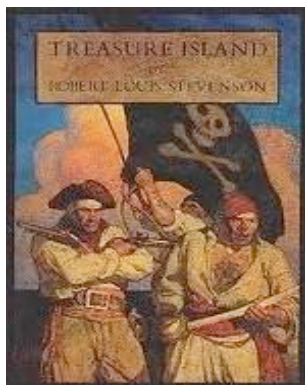


TREASURE ISLAND



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BOOK SIX – CAPTAIN SILVER

CHAPTER 28.

IN THE ENEMY'S CAMP

The light of the torch, inside the log-house, showed my worst fears. The pirates had control of the house and the supplies. There was a cask of brandy, pork and bread. What I feared the most, was no sign of any prisoners. All I could think was they had all perished, and I felt bad that I hadn't been there, to perish with them.

There were six buccaneers in total. Five of them were on their feet, looking red and swollen, after being woken from their drunken sleep. The sixth pirate leaned on his elbow and looked deathly pale. He had a blood-stained bandage around his head. I was sure it was the man who had been shot and ran back among the trees in the great attack.

The parrot sat, preening her feathers, on Long John's shoulder. I thought he looked a lot paler and much sterner than I was used to. He still wore his fine cloth suit, but it was now spotted with clay and torn with the sharp branches of the forest.



"So," he said, "shiver me timbers, here's Jim Hawkins! Just dropped by, eh? Welcome."

He sat down across the brandy cask and began to fill a pipe.

"Give me a light, Dick," he said and then, when he had good smoke, said "That'll do, lad,"



"You, gentlemen, relax! You needn't stand up for Mr. Hawkins; He'll excuse you... And so, Jim"... stopping the tobacco...

"here you are. What a pleasant surprise for poor old John. I could see you were smart when first I set my eyes on you, but this sort of surprises me, it does."

I said nothing to all this, as they had me with my back against the wall. I stood there, looking at Silver's face, with as much confidence as I could muster, but with black fear in my heart. Silver took another slow puff or two on his pipe and then spoke again.

"Well Jim, now that you're here," he said, "I'll tell you what I think. I've always liked you, I have. You are a lad of spirit, and you remind me of myself when I was young. I always wanted you to take your share, and die a gentleman.

Captain Smollett's a fine seaman, I will admit, but hard on orders. 'Duty is duty,' he says and he is right. You need to keep clear of the Captain. The Doctor is dead against you... 'ungrateful boy' was what he said. So, the long and short of it is: you can't go back to your own lot, because they won't have you. Without them, you'd have to start a third ship's company all by yourself, which might be a bit lonely. So you'll have to join with me, Captain Silver."

So far, so good, I thought. My friends, were still alive and although I partly believed what Silver said... that the cabin party were mad at me for leaving them... I was more relieved than upset by what I just heard.

"I don't know why or how you arrived here," continued Silver, "but here you are and I am all for talking about it. I have never seen any good come out of threatening. But if you want to stay, you'll join us. If you don't, Jim, well, you're free to say no. Free and welcome, my shipmate, I can't be fairer than that!"

"Do you want an answer, then?" I asked with a tremble in my voice. Through all this talk, I could feel the threat of death that hung over me. My cheeks burned and my heart beat painfully in my chest.

"Lad," Silver said, "no one's forcing you. Take your time mate. None of us will hurry you. Time goes by so nicely in your company, you see."

"Well," I said, growing a bit bolder, "if I'm to choose, I would need to know what's what. Why you are here, and where my friends are."

"What's what?" repeated one of the buccaneers in a deep growl. "Ah, he'd be lucky to know that!"

"You'll perhaps shut your mouth until you're spoken to, my friend," cried Silver to the pirate. And then, in a softer tone, he said to me, "yesterday morning, Mr. Hawkins, Doctor Livesey came down to us with a flag of truce. He says, 'Captain Silver, you've been sold out. The ship's gone.' Well, maybe we'd had a few drinks of rum, and a song to help it down. So none of us had been looking out. But when we looked out, by thunder, the old ship was gone!

I've never seen anything look fishier; and I tell you, that looked the fishiest. 'Well,' says the Doctor, 'let's bargain.' We bargained, him and I. So here we are: supplies, brandy, log house, the firewood you were thoughtful enough to cut. In a manner of speaking, we got the whole lot. As for them, they've walked. I don't know where they are." He puffed quietly again on his pipe.

"Oh yes, and in case you think, in that head of yours," he went on, "that you were included in the treaty, here's the last word that was said; 'How many of you,' I said, 'are to leave?' he said 'Four, and one of us wounded. As for that boy, I don't know where he is, damn him,' he said, 'and I don't care much as we are sick of him.' These were his words."

"Is that all?" I asked.

"Well, it's all that you're to hear, my son," returned Silver.

"And now I am to choose?"

"And now you are to choose," said Silver.

"Well," I said, "I am not a fool but I know very well what is going on. Let the worst come. I don't care. I've seen too many die since I have known you. But... there's a thing or two I have to tell you," I said. By now I was quite excited.

"The first is: You are, in a bad way... The ship is lost, the treasure is lost, men are lost and your whole business has gone to wreck and ruin. And if you want to know who did it... it was me! I was in the apple barrel the night we saw land, and I heard you, John, and you, Dick Johnson, and Israel Hands, (who is now at the bottom of the sea), but told me everything you said before he went. As for the ship, it was me who cut her rope. It was me that killed the men you had on board.

It was me who took her where you'll never see her. The jokes on you. I've been on top of this business from the start. I don't fear you, any more than I fear a fly. Kill me, if you want, or spare me. But I'll say one more thing. If you spare me, bygones will be bygones, and when you are all in court for piracy, I'll save you as much as I can. It is for you to choose. Kill me, and you won't do yourselves any good, or spare me and keep a witness to save you from the gallows."

I stopped, because, to tell the truth, I was out of breath, and to my surprise, not one of them moved. They all sat staring at me like sheep.

As they stared, I started again, "So now, Mr. Silver, I believe you're the best man here, and if you choose the worst, I'd like you to let the Doctor know how I was killed."

"I'll bear it in mind," said Silver in such a strange voice that I could not, decide whether he was laughing at me or liked my courage.

"I'll drink to that... he knew Black Dog" cried the old red-faced seaman, Morgan. (the man I had seen in Long John's pub)

"Here, here," added Silver. "I'll drink another to that, by thunder! It was this same boy that faked the chart from Billy Bones. This is the last time, we split up from Jim Hawkins!"

"Then let's take him!" said Morgan with an oath.

And he sprang up, drawing his knife as if he were a young man.

"Stop, there!" cried Silver. "Who do you think you are, Tom Morgan? Maybe you think you are the Captain here! But my wooden leg, I'll teach you better! Cross me, and you'll go where many a good man's gone before you. Some to the gallows, shiver me timbers, and some by the plank, and all to feed the fishes, Tom Morgan."

Morgan paused, but a deep mumbling rose from the others.

"Tom's right," said one.

"I've been fooled long enough," added another. "I'll hang if I'll be fooled by you, John Silver."

"Did any of you gentlemen want to have it out with me?" roared Silver, bending far forward from his position on the keg. "Say what you mean. Anyone that dares, go and take a cutlass, and I'll see the colour of your insides, me crutch and all, before my pipe's empty."

No one stirred and no one answered.

"That's it, is it?" he added, returning his pipe to his mouth.

"Well, you're not worth much to fight, anyway. Now listen up, I'm Captain here because I'm the best man by a long sea-mile. If you won't fight, then, by thunder, you'll obey! I like that boy, and I've never seen a better one.

He's more of a man than any of you rats in this house, so don't let me see any one lay a hand on him."

There was a long pause after this. I stood up straight against the wall, my heart still going like a sledge-hammer, but with a ray of hope now shining. Silver leant back against the wall, his arms crossed, his pipe in the corner of his mouth.



The others, drew slowly together at the far end of the log-house, and whispered.

Every now and then they would look up at Silver.

"You seem to have a lot to say," called Silver, spitting far into the air. "Speak up and let me hear you."

"Beg your pardon, sir," said one of the men; "this crew's not happy and we don't like bullying. We have our rights like any other crew. As you are Captain at the present, we claim our right to step outside to talk as a group."

With a salute, they walked outside one by one.

Silver instantly removed his pipe.

"Now, look you here, Jim Hawkins," he said in a quiet whisper, "you're within half a plank of death, and what's worse, of torture. But I stand by you through thick and thin. I wasn't going to until you spoke up. But I saw you were right and I said to myself, 'stand by Hawkins, John and Hawkins will stand by you.' I'll save my witness, and he'll save my neck!"

I began to understand.

"You mean all is lost?" I asked.

"Aye, by gum, I do!" he said. "Ship's gone. Once I looked into that bay, Jim Hawkins, and there was nothing, well... I gave in. As for that lot and their meeting, they're fools and cowards. I'll save your life from them... if I can. But, see here, Jim... tit for tat... you'll have to save Long John from hanging."

"I'll do what I can," I said.

"It's a bargain!" cried Long John. "You speak up truly, and by thunder, I'll have half a chance! Understand me, Jim," he said, "I'm on the Squire's side now. I know you've got that ship safe somewhere. How you did it, I don't know, but safe it is. But we might be able to do a power of good together!"

He poured some brandy from the cask into a tin cup.

"Want a drink?" he asked; and when I refused said: "Well, I'll have one myself, Jim. I need courage, for there's trouble coming. Speaking of trouble, why did the Doctor give me the chart, Jim?"

My face went blank. I was confused now.

"Well, he did, and there's a reason for it Jim, good or bad."

He took another swallow of the brandy, shaking his head like a man who looks forward to the worst.

