

The Longfellow Adventures
PIRATES OF THE SOUTH SEAS

Book 1:

Telescope Jim

By: J. S. Lome

With a Sneak Preview of
Telescope and the Terodactyl

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First ebook edition 2019

Pirates of the South Seas

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Telescope Jim

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Monsters of the South Seas

Book 1
Telescope and the Terodactyl

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CHAPTER 1

THE STICKER AND THE GAME

ONE DAY I’LL TELL A STORY ABOUT PAINTING YOUR NAILS and barbies and stuff — you know, with teapots and gossip and all that. But as for now, I’m telling a story about sea-ruffians or pirates to the common man, so there won’t be any nail-painting or excited blabber here. Not unless its fingernails painted in traitor’s guts, and blabber about treasure and battle, which is just the kind of story I would have liked when I was a boy. And it’s just the kind of thing that happened to me when I was a young man overseas, when I met a person called Jim.

Longfellow Jim, as some called him because of his enormous height, was traipsing around my seaport when I was at the age of sixteen. I had dropped out of school a year earlier and had been shipped off to the South Seas in punishment of my bad behavior.

My place in the world, where I was allowed to exist, was in the service of the kitchen, as a dishwasher. I was responsible for the slop that was fed to you from this half-rate restaurant — me and this chef person and this other chef person called the Sous.

Under the strange and awkward pretense of washing dishes, I was paid to listen to these two chefs prattle and yell, and in good truth save the kitchen from utter ruin.

But, after the kitchen was closed, the two chefs became perfect gentlemen and wandered the streets in complete cheerfulness. And on this particular day when Jim appeared, not even the biting wind that cut across the streets could disturb their good humor.

I went with them, and as we passed building after building, the chefs walked and gawked and cursed and yelled according to their varying moods, until we reached our usual pub called the Orderly Way.

When I entered, a hand slapped me on the back.

“Go’n in?” asked a voice. I turned to see who had struck me and found a burly man holding the door open for me.

He was unusually tall and broad and nearly knocked me over. One of his apish arms, which had slapped me on the back, presented the doorway to

me and I went in. But as I took my regular seat, I watched the man's brown, bushy beard and blue eyes float around the room until they ended up at the poker table behind me.

As the night continued, I was continually interrupted by the Burly Man's booming voice.

"Now there's a good hand!" he laughed. "Pocket threes! Who would have thought!" He jabbed his opponents with his elbow. "See, I knew that fella was bluffing!"

The Burly Man remarked on the unusual amount of good hands he was getting, then apologized for winning, then left for the bathroom, rummaging his large weight beneath his jackets. As he returned, the ground shook and he continued to make a humble ruckus about being the leader.

"Chip leader? Are you sure?" he said with surprise. "Must be my lucky night!"

The faces around the poker-table grew grimmer and the Burly Man's chip-pile grew larger. Finally, all the chips ended up beneath the Burly Man's wooly beard and arms. When he stood to leave, one of the players shouted 'cheat' and in a moment the room was turned upside down.

The Burly Man leapt over the table to scare the man who had said it. And several men who had been waiting to take the Burly Man's money leapt from the shadows. Next, there was a great yell, and someone screamed "men are killing one another in here!"

Suddenly, more men who hadn't been seen in weeks appeared from windows and back alleys to join in the excitement. They jumped from stools, from staircases, from chandeliers, and rooftops — from every shadowy corner in the place. In short, the evil spirit that had been working over the place was finally realized in the uproar.

And from within the massive crowd which formed, the Burly Man's head popped out between flailing arms with an excited, cheerful grin as if he was enjoying an especially delightful ride at the theme park. His giddy face rode the waves of arms to the right, to the left, and finally, he disappeared into the crowd and reappeared outside of it, yelling insults at the 'filthy cheat.'

"Kick him in the neck!" he cried in varying tones of savagery, "I say we skin the cheat alive!"

Until everyone looked around and realized *he* was the one yelling and had done such a good job pretending to be one of his own attackers that they had lost him for a good twenty seconds.

The joke enraged the other men and they leapt at him again, but this time, the shrill voice of a barmaid rang out and brought everything to a halt as if sudden death had fallen upon the room.

“Now *what* is going on?!” hissed the barmaid as if just realizing some thirty men were trying to kill one another.

The accusation of cheat came out and the Burly Man told the accuser he was a dirty liar who had funny-looking eyebrows. There was another small squabble about the eyebrows, but finally the Burly Man had to leave.

“Keep your darned money,” he scoffed, kicking over the poker table and spreading chips and bills onto the floor. “If I did wrong, it was in lettin’ you keep a bit of my money. I won’t take a single dollar with me in these jackets!”

This caused the bar staff to immediately search his jacket and affirm there was no money there. Then they let him leave. But when each of the players went to reclaim their cheated money that had been spread onto the floor, several thousand dollars were missing.

At this point, I shuffled off my seat, glad to have been untouched by the brawl and pleased to have witnessed it.

Still, I wasn’t out of the clear. For when I returned to my hostel and snuggled down to sleep with the shouts of the men floating around in my head, I took off my own jacket, stuffed it under my bed and was struck with sudden fear.

On the back of my jacket, which was shimmering in the light, was a large, foot-wide reflective sticker. *I hadn’t put it there.* It reflected the objects of my room perfectly and gave a mirror image of everything in it.

Vaguely, I remembered that part of my jacket being struck by the hand of the Burly Man when I had walked into the pub . . . Yes, it had been him who had slapped me on the back!

Cold fear trickled through my body. My hands began to shake. My regular stool at the Orderly Way was directly in front of the poker table, and with my back turned, the shiny sticker would have reflected the other players’ cards like a mirror . . .

The Burly Man had been called cheat and scoundrel and had been accused of looting every man at the poker table. These accusations, I realized in a daze of horror, were painfully true, but worst of all, he had used *me and my jacket* to accomplish his thievery.

But where had all the money gone?

CHAPTER 2

THE DEMOLITION SITE

THE NEXT MORNING, I GATHERED MY THINGS FOR WORK AS a blazing sun reflected off the bay, reminding me of the half day I'd wasted in sleeping.

I glanced at my jacket with the sticker, which I had hidden deep under my bed, and the whole event came swirling back to me. I remembered the muddled, angry crowd, the smoky barroom, and the outlandish Burly Man who had included me in his cheating scheme. Then I thought of his childish delight when he had surfed the crowd of swinging fists and snuck out beneath them. But where had his cheated money gone?

Next to my jacket, I found an order form: this was my task list for that afternoon from the building manager

Scrap-metal delivery needed at 1116 Autobauk Lane.

One of my jobs besides dishwasher was delivery man for different businesses. I was rented to shop-owners to help with their afternoon work. This brought all sorts of odd jobs my way and that afternoon, it brought me to the fringes of the city, to an abandoned lot deep in the mountains surrounding the beautiful town which had become my new home.

My cart, my work outfit, my tools and other things I pulled behind me through a cobblestone track in the mountains. It was terribly hot and the raging sun blasted me as I walked up the lanes through streets and jungle foliage that crept around the city.

The buildings became more decrepit and monster-like as the forest began to infiltrate the structures. Soon, palm trees and bushes mixed with the gates and fences of the city, until at last, I reached an old hotel where several trees had grown through the roof.

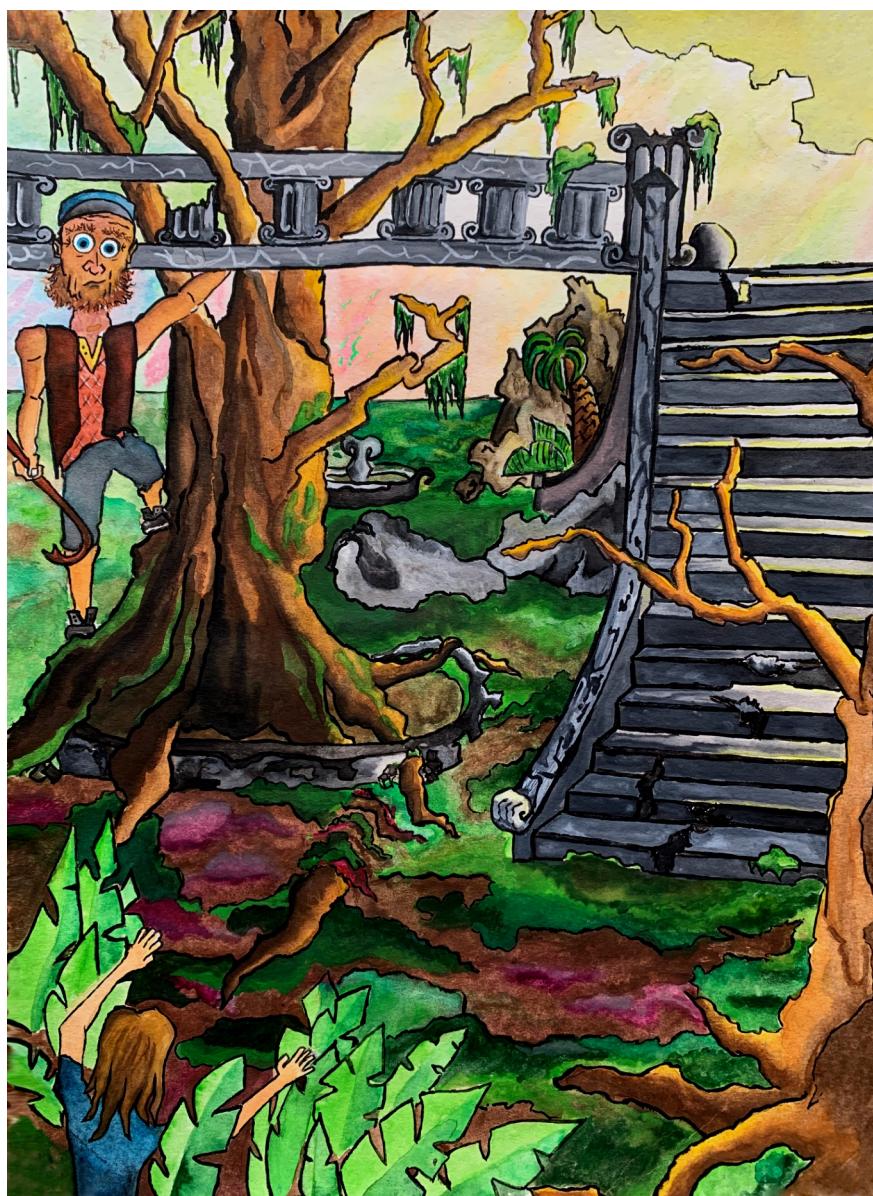
One One One Six Autobauk Lane, I read off the building address, wiping the sweat from my face. Next to the building was a banner.

NOTICE OF DEMOLITION, the sign read.

I saw beyond the rooftops, the white buildings of my city miles away — hundreds of feet below. I marveled at my climb. Sailboats sailed in the distance, riding ripples of what seemed a blue carpet on which toy ships

moved — and around which miniature green mountains loomed.

“You’re late,” greeted a construction worker behind me.



I turned. My order form was ripped from my hand and the construction worker, who had emerged from the dilapidated building, scrutinized the form and led me inside. Within the old structure there were vines and bushes growing through broken walls, climbing up the stairs. Patches of black hinted at previous fires. Old blankets and tin cans indicated previous squatters. There were rusted pipes hanging from the ceiling, and finally, giant, trees rising through a rotted roof.

“Watch your step,” declared the man, bounding up a crooked tree like a stair. As he directed me, I scurried after him.

At the top, the construction worker began reading markings on the wall and counting his steps. Suddenly, there was a loud bang as he struck the wall with a crowbar and began pulling it apart.

His bearded face peered inside where signs, arrows, and numbers lay hidden. He assessed the signs and continued pacing through the house as if he was navigating through it, until he abruptly retrieved a heavy pipe from within the walls and handed it to me.

As I received the pipe, a coin fell to the ground.

I halted. There was a flicker of silver on the coin, which drew my attention. When I reached down to grab it, I saw a ship on the coin and quickly hid it in my pocket.

The construction worker continued tearing the place apart and handed me more pipes, which I loaded into my cart. A half hour later I had a cart full of heavy lead pipes.

“This is the scrap-metal?” I asked as the last pipe was placed on my cart. “What do people want with all this old junk?”

The man scowled at me.

“You’ve never done construction before, have you son? Pipes! Pipes! Pipes is good for all sorts of things.”

This was supposed to be an explanation. He lifted his hand to his beard and handed me a second address from his pocket, which I read.

“That is where you are to deliver the metal,” he explained.

“That will take me to the marina,” I remarked, observing the address.

“That’s right. Go son. Scram! Out, out! Get gone, kid! Woooeeee!”

Each of these exclamations grew louder and more abrupt, ending in a sort of cattle-call that shook my bones. I ran without thinking — down the main track, through the passerby and tourists, past offices and the police station toward the marina, where I was greeted by a man in a yellow jacket and large boots.

“Demolition go okay?” he inquired, smirking and eyeing the city nervously. Soon, many hands were unloading the pipes into the boat, and I turned, glad to be finished with the hard business of carting.

But as the pipes were stowed and the boat was untied, I peered through the boat-window and saw the men hovering around an object hidden in the pipes. I saw something golden and what looked like the figurine of a monkey.

The lengthening shadows told me I was needed at the kitchen for cleaning dinner dishes. As I left and walked higher and higher into the city, I turned and watched the boat with the pipes exiting the marina. It moved around the docks, around the quays, around giant ships and sailboats, passed the cliffs and small islands, until it left our port completely and turned determinedly into the giant waves of the deep ocean and disappeared into a stormy sunset.

CHAPTER 3

LOOT AND LOOTERS

I PONDERED THE COIN I'D FOUND AT THE DEMOLITION SITE AS I returned to the kitchen. Behind me, the sea blew harsh winds over the mountains and seemed to shout at me as thunder rolled and a heavy wind sent a black cloud my direction. After work, as I tried to sleep, I contemplated the men at the marina and their strange behavior.

Why had they wanted all those heavy pipes? Why had they been removed from inside the walls of the old building? And what about the golden monkey?

The man in the yellow jacket troubled me in my dreams. I saw his weathered hands, his worn jacket, and his knowing, black eyes. His boots stomped toward me with a slow energy. Then, late in the night, I awoke to find several specks on the water.

They were ships! Dark ships. Moving without any light . . . moving secretly into our marina . . .

At intervals, I rose to see the ships closer and closer, until finally, in early morning, they reached our harbor.

"That voice!" I said, rising from a dream.

The voice of the construction worker rang in my head as I bolted awake.

"Pipes! Pipes! Pipes!" he had said. "Scram! Get gone! Woooeeee!" I had remembered that voice all through my dreams.

Then, the Burly Man from the Orderly Way drifted into my thoughts. They had been the same voice!

Could the man from the demolition site be the same man who'd cheated at poker? The accent had changed, the outfit had been altered, but beneath both was the same broad, bearded person! I was sure of it! He had walked with the same jolty movements. And his eyes were of the same color blue!

"It was you!" I murmured, falling back to sleep.

When I woke, I half-doubted my nightly suppositions and believed that the ships had only been a delirious dream.

The sea was grey. A vicious wind splattered rain across the bay, but there was no sign of any dark ships.

I exited the hostel and made for my favorite bakery in honor of my hard work from the previous day. I ordered pancakes and coffee and stared into the rainy morning. The bay's tempestuous winds rustled the shops as I pondered the Burly Man who had tricked the other poker players and pretended to be a construction worker. Why had there been a golden monkey hidden in those pipes? And where had all the poker money gone?

I wandered to the bathroom, and when my hand grasped the paneling inside, I remembered the Burly Man taking several trips to the bathroom. Then I thought of how that golden monkey had been hidden in the pipes. This triggered an idea. I finished my breakfast and hurried through pelting rain to the Orderly Way, where I asked to be let into the back.

"I lost my room key," I told the staff and insisted I needed to search for it.

I was allowed to scour the room where the poker table had been. Then, at the bathroom hall, I began to peel back the paneling boards and dug through the insulation to find something that made me shudder with amazement — a wad of hundred-dollar bills. The missing money from the poker game! It was just like the demolition site. The Burly Man had been sneaking to the bathroom to hide his winnings. He had hid it the same way the gold monkey had been hidden — within the walls. But what else had he hidden in the pipes?

After five minutes, I discovered several wads of money, which I stuffed into my socks and hurried into the streets.

I had never been so rich in my life. At the nearest bakery, I ordered the most expensive item on the menu.

"Thank you very much! And here's a tip for your work." I slipped the cashier a twenty.

Next, I bought a hat, some boots, a jacket to replace my old one, and a guitar that I had desired since I arrived at the port.

I reached into my pocket and as I pulled out my wad of money, the silver coin from the demolition site went tumbling to the ground.

The man at the shop observed me as I set my money down and recovered the coin. Suddenly the man disappeared into the back of the shop. I waited and waited for him to return. But he was gone for so long, I became worried.

I heard a strange noise on the wind — the jingling of bells or was it a whistle? Something in that noise frightened me. I took my guitar and ran, but I heard the same whistle coming from the rooftops. I saw a group of men watching me from the shadows.

“They’re after my money!” I told myself. I figured the shop-owner had disappeared to inform the group of robbers of the large amount of money I was carrying.

As I slipped into my hostel, I saw a very tall man with thick boots peer at me from across the street. I quickly found a loose floorboard beneath my bunk, hid the money, and gazed out the window. The shadowy figure was joined by several more men, who quietly disappeared into darkness.

CHAPTER 4

THE BURLY MAN

THE NEXT MORNING, I VENTURED INTO THE CITY. OVER THE trees and rooftops, there was a crowd of people on the mountain where the demolition site had been. As I drew near, I saw news vehicles, reporters, and even a helicopter — they were surrounding the site where the pipes had been hidden.

“What is this about?!” I asked, arriving at the old building.

“The Sinsay Treasure,” a boy explained at the edge of the crowd. “Haven’t you heard? A silver coin was found from an ancient treasure. They are excavating the building to see if there is more inside. There is supposed to be loads of silver coins, gold bricks, and a solid-gold monkey.”

I watched with strange excitement building in my heart as men began inspecting the building for the treasure and the ancient silver coins. The news teams continued to report, and I dug my hand in my pocket where I grasped the silver coin I’d found.

Then, I glanced secretly at the aged coin in my hand and tried to conceal my fluttering heart — it had been treasure hidden in the pipes! A real silver treasure! And I had part of it in my own pocket! I had even helped carry it away — gold bricks, silver coins and a monkey of solid-gold.

From where had Burly Man gotten it? Who was he? Where had the treasure gone?

Hours later, as I worked in the kitchen, the Burly Man walked into my restaurant and broke into my thoughts with his loud, booming voice.

“Waiter, I want to speak with the chef!” he declared, bursting through the kitchen doorway.

“Chef is busy,” the sous chef replied.

Suddenly the sous chef’s ponytail was firmly gripped by the Burly Man and stuffed into the garbage can, which drew the Chef’s attention.

“I would like a dish of sirloin steak.”

The Burly Man proceeded to order in the most refined terms a steak marinated with Mediterranean flavoring. He ordered fish broiled with an herb from Norway, then shrimp sautéed in the style of New Orleans. And all of it

he wanted done immediately and with professionalism!

The two chefs looked at one another after the Burly Man had left.

“Did you hear the way he yelled at you?” the chef asked, inspired.

“How he spit right in your face.”

“I did Chef,” answered the sous, fixing his ponytail.

“No bum off the street would demand food like that,” continued the chef reflectively.

“Who do you think he is?” probed the sous, sensing a superstitious mood in the chef.

The chef became meditative and sharpened his knives.

“A food critic,” he declared, opening his knife-case. “See if you can find anything about him?”

The sous chef began scrolling through pictures of food critics on his phone.

“It looks like he is from the European circuit!” declared the sous, finding a lookalike to the Burly Man from Sweden.

“As soon as he stuffed your ponytail in the garbage, I knew he was a man of taste,” returned the chef, scavenging his best cut of steak from the back of the fridge.

“Now careful Chef,” warned the sous playfully. “We have a food critic in our restaurant. The headlines could sing your praises. ‘Crooked-eared chef cooks perfect dish for undercover bum.’”

“Don’t forget ‘dodgy sous who had his ponytail stuffed in the garbage!’” returned the chef angrily.

“I’d be honored to remember it,” replied the sous.

All this time, I sprayed and loaded dishes, trying to keep myself unnoticed in the back of the kitchen. But once the Burly Man had left, I warned the chefs of his suspicious identity. However, I was only scolded with the foulest of dishwashing names — water-rat, spray-slave, plate-clerk, garbage-handler. *What did I know!*

After a quarter of an hour, the requested dish was served and the Burly Man ate in silence and with great pleasure, wiping his beard, licking his lips and placing a pint of ale to his mouth. Then, to show his appreciation, he let out a loud burp and groaned delightedly.

“My compliments to the chef!” he declared, stumbling to the stage, where he grabbed my guitar, which had been set nearby.

“Don’t mind if I play a song, do you?” he announced, burping and

pulling the guitar out of the case.

He directed drinks to be served all around, then taking center stage, began singing sea stories.

"Boom boom boom go the cannons in my ear. I put my finger to the trigger. A cannonball nearly hits my foot. I can't heeeeeeeeear. Boooooooom in my eaaaaaar. Battle.

"That was one of my own compositions, a very important little tale drawn from me own life experiences.

"Now how about one dedicated to a dear old friend of mine.

"Blue eyed bobby stole me wallet, the dirty son-a-gun and happened to land with his face in sand, after my foot kicked the back of his leg. Then the waves pulled him out to the sea — hey! hey!"

"Where are you going? Where you going?" blurted the Burly Man when several of the customers tried to leave the room. "Never heard a sea yarn before? I was just getting to the good part where the sharks come and the crabs get hold of his legs. There's an awful lot of dangerous critters in the dark seas you know. Never mind that now."

He glared with bulging eyes and blew through his teeth. Then he forced his listeners to sit. His voice echoed through the room as he recounted in sea language his adventures through jungle fortresses, marooned islands, and the salty sea.

"A last story, a last story!" he declared as if he the crowd had been begging for more.

And in a deep and frightful voice he sang:

In the Darkened Isle of Stones, they cast me down to be turned to bones,

Between cliffs and craters and gullies it was, with dark and stony faces above,

Where man and house and trees were none, I lie and cursed and cried and sung,

In the Darkened Isle of Stooooooooonnnnnnnneeeeeess!

His listeners plugged their ears as he finished. But the Burly Man set down his guitar and proudly bowed.

CHAPTER 5

THE METAL EYE

THE BURLY MAN SET MY GUITAR IN ITS CASE AND DAWDLED near the stage before stepping down. Then he retreated to a dingy booth where he finished his drink and paid for his meal. The restaurant emptied and the Burly Man was left alone, confined to his thoughts. He was, I believe, mentally lingering over the last phrase in his song, for after a long, blank stare, he beat his chest and softly sung:

"Where man and house and trees were none, I lie and cursed and cried and sung. In the Darkened Isle of Stooooooooooooonnnnnnnneeeeeess!"

His words ended in a burp.

Out the window, a figure caught my eye beneath an awning. Beside it, another shadowy outline signaled toward our building, within which the Burly Man sat.

I approached the Burly Man, who seemed to weigh a hundred times the weight of a normal man surrounded in all his rags and hoods and jackets and staring pensively.

"What you looking at!" he barked. My eyes glimpsed a silvery belt below his vest, and two massive, untied boots with laces hanging askew. His thoughtful blue eyes, which scrutinized me, seemed strange to belong to such an ape of a man with a loud, brutish voice.

"It's you, delivery boy," he bellowed, recognizing me.

"Have you seen the weather?" I remarked, winking noticeably as I collected his dishes.

The man's eyes narrowed. Without moving, he peered sidelong at the window. He coughed, and using his old reflective trick, took a metal flask from his pocket to observe the persons across the street.

"Awful tempestuous weather," he agreed meaningfully and raised his eyebrows to show he was impressed with my secretive communication.

He stood and walked toward the restroom. When we both were out of sight of the window, he grabbed me by the collar and growled with doggish fear.

"You listen to my words and answer me plainly!" he hissed, pushing

me toward the window. "Look out there with your cleaning rag to the glass and tell me what you see."

I did as he said and, pretending to clean the windows, glanced across the street at the men hiding in the shadows. There were two big men and a little man observing our restaurant, I told him.

"Does the big fellow have a cutlass on him?" inquired the Burly Man quietly.

"Cutlass?" I asked.

"A sailor's knife, son!" answered the Burly Man impatiently. "Is his hand upon a sword at his belt-line?"

I nodded. The Burly Man drew a deep breath.

"And is there a scar about his right cheek where a man tried to drive a knife into his skin?"

The Burly Man illustrated this by putting a finger to his cheek and moving it toward his ear.

I peered closer and seeing the exact mark on the man reported it to the Burly Man.

"Ghosts and devil-men!" muttered the Burly Man. Then he inquired about the small man.

"Does the little guy have two stubs on his left hand where a man gnawed through his fingers like a rat?"

I answered that I saw two stubs in that exact place!

"Betwixt the devil! Three-Fingered Jim and Mangle-Face Jim — back from the dead!"

The Burly Man fell flat on his back as if someone had punched him and started wheezing and choking.

I asked who these men were, for I understood that they were the same men that had followed me home from the guitar shop. And I had the strangest idea that it had been these men that had come in the black ships during the storm.

"Quiet, quiet you devil of a son!" hissed the Burly Man, getting up and trying to calm himself. "You're staring at the shadowy faces of Devil Jim's ruffian crew. Three-Fingered Jim, and Mangle-Face Jim, like I said, worst of sailors and smugglers."

The Burly Man crawled to the door that led out of the restaurant and into the hostel. He asked if I had a room in the building. When I answered yes, he blurred:

“Get us up there, double quick!”

I led him up the elevator and into my room which was empty.

The Burly Man hurried to the window and pulled back a curtain.

“Do you have any birds in the alleyway?” he pried. When I told him crow’s nests covered the awnings, he asked if I could catch a crow and bring it back.

I soon returned with the requested crow, which I’d caught using the hostel’s fish-net.

“The top window across the street with the curtains drawn,” the Burly Man murmured, peering out the window as I brought him the bird. “Do you see a metal circle on the glass? That’s where the big man is staying, the captain of their crew — Devil Jim.”

I approached the window and peered. My eyes followed the building to the top, where I saw a metal circle that looked like a magnified glass pressed against the window along with a pipe-shaped object.

“Now send the bird out,” directed the Burly Man.

I sent the bird out the window and into the rain. It flew off cawing and flapping.

The curtain where the metal circle had been ruffled and the pipe-shaped object withdrew.

“The metal circle is gone . . .” I reported.

The Burly Man sank to the floor with a deep exhale.

“Sit yourself down lad,” he sighed in relief. “There isn’t a monsoon from hell that would make that man come in here now, not with the sign of bad-luck over this house. All devil-pirates are terribly superstitious and blackbirds is the worst of the omens. Not tonight, he won’t attack.”

“Attack?” I asked curiously.

“Of course,” replied the Burly Man, glaring at me sidelong, “come to kill Longfellow Jim. That is my name — good to meet you.”

He extended a calloused, sweaty hand and I shook it.

CHAPTER 6

TELESCOPE JIM

ONCE THAT CROW FLEW, THE BURLY MAN BECAME boisterous. His bearded face beamed in the light of the bedside lamp and he talked as freely as if his soul had wandered back from the grave.

His skin, which was sunburnt from drifting at sea, softened as he smiled. The tangled beard and chapped, lump of a nose seemed hardly threatening as his face filled with joy and he slumped to the floor.

“Devil Jim — that’s who is across the street,” whispered the Burly Man, drinking from the flask in his pocket. “We Jims have been enemies since practical childbirth. I fought off the Devil on the high seas, barehanded in the middle of a typhoon. Then I was taken captive by that one-eyed monster, Jim, tied to the mast and left for dead with nothing but an island of stones to survive on.”

“But aren’t you Jim?” I clarified.

“We both Jims,” explained the Burly Man. “Jim’s a common name for thieves and scoundrels. It’s the first one that comes to our minds when we’re lying, but it sticks — sticks like the fleas on Jim’s back.”

Jim had a sudden itch behind his shoulder that made me step a few paces back.

“Jim — me-Jim — I mean myself — I am called Longfellow,” he declared with importance. “The other Jim is Devil Jim. All his words are dark like the devil and his face is evil as a thunderstorm. He could kill you with his looks or even his bad breath, if ever you got close enough to smell him.”

‘Longfellow’ Jim rambled in this disorderly way for the next hour, becoming dramatic at times, talking as quietly as if he were afraid the wind might hear — but always telling the story so that he was the hero and the other Jim, Devil Jim, was the loser.

“He left me marooned,” Longfellow continued. “He stranded me on the terrible island of stones. Then I wandered through places no man has seen.

“You may have heard Devil Jim called Telescope Jim once or twice, on account of the metal eye that you saw earlier.

“Devil Jim had his eye bitten out by rats while he was tied to a pier.

After he lost his eye, he paid to have a telescope placed there, so he could see the other Jim (me-Jim) escaping on the waves. Sometimes his eye is like a radio tower sticking out of his head, and men grow scared, thinking he's an alien with an antenna and beat him over the head.

"Other-times, the telescope disappears into Devil Jim's head," Longfellow Jim made a popping sound with his lips, "and then you're staring at no eye at all, just a black pit — into Devil Jim's soul, and by extension, the devil himself. That's why he's called Devil Jim."

Jim slapped the floor and chattered his teeth as he rattled through story after story with the two Jim's at one another's throats. Limbs were cut. Cannons were blasted and men were marooned. As his stories were told, Jim built a barricade of stolen whiskey bottles around him from the bar. Then, late in the night, he turned his jacket inside out, placed it on the floor and began to survey it nostalgically, drinking from his flask.

Tattooed on the jacket was a map of the ocean. I knew the places well. It was a map of the South Seas, but there were other places on the map I did not recognize.

Jim grasped a lighter from his pocket and illuminated the map and smiled at me. There were secret currents, shipwrecks, caves, shark sites, battle sites, and smuggling routes between the islands.

"Tattoos is a sailor's best friend!" Jim remarked proudly. "A sailor would tattoo the land that shipwrecked him if he only had some ink."

I turned to Jim, assessing his map uncertainly. Suddenly I felt the urge to tell him that I knew about his treasure in the pipes and about his poker scheme.

"I found the money you cheated — hidden in the walls of the Orderly, hidden just like the treasure you unloaded from the demolition site."

Jim looked at me wide-eyed, impressed at my awareness of his schemes. But then he turned on me suddenly.

"You took Jim's money!" he hissed. "Are you working with him — with the Devil?"

"No, I've never met the Devil or this Telescope person you call Jim," I told him emphatically. "In fact, I think those men across the street are following me."

Jim's nostrils flared.

"Come with me," he demanded, leading me out of the hostel. His face was red with anger and his eyebrows fluttered as he led me down the alley

and across the street to the hotel where Devil Jim was staying.

“You can prove your sides now,” whispered Jim in my ear.

Before I knew it, the lumbering, oversized man was climbing the side of the building like a mammoth Bill-goat. Soon, he reached the fire escape and climbed straight to the top windowsill. I followed his path, and using the fire escape stairs, arrived at the window where the metal eye had watched us.



Inside, there were the snores of what seemed many men. But when I looked inside, there was only one giant man sleeping on two beds pushed

together, and beside him was the telescope that Jim had told me about. It was looking very alive to me, and the man's body seemed five times the size of Longfellow Jim, who I considered a practical monster.

"Pirates of the old day, son," Jim explained, seeing my fear. "They are scary folk. Now, go in there and place these five smooth stones in Goliath's smoking tray."

Jim handed me a leather pouch.

I crept very quietly through the window and couldn't help staring at the metal hole in the Giant's eye-socket.

Around him were harpoons and fancy weapons. I saw a hatchet made of shark teeth and a shark-tooth necklace on the bedside table.

Spread across the table was a map with calculations and mysterious writing. Across the land and sea were secret passes — marks where treasure had been lost and marks where it had been found. My eyes kept wandering over the sea-routes underneath the water and the mysterious islands to which they led, until there was a loud snore and Devil Jim's hand reached out and grasped my shirt.

"Steady, steady son," whispered Longfellow from the window. "It's only a nightmare in Jim's brain. Caw like a blackbird now."

I made a noise like what I thought was a blackbird, but the giant man's fist grew tighter around my shirt until my sleeve tore.

"That's not a blackbird!" hissed Longfellow desperately. "That's a dove. Caw! Caw!"

I mimicked Jim's cawing and Telescope Jim released me and recoiled into his bed. The giant's sleepy, single eye looked lazily around the room. His monstrous head of flesh stared blankly and his hand reached for his telescope.

Quickly, I grabbed from the floor Devil Jim's wooden pipe, which was as big as a saxophone and placed the small bits of rock Jim had given me into the pipe. Then I crawled out the window to the fire escape.

"There, there, son, you're as good a sailor as any, I reckon," said Longfellow in relief. "I know you aren't working with the Devil."

When I came down the side of the building and crossed through the alleyway, Jim was shaking with silent laughter.

"What? What are you laughing at?" I asked, my voice still cracking with fright.

"Nothing son," Longfellow replied, extending an open hand to me. "Give good Jim a pass into your common room, where I can sleep the night."

I led Jim into the hostel common-room through the back door, gave him a blanket and went to my own room, where I locked the door, and let a feeling of fright settle over me as Devil Jim's giant face and empty eye-socket haunted me all through the night.

CHAPTER 7

MILES THE MUTINEER

THAT NIGHT I DREAMT OF A MASSIVE THUNDERSTORM looming over my city with beard-like clouds hanging down. A tornado spun at its center like a giant telescope watching me, and through the wind and rain, the storm laughed and snored, until, a puffy hand lifted a wooden pipe into the air. Suddenly there was an explosion.

BOOM!

I woke with a sudden start. Rising out my window were plumes of smoke — smoke coming from Telescope Jim's window!

Reality, it seemed, had merged with my dream. Telescope Jim had apparently endured an explosion, which I suspected had come from the bits of stone I'd placed into his pipe. He must have woken, and upon lighting his pipe, ignited something like firecrackers in his face — an event which my slumbering mind had anxiously anticipated.

I seemed to hear Longfellow Jim laughing somewhere in my mind as fire sirens sounded and yelling ensued from across the street.

If *I* hadn't pulled the prank myself, I would have thought it was funny. But, the idea of inciting a giant sea-ruffian to anger made me shudder with fright.

When I went downstairs, a further disconcerting sight met me as I passed the hallway between the hostel and the bar. My dishwasher post had been filled by another boy, who busily chopped vegetables for the day's kitchen prep.

"What are you doing?" I asked, peering into the kitchen.

The building manager had given my job away early that morning, the boy told me.

I nearly punched him, but as soon as I returned to my room, I forgot about the boy. My keycard had been locked out.

"What is going on?" I asked the receptionist, trudging to the front desk.

"It says you're checked out due to insufficient funds," she informed me, and I stared, confused. Three months' work had been stored up. How could they be kicking me out?

Just then, Longfellow Jim came striding into the lobby, holding a dish of noodles from which he indulgently slurped.

“What have you done?!?” I hissed, referring to the prank in which he’d entangled me.

Jim finished his noodles, unfazed, and peered from grinning eyes.

“Can you imagine the look on Devil Jim’s face!” he laughed. But after he finished his breakfast, he took me aside in the common-room.

“We have bigger problems,” he said, changing his tone. “My friends, the ones who took off with the *pipes*,” he winked, meaning his treasure, “they haven’t responded to my communications. They stowed the *pipes* safely, but I haven’t heard from them for a couple of days. I’m afraid Devil Jim found them and,” he drew a finger to his throat, miming the death of his friends.

“The *pipes* might be in danger now, if Devil Jim is looking for them. That’s where you come in.”

His blue eyes focused on me very seriously and I felt the weight of his gold pressing down on me.

“You have to help me get those *pipes* safe again, before Devil Jim finds out where they’ve been hidden. I’m sorry, but you have to come with.”

Jim looked at something in his hand. He unfolded a piece of paper and handed me what appeared to be a police report.

“*Miles the Mutineer*,” I read from the report. “*Villainous sixteen-year old ruffian — five-foot-nine, a hundred and fifty pounds. Thought to be dead. Dangerous and spotted at local sea pub. Reportedly working in coordination with second villain — dangerous, heroic Jim.*”

“Heroic Jim?” I wondered aloud.

“That’s me,” explained Jim seriously. “We both are dangerous. But I’m a little more established than you, Miles.”

“Miles,” I repeated, frowning. “I’m not Miles.”

“The police report says you are.” Jim read further into the case notes. “*Miles the Mutineer, terrible villain shot dead by a cannon ball over a treasure fight* — that’s the treasure in the pipes. Now they have a face to go with the name: your face.” Jim pointed at the police report to give more weight to his words. “It’s right there. *Sixteen-year-old ruffian, sort of ugly* — oh and the bar staff found an ax in your guitar this morning that proves you are Miles. That’s why your keycard don’t work — why you can’t work here anymore!”

I felt the room spinning. Could Jim’s words be true? The police report

seemed like a prank, but my lost job and my keycard trouble made me unsteady and nervous.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if they already have the footage of you taking the money out of the walls of the Orderly,” Jim continued, eyeing me carefully. “How long before they find out you moved them pipes from that run-down building and solidify you as Miles?”

I stared at the beggar, completely baffled and infuriated, imagining myself choking his sunburnt neck and pulling out his bushy beard.

He’d ruined my job and my life and turned me into a thieving fugitive! Slowly it dawned on me. It had all been a trap — the poker game, the demolition site, even his song at the restaurant. *He* had placed the hatchet in my guitar case to turn me into this Miles character connected to the treasure. Had he picked me out of all the youngsters to fit the description because I had a small history of pranking and stealing in my old life? Could he be framing me for evil — or for good?

His eyes seemed to watch all these thoughts dart through my head.

Finally I glared at him.

“You did all this!” I hissed, pushing him aside. “You wanted to force me into helping you!”

“No, no, no, *I’m* helping you,” corrected Jim. “I’m giving you a chance to get out of this dump and get your heart into the South Seas! What would your parents say if they knew you were twelve hundred miles across the ocean washing dishes?!”

My parents had sent me overseas to see the world and gain experience, but all I had done so far was work at a restaurant and bum around a hostel. Jim’s words cut me deeply. Suddenly, I wondered about his treasure.

“How much will *I* get if I help you?” I asked. “How much of the pipes?”

Jim patted me on the back.

“Enough to buy this hostel and turn it into a giant fish fry,” he remarked absurdly, and seeing my altered attitude, began leading me to the back of the hostel.

I insisted I hadn’t joined him yet, but Jim continued to talk and eventually I was drawn into his plan almost against my will, until finally I was standing outside my hostel with the door of my old home securely shut behind me.

CHAPTER 8

LIKING TO BELIEVE

JIM COLLECTED MY THINGS FROM MY ROOM. HE HANDED ME the hiking boots and backpack from under my bed. I had to lower my head at the pathetic state of my overseas adventure. My parents had given me these items believing that I would explore the country, but I had never left the city.

I threw the straps of my backpack over my shoulder, tied my boots to its handle, and started off into the grey alleyway, where, through the rooftops, the distant light of late morning shimmered off the bay.

There was a different allure now in the water. The idea of exploring its wild and mysterious depths captivated me, and I couldn't keep my eyes off its glistening horizon. I imagined Jim's island nestled within a turquoise lagoon, sheltered by stretches of palm trees and brimming in a secretive jungle that cloaked his hidden treasure. But would those jungle leaves also hide Devil Jim the giant? Would his band of sea-ruffians be waiting for us there?

"The ferry boards in an hour," Jim remarked, quickening his pace. "If we are swift, we'll arrive just in time to board."

Jim strode jauntily through the business district where businessmen bustled between towering buildings and into fancy doorways. Several passersby scowled at Jim's ragged coat, but he winked and nodded as if he knew something they didn't. Then he changed our direction toward the bay where a highway crossed overhead and waves smashed beside us. Ahead a giant ship came into view with a line of people streaming behind it.

"Jim, we don't have any tickets!" I exclaimed as we joined the line, which waited to board.

Jim scowled at the tickets in the other passenger's hands as if it was the first time he'd seen them. Then he looked down the line to a news team which I believed had covered the story from the demolition site.

When we met the ticket collector, Jim approached proudly and told him our situation.

"Our tickets have two names on them and there are also a bunch of numbers," Jim told him. Then he gave the colors and boarding times, but suddenly the ticket collector cut him short.

“But *where* are your tickets?” he asked, frowning, and when Jim continued to describe the tickets, he murmured “you don’t have any *tickets*?!”

“What?!” Jim gasped, stumbling backward as if the ticket collector were choking him. “What did you say?!”

He was so loud that several people in line began to stare.

“I don’t believe it!” he yelled, grasping me by the shoulders protectively. “Right here in front of my boy. Did you hear what he said?! I don’t believe it! I want to see a manager!”

When Jim threatened to cut the ticket collector’s nose-hairs from his face, the ticket collector called his manager, who listened for a minute, eyeing Jim and I as the commotion behind us grew.

“What do you mean you *think* you have tickets?” inquired the manager sensitively.

“Like I told this *gentleman*,” explained Jim in a tone that meant the ticket collector was an idiot. “I *believe* I have two tickets like everyone else.”

He lifted his eyebrows meaningfully. The manager seemed to understand this expression and shifted uncomfortably.

Jim shuffled forward, pulling me along and shielding me from the ticket collector.

“He said to our face — in front of all these people — that we didn’t have any . . . any tickets!”

Another dramatic gasp was projected into the line as Jim turned to see the impression he was making, but the people behind were cursing him for holding up the line.

In the distance, the news workers began gathering their cameras. Jim looked pleased.

“He said it from up there,” continued Jim, “in his ticket booth — with all those tickets around him.”

The manager furrowed his brow.

“Are you saying he looked at you from *above*?!” he inquired curiously.

“That’s the word — *above*,” agreed Jim, “like he was better than us — as if he had tickets we didn’t have!”

Jim paced as if he was retelling a traumatic event. He glared at the ticket collector and winced as if he was getting stabbed.

“I only asked a question,” defended the ticket collector.

“But what does a question mean to people like us — ” interjected Jim, grasping me by the collar, “ — to us, who *believe* we have tickets, he’s saying

we don't, from up there in his booth, with tickets all around him, with tickets in his hand. Look at him, he's holding a ticket right now!"

The manager eyed the ticket collector suspiciously, and seeing the approaching news team, pulled the collector out of the booth.

In a moment, reporters were sprinting towards us with camera teams in tow.

"Son, how do you feel?" they asked, shedding blinding light onto my face. "How did it feel to be asked if you had tickets, to be shamed, to be told that you were nothing, to *be* practically nothing?"

I glared at the news team, unsure with whom I was more angry. But the manager stripped the ticket collector of his uniform and handed three tickets to Jim.

"Why, I believe this man has three tickets!" the manager declared benevolently.

Jim threw the tickets on the ground, spat on them, and scowled like a child.

"Three tickets," he hissed incredulously, "to people who have been believing all day, hoping and dreaming of little tickets in our pockets — do you believe *three* tickets will make up for being told we had none!"

"Four tickets," declared a second manager ingeniously.

"Four *first class* tickets!" corrected a third manager, scowling at the second manager and throwing tickets at Jim's feet in front of the cameras.

I felt myself turning red as the two managers more dramatically offered beverages, hotel rooms, and ferry passes — each which Jim refused — until, as the cameras were stabbing me in the face, the head manager finally yelled out:

"Alright! I believe this man owns the ship!" He put his arms around us magnanimously. "Why, he is captain of the ship!" He smiled craftily at Jim and the news team as if he had won a very complicated battle.

This offer impressed Jim perfectly. His eyes widened. He straightened up and proudly observed the pathetic people behind us holding tickets.

"There we are gentlemen," Jim agreed, shaking the hand of the manager. "I am glad you understand. I was beginning to think you were confused about my *beliefs!*"

The news cameras were shut off. Several onlookers, who had recorded the event, uploaded the video of the incident to the web and muttered in disappointment "what a rip, only ten likes!"

The managers shook one another's hands in triumph.

"No one wants to see someone give their passengers a whole ship!"

They directed the onlookers to leave as Jim and I were given two red jackets, offered champagne, and escorted to the top of the ferry where the captain's suite was located.

CHAPTER 9

GIANT-FIBBING METHOD

JIM RELAXED HIS FEET INSIDE THE CAPTAIN'S CABIN, WHERE several massive windows looked out onto the bay. I pressed my face against them, trying to see my hostel through the mess of buildings. Then my eyes drifted passed the quays where industrial ships were being loaded, passed beaches where tourists walked and green hills near the outskirts of the city. In the distance, the shores of a second, large island broke the haze of the horizon.

The ferry turned toward the horizon of grey and blue, and the second island's shores, where I imagined Jim's treasure to be.

Jim lit a cigar, set his feet across the captain's desk and blew smoke into the pristine cabin. I sat on the comfy seats, staring at a view I had never witnessed before, and thought that the regular passengers were fools and Jim was brilliant for getting us there. I began to ask Jim how he did all of it.

"By a magnificent little thing called the Giant-Fibbic Method, Miles," Jim replied, taking a huge whiff of smoke and blowing it into the cabin.

I cracked a laugh.

"Don't you mean the *scien-tific* method," I corrected, but Jim shook his head and set down the cigar.

"No. That's the old one, for people who think rocks is rocks. I'm talking about the new one that is about telling fibs, where you can make a rock a tree or a walnut a piece of nose-hair unless you want it to be a grasshopper."

He flicked his eyebrows impressively as I stared at the deep-blue waves and thought about his statement.

"What on earth do you mean?" I asked in horror.

Jim sat back in the captain's chair and puffed out a thick cloud of smoke that stained the luxurious furniture.

"I first learned of the Fibbing Method when I was at the doctor's office," explained Jim. "I had a problem with my big toe and somehow, by way of data and math and all that, it was fixed. Then, after the uncomfortable science was out of the way, the doctor remarked in the old scientific way that

it was a so many centimeters long and in fact a rather *big foot*.

“The nurse who stood nearby,” continued Jim, “looked at me and gasped. Then the doctor’s eyes began to flutter and I told him that I liked to think my foot was small. ‘Your foot is big, but you *think* it is small?’ clarified the nurse and left the room.”

Jim leaned back and continued to tell his story.

“Then the doctor gave me some water and said something about pig’s feet — that maybe he had said *pig’s foot* and not big foot at all. I told him that I was sure he said my foot was big! Then he sat down breathing hard and choking.

“Before I could finish helping the old man, the greatest thing happened — a whole mess of people rushed in with the nurse who was making all these exclamations.

“They asked me if I liked to think my foot was small. I told them I did. They escorted the doctor away and started asking me questions.

“Being a mammoth of a man with huge, wild teeth and an ugly, hairy face — did you find it offensive when he told you that you had a big foot?”

“They asked me all sorts of insulting things, until I was fuming — *perhaps I did have an ugly, big foot*, I thought to myself. *Maybe I am a sort of caveman, and this assessment of my foot in inches and centimeters was an insult.*”

“Wait a second,” I said. I had to interrupt Jim because he was talking very fast. “Are you saying they thought the Doctor called you a Bigfoot . . . like a Sasquatch?”

“Exactly. Came right out of the devil’s mouth,” answered Jim. “The whole town nearly chucked him in the river for saying it,” he added jovially. “Some extra-humane people with amazing, good hearts, bless their souls, told the doctor *he* was the Bigfoot; then they tied a plastic foot to his face and dragged him around the city.”

I stared at Jim, shuddering in horror.

“It was out of compassion that they did it,” Jim explained, “in the science world doctor’s bruises and beatings are beatings, but in the Fibbing one, they are acts of compassion — *compassion Miles!*”

Jim could see the disgust forming on my furrowed brow.

“Now don’t get mixed up. The doctor had beaten my soul. It’s humane to get rid of soul-beaters.

“After they asked me about believing I had a small foot, everyone

started giving me things and asking if I needed to be comforted after my trauma. I never felt so babied in my life.

“The crowds gathered around saying ‘look at Bigfoot’s pain. Just think if you had been an ugly caveman and smelled and were filthy and practically never showered and had been told by a small-footed person that you had big feet. How would you feel?’

“Some of the townspeople started kicking one another for not being angrier at small-footed people in general. And they started arguing about who had the most small-foot-hate in their hearts, which is actually a prized virtue in the Fibbing world. And one man whose feet were really small got thrown in a dumpster so everyone could show off their Bigfoot love together and their good hearts.

“That’s when it happened. That’s when my big moment took place.” Jim leaned in with excitement. “After hearing all these people insult my feet and seeing that fat old doctor say his bit about centimeters, I imagined I *had* been a cavemen and had been lied to by my parents and suddenly had found out by this dumb old doctor that I was Sasquatch, and I felt hurt in my heart.”

Jim pointed to a fleshy part of his chest. “That’s when my big pain moment took place. And suddenly in the Fibbing world — I was a hero! Yay!”

Jim stood up, cigar in his mouth, and clapped for himself.

“I think I might even have cried,” he confided. “And by Fibbing reasons, you can get money for tears. The townspeople told me I could sue, and that was how I bought my first mansion, until I turned it into a slum and burned down all the furniture and never mowed the lawn and stuff — it sold for a couple dollars and I bought cigarettes.

“So you see Miles, the fact that we didn’t have two tickets, by Giant-Fibbic reasons means that it was exactly what the ticket collector *couldn’t* say.”

I stared at Jim, trying to process all this and thought back to his story about his foot being assessed as ‘big.’ Then I thought about him feeling bad for having big feet and even looking like a Sasquatch — which he seemed like with his angry, greedy face — and how his pain had been used to get the doctor sued, and I thought him a downright evil person.

“But Jim, Sasquatches aren’t real,” I objected, finding a hole in his tale. “Why would anyone care if they called you something that wasn’t real?”

Jim started to get nervous and shudder in discomfort.

“Well that’s not the point. None of that matters . . . I wouldn’t expect science folk like yourself to understand, being mostly bad in your heart and liking things like numbers and statistics and never a person’s heart. Everything’s real in the Fibbing world, even the greatest of all fibs — especially those. Scientifically there ain’t no Sasquatches, no,” he reflected sadly. “But in the Fibbing world, where rodents are asteroids and glowworms are toddlers, Bigfoot is as real as diapers on Santa Claus’ bottom.”

“Jim there isn’t a Santa Claus,” I objected again.

“In the Fibbic-world I’m making up, which is like video games, there is! That’s why I’m using him as an example!” exclaimed Jim, coughing out smoke. “Don’t you play video games, Miles?”

He spat out a bit of his cigar which had broken off in his clenched mouth.

“Actually, now that I think of it,” he groaned in frustration. “I don’t think you have a good enough heart to understand. That’s all this is. Everyone knows evil hearts can’t understand the Fibbic ways, cus they don’t care about people. I’m trying to help people, Miles! So my lies are good! Good!”

I stared at Jim’s fuming face and widening nostrils, wondering if he was mentally disturbed.

Then something began to settle in my own head.

“Jim, maybe it’s heartless to have all this science and numbers in my brain, but what if the ticket collector, in his imaginary world — the Fibbic one that is like video games — what if he played video games to and liked to believe he was a sort of walrus or an albatross and not a ticket collector at all. What if he believed, Fibbically that is, that he never said the words *you don’t have tickets* and only squawked like a sea-gull?”

Jim’s nostrils flared until they were the size of a wild bull’s. He stamped his feet and puffed his cigar.

“Boy! You really are about as stupid as a toadfish. My fib about tickets was turning loafers into kings and captains, so by Fibbing reasons it was incredibly good! But him being a walrus or a squawking sea-gull don’t help anyone. See this proves that you really are evil. Evil hearts get called all sorts of names in the Fibbing world, so just be glad I don’t become humanitarian and cast you into the water like they did the doctor.”

Jim threw his cigar into the waves and stood, feeling I think, extra proud and heroic for dealing with an evil-hearted science-person. He seemed upset that I didn’t fall flat on my face, worshiping the brilliance of his new

method. But after he went away to the balcony, to peer out to sea, I thought I heard him crying over his poor, big foot, or could he have been laughing?

Jim cast a sidelong glance at me and for a second, I thought he was impressed. But then he hid his smile and went back to looking at the waves.

CHAPTER 10

ONE RUFFIAN LOST, ANOTHER RETURNED

AFTER JIM HAD LAUGHED OR CRIED OR DID WHATEVER HE did looking out to sea, he became agreeable and returned to the captain's cabin cheerily.

His words however, churned in my mind as the ship rose and fell and the mountains from my island floated away. Our ship was overtaken by a hazy mist. I pondered Jim's story.

Perhaps I should have been more compassionate toward Jim's big foot. Perhaps I should have felt more wounded by what the ticket collector had said about our tickets. But no matter how I tried to grow my heart bigger, I couldn't help thinking that Jim was a scoundrel.

There were all sorts of imperfections about myself with which I could get upset. I thought of my nose or my ears or my head-shape, and then my hands, which seemed small and ugly. I could think of myself as wrinkle-handed me or small-handed me or gangly-fingered me. Any one of these details could drive me to behave as wildly and injured as Jim and his big foot if I let it.

As I thought this, I heard a voice outside the door. Through the window some of the managers were gathering money to give to Jim for the ruckus he had made, since he couldn't own the ship.

I heard something about a 'son' losing his school tuition and a 'baby girl' losing her chance at having her own room and one of the manager's families was going to give up their vacation.

The collection of bills made such a thick wad that I felt my heart trembling with excitement. There were thousands of dollars there, enough to rent a room at the hostel for months, years. I would never have to work again! I began to plan what I would do with the money.

"Let's just be glad we had the captain's suite to give them," remarked the first manager, heading toward my door. "If we didn't turn away the field trip of kids, we wouldn't have had anything at all to give the complainer."

I winced, remembering a school bus and several dozen kids who had been waiting to board. Had Jim's fuss caused them to lose their field trip!? Of

course it did. Hadn't I ever thought that by Jim and I getting seats it meant that they had to be taken from someone else, from someone who had worked for their seats.

I suddenly thought of the bus full of kids returning to school with dashed hopes and I decided I would never take anything free again.

Suddenly, the door burst open.

"Son, will you take this money by way of apology."

It wasn't a hard decision. I refused the money and shut the door.

The managers seemed to think something strange had happened. But they kept the money and returned down the hall.

I imagined the students who would have rushed around the captain's cabin, peering out the giant windows, grinning from ear to ear. Then I thought of Jim's bloated, arrogant face, puffed up about his humanitarian fibbing lies, smoking a cigar and dirtying everything in the room, and I felt terribly sad.

I found Jim on the upper deck, dictating to the ship's navigator which route to take, and directing him closer and closer toward the island we were approaching.

"I can't get any closer to those mountains," replied the navigator, pointing to his computer. "The water is too shallow."

"Nonsense," returned Jim. "I know these waters like the back of my hand."

The navigator took the ship a little further and told Jim this was the closest he could go.

Half a minute later there was a loud splash.

The captain and the managers came running to the back of the ship.

"Where did he go?" they asked. "You don't think that was the ticket fellow?"

They concluded it had been, but none of them inquired any further.

Soon, the ship docked at a bay surrounded by bright, green hills, which cheered me up. I exited the ship with the passengers who had worked for their tickets and stared at the outdoors.

Large, rugged mountains rose before me, covered in jungle foliage. And in the valley ahead, there was a small city with vineyards, apple groves, and fruit farms.

I wanted to get my bearings, so I climbed the nearest hill and turned around. In the bay, I saw ships and mountains. There was the city beyond the bay, shinning below an outline of cliffs. And then there was the shore of surf

and a sparkling light — a tiny round circle, reflecting like a mirror — a circle I had seen before.

It was the brass Telescope from Telescope Jim's eye gazing at me.

CHAPTER 11

STARS AND SUPERSTITION

I GASPED AND FELL BELOW THE BUSHES. *HAD THE GIANT SEEN me? Or had he only been looking in my direction?* Through the bushes, a small ship gleamed on the beach.

The telescope eye continued to scan the mountainside. Next, a group of figures exited the boat and hurried along the beach. I realized now that Jim had jumped ship to flee from Telescope.

I scrambled under the forest canopy and hid within the trunks that were like massive vines growing out of the ground.

Jungle noises crept into my ears. Chirping bugs, shrieking birds, and an occasional screeching possum. Uneasy feeling trouble me as I scrambled further into the forest and insects the size of mice wandered between my feet. What kind of place was this?

This was the wild outdoors your parents sent you to discover, I told myself.

The terrain grew less and less familiar. Soon I was skulking between trails that ended in the stiff form of rock walls.

Suddenly the forest cracked with fast-moving footsteps. Whispers filled the air and abruptly I was ripped from my hiding place.

A cloth went over my face.

Another cloth was placed in my mouth.

Several rapid hands bound my feet and the whispering continued.

Sneaky little critter hidin' in the dark.

What was he doin' hidin' there my captors asked.

The voices were harsh and grating and resembled dogs' growling more than man's speech. But canine or no, they talked over *the nice journey I was having* and inquired how it might end.

"Do you think he likes pick'n daisies near the cliffs?" asked a husky voice.

"Maybe he's a sort of bee-studier person that likes to stick his head in beehives?"

This was followed with ghoulish snickering.

"Or maybe he's a thrill-seeker who wants a chance at swimmin' with sharks?"

They pondered these ideas as thoughtfully as if they were planning the end scene to an exciting new movie.

Lastly, they asked if *perhaps I was a biologist type who might be interested in playin' games with the spiders and scorpions?*

Just then, quiet footsteps sounded next to me and several crawling insects were dropped on my face.



"AHHH! GETTIT OFFFFF!!!!" I yelled at the top of my lungs.

"What's he screamin' about?" my captors asked, rushing over to me.
"Why's he rubbin' his face in the grass? Is he a gnome tryin' to get back into
the earth or maybe a tree fairy that fell out of a tree?"

My skin crawled as I tried to squirm free of the insects wandering
down my face.

Then a voice like thunder filled the forest.

"What's that crawlin' on his face?" boomed the voice. There was a
moment of silence while some men looked me over. "Don't touch him or I'll
strike you dead."

The cloth was removed from over my eyes.

Before me was a very rugged group of men all staring at me with
skewed faces. They were outlandish, rough, tall men with rifles and cutlasses
tied to their backs and pistols in their hands. Their faces were so dirty they
resembled the mountainside.

Deep in the back was a lone, massive figure I knew to belong to
Telescope Jim. He stared at me through the tree trunks.

"He's covered in lady bugs," remarked the giant as my gag was
removed. "Lucky bugs. That's the best sign we've had in weeks. Give 'im a
sip of water."

I was handed a canteen from which I drank greedily as I removed the
remaining bugs. I still felt as if I'd been brutally tortured by having all those
insects crawl on my face blindly.

Next, an animal passed behind me in the woods.

"Was that a pig?" murmured the man with the scar called Mangle-Face
Jim.

"A boar," added Three-Fingered Jim. Both ruffians grabbed their guns
and headed into the woods. "Double signs of good luck," they muttered.

The forest sounded with footsteps and angry gunfire. But too my
amazement the boar was soon shot and retrieved. Then a fire was made, and
the men began preparing to eat the meat.

They watched me out of the corner of their eye.

"So he's a leprechaun," they decided after finding the second sign of
good luck and began prodding me with sticks.

"If he's a leprechaun, why don' he talk funny?" they asked, scowling.

"And why don' he have pointy ears?" objected one of the men. This
seemed awfully suspicious to the ruffians and they squinted at me skeptically.

“He don’ smell much like fish’s guts,” remarked another man in conclusion. “I never trusted anythin’ that smelled better than a codfish.” This explained the foul smells of the men around me and convinced me they trusted one another deeply.

“Leprechauns don’ eat fish and don’ smell like ‘em either,” declared Telescope Jim standing, “they smell like four-leaf clovers and grass that’s coverin’ buried treasure, which is good enough for me.”

My hair was sniffed and it was agreed that I did smell like grass, in which luckily I had just rolled.

“They’ll be no more investigatin’ of leprechauns,” declared Devil Jim as a flicker of light shot overhead. “A shooting star!”

The giant stood, furthering the mystical moment with making a small earthquake.

“The signs of good luck are surrounding him like God’s good angels,” he said in a cursing tone. “If anyone hurts him, I’ll use that man’s head for a cannonball next battle and shoot it into the sharks.”

The men were inspired by the sudden display of wildness and I was immediately loosened and patted apologetically. Though I felt little more safe than if I had joined a pack of wild bears.

CHAPTER 12

BIRDS AND BOASTING

THE LAST SIGN OF GOOD-LUCK HAD COME FROM A BRIGHT light that had shot over our heads. It had appeared to be a shooting star, but afterward I felt a flake of something hot land on my arm.

A firework? A *noiseless firework had been shot off*. Telescope had believed its light was the final sign of my good-luck prospects.

But as I glanced at the trees overhead, I saw a figure move slyly through the foliage. I gasped.

There was *someone* in the trees. Someone had lit the firework.

I sat down and tried to think while the men began roasting the pig. As it was cut, I noticed that one of its fleshly legs had a mark where a rope appeared to have been tied.

The pig had been set loose right behind me to create the appearance of good luck to the superstitious men.

And the pile of lady bugs which had crawled down my face — they had been placed there by quiet hands moving over quick feet. Could it have been Longfellow Jim?

I thought it must be him and grew more excited. By presenting these coincidences around my discovery he had given the men a reason to keep me and protect me from harm.

The rest of the week, however, I saw no sign of Longfellow. It seemed he had disappeared into the forest for good, and I believed I was stuck with the outlaws. This was no encouraging thought.

Sea-ruffians, as you may well know, are ruthless vagabonds and thieves. They make their camp late, and devour animals quietly in the dark. They are always half-joking and half-shooting things and carried plenty of guns and knives. Any leftover bones from their food they used for weapons.

Devil Jim's own rifle was made from the jawbone of a giant-white shark that he'd killed in a deep-sea cave. This bone, which he gripped like a toddler's fork, he'd also used in the destruction of his enemies during an infamous battle — so the story went from his rugged companions, who snarled and twitched as if they all had mysterious diseases or had lived in a

pack of wolves their whole life, both which were practically true.

“You must be wondering what a wild-dog, massive man like me is doing in a place like this with all theses scoundrelly, bug-eyed creatures?” Jim asked one day, treading next to me like an elephant walking on its hind legs. “Well let me tell you. We’re goin’ hunting! Not for men, nor for animals either. But for somethin’ sort o’ in-between.”

Three-Fingered Jim grinned cruelly.

“Sometimes we do however ask a traveler ‘are you a bird hunter?’” he added. “And if he hesitates, we shoot him! Cus we *against* the shootin’ of animals.”

Three Fingered Jim exchanged a malicious grin with Mangle-Face.

Telescope moved the jawbone rifle to the other side of his hip and let his boa-constrictor-like arms flop beside himself while he propped his gun between his elbow and his hip.

“I’m downright sad about animals,” the giant confessed. “Since I was a kid, I could never kill a one of ‘em. And my teachers were always asking me to do it and I hated teachers for that. They’d say to me ‘hey bulbous kid! dissect that frog!’ and I couldn’t do it. I refused to hurt another living creature.”

Devil Jim flashed a proud glance.

“Teachers always had dogs they would beat,” Telescope added, looking down at me. “And squirrels they shot with pellet guns. I could never beat dogs and talked openly against shootin’ of squirrels, so they flunked me — prejudice against my kindly hands. Called me kindly-Kurt and kind-man-Ken and all sorts of awful names like that, and I was flunked for not hurtin’ animals, which is basically math and science — hurtin’ people’s brains and such.”

Devil Jim walked into the forest and set his pack onto the floor. That night, the men slept in perfect secrecy, either high in the trees, hidden in hammocks, or under a pile of pine needles with the ends of their smoking pipes sticking out for air. Late in the night, there was a terrible squeaking from atop the highest of trees. Then there was three gunshots.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! And the next morning — would you believe it! — we had smoked bird which had fallen out of the sky!

“Strange how fates is,” reflected Telescope, buttering the bird and tearing up as he sliced an onion. “Providence shot that bird out of the sky just when we needed food the most.”

“Do you think it would be strange,” I asked, “if we found birds falling out of the sky with stray bullet holes in them the rest of our trip?”

Big Jim chewed a bit of bird thoughtfully and agreed that that could very well be the case, since fate was good at providing for Big Jim’s belly even though his hands were kindly toward animals.

“I did come across an evil critter once,” Jim reflected when we had finished eating, “that almost made me do the evil thing of skinning a creature alive. He was a nasty little sea-devil with a cheery face that strut about singin’ songs and playin’ cards. But I beat him every time.”

I looked up at Telescope. It seemed he was talking about Longfellow Jim, though I hardly believed he could have beaten Longfellow at cards. I felt indignant. Suddenly, up in the trees there was a noise like a bird mimicking the giant.

“Who said that? Which asinine arse said that?” blurted the giant, lifting his gun.

All the men raised their own guns, but the mocking voice echoed further and further away, until we could here it no more.

“I chased the darn bird everywhere,” continued Devil Jim smugly, “through storms, across oceans, onto desert islands, even into the arctic.”

I imagined Longfellow out-smarting Telescope through all these places, but Devil Jim smiled to himself.

“And the poor half-animal-guy, well he’s frozen now. Most of the rumors say he lives in Antarctica, eating snow and makin’ snow-angels.”

His telescope-eye and the fat, baseball-sized real-eye surveyed the forest.

“Does he get all the gold though?” I asked, unable to hold back my indignation about the insults directed at Longfellow.

The giant’s enormous arm lunged at me.

“Why you runt! I’ll squeeze you in two and use ya for chewin’ gum!” he shouted, grasping at the air.

The men turned and raised their guns as if Jim was some old elephant in a circus who’d gone mad.

“A cold, a cold!” I explained, dodging the giant’s arms and rushing away like a cowboy running from an angry bull. “I wondered if the bird might catch a cold from living in the ice and snow? You said he lived in Antarctica! That’s all I meant.”

The giant’s dumb face stared for several long moments — blankly and

angrily, as if his brain had stopped working. The men rushed between me and the giant like clowns trying to distract the angry bull. Then the giant dropped his arms, growled, and sulked away.

CHAPTER 13

BLIND MAN'S BAY

TELESCOPE'S FACE HAD CONTORTED INTO SOMETHING LIKE A baboon's backside when I made the comment about Longfellow 'getting all the gold.' That irate expression lingered on his face as he suspiciously viewed me the next few days. I tried in every way to stay away from the diabolical brute and began to believe he wasn't mentally stable.

I had committed a terrible blunder, however, in my service to Longfellow when I enraged the giant. For my duty was, I believed, to figure out the missing pieces to Telescope's story.

What had happened to Longfellow's men who had taken away the treasure? The man with the yellow rain-jacket and the black boots who had stored the pipes at the marina — where had he gone? Did he survive Devil Jim's attack? Could the treasure have been hidden somewhere nearby? Any chance of inquiring into this now seemed dangerous.

"Don't be afraid of the capt'n," Three-Fingered Jim told me as we set out the next day. "It's for starvin' children in Africa that he gets all upset and tries to kill things."

I lowered my brow and turned to the band of mangy mongrels.

"That's right. He's an 'umanitarian," explained Mangle-Face spitting everywhere. "If Telescope's brains start to twitch unfriendly-like, it's on account of him feeling hurt for somewhere in the world."

The sneering faces of the sickly men twisted as we set off. Later that day we found Jim in such an unfriendly state of mind. The big man was bludgeoning a three-foot-wide tree with his bare fists.

"What's he doing?" I asked.

The men scowled.

"There's awful bad mud slides in South America," they explained and wandered off.

Then, hours later, we found him plowing through a bunch of sheds that turned out to have no food in them and the men remarked knowingly.

"It's the tsunamis in Japan, that's what he's upset about. Terrible. Just terrible. Poor Jim feels it. We feel it too."

And at night, I awoke to find the Devil throttling trees again in his sleep. The group of men gathered around and sleepily told me that Jim always loved animals. And that places all over the world was caging and torturing animals that very moment. They wandered back to bed, applauding one another for having such a humanitarian almost-sort-of-person as their leader.

All these incidents only caused me to become more frightened and less at ease, until one day our adventure took a sudden turn.

After our long trek south into the mountain ranges, we came to a long beautiful valley with a long lake at the center. Next to it was a wooden hut, toward which we headed.

The men had eaten very little and I was eager for some way to escape. But when we approached the old cabin, we found it dark and empty.

“Wait a second, there’s a boat over here,” directed one of the men, nodding to a blur near the dock. “And there’s a smell coming from it.”

There was a large riverboat parked in front of the cabin. We began to hear faint noises coming from within the dark recesses. And though an aroma of food was wafting our direction, there was no light and no other sign of life on the boat. Devil Jim approached and bent his massive self into the entrance of the boat, causing it to sway.

“Who’s there?” asked a voice from the darkness. “I hear footsteps. Five, six, seven . . . *twenty . . . or more* sets of feet! Dear me, who are all these visitors?”

The voice came from an old man at the back of the riverboat. He was covered in grey hair and cloaks and stirred a saucepan of simmering food in the pitch dark.

“He’s blind,” inferred Telescope as they shined a light on the old codger, who cooked quietly.

“One of those sets of feet is heavier than the others,” remarked the old man, twisting his head curiously, “and the floor of my boat has lowered significantly.”

“Right you are old fool . . . ” said Jim, but his voice faltered. His giant single eye which wandered through the shadows had come across a luggage trunk, and his hand had swung it open.

Inside the trunk, a sparkling sight caught the attention of all the eyes in the room, except the blind man’s of course, who stirred the saucepan unwittingly. Telescope’s men shuddered in delight. There were diamonds and jewels and silver ornaments hidden away in the trunk.

"Are you men in need of some food?" inquired the man, tilting his head at the silence.

Telescope made a loud, fake laugh to cover up the silence.

"That would be wonderful!" he declared, sitting down loudly so his men could swipe the jewels and stash them in their pockets without being noticed. "What an 'ospitibal old arse — I mean horse of man of you are."

"You're hunters?" guessed the old man, bringing a pan of mushrooms and beefsteak to a couple of the visitors. "I hear the clinking of guns in my old ears."

"Hunters yes!" laughed Telescope, raising his gun and pointing it at the old man's face suspiciously. "(Old buzzard! how did he know that?!) he muttered under his breath, but then realized that the man had overdeveloped his ability to hear in his blindness. "We are hunters from across the sea, looking for a certain kind of folk that are shooting birds.

"You're against hunting," inquired the old man, stirring his pan.

"Ever seen any bird-hunters around here?" inquired Mangle-Face Jim.

"I housed a traveler three days ago, but I don't think he killed any birds," replied the old man, hobbling back to his stove to deliver more food, "he only wanted to store his luggage trunks."

Suddenly all the men grew excited, understanding that Longfellow must have been the traveler and brought these trunks of treasure.

My heart sunk as I realized Longfellow's gold would soon be in the hand of these outlaws.

"Luggage trunks — he left more than one?" inquired Telescope delicately.

"Yes, three trunks. One . . . two . . . three . . . heavy things . . . "

The old man's thoughts broke in absentmindedness. Then he told a story about the food, which he had caught and made himself. *He had raised a family here, didn't they know. In his young life he had been so happy, before his family's tragic deaths.* He wanted to tell them his favorite memories with them.

Suddenly Devil Jim couldn't take it anymore.

"Where did the man go, you nasty buzzard! And the other luggage trunks?" he demanded.

"The trunks? Oh yes . . . yes!" replied the old man, remembering their previous conversation. "He had three trunks and stored them in the back. I forgot all about them once you started inquiring so politely into my family

history."

"I did no such thing," barked Devil Jim, standing, and forcing the man to the back of the riverboat, which swayed.

"Now before I show you the boxes, did you ever hear of a fatter person sneaking about in the woods?" asked the old man, turning around suddenly.
"The man who brought his luggage told me there was a heavier person sneaking about, and I was to beware of him. Are any of you very heavy?"

Devil Jim became uneasily silent.

The old man's wandering mind transferred back to the treasure boxes which had touched his extended arms.

As he bent over the two luggage trunks, the men quickly pushed him aside and opened the trunk where a shimmering sight of gold reflected in their faces.

"Good heavens, he's a moron and a babbler!" declared Telescope as the man was pushed to the back of the boat. "He doesn't have a clue that there are piles of gold here. But what's the good of gold if you can't see it, aye men!"

I was pushed alongside the old man, so I couldn't see the treasure. I felt that something terrible was about to happen to the old man and went to protect him.

Suddenly there was the noise of something rubbing against the riverboat, and I realized that the old man was gone.

Through the windows, I saw trees alongside the boat that were moving. They suddenly became tilted. At the same time, the boat became tilted as well.

Then I felt something pull at my belt — I was pulled steadily backward by a rope. I was lifted into the air through a window and out of the boat. Next, I was looking at the riverboat from above, hanging by a rope which had been tied to an over-hanging tree and I watched the riverboat speed away in horror.

"Oh no! Oh no!" I shouted for I realized in a moment that we had drifted far from the cabin by the lake and were now at a narrow river-dam where the water dropped into a fall, and over which the riverboat plummeted.

The giant boat loomed its back end, was tilted up slightly and then tipped over the edge into darkness.

CHAPTER 14

A TWIST IN THE CAVES

I WAS LEFT DANGLING IN A MESH OF TREE-TRUNKS protruding from the shores — hanging from a rope to which I had been tied. The old man had saved me.

I had been lingering near the back door, when somehow or other, the rope had been tied to my belt. The old man must have been carrying it with him. The other end he had flung over a protruding tree, swung himself free of the riverboat and tied my rope to the tree so I was pulled out as the boat plunged toward the falls.

I glanced at the shadows and saw the old man's figure clambering up the overhanging trees into darkness.

Something about the way he clambered triggered a strange feeling in me. The old man seemed taller, more nimble, and quick-footed. He had clambered in the same way Longfellow had clambered up the trees in the hotel at the dig-site.

The old man was Longfellow! My heart beat with sudden relief and excitement.

Longfellow had been masked in some way or other. I saw a fake beard and cloak hanging in the trees overhead! It has been his lumbering frame under the disguise. All the wandering conversation had been an act to disguise himself.

I reached behind me and untied the rope from my belt, then crawled along one of the lower tree-trunks to shore.

Longfellow had disappeared . . .

I heard the outlaws crying below. Apparently my time with them wasn't over. I would be in a precarious situation if they found me unharmed. So I peered over the cliff where the water had plummeted. The riverboat was bashed and was now sinking near the shore. The men were climbing out of it one by one and swimming ashore.

I hurried down the cliff to the pool of water where I dipped quietly in and crawled out as if I had gone over the falls as well.

"A swindler!" shouted Devil Jim, swimming ashore. "He was a

trickster and a con artist!"

Several of the men turned to me as I crawled out.

"What an 'orrible bad-luck leprechaun you found capt'n," they said, staring at the sinking river-boat. "The treasure is gone!"

"He wasn't blind a bit," blurted Three-Fingered Jim, holding his three fingers to his eyes.

"Do you still have your *scroll* captain?" asked one of the men. I wasn't sure what this meant, but Devil Jim searched his jacket and replied that he still had his scroll. Then the giant reached to his face.

"My telescope. Where's me scope!" An ominous metal hole appeared where the giant's telescope had been. I felt fear come over me as I remembered Longfellow's words about the giant's eye-socket being a window to the devil.

"He took it from me! That old man, blast him!" shouted Jim.

The men grumpily started a fire on shore and the whole event was revisited. The old man had pretended to be blind. He had showed them a bunch of fake treasure in order to steal their pirate-guns, which were quite valuable. His longwinded babbling was contrived to distract them, along with his cooking and fake treasure, so they wouldn't notice the boat moving slowly toward the dam.

Somehow, the men refused to believe the man could have been their enemy, Longfellow, though I knew it had been him. The riverboat and cabin must have been the vacation spot of some rich person, which Longfellow had chanced upon and used for his scheme.

Devil Jim set up a camp on the shore and the outlaws were forced to sleep round the campfire with wet clothes. They had lost most of their guns in the fall and were down to primarily knives as their immediate weapons. In the morning, the injured men were left behind and I realized Longfellow's plan of lessening their numbers. There were only fifteen now, and this seemed much easier to handle if it came down to a gunfight when we found the gold.

But as for me, the men gave me worse and worse looks as our trip went on, as if I was responsible for all their calamity.

At one point, Devil Jim had the horrible luck of climbing a tree with no core inside. One of his followers (we weren't sure which one — though I thought his voice had come from the tree-limbs above) wondered *what was the point of having a captain called telescope if he couldn't see more than five feet in front of himself?*

Telescope grumbled at the complaint and scurried up the nearest tree in an attempt to learn our location.

His huge weight was gone for many seconds and the outlaws drew a deep breath as if the earth was somehow bigger and less stifling.

Then there was a crack like thunder.

One man yelled “timber!” and another “giant blubbery man!” and everything giant and blubbery fell to the earth along with some sticks.

Some of the men had broken legs and this lessened our numbers even further. We were down to *fourteen* men!

Then, Devil Jim went across a bridge that said *maximum weight: one thousand three hundred and twenty pounds*, which was ten more than Telescope thought he weighed, and we all breathed a sigh of relief, until Jim passed over the bridge and it flat-out shattered.

Telescope went sloshing down the river and all the men chased after him like he was their fattened cow.

When Telescope had dried and comforted his bruised self, he grasped my shirt and held a knife to my throat.

“What kind of a devil leprechaun are you!” he cursed in a demonic language of hisses and growls. I thought for a second that his humanitarian side might suddenly feel pain from some other side of the earth.

But he rolled over, took a deep breath, and plodded on.

During my third week with the outlaws, a storm forced all of us into a cave system. The fourteen weary souls trudged into the cave, which had two rooms and many tunnels, and there they set up camp. A lantern had drawn them to this area of the forest, and luckily brought them across the cave.

After they’d settled down and tried to fall asleep, there came a whispering from the men who’d camped in the furthest room. I heard between hisses the words *telescope* and *fat* his through the cavern.

“Who sad that?” blurted Telescope uncontrollably. “What are you saying about me, you mangy mongrels?”

One of the men in the other cave sat up as if he had been dozing off.

“We was saying nothing, just talking about food.”

But more whispering came and more words drifted to our ears. *Bad sort of captain. Smelly oaf, hisss hisss hisss. That blind man was his fault.*”

Telescope pondered these words in the shadows. And tossed and turned uncomfortably.

I felt I needed some air and shuffled to the other end of the cavern,

where I saw the other group of men heading down the tunnel.

“I thought it came from over there,” one of them said and I followed them into the tunnel.

The men had their knives drawn and were walking carefully through the dark, when one of their feet struck something.

“Why this is a turn of luck,” said one of the men, reaching down for something.

They turned on a lighter and something gold glittered under the dirt. There were five golden bracelets, hidden in the cave floor.

I heard from the shadows much applauding of the leprechaun as they scooped up the objects and donned them around their wrists.

Then they looked ahead toward the depths of the cave.

“What if there's more?” they wondered aloud, “and what an opportune time for only the three of us to find it, without any fat man around.”

“If we find the chests, perhaps we let the goose-chase carry on and one day come back and find the poor forgotten chests alone.”

The men agreed to this and continued forward, examining their shinny bracelets.

As I listened to them, I heard the snoring of a man. When I turned I saw the cave from which we had just come. I trudged forward and found the whole band of men before me, many of them awake and holding their guns. They had been listening to the other men scheming to keep the gold for themselves.

I doubted that Devil Jim expected any better from his heartless band of hooligans. But then the words *fat* and *smelly* drifted through the cave again.

I saw a figure move through the shadows next to the three men with bracelets, and I heard the clinking of something like metal.



As they lit a lighter to view the path ahead, my eyes saw little specks moving out of the bracelets in a stream onto their hands and trigger-fingers. It was a swarm of spiders and centipedes and worse things.

Suddenly there was a yell of pain and sudden firing as their trigger-fingers were bit by the insects.

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM.

Next I heard one man yell.

“Shoot the man that looks like a horse,” and “We’re keeping the gold for us.”

This threw the cave into an uproar.

“Mutiny!”

The men who had the bracelets began shooting wildly at the men that had appeared suddenly, and those who had been listening in the dark began defending themselves against the onslaught of bullets.

BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, sounded one end of the room. BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, returned the other.

Telescope and his men started ducking and diving as bullets ricocheted off the walls, until Telescope’s voice rang out.

“Stand down! Stand down! It’s us. It’s us,” he yelled.

But when they turned on a light, the three men with the bracelets where shot in some way and stung by many insects and two others from the other team were wounded.

“Captain, what’s this?” asked one of the men, lifting a brass telescope from the ground.

“Me scope. How in the heck did that get there . . . ?” Telescope let out a yell. “It was him! The blind trickster!”

He stood and placed the telescope back on his face.

HISSS.

Devil Jim roared again and flung his telescope into the cave. A serpent crawled from within the telescope. It had bitten his face.

“That evil man, that horrible old creature! Curses! Death! Forever pain!” yelled the giant as he held his forehead in pain.

But finally he let out a loud groan, grabbed his telescope and hurried away.

CHAPTER 15

DEVIL JIM'S LIST

THAT NIGHT I DECIDED I WAS GOING TO LEAVE. I FOUND NO opportune way of slipping off, however. Every time I trudged away by myself, Devil Jim would appear right behind me.

“Are you scared of all those animals I’ve been eating?” he asked, sneaking up behind me.

I *had* been noticing a large number of animals disappearing over the past week. The men had been returning with them in the night. They’d mention something about healing their wounds and next morning the animals would be gone.

“Well let me tell you,” said Telescope, “I don’t eat any of those animals. I take ‘em off into the woods cus o’ their wounds. When they’re better, I let ‘em go eat grass and be free.”

He patted his belly, which incidentally released a burp. But I was appeased by his congenial booming voice, and he led me back to the camp, where I sat awake all night. I couldn’t help feeling like something was wrong.

Then Telescope and his men began talking around the campfire in hushed tones, after I retreated to my hammock. There seemed to be less laughing than usual and this made me very uneasy. Finally I filled my hammock with pine needles and climbed down to listen.

When I had crept close and could see their figures sitting around the fire, I began to decipher their words.

“When we shot those birds,” said one of the men, “when the eight hundred stray bullets killed ‘em in that coincidental tragedy, the pesky birds were headin’ South not North. So why would we lookin’ North for their golden eggs?”

“Those strange and pesky birds,” countered another man more angrily, “might ha’ been headin’ South, but their eggs where hid North, before they were slain with the wild bullets. They took off in the other direction to be tricky-like. Haven’t you ever used your head in a jam?”

“Quiet men, quiet now,” interjected Telescope peaceably. “We witnessed the tragedy of those strange and nasty birds dyin’ a few weeks

passed and ‘ave searched these hills dead through. But the stray-alley-cat-bird I’ve been followin’ hasn’t shown his mangy face yet. When he does and finds that his old bird-friends died near one of his old hideouts, he’ll lead us to the eggs and there tragedy will strike again.”

I shuddered at the coded banter. These men were talking slyly about Longfellow and his men — about their deaths, the gold, and even Longfellow’s return. This was the information I had been hoping to discover.

It also appeared that we had arrived at the very spot where Longfellow’s men had died. They believed Longfellow would know where the gold had been hidden once he discovered where his followers had died.

Suddenly, my thoughts were interrupted.

“If we don’t get some luck soon, capt’n,” declared one of the men. “I’ll run over there and cut the leprechaun’s throat.”

“Shhhh. None of that now, none of that,” demanded Telescope, peering over his shoulder to my hammock where the pine needles still disguised my absence.

Telescope was quiet for a long time. He seemed rather calm, and after staring at the flames with a grin, he took out a notepad from his front pocket and stared at it.

The men left and the fire was put out. The animals they had captured were rounded up and led to one corner of the forest.

I waited and waited, and after falling in and out of sleep in the bushes, I woke to find Devil Jim fast asleep in a bed of moss and his notepad laying across his chest in the rays of moonlight. Something in the smile Jim wore drew my curiosity. I found myself walking dangerously up to the sleeping giant as if I were incapable of fear.

It must have been boldest moment of my life, but I grabbed the notepad and began to read it in the moonlight. There were several things written out in a list.

First, I saw *goat* but this was crossed out, then there was *lamb*, and that too had a line through it. Then there was *fox* and *vulture* and several other names of animals with some little description next to them, but all of these were crossed out. The last item on the list was the only one uncrossed.

My heart beat very fast.

It was leprechaun.

CHAPTER 16

A LEPRECHAUN TAKES FLIGHT

“**B**EARS UMMY YUMMY,” TELESCOPE MURMURED IN HIS sleep and added, “horse ummy yummy,” grinning wide and finally muttered “leprechaun ummy ummy yummy,” and rolled over.

Such a fright took me that I started convulsing where I stood. I thought I might faint. My feet locked up. My limbs trembled.

The giant’s huge, horrible face grinned and he licked his lips in his sleep. His belly that was the size of a refrigerator quietly lifted and fell.

As the giant rolled back over his jacket opened and dropped something in my path. My curiosity was compounded by my reckless fright. I stared and stared at a long leather scroll, and reached for it impulsively. Suddenly Jim snorted and I took off at a sprint.

I bolted! I had subdued a shout which must have woken them all! And I had Devil Jim’s scroll in my hand.

I didn’t stop running. At any moment I expected to be caught.

My feet raced through bushes and trees. I sprinted wildly. The sounds of their feet would overtake me at any moment.

The treetops and mountains rushed by in the moonlight. The thought of the men gathering around filled me with terror.

Soon my lungs ached, and my sides burned. Yet I kept going. I saw in my head Devil Jim’s enraged face and knew he would kill me if he saw me.

“Don’t stop. Don’t stop. Run Run Run!” I said to myself as I paused to take a break.

But I waited in the bushes, listening for sounds of the men, which was impossible to hear with my panting.

Then I heard a shout rising from the valley bellow. They had awoken and found that I was gone.

“Run. Run. Run. Don’t stop. Don’t stop — he’ll squish you in two and use you for chewing gum!”

I started up again and this time I didn’t stop. I had shivers. I had flutters in my heart. My legs and arms trembled as I ran through the jungle, and half an hour later, my body was still shaking.

All of Longfellow's tales of his adventures with Devil Jim replayed in my mind. I thought of all the animals Devil Jim had eaten, and his lies, and how the devil had probably seen me from within Telescope's metal eye-socket.

As I scrambled up a mountain, gunshots rang from the valley below. Were they aimed at me? I turned to a cave to hide and discovered some ink on the mountain. It was a design of some kind.

A sailor would tattoo the land that shipwrecked him if he only had some ink, Jim had told me back at the hostel.

The ink signs were very alike those Jim had used at the demolition site. They were a group of upside-down V's that had become very familiar to me since my recent flight.

I turned to look over the valley and saw the V-shapes on the horizon! The ink design was the outline of a mountain — and the direction in which I was to head. But my heart sank — the mountain was across a deep valley . . .

I decided to follow Longfellow's directions. After a long trek down a steep and slippery hill, and an arduous trek up another, I reached the mountain which Jim's sign had indicated. There I rested in the shadows.

As afternoon neared and I began to explore the mountain, I found another sign etched on a rock. There was the number twenty, a footprint, an arrow, and a small shovel.

“Twenty paces that way, dig,” I translated.

I paced out twenty steps in the direction of the arrow, along the rough mountain-cliff, and found a large, flat stone, which I used to begin digging. After a little effort, the ground gave way to a hollow space underneath the rock, heading into the mountainside. I tucked my head in and found before me the entrance to a long, dark cave.

I slid below the mountain, my head scraping the rough rock walls. But on the inside, I found a dry opening. I crawled onto a smooth rock surface and heard the blowing of wind through the cave, which made me feel somehow safe and welcome. I stepped forward and my hand reached a rope ladder, which climbed to a window. From the window, rays of light projected onto a tall, uneven ceiling, which became more apparent as my eyes adjusted.

I climbed the ladder, which was over twenty feet high, and looked out over the mountainside and the trail with the entrance. The hole I'd dug, however, left an obvious path for Telescope to find.

Suddenly, the intention behind the ladder became clear to me. The

ladder was made in such a way that it could flip over the outer wall of the cave. Then, I could climb down and close up the entrance.

Standing on the window, I flipped the ladder to hang over the cliff-side. Then I climbed down, filled the hole, and replaced the long flat rock over it. After climbing back up, I pulled the ladder into the cave and the entrance to the cave was hidden again.

CHAPTER 17

SURVIVAL AND THE CAVE

WHAT KIND OF PLACE WAS I IN? I WONDERED, IMPRESSED by the design of the caves.

After a small exploration, I found additional systems of caves in the back. There was a mountain spring, a bucket of water, a mattress, a flint, a lantern, some well-dried firewood, kindling, and even tufts of bark for starting a fire.

“Why, this was a well-organized mountain hideout,” I laughed to myself, lying down on the mattress and hanging a lantern.

Using the bark and a flint, I was able to start a small fire within a pit further inside the cave.

Would this ruin my secrecy? My eyes followed the rising smoke and saw that it was lifting high into the rocks and disappearing into the mountain.

I thought of Devil Jim and his men who were now prowling outside somewhere. And I pondered the danger I was in.

After exploring the tunnels the next day, I found many lookouts, and even viewed Devil Jim himself and his men sneaking along the mountainside.

I was afraid at first, but then I realized I was within a pirate sanctuary, and would be safe and quite protected. I observed the men from the top lookout and recorded their position on a detailed map of the jungle which I’d found. The map outlined tunnels and trenches and hideouts all along the forest. It seemed to be only part of a whole, for there were references to places and hideouts not on the map.

Eventually I felt safe and quite proud of the ruffian refuge.

The more I explored the system of caves, the more they drew my curiosity. Was this the cave where Longfellow’s men had stayed before they were killed? Perhaps Jim had directed me to it? If so, where was Jim?

As I had undone my jacket on my first night there, I had come across the leather scroll which I had grabbed during my traumatic flight from Devil Jim. I had stuffed this object in the inner lining of my jacket and half-forgot about it. But when I surveyed it then, I nearly shouted in amazement. It was a map! Telescope Jim’s map, the one I had seen in his hotel room, back in the

city!

My eyes stretched across this piece of strategy from my enemy and I laughed, realizing this was Devil Jim's closest and most secret piece of information. The mysterious pools and the magical islands outlined in his own hand filled me with awe and wonder. My eyes followed the depicted waves through underwater passages and onto secret pirate territories. Beside each marking were notes describing each's importance.

That night I slept peacefully with Telescope's treasure map beside me. The smoke of my fire crept into the mountain and disappeared through several diverting cracks in such a way that the source of the fire could not be discovered.

Inside a tin box, I found a journal of events.

Pipes are stored. T Jim is close. We will try to divert him tomorrow.

Longfellow's followers! This was their entry just before they were killed . . . They had stored the 'pipes.' But where? Was the gold here in the cave!

I left my own entry.

Miles the Mutineer, sometime in March. I spent three weeks with T Jim's band of outlaws before I deserted them with important information. L Jim narrowed them down to only thirteen. I made a fire and used the ladder to hide the entrance. I have stolen T Jim's map and hold it now with me. His location I have recorded in the upper-lookout map-log. No sign of L Jim. I anticipate an attack.

After many nights of loneliness and hunger, I went to a precipice through a long stairway and looked out over the ocean to find my home island.

From the high point, the shimmering waves, steady breeze, and rough landscape made feel as if I were viewing a real-life painting. They struck me with sudden meaning — a feeling of something greater than myself, greater than the treasure, than life, and even mankind, but what was it?

I suddenly wondered what all this beauty and wildlife meant.

As I listened to the peace of the outdoors with its strange birds and nocturnal sounds— and the powerful rumbling waves in the distance, my mind seemed to grasp it. This was the creation of something man could not understand. Something leapt in my heart!

Could all of it be the creation of the *supreme being* with which so many people described connecting throughout history? This idea was

frightening and befuddling. Yet, I was helpless and in need.

Suddenly, a prayer rushed to my lips.

“Food, I need food, God,” I cried, and asked to find Longfellow and escape from Telescope Jim for good. “And if you don’t mind — maybe I could find a bit of the treasure that old Jim left here — good Jim that is, the Longfellow one.”

And I hoped God had understood me.

I was halfway down the stair when I heard a pig squealing in the dark. Somehow, it had entered my cave by a distant route.

My prayer had been answered already! But how was I to kill it?

In a rush, I took the pirate knife I had gotten when living with the outlaws and a spear I had found next to the mattress in the cave and snuck toward the squealing pig. As I drove him into the cave, I trapped him and his large, furious face turned on me, blinded in the light of my lantern.

Horror struck me as I realized that if I didn’t strike well, this creature would seriously harm and possibly even kill me.

The pig snorted and plunged toward me. I scurried up a bank and hurled the spear with all my weight.

There was a sharp cry of rage and terror.

My strike was successful!

The pig fled through the cave squealing. Minutes later, I found it dying in a corner. Then, I took the pirate blade to its throat, asked God’s forgiveness for killing an animal and thanked Him for bringing me the food anyway.

Suddenly, there was a noise behind me.

“Miles, you crafty devil? You killed supper in honor of good ol’ Jim’s return?”

I turned with the delight of seeing another human being, a friendly one as well. For the speaker was Longfellow Jim, who held an outstretched lantern.

CHAPTER 18

A FEAST BETWEEN FRIENDS

“**J**IM!” I EXCLAIMED, RUSHING TOWARD HIM. *TWO PRAYERS answered in one day!* I thought to myself. *What about the treasure now!*

It was a beautiful thing to be in that stone cavern with a crackling fire as the pirate smokestacks spread our smoke throughout the mountainside, keeping our cave hidden. The pirates, it seemed, were masters of secrecy, resourcefulness, and rough living conditions. Their systems of protection were ancient and simple, but clever. Jim and I had a castle it seemed as rain began to pour.

We pulled the boar back through the cave, where Jim skinned it. The meat was cut into pieces and roasted over a fire. Jim brought some root-beer from bottles that were stored at the bottom of a natural spring. When he opened them they were ice-cold. Then the rain poured and I thought of Telescope and his men suffering the rain in the wild.

Jim told me how he had been the one laughing in the trees. He had given me the signs of good luck, knowing Devil Jim’s superstitious ways.

“I couldn’t help playing tricks on me old nemesis,” he said, chewing on some of the meat.

He had found the riverboat and used some old hidden treasure to fill the boxes.

He had drawn the men into the cave as well, and placed the gold bracelets in their path. He had been hiding and slipped a magnet by the bracelets which unleashed a latch and the insects that had triggered the gunfight.

He had of course been listening to the men when they had been talking of killing the pesky birds and deduced from their position that his men must have hidden the gold in the hideout we were in.

“Then I made those tattoos that brought you here, and even shot at you a couple times when you crossed them, so I knew you’d hide and see them.”

Jim smiled a wide grin.

“We down to only seven now, Miles, seven filthy varmints,” he

muttered, meaning the outlaws.

When I showed him Telescope's map, he looked shocked.

"Miles, how on earth!" he exclaimed, staring at the map. "Do you know what this is?"

I told him I thought I did.

"This is a map of all Devil Jim's secret knowledge of the seas."

Longfellow told me he would have to study it, since it was partly encrypted with Devil Jim's code names. Then he grew very excited and told me there was more treasure out there. Lots of it.

I asked Jim where he had been all this time and he told me he had been making arrangements for our escape.

While we feasted in the glow of the fire, Jim explained the history of the treasure.

"A mysterious tribe discovered it. Then there had been wars over it between the Spanish, French and Dutch, but that ended in the treasure's loss. The shipment I discovered was only part of the full treasure.

"Telescope and I were mates then," Longfellow continued, leaning back and chewing on a pork leg. "We found it using our combined knowledge of ancient shipwrecks. Then Devil Jim turned on me. Tried to keep it for himself. There was a faction between us. I was tied to the mast and left for dead on an island. But I had altered the ship's log so he lost the location of the treasure. But I remembered it in my 'ead, and went back for it."

"Then you stored it at the hotel?" I guessed. "Until the city decided to demolish it."

"Exactly!" answered Jim. "And that was what brought me to you."

Jim finished his pork leg and stretched lazily. I stretched my own stomach painfully. I felt like a boa constrictor who had swallowed an entire animal whole.

"Come with me Miles," Jim declared, standing. "It's time you saw the treasure."

Jim led me down a rocky stair toward a passage that was covered in water.

At the back of a beach, he uncovered a raft made of driftwood that he used to pass over the water. We paddled through caverns that were just cracks in width, and went deep into the mountain, until we came to a distant shore. Jim landed the boat and began digging.

Within a few minutes we had two chests of wood before us.

Jim opened one and it shined with silver. Sterling silver coins. At the bottom were gold bricks.

The next chest showed gold chains that embedded with diamonds and crowns adorned with pearls. I saw a large red jewel that I nearly pocketed.

There were black jewels and green jewels and shiny grey jewels. Jim looked on these with a grin.

“There is much treasure like this in the South Seas.”

Then he reached into the chest of silver and removed from beneath it all, a golden monkey, which Jim said was the trademark of the Sinsay treasure.

The gold bricks were as heavy as a bowling ball. They each bore an old and mysteriously engraving from some other time and some other place. I held the golden monkey in my hand, a prize of the ancient world.

It was held firmly by the hand of Miles the Mutineer.

We loaded each chest onto our raft and towed them back through the cave.

“By all reason, the meal we just had will be our last,” remarked Jim. “We are only two men against a troop.”

He looked at me nostalgically as if I were the last human he would set eyes on.

Then he smoked his last cigar, drank the final bit of root beer and became serious. He handed me something wrapped in leather from a secret storage compartment.

“A pistol?” I remarked, taking an old black revolver.

“I have made arrangements for a boat to meet us at the nearest bay. If we are strategic, Telescope Jim will miss us.”

Jim led me to the back door at the opposite side of the mountain and we headed into dark of night without any further strategy.

There was a single, descending path down the mountain toward a glimmering bay and a horizon of ocean.

“They will have at least one sentry between us and the sea,” Jim whispered as we each dragged a chest onto the road. “If we are lucky, we will find him first. As soon as we shoot, the rest will be on us in no time.”

It was very strange heading into the darkness, towing our treasure behind us, like a couple of gypsies. We moved an inch an hour it seemed.

We moved and were quiet. We dragged and pulled and hauled and remained still, looking for an attack from the darkness.

On and on the rugged path went.

Each moment I suspected sudden gunfire. My legs burned from pulling and my arms grew limp.

One more inch, one more foot, I told myself

There was the sea, I could smell it.

Soon I could hear the waves rolling against the rocky shore.

Freedom. Jim's boat would be there, just beyond the ledge.

Finally, we reached the last cliff before the bay and the hillside erupted in gunfire.

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM.

I turned to the forest behind me.

Early-morning sun illuminated the landscape that hid the angry gunfire. Telescope's sentry had seen us and sent out the alarm.

Several more bullets whizzed through the jungle and ricocheted off rocks.

“Hurry, Hurry!” I hissed to the path behind me.

The edge of the track led around a cliff and over the water. Abruptly it came to a halt.

Deep, swirling stretches of ocean lay below. It was a long drop.

“Jim, where's the boat?” I called.

The cries of the outlaws broke the trees behind me.

I ducked and lifted my pistol toward the noise. I fired. I could see nothing, but my attackers saw me.

Bullets whizzed passed my head and struck the rocks behind me.

A shot struck the edge of my boot and I shuddered. Telescope had seen me, he was watching me with his telescope. I had only moments before his next shot put an end to my life.

“Longfellow, Longfellow!” I hissed, turning to the path from which I'd come.

A sudden fright took me. There was no response.

Longfellow was gone.

CHAPTER 19

THE END OF THE ROAD

I CREEPT AROUND THE ROCK WALL WHICH I HAD IMAGINED TO have hidden Jim's figure.

There was no one.

I risked a more dangerous glance down the path which led into the mountains. It was likewise empty, and more bullets zinged passed my head.

Longfellow had abandoned me.

He must have been gone for minutes now, perhaps half an hour or more!

The sudden pain struck me as gunfire blasted the cliffs above. Jim had used me as bait. He had fled with his own share of the treasure, and left me with the other half to lure Telescope away.

I stared in horror at the vast ocean. I could either jump or face the troop of men who would surely skin me alive!

“Longfellow!” I yelled. But there was no answer.

A worse realization struck me as I grabbed my trunk.

“The thief. No! No!” I yelled, voicing my fear. “The swindler!” I shouted, for I suspected something worse.

He had not only used me as bait, but swindled me too.

My heart shook within me as I broke open the lock on the chest and reached inside.

Stones.

The chest I had been carrying was filled with stones. Jim had switched the chests before we left and I hadn't known any different.

It had been an evil trick, a vicious scheme. He had used me to get the map. He had used me to get the treasure, brought me across islands to die at the hands of his enemy.

What a terrible feeling!

Leaving me to the outlaws was murder. What could I do? I was pressed to the edge of the cliff with nothing but a chest of stones! There was only the sea and the cliffs.

I stared. The gunshots rang.

I threw the chest off the cliff.
KAPLUNK.



I jumped after it. Bullets whizzed over my head. I heard the men shout as they raced down the mountain to look for the sinking chest.

It was a long fall. I landed with a painful smack and sunk below the surface.

I was about to swim ashore, when I saw the shadow of a boat coming toward me. Above Telescope's eye was looking at me through the water.

From within the waves I looked up, terrified.

Then I saw something glitter in the water.

My coin from the demolition site.

It had escaped my pocket in my fall and drifted passed the treasure chest. It was the only treasure I had from my entire journey.

Above, Telescope Jim continued to watch, following me with his eye.

I reached and swam. I dug and kicked and lurched.

But my lungs were bursting.

Alas no! My life was not worth that coin!

The barrel of a gun took aim from the boat above. And I swam away.

I lost the only bit of treasure I had ever had.

I resurfaced under a cavern below the cliff, where I drew a deep breath.

I could hear the boats gathering outside the cliff, shouting at one another to find the chest.

Several men jumped in the water, but I was long gone.

Within the shoreline-cave, I found an exiting path through the cliff. On the other side of the small peninsula, I met up with an official hiking trail that was part of the national park system.

I ran and ran and ran. My legs ached. My head swam.

Soon I saw buildings rising over the hills. I had come back to civilization.

I ran toward the city, feeling terrible, but still amazed I had escaped. How long before Telescope found the empty chest of stones and came after me.

Probably never, I thought with peace returning as I remembered the chest disappearing over an ocean shelf. They had never known it was a fake. I myself had believed the trick up until the last moment. For all Telescope Jim knew the treasure had been lost again at sea.

I will not explain the horror and pain I endured as I wandered back to the city. I won't tell you the names I called myself and Jim, and the dismay I suffered boarding the return ferry without my rucksack or any treasure — without even the silver coin which had begun my journey.

I had killed my boar and that was my great accomplishment.

Very soon I was back at the dish pit, and weeks later, I was called to the front office.

"There is a letter here for you," I was told.

There was no return address. But I was suspicious of the note immediately.

My terrible failure had been pushed to the back of my thoughts for many weeks now. My good name had been restored at the hostel and I slept and worked and wandered the city just as I had done before my adventure.

But the mysterious letter filled me with a sudden thrill as I opened it.

There was a mysterious note inside.

Under the red brick with the pier that has the good me's initials.

“The good me?”

This sounded awfully like one of Jim’s colloquialisms, and it drove me mad to wait as I finished my work in the kitchen.

As soon as nine o’clock struck, I raced out to the docks and found a pier with the initials L. J. carved into them.

At its base was a red brick. I dug and dug down beneath the red brick. And in old Jim fashion, buried under a pile of rocks was a box.

It was heavy.

I took the box carefully up to my room before I opened it. I shut the door and made sure no one was there. Inside I found a note wrapped around something else.

I had to test you in more ways than one, Miles, my friend.

Some in my crew were ‘liking to believe’ they were captain, and they tried to contact the Devil about my treasure. The Devil ended up showing them no mercy, and they nearly lost my treasure along with my trust.

So you see, I had to test you on the ferry. But you proved to have a solid head on your shoulders, which is what I need. You fought through fake reality and held fast to solid truth and almost met your end during your travels with the Devil. But you depended on powers greater than yourself in the old buccaneer spirit. These things are more valuable than gold in the world of treasure-hunting

So you see Miles, I need a new first mate. And well you are the man, if you want.

I eagerly await your answer. Send your response by flare tonight atop Mount V_____. One flare for yes and two for no. Sorry about leaving you at the cliffs like that and don’t worry if you lost the chest. I filled it with stones. I had figured keeping you in the dark was the best way to keep Devil Jim thinking you had the treasure . . .

Anyway, I just received information about a dangerous new mission. I need more help than just yourself however. Let me know your answer.

*Yours Scientifically,
The filthy ol' scoundrelly Longfellow Jim.*

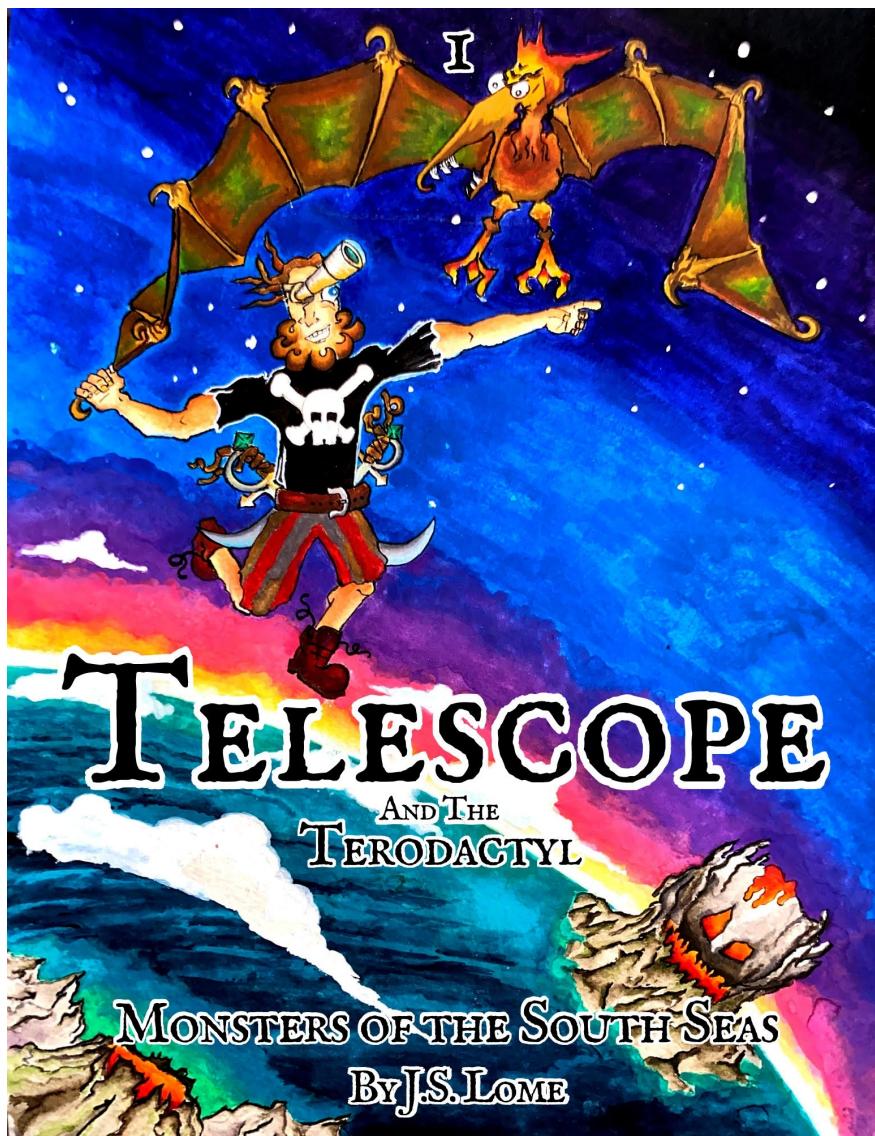
Wrapped inside the note was the figurine monkey of solid gold.
The monkey! The golden monkey! I shouted and had to quickly quiet myself.

This piece of the treasure, I discovered as I did an online search later, was supposed to be the most valuable part by a hundred times, according to the rumors that *believed* it was real.

I carefully wrapped the monkey in a cloth, hid it in a place which only I knew.

After purchasing a flare gun, I hurried to the top of Mount V_____, where I shot a single flare out over the ocean and expected Longfellow's eager eyes to be watching.

SNEAK PREVIEW
TELESCOPE AND THE TERODACTYL



CHAPTER 1

THE YEAR OF THE MISSING ROOFTOPS

IT IS WRONG TO TALK OF WARRIORS. IT IS WRONG TO SPEAK about heroes. It is wrong to say the word monster.

That is what I was taught when I was at school in the South Seas. It was a small school, on a small island . . . with small-minded staff.

But there was no talk of monsters and the staff made sure of it.

When I was in the first grade, I had been carrying a notebook with drawings of sea monsters overturning ships and smashing harbors.

This was stolen from me the moment I entered the building.

“What are you doing with those drawings?!” a teacher asked, snatching them away.

“I don’t know . . . looking at them.”

I was whispered about and glared at. The notebook was confiscated and burned, I believe, secretly among the staff.

Soon afterward, a strange old man found me. He must have been a janitor. He was whisking along in the shadows on his cleaning machine.

The cleaner stopped. The engine halted. The rickety old man hobbled down off his machine.

“You the boy with the monster book?” he asked in a whisper.

A rich smile filled his face.

“I remember drawing pictures like that.”

He winked and shook my hand.

“When I was a boy, my house fell into the ocean.”

He paused. We stared in silence.

“Mud slide?” I asked after a moment.

“Plenty of mud. No slide,” he replied quickly. “Roof torn off though. Year of the missing roofs.”

“Hurricane?” I asked.

“No hurricane,” answered the old man, “a sound like one, and craters the size of a car left on the beach.”

This old buzzard staggered away without a word. The cleaner started up. I was left in the dark to ponder these strange ideas.

The following year I was accused of Monster Hysteria. In other words,

I was suspected of believing monsters were real and making a fuss about them.

This all started because I called a whale ‘a monster.’ Then the strange word Hysterian was thrown out.

“A historian?” I asked.

“Not hist-OR-ian — hyst-ER-ian,” corrected a teacher, writing me a pass to the principal’s office “ — someone who gets hysterical about large and dangerous untrue . . . well monsters.”

Oddly enough, I was sent to a cold, dungeony sort of room where I happened to be tormented by an enormously fat man with teeth that were like fangs — a small side-note — he was our principal.

This large, hunched human had moles on his cheeks — and hair on his moles, and no hair on his head, and a ring of hair from his eyebrows to his temples that wound round his neck. The hair got really thick back there, a bit like a mane.

It was hard not to use the word monster when entering his office and finding him feasting on deep friend garlic food, as I did when I first met him.

I will interject here that I was only eight when I faced the hairy, humongous human. This was about the time that our school was to be closed for bad weather, and our staff were particularly uptight and crabby.

“What makes you think there are real live monsters out there?” inquired my principal, leaning over his desk with interest.

“I don’t. I was just saying the whale in the harbor was a giant — ”

“Ah ha!” interrupted my principal. “How are you using that term giant . . . do you mean to say the whale was actually an oversized human crawling out of the sea?”

“No.”

The man’s shadow grew behind him as he leaned forward. It stretched like a Sasquatch’s.

“All words have meaning, son,” growled the principal, scooping bits of spicy food into his fanged mouth. “Especially those that appear to have no meaning at all!”

He stood and attempted to form his fanged face into a smile.

“We don’t use words that might mean something other than what they mean during these turbulent times. Now wait in my dungeon . . . I mean lobby, for the rest of the hour.”

I was pushed out the door after a bit of hot breath from spicy food was

sent my direction, and the next little boy was brought in to be attacked, assaulted, tormented, and frightened by the hairy, humongous human.

No . . . there were no monsters.

Only Hysterians and bad weather. Our school was closed for five weeks during my third-grade year for a monsoon that never came. One day, it did rain however.

“There’s the nasty storm we’ve been waiting for!” I remarked on the way to the park.

“Looks like a bruiser,” replied my friend.

“You might even call it a monster.”

My friend nearly choked.

“What do you mean . . . there aren’t . . . such . . . things!” he yelled.

Then the grand old word came. No answer. No rebuttal. Just the name. And some yelling.

“Hysterian! Hysterian!”

Truth be told. I didn’t believe in anything bigger than a tadpole, but I did like my fellow mankind to make sense. I had a strange feeling then, as I walked along the beach, that something wild and dangerous waited for me in that stormy sea.

After our school was closed for a month, I did what any sensible person would do, I became curious.

School started up. I wandered the halls. I went for a stroll. I thought about something other than textbooks and classes, and I wondered.

The library lights came into view. We had an ancient library — all computers. Screens from wall to wall. No real books, unless you went to the back and asked the librarian for some.

“Ma’m, do you have any books about the history of our island?” I asked.

“Son . . . all books are available online.”

“I don’t want one of those books . . . I’m curious about the year of the hurricanes. Eighty-Six was it? Year of the missing rooftops.”

She gasped in disapproval before looking quickly around to see if anyone was listening. Then she took off here glasses and gave me a smile, bless her heart.

“Well there might be books about that back here.”

I was led to a shelf in her office.

“I was around during the year of the missing rooftops,” she told me in

a whisper. I believe she thought she'd found a kindred spirit.

"Oh . . . really?" I asked with feigned surprise.

"Of course . . . the year the craters spread across the beach," she added. "I don't mean anything by mentioning them. Meteors and small planets can fall out of the sky without there being massive creatures roaming the earth."

She looked at me with wide eyes.

I felt my heart skip a beat. She continued using words like giant, behemoth, and mammoth while throwing odd looks at me.

Her brain was working fast and mine was just catching up.

"You know about the gouges of Two Thousand and Three?" she gabbed. "Four giant scratches in the rocks outside the harbor. But the earth can crack to look like the claw marks of a wild humongous beast."

She glanced at me over her glasses.

"I'm sorry I used the word beast."

"That's alright. I won't call you a Hysterian."

"Thank you."

I was patted on the back and sent to class with a cup of hot cocoa and a stack of books about odd happenings at our island . . .

Me and the librarian became good friends after that, and well I became exactly what I'd thought they'd called me. I became a monster historian.

CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORY OF MONSTERS

HERE ARE MY FINDINGS IN MY DEDICATED STUDY OF monsters at our small island.

Year of the missing roofs. Nineteen Eighty-Six. Several hundred houses had the tops of their roofs pulled off. Shrieking like a terrible wind. But no wind. Men reported the earth shaking. One ship was sunk. Also, a little girl reported finding a rocking chair in her backyard.

“Rooftops? Shaking ground? A rocking chair? How do these connect?”

I talked this over with my friend, Kales. She was named this because her parents liked lettuce. Her and her brother Beechwood were the only two kids who didn’t mind being called Hysterians, only because they got called worse things for having weird names.

Two Thousand and Twelve. The year of the missing fishermen. Bad weather caused the ports to close. Rescue crews received an SOS signal and found dozens of fishermen floating out at sea. According to the article, the men ‘lost their footing’ during the storm. And of course, their ships were found stacked on top of one another in a bay.

Now here’s a good one.

Story of the missing guy. One year a guy went missing for about five whole months. He came back with his mind completely lost. Kales and I actually tracked him down. The old guy said he woke up in the dark. Everything smelled like fish. Then he went sky diving. And he had scars like teeth on his arms and legs.

“Did you see any large animals?” we asked. “Any dangerous, wild animals?”

Kales recorded the man’s testimony.

“Big things, yea. Elephants.”

“Any rhinoceroses?”

“Yes?”

He answered yes to inquiries about twelve other animals before we changed the subject.

“Can you draw us a map?”

“A map of the island where I was captured? Why of course!”

He printed out his own name and circled it.

"Well, even if his mind is gone, the story of his discovery is worth something," Kales remarked as we left. "He was found in a boat with a flotation device and several bits of missing roof."

The man also talked nonstop of a smell like rotten eggs.

Rhinoceroses. Elephants. And rotten eggs. That sums up our investigation — oh and one more thing.

In Two Thousand and Fifteen. Three giant waves struck the harbor. Ship after ship capsized. But meteorologists said the waves didn't come from tectonic shifting. On the same day many kids were reported missing from their campsites . . .

Wait, what?! That's right . . . I nearly chewed my finger off when I read that. I was eating a bag of chips in the old library with Kales and Beechwood.

A group of kids went missing from their tents. Totally regular camp-out stuff. You know, tents ripped open, large footprints on the beach. Trail of mauled trees leading into the ocean.

The official statement was that the kids just floated out to sea, and there might have been a strong wind. We have a real great community of small-minded people on our island — reporters included.

I had to read that story twelve times before I realized it had been written without a proper explanation.

I read this the day Kales, Beechwood, and I were discovered.

We were in the fifth grade, just hitting the peak of our monster-studying career — right about the time the outbreak of Walrus Virus hit our island.

Suddenly there was a bursting apart of one of the bookshelves.

A furious teacher's face was thrust in front of ours and we were dragged out.

"What are you doing away from the screens!" she yelled. "You can't be here. What is this — books? Books! Books about oh no . . . no, no! Things that aren't real! Come with me."

Kales, Beech, and I got tossed rather cruelly down the old library stairs. Kales took a bludgeon to the head from a random bookshelf. And I was dragged by the scruff of my neck to the principal.

I took the brunt of the punishment. I told the teacher I'd frightened Kales and her brother into following me — by telling them stories about . . . about MONSTERS!

The teacher ate this right up. She wrote down my name and added that I'd used inappropriate language and frightened smaller, more helpless kids. Beech was three times my size.

I had always known my day was coming. My parents would get a call. I could see the look on my dad's face. I could hear the rumors that would spread about me, about him! He would lose his job, and I'd be grounded for life!

I waited in the principal's office.

Same old beast. Same old mole-hair . . . Little more neck hair . . . Same fat fanged-face. Only this time he meant business . . . How was I supposed to know the Walrus Virus had spread worldwide over passed weeks, disgruntling teachers around the globe, including the hairy, humongous human that was my principal.

CHAPTER 3

MASS HYSTERIA

THE PRINCIPAL WHO WAS NOTHING LIKE A MONSTER WAS angrier than usual.

His fingers, which had rough, scaled knuckles, strummed the desk. His fang-like teeth were propped into an unusual greedy smile, which turned red and blue with bits of half-devoured jellybeans.

This was the snack he consumed during his meetings, which is how he grew so enormous.

“Well you know what people are saying . . . ” he began. “Jellybean?”

He offered the bowl of the colorful treat.

“No thanks.”

The fury paws stuffed handfuls of the beans into his mouth.

“I understand we found you in the middle of studying some outdated paper books about certain exaggerated events.”

The slobber-filled laugh was now a multicolored one and the words it contained were hard to understand.

I told him this.

“Are you mocking me son? Are you saying I’m some unintelligible . . . creature?”

“No, you’re just slobbering down your left cheek.”

“Slobbering ha!” he shouted. “Another word for mon . . . for mon . . . You called me one of those . . . those things! So, let’s have it. What is your favorite imaginary . . . thing? Hmm? Giant drooling moose? Double pawed d-d-dragon?”

Double pawed mouthfuls went on consuming the jellybeans. This man was going to eat himself to death in front of me. Either that or he was trying to trick me into calling him a monster.

“Are you aware of your reputation on social media?” he asked after a great coughing fit. “Kids are saying the m-word left and right because of you! And looking for mysterious creatures around every corner. We can’t have kids doing that with the virus and everything!”

“Yes sir, but why not?” I inserted quickly.

“Why? Well because we can’t have everybody focused on untrue

things. The whole world would go hysterical if they thought ‘MONSTERS’ existed. Questioning this proves you’re a Hysterian!”

I had a small argument about the logic of this accusation, ending in me being deemed a Super-Hysterian.

“Listen I am in a tough position,” my principal explained after a one-sided shouting match. “We are in a tough position. Kids are saying you have a little club that are interested in these things. That you ‘have seen’ and even talk to ‘monsters’ — do you talk to them? You haven’t seen any have you . . ?”

I scowled. He was not being sarcastic.

One, and then both hands went grasping for more jellybeans.

“Sir, it seems like you believe in them since you care about the word so much.”

I had caught him in a coughing fit.

The mole-hair principal began breathing fire, I mean jellybeans. His horned paws slammed the desk and he coughed out gobs of red and blue goo.

“Don’t — matter — what — you — think — you rascal!”

“Sir, you know rascal is another word for mon . . .”

“Don’t bring your potty mouth in here! Don’t corrupt these walls!”

He clutched both sides of his office as if my words might strike them, but he looked like a troll trying to bring down the building. I won’t say I didn’t fear for my life.

“The point is social media is going nuts,” he continued. “It’s saying our school can’t handle Hysteria. That we’re in on it. And well we have to do something about it.”

“You’re not going to . . . to call my parents?” I gulped.

The hairy, fanged man scowled. Chewing stopped.

“Devil I am. You’re expelled son.”

My heart dropped.

“What? From school?”

“Not from recess. From school. From class. From books. From the whole island. Because this ‘m’ nonsense has gone viral.”

I thought this was a joke at first, but I could see by the way he kept scooping jellybeans into his fanged mouth that something was indeed wrong.

I stood up to leave.

“You haven’t been expelled yet. Not formally. You will wait here.”

The giant man left. I was left in suspense for a very long time,

contemplating the error of my ways, and fearing the principal's words.

Very soon I was led to the gymnasium where I was caught in a whirlwind of flashing camera lights. Not just phones but news cameras, video cameras, and a live feed was projected on the wall.

The entire school was assembled — sixth graders, seventh graders, all the teachers— and they were looking at me with hatred and glowing faces.

I also saw many men and women who looked as though they had driven very far to see me.

I was forced to sit in a chair. The teachers had their moment to show their outrage. I was made to endure like a toad stuck in the clutches of a power hungry — well, I won't say beast.

I was told I was expelled, and not to come back. Then the reporters got hold of me.

“Did you say the ‘m’ word?”

“Have you ever used large-creature language before?

The blaze of the lights was overwhelming.

“Have you ever read books about such creatures?”

“Are you against the banning of these topics . . .”

I was silent, dead silent. It only took a moment for the crowd to make its decision.

“Hysterian! He’s a Hysterian!”

It was crazy. There was no second-guessing their decision. The crowds pushed through the teachers and security.

It wasn’t only I, but my principal who ran with me. I hurried out backstage and down the back exit, where I slipped into Kales and Beech’s minivan. Their mother, who was hardly aware of the danger to which I’d been exposed, drove me all the way home, wondering why there were so many cars in the school parking lot today— and commented about another outbreak of the Walrus Virus which would surely shut down school again. Possibly for weeks.

“Shut it down?”

I was quite relieved.

CHAPTER 4

THE RELATIONS SPECIALIST

THAT NIGHT MY DAD GOT IN A SHOUTING MATCH WITH THE television. He called the principal a bunch of names for letting the news attack me. My mom told me the island had a small gene pool.

The next day a big, burly man showed up at my door. He had a long fur coat and fine leather gloves and several knives around his waistband. There were also ten telescopes of different sizes tied to his jacket. He pulled out the smallest, which was actually a magnifying glass and examined a piece of paper.

“Are you the occupant of 12100 Winchester Boulevard?”

I told him I was.

“I’d shake your hand but we’re under Walrus Flu regulations.” So, we bumped elbows for a greeting . . . Awkward greeting . . .

Before I could give my name, he told me I should call myself Chester if I wanted to attract the least amount of attention.

“Chester has been found as the least likely name associated with monsters, the slaying of monsters, or anything heroic.”

I told him my name was Thad, Thad Bartok, which according to the man, had a vicious ring to it.

He extended a mid-sized magnifying telescope and examined my face.

“Good amount of wildness in your eyes! Primitive head shape.

Ferocious set of teeth! This will be tough.

“Excuse my telescoping your face,” the man apologized, “but it’s my job to restore a good public image, so I have to know what we’re up against. And if you think you can escape bad press without my help, well, you’ve got your head in the clouds.”

He paused.

“That was not an allusion to any tall or enormously tall creatures,” he whispered.

“Disclaimers young Thad, that is the only way to be safe. Saved my skin more than once.”

He paused again.

“That was not an allusion to a monstrous de-skinning animal.”

The gruff man removed a sailor's hat and made a low bow, which revealed a long mane of tangled hair that reached the ground.

"Abel Saurian. Public relations specialist," he said, introducing himself. "I'd like to help navigate you through your social media troubles."

He shuffled his waistband of telescopes and retrieved a pen, which caught my eye.

"Squid ink, that one. Treacherous to erase, signing in blood you are. But we'll get to that later."

I noticed a sticker on the pen which said no animals were harmed in the production of this fine pen, then in smaller writing except when they were killed and slaughtered.

An uneasy look settled on Abel's brow as he extended the largest telescope, which peered beyond my house onto the hills. There, a train of cars was forming.

"Might'n we be able to find somewhere safer to chat," he suggested in a hurried whisper, "I know a coffee house down by the marina."

Several cars turned and headed our direction. I saw after a closer look that the vehicles had news logos on them!

"You don't have a bazooka, do you," Abel muttered. "Ah never mind that. Come with me."

The large sailor led me down a rocky path to the shore, where we entered a fishing boat. Bits of wire, hooks, and half-skinned fish were strewn about. We drove along the shore to a cliff with a small dock at its base, then parked and climbed up a winding stair leading inside a cave.

"Fisherman's entrance," he informed me with a grin. A large skull with massive tusks was set on a wooden sign that read The Boar's Habit.

"Best coffee this side of Borneo," Abel remarked with a wink, leading me up a series of caves lit by lanterns.

The winding stair ended at a coffee shop overlooking the sea.

There were wooden tables. Glowing lanterns. Shadows everywhere. Shadowy men. Knives flashing. Men playing cards. Heavy tobacco smoke wafting through the air.

At the bar sat a man with a patch over his eye. Next to him was a man without a leg.

"Is there a hospital nearby?" I asked in a whisper.

Abel took a seat and passed me a coffee.

"I won't say that that man's scar don't look like it come from a

serpent,” he replied, nodding to the man with the patch. “Or the marks around the other man’s leg don’t appear to have been made by very large teeth.”

He leaned forward.

“You know of course, Thad — I mean Chester, that there are bigger things in the world than lions.”

He surveyed my face quietly in the shadows.

“Why do you think schools are shutting down every other month? And bunches of kids go missing? Not for bad weather and the Walrus Flu.”

Abel lifted his eyebrows mysteriously and drank from his glass.

“Well never mind that.” He lifted his voice and slapped the table.
“Waiter, couple of boar’s legs for this young man.”

I was brought a leg of meat and some crab cakes.

“I am a lawyer, Thad,” Abel began, cutting off a slice of meat and stuffing it in his mouth. “Not the kind you know.” He coughed on the large bite. “I specialize in a certain kind of sea business, a business that has been making giant strides these past years . . .”

“There were no references to Twelve-Foot-Tall men in that sentence,” he whispered under his breath.

“The big issue, the elephant in the room — small elephant, mind — is that you said a certain word and studied a certain topic which made a lot of people angry . . .”

Abel took another stab at the boar’s leg.

“You could take a shot at the microphone — try to explain yourself. But before you could say the word ‘micro’ and ‘phone’ together, the news would have edited it to sound like ‘monster.’

“So, my advice is to go at ‘em with humbleness. Humility is the best policy when facing social media mobs who want to tear you limb from limb.”

Abel lowered his voice.

“That was not a reference to large reptilians from the sea.”

Abel leaned forward.

“Will you let me help you?” he asked. “I can erase you from the world’s memory before they get a firm grasp on you.”

“How?”

“You’ll just have to trust me. I only ask that you take a look at something in return.”

I couldn’t see any reason to hesitate, so I agreed. Abel reached across the table and patted my shoulder.

I was directed to follow him.

Abel made some phone calls. Soon, a school bus was waiting outside. I was loaded in and we were driven back to my school.

“What are you doing!”

To my horror, the bus parked at our gymnasium and outside, news vehicles were parked.

“I’ve set up an interview with the press,” Abel explained and quickly disappeared.

“What about what you said about the microphone — ”

I was led by security into the gymnasium, where angry faces and camera lights flashed. This time there were several hundred people packed into the auditorium. Each person had a phone in the air and recorded my face.

All the unbearable interrogation was going to start again —

Then suddenly, a voice erupted from backstage.

Several persons rushed out from behind.

“Help! Help!”

The cries were coming from several shuddering staff, including my principal.

“Monsters! Here in the building. Large scaled monsters! They’re here! Go look, look!”

It was horrible, frightful. The strained shouts confused everyone.

The five or so staff were hysterical, unhinged, shaking, pointing, and screaming for help.

“You don’t understand — scales and claws!” yelled my principal.

The crowds were confused. Strangest of all, the cameras began to quickly turn off. And it seemed to me that the news teams began to back away.

No one said a word. My principal and the teachers remained terrified, and the crowds began to disburse!

Some frightened persons pushed passed me and began arguing with my teachers.

I was forgotten just like that.

How had Abel done it? What kind of law had he studied? I asked him this as soon as he found me in the hall moments later.

“Law of nature,” he replied, “particularly the area of animal behavior and human response.”

I thought this was a joke, but Abel didn’t laugh. He was swiping

through news feeds on his phone and flashed me a delighted grin.

“That bit of awkward video footage ended everything. Looks like the news has moved on.”

The headlines which had borne my name only a day ago were replaced with stories of the Walrus Flu.

“How did you get my principal and the other teachers to say all that?” I asked.

“Well it wasn’t hard really,” he replied with a grin. “I cut the electricity and let a few scaled creatures wander round backstage.”

I imagined a boa constrictor and alligator frightening my teachers.

Abel passed me an envelope.

“Here’s the other end of your bargain. I told you the law I studied had to do with the sea. Well here’s something I discovered in my line of work.”

Inside was a picture.

It was a photo of the missing guy that Kales and I had studied.

“We interviewed that guy,” I told him.

In the picture, the missing guy sat on a chair, a rocking chair! The rocking chair that had dropped out of the sky and been found in a girl’s back yard.

The next picture was of the missing guy curled up in a boat. Beside him were two piles of shingles — the missing rooftops — and two gigantic, curled, pointy objects that looked like massive snails.

“Talons . . .” explained Abel. “From a giant vulture. That’s how I found him before the Coast Guard was called. Marina Police destroyed the talons out of fear of starting a frenzy. But I kept the picture. And your friend Kales connected the missing rooftops. She guessed the rocking chair in the little girl’s backyard was his. She might have some monster-hunting blood in her.”

“Which comes to my point,” Abel continued.

He lifted his phone and played a recording.

“This bit of radio came to my co-workers a few months back.”

I heard crinkling. Then static. Then metal clamoring.

Then a girl’s voice came on. Sweet, soft voice, like an angel’s, but filled with fright.

“Help . . . help . . . if you can hear this, please . . . we were attacked . . . we have information . . . help . . . please help . . .”

The recording stopped. The effect was unsettling. It made my skin

crawl.

If you can hear this, help . . . the voice had said. But what could I do?
Abel led me to the school's exit.

"The real reason I found you was to convince you to join me in my line of business. You see, the law of nature I studied was a dog-eat-dog sort, or rather," he raised his eyebrows, "a large-creature-eat-tiny-human kind, and its transformed into the angry-human-grabs-his-gun-and . . .

"Well there are groups of us, Thad, that are tired of our schools being shut down and our jobs being eliminated because of fear, and we're setting out to find out what is happening to our world . . . To find the creatures that are behind all this and stop them."

"You want to . . . hunt the virus?"

Abel gave me a dark look.

"You have the pictures. You can keep 'em."

And without another word Abel walked out.

CHAPTER 5

SUDDEN CONTAMINATION

HAD I BEEN CHEATED? HAD I BEEN LIED TO?

School closed for bad weather? For Walrus Flu? Could this be a disguise for something too big for our world to handle . . . real . . . live . . . monsters? And while families were quarantining and washing hands, giant creatures were roaming our earth?

That seemed to be the gist of Abel's words. I considered the events Kales and I had studied and the outrage we had in turn received.

Could our school's hysteria about monsters be because our world was getting attacked by them? Not a virus or a monsoon, but something violent with which we didn't know how to deal.

The radio recording Abel had played ran through my thoughts. Who had sent it? What had happened to her? What had attacked her? Was she still alive?

Before Abel had left, he had given me a business card in case I ever wanted to help him, but I folded it up and tucked it away in my jacket pocket.

The next day, I watched the news pour in with mixed feelings.

Schools closed. Offices shut down. Food shortages increased. Panicked people bull-rushed grocery stores. Stock markets plummeted.

My father went out at night with gloves and a mask like some sort of space traveler to find food. My mom began packing suitcases in case we had to leave suddenly.

Before long I had forgotten about Abel and his monster-hunting business. These attacks were a flu, a dangerous bug, not giant hairy monsters.

The map of contamination grew larger and larger. News stations talked more incessantly of the deaths.

Then, after school had been closed a fortnight, Abel found me wandering the beech.

"Had any more thought about that recording I showed you?"

I had forgotten what he meant at first and shook my head.

"Got another picture for you," he added.

He flashed a photo of two massive skulls and a person standing next to them.

“Giant tiger skulls. Found off the coast of Borneo. Proof that what I’m telling you is . . . Still not interested?”

I thanked him for his help and quickly left.

That week my parents sent me to Beech and Kale’s house to take my mind off the panic.

Friday morning, I awoke to sirens.

“What’s the matter?” I asked, coming down the stairs.

Sudden fear rushed through my heart.

Kales and her mother were gathered around the television.

“Brand new outburst of the plague.”

“Three hundred died this morning . . .”

The television flashed to a series of hospital rooms.

Kales’ mom shut it off.

“Three hundred . . . that was fast. Where did it come from?” I asked.

No answer.

“The beach.” Kales’ mother’s voice cracked. “It was fast . . .”

“Fast like the rooftops,” Kales added. She looked at me meaningfully.

“What’s the matter . . . ?”

Suddenly my mind caught up. The sirens were not on the TV. They were coming from outside . . . from the beach.

I bolted toward the door.

Kales yelled for me to stay. Something sharp pounded in my heart.

I followed the sirens. They were coming from my neighborhood.

The beach was covered in craters. Cars and ambulances were everywhere.

I had to zigzag around giant, massive pits. They were being washed out by firemen.

Washed out because of the virus?

I ran faster. Giant craters were forming in my heart.

My neighborhood was blocked off. Our row of houses were . . . were gone . . . completely missing.

Quarantine tape stopped me.

“You can’t go in there . . . Virus.”

“Your family is at the hospital.”

I was directed away. Then the words came.

“No one survived. Sorry, they’re gone . . .”

My parents. Gone. Just like that. Lost forever.

Walrus Flu! The dang plague! — it had taken my parents . . .
I'd never see . . . I'd never do anything . . . with them again . . .
I received no consolation. Hundreds had been affected by the attack.
We were directed here and there. I was shown a hospital room where it had
happened.

“That’s where they spent their last moments,” I was told by a nurse. “I
am sorry. They’re gone.”

“Can I see them? What happened to my home?”

“Contaminated. Bulldozed . . . They died swiftly. Their funerals will be
happening soon . . .”

Happening . . . soon . . .

A haze of sorrow overshadowed me. I wandered in a daze from
hospital rooms to hotel rooms. Out of the cloud of sadness, a hand grasped
my shoulder.

Abel had come to the funeral.

Small church, two coffins. No bodies. Virus took ‘em. Bodies
contaminated. Disposed of.

I looked up and saw a tear on Abel’s face.

He didn’t offer any more pictures, but something had been building
inside me which leapt out suddenly.

I had been thinking about what Kales had said.

“Fast like the missing rooftops.”

And there had been craters on the beach, which the firemen had
quickly washed away. They had sprayed them with water. Why were they so
concerned about removing the craters if it was a virus . . . ?

Was it because there were paw prints inside? Was it because there were
real . . . live . . . monsters . . . destroying our world as we spoke?

The sudden impulse took me.

“I want to hunt them . . .” I muttered. “I want to kill the things that did
this.”

Abel’s eyes widened.

I hadn’t even realized I believed him.

Perhaps my unconscious self had observed what my mind had ignored
— the outrage about monsters, the prohibiting of the topic, and a constant
stream of untrue stories about the plague — it was all to stop fear from
spreading. It was a way of controlling everything while our world was slowly
defeated.

Abel pulled out a small telescope-magnifying glass to examine me, he was so startled.

Then he gave a sad smile and told me he wasn't leaving.

All the doors shut. I was left with some strange aunt, an empty building, the two coffins —

And Abel.

"I don't mean to mess with your feelings Thad, what you're going through must be terrible, but there is something you should know."

He fiddled with one of the telescopes.

"Not everyone believes these creatures are destroying their victims. Some believe there is a method to their attacks. No bodies. No carnage. Remember the old man who was dropped out of the sky. He was being taken somewhere before he fell . . . and he had been kept alive."

"Are you telling me that my parents might be alive . . . ?"

Giant hope bounded in my heart.

Where were they? What was happening to them? How could we find them?

Every bit of me sprung back to life in the small glimmer of hope Abel gave me.

"That's what I've been trying to tell you. That's why I showed you that recording. We're not just hunting the monsters, we're trying to save the people that were taken. And we need all the help we can get."

Abel left.

I was alone. Strange empty church. Strange aunt. Strange empty coffins. No bodies.

But now giant hope was rising in my heart.

They were possibly alive! Alive! And there were people out there trying to find them.

A sudden memory rushed into my head. What had the missing guy said when Kales and I had interviewed him?

"You want a map of the island where I was captured," he had said.

The crazy old man couldn't help us find the island. His mind was lost . . . but he at least had told us he had been captured — held prisoner at an island. An island in the sea . . . with monsters.

That's where my parents were . . .

I searched through my pockets to see if I still had the business card Abel had given me. And there it was folded up.

“If you are interested in joining the hunt meet me at this location,” he had said.

On the card was an address.

One One Nine, Old Sandy Beach Road.

Telescope and the Terodactyl is published in full.

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