

The Ghost of Shark-Tooth Cove

My adventure began not with a sea-chest, but with a storm. It was a wild afternoon in late September. The wind howled around our small cottage like a lonely wolf. Rain beat hard against the windows. I, Tom, was seventeen, and I lived with my mother in the quiet fishing village of Greyhaven. I was reading by the fire when a heavy knock sounded at the door.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

Someone was at the door.

"I'll get it," I said. I stood up and opened the door. The wind almost pushed me over.

A man was standing outside in the rain. He was a sailor, I could see that. He wore an old blue coat that was dark with water. He had a brown face with many lines, like someone who spent many years at sea. His eyes were a light, clear blue, and they looked past me into our warm room.

"Can I help you?" I asked.

"I am looking for Captain Barnes," the man said. His voice was rough and low.

"Captain Barnes was my father," I said. My heart felt heavy, like it always did when I talked about him. "But he... he was lost at sea three years ago."

The sailor's face changed. A strange look came into his sharp blue eyes. "Lost, you say?" he said slowly. "Yes, maybe so." He stepped inside, and water dripped from his clothes onto our floor. "My name is Silas Gunn. I sailed with your father on his last voyage."

Silas Gunn sat by our fire. He warmed his big, rough hands. He told us a story.

"Your father was a good man and a brave captain," he said. "Before the storm took his ship, we found something on a small island. A place called Shark-Tooth Cove. We found a cave there."

He stopped talking for a moment. The only sound was the storm

outside.

“In that cave, Tom was a treasure.”

My heart beat fast. Treasure! The word was like magic.

“Why didn’t you take it?” I asked.

Silas Gunn’s face became dark. “We argued. Your father was a careful man. He wanted to come back with a good plan. But then, the storm came.” He looked into the fire. “I was the only one who lived.”

Then, he took a small packet from inside his coat. It was wrapped in oilskin. He opened it carefully. Inside was not gold, but an old piece of yellow cloth. He put it on the table. It was a map.

“I need your help, Tom,” he said, his eyes on me. “Your father talked about secret signs. You can read this map. We can find the treasure together. Half for you, half for me. For your mother.”

I looked at my mother. She was afraid, but she saw the hope in my eyes. Two days later, I was on a ship called the *Morning Star* with Silas Gunn.

The *Morning Star* was an old ship. She smelled of fish and old wood. Silas had two men with him, Joe and Bill. They were brothers. They were quiet and never smiled. They just worked.

As soon as we left the harbour, Silas changed. He became nervous. He often stared at the empty sea, as if he saw something we could not see.

The weather was good. The sky was blue. The wind pushed us along. I learned some sailor’s work. But I often saw Silas, Joe, and Bill talking together in low voices. They stopped immediately when I came near. It felt wrong.

On the second afternoon, the island appeared. It was a grey lump of rock with some green on top. Just like the map. We sailed around a point, and there it was.

Shark-Tooth Cove.

The name was right. The entrance was a narrow opening between two black rocks, like fangs. Inside, the water became still and dead. It was green like an old bottle. It was quiet. A heavy, pressing quiet. You could only hear the high cry of seagulls, far away.

“This is it, boy,” Silas said. His hand was like a clamp on my shoulder. “Your father’s great find.”

Chapter 4: Into the Dark

We dropped anchor. The plan was simple. Silas and I would go ashore first to find the spot. Joe would follow with a shovel and a pick. Bill stayed with the boat.

Our small boat touched a beach of grey pebbles. The air was thick and hot. It smelled of sun-baked stone and rotting seaweed. The jungle began right at the tree line – a wall of dark, tangled green. Silas looked at the map. “There,” he said, pointing. “A big grey rock, split in two. That’s the marker. The cave is behind it.”

We pushed through vines that grabbed our clothes. The place was full of strange little noises. Then, in the deep shadow of that split rock, I saw it. A black hole in the cliff. Just tall enough for a man to walk in without bending down. A cold, damp breath came out of it. It smelled of wet earth and something very old.

Silas lit the lanterns. The flames jumped, then settled. “Stay close now,” he said, and his voice came back hushed and hollow from the cave. “It is easy to get lost here.”

The tunnel swallowed us.

Our light moved over wet, shining walls. It was colder inside. The floor sloped down, then turned, just like the lines on the map. We passed openings to other passages – dark mouths leading away into nothing. All you could hear was the scuff of our boots and the steady *plink... plink... plink* of water. The sound got into your head.

It felt like an hour. My legs started to ache. But just then, the tunnel opened up.

We were in a bigger chamber. And there, right in the middle of the dirt floor, was a pile of stones.

They were not natural. Someone put them there. Carefully.

My heart jumped. This was it. The “X” on the map.

“Here!” I said, too loud. “We found it, Silas!”

I turned to him, smiling.

He was not looking at the stones.

He was looking at me. And he was not holding his lantern anymore.

Instead, he was holding a knife. A long, mean-looking blade caught the yellow light.

“Yes, Tom,” he said. All the pretend warmth was gone from his voice. Now it was flat and cold. “We found it. Thank you for showing me the way.”

I stepped back. The cave felt much colder. “What?”

“The map was right,” he said. He stepped closer. The knife did not move. “But the last part... that was a little puzzle. One only your father knew. I needed you to read the signs. You walked right to it, like you knew the way.”

The treasure was under those stones. I knew it then. And I knew something else, too. A feeling of ice filled my stomach.

“We had a deal,” I said. My voice sounded thin and young.

He gave a sharp laugh. “A deal? With a boy? Do you really think I would share? Joe and Bill are coming. They get a part for the hard work. You?” He took another step. The point of the knife gleamed. “You will have a bad accident in this deep, dark cave. You will slip and hit your head. Very tragic.”

I moved back against the wall. He was blocking the only way out. I held up my lantern. It was my only weapon, and it felt stupid and light.

That’s when we heard it.

A sound from the dark. Not from the tunnel. From a side passage we ignored.

It was not footsteps.

It was a voice.

Low. Moaning. Like wind in a deep hole. “Leave...”

Silas became stiff as a board. The colour left his face. He looked grey in the lantern light.

“Leave this place...”

A man stepped to the edge of our light.

He was tall. So thin he looked like a post in rags. His clothes might have been a uniform once, a very long time ago. His face was pale, worn down to bones and deep lines. He had no weapon. Only an old, rusted lantern. Unlit.

“The gold is cursed,” he said. His voice was hollow. Empty, like the cave itself was speaking. “It buys nothing but graves. Your captain knew. I tried to bury it here. To end it.”

“My father?” I breathed the words.

The thin man nodded. A slow, tired movement. “A good man. His crew... they fought. The others, led by this one.” A bony finger pointed straight at Silas. “They wanted the shine more than their souls. The storm that took them... was it bad luck? Or did the curse call it home?”

Silas made a choked sound in his throat. “Liar! Mad old hermit! Beachcomber!”

“Am I?” The man stepped closer. I saw that he was not a ghost. He was flesh and blood, but worn thin like old paper. His eyes, though... his eyes held a truth worse than any ghost story. “I was a boy on the ship that first hid this poison. I stayed. To guard it. To atone.” His hollow gaze fixed on Silas. “I watched from the trees. I saw you argue. I saw you push the mate into the sea when he spoke against you. The sky was clear when you did it.”

Something broke in Silas then. A scream tore out of him – raw, furious, and full of fear. He did not attack the old man. Or me. He turned and threw himself at the pile of stones, clawing at them with his bare hands. “MINE!” he shrieked. Dirt flew. “ALL MINE!”

The old man moved faster than I thought possible. He did not go for Silas. He ran to the side, to a spot on the wall. He slammed a rock he carried against a jagged point on the wall.

CRACK.

The sound was sharp as a gunshot in the closed space.

“The roof!” the old man shouted, his voice ringing now. “It is rotten! Run, boy! NOW!”

Over our heads, dirt and small stones began to rain down. Then a stone the size of my fist fell. A deep, grinding groan came from the rock above. I could feel it in my teeth.

Silas, completely mad now, kept digging. He uncovered a corner of a box. The wood was black with age.

I ran.

I did not think so. I turned and ran back down the dark tunnel. My lantern swung wildly, throwing crazy shadows. I did not look back. Behind me, a great roaring CRUMPH of collapsing rock. It was so huge, it felt like the mountain was falling. Swallowed in that noise was one last, short scream.

Then silence.

A thick, dusty silence.

I burst onto the pebbled beach. I stumbled and fell to my knees, gasping in the clean, blinding daylight. The stones were sharp. Joe was there. Just standing. A shovel on his shoulder. He saw my heaving chest, my face white with dust and terror.

“Gunn?” he asked. One word.

Before I could speak, a final dull *thud* rolled from the hillside. Like a giant’s heartbeat. A puff of grey dust sighed from where the cave mouth had been.

It was gone. Just a new slope of fallen rock.

Joe’s face changed. The hardness left it. It was replaced by fear. He looked from the sealed cliff to the *Morning Star* in the still green water, and then to me – alive, covered in cave dirt.

Without a word, he dropped the shovel. It clattered loudly on the stones. He turned, ran for the small boat, pushed it into the water, and rowed for the ship like every devil from hell was after him.

He never looked back.

I was alone.

The sun was getting lower. The sky had streaks of orange and purple. I heard a soft crunch on the pebbles.

The old man walked out of the trees. He was covered from head to toe in fine grey dust. Like a ghost made solid. But he was walking. He was whole. He knew another way out.

He didn’t say anything. He sat on the cool stones beside me. Not too close. We sat in the quiet. We watched the *Morning Star* haul up its anchor. Its sails opened, white as it turned and slipped out of the cove. It did not signal. It did not wait. It just ran.

“Men like that,” the old man said. His voice was rough but calm now. Just an old man’s voice. “They are always running. From what

they have done. From what they are.”

“Is it true?” I asked, my voice rough. “About the curse?”

He was quiet for a long moment. He looked at the sealed cliff. Then he tapped a finger slowly against his chest, right over his heart. “The only curse that matters lives here. Greed. It is a sickness. The gold sleeps now. Let it sleep. It has what it wanted.”

“Who are you?” I asked.

A faint, tired smile touched his lips. “An old sailor who forgot his way home a long time ago. A name does not matter. I have been the keeper of this place for more years than you have lived. Your father... he was a good man. He gave me food from his own stores. Good tobacco. He sat with me and listened when I told him to leave this place. The other one... his eyes were only for the shine.”

“What now?” I said.

“The cave is sealed. My watch...” He gave a long, slow sigh. “My watch is finished.” He looked out to the open sea. The setting sun caught his eyes. For a second, they did not look old at all. “I have a little boat on the other side of the island. I think... it is time I saw what lies to the east.”

He turned those clear eyes on me. “And you, Tom? You are on a forgotten island.”

I thought of my mother then. Not as part of an adventure, but as herself. Sitting in our quiet kitchen, the clock ticking, waiting for a door that might never open. The hook of adventure was gone. Snapped clean off. All I felt was a pull so strong it hurt. A pull for home.

“I need to get home,” I said. It was the truest thing I had ever said. He nodded. A slow, solid nod. “Then come. It is a long way across open water. The sea is calm now. But my arms are not as strong as they once were. You will help an old man row.”

We left Shark-Tooth Cove the next morning. I had no gold. Just two people in a boat too small for the open ocean.

The old man’s boat was worse than the *Morning Star*. A fishing

dory, its paint peeled off. But it floated. There were two sets of oars, a water barrel, and a sack of hard biscuits and dried fish. "Will it make it?" I asked, looking at the waves.

"She has made it this long," he said. He was checking the ropes, his fingers knowing every knot. "The sea is kind if you listen to her."

We rowed. On the first day, my arms burned. Blisters rose, burst, and bled. He rowed steady, never slowing. He taught me the rhythm. Do not fight the water. Work with it.

Nights were the strange part. On the ocean, the dark is complete. No city lights. Just black water, black sky, and stars so thick you could almost touch them. He knew them all. He pointed.

"The North Star. Steady. Always there. Those three in a row – Orion's Belt. A sailor's friends."

He told stories. Not like my father's stories of pirates and treasure. Real stories.

"I was caught in a typhoon off Java. Waves as high as cliffs. The ship's dog – a terrier named Jack – howled the whole time. I thought it was doom. But he was keeping time with the wind. When he stopped, the worst was over."

Or: "I met a woman in Lisbon. She ran a tavern. She could fix a broken spar better than any ship's carpenter. She taught me that the strongest thing is not wood or iron, but knowing how things fit together."

We rowed for days. And slowly, the hook of adventure in my heart was replaced by something else. Something wider and quieter, like the sea itself. It was the understanding that my father's true treasure was not in a cave. It was in the quiet kitchen at home, waiting for me.

One morning, I saw a thin grey line on the horizon. Land.

The old man smiled. "Greyhaven," he said.

When our boat touched the sand of my own village beach, the sun was high. I turned to thank him, to say goodbye.

But the old man and his boat were already moving away, back towards the open sea. He lifted a hand in a silent salute. Then he turned his face to the east, and the wind took him.

I walked up the beach, towards home. I had no gold. But I had a story. And sometimes, that is the only treasure that does not need a map, and cannot be cursed.

The End

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