

## Bob, Son of Battle

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The girl stood hard against the door, her fingers still on the handle; trembling like an aspen at the sight of the uncanny pair.

That look in the little man's eyes petrified her: the swollen pupils; lashless lids, yawning wide; the broken range of teeth in that gaping mouth, froze her very soul. Rumors of the man's insanity tided back on her memory.

"I'm—I—" the words came in trembling gasps.

At the first utterance, however, the little man's hand dropped; he leant back in his chair and gave a soul-bursting sigh of relief.

No woman had crossed that threshold since his wife died; and, for a moment, when first the girl had entered silent-footed, aroused from dreaming of the long ago, he had thought this shall-swad figure with the pale face and peeping hair no earthly visitor; the spirit, rather, of one he had loved long since and lost, come to reproach him with a broken troth.

"Speak up, I canna hear," he said, in tones mild compared with those last wild words.

"I—I'm Maggie Moore," the girl quavered.

"Moore! Maggie Moore, d'ye say?" he cried, half rising from his chair, a flush of color sweeping across his face, "the dochter o' James Moore?" He paused for an answer glowering at her; and she shrank, trembling, against the door.

The little man leant back in his chair. Gradually a grim smile crept across his countenance.

"Weel, Maggie Moore," he said, half-amused, "ony gate ye're a good plucked un." And his wizened countenance looked at her almost kindly from beneath its dirty crown of bandages.

At that the girl's courage returned with a rush. After all this little man was not so very terrible. Perhaps he would be kind. And in the relief of the moment, the blood swept back into her face.

There was not to be peace yet, however. The blush was still hot upon her cheeks, when she caught the patter of soft steps in the passage without. A dark muzzle flecked with grey pushed in at the crack of the door; two anxious grey eyes followed.

Before she could wave him back, Red Wull had marked the intruder. With a roar he tore himself from his master's restraining hand, and dashed across the room.

"Back, Bob!" screamed Maggie, and the dark head withdrew. The door slammed with a crash as the great dog flung himself against it, and Maggie was hurled, breathless and white-faced, into a corner.

M'Adam was on his feet, pointing with a shrivelled finger, his face diabolical.

"Did you bring him? did you bring that to ma door?"

Maggie huddled in a corner in a palsy of trepidation. Her eyes gleamed big and black in the white face peering from the shawl.

Red Wull was now beside her, snarling horribly. With nose at the bottom of the door and busy paws he was trying to get out; while, on the other side, Owd Bob, snuffling also at the crack, scratched and pleaded to get in. Only two miserable inches separated the pair.

"I brought him to protect me. I—I was afraid."

M'Adam sat down and laughed abruptly.

"Afraid! I wonder you were na afraid to bring him here. It's it the first time iver he's set foot on ma land, and 't had best be the last." He turned to the great dog. "Wullie, Wullie, wad ye?" he called. "Come here. Lay ye doon—so—under ma chair—good lad. Noo's no the time to settle wi' him"—nodding toward the door. "We can wait for that, Wullie; we can wait." Then turning to Mag-

gie, "Gin ye want him to mak' a show at the Trials two months hence, he'd best not come here agin. Gin he does, he'll no leave ma land alive; Wullie'll see to that. Noo, what is 't ye want o' me?"

The girl in the corner scared almost out of her senses by this last occurrence, remained dumb.

M'Adam marked her hesitation, and grinned sardonically.

"I see hoo 'tis," said he; "yer dad's sent ye. Aince before he wanted somethin' o' me, and did he come to fetch it himself like a man? Not he. He sent the son to rob the father."

Then, leaning forward in his chair and glaring at the girl, "Ay, and mair than that! The night the lad set on me he cam'—with hissing emphasis—"straight from Kenmuir!" He paused and stared at her intently, and she was still dumb before him. "Gin I'd bin killed, Wullie'd ha' bin disqualified from competing for the cup. With Adam M'Adam's Red Wull oot o' the way—noo d'ye see? Noo d'ye onderstan'?"

She did not, and he saw it and was satisfied. What he had been saying she neither knew nor cared. She only remembered the object of her mission; she only saw before her the father of the man she loved; and a wave of emotion surged up in her breast.

She advanced timidly toward him, holding out her hands.

"Eh, Mr. M'Adam," she pleaded, "I come to ask ye after David." The shawl had slipped from her head, and lay loose upon her shoulders; and she stood before him with her sad face, her pretty hair all tossed, and her eyes big with unshed tears—a touching suppliant.

"Will ye no tell me where he is? I'd not ask it, I'd not trouble ye, but I've bin waitin' a waeifu' while, it seems, and I'm wearyin' for news o' him."

The little man looked at her curiously. "Ah, noo I mind me,"—this to himself. "You're the lass as is thinkin' o' marryin' him?"

"We're promised," the girl answered simply.

"Weel," the other remarked, "as I said afore, ye're a good plucked un." Then, in a tone in which, despite the cynicism, a certain indefinable sadness was blended, "Gin he mak's ye 'as good a husband as he mad' son to me, ye'll ha' made a maist remarkable match, my dear."

Maggie fired in a moment.

"A good feyther makes a good son," she answered almost pertly; and then, with infinite tenderness, "and I'm prayin' a good wife'll make a good husband."

He smiled scoffingly.

"I'm feared that'll no help ye much," he said.

But the girl never heeded this last sneer, so set was she on her purpose. She had heard of the one tender place in the heart of this little man with the tired face and mocking tongue, and she resolved to attain her end by appealing to it.

"Yo' loved a lass yo'sel' aince, Mr. M'Adam," she said. "Hoo would yo' ha' felt had she gone away and left yo'? Yo'd ha' bin mad; yo' know yo' would. And, Mr. M'Adam, I love the lad yer wife loved." She was kneeling at his feet now with both hands on his knees, looking up at him. Her sad face and quivering lips pleaded for her more eloquently than any words.

The little man was visibly touched. "Ay, ay, lass, that's enough," he said, trying to avoid those big beseeching eyes which would not be avoided.

"Will ye no tell me?" she pleaded. "I canna tell ye, lass, for why, I dinna ken," he answered querulously. In truth, he was moved to the heart by her misery.

The girl's last hopes were dashed. She had played her last card and failed. She had clung with the fervor of despair to this last resource, and now

it was torn from her. She had hoped, and now there was no hope. In the anguish of her disappointment she remembered that this was the man who, by his persistent cruelty, had driven her love into exile.

She rose to her feet and stood back. "Nor ken, nor care!" she cried bitterly.

At the words all the softness fled from the little man's face.

"Ye do me a wrang, lass; ye do indeed," he said, looking up at her with an assumed ingenuousness which, had she known him better, would have warned her to beware. "Gin I kent where the lad was I'd be the vairy first to let you, and the p'lice, ken it too; eh, Wullie! he! he!" He chuckled at his wit and rubbed his knees, regardless of the contempt blazing in the girl's face.

"I canna tell ye where he is now, but ye'd aiblins care to hear o' when I saw him last." He turned his chair the better to address her. "'Twas like so: I was sittin' in this vairy chair it was, asleep, when he crep' up behind an' lep' on ma back. I knew naethin' o't till I found mase' on the floor an' him kneelin' on me. I saw by the look on him he was set on finishin' me, so I said—"

The girl waved her hand at him, superbly disdainful.

"Yo' ken yo're lyin', ivery word o't," she cried.

The little man hitched his trousers, crossed his legs and yawned.

"An honest lee for an honest purpose is a matter ony man may be proud of, as yo'll ken by the time you are my years, ma lass."

The girl slowly crossed the room. At the door she turned.

"Then ye'll no tell me wheer he is?" she asked with a heart-breaking trill in her voice.

"On ma word, lass, I dinna ken," he cried, half passionately.

"On your word, Mr. M'Adam!" she said with a quiet scorn in her voice that might have stung Iscariot.

The little man spun round in his chair, an angry red dyeing his cheeks. In another moment he was suave and smiling again.

"I canna tell ye where he is noo," he said, unctuously; "but aiblins, I could let ye know where he's gaein' to."

"Can ye? will ye?" cried the simple girl all unsuspecting. In a moment she was across the room and at his knees.

"Closer, and I'll whisper," the little man, peeping from his nest of brown, was tremblingly approached to his lips. The little man leant forward and whispered one short, sharp word, then sat back, grinning, to watch the effect of his disclosure.

He had his revenge, an unworthy revenge on such a victim. And, watching the girl's face, the cruel disappointment merging in the heat of her indignation, he had yet enough nobility to regret his triumph.

She sprang from him as though he were unclean.

"An' yo' his father!" she cried in burning tones.

She crossed the room, and at the door paused. Her face was white again and she was quite composed.

"If David did strike you, you drove him to it," she said, speaking in calm, gentle accents. "Yo' know, none so well, whether ye've bin a good feyther to him, and him no mither, poor laddie! whether ye've bin to him what she'd ha' had ye be. Ask yer conscience, Mr. M'Adam. An' if he was a wee aggravatin' at times, had he no reason? He'd a heavy cross to bear, had David, and yo' know best if yo' helped to ease it for him."

The little man pointed to the door; but the girl paid no heed.

"D'ye think when ye were cruel to him, deerin' and fleerin', he never felt it, because he was too proud to show ye? He'd a big saft heart, had David, beneath the varnish. Mony's the time when mither was alive, I've seen him throw himsel' into her arms, sobbin', and cry, 'Eh, if I had but mither! 'Twas different when father was alive; he was kinder to me than. An' noo I've no one; I'm alone.' An' he'd sob and sob in mither's arms, and she weepin' hersel', would ye think, while he, wee laddie, would make comforted, cryin' broken heart. Da's son

to care for me noo; I'm alone. Mither's left me and eh! I'm prayin' to be wi' her!"

The clear, girlish voice shook M'Adam, sitting with face averted, waved to her, mutely ordering her to be gone. But she held on, gentle, sorrowful, relentless.

"An' what ye'll say to his mither when ye meet her, as ye must soon noo, she asks ye, 'An' what o' David? What o' th' lad I left wi' ye, Adam, to guard and keep for me, faithful and true, till this Day?' And then ye'll ha' to speak the truth, God's truth; and ye'll ha' to answer, 'Sin' the day ye left me I never said a kind word to the lad. I niver bore wi' him, and never tried to. And in the end I drove him by persecution to try and murder me.' Then maybe she'll look at ye—ye best ken hoo—and she'll say, 'Adam, Adam! is this what I deserved fra ye?'"

The gentle, implacable voice ceased. The girl turned and slipped softly out of the room; and M'Adam was left alone to his thoughts and his dead wife's memory.

"Mither and father, baith! Mither and father, baith!" rang remorselessly in his ears.

### CHAPTER XXIII

#### TH' OWD UN

The Black Killer still cursed the land. Sometimes there would be a cessation in the crimes; then a shepherd, going his rounds, would notice his sheep herding together, packing in unaccustomed squares; a raven, gorged to the crop, would rise before him and flap wearily away, and he would come upon the murderer's latest victim.

The Dalesmen were in despair, so utterly futile had their efforts been. There was no proof; no hope, no apparent probability that the end was near. As for the Tailless Tyke, the only piece of evidence against him had flown with David, who, as it chanced, had divulged what he had seen to no man.

The £100 reward offered had brought no issue. The police had done nothing. The Special Commissioner had been equally successful. After the affair in the Scoop the Killer never ran a risk yet never missed a chance.

Then, as a last resource, Jim Mason made his attempt. He took a holiday from his duties and disappeared into the wilderness. Three days and three nights no man saw him. On the morning of the fourth he reappeared, haggard unkempt, a furtive look haunting his eyes, sullen for once, irritable, who had never been irritable before—to confess his failure. Cross-examined further, he answered with unaccustomed fierceness: "I seed noo, I tell ye. Who's the liar as said I did?"

But that night his missus heard him in his sleep conning over something to himself in slow fearful whisper, "Two on 'em; one ahint t'other. The first big—bull-like; t'ither—" At which point Mrs. Mason smote him a smashing blow in the ribs, and he woke in a sweat, crying terribly, "Who said I seed—"

The days were slipping away; the summer was hot upon the land, and with it the Black Killer was forgotten. David was forgotten; everything sank into oblivion before the all-absorbing interest of the coming Dale trials.

The long-anticipated battle for the Shepherd's Trophy was looming close, soon everything that hung upon the issue of that struggle would be decided finally. For ever the justice of Th' Owd Un's claim to his proud title would be settled. If he won, he won outright—a thing unprecedented in the annals of the Cup; if he won, the place of Owd Bob o' Kenmuir as first in his profession was assured for all time. Above all, it was the last event in the six years' struggle 'twixt Red and Grey. It was the last time those two great rivals would meet in battle. The supremacy of one would be decided once and for all. For win or lose, it was the last public appearance of the Grey Dog of Kenmuir.

And as every hour brought the great day nearer, nothing else was talked of in the country-side. The heat of the Dalesmen's enthusiasm was only intensified by the fever of their apprehension.

(To be continued.)