***Treasure Island***

***Chapter 26:***

# *Israel Hands*

***Brief Summary:***

* The *Hispaniola* arrives at the northern end of the island.
* Because they have no anchor, they have to wait until the tide goes out a bit so they can beach the ship.
* So Jim hangs out with Israel Hands.
* Israel wants Jim to throw O'Brien's body overboard because it's bad luck to have a corpse aboard, but Jim isn't strong enough.
* Israel wants Jim to go below deck to get a bottle of wine – he claims the brandy has become too strong for him.
* Jim starts to get suspicious of why Israel wants him off the deck, but he decides to play along.
* He says he'll go below for wine, but that he'll have to spend a long time looking for it.
* Jim makes a lot of noise as he goes below deck, then creeps back up to watch Israel Hands.
* Even though he's injured, Israel gets up and manages to find a knife hidden in a coil of rope. Jim realizes that he can move around and is now armed.
* Jim is sure Israel Hands means to kill him. But before that happens, he and Hands both want the same thing: they want to beach the ship in a sheltered place so that it will be safe.
* Jim thinks Israel Hands won't kill him until the *Hispaniola* is ashore.
* Jim slips back into the cabin, grabs a bottle of wine, and brings it to Israel Hands.
* Israel pretends not to have moved. He also acts like he's on his deathbed.
* Jim tells him he should say his prayers.
* Israel Hands replies that he's been at sea 30 years, and he's never seen anything good happen to a good man.
* Hands then tells Jim to follow his directions exactly so they can arrive at the North Inlet.
* Jim gets so involved in this final bit of steering that he forgets to watch Hands. It's only instinct that makes him turn around just as Hands is drawing a knife on him.
* Jim leaps to the side and lets go of the steering lever, which suddenly hits Hands in the chest.
* Jim uses this moment to reach for one of his pistols.
* He pulls the trigger but nothing happens – the pistol has become soaked with seawater and isn't usable.
* Hands leaps for Jim again, and the two start dodging back and forth.
* Suddenly, the *Hispaniola* hits ground and tips at an angle.
* Both Israel Hands and Jim roll straight down the deck.
* Jim quickly recovers and climbs up to the top of the mast.
* There he reloads his pistols while Hands starts climbing up the rigging with his knife in his teeth.
* Jim warns Hands that if he keeps climbing, Jim will blow his brains out.
* Hands says he and Jim will have to come to an agreement – but even as he's saying this, something comes flying through the air to pin Jim's shoulder to the mast.
* It's the knife: Hands has thrown it at him.
* As the knife hits Jim, he fires his two pistols. The bullets hit Hands, who falls dead into the sea below.

***Synopsis:***

Jim and Hands approach the North Inlet but must wait for a favorable tide to cast anchor. Hands proposes throwing the Irishman’s dead body overboard, as he objects to the corpse’s presence on deck. Jim replies that he does not like the idea, and Hands responds that a dead man is simply dead. Jim retorts that the spirit never dies. Suspiciously, Hands claims that the brandy is too strong for his head and asks Jim for wine instead. Jim feigns innocence and goes to fetch some port wine, but watches Hands in secret and observes him extract a long knife from a hiding place and place it under his jacket.

Jim knows that he needs Hands to guide the ship safely into the inlet and remains wary of him. As he becomes absorbed by the effort of maneuvering the ship into its anchorage, he relaxes his vigilance and Hands attacks him. They engage in a fierce scuffle. Jim climbs up a mast and Hands follows. Jim pulls his pistol on Hands, who flings his knife, piercing Jim’s shoulder and pinning him to the mast. Jim’s gun goes off and Hands falls into the water.

***Critical Study:***

Chapter 26 ("Israel Hands") begins as Jim and Hands, unable to anchor the ship, wait for the tide to come in far enough so they can safely beach her. Hands tries to get Jim to toss the dead sailor, O'Brien, overboard, but Jim says he is not strong enough. Then, after a short discussion on the unluckiness of the ship and the nature of death, Hands asks Jim to get him some wine from the cabin. He obviously wants Jim out of the way, so Jim goes below, then quickly sneaks back to where he can see Hands, injured but not as badly as he has pretended, crawl across the deck and retrieve a bloody knife from a coil of rope, hiding it in his jacket and then going back to where Jim left him. Jim reflects that Hands certainly means to kill him, but that he will probably spare him until the ship can be beached, for he will need Jim's help to navigate it.

Jim comes back with the wine, and Hands, acting very weak, asks him to cut a quid of tobacco, since he — Hands — has no knife. He says he is dying. Jim advises him to say some prayers, but Hands reckons this is nonsense. The tide is right, then, and they take the ship to the northern anchorage to beach it, seeing as they do so the wreck of another, abandoned, ship. Struggling to maneuver the Hispaniola into place at Hands' direction, Jim is distracted until, suddenly, he sees the coxswain moving toward him, knife in hand. Hands lunges and Jim lets go of the tiller to jump aside. The tiller, released, hits Hands in the chest. Jim pulls out one of his pistols and aims, but the weapon has been fouled with water and will not fire. Dodging and weaving, the two feint at each other. Then the ship runs aground and tips to the side, the deck at a sharp angle and the masts leaning out over the water. Both Jim and Hands fall over, but Jim gets to his feet and climbs the ropes to the mizzenmast, narrowly avoiding the knife. Now, seated on the mast's crosstrees, he primes and reloads both pistols, while Hands struggles slowly toward him, dragging his injured leg. Hands, however, seems to reflect that he is in a bad position, and he offers to surrender — but, even as he is speaking, he throws the knife suddenly, pinning Jim by the flesh of his shoulder to the mast. Hurt and surprised, Jim fires both pistols and drops them, and Hands falls dying into the water.

***Significance:***

After they reach the North Inlet, Jim and Hands wait for the other tide so that they can land the Hispanolia on the beach - they cannot simply anchor because Jim has cut the rope and the anchor is gone. At this point, Israel Hands asks the young narrator to go into the cabin and get him some wine because the brandy is too strong. Jim, however, realizes that this request is strange, and Jim realizes that this is just a pretext to get Jim out of the way. Although he goes along with Hand's deception, Jim quickly sneaks back up to see what Hands is up too. He discovers that Hands has a coil of rope and a knife and is laying in wait for Jim to come back up the stairs, unsuspectingly. Although Jim knows that Hands is armed and dangerous, he does not think that he will do anything to him until the ship is safely beached and so he goes back up the stairs with the wine. He is right, Hand pretends that he has no knife when he asks Jim to cut him a piece of tobacco.

At this point, Jim suggests to Hands that he pray and be forgiven of his sins, namely killing his fellow pirate. Hands, however, disregards this notion, saying that his philosophy is that no good comes about being nice and the person who strikes first is the person who in the end survives. Finally, when the tide is out, and Hands tutoring Jim, the boy manages to bring the ship to the shore, a difficult feat of navigation. Completely enthralled by the landing, Jim forgets that Hands is armed and dangerous and he is nearly stabbed but jumps and turns out of the way just in time to avoid the approaching Hands. Jim shoots the pistol at Hands but nothing happens because the pistol is wet. As Jim is trying to dodge the seamen, the Hispanolia strikes land and tips over at a 45 degree angle. Jim, Hands, and the dead body all roll in the same direction. Jim is the first to his feet and he climbs to the top of the mast. Hands throws his knife, which narrowly misses Jim. Hands begins to climb up the mast to get Jim but suddenly, without his doing a thing, Jim's pistols go off and drop in the water his body. Luckily, Hands is hit and drops into the water, following the pistols.

One of the few symbolic objects in Treasure Island is a knife. Notice, that whenever Jim is endangered or threatened by anyone, they wield a knife. This chapter, of course, is no different. The object that Israel Hands threatens Jim with is a knife. A knife, therefore, represents danger and killing for Jim.

In this chapter, one of the most revealing conversations is when Israel Hands expresses the kill-or-be-killed philosophy of the pirates. Hands feels absolutely no regret over the death of O'Brien. He sees absolutely no good in goodness but observed that "dead men don't bite" and therefore always tries to hit first. The only thing that he believes in is luck and himself.

The major theme again explored in this chapter is Hands as a father figure. Jim literally basks in the presence of Hands as he instructs him on how to both sail and land the Hispaniola. Jim is so desperate for any father figure that he forgets about the imminent danger that Israel Hands represents and instead basks in the attention and advice. It is unfortunate that like his real father, Israel Hands also meets the end of his life at a time when Jim can witness it.

***Critical Analysis:***

Israel Hands guides Jim as he navigates the *Hispaniola* and then suggests Jim go down to the cabin for a bottle of port. Suspecting a trick, Jim spies on the pirate and sees him retrieve a long knife from the port scuppers and conceal it in his jacket.

Under Hands's supervision, Jim maneuvers the *Hispaniola* toward the beach. As the ship swings around to slide to shore, stern first, Jim turns his back on Hands in order to watch the ship touch land. Spinning back around, Jim sees Hands coming toward him, "the dirk in his right hand."

During the ensuing fight, Jim's youth and nimbleness serve him well. Then abruptly, the *Hispaniola* strikes sand and keels over on her side. Jim, Hands, and the dead O'Brien tumble together, in a heap, into the scuppers. Jim scrambles out and up into the sails of the leaning mizzenmast. Then Israel starts to climb, and Jim warns the pirate to keep his distance. In answer Hands throws his knife and pins Jim's shoulder to the mast. Without thinking, Jim fires both pistols, and Hands plunges head first into the water.

At last Jim takes steps to outmaneuver Israel Hands in order to find out what his odd smile means. Jim is learning to successfully navigate a dangerous, adult world in which things quite often are not what they seem. Thinking like an adult, he understands what Hands is planning once the schooner is beached, and then makes plans of his own.

Throughout this adventure, Jim's courage has been tested time and again. Now, face-to-face and alone with Israel Hands—a personification of evil—he must rely on his wits and physical agility to outmaneuver his opponent. No one else can help him. Clearly, the man is old and physically impaired by his wounds and general weakness. Yet like blind Pew and one-legged Silver, he remains exceptionally dangerous. In their final moments of confrontation, Jim sheds the last of his childishness. He courageously goes man-to-man with the pirate, with never a thought that he is only a solitary boy battling a full-grown man.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

Soon the wind turns, so [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) and [Israel Hands](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) stop the ship and rest. Hands asks Jim to push [O’Brien](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) overboard, rather than keep him on deck, but Jim refuses. Hands says that the Hispaniola is an unlucky ship—many men have been killed on it. He asks if Jim thinks a dead man can come alive again: Jim says the body is dead, but not the spirit, and Hands says he hasn’t seen spirits do much danger.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Throughout the book, it has become evident that some characters simply have better or worse fortune than others: here Hands further elaborates on this reality, though with a superstitious twist, given that it seems Hands is trying to decide how fearful to be of spirits.

***Summary part 2:***

Suddenly [Hands](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) asks if [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) will get him some wine, since the brandy is too strong. Jim is suspicious of this excuse, especially as Hands keeps watching Jim closely. But he decides to hide his own suspicions, and cheerfully agrees. He slips downstairs, runs along the gallery, and peeks out of the fore. He then sees Hands rise from his hands and knees and painfully heave himself across the deck, where he pulls a bloodstained knife out of a coil of rope. He hides it in his jacket and crawls back.

***Analysis Part 2:***

By now, Jim has learned enough about treachery and duplicity to know not to trust Hands, especially since he also is well aware of the pirate’s penchant for rum over wine. Jim’s suspicion proves to be well-founded, since his own quick thinking will allow him to be able to stave off what Hands thinks is the advantage of surprise.

***Summary Part 3:***

Now knowing [Hands](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) is armed, [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) still is certain that the two of them both desire to beach the Hispaniola safely—only until then will his life be spared. Jim heads back to deck, where Hands asks him for some tobacco. Jim says if he were Hands, he’s spend more time praying: Hands has betrayed the crew, has killed men, and has lived sinfully. But Hands answers solemnly that he has never yet seen any good come from goodness: whoever strikes first wins. Changing his tone, he says that the wind has now shifted.

***Analysis Part 3:***

While there’s little Jim can do right away in response to Hands’ treachery other than engage him directly in battle, he is able to strategize given his knowledge of the goal they both share as well as where their aims diverge. Here, again, Hands speaks for the pirates in general, but also many of the other characters, when he chooses pragmatism over goodness.

***Summary Part 4:***With [Hands](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) directing, [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) steers around the banks and towards the shores of North Inlet. Hands points out a beach to Jim, and explains how he might get the Hispaniola back to sea again after docking her there. He issues Jim his directing commands, and they have almost reached the shore when suddenly Jim feels dread and turns around—Hands has leapt towards Jim with the knife in his hand.

***Analysis Part 4:***Jim is able to enlist Hands as his right-hand man in a kind of unofficial truce, allowing them both to survive as long as possible. Only when land is in sight does the pirate presumably decide that he’s now able to survive on his own, and can try to take out Jim.

***Summary Part 5:***[Hands](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) throws himself forward and [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) jumps sideways onto the open deck. He draws his pistol and shoots, but sea water has made the gun useless. He curses himself for not checking and reloading his weapons, and marvels at how fast Hands can move despite his injuries. He realizes it would be fatal to retreat—that would box him in at the corner of the deck—so he stands and waits, ready to dodge. Hands stops too, then feints, and Jim moves correspondingly. It’s like the games he used to play at Black Hill Cove, Jim thinks, though never with his heart beating so hard.

***Analysis Part 5:***Although Jim has had time to prepare for this moment, he only now realizes that he’s not quite as prepared as he could have been, having failed to check to ensure that his pistol was working. Still, Jim once again excels at quick thinking, learning from the games he played as a boy, even though now the stakes are much higher and his skills are literally a matter of life and death.

***Summary Part 6:***Suddenly the Hispaniola rams into the sand and the deck tilts to 45 degrees. [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) and [Hands](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) both roll down, Hands slamming into [O’Brien](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters)’s body. Jim jumps into the mizzen shrouds (the rigging holding up the mast) and dodges Hands’s knife hurled towards him. Jim quickly recharges his pistol, while Hands painfully pulls himself into the shrouds and begins to climb. Pistol in hand, Jim orders Hands to halt. The coxswain stops and Jim laughs out loud: Hands says that he’s had no luck—the ship’s lurch did him in. Jim continues to smile, but Hands once again hurls another knife into the air, pinning Jim’s shoulder to the mast. Almost unconsciously, he shoots, and his pistol falls into the sea, along with Hands, head first.

***Analysis Part 6:***As Jim and Hands have been fighting, the ship has continued its forward march to the shore. Luck is now on Jim’s side, as the interruption allows him to escape immediate danger and use the advantage of his small size to clamber up and away from Hands. Jim’s newfound confidence turns out to be slightly misplaced, but only slightly, as he is able to kill Hands in defense—the first time he’s killed a man, and a huge event in his young life, although in the immediate moment it mostly means that his own life has been spared.