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Kidnapped

Robert Louis Stevenson · *1886 · original English text*

In the year of grace 1751 a Lowland boy leaves his father's house for an inheritance, and is sold onto a brig bound for the Carolinas. Stevenson joins a stolen birthright to the Jacobite rising's aftermath: law and loyalty, Whig and Stewart, and a friendship tested in the heather after the Appin murder.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What does a just man owe—to kinsmen who cheat him, to a hunted companion, and to the law itself—when the country is still divided by a lost cause?

"That will I! ... I am no thief, nor yet murderer. I'll stand by you."
David Balfour · Chapter IX

David will not be made a thief or a murderer, and he will not abandon Alan Breck. The book honors courage and fidelity without pretending that clan loyalty, or the law that hunts it, is clean. Friendship holds; the quarrel in the heather shows how costly it is.

KEY CHARACTERS

David Balfour
Lowland heir, honest, sometimes stiff; the narrator who will not be made a thief

Alan Breck Stewart
Small, brave, vain, and loyal; a Jacobite soldier who will not leave a friend

Ebenezer Balfour
David's miser uncle, who would rather kill or sell a nephew than yield Shaws

Captain Hoseason
Master of the Covenant, pious in talk and ruthless in a bargain

Mr. Rankeillor
The family lawyer who finally rights the inheritance

Mr. Campbell
Minister of Essendean, who sets David on the road with a blessing

Cluny Macpherson
Highland chief in hiding, whose hospitality is real and whose card-table is not safe

James of the Glens
Stewart leader who will be blamed for the Appin murder

A HAND GIVEN IN THE ROUND-HOUSE

> *"That will I! ... I am no thief, nor yet murderer. I'll stand by you."*
> **David Balfour** · Chapter IX

> *"I will begin the story of my adventures with a certain morning early in the month of June, the year of grace 1751, when I took the key for the last time out of the door of my father's house."*
> **David Balfour** · Chapter I

Grades 6–8
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01 The House of Shaws

CHAPTERS I—IV

A boy comes to claim his place, and his uncle tries to end the claim.

- David leaves Essendean in June 1751 with a letter for his uncle Ebenezer of Shaws
- The great house is unfinished, mean, and dark; Ebenezer is a miser who lives as if already buried
- David is sent at night up a stair-tower in an unfinished wing, and finds no stair where a step should be
- Having survived the attempt, he is still not safe in his uncle's hands

> *"I will begin the story of my adventures with a certain morning early in the month of June, the year of grace 1751, when I took the key for the last time out of the door of my father's house."*
> **David Balfour** · Chapter I

02 The Brig Covenant

CHAPTERS V—VII

A ferry errand becomes a kidnapping for the Carolinas.

- Captain Hoseason and the lawyer Rankeillor's name are used to lure David to the Queen's Ferry
- Ebenezer sells the boy; David is knocked down and carried aboard the **Covenant** of Dysart
- The ship is bound for the Carolinas, where a kidnapped heir can be quietly sold
- David comes to himself as a prisoner among a rough crew, far from any court that could hear him

03 The Man with the Belt of Gold

CHAPTERS VIII—XI

A Jacobite comes over the side, and David chooses a side with him.

- After a wreck of another boat, **Alan Breck Stewart** is taken aboard with a belt of gold
- Hoseason means to rob and betray him; Alan asks David whether he will stand with him
- The two hold the round-house against the crew
- A bond is made between a Whig lad and a hunted Stewart

> *"That will I! ... I am no thief, nor yet murderer. I'll stand by you."*
> **David Balfour** · Chapter IX

04 The Red Fox

CHAPTERS XII—XVIII

Shipwreck throws them into Appin at the hour of a murder.

- The Covenant is wrecked on the Isle of Mull; David is cast ashore and must make his way alone
- He hears of the Red Fox, Colin Campbell of Glenure, factor on the forfeited lands
- David comes up in time to see Glenure shot; he is at once taken for a party to the crime
- Alan finds him again, and the two must fly the country of James of the Glens

05 The Flight in the Heather

CHAPTERS XIX—XXV

Friendship is proved by hunger, pride, and a quarrel.

- They hide among rocks and moors, hungry, watched, and often lost
- Cluny Macpherson's cage in Ben Alder gives them shelter—and a dangerous game at cards
- Alan and David quarrel in the heather; pride nearly breaks the companionship
- In Balquhidder they are among Stewarts still, and the pipes and the old cause are not yet dead

06 The Inheritance Recovered

CHAPTERS XXVI—XXX

The law, at last, is made to serve a just title.

- David reaches Mr. Rankeillor, who knows the true story of the Shaws inheritance
- Ebenezer is drawn into a confession by a stratagem at the house
- David's rights are secured, and Alan must still be got safely out of the country
- The friendship ends in a parting, not in a tidy peace: the rising is over, but the hunted man is not free

Loyalty · Justice · Courage · Friendship · Home and Inheritance · Exile

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 6–8

1. The unfinished stair in the House of Shaws is not a gothic ornament. It is an attempted murder, and it tells you what Ebenezer is.
2. David is a Whig; Alan is a Stewart. The book does not flatten that difference. Watch how they keep faith without sharing a cause.
3. The Appin murder happens in David's sight, and innocence is not enough to keep him from being hunted. Law and clan justice are both in play.
4. The quarrel in the heather is as serious as the fight in the round-house. Pride can undo a friendship that danger could not.
5. Stevenson wrote this after studying the historical trial of James Stewart. The tale is an adventure, and it is also about a country after a rising.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #421, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/kidnapped/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.