

## Achfary

Achfary. A small village near to nowhere tucked in a nook in the hillside. Shrouded in the shadow of the towering Ben Stack. The bare rocks protrude out from the earth, unchanged since the mesozoic era and the shimmering Loch bounces sunlight around like a mirror ball.

The earthy fragrance of adventure shimmers in the air as a family loads up their car. A girl stumbles, tripping over the small step at the entrance to the little cottage which would become her home for the coming late summer weeks. Her face was barely visible through the pile of slightly soggy wetsuits stacked in her arms. This family's wetsuits were in a constant state of dampness you see, as everyday or every other day during the holidays they'd be in the water, perhaps paddleboarding in Scourie, or diving under waves in search of mermaids at Polin. Well unless it was too sunny for wetsuits, but that was a rare occurrence in the north-west coast of Scotland.

Two ruckus boys pushed past the girl, unsteady her more still. A labrador with fur as red as a foxes sat impatiently by the boot of their mud splattered car, the youngest family member had accidentally said the word WALK instead of spelling it out in the usual slow undetectable manner. The labrador was intent on joining his family for the day's escapade which he sure hoped involved a lot of sticks. After a lot of dilly-daddling the family finally managed to bundle up in the car, chewing on all sorts of processed food or "adventure fuel", as they called it. After a short drive along winding remote roads the family finally came to a turn off onto a rocky ominous track, crossed a river and finally parked next to a weather worn old barn. A cold wind bit the family as they piled out of the car and pulled on a few extra layers.

This family knew better than to be turned away by a foolish stray wind and began lugging their heavy backpacks up a winding path, in the distance was a small speck of forest at the base of Ben Arkle. The prickly heather scratched and the dreaded midges gnawed at the family. But they were Oblivious. Even the two brothers whose legs were bare seemed not to notice. This was more stubborn than brave though, as these two boys would refuse to wear trousers instead of shorts in the most glacial, bitterly cold parts of winter. As the path wound on the family began to draw closer and closer to the patch of forest and soon found themselves shrouded in the shadow of the towering trees.

A stone, split right down the middle, stood at its entrance, its surface decorated with intricate patterns of lush green moss and delicate lichen. It was like a portal to its own little world. Lulled by the rush of fresh water and the chirping birds the family ran headfirst through the split stone. But on the other side of the stone they were only greeted by the disenchanting site of a muddy path, and the dry peeling bark of the swaying trees. The family stood. Contemplating their situation for a good few minutes before "look", the fathers nimble eyes had spotted a trail of vegetation growing along the river bank.

As the family ventured along the river deeper and into the forest its alluring shimmer and smooth flow drew them in deeper, piquing their curiosity as it became more ruggedly magnificent and entrancing. Perched on the hillside, minute waterfalls had formed with deep pools swirling below them. The daughter decided that if fairies or

pixies ever did exist, this river would certainly be their chosen habitat. The plants surrounding the river had become greener and greener, thriving by the cliffs which the river had carved through the hillside.

A joyful bark escaped from the labrador as he turned a corner and when the rest of the family tumbled behind him they found themselves staring inspiringly upon a truly magical sight. Nestled between the towering cliffs was a majestic waterfall. Rainbows bounced around it giving the air an iridescent glow. Everything felt a million times greener and brighter than the family had ever seen before. After a good long time of admiration the family finally remembered their real mission. Cradling their backpacks like precious treasure they carefully unfolded their wetsuits and towels. They pulled on their wetsuits, or should I say struggled into their wetsuits (as one cannot romanticise the putting on of a wetsuit) and stood together at the edge of a deep pool staring into its depths.

Together, the family plunged into the pool. The fresh water submerged them and they felt what cannot be described but only known by those wild swimmers, or just bathers who have experienced it.

It truly was "A moment of sheer unconditional delight."

Word count: 815