***Treasure Island***

***Chapter 14:***

# *The First Blow*

***Brief Summary:***

* Jim looks around himself: the island is marshy and uninhabited.
* He comes across a glade of trees.
* He hears a rustle from a surprised bird and assumes that his shipmates are about to appear.
* He hides in a tree and listens.
* Two people are talking: Long John Silver and a sailor named Tom.
* Long John Silver is explaining something to Tom – it's unclear what.
* Tom answers: Silver, you're a brave, smart, rich guy – why would you follow the words of this bunch of low-lives?
* Tom's answer is interrupted by a scream off in the distance.
* Tom jumps and reaches out his hand to Long John Silver.
* Long John Silver leaps backwards out of reach and demands that Tom keep his hands off.
* Tom tells Long John Silver he must be feeling guilty about something, to be so afraid of Tom.
* Tom asks what that sound was.
* Long John Silver doesn't sound upset at all when he says it must have been Alan.
* Tom says Alan was a true sailor and tells Long John Silver he won't join Silver's group even if it means his death.
* Tom turns around and sets off for the beach.
* Long John Silver grabs a branch and hits Tom across the back, then stabs him twice.
* Jim faints.
* When Jim comes to, he sees Long John Silver pull a whistle out of his pocket and blow a series of notes as some kind of signal.
* Jim grows frightened and crawls away.
* Jim is lost and too afraid to go back to the ship.
* He thinks he's either going to starve to death on the island or be murdered by the mutineers.
* Jim has reached a hillier, more thickly forested part of the island.
* Something makes him stand stock still, his heart beating quickly.

***Synopsis:***

Chapter 14 ("The First Blow") begins with Jim, on his own, exploring the part of the island on which he finds himself. He encounters vegetation, birds, and snakes that are unfamiliar to him. (The island seems to be located somewhere in or near the Caribbean; the snake Jim sees and hears is a rattlesnake, a native to America as Stevenson, who had spent some time in California and Nevada, would have known. Jim also identifies some of the trees he sees as live oaks, a sort of evergreen oak native to the southeastern U.S. and presumably to Caribbean islands as well.) Then, hearing voices approach, Jim crouches hidden and still, and then creeps to where he can overhear the conversation. There are two men, Silver and another called Tom. Tom is arguing with Silver against the pirates' enterprise, and Silver is trying to convince him to go along with them. But then all hear a loud, terrible scream, obviously a death-cry, and Silver tells Tom that it was Alan, apparently another who has tried to resist the pirates' business. Tom refuses Silver's advice and turns to walk away. Silver throws his walking crutch and knocks Tom down, then falls on him and stabs him to death. Jim, horrified, backs away and runs from the sound of the other approaching men, whom Silver has summoned with a whistle.

***Notes:***

Proud of himself for giving the pirates “the slip,” Jim sets out to explore the island. It is unlike any other place he has ever seen, and his interest in the landscape soon drives Long John Silver and the other mutineers out of his mind. Jim hikes through marshes and over hills. He sees birds and snakes. One of the snakes makes a strange sound— but Jim does not learn until long afterward that this is the rattlesnake’s way of giving a warning before it strikes. When Jim sees Long John Silver and another crewman walking together, he remembers that he needs to find out what the pirates are planning. He sneaks up on the men and listens to their conversation. Silver’s companion is a man named Tom, who turns out to be one of the last honest men of the crew. Tom insists that he will never turn disloyal, and he pleads with Silver not to rebel against Captain Smollett. This conversation is interrupted by a shout and a cry of pain in the distance. Jim knows instantly that the person he is hearing is probably another loyal crewman being murdered. Silver does not pretend otherwise. “I recon that’ll be Alan,” he says calmly. Tom understands that he is about to be killed too—if he does not join the mutiny. Still, he refuses to join in the crime. He runs away, but Long John Silver throws his crutch at him, knocking him down. Jim does not know whether or not the force of this impact kills the man, but it does not turn out to matter. Long John Silver hobbles toward the fallen man and stabs him twice in the back. This cold-blooded murder horrifies Jim. For several moments, he cannot seem to breathe properly or focus his eyes. Then Silver blows a whistle, and Jim hears the other pirates running toward the sound. Quickly—but without letting 15 himself be seen—Jim scrambles in the opposite direction, staying in the cover of the trees. He runs as far and as fast as he can. Now, he knows, he is in the worst possible spot. If he goes back to the boats, the pirates will kill him. If he stays away, they will realize he suspects their plans, and they will find him and kill him anyway. Hardly noticing where he is going, Jim runs up a little hill with two peaks. He comes into a little forest and sees something—a man, maybe, or a monkey?—jump out of sight behind a pine.

***Analysis Ch 13:***

As Jim surveys the island, he is startled to hear voices nearby. He creeps closer and finds Silver addressing one of the sailors named Tom, trying to persuade him to join the mutineers. Silver makes it clear that Tom’s life is riding on his decision, but Tom declines politely but firmly. They suddenly hear a piercing scream from far away, and Tom is greatly alarmed. Silver says coldly that the scream must be from Alan, another honest sailor who has refused to join the pirates.

Tom tells Silver that Silver is his friend no more and starts to walk away. Silver flings his crutch at Tom’s back, knocking him down, and then walks over and kills him with his knife. Jim is terrified, realizing that he has no way to get back to the ship without being spotted and killed by Silver and his gang. Jim starts to run deeper into the island.

***Critical Study:***

By crossing a swamp, Jim believes he has escaped from Silver and thus can relax and enjoy exploring the mysterious island. This carefree attitude, however, is quickly impinged on, as he hears birds circling overhead that signal that the pirates are nearby. By hiding in a oak tree, he overhears [Long John Silver](https://www.gradesaver.com/treasure-island/study-guide/character-list#long-john-silver), who is angrily conversing with another man. Frightened, Jim realizes that even though he is scared, he should try to get closer in order to overhear what is happening amongst the pirates. When he gets close enough to hear, he realizes that Silver is trying to persuade a man named Tom to join the pirates. Their conversation, however, is interrupted by an angry cry in the distance and then a scream, something that Jim recognizes is a death cry. Alan, another honest sailor, has been killed by the pirates because he will not convert to their cause. Tom starts to walk away, but Silver reacts very angrily, throwing a tree branch at him which makes him fall to the ground. The one-legged Silver, devoid of his crutch, is still able to swiftly move to Tom and stick him with a knife not once, but twice.

Because of the recently-witnessed violence, Jim feels dizzy and like fainting. Finally, Jim comes to his sense and realizes that if he does not escape, he will be the next person that is dead. Silently, Jim crawls into an open space and runs as fast as he can, not paying any attention to where he is going. While he is still escaping, he realizes that there is no possible way to return to the boats because if he does he will certainly be killed. He is in a dilemma, however, because he also realizes that if he doesn't return the pirates will realize that he knows their secret. The chapter ends with Jim's facing a "fresh alarm" with a "thumping heart."

The description of the island's plant life is particularly incredible, and makes the island leap out of the pages and into the readers imagination, especially as Jim is running through the island, desperate to escape the clutches of the pirates. The behavior of the birds, the swamps, thickets, and the open sandy area, enables the reader to have a vivid mental picture of the geography and setting of the island. Another great description in this chapter is of the murder of Alan. Because Jim does not witness this murder, he is forced to describe the murder through primarily sounds, including the yell of the victim, the rustle of birds, the boom of the surf, and finally, silence. Everything else is left to both the imagination of the reader and of the young narrator.

The major thematic moment of this chapter comes when Long John Silver murders the innocent Tom. The awareness of young Jim that despite the absolute cold-blondness and ruthlessness of the crime that nothing else in nature has changed sets about two major thematic points. First, the amoralistic aspect of this book. Stevenson himself claimed that this book has no moral lessons and this is one of the ways that he makes this prediction come to life in the pages. The fact that nature is mute in the face of this monstrous evil symbolizes the fact that nature does not judge Long John Silver's actions, they were merely necessary in order to ensure that their cause wins out.

The second thematic moment that comes from his point is that it continues the maturation of the narrator, young [Jim Hawkins](https://www.gradesaver.com/treasure-island/study-guide/character-list#jim-hawkins). From the beginning of the novel, we watch a young boy cry at the death of a pirate who dies from natural causes, a stroke. Because of the constant nature of death in this novel, this time, when he witnesses his first cold-blooded murder, Jim does not cry nor make any sound, he just sits in silence. Although he does faint afterwards, it is clear that he has made great strides since the death of his father and [Billy Bones](https://www.gradesaver.com/treasure-island/study-guide/character-list#billy-bones).

***Critical Analysis:***

Having escaped [Long John Silver](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Treasure-Island/character-analysis/#Long_John_Silver), Jim is free to explore on the island. It seems uninhabited except for "dumb brutes and fowls" and the occasional snake. Jim comes to a broad, steaming marsh within sight of the Spy-glass hill and, moments later, hears voices, one of which is Silver's. Jim quickly hides but then decides he has a duty to sneak closer, to hear what is being said.

Slowly and steadily he crawls closer until he can see Silver standing face to face with a crew member named Tom, pleading with Tom to join the mutiny, but the man is honest and refuses. Abruptly, there are distant cries of anger, and then a horrid drawn-out scream catches their attention. With a smile Silver tells Tom the death cry has come from seaman Alan. Heroically, Tom tells Silver, "you're a mate of mine no more." He then turns his back on Silver and begins to walk away. With a yell Silver sends his crutch flying like a missile, striking Tom in the back; breaking his spine on the spot. Then "agile as a monkey," Silver is on the fallen man and stabs him twice.

The staggering violence of the scene overwhelms Jim, and he comes close to fainting. When he recovers, Silver is calmly cleaning his blood-stained knife on the grass. For a moment the event feels unreal to Jim, as if he had dreamed it. Crawling clear of his hiding place, he begins to run without thought.

The savagery and greed of the pirates drives events in this chapter. Impatient for the mutiny to begin, the buccaneers can barely control themselves. Their mood turns ugly and rebellious, which threatens to undermine Silver's careful scheme for obtaining the gold and disposing of the honest men. Less barbarous characters would wisely exercise self-control and master their greed for the sake of the plan.

The moral ambiguity of [Long John Silver](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Treasure-Island/character-analysis/#Long_John_Silver) is fully revealed in his handling of the honest sailor Tom. Silver knows right from wrong; good from evil. He knows Tom opposes the mutiny for honorable reasons. So Silver appeals to Tom's friendship, pointing out that he is risking his life talking to Tom rather than killing him outright. Silver may or may not be sincere. However, when Tom turns and walks away, Silver instantly shifts from civilized to savage. With no moral qualms he murders Tom.

Silver's physical prowess and agility were described as he moved about his tavern and maneuvered aboard the *Hispaniola*. Now he demonstrates formidable skill and strength in physical combat with Tom. The honest sailor underestimates Silver's ability to stop him, based on the pirate's physical limitations. The speed and accuracy with which Silver turns his crutch into a weapon and then leaps upon Tom to finish him off is fearsome. This explains why Silver can dominate the other pirates and foreshadows a time when he is challenged by them.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

[Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) crosses a marsh and reaches sandy terrain, with a craggy peak in the distance. Excited, he explores the unknown land with its strange plants and snakes. Once he catches sight of the Spy-glass, he hears a noise, and realizes that the ship-mates must be close. Afraid, he ducks behind a tree, but then decides that he should at least spy on the traitors.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Jim’s carefree feelings of excitement and novelty cede, soon enough, to a new anxiety that he’ll be discovered by those he now knows to be his enemies. Still, he is able to make the most out of his decision to sneak ashore by once again spying.

***Summary part 2:***

[Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) sneaks towards the voices, and hears [Silver](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/long-john-silver) saying that he only wants to save their lives. A red-faced crewman, [Tom](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters), declares he must do his duty to the captain. Jim hears a loud angry cry, and then a scream: Tom jumps, but Silver stays calm. Tom then realizes that [Alan](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) has been killed by Silver: Tom yells at Silver to kill him too if he must, but he defies him. He turns and heads back toward the beach, but Silver cries out and hurls a tree branch at Tom, who falls. Silver leaps upon him and stabs him several times. Jim is close to fainting: the world spins above him, and when he comes to he sees Silver calmly cleaning his knife.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Jim has stumbled in on a scene of attempted treason: Silver is trying to convince Tom that he should switch sides and support Silver over Captain Smollett. This sailor, though, refuses, even (or especially) once he learns that Silver has already killed another crewman, Alan, for refusing to switch sides. Jim is both appalled by Silver’s sudden violence and amazed at Tom’s bravery: both are extremes of adult behavior with which he’s not yet familiar.

***Summary Part 3:***

Then [Silver](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/long-john-silver) whistles: terrified, [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) creeps backward from the thicket and runs as fast as he can until he is entirely lost. In despair, he thinks he’ll never make it back to the Hispaniola—he’ll die here from starvation or be murdered by the pirates. He races towards the foot of a hill with two peaks, then, alarmed again, suddenly stops.

***Analysis Part 3:***

For the first time, Jim lacks any kind of a plan, no matter how ill thought-out, and so he really begins to panic—another reminder that he is so much younger than everyone else and trying to deal with new, shocking realities on his own.