

6. DAITH IN A CAULD KINTRA

'Teem the strang frae the chunty ower the rhubarb, Meg,' Jow Dow cried out. 'It'll gar it grow wi a vengeance.'

'Ony sign o the doctor's gig?' speired the skiffie, as she raxxed ower the washin green, tae cowp the derk yalla piddles ower the neuk far the young rhubarb lay curled up aneth the yird.

Gaun roon tae the hen's sheddies, Minnie Bruce set doon the hen's pail, her hairt thuddin, her lugs cockit, at the mention o the doctor.

'Ay, I saw it draw inby Northies fin I wis cairtin sticks frae the Fir widdie. Dr Henderson'll veesit the maister neist. He winna be keepit lang at Northies, the ferm-wife's due tae bairn, bit she's drappit sax already, they maun ken the road oot noo bi hairt. Faith, they say her man's niver aff the heid o her, nae winner she's bowdie-leggit. He jist his tae tweak his galluses an she lies doon. It's a winner she's time tae set the fire in the mornin, let aleen kinnle it.'

As Meg tipped the stank ower the flooers, the grieve sang oot wi a roar:

'Rise an teem the pail, Belle,
Rise an teem the pail.
Rise an teem the pail, Belle,
Or I'll hae tae dee't masel.'

Minnie hid passed Meg nae twa meenit's syne, preenin the washin tae the towes strung frae three neuks o the gairden. The crookit airm o the rodden wis the soothmaist pole, a nail on the reef o the cairtshed aside the green wis the norlan pole, the bough o the aik that merkit the green aff frae the kailyaird wis the eastern merker. The maid's thick airms raxxed up abeen her heid, fechtin agin the win wi a weet sheet. Her hauns war rubbit reid raw frae bein steepit in the wash. She hid bin up sin the back o five lichtin the fires an makkin the feed men's meat. Steenhillock hid caught a chill in the stable three wikks back, an much o the tcyauve o luikin efter her invalid maister fell on her twa braid shooders. She maun hae laid the washin doon fur a meenit, an nippit intae the fermhoose tae teem the reamin chunty that sat aneth the fermer's bed afore the doctor's veesit.

The quine devauled a whylie, tae lug-in tae fit the grieve wid say neist. She daurna stop the doctor fin he drave his gig up the road tae speir foo ill her faither wis. Her Ma, or her brither Matty hid mair richt than her tae speir onything, bit he wis awa aa day at Strathbogie College in the toon, gaitherin lear o a different kyne. She micht be her faither's favourite, bit

it did her nae gweed service wi the lave o the family. Fin her faither wis weel an gaun aboot, he couldna thole the cauld win tae blaw on her. Fin it wis dennertime, Steenhillock wid scrape the tastiest bitties o beef frae his plate ontae hers, touzle her heid, an wink, an tell her 'stick in till ye stick oot'

Matty, her brither, hid gotten buiks fur his birthday, an new schule claes. He wad raither hae gotten a shelt like Daisy, that his Da hid bocht fur Minnie, Daisy wi heich steppin hooves an a blaik star on her broo, an a tail that sweeshed like a wheep. Mebbe their faither felt sorry fur Minnie, fur she wis fully as gleg as Matty on the uptakk, bit tae spenn siller on a quine's education wad hae bin conseered a waste bi the fowk o the pairish. Bit a dallie, a horsie, a zither, this he could an did gie, wi muckle luv forbye, leavin little ower in the wye o affection fur her dour, sarcastic brither.

Jock Dow hid bin up sin five in the mornin , as early as Meg hersel. It wis his job tae knock up the feed men on his wye tae the stable, far he unlockit the corn kist wi the key entrusted tae him bi Steenhillock, tae scowp oot the feed inno each shelt's bag. It wis Jock Dow fa gaed the men their orders ilkie mornin, fa saw till it that they cleaned oot the strae frae the stable, groomed their horse an forked in their hey. It wis Jock Dow fa cried 'Bridle' tae set them tae wirk, fa gart them lowse fur a break at echt o' clock tae sup tay frae their wee tin flasks wi their stoppers corkit wi broon paper. It wis Jock Dow fa set them tae wirk again till dennertime, fin the horses nott twa oors tae feed, giein the men time tae sort their hey an feed fur nicht. Ay, an fa else wis it bit Jock fa strode ben the byre at milkin time, mornin an nicht, an made sure that the milk cairt wis loadit wi full cans fur the echt mile ride tae the toon? Faith, fit wad they hae daen withoot Jock this lasy fyew wikks, at the big toun dairy tfar his maister's mither bedd in her fine braw hoose, in her widda's weeds, wi her twa unmerriet dothers.

Ikke day that Steenhillock lay seek, Jock's pouer grew mair an mair. A ferm wis like a ship...it needit a captain, an wi Matty Bruce half-grown, and his mither still weel-tae-seen, the grieve wis wytin his chaunce till Steenhillock deed o the fever draggin him doon. Because o his maister's seekness, there hid bin nae cheenge o men at the feein mairket on muckle Friday, fan the ferm loons tuik their arles an the offer o sax months work, fan the colour serjeants frae the Gordons trystit the loons frae their clorty parks tae jyne the regiment.

Sally Bruce hid gaen roon aa the cottars in turn, priggin wi them tae bide wi offers o mair neeps an coal...bit it wis tae the chaumer door, far Jock Dow bothied, that she'd cam first, tae sikk fur help. He wis flattered, bit he wisnae a feel, either. They war baith o an age, an Jock wis still unmerriet. Like the stallion that gaed roon the ferms servin the meers, he hid niver bin short o female company, an ower the years, he'd coveret puckles o shearers and skiffies fa'd come and gaen on the ferms he'd wirked on. Whyles, they'd gaen wi mair than they bargained fur. Baith in een...he kent the horseman's wurd, an could command baith shelt an wumman fin the humour tuik him. Nae that he wished his maister ill, bit a body makk o life fit he can, an Jock wis fair gleg on the uptakk.

Minnie Bruce heard the tail eyn o the sang, an heard Prince nicher and strikk the steeny road wi his muckle hooves. The grieve maun hae harnessed him an led him oot for Dandy the orra loon tae cairt cinders oot ontae the road. The road wis fair scartit wi ruts far the sna bree rinnin in the Spring thaws hid torn the tapsoil awa like bits o flesh riven affo a deed hare bi a hungert craa. Then she heard the skiffie passin on some claik she'd pickit up in the ferm kitchie.

'It's nae guid news aboot Steenhillock. He sud niver hae spent aa nicht in the stable wi thon new horse that turned sae seek, nae an him wi a hoast on him afore he gaed oot, an a weak chest onywe. I'd a brither fa tuik stots an sterts o bronchitis, bit efter a fortnicht he aye shook it aff. It's three wikks noo as ye ken, Jock, the maister's bin beddit, an he's nae makkin muckle o't. In fack, he's turned far waur these hinmaist twa three days. Yon's fit wye Doctor Henderson's bin cried in. It's lang by the stage o curin the maister bi steamin him an haudin on the toddy. Fin I gaed in wi a joog o fresh watter this mornin, he complained o a pain in his breist. I helpit the mistress tae lift his heid affo the bowster, an he whizzled an whizzled tryin tae catch his braith, an pyochered an spat inno the spittoon. The spit wis streakit wi bluid, Jock. Fin we laid him back doon, he peched an peched like dug fin its chased a rubbit. An the swat rins aff him like watter!'

'Mistress Bruce is spongin him nicht an day tae bring doon the fever, bit I dinna like the colour o him, nae ava. He's grey, Jock, grey as a steen, shakkin sae hard it's a winner his hair disna faa frae its verra reets. I niver saw a body shakk like yon. Mrs Dunlop doon at the Fir Widdie wis a nurse in the toon. She caad it 'rigors', and its coorse tae watch. Sae I can thole teemin the peer breet's chunty, if it leaves the mistress free tae nurse him in ither wyes.'

Minnie's mither, Sally Bruce, ay gied the orra wirk tae the maid. 'Nae pynt in haein a dog an barkin yersel,' she'd say, tho she tuik her turn at the milkin wi the lave, an did aa the bakin, butter makkin, jam makkin an cheese makkin aboot the place. Likewise in the byre she tuik tent o the newborn calves, learnin them tae sook frae the coggie insteid o their mithers' teets. These last three wikks tho, she'd bin unca hard caad rinnin efter her ailin man.

Steenhillock hid jeeled himsel tae the been at the heicht o a blizzard in the tail eyn o Februar, oot aa nicht in the stable nursin a new-bocht mare that deed, in spite o aa his care an aa his trauchle. Noo his wife wis nursin him, up an doon the stairs near weirin them oot, ilkie time Matthew Bruce gied as muckle's a myowt. She hid steamed him, tried tae tempt him tae eat wi sweet saps, or drog him wi toddy, bit ay the hoast, hoast, hoast, grew rocher an deeper, till the beens that showed at the neck o his sark powked throw the skin, as the tide o health creepit oot, an somethin derker creepit in aboot. Noo its shaddas sat in the sunken howes o his chikks, in the gorblic's blaeness o his lang, scrawny throat far the spit gaithered an rochled doon in his chest.

The fermer o Steenhillock wis fifty-three year auld an deen, wi Matty, his heir jist a half-grown loon at Strathbogie College in the toon, a half-grown loon that hated the ferm an the beasts, the plowter o dubs an the coorse uncertainties o the North East Sizzens. Fifty-three year auld an deen, wi a wife that wis forty bit could pass fur thirty withoot ony trouble ava, that could still gar a man's heid turn an sikk tae follae. Nae easy, nae easy, tae leave sic a wife aleen in a teem merriege bed. For he lued her as weel as he hid on the first day he met her, steppin oot frae her cousin's door in the toon tae buy milk frae his faither's milkcairt.

He wis a queer mixture, richt eneuch, Minnie's faither... On the Sabbath, he stude in the kirk in his best claes, precenter fur the pairish, an nae a sowel could sing till he struck the tunin fork an led them, his voice as sweet an low as a cushie doo. He hid gaen Minnie her horsie, Daisy, her dallie, Betsy, tee, fin she wis five. In the seeven years sinsyne, Betsy gaed awye wi Minnie, tuckit inno the belt o her skirt, her comforter an frien, for she wisna alloued tae play wi the cottar bairns that cam an gaed wi the Sizzens, that wadna be richt an fittin. The young quine ruggit her dallie ooto her skirt band, an pattet her yalla cloot heid.

'Da winna dee, Betsy. It's aa lees they're sayin. Granda Bruce anely deed five month syne, an he wis seevinty-sax, an auld bodach wi a fite mowser that needit a stick tae wauk. An Da's mowser's broon, Betsy, wi jist a twa,

three fite hairs throw it. Forbye, fa'd rin the ferm an ging tae the mart on a Friday, if Da dee't? An faa'd lead the singin at Steenhillock Pairish kirk on a Sabbath? Naebody sings as weel as Da, Betsy. An he hisna learnt me play the zither he gied me, yet, Betsy, an he promised he wid, ye ken.'

An she shook Betsy sae hard, the wee clootie dallie noddit its heid as if tae agree. Fur a meenit, the bairn thocht on the bonnie zither that bed on tap o the press in her wee attic bedroom. Blaik varnished it wis, wi braw inlaid mither-o-pearl floories on it, and wee gowd furliorums peintit ower its face. She could anely strung the strings o't as yet...Da wis wytin till she wis aulder till he showed her foo tae play it. Aa the wye frae Russia, he'd brocht it, fin he wis a young chiel on his first sea voyage as ship's engineer on the Blue Star Line.

Granda Bruce hid faithered fower loons an twa quines in his lang merriege. Uncle Peter fermed Kilbog, ower Dunracht wye. Uncle Jim fermed Widside at the skirts o the growin toun. Uncle Dougal meneged a rubber plantation hyne awa in Kuala Lumpur in Far Malayasia, faith, puckles o his Bruce cousins war skittered aa ower Malaysia an Ceylon makkin siller haun ower fist...an Minnie's Da....Minnie's Da hid bin schuled at Strathbogie College in the toon, tae be a ship's engineer an sail the muckle oceans. He hid won his engineer's ticket quick smert fur the Bruces war aa clivver, an he'd gotten a place on a ship seen efter. Bit fit naebody hid calculated on, wis that fack that young Matthew Bruce hid nae sea legs ava. Frae the time that his ship sailed ooto the herbor o Aiberdeen, inno the roch sweel o the North Sea, he'd bin near deed wi sea seekness peer vratch, aa roon the heel o Norway an Sweden inno the Baltic Ocean, throw the Gulf o Finlan tae St Petersburg.

He hid bocht the zither durin the twa three days that the boat wis in herbour, for he ay lued music, bit nae the rhythms o the sea, fur the sea hid nane that made ony sense, its rhythms war aa its ain. His feet war destined tae wauk at the tail o the ploos at the slaw turn o the Sizzens, nae tae styter an tummle like a peerie ben a weet deck in the teeth o gurly gale. Sae dowie the voyage hid been, he'd hauf a mind tae bide in Russia raither than pit tae sea again, bit sense won ower an hame he cam, an the trip comin hame wis fully as coorse as the trip that tuik him awa.

His faither, Auld Mattha, hid tae accept the fack that he wid hae three fermin sons insteid o twa, an haik aboot fur a tenancy fur him. An that wis foo Minnie's faither sattled in Steenhillock. An fifteen year, near, till the day, he hid merriet Minnie's mither an brocht her up the steeny brae like an teuchit trystin a mate tae a cauld bield in a heich park. The zither

bedd at the fit o his sea chest till Minnie wis auld eneuch tae wauk an toddle ower tae the chest an lift its lid. It wis the bonniest thing she hid iver seen, an as littlins will, she wintit it. An as dotin faithers will, he couldna refuse her, clean connached an pettit an spylt as she wis bi him in aathing.

'She'll bladd it or brakk,' her Ma warned him.

'She winna,' her Da said. An she hidna, faith she'd keepit it polished like a new preen, an guairdit it like a dug wi a been an wadna let naebody near it fur onything. Sae Da couldna dee, the thocht wis unthinkable, an her nae able tae play ae tune on the Russian zither. Auld Mattha Bruce wis deed, bit he'd bin ripe fur deen, foonert an fooshionless, wi gummy een an pains in his jynts, like an auld rukk turnin fooshty an rotten wi time. She stappit Betsy back inno the waist band o her skirt, an stampit aff roon the side o the byre tae the henhooses perched on the brae tae feed her feathery chairges. 'Chookie-chookie-chook-chookie' she wheedlit, rattlin the dry seed in the pail. 'Chookie chookie chook chook chook.'

Bi the time she hid cowpit the last o the clockin hens aff its nest an dichtit the strae aff the hett, broon eggies tae nestle in the foon o her basket, Doctor Henderson's car hid bin an gaen, an it wis dennertime.

Meg Ramsay hid fulled the ropes wi the wikk's wash, crossed her fingers that the rain that hid threatened aa day wid bide aff, an wis back at her darg in the hoose, scrapin carrots an neeps fur the muckle blaik pot ower the swey, that wis heatin ower the lowpin flames, near full tae the neck wi watter an chukken beens frae the Sabbath roast. The skiffie wis skirpin satt ower the pot fin Maisie plunkit the basket o hens'eggs doon on the kitchie table.

'Far's ma mither?' the quinie speired.

'Ower at the byre, feedin the new calfies.'

Normally, Sally Bruce wad hae bin here, makkin the dennertime broth fur the fermtoun fowk an the orra loon, Dandy, fa waukit up frae his faither's craft ilkie day tae earn some guid will an some neeps frae Steenhillock. In return fur Dandy's wark, Matthew Bruce wad len the crafters his binder an ither tools an gear fin it wis nott. Young Matty Bruce wadna be hame till nicht, fin his darg wis deen at Strathbogie College, fin the dairy cairt cam back wi teem, clean cans frae the toon. The ither feed men war cottared on the ferm, or bedd nearhaun.

It wisna like Minnie's mither tae be ooto the hoose at dennertime. Dandy cam intae the kitchie close at Minnie's heels, humphin a creel o fresh-cuttit sticks.

'Will the broth be lang, Meg?' he speired. 'Ma stammache's beginnin tae think ma throat's bin cuttit. We're hyne ahin wi the plooin, an Jock wints tae ken fan tae lead the horse back fur their feed.'

'Hauf an oor at maist,' quo the maid. 'Fin the mistress comes ower frae the byre.'

Neither o them hid spukken twa wirds tae Minnie. Yon wis queer, tee. Usually Dandy wid hae a joke or a lauch wi her, or Meg micht gie her a bittie gossip she'd heard frae the fishwife that trampit roon the farms on a Wednesday. It wis like they didna ken fit tae say tae her, an there wis nae need, because Da wis gaun tae be fine noo that Dr Henderson hid cried inbye.

'I'm awa upstairs tae see ma faither,' she telt them, gaun intae the lobby an ontae the stairs, takkin the steps twa at a time wi her lang-buttoned beets. Naething could herm her Da. The Bruce's gart things happen aroon Steenhillock..things didna happen unless they planned them. An it didna fit in Minnie's plans that her Da should dee. Daith cudna be that coorse. He could hae onybody else aboot the place He wintit, even her mither, Sally, bit nae her Da, nae him, onybody bit him. Ilkie nicht she said her prayers like her faither hid telt her...the Big Prayer noo, nae the little een, though sometimes she said them baith, stertin aff wi 'Oor Faither', an syne gaun ontae the Littlin's Prayer, 'Noo I lay me doon tae sleep..'

She stood ootbye her faither's door, an though it wisna nicht, an she wisna dressed in her goon an kneelin aside her bed, she whispered the wirds three times afore gaun in :

'Thy Will be deen on Earth as it is in Heiven...'

She smeethed doon her peenie an gaed intae the room. Da wis sleepin. She creepit ower tae the fire an powkit the crummly cinnners intae a grey aisse, cannily biggin the fire up again wi kinnlers. The kinnlers war rosy, they crackit an spat an hissed. Jist as she placed the coals in a fine wee brig ower the rikk an the spittin sticks, the seek chiel hoastit. It wis quate in the room, nae a soon bit the tick o the clock on the mantlepiece, an the pech o her faither's breathin. The breathin sterted tae slaw doon, stoppit aa thegither fur hauf a meenit...sic a fleg, sic a fear thon gied her..then, jist as she made tae flee doonstairs fur help, it sterted again, faister an faister, as if his lungs war bladdit, like a blacksmith's bellows wi holes in the bag, garrin him sook the win in harder an quicker tae win ony puff ava. An syne again the breathin wid slaw tae a snail's rate, an stop o a suddenty fur anither meenit or so, afore stertin up again like a bawd racin.

Minnie hid niver met Daith afore, hid nae wye o kennin that this wis his callin caird. She lay doon aside her Da on the bed, and pit her heid on his bosie. Ae thin airm creepit oot frae the bedclaes, and gaed roon her

shooders. Her faither's een flichtered open an shut a twa three times, an he sterted tae quote Scripture at her. This wis naethin new. Da wis gettin better. He aften quoted Scripture. His hale life follaed the Lord's Buik. Minnie luikit intae his face. His een war shinin.

'In my Faither's Hoose are mony Mansions. If it werena sae, I wad hae telt ye. I gyang tae prepare a place fur ye. An if I gyang tae prepare a place fur ye, I will cam again, an takk ye fur Masel, that far I am, there ye will be as weel.'

Minnie wisna sure fa her faither wis spikkin till. He wis luikin ower at a photograph o his deid faither, Auld Mattha Bruce, bit it wis as if some ither body wis in the room, tho Minnie couldna jist makk oot fa it wis. Her faither's breathin fooneret again, back tae the slaw pech, pech an syne the quate fin his lungs stoppit aatgegither, bit again he rallied an his moo begin tae wirk, fechtin tae frame the wirds he winted tae say, tho the wirds war low an hairse.

'For this corruptible maun pit on incorruption, an this mortal maun pit on immortality...Corinthians, quine, chapter ane, verse fiftythree. Fiftythree verses, Minnie, ane fur ilkie year o yer faither's life.'

His grip on her shooder suddenly tichtened, his braithin grew faister again.

'I wint ye tae promise me Minnie, sweir tae me that ye'll luik efter yer mither an brither fin I'm awa. The three fowk dearest tae me in aa the world bide aneth this reef, an yer the youngest o them. Bit ye'r the ane I'm closest tae Minnie, an it's richt an fittin yer here at the last. Takk care o them Minnie, takk care o them. Fur my sake, lassie. Sweir it.'

He dug his cleuks inno Minnie's airm sae sair that the skin bore the merks o his fingers. Bit afore she could utter a myowt, her faither wis deid. As quick as a blink, frae ae warld intae the neist.

Naebody telt Minnie Bruce that her faither wis deid, nae doctor or neebor or kinsman, bit a secunt afore there'd bin twa fowk there in the room, an noo there wis anely ane, for fit lay wi it's airm aroon her, an that scrawny airm still hett, wis bit the mortal cloots o the man that hid bin her faither. He hid steppit neatly ooto them an vanished, she kent that, jist as she kent that the fit comin up the stairs wis her mither's, back frae the byre. The door wis pushed ajee, an Sally Bruce stude in the moo o't, wi a calf's bottle teet in her haun an her face drained fite o colour. She hid gaen tae the byre tae atten tae the ferm's business, an her man hid deed whyle she wis eidently feedin the calfies. He hidna even wyted tae say cheerio. Minnie hid swickit her ooto that, the last ane tae see him alive in the warld o the leevin.

'Get oot,' her mither hissed at her. 'Get oot an leave yer faither an me aleen.'

Dumfounert, the lassie hytered ooto the room, leavin her mither tae greet over her deid man. Jock Dow rode ower tae Kilbog, tae takk the wurd tae Peter Bruce that his brither wis deid, an Dod Mathieson rade tae Widside, tae let Minnie's uncle Jim ken, sae that Auld Grandma Bruce could hear the news frae a son, fur it wid hit her hard sae sune efter the daith o her ain man, Mattha. Young Matty cam hame frae Strathbogie College full o the news that he'd won a bit medal fur Latin, tae be telt that he micht jist lay by his buiks, ay, an his medal an his Latin tae, fur he widna be needin ony o them again. He wis fowerteen year auld, o an age fin his peers war wirkin, an noo that his faither wis deed he wid hae tae wirk tee, tae keep a reef ower his mither's heed an breid on her table.

Peter Bruce's wife Mysie, an Jim's wife Nan cam ower tae help wi that nicht's milkin, fur whether or no a fermer dees his beasts man be fed an wattered an milked, peer breets, it wisna their wyte it hid happened tho some micht argue it wis, seein's an ailin shelt hid brocht the hale thing aboot tae stert wi. It wis the first nicht sin iver that Minnie could myne that her mither hidna teen the been caimb tae her heid, tae rug the tousles ooto her lang broon hair tae check fur fear o flechs pickit up frae the cottar bairns. It wis a Setterday, sae there'd bin nae schule that day, an there wid be nae schule the morn.

Mysie Bruce frae Kilbog pit her airms roon Minnie an Matty's shooders, an led them ben tae the best room, the een luikin ootower the kailyaird, wi the Bruce's cornparks raxxin ahin it, an the scrubby bit o a knowe far the Davidsons grazed their stots, risin up ahin it. The aunts hid bin busy aa evenin, washin Minnie's faither, an dressin him in his Sabbath suit, even doon tae blaikenin his sheen afore they pit them ontae his feet. The Leddrach jyner hid ay a twa, three kists at the back o his shoppie, fur Daith wis a steady customer, an Minnie's uncle Peter hid harnessed the shelt tae the cairt, pit on the shelvin, an gaen ower tae Leddrach tae choose ain, a stoot aik kist. Sam Mathers the jyner wis still wirkin on the letterin fur the braise plaque that he'd nail on the lid afore it wis haimmered doon. As the evenin wore on the best room wis shinin like a new preen, fur the cottar wives hid bin een an cleaned it, an stockit the scuttle wi coal, an the glaiss joogs wi bits o flooers, tho there wis little eheuch in the wye o flooers in April, forbye twa three early daffs. Dr Henderson, tee, hid bin back, he micht as weel hae written the daith certificate oot the first time he come yon day Meg Ramsay said, fur he maun hae kent that it widna be lang or een wid be socht.

'Ye can see yer faither noo,' Aunt Mysie telt her young nephew an neice 'Aa his tribbles are ower wi. Ye maun kiss his broo, an pye yer respecks taew the deid.'

Minnie gaed ower first, teetin ower the side o the kist tae luik doon on the face o the man fa'd begat her. His een war steekit wi twa pennies, his hauns faulded afore him on his lap. He'd bin shaved, his hair hid bin washed an caimbed, forbye's the pennies, he micht hae bin gettin ready tae gyang tae the kirk. Dyod, he wad be gyaun tae the kirk, three days frae noo, on Tuesday neist, bit nae tae lead the singin, niver again tae lead the singin. She booed ower the side o the kist an touched his broo wi her lips, bit she didna greet. Efter aa, her faither hid telt, he'd gaen tae makk a hame fur Minnie an himsel. Ae day, he wis comin back fur her. She'd tae bide strang tae luik efter Matty, an her mither, like he'd made her promise.

Matty, tho, bubblit an grat fin he saw his faither's corp. His fowk war gey comeat that the loon should takk his faither's daith sae hard, fur they didna ken that fit Matty wis greetin fur wis his buiks, an his friens an his future, the future he'd dreamed o, that widna be comin tae pass, nae noo, nae iver. Matty Bruce hid dreamt o bein a lawyer, a doctor, a professional chiel wi a fine hoose in the toon an letters tae his name. Insteid, he'd bin trailed back tae the clart an trauchle o the ferm, that baith fed an claited an scunnered him.

Aunt Mysie pit her airms roon her neice an nephew, an pushed them ower tae their mither, fa wis slumped in a cheer at the fireside, her een swallt wi greetin

'Takk yer twa bairns inno yer bosie, Sally, at least ye something tae mynd him bi'

Uncle Peter hid poored his sister-in-law a stiff dram, the nearest thing tae medecine iver keepit in the fermhoose. It sortit aathin frae kink-hoast tae teethache. Mebbe that wis fit made her say fit she said, mebbe it wisna. She shook aff her shawl, an pulled Matty ower tae her bosie and grippit him hard tae her briest. She pushed Minnie awa.

'I dinna wint her. Matty's aa the faimly I need, noo. She maun gyang tae her Granny Bruce in the toon, eence aathing's ower wi.'

Mysie Bruce raised her eyebrowos at yon, till her sister in law explained farrer.

'Her granny his a fine hoose near tae guid schule. Siller'll be ticht at Steenhillock. I've naethin tae offer her here, naething. It'll be makk dee an mend fur a lang time noo. Gweed-be-here, she can ay come hame wikkeyens wi the dairy cairt!'

It wis Minnie fa stude in the stirkie's staa noo, nae Matty. It wis as if the sun hid gaed in aahin a cloud, she cudna jist takk in yet foo her life hid cheenged foriver wi her faither's daith. Gin she shook hersel, he wid frae yon timmer kist even yet, an catch her up in his airms, an rub her chikks reid wi a beardie. Aunt Mysie tuik Minnie awa ben tae the kitchie an made her a mug o hett tae, an spreid her a scone, wi butter an brummil jeely.

'Upstairs quinie, an sleep. Yer ma's nae hersel jist noo. Aathin'll seem better in the mornin. Upstairs an steek yer eenies.'

Sae Minnie climmed the stairs, an knelt at the side o her bed as she ay did, an said her prayer, 'Thy Will be dane', an lay doon wi Betsy in her bosie, worn oot bi aa that hid happened yon day, fur it didna seem real tae the quine that she'd niver see Da again this side o Kingdom Come. An doon in the ben room her uncles spakk lang intae the nicht, aboot fa they wad sikk tae takk a cord an help showder the kist on its journey frae cairt tae kirk, an kirk tae lair, aboot beasts an siller an fit tae pit in the paper, aboot hymns an hairts an foo he wis better oot o't their brither, ay, gaen tae better place richt eneuch, nae scutter wi cottars an corn far Matthew'd gaen. An their twa wives Nan an Mysie gaed throw tae the kitchie tae plan fit tae ett fur the funeral tea efter the beerial wis by, fur nae wummin body micht staun at the graveside watchin the hinmaist rites, na faith, they war far ower weak tae thole thon, the yird drappt doon on the lid o the lowered kist in the grun. They wad see tilt the men wore blaik airmbands, that the kist hid a pucklie wreaths, that there wis drink in the hoose an clean glaisses tae sup it frae. Nan's faimly happit the mirrors an stoppit the clocks fin there wis a Daith in ane o their hooses, bit Sally Bruce wad hae nane o yon, faith, gin ye stoppit the clocks fit the sorra wye wid ye ken fin milkin time'd won roon?

Minnie heard nane o this, clean dane wi the day's tribbles. Fur a lang time efter she beddit she sabbit inno her bowster till the sterched cotton wis weet, wi nane tae heed her. If anely Isie hidna flitted tae the toun, the Bruces wad hae sent fur her an her fowk that nicht tae help wi the maitters in haun, an Isie wad hae made it easier tae thole. Bit there wis nae Isie, jist Betsy the clootie dall. Neist mornin fin she waukened, Betsy the dall hid vanished. Tho she hunted the hale hoose fur her, the clootie dall wisna tae be seen.

'A dall? A dall? Is that aa she his tae fash aboot, an her faither lyin deid in his kist the unnatural wee vratch!' her mither railed.

Bit Matty Bruce gaed a bit smirk, an sidled up ahin his sister, tae fuser in her lug... 'Fin I wis a bairn, I spak as a bairn, I kent as a bairn, I thoct as a bairn; bit fin I becam a man, I pit awa aa bairn ferlies. Yer a big

quine noo, sister, ye winna be needin a dallie there in the toon fin Ma
packs yer bags. Ye can caa fur yer bittie o cloot till yer blue in the face,
fur ye winna fin her. Ye can greet till yer reid in the face, bit naebody'll
care. There's nae Da noo tae pett ye, yer jist the same as me noo, nae
better, nae waur.'