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Eustace, the Outcast

CHAPTER XXV.—Continued.

Willy crossed heights after height and valley after valley at great speed. None knew the shortest route to take better than he, for of late he had traversed that distance very frequently and at all hours.

From where he stood the village was nearly half a mile distant, and Willy could not think of losing the time which would be required to go on by it; he therefore hurried on, and was swiftly descending the slope, when in the field opposite, close by the side of the edge which had previously concealed her, he saw a woman tending a cow.

"Mrs. Tippet, by a that's lucky," ejaculated Willy. "Dod, I couldn't have met in w' a better hand."

"Instantly she shaped his course towards her, and vaulting over the gate of the field, he soon came within speaking distance.

"Hey, man, what sort o' work's that?" demanded the redoubtable woman as he came near.

"Dinna be angry, Mrs. Tippet," returned Willy. "I am on an errand the night that menna thos delay."

"Oh, it's you, is it?" she said, while shadowing her eyes from the sun, which dazzled her vision.

"Yes," answered Willy, "it's a' up wi' the smuggling noo, Mrs. Tippet. Baith Maister Jessop and Maister Adamson has been betrayed, and the gaugers are gaun the night tae empty their concealments."

"Oh, mercy, wha's done that?" she cried.

"Dickson's the man," Francis Dickson? "Ay, blast him—him and nae ither."

"Nae ither," exclaimed Mrs. Tippet, with something like a shriek. "There is another. This explains which for him and Fate was fetching at Bonner Dub the ither night. Oh, the vagabonds—the villains! But they'll neither hae luck nor thrive for it, and if the lads o' Cowdenham are worth their lugs they'll tie a stane about both their necks and throw them over Shittenhaugh. But gang yer ways, my man, and warn Jessop and Iae o' the alarm up by. Well there no be time to empty Hollow Craig before the gaugers come! They might get away the stuff in boats."

"That's impossible," rejoined Willy. "They'd be along the brae heads as sune as it's dark, and Lieut. Gramme is tae be aff the Heid w' his cutter to catch the lugger."

"Heh me, than a' is lost," cried Mrs. Tippet, with a doleful shake of her head, and the oval-scullie bonnet which enveloped it.

Willy waited no longer for the exchange of words, but glad at having found such effectual means of rousing the smugglers of Coldingham, he started off with renewed speed in the direction of Eymouth, while Mrs. Tippet laid a heavy stave across her cow's back to quicken its pace homewards.

On emerging on the quarry and looking across Willy gave a great start, and his heart fell, for there was Duoson Dunbar and several of his men crossing the terrace and approaching the front door of the building. In his desperate haste he leapt into the first boat he saw and rowed across to the archway. The heavy door was closed and fastened as usual, but he made the signal, and waited impatiently for Marion to answer it.

"Are they in?" he breathlessly inquired.

"'Tis so, ye hame the yer father," he answered, "and then I wae, he, air and over the heights tae Lowder."

In five minutes Willy had imprinted a paring kiss on Marion's lips, and was again traversing the heights in the direction of St. Abba.

CHAPTER XXVI. BOBOS AT LOWDEN AND LOWDEN SHORE—CAPTAIN DONALDSON AND HIS LOG-ON-THE-REBEL.

No sooner had Willy left Lowden to give warning to Jessop, than Mr. Adamson set to work to make the most of the few hours which would intervene before the arrival of the officers. Men had to be done in the interval, if he was to be saved from the utter ruin, and still more if he was to disappoint Dunbar as he had designed, and secure the informant's share of his own store concealed in the Hollow Orag.

His first step was to despatch a trusty messenger to Cockburnspath, with a message to the excise-officer there, to the effect that a large quantity of smuggled gin was concealed in the neighborhood of Lowden shore, and that if he came immediately to the spot it would be put into his possession. Such a message as this he well knew would bring the officer on the instant, and he devoutly hoped that his arrival would precede that of the Eymouth gaugers at the same place.

This done all hands about the farm were mustered to empty the contents of two sacks, and convey the kegs to a safer concealment. By dusk the kegs were got into the cart, and the scouts set to watch on some of the eminences near, reporting that no suspicious characters were in view, they left the premises in a body, and scattered in all directions, under injunctions to find their way by different paths to the shore of Coldingham Loch.

Immediately after they were gone Mr. Adamson yoked his gig, and he and Eustace getting into it, departed for the same place.

It was now quite dark and moonless, and they made their way over the trackless moor by the dim light of the stars. As they moved on, the former kept looking anxiously across the heights and out upon the shrouded sea.

"My chief fear now is for Donaldson," he muttered. "If he should come in within the next two hours we can do little or nothing to save him from the cutter."

"Has the cutter been seen yet?" inquired Eustace.

"No, your brother the Lieutenant having learned experience by his former failure, will not appear on the scene till late, but no doubt he is hovering about, and will discover the lugger the moment she draws near. If I had only got twenty-four hours longer warning, I would have managed to give him intelligence—but, as it is, I fear the cargo must go."

They had gained the crest of a rounded eminence, and the bright sheet of water lay before them surrounded by bare, unwooded heights. At the upper end grew a mass of sedges and other water plants, and here, beside a boat which was drawn up, the kegs were being quickly transferred to it.

"That's the style, lads," said Adamson encouragingly. "Work with a will, and we'll save the stuff from the hands of the harpies yet."

He dismounted while he spoke, and took from the box of the gig a mass of stout cords cut into lengths, with a square piece of cork fastened to the end of each. This was tumbled into the now loaded boat, and two of the men got in and rowed into the middle of the loch among the sedges. Here a length of rope was fastened around each keg, and it was dropped to the bottom—the cork, of course, floating on the top, thus giving the means of pulling up the keg at some future time.

This work proceeded with great celerity, and by the time the boat was emptied others of the carts had come to the side of the loch, whose contents were ready to re-fill it.

In less than two hours the whole of the kegs were safely deposited at the bottom of the loch—the boat put again into its house, the carts away, and the lonely sheet of water left to its usual solitude.

When they returned to the farm-house William had arrived with the news of what had taken place at Jessop's. They now knew that the Supervisor, and his men would make their appearance very shortly, but as yet the messenger had not returned from Cockburnspath and Adamson feared that the officer of that district would be too late.

Presently the scout stationed on an eminence which overlooked the road came running in with the intelligence that a compact body of men were coming slowly across the moor. On hearing this the farmer at once gave orders that all should disperse, so that the officers when they arrived might find everything in its usual quietness, and perceive no indications of the hasty work that had been done, or that their visit was expected. Acting on this injunction, the men withdrew to their houses, Ralph located himself in the kitchen, and the group in the parlor assumed an appearance of perfect unconcern. At Mr. Adamson's request, Lillias brought out her work basket, and the good farmer put on his spectacles and began reading aloud a paragraph out of the Courant.

An unmistakable indication of the arrival of the expected visitors was at length given by the furious barking of one of the house dogs, which was immediately followed by the tramp of several feet, and a loud knock on the front door.

Acting on previous instructions, the servant girl answered the summons, while Mr. Adamson went on unconcernedly with his reading, which he did not stop still the Supervisor stood within the room with his men at his back. Affecting only then to be first aware of his presence, he laid the paper on his lap and looked up with an expression of great astonishment, the others trying to imitate him in this as well as they could. It was the first time Eustace had seen the redoubtable Mr. Dunbar, and he sat regarding him with not a little curiosity.

"Mr. Dunbar!" exclaimed Adamson, "who would have thought of seeing you here at this late hour?"

"Not you, I dare say," returned Dunbar, "but duty sometimes brings us excise officers abroad at hours not of our own choosing."

"Oh, you are on a visit of duty. Not to me, I hope?"

"I am sorry to say it is to you, Mr. Adamson."

"What—although you found how thoroughly you had been hoaxed the last time?"

"Why, yes, I have found out that I was hoaxed the last time, and very cleverly too. You are a cunning chield, but I rather think I shall be too much for you tonight."

"To the point, sir, if you please," said the farmer with a show of anger. "I am not disposed to manifest good humor at being insulted and inconvenienced by your domiciliary visits. If you choose to give heed to every idle tongue that wags in your ear I am not inclined to submit tamely to the consequences of your credulity. Now say at once for what purpose you are here tonight."

"To search your premises."

"Oh, you expect to find concealed here something contraband?"

"I do."

"Another hoax has been perpetrated on you, I suppose."

"No—not this time," replied Dunbar, confidently. "I might have made this seizure without coming to the house at all, but I thought it as well to do it in your presence. So, if you choose to accompany us—"

"By all means," said Adamson in a tone of offended indifference. "You will want lights, I suppose?"

"We have lights," rejoined the supervisor; then turning to his men he added, "Get out your lanterns."

Four lanterns were lighted on the instant, and the farmer with Willy and Eustace followed the officers to the outside of the house. Ralph came from the kitchen and joined them.

With a bold, unhesitating air, the Supervisor led the way to the stackyard, casting glances of triumph at the farmer as they went along. The latter maintained an expression of equanimity, which Dunbar set down to the strength of his fancied security, and he confidently anticipated being able to confute and overwhelm him immediately.

With the directness of one whose information was accurate and minute, the Supervisor went to the second row of stacks, and passed at the first which Dickson had named. Then he turned round and looked into the farmer's face with a significant smile. To his surprise that face betrayed no sign of uneasiness or discomfiture.

"You are a capital actor, Adamson," he remarked.

"What makes you say so?"

"Because you can put on an unconscious look, though you know well enough that within a few feet of us lies that which when discovered, will prove your ruin."

"I know no such thing, sir; so you give me credit for too much."

"Very well. Now men, search that stack."

In a moment the lanterns were lowered, and speedily an exclamation of triumph escaped the lips of the officers, for at one place the sheaves were loose, and could be easily drawn out. A dozen of them were quickly tumbled out, and Dunbar himself dived into the interior. But he came again in less than a minute, breathless and furious.

"That concealment is empty!" he roared. "Try the next stack."

The cavity in the next stack proved as destitute as the first, and the rage of the Supervisor was only equalled by his astonishment.

"Well, Mr. Dunbar," said the farmer with a little laugh, "have you made a fortunate seizure?"

"Curse ye for an old hoary-headed fox," thundered the Supervisor, wholly beside himself with passion, and advancing upon Adamson, as if he would strike him.

Eustace at once stepped forward and confronted him.

"Beware, sir," he sternly said, "I have kept silent so long as you have kept within the bounds of your duty, though methinks you are inclined to

discharge it with unwarrantable insolence. But no minion of the Government shall ferociously menace a friend of mine in my presence."

"Who the deuce are you, sir?" roared Dunbar, in a foam.

"One who knows how to treat a bully like you," was the answer.

"Do you know who I am, sir?" I am a gentleman, and an officer of the Revenue."

"I doubt not you are an officer of the revenue," returned Eustace scornfully, "but you show few signs of being a gentleman."

"So!" bellowed the enraged Supervisor.

"No, sir. A gentleman would not manifest such a keen relish for the pitiful work in which you are engaged tonight. But that is a discussion on which I have no inclination to enter. All that I have to say is that I shall not permit you to vent any of your spite or passion on my friend, Mr. Adamson."

"Oh, ho! You mean to resist me in the execution of my duty?" exclaimed the Supervisor, becoming cowed before the firmness of the indignant youth.

"Not so," rejoined the latter. "So long as you keep to your duty, however offensively performed, I shall not deign to notice you; but dare again to address Mr. Adamson in such a way as you have already done, and I shall take a very summary way of teaching you manners."

"I see how it is," cried Dunbar. "You are acting as a foil, but it won't do. The stuff is on the premises."

"Where have you any proof of that?" demanded the farmer.

"What are these holes in the stacks for?" queried the supervisor.

"Perhaps they are ventilators," laughed the farmer.

With a few more strong expletives, Dunbar turned round to his men.

"Search away," he shouted. "We may have mistaken the stacks after all. There is no mistake about the stuff being here."

At this suggestion the men dispersed, and began an inspection of the whole stackyard. But every rick they examined was solid, and no cavity could they discover where stuff could be concealed.

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