***Treasure Island***

***Chapter 31:***

# *Flint’s Pointer*

***Brief Summary:***

* Long John Silver admits that he saw Doctor Livesey gesturing for Jim to make a run for it. Since Jim kept his promise, Long John Silver feels that Jim has saved his life, so he owes him.
* The pirates beckon Jim and Long John Silver over – they have breakfast going.
* Long John Silver tells the group that the Doctor and his fellows have the ship, but once the pirates get the treasure, they'll have the upper hand, since the pirates are the ones who have the boats to row out to the ship.
* Long John Silver tells them all of these half-truths to build up the pirates' confidence and to keep them from getting violent.
* Long John Silver reminds them of Jim's value as a hostage.
* Jim is worried: what if Long John Silver goes back to working for the other pirates? What did Doctor Livesey mean by warning Long John Silver not to go after the treasure?
* They all set off looking for the treasure. All the sailors are armed, and Long John Silver is carrying Captain Flint (the parrot, not the dead pirate) on his shoulder. Jim is tied to Long John Silver with a rope around his waist (like a toddler harness!).
* They walk over to the rowboats and set off after the treasure.
* They follow the directions on the map until, suddenly, the man on the furthest left lets out a shout.
* There's a skeleton lying on the ground covered in scraps of cloth.
* Long John Silver realizes that the skeleton is a pointer, indicating the direction of the treasure.
* He shakes his head – it's just the kind of dark joke Captain Flint would have liked.
* Long John Silver figures out that the bones must have belonged to a pirate named Allardyce.
* The pirates exchange memories about Flint – his wickedness and his bad temper.
* Even though Long John Silver tells them to be quiet and keep going, finding this dead pirate skeleton has clearly freaked out his men.

***Synopsis:***

Silver thanks Jim for saving his life and for not running away when Dr. Livesey encouraged him to do so. Jim and Silver sit down to breakfast, and Jim is astonished by the fact that the band has prepared three times as much food as is needed. Silver’s men are happy, confident of seizing the treasure soon, but Jim is sad in his certainty that Silver will betray him at the soonest practical moment.

After breakfast the pirates set off on the treasure hunt, with Silver leading Jim on a leash. They trudge through the hills, periodically pausing to consult the map. Reaching the top of a hill, the pirates are shocked to find a skeleton in seaman’s garb, stretched out on the ground like a compass, pointing to the treasure. The man’s knife is missing, suggesting that the pirates are not the first to have come across the skeleton. The pirates recognize the skeleton as a former mate, Allardyce, who served on Flint’s crew, because of its long bones and yellow hair. Following Allardyce’s clue, they head on toward the treasure.

Summary:  
Chapter 31 ("The Treasure Hunt — Flint's Pointer") begins with Silver's telling Jim that his refusal to break his word and escape, along with the doctor's warning, are the first hope he has had of saving his own life. They eat the breakfast that the wasteful pirates have cooked, throw the leftovers on the fire, and Silver cheers the others up by saying they'll soon find the treasure and then have the upper hand, for they have the boats to take it to the ship, which they'll find when the treasure is secured, holding Jim as hostage. Jim is sure that Silver will turn on him should they succeed in finding the treasure, and he wonders why his friends gave Silver the map. They all set out in the two boats from the anchorage and, following the map's ambiguous directions, land the boats and begin to climb to the treasure site, Silver leading Jim on a rope. After a while they find a human skeleton, which they recognize as a former companion, one of the men whom Flint killed after burying the treasure. The bony arm is pointing in a direction that turns out to coincide with the compass reading given on the map, and they realize that Flint left the man there as a pointer. They begin to be superstitiously frightened; they know Flint is dead, but they fear his evil spirit.

***Critical Study:***After Dr. Livesey leaves, Long John Silver tells Jim that he observed Dr. Livesey encouraging Jim to try to leave and that the boy's refusal gave him much hope for the future. Silver tells Jim that they must save themselves by sticking close together. In order to restore the men's confidence in Silver, Silver discloses to the pirates that Jim is a valuable hostage because Silver gleaned news from Jim's conversation with the doctor that the doctor and his companions have the ship, once the mutineers have the treasure, therefore, they will be able to take the treasure away from the island and find the ship. Jim is worried though, because of Silver' duplicity he is not sure what to believe. Jim is also worried of why his companions deserted the stockade, why they let Silver have the treasure map, and why the doctor warned of trouble on the treasure hunt.

As the pirates begin their treasure hunt, the whole party heads toward the tall tree on the shoulder of Spyglass hill, which is the landmark cited in Flint's note on the back of the treasure map. As the men journey, Jim and Silver trail slightly behind, with Jim sometimes giving the one-legged man a hand so he does not fall. Suddenly, the man who is ahead of the rest of the group cries aloud and everyone runs toward him. They find a human skeleton lying at the foot of a tall pine tree in a perfectly straight, unnatural position, his feet pointing in one direction and his hands, raised over his head, the opposite direction. Silver believes that he man's body has been placed that way to serve as a compass, and, after checking their own compasses, they believe this to be correct. After closer examination, Silver believes that the skeleton is one of the pirates that Flint killed, someone they recognize as Allardyce. They notice that although most of the clothing has rotted away, none of the possessions that may have been in the man's pockets are lying around. The men feel haunted by the spirit of cold-blooded Captain Flint and walk closely together as they head toward the treasure.

In even contemporary reviews of the book, such as the Saturday Review, critics observed "Long John, called Barbecue, is incomparably the best of all. He, and not Jim Hawkins nor Flint's treasure, is Mr. Stevenson's real hero." In a lot of ways, this is precisely true. It is Long John Silver's colorful personality, his pirate dress and peculiar walk that people remember from this book, not the young hero Jim. In this chapter particularly, the manner in which Robert Louis Stevenson describes the actions of Silver trying to walk both lines makes him very agreeable to the reader. He is the real hero of the book.

Also, in this chapter, you again see the best father figure of the book in action, Long John Silver. As Long John Silver makes special protection to take care of the younger Jim, it is like he is a father taking care of a son. The special bond between the two characters is reinforced by their taking care of each other at a time in both of their lives when they need someone else.

The other aspect of the characters that is clear in this book is the recklessness of the pirates. At the beginning of the chapter, Stevenson contrasts the pirates attitudes, who clearly are carefree and care only about the present. This attitude is in sharp contrast to Jim's companion's attitude, who clearly plan for the future. Yet another sign of the pirates careless attitude is that both the man with malaria and the man with the wounded head comes with the rest on the treasure hunt, despite the fact that they should clearly be resting.

***Critical Analysis:***Silver commends Jim for sticking by his word and not running off. This has, in essence, saved the pirate's life, as his men would surely have turned on him as a result. Silver stresses that he and Jim must stick close during the treasure hunt.

They join the buccaneers for breakfast. When Silver declares that when Jim will no longer be useful and will get what he deserves, the boy is not sure that the pirate is really bluffing. He knows that Silver still has "a foot in either camp," and might choose at any time to betray him.

Shouldering picks and shovels, the pirates set off on the treasure hunt. Silver has secured Jim to himself by a length of rope. The group reaches Spyglass Hill and begins scouting for a conspicuously tall tree, as described on the map.

Studying the strange pose of a skeleton they come across, Silver realizes that the bones are a grisly pointer left by Captain Flint and are aimed at the treasure. This strikes the other pirates as a bad omen. Six men died at the hands of Flint, and their number is also six.

[Stevenson](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Treasure-Island/author/) adds a teaser to the chapter title, signaling the reader that here, at last, is the Treasure Hunt. Prior to setting off, the pirates enjoy an extravagant breakfast that reflects their "live for today" attitude. It's the same attitude that allows them to recklessly squander the wealth they acquire through pirating. Silver says nothing, though his personal history sets him apart from these men. Rather than reckless, he is careful and calculating. The buccaneers' excesses, whether with food, rum, or money, are symptomatic of their lack of discipline and their decadence.

As the treasure hunt progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that keeping the pirates under control is going to be a tough job for Silver. In their excitement, they are exceptionally undisciplined as they run to and fro, shouting, in search of clues. When they stumble upon the skeleton, their spirits plummet to a dangerous low. Only the reminder that vast quantities of gold are somewhere up ahead gets them moving again.

Silver's fluid and self-serving sense of morality is a source of worry for Jim. He knows the pirate is playing a new game that will pit him against his five deadly comrades. Even so, there is every chance that Silver will alter the game, if it pleases him. For this reason Jim cannot depend on Silver keeping his promise to [Dr. Livesey](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Treasure-Island/character-analysis/#Dr._Livesey).

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Silver](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/long-john-silver) tells [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) that he guessed [Dr. Livesey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/doctor-livesey) told him to run for it, and he’s grateful that Jim kept his word. Now they must follow Livesey’s treasure hunt orders, though he has little idea what he meant. They eat breakfast, and Jim marvels at how wasteful and careless the pirates are—how ill-suited for a long battle. Silver pays their recklessness little heed, only cheering them up with grand notions of treasure. Then he says that they’ll use Jim as hostage to get back the ship, and sail off in the ship with the treasure.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Silver has been watching Jim and Livesey’s conversation from afar, and he now respects Jim even more for keeping his word (something that can not usually be said for Silver himself). Now Jim begins to recognize Silver’s desire to bet on the captain’s crew more than on his own pirates, given their revelry and various weaknesses.

***Summary part 2:***

[Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins)’s heart sinks, as he realizes that [Silver](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/long-john-silver) won’t hesitate to be a double traitor, and would probably prefer wealth and a pirate life to a mere chance he’ll face the gallows. Jim also dreads the moment when he, a boy, and a one-legged man might have to face five bloodthirsty pirates. He’s also still confused by his friends’ abandonment of the stockade, and by the [doctor](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/doctor-livesey)’s last warning about the “squalls.”

***Analysis Part 2:***

Still, Jim recognizes that ultimately, Silver cares about himself more than about anyone else, and will casually use people to his advantage despite any protestations of loyalty. As a result, Jim understands that he must be similarly selfish and single-minded.

***Summary Part 3:***

A cord is strung around [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins)’s waist and he’s led outside the log-house. The others carry the provisions with them, and march slowly to the beach. They discuss, on the way, the chart: the red crosses are large enough to be confusing, and the directions are somewhat ambiguous, mentioning a tall tree, Spy-glass shoulder, the direction E.S.E. and Skeleton Island. They see a number of tall trees, and each man picks his favorite. [Silver](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/long-john-silver) orders them to continue straight ahead anyway.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Still a prisoner, Jim is nonetheless able to pay attention to the pirates as they begin the search for treasure in earnest. While he still struggles to understand the doctor’s decision to give the treasure map to the pirates, and Silver is similarly suspicious, the pirates themselves lend little attention to this strange choice.

***Summary Part 4:***After about half a mile, the pirate furthest to the left begins to shout in terror, and the others run towards him. At the foot of a tall pine lies a human skeleton in an unnatural position, his feet pointing in one direction, his hands, raised and clasped, in the other. All are terrified, and [Silver](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/long-john-silver) remarks that this body must be a kind of compass: indeed, it points E.S.E. It must have been [Flint](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-flint), having killed the six men, who dragged this one to the tree, Silver says.

***Analysis Part 4:***The human skeleton is a reminder that other lives have been sacrificed in order to hide the treasure. If Flint was the person who hid this treasure, as Silver reasons, it’s not entirely clear whether the body was meant to guide future treasure hunters, strike fear into them, or both.

***Summary Part 5:***

The pirates begin to recollect about the frightful [Flint](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-flint) and the men he killed: one almost thinks he hears Flint’s sailor song. [Silver](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/long-john-silver) chides him, saying Flint is dead and can’t walk or sing, but still the pirates remain frightened.

***Analysis Part 5:***

As usual, the pirates are highly superstitious, and fear the dead as or almost as much as they fear the living—an attitude that contrasts with Silver’s reasoned approach.