***Treasure Island***

***Chapter 32:***

# *The Voice Among the Trees*

***Brief Summary:***

* The pirates stop to take a rest after reaching the top of the hill.
* Tom Morgan says he's not feeling well; he's still thinking about Captain Flint.
* They start talking about the pirate captain again.
* Suddenly a high voice somewhere in the trees starts singing, "Fifteen men on the dead man's chest/ Yo ho ho, and a bottle of rum!" (32.9).
* The six pirates truly freak out – Tom Morgan actually falls to the ground.
* Long John Silver is pale and frightened, but he tells the other pirates it's just someone messing around.
* Then the voice calls, "Fetch aft the rum, Darby!" (32.14).
* Apparently, these were Flint's last words.
* Long John Silver won't let the other terrified pirates turn back.
* He points out that the call had an echo – and no spirit voice echoes, does it?
* George Merry seems comforted by Long John Silver's observation.
* They realize that the voice doesn't sound like Captain Flint at all – it sounds like Ben Gunn!
* George Merry says no one cares about the ghost of Ben Gunn. So all the pirates seem to feel much better, and they continue on.
* Dick Johnson is still holding his Bible fearfully, and Long John Silver makes fun of him for it.
* Finally they reach the three tall pines where the treasure is buried.
* Thinking he's about to find a vast treasure, Long John Silver looks menacingly at Jim.
* Jim realizes that if the pirates find the treasure, Long John Silver may not honor the treaty he struck with Doctor Livesey.
* Dick Johnson has started babbling – he's caught a bad fever and he's becoming incoherent.
* Then they find something that's a complete shock: the treasure has already been dug up!

***Synopsis:***

Taking a rest from the search, Silver expresses his confidence that they are close to the treasure. One of the pirates feels uneasy thinking about Flint, and Silver says they are lucky the old captain is dead. The pirates suddenly hear a trembling, high voice singing the same song the pirates frequently sing, “Fifteen men on the dead man’s chest.” One of the pirates claims the voice is Flint’s, and the men grow terrified, thinking they have awakened a ghost.

The pirates hear the voice again, and it wails what all the men recognize as Flint’s last words. One of the men takes out his Bible and starts praying. Silver, the only one who remains undaunted, scorns the other men’s belief in spirits and keeps focused on the search for the treasure. The pirates continue onward. As they approach the treasure site, Silver’s nostrils quiver and he seems half mad. Suddenly coming upon the site, the pirates are shocked to find it has already been excavated, and only an empty hole lies before them.

***Summary:***In Chapter 32 ("The Treasure Hunt — The Voice Among the Trees") the pirates grow more leery of their enterprise, and Silver tries to reason with them. But suddenly, they hear a ghostly voice somewhere before them, first singing the song Flint was famous for, and then crying out in Flint's last words. Even Silver is shaken, but he says he wasn't afraid of Flint in life and will not let Flint's ghost scare him now. Then he notes that the ghostly voice produced an echo among the hills, and the group decides that it was in fact more like Ben Gunn's voice than Flint's. None of them — except for the young sailor, Dick, who is coming down with fever himself — is afraid of Ben Gunn, not even of his ghost. They continue to follow the treasure map, making a few false turns, and from Silver's demeanor Jim realizes that when they do find the treasure, the man will certainly turn on him as well as on Livesey and the others. But when they get to the place where the treasure should be, they find not the seven hundred thousand pounds that ought to be there but only a big hole. Someone else has found Flint's treasure first.

***Critical Study:***Finally, the buccaneers reach the top of the steep plateau, the men sit down and look at the view. As the men whisper about Captain Flint's exploits, they suddenly hear a voice singing his favorite song:

Fifteen men on the dead man's chest

Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!

Terrified, the pirates turn pale. But as suddenly as the voice began, it brakes off. Only slowly, Long John Silver tells the rest of the group that the voice is not a ghost and that his voice seems familiar. Suddenly, the voice wails again, this time saying "Darby M'graw! Darby M'Graw! Fetch aft the rum, Darby!" Realizing that these were Flint's last words, the rest of the pirates are even more terrified. Still undaunted, Silver rallies the men, claiming that he is not afraid of Flint, alive or dead, and all he want is the treasure. Although the men still fear that Flint's spirit is haunting them, Silver points out that the voice had an echo and a ghost's voice would not have an echo. Silver finally recognizes the voice as [Ben Gunn](https://www.gradesaver.com/treasure-island/study-guide/character-list#ben-gunn)'s and the men lose their fear. Merry says, "Nobody minds Ben Gunn, dead or alive."

The men start off again, and as they near the tree under which the treasure has been buried, the men become very excited but when they finally get near the spot of the buried treasure, they suddenly stop. In front of them is a very large hole, dug some item ago, which contains the shaft of a broken pick and parts of packing-cases, on which the name of Flint's ship, Walrus, is branded. The treasure was gone!

At the beginning of the chapter, the men describe the view of the island, including the Cape of Woods in front of them, Skeleton Island behind them, Spy-glass above them - and the sea in different directions. This description is important to the entire chapter because it increases the sense of isolation and highlights the fact that Jim and the men are trapped on an island, in the sea. There is no escape for these men. They must fight it out to the end. The mood of solitude is enhanced by the fact that the only sounds on the island are the men's whispering voices and the distant sound of the surf.

It is interesting that these men do not respect Ben Gunn at all. As soon as they here that it is his voice, they are no longer extremely frightened and instead treat him like a buffoon. Ben Gunn, however, is much smarter and more resourceful than any of his former comrades give him credit. He was able to not only survive on the island for three years, but was also smart enough to both move the treasure and help the "good" guys eventually triumph.

In this chapter, you also clearly experience the dual personality of Long John Silver. The mere thought of the treasure brings out his "evil" side as he yells at Jim Hawkins and tries to make both men move quickly to the treasure. This is in sharp contrast to the loving, father like attitude that he has taken towards Jim in the previous few chapters. Once again, Jim's father has abandoned him.

***Critical Analysis:***The pirates stop to rest at the top of the plateau, which commands a sweeping view of the island. Suddenly, a high, trembling voice breaks the silence. It comes from the trees, singing "Fifteen men on the dead man's chest—Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!"

The men are struck with terror, believing it's the ghost of Flint. Even Silver is shaken, though he tries to pass it off as playing a joke. The voice comes again, more distant now and crying, "Darby M'Graw!" over and over, followed by an order to "fetch aft the rum." Tom Morgan moans that these were Flint's last words before he died. Silver struggles to squash the rising terror among the men, but they are too spooked. However, they soon recognize the voice as that of their old shipmate Benn Gunn. None of the men fear him, alive or dead! With renewed spirits, the party sets out again, on fire with the thought of finding £700,000 in gold.

About this time Jim notices a change come over Silver. He has no doubt that, finding the treasure, he will "cut every honest throat" on the island and sail to freedom on the *Hispaniola*.

Then all hope of finding treasure comes abruptly to an end. Reaching the top of the hill, the pirates find a gaping hole where £700,000 of gold should have been.

Tension among the pirates is high as the chapter opens. During much of what occurs, it is not what the pirates see, but what they hear, that heightens the tension further. At first, from their place on the plateau, where they rest, nothing can be heard but the distant breakers and the chirp of insects in the brush. These are the lonely sounds of an isolated island, far from the safe and civilized world. It makes the sound of an unexpected, disembodied voice from the trees all the more unnerving, especially when the voice mimics the much-feared Captain Flint.

When the men decide that the voice belongs to their old shipmate Ben Gunn—dead or alive—they relax enough to resume their hunt. It seems they neither fear nor respect the man. The men have no idea just how clever and resourceful Gunn is; that by his wits alone, he has survived three years on this island. This foreshadows the time when three of their group will be similarly marooned, but far less likely to survive.

Jim's fears of betrayal are realized as the pirates close in on the treasure. The intensity of Silver's emotion raises a question about his underlying feelings for Jim. Perhaps Silver is conflicted about killing Jim and, in a sense, hates him for forcing his hand. But kill him, he must. Silver knows Jim is too honorable to join him in his piracy, and if he eliminates the other honest men, he has no choice but to end Jim's life as well.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

The party climbs a hill and then stops to rest. Before them is a vista of much of the island, with Skeleton Island and the sea on the east, its emptiness underlining the sense of solitude on this island. [**Silver**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/long-john-silver) takes his bearings and cheerfully says they must be close to finding the treasure. But [**Morgan**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) mutters that thinking of [**Flint**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-flint) has chilled him, and the other pirates agree.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Treasure Island, while the setting of much of the book, has remained mostly instrumental to most of the characters. Jim is seemingly the only one to have enjoyed its novelty for itself, while for the rest it is only the treasure hidden on the island that makes it alluring.

***Summary part 2:***

All at once, a thin, high voice rings out, singing the classic sailor song, finishing “Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!” The pirates all go pale, and [**Merry**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) cries that it’s [**Flint**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-flint). To [**Jim**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins), the voice sounded simply sweet, but [**Silver**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/long-john-silver) too seems shaken, though he tells the others that it must be someone trying to fool them. They’re cheered, but then the voice cries, “Fetch aft the [**rum**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/symbols/rum), Darby!”—the final words, Morgan whispers, that Flint ever spoke. Even Silver mutters that no one on this island but them had ever heard of Darby—but he’ll still face Flint dead if he must, for the 700,000 pounds hidden close by are worth it.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Jim is skeptical of the dangerous power of the voice, which the pirates seem to fear so much—usually he follows Silver in this rational perspective, although now even Silver isn’t sure how to reconcile what he hears with his knowledge that no one on the island has heard of the man cited by the voice. Still, Silver is not nearly as willing as the pirates to take this event as a sign to turn back.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Merry](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) tells [Silver](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/long-john-silver) not to cross a spirit, and the others seem ready to run, though they fear separating even more. Silver says that the voice had an echo—and just like no spirit has a shadow, so this must mean it was a living man. [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) thinks this is a weak argument, but Merry and [Morgan](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) seem cheered. Suddenly Silver shouts that it sounded just like [Ben Gunn](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/ben-gunn)’s voice. But [Dick](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) says that doesn’t help, since Ben Gunn’s not on the island either—but Merry cries that Gunn doesn’t frighten anyone, dead or alive. They all feel more encouraged and they set off once again, only Dick still fearful, and, it appears, beginning to fall ill.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Once again, Silver uses all the clever tools in his arsenal to try to have his own way among the other pirates, and despite Jim’s skepticism, Silver does seem to know what will work. Ultimately, however, his recognition of Ben Gunn’s voice is what proves most successful in convincing the pirates that they have little to fear, since both Silver and Captain Flint are far more frightening than Gunn to them.

***Summary Part 4:***The group marches across the plateau and attempts to dig under several trees in their path, each turning up nothing. Finally they approach a huge, 200-foot tree, and the pirates’ eyes burn with excitement. [Silver](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/long-john-silver) grunts and limps, glancing every so often to [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) shrewdly: Jim is certain that all Silver’s promises have been forgotten now that he’s so close to the treasure. As they speed up, Jim sometimes stumbles, and Silver pulls roughly at the rope. Jim is also troubled and sobered by thinking of [Flint](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-flint)’s six-fold murder on the very plateau they just passed.

***Analysis Part 4:***Here Silver, too, is not exempt from the blinding greed and fascination with treasure that motivate the pirates. Jim is left as the only one thinking calmly and rationally, though in his case too he’s learned from Silver to focus on his own survival above anything else. It’s this potential for survival that Jim thinks might be threatened now that Silver is so close to the treasure he’s spent so long seeking.

***Summary Part 5:***

As they reach the tree, the pirates halt: the ground has been dug up, though not recently—grass has begun to sprout in the hole. Several packing-case boards are strewn about with the name Walrus, the name of [Flint](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-flint)’s ship. The treasure is gone.

***Analysis Part 5:***

Once again, things turn out to be more complicated than they first seemed—the confusing actions and words of Dr. Livesey perhaps have something to do with this development.