***Treasure Island***

***Chapter 4:***

# *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 tells his mother about the pirates’ plot to take Billy’s sea chest, and he flees with her to the neighboring village to seek help. Terrified by the name of old Flint, none of the villagers is willing to go to the inn to offer assistance. Armed with a gun, Jim returns with his mother to the inn. He searches through the dead Billy’s clothing to find the key to the treasure chest. Finding the key around Billy’s neck, Jim and his mother open the chest and find gold hidden at the bottom, a portion of which Jim’s mother claims as her due. They hear running footsteps in the street outside. Jim takes some papers wrapped in an oilcloth that he has found in the sea chest and then flees the inn with his mother. Weakened by fear, his mother faints outside. Jim succeeds in dragging her under a bridge, out of sight but within earshot of the inn.

***Critical Study:***

As Chapter 4 ("The Sea Chest") begins, Jim tells his mother what the captain has told him and, knowing their danger, both walk to the nearby village for help. They arrive at dusk and can find no one brave enough to go back with them, although one boy says he'll ride for Livesey. Mrs. Hawkins says she'll go back alone, then, to get what the captain owes her, and Jim has no choice but to go with her. They return to the inn, and Jim reluctantly searches the captain's corpse to find the key to the sea chest. In the chest they discover various articles, including a few bars of silver, a few English and foreign coins, and a sealed packet. Jim's mother begins to count what coins she can recognize, but they hear the blind man's stick approaching and, in the dark, they run out of the inn.

***Critical Analysis:***

At the death of Billy Bones, Jim immediately tells his mother everything about the strange men and the two quickly realize that they are in severe danger. Even though they are owed some money because of Billy Bones extended stay at their inn, the two decide to leave immediately in order to avoid encountering Black Dog, the blind man, or other despicable characters. Although the most prudent idea would be to get Dr. Livesey, Jim does not want to leave his mother alone and so abandons that thought. Instead, the two decide to seek help at the local village.

Upon arriving at the local village, mother and son are surprised and disappointed that no one will help them fend off the pirates at their inn. Dismayed but not dissuaded, Jim's mother is determined to get the money owed to her and so the two, this time armed with a rifle, return to the inn. Upon arriving at their premises, Jim bolts the door and retrieves a key from Billy Bones' neck that opens his treasure chest. Jim's mother unlocks the chest and finds a myriad of different items, including a brand-new suit, pistols, compasses, a quadrant, and various trinkets. Finally, at the bottom of the chest, is what she is looking for, a bag of gold coins with currency from many nations, and papers tied up in an oilcloth. While she is searching for the exact amount of money due to her, Jim hears the tap-tap-tapping of the blind man. After trying the bolted door, the blind man reluctantly leaves. Mother and son take the money counted out so far as well as the oilcloth packet. As they make their way back to the village, they hear voices and see a lantern coming their way. Suddenly, Jim's mother faints, and in order to protect them from the quickly approaching lantern, Jim drags her under the arch of a bridge.

Jim's mother is characterized for the first time in this novel as someone who is courageous and concerned for the welfare of her family. Despite the readily apparent danger and the villagers unwillingness to help her, she turns back against the odds in order to retrieve the money that is owed her. Her courage, honesty, and stubbornness is also evident when she demands the precise amount of money owed her, even amongst the danger of the pirates at her door.

In this chapter, a major theme of the novel is also expanded and furthered. Since its publication, critics have classified this novel as a "classical adventure." As one of the main thematic elements of a classical adventure is the manner in which the protagonist of the novel becomes involved in the actions. In this case, Jim, the protagonist, is initially an innocent bystander but through events out of his own control he becomes an active participant in the story in the book, determining his own course of action. In this chapter, Jim begins this transformation. Instead of passively being controlled and ordered around by Billy Bones and the blind man, he takes control and helps save his mother. In this way, the story is not only a quest but also a story of Jim's progress towards maturity.

Another interesting aspect of this chapter is the use of domestic images to contrast between Jim's situation and the normal situation of other people. As Jim and his mother approach the village where no one will help them, all is calm and quiet and the images is of warmth and security, something that stands in contrast to the terror that the hero is involved with. In this passage, Stevenson also associates the name Captain Flint with the terror, because "the name was well enough known here to have a great weight of terror." The return to the inn and the searching of the dead man's body, under these circumstances, become even more an act of heroism, and again marks the transition between the passive and active character of Jim.

***Significance:***

Jim and his mother are alone in the inn. Captain Flint's former crew could return at any time to seize whatever money they can find. Angrily, Mrs. Hawkins declares that some of Billy's money is owed to the inn. Pirates or no pirates, she will take from Billy's sea chest enough to settle the account.

She and Jim bar the door and pull the shades. Rushing upstairs, the two unlock the old sea-chest and, at the very bottom, find a canvas bag filled with money and a bundle of papers.

Mrs. Hawkins begins counting out what Billy Bones owes. Suddenly, they hear the sound of tapping along the road. The blind beggar has returned. He strikes the barred door with his cane and jiggles the handle. Then the sound of his tapping retreats. Using the fog for cover, they escape.

At last the contents of the mysterious sea chest are revealed. They offer tantalizing hints about Billy Bones. The clean, brushed suit of clothes suggests his hopes for a better future when he might wear such things. The miscellaneous items seem linked to his seafaring years, while the West Indian shells hint at a hidden facet of Billy's personality that could value things delicate and beautiful.

In a spectacular show of courage and foolishness, Mrs. Hawkins returns to the inn. She is fully aware that the pirates will soon return to search for Billy's treasure. Nevertheless, she wants her money. She is honest to a fault as she goes through Billy's sea chest, refusing to cheat the dead man as well as the scoundrels who, given a chance, will harm her and her son. Jim condemns his mother for her honesty.

When Jim takes the oilskin packet from among Billy's things, he acquires the catalyst that sets the rest of the story in motion. He also demonstrates a touch of maturity when he overcomes his natural disgust to search Billy's body for the sea chest key. This foreshadows the frequent close contact with death that Jim will have to deal with later in his adventure.

Sound plays an important role in this chapter. Before Jim and Mrs. Hawkins flee the inn, there are whispers between mother and son, the tapping of the beggar's stick, the rattle of the inn door's bolt, and the ominous, far-off whistle. Outside, there is the sound of running footsteps approaching the inn. When Mrs. Hawkins faints, she and Jim are close enough to hear what happens next.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) tells his [mother](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-s-mother) everything he knows, and they realize that the [blind man](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) and [Black Dog](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) probably won’t be willing to settle the captain’s debts to the inn. They’re also both increasingly scared to be alone in the house, so they decide to seek help in a village nearby.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Having refused to pay rent for months, the captain has now left Jim and his mother scrambling to make ends meet themselves, not to mention afraid for their safety and well-being.

***Summary part 2:***

They walk together to the village and arrive by evening, and yet no one agrees to return with them to the Admiral Benbow to help: the name of [Captain Flint](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-flint) terrifies many of them, and cowardice, [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) realizes, is infectious. But [Jim’s mother](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-s-mother) makes a speech vowing to get back the money that belongs to her fatherless son, so they’ll open the chest on their own.

***Analysis Part 2:***

This event serves as another lesson for Jim—that in life, most people fail to live up to the ideal of courage in the face of danger, especially, as he now realizes, when the terror of piracy is involved. But Jim’s mother loves her son enough to risk such danger.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) and his [mother](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-s-mother) return, still frightened, and enter the parlor with the dead [captain](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/billy-bones-the-captain) still lying there. Jim goes to his knees and sees that the captain was clutching a blackened piece of paper, which he imagines to be the “[black spot](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/symbols/the-black-spot).” It says, “You have till ten tonight.” It’s now six in the evening.

***Analysis Part 3:***

It now makes more sense why the captain shouted “Ten o’clock!” before he died: Jim can imagine that the black spot was what the captain had feared, though he’s still not sure what that means.

***Summary part 4:***

[Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) feels through the [captain](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/billy-bones-the-captain)’s pockets and finally finds a key hanging around his neck. Jim and his [mother](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-s-mother) then hurry upstairs to where his chest is lying. They open it: there are new clothes inside, some tobacco, a watch, and some compasses. Below all these things, however, is a canvas bag that holds gold, along with an oil-cloth packet. Jim’s mother says that she’ll only take exactly what she’s due, and begins to count out the coins, while Jim takes hold of the packet.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Some of the mysteries held by the captain while he was alive are now becoming accessible to Jim and his mother. Initially, however, it’s not entirely clear why he so zealously guarded this sea chest: though there is some gold inside, it doesn’t seem to warrant all the terror and plotting associated with it.

***Summary part 5:***

[Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) then starts to hear the tapping of a blind man’s stick, and he begs his [mother](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-s-mother) to leave, but she’s now even more frightened to take more than she’s owed. Then they hear a whistle; they jump up, Jim grabbing the oil-cloth bag, and race downstairs and outside back to the village. As they look behind them, they see a stranger carrying a lantern. Jim curses the neighbors’ cowardice as his mother faints, and he drags her under a bridge to hide.

***Analysis Part 5:***

The tapping of the blind man’s stick suggests to Jim that he is not yet free of the mysterious visitors associated with the captain. Jim’s mother, meanwhile, had enough courage to try to seize the gold, but her wits give out on her when she’s faced with this overwhelming situation, leaving Jim to act as an adult and manage it.

***Quotations:***

***Quotation 1:***

A strong smell of tobacco and tar rose from the interior, but nothing was to be seen on the top except a suit of very good clothes, carefully brushed and folded. They had never been worn, my mother said. Under that, the miscellany began--a quadrant, a tin canikin, several sticks of tobacco, two brace of very handsome pistols, a piece of bar silver, an old Spanish watch and some other trinkets of little value and mostly of foreign make, a pair of compasses mounted with brass, and five or six curious West Indian shells. I have often wondered since why he should have carried about these shells with him in his wandering, guilty, and hunted life. (4.17)

***Explanation 1:***

Jim can see Billy Bones's material possessions, but he can't see inside his head. By focusing on appearances instead of on psychology, Jim's narration is leaving much more room for the reader's imagination to work. It's pretty exciting to join Jim in wondering why Billy Bones carried these shells with him "in his wandering, guilty, and hunted life."

***Quotation 2:***

I lost no time, of course, in telling my mother all that I knew, and perhaps should have told her long before, and we saw ourselves at once in a difficult and dangerous position. Some of [Billy Bones's] money--if he had any--was certainly due to us, but it was not likely that our captain's shipmates, above all the two specimens seen by me, Black Dog and the blind beggar, would be inclined to give up their booty in payment of the dead man's debts. (4.1)

***Explanation 2:***

As soon as Billy Bones enters the Admiral Benbow Inn, Jim shows signs of the secretiveness and independent thinking that will characterize his behavior on the island. Jim hasn't told his mother about Billy Bones's origins, although he thinks in passing that "perhaps [he] should have told her long before." This reflection sounds a lot like Jim's passing regret over leaving the fort without permission. Even in this tiny exchange, we can see foreshadowing of how Jim is going to develop as a character over the course of the novel.

***Quotation 3:***

"I'll show these rogues that I'm an honest woman," said my mother. "I'll have my dues, and not a farthing over. Hold Mrs. Crossley's bag." And she began to count over the amount of the captain's score from the sailor's bag into the one that I was holding.

It was a long, difficult business, for the coins were of all countries and sizes--doubloons, and louis d'ors, and guineas, and pieces of eight, and I know not what besides, all shaken together at random. The guineas, too, were about the scarcest, and it was with these only that my mother knew how to make her count. (4.19-20)

***Explanation 3:***

Jim's mother is the one who first opens Billy Bones's sea chest, but what makes it OK is that she is looking for the money he owes her. This means Jim manages to come by the treasure map without stealing – he's still a good kid, and certainly better than the pirates. But the other thing that's key about this scene is that it introduces something new and exotic into the story line. Billy Bones's coins "of all countries and sizes" demonstrates that he is widely traveled. This foreshadows that Jim is going to go on a voyage of his own, and perhaps even that he will wind up with his own collection of coins from around the world.