

## The Ferryman & The Fearn King

It had been a long hard winter, and dark, foreboding clouds hung over the very future of 'Coille na Fearna'.

Change was afoot - the Auld Laird, Calum MacAllan the Third, had recently passed peacefully away and Calum MacAllan the Fourth then inherited the estate.

Auld Calum had loved the woodland, but Young Calum loved only power and money. And he intended to fell all the trees, turn the land over to sheep, to sell for a quick pound at market.

Fin Glass the Ferryman, the man who had introduced Auld Calum to the wonders of 'Coille na Fearna' knew that he had to change how Young Calum *saw* 'Coille na Fearna' if it was to be saved.

Only, he wasn't at all sure, quite how to do this.

He left his home by the river, where the alder thrived, watched ravens turning somersaults below the rocky crags at 'Creag an Fhithich', and then at the source of 'Allt an t-sithein', the Faerie Burn, the Ferryman wet his lips, took a few deep breaths and recited a silent prayer.

As dusk approached, Fin Glass found himself at 'The Council of Elders'; a circle of ancient alders, each of them full of spirit & character. He rested at the foot of *the* most ancient of all the alders, the Fearn King himself, and fell into a deep, restful, sleep.

Music, faint at first but slowly growing louder, began to permeate the Council of Elders. And as the music grew, the faerie folk appeared from very heart of the ancient alders themselves.

They danced, and as they danced to the sound of pipes and whistles, the branches of the Fearn King reached down towards the ferryman. They loosened the laces on his boots and removed Fin's tired feet from them. Then the earth itself began to move, gently massaging the ferryman's feet.

When he woke, the Ferryman felt refreshed.  
He had a plan!

The following day, after the Ferryman had told his friends of 'Young Calum's' plans, they gathered at the council of Elders bringing gifts.

Seamstress, Catriona Taylor, made a beautiful eye-catching waistcoat, on her alder spinning wheel, using dyes from the bark and leaves of alder; cobbler, Ben Arthur Grassie, made an exquisite pair of clogs from alder wood; and blacksmith, Shona MacGowan, forged a dazzling brooch in the heat generated by charcoal, again made from alder coppiced at 'Coille na Fearná'.

The friends shared an embrace at the foot of the Fearn King, whilst the faerie folk, scattered faerie dust.

All those in the circle of friendship, all that they created, and all those who might wear their creations, would now be granted the gift of insight and understanding.

Fin's preparations were complete.

The next again day, the Ferryman, wearing his friend's gifts, set out on the river with 'Young Calum', in his wicker and hide canoe.

As they left his house, built on stilts of alder wood, with beams of hazel and a beautifully shaped thatched roof, he could hear pipes and whistles, emanating from the uppermost branches of the ancient alders, and a Heron drifted upstream.

Immediately, 'Young Calum' became transfixed by the ferryman's new waistcoat!

'Mr Glass', he said, "Speaking as the new laird of Leiterfearn, owner of 'Coille na Fearn', I have been admiring that waistcoat that you have on, and, to put it bluntly, I want to have it!

If you don't mind?"

Smiling, and bowing slightly, Fin replied, "Of course, my laird".

And then again, 'Young Calum's, greed showed itself "Those clogs! They have such a rich colour and such a natural, soft, contoured shape. I want those clogs too!

If you don't mind?"

"Of course, my laird," said the ferryman, bowing slightly.

'Young Calum' was well and truly having his eyes opened. Marsh Marigolds radiated optimism from their home on the riverbank and the tall, sparsely branched Marsh Thistles, nodded their deep-purple flowering heads in their direction.

He gasped as saw an otter as she swam gracefully by, but then suddenly and ferociously, with eyes narrowing, 'Young Calum' exploded.

"You are up to no good Fin Glass, but you cannot trick me!

He ripped off the beautiful waistcoat and cast it downstream as far as his strength would allow.

It drifted before becoming snagged up in a low sweeping branch of an old riverside alder.

There was an audible gasp from the woodland community. Then, 'Young Calum', 'encouraged', shall we say, by the clogs, leapt to his feet and made a dash through the shallows to the shore.

When he returned with the waistcoat, 'Young Calum' made one last request of the ferryman.

"That brooch," he asked meekly, "may I?"

And again, Fin Glass replied 'Of course my laird'

As the brooch was clasped to the waistcoat, Calum sighed, "That music. Coming out of the woods. Has it always been here?" he asked. "Yes," said Fin, trying to hold back tears of joy, as he recognised the signs of the new laird's awakening.

The simple wicker and hide canoe navigated its own course down-stream before coming to rest at the outer edge of the Council of Elders at the very heart of 'Coille na Fearná'.

The two men quietly lifted themselves out of the canoe, just in time to witness a flash of electric blue that belonged to the woodland's brightest inhabitant, the dazzling Kingfisher, as it darted from a branch of an ancient Alder and dived into the river.

As he truly saw, with his eyes wide open for the first time, the beauty of the Kingfisher, he knew that he could no more fell the trees of 'Coille na Fearná', than he could give up on life itself.

As he walked off with Fin Glass the Ferryman to sit with the Fearn King, in the centre of the Council of Elders, Calum MacAllan was a changed man, thanks to the efforts of the community of Leiterfearn and the spirit of 'Coille na Fearná'. And, because he was a changed man, the woodland at 'Coille na Fearná' had been saved, and its future was secure.