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Kidnapped—Chapter 21: The Flight In The Heather: The Heugh Of Corrynakiegh

May 27, 2020



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

Chapter 21 The Flight In The Heather The Heugh Of Corrynakiegh Early as day comes in the beginning of July, it was still dark when we reached our destination, a cleft in the head of a great mountain, with a water running through the midst, and upon the one hand a shallow cave in the rock. Birches grew there in a thin pretty wood, which a little farther on was changed into a wood of pines. The burn was full of trout, the wood of Cushart doves.

On the open side of the mountain beyond, warps would be always whistling, and cuckoos were plentiful. From the mouth of the cleft we looked down upon a part of Mammaw, and on the sea-lock that divides that country from Appan, and this from so great a height as made it my continual wonder and pleasure to sit and behold them. The name of the cleft was the Heugh Of Corrynakiegh, and although from its height and being so near upon the sea it was often beset with clouds, yet it was on the whole a pleasant place, and the five days we lived in it went happily.

We slept in the cave, making our bed of heather bushes which we cut for that purpose, and covering ourselves with Allan's greatcoat. There was a low concealed place in a turning of the glen, where we were so bold as to make fire, so that we could warm ourselves when the clouds set in, and cook hot porridge, and grill the little trouts that we caught with our hands under the stones and overhanging banks of the burn. This was indeed our chief pleasure and business, and not only to save our meal against worse times, but with a rivalry that much amused us.

We spent a great part of our days at the waterside, stripped to the waist, and groping about, or, as they say, guddling for these fish. The largest we got might have been a quarter of a pound, but they were of good flesh and flavour, and when broiled upon the coals lacked only a little salt to be delicious. In any by-time Allan must teach me to use my sword, for my ignorance had much distressed him, and I think besides, as I had sometimes the upper hand of him in the fishing, he was not sorry to turn to an exercise where he had so much the upper hand of me.

He made it somewhat more of a pain than need have been, for he stormed at me all through the lessons in a very violent manner of scolding, and would push me so close that I made sure he must run me through the body. I was often tempted to turn tail, but held my ground for all that, and got some profit of my lessons, if it was but to stand on guard with an assured countenance, which is often all that is required. So, though I could never in the least please my master, I was not altogether displeased with myself.

In the meanwhile you are not to suppose that we neglected our chief business, which was to get away. It will be many a long day, Allan said to me on our first morning, before the Redcoats think upon seeing Carinachee, so now we must get words sent to James, and he must find the scylla for us. And how shall we send that word? says I. We are here in a desert place, which yet we dare not leave, and alas you get the fowls of the air to be your messengers, I see not what we shall be able to do.

Ay, said Allan, you are a man of small contrivance, David. Thereupon he fell in amuse, looking in the embers of the fire, and presently getting a piece of wood, he fashioned it in a cross, the four ends of which he blackened on the coals. Then he looked at me a little shyly.

Could you lend me my button? says he. It seemed a strange thing to ask a gift again, but I own I am laith to cut another. I gave him the button, whereupon he strung it on a strip of his greatcoat, which he had used to bind the cross, and tying in a little sprig of birch and another of fir, he looked upon his work with satisfaction.

Now, said he, there is a little clacken, what is called a hamlet in the English, not very far from Carinachie, and it has the name of Coalizner Cohen. There there are living many friends of mine whom I could trust with my life, and some that I am no just so sure of. Ye see, David, there will be money set upon our heads.

James and Sul is to set money on them, and as for the Campbells, they would never spare scylla where there was a steward to be hurt. If it was otherwise, I would go down to Coalizner Cohen whatever, and trust my life into these people's hands as lightly as I would trust another with my glove. But being so, said I, being so, said he, I would as leaf they did not see me.

There's bad folk everywhere, and what's far worse, weak ones. So when it comes dark again, I will steal down into that clacken, and set this that I have been making in the window of a good friend of mine, John Breck McCull, a bowman of Appan's. With all my heart, says I, and if he finds it, what is he to think? Well, said Alan, I wish he was a man of more penetration, for by my troth I am afraid he will make little enough of it.

But this is what I have in mind. This cross is something in the nature of the cross-turry, or fiery cross, which is the signal of gathering in our clans. Yet he will know well enough the clan is not to rise, for there it is standing in his window, and no word with it.

So he will say to himself, the clan is not to rise, but there is something. Then he will see my button, and that was Duncan Stewart's. And then he will say to himself, the son of Duncan is in the heather, and has need of me.

Well, said I, it may be, but even supposing so, there is a good deal of heather between here and the fourth. And that is a very true word, says Alan. But then John Breck will see the sprig of birch, and the sprig of pine, and he will say to himself, if he is a man of any penetration at all, which I missed out, Alan will be lying in a wood which is both of pines and birches.

Then he will think to himself, that is not so very rife hereabout. And then he will come and give us a look-up in Carinachie. And if he does not, David, the devil may fly away with him, for what I care, for he will know be worth the salt to his porridge.

Amen, said I, drooling with him a little. You are very ingenious. But would it not be simpler for you to write him a few words in black and white? And that is an excellent observe, Mr. Balfour of Shores, says Alan, drooling with me.

And it would certainly be much simpler for me to write to him. But it would be a sore job for John Breck to read it. He would have to go to the school for two, three years, and it is possible we might be wearied waiting on him.

So that night Alan carried down his fiery cross and set it on the bowman's window. He was troubled when he came back, for the dogs had barked and the folk run out from their houses, and he thought he had heard a clatter of arms and seen a redcoat come to one of the doors. On all accounts we lay the next day in the borders of the wood and kept a close look-out, so that if it was John Breck that came we might be ready to guide him, and if it was the redcoats we should have time to get away.

About noon a man was to be spied, straggling up the open side of the mountain in the sun, and looking round him as he came, from under his hand. No sooner had Alan seen him than he whistled. The man turned and came a little towards us.

Then Alan would give another peep, and the man would come still nearer, and so by the sound of whistling he was guided to the spot where we lay. He was a ragged, wild, bearded man, about forty, grossly disfigured with the smallpox, and looked both dull and savage. Although his English was very bad and broken, yet Alan, according to his very handsome use, whenever I was by, would suffer him to speak no Gaelic.

Perhaps the strange language made him appear more backward than he really was, but I thought he had little good will to serve us, and what he had was the child of terror. Alan would have had him carry a message to James, but the Bowman would hear of no message. She was forget it, he said in his screaming voice, and would either have a letter or wash his hands of us.

I thought Alan would be gruelled at that, for we lacked the means of writing in that desert. But he was a man of more resources than I knew, searched the wood until he found the quill of a Cushart dove, which he shaped into a pen, made himself a kind of ink with gunpowder from his horn, and water from the running stream, and tearing a corner from his French military commission, which he carried in his pocket, like a talisman to keep him from the gallows, he sat down and wrote as follows. Dear Kinsman, please send the money by the bearer to the place he kens of.

Your affectionate cousin, A.S. This he entrusted to the Bowman, who promised to make what manner of speed he best could, and carried it off with him down the hill. He was three full days gone, but about five in the evening of the third we heard a whistling in the wood, which Alan answered, and presently the He seemed less sulky than before, and indeed he was no doubt well pleased to have got to the end of such a dangerous commission. He gave us the news of the country, that it was alive with redcoats, that arms were being found, and poor folk brought in trouble daily, and that James and some of his servants were already clapped in prison at Fort William under strong suspicion of complicity.

It seemed it was noised on all sides that Alan Breck had fired the shot, and there was a bill issued for both him and me, with one hundred pounds reward. This was all as bad as could be, and the little note the Bowman had carried us from Mrs. Stuart was of a miserable sadness. In it she besought Alan not to let himself be captured, assuring him, if he fell in the hands of the troops, both he and James were no better than dead men.

The money she had sent was all that she could beg or borrow, and she prayed heaven we could be doing with it. Lastly, she said, she enclosed us one of the bills in which we were described. This we looked upon with great curiosity and not a little fear, partly as a man may look in a mirror, partly as he may look into the barrel of an enemy's gun to

judge if he be truly aimed.

Alan was advertised as a small, pockmarked, active man of thirty-five or thereby, dressed in a feathered hat, a French sidecoat of blue with silver buttons, a lace a good deal tarnished, a red waistcoat and breeches of black shag, and I as a tall strong lad of about eighteen, wearing an old blue coat, very ragged, an old Highland bonnet, a long homespun waistcoat, blue breeches, his legs bare, low country shoes, wanting the toes, speaks like a lowlander, and has no beard. Alan was well enough pleased to see his finery so fully remembered and set down, only when he came to the word tarnish he looked upon his lace like one a little mortified. As for myself, I thought I cut a miserable figure in the bill, and yet was well enough pleased too, for since I had changed these rags the description had ceased to be a danger, and became a source of safety.

Alan, said I, you should change your clothes. Na troth, said Alan. I have nay others.

A fine sight I would be if I went back to France in a mind, that if I were to separate from Alan and his tell-tale clothes I should be safe against arrest, and might go openly about my business. Nor was this all, for suppose I was arrested when I was alone, there was little against me, but suppose I was taken in company with the reputed murderer, my case would begin to be grave. For generosity's sake I dare not speak my mind upon this head, but I thought of it none the less.

I thought of it all the more too, when the best part of another in small change. True, it was more than I had, but then Alan with less than five guineas had to get as far as France, I with my less than two, not beyond Queensferry, so that taking things in their proportion, Alan's society was not only a peril to my life, but a burden on my purse. But there was no thought of the sort in the honest head of my companion.

He believed he was serving, helping, and protecting me, and what could I do but hold my peace and chafe and take my chance of it. It's little enough, said Alan, putting the purse in his pocket, but it'll do my business. And now, John Breck, if ye will hand me over my button, this gentleman and me will be for taking the road.

But the bowman, after feeling about in the hairy purse that hung in front of him in the Highland Manor, though he wore otherwise the lowland habit with sea trousers, began to roll his eyes strangely, and at last said, Her Nainsull will loss it, meaning he thought he had lost it. What, cried Alan, you will lose my button that was my father's before me? Now I will tell you what is in my mind, John Breck. It is in my mind this is the worst day's work that ever ye did since ye were born.

And as Alan spoke he set his hands on his knees and looked at the bowman with a smiling mouth, and that dancing light in his eyes that meant mischief to his enemies. Perhaps the bowman was honest enough, perhaps he had meant to cheat, and then finding himself alone with two of us in a desert place cast back to honesty as being safer,

at least, and all at once he seemed to find that button and handed it to Alan. Well, and it is a good thing for the honour of the Maccles, said Alan, and then to me.

Here is my button back again, and I thank you for parting with it, which is of a peace with all your friendships to me. Then he took the warmest parting of the bowman, for, says he, ye have done very well by me, and set your neck at venture, and I will always give you the name of good man. Lastly the bowman took himself off by one way, and Alan and I, getting our chattels together, struck into another to resume our flight.