**Farewell to the Folk**

While Andrew and Shonagh awaited the return of Enourabi from the burial place they occupied their time saying farewell to the many friends they had made during their time with the folk. They found it very hard to come to terms with all that had happened to them and the lack of any reference to time made it all very difficult to understand.

‘Just think,’ said Shonagh, ‘the first encounter we had with the creatures aneth Bennachie was with the naer and he nearly frightened me to death! Then he turns oot to be one o the friendliest creatures you could find. Nae wonder the Picts put him and his kin on the stones so often, they must hae kent how great they were.’

‘Aye,’ agreed Andrew, ‘ if we’ve learned nothing else we’ve learned nae to be ower quick to judge things until you ken what they’re really like. Mind you I dinna think the Kah Du-Kel would hae thought the naer were ower friendly! Did you ever hear sic a noise as they make when they detect something they dinna like! That’s a sound I’m bound to remember nae matter what Enourabi does to us!’

‘What do you think he’ll do? I dinna want to forget everything we’ve learned here nor do I want to forget the folk. We’ve made real friends. Gurval and Enora have been super. They almost made us part o their family and they trusted us withoot question.’

Andrew was quick to ease Shonagh’s doubts, ‘I asked Gurval aboot that. He says that we winna forget what happened to us except in the normal way that folk might forget details o events while still remembering the main things had happened. They just go into your sub-conscious, I suppose.’

Shonagh smiled, ‘Do you think he’ll get Danny to forget Tourz and all the fun he’s had with him? Danny’s nae likely to run and tell everybody what’s happened and even if he could tell other dogs I canna see them rushing to Bennachie to find oot if he’s telling the truth!’

Their conversation was brought to a halt by Enora who had come to tell them that Enourabi had returned from the burial ground. They joined her in heading for the meeting place where Enourabi was to speak to the folk o the ker and, when they got there, they saw that quite a crowd had gathered.

As usual Shonagh was most impressed with the air of calm dignity that Enourabi brought to the meetings. People often think that, because folk are small, they cannot command respect. They think of leaders as being tall, forthright folk who command because of their powerful appearance. Enourabi had none of these qualities, but when he spoke you listened and acted on what he said because he said it quietly, thoughtfully and with utter conviction. You were almost mesmerized into listening. Who in her school would have believed you could learn so much just by listening to someone quietly talking to you?

Enourabi climbed slowly on to the granite platform flanked by Kozhiadez and Barban. He gave a kindly smile as Barban raised her arms to silence the crowd, although, truth to tell very little sound had come from the waiting folk for they were patient people as all the folk aneth Bennachie were.

‘This is an important day for us folk o Menez. My brother has been laid to rest and may Doue forgive him and keep him safe. We’ll hae nae more trouble frae him and, having listened to Gurval and Barban, I’m sure we’ll hae nae more frae the Kah Du-Kel.’ Enourabi’s smile widened, ‘Well, nae mair than we had afore Beuneg got among them. These bad times are ahin us and we’ve got folk, new friends, to be grateful to for that! What they did has done a lot to see that oor way o life can continue in the way we want it to and that is the thing we hae to be most grateful aboot.’

As Enourabi was saying this, the focus of the crowd’s attention was fixed on Shonagh and Andrew and it is to their credit that they were suitably embarrassed by the attention paid to them. Enourabi raised his hands in the manner of the folk, his palms towards them, and the two outsiders felt as though they were truly of the folk as they could almost physically feel the warmth of folk’s regard for them.

Enourabi lowered his arms, ‘We hae also to pay oor respects to Gurval, Barban and the others who went to fight so that the rest o us could live safer lives. We hae to be grateful to them. Oor magerez nae only cures oor ordinary ills, but has also removed a coorse sore frae oor midst and we winna forget that.

‘Noo, we must get on with oor lives and we must see that oor friends get back to ther ain folk withoot ony more delay.’

Enourabi raised his arms in salute to the folk and slowly they dispersed to return to their lives knowing that the threat of the Kah Du-Kel and their evil raids on the ker and the outlying settlements were past. Enourabi, Kozhiadez and Barban came towards Shonagh and Andrew and Barban was first to greet them with a most uncharacteristic hug! Kozhiadez placed her hands on their shoulders in turn and her beaming smile said all she wanted to say, but she added, ‘You will never be forgotten by the folk, for your name will live in oor legends and ballads as long as there are singers left and when there are nae singers and storytellers left there will be nae folk!’

Enourabi took both of them by the hand, ‘Come, we’ll gang to my mougev and I’ll do what is necessary for us to protect oor way o life frae the ootside. It is the only way, but be assured it winna hurt you and I’m nae gan to wipe your memories oot o your heads.’

‘We wouldna like to forget oor time here, ‘ said Shonagh, concern plain in her voice, ‘we’ve made so many friends and shared so many adventures.’

‘Och, dinna worry,’ soothed Enourabi, ‘that winna happen. Besides, Gurval’s been telling me all aboot the return o the moch-dour. That’s the best news I’ve heard for a gey long time. The water o the sters are improving and the pollution is clearing up. The air seems to be clearer ootside as well and all that work the Baillies do is improving things on the Hill. Maybe the folk ootside are learning at last that you canna go on just destroying things and that you hae to look after them. The day’ll maybe come yet when we’ll come up frae aneth the hill and we can all live content together.’

Shonagh registered her shock, ‘You mean you ken aboot the Baillies o Bennachie? I thought that was one o Airchies secrets!’

‘Och, aye, there’s nae much that happens ootside that we dinna ken aboot. It’s just that we are nae quite ready to be part o it. Nae just yet, but maybe someday!’

The party entered Enourabi’s mougev and he motioned them to stand next to a granite plinth that could well have served as an altar. Visions of primitive sacrificial ceremonies flashed through the minds of both our heroes, but were quickly erased as their more rational selves reasserted themselves!

Enourabi read their minds, ‘Dinna be scared. There’s naething gan to happen to you. I just put my hand on your head and look into your eyes for a wee while. Then it will all be past. You’ll feel nothing and your memories will nae be affected. Just as memories fade with time so will yours. They’ll always be there, but winna resurface unless you deliberately want to recall them. We’re just protecting oorsels in case you inadvertantly let it slip that we’re here in Menez and that might gie folk the notion to come looking for us. What I’m gan to do is just to speed up the process whereby the memory o your time here will retreat to the back o your minds. I’m just gan to hurry things along. Your minds winna go blank or onything like that!’

The pair nodded, reassured by Enourabi’s words. He stepped forward and placed a hand on Shonagh’s head first of all. Shonagh felt his gentle touch and looked into his eyes which, large as they were, seemed to grow even larger as he gazed intently at her. For just the briefest of moments she felt a little dizzy, but it passed almost as soon as it had come and when Enourabi’s smile widened as he removed his hand from her brow she smiled back and was aware that she could not really say that anything had been changed or altered by the encounter with Enourabi’s eyes!

Shonagh stood and watched carefully as Enourabi repeated the process with Andrew, but was not aware of Enourabi doing anything but simply laying his hand gently on Andrew’s head and gazing into his eyes as he had done to her. ‘Well,’ she thought, ‘the world is a strange place and I must remember never take it for granted!’

The brief, but simple, ceremony being over Enourabi called on Gurval to join them. ‘I’m getting too auld for long journeys, but Gurval, who has greatly valued your friendship and the enormous help you’ve gane to us folk, will lead you back to a place where you can get back to your ain world up abeen. What Kozhiadez said earlier is true. We’ll never forget you and your wee dog. I dinna ken what Tourz will do for a friend when Danny’s away. Take care wherever you go. If we ever need your help again I ken you’ll come to help us and we’ll ken how to get word to you, hae nae fear o that!’

Enourabi held out his hands in the manner of the folk and both Andrew and Shonagh responded in like manner. Shonagh had to stop herself hugging the kindly old man, but that was not the way of the folk.

Gurval led them out of the mougev, ‘The journey should not be a long one, but it might be a bit o a climb getting oot so I’ve taken along some o your pitons and rope just in case. Water can change things a lot doon here and that was a mighty spate that struck us when we were at Beuneg’s mougev. Its just as well to be prepared and Enourabi wasna that sure o the state o the tunnel you’ll be leaving by.’

Quite a crowd had gathered to see them off, but there were no cheers and little joy for, while the folk were very glad of the help they had been given to them by Shonagh and Andrew, they were sad at the departure of their friends. It took them quite a while to get Danny to leave Tourz and, when Tourz made to follow them, Gurval had to get Uisant to restrain the ram while they made their way out of the ker. Then, sadly, they patted and stroked the naer for the last time and made to move off.

With a last look round the ker and a final wave to Enourabi, Kozhiadez and the other folk the small group of three entered the tunnel that would lead them to their exit point and back to their own families. It was with a large lump in their throats that they signalled their final farewell. So much had happened to them in Menez and now their adventures under Bennachie were about to come to an end. They had faced great dangers and now these dangers had been overcome.

Little were they to know that yet another test of their courage remained, it would soon face them and it would arrive much sooner than they could ever have imagined in their wildest dreams.