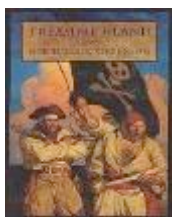


TREASURE ISLAND



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BOOK SIX – CAPTAIN SILVER

CHAPTER 32.

TREASURE HUNT – THE VOICE AMONG THE TREES

Partly from worrying about the ghost of old Flint and partly for Silver and the sick men to have a rest, the whole group sat down as soon as they had climbed to the top.

From the plateau, we could see the whole bay and Skeleton Island. Straight above us rose the cliff face of the Spy-Glass, dotted with single pines and black cracks in the rock. There was no sound except the distant waves, and the chirp of hundreds of insects in the bushes. Silver sat, and took more bearings with his compass.



"There are three 'tall trees' right in line from Skeleton Island" he said. It means 'Spy-Glass shoulder' is that lower point there. It's child's play to find the treasure now. I think we should eat first."

"I don't feel right," growled Morgan. "Thinking of Flint... has lost my appetite."

"Ah, well, my son, you praise your stars he's dead," said Silver.

"He was an ugly devil," cried a third pirate with a shudder; "blue in the face too!"



"That's what the rum did," added Merry. "Blue! Never truer a word."

Ever since they found the skeleton and started thinking about Flint, they had spoken softer and softer until they were almost whispering. Then all of a sudden, from the middle of the trees in front of us, a high, trembling voice sang:



"Fifteen men on the dead man's chest...
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!"

I have never seen men more badly affected than the pirates. The colour went from their six faces instantly and they grabbed hold of each other or crawled on the ground.

"It's Flint, I swear!" cried Merry.

Then the song stopped as suddenly as it began. It sounded as though someone put a hand over the singer's mouth.

"C-come on," said Silver, struggling to get the words out;

"this won't do. Stand by to get going. I can't name the voice, but it's someone mucking around... someone that's flesh and blood, I bet."

Silver felt more courage as he spoke, and some of the others also began to feel better, when the same voice broke out again. Only this time not singing, but a faint distant call that echoed from the cliffs of the Spy-Glass.

"Darby M'Graw," it cried (that is what it sounded like) "Darby M'Graw! Darby M'Graw!" again and again and again; and then rising a little higher, "Fetch me the rum, Darby!"

The buccaneers were stuck to the spot, their eyes bulging out of their heads. Even after the voice had died away, they still stared in deadly silence.

"That seals it!" gasped one. "Let's go."

"They were his last words," moaned Morgan, "his last words alive."

Dick had his bible out and was praying loudly. He had been well brought up, before he came to sea and had ended up with bad mates.

Still, Silver was not convinced. I could hear his teeth rattle in his head, but he didn't believe them.

"Nobody on this island ever heard of Darby," he muttered; "not one of us here." Then, making a great effort, he cried, "Shipmates, I'm here to get that treasure, and I'll not be beaten by man or devil.

I was never afraid of Flint when he was alive, and, shiver me timbers, I'll face him when he's dead. There's seven hundred thousand pounds only a quarter of a mile from here. Since when did a gentleman of fortune give up that many dollars for a boozy, old, dead seaman with a blue face?"

"Stop there, John!" said Merry. "Don't you cross a spirit!"

The rest of them were all too terrified to reply. They would have run away if they dared. Fear seemed to keep them together and with John, as if his bravery helped them.

"Spirit? Well, maybe," he said. "But there's one thing not quite right. There was an echo. No man has ever seen a spirit with a shadow, have they? Well then, how can there be an echo if it's a spirit? I would like to know that!"

This suggestion didn't seem quite right to me but George Merry was very relieved.

"Well, that's true," he said. "You've a smart head on your shoulders, John Silver, make no mistake. Shipmates! This crew is on a wrong tack, I do believe. Come to think of it, it was a bit like Flint's voice, but not exactly. It was like er...like er... someone... somebody else's voice er..."

"Shiver me timbers, Ben Gunn!" roared Silver.

"Aye, so it was," cried Morgan, springing on his knees. "Ben Gunn it was!"


"It doesn't make much difference, though does it?" asked Dick. "Ben Gunn's not here in the body any more than Flint is."

But the older men didn't think so.

"Why, nobody minds Ben Gunn," cried Merry; "dead or alive, nobody minds him."

It was amazing how the colour came back to their faces. Soon they were chatting together, sometimes stopping to listen but after not hearing any more sounds, they grabbed their tools and set off again. Merry walked in front with Silver's compass to keep them on the right line with Skeleton Island. He had told the truth... nobody minded Ben Gunn, dead or alive.

Dick still held his bible, and looked around him as he went.

Silver said, "I told you that you had spoiled your  bible. If it's no good to swear on, what do you think a spirit would give for it? Nothing!" and he snapped his big fingers together, stopping for a moment on his crutch.

But Dick was not well. I could see he was getting sick from the heat, tiredness and the shock of the 'spirit'. The fever, as warned by Dr. Livesey, was growing. It was open walking on the summit of the plateau. We were getting closer to the cliffs of the Spy-Glass.

On the other side I could see the western bay where I had once been tossed around in the coracle. The first tall tree we reached was the wrong one and so was the second. The third, tall tree rose nearly two hundred feet into the air above the bushes. It looked like a giant, red column as big as a house. But it was not the size of the tree that impressed the group, it was the thought of seven hundred thousand pounds in gold, buried somewhere in its shadow.

Their eyes burned in their heads and their feet got faster and lighter as they thought about the treasure waiting for each of them. Silver hobbled, grunting, on his crutch. His nostrils stood out and he cursed like a madman when the flies settled on his hot face. He pulled furiously at my rope. I knew he hoped to seize the treasure, find and board the HISPANIOLA under cover of night and cut every honest throat on the island. He still wanted to sail away as he had first tried, laden with crimes and riches. It was hard for me to keep up with the rapid pace of the treasure-hunters. Now and again I stumbled, and Silver kept pulling at me roughly and giving me a mean stare. Dick, who had dropped behind, was mumbling to himself, as his fever got worse. I was also haunted by the thought of what had happened once before on this plateau. Back to when the pirate with the blue face, was singing and shouting for drink, but had killed his own six men.

"Hurry, mates!" shouted Merry as they broke into a run.

Suddenly, not ten yards on, we saw them stop. Silver hurried even faster with his crutch until he and I also came to a dead stop. We saw a huge hole. It was not very recent as the sides had fallen in and the grass had sprouted on the bottom. In the hole, there was the handle of a broken pick and timber sides of crates scattered around. On one of the boards I saw, the name WALRUS. It was the name of Flint's ship branded with a hot iron.



It was clear to all of us. The treasure had been found and gone through. The seven hundred thousand pounds were gone!