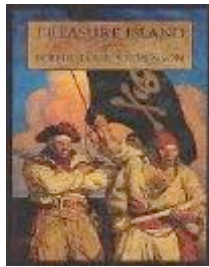


TREASURE ISLAND



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BOOK FOUR – THE STOCKADE

CHAPTER 17.

"THE JOLLY-BOAT'S LAST TRIP" BY: THE DOCTOR

This last trip wasn't like any of the others. The small jolly-boat had far too much in it. As well as five full, grown men... three of them very tall, (Trelawney, Redruth and the Captain) the pork, bread and gunpowder were all making the water come in over the sides. The bottom of my coat was soaked.

The Captain made us throw a few things over the side, as well as try and tip out the water that had come in. This helped the jolly-boat sit a bit more evenly on the water. The tide was also now making our trip harder and pushing us away from where we wanted to go. This meant we could end up near the other boats, where the pirates might show up at any moment.

"I cannot keep her on course for the stockade, sir," I said to the Captain.

I was trying to steer, while he and Redruth, were rowing with the oars.

"The tide kept pushing her the wrong way. Could you row a little harder?"

"Not without swamping the boat with water," the Captain said. "You must point the bow, sir, until you see you are on course."

I kept trying but the tide kept pushing us away from where we wanted to go.

"We'll never get ashore at this rate," I said.

"If it's the only course we can do, sir, we must do it," replied the Captain. "We must keep trying. If we don't, it's hard to say where we will get ashore. Apart from the chance of being boarded by the pirates, if we keep going this way, the tide might calm and then we can go back along the shore."

"The tide is easing already, sir," said Abraham Gray, who was watching out front, "you can ease off a bit now."

"Thank you, my man," I said now treating him like one of us.

Suddenly the Captain spoke again and his voice had changed. "The cannon!" he said.

"I thought of that," I said. "They could never get the cannon ashore, and even if they did, they could never pull it through the trees."

"Look behind, Doctor," yelled the Captain.

We turned and to our horror, we could see the five rogues left behind busy taking the cover off the cannon. Not only that, we had left some gunpowder behind. If they hit it with an axe, it would be free for the evil ones to use on board.



"Israel Hands was Flint's cannon gunner," said Gray.

We now tried to head directly for the landing place. But the worst of it was, we were now sideways to the HISPANIOLA instead of our backs to it. Now we were, an even bigger target for them to fire at. I could hear Israel Hands pumping down the cannon gunpowder on the deck.

"Who is our best shot?" asked the Captain.

"Mr. Trelawney, by far," I said.

"Mr. Trelawney, will you please shoot one of those men, sir? If possible, try to get Mr. Hands," said the Captain.

Trelawney was very cool as he looked down the barrel of his gun.

The Captain said, "Easy when you fire that gun, sir, or you'll tip the boat. All men get ready to steady the boat when he aims."

The Squire raised his gun, the rowing stopped, and we leaned over to the other side to keep the balance. They had the cannon, turned round on the swivel, and Hands, who was filling it with gunpowder, was now the main target. But, we had no luck, for just as Trelawney fired, Hands bent down and the shot flew over him and got one of the others.



All of a sudden there were cries from, not only the ship, but also a great number of voices from the shore. We could see the other pirates running out from among the trees and jumping into their boats.

"Here come the boats, sir," I called.

"Let's go, then," cried the Captain. "Forget about taking in water, if we don't get ashore, it's all over!"

"Only one of the boats is coming, sir," I added, "the rest of them must be running on land to cut us off."

"They'll have to run fast," said the Captain.

"It's not them I'm worried about, it's the cannon fire we are going to get if we don't get going. Squire, you tell us when we get there, we will try to keep the water out."

We were starting to get close to our place now and we had turned the bend so that the other boat could not see us but the cannon was still a threat.

"If I could," said the Captain, "I'd stop and try a shot at another man."

But it was clear that they were going to try and shoot that cannon as soon as they could. They did not even look at the wounded man who was not dead. I could see him trying to crawl away.



"Ready!" cried the Squire.

"Hold!" cried the Captain, as quick as an echo.

And he and Redruth pulled on the oars with a great heave that sent the boat onto the beach and filled the stern with water. The cannon fired at the same time.

(This was what Jim had heard, but not the sound of the Squire's first shot.)

We didn't know where the cannon ball passed, but it must have been close, as the boat sank quite gently, in three feet of water.

The Captain and I were left standing in the water and the other three went completely under. So far, no lives were lost and we could wade to shore in safety.

All our supplies however, were in the water and only two of our guns had stayed dry enough to use. Then, we heard voices coming closer along the shore. Suddenly, we were in danger of being cut off from the stockade and not knowing whether Hunter and Joyce had been able to defend themselves. We got ashore as fast as we could and left everything behind in the poor, sunken jolly-boat.

