

The Man of the Island

by Robert Louis Stevenson *from* Treasure Island

Treasure Island is an adventure story about a boy named Jim Hawkins who discovers a treasure map and sets out to find the treasure. In this passage, Jim is on the island where the treasure is supposed to be hidden. He is running away from the pirates that have captured his ship. Here he tells of meeting a strange person.

From trunk to trunk the creature flitted like a deer, running man-like on two legs, but unlike any man that I had ever seen, stooping almost double as it ran. Yet a man it was! I could no longer be in doubt about that.

I began to recall what I had heard of cannibals. I was within an ace of calling for help. But the mere fact that he was a man, however wild, had somewhat reassured me, and my fear of Silver began to revive in proportion. I stood still, therefore, and cast about for some method of escape, and as I was so thinking, the recollection of my pistol flashed into my mind. As soon as I remembered I was not defenseless, courage glowed again in my heart, and I set my face resolutely for this man of the island, and walked briskly toward him.

He was concealed by this time, behind another tree-trunk, but he must have been watching me closely, for as soon as I began to move in his direction he reappeared and took a step to meet me. Then he hesitated, drew back, came forward again, and, at last, to my wonder and confusion, threw himself on his knees and held out his clasped hands in supplication.

At that I once more stopped.

“Who are you?” I asked.

“Ben Gunn,” he answered, and his voice sounded hoarse and awkward, like a rusty lock. “I’m poor Ben Gunn, I am; and I haven’t spoke with a Christian these three years.”

Questions

1. What do you think “within an ace” means in this sentence: “I was within an ace of calling for help.
2. What gave Jim courage?
3. What does “supplication” mean?
4. Why was Gunn’s voice hoarse and awkward?