

# The Misdeeds of Isobel Grierson

By E. Lynn Linton

Two years afterwards, on March the 10th, 1607, Isabel Grierson, “spous to John Bull,” came into court with anything but clean hands. She was accused of having visited Adam Clarke and his wife—they lying decently in bed, their servant being in the other bed beside them—not as an honest woman, but in the form of a cat, being accompanied by other cats which made a great and fearful noise. Whereat Adam Clarke, his wife, and servant were so affrighted they were almost mad. At the same time arrived the devil in the shape of a black man, and came to the servant girl then standing on the floor, and drew her up and down the house in a fearful manner, first taking the curtche (cap) off her head and casting it into the fire, whereby the poor woman had a sickness which lasted six weeks. Isabel killed William Burnet by casting a cutting of plaid in at his door, after which the devil, for the space of half a year, perpetually appeared to him as a naked child, holding an enchanted picture in his band, and standing before the fire; but sometimes he appeared as Isabel herself, who, when William Burnet called to her by name, would vanish away. So she haunted and harried him till he pined away and died. She bewitched Mr. Brown, of Prestonpans, by throwing an enchanted “tailzie” (cut or piece) of beef at his door, sending the devil to distress him for half a year, appearing to him herself in the form of an infant bairn, and so hardly treating him, that Brown died as Burnet had done. Then she bewitched Robert Peddan, who got no good from any remedy, and knew not what ailed him, until he suddenly remembered that he and Isabel had had a quarrel about nine shillings which he owed her and would not pay; so he went to her and paid her, asking humbly for his health again; which came. Robert Peddan deposed, too, that, being once at his house, she wanted her cat, whereupon she opened his window, put out her hand, and drew the cat in: at which time was working a brewing of good sound ale, which all turned to “gutter dirt.” Another time she or her spirit went at night to his house and drew Margaret Donaldson, his wife, out of her bed, and flung her violently against the floor; whereat the wife was very ill and sore troubled, and cried out on her. Isabel, hearing of this, went to the neighbours, and said they were to bring her and Margaret together again; which they did; and Margaret had her health for nine or ten days. But Meg, not heaving off calling out against her, Isabel went to her, “and spak to hir many devillisch and horribill words,” saying, “The faggot of hell lycht on the, and hell’s cauldron may thow seith in!” So Meg was sick again after this; and as a poor beggarwoman coming to the door to ask meat told her she was bewitched for that she had the right stamp of it, the case grew serious, and Margaret cried out more loudly than before. Then Isabel went again to her house with a creil on her back, and said passionately, “Away, theiff! I sall haif thy hairt for bruitting of nine sae falslie;” which so frightened Meg that she took to her bed, and Isabel was arrested, tried, convicted, and burnt.