

SECTION 5.

Edited by Amelia Krpata and Taylor Young

The island looked completely different when I came on deck the next morning. Although the breeze had stopped, we had drifted a long way during the night and were now resting about half a mile southeast of the island's low eastern shore. Gray woods covered most of the land. This dull color was broken only by streaks of yellow sand in the lower areas and by tall pine trees that rose above the others, some standing alone and some in groups. The overall look of the island was gloomy. The hills rose sharply above the trees in bare, rocky spires. The tallest of all was the Spy-glass hill, rising three or four hundred feet and shaped like a tall tower, steep on every side and flat at the top, like a pedestal for a statue.

The HISPANIOLA was rocking hard in the ocean swell. The booms banged against the blocks, the rudder crashed back and forth, and the whole ship creaked and groaned like a noisy factory. I had to hold tightly to the rigging, and the world spun before my eyes. I was usually a good sailor when the ship was moving, but being stuck in one place and tossed around like a bottle made me sick—especially in the morning, on an empty stomach.

Maybe it was that feeling, or maybe it was the sight of the island—with its gray woods, strange rock towers, and the loud surf crashing on the steep shore—but even though the sun was shining and birds were crying all around us, my heart sank. Anyone should have been glad to reach land after so long at sea, yet from the very first glance, I felt dread. I hated the very thought of Treasure Island.

We had a miserable morning ahead, since there was no wind. The boats had to be lowered and manned, and the ship had to be pulled by ropes around the corner of the island and through a narrow passage to the harbor behind Skeleton Island.

I volunteered for one of the boats, though I had no right to. The heat was unbearable, and the men complained loudly. Anderson was in charge of my boat, but instead of keeping order, he complained as much as anyone.

"Well," he said with a curse, "it's not forever."

This worried me. Until now, the men had worked willingly, but the sight of the island had loosened their discipline.

All the way in, Long John Silver stood near the steersman and guided the ship. He knew the channel perfectly. Even when the sailor in the chains found more water than the chart showed, Silver never hesitated.

"There's a strong current here," he said, "and this passage has been worn deep over time."

We anchored exactly where the chart showed, between the mainland and Skeleton Island. The seabed was clean sand. When the anchor hit, birds flew up in clouds, crying loudly, but soon everything grew quiet again.

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The harbor was completely enclosed by land, hidden in thick woods. Trees grew right to the water's edge, and low shores surrounded us. Hills rose around us like the seats of an amphitheater. Two small rivers—or rather, two swampy streams—flowed into this still water. The plants near them had a bright but unhealthy look. We could not see the stockade or house because they were hidden by trees. Without the chart, we might have believed we were the first people ever to anchor there.

There was no breeze and no sound except the distant surf. A damp, rotting smell filled the air. The doctor kept sniffing.

"I don't know about treasure," he said, "but I'd bet there's fever here."

The men's behavior grew worse once they were back aboard. They lay around the deck muttering angrily. Every order was met with dark looks and lazy obedience. Even the honest men were affected. No one corrected another.

Mutiny hung over us like a storm cloud.

Long John worked hard to calm the crew, moving from group to group with friendly words. He was cheerful and helpful, smiling at everyone. If an order was given, he hurried to obey with a loud "Aye, aye, sir!" and when nothing else was happening, he sang to hide the growing anger of the men.

This worried me most of all. We held a meeting in the cabin.

"Sir," said the captain, "if I give another order, the ship will explode into violence. If I argue, we'll be stabbed. If I don't, Silver will know something's wrong. We only have one man we can rely on."

"And who is that?" asked the squire.

"Silver," said the captain. "He wants to keep things calm. Let's give him the chance. We'll allow the men to go ashore for the afternoon. If they all go, we defend the ship. If none go, we defend the cabin. If some go, Silver will bring them back peaceful."

It was agreed. Pistols were given to the loyal men, and Hunter, Joyce, and Redruth were warned. Then the captain spoke to the crew.

"My lads," he said, "we've had a hard day. You may go ashore if you wish. I'll fire a gun before sunset."

The men cheered wildly, as if they expected to find treasure at once.

Silver organized the group. Six men stayed aboard, and thirteen—including Silver—went into the boats.

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That was when I had my foolish idea. I slipped into the nearest boat and hid. No one noticed except one man who whispered, "Keep your head down."

Silver saw me and called out, and I began to regret my choice.

The boats raced for the shore. Mine reached first. I jumped out, grabbed a branch, and ran into the woods.

"Jim! Jim!" Silver shouted.

I ran until I could run no more.

Finally, I was so happy to have escaped from Long John that I began to enjoy myself and look around with interest at the strange land I had reached. I had crossed a wet, marshy area filled with willows, tall reeds, and odd swamp trees. Now I stood at the edge of an open stretch of rolling sandy ground about a mile long. It was dotted with a few pine trees and many twisted, pale-leaved trees shaped like oaks but lighter in color, more like willows. On the far side of this open land rose one of the hills, with two sharp, rocky peaks shining brightly in the sun.

For the first time, I felt the real excitement of exploring.

The island was empty. I had left my shipmates behind, and there was nothing in front of me but animals and birds. I wandered among the trees. Here and there I saw strange flowering plants I had never seen before. I also saw snakes. One lifted its head from a rock and hissed at me with a buzzing sound like a spinning top. I did not know then that it was a deadly snake and that the sound was its famous rattle.

Soon I reached a long thicket of these oak-like trees. They were live oaks, or evergreen oaks, as I later learned. They grew low and thick along the sand like tangled bushes. Their branches twisted strangely, and their leaves were packed together like a roof of thatch. The thicket stretched down from the top of a sandy hill, growing taller as it went, until it reached the edge of a wide, reedy marsh. Through this marsh a small river slowly flowed into the bay. The marsh steamed in the hot sun, and the outline of the Spy-glass hill seemed to shake in the hazy air.

All at once, the bulrushes began to move. A wild duck flew up with a loud quack, then another followed. Soon, a huge cloud of birds rose from the marsh, screaming and circling in the sky. I guessed at once that some of my shipmates must be nearby along the edge of the marsh. I was right, for soon I heard the distant sound of a human voice, low at first, then slowly growing louder.

This frightened me greatly. I crawled under the nearest live oak and crouched there, listening as quietly as a mouse.

Another voice answered, and then the first voice, which I now recognized as Silver's, began talking again. He spoke for a long time, only stopping now and then while the other man replied.

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From the sound of it, they were speaking seriously and almost angrily, though I could not hear the words clearly.

At last they seemed to stop moving and perhaps sat down. They did not come any closer, and the birds slowly settled back into the swamp.

I suddenly felt ashamed that I was wasting time. Since I had foolishly come ashore with these dangerous men, the least I could do was listen to what they were planning. It was clearly my duty to creep closer under the cover of the trees. I could tell where they were not only by their voices but also by the few birds still flying nervously above them.

Crawling on my hands and knees, I slowly moved toward them. At last, I raised my head through a gap in the leaves and saw a small green hollow beside the marsh, surrounded by trees. There stood Long John Silver and another sailor, facing each other.

The sun shone directly on them. Silver had thrown his hat on the ground. His large, smooth, pale face was shining with sweat, and he looked up at the other man as if begging him to listen.

"Mate," he was saying, "it's because I think so highly of you—worth your weight in gold, you are! If I didn't care for you, do you think I'd be here warning you? It's all over—you can't change what's coming. I'm speaking to save your life. If the others knew, where would I be, Tom? Now tell me, where would I be?"

"Silver," said the other man. His face was red, his voice rough and shaking like a tight rope. "You're old, and you're known to be honest. You've got money, and you're brave too, I believe. And you expect me to follow a gang like this? Never! I'd rather lose my hand. If I turn against my duty—"

Suddenly, he was cut off by a terrible sound. Far out in the marsh, there came a cry of rage, then another, and then one long, horrible scream. The rocks of the Spy-glass echoed it again and again. All the birds flew up at once, darkening the sky. Long after the scream faded, silence returned, broken only by the birds settling back and the distant sound of waves.

Tom jumped at the sound, but Silver did not move. He stood there, leaning lightly on his crutch, watching Tom like a snake ready to strike.

"John!" cried the sailor, reaching out his hand.

"Hands off!" Silver shouted, leaping back with surprising speed.

"Hands off if you like," said Tom. "Only a guilty man fears me. But tell me—what was that?"

"That?" said Silver with a cautious smile, his sharp eye shining. "Oh, that'll be Alan."

"Alan!" cried Tom. "Then may he rest in peace! As for you, John Silver, you are no mate of mine. If I die, I'll die doing my duty. You killed Alan—kill me too if you can. I defy you!"

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With that, he turned his back on Silver and walked toward the beach. But he did not get far. Silver grabbed a tree branch, swung his crutch, and threw it with terrible force. It struck Tom squarely between the shoulders. Tom gasped, threw up his hands, and fell.

Whether he was badly hurt or not, no one could tell. But Silver was on him in a moment, stabbing him twice with his knife. I heard him breathing hard as he struck.

I do not know exactly what it means to faint, but the world spun around me in a blur—Silver, the birds, and the hill turning over and over.

When I came to myself, Silver had put his hat back on and cleaned his knife. Tom lay motionless. The sun still burned over the marsh as if nothing had happened.

Silver then blew a signal on his whistle. Fear filled me. Others were coming.

They had killed two already—might I be next?

I crawled away and then ran, faster than I ever had before, until fear drove me like madness.

I was lost. I could never return to the ship. There was nothing left but death by hunger or by the mutineers.

Still running, I reached the foot of the hill with the two peaks, where the trees grew wider apart and the air smelled fresher.

And here a new fear stopped me cold.

From the side of the hill, which was steep and rocky here, a small slide of gravel broke loose and went rattling and bouncing through the trees. I turned my eyes toward the sound and saw a figure leap quickly behind the trunk of a pine. I could not tell what it was—bear, man, or monkey. It looked dark and shaggy, and that was all I could make out. But the fear of this strange creature froze me where I stood.

It seemed I was trapped on both sides: behind me were the murderers, and in front of me was this unknown being. At once I began to prefer the danger I knew to the danger I did not. Silver himself now felt less frightening than this wild figure. I turned around, glancing sharply over my shoulder, and began to head back toward the boats.

At once the figure appeared again and made a wide circle, cutting me off. I was already tired, but even if I had been fresh, I could see I had no chance to outrun such a creature. It moved from tree to tree like a deer, running on two legs but in a way no man I had ever seen would run, bent almost double. Still, I could no longer doubt that it was a man.

I remembered stories I had heard of cannibals and was almost ready to cry for help. But knowing he was a man, even a wild one, made me feel a little calmer, and my fear of Silver returned just as strongly. I stopped and tried to think of a way to escape. Then I remembered my

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pistol. As soon as I knew I was not helpless, courage filled me again. I turned toward the island man and walked straight at him.

He was hidden behind another tree, but he must have been watching me closely. As soon as I moved toward him, he stepped out. He hesitated, stepped back, then forward again, and finally—to my surprise—fell to his knees and held out his hands as if begging.

I stopped once more. "Who are you?" I asked.

"Ben Gunn," he answered. His voice was rough and rusty, like an old lock. "I'm poor Ben Gunn, and I haven't spoken to a Christian in three years."

I could now see he was a white man like myself, and his face was even pleasant. His skin was burned dark by the sun, and even his lips were black, while his pale eyes looked almost shocking in his face. He was the most ragged beggar I had ever seen. His clothes were made from torn ship's canvas and old sailcloth, all fastened together with buttons, sticks, and bits of rope. Around his waist he wore an old leather belt with a brass buckle—the only solid thing he had.

"Three years!" I cried. "Were you shipwrecked?"

"No, mate," he said. "Marooned."

I knew the word meant being abandoned on an island with little food or weapons.

"Marooned three years ago," he continued, "living on goats, berries, and oysters. A man can survive anywhere, I say—but my heart longs for Christian food. You wouldn't happen to have a bit of cheese, would you? No? Many a night I've dreamed of toasted cheese and woke up to this."

"If I ever get back aboard," I said, "you shall have cheese by the pound."

All this time he had been touching my jacket, my hands, my boots, showing a childish joy at seeing another person. But at my last words he suddenly grew sly.

"If ever you get aboard again?" he repeated. "Why, who's to stop you?"

"Not you," I said.

"And right you are," he cried. "What's your name, mate?"

"Jim," I told him.

"Jim, Jim," he said happily. "Now, Jim, I've lived rough. You wouldn't think I had a pious mother, would you?"

"Not particularly," I said.

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"But I did," he replied. "And I was a good boy once. But it all went wrong. Still, Providence put me here, and I'm back on piety now. And, Jim—" he whispered—"I'm rich."

I thought he had gone mad, but he insisted.

"Rich! And I'll make a man of you, Jim. You'll bless the day you found me!"

Suddenly his face darkened. He grabbed my wrist and pointed a finger.

"That ain't Flint's ship, is it?"

"No," I said. "But some of Flint's men are aboard."

"Silver?" he gasped.

"He's the cook—and the leader."

He squeezed my wrist. "If you were sent by him, I'd be dead already."

I told him our whole story. When I finished, he patted my head.

"You're a good lad, Jim. Now, would your squire be generous for help—say, a thousand pounds?"

"I'm sure he would," I said.

"And a passage home?"

"Yes."

He looked relieved.

Then he told me he had been with Flint when the treasure was buried. Flint returned alone; the six others were dead.

Three years later, another crew marooned him here to find the treasure.

Now he had survived alone for three years.

He told me to repeat his words carefully to the squire.

At last he said, "I have a boat hidden. If need be, we can use it tonight."

Just then, the island thundered with the sound of a cannon.

"They've begun to fight!" I cried.

We ran toward the anchorage, and Ben Gunn ran lightly beside me.

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A volley of guns followed. Then, ahead, I saw the Union Jack flying over the trees.