

Part I: The Old Buccaneer

Chapter I

The Old Sea Dog at the Admiral Benbow

Many people have asked me to write down the whole story of Treasure Island, from the beginning to the end. But I'll keep the location of the island a secret, because there is still some treasure buried there. I'll start my tale back when my father was running an inn called the Admiral Benbow. That was when I first met the old weathered seaman who was staying at our inn.

I remember him as if it were yesterday. He trudged up to the inn door, with his sea chest being carted behind him in a wheelbarrow. He was a large, strong, nut-brown man. He wore his pitch-black hair in a ponytail that fell over the shoulder of his dirty blue coat. His hands were wrinkled and scarred, with black, broken nails. The sickly white scar across his cheek came from the blow of a cutlass, most likely. I remember him whistling to himself. Then he started singing that old familiar sea song in his high, crackling



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The captain arrives at the Admiral Benbow Inn

voice:

*“Fifteen men on the dead man’s chest—
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!”*

He knocked hard on the inn door with a stick he carried. My father answered the knock, and the old seaman demanded a glass of rum. I brought him a glass, and he drank slowly. He peered around at the cliffs and up at our sign.

After a time, said he “This is a handy cove. You get much company here, mate?”

“Sadly, no,” my father told him.

“Well, then,” said he, “this is the place for me. I’ll need help bringing up my chest,” he cried to the man pushing the wheelbarrow. “I’m a simple man,” he continued. “I’ll be staying here. All I want otherwise is rum and bacon and eggs. I’ll sit up on that cliff and watch for ships. And you can call me captain.” He threw down three or four gold pieces at my father’s feet. “You can tell me when you’ll need more,” said he sternly.

No matter how dirty his clothes or how rough he spoke, the captain still seemed like a man used to being obeyed. The man pushing the wheelbarrow told us the captain had arrived on a ship called the Royal George. The captain had asked around about inns. He was told ours had a good reputation and was mostly deserted, so he chose to stay with us. That was all we could learn of this mysterious



man.

He was usually very silent. He would walk around the cove or on the cliffs all day, looking through a brass telescope. All evening he sat in a corner of the parlor next to the fire and drank rum and water. He would not speak when spoken to. He would simply look up with an angry expression and blow through his nose like a foghorn. We soon learned to let him be.

Every day when he came back from his walk, the captain would ask if any sailors had gone by along the road. At first we thought he was looking for men like himself to socialize with. Then we realized he only wished to avoid any other seamen. He was always sure to be as silent as a mouse when another seaman was present. One day he offered to pay me if I would let him know the moment a seafaring man with one leg appeared.

This one-legged man began to haunt my dreams. On stormy nights, when the wind shook the house and the surf roared, I would see him in my nightmares. Sometimes his leg would be cut off at the knee, other times at the hip. Sometimes he was a monster who had only one leg in the middle of his body. He chased me tirelessly through my dreams. The money I earned looking out for him was not worth the suffering it caused me.

I was absolutely terrified by the idea of the seafaring man with one leg. But I was far less afraid of the captain himself than anybody else around him. There were nights

when he drank far too much rum and water. On these nights, he would force his terrified audience to listen to his stories. Or he would make them join in on the chorus to his wild sea songs. Many nights I heard the house shaking with “Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum.” All the neighbors would join, fearing for their lives if they didn’t sing loud enough. He would glare around at his companions and then slap his hand on the table to silence everyone. He would fly into a fit of rage if anyone interrupted his stories. The same was true if he felt the group wasn’t listening to him. No one dared leave the inn until he stumbled off drunkenly to bed.

His stories were what frightened people worst of all. There were dreadful stories about men being hanged. Stories about men forced to walk the plank. Tales of storms at sea, and the strange and exotic places he’s been. According to his stories, he had lived among some of the cruelest men that ever sailed the sea. The rough language in which he told these stories shocked the local people. The horrible crimes that he described struck fear into everyone. My father was worried the inn would go out of business, but I disagreed. Not much happened in our small town. People were frightened at the time by his stories, it’s true. But when I think back on it now, I believe they really liked it. There was even a group of younger men who pretended to admire him. They called him a “true sea dog” and a “real old salt.” They proclaimed the captain to be just the sort of man that made the world fear the English navy.



He stayed with us week after week, month after month, until his money ran out. But my father never found the courage to insist on asking him for more. If my father ever mentioned it, the captain blew through his nose like a roar. He then stared down my poor father until my father left the room. I'm sure the stress the captain caused him led to my father's early and unhappy death.

The captain never changed his clothes. Even as his hat began falling apart, he continued to wear it. He patched his coat himself upstairs in his room, and in the end, it was nothing but patches. He never wrote or received a letter. He rarely spoke to anyone unless he was drunk on rum. We never saw him open the giant sea chest he'd brought with him.

He was only confronted once, and that was towards the end of my father's life. Dr. Livesey came late one afternoon to check up on my father and have dinner. After dinner he went into the parlor to smoke a pipe. He was waiting for his horse to be brought around from the stables up the road. The captain sat in the parlor as well, drinking his rum. The doctor seemed so neat and shiny compared to that filthy pirate of ours. Suddenly the captain started singing violently:

*"Fifteen men on the dead man's chest—
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!
Drink and the devil had done for the rest—
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!"*



Dr. Livesey gets annoyed



At first I had assumed “the dead man’s chest” was that big box of his upstairs in the front room. That thought was mixed up in my nightmares with the thought of the one-legged seafaring man. By this time we had all stopped paying attention to the song. But Dr. Livesey had never heard it, and I could tell he didn’t like it. He was talking with a local gardener, and he looked up angrily when the singing started. In the meantime, the captain’s singing reached a crescendo. He stopped singing and slammed his hand on the table. We all knew this meant the captain wanted silence. Everyone stopped talking—all but Dr. Livesey. He went on talking to the gardener and smoking his pipe. The captain glared at him for a while then waved his hand in the air in disgust. Finally, the captain growled, “Silence, there, you!”

“Were you talking to me, sir?” asked the doctor. The captain, swearing, replied that indeed he was.

“I have only one thing to say to you, sir,” replies the doctor. “If you keep on drinking rum like that, we’ll have one less dirty scoundrel in the world!”

The captain’s fury was awful. He sprang to his feet, pulled out a knife, and threatened to pin the doctor to the wall with it.

The doctor never moved. He spoke to the captain in the same rude tone of voice as before. “If you don’t put away that knife immediately, I promise I’ll have you hanged.”

*The captain pulls out his knife*