

## Detective Dilbert's Bagpipe Boondoggle

### Chapter 15

Wait. Don't talk. Give me a second. I just want to remember it one more time—my muscles bulging, the rope whirling at a wind-whipping speed, the nostril-steaming, hoof-pounding, creature-pronging, bloodhound-flattening bull. We are face to face, the bull and me, nostril to nostril, eyeball to eyeball, horn to...soft, delicate snout. The people gasp at my courage. The Earth stops spinning. Everyone inhales. And before one lung deflates, I have the bull on its side, hooves tied and secured. Danger thwarted, over, done, terminado—just like that—I've taken care of the problem. Everyone is safe—all because of my tornado-fast lasso maneuver. The cheering crowd is mad with happy craze. A remarkable moment indeed. And I did it all, all with just one paw and one puny rope.

OK, I see that weird expression on your face. Yeah, I know what you're thinking. And you're wrong—I haven't forgotten the help you tried to give. You were so cute, the way you thought you could swing that rope, the way the rope got all tangled and knotted around the bull's hooves. That's OK. You tried. But if you don't mind, I'd like to offer a little advice—snap out of it! Will ya? We're not even in Spain anymore; we're in Scotland. You really need to let go of the past and focus better. Tell ya what—you stay put and just observe for a while. I'll call if I need you.

So, as I was saying—Scotland—that's where I currently be, and maybe, just maybe, that's where I'll find the diamond. Think I'll sniff around a bit. I'm about to activate my shnozzola's olfactory system when my droopy ears catch hold of a thick, rumbling buzz sound. The density of the reverberation tickles my eardrums and lifts my saggy earflaps. It's like a choir of a trillion mosquitoes is performing in my ear canals. But, of course, that would never happen because my paddle-like earflaps would snap those buzzers silly before they got near me. No, the sound's coming from somewhere over that green, grassy hill. Think I'll take a look...

With my muscular body, my shrewd maneuvers, and my great intellect—I summit the hill in no time. Huff... Huff... Huff... What did you ask? Huff... Huff... Wait a minute—hold on... Huff... Huff... I'll tell ya... Huff... what I see; give me... Huff... a second. Gotta catch... Huff... breath. (sleuths know...timing...crucial. Huff; huff... You unaware...just novice....) Give.....me.....  
a.....

.....second.....OK, you with me yet? Good. As I was explaining, seconds after my slither to the top of the hill, I peer below, but I have to rub my eyes. Could they be malfunctioning? I'm baffled at what I see. It doesn't add up. It's like I'm witnessing horses riding the backs of ants or maybe ice cream baking in the oven. I give my eyes another good rub. Nope, they're still there—tractor-sized men, tractor-sized men with beastly muscles, tractor-sized, beastly men with barrel-sized muscles, tract—OK big, hunky dudes wearing skirts, really pretty skirts too. The strong, beefy men are grunting and growling; they're hurling boulders and flinging metal objects. Obviously, these guys aren't to be messed with—we're talking really tough blokes, super he-men...in cute skirts. I'm reminded of Thester dressed in Isie's tutu; I remember the scowl he had when he was forced to wear it—wonder if he'd

be happy to learn some men don't mind a frill or two. And then, adding crazy to bizarre, I learn what all those mosquitoes-in-the-ears was about earlier—some of the men are blowing into these weird tubes that are connected to bags, making that peculiar insect-buzzing noise. Not far from the bag-blowers are people kick-jigging to the beat. Apparently, they think this mosquito-choir sound is music. A crowd is gathering to observe the skirted men who are gathering on the field.

Time to take a closer look. I pull my cloak of invisibility from my lower-left storage unit at the base of my neck. A few summers ago, Isie was into Harry Potter. She was always bragging about a cloak of invisibility she had hanging in the coat closet. She never did put it on, though, so...don't tell anyone, but I kind of borrowed it. Weird how she kept bragging even after I took it. So, now, finally, I get to try it out. I whip the secret disguise from its hiding place and secure it around my neck. I peer downward toward my paws. Excellent. I see all my parts as usual, but the great thing is, no one else will see me. I see all; they see zilch—literally and figuratively. Shrewdly, I begin my descent down the hill and make it all the way to the bottom, not even once tripping on the cloak's long, flowing cloth. I then secretly maneuver through the crowd; no one even bats an eyelash at me—I'm that invisible. Positioned in the middle of the sideline's action, I survey the details and deduce that what's going on is some sort of Scottish competition.

"Welcome to the Highlanders Competition," the announcer booms into a microphone. Aha, a competition, so I'm right—of course, naturally. "It's time for the caber toss," the announcer's words trill the same way my whole body shakes itself dry after a bath; his words flip up and over up and over in midair before they land—it's English, but it isn't.

A horde of men in their sweaty little skirts runs onto the grassy field; they're growling and snarling; they're baring their teeth like angry guard dogs; they're wanting to rip something apart. One at a time, each man hurls a 200 pound telephone pole—what the Scots call cabers, I deduce. What a contrast. Beastly men in cute little skirts hurling telephone poles as easily as if they were straws. Suddenly, a gust of wind nearly knocks me off my paws. It's a thick, nearly visible force. It punches me in the gut; I bob and sway like a punching bag. But I withstand its attack and pop back upward. And just in time too, for when I am once again upward, I see what my eyes never wish to see again. And I learn what I need not be taught twice. This is the moment I discover how to make a caber-tossing, gravel-grinding man shrink to mousy size. I should pretend I don't see them, should play dumb. I don't. I look. When his pretty little skirt is wind-whipped upward and his thick, high-waisted, blindingly white undies are plain and clear to all, well, I giggle. Can't help myself. Everyone else cringes, but me, I giggle, giggle at the burly man who's tucking his head into his collar, trying to be a turtle in hiding, the beastly human with super power strength whose knees are buckled inward, whose face is crimped into fan-like worry folds. Instantly, the crowd behind me grimaces and in unison melts backward—backward and away from me.

"Who dares laugh?" His deep, gravelly voice hisses and spews. The steam-engine of a man turns and glares right at me. His meat-grinding teeth drip with saliva; his pronged glare drives holes into my skull.

Silence permeates the crowd. No one swallows; no one takes a breath. They're all waiting to see what the skirted man with white undies will do. Boom... Boom... Boom... The ground nearly shakes as the man stomps toward me. My insides fold. But

then, the wind kicks up again, sending a familiar scent to my bionic sniffer. Instantly, the words **hay** and **straw** print across my eyeballs. And then I see him. He's standing on the other side of the field, staring straight at me. So, this is quite a dodgy situation I've got here. I've got this skirted grizzly bear of a man stomping toward me and a thief who I'm supposed to be chasing staring right at me. I don't have time to dawdle. I've got to make my move now and catch that menacing thief with a fake mustache. I'm about to leap out onto the field and chase after the diamondnapper when suddenly, the thief holds up a sign to me. All it says is RUN! That lizard-licking, soap-sucking, no-good thief is taunting me, telling me to run from him. I'll show him who should run.

But it's too late. I can't run after the thief now because—well, I'm currently hoisted above the white-undie man's head, ready to be hurled through the air like a telephone pole—or caber, as the men in girlie skirts like to call them. This is quite a boondoggle. Uh um, maybe you can help?