

Three Men and a Minnow

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By

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For Amanda, at Langass Lodge, North Uist.

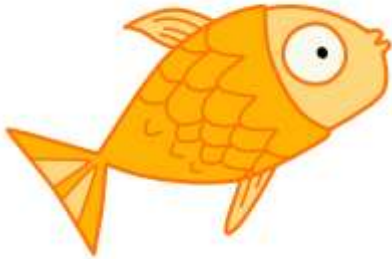
(The lady who wants to know 'everything' that happened on 21 June 2013.)

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The terrible thrashing and whining of it was pounding down on us all the way from the Pier, tormenting the calm of a fine soft day the likes of which is a rare thing on Loch Scadavay.

"The Ineptitudes", as I think of them, were back.



'Well here they are, coming for us again,' I said to My Own Brownies. 'But just leave everything to me boys, for I tell you we shall have ourselves some fun off them this very day, you mark you my word.'

And there was just a whisper of a breeze over the water and with the Sun skipping in and out from behind the low clouds building away to the South. The water was warm as a bath, the air full of moisture and the midge as hungry as a horse. It is not often that the Fishers are getting such a gentle wind as this, set right as it was, so that even these poor old devils would be finding it easy to cast their flies at us.

And a thing for you to know is that even My Own Brownies are not that bright; no, not a one of them, even after all my years of drumming The Education into them. But is that not why they are looking to me, to be keeping them safe when the men come fishing after them? But

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whether they are of a mind to listen is another matter altogether, for even My Own Brownies are not one whit better listening to me than The Men have been down through those long years past.

No, it has to be admitted; "giving heed to The Good Advice" is not the strong point of them, The Men and The Brownies both. And the full truth of it is that Brownies are a lot more 'instinctive' than is good for them, being easily disposed to rush after anything that takes their fancy, be it food or whatever; just like The Men.

And yes, in case you have not yet understood, this is where I myself am living nowadays, at Mo's Skerry, just off Eileanan Glas in Loch Scadavay at North Uist, with the wild Atlantic Ocean on my doorstep. And it is 'Mo the Minnow' that they are calling me nowadays, though you may know of me as 'The Brahan Seer' - when they were saying that I was a Lewis man, which is a terrible thing to be saying about anyone. And there are many other names that they have been giving me, at other times and in other lands, when I was not even being a man or a minnow.

Perhaps you heard about the time when I was that bear they were calling Hercules, larking about, play-fighting in films and making those advertiz-a-ments; and being at the golf with that one they were calling Bob Hope, a made-up name if ever there was one, and he pretending to be an

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American funny man, awhiles underneath it all he was as English as those jellied eels they are so fond of eating.

And I am tell you, he never made *me* laugh, no not even the once, though the rest of them were falling about like drunks at his nonsense stories. He was just the one of them trying to make fun of me, but I was just putting up with them so that I could go on being with my servants Andy and Maggie, who were attending to my every whim and me just sunning myself every day, lying about beside my very own swimming pool.

And then one day, just down the road in Benbecula, when they were filming one of their dafter advertiz-a-ments, I was after having a wee adventure to myself and disappearing for a few days.

And this is where I was for most of the time, right here, just lying up there on Eileanan Glas (the place that The Men are calling The Wee Island), just humming away to myself in the sunshine among the peat and the heather and dreeping down and sitting on this very skerry, splashing and swimming about in this wee inlet, just chilling, so to speak.

But the whole truth of it was that, whenever the wind was dropping the bloodsucking midge were swarming down on me like a shoal of leeches, (if you will please excuse the mixed metaphor), draining the blood out of me by the gallon so that I was spending more and more time in the water,

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already making my plan to come back here as a minnow, knowing that my time as a bear was coming to an end.

And now I can hear you say to yourself:

"But why a minnow, why so small?"

Well, when I was that bear and I was standing over eight feet tall, and near hugging the life out of The Men, and breathing my words right into their very ears, they were not still not hearing me, every one of them just thinking to himself:

*"No, what he is saying will **not** happen to me.*

No, I will be the one who will always get away with it!"



And so it was when Hercules departed I was already set on leaving The Men to get along without me, taking 'the time out', living the quiet life as Mo the Minnow, out here at the edge of the World.

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And these are all the things that I was thinking to myself, when The Men that we were calling 'The Three Bobs' were coming after us that June day in 2013.

Now the first and foremost of them was the smallest of them, a local man that we are calling Story Bob, their Ghillie, a man who for many a long year was thumping 'The Education' into them at The Big School. And now here he was, crouching down in the middle of their boat, with no way he could see ahead or behind, blocked by the other two of them perching high above him on their boat seats, himself gripping hard on the oars like one of those Mohawks gripping at their steel beams, for the making of yon Empire State Building, when I was a seagull swooping about them, snatching away at their play-pieces and screeching at them to stop building their skyscrapers. For I tell you true, it cannot be natural for the men to be working and living at such a terrible, terrible height.



And then I was glimpsing up into Story Bob's face, to see the far-staring eyes of fear for the terrible responsibility that he had taken upon himself, trapped into being their Ghillie as a favour for a friend.

And the first of The Ineptitudes is the one that we are calling Zulu Bob, sitting up there proud in the bow, like one of those Viking lads that used to be going about this place. And at once I was



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seeing that here was a man who would be looking at himself in the mirror every day, hoping that he was still being the trim and handsome fellow of his younger days, with a twinkling smile for The Ladies under his thick thatch of the grey hair of the lost wisdom. And they are saying that for long years he was being some sort of bigwig, bossing them all about, up there in Edinburgh. But now in his retirement he is pretending to them, playing the strong quiet man who is speaking but seldom, and then so softly that it was difficult even for me to be hearing him, even though I myself have the ears of the white owl of the night.

And the last of them was The Other One, the one that pricked at me constantly with his inane words, The One who drove me to the terrible deed. And there he was sitting squat on his boat seat like a great bearded toad, with his carefree pudgy hand at the tiller of the outboard.

And he is the one we were calling Bumble Bob, the one that is more than half-deaf with the whistling of the kettle in his ears, The One that is having but that one brain cell still working, and that lonely wee thing as tired as a mouse carrying an elephant across a desert. And they say that years ago this Bumble Bob was acting the clown as some sort of a mad professor up there in Glasgow, which might be explaining why he was almost never stopping the talking, not even to sook in wee bit breath. Indeed I am telling you plain

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that it is a great mystery to me that Bumble Bob is not already dead of the oxygen starvation!

But the whole truth of it is that these three men were already declined to their anecdotage, gripped by the need to be telling and re-telling the same tired old stories, dumping them on anyone who will listen or even pretend to listen. To say that I myself have heard them more than a million times during these past years is not that far short of an exaggeration.

But now I am admitting to you the rest of the truth that it was a bad thing that I did, a selfish thing, acting against my own true nature. For is it not myself who carries that great burden of always striving to help them, possessed as I am of the gift of the many strange powers?



But I must be fair on myself, for it was quiet as a church on a Saturday night until they came shattering it with the churning-chop of their tiny propeller whirling at us and shredding their bletherings into confetti of broken words, starting off one of my terrible, terrible headaches.

And if that was not enough, I could feel the rain building for a helluva downpour; and as My Own Brownies will tell you themselves, that of itself is always making me more than a wee bit peculiar.

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But what was really putting my teeth on edge was the other boat that was skulking about as well, the one with the quiet American outboard and its big slow propeller with just the two of The Men in it, the brothers that we are calling Rattus Bob and Spider Bob.



Now it has to be admitted that those two men are a different kettle, for they are knowing fine and well how to be catching the fishes, going about it quietly, sniffing them out, just like those Hounds of the Baskerville with their big wet noses, whisking their flies out onto the water and twitching and tweaking them as slow as you like, making The Brownies go mad for them.

And so I was at once telling My Own Brownies to be hiding themselves at the bottom of the loch until I was giving them the all clear. But we were lucky, for the swish-swish-swish of their propeller took them on past us up through the Deep Channel, heading away to The Top of the Loch.

When The Three Bobs were almost upon us, each one of My Own Brownies was already hiding quietly behind his very own rock, each one with his very own instructions,

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waiting for my call to action. And I myself was hovering in the shallow water over Mo's Skerry, opposite the Inlet that separates Eileanan Glas from The Far Bank, where those Truly Wild Brownies are.

And then Bumble Bob was slowing them so that I was hearing them the better. But Story Bob and Bumble Bob were grizzling away at each other like bumblebees trapped in a jar, neither one listening to the other, a common thing for old men in boats.

But their words were not making one bit of sense to me for the pulsing of their propeller was making my eyes bulge near out of their sockets. Then suddenly it was clear to me -The Ineptitudes were living up to their name:

They were not of a fixed mind about where or how to fish at us!

This was my opportunity and so I started the pulsing of 'sonar blips' up at them through their fishing lines, but my messages could not get through as the hail of words that they were firing at each other were like the bullets from those terrible guns that man Richard Gatling persisted in making, no matter how many times I told him not too.

But some fragment must have reached his brain cell for suddenly Bumble Bob shut down the clamour of it.

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And for those few milliseconds the silence of it was Bliss! Sheer unadulterated Bliss!

'Well gentlemen, what do you say to this, my dear companions of the boat?' droned Bumble Bob in his squeaky baritone voice, sounding like a chanter with a broken reed. 'I feel in my waters that **this** is a most ideal spot at which to commence our labours. This small wind will take us nicely up along the side of The Far Bank towards The Top End. Behold laddies, I say unto you that there are fishes all around us waiting to play their part in the great drama of this our last day in Fishers' Paradise for this our tenth year! Are we in complete accordance?'

As ever this small round man, speaking from his own cheery world of self-delusion, was brim-full of misplaced self-confidence, babbling his drivel with earnest and pompous verbosity, tripping from one daft assertion to another, his mind leaping with the mad agility of the legs on the spring lambs.



For I can tell you true that there was not a single Brownie within ten boat lengths of them and that this small wind was set to carry them **back** out into the Deep Channel and away down again to the Pier and not along The Far Bank to The Top End!

From his parallel world Story Bob was telling a tale of Winston Churchill slurping at the brandy with a woman who

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was having the three breasts on her and this was making them laugh like those hyenas.

But I should be admitting it to you, fish are never finding fun in a thing that is made of words. No, we ourselves are more for the clowning about and giving someone a big fright and seeing what they make of it. Yes, *action humour* is more to our taste, like Charlie Chaplin that was always making me laugh.

But when we are doing our laughing it is nearly all done inside our heads, silently so to say, with just a few wee bubbles coming out of us but only if it is terrible, terrible funny.

And then The Ineptitudes were starting at what they are calling the fishing, though the truth of it was that they were cracking their lines down at us like those Lion Tamer Boys at the Circus. But at least I was not getting the thumping headache from their outboard, and so I was keeping at my blippings to Bumble Bob, striving to reach his orphan brain cell, trying to implement my *Plan A*, but only with partial success.

'Story Bob our Ghillie, I do now believe with complete wholeheartedness that on this occasion we have indeed misread the wind. It seems that this delightful and warm little breeze does *not* in factitudinal reality emanate from *behind* us but comes *towards* us from yonder Top End. *Ergo* I do *now* suggest that it is to The Top End we must now go

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to take fullest beneficence from it. Are we in complete accordance?'

'I, Story Bob, seeking ever to serve as your Ghillie of the first grade, hold here in my skilled and eager hands these strong and sturdy oars now poised as hawks at the hover, ready to whisk you to the place of your hearts' desiring. Just say the word, Zulu Bob of the Bow.'

Bumble Bob was already lowering the German outboard back into the water. As I looked up into the tranquil face of Zulu Bob I saw his eyes stir to full power, taking as he was a long slow inhalation of The Contemplation, putting me in mind of the last great gulp of the sperm whale before he dives thousands of feet to the darkness of the ocean floor.

And just before his words came I saw the corners of his lips twitching into a tiny secret smile that was telling me everything of this man. And a part of the truth of it was that Zulu Bob had long since stopped listening to the twaddle that gushed from the incontinent lips of Bumble Bob; and not for the first time I was reminding myself of one of my very own advices:

"The fewer the words, the wiser the man."

And I was at once aiming my signals instead at Zulu Bob, furiously nibbling out my message onto his fishing line which drooped untended, his harmless flies on the rocky bottom.

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And yet still his words did not come as the long slow inward hiss of air slowly filled him from a stoop to his full height; and yet the face of the great man remained as frozen as the night-rabbit in the glare of the lamp, as he took time to ponder the conflict between their urging words and my opposing nibblings.

And then, at the very last second of waiting, just as Bumble Bob was reaching for the twist-grip I sensed that I was connecting deep into Zulu Bob's



immense but near dormant brain until at last his words came as if he was whispering some dark and dreadful secret.

'Yes, Bumble Bob of the Stern, I do agree that we should again try The Far Bank from the Top End. But why, Bumble Bob did you start us in this wrong place? And why did you again ignore my earlier interjections, a thing you almost always do? But, now that you appear to be listening to me at last, hear this and hear it well:

'I, Zulu Bob of the Bow, desire to fish down that other side, just over there, down the side of that Wee Island.

Is this understood?'

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And refracted through water surface I saw a dark mist gathering over them, the like of which often comes just before a thunderhead crashes.

The other two men were stunned by this Declaration of Zulu Bob, who all along was being the chameleon of a polite, mild-tempered and deferential elder man to be hiding the dragon of that younger man of old, who, when he was decided upon a thing, would surely have his own way.

And then it was that I was knowing that all those messages I had been sending at Bumble Bob and Zulu Bob were being next to useless.

(But the whole truth was that the small chubby hand of Bumble Bob held the twist-grip. And what were the chances of the soft words of Zulu Bob cutting through the clack of their tongues and the screech of the outboard to find a way down those near-deaf ears to that remnant brain cell lurking deep in the density of Bumble Bob's skull?)

As the elastic vacuum of their silence stretched out and time stood still, the cloud of their misapprehension grew darker and I thought I was hearing the first grumbles of a ding-dong argument between The Ineptitudes.

'Certainly Zulu Bob, of course you most certainly shall have your wish,' quipped Story Bob quickly, offering himself

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as a human lightning rod, hoping to release the rising tension with that ancient unguent of ready agreement.

And then it was that tired old brain cell of Bumble Bob reached out in near despair to tell me that its man was gnawing anew upon the bitter pith of the gentle rebuke of Zulu Bob and resolving yet to try yet again for a future in which he would try talking the less and listening the more.

Suddenly they were thudding away from me over to the Top End of the Far Bank, the home of the Truly Wild Brownies, a place that I never go for those Brownies have been known to be eating a minnow or two.

A dull thud told that they had found one of the rocks up there and the outboard stopped. I was swimming up to The High Point of Eileanan Glas and their voices carried to me on the slap of the waves.

'I must inform you Story Bob our Ghillie that this is the very spot where our own Zulu Bob of the Bow had his Day of Glory and the Brownies rose in biblical numbers to his huge Blue Zulu on the dropper and his big bushy Kate McLaren on the tail. And this is why I was filled with such a great desire here to fish, so that you, Zulu Bob of the Bow, might repeat your success of old!'

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Again stubbornness of Bumble Bob was working to keep them away from me and so I was sending a massive pulse to Zulu Bob so that he would not be forgetting his Declaration.

'Ah yes, Bumble Bob, well do I remember that wonderful day and have relished it on many a dark wintery evening while raising a glass of ASDA 'deal of the day' malt to my lips. And yes, your fine eulogy is most well deserved, for on that day I was indeed truly magnificent and my every cast brought a fish to the boat. But notwithstanding my past and glorious success at this very spot, that was **then** and this is **now**. And today I repeat, what **I** want to do is fish down the side of that Wee Island yonder. **This I will not be denied!**

'Yes Zulu Bob of the Bow,' wheedled Bumble Bob, 'but **please**, shall we not tarry here for but a wee whiley longer? Please? So that we may cast yet a few more casts. Look, why not fling your flies just over there, behind yonder bigger rock; for I am sure an enormous Brownie lurks in wait for you in those dark and peaty waters.'

Story Bob their Ghillie, sensing again the building of the conflict between his gentlemen, launched into an odd tale of a taciturn CalMac Captain threatening to use



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his Ferry to drag the Isle of Barra out into the Atlantic to sink it.

And for no reason that was making any sense to me, Bumble Bob was laughing like a babe having its tummy tickled. Zulu Bob was already closing himself down again against their prattle and said nothing, let his flies sink, becoming once more impossible to reach.

I tried Bumble Bob again, pulsing a negative thought at him and this time my message had embedded itself, displacing the lure of the Far Bank.

'Right Story Bob our Ghillie, I do declare that on this day there is indeed not one single fish at this spot and agree that we should indeed move to fish over there, down the side of The Wee Island, and so fill the heart of our companion Zulu Bob of the Bow with unbounded joy. Let us go there at once without delay, for the day wears on with not a fish yet caught. Are we in complete accordance?'

This brought Zulu Bob back from his slumbers and he lifted his flies from the bottom of the loch where he had been resting them.

'Now watch your line Zulu Bob, we do not want it tangling with the propeller yet again, do we?' said Bumble Bob starting to lower the outboard.

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'No, Bumble Bob,' said Story Bob, bubbling with joy at this new accord between his gentlemen. '**Please**, allow me to row you across. It is but a short distance. For that is my job as your Ghillie, is it not?'

And as Story Bob took up his oars both of The Ineptitudes allowed their flies to trail behind. And now Story Bob was telling them of a woman who had a car accident at a hump in the road. But this story was not fully told for one of the Truly Wild Brownies of the Far Bank, the boy-fish Eric, followed the Claret Bumble of Bumble Bob. I was at once sending him a warning message but as Eric turned back he snapped at the fly and caught himself.



And now we were enduring the great whoops of delight that came from the boat.

In truth Eric was no great catch for he is as dim a fish as they come and has already been caught many a time on the troll. On his release Eric plopped back into the water and shot off at full speed to his own side, leaving us free to play out my plan.

Story Bob put them above The High Point of Eileanan Glas, and they started to a slow drift down on us. I was sending out the word to My Own Brownies, a sort of curtain call. But the boat was setting all wrong, coming at us stern

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first, and so I was nudging their bow a wee touch so that they could be casting their flies the easier, else they would have been casting up into the heather again.

And then I was sending great waves of energy over them, dowsing the fire in their tongues. And for first time they were fishing at us almost properly, with the only words being terse requests from Bumble Bob asking their Ghillie to move their boat "in a bit" or "out a bit" from the bank.

And for just the once My Own Brownies were truly magnificent, putting on a bravura performance, rushing at their flies with dorsal fins cutting big waves, before leaping right out of the water and splashing over their flies until The Three Bobs were squealing out like piglets. But the truth of it was they were nowhere near catching a one of them, for My Own Brownies were leading them a merry dance down to where I was waiting in the shallow water above the outer edge Mo's Skerry behind my Big Black Rock.

'Watch out Story Bob! Look, there be a big skerry jutting out, just behind that black rock!' cried out Bumble Bob.

And then the boat was thumping past me with Story Bob slicing an oar right past my head and swinging them clear.

But though the *Plan A* had failed I was already having the *Plan B*.

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'No, Story Bob,' scolded Bumble Bob with an uncharacteristic impatient edge to his request, 'please keep us as **near** to that big skerry as you can. Please.'

'Right, Bumble Bob! Got you! How's that?'

'Yes, yes, thanks. Yes, that is very good. Yes that is very, very good. Yes, this is the place! This is just right, perfect. Now we can fish the drop-off into the deeper water behind the skerry.'

Bumble Bob seemed intent on fishing all the way out into the Deep Channel and was so excited by his idea that he completely ignored my blippings and so I had to swim closer to him, trying to see right into his eyes, hoping to reach his overloaded brain cell that way.



The Three Bobs were now fully past the end of Mo's Skerry and I was finding myself as far out as I had ever been daring to go and thinking I would have to give up on them for now and head back to the safety of Mo's Skerry for fear of the Feral Brownies.

'That was a good drift, Bumble Bob,' said Zulu Bob.

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'Yes, Zulu Bob of the Bow, you were indeed wise to insist strongly that we fish down the side of The Wee Island. Yes, you were truly inspired.'

I sent Bumble Bob one last enormous blip and it worked!

'Companions of the boat, surely we have time for one more drift before our luncheon appointment with Rattus Bob and Spider Bob. Let us return at once to yonder High Point for we know with great certitude that there are plenty fishes to be caught on this side. Are we of complete accordance?'

'Good idea! I'm for that,' whispered Zulu Bob.

The Plan B was working!

'Right then, let's do it,' added Story Bob, dipping his oars.

'No, Story Bob our Ghillie, save your ample strength and allow me to take us back up with this sturdy German outboard. We simply must allow technology to play its part when good fishing time is at a premium. *Vorsprung Durch Technik*'.

And though Bumble Bob was lowering the horrible propeller I knew that I must stay close to him so that I could be taking control of his tiller hand when the time came.

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But it has to be said I myself was so excited I was almost suffering a moment of incontinence, a thing I find I have to be guarding against nowadays, for it is an unpleasant embarrassment, even for a minnow.

And then the tubby little man took me completely by surprise! The boat slewed backwards and sideways with the propeller sucking at me and I was seeing myself as minnow patè, and ending of my quiet life here as Mo the Minnow of Loch Scadavay.

And there would be no knowing where I might be reappearing in an unplanned metamorphosis: like that time when I spent twenty-three years as a slug in a smelly midden until one day, mercifully, a wee raggedy boy with a squint in his eye was squashing the life out me with a big stone. Then I woke only to find that I was that wee moosie whose wee hoosie had just been destroyed by that poet-farmer laddie Robert Burness. And as I looked up at him and our eyes locked, I will never forget the kindness in him as he stood above me on the cold clay of that rain-swept field. And so I was sending him a few of my wee poems to help him on his way.

'OOPS, sorry chaps! Slight miscue there,' said Bumble Bob, staring at the control handle. 'The twist-grip on this German outboard is vice versa to the American one. Ah, there we are, NOW we shall go ahead at last.'

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By the time I was clearing my head of the turbulence they were nearly past Mo's Skerry but moving slowly, piping away at each other like oystercatchers, with Story Bob launching another tale at them about some Barber called Ollie playing fancy music for a big woman singing like a butterfly because she was trapped in a revolving door.

And so it was time for *Plan C* and I swam clear around them at high speed until I was dead ahead of the bow and them coming right at me. And then I was waiting and waiting until just the right moment.



*And then I did it, using
the Enormous Force
that is in my tail,
I was giving them
a BIG SHOVE and
turning their bow at
Mo's Skerry.*

And their boat was screeching up onto the big underwater rock and stopping, leaving them stranded, teetering and wobbling above me like inebriated curlers out on the ice, rocking between the safe shallow water of the skerry and the deep water on my side.

'Hold onto the boat lads,' commanded Story Bob, 'we're definitely going over!'

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And then I was giving their boat another wee nudge and they were falling backwards with the slow motion, coming in beside me with hardly a splash.

And then at last the German outboard emitted its final high-pitched death scream!

And there was the blubb-blubb-blubbing as Story Bob's rucksack dived to the dark depths and two boat seats slipping away like silver salmon to join it.

Bedlam broke out with dozens of brownies swirling around me! And not just My Own Brownies but a gang of the Truly Wild Brownies and even one of those big Feral Brownies from The Deep Channel.

And they were going mad at it, flashing around the legs of the men and laughing and giggling until the water was filling with their laughter bubbles.



Maybe it was these bubbles breaking on the surface that was affecting the men, for now all three were laughing out along with us. And to tell you the whole truth I was giggling too until it was dawning upon me that a Brownie might be eating me on impulse.

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And so with the heads of the Three Bobs bobbing alongside their upturned boat, I swam past them, hiding high up inside the hull, just below the trapped air, hearing all that the men were saying.

It was Story Bob who was the hero of them, taking immediate charge:

'Are you all right, Zulu Bob?'

'Yes. But I am very annoyed that my automatic life-jacket has not self-inflated as it should. I paid good money for this thing. I shall complain about this in the strongest terms!'

"Whooooosh!" came the sound of Bumble Bob's life-jacket inflating as he pulled the red toggle.

'And you, Bumble Bob, are you unhurt?'

'Yes thanks Story Bob. I am in most deep water here and shipping it through my every orifice but otherwise I too remain intact in both mind and body.'

I had been expecting angry complaints and blame-calling, as most men are doing when facing their misfortunes. But these men were surfing from the crest of one wave of the giggles up onto another until I was wondering if it was the hysterics that they were having.

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'Good,' said Story Bob. 'Now both of you must keep a firm hold of the boat while I swim around to the bow and pull us back to that skerry where the water is shallow'.



And then he was off, his short arms and legs pumping furiously until he was up on Mo's Skerry, grabbing the bow rope and pulling them towards him.

The long body of Zulu Bob trailed behind his upstretched arms, his languid legs dangling like a somnambulant swan until his knees were dunting into the skerry and he was stumbling upright to stand with the water barely reaching his knees.

Bumble Bob swam alongside the boat buoyed by his orange life-jacket with his tree-stump legs scissoring erratically until his chest found the skerry and he too scrabbled and stumbled onto his knees then hauled himself upright.

And it was Bumble Bob who spoke first and I could tell from this strange soprano voice of him that the shock of it had knocked the professor right out of him, for he was speaking as if he was again a normal Glasgow man.

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'Well, Story Bob,' he hooted, 'do you realise that we three have now entered the myth and legend of North Uist. Our tale will be told and twisted, and within a few tellings they will say we smashed this old boat to smithereens upon this skerry, with waves as high as a multi-storey pounding us and an Air-Sea Rescue Helicopter circling above with its searchlight hunting us down through the blinding sleet with the rescue diver swaying back and forth to winch us up to safety.'

'Ah, look!' cried Story Bob. 'Your lunch bag from Langass Lodge is floating away on the breeze!

'No, Story Bob, please, let it go forth alone, it is of no real importance. Let us first attend to the boat,' said Bumble Bob, bouncing back into his old persona.

But this entreaty slapped against water-logged ears as the spirit of Mark Spitz was entering into the short and sturdy frame of Story Bob who was already powering off in pursuit of the bobbing bag at a furious crawl, raising a cloud of steam in his wake.

'Honestly, Story Bob, the bag is not that important, really! Remember your triple heart by-pass operation, laddie!'

But Story Bob their Ghillie and the lunch bag were already lost to view behind The Bottom End of Eileanan Glas.

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'Right Zulu Bob, let us first get all our gear onto the bank of this wee island.'

'But Bumble Bob, my life-jacket did not self-inflate, did you know that? I shall complain most bitterly, possibly in writing. I paid good money for this and it should have worked!'

'Yes, Zulu Bob, you have them dead to rights, if you will forgive the pun. But look here laddie we still do have both oars, undamaged. The hull is intact, not a mark on it. It was a blessing that were indeed moving so slowly. And your rod seems fine though mine own is snapped asunder. Our Ghillie's outboard has stopped but looks otherwise undamaged. Surely it will work again when it has dried out. Did I ever tell you about the time the IBM computers were soaked by a sprinkler system malfunction but worked perfectly well after they were dried out?'

'Yes, Bumble Bob, many, many times.'

'But drat and double drat! My boat seats are disappeared to the bottom. But worry not Zulu Bob; you may recall I bought them second-hand some several years hence, so I have no great loss.'

'Listen carefully Bumble Bob, are you *absolutely sure* that both of those boat seats are yours? I paid full price

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for my boat seat you know, and I will be very annoyed if we have lost it.'

'Yes Zulu Bob, we left your boat seat back at the car today. The seats that rest side by side at the bottom of this loch are both mine own.'

'I just hope you're right Bumble Bob. I paid full price for it you know. And this life-jacket was expensive too and did not self-inflate as it should have done. I shall definitely complain. Shall we roll the boat over and bail out?'

'No, Zulu Bob, not yet. *Aspetta un attimo, per favore*, while I undo the clamps and free the outboard. Then we can roll her without damaging her.'

And I am admitting to you now that the truth of it was that I was smirking, knowing for certain that my plan to sabotage the German outboard had worked. But I was starting to admire the cheery acceptance of these old men and seeing that they too were enjoying the simple *action humour* as much as we fishes.

'Our fellow fishers will enjoy having their fun from us on this one, Zulu Bob, do you agree?'

'Yes, that they will Bumble Bob. But this life-jacket should have self-inflated. Do you remember that time some years ago at Loch Caravat when it took only a splash upon it

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to cause the mechanism to fire? It worked alright that time! I will most ...'

'Look, Zulu Bob, our very own Tarzan returns with our lunch bag.'

'Ahoy sailors! You shall not starve today! Look here it is!'

'Good man Story Bob our Ghillie! And look, we have both oars intact, and the engine seems undamaged although somewhat drookit. And the hull is undamaged and unmarked. Thank goodness we were moving so slowly.'

'Yes, but my life-jacket did not inflate. I shall ...'

And it was then that that Bumble Bob surprised me again, suddenly rotating the boat back to an even keel, floating deep, half-filled with water and trapping me inside so that I was rushing down and hiding myself under the decking.

But I was at once realising I could be trapped inside the boat and easy prey for The Seagulls of The Pier pecking for food scraps after the men go home from The Fishing.

'Well Story Bob our Ghillie,' said Bumble Bob, 'in the great scheme of things no great damage done, just one rod broken and two boats seats gone to a watery grave.'

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'Do not worry about your boat seats for I shall ask Ian son of Stewart of Grimsay to come to dive for them soon. I have marked the spot, just beside this skerry.'

'But do not worry about them for they are old and well used, as we are.'

'But my rucksack is down there too with those special back-up outboard batteries. Now they will also be 'kaput' like the outboard and its battery.'

And now Bumble Bob was bailing out with a blue bucket.

'But surely Story Bob, the Germans would see to it that they are waterproofed since they are for use in a wet environment. Did I ever tell you the tale of the IBM computers? ...'

And then I was taking the big chance and as the blue bucket scooped down I swam up into it. And as Bumble Bob was swinging it out over the loch and tipping me back home, our eyes locked, and I was seeing the pleading in him for my story so that he could write it all down for you.

And so, in that split second of my pity for him, I was admitting all of it, the whole truth of it, flashing it straight into his grateful old eyes.

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