

TREASURE ISLAND



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BOOK FIVE – MY SEA ADVENTURE

CHAPTER 26.

ISRAEL HANDS

The wind was blowing in our favour now. As we had no way to put down the anchor, we didn't want to run into the beach until the tide had flowed in. We had lots of time to wait. Israel Hands told me how to keep the ship steady for the tide. So after a lot of tries, I could finally do it. Then we sat and ate a meal in silence.

Finally he said with his strange smile, "Captain, me old shipmate, shouldn't you throw O'Brien here, overboard? I wouldn't normally as a rule, but I don't think we need him anymore now that he is dead, do you?"

"I'm not strong enough to do it by myself and I don't like the idea of it, so he should stay there," I said.

"This is an unlucky ship, this HISPANIOLA, Jim," he went on.

"A lot of men have been killed on this ship. I have never seen such rotten luck. O'Brien... he's dead, isn't he. Well now, I'm no scholar, but you are a smart lad. Do you think a dead man is dead for good, or does he come back to life again?"

"You can kill the body, Mr. Hands, but not the spirit! You must know that," I replied. "O'Brien is in another world, and he may be watching us."

"Ah!" he said. "Well, that's a shame... that would seem as if killing someone was a waste of time... Would you be so kind to go down into the cabin and get me a... well, a... shiver me timbers! I can't get the name of it! Umm... can you get me a bottle of wine, Jim... This brandy is too strong for my head."

Israel's voice did not seem quite right and it was strange that now he wanted wine instead of brandy. I didn't believe him. I could tell he wanted me to leave the deck but I didn't know why.

He kept looking around all over the place but wouldn't look at me at all. He was behaving like a child who had done something wrong and was trying to trick me. I was quick with my answer, because I could tell that such a stupid man, would be easy to trick.

"Some wine?" I said. "Of course! Will you have white or red?"

"I think it's all the same to me, shipmate," he replied. "Just make it strong and plenty of it!"

"All right," I answered. "I'll bring you port, Mr. Hands. But I might have to dig to find it."

With that, I hurried down below with as much noise as I could. Then I took off my shoes and ran quietly along the galley. I climbed a ladder and popped my head out from the other side. I knew he would not expect to see me there and I was very careful not to be seen.

He had got on his hands and knees, and although his leg still hurt him when he moved, he pulled himself across the deck. Quickly, he had reached some rope and a short knife stained with blood. He looked at the knife for a second, then tested the point of it on his hand. Then, he stuffed it under his jacket to hide it. He crawled back to his old place against the barrel. This was all I needed to know. It proved Israel could move around and now he was also armed with a knife.

It was clear that I was going to be the next victim. Yet I felt sure I had one thing in my favour. We both needed to get off the ship with as little work and danger as possible.

While I was thinking all this, I had run back to the cabin, put my shoes back on, grabbed the first bottle of wine I could see and went back on deck.

Israel Hands lay as I had left him. When I gave him the bottle he took a good drink of wine and said, "Here's luck!"

Then he pulled out tobacco and begged me to cut the end off for him.

"Cut this for me Captain," he said, "I don't have a knife or the strength to do it, even if I did have. Ah, Jim, Jim, I reckon this will be my last tobacco as I don't think I will live much longer."

"Well," I said, "I'll cut your tobacco, but if I was you and I was so hurt, I would start saying my prayers."

"Why?" he asked.

"Why?" I cried. "You broke your trust, you have told lies and spilled blood. A man you killed, is lying at your feet and you ask me why?"

I spoke a bit angrily, thinking of the knife covered in blood that he hid in his jacket.

He took another big drink of the wine then said, "For thirty years, I've sailed the seas and seen good and bad weather, food running out and knives flying. No good, ever comes of it. But he who strikes first wins, is my belief - dead men don't bite. Anyway enough of this! The tide is good. You just take my orders, Captain Hawkins, and we'll sail her in and be done with it."

The entrance to this north anchorage was very narrow.

Between us, we were able to dodge our way in, shaving the banks doing a mighty fine job. As the land closed around us, the trees were just as thick as the other side of the island but it was longer and thinner like a river.

In front of us, we saw the wreck of an old ship in the last stages of falling apart. It was a sad sight, but it showed us the river was calm.



"Look!" said Hands, "there's a good bit of beach to put the ship in. Fine flat sand and trees all around it."

"When we are in," I asked, "how will we get her off again?" He replied, "you take a rope on shore when the water is low, wrap it around one of those big pine trees and bring it back to the ship. When it's high water, everyone pulls on the rope and away she comes 'sweet as'. Stand by. Steady as she goes."

He issued his orders, which I obeyed, until all of a sudden, he cried, "Now, me hearty! Pull!" The HISPANIOLA swung around fast and ran into the shore.

I was so excited doing these last moves and waiting for the ship to touch, that I forgot my danger and I stood looking over the side, watching the ripples in the water. But the *quiet* made me turn my head.

Sure enough, when I looked around, there was Hands, already halfway towards me with his knife in his right hand. At the same time, he threw himself forward and I jumped sideways.

As I did, I let go of the wheel. It spun and struck Israel across the chest and stopped him in his tracks. Before he could recover, I took my pistol from my pocket, took aim and although he had turned to come at me again, I pulled the trigger!

But there was no flash and no sound. It was full of sea-water. I was angry with myself for not making sure my only weapon had been reloaded. Now I was fleeing, like a sheep before a butcher. Even though he was wounded, he moved fast. I had no time to try my other pistol and did not want to be boxed in on deck, so I placed my palms against the main-mast, which was pretty big and waited.

He could see I was going to try and dodge his knife, so he also stopped. It was like a game I played at home around the trees, but never with my heart beating as hard as now. I thought I could dodge him easily for a while, but I couldn't see how to escape.

Suddenly the HISPANIOLA hit the sand then leaned over to the port side, until the deck was on forty-five degrees angle. We both rolled, with the dead man in the red scarf - his arms still spread out, tumbling stiffly after us.

I was the first on my feet again, because Hands got tangled with the dead body.

I sprang onto the rope ladder and did not take a breath until I was seated on the cross-trees. Luckily, I was quick. The knife struck just below me as I flew upward. Israel Hands just stood there with his mouth open and his face looking up in surprise and anger.



I lost no time in getting both my pistols ready for use. Hands could see the odds going against him, so he pulled himself onto the rope ladder with the knife between his teeth. Then he began to slowly and painfully climb.

When he was part of the way up, I said with a pistol in each hand;

"One more step, Mr. Hands, and I'll blow your brains out! Dead men don't bite, you know," I added.

He stopped. I could tell by his face that he was trying to think. To speak, he had to take the knife out of his mouth, but he didn't move any closer.



"Jim," he said, "I reckon we're in trouble. I would have got you if the boat hadn't knocked me, but I was unlucky. I think I'll have to kill you, which is hard for a master sea-man to do to a youngster like you, Jim."

I was listening to his words and smiling away to myself, when, all of a sudden his right hand went over his shoulder. Something flew through the air like an arrow.

I felt a thud and then a sharp pain.

I was pinned by my shoulder to the mast. But while I was in awful pain and surprise, both my pistols went off before they fell out of my hands.

At the same time, Israel Hands fell head first into the water.