Pirates

*Starkey pulls out his pistol to shot a lost boy, he is stopped, abruptly by Hook’s hook*

STARKEY (*abject).*  Captain, let go!

HOOK. Put back that pistol, first.

STARKEY. ‘Twas one of those boys you hate; I could have shot him dead.

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

SMEE (*wriggling his cutlass pleasantly).* That is true. Shall I after him, captain, and tickle him with Johnny Corkscrew? Johnny is a silent fellow.

HOOK. Not now. He is only one, and I want to mischief all of them. Scatter and look for them. (*The boatswain whistles his instructions, and the men disperse on their frightful errand. With none to hear save SMEE, HOOK becomes confidential.)* Most of all I want their captain, Peter Pan. ‘Twas he cut off my arm. I have waited long to shake his hand with this. (*Luxuriating)*  Oh, I’ll tear him!

SMEE (*always ready for a chat).* Yet I have oft heard you say your hook was worth a score of hands, for combing the hair and other homely uses.

HOOK. If I was a mother I would pray to have my children born with this instead of that (*his left arm creeps nervously behind him. He has a galling remembrance)* Smee, Pan flung my arm to a crocodile that happened to be passing by.

SMEE. I have often noticed your strange dread of crocodiles. (*He lays bare a lacerated heart.)*

HOOK The brute liked my arm so much, Smee, that he has followed me ever since, from sea to sea, and from land to land, licking his lips for the rest of me.

SMEE (*looking for the bright side).* In a way it is a sort of compliment.

HOOK (*with dignity).*  I want no such compliments; I want Peter Pan, who first gave the brute his taste for me. Smee, that crocodile would have had me before now, but by a lucky chance he swallowed a clock, and it goes tick, tick, tick, tick inside him; and so before he can reach me I hear the tick and bolt. (*He emits a hollow rumble.)* Once I heard it strike six within him.

SMEE (*sombrely).*  Some day the clock will run down, and then he’ll get you.

HOOK (*a broken man).*  Ay, that is the fear that haunts me. (*He rises.)* Smee, this seat is hot; odds, bobs, hammer and tongs, I am burning.

*(He has been sitting, he thinks, on one of the island mushrooms, which are of enormous size. But this is a hand-painted one place here in times of danger to conceal a chimney. They remove it, and tell-tale smoke issues; also, alas, the sound of children’s voices.)*

SMEE. A chimney!

HOOK (avidly). Listen! Smee, ‘tis plain they live here, beneath the ground. (*He replaces the mushroom. His brain works tortuously.)*

SMEE (*hopefully).* Unrip your plan, Captain.

HOOK. To return to the boat and cook a large rich cake of jolly thickness with sugar on it, green sugar. 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. We must leave the cake on the shore of the mermaids’ lagoon. These boys are always swimming about there, trying to catch the mermaids. They will find the cake and gobble it up, because, having no mother, they don’t know how dangerous ‘tis to eat rich damp cake. They will die!

SMEE (*fascinated)*. It is the wickedest, prettiest policy ever I heard of.

HOOK (*meaning well).* Shake hands on ‘t.

SMEE. No Captain, no.

STARKEY (*chagrined because she does not mewl).*  No mewling. This is your reward for prowling round the ship with a knife in your mouth.

TIGER LILY (*stoically).* Enough said.

SMEE (*who would have preferred a farewell palaver)*. So that’s it! On to the rock with her, mate.

STARKEY (*experiencing for perhaps the last time the stirrings of a man).* Not so rough, Smee; roughish, but not so rough.

SMEE (*dragging her on to the rock).* It is the captain’s orders.

(*A stave has in some past time been driven into the rock, probably to mark the burial place of hidden treasure, and to this they moor the dinghy.)*

STARKEY. What was that? (*The children bob.)*

PETER *(who can imitate the captain’s voice so perfectly that even the author has a dizzy feeling that at times he was really HOOK).* Ahoy there, you lubbers!

STARKEY. It is the captain; he must be swimming out to us.

SMEE (*calling).* We have put the redskin on the rock, Captain*.*

PETER. Set her free.

SMEE. But Captain –

PETER. Cut her bonds, or I’ll plunge my hook in you.

SMEE. This is queer!

STARKEY (*unmanned).*  Let us follow the captain’s orders.