***Treasure Island***

***Chapter 20:***

# *Silver’s Embassy*

***Brief Summary:***

* Through a hole in the wall, Jim can see Long John Silver and another pirate holding a white flag, which signals a truce.
* Captain Smollett thinks it's a trick, so he asks the two men what they want.
* The second man says that "Cap'n Silver" wants to make terms for a truce.
* Captain Smollett refuses to acknowledge Long John Silver under the title "Captain" – he's just a pirate and a ship's cook.
* Long John Silver struggles up the hill to the fort, where he meets Captain Smollett standing out front.
* Long John Silver explains that he's there to discuss the terms of surrender once and only once. He admits that Captain Smollett and his group got the drop on the pirates the night before, but it won't happen again.
* Even though Captain Smollett doesn't show it, he has no idea what Long John Silver is talking about.
* But Jim does – he realizes that Ben Gunn must have snuck down to the beach when all the pirates were drunk and killed one of them. So there are only 14 pirates left.
* What Long John Silver wants is the treasure. He knows they have the map.
* Long John Silver says he never intended to hurt them, anyway.
* Captain Smollett replies, "We know exactly what you meant to do" (20.30), and now you can't do it.
* Long John Silver thinks Abraham Gray has told them about the pirates' plans.
* Captain Smollett says no, and that he (Captain Smollett) would never ask a man to rat anyone out like that – it's not honest.
* Long John Silver seems impressed by Captain Smollett's moral code. So they both settle down and smoke their pipes.
* Long John Silver offers these terms: if they give the pirates the map and stop shooting at them, the pirates will offer them a choice.
* Either Captain Smollett and his friends can sail off on the *Hispaniola*, to be put somewhere safe ashore, or the pirates will agree to divide their supplies and leave them safely on the island.
* Long John Silver also specifies that this offer is open to any of the men in the fort.
* Captain Smollett asks if that's all Long John Silver has to say.
* Long John Silver replies that, if Captain Smollett doesn't agree to this offer, then it's open season between the pirates and Captain Smollett's group.
* Captain Smollett makes this counter-offer: if the pirates come one by one, unarmed, to surrender, Captain Smollett will chain them up in the ship and take them back to England for a trial. Otherwise, the pirates are screwed: they don't have the treasure map, and none of them have the skill to sail the ship without help.
* Long John Silver looks absolutely furious.
* He clambers up with difficulty and spits in the sand.
* He says that, before the hour is up, the pirates will destroy their little fort, and then they'll see who's laughing.
* Long John Silver goes back to the bottom of the hill where his comrade is waiting and they disappear into the trees.

***Synopsis:***

Captain Smollett is wary of Silver’s gesture of truce, fearing a trick. The pirate announces himself as “Captain Silver,” and asserts that he wants to reach a compromise with Smollett. Smollett questions Silver’s claim to the title of captain and refuses to talk with him. Silver hoists himself over the stockade fence anyway, and approaches Smollett. He demands the treasure map in exchange for a cease-fire. Smollett angrily reminds Silver that he is far more powerful than the mutineers. Silver tries again, promising the captain and his men safe voyage in exchange for the map. When Smollett again refuses, Silver leaves indignantly.

***Notes:***

Accompanied by one other pirate, Long John Silver stands outside the stockade. A chilly fog swirls around their knees and obscures the view of the forest behind them. The captain peers outside, looking for signs of a surprise attack. He sends three men to strategic positions inside the house to keep watch. He orders everyone else to load muskets and stand ready. With these preparations complete, Captain Smollett calls out to ask Long John Silver what he wants. Long John Silver—now calling himself Captain Silver—asks permission to come unarmed into the bunkhouse and speak. Captain Smollett says, “I have not the slightest desire to talk to you.” However, he adds that Silver will not be harmed if he wishes to come. The captain steps outside and watches Silver climb the fence and make his way up the hill. With his one leg and his crutch, Silver makes very slow progress on the sandy ground, but Captain Smollett does not offer to help. Instead he sits down and whistles a tune while he waits. Silver eventually reaches the captain and, after complaining that the captain should invite him inside, sits beside him on the ground. Silver complains about something that happened last night, and it becomes clear that one of the pirates was bludgeoned and killed while he slept. None of the captain’s men went out last night, but the captain does not admit this. Jim knows what must have happened: Ben Gunn must have attacked the mutineers’ camp on his own. Now there are only fourteen pirates left. Silver and Captain Smollett smoke their pipes together, not speaking. Finally Silver spits on the ground and makes an offer. He says that if Captain Smollett hands over the treasure map, the pirates will spare the men’s lives and share the rest of the food. However, the pirates will take the treasure for themselves. Captain Smollett is clearly unimpressed by Silver’s proposal. He says that the pirates have no basis for making demands. They do not know where to the find the treasure. They do not have the knowledge necessary to sail the ship away without wrecking it. They are cowardly drunks who cannot fight. The captain makes a counterproposal: if the pirates turn themselves in, he will chain them up and take them back to England for a fair trial. Otherwise he will fight them to the death. “I’ll put a bullet in your back when next I meet you,” he says. This makes Long John Silver angry. He wants to leave, but he cannot stand up on his own. He asks the captain to help him, but the captain refuses. Nobody else offers to help either, so Silver is forced to crawl to the porch and pull himself up to a standing position. He spits into the spring and vows to attack the stockade within the hour. “Them that die’ll be the lucky ones,” he says. He stumbles back down the hill and, with great difficulty, climbs over the fence. Jim and his friends watch, not speaking, until Silver disappears into the trees.***Analysis Ch 20:***

Going to one of the gun ports in the blockhouse wall (Chapter 20, "Silver's Embassy"), Jim sees Silver and another man just outside the stockade. Captain Smollett goes to the doorway to talk with Silver, allowing him to climb over the fence. He waits while Silver struggles with his crutch on the sandy knoll, and he refuses to let the erstwhile cook, now calling himself "Captain Silver," enter the house. Silver says he has come to discuss terms, after the trouble of the previous night when the pirates, all drunk but Silver, were attacked and one was killed with a spike. Smollett acts nonchalant, although he does not know what Silver means, but Jim remembers Ben Gunn's promise that, if the pirates camped on shore, there would be "widders in the morning." Silver tries to get Smollett and the others to give his group the map, assuring him that he will then take them without harm off the island to safety — or, if the captain would prefer, will leave them provisions and send a ship to rescue them. Smollett replies with his own terms: If the pirates will surrender, he'll put them in irons and take them back to England for trial. Angrily, Silver struggles to his foot and leaves, making dire threats.

Smollett turns back into the house, as Chapter 21 ("The Attack") begins, to find that all but Gray have left their posts to witness the parlay, and he rebukes them. Then he tells them the attack will come within an hour, but that they are in a better position and can defeat the larger force. They prepare to defend the blockhouse, and as the day begins to heat up they wait. After a little over an hour, Joyce sees one of the pirates approaching and fires. The attackers come in from all sides. As shots are exchanged, one hits Livesey's musket and destroys it. Four of the pirates get over the fence. Two more are killed, and one runs away. Others continue to fire from the woods outside the fence. The four inside the enclosure swarm the house, injuring Hunter, and soon all are fighting in the yard with cutlasses. The battle is short. The surviving pirates retreat. But Hunter and the captain are injured, and Joyce is dead. Still, the group in the stockade has bettered the odds in their favor, for — counting the man Trelawney shot on board the ship — eleven of the original nineteen pirates, as Smollett had estimated, are dead.

The three chapters narrated by Livesey do not change the voice of the narrative greatly, because both narrators narrate in a similar style — clear, concise, and informal but not colloquial. Yet the doctor relates incidents that Jim could not relate, even if he had been present (for example, Smollett's saying that they have so little food that perhaps they are better off without Redruth, a coldly calculated remark he would surely never have confided to anyone but Livesey). Likewise, Jim remarks upon events (for example, Smollett and Silver smoking together, each trying to unnerve the other — which, he says, was "as good as a play" to watch) that Livesey would probably not point out.

Abraham Gray, as carpenter's mate, would have been useful to the pirates if they could have made him join them. Historically, specialists like Gray were often forced or recruited by pirates who had taken their ships, whereas common sailors were usually allowed to go free unless they joined willingly. However, the mutineers here could not have afforded to free the two sailors (Tom and Alan) whom Silver took ashore, and, because they could not persuade the sailors, the pirates killed them. Gray, potentially more valuable, was left on the ship. Silver, who is thinking all the time, knows his position was severely weakened when Alan's death was heard, and especially when the captain and his party got to the stockade, even at the cost of Redruth's life. He has probably been in contact with the group left on the ship during the first evening and knows that he has lost one man there, leaving him with ten ashore (including himself) and four on the ship. With the loss of the man killed by Ben Gunn — although Silver thinks someone from the stockade killed him — he is no closer to gaining the map, is subject to more random losses of men, and is in dubious control of the undisciplined bunch who have elected him captain but can depose him if they wish. Thus, although he must realize his embassy to the stockade is going to fail, he wants to size up the situation there in preparation for an attack, which will be what he sees is his last chance — and the sooner the better. The mutineers still outnumber Smollett's group (by twelve to seven, including Jim, for Silver has probably got all but one man, Hands, off the ship; thus Jim's count during the attack is wrong even so), and they are now armed with some muskets. (This is never made clear, but probably Silver had a cache of weapons brought on board before they left Bristol.)

A note on weaponry is in order here to explain how primitive the firearms available in the eighteenth century were. Pistols were useful only at close range and had to be primed and reloaded after each shot (or after two shots for double-barreled pistols), a time-consuming process. Muskets had a longer range, although they, too, fired only one shot at a time. But muskets lost accuracy and force at greater distances, because their longer barrels were still smooth-bored, although the balls they fired might be rifled (that is, scored to ensure a relatively straight flight). Squire Trelawney's shot from the boat, from half the distance between ship and shore (a sixth of a mile or nearly 300 yards), is so much a stretch that it must be attributed to poetic license on Stevenson's part. The ship's gun, the "long nine," also had to be primed and loaded before firing, and its nine-pound cannonballs were relatively ineffective at long range except for lucky shots, because they did not explode on impact; such guns were most useful at close range during sea battles between ships.

Glossary

jolly-boat a sailing vessel's small boat, usually carried on the stern.

gig a long, light ship's boat.

"looped for musketry" with small ports for firing weapons.

paling a fence made of pales (narrow, upright pointed stakes; pickets).

musket a smoothbore, long-barreled firearm, used before the invention of the rifle.

keg of pork a barrel of pork cured in salt for preservation.

painter a rope attached to the bow of a boat for tying it to a dock (or to a ship) or for towing it.

two fathoms and a half fifteen feet; a fathom is a unit of length used to measure the depth of water or the length of a nautical rope or cable, equal to six feet (1.8288 meters).

don't hang so long in stays "In stays" or "in irons" is said of a sailing vessel that is headed into the wind with no way on, one that has failed to come about (to change course so that the sails shift); the captain is using the phrase figuratively to urge Gray to change his loyalty from Silver to his rightful captain; he uses "in irons" in much the same way during his later parlay with Silver.

gallipot a small pot or jar of glazed earthenware, especially one used by druggists as a container for medicine; Dr. Livesey uses this figuratively of the jolly-boat because of its small size.

the gunwale was lipping astern The gunwale (pronounced GUN-ulh) is the upper edge of the side of a boat; water was touching the edge of the jolly-boat's gunwale at the rear (stern).

trim the boat to balance the boat by ballasting, shifting cargo, and so on.

the long nine a large artillery piece mounted on the ship; this is primed with powder and wadding; loaded with nine-pound, round lead shot; aimed; and fired by a gunner by touching the powder with a lit match. Thus, in Chapter 17, the captain asks Trelawney, who is watching the gunner, to tell the others in the jolly-boat when he sees the match so that they can hold or back the boat, because the gunner will have aimed ahead of it.

carpet bowls a game played by rolling a weighted ball at a target ball or jack, as in lawn bowling but played indoors on a carpet.

good divinity sound religious doctrine.

Jolly Roger a black flag of pirates, with a white skull and crossbones.

Ben Gunn is fly Fly is thieves' slang, originally, meaning "alert and knowing; sharp, quick."

Davy Jones in folklore, the spirit of the sea, or the sea personified; used by sailors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

You're on a lee shore A lee shore is a sheltered shore, out of the wind; thus Smollett means that Silver and his pirates are in a bad position with no good way out.

a rum puncheon a wooden cask or barrel for holding rum.

doldrums equatorial ocean regions noted for dead calms; a sailing ship in the doldrums may be becalmed indefinitely for lack of wind.

***Critical Study:***

At the beginning of the chapter, two pirates are waving a flag of truce outside the stockade. Cautiously, the captain inquires of what the pirates want. The man who accompanies Silver says "Cap'n Silver" wants to make terms, and Smollett claims he has not heard of "Cap'n Silver." Consequently, Silver explains that after Smollett's "desertion" the men elected Silver captain and he wants Smollett's assurance that he will not be harmed if he enters the stockade. Not happily, the captain agrees to his request.

Despite his one leg, Long John Silver (who is dressed in his finest attire, a blue coat trimmed with his brass-buttons and a laced hat) aptly maneuvers over the fence and proceeds up the sandy hill. There, however, he experiences much more trouble as his crutch sinks into the sand and he struggles to move. When he finally gets to the top, the captain refuses to let him in to the house, instead, the two negotiate outside. He greets Jim, who has left his post out of curiosity, and Jim discerns from his conversation with Silver that Ben Gunn has killed one of the pirates in the middle of the night.

Silver opens the negotiations by saying that he thinks that the pirates should be given the treasure map. In return, he will divide the supplies and take them on the ship and put them at the nearest port, or tell the next ship he sees to come and get them. Smollett, disgusted with Silver's proposal, makes a counter-proposal, claiming that if the pirates come to him unarmed, he will put them in shackles and give them a fair trial. Adding insult to injury, Smollett points out that the pirates are powerless - they don't have the map and they are also on the wrong side of the island, "on a lee shore," the side that is away from the direction in which the wind blows. In conclusion, he orders Silver to leave.

As he leaves, no one will give Silver a hand up. Furious, Silver crawls along the sand until he can grasp the porch and then hoist himself up. Retaliating, he spits in the spring water and promises that he will destroy them within an hour, those who die will be the lucky ones. He then departs, but not without extreme difficulty.

Analysis

Once again in this chapter the focus is one of the themes of the book: the all-important quest. Notice, that even in the peril circumstances that both Silver and Smollett find themselves and their men in, the most important thing is finding the treasure. While some might simply give up or try to negotiate the best terms in order to ensure the safety of their lives, in the quest paradox that this book is placed in. The goal, and the reader's interest, is not merely about survival - it is also about finding the treasure.

Another notable feature of this chapter is the emphasis of the setting as an influence on the plot. At the beginning of the chapter, Stevenson uses descriptions to paint the scene graphically and to point out that the setting influenced the plot, since the unhealthy island swamp may cause illness among the pirates. This same theme comes into play as Long John Silver struggles to get up, and down, the sandy hill. The setting serves to further entice Long John Silver's anger, which will eventually cause a change in the plot because the leader of the mutineers will demand that they attack in retaliation for the supposed rudeness of Smollett's men.

A great deal more about the two sides of Silver's personality are also revealed in this chapter. As Silver first appears, dressed in his finery, he is strong, athletic, cheerful, and confident. He chats pleasantly with Jim, displaying his father-like tendencies again, as well as being a generally pleasing individual, the "Billy Bones" side of his personality. This attitude, however, is ephemeral. In the end, Long John Silver is in a frenzy of anger, and he seems vicious, vindictive, cruel, and unscrupulous, at the same time, however, his physical limitations rend him weak and powerless, the "Blind Pew" aspect of his personality.

***Critical Analysis:***

Silver and his lieutenant wade through early morning fog up to the stockade, carrying a flag of truce. Silver calls out that he's come to make terms on behalf of the "poor lads" who have chosen him as captain after Smollett's "desertion." Agilely scaling the stockade wall, Silver approaches, expecting to be invited into the log house, where it's warm. However, the captain states that, as a mutineer and pirate, Silver can "go hang" and stay outside.

Still on his best behavior, Silver launches into his speech and proposes an exchange: the treasure map for the lives of the captain and his party. The captain bluntly replies that he knows the violent end Silver has planned for them. Silver's temper flares, but he recovers and makes a new offer: Give him the map and, upon his word of honor, they will be given safe passage on the *Hispaniola* to somewhere safe ashore.

[Captain Smollett](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Treasure-Island/character-analysis/#Captain_Smollett) makes a counteroffer to arrest and take the mutineers back to England, where they will get a fair trial. He points out that, without the map, Silver can't find the treasure. Furthermore his mutineers aren't fit to sail the ship, and they do very poorly in a fight. He then sends Silver on his way, with the promise that, the next time they meet, he will shoot him.

The chess game between [Long John Silver](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Treasure-Island/character-analysis/#Long_John_Silver) and [Captain Smollett](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Treasure-Island/character-analysis/#Captain_Smollett) continues. In his confrontation with the captain, Silver demonstrates the coolness and cunning that make him a leader. Coming to the stockade is a bold move, but being a good judge of men, Silver knows that the occupants will honor a flag of truce. The captain treats him with contempt and stubbornly refuses to bargain, but Silver keeps his head, preferring to get what he wants by persuasion and deceit than by violence. Only at the last does Silver unleash his fury at being thwarted. He is used to being feared and obeyed. The transformation is as swift and frightening as that witnessed by Jim earlier on the island.

In cool-thinking and strategy, Captain Smollett is a perfect match for Silver. By the time Silver departs, the lines of battle have been drawn—which is what the captain wants.

***Notes:***

Accompanied by one other pirate, Long John Silver stands outside the stockade. A chilly fog swirls around their knees and obscures the view of the forest behind them. The captain peers outside, looking for signs of a surprise attack. He sends three men to strategic positions inside the house to keep watch. He orders everyone else to load muskets and stand ready. With these preparations complete, Captain Smollett calls out to ask Long John Silver what he wants. Long John Silver—now calling himself Captain Silver—asks permission to come unarmed into the bunkhouse and speak. Captain Smollett says, “I have not the slightest desire to talk to you.” However, he adds that Silver will not be harmed if he wishes to come. The captain steps outside and watches Silver climb the fence and make his way up the hill. With his one leg and his crutch, Silver makes very slow progress on the sandy ground, but Captain Smollett does not offer to help. Instead he sits down and whistles a tune while he waits. Silver eventually reaches the captain and, after complaining that the captain should invite him inside, sits beside him on the ground. Silver complains about something that happened last night, and it becomes clear that one of the pirates was bludgeoned and killed while he slept. None of the captain’s men went out last night, but the captain does not admit this. Jim knows what must have happened: Ben Gunn must have attacked the mutineers’ camp on his own. Now there are only fourteen pirates left. Silver and Captain Smollett smoke their pipes together, not speaking. Finally Silver spits on the ground and makes an offer. He says that if Captain Smollett hands over the treasure map, the pirates will spare the men’s lives and share the rest of the food. However, the pirates will take the treasure for themselves. Captain Smollett is clearly unimpressed by Silver’s proposal. He says that the pirates have no basis for making demands. They do not know where to the find the treasure. They do not have the knowledge necessary to sail the ship away without wrecking it. They are cowardly drunks who cannot fight. The captain makes a counterproposal: if the pirates turn themselves in, he will chain them up and take them back to England for a fair trial. Otherwise he will fight them to the death. “I’ll put a bullet in your back when next I meet you,” he says. This makes Long John Silver angry. He wants to leave, but he cannot stand up on his own. He asks the captain to help him, but the captain refuses. Nobody else offers to help either, so Silver is forced to crawl to the porch and pull himself up to a standing position. He spits into the spring and vows to attack the stockade within the hour. “Them that die’ll be the lucky ones,” he says. He stumbles back down the hill and, with great difficulty, climbs over the fence. Jim and his friends watch, not speaking, until Silver disappears into the trees.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

Outside the stockade it’s just [Silver](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/long-john-silver) and another pirate. [Smollett](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-smollett) tells the others to stay inside, as it could well be a trick, and to keep a look out on all sides. Silver’s servant says that “Cap’n Silver” has come to make terms. Smollett says that he’ll allow Silver in—any treachery will be on the other side—but Silver laughs and says the captain is a gentleman.

***Analysis Part 1:***

The captain is well aware that Silver’s protestations of truce and fairness don’t mean that much, unless it’s in Silver’s own best interests to maintain the truce. Silver has little more than scorn for the captain’s own sense of dignity and fairness.

***Summary part 2:***

[Silver](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/long-john-silver) limps up the knoll to the log-house. When Silver asks why he won’t be let inside, [Smollett](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-smollett) declares that he can either be an honest ship-cook or “Cap’n Silver,” a mutineer and pirate, in which case he’s worth nothing. Unfazed, Silver greets [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) cheerfully. He acknowledges that they made some good shots the night before, but that it can’t happen again. Smollett doesn’t let on how confused he is, though Jim suspects that [Gunn](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/ben-gunn) had snuck up on the pirates and picked a few of them off.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Smollett creates an either-or choice for Silver: just as Silver has been trying to convince others to join his side, Smollett declares that Silver must choose one side or the other, rather than constantly play each group off each other. Silver is, as ever, able to adapt easily to any situation, and remains unaffected by others’ suspicions of him.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Silver](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/long-john-silver) says that all the pirates want is the treasure, while [Smollett](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-smollett) and the others presumably want to save their lives. He demands that the captain give him the [treasure map](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/symbols/the-map-of-treasure). The captain coolly refuses. They both light a pipe and silently sit, smoking. Silver again asks for the chart: if he gets it, they can either come aboard with the pirates and be left at another port, or they can stay on the island with provisions.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Silver’s suggestion is one possibility, which seems rather attractive, and yet it depends on the captain putting his trust in Silver and the other pirates—something that he’s unwilling to do. Instead, each man continues to study the other, as if to predict the other’s mind and moves.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Smollett](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-smollett), in turn, says that if the pirates surrender unarmed, he’ll take them back to England for a fair trial: if not, he’ll see them “to Davy Jones”—that is, kill them. They can’t find the treasure and there’s none among them who can sail the ship. The next time he sees [Silver](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/long-john-silver), the captain concludes, he’ll shoot him straightaway. Suddenly furious, Silver roars for someone to help him up: no one does, so he crawls to the porch and hoists himself up, then spits on the ground, saying that’s what he thinks of them. In an hour, he’ll be ready for battle, he says, and limps off.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Now the captain proposes his own plan, which Silver can take or leave. But the captain is eager to emphasize that Silver is at a disadvantage here. Ultimately, the captain refuses any kind of treaty or compromise: he will fight the pirates for the treasure. Seeing that his scheming has come to nothing, Silver immediately sheds all pretense of friendliness.