon gansey, short breeks, een o ma faither’s aal bunnets on ma heed an roch made soutar’s sheen. He wore a suit wi lang breeks and fancy licht broon beets wiz a shine on them like a mirror. He’d a collar an tie and wore a cap made wi the same material as the suit. He looked up at me and smiled but fin he did that he lost control o the top and it wupped about for a minty then stopped.

“Would you like to try it?” he askit o me. He spoke the same wye as een o my teachers at skweel. She tellt us she came fae Edinburgh. So that’s far the fowk o the hoose must come fae.

In nae time I wiz tryin my hand at makin the widden top spin but I couldna dee it as weel as he could. We were getting a gweed laach ivvery time I did it wrang an spun it awa aa ower the place. We were haein sic gweed fun fin the big door o the hoose opened and a really bonny woman came oot. She said the laddie’s name “Charles you’d better come- - - . That’s fin she noticed me and said hello. She’d the same smilin een as the laddie and she seemed tae be fair chuffed fin Charles tellt her we’d been having such good fun. She asked me if I’d like to come in for Christmas supper wi Charles. I wisna too sure though for they were affa posh. It wiz Charles that insisted I come in and that he’d let ma see his wind up train aifter supper. Still a bitty reluctant though I’d a quick look doon at my clyse and the bonny lady saw me and laughed. “Don’t worry about having your play clothes on just come in as you are.” Play clothes? Michty but this wiz my best. I didna tell her that though. Through the big door there wiz tiles deen in the shape o a shield on the fleer wi fancy writin on it and a big copra mat for dichtin yer feet afore ye stood on the tiles. Against the left waa wiz a big stand wi coats an hats hung ontill it and a whole rack o different walkin sticks. Fae the ceilin hung a hale load o glaiss globes and Charles tellt ma they were electric lights fin he saw my amazement. This wiz the closest I’d iver been tae an electric light. We’d only gas lamps in Tarlair street wi their greeny peelywally licht. This licht wiz bricht as day.

A young lassie dressed in black wi a white frilly apron and a wee hat on her heed teen me and Charles intae fit she caad the ‘Dining-room’ There wiz a massive table in the middle o the fleer covered wi a white tablecloth and ontae it there wiz places set wi plates forks, knives an speens by the dizzen. On the centre o the table were great big bowels o a different kind o fruit. We sat doon far we were showed and the servant lassie left us. A couple mintys later the bonny lady and a man entered and came up tae speak tae ma. He’d the same smiling eyes as the lady and I could see at a glance that he wiz Charles’ dad. Fin he spoke it wiz affa posh. I dinna ken if he understood me fin I answered his questions but he smiled and said tae Charles to look after our special guest before sittin doon at the

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heed o the table. The bonny lady sat at the ither eind. A fyowe mintys later twa servant quines came in an laid big plates o food in front o us. I wiz lickin my lips wi anticipation as the man said grace. On the plate affront ma there wiz roast beef wi dumplin, roast tatties, neeps, carrotts and wee green things that looked for aa the world like wee cabbages.

Charles tellt ma they were caad Brussel's Sprouts. A gweed lash o gravy on tap and we got stuck in. Nae kennin fit fork an knife tae use I jist copied Charles. Tae this very day I've nivver eaten a better meal. Aifterhin we got a big slice o aipple pie wi cream on't. Pure heaven. Aifter we'd hid oor mait the servant lassies came in and started tae clear awa the dishes. Charles' dad said that us gents would retire to the library, and ushered us through the hoose. Enterin the library wiz something else. Each waa apart fae the door and fireplace hid raas o shelves each fullid wi books. Many o them were leather-bound and must've cost a fortune. A lot o the books looked as if they were medical or maybe law. Well fitiver they were I couldna read the words.

The man looked doon at me wi his smilin een nae doot seein foo my een hid lichted up then asked "Do you like books?" I nodded my heed and sayin I suppose in wonder that I'd niver afore seen this muckle books in my life. He laughed an speired if I wiz a good reader? I shook my heed "Nae really but if I'd books like this I wid be!" Again he laughed and rubbed ma heed as he wint tae the big table at the end o the room and poored himsel a drink fae a decanter afore lightin up a cigar and sittin doon. Charles wiz at ma tae come and see his train. It wiz set oot on a track at the far corner the room. We played awa as the man enjoyed his cigar and drink. It only seemed mintys later fin een o the servants came in and announced tae the man that athing wiz ready in the dining room.

Back through the table hid been cleared. Instead o fancy tablecloths the surface wiz jist varnished wid that looked as if a body wid be able tae see their face in it. In the centre there wiz a a fyowe wee widden boxes wi numbers and symbols on them and next tae that a big green baize cloot hid been set oot and a fit looked like a black horn cup on it. Aside the cup were twa dice een wi numbers and the ither wi strange symbols like on the wee boxes. The man laughingly tellt us tae tak oor seats. I could see Charles wiz fair excited and fin aa the servant lassies came in they looked excited ana. The lady and the man shouted oot a name and that person came and sat doon in front o the green cloot. They'd tae pit the dice intae the cup rattle them aboot then roll the dice ontae the green cloot. Each person hid tae dee this three times as the man teen notes fae each roll o the dice. This wint on until my name wiz called and abody githered there tellt I wiz the special guest o Charles. Abody hid smilin een as they watched me roll the dice. The man duly noted the score then handed the note book ower tae the lady. She quickly tallied up at the side o each name and handed ower een o the wee widden boxes tae that person.

The boxes wid've been aboot the size o a pencil case wi a lid that slid oot so ye could use it as a straight edge. As each person got their box they opened it wi great excitement, some got jewelery ithers got siller. Then it came tae my turn and fin I slid the lid aff inside wiz a siller croon or five shilling piece tae them that disna mind on them. Fair chuffed I thanked the folk but the man put up his hand. "No need to thank us for you won it fair and square!"

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He came in a boot and then the lid gave me my box and turned it over. It had strange writing on it and everybody gasped when they saw it. The man told me it was a 'Felshee' and that I'd have to keep it about my person at all times. I asked the obvious question "It's a 'Felshee'???" Everybody laughed at this and I could see everybody had smiling eyes. The man put his hand on my shoulder and said "Time will tell!"

After I got home I gave my mother the crown and told her I'd found it. She wasn't that pleased and even though it was a windfall she kept it at home far from me. I didn't want to tell her about the folks at the big house, nor that I found it on the street for she would've put me straight to the police station to hand it in thinking some poor old man had lost it. So I told her I found it down by the harbour between high and low water. Now that here in Macduff is believed to be a gift from the 'Gweed Fowk' of the sea.

I grew up and being born in 1910 I was old enough to fight in the second war so I sailed on a drifter sweeping mines up at Scapa. My father had been on drifters during the Great War but had been killed in the Aegean in the same action that Joseph Watt from the Broch had earned the Victoria Cross or Skipper Watt as everybody knew him. Unlike my father I survived my war and afterwards came back to Macduff and resumed the fishing. It was about 1950 when I realised that something was wrong with me. At the age of forty I still looked twenty and folks that were at school with me began to make comments about this. I was getting worried kind of masel to tell the truth and my mind always went back to that Christmas day so long ago and the man telling me about the 'Felshee' and that 'Time will tell.' I've always kept it with me as he told me to.

Eventually by the mid fifties I'd have to leave Macduff altogether. I came back in the 1980s and just told folks I was the son of the man they knew. It looks to me as if I'll have to move on again for a couple of years and come back once more as my own son in a couple of decades!" I finished scribbling as I caught up with the yarn. I said to him "Mighty loon but that was just a cracker of a story!" Then I asked "How did you manage to make that up?" He smiled at me with such sadness in his eyes as he took out of his pocket what looked like a ruler and handed it to me. It was well worn but I could hardly make out strange writing on it. I handed it back with the question "Felshee?" He nodded saying he'd showed it to a couple of scholars years before that knew ancient languages but they didn't know the words but one had heard about a legend that the ancient gods could grant immortality to the 'winner of the game' by awarding them with a 'Felshee' when I told him the name. He said to me with great sadness in his voice "Would you take the Felshee from me?" I hesitated for a moment thinking of immortality and what it would mean to outlive everybody you knew. I shook my head. "No, my loon I've been my shotty at life, I'll just carry on till the hinner ein o't."

I'll put the same question to you reader.

"Would you take a 'Felshee' if offered you?"