

Lyrics of songs on *Like the River*

THE FALL OF TAM MONCRIEFF (*Copyright © Alex J MacDonald 2008*)

He was out on the hill when the news came through of the death of his daughter's son;
He was old and grey, but tall and lean, coming down in the setting sun.
A heroin overdose, they said, had taken his life away;
He'd gone to the city to look for gold, but all he found was clay.
The old man bent as he leaned on his stick, but never a word he said;
His heart turned cold, cold as a stone, as he turned and walked to the shed.
He took his precious Purdies down and cut the barrels off;
In the grey of the dawn his old Transit van started up with a purr and a cough.

He took the long road south from there by mountain and by strath,
But no one in Auld Reekie then could feel his approaching wrath.
The first place that he made a call was a pawn shop down in Fife,
Where a man he knew gave a thousand pounds for the jewels of his long dead wife.
The Forth Road Bridge was clear going south, and he found a place to stay—
An old hotel in the centre of town, with his van parked some streets away.
That night he went out to find his man and it didn't take him long;
Big Tam was his man if he wanted a deal for something hard and strong.

In a suit and tie and a long brown coat, the old man limped down the street;
In the back of a pub in the New Town was where they'd arranged to meet.
The old man looked Tam in the eye and explained what was his need;
The case he opened looked full of tens; he was aware of Big Tam's greed.
He said he wanted to open up a new market in the north;
A hundred times what was in the case was what the deal was worth.
Big Tam's eyes narrowed and he asked, "Do I know that you're for real?"
The names the old man mentioned then were enough to clinch the deal.

After midnight the following day was when the deal went down,
In an antique shop in Montague Street on the other side of town.
Big Tam he opened up his case—it looked as pure as snow.
The old man laid his brief case down and opened it kind of slow.
You could hear every breath as they gazed upon the rows of hundred pound notes;
What they didn't see until too late was the old man reach in his coat.
When they all looked up, they were looking down four barrels short and cold,
And the man who held them was tall and straight—now he didn't look so old.

No one moved a muscle, but the colour drained from Big Tam's face,
When the old man said, "I'm Dan Mackay—I've come in judgement not in grace."
Then he told them all the story of his daughter's only son,
And cold sweat ran down Big Tam's brow, before his tale was done.
"There's many a beast I've killed," said Dan, "Nobler far than you.
But you're going to wish you never were born by the time that I am through"
With a case and a gun in both his hands from the table he went back;
He walked out of there with £1,000 and a million pounds in smack.

His old transit van was parked outside and the engine roared and growled,
While back inside Big Tam went nuts—going out the door he howled,
“We’ll take the BMW and catch this Dan Mackay.
He’ll never leave this town alive, tonight he’s gonna die”.
But they never did catch the old transit van by the bypass or the bridge;
On the motorway and the A9 north, it always had the edge.
Big Tam and his henchmen didn’t know that at the heart of the battered van
Was a Cosworth engine, six speed box and a driver who was the man.

Many a time, with a stag in the back, that race he’d always win,
But now he played Big Tam like a fish, and he steadily reeled him in.
He went through Drumochter and the Slochd like the wind on the mountainside;
By Inverness and the Kessock Bridge they couldn’t catch him though they tried.
By Contin, Garve and wild Braemore, he took the long road west;
Some call it the Destitution Road; it’s a road that he knew best.
He let them see him take the turn that heads down to Little Loch Broom,
But then he pulled away again, just to give himself some room.

At Corrie Hallie he finally stopped and put on his mountain gear;
In the clear still morning air he heard the BMW getting near.
In his rucksack went the heroin; he took a long stick and a gun.
He pocketed the thousand pounds just at the rising of the sun.
The BMW screamed to a halt, and Tam said, “There’s the van.
There’s empty cases across the road, so now we’ve got our man!”
The three of them ran up the path, but young Jake got far ahead;
He never saw the snare wire, he went down and cracked his head.

But when the other two came up, there was nothing there to see,
So they kept on going up the hill and thought they were still three.
At last they caught a glimpse of Dan as he disappeared into the mist;
Big Tam got off three hurried shots from the handgun in his fist.
On up An Teallach’s mighty slopes, Big Tam was left behind;
Red Billy was a wee hard man, but he was running blind,
So he never saw the hazel stick that sent him down the rocks;
The old grey man that hunted them was as cunning as the fox.

When Big Tam came gasping up at last, he could hear poor Billy scream;
He saw that Billy couldn’t move, it was like a nightmare dream.
He swore that he would bring Dan down—it would only take one hit.
If he had been a wiser man, that was the time to quit.
On the Corrag Bhuidhe pinnacles was where they finally met;
It was there drug baron Tam Moncrieff would settle his final debt.
On the edge of the abyss they stood as the sun came shining through;
“You’ve got something there”, said Tam, “that doesn’t belong to you.”

In one hand Dan held the rucksack, in the other he held his gun;
Big Tam’s eyes glittered when he saw the smack shine in the sun.
“You’re right”, said Dan, “but it’ll be no good for the journey you’re going to take.
Why don’t you leave it and change your ways?” But Big Tam made his last mistake.

He raised his gun to bring Dan down, but his shots went echoing wide;
A million pounds of heroin hit him on the side.
He could have let his old life go and caught the hand held out,
But instead he clutched his drugs and gave a great triumphant shout.

He balanced on that bitter edge for an eternity of time,
But the day had come at last when he would pay for every crime.
Down from that fearful peak he fell a thousand feet or more,
But Dan looked up to the heavens above, where he saw an eagle soar.
And all around there blew like snow the price of a grandson's life;
It was scattered on that jagged cliff, where each rock shone like a knife.
And long they looked in Edinburgh town for the return of Tam Moncrieff,
But never he came, for he'd paid the price, the price of an old man's grief.

ALL THE NIGHT IS EMPTY (*Copyright © Alex J MacDonald 2008*)

All the night is empty as she walks from the room
That is framed in the colour of her hair
She leaves her mind bleeding on each step of the stair
And the stones mock the movement of her heels
The cold wind clutches at her shadows on the wall
She feels that it's reaching to her soul
The orange light makes dry leaves alive round her feet
And the rustle reaches back into her dreams

She sees these dead leaves as they were six months ago
With the drizzle of the sky going through her hair
Her tangled web of life becomes the falling of the leaves
Her happiness a destiny of dust
If there was anyone to hear her she'd cry till he heard
But her wisdom tells her no one's really there
Her anguish and the hunger of a million children's eyes
Prove to her that no one really cares

But away behind the vision of her eyes and of her head
There's a picture that she never can erase
It's the awful sight of one who was broken by this hell
His mind and body torn against the sky
Her footsteps clatter from the dark wet cobble-stones
To run her mind away from what she sees
But his hands of love reach out down the arches of the years
His cry of desolation fills her ears

The ancient stony walls close in around her steps
She sees that she's got nowhere else to run
His loneliness is hers he took it for his own
His love has broken through this hell.

BIG MAN BIG HEART (*Copyright © Alex J MacDonald 2008*)

On the last of the land a young man stands
Where the sun sinks low
Between darkness and light, the daylight and the night
Torn in his soul
Shepherd by day, the night-time for play
In the summer or winter frost
Music in his hands, dancing to the bands
This is the shepherd that was lost

Refrain

*Big man with the big heart
He was a heavy with the light touch
He was a shepherd who knew his sheep
Big man with the big heart
He was a heavy with the light touch
He was a shepherd who knew his sheep*

He drives home late, comes in through the gate
And he stands with his hand on the door
His dying mother's song proves that he was wrong
He turns to the hills, his heart is sore
As he stands by her grave he tries to look brave
But her words shake him to the core
Will you meet me there? was her question and her prayer
But he turns away once more

He can wrestle and fight and drink through the night
He can make the hammer fly from his hands
But one night at a dance a girl asks him by chance
If he's heard the preacher who understands
Curious to know, he decides to go
And settle this thing in his mind
But much to his surprise, the preacher sees through his disguise
He's empty, he's aching and he's blind

As he drives by the shore, he meets him once more
And confesses he wants to be changed
And down on his knees he feels the coldness unfreeze
His priorities all rearranged
The darkness of night is dispelled by the light
Of the shepherd who's given his life
He sees him stand in the preacher's hand
The one whose love cuts like a knife

He sets out on that road where he'll bear a heavy load
Of caring for everyone that's lost
His voice reaches out, he'll whisper and he'll shout

This love doesn't care about cost
To seek and to save before he reaches the grave
His ambition right from the start
Through laughter or tear he will draw you near
This preacher with the shepherd's heart

He will not spare himself nor dare
To turn away until we all know
That the love that changed him doesn't come from within
It comes from the high to the low
But as the years roll this work takes its toll
On a heart that wanted to win
The great voice is stilled but the place now is filled
Prepared by the shepherd for him

THE GLORY (*Copyright © Alex J MacDonald 2008*)

People of the islands, of the hills and of the sea
On the deep green water the long ships were sailing
Harvests of the land, harvests of the sea
Provide for our children without failing
They came for us in the daylight, their hearts as dark as night
Our warriors abroad, betrayed in the fight
They took our land and language, left us nowhere to hide
But they couldn't take the glory away from our side

I've seen the glory in the light upon the land
In a dark-haired beauty and in banners unfurled
But I've seen it most on the pages of the book
Where I've seen the glory of the face beyond the world
But they came for me in schools and on a TV screen
In science and in slyness and where they would not be seen
They took away my innocence, my wonder and my pride
But they couldn't take the glory away from my side

Created in the glory of the union of love
A tapestry of wonder, woven in the womb
Growing to a pattern reflected from above
She lay enfolded in the shelter of her room
But they came for her with arguments about a right to choose
In a battle for her sisters to win she had to lose
They took away her body, they broke it and they lied
But they couldn't take the glory away from her side

They came for the foreigners whose faces didn't fit
For the handicapped and helpless, the worthless and the weak
But you were none of these and you never said a word
So when they came for you, there was no one left to speak

They take away your freedom, they take away your right
They take away your conscience and your will to fight
Till you're broken by the burden and in the dark you've died
And then they'll take the glory away from your side
But will they take the glory away from your side?

THE BANKS OF NEWFOUNDLAND *(Traditional)*

On St Patrick's Day the seventeenth from New York we set sail,
Kind fortune did favour us with a fine and pleasant gale.
We bore away from Americay, the wind being off the land
And with courage brave we ploughed the wave
Bound down for Newfoundland.

Our captain's name was Nelson, just twenty years of age,
As true and brave a sailor lad as ever ploughed the wave.
The Evelyn our brig was called belonging to MacLean,
And with courage brave we ploughed the wave
Bound down for Newfoundland.

Just three days out, to our surprise, the captain he fell sick,
And shortly was not able to take his turn on deck.
The fever raged, which made us think that death was near at hand,
So we bore away from Halifax
Bound down for Newfoundland.

At three o'clock we sighted a light which we were glad to see,
The smallpox had been raging (that's what it proved to be),
At four o'clock in the afternoon as sure as God's command,
He passed away in Arichat
Bound down for Newfoundland.

All that night long we did lament for our departed friend,
And we were praying unto God for what had been his end.
We prayed the God would guide us and keep us by his hand
And send us fair wind while at sea
Bound down for Newfoundland.

THE TAY BOAT SONG *(Traditional)*

When I've done my work of day and I row my boat away
Down the waters of Loch Tay when the evening light is falling
And I look upon Ben Lawers where the after-glories glow
I dream of two bright eyes and a melting mouth below

She's my beauteous Nighean Ruagh she's my joy and sorrow too
For I doubt she is not true but I cannot live without her

And my heart's a boat in tow and I'd give the world to know
If she means to let me go, as I sing heree horo

Nighean Ruagh your lovely hair has more glamour I declare
Than all the tresses fair from Killin to Aberfeldy
Be they lint-white, gold or brown, be they blacker than the sloe
They are no more worth to me than the melting flake of snow

Her glance is like the gleam of the sunlight on the stream
Like the songs the fairies sing like the songs they sing at milking
But my heart is full of woe for this night she bade me go
And the tears begin to flow as I sing heree horo

TEARS (*Copyright © Alex J MacDonald 2008*)

Did I ever dream in those first bright days
When I promised you that there was One
Who could wipe away every tear from your eyes
That now I would cause those tears to flow?

Thank God I cannot wipe away your tears
Because if I possessed that power
How could I know that when you needed me
I could love you enough to forget my pride?

And now I watch you weep bitter tears
For the pain and the loneliness that I have given you
And I walk again the old roads of agony
And I look into walled gardens and I weep too

But still I know that the same Lord is the same
As He was yesterday when our love was young
And He is still able to wipe away our tears
And in His love we can again sing our song

HE STANDS A BEGGAR (*Copyright © Alex J MacDonald 2008*)

The preacher came from the western wilds / To the wealthy town by the sea
They looked askance at his homespun clothes / His hair was shaggy and long
They smiled as he climbed the pulpit steps / But his voice was clear and strong
Every eye was turned and a stillness fell / And this is what he said

Refrain *He stands a beggar at your door*
 Will you open and let him in?
 Or will you turn him away my friend?
 It's your heart he wants to win.

A great clan chief had a daughter dear / It was time that she should wed
To a feast in the castle he did call / All the finest in the land
O daughter dear, today's the day / To choose the best young man
O Father dear, I'll choose today / I'll choose the best young man

But in the early morning mist / Before the guests arrived
A beggar came and asked to see / The daughter of the chief
She was much too busy, the servants said / To see the likes of him
They shut the door right in his face / And told him to be gone

The beggar he lifted up his crutch / And laid it to the door
At this the dogs began to bark / And they made such a roar
That high above in her castled room / The daughter asked the cause
It was only a beggar, her servants said / Though he asked for her by name

The chief's daughter came down the stair / With her servants all around
"What can I do for you, my man?" / She asked as her servants frowned
The beggar he looked her in the eye / And this is what he said
"I've come to ask for your hand in mine, / For you and I will wed."

The lady then held out her hand / And the beggar he held it firm
"Here is my hand", the lady said / "For you and I will wed.
And when will you return for me?" / "I'll come in a year and a day."
And the servants laughed at the lady's wit / As the beggar he went away.

But the smiles were soon all turned to frowns / When the guests they did arrive.
To the fine young men who courted her / She gave the same reply:
She said, "O that can never be, / For my hand I gave today
To a fine young man who will be mine. / We'll be wed in a year and a day."

Her father then was sore dismayed / At what the lady said.
"O daughter, that can never be / That a beggar you should wed."
"But Father dear, I gave my word / And to him I shall be wed."
And this she said for a year and a day / No matter what was said.

The year passed round, a year and a day / And winter turned to spring
The lady she dressed herself so fine / But for her no bells did ring
Then over the hill came the sound of pipes / And many a voice did sing
And in front of them all on a great white horse / There rode the son of the King.

The preacher paused in the deathly hush / That had fallen on all around
He looked at them and then did say / In a voice that would raise the dead:
"Christ Jesus stands at your door tonight / As a beggar he stands there
Do you recognise the King of Kings? / Will you open and let him in?"

SCOTLAND'S STORY (*Copyright © Alex J MacDonald 2008*)

The northern Lion lies asleeping in the darkness before the dawn
Across the sea the light is shining from Iona the isle of dreams
Creates a kingdom from painted warriors, Celtic bards and Saxon lords
Scotland's glory, Scotland's story, Scotland's glory: the light has come

Viking longboats swiftly sailing, mail-clad Normans claim the land
Across the border swings a hammer, creates a desert and calls it peace
A great sword rises to fight for freedom. Through blood and fire there comes a king
Scotland's glory, Scotland's story, Scotland's glory: for freedom stands

The flower falls on Flodden's field. Priests and nobles oppress the land
The message comes that heaven's open, but they insist that you have to pay
But one man is with God the winner. With open book feared no man's face
Scotland's glory, Scotland's story, Scotland's glory: the law is king

Now the hunted becomes the hunter, from dark Glencoe to Culloden moor
From Strath Naver to France and Belgium, no great mischief if they fall
But from the Kingdom a great voice wakens to call the nation to faith and love
Scotland's glory, Scotland's story, Scotland's glory is born again

Through war and ruin and hopes of empire, a land for heroes they promise you
The straths are empty, the yards are silent. Confusion reigns, our sorrows drowned
But on our banners the cross and lion tell a story of love and power
Scotland's glory, Scotland's story, Scotland's glory may come again

THE RUNNER (*Copyright © Alex J MacDonald 2008*)

You ran through the fields where the wild flowers grew
As a child in the meadows with laughter in your eyes
You ran through the woods with the moss beneath your feet
A boy in the shadows with the hope that never dies
You ran on the hills with your face to the sky
Like the hare on the mountain, like the eagle on the wind
You ran like the river running to the sea
The river you would follow to the world's end

Refrain

*And you'll fly like the eagle
And you'll run like the wind
You'll run and not be weary
You'll walk and you will never fall*

You ran on the grass in lanes around the track
The length of the mile and the strength of your heart
You ran up the mountain with the cold stone lord
But you left him for dead, you won the race from the start

You ran with the hares and you ran with the hounds
But in the east wind of the city you started the big race
You ran on the strength of the one who gave his life
Running for freedom, for glory and for grace

You ran for understanding of sickness and of pain
Of healing and of mending what was broken and maimed
You ran for all the people who could not run themselves
The cripple and the helpless, the hurting and ashamed
You ran to the country where beauty wears a skull
Where good blends with evil and all the gods are one
You ran to the blind to give them their sight
To the leper and the outcaste and the ones nearly gone

You ran to the poor man who had the bite of death
The kiss of life for him, the kiss of death for you
You ran the second mile for him, you gave him your own breath
Now the legs that ran for others will no longer run for you
You can't run in the fields and you can't run in the woods
On the track and on the hill your running days are done
But you'll run in the city where the river flows
You'll fly on the mountain when the day comes

BON ACCORD (*Copyright © Alex J MacDonald 2008*)

I came to this city about ten years ago
And I didn't know how strong the east wind could blow
It's blown away my cobwebs, it's blown into my soul
Makes me long to be clean, to be alive and to be whole

Refrain

*Happy I was to meet you
Sorry I am to part
Happy I'll be to meet again
Where we will never part
Bon Accord*

This city's built of granite on the land and on the sea
Between Highland and Lowland, between the Don and Dee
Now granite's strong and lasting, against the wind and rain
Formed in earth's furnace, like a people's pain

You came here from the north, from the south and from the west
From the hills and from the islands, the brightest and the best
You were drawn here to this city, its learning and its oil
You helped to build its glory with your skill and with your toil

But there is within this city another one of love
It's not built from the earth, it comes down from above
But we've helped to build its walls, every stone to us is dear
It's built upon the rock, with blood and sweat and tears

Been with you through the high times, been with you through the low
But now's the time for parting and I just want you to know
That I never will forget you and what you did for me
And how God did something special when he set us free

THE SHEPHERD'S SONG (*Copyright © Alex J MacDonald 2008*)

I have come from the north country
A land of loch and hill
Where the curlew's cry fills the sky
On an evening damp and still

Refrain

*When the shepherd sang for his lost sheep
On his knees beside the bed
And a mother filled the house with light
Made sure that all were fed*

The crofter's son came across the hills
To the place where the rivers meet
In the winter chill he trapped the hill
In the summer he fished the beat

In the prime of life he wed a lass
From the strath where he belonged
They made a home which was not their own
But they filled that house with song

He worked the sheep and he worked the land
A land that was his by right
But a different country he could see
That he dreamed of every night

Now some demand the earth and the land
In the end they'll get six feet
But the shepherd he loved the land above
Where the Good Shepherd he will meet