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Kidnapped—Chapter 29: I Come Into My Kingdom

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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 29 I Come Into My Kingdom For some time Alan volleyed upon the door, and his knocking only roused the echoes of the house and the neighborhood. At last, however, I could hear the noise of a window gently thrust up, and knew that my uncle had come to his observatory. By what light there was he would see Alan standing, like a dark shadow on the steps.

The three witnesses were hidden quite out of his view, so that there was nothing to alarm an honest man in his own house. For all that, he studied his visitor a while in silence, and when he spoke his voice had a quaver of misgiving. What's this? says he.

This is nay kind of a time of night for decent folk, and I hay nay trokings with night hawks. What brings ye here? I have a blunderbush. Is that your cell, Mr. Balfour? returned Alan, stepping back and looking up into the darkness.

Have a care of that blunderbush. They're nasty things to burst. What brings ye here? And where are ye? says my uncle angrily.

I have no manner of inclination to rout out my name to the countryside, said Alan, but what brings me here is another story, being more of your affair than mine, and if you're sure it's what you would like, I'll set it to a tune and sing it to you. And what is it? asked my uncle. David! says Alan.

What was that? cried my uncle in a mighty changed voice. Shall I give you the rest of the name then? said Alan. There was a pause, and then I'm thinking I'd better let you in, says my uncle doubtfully.

I dare say that, said Alan, but the point is, would I go? Now I will tell you what I'm thinking. I'm thinking that it is here upon this doorstep that we must confer upon this business, and it shall be here or nowhere at all, whatever, for I would have you to understand that I am as stiff-necked as yourself, and a gentleman of better family. This change of note disconcerted Ebenezer.

He was a little while digesting it, and then says he, Will, will, what must be must, and shut the window. But it took him a long time to get downstairs, and a still longer to undo the fastenings, repenting, I dare say, and taken with fresh claps of fear at every second step and every bolt and bar. At last, however, we heard the creak of the hinges, and it seemed my uncle slipped gingerly out, and, seeing that Alan had stepped back a pace or two, sate him down on the top doorstep with the blunderbuss ready in his hands.

And now, says he, mind I have my blunderbush, and if ye take a step nearer, ye are as good as deed. A very civil speech, says Alan, to be sure. Nah, says my uncle, but this is no a very chanty kind of proceeding, and I am bound to be prepared.

And now that we understand each other, ye'll can name your business. Why, says Alan, you that are a man of so much understanding, will doubtless have perceived that I am a Highland gentleman. My name has no business in my story, but the county of my friends is no very far from the Isle of Mull, of which ye will have heard.

It seems there was a ship lost in those parts, and the next day a gentleman of my family was seeking wreck-wood for his fire along the sands, when he came upon a lad that was half drowned. Well, he brought him to, and he and some other gentleman took and clapped him in an old ruined castle, where from that day to this he has been a great expense to my friends. My friends are a wee wild like, and not so particular about the law as some that I could name, and finding that the lad owned some decent folk, and was your born nephew, Mr. Balfour, he asked me to give you a bit call, and confer upon the matter, and I may tell ye at the off-go, unless we can agree upon some terms, ye are little likely to set eyes upon him, for my friends," added Alan simply, are no very well off.

My uncle cleared his throat. "'I'm no very caring,' says he. He was nay a good lad at the best of it, and I've nay called to interfere.

Aye, aye,' said Alan. I see what you would be at, pretending ye don't care to make the ransom smaller. Nah,' said my uncle, it's the mere truth.

I take nay manner of interest in the lad, and I'll pay nay ransom, and ye can make a kirk and a mill of him for what I care. "'Hoot, sir,' says Alan. Blood's thicker than water in the devil's name.

You can nay desert your brother's son for the fair shame of it, and if you did, and it came to be Kent, you would nay be very popular in your countryside, for I'm the more deceived.' "'I'm no just very popular the way it is,' returned Ebenezer, and I did nay see how it would come to be Kent. No by me, anyway, nor yet by you or your friends. So that's idle talk, my bucky,' says he.

"Then it'll have to be David that tells it,' said Alan. "'How's that?' says my uncle sharply. "'Oh, just this way,' says Alan.

My friends would doubtless keep your nephew as long as there was any likelihood of Scylla to be made of it, but if they were nayn, I'm clearly of opinion they would let him gang where he pleased, and be damned to him. "'Ay, but I'm no very caring about that either,' said my uncle. I would nay be muckle made up with that.' "'I was thinking that,' said Alan.

"And what for why?' asked Ebenezer. "'Why, Mr. Balfour,' replied Alan. "'By all that I could hear, there were two ways of it.

Either you liked David and would pay to get him back, or else you had very good reasons for not wanting him, and would pay for us to keep him. "'It seems it's not the first. Well, then, it's the second, and blithe am I to ken it, for it should be a pretty penny in my pocket and the pockets of my friends.' "'I dinnae follow you there,' said my uncle.

"No?' said Alan. "'Well, see here, you dinnae want the lad back. Well, what do you want done with him, and how much will you pay?' My uncle made no answer, but shifted uneasily on his seat.

"Come, sir,' cried Alan. "'I would have you to ken that I am a gentleman. I bear a king's name.

I am nay rider to kick my shanks at your hall door. Either give me an answer in civility, and that out of hand, or by the top of Glencoe I will ram three feet of iron through your vitals.' "'Amen!' cried my uncle, scrambling to his feet. "'Gimme a minute! What's like wrong with you? I'm just a plain man and nay dancing master, and am trying to be as civil as it's morally possible.

As for that wild talk, it's fair disreputable. Vitals, say you! And where would I be with my blunderbush?' he snarled. "'Powder on your old hands are but as a snail to the swallow

against the bright steel in the hands of Alan,' said the other.

Before your jostling finger could find the trigger, the hilt would dull on your breast-bane. "Amen! Ways denying it!' said my uncle. "'Pit it as you please.

Hay it your aynway. I'll do nay thing to cross you. Just tell me what like you'll be wanting, and you'll see that we'll ken agree fine.' "'Troth, sir,' said Alan.

I asked for nothing but plain dealing. In two words, do ye want the lad killed or kept?' "'O sirs!' cried Ebenezer. "'O sirs me! That's no kind of language!' "'Killed or kept?' repeated Alan.

"O keep it, keep it!' wailed my uncle. "'We'll have nay bloodshed if you please.' "'Well,' says Alan, "'as you please. That'll be the dearer.' "'The dearer!' cries Ebenezer.

"Would ye file your hands with crime?' "'Hoot!' said Alan. "'There bathe crime whatever, and the killing's easier and quicker and surer. Keeping the lad'll be a fasciast job, a fasciast kittle business.' "'I'll have him keep it, though,' returned my uncle.

"I never had nay thing to do with any thing morally wrong, and am no gone to begin to pleasure a wild Highlandman.' "'You're unco-scrupulous!' sneered Alan. "'I'm a man of principle,' said Ebenezer simply. "'And if I have to pay for it, I'll have to pay for it.

And besides,' says he, "'ye forget the lad's my brother's son.' "'Well, well,' said Alan. "'And now about the price. "'It's no very easy for me to set a name upon it.

"I would first have to ken some small matters. "'I would have to ken, for instance, "'what ye gave Ho-Season at the first off-go.' "'Ho-Season!' cries my uncle, struck her back. "'What for?' "'For kidnapping David,' says Alan.

"It's a Lee! It's a black Lee!' "...cried my uncle. "'He was never kidnapped. "'He Lee'd in his throat that told you that.

"Kidnapped he never was.' "'That's no fault of mine nor yet of yours,' said Alan. "'Nor yet of Ho-Season's, if he's a man that can be trusted.' "'What do you mean?' cried Ebenezer. "'Did Ho-Season tell you?' "'Why, ye darned old runt! "'How else would I ken?' cried Alan.

"Ho-Season and me are partners. "'We're gang shares. "'So ye can see for yourself what good ye can do Leeing.

"And I must plainly say ye drove a fool's bargain "'when ye let a man like the Sailor Man "'so far forward in your private matters. "'But that's past praying for, "'and ye must lie on your bed the way ye made it. "'And the point in hand is just this.

"What did ye pay him?' "'Has he told you himself?' asked my uncle. "'That's my concern,' said Alan. "'We'll,' said my uncle.

"I didn't ay care what he said. "He Lee'd, and the solemn God's truth is this, "that I gave him twenty pound. "But I'll be perfectly honest with ye, "for by that he was to have the selling of the lad in Caroliney.

"Wilk would be as muckle mare. "But no from my pocket, you see.' "Thank you, Mr Thompson. "That will do excellently well,' said the lawyer, "stepping forward, and then mightily civilly.

"Good evening, Mr Balfour,' said he. "And good evening, Uncle Ebenezer,' said I. "And it's a brow night, Mr Balfour,' added Torrance. "Never a word,' said my uncle, "neither black nor white, but just sat where he was "on the top doorstep, and stared upon us "like a man turned to stone.

"Alan filched away his blunderbuss, "and the lawyer, taking him by the arm, "plucked him up from the doorstep, "let him into the kitchen, "whither we all followed, "and set him down in a chair beside the hearth, "where the fire was out, and only a rush-light burning. "There we all looked upon him for a while, "exalting greatly in our success, "but yet with a sort of pity for the man's shame. "Come, come, Mr Ebenezer.' "You must not be downhearted, "for I promise you we shall make easy terms.

"In the meanwhile give us the cellar key, "and Torrance shall draw us a bottle "of your father's wine in honour of the event.' "Then turning to me and taking me by the hand, "Mr David,' says he, "I wish you all joy in your good fortune, "which I believe to be deserved.' "And then to Alan with a spice of drollery, "Mr Thompson, I pay you my compliment, "it was most artfully conducted, "but in one point you somewhat outran my comprehension. "Do I understand your name to be James, or Charles, "or is it George perhaps? "And why should it be any of the three, sir?' "quoth Alan, drawing himself up, "like one who smelt an offence. "Only, sir, that you mentioned a king's name,' replied Rancula, "and as there has never been a King Thompson, "or his fame at least has never come my way, "I judged you must refer to that you had in baptism.' "This was just the stab that Alan would feel keenest, "and I am free to confess he took it very ill.

"Not a word he would answer, "but stepped off to the far end of the kitchen, "and sat down and sulked. "And it was not till I stepped after him and gave him my hand, "and thanked him by title as the chief spring of my success, "that he began to smile a bit, "and was at last prevailed upon to join our party. "By that time we had the fire lighted, "and a bottle of wine uncorked.

"A good supper came out of the basket, "to which Torrance and I and Alan set ourselves down, "while the lawyer and my uncle "passed into the next chamber to consult. "They stayed there closeted about an hour, "at the end of which period "they had come to a good understanding, "and my uncle and I set our hands "to the agreement in a formal manner. "By the terms of this my uncle bound himself "to satisfy Rankela as to his intromissions, "and to pay me two clear thirds "of the yearly income of Shores.

"So the beggar in the ballad had come home, "and when I lay down that night on the kitchen-chest, "I was a man of means, and had a name in the country. "Alan and Torrance and Rankela slept "and snored on their hard beds, "but for me who had lain out under heaven "and upon dirt and stones so many days and nights, "and often with an empty belly and in fear of death, "this good change in my case unmanned me "more than any of my former evil ones, "and I lay till dawn, looking at the fire on the roof, "and planning the future."