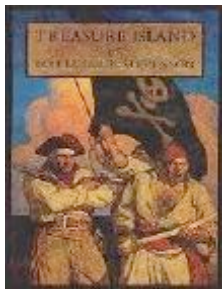


TREASURE ISLAND



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BOOK ONE – THE OLD BUCCANEER

CHAPTER 3.

THE BLACK SPOT

At about lunchtime, I went to the Captain's door with a cold drink and some medicines. He was still lying as we had left him, only a bit higher up in the bed. He seemed both weak and nervous.

"Jim," he said, "you are the only one here I can trust and you know I've always been good to you.

There has not been a month gone by that I haven't given you a silver coin for yourself. You can see, mate, how I am feeling pretty low. Jim, will you bring me a drink of rum now, matey?"

"But the Doctor..." I began.

He broke in cursing the Doctor, in a feeble voice, "Doctors are all talk," he said; "and that Doctor there, why..., what does he know about sea-faring men?"

I have been in places so hot, mates were all dropping around me with fevers, and on lands that were rocking like the sea with earthquakes... what does the doctor know of lands like that? What's more, I lived on rum! I've lived all my life on meat and drink and if I don't have my rum now I will feel as alone as on any island and my blood will be on you, Jim..., and that Doctor."

He kept going for a while with curses.

"Look, Jim, see how my fingers fidget," he continued complaining.

"I can't keep them still, because I haven't had a drop of rum all day. That Doctor is a fool, I tell you. If I don't have a bit of rum, Jim, I'll go mad.

I am a man that has lived rough. Besides, your Doctor himself said one glass wouldn't hurt me. I'll give you a gold coin for one glass, Jim."

He was becoming more and more noisy, and this worried me because my father, was very sick that day and needed peace and quiet. Besides, I was sure what the Doctor said was right, and now having the words said back to me, I was a bit offended at being bribed with a coin.

"I do not want money," I said, "but you owe my father. I'll get you one glass, and no more."

When I took it to him, he grabbed it greedily and drank it all.

"Yes, yes," he said, "that's a bit better, for sure. Now, matey, did that Doctor say how long I was to lie here in this old bed?"

"For a week at least," I said.

"Thunder clap!" he cried. "A week! I can't do that! They'd have the black spot on me by then. Those lazy lubbers* (**sailors*) are going to hear of me in this state. Lubbers, that can't keep what they've got and want to take money from everyone else. I ask you, is that any way for a sailor to behave? I am a saver. I have never wasted my money, or lost it either. I will trick them again. I'm not afraid of them. I'll find another reef, matey, and hide from them again."

As he was speaking like this, he tried to get out of bed. He was holding on to my shoulder with a grip that almost made me cry out. His legs seemed to move like dead weight.

Although the words he said were strong, the way in which they sounded was weak. He paused when he had made it to sitting on the edge of the bed.

He whispered, "That Doctor's done me in, my ears are singing. Lay me back down again."

Before I could do much to help him he had fallen back on the bed and lay there for a while... silent.

"Jim," he said after a while, "did you see that sea-faring man today?"

"Black Dog?" I asked.

"Ah! Black Dog," he said. "He's a bad one, but there's worse than him around. Now, if I can't get away, and they hand me the black spot, (mind you, it's my old sea-chest they're after) you get on a horse.

You can ride a horse, can't you...? Well, then, get on a horse, and go to...well,... to that darn doctor and tell him to get all men... (magistrates and such) ...and bring them all to the Admiral Benbow. All of old Flint's crew, man and boy, all of them that are left, that is. You see, I was Old Flint's first mate, and I'm the only one that knows the place where it is. He gave it to me at Savannah, when he lay dying. Just like, as if I was now.

But don't tell him unless they get the black spot on me, or... unless you see that Black Dog again or... a sea-faring man with one leg, Jim. The one legged man most of all."



"But, what is the black spot?" I asked.

"That's a curse mate, to send me to my death. I will tell you if I get that. But, you keep your weather-eye open, Jim, and I'll share half of my fortune with you... On my honour!"

He kept talking a bit longer, his voice growing weaker and not long after I had given him his medicine, which he took like a child, he fell into a deep sleep. So I left him alone.

I was not sure what I should have done. I probably should have told the whole story to the Doctor, but I was afraid the Captain might regret telling me what he did and try to get rid of me.

But as things turned out, my poor father died that evening, which made me forget all about what had been said.

Then being sad, having neighbours visit and arranging the funeral, I still had all the work at the Inn to do. This kept me so busy that I hardly had time to think of the Captain, let alone be afraid of him.

Somehow he got downstairs the next morning and had his breakfast, though he didn't eat much. But he had more than his usual supply of rum. That was because he helped himself to the bottle, snorting and blowing through his nose so that no one dared to cross him.

On the night before my father's funeral he was as drunk as ever and it was not very nice for everyone to hear him, singing away at his ugly old sea-song when everyone was so

sad. As sick as he was, everyone was still in fear of him and the Doctor was seeing a patient many miles away, so he was not likely to visit any time soon.

The Captain seemed to grow weaker rather than gain any of his strength. He slowly climbed up and down the stairs, walking from room to room. Sometimes, he put his nose out the front door to smell the sea, holding on to the walls as he went for support and breathing hard and fast like a man on a steep hill.

He never really spoke to me again and I think he had pretty much forgotten what he had told me that day.

It seemed he was more on edge now, even when he was drunk. He would pull out his cutlass and lay it on the table in front of him in case anyone came near. He often kept his thoughts to himself and did not seem to notice the people around him. On one night, he surprised us with a kind of country love-song that he must have learned when he was a boy, before he had gone off to sea.

Then the day after my father's funeral, at about three o'clock on a foggy, and frosty afternoon, I was standing at the front door, full of sad thoughts about my father, when I saw someone walking slowly towards us along the road.



I could tell he was blind, because he tapped the road before him with a stick and wore a great green patch over his eyes and nose.

I had never seen such an awful looking person in my life. He was hunched over, as though old or weak and wore a huge old ragged sea-cloak with a hood that made him look scary.

He stopped close to the Inn, and singing in a strange voice to the air, "Will a kind friend tell a poor blind man, who has lost the dear sight of his eyes in fighting for his native country, England... God bless King George!... where in this part of the country am I?"

"You are at the Admiral Benbow, Black Hill Cove, my good man," I said.

"I hear a voice," he said, "a young voice. Will you give me your hand, young friend, and lead me in?"

I held out my hand, and the awful, eyeless man grabbed it hard. I got such a shock; I could not pull my hand back. The blind man pulled me up close to him straight away.

"Now, boy," he said, "take me in to the Captain."

"Sir," I said, "on my word, I am afraid to."

"Oh, that's it!" he sneered, "Take me straight to him or I'll break your arm."

And he gave my arm, such a pull, that it made me cry out in pain.

"Sir," I said, "I meant, for your sake. The Captain is not what he used to be. He sits with his cutlass at the ready. Another man came and..."

"Come on, march!" he interrupted. I had never heard a voice so cruel, cold and ugly as that blind man's. It scared me, more than the pain in my arm, so I obeyed him straight away.

I walked him to the front door and in to the lounge room, where our sick old buccaneer was sitting, drunk with rum. The blind man held his tight hold on my arm and he leaned so much of his weight on me, I could hardly stand up.

"Take me straight to him and when he can see me, yell out, 'Here's a friend for you, Bill.' If you don't..., I'll do this!," and he squeezed my arm so tight I thought I would faint.

I was so scared of the blind beggar that I forgot I was scared of the Captain, and as I opened the lounge room door, my words came out in a shaky voice.

The poor Captain looked up and the rum seemed to go and leave him all of a sudden sober. He went to stand up, but I don't think he had enough strength left in his body.

"Now, Bill..., sit where you are," said the beggar. "I may not be able to see, but I can hear even a finger move. Business is business. Hold out your left hand.

Boy, take his left hand by the wrist and bring it close to my right hand."

We both did exactly as he said and I saw him pass something from inside the hand that held his stick, into the palm of the Captain's hand.

"Right, that's done," said the blind man. With those words he quickly let go of me, and with amazing speed, skipped out of the Inn and on to the road.

I just stood there really still as I heard his stick go tap-tap-tapping into the distance.

It was some time before either of us, took in what had just happened, but as I let go of the Captain's wrist, he looked in his hand at the piece of paper called the black spot and read the words.

"Ten o'clock!" he cried, "six hours, we'll beat them yet," and he sprang to his feet.

But as he did so, he stepped back, put his hand to his throat, stood swaying for a moment. Then, with a weird sound, he fell from his whole height, face down to the floor.

I ran to him at once, yelling to my mother. But it was all too late.

The Captain had been struck dead by another heart attack.

It is hard for me to understand, because I had never liked the man, but lately I had started to feel sorry for him.

As soon as I saw he was dead, I burst into a flood of tears. It was only the second death I had known and I had not even had time to get over the sadness of my father dying.