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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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The Hound of Duncardin

by ARLTON EADIE

"Take that knowledge to hell with you!"

THE Fates which preside over the destinies of mankind must have been sitting up and taking notice during the five minutes that I stood hesitating at the junction of the two paths which ran in divergent directions over the heather-clad Scottish moor.

I had been fairly late in setting out from Gairloch, where I had spent the previous night, but I thought I had allowed myself ample time in which to cover the fifteen or so miles which lay between that little town and the coast village of Melvaig where, so I had been informed, I could obtain comfortable lodgings. But the proposed itinerary of a solitary walking-tour, such as I was then enjoying, is liable to be somewhat elastic. I had dawdled away most of the day, stopping now and again to admire the glorious

scenery of the Ross coast and to indulge in a quiet smoke while lying on the fragrant heather, and when the twilight began to close in unusually early by reason of the dark and threatening clouds overhead, I discovered that I was still a good many miles from my destination.

Such was the situation when I halted at the crossroads in the gathering dusk, undecided which to pursue. The path to my left ran along the coast, and by following it I would ultimately arrive at Melvaig, but the one which slanted off at an angle to my right seemed to lead direct to a very cheerful cluster of lights about a mile distant across the purple moor.

It was, I concluded, a village of some sort; a village would probably mean an inn, and an inn would mean shelter of a more or less comfortable description. I felt sorely tempted to forego the assured comforts of Melvaig in favor of the nearer entertainment which the winking lights to my right seemed to promise.

A sudden spatter of heavy raindrops on my face decided me. I turned away from the sea and headed across the moor at my best pace.

I soon discovered, however, that the lights were not so near as I had first supposed them to be. Moreover, the path I was following did not seem to lead directly to them; it twisted and turned in different directions, until I lost all patience with its devious windings. By this time the rain had settled into a steady driving downpour, and wreaths of white mist were beginning to settle among the hollows of the moor. I knew that the folk who lived thereabouts kept early hours; any moment they might take it into their heads to extinguish the lights and go to bed, in which case I might spend the rest of the night in wandering about that desolate stretch of moorland. Finally I found that the path I was treading seemed to be branching off at right angles to the place I was now desperately anxious to reach. It was this last straw that snapped my already overtaxed patience.

"Here goes!" I cried, as I left the guidance of the path and struck across country in the direction of the beckoning lights.

After I had been walking ten minutes I began to notice that the ground was getting very soft underfoot. At first I did not attach much importance to this, setting it down to the heavy rain, but I soon found myself ankle-deep.

I backed away from this muddy patch and walked a few dozen yards to the right, in order to avoid it. The next minute I was immersed to the knees in the treacherous morass.

Too late I understood the reason for the zigzag windings of the road I had so rashly quitted. I turned and waded back through the clinging slime, only too eager to regain the road. But it was very difficult to judge my sense of direction once I had lost sight of the distant lights. I floundered on almost at random, at every step sinking deeper in the sucking ooze. Yet I knew I must keep moving, for the moment I attempted to stand still I began to sink.

On I struggled, blindly, desperately, trusting to chance to lead me out of that quivering death-trap. Then of a sudden the ground seemed to open, engulfing me waist-deep in the marsh.

Then did the icy hand of despair clutch my heart in real earnest. I knew not which way to turn; yet it meant death to stand still. But whichever way I turned I seemed only to sink deeper in the mire.

In vain I tried to gain a firmer foothold—the yielding slime encompassed me on every side.

"Help! Help!" I shouted at the top of my voice.

But the only answer was the sough of the wind and the bubbling of the ooze around me. Far away across the dismal expanse the cheery lights that had lured me to my doom seemed to mock me with their unchanging stare.

In my frenzy I cursed them—cursed my own folly in leaving the path—the clinging mud—the darkness. . . .

"Help!" I shouted with the full force of my panting lungs.

The echoes of my voice died away. My strength was exhausted; I could struggle no more. It was the end. But even as I steeled myself to meet the inevitable, I heard a deep-throated baying near at hand, and a moment later a huge, shaggy form loomed dimly through the darkness.

Thus did I make my first acquaintance with the Hound of Duncardin.

A GREAT wave of returning hope surged through my heart at the coming of this four-footed friend in need. Where such an animal could tread a man could follow without being engulfed. I turned and struggled in the direction of the dog, and he, on his part, seemed to encourage my efforts by a series of loud but friendly barks. Soon I had the satisfaction of feeling the ground becoming firmer, and presently I was able to drag myself, panting but elated, on to a grassy hillock. The unerring instinct of the animal had saved me from the fate which my own reason had been powerless to avert.

After a few minutes I rose to my feet, whereupon the dog trotted on a yard or so ahead, giving a low whine now and again as though inviting me to follow him. And I was only too pleased to avail myself of his friendly guidance. I purposely refrained from attempting to make friends with him, thinking that I might distract his attention and cause him to follow me, instead of allowing me to follow him. I trudged on in silence until I heard my boots crunching on the hard gravel of the highroad.

"Good dog," I called out coaxingly. "Wise old boy! I'll buy you the finest feed of meat you ever tasted, as soon as I can. Home, boy, home! Show me where you live, like a wise old doggie." He gave a short bark and wagged his tail as if he understood my words, then trotted on ahead as before. I quickened my steps in order to get a nearer look at him.

Until then I had naturally assumed it to be one of the sheep-dogs belonging to an adjacent croft, but now, even in the darkness, I came to the conclusion that the dog was much too large to belong to that breed. Little as I felt inclined to criticize its appearance, I could not help thinking what a weird-looking creature it was. It seemed to be built on somewhat similar lines to a greyhound, but it was much larger and its coat, instead of being smooth, was of long rough hair, in hue a peculiar shade of pallid gray. My impression was necessarily vague, for it was gleaned by the flickering flame of a match as I paused to light my pipe. It appeared to me, however, that the dog was an unusually large specimen of the Scottish deerhound.

But had he been the sorriest-looking mongrel breathing, I should have been quite content to follow my four-footed

rescuer wherever he might lead. Truth to tell, I was beginning to grow quite fond of his company, and I determined that if his owner was disposed to part with him for a reasonable sum, he would find a good home with me for the rest of his days.

As things turned out, however, I never had the chance of speaking to his owner, for we had no sooner arrived in the immediate neighborhood of the lighted windows which had been the initial cause of my trouble, than he gave vent to a long, mournful howl and raced across the moor until he was swallowed up in the darkness of the night.

I called after him and whistled for several minutes, but he did not return; so I turned again to the welcoming lights—only to utter a gasp of sheer amazement and remain staring at what I saw.

I HAD fully expected to find myself confronted with a tiny crofter's cottage, or at most with a fair-sized sheep farm. Instead, I saw before me a massive, iron-studded gate, defended by portcullis and numerous machicolations overhead, and flanked by turrets bearing the extinguisher-shaped roofs so commonly seen in Scottish mediæval architecture. Beyond the outer walls I caught a dim impression of the sheer towers and lofty battlements of a central keep.

This was certainly a very different ending from what I had anticipated. For a while I stood there, overawed by the imposing majesty of the mighty building I had stumbled upon all unawares. The very walls seemed to look down in frowning disdain upon my weary and mud-bedraggled figure, as though daring me to invade their haughty precincts. To use the expressive Scotch idiom, the place looked "unco ghaistly," and I found myself wishing more heartily than ever that I had kept to my original intention of making for Melvaig.

Presently my eyes caught the glint of brass upon the ancient timbers of the gate. It was a very modern-looking bell-button, and on the outer rim it bore the prosaic invitation, "Push."

I placed my finger on the ivory knob and pushed accordingly, and presently, in response to the distant whirring of an electric bell, footsteps sounded on the stone flags on the other side and the door swung silently open.

Although my appearance at that lonely spot might well have occasioned some surprize, there was no sign of such an emotion on the sedate features of the elderly, liveried man-servant who appeared. In a few words I explained that I had lost my way on the moors and asked if he could direct me to the nearest inn. The latter request brought a ghost of a smile to his shaven lips.

"The *nearest,* said ye?" he repeated with peculiar emphasis. "Wheest, man! Do ye no ken that this is Duncardin Castle, and the nearest hoose o' call is a matter o' eight miles awa'?"

As he mentioned the name of the castle something seemed to stir faintly in the depths of my memory. When and where had I heard that name before? For a moment I stood vainly trying to fix the half-forgotten associations; then, like a flash of light streaming into a darkened room, recollection came—Alan Duncardin, the young "one-pip" who had joined our battalion when we were holding the water-logged ditches which went by the name of trenches to the west of Armen-

tières. Could it be possible that there was some connection between the two?

The subject of the various nationalities of the men who formed the Scottish regiments was something of a standing joke in the British army, for it was asserted that they came from anywhere except north of the Tweed. But the traditional gibe had no point in the case of Second-Lieutenant Duncardin. A tall, lanky, raw-boned youth, with sandy hair and a serious freckled face, he was every inch a true highlander—"Ye micht almaist see the heather grawin' betwix his taes," as our old pipe-major once declared solemnly. All this passed through my mind so quickly that there was scarcely a noticeable pause before I again addressed the man.

"Does Mr. Alan Duncardin live here?"

"Nae doot ye mean *Sir* Alan Duncardin?"

"Yes," I returned, hoping that I was speaking the truth. "Will you give him my card?"

The man ushered me into the lofty, antler-hung hall and disappeared in quest of his master. A few moments later the door opened and I saw that my chance shot had indeed hit the mark. The man who came eagerly forward with outstretched hand was the young subaltern whom I had last seen being carried down the communication trench, badly gassed.

No sooner did he learn of my misadventures of the night than he dragged me upstairs and insisted on my donning one of his spare suits while my own soaking clothes were drying. After a hearty supper and a stiff glass of whisky I felt more comfortable than I had ever hoped to feel that night.

"You had a close call on the marsh," said Alan. "If you had passed it by daylight you would have seen the notices which I've had put up, warning travelers to keep to the road."

"I have to thank your dog that I am here at all," I rejoined, but my host shook his head.

"It wasn't my dog. The only dog we have is a toy spaniel belonging to Lady Annabel, my stepmother. The dog you saw must have been a stray sheep-dog from somewhere or other. The intelligence of such animals is marvelous. I have seen one of them, without any supervision, bring in a herd of thirty cows, one by one, to the milking-house without ever fetching a second time a cow which has been milked."

I shook my head. "I'm positive that the dog that guided me here was a deerhound," I said.

"Impossible. The only dog of that breed about here died over a year since," Alan said impatiently, and abruptly changed the subject.

We sat yarning and smoking and fighting our battles over again until late in the night. He told me that he had come into the title and estates some eighteen months previously, when his elder brother had died after a brief illness. His father, Sir James Duncardin, had married a second time, and his widow, the present Lady-Dowager Annabel, occupied a separate suite of rooms in the great rambling castle, together with her son, Ian, who was Alan's half-brother and next in succession. Most of the older portions of the feudal stronghold were shut up and unoccupied.

"It's a very interesting old place," said Alan. "You must let me take you over it in the morning—for of course you're going to make this your headquarters for

the next week or so. I've already ordered your room to be got ready. By the way," he added with a smile, "I hope you're not scared of ghosts?"

"Why? Have you got a family specter or two on the premises?" I laughingly inquired.

"So they say," he answered carelessly, and proceeded to lead the way up a winding stone staircase to my bedroom.

I GOT something of a surprize when I entered the breakfast room the following morning. My mind, in response to Alan's description of his stepmother as the "Lady-Dowager," had conjured up a vision of a venerable, silvery-haired old lady clad in rustling black silk who, more probably than not, supported her tottering footsteps with the aid of an ebony stick. Imagine my astonishment to find myself being introduced to a radiantly beautiful young lady who appeared to be scarcely older than Alan himself. She must have married the late Sir James unusually young, I decided as I regarded her pale though petal-clear skin and the wavy masses of hair which, shining with the glossy black luster of a bird's plumage, framed the perfect oval of her face. Her eyes, shadowed with long lashes, held in their dark depths a baffling expression that was at once languorous yet keenly alert; the set of her firm, scarlet lips, the only touch of color in her face, appeared to hint at unusual determination and fixity of purpose.

Ian Duncardin, her son, had inherited something of her dark, exotic beauty; but his face bore a sulky expression, and for some reason or other he seemed just then to be somewhat ill at ease.

We chatted on different subjects during the meal, and presently I began to tell them of my adventure on the moor. I had just reached the point where I was describing the coming of the strange hound when Alan thought fit to supplement my tale with a few words of—to my thinking unnecessary—explanation.

"Of course it was some wandering sheep-dog," he interposed.

I shook my head decisively. "No. I am prepared to take my oath that the animal I saw was a huge, gray-coated deerhound."

A sudden crash interrupted me. The coffee-cup had fallen from Lady Annabel's hand and she was staring across the table at me with parted lips and wide-open eyes.

"A deerhound, did you say?" she asked slowly.

"I'm sure of it," I returned, not a little puzzled to account for her intense interest in the breed of the dog. "I'm very fond of dogs, and I take a great interest in the various breeds. It was a deerhound, sure enough. I intend to take a long tramp across the moor this morning in the hope of renewing my acquaintance with my friend in need."

"I don't think you'll meet that dog again," said Lady Annabel slowly. "But if you do, I should advise you to give it a wide berth."

I lifted my eyebrows at this. "Why, do you think it is dangerous?"

She nodded her dark head once or twice as she regarded me through narrowed lids.

"Yes," she said at length. "It might be very dangerous." And after a pause she repeated the last two words under her breath: "Very dangerous!"

I smiled to myself but said nothing. It seemed to me that Alan's beautiful stepmother was unusually nervous where dogs were concerned. Subsequent events proved that she had need to be.

Breakfast over, Alan took me for a tour of inspection over the old castle. I say "tour" advisedly, for the place proved to be much more extensive than I had at first supposed. Although interesting enough from an antiquarian point of view, the dark corridors and deserted chambers had a grim, forbidding air. The old chieftain who had reared it had planned with an eye to strength rather than comfort, and but few modern improvements had been added subsequently.

Lastly he showed me the chapel. It was small, but a perfect gem of pure Gothic architecture, with exquisite stone carvings on the capitals of the pillars and the frettings of the vaulted roof. Here were the tombs of every head of the House of Duncardin, from the first Sir Roderick to Alan's elder brother, who had been laid their eighteen months ago.

"He died young," I remarked, as I read the inscription chiseled on the marble slab which covered the entrance to the vault. "Did he meet with an accident?"

Alan Duncardin shook his head without speaking, and immediately turned and led the way out of the chapel. Glancing at his face, I noticed that he looked unusually pale, and as he mounted the spiral stair his breathing became labored and irregular.

"It's that cursed gas!" he gasped jerkily. "I've never been the same since it bowled me over that night when the Germans made their big drive at Bois Grenier. I'm sorry to leave you on your own, but I think I'll have to turn in for a bit until I feel a little better. Would you mind helping me to my room and asking Dugald to send for Dr. Blair?"

Although Alan tried to make light of his illness, I could see that he was in considerable internal pain, but somehow or other I could not reconcile his symptoms with the after-effects of poison gas. It seemed to me more likely that he had eaten something that had disagreed with him.

I caught sight of Dr. Blair as he passed through the hall on his arrival. He was stout and elderly, with a slow, pompous manner, and he evidently possessed no small opinion of his own importance.

"Poor Alan has had one of his attacks," I heard Lady Annabel say as she came forward to meet him.

"Oh, I'll soon set him right again," was the doctor's confident reply. "Nothing to be alarmed about, your ladyship. These attacks are distressing while they last, and —ah—undoubtedly painful. But a little treatment — ah — palliative treatment, which a practitioner of my large experience knows so well how to administer——"

I could not help smiling to myself as they passed out of earshot. Evidently Dr. Blair was a type of medical man that is fast becoming extinct.

IN SPITE of the aged medico's confidence in the efficacy of "a little palliative treatment," it was quickly apparent that Alan's illness was no trifling matter. He was confined to his bed the whole of the next day, and I was rigidly excluded from his room. Left to my own devices, I routed out a very serviceable built-cane rod and a book of flies, and, armed with these, I determined to see what sport the sea-trout would afford in the neighboring loch. After lunch I waylaid Dugald, the old butler, and made a few inquiries as to the best places to try.

"Aye, there's some gran' fush in yon

loch," he said in a tone which showed him to be a keen enthusiast in the beloved sport of Izaak Walton; and he surprized me somewhat by offering to accompany me and act as gillie.

I was only too pleased to take advantage of his offer, for local knowledge means a lot of difference to your haul when fishing strange waters. Dugald changed his clothes for a suit of homespun tweed, and we set out together, he carrying a creel and a gaff whose dimensions seemed to augur well for the size of the "fush" he expected to encounter.

From a fly-fisher's point of view the weather was unusually promising. The sky was overcast with a thin veil of fleecy clouds, just sufficient to take the glare off the water; the gentle westerly breeze was just strong enough to cause a tiny ripple on the otherwise calm waters of the loch. Old Dugald pointed to where a series of tiny swirling breaks showed on the surface of the inshore shallows.

"Guidsakes, sir, but they're takin' fine. Ye'll hae guid sport, A'm thinkin'."

The old man proved a true prophet. After an afternoon of pleasurable excitement I had the satisfaction of seeing five fine trout, none of them under three pounds, safely gaffed and transferred to the creel. By the time the fish had ceased to rise, the sun was already low in the western sky.

I noticed that Dugald seemed unusually silent and thoughtful as we started to return; he gave me the impression of wanting to say something without knowing exactly how to begin. When we were almost at the castle gate he turned to me with a question:

"Begging your pardon, sir, but did I no hear ye tell her leddyship something aboot a deerhoond that ye saw the nicht ye came here?"

I told him of my adventure on the moor and of the dog that had shown me the way out of the swamp. When I had finished, the old man shook his head.

"I dinna ken any such dog hereaboots," he said slowly, adding in a curious tone of voice, "at least, no the noo."

"What do you mean?" I asked, puzzled as much by his tone as the broad Doric.

Dugald puckered his eyes and favored me with an odd look.

"The young laird, Sir Malcolm, used to hae such a dog as yon, and verra' fond of it he was, too. After Sir Malcolm died, the dog was aye scratching and whining at his tomb in the auld chapel. The puir critter's grief was pitiful to witness, sir, and in the end her leddyship had to hae puir Bruce—that was the dog's name, sir—she had to hae him destroyed."

"So the dog is dead?" I asked, rather needlessly.

"Deid an' buried, sir, these eighteen months."

"In that case it could not have been Bruce that I saw on the moor," I remarked with a laugh.

There was a long pause during which Dugald strode by my side in silence. Glancing out of the tail of my eye, I saw that he was stroking the strip of sandy-gray whisker, at the side of his face, with a curiously irresolute air. At last he stopped dead and grasped my arm.

"The young laird died michty queer and sudden, an noo Sir Alan's tuk wi' the same seemptoms—an', mark ye, her leddyship's ain son is heir to the title and estates——"

I stared at the man blankly, only half comprehending the sinister meaning of the fiercely whispered words.

"Good God, man!" I cried. "What do you suspect?"

"I suspect there's deil's wurrk gang on yonder," he jerked his head toward the distant towers, now outlined black against the glory of the dying sun. "It's ma belief that the hound ye saw was no mortal critter, and, if I may make so bold, I'd like ye to let me know the meenit ye see it again. I sleep in the room wi' the door facing the passage belangin' to your ain room, sir, and I doot I'll be wakin' maist the night."

As he said the words a faint sound was borne to our ears on the wings of the rising night wind. Far off and intermittent though it was, there could be no mistaking the nature of that cry, and I shivered suddenly as though a sponge soaked in ice-cold water had been passed down my spine.

For the sound we heard was the long-drawn, mournful baying of a hound.

TIRED out as I was by my long day in the open air, I found that sleep would not come to me that night. My mind was busy with a thousand thoughts, speculations, and wild, impracticable plans as I lay staring up at the black-raftered ceiling above my bed, counting the quarters as they were told by the old clock at the foot of the stairs, watching and waiting for I knew not what.

To my ears, strained to catch the slightest sound, the ancient pile seemed filled with a thousand vague noises; the faint impact of a shutter against the wall as it swung in the wind, the occasional whine of the weathercock on the pointed roof of the tower overhead as it swung to the random gusts, the flapping of a loose corner of the tapestry on the wall, and the slow, regular tapping of some beetle burrowing in the ancient wainscot.

At last I could bear the tedium of my own thoughts no longer. I switched on my electric pocket-lamp and took up a book which I had begun earlier in the day. But the commonplace plot and the trite phrases proved a more effective anodyne than I had anticipated; after reading a page or two I was soundly asleep.

How long I slept I know not, but I woke with a start, every nerve a-tingle. In the corridor outside was a sound different from the natural noises of the night. It was the faint, padding footfalls of a large hound. Nearer and nearer they came, not ceasing until they were opposite the door of my room. Then there came the sound of snuffing at the crack between the woodwork of the panels and the floor.

I passed my tongue over my dry lips, then called softly.

"Bruce!"

The dog seemed to recognize his name, for he gave a low whine of recognition and pawed eagerly against the door. So friendly and natural was his demonstration of delight that I felt my misgivings vanish. I rose, put on a dressing-gown and thrust my feet into my slippers. Then I crossed to the door and—not without some slight hesitation, I confess—pulled back the bolt and allowed it to swing open.

Standing on the threshold, wagging his long, bushy tail with pleasure, was the deerhound that had saved me from the marsh.

For a moment I stared at him in wondering silence, scarcely knowing what to think. Then Bruce bounded forward,

thrust his muzzle against my legs, his great expressive eyes looking up into my face and then at the door with an appeal there could be no mistaking.

I leant down and patted his coarse, shaggy coat.

"What is it, Bruce, old boy?" I said.

The great dog trotted out into the corridor, then half turned and stood watching me, whining softly the while. It was an unmistakable invitation for me to follow him.

Mindful of my promise to the old butler, I tapped lightly on his door. It was immediately opened by Dugald who, fully dressed, had been awaiting the summons.

"Guid presairve us!" the old man whispered in an awed voice. "'Tis auld Bruce himself!"

"And he wants to lead us somewhere," I returned. "Come, let us follow him."

Treading as softly as possible, we passed along the corridor and down the spiral staircase to the ground floor. There the dog made straight for the door leading into the old chapel.

"'Tis as I thocht, sir. The puir beast is makin' for his maister's grave!"

The old man's hands were trembling so that he could scarcely fit the key in the lock. But at last he had the door open; then, straight as an arrow, the hound made for the marble slab which covered the tomb of the dead laird and began scratching frantically at it with his paws.

"Is there a vault below that stone?" I asked the white-haired man at my side.

"Aye, sir. But surely——"

"Help me to raise it," I interrupted.

Exerting our united strength, we shifted the slab to one side. Beneath was a square, stone-lined cavity containing a single coffin. The dog immediately leapt down, and I, pausing only to thrust my lamp into Dugald's shaking hand and bid him direct the beam downward, followed. The agitation of the dog was pitiful when I commenced to loosen the screws of the coffin lid with the blade of my knife. But, unheedful of everything save the task before me, I worked steadily until the last one was extracted and the lid was free.

Slowly, reverently, I uncovered the face of the body within; then——

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded a harsh, metallic voice above me.

It was Lady Annabel, her face deathwhite, her dark eyes charged with horror, and, it seemed, with fear as well. I scrambled out of the vault and stood facing her.

"It means that I have solved the mystery of Sir Malcolm's untimely death," I said slowly, "and, unless I mistake not, of Sir Alan's present illness."

"You're mad!" came from the woman's faltering lips.

I pointed downward into the vault.

"Look upon the face of the dead, Lady Annabel," I said sternly. "There is only one thing that would preserve a body uncorrupted for so long a time. Sir Malcolm met his death by *arsenic!*"

Lady Annabel slowly raised her hand, and for the first time I saw that she held a small silver-plated revolver. I saw the shining barrel change into a circle as she aimed the weapon at me, and I gave myself up for lost.

A horrible, rasping laugh came from her lips.

"You're right—I poisoned him!" she cried. "Take that knowledge with you to hell!"

I threw myself flat as the weapon

cracked, and I heard the smack of the bullet on the stones above my head. Immediately afterward another report echoed through the silent chapel. When I rose unsteadily to my feet it was to see the murderess lying, slain by her own hand, by the side of her victim's grave.

But the faithful hound, whose love and devotion death itself had been powerless to quench, was nowhere to be seen.