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Kidnapped—Chapter 2: I Come To My Journey's End

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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

Chapter 2. I Come To My Journey's End. In the forenoon of the second day, coming to the top of a hill, I saw all the country fall away before me down to the sea, and in the midst of this descent, on a long ridge, the city of Edinburgh smoking like a kiln. There was a flag upon the castle, and ships moving or lying anchored in the firth, both of which, for as far away as they were, I could distinguish clearly, and both brought my country heart into my mouth.

Presently after I came by a house where a shepherd lived, and got a rough direction for the neighbourhood of Crammond, and so, from one to another, worked my way to the westward of the capital by Collington, till I came out upon the Glasgow road, and there, to my great pleasure and wonder, I beheld a regiment marching to the fifths, every foot in time, an old red-faced general on a grey horse at the one end, and at the other the company of grenadiers, with their Pope's hats. The pride of life seemed to mount into my brain at the sight of the red coats, and the hearing of that merry music. A little farther

on, and I was told I was in Crammond parish, and began to substitute in my inquiries the name of the house of Shores.

It was a word that seemed to surprise those of whom I sought my way. At first I thought the plainness of my appearance, in my country habit, and that all dusty from the road, consorted ill with the greatness of the place to which I was bound. But after two, or maybe three, had given me the same look and the same answer, I began to take it in my head that there was something strange about the Shores itself.

The better to set this fear at rest, I changed the form of my inquiries, and spying an honest fellow coming along a lane on the shaft of his cart, I asked him if he had ever heard tell of a house they called the House of Shores. He stopped his cart and looked at me, like the others. "Ay," said he.

"What for?" "It's a great house?" I asked. "Doubtless," says he. "The house is a big muckle house." "Ay," said I. "But the folk that are in it." "Folk?" cried he.

"Are ye daft? There's nay folk there to call folk." "What?" say I. Not Mr. Ebenezer? "Oh, ay," says the man. "There's the laird, to be sure. If it's him you're wanting.

"Wall like be your business, Manny." "I was led to think that I would get a situation," I said, looking as modest as I could. "What?" cries the carter, in so sharp a note that his very horse started, and then, "Well, Manny," he added, "is nay in my affairs. But ye seem a decent-spoken lad, "and if ye'll take a word from me, ye'll keep clear of the shores." "The next person I came across was a dapper little man in a beautiful white wig, "whom I saw to be a barber on his rounds, and knowing well that barbers were great gossips, "I asked him plainly what sort of a man was Mr. Balfour of the shores.

"Hoot, hoot, hoot," said the barter. "Nay kind of a man, nay kind of a man at all," and began to ask me very shrewdly what my business was. "But I was more than a match for him at that," and he went on to his next customer no wiser than he came.

"I cannot well describe the blow this dealt to my illusions. "The more indistinct the accusations were the less I liked them, for they left the wider field to fancy. "What kind of a great house was this that all the parish should start and stare to be asked the way to it? "What sort of a gentleman that his ill fame should be thus current on the wayside? "If an hour's walking would have brought me back to Essendine, I had left my adventure then and there, and returned to Mr. Campbell's.

"But when I had come so far away already, mere shame would not suffer me to desist till I had put the matter to the touch of proof. "I was bound out of mere self-respect to carry it through. "As little as I liked the sound of what I heard, and slow as I began to travel, I still kept asking my way, and still kept advancing.

"It was drawing on to sundown when I met a stout, dark, sour-looking woman coming

trudging down a hill, "and she, when I had put my usual question, turned sharp about, accompanied me back to the summit she had just left, "and pointed to a great bulk of a building standing very bare upon a green in the bottom of the next valley. "The country was pleasant round about, running in low hills, pleasantly watered and wooded, and the crops, to my eyes, wonderfully good, "but the house itself appeared to be a kind of ruin. No road led up to it.

"No smoke arose from any of the chimneys, nor was there any semblance of a garden. My heart sank. "That!" I cried.

The woman's face lit up with a malignant anger. "That is the House of Shores!" she cried. "Blood built it! Blood stopped the building of it! Blood shall bring it down! See here!" she cried again.

"I spit upon the ground and cracked my thumb at it. Black be its fall! If ye see the lead, tell him what ye hear! "Tell him this makes the twelve-hundred-and-nineteenth time that Janet Clouston has called down the curse on him and his house. "Buyer and stableman, guest and master, wife, miss or bairn, black! Black be their fall!" "And the woman, whose voice had risen to a kind of eldritch sing-song, turned with a skip and was gone.

"I stood where she left me, with my hair on end. In those days folks still believed in witches and trembled at a curse, "and this one, falling so pat, like a wayside omen, to arrest me ere I carried out my purpose, took the pith out of my legs. "I sat me down and stared at the House of Shores.

The more I looked, the pleasanter that countryside appeared, "being all set with hawthorn bushes full of flowers, the fields dotted with sheep, a fine flight of rooks in the sky, "and every sign of a kind soil and climate, and yet the barrack in the midst of it went sore against my fancy. "Countryfolk went by from the fields as I sat there on the side of the ditch, but I lacked the spirit to give them a good e'en. "At last the sun went down, and then, right up against the yellow sky, I saw a scroll of smoke go mounting, "not much thicker, as it seemed to me, than the smoke of a candle, but still there it was, and meant of fire, and warmth, and cookery, "and some living inhabitant that must have lit it, and this comforted my heart.

"So I set forward by a little faint track in the grass that led in my direction. "It was very faint indeed to be the only way to a place of habitation, yet I saw no other. "Presently it brought me to stone uprights, with an unroofed lodge beside them, and coats of arms upon the top.

"A main entrance it was plainly meant to be, but never finished. "Instead of gates of wrought iron, a pair of hurdles were tied across with a straw rope, "and as there were no park walls, nor any sign of avenue, the track that I was walking passed on the right hand of the pillars, "and went wandering on toward the house. "The nearer I got to that, the

drearier it appeared.

"It seemed like the one wing of a house that had never been finished. "What should have been the inner end stood open on the upper floors, "and showed against the sky were steps and stairs of uncompleted masonry. "Many of the windows were unglazed, and bats flew in and out, like doves out of a dove-coat.

"The night had begun to fall as I got close, and in three of the lower windows, "which were very high up and narrow, and well barred, the changing light of a little fire began to glimmer. "Was this the palace I had been coming to? "Was it within these walls that I was to seek new friends and begin great fortunes? "Why, in my father's house on Essend Waterside, the fire and the bright lights would show a mile away, "and the door opened to a beggar's knock. "I came forward cautiously, and giving ear as I came, heard someone rattling with dishes, "and a little dry, eager cough that came in fits, but there was no sound of speech, and not a dog barked.

"The door, as well as I could see it in the dim light, was a great piece of wood all studded with nails, "and I lifted my hand with a faint heart under my jacket, and knocked once. "Then I stood and waited. "The house had fallen into a dead silence.

"A whole minute passed away, and nothing stirred but the bats overhead. "I knocked again, and hearkened again. "By this time my ears had grown so accustomed to the quiet "that I could hear the ticking of the clock inside as it slowly counted out the seconds, "but whoever was in that house kept deadly still, and must have held his breath.

"I was in two minds whether to run away, but anger got the upper hand, "and I began instead to rain kicks and buffets on the door, and to shout aloud for Mr. Balfour. "I was in full career when I heard the cough right overhead, and jumping back and looking up, "beheld a man's head in a tall nightcap, and the bell-mouth of a blunderbuss at one of the first-story windows. "It's loaded,' said a voice.

"I've come here with a letter,' I said, "to Mr. Ebenezer Balfour of Shores. Is he here?' "From whom is it?' asked the man with the blunderbuss. "That is neither here nor there,' said I, for I was growing very wrath.

"Well,' was the reply, "you can put it down upon the doorstep, and be off with ye.' "I will do no such thing,' I cried. "I will deliver it into Mr. Balfour's hand, as it was meant I should. "It is a letter of introduction.' "A what?' cried the voice, sharply.

"I repeated what I had said. "Who are ye, yourself?' was the next question, after a considerable pause. "I am not ashamed of my name,' said I. "They call me David Balfour.' "At that I made sure the man started, "for I heard the blunderbuss rattle on the windowsill, "and it was quite a long pause, "and with a curious change of voice, that the

next question followed.

"Is your father dead?" "I was so much surprised at this, "that I could find no voice to answer, but stood staring. "Aye,' the man resumed, "he'll be dead, no doubt, "and that'll be what brings ye chapping to my door.' "Another pause, and then defiantly, "Well, ma'am,' he said, "I'll let ye in,' "and he disappeared from the window."