

“Odds, bobs, hammer and tongs, I hear you.”

In that supreme moment Hook did not blanch, even at the gills, but Smee and Starkey clung to each other in terror.

“Who are you, stranger, speak?” Hook demanded.

“I am James Hook,” replied the voice, “captain of the *Jolly Roger*.”

“You are not; you are not,” Hook cried hoarsely.

“Brimstone and gall,” the voice retorted, “say that again, and I’ll cast anchor in you.”

Hook tried a more ingratiating manner. “If you are Hook,” he said almost humbly, “come tell me, who am I?”

“A codfish,” replied the voice, “only a codfish.”

“A codfish!” Hook echoed blankly; and it was then, but not till then, that his proud spirit broke. He saw his men draw back from him.

“Have we been captained all this time by a codfish!” they muttered. “It is lowering to our pride.”

They were his dogs snapping at him, but, tragic figure though he had become, he scarcely heeded them. Against such fearful evidence it was not their belief in him that he needed, it was his own. He felt his ego slipping from him. “Don’t desert me, bully,” he whispered hoarsely to it.

In his dark nature there was a touch of the feminine, as in all the great pirates, and it sometimes gave him intuitions. Suddenly he tried the guessing game.

“Hook,” he called, “have you another voice?”

Now Peter could never resist a game, and he answered blithely in his own voice, “I have.”

“And another name?”

“Ay, ay.”

“Vegetable?” asked Hook.

“No.”

“Mineral?”

“No.”

“Animal?”

“Yes.”

“Man?”

“No!” This answer rang out scornfully.

“Boy?”

“Yes.”