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The Dragon of Glensporran

Every day was a busy one for Angus MacWally. He was a Lord; but his Estate of Glensporran being in Scotland, he was called Laird. He lived in a great castle which overlooked a big lake surrounded by green hills; and each morning the Laird would go out onto his balcony to view the valley beyond. At this time of day there was usually a mist on the water of the lake, and with a light breeze blowing across it, the air was often cold. Angus didn't mind this because, after stretching his legs outside, he would return to the dining room for breakfast. There, with a fire blazing to warm the room, the Laird would sit at the table, before him a steaming bowl of hot porridge.

As he ate, the porridge warmed his insides and generally prepared him for doing what a Laird did. His job was to make sure that his Highland Estate ran smoothly, and that his people were happy. Most of the time they were, except when things went wrong; and if they were unable to fix the problems themselves, they would go to the Laird for help. This was why Angus always had his breakfast early, so that he wasn't disturbed while he was eating. Unfortunately, this was one day which was about to start badly and become much worse as it wore on.

He looked up as the door opened and his Factotum burst in. Now, Factotum sounded a rather grand title when, in fact, it was just another word for an odd-job man. The job of the moment was simply passing on some news; but it was not good news and when he heard it, the Laird was bound to start yelling. Taking a deep breath, Andy MacDoodle said: "There's a problem, Laird."

Angus scowled at his Factotum. "When isn't there? Can't it wait till I've finished my breakfast?"

"Er... not really," stuttered Andy, "This is pretty urgent. The people need an answer."

The Laird dropped his spoon into the bowl and pushed up from his chair angrily. "They always need answers, and they always want them yesterday. Why can't they sort out their own problems? Why do they expect me to think for them?"

Bustling across the dining room, he stormed out to the hall beyond. It was filled with people, and the instant they saw him they surged forward. "It was terrible," one of them began to jabber, "With big wings and sharp, snarly teeth!" Another added: "And huge like you wouldn't believe!" A third person cut in, saying: "And it breathes fire! Look what it did to my crook." He held out a long stick that was burnt and blackened, then continued: "It frightened the life out of me, and my sheep all ran away." Then they were telling their own stories, all at the same time, growing louder and louder until the sound of their voices filled the chamber. Angus MacWally thrust his arms in the air and bellowed: "Enough!"

The crowd fell silent. The Laird scanned the faces before him and it was clear they had been scared by something. He turned and said quietly to the man at his side: "What are they on about, MacDoodle? They say it is huge and has wings and sharp, snarly teeth."

"And it breathes fire," Andy reminded him. "It would seem we have ourselves a dragon in Glensporran." He waited for a reply, but when there wasn't one, he said: "So, what are you going to do about it?"

"Me?" spluttered Angus, "I don't know anything about dragons. Why me?"

The Factotum shrugged. "Why not you? It's your Estate; these are your people; and, I guess, it's your dragon. Sorry, Laird, but this is your job and you're stuck with it."

The Laird groaned. "That's as maybe, MacDoodle; but I have someone in mind who is better at this sort of thing than me. Bring McCracker to me. He'll know what to do."

Jock McCracker was Chieftain of his clan. They were a rough, tough bunch, and Jock was well known as the toughest of all. "Leave it to me, Laird," he declared loudly, "A silly old dragon's no match for me and my lads." Away Jock marched so sure of himself that the Laird was thinking his troubles were over. The Chieftain returned late that afternoon in a sorry state, his clothes burnt and his hair singed. "That dragon doesn't play fair," he complained, "What with its fire-breathing and all, we couldn't even get close. You'll have to find someone else to deal with it. We're going home."

Once word got around that Jock McCracker and his band of ruffians had been frightened off by the dragon, nobody was prepared to put themselves in danger. "We could advertise," suggested Andy MacDoodle, "Maybe you could offer a reward to anyone who will go against the dragon."

The Laird gave his Factotum the job of painting the sign which was hung outside the main gate of Glensporran Castle. It was there for three days, but no-one seemed interested. Then two strangers arrived in the valley. It was their plan to visit the Laird to see if he had any work for them, and they were delighted by the words on the sign:

Wanted

Anyone willing to perform a task of great importance.

A handsome reward is offered.

"Will you look at that, Balmpot," said LummoX to his friend, "That sounds exactly like a job for us."

"You're right, LummoX," said Balmpot, "It might have been made for us. I reckon this is our lucky day. Let's go and find this Laird, Angus MacWally."

"Hmm." The Laird stroked his chin thoughtfully as he looked on the two strangers before him. "You say you are very good at what you do; and what might that be?"

"We're performers," replied LummoX. "That's what the sign said you wanted."

"We are renowned throughout the Highlands," added Balmpot, then explained further: "He sings and I play." He showed the Laird the bagpipes he was holding under his arm. "And we write our own songs. Now, what's this task of great importance - a concert, or a parade, maybe?"

Trudging their way across the valley and towards the hills, LummoX was still puzzled about the job they had taken on. "I can't understand why the Laird wants us to find a dragon and sort it out. What did he mean by that?"

"Perhaps it's not a happy dragon and our job is to cheer it up," suggested Balmpot.

"I suppose so," said LummoX, "We could try that new song we've been working on. That's quite a jolly tune."

They soon knew they were coming close. The Laird's man MacDoodle had told them to follow the burnt grass and heather; and as they climbed higher up the hill, some of it was still smoking. "I think it might be an idea to announce ourselves," said Balmpot, moving his bagpipes so they were ready to play. "How about I start with a Highland reel and you come in later?" With that, he put the pipe in his mouth and began blowing air into the bag. Then, when it was full, he pushed down with his arm to squeeze it. Sounds filled the air and wailed up the hill.

There was movement up ahead as the dragon came out of its lair to see what was making such a peculiar noise. LummoX noticed its head appear over a rock. "Right, Balmpot," he said, "It's Showtime. Let's give it all we've got" and he started singing. Balmpot played his bagpipes louder, while LummoX crooned away beside him; and they continued up the hill towards the dragon.

Much later, the two performers were standing before the Laird. The huge crowd behind them had cheered them all the way to the courtyard of Glensporran Castle. The Laird raised his hands for silence. "We are all thankful for doing what no-one else could.

You have saved my people from the fiery dragon and brought peace to Glensporran. I am puzzled, though. How did you manage it - with swords, or spears, or clubs...?"

"Oh, no," said Balmpot, "We played and sang; and, for some reason it just up and flew away."

"That doesn't seem possible," commented the Laird, "Would you care to repeat your performance for us now?"

MacDoodle tugged the Laird's robe and leaned close to whisper: "I don't think that's such a good idea, Laird. I've learned they are unbelievably terrible."

"Nonsense," rasped the Laird, then said to the two performers: "Let's hear it."

Balmpot's bagpipes began to wail, and LummoX started into his song. Within less than a minute, the courtyard was empty, and the Laird was begging them to stop. He waited for the bagpipes to drone into silence; then said: "That really was quite, er... stirring. Do you actually make a living out of this?"

"A very good one," said LummoX, "Our audiences always pay us well."

"Usually after only one song," said Balmpot, then added: "Sometimes they are so quick to pay that we don't even get to finish."

The Laird nodded and sighed. "I can understand why. Now, I imagine you'll be wanting to leave. I'll get MacDoodle to pay you your reward."

"There's no real hurry," said LummoX, "I'm sure there's time for a few more songs. Do you have a special request?"

"Just one," said the Laird, and he made his request to MacDoodle, in a whisper so that the others couldn't hear: "Pay them double, triple if you have to: just get them to leave. I don't think my ears can take any more of their caterwauling."

The two performers were on their way out of the valley, their sporrans full of reward money. "That was really nice of him," said Balmpot, "Very generous." He smiled broadly. "It obviously pays to perform before a better class of audience."