

# **Contraband**

A Tale of Modern Smugglers

By

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TO  
SPENCER LAKE  
AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES  
OF  
FORTUNE, NEWFOUNDLAND

## CHAPTER I

### ON BOARD THE "GLENBOW"

The mail packet S.S. *Glenbow*, ploughing her way up the south-west coast of Newfoundland in a beam sea and half a gale of wind, rolled rail in rail out as she neared St. Lawrence.

Dare Stanley, who had been lying down in his berth, felt the necessity of fresh air, and slipping on an oilskin coat he made his way on deck. The air was fresh enough there in all conscience! He found all but the bridge deserted; the heavy sea made a stay on deck undesirable. Yet he did not wish to return to his cabin, having a desire for company of some sort, so, watching his chance, he fought his way aft to where the smoke-room was situated.

Short as was the trip, he was drenched and had the breath half knocked out of him before he could gain sanctuary. Once he reached the smoke-room he had to exert all his strength to open the door, which was pressed to as with a vice by the weight of the wind. He managed to get it open enough to slip inside, when the door closed precipitately behind him and knocked him half-way across the room.

He was helped to his feet by the chief engineer, who was seated at a card-table with the captain and two passengers. Three other passengers completed the company.

"Hello, young Stanley!" shouted the captain, who was a friend of Dare's father. "Bit rough outside, is it?"

Dare showed his teeth in a grin for answer, and stripped himself of his oilskins, while the company returned to consideration of the game his entry had interrupted. It was soon finished. The captain, who was partnered with one of the passengers, showed great good humour as he drew in his share of the winnings. Not so the chief, who had lost.

"There ye are," said that disgruntled individual as he paid out. "Man, dear, did ye ever see sich cards in all your born days! If my luck keeps bad I'll have to follow the lead of the fo'c'sle crew and play for tobacco."

This humorous sally was greeted by an appreciative guffaw.

"Speaking of tobacco," said one of the passengers during the conversational lull which followed, "I'm a living witness that the only way you can get rid of it on this coast is to give it away."

"That's so," agreed his companion. They were both, it seemed, representatives of tobacco firms. "And of all the places on the coast Saltern Bay is the worst."

"It's a crying shame!"

This topic in lieu of a better was seized upon as likely to yield something of interest.

"How's that, Mr. Parsons?" said the captain insinuatingly.

"Smuggling," answered Mr. Parsons tersely, and all the company, including Dare, pricked up their ears. For although this was a perennial subject of discussion, it never failed to rouse interest, for the simple reason that it touched nearly everyone's feelings or pockets, or both, in one way or another.

"Smuggling, sir," repeated Mr. Parsons. "Saltern Bay is a hotbed of smugglers. Mind you, I don't mind a man bringing in a little brandy or tobacco on the quiet free of duty, but when you get a gang of men organizing a regular supply of the stuff and thus undermining the legitimate trade of the country, then I say it's time to stop it."

"You're right," asserted his colleague. "If I had my way I'd blow St. Pierre Colony sky-high out of water. Why we were ever fools enough to give it back to the French when once we'd won it, I don't know. It's been nothing but a thorn in the side of the tobacco business ever since."

"Oh come, Mr. Bayley," protested the captain good-humouredly; "you wouldn't go so far as that surely. St. Pierre is all right. A jolly little town in its way."

"And as for giving it back to the French," put in the chief, "man, there were reasons for that, diplomatic reasons which take no account of individual likes or dislikes. The English had to smooth down the French a little at the time, and the cheapest way of doing it was to cede them St. Pierre and the rights of fishing on the so-called French coast, an injustice to the islanders if there ever was one."

"I'm with you there," put in a passenger who had hitherto remained silent, a merchant from Bay de Verde.

"Well, I'm not worrying about the fishing rights," said Mr. Parsons egoistically; "it's the tobacco rights I'm interested in."

"Of course," said the captain dryly.

"It's come to the time when the Government has got to take action or be for ever disgraced in the eyes of its electors," declared Mr. Parson's colleague somewhat grandiosely.

"Bad as that, is it?" said the captain, intent on drawing both men out.

"Worse," interpolated Mr. Parsons pessimistically. "Do you know the extent of my order for the district between Point Day and Barmitage Bay, captain? A measly five hundred dollars, on a route that ought to yield a three thousand dollar order every month."

"Umph!" The sympathetic articulation came from the chief, who had a just appreciation of figures as such. "Man, dear, the smugglers must be doing a roaring trade," he added, "for there's not a man on the coast that doesna' smoke or chew the weed."

"A true word," said Mr. Parsons sadly. "But what would you? Five out of ten of them do their own smuggling, and the rest are supplied by the smuggling gang. It's impossible to compete with their cutthroat prices."

"A gang, is there?" inquired the captain, who had been up and down the coast for twenty years and probably knew more about Mr. Parsons' subject of grievance than that worthy himself did.

"Of course there's a gang, captain. There must be. There's a regular underground trade."

"What are the Revenue people doing?" put in the merchant from Bay de Verde.

"Bah!" Mr. Parsons expectorated in disgust, then attacked the Service in earnest.



"What do they ever do," he declared, "but send a dinky little gunboat up and down the coast?—a boat that every smuggler recognizes twenty miles away and avoids accordingly. What they need to do is to place men on land, not ten miles off it. Saltern Bay is honeycombed with coves and beaches where the smugglers can land and no one the wiser. Have a few men spying up and down the land. Let them keep their eyes open and find out the smugglers' cache—then make a raid. A few raids and smuggling wouldn't be so brisk, for smugglers can no more afford to lose their goods than other people."

Mr. Parsons' colleague nodded in agreement.

"I seem to remember hearing that the Customs at Saltern attempted something of that kind," hazarded the captain.

"Bah!" said Mr. Parsons. "Old man Johnson, sixty if he's a day, made a daylight trip to 'Madam's Notch' and found half a case of brandy and a few pounds of tobacco. There's those who believe the smugglers placed it there on purpose. I'm one of them. There's others who say that Johnson will never be a poor man if he lives to be a hundred and that the smugglers have made his inactivity worth while. He ought to be kicked out."

"He has been." Dare could not resist the opportunity of being the conveyor of new and interesting information.

Mr. Parsons and his colleague turned surprised looks on their informant.

"What's that!" ejaculated Mr. Parsons incredulously.

"Didn't you know?" said the captain easily, saving Dare the trouble of repeating his statement. "Johnson resigned about three

weeks ago. Captain Stanley, this young man's father, has been appointed in his place."

"News to me," confessed Mr. Parsons.

"We've been on the Northern route this past month," informed Mr. Bay ley in explanation.

"Seems to me," said Mr. Parsons after an appropriate silence and a hard scrutiny of Dare's countenance that caused the latter to change colour, "seems to me that I've heard of Captain Stanley before."

"Well, you ought to have done," the chief declared, "for there's not a man on the island has done more to rid the Revenue service of graft and sheer inefficiency."

"Oh, that's the man, is it? There was a question asked in the House about him, I remember. Well, good luck to him if he's bound on cleaning up Saltern Bay. All I can say is that he's got his work cut out, for there's not a cleverer or rougher lot ever swindled the Government out of revenue."

This point seemed to be mutually recognized as bringing an end to the conversation. The subject for the time being was dropped. Soon after, the captain withdrew to visit the bridge, and the chief, grumbling about cheap engines, went to see how those that were serving the *Glenbow* so well were progressing.

Dare was left with the four other passengers, who were soon drawn irresistibly to the card table. But he paid little attention to his fellow-voyagers. His mind had been stimulated by the recent conversation and was busy formulating guesses as to the real situation in Saltern, and the likelihood of there being some

excitement to relieve the monotony he must otherwise endure in a small village where he knew no one.

As the captain of the *Glenbow* had stated, Captain Stanley was Dare's father, and, more than that, he was something in the nature of a hero to his son. Bred to the merchant service, Captain Stanley had, after twenty-five years of the Western Ocean trade, retired from the sea and accepted from the Government a position as a special inspector in the Revenue Service.

That was five years ago, and they had been busy years, full of incident and sometimes yielding adventure. In the past year or two Dare had been taken a little into his father's confidence, and on one occasion had proved very useful in the solving of a particularly stiff problem centring upon illicit trading. When, therefore, his father had been appointed temporary Customs Officer at Saltern, the real reason for the appointment being the elimination of the smuggling rife in the Saltern Bay district, he naturally hoped to be allowed to take a hand in the affair.

Captain Stanley had gone to Saltern two days after his appointment, but Dare and the captain's old retainer, Ben Saleby, had been left behind, Dare to finish his term at Bishop Field's College, and Ben to attend to the details involved in closing the captain's town house.

Now, however, both were on their way to join the captain.

Dare was an average youth, quick, intelligent, well set up. He had fair hair which lay close to his head and had a tendency to curl. His eyes were blue, the colour of those of most adventurers, and he wore for the most part a winning smile. That smile hovered about

his lips as he sat in the smoke-room thinking of Saltern and the work ahead. Things promised well.

The blowing of the siren and the sudden realization that the ship was in smooth water roused him from his pleasant meditations. The ship was making harbour. A glimpse through the port-hole showed him a low point of land. He quickly donned his oilskin coat and went on deck. The ship was now in calm water sheltered by the land. He went forward and watched the town slowly come into view. While he was eyeing it someone nudged his elbow. He turned round to face Ben.

"Hello, Ben!" he shouted, pleased. "Well, we're getting there."

"And about time too," Ben grumbled. "I've seen a windjammer work the coast quicker'n this one."

"What place is this? St. Lawrence?"

"Aye. Weren't you sure? But I fergot; you ain't been this way before."

"That's so. I say, Ben, there was a chap in the smoke-room spouting a lot of stuff about the smugglers in Saltern Bay. He said they were a tough lot. Looks as if there's warm work ahead."

"Reckon the cap'n kin be tough, too," said Ben with an odd touch of pride.

"You ought to know," laughed Dare.

Ben had sailed with Captain Stanley for years and had left the sea at the same time, though it must be admitted it had been with reluctance. Only his loyalty to the captain enabled him to make the break, for the change from bos'n of a ship to major-domo of a town

house did not appeal to his deep-water tastes. The monotony of town life was relieved now and then, however, by the captain's Revenue Service activities, for when there was work of a more than usually difficult character ahead, Ben's services were always impressed, to his great content.

"It's only an eight-hour run from here," said Dare.

"Ten on a day like this," declared Ben.

"I hope we'll be able to land," said Dare anxiously. "It's pretty rough."

"We'll lose this sea when we rounds into the Bay," Ben told him. "There's smooth water off Saltern. Never fear, we'll land all right."

"I hope so!" ejaculated Dare.

"I say, Ben," he added, a little later, "do you suppose it's true what that chap was saying about those Saltern fellows being the hardest lot going?"

"I don't disbelieve it," said the old sailor. He put his hand in his pocket and drew out a black-bowled clay pipe of incredible age, and began to fill it dotingly. Dare remained silent while the rite was being performed, gazing the while on the grizzled veteran.

Ben was also "sixty if he was a day," but hard as nails yet. His face, tanned the colour of a barked sail, was battered and ugly, but good nature lit it and made it human and friendly. His short stature, long arms, bowed legs, and slightly leaning-forward posture gave him the appearance of a gorilla; but there the resemblance ended, for under his hardened exterior he had the tender heart of a child.

"There's one of 'em in the steerage," he said when his pipe was drawing well.

"One of what?" asked Dare.

"One of them fellers from Saltern Bay."

"A smuggler?" exclaimed Dare, excited at the possibility.

"That's as may be. He hails from Tarnish. He told me a lot about the smugglin' game."

"Ah!"

"Aye, he knows a thing or two, he do. Know what he said?"

"No."

"He laughed when I asked if there warn't no way of stoppin' the smugglin', and said, 'Not while there's a oven in Saltern Bay,' said he.

"And what eggsactly do you mean by that?" I asked him.

"'Oh,' he said, 'that's a riddle.'

"'But what might ovens which is meant for cookin' have to do with it, anyhow?'" I asks again.

"He laughed a great laugh and he said, 'That's fer you to find out.'"

"Well?" demanded Dare eagerly, as Ben stopped. "What then?"

"Nothing," replied Ben. "That's all."

"It sounds meaningless to me," said Dare. "Do you suppose he was pulling your leg?"

"He might have been and yet he might not."

"You didn't tell him the business we're on?"

"Trust me," assured Ben dryly.

"Well, we can do little but guess about things yet. I expect father will have a few things to tell us when we see him."

"Not a doubt of it."

"Let's see. What time ought we to get there? Eight hours' run. It's two o'clock now. Allow an hour for delay here. We ought to do it by eleven o'clock."

"Aye, around midnight," said Ben.

## CHAPTER II

### FIRST BLOOD TO THE SMUGGLERS

At half an hour after midnight, the *Glenbow* rounded Saltern Head and drawing in close to the land dropped her anchor about ten minutes' row from Saltern Quay. The wind had dropped, and the sea under the shelter of the land was quite calm. The town was hidden from sight in the darkness, which was more than ordinarily intense owing to the clouded sky and the lack of a moon. Ashore, the light on the quay blinked its warning, and two or three other late lights showed where the town lay asleep.

A raucous blast of the ship's siren woke echoes between the surrounding hills, but did not seemingly awake the people who lay sleeping between them. Dare, leaning eagerly over the rail with his gaze fixed shorewards, thought ruefully that such a sleepy town was not likely to yield much in the shape of adventure. He had not much time to dwell on that, however. Soon Ben, who had been collecting the luggage and seeing it safely stowed in the boat, which had just been lowered, came up, and they both went to the ship's ladder. A few minutes later they were being rowed ashore.

As the boat shot between the quays jutting out from the harbour, Dare searched the blackness in vain for the gleam of a friendly light.

"Doesn't look as if father has come to meet us," he said to Ben. That worthy merely grunted.

The boat was rowed towards some steps at the foot of the quay on the town side, and they disembarked without further speech.



Their luggage was taken out of the boat and placed on the quay by the boat's crew, which then went swinging off into the darkness, leaving Ben and Dare to make their way through the town as best they could.

"Here's a to-do," then grumbled Ben. "No one to meet us and it pitch dark and we not knowin' the road or the house."

"The best thing we can do is to follow the boat's crew," suggested Dare. "It's likely the post office is not far from the Customs."

They were, in fact, housed in the same building. Ben agreed, and picking their way as well as they could, they set off to follow the crew, with only the sound of the others' heavy tread to guide them.

They managed well enough until they came to a turning, and by that time the crew were so far ahead that neither Ben nor Dare could determine which way they had taken. In this somewhat absurd predicament they hesitated, Ben making use of the occasion as an opportunity to air his vocabulary. They were about to go straight ahead, when they saw a light approaching from the turning, and decided to accost whoever carried it. As the bearer of the light approached, they saw that it was a woman. Ben, taking the initiative, went to speak to her.

"Beggin' your pardon, ma'am——" he began.

"I'm sure it's the first time you ever done it, Ben Saleby," came the tart interpolation.

"Why, it's Martha!" exclaimed Dare joyfully. Ben grunted.

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