

# OpenTheo

## Kidnapped—Chapter 17: The Death Of The Red Fox

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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 17 The Death Of The Red Fox The next day Mr. Henderlin found for me a man who had a boat of his own, and was to cross the Linnilock that afternoon into Append fishing. Him he prevailed on to take me, for he was one of his flock, and in this way I saved a long day's travel and the price of the two public ferries I must otherwise have passed. It was near noon before we set out, a dark day with clouds and the sun shining upon little patches.

The sea was here very deep and still, and had scarce a wave upon it, so that I must put the water to my lips before I could believe it to be truly salt. The mountains on either side were high, rough, and barren, very black and gloomy in the shadow of the clouds, but all silver-laced with little watercourses where the sun shone upon them. It seemed a hard country, this of Append, for people to care as much about as Alan did.

There was but one thing to mention. A little after we had started the sun shone upon a little moving clump of scarlet close in along the water-side to the north. It was much of the same red as soldiers' coats.

Every now and then, too, there came little sparks and lightnings, as though the sun had struck upon bright steel. I asked my boatman what it should be, and he answered he supposed it was some of the red soldiers coming from Fort William into Appen against the poor tenantry of the country. Well, it was a sad sight to me, and whether it was because of my thoughts of Alan, or from something prophetic in my bosom, although this was but the second time I had seen King George's troops, I had no good will to them.

At last we came so near the point of land at the entering inn of Loch Levin that I begged to be set on shore. My boatman, who was an honest fellow and mindful of his promise to the catechist, would fain have carried me on to Ballycoolish. But as this was to take me farther from my secret destination, I insisted, and was set on shore at last under the wood of Lettermoor, or Lettervore, for I have heard it both ways, in Alan's country of Appen.

This was a wood of birches, growing on a steep, craggy side of a mountain that overhung the loch. It had many openings and ferny house, and a road or bridle-track ran north and south through the midst of it, by the edge of which, where was a spring, I sat down to eat some oat-bread of Mr. Hendelands, and think upon my situation. Here I was not only troubled by a cloud of stinging midges, but far more by the doubts of my mind.

What I ought to do, why I was going to join myself with an outlaw and a would-be murderer like Alan, whether I should not be acting more like a man of sense to tramp back to the South Country direct, by my own guidance and at my own charges, and what Mr. Campbell or even Mr. Hendeland would think of me if they should ever learn my folly and presumption, these were the doubts that now began to come in on me stronger than ever. As I was so sitting and thinking, a sound of men and horses came to me through the wood, and presently after, at a turning of the road, I saw four travellers come into view. The way was in this part so rough and narrow that they came single and led their horses by the reins.

The first was a great red-headed gentleman, of an imperious and flushed face, who carried his hat in his hand and fanned himself, for he was in a breathing heat. The second, by his decent black garb and white wig, I correctly took to be a lawyer. The third was a servant, and wore some part of his clothes in tartan, which showed that his master was of a highland family, and either an outlaw or else in singular good odour with the government, since the wearing of tartan was against the act.

If I had been better versed in these things, I would have known the tartan to be of the Argyle or Campbell colours. This servant had a good-sized portmanteau strapped on his horse, and a net of lemons to brew punch with, hanging at the saddle-bow, as was often enough the custom with luxurious travellers in that part of the country. As for the fourth, who brought up the tale, I had seen his like before, and knew him at once to be a sheriff's officer.

I had no sooner seen these people coming than I made up my mind, for no reason than I can tell, to go through with my adventure. And when the first came alongside of me, I rose up from the bracken, and asked him the way to Ockharn. He stopped and looked at me, as I thought, a little oddly, and then turning to the lawyer.

"'Mungo,' said he, "'there's many a man would think this more of a warning than two piets. Here am I on my road to Jura on the job you can, and here is a young lad starts up out of the bracken, and spears if I am on the way to Ockharn.' "'Glenur,' said the other, "'this is an ill subject for jesting.' These two had now drawn close up, and were gazing at me, while the two followers had halted about a stone-cast in the rear. "'And what seek ye in Ockharn?' said Colin Roy Campbell of Glenur, him they called the Red Fox, for he it was that I had stopped.

"'The man that lives there,' said I. "'James of the Glens,' says Glenur musingly, and then to the lawyer. "'Is he gathering his people, think ye?' "'Anyway,' says the lawyer, "'we shall do better to hide where we are, and let the soldiers rally us.' "'If you are concerned for me,' said I, "'I am neither of his people nor yours, but an honest subject of King George, owing no man and fearing no man.' "'Why, very well said,' replies the factor. "'But if I may make so bold as ask, what does this honest man so far from his country? And why does he come seeking the brother of Ardshiel? I have power here, I must tell you, I am King's factor upon several of these estates, and have twelve files of soldiers at my back.

"'I have heard a wayward in the country,' said I, a little nettled, "'that you were a hard man to drive.' He still kept looking at me, as if in doubt. "'Well,' said he at last, "'your tongue is bold, but I am no unfriend to plainness. If ye had asked me the way to the door of James Stewart on any other day but this, I would have set you right and bidden you God's speed.

But to-day, eh, Mungo?' And he turned again to look at the lawyer. But just as he turned there came the shot of a fire-lark from higher up the hill, and with the very sound of it Gleneor fell upon the road. "'Oh, I am dead!' he cried several times over.

The lawyer had caught him up and held him in his arms, the servant standing over and clasping his hands. And now the wounded man looked from one to another with scared eyes, and there was a change in his voice that went to the heart. "'Take care of yourselves,' says he.

"'I am dead!' He tried to open his clothes as if to look for the wound, but his fingers slipped on the buttons. With that he gave a great sigh, his head rolled on his shoulder, and he passed away. The lawyer said never a word, but his face was sharp as a pen, and as white as the dead man's.

The servant broke out into a great noise of crying and weeping like a child, and I on my

side stood staring at them in a kind of horror. The sheriff's officer had run back at the first sound of the shot, to hasten the coming of the soldiers. At last the lawyer laid down the dead man in his blood upon the road, and got to his own feet with a kind of stagger.

I believe it was his movement that brought me to my senses, for he had no sooner done than I began to scramble up the hill, crying out, "The murderer! The murderer!" So little a time had elapsed that when I got to the top of the first steepness, and could see some part of the open mountain, the murderer was still moving away at no great distance. He was a big man in a black coat with metal buttons, and carried a long fouling-piece. "Here!" I cried.

"I see him!" At that the murderer gave a little quick look over his shoulder, and began to run. The next moment he was lost in a fringe of birches. Then he came out again on the upper side, where I could see him climbing like a jackanapes, for that part was again very steep, and then he dipped behind a shoulder, and I saw him no more.

All this time I had been running on my side, and had got a good way up, when a voice cried upon me to stand. I was at the edge of the upper wood, and so now when I halted and looked back I saw all the open part of the hill below me. The lawyer and the sheriff's officer were standing just above the road, crying and waving on me to come back, and on my left the redcoat's musket in hand were beginning to struggle singly out of the lower wood.

"Why should I come back?" I cried. "Come you on!" "Ten pounds if ye take that lad," cried the lawyer. "He's an accomplice.

He was posted here to hold us in talk.' At that word, which I could hear quite plainly, though it was to the soldiers and not to me that he was crying it, my heart came in my mouth with quite a new kind of terror. Indeed it is one thing to stand the danger of your life, and quite another to run the peril of both life and character. The thing, besides, had come so suddenly, like thunder out of a clear sky, that I was all amazed and helpless.

The soldiers began to spread, some of them to run, and others to put up their pieces and cover me, and still I stood. "Duke in here among the trees!" said a voice close by. Indeed I scarce knew what I was doing, but I obeyed, and as I did so I heard the fire-locks bang and the balls whistle in the birches.

Just inside the shelter of the trees I found Allan Breck standing, with a fishing-rod. He gave me no salutation. Indeed it was no time for civilities.

Only come!' says he, and set off running along the side of the mountain towards Balacoolish, and I like a sheep to follow him. Now we ran among the birches, now stooping behind low humps upon the mountainside, now crawling on all fours among the heather. The pace was deadly, my heart seemed bursting against my ribs, and I had

neither time to think nor breath to speak with, only I remember seeing with wonder that Allan every now and then would straighten himself to his full height and look back, and every time he did so there came a great far-away cheering and crying of the soldiers.

A quarter of an hour later Allan stopped, clapped down flat in the air, and said to me, —'Now,' said he,—'it's earnest. Do as I do, for your life!' And at the same speed, but now with infinitely more precaution, we traced back again across the mountainside by the same way that we had come, only perhaps higher, till at last Allan threw himself down in the upper wood of Lettermoor, where I had found him at the first, and lay, with his face in the bracken, panting like a dog. My own side so ached, my head so swam, my tongue so hung out of my mouth with heat and dryness, that I lay beside him like one dead.