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Kidnapped

绑 架

Robert Louis Stevenson

Syllabus designer: David Foulds

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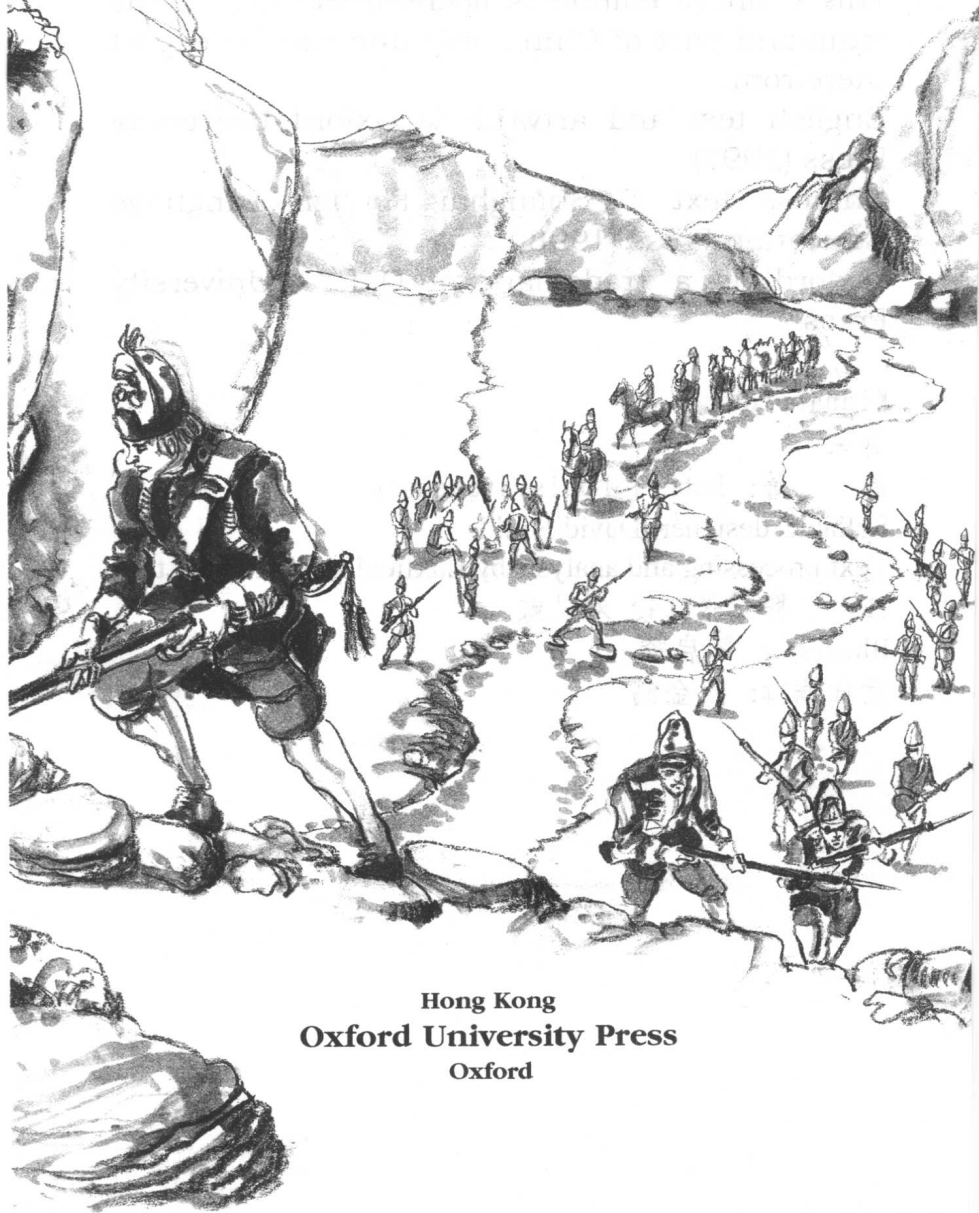
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Kidnapped

Robert Louis Stevenson



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THE HOUSE OF SHAWS

My journey begins

I will begin the story of my adventures with a certain morning early in June, 1751. I was seventeen years old and, until then, had lived all my life in the village of Essendean, in the Lowlands of Scotland. On that day, I locked the door of my childhood home for the last time. My father, a schoolmaster in the village, had been dead for three weeks, and it was time for me to leave home and look for work. 5

The sun was beginning to rise and the mist was lifting as I walked down the road. Mr Campbell, the minister, was waiting for me at the garden gate. He kindly said he would walk with me as far as the river. After a while, he asked if I was sorry to leave my home. 10

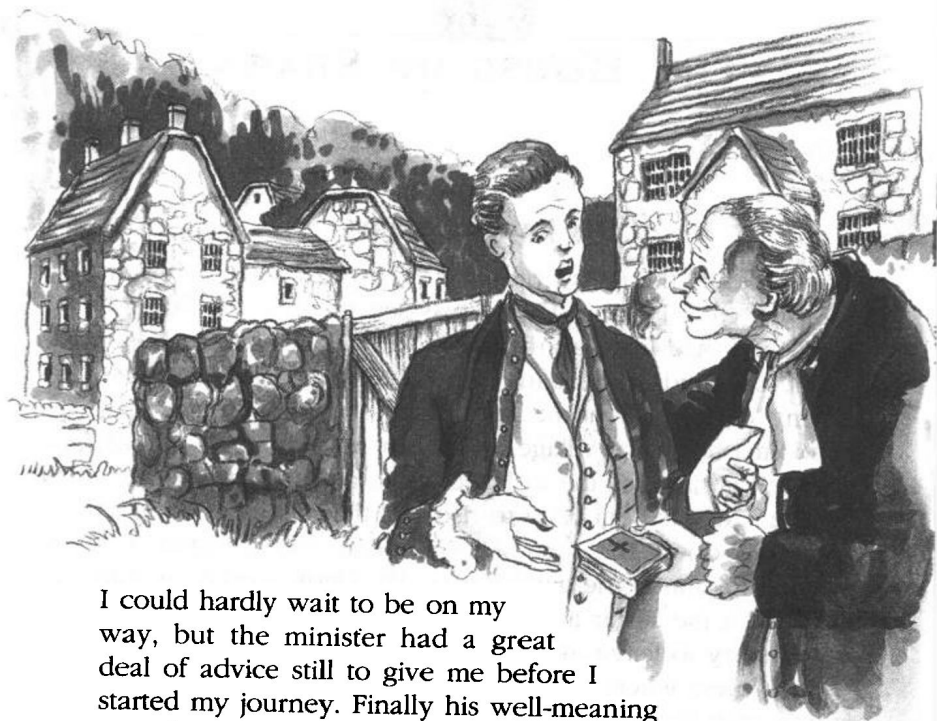
'If I knew where I was going, or what would happen to me,' I said, 'then I would give you an answer straight away. I've had a happy life in Essendean and I'm very fond of the old place, but I've been nowhere else. To tell you the truth, if I could be sure I was going to make my fortune, then I'd be happy to leave.' 15

'Well, Davie,' said Mr Campbell, 'I will tell you what you must do. Before he died, your father gave me a letter. You must take this to the House of Shaws, which is near Cramond.' 20

I was very surprised at this. 'The House of Shaws!' I cried. 'Why did my father wish me to go to the House of Shaws?' 25

'I do not know,' replied Mr Campbell, 'but the name of the family that lives there, Balfour of Shaws, is the same as your name. The family is a very old and respected one, although it is not so important now as it once was.' 30

Then Mr Campbell gave me the letter. It was addressed to Mr Ebenezer Balfour of Shaws. When I took it, it seemed that I held in my hand the key to a wonderful, unknown future.



I could hardly wait to be on my way, but the minister had a great deal of advice still to give me before I started my journey. Finally his well-meaning

5 speech was over. Before he left me, he gave me the money from the sale of my father's books, a shilling piece and a Bible, and then he shook my hand very hard. After that he returned quickly to the village, never stopping once to look back. I turned, and at last set off for Cramond.

10 Two days after I left home, I came to the top of a hill and saw the city of Edinburgh below me. It seemed as if all the chimneys of the city were smoking at once. A flag was flying from the castle. In the distance I could see the sea, and many ships coming and going. For the first time since leaving

15 home, I felt a little afraid.

A great disappointment

I walked a little further on, and stopped at the first house I saw to enquire the way to Cramond. I reached that place soon afterwards, and began asking how to get to the House

of Shaws. The name of the house seemed to shock the people I asked and I began to think there must be something strange about the place. Wanting to learn more, I decided to change my question. I saw an old man, and this time I enquired whether he knew anything about the house.

5

'Of course,' he replied, 'why do you ask me that?'

'Is it a big house?' I asked.

'It is certainly a great, huge house.'

'And,' said I, 'what can you tell me about the people who live there?'

10

'Are you mad?' he replied. 'There are no people there.'

'What about Mr Ebenezer?'

'Oh, him. Yes, he's there all right, but — why do you want to see him?'

I replied that I hoped Mr Ebenezer might give me a job.

15

'What!' cried the old man. 'Take my advice and stay away from the House of Shaws!'

My next questions were answered in the same way. Not surprisingly, I was getting rather worried. Just before sunset I met a dark, cross-looking woman and asked her my usual question. She took me to the top of a hill and pointed at a large building in the next valley. The countryside around it was green and pleasant, cheerfully patterned with trees,

20



haystacks and neatly-farmed fields. The house itself, however, was a gloomy sight. It looked like a large, empty ruin, where no one had lived for many years. There was no road leading up to it and no smoke coming from any of the chimneys. My heart sank. 'Is that the House of Shaws?' I asked, choking with disappointment.

'That,' said the woman very angrily, 'is the House of Shaws, and bad luck to it!' She spat on the ground. 'If you see the owner, tell him that this is the twelve hundredth and nineteenth time that Jennet Clouston has cursed him and his house, every fallen-down building on his land, and every man, guest, master, wife, girl and child connected with the house!' Then she turned round quickly and was gone.

I approach the House of Shaws

I sat down and stared at the House of Shaws. People walked past me on their way home from work, but I was too unhappy even to say 'good evening' to them. At last the sun went down and I saw a thin thread of smoke rising from one of the chimneys. At the sight of that, my spirits rose a little and I set off towards the House of Shaws.

After I had walked a little way, I came to the main entrance. Instead of gates there were only two pieces of wood tied across the entrance with a rope. There were no walls surrounding the house and grounds, and there was no avenue. The nearer I got to the house, the darker it looked. It seemed as if one part of the house had never been finished. There were no walls around the upper floors and no glass in many of the windows.

As it became darker, I could see a very dim light from a fire through the downstairs windows. I walked on and came to the door. I knocked.

Everything was silent. I knocked again but there was no answer. For a moment I wanted to run away, but then I became angry. I shouted and kicked the door. Then I heard a cough. I looked upwards and saw a man's head at one of the first floor windows. He had a gun in his hand.

'It's loaded,' he said.

'I have come here with a letter,' I said, 'to Mr Ebenezer Balfour of Shaws. Is he here?'

'Who is it from?' he asked.

'That does not matter,' said I.

5

'Well, leave it on the doorstep and go away.'

'I will not do that,' I said, 'I will deliver it to Mr Balfour. It is a letter of introduction.'

'What?' he cried. I repeated what I had said. There was a pause and then the man asked who I was.

10

'I am not ashamed of my name,' I replied. 'I am called David Balfour.'

The man's voice changed. He seemed frightened. 'Is your father dead?' I was too surprised to answer this question. 'Yes,' he continued, 'he must be dead. You are here knocking on my door because he is dead. Well, I will let you in.' And he disappeared from the window.

15

Ebenezer Balfour is my uncle

He opened the door and said, 'Go into the kitchen and do not touch anything.' It was dark inside the house except for the firelight, but I walked to the kitchen. It was the barest room I had ever seen. It was large and stone-floored with locked chests around the walls. There were six dishes on the shelves and the table was laid for supper with a bowl of porridge, a spoon and a cup of beer. There was nothing else in the kitchen.

20

25

The man came in. He was thin and mean-looking and walked with his head and shoulders bent. It was very difficult to decide how old he was, as he looked anything between fifty and seventy years old. Instead of a coat, he wore an old nightshirt over his dirty clothes. He had not shaved for a long time. I thought he was an old servant who had been left to look after the house for no wages.

30

'If you're hungry,' he said, 'you can eat some porridge, and you can have some water to drink if you are thirsty. I'm afraid there is no wine left in the cellar here to give you.'

35

I'll drink the beer, because it's good for my cough.' He drank the beer. Then he said, 'Give me the letter.' I told him that the letter was for Mr Balfour, not for him. 'I am Mr Balfour,' cried the man in a trembling voice, 'and although you do
5 not seem to like me or my house or my good porridge, I am your uncle, and you are my nephew.'

I was so surprised and disappointed to learn that this man was my uncle that I could not speak.
I handed the letter to him.



‘Why did you come here?’

‘I came here to deliver the letter to you,’ I replied.

‘I think you came because you thought I’d help you,’ said he.

‘Yes, sir,’ I said, ‘when I heard that I had rich relatives, I did hope they would give me a little help. But I’m not a beggar, and if you will not help me, I’ve plenty of friends who will.’ 5

‘David,’ he said, ‘don’t be angry with me. We’ll be good friends.’ He then asked me how long my father had been dead. ‘Three weeks, sir,’ I replied. 10

‘Your father was a very silent man,’ continued Uncle Ebenezer, ‘he liked to keep his thoughts a secret. When he was young, he never spoke very much. Did he ever — did he talk about me?’ 15

‘Until now, I didn’t know my father had a brother,’ I replied.

‘Oh,’ said my uncle. ‘Oh. Then I suppose you didn’t know about the House of Shaws either?’

‘No,’ I answered, ‘I hadn’t heard anything about it.’ 20

My replies must have pleased him, because he suddenly seemed to relax. He tapped me cheerfully on the shoulder and said he would take me to my bedroom.

My first night in the house

He didn’t light a candle, but walked into the dark passage and then up the stairs. He opened the door with a key and told me to go to bed. 25

‘But,’ I said, ‘it’s so dark that I can’t see the bed.’

‘Well,’ replied my uncle, ‘there’s a good moon. That will help you to see. I don’t like lights in my house, because of fire. Good night, David.’ Before I could say anything else, he had closed the door and locked me into the room. It was very cold and, needless to say, there was no coal for a fire. The bed was so damp that I slept on the floor. Was this my wonderful future? 30 35

When there was enough daylight, I looked around the room. It was a large bedroom with three windows, and furnished in a very grand way. The furniture and curtains, though, were very old and in bad condition. Many of the
5 glass window panes were broken, and the whole room was dirty and dusty. I shouted to my uncle in a loud voice. He came upstairs and let me out of the room. We had breakfast together. Again the meal was of porridge and beer.

‘David,’ said my uncle, ‘I respect your family and I will try
10 to help you, but you must not send letters or messages to anyone.’ This made me very angry. Why did my uncle not trust me? I told him that I would leave his house.

‘No, no David,’ he replied hastily, ‘stay here for a day or two and I’ll try to help you.’

15 I agreed to this and told Uncle Ebenezer that I would be very grateful for anything he could do for me. He then began to prepare to go out. He opened a chest and took out a very old blue coat and a fur hat. Suddenly he stopped his preparations. ‘I can’t leave you alone in the house,’ he said,
20 ‘so I will have to lock you out.’

I realized that my uncle thought I was a thief. My face went red with anger. ‘If you lock me out of the house,’ I said furiously, ‘you can count me among your enemies from now on!’ He thought about this for a few minutes. Then he said
25 he would have to stay with me in the house.

I discover something strange

The rest of the day passed fairly well. We had more porridge at midday and porridge again in the evening. I believe my uncle never ate anything else. I found a lot of books in a
30 room near the kitchen and spent the afternoon looking at them. Then I discovered something very strange.

In one of the books I found, there was a message written in my father’s clear writing. It said, ‘To my brother Ebenezer on his fifth birthday.’ Now, I believed that Uncle Ebenezer
35 was older than my father, and that was why he had inherited the House of Shaws when my grandfather died. But, if my

father was really younger than Ebenezer, he must have been able to write very well before he was even five years old. It seemed very strange.

I tried to forget about this but the thought kept coming back into my mind and worrying me. I asked my uncle if my father had been an especially clever little boy who could read and write well when he was very young. 'Certainly not,' replied Uncle Ebenezer. He seemed to be rather irritated by my question. 'I myself was much cleverer than your father, and I could read as soon as he could.' My uncle's words suggested that he was younger than my father. He spoke as if he was proud that he could read at the same time as my father. He surely wouldn't have said this if he was older than my father.

'Perhaps you were twins?' 15

He jumped up from his stool. 'Why do you ask me that?' he shouted and seized hold of my jacket. I saw that he was shaking with fear. Then he tried to control himself and started to pretend that he was only upset because of my father's death. 20

I did not understand any of this at all. If my father was the elder brother, why did Uncle Ebenezer own the House of Shaws? Why did my uncle seem to be afraid of me? Was he mad?

The tower 25

My uncle did not speak for a long time. We sat at the table and looked at each other with suspicion. The more I thought about my uncle's behaviour, the more certain I became that he had some reason to be afraid of me.

After we had our evening meal, he spoke. 'David, there is some money that I promised to give you before you were born. I would like to give it to you now. There are thirty-seven gold pieces. If you will go outside for a little while, I will go and fetch it. I will call you inside again when I have got it.' I went outside. It was a very dark night with only a few stars and I could hear the wind sighing in the distance. It seemed as if there would soon be thunder. 35

'You can come in now,' said my uncle. I went indoors and he gave me the money. I was very surprised at this because by then I was certain that Uncle Ebenezer was a miser. I was sure that he would want something from me in exchange for
5 his precious gold pieces.

A little later he looked at me out of the corner of his eye. 'Now,' he said, 'you can do something for me.' I told him I would be pleased to help him in any way I could. 'I am getting old,' he continued, 'and I would like you to give me
10 a little help in the house and garden.' I replied that I would be glad to do that. 'Well,' he said, 'we will begin at once.'

He gave me a key and asked me to go to the top of the tower at the far end of the house. I was to climb up the stairs to the top, where I would find a chest. He wanted me
15 to bring this chest down with me.

'May I have a light?' I asked.

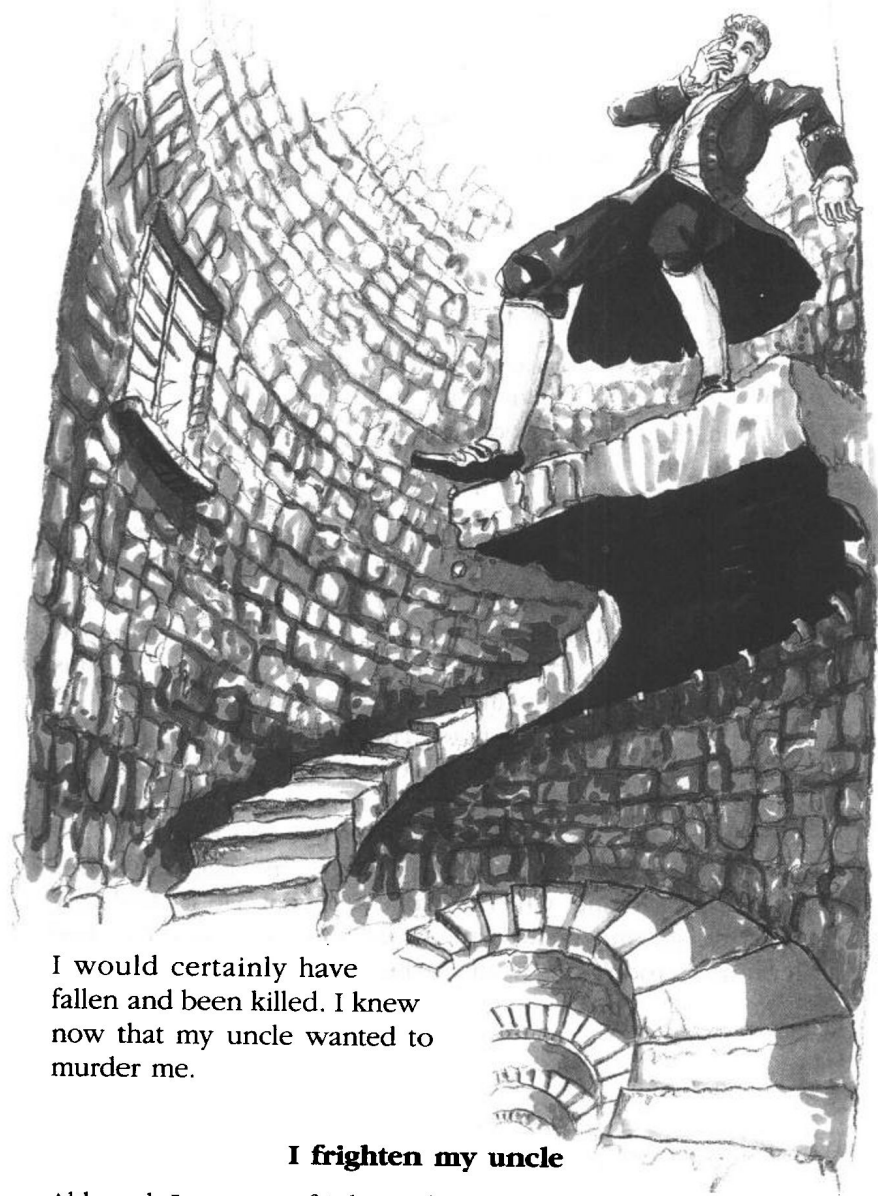
'No,' he replied, 'I have told you already that I do not like lights in my house.'

'All right,' I said, 'are the stairs safe?'

20 'Stop fussing, lad, of course they're safe. Oh yes, very safe indeed. There are no railings to hold on to, but if you keep close to the wall, you'll be fine.'

The only way to get to the tower was to go outside and walk in front of the house. I went out into the night. It was
25 very dark indeed. I walked along to the door at the bottom of the tower and put the key in the lock. At that moment there was a sudden flash of lightning which was so bright that it almost blinded me, and I could not see properly when it had faded away.

30 I opened the door. It was even darker inside the tower than outside it and I had to feel my way with my hands. The walls seemed to be made of good stone and the steep steps felt quite solid under my feet. The tower had five floors. I started to climb. As I climbed higher, it seemed as
35 if the air was clearer and there was more light. I could not understand this, but then there was a second flash of lightning. It lit up the inside of the whole tower. There were no more steps in front of me. If I had climbed another foot,



I would certainly have fallen and been killed. I knew now that my uncle wanted to murder me.

I frighten my uncle

Although I was very frightened, I was so angry that I did not have time to think about my fear. I was determined that I would defeat my uncle's plan to kill me. I began to go down the stairs very carefully. When I was about half way down, there was a huge gust of wind which shook the tower. The wind was followed by a burst of very heavy rain.