CHAPTER 1

The Old Sea Dog at The Admiral Benbow

Squire Trelawney, Dr. Livesey, and some other gentlemen have asked me to tell the entire story of Treasure Island. I will keep nothing back except for the location of the island, for treasure still remains there. I, Jim Hawkins, am writing of these events in the year 17__. I will start by going back to the time when my father kept the Admiral Benbow Inn on the English coast and an old scarred seaman first came to lodge with us.

I remember him as if it were yesterday. He plodded to our door, a tall, strong, heavy, tanned man in a stained blue coat, pulling his sea chest behind him on a cart. His hair was pigtailed and tarred sailor-fashion, and his hands were scarred with black, broken nails. The white sword-scar on his cheek stood out clearly. He looked inside, whistling to himself. Then, in an odd high voice,

he broke out into a sea-song we would soon know well:

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

He rapped at our door. When my father appeared, the man called roughly for a glass of rum. It was brought. He drank slowly, savoring it while he looked around at the cliffs and at our signboard.

"This is a nice place for a grog-shop," said he after a time. "Do you get many visitors, mate?"

My father told him no, unfortunately, we got very few.

"Perfect," said he. "I'll stay here a bit. I'm a plain man who wants only rum, bacon, eggs and a high cliff to watch ships sail." My father hesitated, nervous to ask the normal questions. "And what might you call me, mate? 'Captain' will do. Oh, I see what you're waiting for—there!" and he threw down several gold pieces. "When I've spent those, tell me," he ordered fiercely.

In spite of his rough speech and his clothing, he didn't seem like a common sailor. Indeed, he seemed much more like a captain who was used to having his orders obeyed. We learned only a little: the morning before, the mail-coach had let him off at the Royal George. He had asked there about inns along the coast. Perhaps ours had been recommended, or described as lonely. For whatever reason, the seaman had chosen it from all the others.

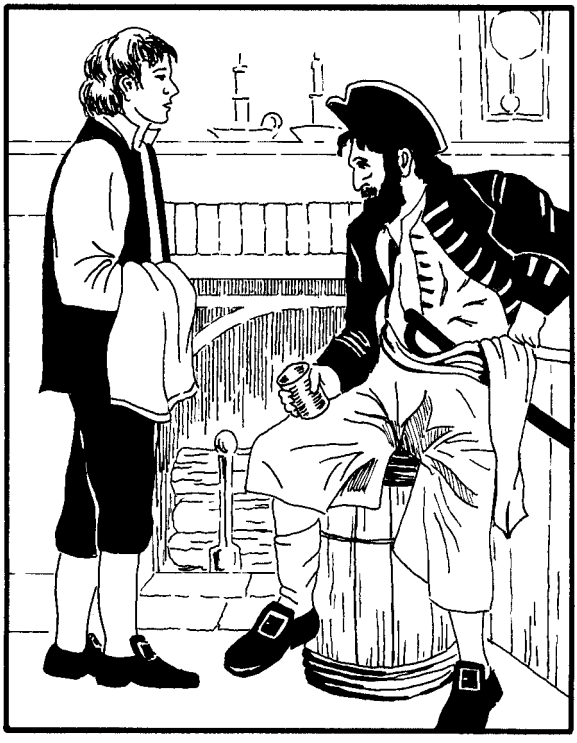
He would say no more.

He spent his days hanging around the cove or on the cliffs with a brass telescope; in the evening he sat in a corner near the fire, drinking strong rum with a little water. If spoken to, he rarely answered except with a sudden, fierce look; then he would sort of growl through his nose like a foghorn. We, and our guests, learned to leave him alone.

Every day when he returned from his walk, he would ask if any other seafaring men had passed by. At first we thought he was looking for companionship, but soon we realized that he asked because he wished to avoid them. When another seaman stopped to lodge at the Admiral Benbow, the captain would carefully look him over through the curtains before coming into the parlor. Until the new sailor left, our man was quiet as a mouse.

One day he took me aside and promised me four silver pennies per month if I would keep a watch: should a one-legged sailor appear, I was to alert him right away. On the first of each month I asked him for my wages, and often he would simply give me a nose-growl and stare me down; but before the week was over, he always had second thoughts. He would pay me, then repeat his orders to look out for "the seafaring man with one leg."

The one-legged sailor haunted my dreams. On stormy nights, when the wind shook our house and the surf roared into the cove, I saw him in a thousand forms with a thousand evil expressions.



Sometimes his leg was cut off at the knee or hip; sometimes he was a sort of monstrous one-legged creature. The worst of the nightmares had him chasing me over hedges and ditches. In all, I paid a pretty high price for my monthly four pennies.

I was so terrified of my dreams of the one-legged sailor that the captain did not seem as frightening to me as he did to my parents and our

customers. Some nights he drank too much rum, and would sit and sing his wicked, wild old sea-songs, ignoring everybody. But sometimes when drunk, he would call for rum for everyone present, and force them to gather around, either to sing with him or listen to his stories. Many a time did I hear the house shake with "Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum," everyone joining in for dear life, trying to out-sing one another so as not to displease him. He was domineering and unpredictable. He would slap his hand on the table to demand silence; sometimes he would become angry at a question—at other times he would become angry because no questions were asked, assuming this to mean the group was not listening carefully to him. He would allow no one to go home until he had drunk himself sleepy and staggered off to bed.

His stories were what frightened people the most. He told dreadful tales of hangings, and walking the plank, and storms at sea, and the wild deeds and places in the pirate-infested Caribbean islands. If they were true, he had lived among the wickedest men in the history of the sea. His profanity shocked our guests' plain country ears, and my father felt that he would ruin us. Surely people would tire of coming here to be terrorized and sworn at. But I believe he was actually good for business. His frightening conduct was a fine bit of excitement in the quiet country life. Some of the younger men even pretended to admire him,

calling him a "true sea dog" and a "real old salt," and saying he was the sort of man that made England a great sea-power.

In one way, at least, he did us serious financial harm. He stayed for months and months. The money he had paid when he arrived ran out, and my father never dared demand more. If he hinted at it, the captain gave a nose-growl so loud it was like a roar, staring my poor father out of the room. The annoyance and terror of those days surely hastened my father's early death.

The captain never changed his clothes all the time he lived with us. His cocked hat began to sag and lose shape, and he just let it hang. His coat developed holes, which he patched until it was mostly patches. He neither wrote nor received letters, and spoke only when drunk or demanding drink. None of us had ever seen him open the sea chest.

Only once did anyone cross him, near the end of my father's long illness. Dr. Livesey came in to see his patient, and accepted a bit of dinner afterward from my mother. He then went into the parlor to smoke a pipe until his horse was brought. I followed him in and was struck by the contrast: on the one hand was the neat, bright doctor, hair fashionably powdered white as snow, with dark eyes and pleasant manners; on the other was the filthy, heavy, bleary scarecrow of a drunken pirate captain, surrounded by simple country folk. The captain began to sing his usual song:

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

At first I had supposed "the dead man's chest" to be his big sea chest upstairs. It had been in many of my nightmares. But by now we were all used to the song—except for Dr. Livesey, who was talking with old Taylor, the gardener, about a new cure for his stiff joints. The doctor looked up angrily, then calmly continued his discussion. The captain, unused to being ignored, slapped the table in his customary demand for silence. He got it from everyone but Dr. Livesey, who kept speaking in a clear, kind voice in between draws on his pipe. The captain glared at him for a while, slapped the table again, glared even harder, and then swore and cried out in fury: "Silence there, between decks!"

"Were you addressing me, sir?" said the doctor.

"I was, blast you!" answered the ruffian.

The doctor replied in a professional tone, "I have only one thing to say to you, sir. If you keep on drinking rum, the world will soon be rid of a filthy scoundrel!"

The old fellow's fury was awful. He sprang to his feet, then drew and opened a sailor's pocketknife. "Silence, I say, or I'll pin you to the wall!" he bellowed.

The doctor stood his ground and spoke as calmly as before, so that the whole room might

hear: “If you do not put that knife away this instant, I promise upon my honor that you shall hang next time court is in session.”

They stared at each other for a bit, but the captain soon lost the battle of wills. He put up his weapon and sat down, grumbling like a beaten dog.

“And now, sir,” continued the doctor, “take heed. I am a magistrate of this district as well as a doctor, and my job is to enforce the peace. I will have you watched day and night, and if I hear a single complaint about you for any reason—if you are even rude to anyone again—you will be hunted down and thrown out of town. Be warned.”

Soon Dr. Livesey’s horse was brought and he rode away, but the captain kept silent that evening, and for many evenings to come.