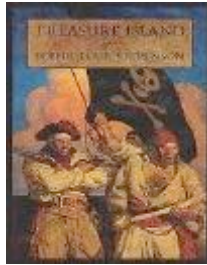


TREASURE ISLAND



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BOOK THREE – MY SHORE ADVENTURE

CHAPTER 15.

THE MAN OF THE ISLAND

I heard the sound of stones falling down the side of the hill. I looked around to see what had made them fall and I saw, just for a moment, something leap behind the trunk of a tree. I did not know what it was. I couldn't tell if it was a bear, a man or a monkey. It looked dark and shaggy but the fright of this new thing made me stop in my tracks.

Now I felt cut off on both sides. Killers behind me and I don't know what in front of me. I began to prefer the devil I knew, rather than the new thing I did not. All of a sudden, even Long John Silver did not seem to be so bad, compared to whatever the creature was, in this forest.

I slowly started to head back towards the boats. Just then, the thing showed itself again.

It made a wide circle around me and tried to cut off my path. It was running on two legs but was bent over in half as it ran. But, now I was sure it was a man. I wondered if it was a cannibal... the men who eat people.

I stood very still and looked for a way to escape. Then I felt the pistol I had been given. It gave me a bit more courage and so I stood, as tall as I could and walked towards him. He was still trying to hide behind another tree trunk and was watching me closely. When I got fairly near to him, he surprised me. He held up his hands closed together and fell to his knees. I just stopped.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"Ben Gunn," he said. His voice sounded very rusty, like as though he had a sore throat.



"I'm poor Ben Gunn, and I have not spoken to anyone for three years!"

I could see that he had white skin like me but he was very burnt by the sun. His lips were black and of all the beggars I had seen, he was the most ragged. His clothes were all torn and patched together with bits of stick and he had an old leather belt around his waist. They looked like they were made of animal skin.

"Three years!" I cried. "Were you ship wrecked?"

"No, mate," he said, "left behind. Marooned you might say."

I had heard the buccaneers speak of this being done to men, to punish them.

"For three years," he said, "I have lived on goats, berries and oysters from the sea. I know that no matter where I am, I can look after myself but I have had some nights, where I just dream about cheese. Mostly melted cheese and then I wake up again and see that I am still stuck here on this island. I don't suppose you have any cheese on you, do you? "

"If I can get back on our ship again," I said, "you can have as much cheese as you want."

While we were talking, he was touching my coat and looking at my boots. But when I said my last word, he stared up at me.

"Did you say, if you can get on board your ship again?" he asked. "Well, who would be stopping you?"

"Not you, I know that," I said.

"You are right there," he cried. "Now what is your name, mate?"

"Jim," I told him.

"Jim... Jim," he said. "Well, now, Jim, I have had a hard life here. I've had a lot of time to think on this lonely island.

I was a bad man before I was put here and now I know I will be good one".

He looked all around him and in a soft voice he said, "I am rich."

I looked at the poor man as though he had gone mad and then he said a little louder, "Rich! Rich! I say.

Jim... Jim..., I'll make a rich man of you, because you were the first one to find me!"

Then he grabbed my hand and lifted his finger to point at me and said, "Now, Jim, you tell me the truth. That's not Flint's ship is it?" he asked.

I smiled at him and said, "It's not Flint's ship and Flint is dead. But as you asked me, there are, some of Flint's men on board. And that is not good luck for us."

"Is there a man with one leg?" he gasped.

"Silver?" I asked.

"Ah, Silver!" he said. "That's his name!"

I told him, "He's the cook, and the gang leader too."

He was still holding me tight by the hand, and he gave it twist.

"If you were sent by Long John," he said, "I'm as good as dead, pork pig. Whose side are you on?"

I quickly made up my mind and told him the whole story of our voyage and what had happened the night before we landed at the island.

"You are a good lad, Jim," he said. "You can trust Ben Gunn. Jim, do you think the Squire would give a reward to a man that might help him get out of his mess?"

I told Ben that the Squire was a good man.

"Ah yes, but you see," said Ben, "I don't mean new clothes and new job, Jim. I mean... would he be likely to give a reward of, say one thousand pounds of money?"

"I am sure he would," I said. "And it stands already, all the men were going to get a share of the treasure."

"And would I get a trip home?" Ben added.

"The Squire is a true gentleman. If we got rid of the others, we would want you to help us work on the ship, to get us home," I said.

"Ah yes," he said, "so, you would."

"Now, I'll tell you some of my story," he went on. "I was on Flint's ship when he buried the treasure. Flint and six strong men went on shore for nearly one week. The rest of us stayed on the old WALRUS. One day, a signal went up and Flint came back in a little boat, all on his own."

He looked very pale and wore a blue scarf around his head. The six men were all dead... dead and buried. Not one man on the ship could work out, how he did it. Billy Bones and Long John Silver asked him where the treasure was. He just said, 'you can go ashore, if you like, and stay, but this ship will be leaving now!' That's what he said. Well... then I was in another ship three years ago, and we came past this island again. 'Boys,' I said, 'this is where Flint's treasure is. Let's stop and find it.'

The Captain was not happy about it, but all the other men wanted to find it. They looked for twelve days and could not find it. Then they all started looking at me and said 'Benjamin Gunn, here's a pistol, a spade, and an axe. You can stay here and find Flint's money all by yourself'.

Well, Jim, I have been here for three years and I want you to look at me. Do I look like a seaman? No, and I wasn't either."

He winked at me and pinched me hard.

"I want you to go back to your Squire and tell him my story. Tell him I have been here in the sun, dark and rain. But most of all, you tell him my time here was spent on another *important matter*. Tell him I am a good man and was born a gentleman... not a 'gentleman of fortune' like old Silver!"

"Well," I said, "I'm not really sure I know what you have been saying. But apart from that, how am I going to get back on board the ship?"

"Ah," he said, "that's tricky, for sure. Well, I made a boat, with my own two hands. I keep it under the white rock. If it's too hard for you, we might have to use that when it gets dark."

Just then, even though it was still light, the island woke up to the thunder of a cannon being fired.

"What was that?" Ben cried.

"They have begun to fight!" I yelled. "Follow me!"

I began to run to the ship, with Ben close by my side.

"Left, Jim, left!" he called "Stay under the trees! There is where I killed my first goat. They don't come down here now. They are scared of me. Ah... and can you see these mounds of dirt? I come here and pray at these graves, when I think each week has gone by."

He kept talking like this, as we ran. I thought he was making up for lost time!

After the cannon-shot, we could hear sounds of guns being fired. Then in front of me, I could see the union-jack flag from the ship, flying above the trees.

