

The Further Adventures of Jim Hawkins

H.M.S. BARABBAS

- excerpt

Ben Jeapes

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Chapter 1

We Buried the Doctor

“We buried the doctor today. The old man nearly made his century, which would not have surprised anyone who knew him. He was always his own best patient.”

Sir James Hawkins, FRS, MD, laid down his pen, full of thought. The lamp flame cast a circle of light around his study. Across the desk, the window was dark. Beyond it he could hear the sea. Raindrops on the glass reflected back the yellow light.

Footsteps moved on the boards behind him. Another lamp was set down on the desk and a pair of slender arms wrapped gently around his neck. He leaned a little to one side so that she could read what he had written. Then she kissed the top of his head.

“He was very proud of you.” He didn’t answer. “Who are you writing to?”

He hesitated. “I don’t know. Now he’s gone there’s so much inside me that I feel I could ...” A sigh. “Yes, he was proud of me. Perhaps he would have been less proud if he knew everything.”

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"It would not have made the slightest difference," she scolded. "One little lie back when you were a boy- ..."

"... and many larger ones when I was a man," he said wryly.

"So, what will you do when you've written down the truth? Publish it for all to see?"

"Perhaps I should. It will be interesting to see how many readers remember the first part."

Many years ago he had written an account of how he, the son of an innkeeper, came to know Dr David Livesey, and acquired a fortune, and made the acquaintance of many other colourful characters. He and the doctor had been involved in a grand expedition to retrieve the buried treasure of a pirate – Captain Flint, 'the bloodthirstiest buccaneer that sailed', as Squire Trelawney had described him. He had set out on the voyage as a young boy looking forward to adventure. By the time he came back he had witnessed murder and betrayal, and had learnt the hard way that sometimes good men must deal with the devil.

He also returned with the 'one small lie' on his conscience and it had shaped his life ever since. He had not put the lie into his account, which for want of anything better he had called *Treasure Island*.

He took up the pen again and held it over the paper. Then he looked pointedly at her until the hint was taken and with a muffled "hmpf" she left the room.

And then he began to write.

"Readers of my earlier account might recall a man named Israel Hands. They might have believed

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that when he died on Treasure Island, that would be the last they heard of him. That was certainly my assumption. I was wrong ...”

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Chapter 2

The Return of Israel Hands

*I*srael Hands climbed the rigging towards him like a spider towards a fly, with a dirk in his clenched teeth and murder in his eyes. Jim had nowhere else to go. Perched on the cross-trees at the very top of the mizzen mast, his breath came in short, sharp bursts.

The grounded schooner lay over at an angle and the masts hung over the water. He looked down and contemplated jumping. If he did, Hands would simply jump after him.

Jim had two pistols and both were primed. He held one in each shaking hand, sighting along the barrels into the middle of Hands's swarthy face, and made himself breathe steadily.

"One more step, Mr Hands ..."

He tried hard to think of something witty to say; something clever that would show he was in command of the situation.

"Dead men don't bite, you know."

And then Hands said something which Jim didn't quite catch, but he knew it made him feel foolishly secure, even though in just a few seconds Hands would try to kill him, and the knife flashed through the air and

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pinned his arm to the mast, and the two guns went off and the crash of the explosion jerked Jim out of his sleep.

His room was grey in the pale light of dawn. He lay in bed and groaned. How many more times?

This time he had woken up before Hands's head exploded. That detail, a blast of bone and blood and brains, had not been in *Treasure Island*. When he wrote that book four years earlier, at the age of thirteen, he had been painfully aware that his mother would want to read it. And it had not been something he wanted to remember.

With a curse he threw back the blankets and swung his feet down to the carpet. By the sound of the rattling windows and howls in the eaves, a gale had come up during the night. Just the kind of weather to blow the cobwebs out of his head. He would get dressed and go out, and perhaps something would happen that day to banish the ghost of the dead pirate once and for all.

*

"A Member of Parliament?"

Jim's hair streamed back from his face. He trudged along the cliff path, sea to his left and land to his right, and addressed the wind.

"I could buy myself a borough. I could buy two. I wonder if that's allowed ..."

It was going to be the kind of day when sea and sky were as grey as each other, and even the mightiest man'o'war was tossed about like a toy on the water. All the way to the horizon, the sea was studded with white foam. Sheltered close to shore was a lobster boat, a small,

THE RETURN OF ISRAEL HANDS

open vessel, but even in the shelter of the cliffs its mast whipped from side to side as it gathered in the night's harvest.

"A farmer?" Jim spoke to the wind again. "I could farm. I could be the lord of the manor. I could be like the Squire ..."

The thought of being like the Squire made his face twist in wry amusement. Squire Trelawney was a thoroughly decent man, but ... If the Squire had known where and when to keep his mouth shut, and not announced in the middle of the crowded port of Bristol that he was looking for a boat and crew to go seek Flint's buried gold, then he would not have attracted the attention of Long John Silver and the adventure of Treasure Island would have been much less of an adventure.

Jim continued along the path. Billy Bones, the first pirate he had ever met, had patrolled here with his brass telescope. He had come along this path day in, day out, whatever the weather, in a vain attempt to spy his approaching doom. Still the doom came to him, delivered by a blind man and setting Jim on the path to treasure.

Then, Jim had lived with his widowed mother in an inn. Now Jim never needed to work in an inn again, and they lived in a house of their own – with two servants, which was the most they could bring themselves to hire, and Mrs Hawkins drove them to distraction by doing half their work for them. Dr Livesey had invested Jim's share of the money for him in three separate banks and would manage the funds until Jim came of age. When

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Jim turned twenty-one, he would be rich. And then what?

He had first thought, 'and then what?' when he turned seventeen, three months earlier. His twenty-first birthday was still four years away, but it had suddenly struck him that seventeen was the halfway point between becoming officially a rich man and the adventure that had made him rich in the first place.

And that was when the dreams had started. They came whenever the treasure was on his mind.

And then what?

He could have a life of guaranteed, comfortable mediocrity. It was not an attractive prospect.

His eyes had fallen idly onto the boat again while these thoughts ran by, and so Jim saw the accident as it occurred. There were two men on board, one at the tiller, one further forward to work on the lobster pots. The wind had been coming at the sail from behind the boat. Now it moved unexpectedly across the stern and the boat jibed violently. The boom swung over and the man at the tiller chose that moment to stand. The boom cracked him over the head and he collapsed like a puppet whose strings have been cut. His limp form lay across the gunwale, half in and half out of the boat.

With no one at the helm the boat immediately swung around and the blast of the wind blew it flat. The other man was almost thrown out, but he lunged to catch his friend and scrambled for the upper side of the boat. Somehow he still kept hold of the unconscious helmsman, though water raged around his waist. The boat slowly began to right itself, but then another wave

THE RETURN OF ISRAEL HANDS

broke over it and the whole thing disappeared into a surging mass of white spume.

Jim's own worries were long forgotten. At some point during that action he had already started to clamber down the path to the cove. Men who were already on the beach were running towards the water's edge where the waves smashed themselves into sucking froth. The boat had disappeared completely but dark spots – the heads of the two crew, one still supporting the other – had appeared on the surface.

The men were pulling off their coats and running into the sea to help. The two lobstermen were being swept towards the end of the cove where the sea surged and raged around ragged granite boulders. Before the rescuers could get to him, the sea picked both men up and threw them at the rocks.

By a miracle, when the foaming white drained away from the rocks again, the two men came with it. The rescuers ploughed forward in the water to seize them and drag them back to shore before the sea could have another go.

Jim threw off his coat and ran into the surf to help drag the lobstermen up onto dry land. The conscious man's face was white, and his eyes and teeth were clamped shut in agony. As he emerged from the water Jim could see why. His leg flopped at an angle that nature would never have allowed.

The other man lay quite limp and Jim had no idea if he still lived. Blood flowed red from a wound on his head.

One of the rescuers looked up at him.

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“Fetch the doctor, Master Hawkins.”

With hindsight, Jim realised he could have told himself that before climbing all the way down to the beach. But even as he thought it, he was running obediently back to the path to the top of the cliff and the town.

Chapter 3

A Dream Defined

“*M*y leg hit the rocks, doctor,” the man gasped. His face was battered and bruised and his canvas trousers were soaked with blood.

“So I understand, Mr Cooper.” Dr David Livesey was as calm and collected as if hosting a friendly gathering in his own parlour, not the front room of an inn full of smoke and people. “As did the rest of your body, I observe.”

They had brought the two lobstermen back to the Admiral Benbow. It was the nearest building to the cove. The tables were pushed together and the men were laid out on them.

It was a strange feeling for Jim to return to this place. When he came back rich from Treasure Island, his mother had sold the inn with very little sense of regret. Now, the crowd of twenty or so faces was the same, and so was the furniture, and the fire in the grate was as warm and friendly as he had ever made it himself. And yet, even though he had grown up in this room, he almost felt like a stranger.

The doctor probed Cooper’s skull and ribs with long, slender fingers.

“Nothing wrong at this end. A few days rest and all this will be right as rain. Now for the prize exhibit, eh? The knife from my bag, Jim, if you please.”

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Jim was not sure how or why he had become the doctor's assistant, but he was carrying the leather holdall and so he delved into it for the knife. Jim passed it over with the bone handle first, and the doctor sliced through the canvas of Cooper's trouser leg with the long, slender blade.

"Stand back, if you please." The doctor was stern as the crowd pressed in for a closer look. They moved back obediently, if reluctantly, and Cooper's broken leg was there for all to see. A white shaft of bone protruded through raw, red flesh.

"Landlady, a bottle of your best brandy," Dr Livesey ordered. "Jim, my purse is in the bag – please pay the lady." He surveyed the crowd and began to pick out the strongest men. "You, you, you ... stand there, there and there. You two, take his leg below the fracture, and when I give the word, pull. Jim, in the bag there is a small block of wood." He held his thumb and forefinger apart by an inch. "Pass it to me, please. Mr Cooper, you have a fractured tibia and I must reset it."

The block was plain and rectangular and bore the imprint of many sets of teeth. Everyone in the room knew what was coming, not least the injured Cooper. He seized the bottle when it was offered to him and swallowed a good quarter of it in a matter of seconds.

"Do what you must, doctor," he choked, before the doctor pressed the wood between his teeth. Then he bit down hard. He convulsed under the strong hands of the men chosen to pin him down, as the other two men heaved on his leg and the bone slid back beneath the skin. The doctor pushed the two ends into place and

A DREAM DEFINED

bound the wound tight. Tight, muffled sounds of agony forced their way through the wooden gag as the doctor strapped a splint to his leg.

At last it was over. It took a moment to extract the block of wood from his jaws.

"And what about Jack, doctor?" he gasped, with a nod at the unconscious man. Dr Livesey came over and took Jack's wrist. He felt for the pulse and then laid the hand gently down, with a shake of his head.

"There's nothing I can do for Jack," he said sadly.

*

"Quite a day, eh, Jim? Thank you for your help."

The doctor raised his voice over the sound of waves and wind. The two of them walked slowly back along the cliff path towards town. Jim still carried the doctor's bag.

"I did very little," Jim pointed out.

"You ran, fast, to fetch me. You helped save a man's leg."

Jim couldn't deny it, but he still felt it was faint praise. If he hadn't run to fetch the doctor then someone else would have – but only one man could have done what the doctor did.

"I'm not the one who knows what a tibu- ... tib ..."
Jim could not even remember the word.

"Tibia," Dr Livesey said with a smile. "One of the three main bones in the leg."

"But the leg will heal?" Jim asked, to take the subject away from his anatomical ignorance.

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“Oh, without a doubt. The salt water kept it clean so there should be no infection. He may limp for the rest of his life but, I hope, with little pain.”

They walked in silence while Jim summoned courage to ask the next question.

“Was there nothing you could have done for the other man?”

The doctor shook his head.

“His skull was fractured; bone had been driven into the brain; a hard clot of blood had formed. I have seen men with worse who lived and men with less who died. Injuries to the brain are the strangest thing. One can never tell quite how fatal they might be.”

His voice grew quieter and he gazed out at the horizon, over the raging sea. Jim had known the doctor long enough to know that the matter consumed him. Perhaps he truly could have done nothing. Perhaps no man could have saved Jack. But Dr Livesey was born to be a healer of men. If he saw something that was broken then it was his instinct to make it better.

And then the thought came like a stab to Jim’s heart.

He had seen the hope on every face at the Admiral Benbow when they appeared in the doorway. The way every man and woman there simply accepted the doctor’s medical wisdom. Jim knew he would never be looked at in that manner. His money could buy him respect which would last precisely until the last penny was spent. What the doctor had would last forever, because he knew there were three bones in the leg and so much more besides, and he used that knowledge to make the world a better place.

A DREAM DEFINED

Jim wanted a future where he could walk into a room and be valued in the same way – not for his fine clothes but for who it was wearing them.

“I know what I would like to do with my money.” He blurted it out before he could change his mind – words that would finally tear him away from his old life and throw him out into the world. He did not know it then, but for years after he would remember this moment, and either bless or curse his younger self for not knowing what lay ahead.

“I should like to learn to become a doctor, like you.”

[End of excerpt]