

Peter Pan

(but not as you know it)



BRADLEY PEARCE

PETER PAN

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Dedicated To: MARIKA

"You can't take pennies to Heaven Peter."

Tinkerbell



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lost Boys Club

“What did you say the name of the woman was?” Asked a well-dressed young man over a newspaper, a cigar smoldering between his fingers sending a trail of smoke up into the air.

“I didn’t... but if you must know, her name was Tinkerbelle... or that’s what I think she said.” Replied Peter over a brandy glass.

“*Tinkerbelle*? What sort of name is that?” Asked Nibs lowering the newspaper with a questioning look.

“I thought it was a rather *adorable* if I may say.”

“And where was this place?”

“A *charity store* on Portobello. It had a familiar name. What was it again?” He asked himself.

“You’re telling the story Peter, you tell me.”

Staring into space he tried to recollect the name. He could see the store front as clear as day in his mind.

“Ah yes... *Tennapenny* if I recall.”

“What on earth were you doing in a charity store? ...”, raising an eye brow, “... if you’re short of a few quid perhaps ...”

“That won’t be necessary... no, it was by accident actually... I was out on a walk with Archie.”

“They say nothing is by accident.”

“So they say... nonetheless, as I was saying...”

Only to be interrupted by two voices.

“Peter...”, said one voice.

“... Nibs...”, said the other.

“... How strange to find...”

“...you two here.”

“Ah, if it isn’t the twins, I was wondering when you would arrive.” Said Peter.

“Curley, Sam...”, Nibs welcomed, “... Peter was just informing me of a woman.”

“Is she attractive?” Asked Curly inquisitively.

All eyes turn to Peter for confirmation.

“I *suppose*. I never really thought of her that way.”

“Best you don’t. If Gwendolyn finds out you’re seeing another woman...” Commented Nibs.

“I’m not seeing another woman.”

“Not if Hook...”

“... has his way.”

“He was in a *charity store*.” Declared Nibs.

“*Oh, dear Peter...*”

“... we’re so sorry...”

“... If there is anything...”

“... we can do.”

Newspapers ruffle within the hall. Heads turn and look dubiously at Peter. A hush comes over the exclusive Gentleman’s Club as they wait for his response.

“I’m fine. I fine.” He declared for all prying ears to hear.

Grey headed gentlemen return to muffled conversations.

“What on earth were you doing a *charity store*?” Questioned Nibs as though he had ventured into a public toilet.

“It was an accident...”

“There’s no such thing...”

“... as accidents.”

“So I’ve been informed... *anyway*... something caught my eye in the window.”

“Was it your reflection?” Asked Nibs.

“Quite possibly... I leaned forward to peer inside, and the funny thing is, I swear... a hand pushed me forward... ever so slightly.” Reaching for his shoulder as though to validate his story.

“Who pushed you?” Asked Sam.

“That’s the mystery. No one.”

“No one? ...”, echoed Curly.

“... no one.” Parroted Sam.

“I looked about but couldn’t see anyone. Just me... *Funny* I thought.”

“*Funny*...”, said Curly.

Sam looked to Curly confused, “... *funny*.”

“Then I noticed I had left a hand print on the window. I went to wipe it away... That’s when the woman inside thought I was waving to her.

“What did you do?”

“I waved back.”

“That’s rather...”

“...awkward.”

“*Rather*... I was caught like a proverbial hare in the proverbial headlights as it were.”

“A sticky situation old chap.” Said Nibs drawing on his cigar before blowing a smoke ring into the air.

“How exciting...”

“...do go on Peter.”

“She beckoned for me to come inside. It all seemed quite silly, but I couldn’t just walk away.”

“A gentleman never...”

“... walks away Peter.”

“No, indeed a gentleman wouldn’t.” Said Peter.

“So what did you do?”

“I went inside hoping to explain away the misunderstanding...”, drifting into a daze recalling the enchanting store as if it were yesterday. Because it was yesterday. The alluring scent of muffins drifted beneath his nose, “... (*sniff*)... (*sniff*).”

“Peter... you were saying?”

“Ah, yes... sorry... when I went to speak, I was tongue tied... she was quite enchanting if I maybe so bold to say.”

“Unlike you old chap.” Remarked Nibs.

“Indeed Nibs.”

“What happened next?” Asked Curly anxiously.

“She wanted to know, if I was okay... thinking I had tripped.”

“Tripped? ...”

“... I thought you said...”

“... you were pushed...”

“... you can’t go changing...”

“... the story to please yourself ...”

“... otherwise Judge Tootles...”

“... would have you hung, drawn...”

“... and quartered.” Remarked the twins shifting their eyes to a podgy man sitting in an oversized brown leather chair, appearing to have nodded off.

An empty brandy glass on the table beside him. An eye brow arches like a lazy hairy grey caterpillar and nostrils twitch at the irritation smell of cigar smoke. Perhaps the early stages of rigor mortis.

The young men returned their attention to Peter.

“I was certain I was pushed.” Reaching for his shoulder.

“If you say so old chap... have you had the brooch appraised yet?” Asked Nibs.

“Brooch? ...” Inquired Sam.

“...what Brooch?”

“Peter here acquired a rather exquisite brooch from the said charity for a mere twenty pounds.”

“In all fairness, it was initially ten pounds.” Peter defended.

“Peter... I’m not sure you know how haggling is supposed to work I thought one is meant to go down, not up.”

“It was for a good cause.”

“And what cause would that be?” Asked Nibs.

“She did not say.” Said Peter.

“Must be a knock off...”

“... a fake at that price.”

“From my experience of these things. I thought it was genuine. It had hallmarks. You wouldn’t have it with you... would you?” Inquired Nibs keen to see it again.

“I’ve left it at home.”

“Hmm. I hope you locked the doors old chap.”

“I have Archie is guarding it.” Said Peter.

“He’ll roll over...”

“... at the first sign...”

“... of a biscuit.”

In disbelief Nibs shook the newspaper and eyed the stock prices.

“Oh dear, more of my inheritance down the drain.”

“If you’re short for cash, I am sure we could chip in a few quid for you.” Offered Peter.

“Still plenty in the bank dear boy. I won’t be visiting any charity shops in the near future, and neither will you I hope.”

“Of course not.” Peter lied.

His mind drifting to the quaint store.

The Royal and Ancient Gentlemen’s Club had become a second home to Peter and the others. As it had for others with well-endowed trust funds that provided for their every need. The burden of the world lifted from their shoulders. Vanguard members tolerated them to keep the club afloat. Money was money, old or new. The young Turks would inherit it eventually, one day. But not while brandy still coursed through their varicose veins.

The twins had taken themselves to a couch before a fireplace and were engaged in what could have been a conversation. Unsure who was talking to who. Peter shook his head at the pair. Nibs hid himself behind a newspaper. And once in a while a puff of smoke would rise up like an Indian smoke signal.

Sighing when a share price had fallen. Tutting when one had risen.

Outside, inclement weather lashed the windows with wind and rain. It would be a blustery night he thought. Peter checked the time and found it too early to leave. Perhaps another drink. Feeling a hand on his shoulder and he looked about to see no one standing there. Then he noticed a shadowy aberration moving across the far wall. He followed before it disappeared into a dark corner as if to hide. Then hears a faint feminine giggle. Goosebumps tingle over him. A worried look comes over his face.

Not going unnoticed by Nibs peering over the paper.

“You okay Peter? You look like you’ve seen a ghost.” He asked.

“Perhaps, who knows who haunts this place.”

“Indeed. I dare say there are a few old boys that have stayed on for last call.”

“How’s the market?” Deflected Peter.

“Up and down.” Folding the paper and picking up a brady glass.

A vision of Tinkerbell flashed in his mind. A grin formed in the corner of his mouth. The fragrance of the store replaces the smell of cigars.

A feeling of *deja-vu* comes over him.

“Do you think there is something more than... *this*?” Gesturing the grand hall.

“What do you mean?” Asked Nibs wondering where the question was leading him.

“Well, I mean, this. Sitting about doing... nothing. Have you ever thought there could be something more?”

“Like what?” Unable to perceive the unimaginable.

“Like... making our own way in this world?”

Nibs looked at Peter as though he had gone mad.

“*Keep your voice down... those are treacherous words.*” Whispered Nibs looking about.

Judge Tootles snorted, twitched.

“That shop girl... what’s her name... been putting silly notions into your head?”

“Tinkerbell, and no she hasn’t. I’m just saying.”

“I rather you not old chap. Me? Work? Really? I have the hands of a milk maid’s bosom.”
Remarked Nibs lifting the paper to hide behind.

“A preposterous thought I know... you’re qualified for nothing.” Remark Peter.

“Precisely... speaking of bosoms, how is dear Gwendolyn?”

“She is well, I think. Might pop into the Jolly Roger tomorrow for a quick one if you’re passing.”

“A quick one?”

“A beer.” Peter corrected him.

“Oh, I see, I’m glad you clarified that... I’ll have to check my schedule of course.”

“Of course. I can see you’re a very busy man Nibs.”

“Commerce and industry, waits for no man.” Shaking the paper to straighten it.

“That’s what I’ve heard. Hopefully Hook won’t be about.”

“Would you want him as a father-in-law?”

“Not particularly, but it is a package deal. There’s no escaping him I’m afraid.”

“Ah, the things we do for love... You’re a brave man Peter to go toe to toe with Captain James Hook.”

“I wish that damn crocodile would fall on him and...” Peter did not finish what he wanted to say.

“Careful what you wish for old chap... They should remove that monstrosity... That crocodile that it is... Where on earth did, he find it?”

“Gwendolyn says it was her great grandfather’s. He was a big game hunter until the crocodile ate him... Only to be shot dead by the Scout... The crocodile that is.”

“But it could be worse.” Suggested Nibs.

“How’s that?” Asked Peter curiously.

“If Hook had his way, it would be *you* stuffed and mounted on the wall.”

‘*Gulp.*’ Peter imagined his stiff corpse mounted above the bar. His tie drooping. Wishing now he had brought a tie pin. Gwendolyn looking tearfully up at him. Hook grinning from ear to ear. Twisting the ends of his black moustache. A double barrel shotgun in his hands. A warning to any upstart who dares step too close to his beloved daughter.

“You’re looking rather napper this evening may I say... going out later?” Inquired Peter.

“One must look one’s best Peter.” In a very Eton accent.

“One must.”

“If you need some pointers...”, eyeing Peter’s attire, “... I know a very good tailor.”

“Thank you Nibs, but I’m fine.” Brushing down his tweed jacket.

“I’m sure you are. Do they give discount at this *charity* store of yours?”

“I shall inquire for you.” Jested Peter.

“Touché, old chap touché...” Submersing himself behind the paper and sighing.

“I must be heading off after this...” raising his near empty glass, “... Archie is at home alone... he’ll be wondering where I’ve gotten to.”

“Hmm.” Mumbled Nibs now absorbed in the paper.

Outside the sky had darkened. The clock on the wall ticked away time. Flames of the fire flickered and danced their pagan dance. Spilling long dancing shadows across the floor. Then Peter remembered. How could he be so careless. Quickly tucking his legs close to the chair, fearful that someone would discover his secret...

Tennapenny

Meanwhile, somewhere in Hyde Park, the day before...

"Archie, I wish you wouldn't do that." Informed Peter watching the terrier relieve himself against the umpteenth tree that afternoon.

"You can't have much left in the tank old boy."

Archie shook a leg and caught up. Peter holds a folded umbrella in his hand as though it were a walking stick. Trees cast large shadows. White swans guiding gracefully over the Serpentine. It was the perfect day for a walk. Clouds covered the sky from one horizon to the other. Peter wandered aimlessly. All the while listening to the birds singing. His footsteps sounding upon the gravel path.

"What a lovely day don't you think?" He asked Archie.

Archie wondered what the human was barking on about as he trotted alongside sniffing tree trunks. Coming to a large iron gate, Peter halted abruptly and looked back over his shoulder. Then up and down a long road.

"I don't recall this gate old chap." Wondering if he had taken a wrong turn.

And he contemplates which way to go. Opposite stood large white terraced manor houses. Like regimented uniformed soldiers. The road bustled with an endless procession of Hackneys, lorries, cars, and towering red double-decker buses. To his left he spies a narrow street jammed with colorful barrows and pedestrians shuffling between stalls looking for bargains.

"This looks interesting don't you think? ... come on Archie."

"I haven't been here for years." Recalled Peter being drawn deeper and deeper into the lane as if being pulled in by a mysterious force.

He became one with those about him like a school of fish. Washing from one stall to another. Looking, but not seeing. Hearing, but not listening. Then he catches sight of something that stopped him in his tracks. Seeing his reflection in a large store front window. There was only one problem. There were no other reflections, but his own. No stalls. No people.

Just him and Archie.

Peter looked about to see a street crowded with people and barrows. Then back to the window void of life. A rash of goosebumps tingle over him. And wondered if his mind was playing tricks on him. He hears a mischievous giggle. The same he had heard at the club. And wondered if the ghost had followed him home. A gust of cold wind draws him back to the street. Archie looked up at him and whimpered and raced to the door as though he were being called. The door mysteriously opens, and Archie dashes inside.

"Archie!" He called out in vain.

He stared at the brightly colored store front. Painted fire-engine red. Standing out from the dull colored stores about it. Across the window in large, frosted lettering read the sign...

TENNAPENNY

He stepped closer. A flower box of yellow daffodils sits beneath the window. Leaning forward awkwardly to peer inside. Eyes adjust to dimly lit interior. He sees a woman patting and talking to Archie. Then, without warning, an unseen presence nudges him forward.

Causing him to mar the window with his hand.

“I wish you wouldn’t do that...”, said Tiger Lily, “... you know how father doesn’t like us to interfere.”

“He’s special... you’ll see.” Said Tinkerbell grinning.

‘Ding.’ A small bell sounded above Peter’s head as he entered.

“Archie!” He exclaimed, calling him to come.

Obediently Archie remained beside the woman.

“I’m awfully sorry. I don’t know how he got inside. The door...”

“That’s okay. The door is always open to old friends... aren’t you, Archie.”

Archie looked up to Tinkerbell and wagged his tail.

“How do you know his name?”

“It’s on his tag of his collar.”

“Of course... Silly me.”

“Tink_er_bell.” Murmured Tiger Lily beneath her breath giving her a stein look.

“Tinkerbell...” What an unusual name.” Remarked Peter catching it.

“Is it? I thought it quite normal... Don’t you Tiger Lily?”

“Tiger Lily?” ... I’m beginning to feel like the odd one out.”

“And what is wrong with Tiger Lily?” She protested, about to cast a spell at him.

“Nothing... It’s a *charming* name... I’m Peter... Peter Pan.”

“Play nice Tiger Lily...”, cautioned Tinkerbell, “... Peter is our guest.”

“Hm!” Grumbled Tiger Lily going to stand behind the counter with folded arms.

“I hope I haven’t upset her. I didn’t mean anything by it.” He apologized.

“She’ll warm to you in time.” Informed Tinkerbell rousing the scent of baked muffins beneath his nose.

“(Sniff-sniff)” ... Peter’s nostrils flare, “... You smell that?”

“Smell what?” Asked Tinkerbell, playing with him.

There was something strangely familiar about the place, as if he had been there before.

“Perhaps you have.” Said Tinkerbell.

“I’m sorry.”

“You were saying how you may have been here before.” She teased him.

“I did?”

“Hm... Why don’t you stay and look around. You might see something you like.” Suggested Tinkerbell stepping away.

Archie followed at her heels.

Tongue tied and confused, he found himself agreeing and began wandering about the store. Picking at nick-nacks in boxes. Glancing up occasionally to see the Tiger Lily watching him.

“How about this?” Tinkerbell asked appearing from nowhere.

“Where’d you ...”, startled by her sudden appearance.

“You have a lady friend I assume.”

“Yes, I think.”

“You think? ... Have you not made your intentions clear to her?”

“My *intentions?*”

“Yes, your intentions, your love.” Pressed Tinkerbell.

“Love?” ... I ah.” Becoming flustered.

“May I suggest this.” Holding out an emerald brooch surrounded with diamonds.

“Oh, it looks very expensive.” Thought Pete aloud.

“I can let you have it for ten pounds.”
 “Ten pounds? ...”, examining the craftsmanship, “... It looks real to me.”
 “A flawless imitation I assure you...”, she lied, “... Twenty pounds?” She haggled.
 “I’ll take it.” Accepted Peter.
 “She’ll love it. I assure you. What did you say her name was again?”
 “Gwendolyn.” Peter blurted.
 “Welsh, is she?”
 “Her mother was.”
 “Oh I’m sorry to hear that.”
 “She still has her father... Captain Hook.”
 “Captain James Hook, proprietor of the Jolly Roger?”
 “That’s right... How did you know?”
 “*Tinkerbell!*?” Interrupted Tiger Lily warily.
 “Our paths have crossed in the distant past... so to speak.”
 “Oh, I see, of course.”
 “Let me pop this in a box. Gwendolyn will *adore* this.”
 “Thank you. I think so too.” Handing her the twenty pounds.
 He catches Tiger Lily having stern words to her.
 “Shh... Blackbeard won’t miss the brooch.” Dismissed Tinkerbell.
 “And what will father say?” Warned Tiger Lily.
 “Leave father to me.” Placing the brooch inside a dark velvet box.
 ‘*Clunk... Clunk... Ching... Ching...*’ Ringing up the sale on the old register.
 “Twenty pounds? It’s worth twenty thousand pounds.” Informed Tiger Lily.
 “Think of it as an investment. There is always the bigger picture... You of all, should know that.” She grinned.
 “I hope you know what you’re doing Tinkerbell.”
 “Is everything okay? ...” Asked Peter approaching the counter, “... I’m happy to pay more.”
 “Twenty pounds is more than sufficient Peter...”, handing him the box, “... all profits go to a good cause.”
 “That’s good to know...”, pocketing the box, “... thanks again.” About to leave.
 The doorbell dings above his head, and as it did, it felt like he was waking from a dream.
 “Peter.” Called out Tinkerbell.
 “Sorry?” Turning about.
 “Haven’t we forgotten someone?” Looking down to Archie.
 “Oh my goodness... Archie! Come here boy.”
 But Archie wanted to stay.
 “Off you go now.” Instructed Tiger Lily.
 On her command the terrier trotted out the door as though Peter were not there.
 “Archie! Come back here... Archie! Wait up! ... I have to go.”
 “Be seeing you.” Said Tinkerbell watching him leave.
 “What have you done Tinkerbell?” Asked Tiger Lily.
 But Tinkerbell just smiled a fairy smile.

“Archie?! ... Where are you boy?” Looking up and down the lane for him.
 In the distance he hears a familiar bark and headed in the direction.

“Excuse me... excuse me please... coming though... sorry.” Apologizing to passersby.

The barking grew closer, and he finds Archie at the base of a tree barking. Leaping up at something only he could see.

“What is it old chap?” Asked Peter peering into the tree and seeing nothing.

Tiger Lily sits on a branch looking back down at him.

“Be seeing you Archie.” She said before disappearing.

Archie fell silent confused by her sudden disappearance. Sniffing about the base, cocked his leg, and did what he did best.

“Let’s be getting you home.”

Just then the clouds parted and drifted away. Exposing him like a vampire in the later afternoon sun.

“Ah...”, discovering now he had left his umbrella behind at the store, “... I seem to have left my umbrella behind... oh dear...”, pondering whether to go back and get it, “... why don’t we just wait beneath this tree for a moment.” He compromised, hoping the clouds would gather again.

Moments became a minute, and a minute became ten. Then twenty. Passersby look at him strangely.

“Afternoon.” Peter politely smiled back.

Looking to the sky finds it void of clouds.

“It’s no good Archie, looks like we’re going to have to make a run for it.”

Walking quickly, but not so quickly as to look awkward. Side stepping oncoming passersby as though they were lepers. Stopping now and then to find sanctuary beneath a tree. His town house was still a block away. He was almost there. Then from nowhere, Nibs appeared walking towards him. A tree stood midway.

Peter had to make it there before Nibs did.

“Come on Archie a tree... Look.”

“Peter! ...”, Nibs called out surprised to see him, “... you look like you’re in a rush.”

“Was I? No, no...”, he said panting, “... just out for a *casual* stroll with Archie... doing some shopping.”

“Oh, what did you buy?” Asked Nibs curiously.

“Just a little something for Gwendolyn...” Pulling the velvet box from his pocket and opening it, “... from a store on Portobello.”

“It’s exquisite... must have cost a small fortune.” Remarked Nibs holding up to the light.

“Twenty pounds.”

“I’m telling you Peter... it’s not worth twenty pounds.”

“She did say it was fake.”

“No Peter... I know jewelry. I’m afraid that this might be the real McCoy old chap... best you get that appraised.” Handing it back to him.

“I’ll do that. Thanks...”, placing the ring back inside the box, “... you’re looking rather dapper, off somewhere?”

“Just to the Club. You’ll be there?”

“Tomorrow perhaps... must get Archie home. He’s running on empty.”

“Right-o... tomorrow then. Must be off old chap... it’s a lovely day for a scroll.”

“Delightful, isn’t it.” Said Peter waiting for Nibs to leave using Archie as an excuse to stay beneath the tree.

However Archie was tired of waiting and had trotted off to the next tree. Peter wonders if he should return the ring. It is what a gentleman would do. Besides, he had left umbrella behind. Tomorrow perhaps. Or the day after. One day was the same as the other for Peter.

Just then, he had a peculiar feeling that someone watching him. Turning about, sees no one. Just the rustling of leaves in a nearby tree.

“Hmm.” Shaking off the feeling.

“I hope you know what you’re doing Tinkerbell.” Warned Tiger Lily to her sister sitting beside her...

The Jolly Roger

Peter waited patiently to be served. Large cat-like eyes peered down at him as though the creature was eyeing him for supper. Recalling Nibs' comment about Hook having him stuffed and mounted in its place. Imagining himself mounted stiff and rigid. His tie drooping. He did not know which was more embarrassing.

"What will it be Peter?" The barman asked, pulling him from the macabre vision.

"A pint of Spitfire and a packet of Walkers crisps for now thank you Mister Smee."

Pushing forward a five-pound note with one eye on the crocodile above. Smee pulled down on a wooden handle. Again. And again.

Drawing beer to a pint glass, forming a frothing head.

"There you go Peter."

"Gwendolyn about?" He asked tentatively.

"She'll be in later. I'll tell her you're here when she arrives."

"Thanks. We'll just be over there." Indicating a booth.

Archie trotted at Peter's heels then leaped up onto a seat.

"What did Tinkerbelle say Archie? ...", turning to the fox terrier now curled up beside him, "... my *intentions*...", contemplating the romantic notion.

Taking the velvet box from a pocket opened it. The brooch sparkled in the dim lighting of the bar. The large emerald-green stone seemed larger than it had the day before. The glass stones that surrounded it sparkled like priceless diamonds. It had a weight of gold about it. Perhaps Nibs was right, perhaps it was real. The thought fades as if it had been erased and replaced by another.

And he found himself talking to himself,

"Love is rather complicated I'm afraid Archie... Best you stay a bachelor and lest you too suffer the pangs of cupid's arrows." Pocketing the brooch.

But the words fall on deaf ears. Archie was not listening to what the human was saying. But the sound of packet of crisps opening catches Archie's attention causing him to sit up hopeful of a crisp.

"Not for you." Peter informed him, unfolding the newspaper in search of something of interest.

But it may as well have been in a foreign language. Turning page after page after page like the clock on the wall ... tick tock tick tock...

... Suddenly a thunderous voice bellowed his name from the bar.

"Peter Pan! ... What are you doing here!" Captain Hook questioned loudly for all to hear.

Pounding a heavy fist on the bar.

Archie sits up and barked at Hook.

"Shh! Archie." Trying to quieten the terrier.

"Well_, answer me boy!" Asked Hook now standing over him.

Mister Smee by his side, grinning having informed him of Peter's arrival.

'*You bastard*...', cursed Peter, "... I'm here to see Gwendolyn."

"Over my dead body you will boy!" Spat Hook, his breath reeking of whisky.

Gwendolyn entered the bar to find her father standing over Peter.

"Father, let him be." She protested, pulling on her father's arm to no avail.

“You keep out of it of girl... The *boy is mine.*” Pushing his daughter to the floor.

Incensed with anger Peter stood and swung wildly at Hook. Missing with every punch he threw. Hook ducked and dived like a prize fighter.

“Bad form Peter... You’ll have to do better than that.” Throwing a heavy fist to Peter’s mid-section knocking the wind out of him and sending flying back to the booth.

Archie bites at Hook’s trouser leg. Pulling and tearing the fabric.

“Damn dog.” Shaking his leg trying to loosen the canine beast that would not let go.

“Father, stop this madness. I love him.” Cried out Gwendolyn.

‘*She loves me.*’ Thought Peter.

He would fight to the death for her honor. It’s what a gentleman would do. Taking a hefty swallow of beer. Pulled himself upright and raised clenched fists.

“You should have stayed down boy.” Warned Hook twisting the ends of his moustache with glee.

“Over my dead body.” Reciprocated Peter.

Hook stood his ground as Peter swung wildly, again. Missing with every blow as though the man were a ghost.

Nothing connected.

“Bad form Peter...” Jested Hook, “... enough of these games... Mister Smee.” Stepping back.

Smee stepped forward.

“Gwendolyn!” Peter reached out his hand to her.

“Peter!” She cried out restrained by her father.

“Take care of him Mister Smee.” Instructed Hook.

“Aye, aye, Captain... With pleasure.” Growled Smee reaching inside his jacket to pull out a dark revolver.

“Father! Please! No!” Pleaded Gwendolyn.

“Any last words Peter?” Asked Smee taking aim.

“I love Gwendolyn with all my heart...”, standing upright to take it like a gentleman unafraid to die, “... sorry Archie, this is it, old chap.”

But Archie was not listening. Nor did he hear the shots ring out.

“Boom! Boom! Boom! ...”, Smee fired point blank into Peter’s chest, one after the other after other after the other after the other after the other, “... Boom! Boom! Boom!”

“Peter.” He hears Gwendolyn calling his name followed by a stabbing pain to his chest.

“Ow!” He cries out in pain.

“Peter.”

Followed by another stabbing pain.

“Ow!”

“Peter... Wake up.”

Opening his eyes to finds Gwendolyn poking a pointed fingernail into him.

“*Gasp!*” He sits upright gasping for breath.

Hands run over his body for fatal wounds. Confused by the macabre dream. He looked about for Hook. No-where to be seen. Smee polishes glasses behind the bar shaking his head. He had seen a few things in his time, but this took the cake.

“Sorry I must have nodded off.” Admitted Peter composing himself.

“Apparently... So you love me?” Informed Gwendolyn.

“You heard that?”
 “I think most of the bar heard.” Smiled Gwendolyn.
 “Oh dear.” Feeling embarrassed.
 “Don’t fret silly... I love you too.” Leaning forward to kiss him
 Reminding him of the purpose of his visit.
 “I have come bearing gifts.”
 “Oh, a gift for me?” She beamed looking surprised.
 Reaching to a pocket takes out a dark velvet box.
 “Sorry I didn’t have time gift wrap it.” Handing it to her.
 “(Gasp!) ...”, she gasped on opening it, “... oh Peter, it’s beautiful... It must have cost a small fortune.”
 “You could say that... You really like it?”
 “I do...”, she confessed kissing him again, “... thank you.”
 “Tinkerbell said you would.”
 “Tinkerbell?”
 “The young woman who served me.”
 “Was she beautiful?”
 “I don’t know, I didn’t notice.” He lied.
 Suddenly he felt a sharp kick to his shin followed by a faint giggle.
 “Ouch!” He exclaimed in pain.
 “Are you okay?” She asked.
 “Yeah... I must have bumped my leg... sorry.”
 Just then Hook entered the bar and catches Gwendolyn with Peter.
 “Father, look what Peter got me.” She beckoned him closer showing him the emerald brooch.
 “Why_ it’s lovely dear.” Hook charms his daughter.
 ‘*It must be fake...*’ He thought examining the brooch.
 “Good form Peter... Good form...”, Hook lied beaming a crocodile smile, “...why don’t you run along dear and while I have a quiet word with Peter.” Suggested Hook.
 “Be nice now father.” Warned Gwendolyn kissing her father on the cheek.
 “Of course, my dear...”, he grinned, waiting until she was far enough away, “... now listen to me Pan. I don’t like you... I don’t like you one bit... you understand boy?!” His breath reeking of whisky.
 Peter looked anxiously at Smee standing behind the bar polishing glasses. A bulge beneath his jacket.
 “You’re making yourself quite clear Captain.”
 “You keep away from Gwendolyn... thinking you can buy her love with cheap jewelry.”
 “Actually, I don’t think it’s...”
 “I don’t care what you think Pan... keep away from my daughter.” Hook reaches inside his jacket ...”, causing Peter to sit back, as Hook pulled out a cheque book, “... how much?”
 “Excuse me?”
 “How much did it cost? ... the brooch ...”, he inquired, “... so I can reimburse you and you can go on your way and never be seen again.”
 “Twenty.” Said Peter.
 “*Twenty... thousand... pounds_.*” Repeating the amount as he wrote, tearing the cheque out and holding it out to Peter.

“No, just twenty pounds.” Informed Peter.

Stunned, Hook is left hanging holding the cheque.

Peter hears a mischievous giggle.

“Do hear that?”

“Hear what?” Asked Hook tearing the cheque into pieces.

“That giggle.”

“Are you trying to be *clever* Pan?” Two heavy lack eyebrows pinch together as though they were displeased with him.

“No Captain, I’m just saying I heard someone giggling... You didn’t hear it?”

“Really Pan? First you try to palm off fake jewelry to my daughter now you’re hearing voices... I loathe Trust Babies, I loathe you... do you hear me... bad form if you ask me.”

“Bad form.” Recited Peter.

“I’m a self-made man... self-made, you hear me ...”, slamming his fist on the table, “... *hard work... perseverance... and most of all... responsibility... All of which you lack Pan... bad form.*”

“Bad form.” Squirmed Peter.

Hook was right, thought Peter. He had never experienced hard work. Let alone taken responsibility for anything, or anyone. Other than Archie.

Hook could see he had struck a nerve and grinned pleased with himself.

“Mister Smee.” Hook summoned Smee to the booth.

“Captain Hook?” Inquired Smee appearing beside him.

“Two whiskys if you please... To celebrate.”

“Celebrate... What are we celebrating if I may be so bold to ask Captain?”

“Peter’s bad form.” Smiled Hook.

“Aye, aye Captain.” Saluted Smee.

“And Gwendolyn?” Asked Peter dejectedly.

“Best you forget about Gwendolyn dear boy... She has more *capable suitors* calling on her.” He lied.

“She does?” Questioned Peter, the kiss that still lingering on his lips.

Smee returned with two glasses of dark whisky on a tray.

“Good form Mister Smee.”

“Enjoy Captain.”

Hook raised his glass and proposed a toast.

“To self-made men... Something you will never know Peter Pan.” Throwing back the drink grinning with contempt.

Peter stood, gathered his paper, and raised his glass.

“*We’ll see about that.*” Accepting the challenge and swallowing the drink feeling it burn his gullet.

Outside, the sound of heavy machinery sounded. Shaking the very foundations of the building. It was an opportune time for Peter to leave.

“...Come on Archie.”

The creature above the bar shook on its mounts. It was as though it had come alive...

Wendy & Mister Black

Meanwhile, several days earlier...

The sky was bluer than blue and the grass, greener than green. Clouds floated like fluffy white cotton candy in the sky. One may have looked like a rabbit.

Wheels roll over and crackle on a gravel path. Rolling over and over, and over again.

“What a lovely day for a stroll in the park don’t you think Wendy? ...” Asked Tinkerbelle, “... Oh look over there, the daffodils are in bloom.”

“I wouldn’t know.” Grumbled Wendy feeling out of sorts.

“Save your strength for the pond, you can run around there.” Informed Tinkerbelle.

“Oh look... a hat.” Spied Wendy seeing it on a bench.

“So, there is... I wonder who it belongs to? It’s such a lovely hat. I don’t see the gentleman about, do you?”

Wendy sits up and stretches her neck like a giraffe looking about for the gentleman. Hoping not to see him.

“It would make a lovely nest...”, she suggested examining the fine bowler hat, “...let us find a tree before a pirate snatches it.”

“Pirate?” Asked Tinkerbelle surprised.

“And Goblins and Fairies.”

“*Fairies?*” She gasped.

“These are dangerous waters we sail...”, warned Wendy peering through periscope hands.

Tinkerbelle places the oversized bowler hat on the child’s head.

“Now look who the pirate is? ...”, tickling her, causing her to giggle, “... I didn’t know pirates were ticklish?”

“(Giggling)... *Ekh_!*” Wendy squealed hysterically fidgeting.

Stopping at another bench they see children running about before a large pond. A toy sail boat glided across the surface. A small boy watches on from the other side holding out a radio control. Tacking it one way, then the other. Children stop playing and curious to see the young girl in the wheelchair wearing the oversized hat on her head.

Pulling herself upright, Wendy steadied herself against the wheelchair.

“Who are you?” Asked a small boy curiously.

“I’m a pirate.” Retorted Wendy.

“*Ekh!* ...”, shrieked the boy running away to warn others, “... *Pirate! Pirate!*”

Wendy went in pursuit of the boy. Slashing an imaginary sword in front of her.

“Don’t overdo it, Wendy!” Warned Tinkerbelle watching her run off.

“You can’t save them all.” Said Tiger Lily mysteriously materializing beside her.

“I can save one.” Informed Tinkerbelle.

“But Wendy...”

“Not Wendy...(*sigh*).” Lamented Tinkerbelle.

“Then who?” Asked Tiger Lily confused.

“Peter... Peter Pan.”

“Who is Peter Pan?”

Just then a voice called out.

“*Archie!* ... *Archie!* ... Come back here!”

“Ah... here he comes now... Right on time.” Grinned Tinkerbell.

Archie dashed to the bench where two individuals were sitting, unseen.

“*Hello Archie...*” Said Tiger Lily, “... *How are you today?*”

“*Yap!*” Archie replied.

Peter approaches the bench beneath a large black umbrella.

“What are you barking at Archie?” Looking about, seeing nothing but a vacant bench and a wheelchair.

“Is that your dog?” Asked a child’s voice behind him.

“Well, hello there... Why yes, it is.” Turning about to see a young girl wearing an oversized bowler hat on her head.

“And who you be?”

“I’m Wendy... I’m a pirate.” She said as a matter of fact.

“How do you do Wendy the Pirate, I am Peter, and this Archie. He can be a little pirate sometimes.”

Archie leaped up and down causing her to fall to the ground causing her to squeal in a fit of laughter.

“Archie, stop that.” Pulling the terrier away.

“*He’s funny...*”, getting to her feet, but then noticed something peculiar about Peter, “... you don’t have a shadow.”

He had been caught out. By a child of all people.

“So it seems... oh dear... I must have misplaced it.” Playing along with the child.

“Does it hurt?” She asked curiously.

“Sometimes... Not so much on cloudy days.”

“Where did you last see it?”

“I long time ago when I was a child... about your age.”

“You can have mine if you like...” Moving closer to stand next to him casting her shadow to where his would be.

And for a moment, he felt whole. Raising his arm, Wendy mimics the motion. And her shadow moved on the ground. Raising a leg, the shadow does likewise.

“This is fun.” Wendy giggled.

‘*Woof!*’ Archie barked as though he were being left out.

“Can Archie come play?”

“I don’t see why not.”

“Come on Archie!” Called Wendy running off with the terrier and her shadow at her heels.

“They make a delightful pair, don’t they?” Said Tinkerbell.

“I hope you know what you’re doing Tinkerbell.” Warned Tiger Lily before vanishing in a tingle of glittering light.

The sparkling aberration catches Peter’s eye, and he wondered if his eyes were playing tricks on him. Taking a seat unfolded a newspaper and began reading it. Looking up now and then to see the pair running about with the other children.

Wendy returned exhausted, panting heavily. Archie at her heels. His tail wagging excitedly. She collapses in the chair.

“*Archie!*” Giggled Wendy hysterically fighting off the playful terrier.

“We best be off. Will you be, okay?” He asked looking about for an adult.

“I’ll be fine.” Seeing Tinkerbell holding a finger to her lips.

“Okay then, you take care now.” Said Peter standing to leave.

“Bye Archie.”

“Come on Archie. This way... I do believe we are lost old chap... you’ve led me down a wrong path again... what am I to do with you?”

Looking back, he notices a lady attending to the child.

“Hm? ... Where did she come from Archie... I didn’t see her, did you?”

“*Woof!*” Replied Archie.

“How was that?” Asked Tinkerbell.

“Archie was fun... I hope we see him again.” She panted.

“I’m sure we will.” Grinned Tinkerbell handing her an inhaler.

After several puffs, her breathing calmed.

“How’s that feel?”

“Good. (*cough*).”

“How about we find a tree for your hat, shall we?”

“That one!” Said Wendy pointing to a distant tree.

“Hm... It seems to have several hats already in it... you wouldn’t know who put them there do you?”

“*No_.*” Wendy lied.

“*Hmm.*” Mused Tinkerbell.

Coming to the tree they look up to see half a dozen black bowler hats among its branches. A blackbird flies off. Only to return moments later with a worm between its beaks.

“Yummy, worms for dinner Wendy?” Asked Tinkerbell.

“Yuck! No thank you.”

“How about up there?” Tinkerbell spotted a location for the hat.

“It’s too high. I can’t reach.”

“Here, let me lift you... don’t look down.”

“Okay.” Promised Wendy holding onto the hat.

Wendy feels Tinkerbell’s hands about her waist. Lifting her higher and higher. Until she reached the branch. Just then, a precocious looking black bird landed on the branch and watched as the precarious looking child secured the hat between two branches.

“Well hello... And what in your name?” Asked Wendy on seeing the bird.

“(*Chirp-chirp!*) ... *Mister Black.*” The bird chirped tilting its head sideways as though to get a better look at her.

“It nice to meet you Mister Black... I’m Wendy... I do hope you like your new home... try it in for size if you like.” She encouraged the bird.

“(*Chirp-chirp!*) ... *Don't mind if I do...*”, hopping along the branch onto the brim and peered inquisitively inside, “...*chirp-chirp!*) ... *the silk lining with have to go of course.*”

“Of course...” Agreed Wendy, “... enjoy your new home, I must be off... bye, bye.” Pushing herself away from the branch she felt herself drifting effortlessly down until her feet touched the gravel.

Looking up at the hat among the branches, she wondered how Tinkerbell had reached so high.

“Who were you talking to up there?” Asked Tinkerbell.

“Mister Black... he likes his new home.” Informed Wendy.

“There must be someone somewhere missing a lot of bowler hats don’t you think?”

“(Giggle.)”

“Come one, let’s get you home.” Noticing the time.

On come to the park bench where they had found the hat, they discover an old man scratching his bald head, as though he had misplaced something.

He was sure this was the bench.

“You haven’t seen a hat, have you?” The old man inquired as they passed.

“No_...” Wendy lied, “... perhaps you should ask Mister Black.” She suggested.

“Mister *Black*? ... where do I find this, *Mister Black*?” Asked the man looking to Tinkerbelle hoping she would be of help.

“I believe he is over there...”, pointing in the direction of the tree, “... but you must hurry before he flies off... good day to you.”

“Good day to you too...”, replied the man turning to see children running about the grass, “... those *little rascals*.”

Wheels turned over and over, and over again. The sky bluer than blue. The grass greener than green. The clouds like white cotton candy in the sky. One may have looked like a rabbit.

The day had been magical...

Councilor Murtagh

Deep within the bowels of a forgettable council building. On a forgettable street. Sat an overlooked man. In an overlooked office. As though he were a forgotten box car shunted to the far most corner of a railway yard.

And be forgotten.

'Bang!' A heavy rubber stamp slammed down in frustration.

A clock on the wall ticked away the seconds to the man's retirement. All he needed was one more *commission* to secure his place in the sun. A quaint villa in the south of Spain. Was that too much to ask for a lifetime of drudgery buried beneath the grey cold streets of London for forty-six years. The man sighed heavily and shook his head in disapproval.

Raising the blood red stamp like an executioner's axe and slammed it down.

'Bang!'

A sense of power rushes over him momentarily. Only to quickly dissolve to discontent.

He reaches for a cup and takes a sip. Tutting his tongue as if the *tea* had lost its taste. Opening a bottom drawer to retrieve a bottle filled with an amber solution and quietly poured a generous measure into the cup. Returning the bottle to its hiding place. Taking another sip. Finds the taste to his satisfaction.

Just then there was a knock at the door and a wiry looking clerk entered folding a bulky file. The man looked at the uninvited intruder who had trespassed his scared enclave. The clerk looked about. Nostrils twitching as though he could smell something odd. Yet familiar.

Unable to place the salient malt odor.

"What do you want?!" The man snapped at the clerk like a rabid dog.

"You Murtagh?" A meek voice asked.

"What does it say on the door?"

"This is for you... the mayor wants you to deal with it... *urgently*." Informed the clerk placing a large dull red folder on the desk.

Murtagh eyed the folder, then the scrawny lad backing away.

"That will be all...", Murtagh instructed, "... close the door behind you."

Murtagh waited for the lad leave. Watching his shadow move along the frosted window from view. Taking another swallow from the cup, eyes the thick file bound by a thick brown rubber band.

'*Urgently? ... why does the mayor want me to deal with it?*' He thought suspiciously.

The name on the file meant nothing to him. The size suggested it had a long history with the council. He pulled away the rubber band and placed it to one side. Opening the folder finds a familiar form headed...

REPOCESSION ORDER

Unmoved, Murtagh eyed the form from top to bottom. Gleaming the tragic details. Nothing that he had not read a dozen times that morning. Eyes light up at the golden opportunity that had landed on his desk. It was as though his prayers had been answered. He looked up to the ceiling. Perhaps there was a God. He opened a drawer and pulled out a post card of Spain and stared at it. Feeling a warmth on his skin as though he were basking in the sun. No more,

cold grey monotone winters. Murtagh had the power of life and death over council properties. The unfortunate enterprise had fallen far behind on its rent. Far enough so for him pull the rug from beneath its feet. He would be the scapegoat. While the mayor slept with a clear conscience.

Sighing heavily takes another swallow to drown the guilt.

'Kensington... Hm.'

A property of this size would bring a handsome commission from the right investor. Pulling out a little black note book from a vest pocket began thumbing through the dog-eared pages scrawled with names and numbers.

"No... no... not him... he's in jail... no... Ah." Stopping at a name on a page.

It had been a while since the two men had done business, but it had been beneficial to him in the past. Timing would be essential, and above all, discretion. The more he thought, the more confident he felt.

What could possibly go wrong.

A gust of cold air rushes over Murtagh as though the door had opened. But the door remained closed. A shadow moved across the wall behind him. Goosebumps tingle over his shins. As though someone else was in the room. Watching him.

Looking about he sees no one.

"That's weird." Taking a swallow to settle his nerves.

Spindly fingers punch at buttons on the phone, and he waited for it to be answered...

"Steady now Mister Smee." Informed Hook holding a bar stool on which Smee was standing brushing the crocodile with a feather duster.

Smee places his hand on the creature's belly to steady himself feeling something bumpy within.

"What did they stuff it with? ... Stones?" He asked feeling small lumps and bumps.

"Don't worry about that man... Make sure you get its teeth and eyes... I want them to sparkle."

"Aye-aye Captain."

Large feline like brown eyes gawked back at him. Jaws lined with jagged yellow teeth. And he imagined himself in its jaws. Suddenly he hears a loud growl. Shaking the creature violently on its mount. Making it appear it had come alive. Its tail detaches and droops.

"Ekh! Its alive!" Exclaimed Smee.

"Blasted road works! ... Bad form." Cursed Hook looking to the windows as diesel engines start up.

'Buzz-buzz... buzz-buzz... buzz-buzz...'

Hook senses something vibrate inside a pocket and wonders if it is him, or the jackhammers.

'Buzz-buzz...' There it was again, then it was gone.

He pats himself down in search for his mobile. The name on the screen suggested he should take the call. Stepping away, to the privacy of the office.

Leaving Smee marooned on the stool.

"Shan't be long Mister Smee." Hook lied.

"Captain? ..." called out Smee marooned on the stool, "...*Captain?*"

"Hook speaking." He answered.

“Morning Captain... Murtagh here... Paul Murtagh, from the Council.”

“Ah *Mister* Murtagh, it’s been a while...”, speculating the purpose of the call, “... How are you?”

“I’m well, I’m well, no complaints... And yourself Captain?”

Hook senses an anxiousness in Murtagh’s voice, as though he were fishing for something.

“No complaints, but one can always feel... *better* I suppose.” He throws out the bait.

Having profited very nicely from the last property Murtagh had offered up.

Perhaps he had another.

“How can I help you *Mister* Murtagh?” Choosing his words carefully.

“After our last ah... dealing...”

“For which you were well rewarded.” He qualified for anyone listening in.

“Yes, most generously... thank you Captain.”

“You have another property?” Inquired Hook.

“A file has come across my desk... I thought might interest you.”

“Really... Tell me more.”

“A sizeable property in Kensington... behind in its rent for a while now.”

“Oh dear...”, empathizing briefly, “... Kensington you say, hmm...”, eyes light up, “... I’m surprised you waited that long to evict the tenants.”

“Well, they’re still there.”

“Still there?”

“The mayor has been carrying it up until now, turning a blind eye as it were... but it seems now, even he has had enough. He’s asked me to...”

“Hm... I see... most interesting... we should talk more about this, perhaps over a drink... how does next... *Tuesday* sound?”

“Next Tuesday...”, thumbing through a calendar, “... *I can do next Tuesday.*”

“Good. Good. I look forward to it... and bring the file with you.” Two thick black eye brows pinch together like hairy caterpillars kissing.

“Of course Captain.”

“You’ll be well rewarded Paul.”

“Thank you, Captain, you’re too kind.”

“Good day Paul.” Killing the call.

Grinning like a Cheshire cat Hook leaned back in the chair.

‘Kensington.’ He thought.

This could be the jewel in his crown. Then wondered why the tenants were still occupying the property having fallen so far behind. Had the mayor had gone soft. Hook would have them on the street and sleep like a baby afterwards. With Murtagh pulling the strings behind the scenes he could get his hands on the property with little or no competition. The ink would be dry on the contract before anyone noticed the property had been sold.

“Ahh_ (*Sigh*)...” Hook grinned with content and reached for the short glass on his desk and pouring himself a generous measure of whisky. Taking a swallow of the dark malt.

“... *Perfect.*” Toasting his good fortune.

‘Perhaps after this they’ll let me into that damn Gentleman’s Club, The Royal and Ancient...’, he fantasized seeing himself in a large leather chair, then grumbled, “...*Hm.*”

‘My first call of business would be to get rid of Pan... Damn upstart... A Gentleman’s Club should be for self-made men.’ Holding up the glass to the light and peering into it as though it were a crystal ball.

He had almost forgotten about Mister Smee, until he heard a crashing sound coming from the bar.

“Mister Smee?” Cried out Hook rushing from the office to find him on the floor.

“I’m fine captain... The floor broke my fall...”, pulling himself to his feet dusting himself off, “...I’ll get that fixed Captain.” Attempting to push the tail back up.

“No leave it. I like it like that... Makes it look more alive, don’t you?” Said Hook grinning.

“If you say so Captain... Important call?”

“You could say that Mister Smee... our good friend Mister Murtagh at the Council has found a property I may be interested in ... *acquiring*, as it were.”

“Is that right?”

“Tenants reluctant to move on, as it were.”

“Is that right? And where might this property be if I may be so bold to ask Captain.”

“Kensington Mister Smee.”

“*Kensington* Captain? That would be a feather in your cap.”

“Indeed Mister Smee... The tenants may require your gentle *persuasion*, as it were.”

“Always happy to help them on their way Captain.”

“Thought you might Mister Smee.” Grinned Hook.

Just then the jack hammers started up again. Deafening any thought he may have been entertaining. The hairy black caterpillars returned above Hook’s beady black eyes. This time not to kiss but do mortal battle.

“Damn road works! ... Bad form.” Cursed Hook...

Neverland

“This way Archie don’t dawdle old chap.” Said Peter waiting on the terrier.

Cloud stretched from one horizon to the other. Peter could not have wished for a better day. Still, he carried a furred umbrella under his arm in case the heavens broke open and sunlight rained down on him.

“It seems we’re lost again Archie. Is it me? Or are leading you down the preverbal garden path old chap? ...Hm? ...what do you have to say to yourself?” Thinking he had taken the same path as the day before, but today it seemed... different.

But Archie was not listening to the human. He had taken himself to a park bench where someone only he could see was sitting.

“Archie! Here boy!” Peter called out fruitlessly to him.

“*Off you go now.*” Tiger Lily instructed.

Archie rushes towards him. Only to race past and stop at the gates. And waited for the human to catch up.

“Sometimes, I wonder who is taking who for a walk.”

He looked towards Notting Hill then at his watch. Showing mid-afternoon.

“Why don’t we give Tinkerbell a visit and collect my umbrella?”

The sound of Tinkerbells’ name made Archie’s tail wag excitedly.

“Very well then, Tennapenny it is then.”

The terrier raced off ahead as though he knew which way to go.

“*Archie!*” Called out Peter.

Every day was much the same on Portobello. Tourists clotted the lane looking for mementos of the ancient Roman city. Soliciting voices cried out bargains. Passersby looked at the man holding the umbrella above his head. Then to the sky as if he knew something they did not. Ahead, he catches sight of the fire red store standing out from the others about it.

From the outside the store appeared quiet. As though it were closed. The stores about it appeared to be doing a brisk trade. Archie waited at the door waiting for it to open.

‘*Ding.*’ Sounds the bell overhead and the terrier darted inside.

Peter enters, and he feels himself engulfed in comforting warmth. The warmth one feels when coming home.

A voice called out from the counter.

“Peter, you returned.” Said Tinkerbell appearing magically at that moment.

“Of course... Archie seems to know his way here better than I do.”

“I hope Gwendolyn liked her gift.”

“She did... I’ve come to thank you and say I may have underpaid for the brooch.”

“Really?” Tinkerbell acted surprise.

Tiger Lily watches on.

“A friend of mine...”

“*Nibs.*” Said Tinkerbell.

“That’s right, how did you know?”

“You mentioned him before.” She teased Peter.

“I did?”

“You were saying?”

“Nibs has a very good eye for such things, and he seems to think it was genuine.”

“Really... That’s a bit unfortunate then isn’t it... I’m sorry but, we have a no return policy.”

“No, no, I don’t think you understand...” Becoming confused.

“Oh look at the time... I really must be going, why don’t you and Archie join me?... It’s such a beautiful day, you won’t be needing your umbrella...”, taking the umbrella from him placing it next to the umbrella from his first visit, “...oh dear, seems we’re getting bit of a collection don’t you think Archie?”

“*Woof!*” The terrier agreed.

“But I’m very sensitive to sunlight.” Peter lied.

“Of course you are...”, Tinkerbell grinned, “...this way.” Summoned Tinkerbell taking him by the arm.

Archie raced ahead. Peter looked to the sky fearing it would break open at any moment and expose him.

“Where exactly are we going?” He asked becoming disoriented.

“It’s a surprise... It’s not far... just around the next corner.”

“Are we there yet?” Panted Peter becoming short of breath.

“Almost...” Teased Tinkerbell stopping in front of a two-story brick building, “... we’re here.”

Peter took in the tired brick building. A black wrought iron fence held back an untrimmed hedge trying to escape. A dull brass plaque on a concrete pillar stated in large lettering...

NEVERLAND

“*Neverland?* What is this place?” Asked Peter curiously.

“I help out here... from *time to time.*” Informed Tinkerbell leaving it at that.

“Well if you sold your jewelry for what it was worth, you wouldn’t have to.”

“There’s more to life than jewelry Peter...” she informed him, “... why don’t you come inside.”

“Oh, I don’t know... we really should be getting back you know.” He hesitated.

“Just five minutes.” She appealed.

Just then, Archie runs up the path into the building on hearing a familiar voice coming from within.

“Archie, come back!... Well, I guess I’m going inside.”

Tinkerbell led the way. Peter followed cautiously behind. Entering a long-carpeted hallway. The scent of disinfectant hung in the air. Children’s voices filter through the walls. Part of him wanted to leave. Yet, there was something that was compelling him to stay. Turning about, discovers Tinkerbell had vanished, as though into thin air.

Leaving him alone in the hallway.

“Hello! ... Hello! ... Anyone there? ... *Tinkerbell?*” He called out hoping someone would appear.

From a distant room, he hears Archie yapping and a child giggling hysterically.

“*Archie?*”

Peering into rooms, sees beds occupied by children. Then realized the place was a children’s hospital. The barking grew closer. The giggling more hysterical. It was coming from

the next room. Poking his head into the doorway to find Archie on a bed pawing at a child giggling beneath the blankets. Monitors sat on trolleys. A dip bag hangs from a tall silver stand. Archie's pawed at the giggling lump beneath the blanket. On seeing Peter standing in the doorway he stopped barking. Causing the giggling to stop. As though they had been caught out.

A head appeared from beneath the covers.

"Peter! ..." The child cried out, "... you came!"

"Wendy? ..." Said Peter surprised to see her, "... What are you doing here?"

But the question goes unanswered. She just smiled. Somethings are best left unsaid. Archie jumped up and down causing her to squeal and seek cover beneath the blankets again.

"I see you've meet Wendy..." Said Tinkerbell appearing behind him.

"Yes... We are *old* acquaintances."

"They'll be fine... come, let me show you around the place."

"I really don't want to intrude."

"You're not intruding... This way."

"But I... I really should be..." Finding himself following her.

"We're a little understaffed... but we make do with what we have... This is Sister Maria."

"Sister." Peter greeted the woman, smiling meekly.

"Peter, we've heard so much about you... God bless you." Sister Maria grinned taking his hands.

"You have? ...", somewhat bewildered, "... I'm a little confused... What is this place?"

"Don't you know Peter?" Asked Tinkerbell calmly.

"I have no idea... I assume it's some kind of children's hospital."

"That's right... A *children's hospital*."

"I saw her in the park the other day...", looking over his shoulder, "... I didn't see you there."

"Tiger Lily and I were there...", she grinned, "... we must have just missed you."

"What's Wendy doing here?"

"She's... ill." Leaving it there.

"That explains the wheelchair ... she seemed okay in the park."

"Hm... That was a good day."

"Will she be staying much longer?"

"A little longer... not much." Informed Tinkerbell.

"Oh that's good... Where are her parents?" He asked curiously.

"*Parents?* ..." Tinkerbell falls silent, "... ah, unfortunately Wendy is an orphan."

"An orphan, oh dear...", lost for words, "...who will care for her when she leaves?"

"That's all been arranged... upstairs... don't worry yourself about that..." Informed Tinkerbell, "... let me show you the grounds."

Leading him to the back door and a porch overlooking a back yard of long grass and weeds.

"It needs a bit of work." She said suggestively.

"Oh, dear it does, doesn't it? ... Maybe I could be of assistance... I'd ask Nibs to help, but I dare say his hands would blister at the thought ... Curly and Sam could be persuaded." He offered.

"You don't have to... I'm sure we'll find the money for it."

"Save your money... A little manual labor never hurt anyone... And Wendy could play with Archie."

“She’s taken a liking to you Peter?” Said Tinkerbell.

“She has?”

“Never stops talking about you?”

“Really?”

“Tea?”

“Oh... Yes please...”

Suddenly he finds himself alone on the back steps. He did not even the door close.

“Where’d you go?”

“*You know you could clear that yard with one sweep of your hand.*” Whispered Tiger Lily.

“*He doesn’t know that... Besides, it will do them good. Get them out of that stuffy Club.*”

“*I hope you know what you’re doing Tinkerbell.*” Warned Tiger Lily disappearing just as Peter entered the room.

“I thought I heard voices.” He said looking about the kitchen.

“I was just me talking to myself... Tea?” Holding out the pot.

“Mmm... You can’t beat a cup of English tea... It’s the answer to everything.” Informed Peter, taking a sip.

“You hear that?” Asked Tinkerbell.

“Hear what?”

“Silence.” Looking to the hallway.

Creeping to Wendy’s room to discover Archie curled up beside her.

“*Shh.*” Whispered Tinkerbell.

“I better get going after this... Don’t want to hold you up.” He whispered.

“Don’t be silly, we have all the time in the world Peter.” She grinned.

Just then Sister Maria returned holding a clip board in her arms.

“How are they today?” Asked Tinkerbell.

“They’re holding their own.” She said solemnly before crossing herself.

“Peter and his friends have volunteered to help clean up the back yard. Isn’t that wonderful.” Advised Tinkerbell.

“That *is* wonderful. God bless you... I’ll have tea and ginger cake ready for you.” Said Sister Maria.

“How can one say no to that.” said Peter.

“She’s sleeping.” Tinkerbell informed Sister Maria.

“Sleeping? ...”, questioned Sister Maria, “... praise the Lord.”

Just then Archie appeared at Peter’s feet. As though he had been summoned by an unseen presence.

“Best you be off before it gets dark.” Informed Tinkerbell.

“Oh dear, look at the time... where has the day gone? Tell Wendy, we’ll be back.”

“I’ll do that.”

“Come Archie... This way.” ...

Small Problem

An ominous looking placard of a skull and crossed bones swung gently above the bar's entrance. Its name etched large gold lettering across a large, frosted window...

THE JOLLY ROGER

Murtagh hesitated before entering, as if he were having second thoughts. The thirty pieces of silver weighed heavily on his mind. The opportunity may never arise again. Looking about he sees only road workers in orange hi-vis and white helmets staring back at him. Council workers like himself.

But not like himself.

Suddenly, a loud jack hammer comes to life startling him. At first, he thought it was gun fire. Startled, he flinches. Causing the workmen to laugh. Keen to escape the noise, pulling open the bar's doors he entered. The sound of the jack hammer followed him inside. Only to fall silent as the doors closed behind him.

It was as though it had entered a church.

Smee looked up from the bar to see a pale lanky red-headed gentleman. Wearing a tired grey suit. Holding a brief case in one hand. Brushing dust from his jacket with the other. He wipes the sweat from his brow with a soiled handkerchief. Murtagh eyes adjusted to the dim interior. He catches sight of the crocodile mounted above the bar.

Patrons look up and scrutinize the man that had disturbed their quiet sanctuary.

"What will it be?" Asked Smee reaching for a pint glass.

"Is the Captain about?"

"The Captain? ... he's out back... who can I say is calling?"

"Murtagh... Paul Murtagh... from the council." He answered in a thick Irish accent as if to qualify himself.

"Ah, Mister Murtagh, the Captain said you would be visiting... why don't you take a seat while I fetch the Captain."

Murtagh finds a table and places his briefcase on top. He spies a young man with a terrier curled up beside the man reading a newspaper. Peter catches Murtagh looking at him. Eyes meet momentarily. Then quickly away. As though they had caught the other looking. Archie lifted his head and sniffed the air. Peter straightened the paper again and resumed reading. Forgetting the odd red headed gentleman as quickly he had noticed him. Archie lowered his head to resume his nap.

The crocodile catches Murtagh's attention again. Its tail shaking in time with the vibrations coming from outside. Large cat-like brown eyes stared down at him. And he imagined coming face to face with the creature in the wild.

Suddenly a voice thundered from the corner of the bar.

"Councilor Murtagh!" Exclaimed Hook for all in the bar to hear.

Pulling his attention away from the beast about to devour him.

"Captain!" Murtagh reciprocated the greeting.

"It's good to see you..." Extending a hand, "... come this way, we can talk in... *private*..." Said Hook looking about for prying eyes, "... *what's he doing here?*" Seeing Peter at the booth.

"What's that Captain?" Asked Smee.

“Nothing...” Dismissed Hook, “... would you like a drink, Paul? ... On the house of course.”

“I wouldn’t say no if you’re offering Captain, that’s most kind... a whisky if it’s not too much ask.”

“Two whiskies Mister Smee.”

“Aye-aye Captain.”

“Blasted road works, I do apologize... bad form I say... nothing you could do. *Hm?*” Complained Hook looking to the street.

“It’s outside my department I’m afraid Captain... but I might know someone who could.” Murtagh lied.

“You do that... this way Paul...” Hook grumbled leading him to an office, “...did you bring the file?” He asked eagerly.

“I certainly did Captain.” Tapping the briefcase.

“Have a seat.” Gesturing a wooden chair opposite the desk.

Murtagh sat like a nervous school boy clutching the briefcase on his lap. Eyes dart about the office void of decoration. A book case here. A shelf there. A large metal safe sat to one side. He could only imagine the treasure that lay within. Sunlight beamed through a large sash window.

“Ah hm.” Coughed Hook suggestively as if Murtagh had forgotten something.

Hook eyes the briefcase then him. Then the briefcase.

“Sorry Captain.” Nervously fumbling with the combination locks.

‘*Click... Click.*’ Latches spring like traps to open the case.

Murtagh pulls out a red file and hands it to Hook.

“Tell me about the property.” Pulling away the rubber band.

“Well... Ah... As you can see the property has been on the council’s books a while... it’s been propped up by Labor governments and councils and whatever charitable donations to keep it afloat...”

Just then Smee enters the room carrying a tray with two glasses of neat malt whisky.

Murtagh falls silent.

“Don’t worry about Mister Smee Paul... anything you say in front of me you can say in front of him... isn’t that right Mister Smee?”

“If you say so Captain...”, placing glasses before the men, “... will that be all Captain?”

“That’s all thank you Mister Smee... we’ll talk later.”

“Aye-aye Captain.” Leaving the men to their business.

Murtagh waited for the door to close.

“Oh dear, they really are in a pickle... I’d be doing them a favor...” said Hook perusing a statement of arrears, “... you were saying Paul?”

“We live in different times Captain... policies change, priorities change... there is only so much money to go around.”

“Indeed Paul, indeed.”

“It seems the council can no longer carry the enterprise much longer... what donations it gets are insufficient to its cover costs, let alone the upkeep... then there is the specialized medical equipment... the mayor has asked I step in... in my capacity of ...”

“... Judge, jury, and executioner... someone has to put the place out of its misery.” Completed Hook.

“It’s a property no one wants to get involved with... if you know what I mean... but I’m sure you won’t have any trouble sleeping at night.” Said Murtagh.

“None whatsoever...” Grinned Hook gleefully, “... and neither will you after your *commission*.”

“Thank you, Captain, you’re most kind.” Grinned Murtagh sitting back pleased with himself.

“What was the last valuation on the property?” Hook thumbs pages for a council tax rate notice.

“Kensington is a sort after location as you know Captain... the last valuation five years ago I recall was in the order of *three and half million* pounds... it wouldn’t be worth more than that... less given its state of affairs and its tenants.”

Murtagh watches Hook’s reaction the amount.

“Hm... three and a half you say?” Tallying the amount in his head.

“There are just two small problems though...” Informed Murtagh anxiously.

“And what would they be?” Glaring at Murtagh as though he had been tricked.

Murtagh takes a swallow of whisky before replying.

“We have to advertise the property for sale to the public.”

“I would rather you didn’t.” Suggested Hook.

“It’s council policy. Otherwise any contract would null and void... but...” Murtagh hesitated with a cunning plan.

“*But?* ... But what?” Leaning forward.

“It doesn’t say how big the advert has to be, or where it has to be... it just needs to be *advertised* to qualify.”

“Really?” Hook grinned.

“That’s right Captain... I could place a small advert, in some forgotten newspaper in some forgotten borough... that no one ever reads.”

“You can do that?”

“Of course...” Grinned Murtagh, “...as you say Captain... I’m the judge, jury and *executioner*... The mayor wants it off the council’s books... *urgently*... he’s given me sole discretion in the matter.” Sitting back taking swallow of whisky.

“And what was the *other* small problem?” Asked Hook leaned back eyeing him.

“The tenants.”

“What about the tenants? ... Evict them!” Demanded Hook.

“That’s easier said than done Captain... the lease on the place does not expire for another seven years.”

“But they haven’t been paying their rent... I can’t wait seven years.”

“Their past rent is with the council... we’ll clear that with the sale proceeds... however... it will be up to the new owner to evict them for non-payment of future rent... the council will wash its hands of the place after the sale.” Informed Murtagh swallowing the last of whisky lest he be denied finishing it.

“So, I get the property... *and* the tenants.”

“That’s right... how you handle the tenants... is up to you.”

Hook sighed heavily and contemplated the conundrum.

“The Council could try to evict them... but that would only create *publicity*... something we are trying to avoid for a quick quiet sale... if you know what I mean.”

“I do Mister Murtagh, I do.” Reaching for the bottom drawer and refilling his glass.

“As the lawful owner you would be perfectly within your rights to evict them... the property would be yours to do as you wish.”

“That right? ...” Hook contemplates the idea grinning, “... another Paul?” Splashing a generous amount into his glass as if pleased with the suggestion.

“Once the tenants are out, the property should double in value going by the other properties about it.” Informed Murtagh.

“(Sigh)... leave the tenants to me Paul... I’ll have Mister Smee see to them.”

“Indeed, tenants move on... they always do... I wouldn’t lose any sleep over it.”

“Oh, I assure you Paul, I won’t.”

“You’re getting a bargain Captain... but not a word to anyone.” Warned Murtagh looking to the door.

Just then the sound of jackhammers fell silent as though they had been caught eavesdropping.

“My lips are sealed Paul.” Looking him squarely in the eyes.

“Here’s to you Captain.” Raising his glass to toast their arrangement.

“What’s the name of the enterprise operating there, I seem to have over looked it.” Hook shuffled through pages.

“It’s on the front of the folder.” He pointed out.

Hook closed the folder and stared at the peculiar name.

“*Neverland?* ... What sort of name is that?” Unable to fathom it’s meaning, yet it for some reason it resonated within his mind.

A giggle sounded from the direction of a corner of the room.

“Did you hear that?” Asked Hook, thinking he had heard a ghost.

“Hear what?” Asked Murtagh hearing nothing, just the sound of the jackhammers starting up again.

“Nothing...” Dismissed Hook, “... blasted road works... have a word with your man would you.”

“Leave that to me Captain.” Lied Murtagh...

Ward Rounds

'Squeak...Squeak...Squeak...' Squeaked a wheel as though it were in pain.

Telegraphing its imminent arrival. The stainless-steel trolley moved unhurriedly along being pushed by a nurse in a blue uniform and white shoes. The trolley stopped at a doorway and the wheel fell silent.

The nurse looks to a clipboard for a name and makes a notation on it.

'Tap-tap-tap.' Lightly tapping on the door before entering the room.

Its walls painted pink. Soft plush colored animals and dolls. Children's books line a shelf. On a side table a large vase of colorful flowers.

"Penelope... Its time...", the nurse informed the child, "... how are you feeling?" Pushing the trolley beside the bed.

Monitors either side of the bed relay the vital signs of the child laying in the bed. The child grimaces a smile beneath an oxygen mask fogging with each breath.

"That's good... here, sit up a little...", placing a pillow behind her back, "... that's better."

Taking the clipboard hung over the end of the end the nurse another notation.

Her expression remains unchanged.

"Are you having pain?"

A sleepy small head with blonde hair and hazel eyes nodded.

"That's no good... shall we make it go away?"

The small head nodded softly again.

Beside the bed stood a silver stand. A clear plastic bag hangs suspended from it. Filled with a clear innocuous looking solution. The nurse turns a nib regulating the solution feeding into the child's arm through a long plastic tube.

"There that should do it...", smiling to the child before making a notation on the clip board, "... right, time for your pills."

Penelope turned her head one way, then the other, as though in protest.

"Now, now... it's for your own good... you want to get better, don't you?" Lifting the mask from the child's face.

Penelope looked sternly at the nurse.

"Open up."

A small mouth opened, and a tongue poked out, like a baby chick waiting to be feed. Shaking two small tablets from a small brown plastic bottle onto one hand. Placing the tablets on the child's tongue. Then hands the child a glass of water. Taking a swallow the child gulps down the tablets.

Then sticks out her tongue to show they were gone.

"Good girl... time for sleep."

Removing the pillow the child lays back the child succumbs to forces beyond her control. Eye lids flicker before finally closing. The nurse makes a final inscription on the clipboard.

Closing the door behind her, scanned the clipboard for the next child.

"Phillip... (*Sigh*)."

 She sighed.

'Squeak...Squeak...Squeak...' Moving to the next door as though in no hurry.

As if it would prolong the boy's life.

Stopping before the door the nurse takes a deep breath to find strength.

'Tap-tap-tap.' Knocking daintily before opening the door to a room not unlike the other.

Shelves lined with plush toys and story books. In the place of flowers sat an assortment of toys. Racing cars, fire engines, and toy soldiers. A boy in striped pajamas sits upright having heard the squeaking wheel. Brown eyes as big as saucers peering over an oxygen mask covering much of his face.

A large picture story book lay opened on his lap.

"Phillip... how are we today?" The nurse asked smiling.

"Okay." Said Phillip glumly.

"Just, okay? ...", scanning monitors belying the boy's reply, "... time for your medicine." Removing his mask.

"Do I have to?"

"Doctor's orders I'm afraid." She informed him while reading the chart at the end of the bed.

Taking a small brown pill bottle. Reads the label to confirm its contents. Then shakes a red and white capsule onto her hand.

Pouring a glass of water she hands it to the boy.

"Open up...", she instructs, "... here comes the train... *chu-chu, chu-chu...*", mimicking the sound of a train and placing the tablet on his tongue, "... have a drink and swallow."

"*Gulp...*", eyes squint as the boy swallows hard, making a distasteful expression, "...yuk!" Phillip protested.

"Good boy...", brushing his brown hair, "... any pain?" Placing the oxygen mask over his mouth and nose again.

"No." The boy lied.

"You sure?"

The boy nods subtly. The oxygen mask fogging with each breath.

"Okay... but you let me know... I can make it go away." Handing him back the picture book."

The boy eyed the nursed warily. Wondering if the pain would ever go away.

"See you tomorrow, okay?"

"Okay." A meek voice answered beneath the mask.

Dismissing the grown-up, Phillip returned his attention to the story book. To a world beyond the four walls he found himself. He looked up at the window to the tree outside. Its leaves turning brown and falling to the ground. In many ways, he felt like those leaves. But he did not know why. A gust of wind lashed the window and rattled the frame diverting the lad's attention from the tree.

As though such thoughts should not trouble a young boy's mind.

'Squeak...Squeak...Squeak...' The trolley continued its way to the next door.

Only to find it open and a doctor leaning over a child wheezing for breath. Tinkerbell stands on the other side of the holding the child's hand.

The squeaking wheel falls silent.

Heads turn momentarily to see the nurse in the door way with the trolley.

"Anything I can do?" The nurse asked.

"Over there." The doctor points to the other side of the bed, if only to be out of his way.

"*Beeeeeeep_!*" A monitor squealed long and loud.

"Her heart has stop! ...", exclaimed the doctor, "... close that door!"

The nurse closes the door, lest the other children hear anything.

Hurriedly placing a stethoscope to his ears the doctor listens for a heartbeat. That never came. In panic, he looks to Tinkerbell standing impassively. Confused, he returned his attention to the child and pressed rhythmically down on her chest.

“One-one thousand, two-one thousand, three-one thousand...” He counted off, “...oxygen nurse.”

“One-one thousand, two-one thousand, three-one thousand.” Again he checks for a heartbeat.

A monitor comes life with blips and beeps. The child gasped and coughed. As though they had been strangled.

“She’s back... (*phew*)... that was close...”, informed the doctor scanning the monitors for vitals, “... heartrate strong... blood pressure good... I don’t understand.”

“Somethings... are beyond our understanding.” Informed Tinkerbell looking to the ceiling.

“Hm...” He grumbled packing away his stethoscope about to leave, “... keep an eye on her.”

Eyes begin to flicker open. Glazing into space, searching the strange faces in the room before settling on Tinkerbell.

“I’ll be back in the morning to check on her... right now I need to get back before they notice I’m gone.”

“Thank you, Stuart.”

“Anything for you Tinkerbell.”

Tinkerbell takes the child’s hand. Small fingers grasp about fingers not wanting to let go. “Hey...”, she whispered, “... welcome back.”

A grin formed on the child’s face.

“Time for your medicine young lady.” Informed the nurse.

“That won’t be necessary...” Informed Tinkerbell, “... the doctor has already administered it.”

“If you say so... I’ll carry on with the others.”

“Thank you, Sister.” Watching her leave and close the door behind her.

Wendy’s eyes shift to Tinkerbell as though she had a secret and was bursting to tell someone.

“It was *beautiful*...”, confessed Wendy, “... I wanted to stay.”

“*I know*...” she whispered stroking the child’s head, “... *but it’s not your time*...”

The Solicitation

A haze hung in the air, tainting it with a pungent, yet not unpleasant odor of cigar. Newspapers rustled from large leather chairs. Gentry voices could be heard if one cupped one's hand to one's ear.

Peter sat memorized by naked pagan flames dancing about the fire. Radiating its warmth. Cocooning him within the belly of the Royal and Ancient Gentleman's Club. He had wealth. He had security. He had everything any person could desire. Yet, he felt as though something was missing. He felt invisible. Then pondered if he were.

Invisible people do not have shadows he thought.

Sam and Curly sit opposite talking to each other. Completing each other's sentence. Like a snake chasing its own tail. Peter grinned and shook his head. Nibs had buried himself behind a newspaper. Tutting and sighing intermittently like a steam train.

Peter wrestled with how to broach the question he was about to ask.

"Ah-ha... Gentlemen." Peter spoke, as though he were to make an announcement.

The twins cease mid conversation. Not that there was a middle. Nor an end.

"Peter..." Acknowledged Nibs peering over the top of the newspaper speculating he was about to say something, "... do I hear wedding bells?"

Setting off a ping-pong exchange from the twins.

"Wedding bells..."

"... congratulations Peter..."

"... bravo old chap..."

"... have you set a date?"

"No... there's no wedding... okay... and there won't be if Hook has anything to do with it."

"No wedding? ..."

"... what then?"

"*Ssh!* ... let Peter finish..." Nibs interjected, "... go on Peter."

"Thank you Nibs... I was wondering what you were doing this weekend?"

The twins look momentarily to each other confused then back to Peter.

"Same as we ..."

"... always do..."

"... nothing..."

"... why do you ask?"

"I was wondering if you lot would like to join me with a little laboring."

"Laboring? ..."

"...like with our hands?"

"That's how it's usually done I believe..." Said Peter, "... there'll be ginger cake and tea afterwards as a reward."

"*Ginger cake...*"

"...and tea you say..."

"... tempting..."

"... Hmm." Looking at each other.

"And tell us Peter... what brought on this sudden solicitation of labor?" Asked Nibs curiously.

“Neverland.” Informed Peter, hoping the name meant something to them.

“Neverland?” He parroted.

“... Never heard...”

“... of it.”

“Of course you haven’t... sorry, yeah, it’s a children hospital... Tinkerbell took me there.”

“*Tinkerbell*... The woman from the charity store? ...”, questioned Nibs raising an eye brow suspiciously at him, “... does Gwendolyn know you’re seeing another woman?”

“That explains why...”

“... there’s no wedding bells.”

“It’s not like that... there is no *other* woman... Tinkerbell works there.” He explained.

“You seem to be seeing an awful lot of her lately if I may be so bold to say.” Suggested Nibs.

“I wouldn’t say *two times* was a lot... besides, you know I only have eyes for Gwendolyn.”

“Hmm.” Pondered Nibs.

“What would this laboring...”

“...actually involved...”

“... precisely?”

“Their backyard is overgrown and could do with a bit of a tidy up... so I offered my services... you don’t have to come... I completely understand... I just thought you lot might like a break from all this... *excitement*.” Gesturing the hall.

“Let’s not be too hasty...” began Sam.

“... Ginger cake...”

“... and tea you say?”

“That’s what *Sister* Maria said, she wouldn’t lie, would she?”

“Count me in...”, said Sam.

“...me too.” Said Curly not to be left out.

“Nibs?” Asked Peter seeing him sink behind the newspaper as though he were trying to hide.

“(Tut-sigh_) ...”, lowering the paper, “... you know my hands would blister at the very *thought* of manual labor.”

“Perhaps you could *supervise*.”

“You make an interesting proposition... *Hmm*... it will give me an opportunity to meet this *Tinkerbell* of yours.”

“That’s great, I’m sure you two will hit it off... I’ll send you the address... Saturday 8:00AM sharp.” Informed Peter.

“In the morning? ...”

“...is it light then? ...”

“... I’ve heard rumors it is...”

“...what’s the dress code...”

“... For such *things*?”

“I believe it’s causal... dress down, not up.” Informed Peter.

“Do we have...”

“... any dress downs? ...”

“... I’ll call mother...”

“... She’ll know...”

“...Good idea.”

“Nibs?”

“I’ll be fine... I’m sure I can find something *suitable* for the *occasion*.”

“Fantastic, I knew you guys would not let me down.” Peter grinned.

Nibs retreated behind the newspaper as the twins sat back and speculated about the upcoming adventure and the prospect of ginger cake and tea. Flames flickered and danced. Re-capturing Peter’s imagination. It all seemed too easy. Hoping it was all not just a dream and he would awaken and find himself being poked by Gwendolyn. Grimacing as he ran hand over his chest at the thought.

Judge Tootles grunted and snorted. A nostril twitched as if he could smell ginger cake. Heads turn to see the Judge twitching. Expecting his eyes to open at any moment. Only to succumb to the brandy and nod off.

“So close...”, remarked Nibs, “... has anyone actually seen him with awake?”

“There was a rumor... years ago...”, said Peter, “... but it was only a rumor.”

He checks the time.

“Okay gentlemen... I must be off. Archie waits for no-one.” Pulling himself from the comfy chair.

“Give him my regards.”

“Saturday, don’t forget.” Warned Peter.

“I won’t... I like work... I can watch it for hours.” Jested Nibs.

Peter makes his way to the foyer, only to catch sight of Hook entering, with the club’s chairman. Slivers.

“*What’s Hook doing here?*” Stepping into a darkened recess to avoid being seen.

The men pass unaware of his presence.

“This way Captain if you please.” Said Slivers leading the way.

Reaching for his mobile, Peter sends Nibs a text message...

Peter: ‘Hook has arrived with a Slivers.

Find out what you can.’

Nibs: ‘A gentleman never kisses and tells.’

Peter: ‘You’re no gentleman.’

Nibs: ‘They’re sitting behind me’

Peter: ‘I expect a full report Saturday.’

Nibs: ‘Over and out.’

“Welcome, welcome Captain, have a seat, make yourself at home... A drink perhaps. On the house as you say.” Offered Slivers.

“Brandy would be nice, thank you William.”

“Two brandies please.” Slivers raises a hand to a waiter gesturing two drinks.

“It’s a grand place you have here.” Inspecting the spacious hall.

Plumb colored carpeted floors. Gilded framed portraits of deceased members hanging from it walls.

“We like to think so, what?” Acknowledged Slivers.

Just then a man dressed in a white uniform arrived balancing a silver tray with two bulbous glasses. Slivers waited for the man to leave. Hook raises his glass to propose a quiet toast.

“To my membership.” Hoping he had not spoken too soon.

“To yourself membership... I’m sure it’s just a formality... moreso once you acquire that property you were speaking of... where was it again?”

“Kensington.” Hook name drops.

“Really?” Slivers’ eyebrows raise enviously.

“Hm... I can’t go into details obviously, it’s all hush-hush while we’re negotiating with the buyer.” Lied Hook.

“Of course, of course... I understand completely.”

Hook sits back taking a swallow of the smooth brandy feeling it to burn to his stomach.

“And what is your intention for the property?”

“I’ll bulldoze it and build luxury apartments of course.”

“Of course.” Parrots Slivers.

“Keep the riffraff out... *If you know what I mean...* Bad form if you ask me.”

“Indeed.”

“Current tenants behind on their rent. They have to go.”

“Of course, of course... what is the country coming to?” Questioned Slivers.

“Exactly William. It’s time we got this country back... make England great again, I say. (*sniff*).”

“I’ll drink to that...” Slivers raises his glass, “... *To the King!*”

“*To the King! ...*”, affirms Hook, “... so tell me...” leaning forward and speaking softly, “... Pan... Peter Pan.”

“I know of him. Is there a problem?” Slivers inquired inquisitively.

Peter’s name catches Nib’s attention.

“If I may be so bold ask...”

“What is it Captain, you can speak your mind freely here, you are among friends here.”

“How is it that Pan, with not an ounce of sweat to his name is a member... and a man like me, must jump through hoops to get in?”

“That is a fair question Captain, and many members share your view, I among them...” Slivers leaned back in the chair and contemplated how to answer without offending Hook.

Drawing on a fat cigar before blowing a cloud of smoke into the air like a steam train. He may be chairman, but even his hands were bound by the indefeasible rules that governed the Royal and Ancient Gentleman’s Club.

“...Our charter states that membership can be passed from father to son, so long as they maintain a minimum level of... *wealth* as it were. Pan’s Father was a member, as was his father before him... isn’t Pan courting your daughter?” Asked Slivers confused by the captain’s distaste of for the lad.

“Oh I wouldn’t say, *courting* as such... They’re more like, *good friends*.” Lied Hook.

‘(*Cough-splutter*).’ The comment causes Nibs to choke on the drink just as he was about to swallow.

“You know the young ones these days Captain, they spend it quicker than they earn it. I am sure Pan is draining his trust account like a leaking boat. The Club holds an audit from time to time... I am sure we could arrange one to weed out the unworthy... excuse the pun (*chuckle*).” Chuckled Sliver to himself.

“Very good (*chuckle*).” Stroked Hook.

“Any member who fails to meet the minimum requirement of one million pounds net worth... will be struck from the register... no exceptions... rules are rules.”

“Precisely.” Hook nodded in agreement.

“It’s only a matter of time before your precious Peter Pan is gone.”

“I’ll drink to that.” Raising his glass to Slivers...

Busy Bee

“Are you sure...”

“... this is the place...”

“... It’s the address...”

“... Peter gave us...”

“... Neverland...” Pointing the plaque on the concrete gate pillar.

“... must be the place...”

“... I hope we’re not late.”

Just then a black cab pulls to the curb beside them, and Nibs climbs out looking rather dapper.

As though he were out on a Saturday stroll.

“Nibs...”

“... We didn’t expect...”

“... to see you here...”

“... you’re a little over dressed...”

“... don’t you think?”

“Me work? Don’t be silly. I’m here out of curiosity... I wish to meet this *vixen... Tinkerbell...* and put an end to this *ridiculous* affair.”

“Affair? Oh dear...”

“... Peter is having an affair?...”

“... what about Gwendolyn? ...”

“... they had a good run...”

“... what about ginger cake?”

“There’ll be no ginger cake gentlemen...” Informed Nibs, “... best take yourself home.”

“But we were rather...”

“...looking forward to it.”

Just then Sister Maria appears at the front door and sees the three young men standing on the sidewalk chatting to themselves.

“Ah there you are... Peter said you would come... come, come... don’t tardy. This way!” She chides them like naughty school boys.

The twins followed obediently. Nibs trailed behind, keeping a distance as if it were some sort of trap.

“Peter is out the back... follow me.” Informed Sister Maria.

“But I really don’t think...” Nibs began to say only to be cut short.

“Ah_ *you* must be Nibs?” Sister Maria squints her eyes at him, “... Peter did *warn* me you may prove difficult.”

“*Difficult?* ...” Questioned Nibs, “... I really must protest...”

“*Sh!* ... put these on...”, holding out a pair of folded overalls, “... you can change in there...”, pointing to a vacant room, “... off you go then.”

It seemed he had no choice. Fearing what she would do if he did not obey. He finds himself inside a room with a bed surrounded by monitors and medical equipment. The smell of disinfectant roused beneath his nose. He thinks about fleeing. But his feet would not move. It

was as if they were stuck to the floor. Then hears a giggle behind him. Turning about he sees no one.

Unfolding the overalls out before him.

“*Damn.*” They were a perfect fit.

Slipping off shoes he stepped into them. Brushing himself down as if he were about to go out for the evening. Catching his reflection in a mirror sees an the oddly dressed gentleman. Unsure what to make of the anomalous aberration staring back at him.

‘*Tap-tap.*’ A knock sounded at the door.

The door opens expecting to see the Sister only to discover a young woman standing before him.

“You must be Nibs.”

“So people keep informing me.”

“And you are?” Inquired Nibs.

“*Tinkerbell...* but you can call me Tinkerbell.” She smiled handing him a pair of black gumboots.

“So *you’re* Tinkerbell.” Grinned Nibs taken back by her beauty.

“Hurry up now... the others have already started... you don’t want to miss out on all the fun.”

Perhaps he would stick around. He could see why Peter had become smitten by the woman. And followed her along the hall way, that seemed to go on forever and ever. Eventually coming to the back door that opened to the rear yard overseeing a yard overrun with weeds and long grass.

“Oh dear, I see what Peter meant by over grown.” Said Nibs.

“You may need these.” Tinkerbell holds out a pair of soft leather gloves.

“How did you know?”

Tinkerbell just giggled. It was the same giggle he had heard from the bedroom. Turning around, only to discover she had vanished.

“Where you go?” Looking about for her.

“Nibs you made it. I didn’t think you would come.” Said Peter approaching him.

“Oh ye have little faith Peter.” Nibs lied.

“You’ve met Tinkerbell. Isn’t she enchanting?”

“I can see why you have fallen for her... but it really must end Peter... think of Gwendolyn.”

“It’s not like that Nibs. You have it all wrong. I’m madly in love with Gwendolyn... Tinkerbell is just a *friend...*”, said Peter, “... she’s all your old chap... I think she *fancies* you.”

“You do?”

“I do... play your cards right, I think you’ll be in with a chance.”

“*Really?* ... Hmm.” Looking to the back door to see her standing there smiling at him.

“How did you get on with Hook and Slivers...”, Peter asked, “... Nibs?”

“What? Oh that... Yeah, no, ah...”, becoming flustered and tongue tied, “... something about Hook becoming a member of the club.”

“Hook? Becoming a member?”

“It all hinges on him buying a property somewhere... Your name came up.”

“My name?... What did they say?”

“Hook wants you out of the club... Slivers said something about an audit of each members’ funds.”

“An audit?”

“You okay in that department?”

“As far as I know I am... I will need to talk with my accountant.”

The conversation is cut short by Sister Maria.

“No time for idle chatter boys... there is work to be done... chop-chop.” Clapping her hands.

“Sorry Sister...”, apologized Nibs, “... what would you like me to do?”

“You can begin over there...”, pointing to a corner of the yard sprawling with weeds, “... you’ll need this”, handing him a spade.

Nibs inspected the spade as though it were a foreign object then to Sam and Curly thrusting their spades into the undergrowth.

“How hard can it be?” Marching away like an infantryman to do battle.

The afternoon sun beat down on the four young men. Each toiling at their own pace. Leather gloves did little to protect soft uncalloused hands. Muscles straining as sweat dripped from their foreheads. Sam and Curly had gotten into a race as to who would finish early and be first to the ginger cake.

Only to have Sister Maria assign them another task.

“Hello.” A small voice spoke.

Nibs stopped what he was doing and sees a small child holding out a glass of water to him.

“Is that for me?”

The girl nodded as though too shy to speak.

“And who might you be?”

“Wendy?”

“It’s nice to meet you, Wendy. I’m Nibs.”

“Nibs... (*giggles*) ... That’s a funny name.”

“It is, isn’t it? My parents gave it to me... but I like it.”

“I like it too.”

“Would you like to help me? I have a very stubborn weed here and I need someone *very* strong to pull it out... think you can do that?”

Wendy nodded excitedly, checking that Sister Maria was not about. Taking hold of the towering plant by the stem pulled on it. Nibs dug at the roots decapitating it beneath the soil.

Sending Wendy flying backwards squealing.

“*Ekh_!! ... (Giggle!)*”

Phillip sitting on the top step catches sight of Wendy falling backwards and squealed with laughter.

“You, okay? ... and who might that scallywag be?” Asked Nibs helping her up.

“That’s Phillip... he my *best* friend, in the whole world.”

“In the whole world? ... maybe he would like to help pull out some weeds.”

“He’s not allowed to, he’s... sick.” Informed Wendy.

“That’s no good.”

Wendy’s scream draws the attention of Sister Maria.

“Don’t move. There’s a monster at the door.” Warned Nibs.

Wendy giggled quietly, trying desperately not to move lest she attracted the Sister's reprimand.

The monster returned inside.

"That was close." Said Nibs.

"You're funny... (*giggling*)."

"Where are your parents?" He asked looking about for them.

"Dead." Wendy said coldly.

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"That's okay, it happened a long time ago... when I was a baby."

"What are you doing here?"

"I live here."

"It's a hospital, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is."

"Are you ill? ... You don't look ill."

"I am, on the inside... but I'll be going home soon." Wendy beamed a smile.

"That's good." Smiled Nibs.

"Wendy, there you are." Said Tinkerbell materializing behind Nibs.

"Why don't you come inside and help me with the tea and ginger cake for the men?"

"Bye Nibs."

"Bye Wendy."

He watches her walk away. Taking Phillip by the hand they go inside.

A stack of weeds lay piled in the center of the yard. Four weary men stripped of overalls sat on the back steps. Relieved the day was over. The sun hung on the horizon, refusing to move. Much like the men. Happy just to sit there and take in the sight of the cleared yard.

"Job well done boys. Thanks." Said Peter.

"I haven't had..."

"... so much fun..."

"... for a long time." Said the twins.

"How are you feeling Nibs?"

"Surprising well (*sigh*)." Relieved it was over.

'*Squeak... Squeak... Squeak...*' Sounded an approaching trolley pushed along by Wendy.

On top a pot of steaming tea, cups and a ginger cake cut into pieces.

"Tea anyone?" Asked Tinkerbell.

"Yes pleased!" Cried out the twins in unison.

"How's the paperwork coming along for *that* property.... *Neverland*." Hook spat the name into the phone.

"These things take time Captain..." Replied Murtagh on the other end, "... there are procedures we have to follow."

"I don't give a damn about procedures Murtagh, that's what I pay you for... you want to get paid don't you, hm?"

"Of course, of course Captain... leave it to me, they'll be served with an eviction notice very shortly and then they'll have three months to come up with the arrears..."

"Three months?" Protested Hook.

“Like I say Captain ... These things take time... There is no way they’ll be able raise the money in three months...” Murtagh pauses, “... after that I’ll place an advert in some rotten borough and within weeks it will be yours... we can settle my account separately of course.”

“Of course, of course... very well then Murtagh, keep me posted. I’ll have Mister Smee and his gentlemen friends see to the tenants after that.”

“As you please Captain.”

Hook slammed down the hand piece of the phone.

“Goodbye Captain.” Responded Murtagh hearing the phone go dead.

Then dialed a short number and waited. Tapping a pen on the desk to a tune in his head.

“Accounts?... Murtagh here, Property Department... yes, yes, that’s right... I need to see the latest statement of account for the Neverland property in Kensington... I don’t know the number of it, you figure it out... how many Neverlands can there be? ... I want it on my desk by this afternoon, got it? ... right then, good day.” It was Murtagh’s turn now to slam down the phone in frustration.

In front of him on the desk, sat the thick red folder. As he opened it, a black and white photograph of a group of children fell onto his desk. Some in wheelchairs. Some in beds. Pangs of guilt prick at his conscience. The devil flashed a vision of an island in the sun. A seductive warm glow comes over him.

And he closes the file on the long since dead children...

Gilbert

The twins and Nibs sat rigor-mortis in their seat. The slightest of movements would send a spasm of pain through their bodies.

Brandy their only relief.

“Remind me never...”

“... to volunteer...”

“... for anything...”

“... ever again.”

“I’ll second that.” Said Nibs examining his hands.

“We’ve heard Slivers...”

“... is on the warpath.”

“Warpath?” Questioned Nibs.

“Rumor has it...”

“... he’s looking into ...”

“... everyone’s Balance Sheets.”

“Really?” Thinking back to the discussion he had overheard.

“We heard it...”

“... from a liable source...”

“... a full and ...”

“... thorough audit...”

“... no one will exempt...”

“... not even...”

“... Judge Tootles.”

Then as if he had heard his name, Tootles sniffed the air, snorted twice. Then continued quietly snoring. A rotund belly raises and lowers. A cigar smolders between two stubby fingers sending a trail of vapors into the air forming a cloud above his head. A glass of amber brandy sits on the side table. Neither half empty. Nor half full. His lips moving, as if he were in conversation with someone or something, only he could see.

Nibs wondered if he would become like that when he got old.

“I wonder what...”

“... brought the audit on?”

Breaking Nibs’ ponderance of the Judge.

“I suspect it has something to do with Hook and Slivers wanting to get rid of Peter.”

Warned Nibs.

“Peter? ...”

“... but why?...”

“... he’s a decent chap...”

“... a good stick.”

“I hope *you* boys will be, okay ... every man for himself.” Warned Nibs.

A worried look comes over the twins faces as they stare blankly at each other. Frantically they reach for mobiles and sore thumbs swipe screens to check the balance of their bank accounts.

“Good God...” Panicked Curly.

“What is it?” Asked Nibs.

“...I’m down to my last five million...” Exclaimed Sam.

“... me too...” Echoed Curly.

“... I hope that’s enough.”

“*Five million? (gulp)... each?*” Choked Nibs surprised by the amounts.

“How about you Nibs?” Asked Sam.

“I’ll be fine... it’s Peter we should be worried about... I wonder what’s keeping him.”

Sitting upright and immediately regretting it, “...*ow!*”

“You okay Nibs?”

“Just a tad sore, ah.” Settling back contemplating taking a sip of brandy.

His legs hurt. His arms hurt. His back hurt. It would have been easier to name what did not hurt.

“Who was that child...”

“... you were talking to?” Asked the twins.

Nibs recalled the playful lass, pulling on the oversized weed and tumbling backwards in a fit of laughter. A grin formed in the corner of his mouth, the only part of him that did not hurt to move.

“Wendy, I believe... A delightful little creature... as was Tinkerbell... I *may* have ah... *misjudged* her.”

“So Peter is...”

“... not having an affair?”

“I’m afraid not gentlemen... *your* accusations of him have been proven false.”

“But we...”

“... you said...” The twins stuttered.

“No need to *apologize* gentlemen... lucky I was there to quench the illicit intentions of the vixen desires and defend Gwendolyn’s honor.”

“Bravo Nibs.” Said Curly.

Suddenly Nibs feels a short sharp kick to the shins.

“*Ow!*” Cried Nibs, looking to the twins opposite, but too far away to have kicked him.

Sitting upright, immediately regretted the decision.

“*Ah_!*” He groaned again.

“You okay Nibs...”

“... you look like...”

“... you’re in pain.”

“Nothing that another brandy won’t fix.” Slowly to raise an arm to the waiter.

“I thought she was ...

“... rather charming.”

“Looks can be deceiving gentlemen... women are cunning creatures.”

“She didn’t...”

“... look cunning...”

“... she looked...”

“...rather angelic.”

A faint giggle sounded behind the twins. They look over their shoulders but see no one.

“Did you...”

“... hear that?”

“Hear what?” Questioned Nibs curiously.

“A giggle...”

“... it sounded like...”

“... a woman.”

“Impossible... women are not allowed in the club... must be your imaginations.” Informed Nibs.

“We swear...”

“... we heard it.”

“Must be the wind.” Informed Nibs looking to the rattling windows.

“Of course...”

“... silly us.”

“Well, well... speak of the devil.” Said Nibs seeing Peter walking rather gingerly.

“Gentlemen... *ow...*”, acknowledged Peter lowering himself into the chair, “... *ah_ (sigh)*.” Sighing as though he were lowering himself into a hot bath.

Unsure he would ever be able to lift himself from it.

“We know the feeling old chap... I’d raise my arm to order you a drink, but I can’t. Its every man for himself I’m afraid.”

“You did a terrific job today gentlemen... thank you and well done...”, toasted Peter lifting his glass, “... *ah!*”

“Have you...”

“... heard the news?”

“What news?” Asked Peter anxiously.

“Slivers is having...”

“... an audit.”

“This is Hook’s doing... him and Slivers are up to something.” Remarked Peter.

“You will be, okay?” Asked Nibs.

“I don’t know... I’ll have to check... you lot?”

“Don’t worry about these two... besides, the annual general meeting isn’t for a few months... plenty of time to get your affairs in order.”

“I didn’t know Hook was interested joining... I’m sure Gwendolyn would have told me.”

“You have a spy in the enemy camp Peter.” Suggested Nibs.

“Perhaps I’ll ask her next time I see her.”

“You do that... oh, just to let know... I was thinking of asking that Tinkerbelle woman out for a drink... now that your *relationship* is over with her.”

“There was *never* a *relationship*...”, corrected Peter, “... we’re just good friends.”

“Just be thankful...”

“... the affair ended...”

“... when it did...”

“... it would never...”

“... have worked...”

“... think of Gwendolyn.” Said the twins.

“You two are impossible...”, returning his attention to Nibs, “... I thought you didn’t like the woman?”

“She has a certain... *charm* about her.”

“Good luck with that.”

“A gentleman never needs *luck* Peter... speaking of charming creatures... what’s with the little girl... Wendy?”

“She’s a patient there... I haven’t really asked.”

“What sort of hospital allows its patients to roam free like that.” Asked Nibs.

“They aren’t *chickens* Nibs.”

“Shouldn’t she be in bed recuperating, or something.”

“Maybe she’s feeling better.”

“*Hm...* I suppose.” Reflected Nibs.

“Every muscle in my body aches.” Chimed Peter.

“You brought upon yourself Peter... volunteering us... what were you thinking?”

“It seemed effortless at the time.”

“It always does... look at these beautiful hands... *ruined*.” Complained Nibs holding out his hands. Fingers covering blisters.

The twins would have commented but they had fallen asleep. Basking in the warm glow of the fire. Heads reclined back on the sofa.

“You should visit her at the charity store... when you’re up to it of course.”

“I might just do that Peter.”

“She has a sister.”

“*Really?*”

“Tiger Lily, I believe her name is.”

“Is she attractive?”

“I never really noticed.” Said Peter.

Suddenly Peter receives a swift sharp kick in the shins from an invisible source.

“*Ow!*”

“I know the feeling... old chap.” Said Nibs feeling every muscle in his body aching...

‘*Beep! - Beep! - Beep!* -’ Squawked a reversing lorry crawling on all fours into the rear yard of the Jolly Roger.

Hazard lights blinked intermittently. Smee stood at the opening of the storeroom guiding the lorry back. Thick clouds shroud the moon and stars above. Moths flutter about a solitary bulb above the storeroom door. Meekly illuminating the darkness of the yard.

“That’s far enough.” Smee called out raising a hand to halt the lorry in its tracks.

Brakes catch and hiss. The engine falls silent. Hook peered into the street before securing the wooden gates with a heavy chain and padlock.

“Kill the lights.”

Sending the yard into near darkness. A shaved bald-headed Filipino man, his temples tattooed with lightning bolts, climbed down from the driver’s cab. Appearing weary from the twenty-four-hour haul from Italy.

“Any problems Gilbert?” Smee asked.

“No Mister Smee. None.” Pushing up two metal bars on the container doors, squeaking as they opened.

‘*Bang! Bang!*’ Doors slam against the metal sides, ringing out like gun shots.

“Let’s not wake the neighborhood gentlemen, shall we?” Warned Hook standing in the shadows.

“Sorry Captain.” Said Gilbert.

“Right let’s get this lot unloaded before the Old-Bill comes snooping.” Instructed Hook, standing back.

Smee rolled up his sleeves. Gilbert slashed the side of a cellophane wrapped pallet with a flick knife peeling away layers of plastic wrap. Smee and Gilbert labored unloading cartons

containing bottles. Hook stood by marking the boxes from the manifest. Boxes of illicit cigarettes and liquor. Supported by sham invoices from sham foreign suppliers to confuse any investigator that came knocking. It was almost the perfect crime. Almost. The scheme was only as good as the weakest link.

Hook eyed Gilbert suspiciously.

It was all a little too late to choose one's bed fellows. Smee and Hook went back a long way. Long before the Jolly Roger. They had dirt, and blood under their nails. If Smee trusted Gilbert, that was good enough. After some time, the last box was handed down to Smee. Strong arms take it and carry it inside the storeroom.

Gilbert jumps down and closes the container doors.

'Bang-bang... clank-clank.' Doors close and latches latch.

"That's all of it Captain..." Gilbert informed, "... all accounted for?"

"It's all their Gilbert... good form." Hook scribble on the manifest.

Stabbing it with a pen.

Gilbert waited anxiously as though the Captain had forgotten something.

"Oh yes, of course." Retrieving a thick brown envelope from within his jacket.

Gilbert quickly pockets it from sight, knowing full well its contents.

"Thank you, Captain. Until next time." Giving him a nod, climbs into the cab of the lorry.

The metal beast awakens, coughing carbonized phlegm into the night air. Brakes squeal their release and the lorry slowly crept forward, turning onto the street. Hook watched it take another turn and disappear from view. Peering into the darkness seeing parked cars line the street. Then a suspicious looking white van.

Incongruent to the vehicles about it.

"Everything alright Captain?" Noticing him staring into the street.

"It's nothing Mister Smee." Dismissing the van.

Perhaps he was just being paranoid, securing the gates. Giving the chain a heavy tug for good measure,

"Nothing I can't handle Mister Smee."

"Aye-aye Captain if you say so... I can lock up... Why don't you get yourself home."

"Good form Mister Smee. I will see you tomorrow." About to leave.

Standing beneath the bulb, Smee had a feeling he was being watched. He looked at the mounted surveillance camera on the wall. A single glass eye stared back at him. Stepping inside the storeroom closes the door behind him and secures several deadbolts.

The bulb falls dead. Darkness fills the void of the yard.

"You think he saw us sir." An officer asked.

"Not sure... You couldn't have chosen a bigger van?" A detective shook his head in disbelief.

"It was the only one available." Said Harris.

"You get the plate number of the truck Alpes?" The detective asked another officer.

"Sure did, running them through Inter-Pol as we speak sir"

"And?" Barked the Brown inpatient for answers.

"I'm still waiting... it is the middle of the night sir."

"Chase that up ASAP, I want this written up and on my desk by tomorrow morning."

"Yes sir."

"Okay, let's get this oversized white elephant out of here." ...

Sleep Over

“What are we doing today?” Asked Gwendolyn in a chirpy voice stepping into the bedroom, a towel wrapped about her head.

“I’m staying right here... I can’t move a muscle... *Ah.*”

“Was I that good last night?”

“As wonderful as you are my darling Gwendolyn... *ah...* the credit must go to Tinkerbell.”

“Hm... You are seeing an awful lot of her lately Peter... all I hear is Tinkerbell *this* and Tinkerbell *that*... should I be concerned Peter?”

“Don’t be silly, come back to bed Gwendolyn.” He pleaded, pulling the sheet over his head to shield himself from the morning light streaming through the bedroom window.

Gwendolyn pulled the sheet away and stood over him. He pulls her onto the bed on top of him.

“*Ekh!*” She cried out resisting his clutches halfheartedly.

“*(Sigh)*... you smell nice...”, inhaling her fragrance, “... I could lay here forever with you.”

“Not if my father has his way.”

The mention of her father was like a cold shower. Thoughts of a sensual romantic romp become flaccid.

“I really wish you wouldn’t mention your father, you know the effect it has on me.”

“Maybe I should mention him more often then. You’re going to have to face him one day.”

“What do you mean?”

“When you ask for my hand.”

“People still do that these days?”

“Of course.”

“Can’t we just elope?”

“What about the wedding? ... The guests, the dress... the cake!”

“What was I thinking?” Pulling the sheet back over their heads.

He pulls away her towel with little resistance and he kissed her. Hands begin to wonder.

Gwendolyn pushes the sheet away as though to gasp for air.

“This *Tinkerbell* woman...” Gwendolyn begins to question.

Another cold shower extinguished his flickering flame.

“What about her?” He asked knowing where the questioning was headed.

“Is she pretty?”

“Not as petty as you? ...”, he replied, before feeling a sharp kick on the shin, “... *ow!* Why did you kick me?”

“It wasn’t me?” Said Gwendolyn.

“*Aah_.*” Peter groaned rubbing his leg.

“Maybe you pulled a muscle.”

“Now there’s a thought.” He grinned.

“I’m beginning to suspect you’re having an affair.”

“What is it with everyone thinking I’m having an affair?”

“Oh, so others think this too... *Oh* Peter... how could you.” Pushing him away, laying with her back to him.

“Oh Gwendolyn, don’t be silly... I love you, and only you...” He kissed her shoulder softly and rubbed it.

“Don’t rub it away.”

“I’m not... I’m rubbing it in.” Kissing her again.

Gwendolyn rolled over, faces almost touching. She stared into his eyes.

“I’m sorry if I’ve been distant... the past few weeks have been quite *odd*...”

“*Odd?*”

“Yeah, you know... odd, peculiar, strangle... *funny*.”

“I’m quite familiar with the term Peter.”

“Well, ever since I bought the brooch...”

“I *love* that brooch...” Grinning like a Cheshire cat.

“I know you do.” Kissing the tip of her nose.

“You were saying?”

“About what?”

“About feeling *odd*.”

“Oh yeah...”, regathering his thoughts, “... until I stumbled upon Tinkerbelle’s store, I always felt something was missing from my life... a purpose.”

“Purpose? What are you talking about Peter?”

“What have I achieved with my life? ... Nothing... I want to be someone.”

“But you are someone... You’re Peter... Peter Pan.”

“I know that, but I feel there’s more to life than getting up and taking Archie for a walk... sorry Archie...”, peering over to the terrier sleeping on the chair opposite not paying the humans any attention.

“I haven’t worked a day in my life and the day I did... I pulled every muscle in my body... *aah*...”, he groaned, “... I feel *alive* Gwendolyn... and it’s all because of her... and your *brooch*.” He quickly qualified.

“I *love* that brooch...”, she grinned, “... it must have cost a small fortune.”

“You could say that.”

She kissed him.

“Then there’s Wendy.”

“Oh dear... more women?” Gwendolyn pushes herself away from the man she thought she knew.

“It’s not like that... she’s a little girl...”, then realizes what he had just said, “...a patient at this children’s hospital... where Tinkerbelle helps out there when not at the store.”

“She’s a busy woman this *Tinkerbelle* of yours.”

“You should meet her.”

“If you think we’re ready for that in our relationship.”

“I believe we are.”

“Where is this store?”

“Tennapenny, on Portobello... You can’t miss it... it has a bright red store front. Makes all the others seem quite dull if you ask me... I know she would love to meet you.”

“I’m sure she would... I can size up the competition.”

“She has a sister named Tiger Lily... I think.”

“You have been busy haven’t you Peter... no wonder you’re so tired.”

“I only have energy for you Gwendolyn.” Moving closer to kiss her.

Pulling the sheet up over their heads.

A giggle sounded from Archie’s direction.

“Did you hear that?” Asked Peter peering above the covers seeing Archie whimpering on his back as though he were having his belly stroked.

“Hear what?” Asked Gwendolyn sticking her head up like a meerkat.

“Nothing... must have been Archie... *hm.*”

The lovers disappear beneath the sheet again to create giggles of their own...

Eviction Notice

Murtagh stabbed at keys of the typewriter. A cigarette smoldered from the corner of his mouth whiffing a thin trail of smoke into the air.

'Tap-tap-tap... tap-tap-tap-tap-tap... zing... ding! ... clunk!'

Shoving the return carriage again back from whence it had come.

Eyes squint at a form held captive. Nostrils snarl at the tetchy smoke whiffed over his face. Suddenly the door opened, and a youthful head poked itself through the opening sniffing the air.

"You can't smoke in here." A meek voice squeaked.

"Piss off! It's my office I can do whatever I want." Snarled Murtagh at the scrawny pale face clerk.

"There are regulations."

"To hell with regulations... What's your name? Hm?"

The question is met with silence. Fearful of what Murtagh could do.

"That's what I thought, now bugger off." He warned the underling.

The door closes leaving Murtagh alone in the large dark office. He stared back at the form and the empty dotted line that required completed. Looking to a file on his desk, and a statement of arrears.

It did not paint a pleasant picture.

'Tap-tap-tap... tap-tap-tap... zing... ding! ... clunk!'

Filling barren dotted lines with dates and amounts all the while humming an indiscernible tune to himself that only he could recognize.

'Tap-tap-tap... tap-tap-tap... zing... ding! ... clunk!'

The schedule of unpaid amounts went on and on, page after page. The council had carried the place far too long. He shook his head in disgust. Eyes dart across the page. Satisfied he had not missed anything pulled the form from the carriage screaming and examined it as though it were a piece of fine art. Drawing on the last of the cigarette blew the smoke over the form as though to baptize it. Stubbing the cigarette in an ashtray laying it to rest among the other burnt buckled butts.

"That should keep the Captain happy." Raising a corner of his mouth to grin.

Then placed a large stamp diagonally across the middle of the page stating clearly in large red capital letters ...

EVICITION NOTICE

At the bottom Murtagh scrawled what could have been a signature. Stamping the notice with an official council seal. Carefully peeling away the carbonized copy. Placing it to one size. Carefully folding the original and fitting it neatly into an envelope to await delivery. There were procedures that needed to be followed. A time table to be adhered to before a property could be pulled from beneath a delinquent tenant.

The council was not totally heartless.

Murtagh stared at the unfortunate recipient's name through the wax paper window of the and grinned...

NEVERLAND

Then wondered if he should deliver the letter himself but decided best to distance himself from the affair. Tossing the envelope into the *out-tray* on his desk. Neverland would be given three months to raise the million pounds of unpaid rent. In addition to a mirid of superfluous charges that had accumulated over the past decade. Should they be unable to come up with the money then the council's only option would be then to sell the property and recover what it could. Its hands were tied. There were procedures to follows.

Rules to adhere to.

As evicting officer in charge it was Murtagh's responsibility to advertise the property for sale. But where? Several places had served him well in the past. Places where no questions were asked. Wheels that would need greasing. Taking a box of business cards from the top drawer begins to flick through them like playing cards. Ejaculating cards to the left and the right. Scrutinizing each one carefully.

Who could he trust?

He reaches for the packet of cigarettes only to find it empty. He was sure there were several left after the last one. Examining the ash tray to count the dead butts.

He hears a mischievous giggle coming from behind him.

He swivels hoping to catch whoever was there. But sees no one. Perhaps the place really was haunted as the rumors suggested. He had heard stories from the lunchroom. Deceased managers that still walk the corridors at night. The thought sends chills over his body. Shaking of the eerie feeling off. Ghosts were the least of his concerns. His days at the council were numbered.

The ghosts could have the place to themselves.

Frustrated, he continued thumbing through the cards. The pack thinned to three cards. Spreading the final three cards in his hand and sees the card he was after. Staring at it as though it had triggered a memory. Tossing the other two with the others.

The card, absent of any decorative borders or elaborate embossing. As though the man in question was too tight to spend a penny more than was needed. A man who made Ebenezer Scrooge seem like a spend thrift...

Angus McTaggart

"Perfect." Uttered Murtagh.

MacTaggart owned a small printing press for a long-forgotten borough paper on the outskirts of Dundee. A place made famous for its jute, jam, and journalism.

A scent orange peel drifts under his nose.

'*Sniff-sniff.*' Nostrils twitch unable to place the scent and wonders where the smell was coming from.

He then hears the sound of someone biting into toast. He looks about as though the person was right behind him. But sees no one.

"How strange... (*sniff-sniff*)."

It had been a while since the two men had spoken and wondered if MacTaggart was even alive. Perhaps his son had taken over the business. Murtagh lifted the handset from its cradle and fingers stab at buttons.

And he waited for it to be answered...

Alpes and Harris arrive back to cluttered desks, in-trays overflowing with case files. Collapsing into chairs for a moment's reprieve.

"Remind me again why I joined the force?" Asked Harris.

The question goes unanswered.

"I have an idea." Said Alpes.

Clearing aside files on his desk in search of the phone and a number scribbled on a desk pad.

"Found it."

'Clunk-clunk-clunk... Clunk-clunk-clunk-clunk... Clunk-clunk-clunk-clunk.' Fingers punch at buttons on the phone.

"Who you calling?" Asked Harris curiously.

Again Alpes ignores the question as he waits for the call to be answered. It rang and it rang, and it rang, then rang again, and again. And wondered if it would ever be answered. Wondering if he had the right number.

"Click... Hello? ... Smith speaking." A voice answered at the other end.

"Eddie? ... Detective Alpes of London Met."

"How can I help detective?"

"We spoke the other day regarding a one Captain Hook."

"As I informed you detective his taxes are fully paid... His Majesty has no qualms with the Captain."

"Perhaps not, but we believe he has not been entirely forthcoming with his customs duty declarations... *contraband*, if you know what I mean." Informed Alpes, using the word as bait.

"I'm listening." Smith's ears prick up.

"If only we would like to look at his books, invoices, stock."

"Why don't you just get a search warrant?"

"We'd like to save that for later."

"So how can I help?"

"We thought something more... *subtler*... like a *routine* tax audit." Said Alpes.

"Hm... I don't know... It's highly regular... You say contraband?"

"Unpaid Custom's duty... we just need to see his records... sniff about his storeroom... ensure everything is in order... If you know what I mean."

"I'd have to ask my superior."

"I would rather fewer people knew about this the better."

"Of course, of course."

"One more thing."

"What's that?"

"We would like to accompany you... undercover so to speak... get a first-hand inspection of the storeroom."

"Of course, of course... send through the paperwork and I am sure we can organize something this end and get back to you with dates."

"Thanks Eddie. I'll inform my superior." Alpes hung up the phone.

"And?" Asked Harris.

"It's a go."

“Good... Write it up and inform Brown... ah_ (*yawn*)...” Instructed Harris yawning and stretching, “... Let’s just hope Hook doesn’t get wind of this.” ...

Mermaid Lagoon

Peter pushed Wendy along. Bicycle-like wheels crackle upon the gravel. Archie trotted alongside.

“I’m very clever you know.” Wendy informs Peter.

“Are you now?”

“And I’m only six.”

“Six? Then, just imagine, how clever you’ll be when you’re seven.”

“Oh no, I’ll think I’ll stay six *forever* and ever.”

“I wish we all could all stay six forever... but time catches up with all of us eventually.”

“Not me.”

“Hm, good luck with that.” Informed Peter.

Suddenly Archie rushes off as if someone had called him.

“Archie, come back here!”

But to no avail. Archie dived beneath a scrub. His rear end protruded with his tail wagging excitedly.

“Archie, get out of there!”

“(Giggle-giggle).” Giggled Wendy at the sight.

“Hurry up Archie, or you’ll be left behind.” He warned walking pass the wagging tail.

Inhaling the cool afternoon air, he thought he detected the scent of marmalade.

“*Sniff-sniff*... You smell that?” Asked Peter looking about for the source.

“Smell what?”

“Marmalade ... Orange marmalade... *Sniff-sniff*.”

“Giggle... you’re funny... do you have a girlfriend?” She asked taking Peter from surprise.

“I do actually... do you have a boyfriend?”

“Sort of.” She said shyly looking away from him.

“Really... and what his name?”

“It’s a *secret*... what’s you’re girlfriend’s name?”

“Gwendolyn.”

“Do you love her?”

“Of course?”

“Are you going to marry her?”

“I want to but...”

“But what?” Wendy looked up at him.

“It’s complicated.”

“*Complicated?*” Asked Wendy confused.

“It’s a grown-up thing... something you will never have to worry about.”

Wendy looks up at him as though he knew her secret.

“... because you are staying six forever... remember.” He reminded her.

“And *ever* and *ever* and *ever* and *ever*!”

“That’s a very long time.”

“Oh look! A *penny*! ...”, Wendy points to a coin laying on the path, “...oh, oh, oh... pick it up please!” She pleaded.

Peter bent down and picked up the dull looking penny weather by the elements and gave it a rub before handing it to her.

“*Nineteen-fifty-nine...*” making out the date and the head of Queen on the back of the coin,
 “... You collect them?” He asked.
 “I’m saving up for something.”
 “And what would that be?”
 “Something big.” Informed Wendy.
 “*Big?*”
 “Or that’s what Tinkerbelle told me.”
 “Well if anyone would know, she would know.”
 “Can you hold onto it for me.”
 “Of course...”, pocketing the coin, “... is this the place?”, coming to halt before a large lagoon with children darting about like a flight of swallows.
 “Not too close... there are Mermaids in there.” She warned him.
 “*Mermaids?*”
 “They only come out at *night* when no one is around... they *sing* to the *moon* you know.”
 “Oh, I didn’t know that... have you ever seen one?”
 “Once, over there, behind those reeds...”, pointing her finger, “... well, I thought it was mermaid.”
 “We have Archie to protect us... won’t you Archie? ... Archie? Where has he gone now? ... *Archie!*” Calling out for the terrier.
 “Maybe a *mermaid* got him?”
 “He’s too boney, they’d spit him out at the first bite... I think they would prefer something plumper... like a little girl.” Peter tickled her.
 “*Ekh!! Giggles.*” Squealed Wendy fidgeting in the seat.
 Archie came running on hearing the excited squeals.
 “Why don’t you go play while I rest my weary bones over the bench?”
 “Okay... come on Archie.” Summoned Wendy springing from the wheelchair.
 Archie followed snapping at her heels.
 “Not too close to the pond.” He cautioned her.

Peter is about to sit down when he discovers a pristine black bowler hat on the bench. Just sitting there. As though it were out for a walk by itself and had decided to rest a while.

“Mind if I join you old chap.” He asked the hat.

Hearing no objection he takes a seat beside the hat and looked about for the gentleman to whom it may belong. But sees no one. In the distance he hears children play. Wendy and Archie among them, chasing each other in circles. White swans glide gracefully over the surface of the lagoon trailing a wake behind them.

“*(Sniff-sniff).*” The smell of marmalade had returned.

Nostrils twitch to detect the source of the scent coming from no-where, yet as though it was right beside him.

“Can you smell that old chap? ...”, he asked the hat hoping he was not alone, “... Must be the pollen... *(Sniff-sniff).*”

“*Why is he talking to the hat?*” Asked Tiger Lily.

“*Perhaps they know each other?*” Said Tinkerbelle taking a bite of toast.

“*I’m going back to the store. I don’t know why you waste your time with him.*”

“*Wait and see sister. Wait and see.*”

Tiger Lily sparkled and disappeared into thin air.

Peter leaned back on the bench arms. Splaying his arms as though crucified and bathed in the mid-afternoon sun. The sound of children playing in the background.

Wendy crouched behind the tall reeds beside the bank of the lagoon. Children gather about chuckling in amusement.

“*Shh*.” She whispered for them to be quiet.

“What is it?” Asked one child.

“A monster.” Replied another.

“*Shh*...” Warned Wendy again, “... It’s coming.”

Small bubbles break the surface of the water. Followed by larger bubbles.

“I can’t see.” Said a child from the back.

“*Shh... They’ll hear us... and eat us.*” Cautioned Wendy.

The warning makes the children stand back a little.

Ripples radiant from an unknown source beneath the surface. Suddenly a black shag burst from the dark waters startling the children and causing them to run off away screaming in fright.

“It’s *only* a bird!” Said a child disappointedly and running away to play with the other children.

Leaving Wendy and Archie crouching behind the reeds. Eyes trained on the ripples racing behind the shag. The ripples got closer and closer. Until they were almost upon the bird. Sensing something was about to pounce it takes flight with a frantic flurry of flapping wings. Squawking as it took to the air. Lifting itself up just as an elongated silver creature leaped from the water. Long pale arms with crawl like fingers reach for the bird but fail to grasp it. The creature dives back beneath the surface growling in frustration. But not before catching sight of Wendy peering from behind the reeds.

Ripples now race towards her.

Archie barked at the charging creature. She struggles to hold the terrier back. All seemed lost when suddenly Tinkerbelle appeared from no-where standing between Wendy and the advancing creature. Lifting the terrier just as the creature raises from the water before them. Its body covered with silver scales. Its face that of a woman with long flowing fair hair. Lips part to reveal jagged teeth and a forked tongue darting in and out. Tasting the air of the furry canine morsel.

Archie growled at the creature.

Tinkerbelle stood silent. The creature swayed gracefully. Washing its tail side to side holding itself out of the water. Sounding a gurling-hissing sound. Its eyes now fixed on Wendy sheltering behind Tinkerbelle.

Tinkerbelle’s eyes grew large and furious, as though she could read the creature’s mind.

“*Be gone!*” She whispered softly blowing towards it.

Suddenly a tempest pushes the creature violently backwards and it splashes beneath the surface to escape. The wind dies away, and the surface of the lagoon became like glass again.

“You, okay?” Tinkerbelle asked.

“How’d you do that?”

“You believe in magic, don’t you?” She asked.

Wendy nodded. Eyes whelm with tears.

“Don’t be afraid.” She whispered leaning down kissing the top of her head.

And with it any memory of what had just happened.

“Come on Archie.” Wendy called out running off to join the other children playing in the distance.

The pond now serene. Idyllic. A dragon fly dances just above the surface unaware of the dangers that lay beneath. Its wings a shimmer in the sunlight. Then without warning, a thin forked tongue darts upward, and dragon fly was gone. It all happened in the blink of an eye.

Circular ripples mark a watery tombstone. Until they too were gone...

Lost and Found

Peter soaked up the last warm drops of the autumn sun. The sound of children squealing a melody in his ears. And was about to nod off when he thought he heard the sound of footsteps approaching him on the gravel path. Ears prick up as they got closer. Perhaps it was the man who had forgotten his hat. But the steps were too light. Too dainty he thought.

He waited for the footsteps to pass.

But the footsteps stopped. And a shadow came over him as though someone was blocking out the sun. He opened his eyes, squinting at the silhouetted figure before him.

Then smiled.

“Hey, what are you doing here?” He asked.

“Just out for a walk...”, seeing the black bowler hat beside him, “... yours?”

“No, no... someone must have left it behind. It’s a rather nice hat. I hope the gentleman comes back to collect it... I wonder if there is a *lost and found* for such things?”

“For hats?”

“And other things.”

“Such as?”

“Hand bags... Shoes...” Peter began to list.

“Children perhaps?”

“Children?”

“I was thinking of one in particular.” Waiting for the penny to drop.

“Oh_ Wendy... she’s ah_... over there playing with the other children.” Catching sight of her.

“Do you mind? ...” Asked Tinkerbell sitting down, “... Such a lovely day, isn’t it?”

“I was just thinking the same.”

A strange sensation comes over Peter and a shadow momentarily materializes beneath his seat.

“The days are getting shorter. All good things must come to an end.” Peter inhaled deeply, holding it before releasing it.

“Do they?” Asked Tinkerbell.

“Dust to dust they say.”

“Don’t you ever wonder if there is something beyond *this*.” Teased Tinkerbell.

“You live, you die, the lights go out. That’s it I’m afraid.”

“That’s rather bleak Peter... you liken your whole existence to that of a light bulb.”

“It all depends on the wattage... some lives glow bright, some dimly.”

“And yours Peter? How bright do you glow?”

“Ah, you have me there Tinkerbell... not very bright I’m afraid... perhaps thirty watts... and you?”

“Hm... I’m more of an eternal flame... as are you, Peter.”

“I don’t feel very eternal.”

“All this is temporal... as you say, nothing lasts forever... dust to dust.”

Suddenly a gust of wind lifted the hat and sends it flying. Peter hurried after it, catching it just as the wind died away as mysteriously as it had begun. Looking back at the bench noticed that Tinkerbell too had vanished.

“How does she do that?” Scratching his head.

Brushing the hat returned to the bench and placed it down. The breeze was now chasing the children. Tickling them. Causing them to squeal with laughter.

Leaning back, he resumed his afternoon nap.

But no sooner had he closed his eyes, he feels a creature pawing at his chest and a familiar wet tongue licking his face.

“Archie!” Fending off the terrier’s affection.

Wendy stands before him wearing the oversized bowler hat covering half her head. Looking very much like a lost cast member of the Addams family.

“Hello, and who might you be?”

“It’s me... Wendy!”

“Oh so it is... How do you do. What a lovely hat. Don’t suppose you know who it belongs to do you.”

“Mister Black.” Informed Wendy, walking about with her arms in front of her.

“And where might we find this *Mister Black* to return his hat?”

“Over there.” Pointed Wendy to a distant tree.

“Hmm... I don’t see him.”

Wendy climbed into the wheelchair and made herself comfortable.

“Tally Ho_” She cried pointing to the tree.

“If you insist... Tinkerbelle stopped by.”

“Oh... I didn’t see her.”

“Then she disappeared. Rather suddenly. Just like that.”

“She does that.” Informed Wendy.

“I know.”

Arriving beneath the tree, Peter looked about for the mysterious Mister Black no-where to be seen.

“Should we knock?” Asked Peter.

“Don’t be silly... there’s no door.” Corrected Wendy.

“Indeed... Perhaps if he had a mail box, we could leave it in there.”

“Don’t be silly... he doesn’t have a mail box.”

“What was I thinking... perhaps we should come back later when he is at home.” Suggested Peter about to turn about and head back.

“He’s home... Look.”

“I don’t see anyone.”

“Up there.” Pointing within the tree.

A blackbird peered down at the odd couple below, tilting its head as though it recognized the child.

‘*Chirp!*’ Mister Black welcomed the visitors’ baring gifts.

“Hello Mister Black... we have a something for you.” Informed Wendy holding out the hat.

“Oh I really don’t think we should...”, then noticed other black bowler hats peeped among the branches, “... are those hats up there?”

Wendy giggled with delight.

“You wouldn’t have anything to do with that would you?”

Wendy giggled again.

“Lift me up.” Instructed Wendy.

“Oh_ I don’t think we can reach that high... how did you get them up there before?”

“Tinkerbell lifted me.”

“Tinkerbell?”

“Don’t look down.” Informed Wendy.

“Okay, but I think it maybe too high for but of us.”

Wendy stands on the chair and Peter places hands about her waist.

“Oh my goodness, what did you have for breakfast?”

“(Giggle).” She giggled.

“You ready?” Lifting Wendy into the air, her arms reaching out.

“Higher.” She instructed.

“I really don’t think this is going to work.” Insisted Peter straining his arms higher.

Just then he feels a lightness come over his legs as though someone had taken him about the waist and was lifting him up.

“Don’t look down.” Warned Wendy.

Looking down was the last thing Peter wanted to do. He would get vertigo just standing on a chair. Higher and higher they climbed in among the tree branches.

“That’s high enough.” Said Wendy looking about for a suitable branch.

“(Chirp-chirp) ... Hello Wendy.” Said Mister Black.

“Hello Mister Black... another room for your home.”

The bird hopped along the branch then onto the brim of the hat to inspect the interior.

“(Chirp-chirp) ... the lining will have to go.”

“Oh course... there you go.” Shoving the hat securely between two branches.

“(Chirp-chirp) ... who is your friend?”

“Oh, how rude of me... this is my friend Peter... Peter met Mister Black.”

“(Chirp-chirp) ... Peter.”

“How do you do Mister Black... We really must be off now Wendy.” His legs dangling in thin air beneath him.

And upon that thought they descended. Feeling the earth beneath his feet and weight on his legs. Relieved to be back on the ground. Turning about hoping to see whoever had lifted him.

Only to see Archie.

“Woof!” Archie barked up to the tree to Mister Black peering down at him.

“What just happened? ...”, feeling sure that someone had lifted him, “... impossible.”

But Wendy was not listening. Exhausted, she had fallen asleep in the chair.

Taking the penny from his pocket Peter placed it in her hand and closed her fingers about it.

And pulled the blanket to her shoulders.

“Come one Archie, it’s time to go back.” He spoke softly.

There was a nip in the air. The seasons were changing...

MacTaggart

'Ring-ring... Ring -ring... Ring-ring...' An old phone rang.

A bald-headed old man, face and hands marred with black ink looked up from behind an whirring printing press thinking he heard a noise.

'Ring-ring... Ring -ring... Ring-ring...'

There it was again. Pressing an ear to the side of the press as though it were coming from the press. But hears nothing. Taking a spanner, taps the side of the metal beast. Only to hear sound to return.

'Ring-ring... Ring -ring... Ring-ring...'

"Hm." Dismissed the old man about to resume his work.

Moments later a voice hollered out to him.

"Daa_d!"

"Damn, blast it... Canny yo_u see_ I'm bu_sy laddie." He called back.

"Daa_d!"

"Fo_r the lov_e of Go_d, wha_t is it no_w laddie?" Slamming on a large red button to stifle the press.

The incessant whirring begins to fade.

"Daa_d, it's a ma_n from Lon_don, for yoo_u_."

"Lon_don ya' say_? ... Whoo_?"

"Aye_, says his name_ is Mur_tagh_."

The press came to a halt and silence filled the dimly lit workshop.

"Mur_tagh_, you say?" Recalling the name.

It had been a while. Whatever he wanted must be important enough to come fishing in distant ponds. Looking to the old press in desperate need of repairs. Repairs that cost money. Money that Murtagh could provide.

"Tell him I'll be there in a moment." If only to keep the Irishman waiting a little longer.

Wiping sweat and ink from his hands with a soiled rag. Satisfied, he had kept him waiting long enough. Strolled to the office. Unpaid invoices littered a desk. Shelves lined with dust covered folders. The old man collapsed into a chair that creaked under his weight.

Picking up the handpiece to hear heavy breathing on the other end.

"An_gus MacTagg_art speaking."

"Angus my old friend... How are you?"

"I canny complain... canny complain... and you?"

"Likewise I suppose... it's been a while since..."

"Aye it has... How canny I help yo_u Mister Mur_tagh?" Getting to the point.

"We have a property coming up for sale... If you know what I mean."

"Aye_... Is tha_t ri_gh_t?"

"A very large property."

"Go on Mister Mur_tagh_."

"One that requires your discretion, if you know what I mean."

"I think I do Mister Mur_tagh... you say... a large property... wha_t did yo_u haa_ve in mi_nd?"

"You still print local rags for the suburbs?"

"Of cou_rse I doo... though circulation is down... blasted internet."

“Good, good, the fewer that see it the better.”

“Leave it to me Mister Mur_tagh.”

“You’ll be rewarded for your discretion... your usual fee.”

“This is a much *big_ger* pro_perty you say?” The old man began to haggle.

“It is indeed Angus... would you consider another thousand?”

“Twoo.” Countered MacTaggart immediately.

“Hm, ah...” Hesitated Murtagh, pretending to sound flustered, “... *If you insist.*”

“I doo.”

“You have me over a barrel Angus. Done.” Lied Murtagh.

“Send me wha_t yoo_u want Mister Mur_tagh... leave the rest to me.”

“I knew I could count on you... good day to you Angus.”

“You too Mister Mur_tagh.”

The old man placed the handpiece to its cradle and turned to his son filling the doorway.

“Who was that?” He asked.

“That cro_oked-spined Murtagh, from London, looking to place a wee ad_vert in our loc_al pa_per.”

“Is he noow?”

“Aye, he is laddie.”

“Perhaps the good Lord has sent him.”

“There’s a roo_f that needs a fix’n and a press that moans worse than your mother.”

‘*Sniff-sniff.*’ The old man’s nose twitches thinking he could smell marmalade.

“You smell that?”

“Smell what?” His son asked sniffing the air.

‘*Sniff-sniff.*’ The old man loses the scent then reaches for a bottle he pours himself a glass of whisky.

His mind was telling him one thing, his heart another.

“Archie! Hold up...” Gwendolyn called weaving between people until she lost sight of him, “...Archie!”

Archie continued on his hurried way, as though he had some place to be.

People swirled in eddies about barrows. Lingered briefly before being washed to another. Then another.

“What was the name of that store?” She asked herself, looking up and down the street, for a bright red building, “...*Tennatuppence?* ... No wait, *Tennapenny.*”

But the stores all looked the same. Dull and weathered. Then wondered if she had the right street.

“Archie!” She called out fruitlessly.

“Have you seen a fox terrier?” She asked passersby.

“Sorry love.” A lady replied sympathetically.

Reaching the end of the lane Gwendolyn became despondent. Not only had she not found the store, but she had also lost Archie.

What would Peter say.

“Archie! ...” She cried out in desperation, “... so help me Archie, if I ever find you...”

Just then she hears barking coming from within the lane. A familiar bark that could only belong to one dog. Determinedly she marches back down the lane. Making her way through the congestion, from one side then to the other. Calling out his name. Then a strange feeling

comes over her compelling her to stop. A nostalgic scent drifted in the air. She looks up to the clear blue sky, feeling its warmth of the sun on her face. Closing her eyes she made a wish.

“Did you hear that?” Asked Tinkerbell looking through the window.

Archie whimpered in her arms as though he had heard it too.

“Is that her? ... The mortals wench?” Asked Tiger Lily, eyeing her warily.

“If you mean Peter’s lady-friend... yes... now play nice sister.” She warned, blowing gently in Gwendolyn’s direction.

Suddenly a cloud materialized from nowhere and blocked out the sun, casting a cold dark shadow on her. Awakening her from her warm daydream, eyes open and she hears barking coming from within a store.

A store painted bright red with *Tennapenny* frosted across its window.

“That’s weird... how could I have missed that?”

“*Woof-woof!*” The barking sounded again.

“Archie?” Tilting her head as though the barking was coming from within.

“*Woof-woof!*” Archie called out again.

“If that’s you *Archibald Pan*, you’re in *so_* much trouble.”

She peers through the window but is unable to see anything. Turning the handle pushes the door gently open. Sounding the overhead bell.

‘Ding-ding.’

The noise of the street faded as she closed the door behind her. Lights cast soft sepia tones over the trove of treasures filling countless shelves.

“*Woof-woof.*” Barked Archie scampering to her wagging his tail.

“There you are Archie...”, reaching down to pick up him up, “...I was so afraid I had lost. What would Peter say?”

“You must be Gwendolyn?” Asked Tinkerbell appearing behind her.

“Oh! You gave me a fright. I didn’t see you there... how did you know my name?”

“Peter told us.”

“Us?” Gwendolyn looked about the store and sees Tiger Lily behind the counter with pursed lips.

“Archie is a frequent visitor, aren’t you?” Informed Tinkerbell.

“*Woof!*”

“Oh I see...”, somewhat confused, “... you must be Tinkerbell?” Gwendolyn asked, then looked to Tiger Lily.

“My apologies, I should introduce myself, I am Tinkerbell and that darling creature over there is my sister Tiger Lily... Peter has told us so much about you.”

“He has?”

“Of course, He’s quite a dish if you ask me... but don’t worry, he’s not my *type.*”

“That’s good to know...” Informed Gwendolyn feeling a little awkward.

“Tea?” Asked Tinkerbell.

“Well I wasn’t ah... you see I have to be going... I only came to... ah...” Clutching at excuses.

“Peter said you were going to pop in.”

“He did?”

“I’ve just baked some *lovely* muffins... *Oh* what a shame.” Pulling a long face.

The scent of muffins mysteriously whiffed beneath Gwendolyn’s nose.

“*Sniff-sniff...* mmm_ they do smell nice don’t they... perhaps I could stay for one.”

“That a girl, we have *so* much to talk about.”

“We do?”

“Tiger Lily, the tea if you please... Archie, why don't you go help Tiger Lily.”

Archie races off to the back of the store.

“Please, have a seat.” Offered Tinkerbell gesturing to a small table and two chairs beside the front window.

“What an *enchanting* store.”

“Mm, you could say that.” Grinned Tinkerbell.

“Been here long?”

“Sometimes... it seems like an *eternity*.”

“I must have been up this street a hundred times... and never noticed it until now... How weird is that?”

“Everyone finds us in their own time... did you like your brooch?”

“It was beautiful. Thank you for helping Peter choose it... he is quite hopeless when it comes to jewelry.”

“Men, I know... Ah, there you are Tiger Lily... I'd thought you had gone to China to get the tea.”

Tiger Lily bit her lip and smiled. Placing down a tray of porcelain cups on saucers and a plate of muffins still steaming, as though they had just been taken of the oven.

“You weren't joking about freshly baked were you... they smell delicious.”

“Tell me, your father owns the Jolly Roger I believe.”

“That's right, how did you know?”

“Peter of course, he's a little chatter box sometimes.”

“*Peter*? A chatterbox? I can hardly get a boo out of him.”

“Oh really, I guess Wendy must be having an impact on him.”

“I've heard about Wendy... How is she?”

“She's as well as can be expected... *Tea?* ...”, handing her a cup on a saucer, “... have you set a date yet?”

“Date for what?”

“The *wedding* of course...” Tinkerbell hesitates, seeing a surprise look on her face, “... *oh dear*..... he hasn't asked you yet... he must be waiting for the right moment. He's such a romantic.”

“Peter? ... Peter *Pan*? ... A *romantic*? ... You sure we're talking about the same man?”

“Hmm... so tall...”, raising a hand, “... dark hair, brown eyes... two left feet... hides under an umbrella.”

“He has *sensitive* skin.” Corrected Gwendolyn.

“*Perhaps*... he came in the other day looking for a ring.”

“A ring?”

“*Oops*... perhaps I've said too much. I'm so sorry, I hope I haven't spoiled the surprise.”

“To the contrary... I was beginning to wonder if it would ever happen.”

“Oh dear, I may have let the cat out of the bag... well, now that you're here... would you like to see it?” Pulling a black velvet case from a pocket, handing it to her to open.

“I shouldn't, but...”, she opened the case.

‘*Gasp.*’ Taking her breath away.

Countless diamonds sparkled like angels about a translucent ruby stone.

“It's *beautiful*...” A tear whelmed in her eye.

“I knew you would like it.”

“*Like it?* It’s *perfect*... thank you.” Closing the treasure chest and handing it reluctantly back.

“Remember, it’s our secret. *Promise.*”

“I promise.” Said Gwendolyn taking a sip of the tea, “... this tea is *exquisite*? Where is it from?”

“China, I believe... Another muffin?” ...

Letter from the Council

“Bills, bills... and more bills (*sigh*).” Sighed Sister Maria despondently.

The desk covered with a pile of unpaid invoices stacked to one side. A smaller stack of donations on the other. Fingers punch keys on a calculator.

“The Good Lord will provide.” Informed Tinkerbelle.

“Well, I’d wish He’d hurry up... oh. *Forgive me.*” Immediately regretting the comment and crossed herself twice.

“I’m sure Father has more important things to worry about than us Sister.”

Sister Maria looked up as though she had mis-heard her.

“What have you there.” Drawing her attention to a benign brown envelope.

“It’s from the Council.” Informed Sister Maria calmly.

Feeling a sense of relief that it was not another bill. Yet the weight of it suggested something important. Making an incision along the top edge pulled out the folded page.

“*Gasp!* ... Oh! ...”, she gasped seeing the large blood red eviction stamp across the center of the page, “... this can’t be.” Handing the document to Tinkerbelle.

“I’m sure it’s just a mistake? ...”, inspecting the notice, “... *Murtagh.*” She whispered to herself.

“What was that?” Asked Sister Maria.

“Murtagh... the gentleman at the Council... the name at the bottom.”

“We barely have enough money as it is... It was only a matter of time before the wolves came calling.”

“We *still* have three months.”

“Three months? ... to be thrown onto the streets in the *middle* of *winter*... what about the children?” Sister Maria crossed herself placing her hands together looked to the ceiling and offers up a prayer.

Tinkerbelle places a hand on her shoulder to comfort her troubled thoughts.

“We’ll be fine... don’t worry yourself, or the children.”

“What can you do?”

“Leave this to me Sister... I think I will pay Mister Murtagh a visit... have a quiet word with him about the good work we do here.”

“Do you think he would listen?”

“We can only hope and pray.”

Sister Maria crossed herself again in agreement.

“And remember, don’t tell a soul. Lest we worry the children... Finish up here and make ready for supper.”

“Yes Tinkerbelle.” Said Sister Maria.

Tinkerbelle turned about and spied Wendy standing in the doorway and wondered how much she had heard. The look on her face said it all. Then raised a finger to her lips to be quiet and crept quietly from the office. Taking Wendy by the hand leads her to the back steps where they both sat. Neither speaking for what seemed like an eternity.

Then Wendy broke the silence.

“I’ll be okay, I’m going home... but what about the others?” Asked Wendy.

“They’ll be fine... I have a plan.”

“Can *I* part of the plan.”

“You always have been...”, she grinned, “... you’re the best part of it.”

“*Goodie!*”

“You know how to keep a secret?”

“*No.*” Wendy asked curiously.

“Don’t tell anyone.”

“Oh, not anyone?”

“No-one at all... not even *yourself.*”

Wendy screwed her face up puzzled, “... can I tell *Archie?*”

“I guess he’s okay.” Kissing the top of the child’s head.

Time stood still at The Royal and Ancient Kensington Gentlemen’s Club. Were it not for the flickering fire one would have thought one were looking at photograph. Then as if by magic, the picture would come to life and a waiter would appear.

Summoned by a raised hand.

A haze of cigar fumes stained the air. The chandelier dimly illuminates the Grand Hall. Judge Tootles filled his chair. Neither awake nor asleep. Ears acutely tuned to the conversation between Peter and Nibs. Curious as to what they were saying. He was once young himself, though he was not sure when. But he was sure it was sometime in the recent past. Taking a deep breath he held until he could no longer. Then released it before taking another. Secure within the leather chair. Sedated by Napoleon Brandy. His mind drifted to another place. To a mischievous adventure from long ago.

Yet it seemed like yesterday.

“*Ah! Hm!*” He snorts abruptly, as if *someone* had poked him in the ribs.

“I think Gwendolyn is up to something?” Informed Peter.

“Another man?” Asked Nibs peering over the paper.

“*Eh? ... No! ...* what makes you say that?”

“I’m just saying, if you’re seeing that Tinkerbell woman... It’s only matter of time before... you know...” Nibs raised an eye brow suggestively.

“I *not seeing* Tinkerbell... anyway, I thought you were going to ask her out.”

“You have her number?”

“No, I don’t think she has a phone.”

“No phone? Who doesn’t have a phone?”

“You can ask her that when you see her.”

“How do I get hold of her.”

“You could stop by the charity store, if you can lower yourself to that.”

“*Tennapenny* on Portobello.” Recalled Nibs.

“That’s the place... you can’t miss it. It has a bright red frontage.”

“Might just do that...”, he grinned shaking the paper shift, “... so what’s up with Gwendolyn?”

“That’s the thing, I don’t know... Ever since she visited Tinkerbell the other day, she’s been acting *strange.*”

“Women old chap... best not try to understand them.”

“You can say that again... have you heard any more about the audit?”

“Slivers is sending out a notice to all members. We should hear soon. Are you going to be okay?” Asked Nibs looking over the paper to him warily.

“I guess, I’ve an appointment with my accountant... can’t see a problem unless the world economy collapses or there’s a world war.”

“Ditto old chap...” Informed Nibs shaking the flaccid paper erect again, “... ditto.”

Nibs examined his reflection in a shop window. Turned sideways and brushed himself down.

“Hm...”, pleased with his appearance, “... you can do this.”

Passersby take a wide berth around him.

Putting on a determined face he waded onto Portobello lane littered with barrows and human livestock. Looking about hoping to see the bright red store front. Only to see pastel-colored buildings.

“Maybe its further down.” Venturing into the lane deeper.

People stare at the young man dressed in his Sunday best, looking out of place. Ignoring their attention Nibs walked confidently pass. Eyes sifting one side of the lane to the other as though he were lost.

“*Blast if I can see it.*” He tells himself.

“Excuse me...”, catching the attention of a passerby leaving the lane, “... is there a store called *Tennapenny* by any chance? ... bright red?” He added as though it would help.

The passerby stared blankly into the lane for a moment in contemplation. The name sounded familiar.

“Sorry...”, shaking their head, “... nothing bright red down there. You sure you have the right street?”

“I’m beginning to wonder myself... thank you for your help.” Looking back into the lane wondering if he should have another look, or head to the Club.

Either way it meant going back down the lane.

“Oh well, that was a waste of time that was.” Conceding defeat.

People bustled about him. More than before so it seemed. Voices chatter and vendors call out. The lane had suddenly swelled bodies. He found himself being pushed one way then the other. Then catches sight of his reflection in a large black window.

Written upon it the name...

TENNAPENNY.

The red store front stood out like a brightly polished fire engine.

“How could I have missed that?” He asked, scratching his head looking up and down the lane to the dully painted stores about it.

Stepping forward he peers through the window only to see a dark void. And wondered if the store was closed. The sign on the door stated otherwise. He opened the door and a bell sounded above him. Catching his attention as he stepped inside. The noise of the street fell away.

Looking through the window from the inside finds the street outside now void of people.

“Nibs... You made it.” Said Tinkerbelle appearing from behind.

“*Tinkerbelle*... You were expecting me?”

“Peter said you would come.” She lied.

“He did?”

“Thank you for helping the other day... I hope you were not too sore afterwards.”

“Always happy to help...” He lied.

“You’re looking rather dashing today.” Standing back to admire him.

“Why thank you.... I do try.”

“And what brings you to our charming store.” She asked knowingly.

“Well actually it’s you I’ve come to see.”

“Oh really... *me?*” Acting surprised.

“I would have phone, but you don’t seem to have one.”

“I find phones so... *impersonal*... Don’t you think?”

“Well now that you mention it.”

“I prefer face to face... Don’t you?” Stepping closer.

Nibs squirmed like a worm on a hot tin roof.

“*Tea?*” She asked.

“Well I was just... ah...”

“Tiger Lily has just made some... *haven’t you Tiger Lily?*”, Tinkerbell called out suggestively, “... have a seat...”, gesturing to an empty chair by the front window.

“Tea would be lovely, thank you.”

“You wanted to speak with me?”

“Oh yes, that... I ah... I ah...”

“Oh there you are Tiger Lily.”

Tiger Lily arrives moments later with a silver tray with a pot of tea and porcelain cups. Placing the tray on the table, stood back and examined him. Sensing a curious charm about the mortal.

“Tiger Lily, this is Nibs... Nibs, this is Tiger Lily.”

“How do you do.” She purred.

“Thank you, Tiger Lily.” Said Tinkerbell wishing for her to leave.

“Sister?” Asked Nibs.

“So to speak.” She reflected.

“Oh.”

“You wanted to speak with me?”

“I was wondering if ah... if ah... sorry, I really haven’t done this for a while.”

“I understand... please go on.” Leaning closer to him.

“Well you see... I was wondering if ah...”, taking a deep breath, “... if you would like to go out... with me that is... on a date... *so to speak.*”

There he had said it.

Tinkerbell sat back. No one had ever asked her out on a date before, well not within the past two centuries.

“I’ll be delighted, thank you for asking.”

“*You would? ...*”, catching him by surprise, “... I mean... you would.”

“Of course, ... shall we make it Saturday at eight?”

“Saturday? ...”, caught off guard, “... yes, of course... but how do I find you if you don’t have a phone.” He asked.

“Don’t worry about that... I’ll find you.” She grinned...

You have a Visitor

'Click... Clunk... Click... Clunk...' A dull grey council wall clock ticked loudly.

Murtagh sat staring blankly at a form. In his hand a large blood red stamp. Eyes shift to the window shrouded by a venetian blind. Shadows moved pass. One way, then the other.

"Hm." He grumbled.

'Bang!' Slamming the stamp down.

The hula bobble doll on his desk wobbled size to size.

'Click... Clunk... Click... Clunk...' Sounding unusually louder than usual.

He looked to the clock.

07:27AM.

It was going to be a long day. He contemplates a drink but decides otherwise.

Suddenly the telephone startles him.

'Ring-ring... Ring-ring...'

Looking at the phone suspiciously. Who would be calling at this hour of the morning picking up the handpiece.

"Hello?" He answered.

"Mister Murtagh?" Asked the receptionist.

"Yes, yes, what is it?" Frustrated having been interrupted.

There's a woman here to see you."

"I'm not expecting anyone. Send her away." He instructed distastefully.

"She is very insistent."

"What's her name. What's it about?"

Murtagh waited, hearing muffled voices in the back ground.

"Tinkerbelle... no last name... it's to do with... Neverland?"

"Neverland? ... (blast)." He cursed.

"What was that?"

"Nothing... send her away... tell her I'm not here... or something."

"But you are there."

"Then inform her I'm in a meeting... A very long meeting and I won't be available 'til...", thumbing the pages of his diary loudly, *"... January."*

"Very well, I will inform her... thank you Mister Murtagh."

"Hm...", slamming down the phone, *"... think you can come crawling, do you? ..."*, feeling safe in his dungeon office, *"... perhaps I will have that drink after all"*, pulling the bottom drawer open.

'Click... Clunk... Click... Clunk...' The clock on the wall clicked and clunked.

'Clickedy-clunk... Clickedy-clunk...'

Murtagh looked up as though he had misheard it.

07:27AM.

"Hm."

'Clickedy-clunk... Clickedy-clunk...'

There it was again. And it was getting louder. Now sounding like approaching footsteps.

'Click... Clunk... (silence)...' The clock falls silent as though time had stopped.

He looks to it to see the second hand frozen.

A shadow materializes on the frosted door. And Murtagh stealthfully closed the bottom drawer and stared at the slight ghostly figure standing there. Making out the shape of a woman. Eyes shift to the phone as though it had something to do with it.

'No_, *not possible.*' He thought eyeing the shadow suspiciously.

The labyrinth of stair wells and corridors would baffle the best civil servant. The shadow did not move.

It was as though it was waiting for someone.

'Tick-tock... Tick-tock.' The clock whispered in his ear.

07:27AM.

"That can't be right...", checking his watch, confirming the time, "... (*blast*)."

A flock of butterflies take flight in his stomach. Reaching for the bottle pours himself a drink. Just as he is about to lift the cup to his lips three dainty knocks sound at the door.

'Tap-tap-tap.'

The handle turned. The door suddenly opened. Catching him in the act.

"It's a little early for drinking, don't you think Councilor Murtagh? What would your superiors think?"

"*And who the hell are you!*", he growled, spilling his drink over himself, "... ah... now look what you've made me do."

"Tinkerbelle... Your secretary sent me down." She lied.

"I thought I told her I was busy."

"No, you said you were in a meeting... And clearly you are not." Corrected Tinkerbelle.

"I don't care what I said, I want you out of here...", reaching for the phone fingers stabbing at a button, "... *security*... Murtagh here...", he snarled, "... yes, yes, now listen, there is a blasted woman in my office... no, no, it's not like that... I want her out, immediately, do you understand... right away." Slamming down the phone.

"Oh dear, I hope I haven't caught you at a bad time Councilor."

"Save your breath... Security will be here shortly to escort you from the building."

"Well then, we don't have much time, now do we ...", she informed him, opening the letter, "... about this *eviction notice*... I don't understand how you can close us down."

"You're a year behind in your rent... *Ms_ Tinkerbelle*... the Council has decided it prudent to *move on*... you had a good run." Looking to the door wondering what was keeping Security.

"What's to happen to the children?" She asked softly.

"That is not my concern now is it... now if you don't mind, I have work to do." Becoming impatient.

"I'd like to wait for security if you do not mind... I wouldn't want to become *lost* in all those corridors, *would you?*"

"There is nothing I can do... my hands are tied I'm afraid."

"Really?"

"You have three months to come up with the rent."

"I was so hoping you could help us Mister Murtagh, show a little kindness, a little... compassion... for the children."

"Compassion does not keep the council running *Ms... Tinkerbelle*..." The name stung on his tongue, "...rules are rules... I'm just doing my job."

"I completely understand Councilor... I tried my best I suppose... thank you for your time. I really must be off."

"Don't you want to wait for security to escort you back?"

“I’ll be fine... you have yourself a nice day now.” She informed him.

Murtagh watched as she left, expecting to see her shadow on the door. But saw nothing. It was as though she had vanished into thin air. Moments later Security come rushing in to catch Murtagh with a cup to his lips.

“What took you?” Blurted Murtagh angrily.

“We got lost.” Said one guard.

“Lost? ... never mind now... the woman has just left... you would have past her in the collider.”

“There’s no woman in the collider Councilor.”

“What do you mean, no woman?”

“Sorry Councilor, the corridor was empty, just us... (*sniff-sniff*) ... what that smell?” The guard asked, “...(*sniff-sniff*).”

“My cologne... now get out and find that woman.”

“What does she look like?”

“A woman... she’s ah... ah...” becoming suddenly forgetful, “... she was just here... I think...”

The guards look to each other, sniffing the pungent malt odor in the air.

“If you say so Councilor.” Stepping back and closing the door behind them.

‘*Clickedy-clunk... Clickedy-clunk...*’ Heavy footsteps sound on the polished linoleum floor.

Murtagh looked to the clock.

07:27AM.

It was going to be a very long day...

Two weary officers sit before a large wooden desk covered with of files. Wearing the same suits as the day before, and the day before that. Waiting for their boss to speak.

“Anything back on those plates Harris?” Asked Brown.

“We got this...”, handing him several black and white photographs, of the same lorry from the night before, and same driver, “... Gilbert Garcia... driver for the Bianchi Cartel... out of Milan... he’s been nicked a couple of times, but the charges never stick... Bianchi’s lawyers always get them off... Judges being paid off... if you know what I mean.”

“Doesn’t surprise me...” Brown frowns in thought, “... maybe we can’t bring down Bianchi, but Hook is still within our reach... what’s our next move.”

“Alpes here has a contact at His Majesty’s Revenue and Customs.” Informed Harris.

“And? ...”

“Thought we’d give Hook a surprise tax audit... get a chance to book at his records... and more importantly... his storeroom.” Added Alpes.

“Good idea... saves getting a search warrant... and Hook getting suspicious...”, the thought pleased him, “... how soon can you set that up?”

“One phone call.” Informed Alpes.

“Make it happen... I want you both there, undercover of course ... sniff out the storeroom... make sure they have invoices for everything... who he is buying from and who he is selling to... I want to know what Hook is up to. It’s one thing to keeping it for himself... It’s another more serious matter if he’s distributing the stuff.”

“Yes sir.”

“I want an update by the end of the day.” Instructed Brown.

“Yes sir.” Standing to leave.

“Take these with you... good job men.” Handing the photographs back watching the men leave.

Taking sip of bitter black lukewarm coffee, already an hour old.

It was going to be a long day...

Wee Phillip

'Clink.' Wendy drops a penny into a jar and secures the lid lest it escape.

'Rattle-Rattle-Rattle.' Shaking the jar coins against the glass.

"How many does that make?" Asked Tinkerbell.

"Fifty-five... will that be enough?" Holding the jar up as though it contained copper butterflies.

"Perfect... that's just the right amount...", Tinkerbell informed her taking the jar from her and placing it on the side table, "... it's time for your medicine." Handing her two small tablets and a glass of water.

"Do I have to?" Turning up her nose.

"No, but if you want the pain to go away."

Wendy looked at the tablets, placed them in her mouth and took a swallow of water. Holding it as though holding her breath until she could no longer. Squinting her eyes swallowed hard.

"Ahhh__" Sticking out her tongue to show they had disappeared.

"That wasn't so hard now, was it?"

"Yuk!" She replied, then smiled a big smile.

"That's a good girl."

Monitors about her beep and hum. A drip bag hangs on a towering silver pole, a narrow plastic tube runs down from it and into her arm.

"How much longer?"

"Not much."

"No, I mean before I can go home?"

"Oh... Not for a while... we still have things to do... *shh*, now sleep." Tinkerbell whispered softly as though casting a spell.

"Okay." She murmured sleepishly, eye lids fluttered like butterfly wings.

Sister Mary stands in the doorway.

"What is it?" Asked Tinkerbell knowingly.

"It's Phillip." She said ominously.

"I'll be there in a moment." She whispered not to wake Wendy.

Leaning over the child kissed her forehead head and brushed her hair. Fingers stroke cheeks, so pale. So innocent.

Looking up as though to an unseen force looking down at her.

"Father..." She whispered in prayer, "... save this one."

But she knew she could not save them all. Everyone has a purpose. Everything happens for a reason. Nothing lasts forever. Life passes in a blink of an eye.

For some, even quicker.

"Tinkerbell! Hurry!" Sister Maria instructed frantically reappearing at the door way.

"*(Sigh)*... coming." Informed Tinkerbell letting go of Wendy's hand.

Making her way unhurriedly to a room where a doctor was standing over a child laying on the bed. An oxygen mask covers the boy's face. Tinkerbell stands on the other side and takes the boy's hand. Sister Maria stood at the end of the bed, fingers fumble rosary beads muttering a silent prayer for the child.

“Come on Phillip, stay with us.” The doctor encouraged feverishly, flashing a pen torch across the boy’s pupils, unresponsive to the light.

A monitor above the bed displays the boy’s vitals. Blood pressure perilously low. His heart beat an elongated scrawl of long intermittent blips. The doctor looked at Tinkerbell standing quietly by the boy’s side. His hand in hers. Unmoved by the boy’s fate. The boy gasped a final breath, his hand clasping her hand. Then the monitor sounded a loud continuous siren. The doctor stifles the siren.

Tinkerbell releases the boy’s hand only to grasp another hand. Unseen.

“(Gasp).” Sister Maria crosses herself frantically. Praying beneath her breath.

The doctor presses down on the boy’s chest, again and again and again.

“Charge the defibrillator... One hundred!”

“One hundred.” Recites a nurse behind him.

‘Beep-beep-beep-beep_’ The defibrillator sounds its charge, a green light turns red.

“Charged!” Informed the nurse pushing a trolley forward.

“All clear!” Instructs the doctor placing paddles on the boy’s chest.

‘Boom!’ An electrical pulse charges through the boy’s body causing it to arch violently.

All eyes shift to the monitor. All but Tinkerbell’s. The line on the monitor remained flat. Scrawling across the screen, unwavering. Eternally flat.

“One-fifty.” Instructed the doctor, pressing repeatedly on the boy’s chest.

‘Beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep_’ The defibrillator re-charges. The light turns red.

“All clear!”

‘Boom!’ Electricity surges into the boy’s body arching before falling flaccid again.

“Two-hundred!” Cried out in vain.

“That’s too much for the wee laddie...”, warned the nurse, “... you kill him.”

“He’s already dead for God’s sake...”, immediately regretting his words, “... sorry Sister.” Looking up to Tinkerbell unmoved by his comment.

“It’s okay... you’re right.” She nods subtly to him for one last try.

‘Beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beep_’

The defibrillator re-charged. Taking longer than before. The light turns red.

“All clear!”

‘Boom!’

The boy’s body convulses. Caught in between life and death. Lights in the room flicker momentarily. A small unseen hand squeezes hers tightly. Not wishing to let go. And not wishing to return to a body riddled with pain. The charge falls away and as it does the small hand releases its grip to the earthly realm.

Tears whelmed in Tinkerbell’s eye as she looked to the ceiling.

“He’s gone.” She said in quiet voice.

“We can’t give up.” Pleaded the doctor.

“It’s futile Doctor... let him rest...he’s gone.” ...

What are you doing here?

“Where’s Phillip? I can’t seem to find him... he’s not in his room.” Asked Wendy skipping into the room, hoping to see him appear around the corner.

Sister Maria looked to Tinkerbell who looked at Wendy with mournful eyes. No words could convey his passing. Wendy knew from their silence what had happened. She knew it would one day.

She did not expect it to come so soon.

“He’s gone home.” Said Wendy as though he had packed his bags and slipped out unnoticed.

“Yeah, last night... you, okay?” Asked Tinkerbell.

“I guess.” Pulling a sad face and returning to her room.

Her steps now heavier than before. Climbing up onto the oversized bed she laid down and stared up at the ceiling. Her thoughts abound with visions of Phillip. His voice echoing in her ear.

She grinned to herself.

“*Wait for me.*” She whispered to him.

Her attention is drawn to the jar of pennies on the table beside the bed. Taking the jar spills the pennies before her and begins to count them.

“One... (*clink*)...”, dropping the coin into the glass jar, “... two... (*clink*)...”, sometime later, “... fifty-four... (*clink*) fifty-five... (*clink*)”, dropping the final coin into the jar.

Securing the lid tight. Feeling the weight of them in her small hands.

“How many today?” Asked Tinkerbell appearing at the door.

“Still Fifty-five... will that be enough?”

“That is more than enough.”

“I hope so.”

“Why don’t we visit the park, we might see a mermaid?”

“I don’t feel like it.” She said despondently.

“I understand... Archie might be there... Peter did say they would be out for a walk today.”

“*Archie?* ...” Eager ears prick up.

“Come on you. Let’s get you ready...”, taking the jar from her, “... we might find another penny if we’re lucky.”

“You think so?”

“We won’t know unless we go now, will we? Grinned Tinkerbell.

Nibs paced back and forth, stopping momentarily to admire himself in the mirror. Then resumed the anxious pacing. Only to turn about and return from whence he had come. And admire himself in the mirror again. Checking his watch for the umpteenth time and looked to the window.

The day outside beginning to dim.

“What am I doing?” Berating himself, wondering if he had made a mistake.

He had not been on a date with a woman for over ten years, and even that with his mother. Checking the time again.

07:59PM.

Standing at the window looked out to the street, hoping to see her. The street appeared barren. But then he noticed a pumpkin laying on the side of the road. A flock of autumn leaves danced on the breeze. The leaves fall and gather before the gate. Mysteriously the gate opened. The leaves swirled through.

The gate closed behind them.

“How peculiar.” Wondering what to make of the anomaly.

Then came a knocking at the door.

‘Tap-tap-tap.’

“Who could that be?”

Peering through the peep hole to see no one there. Then wondered if he had imagined it.

‘Tap-tap-tap.’ There it was again, followed by the faint sound of giggling.

Again he peered into the peek hole, still saw no one.

“Hm.”

Taking a deep breath, he puffed himself up ready to confront the mischievous individual. On opening the door finds Tinkerbell standing before him.

“Nibs... I was beginning to wonder if you were home.” She smiled.

“Tinkerbell? ... how did you? ... where did you? ... I didn’t see you arrive...”, baffled by her sudden appearance, “... how did you know where I lived?” Sticking his head into the hallway.

“What a lovely place you have.” Remarked Tinkerbell dismissing the questions that defied answers he would understand.

“I’d like to think so... may I say you do look beautiful.” Standing back to admire her in a sparkling gown and red heels, “... you look *magical*.”

“Magical? I do try... you look rather resplendent yourself.” Stroking his pride.

“Just something I threw on... I’ve made reservations at an exclusive restaurant in Mayfair for eight-thirty... we should be off if we are going to make it.”

“I have a cab waiting outside.” Informed Tinkerbell.

“You do? I didn’t see any...” Nibs goes to the window to see a black hackney cab parked by the curb, “... where did that come from?”

“It’s here now. Best we be going.” Informed Tinkerbell.

The cab pulled to the curb outside the restaurant. Nibs opens the door for Tinkerbell to step out onto the pavement. Taking her by the hand as though she were a princess and he her prince on their way to the ball.

“Reservation for Astor.” Nibs informed the host wearing a fine black tuxedo.

“Monsieur, Madame Mazel, this way.”

“This way my lady.” Nibs held out his elbow for Tinkerbell to hold.

Walking un rushed between tables, the air filled with hushed conversation and elegance. Above a chandelier shone like a million stars. Nibs pulls a chair out for Tinkerbell before taking his own opposite. The waiter lights the candle on the table.

“Would you like a drink first?” Handing her a menu.

“I really shouldn’t... but if you insist.” Said Tinkerbell.

“Chardonnay?” Asked Nibs.

“Perfect, just a drop... wine goes to my head.”

“Two Chardonnays please.” Nibs informed the waiter.

“Why are there no prices?” She asked examining the menu.

“It’s not that type of restaurant... don’t worry... consider it my treat.”

“You’ve been here before?”

“Once or twice... by myself.”

“Is there no special lady in your life Nibs?”

“There was once, but alas it was not meant to be.”

“And you?... no prince charming to sweep you off your feet.”

“Many.... but that was a long, long... long time ago... as you say... it was not meant to be.” She laments.

The waiter returns with a frosted silver ice bucket containing a bottle of wine. On pulling the cork poured two flute glasses and placed them before the couple.

“I’ll give you a moment to consider your orders.”

“Merci beaucoup.”

“You speak French?” Asked Tinkerbell.

“Petite... And you?”

“A little...”, she lied, “... this wine is divine...”, taking a sip, “... what would you suggest?” Eyeing the menu.

“The duck is to die for I hear.”

“Oh, the poor duck.”

“Indeed, all the lucky for us...”, dismissed Nibs, “... so tell me, where are you from?”

“Excuse me?” Taken back.

“From where, do you originate... I know so little about you.”

“Oh... Dingle.”

“*Dingle*? Any relation to what’s his name?”

“Richard? No... perhaps distantly ... and you?”

“Originally England, then the America, only to settle back here.” Said Nibs indifferently.

“I’m sorry to hear that... I think I will have the duck.”

“I wise choice...” Nibs nods to the waiter standing nearby, “... Madame Mazel will have the duck, and I will have the Salmon En Papillote... Merci beaucoup.”

“Tres bien Monsieur.” Making a mental note...

“Oh... I’m so full... I swear I am going to burst...”, Tinkerbell sat back holding her stomach, “... I haven’t tasted duck like that since the banquet at Versailles... the revolution was so unnecessary don’t you think?”

“I’m sorry?”

“*Poor Marie.*” Tinkerbell laments.

“Osmond?”

“Antoinette...”, she corrected him, “... if only she had left earlier, but she insisted on staying.”

“Of course... it’s not your fault...”, playing along somewhat confused, “... dessert?”

“I couldn’t possibly Nibs... but don’t let me stop you.”

“Not for me...”, checking his watch, “... oh, look at the time, we really should be getting you back home... waiter...” Nibs raises his hand to attract the waiter’s attention.

“Is everything as you wish Monsieur.”

“Perfect my good man... the bill if you please.”

The waiter leaves only to reappear balancing a silver tray, a black leather folder at its center. Nibs places a platinum credit card atop of the folder without looking at the bill.

“Merci beaucoup Monsieur... one moment *s'il vous plait*.” The waiter nodded and walked away, only to return moments later with a dissatisfied look on his face holding out the tray, the black leather folder.

His card cut in half and placed on top.

“Ah-hm.” The waiter coughs with disdain.

“Is there a problem? ... I assure you there is funds in the account...”, now looking at the card, “... how embarrassing...”, reaching for his wallet, only to discover the other cards missing, “... there must be a mistake.”

Tinkerbelle sat quietly watching on, as though she had nothing to do with it.

“Please, let me pay for this.” She offered, placing a plain white card on top of the black folder.

The waiter nodded in appreciation to her and walked away a second time, this time to return with the card and a single chocolate.

“Merci beaucoup Madame Mazel...”, bowing subtly to her before turning to Nibs and giving him a stern look, “... *Monsieur*.” And departed.

“How embarrassing, that’s never happened in my life... there are funds in the account, I assure you.”

“It must be a technical glitch.” Offered Tinkerbelle grinning.

“Yes, a technical glitch... I’ll reimburse you as soon as I sort this out.”

“No need to Nibs, it is *my treat*, I believe is the term you used?”

“You really shouldn’t, a gentleman always pays.”

“Perhaps, but sometimes it nice to be treated.”

“Accepted with thanks...”, Nibs humbly bowed his head, “... let’s get out of here before they place me in the blacking factory.”

“Ah, the blacking factory... such fond memories.” Reminisced Tinkerbelle.

“We could go back to my place for a night cap.”

“That sounds delightful... but just the one... I have to get up early tomorrow.” Informed Tinkerbelle...

Nibs awoke to blinding sunlight streaming through his bed room window. His head pounding like a Royal Edinburgh Tattoo. His mind battling to recall the evening before. Tinkerbelle. The restaurant. The credit card. The last thing he remember was climbing back into the cab.

After that, his mind went blank.

‘*What happened after that?*’ He thought.

He could not recall arriving home. Eye squint about the room. It was his bed room all right.

“Ah... my head!” He moaned, squinting his eyes.

Lifting the sheets, he realized he was completely naked. Stunned, he heard noises coming from the bathroom.

A feminine voice singing gayfully from the shower.

‘*Tinkerbelle? ...*’, he thought, ‘... *no... we couldn’t have, we didn’t... did we?*’

Pulling the sheet up over his head as though to hide. Pretending to be asleep. He was sure he had only had a couple of drinks. Yet here he laid. Naked. Tinkerbelle in his bathroom.

The shower stops. As does the singing. He hears the sound of approaching footsteps that stop beside the bed. Suddenly the sheet is pulled away and exposes him to the waist.

“Good, you’re awake.” Said Tiger Lily standing over wrapped in a large white towel.

“What are you doing here? ...” Surprised to see her, “... where’s Tinkerbell?”
“She had to go... she asked if I could stand in.”
“Stand in? ...for what?” He stuttered.
“Don’t you remember?” She asked disappointedly.
“Not a thing I’m afraid... I must have black out.”
“Oh dear...”, she purred, “... maybe this will remind you.” Allowing her towel to fall away and climbing into bed and pulling the sheet over their heads.
“*Oh dear indeed.*” Whimpered Nibs...

Late Delivery

“Kensington? You, can’t be serious father...”, argued Gwendolyn with her father, “... we can’t move.”

“It’s almost settled, I’m in a position to buy a very sizable property there...”, Hook chuckled to himself, “... we’re moving, and that is that.”

“I like this place father... you can’t just uproot us from here... what would mother say? It was her place.”

“Your mother would agree with me one hundred percent, God rest her beloved soul...”, Hook lied, “... besides, *The Club* is there... how would it look to the other members.”

“Is that what this all about father? ... your *look*?”

“Precisely... (*sniff*)...”, Hook sniffs and straightens himself, “... and another thing, I forbid you from seeing that Peter Pan... *bad form* if you ask me.”

“You cannot forbid me from anything... and isn’t Peter a member of this *Club*?”

“Not of much longer.”

“What does that mean?”

“Don’t you worry about your precious Peter Pan, his days at the club will soon be over... once I get my hands on *Neverland*, I’ll bowl the thing down and put up an apartment building.”

“*Neverland*?” She asked.

Hook wondered if he had said too much.

“Oh, look at the time... I really should be heading off. Mister Smee will be wondering what is keeping me.”

“Father, It’s nearly midnight.” Queried Gwendolyn.

“We have a late delivery... blasted freight companies... *bad form* if you ask me... why don’t you get yourself off to bed. We can talk more tomorrow.” Hook lied.

“Good night, father.” Pouting, not happy with her father’s decision.

“Good night, Gwendolyn.”

He waited for her to leave before reaching for his mobile.

“Answer it damn fool.”

“*Captain*. “Answered Smee.

“We set for tonight?”

“*Aye, all set Captain... Gilbert should arrive just after one.*”

“Good, good... I’ll be there shortly.”

“*Aye-aye Captain.*”

“You get all that Alpes?” Asked Harris, beneath a set of headphones listing in on the conversation.

Tape reels turn slowly, recording every word. A paper cup of cold black coffee sits on the bench. A cigarette smolders in an ash tray sending up a trail of smoke that settles in the air.

“One o’clock... That does give us much time to set up.”

“Inform Brown.”

“Why do I have to be the one to wake him up.”

“Because I outrank you... I’ll organize a van. Something *less conspicuous* this time.”

“That wasn’t my fault, it was the only one they had. Let’s see you do any better at this hour of the night.” Stubbing out the cigarette and throwing back the foul-tasting coffee.

Alpes anxiously dials a number and waited for it to be answered. Praying beneath his breath the detective was still awake.

“Alpes, what do you want at this hour?” Answered Brown annoyed.

“Sorry to wake you Detective, it’s Hook, he’s got another shipment coming in.”

“That right? ... What time?”

“Around one.”

“You two can handle that. Write it up and have it on my desk tomorrow morning.”

“Copy that Sir.”

The phone falls silent.

“I hope your friend at His Majesty’s Revenue and Customs comes through for us.” Asked Harris.

“Eddie said the letter is already in the post... Hook won’t like that.”

“Who does? ... what time is Brown arriving?”

“Just us I’m afraid.” Informed Alpes.

“We better get cracking then... I’ve got us a smaller van this time.”

‘Beep! – Beep! – Beep!’

The lorry reverses slowly towards Smee standing at the entrance of the storeroom.

“That’s fall enough Gilbert.” Raising a hand to halt him.

Brakes hiss and sigh. The engine falls silent. Headlights die. Shrouding the yard in darkness. Hook closes the gates, but not before looking up and down the street. The white van from before had moved on. Satisfied he was not being watched, chained the gates.

‘Clunk-clatter. Clunk-clatter. (Squeezing)... Bang! ... Bang!’ Gilbert pulls open the rear doors slamming them against the sides of container.

“Christ Gilbert! You trying to wake the dead?” Warned Hook.

“Sorry Captain, it’s been a long day.” He responded

“Come a long way?”

“Milan... Twenty-four hours.”

“How do you stay awake?” Asked Smee curiously.

Gilbert reaches into his pocket to pull out a small plastic bottle and rattles it before opening it and throwing two small white tablets into his mouth as though it were candy. Twitching, eyes darting about as though following an imaginary fly.

“How did you get through the border?”

“Bianchi has contacts.”

“I don’t think I really want to know...”, said Hook, *“... get this lot unloaded and you can get some rest.”*

“No time for rest Captain...”, informed Gilbert, *“... have to get back.”* Climbing into the back of the container.

Flicking a switch blade makes a long incision to cellophane wrap. Peeling it away to reveal stacked boxes on a pallet. Boxes containing booze and cigarettes. Handing each box carefully down to Smee as Hook watched on ticking the manifesting.

Hook notices another pallet at the far end of the container. Different to his. This was wrapped in red cellophane.

“What’s that?” Asked Hook.

“That’s not for you Captain.”

“Obviously, but what is it nonetheless?”

“A special delivery for a client.”

“Drugs?” Asked hook warily.

“I’d rather not say Captain.”

“Damn you Gilbert... I don’t want *that* on my property... you hear me? ...”, snarled Hook looking to the gates, “... don’t ever bring it here again. You hear me?”

“Yes Captain, sorry Captain. It won’t happen again Captain.”

“You’re damn sure it won’t... I can’t afford to be caught with drugs on my property... what were you thinking Gilbert?”

“Bianchi said drop your stuff off first.”

“I don’t care what Bianchi said, you hear... *Bad form*, you hear.”

“Yes Captain. Sorry Captain.” Cowered Gilbert.

Hook reaches inside his jacket for a thick envelope of money and hands it to Smee.

“But Captain?” Gilbert asked surprise.

“Mister Smee will give it to once you are out of those gates and off my property... the sooner you get going, the sooner you can have your money.” Hook spits in disgust.

‘(Squealing)... slam...slam ...Clunk-clunk.’ Container rear doors close.

Hook unshackled the gates and peers into the street.

Quiet. The clouds had cleared, a crescent moon hung low on the horizon over the east-end. No one in sight. Eyes scan the parked cars. Darkened windscreens reflecting street lights. All seemed calm.

“What’s he looking for?” Asked Alpes from the back seat.

“For us.”

Harris raising a camera to his eye, “... smile.”

‘Click-click, whir... Click-click, whir.’ A camera stutters, capturing Hook’s head poking out between the large gates.

Suddenly the lorry headlights send strong beams onto the street. The diesel engine roared and groaned as it crawled out onto the street before parking by the curb.

“What’s he doing? Why’s he not driving away? ...”, asked Alpes, “... are you getting this?”

‘Click-click, whir... Click-click, whir.’ The camera answered him.

Smee appeared holding a small package in his hand. Stopping momentarily to check the way was clear. Walked to the lorry’s cab and handing the driver the package.

‘Click-click, whir... Click-click, whir... Click-click, whir.’ The camera capturing the sequence of events.

“Is he stupid?” Asked Harris seeing Smee point his finger at the driver angrily and shaking his head.

“He’s annoyed about something.” Noticed Alpes.

‘Click-click, whir.’

“Do we pull the lorry over?” Asked Alpes.

“Nah, he’s just the driver... it’s Hook we’re after... it’s probably just a lover’s tiff.” Informed Harris.

Gilbert roared the engine in frustration. Reaching for the tablet bottle from his pocket. Skillfully twisting the top off and throwing several tablets into his mouth and chewed on them. One more delivery then back to Milan.

It was going to be a long night.

“That was close...” informed Hook, “... bad enough we’re handling this lot, but I draw the line at drugs you hear? ... bad form I say.”

“Bad form Captain.” Agreed Smee.

“It’s only a matter of time he slips up and we’re nicked.”

“I hear you, Captain.”

“Get this lot down below... I have a bad feeling about tonight.” Hook stared up at the waning moon.

“Aye-aye Captain.”

“I’m going home.”

“You’re not staying to help?”

“You can handle it Mister Smee.” Waving him goodbye.

Smee watched as the captain disappeared inside.

“I’ll be fine Captain... Don’t worry about me Captain.” Muttered Smee beneath his breath eyeing the two dozen boxes inside the doorway.

Closing the door behind him, extinguished the bulb leaving the dancing moths to find another home. Then flicked another switch that appeared to do nothing. Lifting the corner of the heavily soiled carpet to reveal two sturdy metal hatches embedded in the floor. On opening the doors the imprisoned light escapes. Revealing a series of worn stone steps to an underground cellar. A remnant of the ancient Roman city. The cellar not on any council plans and long since been forgotten by man.

A single bulb illuminated the earth brick chamber. The air smelt dry and cold.

Smee lugged boxes into the hole in the ground, only to return for another. Then another. Then another. And another. Finally when it was all done, he stood back to look at his efforts and wiped sweat from his forehead. Stacked cartons filled a previously vacant corner. A rat scurries across the floor momentarily startling him.

hides behind a stack of boxes.

“Blasted rats!” Smee cursed the furry rodent.

Content that everything was as it should be, he climbed back to the surface with heavy footsteps.

‘Bang! Bang!’ Metal doors slam heavily, amplified loudly within the store room.

Flicking the switch Smee sends the subterranean chamber into darkness...

Taxman

“This arrived in the mail for you this morning.” Informed Gwendolyn handing her father a brown envelope.

“Blasted taxman... bad form...”, noticing the crown and circle on the corner, “... you deal with it my dear, I’m busy today.” Sliding the envelope back to her across the breakfast table.

“If you say father. I’m sure it’s nothing... you were in late last night.”

“A last-minute delivery from ah ...”, hesitating as he thinks of somewhere, “... from France... Champagne.” He lied.

“Oh, I thought we were already fully stocked?”

“We are, but you can never have enough... mind passing the pepper my dear.”

Hook shakes the silver condiment over pouched eggs showering them with black granules, hoping that was then end of the conversation.

“Are you still serious about moving from here?” She asked, re-igniting the argument from the night before.

“My mind is made up... we’re moving and that is that.

“And the property, what was it again...”, she thinks for a moment, only to have the name suddenly appear in her mind, as it had been placed there, “... *Neverland*, wasn’t it?”

Hook looked up, surprised she had remembered.

“Not a word to no-one.” He warned.

“It is *legal*, isn’t it?”

“Of course, it is... It’s just that, ah... *negotiations* are at a delicate stage.”

“Oh of course.”

“I shouldn’t have told you in the first place.”

“My lips are sealed father. You can trust me.”

“I know my dear. I know.”

“Oh, look at the time, I must fly.” Shoving the last bite of toast into her mouth, washing it down with lukewarm tea.

Hook looks to the clock seeing quarter to ten.

“I’ll be in later to talk to Mister Smee... he may be feeling a bit jaded after last evening.”

“You work him too hard father.”

“Perhaps.” Grinned Hook.

“See you later... *mmm!*” Placing her hand on the top of her father’s head as though it were a kiss.

Hook hears the front door close, and the sound of a car start and drive away.

“*Ahh_*.” He sighed relieved to have the place to himself.

Sitting back shakes the morning paper and scanned it for something interesting. Only to find the same news on a different day. It was all one big global pendulum swinging one way, then the other. Things that were up were coming down. And things that were down were going up. Only the names had changed. He looked about the kitchen of the manor house realized it was time for a change.

And Neverland would provide it.

“*Ha...*”, he chuckled, shaking the stiff, then notices the room had become suddenly chilly, “... *hmm.*”

Reaching for the cup of tea and takes a sip only to find that it too had become cold.

“How strange.” Grimacing with the distaste.

(Giggle). A mischievous laugh is heard.

Hook looked about hoping to catch where it had come from. It was the same as the laugh he had heard at the club and wondered if a ghost had followed him home. The wind rattles a windowpane drawing his attention to it.

“Perhaps it is time to move on.” Shaking the paper again.

“Morning Mister Smee!” Gwendolyn called out on her way to the office.

“Morning Miss Gwendolyn.” Wiping the bar with a cloth.

“Father said you a delivery of champagne last night.”

“*Champagne?*” Smee said surprised.

“From France... late delivery... last night.”

“Ohh_ *that* Champagne, why didn’t you say... aye, that’s right.”

“Do you have the paperwork for it.”

“*Paperwork?*”

“Yeah... delivery dockets, invoices... a manifest perhaps?”

“I think your father must have those... silly me I must have gotten to get them off him... It was rather late.”

“He works you too hard Mister Smee.” She empathized with him.

“He’s a good man your father Miss Gwendolyn... I very grateful for all he has done for me.”

“Perhaps, but there are regulations that govern the workplace Mister Smee and there no excuse for over working you... why don’t you head off early today, it’s going to be quiet with the roadworks outside.”

“You’re most kind Miss Gwendolyn.”

Just as he spoke the sound of a compressor engine came to life soon followed by a pounding jackhammer. Shaking the building to its ancient foundations. Dust falls like snow from above. Covering the bar Smee had just polished.

“Blasted council!” Cursed Smee looking sternly towards the windows.

Above his head the crocodile shakes and wobbles on its braces. A bolt turns here. A nut begins to loosen there.

“I’ll be in the office if you need me Mister Smee.”

“Right-o Miss Gwendolyn...”, about to wipe down the bar top again, “... blasted council! Bad form!”

Placing the mail from her handbag on in-tray to be opened later. Re-booting the computer in the process. Then contemplated which to do first.

“Coffee.” She decides.

Returning with a hot steaming cup. Shuffling envelopes, sorting them by size. Saving His Majesty’s Revenue and Customs for last. Running a silver bladed knife along an edge she guts each envelope and removes the content inside. Reading the paper entrails before dispensing them to an in-tray for processing later. Finally, she comes to the brown envelope obvious as to who was the sender. Reluctantly she stabbed at an opening pulling out a several fold of papers. Her eyes are barbed on two words in the subject line...

TAX AUDIT

Initially taken back. No one ever likes a visit from the taxman. It's as though the grim reaper had come calling. But she knew the books were in order, having prepared them herself.

"Hm." Expressing her enthusiasm.

Wondering what had sparked their attention.

Nothing came to mind. She contemplated calling her father as if he would know why. But decided to wait until he arrived. Something niggled her about the recent delivery of champagne. Heading to the storeroom with a list of the stock on a clipboard. The room was dark and cold. Fingers fiddle for a switch.

Flicking one, nothing happened.

"Still haven't gotten that switch fixed."

Throwing another switch, and the storeroom comes to life. Blinding her momentarily. Bottles of wine and barrels of beer line the walls on racks. Working her way around the storeroom methodically ticking off stock items. Counting bottles and ticking the clipboard. Everything seemed to be accounted for. Looking about for the boxes of champagne, finds none lying about.

"That can't be right?" Shaking her head.

Returning to the bar to find Smee now racking glasses.

"Everything okay Miss Gwendolyn?" Seeing a confused look on her face.

"I can't seem to find that delivery of Champagne from last night."

"Is that right Miss Gwendolyn." Replied Smee scratching his head.

"That's right Mister Smee."

"I didn't rightly get a good look at them Miss, it was dark and late... Maybe the Captain can help, he has the papers and all Miss."

"You're right Mister Smee... you must be tired."

"If that will be all Miss, I better get back to work."

"Thank you, Mister Smee, sorry to disturb you."

"Anytime Miss Gwendolyn."

"Oh, Mister Smee, before you go." Catching his attention.

"What's that Miss Gwendolyn?"

"We really must get that switch fixed."

"Switch Miss?"

"The switch in the storeroom... One doesn't work."

"I'll look into it personally myself... must be a faulty bulb." Informed Smee knowingly.

"There's only one bulb in the storeroom... And that works perfectly fine." She informed him.

"Hm... I never noticed..." Smee lied, "... I'll have the sparkie look at it."

"You do that Mister Smee... I wouldn't want it to cause a fire."

"No Miss..." Smee lied, "... thank you Miss."

Returning to the storeroom stood at center of the room. Eyes darted from the clipboard to the shelves and back again. Doubling checking her count. Everything that was supposed to be there was there. Tapping a foot on the heavy carpet beneath her feet. Shaking her head in frustration at the mystery.

It was as though the Champagne had vanished into thin air...

Kiss and Tell

The fire blazed brilliantly. Warming the inebriated members. Judge Tootles sat upright in his leather chair. Neither awake nor asleep, eyes gazing into space. His mind caught in a place between this world and the next. Talking to someone, only he could see. Taking a sip of brandy. A grin forms momentarily on his face then fell away as though he has passed wind. A cigar smolders in an oversized crystal ashtray on a side table. Astute ears prick to a conversation between young gentlemen seated nearby.

“So, how did it go with Tinkerbell... spill the beans.” Inquired Peter leaning forward.

“I’m not one to kiss and tell Peter.” Informed Nibs hiding behind a day-old Financial Times.

“That will be the day.” Said Peter.

“Well, if you insist...” Relented Nibs, “... I really don’t know where to begin quite frankly.” Unsure if he knew the events that had transpired himself.

“You were a gentleman?” Inquired Peter.

“Oh course... I think.”

“You think?”

“It’s all such a blur... I must have blacked out.”

“*Blacked out?* You better start from the beginning.”

“I remember waiting at my place... God knows how she found me...” he said as if he were bandit in hiding, “... I’m looking out the window for her and I see these leaves swirling up the street towards me...”

“Leaves?”

“Yes leaves... Autumn leaves if you must know.”

“Of course, they’re in season... go on.”

“They stop at my gate...”, he visualizes them settling, “... and I swear the gate opened and closed as they passed through... and what is most odd...” he hesitates.

“What’s that?”

“There was a pumpkin sitting on the side of the road.”

“A pumpkin, really? ... there weren’t eight white mice about by any chance?”

“I didn’t see any... not that I recall.”

“Because you blacked out.”

“That was later.”

“Exactly... next thing there’s a knock at the door... and there she is.”

“Like magic.”

“I wouldn’t go that far... anyway... least to say she looked beautiful.”

“And yourself?”

“Resplendent, of course.”

“Of course... go on.” Peter encouraged him.

Just then Sam and Curly appeared. Dressed in identical suits, drinks at hand they take their place on the couch beside the fire.

“Nibs...”

“... Peter.”

“Curly...”

“...Sam... Nibs was just filling me in on his date with what’s her name.” Peter teased him.

“Tinkerbell...” Nibs informed the twins.

“Don’t let us...”

“... stop you...”

“... please go on.”

“Hm...”, grumbled Nibs with three eager faces egging him on, “... as I was saying... she looked like an angel... there’s no other words to describe her... I can see why you were smitten by her Peter.”

“I was never ...” Began Peter.

“No use denying it Peter, any less man than myself, would be.”

“Of course... because you’re a gentleman.”

“Precisely.” Reminiscing the thought.

“Earth calling...”

“... Major Tom.” Said the twins seeing Nibs drift off.

“Sorry? What?” Nibs retruns to the room.

“You were saying?” Said Curly.

“Ah yes... I took her to one of my favorite restaurants.”

“Which one is that?”

“I can’t recall...” Nibs lied, “... she had the duck, and I had the something French... I think.”

“You don’t remember?”

“He blacked out.” Informed Peter coming to his defence.

“Blacked out? ...”

“...she roofied him.”

“She did not *roofied* me... did she?” Nibs turned to Peter seeking his opinion.

“Of course, not... you simply had too much to drink.”

“Next thing I know... I wake up with a pounding hangover... alone in my bed.”

“Of course...”

“... you did...”

“... she was probably...”

“... in the shower.”

Nibs looked at the twins as though they knew more than they were letting on. An awkward silence hung in the air.

Then decided that the truth was the best defence.

“No, actually... it was Tiger Lily.”

“Who’s Tiger Lily?” Asked Curly.

“Tinkerbell’s *sister*.” Informed Peter making quotation gestures with his fingers.

“Ah_ you nearly...”

“... had us there Nibs.” Said the twins sitting back chuckling to themselves.

“Tiger Lily? ... Really? I suppose she just magically appeared from nowhere as well?” Said Peter.

“Yeah... just like the *pumpkin*.” Replied Nibs.

“You’re not going to tell us what *really* happened are you?” Asked Peter.

“Like I say... I’m not one to kiss and tell Peter.” Shaking the paper and submersing behind it to hide...

Scotland Yard

Paper cups fill a wire basket. Dead cigarette butts lay buckled in an ashtray. The smell of their decaying bodies hung in the air. A man sits slumped over a keyboard.

Two nicotine-stained fingers poke at keys.

'*Stab... stab... stab...*', looking up at the screen then back to the keys in search of a letter, then another, '*...stab...stab...stab.*'

Suddenly the red phone on his desk begins to ring loudly.

'*Dring! Dring! ... Dring! Dring! ...*'

The man looks up at it annoyed.

'*Dring! Dring!... Dring! Dring! ...*'

"Blast it...", not wanting to be interrupted, "... it better be good." He warned the unknown caller before picking up the handpiece.

"Detective Sergeant Brown speaking." He spat into the mouthpiece.

"Detective Brown? ... Chief Inspector Prichard... Scotland Yard... Hope I'm not interrupting you."

"Not at all Inspector...", changing the tone, "... I ah... was just typing up a report... paperwork, you know how it goes."

"I do, I do."

"How can I help Inspector?"

"It's come to my attention that you have an investigation into a one Captain James Hook?"

"We are... is there a problem?" Swiveling around in his chair to stare out over greater London.

"No problem... Just a courtesy call... We also have our own ongoing investigation into Captain Hook and were wondering what your interests in him were."

"Courtesy call? ...", he asked suspiciously, "... then you won't mind me asking your interest in him?"

"Touché Detective... you show me yours I'll show you mine... well if you must know, drug trafficking."

"Drug trafficking? Hook? ...", Brown chuckled to himself, "... that's impossible."

"And you Detective?"

"Contraband... but I very much doubt Hook is involved in drugs. That's out of his league."

"Perhaps, but sources have him connected to the Bianchi Cartel... Milan... does the name Gilbert Garcia ring any bells?"

"We know Gilbert very well... low rung driver... what of him?"

"He's been spotted making drop offs about the city... Cocaine, Meth, Ecstasy."

"That doesn't sound like Hook."

"Never does until we bring them in."

"We have two men going in uncover as part a routine tax audit in the next couple of weeks, snoop around the storeroom, I'll let you know if we come across anything."

"You do that... I'd certainly be interested."

"I'll inform the team of your interest... thanks for the call, Inspector."

"Thank you, Detective."

The phone goes dead. Placing the handpiece back he stared at it in disbelief.

"Nah. Not Hook." Shaking his head.

The computer screen draws his attention back to the uncompleted report. Eyes struggle to focus again scanning one side to the other. Finding where he had left off.

Fingers stab at keys.

'Stab... stab... stab...'

Looking up at the screen then back to the keys.

'...stab...stab...stab.'

The tip of a tongue protrudes between a pair of pursed lips....

“You looking for something? ...” Peter asked catching Gwendolyn going through a set of drawers like a child searching for a hidden Christmas present.

Archie looked up from a chair.

“Socks.” She lied.

“Socks?”

“I’m cold.” Closing the drawer.

“Then come back to bed... it’s the middle of the night.”

“Its eight-thirty in the morning... some of us have jobs to go to... have you ever worked a day in your life?”

“I had a paper-round once...,” then qualified, “... as a child of course.”

“I hope so.”

“Call in sick.”

“Father has Mister Smee working hard enough as it is, poor thing.”

“Come back to bed.” Holding out his hand.

Taking it she looks at him laying half naked on the bed.

“When are you going to make a decent woman of Peter Pan?” She said suggestively.

“I’m working on that.”

“Are you now? ...”, she grinned knowingly, “... and the ring?”

“Ah, the ring...”

“It’s okay, Tinkerbell showed me... it’s *beautiful*.”

“Did she now?” Piecing together Tinkerbell’s trickery.

“I hope you don’t mind.”

“I was wanting it to be a surprise.” He lied.

“Where is it? Can I see it?” Eyes widened with anticipation looking about the room as though she has missed a secret hiding place.

“Well its ah...”, hesitating to think of an excuse, “... it’s getting polished.”

“It polished? It looked perfectly okay to me.”

“I want nothing but the best for you Gwendolyn.” Kissing her and pulling her into bed...

... Meanwhile, sometime later, Peter and Gwendolyn lay side by side, exhausted, panting. Staring blankly at the ceiling.

“What about Mister Smee?” He asked from nowhere.

“I only have eyes for you Peter.”

“You know what I mean.”

“I’ll call in sick... Mister Smee can manage on his own. Besides, the road works have practically shut us down.”

“We could go for a walk later.”

“That would be nice.”

“Nibs went on a date with Tinkerbell.” Enlightened Peter.

“Nibs? On a date?”

“Apparently... or so he said.”

“Wonders never cease. How did it go?” She asked curiously.

“He can’t recall... he blanked out apparently... says he went out with Tinkerbell and woke up to Tiger Lily... and something about a pumpkin.”

“A pumpkin?”

“Don’t ask... I’m sure he made the whole story up to throw us off.”

“Sounds like Nibs.... We may be moving?” She raises the subject.

“Moving? ...”, Peter parroted, “... where?”

“Father is looking to sell and move to Kensington.”

“Kensington? ... That would explain the membership.” Surmised Peter suspiciously.

“Something about buying property there... what was the name he said... hm...”, she tried to recall, “... something *land*... wonderland? ... No ... Everland? ... no... *Neverland*. That’s what he called it... Neverland... What a *strange* name.”

“What did you just say?” Asked Peter, sitting upright looking at her.

“Neverland...”, she repeated seeing a strange come over him, “... is something wrong.”

“That’s where Tinkerbell works. It’s a hospital, Wendy is a patient there... what did he say?”

“He’s buying the place... something about knocking it down and building an apartment in its place.”

“He can’t... it’s not for sale.”

“He said something about negotiations were taking place ... I’m so sorry Peter, I didn’t know.”

“It’s not your fault ...”, kissing her forehead, “...why don’t we take a walk this afternoon and visit Tinkerbell to find out what she knows.” ...

I have a Plan

“It’s not much further...”, informed Peter seeing the brick building in the distance, “... come on Archie.”

The terrier cocked a leg to another tree and dashed towards him.

“Are you sure about this Peter?” Asked Gwendolyn having second thoughts.

“I just want to know what’s going on.” Arriving at the open gate.

Gwendolyn froze, reluctant to step inside. The building cast a cold ominous shadow over her. Sending a rash of goosebumps over her.

“Maybe I should wait outside.” She hesitated.

“She won’t bite.”

“But my father who’s behind all this.”

“We don’t know who’s involved...”, taking her by the hand and squeezing it lightly, “... come on, you can meet Wendy.”

Suddenly Archie scampered through the gate and into open front door as if someone had called his name.

“Archie!... Come back here you! ...”, calling out in vain, “... well I guess we’re going in.”

Gwendolyn’s nose twitches. A scent of pine disinfectant hung in the air. A nurse pushes a trolley with a squeaky wheel along the hallway and catches sight of Peter.

“Ah Peter.” Said the nurse seeing him in the foyer.

“Sister Maria... is Tinkerbell about?”

“She hasn’t arrived just yet...”, looking to the clock on the wall, “... she shouldn’t be much longer.”

“Oh, okay then, perhaps we could wait for her.”

“Wendy is in her room if you would like to wait there...”, hearing giggles and squeals, “... she could do with a visitor face today... it will lift her wee spirits.”

“Is she okay?”

“She’s fine... it was close, but she’s a fighter. Why don’t you surprise her.”

“We will... thank you Sister.”

Sister Maria continues on her way. A wheel wobbles and squeaks as though whistling a tune to itself as it went on its merry way.

“This way...” Said Peter following the squeaking wheel to an open door.

Gwendolyn takes in the monitors and drip stand. Something was not right. The goosebumps she had experienced earlier returned to haunt her.

Archie paws at blankets with a child fidgeting and giggling beneath,

“Archie! Stop that.”

The terrier halted momentarily looking over to Peter standing in the doorway. The giggling beneath the blanket fell silent. Suddenly Archie pounced on the lump only to awaken the squealing prey beneath. Peter lifts the terrier from the bed and places him on the floor. The wiggling lump becomes still.

Peter pokes at the lump with a finger.

“*Ekh!*” The lump reflexed and squealed.

Peter poked again. This time at a leg. The lump flinched and squealed in anticipation of another attack elsewhere. Pulling back the blanket exposes a child’s head, tangled hair over a face. An oxygen mask covers much of the face.

Peter is taken back, unsure who he was looking at.

“Peter.” Said Wendy wheezing for breath.

She sees Gwendolyn standing behind him.

“Hello Wendy.” Gwendolyn replied quietly.

“Are you, his girlfriend?”

“You could say that.” She grinned.

“He said he wanted to marry you.” Said Wendy.

“Did he now?” Looking to Peter.

“We talk, you know.”

“Obviously... And how are you today?” She asked.

“Okay... I suppose.” Sitting upright taking off the mask.

“We’ve come to see Tinkerbell, but it’s always good to see you... you want to go for a walk later... to the park?” Asked Peter.

“Not today... I’m tired.”

“We’ll back tomorrow okay.”

“Okay.”

“Not today, Archie, Wendy is tired.” He informed the terrier, looking up at him.

“Woof!” Barked Archie in reply causing Wendy to chuckle.

“There you are.” Said a voice from the doorway.

“Tinkerbell.” Said Peter surprised to see her.

Lifting Archie back onto the bed. Wendy hides beneath the blankets again as Archie paws at the fidgeting elongated lump.

“Why don’t we go out back where its quieter...”, informed Tinkerbell leading the way, “... a job well done...”, inspecting the back yard, “... how is Nibs?”

“Confused... but otherwise he’s good.”

“So what brings you here?” She asked.

“I don’t know how to say this but... I heard that someone may be acquiring Neverland?”

“Really? ...”, trying to sound surprised, “... And who might that be?”

“I’d rather not say at this stage.” Peter hesitated.

“My father... I’m so sorry.” Blurted Gwendolyn not wishing to play games.

“Ah, Captain Hook... I should have known he was behind this.” Said Tinkerbell.

“You knew about this?”

“We had notice from the Council.”

“What notice?” Asked Peter.

Just then Tiger Lilly appeared at the back door holding a brown envelope and handed it to Tinkerbell.

“Thank you.”

Tiger Lilly returned inside soon followed by a bright flash of light.

“Did you see that?” Asked Peter.

“See what?” Asked Tinkerbell, handing him the envelope.

“Nothing.”

Peter begins to read the first page.

“*Eviction Notice?* ... They can’t be serious?”

“I’m afraid they are... we have just on two months to come up with the money or...”, informed Tinkerbell, unable finish.

“We have to do something!” Pleaded Peter.

“What can we do Peter? ... It’s hopeless, we don’t have the money.”

“How have you survived to date?”

“On donations... and prayers... everyone who works here, is a volunteer.”

“What sort of hospital runs on volunteers?”

“Dear, dear Peter... this is not a hospital.”

“Then what is it?”

Gwendolyn places her hand in his as though she had something to say.

“Peter... it’s a hospice... for children.” She quietly informed him.

“A *hospice*? Don’t be ridiculous... what about Wendy?”

Gwendolyn looked into his eyes and said nothing. No words would change the reality of the situation.

“She said she was going *home*.” Shaking his head in disbelief.

“In many ways she is...”, informed Tinkerbell, “... she’s accepted her fate... You must too.”

Peter sat stunned. Half in disbelief. Half in anger. Half confused. Half in denial.

“Peter...”, Gwendolyn consoles him, “... you, okay?”

“Yeah, yeah... who’s this Councillor *Murtagh*? Let me talk to him.” Seeing the name at the bottom of the page.

“I’ve already spoken to him... his hands are tied.”

“So *Hook* can just come in and buy the place, just like that? ...”, then realized what he had just said, “... sorry.”

“It’s okay.” Said Gwendolyn squeezing his hand softly.

“You could speak to your father this evening. Perhaps he’ll change his mind.”

“I very much doubt that... Once he has his mind set on something...”

“Besides, if it is not the Captain then there is always someone else who will...” Informed Tinkerbell, “... our only chance is to raise the money in time.”

“How much are we talking about?” Asked Gwendolyn.

“One and half million... pounds.” Informed Tinkerbell.

“(Gulp) ... How much?” Blinked Peter.

“And that is just the arrears... there are on-going costs to run this place... donations can only go so far.” Tinkerbell said in despair.

“Where are we going to find that sort of money?” Asked Gwendolyn.

Peter sat silent, his mind deep in thought.

“What are you thinking Peter Pan?” Seeing a distant look come over him.

“We’re thinking too small... we have to think... big.” His eyes shine with hope.

“What are you on about?” Asked Gwendolyn.

“I have an idea... It’s a long shot, but it might just work.”

“Tea? ...” Asked Tiger Lilly appearing with a tray laden with tea and muffins, “... Is everything okay?”

“Perfect... Couldn’t be better.” Grinned Tinkerbell...

The Investment

Fingers tap on leather armrests like morse code. Peter fidgets in his seat as he waited anxiously for the others to arrive. The Royal and Ancient Gentleman's Club felt *different* this evening. Something had stirred inside him. Something had been awoken. Something that had been asleep for a very long time. As though a pang of guilt had been liberated from the very depths of his soul. He looked about the lifeless grey-haired gentlemen seated in dark dinner suits. And starched white shirts. Propped up by brandy and cigars. It was as though he were looking into his future.

He was beginning to feel like a fish out of water.

Then sees Judge Tootle talking on a phone. \

"That's weird."

Not just a phone. But a smart phone. Surely the incongruence of the event would cause a collapse of the space-time continuum, thought Peter. He waited for a portal to open up to suck him and everyone on the planet into it.

But nothing happened.

He watched on. If only out of curiosity. The Judge was alive. Animated. Talking to someone on the other end of the call. His head bobbed up and down in agreeance. Having seemed like he had finished. Held the device out before him and poked at the screen with a finger. Again, and again. Ensuring the thing was dead. Before tucking it inside his jacket.

Taking a heavy draw on a cigar, exhales a plume of smoke into the air. Settling back into his chair takes a sip of brandy. He turns his head to catch Peter watching at him as though he had been caught out. The Judge grinned and raised his glass to him.

Peter reciprocated the gesture.

"Peter?" A voice called out diverting his attention.

"Nibs I'm glad you came."

"So, what's the emergency?"

"Probably best to wait for Sam and Curly."

"If you say so old chap... how many have you had?" Noticing two empty brandy glasses sit on a small table beside Peter.

"Not enough."

"Is it about Gwendolyn?"

"Not really... I don't think... maybe her father... well actually, it's a lot to do with her father if you must know."

"You're telling the story old chap...", signaling a waiter, "... two more."

"Have a seat." Invites Peter.

"Don't mind if I do...", taking his chair by the fire relishing its glowing warmth, "... it's getting nippy outside."

"How you placed for the audit?" Asked Peter curiously.

"I should be fine. My accountant is just pulling together the balance sheet... I should squeeze in with some to spare... and you?"

"I'm speaking to my father's accountant next week."

"You're cutting it a bit fine old chap, aren't you?"

"Something has cropped up... an emergency... so to speak."

"Is that what this little meeting about?" Inquired Nibs.

“In a way...”, the conversation is interrupted by a waiter balancing a silver tray and two bulbous brandy glasses.

“Merci beaucoup.” Thanked Nibs swirling the golden solution about the sides of the glass.

“*Prendre Plaisir.*” The waiter subtly nodded subtly and walked away.

Peter waited for the waiter to fall outside ear shot.

“Do *we* really *belong* here Nibs?” Gesturing the giant hall.

“Well it’s our *birthright* isn’t it... carrying on from our fathers, as our sons will after us.”

“I don’t have a son... do you?”

“Not that I’m aware of... one day... who knows... Tiger Lilly might be the one.”

Suddenly Nibs feels a sharp kick to his shin.

“*Ow!*” Grasping his leg and rubbing it.

“You okay old chap?” Asked Peter.

“Cramp.” He lied.

“You and Tiger Lilly? That will be the day.”

Suddenly Peter feels a sharp kick to his lower leg.

“*Ow!*” He cried out by the sudden pain.

“Not you too?... must be the cold weather...”, deduced Nibs sitting closer to the flickering fire.

“Must be.” Rubbing his shin.

“Spill the beans Peter, you’re hopeless at keeping secrets... before the other two get here and conjure up their own story... you know what they’re like.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right... it’s about Neverland.”

“Oh no, no, no...”, Nibs stuttered, “... my hands have never been the same after the last indenture.”

“No, it’s not another busy bee.”

“Thank goodness for that, what is it then?”

“They’re being evicted.”

“Evicted? Don’t be ridiculous... they can’t evict a hospital... can they?”

“Apparently, they can... that’s the other thing... it’s not that exactly a hospital.”

“What is it then... It looked like a hospital.” He asked with a concerned look.

Peter waited. Hoping Nibs would come to the same realization for what it was. But Nibs just stared blankly back at him.

“It’s a hospice Nibs... these kids never get to grow up.”

“What about Wendy?”

“Her too.”

“Ah...” It all fell into place. Tinkerbell, the charity store, “...what can we do?” He asked.

“Save them.”

“How?”

“They have two months to come up with the arrears.”

“How much is it... let me write a cheque.” Said Nibs reaching for a bill fold inside his jacket.

“You don’t understand... they’re not two months in arrears...”

“What is it then?”

“... they have two months to come up with one and half million pounds.”

“*(Gulp)*... did you say one and half million?” Pocketing the check book.

“Hook is looking to buy the building and bulldoze it for apartments.”

“If we all chipped in, we could cover it...”, suggested Nibs, “... I could spare half a million.”

“I could too... and the twins the balance.”

“And then some... so, why the worry look.” Asked Nibs.

“Paying off the arears will only stop the bleeding for the time being.”

“And?” Asked Nibs inhaling the vapors from the glass dulling his growing anxiety.

“We have to think long term... we need to think... *big*... really big ... we can't let them take it.”

“What do you suggest we do?”

“We buy the property ourselves... as an investment as it were... London land prices can only go up.”

“How's that going to work? They still need money to operate.”

“The biggest cost of any business are wages and rent... most of the staff are volunteers, that just leaves some capital expenditure on equipment... but nothing we can't solicit from donors and medical companies... if we extinguish the Council's rent you've gotten ridden of ninety percent of the outgoings.”

“And we have a valuable piece of real estate in Kensington...” Added Nibs forming the picture in his head, “... you may be onto something.”

“Rather us, than Hook don't you think?”

“How much is this property going to cost?” Asked Nibs sitting back as if to distance himself from the answer.

“Latest valuations, from what I've investigated is... in the order of five million.”

“five million!” Gaped Nibs, hoping no one had heard him.

He looked about to see no one looking his way.

“You can't be serious? We don't have that sort of money.”

“I could scratch together a million and half... I'm guessing the same from you and another two from the twins.”

“That shouldn't be a problem for them from what I've heard... but you over look one fact Peter.”

“And what's that?”

“There's a little matter of the Club's Audit and our membership here.” Reminded Nibs.

“Ah-ha my dear friend... it's all in the timing.” Said Peter as if revealing a magic trick.

“And what timing would that be old chap?” Asked Nibs.

“The Audit is in two weeks' time... the arears are not due for another two months, then there's the obligatory sale date... the club would be none the wiser.”

“I see your point grasshopper... but what makes you think I'm going along with this scheme of yours?”

“*Tiger Lilly*... I can't see you throwing the mother of your children onto the street?”

“Hold on a jolly minute there... I barely know the woman.”

Suddenly Nibs feels another sharp kick to his shin.”

“*Ow!*” He cringes rubbing his leg.

“You okay old chap?” Asked Peter.

“Did just kick me?”

“Not me old chap... maybe it's your conscious pricking you.”

“Funny place to have a conscious if you ask me.”

“So, are you in or not?”

“Hmm, I’ll wait to see what the twins have to think about your crazy proposition... If they’re in, I’m in... but I don’t think you’ll get a penny out of them.”

“Ah... speak of the devils.” Said Peter seeing the twins arrive.

“Peter...”

“... Nibs.” The twins sung out.

“Has Peter ...”

“... told you the news...”

“... *exciting*, isn’t it?” Replied Sam and Curly taking the couch opposite before fidgeting like two naughty school boys.

“They know already?” Asked Nibs.

“Asked them earlier today... here’s to you Nibs.” Raising his glass to him...

What's Plan B

The bar door opened. Four suited men walk briskly inside eager to escape the sound of the noisy jack hammers. Heads look up from pints and papers and crisps to see who had disturbed their peaceful afternoon.

Looking like four thirsty patrons, Smee eager to serve them.

“What will it be gentlemen?” He asked reaching for pint glasses.

“Not just now thankyou barman... perhaps afterwards...”, the gentleman turned to look at a colleague nodding in agreeance, “... we're here to see a...”, unfolding a piece of paper and inspecting it for a name, “... a *Captain James Hook*?”

Smee eyes the men suspiciously as though something was not right about them. Alpes and Harris look incongruent to the other two dressed in sharp dark suits.

“Is he available? He is expecting us.” Said a gentleman.

“Is that right? ... he's not here right now. Can I ask what this is about?” Asked Smee.

“We're from His Majesties Customs and Revenue... just a *routine* audit.”

“Oh, I see... like I say, he's not here right now, I'm expecting him in soon... his daughter is here... she handles the books ... I could tell her you're here... if you don't mind waiting... a drink while you wait...”, baiting the men, “... on the house of course... anything for His Majesties Customs and Revenue.” Grinning a crocodile grin.

“Perhaps a quick one wouldn't hurt.” Said the gentleman looking to his partner beside him.

“I wouldn't say no.” Replied the other man.

Alpes shrugged his shoulders and looked to Harris for sanctioning. Harris thought long and hard as to what Brown would think about them drinking on the job.

“Why not.” He relented.

“What will it be gentlemen.”

“Four pints of London Pride... And a packet of Walkers.”

“Coming right up... take a booth, I'll bring them over to you.” Indicating a distant corner booth.

“Cheers.”

Moments later Smee arrived holding a tray of four large frothing beers and a packet of potato crisps.

“Enjoy... Like I say the captain won't be much longer... get those down you first.”

“Most appreciated.”

They wait for Smee to leave and turned to look at each other.

“We're not here to drink beer gentlemen...”, warned Harris... “... if Brown finds out we won't hear the end of it.”

“He won't find out and besides... we're undercover remember... we have to look the part... you boys must get free drinks all the time?” Asked Alpes supping his ale leaving a white moustache on his upper lip.

“Not really... this is the first.” A taxman replied.

“Bloody hell... Hook already has us over a barrel, and we haven't even begun.” Informed Harris.

“So, what's the plan?” Asked a taxman beside him.

“One of us needs to get into Hook's storeroom... Have a look around for anything that doesn't belong.”

“I can arrange that.” Said one taxman.

“The other needs to go through the paperwork... That’s probably you.” Looking to Alpes.

“What you trying to say?” Asked Alpes.

“Nothing... you have a better eye for detail.” Harris lied.

“Oh. If you say.” Relented Alpes.

“You can accompany him, make it look official... ask all the right questions.” Harris looked to the taxman.

“Cheers...”, Alpes raises his glass, then notices the crocodile mounted above the bar, “... is that thing real?”

“Once probably.” Informed Harris.

“Doesn’t look very safe if you ask me.”

“Nobody is asking you... And besides, you’re a tax man, not a health and safety inspector.”

“Just saying.” Said Alpes.

‘*Knock-knock.*’ Smee knocked on a door.

“Who’s there?” Joked Gwendolyn looking up from a ledger.

“Only me Miss Gwendolyn... sorry to disturb you... there’s four gentlemen from the tax department here to see the captain.”

“Oh blast... is that today...”, frantically flicking pages of a calendar diary before stopping at a page, “... where are they?”

“I’ve given them a beer while they wait for the Captain.”

“Good thinking... it will give me time to tidy up here... tell them I’ll be with them as soon.”

“Righty-o Miss Gwendolyn... you sure you don’t want to wait for the captain Miss?”

“I handle the books around here.”

“As you say Miss Gwendolyn.”

Gwendolyn busily re-arranged her desk. Stacking papers into neat piles. Aligning files into regimented rows. Content everything was in its place. Switching the computer to a surveillance screen sees the bar and patrons in high definition black and white. And spies four gentlemen sitting at a corner booth. Their pint glasses near empty. One eating a bag of crisps. She toys with idea of serving them another. Then decides against it. The taxman was difficult enough sober. Let alone intoxicated.

‘*Unusual to send four.*’ She thought, two would have been more than enough.

Contemplating the seriousness of the audit decides to interrupt their beers after all.

“*Gentlemen...*”, getting attention, “... how are you today?”

“Very well thank you.” Replied Harris caught off guard.

“My apologies... my father seems to have been delayed for some reason, but as the office manager I will be happy to assist you in your enquiries... if you like to follow me.” Walking away leaving the men to hurriedly scull the remainder of their beers.

“Sorry, there isn’t much room, I wasn’t expecting as many... *why are there* so many of you?”

“Oh, we ah... we ah...” Stuttered Harris lost for a reason.

“We thought we’d kill two birds with one stone... VAT and customs duties.”

“If you say..., where would you like to begin?” She asked.

“I thought this gentleman and I could begin by going over your VAT returns and the other two gentlemen could inspect your storeroom and match it to the Customs Manifest.”

“These men have *names*?”

“Of, course they do... I’m Hicks and that gentleman is Douglas and the other two are... *Alpes*? And ah...”

“*Harris*... we’re new the audit team.”

“Are you sure you are from the Revenue Department? ...”, becoming wary of the gentleman, “... do you have any credentials I can see?”

“My apologies...”, Hicks pulled a wallet from within a jacket, opening it to reveal plastic identity card.

She inspects the faded photograph and looks to Hicks for a vague likeness and handed it back to him. Douglas fumbles with his wallet and clumsily drops it on the floor. Picking it up and hands her a wallet that had seen better days jammed with receipts and credit cards. Flipping it open reveals a picture was as bad as the first.

Alpes and Harris pat themselves down to play along knowing they would be found wanting.

“Don’t bother...”, she informed the two men, handing wallet back to Douglas as though it were diseased, “...I’ve seen enough... you can’t be too careful these days.”

“Perfectly understood Miss ... do you have a schedule of inventory?”

“Of course...”, reaching for a folder on a shelf behind her, “... I would have Mister Smee show you around but he’s busy tending bar... the storeroom is just down the hall, you can’t miss it.”, handing the schedule to Douglas.

“Most obliged.”

“If you have any questions, I be here with Mister Hicks and Mister... *Alpes*, was it?”

“That’s right Miss.” Alpes confirmed.

Douglas and Harris make their way to the storeroom only to find it in complete darkness. Fingers fumble for a switch.

‘*Click.*’ Nothing.

Harris tries again as if a second time would produce a different result. Nothing.

“Blast. How are we to see in the dark? ...”, cursed Harris, then fingers felt another switch, “... hold on.”

‘*Click.*’ And a single overhead light illuminates the void.

“Let there be light.” Said Douglas.

The air smelt dry and stale. Harris opens the back door. A gust of fresh air rushes past him, together with the deafening noise of road works. He takes a quick glance into the back lot. Tire tracks led up the back door. A battered dumpster sits beside a brick wall. Suddenly a large black rat scurried along the bottom of the fence and disappeared behind the dumpster.

Harris had seen enough, and quickly closes the door. Keeping the noise and the rat outside.

“Right, where do we begin?” Asked Harris.

“I was hoping you tell me... what are we exactly looking for?” Inquired Douglas.

“Anything that isn’t on there, I’m guessing.” Pointing a finger at the schedule.

“Why don’t we start in this corner and work out way around.”

“Good idea.”

Methodically they worked their way around the storeroom only to return to the same spot they had begun an hour earlier.

“That can’t be right.” Said Harris.

“We’ve checked everything off. It’s all accounted for, to the bottle. What exactly are you looking for?”

“A bloody lorry load... That’s what I’m looking for. It just can’t disappear into thin air. Can it?” Said Harris stands beneath the bulb.

A soil-stained carpet beneath his feet. The musty air was beginning to irritate his lungs.

“Maybe he’s shipped it out already?” Suggested Hicks.

“Maybe. But we would have noticed.”

“It’s all in order...” Informed Douglas signing off the schedule.

Suddenly the doorway is filled with large menacing silhouette.

“Can I help you gentlemen?” Asked Smee anxiously seeing Harris standing on the carpet.

“No, not really... I think we are done here.”

Smee eyed Harris suspiciously. There was something not right about him. Something that made the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end. He glances about the storeroom to ensure nothing was out of place.

“Very well then. Don’t forget to turn off the light before you leave. I must get back to the bar.”

“We’ll be right out.”

Harris waited for Smee to leave.

“Blast. Brown is not going to like this. Let’s see what Alpes has found.” Flicking the switch.

‘Click.’ But nothing happens. Then remembered the second switch.

‘Click.’ The room falls into darkness.

“They really should get that fixed.” Remarked Douglas.

“How’d you get on?” Asked Alpes before thinking.

“All good. You run a tight ship Miss.” Shaking his head in frustration.

“You can thank Mister Smee for that. He handles all consignments. I just handle the paperwork.”

“Is that right?” Said Harris.

“Indeed, nothing comes or goes without Mister Smee knowing about it.”

“I’ll make a note.”

“Is that necessary?” Questioned Gwendolyn.

“Oh, to thank him.”

“You two, almost done here? ...”, asked Harris checking the time, “... we better be getting back.”

“But we still have another return to work through.”

“Let’s save that for another day, shall we?” Keen to get going.

“I thought you were new to the team?” Questioned Gwendolyn looking to Harris then to Hicks.

“He is... but as a senior officer... so to speak.” Informed Hicks.

“Okay then if you insist... I’m happy to schedule another time, how’s next week for you?” Asked Gwendolyn.

“That won’t be necessary Miss. We’ll call you... keep up the good work.”

“Why thank you... I do try my best.” Blushed Gwendolyn.

“Gentlemen... pack up your... *stuff* ... its time head back to the *office*.”

“I thought we might have a another before we go.” Said Alpes.

“Not on my watch.” Informed Harris snapping the briefcase closed like crocodile jaws.

The four men leave as empty handed as they had arrived and are greeted on the street by the sound of road works and biting northerly breeze. Harris pulled the collar of his jacket up and looks to the two taxmen.

“You two better head back. Sorry to waste your time.” Said Harris watching then wave down a black cab and drive away.

“Brown won’t be happy...”, said Alpes, “... didn’t you find anything?”

“Not a drop.” Said Harris frustrated.

“We can’t go back in again. Not after telling them everything was in order.”

“I know... we just have to move to Plan B.”

“What’s Plan B?”

“I haven’t decided yet... but whatever it is... Brown won’t be happy about it.”

“You’re back early. I wasn’t expecting you until after five.” Said Brown looking up from a keyboard.

The despondent look on the detective faces telegraphed the bad news.

“What happened?”

“Nothing happened. Hook is clean as a whistle.” Informed Harris.

“That can’t be right. We’ve just had two of His Majesties’ finest go over the place and you’re telling me nothing is out of place? ... not one bottle?”

“That’s right... his daughter keeps the books, to the penny... however, ...”

“However, what?” Brown leans forward hoping all was not lost.

“Smee handles the consignments. Hook’s daughter’s a patsy... whatever he’s up to, she’s not in on it.”

“Okay then, we’ll focus on Smee.” Instructed Brown.

“But the contraband wasn’t there.” Reminded Alpes.

“Did you check the basement?”

“What basement? ... there was no basement.”

“Of course, there is... some of those buildings go back for centuries.”

“Now that you mention it...”

“What’s that?” Asked Brown keenly.

“There was a second switch...”, informed Harris, “... but it didn’t work... if you know what I mean.”

“He’s hiding something gentlemen.” Said Brown reclining back in the chair in thought.

“But we can’t go back...”, informed Alpes, “... he’ll be onto us.”

“Then that leaves us only one option gentlemen.”

“Plan B?” Asked Alpes.

“A raid, gentlemen ... I’ll inform the boys at the Yard... we’re going in.” Informed Brown leaning back in his chair...

Father, how could You?

“Where were you yesterday?” Asked Gwendolyn somewhat angrily seeing her father appearing for breakfast.

“I was out of town on business if you must know... got back later than I anticipated, I hope I didn’t wake you.”

“No, you didn’t wake me... I was still awake.”

“Trouble sleeping?” He asked pouring himself a cup of steaming tea.

“You could say that.” Replied cryptically.

Hook sensed an uneasy tone in her voice. A tone that women made when men were in trouble.

“Have I done something wrong?” He inquired innocently as it were something trivial like leaving the toilet seat up. Or had forgotten to take his shoes off.

“Well, firstly...”

“Firstly? ... There is more than one? ... I must be trouble.” Hook joked amusingly.

“This is nothing to joke about. If mother was here...”, she began, only to be cut short.

“Leave your mother out of this... she is not here to defend herself.”

“I’m sorry... It’s not about her... It’s about *you*.”

“*Me*? What have I done to upset you my dear? ...”. Raising the corner of his mouth as though it were humorous, “...(*chuckle*).”

“Firstly, four people from the tax department came yesterday.”

“Was that *yesterday*? I must have forgotten... how did it go?” He asked curiously.

“The books were in order if that’s what you’re asking... you’ll have to speak to Mister Smee about the storeroom.”

“What about the storeroom?” Frowned Hook now paying attention.

“Mister Smee said they were crawling all over it... as if they were looking for something... which reminds me... what ever happened to the champagne you got delivered. I’ve never seen the paperwork for it.”

“Have you asked Mister Smee?”

“I did, and he said you must have it.”

“They might in the car, or my briefcase... you know how disorganized I am.” Hook hides behind the paper.

“I very much doubt that father.” Calling out his lie.

“I’ll speak with Smee when I see him today.”

“You do that.”

“Was there something else you wanted to talk about?” Hook enquired hoping the worse was over.

Gwendolyn took a sip of black coffee wondering how to raise the subject that would strike a divide between them.

“Actually, there is...”, taking a deep breath to compose herself, “... father, put the paper down, we need to speak.”

“I thought we just did.” Looking over the paper to see the stein look on his daughter’s face.

‘*What could be worse than the taxman?*’ He thought, before another thought struck him between the eyes.

“You’re not *pregnant to Pan*, are you?” He asked anxiously.

“I’d be so lucky.” She replied with a grin, if only to see the look on her father’s face.
 “I told you to keep away from the *boy*.”
 “Father, I will see whoever I choose to see.”
 “That boy will amount to nothing!”
 “Whatever he amounts to will be less... *shameful*, than what are proposing to do.”
 There, she had said it.
 Hook sat in silence. Unsure what his daughter was on about.
 “Shameful? ... Excuse me?” Stunned by the accusation.
 “You know exactly what I am talking about... *Neverland*.”
 ‘*Neverland?*’ Thought Hook.
 “What about it?” He asked.
 “You intend to buy it?”
 “That is my intention... I told you, weeks ago.” Defended Hook wondering what all the fuss was about.
 “Yes, but that was before I knew what I know now.”
 “And what do you know now?” Asked her father playing along.
 “You do know it is a children’s hospice?”
 “And?”
 “Do you not have an ounce of humanity in your body father?”
 “That died when your mother died.” Hook said plainly.
 “What happened to leaving mother out of this?” She countered.
 “People die all the time... the children will find someplace else to die.” Said Hook coldly.
 “Father, how could you?” She scowled at her father.
 “It’s not personal Gwendolyn, it’s business.”
 “You’re talking about dying children father.”
 “Like I say, they’ll find someplace else... they always do...”, dismissed Hook picking up the paper to hide behind, “... the matter was settled.”
 A cold silence hung over the breakfast table like dry cold toast.
 Thinking, he had heard the last of it. His mind turned to the four taxmen and the cartons hidden in the basement.
 But Gwendolyn was not finished. She still had an ace up her sleeve.
 “Peter is intending to buy it himself.”
 Hook drops the paper to his lap and looked suspiciously at his daughter as though it was a high-stake game of poker.
 “You’re bluffing. He can’t afford the place. Ha... you almost had me. Peter Pan buying Neverland... *Hm!* That, will be the day.”
 “Perhaps not him personally, but he’s gotten together other *investors*.” Then wondered if she had said too much.
 “Is that right? ... and what is Pan going to do with it? He’ll be, broke before you know it.”
 “He’ll make it work.”
 “One thing I know for sure Gwendolyn, my lovely daughter... no one ever got rich from running a charity.”
 “It’s not always about money father. A person can be rich without money.”
 The riddle perplexed Hook, and he stared at his daughter unable to unravel the riddle.
 “My *own* daughter, conspiring against me... what would your mother say?”
 “She’d probably say... It’s not business, it’s personal.”

“I have investors too.” Hook lied.

“We’ll see... Oh, look at the time, must fly...”, gulping the last of her coffee, “... Mister Smee will be wondering where I am.”

“Tell Smee I’ll be in later to go over the stock.”

“Don’t forget the paperwork on the champagne.” She said leaving, kissing her father on the cheek.

“I’ll do that.” Hook lied...

Don Bianchi

An old man knelt in prayer. His head of grey hair bowed. Seeking absolution from the Almighty for sins accumulated over a lifetime. And compounding by the day. Judgement day would not be far off. Repentance his only salvation.

But not today.

Menacing men in dark suits stand at the entrance. Standing watch. Standing guard. Outside grotesque gargoyles watch down upon sinners posing for selfies with the gothic relic. Countless spirals point heavenward. Resembling more of an oversize hedgehog than a Cathedral. It had stood for over six hundred years and would stand for another six hundred. It would outlive the old man within. And the sinners without.

Photos would fade before the stones ever crumble to dust.

'Dong_ ... Dong_ ... Dong_.' A heavy bell tolled mournfully above.

Causing pigeons to scatter and squawk in protest as they took flight. The old man looked up and wondered if the bell was tolling for him. Choir boys sing like heavenly angels. Voices echo off polished floors and towering stone pillars. Filling the vast space with God's presence.

The old man fumbles with rosary beads. Mumbling the creed beneath his breath. His knees ached. Sighing heavily, crossed himself and sat back on the bench. Content he had made his amends with the Lord for the time being. The morning sun penetrated stained glass windows. Casting beams of light across the high altar. Coloring an otherwise stone-grey interior.

A man walked unhurriedly along the aisle. As he had been instructed. And stood at the end of the pew.

And waited patiently.

"Gilberto, Gilberto... Come-a, sit-a." The old man gestured upon seeing him.

Gilbert faced the alter and crossed himself and sat beside the old man.

"Don Bianchi...", Gilbert acknowledges the old man, "... you wanted to see me?"

"Si, si... I did... we need to talk..." Bianchi whispered rubbing his knees, "... it is good to see you, my friend."

"And you too Don Bianchi." He said anxiously.

"I have a *special* job for you." Informed Bianchi in a quiet voice.

"Anything for you Don Bianchi."

"Good, good. I knew I could count on you." Sighing and crossing himself.

His eyes shift to the martyred saints above his head. Lest they hear what he was about to confess.

"Hook... how much does he know?"

"Know?"

"Si, know." Giving him a stern look.

"He knows nothing Don Bianchi." Gilbert lied.

"Good, good... ensure it stays that way... his good name has served us well."

"Indeed... Customs wave us through every time."

"Good, good... I have an important cli_ent in London." Said Bianchi looking over his shoulder as though someone maybe listening on.

The singing stopped and the vast interior fell deadfly silent. Too silent for Bianchi's liking. One could hear a pin drop if it fell. He waited for the singing again before speaking. Soprano

voices begin to rise higher and higher. Filling the emptiness. Satisfied prying ears could not hear, Bianchi continued.

“I have a shipment arriving soon from Columbia.”

“You can count on me Don Bianchi.”

“Good. Good... You can take-a André with you.”

“André?” Questioned Gilbert anxiously.

“Si. Si... Is there a problem?”

“No, of course not Don Bianchi... I thought he was in jail?”

“He was... but now he is out... the Judge-a made a mistake-a... *Hm.*” Dismissing it as a misunderstanding.

“Of course, Don Bianchi.”

“My people will be in touch.” Bianchi raises a hand as though it is time to leave.

“Si Don Bianchi. Thank Don Bianchi.” Kissing his hand.

Gilbert bowed subtly to the old man and walked to the end of the pew. Turned to the altar and the towering effigy of Christ on the cross. Crossing himself, walked back down the aisle only to see another man walking towards him as if it were a prisoner exchange. Looking momentarily at each other, then away. The less they knew of each other, the better.

A stolid man at the entrance allowed Gilbert to pass.

‘*Sigh.*’ Sighed Bianchi looking to the face of Jesus on the cross for forgiveness.

But Christ was unsympathetic.

“*Hail Mary, full of Grace.*” He uttered crossing himself and returning to his knees to pray the Rosary.

The man waited at the end of the pew to be summoned. A hand raises and gestures the man to step closer.

“Don Bianchi.” The man speaks meekly and kisses his master’s hand.

“Come sit... my friend.” Bianchi gestures...

Something for You

'Tap-tap.' Peter knocked softly on the half open door.

"Peter, you came!" Exclaimed Wendy sitting up in bed excited to see him.

A pile of pennies lay on her lap.

"Hey you." He replied, belying his feelings.

Archie leaped onto the bed wanting to play. Scattering pennies about the blanket. Frantically she re-gathers them and places back into the jar lest she loses one.

"Archie, stop that..." , picking terrier up Peter placed back on the floor, "...how many?"

"Fifty-five." Wendy rattles the jar and places it carefully on the side table.

"Wow, that's a lot." Informs Peter smiling.

"I thought since it was such a lovely day, you might want to go to the park... what do you think?"

"Can we?" She replied gleefully.

"Of course... Sister Maria said it's up to you, if you're feeling up to it, that is."

"I need to get dressed." Informed Wendy.

"Of course, I'll just go fetch the wheelchair... come on Archie, give Wendy some privacy."

Archie cocked his head and wondered what the human was going on about.

"Okay, you can stay and help."

Moments later Peter returned with a wheelchair.

"You ready?" He asked waiting for a reply.

"Ready!" She called out from within.

He entered and found her wearing a blue dress, and white shoes.

"You look pretty." He complimented her.

Twirling about, the hem of the dress raises up. Archie thinks this was a game and mimics her by running about in a circle. She stopped, only to feel dizzy.

"Oh, careful now..." , said Peter taking her by then hand, "... lets get you in the chair."

Climbing into the chair, Peter places a blanket over her legs.

"Come on Archie." He summoned the terrier to follow.

Wheels crackled on the path. Archie raced off ahead to pee on a tree.

"Told you it was a lovely day... *ah...*", informed Peter inhaling the crisp autumn air, "... winter will soon be here." Then immediately regretted his words.

"There is a season... turn, turn, turn..." , Wendy began, "... or *something* like... That's what Tinkerbell says."

"Hmm..." He reflected, "... there is indeed."

The crackling beneath the wheels falls silent.

"Can we sit and talk for a bit? ...", remembering the purpose of their excursion, "... you can have a play after if you like."

The wheelchair comes to a halt beside a park bench. Absent of black bowler hats.

"I'm sorry, I didn't know about..." , he began but could not come to say the words.

"About what?" She asked confused.

"The seriousness of your illness... I thought that perhaps... you would get better... I really wish I could do something."

She giggled and grinned.

“What’s so funny?” He asked.

“You... there’s nothing to be afraid of... I’ve been there.”

“Where?” Peter asked as if she was confused.

“Heaven.” She said as a matter of fact.

“What’s it like... *there*.”

Her mind drift as though in a warm daydream.

“It felt... *nice*... but they said I *had to* go back...”, she said disappointedly.

“Who did?”

“I don’t know... angels.” She grinned trying to recall them.

“Archie and I would like you here with us... I have something for you.”

“For me?”

“I’ve been thinking what you said before... and...”, reaching for an envelope inside his jacket and handing it to her.

“What is it?”

“Open it... it’s a surprise.”

She carefully takes the contents from within and unfolds what looks to be a certificate of sorts.

“A... dopt ... tion.” She pronounced confused, before seeing her name in large letters beneath...

Wendy Pan

A smile comes over her face and eyes light up as big as saucers and she looked to Peter in disbelief.

“For real?” She asked stunned by the revelation.

“Forever... I am now officially your father.” Informed Peter.

“Does Tinkerbelle know?”

“Of course... she helped organize it... Archie, come and meet your new sister.”

Upon hearing his name Archie leaped onto her lap.

‘*Ekh_! Ha_!*’ She squeals and giggles.

“Archie, get down... that’s enough.” Lifting the terrier away.

“This is the best surprise I have ever had in the whole_ wide_ world_.”

“I was hoping you’d say that.” Beaming a fatherly smile.

“And Gwendolyn will be my mother?” She asked as if to complete the family.

“Of course.”

A warm glow came over her as if her world was now complete. Folding the certificate, carefully places it inside her dress close to her heart for safe keeping. Just then an unexpected visitor arrived. And landed on the back of the bench. As if it had overheard the conversation and had paid them a congratulatory visit. The bird looked at Peter thinking it had seen him before somewhere.

Cocking its head to one side to get a better look at him.

“Oh look...”, exclaimed Wendy, “... it’s Mister Black.” Excited to see him.

“Mister Black...”, Said Peter, “...I’m afraid we don’t have any hats today.”

The bird paced back and forth and whistled.

“What’s he saying?” Asked Peter.

“He wants to know if we would like to stop by for tea.” Replied Wendy watching the bird flapped its wings and fly away.

“That’s very nice of him. Why don’t we do that...you warm enough?”

“Hm.” She agrees.

“Wait... keep still... there’s something on your cheek.”

Wendy freezes and wondered what it could be.

Peter leaned down and kissed her cheek.

“There, got it.” He said.

Wendy smiled contently.

“Come on Archie, time for tea.”

Wheels crackle upon the path. In the distance children run about like wingless butterflies.

“You want to join them?” He asked.

“Not today, I’m tired.” Pulling the blanket about her shoulders.

“Which way is it to Mister Black’s tree?”

“Over there.” Wendy pointed the way...

The Bully

The fire crackled, radiating its warmth about the Great Hall that evening. Judge Tootles sat motionless. Nostrils twitching like a blind mole. Ears detect the faintest of conversations about him. The twins had taken themselves to the couch holding what could have been a conversation. Finishing each other's sentences and confusing the judge in the process. Peter and Nibs sit opposite. Nibs behind a copy of the Financial Times and Peter behind a bulbous brandy glass.

His mind occupied with thoughts of Wendy and Neverland.

"Penny for your thoughts." Asked Nibs, seeing the forlorn look on his face.

"Sorry?" Broken from the trance.

Pricking Tootles ears.

Washing brandy about the glass Peter inhaled the sensual aromas before taking a sip and allowing it to sit in his mouth. Savoring it before swallowing and feeling it burn to his stomach.

"Ah_ (*sigh*)." He sighed.

"Why the long face."

"(*Sigh*)... she's an amazing kid."

"Who would that be?"

"Wendy... she's dying you know... and she's not afraid... in fact, she seems to welcome it."

"We each handle death in our own way old chat..." Nibs remarked philosophically, "...personally, I don't want to be around when it happens... have you spoken to your accountant yet?" Quickly changing from the dark topic.

"What? ... No, not yet. I have an appointment next week. You?"

"All sorted. ... this little investment of *yours*...", began Nibs.

"*Ours*." Peter corrected him.

"*Our little investment*... could well see an end to our membership." Gesturing the opulent setting he found himself.

"You don't have to if you don't want to." Informed Peter.

"A team of wild horses could not pull me away Peter... besides, we're good for another year or so."

"How's that?"

"The auction on the property won't be until after the AGM... And God knows when the next audit will be."

"Who actually called for the audit, you know?" Asked Peter.

"I *heard*... it was Slivers."

"*Slivers*?... then Hook won't be far behind."

"You will be okay, won't you?"

"I guess I am, but I won't know for sure until I've spoken to the accountant... The market is all over the place."

"You didn't invest in *Crypto*, did you?" Asked Nibs as if it were a dirty word.

"I leave all that to my father's investment managers."

"Well don't...", warned Nibs, "... stay as far away from it as you can." He said having been stung by the bee.

The twins look up on hearing the advice with ashen faces. Then look to each other as though they could read the others' mind and frantically reach for their mobiles.

“Sell...”, said Sam.

“... all of it.” Instructed Curly.

“Nice for some.” Remarked Nibs shaking the paper straight.

“Indeed... I really must be off Archie will be getting worried about me.”

Washing the last of the brandy about the sides of the glass swallowed the remains hard. Pulling himself reluctantly from the chair. Tootles had heard enough. As for his own position, needless to say he would not be found wanting. Much of it gathering interest and dust in some foreign bank somewhere. If only he could remember. His accountant would know. They always did. And with that reassuring thought, puffed on a smoldering cigar.

Re-invigorating him like smelling salt and dozed off for a small nap.

Stepping out of the Club, Peter looked to an ebony night sky above. Clouds shield the moon and stars. Making the evening darker than usual. Checking the time found he is running late and becomes concerned for Archie. As he quickens his pace, he thought he could hear footsteps on behind him. As if someone were following him.

Stopping, he looks back and listens. Seeing no one. Hearing no one.

“*Hm.*” He swore he heard something.

Shaking the foolish thought off continued on his way. Arriving at a large open gate of Hyde Park, lampposts illuminate the path within. An eerie veil of fog was beginning to descend. He contemplates the short cut. Dismissing thoughts of Jack the Ripper, stepped boldly into the park using the next lamppost as his guide.

Then the next, and the next. And the next.

After a while he was beginning to think he was lost. Had he taken a wrong turn he wondered. Stopping, he was sure he could hear distinctive footsteps on the gravel path some distance behind him. Before falling silent.

Standing beneath a lamppost he peered into the suffocating darkness.

“Hello? Anyone there?” He asked warily.

Hoping no one would reply.

Silence. Only the faint bustle of the city beyond the walls. Keen eyes search for shadows in the darkness. Nothing.

“*Hm.*” Perhaps he was hearing things.

He began to regret his decision to take the short cut. His breath quickens. His heart beats with anxiety. Sweat breaks out beneath his collar. Wishing now that Archie was there to guide the way. Frustrated, he continued to the next lamp post before abruptly stopping.

Only to hear definite footprints this time coming up behind him.

‘*Crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch...*’ The footsteps fall silent.

But they had already been caught out.

“Come out whoever you are.” Peter called out bravely taking a deep breath.

A prolong silence ensued.

“I know you’re there.”

‘*Crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch...*’, the footsteps answered his request.

From within the darkness a solid broad-shouldered man emerged and stood before him.

As if sizing him up.

“Pan? ... Peter Pan?” The asked in a menacing voice.

“That’s right, ... can I help you?” Peter asked innocently.

Then, without warning the man throws a heavy fist to Peter's stomach. Winding him and sending him to the ground. But gets quickly to his feet again to defend himself. Throwing a fist at the man only to be deflected and receive another blow across his face. Down goes Peter again. Attempting to get to his feet is now met with a volley of kicks to his ribs.

Buckling him over in pain.

"Take my wallet, here..." , reaching for his wallet.

"I don't want your damn money." Retorted the man angrily.

"What do you want then?" Panting heavily clutching his ribs.

"That was just a taste of what you'll get if you don't keep away." Warned the man.

"Keep away from what?"

"*Neverland...*", spat the man, "... you've been *warned*." Warned the man before turning about and disappearing back into the darkness.

Throbbing with pain, Peter pulled himself onto a bench. Fingers touch the side of his face.

"*Ow!*" He flinched.

Someone wanted him away from the place. Hook's name comes to mind.

'*No... Not even he would be that ruthless.*' He thought naively.

Just then, an aurora of swirling-colored lights descended over the park. Illuminating the path. Looking about for the source, that seemed to be coming from thin air. Confused, he hears screams in the distance and sees the man running as though being chased by an unseen ghost. The light engulfs the man and his scream fall silent. The park is engulfed by darkness again.

And Peter wondered if his was seeing things.

"*Woah.*" Feeling woozy as he pulled himself upright.

In the distance he makes out someone silhouetted at the gate.

"*Tinkerbell?*" He questioned confused.

A passing lorry sounded its horn loudly. Drawing his attention away momentarily. When he looked back. The aberration was gone. Dazed he makes his way to the gate. The sounds of the ancient city filled his senses. Vehicles roll by.

Indifferent to the ragged looking man on the pavement...

A Million Pounds

With his arm in a sling. Peter sat dazed. Watching the second hand of the clock on the wall opposite as it ticked away the time.

'Tick... Tick ... Tick ...'

Archie curled at his feet. A room adorned with high ceilings and arched windows from a bygone era. Reminiscent of the Royal and Ancient Gentlemen's Club. Hearing footsteps echoed off wooden floorboards. He looks to a door expecting someone to appear. But the footsteps pass by, and another door is heard opening and closing.

He fidgets in the seat, only to aggravate the injury.

"Ah." He flinched with pain.

"Mister Touhy will see you now Peter." Informed the receptionist appearing at the door.

"Thank you, Dorothy... Ah." Pulling himself upright.

Archie awakens on hearing the woman's voice, wags his tail and gets to his feet.

"This way Archie." Limping to a door he knew too well.

On it a plaque that read...

Bernard Touhy

Accountant

It was a door he visited once a year. Around tax time. However, this pilgrimage could well be his last. An elderly grey-haired gentleman stands to greet Peter from behind a desk.

Extending a hand only to withdraw it on seeing Peter's condition.

"Good God Peter... what happen to you?" Touhy asked aghast by the sight of his injuries.

"I'm not sure myself... But if you must know, I wouldn't go walking alone in Hyde Park at night if I were you."

"You were robbed? Good God man... what is the world coming to?"

"No, not robbed."

"Not robbed? ...", Touhy parroted, "... you weren't..." He asked suggestively.

It took a few moments before Peter realized what the old man was on about, then clicked.

"No, no, no, no, I wasn't..." Replied Peter suggestively.

"Sorry, I shouldn't pry... please sit down, let me pour you a drink." Opening wall cabinet and pours two crystal tumblers of malt whisky handing.

"Get that down you old chap."

"Cheers... it could have been worse... ah...", raising his glass, flinches with pain, "...its why I'm here actually... in a roundabout way." Said Peter.

"How do you mean?"

"It has to do with a certain property I intend purchasing."

"And *these, people* ... wish you not to." Touhy surmised quickly.

"*Precisely.*" Taking a swallow of the whisky, inhaling the fumes.

"Something tells me you're intending to anyway."

"Of course...", Peter grinned, "... a team of wild horses could not pull me away."

"You're just like you father... how is he?"

"I wouldn't know... I was hoping you had had news of his whereabouts."

"Last I heard he was up the Andes... Or was it the Amazon? I don't know here he finds the strength at his age."

“I’m sure we’ll receive a post card from him one day.”

“Fine chance... have you had one yet?” Countered Touhy.

“Touché Bernard... Touché.” Taking a swallow, feels the warming effect of the amber anaesthetic taking effect.

“So how can *I* help.” Touhy asked warily.

“Like I say, there’s this property... Neverland... heard of it?”

“Can’t say I have...”, shaking his head on reflection, “... where is it?”

“*Kensington.*” Informed Peter.

A stunned look comes over Touhy’s face, staring at Peter as though he had misheard him.

“*Kensington?* ...”, rolling his eyes, “... Peter, you’re punching above your weight aren’t you... there’s no way you can afford anything in Kensington... you’re father perhaps... and there’s no way of contacting him.”

“I know... I have put together a small syndicate of investors as it were... from the Club.”

“Oh, I see... and you want to know how much you have.”

“In short, yes.”, swallowing the last of the whisky.

“Hm... I have your file here...”, opening it to retrieve a set of financial statements, “... I was just going over it before you came in.”

“How much can I get my hands on.” Peter asked keenly.

“Much of this is tied up in trust for you... and your *children*... how’s that going?”

“I’m working on it... I’ve recently become engaged apparently.”

“Good for you... *apparently?*” Touhy catches up.

“Long story... you know women.”

“Indeed... best not go there.” He agreed shaking his head and tutting like Nibs.

“Is there a problem?”

“How much were you after exactly?”

“A *million* ... pounds?”

“That’s going to drain your bank account... we can sell some shares... then there’s the apartment.” Advised Touhy.

“That can go, I can find someplace smaller.”

“That won’t be necessary... the shares will cover what you need... but there won’t be much left over.”

“Sell whatever you can.”

“You’re set on buying this property, aren’t you?”

“Lives depend on it, Bernard.”

“Hm... I can see that...”, examining his injuries decides to prescribe further medication, “... another?” Reaching for the bottle.

“Just a nip.” Watching the old man pour a double.

“It will take time... the market is down... how soon do you need it?”

“Well actually...”, looking over his shoulder for prying ears, “... I was hoping to kill two birds with one stone.”

“Go on.” Touhy leaned in closer.

“The Club is conducting an audit of its members...”, he waited for the news to sink in, “... I was kind of hoping you could delay any ah, *disposals*... until after the audit... if you know what I mean.”

“Oh, I see... When’s the audit?”

“Two weeks.”

“And when’s the auction?”

“That’s yet to be advised... I contacted a Councillor *Murtagh* who is handling the property... but he’s proving to be uncooperative and evasive for some reason.”

“Doesn’t surprise me... you don’t want to know what goes on behind closed doors there... the palms that are greased...”, catching himself before he had said too much, “... hm, ... I’ll get Dorothy to send you a copy of these... you can submit those.”

“Thanks.”

“Are you sure you’ll be okay... these people...” A worried look comes over the old man’s face.

“Don’t worry about me Bernard... if they wanted me dead, they had their chance.”

“You’re a brave man Peter... so, what’s so special about this property? A good return on investment?”

“None whatsoever... unless you count human souls.”

“I don’t follow.” Becoming somewhat confused.

“It’s a hospice for children.”

“Oh, I see...”, taken back, “... and there’s nothing I can say that would convince you otherwise?”

“Nothing at all... I think it’s time I made something of my life.”

“Your father would be proud of you.”

“You think?”

“Oh course...”, Bernard lied, “... why don’t I make some calls to the brokers, and we’ll get you the best price for your stocks.”

“I appreciate that.”

“It won’t leave much on your balance sheet afterwards... Unless your father discovers a hoard of treasure... wherever he is.”

“Sell whatever you can.”

“You’re determined, aren’t you?”

“All of it if you have to.” Peter doubled down.

“I don’t think that will be necessary...”, grinned the old man raising his glass to him, “... here’s to your venture!”

Peter throws back the remainder of the glass, feeling it numb the pain.

“Ah... come on Archie, time to go.” Pulling himself upright.

“Good God Peter... what does the other guy look like?” Asked Nibs seeing Peter hobbling into the club looking the worse for wear.

“I didn’t get a good look... *ah*.” Falling backwards into the chair.

Judge Tootles looked over to the source of the groan. Not liking what he saw and shook his head subtly with disapproval. And listened on intently.

Judging no-one, lest he be judged.

“I hope you got a few good blows away.” Said Nibs mimicking punches.

“I’m a lover not a fighter Nibs.”

“Obviously? ... it wasn’t Gwendolyn, was it?” He asked, just as the twins arrived and took their places on the couch opposite.

“Gwendolyn? ...”

“... I never liked...”

“... that woman...”

“... what did you...

“... do to her?” The twins asked.

Members peer over newspapers at the scandalous accusations.

“I didn’t do anything!”

“Why did she hit you?” Asked Nibs.

“She didn’t... I was mugged in the park if you must know.”

“Ah...”

“... that explains...”

“... why we haven’t...”

“... seen you.”

“I’m fine... if anyone wants to know.” Informed Peter.

Old heads submerge behind old newspapers. The air is filled again with murmuring conversations.

“You were...”

“... robbed?” Asked the twins.

“Not exactly.”

“What does that mean? *Not exactly*... either you were, or you were not.” Questioned Nibs.

“Nibs has a...”

“... point Peter.”

“I fought them off.” He lied.

Not wanting to tell them about the warning that could fracture the delicate syndicate. Tootles shook his head. He knew a lie when he heard one.

He had heard a few in time.

“I thought you said you were a lover, not a fighter.” Remarked Nibs.

“I am... but sometimes a man must stand his ground.”

“Bravo old chap...”

“...you’re rather brave.”

“The man ran off.” Hoping that would be the end of the conversation.

“What on earth were you doing in the park that time of night?” Asked Nibs.

“I was worried about Archie... I’ve taken the path a hundred times before.”

“Never again I hope.”

“No... not anymore.”

“Well, it’s good to have you in one piece.” Remarked Nibs.

“It’s good to be in one piece.” Agreed Peter.

“So... how did you get on with your accountant?”

“Good, everything is in order... And you?”

“I’ll scrap through.” Informed Nibs before looking to the twins fidgeting like two children.

Something told him he need not ask about their position.

“Nice for soon...” He said shaking the Financial Times, “... hm.” ...

Keep your voice Down

'Beep-Beep-Beep!' The lorry reversed into position.

Smee closed the corrugated gates and secured the heavy chain and lock. But not before peering into the street for suspicious vehicles. Unaware of a van parked in the shadows some way down the street.

Two weary men sit within.

"I wish you wouldn't smoke in here... open a window why don't you." Protested Harris.

Alpes stubs the cigarette out, buckling it in the ashtray.

"Satisfied?"

Harris ignored the comment and focused a camera on the gates.

'Click-click, whir... Click-click, whir... Click-click, whir.' The camera sounds capturing the kodak moment.

"I wish we had ears on the place." Said Harris.

"We should have planted a microphone."

"Too late now...", just then had an idea, "... I'm going for a walk."

"Where you going?"

Harris gestured the gates down the road.

"What am I going to do?"

"Keep an eye out... toot if you see trouble."

Harris quietly closes the van door behind him. Lest it draw attention to himself. Alpes lights another cigarette and watches his partner strolled down the street. As though walking home from the pub. A dog barked from behind a wall sensing someone on the other side. Only to fall silent as the footsteps depart. Harris makes his way to the gate and concealed himself in a shadow by the wall.

Hearing a cab door close his ears prick to voices speaking...

"Any trouble Gilbert?" Asked Smee.

"No, Mister Smee."

"Get this unloaded and we can all go home."

"The Captain not about?"

"Not tonight, he's attending to another matter... nothing to concern you." Informed Smee.

"If you say Mister Smee."

Gilbert throws up metal latches and swings the rear doors open slamming against the sides of the container.

'Bang! Bang!'

"Christ Gilbert... you trying to wake the dead?"

"Sorry Mister Smee."

Smee inspects the pallet of contraband. Then eyes another pallet at the rear of the lorry, wrapped in pink plastic.

"What's that?" Asked Smee warily.

"Another *customer*." Gilbert replied cryptically.

"You heard the Captain... he doesn't want that stuff on his property. You should be thankful he's not here tonight."

"Yes, Mister Smee, sorry Mister Smee... It won't happen again." He lied.

Harris' ears prick up with the warning.

"Get this lot unloaded." Instructed Smee opening the back door.

The overhead bulb shone brightly in the darkness, soon to be joined by an interior bulb through an open door. Gilbert climbs into the container taking a switch blade from his pocket. Flipping it like a gun slinger. And skilfully gashes the wrap. Peeling it away like Christmas wrapping.

And began handing down cartons to Smee.

"Careful now." Warned Smee.

Harris hears sound of exertion and the rattling of bottles. Of boxes being stacked on top of each other. It seemed to never end. Just how much contraband was there he wondered.

A while later, the sound falls silent.

"That's it." Informed Gilbert jumping down with a thud and closes the rear doors.

Peering inside the storeroom, only to have Smee catch him and close the door on him before he had a good look.

"That will be all Gilbert." Reaching inside his jacket to retrieve a thick envelope of cash.

"Thank you, Mister Smee... Don Bianchi is most appreciative."

Smee glared at Gilbert as though the walls had ears.

"Keep your voice done Gilbert. You don't know who might be listening." Looking to the gates warily.

The hairs on the back of his neck stood on end. It was quiet. Too quiet for his likening. He goes to the gates pushing them open enough to get a view of the street. Looking one way then the other.

"Is everything alright Mister Smee."

"Fine. Fine... you best be going."

"Yes, Mister Smee." Taking a small plastic bottle from his pocket and taking two small white tablets from it.

Offering one to Smee.

"Get that stuff away from me. Strictly booze... you understand."

"Yes, Mister Smee, sorry Mister Smee." Throwing the tablets into his mouth like peppermints.

Smee shock his head in disapproval.

Gilbert climbed into the cab and started the engine and waited for Smee to fully open the gates before easing the lorry through and onto the street. Smee watches as it disappears up the street and round a corner from view. Shifting his attention back down the street. Eyes adjust to the darkness making out a van in the shadows. A whiff of smoke leaks from a partially open window on the passenger side.

Thinking he could make out two shadowy figures within.

Frowning, knowing how close he had come to being caught. He contemplates walking up to it and tapping on the window. Then decided against it. Like a game of cat and mouse. The cat would pounce when its ready. Looking about for other suspicious vehicles but sees none. There would be no pouncing tonight he thought. Turning his attention to the stars and pretended not to notice the van.

And walked back inside the yard closing the gates behind him.

"You think he saw us?" Asked Alpes stubbing out the cigarette.

"Nah." Dismissed Harris panting.

"What you find out?"

“Your friend Gilbert had something more on board this evening.”
“What was it?”
“I don’t know... But Smee didn’t want a part of.”
“So why don’t we nick him now?” Becoming frustrated.
“Brown is waiting on Scotland Yard... there’s something bigger than contraband.”
“Like what?”
“Drugs.” Informed Harris.
“Hook? Drugs?”
“I heard *Bianchi*’s name mentioned.”
“Don Bianchi? (*gulp*)... I don’t think I want to be involved.”
“It’s what you signed up for Alpes.”
“Yeah, but... *Bianchi*.” Shaking his head.
“Brown doesn’t want to move until the Yard gives the word... we better write this up... let’s get outta here.” ...

AGM

'Bang! Bang! Bang!' An ancient wooden gavel hammered onto a table. Startling Judge Tootle. Awakening him from a nap. Thinking he was back in court was about to cry out *'order'* only to be stifled by a loud thunderous voice.

"Order_! ... Order_!" Called out Slivers, beseeching members to quieten.

Heads turn to a table lined with grey-haired gentlemen. Their wealth obscene, their credentials impeccable. The vanguard of the Royal and Ancient Gentleman's Club. Like their fathers before them. And their fathers before them. Glazed inebriated eyes look back at the young men seated like nervous school boys. Peter, Nibs, and the twins had taken seats at the rear. Hook sat to one side watching the proceedings anxiously. Waiting for his name to be called.

Slivers waited for complete silence before continuing.

'Bang.' Banging the gavel a final time and crushing the last remnant of conversation.

"Gentlemen... I bring this meeting to order...", shuffling papers before him, *"... we have a bit to get through this evening... first on the agenda are approval of the Club's annual accounts... I will hand this over to our treasurer, the honorable Mister William Riley."*

All eyes shift to a diminutive grey-haired gentleman seated beside Slivers sifting through papers as though he had misplaced a page. Unfolding a pair of reading glasses, perches them on the end of his nose and transforms himself into an accountant.

Taking a swallow of water he clears his throat.

"Ah-mm... gentlemen...", he announced in a monotone voice, *"...despite economic and fiscal pressures of which you are all aware... I am pleased to report, the Club has had a good year... with investments returning a profitable surplus of some one million pounds."* Pausing momentarily to let the amount sink in and waiting for a round of applause.

But none came.

"That's good for the club." Whispered Peter to Nibs.

"Down on last year." Reminded Nibs.

"Assets are up two million... with a reduction in liabilities of one million... capital expenditure continues on renovations to the west hall...", Riley babbled on and on, seconds became minutes, and minutes seemed like hours, rattling off numbers that went over most of the members heads.

Causing Tootles to nod off. And several other members become drowsy.

And after what seemed like an eternity, *"... and that concludes my report."*

Riley fell silent and withdrew again into his shell.

"Sigh_." A thankful sigh sounded after the unrelenting delivery.

"Thank you, Mister Riley, on a job well done... are there any questions from the floor?" Slivers asked expecting there to be none.

Silence befell the grand hall. Slivers grinned.

'Bang! Bang!' Shattering the silence.

"I propose the motion that the Club's accounts be passed in their current form... do we have a seconder?" Slivers looks about the bench.

"I'll second that motion." Spoke an elderly gentleman beside Judge Tootles raising his hand.

“Very well, let the records show honorable Mister Davidson as the seconder... all those in favor say *Aye*.”

“*Aye*...” A choir of voices call out in unison.

“All those against?” Slivers asked sternly, eying the members before him.

No one dared to speak. Lest they wish his wrath upon them. Judge Tootle snored. Slivers looked to the Judge and dismissed his objection. Quietly suggesting the man next to him should give the Judge a gentle nudge to awaken him.

But the man shook his head warily.

“The motion to accept the Accounts of the Club is passed.”

A male secretary sitting at the far end of the table busily scribes the motion into a large minute ledger.

“Right... next on the Agenda... the audit of Members Financial Position... and despite a very good year, the board of directors have found some members wanting.” He grinned.

Slivers waited for the fear to sink in as though he were playing with them. His eyes fall upon Peter in disapproval.

“Hm...”, he mumbled begrudgingly beneath his breath, “... look about yourselves gentlemen... you are the *fortunate*... those... *less fortunate*, are not here this evening... they have been informed by letter earlier this week.”

“We made it through.” Exclaimed Peter quietly to Nibs.

“Only by the skin of our teeth.” Warned Nibs.

“The board will be looking very closely into your affairs gentlemen... this is *The Royal and Ancient Gentleman Club*... we can’t have *riffraff* among our members... we are *gentlemen*...”, he reminded the dark suited gentlemen grinning, “... which brings me to the final point on the agenda this evening... nominations for new members.”

All eyes shift to Hook seated to one side.

“I have personally known this gentleman for years...”, Slivers began to lie, “... going back to our time at Radley... a journeyman, not unlike myself, a self-made man of consider wealth and intellect... a righteous man, a man of King and country... a pillar of our community... after some discussion with the board of directors, I wish to nominate the honorable gentleman, Captain James Hook as a member to The Royal and Ancient Gentleman’s Club... do I have a seconder?”

An awkward silence falls over the grand hall. Hook’s reputation had preceded him.

Peter stood, raising his hand to be noticed.

“I’ll second that.” He announced for all to hear.

Stunning Slivers and Hook momentarily.

“*What are you doing?*” Whispered Nibs to him.

“*It’s for Gwendolyn.*” Whispered Peter.

“*I hope you know what you’re doing.*”

“Let the records show the chair recognize the seconder as the honorable gentleman, Mister Peter Pan.” Slivers announced in a hesitant voice.

Hook looked at Pan suspiciously. What was his game? Thinking he could win him over by doing this. They were adversaries.

Pan was up to something.

“*Bad form Pan.*” Hook mumbled, beaming a crocodile.

“Very well then... all those in favor say *aye*...”

“*Aye*...” Sounded an obedient cry of voices.

“Those against?”

A deaf silence befell the grand hall.

“Very well then... let the records show that as of this day, the honorable Captain James Hook has been unanimously elected as a member of The Royal and Ancient Gentleman’s Club... please stand extend a warm round of applause to the Captain.”

Members stood and began to clap. What was done was done. And nothing could undo it. Hook stood and bowed in appreciation.

The applause tailed off and members took their seats again.

‘Bang! Bang! Bang!’

“Order gentlemen...”, Slivers brings the room back, waiting for complete silence again, “... that concludes the meeting gentlemen... please make yourselves known to the Captain before you leave this evening... I call this meeting adjourned.”

‘Bang!’ Slamming down the gavel for the final time.

“Congratulations Captain... Your boy Pan came through... I thought...”, began Slivers.

“He’s up to something. Mark my words... This changes nothing.” Warned Hook.

“That’s between you and him now... he’s met the bench mark of membership. I don’t know how. You say he’s interested in your property?... He’ll have to spend a pretty penny to get it, and I know for a fact he doesn’t have it.”

“Is that right?” Asked Hook curiously.

“Not with his balance sheet... Unless...”

“Unless what?” Asked Hook curiously.

“He has others investing with him... just saying...” Suggested Slivers.

“Hm... You could be right...”, recalling Gwendolyn’s earlier comments, “... Who’s the lot with him?” Eyeing up Peter and Nibs and the twins making their way out the back for the hall.

“The gentleman to his right, is Nibs... Astor... Old money, if you know what I mean... Now the other two... The twins we call them for obvious reason, that’s another matter...”

“How so?”

“They have more money than sense... That could be his leverage right there.”

“Hm (*sigh*.)” Grumbled Hook.

Hook eyes the playful twins, gosling each other unsure what to make of the pair.

“Nothing I can’t handle.” Warned Hook warily.

“A drink to celebrate?” Offered Slivers.

“Perhaps one won’t hurt.” ...

The Call

Wind flogged the old building like Christ. A bolt of lightning flashed, and Peter waited for thunder to sound.

He did not have to wait long.

'*Boom!*' Sounding as though it were directly above him.

Old heads look up to the ceiling as if it were about to fall upon them. Judge Tootles awoke momentarily. Snorted abruptly before resuming his nap. A smoldering cigar between the fingers in one hand. A brandy glass in the other. Comforted by the crackling fire. It would take much more than a winter storm to awaken the Judge from his slumber.

"Odd weather this time of year...", informed Peter, "... *global warming* if you ask me."

Nibs lowered the paper and looked to the ceiling imaging the turmoil outside.

"I think the term for it now is *climate change*... besides, I read it has to do with the sun."

"Excuse me? The *sun*?"

"Sunspots old chap."

"I've heard of them, go on."

"Well, they spit out radiation of sorts... this upsets the earth's magnetic field or something, that upsets the climate... Not so good for us, but the plants must be loving it."

"I suppose they would."

"If you ask me the plants are out to get us... watch your back old chap." Warned Nibs.

"I'll keep that in mind when I'm out with Archie."

A gust of wind rattles the windowpane ending the cataclysmic conversation. The twins sit opposite pondering the potted plant beside them.

"Hello... I'm Sam." Introducing himself.

"I'm Curly."

But the plant did not respond. It just stared blankly back at the twins wondering what to make of the pair.

"So... what's with you and Tiger-Lilly?"

"You heard about that?"

"Tinkerbell." Informed Peter.

The wind howled like a ghost wanting to come inside.

"Nasty weather." Cited Nibs hoping to change the topic.

"So... is it serious?"

"I don't know."

"What do you mean, *you don't know*?"

"Well, one moment she is there, and the next... *poof!* ... she's not...", waving hands about as though conjuring a magic trick, "...it's like she just disappears into thin air... I don't even hear the front door."

"Women old chap, don't try to understand them." Peter added his two pennies worth about women.

"I'm not going to...", Nibs leaned forward and whispered, "... *but I must say it's nice having a woman about the place.*"

"Your secret is safe with me Nibs... oh dear, look at the time... I must be off. Archie will be worried." Pulling himself from the comfy armchair.

"I hope you're not thinking about walking through the park again." Warned Nibs.

“Not this evening old chap...”, holding up a set of car keys, “... gentlemen, if you will excuse me.” Throwing back the last swallow of brandy and wrapping a college scarf about his neck as though preparing to do battle with the elements outside.

“Drive safely old chap.” Informed Nibs.

Stepping outside, Peter looked to the dark turbulent sky. A gust of wind suddenly lunges at him as though wanting to push him back inside. Steadying himself, pulled up the collar of the overcoat. Then made a hurried dash for his car some distance away. Stinging raindrops peat him as he fumbled for keys to open the door. About to climb inside when he notices someone standing beneath a tree holding an umbrella over their head. Staring at him. A flash of lighting silhouettes the stocky gentleman holding something in his other hand. Memories of the man in the park flash in his mind. And he quickly climbed into the car and locked the doors about him.

‘Clunk-clunk-clunk-clunk!’ The doors lock.

Rain on the window made it difficult to see outside. Starting the engine, wipers come to life. Washing side to side. Headlights illuminate the man beneath the tree. In one hand the umbrella. In the other he makes out a knife. He contemplates heading back inside to muster the troops, when suddenly his mobile vibrates in a pocket.

Startling him again.

‘Buzz-buzz... Buzz-buzz... Buzz-buzz...’

Frantically he reaches for the phone, eyes shift to the phone and the caller ID.

‘Tinkerbelle... How did she get my number?’

“Tinkerbelle?” He answered panting.

“Come quickly... Its Wendy.”

“What’s wrong? What’s happened?”

“She’s had a turn... she may not make it... hurry Peter, hurry... I have to go... (click.)”

The phone goes dead.

“Tinkerbelle? ... Tinkerbelle? ...”, he asked fruitlessly, “... Wendy.”

Looking up again, he notices the man had gone. Fearfully he searches for shadows in the dark. Blasting the horn several times hoping ward off the felon and draw the attention of others to his plight.

Tires spin as he revved the engine loudly. Raising a plume of smoke and lurching the car backwards. Thrusting the stick into drive the vehicle accelerates away. Heavy rain peats the car relentlessly. Wipers unable to keep up. Visibility blinded by on-coming headlights and fogging windows. He fumbles with dials. Brake lights suddenly flash ahead of him. A heavy foot slammed on a spongy brake pedal. The car comes to a skidding stuttering halt. Narrowly avoiding the collusion. Adrenaline rushes through his veins. A heart pounding in his chest. It was as though the everything and everyone were against him. The traffic. God.

“Hang in there Wendy! I’m coming... don’t you die on me!” He called out to her.

And at that moment he felt a stabbing pain in his chest.

The pain abates and he focused back on the road ahead. Through the pouring rain.

Through the blinding lights.

“Come on! Come on! ...”, he screamed at the vehicles in front, “... get out of the way!”

Accelerating and braking. Braking and accelerating. Braking again. Each time having to press a little harder and deeper. Seeing a chance to overtake he takes it. Unaware of the jagged yellow line he had just crossed. Pulling out, presses his foot on the accelerator. The engine to groans under the strain. Passing one vehicle. Then another like a madman.

Suddenly from no-where a lorry pulled out across his lane. Slamming a foot on the brake pedal only to find it dead. And he found himself hurtling uncontrollably towards the lorry that had now come to a halt in the middle of the road. He waited for the impending impact. And the imminent death that would surely follow. He waited for his life to flash before his eyes.

But it never came.

Then as if by an invisible hand, the steering wheel is jerk sideways, and the vehicle violently swives narrowly missing the lorry's tray that would have decapitated him. He clutches the wheel with both hands. Bracing his feet against the floor. And waited for the impending impact. The car slid uncontrollably sideways. And as it did, the world about him slowed down. The car begins to tilt over, rolling on its side shattering glass. Rasping metal upon road. Sounding heavy thumps it rolled over, and over, and over again.

Mysteriously the door flies open, and he feels himself being plucked from the battered tin can and thrown unceremoniously onto the road. The vehicle rolls several more times before colliding with a concrete power pole before bursting into flames.

Laying inert. Dazed and confused. The chaos of the world around him filled his senses. Indiscernible voices call out. Eyes open and closed. And he focused his attention on two headlights ahead of him. And surrendered himself to the moment.

And as he did, the rain suddenly stopped. And the voices fell silent. People faded away. He was alone. All pain was gone. A peace came over him. The two headlights became one. And all around him falls dark. Except for the single beam of light growing larger. Brighter.

But this light did not hurt his eyes.

'This is how it ends.' He wondered.

From the light steps a silhouette of a child. He hears a child's laughter.

A laugh he knew too well.

"Wendy?" Confused by her presence.

Reaching out a hand as if wanting to go with her.

"It's not your time.", she whispered smiling before stepping back into the light that became more distant and smaller.

Morphing back into two blinding head lights. Suddenly the pain and noise of voices and wailing sirens and pelting rain returned. As if a divine hand had turned a faucet. And he finds himself surrounded by paramedics, calling out vitals and instructions.

"Peter? Peter Pan?" A medic asked looking at a wallet, then to Peter.

Peter blinked his eyes to acknowledge it was he.

"You're lucky to be alive." Looking to the car being extinguished by firemen.

"Hmm."

Eye lids flicker like morse code as morphine overcomes him, sending him into a deep, deep sleep...

Hello, Hello, Hello

Nostrils twitch. As though irritated by smelling salts, or disinfectant. A heart monitor beeped rhythmically. Peter awoke to a drip bag above his head. A tube leaking to his arm. It all seemed so familiar.

Feeling a heaviness about his head, a hand reaches to a bandage.

“Ow!” He cried trying to move.

“Keep still Peter... you bumped your head.” Gwendolyn informed him, sitting beside the bed.

The events of the accident come flooding back to him.

“Welcome back.” Happy to see him alert.

“How long have I been out for?”

“Just a few days.”

“A *few of days?* ...”, exclaimed Peter, “...was anyone else hurt?”

“Just you silly.”

“How long have you been here?” Noticing her looking tired.

“I’ve never left since they admitted you.”

“Oh Gwendolyn, I’m so sorry... go home and get some rest. I’ll be fine. I promise.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course.” Raising hands and moving fingers as though playing a piano to prove his dexterity.

“I could kill for a hot bath and bed right now.” Pulling herself from the chair.

“So could I... take me with you.”

“You stay right here...”, leaning in to kiss him, “...you’ll live.” Giving her diagnosis.

“Go home... I’ll be fine.”

“I’ll see you this evening.”

“Do the others know?”

“*Everyone* knows Peter, you were all over the news.”

“Oh dear (*sigh*).” Overcome with guilt.

“It wasn’t your fault...”, she tells him, “...*shh*, you get some rest. I’ll see you tonight”, kissing him again.

Just then the sound of an approaching trolley being pushed along by a plump lady in a tight-fitting blue uniform.

‘*Squeak...Squeak... Squeak.*’ The trolley stopped by his bed.

“He’s all yours.” Informed Gwendolyn.

“Ah_, your awake! ...” surprised to see him alert, “... how you are feeling?”

“Fine I guess... *ow!*” He cried, trying to sit upright.

“Don’t you move young man...”, pressing a control to incline the bed, “... the doctor will be doing his round this morning... no doubt the police will want to question you.”

“*Police*... of course.” Wondering how much he had had to drink.

“You’ve had several visitor’s while you’ve been out.”

“Really?” Wondering who they would be.

“Cards and flowers on the side table... and water if you need it.”

“Nothing stronger? ...”, joking, before realising it did not sit well with the nurse, “... water is just fine thanks.”

Looking to the colourful assorted flowers. Get well cards stood like regimented soldiers in a row. Reaching for one chuckled at the humorous message from Nibs and the twins. Shaking his head placed it back among the others. Seeing the glass of water takes a swallow. It was not brandy, but it quenched a parched throat. Laying back, he waited for the police to arrive.

He did not have to wait long...

“*Hello-hello-hello...* What do we have here then?” A Constable asked awakening Peter from a nap, “... how are we feeling?”

“Constable... fine, considering.”

“You’re very lucky to be alive son... lucky you weren’t wearing your seat beat.”

“But I was... well, I think I was.” Beginning to doubt himself.

“Forensic says otherwise.”

“*Forensic?* ... it was all my fault... I was driving too fast... I’ll pay for any damages.” He confessed.

“Really? So, you cut your own brake line then, did you?” Questioned the Constable.

“Excuse me?” Becoming confused.

“The brake line... it was cut ... someone meant you harm Mister Pan... you could not have stopped if you wanted... no matter how fast you were going.”

“*Harm me? Preposterous...* why would anyone want to do that?” Asked Peter naively.

“I was hoping you would tell me.”

Peter thought back. Images flashes in his mind like lightning.

“The man under the tree... at the Club... I remember now... he had a knife in his hand.”

“That so...”, scribbling notes on a small pad, “... go on... can you describe him?”

“It was dark... raining... but it could have been the same man from the park.”

“The park? What Park?” Flicking pages of the note pad thinking he had overlooked something.

“Sorry, yes... a month or so ago I was attacked in Hyde Park on my way home.”

“Did you report this?”

“No... It was just a few bruises... I didn’t think...”, becoming muddled by the series of events.

“And who would be interested in causing you injury Mister Pan?”

Immediately Hook’s name came to mind. But there was no way that could be proved. But the more he thought about it, the more it made sense. Hook would know unscrupulous individuals to do his dirty work for him.

Then there was Gwendolyn to think of.

He was caught between a rock and hard place.

“I can’t think of anyone...”, Peter lied, “... I led a rather boring life.”

“Apparently, not boring enough to some people Mister Pan...”, jested the Constable, “... can you describe the man in the park?”

“Not really...”

“It was dark...”, finished the Constable for him, “... you don’t leave us much to go on Mister Pan.

“Maybe the security cameras at the Club will show someone.”

“We’ve already been over those... whoever did this was well concealed and knew what they were doing... like I say, you’re very lucky...”, closing the note pad and shoving it into a pocket before handing Peter a card, “... if you do recall anything, contact his number.”

“I’ll do that Constable.” Peter lied.
“You have a good day now son.”
“Thank you, Constable.” Watching the uniformed gentleman march off.
Heavy boots echoed about the ward and faded into the distant.
“*Hook...*”, cursing his name, “... I should have known.”
The thought conjures thoughts of Wendy.
“*Wendy.*” He exclaimed looking about for his mobile, no where to be seen.
Side bars of the bed had him imprisoned. The drip line bound like hand cuffs. A vision of Wendy comes to mind. A bright beam of sunlight shines through the window.
His attention is drawn to it.
“Hello Peter.” Said Tinkerbell mysteriously appearing on the other side of the bed.
“Oh...”, startled by her sudden appearance, “... I didn’t see you arrive.”
“How you are?”
“I’ll live... how’s Wendy?” He asked in some way already knowing the answer.
“She’s...”, pausing to find the right words, “...she’s... gone home”, said Tinkerbell quietly.
“I know... I saw her... She looked beautiful.”
“I know.” Grinned Tinkerbell.
“You do?”
“She wanted you to have this.” Handing him a small jar.
Perplexed, he looked at the contents of copper pennies rattling against the side of the glass.
“She’s been saving up, just for you.”
“For me? ...what am I supposed to do with these?”
“She, said you would know when the time comes.”
“What time?”
“You’ll know... besides, you can’t take pennies to heaven Peter...”, looking to the window, “... isn’t it such a beautiful day?”
Momentarily distracted by the angelic beam of light. Visions flash in his mind, of the headlights becoming one. Of Wendy stepping from it. He wanted to tell Tinkerbell and turned about only to find she had vanished into thin air.
“Where’d you go?” Looking about for her.
The jar of pennies weighed heavily in his hand. Unsure what to make of it.
‘*What did she mean... I’ll know when the time comes... what time?*’ He thought.
Spilling the pennies onto the bed before him. He began to count.
“One... Two... Three...” ...

The Auction

Mournful clouds gather above the graveyard. Turning the day grey. Leaning on a crutch, Peter shields himself beneath a large black umbrella.

Rain drops begin to fall.

'Pitter-patter-pitter-patter...' Sounding softly on the fabric.

Looking up as though they were spitting only on him.

Colorful flowers lay about a white head stone standing out among others about it. The inscription read who lay beneath...

Wendy Pan

“Hurry up Peter, we’re going to be late!” Gwendolyn urged from a waiting car.

“We have time...”, dismissing the urgency, “... *we have all the time in the world.*” He said quietly to himself.

Time had no meaning while he was with Wendy. The little girl who would never have the chance to grow up.

“You were right... you will be six forever and ever... (*ha*).” Fighting the tears whelming in his eyes.

Taking the small jar of shining pennies from his pocket to show her. Rattling it gently causing them to jingle.

“Fifty-five...”, he informed her, “... more than enough to buy Neverland.”

“*Peter!* ... the auction starts in thirty minutes!” Called out Gwendolyn.

“I have to go... love you, Wendy.” Kissing his hand then touches the head stone.

'I love you too.' A child’s voice whispered back just as he touched it.

Startled he looked about as to who had spoken. Thinking Gwendolyn was standing behind him. Only to see her still in the car. A gust of wind rushes past and embraces him before whistling through the trees.

“*Hm...* I’ve gotta go... but I’ll be back...”, patting the head stone, “... I’m coming, I’m coming... hold your horses! ... *Ow!* ... *Ow!*”, cobbling awkwardly back to the car.

“You made it...”, said Nibs with Tiger Lilly sitting next to him, “... I didn’t think you were coming.”

He hands Peter a paddle with an oversized number on it.

“*Gwendolyn.*” Blamed Peter looking back to ensure she was not within earshot.

“Where is she?” Asked Nibs.

“Just parking the car...”, collapsing on a chair, “... *ow.*”

The twins fidgeted beside Tiger Lilly, excited to be sitting so close to a woman. She thinks about casting a spell on the mischievous siblings. Then thinks the better of it.

The council chamber echoed with chatter as people took their seats.

“There seems to be a bit of interest in the property.” Said Peter.

“Word must have gotten out.”

“I was hoping for a smaller crowd... less competition as it were... speaking of which, is Hook here?”

“Front row.” Nibs nodded.

“Of yeah, I see him...”, he said disappointedly, “... has anyone seen Tinkerbell? I thought she’d be here.” Looking to Tiger Lilly.

“Something came up.” Tiger Lilly lied.

“Oh, then it’s just us... are we set?” Asked Peter.

“Spoken with the banks, it’s all sorted.”

“How much do we have?”

“Five million pounds.”

“And change.” Informed Peter rattling a small jar in his pocket.

“Well, I hope it’s enough.” Nibs said confused by the gesture.

Gwendolyn appeared and took a seat beside Peter.

“Your father is in the front row.” He informed her.

“Would you rather I sit with him?”

“You’re not going anywhere young lady.” Taking her by the hand pulling her down beside him.

The moment had arrived. Becoming anxious Peter pondered the moments had conspired to led him here. Inhaling, he thought he could smell freshly baked muffins. Thoughts of Tennapenny rouse in his mind.

The reminiscent thought is scattered by the auctioneer’s hammer.

‘Bang! ... Bang! ... Bang!’

Drawing everyone else’s attention to the auctioneer.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for coming at short notice...”, the auctioneer looked warily at Murtagh seated to one side, “... lot number 167 ... a substantial property... known as *Neverland...*”, he hesitates, puzzled the unusual name, “... located in Kensington you are all familiar with it through the brochure... let us open the bidding shall we without any further ado... anyone?”

Heads turn and chatter. But one dared to speak.

“One million...”, proposed the auctioneer hoping to solicit a bid, “...do I hear one million?”

Aa paddle rises in the air, and heads turn to see who it was.

“One million, I have one million...”, the auctioneer chants, “... do I hear one-five? ... one-five anyone?”

Another paddle rises swiftly as though not to be beaten to the draw.

“We have one million five hundred pounds ... do I hear two? ... two million anyone?”

Peter looked to Nibs for confirmation. Nibs shrugged his shoulders and gestured why not. Peter raised his paddle hoping the auctioneer would see it. People look at him suspiciously. Who was this fresh face.

They had never seen him here before.

“Bad form Pan.” Hook chuckled to himself.

“We have two million... do I hear two-five?”

Hook quickly responds.

“We have two-five to Captain Hook in the front...”, the auctioneer noticed him, “... do we have three, three million pounds.” The auctioneer cried out.

Nibs nods again to Peter. Only to be beaten to the draw by a new bidder near the front.

“Three million... we have three million at the front here to this gentleman... do I hear three-five? ... Three-five anyone?”

Peter does not seek Nib's opinion this time and raises his paddle into the air.

"Three-five with gentleman at the back again... do I hear four million? Four million pounds anyone?"

A hush comes over the crowd. No one wanted to speak or scratch their nose.

"Four million pounds...", the auctioneer senses an impasse, "... four million going once."

'Bang!' Striking his hammer onto the podium loudly as though to wake the dead.

He waits in the hope of drawing someone out from hiding.

Hook sits with pursed lips.

"Four million going twice." The auctioneer called out.

'Bang!' The hammer strikes again.

"*We have it!*" Said Peter surprised by how easy it was.

Then Hook raised his paddle and crushed all hope.

Peter's heart sunk in his chest.

"We have four million with the Captain in the front...", nodding subtly to acknowledge him, "... do I hear four-five? ... four million five hundred thousand pounds anyone?" Clarifying the amount.

Without thinking Peter raises his paddle catching the auctioneer's attention.

"Four-five with the gentleman at the back again."

"Hmm." Hook shook his head in annoyance, Pan was proving to be a pestering fly that would not go away.

It was time to put pan out of his misery.

"Five Million...", Hook announced loudly for all to hear, hoping that would be the end of the matter.

"Five million pounds to the Captain... do I hear anything more?"

All eyes shift to Peter at the back of the hall.

"Five million going once."

'Bang!'

All seemed lost.

"That's all we have." Informed Nibs despondently with empty hands.

A look of dread and failure comes over his face.

"Five million going twice."

'Bang!' The hammer fell.

"*I've got you this time Pan!*" Chuckled Hook beneath his breath while twisting the ends of his moustache with glee.

"It's okay Peter... it wasn't meant to be." Consoled Gwendolyn gently elbowing him, causing the jar of coins in his pocket to rattle. Like a bell.

Suddenly Peter has a revelation and without hesitation raises his paddle one last time catching the auctioneer's attention.

Audible gasps are heard about the hall.

"Bad form Pan...", grumbled Hook, "... you should have stayed down."

"What are doing Peter? ..." Asked Nibs, "... we can't afford anymore... we're tapped out."

"Not quite."

"To the gentleman at the back... and what is the bid?" Asked the auctioneer.

"Ah-mm...", clearing his throat, "... five million and fifty-five...", hesitating momentarily, "...pence."

In disbelief, the crowd chuckle in amusement...

Fifty-five Pence

“Five million and fifty-five ... *pence*?” Questioned the auctioneer to confirm he had heard correctly.

“That’s correct.” Announced Peter proudly holding up the jar and rattling its contents to authenticate the amount.

“Is this some sort of joke? ...”, protested Hook, “... you can’t seriously allow this.” Looking to Murtagh to intervene.

Hook’s stern look catches the auctioneer’s attention, and he senses something foul was at play.

“Ah-mm... it is highly *unusual*, but...”, began the auctioneer only to be cut short.

“*Unusual*? ... what but?” Parroted Hook, becoming frustrated.

“It *is* the highest bid.”, the auctioneer grinned, “... do I hear anything higher than five million pounds and fifty-five pence? ... anyone?” The auctioneer asked, looking about the sea of hapless blank faces before reluctantly returning his attention to Hook.

“Five million and *one hundred thousand* pounds... *and* fifty-five pence.” As though to rub salt into Peter’s wounds.

Hook smirked from ear to ear. Hoping that would be the last he would hear from Pan.

Silence. But this was not an ordinary silence. This was a sad silence. The silence you hear at funerals. The underdog had lost.

There would be no happy ending.

“Is there any no more bids? ...”, the auctioneer asked, “... *anyone*?” He pleaded hoping someone... anyone but Hook would win the day.

Silence.

Peter looked to the Sam, then Curly, both shaking their heads,

“Sorry old chap.”

Then to Nibs, sighing and shaking his head.

“That was all I had.” Showing his empty hands.

“Going once...”

‘Bang!’

Prolonged silence.

“Going twice...”

An even longer silence reined.

“Come on man... Get on with it.” Hook protested trying to hurry proceedings along.

“Going three times...”

Then just as the hammer was about to fall like a blade on Peter’s dream. A loud snort ejaculated abruptly from among the people. Of someone snoring. Like a pig snorting for truffles. Heads turn to the direction of the disturbance to see Judge Tootles napping.

Beside him sat Tinkerbelle. Her arm intertwined in his.

“It’s Judge Tootles.” Exclaimed Nibs.

“What’s Tinkerbelle doing with him?” Asked Peter turning to Tiger Lilly.

“Uncle Tootles.” She replied, baffling Peter further.

“*Uncle?*”

“*Distant.*” Whispered Tiger Lilly.

Suddenly the Judge awoke as if someone had poked him in the ribs. Making a loud snort in fright. Startling himself, and those about him. Strange faces stare at him and he wondered where he was. And how he had gotten there. He thought he was at the Club. Apparently not. Then sees Tinkerbelle by his side.

“What’s happened? ... ah-um...”, clearing his throat, “... what have I missed?”, he asked sitting upright and gaining his composure.

“Get on with it, man.” Demanded Hook.

“*Ssh!* ...”, the auctioneer raises an open hand to silence the man, “... the bid stands at five million, one hundred thousand pounds... and fifty-five pence.”

“Fifty-five pence?” Asked Tootles confused.

To one side Peter rattles the jar of pennies catching the Judge’s attention.

“Oh, that’s good then, well done! ...”, Tootle congratulates the boys, “... must get back to the Club.”

“*Sit... stay.*” Tinkerbelle whispered in his ear as though he were a dog.

“Ah-um... the bid sits with Captain *Hook.*” Informed the auctioneer.

“Oh... I see...”, frowning at the thought, “... hmm... five million one hundred you say?” Asked the Judge.

“And fifty-five pence.”

“Of course.” Tootles looked to the four young men as though he were looking to his pass.

“Get on with it, man!” Commands Hook.

Slivers leaned forward from behind the Judge’s large frame and gives Hook a disapproving look.

“*Bad form* old chap.” Sanctioned Slivers shaking his head.

“Do you have a bid Judge?”

Tootles inhaled deeply, before exhaling like a slow deflating tire. There was not much to think about really. He had more money than everyone in the room. And then some.

The crowd waited in anticipation.

“*Six.*” Tootles spoke as though someone had whispered it in his ear, “... yes, six...”, he agreed, “... I’ve always liked the number six.”

“Six million pounds?” Enquired the auctioneer.

“And...”, Tootles continued, turning to Peter, “...fifty-five pence.”

“Very good... The bid stands at six million pounds and fifty-five pence with the Honorable Judge Tootles... Do I hear any more bids?”

All heads turn to Hook.

Frustrated, Hook sat stunned. He had nothing left. He had been out bid and out witted. Surely it was Pan’s doing.

His thoughts are broken by the cry of the auctioneer’s voice calling out and hammering the gavel like a machine gun.

“Going once!”

Bang!

“Going twice!”

Bang!

“Going three times!”

Bang!

“Sold to the Honorable Judge Tootles for six million pounds and fifty-five pence... ladies and gentlemen, these proceedings are closed. Mister Murtagh, prepare the papers for the Judge will you please... Then see me in my office afterwards.” Glaring at the man.

“We did it!” Said Sam and Curly grinning like a pair of Cheshire cats.

“The Judge did it.” Replied Peter unsure what to make of the turn of events.

“You ask him.” Said Peter seeing the Judge reclined in his chair.

“No, you ask him... it was your idea.” Informed Nibs nudging him in the Judge’s direction, “... I’ll be right behind you.” He lied.

Tootles sat in the arm chair like a beached whale. Smoke whiffs into the air from a cigar in an ashtray. A near empty brandy glass rests between fingers. Docile eyes stared into space and lips twitched as though he were talking to someone that only he could see.

“We better not disturb him.” Said Peter.

“Now or never Peter.” Warned Nibs pressing a hand on his back.

Peter is about to turn away when Tootles awakens to see him standing there.

“Ah! There you are young man... I’ve been meaning to talk to you.”

“Judge... ah...”

“Sit, sit Peter... I’ve heard good things about you... You and your band of merry men.” Casting his eyes to the twins unsure what to make of the pair, “... *hm.*”

“You have?”

“Indeed, indeed... about *that* property.”

“That’s what I’ve come to see you about... how did you know?”

“Ah_ there’s the funny thing... I didn’t... if it wasn’t for my sister Agnes in Dundee, I would never have known... her husband Angus owns the local paper, and he knows a bargain when he sees one... Scotsman through and through that man... *Fur coat nay knickers...* if know what I mean.”

“Dundee?”

“Aye... I believe a certain councilman, *Murtagh...* has been sent packing without his pension for this and other skullduggery he’s been involved in over the years... it was either that, or jail... he chose wisely.”

“Oh dear.” Laments Peter.

“Now, about this property... it’s going to need managers... young blood... you up for it?”

“It can stay as a children’s hospice?”

“Of course... I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

“It’s going to need a lick of paint. New equipment.”

“Don’t worry about money... leave that to me.” Informed Tootles assuredly.

“I don’t know what to say... thank you Judge.”

“Thank *you*, Peter... this club needs more decent young like you... now if you excuse me, I have a nap to get back to.”

“Of cos... enjoy your rest.” Bowing subtly and returning to Nibs seated by the fire.

“What did he say?” Asked Nibs from behind a paper.

“Good news... we all have jobs?” Informed Peter grinning.

“Jobs? ...”, exclaimed Nibs, “... I have hands of a milk maiden... you do recall the last time I worked... I couldn’t move for a week.”

“The maybe Tiger Lilly could sooth your pains?” Suggested Peter.

“Hm... You do make a good point old chap.” Grinned Nibs contemplating the delightful thought...

The Raid

“Don’t let your dinner get cold father...”, said Gwendolyn like a mother, then remembered, “... oh I almost forgot, this came in the post today for you...”, handing him a brown envelope, “... seems to be from that Gentleman’s Club.”

“The *Royal and Ancient* Gentleman’s Club my dear.” Informed Hook reverently inspecting the club’s crest in the corner of the envelope running a butter knife along an edge and pulling out a folded page with Sliver’s bold signature in bold blue ink at the bottom.

“Ah_.” He grins with pride.

Eyes begin dance across the page and back again as if he had misread what he was reading. The grin turns to a frown and pride to disbelief.

“Blast! ...”, Hook cursed abruptly, “... they can’t do this to me.”

“Do what father?”, startled by her father’s sudden outburst.

“The Club has rescinded my membership... bad form I say!”

“What did you expect after your little escapade with Councilor Murtagh... so I take it you’re not moving now?”

“Don’t you mean *we’re* not moving?” He corrected her.

“I’m moving in with Peter... after the wedding of course.”

“*Wedding?* What *wedding?* ... over my dead body.”

“Careful what you wished for father... look what happened to grandfather...”, then wondered, “... he’s not, *still inside* that thing? ... is he?”

“Of course, not... don’t worry about that damn crocodile...”, putting an end to the conversation, “... and as for the marriage, I *absolutely forbid* it... do you hear? ... I’ll cut you off without a shilling.”

“We don’t need your money father...”, she retorts, “... Peter has *more* than enough, more so now that he didn’t have to buy Neverland... thanks to Judge Tootles. What a charitable man... some people could take a lesson from him”, looking to her father with a smile.

“Bad form, that’s what I say.”

“Father, have a heart... think of the children.”

Reaching for his mobile dialed a number and waited for it to answer. Only to hear... ‘*We are sorry, but the number you are calling is either switched off or outside the coverage area... Please leave a message after the tone... Beep_!*’

“Slivers... Captain Hook here... I’ve just received this confounding letter... what’s this all about, *hm!* ... there has to be some mistake... you can’t do this! You’ll be hearing from my solicitors... *bad form* Slivers, *bad form!*”

Stabbing a finger at the screen to end the call.

“Blast...”, he exclaimed again, gulping down the last of his tea, “...we’ll talk later... I’m running late.”

“You haven’t finished your dinner father... what’s the emergency?”

“We have a delivery this evening.”

“Another delivery at this hour? Can’t mister Smee can handle it?”

“Don’t wait up for me”, avoiding the question.

“I won’t... just make sure you leave the paperwork where I can find this time... I still haven’t found the last lot.”

“Love you”, kissing the top of her head as he was leaving.

“Love you too father”, hearing her father hurry out the door.

“I see the lorry.” Informed Alpes looking through a pair of binoculars.

“Copy that.” Acknowledged Harris from the back of the van lined with monitors casting CCTV images of the street outside.

“You sure they’re here? I don’t see them.” Asked Alpes fearing it was just the two of them.

“You’re not supposed to see them... don’t worry, they’re there alright.”

“(Squark) ...alpha team one... do you read me? ... over... (squark)” Harris spoke into a walkie-talkie.

“(Squark) ... copy that control... we have eyes on the target... over... (squark).”

“(Squark) ... wait until he’s inside the gates... don’t move until we see the product... over, (Squark).”

“(Squark) ... copy that control... over and out... (squark).”

“Check you weapon Alpes.” Instructed Harris checking his own.

“Where’s Brown? I thought he’d be here.”

“Something came up at the last minute... his old man dropped dead.”

“Trust him to get out of this... let’s just hope it’s not us after this evening...”, feared Alpes making out two figures in the approaching lorry, “... there’s someone else with Gilbert.”

“Get a visual and run it through Interpol.”

“I’m trying, I’m trying... its too dark inside the cab.”

“Damn, we’re blind.” Cursed Harris becoming frustrated.

“(Squark) ...alpha team one... do you read me? ... over... (squark)”

“(Squark) ... loud and clear control ... over... (squark).”

“(Squark) ... there’s another man in the cab... be prepared for anything... over... (squark).”

“(Squark) ... copy that control... on your mark... over and out... (squark).”

“That’s Gilbert alright... he’s wired on something... don’t know who the other guy is? ... you got a visual yet?” Asked Harris.

“I’m trying... too many shadows.”

“Keep at it... we need to know who this guy is”, securing the Kevlar vest about his chest.

The lorry moved closer and closer. A heavy diesel engine groaned loudly alerting Smee to its presence. Heavy chains rattle as gates open. Smee scanned the street and sees a large white van looking out of place among tired looking sedans. But dismissed its presence as he waved to Gilbert keen to get him off the street.

‘Beep! ... Beep! ... Beep! ... Beep!’ The lorry reversed back slowly.

“That’s close enough.” Raising a hand for him to stop.

Brakes catch and hiss jerking the lorry to a standstill. Gilbert climbed out closing the cab door behind him. Only to have the sound of a second door close soon after. Catching Smee’s attention.

Turning about to see a neurotic looking man standing next to Gilbert.

“Mister Smee.” Acknowledges Gilbert.

“Gilbert... you bring company?”

“Ah Si Mister Smee... this is André... He no speaks English so good.”

“I guess an extra pair of hands won’t hurt...”, warily eyeing the man, “... why don’t you two get this lot unloaded.”

“Si Mister Smee... André.” Gesturing André to open the container doors.

“I’ll go see what is keeping the Captain... just put it down here...”, pointing to a spot in the ground, “... I’ll be back.”

“Are you getting this?” Asked Alpes.

“We have a camera on a telephone pole... had it installed last week.”

“What do we do?” Exclaimed Alpes.

“We wait... I’ll run André’s name and face through Interpol and see what crops up.”

Fingers poke at keys and André’s image appears on a screen. Punching more keys sends a request for identification. It does not take long for the screen to flicker and flash his criminal history.

Stunning Harris momentarily as he read through the assaults and murder charges, all conveniently dropped.

“Just got the report of your boy André.”

“And? ... another low life hood like Gilbert?”

“This guy makes Gilbert look like a Girl Guide.”

“Eh?”

Harris’s attention is drawn to the multiple screens. Seeing Smee disappear inside, then reappear with Hook moments later through the storeroom door. Hook appearing animated and angry.

“What’s happening?”

“Hook has just arrived, and he’s not happy about André being there... he’s pointing to something inside the lorry.”

“Sorry Captain... But Don Bianchi said...”, began Gilbert only to be cut short.

“I don’t give a damn what Bianchi said... what have I told you about bringing *that stuff* onto my property?”, pointing to a red shrink-wrapped pallet at the back.

On hearing Bianchi’s name being insulted André stepped forward pulling a flick-blade knife and took a violent swing at Hook. Narrowly missing his face. Hook stumbles and falls backwards to the ground.

“That’s our cue!” Exclaimed Harris on seeing the knife.

“(Squark) ...alpha team one... Go! Go! Go! ... over... (Squark)”

“(Squark) ... copy that control ... over... (Squark).”

Suddenly from behind walls and hedges half a dozen heavily armed men in black combat uniforms rush towards the gates. Bolt cutters sever the chain and the gates burst open. Thin red laser beams search for their prey. Suddenly, an overhead helicopter appeared as if from nowhere beaming powerful shaft of white light into the yard. Sirens wail on the street outside adding to the sudden turmoil. The sky flickered with red and blue flashing lights.

The four faces within the yard stand stunned by the suddenness of the raid.

“Hands in the air! ... We have you surrounded!” Ordered a commanding voice through a mega-phone over the sound of chopper blades overhead.

‘Thud, thud, thud, thud, thud, thud...’

Hook and Smee immediately raise their hands to surrender. However, André and Gilbert were not going to go so easily. Gilbert pulls Glock from behind him. André pulls an Uzi from within his jacket.

Spraying bullets indiscriminately at the probing lights.

'Brr-brr-brr-brr! ...' stuttered the Uzi, *'... Brr-brr-brr-brr!'*.

Initiating a deafening fire fight. Spitting flashes of light and deadly bullets. Hook and Smee dived behind boxes to avoid being hit.

'Ratta-tat-tat! ... Ratta-tat-tat!', automatic weapons return fire.

Peppering the contraband. Shattering the bottles. Bleeding their guts over the ground.

Gilbert and André are soon captured by red laser beams and giggle like tea bags on a string as bullets strike them. Before gravity overcame their lifeless bodies and fall to the ground like rag dolls. Dead. Very dead.

A deafly silence befell the yard. Smoke drifted like fog across the battle field. A pungent smell of gunpowder hung in the air. Two bloodied corpses lay twisted and inert beside Hook. Their eyes staring at him.

"Don't shoot... don't shoot." He called out raising his hands and getting to his feet.

Spotlights catch sight of him.

"Slowly now... no sudden moves... hands where I can see them, Captain." Harris instructed through a megaphone.

"I can explain everything." Said Hook.

"Tell that to the judge... until then, you have the right to remain silent...", securing hand cuffs on him.

"What do we have here?" Asked Alpes seeing the pink shrink wrapped pallet.

"That's not mine... I don't touch the stuff... ask anyone... this is mine." Gesturing to the tattered boxes bleeding booze.

"Not much of it now...", chuckled Alpes, "... search the place... take these guys away."

"What do you mean you didn't find anything?" Bellowed Brown glaring at Harris and Alpes sitting opposite.

"We searched everywhere... even the basement he had... nothing."

"He must have moved it."

"You reckon?" Remarked Brown.

"What about the stuff he got delivered?" Questioned Alpes.

"There's nothing but shattered empty bottles... there's no law against that." Brown shakes his head.

"The drugs?" Harris asked in desperation.

"Not his... the manifest showed it was for a drug lord in Soho... (*Sigh*)." Informed Brown.

"Six months of surveyance down the drain?" Exclaimed Alpes.

"Aptly put Alpes... but don't worry, I have another case for you two to work on...", pushing a bulky file across the desk towards him, "... you can start on that immediately."

"Oh_ Sergeant..." Alpes begins to complain, "... I haven't seen my wife in months."

"Lucky for her then." Brown grins.

"What about Hook and Smee? ...", asked Harris, "... shouldn't we release them?"

"We have the right to hold them for twenty-four hours for questioning...", looking to his watch, "... they can stew in the cells a while longer... it won't hurt them after all the trouble they caused...", sighing heavily, "... that will be all gentlemen." Dismissing the men and swiveling on his chair to look out over London seeing the sun just breaking the horizon.

Taking a sip of cold black coffee, it was going to be a long day...

Crocodile's Revenge

"Father, are you okay? ...", asked Gwendolyn, "... Mister Smee just told me what happened."

"I'm fine, I'm fine, don't worry about me."

"What did the police say?"

"They were after the driver and his associate... *drugs* I heard... Mister Smee and I were innocent bystanders caught in the middle."

"It had nothing to do with those deliveries you've been getting did it?"

"No_, not at all." He lied.

"You're lucky you weren't killed father... or Mister Smee."

"The good Lord must have been watching over us." He said crossing himself.

"I'm sorry father. It must have been horrible for you." Consoling him with a hug.

"I think we'll stay closed today while Mister Smee *cleans* the back yard."

"You should give him the day off father... after what he has been through."

"Don't worry about Mister Smee, he's tough as old boots."

Then as though to interject, loud diesel engines come to life and jack hammers shake the old building, causing dust to fall from the rafters.

"Blast! Bad form! ... will they ever be finished?" Cursing the sudden nuisance.

"Oh well, good thing we're not open I can catch up on some paperwork."

"You do that... I have something to attend in the bar."

"What did you do with the paperwork from that delivering?" She asked curiously.

"Unfortunately, it was destroyed along with the merchandise last night... the vendor won't be receiving payment."

Gwendolyn looked at her father suspiciously unsure to believe him.

"Well, lets hope they don't come after us... we have insurance to cover the damage."

The thought of Bianchi coming after him had not entered his mind until then. And he wondered if news of the incident had reached him yet in Milan.

'That's between him and his driver.' Thought Hook.

"Of course, I'll get Mister Smee onto it." He lied.

"It doesn't look right Captain...", informed Smee looking up at the Crocodile, "... it's coming away from the wall", pointing to loosened bolt.

"Get up there and fix it then...", ordered Hook, hands on hips, "... blasted road works!"

Jack hammers battered the ground, sending shock waves through foundations causing the crocodile's tail to fall further and its stomach to sagged as if it were breathing.

"It's a live Captain!" Exclaimed Smee being startled.

"It's not alive I can assure you of that... now get up there and fix it before it comes down on but of us!"

Smee balanced himself precariously on a step ladder. Placing one hand on the mounting board the other on the creature's belly.

"What's this thing filled with Captain... stones? ... might explain why it's so heavy." Giving the creature's belly a hefty shove.

"Don't worry yourself about that... give it another push." Instructed Hook from below.

"Ah_!" Groaned Smee giving the beast a heave upwards.

"Careful you fool." Warned Hook.

Just then a large hydraulic jack started up shaking old building to its core. Bolts loosen and the mounting board slips from its support. Smee loses his balance, causing the step ladder to topple over. In desperation he reaches for the creature's tail as a lifeline. Only to add to the burdening weight.

"What are you doing man?" Asked Hook seeing Smee hanging like a chimpanzee.

Suddenly the creature's jaws sprang open and its head droops as if it had set its sight on Hook. Then suddenly, the creature leaped from the mounting crashing down upon him.

Crushing Hook's head within its jaws.

'Crash! ... Bang! ... Crunch! ... (burp).'

The creature's belly splits open as countless gemstones spill about the floor. Then, as quickly as the violent intrusion had begun, it ceased. The road works fell quiet. As if in reverence to the dead. Smee picked himself up and hurried to the Hooks lifeless body. His head sandwiched between the creature's jaws.

Blood pooling over the floor.

"*Captain?* ...", asked Smee knowing there could be no reply, "... *Captain?* ... oh dear."

"What was all that noise? ...", asked Gwendolyn appearing at the bar, "... where's the crocodile? ... where's father?"

Smee looked to the floor, the back to Gwendolyn.

"It's best you don't see this, Miss Gwendolyn." He warned.

Nevertheless, she stepped forward.

"*(Gasp!)*" She exclaimed seeing her father's inert body.

"Should I call an ambulance Miss?"

"I don't think it will help Mister Smee...", feeling for a pulse and getting none, "... well, now we know where father hid, grandfather's treasure."

"What should we do?" Asked Smee.

"Gather the stones, and put it in the safe... then, we'll call the authorities."

"As you say Miss Gwendolyn."

A beam of pure white light beamed through the window and shone upon the Captain. Illuminating dust particles that floated in the air as though carrying away his soul. A tear rolled down her cheek. Then another. The beam faded. And with it the road works started up again.

Scattering the serene moment.

Beneath a large black umbrella Gwendolyn looked down to the small white tombstone with a simple inscription...

Captain James Hook

"Hurry up Gwendolyn! ...", called out Peter from a waiting car, "... we're going to be late."

She places a bouquet of white roses at the base of the stone.

"I wish you could be there, but I know you'll be there watching on... Peter's a good man... you'll see."

Pressing fingers to her lips she touches the stone.

"Love you father."

"*Gwendolyn!*" Peter called out.

Grey clouds had gathered above, and tear drops fall like rain.

“Have to go... see you soon... Wendy... keep an eye on him.” Turning to tombstone beside her father’s.

Tinkerbelle looked magical. There was no other word for it. Nibs looked resplendent as he always did. The twins looked like two naughty schoolboys. And Peter, well Peter looked like any man before his execution. Nervous and anxious. There would be no reprieve. Nor did he wish for one. Archie lay at his feet. Shampooed and brushed for the occasion. A red bowtie about his neck.

Voices talk quietly among the gathered congregation.

“*Ah-mm.*” Coughed a Vicar drawing their attention to him, and church fell silent.

An organ played softly. Archie sat up to see Tiger Lily scattering rose petals before her. Following in her wake Gwendolyn on Smee’s arm to give her away. Dressed in a sleek pearl satin gown. Looking like all brides do on their wedding day.

Beautiful.

Peter smiled and fought to hold back a tear welching in his eye. On reaching the altar, Tiger Lily bowed respectfully as though she were saying goodbye. Taking a handful white rose petals in her hand, blows them into the air, as though casting a spell. Suspending themselves in the air for an unusually long period time.

Creating a veil through which Gwendolyn and Mister Smee walked.

“She is all yours.” Informed Smee placing her hand in Peter’s.

“You look beautiful.” He tells her.

“You don’t scrub up to bad yourself... ready?”

“Ready as I will ever be.”

They turn and face the Vicar.

“Dearly beloved... we are gathered here today... to join this man and this woman in Holy matrimony...”

“... I now pronounce you... man and wife... you may kiss the bride.” Pronounced the Vicar.

The happy couple embraced and lips kiss. And continued to kiss.

And kissed some more.

“*Get a room.*” Whispered Nibs.

“Here’s to the happy couple!” Toasted Nibs raising his glass.

“To the happy couple!” Voices sing back followed by clinking glasses.

The crocodile looked down from above the bar. Smee keep a wide berth of it. He raised his glass to the creature. As if the ghost of the Captain resided within.

“To the Captain.” He toasted proudly.

“*To the Captain!*” Voices call out.

“You had that thing remounted after what happened?” Asked Nibs to Peter unsure what to make of it.

“It was Gwendolyn’s idea actually.”

“Really? ... You got the girl, you got the pub, and you saved Neverland.”

“I couldn’t save Wendy.”

“Somethings are beyond our control Peter.” Consoled Nibs.

“Hm... suppose you’re right... to think it all began with a visit to Tennapenny... if I hadn’t met Tinkerbelle, I would never have meet Wendy... it was as though it was meant to be.”

“Who’s Tinkerbell?” Asked Nibs confused.

“What do you mean, who’s Tinkerbell... you know Tinkerbell... she’s over... oh...”
looking about for her, “... I thought she was just with Tiger Lily.”

“Tiger Lily? ... Just how much have you had to drink old chap?”

“You must know Tiger Lily... you’ve been seeing her.”

“Not so loud Peter... Tabitha might hear... I’m already in the dog box.”

“Who’s Tabitha?”

“Tabitha, my girlfriend.” Nibs points to a woman talking to Gwendolyn.

“I don’t understand... they were just here.” Looking about the room for the women who had mysteriously disappeared...

Return to Tennapenny

The sun shone brightly upon the earth, and none more so on Peter striding briskly beneath a large black umbrella. People turned and looked at the peculiar sight. Then to the sky as if it were about to rain. But there was not a cloud in sight.

Peter was on a mission.

“Come on Archie...”, turning to catch the terrier cocking a leg to a tree, “... you must be running on fumes old chap.”

Archie’s ears prick up, but not to Peter, but to a voice from within the tree looking down at him.

“*Hello Archie.*” Tiger Lily whispered.

‘*Woof-woof!*’ He barked back, wagging his tail excited to see her.

“Archie! Come on old chap! ... leave it alone.” Peter called out.

“*Run along now...*” She whispered, “... *see you soon.*”

Archie obediently obeyed and rushed past Peter into a street bustling with tourists and bargain hunters. Portobello had not changed. It seemed like only yesterday he had wandered down the lane looking for the very same terrier.

“Sorry... ah... sorry...”, Peter apologized snagging the umbrella on people, “... sorry!”

“Watch where you’re going with that... *bad form* old chap.” Replied a passerby.

Thinking he had heard a ghost, he looked about hoping to catch sight of the man. But the man had vanished into thin air. And closes the umbrella.

And hoped no one would notice.

“Archie!” He called out.

‘*Woof-woof!*’ A bark sounded within the crowd some distance ahead.

“How hard can it be? ...”, looking about for the store, “... and am I sure it was here.”

It all seemed so familiar, yet it all seemed so... *different*. Eyes make out familiar features of buildings, barrows and vendors calling out their wares. A feeling of DeJa’Vu comes over him as nostrils detect the scent of muffins. A rash of goosebumps tinkles over him. The people before him part and he found himself standing before a large glass window with large, faded lettering...

TENNAPENNY

The fire-engine red storefront, now clouded and dull. Thinking there must be a mistake. But the name across the window told him otherwise.

‘*Woof-woof.*’ A muffled bark comes from within the store.

“Archie?”

Cupping a hand against the glass to peer inside. Only to see a dark interior. On opening the door a tired bell rattled above his head. Eyes adjust the darkness. There was a smell, a smell that came with antique stores. Disoriented, he looked about. Shelves covered with nick-nacks, covered with dust. He sensed something strange about the place. It was the same, yet it was different.

As though time had caught up with it.

“Ah... you must be Peter.” An elderly feminine voice inquired.

Turning about to see two elderly ladies standing behind the counter. One holding Archie affectionately. The woman runs a finger across the counter and gently blows dust towards him as though she was playing with him.

“Tinkerbell?”

“I’m sorry?” Replied Tinkerbell as though he were mistaken.

“Sorry, I thought you were someone I knew... I am Peter... how did you know?”

“It’s on his tag.”

“Of course... silly me... sorry, but I’m a little confused... or lost... possibly both... I was looking for a store called *Tennapenny*.” He asked tentatively looking back to the window.

“This is the place.”

“It can’t be.”

“I sure you it is.”

“How long you have been here? If you don’t mind me asking.” He inquired.

“Oh dear...”, Tinkerbell shook her head in contemplation, looking to her sister as if to confirm the years, “... before the war wasn’t it.”

“One of them.” Replied Tiger Lily.

“That can’t be right.” Becoming more confused.

“Why’s that young man?”

But the more Peter thought, the more his mind became muffled. Forgetful as it were. As though a spell had been cast over him.

“You, okay?”

“Yes, yes, of course... I think.” Looking about the store wondering why he had come in for.

‘*Woof.*’ Barked Archie as if to remind him.

“Of course... come on Archie... time to go home.”

“I don’t think you’ll be needing your umbrella today, Peter...”

“I won’t?” Surrendering the umbrella.

“Why don’t you leave it here with the others.”

“Others?” Becoming more confused.

“You take care now Peter.” Wished Tinkerbell blowing dust from her hand towards him.

Stepping onto the street. The sun shone brightly down on him. He reaches for the umbrella that was not there. Desperately looking back to the store that seemed not to be there. Feeling he would be caught out at any moment noticed something unusual on the ground. As though someone had dropped it.

It could not possibly be his.

Raising an arm, it raised its arm. When he jiggled a foot. It jiggled its foot. He jiggled the other foot. Only to encourage it to do likewise. People stop and stare at the strange young as though he were a street performer.

No matter what he did he could not shake the shadow free.

“I have a shadow...”, grinning to himself, “... *I have a shadow!*” He cried out Peter, and he did not care who heard him.

‘*Woof-woof!*’ Barked Archie, catching his attention.

“Let’s go home old chap... Gwendolyn will be wondering where we’ve gotten to.” Marching off with a skip in his step.

His shadow skipping along with him...

(THE END)

About the Author

Born a long time ago in the small township of Foxton, New Zealand, my first book was a Self-Help book [E is for Effort](#). That led to the debut novel, [The Ring](#). And so began the “End of Days” trilogy. The fuse had been lit and one book led to another, and as they say, the rest is history.

When not writing I enjoy pursuing creative projects, hearty workouts and hanging out with my three amazingly intelligent and beautiful children Harry, Emily, and Rebecca. Then again, I could be found at my local enjoying a craft beer with good friends. They know who they are.

With the exception of God, all the characters in this book are fictitious and are a product of my imagination. I hope you enjoy reading my imaginings, much as I have writing about them.

Please visit www.obooko.com to discover my other books:

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