

# Graham of Morphie and the Kelpie

As told by Bea Ferguson

***You have probably heard about the statues of the Kelpies in Falkirk – maybe you have been lucky enough to visit them.*** They remind us about the history of the area and the wonderful Clydesdale horses which once worked in the area and pulled coal barges along the canal. They also represent the Kelpies in Scottish folktales and legends (the Water Horse) – mythical creatures which lived under water and had the power and stamina of 100 horses. This is one of the well-known stories about the kelpie.

Once there was a Scottish Laird called Graham of Morphie who lived in the north east of Scotland in the area of Forfarshire. He thought he was a very rich and clever man. Rich, he most certainly was, but clever - well you can decide for yourself. One thing you can be sure about; he was notoriously mean. So when he decided to build a fine castle, just so he could show off his wealth and position, well he wondered how he could do it for nothing. Then he had an idea!

He knew that a Kelpie lived at the bottom of a nearby loch. He had seen it come out of the water, as a beautiful chestnut horse, with a silver saddle and bridle. It would graze quietly by the roadside until some man would come along and, not believing his good luck at finding a horse without an owner, would jump on his back. Then the horse took off, faster than the wind and never stopped until it reached the bottom of the loch, where the man remained as a slave for the rest of his life. It was said the Kelpie was a cruel master, but how anyone knew that, well I don't know.

Kelpies were known to be very strong, in fact they had the strength of a hundred normal horses and so Graham decided to try to capture the Kelpie and make it work for him, for nothing. He also knew that all its strength was in

the magic bridle it wore and so all he had to do was get that off. No easy job! But the Laird of Morphie didn't know the meaning of fear.

So one evening, Graham took his sharpest knife and told his wife he was away to find a servant and thought the water horse would make a good one.

'I need your help though,' he said. 'Go into the garden and pluck two twigs from the rowan tree, form them into the sign of a cross, and place them above the front door. That will keep the kelpie out for no evil creature would walk beneath the witch's tree, especially when it is in the shape of a holy cross. Lock and bar the front door, but I must be able to get in myself, so leave the kitchen window unlocked. Do you understand?'

Well, if the Laird wasn't afraid of kelpies, his wife was. She cried and pleaded with him not to do it, but he pushed her away and told her not to be such a fool but do as he told her.

She was so terrified that she quickly pulled the rowan twigs, shaped them into a cross and put them above the door. She locked the door and opened the window, just as he had told her and then she went to bed and hid underneath the blankets.

Graham walked down to the loch. Sure enough, a beautiful chestnut horse with a silver saddle and bridle stood grazing by the roadside, looking very quiet and docile. Graham wasn't fooled by that and crept up behind the creature and struck it on the side of its head, cutting through the leather of the bridle as he did. The kelpie was taken by surprise and reared up in the air and, as it did, the bridle slipped off and fell on the ground. Graham quickly picked it up and put it in his pocket because he knew that without it, the horse had lost its magic.

Suddenly the horse turned to face him and, much to his surprise, spoke in a human voice.

'Graham of Morphie - what harm have I ever done you? Give me back my bridle!'

'Well,' replied Graham, 'maybe you haven't done me any harm, but if you could, you would, so I mean to keep the bridle.'

'Right then,' said the horse – 'I'll take possession of your house!' It took off faster than the wind, while Graham followed, laughing all the way home. When he arrived at the house, there was the horse standing at the front door because it couldn't cross the doorway with a cross of rowan tree above it. Graham quickly went round the back, in through the kitchen window, closed it tightly and went upstairs. He looked down at the horse.

'See here,' he said. 'I need a strong horse to help me build a castle. Stay with me until it is finished and I'll give you back your bridle.'

The horse had no choice because its magic had gone with its bridle.

Now, I've mentioned that the Kelpie was supposed to be a cruel master, but it was nothing compared to Graham. Day after day, he watched that horse pull heavy loads of stones up to the top of the hill. He didn't give it enough to eat and in time it became thin and its ribs stuck out and the gloss disappeared from its coat. It was exhausted, and could hardly drag its feet along.

After seven long years, the castle was finished. One morning, Graham leaned out of the window, threw down the bridle and said, 'Here, take that and get back where you belong!'

The horse stared up at him.

'You'll regret this,' it said and took off faster than the wind, never stopping until it reached the middle of the loch, where it plunged down, down, down into the depths. But as it disappeared it called out these words:

*'Sair back and sair banes,  
Drivin' the laird o' Morphie's stanes!*

*The laird o' Morphie'll never thrive  
As lang's the kelpie is alive!*

Graham moved into his castle but the kelpie's dire warning came all too true. Within a year the laird's only son was dead. In less than two, he was laid beside him. The wife grieved for both, and died of a broken heart. The castle was empty, neglected and fell into ruin. Eventually it fell down and disappeared from view and now only the site remains. Even the name of Graham died out in the district.

But the Kelpie - well, I wonder? Has he had his revenge?

No one has seen it since that day, but if you happen to come across a beautiful chestnut horse, grazing by the road side - take my advice and give it a wide berth. It might be a horse – on the other hand it just could be a kelpie!

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