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From *Sunset Song*

1. . . . 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. Below and around where Chris Guthrie lay the June moors whispered and rustled and shook their cloaks, yellow with broom and powdered faintly with purple, that was the heather but not the full passion of its colour yet. And in the east against the cobalt blue of the sky lay the shimmer of the North Sea, that was by Bervie, and maybe the wind would veer there in an hour or so and you'd feel the change in the life and strum of the thing, bringing a streaming coolness out of the sea.
5. But for days now the wind had been in the south, it shook and played in the moors and went dandering up the sleeping Grampians, the rushes pecked and quivered about the loch when its hand was upon them, but it brought more heat than cold, and all the parks were fair parched, sucked dry, the red clay soil of Blawearie gaping open for the rain that seemed never-coming. Up here the hills were brave with the beauty and the heat of it, but the hayfield was all a crackling dryness and in the potato park beyond the biggings the shaws drooped red and rusty already.
6. ... you'd waken with the peewits crying across the hills, deep and deep, crying in the heart of you and the smell of the earth in your face, almost you'd cry for that, the beauty of it and the sweetness of the Scottish land and skies.

7. The sowing time was at hand, John Guthrie put down two parks with grass and corn, swinging hand from hand as he walked and sowed and Will carried the corn across to him from the sacks that lined the rigs. Chris herself would help of an early morning when the dew had lifted quick, it was blithe and lightsome in the caller air with the whistle of the blackbirds in Blawearie's trees and the glint of the sea across the Howe and the wind blowing up the braes with a fresh, wild smell that caught you and made you gasp. So silent the world with the sun just peeking above the horizon those hours that you'd hear, clear and bright as though he paced the next field, the ringing steps of Chae Strachan--far down, a shadow and a sunlit dot, sowing his parks behind the steadings of Peesie's Knapp.
8. Sea and sky and the folk who wrote and fought and were learned, teaching and saying and praying, they lasted but as a breath, a mist of fog in the hills, but the land was forever, it moved and changed below you, but was forever, you were close to it and it to you, not at a bleak remove it held you and hurted you.
9. Scotland lived, she could never die, the land would outlast them all, their wars and their Argentines, and the winds come sailing over the Grampians still with their storms and rain and the dew that ripened the crops—long and long after all their little vexings in the evening light were dead and done.
10. So, hurt and dazed, she turned to the land, close to it and the smell of it, kind and kind it was, it didn't rise up and torment your heart, you could keep at peace with the land if you gave it your heart and hands, tended it and slaved for it, it was wild and a tyrant, but it was not cruel.
11. *That* is The Land out there, under the sleet, churned and pelted there in the dark, the long rigs upturning their clayey faces to the spear-onset of the sleet.
12. Chris went out to milk the kye and Will went with her over the close, carrying the lantern, the flame of it leapt and starred and quivered and hesitated in the drive of the snow. In the light of it, like a rain of arrows they saw the coming of the storm that night swept down from the Grampian heuchs, thick and strong it was in Blawearie, but high in the real hills a smoring, straight wall must be sweeping the dark, blinding down against the lone huts of the shepherds and the faces of lost tinks tramping through it looking for lights the snow'd smothered long before.
13. The rain still held off, presently the wind soughing down the Howe died away and a little peek of sun came through, not down the Denburn it came but high up in the hill peaks, the lost, coarse ground where never a soul lived or passed but some shepherd or gillie, you could see them far off, lone and lonesome there on a still, clear day. Maybe so the dead walked in a still clear, deserted land, the coarse lands of death where only the chance wanderer showed his face, Chris thought, and the dead lapwings wheeled and cried against another sun.

14. So she went down to the shore, the tide was out, thundering among the rocks, not a soul on the beach but herself, gulls flying and crying, the sun strong and warm. She sat on a seat in the glow of it and shut her eyes and was happy. Below her feet the ground drummed and trembled with reverberations from that far-off siege of the rocks that the sea was making out there by the point of the bay, it was strange to feel it and be of it, maybe folk there were who felt for the sea as last night she had felt in the rain-drenched fields of Kinraddie.
15. But half an hour later, Stonehaven a blinding white glimmer behind, Dunnottar in front, they were climbing down the path that led to the island. The air was blind with the splash of the incoming tide, above you the rock rose sheer as the path wound downwards sheer; and high up, crowning the rock were the ruins of the castle walls, splashed with sunlight and the droppings of sea-birds. Gulls there were everywhere, Chris was deafened in the clamour of the brutes, but quiet enough in the castle it proved, not a soul seemed visiting there but themselves.
16. She sat by the window, it was a night that was rimed with a frost of stars, rime in the sky and rime on the earth, the Milky Way shone clear and hard and the black trees of Blawearie waved their leafless boughs up against the window, sparkling white with the hoar; and far across the countryside for hours she watched the winking of the paraffin-lights in the farmhouses, till they sank and went out, and she was left in a world that might well have been dead but that she lived.
17. In the cornyard the hens came tearing about her, mad with hunger, she gave them meat hot from the pot and then a bushel of corn, they liked that fine. But first the little bit Wyandotte got up on the cartshaft and gave a great crow that might have been heard in the Upperhill; and he cocked a bright eye on her, first one eye and then the other, and Chris laughed again.
18. ...There was Ewan with the horses, ploughing his first rig, bent over the shafts, one foot in the drill, one the rig side, the ploughshare, sharp and crude and new, cleaving the red-black clay. The earth wound back like a ribbon and curved and lay; and the cloud of gulls cawed and screamed and pecked on the rig and followed at Ewan's heels again.
19. Spring had come and was singing and rilling all over the fields, you listened and heard, it was like listening to the land new wake, to the burst and flow of a dozen burns in this ditch and that; and when you turned out the cattle for their first spring dander, in case they went off the legs, they near went off the face of the earth instead, daft and delighted, they ran and scampered and slid, Chris was feared that the kye would break their legs.

CLOUD HOWE

20. The borough of Segget stands under the Mounth, on the southern side, in the Mearns Howe, Fordoun lies near and Drumlithie nearer, you can see the Laurencekirk lights of a night glimmer and glow as the mists come down. If you climb the foothills to the ruined Kaimies, that was builded when Segget was no more than a place where the folk of old time had raised up a camp with earthen walls and with freestone dykes, and had died and had left their camp to wither under the spread of the grass and the whins--if you climbed up the

Kaimes of a winter morn and looked to the east and you held your breath, you would maybe hear the sough of the sea, sighing and listening up through the dawn.

21. So the two of them would crawl round the floor and would growl, play tigers and beasts of like gurring breeds, Ewan with his coolness and graveness forgot, Robert worse than a bairn, Chris sitting and watching, a book in her hand or darning and knitting, but not often those. Robert got angered when she sat and darned. What, waste your life when you'll soon be dead? You're not going to slave for me, my girl!
22. They came at last on Blawearie's brae, and panting, looked down on the windy Mearns, the lights of Bervie a lowe in the east, the Laurencekirk gleams like a scattering of faggots, Segget's that shone as the blurring of stars, these were the lights of the jute mills there. So they stood a long while and looked down the brae, Kinraddie below them happed in its sleep; and Robert fell into a dreaming muse, as he often did, with his mind far off. Chris said nothing, content though she froze, after one peek at his stillness beside her.
23. But the Spring was coming. You looked from the Manse at the hills as they moved and changed with each day, the glaur and the winter dark near gone, the green came quick and far on the peaks, the blink of the white snow-bonnets grew less, swallows were wheeling about the Manse trees, down in the fields of the Mains you could hear the click and spit of a tractor at work, far up by Upperhill parks rise the baa of the sheep they pastured now at Bridge End.
24. Then she fell in a dream as she heard them talk, the rooks were cawing up in the yews, and you thought how they'd fringed your pattern of life--birds, and the waving leafage of trees: peewits over the lands of Echt when you were a bairn with your brother Will, and the spruce stood dark in the little woods that climbed up the slopes to the Barmekin bend; snipe sounding low on Blawearie loch as you turned in unease by the side of Ewan, and listened and heard the whisp of the beech out by the hedge in the quiet of the night; and here now rooks and the yews that stood to peer in the twisty rooms of the Manse.
25. Chris looked at the fairy featherings of clouds that went south on the hurrying wind of the Howe, the green of the hedges trilled low in its blow, you could feel in your body the stir of the blood as the sap stirred sweet in the hedge, you supposed. Spring and the time of young folk and dreams, following cloud-pillars as they sailed the Howe! . . . And maybe Ewan was doing no more in that he refused all clouds and all dreams!