



A VILLAINOUS PETER PAN RETELLING

BECOMING HOOK

LEGENDS OF NEVERLAND BOOK ONE

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CHAPTER 1



Jimmy lay on top of his cot with his chin propped in his hands. Peter had granted him permission to release one of the pixies from her cage, and Jimmy watched, mesmerized, as she flitted around the damp underground cave he and Peter used as a hideout. Her wings hummed and the jingling of bells filled the room with the enchanting noise all pixies made from time to time. Jimmy had flown a few times using the pixie dust Peter collected, but he was still fascinated by the movement of the pixie's wings as they blurred together in flight. For the first time, underneath the jingling, Jimmy heard faint words.

"Release me!" the tiny pixie pled. "Let me out!"

Jimmy stared. This pixie was not buzzing around the room like some foolish bumblebee. She was frantically running her hands all over the cave wall, desperately yet methodically searching for an escape. Could pixies...reason? He had never before been visited by the idea that they were capable of intelligence.

"You can talk?"

The pixie performed a graceful pirouette in the air, spinning to face him. The fluttering of her wings grew less rapid, and she slowly descended to perch on Jimmy's pillow. "You understand me?"

"Yes. I only heard jingling bells before, but I can hear your voice now."

The pixie held her hands up to her tiny mouth. "You haven't been putting the dust into your drink each morning, have you." It was a statement, not a question.

Jimmy thought hard. Peter had all the Lost Boys collect eggs, milk, and pixie dust every morning. The eggs they cooked, and the dust was mixed in with the milk to be drunk. He had never thought much about it; it was just a boring morning routine. But after he got violently sick from eating bad mushrooms some months ago, milk began to taste strange to him, and he had avoided it—along with the accompanying pixie dust—ever since. "No, not lately. Why?"

The pixie tilted her head from side to side. "You're older."

"No, I'm not!" Jimmy leapt to his feet, outraged at such a suggestion. Wasn't aging the worst crime of all in Neverland? How dare this stupid pixie make such absurd accusations! He lunged forward to snatch her up. Jimmy couldn't wait to stuff this pixie into her cage and put her back where she belonged—with all the other of the Lost Boys' pets.

The pixie fluttered into the air, darting around to evade his grasp. "It's true!" she screeched, her thin voice piercing Jimmy's mind like a dagger. "Why do you think Peter Pan has you steal our dust every day? It's to keep you young forever and never return to your families! He's a monster who kidnapped all of you!"

“Stop it! You’re lying!” Jimmy yelled, then leapt off his cot, snatched the mischievous pixie out of the air, and thrust her back into her prison. His fingernail scraped against the tiny creature’s body as he did so, and he picked off the scrap of green fabric that snagged under his nail. The pixie clung to the bars and glared at Jimmy. Her face had changed from a gentle golden glow to a bright red.

“Do you even remember your family?”

“Shut up!” Jimmy screamed. He snatched up the cage, ran down to the animal shed, and shoved it onto one of the many pixie-laden shelves.



Jimmy ran all the way to the beach, where the white-crested waves and screaming calls of the seagulls had always managed to soothe him before. No matter how he tried, he couldn’t seem to get rid of the pixie’s cry.

“Do you even remember your family?”

What nonsense. Of course he remembered his family! Jimmy strained his memory as fuzzy and elusive recollections floated near the forefront of his mind but were difficult to clarify. He had a mother...didn’t he? Yes, he did. She was a sweet, plump woman with wavy black hair, but for the life of him, Jimmy couldn’t remember her face. His stomach sank. He couldn’t even picture his father—the man he had been named after. He didn’t even know if he had brothers or sisters.

The first real memory he had was of Peter Pan slipping

into his window one night, promising a lifetime of adventure and eternal youth. Almost everything else before that point had faded over time to a hazy, grayish black.

The pixie had been right; he couldn't remember his family at all. The young man's shoulders slumped, and he dug his fingers into the gritty sand. He flung a handful at a nearby crab and watched glumly as it scuttled away over a smattering of shells and rocks that lay scattered on the shore.

Jimmy shook himself out of his gloom. Pan frequently went to visit the "other world" to look for more boys to join their club in Neverland, so all Jimmy had to do was ask to go with him to visit his family next time. He and Peter were friends—best friends! Jimmy was the first Lost Boy Peter had brought to Neverland, a fact which he had always been proud of. But now, pangs of homesickness stirred in his gut.

Jimmy couldn't bring himself to leave the comfort of the beach's crashing waves yet. He watched as the sun sank lower and lower, painting the oceanic landscape with golden, rosy hues until it finally dipped beyond the horizon. The changing tide crept closer to his bare feet, but Jimmy couldn't find the motivation to move farther up toward the tree line. The sand on which he sat grew increasingly colder as stars began to pop into existence across the vast expanse of night sky. The brightest star of all—the second to the left of the moon—was the one that housed the gateway through which Peter brought all the Lost Boys. The star winked, mocking his pain.

No, he wouldn't subject Peter to an interrogation about an offhand remark from a rogue pixie. If anyone should be cross-examined, it was that good-for-nothing pixie!

Just as the water reached his toes, Jimmy pulled himself to his feet, brushed off the seat of his pants, and hiked back

to their base camp, leaving a trail of footprints in the sand as he walked. As he drew nearer to the hideout, Jimmy grew ever more resolved. He needed to talk to the pixie again. He snorted. A pixie talking? He half hoped he had imagined it all.

Jimmy slid down the hollowed-out tree trunk and shot out onto the packed dirt floor beneath the forest. Candles illuminated the large room where more than a dozen boys all played—some were rough housing in the center, while others were throwing Rolland’s cap around as Rolland ran after it, laughing. The joy they all felt couldn’t penetrate Jimmy’s melancholy. Everything felt surreal. As he peered into each boy’s face, another phrase the pixie had yelled came back to him.

“He’s a monster who kidnapped all of you!”

Was it true? Peter hovered over everyone, doused as he always was in pixie dust, egging on each Lost Boy in turn.

Jimmy numbly considered his friend, whose red hair flopped into his eyes from underneath his green cap. Peter had always said that he’d saved them all. Saved them from a life of being unwanted and growing old. He granted them a future of ease and enjoyment, free from the cares of that other, darker world. He thought back to when he and Peter first met. Peter seemed larger than life back then. But now? He studied the boyish face. Peter looked small, or at least, smaller than himself. Was what the pixie said true? Was he, Jimmy, getting older and growing taller?

Jimmy slouched out of the room and down the earthen tunnel to the hollow they used for an animal shed again. He flung open the door, startling several chickens, who flapped and clucked around the small room. Jimmy marched over to the rows of pixies in cages and identified the softly glowing female pixie with yellow hair who had goaded him earlier.

She was sitting, hunched over in her cage, massaging her tiny abdomen.

Jimmy tapped sharply on her cage. "Hey, pixie."

The pixie turned and fluttered her wings angrily, dust flurrying down into the collecting pan set beneath her wire cage. "Hello, thief."

Jimmy frowned. "I'm not a thief."

"So you say, despite the fact that you steal my dust daily." The pixie's voice was weak, and she continued to press against her sides, her tiny features crumpled in pain.

"I'm not stealing your—" This conversation, surrounded by the smell of penned animals, would get them nowhere. Jimmy picked up the pixie's cage and carried her out of the shed to his room, where he firmly bolted the door so no other boys would disturb him. "Look, I just want to know what you meant by not remembering my family. I remember my mother!"

The pixie gave a sharp laugh that was cut short when she clutched at her middle. "That's surprising, considering how long you've been here. You must've really loved her."

"How long I've..." Jimmy never thought about time anymore. The days and nights always seemed to meld together in Neverland. How long *had* he been there? The pixie gave a tiny cry of pain and collapsed to the bottom of her cage. "What's wrong with you?"

"You!" she spat, then gasped out, "You injured me when you grabbed me earlier, but you didn't think about that, did you? No, you Lost Boys only ever think of yourselves and having fun forever."

"That isn't true! Here, I'll show you!" Jimmy unlocked the pixie's cage. She didn't fly away like he expected, but stayed huddled on the interlocking wires. He gently lifted

her out of the cage and laid her on his pillow, careful not to bend her fragile wings.

She had a vividly green dress that covered her torso and flowed over her legs, and she was so small that Jimmy's fingers would have been far too large and clumsy to be of any assistance. He examined the tiny body anyway, but couldn't see any injury. "You're so small. I don't know how to help you."

The pixie glared at him, red all over again. "You can't when I'm this size."

"Yeah, like you could be any other size."

The pixie cried aloud again, her enormous blue eyes watering with pain, and panic clawed at Jimmy's throat. He would be responsible if the pixie died. "Tell me what to do!"

The pixie turned her tortured face toward Jimmy, then shook her head, resigned. "Just ... don't scream. Or call Pan," she whispered. She furrowed her eyebrows in deep concentration, then glowed a brilliant gold and began to enlarge. Jimmy scrambled away from her as she grew rapidly until she was the same size as a young woman, and the small cage was pushed to the ground as the pixie took up all the cot's space. Everything about her was petite, even in her enlarged form. She had thin arms, a trim waist, slender legs, and her bright yellow hair looked windswept despite the room's air being still.

Jimmy's mouth hung open in shock, eyes large as dinner plates. "You just...Pixies can...What?!"

"I said don't scream." The pixie grimaced again, and for the first time, Jimmy noticed golden blood trickling out of the pixie, oozing from a wide rip along her dress. "Get a knife."

Jimmy withdrew the pocketknife tucked into his vest. All this time he had been sitting on the beach trying to

remember his family, and this pixie had been injured and suffering! She wasn't going to ask him to put her out of her misery, was she?

She gestured weakly to the candle on Jimmy's side table. "Get the blade hot. I need you to cauterize the wound."

Jimmy's panic grew. He had only experienced having a gash cauterized once—when he was much younger back in London—but he would never forget the searing pain. Now this pixie wanted him to perform the operation he could barely remember?

He couldn't! He was only sixteen years old, or at least, he had been when he left with Peter. But...what other choice did he have? Who else would help the pixie if not him? He didn't have the knowledge or experience to perform medical treatments! Jimmy held the blade into the flame and watched as the metal began to glow red hot.

"Give me your belt." The pixie's tone was demanding as sweat broke out on her forehead. Jimmy removed the leather strap and wordlessly handed it over. The pixie clamped her jaws around the belt then ordered through clenched teeth, "Do it." She closed her eyes and turned away.

Jimmy gingerly folded back the ripped fabric to expose the injury, then took a deep breath to steady his hands. It was fortunate he had such a strong stomach. If Rob or Ozzy had been the ones to see all the blood and do this, they would be hunched over, heaving. This pixie needed Jimmy.

He gently pinched the separated skin together and pressed the long flat of a blade against the width of the wound. The pixie cried out, and glittering tears seeped from her eyes. Once the wound had sealed, Jimmy immediately withdrew the knife, revolted by what he had done.

“I’m sorry, so sorry!” Jimmy repeated. The pixie slammed her head backward, writhing in agony. Jimmy heard several quiet sobs escape from between the pixie’s pressed lips, and his stomach churned horribly. He placed a hand on her delicate shoulder, trying to express the extent of his remorse. The pixie’s gasps of pain had barely begun to slow when a rapid knocking assailed the quiet room.

“Jimmy Boy!” Peter Pan’s voice floated in from behind the locked door. “Everything okay in there?”

“Fine!” Jimmy was amazed at how calm and collected he sounded. “Just rehearsing for a new play is all!”

Peter’s easy laughter rang out, boisterous and lively as ever. “Sounds like fun! I look forward to it!”

It surprised him how easy it was to lie to his best friend. Jimmy heard Peter’s voice fade away without any accompanying footsteps. For the first time, Jimmy wondered how many pixies had to sacrifice their dust each day just to maintain his friend’s constant use of it in addition to what he drank. He spun to face the pixie, who was still sweating and trembling.

“Were you telling the truth? Does drinking the dust make us stay young forever?”

The pixie turned her head toward Jimmy and weakly lifted a solitary finger. “You tell me. Did you have facial hair when you stopped taking the dust?”

Jimmy slowly raised his hand and stroked the stubble on his chin. She was right. He was getting older.

“You stink too,” the pixie reported in a matter-of-fact voice. “Grown-up humans smell *terrible*.”

Jimmy raised an arm and sniffed. She was right again. How had he not noticed all these changes? He supposed that it happened so gradually that it was impossible to tell

from one day to another, and none of the other Lost Boys had said anything.

“Do you have a name, pixie?”

The pixie wiped sweat from her forehead and placed her hand on her abdomen over the sealed wound. “Tinkerbelle, but you can call me Tink,” she said through clenched teeth. “And you, Lost Boy? Do you have a name?”

“Jimmy. My name is Jimmy.” He hesitated, then asked, “Tink...do you know how long I’ve been here?”

The pixie’s brow furrowed. “In Earth time?” she counted on her fingers then flicked her eyes up to the ceiling as she thought hard. “Probably about two hundred years, but not nearly that long in Neverland time.”

Jimmy staggered back and sank to his knees as his chest constricted around his heart. *Two hundred years?* “But...my family...m-my mother...”

The pixie’s eyes softened with the first showing of compassion as she shook her head. “Humans don’t live very long, Jimmy. I’m sorry.”

Jimmy couldn’t catch his breath. All his family members were dead. Had they searched for him? Wondered where he had disappeared to for decades on end? When he’d left with Peter that night, Peter had assured him he would be able to come back whenever he wanted. In Jimmy’s mind, when he decided to return, he would arrive back during the same night from which he departed.

Up to this point, his life’s entire purpose had merely been to have endless fun, day in and day out. But now...now he had nothing to go back to when he was finished with his fun. What other option did he have? His entire future had been stolen from him.

How long had the other boys been here? Less time than he had, he knew that much. Did they still have the chance

to return to their families and experience what he would never be able to?

He glared at the meddlesome pixie. Everything had been fine this morning! Now, this pixie had him questioning his future, his very existence! Could she be lying? What evidence was there, really, that he should trust her over his best friend? He clung to the shred of hope as if it was his only salvation.

CHAPTER 2



Jimmy was quiet at breakfast the next day. He watched his friend like a hawk, and saw Peter Pan's normal, boisterous self bouncing with enthusiasm as he went about his morning routine. Pan sent Rolland and Chibu to collect the eggs, milk, and pixie dust. They arrived back several minutes later, staggering from the weight of the heaping egg basket held between them, Rolland carrying the milk pail in his other hand, and Chibu clutching the bag of dust with his basket-free hand.

Jimmy stared at the bag of pixie dust, which Peter Pan had eagerly snatched from Chibu. He refilled the leather pouch at his hip, then poured a generous measure into the milk pail. The remainder he carefully siphoned into the storage chest that housed all the dust Peter used for his trips to the other world to find new Lost Boys.

"You mean kidnap innocent children?" Tink's voice corrected in his head.

"Why do you do that?" Jimmy asked, carefully avoiding Peter's eye. "Put the pixie dust in our drinks, I mean."

Peter flashed his boyish, youthful grin. "Helps keep our

minds sharp and bodies healthy as we never grow old here, of course.”

“Don’t the pixies need it for themselves?”

Peter crowed with laughter. “Just as much as the goats need their surplus milk and the chickens need extra eggs, I suppose. Waste not, want not, am I right?” He ladled milk into mugs, and the twins began to scramble the eggs at the wood-burning stove.

The Lost Boys lined up to accept a glass of the drugged milk from Peter. Jimmy fought down a sudden, violent urge to overturn the milk pail and swat the mugs from the boys’ hands. There was nothing wrong with Peter wanting to have his friends stay youthful and healthy—it was good, really, that he cared so much. But still, the sick, twisted feeling in Jimmy’s gut grew.

“What would happen if we stopped taking the pixie dust?”

Peter raised a bright-red eyebrow as he shot Jimmy an inquisitive look. “What’s with all the questions this morning, Jimmy Boy?”

“Just curious is all,” Jimmy mumbled. He didn’t fall into line with the others, which Peter noticed, and he sought him out to hand him a mug.

“Drink up, pal. We can’t have you turning into an adult on us now, can we?”

So Tink’s allegations were true. Jimmy forced his lips into a pained smile and accepted the drink. He stared down into the contents. The thick milk had the faintest tinge of golden glitter swirling around in it. For the longest time after he first arrived in Neverland, Jimmy thought of it as beautiful and mysterious, but now, the beverage flashed dangerously at him. Tink’s accusations rang in his mind,

vibrating around his skull until he thought he would go mad from it.

“Peter?”

Peter Pan jerked his head in acknowledgement that he was listening. All the other Lost Boys, who had just been served plates of scrambled eggs by the twins, had their mouths stuffed full and were unusually quiet as they ate. Jimmy swallowed hard to try to remove the growing lump in his throat. “How long have we been here in Neverland?”

“We all came at different times, Jimmy Boy. You know that.”

“Me, then. How long have *I* been here?”

“What difference does it make?” Peter shrugged. “What does time matter as long as we are having fun here?”

“I’m having fun!” Ozzy burst out, spraying a mouthful of half-masticated egg across the wooden table.

Rob burst out laughing and used his spoon to fling eggs back at Ozzy. A brief but furious food fight immediately broke out. The boys lobbed cutlery, plates, and food at each other, all ducking and weaving to avoid being splattered with breakfast. In the ensuing hubbub, Jimmy took the opportunity to surreptitiously dump his mug of milk onto the dirt floor next to him. He watched the liquid soak into the earth, and the last glimmers of pixie dust winked back at him before fading from view.

Peter, as always, emerged victorious from the food fight. He tucked his thumbs into his armpits, rose into the air, and emitted a loud rooster’s crow.

Following the thrill of the food fight, Peter didn’t seem inclined to calm down enough to talk with Jimmy. Peter left the mess of the food fight—fruit and eggs strewn over the table and floor, with milk dripping down onto the bench—and grabbed his fishing pole from a corner. “Last one to the

fishing hole is a rotten egg!” In a flash, Peter flew up the tunnel and was out of sight.

The other Lost Boys clambered over one another to retrieve their own fishing poles, squabbling amongst themselves as they tried to untangle their lines and hooks and follow Peter Pan. Within one minute, all of them except Jimmy had disappeared. He couldn't seem to muster up the energy to race to the fishing hole today.

The hideout was abnormally silent in the absence of his friends. Jimmy stared at the food splattered all over the kitchen area, his shoulders hunched. As he took in his surroundings, it felt like waking up after years of being asleep. Burned pans were crusted with hardening egg yolks, the blackened and moldy residue of previous food fights coated the table in a moss-like texture, and gnats were beginning to buzz all around the mess. Jimmy inhaled. The entire place reeked. Maggots would follow soon, and once the state of the hideout deteriorated to unlivable, Peter would simply move all the boys to a new location, just like always.

Jimmy's stomach turned. The fuzziest of recollections floated just out of reach in his memory. The hazy image of his mother scrubbing a kitchen table while telling him a story sharpened. A warm sensation started in his chest and began to spread. He'd had a family once; he had been loved. Jimmy sank down to the ground, slumped back against the dirt wall, and buried his face into his hands.

What had he done when he agreed to come with Peter to Neverland?



He still hadn't moved by the time the rest of the Lost Boys returned hours later. Jimmy heard their gleeful shouts and laughter long before they slid, one by one, down the hollowed-out tree trunk. Peter flew in after them with a string of fish trailing behind him.

The boys all threw their fishing poles haphazardly into a corner, causing the strings and hooks to tangle even worse than before. Peter Pan began tossing individual fish to each boy in turn.

"Where were you, Jimmy?" asked Smee. He was a plump boy who looked younger than everyone else, perhaps ten years old, and hadn't been with the Lost Boys very long. His full cheeks, constantly sunburned nose, and platinum-blond hair made his babyish face wide and innocent-looking—very different from Jimmy's long, thin face with his unusually straight nose and long dark hair.

Jimmy shrugged. "Not feeling well, I guess." He couldn't stop looking at each of his friends and wondering how long they had all been there. Did any of them remember their origins? If they did, they certainly didn't seem troubled by leaving them behind. They all began to throw the fish between themselves with blinding speed, laughing uproariously if anyone dropped his slippery load or received a fish to the face.

Smee plopped down next to Jimmy and handed him his catch from the day. "Will you help me clean it?" Smee's face remained so eager and hopeful that Jimmy couldn't say no. Smee seemed to think that Jimmy could do no wrong, and

being admired so much buoyed Jimmy's spirits, but only fractionally so. Besides, he loved the salty smell of fish and needed something to occupy his hands. He carried the codfish over to the table, then recoiled. The filthy table grew dirtier and more repulsive the longer he examined it.

"Hey, everyone, how about we all come over and clean up this table?"

A shocked silence met his words as the boys turned as one and stared, utterly taken aback, at the suggestion.

Peter Pan burst out laughing. "That's why we live in Neverland, Jimmy Boy! No chores, no bedtime, no work *ever!*" The other Lost Boys raised an ear-splitting cheer. Peter traced a finger along his chin as he considered his tall, lanky friend. "You certainly are behaving strangely today, Jimmy. Lighten up! You're acting all...grown-up."

Several boys hissed at the forbidden word, and Jimmy refused to meet any of his friends' eyes. Is that what being grown-up meant? Having responsibilities and not seeing the world as a joke anymore? His mother hadn't been a terrible person, and she was a grown-up...or had been once. The thought of his mother dying without even the chance to say goodbye tore at his heart. To avoid the pain, he struggled once again to remember his father, but came up with nothing, which only served to deepen the wound gnawing at his chest.

"C'mon, Smee, let's clean it outside," Jimmy muttered. He and Smee clambered back up to the surface, leaving the cacophony of the Lost Boys below. Jimmy found a wide, flat rock and began to scale and gut the fish.

"You really are quiet today," Smee observed. "Are you sick? I can go get Peter if you want."

"No!" Jimmy objected a little too quickly. He glanced around the clearing to ensure that they were alone. "Smee,

do you remember your family at all?” As the newest arrival, if anyone was able to remember, Smee would.

Smee’s eyebrows furrowed as he concentrated. “I think so, but the details are sort of slipping away. Peter came the night I had a fight with my mum. She wanted me to feed our dog, Missy, and I didn’t want to. Peter said that I would never have to do chores again if I came with him.”

Smee continued, “I should go back soon; my mum said she was going to plan me a birthday party. Even though I wouldn’t feed the dog, she still was going to have a magician come and do tricks for me and my friends. You can come to my party if you want to.”

Jimmy smiled wistfully, even as his heart sank. He couldn’t even remember the concept of birthdays anymore since Peter forbade any mention of age or getting older. “That sounds nice. What’s your mom like?”

“She’s real pretty, my mum is! She has long hair and puts it in a braid. I would swing on it all the time and pretend to be a monkey when I was little. She would always tell me to stop, but it was so fun.”

“Did she tell you stories?” Jimmy couldn’t tell why he kept coming back to the idea of a mother who told stories. Maybe because it seemed so homey and pleasant.

“Yeah, she’d tell me stories about when I was a baby, and silly things I used to do. She told me the story of Rapunzel, and I thought it was a story about her for a long time because it sounded like her hair.” Smee’s lip quivered, then he quietly confessed, “I miss her. I think I’m ready to go back now. Do you think Peter will take me?”

Jimmy piled all the fish guts into one corner of the stone slab they used as a table but didn’t respond. The truth was, he didn’t know what Peter would do if Smee expressed a desire to return. Once boys arrived, Peter kept them all so

busy with games and endless entertainment that no one had ever asked to go back. How much did he know about his friend, really?

“I don’t know. But,” he added as sudden inspiration struck, “if Peter won’t take you, I will.”

“You?” Smee’s eyebrows raised incredulously. “You can’t fly without Peter’s dust.”

“No,” Jimmy admitted. “I can’t.”

He slowly de-boned the fish, and the image of Tinkerbell floated back to him. He had returned her to her cage to heal—along with a tiny blanket and enough food to help with her recovery—and had been checking on her every few hours. He knew he needed to free her, but with her injury, she would easily be captured again. At least until she was stronger, she needed protection, and he felt compelled to give it.

Jimmy continued pensively, “Pixie dust doesn’t belong to Peter anyway and...I know someone who might be able to help us get home.”

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