

“Did you say you would go, Cecco?” he said musingly.

Cecco went, first flinging up his arms despairingly. There was no more singing, all listened now; and again came a death-screach and again a crow.

No one spoke except Slightly. “Three,” he said.

Hook rallied his dogs with a gesture. “S’death and odds fish,” he thundered, “who is to bring me that doodle-doo?”

“Wait till Cecco comes out,” growled Starkey, and the others took up the cry.

“I think I heard you volunteer, Starkey,” said Hook, purring again.

“No, by thunder!” Starkey cried.

“My hook thinks you did,” said Hook, crossing to him. “I wonder if it would not be advisable, Starkey, to humour the hook?”

“I’ll swing before I go in there,” replied Starkey doggedly, and again he had the support of the crew.

“Is it mutiny?” asked Hook more pleasantly than ever. “Starkey’s ringleader.”

“Captain, mercy,” Starkey whimpered, all of a tremble now.

“Shake hands, Starkey,” said Hook, proffering his claw.

Starkey looked round for help, but all deserted him. As he backed Hook advanced, and now the red spark was in his eye. With a despairing scream the pirate leapt upon Long Tom and precipitated himself into the sea.

“Four,” said Slightly.

“And now,” Hook asked courteously, “did any other gentleman say mutiny?” Seizing a lantern and raising his claw with a menacing gesture, “I’ll bring out that doodle-doo myself,” he said, and sped into the cabin.

“Five.” How Slightly longed to say it. He wetted his lips to be ready, but Hook came staggering out, without his lantern.

“Something blew out the light,” he said a little unsteadily.

“Something!” echoed Mullins.

“What of Cecco?” demanded Noodler.

“He’s as dead as Jukes,” said Hook shortly.

His reluctance to return to the cabin impressed them all unfavourably, and the mutinous sounds again broke forth. All pirates are superstitious; and Cookson cried, “They do say the surest sign a ship’s accurst is when there’s one on board more than can be accounted for.”

“I’ve heard,” muttered Mullins, “he always boards the pirate craft at last. Had he a tail, Captain?”