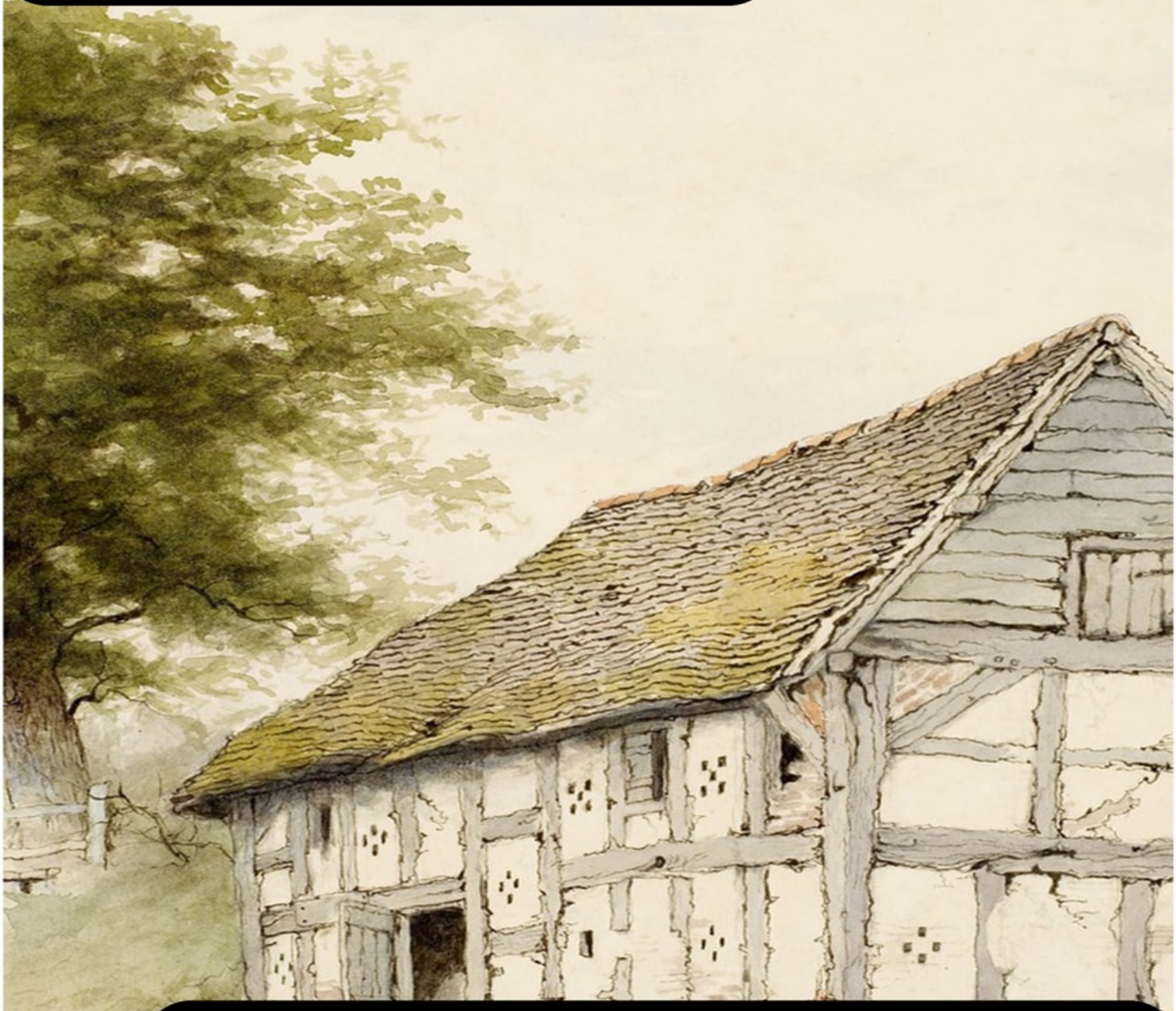
LEWIS GRASSIC GIBBON



THE COLLECTED WORKS OF LEWIS GRASSIC GIBBON

Lewis Grassic Gibbon

The Collected Works of Lewis Grassic Gibbon

EAN 8596547390312

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

A SCOTS QUAIR

Table of Contents

SUNSET SONG

Table of Contents

TO

JEAN BAXTER

Table of Contents

NOTE

If the great Dutch language disappeared from literary usage and a Dutchman wrote in German a story of the Lekside peasants, one may hazard he would ask and receive a certain latitude and forbearance in his usage of German. He might import into his pages some score or so untranslatable words and idioms--untranslatable except in their context and setting; he might mould in some fashion his German to the rhythms and cadence of the kindred speech that his peasants speak. Beyond that, in fairness to his hosts, he hardly could go--to seek effect by a spray of apostrophes would be both impertinence and mistranslation.

The courtesy that the hypothetical Dutchman might receive from German a Scot may invoke from the great English tongue.

L. G. G.

PRELUDE

THE UNFURROWED FIELD

Table of Contents

Kinraddie lands had been won by a Norman childe, Cospatric de Gondeshil, in the days of William the Lyon, when gryphons and suchlike beasts still roamed the Scots countryside and folk would waken in their beds to hear the children screaming, with a great wolf-beast, come through the hide window, tearing at their throats. In the Den of Kinraddie one such beast had its lair and by day it lay about the woods and the stench of it was awful to smell all over the countryside, and at gloaming a shepherd would see it, with its great wings half-folded across the great belly of it and its head, like the head of a meikle cock, but with the ears of a lion, poked over a fir tree, watching. And it ate up sheep and men and women and was a fair terror, and the King had his heralds cry a reward to whatever knight would ride and end the mischieving of the beast.

So the Norman childe, Cospetric, that was young and landless and fell brave and well-armoured, mounted his horse in Edinburgh Town and came North, out of the foreign south parts, up through the Forest of Fife and into the pastures of Forfar and past Aberlemno's Meikle Stane that was raised when the Picts beat the Danes; and by it he stopped and looked at the figures, bright then and hardly faded even now, of the horses and the charging and the rout of those coarse foreign folk. And maybe he said a bit prayer by that Stone and then he rode into the Mearns, and the story tells no more of his riding but that at last come he did to Kinraddie, a tormented place, and they told him

where the gryphon slept, down there in the Den of Kinraddie.

But in the daytime it hid in the woods and only at night, by a path through the hornbeams, might he come at it, squatting in bones, in its lair. And Cospatric waited for the night to come and rode to the edge of Kinraddie Den and commended his soul to God and came off his horse and took his boar-spear in his hand, and went down into the Den and killed the gryphon. And he sent the news to William the Lyon, sitting drinking the wine and fondling his bonny lemans in Edinburgh Town, and William made him the Knight of Kinraddie, and gave to him all the wide parish as his demesne and grant to build him a castle there, and wear the sign of a gryphon's head for a crest and keep down all beasts and coarse and wayward folk, him and the issue of his body for ever after.

So Cospatric got him the Pict folk to build a strong castle there in the lithe of the hills, with the Grampians bleak and dark behind it, and he had the Den drained and he married a Pict lady and got on her bairns and he lived there till he died. And his son took the name Kinraddie, and looked out one day from the castle wall and saw the Earl Marischal come marching up from the south to join the Highlandmen in the battle that was fought at Mondynes, where now the meal-mill stands; and he took out his men and fought there, but on which side they do not say, but maybe it was the winning one, they were aye gey and canny folk, the Kinraddies.

And the great-grandson of Cospatric, he joined the English against the cateran Wallace, and when Wallace next came marching up from the southlands Kinraddie and other noble folk of that time they got them into Dunnottar Castle that stands out in the sea beyond Kinneff, well-builded and strong, and the sea splashes about it in the high tides and there the din of the gulls is a yammer night and day. Much of meal and meat and gear they took with them, and they

laid themselves up there right strongly, they and their carles, and wasted all the Mearns that the Cateran who dared rebel against the fine English king might find no provision for his army of coarse and landless men. But Wallace came through the Howe right swiftly and he heard of Dunnottar and laid siege to it and it was a right strong place and he had but small patience with strong places. So, in the dead of one night, when the thunder of the sea drowned the noise of his feint, he climbed the Dunnottar rocks and was over the wall, he and the vagabond Scots, and they took Dunnottar and put to the slaughter the noble folk gathered there, and all the English, and spoiled them of their meat and gear, and marched away.

Kinraddie Castle that year, they tell, had but a young bride new home and she had no issue of her body, and the months went by and she rode to the Abbey of Aberbrothock where the good Abbot, John, was her cousin, and told him of her trouble and how the line of Kinraddie was like to die. So he lay with her that was September, and next year a boy was born to the young bride, and after that the Kinraddies paid no heed to wars and bickerings but sat them fast in their Castle lithe in the hills, with their gear and bonny leman queans and villeins libbed for service.

And when the First Reformation came and others came after it and some folk cried *Whiggam!* and some cried *Rome!* and some cried *The King!* the Kinraddies sat them quiet and decent and peaceable in their castle, and heeded never a fig the arguings of folk, for wars were unchancy things. But then Dutch William came, fair plain a fixture that none would move, and the Kinraddies were all for the Covenant then, they had aye had God's Covenant at heart, they said. So they builded a new kirk down where the chapel had stood, and builded a manse by it, there in the middle of the yews where the cateran Wallace had hid when the English put him to rout at last. And one Kinraddie, John Kinraddie, went south and became a great man in the London court,

and was crony of the creatures Johnson and James Boswell and once the two of them, John Kinraddie and James Boswell, came up to the Mearns on an idle ploy and sat drinking wine and making coarse talk far into the small hours night after night till the old laird wearied of them and then they would steal away and as James Boswell set in his diary, *Did get to the loft where the maids were, and one* Πεγγι Δυνδας ωας φατ ιν τηε βυττοcχς ανδ ι διδ λιε ωιτη ηερ.

But in the early days of the nineteenth century it was an ill time for the Scots gentry, for the poison of the French Revolution came over the seas and crofters and common folk like that stood up and cried *Away to hell!* when the Auld Kirk preached submission from its pulpits. Up as far as Kinraddie came the poison and the young laird of that time, and he was Kenneth, he called himself a Jacobin and joined the Jacobin Club of Aberdeen and there at Aberdeen was nearly killed in the rioting, for liberty and equality and fraternity, he called it. And they carried him back to Kinraddie a cripple, but he would still have it that all men were free and equal and he set to selling the estate and sending the money to France, for he had a real good heart. And the crofters marched on Kinraddie Castle in a body and bashed in the windows of it, they thought equality should begin at home.

More than half the estate had gone in this driblet and that while the cripple sat and read his coarse French books; but nobody guessed that till he died and then his widow, poor woman, found herself own no more than the land that lay between the coarse hills, the Grampians, and the farms that stood out by the Bridge End above the Denburn, straddling the outward road. Maybe there were some twenty to thirty holdings in all, the crofters dour folk of the old Pict stock, they had no history, common folk, and ill-reared their biggins clustered and chaved amid the long, sloping fields. The leases were one-year, two-year, you worked from the

blink of the day you were breeked to the flicker of the night they shrouded you, and the dirt of gentry sat and ate up your rents but you were as good as they were.

So that was Kenneth's leaving to his lady body, she wept right sore over the pass that things had come to, but they kittled up before her own jaw was tied in a clout and they put her down in Kinraddie vault to lie by the side of her man. Three of her bairns were drowned at sea, fishing off the Bevie braes they had been, but the fourth, the boy Cospatric, him that died the same day as the Old Queen, he was douce and saving and sensible, and set putting the estate to rights. He threw out half the little tenants, they flitted off to Canada and Dundee and parts like those, the others he couldn't move but slowly.

But on the cleared land he had bigger steadings built and he let them at bigger rents and longer leases, he said the day of the fine big farm had come. And he had woods of fir and larch and pine planted to shield the long, bleak slopes, and might well have retrieved the Kinraddie fortunes but that he married a Morton quean with black blood in her, she smitted him and drove him to drink and death, that was the best way out. For his son was clean daft, they locked him up at last in an asylum, and that was the end of Kinraddie family, the Meikle House that stood where the Picts had builded Cospatric's castle crumbled to bits like a cheese, all but two-three rooms the trustees held as their offices, the estate was mortgaged to the hilt by then.

So by the winter of nineteen eleven there were no more than nine bit places left the Kinraddie estate, the Mains the biggest of them, it had been the Castle home farm in the long past times. An Irish creature, Erbert Ellison was the name, ran the place for the trustees, he said, but if you might believe all the stories you heard he ran a hantle more silver into his own pouch than he ran into theirs. Well might you expect it, for once he'd been no more than a Dublin waiter, they said. That had been in the time before Lord

Kinraddie, the daft one, had gone clean skite. He had been in Dublin, Lord Kinraddie, on some drunken ploy, and Ellison had brought his whisky for him and some said he had halved his bed with him. But folk would say anything.

So the daftie took Ellison back with him to Kinraddie and made him his servant, and sometimes, when he was real drunk and the fairlies came sniftering out of the whisky bottles at him, he would throw a bottle at Ellison and shout *Get out, you bloody dish-clout!* so loud it was heard across at the Manse and fair affronted the minister's wife. And old Greig, him that had been the last minister there, he would glower across at Kinraddie House like John Knox at Holyrood, and say that God's hour would come. And sure as death it did, off to the asylum they hurled the daftie, he went with a nurse's mutch on his head and he put his head out of the back of the waggon and said *Cockadoodledoo!* to some school bairns the waggon passed on the road and they all ran home and were fell frightened.

But Ellison had made himself well acquainted with farming and selling stock and most with buying horses, so the trustees they made him manager of the Mains, and he moved into the Mains farmhouse and looked him round for a wife. Some would have nothing to do with him, a poor creature of an Irishman who couldn't speak right and didn't belong to the Kirk, but Ella White she was not so particular and was fell long in the tooth herself. So when Ellison came to her at the harvest ball in Auchinblae and cried *Can I see you home to-night, me dear?* she said *Och, Ay.*And on the road home they lay among the stooks and maybe Ellison did this and that to make sure of getting her, he was fair desperate for any woman by then.

They were married next New Year's Day, and Ellison had begun to think himself a gey man in Kinraddie, and maybe one of the gentry. But the bothy billies, the ploughmen and the orra men of the Mains, they'd never a care for gentry except to mock at them and on the eve of Ellison's wedding

they took him as he was going into his house and took off his breeks and tarred his dowp and the soles of his feet and stuck feathers on them and then they threw him into the water-trough, as was the custom. And he called them *Bloody Scotch savages,* and was in an awful rage and at the term-time he had them sacked, the whole jingbang of them, so sore affronted he had been.

But after that he got on well enough, him and his mistress, Ella White, and they had a daughter, a scrawny bit quean they thought over good to go to the Auchinblae School, so off she went to Stonehaven Academy and was taught to be right brave and swing about in the gymnasium there with wee black breeks on under her skirt. Ellison himself began to get well-stomached, and he had a red face, big and sappy, and eyes like a cat, green eyes, and his mouser hung down each side of a fair bit mouth that was chokeful up of false teeth, awful expensive and bonny, lined with bits of gold. And he aye wore leggings and riding breeks, for he was fair gentry by then; and when he would meet a crony at a mart he would cry *Sure, bot it's you, thin, ould chep!* and the billy would redden up, real ashamed, but wouldn't dare say anything, for he wasn't a man you'd offend. In politics he said he was a Conservative but everybody in Kinraddie knew that meant he was a Tory and the bairns of Strachan, him that farmed the Peesie's Knapp, they would scraich out

Inky poo, your nose is blue,
You're awful like the Turra Coo

whenever they saw Ellison go by. For he'd sent a subscription to the creature up Turriff way whose cow had been sold to pay his Insurance, and folk said it was no more than a show off, the Cow creature and Ellison both; and they laughed at him behind his back.

So that was the Mains, below the Meikle House, and Ellison farmed it in his Irish way and right opposite, hidden away among their yews, were kirk and manse, the kirk an old, draughty place and in the wintertime, right in the middle of the Lord's Prayer, maybe, you'd hear an outbreak of hoasts fit to lift off the roof, and Miss Sarah Sinclair, her that came from Netherhill and played the organ, she'd sneeze into her hymnbook and miss her bit notes and the minister, him that was the old one, he'd glower down at her more like John Knox than ever.

Next door the kirk was an olden tower, built in the time of the Roman Catholics, the coarse creatures, and it was fell old and wasn't used any more except by the cushat-doves and they flew in and out the narrow slips in the upper storey and nested there all the year round and the place was fair white with their dung. In the lower half of the tower was an effigy-thing of Cospatric de Gondeshil, him that killed the gryphon, lying on his back with his arms crossed and a daft-like simper on her face; and the spear he killed the gryphon with was locked in a kist there, or so some said, but others said it was no more than an old bit heuch from the times of Bonny Prince Charlie. So that was the tower, but it wasn't fairly a part of the kirk, the real kirk was split in two bits, the main hall and the wee hall, and some called them the byre and the turnip-shed, and the pulpit stood midway.

Once the wee hall had been for the folk from the Meikle House and their guests and suchlike gentry but nearly anybody that had the face went ben and sat there now, and the elders sat with the collection bags, and young Murray, him that blew the organ for Sarah Sinclair. It had fine glass windows, awful old, the wee hall with three bit creatures of queans, not very decent-like in a kirk, as window-pictures. One of the queans was Faith, and faith she looked a daft-like keek for she was lifting up her hands and her eyes like a heifer choked on a turnip and the bit blanket round her shoulders was falling off her but she didn't seem to heed,

and there was a swither of scrolls and fiddley-faddles all about her.

And the second quean was Hope and she was near as unco as Faith, but had right bonny hair, red hair, though maybe you'd call it auburn, and in the winter-time the light in the morning service would come splashing through the yews in the kirkyard and into the wee hall through the red hair of Hope. And the third quean was Charity, with a lot of naked bairns at her feet and she looked a fine and decent-like woman, for all that she was tied about with such daft-like clouts.

But the windows of the main hall, though they were coloured, they had never a picture in them and there were no pictures in there at all, who wanted them? Only coarse creatures like Catholics wanted a kirk to look like a grocer's calendar. So it was decent and bare-like, with its carved old seats, some were cushioned and some were not, if you weren't padded by nature and had the silver to spend you might put in cushions to suit your fancy. Right up in the lithe of the pulpit, at angles-like to the rest of the kirk, were the three seats where the choir sat and led the hymn-singing; and some called it the calfies' stall.

The back door, that behind the pulpit, led out across the kirkyard to the Manse and its biggings, set up in the time of the Old Queen, and fair bonny to look at, but awful damp said all the ministers' wives. But ministers' wives were aye folk to complain and don't know when they're well off, them and the silver they get for their bit creatures of men preaching once or twice a Sunday and so proud they hardly know you when they meet you on the road. The minister's study was high up in the house, it looked out over all Kinraddie, at night he'd see from there the lights of the farmhouses like a sprinkling of bright sands below his window and the flagstaff light high among the stars on the roof of the Meikle House. But that nineteen eleven December the Manse was empty and had been empty for

many a month, the old minister was dead and the new one not yet voted on; and the ministers from Drumlithie and Arbuthnott and Laurencekirk they came time about in the Sunday forenoons and took the service there at Kinraddie; and God knows for all they had to say they might well have bidden at home.

But if you went out of the kirk by the main door and took the road east a bit, and that was the road that served kirk and Manse and Mains, you were on to the turnpike then. It ran north and south but opposite to the road you'd just come down was another, that went through Kinraddie by the Bridge End farm. So there was a cross-roads there and if you held to the left along the turnpike you came to Peesie's Knapp, one of the olden places, no more than a croft of thirty-forty acres with some rough ground for pasture, but God knows there was little pasture on it, it was just a fair schlorich of whins and broom and dirt, full up of rabbits and hares it was, they came out at night and ate up your crops and sent a body fair mad. But it wasn't bad land the most of the Knapp, there was the sweat of two thousand years in it, and the meikle park behind the biggings was black loam, not the red clay that sub-soiled half Kinraddie.

Now Peesie's Knapp's biggings were not more than twenty years old, but gey ill-favoured for all that, for though the house faced on the road--and that was fair handy if it didn't scunner you that you couldn't so much as change your sark without some ill-fashioned brute gowking in at you--right between the byre and the stable and the barn on one side and the house on the other was the cattle-court and right in the middle of that the midden, high and yellow with dung and straw and sharn, and Mistress Strachan could never forgive Peesie's Knapp because of that awful smell it had.

But Chae Strachan, him that farmed the place, he just said *Hoots, what's a bit guff?* and would start to tell of the terrible smells he'd smelt when he was abroad. For he'd

been a fell wandering billy, Chae, in the days before he came back to Scotland and was fee'd his last fee at Netherhill. He'd been in Alaska, looking for gold there, but damn the bit of gold he'd seen, so he'd farmed in California till he was so scunnered of fruit he'd never look an orange or a pear in the face again, not even in a tin. And then he'd gone on to South Africa and had had great times there, growing real chieflike with the head one of a tribe of blacks, but an awful decent man for all that. Him and Chae had fought against Boers and British both, and beaten them, or so Chae said, but folk that didn't like Chae said all the fighting he'd ever done had been with his mouth and that as for beaten, he'd be sore made to beat the skin off a bowl of sour milk.

For he wasn't well liked by them that set themselves up for gentry, Chae, being a socialist creature and believing we should all have the same amount of silver and that there shouldn't be rich and poor and that one man was as good as another. And the silver bit of that was clean daft, of course, for if you'd all the same money one day what would it be the next?--Rich and Poor again! But Chae said the four ministers of Kinraddie and Auchinblae and Laurencekirk and Drumlithie were all paid much the same money last year and what had they this year?--Much the same money still! *You'll have to get out of bed slippy in the morning before you find a socialist tripping and if you gave me any of your lip I'll clout you in the lug, my mannie.*

So Chae was fell good in argy-bargying and he wasn't the quarrelsome kind except when roused, so he was well-liked, though folk laughed at him. But God knows, who is it they don't laugh at? He was a pretty man, well upstanding, with great shoulders on him and his hair was fair and fine and he had a broad brow and a gey bit coulter of a nose, and he twisted his mouser ends up with wax like that creature the German Kaiser, and he could stop a running stirk by the horns, so strong he was in the wrist-bones. And he was one

of the handiest billies in Kinraddie, he would libb a calf or break in a horse or kill a pig, all in a jiffy, or tile your dairy or cut the bairns' hair or dig a well, and all the time he'd be telling you that socialism was coming or if it wasn't then an awful crash would come and we'd all go back to savagery, *Dam't ay, man!*

But folk said he'd more need to start socializing Mistress Strachan, her that had been Kirsty Sinclair of Netherhill, before he began on anybody else. She had a fell tongue, they said, that would clip clouts and yammer a tink from a door, and if Chae wasn't fair sick now and then for his hut and a fine black quean in South Africa damn the hut or the quean had he ever had. He'd feed'd at Netherhill when he came back from foreign parts, had Chae, and there had been but two daughters there, Kirsty and Sarah, her that played the kirk organ. Both were wearing on a bit, sore in the need of a man, and Kirsty with a fair letdown as it was, for it had seemed that a doctor billy from Aberdeen was out to take up with her. So he had done and left her in a gey way and her mother, old Mistress Sinclair, near went out of her mind with the shame of it when Kirsty began to cry and tell her the news.

Now that was about the term-time and home to Netherhill from the feeing market who should old Sinclair of Netherhill bring but Chae Strachan, with his blood warmed up from living in those foreign parts and an eye for less than a wink of invitation? But even so he was gey slow to get on with the courting and just hung around Kirsty like a futret round a trap with a bit meat in it, not sure if the meat was worth the risk; and the time was getting on and faith! Something drastic would have to be done.

So one night after they had all had supper in the kitchen and old Sinclair had gone pleitering out to the byres, old Mistress Sinclair had up and nodded to Kirsty and said *Ah well, I'll away to my bed. You'll not be long in making for yours, Kirsty?* And Kirsty said *No,* and gave her mother a sly

bit look, and off the old mistress went up to her room and then Kirsty began fleering and flirting with Chae and he was a man warm enough and they were alone together and maybe in a minute he'd have had her couched down right well there in the kitchen but she whispered it wasn't safe. So he off with his boots and she with hers and up the stairs they crept together into Kirsty's room and were having their bit pleasure together when *ouf!* went the door and in burst old Mistress Sinclair with the candle held up in one hand and the other held up in horror. *No, no,*she'd said, *this won't do at all, Chakie, my man, you'll have to marry her.* And there had been no escape for Chae, poor man, with Kirsty and her mother both glowering at him.

So married they were and old Sinclair had saved up some silver and he rented Peesie's Knapp for Chae and Kirsty, and stocked the place for them, and down they sat there, and Kirsty's bairn, a bit quean, was born before seven months were past, well-grown and finished-like it seemed, the creature, in spite of its mother swearing it had come fair premature.

They'd had two more bairns since then, both laddies, and both the living spit of Chae, these were the bairns that would sing about the Turra Coo whenever they met the brave gig of Ellison bowling along the Kinraddie Road, and faith, they made you laugh.

Right opposite Peesie's Knapp, across the turnpike, the land climbed red and clay and a rough stone road went wandering up to the biggings of Blawearie. *Out of the World and into Blawearie*they said in Kinraddie, and faith! it was coarse land and lonely up there on the brae, fifty-sixty acres of it, forbye the moor that went on with the brae high above Blawearie, up to a great flat hill-top where lay a bit loch that nested snipe by the hundred; and some said there was no bottom to it, the loch, and Long Rob of the Mill said that made it like the depths of a parson's depravity.

That was an ill thing to say about any minister, though Rob said it was an ill thing to say about any loch, but there the spleiter of water was, a woesome dark stretch fringed rank with rushes and knife-grass; and the screeching of the snipe fair deafened you if you stood there of an evening. And few enough did that for nearby the bit loch was a circle of stones from olden times, some were upright and some were flat and some leaned this way and that, and right in the middle three big ones clambered up out of the earth and stood askew with flat sonsy faces, they seemed to listen and wait. They were Druid stones and folk told that the Druids had been coarse devils of men in the times long syne, they'd climb up there and sing their foul heathen songs around the stones; and if they met a bit Christian missionary they'd gut him as soon as look at him. And Long Rob of the Mill would say what Scotland wanted was a return of the Druids, but that was just a speak of his, for they must have been awful ignorant folk, not canny.

Blawearie hadn't had a tenant for nearly a year, but now there was one on the way, they said, a creature John Guthrie from up in the North. The biggings of it stood fine and compact one side of the close, the midden was back of them, and across the close was the house, a fell brave house for a little place, it had three storeys and a good kitchen and a fair stretch of garden between it and Blawearie road. There were beech trees there, three of them, one was close over against the house, and the garden hedges grew as bonny with honeysuckle of a summer as ever you saw; and if you could have lived on the smell of honeysuckle you might have farmed the bit place with profit.

Well, Peesie's Knapp and Blawearie were the steadings that lay Stoneheavenway. But if you turned east that winter along the Auchinblae road first on your right was Cuddiestoun, a small bit holding the size of Peesie's Knapp and old as it, a croft from the far-off times. It lay a quarter-

mile or so from the main road and its own road was fair clamjamfried with glaur from late in the harvest till the coming of Spring. Some said maybe that accounted for Munro's neck, he could never get the glaur washed out of it. But others said he never tried. He was on a thirteen years' lease there, Munro, a creature from down south, Dundee way, and he was a good six feet in height but awful coarse among the legs, like a lamb with water on the brain, and he had meikle feet that aye seemed in his way. He was maybe forty years or so in age, and bald already, and his skin was red and creased in cheeks and chin and God! you never saw an uglier brute, poor stock.

For there were worse folk than Munro, though maybe they were all in the jail, and though he could blow and bombast till he fair scunnered you. He farmed his bit land in a then and now way, and it was land good enough, the most of it, with the same black streak of loam that went through the Peesie parks, but ill-drained, the old stone drains were still down and devil the move would the factor at Meikle House make to have them replaced, or mend the roof of the byre that leaked like a sieve on the head of Mistress Munro when she milked the kye on a stormy night.

But if anybody, chief-like, were to say, *God, that's an awful byre you have, mistress,* she would flare up in a minute *It's one and good enough for the like of us.* And if that body, not knowing better, poor billy, were to agree that the place was well enough for poor folk, she'd up again*Who's poor? Let me tell you we've never needed anybody come to our help, though we don't boast and blow about it all over the countryside, like some I could mention.* So the body would think there was no pleasing of the creature, and she was right well laughed at in all Kinraddie, though not to her face. And that was a thin one and she had black hair and snapping black eyes like a futret, and a voice that fair set your hackles on edge when she girned. But she was the best midwife for miles around, right often in the

middle of the night some poor distracted billy would come chapping at her window *Mistress Munro, Mistress Munro, will you get up and come to the wife?* And out she'd get, and into her clothes before you could whistle, and out into the cold of Kinraddie night and go whipping through it like a futret, and soon be snapping her orders round the kitchen of the house she'd been summoned to, telling the woman in childbed she might easily be worse, and being right brisk and sharp and clever.

And the funny thing about the creature was that she believed none spoke ill of her, for if she heard a bit hint of such, dropped sly-like, she'd redden up like a stalk of rhubarb in a dung patch and look as though she might start to cry, and the body would feel real sorry for her till next minute she'd be screeching at Andy or Tony, and fleering them out of the little wits they had, poor devils.

Now, Andy and Tony were two dafties that Mistress Munro had had boarded out on her from an Asylum in Dundee, they weren't supposed to be dangerous. Andy was a meikle slummock of a creature, and his mouth was aye open, and he dribbled like a teething foal, and his nose wabbled all over his face and when he tried to speak it was just a fair jumble of foolishness. He was the daftest one, but fell sly, he'd sometimes run away to the hills and stand there with his finger at his nose, making faces at Mistress Munro, and she'd scraich at him and he'd yammer back at her and then over the moor he'd get to the bothy at Upperhill where the ploughmen would give him cigarettes and then torment him till he fair raged; and once tried to kill one with an axe he caught up from a hackstock. And at night he'd creep back to Cuddiestoun, outside he'd make a noise like a dog that had been kicked, and he'd snuffle round the door till the few remaining hairs on the bald pow of Munro would fair rise on end. But Mistress Munro would up and be at the door and in she'd yank Andy by the lug, and some said she'd take down his breeks and skelp him, but maybe that was a lie. She

wasn't feared at him and he wasn't feared at her, so they were a gey well-matched pair.

And that was the stir at Cuddiestoun, all except Tony, for the Munros had never a bairn of their own. And Tony, though he wasn't the daftest, he was the queer one, too, right enough. He was small-bulked and had a little red beard and sad eyes, and he walked with his head down and you would feel right sorry for him for sometimes some whimsy would come on the creature right in the middle of the turnpike it might be or half-way down a rig of swedes, and there he would stand staring like a gowk for minutes on end till somebody would shake him back to his senses. He had fine soft hands, for he was no working body; folk said he had once been a scholar and written books and learned and learned till his brain fair softened and right off his head he'd gone and into the poorhouse asylum.

Now Mistress Munro she'd send Tony errands to the wee shop out beyond the Bridge End, and tell him what she wanted, plain and simple-like, and maybe giving him a bit clout in the lug now and then, as you would a bairn or a daftie. And he'd listen to her and make out he minded the messages and off to the shop he'd go, and come back without a single mistake. But one day, after she'd told him the things she wanted, Mistress Munro saw the wee creature writing on a bit of paper with a pencil he'd picked up somewhere. And she took the paper from him and looked at it and turned it this way and that, but feint the thing could she made of it. So she gave him a bit clout in the lug and asked him what the writing was. But he just shook his head, real gowked-like and reached out his hand for the bit of paper, but Mistress Munro would have none of that and when it was time for the Strachan bairns to pass the end of the Cuddiestoun road on their way to school down there she was waiting and gave the paper to the eldest the quean Marget, and told her to show it to the Dominie and ask him what it might mean.

And at night she was waiting for the Strachan bairns to come back and they had an envelope for her from the Dominie; and she opened it and found a note saying the writing was shorthand and that this was what it read when put in the ordinary way of writing: *Two pounds of sugar The People's Journal half an ounce of mustard a tin of rat poison a pound of candles and I don't suppose I can swindle her out of tuppence change for the sake of a smoke, she's certainly the meanest bitch unhung this side of Tweed.* So maybe Tony wasn't so daft, but he got no supper that night; and she never asked to see his notes again.

Now, following the Kinraddie road still east, you passed by Netherhill on your left, five places had held its parks in the crofter days before Lord Kenneth. But now it was a fair bit farm on its own, old Sinclair and his wife, a body that was wearing none so well--soured up the creature was that her eldest daughter Sarah still bided all unwed--lived in the farm-house, and in the bothy was foreman and second man and third man and orra lad. The Denburn lay back of the Netherhill, drifting low and slow and placid in its hollow, feint the fish had ever been seen in it and folk said that was just as well, things were fishy enough at Netherhill without the Denburn adding to them.

Through the rank schlorich of moor that lay between the place and Peesie's Knapp were the tracks of an old-time road, some said it was old as Calgacus, him that chased the Romans all to hell at the battle of Mons Graupius, others said it was a Druid work, laid by them that set the stones above Blawearie loch. And God! there must have been an unco few idle masons among the creatures, they'd tried their hands at another stone circle in the Netherhill moor, right midway the old-time road. But there were no more than two-three stones above the ground in this later day, Netherhill's ploughmen swore the rest must have been torn up and broadcast over the arable land, the parks were as tough and stony as the heart of the old wife herself.

But it was no bad place for turnips and oats, the Netherhill, sometimes the hay was fair to middling but the most of the ground was red clay and over coarse and wet for barley, if it hadn't been for the droves of pigs old Mistress Sinclair fed and sold in Laurencekirk maybe her man would never have sat where he did. She came of Gourdon stock, the old wife, and everybody knows what they are, the Gourdon fishers, they'd wring silver out of a corpse's wame and call stinking haddocks perfume fishes and sell them at a shilling a pair. She'd been a fishing quean before she took up with old Sinclair, and when they settled down in Netherhill on borrowed money it was she that would drive to Gourdon twice a week in the little pony lorry and come back with it stinking out the countryside for miles around with its load of rotten fish to manure the land. And right well it manured it and they'd fine crops the first six years or so and then the land was fair bled white and they'd to stop the fish-manure. But by then the pig-breeding was fine and paying, their debts were gone, they were coining silver of their own.

He was a harmless stock, old Sinclair, and had began to doiter and Mistress Sinclair would push him into his chair at night and take off his boots and put slippers on him there in front of the kitchen fire and say to him *You've tired yourself out again, my lad.* And he'd put his hand below her chin and say *Och, I'm fine, don't vex yourself. . . . Ay your lad still, am I, lass?* And they'd look at each other, daft-like, two wrinkled old fools, and their daughter Sarah that was so genteel would be real affronted if there were visitors about. But Sinclair and his old wife would just shake their heads at her and in their bed at night, hiddling their old bones close for warmth, give a bit sigh that no brave billy had ever show inclination to take Sarah to *his* bed. She'd hoped and peeked and preened long years, and once there had seemed some hope with Long Rob of the Mill, but Rob wasn't the marrying sort. God! If Cuddiestoun's dafties were real dafties what

would you say of a man with plenty of silver that bided all by his lone and made his own bed and did his own baking when he might have had a wife to make him douce and brave?

But Rob of the Mill had never a thought of what Kinraddie said of him. Further along the Kinraddie road it stood, the Mill, on the corner of the side-road that led up to Upperhill, and for ten years now had Rob bided there alone, managing the Mill and reading the books of a coarse creature Ingersoll that made watches and didn't believe in God. He'd aye two-three fine pigs about the Mill had Rob, and fine might well they be for what did he feed them on but bits of corn and barley he'd nicked out of the sacks folk brought him to the Mill to grind? Nor could a body deny but that Long Rob's boar was one of the best in the Mearns; and they'd bring their sows from as far afield as Laurencekirk to have them set by that boar of his, a miekle, pretty brute of a beast.

Forbye the Mill and his swine and hens Rob had a Clydesdale and a sholtie beast he ploughed his twenty acres with, and a cow or so that never calved, for he'd never time to send them to the bull though well might he have taken the time instead of sweating and chaving like a daft one to tear up the coarse moorland behind the Mill and turn it into a park. He'd started that three years before and wasn't half through with it yet, it was filled with great holes and ponds and choked with meikle broom-roots thick as the arm of a man, you never saw a dafter ploy. They'd hear Rob out in that coarse ground hard at work when they went to bed, the rest of Kinraddie, whistling away to himself as though it were nine o'clock in the forenoon and the sun shining bravely. He'd whistle *Ladies of Spain* and *There was a young maiden* and *The lass that made the bed for me,*but devil the lass he'd ever taken to his bed, and maybe that was as well for the lass; she'd have seen feint the much of him in it beside her.

For after a night of it like that he'd be out again at the keek of day, and sometimes he'd have the Clydesdale or the sholtie out there with him and they'd be fine friends, the three of them, till the beasts would move off when he didn't want them or wouldn't move when he did; and then he'd fair go mad with them and call them all the coarsest names he could lay tongue to till you'd think he'd be heard over half the Mearns; and he'd leather the horses till folk spoke of sending for the Cruelty, though he'd a way with the beasts too, and would be friends with them again in a minute, and when he'd been away at the smithy in Drumlithie or the joiner's in Arbuthnott they'd come running from the other end of the parks at sight of him and he'd get off his bicycle and feed them with lumps of sugar he bought and carried about with him.

He thought himself a gey man with horses, did Rob, and God! he'd tell you stories about horses till you'd fair be grey in the head, but he never wearied of them himself, the long, rangy childe. Long he was, with small bones maybe, but gey broad for all that, with a small head on him and a thin nose and eyes smoky blue as an iron coulter on a winter morning, aye glinting, and a long mouser the colour of ripe corn it was, hanging down the sides of his mouth so that the old minister had told him he looked like a Viking and he'd said *Ah well, minister, as long as I don't look like a parson I'll wrestle through the world right content,* and the minister said he was a fool and godless, and his laughter like the thorns crackling under a pot. And Rob said he'd rather be a thorn than a sucker any day, for he didn't believe in ministers or kirks, he'd learned that from the books of Ingersoll though God knows if the creature's logic was as poor as his watches he was but a sorry prop to lean on. But Rob said he was fine, and if Christ came down to Kinraddie he'd be welcome enough to a bit meal or milk at the Mill, but damn the thing he'd get at the Manse. So that was Long

Rob and the stir at the Mill, some said he wasn't all there but others said Ay, that he was, and a bit over.

Now Upperhill rose above the Mill, with its larch woods crowning it, and folk told that a hundred years before five of the crofter places had crowded there till Lord Kenneth threw their biggins down and drove them from the parish and built the fine farm of Upperhill. And twenty years later a son of one of the crofters had come back and rented the place, Gordon was the name of him, they called him Upprums for short and he didn't like that, being near to gentry with his meikle farm and forgetting his father the crofter that had cried like a bairn all the way from Kinraddie that night the Lord Kenneth drove them out. He was a small bit man with a white face on him, and he'd long, thin hair and a nose that wasn't straight but peeked away to one side of his face and no moustache and wee feet and hands; and he liked to wear leggings and breeks and carry a bit stick and look as proud as a cock on a midden.

Mistress Gordon was a Stonehaven woman, her father had been a bit post-office creature there, but God! to hear her speak you'd think he'd invented the post office himself and taken out a patent for it. She was a meikle sow of a woman, but aye well-dressed, and with eyes like the eyes of a fish, fair cod-like they were, and she tried to speak English and to make her two bit daughters, Nellie and Maggie Jean, them that went to Stonehaven Academy, speak English as well. And God! they made a right muck of it, and if you met the bit things on the road and said *Well, Nellie, and how are your mother's hens laying?* the quean would more than likely answer you *Not very meikle the day* and look so proud it was all you could do to stop yourself catching the futret across your knee and giving her a bit skelp.

Though she'd only a dove's flitting of a family herself you'd think to hear Mistress Gordon speak that she'd been clecking bairns a litter a month since the day she married. It was *Now, how I brought up Nellie*--or *And the specialist in*