



Tick Tock Goes The Croc

Thomas Woodland

Retold Fairy Tales

5 min read

The two blades, one slender and elegant, one short and stubby, flashed silver in the moonlight atop the cliffs. Anyone watching, on that fateful night, might have seen two figures engaging in a strange kind of dance, silhouetted against great white moon. One was tall, well built, a long greatcoat swishing around his ankles. Long, elegant mustachios twirled from above his lips, and a wide brimmed hat sat on his head, a long feather pluming from the brim. His sturdy leather boots darted over the ground as he deftly leapt forward and backward, his arm twisting and turning like a snake with every thrust of his rapier.

The other figure was smaller, more slender and seemingly even more agile than his opponent. His feet hardly seemed to be touching the ground at all as he skipped around his enemy, jabbing and slashing with the dagger, nimbly avoiding every attack. He turned an elegant cartwheel to avoid a thrust, somehow not losing his peaked hat, his own feather tickling the grass as he spun. A golden belt buckle twinkled at his waist as he regained his footing, still facing the other figure. A small ball of light, pure white, hovered above his shoulder, scattering silver dust as it moved.

The larger silhouette lunged forward again, snarling.

“You think you can beat me boy?” He asked, swiping at his opponent’s face. “I’ve taught you everything you know. I took you in, and this is how you repay me?”

“You took me in because you needed me.” The boy retorted, parrying the attack with the flat of his blade.

“I needed you?” The man roared. “You were a lonely, scared boy who’d run away from home! You had nothing,

and no-one! I fed you, clothed you, taught you to fight! That dagger is mine, that tunic is mine, that belt is mine!”

“You taught me too well, old man.” The boy answered. “And you think I’m alone? I’ve found others, others like me. This island belongs to us now, and you, and your crew, are hereby being evicted!”

So saying, the boy leapt into the air, and flew, arms outstretched, over the man’s head. The rapier flashed upwards, aiming for the boy’s stomach, the tip poised to unzip him from naval to sternum. The boy twisted in the air, swerved around the blade, continued past the man. He banked, turned in the air, and came back, slashing with his dagger as he did so. The dagger that the man had given him as a present for completing his training.

The man’s rapier fell to the ground. It bounced off a rock and, with the hand still holding it, tumbled off the cliff edge. The other man howled, clutching the stump of his wrist, dark liquid dripping from between his fingers. The boy spun once in the air, and planted a foot firmly in the centre of the man’s chest, right on the ruffles of his dress shirt. The man wobbled, flailed, and fell backwards, twisting through the air until he hit the water far below. The boy twirled in air, sheathed his dagger, and flew off into the night.

The man sank beneath the waves, blood pluming from his wrist, pain and shock overriding his brain. He went down, down, almost to the bottom, hanging in the water amongst the wreck of a ship. He opened his eyes, and was amazed to find he could see. An eerie green light was emanating from all around him, penetrating easily through the crystal-clear water. The rocks on the sea bed and of the cliff wall were glowing, like an oil lamp but all-encompassing. The wreck was old, the wood rotting and the hull split on the seabed. The open mouth of the hole yawned at him, a place that none of the green light seemed to reach.

Something glittered on the seabed, a tail of black twisting upwards from its base.

His rapier, his severed hand still attached to the handle, was lying in front of him. The sight of it, with his blood, dark in the water, made him feel sick.

His eyes were stinging from the salt water, and he shut them, knowing that his tears would be lost anyway. When he opened them again, his heart stopped.

There was a dark shape, thick and long, twisting through the water towards him. Through his squinting, stinging eyes, he saw it wriggle, four short, stubby legs hanging beneath it. A long, muscular tail thrashed suddenly behind it, propelling it forward with a great burst of speed. Its head split open as its jaws gaped, wide enough to swallow him whole.

A crocodile.

The man reacted instinctively, despite his lungs straining and eyes hurting and pain from his recent amputation nearly blinding him. With his remaining left hand, he scrabbled for his sword, shook the hand free, and swiped at the animal as it lunged at him. It deftly twisted away, sailing past him just as the boy had on the cliff top. The man flailed in the water, thrashing with his arms and legs to propel himself away from the hideous creature. He struggled blindly through the water, lungs beginning to burn as his air continued to drain away.

The open mouth of the cracked hull swallowed him up as he disappeared into the wreck. Looking back, he watched in horror as the crocodile dipped lower in the water, and closed its jaws around his severed hand. It engulfed it whole, looking up at him even as it disappeared down its gullet. Blurred as his vision was, he could see in the creature's vile yellow eyes that it wasn't satisfied. It got a taste for him. His hand had been the starter. Now it was time for the main course.

He flailed further into the wreck, passing through the galley and into the sleeping quarters. The crocodile followed him, lazily drifting through the water. It didn't hurry. It knew he was trapped.

And trapped he was.

There was no way out of the crew's quarters. The trapdoor in the ceiling was rotted shut, the wood swollen and warped. He turned back, hoping to get out before the creature reached him, but it was too late. It was hanging there in the doorway, watching him.

His lungs were tearing themselves apart. He was running out of air, with a perfectly evolved killing machine no more than a few feet away, slowly bleeding out from a wound inflicted on the boy he had treated like a son. He weakly held out his sword before him, but it did no good. His strength was failing him, and the weapon fell from his fingers. He closed his eyes. He didn't want to see it happen.

And then he heard it.

A ticking sound, coming from next to him, by one of the bunks.

He opened his eyes, and saw...

An alarm clock. A mechanical alarm clock, seemingly untouched by the salt water. The man could see the numerals and hands glowing faintly in the darkness as it ticked on.

Without thinking, without even being sure what he was doing, he snatched it up, and hurled it forward even as the crocodile, sensing something had changed, lunged forward. The device, chunky and metallic, tumbled

through the water in slow motion, and disappeared into the creature's throat.

The jaws, lined with mountain ridges of white teeth, snapped shut. The creature shuddered, choking, convulsing at the foreign object that had been jammed into its oesophagus. It twisted in the water, squirming in pain as it tried to swallow the clock.

New strength filled the man's veins. He snatched up his sword, forced it between the edges of the trapdoor and the wood around it, and levered with all his strength, lungs screaming at him as the last of his supply ran out. The wood creaked, splintered, but held. He levered again, and this time, the planks split, the panel breaking apart as the rotten planks fell apart. The man surged upwards desperately even as the crocodile managed to swallow the clock and hurled itself at him again.

But the trapdoor was too small. The crocodile could get no more than its snout through the narrow opening. The man couldn't hear the crocodile's roar of anger, didn't even know if crocodiles could roar. But he could still hear the ticking, like a watch, of the clock that had saved his life. He dropped the sword, watching it sink back into the depths, and kicked for the surface, watching the last of his air drift past him in precious silver bubbles. He couldn't take it anymore. He had to open his mouth and breathe, even if it was just water that rushed down his throat and into his lungs. He had to do it.

And suddenly, his mouth was wrenched open in a silent scream as his head broke the surface. He greedily sucked in air, sweet sweet air. Never before had it felt so good to breathe. For a moment, he lay on his back, tears streaming down his cheeks, looking up at the moon.

And then, he saw the dark shape flash across it in the dark sky, the tiny light still with him, flying alongside him as he whipped through the air.

The man felt hatred begin to boil his blood. A fire ignited within him and he surged forwards in the water, swimming as fast as his remaining limbs would let him, each stroke fuelled by fury. That boy. The boy he had found as a snivelling wreck, the boy he had taken in as part of his crew. The boy who he'd seen fight, shout, drink, and laugh with the rest of them. The boy who'd refused to grow up, but who'd developed so much since he'd taken him in.

That boy had just cut off his hand and left him for dead.

That boy was going to pay. Him, and his damn fairy.

The man reached the shore and pulled himself up onto the beach. It was only now that the thought of blood loss occurred to him. Quickly, he pulled off his belt and wrapped it tightly around his bicep, forcing the steel pin

through the leather to make a new hole, taking care not to look at the wound. It was risky; he could end up losing his entire forearm and not just his wrist. But when he weighed that against losing his life, it was an easy choice. After all, he could still take revenge on the boy with only one arm.

The journey back to his ship would normally have taken him no more than half an hour, an easy walk through a thin forest on flat ground. But with blood loss, shock and anger clouding his mind, it wasn't until two hours later that he stumbled up the gangplank. The deck was deserted, the crew asleep.

He tried to call out for his first mate, but the words came out as no more than a croak. His legs gave out beneath him, and he collapsed to the deck. He was half aware of a door opening, of shouts for help, but it all felt disconnected. The last thought to pass through his head was that he was not going to die before that boy had felt his wrath. Then, all was black.

*

Pain.

That was first thing he knew.

Not the sharp, cutting pain of his initial injury, but the dull, agonising ache of something that would not go away.

Slowly, his eyes cracked open. He could see shadows dancing on the wooden ceiling above him, jumping and weaving from the flickering of the candle and the rocking of the boat.

“Ah, uh Captain. You're awake.”

The Irish-tinted voice was that of his bosun, and he sounded afraid. The man sat up, despite his crewman's efforts to push him back down.

“B-b-b-but Captain, the doctor said you need your rest.”

“Take your hands off me.” The man snapped. He tried to put his hands down on the shelf next to his bunk in his quarters, but something clunked as he did so. He glanced down, and shrieked.

There was a bloody bandage wrapped around his wrist, the material dotted with dark stains. But the stains were black, not red. A terrible, empty black.

“Ah-h-h-h-h. Yes, C-c-c-c-captain.” The bosun began.

“SMEE!” The captain roared, making the bosun's cheek flush even redder than his bulbous scarlet nose. “How many times am I to tell you that I am never, ever, EVER, to see my own blood?!” As he said this, he rose upwards to his full height, towering above the portly Irishman. Each 'ever' was punctuated by a thunderous

step forwards, his boots slamming down on the floorboards. “How many times have I made it explicitly clear that the colour of my blood is the one thing that absolutely, unequivocally, indescribably terrifies me?”

“I-I-I-I-I’m s-s-s-s-s-sorry Captain.” Smee trembled. “I w-w-w-w-was just about to rem-m-m-m-move it when you woke up.”

The captain didn’t answer him. Instead, he tore off the bandage, gazing at what lay beneath.

There was a metal casing fixed over the end of his arm. A steel dome, fashioned from a goblet, fastened into the flesh with steel pins. Where the neck of the goblet should have been, a sliver of moonlight curved outwards, a perfect question mark of pointed silver.

“T-t-t-the doctor fa-fa-fashioned it for you, Captain T-”

“DO NOT CALL ME THAT!” The captain bellowed. He turned, and stalked back to the maps table at the back of his quarters. He stood there for a moment, hunched over the wooden surface, arms supporting him. He dug the point of the hook into the table and pulled, watching the shaving curl upwards as he carved it out. “That is a name that no-one knows.” He muttered. “That no-one fears. I used to be the bosun for the most feared pirate in the world, Smee. The great Edward Thatch. Blackbeard himself! Everybody knows his name! And now, here I am. A captain myself. And nobody knows my name.”

“B-b-b-b-but Captain. If I don’t call you that, what do I call you?”

The captain looked at him, fire dancing in his eyes.

“My name shall be one that shall be known by everybody. A name that strikes fear into the heart of all those that hear it. A name, that when that boy-”

“You m-m-m-mean Peter-”

“DO NOT say his name either!” The captain was breathing more and more heavily now. “When that boy, who cheated me, betrayed me, used me, cut off my HAND!” Here, he swiped across the desk with his hook, tearing a thick, ragged line across the surface. “I took him in as a son,” he continued, more quietly. “I was the father he never had, I was both mother and father to him. Too bad he shall never have an actual mother.”

“B-b-b-but Sir, what if he brings a mother here?” The captain laughed.

“If he tries to bring a mother here, she will share his fate.”

“A-a-a-and your name, Captain?”

“Yes! When he hears it, he will tremble, as he remembers the day that he first crossed me!”

“And w-w-w-what is this name, C-c-c-captain?”

The captain smiled, tasting the words before he spoke them.

“Why Smee. What else, but Captain Hook?”

Read more fairy tales on Fairytalez.com