



# *Shadows Lie*

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Action/adventure, Magic, Mystery

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James knew the stories. He knew the tales and the whispers even better than he knew his own reality. It wasn't always easy, that is, to recall the thin line between what people believed and what he truly was—, who he truly was. The young man whose magic depended on time, one hand always ready to wield it and the other one missing, replaced by a glimmering hook which became his name soon afterwards. Captain Hook; that was the man seas and countries feared. If only they knew who the real monster was.

James walked through the main deck, his footsteps loud against the wooden surface. He pulled out his pocket watch from his black coat, his blue eyes glimpsing at the early hours of the night. Any second now, he thought. And waited.

He put the watch away, its ticking still present. It was a sound that never left him, one that had become part of him. His thoughts, his breaths, his movements—; they were all made out of that sound. James had become part of that ticking clock that chased him day and night, up to a point where he had become time. He had become magic.

That young man, that ticking pirate with the eyes of a forget-me-not and hair as dark as the sky mirrored by the ocean, that boy was the one that should be feared. That was the true monster. The other version of him, the mask of Captain Hook and his rivalry with the kid that never grew up, was a simple fairy tale. The sugar-coated narrative that the world had been prepared to swallow.

The truth, however, was one that remained hidden among the wickedness of James' soul.

"He's late," the sailor by his side pointed out, his gaze lost in the ocean behind them. Their ship floated there, awaiting to leave the docks before midnight. The night remained young for a few more tricks, James knew.

“He’ll be here,” he sighed, his eyes everywhere but in his ship.

“He’s never been late before, captain.”

James stood straighter. His voice was hoarse when he repeated, “He’ll be here.”

The sailor left him alone as James strolled towards the quarter deck. The sails were caressed by the wind as the soft breeze kissed the cloth softly, as if it were saying good-bye. The wind was always sweet like that, near the docks of sleeping cities with no magic, as if it were all too precious and about to crack. The silence was unnerving even when the pirate was more than used to it. The night was too calm, the plan was too good. Time ticked by.

James could feel his magic shiver. He grasped it harder, holding it back for a few more minutes. He had become magic because of that godforsaken watch, he had become a beast because of that kid people called a hero. He had become immortal in that island because he had become magic. Captain Hook it was, then.

Any second now.

Here, in these docks of powerless streets, he wasn’t the monster. Here, James was the villain. He was, as a matter of fact, the navigator of the darkest waters and the enemy of all children in Neverland. They had no idea, though, of what that island really was. Of the things that had happened there. Of course, nobody spoke about that side of the story. Who would be willing to when things had gone so terribly wrong?

If this city were to know his true name and to realize who he truly was, they would be more than scared. They would be far beyond what the word ‘terrified’ grasps.

James observed the horizon, his hand and hook in his pocket. He breathed in the scent of salt and fish, an aroma that had once reminded him of the great, vast everything that he had yet to see. This smell had once been the promise of new shores and adventures.

Now, as the pirate inhaled that ghastly air, he could only shudder. He had already seen all shores and, even though the adventures hadn’t run out, he only wanted to sail back. He could feel the island call for him, its tentacles wrapping him as he closed his fingers around the watch.

“Don’t stare for too long, Hook. Once might begin to think you look slightly desperate,” a voice purred behind him. James turned around to catch glimpse of the young boy that stood across the deck, brown hair and dark eyes, dirty and tired.

The captain walked back to the main deck, enjoying the sound of his boots that followed the tick, tock of his mind. “You’re late, Bones,” he spat. “You know I don’t like people being late.”

The boy gave a step back. “Did the best I could,” he offered, not feeling guilty at all.

James paced around the boy—, Bones—and lifted his chin. “Do you have it?”

Bones moved uneasily in his spot, his hands shaking in his pockets. James knew the game too well. The sarcasm and silver tongue Bones used were an old act by now, one he could see beyond.

“I do.” However, Bones made no move to grab what he held in his pocket.

The pirate held his gaze for a while, already feeling how his own eyes began to change colours. He looked deep into Bones’ dark eyes before he burst out into laughter. Intimidate him, the ticking voice inside him said.

James gave one step towards the boy. Then another. Slowly, very slowly, he headed to him, eyes severe as he stood taller, his magic curling and hissing. He cut the space between them and whispered, “Give it to me.”

There was a certain weight in his words, a certain seriousness that made Bones reluctantly slide his hand out of his pocket, his eyes never leaving the pirate. James managed to hide his smile when he saw it.

He grabbed the stone, white as moonlight in those clear, starry nights. It was round and soft, unnervingly white in a way that dazzled. He raised it and examined it. “Is it the one, Bones?”

The boy shifted positions. “The very one, Hook. Do you really think I could fool you with that stone? It shines as if—”

But James wasn’t listening. His eyes absorbed the brightness of it. Such a pure, heavenly stone. It was just what he needed to control the darkness. Neverland would never see it coming. This was his way out. He could change the tale.

“You know what will happen if I hear you have played me, Bones,” he warned him, still not facing the kid. “You know I have ears every one. All shadows report to me, all waves whisper to me.”

That was the monster’s power, Bones knew. Those were the truths of the pirate the boy had got to know, not the ones of the fake Captain Hook everyone portrayed as a simple, flat villain.

“I do,” Bones countered. “I would never play you. Especially now.”

The pirate tensed. “What do you mean, especially now?”

Tick, tock. Tick, tock.

“Well, just that...”

“Spit it,” James barked, already putting the stone away and storming towards the boy. He knew things. He knew something.

Bones walked backwards as the captain approached, so quickly that he tripped over a loose wooden beam and

fell back. “Nothing,” he mumbled. “Nothing Hook. I mean, you–, you have the stone now. I–. I know the shadows would tell you if I betrayed you and–”

James froze. His magic smiled.

“What is it you know about the stone, lad?”

Bones was shaking when he said, “Nothing.” Liar... “Well, a little. I swear I wasn’t digging for information, Hook. I promise. But I heard things that–”

“What kind of things?”

“I–”

“SAY IT.”

“That the stone can command shadows,” Bones cried.

James backed away.

His fingers caressed the white stone on his cloak. He could feel its emptiness even when his magic was roaring inside. Despite of the ticking thoughts that moved him, the pirate could sense the stone’s impatience. It wanted to be filled. It demanded to be filled.

It would only take a whisper, or so the stories said. Only a whisper to call for the shadows to turn the stone black. Only then would James be the owner of all shadows. And Neverland... Oh, Neverland had tons of shadows. There were uncountable wonders in that island, but nights had always been James’ favourites. He had travelled to the end of the world and back, yet the darkest nights in history were in Neverland.

He would own it. He would tame the monster inside him.

“You think it’s true, Bones?” he purred.

The boy hesitated. “Yes,” he whispered after a short while. “I’ve seen and heard many things, Hook, living among these docks. I don’t see why the stone would be a fake.”

How innocent of him to think I was asking for his insight, James thought. The captain already knew the stone was real. He knew what Bones had seen and heard. He knew all that and more. That was the problem.

“Hmmm.” The pirate looked away, considering. It was getting late, he realized, as the moon climbed higher. He wasn’t counting with all the time in the world.

“Will you kill me, Hook?” Bones managed to ask him from the floor, eyes wide.

But James didn’t care about the boy anymore. Something had changed in the air. Something was wrong. It was just a hunch, a tiny, little feeling moving inside him. Tick, tock.

“Take a guess,” he said vaguely.

“No?”

James snorted. “Why not, lass?”

Bones bit his lower lip. “Because I’ve been useful to you. I’m the best you’ve got on this coast, and you know it. You ain’t going to kill me because I’ve seen a lot already, captain.”

It was the people who see too much that died first. Who had taught this boy how the world worked?

James came closer, his eyes going from blue to a brighter colour. There was no doubt now that something was off. The streets had become noisier, the lights had become brighter.

“Take another guess,” he told the boy.

Bones’ eyes widened even more. “No! Please!” he screamed. “Please, Hook! I promise I won’t speak. I’ll be good. I swear. I’ve never crossed you! NEVER! PLEASE!”

Nothing the boy could say would matter. Even if James wanted to show mercy—which he didn’t—the ticking magic and the clock in his blood would never let him. The footsteps became audible soon enough.

People were coming.

James caught Bones by the collar of his shirt and pushed him up. “Who did you tell about this meeting, lad?” He shook the boy as he roared, “Who knows about me being here? Tell me!”

“No one,” the boy cried. “I swear I told no one, Hook.”

He dropped him, storming back to the end of the deck. “They can’t know I’m here,” he whispered to himself.

“They can’t know it’s me.”

James took the watch out, ignoring the boy’s screams and pleas. He would take care of him later. More pressing matters were calling for him.

“We’re leaving!” he ordered his crew. A set of steps and movements began, action beginning to set the boat free.

“Hook,” Bones pleaded.

The captain’s mind was somewhere else entirely.

James observed the clock, absorbed the full picture as his magic prepared. Ten hours since midday, thirteen minutes past. He chewed the seconds, swallowed the minutes and savoured the hours. He memorised the clock’s path; the needles and the noises. He tasted time and his magic trembled.

James observed the deck’s corner, there where the shouts and crowds were coming from. He held the watch tightly, his hand beginning to sweat beneath it. People were coming, his magic was ready.

Any second now.

Tick, tock.

When the first person came out of the corner, followed by a crowd that was coming for him, James was faster. He saw them, only slightly visible from where he was and merely beginning to approach. His eyes found them immediately and he pulled from his magic.

James pulled time and went backwards, observing how the men walked back as well. It was happened so fast. He pulled time back. One hour, two hours. He went back until he saw the mist. There. He'd been looking for it. The pirate went back and forth until he found the perfect hour, the perfect minute. He stopped in a second where the dock had been full of mist and the scene had been dark, perfect.

He stopped there.

Tick, tock.

His magic slid through the passing seconds, rushing and jumping and stopping. Mechanically, his powers went back in time to the most convenient scenario of that dock, his boat and crew remaining the same.

“Sail!” he ordered.

James breathed in; the scents had changed, the coolness in the air had changed. His light eyes were now struggling among mist and a different time. He felt good. The ship was moving. He was safe at last.

“What... How...” Bones stumbled to his feet, shaking from head to toe.

He'd began to walk in the captain's direction when James stopped him, “Don't come any closer, lad. Stay where you are.”

The ship sailed fast and away in only a couple of minutes. Once James had made sure that they were far from shore, safe enough so that no special lens or vigilant would see them from the coast, he pulled time again. He returned to that night where his watch showed ten hours past midday and a couple of minutes after. He settled there, back where they had been but now somewhere else.

Then, James turned back to the young boy standing across the main deck.

“You traitor,” he spat, storming towards him. The pirate stopped soon enough, though. There were more things he could do to this boy... bigger plans than accusing him of all the things he already knew he had done.

The captain turned around and climbed to the quarter deck, the sails screaming against the wild wind now. He stored his watch back and eased his magic, ready to take the white stone back out. He did.

“Do we set course to where we agreed on, captain?” one of the sailors asked him.

James' eyes were still on the stone. All this power... "Why would we change it?" he countered. "Nothing of what has happened tonight has affected the plans, lad. We're back to the same minute. We're still on time."

"Aye."

James looked away from the stone and set his gaze on the waves. "Set course back to Neverland."

The sailor nodded. He set the course.

James pulled from time again: accelerated it and went back to Neverland. There, where his eyes could glimpse the island of children who never grew up and fierce adventures, he stopped time. He didn't chose the minute particularly this time. The pirate didn't bother to browse through hours and then through minutes. He was in the sea that had voices, the sea where mermaids cursed him and waves embraced him. He was home, back to where the darkness kissed him.

He observed the stone once more. So white... so empty. He'd been waiting to fill it for such a long time.

It was then that the monster whispered to the stone. The pirate's lips caressed the soft surface as the words left his mouth. He had tasted them before, but never like this. Never before. They tasted like wine. They were just as intoxicating and as heady. As delicious, too.

What he whispered is unknown even now. Nobody can tell, remember or imagine what James whispered into the stone's invisible ears that night. It was far too precious and beautiful and powerful for the world to know. The stone grew darker. It went from an unnatural white to the colour of a pearl, then jumping from shades of grey and to black, where it dyed itself of a black colour that the world had never witnessed before. No seas or worlds had seen that black, that obscurity that filled the stone so suddenly.

The shadows had come. They slid from the ship, from men, from waves and all the way from Neverland they came. They rushed and flew and laughed as children, jumping all the way to the stone. They obeyed the call.

They came to him, the master of shadows, the owner of darkness.

The monsters who now had somewhere to hide.

"Hook?" a voice asked from behind. Oh, right. Bones.

Are you still going to kill me?, Bones' eyes said.

I will devour you, the pirate's replied.

James bolted in his direction, grabbing Bones by the neck and closing his fingers around it. He was a traitor.

He knew too much. He couldn't be left alive. Not with all this power... Not now, of all times.

James became the monster. The monster became him. Captain Hook... Oh, that tale became history.

His eyes finally changed colours. All the blue in them was sucked out until that surface became white. There was a black line defining his iris, but only white inside.

His hook ended Bones' life, his eyes the colour of stars.

James called for the shadows and the shadows came. Just as the stone's power promised, the pirate became the wielder of the darkness that hid around that world and the next one. He became the king of the darkness in the darkest corners and in a man's soul. He was everywhere. He was the monster he had always wanted to be.

There, his hand still curled around Bone's lifeless body, James saw how his hand vanished into a shadow. Then his arm and his legs until he had disappeared. He became a shadow himself, too.

Now, that was where the monsters belonged. He had a home. The true version of Captain Hook, the truth beneath the story, had come to root. It was there and nobody would see it. This was the monster that the villain would hide. Captain Hook was only a mask he would wear. Neverland wouldn't see it coming. No one would.

Who could see the monsters made out of shadows that hid in the darkness, after all?

Now he stories were right.

It was that night that the true villain of the tales you might have heard came about. It was that night that the monster, the bad guy, hid beneath another version of himself. Everyone underestimated Captain Hook. The true wicked being, however, was under that side of the coin.

The second star to the right is the one children follow, yes. They never see James hiding in the darkness between two stars.

Those are the most wicked of all tales.

The ones of the monsters inside.

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