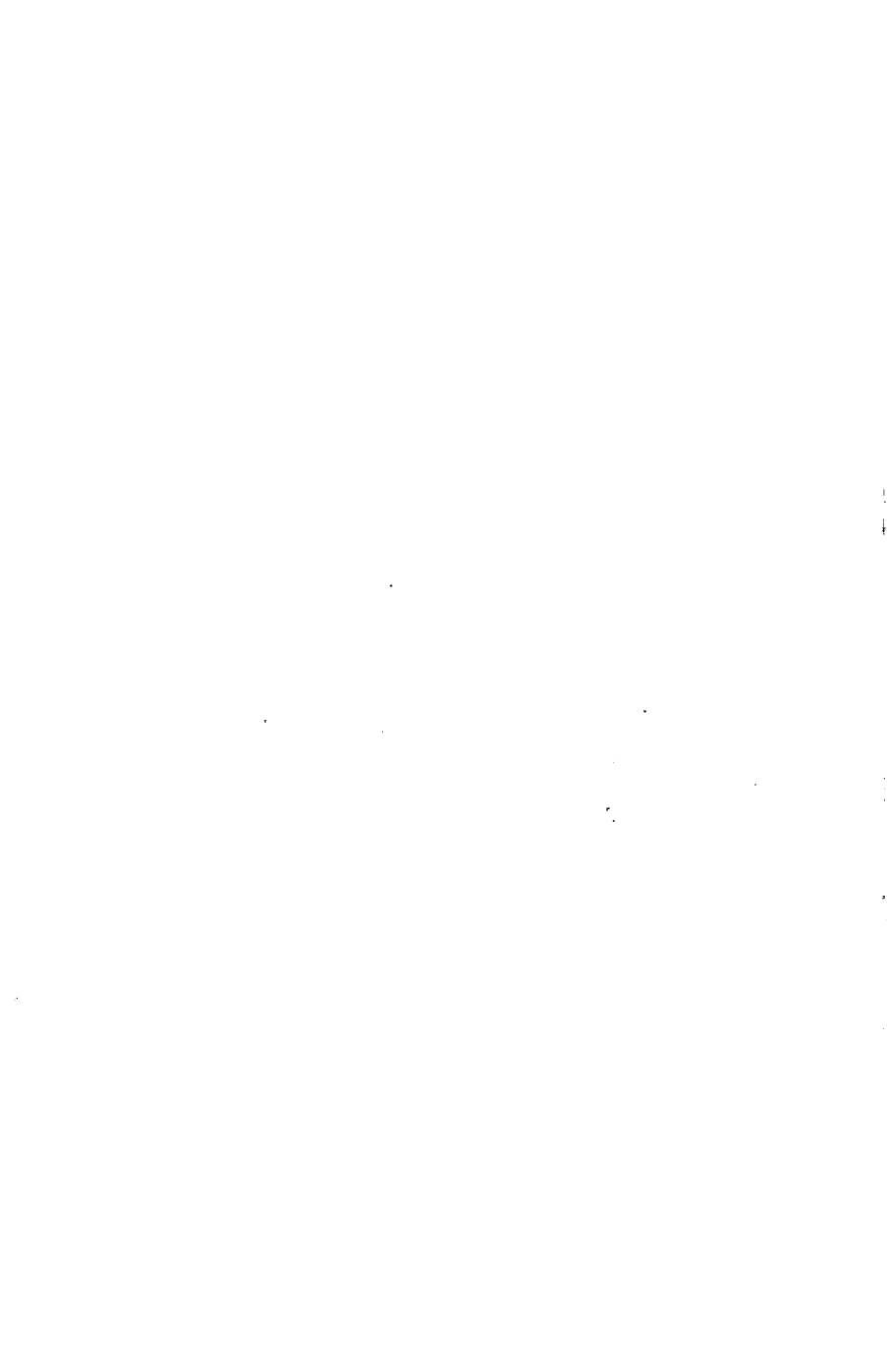


NO TIME
for
SLEEPING

by
DAVID LAMBERT

1958
LAWRENCE & WISHART
LONDON

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FOR
PHYL BELL

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Chapter One

THE Whitefield was a favoured meeting-place even in December. A whin-strewn brae, it stretched for miles into bleak moors that merged, a long day's hike away, with the first wide range of the West Highlands of Scotland.

But here, an old man's walk from the town, was a sheltered area. On this first Sunday morning of December, 1937, the sun broke through with almost summer heat and already many of the long, wrought-iron seats that marked each hundred yards of the beaten path were occupied.

Here you could sit, looking down on a splendid sweep of the Clyde Valley far below, a mile away yet seeming near enough to touch, it was so clear in every detail.

Along the river's edge the shipyard sprawled untidily. An odd collection of tall gantries stood aloof, like storks, above the blackened roofs of squat machine shops where Clyde-built ships and engines took shape beneath the patient hands of craft-proud men.

There, to the left, Fir Hill climbed sharply all the way from the river towards the moors. From this main stem a feathered pattern of tenement-lined streets fanned outwards in an ever-widening arc that would soon reach the Whitefield and engulf it too. At the very edge, a narrow rim of red-roofed bungalows was being built and 'For Sale' notices sprouted invitingly from the rubble-strewn gardens.

Far below, dominating the red and grey patchwork of factory buildings, shops and houses, the compact bulk of the Ferguson Motor Works, even in its Sunday silence, held attention. For, despite the Yard and its proud ships, this was Ferguson's town. From almost every house some worker came each day to the busy factory. But, today being Sunday, they were all free of that compelling call.

Hand in hand along the narrow path that skirted the Whitefield came a gravely strolling young lass and a toddling child. They attracted much attention. There was ample time for leisured study of the pair as they passed by and from every seat along the way heads turned slowly, following them.

It was not surprising. The girl, she was no more than twenty, maybe less, had all the slender grace of a young deer wary in its movements. Jet black hair cascaded loosely to her shoulders in a foam of curls and she brushed the loose strands off her cheeks with a nervous gesture as she walked, conscious of the attention being paid to her and the child.

Within the dark halo of hair her face seemed small and rather pale for youthful health. Yet the great, dark eyes were alive enough as she responded to the many "Hello, Jean" calls greeting her along the way. It was that kind of town. No matter where you went, somebody knew you—and your business, Jean O'Brien thought ruefully.

There were folk on these seats now who could tell every detail of her life. They knew when she was born; the day her father ran off, leaving Ma O'Brien with three wee weans to look after; the day Bill Omond came to live with them.

The thought of Bill gave her new assurance. She had never been ashamed of the life her mother lived with him. He was a good man. She loved him all the more that he was not her father, yet could be so generous in his affection, care and, above all, understanding. All her life, because of him, she had known what it was to face the sly look, the thinly veiled insult. Yet never once had she failed to meet them with an honest answer. She wouldn't start now.

Their mother would often tell of that first day, eighteen years ago, when Bill came on their stair-head looking for lodgings. A braw, well set up lad he had been then, she said. About forty, and a head of fine, grey hair like a silver fox; a cleanly robust health; and a kindness in him that gave her the first real happiness she'd known for many a year.

Yes, it was sin; and maybe Jeannie O'Brien had wept more tears into the pillow this man soon shared with her than folk would ever know. But it was no great penance for the love he

had given her and her three children; Cathie, Mike, and Jean.

Jean was content in the assurance that her Ma did not regret it. Not even now with the upheaval in their home. She was no less content with her own part in that. It was no pleasure to walk here knowing folk were talking about her or to meet the hostile stares of some who were affronted by her actions. But she was not ashamed and offered no apologies.

Father McGrory. It was his duty to warn them of their obligations to the Church. Religious prejudice was strong here and they were still a small minority in this community. Abused, discriminated against for their beliefs, they must cleave all the more together in defence of their own faith. That was true. Could they then afford dissension within their own home? Bill Omond was outside the holy family of his own free will. He was a threat to them and to the Church while he stayed there. So the old priest argued.

Yet was it so? It was true that Bill attacked the clergy here who condoned the brutality of Franco and his fascist army when they revolted against their Government out in Spain. So did she. So did a lot more working folk, Roman Catholics and all kinds. They knew the Church owned land in Spain and didn't like the Government's reforms. But that was what the people voted for and they had every right to get it, Church or no.

Her sister Cathie thought that was profanity. But what did she know about Spain? Nothing except what Father McGrory told her. She never read a newspaper, let alone books.

Anyhow, she should have held her tongue, not run complaining to the priest. Any trouble in their home, she caused it. If she thought for a minute Ma would put Bill Omond out of her life because the clergy said she should do so, she was far mistaken. Cathie had no one but herself to blame that she was the one to go. Maybe she wanted it that way. She'd never liked Bill and had no great affection for any of them. She was better away from them on her own.

Mike now; if he was a casual worshipper, that had less to do with Bill than with his own chronic laziness. He liked the

easy road and always seemed to find it. Even now, away in England, where he was a full-time footballer, he could escape the full force of the conflict and, on his brief visits home, avoid it with the subtle skill he practised on the football field.

Ma was—well, just Ma. Confused, yet steadfast in her faith as in her love for the man who brought her happiness. She would never renounce that love or be ashamed of it.

What of her own feelings? If Bill was evil it assumed a subtle form. The truth was she believed in him with a deeper faith than ever she had found in Church. He was not perfect, with his quick temper and dour moods, but no other man or woman she had ever known was so filled with a true humanity and love of people. Her thoughts blurred in a rush of feeling as she thought of him.

The child at her knee screamed suddenly as a loping greyhound came nosing curiously at this small morsel of humanity. Jean swiped at it with her handbag and the child chuckled in nervous glee as the big dog broke away from them with a yelp of fear.

Jean stroked the child reassuringly. She needed soothing all the time, and little wonder. An orphan refugee from the Civil War in Spain, her mind was still full of the hellish terror of a midnight bombing and hours spent crying, lonely with the dead. When she woke you in the night with her instinctive, clutching fingers and whimpering fear, you could really understand what life had done to her.

Here, in the quiet of a Sunday morning, it was hard to grasp the fact that Spain was a land ravaged by war. Yet there were lads from home out there, in the International Brigade, brave and talented young men who understood the real meaning of fascism and of Franco's armed revolt.

There was this child here too—Molly they had called her—as a steady reminder of what it meant to ordinary folk caught up in a struggle they did not fully understand.

Did she really understand, Jean wondered? It was a question she had asked herself so many times these last few weeks. For it was on this rock that she had made her stand against the Church.

She believed the Church was wrong in defending Franco and she could not stay silent any longer. Her protests were all the more intense for their long suppression. It was this brash intolerance that forced her sister Cathie to seek help from the priest, but even he could not convince her. Then he made the mistake of blaming Bill Omond for her disloyalty and his hopes perished instantly.

Bill had always tried to steer clear of the family conflicts, though he was more than proud of Jean and encouraged her to join in the campaigns for Aid to Spain in which he had been active for more than a year.

Ma suffered most because of the open break in her family. She took no part in politics at all. Yet adopting Molly was her idea. A hint maybe that she agreed with Jean and Bill to that extent at least. And now the battle in Spain was no longer a remote conflict to Jean, but deeply personal and sustained.

For this child there was nothing she would not endure. No mother could have loved her more. She was sure of it, and held Molly close to her aching breasts as if to nourish her there and protect her.

They had so few moments like these. Her days were spent at a bench in Ferguson's and she had no great liking for it. Every time she saw these red-roofed bungalows down there she envied the folk who would enjoy them, dreamed that she might too, and was sobered by the reality of what life held for her. Ferguson's! Still, it was a job, and there were thousands on the dole who would be happy in her place. That thought eased her discontent. More than ever now her pay was needed. Cathie away; Mike away; Bill in hospital——she remembered it again with sudden shock.

Dear, daft Bill. How typical this episode of all his life. Out leading a big demonstration of unemployed workers, carrying the big banner, and him not really fit to stand. When the police charged to disperse them it was sure that great white head of his would be a ready target. So it was.

He'd been sick for days before then. A chronic stomach ulcer that had plagued him for years was in revolt again. But he had a strike on in the foundry where he worked and wouldn't

lay off. And then the demonstration, he would go there as well. So between one thing and another he was in some state when they saw him in the hospital that night. They could joke about it now but it was no laughing matter then. She never wanted to see him like that again.

Ma was visiting him now, straight from ten o'clock Mass. But she was due back home soon and that was enough to turn Jean's thoughts in the same direction. Visiting 'our Bill' was a lively entertainment. He was in fine form again and, if your visit did him no good, you certainly felt the better for an hour spent in his company. Even to hear Ma tell the tale, as she would in every detail, was a tonic. Jean took her small companion's hand and turned once more towards Fir Hill and home, watched in passing by the lazing groups along the way. On a Sunday morning there was little else to do. She could hardly grudge them their brief interest.

Chapter Two

AT last, after fourteen days of arguments, Bill Omond had won his second pillow. Now he could see all round the ward. The long, white row of numbered beds became a wide new world to conquer and he rejoiced in it, picking his target for the next ward debate when he would no longer be forced to talk flat down on his back.

But, for the moment, that was a pleasure deferred. A truce had been declared. Obedient sleepers lay outstretched, tucked for the night into the strait-jacket of linen sheets as yet unruffled by their restless movements.

They were the lucky ones. Bill hadn't settled to the routine, couldn't sleep so early. A thin, hard mattress was no great help either. But he couldn't do much about that.

He stretched his full six feet length on it, lifting his heavy body off the sheet to pull down the big nightshirt the determined nurses had put on him. Every ounce of his fifteen stone

seemed to rest on that one, round bone at the base of his spine and there the shirt would wrinkle.

He slipped his hands below his hips to ease the soreness for a bit. At sixty-one he was too old for this caper—spoiled, the nurses told him. And maybe they were right at that. You could tell by the look of him he was well cared for.

This bed wasn't like his own back home at any rate. And this communal life was no joke either. The daft hours they kept. Rattled awake at five in the morning; down to sleep like a wean at half-past eight at night. It took some getting used to.

But this quiet spell was fine. It was sheer luxury to lie back quietly on his pillows watching the fluttering of shadows across the roof as the day nurses flitted, silent as butterflies, on their final rounds.

The excitement of a crowded evening visiting hour had set his brain in a riot of confusion. Ma, his Jeannie, was the last to leave, telling him, as usual, to—be good.

As if he could be anything else in here. But that wasn't what she meant. Her thoughts were on his coming home. That was when he would have to start being good. (She was right of course. It was time he learned sense.) He should stay at home with his feet up at nights. Let the young folk put the world all in order. It was theirs to make or mar. Out carrying banners, shouting slogans, making speeches at his age. It was a kind of madness. He should be glad of the chance to sit at his own fireside and read all the books he'd put by all these years. That was how it would be after this.

And, even as he said it, he knew it was a lie. This was no time for sleeping or for reading books. There was far too much to do. He could not shut his eyes and mind to the world outside and he had to face the aftermath of the recent conflict inside his own home. He was stung awake by a sudden fear that Jeannie was not safe while he lay here, and half sat up in bed.

Once more he relaxed, smiling at his fear. Jeannie not safe! She would scorn the thought, he knew. It was many a long day since a priest could strike fear in her heart.

He thought of her then, not as she was now—fat, motherly,

and fifty—but a fine young woman facing life with her sleeves rolled up and the laughter never very far from those great, brown eyes of hers that would look at you so candidly from a round, freckled face tanned like a gipsy.

For a while, maybe, fear of the Church had held her back from loving him. Or was it fear of what the neighbours would say? So he'd often teased her since. But by then she had come to him, loving, and not ashamed of it.

Now, after all these years, the old superstitions that were always latent could still bother her. "Was Cathie's leaving home the beginning of her punishment?" she had asked. But she'd said it ruefully, not really showing fear at all.

They'd always known Cathie was the one who had never accepted Bill in her father's place. She was old enough to remember the first day he came as a stranger. So she had looked on him all through the years.

Jean though, she was Bill's child entirely. A wistful waif he had cuddled long ago. A tomboy, tough as a rubber ball and just as lively. She was now a virgin beauty with a brash awareness of it and a calm assurance in her attitude to life.

Jean knew what she wanted, or thought she did. Maybe she had a lot to learn, but she would learn it all in her own sweet way and in her own good time. Even he had to step warily with his advice, and what her Ma thought just didn't count at all.

Only tonight she had complained to him about Jean. She was still playing around with the head draughtsman in Ferguson's; Donald Grant, a married man and twice her age. No good could ever come of it. Never mind the fact his wife had been away for a year now in a mental home. He still couldn't take Jean even if he wanted to, and folk were talking about her already.

"Are you feared for your lassie or of the neighbours?" he had chided. That didn't mean he was content himself. Jean could be a provoking bitch at times, but the less Ma said the better. Before they knew it, Jean would push on to a real show of defiance that would shock the neighbours silent for a change.

He wasn't really worried, though; nor need Ma be. Jean could take care of herself all right. Indeed, he was more concerned right now by the many hints from Ma about his own future.

"You'll not be bothered with that place for a while," she'd say every time their conversation veered round to events down in the Yard foundry. Of course, it was true he'd not be fit to work again for a while yet. But that wasn't what she meant. He could sense she was breaking the idea gently—you'll not be back there at all—and he knew it meant a clash of wills ahead. He didn't like that. She seldom interfered with him, but had a stubborn streak in her make-up that was hard to cope with when she had made her mind up about anything.

He must go back. Down in the Yard foundry were two hundred men who'd shown enough faith in him as their shop steward to come out on strike because he had been sacked. They won that strike. There was still a job for him in the Yard foundry. The day he stepped back on the black sand floor would seal their victory. And that day would come; he was sure of it.

Only this morning he had talked of it with one of his work-mates, Jock Harris, the man deputising for him as shop steward. A good type Jock; his paunchy, balding little friend. Quiet, a bit timid whiles, but sincere. A Labour stalwart all his days, he'd plod along in the middle of the road to the very end.

He'd done well in the strike at any rate, better than you would expect, for direct action was a thing he didn't like. Nobody liked a strike. But there were times when you could win no other way. It needed courage to get up on your feet and say so. You gave the lead. An awkward moment. They'd sit all round you, feet shuffling in the sand, and wait. Who'd speak next? That was important. Men like Jock Harris could always sway a meeting one way or the other, start an avalanche of thought, and then it was unanimous, or near it, at the end. That was the main thing.

Down on the foundry floor, they'd no pretence to the fine manners of a debating chamber. But they got results with an

open show of hands and were very jealous of their rough democracy. They were proud too that, when a clash began, every union in the Yard looked to the foundry for a lead.

And wasn't the same thing true, on a bigger scale, for all Clydeside?

In London, Manchester and Wales; on Merseyside and through the Yorkshire Dales; wasn't it true that hearts picked up a beat when the news came through—the lads are moving on the Clyde?

A rent strike or a wages fight. For Peace in Spain; against Rearmament; or Down With Chamberlain. So many, many times he'd known the play of militant forces on Clydeside stir the whole nation in a surge of movement. He and his workmates were always in the lead. They'd a right to be proud of it.

The Civil War in Spain was a fair example. A far-off nation they knew little of. All they knew was that the people there had voted for a Popular Assembly pledged to some mild and badly needed land reforms. But there were forces in Spain who didn't like reforms; even mild ones. A fascist military coup, led now by a swarthy little ruffian, was a challenge to all right thinking men. On Clydeside the response was prompt and powerful.

Here the International Brigade found its first British volunteers—and its first martyrs. Dave Ramsay, a proud stalwart from the Yard foundry, was the first to go and among the first to die out there. Yet many followed him no less courageous, no less understanding why it was they fought.

At home here, those too old and those too young to fight; the women folk; the clergy; many strange allies found common purpose seeking aid for Spain, its people, and its democratic Government.

At first of course there were doubts and some confusion. Labour councillors, quiet trade union men, wary always of Communist appeals, were none too ready to be trapped with them on this common platform. So they held back, waiting for advice from their own top leaders who were no less wary for the very same reason.

In these frustrating months, Bill Omond, Dave Ramsay, his wife Molly, their young son Davie; and a dozen more, plunged into action with the local Communists. The response was a real inspiration. In two months they could buy an ambulance and stock it full with tinned goods and first aid equipment. When it went to Spain, Dave went with it. He was at the front, the news still fresh in all their minds, and the very next letter told them he was dead. It was a sorry blow for Bill, they had been great friends, and no one had encouraged Dave more in this impulsive venture.

Young Davie was now a regular visitor to their home—and a sparring partner of young Jean's. If Ma would only leave her alone the two of them would settle down together fine. But that was another story—no more than a pet notion of his own really. Still, you never know.

On Spain, they took the whole town by the scruff of the neck and shook it up a bit. No one could walk to their work down in the Yard without crossing a whitewashed slogan:

AID FOR SPAIN!

Never a week passed without some direct appeal, with the hand out, being made. There were some grumbles from religious types. The priests wouldn't have their folk take any part in this crusade. It was soon a firm warning. But it was very often quietly ignored and Bill had many a shilling for Spain from men who wouldn't miss one Sunday's Mass while they could crawl to the chapel door.

Still, the official brake was on one way or the other. Labour groups, trade union branches, Co-op Guilds, all influenced by official policy, were shy of moving. Then Sam Davison came as the new Labour Party Agent. He changed all that and wasted no time about it either.

A young Fife miner, small built, neat and quiet spoken, he'd made a fine impression and won easily at the selection conference. Already he was making a fair show. There was no doubt of his ability. But he'd raised some anxious eyebrows among the milder types with his outspoken comments on their failings.

Bill Omond had liked him from the start. It did his spirits good to hear a young man speak like that with a flavour of the pioneers in all his thoughts and actions. Sam wanted aid for Spain and no mumbling apologies.

From a public platform in the main Town Hall he faced a crowded audience with a passionate appeal that they do all they could for Spain. Dave Ramsay, powerful and fluent too, spoke with him that time. It was the first of many meetings they shared till Dave went off to Spain. Then Bill took his place more often than not. But Sam was always there, sure and unwavering in his appeal.

He'd come twice now to visit Bill in hospital and listened more than talked. There was still a lot about this town and all its people Sam wanted to know—and quickly. No man he'd met yet had a better understanding of this robust self-assured community to which he now belonged. Bill's only fault was his impatience. Losing faith in their Labour leaders he had joined the Communist Party. But that need not be final. He could be won back to the ranks.

Chapter Three

NAN DAVISON loved her husband very much and was proud of his success as Labour Party Agent. It was true that she had less of his company than some of his committee members but that was no different from the old days when he was in the pit, back home in Fife. Funny to think of it as 'the old days' already. Yet so it was.

Oh, what she'd give right now to be back there in the miners' row among her own folk. There you could speak your mind and not care who heard your opinions. Now you were a politician's wife it was different. It curbed your style. Each word and action had to be well groomed before you set it free.

Sam didn't appreciate that yet, much as she had tried to warn him. He was making big strides but had already trod