Eustace, the Outcast.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SUCCESSFUL STRATAGEM—RUNNING THE CARGO—THE SMUGGLERS' CONCEALMENT—THE SPY INFORMANT—THE CUTTER IN PURSUIT.

With all haste the smuggling lugger was run close under the cliffs at the west side of the promontory, where the coast receded for nearly a quarter of a mile, and left an opening which formed a little nook where boats might land on shelving channelly beach. It required a most minute practical knowledge of the spot to enable the vessel to be taken so near the heights, because, close to the perpendicular sea wall, and forming as it were bulwarks or butresses for it, great masses of rock were strewn, some of them under water altogether, others with their heads above it, and others again rearing their sharp and jagged pinnacles higher than the masthead of large vessels. Between these rocks there were many clear spaces of deep water where in that calm night the Delight could ride with perfect safety, only in the darkness it required an accurate knowledge of the grounds to take her there.

Captain Donaldson was intimately acquainted with the place, and so was the man at the helm, but to make the matter still surer, the boat which had come out to give information about the cutter led the way in, and long before the Greyhound got round the promontory the lugger had taken up a position where a cluster of huge rocks almost concealed her from view.

Of course if those on board the cutter suspected that she was somewhere in shore they would have little difficulty in discovering her out, if information of her arrival had not reached them, there was every probability that they would go past without gaining a sight of their prey. The lugger was well within the shadow of the cliffs—a shadow of profoundest gloom; and the surrounding masses of rock made it very difficult to detect her hull. Every sail was of course furled, and her bare taper masts could not show themselves against the black face of the cliff.

After all was accomplished, and every light was extinguished, the smugglers watched in perfect silence for the approach of the cutter, and at the end of about a quarter of an hour they caught sight of her coming freely on, with only her small sails set.

She had taken a good offing and by her manner of sailing gave no indication that her commander entertained the slighest suspicion that so rich a prize was near. Had the lugger remained where she was when Dickson hailed her or had she put to sea again, she would most certainly have been observed, for the moon had nearly risen, and the darkness was decreasing. But by the step they had taken the presence of the lugger was not detected, and the Greyhound passed on westward.

They watched her keenly and saw with intense satisfaction that at the speed with which she was going she would soon be out of sight. Suddenly, however, the sail she caaried was taken in and she was brought to.

'Curse the fellow, he's going to wait there for the night,' muttered Eonaldson.

'There's nae doot o' that,' observed Dickson.

'Confusion to him, I was in hopes he would go up the firth and allow us to run the cargo at the old place, but from where he lies he commands a view of both Lowden shore and Headland cove.'

'A clear view,' responded Dickson, 'and mair than that it's evident he's on the watch, and winna stir thence till daylight.'

'Then what are we to do? If we stay where we are he'll sight us in the morning; if we go to sea, he'll sight us in a moment we put the sky between us and him, and it strikes me from his build he's a faster sailer. I would match the Delight against him if she was empty, but with the cargo it might be dangerous So what the mischief is to be done?'

'We maun work round to Eyemouth, as the maister said,' answered Dickson.

'Hem—well, that's our only chance. Can Jessop stow away the stuff at present?'

'I believe sae, though it mauna be for lang, for he's expectin' ane o' his ain luggers directly.'

'Well, the sooner we creep along the better. You go ahead in the boat till we round the head, and for the life of you keep us in the shadow.'

Dickson promised to be particular in this important matter and vanished over the side. The smugglers now noiselessly proceeded to run the lugger eastward, and kept at the same time a steady eye on the cutter to watch if she should discover them. Once round the promontory they would be effectually screened from observation, but so long as the darkness was their only proocection their position was critical.

Under Dickson's guidance, however, they managed to move forward at what seemed a perilous nearness to the shore, yet a nearness rendered necessary if theey would escape observation. From where the cutter lay it was indeed a question if they would get around the promontory unseen, and the captain deputed to Eustace the important duty of watching the Greyhound, and instantly reporting if she gave any sign or any intention to move. In such an event the smuggler had determined to run for it and fight if the cutter came up with them.

But fortune favored them still, for after a slow and silent progress Eustace reported that he could no longer see the cutter as a cliff now intervened between the two vessels.

The captain came aft and glanced in the lugger's wake.

'Oh, yes,' he said, in a tone of great satisfaction, 'we have got round the houlder of the Rirk Hill and can make a clear run to Eyemouth without the fellow seeing us.'

Tackle was now let over the stern, by which Dickson fastened his boat, and he and the two men who rowed came over deck. One or two of the topsails were shaken out and the lugger sped rapidly across Haldingham Bay, coming once more to a standstill under the heights which flank Eyemouth harbor on the west.

All seemed now clear for the running of the cargo, and shortly after a signal had been made from the top of the rocks a number of boats came silently out of the harbor and as silently ran under the side of the lugger. They were filled with rough, shaggy-looking men, dressed in all sorts of garments. Most of them were in the garb of fishermen, but not a few had a nondescript look, which showed they had little professional connection with the sea.

On these men and the scene which immediately followed Eustace looked with not a little interest and curiosity. Some of them, indeed, were wild desperate looking grisly fellows, quite in harmony with the lawless occupation in which they engaged, but many were decent looking, good-natured, pleasant spoken men, who wrought away at the unloading of the cargo in haste certainly as those who knew they were doing what was illegal, but not like criminals, nor like men who were conscious of guilt.

One man in particular attracted the notice of Eustace—a thick-set man, with a bald head and a fat face, with an expression of sly humor. He came alongside in a boat by himself, and fastening her to a boat which dangled from the hull, made his way on deck.

'Ha, Gilbertson,' said the captain, the moment he recognized him. 'This is hot work, but we'll do this new lieutenant and his fine cutter. No land sharks prowling about, I hope."

'Canna say for certain, but there's a fellow in Coldingham I hae my suspicions o', and thocht mair than ance he wasna true blue.'

'If I come across him I'll stop his treacherous tongue', exclaimed Donaldson. 'Fut it's lucky at all events that the gaugers are not at Eyemouth tonight. Has Jessop plenty of room?'

'That's just what he hasna,' replied the other; 'at least he thinks it will be a gey ticht fit. Noo, if ye like to deal canny wi' me, I'll take maybe the matter o' fifty kegs.'

'All right, my hearty, they are yours at the old price.'

'Here's the siller, then,' cried Gilbertson, taking out a handful of silver.

'So be it. I'll up the blunt to Adamson. Off with you to the boat and I'll hand you the fifty kegs myself.'

Gilbertson leapt over the side in a twinkling, and the captain dived below, where Eustace saw him tossing out the kegs in his boat as fast as he possibly could. Celerity, indeed, seemed to be the order of the occasion. Numerous though the men were, there was no noise and little confusion, but the moment a boat was laden it shoved off, and disappeared round the corner of the cliff. In this way boat after boat received its freight, and the hull of the lugger rose in the water as the weight in her hold diminished. Suddenly, and to the consternation of everyone, the look-out gave the information that the cutter was in sight. The captain, who was below at the moment, rushed on the deck the instant he heard the report, and scanned the sea to the westward. The moon had now risen, the darkness had vanished, and the outline of the coast could easily be distinguished, as well as the water and every object upon it. One glance sufficed to show the cutter coming down in full sail. She had just turned the corner of the St. Abb's promontory, but the speed at which she was going she would reach them in about twenty minutes or half an hour.

The men wrought with an energy quickened by the approach of danger, and the remaining part of the cargo was flung out with the utmost rapidity. Before the Grehound had passed Middletown Point the last keg was into the boats; and the latter ready to slip round into the harbor. Meanwhile Eustace and his friends had been conferring together, and the former came hastily towards the commander of the smuggler.

'Captain Donaldson,' he whispered, 'we have special reasons for desiring that my brother would not see us here, and should not even know of our return to Scotland. Could the boats not see us here, and should not even know of our return to Scotland. Could the boats not take us ashore, where we could find a temporary place of concealment?'

'Of course they could. Jump in and Jessop will stow you away in one of his underground places, where the devil himself could hardly find you. Stay, Jessop will hesitate to trust you without an assurance of your fidelity from me.'

A shaded lamp stood at the binnacle, and the captain stooping towards it, wrote a few lines in his pocket book, tore out the leaf and handed it to Eustace.

'Give him that,' he said, 'and you will be all right. Stay where he puts you till I can communicate with you again. Now leap over the side, for you havn't a moment to spare.'

As they approached, a boat came out from the archway empty, and crossed to the other side of the harbor, leaving the laden room to pass in. The moment they entered the mouth of the arch they were shrouded in utter darkness, but presently a gleam of red light, as from a lamp or lantern, streamed upon them, revealing a small doorway through which no boat could pass. Having reached this doorway the boat came to a standstill, and with frantic haste, but in perfect silence, the kegs were handed out and received by several men stationed within.

'Now, sir,' said the man who had charge of the boat, addressing Eustace, 'that's where you and your friends hae to gang, and ye had better be quick about it. Maister Jessop is inside.'

The youth did not need further invitation, but at once sprang through the door, followed by Willy, Joe and Ralph. They found themselves in a lofty passage. with a green rocky floor and a stone wall on either side. Two or three dark muffled forms were bearing the kegs into the interior in a recess a man stood with a lantern, whose light he caused to fall wherever it was required. The person of this man was closely muffled up, and his face was in the shadow, but the moment Eustace was opposite to him he threw the light of the lantern full upon the faces of the new comers, and started violently when he saw they were strangers.

'Who are you, and what want you here?' he exclaimed.

'That will explain,' answered Eustace, as he put into his hand a slip of paper given to him by Captain Donaldson.

The other ran his eye over the pencilled lines.

'All right,' he muttered, and at the same moment one of the smugglers whispered that the last keg had been handed from the boat into the passage. He heard his companions rushing out and leaping into the boat, which they propelled to the other side of the harbor.

'Hold that a moment,' said the man, putting the lantern into the hand of Eustace. The latter, of course, took it, and the other proceeded with all haste to close the massive door, and send firm into their iron sockets the numercus iron bolts which secured it.

'There—we are safe now,' he observed. 'If anybody wants admittance they must find it from above.'

'Are you Mr. Jessop?' asked Eustace.

'I am. I don't know who you are, further than that your name is Grahame, but Donaldson vouches for your fidelity, and therefore I trust you. He tells me you four seek concealment. You shall have it, but first of all swear to me for form's sake that you will not reveal anything you may see or hear in this place,'

As may be supposed, they made no objections to this proposal, and each in turn took an oath to this effect.

'Now, follow me,' said Jessop, taking the lantern again from Eustace, and leading the way forward.

At a little distance they came to an open doorway in the side of the passage, revealing another passage leading to the left. Into this their guide went, and, standing aside, motioned them to pass. The passage in which they now were was wider than the other and along one side of it a large number of kegs, just landed, were piled. As they could not move on without their leader, they paused to wait on him, and saw him begin to turn an iron wheel with a short handle, fixed close within the doorway they had just passed. This doorway had no door attached to it, but presently what appeared to be its threshold rose up and a solid wall of masonry ascended to the roof, closing up the aperture effectually.

'Now,' said Jessop, 'if the Lieutenant of the cutter and all his crew, with Duncan Dunbar and all his excisemen to boot, were on the other side, they could not either find or force an entrance.'

'Not by that doorway, certainly,' remarked Eustace. But the passage without seems to lead farther forward.'

'Only to my kitchen,' returned Jessop. 'And now that we have made everything perfectly secure, we must find our way to an equally secret path to one of the rooms above, where I will do my best to make you comfortable.'

They again passed forward under the guidance of their strange host, who led them through a number subterranean apartments, all filled or nearly so with smuggled liquors. In the corner of one one of these dungeons was a strong square iron frame, surrounded by a kind of machinery, and by the direction of Jessop they all got upon the frame, when he touched a handle and they rose up within a hollow shaft. Slowly but steadily they ascended, their course being seen only by the dim light of the lantern, till after they reached what appeared to be a great elevation. Jessop touched a handle again, and they all at once came to a standstill. A sharp click was heard, and the barrier in front of them moved aside, showing a square space, through which light faintly came. They stepped from the frame through the square space, and now found themselves in a large furnished rooom through an uncurtained window of which the moonlight streamed uninterrupted.

Eustace at once concluded that they had gained admission to this room by a pane in the wall, but here he was mistaken. The secret mode of access was more ingenious still, for on looking back he saw the aperture was being closed up by a massive grate, which fell back into it thus concealing it in a very effectual way—in a way, indeed, such as to baffile the search of anyone who was unacquainted with the secret. A stranger would not for a moment have supported that behind a fire place so stable was a hollow shaft descending to the subterranean chambers beneath.

The chamber into which they had now got communicated in the usual way with the rest of the mansion, and have Jessop made preparations for their comfort and repose. Here also will we now leave them and recount certain matters which took place on the coast on that same night and which will explain the motions of the revenue cutter.

Just as the evening was beginning to close in, the crouching figure of a man might have been seen stealthily quitting the village of Goldingham, and taking the road which led past the hamlet of Northfield towards St. Abb's Head. He was a thin, pale-faced man, with a stooping gate and a cunning looking face, and as he came down by the burnside he looked round in all directions to see that he was not observed. He was inwardly congratulating himself that this was the case, when at the corner of the road he was suddenly confronted by a tall, masculine looking woman, leading a cow. This woman had a huge coal-scuttle bonnet on her head, a man's coat on her back, and a pair of stout hob-nailed shoes on her feet.

'Weel, Pate,' she exclaimed, in a voice as masculine as her person, 'where are ye for the nicht? Ony thing expected.

'No that I ken o', Mrs. Tibbits. I—I'm just gaun for a bit walk tae mysel'.'

'A walk, Pate? This is a strange time tae take a walk. It will be dark afore yer at the corner plantain.

'That's very true, Mrs. Tibbits, but ye see I hae been on the loom a' day, and I need tae rax my legs a bit.'

'I say, Pate,' said the woman, coming nearer and speaking in a low tone, 'is there no a lugger comin' in sune, think ye?'

'No that I hear o'.'

'Ye'll let me ken if the Delight or the Venture mak's their appearance.'

'Oh, ay, I'll dae that.'

'Ye ken I may as weel get a share o' what's gaun as ither folk, Pate.'

'There's nae doot o't, Mrs. Tibbits. There's nae doot o' it. Weel, gud nicht. I'll be sure to let ye ken.'

Away strode the tall woman homeward with her cow, and onward went the pale-faced man whom she had called Pate.

'Dod, I wad ha given something no tae hae met in wi' her,' he muttered. 'If onything sud spunk out she wad think naething of fellin' me.'

The place was very solitary, but not quite devoid of habitation, for on one of the centre eminences of the "Head" one building showed itself against the northern sky. This was a signal station, the vicinity of which Pate avoided, and made his way by a comparatively easy ascent to the top of the eastmost hill. Here was a level space of about two acres in extent and in one corner near the verge of the cliff stood the remains of an ancient chapel, surrounded by the grassy mounds and quaint old headstones of a graveyard.

'There's nae appearance o' her yet,' muttered Pate. "My certie, if no the nicht, and if Maister Dunbar comes frae Eyemouth wi' his men for naething, he'll gio me an awfu' swearin', and I'll lose the siller he promised me for the information. But, after a', it's sune enouch yet. The captain kens better than to show hissel within sicht o' land afore its dark. I'll lie doon and watch a bit. He'll show its licht, and if Dickson is on the look-out frae the tap o' Earnsheugh I'll ken the signal as weel as him."

He advanced to the north east corner of the height, and stretched himself on the grass on the verge of the beetling cliff. Two steps further and he would have been hurled to destruction, but as he lay here with the utmost composure—his restless eyes wandering hither and thither over the immensity of darkness which now brooded over the face of the deep. Suddenly he started to his elbow, for a light showed itself in a peculiar fashion, and then went out. That was a signal the meaning of which he knew. It conveyed the intelligence to the initiated that a lugger had arrived; and Pate was well aware that the signal would be already answered from the land at a point which he could not there see. He tarried on the crest, but returning to the valley by the path up which he had climbed, he took up a position at a stile on a stone fence, and looked intently along the heights to the east, listening as he looked, as if waiting impatiently for some arrival.

'Plague take them,' he muttered. 'If they dinna come sune the cargo will be run, and every keg stowed away in the hidin' places.'

But even as he thus muttered, footsteps were heard approaching, and presently a group of men were seen moving silently forward to the spot he occupied.

'Oh, there you are,' said their leader in a quick way. 'Has the lugger come?'

'It's a' richt, Mr. Dunbar. She showed her lights half an hour syne, and by this time she has begun tae rin the stuff at Lowden Shore.

'Capital,' cried the other, who was the Supervisor of Excise, and whom the intelligence highly slated, as it did also the five or six gaugers who followed him. 'Come on, lads,' he said in a suppressed voice, 'and, Pate, you come too, and when the stuff is seized you shall have your reward. Quick, lads, before the Greyhound comes, and snaps the prize out of our teeth.'

'But I canna gang wi' ye,' remonstrated the informant. If I was seen by ony o' the smugglers, my life wadna be safe.'

'Well, you'll have to come and wait at the Wick at any rate till we return. I cannot give you the reward till I make the seizure; that is our bargain.

And without waiting to bandy more words, the Supervisor with his assistants set off along the valley at a run, and in about a quarter of an hour came breathless to the little beach, on the dry channel of which lay several fisherman's boats. Without ceremony the officer began hauling the smallest of these down to the water, and having got her oars leapt in and rowed out into the bay at as fast a speed as they could make.

'Confound it, there's the Greyhound,' said the Supervisor, who was at the helm, and who at the moment caught sight of the cutter as she came round the point. 'Never mind,' added Dunbar, 'the most of the stuff will be on the beach by this time, and we shall get a lion's share. Row quick, lads; row like the mischief'

They did row with all the energies of men whose activities were sharpened by the expectation of gain; but when they got round an outlying cliff and had a full view of the Lowden Shore, they were chagrined beyond measure to find that place a complete solitude. There was no lugger in the offing, and no boats at the beach delivering the cargo. The officers stopped rowing in an instant, and the Supervisor burst into a fit of swearing.

'Hang it, we are sold. That fellow Pate has either deceived us altogether or purposely led us off the scent.

'Yonder she is!' exclaimed one of the men, pointing back to the base of the cliffs which formed the point of St. Abb's.

A simultaneous look in the direction followed the exclamation, and they being further inland than the lugger, saw the latter moving away close by the foot of the heights. They at once divined her purpose, and saw likewise that the cutter did not discover the presence of the smuggler, for she had now lain too at a considerable distance from land. Their only plan, however, was to row out to the Greyhound, and boarding her, follow in pursuit, and the boats head was turned to where the revenue vessel lay. It was a long and sure pull, for the tide, though nearly at the flood, had not yet turned and long ere they reached the cutter the lugger had disappeared round the promontory. Great excitement was caused on board the cutter by the intelligence they brought, and Randolph Grahame rushed from his cabin to conduct the pursuit. The boat in which the officers had come being fixed astern, every stitch of canvas was hoisted, and the fast sailing vessel flew through the water towards Eyemouth, where they expected the lugger to have gone.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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