The Galliard

Margaret Irwin

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Prelude

On the Border

For the Galliard and the Gay Galliard's men
They ne'er saw a horse but they made it their ain.

They were in the saddle again, out on a nightride again, but what a night for it!

All Hallows' E'en, when all honest folk should be either in bed safe from hobgoblins, or else ducking for apples in a bowl with the lassies and playing tricks on them when they sat brushing their hair in front of a burnished steel mirror and watching it to see the face of their future mate, or if they were bold enough, running out into the kailyard at midnight to pull a kail runt to see if it were straight or crooked, for so would be the shape of their man – and if it had plenty of earth on its roots that would be the best luck of all, since earth meant money.

Some of the younger lads on this ride, Long Fargy and Dugall Quin and wee Willie Wallocky, out for the first time, had planned to black their faces and rig up some turnip lanterns and go round with the youngsters to all the neighbours' houses at Haddington, singing their song of 'the merry guisers', which changed in the last verse to 'the thirsty guisers' as a broad hint for drink to be served them.

But it was another sort of raid they were on now, called out on the instant by their lord, as was his way, and bad luck and a sore back to the lad who wasn't in his steel bonnet, and his boots in the

stirrups, within five minutes of hearing the order to horse. Their leatherjacks were all the armour on their bodies, nor did their lord wear more, except that his sleeves were of linked chain-mail and he wore a light modern sword where a few of his men carried the heavy two-handed weapon or for the most part a Jedburgh axe slung at the saddle-bow.

They had been told to leave their dags and pistols behind – it was to be a quiet job, then, as was fitting to this eerie hour – and wee Willie was not the only one to stick a bunch of scarlet rowan berries in his cap as defence against the goblins known to be abroad on this last evening of October. Only the Galliard would choose such a night for a foray, a night moreover when the Merry Dancers, those spirits like streamers of red fire, were out riding the Northern Lights.

So they grumbled to each other as they rode, but very low, in obedience to the order for silence, their stirrups and harness bound in rags to keep from jingling; it was as bad to be the Galliard's disobedient servant as his enemy – worse, in fact, for he did not kill unnecessarily on a foray.

But what foray could it be that even the Galliard would lead, now they were at peace with England? Their lord had won that French nickname for a gay reckless rake from a noted freebooter who 'ne'er saw a horse but he made it his ain'. But only a year ago the Queen Regent of Scotland had made him her Lord Lieutenant of the Border, Warden of the Marches, Lord of Liddesdale and Keeper of Hermitage Castle, and he would hardly flout his royal appointment so far as to break truce with England, still less to ride on some private quarrel, least of all to lift his neighbours' cattle. Only two dozen had been called out – on what errand?

When they were clear of all walls and out on the wide moor, that dark figure at the head of their troop drew rein, and waited till they came up round him. It was too dark to see his face; but his height and broad shoulders showed up against the torn, stormy dusk of the sky above the hillside, and there was a faint glinting on the dark mail of his sleeves and on his steel helmet from those red flickering lights in the sky of the far North.

A young man, not more than twenty-four years old, he was as stalwart as any of the older, hardened moss-troopers in his train, and one and all felt his eye upon them, even in the darkness, as he spoke in a low yet rather harsh vibrant voice.

'Well, lads, we're out for a bag of English gold! But don't wag your jaws open, for it's for none of our keeping. This is no march-treason, stealing English gear in time of truce. We are riding against traitors, and the gold is being brought from England to pay the rebel troops. Last week the Lords of the Congregation declared the Good Queen was no longer Regent, and stamped their declaration with a forged seal. They asked England for a thousand men to help them fight against their lawful ruler.'

There was a deep angry growl at this last; it was worse than treason, worse even than march-treason against the Border law between the countries, for it was inviting the ancestral enemy of centuries to come and invade their homes yet again. There was not a man there who had not suffered from the last invasion just over a dozen years ago, when the English had tried to capture the baby Queen Mary of Scots as a bride for their boy King, Edward VI.

The little Queen had been sent safe to France; King Edward had died in his sixteenth year; but the vale of Teviot and the fair fields of Merse and Lothian had been turned into a desert, and hundreds of villages and many market towns and castles and monasteries had been burnt and smashed to ruin.

'Then let it be a killing job tonight, sir,' said an older, gruffer voice. It came from the heavy shape of a man who leaned with bowed shoulders over his horse's neck. 'I'll not hear it said that an Englishman lay under me and ever got up again.'

'That's old Toppet Hob's growl, I'd know it a mile off. No hope of your lying tonight on top of an Englishman, Hob; it's a neighbour we're out after, John Cockburn, a far cousin of mine by marriage, and you'll keep your grimy fists off his throat or you'll have to reckon with his kinsman. Aye, John Cockburn's a traitor, and double-dyed; he is taking English gold again and carrying English gold to his fellow-rebels, curse him! But we'll lift that last burden from his conscience. We'll wait for him in the wood below

Hailes Castle as he skirts the bog on his way from Berwick, and spring an ambush on him. So wind your scarves well round your necks, my lambs, lest you get a sore throat from cold steel. When you get to the wood, keep silent as death, and remember that if you're scared of the dark this All Hallows' E'en, John Cockburn's men will be more so when such ugly goblins as yourselves spring out on him.'

He swung his horse round and thudded over the moor, his men after him in the same sweeping movement, for there was no dallying when the Gay Gailiard led a raid, and no wish for it. The wind was in their faces, sharp and damp from the east, with a salt tang in it from the sea. They sang low as they rode, in a curious laughing mutter of voices, the raiding song of their clan:

'Little wot ye wha's coming?
Hob and Tam and a's coming,
Fargy's coming, Willie's coming,
Little wot ye wha's coming!'

And so on through all the names of their company in turn over and over, until they came down the moor into the shelter of the hollow and saw the hill of Traprain rise above them, a black sleeping monster hunched against the dim sky and racing clouds. There in the scanty wood the Galliard halted his men, and their muttering song died on the wind.

There was wild weather in the upper air, may all the saints hold it there and not let it come down on them in heavy rain and rack his old shoulders with cramp again, prayed Toppet Hob devoutly, wishing the New Religion didn't prevent his vowing a candle to Our Lady if she'd keep the wet off his back. A chill comfortless business this New Religion, warning a man off the saints and any hope of driving a fair bargain with them.

Now the men were all huddled together under the bare sootblack trees. An owl went blundering heavily up out of the low scrub of heather and whin, and Willie Wallocky let a screech out of him that he hoped to God would pass muster as that of the bird. It

didn't, but a muttered curse and warning was all that it called down on him for the moment.

The sour smell of hot wet leather from the sweating horses cooled to a chill steam. the darkness settled on them, deepened slowly; the silence widened to an enormous gulf. Farther and farther off, the sounds of night reached out to them, the cry of a startled curlew, the sough of the wind in the sedges, the whisper and rush of dead leaves swirled up from the wet ground and scurrying on the wind.

And always close round them were the sounds they made themselves for all their care, the stifled yawns that broke in a gasp, their whistling breath as they blew on their hands to keep them from stiffening with the cold and damp, the squelching of a horse's hoofs in the mud, stamping and fidgeting, and once or twice, shatteringly, the sudden trumpet of his sneeze. But this was rare, for these small rough-coated beasts that could leap so nimbly over the peat-hags in the dark and find a foothold in the slippery morass knew on what sort of errand they were out.

The wind whistled shriller; more than one man could have sworn he heard the thin cackling cries of witches in the upper air. But the furies that drove down on them were gusts and spurts of rain, swishing down on their heads and shoulders, trickling under the thick folds of the rough woollen scarves wound so closely round their necks for defence against sword thrusts, groping with icy fingers farther and farther down against their shrinking skins as they shivered in this wet chasm of utter darkness.

To their leader all that mattered was that the night was all but past, and had he missed his prey.

The rain stopped. The trees that had waited with him all these hours, so close to him that he could smell their wet mossy bark, now began to take their shape slowly with the dawn. The stars between the racing clouds were growing small and dull; the hump of Traprain was black once more against a rim of pewter; the night was over, then the quarry had escaped his grip. John Cockburn must have got some warning of his movements and smuggled his bag of gold safe across the Border to Edinburgh, into the hands of the 'Bastard of Scotland', Lord James Stewart,

leader of the Lords of the Congregation, and of his prime agent, Mr John Knox.

He heard the thudding of hoofs on the wet moor. At the distant sound every man tightened his horse's girths and clambered into the saddle, stiff with cramp but ready before the scout reached them with news that their quarry was coming. The Galliard thrust a numbed foot into his stirrup, the fierce joy and heat of action already warming his blood. Not for nothing had he held his men in leash all this chill night.

It was still quite dark in the little wood, but John Cockburn knew the ground almost as well as the kinsman lying in wait for him, and he and his men would be off their guard, nearing the end of the night and of the journey. That end would come quicker than Cockburn thought for; he would see these familiar trees suddenly come alive and moving, rushing round him like demons in the darkness.

Now the Galliard could hear the creak of saddles, a clink of harness, and horses clumping heavily, slowly, tired with their journey. He stuck spurs into his horse, and Corbie sprang forward with a shrill whinny, as eager for the fray as his rider, who answered with a yell of joy, taken up by his men. They swung in among them, scattering them, a man shrieked that the devil was upon them, there were shouts and oaths and the clashing of steel.

The Galliard's eyes, said his men, could see in the dark, and they saw at first glance the heavy lump of the portmanteau jingling at Cockburn's saddle-bow. With a blow of his sword he cut Cockburn down from his horse, another cut severed the strap that fastened that clanking bag, and the Galliard swung it on to his own saddle, and galloped off with a halloa to his men.

'Hey, my night hawks,' he called to them, laughing, 'has that warmed your cold feet as it has mine?'

Said Long Fargy, 'That was a grand ding you gave him, sir.'

Said Toppet Hob, 'I'm thinking Your Lordship kept my hands off your kinsman for the pleasure of cracking his head yourself!'

'Is he dead?' asked wee Willie in an excited squeak, for he had not yet seen a man killed.

'Not he,' said his lord. 'It takes more than that to cleave our family's brain-pans.'

They joked together, the men as much at ease with their lord as with each other, now that their job was over and he was well pleased.

'There'll be great cursing at Cockburn's the night,' they prophesied. 'It's they who'll be crying this time "Fy, lads, cry a', a', a', my gear's a' ta'en!"'

'And Cockburn's lost gear will cost him more than the lifting of a herd of cows.'

'Aye, and it will cost his masters more,' the Galliard told them. 'We've put a good chapter of Lamentations into Johnny Knox's next sermon.'

'I mind him well as a lad in Haddington,' growled old Toppet Hob, as though the worst thing that could be known of a man was his birthplace.

'Will they raise the Hot Trod on us?'

'They'll not dare,' said their lord, 'they'll have to keep this night's work quiet. The Queen of England won't thank them for bringing it into the open!'

But he did not feel as sure as he sounded. And it was for his castle of Crichton, not the nearer one of Hailes, that he was making.

A streak of angry red had begun to fire the iron edge of the clouds; it showed the black shapes of horsemen riding fast up over the hillside, and far behind them, on the moorland path below the wood, a pair of seagulls swooping and screaming over a group of bent forms huddled round a prostrate figure.

Big Bess was trying to whisk eggs to stir into her pan of Friar's Chicken with the one hand while with the other she turned the spit on which a haunch of venison was frizzling and sputtering.

'I have but the one pair of hands,' she was wont to tell her mistress with untiring insistence on an indisputable fact.

The kitchen door of the Laird of Sandybed's house at Haddington stood open to the stonewalled passage that in its turn was open to an oblong slice of sky and running water. This was not because the

kitchen was hot to suffocation and reeking of roast meat, fried fat and cinnamon, nor yet because Bess liked to get a hurried glimpse of the shallow Tyne that flowed outside her master's back door, very convenient for the rubbish and slop-pails; but because the grey oblique light given her by those two doors was all she had to cook by.

And suddenly that was obscured.

'If that's yourself, Simmy o' the Syke, for the Lord's sake have the sense to come in and not stand blocking the light on me,' she yelped on a high yet full-throated note like that of a hound.

'It's not himself,' said a strange voice, deep yet rather harsh, that sent the blood tingling through her veins.

She swung round so quickly that she spun the bowl with the eggs on to the floor.

'Mary have mercy!' she breathed, crossing herself, before she remembered that both words and action were a legal offence.

In the doorway was a tall stalwart young man, splashed with mud to his head and shoulders and with water dripping from him as he stood with his legs apart, his arms clutching a heavy portmanteau to his chest, his swarthy head cocked and his eyes scanning her with so merry yet ruthless a scrutiny that poor Bess felt hotter than the kitchen fire had made her. Only wee Simmy o' the Syke knew that inside that great gawky frame was a timid and modest being that leaned on his tenderness for protection, although he barely reached her shoulder.

'What are you doing here – staring like that at a decent body?' she demanded.

'That's a poor word for your splendid body, my Queen of the Amazons!' And he let the bag slide to the ground with a jingling crash and came over to her at one stride.

'I'm not your Queen, and my name's not Agnes, it's Bess, and – and – the men don't like me as a rule, I'm so big,' she finished weakly as he put an arm round her waist and stood with his shoulder, touching hers, which was almost on a height with his own.

'The very thing I like best about you at this moment. I want your clothes. Will you take off your petticoats for me, Bess?'

Instinctively she swung out a fist like a ham to box his ear, but thought better of it as she saw the flash in his eye. This was not a man to anger lightly, even in fun, and he was a noble, she had seen and heard it from the first really.

'I'll do no such thing!' she exclaimed in shocked tones.

'You will – for the Lord Lieutenant!'

'Oh mercy! I might ha' known it!' she cried on a note of terror. 'But I've never set eyes on Your Lordship, I've been away with my married sister since a bairn—'

He snatched off her apron.

She gasped out, 'You'll not force a poor girl!'

'I'd never force a girl my own size! What d'you think of me?'

'What I've heard,' she stammered ruefully.

'Then hear this: I've no time for raping, I'm on the run, so off with those things – hurry now or I'll tear them from you. They're after me.'

He was dragging off his wet leather-jack and breeches as he spoke. She was quick enough then to strip herself of her bodice and skirt and help him to bundle himself into them, while he laughed and joked like a schoolboy dressing up for a prank. She dealt with their fastenings for him before she flung a plaid round her massive shoulders.

'Now look out of the back door and see if anyone's following,' he commanded. 'If there's no one, then shut and bolt it. Never mind your shift.'

She did as she was told and came back with a grave face. 'Not a body to be seen, my lord, but I heard the bay of hounds far upstream.'

'They'll lose the scent at the water. I turned my horse loose there and came down the river-bed.'

'Eh, sir, is it the Hot Trod?'

'Aye, Bessie, they're after me with bug'es and bloodhounds and all. Now fetch Sandybed to me – and I'll turn this spit for you in case anyone comes.'

The Laird of Sandybed was another Cockburn, a distant and humble relation both of John Cockburn and of the young

Lord Lieutenant. He came padding down the kitchen stairs in his slippers, neighing feebly with anxiety, an elderly man with reddish-grey whiskers, his fluffy face at this moment very white about the gills.

He had already heard flying rumours of the portmanteau raid, and fondly believed that the author of it was safe, or not, in his castle at Crichton – but here he was in Sandybed's own kitchen, and in his own servant-maid's clothes, and here – God help him! – was that ominous black portmanteau plump in the middle of the kitchen floor, along with an overturned bowl and a creeping mess of raw eggs into which he stepped before he noticed.

'Eh – eh – my lord! – you here, and in such a guise!'

The Galliard swept him a curtsy, eyeing him with cruel amusement. 'This is a bad day for you, Sandybed, but I'll make it a good one both for you and your heirs if I rid myself of this cold feeling round the roots of my neck.'

'What feeling, my lord?'

'Why, a foretaste of the axe, man!'

'You're not outlawed? They'd never put the Lieutenant to the horn!'

'This is not a horning, it's a hanging job. The Bastard and his spaniel the noble Earl of Arran are at the gates of Crichton with cannon and a couple of thousand men – if they're not inside the Castle by now. I've told Somerville it's no use to defend it.'

'Eh, dreadful, dreadful! Crichton – the fairest of all, your castles! All the expense your father put himself to, getting those stonecutters from France – I always said – I always said—'

But he had better not say what he had always said of such extravagance, so he only neighed plaintively, 'Eh, what evil times we live in! No man is safe, no man! After all the care I've taken to keep out of it all! You'll not be staying the night?'

'Three or four, more likely.'

At this, Sandybed, quite unaware of what he was doing, pranced feebly up and down and wiped his eggy foot against the side of the portmanteau.

'I never knew you spurned money,' observed his visitor; 'there

are £3,157 in that bag, all counted out by Queen Elizabeth herself on the floor with the help of her minister, Cecil. It's a weight, I can tell you, to carry downstream in one's arms.'

Sandybed hopped back as though the bag had burnt his foot.

'*You* carried it here! But where is Your Lordship's bodyguard?'

'What use of a bodyguard against two thousand men? I only had a quarter of an hour's warning before they got to Crichton – time enough to leap on a horse barebacked, but no time for saddle or spurs, or boots either for that matter. But I've got the bag.'

'Ah, God be praised!' Bess bayed from the doorway, wrapped in her plaid. 'Your Lordship will have Tom Armstrong's to-name from now on – "Luck i' the Bag"!'

After three days of wearing Bess's clothes and making a show of turning the spit most of the time, the Lord Lieutenant managed to get himself and his bag to Borthwick Castle. There his Captain, John Somerville, arrived with the enemy's terms. The money must be handed over to them instantly, and reparation made to 'that honourable and religious gentleman' John Cockburn, who had shown himself so 'very diligent and zealous for the work of the Reformation', and was now as a result lying grievously wounded. If the Lord Lieutenant refused to obey these commands, then he would have his castle of Crichton sacked and burnt and his property confiscated.

'And they've left Captain Forbes and fifty hagbut men in charge until they carry out their orders,' John Somerville finished on a dour and heavy note.

'Where are the Bastard and Arran?'

'Gone back to Edinburgh, sir, and none too soon for them. D'Oysel took the opportunity you gave him by their absence to lead a sortie from Leith against the rebels and drive them back to Edinburgh. They put up hardly any fight.'

'Why, where were the rest of their leaders?'

'In church, listening to a "comfortable sermon" by Mr John Knox.'

'He'll need to make it a deal more comfortable after that repulse,' his lord remarked, 'the more when he knows they've no money to pay their troops.'

'He knows it – "deadly news", he called it.'

'Well he may. Their men are beginning to desert already; if it goes on they'll never be able to hold Edinburgh.'

'Your Lordship won't give up the subsidy to them, then?'

'Don't be a fool, Somerville!'

The Captain, a gaunt man with a bleak nose and grizzled grey hair, looked at his master in some perplexity. This young man was as tough a customer as many of the robbers that he was privileged to hang, yet he had no second thoughts about flinging his property to the flames, since he could thereby preserve the spoils he had won for the Queen Regent instead of letting them fall into the hands of her enemies. 'Ah well, it's a great thing to be only twenty-four,' the Captain finally summed it up to himself.

Aloud he said, despondently pulling his long nose, 'It's little luck Your Lordship has got out of the bag.'

'Has Bess handed on that nickname, then?'

'Bess? I have not the full list of Your Lordship's wenches.'

Somerville sounded mortally offended, but relented enough to add, 'It's your own men are calling you "Luck i' the Bag".'

His Lordship for all answer flung himself out of his chair and was marching up and down the room, running his fingers through his rough black hair, tugging at it, his hot reddish coloured eyes bright with anger.

'Curse the Bastard!' he burst out. 'As to that sickly wheyfaced mooncalf Arran, if he dares set a finger on any of my goods I'll send him a challenge to mortal combat.'

'He'll not accept it,' said the older man dryly, but his master looked so black at this that he tried to cheer him by telling him that d'Oysel had written of his raid to the French Ambassador at the English Court, and told him to tax Queen Elizabeth with her double dealing in subsidizing the Scots rebels.

'She'll deny it of course, she'll deny anything, and her Envoy is trying to make the Lords of the Congregation deny it too –

much they care if her face is blackened, when they never mind the grime on their own!'

The Earl of Arran, son of the Duke of Hamilton and Châtelherault, and the heir to the Scottish throne most favoured by the rebels and their English party (there was considerable talk of marrying him to the young Queen Elizabeth), was put in charge of the punitive expedition on Crichton, with three hundred horsemen to carry off all that could be carried, and to destroy the rest. Only the walls and the work of the French stonecutters would outlast the flames.

John Somerville, grimmer and gaunter than ever, came back again with news of it; and he and his master went up on the tower of Borthwick Castle where they could see the dun clouds of smoke rising in huge columns, flame-reddened at the lower edges, and spreading on the wind for miles round.

'They've taken all the furniture except the big beds,' said Somerville with the sour relish of one who knows and tells the worst; 'and those they're burning with the rest. The oak coffers and treasure-chests are halfway to Edinburgh by now.'

'And the charter-chest?'

'Aye, sir.'

'I wonder they didn't use the title-deeds and family papers to light the fire!'

'They didn't do that' – Somerville never perceived irony – 'but the rare glass that the Fair Earl brought from Venice has all been smashed by the troopers. It's well he didn't live to see it, for he set great store by those toys.'

The present Earl, who was anything but fair, knitted his black brows together, seeing again those opalescent goblets, light as bubbles, and fantastic ships and dragons, that his father had packed and brought home from Italy with such infinite care, and which he himself as a boy had never been allowed to touch.

'What odds?' he broke out roughly. 'My father lost more in his time than a little glass too brittle to use. And it's like enough I'll lose more than a houseful of gear. I'm not an inland Scot to sit snug at home and never smell the smoke of my own barns.' He suddenly

burst into a roar of laughter, and told his astonished Captain, 'It's your face, man, squinting down your long nose at that smoke! What are you looking so glum for? Am I to yelp like any old wife for her cow or the three coverlids off her bed? The Black Douglas was right, "It's better to hear the lark sing than the mouse cheep."'

Those odd reddish eyes were gleaming with an excitement strange to Somerville. Yet the Captain had borne the loss of his own house and goods more than once; it was the common lot of those who lived on the Border.

'Aye,' he said, 'but I had thought to see the end of that in my time. The last King worked hard enough to make the furze bush keep the cow, but it's little use to hang the robbers and reivers, if rebellion is fostered by the highest in the land. It used to be cattle raids, but now it's civil war.'

And he let a groan out of him ('like a sick bullock,' the Galliard remarked in exasperation); he was past fifty, and tired, and his wife was expecting her tenth, and what was the use of bringing more and more children into a world that never seemed to get any nearer to a breathing space of peace – no, not for all its new laws and new religions and new books of the gospels to make every man feel he was as wise as the priest – aye, and discoveries of new countries filled with gold, and new weapons to make war more deadly and therefore more certain. But people were just as poor, property as insecure, life as difficult and unsafe. 'The world changes damned little,' he mumbled in conclusion to his thoughts.

His master was not listening to the monotonous growl of his Captain's voice. He was leaning on the parapet of the tower, looking out over the wide rolling hills, and those clouds and wreaths of smoke that darkened the horizon of this bright autumn sunshine. His blood still tingled with that strange exultation – let them take his goods, burn his house, batter it to the ground if they care to waste so much powder on it – what odds did that make to him? He'd have the less to worry over!

In this moment of loss and defiance he was at one with the host of his fellow-countrymen on the Border, known only by their nicknames in the songs that were sung and never written down,

such names as the Galliard and Luck i' the Bag, more his own than any of the hereditary titles in his charter-chest, since they had been won by himself. He was the Queen's Lord Lieutenant on the Border, the highest office to be held by a Scottish subject, with absolute power to send letters in the name of his Sovereign to command his neighbours on pain of death; yet he was part of that remarkable commonwealth of the Border, hardly to be distinguished from his men in battledress, and now, like them, made to realize that his castle, like their cottages, was a thing to be left quickly and without care.

A fat horse and a fair woman,
Twa bonny dogs to kill a deer —

that was as much property as a man could wish, if he would ride light in the saddle, and only so could he ride light of heart.

Nothing of this came out in words, even to himself, only a sudden whoop of rage against Arran that rang out on a note of fierce joy. 'By the faith of my body, I'll get my pleasure yet of yon straw-coloured tatter-boggart – I'll pull his house about his long asses' ears and himself inside it! Let Arran slug it in bed while I take to the heather – I'll wake him yet to defend his life – aye, and I'll light my candle at the flames of his house to lead me in the darkness better than moon or star.'

'Your Lordship cannot,' came the dry reminder, 'for he has my Lord James Bastard's armies behind him, and you have only your own men.'

'You are right as usual, damn you!'

And he rattled down the winding stone stair of the tower to write instead his challenge to single combat 'armed as you please, on horse or foot, unto the death'.

But there too John Somerville was right. Arran sent back a dignified reproof that it was the 'deed of a thief to beset a gentleman's road and rob him of his goods', and promised to uphold it by force of arms 'the next time I come that way'. But he wrote this from as far away as Stirling, where he was well guarded,

and seemed in no hurry to come out of it by any way.

The bag of gold safely reached the Queen Regent, and the effect was what its captor had hoped: the rebel troops besieging Leith, short of both pay and food, deserted in ever larger numbers; the next attack of the Regent's troops broke their ranks; and within one week of that 'dark and dolorous night', as their preacher, Mr John Knox, always referred to that night of All Hallows' E'en, the army of the bastard Lord James Stewart had to retreat from Edinburgh to Stirling.

They made the move at midnight in a disorder that was all but a rout, the rabble of Edinburgh, risen from their beds to run after them, throwing stones, flouting and hooting at them. 'The sword of dolour passed through our hearts,' as Mr Knox lamented, even while he contrived to lay the blame of it on his allies, telling his noble leaders, the Lord James and the Duke of Châtelherault, that they were nothing but 'a bragging multitude'. It was not a comfortable sermon.

Yet he too had his moment of exultation in loss, when he told them in that same sermon that 'whatsoever shall become of us and of our mortal carcasses, I doubt not but that this cause, in despite of Satan, shall prevail'.

But for the moment Satan, the generic term for all who opposed Mr Knox, prevailed; the siege of Leith was raised, and the Queen Regent able to march out of it and back into Edinburgh. She owned to the luck the bag had brought her, and told her Lord Lieutenant to name his reward.

He asked for eighteen hundred men to lead against the rebels at Stirling, with leave to pause a few hours on the way to burn and loot a castle of Arran's.

This happened in 1559, just over a year after Queen Elizabeth had come to the English throne, half a year before the Queen Regent of Scotland died, and while her daughter Mary, Queen of Scots in her own right, was away in France, married to the little French King, François II.