

## Chapter 9

### Bobby-on-the-Beat

Bearloch's own and only policeman was PC Bobby MacBadger, who was also commonly known as Bobby-on-the-Beat.

This was because there were other Bobbies in Bearloch. There was Bobby-in-the-Band, a grey seal who played trombone in Sandy MacSeal's jazz band. There was Bobby-in-the-Bothy, a very unsociable wild cat who lived alone in a ramshackle bothy outside the village. There was Bobby-round-the-Bend, who was a goat and just a little crazy. He was often to be found in the bar of the Banshee Hotel, where Wompy's great-nephew, Bobby-behind-the-Bar, would bob around serving the drinks. But when Bobby-behind-the-Bar went fishing in the loch they called him Bobby-in-the-Boat.

PC Bobby-on-the-Beat did not have much to do. Crime was rare in Bearloch. This was partly because there were not so many laws as there are in the known world. It was partly also because Bearloch people all knew each other. You are less likely to mug an old lady in the street if she is your second cousin or your next-door neighbour's aunt. Bearloch had no lack of the dislikes and grudges that arise when people know each other well, but these hardly ever led to anything more criminal than Mairi MacSheep's sniff.

PC Bobby had his own view of why there was no crime in Bearloch. He put it down to the way he patrolled his patch every day. This, he maintained, reminded people of the long arm of the law. (His own arms were rather short, and disrespectful children sometimes called him 'the short arm of the law.')

He supposed that all sorts of mischief were brewing in people's minds until they saw him on the beat and thought better of it.

Though PC Bobby-on-the-Beat was proud of the lack of crime in Bearloch, he was not altogether happy about it. He was very fond of murder mysteries, and when he was not out on the beat he would sit in his police station reading them. He fancied himself a great detective solving crimes as difficult to crack as those in his favourite books. He knew exactly how he would do it. He just lacked the opportunity.

So, like Grampa, PC Bobby was often disappointed that nothing happened in Bearloch. He had his mental list of likely murder suspects, and was always on the lookout for a corpse.

However, it should be said that PC Bobby was a kindhearted badger. He did not really wish any of his neighbours dead. He just wanted a murder to solve. If he could have that without anyone actually being killed then that would be fine.

\*

"Watch out! Here's the short paw of the law," shouted Tosh. He had been peering out of the kitchen window and saw PC Bobby emerge from the mist and march quickly up to the front porch of the Den.

When he had been told the story, Bobby sat back in his chair and said: "I am afraid we have a murder on our hands."

"Oh, surely not," said Mother MacBear, who thought it was lucky Grizzelda was no longer in the kitchen. "That's not at all what the note said."

"Oh, the note is just a ploy to make us think she's all right, so that we don't put so much effort into hunting them down. It's obvious they've killed her. Why would they have taken her if they didn't mean to kill her?"

"But why should they want to kill her?" asked Mother MacBear. This stumped PC Bobby. Grizzlette was not much liked in Bearloch, but they could not imagine why anyone should want to kill her.

PC Bobby got out his notebook and began to make a list of suspects, but he soon realized that, since no one had a motive for the crime, everyone would have to be a suspect.

"I shall have to interview everyone in Bearloch," he said, "see who haven't got alibis, and get a sample of handwriting from everyone. And I shall have to go to Blair Bear to look for clues. There's a great deal to do. I must get started at once."

The MacBears thought this meant he was leaving. Actually it meant he needed handwriting samples from all of them and to know where they were the afternoon Grizzlette disappeared. This done, he said, "A wee dram would be very welcome before I go out in the fog. Just to keep out the cold."

PC Bobby was a little too fond of the whisky. There were times when people called him, not Bobby-on-the-Beat, but Bobby-on-a-Binge.

He sat with his whisky, deep in thought, for quite a while. He tried to think what the heroes of his detective stories would have done. He could not remember a case where they had to work in the fog.

\*

That evening, he was sitting, with another whisky, in the bar of the Banshee Hotel. Bobby-round-the-Bend was reciting his latest haiku:

My breakfast  
a jar of marmalade  
and no toast.

This was greeted with much cheering and some jeering.

"Give us another one, Bobby," shouted someone. So he did:

Incoming tide  
all the little crabs  
jump with excitement.

This was greeted with a few boos from people who had never seen crabs jump. Undeterred, Bobby-round-the-Bend continued with another haiku:

Horse in the haar  
staring it can only see  
what it searches for.

The audience found this one rather baffling. Then some other people jumped up to try out their haiku on an audience.

PC Bobby had written many haiku himself. Since the contest was announced, he had taken to composing them when he was out on the beat. But this evening he was certainly not in the mood for haiku.

He had spent the afternoon interviewing everyone he could find in the village, until eventually he decided it would be less tedious to continue in the bar. But everyone had an alibi. Nobody's handwriting matched the note. Nobody had seen or heard anything unusual the day before.

PC Bobby was at a complete loss. He had no suspects. In murder mysteries there were always suspects. Usually there were too many suspects, all with plausible motives. What did a detective do when he couldn't find a single suspect?