

## Jennie's Story by Ethyl Smith



**1<sup>st</sup> o May 1685**

Ma worst nichtmare.

Whiles, I sit on ma bed starin at the daurk. And I see that terrible mornin again as clear as if it wis happenin richt in front o me.

In ma dreams, I see sodgers in reid coats airmed wi muskets an swords, horses champin and snortin. And then, worst o aw, ah see the man that haunts me day and nicht. This man dressed aw in bleck. They cawed him Claverhoose or Bluidy Clavers. In ma dreams this Bluidy Clavers aye wears a big, wide-brimmed hat wi a white feather. He aye rides a bleck horse. And yon face is aye as haurd as stane wi a mooth like a rat-trap and cauld grey een that daur ye tae argue wi him.

Early on that May mornin, ma faither, John Broun o Priesthill, hud gaun oot tae cut peats. Ma cousin Johnnie went wi him. It wis misty on the muir that day as it wis maist days. They'd ainly cut yin or twa peats when John Graham, the man cawed Bluidy Clavers wi his bleck claes and white feather in his hat, surprised them, gallopin oot the mist wi a line o airmed sodgers at his back. He wis huntin ma faither. For ma faither wis a man that daured tae speak oot against the government and in thae daurk days men that spoke oot against the government got the jile.

The man in bleck stapped his horse alangside faither. "I'm lookin for John Broun o Priesthill.

"Ye've foond him," said Faither quietly, and immediately Clavers and his men had taen Johnnie and ma faither prisoner and mairched them back tae the fermhoose.

Mither and masel kent naethin about it. No until oor collie Bess lay doon on the flair and sterted growlin at some danger ootside. She wis even shiverin. For ony ither stranger comin by the ferm, she wid hiv been barkin and runnin at the door. This wis different. Mither gasped an didnae move. Ah lucked at them baith, then ah daured tae open the door.

Ootside, oor yaird wis fu o sodgers on horseback. Faither and Johnnie were tied wi thick rope and gettin trailed ahint like beasts heidin for market.

Ah screamed, "Mither! Cam quick!"

She cam and we baith stood on the doorstane, feart and helpless.

But somehow Faither steyed calm. He wis the ainly calm yin amang aw this steer. It didnae seem tae bother him. It wis like he expectit this tae happen.

Ah wantit tae run tae him but Mither held ma airm and made me bide still.

Bluidy Clavers lucked richt fu o himsel. He lowped doon frae his horse and ordered his men tae untie the prisoners. He stertit struttin back and forrit in front o them. "I tak it ye baith ken whae I am. And that ye baith ken why I'm here."

He poked the sherp end o his ridin stick in their faces. Cousin Johnnie wis chalk-white, legs shakin as if he wis mibbe aboot tae faw doon or wet himsel.

"We baith ken ye," Faither said. "Ye're John Graham o Claverhoose, wi a reputation as gangs afore ye."

"Guid tae ken. Maks ma task easier." Claverhoose leaned forrit and pushed Faither doon on his knees. "I'm here aboot obedience tae the Crown. Ye seem tae be failin in yer duty. Are ye listenin? Will ye submit tae His Majesty and swear an oath o loyalty?"

Faither shook his heid.

Claverhooose's face turnt bricht red. He struck Faither that haurd Faither cowped forrit. His face hit the grund. His broo split open. Bluid come spurtin oot.

“Ye think you're better than His Majesty, dae ye?” Claverhooose scuddit faither's heid doon again. Haurder this time.

The bluid ran intae Faither's een tae he could haurdly see. He lifted his sleeve tae dicht it awa. Claverhooose stapped him. “Naw, naw. Jist bide like that. Ye mak a bonnie sicht.”

Ma faither said nothin. He juist looked calmly ower at Mither and me, peyin nae heed tae the cruel nobleman John Graham o Claverhooose.

Bluidy Clavers glowered at faither then grabbed faither's hair. Pouin him roond by the hair, he forced ma faither tae luck intae his cauld grey een. “Think again. This is yer last chance.” Then wi a haurd nieve, he skelped Faither in the mooth. Mair bluid wis poorin oot.

“Sir.” Yin o the sodgers daured tae interrupt. “Mibbe we shud tak this felon tae the nearest jail whaur a magistrate can decide whit tae dae nixt?”

Claverhooose opened his mooth as if tae argue when the twa men he'd sent tae search the hooose cam runnin wi an airmfu o muskets an swords. “Proof o rebellion,” he shouts. “A capital offence. We hae nae need o magistrates.”

He taen a fine siller pistol frae his belt and lucked roond daurin onybody tae speak. Clavers primed the pistol, then held the muzzle against the back o faither's heid.

There wis a lood crack.

White reek swirled round John Broun and John Graham. When the reek skailed, I saw ma faither lyin deid in a daurk pool o bluid.

Wioot anither word, Claverhoose pit awa his pistol and walked ower tae his horse.

Ma mither ran tae her man. She drapped tae her knees aside him. And as if she could stap the life fae escapin his body, she gaithered up bits o bone, and gristle, and even the cauld congealin bluid and pit it aw intae the dish-clout she wis haudinwhan aw this stertit. She tied the corners thegither tae mak a wee bag afore settin it gently doon. Then she taen aff her peenie and draped it ower the crumpled body. Aw I could see o Faither wis his dirty auld buits, the soles still covered wi gress and glaur frae the muir.

The man in bleck rode aff wi his sodgers, takkin Cousin Johnnie wi them. Mither and ah juist sat there aside John Broun, the guid man o Priesthill.

We were lost, oor warld shattered forever on a misty day in May sae lang ago.