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О. Генри.

Г34

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Книга предназначена для изучающих английский язык на продолжающем уровне.

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АНГЛИЙСКИЙ В АДАПТАЦИИ: ЧТЕНИЕ И АУДИРОВАНИЕ

О. Генри

**«ВОЖДЬ КРАСНОКОЖИХ»
И ДРУГИЕ ЛУЧШИЕ РАССКАЗЫ = “THE RANSOM OF RED CHIEF”
AND OTHER STORIES**

2-й уровень

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O. Henry



"The Ransom
of Red Chief"
and Other
Stories

THE RANSOM OF RED CHIEF

It looked like a good thing: but wait till I tell you. We were down South, in Alabama — Bill Driscoll and myself — when this kidnapping idea occurred to us.

There was a town called Summit. Its citizens were very harmless and self-satisfied farmers.

Bill and me had about six hundred dollars, and we needed just two thousand dollars more to pull off a fraud in Western Illinois with. We talked it over on the front steps of the hotel. People love their children in small towns; so a kidnapping scheme ought to do better there than in a big city where newspapers stirred up talk about such things. We knew that in Summit there were only a couple of constables, so it looked good.

We chose for our victim the only child of a respectable and stingy citizen named Ebenezer Dorset. The kid was a boy of ten, freckled and red-haired. Bill and I decided that Ebenezer would pay a ransom of two thousand dollars without hesitating a moment. But wait till I tell you.

About two miles from Summit there was a little mountain, covered with a thick cedar grove. On the farthest slope of this mountain there was a cave. There we kept our things.

One evening after sunset, we drove in a buggy past old Dorset's house. The kid was in the street, throwing rocks at a kitten on the opposite fence.

"Hey, little boy!" said Bill. "Would you like to have a bag of candies and a nice ride?"

The boy hit Bill right in the eye with a piece of brick.

"That will cost the old man another five hundred dollars," said Bill, climbing over the wheel.

That boy fought like a devil; but, at last, we got him down in the bottom of the buggy and drove away. We took him up to the cave and I tied the horse to a tree in the cedar grove. After dark I drove the buggy to the little village, three miles away, where we had hired it, and walked back to the mountain.

Bill was pasting plaster over the bruises on his face. There was a fire burning behind the big rock at the entrance of the cave, and the boy was watching a pot of boiling coffee, with two eagle feathers in his red hair. He pointed a stick at me when I came up, and said:

"You, cursed paleface! How dare you enter the camp of Red Chief?"

"He's all right now," said Bill, looking at the bruises on his legs. "We're playing Indians. Buffalo Bill's show is no match for this game. I'm Old Hank, the Trapper, Red Chief's captive, and he promised to scalp me at dawn. Upon my word! That kid can kick hard."

Yes, sir, that boy seemed to be having the time of his life. The fun of camping out in a cave had made him forget that he was a captive himself. He immediately named me

Snakeeye, the Spy, and promised that, when his brave Indian warriors returned at dawn, they would burn me.

Then we had supper; and he filled his mouth with bacon and bread and sauce, and began to talk something like this:

“I like this fine. I have never camped out before; but I had a pet opossum once, and I was nine last birthday. I hate going to school. Are there any real Indians in these woods? I want some more sauce. We had five puppies. What makes your nose so red, Hank? My father has lots of money. I don’t like girls. Why are oranges round? Have you got beds to sleep on in this cave?”

Every few minutes he would remember that he was a redskin, and take his stick rifle and walk quietly to the mouth of the cave to spy on the cursed paleface. Now and then he would let out a war whoop that made Old Hank shiver.

“Red Chief,’ I said to the kid, ‘would you like to go home?’”

“What for?” said he. “I don’t have any fun at home. I like camping out. You won’t take me back home again, Snakeeye, will you?”

“Not right away,” I said. “We’ll stay here in the cave a while.”

“All right!” said he. “That’ll be fine. I have never had such fun in all my life.”

We went to bed about eleven o’clock and put Red Chief between us. We weren’t afraid he’d run away. He kept us awake for three hours, jumping up and reaching for his

rifle and screaming: ‘Hush!’ in mine and Bill’s ears at any noise outside, as he imagined the cursed palefaces coming up to our cave. At last, I fell into a troubled sleep, and dreamed that I had been kidnapped and chained to a tree by a savage red-haired pirate.

Just at dawn, I was woken up by awful screams from Bill. They weren’t shouts or whoops, such as you’d expect from a man — they were simply screams, such as women give when they see centipedes.

I jumped up to see what the matter was. Red Chief was sitting on Bill’s chest, holding Bill’s hair with one hand. In the other he had a sharp carving knife; and he was trying to scalp Bill, just like he had promised him the evening before.

I got the knife away from the kid and made him lie down again. But, from that moment, Bill’s spirit was broken. He never slept again as long as that boy was with us. I slept for a while, but toward dawn I remembered that Red Chief had promised to burn me in the morning. I wasn’t afraid; but I sat up and lit my pipe and leaned against a rock.

“Why are you up so early, Sam?” asked Bill.

“Me?” I said. “Oh, I got a pain in my shoulder. I thought sitting up would be better.”

“You’re a liar!” said Bill. “You’re afraid. The kid promised to burn you at dawn, and you are afraid he’d do it. Isn’t it awful, Sam? Do you think anybody will pay out money to get a little devil like that back home?”

“Sure,” said I. “A naughty kid like that is just the kind that parents love most. Now, you and the Chief get up and cook breakfast, while I go up on the top of this mountain and look around.”

I went up to the top of the little mountain and looked at Summit.

I expected to see the strong citizens armed with pitchforks searching the neighbourhood for the kidnapers. But what I saw was a peaceful countryside with nobody in sight.

“Perhaps, they have not yet discovered that the kid is gone,” I said to myself, and I went down the mountain to breakfast.

When I got to the cave I found Bill pressing himself to its wall, breathing hard, and the boy threatening him with a big rock.

“He put a hot boiled potato down my back,” said Bill, “and I boxed his ears. Have you got a gun about you, Sam?”

I took the rock away from the boy.

“No man has ever beaten the Red Chief unpunished,” said the kid to Bill. “You’ll pay for it!”

After breakfast the kid took a piece string out of his pocket and went outside the cave.

“What’s he up to now?” asked Bill. “You don’t think he’ll run away, do you, Sam?”

“No fear of it,” I said. “He doesn’t seem to be a home body. But we’ve got to make some plan about the ransom. They don’t seem to understand that that the kid’s gone.

His parents may think he's spending the night with Aunt Jane or one of the neighbours. Anyhow, he'll be missed today. Tonight we must get a message to his father demanding the two thousand dollars for his return."

Just then we heard a kind of war whoop and saw Red Chief whirling the string he had pulled out of his pocket around his head.

As I jumped aside, I heard the sound of a heavy blow and a sigh from Bill. A rock the size of an egg had hit Bill just behind his left ear and made him fall in the fire across the pot of hot water for washing the dishes. I dragged him out and poured cold water on his head for half an hour.

By and by, Bill sat up and felt behind his ear and said, 'Sam, don't go away and leave me here alone.'

I went out and caught that boy and shook him hard.

"If you don't behave," I said, "I'll take you straight home. Now, are you going to be good or not?"

"I didn't mean to hurt Old Hank," said he. "But why did he hit me? I'll behave, Snakeeye, if you don't send me home, and if you let me play the Black Scout today."

"You're going to play with Mr. Bill," I said. "I'm going away for a while, on business. Now, you come in and make up with him and say you are sorry for hurting him, or you'll go home at once."

I made him and Bill shake hands, and then I took Bill aside and told him I was going to Poplar Cove, a little village three miles from the cave, to find out what people thought about the kidnapping in Summit. Also, I wanted

to send a letter to old man Dorset that day, demanding the ransom and telling how it should be paid.

“You know, Sam,” said Bill, “this kid’s made me lose my nerve. You won’t leave me long with him, will you, Sam?”

“I’ll be back some time this afternoon,” I said. “You must keep the boy busy and quiet till I return. And now we’ll write the letter to old Dorset.”

Bill and I got paper and pencil and worked on the letter while Red Chief walked up and down, guarding the mouth of the cave. Bill begged me to make the ransom fifteen hundred dollars instead of two thousand because he thought that nobody would give up two thousand dollars for that devil of a boy. To Bill’s great relief, I agreed, and we wrote a letter that ran this way:

Ebenezer Dorset, Esq.,

We keep your boy in a secret place far from Summit where you can’t find him. We demand fifteen hundred dollars in large bills for his return; you must leave the money at midnight tonight at the same place and in the same box as your reply. If you agree to these terms, send your answer in writing by a messenger tonight at half past eight o’clock. The messenger has to place the answer in the box at the bottom of the post of the fence of the wheat field opposite a lonely tree. If you don’t pay the money, you will never see your boy again. If you pay the money as demanded, he will be returned to you safe and well within three hours. These terms are final.

Two Desperate Men.

I put the letter to Dorset in my pocket and I was about to start, when the kid came up to me and said:

“Snakeeye, you said I could play the Black Scout while you are away. I’m tired of playing Indian myself. I want to be the Black Scout. I’ll have to ride to the fort to tell the settlers that the Indians are coming.”

“All right,” I said. “It sounds harmless to me. I guess Mr. Bill will help you save the poor settlers from the savages.”

“What am I to do?” asked Bill, looking at the kid suspiciously.

“You are the horse,’ said Black Scout. ‘Get down on your hands and knees. The fort is ninety miles away and we have to get there on time.’”

Getting down on all fours Bill said:

“Hurry back, Sam, as soon as you can. It’s a pity we didn’t make the ransom a thousand.”

I walked over to Poplar Cove and sat around the post office and store, talking with the farmers. One of them said that Summit was all upset because Old Ebenezer Dorset’s boy had got lost or been stolen. That was all I wanted to know. I posted my letter and went away.

When I got back to the cave Bill and the boy were not there. So I lighted my pipe and sat down on a rock waiting for them to come back.

In about half an hour Bill appeared in front of the cave. Behind him was the kid, stepping softly like a scout, with a broad smile on his face. Bill

stopped, took off his hat and wiped his face with a red handkerchief. The kid stopped about eight feet behind him.

“Sam,” said Bill, “I suppose you’ll think I’m a renegade, but I couldn’t help it. The boy is gone. I have sent him home. Everything is over.”

“What’s the trouble, Bill?” I asked him.

“I rode,” says Bill, “the ninety miles to the fort. Then, when the settlers were safe, I was given oats. You see, Sam, sand isn’t pleasant to eat. And then, for an hour I had to try to explain to him how a road can run both ways and what makes the grass green. I tell you, Sam, a human can’t take so much. I took him by the collar and dragged him down the mountain. On the way he kicked my legs and bit me on my thumb two or three times. But he’s gone now. I’m sorry we won’t get the ransom; but it was either that or Bill Driscoll go to the madhouse.”

“Bill,” I said, “there isn’t any heart disease in your family, is there?”

“No,” said Bill. “Why?”

“Then you might turn around,” I said, “and have a look behind you.”

Bill turned and saw the boy, and grew pale and sat down on the ground. For an hour I was afraid for his mind. And then I told him that my plan was to finish the whole job as soon as possible and that we would get the ransom and be off with it by midnight if old Dorset agreed to our terms. So Bill cheered up enough to give

the kid a weak smile and a promise to play the Russian in a Japanese war with him as soon as he felt a little better.

My plan for collecting that ransom was absolutely safe. The tree under which the messenger had to leave the answer — and the money later on — was close to the road fence with big fields on all sides. If constables wanted to watch for any one to come for the note they could see him a long way off crossing the fields or in the road. But no, sir! At half past eight I was hidden up in that tree, waiting for the messenger to arrive.

Exactly on time, a boy rode up the road on a bicycle, found the box at the foot of the fencepost, put a piece of paper into it and rode away again back toward Summit.

I waited an hour and then climbed down the tree, got the note, and hurried back to the cave. I opened the note, got near the lantern and read it to Bill:

Two Desperate Men.

Gentlemen: I received your letter about the ransom today. I think you demand too much, and so I make you a counter proposition, which I hope you will accept. You bring Johnny home and pay me two hundred and fifty dollars in cash, and I agree to take him off your hands. You had better come at night, for the neighbours believe he is lost, and I can't imagine what they might do to anybody they see bringing him back.

*Very respectfully,
EBENEZER DORSET.*



I looked at Bill.

“Sam,” he said, “what’s two hundred and fifty dollars, after all? We’ve got the money. One more night of this kid will send me to a madhouse. Besides I think it was so good of Mr. Dorset to make us such a generous offer. You aren’t going to miss the chance, are you?”

“Tell you the truth, Bill,” I said, “this little devil has somewhat got on my nerves too. We’ll take him home, pay the ransom and get out of here.”

We took him home that night. We told him that his father had bought a rifle for him, and we were going to hunt bears the next day.

It was just twelve o’clock when we knocked at Ebenezer’s front door. Old Dorset came out and Bill counted out two hundred and fifty dollars into his hand.

When the kid found out we were going to leave him at home he started screaming and grasped Bill by the leg. When his father managed to drag him away, Bill asked:

“How long can you hold him?”

“I’m not as strong as I used to be,” said old Dorset, “but I think I can promise you ten minutes.”

“Enough,” said Bill. “In ten minutes I shall cross the Central, Southern and Middle Western States, and be heading for the Canadian border.”

And, as dark as it was, and as fat as Bill was, and as good a runner as I am, he was a good mile and a half out of Summit before I could catch up with him.