Believing in fairies

by VelvetGoldie

Summary

Jane is turning 18, yet she has a hard time facing the fact she's becoming an adult; as her future is looking dark, she hopes one more time that fairies do exist... When Peter Pan appears and takes her to Neverland, she thinks she has it all. But as she's taken to the Jolly Roger and meets the dangerous captain Hook, she starts to wonder if there still is something she doesn't have? A coming of age story.
The crumbled and torn letter lay at her feet. Her chin was raised up as she watched the night sky without ever really seeing it.
The words, violently printed onto the white paper, were echoing in her head.
"Rejected."
"After many deliberations, the Admission Committee has come to a decision..."
"Rejected."
"...we regret to inform you that your application for our university has been..."
"Rejected."
"...Please accept, Ms. Foreville, our regards."
"Rejected."
Rejected. Rejected.

She glanced coldly at the floor, where the letter was still mocking her in its own insidious way. She did not kick nor trample on it as she had done almost all afternoon. It seemed exhaustion had finally overcome useless anger.

Finally, Jane inhaled deeply and lifted her fingers to the handle of the door. It opened almost silently, and just as soon as it did she was outside.

For a moment, she hoped the cold air would cleanse her mind of the harsh and blazing words engraved in it, evermore teasing her. Reminding her of her failure.

But she had worked so hard, she thought, not realising her legs had given up and left her to kneel on the cold ground.

But she had worked for months for this menacing exam, believing she could do it. It wasn't fair, no, it wasn't; she almost sobbed — except she couldn't possibly be sobbing, for she was not a kid anymore; no, she wasn't.

So what had been the point of denying a part of her life, preparing for this test, hoping it was worth it? Hoping she would gain it back once she was accepted to this university — the one she had always dreamed of?

Her blurry vision — the wind, she though — finally found a glimmering star in the sky. She knew which one it was. It was only yesterday when she had pronounced to it with the same fervor she always had, her magic words. Only yesterday, but now she felt she would never say it again. The magic was gone. Why didn't she realize sooner that it had gone?

She could pray and chant "I do believe in fairies" as much as she wanted, it had never saved her. Every night, ever since a night so long ago she couldn't remember when, she had believed in fairies while looking at that special second star to the right. Yesterday, she used to dream of flying ships and thrilling mermaids...

She remained silent and lost in her thoughts for a while, although it seemed that her mind was blank. She simply felt the wind cool down her burning brow, create goosebumps on her arms. Then, words fell out from her lips, although she didn't think she said anything.

"I do believe in fairies..."

When she heard the words, a low chuckle escaped her, making her shoulders shake. They shook along with her miserable laugh, until they shook with the cries she couldn't ignore any longer. And suddenly she couldn't help but face the fact — she was afraid.

She panicked, she cried, her head seeming to implode, as she realized she had no idea what to do next. She had her whole life planned ahead of her: and there it was, destroyed by black letters on a thin and cutting paper. She had to plan once more her life from scratch. But she didn't know where to go. Worse even, what if she ended up some place she hated? What if she woke up, a 45 year-old greying woman, realizing she had failed her entire life not doing what she was passionate about? Although Jane didn't even know what she was passionate about anymore. The things she loved, she wanted to do and study had been denied to her by a piece of paper.

She wanted to cry to her mom, to cry to her dad, to cry for god's sake. Oh god, what was she going to do? Her mind was on fire and nothing could calm her down, nothing could convince her that she was panicking for useless reasons.

Then she heard footsteps behind her.

"Jane, what are you doing, all alone outside? Have you turned crazy yet?"

Her little and bitter cousin Clara, nothing else. Nevertheless, her cold remark had the credit to
suddenly stop Jane from falling into further distraught. She did not reply but got up on her feet, her legs still shaky but her head up and dignified.

"Are you doing this thing with fairies again? Aren't you supposed to be a grown up now?"

True, Jane was supposed to get older in a couple of days, which explained why her cousin's family showed the curtesy of coming up to her parent's house. She should have said to Clara what she had thought minutes ago herself: that yes, she was a grown-up now, and she didn't believe in fairies anymore.

But the last thing she wanted at the moment was to be given lessons by an angry thirteen year-old girl, five years younger than she; and, try as she might – she wasn't ready to say she didn't believe in fairies yet.

"Go to bed, Clara." The girl magnificently ignored her.

"Oh, are you turning to your 'Peter Pan' because you can't go to your silly school now?" The girl blinked for a moment – why would anyone be so desperate about not going to school? She continued. "Well, you know what? Here's some news for you: Peter Pan and fairies? They don't even –"

"Clara, just shut up! You'll understand when you get older." As Clara didn't reply, Jane sighed, enjoying the short moment of peace. Closing her eyes for a couple of seconds, she opened them again. She saw a faint light floating before her eyes, as it does when one is tired. She expected it to disappear, except it didn't. Instead, it grew brighter and brighter, almost as it got closer. Almost as if it were...

Clara saw that light as well, slightly disturbed as well. But when she saw the look on Jane's face, she couldn't help but throw a last, biting remark at her.

"What are you expecting, Jane? It's just a stupid firefly, obviously, because fairies – and all this crap – they don't exist."

Jane couldn't prevent it. She was too mesmerized to hear what Clara was saying, and she was now already regretting it. She turned around to look at her cousin, half-furious and half-terrified. When she turned back to the look for the flickering light, the glow had fallen to the ground.
"But what have you done?!" Jane was desperate.

"Oh, come on, why are you so upset? It was just a joke!" But something in Clara's eyes showed emotions she didn't want to feel. A little bit of panic; a little bit of guilt. She had seen the light fall as soon as she had said the words, and didn't want to face what it could mean.

"You know what, Jane, you're really weird. I'm going back to bed. I got enough of you! I'm not waisting my time with a crazy cousin who still believes in fairy tales. You do really need to grow up!" As soon as she had said these words, Clara left, not to be seen by Jane again.

It was as if Jane didn't hear the bitter words of her cousin. When Clara disappeared, Jane had already ran up to the light, glimmering less and less.

Lowering her eyes, she discovered, alone in the middle of the grass, a small and inert form. It could have been nothing – it should have been nothing. But it wasn't.

This small thing; by far the most delicate and precious thing she ever saw in her whole life – was, of course, a fairy. Why did she ever doubt it? Her heart leaped in her chest; her blood ran twice through her body in a second; her mind spun around her very own head. Of course, it was a fairy. Of course, she wasn't wrong to believe in it – all this time. Just when the last lights of belief flickered and disappeared inside her, the sight of that fairy set ablaze her heart, with a fire so strong it would almost burn her whole.

Here was a fairy. A fairy, just like you see in the books. A fairy with silver hair, and with fragile dragonfly wings. A dead fairy, lying at Jane's feet.

Passing from a joy that could have illuminated a thousand other souls to a state of extreme bleakness, Jane fell to her knees. Her view slowly got blurred with all the tears that were inexorably filling her eyes.

She should have prevented it. During her whole life, it was everything she had dreamed of. She had always been waiting for a sign, for something, to prove she wasn't wrong. To prove that all her beliefs about magic, and Peter Pan, and fairies, were true. And right at the moment where her life looked so dim and hopeless to her, a light had appeared – except that this light was now gone forever. Jane didn't even have the strength to loathe Clara for it – she was already torn apart by the pain of seeing her dream gone to dust, for the second time in a single evening.

She didn't know how long she stayed here, crying for the fate of that little fairy with silver hair. When she thought she saw a shadow drifting from the sky, she didn't pay attention – her view was clouded by tears after all. However, she heard a sort of whiff, one that wasn't caused by the wind running through the leaves of the summer trees.

But only the landing of a little boy made her realize something was happening. It didn't feel like a big deal at first – she had gone through so many emotions in one evening that she already accepted the next thing as almost natural.

The little boy looked down to discover the lifeless body of the fairy at Jane's feet.

When he opened his mouth to cry out, horrified, angry, and – sad, Jane could only watch, motionless, slowly blinking her own tears away. Surely it was all a dream now. But now, the boy looked at her with eyes that could have made grown men draw back in fear.
"It's your fault! She died because of you!"

The harshness, the false judgement, it all made Jane snap back to her. It was like Clara all over again. She wasn't sure she could stand for it now.

"No! It's not true! You're mistaken – I swear, I promise I didn't do anything!"

"You lie!" He looked at her from head to toe with disgust. "You are an adult!"

Jane drew back now. She didn't know what shocked her more: to be loathed by a memorable flying boy, or to be called an adult – while, in truth, she didn't feel like one yet.

"But – listen! I might be a little grown up, but it doesn't stop me from believing in fairies!" Until she almost gave up on that belief, a voice in her head teased. But she had enough remorses already. She carried on, not yet ready to be trampled on for something she didn't commit – something she never wished to see happening again. "It was actually my little cousin who said... Who said..." She stopped here, unable to repeat the words, but the boy understood.

He stared at her for a long time, with a serious look on his face. "Explain yourself" he simply said, making Jane slightly puzzled, not used to sudden mood swings.

"My cousin did it. She was teasing me because ever since I was little, I always said I believed in fairies – up to today. Clara and I – we were close and she played along with me, but when she grew up, it seems she grew out of it as well." Jane looked down at the fairy, then back at Peter. "I am so sorry for what happened. It just happened so fast, I couldn't..."

Jane looked down again, to hide the tears flowing in her eyes once more. One of them dropped and landed – in an eerie and soft way – onto the fairie's wing.

The boy looked convinced about her story now – another mood swing. He flew up a little in the air with ease. At this moment, Jane suddenly realized that this was true – the fairies, Peter Pan; they were all true. What more was there?

"The fairy you see" he started solemnly, too solemnly for a little boy who wasn't playing pretense, "she went here to reward with a wish the person who believed in fairies even as an adult." Jane listened, her mouth agape. "Believing in fairies as an adult saves many fairies – they're grateful for that." Peter paused, before adding in a lower tone of voice: "But it's too late for her to grant your wish now." He looked down at Jane and at the fairy. "I came here to meet an adult who believed in fairies – I suppose it's done now. So goodbye."

As he was starting to lift off, Jane felt as she had been struck by lightning. No, this couldn't be the end! Not so fast, not when she felt everything was about to begin. She had to stop him no matter what.

"No, wait! Even if the fairy is dead, my dream can still come true!"

Peter made a face as if he didn't believe her – or as if he had already forgotten her very existence. But, curious, he came back to Jane. When she saw his confused figure, she explained:

"My dearest dream – since, well, ever – is very simple. It doesn't take a fairy – just fairy dust." She paused, looking full and straight at him. "I want to go to Neverland."

But the little boy was hesitating.

"Are you sure? You are an adult. If you go, you'll never be able to leave. If you go now, you'll stay
on Neverland... only forever."

"Why, it's not long at all" replied Jane, a little smile creeping its way to the corner of her mouth.

The answer seemed to please him. The smile the child gave her there was shining – it was a smile filled with small milky teeth, that looked ready to bite the whole world if they could.

His answer matched his smile, illuminating Jane's heart.

"Alright, why not? It can be fun!" He executed a wide and skillfull looping in the air. "So, what are we waiting for? Let's go! I swear that I, Peter Pan, will lead you to Neverland!" Jane had been ready for this signal for a long time. She smiled blissfully, almost not believing her luck – almost.

She asked Peter to wait for her a second and she ran into her room faster than she ever did. When she came out, she was beaming with hapiness and looked triumphant, with shoes now tied at her feet and a strong bag attached on her back.

She slipped to Peter: "I had it prepared for a long time – it's my survival kit for desert islands. I have this with me everytime I have to take the plane." She had seen LOST, after all – she sujrely ould know what to expect.

Peter stared at her without really understanding – a plane? This kind of things were of course unknown to him... Nevertheless, he rummaged a little in his pocket and found a handful of shimmering dust.

"Fairy dust", he felt the need to explain – even though he didn't have to. It was exactly looking like what Jane had imagined.

Peter opened his palm and let the dust cover Jane. Her heart beating fast, she closed her eyes as she received it. She didn't have to think happy toughts : happy, she already was. More than she ever was and more than she ever would be. When she opened her eyes, she was floating. She had to pause for a while to realise this that it was real – she was floating in the air!

She took the moment in, until her heart burst with so much joy that she felt herself go up, up, so much that she needed to move or it would feel she could fly up into space. She inhaled softly – and suddenly, she found herself flying down, down to the grass. It was at the last moment when she flew back up, she knew she would never be the same again.

Something she had read somewhere a long time ago rang into her head: humans once knew how to fly, and only in their dreams, they remembered.

When she had finished her first flight – although she thought she could go on forever – Peter laid out a hand to her.

"Ready?"

Jane looked behind her – one very last time. What she saw wasn't her home; what she saw was her future, which looked so uncertain to her at this moment. And it was waiting for her if she touched the ground again. She turned around to face Peter. Looking straight right at him, she knew the answer he expected.

"More than ever."

And together, they lifted off to the second star to the right.
Jane didn't know for how long she had been in Neverland. Days, weeks and months seemed to arrange themselves in such a way it wasn't humanly possible to align with it. But after all, why should she care about the time she was spending in Neverland? Smiling, she remembered Peter's words: "It's only forever..." And it was fine by her.

She would always remember her arrival and when she saw the island for the first time. Never in her life had she ever seen such beauty. After an unforgettable flight through the stars, Peter and her finally reached the second star to the right – the very star she would once stare at every evening. Once, it seemed she could take it between her fingers; now, the star had swallowed her whole, in a giant blur of whiteness. And then the clouds separated. That was then she saw it: Neverland, the wonderful island shimmering underneath the skies. It was full of promises, of thrilling adventures, of endless youth, always renewed, always living in the present. From up there, she could see it all: the fairy-tree, the mermaid lagoon, the dreadful hangman’s tree... She forgot to breathe for a moment. And she almost forgot how to fly, so that Peter had to catch her before she fell!

He made her discover the whole island, to and fro across. Every day had many different suprises in store; from the classical treasure hunt to sharing the peace pipe with the indian tribe, Jane had no time to get bored – or even to think of what she would do the next day. It was perfect. Every night she told herself it was all she ever wanted. She smiled falling alseep on her bed of leaves.

Peter had decided she would be the new mother. She wasn't suprised, and although she didn't admit it, she was thrilled to stay with the infamous Lost Boys. She quickly got along very well with them. She was already experienced with baby-sitting and the kids soon loved her. She was glad; she would have hated to be an awful mother. But of course, it was all make-believe. To be true, she was mostly playing with them instead of running after them and ordering them to finish their meal. Anyway, she just couldn't get mad at them and their little mirthful faces. Some looked like they were about Clara's age, and sometimes she found herself wondering about her – about her own family. Yet, the more the time passed, the less she thought of them. She was happy being young, careless and free once more – and forever.

But sometimes, Jane couldn't help but to be affected by the age gap between her and the children.

Even if she wanted to live in a simpler and freer place, she had still spent 17 years of her life in another kind of world. A cruel world that wanted children to grow fast, and asked teenagers to become adults in the blink of an eye. Jane had been sensible to that, and, at 18, she wasn't a child anymore, although she wasn't ready to be an adult yet. After all, didn't she gain maturity and wisdom as she grew older? Didn't she have to give up the games she played in kindergarten for the sake of new ones, sometimes more cruel, in middle and high school? In some time, she realized she was, and for a long time now, beyond the age of simple things. She now aspired to other things, another type of fellowship... something different than the company of children, sometimes. That's why, against all her efforts, she had to realize the obvious: she still believed in fairies... but she had sometimes to fight against her growing slowly into an adult.

In those moments where she felt she needed a break from all the kids surrounding her all day, she would leave in the middle of the night in order to walk, alone, along the beach as she looked up to the stars. These little moments were something only for her, something private. As she was sitting on a large and flat rock, she suddenly thought of something. It had been a while since she saw Neverland from the top of the clouds – since she had arrived, in fact... And more than that, she had never seen this amazing view at night. As she was free to do whatever she wanted, after
all, she lifted off and laid comfortably on the top of a very fluffy cloud; and there, she simply admired the scenery.

Underneath the night sky, Neverland looked more mysterious than ever, full of magic and secrets. She could behold the glow of hundreds of fairies as they danced around their beloved tree, and the thousand stars in sky were enough to complete this peaceful vision. Seeing this, Jane felt so touched and relaxed deep down within her soul that she easily drifted off to sleep, without even realising it.

And she woke up almost immediately as she felt her body hit the water. The cloud had given up on her as she fell asleep! Right, she would remember that. She quickly got her head out of the sea and spat out the salted water she had almost drunk. Struggling the best she could, she took a quick look around to analyse the situation. To her horror, she realised she was very far from the shore... But a few yards from her stood, imposing amongst the infinity of the water, a gigantic pirate ship. Jane shivered when she read its name, spread in golden letters on the side of the boat: the Jolly Roger.

What was left for her to do? She couldn't fly again, since all the fairy dust that covered her had been rinsed off when she hit the water. On one hand, she could appreciate a slow death as she would eventually drown if she wanted to swim to the far-away shore... Or, on the other hand, she could consider the no-less-suicidal plan of going aboard the pirate ship.

Her choice was sharply made. It was better to face a quick death, after all. And since she had gone this far, she might as well get to meet pirates, real ones! (even if that meant to die immediately after by their hand.) But how to get onboard? She couldn't see any ladder, any rope that would allow her to climb up. And more than that, what would be the point of sneaking since she would be then at the sight of all once on the deck? No, she had to make it big: if she was going to die, she might at least put on a show, instead of being slayed like a common thief.

"Ahoy, up there!" she shouted in her mightiest voice – a terrible attempt, surely. A face looked down from the deck to see where this cry was from. Jane immediately called out:

"Ah! Hey, you! Yes, you! Would you be so kind to help me? I would love to reach your vessel before I die of hypothermia."

The man had such a look of surprise on his face that Jane had to repress a laugh. He turned around – probably to discuss the matter with other members of the crew. She understood some parts of the conversation as it echoed over the water.

"Now the capt'n surely wouldn't let someone get onboard like that..."
"What if she was a spy? Or a thief? Or even both?"
"A spy with so little discretion? Now don't be stupid you dog!"
"A'right, a'right, but I'm wondering if..."

Well, this looked like it would take some time. Jane decided to speed things up.

"Oh, no!" she cried as desperately as her average talents of actress allowed her to. "What is it that I see? I'm afraid that... Oh, it can't be true! Sharks!"
Then, she decided to put on her best show. She started shouting, bustling about in a mad way. "I'm going to die! Oh, God, I'm going to die! Please, help me! ...Oh my, they're getting closer... I don't want to die killed by fish! I beg of you, help me please!"

Eventually, these cries of urgency had more effect on the men than the threat of a slow death, as right
after that, a rope was thrown overboard. Jane simply had to hold on tight to it as she got pulled up, still dazed that her silly acting had worked.

She almost jumped back in the water as she saw the whole crew, peering at her in an almost menacing way; not really what she could qualify as a really warmhearted one. She didn't even have the time to open her mouth to explain her situation that already, the whole crowd was stepping aside, a murmur spreading among them.
"The captain!"

The captain was furiously making his way through the people crowding the deck. His black boots were clinking heavily at each of his steps, in such way that it almost sent shivers in Jane's spine. She caught from the corner of her eye the movement of a long red coat and the glint of a sharp hook. Right after followed an awful bawl she would remember in a long time.
"Who dares to cause such disorder among my crew?"

No one ventured to reply anything – and especially Jane. When the captain finished to cover the distance that separated him from her, she couldn't help but remember – she had no weapon to defend herself... And, whatever she might had thought earlier, being murdered by that man wasn't going to be pleasant. He was almost the embodiment of ferociousness. His long dark hair and his eyes only added to the character. Well, at least you could easily get lost into these mesmerising blue forget-me-not eyes, she thought.

But he also had this cruel hook in lieu of his right hand. She resigned herself.
"Give me at least a quick death to get this over with..." She didn't want to say that out loud, yet she did. She realised that at the point where she was, she just didn't care anymore.

The captain stared at her for a while, giving Jane the opportunity to get lost in his eyes once more. If it was the last thing she would see before dying, she finally realized she could have had worse.

"Who said we should kill anyone? It would be shame to end your life without knowing what brings you amongst our" – he had an evasive gesture to indicate the crew – "fierce company". Getting down on one knee to face her, he placed the sharp edge of his hook right in front of her nose.
"Tell me. What do you want from us to disturb - in such unlady-like manners - our little crew?"
"Certainly, I wouldn't have if I hadn't fell in the water like a beginner" she replied quickly – perhaps too quickly. The captain's reply was twice as sharp and twice as acute.
"Oh, so you fell to the water, say thou? Yet I don't see any other ship around here, except ours." Jane gulped, hesitating.
"How I fell isn't important' she replied after a few seconds floated in the air. "I'm here only to save my life." Jane had dismissed his question the best she could. She knew way too well the importance of fairy dust to let the captain know she flew up here.
At this moment, a sailor felt the need to add: "Tis true, capt'n! She was goin' to be eaten by sharks, capt'n – so we brought 'er up, 'cause that would 've been ugly for her to die like this, y'get me?"

Hook had a disgusted pout. He took a deep breath, then shouted:
"You imbeciles! It is known there are no sharks around here for miles and miles! You mean this simple girl has fooled you so easily?"
He grabbed Jane by her hair and casted her head back – thus leaving her throat nude to the blade of his hook.
"Already a lie... And you've just joined us, dear!" His tone was smooth and wry and awful to bear.
"Didst thou really think you could fool us again any longer?" He held her closely, so that she couldn't even think to struggle. He spoke so close to her ear that she could feel his beard scratching her face.
"Now please tell us, before you die: does a creature as sly as thee has a name that she wants to share with us – for posterity?"
"Jane" she managed to gasp. "My name is Jane."

Upon this, the captain immediatly released her. "Jane... Wendy's daughter?" He was now looking at her with a whole new interest, with a glance almost scarier than the one he had before. "I do have to reckon, there is a certain likeness..."
Jane wasn't sure to understand. She quickly searched through her family tree – she had helped her mother form it, a few years ago. Then she remembered something – perhaps it was just the thing that could save her life.
"I did have a Wendy for an ancestor, and she had for daughter a certain Jane. I was named after her."

She could see in his eyes that this statement made the captain react immediatly, yet herself didn't dare to realise... She had to ask.
"Do you mean that... You knew my ancestor, Wendy?" Suddenly, her imagination was set ablaze. She had thought about when they made the family tree, but it was just a silly thought... Yet, now she could almost believe... Did she really look like the Wendy from the book? Did that mean anything?
"Aye, a Wendy came to Neverland a long time ago. Later, her own daughter came as well. And then Jane's daughter, and her daughter... And so on, until one day Peter stopped bringing anyone to Neverland." His inquisitive eyes laid on Jane. "That is, until today."

Jane was too awestruck to realise that the captain had already guessed where she came from and, most importantly, who had brought her here.
Living with pirates

The captain had insisted: Jane had to be treated like the lady she was, and as an honored guest she deserved to live in a decent cabin. Already too happy to still be alive at this point, Jane would have gladly accepted to sleep in a barrel if she had to. But far from finding herself in a lost hold somewhere in the boat, she had her very own cabin. To her delight, it even comported a real bed. What a change from the one made of leaves, she thought.

Suddenly, she remembered the Lost Boys. What were they going to do? By now, they should have realized she was missing.

Which is why Jane didn't have time to bask, for too many thoughts gnawed on her. Yet, as much as she was worried about the Lost Boys, she couldn't help but remember about what the captain had said earlier, about Wendy... and Jane's family. She didn't want to believe there was a correlation to be made; she already had enough in her life – and, for god's sake, it seemed sometimes that she had only arrived on the island yesterday. But her soul ran on belief, and soon she found herself thinking.

From what she could remember, Wendy's maiden name didn't appear on the family tree – she was only stated as 'Wendy Gillen', wife of a rich London banker with an Irish descent named Francis Gillen. So maybe, just maybe... But soon, she realized while shaking her head that it was a silly assumption to be made. If her ancestor Wendy really was Wendy Darling, then why did Peter Pan stop taking her daughter, and grand-daughters, and great-grand-daughters, and so on, to Neverland every spring? For it was written clearly in J.M. Barrie's book: Peter took to Neverland Wendy's daughter Jane to do some spring cleaning, and then he took Jane's daughter to do the same, and on and on. After all, if it was some kind of tradition for girls in her family to go to Neverland as children, she should have been slightly aware! Even though... The captain did mention the fact that Peter suddenly stopped taking young girls to Neverland. Why was that?

She had to face the truth: if she wanted to solve this mystery, one person must certainly have some answers... and that person was the captain.

With a perfect timing, someone (she quickly recognized the faithful Smee) interrupted her thoughts by knocking at her door, informing her that she was invited to dine with the captain this very evening. Jane was almost glad of that; as much as the man frightened a part of her, she could ask him some questions; such as her relation with Wendy Darling, but also what was the part she would have to play in Hook's evil plans to catch Peter Pan.

Smee led her in front of a door bearing the description: « Jas. Hook ». There was no need to knock: the door was already opened, and behind it sat captain Hook, performing one of his compositions on his harpsichord. She could easily guess it was one of his, since the lyrics were more or less based on words such as 'murder', 'gutting' and 'cannons'.

Ignoring these quite unorthodox lyrics, she had to admit that the tune itself possessed a certain charm – and so did the voice of the singer. She waited there, standing on the threshold, her hands joined in her back. She slowly closed her eyes, listening closely while waiting for him to acknowledge her presence. Then, as he finished, he let his hook glide along the keys and turned in the same movement towards her, his hook raised in the air.

"My dear Jane. Welcome." With one glance, he dismissed Smee who vividly nodded and left while softly closing the door behind him. Then, looking back at Jane, he detailed her from top to bottom.

"You look far better than you did yesterday, dear. I do hope your apartments are at your liking?" he asked, an eyebrow raised as if he were interested in the answer.

"I have been more than satisfied, captain" answered Jane in complete honesty. "But you surely didn't invite me over here in order to discuss the comfort of my cabin."
Hook's eyes slightly narrowed. "Not one for small talk, then. It is fine. Seat, please." Even if he asked politely, he spoke on a tone of voice that didn't leave any room for refusal.

Jane sat facing the captain on the other side of the table. Between them sprawled a heap of various elaborated meals – way more elaborated than what she could have imagined, coming from a pirate ship. That's when she realised that she hadn't been eating anything for the last few 24 hours – apart from a few pomegranates that she shared with the lost boys earlier – and was, therefore, terribly hungry. As Hook started pouring himself a glass of wine, she promptly put in her plate a huge amount of the first thing that she could get her hands on and started eating greedily.

"So, you are working for Pan." Jane almost spat out her bite. Oh, that was it, he addressed the topic right away! He continued. "I thought that someone as perspicacious as you would have known what to expect upon accepting my invitation. I'm a very busy man and I do not wish to waste any of my precious time beating around the bush." Slightly leaning towards her, he looked at her straight in the eye. "So?"

Jane was caught off guard. She knew he was eventually going to ask her this question sooner or later, but not right now! She didn't have the time to think of a way to alter her story, that the words were already flooding from her mouth with no way of stopping them.

So she told him everything: the death of the fairy at her door, her life with the lost boys, her fall from the clouds... All while blaming herself for that damned thing known as honesty. Hook had been listening to her closely, without losing a word of her story. He waited for her to be entirely done before speaking again.

"I have to admit..." He let the moment float for a while as he took a sip from his cup. "...I am a little unimpressed. There is nothing I had not guessed already – apart from a few details, of course. I mean – we had gotten used to receive visits from Pan's little friends. I am afraid your story is almost the same as theirs." Jane had to repress from gawking. He carried on.

"You know, miss Jane, every time, we have tried to extrapolate the best from them – we have tried to charm them, threaten them, lure them... All of it in order to destroy this wretched boy once and for all. Yet, you may have noticed that despite our efforts, this never worked out, as Pan still lives – thus, to my great despair. Whatever we tried, Pan's friends deceived us by simply refusing to follow our carefully-laid plans. It's hard to conceive, the way small girls get so quickly attached to this brat." He stopped for a second, sipping his wine and looking away as if he didn't care about her presence at all. "And I suppose it will be the exact same with you: we will try to convince you to join us to defeat Pan, but you'll most likely stay faithful to him and betray us. Nothing I haven't seen so far."

Jane was in shock. So, her adventure – the time of her life, the adventure she dreamed of for so long – wasn't interesting in any way to the captain?

"What do you want from me, then?" The captain deigned to look at her, and answered as if he had been prepared for such question.

"It's simple. Do you want to stay faithful to Pan? You have the chance to tell us now. We won't harm you in any way, if you do admit it; actually, we will let you leave the ship freely. You have my word, milady."

But Jane could see where he was going with this offer. Right now, he was offering her to leave freely – yet, she knew that as soon as she would put her foot on solid ground, she would be followed by some people from the crew. They would undoubtedly follow her until she would lead them – unknowingly – to Peter and the Lost Boys. This was the only reason why he didn't make her a hostage right away, she was sure of that. The only logical thing to do was obvious. She had to reject the captain's offer to leave safely. Then, she would remain here for a while – that is, until she found a
way to rejoin the children again. She had to do something that didn't please her: she had to lie and manipulate the captain to make him believe she didn't care about Peter.

"You know what, captain?" She started off, her tone as detached as possible. "I never truly cared for Pan – he was my ticket to Neverland for sure, but it would be mindless of you to believe for a second that I enjoyed spending my time surrounded by mere kids. Plus, I don't mean to brag, but I've always thought I'd make a wonderful pirate." He watched her silently, so she continued. "Look at me, captain. Do I really look like a frightened little girl that Peter took with him for fun?" She frowned and slightly shook her head. "Let me tell you: back in my homeworld, I was already considered an adult. So trust me, I wouldn't appreciate to waste my time with children if I had the choice."

He sat back and slightly stroked his beard with his valid hand, thinking. He detailed her from head to toes with his sharp blue eyes.

"You are right, milady. I hadn't considered the fact that you were certainly older than the kind of girls Pan brought here. So, you do admit you do not have this childish admiration that bind the other girls to Pan..." Jane shook her head once more, feigning to be offended by the mere mention of this idea. "Therefore, you would have no reason to betray us... Isn't that true?" He addressed her such a penetrating glance that for a second, Jane was afraid that he had seen through her and her true intentions. Yet, she endured the look he gave her and nodded as if she had never thought to betray him for an instant. In the end, she was never really sure if the captain was buying it or not, but after a silence that seemed to be lasting forever, he finally spoke again.

"Very well. I accept you as a pirate amongst our crew. You will help us – in time – to defeat Pan."

Jane couldn't believe it. Had he just accepted her as a pirate, just like that? He didn't let her think about it anymore, as he already approached to fill her cup with wine.

"Since you claimed to be such an adult earlier, let's drink - to your recruitment." Jane had no problem with this. With the will for some competition emerging inside her, she toasted with the captain and emptied her cup as if it had been some simple grape juice. She did not pretend to have a pirate's liver yet, but she still wanted to gain the captain's trust. Pouring herself another glass, she finally seized the chance of this private meeting to ask the captain some questions about the people who she thought could be her ancestors.

"Tell me, Captain. You said earlier that I looked like a certain Wendy. Was it, by any chance, Wendy Darling?"

"Aye, it was her full name." He leaned back in his chair, thinking, digging up old memories. "Even if, when she was with us, she preferred the name Red-Handed-Jill. As I told you, later, Pan came back with Wendy's daughter, and so on."

"Do you have any idea why Peter stopped bringing these girls to Neverland?"

"I have none, I am most afraid."

"Then tell me about the last girl who came. What was her name? What was she like?" Jane was now insatiable for answers, and the wine was finally having some effect on her.

"If my memory does not fail me, I do recall her to be named Moira. And she had the same type of hair you have" – he gestured vaguely toward her auburn curls – "except it was ridiculously short. She was most definitely the strangest of the lot. She kept talking about the fashions out there, in her world. Some kind of dance – if you could call it dance – named the... Charleston, I believe."

Jane was struck with realisation. Moira... and Charleston... That would be her great-grandmother he was talking about, Moira Fairbanks! She had left London to live in another country – and founded a family there; Jane's family.

Suddenly, all the lights lit up as she put two and two together. That was the reason why her grandmother and mother – and herself – didn't get to visit Neverland as children... Since they had moved from the nursery, Peter was never able to find them at their window again!

Seeing that she looked like she had somewhat been struck by lightning, Hook had to ask her if she
was alright.
"I am. I've just got the confirmation I was hoping for. I'm closer to Wendy Darling than I thought..."
Jane couldn't believe it. Yet, she did. "Thanks to your testimony, captain. The Moira you've talked
about was actually Moira Foreville, my great-grandmother – I am most certain of that."

Jane couldn't really describe how she was feeling right now. She was just overwhelmed with great
emotion, now realizing she was fitting into a fantastic family tree, after all... And that she had never
been so right as to believe in fairies all these years. As for Hook, he was starting to realize how long
it had been since the little Moira came to Neverland.

"Your great-grandmother, you say... Well, it has been a very long time since her visit, then. That
explains why you are wearing such... unladylike clothing." He half-smiled as he poured himself his
fourth or fifth glass of wine. "And I though she was strangely dressed! If I knew that a few
generations later, women would be wearing pants like men... I have to admit, miss Jane, that at first
many of my men thought you were some kind of... loose woman, – and I, for a second, thought so
too. After all, you are wearing such revealing clothes... No offense, of course."
"Why, but you did offend me!" Jane was outraged. She couldn't stand the idea of the captain – or any
man on the ship, to be true – thinking of her as a prostitute of any kind. Oh, she did not leave her
home world for this! "And of course, believing this, you wanted to keep me aboard!" She stood up,
her fists clenching in rage. Hook stood up as well, hands – and hook – raised in the air as a sign of
peace.
"Now, now, don't scorn, miss Jane. I was wrong to be so quick in my assumptions – and so were my
men. It was bad form, and I hate that. I will have my men making amends for what they believed."
Jane almost calmed down, but kept her fists tight, digging her nails in her palm. "Please accept my
deepest apologies." She found the ability to accept them as the last waves of rage were fading away.
After all, he at least apologized. Bless his respect for his Etonian code of good form. Maybe he was
less of a pirate than some men were.

They spent the rest of the evening chatting about unimportant things they wouldn't remember the
next morning, while drinking bottle after bottle – long after the dinner was finished.
After a few bottles, Jane was starting to become a little feeble – she was always this kind of person to
fall asleep when drunk. In the end, Hook himself escorted her to her apartments, as she couldn't walk
two steps without staggering.

"Can I let you open your own door or do I have to carry you inside, since you might fall anytime
soon, my dear miss?"
"Please, I'm a pirate, now." She gently poked him on the chest. "And not a miss anymore" she added.
She tended to forget about notions such as personal space, after a few drinks – even when she was
facing someone as dangerous as the infamous captain Hook. Luckily, it seemed that the captain was
sharing the same problem. He smiled back at her, and that's when she knew he was slightly drunken
as well. Then, she noticed that he was standing close to her – maybe a little too close, even. She
could perceive he smelled like tobacco and rum – and she didn't hate it. Actually, she could even
appreciate that specific smell.
"Well, in that case, goodnight..." for the first time in the evening, she noticed that he wasn't taking his
eyes off her. Then, he got distracted by her hair, as he absentmindedly seized one of her auburn
strands that had gotten into her face to put it back behind her ear. "...pirate missy." Then, he took a
few steps back and performed something that looked like a courteous bow and promptly left, leaving
Jane alone in front of her door, her heart beating fast and her cheeks - red.

"What the hell was that?" She decided to put the behaving of the captain on the account of all the
wine he had been drinking during the evening.

Once back inside, Jane barely had the time to collapse on her magnificent bed that she was already
drifting off to sleep.

She awoke next morning with this confused feeling you get when you wake up somewhere else that the place you're used to. The sun was just rising, and the early dawn light was starting to fill the room. She stayed here a little, letting some shy rays of light warm her bones, while looking at the sun and its reflection on the water.

On deck, people were up and kicking: sailors and other shipmates were already working, cleaning the boat, taking care of the sails, and doing whatever pirates are supposed to do. Jane was wondering about what this day would bring, when her eyes laid on a letter that had been placed on a shelf next to her. Unfolding it with care, she read:

« Miss Jane,

The captain has informed me of your situation. As the first mate on the Jolly Roger, let me welcome you into our crew. I supposed you wouldn't be aware of what to do here as a pirate: that is why I invite you to join me upon the deck as soon as you're awake.

Mr. Smee »

Jane folded up the letter. Smee must have placed it here while she was sleeping, without waking her up. That was quite gallant – that is, coming from a pirate. She decided not to make Smee wait any longer and swiftly jumped out of the bed, landing on her two feet. After taking a quick glance at her reflection on the mirror that was laid on her dresser, she threw some water on her face thanks to the bowl that was next to it, and briefly tied her hair into a loose bun. Decided, she opened her door wide and headed to the deck.

There, she was soon peered at by some seventy pairs of curious eyes. She was tempted to look down and almost blushed, since being the center of attention was definitly something she wasn't used to...

Yet, she decided to stay strong – if she couldn't face some pirates, what was she going achieve in Neverland? - and even found the ability to smile as if she knew personally every single one of them. Stepping on the deck and careful not to trip, she turned to face a pirate on her left – a man with his hands sewn backwards – and asked him, with her shinest smile:

"I beg your pardon, my good sir, but would you be so kind to tell me where I could find Mister Smee? He asked me to find him on the deck. Oh, and by the way; I'm Jane, and I'm joining the crew." She would have shaken his hands, as it's a common way of greeting people you meet for the first time, but with this pirate - and especially his hands - she wasn't really sure of how she could accomplish such an act. At this moment, she heard behind her someone calling.

"Miss Jane! Yer already up, I see! Wonderful!" She sighed out of relief, as Smee was saving her from a certain form of social awkwardness. He continued, unstoppable: "I got so many different things to tell you! Oh, I could show you around first, and then maybe show you some different chores you can do while you're here with us. 'Cause there's plenty to do, missy, be sure of that, since our crew is always getting smaller and smaller whenever there is a fight between us pirates and Peter Pan."

Peter... she thought once more about him and the boys. He will believe her to be a hostage on the ship, for sure. What will he do then? Most likely attack the Jolly Roger... And thus, taking the risk to be wounded, or worse. Jane had to go back to the Lost Boys soon before he came to her rescue. At least to convince him she did not have to be rescued at all. Plus, she agreed to be a pirate – but she was just prettending. It wouldn't be too long before the captain understood she wasn't going to help them defeat Pan. Except if... She thought about all the times Hook had tried to make Peter's friends betray him. It never ever worked. She suddenly realised something.

The captain was too clever to believe it would work again with her. He could have menaced her, or
tortured her so she could spit the truth about Peter and the Lost Boys' secret lair, and then kill her once he's done. Yet he made her a pirate instead. He kept her well alive here. Surely, he didn't make her a prisoner... But it was all the same.

I'm only here was here as a bait, she realised. He didn't make me a hostage so I wouldn't understand his plan right away. She was only kept to lure Peter here – and what better way to lure someone when the bait itself is clueless of its role? Well, too bad for you, James Hook, she muttered to herself. I know what your plan is. And I won't let you use me as your patsy.

After showing her around the ship, Smee assigned her some chores she could do – tidy up the weapons, arrange the barrels of rum and the barrels of canon powder, clean the deck... She worked for hours amongst the different members of the crew, but she didn't have to complain. She liked manual work; it was so much less annoying than studying, after all! At the end of the day, she had made some friends and was officially part of the crew.

As she chatted with a new companion – Terrible John – she mentioned an idea she had for her pirate name, "Heartless Liz". However, he informed her that she'd only own her pirate name once she would have her first fight. Seeing Jane pout from disappointment, he quickly added: "But don't ye worry, miss Jane! Tomorrow, we're goin' to do some treasure hunt on the island; there, we'll meet some Indians for sure, and we'll fight, you'll see!"

Knowing this, Jane was invigorated. She already had an opportunity to go on the island! Already, she set her mind onto finding a way to get back to Peter.

Once all the chores were done, the moon was already up in the night sky. Going back to her cabin to get some rest, she realised she hadn't see the captain all day. He was probably preparing his plan for the treasure hunt tomorrow. She thought again of how he planned to use her. But now that she had outwitted him, she knew she wasn't going to stay here and play her perfect part as a lure in his vengeful play. She was going to find a way to avoid Pan to confront Hook. This, for two reasons: she didn't want anyone to be hurt, or even to die, because of her. On the other hand, she didn't want the captain to believe she could be won over by some sweet talk and then used as he wished.

Dignified and proper, she opened the door to her cabin. "Tomorrow, she thought, tomorrow, I will be able to outplay him, no matter what he thinks."
Treasure Hunt

Jane woke up, a little stiff from the chores she had to do the day before. Still, she jumped out of the bed and promptly put on her leggings and tank top. It wasn't the best choice of clothes if she had to fight today, she thought, but she didn't have anything else, after all. As she arrived on the deck, she found Smee waiting for her.

« Miss Jane ! What a grand day, is it not ? We are finally going to get our hands upon that treasure that Pan stole from us months ago ! » He threw a sword at her that she caught with one hand. To her surprise, it was the sword she had liked at once when she was cleaning the weapons. Even if she was touched by the good intention coming from him, she still had to ask him something.

« Has the captain said anything about having someone looking after me during this mission ? » It was a risky move, but she had to try anyway. Indeed, Smee looked somewhat embarrassed.

- Why... I'm not sure if I'm allowed to say, miss... But, well, he has told John the Terrible to keep a close watch on you today. To assure your safety, I assume, since you are new here, after all. »

It was all she needed to know. Now she was sure that the captain had accepted her aboard to serve his own interest... And he had one of his man spying her! There were probably more spies, too, but for now she had to mind John in the first place. Now, she knew that if she did anything that could betray her intentions, she was good to walk the plank. She had befriended John yesterday, but it was all pretend coming from him... She had to put her plan in execution fast, from now on. Every day she spent on the Jolly Roger was another day closer to being caught.

She got into a small boat with Smee and John, all three of them equiped with swords, axes and sabers. The plan that the pirates laid was simple : to get to the treasure, they had to go through the Mermaid Lagoon, but not by boat ! Otherwise, Smee told her, it would be too easy for the mermaids to charm and drown them... So they had to join the lagoon by foot. For that, the company had to hike through the deep woods in order to avoid Indians – but there was still a risk to meet them at some point. A lot of walking was going to be made, and Jane wanted to wait until everyone was tired to take her leave without no one noticing. Then, she'll go back to the Lost Boys and warn them about Hook's plans to trick him – using her. However, this was her plan - until she learned that John had the duty to watch her. Now she was knew she would be kept an eye on all the time, what was she going to do ?

They were hiking into the woods for an hour and a half, without meeting any other danger than some thick branches and wild poisoned flowers. It wouldn't be too long until they reached the edge of the forest by now, and if they made it to the outside of the woods, there was no chance left for Jane to leave unnoticed. She was relying on the darkness of the forest to hide her escape. Yet, she always felt John's eyes in her back, preventing her to try anything. But she had to try and escape today. After all, who knew when she would have the chance to attempt another escape ? Maybe later, on another day, but later would be too late. She had to warn Peter now, or else he could jump into the lion's den trying to rescue her as soon as tomorrow. Maybe if she ran away really fast, she could... -

She didn't have time to make up her mind. Suddenly, she heard someone shout:

« The Indians ! They're attacking ! »

That was her cue. She should have taken advantage of the muddle around her to run, run as fast as she could – yet here she was, a sword in one hand and her two feet firmly attached to the ground, her own mind as lost as the pirates panicking all about. Faster than she could say, the whole indian tribe
jumped out from behind the trees and bushes. She could have ran away at once, for sure... But this was a fight. She wouldn't flee a fight now, even if it was her only chance to see the boys again. Because – even if that was a bit cliché to say – she wasn't a coward! She tightened her grip around her sword. Before she had time to realise what was happening, a huge indian was already running straight onto her like a berserker. Knowing she had no chance to face him directly, she decided to hold her ground... until the last second, where she slid to her side and let him run straight into the tree that was beside her. It was enough to knock him down, but she hit him again with the hilt of her sword, just to make sure. She could have used her sword like it was meant to be used (that is, with the pointy end), but it was just no use – what would be the point to kill a man who was already knocked down? She'd only use her sword if someone up and kicking faced her with a weapon as all, it wasn't all make-believe anymore.

Jane looked around her. All she saw was fighting and violence everywhere. Looking for John, she found him struggling with a young squaw – probably Tiger Lily. As for the captain – she didn't have to care about him, she reminded herself – yet she looked for him anyway. Hook had lost his weapon and had come to blows with the indian chief. Even though this was the perfect time to leave, she stayed here, almost forgetting how to breathe. For a second, it looked like the captain was loosing the fight... Until he heavily punched his assailant straight in the jaw – who spat out one or two teeth and fainted to the ground.

Before Hook could turn around and see her, she finally remembered she had to escape – so she did. No one else was paying attention to her. So she ran and ran to the hollow tree – the place where she knew she would find the Lost Boys. She knew the forest well enough, as she visited every bit of it with Peter. Branches were whipping at her face, leaving red streaks of blood on her cheeks, her hands were tormented by the thorns she pushed from her way, but still she ran – ran as far as possible from the battlefield.

Finally, she found herself at the bottom of a majestic sycamore. Imposing in the middle of all the other trees, Jane had always found it magnificent. It was strange that after all this time, the pirates never found it. Perhaps they didn't care about the basic beauty of nature. Or maybe the sycamore wasn't the only shelter the boys had there were probably others, but she had never heard of them.

Looking one last time behind her to make sure she had not been followed, she knocked three times on the trunk, and after a pause, two times, slower. Then, she felt the ground shirk from her feet, as the hatch leading to the boys' refuge was opening underneath her. Jane fell violently to the ground she'd probably have some bruises tomorrow. Looking up, she met the lost boys' curious eyes, peering at her in a dazed way. After a few seconds of silence, it was finally the youngest, Tiny Tom, who said something first.

« Jane ! Jane is back ! » And in less time that you need to say "blueberry pie", she found herself stunned by children's cheers and drowning under an attack of hugs. She surrendered to the ambient mood, and for an instant forgot about everything that had happened the last few days – from the pirates to the indian attack. She lifted up Tiny Tom and made him spin around, laughing, before putting him back on his feet and affectionately ruffled the other boys' hair.

« So, Jane ? » asked a well-known voice from the other end of the room. « Where have you been hiding? » She looked at Peter, who was standing with his fists firmly planted on each of his sides. Suddenly, she remembered why she had come back here.

« Peter. Let me explain all that happened... » Then, she recalled; her audience was quite young, so she decided to not be too boring when telling her tale.

« Actually, let me put it this way. Sit down, kids I'm going to tell you a story. A very true story, since
it happened to me when I was missing. » So she narrated it all: how she fell from the cloud, how she fooled the pirates to be pulled up the Jolly Roger, her plan to escape, and the gruesome battle with the indians... However, she avoided to confess that she at first thought well of the capitain, how she was seduced by his gentleman manners, when they dinned together. After all, being nice was all part of his plan.

At the end of her tale, Peter stood up.

« What a bunch of old-rotted rat faces! They are going to pay for what they did to you, Jane! Ain’t that right, boys?

- Yeah! » And, already, the boys were all up, running, shouting and kicking around. Jane was completely distraught.

« Boys, wait! Stop, stop, stop! » The silence was practically immediate.

« Peter, have you even listened to what I just all said? No one has captured me, or tortured me, or any of that! It was what they wanted you to think, so that you would come and rescue me and fall into their trap! But I was actually treated very well, and I have to remind you: I arrived on this ship on my own free will. »

Now, it was Pan and the boys who were distraught. Peter, looking grumpy, folded his tiny hands in his back and walked a little around the room.

« You mean... No one has hurt you? But they are pirates! Grown-ups!

- So am I Peter – a grown-up, I mean. Yet, I would never do anything to harm you. » She paused for an instant, marking her words. « Look, Peter. I took all these risks – I lied to Hook and his crew, I went through a fight with Indians, just to warn you not to come to my rescue because I did not need to be rescued. This way you – or the other boys – would not get hurt. » She took a moment before continuing. She was going to have to tell him something harder than the rest.

« Peter, promise me... Promise me that you won't get close to the Jolly Roger again. Because I must go back.

- WHAT?! » Said the boys in unison. It was hard for her, but she had known this ever since she left the fight. She had left too many clues behind her, running through the woods.

« Listen, I must. I was careless when I came here to find you. I left traces in the forest, hints that will allow the pirates to track me down here – and therfore, to find you. You would be outnumbered: there are about fifty pirates out there. Oh, Peter, it would be a terrible slaughter if they came here looking for me! » She hugged Tiny Tim at her side. « For your own safety, I beg of you to let me go – and never look for me again. » What other choices did she have? If he came back for her, he'd fall into a trap that would lead to his death if she stayed, she would lead the pirates directly here, and generate a dreadful fight. If anyone came to be hurt by her fault, she would never be able to look at herself in a mirror ever again.

The Lost Boys were all whimpering, now. The young Max raised on her a pair of two watery eyes.

« So it’s goodbye forever, Jane?

- Not forever, you silly! » She gently pinched his cheeks. « I'll simply stay there until the captain agrees to let me go freely. » She tried to be reassuring, but deep down she wasn't believing it. If Hook let her go, it would be to follow her until she lead him to the Lost Boys’ lair.
Peter Pan had none of it.

« Jane, you know I'm not afraid to fight that rat who calls himself Hook ! » He brandished his sword in front of him, proud and sure to never be defeated.

« Peter, I know. But not only do I worry for you, but I also worry a lot about the others. Look at them : Tiny Tom is barely even 6 years old ! If you go there, the boys will want to go with you, but they're so young : they don't know what pirates can do. They might die, Peter, and it would be my fault. So I forbid it. » She thought again of the silver-haired fairy that died during that night, so long ago... Wasn't it her fault, somehow ? That's why she would never allow such thing to happen again not if she could prevent it.

Peter opened his mouth, hesitated, closed it, then opened it again only to change his mind. Finally, frowning, he accepted reluctantly. Jane felt a little bad for denying him the right to fight against Hook, but she couldn't help it: he was only a child to her eyes. Still, he asked her if she could stay a little longer, only a few moments. Jane gladly accepted.

Max made her a rough bandage around her left hand that had been hurt by the thorns in the forest, and then she and Peter isolated themselves a little. Jane took the opportunity to thank him from the bottom of her heart for taking her to Neverland. Then, she thought about her ancestors, who, like her, had lived memorable adventures by Peter side, just like she did. The only difference was that she was bound to stay here forever, not simply for Spring Cleaning.

« Peter... Do I look like her ? Like Wendy, I mean ? » He detailed her, with his big innocent eyes.

« Why, you do have Wendy's hair. And some dimples, like her, when you smile... Why do you ask that ? » Jane did not reply she simply looked at him, giving him her most genuine and kindest smile. And for a second, it was not Jane that Peter saw in front of him, but Wendy Darling, the same way she appeared to him when he first met her in the nursery. Then he remembered the last time he saw Wendy, a grown-up as well, and beside her was a child sleeping in her bed. And later, this child grew up and had a child, too. His eyes broaden just as big as his astonished smile as he realised.

« You mean... You are Wendy's grand-daughter ? Or maybe Moira's daughter ! She, too, had funny clothes on !

- I'm not her daughter, Peter, but close : I'm her great-grand-daughter, if I remember well. » She smiled at him, and with a somewhat fond tenderness, fluffed his wild hair. « I will miss you, Peter Pan. Thank you for taking me to Neverland, after all this time. I'm sure Wendy would be proud. »

She ceremoniously bid farewell to the other boys. Now that she didn't know if she would ever see them again, it was with some melancholy that she reminded them to brush their teeth after each meal, to wash their hands before eating... Maybe she had slipped into this role of mother more than she thought, after all.

She had left the Lost Boys' shelter for some time now, and she was heading to the battlefield – or, what was left of it. She had been gone for less than two hours... Maybe they didn't even realise she had been missing ? But what she saw made her realise that she was quite mistaken.

« Ouch. » She thought, as she contemplated what was happening at a few meters from her. The captain was yelling orders at a frenetic rate, frightening to death the poor moussaillons who weren't too sure of what to do. Where she was, she could clearly hear him :

« What do you mean, gone ? How could you loose her this way, you feckless rookies ! Where is that moron who was in charge of keeping an eye on her at all times ? » John (who was not so "Terrible"
at this point) got closer shyly.

« So you are incompetent fool who's not even able to do what he's assigned to? Do you even realise how fundamental she was in our plan to defeat this ridiculous Pan? » He was almost spitting out his name, as if he was the worst creature that existed in the world. And, to his eyes, he probably was. « What do you say for yourself?

Well, 'erm, y'see, captn', the indians... They arrived s'fast I couldn't watch 'er all the time... Also, I had to fight, too, y'know! » John babble helplessly.

Hook sighed heavily. Seeing him starting to load his gun in way that didn't predict anything good for the poor John, Jane knew she had no other choice but to interfere.

« Stop everything! I'm here! » The captain suspended his gesture – John sighed in relief – and turned to her. For an instant, and only for a short instanta, Jane thought she saw a gleam of... relief? In his blue eyes... But that's normal, after all, she reflected. For him, I'm just a precious pawn for his plans to work. And she was right, for a second later, his look turned harsh again.

« By jove, we were looking for you everywhere, and no body was found! My men were starting to believe you had been taken by the indians as a hostage!

- Really, captain, you were quite mistaken. After knocking down one of the indians myself, I have to admit - I left the fight. Yet, here I am! I came back, so don't you blame me, if you please. » Hook got closer to her, suspicious. In his cold fury, he seemed even more dangerous than usual. Suddenly, noticing something, he took her left hand into his. Jane looked down to what could have caught his attention. To her horror, she realised: he saw the bandage that Max had made her, earlier. It had been made with some cloth that only the Lost Boys were using; the same one in which Peter's clothing was made. And Hook knew that. She looked up, panicking, and met the captain's eyes who were registering every single of her reactions. And if the bandage hadn't betrayed her already, her response had taken care of it.

Hook's frozen tone was worse than any of his rampageous crises of anger. In a voice colder than death itself, he announced:

« I see. » After a silence that lasted for what seemed forever, he added: « I don't know what you've told Pan and these wretched boys... But I'll find out soon enough. I wished I wouldn't have to come to this, but you leave me no choice. » He had no compassion of any kind showing on his face just cold and pure hate. Snapping his fingers, he summoned his faithful second. « Smee. Chain this traitor up and throw her in a hold in the Jolly Roger where I won't have to see her face for a while. She'll stay locked up there until her dear Peter Pan comes to her rescue. » As he leaned closer towards her, Jane could see the absence of any trace of mercy on his features. « I had warned had to pick your side better. »
James Hook was pacing around furiously in his cabin. It was a habit he caught in his youth, when he was but a simple navy officer. The navy... It seemed so unreal, whenever he thought about it. All of this happened an eternity ago, to the point where he was starting to doubt if any of was actually real. He had lost sense of time long ago : at first, he couldn't remember what year it was then months, and finally days started to blend together, and slowly fade in his memory.

Jane's arrival – this damned wench, he thought with contempt - brought a certain reality check into his life. She reminded him of the existence of a world beyond Neverland – the real world, he thought. What did his true home of England looked like, now? For how many centuries has he been away?

With a heavy sigh, he let himself fall into his seat, facing the window that gave him a great view over the sea. He couldn't possibly let himself slip into the bittersweet embrace of melancholy. Not until he had taken care of several problems – and Miss Jane Foreville's case came first.

How did she even imagine she could fool him ? It wasn't the betrayal that hurt him – he was used to it, after all... But if so, why thinking back about it had such a bitter taste?

This time, he had been so sure to have won her over, to have gained her trust. Wasn't she older than most of Pan's friends ? Certainly, she couldn't vow him any kind of childish admiration – and even less a mediocre sentiment of love. But if so, why did she go back to him ? What could she possibly gain from seeing him again ? Hook had offered her everything that was in his power to give, such as a safe occupation amongst the crew, a personal cabin... Hell, he even had invited her in his own apartments for dinner !

The more he thought about it, the more the fiery feeling of anger grew within his guts. Wrath wasn't favourable to meditation, and it teased him twice as much that he wasn't able to understand the girl's irrational behavior. Letting out a cry of rage, he violently stabbed his wooden table with his claw, hopping it would help release some of his inner fury. How could a simple girl possibly divert him from his captain duties ? He had maps to study, letters to write, loot to share... He set about concentrating on the pile of scrolls laying before him.

A minute later, he grasped his hat and raised from his seat.

Out of his cabin, he met Smee. « What's wrong, capt'n ? Asked his faithful second in an almost naive way.

- Out of my way, Smee, he roared. I have some unfinished business with a certain someone. »

She had played, and now she had lost.

She knew it as soon as she got roughly handcuffed by some bearish-looking members of the crew and brought back to the Jolly Roger not as a pirate, but as a captive. So, that was it : after so many adventures, her story was ending right here ? She took many risks to tell Peter he would fall straight into Hook's trap if he ever came back here, thinking she was a hostage in need to be rescued... While in truth, she wasn't a hostage. She was being quite properly treated, only, as a pirate. She even had the opportunity to have dinner with the captain!

The captain... She thought about him with bitterness. Now that he knew about the double game that she had been playing all along, she could say goodbye to her privileged status. And the irony in all of
that was that now she was really held hostage – when a rescue mission lead by Pan would've been warmly welcomed – he wouldn't come for her, since she forbidded it for his own safety.

Jane looked at the prison she was held in. They had thrown her into a dim and exiguous cell, whose walls were sweating from their dampness. There were no lights, or barely: a small oil lamp laying on the ground was the only thing that somehow allowed her to discern roughly her cell's outlines.

At least, there were no rats – not that she was afraid of them – but she was instead afraid for her food rations. They were already not much, and she couldn't suffer from sharing her slim piece of bread with some rodents stealing from her.

She could percieve some shadows creeping from under the threshold of her cell, here and there. They were the silhouettes of the guards coming in front of her door to slip some food for the day. Strange thing, she noticed that when she was playing games with the Lost Boys on the island, she had stopped noticing how many days were going by. And now that she was stuck here with no other reference than her daily meal's arrivals, she knew exactly for how long she had been held captive in this cell. Three days exactly. Had she been a man, she would already have grown a beard.

She sighed. After a quick tour of her cell – she had already done it a thousand times – she ungracefully sagged against the wall and let herself slowly slip to the ground. Her head thrown back and her eyes closed, she started to muse once again.

She thought over and over about how she got thrown here with such easiness. Oh, how she could almost slap herself, sometimes! Where did she go so wrong? Everything had been going so well, until this!

Yet, she had to admit – she got to foil the foul captain's plans. She succeded in convincing the kids to not go back for her, so they wouldn't fall into his trap. And Hook could wait for as long as he wished, Peter would not come back here again. Even if that meant she had to rot in this cell forever, she was glad she had done the right thing. This thought was the only thing she clinged to in order to not go mad.

She must have fallen asleep without noticing, for it was when someone loudly kicked into the door in an enraged way that she woke up. Her vision was still quite blurry, but there was no need to see clearly to guess who was the only person aboard who could behave in such an impulsive way.

« WHY ISN'T HE COMING ? » roared the captain as he rushed onto her.

He lifted her up harshly, and coarse was his tone. Pinning her arms to her side, he abrubtly shaked her as he repeated his question. « Why? What have you said to him, you filthy witch? »

Jane, patently awake by now, simply looked straight at him without replying. Which apparently only contributed in irrating the man even more.

Throwing her down in a mannerless way, he started to pace around angrily.

« You! » he accused her, his finger pointed at her face. « You have been spying on this ship, and you had heard about my plans, one way or another!

- There was no need to spy around, captain, she answered has her wits came back to her. You were acting with such a lack of discretion that even a 4-year-old kid would have understood what your plan was. »

She heard a loud smack, but it was only when she felt her cheeck ache that she understood Hook had struck her.
Once again, she thought, she had played, and now she had lost... She shouldn't have been blustering in such way, but after all, her impertinence was one of the rare things she still had.

She turned her face to Hook and gave him a restenful glance. « Is this what you're reduced to, captain? Beat your own hostages without showing any kind of honor? »

Hook looked hard at her, still furious. He raised his hand once again... But then changed his mind. Turning away from her, he walked a few steps in the cabin. She waited for him to make the next move.

After a few moments of reflection, he took a deep breath and turned around to face her once again. More calmly, this time, he said:

« It has never been seen, Pan not coming to rescue one of his friends. What did you say to him so that he wouldn't even come and scout this ship? »

Jane decided she should be honest. She wouldn't gain anything from lying, after all.

« I simply told him not to come rescue me. I stated him that I was fairly well treated, here. - Well, that is, before I knew you'd throw me into a dark cell with only a small piece of bread to dine on, she bitterly added with a sharp tone.

« Peter does not know about my current condition. He believes I am living quite nicely aboard the Jolly Roger, and he'll probably soon forget about me. You could still wait for months that he still wouldn't show up. »

She expected the captain to go mad once again, but instead he continued his questioning.

« But, regardless of that, you came back, insisted Hook. Why is that?

- I had left behind me some obvious hints that could have easily led the bunch of you pirates to the kids' lair. I had to come back and rub out all of these marks.» That was the only reason she came back, right? Yet, a small inner voice whispered in the back of her head that it wasn't the only reason... She preferred to dismiss it. Hook still had one last question for her.

« Jane. I had offered you everything. You had a comfortable position among us, you benefitted a companionship that was suitable to a person your age – what did you have to gain, coming back to Pan? I thought you were... I thought you were wiser than that. »

Jane was stunned. Would that be... Could that be jealousy? She preferred, however, to keep this to herself. There was no need to peeve the captain again. There was such a serious look on his face that even she understood this was no time to mess with him. He was avidly examining her face, waiting for the slightest reaction, the tiniest flickering that could have been read in her eyes. He peered at her as if he was waiting for the key to a mystery.

She maintained his gaze for a while. Then, licking her lips that had strangely gone dry, she gave him the answer.

« They are children, Hook. Children. How could have I ever let them fall into your trap? They would have been butchered with no mercy. As soon as I had guessed your intentions, it was but my duty to warn them about the danger.

- Children! The captain almost choked. Poor, defenceless children, is that so? » He brandished his hook right under her nose. « Innocent children, maybe? So innocent they can cripple a man and laugh about it as they deliver his very hand to the crocodiles?!
« Do you have any idea, Jane, do you even have the slightest idea of the pain following the loss of a limb? Oh, of course, there is the physical pain – the gangrene slowly risking to develop along the arm, the fire cauterization … But that is nothing, compared to the phantom limb waking up sometimes. And the pain, this pain is worse, for you cannot ease it in any way.

« But regardless of all of that, you can still consider sweet and innocent children who are able to do such things? I bet you didn't think about that, did you, Jane? »

Jane felt tears gathering up in her eyes. No, she hadn't thought about any of this. To her, Peter Pan and the Lost Boys had always been the heroes of the story. And Hook was supposed to be the villain for all the times to come. But right now, she was realising how she had been fooling herself the whole time.

Unable to support his gaze any longer, she turned her head away and bit her lower lip so hard the taste of blood started to be overwhelming in her mouth. The captain was still retaining her arm and was now crushing it so hard her whole limb was becoming numb. He scanned her face a while longer, then, grumbling some hateful curses, suddenly let go of her and left her cell soon after.

He slammed the door so hard that the lamp died out, leaving Jane alone in the darkness.
Hook had heard Smee call him, but he didn't bother to look up. He had gotten so drunk last evening that the morning's unavoidable hangover was even harder than he thought. His men had celebrated all night long the success that came with their latest treasure hunt. After the fiasco they had encountered before, Hook had decided to change his strategy in order to get to the mermaid's lagoon safely. This time, they didn't meet any Indians, and without Jane messing around and ruining things, they succeeded.

It had been a memorable night of junket, compounded with bawdy songs and rhum flowing like water on the deck. However, Hook had decided as usual to retrieve quite early, preferring his own apartment's solitude to get drunk, so that his men would not see him slowly losing his well-build dignity.

With a tremendous amount of effort, Hook finally managed to open an eye, then the other. He had – once again – fallen asleep onto his desk, a flask of rhum still seated into his valid hand. Waking up wasn't going to be an easy thing, and already his headache tormented him like Hell. After a good while, he granted Smee some of his attention.

« What is it, then ? said Hook on a scornful tone. Is it some crew member who needs to walk the plank, perhaps ? Or another one who wants to get more than his fair share from the treasure?

- Well, not exactly, captain. » Smee took his hat off and started to twiddle it between his clumsy fingers. « It's just that... The girl... Well, she's quite ailing, sir. »

At first, Hook thought he had misheard the man. His last – and only – meeting with Jane had happened more than two weeks ago, and he had left right after he had talked to her about his missing hand. He still wondered why he did reveal this to her... And he had been hoping since then to completely forget her presence on the ship. Because of this, he had strictly forbidden his men to even mention her name.

« Ailing, Hook repeated, not quite awake. Ailing. And so what ? She might as well die, for what I care. Smee. Do I really have to remind you why I still keep her aboard ? Because if I let her go, she'll reveal to Pan all of our plans ? » And mostly because if I let her go, everyone will start to think of me as merciful, he mentally added for himslef.

Smee was playing with his hat with even more nervousness. « That is... As I was putting some order in the logbook today, I realised... It's quite embarassing, but we lost a great deal of men, recently, captain. A little bit of extra-help would be more than welcome, and it'd be a shame to waste a potential moussaillon, y'know ?

- I see. » Hook was completely awake, by now. So, aparently, they were so many men missing that Smee was thinking about recruiting a woman – and more than that, a treacherous one ?

« You said that she was in bad shape. A weak sailor wouldn't be of any use. » Clearly, the idea of seeing this insidious girl upon his deck again wasn't pleasant at all. The less he saw her, the better. If he laid his eyes upon this scoundrel again... He didn't even know how he might react.

« Which is why I'm informing you now. If you accepted right away, we'd still be able to get her back
on her feet. A few days more, and I wouldn't be so sure about that.

- She betrayed us once. What makes you think she wouldn't do that again? To let her be free again would be a risk. She could sabotage the ship, for what I know, or poison our food...

- Which is why I'd agree to keep an eye on 'er, captain. »

Well then, Hook thought. Whether he has some kind of soft spot for the girl, whether we really are desperate.

« All right, Smee. You might as well free her... answered the captain grimly. But it is your job to get her well again. And if you fail at watching her properly and she betrays us again... I'll gladly stick my hook through her throat. Or, better, yours, since it is after all your brilliant idea. » The smile he bestowed as he said those words was so menacing that the poor man turned white. Mumbling some vague acknowledgments, he soon slipped away.

Smee being gone, Hook finally allowed himself to sink back into his seat. No matter what this damned girl becomes. As long as I ignore her, everything will be the exact same. Thus reassured, Hook set about facing this new day... As unwell as he felt thanks to the phenomenal hangover he was burdened with.

Jane was about to pass out when her prison's door opened. Her nausea was tormenting her, not to mention the permanent fever that just couldn't let her get some rest. She couldn't stand the fact she wasn't able to think clearly. Everything was blurry around her and in her mind. She felt like she was constantly drowning in an ocean of delirium, and there was no way to get out of it, to get some air.

At least, if I fainted, I could finally get some kind of rest, she thought. As she closed her eyes – her eyelids were burning - she heard footsteps racing towards her, and arms catching her before she could fall to the ground. Everything went black.

Waking up, Jane wondered for a while if she wasn't dreaming. But the mellow texture of the sheets covering her body, the smooth contact of the mattress with her skin were real enough. She got the very distinct sensation to finally wake up from a terrible nightmare – a nightmare both indistinct and hectic.

« Miss Jane, better pace yourself here. You caught a horrible fever, down there in the hold. It was too dank and decrepit, and your health weakened considerably. »

Well, I kinda already had suspected that, she wanted to respond, but she felt too tired to even open her mouth. She knew it since her fifth day of imprisonment : she felt herself getting sick, but she had absolutely nothing to get better. The guards ignored her, just like the rest of the crew, and the captain as well. She never felt so alone than during these long days, when she felt like she was losing her mind, and she had nothing or no one to keep her sane. As her mind was slipping away, she lost count of the days and started to wonder if anyone even remembered she existed.

She tried to get up, and the only thing she managed to do was to let out a painful moan.

« Don't move, miss ! You should try to get some more rest, y'know. You'll get back on your feet faster this way. » As he fetched some water and a towel, he turned back to her to add : « Oh, and miss, don't you worry from now on. You're safe. »

Bloody hell, how I hate to be weak, was Jane's last thought before she sunk back into slumber – slumber she hoped to be renovator enough for her to whack the hell out of this damned Hook once she woke up.
It took Jane three days before she could put stand up steadily again. Three days where Smee politely practised careful treatments, even if she kept telling him she was fine, really. Her first contact to the ground wasn't as successful as she expected – as soon as she put her feet down, her legs failed her and she fell back onto her bed. But with another careful attempt, she got stable enough to finally put a foot before the other. Oh, what a privilege it was to be able to do again what was once so simple!

Smee found her walking around the room meticulously. As soon as he saw her, he clapped his hands in glee:

« What a great joy it is to see you up and kicking once again, miss Jane!

- I wouldn't be here without your help, Smee. You're the only member of the crew who cared enough to help me out of this prison. I don't know how you convinced the captain to let me be free again, but I owe you one. » She gratified him with the most warmheartedn smile. Smee flushed a bit.

- Well, to be completely honest with you, miss, I gotta say... The capt'n only accepted because... We've somehow been lacking crew members, recently. And, your help would be greatly appreciated, miss.

- Hook would let me circulate on the ship... freely ? Jane was astounded.

- How can I say... Not really... Not at first, at least. I'll have to watch you, for sure. But I'm sure, if you don't do nothin' wrong, we won't need that at all, later. »

This was alright for Jane. If having Smee keeping an eye on her was the price to pay to be free again, she'd gladly accept it.

« When should I start ? She inquired.

- Oh, please, don't put any pressure on you already. You need to rest a bit more, or you'll have a relapse faster than I could say ! »

It finally took Jane three more days before she could work aboard the ship once more. As promised, Smee followed her at all times, but he wasn't so hard to bear. Of course, she sometimes wished for some moments of solitude, just for an hour or two, but she knew perfectly she didn't earn this right – yet. Trying to escape would be no use, and she knew it. Smee had luckily convinced the captain to be generous once, but he would show absolutely no kindness if she was caught trying to run away once more. Also, run away – but to go where, she wondered. At least, here, even if she wasn't entirely free, she was safe. Any fool could have understood that, and it would take someone twice as fool to screw this up by breaking the rules established.

So she waited patiently. She'd be watched as long as she hadn't convinced the whole crew she was irreproachable... But that could take months, or even years. And Smee wasn't the one who had the final say in all of this : the captain of the Jolly Roger did.

However, this one was rarely showing up, and when he did, he completely ignored her. He must hate me, she reflected, and he has his good reasons. But, hey, he didn't do anything to be likable either!

Anger grew within her guts as she thought about the captain, and she consequently scrubbed the floor with more intensity. When she thought she almost started to have some compassion for the
man... Until Smee admitted he had once said he didn't care whether she was dead or dying in her cell!
He would have let her rot in her prison without ever doing a single thing about it. And that was this
kind of man who possessed the key to her freedom? How could she convince him that she didn't
need to be watched all the time, that she wasn't going to cause any problems aboard, if he acted as if
she didn't exist?

Standing in front of the helm of the Jolly Roger, he overlook the deck and his men. From this height,
the captain had an excellent view over the crew and could easily inspect the work done. He gazed
over the pirates working here and there... And his look irresistibly landed over her.

The young Jane looked absorbed by her task, which was to scrub part of the deck. Kneeling and
turning her back to him, she sometimes raised to wipe off the sweat from her brow, pleated with
concentration, in a raging way with the back of her hand. She kept on working so, without ever
complaining, from what he had heard from Smee.

Suddenly, Hook realised he was peering at her – for a little bit too long – and he sheerly looked
away. He tried his best to ignore her, but every day he couldn't help to give her some furtive glances
here and there. Why was that? She was a traitor, a filthy one who'd betray him again if she had the
chance. He still couldn't believe he had told her about one of his greatest pains – the loss of his hand.
She could use this against him any time, he was sure about that.

Bad move, Hook, he kept muttering to himself.

But still... He couldn't help but to be fascinated by her. To see her undertake the hardest tasks with
more will than most of his men was enough to understand that she was inhabited by fire.

All of a sudden, she got up and turned to him. Hook realised – too late – that he had been looking at
her again, and by pure accident, their eyes met. She looked full and straight at him, as if she could
read his very thoughts. As for the captain, he couldn't read through her for sure, but he thought – for
a second – he saw a gleam of... curiosity? Enhance her pupils.

He turned his back to her at once, hoping that his own face didn't betray his thoughts. But what kind
of thoughts were his? He didn't know that himself. Maybe simple curiosity, he reflected. It is rare to
see a traitor work this hard to get along with the crew unless they're up to something. I must keep an
eye on her, or she'll stab me in the back faster than I would know.

Convinced to not look back at her once more, he headed to his own cabin, to focus on things much
more important than a lass... but oh so much duller.
This time, she really was going to get a hold of him, decided Jane when waking up in the morning.

Even though she had been working relentlessly for two weeks, the faithful Smee was still following her everywhere like a shadow.

She was working very hard to be on her best behavior at all times, and even tried to be a part of the team, but still she was denied the basic right of being entirely trusted.

Of course, she didn't blame the pirates who were skeptical about her. After all, one day she was a member of the crew, the next she was thrown in some prison at the bottom of the ship, and after that she was a member once again. It was a miracle she hadn't walked the plank yet.

After working aboard the ship for so long, she had started to wonder why she had given in so easily. Living with pirates wasn't exactly what she had expected when she took Peter's hand.

"All my life, I've only ever wanted one thing", she pondered one day. "To go to Neverland."

Now that she finally got there, she realised – she didn't have any other goal in her life. Spending her life dreaming, she missed the occasion to truly discover what she wanted to be, who she was. "Have I always been so shallow, then ?" she wondered with self-disgust.

An eternity ago, she never had to ask herself those questions : all she ever did was to play with the kids and live wonderful adventures all day. She had been living a dream... and she was foolish enough to believe this could last forever.

Even Neverland was somehow respecting Nature's laws : adults cannot live like children forever. Maybe the Island had its own will, but just as she began doubting about her right to live with children, an unexpected chain of events led her amongst pirates.

"If this whole 'destiny' thing is true, then maybe – just maybe – there is something for me to accomplish here." Expect Jane wasn't really sure to believe in fate, even though she was a quick one to believe in fairy tales.

She didn't complain about this kind of life – so different to the one she lived with the Lost Boys. During these last few weeks aboard the Jolly Roger, Jane had to prove herself all the time to excel, even. Otherwise, she'd be roughly snubbed, criticized for her lack of experience.

Strange thing to say, but thanks to this, she actually gained something she got to trust herself more, to learn new things.

On the contrary, when she was with the Lots Boys, she never got to do such thing. Since she was the only adult, she was automatically the leader when it came about knowledge or experience (except for Peter, who was still their chief, of course).

Maybe that was the reason she found herself at this specific time and this specific place. Maybe she was here to grow up somehow. To grow up in Neverland, what an idea !

"I couldn't possibly excel as an adult in the real world... But what if, here, I could become somebody ?" Jane started to hope. "What if I could gain the crew's respect ?" Her heart beat faster at this idea.

A new desire was growing inside her. A desire both concrete and untouchable : to accomplish
something as a person. She, too, wanted to gain a reputation amongst the pirates in this harsh place of Neverland! It was a path she could only follow alone, this time. Nothing like being wished away to a magic land by a deus ex machina like Peter Pan! And oh how sweet it would be to try to accomplish something by herself.

But she couldn't even expect to become a somebody until she gained respect from one notorious pirate, and he was far from being an easy one to convince.

Jane wondered if one day the captain would become lucid enough to realise she wasn't a threat anymore – was she ever one? she thought to herself. She was so far still forbidden to get close to the weapon rack on the ship, was closely watched almost every hour of the day how could she accomplish anything dangerous in those conditions?

It was her turn to work in the kitchens today since she had never been any good at any cooking-related-type-of-stuff, she had been given a quick crash course of the basics. To avoid being scolded at, she tried her best to learn fast – hard task, as she had been gifted at birth by two clumsy potato-hands when it came to cooking. Still, she didn't give up. 'And I betta' do so', she thought, since the cook - a certain Mr. Swift, whose mind was ironically quite slow - didn't let her linger. He had, however, a quick disposition to copiously insult anybody who did anything a tiny bit wrong, making him Neverland's own Gordon Ramsay.

Of course, the rest of the crew wasn't as irritable as Mr. Angypants. It took her some time to realise that most of them - far from being as threatening as you might have believed at first sight – were actually big simpletons who wouldn't harm you if were simply nice to them.

These poor devils were acting somehow childishly when they weren't busy terrorizing their enemies. So, it all depended on which side you were, really. Jane had tried to put the nicest ones on her side thanks to some bottles of rhum shared together, all while teaching them the subtleties of poker. After a drunken evening and an ungracious burping contest, she was already part of the team.

She was busy peeling potatoes, trying not to cut one of her fingers off, as Smee – who was still on his watch duty – was standing beside her, chopping some fish with an ease that seemed unearthly to Jane.

"Do you think the captain would let me see him today, Smee?" she asked abruptly. Perhaps too abruptly, for it took the quartermaster some time to understand the meaning of the question.

"Well, that is, missy... I didn't know you were in want of a meeting with the cap'. He's a really busy man, y'know!"

For sure, Jane couldn't reveal him the true reason she wanted to have words with Hook – to become free aboard the ship again, and therefore not having him around all the time – for it might wound him some. She threw some sticky potato peel in the bucket planned for this use before continuing.

"Anyways, would it be possible?"

- Well... Um... Well, it's true, I don't really see why not. You're almost part of the crew, now.

- Almost." She emphasized the word, wearing an exaggerated pout on her lips.

Still, she decided to take Smee's answer as a positive one, hotheaded as she was. Once her kitchen drudgery was over, she headed over to the captain's cabin as his faithful bosco was having his break. She knocked three times – three short, fast-paced knocks – at his door before she changed her mind. She used to do the same, she remembered, when she had to call someone on the phone, by pressing
the little green button before she could hesitate.

A deep and bitter voice answered soon enough, inviting her grumpily to enter.

At her entrance, the captain looked at her with a hint of surprise painted across his features. By the time he had put his pen down, his look had already stiffened, showing his annoyance for being thus troubled.

"Tell me, how can I help you, miss?" His words were mannerly, yet his tone was colder than ever. It was the chill in his voice that caused Jane to stop for a moment, to freeze in horror as she had forgotten the reason for her interruption. Shaking her head as if she had to wake up, she cleared her throat before answering.

"Captain, it's been more than two weeks since I've started to work aboard the Jolly Roger again" she began.

"Is that so? Has it been so long since I accepted to free a traitor, and she is still alive? My, my, I am getting old" delivered Hook with a scathing tone.

Jane frowned. If that was his attitude already, this wasn't going to go smoothly. To him, she was still a filthy felon. She almost retorted that he should have let her rot in that dirty old cell, if he hated so to see her aboard... But, doubting it would actually help her case, she bit her lower lip to avoid being disagreeable. She continued firmly:

"Captain, ever since I've been back on my feet, I've been working" - my freakin' arse off – "the hardest I could. Ask Smee if you don't believe me."

Hook raised an eyebrow with disdain. "And your request being...?" he asked with such an irritating fake tone that Jane almost snapped out. Deep breath, Jane, c'mon.

"I would sincerely appreciate that you would start to believe you can trust me, captain. Smee promised me you'd let me come and go unwatched in time." She stopped, trying to calculate her next words as finely as she could.

"If it pleases the captain of this fregate to grant me enough trust, I would like to become a member of the crew. A real member of the crew. I'd stay faithful" – this time, she almost added. But she read in his eyes that he thought the same thing.

His answer was final.

"So, if I understand your request well enough... You, a traitor and captive, dare to come to me and ask me if I could let you come and go around freely aboard my ship?" He raised from his seat and stood in front of her.

"Don't you think I've been more than generous so far, Jane?"

She held his gaze firmly, fire shooting from her eyes. Generous? What has he ever done as generous? Once again, Hook answered as if he had read her mind.

"I have already accepted you once aboard the Jolly Roger, willingly. You could have been drowning and sought refuge, and here I was, offering you a safe place to stay."

"Now this is rich coming from you, con guy!" Jane bursted out, unable to contain herself anymore. "You would have killed me right away, if you hadn't thought about using me as a bait!" Regardless of her protests, Hook carried on his speech.
"You have betrayed me and wrecked my plans to destroy Pan. Yet, here I was, giving your precious self a second chance. I've allowed you to join my crew once again, you, a traitor. However, no matter what I granted, you still believe you have the right to complain. Now this, this is rich, don't you think?"

Jane didn't lose her confidence for so little. "I know perfectly well why you keep me here, captain, and that is not by generosity. It is only because you lack of men!" He was painting himself as the hero of the story, but he was neatly avoiding the details! "Also, I suppose that Smee, being your quartermaster, has better things to do than babysitting, ain't that right? Yet, you deprive yourself from his precious help because your pitiful ego refuses to admit that I deserve some well-gained trust!"

Jane froze. As she finished her comeback, she suddenly realised that the usually blue eyes of the captain were now red – red as deep blood.

Faster than she could say, she found herself violently planted against the wall. Hook had his claw right against her bare throat, its cutting edge leaving no way for her to escape his grip. His valid hand was twisting her wrist, preventing her from stealing the weapon she noticed was hanging at his side.

For the first time since she got aboard the Jolly Roger, she felt something rising in her gut – a despicable feeling that she would have liked to ignore. Panic. Terror. Fear for her life.

She tried to struggle away, but this only encouraged the captain to bend her wrist furthermore, and his hook to start digging in her skin.

For an instant, she wanted to turn her face away, to hide the tears that rose inexorably to her eyes. So that the last vision she'd carry to her grave wouldn't be those terrible red eyes.

But she was Jane, from the Darling family. She was Heartless Liz, the pirate. She was the truest believer, wasn't she? She was a fighter, and fight she would, even if it meant her death. Even if the person about to kill her wasn't human anymore, but just a monster made of cruelty and hatred.

She raised her eyes upon him, giving him the most dreadful look she could achieve.

"Do it. You could have already done it once. Finish the job, then."

As she finished her sentence, the time seemed to stop. What was in the monster's eyes, she never knew, for her own were filled with tears. Jane waited firmly for the final blow.

She was on the verge of faltering, when the monster of cruelty and hatred let go of her.

Jane's legs flinched under her weight, and she felt her body fall to the solid ground. She instinctively raised a hand to her sore throat. She felt her fingers getting warm and humid to the touch. She had lost blood - but not much, she realised with a confused relief.

For a moment, silence fell in the room. Jane dazely contemplated the silhouette of the captain turning his back to her, unknowing of what to do next.

Without even facing her, he said in a hoarse and dry voice – almost softly at first: "Out."

She didn't react right away, still in shock. Neither her head, nor her limbs would react. But then Hook roared, causing her to come back to her senses in the instant.

"GET OUT!

Not knowing clearly what she did, she ran away and slammed the door behind her, shaking.
"Only one thought drove her now. It was an epiphany, that seemed so clear now that she wondered why she hadn't realized it yet.

"I need to get out of this place. How did I ever imagine I could gain any gratitude or notoriety here? If I stay any longer... This ship will be my demise."

"Oh captain, what on earth did you possibly do to that poor girl? It's been two days she hasn't been eating."

"Good for her. I couldn't possibly worry less, thank you for your input, Smee." To be honest, Hook had had more than enough with this troublemaker.

"But, cap', I'm afraid you've been a little too harsh with her, don't ya think? You might wanna present her some kind of apology..."

"In the Devil's name, Smee! I don't owe that brat anything!" Why was everybody telling him what to do, now? Regardless, the bosco continued.

"I know! Maybe you could invite her to dinner, cap'. That'd be two problems solved right away: she could eat a little, and you could present 'er your apologies for givin' er the fright of er life." Since Hook didn't stir, he carried on.

"Well, if you don't invite that poor girl yourself, I'll do it for ya! I mean, where has the world gone to? Here's that a respectable captain is now terrorizing young ladies, now! I fought you used to respect good forms, now, cap'."

That was it. No one should be able to tell the captain he lacked of good form. He would lose his reputation, him, a man from Eton.

For once, his quartermaster was right. He couldn't possibly lay claim on being an O.E if he showed bad form.

Even though Hook was an Old Etonian, he had destroyed every proof of his passage to Eton, out of fear of staining the name of his beloved school. He had done it right after his dreadful actions in the Spanish bay, where he lost his humanity so many years ago. Yet he still belonged to Eton and his heart was bound to the principles he had learned there.

"Very well! If that matters to you so much, invite this damned girl to dinner, tonight, at 8'o'clock. Sharp." He pointed at Smee with an accusing look. "But don't expect any excess of kindness from me!"

This seemed to concur plenty to Smee. "Perfect, captain! I knew you'd accept. I'm on my way to tell her, then!" And he headed cheerfully out of the cabin.

Once the door closed behind the Irish bosco, James Hook relaxed deeper into his seat. Oh, how they could get on his nerves, all of them! And they were starting to say he lacked of good form, now? He must have really reached the bottom, then.

To prove they were wrong, Hook had to be on his best behaviour this evening. With a deep, tired sigh, he got out on the bridge and started to run his daily affairs, trying not to think of this chore of a dinner awaiting tonight.
All apologies

Take a deep breath. You can do this.

Jane was standing at the edge of the wide opened rear window of the ship, the biggest one. She was charged to clean it, which would take her at least a good part of the day.

From the corner of her eye, she spied the pirate who was supervising her today. The captain had at least understood part of her request: she wasn’t watched by Smee anymore, but by some random pirates day after day.

C’mon, don’t chicken out of this. It’s your only chance to get out of this dreadful place.

Since the incident with Hook, she had been busy. Too busy to eat or even to sleep. She had been planning carefully her killer-escape plan. Today was her chance. She was going to do the thing, she thought.

She simply had to jump out of that window, hoping she'd land safe to the water, and swim to the shore. She had thought of stealing a safety boat, but had quickly dismissed the idea when she saw that they were all under surveillance. So, this was her day. With an unsuspecting pirate half-sleeping at the corner of the room, she’d be able to slip from his watch before he could catch her.

Maybe she wouldn't make it to the shore, she thought. But to this point, it didn't matter anymore. She would at least die trying.

One... she gulped anxiously.

Two... Deep breath. Here it comes.

Hitting its cue perfectly, a knocking on the door interrupted her suicide-like mission. Jane was half-relieved.

It was Smee. His cheerful face was enough to warm Jane's heart a bit. Just a bit, as it froze once again when she heard the reason for his appearance.

"Jane ! The captain requires your attendance for dinner tonight."

She thought she had misheard the proposition at first.

"A dinner ?" she spat out, just to make sure.

"That's the thing, missy. You are required for a dinner, tonight, with our captain."

But this made absolutely no sense! She only rembered too well how her last meeting with Hook went. That man was loathing her now, for sure. He would never invite her on his free will! Except if...

"Smee... Are you in any way related with the planning of this meeting ?" She wanted to sound reproachful, yet the character's natural bonhomie was enough to make her voice flinch. She could feel a smile appearing at the corner of her lips.

"Now then, miss Jane : who else ?" answered Smee laughing. And Jane couldn't help but laugh with him. Smee had apparently some kind of paternal affection towards her – and yet again, he was taking care of her well-being only like a father would.
"Very well, my dear Smee. I accept... But only because you are so willing for me to go!

Why that's great, missy !" answered Smee in his ever-joyous tone. "However... We oughta make you more presentable, it is a formal dinner."

He inspected her from head to toe, before adding : "And, with all due respect, miss, there is some work to do !"

Jane laughed heartily to the jest. "And you are right indeed ! I can't even remember when was it I took my last shower – and I believe you can understand that to my smell, now !" She concluded with a faint laugh.

Almost timidely, she approached the captain's cabin. An entire afternoon had been required in order to make her look less-like-the-embodiement-of-messiness. As she saw her reflection in the clear water of her basin, she almost gave herself a fright.

Awaiting anxiously the time of the meeting, she kept on grinding a strand of hair that hanged to her cheek.

Fortunately, Smee was already here, in front on the captain's door, ready to welcome her. Seeing her, his cheerful face lit up even more.

"You've arrived!" Then, inspecting her quickly, he added: "I knew this dress would suit 'ya. Now you almost look like a lady!"

Jane smiled, nodding to show she appreciated the pun.

"Indeed, almost like a lady! But I'm sure you'd agree there's plenty of work to do until that completely happens!"

They laughed heartily together. It was good, to laugh a little. Already, she was feeling better.

But she had to admit – she looked a little more presentable in this dress. And hell, she could, for all the time it took her to understand how to put the damned thing on!

It was a simple dark blue dress made from thick cotton, that descended to her ankles. A simple brooch was pinned at the top, which embellished the whole set. But the trick with this hell of a dress was the back – which had to be laced. It took Jane half an hour to lace it herself, as she wasn't going to ask someone to do it for her!

Wishing her a good evening, Smee opened the door in a somewhat galant-way (but mostly lumpish). No going back now. Gulping nervously, Jane stepped over the threshold.

The captain was standing in front of his window, his back facing her. He had left his usual red coat for a simpler black silk jacket embroidered with delicate golden tracery.

Jane must have entered silently – that, or the captain pretended he hadn't heard her. Sliding against the wall, she hoped to blend in entirely with the curtains. She remained like this for a while, her forehead pleated, unable to look away from the immobile statue that ignored her.

"Are you planning on spending the evening this way?"

Jane couldn't help but start at the question. She stammered, unable to control her tongue:
"Well, it is that I... Actually, I... I..." even she didn't have a clue to where she was going with this. Attempting to stay hidden like a child wouldn't have changed anything to the situation.

"I, I, me." sighed Hook in a exceedeed tone. "Has the world started to revolve around you now, Jane?"

She prefered not to answer. In another situation, she'd probably have gotten offended and would have replied venomously. But tonight, she wasn't even sure she could attempt anything. Hook turned around stiffly and, for the first time since she had gotten here, landed his eyes on her. He barely took notice of her presence, and promptly turned aside to take a seat without inviting Jane to do so.

Well, wasn't that well worth it to bother with that wretched dress, thought Jane. As soon as this dinner is over, I'll throw it to the fire. Or maybe turn it into brand new curtains.

Since the captain didn't appear to invite her at the table, she took her own seat. Just like during her first dinner with the captain, the table's ebony disappeared under the abundance of the dishes. Seafood galore, but also fowls, exotic fruits and vegetables were laid all over the place – everything that could have been seen at a festive dinner. Except, she remarked raising her eyes to Hook, the ambiance was anything but festive.

Hook began to help himself – in a brutal way, putting back heavily the utensils without any form of ceremony. He soon focused onto his food only, the silver flatware chinking loudly at each service; a noise that sounded even louder within the deep silence filling the room. Everything in his manners attested his irritation.

Jane did the same. Several minutes passed by, the quitness paced by the repeated sound of the cutlery tinkling against the plates.

She took a sip of wine. It was rough and bitter to the throat. But something strong wasn't inopportune, she reflected. The heaviness of the environment was so strong she quickly decided that finishing her whole glass at once wasn't such a bad idea after all.

It didn't make sense. Smee probably went through a lot of organization for this dinner that was worthy enough to be served in the Titanic, but what was the point? The result – as neat as can be – didn't have any appeal if the two protagonists had no wish whatsoever to see each other, let alone to have a proper conversation.

"Isn't that a bother... The longer a silence get, the harder it becomes to start a discussion." thought Jane out loud.

"In the future, please avoid any form of witticism" answered Hook in a cold, harsh tone, "it doesn't quite suit you."

Jane hardly accepted that mockery. "And that's for telling me this kind of things that you invited me to dinner tonight?"

The captain had an infuriated look. "Content yourself with finishing as soon as possible." was his only answer.

She kept to that order, and reported all her interest onto the pheasant meal in front of her. She tried to disregard completely the fairly wrathful presence of the captain by imagining new fates for her dress, that seemed to her more than ever useless. Turn it into confettis, perhaps. Now that would bring some fun onto that blasted ship.

Suddenly, as she poured herself another glass of wine in the most perfect quiteness, Jane finally put
her finger on the ridiculous of the situation that made this dinner more absurd even.

"So, that's it? I simply come here, we share the most awkward dinner ever, and we part without having exchanged two words?" She slightly bended forward.

"There surely must be another reason for which you invited me tonight." Actually, she knew quite well what was that reason – and she didn't have a doubt that Hook was perfectly aware of it as well. Between them floated the memory of their last encounter that neither of them wanted to express out loud.

The captain sunk a little deeper into his seat, his face shut. "If that may reassure you, this great idea of inviting a wretched wench such as yourself didn't come from me."

"Isn't that reassuring. I wouldn't have accepted myself" she answered, "if it weren't for that insisting quartermaster of yours."

At the rememberance of the way Smee had harangued him, a disgusted pout appeared onto Hook's features. If only he could have minded his own buisness! At this moment, the captain was torn between the wish to make him pay for provoking such infamy and the wish to cool his guest's blood at once.

His fist tightened as he struggled for keeping his composure and his ever good form. Instead of looking for his gun, his fingers headed to the nearest liquor bottle – a way like an other to offset his murderous pulsions.

Across the table, Jane contemplated the captain and could read on his face his state of mind. Once again, she could see the monstrous in him overtaking his human costume. She promised herself to not manifest her presence if she wanted to keep a hold onto her dear life. She had already played with fire less than 48 hours ago, and she didn't intend to do it again anytime soon.

Therfore, she dutifully chewed the piece of meat that remained into her plate. She was almost – almost - getting accustomed to the loud silence of the room. But the absence of conversation was ever so obvious, especially that neither of them were wishing to spend this evening – or any other day of their life – in any way close to each other. The antipathy was almost tangible, the aversion so overwhelming, that suddenly she could stand no more.

Abrubtly putting down her glass, she began to raise from her seat, causing Hook to hoist a suspicious look in her direction. She almost opened her mouth to protest, to complain, anything – but was immediately stopped by the frozen look of her host.

Strategically changing her mind, Jane sat back down and settled for sighing overwroughtly.

But it seemed that he had understood her silent message. A few minutes later, it was his turn to rattle his chair back and to suddenly get up.

"Enough with this masquerade."

Jane raised an eyebrow, but didn't stir, her eyes set onto the shut figure of the captain. He continued: "I suppose you must find this vain exercice of socialization just as useless as I do."

A nod was Jane's careful answer. His eyes remained over her for an instant, until he carried on. "What would you say if we were to stop this ridiculous pretense of a dinner and came clean?"

Was that some kind of a trap? The dangerous formulation of that last question let her imagine the worst. However, she had to admit that the last of her desires was to swallow another bite of that cold
pheasan. So she nodded.

Hook seemed lost in his thoughts. He contemplated for a moment that young woman before him, of his piercing and calculating eyes.

"This masquerade," he designated his surroundings with an evasive gesture, "is my bosco's making. And all for what?" His eyes landed back onto her. "For a simple, pretentious creature who doesn't know her place." He was getting closer now, stealthily.

"To be honest, I'm not even sure myself why I keep on making efforts with you precious self." He was two feet away from Jane now. "I should have let you die in that prison cell."

The coldness of the tone in which that last sentence was pronounced sent a shiver down Jane's spine. Henceforth leaning closer, an arm onto the armrest and his hook resting inches away from her back, he wasn't allowing any way out. At this moment, he was a feline isolating his prey. At this moment, he was a deadly, instinctive killer.

"But still – here you are, alive and whole to pester me to death. I suppose you must feel flattered?" he spat out.

He animalistic menace in his presence was tangible. He wasn't saying anything anymore, yet here he remained, awaiting an answer for his rhetorical question. Sore-throated, Jane found herself unable to meet his eyes and instead focused onto her clenched fists resting on the table.

In what mess have I put myself in.

With an infinite slowness, she parted her lips – meticulously, even, before biting them back again. She knew she should say something. Anything – but the captain was awaiting for an answer that she only could give.

"I do not feel flattered" was at first her flabby answer, no better than a five-year-old child's. "And it is not my prime goal to pester you, captain. Believe it or not," and saying this she found the strength to look up into the inquisitive eyes of her tormenter, "but I am not in the least satisfied of all the problems I have caused until now."

That looked a lot like apologies – way too much to her taste, but that was the truth. Everything she had done, she had done in the sole purpose to help Peter out, but never to provoke directly his enemy; those were two very distinct things.

Maybe he had understood seeing her boring eyes, as Hook drew back – and Jane took what might have been the first breath after a long apnea.

"In that case, should I understand that you have regrets betraying us?"

"Never" answered Jane a little bit too fast, and with too much conviction in her voice. She restarted: "Never, for it allowed me to spare lives -" she glanced nervously at Hook, "no matter how cruel they may be." She remembered only too well of the ghost hand tale.

The captain winced a little, but didn't rave for all that. Jane decided to act as an adult, for the first time since she actually was one.

"Hook..." she restlessly gulped, unsure of carrying on. "Hook, I am, how to say... Sorry..." or I think I am... "for having been the source of so much trouble." There. She did it. She acted as the adult one and had apologized first – even though she didn't regret anything she could have done so far.
The captain peered at her, a hint of suprise painted over his features. Did this wretched little scallywag just apologize to him? Now, if a person as impossible as she was capable of showing humility, wasn't it the least he should do that act the same?

James Hook was supposed to swallow his pride and bend to the rules of good form. She had tricked him at the game of social rules by apologizing first. He now couldn't send her back until he had done the same, and he knew it.

After sighing like he carried the weight of the world on his shoulders, Hook took his resolution. Just a few words to say and he would be rid of that girl.

"Jane. I believe I also..." He took a long pause before finishing his sentence. "I also owe you an apology."

She didn't answer anything, laying onto him frank and clear eyes. She awaited for the rest, and her silence was insidiously putting pressure onto Hook.

"During our last meeting, I acted harshly under the influence of wrath. I suppose you did realise this yourself. And for that..." Heavy pause. Sigh. "I present to you my apologies."

"Should I expect that it won't happen again?"

"Don't try to trick me into making shallow promises." His voice was once again dry. He had said what he needed to say, and now he had only one wish: to get rid of that troublemaker and enjoy solitude once again. Happily enough, it seemed she nourished the same expectations.

"Very well, Hook, I accept you apologies. I do hope we'll remain in good terms with each other, now." He almost scoffed at the enormity, but didn't let it show. Since she was heading to the door, he put on his mask of courtesy to accompany her. He raised his hand to the knob in order to open the door, but it seemed she had the same idea. Their fingers almost touched and she drew back quickly.

"Is this all you needed to say to me?" dared Jane before leaving for good. "It would be a shame that they'd force another dinner upon us in order to have a new conversation." she added with a half-smile.

"And that would be the last thing in the world we'd want, for sure." answered Hook in the fakest tone in the world.

The door closed behind him and Jane finally gone, Hook appreciated a well-gained solitude. He still threw some bottles to the ground and concieved some evil schemes he'd inflict to Smee as soon as he could for generating what has been the worst dinner of his life.
Sweet escape

The crew had left at dawn, without notice. When she heard the rambling upon the deck as the very first lights of the day were shining in the room, Jane had the same reaction as anyone who hadn't had a good night sleep for too long. She shrugged and went back to sleep. Five minutes later, she understood bitterly that she had definitely slipped from slumber's grasp for today.

Curiosity got the best of her as she got up and headed towards the door. Her vision was still blurred from heavy sleeping; she realised it only when she found her nose collapsing against the heavy wooden door.

Stepping hesitantly out of the room, preparing herself for more viciously hidden doors - just in case - she found herself awestruck as every single pirate of the crew was upon the deck already, running in an organised mess, slipping with remarkable agility along ropes, sharing amongst them guns and powder in an almost military way. Such order and regularity coming from a crew that only yesterday couldn't help but start a fight for the slightest trifle was enough to take her breath away.

Jane suddenly had the same impression than the one she often got in her youth: as if she had missed the school bus after snoozing for too long, or as if she had forgotten she had a test that day. Did she forget something important was taking place today? This wouldn't be such a suprise, but...

The reassuring passing of a certain bosco with a red hat allowed her to get some answers. "Smee! Tell me, did I miss anything? I absolutely don't remember something was supposed to happen today and - - "

Smee, too busy with the departure to fully give her some attention, distractly mumbled something about the captain who didn't wish to warn her about the crew going on a mission.

Jane found herself half reassured, half shocked.

"We're going on a mission that I don't even know about? That seems sorta ridicul -" "Sorry miss, but the capt'n said that only the members of the crew were going on the island, and he told me you weren't accepted as a member yet."

"Oh." Jane's body tightened. "I see."

Only then, Smee looked up from the list he was crumpling in his hand to take notice of Jane's frustration. He raised his hand as to comfort her, but she had already turned away.

"Thank you, Smee. I know where is my place, don't worry." And she went back to lock herself in the room, waiting without flinching for the whole crew to leave.

Half an hour later, the pirates had slipped off the Jolly Roger in small canoes, without leaving a single one to her, of course. Jane had vaguely thought about sneaking into one for a moment, to gain the coast with them. Knowing only too well this would fail, she did nothing. She wasn't even sure she had enough will to do it. The only thing she felt able to do was to lay back into her hammock, eyes fixing endlessly the ceiling, feeling too frustrated to go out.

She shouldn't have so much concern for being left out... But she never felt as much as an unwelcomed stranger than now. They wanted her out of the crew? Fine. She'd stay out of the crew. So she stayed, waiting, grumpy like a five year-old.

Only long after the last voices and swirls had been heard, she decided to leave her refuge.

A great emptiness welcomed her upon the deck.

Not a single man had stayed. It was now only her, the desert immensity of the Jolly Roger, and the
infinite and mesmerizing blue of the sea.

It was almost strange at first – every pirate that had been at her side for weeks left a mortifying silence behind them as they went to the coast. No more goblets clashing, no more insults yelled by Mr. Swift, no more life aboard. That was, in a way, quite depressing. As if everything had been but a mere dream...

Jane, free from any chore, let her legs guide her. She visited the whole length of the deck, there and back again. At first, she was simply walking, taking time to fully appreciate the fascinating sea. Then, without even realising it, she was going faster and faster. Something strong was growing inside her, something she couldn't control even if she wanted to. This energy growing more and more took control of her body, as she started to run, to dance, to bounce.

She understood the nature of the feeling that overtook her very self. That was joy, simple and irrepressible joy, so strong that she could only let it explode.

She was alone, and for the first time in forever, she was free. Free!

So she laughed, she let herself dance, her heart filled with a child-like joy. Jane felt freed from a great weight. As if her being was entirely effervescent, she was once again light, so light that she could almost fly.

For the first time, she felt herself at home aboard the Jolly Roger. Just as she did when she was a child and she was left in an unknown house, she decided to open every door, discover every hidden treasure of the ship. She lightly assumed that everybody did the same when they were left in an unknown place. That was part of human nature, to be curious. A shiver of excitement run along her spine.

She started with the kitchen. Behind the stocks, she found the rhum stocks and let out a small joyful noise escape from her mouth.

"They surely won't notice if one bottle is missing, right?" she asked an imaginary interlocutor. As he didn't answer, she took the silence for an approval. The cap of the bottle popped soon after and the first sip she took marked the beginning of her own, very private one-person party.

Opening the doors of the storage room, she found with glee an old hat collecting dust in the corner, so she wore it as a child desguising with what he can find in the drawers. She was walking around as if she were the master of the ship now, giving pretend orders to invisible pirates in a fake rogue tone.

"Oy, you! You betcha clean 'em barrels good, you old... You old dead rat's butt!" Another sip. "As fer you, you scallywag, you betta move yer lazy fat arse faster or ye'll find yerself overboard in a second!"

As she took one or two other sips, Jane dropped, laughing, like a sack of potatoes against the wall. When she realised how stupid she must have looked, yelling like an old pirate captain to an imaginary crew, she only laughed more.

When her laughter died down, she looked up. Her gaze followed the staircase leading to the captain's door. Surely, she wouldn't dare...?

She checked her surroundings, feeling guilty for something she hadn't done yet, before coming back to her senses and telling herself that this behaviour was ridiculous – more ridiculous even than yelling to ghost pirates. Well, she could come up the stairs, the door would be surely locked anyway, she thought.
It wasn't. A simple pressure applied to the doorknob was enough and before her appeared the captain's log.
Every feeling of guilt disappearing after approximately 2.67 seconds, she stepped into the room.
She only knew it too well, she could have told herself. However, it was something to visit someone's place as a guest, and another thing to visit it unwatched, uncaught.

My, my, this place is way overloaded, was the first thing she thought. After all, the gigantic seat at the center of the room – covered in the same red velvet as the immense carpet covering the floor – was eating up most of the space available.
And what a ridiculous decoration. Flourishes and fleurs-de-lys were all over the place, amply covering the walls. And, most of all, hideous cherubs on each side of the door, seriously? From the tip of her fingers, she turned the globe on her left.
She started with the desk. It had obviously suffered from many attacks of the captain's dreaded hook – she felt some pain for the object, which was made of deep black wood charmingly detailed at the table legs. The red and golden paintings over the desk were not without taste either. But these had the tendency to disappear under the overwhelming accumulation of maps, long-toms and flasks – so many bottles you could actually turn this desk into a mini-bar.
Still with no other thoughts than shallow curiosity, she opened the drawers one by one.
Many were, to her great disappointment, empty. But some did contain more maps, more empty flasks of rhum, and some scores she wasn't able to decipher. Another drawer was however interesting, as it was filled with disembowled pocket watches.
Walking around freely in the small circumference? Of the room, she headed naturally towards the harpsichord that was placed close to the window. She tried out some music notes, however not daring to linger on – the sound of the notes seemed so loud in the silence that she unconsciously feared to get caught red-handed.
It was as if this room was filled with superfluous loot from the pirate's robbery. And she could suppose more was to be found in the many chests here and there in the room. Randomly, she opened one.
However, as she raised the heavy lid of the chest, she did not find the stolen loot she expected. Inside this dusty old chest were stocked books. These were old hardback leather books, with no title on the spine. She opened a few, flipping rapidly through the pages: she found the Gallic Wars, other classics such as The Odyssey or The Iliad; all of them in their original version, naturally. This didn't surprise her; this kind of literature was at the basis of any education, especially for a man such as Hook. However, she also found some books she never heard about before: the Genealogia Deorum Gentilium, the Res Gestae Divi Augusti, some elegies by Propertius, some poems by Tyrtaeus...
She went through some, suddenly regretting she didn't pursue her latin classes for more than a year. She was about to close the chest when she came across a book that wasn't in thick, leather hardcover, but was lighter, more flexible. She opened it.
On the top right-hand corner of the very first page could be read, in an elegant cursive handwriting:
“Property of Captain James...” the name of Hook wasn't the one following, but another name which sounded much more aristocratic. On the following page was written by the same hand, in broad letters: “Studies of Neverland”. Barely breathing, Jane turned the pages with caution, as if she was about to make the most extraordinary discovery.
There was an accurately drawn map of the island. Everything was there: every edge was represented with a geographical accuracy, that also showed a visible illustration skill. Even if this map was
entirely drawn in black ink, it was still entirely legible. Further, this artistic talent was confirmed as Neverland’s flowers were represented with an impeccable detail. Some flowers that didn't have a name yet, but also others, more common, such as the Myosotis albiflora. Jane was absorbed by the study of these drawings when she thought she heard a noise upon the deck.

She came back to reality as sudden fear flowed through her veins. Subject to panic, she believed that the crew came back. For how long had she even been here? Without really knowing why, she slipped the notebook under her top and left the room in a hurry.

Once upon the deck, she was reassured entirely. This had only been a fake impression, apparently. Her imagination was so vivid she was now shivering at the slightest creak! Yet, with her sudden panic she had lost any wish to visit unknown places of the ship. She let out a long sigh and left herself slip along the rudder.

Then, lulled by the sweet sound of waves slowly crashing against the wooden ship, and the rhum flowing through her veins, she let herself doze in this warm summer afternoon.

She must have fallen asleep, because when she saw a small light twinkling in front of her nose, she first took it for some optical illusion. As she wasn't one to ask herself much questions when her body was half-filled with alcohol, she closed her eyes and let slumber get the best of her. Until she felt something was pulling a strand of her hair. Repeatedly. And then she her a tinkle.

She opened her eyes right away and saw it again, this small glowing light, except it was flying furiously around her head.

"A fairy!" She mumbled, still pasty. For a moment, a stupid beatific smile floated upon her face. Even if she saw more than her fair share of fairies since she came to Neverland, she had spent so many years hoping to get a glimpse of one that seeing a fairy today was always a benediction to her eyes. Suddenly, she came back to herself and felt embarrassed. She had been staring at that fairy, which was very rude.

"Oh, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to be rude!" The fairy, a small blonde with delicate wings, seemed indeed irritated enough. But Jane didn't have time to extend her apologies that already she had thrown onto her a pinch of golden powder.

Jane understood right away. She was helping her get out of this ship! Already, she was feeling her body lifting in the air, ready to follow her. When, suddenly, she felt something bite inside her, stopping her flight. Guilt, she realized.

"Oh, come on! Not now! Not when I finally get my chance to leave this damned ship!"

Of course, had Jane been the heroine of a movie, she would probably have done the right thing. She could have stayed aboard, would have worked hard to show she was to be trusted. Just one thing to do – stay aboard, and she would finally be part of the crew.

Except believing that was simply lying to herself. As much as she wished it, she would never be fully accepted on board – and for too many reasons. And her wish for freedom was much greater. After all, whatever she would do, she'd always be a stranger, an annoying burden that was to be kept until Peter came back for her.

The irony was that Peter wasn't the one coming to save her. And the pirates weren't even here.

Dismissing the last bit of guilt to replace it with happy thoughts, she lifted in the air for good. Following the best she could the small flicker of light flying towards the island, Jane finally reached the coast and the sand – so warm and welcoming. She took a deep breath, and then she looked back, at last. Beyond her, the Jolly Roger seemed so small that she could almost take it and crush it into her fingers. And this was what had retained her for so long?
"Aaaargh!!"

"Anything wrong, Jane?"

"Anything wrong? It's the fricking fith dragonfly that utterly refuses to be drawn! If it goes on like this, I swear I'm going to throw everything in the river and -"

"Come, Jane, you can put your notes aside for the moment. You better come on now, Talutah has prepared her famous salmon recipe for dinner!"

When Jane had left the Jolly Roger, she found Peter waiting for her on the shore. They met with joy and shared their adventures – especially Peter; exchanged the latest news – especially Peter; when he finally explained to her that when he saw the pirates on the island, he remembered her and sent the fairy (named Mirmeille) to look for her. Was that a form of respect towards the maternal figure she incarned or just a pure form of affection? She would never truly know.

They came back to the Boy's secret lair – Jane met the new Lost Boys. Some had disappeared; according to Peter, he had simply 'lost them along the way'. The ones she knew seemed to have grown up: Tiny Tom wasn't so tiny anymore, but he was the only one who remembered her and her stories.

Soon, life followed its flow once more, and Jane found herself playing endlessly with the Lost Boys again. But, more and more, Jane started to let her thoughts ramble; she got easily distracted now, and therefore got beaten to most of the games they played. Some kind of boredom grew within her; without her noticing, she was paying less attention to the kids. As if her role of mother was wearing her. They noticed it when she told the same bedtime story twice.

Sometimes, she looked back to her life before: she compared the life she led with the pirates and the one she led now. She regretted none, and was satisfied with what she had today. Yet, the days passed by and she was waiting for something that was never to happen if she stayed here. Always, the boys were fighting against the pirates, the pirates were fighting against the Indians, and Jane got along with whatever friendships that Pan and the boys made and unmade.

She looked at the boys as they were running along the room, chasing a mouse that unluckily stepped into their playground. If it came out alive, the poor thing would never recover. Then, Jane stood up and left the room unnoticed. The silence soothed her and she cleared all of her thoughts. For reasons she couldn't choose to ignore anymore, she realised she wasn't able to live with the children the same way as before. Or come back to the pirates. She was tired. Tired of having to be part of a single clan.

Tired of this cats-and-mouse game between the pirates, the Indians, the boys... This game that wore her. She didn't want to choose a side anymore.

How could she accept to repeat the same actions everyday? Had she not come to Neverland to escape the horrifying monotony of her homeworld? Around her, the island was glowing in a reassuring blue light as the stars were shining bright. Never had the unknown hidden deeply in the woods seemed so welcoming. She made her decision.

She explained herself with the Lost Boys. They let her go without much protest, much less than when she first left them. This time, since she wasn't joining the pirate's side, her fate suddenly seemed less interesting. No ennemies ahead? Why, she could do whatever she wanted; anyways, she
got boring these last few weeks. She could still visit them from time to time, even if she highly doubted that the next time she would come along, they wouldn't remember her much. Then, she gathered everything she owned and left in the morning.

Since she left Peter, Jane had been rambling, venturing all around the island for months – maybe even a whole year, if she counted well enough.

She glanced at her hair – when she had arrived to Neverland, they were shoulder-length. Now, they had grown down to her elbows. This vague indication helped her to somehow have a temporal reference. But how fast was hair supposed to grow anyway? For what she knew, she might as well be 19, 20, or even 21, now. But all of this didn't matter much, she shrugged.

When she left Peter, she simply walked straight in front of her. In the backpack that the boys had kept for her, she collected enough to live and exchange what was superfluous.

But the most useful tool in her adventure had been Hook's notebook. First of all, the map helped her a lot; but also some notes indicated what fruits could be eaten, where she could find water sources, what tracks she could follow safely.

She had wondered a lot about the notebook. It stopped straight in the middle of a drawing; however, she found it well resting deep down a heavy chest. As if something had stopped him in the middle of his reasearches. And it was easy to guess what it was. When Hook lost his hand, he probably stopped his census of Neverland's wonders – since his Nemesis appeared.

During the first days of her wandering, she had slept wherever she could, mostly under the night sky or safe inside a cave. Then, she met along the way some diverse Indian tribes – and, just like that, she found herself spending days or weeks with them. During winter – when Peter left and the whole island was asleep – they gladly shared their tents, their food. In exchange, she taught them songs and stories straight up from her homeland.

As for her, she started to note mechanically into Hook's notebook what she had learned out there: what were their traditions? Their dialect? Their typical diet? And so on. At first, she did feel a little guilty to add her own writing alongside Hook's, in this notebook that wasn't hers; but then, she decided that it was much better to carry on the completing of the book instead of letting it rot inside a chest.

She loved to stay at the Indian's, but ever since her prolonged sojourn at the Jolly Roger, Jane couldn't bear to stay at the same place for too long – so she went on the road again, and the notebook expanded.

Once, she went to place that even Peter and the Lost Boys had never shown her: the Pirate's harbour. After spending most of her time in the woods, what a shock it was to discover this part of the island, dominated by men! This reminded her of her life before – the real life, if she dared to put it that way. She ventured here and there, listening to what stories the pirates had to say without lingering for too long. One day, Jane dared to stay longer in a pub. However, hearing the name of a Jolly Roger mate, Jane thought it would be safer to leave right away. Later, she had exchanged and old keyring she found in her bag (a plastic fairy, but she convinced the buyer that it was a real fairy that got cursed) against a large hooden cape – quite practical to walk around unnoticed.

After that, Jane never really dared to come back to the port, preferring the quiteness of the jungle to the human pother.

Jane never felt so alive, so free and independant. Her life with the Lost Boys was ruled by Peter, her life with the pirates was ruled by Hook, and now she was the only master of her life.

At this point of the story, Jane started to make a census of the animal life on the island – a hard task, she had to admit. Why did she do it? She didn't know herself, but it gave her current life a meaning; a
reason to get up each morning, a new discovery to be made everyday.

While she was having a hard time drawing the dragonfly, she had already been staying in Tiger Lily's tribe for a few days. She already got along them when she was with the Lost Boys, and today she was a kindly welcomed guest.

Taking her salmon serving, she installed herself by the fire. Tiger Lily was enthroning upon the assembly, high in her honorary seat – she had inherited the power from being the most fierceosome warrior of the clan. Not only was she the daughter of the chief, but she also possessed her own qualities, and that Jane respected as much as anyone.

"Jane, what did you add in your notebook today?"

It was Talutah, Lily's younger sister. It seemed that if Lily had inherited the hot temper of a true chieftain, she left to Talutah a fairness of heart and a serene temper. To be honest, Jane was more at ease with Talutah than with Lily. Even if she had a common physique, she possessed those deep, soothing black eyes that seemed to fathom one's soul without ever judging. The opposite, somehow, of her big sister. Lily was of a beauty that could have been sang in ancient Greece – but her eyes were dark and severe, and she couldn't lay her eyes on you without making you feel considered for all your unspoken crimes.

"Not much, I'm afraid" sighed Jane.  
"Oh, come on, please show me anyway." You couldn't refuse anything to that sweet girl.

Jane handed the notebook over to her. For the hundredth time, the girl browsed through with an unconcealed excitement – she loved, most of all, the drawings of landscapes and animals. One day, she had stopped onto the drawings of the pirate's harbour, intrigued.

"Did you ever meet pirates, Jane?" she asked her then.  
"More than I should have! And I even met..." she mimed the unfamous hook with one hand. The young girl didn't hide her emotion to this confidence.  
"The whole tribe keeps on repeating me that he's by far the most dangerous pirate of all. Oh, Jane, is that true that he has sharpened teeth and eyes that shoot fire?"

It was Jane's turn to be flabbergasted. Throwing her head back, she had laughed heartily until she couldn't breathe.

"But..." she answered between two hiccups, "but no, far from it! It is true he's dangerous, but you can't see that in his appearance..." There, she had stopped a moment, her chin buried in her palm as she always did when she got thoughtful.

"Actually, it's more in his presence that there's something dangerous; almost animal; almost feline..." Jane paused, looking for the right words. "However, he still has got some kind of dignity that's reminding of the British aristocracy, I think... Oh well! You'll get that soon enough if you ever meet him one day."

Talutah opened her eyes as wide as she could. "Oh! But I don't ever want to meet him one day!". Jane tried to reassure her.  
"Don't you worry! He's not that terrible. If that can comfort you, I read that he also has a sensitive side. For instance, he can play the harpsichord."

"Even with a hook instead of his hand?"

"Crazy, right?"
Which left Talutah silent for a long while. She started again: "Well tell me, Jane, if he doesn't have fiery eyes or sharpened teeth, how is he?"
It seemed strange for Jane to describe the captain. For her, the captain was, and that was all you needed to know. She thought for a while, trying to find the exact words that could picture Hook. "Well," she began, "he has those very very blue eyes – like forget-me-nots, actually. He also has long, curly – or more like messy! - black hair... A finely trimmed beard... Regular and thin features... A perfectly normal dentition, just so you know... And, do I have to add he has a hook instead of a right hand?"

"Mm. So, he doesn't look this terrifying." And she added in a lower and playful tone: "Even a little handsome, from what you're saying!"

"Handsome..." That was quite a new word to describe Hook! To her, he had always been a challenger, an opponent she could confront in mind and manipulation games – the body didn't matter in all of this. But, now that Talutah was pointing it... "Yes, perhaps. But you know, I haven't seen him in a while; I couldn't confirm that now!"

"Well anyways, it almost makes me want to see him for real, this time!" concluded Talutah, laughing.

She had currently finished to browse through Jane's notebook.
"Hey, you missed the dragonfly, here."
"Oh! Please, don't talk to me about dragonflies, I've had enough of it for the day!"

The dinner was over, and the oldest stayed by the fire to share the smoking pipe as the dean of the tribe told the forgotten myths and legends inherited from their ancestors.

Jane got back to her tent, trying not to think too much of her discussion with Talutah.
Complications at hand

"Where is Talutah?"
"I don't know... What's going on, Lily?"

Jane didn't get an immediate response; Lily had already left to ask someone else. For the first time since she had first met her, the usually cold and controlled princess seemed lost and unable to get a grip on her emotions – which is how Jane understood that only one thing could generate such a state.

Talutah had been missing.

"Lily! Wait up! I'll help you find her!" was her first reaction.
"And how do you intend to do that?" was the princess' answer, walking at a fast pace, unable to fix her attention onto a single precise thing.
"Well, where's the last place she's been seen? I have my notebook, I could start some researches and put some marks around the area where -"
"Great. You do that." Lily stopped for a second at last to face Jane. "She went salmon-fishing at the Red River this morning. I'm going to inspect the opposite edge of the river."

Jane ran to the river, followed it. Calling Talutah at the top of her lungs, without ever recieving any answer, her fear for her friend only increased. As she was leaving to inspect another part of the territory, she stopped, feeling something under foot. Lifting it slowly, she found what she feared: an object belonging to Talutah – her blue stone necklace.

Jane passed hours hoping to find any sign to prove that the young girl was still alive, and if so, where she was. As her muscles grew sore and the day was losing of its brightness, she realised bitterly she wouldn't find anything for now. Panic was too strong and she couldn't lead a reasonable tracking. Returning to the village, she prayed that someone had been more successful than her and had found Talutah.

Another kind of suprise was expecting her. A gathering had occured around the hunters of the tribe. They had found something, or more precisely someone. This someone was bound and gagged and seemed quite flustered at the moment. And she knew this someone only too well.

"We found him roaming 'round the camp!" shouted one of the hunters.
"That's this cursed captain of the Jolly Roger!"
"Kill him! It's surely because of him our Talutah's been missing!"

Jane assisted, powerless, to the growing swarming of the tribe: from any side, they were hoisting up a totem, bringing rope to tie Hook to it, wood to start a bonfire out of him... And, this, without letting him emit a single protest; without even according him any form of a trial. The infatuation of the masses made every person with common sense go blind with fury. The amiant dander, the shouts, the anger and the war cries smothered this place usually so calm and peaceful, snapped up the whole world. The chaos made Jane react half a second before she, too, yielded to this inexorable madness. She had to put an end to this furious folly. She ran up to Tiger Lily, who assisted to the whole scene from her throne.

"Lily! Lily! - - Princess! Make them stop!"
"This man must pay for his crimes, Jane."
"I know, but if you're so sure the pirates have Talutah, shouldn't we use him as a ransom against her?"
The princess didn't even bother to look at her and was still observing her men preparing the execution. In her eyes was reflected the hideous desire of vengeance. In desperation, Jane couldn't help but shout. Put an end to this furious folly.

"If he's killed, we'll never find Talutah alive!"
Lily gave her a final sharp look, and, not saying a word, raised straight from her seat. She only had to lift her arm – and her men to freeze. The world became clear once again.
"Jane. If such is your idea, go see this man and ask him if he has any information about Talutah. Should he have none, we will carry on the execution."

Jane took a moment to understand the favour that was made to her. In her desire to stop a cold-blooded murder, she got carried away – and almost overstepped the boundaries. She had no right to judge the customs of the clan which hosted her.
"This seems fair" was all she could answer, flabbergasted. The words they had exchanged had been in a low tone enough so that no one else could hear.

With an uncertain stance, she turned to face the mob and took a step towards the fallen captain. The crowd before her seemed to split up like the Red Sea before Moses, only making her nervousness worse. Hook was tied up to the totem, a gag across his face. However, just like a proper Englishman, he intended to maintain as much dignity as possible when one is in such position. Jane found herself facing him, and the world around her was silenced.
Instead of taking off his gag right away, she took a moment to consider him, arms crossed before her. There was the man who had not ceased to try to use her as a bait: the roles were reversed. He held no more power over her. But as for her...

Slowly, she raised both her hands up to his face and them behing him, looking for the knot which obstructed his words and undoing it. The gag slipped along his cheek and remained in her hand. She didn't lower it right away, but let it linger a moment, her fingers barely even touching his jawline. They stayed like this for a while, staring straight into each other's eye, trying to determine who would waver first.

It was the first time she rediscovered Hook, and in circumstances far different from all the times he had an authority on her. Here and now, she was his equal, or even his superior. Looking straight into his bright blue eyes, she read what she expected: he was himself aware of this switch of roles.

"Hell, Hook. It's been a while." He didn't reply.
"I took off your gag, now" she said, showing the strap of cloth recumbant in her hand. "You can talk."
The obstinant captain was holding on quite well. She carried on:
"Tell me where you've taken Talutah, and you're free."

Hook looked away from Jane to consider the rest of the assembly. His gaze swept over the mob and came back onto her, then gestured to Jane to get closer.

"They won't let me go anyways, isn't it?" he whispered. The tone was disdainful, almost mocking. She could indeed see the shadow of a smile tugging on the corner of his lips. Hook seemed to entirely control the situation, which intrigued her – as much as it irritated her. How could he show such bravado in a moment like this?

"I don't think so, no." she answered, even lower, a smile menacing to appear at the corner of her own lips. She shouldn't show it, but the return of the captain's nonchalance was actually amusing her. She had said those words in a secret tone, but in a light voice. As if she had accepted to be play of game. Strangely enough, she wasn't worried about the captain's fate; something in her told her that he wouldn't die today. Not like this.
"Very well." He spoke louder, to ensure everyone could hear him: "I know where your Talutah is hidden; however, I'm the only person alive who knows how to get to her. If you wish to see her alive and well once again, I'll have to be escorted to her."

A murmur raised amongst the indians. Shouldn't we make a bonfire out of the captain tonight? As for Jane, she couldn't help but smile, her arms still crossed. She slightly lowered to the captive's side: "I've got to admit, well played here, Hook. But you're aware of the fact they'll kill you as soon as you've lead them to Talutah, right? And that's assuming you're not lying."
"Which is why you'll be the one escorting me to their dear missing one."
"What?!" Jane reacted immediately, in shock. She smiled no longer, and had taken a few steps back out of surprise.

Hook simply addressed her a crocodile smile and turned from her to say louder:
"Oh, and I forgot: I'll only be escorted by this fine young lady right here" , he said as he designed Jane before she could protest.
"And why is that, pirate?" replied Lily.
"Hey, yes, why is that, if you please?" added Jane, filled with reproach and suspicion.
"Well, get my point: too many times your tribe intended to kill me – and this lady here, not once. You should give her the chance, to change."
"Ah! Now that is not a relevant reason, isn't it Lily? … Lily?"

Jane gave a panicked glance back to Tiger Lily. Ignoring her silent calls for help, the princess decided for her right away. "Deal."
"What?" Jane was out of control. "Princess! That's clearly, highly suspicious, and -" The proud chief had stepped out of her throne and was already leading Jane out of the circle to speak to her in private.

"Jane, listen to me carefully. Once Talutah has been liberated, you will take this weapon" – she put a knife into her hand – "and you will kill that man." Jane's heart skipped a beat.
"It's out of the question!"
"Why not? You know he deserves it."
"I know that as much as anyone, but I am not a killer!"
"You don't know, you've never tried."
"Well, I don't intend to try it any time soon! I'm sorry, princess: I will escort him and bring Talutah back to you, but my duty ends here. I truly estimate your tribe and thank you for this friendship that binds us, but I will never commit a cold-blooded murder." She handed the knife back to Lily in a sign of utter refusal.

Lily contemplated her for an instant, judging her sudden weakness with her cold chieftain look. "Very well. This is your decision; I must respect it. You already help us greatly."
"Really?" Jane was dubious. "That's it? You're not even mad?"
"That's it."

At this moment was brought to them Hook, who had been untied from the totem but was kept securely tied up to avoid any impromptu rebellion. For a man who was bound up and surrounded from every angle by enemies, he seemed too at ease. This damned arrogant.

The thorn in his side, Hook had concluded. That's what this damned Jane had been these last months.

She arrived upon his ship with her own, strange and infuriating ways, yet never seemed out of place. She made it seem that wherever she went, she was at home. As if she belonged here; except she didn't. She did not belong to this society; neither the pirate's nor the Lost Boy's society.
When Hook first arrived to Neverland, he had tried so hard to keep his Etonian manners amongst the range of fools that surrounded him. It resulted in him being the greatest pirate of them all, of course; but still, he would never enjoy the highest society's delights ever again. He had to make a choice and to deny a part of himself. Never was Hook ever to be accepted fully for what he was, wherever he went. Should he decide to come back to England, he would forever be the mischievous and not-to-be-trusted pirate who could never regain his lost noble prestige; should he stay, he would remain the literate Etonian who commits evil deeds with lower classes fellows. Always, choices were to be made; and that was good form - or what he believed was good form.

Yet, she arrived. And the way her very being presented itself was always made with such an ease... She never had, or so it seemed, to deny a part of herself. She was always fully Jane, staying true to her beliefs, despite being an adult fully aware of society's harsh regulation - which precisely made her so damned annoying. She was the living proof that his beliefs about good form – and this stayed across his throat – could actually be wrong.

This woman, this adult, who remained able to move in any social circle, to be accepted there, without making any sacrifice, was a permanent reminder that Hook might not truly possess good form. Had Peter Pan never existed, he might just have elected her as his sworn enemy for what she represented.

When she first made herself at home aboard his own ship, he couldn't help but hope he could become someone noble again – to regain his lost reputation to the eyes of someone who never met him. She brought with her some part of his old world, where social order was the watchword. Surely, he could feel like a noble Etonian once again? This was not the case. She was too stubborn, of course, and quickly branded him as a villain as well. So here he was, assigned back to his shameful ways, the proper Englishman in him buried once more underneath the heavy coat of piracy.

When she actually tried to play him, he knew he had placed false hopes in her. He, the great captain, to be played by a foolish foreign girl! She was mistaken to believe she ever had this power. He tried to hide her from his sights when she betrayed him once, but she managed to come back and be part of the crew once more. Truly horripilant. He surely didn't miss her when she was gone; although now was also gone his levrange to capture Pan. But getting rid of her was actually just as much as a victory, he decided. Of course, he couldn't show this to his crew. But she did remain present in his crew's memories, and too often to his taste he heard her name appear admist a conversation. This did not please him. How dare she gain reputation; her, a futile little thing?

And here she was, in front of him. Once again, instead of just dying like any proper brat should, she managed to come back on top; probably in the most insidious way. He had rather hoped she got eaten by a tiger, but instead she had gained support from another kind of Tiger, who appeared to be the leader of the Indians. Once again, her natural ability to get everyone in her pocket was most irritating.

As he saw her, he thought he should simply kill her right away. He had no more obligations that tied him up – no more Smee to defend her, nor keeping her alive for Pan to come... But this time, he was being literally tied up. The killing would be for later, then. For now, he had to act elegantly. Just as a true Etonian would.
Shifting grounds

She waved goodbye to her friends one last time before finally starting this new journey. Waiting until they had gotten far away from the camp, she at last broke the silence and started talking to Hook.

"All right, Hook. Why are you acting like you're so happy to be here? What's your plan?" This had been at the top of her mind ever since she had so unorthodoxically came across him a few hours ago. His answer did not please nor reassure her.

"Believe it or not, but I may not have such thing as an evil plan in mind. Have you considered the fact I simply enjoyed the pleasure of your company?" replied Hook while granting her a smile he probably expected to be charming.

If someone could ever roll their eyes so much as if they intended to see the sky through their skull, it might resemble very closely to Jane's reaction. Tilting her head to the left with the "shut up or I'll skin you alive" expression painted across her features, she gave a the biggest sigh of annoyance before replying. "Now, we both know that's not true. I only remember too well how our last exchange went." Images of the horrible dinner they were forced to share in the captain's cabin resurfaced. She shrugged them off.

"Do you actually have any idea as to where is Talutah?"
"You offend me quite, Jane. I do believe I am a man of my word!"
"Only when it suits your interests..." she replied, a disgusted look on her face.
Hook took a mock-shocked expression, gasping like a bad theatre actor would, for the sake of annoying her a little bit more. "Why, I have to admit, I was mistaken, Jane. Your company isn't as pleasurable as I first said. What I do remember for sure is that you used to be less of a sour little lady in my company." Jane couldn't help but snort back at the remark.

"Well, being under your direct threat all the time didn't allow me this pleasure."
"Rejoice, then! You're not anymore. Come away, then, say all the nasty things you've been burning to throw at me for so long."
"It'll be my pleasure, as soon as you've told me where Talutah is hidden."

Hook stepped ahead and turned around to face her, taking relaxed steps backwards, causing Jane to slow down.

"I'll make you a deal. I'll tell you where she is, and you'll be telling me, well, how about – how you managed to survive since you've been gone? I'm quite curious about that."

Jane stopped abruptly, now angrily tugging on her end of the rope which bound the captive.
"For heaven's sake, Hook, what the hell is your deal? What does it matter to you anyway? I swear, stop trying to mess with me, pirate, or I'll throw you to the first crocodile we come across – or any beast with a large enough appetite to digest your immense self-conceit, and I'll find Talutah myself!"
Hook raised his eyebrow, a smile at the corner of his mouth. He took a step towards her. "Come, come, Jane, I cannot help myself – I love to see your angry little face turning red. Now, as to where your Talutah is -"
Then, out of the blue, he threw himself onto Jane, trying to throw her off balance and escape. But Jane had been faster and had taken a step aside, which caused Hook to fall on his elbow. She refrained from kicking him in the gut, but drew the sword they had taken from him instead.

"Now, I'm telling you again, don't try to trick me into trusting you. Next time you'll attempt a trick like this, I will kick the air out of you." As he helped himself back up on his feet, she kept her distance, just to make sure he didn't try anything foolish again. Of course, she wouldn't kick him in the gut – she had seen enough movies to know it was the perfect occasion for him to free himself from her and hoped she knew better than that.
"Maybe I missed your bitterness after all" he said, finally standing thanks to a tree providing him the support Jane wouldn't offer. "Wish I could say the same thing."
"You're lying, my dear."
"Just shut up and lead me to Talutah."
Glancing at her with another sarcastic smile, he only muttered a smug "as my lady wishes" before they started to move on. Although he was captive, he was acting way too casual to her liking. Which was definitely not a good thing.

For a while, they just walked straight ahead, Jane keeping her eye on Hook's back as she followed him silently. She didn't actually believe he would be leading her into some kind of trap; since he had not been rescued at the Indian's camp, his crew probably had no idea as to where he was right now. Also, from what she had learnt during her stay on the Jolly Roger, the pirates were not ones to install camps on the Indian's territory. As long as they remained within its borders, she was safe. But now, Hook was leaving the main path and started to venture left, then right, until she realised they had completely left the track.

"All right, Hook" she stopped dead, forcing the captain to turn around and face her. "Where in the name of Neverland are we going?"
"Well, believe it or not my dear, I do have a clue as to where Talutah is hidden. Which is where we are currently headed."
Until now, she hadn't been really sure he had been telling the truth about Talutah. Now, she was a bit comforted about it – but not entirely. She could never be entirely comforted as far as Hook was involved.
"Well, that is reassuring – but could you describe the exact place we're going, now?"
"Thought you might ask." He paused, letting the suspense flow for a few heartbeats, before continuing.
"You see, every now and then, we pirate captains of Neverland have this little challenge. You must understand now, things do get dreary around here, especially when Pan isn't around... Therefore it is only natural that after a couple of pints, some of us wish to have a distraction. Sometimes, it might just be a duel to death between two boasting pirates – always amusing, but not really... imaginative. So, a few days ago, a fellow named Matthew Bowen – captain of The Red Witch - came up with this interesting competition." Jane took a deep breath, slowly understanding what Talutah's disappearance had been all about. Hook carried on.

"He would capture one Indian – an important one, not just someone no one cared about. Then, he would hide this person in a cave close to the Dead Man's creek. The first man who could deliver the captive would win – both money and fame. The three of us captains taking part in this competition would start around the Indian's camp. Of course, we would be on our own – getting help from our respective crews would have made the game too easy. Then, trying to get past the Indians without getting caught—"
"Which, you failed" couldn't help but interrupt Jane. He glanced coldly at her, and for a second she had to remind her he was tied up and she was safe from his lethal mood swings. He maintained the eye contact for a few more seconds before continuing.
"Yes, miss Jane, which I did. However, this was not completely unfortunate. You will help me win this competition."
"Excuse me, sir? I am not playing a part in this sick little arrogant game of yours, thank you very much!" She spat at him, not believing what she just heard.
"Oh, is that so? Therefore, you do not wish to help me free your dear Talutah?"
"Don't ask silly rhetorical questions! You did not seem so appreciative of my 'help' when you tried to escape earlier."
"It was but a fake attempt to consider your value. Consider this, Jane: had you failed this simple
attack, you wouldn't have been of any use when fighting to save your precious Indian princess, isn't it right?"

Jane simply produced a 'humph' of discontent. Oh, the dog! Even though she was at the right end of the rope, she felt as she were the one tightly tied up. Once again, she thought she was on top of the game, only to find out she would simply be used by this arrogant man. All of this for what? She had worried to death about Talutah, and she had been captured... For the sake of game, played out of boredom by the main pirate captains of the island! Feeling rather flustered at the moment, it took her while to calm herself down. The captain didn't make a move, silently observing her reactions. After a few minutes had passed, she had finally collected herself to say:
"Fine. What if we lose?"
"If I lose, someone else will get to decide of Talutah's fate. That would be, selling her back to the Indians, in the best cases. In the worst cases imaginable..."
Jane did not need to hear more. She shivered, before closing her eyes and opening them again slowly.
"We'll win."
"How could you be so certain of that, my dear? I don't believe we have a plan or -"
"We'll win." She stared at Hook with such defiance he almost took a step back. "I will not free you until we reached the Dead Man's creek." Nor will I be able to sleep or get a moment of rest. "I'll follow you. Let's go. Hurry up."

Hook did not object to tell her she was the one slowing them down, and did as he was told. He didn't care this much about the Indian's fate, but he did want to win this bloody competition. The creek could be reached before the end of the day, but they would probably need to stop at some point before arriving to the cave to recover. It was not unlikely they would have to fight once there. But for now, he had to endure the walk to the creek with Jane. As much as she could be a valuable asset in the fight yet to come, he couldn't help but feel twitches in his ghost right hand, meaning only one thing: he still wanted to kill her.
One thing at a time, now. Let us not rush this, he thought to himself.

They had been walking for a few hours and hadn't exchanged many words, as Jane was too preoccupied about Talutah. She was a good friend, and so full of joy and kindness. Even if fate hadn't been soft to her. Talutah's mother had died during a hunt that turned sour, and even if her sister Lily did not show it, she knew she grieved as much as she did. Soon, Lily tried to move on by learning how to be a great fighter; her rage served her well. But Talutah, being younger, couldn't fight yet, and with her father often gone to some raid or fight, she found herself being raised by the whole camp instead. From the elders, she learned patience; from the healers, she learned caring; but most of all, she learned love and sharing. No soul as kind as Talutah should have ever been exposed to what she was going through at this very moment.
Jane's joints grew white as she clamped her hands harder.

The sun was just starting to lower. Hook decided it would be time to stop and prepare themselves before their rescue mission was brought to an end. Jane couldn't help but agree as she felt her limbs grew sore and her stomach grew hungrier. The sound it made as they settled down against some trees did not fail to be noticed by Hook.

"I do hope you have brought some form of sustenance with you to remedy this issue, my dear." he said, rather hoping he could grasp something to eat as well.
He was not disappointed as she pulled a mango from her bag and threw it to him. The fruit fell to his lap and Hook managed to take it with his left hand. However, even if his hook could have been helpful in skinning the fruit, his wrists being tied limited his range of motion greatly. In fact, he couldn't do anything with his hand and hook at all. He slowly but obviously cleared his throat in
order to get Jane's attention. With a groan, she raised her head to accord him the attention he was requiring.

"I do not wish to fluster you, Jane dear, but it seems I'm unable to skin that damned fruit myself." As much as he hated asking for anyone's help, his hunger had gotten the best of him.

"Y'got a hook. Use it." It was the captain's turn to groan out of frustration.

"Unless you free me of these ropes, I wouldn't be able to move my hook even if my life depended on it. Which might just be the case, except if you do want to let me starve to death." Rolling her eyes to the skies as she had done so many times since the beginning of their journey, she got up while muttering something like "fine, don't be so over-dramatic".

Jane took a few steps forward and crouched in front of Hook, drawing a small knife from her boot. She took the mango from Hook's hand, her fingers conscientiously avoiding his, and started to take off its skin piece by piece. The captain hoped she would remain silent, but their current proximity made the silence heavier than when they had walked through the woods. Of course, she opened her mouth to speak.

"Y'know, Hook; you've changed your attitude since I left the Jolly Roger. Isn't that right?"

"As you said yourself – we are under different circumstances."

"So you mean you're acting so nonchalant because you're not giving me orders any longer? Usually, I would say someone tied up would actually be acting humbler." replied Jane, in the tone implying he wasn't fooling anyone.

Touché.

"If you ever thought I would be the humblest of captives, I am afraid you would be wrong."

"Hmph. You're right, of course." She paused for a second, thinking. "But still, all that smooth talk and manners of yours... One could think you're up to something." She stopped peeling for a moment to look straight at him. He did not give away any form of emotion. As she did not get anything from him, she went back to the peeling and the talking. "I do remember, last time you acted this smoothly, you only tried to make me trust you. 'fraid it won't work a second time here, captain."

Hook was going to have to say something, or she would be more suspicious of him than ever. He opened his mouth, but right at this moment her hand slipped and she cut the tip of her finger; blood followed soon after.

"Drat." She stopped and instinctively drew her finger to her mouth to bite the bleeding end and suck it lightly. Hook forgot what he wanted to say.

She looked around to find something to wrap her finger in, and without really knowing why – or maybe it was just because it was good form to do so – he proposed to offer his handkerchief. With her usual natural ease, she smiled and accepted the offer. She leaned in closer and extended her right hand to gently pull the fabric from his pocket.

However, her left hand was still drawn to her mouth and her crouched position did not help her balance. Before she could realize it, the treacherous ground had slipped under Jane's feet and she had fallen straight over the captain.

For both of them, the world stopped for half a heartbeat. But soon after, Jane realized that she layed in the most unwelcomed position – over Hook. She had instinctively put her forearms in front of her during her short fall, and they were now resting over the captain's chest. Her knees were cold, deep into the wet dirt. But moreover, she could feel she was sprawled between Hook's legs, one on each side of her. Rather distressed by the situation, she glanced up with a devastated look on her face, her cheeks pink with embarrassment.

The captain looked – if such thing were possible for a fearless pirate – just as taken aback as she was. In the range of half a second, he found himself crushed under the body of the young woman who had been holding him captive for the last few hours. A position rendered even more uncomfortable by the fact his wrists were tied up, in front of him, and right now her stomach was softly pressing against his hand and hook. He was, more than ever, unable to move.
He looked at Jane, who, at this precise moment, was the embodiment of embarrassment. Her face had taken a pinkish hue while her hair was messing around her face, a strand caught in her mouth. This view shouldn't have been pleasant. So he felt instantly angry with himself when he realised – he found it oddly attractive.

He grunted while trying to straighten himself back up and Jane tried got up as fast as she could, removing fast her hands from Hook's torso. Soon, she was on her feet, arranging her clothes and coughing just to make sure to break the awkwardness of the scene.

"I am" she started, recovering her knife and the mango that had rolled away, "so sorry". Unsure if she actually controlled her movements, she quickly put the knife back in her boot and put the fruit down next to Hook.

"That's all right" was all he could say. Had this happened upon his ship, he would have killed the person who would have dared to make him fall. But this was not his ship, and he was not free, and there was nothing else he could say but "No harm done", while cursing himself for it.

Jane grabbed her own fruit in her bag, and informed him:
"We'll reach the creek in about an hour. You better eat now." She then turned her heels abruptly and took a walk in the woods, leaving Hook alone so he wouldn't hear her heart still pumping violently in her chest.
Rescue mission

It was time to act.

Jane pulled sharply on the leather strap which held her sword. In a single movement, she fixed her bow and quiver in her back. Confidently, she slipped her knife in her boot after making sure it was sharp enough. Finally, she raised her eyes on Hook.

"Let's go."

He had no choice but to accompany her. Certainly, he would be released and freed only once this business was over. To Hook, that mission in which his holder was engaged in was nothing else but a game; the indian's fate didn't matter to his eyes. To lose was a sad outcome, assuredly, but he would know who to move past it; there wasn't much at stake to him. But the way the young Jane was preparing to the confrontation to come revived his taste for adventure, which he badly needed. Suddenly, to lose gained a whole new meaning, much heavier than to lose some gold coins gambled during alcoholic nights. Now, Hook was going double or quits. Oh, how the blood in his veins seemed to vivify!

He didn't entrust Jane with these sentiments on their way to the captive. She would have payed little, if none, attention to it. Her burning gaze was only fixed onto one thing: the Dead Man's Creek. Was she thinking about the other deaths that were to happen in this place?

Suddenly, he stopped.

"Shh. Careful, now. We are almost there." Jane and him would now progress guardedly.

"I know that. What's our plan of attack?"

"Plan of attack? I absurdly thought that you had taken care of the plannification. I am but your humble – and captive – guide." Hook couldn't help but to be willingly irritating whenever he had the chance. Piracy, amongst other things, tended to do that to a man. Jane had to refrain from groaning of frustration. Passing a weary hand onto her face, she inhaled deeply three times before resuming.

"Very well. Let's try to get closer and to analyse the site before we do anything else."

The path that the young woman and the pirate followed allowed them to have a perfect view upon the entry of the cave. Installed on a hill a few meters away from the place of the action, they hid behind bushes before starting to analyse the situation. Then Talutah appeared to Jane. The young girl was sitting, her hands and feet tied, guarded by two pirates at the entrance of the cave.

"It is most probably Sharp Will and Crazy Max... Two men belonging to Bowen's crew." Hook allowed this information to reach Jane before continuing. "If the allies of the organizer of the competition are still here and alive, we can suppose than we have arrived before the two other competitors."

"I can take care of two men. But if there's any other guards –" Bad thing to say. At this instant, two other men came out of the cave. The first man was a short but stocky one, a saber and sword on each of his sides. The second one, more stately and impressive, tattooed from head to toe but pale as death, was undoubtedly the captain of The Red Witch, Matthew Bowen, obviously ready to fight to keep his hostage. Heavy golden jewels suspended to his ears jingled with every step he took. Jane fixed the man whom she analysed quickly as being the most dangerous one. So that was he, the man who had the idea of this sick competition; the one who had captured Talutah.

But a man who also participated to this insane contest – and most joyfully – was at her side. She repressed the disgust that Hook inspired to her at this precise instant. She needed him, but couldn't admit it out loud. Not as long as she could avoid it.

"Four men, then. I can put down two of them from here with my bow. By the time the two others
arrive, I could maybe even get a third one. And I take care of the last one hand to hand.” Jane
announced her plan most determined but Hook repressed a disdainful scoff.
"Oh, Jane. Jane, I had no idea you cared so little for life." She didn't answer, but her eyes shot fire at
him. "Come, come, let us be realistic – I am certain that you are most precise with that little bow of
yours you got from the indians –"
"Do you want the proof of that, pirate?"
"– But you will never be fast enough to shoot a second arrow once you hit the first man. And believe
me, these men are fast; they know their ground. They will be upon us before you get the chance to
ready your bow a second time."

He was right. That damned pirate was right; even if she was rather accurate, the speed was
something she did not master yet. And as for the hand to hand combat, she actually didn't want to
think about it too much. She was ready, but against three pirates at the same time? Now she was
doubting her own capacities. Jane sighed heavily. There it was; she couldn't avoid it any longer.

"What are you suggesting, guide?" Hook gave her a pawky smile.
"Free me. I could lend you a hand... A single hand, surely, but a helpful one." It was Jane's turn to
repress from expressing all of her disdain.
"I suppose you can imagine why I am not particularly warming up to that idea."
"Certainly. But, on the other hand..." He stopped, got closer to Jane. "… what other choice do you
have?"

Jane swallowed but supported his gaze. Just as he supported hers. There wasn't any other way; she
knew it, and had always known it. The captain's help was the only one she had. Unfortunately, she
needed it to save her friend; friend who's only family loathed pirates entirely.

Slowly, so slowly, she slipped her knife out of her shoe. All was silent. Hook didn't move; he only
watched her movements. Bringing her blade to his bounds, she suddenly stopped. She tried to ignore
all doubt and all fear concerning the consequences of her acts.
"Hook..." Jane paused, and fixed intensely the pirate, almost begging. "Please, tell me I am not
mistaken to trust you."
All traces of smiling had vanished from the captain's features. All that remained were the piercing
blue eyes, answering silently to Jane's question.

In a single and sharp gesture, she cut his bounds.

For an instant, Hook only contemplated his limbs, now free. But then he looked up to Jane, a rictus
forming at the corner of his lips. Jane forgot how to breathe, frozen.

"Well? What are we waiting to save your Talutah?"

And Jane had to refrain from laughing out of relief.
"Very well" she started while handing back to him – with some regrets – his sword. Hook welcomed
it with a frank smile, as if he welcomed back an old friend. "I suggest that you go around the hill and
surprise them from behind, and attack hand to hand. Of course, it would be better to attack –"
"– only once you have started to shoot arrows at them" completed Hook. "A most common
technique, yet a reliable one."

Jane gave him a faint smile and shook her head to agree, before looking back at their enemies. Two
of them had gone back into the cave, including Matthew Bowen. She would have wanted him to be
his first target, but she'd have to do otherwise. Sliding her bow from her shoulders and pulling out an
arrow, she drew a deep breath. Her position was rather advantageous, but... It was her first
experience of real and planned fighting. This, she couldn't admit it to Hook and could only hope she
would do her best.
The captain glanced at Jane a last time. The young woman was obviously lacking of experience. How did she even manage to survive on her own since she left the Jolly Roger? Sweat was running along her temple and her hands were almost trembling as she bended her bow. But in her eyes, one could read the purest determination. Lips narrowly closed, she breathed slowly, ready to act. Something in Hook almost made his heart skip a beat. Not saying a word, he quickly slithered through the forest's shadows and left to rejoin the cave.

Jane was alone. In the anticipation of the conflicts, her senses seemed to increase. She could feel the wind on her face to the most extreme degree; the contact of the dirt on her skin was almost welcoming, reassuring. Without realising it, she suddenly felt whole; she was one with the elements around her. She was ready, she understood. Far off, she caught sight of Hook sliding along the rocks of the cave. Her arm reaffirmed her hold on the bow's string. She adjusted her aim on the pirate – Crazy Max – to Talutah's left.
A breath. And the arrow flew through the air.

The pirate ramed the ground in a loud thud that Jane almost didn't hear. The man laid on the soil, hunched, his hands on the arrow planted in his leg; only his painful scream brought Jane back to her senses. Quickly, she drew another arrow and got ready as Hook came into action. He reached the second pirate before he even knew where the attack was coming from. The sword flung through the air and cut the man in his side. Before leaving him the chance to parry the attack, Hook had already knocked him unconscious with his sword hilt. Had Jane been standing close to the action, she would have heard the crashing of some teeth as he fell to the ground. He carelessly kicked the pirate's body out of the way and got ready to attack the third pirate. Jane braced herself for the arrival of Matthew Bowen, who soon came out of the cave, alarmed by the chaos reigning outside. More menacing than ever, the pirate seemed happy to finally be able to fight somebody. His teeth glistened and his eyes gleamed with pure viciousness.
She steadied her bow and shot, fast, too fast. A second arrow flew across the air... To crash against a rock a few feet away from the captain of The Red Witch.
She was discovered. The piercing evil eyes of the pirate spotted her immediately and her blood seemed to freeze in her own veins. She only had two more arrows. She took one out, in a single breath, as Bowen headed towards her. Only a few more meters...
She did not choose to be merciful, like with the other pirate. She did not have the time nor the luxury for that. The arrow headed straight towards her enemy's face; for half a heartbeat, she thought she had won. But the captain bended just at the right time; the arrow struck a target, ending its course in a pirate's back – the pirate whom Hook was fighting. But Matthew Bowen was still alive, and more furious than ever. An axe in one hand, a knife in the other, he was heading decidedly towards Jane.
She wasn't out of arrows but out of time. She could only flee.
She rolled out of her hiding spot and circled the side of the hill, putting as much distance between Bowen and her. She only had her knife, so she ran to the pirate still screaming out of pain because of the arrow stuck in his leg to steal his sword. Now, she should rely on the hand to hand combat... Even if she wished more than ever to avoid it. Bowen was obviously an experimented fighter; she could see it from the many scars covering his arms, regardless of his numerous tattoos.

The pirate's saber was caught in his many belts; Jane pulled, panicked, trying to get it out, in vain. She was losing any hope to get it when she heard behind her the sound of a weapon slicing through the air. Giving up the saber, she rolled on her side, Bowen's axe striking down violently on the ground, at the exact same place Jane was half a second ago. The axe was extracted from the ground and fell onto her once again; Jane avoided it one more time. But she couldn't keep on going like this for long. She was on the ground, without any weapon to counteract his enemy's, and as long as she couldn't get up, she was vulnerable. The axe was raised up in the air a third time. Jane nearly closed her eyes... But heard the sound of metal going against metal.
Hook had come hand to hand with Bowen. Jane rolled out of their fighting zone to rush to Talutah and undo her bounds. Once freed, the young indian threw herself into her arms, tearing up, murmuring thanks in her native language as Jane was trying to catch her breath.

In front of her, the two captains were fighting restlessly, axe against sword, but also punching, biting, kicking each other. Jane broke the embrace to look at Talutah, making sure she was well. But at this instant, an horrified look seized the young girl's features, staring at something behind Jane. Before she could even realize it, Talutah had taken the knife from Jane's hands. In a single and assured motion, she propelled the knife which struck its target in a smack, followed by the sound of a body hitting the ground. Jane turned around to see a last pirate, a few feet away from her, the knife planted between his eyes, his own saber slipping from his hand to fall on the ground in a loud clink. An ultimate sound of metal was heard; the sound, almost musical, of a sword sliding against skin, cutting flesh. Matthew Bowen, undone, collapsed on the ground, last enemy of this battle. Jane and Talutah stared at Hook – the rage upon his face, his red eyes blending with the scarlet smeared onto his features. None said a word, and only the whining of Crazy Max broke the silence. Hook was approaching him when Jane perceived movement behind the captain – a fast but silent movement. From the forest hastened a man, his tomahawk headed straight towards the captain's skull.

Jane didn't think. With a bound, she leaped onto the pirate and pushed him away bluntly, to deviate him from the deathly circle traced by the indian's axe. It swept close to her own head. Hook, now aware of the danger, was already getting up, ready to counter attack.

A cry resounded in the creek. Talutah rushed to the indian, stopping his arm. Hook and Jane remained frozen in front of the scene, only capable of observing.

"Brother, I forbid you to harm this man. He saved me, and saved Jane, our friend." Jane recognized the indian, no other than Aketcheta, the hunter from Lily's tribe. He seemed rather skeptical and protested immediately.
"I personally received from our chieftain the order to get rid of this pirate once you would be out of harm's way" he responded, designating Hook. Jane took this information like a blow to her heart. This was why Lily had allowed her to leave so easily when she had refused to kill Hook. She had found someone else to execute this task.

"Talutah, you know you cannot trust pirates" he added. "And you wouldn't disobey our leader." Aketcheta's tone was supposed to be compliant, but the hate he vowed to pirates could be felt within every inch of his being. However, Talutah had not said her last word.
"Our leader is most of all my sister, whom I know to be sometimes irrational and unjust. Refuse to execute her order won't deshonor you. I command you to put away your weapon and to bring me back to the clan. Enough blood has been spilled today."

The silence seemed to extend forever in the electrified atmosphere of the group. The young indian and Hook eyed each other scornfully for a long time. Jane swallowed hard. Finally, after much hesitation, Aketcheta finally put back his tomahawk in his belt and crossed his arms in front of him. He wouldn't forgive Hook, but had to respect Talutah's choice, or would have suffered the retaliation of her sister and leader. Without wanting to show it, Jane felt more relieved than she should have been.

"Thank you, Brother." As to Talutah, she didn't hesitate to show her relief and joy for being heard. "I would like to speak with Jane for a moment. You can go back to the forest, I'll be back soon."

Aketcheta nodded solemnly and regained the forest, but didn't forget to eye scornfully at Hook one last time, whom replied by lightly touching his temple in a mocking salutation. Jane and her friend walked a few steps away from the remaining carnage as the captain blithely picked the pockets of the victims.

"Jane, I could never thank you enough for what you did. If you come back to the camp with me, I'll
make sure you'll be covered with honor which you greatly earned." Jane blushed but quickly refused.
"You know you're exaggerating... Besides, I'm not the only one who delivered you." She glanced faintly at Hook and seized the opportunity to change the subject, talking about honors making her feel uncomfortable. "There, you've met the terrible captain Hook" she carried on, lower. "So, what about his pointy teeth, his eyes that shoot fire?" she said, winking teasingly to her friend. It was Talutah's turn to blush.
"You were right, I've been silly to believe this nonsense..." Then, unable to refrain herself, she added: "Besides, your description was rather accurate... Except you forgot to precise that he didn't lack charm, for a pirate!"
Jane looked dumbfounded and embarrassed for an instant, but then allowed herself to giggle like a schoolgirl with Talutah. She had been missing her.

Farther, Hook heard the laugh of the young girls as he pulled the purse of gold from Sharp Will's belt. He contemplated the young indian, but most of all, Jane. Decidedly, Hook wasn't sure he recognized himself anymore. He had swore he would kill the impetuous brat as soon as he could... And what did he do? He saved her in the middle of a fight! What madness had seized him? He was used to skin and murder anyone at any time, especially people who had frustrated him. To see a bit more blood wouldn't have bothered him. Hook remained pensive for a while, visibly vexed by his own inconsistancy. Finally, he decided that saving her had been profitable, after all. Jane dead, the young indian would certainly not have stopped the tomahawk to slice his skull wide open. That's when Jane and Talutah came back to the captain. The young indian was the first to speak to him.
"Despite the conflicts between our tribe and the people of your... career, I most sincerly thank you for your efforts deployed today." Jane had avoided to tell her the truth about her kidnapping and the competition. Enough unpleasant things had happened already. Talutah then turned to Jane.
"I regret that you won't come back with me. Are you certain?"
"Yes. I need a little change of air, I believe. You know I don't like to linger for too long." Talutah smiled softly and assured she would always be welcomed in the tribe. The two friends parted kindly. Jane watched Talutah as she rejoined Aketcheta in the forest. After waving her a last goodbye, she found herself alone with Hook. Both of them carefully avoided any eye contact.

"Hook... Thank you for earlier." He didn't reply. She waited for a few instants, then, realising he wouldn't say a word, started to move away. Then, she heard a discrete throat clearing.
"I return the thanks, Jane." Without turning back, she couldn't help but allow a little smile to appear on her lips. He showed, after all, good form.
"So... Have you won the competition?" She asked, despite her revulsion for that twisted game.
"It would appear that I have. This fifth and unexpected pirate –" he designated the man with the knife still stuck between his eyes – "was none other but the second competitor, who must have signed a pact with Bowen to unite against the two other participants." Seeing the shocked reaction on Jane's face, he added: "Why, this kind of practices is most common in piracy, Jane. It was rather foreseeable."
"What about the last competitor?" asked Jane.
"Most likely captured by an indian tribe and put to death, I suppose. It is not of any importance to me." However, Jane got the impression that they had not stopped to hear about that captain. A sensation which she dismissed rapidly when she saw a purse of gold exceed from Crazy Max's pocket. She rushed to take it. Seeing Hook slightly suprised expression, she explained, a smile tugging at the corner of her lips:
"So what? One cannot live with pirates for a few months without picking up some of their bad habits."
"And what would you do with that money, may I ask?"
Jane thought about it for an instant. To steal – no, to retrieve – money from ennemies was one thing;
to spend it was another. She had lived from barter exchange with the different Indian tribes for a long while and was used to be content with little. But now...

"Well, now that you know I'm alive, I guess I don't really have to hide anymore. I might as well spend this nice sum at the Pirate's docks. I think I'll go there immediately." She smiled. She could buy herself new clothes, books... Things she had denied herself for months.

Hook seemed hesitant. Seeing he wouldn't say why, Jane had to ask:
"What about you? Where will you be going, now?" Clearly embarrassed, Hook finally replied, with an annoyed tone:
"I was actually going to the docks as well, to celebrate this victory with my crew."

"Oh." Jane understood where the annoyance came from. She replied, embarrassed: "On second thought, I might not go immediately, but maybe in a day or two..." Truthfully, she had no other place to go and was dying for a hot bath, or even a comfortable bed. But she would rather avoid the embarrassment of another trip with the captain, whom she obviously annoyed. However, this scene was ridiculous, she thought. They had just saved each other's lives, but they preferred to avoid each other, and maybe even never meet again? Also, to be sincere, she didn't really want to travel alone once more. So she changed her mind.
"You know what? I may seem inconstant, but what do you think about traveling together? The docks must be only one day away from here."

Hook was taken by surprise. He didn't think her to be so persistent. She was offering on her free will to travel with him, him who nurtured the project to kill her because of her good form? This offer was both incredibly stupid and tempting. He didn't risk anything and could finally execute his plan. He accepted.

Jane and Hook left together towards the port after recovering their weapons – and some others. They did not notice the pirate observing them from afar, furious to have lost his opportunity to fortune and respect.
Tell me, Jane, why did you think going to the docks with Hook was a good idea again? Jane kept asking herself that question over and over until she forgot to look for an answer.

The man was awfully silent. She almost preferred it when he was openly annoying and teasing her in order to get out of his bounds. Now that he was free, he hadn't even bothered to open his mouth a single time in almost an hour, but what felt like four; Jane felt slightly frustrated by this. The more the time passed, the harder it got for her to think of something to say. She glanced quickly at Hook, who seemed lost in his thoughts. Almost as if he didn't remember she was here... Suddenly, she couldn't stand it anymore.

"Say, what is the point of traveling with someone if nobody says a thing?" Jane asked. It took a moment for Hook to frown and blink, and he finally turned to her, perplex. "What do you mean?"

"Well, you heard me. I asked if we could travel together because I was tired of traveling alone. I could use some company – yet now it feels just as if I were alone again."

"Oh. I see." Hook paused, yet did not stop walking, although he did slow down slightly. "I am afraid I am not used to travel for too long with the same person. Most of them bore me after a while – those who did are most likely to be found six feet deep by now." Jane felt a shiver running down her spine but tried to pretend it didn't happen.

"Come on. Was that a threat or are you just playing with me?"

Hook did not answer and carried on, leaving Jane a little behind and ill-at-ease.

It was when they finally sat down to eat that Hook opened up.

They were sitting in front of each other, the fire separating them. He was laid back against a tree, his left leg spread out before him. Jane, alert, sat with her legs crossed and her back straight up, just as she got used to with the Indians.

For a while, there was only the soothing silence of the night and the crackling of the fire. Jane chewed her piece of meat methodically when Hook opened his mouth to speak. "Tell me, Jane, what brought you to Neverland?" he asked, fixing his eye on her. She didn't reply right away, her face still. She lowered her food on her lap.

"Peter did. That's a silly question."

"I think you know what I mean, Jane." He paused. Jane was surprised; for the first time ever, he was showing some genuine interest about her life. She didn't look away from him, but did not give any sign of a response either. Before her stubborn silence, he continued. "Coming to Neverland at your age is a big enough commitment. You must be aware of that. Leaving the nest to Neverland, so old, yet still young... Something must have been driving you away. I wonder what."

"Try me" she simply answered. He obviously already had his own answer to that; he might as well say it.

Something shimmered in Hook's eyes. He paused for a while before revealing his theory. "You've been forced to do something you didn't want to. Not growing up, no – you were already quite advanced for that... Something that tied you up for the rest of your life." Jane's eyes glimmered; she was breathing hard, but still kept stoical. He let the moment float in the air for a while, sure of himself, before finishing his sentence. "You were escaping an arranged marriage."
Jane simply bursted out of laughter, leaving the captain lost for words. She laughed for a small moment, but when she finally stopped giggling, she was ready to explain the truth. "You came so close to guess the real thing!"
"Why, my deduction senses were always found to be quite accurate." He was visibly offended, which made Jane smile softly a little more.

She paused for a while, taking the moment in.

She had never laughed in his presence before. She suddenly realised that she was having a conversation with Hook; not one to bargain for her life or to try to trick each other; one that felt real. Something had changed – in a good way. Ever since they saved Talutah, the hostility between them had faded. He might chose to remain silent while they were traveling together, and even though she felt a little embarrassed, she did not feel threatened at all. Hook might be denying it to himself: she could see it in the way he still avoided her eyes sometimes, in the way he didn't speak to her during the trip. But try as he might, convincing himself she was still an annoying expandable human being wasn't working anymore. She didn't know when he would admit it to himself, but to her it was obvious: Hook was on a good path to become something else than an enemy.

"It's okay, you couldn't have guessed it anyways" she sat back more comfortably against the tree. "True, I was escaping something that tied me up – but not arranged marriage. It barely exists anymore – it still does, but not where I live. Also, for your information, people don't really get married at 16 – or whatever young age – so often anymore! No, well, um... I was escaping..." She paused. What had she been escaping from anyway? Going to a college she simply didn't like? Now that she had lived on the brink of life and death, it seemed like such a small deal.

She froze for a moment. She had escaped real life for an amazing fantasy life, for sure. But... Was it worth it? Wasn't it... ridiculous? She had acted like a scared little girl – and she probably was one, looking back. She was more afraid of college and future than fighting a puma in the jungle? That made no sense. She made no sense. What had she been thinking?

Hook could read the internal turmoil she was suddenly in. For a strange reason, he spoke to her, almost softly. "Is there anything wrong? Jane?"

She was brought back to the present, sitting in front of a fire on an enchanted island. "No.. Um, it's okay. I don't know what came over me." She cleared her throat several times before continuing. "I mean, I just realised – I'm ridiculous." She paused, expecting a bitter remark from Hook. But to her suprise, he didn't stir. "I escaped because... It seems I was scared of growing up, in a way. I couldn't bring myself to go to university and carry on life because I was uncertain of what I'd do next. Sure, it seems there is no future for people of my generation, and I might have ended up working somewhere I hated, but hey, I know by now – I could have gotten by. I shouldn't have escaped my responsibilities. Gosh, I was so stupid" she let out with a sigh.

Hook had not said a thing until she was done. Now she finally was, he didn't mock her as she expected. He turned his face away from the fire, not looking at anything in particular.

"Do you ever wish to come back?"

Jane raised her head and fixed him. He did not let out a hint of emotion, neither in his voice nor in his expression. But she felt that he should be melancholic, to ask such question. It took her a moment of reflexion before she could answer and decided she'd be honest.
"Yes. Sometimes. I actually miss my family here and then. But life here is keeping me so busy, I don't have time to have regrets. It's better this way." She tried to convince herself, but couldn't help but hear her voice breaking as she finished the sentence. She kept silent for a while, the crackle of the fire filling the emptiness of the air. "Do you?" she finally asked, looking straight at him. Instead, he shifted, and changed the subject.

"Tell me – what is it that scared you so about university? Do masters still bully their students?"
"What? No! I mean, they don't whip them for sure, for what I know..."
"Is it the dance classes, then? Do they still force you do deal with them? I hated this awful buisness. Disgraceful colleagues always used to step on my feet. Never figured whether they did it on purpose or not..."
"Probably, yes." He stared at her, his eyebrow raised as if to question if she dared insulting him. But looking at her, he only found a warm smile softening her features. "Besides, there's no such things as dance classes in university either", she continued. "They have entire colleges dedicated to it, for sure, but not where you get a general, basic education."
"Are you telling me you never learned how to dance? Haven't you got any notions whatsoever of the quadrille, the minuettto, the cotillon, or even the waltz..." he was shocked by this degradation of the society's accomplishments, but had to stop after seeing her slightly chuckle.
"No such things, no! You'd be horrified of the dances nowadays – or the music in general! It's not usual to dance – what was it? - the cotillon or the quadrille in society." She chuckled every time she pronounced the names of these old-fashionned dances. "However, the waltz is still here! It's considered to be very elegant."
It was Hook's turn to chuckle. "Oh, so you are telling me the waltz is appreciated now? I remember it to be quite outrageous. I do not wish to see what your 'modern dances' must look like, then."
"Really? Well I wouldn't know how outrageous waltz could be – I see it as a very distinguished dance. If only I knew how to do it -"
"Would you like to learn?"

She stopped chuckling and stared at Hook, intrigued. "Are you so willing to reestablish the society's proper manners you'd teach me how to dance?" He didn't answer, but got on his feet and took a few steps towards her, erasing the distance between them. He simply extended his valid hand. And she could only take it.

She got pulled up on her feet, supported by his left arm. She was suddenly standing too close to him, which made her uncomfortable for the first time since she first met him. Talutah's words were ringing in her ear. To escape the latent awkwardness, she tittered: "But there's no music." Serious as a statue, he answered:
"There's no need for music. You just need to follow a simple rhythm, as a pattern to learn the steps." He was all professor-like, now. The proximity did not seem to bother him, as he placed his left hand in hers and his hook on her back – barely touching it. She held his hand, not feeling very brave at this moment. "Now. I take a step forward, you take a step back. Even an idiot could do it, so you might just manage." She glanced at him furiously, but he was already carrying on his lesson. "Then, I join my feet – so do you – and take another step forward."
"All right, so far, it seems simple enough. What then?"
"Then, you leave all the rest to me."
"Wait, what? But -" he did not allow her to finish her sentence. Already, he was counting, his eye fixated to a point behind her shoulder. "One, two, three, one, two three." And he advanced, so she took a step back. Then he pulled her, so she took a step forward. And then again. And again. He was giving a slow rhythm at first, so that she could follow, but the flowing sensation of the dance was already entrancing her, and got bolder as he counted faster. They carried on until she felt she had somehow gotten the hang of it. Suddenly, he stopped.

"Seems you learnt fast enough." Jane could only smile a bit, but he did not return it to her as he was already begining the second part of the lesson.
"Now, the posture. Yours is terrible. Do not slouch like this."
"Well, I suppose it was easier by the time women had to wear corsets, but excuse my spine for being natural." He didn't reply to her bickering. Putting himself in the position of a teacher changed his whole manners, apparently. He pushed the flat of his hook onto her back so that she straightened up,
which she instinctively did. To ensure she kept the proper posture, he pulled her closer, no gentleness in his gestures any longer, but he still kept his movements mechanical. Being brought up so close to him, she felt suddenly terribly ill-at-ease. If she dared to look up, she would have probably collided with his chin. She suddenly realised why waltz was considered to be so outrageous. So she did the only thing she could do: fix a point far behind his shoulder, and hope her feet could follow.

She was gently pushed, and pulled, and pushed and pulled again, until they were turning around and away from the fire, then were far from it. She couldn't do anything but follow the steady flow, and to entirely give in to the man leading her. She could feel his heart beating, as steady as the rhythm he was giving, right against her chest. Except, he was not giving any rhythm anymore. But she could hear music nonetheless. A ballet-like music, straight out from the fairy tale she was in. She was so focused on following the path he drew along with his dance steps that she hadn't realised at first the soft, golden glowing lights behind his shoulder. Fairies were around them. Yet she did not lose her focus. But she was not following anymore: now, she was truly dancing along with the man whose deadly hook was supporting her.

Suddenly, he tore away from her. For half a heartbeat, a part of her missed the warmth she had been wrapped in. But the separation was momentary, for he lifted his arm and made her spin under it. She did not know how, but she followed this movement as gracefully as she could. And again, he had put his hook behind her back, but instead of continuing the dance, he tilted her down, always supporting her. Suddenly, her back facing the ground, she couldn't help but look straight into his eyes, although he was still too close to her taste. And, for the first time since the lesson had started, he was staring back. This time, he was really seeing her. The lesson was over and the teacher was gone. All that was left was the man with the hook and the soft and piercing blue eyes lost in hers.

Just as she got lost in his. How could she not. His mesmerizing gaze finally shifted from her eyes, and glided over her face to land softly over her lips. She only stared. His lips slightly parted, and she thought he would kiss her. Why would he kiss her, a small spot in her mind reacted.

But right now, she did not care for the answer. Because right now, against all odds, she was willing to be kissed; because it didn't mean anything. Even if she held no affections for him. Just because this moment felt perfect, she could have gone by. The moment lingered – she was staring at his lips now, too. They looked utterly tempting.

Except he abruptly looked away and pulled her back up – and at this moment she felt like she could cry. Because the perfect moment had ended, and she had to remember what a pirate this man actually was. Because the boundaries between them were put back into their places.

He spoke. The fairies had gone. Were they even here in the first place?

"We should get back to the camp."
All she could do was nod.
They went back to their small camp. The fire had almost vanished, so Hook went out to pick up some wood. When he came back, she was laid on her side, eyes closed, pretending to sleep – until she fell truly asleep.

Hook sat back against his tree until he heard a regular, deep breathing coming from her. He remembered what he had planned to do, when he was at the Indians'. He wanted to kill her – even if it meant slitting her throat while she was asleep. It was disloyal, but he hadn't been bothered by that at the time. Silently, he stood up, getting closer to her, the sound of his footsteps muffled by the tender leaves on the ground. She was definitely asleep. Her chest raised up and down slowly, regularly. Just as regularly as it had earlier, when he held her into his arms and carried her to the sound of an imaginary waltz. What madness took him so that he actually danced with her?
He knew her face only too well, but found himself staring at it again, wondering if he still wanted to murder something that seemed so harmless while sleeping. He almost groaned out of frustration when he thought she was, even while sleeping, showing such good form that even he didn't want to kill her anymore. To distract himself, he looked away. His gaze landed on her bag, from which something was slipping. Absentmindedly, he took it – he was a pirate after all. Except the thing he held in his hand was familiar.

It was his notebook. An old, leatherbound notebook he had brought with him in Neverland. He didn't even realise it was missing until he found it in Jane's bag. That brat had been snooping around in his cabin now? That was a decent enough reason to murder her. Except, he didn't look back at her in case it changed his mind. Instead, he opened the book.

He found back this old map he drew. How precise it was. He still had his right hand, at this time. He could always write and play harpsichord decently with his left hand, but could never find back his drawing skills again. He didn't think he'd miss it. Turning a few pages, he remembered every moment he made those notes about Neverland. It was something that none of the members of his crew should know, but he enjoyed the magic moonlight reflecting over the lake while he wrote his discoveries about the island. Now she found the book, she was the only other person to know. Another reason to end her life. He flipped through the pages, and frowned when he came across notes he did not remember. Looking at them more precisely – notes about the Indian clans, dragonflies and fairies – he frowned even more. She had been completing his notebook. That was a childish thing to be mad for, but he was not fully grown-up concerning some aspects of his life.

He was ready to slit her throat with his hook, the same hook which held the small of her back as they were dancing earlier. The sudden memory stopped him again, and he loathed himself for it. Before he took a resolution, his eye was caught by the lines at the latest page of the book. And the drawing.

She had schematised the different steps of the waltz. She must have done it while he was picking up wood for the fire. And she had written a few things – in French, probably hoping no one else on the island would be able to understand it; but mastering French was a requirement at Eton. Deciphering her hurried scribbles, he read:

"I wish I had known earlier Hook was such a good dancer. A bit too stiff, perhaps, but good enough to make me forget he could murder me at this very instant. It'd be a shame if he did, because I still want to learn about the quadrille and the cotillon a bit more.

Note to self: inspect surroundings and find out if there's actually fairies around the area."

At this moment, he heard Jane groan in her sleep. Before telling himself he had no need to panic, he had promptly slipped the notebook back into her bag and returned to his spot. With a sense of utter confusion overtaking him, he finally found sleep before the sun was up.
A violent absence

They were dancing again.
Hook kept Jane close to him – not to teach her better, he knew – they both knew. The wind seemed to carry their steps.
He looked down to see her – finally see her. She didn’t seem to take notice of his presence; immobile and painting-like, she was fixing something behind him; just like the style of the dance imposed it. But for him, it was too late – he was caught by her features, by the pale light of the moon reflecting on her skin. He was attempting to see her, seeking every nuance of her eyes, studying each freckle scattered on her cheeks – he knew every single detail which composed her; but he couldn’t seem to focus; his vision was constantly deflected, strayed.
He hastened his pace, but wasn’t mastering the dance any longer; the wind was too strong, and his only anchor point was there, before him. However, he couldn’t grasp her; she should have been warm between his fingers, yet remained cold like the moon; that moon reflecting on her cheeks. And, cold like the moon, still she didn’t see him; why didn’t this dance end? He must stop at once – he wanted to hold her and to see her, and for her to see him; to take notice of him. But they danced and danced; how thunderous was that dance. Already, she was fading away – she was disappearing, become one with the night and the moon.
They must stop; he wanted –
And suddenly, the dance ended.

At last, he saw her; for a split seconde, everything was there. There she was, existing and immobile: the wind had stopped its cruel tease. Suddenly, she turned her head and looked at him; and that minuscule moment during which their eyes met filled and contented him for eternity.
A full and gentle expression appeared on her face; her moon-colored face. Hook leaned closer, so slightly closer. She smiled; and how warm and comforting was that smile. He didn’t remember who it was who smiled at him like this before. Images came back, running; a woman with blues eyes like him, leaning with tenderness over a child’s bed.

Suddenly, the woman with blue eyes, Jane, the smile; it all disappeared when the harsh and brutal sound of metal, cutting, echoed with pertinacity. The moon face was now stained with red, and the tender eyes had turned empty. Hook lowered his eyes to a crimson iron claw. When he looked back up, Jane was vanishing into the shadows, a silent reproach painted across her features, cursing him again and again.

Hook woke up in a jolt.

His first reflex was to look for his rum flask with a shaking hand. As usual, he drank its contents in a second, wiping off angrily any trace of sweat threatening to pearl on his brow. When he lowered back his rum flask on his lap, he had forgotten what the reason of his panic had been. Probably another dream about that blasted crocodile, he reflected.

He finally raised his head and observed his surroundings. Something was wrong, he realised. Jane was gone.

/ 

He had found the notebook.

Jane woke up at sunrise. She slowly turned her face towards Hook to note he was still asleep. Reassured, she slowly stretched to ease down the stiffness following a night spent on the ground –
she would have killed for a real mattress made of feathers and not fallen leaves. Lazily, she drew out her arm to her bag and rummaged for a while, looking for the notebook. Early morning was a perfect time to observe a specific type of Neverland birds, and she was firmly intending on adding one to her inventory before breakfast. She flipped through the pages of the book before her, appreciating the feeling of paper running against her fingertips. When suddenly, she stopped. She came back to few pages before; without success.

The dead leaf that she used as a bookmark had gone. She looked once again, thoroughly, in the entire book. But nothing worked; the leaf from the Lost Boy’s sycamore wasn’t there. She remembered precisely placing it back yesterday evening, after having written new notes about the waltz she and Hook shared.

At the thought of the dance, a shudder ran through her; she decided to ignore it and focus on the case of the lost leaf. Her eyes traveled over the ground... Until she encountered a leaf, greener than the others; that of the sycamore, far from her bag. A few steps away from Hook.

She lowered her eyes onto the notebook; then conducted her gaze onto Hook. Feeling a discomfort taking a hold of her, Jane slowly turned the pages and came back to the notes she took yesterday. No one was supposed to read what she had written in that book. Especially not Hook. She read her notes over.

"I wish I had known earlier Hook was such a good dancer. A bit too stiff, perhaps, but good enough to make me forget he could murder me at this very instant. It'd be a shame if he did, because I still want to learn about the quadrille and the cotillon a bit more."

Until the, she never had a reason to blush from her notes; scholar-like notes about the island, taken out of sheer curiosity. But suddenly, at the idea that a foreign reader might have observed her writings, her sketches, bothered her. And now, she just had to talk about dancing... In a notebook that didn’t belong to her. Hook must have been furious to realise she had stolen something from him – and that she had been snooping around in his cabin as well.

Yet, he didn’t do anything. A quick glance in his direction confirmed to Jane that he was profoundly asleep. As soon as he had found the notebook, he should have had woken her up, to drag explanations out of her... But nothing.

Surely, their dance yesterday evening could have played a part in his behaviour...? But no. Jane refused to allow herself to believe such things. He was a pirate... Furthermore, he was Captain James Hook from the Jolly Roger. Never had he shown any goodness on her behalf, and certainly wouldn’t start now. She must always be careful whenever it came to Hook – her very survival depended on it. He actually might be planning a revenge; planning to do something evil, something wicked, only because she stole something – something from him. And it wasn’t wise to steal from infamous pirates.

With the morning’s first rays of sunshine, the hook of the captain seemed to come alive – to burn with a certain cruelty. How could she ever conceive to trust a pirate? Her mistake – the dance – from yesterday was inconsiderate. She never should have traveled with him in the first place. Hook was, and always would be, an enemy.

"I’ve been stupid" she muttered for herself more than for anyone else, before standing back up. Jane looked up to the skies of Neverland. She had a few hours ahead of her. Quietly gathering her belongings, the young woman disappeared without ever waking the captain, lost in a deep slumber.

/ 

The unceasing racket so specific to the obstreperous pirate’s life was the very first thing that welcomed you once you arrived at the docks. There wasn’t a single crate or barrel which wasn’t
topped with at least one or two merry – and rather drunken – pirates. Jane ignored the best she could their disgusting taunts and the slimy spittles spread on the ground. If, at first, she had been shocked and rebuffed by the coarse appearance of the place, she soon disregarded it and finally found some odd and - somewhat reassuring - features in the pirate’s docks.

Was it the warm and trembling light of the torches at every corner of every alley, the heavy ferns scattered along the streets and hiding the signboards of each dodgy tavern, or just the constant bonhomie of the sailor’s songs echoing at every turn? Perhaps it was everything at once, she finally agreed while slightly nodding. The darkness was never total, here; unlike the forest, which sometimes seemed cold and bitter in the strongest hours of the night. Here, she continued to ponder while walking aimlessly down the streets, there was only warmth: the warmth of the men having been working all day, that of the alcohol which would surely heat up her limbs if she indulged herself.

And she did. Weighing from the tip of the fingers Crazy Max’s leather purse, hidden in a cuff of her cape, she walked straight into an inn – the fourth on the left, just like she remembered from her last stay. At least, there, the meat wasn’t soaked in grease and the white rhum was always accompanied by some lemon from the tree next door.

Any day before, she thought as she stepped through the door, she would have kept her hood on. However, she reflected, she didn’t have to fear Hook’s crew any longer – she had once again fled from him, it was a fact... But he was indebted towards her, concluded Jane while pushing her hood off her face and letting her braid run free against her neck. She was safe. As she took a few steps towards the bar, she decided she didn’t want to think of the captain any more. A decision quickly confirmed by the drink of rhum she drank down without even noticing it.

An hour later, Jane was seated along with the joyous company of some pirates and a few waitresses who absorbed, not without amusement, her raving stories about "the modern world" and other strange things, such as "the inna’net".

"I swear, guys – cats! Thar’ everywhere; I mean, iz like Ancient Egypt all over again, y’know? A frickin’ cult, I’m tellin’ ya" insisted Jane while slamming her fist onto the table. "And da people, they film like – just a cat falling from a table, and bam! In half an hour, shit’s gone viral!" And people surrounding her laughed and offered her new drinks, eager to hear more of these mad tales from beyond the Island. Quite a change from the stories of the usual fights at sea, for once.

"But then, what do they to with ‘em – videos, yeah?" asked a young blonde waitress. "Iz like paintings, but moving, all right? So people – they put ‘em on them walls?"
"No, well yeah – yes and no. Videos that move and that we put on the walls, iz the TV – and moving videos but which are in da computa’, they stay in thar’. You watch ‘em and forget them, all right? But then, the problem wiz da TV..."

Jane had to be kicked out after she started to rave angrily about some more inna’net witchery; later, she threatened to redecorate the walls with the guts of the next person who would get too close and try to touch her knees with calloused hands. Along with a very colored language, she was unceremoniously sent out of the inn by the very same people who had laughed and shared drinks with her earlier. A few seconds after the door closed on her, the music, the laughs and the merry shouts started again, as if the incident had never happened – and which would soon enough be forgotten the next morning, being one like so many others during a regular night at the pirate’s docks.

Through Jane’s whirling vision, the night dressed itself with new shapes and new colors. Performing a few steps, she raised her eyes to observe the moon and the stars, which simply refused to stay at their place. Unable to remain standing properly, she slightly tottered but kept on walking haphazardly. She advanced while people around her passed, moving shadows leaving no stains against the blue night. Nothing was clear; and, in this dense and infinite swarm of sounds and colors,
fully absorbed and fully forgotten in a moment, Jane felt free; free of all worries. She didn’t think; she could only feel. She deeply and entirely felt the heavy and warm breeze brushing her face; she felt the smell and the sizzle of the flames in the torches next to her; she felt the confusing noise emerging from the many groups of people passing by, surrounding her, all in an organised and linear dance.

And she suddenly felt solitude.

It was there, everywhere around her, cold at her side – absence. Something was missing. She never felt it in such a strong way until now. She had travelled alone after leaving the Jolly Roger, wandering from indian camp to forgotten caves... Yet, she never felt alone, for the island was so young and so new. And now, suddenly, the absence of something was pressuring against her – around her.

Something had changed. She had left Hook a second time, but for the first time, she felt his absence.

Jane was immobilized by the thought – this sudden lucidity, strinking and true, had been revealed in the depth of a whirling night. And, as if pinned down to the solid ground, she didn’t hear the silent footsteps sounding behind her. Footsteps like any others, surely; but something was wrong. As if every other steps around had gone quiet, those sounded dangerously. She should have noticed it, she realised as the first hand crashed against her throat, vanishing any trace of intoxication in her veins. She should have noticed it, she blamed herself as she started to struggle.

Her first and lucky reflex was to violently punch her elbow into her offender’s stomach – who, breathless, released his grip and allowed Jane to seize the sword at her belt. Before she even turned around, she had adopted a combat position, ready to definitly fend off her enemy. Except that where she expected only one enemy, she found three. But even with three enemies, Jane didn’t loose a single second to feel distraught – and she was the first to attack, aiming directly at the attacker in the middle. But with a skillful and swift wrist movement, he deflected her move, only to fight back from the edge of his rapier. Jane hit violently, diverting his strike from the right... But found herself being attacked on her left side.

In a single motion, she spun, drawing with her sword a broad half-circle to repel for a moment her enemies, in order to focus on the attacks coming on her left. She returned blow for blow: parrying when she must, attacking right after, succeeding in scraping the jaw of one of the criminals. But it wasn’t enough, she realized: soon, the three assailants were surrounding her, ready to attack her alltogether at once. Jane switched tactics and went for the general defense: with a swift sword swipe, she kept the criminals away, deflecting all three attacks at once – but her arm was giving up. They musn’t realise it, she understood. It was time to move.

Giving up any static posture, Jane fled quickly, taking broad steps backwards to the alley behind her. All while facing her enemies and slicing the air from left to right, she pushed one away with a large blow on her left. Soon, Jane’s steps led her onto elevated planks, one of them being in equilibrium over a barrel. Keeping her opponents facing her, she waited for the right moment... To violently lower down her heel onto the balancing plank, which collided with the chin of the smallest of the thugs. His companions barely noticed it and left him, ridiculously spread in a puddle of mud.

Only two left; for now. Jane could see the growing anger in the eyes of the attackers, but she didn’t shudder. She stepped back again, and again; the loud tinkles of metal against metal and the grunts accompanying each strike sounded in the empty streets as the group got sensibly closer to the docks. She couldn’t hold on for much longer, she understood bitterly. They cornered her restlessly against the tavern’s walls; but Jane got away again and again, sliding under a sword to flee a little further.
When she was caught out against a large palm tree, she eluded from the right – only to reappear on the left and slash the leg of the first brigand. One man on the ground, one man slowed down, and one very angry man, she analysed. She could try to lose the slower of the two and –

And she felt a blade getting too close to her skin – and severely nick her right arm. A grunt of pain escaped from Jane's mouth. Unable to calculate her moves any longer, she struck – struck and strucked, filled with fire and rage. With a furious gesture, she rant and raved against her two assailants; not giving up anything. She rageously lifted her sword high above her head, unleashed... And granting a large opening to her enemies.

The second strike was even more seizing than the first. The saber attained her through her flank. First off, she only felt the cold and cruel sliding of the blade tearing her clothing, to almost hiss against her skin. The pain came afterwards, icy, followed by the worrying warmth of blood. Jane staggered, only fighting with one hand, keeping the other pressed against the wound. She stepped back little by little, the rage of combat having slipped from her: her pride was the only energy leading her ripostes.

A strike to her head almost deprived her of an ear; she avoided it at the very last moment. Then stepped back. And stepped back. She only came to realise her heel had slipped off the dock when she felt her body collided with the cold waters of the night.
The first thing Jane felt when she opened her eyes was a dreadful headache, which officially meant she had the right to be flustered about her current state. But, on the other hand, what she felt a split second after made her immediately reconsider her situation. A soft and silky texture was mingling between her fingers. She played around with it for a few minutes, her dozed mind trying to reconstruct her knowledge about silky and soft material. As she did, she felt the sun, a little dimmed by the thick windows, heating up her cheeks and encouraging her to stop blinking in order to fully open her eyes. And she did. What use was it arguing with the sun, after all?

She was in a room. A mid-size one, but wider than what she had been used to in a pirate ship, first of all. And the soft fabric she rummaged mindlessly between her fingers was no other than the – oh, so welcome – sheets of a bed. Jane raised her head a little, then allowed it to fall flat against the cushy pillow in order to fully enjoy the sudden comfort she found herself in. A slight sigh of happiness escaped her as she buried herself further into the covers, closing her eyes and turning to her side. She didn’t want to think; besides, the joy of the sweet slumber she was giving in almost erased the pain of her headache.

As she hoped she could gain an hour or an eternity more of comfort, she heard a knocking on the door. Jane frowned and almost let a groan escape from her. She hadn’t had access to such peacefulness in ages – she wasn’t going to give it all up right away to go and open a door. But it seemed fate had decided she had had enough sleep already, she accepted bitterly when the door opened anyway.

"Good morning, missy. Sorry to interrupt" said a lady stepping over the threshold, whose tone wasn’t as sorry as she said she was. "Hope y’ Slept well?" Once again, she asked this question blandly, like someone having to repeat the same thing way too often on a daily basis.

"Where am I?" Could only reply Jane, slowly calculating that she had no clue as to how she got here – and why.
"You, miss, got quite a blow, hey?" Started the lady, fumbling over with the towels and sheets she carried with her. "We’re at the Dragon Inn, y’know, the best one of whole wide docks? Some bloke dropped you here. You were soaked to the bone, and y’had apparently knocked y’self onto some rock or s’thing."

Jane raised her hand to her head. She felt bandages wrapped around her skull, confirming what the lady had said. She silently mused for a second. Then, arranging her pillows to sit straight on the bed, she asked: "Do you know who it was who dropped me here?"
"No idea, missy. I don’t really care who comes by and all. The less I know, the better I get." She stopped a second to mutter a swear or two as she couldn’t get the clean sheets she carried to fold properly. "All I know is that he left quite a good sum of money – no less than six gold coins, could ya imagine? That bloke must care about you, I say."

Jane took the information in, and turned it over and over in her mind. She felt like she knew who carried her here, but she had to be sure. Almost absentmindedly, she asked the lady to fetch her her cape sitting on a chair, as she was getting a little cold.
"Sure thing. Anything else y’want before I go?" She stood at the door, a hand on the knob. Jane turned her head to take a look at her. She was a forty-something mulatto, but was certainly acting way older than she truly was. "What did you say your name was?"

"I didn’t say it. Hell, nobody’s got a use for it anyways! All right – not that I hate to chit-chat with pretty young ladies such as y’self, but some of us actually got to work ‘round here." Jane nodded and smiled as she left the room and closed the door. When she heard her footsteps fading in the corridor, she took the cape and rummaged inside it to finally pull out the leather purse she took from Crazy Max. She fully opened it and poured its content onto the mattress. She counted the coins with precision, knowing exactly how much she had before. Six gold coins were missing.
"Pirate." she muttered under her breath, a half-smile crossing her features.

She must have fallen back asleep, because once again a knocking on her door woke her up. It was the lady again.

"Still sleeping, heh? Well, I guess y’needed it, then. But I best hope you’re fully recovered now. ‘Cause you better check what someone just sent for ya’..." And, with grand and almost caricature-like manners, she spread onto her bed a magnificent blue dress, as well as a note and a mask. Jane could only stare at first, not quite sure to fully understand.

"What is all of this?"

"Beats me. Some bloke came here and dropped it for ya. You, girl, are apparently gonna be the official belle of the ball tonight." Seeing the crossed look on Jane’s face, she let out a small grunt. Was this girl really unaware of everything? "Y’know, the pirate’s ball! The one to celebrate Captain Hook’s victory in the Captain’s contest? Oh boy, was Captain Matthew Bowen mad about that. Well, to hell with him. He never tipped me right anyways!" Jane only stared at her, mouth agape.

"For the god’s sake, just read the note, girl!" With hurried hands, Jane snapped the seal open and read the letter.

"Dear Ms. Jane,

Your presence is requested at tonight’s Victory Masquerade held on the pirate’s docks. You will find herewith a complete attire as well as a most delicate Venician mask. I personally took the liberty to pick it myself, only hoping it might suit you quite finely.

I can only hope to see if my choices were indeed correct by seeing you tonight.

Yours,

The Captain."

Jane was entirely flabbergasted. A look of complete incomprehension painted across her face, she put down the note on her lap. Mistaking this suprised expression for utter shock due to pure joy, the lady clapped her hands together, rejoicing as well.

"So, how does it feel to have your suitor requesting your presence for the masquerade tonight? I haven’t seen such a romantic gesture for years – almost makes my poor old heart stir a bit. Hell’s above, I think I might even help you get ready!"

"He’s not my suitor" began Jane, absentmindedly muttering. The lady dismissed this statement as a simple display of young love’s shyness. But Jane continued, suddenly getting out of her bed in a spring. "Look, I don’t even know why I got this!" But the lady continued, having the most fun she had in ages. "Well, wether you know it or not, I’ll send you down there – and fully dressed, by Calypso! No chance I’m gonna send this perfectly good dress to waste, y’hear me?"

And thus, without Jane really reacting, the lady managed to start stripping a still rather dozed Jane out of her clothing and give her a good bath first of all. Jane, who had been hoping to get a proper bath for months, wasn’t enjoying it half as much as she ought to, since her mind was set onto another topic. Something within her stirred when she opened the letter – something was off, something felt wrong, and it was something she couldn’t quite put her finger on. Then, she read it. Why would James Hook ever invite her to a ball – and most of all, why would he have picked an entire attire just for her when he stole gold coins from her to pay for the inn? This made no sense. But, on the other hand, she did help him win that Captain’s Contest victory. Perhaps it was only right for him to invite her; given his respect for good form and all. But what if this was all an elaborate plan of his to mock her and get his pitiful revenge when she would arrive?

Jane hadn’t made up her mind when the lady pulled her out of her bath and started to throw a chemise onto her shoulders, then proceeded to add drawers, petticoats, and finally buttoned her
gown. She snapped back to reality as the lady started to pull and tweak her hair in the most inconvinent ways to get it into a complicated mass of curls on the top of her head. "Do you realise this is rather painful?"

"Sorry, missy, but y’see, I’m the best at what I do – before my job at the inn, I used to prepare ladies just fine. How I ended up working here to follow the man I love, I’ll never understand myself. So don’t deny this poor old woman some good ol’ remembrance of the past and let me finish your hair, all right?" Jane muttered that she was not that old, but let her carry on anyway. It seemed she was determined to send her to that masquerade – more for her own amusement than for Jane’s – but maybe she could ditch it all up once she would be there. She was now half-certain that Hook had sent the invitation only to play a dirty old trick of his when she would arrive. She reflected on what would that dirty trick be as she received quite a disgraceful amount of powder on her nose as well as a luscious shade of red onto her lips. And at last, all the torture so often associated with beauty ended. Finally, Jane’s troubled mind was relieved from its worries when she saw her complete reflection in the mirror.

"Wait up. Are you sure this is me?" Asked Jane, lifting up her hand to her face and touching it to make sure that what she saw was real. An outburst of pride went through the lady’s eyes. "I know, I do miracles, girl. Now, why don’t you get your puffy blue dress of yours for a stroll to that ball? And be sure to tell people that it was Deeja, at the Dragon Inn, who made you look the way you do" she added, nudging and winking at Jane. "I’ve forgotten how much I loved doing this instead of ironing sheets. Maybe I should go back to my old buisness sometimes!"

Jane nodded, still breathtaken by the miracle of a piece of clothing as well as some hair torture. "All right, we get it, you’re amazed" continued Deeja. "But it’s getting late already. I best not see you still hanging out ‘round here in ten minutes!" And with that, Jane found herself pushed into the hallway where she managed to find a way out to the docks, the Venician mask in her hand.

She had almost died a day and a night ago, and now she was back there – in the streets. But she wasn’t afraid for a second, she realised. It seemed the whole wide world was celebrating, all in lights and in joy. How could you feel afraid when you were surrounded by magnificent and colorful gowns and costumes all around? Lifting the mask to her face, she rapidly went with the flow and followed the satin dresses to the ball. Trick or no trick, tonight was going to be a night to remember.

Jane arrived to the great hall where the party was held. It was located in the tallest building of the port, towering over the boats, the sand and the sea. She stepped into it, guided by the music – some jolly shanties like she always heard when she came down here, except that instead of being sang by a couple of drunk sailors, it was interpreted by a full orchestra. Immediately, Jane was charmed. As she gazed through the eyes of her mask, lights, glimmering brightly, made her feel like she just came back from the dead, to finally join the reality of the living. What seemed to be hundreds of people, laughing and dancing, welcomed her into this warm change. No more secrets, no more danger – tonight, she was joining the living, unafraid. And she entered the dance.

Hook was flustered. He had come back to the pirate’s port to prepare the celebration of his victory after discovering that Jane had left. For a moment, he had thought she had been captured; what an idea to have, what a sentiment to – fear, he realised. But his use of analysing the ground when hunting down dissident men revealed to him there had been no fight – only quiet and footsteps driven by their own will. This infuriated the captain. Truly, he didn’t understand the lass. But maybe she understood him. And this was the reason she left. Perhaps she felt, deep down inside, that staying with him any longer would have been senseless – he had planned to murder her so many times, and was still debating about it when she left that morning. Yes, perhaps James Hook couldn’t understand Jane Foreville; but she had shown wisdom by choosing to go away. And she had shown she could understand him. She was the only one who could, since Hook wasn’t even certain to fully
understand his own actions.

Especially not when he came down to the docks one night to discover her, fighting against two ruffians. His blood seemed to set fire to his very soul as he rushed up to the fight – but she had fallen into the water. Hook distinctly saw her head collide with a mooring stone. Almost blinded by the fury of the fight, he only realised he had killed the two men when he came out of the water, carrying Jane in his arms before laying her down on the ground. With expertise, he made her spit the water out of her lungs and, still not reflecting on his actions, carried her to the closest inn. He didn’t have any of the stolen coins on him – but he realised she did. Three hurried knocks on the door later, he left Jane to the hands of two women, knowing they would take good care of her with the six golden coins he gave them.

And now, standing at the masquerade held in his honnor with his faithful Smee at his side, the dreadful James Hook was deeply frustrated. He didn’t know why he spent such effort on an ungrateful brat. Perhaps there was no other explanation that the Devil playing tricks on his mind! His bosco undoubtedly noticed the turmoil the captain was in, as he inquired if he felt all right.
"Why ever would you think the contrary, Smee?" replied Hook, whose tone revealed more bitterness than content. But the Irish man didn’t argue.
"I apologize, captain. Why wouldn’t you be all right? This is, after all, a lovely party. And all those women! Most of them are craving a dance with the favourite pirate hero of the day, I say!"

Women. Dancing. Yes, this seemed like a good plan to change Hook’s thoughts. Anything to stop thinking about that wretched girl. Determined to bask in his ever-renewed fame for an evening, he ordered the orchestra to play something slower. Something up for seduction. A women or two could quite make him forget about all his troubles.
"Smee? Bring me someone to dance with. And do avoid sending this awful yellow-dressed wench, if you please. You may keep that one for yourself."

Jane had been dancing as wild as anyone with a transcendent amount of clothing could. From partner to partner, she danced across the room repeatedly, not caring if she got her steps right – and luckily enough, nobody seemed to care either. The magic thing about masks, she thought, was to finally be able to do whatever you wanted without being afraid of the consequences. She had to thank Deeja for sending her down here. She had almost entirely forgotten about Hook and the invitation. Only the harmless fun she was having mattered.

Her spirits lowered down when the music changed, passing from the good-hearted pirate shanties to a slower, calmer tune. Leaving her current partner, she headed back to the few seats, all the while looking for a refreshment through the eyes of her mask. She was halfway there, expecting to seat comfortably in the magnificent sofa hidden in a corner of the ballroom, when someone reached it before her. She rageously turned around, determined to find a place to rest. Her gaze was directed far away and she didn’t pay attention to her direct surroundings; it wasn’t much suprise when, soon enough, she mindlessly bumped into someone. But it was a suprise when she heard, instead of the insults she expected, a strange "Oh, I guess you will do", before being taken by the hand back to the center of the crowd. A little dumbfounded at first, she then decided, with a shrug, to give the man one dance if that was all he wanted. What bad could it do, after all?

But instead, she realised – a little too late – that he had switched his hand for another’s, and with a swift "Enjoy your time with the man of the evening, ma’am", he left her. Jane intended to look back and see who had left her in the midst of this strange arrangement, but lost him in the crowd. Rapidly, she felt an arm wrapping around her, with calculated meekness – enough to make her shiver. The man noticed this and smiled while taking her hand in his. "No need to be afraid, dear. All I ask of you is one dance – but I am most certainly willing to accept more suggestions if need be." Jane grimaced under her mask. The voice, if not the iron claw brushing against her waist, confirmed that
she knew these arms – she knew this scent, she knew this presence. He wore a mask, but it was bandit-like: only a plain leather band wrapped around his head. The blue eyes were half-concealed, and she could fully focus onto his other traits: his jaw; the lining of his beard; the small gold earrings he wore. His beguiling smile. Jane said nothing, waiting to see his next move, as they advanced into a dance she now knew.

"Keeping quiet, aren’t we? It is fine for now. But I do hope you won’t be so quiet in -" he got closer and wrapped his fingers around hers sensually, "other circumstances." Jane almost screamed, but simply bit her lip to avoid any outburst. Hook continued, effortlessly using his main tricks to seduce the woman he thought he didn’t know. Noticing she didn’t say a word, he carried on, reciting his usual seduction lines. "It seemed Fate brought us together – and deep down in your soul, thou must feel it as well." It was too much for Jane. She couldn’t keep a straight face with all of these infuriating and coarse attempts to win her over. Stepping out of the dance, she proclaimed: "Fate brought us together, really? Because I actually thought his name was Smee."

Hook stilled immediately. He knew this voice – of course he did. For the Devil’s sake.

Triumphantly, Jane removed her mask, and fully enjoyed the utter embarrassment which arised onto the captain’s face. Yes, this precise moment most definitely made the entire evening worthwhile. She stayed here for a few seconds, fully and rather cruelly enjoying the captain’s shame – and disgust towards himself. Without adding another word, she went out, in need for some air. As much as she appreciated turning the situation around, she still felt the captain’s presence, hot and demanding, around her. And his words, although she knew he would never had spoken this way to her otherwise, had made her feel things she would have rather ignored. She made her way through the dense crowd, so reassuring earlier, but now oppressing and obnoxious. Finally, she found herself outside. She remained, slopped against the wall of the building, waiting. And thinking. Feeling his hot touch during the dance made her realise that she had truly missed him. The thing was, she didn’t exactly know what she could possibly miss from him – he was a boastful, cruel, revenge-driven pirate. He was a cold and sly murderer. He was a con man.

He was there.

The captain James Hook wasn’t one to be left ashamed in the middle of a ball in his honor. He had furiously made his way through the crowd to find her. He wasn’t letting her go away this time. But, he realised as he stepped through the door, that she didn’t go away. She was here, waiting for him. Calm, cold, and magnificent. She spoke first.

"Sorry I left so abruptly last time."

This apologize was his undoing. He forgot why he supposedly hated her. "I still wonder why you didn’t kill me when you found your notebook – or any time earlier, really. Ah, yes, I must also apologize for that – snooping around and stealing things, I guess." Hook remained silent. The way she spoke, her still and composed tone, influenced him. Him, the captain James Hook, to be influenced in such a way! Yet, immediately and irremediably, his rage died out. He suddenly felt too old, too aged by years at the sea, to feel anger. These mundane and puerile fights they had – they were never worth half of the trouble they created. In fact, he already had forgotten most of them. With tantalizing quietness, he leaned against the wall, next to her.

"You are forgiven."

Jane felt a wave relief run through her – the kind she never expected she would feel if Hook was involved. She looked into the stars, and felt this night was a night of confessions and of true conversations, like the one they had by the fire a few days before.

"Did you bring me to the Dragon Inn after I fell in the water?" She asked, although deep down she knew the answer.

"Aye, Jane."

"You didn’t have to do that" she replied with a smile, which meant a lot more than whatever else she
could have said.
"I know."
Then, neither of them said a thing for a while. The music was still going strong behind them, as well as the laughter and the cheers.
"Say, Hook..."
"Tell me, Jane..."
They spoke at the same time. How ridiculous and embarrassing that was, felt Jane. Both were trying to convince the other to speak first, but none could agree to do it. In the end, Jane blurted out:
"All right! Fine! I'll say it!" She raised her hands in the air and sighed. "It was nothing, really. I just wanted to ask you if you wanted to go back inside and – you know, celebrate, be there for your guests. I mean, they came here especially because of you, some especially to have a dance with you... And in the end, you only danced with me, even though I wouldn't have come if it weren't for your invitation." Hook frowned at this speech, and Jane thought she had angered him by being too blunt, but he inquired:
"An invitation? Whatever could you possibly mean, Jane? I am afraid I never sent anything of the sort, dear. Smee must probably have sent it on my behalf."
"Huh-huh. It couldn't have been Smee. It was too..." Personal, she almost slipped. "Well, there was also this dress and this mask. It said you – the captain – had personally picked them up."
"Why, this is nonsense. With a ball to prepare, I scarcely had any time to accomplish such things." Jane's heart beat faster, a rapid panic starting to rush through her veins. "So who possibly sent -"

A gunshot interrupted and answered her questions. As she looked up, she saw the silhouette of a man, followed by others, all of them armed to the teeth, heading out from the shadows towards Hook and her – towards them. Maybe this evening wasn't going to be such a marvellous one, after all.
"Duck!" shouted Jane before tackling Hook to the ground as the second gunshot sounded in the night. The bullet made an impact into the wall – right where the captain stood a second ago. The pirate helped her get back up on her feet, and as he gripped her shoulder for a moment, he looked right into her eyes, making her forget about the danger which surrounded them both.

"Are you ready to fight?"

Jane looked up at him, a half-grin on her face. Swift as a feather, she pulled off a sword hanging at his side. Hook only smiled and turned to face their enemies. "Good" he muttered. As he did, she thought that as long as they were by each other’s side, she had nothing to fear. That thought would have bothered her much if the circumstances were different. But already, she was running down the path, her guard lifted in front of her.

And the battle began.

The first clang of two swords meeting with violence was soon followed by a second, then by a third, then by many. Adrenaline pushed her limbs forwards, ever harder, ever wilder. By her side fought Hook; calculated, elegant, deadly. His red eyes were the last thing that the first half-dozen of men he crossed sword with ever saw. And red was the shade lurking in Jane’s hair, stained by the wounds of the many men she had to fight back. She had done this before; but this time, everything felt different. As she stood closer to Hook to the point their backs were touching, she knew why. Somehow, she felt stronger, and a little bit more deadlier, as if the captain’s influence had touched every fibre of her very being. And at this moment, she didn’t mind at all.

The thirteenth man had fallen to the ground, revealing behind him the five remaining opponents. Nobody knew how long they had been fighting; to them, it all happened in a heartbeat - their minds clouded by the fury of the moment. It was then the leader of the enemies stepped up. Silence fell as every one stilled. And Jane simply knew, without a doubt, that this man who had been leading his minions to their demise was no other than the captain Matthew Bowen.

With a wicked smile filled with golden teeth, the captain bowed down in fake curtesy. "So awfully glad you got my little invitation, missy. I congratulate you for showing up, otherwise my men would have been rather sad not to find you here among us. Thanks to you, here is James Hook for us to kill: just as expected." Instinctively, Jane stepped forward, anger already growing within her. "And as I expected, that dress doth fit you rather well. Shame I shall ruin it with your blood soon."

At this moment, Hook stepped forward. The deadly cold tone of his voice revealed all of his efforts to follow his Etonian etiquette – although it was obvious he restrained himself not to kill Bowen at this very instant.

"Cut it out, Bowen. You lost that damned contest. Why don’t you go back to your ship and accept your utter failure like a proper pirate?"

"Now, where would be the fun in that? Besides, I would believe I still have a chance to properly win – since you did somehow cheat, with the help of little Miss Strumpet over here. " Hook was about to rain down upon the captain like the fires of hell, but Jane was faster. "You’re a sore loser, Bowen. You’re hoping to gain some popularity out of this? Well, I got news for you, pal: ain’t nobody gonna give a damn when we leave you dead on the ground tonight. Because you are, and always will be, a pain in everybody’s arse." Bowen’s sarcastic laugh only fueled her anger more.

"Well, look who’s got a dirty little mouth here? Did you teach her this kind of language, Hook? I can’t help but wonder what kind of other dirty things she can do."
Jane and Hook rushed down onto Bowen in a singular mouvement. But already, he faded behind his gunmen, leaving the rest of the work to them. Soon enough, Jane got distracted by the last piece of fight she had to give and didn’t notice as Bowen escaped to avoid facing their wrath. It only took the two of them a couple of minutes before getting rid of the last minions – allowing some to run away when they realised it was their best move – but their leader was long gone.

Everything was still now that Jane and Hook were the two last remaining persons standing. The party had fled away, and only the sound of the night filled the docks. The metallic clang of Hook’s weapons falling to the floor brought Jane, dozed by the effort she just gave, back to her senses. "Well, no point in remaining here hoping he will return. That coward has probably rejoined the ornery rats he names his crew." Even if the fight had been an exhaustive one, Hook showed no signs of tiredness. Jane couldn’t help but wonder how many fights he had been into before and how did he recover so fast. As if he heard her silent questioning, he turned to her. "Now, come. Let us walk to regain our strength." She followed him, and she was suprised to see how it came to her naturally to do so. Being close to Hook was becoming something she got used to... To the point she oddly came to appreciate it.

They walked along the docks for a long time, none feeling the need to say anything. Breathtaken by the beauty of the night and refreshed by the lively air of the Neverland sea, Jane felt healed from all the sores of the combat. Lulled by the magic of the night, she was smiling to herself, but stopped when she sensed her heart beating a little faster whenever she looked to her left – where Hook was walking beside her.

Suddenly, he spoke.

"I do apologize for my rather appalling behaviour earlier this evening, Miss Jane" began Hook, seemingly honest. "Is there any way this lack of proper good form could ever be forgotten?"

Jane was suprised by this sudden discourse, but paused for a moment, slighlty frowning and giving it some thought. Then, it seemed she had found a perfect way for Hook to make it up to her. The shine of her idea seemed to glow on her features as she opened her mouth to say:

"Take off your coat."

Needless to say that the proposition immediately cooled out the captain’s chivalrous proposal, no matter how eager he was to erase his ill manners. Reading the reluctance on his face, Jane repeated her request, with more authority: "I said, loose the coat. And the boots. Now!"

Captain Hook, who wasn’t a man to go back on his word once he gave it, finally obliged. Once he found himself coatless and barefoot, he raised his inquisitive eyes to the woman, unsure of what would happen next.

"There, now I stand before you in a rather simple apparel. Is this the way you imagined me redeeming myse-" But before the infamous captain could finish his sentence, two malicious hands pushed abruptly onto his chest, taking him off guard – and the next thing Hook knew was that he had fallen into the waters of the pirate’s docks.

James Hook got his face out of the sea and spat out the salty water, feeling betrayed, outraged, and most of all – shocked by the woman’s improper behaviour. "Ye filthy wench! I shall make you regret your impetuous actions!" Was all the pirate, meaning every word, could rageously shout at Jane. As soon as he had reached the water, the young woman had unlaced the front of her dress to loose the heavier part of her clothing and had stepped out of her delicate shoes. When Hook looked up from the water, it was to see the girl, suspended into the air for a fractal second, throwing herself into the sea as well. A loud splash followed as she crashed next to the stunned pirate captain.
"Well, that was most uncalled for" said Hook as she got her head out of the water. Her damp hair, now entirely undone, clung to her face, as she rubbed it off to get rid of the ruined make-up running down her cheeks. She lowered down her hands, revealing how soppy she looked. The vision was rather amusing, first thought Hook as he glanced at his trickster. But he got lost in his thoughts, observing her eyelashes now made thicker with the drops of water clinging onto them, as if she had suddenly turned into a tragically crying naiad. He got lost in his thoughts, looking at her hair, dripping and clinging to her frame, before being finally spread out, floating in the water. The very drops running down her features underlined the usually hidden suavity of her jaw, of her gracefully-drawn neck. Never had she ever seemed so simple and so pure, and this simplicity revealed something more – the elegant beauty of nature itself. The water held the secrets to fairness, had always believed Hook. Never had this adage been so true, he realised now.

"Well, at the very least I think I am satisfied now" said Jane, cutting down his trail of thoughts. "You are now forgiven for your improper behaviour, captain James Hook." But Jane lost her capacity to remain serious as she broke into an immense smile and added: "But oh really, you should have seen the look on your face!" before breaking into laughter.

Hook wasn’t without honor; he quickly defended himself, not ready to be laughed of by someone else than Pan.

"No one has ever entreprised to lay a finger on me in such a childish and fraught way. Any one who dares to do so must surely be expecting to die of a dreadful and unpalatable way." But Jane hadn’t said her last word about this.

"Now, before I met you, no one had ever dared to try murdering me; nor to use me as a bait to kill someone else. Before I met you, no one had ever been threatening me in every way imaginable, nor made me scrub the floors of a ship until my hands would bleed." She paused, giving Hook a cold stare, before adding: "After all of this, don’t you think you had it coming?"

"Aye, but you have surely forgotten that before you met me, no one had ever saved your life either" said Hook, always ready to win an argument.

"And so have I." Had to remind him Jane. They both paused for a short moment, their silence calling it quits. After a while, Jane simply had to add something.

"How many times have we saved each other’s lives in the last few days?"

"Honesty my dear, I am afraid I have lost count."

Jane smiled, looking fully at her former opponent. Yes, she could now say Hook wasn’t her enemy anymore; enemies do not save each other’s lives on a regular basis, after all. She observed the way he looked, fearsome no longer; but still, even with his long black hair dismantled by the salted waves, the captain James Hook remained a salient and solid figure. Possessing all the striking features that any book character should possess, the captain was out of the ordinary, his natural charisma constantly emanating from him. Even now, being inches away from him, it was hard for Jane to avoid being struck by the fascinating allure of his wonderful blue eyes. She gulped anxiously, starting to feel nervous being so close to this unique character. She cleared her throat, and finally said something to break the silence which was menacing to build up.

"So here we are."

"Here we are indeed." Enhanced Hook, who had remained still when Jane got lost in her contemplation. She could almost feel like he had been doing the very same.

"I feel, James Hook, that we are finally on the same page." It was right. She never felt so strongly connected to Hook as an equal as now. She looked at him with some fear in her eyes, suddenly afraid she had been saying too much – that she had made a fool of herself. She wouldn’t have cared for Hook to think of her as a fool a month ago. But now, she knew, it was all different. "It’s okay, you don’t have to say anything", she quickly added to brush off any discomfort. "Besides, we must now get out of here before one of us catches a cold."

"If this happens to be true, prepare yourself for quite a dire revenge on my part", replied a half-
smiling Hook. Jane smiled as well, before finally doing something she had been dreaming of for a while: she teasefully splashed water in Hook’s direction, not a care in the world as to what would happen next. She simply laughed with the pure glee of innocent moments before swimming away, trying to get back onto the docks.

Hook forgot all about his manners, about the sharp Etionian etiquette stuck to his character. He swam rapidly towards Jane and instinctively grabbed her by the wrist, a wicked smile on his face. Jane playfully struggled, laughing without restraint, but Hook wasn’t letting go – he grabbed her closer, both of them getting even wetter as they fought like children, splashing water all around. But none of them cared. Jane finally gave in and Hook got a hold of her, plunging her head first under the water for a second before releasing her. She got back up and gasped for air, kicking around with even more strength than before. Hook had to pin down both of her arms to her sides to prevent her from doing any more harm. "I told you – you must be have been ready for a dire revenge on my part, Jane!" said Hook, ever mischievously triumphant.

"Fine, I yield, I yield!" finally gave in Jane, still smiling. "Can you let me go, now, captain?" She looked at him, seeing the last traces of the joyful tease slowly fade from his features, as he stared more intensely at her.

He wasn’t letting go. Jane could feel his hand encircling her wrist and his hook clenched at her left arm. She stopped her struggle and stilled. A fallen silence had suddenly put an end to their shared moment of entertainment, replaced by another feeling; much heavier. It pressed onto Jane’s chest and she forgot to breathe as she felt Hook’s presence stealing all of her senses. It was like the dance in the forest all over again; except this time, the excitement and the thrill of the game had made them closer than ever before. Her mind was dulled by the overwhelming beating of her heart. She could only feel both of their bodies, drifting with the gentle ripple of the water; their legs, almost intertwining. Her dress, now reduced to a piece of cloth gorged with water, was at the same time hovering within the stream and snuggling within each of her curves. In the water, the distance between them was meaningless; it was constantly moving, unstable. It was as if it wanted to be filled with their two bodies, pushed by the waves towards one another.

Slowly, Hook lowered down his hand and claw along Jane’s arms, allowing her to stir freely. But none of them made a move. They kept on staring deeply into each other’s eyes, both knowing but at the same time ignoring the feeling which was flowing between them.

She was so close, thought Hook. She looked at him with piercing brown eyes, hooded by those eyelashes drenched with drops of water that could have been tears. And right here, underneath the moonlight, simple and bare, she could be the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. The hatred and jealousy he once held for the girl was gone forever. His sentiment towards the woman was now entirely different – and it could even, in the deepest corner of his soul, frighten him.

He let her go.

Jane slipped away from his grasp and, without saying a word, silently swam back to the shore. She put her wet feet on the warm ground, looking at the small spills of water following each of her steps. Behind her, she heard Hook pulling himself up on the docks and head silently to his boots. Gathering her belongings, Jane smiled when she remembered that those very same boots were the first thing she heard before she even laid eyes on him, on the Jolly Roger, an eternity ago. Suddenly - because sometimes, the lips work faster than the mind, she spoke abruptly. 

"Hook." She paused for a second, looking vaguely over her shoulder, "I do not fear you anymore." The flat and almost peaceful tone she chose to use filled Hook with more questions than answers.

And, in the still of the night, adding nothing, expecting nothing, Jane silently followed the path to the inn.
An enchanting glow, from the light up above, was surrounding her. She couldn’t identify its source, but she knew that here, she was safe. Nothing could get to her. She could remain here forever, she mused as she basked into the warmth protecting her entire body. A few strands of hair were flotting around her face. But muffled sounds came from above – from out there. From he rest of the world she wished she could escape from for a second. If only she could also escape the confused feelings that had arisen in her. But even here, the thoughts of a black-haired man filled her with instant disarray and flushness. Something distant that she could identify as footsteps became louder. And arguing as well.

Jane drew herself out of the water, drops dripping instantly on the carpet that supported the bathtub she delighted in a few seconds ago. As she passed her hands onto her wet face, trying to pull her hair away from her eyes, she spotted Deeja storming the room, shouting indiscantly to someone behind the door she quickly locked. Leaning against it, she turned to a somehow distressed Jane who was trying to conceal some of her nudity – although it was useless, since the chamber maid had been the one who insisted on removing all of her wet clothes last night, after the fighting that she had had to describe to her, not sparing any detail.

"Jane, my little miss, you are going to have to explain what the devil is going on with the lad in the corridor here."
"Wait – what lad do you..." Jane started, before turning to door and shout in its general direction: "Hey! Who are you? What do you want with me?" A small voice inside her mind warned her it could be one of the men from Hank Conroy’s crew, and she was already tense, ready to jump out from her bath to seize some kind of weapon.
"Jane, if you would please calm down" answered the familiar voice which allowed her to loosen her grip on the side of the bathtub. "That madwoman of yours would simply not let me in" – Deeja scoffed, not hiding her feelings about the man she had struggled with – "yet I have a buisness of the upmost importance to share with you at once. It is about last night."

Jane’s heart leaped a little in her chest. The proximity they had shared only a few hours ago had left bewildered emotions creep their way into her mind, and she was still struggling to define them all. But another part of her brain told her she already had it all figured it out, if only she stopped asking herself this many questions. She shrugged the thoughts off.

"Wh-what is it you want to tell me?"
"It is about Conroy, Jane. You and I are in danger once again, I am afraid." Even concealed by the door and his detached tone, Jane could still feel the slight alarm in Hook’s voice. All of her concerns about the complicated feelings she started to develop last night – if not before, she noticed as a million toughts tumbled into her mind in a second – vanished as she turned as white as the bedsheets behind her. Immediately, she rose from her bath, any of her concerns about intimacy gone and forgotten.
"Deeja, you can let him in" she indicated as she grabbed a towel and wrapped herself in. In a rapid motion, the maid unlocked the door and allowed Hook to step in.

He only grasped the quick vision of a white leg disappearing behind the paravent placed next to the bathtub. A second later, a towel was thrown on top of it as Jane started to question him about it all.
"How come we’re in danger? Haven’t we dealt with his pityful thugs yesterday at the docks?"
"I will tell you everything in a second, Jane – but this must remain concealed from anyone’s ears until it is all over. Which will be, soon, if we don’t waste any time."
Jane froze behind the screen for a moment. If Deeja’s presence had given her enough strength to allow Hook in the room, she wasn’t sure of how she would keep her composure if she were left alone with him. Especially not when all that separated her entirely naked self from the object of her recent turmoil was a thin panel of wood and his good form. Her heart beat frantically and she had to take a deep breath before peering from her location, making eye contact with Deeja – and Deeja only.

"It is all right, Deeja. You can leave us with no worries – he’s the man from last night I told you about." Understanding hit the maid right away. Although Jane hadn’t shared informations about their unexpected late-night swim, she had mentioned the dancing that happened before, which was enough for the woman to imagine a possible infatuation between the two. She winked at Jane, who turned red, mouthing some goodbyes as she exited and closed the door behind her. Suddenly, the room felt awfully silent. Only the ruffles of the clothes she struggled with as quickly as she could filled the quietness between them.

For a moment, Hook remained silent. The soft shadows he could sightly distinguish from behind the delicate panel seemed to absorb all of his thoughts. It took a clearing of her voice and a reproach from Jane to get him to talk.

"Conroy has fled before the fight was over", he stated, "as you may remember only too well." A slight groan emerged from Jane, which he dismissed as a mere sign of acknowledgment. He carried on. "I assumed it was a mere proof of his very nature – that of a rat more than of a man – and was certain he must have gone back to the sewers he came from in order to hide his shame from the rest of the world..." Another groan, which he covered by continuing his explanation. "However, as it would be bad form to deny it today – I must have to admit I was mistaken." He had to stop as the infuriated groans were now getting impossible to ignore. "And – now, please excuse me for interrupting my explanations, but may I be of any kind of assistance, Jane?"

An embarrassed silence followed his suggestion. Discomfort almost palpable in her voice, Jane replied. "Well... Actually, my hair has gotten tangled with something like – is it the buttons of my shirt...? But it’s okay, just hand me a pair of scissors or anything like that, I will cut my hair and be done with it."

"Nonsense" came Hook’s instant refusal. In a smooth movement, Hook stepped towards the screen. "Here, allow me."

Jane emitted a laughable squeak of surprise and only had enough time to quickly turn her back to him, the tips of her ears red. She was thankful she already had her trousers on, but was aware of the pityful view she offered otherwise. Her arms, folded over her head, were halfway stuck through her sleeves, the rest of her shirt being stranded at her forehead since the buttons had gotten tangled with her hair so tightly it was impossible for her to push or pull without tightening it further. She was glad she couldn’t see the look on Hook’s face, too afraid to be laughed at in this precise moment. But Hook didn’t stir – nor said a word since he had stepped behind the paravent.

Jane’s bare back was turned to him. The shirt which caused her such trouble was lifted up – revealing smooth and naked skin all the way up to her shoulder blades. He became suddenly acutely aware of the lack of distance between them – and the fact she was bare with no way to cover her breasts save from turning her back to him only confused the usually level-headed captain. Thoughts which had arisen in him the night before, harvested by the complicated feelings he started to experience due to their previous and twisted history, inevitably filled his mind. It took Jane’s timid voice clearing to beckon him back to reality.

"Apologies, my –" he paused, before starting again. "I found myself reflecting on the better way to facilitate your current condition without ruining the fabric you are struggling with." He started running his left hand along the shirt, trying to identify the origin of the problem, which he rapidly
did. But instead of bringing his hand back to his side, he found himself letting it softly slide down, following the contour of Jane’s side. The contact of his palm – so gently pressed against her bare skin, caused Jane to start. Yet she didn’t say a thing as his hand softly ran down her ribs, down to her waistline. It must have been the softest and most burning touch she had ever experienced. But the silken contact stopped running down her body and settled as he stepped forward. He remained there, his hand resting at the curve of her waist. Without thinking, he had stepped closer. Just a little closer to the source of all the turmoil he could hardly ignore. Images of their previous dances filled their minds.

He felt the urge to lower himself down to the nape of her neck – but didn’t, although the space between them longed to be filled and his arms suddenly craved to be wrapped around her. She was shivering under his touch, and he realised she had to be cold.

"Here, I do believe that if I were to –"

With acute precision, he found the source of all the turmoil – a button had indeed gotten wrapped around Jane’s interpid curls – she hadn’t been able to reach it. In a few swift motions, the fabric suddenly flew free, released as he cut off the button which now remained loosely attached to Jane’s hair instead of falling to the ground. Jane’s arms, now free, quickly helped the shirt around her figure, covering her previously bare chest.

She didn’t turn around. He stood, waiting, behind her. His thoughts clouded. She didn’t dare to look at him. But slowly, her head turned – just enough to let him see her profile. Her eyes remained fixed to the ground as her thoughts were wandering far away. Licked lips opened to say something, but he cut her off, suddenly afraid of what those lips could reveal. Afraid that those lips might destroy his new – hopes, he realised.

"I believe it is best if I were to wait outside. I... will make sure no one tries to infiltrate the place", he added as if it could give him a good enough excuse to flee from the room. In truth, he had a hard time to conceal his very own emotions, which betrayed his voice and hand. Later on, he restlessly wished he had stayed, had he known those were to be his last moments with her.

A shaken Jane finished arranging herself, which took a mere couple of seconds. However, it took her much longer to settle the rhythm of her heart before fiding the strength to join him outside.

She greeted a grinning Deej a as she stepped over the threshold of the inn. Fresh air and salted wind hit her instantly as she turned around to find Hook – he was there, leaning against the wall. She halted her steps for a second when he peered at her. It was the first time they looked into each other’s eyes since they had been so close the night before. Heart in her throat, she stepped towards the captain, yet it felt as if each step she took drove her away from him. A sudden pain seized her as she realized he was within arm’s reach, yet none of them did stir. They remained for an instant, their eyes filled with the weight of things better left unsaid.

"Come", he simply declared as he suddenly departed. She followed his steps, remaining behind him – saying nothing, silent as a tomb – always behind him. She didn’t know for how long they walked, was it for hours or minutes? She simply kept his eyes fixed on his back. They both listened to their own footsteps.

But they reached a beach. The sand regularly crunched under their feet; when everything turned silent, Jane looked up to Hook, who had abruptly stopped and turned around to see her. As if in a dream, she was looking at him – yet, without really seeing him. This filled him with terror. Suddenly, all resolutions about containing the new and distraught feelings he had kept buried shattered. He stepped to her, seizing her arms in a firm grip.

"Jane" – the way he said her name almost made her cry with an inexplicable and violent sorrow – "We both are in danger." At this, she said nothing, remained transfixed by the look in his eyes. "I thought Conroy had fled, but I was wrong. He had everything prepared. His attack, last night, was
just the first part of his plan. We thought the men from last night were his crew? They were but cheap mercenaries, hired to evaluate our forces."

"Do you mean –" She didn’t dare to get to the end of her sentence, having already figured out the rest.

"Yes. The rat has had enough time to gather his complete crew – and then more. He is planning an attack today, ship against ship, captain against captain. The Jolly Roger you can see in the distance " he gestured towards the shadow of the ship, cut out from the blue horizon, "is fully armed and my men are willing to go down with it." He paused, as Jane suddenly gripped his wrist in an oblivious gesture of support – of passion. The look in her eyes was almost as red as his in his darkest moments.

"And so am I."

"Jane – you cannot!" Was his instant and horrified response. He didn’t care about the repercussions – he was ready to deny her the right to fight by his side, if it meant having her hating him until the end. Which might come sooner than he previously thought. Her reply was naturally of no suprise to him. "Why so?" she replied fiercely, her hand letting go of his wrist – as he loosened his grip as well.

"Have I not proved myself? Am I considered too weak to fight by your side, although I have done so continually? Or is it that I have been a fool enough to believe you could ever trust me?" She distanced herself from him, staring daggers.

"Hate me if you must, Jane. But I cannot possibly allow you to go with me." His tone was cold, so cold, and left no room for arguing. It was too much. In a vehement gesture, Jane shoved his arms away. In her frozen wrath, she almost didn’t feel the cutting of his hook against her arm which had pushed him off, and turned around to walk away from him rapidly, leaving him behind.

He was pushing her away – so she must do the same, she realized cruelly. She hated him – and herself for having allowed her heart to be tortured by the very thought of him. He did not need her. Especially not when she desperately needed him – because she did. She always did, but was too much of a fool and understood it only now. The cold rage and shame – and passion, such passion she never wanted to experience again, ran down her face in the shape of tears.

A hand seized her arm, stopping her maddened course in all its desperation. Two strong arms turned her around, and before she could realize it, lips had crashed upon hers.

He was there. He was everything. Surrounding her, stealing away all of her senses – there was nothing left in the world but him. Her arms folded around his neck in a desperate gesture, to erase the pain, the fear of having been left alone. He pulled her closer, the same motive conducting his every moves. Their embrace could never be strong enough. Their kiss – finally shared, finally real, annihilated the distance that words had put between them. At this moment, there was only the two of them, locked in a desperate embrace. The waves crashed on the shore and they could not get enough. Restlessly, their lips met, again and again – fingers entwined with hair, pulling closer in a desperate attempt to disappear into each other. But tears doubled, and after an endless enlacement, their lips separated – Jane’s head simply rested against Hook’s chest, rising at each frantic breath he tried to control in vain attempts. She heard him speak, her eyes closed and arms still wrapped around him. She was never letting go.

"You are my weakness, Jane. And I cannot allow you to go with me – for even if I were to succeed in this fight, losing you would be the end of me."

She looked up at him, slowly. How softly cruel was the look in her loved eyes.

"What about how I feel? Am I not allowed to wish to stay with you? Hook – James..." At her saying his name, he could only shut his eyes, and lowered his face to lay an adoring kiss on the top of her head. "James – I feel like I cannot leave you. You must have forgotten how to fight without me by your side. Let us face it, you would be useless up there..." she ended with a sweet chuckle, muffled by his tender embrace. Deep down, she knew he was right. Being together on the Jolly Roger meant they would care too much about each other’s safety instead of fighting properly. She sighed, sorrow once again gaining the best of her.
Hook raised her chin, but she couldn’t see him well, her eyes being filled with tears once again. And slowly, he kissed each of her tears away. The gentleness of his gesture only made her tear up more, and he was more than willing to help with her predicament. He traced the path of her teardrops down to the corner of her mouth. That corner which held the secret kiss he had longed for without knowing it. And she gave it to him. He accepted it – the greatest gift of them all. They kissed once more, a kiss of utter tenderness. A kiss which meant goodbye.

"You know, you might be right... I will be useless without you. Which is why I will end this fight as soon as I may in order to find you. You will not even realize I am gone" he added with a cunning smile, which made Jane laugh once again as he wrapped his arms closer around her. But slowly, she pushed him back. Softly and painfully. It was for the best.

"Do what you must. I will be there when you win" she replied, a twinkle of certain hope in her eye. She was never lovelier than when she believed in him, he thought with some selfishness. But he had been alone for so long – finding someone who supported him was a miracle. She was a miracle.

"Then, I will be back soon, Jane." He deposited a kiss on her forehead. It almost broke her heart in two. "... my Jane."

And she let him go. He walked away – but she was confident he would come back. No one could ever harm James Hook, the storybook character – and the man she was certain to adore. He was safer without her. And when he came back, it would be to share many more adventures by her side. She was looking forward to those, she smiled. And she pondered about her future. She had a future. And it must be by Hook’s side. Yes, she finally found where she belonged. She looked at his distant silhouette disappear and remained for a while on the shore, a hazy smile on her face.

The loud cracking of branches behind her tore her out from her daydream. What could it be? She turned around, but only saw something fly above her, fast, before she slowly realised that this something was in fact someone. Someone she knew had who had seen whatever she had been doing on that shore. Peter Pan descended from the skies, hands on his hips and scorn on his face.

"What just happened, Jane?!" The child was furious. He couldn’t understand, knew Jane. But she tried to explain it him anyway.

"Peter, I know he’s your enemy, but he’s not mine. I cannot fight the same fights as you do", she replied, her hands opened before her in a gesture of sympathy.

"But if you’re his ally, you must be my enemy!"

"No! I can chose to be no one’s enemy! Not everything is black or white, Peter... I know you must be too young to understand..." Peter flew to her, smacking her opened hands away from him.

"And you – you are too old to be my friend! Yes, you have to be old, to do... To do grown-up things with that old codfish!"

"Well, what are you going to do about it? You cannot make me a child again! I grew up here, thanks to him and to you!" She paced around in circles, following Peter’s hovering above her.

"Well – banish you is what I can do!" And with a petulant smile, he snapped his fingers, a tiny light flying to him immediately.

Jane’s eyes widened as she saw a fairy head towards her. She ran – but knew there was nothing she could do. A specific type of dust hit her. A purple one, which made her eyes suddenly heavy... She fell down and felt herself being lifted off the ground as if she weighted no much more than a feather. The last vision she recorded before drifting off to sleep was the sea. The endless, beautiful and deep blue sea.
Pursuit of happiness

Blindly looking for the light switch, Jane let out a long sigh before closing the door with a mechanical hip check. Locking it, Jane officially felt she was back home. The shoes she hastily took off went and hit a chair, but she barely paid attention to it: already, she was at her bed, onto which she unceremoniously sprawled her exhausted limbs. Neither her dress nor her makeup were removed: a minute after she had crossed the flat's threshold, she had drifted into profound slumber.

She was dreaming. She dreamt of the sea of a distant land, which was repeatedly running under her eyes as she tickled the surface of the sky, a soft smile on her lips. She could breathe in the familiar smell of burning sand and hear the sweet ruffle of tropical leaves. It was the warmth of a welcome home. When she touched the ground, it was only to start running towards a distant form, a shadowy silhouette she knew only too well. She longed to reach it, this form, always escaping though immobile; she needed to attain it, to touch...

Her alarm clock rang loudly, and although she had drifted off to sleep with ease, waking up back to reality turned out to be a much tougher affair. Jane pushed the blankets away and pulled herself out of bed, her limbs weak, her face sticky and her clothes ruffled. Opening the curtains and welcoming the sunshine in, she rehashed her dream, deciding she hated it as much as she loved it. It was becoming harder and harder for her to differentiate dream and reality when she woke up. Especially when she dreamed of Neverland.

She loved the smooth sensation of the wind on her skin and the well-known scents that she could relive in such a precise way. But as time passed, as it cruelly does, this kind of dreams slowly started to frighten her. Because how could she be sure that she simply hadn't dreamed all those wonderful adventures in Neverland, such a long time ago? Quickly, she would come back to her senses. She would convince herself of the reality, the tangibility of her memories by casting a rapid glance at the glass bottle which held a few precious specks of shining dust by her window.

A quick check at the mirror allowed her to contemplate, not without some fright, the full extent of the damages of yesterday's evening. She could easily scare people off, herself in the first place, with that horrid and puffy face. She had celebrated her new job by allowing her old college friends to lead her into a heavily alcoholized party, and the first hours of the morning proved her that she was not immune to the secondary effects of champagne, no matter how delicious it was. The cold water of the shower pouring down had the effect of distracting her from the lingering thoughts of her dream, but soon the memory of a shadowy figure appeared to her.

That figure which had been the last thing she would remember of the first man she had loved. Long black hair and eyes of hypnotic blue; the charm and the confidence of a fairy-tale character. Yes, as time went on, she felt that every memory she held of Hook might have only come from her own imagination. Nothing, apart from some shiny dust, could prove Neverland existed. More and more, she started to wonder if she simply hadn't dreamt about her adventures with Peter Pan.

She had to think about her coming back home, four years ago, to convince herself of the reality of her memories.

/

Jane had opened her eyes, laying down on the cold morning grass. Blue skies hovered over her, so familiar to the skies that she had admired at the inn's window the day before. But something was off. Where had the smell of the salty sea gone? Why couldn't she hear the crashing sound of the waves? Painfully, she sat up on her elbows. It seemed that the weight of the head over her shoulders at
increased exponentially. Touching her headacheed brow from the light tip of her fingers, she encountered some remenants of shiny purple dust sprayed all over. As she contemplated the dust, images came back to her. Her argument with Peter; the fairy, flashing rapidly towards her; and James - James, walking away.

All those images immediately made sense as they gathered incoherently in her dazed mind. Suddenly seized with a freezing panic, she got up on her own two feet, and almost fell back to the ground, her head spinning.

James Hook. The sea, escaping from her, farther and farther away. Peter banishing her.

Eventually, the black spots before her eyes faded, and only when she managed to find balance onto her hesitant legs did she look around her. And her heart shattered in her chest.

She was back home.

It took her a minute to recognize those walls; those windows; that garden. This environment seemed to have emerged from a dream; however, as soon as she realized where she was - what had happened - everything became all too cruelly real. Too tangible. Suddenly, every adventure she ever knew in Neverland turned into memories: that was all they would ever be from now on. No more new adventures for her. The reality of the world in which she grew up suddenly weighted much more than the imaginary world that she had accepted as her home.

She was seized with fear and doubt. Maybe nothing had happened ever since she had been rejected from college? Maybe all the adventures that had felt so real – up until the last second – had only been dreamed?

The first lights of the early morning had just started to settle down onto the bushes and flowers surrounding her. And slowly, as her body started to recalled the way she moved, as she had never left home, Jane stepped towards the door that gave into her room. From the outside, she could see that everything was still the same. Everything was in its right place, like when she had left – or dreamt she had left – her home forever.

She drew a breath. Put her hand to the handle, but kept still. She felt that she would cry once she opened that door. Opening that door, she would have to face reality, if she realized that all the time she had spent in Neverland was only just a dream. She would have to face the problems of tomorrow, like before. She would have to live a normal life once again.

Unable to decide if she prefered Neverland to have been real or just a dream of a few hours, she pushed the door open.

What happened next had been extremely foggy, remembered Jane, stepping out of the shower and grabbing a towel to dry her dripping hair. Amongst many cries, tears, and an unprecedented bewilderment, Jane had been welcomed home. Amongst a family that had thought she was gone forever.

She had been missing for two years.

It took her family a week to realize she was home. She had never seen her parents cry before. When they took her into their arms, she was too flabbergasted to realize she was crying as well. It was only then that she became aware of all the damages her departure had caused. That she became aware of how selfish she had been.

"I'm sorry - I'm so sorry", had she then repeated restlessly, her face blurred by her many tears. And
again and again, she begged for forgiveness.

She didn't mention Neverland. She invented a teenage runaway; a very long one, made of driftings and sharing with the people she met along the road, not caring about the dangers of this type of life. This version of the story didn't stray far from the truth.

Her adjustment to coming back home had been smooth, thanks to the caring support of her family. She had, in a way, avoided the immediate pragmatism of her problems from before Neverland. The letter from university which had refused her entry was now a distant memory. She didn't have to worry about it any more.

She had to reconstruct her life, step by step. A new life. It had been difficult first.

Two months after she had returned home, her mother had started to give her some advice to build her life – to build herself – again. She indicated where she should start. She never once asked about her former life, about those two enigmatic years. Maybe because, deep down, she preferred not to know. Her daughter was back. That was all she cared for.

As her mother layed different university flyers in front of her, Jane's thoughts wandered off and escaped by the window, wide open, in her room. She had lost any hope of seeing the strange shadow of a flying boy in the sky. But still, she liked to admire it. As a memory from a time when she had been so close to the stars.

Three months later, Jane started to shake herself up. She had grown tired of dreaming her life away. She had had enough of daydreaming. That was what had lead her to Neverland in the first place. And once she had finally reached that safe imaginary haven, she had had a chance to grow up. To live everything she had ever hoped for. She was in no place to ask for more, she pondered as she admired the last remaining specks of fairy dust carefully kept into a precious bottle. Her time had come and gone. It was now time for her to look at the future. To build herself a new life.

At the fifth day of the fifth month since she came back, Jane stepped into her new – and very first – university.

A new chapter of her life was getting written. And this future, which started along with her determination, announced her full presence and participation into the world. Her two feet on the ground advanced towards a better future. She stepped into the unknown, unafraid. She had spend enough time hesitating, never daring to take a part in reality. She was ready.

The digital clock of her cellphone was dangerously close to 10:30. She had a meeting in a little more than half an hour, twenty minutes away from her building – fifteen if she walked fast enough. If only she could fly, thought Jane for a mere second before pushing this idea far away from her.

She threw a jacket on and, gulping down one last aspirin before rushing away, opened the door and headed downtown.

It wasn't a formal meeting, but it was nevertheless important to her. She cursed herself for not having refused the invitation of her friends the night before. When she pushed the door of the cafe wide open, she was five minutes early, but the person she had to meet was already there.

Thomas Rotansky, her head publisher, was focused in reading the news printed in the paper before him, his two elbows on the table. He looked up when the bell attached to the door tinkled, as he pushed up his glasses onto his nose before smiling at her kindly.
"Morning, Thomas. I hope I'm not late", started Jane as she sat before him, knowing perfectly well that she wasn't.

"You are, oh so terribly late – you really need to work on your punctuality, I'm afraid", he replied jokingly. "Okay. So, here: I gave your manuscript to five publishing houses, and in a week from now we should begin to get some responses."

"That's perfect!"

"However, I can't help but wonder... Why give yourself the trouble? I'm certain that if you gave the manuscript to your mother's publishing house, you could –"

"You know what I think about it, Thomas, and I certainly won't come back on my decision. I already feel terrible for doing my internship there..."

"– and you might have carried on working there. You were very effective..."

"I don't want people to believe I pulled strings to get where I am now. You should understand, you more than anyone else."

Thomas had a little constrained smile. Before being her associate, he had been her best and first friend at university. His father had been his teacher during his first college years, and he had rather suffered from it, he confessed Jane once.

"Fine", he finally replied. "If you wish to keep this publication secret, I'll help you no matter what. Just don't come crying to your mother when you'll get your first refusals", he added with some humour in his eyes. Jane looked up to the ceiling, feigning annoyance, while a smile tugged at the corner of her lips. Patting her arm slightly, Thomas inquired about Jane's new job.

"I start on monday – but I am so eager to begin that I could even start tomorrow!"

"Well, it's true that ever since I've known you, you've always been of a go-ahead type. I don't even know why I should worry about you!"

Jane thought about this remark while sipping her coffee. She had certainly gained much more self-confidence thanks to her adventures in... But she forced herself to cut that thought right away.

However, she had to admit that most of the things she dared to undertake now she was twenty-four were things she couldn't even start to consider when she was seventeen. She had gotten a diploma in communication after four years of hard work, all the while getting some internships at her mother's business – which was the reason why she had decided to find her first job by her own means, tired to depend on her mother's resources. Her job in digital publishing had been a blessing. She also remembered the magical sensation which filled her bones when she first signed her rental agreement. Her own job awaiting her and the keys to her own flat in hand, she was once again independent. Free.

Neverland wasn't the only way to guarantee the freedom of which she had always dreamed of. And, for the first time in forever, she was the only person who held the key to her own happiness. No one could banish her from this reality in which she willingly had accepted to take a part in.

She continued to secure her happiness, by working alongside to her job to try and get her first book published. A book for children. A book that would maintain magic into people's hearts. Besides Thomas, no one else knew about it. This secret guaranteed her independent pursuit of happiness.

"Oh, by the way, I was thinking of something... Why did you choose that pen name of yours: J.
Anzuelo?" Jane blushed for an instant, trying to clumsily hide the redness in her cheeks by raising her cup of coffee higher under her nose.

"Oh, I don't know... I only thought it sounded nice, that's all."

Jane and Thomas left the coffee two hours later, and Thomas, the perfect gentleman, presented his excuses for not being able to celebrate for her new job with her the night before. He was, of course, entirely forgiven.

A few weeks later, Jane would learn that she would be published. Until then, a brand new job awaited her, full of marvellous promises.

Yes, with a piece of Neverland in her heart, Jane really had it all. She thought about it as she lazily walked home. And all the blue eyes that she met in the street couldn't possibly make her change her mind.
"Reunion"

"Only for a few hours", had promised Jane when she had been invited to go out that night. It was now well over three in the morning, and she was questioning her capacity to maintain her decisions firmly.

"Now, don’t tell me that you’re sorry you came!", exclaimed Thomas as they were wandering blindly in the midst of the building’s shadowy figures, hoping to encounter her flat. "It was undoubetly the best night out of your life!"

"The best night out of your life, you mean", replied Jane as she decidedly corrected him. "D’you still have David’s number... Or was it Donny?"

"Daniel", sighed Thomas dreamily. "His name is Daniel. I still have his number well tucked in my wallet – and I have already done my best to learn it by heart." Jane couldn’t help but sigh. As an helpless romantic, Thomas had already learnt more than two dozens of phone numbers by heart, always hoping that they would belong to the love of his life. As for Jane herself, well – she couldn’t quite remember if she ever had found in her pocket a phone number accompanied ?? by the hope for a new meeting. She probably had lost them all, if it were ever the case.

However, she remembered accurately the strange sensation that she had felt that night. A sensation that kept on repeating itself recently.

Eyes had fallen onto her that night. Sitting by the bar next to Thomas, she was ordering her second drink – a cocktail chosen randomly – and her vision was already playing some tricks on her; but not when it came to those eyes.

She knew those eyes. She had seen them in dreams, over and over again. And now, those eyes seemed to creep their way into her life repeatedly.

"Thomas – Thomas, look, quick"; and with her chin, she pointed towards the direction of the insistant gaze. Her friend had to look away from the object of his affections of the night – not without regret – and see what urgent matter required his expertise.

"Quick, tell me –" carried on Jane, "Can you see the person with blue eyes, out there? Please, tell me that I’m not dreaming and that he’s looking at me with the same intensity that you look at a third of the people here tonight."

"Where – Oh! Right, him, I guess. He’s staring at you quite vividly, I reckon. Do you know him?"

It took Jane a moment before she dared to utter a thought that had been gnawing on her for quite some time.

"I know him?" she whispered.

He came from a dream. He couldn’t be here.

"Snap me out of this." And so Thomas did, snapping his fingers before her nose, without waking her up from a strange and dazed dream as she had expected. "But... – it’s not possible". Rather tipsy, Jane managed to stand up from her stool, almost causing it to fall down, and ignored the suprised look that Thomas gave her. She had to see him. She had to be certain. Tottering onto her high heels, Jane tried to find her way amongst the sea of people which blurred her vision and hid away the mysterious eyes. But she had to keep going – she needed to get closer, to make sure... He was calling her – those eyes, beckoning. One more step – he was still so far away, and the crowd, smothering her... – One more step...

A man collided with her – she looked away. One second only. By the time she set back her focus onto her goal, the eyes had vanished.

He was gone. Impossible to find. The gigantic room, drowned under the crowd and the sweat and alcohols of all kinds, had engulfed the memory which had been so clear a second ago.

When Jane came back towards Thomas, he had already forgotten about it all, being too busy finding a way to get closer to the dance floor. It took Jane three more drinks to shake off the cold shivers
which ran along her back in this suffocating room.

She wished she could confide in to Thomas; to admit that, until this evening, she had believed she was suffering from delirious visions caused by loneliness mixed with alcohol. She wanted to tell him that these eyes – those eyes that she had seen that night, she had been constantly seeing them around her lately. When her friend had confirmed that her vision was indeed not playing any tricks on her, she believed she might have fainted. But Thomas was too far from sobriety, and, unlike her, far too joyous, for her to imagine launching a conversation of this type. And how could she announce, in her current state or not, that she had had visions of a man whom she had only met in what sometimes appeared to be but a long and feverish dream?

She kept quiet for the rest of their walk home, allowing her friend ramble away about his fantaisies, which were all about marrying his sixth crush of the year. She merely looked down at the concrete running underneath her feet, imagining instead the white sand of Neverland carressing the tip of her toes.

Jane finally arrived home, feeling much more exhausted than when she had first seen the memory of James Hook coming back to her. Just as the different pieces of her life started to fit in perfect order, blue and piercing eyes, so familiar, had come in, and were questionning her certitudes. She had just signed her first contract, and her book was about to be re-edited in a new print twice as much as important as the first. And she caught herself daydreaming about living fully again: the comfort of her flat seemed to suffer from the lack of companionship. Maybe a roommate; or maybe a boyfriend, if she could feel up to it one day. Days came and went; and, soon, five years would have passed since she had woken up onto her parent’s dewy lawn one early morning. She had managed to get a fresh start from her life in Neverland; she had hoped she could do the same with James Hook. Yet, whenever she met someone worthy of interest – according to her relatives – she couldn’t feel anything but deception. Those men that she met could be perfect in every way... they weren’t James. They simply weren’t him.

She was coming back from another fruitless date when he first appeared to her, like a vivid memory claiming to gain back some rights onto her current life. She was making her way amongst the crowd on a sunny Saturday afternoon, eager to come home and forget about the disappointment written onto the face of the young man she had agreed to drink with – merely because a colleague had insisted upon it. She had paid for the drinks and had left as soon as possible. Stopping in front of a showcase for a moment, she was putting back in order some strands of hair which had escaped from the bun on top of her brow. Looking at her reflection and beyond her shoulder, she noticed a distant figure. A figure she knew only too well, for having been mesmerized by it way too many times. Heart beating fast, Jane had turned around – too fast. She collided with a woman who was passing by, and once she had done apologizing, the figure had been long gone.

She had then come home, hoping to find some distraction admist the pages of a novel or in her work, but she had found herself perambulating in her living-room, constantly stopping in front of her window for a few instants before carrying on her aimless walk. And each time she did, a new memory of Neverland came back to her. As if a toxic substance obstructed her senses, she could only think of him. James Hook was back into her life, whether real or not, as if punishing her for having tried to forget him.

Five times more did the silhouette of James Hook appear to her in the same enigmatic ways. In the streets, in parks, in her life. And, each time, he disappeared, too quickly for her to be able to even think about what she would say to him, if she could reach him.
It was now about five in the morning; from the ajar window came the first mirthful bird chirps of the day. Decidedly spread out onto her sofa, Jane could not bring herself to sleep; too many thoughts were spinning in her mind. Grabbing a book next to her, she set herself to the task of distracting herself. Five minutes later, however, she thrust it back in its original place with violence and frustration, when she had realised that words were streaming under her eyes without making any sense. She couldn’t help it: again and again, her thoughts found their way back to James. She could not accept him into her life; not when she didn’t have any tangible proof that he was indeed back. She had come so far, without being held back by regret and melancholy... Should she abandon herself and become once again whom she had been years ago – a young girl, incapable to keep her feet on the ground, always dreaming her life away instead of seizing the opportunities that life spread evidently before her?

Absorbed in her reflexions, Jane didn’t feel her limbs get heavier with dullness; slowly, memories and reality intertwined amongst the soft lull of her slow breathing. Half-awake and slowly losing herself in the comfortable numbness of her dream, Jane saw James Hook before her: she could make the most of his features beneath the misty veil of her vision. It was but a dream, but she tried, in her stupor, to lift her hands to him: her body didn’t obey, but she was certain that she had managed it... Otherwise, how could he have taken her hands into his? Half-closed eyes hid away the reality, but nothing mattered... Nothing, safe for the soft touch of his fingers against hers. She could be dreaming; in dreams, every boundaries were allowed to fall... And, for the first time since so long, Hook wasn’t this distant silhouette walking away from her on the shore... For the first time, she could feel his warm body, so close to hers...

Torpor had entirely claimed her; in her dream, inconscious words slipped from her lips. She was calling him: she wanted him by her side, real, for the rest of her life.

"James... Don’t leave me..." Each word came muffled from her limp lips, yet she suprised herself by expecting an answer. And, out of the dream, it came.

"I am here, Jane."

But he couldn’t be here. It was only part of the dream, wasn’t it? And yet...
The confused state in which she was in, between dreams and reality, confined her senses. Yet, the warm connexion of his fingers with hers was still here... And, once again, the voice sounded; more distinctly; more real.

"Jane..."

She oppened her eyes.

Hook was here. On one knee before her, he stared at Jane, unfathomable. And still, her hands were held in his.

She wanted to stand; to open her mouth, to speak... She would have wanted to cry out, to scream, to react: but she could do nothing else but take his hand between hers. His blue eyes lowered towards it: she was allowing her fingers to travel along his arm, tracing the countour of each of his veins, each of his scars. Each contact confirmed his presence before her. Keeping silent, he observed the path taken by this hand, gliding with delicacy along his skin, worked up by the harsh wind of the sea. Then, at last, she looked up at him.

Silence filled the room.

They met; in an instant; in a kiss. If she had doubted about his presence until now, nothing could make her doubt at this moment. His hot lips kept on meeting hers; yet, already, the fear of loosing them seized Jane: she would claim them again, with the fervor of their last moments. James was with her side. Every thing made sense again.
Then, after an infinite moment, they broke away – softly – their brows were still touching. Jane’s fingers gripped the fabric of his coat, tracing idly the contour of the golden embroidery decorating his collar.

"How?" started Jane, trying to conceal the shakiness of her voice. "How did you find me, James?" he stared at her with his clear gaze before answering.

"When I came back from this fight against Conroy –" he stopped for an instant, as he caught Jane looking at him with worried eyes – "We won. He will be a source of trouble no more", he reassured her, with a rude tone imprinted with obvious bitterness towards their common enemy. "Once I came back from the fight, I immediately looked for you on the shore. As I understood you were gone, Jane – I knew that the worst had happened."

"I’m sorry – I haven’t been able to defend myself, I didn’t act quickly enough –" Hook raised his hand to her lips, calming her agitation. "It took me weeks to find Pan – I promptly learnt about what he had done to you. That he had carried you away – away from Neverland. I have always sworn that I would have no rest lest Pan died; this utmost infamy only renewed this desire for revenge. Rage consumed me – some of my men paid the price –" Jane cast a reproaching look at him, but allowed him to continue. "Soon, I understood that I had to harness this rage and put it to good use. For months, I looked for means to find you. It was only by capturing one of Pan’s fairies that I managed to find a way back to you."

Hook fell silent, and already, hundreds of questions were rushing at the tip of Jane’s tongue.

"I had lost all hope to see you again. To see Neverland again... I was gone for so long, James –" She cut her sentence short, avoiding to confess that she had attempted to forget about him many times; to lessen the pain of being away from him. But, with a swift perspicacity that Jane knew too well, Hook had understood.

"I arrive late; possibly too late... Ought I worry about any another suitor? The young man who escorted you this evening, by any chance?"

Jane’s eyebrows almost disappeared into her hairline. Her mouth formed an "o" of shock and surprise before she replied, pretending to be offended beyond words:

"Thomas is only my best friend! But I’m relieved to see I wasn’t mistaken... You kept on haunting me, lately. I’ve been seeing you everywhere, like a shadow following me around! How much longer did you intend to conceal your presence from me?"

As usual, Hook had a sly smile before replying.

"If you hadn’t tried to approach me this evening, I would have sworn I had no more importance to you – that you had forgotten about me entirely, cruel vixen that you are." Jane’s grip onto his collar got tighter as she affected a half-amused and half-menacing look. He carried on, a faint sign of malice in his eyes. "Do no think that my pride has been tarnished so that I would kneel back to a woman in order to reconquer her heart. Should your affections have fluttered to someone else, it was but my mission to evaluate the forces of my competitor before anything else..." He layed his hand upon hers, loosening it from his collar with ease, before exchanging a knowing glance with Jane. A smile appeared on her feature, and she replied, any trace of anger in her voice vanished:

"I am glad that this competitor doesn’t exist... Otherwise, he would have had quite something to worry about. I would have broken his heart right after you would have broken his nose."

"Is mine safe from your wrath?"

Jane paused for a second before asking, puzzled:

"Do you mean your heart, or your nose?" Hook smiled, his fingers toying with her auburn strands. "Both, I am afraid." Jane repressed a soft laugh.

"You would be most distressed if you didn’t suffer my wrath from time to time... I’m afraid I cannot guarantee the safeness of your nose, my dear." However, she propelled herself onto the tips of her
toes to lay down another kiss onto the pirate’s lips, who was only obliged to respond with the same amount of eagerness.

"You’re coming home with me?" did he finally ask, after a moment of delicious silence. Naturally, both of them already knew the answer.
"Dear Thomas,

First of all, let me congratulate you for your engagement; I would be lying if I didn’t say that I hadn’t seen it coming, but I am terribly happy for you. Of course, you can expect me to come for your wedding this July, I wouldn’t miss it for the world! I’ve always appreciated Daniel, and I am certain that you will both be marvellous when exchanging your vows. Naturally, I want to be informed about the wedding cake you will pick: I’ve always believed that lemon cakes should be given a chance when it comes to special occasions, even for their slight acidity. As long as you manage to have it well-assorted, there’s no way it can go wrong!

In other news, I will soon be able to hand to you my next manuscript, which will be most likely finished by the end of June. I hope that the manager of the publishing house isn’t too mad at me for running away like that every autumn and winter, but you know how I only gain inspiration thanks to those extended trips."

Jane paused in the redaction of her letter when she heard the sound of three familiar knocks at her door. Pretending to ignore them, she tried to return to her paper work, but the door opened and a smile tugged at her lips. In a few steps, James had come towards her desk, placing a hyacinth next to her inkwell and a soft kiss at her temple.

"How is your new book so far, my dear island expert?" Jane turned away from her parchement for good and raised her gentle eyes to the captain’s blue ones, which her looking back at her with tenderness and malice.

"Unfortunately, my eloquent encyclopedic page about Neverland’s mermaids isn’t on today’s agenda. As tedious as it might sound, I am merely taking care of my correspondance."

"A wedding?" asked he, after going through her letter quickly. "Why, we ought to consider doing the same thing as well, my dearest Jane."

She had a soft little laugh, the kind of laugh that made her appear so lovely to his eyes. She raised from her chair to sit before him onto her desk.

"We already had our own wedding. A wonderful wedding by the sea. Was it really such an easy trifle to forget about?" answered Jane, teasing him tenderly while playing with one of his black strands of hair.

"I was thinking about a wedding on land, although it might never compare to the sea. One amongst the Foreville family, gathered all together." Jane let the strand of hair slip from her fingers, and remained silent and pensive for a while. Then, a smile at her lips, she raised her eyes to him.

"A second wedding? My, my, marrying each other restlessy, this is something that could end up being wearsome, James...", started Jane playfully. She was expecting him to reply on the same light-hearted tone, but James replied with disarming honesty.

"I am afraid that I could repeat my vows each and every day with the same amount of fervor than the first."

This kind of sentences made her want to hate him – without her ever being able to. Instead, she could only meet his lips to claim an eager kiss upon them. He took her in his arms, kissing her back with vehemence, as he always did.

And she could only yield. After all this time, even the slightest attention coming from him was enough to make her numb, to make her world spin, just as easily as the first time they confessed their love to each other. She kept on wondering how a man as magnetic and as fascinating as he could give evidence of so much passion towards her – her, who sometimes came to doubt that she deserved
him. But those kisses, so faithful and true, made her forget who she was, and she entirely gave
herself to him, every doubt vanishing as soon as it came to her.

"Well... It would seem that I will have to hand Mirmeille a second letter to carry on her next trip with
Peter."

Jane rejoined Neverland every six months. And each time she came back, Peter had forgotten all
about her, unlike Mirmeille, the fairy who had allowed her to escape from the Jolly Roger, an
eternity ago. Jane had come to make a deal with her when she once freed her from a spider web. She
was to deliver her letters to her family and friends, thus maintaining a correspondance between the
two worlds to which Jane now belonged fully.
She came back to her family just in time for spring and summer. Her books, which explored the
riches of Neverland under pretense of fiction, met with some success, and she was often sought to
write sequels as well as give some interviews. Before she could even realize it, she had become a
full-time writer.
Her family, friends, and her publishing house, remained convinced that she spent the six other
months of the year in a far-off house in New-Zealand. Little could they know that she was, in fact,
returning to the island and to the man that she loved. And she often mused that, as soon as her
writings upon Neverland were over, she might be able to retire early in order to settle down
definitively on the island – where the most important moments of her life had taken place.

"I was about to accost the Jolly Roger and lead an expedition around Tiger Lily’s camp... But would
like to come wander with me beforehand?"
"Nothing could make me happier, James..." She thought for a moment, before adding: "I would also
like to train a little and duel – my sword might be getting rusty otherwise. My dear, would you
volunteer to be my duelling partner once we reach land?"
"I wouldn’t dare to refuse, even if I might fear to hurt such a charming partner by accident."
"Ha! As if you could!" replied Jane with liveliness.

He furtively stole one last kiss from her, before wrapping a loving arm around her waist. Together,
they crossed the threshold of her cabin – each of them hardly believing in their own happiness.

Sitting upon the desk, the letter lay, waiting to be finished. Next to it, several papers piled up, each
grouped under the same title.

"Neverland Memories", by J. Anzuelo.

The ink was drying slowly.
It had all the time in world.
Hi everyone!

I'm sorry, this update is NOT an actual chapter, but something just as exciting... (cue drum rolls):

I've recently taken measures to **self-publish this story!**

Yes, you read right: *To Believe in Fairies* is now available on Kindle AND as a **paperback**, thanks to the wonderful invention of print-on-demand!

Now, you can own a copy of that story, entirely revised and polished, as a book which you can carry around with you, lend your friends, take notes into... The possibilities are infinite!

I've tried to keep the price as low as possible. Unfortunately, since this is based on a public domain work, I can only own 30% of royalties, so I had to pull the price up a bit for the paperback.

Nevertheless, if you want to possess your own copy of that story, I'd be grateful a BILLION TIMES and more!

You'll find it under the title of *To Believe in Fairies*, by author **Audrey Flynn** on **Amazon**.

And since I'm into announcements, I'll also tell you that I'm working to turn *I'm Dead Because You're Mine* into a long novel, which I will self-publish and you will be able to purchase as well.

I will still post a few chapters of *IDBYM* online, but I'll leave it with loose ends and it will be less developed than the final paperback version.

In the complete novel, I'll add many more things (such as: more drama, more characters, more development, and, obviously, more smut.) This will be published as an erotica novel, so make sure you're of age!

I don't know how long it will take for that to be finished, but I'm just. You know. Letting you know in advance!

So that's it, I'm not dead and I'm turning towards a new media to continue my silly stories. Still love you all, keep on being amazing!

Xoxo - VelvetGoldie

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!