

I will tell you where they are. With the exception of Nibs, who has darted away to reconnoitre, they are already in their home under the ground, a very delightful residence of which we shall see a good deal presently. But how have they reached it? for there is no entrance to be seen, not so much as a pile of brushwood, which if removed would disclose the mouth of a cave. Look closely, however, and you may note that there are here seven large trees, each having in its hollow trunk a hole as large as a boy. These are the seven entrances to the home under the ground, for which Hook has been searching in vain these many moons. Will he find it tonight?

As the pirates advanced, the quick eye of Starkey sighted Nibs disappearing through the wood, and at once his pistol flashed out. But an iron claw gripped his shoulder.

“Captain, let go,” he cried, writhing.

Now for the first time we hear the voice of Hook. It was a black voice. “Put back that pistol first,” it said threateningly.

“It was one of those boys you hate. I could have shot him dead.”

“Ay, and the sound would have brought Tiger Lily’s redskins upon us. Do you want to lose your scalp?”

“Shall I after him, Captain,” asked pathetic Smee, “and tickle him with Johnny Corkscrew?” Smee had pleasant names for everything, and his cutlass was Johnny Corkscrew, because he wriggled it in the wound. One could mention many lovable traits in Smee. For instance, after killing, it was his spectacles he wiped instead of his weapon.

“Johnny’s a silent fellow,” he reminded Hook.

“Not now, Smee,” Hook said darkly. “He is only one, and I want to mischief all the seven. Scatter and look for them.”

The pirates disappeared among the trees, and in a moment their captain and Smee were alone. Hook heaved a heavy sigh; and I know not why it was, perhaps it was because of the soft beauty of the evening, but there came over him a desire to confide to his faithful bo’sun the story of his life. He spoke long and earnestly, but what it was all about Smee, who was rather stupid, did not know in the least.

Anon he caught the word Peter.

“Most of all,” Hook was saying passionately, “I want their captain, Peter Pan. ’Twas he cut off my arm.” He brandished the hook threateningly. “I’ve waited long to shake his hand with this. Oh, I’ll tear him.”