



CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

GREYFRIARS
BOBBY

Eleanor Atkinson

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

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CHAPTER 1



WHEN the time-gun boomed from Edinburgh Castle, Bobby gave a startled yelp. He was only a little country dog—the very youngest and smallest and shaggiest of Skye terriers—bred on a heathery slope of the Pentland hills, where the loudest sound was the bark of a collie or the tinkle of a sheep-bell. That morning he had come to the weekly market with Auld Jock, a farm laborer, and the Grassmarket of the Scottish capital lay in the narrow valley at the southern base of Castle Crag. Two hundred feet above it the time-gun was mounted in the half-moon battery on an overhanging, crescent-shaped ledge of rock. In any part of the city the report of the one-o'clock gun was sufficiently alarming, but in the Grassmarket it was an earth-rending explosion directly overhead. It needed to be heard but once there to be registered on even a little dog's brain. Bobby had heard it many times, and he never failed to yelp a sharp protest at the outrage to his ears; but, as the gunshot was always followed by a certain happy event, it started in his active little mind a train of pleasant associations.

In Bobby's day of youth, and that was in 1858, when Queen Victoria was a happy wife and mother, with all her bairns about her knees in Windsor or Balmoral, the Grassmarket of Edinburgh was still a bit of the Middle Ages, as picturesquely decaying and Gothic as German Nuremberg. Beside the classic corn exchange,

it had no modern buildings. North and south, along its greatest length, the sunken quadrangle was faced by tall, old, timber-fronted houses of stone, plastered like swallows' nests to the rocky slopes behind them.

Across the eastern end, where the valley suddenly narrowed to the ravine-like street of the Cowgate, the market was spanned by the lofty, crowded arches of George IV Bridge. This high-hung, viaduct thoroughfare, that carried a double line of buildings within its parapet, leaped the gorge, from the tall, old, Gothic rookeries on High Street ridge, just below the Castle esplanade. It cleared the roofs of the tallest, oldest houses that swarmed up the steep banks from the Cowgate, and ran on, by easy descent, to the main gateway of Greyfriars kirkyard at the lower top of the southern rise.

Greyfriars' two kirks formed together, under one continuous roof, a long, low, buttressed building without tower or spire. The new kirk was of Queen Anne's day, but the old kirk was built before ever the Pilgrims set sail for America. It had been but one of several sacred buildings, set in a monastery garden that sloped pleasantly to the open valley of the Grassmarket, and looked up the Castle heights unhindered. In Bobby's day this garden had shrunk to a long, narrow, high-piled burying-ground, that extended from the rear of the line of buildings that fronted on the market, up the slope, across the hilltop, and to where the land began to fall away again, down the Burghmuir. From the Grassmarket, kirk and kirkyard lay hidden behind and above the crumbling grandeur of noble halls and mansions that had fallen to the grimmest tenements of Edinburgh's slums. From the end of the bridge approach there was a glimpse of massive walls, of pointed windows, and of monumental tombs through a double-leafed gate of wrought iron, that was alcoved and wedged

in between the ancient guildhall of the candlemakers and a row of prosperous little shops in Greyfriars Place.

A rock-rimmed quarry pit, in the very heart of Old Edinburgh, the Grassmarket was a place of historic echoes. The yelp of a little dog there would scarce seem worthy of record. More in harmony with its stirring history was the report of the time-gun. At one o'clock every day, there was a puff of smoke high up in the blue or gray or squally sky, then a deafening crash and a back fire fusillade of echoes. The oldest frequenter of the market never got used to it. On Wednesday, as the shot broke across the babel of shrill bargaining, every man in the place jumped, and not one was quicker of recovery than wee Bobby. Instantly ashamed, as an intelligent little dog who knew the import of the gun should be, Bobby denied his alarm in a tiny pink yawn of boredom. Then he went briskly about his urgent business of finding Auld Jock.

The market was closed. In five minutes the great open space was as empty of living men as Greyfriars kirkyard on a week-day. Drovers and hostlers disappeared at once into the cheap and noisy entertainment of the White Hart Inn that fronted the market and set its squalid back against Castle Rock. Farmers rapidly deserted it for the clean country. Dwellers in the tenements darted up wynds and blind closes, climbed twisting turnpike stairs to windy roosts under the gables, or they scuttled through noble doors into foul courts and hallways. Beggars and pickpockets swarmed under the arches of the bridge, to swell the evil smelling human river that flowed at the dark and slimy bottom of the Cowgate.

A chill November wind tore at the creaking iron cross of the Knights of St. John, on the highest gable of the Temple tenements, that turned its decaying back on the kirkyard of the Greyfriars. Low clouds were tangled and torn on the Castle battlements. A

few horses stood about, munching oats from feed-boxes. Flocks of sparrows fluttered down from timbered galleries and rocky ledges to feast on scattered grain. Swallows wheeled in wide, descending spirals from mud villages under the cornices to catch flies. Rats scurried out of holes and gleaned in the deserted corn exchange. And 'round and 'round the empty market-place raced the frantic little terrier in search of Auld Jock.

Bobby knew, as well as any man, that it was the dinner hour. With the time-gun it was Auld Jock's custom to go up to a snug little restaurant; that was patronized chiefly by the decent poor small shopkeepers, clerks, tenant farmers, and medical students living in cheap lodgings—in Greyfriars Place. There, in Ye Olde Greyfriars Dining-Rooms, owned by Mr. John Traill, and four doors beyond the kirkyard gate, was a cozy little inglenook that Auld Jock and Bobby had come to look upon as their own. At its back, above a recessed oaken settle and a table, a tiny paned window looked up and over a retaining wall into the ancient place of the dead.

The view of the heaped-up and crowded mounds and thickets of old slabs and throughstones, girt all about by time-stained monuments and vaults, and shut in on the north and east by the backs of shops and lofty slum tenements, could not be said to be cheerful. It suited Auld Jock, however, for what mind he had was of a melancholy turn. From his place on the floor, between his master's hob-nailed boots, Bobby could not see the kirkyard, but it would not, in any case, have depressed his spirits. He did not know the face of death and, a merry little ruffian of a terrier, he was ready for any adventure.

On the stone gate pillar was a notice in plain English that no dogs were permitted in Greyfriars. As well as if he could read, Bobby knew that the kirkyard was forbidden ground. He had

learned that by bitter experience. Once, when the little wicket gate that held the two tall leaves ajar by day, chanced to be open, he had joyously chased a cat across the graves and over the western wall onto the broad green lawn of Heriot's Hospital.

There the little dog's escapade bred other mischief, for Heriot's Hospital was not a hospital at all, in the modern English sense of being a refuge for the sick. Built and christened in a day when a Stuart king reigned in Holyrood Palace, and French was spoken in the Scottish court, Heriot's was a splendid pile of a charity school, all towers and battlements, and cheerful color, and countless beautiful windows. Endowed by a beruffed and doubleted goldsmith, "Jinglin' Geordie" Heriot, who had "nae brave laddie o' his ain," it was devoted to the care and education of "puir orphan an' faderless boys." There it had stood for more than two centuries, in a spacious park, like the country-seat of a Lowland laird, but hemmed in by sordid markets and swarming slums. The region round about furnished an unfailing supply of "puir orphan an' faderless boys" who were as light-hearted and irresponsible as Bobby.

Hundreds of the Heriot laddies were out in the noon recess, playing cricket and leap-frog, when Bobby chased that unlucky cat over the kirkyard wall. He could go no farther himself, but the laddies took up the pursuit, yelling like Highland clans of old in a foray across the border. The unholy din disturbed the sacred peace of the kirkyard. Bobby dashed back, barking furiously, in pure exuberance of spirits. He tumbled gaily over grassy hummocks, frisked saucily around terrifying old mausoleums, wriggled under the most enticing of low-set table tombs and sprawled, exhausted, but still happy and noisy, at Auld Jock's feet.

It was a scandalous thing to happen in any kirkyard! The angry caretaker was instantly out of his little stone lodge by

the gate and taking Auld Jock sharply to task for Bobby's misbehavior. The pious old shepherd, shocked himself and publicly disgraced, stood, bonnet in hand, humbly apologetic. Seeing that his master was getting the worst of it, Bobby rushed into the fray, an animated little muff of pluck and fury, and nipped the caretaker's shins. There was a howl of pain, and a "maist mighty" word that made the ancient tombs stand aghast. Master and dog were hustled outside the gate and into a rabble of jeering slum gamin.

What a to-do about a miserable cat! To Bobby there was no logic at all in the denouement to this swift, exciting drama. But he understood Auld Jock's shame and displeasure perfectly. Good-tempered as he was gay and clever, the little dog took his punishment meekly, and he remembered it. Thereafter, he passed the kirk yard gate decorously. If he saw a cat that needed harrying he merely licked his little red chops—the outward sign of a desperate self-control. And, a true sport, he bore no malice toward the caretaker.

During that first summer of his life Bobby learned many things. He learned that he might chase rabbits, squirrels and moor-fowl, and sea-gulls and whaup that came up to feed in plowed fields. Rats and mice around byre and dairy were legitimate prey; but he learned that he must not annoy sheep and sheep-dogs, nor cattle, horses and chickens. And he discovered that, unless he hung close to Auld Jock's heels, his freedom was in danger from a wee lassie who adored him. He was no lady's lap-dog. From the bairnie's soft cossetting he aye fled to Auld Jock and the rough hospitality of the sheep fold. Being exact opposites in temperaments, but alike in tastes, Bobby and Auld Jock were inseparable. In the quiet corner of Mr. Traill's crowded dining-room they spent the one idle hour of the week together, happily.

Bobby had the leavings of a herring or haddie, for a rough little Skye will eat anything from smoked fish to moor-fowl eggs, and he had the tidbit of a farthing bone to worry at his leisure. Auld Jock smoked his cutty pipe, gazed at the fire or into the kirk-yard, and meditated on nothing in particular.

In some strange way that no dog could understand, Bobby had been separated from Auld Jock that November morning. The tenant of Cauldbrae farm had driven the cart in, himself, and that was unusual. Immediately he had driven out again, leaving Auld Jock behind, and that was quite outside Bobby's brief experience of life. Beguiled to the lofty and coveted driver's seat where, with lolling tongue, he could view this interesting world between the horse's ears, Bobby had been spirited out of the city and carried all the way down and up to the hilltop toll-bar of Fairmilehead. It could not occur to his loyal little heart that this treachery was planned nor, stanch little democrat that he was, that the farmer was really his owner, and that he could not follow a humbler master of his own choosing. He might have been carried to the distant farm, and shut safely in the byre with the cows for the night, but for an incautious remark of the farmer. With the first scent of the native heather the horse quickened his pace, and, at sight of the purple slopes of the Pentlands looming homeward, a fond thought at the back of the man's mind very naturally took shape in speech.

"Eh, Bobby; the wee lassie will be at the tap o' the brae to race ye hame."

Bobby pricked his drop ears. Within a narrow limit, and concerning familiar things, the understanding of human speech by these intelligent little terriers is very truly remarkable. At mention of the wee lassie he looked behind for his rough old friend and unfailing refuge. Auld Jock's absence discovered,

Bobby promptly dropped from the seat of honor and from the cart tail, sniffed the smoke of Edinboro' town and faced right about. To the farmer's peremptory call he returned the spicy repartee of a cheerful bark. It was as much as to say:

“Dinna fash yersel’! I ken what I’m about.”

After an hour's hard run back over the dipping and rising country road and a long quarter circuit of the city, Bobby found the high-walled, winding way into the west end of the Grass-market. To a human being afoot there was a shorter cut, but the little dog could only retrace the familiar route of the farm carts. It was a notable feat for a small creature whose tufted legs were not more than six inches in length, whose thatch of long hair almost swept the roadway and caught at every burr and bramble, and who was still so young that his nose could not be said to be educated.

In the market-place he ran here and there through the crowd, hopefully investigating narrow closes that were mere rifts in precipices of buildings; nosing outside stairs, doorways, stables, bridge arches, standing carts, and even hob-nailed boots. He yelped at the crash of the gun, but it was another matter altogether that set his little heart to palpitating with alarm. It was the dinner-hour, and where was Auld Jock?

Ah! A happy thought: his master had gone to dinner!

A human friend would have resented the idea of such base desertion and sulked. But in a little dog's heart of trust there is no room for suspicion. The thought simply lent wings to Bobby's tired feet. As the market-place emptied he chased at the heels of laggards, up the crescent-shaped rise of Candlemakers Row, and straight on to the familiar dining-rooms. Through the forest of table and chair and human legs he made his way to the back, to find a soldier from the Castle, in smart red coat and polished boots, lounging in Auld Jock's inglenook.

Bobby stood stock still for a shocked instant. Then he howled dismally and bolted for the door. Mr. John Traill, the smooth-shaven, hatchet-faced proprietor, standing midway in shirt-sleeves and white apron, caught the flying terrier between his legs and gave him a friendly clap on the side.

“Did you come by your ainsel’ with a farthing in your silky-purse ear to buy a bone, Bobby? Whaur’s Auld Jock?”

A fear may be crowded back into the mind and stoutly denied so long as it is not named. At the good landlord’s very natural question “Whaur’s Auld Jock?” there was the shape of the little dog’s fear that he had lost his master. With a whimpering cry he struggled free. Out of the door he went, like a shot. He tumbled down the steep curve and doubled on his tracks around the market-place.

At his onslaught, the sparrows rose like brown leaves on a gust of wind, and drifted down again. A cold mist veiled the Castle heights. From the stone crown of the ancient Cathedral of St. Giles, on High Street, floated the melody of “The Bluebells of Scotland.” No day was too bleak for bell-ringer McLeod to climb the shaking ladder in the windy tower and play the music bells during the hour that Edinburgh dined. Bobby forgot to dine that day, first in his distracted search, and then in his joy of finding his master.

For, all at once, in the very strangest place, in the very strangest way, Bobby came upon Auld Jock. A rat scurrying out from a foul and narrow passage that gave to the rear of the White Hart Inn, pointed the little dog to a nook hitherto undiscovered by his curious nose. Hidden away between the noisy tavern and the grim, island crag was the old cock-fighting pit of a ruder day. There, in a broken-down carrier’s cart, abandoned among the nameless abominations of publichouse refuse, Auld Jock

lay huddled in his greatcoat of hodden gray and his shepherd's plaid. On a bundle of clothing tied in a tartan kerchief for a pillow, he lay very still and breathing heavily.

Bobby barked as if he would burst his lungs. He barked so long, so loud, and so furiously, running 'round and 'round the cart and under it and yelping at every turn, that a slatternly scullery maid opened a door and angrily bade him "no' to deave folk wi' 'is blatterin'." Auld Jock she did not see at all in the murky pit or, if she saw him, thought him some drunken foreign sailor from Leith harbor. When she went in, she slammed the door and lighted the gas.

Whether from some instinct of protection of his helpless master in that foul and hostile place, or because barking had proved to be of no use Bobby sat back on his haunches and considered this strange, disquieting thing. It was not like Auld Jock to sleep in the daytime, or so soundly, at any time, that barking would not awaken him. A clever and resourceful dog, Bobby crouched back against the farthest wall, took a running leap to the top of the low boots, dug his claws into the stout, home knitted stockings, and scrambled up over Auld Jock's legs into the cart. In an instant he poked his little black mop of a wet muzzle into his master's face and barked once, sharply, in his ear.

To Bobby's delight Auld Jock sat up and blinked his eyes. The old eyes were brighter, the grizzled face redder than was natural, but such matters were quite outside of the little dog's ken. It was a dazed moment before the man remembered that Bobby should not be there. He frowned down at the excited little creature, who was wagging satisfaction from his nose-tip to the end of his crested tail, in a puzzled effort to remember why.

"Eh, Bobby!" His tone was one of vague reproof. "Nae doot ye're fair satisfied wi' yer ainsel'."

Bobby's feathered tail drooped, but it still quivered, all ready to wag again at the slightest encouragement. Auld Jock stared at him stupidly, his dizzy head in his hands. A very tired, very draggled little dog, Bobby dropped beside his master, panting, subdued by the reproach, but happy. His soft eyes, veiled by the silvery fringe that fell from his high forehead, were deep brown pools of affection. Auld Jock forgot, by and by, that Bobby should not be there, and felt only the comfort of his companionship.

"Weel, Bobby," he began again, uncertainly. And then, because his Scotch peasant reticence had been quite broken down by Bobby's shameless devotion, so that he told the little dog many things that he cannily concealed from human kind, he confided the strange weakness and dizziness in the head that had overtaken him: "Auld Jock is juist fair silly the day, bonny wee laddie."

Down came a shaking, hot old hand in a rough caress, and up a gallant young tail to wave like a banner. All was right with the little dog's world again. But it was plain, even to Bobby, that something had gone wrong with Auld Jock. It was the man who wore the air of a culprit. A Scotch laborer does not lightly confess to feeling "fair silly," nor sleep away the busy hours of daylight. The old man was puzzled and humiliated by this discreditable thing. A human friend would have understood his plight, led the fevered man out of that bleak and fetid cul-de-sac, tucked him into a warm bed, comforted him with a hot drink, and then gone swiftly for skilled help. Bobby knew only that his master had unusual need of love.

Very, very early a dog learns that life is not as simple a matter to his master as it is to himself. There are times when he reads trouble, that he cannot help or understand, in the man's eye and voice. Then he can only look his love and loyalty, wistfully, as if he felt his own shortcoming in the matter of speech. And if

the trouble is so great that the master forgets to eat his dinner; forgets, also, the needs of his faithful little friend, it is the dog's dear privilege to bear neglect and hunger without complaint. Therefore, when Auld Jock lay down again and sank, almost at once, into sodden sleep, Bobby snuggled in the hollow of his master's arm and nuzzled his nose in his master's neck.