

There was a break in his voice, as if for a moment he recalled innocent days when—but he brushed away this weakness with his hook.

Smee, much impressed, gazed at the bird as the nest was borne past, but the more suspicious Starkey said, “If she is a mother, perhaps she is hanging about here to help Peter.”

Hook winced. “Ay,” he said, “that is the fear that haunts me.”

He was roused from this dejection by Smee’s eager voice.

“Captain,” said Smee, “could we not kidnap these boys’ mother and make her our mother?”

“It is a princely scheme,” cried Hook, and at once it took practical shape in his great brain. “We will seize the children and carry them to the boat: the boys we will make walk the plank, and Wendy shall be our mother.”

Again Wendy forgot herself.

“Never!” she cried, and bobbed.

“What was that?”

But they could see nothing. They thought it must have been but a leaf in the wind. “Do you agree, my bullies?” asked Hook.

“There is my hand on it,” they both said.

“And there is my hook. Swear.”

They all swore. By this time they were on the rock, and suddenly Hook remembered Tiger Lily.

“Where is the redskin?” he demanded abruptly.

He had a playful humour at moments, and they thought this was one of the moments.

“That is all right, Captain,” Smee answered complacently; “we let her go.”

“Let her go!” cried Hook.

“’Twas your own orders,” the bo’sun faltered.

“You called over the water to us to let her go,” said Starkey.

“Brimstone and gall,” thundered Hook, “what cozening is here?” His face had gone black with rage, but he saw that they believed their words, and he was startled. “Lads,” he said, shaking a little, “I gave no such order.”

“It is passing queer,” Smee said, and they all fidgeted uncomfortably. Hook raised his voice, but there was a quiver in it.

“Spirit that haunts this dark lagoon tonight,” he cried, “dost hear me?”

Of course Peter should have kept quiet, but of course he did not. He immediately answered in Hook’s voice: