

MINNIE: A Novella in Scots

by:

Sheena Blackhall,

(nee Sheena Booth Middleton)

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Ony resemblance tae fowk leevin or deid in this buik is pure chaunce, likewise the clachans screived o in this story. Minnie is dedicatit tae ma mither, Winnie Booth, fa first pit a buik in ma haun an keepit it there, an tae her maternal forbears, Johan Crab, Flemish pirate an military engineer (bocht lans in Cromar circa 1320) an Juan Phillipe, lane survivin crewman frae the Spanish galleon the Santa Catarina, wrecked aff Collieston (1590) ferryin cannon frae Spain tae the Earl o Errol.

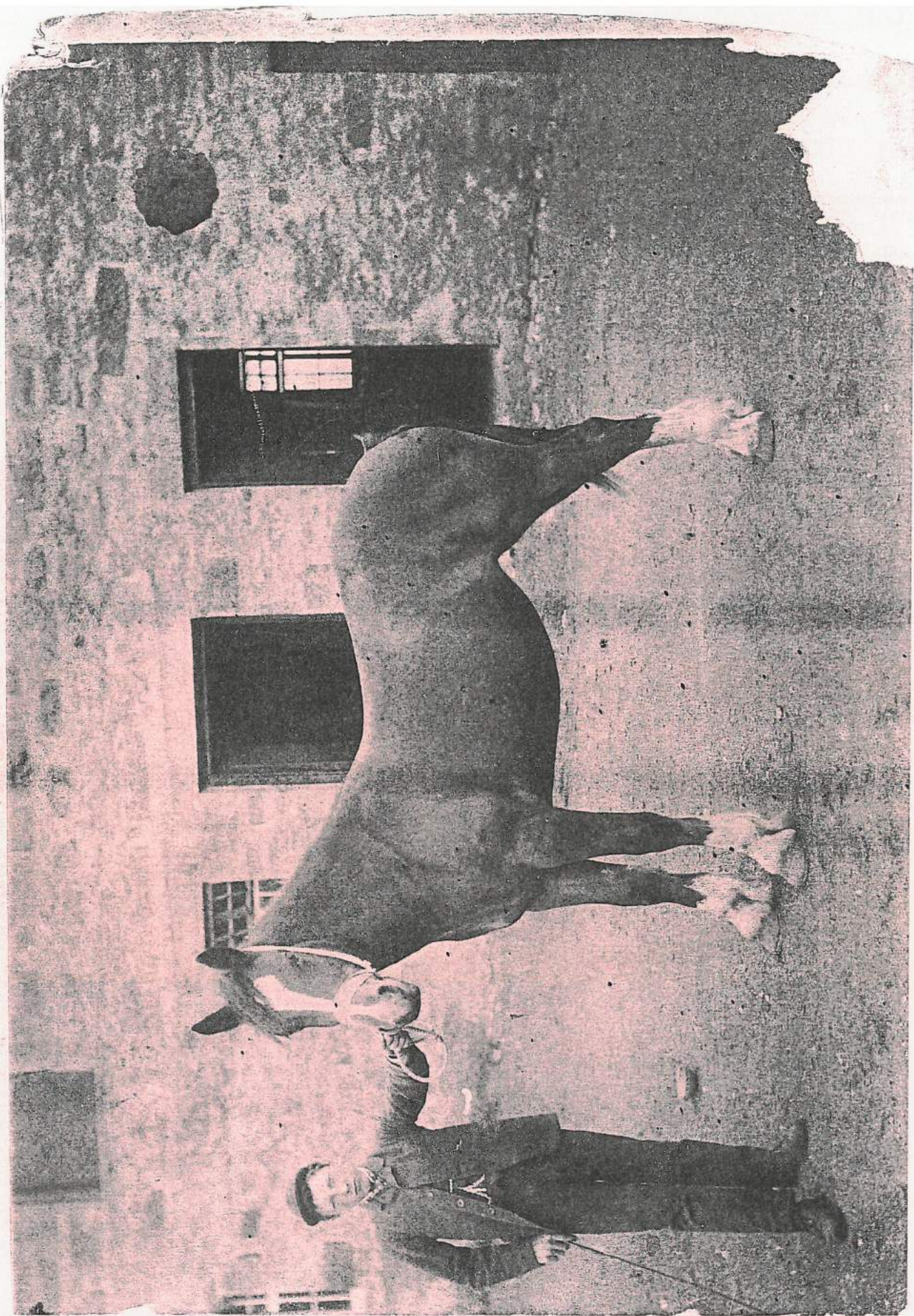
Picture: Matthew Booth (1871-1923) . Darrahill, Udney / Woodside Farm

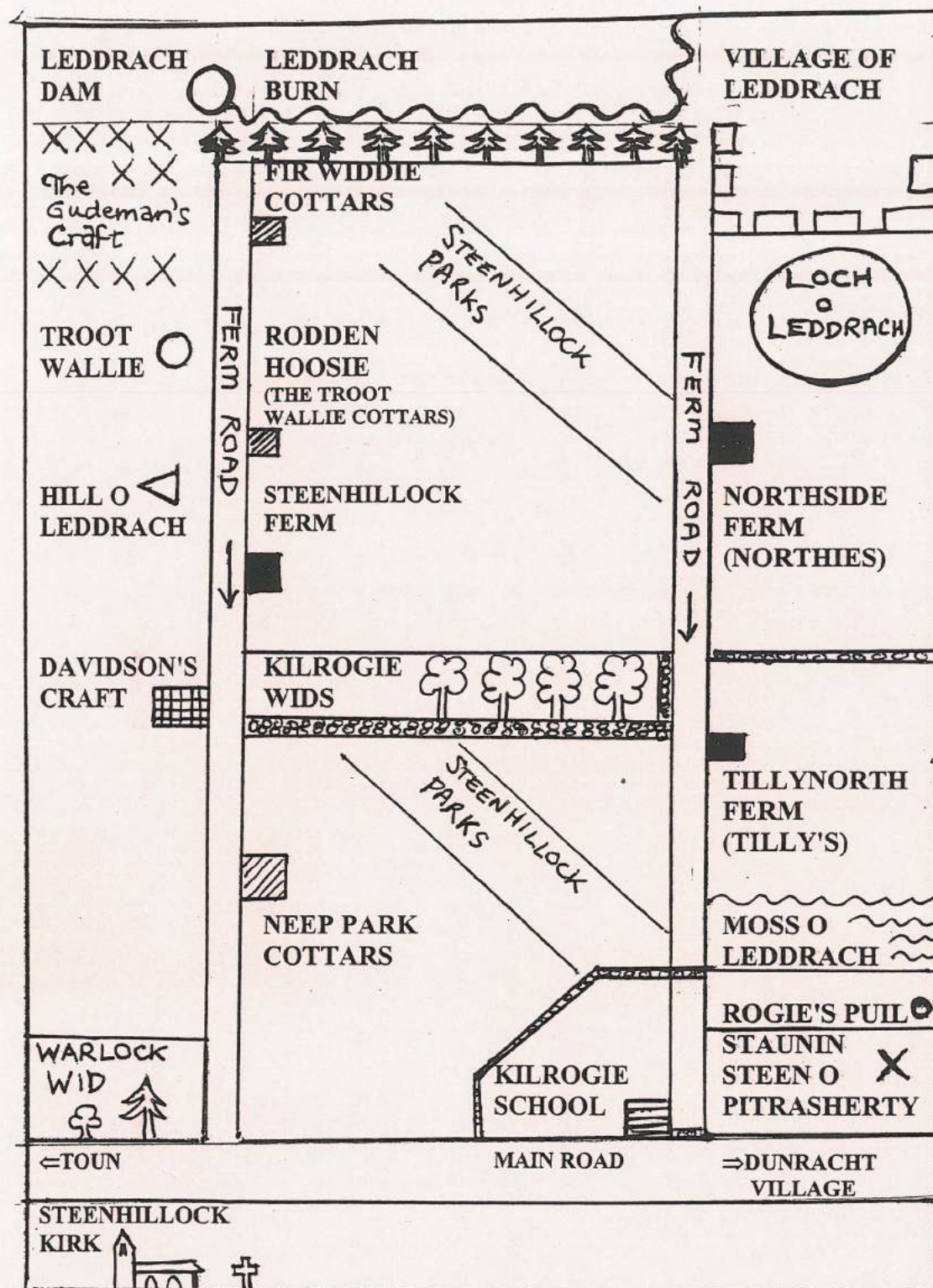


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The Parish o Leddrach : circa 1922-1924.

1. THE CLYACK SHAIFF

*Gin young September's caul a weet
Ye'll shear yer corn mang sna an sleet*

It wis the stert o September, a sunsheeny day, the tail eyn o an early hairst on the ferm o Steenhillock. The hett sun beat doon on the heather on the Hill o Leddrach, crummlin the peat tae stoor an the blaeberries tae a sappy sweetness. Atap a heathery knowe, Minnie Bruce, the youngest hairster, sat ettin her dennertime piece. She wis a fernietickled weel-made quine, eleyven year auld, wi thick blaik hair pued back in a wechty pleat near as thick as a shelt's tail, sae lang that she cud sit on't. Her een war blaik an sherp takkin aathin in, an her skin wis brunt sae broon wi the strang sun she could hae passed as a Spanish grandee's dother, insteid o a fairmer's lassie. She wis hett an swyty an trauchelt, an gled o the rest.

On the scraun fur pollen frae the purple ling, a pugglit bumbee zigzagged roon the quine's hudderie heid, an nae twa yairds frae her taes, a lane grey bawd teetit roon at her frae the neuk o a whin buss, dichtin his muckle lugs wi baith his forepaas. As she sat in the birsslin heat, the hale o the pairish o Steenhillock raxxed oot aneth her like a chessboord. On yon boord, the kirk wis king, risin up frae its boorich o heidsteens wi its wee stinch steeple like a finger, pyntin tae Heiven. Maist o the heidsteens in its kirkyaird war ordnar eneuch, aa bar een, an yon wis a muckle green steen wi three wirds on't, 'Sgian o Sgian', that merkit the lair o a warlock, lyin skelp in the mids o the douce, quate fowk in the kirkyaird. Minnie Bruce passed by the warlock ilkie Sabbath, neeborly like, fur her faither Matthew wis precentor at the wee United Free kirk, as weel as the fermer o Steenhillock, an gey far ben wi the meenister, Maister John Geddes.

The kirk lay tae the sooth o the Hill o Leddrach, ower the main road that tuik ye intae the toon some echt mile aff in the wast. Minnie's granfaither, Auld Mattha Bruce, bedd yonner. Frae his dairy, Auld Mattha coonted the milk cans that his fermin sons at Darraknowe an Mathrick fullt frae their growin herds o kye, an selt it aa roon the wynds an lanes an streets o the stoory toun. The auld man's empire o milk served the fowk in tenements fa lived like battery hens, an the toffs an nibbery in their fine granite hooses. Frae his fleet o cairts, tounsfowk micht buy gweed kintra cream tae poor abune their parritch, an fite faced vratches tcyauvin in factories or offices micht cweel their tarry tay in their chippit mugs or flooery cheena cups.

If the kirk wis king o the chessboard, the ferm o Steenhillock wis queen, the biggest ferm in the pairish, spreidin oot her braa skirts frae the braes at the fit o the Hill o Leddrach. Munchin her wye throwe her piece o bried an jam, Minnie's een traivelled ower her faither's parks tae a cottar hoose at the roadside far the neep-park cottars bedd. Like aa fermers, her faither niver bothered tae gie the cottar fowk their richt names, fur they fyles cheenged sae aften it wis aa a body could dee tae keep tee wi them. Fitiver faimly happened tae lan bi the roadside hoose, they war kent as 'the neep-park cottars', fur neeps grew weel in yon neuk, better nur hey nor corn. Faith, even the cottars thrived better there, fur weel ooto sicht o the ferm toon they micht rype the wids o berries an game an lift as muckle neeps as they likit, wi naebody tae clype or see.

The cottars that bedd there eenoo war the McPhails, fa hid driftit North tae the pairish o Leddrach frae Angus. The heid o the hoose wis caad Tarry because he wis brunt blaik wi bein ootside in aa weathers, like a tarred road. The halflin, Iain wis a glekit vratch, bit hermless, wi his heid ay cockit tae ae side, an wi slivvers that hung frae the side o his moo till his mither thocht tae dicht them. The McPhails hid bin forkin shaves aa foreneen inno the fairm cairts, an war dowpit doon quate like, Tarry the heid o the hoose wi a cutty pipe in his moo, the rikk risin up frae't grey as a goat's beard. Sae heich on the hill, Minnie cudna makk oot fit Tarry wis sayin, like as no it wis naethin o note, mebbe some Leddrach sklaik he'd heard at the kirk on Sunday.

In the lee o a stook aside the McPhails, the Troot Wallie cottars war swattin the fleas frae their lugs aneth the cweelin bough o an aik, raxxin ower the dyke in Kilrogie wids. Frae the tap o the fermtoun brae, Steenhillock's track ran north doon a ruttit roadie twa mile tae the Leddrach dam, an atween the dam an the ferm wis the Rodden Hoosie, far the Troot Wallie cottars bedd. Dod Mathieson an his wife Madge, war cottared there eenoo. He wis baillie tae Steenhillock. His twa loons Alec an Ned war dairymen in the toon, deliverin milk fur the Bruces, comin hame on Sundays tae get their sarks washed an cleaned bi their mither, whyles tae gyang tae the kirk, fur they liked tae haud in wi Matthew Bruce, the fermer. Dod Mathieson kent that his maister preferred himsel tae the grieve, Jock Dow, fa bothied aleen in the chaumer an got roarin fu maist Setterdays. Dod Mathieson hid bin ane o the first men ontae the hairst park a whylie back, ane o the scythemen cuttin roadies tae makk room fur the binder tae dee its wark, or tae cut doon swatches o corn battered doon tae the grun bi the rain that the binder cudna haunle fur aa its mechanical clivverness. Shaves cut doon bi the scythemen, slashed inno a swathe war bun bi haun, stookit clear o the staunin crap, a sair

trauchle oor efter oor, back brakkin darg wi the thrissle prods stoonin in yer hauns an the swyte garrin yer sark stick tae yer shooderbeens. The day, tho, Dod hid his wife tae help him lift the shaves frae the grun, an load them inno the cairts tae takk tae the barn.

The Rodden Hoosie wis the auldest cottar hoose on the ferm. Its kail yaird hid twa gean trees in the neuk o the kailyaird, an the bonniest rodden tree in the district at the fit o its washin green. In the park hard teetle the dyke at the back o the hoose, wis the Troot Wallie, far iver y cottar that iver cam tae bide in the Rodden Hoosie keepit a trootie sae the watter wid keep clean, three steps doon in the hole in the park far the spring jibbled up frae the derk foon o the yird, sweet an clear an bonnie. The Mathiesons hid a quine, Jessie fa'd drooned hersel in the Leddrach dam a five year back, fished oot like an auld buit wi the fool bree sprewin ooto her moo efter hauf the pairish hid caad fur her fur a wikk. Dr Henderson hid examined the body, an said there wis nae sign o onything amiss, tho thon could hae bin a lee fur the Mathieson's sake, kennin fo little the Bruces thocht o skiffies and kitchie-deems fa fell wi a bairn. Faith, they'd sack them as quick as luik at them, rather than hae them a 'burden upon the pairish'. Matthew Bruce sat on the pairish board. It wis ill tae squar the buiks if fowk wad lowse their spayver far they shouldna, an leave the pairish tae pye fur the spunk scaled ooto wedlock. This hairst, anely Dod an his wife war doon on the park, fur the loons war awa in the toun deliverin milk at back doors, shops an closes.

The heat at the heid o the knowe gart Minnie lowse the buttons on her blouse, the fite cotton stukken wi swyte tae her thin flat chest. A single treelip o swyte tricklit ower her neb, an she dichtit it aff wi her haun, a crummle o heather flakin aff an reistin in the curve o her snoot, garrin her sneeze. There wis meevement doon in the hairstpark. Gaun back an fore ower the stibble humphin a basket stappit wi sandwiches an fancies, wis Meg Ramsay, Steenhillock's kitchie deem, and her mither Janet, like twa pots frae the same kiln, jist ane wis mair crackit than tither. Meg sleepit up in the nerra attic room at Steenhillock, near crackin her heid on the rafters ilkie time she beddit, bit her mither Janet wis feed as hoosekeeper tae Dr Henderson, in a hoose bi a wee dirt track atween the Fir widdie an the Leddrach burn. Man, bit it wis a bonnie wee burn far ye micht catch a troot gin ye war gleg eneuch, if the kye hidna kirned up the watter, nosin doon frae the park fur a drink an plyterin in the dubs wi their muckle hairy feet. The doctor wisna a gweed advert fur his trade, as thin as the links o the crook an a permanent dreep at the pynt o his snoot, bit he hid a takkin wye wi him wi littlins, an sae wis weel likit bi cottars an fermers baith. He hid bin byordnar kind tae the Troot Wallie cottars fin their

quine Jessie drooned hersel, nae a wurd o the bairn she wis cairryin gaed doon on the daith certificate, tho aabody kent, onywy, fur fit ither thing wid cause a fit young lassie tae dae awa wi hersel? Eenoo, his hoosekeeper Janet hid devauled a meenit at the tackety buits o Jock Dow, fa wis raxin inno the basket o pieces wi a haun like a ham shank.

Fur days noo, Jock Dow the grieve hid yolked three shelts tae the drag pole an led them intae the park wi a wheep at his elbuck an a fag rikkin frae the crook o his moo. Syne intae the lang rigs o corn the binder breenged, spewin oot cuttit shaives at its dowp. As lang as the weather held the hairsters war oot in the park till midnight wirkin bi the licht o the great hairst meen, men weemin an bairns. Aa hauns war needit tae stook the shaves, settin them up on eyn, stibble tae stibble, echt shaves tae a stook, set north tae sooth tae catch the dryin wins. The day, tho, Jock Dow hid led the horse back tae the stable fur a feed o hey an watter at eleyven o clock, sune efter Minnie's mither Sally an the kitchie deem Meg Ramsay cried aa the big fowk intae the ferm kitchie fur a plate o yaval broth. Seein's the kitchie wis nippit fur space an the day wis fine, the hairsters hid taen their denner oot in the park, or hauf up the hill like Minnie, tae catch the sun.

Jist alang frae Jock Dow, Matthew Bruce, Minnie's da, wis clartin grease on the binder, fool orra brute o thing that it wis, fur naebody kent foo it wirkit bit him, fa'd bin schuled at Strathbogie College, the same Strathbogie College that Minnie's brither Matty attendit ilkie day, unless it wis hairst, like noo. The binder wheeched the legs frae the corn afore it, an spewed bun shaves oot ahin. Bawds an hairst mice ran wud-feart afore the muckle hairy feet o the horse an the sooch an click o the binder. Noo, tho, the binder wis quate, its wark feenished this whyle, its maister ficherin wi't, sortin the tichtness o the binder towe, fur he'd promised a shottie o't tae Tullynorth... The corn wis dry an licht, the binder twine wad need tae be adjusted tae suit. Minnie's faither stude like a brig on the park aneth, wi a fit in twa warlds, the auld an the new, the world o the horse on ae side the world o the machine on tither, a serious, tall man, staunin apairt frae the claik o the wirkers he feed an fired.

The horses that hauled the cairts wad rest in the cweel o the stable fur anither oor yet, Tibby an Prince an Fauldie. Their stable-fiers, Jimmy an Nancy war deliverin milk in the toon. Fauldie wis Minnie's favourite. Eenno he wad be whinneyin fur his meat. Sune, Jock wad feenish his piece, an gyang back tae the stable tae lead him oot tae the watter troch in the yaird, forkin hey inno his manger, an wyin oot his corn ration fur efters, like pudden efter broth. The horse micht rest fur three oors at

dennertime, the fowk cudna. Hens an dyeuks still hid tae be fed, hoosewark dane, fires mendit, an the byre made ready fur the evenin's milkin, a kirm o jobs like threidin a strae raip, ilkie ain dovetailin inno the ither, till whyles Matthew Bruce hardly sleepit in his bed ava, sae faiver said a fairmer's life wis easy wis a damt leear fa niver cam within a sniff o gweed honest sharn. The darg wis hard, the oors war lang, bit at least the fairmhoose wis warm, hett, clean, an weel-plenished. Nane o the Bruces iver stood at the back o a dyke an grat cause they didna ken far their neist bawbee wis comin frae.

Aa the lans o Leddrach Minnie cud see frae the tap o the heathery knowe, as far as the cauld ice prods o Ben Nagarr weirin its hanky o sna in its bosie that niver meltit ava, like an ice laird's hairt. East lay the knowe o Corrliechie, far a Gordon laird as fat as a puddock fell aff his shelt an deid at the heicht o a battle, afore he cud even draa sword, an the wee broon burn o Corrliechie ran reid fur three days an mair, sae gluttit it wis wi deid an deein Gordons. Fit the fecht wis aboot Minnie cudna richt myne, fur the Gordons war aye fechtin somebody, bit Mary Queen o Scots nicht hae bin at the back o't like Helen o Troy, an some fowk said she watched the fecht frae the tap o the knowe, jist like Minnie wis watchin noo, dowpit doon on the hill, owerluikin the hairst park aneth.

She sat, still an serious, an eleven year auld gaun on fur echty, like a wee clay dallie, mouldit, fired an cweeled bi the cheengin sizzens, as muckle a pairt o the scenery as the kittlin groomin its cleuks at the barn door, or the rodden tree showdin saftly at the neuk o the Neep Park Cottars' hoosie, wyed doon wi a line o washin. Hoosaeiver a shout frae the park aneth seen gart her steer, fur Isie Menzies wis climmin up the knowe tae jyne her. Tho Minnie's faither niver cam richt oot an said it, it wis unnerstood that she didna makk friens wi the cottar bairns, shiftless, thriftless, puckles o Steenhillock cottars hid been. Nae the bairns' wyte, mebbe nae their fowk's either, fur they cud be turned awa frae the place without ony redress, if they misfitted Steenhillock himsel in the smaaest wye. An the Bruce's hid a fare notion o themsels, ay, wi the dairyin thrivin there in the toun, and Auld Mattha dowped on the boord o directors o the Northern Mart.

Whyles, cottars stole neeps an firwid, an her da turned a blin ee tae thon, fur they aa did it. Bit he didna like it, nae ava. Isie, tho, wisna a cottar bairn, her buits war guid stoot leather, made bi the soutar o Leddrach. Her faither Chae, an her mither Lotty, fermed Tullynorth, an they had sent men tae help Steenhillock wi his hairst. Isie wis ages wi Minnie Bruce, a full cousin on her faither's side, throw his mither's fowk, the Menzies o

Claggordie. The Menzies war clartit wi siller, aabody kent that. Their faither hid dibbled in stocks an shares, an ained third shares o the Dach distillery, sae it maittered little tae them if the hairst wis guid or coorse, fur their breid wis buttered on baith sides. Neist year, fin Isie turned 13, she wid gyang tae a fee-pyin schule in the toon, awa frae the soss o Kilrogie. The Menzies wad be roupin oot efter the hairst. They hid bocht a wee hotel in the toon, awa frae the tyranny o the byre. The cottars micht shift fur thirsels, syne. Someither chiel an his wife wad hae the trauchle o keepin ferm accoonts an buyin an sellin stock an gear at the marts an rous roon Leddrach.

Isie's hame lay ower Steenhillock's parks tae the east. The Bruces ained a peat cut ower at the Moss o Leddrach, atween Kilrogie school an Tullynorth, an there they cut an stackit, dried an hurled hame fifty loads an mair, tae see them throw the winter, tho Minnie's da cut less an less each year. Chaip fuel wisna chaip fin it tuik sae lang tae gaither, fin aa ye needit wis a scrat o the pen on an invoice, an blaik bags o shelbottle an dross, delivered tae yer door. Peat wis a fine, sweet, crummly heat on a winter's nicht, bit it brunt awa tae stoor. Coal that wis bankit up wi a shovelfu o dross tae keep it gaun, wis aye there smutherin awa in the mornin, a sma job tae raik up the cinnors an bigg the lowe again. Minnie, tho, likit fine tae cut peats ower at Tully's, fur Isie wis ay full o tricks, ye niver weariet lang in her company. The cottar bairns keepit a bittie o distance atween themsels an Minnie an Isie baith, faith ye cudna be easy wi a quine fa's faither cud takk the meat frae yer plate as quick as luik at ye.

Seein her cousin warsslin up the Hill, she shook the crummles frae her piece ower the heather, and ran doon the brae tae meet her. Sune, Isie scammlit up an catched up wi Minnie an ran on afore her diggin the tae o her button-buits inno the heather, climmin farrer roon the Hill o Leddrach, cryin on the slow-coach tae follae her. 'Race ye roon tae the Earth Hoosie!' she cried. An Minnie follaed, pechin, fur the brae wis steep an the heather lang an wirey.

On the wye tae the Earth Hoosie, the twa cousins devauled a meenit, at the sicht o a boorich o sma fite beens wi raggedy cloots o oo hingin atween them.

'Ane o the spring lammies,' Isie telt Minnie, fa hid nae dealins wi yowes ava, fur the Bruces war dairy fairmers, nae mutton fowk.

'Fit killt it?' speired Minnie.

'Its mither didna ain it,' Isie telt her. 'It happens wi yowes, aften wi twins. The mither takks tae een, bit nae the tither, an jist wauks aff an leaves it.'

'Tae dee?' speired Minnie.

'Tae fen fur itsel,' replied Isie. 'Gin anither yowe's tint a lammie, faither skins the deid lammie's and ties its fleece roon the ootlinn. Yowes arena very bricht, ye see. The yowe fa's tint her bairn smells the kent yoam o the deid littlin, and whyles she'll lat the littlin sook her, an bring it up as her ain.'

'Yon's coorse' quo Minnie.

'Nae bit,' Isie telt her. 'It's natur. Natur isna aye as nicey-nice as they like ye tae think in the kirk. If Natur wis cut an dried like the shaves doon there, nae yowe wid turn awa frae a lammie it drappit. Bit Natur's nae cut an dried. It's quanter, like the bits o the cornpark flattened doon bi rain. Maybe mitherin's like that. Some hae mair nur ithers.'

Minnie turned yon ower in her harns like a slow furrow cowpin ower frae a ploocut. Wi her brither Matty, her mither wis kindness hersel, the cauld win cudna bla on him. Wi Minnie, she gaed throw the motions. The quine wis weel-groomed, hoosed, clean an fed. Sae war the horse in the stable. Fin Tarry McPhail wirked the horse, he gaed throw the motions as weel. He wis a dairyman, nae a horseman. Horse war ae mair job tae tick aff amang a heeze o ithers. A tyauve, a scunner, a trauchle. Fin Jock Dow wirked the horse, tho, ye kent the odds richt aff, fur syne Fauldie an Tibby an Prince strode oot wi virr in their muckle ashets o feet, fur they kent he likit them, bi touch, bi spikk, an mebbe even bi smell, if fit Isie said wis true. Like a flooder that opens up fin the sun shines doon on't, Mitherin, then, wis a fey thing, a quanter thing. Steenhillock wis mair a mither tae his dother than iver his wife Sally wis, fur he lued her as weel if nae better than the wirds in the Haly Buik that he wis sae fond o spikkin. Yet Sally Bruce wisna coorse in the vicious sense o the wird, fur she niver liftit her haun tae her hauf-grown quine, faith she niver touched her ava, if she could help it. An luv, Minnie kent, wis like the great blue sea o a sky that the hairsters prayed wad bide clear. Ye cudna girn if it derkened, ye jist got stuck in an made the best o things fitiver.

Isie reached the Earth Hoosie first, wi Minnie close ahin. They crept in backwyse inno the low moo o it, nae muckle bigger nur the moo o a tod's den, a lang human burrow that grew braider an heicher as ye neared the eyn it, sae heich ye cud staun up in the pitmirk cweel, like a brock or a rubbit or a futterat. Whyles, the twa made a den o the auld Earth Hoosie, an stumps o caunle lay fizzled oot on the yirdy fleer. It wis dry, an secret, cuttit twal fit inno the hill. The cottar bairns niver kent o the Earth Hoosie, they biggit their hoosies an dens frae fir branches inno the Fir Widdie, or auld beech boughs in Kilrogie Wids. Cottarfowk cheenged near as aften's ye cheenged yer sark. They lowpit like flechs, they cudna

bide at peace naewye. Bit fermers bedd an reeted, fur mebbe a twa, three generations, nae a day an a denner...an fermers' bairns kent ilkie stick an steen o their faithers' grun, an aa its secret placies. Isie said Fermin an Natur baith hid their nesty sides. Ye micht pett an bosie a new-born calfie, bit fin yon calfie turned till an auld eel coo, doon the road she gaed tae the knackers withoot a meenit's thocht.

Whyles, the cousins played in the foun o the Earth Hoosie, pretendin it wis a kitchie an clappin berries an steens on tap o docken leaves makkin on they war mince an tatties. The day, tho, they lay hauf in, hauf o't o the mou o't, lyin on their wames on the grun, luikin doon ower the hairst park. It wis sae hett that Isie lowsed the tap three buttons on her blouse, openin the boddom o her lang, fair neck tae the hairst sun. She hid lang, reid hair, did Isie, rugged back in a smeeth-caimbed pleat, hair the colour o roosty iron, green cat's een an a hairst-shaped face wi a button snoot an lugs as deinty an sma as a hairst moose. Minnie luiked naethin like her. She favoured her mither's side, the Ross's o Migvree, nae the Bruces. Queer that, tae luik sae like her mither, an be sae little thocht o bi her. Minnie's hair wis as thick an roch as Tibby's tail. Her jaw wis squar an her shanks war lang an sturdy. Isie, tho, wis like a waucht o thistledown, fariver she gaed, she shone, sma boukit an licht's a fireflaucht.

Fin Isie lowsed her buttons, Minnie noticed three roon purple merks at the tap o her cousin's breist been, bruises that luikit like thoomb preints the colour o brummil-bree.

'Fa's hurtit ye Isie?' she speired, fur yon cudna be caused bi a faa.

Isie leuch. 'It wisna sair. He wisna hurtin. He wis sookin.'

'Sookin?' quo Minnie, bumbazed.

Isie rolled ower onno her back, her green een luikin up at the clouds scuddin alang the lift on their wye tae Ben Nagarr. 'Fa's strongest, Minnie. Loons or quines?'

'Thon's easy!' her cousin replied. 'Loons of coorse.'

'No they're nae,' fusered Isie. 'No they're nae. I can makk them weak as kittlins. I can makk them prigg.'

'Fit div ye makk them prigg fur?' speired Minnie.

'Niver ye heed! Ye'll ken some day. Jock's back on the binder again, there's twa rigs left tae cut an the stookin's dane. Race ye back doon the hill an ower the dyke!'

Isie wis first ower the dyke, pechin, her reid pleat stottin aff her back, bit it wis Minnie that aabody wis wytin fur. Ae boorichie o aits stude shimmerin in the strang efterneen sun, up at the far neuk aside the Guidman's Craft. The Guidman's Craft wis the name the fermfowk gaed

tae the gusset o grun atween twa dykes left ower tae the wud beasts o the pairish, their ain wee airt nae touched bi scythe or plooshare, a roch rickle o nettles, steens, briers an butterflees. The auld fowk o the Leddrach said that if the beasts hid their ain bit grun, they wadna covet the grun ained bi their neebors the fermers. An the sweetest brummils grew in yon divits o wyvin girse an wanderin willie, an the bonniest butterflees bedd there, an the verra steens o the dyke war spirkit wi reid in their sizzen wi the wings o leddylanders.

Here stude the hinmaist boorich o corn, the clyack shaif, wytin tae be sheared, trimmlin in the licht September win. Meg Ramsay hid telt Minnie that fin the hairst wis early, the Leddrach fowk caad the shaif 'The Maiden'. Gin it hid bin late, twid hae bin 'The Auld Wife'. An Meg said, mair, that anely a clean quine cud bind it, a young quine nae man body'd haunlit. An Tarry McPhail hid taen his pipe ooto his mou an dichtit his baccy-broon fusers, an said that doon aroon Angus fin he'd bin cottared there, the fermfowk caad it 'The Bawd', fur they thocht that the speerit o the hairst creepit in o't, a great grey ghaist o a bawd, like the lang-shanked lang-lugged craitors that flew throw the corn like the win fin the binder wis wirkin.

'Dowp doon Minnie,' her faither cried, brakkin inno her dwaum. 'Yer brither Matty's the youngest loon in the back park, sae he his the cuttin o't. Bit ye're the youngest quine, an ye hae the bindin o't.'

Wisn't it jist like her da tae swick? Isie her cousin wis a month younger than Minnie...bit it wisna *her* faither's hairst, it wis Steenhillock's, that wad be the wye they'd pickit her afore Isie. Isie wis fully as clean as Minnie, her peenie wis aye like the driven snaa an her sheen shone like sharn on a weet lea rig. Sae Minnie lowpit the dyke, an ran tae the back park far the last o her faither's aits war cuttit, an dowpit doon in the roch jobby stibble o the sheared park, a young, clean quinie, an spreid oot her cotton peenie, an wyted while Matty her brither, aulder nur her bi twa year, spat on his haun, an swung the shaft o the scythe back an roon an brocht the guid corn doon like a wummin's hair lowsed frae its preens at nicht. An the clyack wis bun an pleated wi bonnie blue ribbons, an they liftit Minnie grippin the shaif ontae Fauldie's back, an lead them hame in triumph tae the fairm, their faces brunt broon bi the sun, caff fleein like gowden stoor frae the dowp o the creakin cairt that duntit ahin great Tibby's sweeshin tail. An Minnie forget tae speir foo Isie hid come bi yon bruises, far her breistbeen jyned the foon o her lang fite neck, as the hairsters scaled frae the park settin aff fur hame or byre or fariver their roadies tuik them.