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What's under your kilt, Mister?

Jock Stuart appeared to be completely unaware of the fact that all eyes were on him as he strode down the Boulevard Clichy. He wore the brilliant crimson kilt of the Royal Stuarts. His sporran swung from side to side with each movement of his thighs and his white gaiters were immaculate. On his head, at a jaunty angle, he wore a tam o' shanter, with pom-pom on top and a feather at the side. Under his arm he carried bagpipes, for Jock liked music, and when he threatened to play the pipes there was just no argument.

There were probably a lot of men in Paris that night who were far more handsome than Jock Stuart, but Jock, never-the-less, was good to look at. He was not tall, but was well built. He had a mass of sandy hair, very blue eyes, and a tip-tilted nose in a pleasant impudent face that smiled a lot.

This was the first night of a week in Paris with his older brother Angus and their friend Gordon Sinclair. These two were occupied at the moment with a pair of dubious females in a bar somewhere in a side street. Jock had little time for females of any sort, with the exception of his mother, and he had escaped from brother Angus and friend Gordon by the simple expedient of going to the toilet and then leaving the cafe by another door. Jock meant to have fun that night, but he was going to have it in his own way.

He went into a bar and demanded whisky.

«*Merde*», he said with a big smile. «Thanks very much.»

The woman looked a little surprised but said nothing. Jock perched himself on a high stool, carefully folding his kilt around his legs. He knew only three words of French; the one he had just used, which someone had told him before he left Scotland meant «Thank you», so he used it as often as possible, being naturally well-mannered, and *oui*, and *non*, and that was the full extent of his French vocabulary.

He sipped his whisky and looked around the bar. It was a pleasant place, but not very full as it was early. A girl sat down on the next stool.

«Good night, Scottie,» she said in English.

Jock's mother had told him to be careful of strange women, but being a friendly soul, he felt he could risk a smile and a courteous answer.

The girl looked down at Jock's hairy knees. «You have very nice legs,» she said.

«Aye», Jock answered. He now felt it was time to be a wee bit cautious.

«It's a nice kilt,» she added, stroking it with her hand.

«Aye. It was my father's.»

«I've never known a Scotsman. Do you wear something under that kilt?»

Jock grinned. «That, young woman, is something a Scot never tells. But there's nothing to stop anyone from finding out.»

«I like to find out,» she said. «You come to my room. We make love and I soon find out.»

«How much?» Jock demanded. He was not interested, but felt it would be ill-mannered to give a flat refusal.

«Five thousand francs.»

«*Merde non!* That's a lot of money, and you're the one who wants to find out, lassie. I already know.»

He hurriedly downed the rest of his whisky, and after saying good-night to the girl he climbed down from his stool and left the bar. Soon he found himself in the bright lights of Place Pigalle. Women whispered softly to him, and so did men, some of the men touting for women and others looking after their own interests. He was invited to bars with nude floorshows and to exhibitions of naughty films; people wanted to sell him rude postcards and pornographic books and toys. Jock politely rejected all their overtures in his quaint, very limited French, and the smiling naivety with which he rejected all invitations brought many laughs but no animosity. Clutching his bagpipes he circled Place Pigalle and then once again made his way into a side street.

He heard some music that appealed to him coming from a bar. He peeped in, and seeing no women, decided that it was the right bar for Jock Stuart. It was not a big place but there was a small band and a space was cleared for dancing. There were a few tables but most of the men present were crowded round the bar, either singly or in small groups. There was a lot of noise which suddenly subsided as he entered. All eyes were fixed on him. Someone gave a wolf whistle. Jock found an empty stool and perched himself on it, once again with careful arrangement of his kilt. Again he ordered whisky. The general appearance of the bar pleased him. He heard people speaking English among the babble of foreign tongues, and that made him feel at home. A few men were dancing and he watched them with interest, for he had never seen men dancing together before. A small group of three Americans was standing next to him.

«Say bud, have one with us,» one of them said in a friendly tone. «You look kinda lonely, and no one should be lonely in Paris France.»

«I'm not lonely,» Jock replied. «I'm just alone. But I'll take a drink with ye. Ye're very kind.»

They introduced themselves as Henry, Joe, and Peter, three students spending their summer vacation in Europe. They had several rounds of drinks.

«Say Jock», said Henry, pointing to Jock's kilt. «I'd like to have me one of those things.»

«Are ye a Scot?» Jock enquired cautiously.

«Hell no, I'm an American. I just told you.»

«Well ye canna wear a kilt if ye're not a Scot.»

«I had a grandfather came from Durham.»

«A Sassenach,» said Jock scornfully, «from south of the border. A Sassenach has no right to wear the kilt. We disapprove of Sassenachs.»

«Well, I've been called lots of things, but never a Sassenach,» said Henry. «But I don't see what that has to do with it, if I want to wear a kilt,» he insisted.

«We're vera jealous of our kilts and our tartans,» Jock explained patiently. «I'm a Stuart, so I wear a Stuart tartan. I could wear the McDonald as well, for my mother was a McDonald, but I couldna wear the Ferguson because I'm not entitled to, and I wouldna want to, though it's a very fine tartan.»

«Say what do you wear underneath?» Joe asked. «Do you wear little pants or nothing at all?»

Jock grinned, and became coy again. «A Scot never tells. Ye have to find out for yourself.»

«I'll soon find out,» said Henry. He tried to lift the kilt but Jock was too quick for him. He clasped his knees together and the kilt proved unliftable.

«Ye must not do that,» he admonished. «It's no decent.»

«So that's the answer?» said Peter. «You wouldn't be decent without your kilt.»

«Maybe yes; maybe no. I'm not telling. It's a national Scottish secret and here is no place to find out.»

«Well, don't you want to wash your hands?»

«No.» Jock was firm.

They gave up. Then Henry saw the bagpipes.

«Say, Jock, could I blow those things?» he demanded.

«Ye can try, but I doubt ye would do any good.»

«Let him try,» said Peter.

Henry took the pipes and blew into them as hard as he could. Not a sound emerged. He blew until he was red in the face but the pipes remained silent.

Jock laughed and took the pipes. He breathed easily into them and a horrid shriek filled the room. The music stopped and so did the dancing.

«Play them, Scottie,» someone demanded.

«Yes, Jock, play something,» Joe urged. «Those things do something to my system. I think I must have a Scottish ancestor somewhere. Play the «Gay Gordons». I learned how to dance that in London.

Jock was easily persuaded, and in a moment the gay lilting melody filled the room. Soon almost everybody, led by Joe and Peter, was dancing the «Gay Gordons». Jock jumped up on the bar and strode up and down as he played, for it is hard for a piper to stand still when he plays such music. Henry and one or two others stayed at the bar looking up at Jock with avid eyes as he marched up and down, his kilt swinging with the rhythm of the music. Jock saw them, and knew what they were looking for, but so carefully did he control his movements that his secret was not revealed. The music went fast and unchanging in its rhythm; eventually the dancers fell out two by two until none were left. Jock went on playing.

«I'll find out,» Henry whispered to Peter. «Maybe we can make him dance a Highland fling.»

He called out to Jock, and the music changed from the moderately sedate «Gay Gordons» to the shrill wild music of the Highlands.

Jock danced, deftly moving his feet, dancing on the bar as though he were dancing on Scottish turf, over crossed swords which he must not touch with his feet. The crowd went wild with enthusiasm and the applause mingled with the music made a noise that was deafening.

«I think I can see,» said Henry. «There's nothing under them, I think.»

«There is, you know,» Joe answered. «He's got little tights on.»

«Sometimes I think he has,» said Peter. «But it's hard to tell.»

«I think you might be right, Joe,» Henry admitted.

«I don't know, Henry. You might be. I just can't see a thing.»

Jock suddenly stopped playing and with a wild Scottish yell leaped over the heads of those sitting at the bar and landed on the floor. Had they been quick enough to look, their question might have been answered.

«A drink, monsieur,» said the bartender passing over a whisky, «with the compliments of the manager.»

«Merde! Thank you very much,» Jock answered as he took the drink. «Do ye know now?» he demanded of the Americans, and his turned-up nose was more impudent than ever.

«Yes. We know,» Henry answered.

«I don't think ye do,» Jock argued, «But if ye do, then don't tell anyone.»

«Short of rape, Henry, I don't think we'll ever know,» Joe admitted, with resignation in his voice.

«I guess you're right. He's maddening. We'll take him back to the hotel and find out there. I just won't sleep until I know.»

Jock had enjoyed himself but felt it was time to be moving on. For some time he had been aware of a young man, quite alone, sitting at the bar a few places removed from Jock and his American friends. He looked like a Frenchman and he was about the same age as Jock. He had a nice face and looked rather shy. Their eyes met, and the Frenchman glanced towards the door. Jock nodded, and downed his whisky.

«Goodbye,» he said to the three Americans. «I must go. And come to Scotland sometime if ye would understand the riddle of the kilt.» He was gone before they could protest at his going. The Frenchman was waiting outside.

«My name is Pierre,» he announced, holding out his hand. «Your music and dancing were wonderful.»

«Ye're verra kind. Just call me Jock.»

They walked back to the garish lights of Place Pigalle.

«Would you like to see another part of Paris?» Pierre asked.

«Whatever ye say,» Jock answered. «I'm verra willing.»

They took the metro over to the Left Bank. Pierre was a student and lived near the Boulevard Saint Michel.

They had some drinks in various small bars which were very different from the glittering ones of the Pigalle area but which pleased Jock much more. Pierre, who spoke excellent English, was very companionable. Jock liked him. Time passed quickly, but it grew late and one by one the bars closed for the night. They found themselves in the Boule Mich.

«I think I live in a wee hotel somewhere near here,» Jock announced, «but I don't know where it is.»

«Have you the address?» Pierre asked.

«It's written down somewhere but I think I've lost it,» he stated ruefully, fumbling in the pockets of his jacket. Actually the piece of paper was tucked away in his wallet but he was not telling Pierre that just now.

«Then you'd better come with me for the night.» Pierre was not exactly displeased.

«But I don't want to cause ye any trouble.»

«You'll be more than welcome. Besides, I want to know something.» Pierre glanced down at the kilt, and Jock laughed.

Pierre's room was only a few minutes away, and though he had only arrived in Paris that morning, Jock suddenly realised that he knew where he was. He wondered where Angus and Gordon were.

In the room Pierre's eyes watched Jock closely as they prepared for bed. Settled down for the night, Jock whispered: «Now ye know.»

«Now I know,» Pierre admitted.

«You won't tell anyone?»

«I promise.»

«I know it's silly, but we just like to keep people guessing.»

An hour or so later Pierre was asleep, his head comfortable in the crook of Jock's arm. Jock also should have been asleep for he had had a big day and was tired, and he also had had a lot to drink. Instead, he lay awake. It was very quiet. He wondered if he should get up and go, but that would mean disturbing Pierre. He did not have far to go and he could see Pierre in the morning; in fact he could see Pierre every day for the next week with no trouble at all. The bagpipes were lying on the bedside table next to him. He picked them up and started to breathe into them very softly, so as not to make any noise. But he had drunk too much whisky, and as a result of meeting Pierre he was also a little drunk with happiness. Suddenly a powerful blast came from the pipes as he burst into the «Flowers of the Forest.»

Pierre sat up rubbing his eyes, dismay in his face.

«Jock, we'll be thrown out.»

Jock stopped playing. «I'm verra sorry,» he apologised. «I forgot myself.»

He put the pipes down but it was too late. The door was flung open and a crowd of people filled the doorway. Jock and Pierre sat up in bed feeling rather silly. The concierge was there in his nightshirt and so was his wife. Jock was not entirely surprised to see his brother Angus and friend Gordon also present, their kilts dragged on hurriedly and their chests bare. A few other people also in their night attire also appeared to find out what all the noise was about. Everyone talked at once.

«Mon dieu,» said the concierge. «Is it a fire?»

«Ye little devil, what are ye doing here?» demanded Angus. «Where have ye been all night and why aren't ye in your own bed?»

Pierre looked from Jock to Angus and back again, mystified and alarmed.

«It's my brother Angus,» Jock explained lamely. «We must live in this house too. I thought it was a wee bit familiar as we came in.»

The concierge was very irate. Jock and Pierre were acutely embarrassed. Angus was amused. He shook hands with Pierre. He guessed clearly what Jock had been up to, but though his tastes were different, he was very fond of his younger brother and sympathetic and tolerant at the same time. Gordon also gave Jock a knowing wink. He and Jock had once spent a week together on the Isle of Skye and each knew the other very well. As for the French people present, they did not seem to find it unusual that the two boys were sharing the same bed. After all, the Scots were an eccentric race, but delightfully so. The centuries old Franco-Scottish alliance was not dead.

Madame, the wife of the concierge spoke up. «He is lonely in the night so he comes to talk to Pierre. Pierre is a nice boy.»

«That is no reason to make barbaric noise in the middle of the night when honest people sleep,» said the concierge, still a little irate.

«The Scottish music, it is wonderful,» announced the wife of the concierge. «Go, Gaston, and get some wine. We 'ave a party now we are all from our beds. You, Monsieur Stuart will play some more. We make lots of noise an to 'ell with everything.»

Wartime memories when he had marched to the music of a pipe band came back to the concierge so he went away and returned with his arms full of bottles and no longer irate. Jock covered his nakedness by winding a sheet around himself somewhat after the fashion of a Roman toga and Pierre could not resist the temptation of slipping into Jock's kilt. Jock took up the pipes and the party settled down to enjoy itself. Angus grabbed the wife of the concierge and Gordon took someone else and with Pierre, the concierge, and a couple of other people, Angus initiated them into the intricacies of an eightsome reel. No one in the house could sleep so a few more people arrived and everyone had a wonderful time.

It had to finish though. The party broke up and Angus took possession of the pipes.

«I'll take care of these, my lad,» he announced firmly. «Ye've caused enough disturbance for one night. And I'll se ye back to your room.»

Jock went meekly. In a short while all lights were out and the house was silent again. In his room Jock waited quietly alone. When he felt that everyone was safely tucked away in their beds he quietly opened the door and tip-toed softly down the corridor. He did not want Angus to hear.

He wanted to say «goodnight» to Pierre,

Ned Kelly.