SCOTS HORROR STORIES

THE DEATH DANCE by Gregor Bates (Douglas Academy)

The castle wis an auld grand place. People said it wis hauntit, but I didnae listen. I dinnae believe in ghosts and aw that, they were jist made up stories, weren't they? But I hae tae say, it didnae look half hauntit on that cauld, dreich nicht. There wis a smirr o rain that nicht, and ma kilt wis damp efter the oor long boat ride tae get tae the castle on this island. I should hae brought a jaiket, but I forgot, and so did ma mum and dad, but ma wee sister remembered. I did think it wis a bit strange, haein a ceildh in a run doon castle in the middle o nowhere, but then again, the auld man who organised aw this wis a bit strange himself. Robert he wis cawed. He wis actin especially strange the day afore though, when he invited ma family tae this ceildh and I wondered whit wis wrang. I ken noo though, and I wish I didnae. Poor Robert. He didnae even get a proper burial.

"Oww!" I bawled. I had tripped ower a rock and hurt ma ankle, no a braw start tae the evening, I doubted I would even be able tae dance in the ceilidh wi ma ankle being so sair. I hirpled intae the castle tae where the ceildh wis, and saw the main courtyard, wi towerin waws and a wee stage for the band tae play on. It wis quite a wee band as well, jist a bald accordian and a fiddler wi lang scraggy hair. Tae be honest, I wis feart jist lookin at them, wi their tartan scarves ower their chins and mooths, and daurk black glasses ower their een. Only their nebs could be seen, and that wisnae a braw sight either. I went over tae a wee stane table and ma mum and dad dumped oor stuff doon, pokes o crisps, bottles o juice, some cups and a tray wi some wee cakes in them. Dad had brought a pen-knife as well. "Jist in case!" he said, "you never ken whit might happen!" And he wis right, you never ken whit might happen. I certainly didnae anyway.

Soon the rest o the guests were ready and the music started for the first dance, The Dashing White Sergeant. In a way, it worked that I couldnae join in because o ma sair ankle, as you were tae mak groups o three and that meant ma sister, mum and dad could mak a group, and nobody had tae go awkwardly find a group wi other people. If ye dinnae ken already, The Dashing White Sergeant is a dance where your three pairs up wi another three and you aw spin aroond in a big circle, dance wi jist your own group and then go tae a different group and repeat. Unfortunately this is where it aw went agley.

The music blared. The rhythm flowed. The dancers danced. Ootside the wind howled. The trees whispered. The waves roared. People were smiling. Staring. Never blinking. The pulse o the music got stronger. Louder. Quicker. The dance lost any emotion. Joy. Energy. It almost felt mechanical. Robotic. Controlled. The wind wis silenced. The trees went quiet. The waves died doon. Aw ye could hear wis the ceilidh music. The dancers faces went aw peelie-wally and their een turned reid. Then abruptly, the music stapped. The accordion player and the fiddler pit doon their instruments and pulled doon their scarves and took aff their daurk glasses tae reveal their faces.

Smilin wickedly, wi daurk holes where their een should be. Their mooths had nae teeth nor lips, jist an eerie void. These musicians werenae human in the slightest! And their een sockets were staring richt at me...

I boltit . . . and rin as fast as ma legs wid cairry me. Thankfully, I wis a keen rinner, coming 2nd in the school 200m race and 1st in the 400m race. I wis built for this. I darted and weaved through passageways and corridors, sprinted and scaled up spiral staircases and lang ladders. At yin point, I found a toilet and locked myself in, pechin and wheezing. “That must hae been the fastest I’ve ever rin.” I thought. It wis incredibly painful though, as ma ankle wis still so sair. I wis so distracted that I didnae notice the mingin smell o rottin flesh...

There wis somebody in the bathtub!

Purple sairs had erupted aw over the man’s body and he wis so thin, you could see aw his banes. Yin o his een his fallen oot and bluid wis aw over his body. Nevertheless, I could recognise him. It wis Robert, the strange man who invited us tae his ceilidh. The strange man who wis actin even stranger when he did so! Then somethin so unexpected happened I shouted ma heid aff in surprise. Robert started tae speak.

“I dinnae have lang left,” he groaned. “So I’m going tae talk fast! The fact that you are no hypnotised or covered in a rash, means you never danced, but did you at least see them dancin?”

“Aye,” I stammered, “I saw the musicians and how they hypnotised the dances...and then I saw the musicians take aff their disguises and aw the dancers’ een... They went reid!” Robert sighed. “I ken those ‘musicians’ you talk about,” Robert muttered. “They have been the subject o ma research for quite a lang time noo. These creatures are so powerful, nothin can stap them. I wis aboot tae raise an alarm when they got me. They played their wicked music and forced me tae dance, and they took control o ma body. They made me invite everyone tae this ceilidh. I could still think, but ma body didnae respond tae whit I wis telling it tae dae. I wis a prisoner in ma own body. It wis terrible. Haein tae go tae aw ma auld friends hames and luring them tae their death, it does that, the hypnotising, you ken. First, you lose control o your body, then the infection kicks in. Purple spots are the first symptoms, then you become incredibly hungry and thin. Next, you regain control o your body, but by that time there is nothing you can dae tae stap yourself from dying, slowly and painfully. I would guess that everyone in the ceilidh has about three oors left till there’s nae hope.”

I gasped. “But ma family?!”

Robert shook his heid and said, “They will aw die if you dae nothing aboot it. Tae get them tae survive you need tae kill the musicians. Only then will

your family live. Go! And save everyone. Leave me here. I dinnae have lang left."

Wi a smile on his face his een closed and he slumped back in the bathtub. He wis deid. I wis so feart I stood completely still. Then I remembered the ticking clock. Three oors left. But first I needed a braw plan. I remembered ma dad's wee pen-knife. "You never ken whit might happen!" He said. But I didnae think that he would ever imagine this would happen. No in his wildest dreams.

It wis the hardest I had ever thought. How could I kill the musicians? I wisnae brave enough tae kill them in cauld bluid. Oh no. I wid hae tae find another way. I looked at ma watch. I had wasted half an oor awready. I had tae go intae action.

Creak! The auld stairs screamed as I tiptoed doon them. I sneaked past the passageways and corridors, inched myself through this castle, slowly and quietly. I peered through the doors and crawled past them. On more than yin occasion, I saw the brainwashed servants o the musicians, searching through rooms, lookin for something, or someone. Only efter I saw another dancer patrolling the corridors, constantly moving its heid every time it heard a noise I realised they were lookin for someone in particular. Me. I turned aroond slowly, ready tae mak a hasty retreat, when I saw a glint o metal and twa reid een. It wis ma dad wi his pen-knife. Aboot tae kill me.

I dinnae remember punching him in the heid, but I must hae done, because a reid mark had appeared on the top o his foreheid and he wis clutching it in pain. In hindsight, I should have taken the pen-knife, but I couldnae think straight, I had jist been nearly murdered! Needless tae say, I darted away, and somehow, I ended up in the courtyard, where the "ceildih" had taken place and found myself face tae face wi the musicians themselves...

A shiver went doon ma body and I honestly wis aboot tae faint when the fiddler spoke: "Well, well, well boy! Finally we meet! I wis looking forward tae this moment! KIlling the boy who has been such a nuisance tae oor test run. For when you are deid, we shall tak ower the world! Playing in ceilidhs, dances, weddings, streets even. We shall rule over you eejits, and those who resist will die. Like you boy. Tak pleasure in knowing that you are the first...second actually, tae die as oor plans unfold. And who better tae kill you than your family?"

Ma family advanced on me, each at yin side o me. I wis so terribly feart and I had tae think quick. I looked aroond me for anything which might help but I saw nothing which could be used. Then I spotted it. Above the wee stane stage, which the musicians were standing on, there wis a towerin arch, wi the keystane at the tap (the piece holding it aw together) lookin like it wis aboot tae give way. This wis ma chance. Mess it up and I wis deid. I looked

at ma watch. I had already used up twa oors and fifty-five minutes. I had five minutes left tae put ma plan in action. This wis the crucial moment.

I stared.

I stared as hard as I could, wi ma mooth open in shock and stage whispered: “Robert!”

It worked a treat.

The musicians turned their heids tae where I wis staring and I quickly picked up a decent sized boulder from the pebbly, stony floor o the courtyard and hurled it at the keystane as hard as I could, and magically, I somehow hit it deid on. By the time the musicians had realised whit wis happening, it wis too late. Wi a bluid curdling scream, they were crushed by an avalanche o broken arch and chunks o the waw. They were deid.

This time I did faint.

I awoke tae the sound o a fire crackling beside me. I saw ma dad tending tae it, adding on twigs tae it. Then he noticed me.

“Ma boy! Are you ok?” He queried. “Come here, coorie in! I’m so sorry aboot whit I did, it wis like I wis hypnotised and...and...”

“It’s awright dad” I said “It’s no your fault, I jist want tae go hame!” Dad smiled. “We’ve got that covered. Someone found a torch, and we signalled in Morse Code, clever eh? They responded as well so we jist need tae sit tight for an oor aroond this fire I made.” I sighed in relief.

“I’ll tell you everything then,” I said. But ma dad interrupted.

“Sure, but whit are these purple spots on ma airms?”