Flash Fiction Competition 2014

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A Night In Skye by Chris Cromar

It was the 25th of January, 1878, a cold winter’s evening on the Isle of Skye. It was Burns Night, a night where Scots all over the world celebrate Scotland’s National Bard, Robert Burns. The setting was in an idyllic, picturesque Highland croft, two miles away from its nearest neighbour, with cattle roaming in the adjacent fields.

As the crofters roamed through the Highland fields all clad in Highland dress, the men in kilts and women in tartan dresses. As they approached the croft they were singing Scottish ballads and folk songs loudly. As the croft door opened they were welcomed in the most Scottish of welcomes by Mrs McLeod who greeted the visitors into her home. Mrs McLeod lived in the croft with her husband Mr McLeod, a farmer, and their son.

Mrs McLeod brought the guests a wee dram of whisky as they introduced themselves to one another. Mr McLeod welcomed all of the guests by giving a speech and declared the evening open, he then said the traditional ‘Selkirk Grace’ just before cock-a-leekie soup was served as a starter. To the guests’ surprise, a young man dressed in full Highland uniform entered through the backdoor with bagpipes, it was Crawford McLeod, the son of Mr and Mrs McLeod. He accompanied Mr McLeod who brought the haggis into the room and everybody stood up for this, as ‘A Man’s a Man for A’ That’ blazed through Crawford’s bagpipes for the piping of the haggis.

After this, Craig MacDonald, a crofter from a few miles away belted out Burns’ ‘Address to a Haggis’ with conviction, passion and pride. When this was done, Mr MacDonald opened the haggis with a chorus of cheers coming from the table and the deafening noise of ‘to the haggis’. After this, all of the guests enjoyed their Burns supper of haggis, neeps and tatties and spoke about the challenges facing crofters in the 19th century. After the main course, guests enjoyed Mrs McLeod’s homemade clootie dumpling, then delved into oatcakes and homemade cheese.

As the night went on, and the whisky flowed down nicely, the evening got livelier as the daughter of Craig MacDonald, Flora MacDonald, a naturally talented singer did a rousing rendition of Burns’ ‘Tam o’ Shanter’. This certainly pleased the guests and the half dozen couples got to their feet and started dancing with one another. The drinks continued to flow and the noise got louder and louder as Crawford and Flora continued to entertain the crowd with their musical skills as the festivities continued.

Craig MacDonald’s wife Fiona complained of seeing a gothic like ghost figure in the corner, however, the spirits of alcohol was blamed. At the end of the evening all of the guests held hands and took part in the singing of Burns’ ‘Auld Lang Syne’. As the guests left, Craig wheeled Fiona home in a wheelbarrow.

We will never know if Fiona saw a real ghost that night. 136 years later it remains a mystery...
Far did y'get that picter, Bella? I thocht yer Mam hid pit it oot years ago.

Aye, yer richt, that's me and her in the middle, and that's yer Granny at the back wi' the book, lookin' daggers at us, though she was makin' on she was goin' ower her part.

It wis aboot New Year. The auld Laird wis very keen on play actin' and he hid a pal that wis an artist. That's the wye he got the picter deen. We hid a play maist years fan the actors cam' bye, and that year they needed extra folk t'act. The Laird himsel' hid written the play, so fan he asked yer Mam and me t'be in it, we couldna' really refuse. Nae that we wanted t' refuse. At that age y'dinna care, and besides we were jist goin' thegither, so it was a great chance for coortin! We micht ha' kent yer Granny would see through that ane, though. She wisna ga' t'hae her dochter showi' hersel t'all and sundry, Laird or nae Laird. I can hear him yet.

“Oh Mistress Jamieson, it is a very modest role, I assure you, and besides, her young man will be playing her------well, her suitor. As in life, so in art! I'm sure he will look after Jeannie most gallantly. I would not ask her to do anything which I would not ask of my own daughter”.

Fan I heard that, I thocht yer Granny wis goin' t'mak the obvious remark, namely that the Laird didna' hae a dochter, but she bit her tongue.

“Weel Laird” says she “I'll agree if I can be in the play mysel' and if I can mak' Jeannie's costume.”

Y'could see the Laird wis a bit taken aback, but he rallied.

“Certainly, certainly Mistress Jamieson. I'm sure that can be arranged.”

So there we are, getting ready in the auld coo hoose. That's the manager o' th' actors getting' pooder on his face wi' a rabbit's fit, and that's his wife that's daen' it. Man, she must have been freezin' in that costume. The three lads in the cloaks were a rare laugh, even though they were bloodthirsty robbers in the play. The chap wi' the beard at the back acted the strong man, and he helped the manager rescue yer mither fae the robbers. It wis a rare nicht, that.

The upshot o' it was yer mither an' I got merriet the next summer, and the Laird gave us the picter for a weddin' present, as weel as a nice gift o'money, but yer Mither would never hae it hung up in the hoose because yer Granny thocht it wis makin' a feel o'folk, especially her.

Ach weel, yer Gran's awa ' a while noo, but I canna quite believe yer Mither's nae here ony mair. Jist pit the picter by the wall there, lass. I think I'll hing it above the mantelpiece th'morn.
THE PIGHERD’S DIARY by Bibo Keeley

Monday

Stayed at the barn with Murdo and Rab long after our pig herding was over, getting hammered on the brew which we ‘liberated’ from outside the Monks Cart a while back. Got it safely hidden under some straw bails.

Tuesday

Woke up in the barn with a bad hang-over today. Managed not to throw up during work. Ate lots of wild garlic on the way home as not to make my wife suspicious. Went to bed immediately after dinner.

Wednesday

Melanie was in the stables today when a messenger arrived for her. She was infuriated with what she read. Without saying anything I offered her a wooden club which was lying about. She gladly took it and hit the messenger over the head with it. He collapsed and his wound needed to be attended by Dionysus the stonemason, who is also a bit of a medic. The poor boy had to tell the Master that he had run into the stable door.

Thursday

Heard that the Vicar was coming to the Master’s house to discuss the horse, so Murdo, Rab and I took our herding sticks and wrote obscenities into the mud at the gate in big letters. Meant to linger and see his reaction but needed to attend to the piglets. Got a stout reprimand from the Master but pleaded innocence.

Friday

Hard day of work – but in the evening there was a spontaneous Ceilidh in the barn when Jonathan and Steven arrived unexpectedly. I managed to follow Jonathan, and Lesley the pale undertaker’s daughter. They thought they could sneak out unnoticed. However, it was I who sneaked out unnoticed, to enjoy the view.

Saturday

Jonathan is very fond of Mary. They have been friends since they were little bairns. I remember them well running around the barn, coming up with ever more mischievous games. Tonight, when I heard naughty noises from one of the outhouses, I spied through the gap in the barndoors. Mary had kicked off her boots, stood in front of Jonathan with her short dress, and – under his lustful moans – kept slapping him in the face with a sausage.
Sunday

My wife Betty sat in her sparsly furnished shack today reading. It’s so dark in there she always needs to light candles so see anything – even in the middle of summer. It suits her though, as she is a humourless and grumpy woman who tries to keep her husband on a tight reign. He is a hard-working and quiet man. Unfortunately, the book Betty was reading was my diary.