**The Great Bull of the North**

As the trio of friends walked briskly along the tunnel which would eventually take Shonagh and Andrew to their exit point from the Hill, they talked about all that had happened to them since that fateful day when they met in with the folk. Gurval recalled their reaction to seeing him and Andrew explained about ‘Rhynie Man’ and the kite-shaped boulder that had been found at Barflat near Rhynie with the incised figure on it of a man who looked exactly like Gurval. ‘Rhynie Man’ was only just above a metre in height and Gurval and the other folk were not much taller!

Gurval smiled, ‘I suppose that must hae been one o the folk frae long ago. We’ve never been very big. Dinna ask me why. It could be that living aneth the Hill all the time made space gey valuable so we’d to be wee so as nae to use up too much space!’

They all laughed at that and they began to realise just how much they had grown to like each other and how much they would miss one another once Andrew and Shonagh returned to the world up above.

The sadness that they had felt on leaving the ker had abated, but there was a seriousness about their manner that could be lightened by happy banter, but not entirely removed. Sadness must always be present at the parting of friends even when all present know that the parting must take place. It is even sadder when they also know that they are unlikely ever to meet again.

They were progressing well along the route to the North when a figure in the far distance called loudly towards them and ran to meet them in a manner that suggested all was not well. The mere fact that he was running caused Gurval some worry for the folk of Menez, while being swift walkers, were not given to running except in emergencies.

As the figure got nearer they recognised him as Kolaz, the cattle herd. He was obviously in a state of some distress and he had plainly run a long way because he was panting heavily and his chest heaved in such a fashion that he found it almost impossible to speak when he eventually caught up with the three travellers.

‘Caa canny, noo, Kolaz,’ advised Gurval, ‘ the news canna be so important that you’ve to run yoursel oot o wind. Just you take a wee while to come to yoursel.’

Kolaz began to take deep breaths and slowly his breathing began to return to normality, or at least as near normal as to allow him to break his news and what news it was!

‘Gurval! A terrible thing has happened. Kohle, Great Bull o the North, has got loose. It was the Kah Du-Kel!’

‘You mean that the Kah Du-Kel are back causing trouble already? I thought that with the death o Beuneg we’d be rid o that kind o a thing!’

‘No, no. When you were trying to settle oor business with Beuneg he must hae sent oot groups to look for you. One o they groups came right up North to the cattle grounds and, for sheer devilment I suppose, started in to annoying the bulls and getting them all raised up.

‘Noo, you ken that’s nae a sensible thing to do at ony time and the daft wretches o creatures went for Kohle. It was well penned up as it always is, but they cats were skirling and roaring they way they do when they’re trying to frighten folk and Kohle just went mad!

‘In nae time at all he’d wrecked the palings and posts o his pen and was oot and charging aboot like I’d never seen him afore. We had enough to do trying to keep away the Kah Du-Kel so that we couldna get near Kohle to calm him doon, never mind make him bide where he was. Once he was oot he took off along the tunnels and, we were that busy coping with the cats and the other beasts, that he was away and lost before we kent what was what. We’re in real trouble noo!’

Gurval considered, ‘Hae the Kah Du-Kel left the pens?’

‘Och, aye. It was right weird that. They somehow must hae kent that Beuneg, their master, was dead because almost as suddenly as they’d attacked they just seemed to gie up hope and stopped fighting. They just turned and slunk away like an army that kent it was facing defeat. We had to pen the other beasts that were loose, we couldna hae left the other bulls to wander aboot in the tunnels! They’re near as bad as Kohle, but, by the time we got every beast penned and calmed doon, Kohle was well away frae the cattle pens and we’d nae idea where he’d gone. I set straight off to tell Enourabi what had happened and he sent me after you to warn you o the danger.’

‘Well, we’re certainly glad you’ve done that! We’ll keep a look oot, but you’ll hae all the cattle baillies oot yoursel?’

‘I had to hae as many o them oot as I could. Kohle could do an affa lot o damage if he gets really roused. The trouble is that we’ve seen little sign o him.’

‘I’ll need to get Shonagh and Andrew oot o Menez as quickly as I can. They’ve done enough for us withoot involving them ony mair. Once they’re safe I’ll come seeking you and I’ll gie you a hand. But we’re very grateful for the warning. We’ll keep a sharp look oot, but I some fear we’ll hear Kohle long afore we see him!’

Kolaz, having wished them a safe journey, sped off to see if he could find his lost prize and, after warning him about not running quite so fast, the trio continued their journey. It might not have been apparent to them, but they were certainly moving a wee bit faster than before and Danny’s tongue was beginning to hang out as he strove to keep up.

‘Is Kohle really dangerous?’ Andrew inquired.

‘He’s a bull and all bulls are dangerous. Whatever you do never trust a bull. Bulls can be as gentle as lambs one minute and like raging whirlwinds the next. There’s just nae telling. It’s just the way they are. Kohle is the strongest o oor bulls although he’s nae near as big as some you hae up abeen, but in the confines o the tunnels, in the cramped space, a bull o ony kind can be deadly! Kohle has never been oot withoot a baillie afore as far as I’m aware and if he’s really been driven wild by the Kah Du-Kel then there’s nae telling what he might do.’

‘Well, let’s hope we dinna meet in with him,’ said Shonagh, but the words were hardly out of her mouth when they heard in the distance the unmistakable roar of a bull and it did not sound as if the bull was in a very pleasant mood!

‘I dinna need to tell you who that is,’ said Gurval, with a look on his face that told the two others that they were in the company of a man who was greatly worried. That expression gave way to one of concern and anxiety.

But before Gurval could voice that concern, Shonagh intervened to calm his worries, ‘Andrew, we’ll hae to help Gurval get Kohle under control. He canna walk away frae his responsibilities to the folk and we canna let him doon either. Right, Gurval, what do you want us to do?’

Gurval acknowledged their offer with a grateful smile, ‘I’ve nae right to expect you to help me, but I’ll hae to get Kohle safely tethered or penned or else he could cause damage all ower Menez. Even if we only confine him somewhere where he canna do any harm, that’ll at least allow the cattle baillies to get doon here and see to him. It’ll maybe gie him time to calm doon as well, for a wild bull is a dangerous bull.’

The group eased themselves forward and Andrew picked Danny up and put him into his sack. Danny wasn’t too impressed with this ‘imprisonment’ in a bag, but he managed to get his head and front paws out of the bag so that he could at least see what was going on. He must have been aware of how serious the situation was because, in spite of his obvious dislike of being in the bag, he endured the discomfort and made no sound at all.

As they progressed towards Kohle the roaring and bellowing that was coming from the great bull was augmented by the sound of his hoofs striking the granite paths. This was plainly an agitated beast and it would need a lot of skill and patience to get him calmed down, let alone have him safely penned or tied up.

‘I some doubt that this tunnel hasna been used for a while,’ said Gurval. ‘It’s nae nearly as light as I’d like it. I’ll see if I can wipe us some more light when we get closer to Kohle.’

They crept slowly forward staying close to the wall of the tunnel as though that would offer them some protection which, of course it would not. They just felt safer having something solid to press against as they moved warily forward. Each of them was mindful that any sudden movement on their part could attract the attention of Kohle and might lead to him charging them, There were few places that one could run to for cover from an attack and the only thing one could do was to try and play the amateur bull-fighter and dodge the charges.

Finally they rounded the corner that was to give them their first view of ‘The Great Bull o the North’. Andrew’s first reaction was one of surprise. He wasn’t entirely sure what he had expected, but he certainly was not prepared for what he saw. It was not a great giant that confronted them, but a comparatively small, black bull that looked for all the world like an Aberdeen-Angus except that it sported a splendid set of risky looking horns on its head.

Andrew then recalled that, to the folk, Kohle probably was a beast of some size and that even Aberdeen-Angus looked small when placed alongside some of the Continental bulls he’d seen at the Keith Show. As Kohle’s head reared up in the air his impressive set of horns did look as though they could be extremely menacing and a blow or, even worse, to be gored by them would certainly jeopardise one’s life.

Gurval held out his arm to stop them while he considered what they might do. So far, Kohle appeared not to be aware of their presence.

‘Shonagh,’ he whispered, ‘could you let me hae some o the rope you’ve got. I think I’ll try and get it round his neck and we might be able to tie it to a rock. That would at least keep him here until the cattlemen can get doon for him. While I’m trying to get the rope round him, you and Andrew could maybe try to get his attention and distract him long enough for me to get in aboot. Dinna take ony chances though. At the first sign o a charge, get oot o the way as quickly as you can!’

Shonagh had no doubts, ‘Dinna you worry, we winna hang aboot if he looks like chasin after us!’

Andrew now realised that since they had got close enough to have a real look at the bull, its sharp horns, solid battering-ram brow and raging red eyes made it now seem as great and formidable as anything he had ever seen. This certainly was a ‘great bull’ and, with a gulp, Andrew wondered if they had been a little hasty in volunteering to appease and apprehend this fearsome mass of animal power that now confronted them.

Gurval, bent low, made his way slowly and carefully towards the raging Kohle. He’d got within twenty metres of the bull when it spotted him and the others and immediately its attention was focused on them. It didn’t charge but, at first, merely increased the level of its bellowing and the frequency of its head tossing until the sound seemed to fill the tunnels and Shonagh began to worry in case the sheer volume of noise would cause some of the rocks above to shake themselves loose and descend on their heads.

The noise was bad enough, but Kohle’s display of forceful displeasure was only beginning, because he then started to paw the ground wildly and his head movements became even more exaggerated.

Suddenly the noise and the movement ceased and before they had time to come to themselves the trio were faced with a raging, charging bull. Kohle’s head went down and, with a final imperious stamp of his front hooves on the granite floor, exploded towards them like a torpedo leaving a submarine.

The trio scattered and dived for safety. Shonagh was nimblest and got well clear before Kohle was on them. Andrew and Gurval were not far behind and Gurval, being already crouched down, found it easier to roll swiftly to the side, but still felt the wind of the hooves as they thundered past perilously close to him.

Gurval was quickly on his feet and joined Andrew and Shonagh as they awaited another charge. Having missed his aim on his first charge Kohle had careered into the side of the tunnel and his encounter with the granite, while not injuring him in any way, had been sufficient to cause him to pause and consider before he renewed his attack.

The trio moved back away from the irate bull and entered what seemed like another tunnel while Kohle watched them with eyes that were as wild as ever and seemed to rotate crazily in their sockets. He trotted forward, then stopped to stare at them. They eased themselves backward and found to their abject horror that, in trying to make their way slowly to safety, they had cornered themselves. They had not retreated into another tunnel but simply into a small cavern. There was no retreat! And with Kohle now advancing upon them, there was little chance of all three of them getting clear if the bull now chose to charge!

It was Danny who was to come to their rescue.

Danny had put up with his forced inactivity in the bag long enough and, having been thrown around while Andrew dodged the charging Kohle, he was not about to endure it any longer. While the group stared mesmerised at the approaching Kohle, Danny hauled himself up and out of the bag and dropped at Andrew’s feet.

His appearance seemed to surprise everyone, including Kohle for he stopped dead in his tracks. Andrew muffled what might have been a shout of surprise as he remembered that any sudden sound might reactivate Kohle’s charging instincts. Danny shook himself and then trotted towards the Great Bull of the North for all the world as though he were out for a stroll in a park.

They all watched fascinated as Danny approached the bull and stopped barely a metre from the lowered head and glinting horns. Kohle, having recovered from being confronted with the wee dog, looked carefully at Danny and then did the most unexpected of things - he raised his head, shook it as though he wanted to rid himself of something, then seemed to relax totally. The fearsome beast of impending death and destruction now looked no more dangerous than any cow one would see in a field any day of the week.

Danny trotted up to Kohle and looked as though he was rubbing noses with him as the great head came down to meet him at his level. Danny turned and Kohle followed him in a slow deliberate, rolling stroll towards the three humans who stood agog at what they had just witnessed. Even Gurval, who was well used to the affinity that animals in Menez shared with each other, was astounded at what he had witnessed.

They eased themselves to the side as Danny led Kohle into the cavern. Gurval was quick to see what Danny intended and whispered to Shonagh to get out a couple of the pitons she was carrying. While Danny continued to keep Kohle content, Shonagh and Andrew, as carefully and as quietly as they could, hammered in pitons at either side of the cave mouth while Gurval stretched the rope across the entrance and tied it to the pitons. Thanks to Danny they had penned The Great Bull of the North!

Gurval gathered some moss and lichens and put them in with Kohle in case he got hungry. If the bull was eating he would not be trying to escape and, truth to tell, if he really wanted to get out of the cavern the ropes would not stop him for long. Yet, calmed down, Kohle would wait content and, hopefully, would remain that way long enough for the cattle baillies to arrive and return him to the cattle pens in the north.

Gurval then saw that Danny was given plenty of petted thanks for having saved them and Andrew was left wondering just how much influence their adventure aneth Bennachie had had on his wee dog. Before their encounter with the folk he’d never seen Danny as being anything but a dog that liked to run after the occasional rabbit and laze in the sun: he’d been too small to do anything else! Besides having learned that size isn’t everything, Andrew had also learned to be more appreciative of his wee dog’s considerable talents for keeping the peace!

With a last look at a happier Kohle the party set off once more determined, this time, to reach their goal. Shonagh, Andrew and Danny were now on their way home. Hopefully, nothing else would hamper their progress.