



The Ransom of Red Chief



O. Henry wrote "The Ransom of Red Chief" in 1910. The story follows two kidnappers who steal Johnny, the son of a rich man. The son, called Red Chief by the kidnappers, is a redheaded, devilish brat. He makes life miserable for the two criminals. Below is the ransom demand sent to Red Chief's father and the father's reply.

Ebenezer Dorset, Esq.:

We have your boy concealed in a place far from Summit. It is useless for you or the most skilful detectives to attempt to find him. Absolutely, the only terms on which you can have him restored to you are these: We demand fifteen hundred dollars in large bills for his return; the money to be left at midnight tonight at the same spot and in the same box as your reply — as hereinafter described. If you agree to these terms, send your answer in writing by a solitary messenger tonight at half-past eight o'clock. After crossing Owl Creek, on the road to Poplar Cove, there are three large trees about a hundred yards apart, close to the fence of the wheat field on the right-hand side. At the bottom of the fencepost, opposite the third tree, will be found a small pasteboard box. The messenger will place the answer in this box and return immediately to Summit.

If you attempt any treachery or fail to comply with our demand as stated, 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, and if you do not accede to them no further communication will be attempted.

TWO DESPERATE MEN.



Two Desperate Men.

Gentlemen: I received your letter today by post, in regard to the ransom you ask for the return of my son. I think you are a little high in your demands, and I hereby make you a counter-proposition, which I am inclined to believe 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 neighbors believe he is lost, and I couldn't be responsible for what they would do to anybody they saw bringing him back.

Very respectfully,
EBENEZER DORSET.

Explain why the reply from Red Chief's father is an example of irony.



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Correct answers should include a reference to the unexpected turn of events. Instead of paying the kidnapers to return his son, the father requests payment to take his son back. This is not what either the kidnapers or the reader expects.