

make an end to Red Wull. But Jim Mason quashed the proposal, remarking truly enough that there was too much bad blood as it was between father and son; while Tammas proposed with a sneer that the smith should be his own agent in the matter.

Whether it was this remark of Tammas's which stung the big man into action, or whether it was that the intensity of his hate gave him unusual courage, anyhow, a few days later, M'Adam caught him lurking in the granary of the Grange.

The little man may not have guessed his murderous intent; yet the blacksmith's white-faced terror, as he crouched away in the darkest corner, could hardly have escaped remark; though—and Kirby may thank his stars for it—the treacherous gleam of a gun-barrel, ill-concealed behind him, did.

"Hullo, Kirby!" said M'Adam cordially, "ye'll stay the night wi' me?" And the next thing the big man heard was a giggle on the far side the door, lost in the clank of padlock and rattle of chain. Then—through a crack—"Good-night to ye. Hope ye'll be comfie." And there he stayed that night, the following day and next night—thirty-six hours in all, with swedes for his hunger and the dew off the thatch for his thirst.

Meanwhile the struggle between David and his father seemed coming to a head. The little man's tongue wagged more bitterly than

ever; now it was never at rest—searching out sores, stinging, piercing.

Worst of all, he was continually dropping innuendoes, seemingly innocent enough, yet with a world of subtle meaning at their back, respecting Maggie. The leer and wink with which, when David came home from Kenmuir at nights, he would ask the simple question, "And was she kind, David—eh, eh?" made the boy's blood boil within him.

And the more effective the little man saw his shots to be, the more persistently he plied them. And David retaliated in kind. It was a war of reprisals. There was no peace; there were no truces in which to bury the dead before the opponents set to slaying others. And every day brought the combatants nearer to that final struggle, the issue of which neither cared to contemplate.

There came a Saturday, toward the end of the spring, long to be remembered by more than David in the Dale.

For that young man the day started sensationally. Rising before cock-crow, and going to the window, the first thing he saw in the misty dawn was the gaunt, gigantic figure of Red Wull, hounding up the hill from the Stony Bottom; and in an instant his faith was shaken to its foundation.

The dog was travelling up at a long, slouching trot; and as he rapidly approached the



house, David saw that his flanks were all splashed with red mud, his tongue out, and the foam dripping from his jaws, as though he had come far and fast.

He slunk up to the house, leapt on to the sill of the unused back-kitchen, some five feet from the ground, pushed with his paw at the cranky old hatchment, which was its only covering; and, in a second, the boy, straining out of the window the better to see, heard the rattle of the boards as the dog dropped within the house.

For the moment, excited as he was, David held his peace. Even the Black Killer took only second place in his thoughts that morning. For this was to be a momentous day for him.

That afternoon James Moore and Andrew would, he knew, be over at Grammoch-town, and, his work finished for the day, he was resolved to tackle Maggie and decide his fate. If she would have him—well, he would go next morning and thank God for it, kneeling beside her in the tiny village church; if not, he would leave the Grange and all its unhappiness behind, and straightway plunge out into the world.

All through a week of stern work he had looked forward to this hard-won half-holiday. Therefore, when, as he was breaking off at noon, his father turned to him and said abruptly:

"David, ye're to tak' the Cheviot lot o'er to Grammoch-town at once," he answered shortly:

"Yo' mun tak' 'em yo'sel', if yo' wish 'em to go to-day."

"Na," the little man answered; "Wullie and me, we're busy. Ye're to tak' 'em, I tell ye."

"I'll not," David replied. "If they wait for me, they wait till Monday," and with that he left the room.

"I see what 'tis," his father called after him; "she's give ye a tryst at Kenmuir. Oh, ye randy David!"

"Yo' tend yo' business; I'll tend mine," the boy answered hotly.

Now it happened that on the previous day Maggie had given him a photograph of herself, or, rather, David had taken it and Maggie had demurred. As he left the room it dropped from his pocket. He failed to notice his loss, but directly he was gone M'Adam pounced on it.

"He! he! Wullie, what's this?" he giggled, holding the photograph into his face. "He! he! it's the jade hersel', I war'nt; it's Jezebel!"

He peered into the picture.

"She kens what's what, I'll tak' oath, Wullie. See her eyes—sae soft and languishin'; and her lips—such lips, Wullie!" He held the picture down for the great dog to see: then walked out of the room, still sniggering, and



chucking the face insanely beneath its cardboard chin.

Outside the house he collided against David. The boy had missed his treasure and was hurrying back for it.

"What yo' got theer?" he asked suspiciously.

"Only the pictur' o' some randy quean," his father answered, chucking away at the inanimate chin.

"Gie it me!" David ordered fiercely. "It's mine."

"Na, na," the little man replied. "It's no for sic douce lads as dear David to ha' ony touch wi' leddies sic as this."

"Gie it me, I tell ye, or I'll tak' it!" the boy shouted.

"Na, na; it's ma duty as yer dad to keep ye from sic limmers." He turned, still smiling, to Red Wull.

"There ye are, Wullie!" He threw the photograph to the dog. "Tear her, Wullie, the Jezebel!"

The Tailless Tyke sprang on the picture, placed one big paw in the very centre of the face, forcing it into the muck, and tore a corner off; then he chewed the scrap with unctious, slobbering gluttony, dropped it, and tore a fresh piece.

David dashed forward.

"Touch it, if ye daur, ye brute!" he yelled; but his father seized him and held him back.

"'And the dogs o' the street,'" he quoted. David turned furiously on him.

"I've half a mind to brak' ivery bone in yer body!" he shouted, "robbin' me o' what's mine and throwin' it to yon black brute!"

"Whist, David, whist!" soothed the little man. "'Twas but for yer ain good yer auld dad did it. 'Twas that he had at heart as he aye has. Rin aff wi' ye noo to Kenmuir. She'll mak' it up to ye, I war'nt. She's leeb-eral wi' her favors, I hear. Ye've but to whistle and she'll come."

David seized his father by the shoulder.

"An' yo' gie me much more o' your sauce," he roared.

"Sauce, Wullie," the little man echoed in gentle voice.

"I'll twist yer neck for yo'!"

"He'll twist my neck for me."

"I'll gang reet awa', I warn yo', and leave you and yer Wullie to yer lone."

The little man began to whimper.

"It'll brak' yer auld dad's heart, lad," he said.

"Nay; yo've got none. But 'twill ruin yo', please God. For yo' and yer Wullie'll get ne'er a soul to work for yo'—yo' cheeseparin', dirty-tongued Jew."

The little man burst into an agony of affected tears, rocking to and fro, his face in his hands.

"Waesucks, Wullie! d'ye hear him? He's



gaein' to leave us—the son o' my bosom! my Benjamin! my little Davie! he's gaein' awa'!"

David turned away down the hill; and M'Adam lifted his stricken face and waved a hand at him.

"'Adieu, dear amiable youth!' " he cried in broken voice; and straightway set to sobbing again.

Half-way down to the Stony Bottom David turned.

"I'll gie yo' a word o' warnin'," he shouted back. "I'd advise yo' to keep a closer eye to yer Wullie's goings on, 'specially o' nights, or happen yo'll wake to a surprise one mornin'."

In an instant the little man ceased his fooling.

"And why that?" he asked, following down the hill.

"I'll tell yo'. When I wak' this mornin' I walked to the window, and what d'yo' think I see? Why, your Wullie gollopin' like a good un up from the Bottom, all foamin', too, and red-splashed, as if he'd coom from the Screes. What had he bin up to, I'd like to know?"

"What should he be doin'," the little man replied, "but havin' an eye to the stock? and that when the Killer might be oot."

David laughed harshly.

"Ay, the Killer was oot, I'll go bail, and yo' may hear o't afore the evenin', ma man," and with that he turned away again.

As he had foreseen, David found Maggie

alone. But in the heat of his indignation against his father he seemed to have forgotten his original intent, and instead poured his latest troubles into the girl's sympathetic ear.

"There's but one mon in the world he wishes worse nor me," he was saying. It was late in the afternoon, and he was still inveighing against his father and his fate. Maggie sat in her father's chair by the fire, knitting; while he lounged on the kitchen table, swinging his long legs.

"And who may that be?" the girl asked.

"Why, Mr. Moore, to be sure, and Th' Owd Un, too. He'd do either o' them a mischief if he could."

"But why, David?" she asked anxiously. "I'm sure dad niver hurt him, or ony ither mon for the matter o' that."

David nodded toward the Dale Cup which rested on the mantelpiece in silvery majesty.

"It's yon done it," he said. "And if Th' Owd Un wins agin, as win he will, bless him! why, look out for 'me and ma Wullie'; that's all."

Maggie shuddered, and thought of the face at the window.

"'Me and ma Wullie,'" David continued; "I've had about as much of them as I can swaller. It's aye the same—'Me and ma Wullie,' and 'Wullie and me,' as if I never put ma hand to a stroke! Ugh!"—he made a gesture of passionate disgust—"the two on 'em fair



madden me. I could strike the one and throttle t'other," and he rattled his heels angrily together.

"Hush, David," interposed the girl; "yo' munna speak so o' your dad; it's agin the commandments."

"'Tain't agin human nature," he snapped in answer. "Why, 'twas nob'but yester' morn' he says in his nasty way, 'David, ma gran' fellow, hoo ye work! ye 'stonish me!' And on ma word, Maggie"—there were tears in the great boy's eyes—"ma back was nigh broke wi' toilin'. And the Terror, he stands by and shows his teeth, and looks at me as much as to say, 'Some day, by the grace o' goodness, I'll ha' my teeth in your throat, young mon.'"

Maggie's knitting dropped into her lap and she looked up, her soft eyes for once flashing.

"It's cruel, David; so 'tis!" she cried. "I wonder yo' bide wi' him. If he treated me so, I'd no stay anither minute. If it meant the House for me I'd go," and she looked as if she meant it.

David jumped off the table.

"Han' yo' niver guessed why I stop, lass, and me so happy at home?" he asked eagerly.

Maggie's eyes dropped again.

"Hoo should I know?" she asked innocently.

"Nor care, neither, I s'pose," he said in reproachful accents. "Yo' want me me to go and leave yo', and go reet awa'; I see hoo 'tis. Yo' wouldna mind, not yo', if yo' was niver to see

pore David agin. I niver thowt yo' welly like me, Maggie; and noo I know it."

"Yo' silly lad," the girl murmured, knitting steadfastly.

"Then yo' do," he cried, triumphant, "I knew yo' did." He approached close to her chair, his face clouded with eager anxiety.

"But d'yo' like me more'n just *likin'*, Maggie? dy'yo'," he bent and whispered in the little ear.

The girl cuddled over her work so that he could not see her face.

"If yo' won't tell me yo' can show me," he coaxed. "There's other things besides words,"

He stood before her, one hand on the chair-back on either side. She sat thus, caged between his arms, with drooping eyes and heightened color.

"Not so close, David, please," she begged, fidgeting uneasily; but the request was unheeded.

"Do'ee move away a wee," she implored.

"Not till yo've showed me," he said, relentless.

"I canna, Davie," she cried with laughing petulance.

"Yes, yo' can, lass."

"Tak' your hands away, then."

"Nay; not till yo've showed me."

A pause.

"Do'ee, Davie," she supplicated.

And—



"Do'ee," he pleaded.

She tilted her face provokingly, but her eyes were still down.

"It's no manner o' use, Davie."

"Iss, 'tis," he coaxed.

"Niver."

"Please."

A lengthy pause.

"Well, then——" She looked up, at last, shy, trustful, happy; and the sweet lips were tilted further to meet his.

And thus they were situated, lover-like, when a low, rapt voice broke in on them,—

"A dear-lov'd lad, convenience snug,  
A treacherous inclination."

Oh, Wullie, I wush you were here!"

It was little M'Adam. He was leaning in at the open window, leering at the young couple, his eyes puckered, an evil expression on his face.

"The creetical moment! and I interfere! David, ye'll never forgie me."

The boy jumped round with an oath; and Maggie, her face flaming, started to her feet. The tone, the words, the look of the little man at the window were alike insufferable.

"By thunder! I'll teach yo' to come spyin' on me!" roared David. Above him on the mantel-piece blazed the Shepherds' Trophy. Searching any missile in his fury, he reached up a hand for it.

"Ay, gie it me back. Ye robbed me o't," the little man cried, holding out his arms as if to receive it.

"Dinna, David," pleaded Maggie, with restraining hand on her lover's arm.

"By the Lord! I'll give him something!" yelled the boy. Close by there stood a pail of soapy water. He seized it, swung it, and slashed its contents at the leering face in the window.

The little man started back, but the dirty torrent caught him and soused him through. The bucket followed, struck him full on the chest, and rolled him over in the mud. After it with a rush came David.

"I'll let yo' know, spyin' on me!" he yelled. "I'll——" Maggie, whose face was as white now as it had been crimson, clung to him, hampering him.

"Dinna, David, dinna!" she implored. "He's yer ain dad."

"I'll dad him! I'll learn him!" roared David half through the window.

At the moment Sam'l Todd came floundering furiously round the corner, closely followed by 'Enry and oor Job.

"Is he dead?" shouted Sam'l seeing the prostrate form.

"Ho! ho!" went the other two.

They picked up the draggled little man and hustled him out of the yard like a thief, a man on either side and a man behind.



As they forced him through the gate, he struggled round.

"By Him that made ye! ye shall pay for this, David M'Adam, you and yer——"

But Sam'l's big hand descended on his mouth, and he was borne away before that last ill word had flitted into being.

## CHAPTER XXI

### HORROR OF DARKNESS

It was long past dark that night when M'Adam staggered home.

All that evening at the Sylvester Arms his imprecations against David had made even the hardest shudder. James Moore, Owd Bob, and the Dale Cup were for once forgotten as, in his passion, he cursed his son.

The Dalesmen gathered fearfully away from the little dripping madman. For once these men, whom, as a rule, no such geyser outbursts could quell, were dumb before him; only now and then shooting furtive glances in his direction, as though on the brink of some daring enterprise of which he was the objective. But M'Adam noticed nothing, suspected nothing.

When, at length, he lurched into the kitchen of the Grange, there was no light and the fire burnt low. So dark was the room that a white riband of paper pinned on to the table escaped his remark.

The little man sat down heavily, his clothes still sodden, and resumed his tireless anathema.

"I've tholed mair fra him, Wullie, than Adam M'Adam ever thocht to thole from ony man. And noo it's gane past bearin'. He



struck me, Wullie! struck his ain father. Ye see it yersel', Wullie. Na, ye werena there. Oh, gin ye had but bin, Wullie! Him and his madam! But I'll gar him ken Adam M'Adam. I'll stan' nae mair!"

He sprang to his feet and, reaching up with trembling hands, pulled down the old bell-mouthed blunderbuss that hung above the mantel-piece.

"We'll mak' an end to't, Wullie, so we will, aince and for a'!" And he banged the weapon down upon the table. It lay right athwart that slip of still condemning paper, yet the little man saw it not.

Resuming his seat, he prepared to wait. His hand sought the pocket of his coat, and fingered tenderly a small stone bottle, the fond companion of his widowhood. He pulled it out, uncorked it, and took a long pull; then placed it on the table by his side.

Gradually the gray head lolled; the shrivelled hand dropped and hung limply down, the finger-tips brushing the floor; and he dozed off into a heavy sleep, while Red Wull watched at his feet.

It was not till an hour later that David returned home.

As he approached the lightless house, standing in the darkness like a body with the spirit fled, he could but contrast this dreary home of his with the bright kitchen and cheery faces he had left.

Entering the house, he groped to the kitchen door and opened it; then struck a match and stood in the doorway peering in.

"Not home, bain't he?" he muttered, the tiny light above his head. "Wet inside as well as oot by noo, I'll lay. By gum! but 'twas a lucky thing for him I didna get ma hand on him this evenin'. I could ha' killed him." He held the match above his head.

Two yellow eyes, glowing in the darkness like cairngorms, and a small dim figure bunched up in a chair, told him his surmise was wrong. Many a time had he seen his father in such case before, and now he muttered contemptuously:

"Drunk; the leetle swab! Sleepin' it off, I reck'n."

Then he saw his mistake. The hand that hung above the floor twitched and was still again.

There was a clammy silence. A mouse, emboldened by the quiet, scuttled across the hearth. One mighty paw lightly moved; a lightning tap, and the tiny beast lay dead.

Again that hollow stillness: no sound, no movement; only those two unwinking eyes fixed on him immovable.

At length a small voice from the fireside broke the quiet.

"Drunk—the—leetle—swab!"

Again a clammy silence, and a life-long pause.



"I thowt yo' was sleepin'," said David, at length, lamely.

"Ay, so ye said. 'Sleepin' it aff'; I heard ye." Then, still in the same small voice, now quivering imperceptibly, "Wad ye obleege me, sir, by leetin' the lamp? Or, d'ye think, Wullie, 'twad be soilin' his dainty fingers? They're mair used, I'm told, to danderin' wi' the bonnie brown hair o' his——"

"I'll not ha' ye talk o' ma Maggie so," interposed the boy passionately.

"*His* Maggie, mark ye, Wullie—*his!* I thocht 'twad soon get that far."

"Tak' care, dad! I'll stan' but little more," the boy warned him in choking voice; and began to trim the lamp with trembling fingers.

M'Adam forthwith addressed himself to Red Wull.

"I suppose no man iver had sic a son as him, Wullie. Ye ken what I've done for him, an' ye ken hoo he's repaid it. He's set himself agin me; he's misca'd me; he's robbed me o' ma Cup; last of all, he struck me—struck me afore them a'. We've toiled for him, you and I, Wullie; we've slaved to keep him in hoose an' hame, an' he's passed his time, the while, in riotous leevin', carousin' at Kenmuir, amusin' himself wi' his——" He broke off short. The lamp was lit, and the strip of paper, pinned on to the table, naked and glaring, caught his eye.

"What's this?" he muttered; and unloosed the nail that clamped it down.

This is what he read:

"Adam Mackadam yer warned to mak' an end to yer Red Wull will be best for him and the Sheep. This is the first yoll have two more the third will be the last +"

It was written in pencil, and the only signature was a dagger, rudely limned in red.

M'Adam read the paper once, twice, thrice. As he slowly assimilated its meaning, the blood faded from his face. He stared at it and still stared, with whitening face and pursed lips. Then he stole a glance at David's broad back.

"What d'ye ken o' this, David?" he asked, at length, in a dry thin voice, reaching forward in his chair.

"O' what?"

"O' this," holding up the slip. "And ye'd obleege me by the truth for once."

David turned, took up the paper, read it, and laughed harshly.

"It's coom to this, has it?" he said, still laughing, and yet with blanching face.

"Ye ken what it means. I daresay ye pit it there; aiblins writ it. Ye'll explain it." The little man spoke in the same small, even voice, and his eyes never moved off his son's face.

"It's plain as day. Ha' ye no heard?"



"Ive heard naethin'. . . I'd like the truth, David, if ye can tell it."

The boy smiled a forced, unnatural smile, looking from his father to the paper in his hand.

"Yo' shall have it, but yo'll not like it. It's this: Tupper lost a sheep to the Killer last night."

"And what if he did?" The little man rose smoothly to his feet. Each noticed the others' face—dead-white.

"Why, he—lost—it—on—— Wheer d'yo' think?" He drawled the words out, dwelling almost lovingly on each.

"Where?"

"On—the—Red—Screes."

The crash was coming—inevitable now. David knew it, knew that nothing could avert it, and braced himself to meet it. The smile had fled from his face, and his breath fluttered in his throat like the wind before a thunder-storm.

"What of it?" The little man's voice was calm as a summer sea.

"Why, your Wullie—as I told yo'—was on the Screes last night."

"Go on, David."

"And this," holding up the paper, "tells you that they ken as I ken noo, as maist o' them ha' kent this mony a day, that your Wullie, Red Wull—the Terror——"

"Go on."

"Is——"

"Yes."

"The Black Killer."

It was spoken.

The frayed string was snapped at last. The little man's hand flashed to the bottle that stood before him.

"Ye—liar!" he shrieked, and threw it with all his strength at the boy's head. David dodged and ducked, and the bottle hurtled over his shoulder.

Crash! it whizzed into the lamp behind, and broke on the wall beyond, its contents trickling down the wall to the floor.

For a moment, darkness. Then the spirits met the lamp's smouldering wick and blazed into flame.

By the sudden light David saw his father on the far side the table, pointing with crooked forefinger. By his side Red Wull was standing alert, hackles up, yellow fangs bared, eyes lurid; and, at his feet, the wee brown mouse lay still and lifeless.

"Oot o' ma hoose! Back to Kenmuir! Back to yer——" The unpardonable word, unmistakable, hovered for a second on his lips like some foul bubble, and never burst.

"No mither this time!" panted David, racing round the table.

"Wullie!"

The Terror leapt to the attack; but David overturned the table as he ran, the blunderbuss



crashing to the floor; it fell, opposing a momentary barrier in the dog's path.

"Stan' off, ye——!" screeched the little man, seizing a chair in both hands; "stan' off, or I'll brain ye!"

But David was on him.

"Wullie, Wullie, to me!"

Again the Terror came with a roar like the sea. But David, with a mighty kick catching him full on the jaw, repelled the attack.

Then he gripped his father round the waist and lifted him from the ground. The little man, struggling in those iron arms, screamed, cursed, and battered at the face above him, kicking and biting in his frenzy.

"The Killer! wad ye ken wha's the Killer? Go and ask 'em at Kenmuir! Ask yer——"

David swayed slightly, crushing the body in his arms till it seemed every rib must break; then hurled it from him with all the might of passion. The little man fell with a crash and a groan.

The blaze in the corner flared, flickered, and died. There was hell-black darkness, and silence of the dead.

David stood against the wall, panting, every nerve tightstrung as the hawser of a straining ship.

In the corner lay the body of his father, limp and still; and in the room one other living thing was moving.

He clung close to the wall, pressing it with

wet hands. The horror of it all, the darkness, the man in the corner, that moving something, petrified him.

"Feyther!" he whispered.

There was no reply. A chair creaked at an invisible touch. Something was creeping, stealing, crawling closer.

David was afraid.

"Feyther!" he whispered in hoarse agony, "are yo' hurt?"

The words were stifled in his throat. A chair overturned with a crash; a great body struck him on the chest; a hot, pestilent breath volleyed in his face, and wolfish teeth were reaching for his throat.

"Come on, Killer!" he screamed.

The horror of suspense was past. It had come, and with it he was himself again.

Back, back, back, along the wall he was borne. His hands entwined themselves around a hairy throat; he forced the great head with its horrid lightsome eyes from him; he braced himself for the effort, lifted the huge body at his breast, and heaved it from him. It struck the wall and fell with a soft thud.

As he recoiled a hand clutched his ankle and sought to trip him. David kicked back and down with all his strength. There was one awful groan, and he staggered against the door and out.

There he paused, leaning against the wall to breathe.



He struck a match and lifted his foot to see where the hand had clutched him.

God! there was blood on his heel.

Then a great fear laid hold on him. A cry was suffocated in his breast by the panting of his heart.

He crept back to the kitchen door and listened.

Not a sound.

Fearfully he opened it a crack.

Silence of the tomb.

He banged it to. It opened behind him, and the fact lent wings to his feet.

He turned and plunged out into the night, and ran through the blackness for his life. And a great owl swooped softly by and hooted mockingly:

"For your life! for your life! for your life!"

## PART V

OWD BOB O' KENMUIR