

The Disorderly Knights: Book Three in the legendary Lymond Chronicles

By Dorothy Dunnett

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This third volume in *The Lymond Chronicles*, the highly renowned series of historical novels takes place in 1551, when Francis Crawford of Lymond is dispatched to embattled Malta, to assist the Knights of Hospitallers in defending the island against the Turks. But shortly the swordsman and scholar discovers that the greatest threat to the Knights lies within their own ranks, where various factions vie secretly for master.

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Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap
The third volume in "The Lymond Chronicles, the highly renowned series of historical novels by Dorothy Dunnett, Disorderly Knights takes place in 1551, when Francis Crawford of Lymond is dispatched to embattled Malta, to assist the Knights of Hospitallers in defending the island against the Turks. But shortly the swordsman and scholar discovers that the greatest threat to the Knights lies within their own ranks, where various factions vie secretly for master.

About the Author
Dorothy Dunnett was born in 1923 in Dunfermline, Fife, Scotland. Her time at Gillespie's High School for Girls overlapped with that of the novelist Muriel Spark. From 1940-1955, she worked for the Civil Service as a press officer. In 1946, she married Alastair Dunnett, later editor of **The Scotsman**.

Dunnett started writing in the late 1950s. Her first novel, **The Game of Kings**, was published in the United States in 1961, and in the United Kingdom the year after. She published 22 books in total, including the six-part Lymond Chronicles and the eight-part Niccolo Series, and co-authored another volume with her husband. Also an accomplished professional portrait painter, Dunnett exhibited at the Royal Scottish Academy on many occasions and had portraits commissioned by a number of prominent public figures in Scotland.

She also led a busy life in public service, as a member of the Board of Trustees of the National Library of Scotland, a Trustee of the Scottish National War Memorial, and Director of the Edinburgh Book Festival. She served on numerous cultural committees, and was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. In 1992 she was awarded the Office of the British Empire for services to literature. She died on November 9, 2001, at the age of 78.

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Mother's Baking

(Catslack, October 1548)

On the day that his grannie was killed by the English, Sir William Scott the Younger of Buccleuch was at Melrose Abbey, marrying his aunt.

News of the English attack came towards the end of the ceremony when, by good fortune, young Scott and his aunt Grizel were by all accounts man and wife. There was no bother over priorities. As the congregation hustled out of the church, led by bridegroom and father, and spurred off on the heels of the messenger, the new-made bride and her sister watched them go.

'I'm daft,' said Grizel Beaton to Janet Beaton, straightening her headdress where her bridegroom's helmet had knocked it cockeyed. 'And after five years of it with Will's father, you should think shame to allow your own sister to marry a Scott. I've wed his two empty boots.'

'That you havena,' said Janet, Lady of Buccleuch, lowering her voice not at all in the presence of two hundred twittering Scott relations as they gazed after their vanishing husbands. 'They aye remember their

boots. It's their empty nightgowns that get fair monotonous.'

Being a Beaton, Will Scott's new wife was riled, but by no means overcome. The war between England and Scotland was in its eighth year and there had been no raid for ten days: it had seemed possible to get married in peace. Creich, her home, was too far away. So Grizel Beaton had chosen to marry at Melrose, with the tarred canvas among the roofbeams patching the holes from the last English raid, and the pillars chipped with arquebus shot.

Duly packed like broccoli into lawn, buckram and plush and ropes of misshapen pearls, she had enjoyed the wedding, and even the cautious clash of plate armour underwriting the hymns. Lord Grey of Wilton with an English army was occupying Roxburgh only twelve miles away, and had twice emerged to plunder and burn the district since October began. If the wedding was wanted at Melrose-and Buccleuch, as Hereditary Bailie of the Abbey lands, had fewer objections than usual to any idea not his own-then the congregation had to come armed, that was all. The Scotts and their allies, the twenty polite Frenchmen from Edinburgh, the Italian commander with the lame leg, had left their men at arms outside with their horses, the plumed helmets lashed to the saddlebows; and if then were a few vacant seats where a man from Hawick or Bedrule had ducked too late ten days before, no one mentioned it.

For a while, standing next to her jingling bridegroom, her gaze averted from his carroty hair, Grizel had thought the other absentees had escaped his attention. Then, as alto and counter-tenor rang from pillar to pillar, the red head on one side of her leaned towards the unkempt grey one on the other and hissed, 'Da! Where are the Crawfords?'

And Buccleuch, the bride saw out of the tail of her eye, sank his head into his shoulders like a bear in its ruff, and said nothing. For by 'the Crawfords', Sir William Scott meant not Lord Culter and his wife Mariotta, or even Sybilla, their remarkable mother; but the only man in Scotland Will Scott had ever obeyed without arguing: Francis Crawford of Lymond.

And it was then, as the Bishop bored on through the pages of print which were making these two man and wife, that the Abbey's chipped door-leaf moved and a man entered, in the blue and silver livery of Crawford, to speak quietly to one of the monks. From bent head to devout head, the word travelled. Lord Grey of England, guided by a Scotsman, renegade chief of the Kerrs, had burned Buccleuch's town of Selkirk to the ground, despoiled his castle of Newark. and was advancing, destroying and killing along the River Yarrow, through the trim possessions of the Scotts and their friends.

The wedding ended, hurriedly, on a surge of masculine bonhomie and relief. Five minutes later, followed by the red-eyed glares of their womenfolk, Buccleuch and his friends and his new-married son had plunged off to join Lord Culter, head of the Crawfords, and Francis Crawford his brother, to fight the English once more.

Sentimentally, Will Scott thought, it made his wedding-day perfect. Cantering, easy and big-limbed, through the bracken of Ettrick-side, with leaves stuck, lime-green and scarlet on his wet sleeves, blue eyes narrowed and fair, red-blooded Scott face misted with rain, he was borne on a vast, angry joy.

The lands of Branxholm and Hawick and all Buccleuch possessed in these regions had been a favourite target while King Henry VIII of England and his successor had tried to resurrect their overlordship of Scotland and seize and marry Mary, the child Queen of Scotland, to Henry's son Edward, now the young English King.

They had failed, despite the great English victory at Pinkie, and timber and thatch had risen in Buccleuch's

lands again, and the thick stone towers-his father's at Buccleuch and Branxholm, his own at Kincurd, his grandmother's at Catslack-still survived. After Pinkie, the English army had retired, leaving their garrisons to police the outraged land; and Sir William Scott had left Branxholm to join the roving force then commanded by Crawford of Lymond.

By the following summer, when Francis Crawford disbanded his company, Buccleuch's heir had turned into a tough and capable leader of men, and the child Queen Mary had been sent for safety to France, at six the affianced bride of the Dauphin.

In return, the King of France had filled Scotland with Gascon men-at-arms, Italian arquebusiers, German Landsknechts, a French general, a French ambassador and an Italian commander in French service, the last of whom was riding now at Will Scott's left side, his Florentine English further cracked by the jolt of the ride.

'The little bride shed no tears,' said Piero Strozzi, Marshal of France, in sombre inquiry. He rode with animal grace; a man of near fifty, just recovered from a hackbut shot outside Haddington which would leave one leg shorter than the other all his life. Beneath the umber skin, the basic shapes of his face were deeply plangent, denying his notoriety as a practical joker: only Leone his brother was worse. But today, riding against the muddling wind, in and out of the rain, his plumes dripping wetly from his bonnet and the black hair before his ears in wet rings, Strozzi's theme was the bereft bride.

'She has known you some weeks, it is true?'

'Grizel? I've known her a while, Marshal. Her older sister is my father's third wife.'

'There is sympathy between you?'

Will Scott grinned. Grizel Beaton had slapped his face four times, and apart from these four small misjudgements, they had never touched on a topic more personal than which of Buccleuch's bastards to invite to the wedding. But he liked her fine; and she was good and broad where it would matter to future Buccleuchs, which summed up all his mind so far on the subject.

'She's a canty wee bird,' said Will Scott now to the Marshal. 'But plain, forbye. Couldna hold a candle, ye ken, to Lord Culter's wife. You've met the Crawfords?'

So, duly turned from discussing the bride, 'I have met the Crawfords,' the Marshal Piero Strozzi said. 'The lord is most worthy and the Dowager mother enchanting. And the youngest brother Francesco is fit for my dearest brother Leone.'

A smile twitched Sir William Scott's mouth. As Prior of the Noble Order of the Knights Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem and commander of the King of France's fleet off the Barbary coast, Leone Strozzi, however practised with infidels, was not necessarily fit for Crawford of Lymond.

Will Scott said nothing. But he wondered why the Marshal Piero also smiled.

Sir Walter Scott of Buccleuch was happy, too, because he had caught the Kerrs at it again.

All over the middle Borders their land marched with his, and he loved them as he loved the Black Death. It was a Kerr of Ferniehurst whose timely murder had sparked off the holocaust of Flodden thirty-five years

ago. Thirty-two years ago, a Kerr of Cessford had been involved in a little foray led by Buccleuch; and the Kerr had got himself killed. After that, despite damnable pilgrimages on both sides and eternal vows of reconciliation, despite Buccleuch himself, like his father before him, having to take a Kerr woman to wife (she was dead), the Scott-Kerr feud had flourished.

That it was discreetly refuelled from time to time by the English was subconsciously known to Sir Wat, but he chose to ignore his son's hints on the subject. A number of Scottish lairds, professing the reformed faith rather than the Old Religion of the Queen Dowager, were interested in an English alliance, and not averse to traffic over the Border. Others with homes at or near the frontier itself had had to give up the costly luxury of patriotism.

Still others, among whom the Douglases and the Kerrs could sometimes be glimpsed, were not exactly sure which nation would triumph when the smoke cleared away, and were prepared with spacious burrows in an directions. It had been a fairly safe wager for some time that Sir Walter Kerr of Cessford and Sir John Kerr of Ferniehurst, their sons, brothers and diverse relations had been selling information to the English . . . so safe that, after the late brush with the English at Jedburgh, the Governor of Scotland had been persuaded to place the three leading Kerrs temporarily under restraint.

Unhappily, the hand of Buccleuch was rarely invisible. Suspecting, rightly, that the old man had engineered the whole episode, Andrew Kerr, Cessford's brother, had ridden straight to the English at Roxburgh, and showering Kerrs upon the welcoming garrison, had induced them to burn and plunder the whole of Buccleuch's country twice in four days, with a force many times the size any Scott and his son could muster.

And now, ten days later, a third attack had been launched, and to Buccleuch's ears came the confirmation he longed for. The Kerrs, the weasels, were on horse with the English. Swearing with great spirit from time to time, always a good sign with Sir Walter, he flew through the filmy splendours of autumn, primed to nick Kerr heads like old semmit buttons.

On the low hills above Yarrow, where the woodcutters of Selkirk had cleared a space among the birch and the low, fret-leafed oak, a group of men were working with sheep, the arched whistles coming thin over the ling, and the dogs running low through the bracken as the ewes jostled past staring glassily, the black Roman noses poking as the owners were hoisted rib-high in the press.

The two men lying prone on the heather were watching not the sheep but the valley below, filled now with a mist of fine rain. Both were bareheaded, blending into the autumn rack of the hillside, where the glitter of helmets and the flash of wedding plumes would have betrayed them. Their eyes were fixed eastwards, on the Selkirk road, where hazily in the distance black smoke hung in the air and there was a rumour of shouting.

Nearer at hand, dulling now in the rain, an aureole bright as a sunset showed where, over the next hill, something was burning. The younger of the two men stirred, and then moved backwards and on to his feet, still well masked from the road; and without doing more, drew the attention of the twenty men on that hillside to where he stood still, his yellow hair tinselled with moisture, his long-lashed blue stare on the vacant road, far below, along which the English would ride.

The noise increased. 'Here they come,' said Crawford of Lymond to his brother and smiled, still watching the road. 'Gaea, goddess of marriage and first-born of Chaos, defend us. The Kerrs and the English are here.'

Richard, third Baron Crawford of Culter, grinned and rose cautiously also. Square, brown-haired and thick with muscle, with skin like barked hide after a summer's campaigning about his Lanarkshire home, he

believed his brother's present imbecile plan would either kill all of them or brand them as liars for life. It seemed unlikely, unless you knew Lymond, that twenty men could put an English army to rout.

News of trouble at Selkirk had met the Midculter party halfway on their long journey to the wedding at Melrose. Efficiently, the Crawfords had taken action. Their womenfolk were given shelter in the nearest buildings at Talla. A messenger was sent ahead to Melrose to warn Wat Scott of Buccleuch, and another south-east to the old castle of Buccleuch to summon the hundred German soldiers quartered there by the Government. There was no time to send to Branxholm, Buccleuch's chief castle, where four hundred others stood idle.

By now, the Buccleuch Germans should be waiting in the next valley at Tushielaw. Sir Wat Scott and his new-married son, with perhaps two hundred Scotts, should have left Melrose and be entering the other end of that valley, where Ettrick Water ran between high, wooded hills from burned-out Selkirk to Tushielaw and onwards west. And here, above the valley of Yarrow, Lord Culter and his brother and twenty men from Midculter in their wedding finery with, thank God, half armour beneath, waited to intercept the English army on its plundering march, with two shepherds, twelve arquebuses, some pikes, some marline twine, a leather pail of powder, shot, matches, some makeshift colours, and eight hundred rusted helmets from the Warden's storehouse at Talla.

The English were slow in coming; not through any unfamiliarity with the route, but because the thatches were taking a long time to burn. They had taken a good few beasts and as much corn as they could carry, firing the rest. Most of the cottages they passed were empty, the owners either hiding up the glens or fled to one of the keeps. Lord Grey had paused to attack one or two of the latter as well, but with less success: the stone walls were thick, and needed the leisure of a good-going siege.

But Newark fell, which gave him great pleasure. They had attacked this castle in vain once before: it was the Queen's, garrisoned by Buccleuch. This time they used fire and got in, though four of Buccleuch's men fought to the end and had to be killed, and an old woman got under someone's sword. The Murrays at Deuchar held out, and no one troubled unduly with them; but Catslack was a Scott stronghold and they burned that, though the man Andrew Kerr who had stopped to rummage at Tinnis came spluttering up with a parcel of relations to complain that the assault party had made away with a Kerr.

'My dear friend.' William Grey, thirteenth Baron of Wilton, had been fighting in Scotland for months and disliked the country, the climate and the natives, particularly those disaffected with whom he had to converse. 'You are mistaken. Every man in this tower wore Scott livery.'

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