

Grim  
By  
David M. Donachie

***Church Grim** when a new churchyard was opened it was believed that the first man buried there had to guard it against the Devil. To save a human soul from such a duty a pure black dog was buried in the north part of the churchyard as a substitute.*

~ Katherine Briggs, A Dictionary of Fairies

I was born on a farm, amongst half a dozen brothers and sisters. The farmyard was my nursery. We chased each other in endless circles through the mud, sticking our snouts under the barn doors and the sheep-fold gates, or gathering at the kitchen door — all eyes and thumping tails — in the hope of scraps.

I was still a puppy when Martin came to pick out a pet, and he was still a boy.

Until that day, I'd thought of the farm as my home and my brothers and sisters as my family, but from the moment I met Martin, I knew he was my true family, and that my home was wherever he was.

He was a sandy-haired boy, lanky-limbed, showing the height he'd have as a man. I thought he was the perfect human, and he didn't seem to mind that I was a gangly and shaggy-furred mongrel, with oversized paws and a tail that wouldn't stay still.

Martin taught me all the things that a boy's dog should know: how to bark and run after sticks, how to chase the coneys in the field, how to plunge into the fast-flowing stream on a hot day, and how to stay quiet by the fire so that no adult would remember to put me outside for the night.

Summer passed, and winter, then spring; my first full year. Martin was old enough now to work the fields in the weekdays and attend the parish schoolroom on a Sunday, and I was big enough to mind for myself while he was busy. In the evenings, though, I would take to the lane beside the river to meet him at his coming home. That was when I first taught *myself* something of worth.

Three older boys — John, Richard, and George Stobbes — lived next to our home. These three were enemies of my Martin, and would tease him about the hedges and in the lanes. One darkening evening they came upon him as he trudged his way back from the fields. First they mocked him, then they tripped him, and when he fell they showed him the hard toes of Richard's new hobnailed boots.

That was when I arrived, following the earthy-smell of Martin on the breeze. The first the Stobbes boys knew of it was when I sank my teeth into the back of Richard's leg to pull him away. How he howled and scrambled! John and George ran forward but I bared my teeth and growled them back, long enough for Martin to regain his feet and join me. That was too much for the Stobbes boys, and all three took to their heels.

From then on, I met Martin at the field gate each evening to walk home by his side, and we had no more trouble with the Stobbes boys in the lane.

Summers followed winters in quick succession, all the years around. My Martin grew into a young man, and I into a full-grown dog, with shaggy black fur and floppy ears.

Richard Stobbes, however, never grew out of his hatred of me, nor out of the limp my bite had given him. If he saw me alone in the lane he would throw a stone my way, and I heard him warn my Martin that if I ever strayed onto his land, or worried his sheep, he'd see me dealt with. I had no idea what he meant, but Martin told me never to cross the hedge line that separated our fields from his.

I was a good dog, and so I did my best to go only where Martin said I should, and that included down to the village, where my Martin went a'courting.

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David M. Donachie. is writer, artist, game designer, and developer living in Edinburgh, Scotland, where he inhabits a garret with his wife, two cats, numerous reptiles, and an uncountable number of insects (all pets, honest). He has been writing—often embarrassingly—since he was a boy. His work appears in anthologies from Zombie Pirate Press, Rogue Blades, Dark Ink Press and others, as well as in his self-published anthology "The Night Alphabet." He can be found on [Goodreads](#), [Facebook](#), [Amazon](#), and his [website](#).