



THE CHERRY RIBBAND

CHAPTER ONE

CHERRY RIPE, CHERRY RIPE, IN THE SPRING-TIME OF THE YEAR



RAITH ELLISON had not come straight home from the Conventicle. There was nothing remarkable in that. It was no time to walk calmly back from a proscribed hill communion, where the Gospel was preached by outlaw ministers at the peril of their lives, as if it had been a cock-fighting or tavern merrymaking.

His blind father, old William Ellison, had already been led homeward by Gil, his eldest son—the pair of them passing rapidly athwart the brown heather and dark purple gashes of the moss-hags. Murdoch and Beattie, his younger brothers, had held away to the north, with Raith's mother and sister Euphrain under their protection. That was all the family of the house of Mayfield, save only the dogs and Grizel Alston, the herd's lassie from the Muir of Fintrie, who helped Euphrain with the byre.

Raith Ellison had tried hard to be as enthusiastic about religion as were his father and brothers. But in the first place he took somewhat after his mother, whose East-country blood responded somewhat slackly to the high westland ardours. Moreover Raith was but nineteen and, though he was little better than a young ploughman, he had never, at kirk or market, looked kindly at a girl without having her look kindly back at him. Farther than that it had not gone.

So, for these reasons, very clear to his own mind, Raith Ellison had come home from the great conventicle upon the