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Kidnapped—Chapter 19: The House Of Fear

May 26, 2020



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For the Easter season, I am posting some rather different things on this channel, in addition to my regular output, as a little gift to my followers and supporters. This is the fourth book I am reading through: 'Kidnapped', by Robert Louis Stevenson. I hope that you all enjoy!

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Transcript

Chapter 19 The House of Fear Night fell as we were walking, and the clouds which had broken up in the afternoon settled in and thickened, so that it fell for the season of the year extremely dark. The way we went was over rough mountainsides, and though Alan pushed on with an assured manner, I could by no means see how he directed himself. At last, about half-past ten of the clock, we came to the top of a bray, and saw lights below us.

It seemed a house door stood open, and let out a beam of fire and candlelight, and all round the house and steading five or six persons were moving hurriedly about, each carrying a lighted brand. James must have tinned his wits, said Alan. If this was the soldiers instead of you and me, he would be in a bonny mess.

But I dare say he'll have a century on the road, and he would ken well enough no soldiers would find the way that we came. Hereupon he whistled three times, in a particular manner. It was strange to see how, at the first sound of it, all the moving torches came to a stand, as if the bearers were affrighted, and how at the third the

bustle began again as before.

Having thus set folk's minds at rest, we came down the bray, and were met at the yard gate, for this place was like a well-doing farm, by a tall handsome man of more than fifty, who cried out to Alan in the Gaelic. "'James Stewart,' said Alan, "'I will ask you to speak in Scotch, for here is a young gentleman with me that has name of the other. This is him,' he added, putting his arm through mine, '-a young gentleman of the lowlands, and a laird in his country too, but I am thinking it will be the better for his health if we give his name the go-by.' James of the Glens turned to me for a moment, and greeted me courteously enough.

The next he had turned to Alan. "'This has been a dreadful accident,' he cried. "'It will bring trouble on the country,' and he wrung his hands.

"'Hoots,' said Alan, "'you must take this hour with the sweet man. Colin Roy is dead, and be thankful for that.' "'Aye,' said James, "'and by my troth I wish he was alive again. It's all very fine to blow and boast beforehand, but now it's done, Alan, and who's to bear the white of it? The accident fell out in Appen.

Mind you that, Alan. It's Appen that must pay, and I am a man that has a family.' While this was going on I looked about me at the servants. Some were on ladders, digging in the thatch of the house or the farm buildings, from which they brought out guns, swords, and different weapons of war.

Others carried them away, and by the sound of mattock blows from somewhere farther down the bray I suppose they buried them. Though they were all so busy there prevailed no kind of order in their efforts. Men struggled together for the same gun, and ran into each other with their burning torches, and James was continually turning about from his talk with Alan, to cry out orders which were apparently never understood.

The faces in the torchlight were like those of people overborn with hurry and panic, and though none spoke above his breath, their speech sounded both anxious and angry. It was about this time that a lassie came out of the house carrying a pack or bundle, and it has often made me smile to think how Alan's instinct awoke at the mere sight of it. What's that the lassie has? he asked.

We're just setting the house in order, Alan, said James, in his frightened and somewhat fawning way. They'll search Appen with candles, and we must have all things straight. We're digging the bit guns and swords into the mast, you see, and these, I'm thinking, will be your ayn French clothes.

Will be to bury them, I believe. Bury my French clothes? cried Alan. Troth no.

And he laid hold upon the packet and retired into the barn to shift himself, recommending me in the meanwhile to his kinsmen. James carried me accordingly into

the kitchen, and sat down with me at table, smiling and talking at first in a very hospitable manner. But presently the gloom returned upon him.

He sat frowning and biting his fingers, only remembered me from time to time, and then gave me but a word or two and a poor smile, and back into his private terrors. His wife sat by the fire and wept, with her face in her hands. His eldest son was crouched upon the floor, running over a great mass of papers, and now and again setting one alight and burning it to the bitter end.

All the while a servant lass with a red face was rummaging about the room, in a blind hurry of fear, and whimpering as she went, and every now and again one of the men would thrust in his face from the yard and cry for orders. At last James could keep his seat no longer, and begged my permission to be so unmanly as walk about. I am but poor company altogether, sir, says he, but I can think of nothing but this dreadful accident, and the trouble it is like to bring upon quite innocent persons.

A little after he observed his son burning a paper which he thought should have been kept, and at that his excitement burst out so that it was painful to watch, he struck the lad repeatedly. Are you gone, gite? he cried. Do you wish to hang your father? And forgetful of my presence, carried on at him a long time together in the Gaelic, the young man answering nothing, only the wife at the name of hanging throwing her apron over her face, and sobbing out louder than before.

This was all wretched for a stranger like myself to hear and see, and I was right glad when Alan returned, looking like himself in his fine French clothes, though to be sure they were now grown almost too battered and withered to deserve the name of fine. I was then taken out in my turn by another of the sons, and given that change of clothing of which I had stood so long in need, and a pair of highland brogues made of deer leather, rather strange at first, but after a little practice very easy to the feet. By the time I came back Alan must have told his story, for it seemed understood that I was to fly with him, and they were all busy upon our equipment.

They gave us each a sword and pistols, though I professed my inability to use the former, and with these and some ammunition, a bag of oatmeal, an iron pan, and a bottle of ripe French brandy we were ready for the heather. Money indeed was lacking. I had about two guineas left, Alan's belt having been dispatched by another hand, that trusty messenger had no more than seventeen pence to his whole fortune, and as for James, it appears he had brought himself so low with journeys to Edinburgh, and legal expenses on behalf of the tenants, that he could only scrape together three and five pence halfpenny, the most of it in coppers.

This'll no do, said Alan. You must find a safe bit somewhere nearby, said James, and get word sent to me. You see, you'll have to get this business prettily off, Alan.

This is no time to be stayed for a guinea or two. They're sure to get wind of ye, sure to seek ye, and by my way of it, sure to lay on ye the white of this day's accident. If it falls on you, it falls on me that am your near kinsman, and harboured ye while ye were in the country, and if it comes on me—he paused and bit his fingers with a white face—it would be a painful thing for our friends if I was to hang, said he.

It would be an ill day for Appin, says Alan. It's a day that sticks in my throat, said James. Oh, man, man, man, man, Alan, you and me have spoken like two fools, he cried, striking his hand upon the wall, so that the house rang again.

Well, and that's true too, said Alan, and my friend from the lowlands here, nodding at me, gave me a good word upon that head, if I would only have listened to him. But see here, said James, returning to his former manner, if they lay me by the heels, Alan, it's then that you'll be needing the money, for with all that I have said, and that you have said, it will look very black against the two of us. Do ye mark that? Well, follow me out, and ye'll—I'll see that I'll have to get a paper out against you myself, have to offer a reward for ye.

Aye, will I. It's a sore thing to do between such near friends, but if I get the deardom of this dreadful accident, I'll have to fend for myself, man. Do ye see that? He spoke with a pleading earnestness, taking Alan by the breast of the coat. Aye, said Alan, I see that.

And you'll have to be clear of the country, Alan, aye, and clear of Scotland, you and your friend from the lowlands too, for I'll have to paper your friend from the lowlands. Ye see that, Alan? Say that ye see that. I thought Alan flushed a bit.

That is uncouhard on me that brought him here, James, said he, throwing his head back. It's like making me a traitor. Now, Alan, man, cried James, look things in the face, he'll be papered anyway.

Mungo Campbell will be sure to paper him. What matters if I paper him too? And then, Alan, I am a man that has a family. And then, after a little pause on both sides, and Alan, it'll be a jury of Campbell's, said he.

There's one thing, said Alan musingly, that nobody kens his name. Nor yet they shall name him. Come, then, Alan, there's my hand on that, cried James, for all the world as if he had really known my name and was forgoing some advantage.

But just the habit he was in, and what he looked like, and his age and the like, I could nay well do less. I wonder at your father's son, cried Alan sternly. Would ye sell the lad with a gift? Would ye change his clothes and then betray him? No, no, Alan, said James.

No, no, the habit he took off, the habit Mungo saw him in. But I thought he seemed crestfallen. Indeed, he was clutching at every straw, and all the time, I dare say, saw the faces of his hereditary foes on the bench, and in the jury-box, and the gallows in the

background.

Well, sir, says Alan, turning to me, what say ye to that? Ye are here under the safeguard of my honour, and it's my part to see nothing done but what shall please you. I have but one word to say, said I, for to all this dispute I am a perfect stranger. But the plain common sense is to set the blame where it belongs, and that is on the man who fired the shot.

Paper him, as you call it, set the hunt on him, and let honest, innocent folk show their faces in safety. But at this both Alan and James cried out in horror, bidding me hold my tongue, for that was not to be thought of, and asking me what the Camerons would think, which confirmed me, it must have been a Cameron from Memoir that did the act. And if I did not see that the lad might be caught, ye have nay surely thought of that, said they, with such innocent earnestness, that my hands dropped at my side, and I despaired of argument.

Very well, then, said I, paper me, if you please, paper Alan, paper King George, we're all three innocent, and that seems to be what's wanted. But at least, sir, said I to James, recovering from my little fit of annoyance, I am Alan's friend, and if I can be helpful to friends of his, I will not stumble at the risk. I thought it best to put a fair face on my consent, for I saw Alan troubled, and besides, thinks I to myself, as soon as my back is turned, they will paper me, as they call it, whether I consent or not.

But in this I saw I was wrong, for I had no sooner said the words, than Mrs. Stuart leaped out of her chair, came running over to us, and wept first upon my neck, and then on Alan's, blessing God for our goodness to her family. As for you, Alan, it was no more than your bounden duty, she said, but for this lad that has come here and seen us at our worst, and seen the good man fleeching like a suitor, him that by right should give his commands like any king, as for you, my lad, she says, my heart is way not to have your name, but I have your face, and as long as my heart beats under my bosom, I will keep it, and think of it, and bless it. And with that she kissed me, and burst once more into such sobbing that I stood abashed.

Hoot! hoot! said Alan, looking mighty silly. The day comes on co-soon in this month of July, and to-morrow there will be a fine to-do in Appen, a fine riding of dragoons, and crying out of Kroohan, and running of redcoats, and it behoves you and me to the sooner be gone. Thereupon we said farewell, and set out again, bending somewhat eastwards, in a fine mild dark night, and over much the same broken country as before.