

SECTION 6

It was about half past one—three bells in sea language—when the two boats left the Hispaniola and went ashore. The captain, the squire, and I were in the cabin talking things over. If there had been even a little wind, we would have attacked the six mutineers still on board, cut the anchor, and sailed away. But there was no wind at all, and then Hunter came down with bad news: Jim Hawkins had slipped into a boat and gone ashore with the others.

We never doubted Jim's loyalty, but we were deeply worried about his safety.

With the men in the angry mood they were in, it was hard to know if we would ever see the boy again. We rushed up on deck. The air was foul, and the smell of the swampy harbor made me sick. The six troublemakers were sitting under a sail in the front of the ship, grumbling. On shore, we could see the boats tied up, with one man sitting in each near where the river entered the sea. One of them was whistling "Lillibullero."

Waiting was unbearable, so Hunter and I decided to go ashore in the jolly-boat to learn what was happening.

The two men guarding the boats noticed us and seemed unsure what to do. They stopped whistling and talked together for a moment. If they had gone to warn Silver, things might have turned out very differently. But instead, they stayed where they were and soon started whistling again.

I steered so that a bend in the shore hid us from their view. Once we landed, I hurried toward the stockade, as fast as I dared, with pistols ready and a handkerchief under my hat to keep cool.

In less than a hundred yards, I reached the stockade.

It was built around a spring of clear water on top of a small hill. A strong log house surrounded the spring, large enough to hold forty people and fitted with narrow openings for guns. Around it was a wide open space, and beyond that a tall wooden fence with no door. The place was almost impossible to attack. Anyone inside could stay protected and easily shoot anyone outside. With enough food and a good watch, it could hold off even a large army.

What impressed me most was the spring. We had food, weapons, and even wine on the Hispaniola—but we had no fresh water.

As I was thinking about this, a terrible scream echoed across the island. I had seen death before, but my heart still jumped. My first thought was, "Jim Hawkins is dead."

Being a doctor, I knew there was no time to hesitate. I ran back to the shore, jumped into the boat, and we rowed hard for the ship.

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Hunter was a strong rower, and soon I was back on board. Everyone looked shaken. The squire was pale and silent, blaming himself for everything. One of the sailors was close to fainting.

“That man is new to this sort of thing,” said Captain Smollett. “Another shock and he’ll be useless.”

I explained my plan to the captain, and we quickly agreed on what to do.

We placed old Redruth in the passage between the cabin and the front of the ship with loaded muskets and a mattress for cover. Then we loaded the jolly-boat with supplies: guns, ammunition, biscuits, pork, a barrel of brandy, and my medical chest.

While we worked, the captain warned the mutineers.

“Mr. Hands,” he said, “we are armed. If any of you make a signal, you are dead.”

The men were frightened and rushed below, thinking they could surprise us. But when they saw Redruth waiting with his guns, they retreated quickly.

“Down, dog!” shouted the captain when one man tried to look out.

The man disappeared, and we heard no more from them.

At last, the boat was as full as it could be. Joyce and I climbed in and rowed for shore again.

This time, the men on shore became alert. The whistling stopped, and one of them ran inland. I thought about destroying their boats, but I feared Silver might be nearby, and trying too much could ruin everything.

We soon landed again at the same place and began stocking the blockhouse. All three of us made the first trip, carrying heavy loads and throwing the supplies over the fence. Then we left Joyce to guard them. He was only one man, but he had several muskets. Hunter and I went back to the jolly-boat and loaded it again. We kept going without stopping until everything was brought over. Then the two servants stayed in the blockhouse, and I rowed back to the Hispaniola as fast as I could.

Taking a second load seemed risky, but it was not as dangerous as it looked. The pirates had more men, but we had better weapons. None of the men on shore had muskets, and we believed we could deal with at least half of them before they came close enough to use pistols.

The squire was waiting for me at the back window of the ship. He grabbed the rope and tied the boat fast, and we began loading again as if our lives depended on it. We took pork, gunpowder, and biscuits. Each of us had only one musket and a cutlass. The rest of the weapons and powder we threw overboard into shallow water, where we could see them shining on the sandy bottom.

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The tide was now going out, and the ship slowly turned on her anchor. We heard faint voices calling near the other boats. That told us Joyce and Hunter were safe, but it also warned us to leave quickly.

Redruth climbed down into the boat, and we moved it around for the captain.

“Now, men,” said the captain, “do you hear me?” There was no answer.

“It’s to you, Abraham Gray — it’s to you I’m speaking.” Still no reply.

“Gray,” said the captain louder, “I am leaving this ship, and I order you to follow your captain. I know you’re a good man at heart. I give you thirty seconds to join us.”

There was a pause.

“Come, my fine fellow,” he said. “Don’t wait so long. I’m risking my life and the lives of these gentlemen.”

Suddenly there was a fight, and Abraham Gray burst out with a cut on his face.

“I’m with you, sir,” said he.

At once he jumped into the boat with the captain, and we pushed off.

We were free from the ship, but still had to reach the stockade.

This trip was worse than the others. The boat was badly overloaded. Five grown men and heavy supplies made her ride low in the water. Several times water splashed in, and my clothes were soaked.

The captain made us shift our weight so the boat sat more evenly, but we were still afraid to move.

The tide was strong and pushed us westward. Even the small waves were dangerous. Worst of all, the current carried us away from the stockade and toward the pirates’ boats.

“I can’t steer her toward the stockade,” I said.

“Don’t pull harder or she’ll sink,” said the captain. “Point her upstream until the current weakens.”

“We’ll never reach shore like this,” I said.

“If it’s the only way, then we must,” he replied.

Soon Gray said, “The current’s weaker now, sir.”

“Thank you,” I said, treating him like one of us.

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Then the captain suddenly said, "The gun!"

"Look behind us," he said.

We saw the pirates uncovering the big cannon.

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

We turned the boat straight for shore. Now we were moving more steadily, but we had turned our side toward the ship and made an easy target.

I saw Israel Hands loading the cannon.

"Who's the best shot?" asked the captain.

"Mr. Trelawney," I said.

"Mr. Trelawney, will you shoot one of them? Hands if you can," said the captain.

Trelawney aimed carefully.

"Easy with the gun," said the captain. "Don't tip the boat."

Trelawney fired. Hands ducked, and the shot hit another pirate instead.

Cries came from the ship and the shore. More pirates ran toward the boats.

"Here come the gigs," I said.

"Row harder," said the captain. "If we don't reach land, we're done."

Only one boat followed us; the others ran along shore.

"The cannon is the real danger," said the captain.

We were close now, and the sand was visible under the trees.

"If I dared, I'd stop and shoot another," said the captain.

"Ready!" cried the squire.

"Hold!" shouted the captain.

He and Redruth leaned back hard, and the cannon fired at the same moment.

The boat sank gently in shallow water. The captain and I were standing, but the others fell into the sea, soaked and gasping.

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So far, no one had been killed, and we could wade safely to shore. But most of our supplies were lost underwater, and only two of our five guns still worked. I had saved mine by lifting it over my head. The captain had done the same, carrying his over his shoulder with the lock kept dry. The other three were lost with the boat.

Worse still, we heard voices coming closer through the trees. We might be cut off from the stockade, and we also worried about Hunter and Joyce. Hunter was steady, but Joyce was not a fighter by nature.

We hurried ashore, leaving behind the ruined jolly-boat and much of our powder and food.

We moved quickly through the trees toward the stockade. The pirates' voices grew louder, and we could hear branches snapping as they ran.

I checked my gun.

"Captain," I said, "Trelawney is the best shot. Give him your gun. His won't fire."

They exchanged weapons, and Trelawney calmly checked the gun.

Seeing that Gray had no weapon, I gave him my cutlass. He swung it once, ready for battle, and it was clear he was brave and reliable.

Soon we reached the edge of the woods and saw the stockade ahead. At the same moment, seven mutineers, led by Job Anderson, appeared running toward us.

They stopped in surprise. Before they could react, the squire, Hunter, Joyce, and I all fired. One pirate fell dead, and the others ran back into the trees.

We reloaded and went to look at the fallen man. He had been shot through the heart.

Just as we began to feel relieved, a pistol fired from the bushes. A bullet passed close to my ear, and poor Tom Redruth fell to the ground. The squire and I fired back, but we could see nothing.

We hurried to Tom. The captain and Gray were already with him, and I could tell at once that he was dying.

We carried him into the log-house. He had followed every order without complaint, and now the oldest man among us was the one to die.

The squire knelt beside him, crying.

"Be I going, doctor?" Tom asked.

"Tom," I said, "you're going home."

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"I wish I'd had one more shot at them," he said.

"Tom," said the squire, "say you forgive me."

"Would that be respectful, squire?" he replied. "Howsoever, amen."

After a moment, he said, "Someone should read a prayer. It's the custom."

Soon after, he died.

The captain unpacked many supplies: a British flag, a Bible, rope, writing tools, the logbook, and tobacco. He found a tall tree trunk and raised it at the corner of the log-house. Then he climbed onto the roof and raised the British flag.

This seemed to calm him. After Tom died, the captain placed another flag over his body.

"Don't blame yourself, sir," he told the squire. "He died doing his duty."

Then he asked me, "Dr. Livesey, when do you expect the rescue ship?"

I told him it could be months.

The captain shook his head. "We lost too many supplies. We may not have enough food."

Just then, a cannonball flew over the roof and crashed into the woods.

"Let them waste their powder," said the captain.

Another shot landed inside the stockade but did little damage.

"The cannon is aiming at the flag," said the squire. "Should we take it down?"

"Strike my colours?" said the captain. "Never."

All evening they fired at us. The shots flew over or sank into the sand. One even passed through the roof and floor, but we soon stopped worrying.

"The wood is clear now," said the captain. "Our supplies should be visible. Volunteers to retrieve them."

Gray and Hunter went, but it was useless. The pirates were already stealing our food. Silver was in command, and now they all had muskets.

The captain wrote in the logbook, listing those still loyal.

He wrote: "Thomas Redruth, shot by mutineers; James Hawkins —"

Just then, someone shouted from outside.

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“Doctor! Squire! Captain!”

I ran to the door and saw Jim Hawkins climbing over the stockade, safe and sound.

As soon as Ben Gunn saw the flag, he stopped short, grabbed my arm, and sat down.

“Now,” he said, “there’s your friends, for sure.”

“More likely it’s the mutineers,” I said.

“That!” he cried. “No fear. In a place like this, Silver would fly the pirate flag. That’s your friends. There’s been fighting too, and I reckon your friends won. They’re in the old stockade Flint built years ago. Flint was a clever man—except for rum. Only Silver could match him.”

“Well,” I said, “that may be so. All the more reason for me to hurry and join them.”

“No, mate,” said Ben. “You’re only a boy. Ben Gunn is clever. I won’t go near that place until I hear from your born gentleman, on his word of honor.” He pinched me again. “You’ll say, ‘A precious sight—more confidence,’ and then nip him.”

“And when Ben Gunn is wanted, you know where to find him. Just where you found me today. The man who comes must carry something white and come alone. And you’ll say, ‘Ben Gunn has reasons of his own.’”

“So you want to see the squire or the doctor,” I said, “and I should send them to you?”

“And when?” he asked.

“Between noon and six bells,” I said.

“Good,” he replied. “And Jim—if you see Silver, you won’t betray me?”

“No,” I said.

“If the pirates camp ashore, you’ll say there’ll be widows in the morning?”

Just then a cannonball crashed through the trees and landed near us. We both ran in opposite directions.

For an hour the island shook with cannon fire. I hid and moved carefully through the woods. At last the firing stopped, and I crept toward the shore.

The sun had set. The Hispaniola was still there—but now the black pirate flag flew from her mast. One final cannon shot echoed through the trees.

Men were chopping up the jolly-boat near the stockade. A fire burned near the river, and one of the boats moved back and forth. The men were shouting and laughing—clearly drunk.

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I finally made my way back to the stockade and was welcomed by my friends.

The log-house was built of rough pine logs. The floor stood above the sand, and under the porch a spring flowed into a large iron kettle sunk into the ground. The place was drafty, smoky, and full of sand. Gray had his face bandaged, and poor old Tom Redruth lay dead under the British flag.

Captain Smollett kept us busy. Watches were set, firewood gathered, and a grave dug. I was posted as sentry.

The doctor came out often.

“That man Smollett is better than I am,” he said once.

Later he asked, “Is Ben Gunn sane?”

“I’m not sure,” I said.

“A man alone for three years wouldn’t be,” he said. “Did you say he wanted cheese?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, that’s good. I carry Parmesan in my snuff box. That’s for Ben Gunn.”

We buried Tom and stood bareheaded. Then the leaders talked. Our food was low, and we might starve before rescue. Our hope was that the pirates would drink themselves sick or be weakened by the climate.

“They’ll be glad to leave soon,” said the doctor.

“I lost my first ship,” said Captain Smollett.

I fell asleep at last, exhausted.

In the morning I was woken by shouting.

“Flag of truce!” someone cried. “Silver himself!”

Two men stood outside the stockade. One waved a white cloth. The other was Silver.

“Keep inside,” said the captain. “This may be a trick.”

“Who goes?” he called.

“Flag of truce!” shouted Silver.

“What do you want?”

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“Cap’n Silver wants to make terms.”

“Cap’n Silver? Don’t know him.”

Silver answered, “Me, sir. The men chose me captain after your desertion. We want to submit—if we can agree. Just promise I can leave safely.”

“If you want to talk, come in,” said the captain.

Silver climbed over the fence and approached.

“You’d better sit down,” said the captain.

“You won’t let me inside?” said Silver.

“You’re either my cook or a pirate,” said the captain. “And pirates can hang.”

“Well, cap’n,” said Silver, sitting down, “you’ll have to help me up later.”

“If you have something to say, say it,” said the captain.

“We want the treasure,” said Silver. “You want to live. You have the map.”

“That may be,” said the captain.

“We want your chart,” said Silver. “Give it to us, and we’ll spare your lives.”

“That won’t do,” said the captain. “We know what you meant to do.”

Silver offered a deal: give them the map, and they would either take us aboard and leave us safely or share supplies and send rescue.

“Refuse,” said Silver, “and you’ll see only musket balls.”

“Very good,” said the captain. “Here’s my offer. Come unarmed, and I’ll take you home for trial. Otherwise, I’ll fight you to the end. You can’t sail the ship. You can’t beat us.”

Silver grew furious.

“Before an hour’s out, I’ll smash your house,” he shouted. Then he left.

The captain was angry with us for leaving our posts, but soon set us in order. Muskets were placed at each wall, and positions assigned.

An hour passed.

“Hang them,” said the captain. “Gray, whistle for wind.”

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Just then Joyce fired.

A volley answered from the woods. Bullets hit the walls but none entered.

“How many on your side?” asked the captain.

“Three,” said the doctor.

The main attack came from the north.

Suddenly pirates rushed from the trees and swarmed over the fence. Shots rang out. Three pirates fell. Four made it inside.

One knocked Hunter senseless. Another attacked the doctor. Smoke filled the house.

“Out, lads!” cried the captain. “Cutlasses!”

I ran outside and saw the doctor strike down his attacker. I ran around the house and faced Anderson. I dodged his blow and fell down the slope.

In seconds the fight was over. Gray killed Anderson. Another pirate was shot. The last escaped.

We ran back inside. Joyce was dead. Hunter was stunned. The squire supported the wounded captain.

“The captain’s hurt,” said the squire.

“Five of them are dead,” said the doctor.

“Five against three,” said the captain. “That leaves us four to nine. Better odds than before.”