

Hook

by Jason D. Young

The morning after the worst storm he'd ever encountered, Hook awoke with a start, sitting up quickly on his bunk and reaching for his sword even before his storm-wearied eyes found their focus. He glanced rapidly around his cabin, expecting to find someone there, intruding, but there was no one. He sniffed the air and looked at his possessions, some of them still strewn about after the storm, but saw nothing out of the ordinary. Yet, something was out of the ordinary. Something was . . . different. His mind felt more agile this morning, for some reason. Perhaps it was simply an aftereffect of fighting that horrible storm. The lightning and the fire falling from the sky had certainly commanded his attention. Now that he considered it more carefully, he realized that was the first storm of any kind he'd ever taken the Jolly Roger through. Curious.

One thing was certain, however; his mind felt as if a fog had been lifted and his thoughts were finally clear, though he'd never realized the fog was even there before this morning. The world was suddenly filled with possibilities. Possibilities that Captain Hook found eminently appealing.

He stood, pulling on his coat and belting on his sword one-handed, as he had so many times before. This time, however, he completed the maneuver with anticipation. His mouth was dry with excitement, but his outward demeanor maintained the composure appropriate to a man of his station. Retrieving

his hook from its velvet-lined box he screwed it onto the post of his left arm, exiting from his cabin and swooping up onto the deck. First things first, he decided.

"Smee!" he bellowed. As he surveyed the crew working to repair the damage of the night before.

"Y-y-y-yes, Captain?" The rotund, old, little man waddled into view. "Ready for your morning shave, Captain?" he asked.

"Yes, Smee," Hook purred. "A shave is exactly what I want this morning." One last shave, he added to himself, silently.

"Aye, aye, Captain!" was the chipper reply. Smee set about to preparing for the morning ritual.

Throughout the shave, Hook relaxed, completely ignoring Smee's babbling commentary about the storm, and considered the implications of the changes which he felt more and more acutely every minute. Before this morning, he had felt only the slightest sense of self-awareness. Now, he was unquestionably fully aware of his abilities and circumstances and felt complete freedom to act. That freedom had been missing until now, though he was not certain of the exact reason. Perhaps because he was from a story -- a story he knew intimately, but hated -- he had simply accepted himself as he was. He saw now that he was much more capable than the story ever allowed. Much more intelligent. Much more cunning. How to take best advantage of the opportunity he was now certain was in front

of him was the most important question he had ever had the pleasure of considering. But, as he had already decided, first things first.

"All done, Captain!" Smee chittered, whisking the towel from Hook's face.

"Thank you, Smee. Now go get my dueling pistol. I could use a bit of target practice, I think."

"Aye, aye, Captain!" Smee hummed tunelessly to himself as he went below.

Hook turned to a nearby mate, a man as tall as Hook and twice as broad; a man who looked like he could uproot trees.

"You're Armstrong, aren't you?" asked the Captain.

"Aye, sir, I am, sir," the man replied in a gravely voice befitting a pirate.

"Are you ready for a promotion, Mr. Armstrong?"

"Aye, sir." No wariness, simply acceptance of whatever might happen. Good, thought Hook. That's what I need.

"Stand by, please, Mr. Armstrong." Smee returned with the weapon still in its box.

"Shall I clean it for you, Captain?" he babbled.

"No, Smee, you cleaned it before you put it away. Just load it and bring it to me."

"Aye, aye, Captain! You know, this is a lovely day. Much nicer than yesterday, don't you think? Do you fancy a cruise, Captain? Maybe we could find Peter Pan and take some target practice on him!" Smee toddled over with the weapon and gave it to Hook, who took it in his right hand then swiftly brought his left in under Smee's chin, catching the point of his hook under the little man's jaw, piercing the skin and catching the bone, holding him in place.

"Peter Pan will wait, for now, Smee. I have other business to attend to first. Understand?" Hook breathed quietly.

"I-I-I-I-I think so, Captain," Smee replied as best he could with his jaw held in place, a hint of worry on his face. Only a hint? Pathetic.

"Stay there, Smee," Hook ordered as he released him and walked ten paces along the deck. Turning around, Hook sized up the ineffectual little man who had been as much a foil to him as Peter Pan ever had. Smee stood with a vapid look, blinking stupidly as a drop of blood beaded, then ran from the underside of his chin down his neck to stain his collar. The poor, ignorant fool has no idea, thought Hook.

"Good bye, Smee," he said, then raised the pistol and fired. Smee had time to look surprised, his mouth forming a neat little 'o' below his still-blinking eyes as the ball took him in the chest, piercing him and breaking him. Smee's blinking stopped and his eyes glazed as he slumped to his knees, his jaw rapidly working as if he were stuttering to express his shock, but he made not a sound. He fell onto his face on the deck, blood already beginning to run out from under his fat, little body.

"Mr. Armstrong, have a crew swab the deck there, if you would, and toss Mr. Smee over the side. No need to be formal about it, either, and waste no canvas on him. Oh, and Mr. Armstrong? You're now my First." As soon as the orders were relayed, Hook spoke again, louder this time, "Mr. Armstrong, weigh anchor, set sail and plot a course for the island of the Lost Boys. We have more business to attend to!"

Hook climbed to the poop deck and stood looking out over the taffrail as the Jolly Roger responded to the crew's activities. His outward appearance was merely thoughtful, but deep in his soul, Captain Hook crowed.