

“Fling the girl overboard,” cried Hook; and they made a rush at the figure in the cloak.

“There’s none can save you now, missy,” Mullins hissed jeeringly.

“There’s one,” replied the figure.

“Who’s that?”

“Peter Pan the avenger!” came the terrible answer; and as he spoke Peter flung off his cloak. Then they all knew who ’twas that had been undoing them in the cabin, and twice Hook essayed to speak and twice he failed. In that frightful moment I think his fierce heart broke.

At last he cried, “Cleave him to the brisket,” but without conviction.

“Down, boys, and at them,” Peter’s voice rang out; and in another moment the clash of arms was resounding through the ship. Had the pirates kept together it is certain that they would have won; but the onset came when they were all unstrung, and they ran hither and thither, striking wildly, each thinking himself the last survivor of the crew. Man to man they were the stronger; but they fought on the defensive only, which enabled the boys to hunt in pairs and choose their quarry. Some of the miscreants leapt into the sea; others hid in dark recesses, where they were found by Slightly, who did not fight, but ran about with a lantern which he flashed in their faces, so that they were half blinded and fell an easy prey to the reeking swords of the other boys. There was little sound to be heard but the clang of weapons, an occasional screech or splash, and Slightly monotonously counting—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten—eleven.

I think all were gone when a group of savage boys surrounded Hook, who seemed to have a charmed life, as he kept them at bay in that circle of fire. They had done for his dogs, but this man alone seemed to be a match for them all. Again and again they closed upon him, and again and again he hewed a clear space. He had lifted up one boy with his hook, and was using him as a buckler, when another, who had just passed his sword through Mullins, sprang into the fray.

“Put up your swords, boys,” cried the newcomer, “this man is mine.”

Thus suddenly Hook found himself face to face with Peter. The others drew back and formed a ring round them.

For long the two enemies looked at one another; Hook shuddering slightly, and Peter with the strange smile upon his face.

“So, Pan,” said Hook at last, “this is all your doing.”

“Ay, James Hook,” came the stern answer, “it is all my doing.”