

ANDY BROON'S LOVE AFFAIR

"ANDY BROON," as he was generally called, could hardly be described as a typical Lanarkshire miner. He was too dull, too heavy, to represent the ordinary collier of the Black Country, who, whatever his deficiency of education and faults of upbringing, can generally be written down a shrewd, intelligent chap—rough-hewn, I grant you, as the coals he sends to the surface, but with a plentiful supply of natural intelligence and mother-wit.

Andy was a first-class man with the pick, and his "rake" could always be depended upon by the pony-driver almost to a minute. But whether "up" or "down," Andy was one of the quietest of mortals. His vocabulary was seldom known to extend beyond "Fine mornin'," "It's a braw nicht," or the monosyllables "Aye" or "No," when asked a question by any of his comrades.

Once upon a time this quaint characteristic of Andy's was made the subject of many an open jest among the colliers at No. 9 Pit, Hamilton. They

were wont, too, to play all manner of tricks on him. One day at "piece-time," however, Andy forcibly objected to having his mouth examined, "to see whether he had a tongue," as Bill Watson, the mine bully, phrased it.

"Aye, I've got a tongue," exclaimed Andy with quite unusual flow of speech, throwing himself clear of his tormentors, "an' a pair o' jukes forbye. Wad ye like to sample them?"

The very idea of Andy Broon thus showing fight was so rich that Bill Watson and the others shrieked with merriment. But it was an impertinence that could not be tolerated by Bill, who promptly advanced, and, coolly spreading one grimy hand over Andy's face, "pushed" it away from him with a contemptuous snort. The fight didn't last long. It was a hurricane engagement, from which Bill Watson emerged so tamely that he was off duty for a week. Andy went back to "the face" and to his customary silence as if nothing had happened; but ever afterwards he was left severely alone as a dangerous man with whom to take liberties.

Andy would be about twenty-seven years of age when I met him first at No. 9 Pit. We had absolutely nothing in common, but somehow I formed a

liking for him, and it is certain that he had a great admiration for me. When I gave the boys a song in the little cabin at the top of the "cowsey brae" none of the crowd applauded so heartily or so long as Andy Broon. When, as a pony-driver, I had any trouble either with my "sheltie" or my hutches, there was nobody more willing than he to lend a helping hand. When we parted at the pithead of an evening to go our several ways, there was many a louder, but no cheerier, "Guid-nicht, Harry," from among my black and weary comrades.

But our friendship, if such it could be called, knew no closer ties until one evening I met Andy by "special appointment." As we came up in the "cage" together an hour or two previously he had whispered to me in a very dramatic voice: "Can ye meet us the nicht roond by the auld quarry? I want to see you very partic'lar." I agreed to do so, wondering greatly what important business Andy Broon could have to transact with me at the old quarry in the dusk of an autumn evening. Andy had no companions, male or female; he was never known to give a confidence or to invite one. He was a puzzle to everybody; but I, for one, never felt inclined to subscribe to the general impression that Andy "wisna a' there."

He was waiting for me at the foot of "the lovers' lane" that runs between the two quarry holes, and his eyes gleamed with satisfaction as he came towards me. "Hullo, Harry!" was his simple greeting. Mine took an exactly similar form, with the substitution of the word "Andy" for my own.

Together we started on our stroll. Naturally, I was all anxiety to learn the nature of the important business to which Andy had so mysteriously referred in the "cage," and I was on the point of asking for enlightenment thereon when my companion slipped a wee paper parcel into my hand.

"Dae ye like thick black, Harry?" he simultaneously asked. "That's twa ounce o' the best," he continued, edging slightly away to see the effect upon me of his unexpected generosity.

I replied, with emphatic conviction, that "thick black," either for chewing or smoking, was the best tobacco in the world, but added a desire to know why he had singled me out for such an extraordinary expression of his good-will.

"It's a' richt, Harry!" he replied with a self-satisfied air. "It's a' richt! Say nothing!"

This was exactly what Andy did himself—said nothing—and we walked on for quite a distance in dead silence. Frankly, I was beginning to recast

my views on the question of Andy's being "a' there" or not, and was half regretting that I had agreed to meet him. Besides, it was beginning to get dark, and there were few people abroad. On the other hand, I argued to myself, not even a lunatic would begin any fell scheme of personal injury by presenting his prospective victim with two ounces of "thick black."

Suddenly Andy broke the silence, and did so with a query which, considering I was only sixteen years of age, completely took my breath away.

"What like is't to be mairried, Harry?" he asked in a low, anxious voice, at the same time looking eagerly into my face.

I laughed heartily—couldn't help it. The question, and the solemnity with which it was put, were too much for me, but as I saw that Andy was sorely disappointed I hastened to remark that, though I was not married myself I had an idea that "it must be awfu' nice."

"That's jist what I think!" gleefully exclaimed Andy, his spirits recovering instantly. "An' I'm gaun tae get mairried mase'!" he added triumphantly.

This was news indeed. Andy Broon to be married! The fact would set all Hamilton speaking.

So this was "the important business" Andy had to transact with me, though why he should make me his confidant was not exactly plain at the moment. I congratulated him, and, of course, followed with the customary question as to who the lucky girl was.

"Ah!" exclaimed Andy, his face becoming serious once more. "That's what I dinna ken masel'—at least, Harry, I'm no very sure, an' I wantit tae hae a crack wi' ye about the maitter."

Andy went on then to explain that for some time he had secretly harboured "a richt notion o' Jess M'Gregor, the minister's slavey." He confessed that he had never spoken to her on the subject of his affections; as a matter of fact, he admitted that their acquaintance hitherto had only extended to sundry nods and smiles to each other as they met on the street. But he was anxious to bring affairs to a more satisfactory point. Could I tell him how to go about the business, and could I give him, as an extra special favour, the benefit of my mature ideas on the art of love-making?

Young though I was, I must admit that I had already had some slight experience "among the lassies O," but scarcely enough to set myself up as a mentor in affairs of the heart to a man fully ten

years older than myself. However, it was quite apparent that Andy regarded me as an authority on the subject, and, seeing that the poor chap was in such deadly earnest, I did my best to keep a sober face at his extraordinary story and proceeded to deal with the situation to the best of my ability.

"Well, Andy," I began, with as serious a "dial" as I could assume, "there's only one sure way that I ken o' for gettin' the saft side o' a lass."

"Aye," broke in Andy with great eagerness. "What is't, Harry?"

"Listen, an' I'll explain the whole affair," I returned with a knowing wink. "The first thing you've to do is to get speakin' to Jess—chummy wi' her. D'ye see? That should be easy! Jist gang up to her the first nicht ye meet her on the street, an' ask her if she would like a gless o' ice-cream. Ten to one she'll jump at it."

"Man, it's a grand idea," said Andy enthusiastically. "I never thocht o't, Harry! What a heid ye've got. But what'll I say to Jess efter she's shiftit the ice-cream?"

"Oh, ask her to hae anither! Then tell her that ye'll meet her on Setterday nicht. If she says yes ye can tak' her up to Glesca an' treat her to the

teetotallers' 'burst' in the Wellington Palace—sixpence a time, an' a rare good stuffin' it is."

"Good for you, Harry!" was Andy's response. "Will she like that, dae ye think?"

"Like it!" I repeated with fine sarcasm. "That shows a' you ken aboot women! She'll enjoy her-sel' first-rate, an' think the world o' ye for takin' her. Efter the feed," I continued, "there'll be a rare concert, an' if ye listen to the comics layin' aff aboot their love affairs ye'll maybe get a tip or twa, that'll come in handy for tryin' on wi' Jess. Then——"

"Aye!" feverishly chimed in Andy, "what then?"

"Weel, ye jist come hame to Hamilton, but if ye're fly ye'll stand her anither glass o' ice-cream on the road to the station, an' buy a couple o' fruit-cakes to eat in the train. See?"

"Right!" said Andy, slapping his leg and laughing cheerfully. "Dae ye think she'll love me after a' that, Harry?"

"If she doesna she's no worth botherin' aboot, Andy," was my emphatic reply. "But there's one thing you simply mustna forget—it sort o' puts a finish on the whole affair."

"Yes," said Andy, stopping suddenly and again

looking anxiously in my face, "that's wha' I want—a good finish-up to the job."

"Well," I continued, "when ye come back to Hamilton, an' the twa o' ye arrive at the minister's gate, grip Jess quick, gie her a kiss, an' then run awa' as hard as ever ye can."

"What guid'll that do, Harry?" inquired Andy in a puzzled tone of voice. "Maybe she'll be angry, and no' speak to me again. It's a bit risky, is't no'?"

"Never mind," I loftily replied. "You risk it, Andy. It's the only sure way, mind I'm tellin' ye—an' I ken a' about it."

By this time we had wandered back to the town, and soon afterwards I wished Andy good-night, telling him that I would see him early in the week and learn the result of his initial attacks on the heart of Jess M'Gregor.

The next day was Friday, and Andy announced his determination of seeing Jess that night on her way to the minister's Bible class, and carrying out my suggestions and instructions to the letter. "I'll be awfu' excited, Harry," were his last words to me, "but I'll do as ye've tel't me, because—well, because I'm richt fond o' Jess."

On Saturday morning Andy came along to the

“level” at which I was working as a pony-driver and gleefully related to me the results of his encounter with Jess on her way to the Bible class.

“It’s as richt as rain, Harry!” he exclaimed, giving me a slap on the back which sent me reeling to the other side of the level. “I’m to see her the nicht, and we’re gaun up to Glesca to the teetotallers’ ‘Burst.’”

“Good,” I replied, with a smile at Andy’s enthusiasm. “But mind what I tell’t ye—especially aboot the kissin’. Man,” I added, as we separated, “a kiss is a rare thing.”

“Maybe frae Jess M’Gregor—naebody else!” replied Andy with all a lover’s prejudice. Then we parted.

On the Sunday forenoon Andy turned up at our house in a melancholy state of mental worry, and begged me to see him privately for a few minutes. He had carried out my instructions to the letter, he afterwards explained in nervous tones, down to the ice-cream, the fruit-cakes, and the farewell episode at the minister’s gate. “I think the kissin’ caper has clean cooper’d me, Harry,” he concluded with almost a wail, “for she slapp’d ma face an’ jump’t into the hoose afore I kent whaur I wis or what I had dune.”

I told him that he had performed his part splendidly, and that there was nothing to be afraid of. "But, of course," I added, "ye'll need to send her a love-letter."

Andy's eyes almost started out of their sockets at this. A love-letter! He had never written an ordinary letter in his life, let alone a love-letter. I was no great adept at letter-writing myself, but between us we drafted the following epistle, which Andy carefully carried away with him to the Post Office:

"Dear Jess:—I'm very sorry that I kissed you last night. I'll never do it again. But I couldna help myself, you looked that tricky in your blue frock. If you're no' angry, I'll see you again on Wednesday night out the quarry road. I remain,
"Andrew Broon."

This masterpiece of a "love-letter" completely softened the wrath of Jess—if, indeed, she had ever harboured any—for on the Wednesday evening Andy and I saw her coming along the road. She was wearing her blue frock! I discreetly slipped away, and from a safe distance watched the meeting of the lovers.

Three months later they were married. Andy Broon's waddin' was a great affair. I was best man, the best maid was Nance; but now I'm wandering from "Andy Broon's Love Affair" to my own.