

The Ransom of Red Chief, Adapted by Anne Coulter Martins

Sam and Bill want to be rich without working. Among their money-making plans, this is the first time they've decided to try kidnapping Johnny Dorset for a ransom – the nephew of a rich banker. Johnny is loud, obnoxious, meddling, and full of energy. Worse, he enjoys being kidnapped, playing Indian and calling himself “Red Chief,” tiring Sam and Bill to exhaustion. Red Chief's kidnappers can't wait to get rid of him. They not only discount the ransom price, but Bill nearly drives Johnny away from the camp in fury before they even have the chance to finish the job.

Though Johnny behaves badly, even Sam and Bill begin to realize that the boy is suffering. Bill especially identifies with Johnny, recalling his own lonely childhood. Johnny talks about how his uncle would not let him keep any pets although he had plenty of money to afford it; he expresses a desire to learn and explore, and he keeps returning to the kidnappers even when they are upset with him simply because they've been spending time with him – something that his uncle, and caretaker, Mrs. Rudge, refuse to do.

Johnny represents what happens to a child who is not taught, loved, and cared for. A father is not to provoke his children to wrath. Though Ebenezer Dorset isn't Johnny's biological father, he is responsible for Johnny's upbringing and should be investing more time in his nephew's future. However, he loves money too much and spends his investment energy there instead of a place with lasting value. Johnny's behavior comes from having never been shown the value of temperance and compassion.

Sam and Bill, on the other hand, represent what happens when that child becomes an adult without having been taught, loved, and cared for. Children don't grow out of problems; their problems just grow along with them. Bill is unable to make his own decisions in life even though he is uneasy about doing certain things, shown in his constant second-guessing, fear of the law, and doormat attitude. Sam feels the need to control, impress, and cheat others to establish his own worth, shown in his constant scheming, lying, and exaggerated charisma. Both attitudes come from having never been taught the value of honesty and kindness.

A poor upbringing is no excuse for poor behavior. It's never too late to learn and act differently. Nevertheless, in Act one of *The Ransom of Red Chief*, notice the motivations behind each action. Too much kindness, as well as too much discipline, will spoil a child. It takes a balanced approach, with a conscious effort apart from rote, to train a child in the way he should go.

INTERMISSION

Ebenezer Dorset's love of money reaches ridiculous proportions when he refuses to pay the ransom for his nephew that Sam and Bill have devised. Not only is he willing to give up his nephew if it means another extra few dollars in his pocket, but later it's evident that he had deceived his sister Jane Chandler into thinking he was giving Johnny the utmost care. He can barely stand it when he learns that he'll have to share his wealth with Jane and her daughters. Deep down, Ebenezer knows he is not doing the right thing.

Jane Chandler does not have all her ducks in a row with her own daughters; in spite of Jane's best efforts to balance femininity and strength, her daughters have become headstrong and mischievous. Yet the Chandler family has affection and patience with each other, which

transcend the parenting flaws and the occasional misbehaving. Jane spots the problems with Johnny immediately and knows exactly how to fix the situation, and the girls are eager to bring their cousin into their family and teach him how to relate to each other.

Johnny bristles against the idea of love and affection, probably because his ideas of “love and affection” were always his uncle’s perversion of those ideals. But when he realizes that love and affection means being treated as an equal – even if his idea of equality is a little skewed right now – he opens up to the idea right away. After a friendly pecking order, making Johnny realize the world doesn’t revolve around him, Johnny is ready to change his tune – offering compliments, obeying orders, and accepting kindness.

Sam and Bill, in the meantime, have realized that there is no escape from an honest living. After losing their life’s savings on Ebenezer, they decide if they ever want to get ahead, work is the only answer. Sam doesn’t even want to take a cup of coffee on charity when he realizes how much time has been lost cheating his way through life. After witnessing the events of the last few days, Sam realizes that dignity is more valuable than riches.

Proverbs 6:6-8 Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.

Proverbs 11:27 He that diligently seeketh good procureth favour: but he that seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him.

Colossians 3:20, 21, 23 Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.