

Eustace, the Outcast.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE HORROR OF SUICIDE—SIDING OF EUSTACE—A MORTAL STROKE—THE HIDDEN OF THE WILL—RALPH FINDS AND READS AN IMPORTANT LETTER.

At the sight of Jessie and her child the guilty Randolph seemed blinded as by a flash of lightning. One brief look of utter horror he cast upon her, then with a violent shudder, he covered his eyes with his hands to shut out the spectacle.

The rest were struck dumb, and stood gazing first on the pale trembling figure in the corner, and then on the bowed form of Randolph. Ralph stood in the fond enjoyment of his triumph as the producer of the situation, and was in no hurry to break the spell of amazed and horrified silence.

The spell was at length broken by Jessie herself, who came timidly and tottering from the corner and approached Randolph.

"Do not fear anything for me, Randolph," she said, in a tone of intense sadness and sorrow. "I will not trouble you again. It would not have troubled you but for this talk-of-marriage. I could not allow that crime to be committed. For your sake and the sake of her whom no ceremony could make your wife I came hither to prevent it. And now I am gone. I repeat that from me you have nothing more to fear, for as regards the past, my mouth has been and shall be sealed by silence."

Her words recovered him at once. His quick soul perceived from what she said that the faithful girl who had loved him so strongly had not divulged the horrible deed he had done. His worst fear was therefore removed, and he gathered together his energies to meet the emergency.

As for Jessie, she had no sooner spoken the words she had uttered than she glided across the room and passed out by the door—no one having the presence of mind to prevent her.

"Oh, Randolph, what does this mean?" moaned Mrs. Grahame. "Is that woman indeed your wife?"

"Yes, I guess that's a bit worse than yours, Nell," chuckled Ralph. "But that ain't all. The girl isn't only only his wife, but the child is his son—the heir of Bengarry, if the governor there don't change his will. So he didn't make much of it when he cut out Mr. Eustace, and maybe he'll give him the estate yet, now when he knows what's what."

"Alas, Ralph, do you know that Eustace is dead?" said Captain Dunsmore.

"No he isn't," answered Ralph, briskly. "He's as much in life as you are."

"Eustace alive!" exclaimed Dunsmore, grasping him vehemently by the arm, while the others are equally moved, though with different feelings, by the intelligence. Mr. Grahame did not speak, but started forward, and, grasping the back of a chair for support, gazed breathlessly on Ralph.

"Yes, alive," replied the latter. "Bless you, Captain, he and Willy and Joe did not go down with the Cornets, but they lost their ears and couldn't make the French ship, so they were drifted right on till Providence, sent them to the desert island where I had been left to starve, and next day a ship came and picked us all off, and in the end we got back to Scotland."

"And where is Eustace now?" asked Dunsmore, in breathless eagerness.

Ralph looked into his excited face, thence glanced to Randolph, and seeing that he, too, was breathlessly waiting for the answer, he gave a significant nod. "I rather think I'll not tell you that just now. I know where to get him if he is wanted."

"Ha! it is a fabrication," cried Randolph.

"You wish it was, I dare say," rejoined the gamekeeper. "But keep in that belief if you choose. 'I'll tell Mr. Eustace what has taken place here today, and if it suits him he will soon give you all proof enough that he is alive. Hilloo! what's the matter with the old gentleman?"

As Ralph spoke a dull, heavy thud sounded on the floor, and they looked round to find Mr. Grahame lying in a heap, with his head hanging forward on his breast. The Captain and Ralph rushed towards him, and lifted him up, but he lay in their arms heavy and helpless. His eyes were closed, and the color of his face was a deep purple.

"Merciful heaven, he is in a fit!" exclaimed Dunsmore.

"It's a stroke of apoplexy," said Ralph. "Devilish fortunate," said Randolph to himself, as a thrill of selfish joy struck through his selfish heart, and the keen hope lodged there that the stroke was mortal.

Great was the commotion that now ensued. The servants were summoned, and Mr. Grahame was carried up to his room still insensible, and a message im-

mediately despatched for a doctor. Within the hour the doctor came, and, after a short examination shook his head.

"Very bad case," he muttered, and advised that more medical skill should be called in. The same messenger was therefore despatched on another horse to Newburgh, and meanwhile Mr. Grahame was freely bled. This operation took away, so far, the purple color from his face, and his breathing became somewhat less labored, but he did not gain either sight or consciousness.

"Is there much danger?" asked Dunsmore, following the doctor into an adjoining room.

The doctor replied by putting another question—"Has Mr. Grahame had anything to excite him?"

"He has," was the answer. "He was excited very much—indeed, most violently."

"I thought so."

"His illness, then, is a severe one?"

"The doctor looked at him. "It must candidly inform you," he said, "that there is no likelihood of Mr. Grahame's recovery. It was this conviction that made me chiefly anxious for the presence of Dr. Scott."

The captain was greatly shocked.

"He may linger for some time," added the doctor, "for days, for weeks even, but recover he cannot."

"Will his consciousness not even return?"

"Most likely it will, but he will not recover in any great degree the power of motion or speech." When Dr. Scott arrived he fully corroborated this opinion, and Randolph heard the declaration of the doctors, and suppressing by an effort the intense satisfaction he felt, he left the library to seek his mother's apartment.

In the hall he met a servant coming to him with a letter which had just been delivered by an express messenger.

Turning back, Randolph opened the epistle, and became at once intensely interested in its contents.

"Ha, that is important," he said, as he refolded the letter put it in his breast. "I must depart without an hour's delay. This is a chance that must not be neglected. By heaven! my triumphs are increasing when all seemed lost. Now, to see my mother and make all sure here."

He ran quickly up the stairs, and entered his mother's apartment. Mrs. Grahame lay upon a couch and the housemaid knelt beside her, both uttering wild lamentations. The girl was dismissed, and Randolph closed and fastened the door. Then his mother rose up, and regarded him reproachfully.

"Randolph," she exclaimed, "you have deceived me dreadfully. You have acted foolishly and ruined all."

"Hush, not a word of this," he hurriedly whispered. "All is not ruined. We are safe yet—safer than ever. In fact our triumph is certain if one thing can be accomplished."

"Foolish boy, it is idle to speak thus," she bluntly rejoined. "Your father will never give you the estate now. He will never—"

"He will never speak more," interrupted Randolph, "at least he will not recover."

"I know it. I heard what the doctors said, but—"

"But what, mother? How dull you are. He may now wish Eustace to get the estate, but all his wishes will be of no avail, so long as the will remains."

"But he will order the will to be destroyed."

"Very likely, and that is just what we must prevent."

"Ah," exclaimed his mother, catching at his meaning. "But how?"

"By securing it—by concealing it. He is not in a state to execute another, and will die in a few days at most. Then I shall out Eustace out in spite of every one."

"Oh," she eagerly cried, "you have given me new hope. I looked upon our scheme as irretrievably ruined, but we may triumph still."

"We must, we shall," rejoined Randolph, vehemently. "Do you know where the will lies?"

"Yes—in the library. In the private drawer of your father's writing table."

"And the key?"

"I have a duplicate. Here it is."

"Oh, most rare luck," exclaimed Randolph, in unmitigated triumph. "Let us at once secure it."

She gave him the key, and with it instructions for finding and opening the secret drawer, as it might excite suspicion if also went down to the library with him. Paying careful heed to all her directions, he stealthily made his way thither alone and found that which he sought. In the second drawer lay the will, and snatching it up he placed it in his bosom, relocking the repository, and returning to the bedchamber unseen.

Mrs. Grahame manifested her undisguised satisfaction at the success of his undertaking.

"Now mother," he whispered, "let them do as they will, Bengarry is by this secured to me. Where shall we conceal it?"

"Better keep it in your possession," she said. "No; I must depart tonight with the cutter. I have just received information that the smuggler, Donaldson, whom I have sworn to capture, is to arrive on the coast tomorrow night. The Supervisor informs me that he has effected arrangements with a man connected with the smugglers in the district, who is to reveal all their hiding places, and enable the officers to seize an immense quantity of stuff. Now, this will be too precious a document to have in the cutter, and it must be deposited in some safe place here."

"In the house?" said his mother, inquiringly. "I don't know of any sufficient concealment there," he returned. "I know what their game will be now. Dunsmore will send for Eustace, and their first object will be to have the will found and destroyed. To this effect they will search every nook of the house from cellar to roof. We must hide it, therefore, in some place out of doors which will never be thought of."

"Bury it," suggested Mrs. Grahame.

"Hum," reflected Randolph. "Accident might reveal its grave, and yet if no better idea can be thought of it might—Stay, I have it. When a boy, I used to know an old chestnut tree at one corner of the park with a cavity far up in one of the clefts. Not a soul hereabouts knows of it but myself. That is the spot for the certain concealment of the will."

"Won't the rains injure it," suggested Mrs. Grahame.

"No. I will wrap up my waterproof coat, and wrap it in a piece of it. Besides it will require to lie in the tree for a few days only. By Jove, mother, but we have had a lucky deliverance out of a most deuced situation. That fellow, Ralph, curse him, thought to ruin me on all hands, and egad, he had nearly done it. How he came across Jessie I cannot guess."

"Ah, true, that girl—what is to be done with her?" exclaimed Mrs. Grahame, with sudden anxiety.

"I don't know yet. The fact is, I have a liking for Jessie, and wouldn't have—ah—acted as I did, if this other marriage had not been forced upon me. She is a good girl, and is, I see, still faithful to me, but she has also a spirit of her own and may not forgive the past. But that matter can rest in the meantime. I wish to heaven it were dark, that I might get the will concealed and be off."

While this interview was taking place between Randolph and his mother, Captain Dunsmore remained in close attendance on Mr. Grahame. He saw that an important crisis in the fortunes of his friend Eustace had come, and resolved to devote his whole time and attention to the interests of the latter. Late in the afternoon the patient's heavy breathing changed a little, and he opened his eyes. Dunsmore and the doctor were both by his bedside at the moment, and the latter intimated that he was conscious, though utterly unable to speak or move his limbs. The captain bent forward, and when Mr. Grahame saw him a glance of intelligence appeared in his eye.

"Mr. Grahame, do you know me?" he asked.

The old man made an abortive effort to speak, but his eyes gleamed again.

"You do—I see you do. If you have any particular wishes I shall be eager to give effect to them. Again did Mr. Grahame essay to speak, and, eagerly painful was the effort he made, but without success, and it was evident the inability gave him great anxiety.

"There is something he particularly wishes, yet cannot express it," observed the doctor.

"I think I know what it is," said Dunsmore, and again bending over Mr. Grahame, he whispered: "Do you wish the presence of Eustace?" The question was immediately followed by such a glance of acquiescence in the eye as to give an unmistakable token that this was the wish he was so eager to express.

Whereupon Captain Dunsmore, quitting the chamber, went in search of Ralph Bloxam. He knew where to find him, for by his direction Ralph remained in the vicinity, and soon entered the lower room into which Dunsmore went after sending a message for his attendance.

"Now, Ralph," began the captain, "I need not ask you if you wish well to Mr. Eustace Grahame?"

"I wish uncommon well to him," responded Ralph with a nod.

"And you should do so all the more that your appearance here today caused the excitement which produced his father's illness?"

"Well the old man wishes Eustace here immediately. You know where he is to be found. Will you go at once and bring him?"

"I'll go and tell him at any rate," answered Ralph. "As to bringing him, that just depends on himself."

"Return in half an hour, and I will meet you with a letter for him," said Dunsmore.

They separated on this understanding, and half-an-hour later they met again in the same room, when Ralph received the letter from the captain's hands, along with a sum of money to defray the expenses of his journey.

"I don't need this," said the gamekeeper as he accepted the gold, "but I know another that does, and I'll give it to her."

"Her?" echoed Dunsmore, enquiringly.

"Aye—Mrs. Randolph Grahame."

"Ah! that poor girl with the child! A dreadful business for her, poor thing! Something must be done for her. But to have Eustace here is the first business, so adieu, my lad; and heaven speed you!"

Ralph touched his cap and departed. It was now dusk, and as the gamekeeper took his way through the park the shadows of night were beginning to deepen over the landscape. The scene was very familiar to him, and as he walked along the circumstances connected with his former residence came full into his mind. Particularly did he remember the last time he walked across that park in company with Randolph on the night when the latter betrayed him to the press gang.

"Hang him for a cunning fox," muttered Ralph, as he thought how he had been allured along towards the river. "How preciously gulled I was that time. A pretty lot 'o' scenes I've passed through since then, and one 'o' them was to have my back fayed with the lash. It makes me mad whenever I think of it, but my revenge is coming. In fact, I have had some of it today. My eye, what a treat it was to see him when I knocked away the screen and discovered Jessie. How his cruel crafty soul collapsed. Pity it wasn't him instead of the old man that dropped. Never mind, I'll do for him yet. If Mr. Eustace is wanted it can only be to make him right, and give him the property. Nell, too, how confounded she looked when I popped in. Ah, I guess she wishes now that she hadn't used me as she did. Hilloo, what's that?"

He stopped short at a noise he heard in a tree not far off, and peering forward, he saw the branches of a chestnut shaking, and heard a rustle as if some one was climbing among them.

"A poacher," he said to himself. "Well I ain't the gamekeeper now, and it don't matter a curse to me if a dozen poachers were in the park."

He was about to move forward again, when the rustling among the branches was resumed, and looking more narrowly, he saw the form of a man descending from the tree. He stood still and watched him till he reached the undermost branch, when he flung himself from it with both arms, dropped lightly upon the ground and walked rapidly away in a direction which brought him not far from where Ralph stood. The latter instinctively crept behind a gnarled oak, and watched the man as he moved past and disappeared.

"Randolph Grahame, by all that's curious," he ejaculated, as he recognized the form that glided by.

Ralph stood in motionless astonishment gazing in the direction he had taken long after he had vanished from sight. At last he muttered to himself—

"Well, now, what the deuce could he be up to that for? But it's no use guessing, for nobody on earth could fathom his doings. It would take a fiend from below to make him out."

He walked on and as his road took him past the old chestnut, he looked curiously up among the branches. Of course he could see nothing there, and was about to move on when his eye fell on something white lying on the grass, just under the branch from which Randolph had dropped. He stooped down and picked it up—it was a letter.

"That must have dropped out of his pocket," muttered Ralph. "I can't see to read it here, but I'll take it on with me. I wonder what on earth he was up to that for?"

Saying this Ralph pocketed the letter he had found, and passed on his way towards the gate of the park, having passed which he did not walk very far till he reached the village, and entered the only inn which it seemed to possess, and which was situated about the centre of the main street.

Ralph went up stairs and entered a small room, where sat the disconsolate Jessie with her child on her knee. She had been longing for hours for Ralph's appearance, and received him in a state of wildly excited grief. The scene at the mansion had shaken her nervous system to its centre, and but for the playful prattle of her boy she would have broken down altogether. She received another shock in the intelligence of Mr. Grahame's sudden and hopeless illness; and, in the simplicity of her nature, blamed herself for being the cause of it.

"Oh! I wish I was away from here," she moaned. "Now that I have done enough to prevent the marriage, I will not disturb Randolph by my presence any more. When shall we return to our kind friends at Lowden?"

"I am going there immediately," answered Ralph, "but you must stay here a little longer. The old gentleman wants Mr. Eustace, and I am going post-haste to tell him."

"Oh, dear! and must I stay here?"

"Only for a day or two," said Ralph, cheerily. "You can keep yourself as close in this here room as you like. I've got money for you to pay your way."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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HOW A MONARCH DIED.

A King who preferred to "take off his mortal coil" in a spot so remote his Majesty's dignity.

Of the many strange stories told of the oldest actors—in those days when scenery was but an adjunct to the stage (and a wretched one at that)—perhaps none is more grotesquely funny than the old one of Macready in "Hamlet." In the last act of "Hamlet," when, as all lovers of Shakespeare's drama, in general slaughter take place, Hamlet soliloquizes for a few brief moments, uttering his sentences slowly before he himself feels the death pangs from Laertes' poisoned blade. On the occasion in question the person who enacted the part of Claudius (the king) had an equally appalling direction, and when the latter came near the end of his soliloquy he noticed that should he drop where he stood the curtain would not hide him from view when it fell. He therefore gave a kick to the proscenium King, and muttered to him angrily to "step back." 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