

THE HAWK THAT DARE NOT HUNT BY DAY

BACKGROUND: In times past, many poor families on the coast of England engaged in smuggling. Typically smugglers brought in goods without paying the required import tax and then resold them for a profit. Young Tom Barton, who narrates here, and his Uncle Jack come from a family of smugglers.

A black wave came crashing aboard and suddenly we stood knee-deep in a tide of violent water.

"The Bibles," Uncle Jack shouted. "The Bibles." I knew what he meant.

Snatching a light from the cabin, I sloshed across the deck, my sea boots filled with water, and stumbling headlong made my way down the companionway into the noisy darkness of the hold.

Here below the sounds of the wind and crashing seas faded to a whisper. But there were other sounds--the planking creaked, cargo rustled as it shifted gently with the roll of the ship. It was like being on the inside of a drum.

I shone my lantern overhead along the oaken deck beams and knees. There was no sign of running water anywhere.

The books were stored in a secret place built by Grandfather Jeremiah. In our town of Danfield everyone was a smuggler, even Deacon Shaw....

I drew out the pins, let the heavy timber down, and shone the lantern inside. The compartment was dry and smelled of ink.

The barrels and packs were also dry and had not shifted. I put the timber back in place, once again shone the lantern along the planking overhead, and went on deck to report to Uncle Jack.

"She's dry as a bone," I told him.

Still with salt, his beard glittered in the lantern light.

"Praise the Lord," he shouted.

"And also Grandfather Jeremiah," I shouted back to him against the howl of the wind

The wind slacked off toward morning though the seas still ran high... We had planned to enter the river in the darkness before dawn, but the storm had sped us on. We had no choice except to sail clear of the mouth of the Thames, where we could expect to encounter a searcher.

Searchers seldom ventured as far up the Medway [a river in southeastern England that flows into the Thames] as the town of Danfield. They sometimes nosed around outside the entrance where the two rivers meet, but since the morning one of them was seized, carried aboard by a fisherman, and deposited miles away on a lonely islet to find his way back to London as best he could searchers mostly stayed off the Medway and out of the town of Danfield.

Our pier, with its crooked piling and ragged deck, had a broken-down look, which we encouraged so as to avert suspicion that it was ever used.

A winding, weed-grown path led to an old Roman watchtower. To further allay suspicion we kept scythes, shears, plows, and a pile of harness in the tower. Under the pile of harness were heavy paving stones and under the stones was a stone trap door, which led by a winding stairs to a large storage room. Thither that night we brought Tyndale's Bibles.

Three nights later we loaded the crates and barrels of Bibles into a cart and started west on the long journey to London, leading two horses and a milk cow to give us the appearance of farmers on the way to market.

What do you think happened before this episode? What do you think happened after? The narrator and his uncle have already faced great danger in bringing Tyndale's Bibles into England. What future dangers might they face?

Assignment: You must write a short sequel to this scene. Tell what could happen when the narrator and his uncle try to bring the Bibles into London.

