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## The Mysterious House of Shaws

In June of 1751, I locked the door of my father's house for the last time.

As I walked down the road, I came upon Mr. Campbell. This kind man was the minister in our little town, Essendean. "Are you sorry to leave home, boy?" he asked kindly.

"I've been happy here," I said. "But since my father and mother are both dead, there's no reason to stay. To speak the truth, I do not know where I am going."

"Very well, Davie," Mr. Campbell replied. "I have a letter to give you. Your father wrote it when he knew he was dying. It is your inheritance. He said you are to take this letter to the house of Shaws."

"The house of Shaws!" I cried out. "What did a poor man like my father have to do with

the house of Shaws?”

“Who can say for sure?” Mr. Campbell said. “But that is your name, Davie—Balfour of Shaws.”

Then he handed me the envelope. The words on it said: *For Ebenezer Balfour of Shaws, to be delivered by my son, David Balfour. My heart beat hard. This was a great prospect for a poor boy of 17.*

The house of Shaws was a two-day walk. It was in the neighborhood of Cramond, near the great city of Edinburgh. Mr. Campbell gave me some advice as we walked along. He said I should be quick to understand things, but slow to speak. He added that I must obey the master of the house of Shaws. I promised to do my best.

Mr. Campbell spoke comforting words. He promised that if my rich relatives turned me away, I could always stay with him.

Before he turned back, he gave me four things. The first was a little money from the sale of my father’s belongings. Then there were three gifts from him and his wife: a coin, a bible, and instructions for making Lily of the Valley water. He explained that this water is

good for the body in health and in sickness.

On the second day of my journey, I came up a hill. Just below me was the city of Edinburgh, smoking like an oven. I saw a flag on the Edinburgh castle and ships in the water nearby. The sight of the busy, crowded city brought my heart to my mouth.

Soon I reached the neighborhood of Cramond. I began to ask directions to the house of Shaws. The question seemed to surprise people. One man frowned and said, "If you'll take a word from me, you'll keep clear of the house of Shaws."

I came across a barber. Knowing that barbers are great gossips, I asked him, "What sort of man is Ebenezer Balfour?"

"Why, he's no sort of man," the barber grumbled. "No sort of man at all!"

If I wasn't so far from home, I would have turned back. But I was a bit tired after coming all this way. I wanted to see the house of Shaws for myself.

Near sundown I met a dark, sour-looking woman. Again, I asked the way to the house of Shaws. She pointed to a great, dark bulk of a

building. The place looked like a ruin.

“That?” I said.

The woman’s face grew angry and bitter. “Blood built that place!” she cried. “And blood shall bring it down! When you see the master, tell him Jennet Clouston has put a curse on his house! Black be their fall!”

Then she left me. Her words had sapped the energy from my legs. I sat down and stared at the house until the sun went down. Then I saw smoke rising from the chimney. That meant fire, and warmth, and people inside. It comforted my heart wonderfully.

As I walked up to the door, I saw that part of the building had never been finished. Some rooms and a stairway were open to the sky! Bats flew in and out of several windows that had no glass.

Was *this* the house of Shaws? I had imagined a palace. I had hoped to find friends and perhaps a fortune within these walls.

Inside, I heard dishes rattling, and a dry cough. But when I knocked on the door, the house became dead silent. All I could hear was a clock ticking inside. Whoever was in the