***Treasure Island***

***Chapter 3:***

# *The Sea Chest*

***Brief Summary:***

* Jim tells his mother all about the captain's last words.
* They decide to go together into town to look for help.
* They're shocked that no one will go back with them to the Admiral Benbow. They are all too afraid, especially hearing the name of Captain Flint.
* The most anyone is willing to do is to ride to Doctor Livesey's to let him know what has happened.
* Jim's mother tells them they're all cowards and announces her intention to go back to the inn and open the captain's sea-chest.
* Jim's mother expects the chest to be full of treasure, at least some of which the captain owes her for his lodgings.
* They creep slowly into the parlor of the inn, where they find the captain lying exactly where they left him.
* Jim finds a piece of paper blackened on one side (the black spot!), which says that the captain has until ten that night.
* The clock has only just struck six.
* Jim finds the key to the chest hanging around the dead captain's neck.
* Jim's mother unlocks the chest.
* They find a bunch of random things – clothes, a compass, a few trinkets, and coins from many different places.
* Jim's mother starts counting out the amount she's owed from these spare bits of change.
* Suddenly Jim hears the tapping of the blind man's stick outside; it approaches and then seems to go away.
* Jim's mother is afraid, but she won't stop carefully counting the money. She refuses to just take it all.
* Then both Jim and his mother hear a low whistle.
* Jim's mother decides to take what she has. Jim also grabs a bunch of what seem to be papers.
* They both sneak downstairs and out the back door.
* They can see a lantern and hear approaching footsteps.
* Jim's mother tells Jim to take the money because she's going to faint.
* Jim is sure they are both going to be murdered.
* Jim grabs his mother and helps her down underneath a nearby bridge to hide from sight.

***Synopsis(Ch1-3):***

Jim attends to the ailing Billy, who begs him for a swig of rum in return for some money. Jim is offended, saying he wants only what Billy owes his father for rent. But he gives Billy one glass of rum. Energized by the alcohol, Billy says he must quickly get moving to outsmart his pursuers. He explains to Jim that the former crew of the ship he sailed on, under the now-dead Captain Flint, wants his sea chest. That night Jim’s father, who has also been ill, dies.

Returning from his father’s funeral, Jim encounters a sinister blind man who asks to be taken to Billy. Billy appears sickened to see the blind man, who hands him a black spot, which Jim has learned represents an official secret pirate summons. Reading the black spot, Billy enigmatically cries out that he has only six hours left. He springs into to action, but falls down, stricken with a fatal stroke. Jim is worried and calls for his mother.

Stevenson begins his adventure tale with the unusual device of a young male narrator, giving the narrative an innocent and straightforward tone. This tone eases our entry into the dark criminal underworld of pirates and murderers. Since most readers are typically unfamiliar with such shady figures, Jim’s wide-eyed awe of them mirrors our own perspective. Jim is meek and fearful of the pirates’ drunken, swaggering, coarse language and tendency toward violence. When he calls out for his mother at the end of Chapter III, we are reminded that he is a scared little boy, and indeed a world apart from the sailors. Stevenson’s emphasis on Jim’s childishness in these early chapters highlights the degree to which Jim matures throughout the novel. Later, Jim is no longer cowed by the grizzly seamen and holds his own against them. Here at the beginning, however, the contrast between the narrator’s innocence and the characters’ worldly experience helps set the stage for the rite of passage into adulthood that Jim later undergoes. The device of the boy narrator also allows Stevenson to emphasize the fascinating, enthralling allure of the pirates. Jim is clearly entranced by these ragged, powerful, and outlandish men, much more so than by his own father, who is ordinary and unexciting by comparison. Jim hardly mentions his parents, even after his father’s death. Though the narrative hints that the pirates are morally bad, Jim admires them all the same. As Stevenson surely understood, many readers can relate to the romanticizing of the pirate life, and the fantasy of becoming a pirate may inspire our own wide-eyed fantasies. Indeed, Stevenson encourages us to fantasize and use our imaginations by having the young Jim thrillingly refer to the treasure that still lies buried on the island. The idea of this treasure prompts us to create our own daydreams of finding it. Sharing Jim’s fantasies allows us to become greater participants in *Treasure Island*, and enables us to relate to Jim even more strongly.

In these first chapters, Stevenson begins to show the vast difference between the upstanding world of doctors, housewives, and small business owners, and the sinister world of pirates. Though the conflict between these two sides does not reach its peak until a battle between the good and the bad much later in *Treasure Island*, the roots of this conflict are here in these opening chapters. Billy Bones bullies Jim’s parents enough to frighten them out of collecting the rent he owes them, suggesting that the world of law and order is powerless again a pirate’s brute force and charisma. Even the blind man, whom we later learn is named Pew, becomes a figure of terror, immense in his criminal glamour. However, in the scene in which Livesey coolly rebuffs Billy’s knifepoint threats, we sense that the sides of crime and justice may be evenly matched, and that the balance between them is very delicate. This scene is an early exploration of one of Stevenson’s central ideas in the novel—the frequent opposition between social lawfulness and personal charisma.

***Critical Study:***

 ("The Black Spot") begins later that day. When the captain hears he has been ordered to stay in bed for a week, he declares that this will be impossible. Black Dog and others worse than he will return, wanting to steal his sea chest. They will give him "the black spot," which he says is a summons. When they come, he says, Jim must get Dr. Livesey to call down the law on them. He explains very little, but says these men are "old Flint's crew," that he himself was Flint's first mate, and that Flint gave him something — he does not say what — before he died. Then the captain takes the medicine the doctor left for him and sleeps.

That evening, Jim's father dies, and Jim has little time to worry about their guest and his troubles. The next day the captain manages to come downstairs and help himself liberally to rum. For several days he keeps this up, growing weaker and weaker, until the day after the funeral. That afternoon another stranger arrives, a ragged and fearsome-looking blind man. He forces Jim to take him to the captain, who sees him with terror. The blind man puts something into the captain's hand and leaves quickly. When the captain sees what he has been given, he says: "Six hours. We'll do them yet." But as he gets to his feet he reels, sways, and falls dead to the floor.

***Critical Analysis:***

As the chapter begins, Billy Bones tries to bribe Jim to bring him rum since he is suffering from alcohol withdrawal. Jim agrees to bring him just one drink and when he brings the alcohol to the captain, he tells Jim that within a week lubbers (sailors) will be looking for him, in order to give him the black spot and take his money. Bones, however, has plans in order to thwart his friend's ambitions. He instructs Jim that if he sees the one-legged seaman or Black Dog or if the black spot (a summons) is put on the captain, Jim should immediately ride to Dr. Livesey and lead him to capture all of old Flint's crew at the inn. Bones then explains that he was Flint's first mate and the men will be after his sea-chest. If Jim follows these instructions, the captain promises that he will share his treasure with him.

Instead of being excited, however, Jim is nervous that Billy Bones will kill him because he knows too much and his promise to share his wealth with the young boy. Suddenly, however, Jim's father dies and he forgets all his worries about the pirate because of his grief. The next day, amidst the people mourning, Bones comes downstairs and gets extremely drunk. No one dares to stand up to the man, and the doctor is far away on another case, also unable to come to Jim and his mother's assistance.

The day after Billy Bone's disturbing behavior, Jim observes a blind man wearing a tattered old cloak, tapping a stick, approaching the inn. Innocently, the man asks where he is but when Jim tells him and leads him to the entrance to the inn, the man cruelly grabs a hold of Jim's arm and threatens to break his arm if he does not take him directly to Billy Bones, introducing him as "Here's a friend for you, Bill." When he sees the blind man, Bill Bones seems visibly upset. Directed by the blind man, Jim brings Billy's left-hand to the blind man's right-hand, and something is passed between the two men. Soon after, the blind man leaves and Bill proclaims "Ten o'clock! Six hours. We'll do them yet." He springs up from his seat, but before he can do anything, he falls over dead. Traumatized by witnessing his second death that week, Jim begins to sob.

This chapter is one of the most action-filled chapters of the book, typical of the style in which the novel is written. As Robert Louis Stevenson described, this is a faced paced adventure book, not a slow book full of details. In nearly every page, something significant happens in this chapter: the death of Jim's father, the arrival of the blind man, the death of Billy Jones, and the mysterious meeting at 10 o'clock. In a book of this torrid pace, it is interesting to see what type of people and events receive extra attention and any description of details.

Most notable, in this chapter, there is no description of the funeral or real tragedy or sadness about his father's death, except for when it fits into the plot. Death in Treasure Island is quick, clean, and above all, efficient for the rapid advancement of the plot. It never provokes a sense of real pathos even in the case of Jim's father, in this chapter. Removal of characters by natural or "accidental" means is a step in the process of casting off the potential obstacles to free movement in the adventure to come. As one critic claimed, "Treasure Island is one of the most satisfying adventure stories ever told primarily because it is the most unhampered."

Instead of descriptions regarding the father or Jim's feelings and his mother's sadness, the majority of detail in this chapter is devoted to describing the physical appearance and actions of the pirates, [Pew](https://www.gradesaver.com/treasure-island/study-guide/character-list#pew) and [Billy Budd](https://www.gradesaver.com/billy-budd). These descriptions, including the way they talk, their mannerisms, their cuts and general ratty clothes and unkempt faces and appearances, reveal the ruthlessness of these men, the extent that they will do whatever necessary to accomplish their mysterious past, and thus serve to further the plot.

What is the purpose of the character of Billy Bones in the book? In the first three chapters, Billy Bones seems an important figure, but at the end of the third chapter, he quickly dies. His purpose is twofold. First, he serves to further the plot. His coming to the inn represents the beginning incident in the chain of events which leads to the adventure on Treasure Island; he also foreshadows the subsequent events in a manner calculated to increase suspense and arouse the readers emotions. He unites in his person the past, present, and future. His present dread of encountering "the seafaring man with one leg" is the result of his past association with Treasure Island and at the same time points forward to those future events which involve Jim and his friends in Bill Bone's past. He makes the connection between the everyday life of Jim and his family and, with plausibility, introduces the mystery which the book is centered around. His death, in this chapter, marks the end of the first movement of the story and motivates the second part. It is Bill's death's which enables Jim and his mother to acquire the map of Treasure Island.

***Significance:***

In spite of the doctor's orders, Billy Bones eventually persuades Jim to bring him a glass of rum. He then confides to Jim his history, begging Jim to keep an eye out for any of Billy's former mates.

That evening, Jim's father dies, and for several days, Jim has no time to think about Billy Bones. Then on the afternoon following the funeral, he sees a blind beggar coming to the inn, tapping with his stick down the frozen road. Calling out for assistance, he asks Jim to guide him into the inn. To Jim's surprise, when he offers his hand, the old beggar grips it like a vise and demands to be taken to the captain or he'll break Jim's arm.

Billy Bones is in the parlor, drunk. The sight of the blind beggar terrifies him. Then the beggar presses a square of paper into the captain's hand. On it is a black spot—a kind of summons from his old shipmates. When the beggar is gone, the old pirate springs to his feet, planning to flee. Instead, he reels, collapses, and dies.

Jim's childish innocence falls victim to events in this chapter. He continues to be easily manipulated by the adults around him. Though Billy Bones is weak and sick, he can bully Jim into breaking his promise to [Dr. Livesey](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Treasure-Island/character-analysis/#Dr._Livesey) and fetch him some rum. When the blind beggar shows up, he easily lures Jim to his side and into his grasp. Though the beggar's looks are unsettling, Jim is still too innocent to be cautious. He has never encountered evil and does not recognize it. Similarly, he has never encountered death. Suddenly it comes to Mr. Hawkins, and Billy dies shortly after. Jim weeps over the buccaneer's body, but his tears are for his father. The shocking reality of death pushes Jim onto the path to adulthood.

The theme of the consequences of greed is evident in the tight spot Billy is in. His old shipmates have squandered their wealth and now want Billy's. To get it, they have hunted him down and delivered the black spot. Billy's fear indicates the dangerous nature of their greed.

Once again [Stevenson](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Treasure-Island/author/) links physical abnormality to the dark nature of a character. The blind beggar is even more disfigured and malformed than Billy or Black Dog, and it follows that he is far more sly and evil. His blindness, like the black spot he hands to Billy, is linked to the motif of the color black.

Stevenson makes strong use of sensory images when the sightless beggar makes his appearance at the inn. The sense of hearing is engaged with descriptions of the beggar tapping with his stick along the road and crying out in an odd sing-song voice that soon turns cruel, cold, and ugly. Touch is emphasized with descriptions of the beggar's vice-like grip, the pain he inflicts on Jim, and the hand-to-hand exchange of the black spot.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) goes to check on the [captain](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/billy-bones-the-captain), who tells him how grateful he is for the boy’s loyalty, and asks him for just a bit of [rum](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/symbols/rum), despite what the [doctor](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/doctor-livesey) said. He claims he’s lived on rum and one glass won’t hurt. Seeing how agitated he’s become, Jim says he’ll get him just one glass.

***Analysis Part 1:***

The captain has attempted to bring Jim into his confidence, and now he tries to use that relationship to his advantage in order to get what he wants. Jim is not exactly loyal to the captain, but he does feel pity for him.

***Summary part 2:***

The [captain](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/billy-bones-the-captain) drinks the [rum](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/symbols/rum) in one swallow, then tries to get up but falls back down. He tells [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) that [Black Dog](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) was after his old sea chest. The captain says that if he ever gets the “[black spot](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/symbols/the-black-spot),” Jim should tell [Livesey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/doctor-livesey) to find a crew and follow the instructions in the chest: the captain then says he was once first mate of the pirate [Flint.](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-flint)

***Analysis Part 2:***

Although the captain must know that Livesey has little regard for him, here it seems that given Black Dog’s plotting, he’d rather someone else entirely find whatever it is the instructions imply.

***Summary Part 3:***

That evening, [Jim’s father](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) dies suddenly, so [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) doesn’t have time to think about the [captain](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/billy-bones-the-captain). The captain never does seem to regain his strength, though his temper grows even more violent, even while he also becomes more absent-minded and lost in thought.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Jim’s father has not played a major role thus far, but now Jim is left entirely without a male authority figure—and the captain is not exactly a proper replacement.

***Summary part 4:***

The day after the funeral, a [blind man](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) with an eye patch comes up the road, calling out and asking where he is. [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) says he’s at the Admiral Benbow in Black Hill Cove, and leads him inside, before the man asks to lead him to the [captain](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/billy-bones-the-captain). Jim begins to say that the captain is too weak, but he is soon scared by the man’s cold, cruel-sounding rebuke, and leads him to the captain, whose face grows pale when he sees him.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Yet another mysterious character now shows up at the Admiral Benbow—the captain seems to draw all these figures to him, though now we know it may be his sea chest that proves so alluring. Jim has become a bit protective of the captain, almost as if the captain is the child.

***Summary part 5:***

The man slips something into the [captain](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/billy-bones-the-captain)’s hand and then quite nimbly races out of the house and back down the road. The captain opens his hand, cries, “Ten o’clock,” which is six hours from that moment, and then falls to the floor, dead of apoplexy (internal bleeding from another stroke). [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) bursts into tears, even though he had always found the captain disturbing.

***Analysis Part 5:***

The captain’s second fit is, as the doctor has warned, fatal to him. Even as he dies, the mysteries surrounding him are only increasing. This is the first of only several times that Jim cries, reminding us that he is only a boy though thrust into adult circumstances.

***Quotations:***

***Quotation 1:***

Well, mother was upstairs with father and I was laying the breakfast-table against the captain's return when the parlour door opened and a man stepped in on whom I had never set my eyes before. He was a pale, tallowy creature, wanting two fingers of the left hand, and though he wore a cutlass, he did not look much like a fighter. I had always my eye open for seafaring men, with one leg or two, and I remember this one puzzled me. He was not sailorly, and yet he had a smack of the sea about him too. (3)

***Explanation 1:***

Jim's observations of people's appearances are intriguing because they are often indecisive. How can a man be both sailorly and not sailorly at the same time? This kind of description engages our curiosity and keeps us reading.

***Quotation 2:***

But [Billy Bones] broke in cursing the doctor, in a feeble voice but heartily. "Doctors is all swabs," he said; "and that doctor there, why, what do he know about seafaring men? I been in places hot as pitch, and mates dropping round with Yellow Jack, and the blessed land a-heaving like the sea with earthquakes – what do the doctor know of lands like that? – and I lived on rum, I tell you. It's been meat and drink, and man and wife, to me; and if I'm not to have my rum now I'm a poor old hulk on a lee shore, my blood'll be on you, Jim, and that doctor swab." (3.4)

***Explanation 2:***

Billy Bones has spent many evenings shocking and impressing the quiet country folk of Jim's town with his tales of distant places and adventures. Here, after his stroke, we get the full story: he's lived through terrible situations and has used rum to drown his sorrows. Now he's become so dependent on rum that he demands it even though it will kill him. This contrast between how fun pirate adventures sound and how awful they really are may explain why we can enjoy the story of Treasure Island even as Jim ends the novel swearing that it was horrible and he would never repeat his adventures. (Btw, "Yellow Jack" is yellow fever.)

***Quotation 3:***

[Billy Bones] wandered a little longer, his voice growing weaker; but soon after I had given him his medicine, which he took like a child, with the remark, "If ever a seaman wanted drugs, it's me," he fell at last into a heavy, swoon-like sleep, in which I left him. (3.19)

***Explanation 3:***

There is a repeated theme in Treasure Island that illness makes us dependent and childlike. First there is Billy Bones's weakness, in which he takes his medicine "like a child." Then there is poor, feverish Dick Johnson, who begins babbling and clutching his Bible toward the end of the novel. He totally goes to pieces as he gets sick and follows the other pirates like a child. How does illness make us more childlike? What does this analogy suggest about how Stevenson feels about childhood?