

“Did you hear them say Peter Pan’s from home?” Smee whispered, fidgeting with Johnny Corkscrew.

Hook nodded. He stood for a long time lost in thought, and at last a curdling smile lit up his swarthy face. Smee had been waiting for it. “Unrip your plan, Captain,” he cried eagerly.

“To return to the ship,” Hook replied slowly through his teeth, “and cook a large rich cake of a jolly thickness with green sugar on it. There can be but one room below, for there is but one chimney. The silly moles had not the sense to see that they did not need a door apiece. That shows they have no mother. We will leave the cake on the shore of the mermaids’ lagoon. These boys are always swimming about there, playing with the mermaids. They will find the cake and they will gobble it up, because, having no mother, they don’t know how dangerous ’tis to eat rich damp cake.” He burst into laughter, not hollow laughter now, but honest laughter. “Aha, they will die.”

Smee had listened with growing admiration.

“It’s the wickedest, prettiest policy ever I heard of,” he cried, and in their exultation they danced and sang:

“Avast, belay, when I appear,
By fear they’re overtook;
Nought’s left upon your bones when you
Have shaken claws with Cook.”

They began the verse, but they never finished it, for another sound broke in and stilled them. It was at first such a tiny sound that a leaf might have fallen on it and smothered it, but as it came nearer it was more distinct.

Tick tick tick tick.

Hook stood shuddering, one foot in the air.

“The crocodile,” he gasped, and bounded away, followed by his bo’sun.

It was indeed the crocodile. It had passed the redskins, who were now on the trail of the other pirates. It oozed on after Hook.

Once more the boys emerged into the open; but the dangers of the night were not yet over, for presently Nibs rushed breathless into their midst, pursued by a pack of wolves. The tongues of the pursuers were hanging out; the baying of them was horrible.

“Save me, save me!” cried Nibs, falling on the ground.