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Kidnapped—Chapter 1: I Set Off Upon My Journey To The House Of Shaws

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Alastair Roberts

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

Kidnapped by Robert Louis Stevenson. Chapter 1. I Set Off Upon My Journey To The House Of Shaws. I will begin the story of my adventures with a certain morning early in the month of June, the year of grace, 1751, when I took the key for the last time out of the door of my father's house.

The sun began to shine upon the summit of the hills as I went down the road, and by the time I had come as far as the manse, the blackbirds were whistling in the garden lilacs, and the mist that hung around the valley in the time of the dawn was beginning to arise and die away. Mr. Campbell, the minister of Essendine, was waiting for me by the garden gate, good man. He asked me if I had breakfasted, and hearing that I lacked for nothing, he took my hand in both of his and clapped it kindly under his arm.

Well, Davey lad, said he, I will go with you as far as the ford to set you on the way, and we began to walk forward in silence. Are you sorry to leave Essendine, said he after a while. Why sir, said I, if I knew where I was going or what was likely to become of me, I

would tell you candidly.

Essendine is a good place indeed, and I have been very happy there, but then I have never been anywhere else. My father and mother, since they are both dead, shall be no nearer to Essendine than in the kingdom of Hungary, and to speak truth, if I thought I had a chance to better myself where I was going, I would go with a good will. Ay, said Mr. Campbell, very well Davey, then it behooves me to tell your fortune, or so far as I may.

When your mother was gone, and your father, the worthy Christian man, began to sicken for his end, he gave me in charge a certain letter, which he said was your inheritance. So soon, says he, as I am gone, and the house is read up and the gear disposed of, all which Davey hath been done, give my boy this letter into his hand, and start him off to the house of Shores, not far from Crammond. That is the place I came from, he said, and it is where it befits that my boy should return.

He is a steady lad, your father said, and a canny-goer, and I doubt not that he will come safe, and be well lived where he goes. The house of Shores, I cried, what had my poor father to do with the house of Shores? Nay, said Mr. Campbell, who can tell that for a surety? But the name of that family, Davey, boy, is the name you bear, Balfour of Shores, an ancient, honest, reputable house, peradventure in these latter days decayed. Your father, too, was a man of learning, as befitted his position, no man more plausibly conducted school, nor had he the manner or the speech of a common dominee.

But, as ye will yourself remember, I took I a pleasure to have him to the manse to meet the gentry, and those of my own house, Campbell of Kilrennet, Campbell of Dunswire, Campbell of Minch, and others, all well-ken gentlemen, had pleasure in his society. Lastly, to put all the elements of this affair before you, here is the testamentary letter itself, superscribed with the own hand of our departed brother. He gave me the letter, which was addressed in these words, To the hands of Ebenezer Balfour, squire, of Shores, in his house of Shores, these will be delivered by my son David Balfour.

My heart was beating hard at this great prospect now suddenly opening before a lad of seventeen years of age, the son of a poor country dominee in the forest of Ettrick. Mr. Campbell, I stammered, and if you were in my shoes would you go? Of a surety, said the minister, that would I, and without pause. A pretty lad like you should get to Crammond, which is near in by Edinburgh, in two days of walk.

If the worst came to the worst, and your high relations, as I cannot but suppose them to be somewhat of your blood, should put you to the door, you can but walk the two days back again, and wrist but the manse door. But I would rather hope that ye shall be well received, as your poor father forecast for you, and for anything that I can come to be a great man in time. And here, Davy Laddy, he resumed, it lies near upon my conscience to improve this parting, and set you on the right guard against the dangers of the world.

Here he cast about for a comfortable seat, lighted on a big boulder under a birch by the trackside, sat down upon it with a very long serious upper lip, and the sun now shining in upon us between two peaks, put his pocket handkerchief over his cocked hat to shelter him. There then, with uplifted forefinger, he first put me on my guard against a considerable number of heresies, to which I had no temptations, and urged upon me to be instant in my prayers and reading of the Bible. That done, he drew a picture of the great house that I was bound to, and how I should conduct myself with its inhabitants.

Be souple, Davy, in things immaterial, said he. Bear ye this in mind, that though gentle-born, ye have had a country rearing. Denay shamus, Davy, denay shamus.

In yon great muckle house, with all these domestics upper and under, show yourself as nice, as circumspect, as quick at the conception, and as slow of speech as any. As for the laird, remember he's the laird. I say no more.

Honour to whom honour. It's a pleasure to obey a laird, or should be to the young. Well, sir, said I, it may be, and I'll promise you I'll try to make it so.

Why, very well said, replied Mr. Campbell heartily, and now to come to the material, or to make a quibble, to the immaterial. I have here a little packet which contains four things. He tugged it as he spoke, and with some great difficulty, from the skirt pocket of his coat.

Of these four things the first is your legal due, the little pickle-money for your father's books and plenishing, which I have bought, as I have explained from the first, in the design of reselling at a profit to the incoming dominee. The other three are gifties that Mrs. Campbell and myself would be blithe of your acceptance. The first, which is round, will likely please you best at the first off-go, but, O Davey laddie, it's but a drop of water in the sea, you'll help you but a step, and vanish like the morning.

The second, which is flat and square and written upon, will stand by you through life, like a good staff for the road, and a good pillow to your head in sickness. And as for the last, which is cubicle, that'll see you, it's my prayerful wish, into a better land. With that he got upon his feet, took off his hat, and prayed a little while aloud, and infecting terms for a young man setting out into the world, then suddenly took me in his arms and embraced me very hard, then held me at arm's length, looked at me with his face all working with sorrow, and then whipped about, and crying good-bye to me, set off backward by the way that we had come, at a sort of jogging run.

It might have been laughable to another, but I was in no mind to laugh. I watched him as long as he was in sight, and he never stopped hurrying, nor once looked back. Then it came in upon my mind that this was all his sorrow at my departure, and my conscience smote me hard and fast, because I, for my part, was overjoyed to get away out of that quiet countryside, and go to a great busy house among rich and respected gentlefolk of

my own name and blood.

Davy, Davy, I thought, was ever seen such black ingratitude? Can you forget old favours, and old friends at the mere whistle of a name? Fie, fie, think shame! And I sat down on the boulder the good man had just left, and opened the parcel to see the nature of my gifts. That which he had called cubicle I had never had much doubt of, sure enough it was a little Bible, to carry in a platinum hook. That which he had called round I found to be a shilling piece, and the third, which was to help me so wonderfully both in health and sickness all the days of my life, was a little piece of coarse yellow paper, written upon thus in red ink.

To make Lily of the Valley Water Take the flowers of lily of the valley, and distill them in a sack, and drink a spoonful or two as there is occasion. It restores speech to those that have the dumb palsy, it is good against the gout, it comforts the heart and strengthens the memory, and the flowers put into a glass, close stopped, and set into a hill of ants for a month, then take it out, and you will find a liquor which comes from the flowers, which keep in a vial, it is good ill or well, and whether man or woman. And then, in the minister's own hand, was added, Likewise for sprains rub it in, and for the colic a great spoonful in the hour.

To be sure I laughed over this, but it was a rather tremulous laughter, and I was glad to get my bundle on my staff's end, and set out over the fort, and up the hill upon the farther side, till, just as I came on the green drove road running wide through the heather, I took my last look of Kirk Essendine, the trees about the manse, and the big rowans in the kirk-yard where my father and my mother lay.