

Knots and Brui

A One Act Play

by

Bob Davidson

Written between 19th and 29th July 2009

Knots and Brui – Bob Davidson

Cast

JECK – Foreman of the Bothy. A quiet leader whose word goes. He leads by example and is the most experienced horseman/plooman in fact he is a Champion Ploughman. He is late twenties maybe just thirty and is a handsome upright pipe smoking figure.

ROSS – Second horseman. He too is late twenties, maybe thirty. Very deep, moody and dour. Saw a lot he would like to forget in the trenches in Flanders. A troubled soul.

SANDY – Third horseman. About twenty years old and full of enthusiasm for life and the future. A hard worker, not intent on putting off time.

GEORDIE – The orraman. General farm worker with a good sense of humour. He's maybe in his mid to late twenties. Totally un-ambitious and is happy with repetitive mundane tasks. Plays the fiddle and dreams of far off places but knows he will never see them.

THE LOUN – Fourteen year old boy whose job it is to help wherever he is needed on the farm. He would mostly help the orraman. He also has the very important task of making the porridge for the others each morning. The play takes place on his first day in the bothy.

PHOTOGRAPHER – a roving professional photographer who cycles around The Mearns, Angus and East Perthshire taking photos of farming life.

Knots and Brui – Bob Davidson

The house lights dim as we hear the sound of a solo fiddle playing from behind the curtain. The curtain rises during the tune and as the lights come up we see Geordie sitting on a kist playing his fiddle in a bothy. There are another couple of kists either side of a fireplace. The fire is lit and there is a bench centre stage angled towards the fire. There is one door to the bothy, upstage right, it opens and The Loun enters warily - clutching his bunnet. He is fourteen years old. He sits nervously on one of the kists by the fire until Geordie finishes his tune. The year is 1924.

GEORDIE

(lowering his fiddle)

Well... dae ye ken the name o' that tune?

The Loun shakes his head

Naw?... *(sniffs)* Naw, neither dae I. I learned it b' lug aff a horseman fae North Leys. He didnae ken the name o' it either. Am I right in thinkin' you'll be the new loun?

The new loun nods

Hae ye no' got a tongue in yer heid?

THE LOUN

Aye.

GEORDIE

Aye, he says! Well at least that's a start eh?

He crosses to The Loun and holds out his hand.

I'm Geordie... but you can ca' me Dod.

They shake hands.

THE LOUN

I'm Wullie.

GEORDIE

Are ye now?

THE LOUN

Aye, Wullie McGowan.

GEORDIE

Aye well, Wullie McGowan you'll no' need a name here, if you're the loun, 'cause the Loun is whit ye'll be ca'ed. Until we get a new loun, then you jist might get ca'd Wullie. A'right Loun?

THE LOUN

Aye.

GEORDIE

Can ye play the fiddle?

THE LOUN

Naw...

GEORDIE

... squeezebox? Moothie? Comb and paper?

The Loun shakes his head.

Gawd, you're no' much yis... Can ye work a pair o' horse?

THE LOUN

Aye...

GEORDIE

... havers! Can ye hell!... Oh weel never mind eh? You've time enough...

The door opens and ROSS enters.

ROSS

(to Geordie)

Aye, aye... wha's this? The new foreman?

GEORDIE

Naw... that's Wullie McGowan.

ROSS

Will that be Wullie McGowan the new foreman?

GEORDIE

Och, dinnae Ross... he's the new loun.

ROSS

So – you're no' the foreman?

THE LOUN

(shyly)

Naw.

ROSS

(skelping The Loun on the lug)

Well, get yer erse aff the foreman's kist.

The Loun stumbles sideways and Geordie points to the bench and nods to the loun to sit there.

GEORDIE

This is Ross... *(whispers)* ill natured bugger. He's no' the foreman either.

Knots and Brui – Bob Davidson

ROSS

Naw, maybe no' but at least I'm no' the Orraman!

GEORDIE

I can work a pair as guid as you ony day and fine ye ken it.

ROSS

But ye dinnae though dae ye?

GEORDIE

But I could if I wanted tae, I wid jist rather be an Orraman that's a'...

ROSS

...Aye so ye can lie half the morning in yer bed and louse half an oor afore a'body else!

GEORDIE

Every ferm needs an orraman, and naebody can grape dung like me! And naebody can thin neeps like me! And naebody can play the fiddle like me...

ROSS

...naebody'd want tae...

The door opens and JECK enters...

GEORDIE

... I'm quite a talent.

JECK

Ye're, quite a big heid. Is there ony tea?

GEORDIE

I'll get some Jackie...

He whispers to the Loun while pouring some black looking tea into a bowl.

... he *is* the foreman! That's how I'm getting him his tea. Whit he says goes... but he's a' richt. He's the first, Ross is the second, and Sandy's the third. Is that no' right Jackie?

JECK

Whatever you say, you blethering idiot. Spikin o' idiots. You'll never guess what that idiot Thomson is up tae?

GEORDIE

Oor idiot Thomson?

JECK

Sandy, aye... you'll never guess?

Geordie and Ross turn to Jeck with interest.

He's washing his hair and his mouser and his oxters in the horse trough...

ROSS

... Eh?

JECK

I'm telling ye lads, that's whit I saw.

ROSS

Well I'm no' letting ma pair drink oot o' there again.

JECK

Is he going daft in the heid dae ye think?

ROSS

What dae ye mean, *going* daft in the heid? He's been daft in the heid a' the time av kent him. It'll be for the mannie coming tae tak oor picture... which is another waste o' bloody time.

GEORDIE

There's nae need tae wash just cause ye're getting yer photy ta'en.

JECK

Naw, Dod... ye're right. I think it's Lizzie Watson.

GEORDIE

Ye think what's Lizzie Watson? The wee lass that works in the hoose?

JECK

Aye, I think oor Sandy has a notion to dip his spurtle in her porridge pot.

GEORDIE

(clamping his hands over the Loun's lugs)

Jeck! The Loun! Man yer coorse bugger!

Jeck laughs and spits in the fire and kindles up his pipe.

JECK

I think she's been pittin an extra dollop of butter or an egg in his milk can each morning.

GEORDIE

(Staring at Jeck for a moment)

Does that actually mean that she's been pittin an extra dollop o' butter or an egg in his milk can each morning... or does it mean something else?

JECK

Whit? Naw... it means just that!

Knots and Brui – Bob Davidson

GEORDIE

Och, weel... she sometimes does that wae me tae. She's a braw wee lass Lizzie.

SANDY enters.

Och guid luck tae them baith...

SANDY

Baith o' wha?

GEORDIE

Eh? Oh... Ross's pair.

SANDY

And whit are they needin' guid luck fir?

GEORDIE

Drinking oot the trough noo that's it's foo o' the clairt fae your oxters.

SANDY

Ach ye can rib a' ye like. Nae herm in being clean. Wha's this?

GEORDIE

This is Wullie McGowan, wur new loun.

SANDY shakes hands wae the loun.

SANDY

Please tae meet ye Wullie, I'm Sandy... third horseman. No' long since I was a loun m'sel. Whaur are ye fae?

THE LOUN

Milton O'Kettins.

SANDY

God that's aboot eight mile awa, did ye trevel a' the wey here?

THE LOUN

Naw, I came by bike.

SANDY

A bike! God Almichty ye'll be telling us ye own a ferm tae!

JECK

Your faither wis Rab McGowan?

THE LOUN

Aye.

JECK

I kent yer faither... he wis a guid man. He ploov'd a straight furra. I wis in the bothy wae him at Milton O' Campsie. Jist for the one fee, but he was a guid lad. He wis killed in France eh?

THE LOUN

Aye... the Somme.

JECK

I lost my brother Douglas there. Hell o' carry on... Ross there was gassed at Passchendaele.

GEORDIE

Pity the Germans huddnae used laughing gas, the bugger mightnae huv been sae crabbit.

ROSS

(shaking his head)

And maybe if you'd been there you widnae huv been sae bloody lippie.

SANDY

Geordie would huv jist hud tae play a couple o' Strathspeys on thon fiddle o' his and a' the Germans wid huv got oot their trenches and ran a' the wey back tae Berlin.

ROSS

You young buggers huvnae a clue. Ken at the hairst efter the binder's loused and the shaives are lying about the park as far as ye can see? Well that's whit the bodies were like. Lying there like shaives o' corn. That's jist what it reminded me o'. And noo when I see shaives lying oot efter the binder, they remind me o' bodies. Except they're no stinking like deid rats in alow the flairboards...

GEORDIE

Ross, the laddie's faither!

ROSS

He wis one o' the lucky anes. Efter what we went through, to come back here and die in slavery.

JECK

This isnae slavery... t'hell we get every Setarday efternin aff noo!

ROSS

And whit bloody guid does that dae us?

Ross exits.

SANDY

God, he's richt crabbit the day. It's no' oor fault he wis in the war.

GEORDIE

He's mair contentit when he's working.

JECK

A'body is.

GEORDIE

Och aye... keeps yer mind fae wearying I suppose.

SANDY

Dae ye think there'll ever be another war?

GEORDIE

Naw... never. No' like the last ane onyway...

JECK

Ah, I widnae be sae sure...

GEORDIE

Naw, nae way Jeck... lads widnae go.

JECK

Ye hink no'? They went the last time.

GEORDIE

Aye, but that's because they didnae ken what tae expect. A'body kens noo. Lads widnae ging. You think Ross wid go again if ye telt him tae?

JECK

He maybe widnae hae a say in the matter...

GEORDIE

... naw there'd be mutiny man. The working lads would a' refuse. The French mutinied did they no'?

JECK

Aye, at Verdun, damned lot o' guid it did them. Ye wid need a'body tae mutiny, Geordie, no' jist ae side.

GEORDIE

I ken, but in the German army there must hae been hunners if no' thousands o' lads jist like us that maybe worked on German farms or something... daft when ye think about it. I mean if a'body had jist thocht "och, I'm awa hame to get some ploong or harra'ing done" then there wouldnae huv been a war at a'. There wid huv been naebody there tae fight the damned thing. Jist a puckle Generals sitting on their cuddies wae nabody tae roar at. Naw I cannae see it ever happening again. No onything like the Great War. There micht be wee skirmishes or that, but nothin' like the war in France or Flanders.

SANDY

Ken, Davie Cameron wha used to be the cattler at Newbigging?

JECK

Aye.

SANDY

Well I was speaking tae him last Setarday efternin in Coupar Angus. He's joined the Royal Air Force.

GEORDIE

Davie?

SANDY

Aye.

GEORDIE

Man, I never kent that.

SANDY

Aye, he's been in a year noo. Onyway, he wis hame on leave and he telt me that he wis oot in Mesopotamia...

GEORDIE

Wae the air force?...

SANDY

Aye! Whit dae ye think he'd be daeing in Mesopotamia on his ane? They've been oot there a whiley noo.

JECK

Oor air force is in Mesopotamia?

SANDY

Aye, that's whit I wis telt.

JECK

Whit the hell are they daeing there?

SANDY

Bombing fowk so Davie says. They send oot a hale load o' big de-Haviland bi-planes, bomb some fowk then came back fur mair bombs. It's Davie's job tae load them up.

JECK

Christ he'd be better back here getting some real work done. I cannae understand some fowk... I'm awa tae pay the Laird.

Jakie exits.

THE LOUN

What dae we hae tae pay the Laird fur – I thocht he paid us?

GEORDIE

Whit! Naw that means he's awa' oot fur a pish ye daftie. Right you. Hae you a kist?

THE LOUN

Ma mither's going tae send ower my faither's twa kists the morn.

GEORDIE

Right well yer claes kist'll go there (*he points to stage left - the opposite side from the fire*) and yer meal kist can go there I suppose. That's Jeck's there, (*nearest the fire*) Ross's there. That ane's Sandy's (*getting further from the fire*) and that's mine there. Yours can go next tae ma ane. Everything's in strict order in the bothy. Jeck's first, Ross is second, Sandy's third I'm next and your last. Jeckie's first to sit at the table and he's first tae leave. He leads first oot the stable in the morning and he's first in at night. What he says goes but he's as guid a foreman as I've come across. This is ma third fee here and I'm happy tae bide on fur anither if I'm allowed. Jeck's also first tae wash and yaise the towel so I'm afraid to say your last, so by the time you get a shoty o' the water it'll be gye barkit and the toowel'll be soakit. But that's jist the way it is. Jeck and Ross share this bed – the ane nearest the fire, Sandy and me's in here. You can hae the end ane tae yersel although ye nicht find a rat in there wae ye occasionally! There's a wool blanket there fur ye – jist sleep in yer sark and drawers.

They wander to the fire place.

Right, yer first job in the morning is tae mak the porridge fur the rest o' us. A'body's up at five and the lads'll see tae their horse and you mak the porridge. D'ye ken how tae mak porridge?

THE LOUN

Aye...

SANDY

... aye well see and mak shair ye hae a braw fire going first. Fill the pot fae the pump in the close tae aboot there (*he points*) and hing it on the swey and bring the water tae the boil and then trickle in handfu's o' meal. Dinnae jist fling it in ony auld way. We dinnae want dry knots in tilt. We dinnae want a' knots and brui like bishop's shite, so jist a wee puckle sprinkled in at a time. Dae ye think ye'll manage that?

The loun nods.

GEORDIE

I'll keep ye richt fur yer first week and then ye're on yer ane. Ye'll be working wae me maist o' the time onyway. Pu'ing neeps, spreading dung and seeing tae the tattie pit. You'n me can dae anything and a' thing jist whaur we're needed. Ye'll get a shoty or twa o' the orrabaist and sine efter a whiley we jist nicht let ye tak a load o' neeps in tae toon. But that'll no' be fur a whiley yet so dinnae get ower excited!

SANDY

I can mind the first time I was let awa on ma ane wae the orrabaist and the cairt. Man I thocht I was the bees knees. Whit a feeling that was... awa on ma ane wae a horse and cairt. I thocht I was the laird himsel'.

GEORDIE

Are ye going tae try and bide fur anither fee Sandy?

SANDY

Naw, I've other ideas.

GEORDIE

Oh aye... and wid thae other ideas involve a certain Lizzie Watson maybe?

SANDY

Maybe.

GEORDIE

Man ye dinnae gie much awa dae ye?

SANDY

Aye a' right... me and Lizzie's coorting and we're going tae get merried. We're gonnæ hae the bands cried soon.

GEORDIE

God ye're no' a boy tae hing aboot. Well, well... nae mair bothy life fur you!

SANDY

Naw, this'll be ma last fee in the bothy and then it'll be a cottar hoose fur us. Maybe hae a garden... micht get leave to keep a pig.

GEORDIE

Well mind yer auld bothy cheil Dod when ye come tae kill it!

SANDY

Och aye... I micht send you roond some lard wae an ingin oot the garden. Ye can mak some skirlie.

GEORDIE

Man ye're a richt generous bugger!

SANDY

But me and Lizzie'll no' be in a cottar hoose for long. I hae a notion tae tak the tenancy o' a wee ferm. Fifty or sixty acres, something I can work masel' wae ae pair and Lizzie ge'in me a haund.

GEORDIE

Jist ae pair? So, ye're no' going tae hae us bothy lads aboot yer place then?

SANDY

Naw... it'll jist me and Lizzie... until the bairns come along.

GEORDIE

Man you've got it a' worked oot. I'm fair jealous...

SANDY

Well as Jeck says - this is no' a world fur pitting off time in.

GEORDIE

Naw... he's richt. I whiles think about going awa tae Canada or maybe the Argentine. They hae some braw big fermes oot there but och I think I'm jist as weel here. I've worked o' ower Angus and The Mearns and I had a fee doon in Fife once but here I am, no' three mile fae whaur I was born. Pu'ing neeps, spreading dung and playing the fiddle. God you would think there wis mair tae life than that!

SANDY

There is man get awa tae America or some roads, see a bit o' the world.

GEORDIE

Och it widnae dae if a'body wis to move aboot a' the time...

SANDY

...us bothy lads dae it a' the time...

GEORDIE

Aye but that's jist roonaboot here. No a' ower the world. A'body'd end up in the wrang place. Toil's toil onyway, nae matter whaur ye are. Pu'ing neeps, spreading dung and playing the fiddle... it's a' I ken. And ken this... I think it's a' I need tae ken. Ye're never going to ken it a' so why try. I wis pit on this earth to pu' neeps, spread dung and play the fiddle. Huh... what mair could a man want eh?

SANDY

Aye well, It widnae dae if we were a' the same. Unless a'body was like me!

GEORDIE

Aye wae yer sweet smelling oxters! But it'll no a' be easy on yer wee ferm Sandy. You'll probably be grafting mair than ever tae mak it pey.

SANDY

I'm no' fairt o' hard work.

GEORDIE

I ken ye're no' man. I'm no' saying that. Ye're as hard a worker as Jeck and God knows there's naebody works harder than him.

SANDY

I'm no' worried whit it'll be like Dod. Dae ye no' understand man... I'll be daeing it fur masel'

Jeck enters with a length of rope.

JECK

Daeing whit fur yersel?

SANDY

I hae a notion o' a wee ferm Jeck.

JECK

Guid lad...

SANDY

... I'm coorting Lizzie Watson and we fancy, after a year or twa, tae git a wee place the gither.

JECK

Coorting Lizzie Watson? (*winks at Geordie*) man, I'd nae idea. Well I wish yous baith a' the very best o' luck. Ye'll probably need it! Richt loun, tak a hod o' that.

He passes the loun, the rope and crosses upstage to a chair which is covered in clothes.

Wha's are thur?

GEORDIE

Ross's

Jeck flings the clothes onto one of the beds and carries the chair over to the loun

JECK

Right you twa... stand there.

Jeck positions Geordie and Sandy downstage centre and passes the rope around them yoking them up like a pair of Clydesdales. He then hands the ends of the rope to the loun and gives him the back of the chair to hold as well - like a plough.

JECK

Right.

Sandy blows a loud raspberry.

Whit was that supposed to be?

SANDY

Meg ay farts efter she's yokit. I'm just trying mak it realistic for the loun.

JECK

Richt noo first thing ye hae tae remember loun is that the horses ken the job better than any man. Ye'll ken that when ye get a shoty o' the orrabaist. It kens the job better

than us a' pit the gither. It'll reverse intae the shafts athoot a word fae onybody. Noo, the three o' yea's a team and tae get them going it's?

THE LOUN

Tck tck

Sandy and Geordie start walking, slowly dragging the chair behind them.

JECK

Guid lad. Noo watch that ploo pint... watch it dissnae dig in or hit a big stane. Right noo... pit them tae the left a bit.

THE LOUN

Hey...

JECK

That's it and noo the right...

THE LOUN

Wheesh.

JECK

Weel done loun. Noo turn them at the end rig... coup yer ploo ower... that's it...

THE LOUN

Wheesh, wheesh.

Sandy and Geordie turnabout and head off back across to stage right on the command...

Tck tck

JECK

Guid... did ye dae this at the skail wae yer chums?

THE LOUN

Aye...

JECK

Noo, straight as an arrow... that's it... gie them a wee word o' encouragement...

THE LOUN

C'mon noo. Ye're daeing fine.

JECK

Aye guid that... we'll mak a plooman o' ye yit. Aye... up at five tae muck oot yer pair and gie them a groom doon. A measure o' bruised oats and some hay and a drink and then it's back in fur yer porridge. Soon as ye louse at denner time, mair tae drink and a puckle o' bruised corn. Then at nicht, fed and watered again and groomed doon fur the night. Ye might look in on them later on and maybe gie them a neep. They're

braw baists the Clydesdale horse. *(He notices the ploughing still in progress)* Richt loun, lousing time. I wis speaking till the fermer's wife. Ye've tae git yer porridge wae us in the morning, but ye've tae git yer meat in the hoose. The maidie'll see ye a'richt.

Ross enters and goes over to his pile of clothes.

ROSS
(accusingly)

Wha's been touching ma claes?

JECK
That wis me... I needed the chair fur a whiley...

ROSS
(Slightly subdued)

Oh... right enough Jeck...

He rakes through the pile of clothes with growing anger...

Oh whaur's ma bicycle sark? Has somebody ta'en it? Whaur is it? That'll be you Geordie Robertson... whit hae ye done wae it?

GEORDIE
Eh? I huvnae touched yer sark man... honest av no'

ROSS
I ken ye're thieving meal oot ma kist and a'

GEORDIE
Oh nae wey man, whit the hell wid I need tae dae that fur? Christ we get meal geid tae us. That's oot o' order Ross...

ROSS
I'll show ye oot o' order... I'll gie ye a thick lug...

He makes a lunge at Geordie but is pulled back by Sandy. There is a brief struggle and Jeck steps in between Ross and Geordie.

JECK
Christ, Ross, I'll no' hae fechting in the bothy...

ROSS
The bastart's got ma sark, I ken he has...

GEORDIE
I dinnae hae his sark. I never touched the damned thing...

ROSS
I left it ower there on the haip o' claes.

GEORDIE

I never touched it... honest Jeckie I huvnae.

Jeck moves close to Ross and looks him in the eye. He slowly raises a finger as if to say "wait a minute". He then grabs Ross by the shirt and fumbles with the material about his neck. After a moment.

JECK

Ross! Third yin doon... ye're wearing the bloody thing!

ROSS

Eh?

JECK

See fur yersel... let him go Sandy.

Ross checks his clothing and sees the garment in question. He slumps down on kist with his face in his hands.

ROSS

Oh Christ, Geordie man, I'm awfy sorry...

GEORDIE

It's a' right man.

ROSS

Naw it's no' I should never accused you o' stealing...

GEORDIE

Naw maybe no'. I'm many things but no' a thief eh?

ROSS

I'm sorry Dod... I dinnae ken whit's gotten in tae me this last while.

GEORDIE

It'll be thur Seterday efternins aff... we'd a' be better workin' eh?

ROSS

Aye... I'm sorry.

GEORDIE

(patting Ross on the shoulder)

It's nae trouble man... as long as ye've got yer sark eh?

ROSS

Aye... I've got my sark.

He checks again below his clothing. A brief general air of gloom descends in the bothy until we hear singing from outside.

Knots and Brui – Bob Davidson

If you like what you've read so far and would like to buy a copy of the complete script or would like to perform the play, please get in touch.

Thanks for reading,

Bob Davidson