

## THE FIRST AYRSHIRE CHRISTMAS

“Look Gran, ye’ve got to come an’ look.”

“For goodness sake cheil, I’m trying to finish makin the breid.”

“But Gran, ye’ve ne’er seen a star sae bricht.”

I was sitting by the window, lookin oot at the nicht sky. There wis a star gleamin in the heavens, the like I hud ne’er seen afore.

“Gran, please come an’ see it”

“Oh hing on John, I’ll be there.” She crossed the flair, wiping the floor fae her hauns. She bent her heid an’ lookit out the window.

“Weel, weel, would ye look at that my boy, yer richt I’ve ne’er seen a star sae bricht.” She sat doon aside me and put her airm round my shooders.

“Ye probably could see by it, when it gets derk aneugh.” She laughed.

We sat for a meenit gazing heaven wards.

“I tell you whit, when I get the breed made, I’ll tak ye for a walk through the toon.” She smiled at the expression on my face.

“Really Gran?”

“Aye, the toons sae fue of folk wie the census takin, it’ll be worth a luek, wi’ a’ the frivolity goin on. Go an’ get yer coat an we’ll tak a wee walk.”

I jumped to my room and grabbed my coat; she had finished wi’ the breid, and was washin her hauns in the bowl.

“Fetch my shaw’ darlin. Noo remember! Ye hu’ve to stay close aside me an’ do exactly as I tell ye.”

I got her shaw’ an’ we went oot doors.

The main street of the toon, which wis normally sae whisht and staid, was ableeze with lights frae every window. Folk were oot, talkin an’ laughin wi’ kith an’ kin they hadnae seen for years. Everyone wis in a guid mood, an’ the inns were fu’ o’ folk. When Gran was recognised by acquaintances, she stood an’ prattled fur a while. Younkers ran roon aboot their faithers legs an’ screamed wie delicht when they wur scooped up when the faithers hud hud aneugh o’ it.

We were oot fur aboot an’ ‘our when Gran decided we’d had aneugh, I was sad to go hame; it was like a feast day.

“Come on sweetheirt, let’s tak a short cut through thon lane ahint the big inn.” Gran pu’ed me by the haun up the unlit narrow lane.

As we cut across ahint the inn we heard some one groaning wie pain.

“Whit was that?” said Gran, lookin aboot her. We heard it again.

“It’s comin frae thon stables.” I said, pointing to the half oped door. Licht was streamin dimly oot on tae the groon.

Gran walkit tae the door an’ peerit in, I pushed her skirts aside an saw a wuman lying in the straw, an’ a man kneeling o’er her, haudin her haun. He had a pained leuk on his face, which changed to one of bewilderment an’ helplessness when he saw Gran.

She flung ope’ the door an’ strode across the floor.

“Richt noo my dears, I dinnae need tae ask whit’s goin on, do I?” she said.

“Nae.” Said the man. “I’m not share whit tae dae, she seems in muckle pain.” He was almost greetin. The woman’s face contorted an’ she cried oot.

Gran turned tae him “Whit’s yer name man?”

“Joseph an’ this is my wife Mary.” He replied.

“Joseph, go ye to the inn an’ ask the keeper for some mair lanterns, an’ John ye can go wi’ him an’ ask fur a jug o’ hot water. She pu’ed her shawl aff an’ knelt aside the wuman, an’ gently took her haun.

“There noo Mary, let’s see whit we can dae fur ye my dear.”

Within ten meenits the place wis properly lit an’ Gran had washed her hauns an’ was stroking the woman’s broo an’ murmurin sma’ words of encouragement tae her.

“John, ye can go staun oot by the door noo, ye can keep guard fur us.” She smiled.

She lookit up at the man.

“It won’t be long noo.”

Relief swept o’er his face an’ he bent to kiss the wuman.

Another ten meenits went by afore I heard the scream o’ a new wean. I rushed inside. The wuman was cradling the babe on her chist, her face was beautiful as she gazed at the child, it was as if everythin guid in the world wis there in her airms

Gran lifted the wean frae its mither, washed it, then wrappit it in swaddlin.

Takin up her shaw’ she pit it o’er the straw in one of the mangers an’ laid the babe gently doon.

As she fussed about Mary, washin her an’ helpin her change her claes I crept up tae the manger an’ lookit in. Ach he wis sae tiny, I’ve ne’er seen a new born babe; I just could’nae believe hoo tiny he wis as he lay sleepin. I pit my haun farward an’ stroked his wee fingers. He ope’d his een an’ gazed richt at me. An richt there and then, I kent I lo’ed him. His wee face screwed up and he staired to greet. I shoogled the manger wie gentle haun, an’ in seconds he had fa’en asleep again, it must be tirin, being born.

Gran soon had Mary comfortable an’ Joseph could’nae thank her aneugh as he lifted the bairn an’ pit him in Mary’s airms again.

Gran turned to me “Come on lad, it’s time we wir gaun, it’s past ye’r bedtime.”

She lent farward an’ gied Mary a kiss on the broo.

“Noo, you look efter that wee micht, I’ve a feelin he’s goan to be something special.” She leant o’wer and kissed the babe on the cheek. “Aren’t ye ma wee laddy?” She stroked his cheek an’ smiled, a far away, gentle look in her een.

The last we saw o’ them, they wur huddled the gither, smilin an’ adorin their bairn, in the stable ahint the inn.

As we left there wis twa shepherds an’ a sma’ flock o’ sheep comin along the lane, they stopped at the stable door. Gran took my haun an’ we hurried on.

”Hame!” she said, as I peered efter them. We wur near at oor door when we saw three camels trudging through the nicht.

“Look Gran, whae are they?” I asked.

The riders wir wealthy, each wore a croon, their claes were rich, an the beasts wir laden with guid.

They drew aside us; a dark face loomed o’er us an’ asked Gran.

“The cheil?” he said in a deep, booming voice.

Gran seemed to ken somethin, fur nae questions did she ask, as she pointit tawards the stable door.

“He’s in the stable.”

The rider bent doon an’ threw a coin intae Grans haun.

“My thanks.” He said

A simple exchange of words, an’ they rode onwards doon the lane.

“Who wur they Gran?”

“Kings, darlin boy, they wur kings. Come to see the bairn, an’ tae lo’e him, the way ye dae.”

“Hoo dae ye ken I lo’e him, he’s only a babe!”

“Ye dae though, don’t ye?”

“Aye” I replied an’ followed her intae the hoose.

I lie close to sleep, I cannae help thinkin I had been pairt o’ somethin I dinnae really understaun. But I ken I lo’e that wean an’ whit’s dumfunarts me mair, I think he lo’es me back.