**Home**

The closeness of the encounter with Kohle had finally brought the realisation to Shonagh and Andrew that they had to get back to their own world as soon as they could. They had made many friends beneath the Hill, but this was not their world. The folk were different, the animals were different, they seemed to be able to do without sleep; even time did not operate as it did on the surface! The folk of the Hill were wonderful people. They had made them both so welcome - they couldn’t imagine folk in their world being so trusting and friendly, but it was still not their world. Besides that, they had their families to think of.

Already Shonagh was beginning to miss her father and mother and the familiar things of her home. Andrew felt something of this same longing. If they been able to put their minds to it they would have been able to work out that what was happening to them was quite natural and the process was being helped by what Enourabi had done to them just before they left. The mind was just ordering its priorities and at the head of the list was the family. It was nothing new because for as long as there has been folk there has been a natural instinct for people to want to be with their families and, even when apart, their thoughts automatically turn to them.

Their journey was now carried on in near silence and this dawned upon them when Gurval broke into their thoughts, ‘We’re nae far frae the place where you’ll leave us. When you get ootside you’ll need to cover and shade your eyes till they get used to the light. It’s a lot brighter oot there in the sunshine that it is doon here with the wiped light. When you leave the wee cave that you’ll surface in, just turn to your right when you leave and a ten minute walk through the trees will take you back close to where you came in.’

‘I canna wait to hear what oor folks say. I wonder if they’ve been hunting for us for long? They must hae been gie worried, us being away for so long.’ Shonagh said.

‘I think you might get a surprise aboot that once you meet in with them, but I’ll leave you to find oot aboot that for yoursels,’ added Gurval. ‘Mind, things are nae always what they seem to be! Look at the way Danny sorted oot oor problem with Kohle!’ and Gurval patted Danny gently on the head as he spoke.

Gurval led them up a very narrow tunnel and after a short walk they reached a small, but steep, incline.

‘You’ll need to get up this wee cliff face, but it’s nae very steep. You should be able to get up withoot ropes. There are plenty o handholds and wee crevices for the feet. It levels oot at the top and there’s a gap that you should be able to get through. It looks as though the exit is covered by a bush, but you’ll find that it can easily be pushed aside. Once past the bush you’ll be in the cave. Take care o your eyes in the brightness, as I told you before, and then just step oot into your ain world. It’ll be as easy as that!’

Andrew picked Danny up and put him back into his little bag and turned to say goodbye to Gurval. Gurval held out his hands in the way of the folk and Andrew returned his greeting in like manner. Andrew looked as if he was going to say something, but didn’t seem to be able to find the words. For some reason he didn’t want to admit his throat was dry and all choked up.

Shonagh had to say something, ‘Oh! Gurval! We will miss you and all the folk. Remember us to Enora and thank her for all she did for us.’ Tears began to mist her eyes and she found herself hugging the man who had given her such a scare when they first met.

‘Go!’ said Gurval in a very quiet voice, ‘ go before I decide to come with you. You have saved the folk aneth the Hill and we’ll never forget you. Now you must go home.’

Andrew found his voice at last although it still sounded strained and rather croaky, ‘Dinna forget, if ever you need help you ken where to find us. Mind we told you where we live. We’ll come if you need us!’

No more words passed between them. They all knew what they would have liked to have said, but often, things are better left unsaid, a look or a gesture is enough.

Andrew made the first move and began to clamber his way to the head of the face. Shonagh followed and, just as Gurval had predicted they did not need the rope or pitons to complete their climb. On reaching the small plateau at the top they paused and looked down. They had only climbed around 35 metres, but Gurval looked very small down there in the dim light and only his eyes seemed to really stand out from above.

They both waved and Gurval, gesturing in a similar manner, turned and made his way back to the folk frae aneth the Hill.

Andrew took his bag off and Danny, on being placed on the ground, quickly found the opening into the cave. Shonagh crawled through first of all and, after a bit of pushing and shoving past a bush, emerged into a small, dry cave. She relayed to Andrew that all was well and waited for him to come through. Danny came first and Andrew, with a bit of help from Shonagh, soon squeezed through to join her.

Even in the comparative dimness of the cave they found that the light was quite strong. They decided, impatient as they were to get home, to wait near the mouth of the cave, which was partially shaded by undergrowth, for a while to allow their eyes to become more used to the light. They hadn’t realised just how dim many of the places beneath Bennachie had been. Danny seemed to adjust to the light more quickly than they had and while they waited he rushed in and out of the cave two or three times just to amuse himself.

‘You ken,’ ventured Shonagh, ‘it’s just as well we came up in daylight. We might never hae found oor way aboot in the dark.’

‘Maybe Enourabi planned it that way,’ suggested Andrew, ‘although how he was supposed to ken when it’s light and dark up abeen I’ve nae idea!’

They finally made their way outside and although the sunlight, which was still filtered by the trees, hurt their eyes a little, it was not too bad. They followed the instructions they had been given and soon found themselves not far from the main path to Rowantree Car Park.

How strange it was! A few people were making their way towards the Mither Tap and paid no attention to them at all. But why should they? They were just hill walkers like everyone else; there to enjoy a day on Bennachie. They felt for a short time like aliens who had landed on a strange planet and the inhabitants simply didn’t want to know. It was the strangest feeling they had ever experienced. They were a normal part of all that was going on to everyone but themselves.

They began to make their way down, unsure of how they should react to all this when they saw two familiar figures. It was their mothers walking up the hill and chatting away as if everything was as normal as could be.

Shonagh called out excitedly, ‘Mum! Mum! We’re back!’

The response was not what they had expected. Shonagh’s mother looked across at them, then cautioned, ‘No need to shout so loudly. You’ll alarm everyone on the Hill. You’d think you’d been away from home for a month!’

Shonagh and Andrew glanced quickly at one another and knew immediately that something was different, but only they were aware of what it was. Obviously what they thought was a long time under Bennachie was not a long time on the surface. All their adventures beneath Bennachie appeared to have taken place in the space of about two hours on Bennachie. It was most confusing, but Shonagh and Andrew, without saying a word to each other knew that they must remain silent and just accept that there was nothing they could do or say to alter matters. Time was relative and there was no point in trying to change it!

‘Well you pair made pretty good time! You must have been shifting when you came across the Hill. We haven’t even got lunch ready yet!’ explained Shonagh’s mother. ‘Did you miss that rain storm. I’ve never seen anything like it! It was only up on that side of the Hill over there and only lasted for about 15 minutes but it rained like I’ve never seen rain before. You’re both quite dry so you must have missed it!’

Shonagh and Andrew just stood trying to hide the feeling of amazement that was surging through their bodies, but they couldn’t hide it completely. ‘Well, you needn’t look so dumfoonert,’ said Andrew’s mother, ‘we’re still capable of doing a bit of climbing oorsels. We’re not old fogies just yet!’

Their parents thought that their expressions of amazement were due to meeting them on the hill. Shonagh stammered out a question, ‘Wh - what t-time is it?’

‘Time? About half past two I should imagine. Not much more. Hae, what have you done to Danny?’ Shonagh’s mother had spotted that Danny was covered in rather a lot of earth and greenery.

‘Nothing. He’s been chasing aboot in the woods. That’s all,’ countered Andrew.

‘Well, you must hae done more than that,’ said Andrew’s mother, ‘look at him!’

They all wheeled round and there was Danny sitting quietly about ten metres away and there, grazing the grass next to him in perfect contentment, was a rabbit!

Shonagh’s mother was astounded, ‘I don’t believe it! Whatever you’ve been up to it’s certainly had a major effect on Danny. Five hours ago he’d hae been off and chasing that rabbit all ower Bennachie, but look at him now! You’ve really been teaching him some new tricks.’

Shonagh looked at Andrew and smiled warmly, ‘No, we’ve nae been teaching Danny any new tricks, but there’s nae doubt that he’s learned a lot since we set off ower Scare Hill and, I think I can truly, say we’ve learned an awful lot as well.’ She reached for Andrew’s hand and grasped it tightly, ‘Come on, folks, let’s get back to the car park and enjoy our picnic. After all, that’s what we came for!’