



PETER & HOOK

THE FINAL DAYS

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WITH THANKS TO MEAGHANN BAEKEN, PETRA DOOM, MATHIAS MAHO AND JELMER PANMAN
FOR THE USE OF THEIR CHARACTERS, THE INSPIRATION THEY GAVE ME AND THEIR TREASURED FRIENDSHIP

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BASED ON 'PETER PAN' BY J. M. BARRIE

**TO THE MISFITS WHO ARE SEEKING
THEIR PLACE IN THE WORLD**

Home is what you make of it



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHAT CAME BEFORE	1
0 Prologue	3
1 The final daughter	7
2 The final son	13
3 Old friend	21
4 The Devil's Triangle	35
5 Mother Nature	43
6 Allies	53
7 Plato's cave	69
8 Avernus	81
9 Katabasis	89
10 The eternal plain	99
11 Victory	119
12 Beneath the Never Tree	133
13 Princes of Hell	145
14 Battle of twos	155
15 The final stand	169
16 Heartbreaker	175
17 The death of magic	183
18 Dreams and stars	193
19 One year later	199
20 The promise	203



PETER & PAN

WHAT CAME BEFORE

The gods have been toying with the fate of humans for a long time. But as soon as they began to toy with the fate of their kind, it led to their inevitable demise.

The lies spread by Apollo and the atrocities of Pan & Dionysus that followed eventually brought the entire Pantheon to their knees. Only a few beings created by divine magic managed to avoid this disaster. Their home became a Neverland, an island that balanced on the edge of reality and fantasy. A creation of Pan & Dionysus. But where they got the power to do so was everyone's guess.

For centuries they lived in relative peace. Occasionally Pan would disappear for weeks or even months at a stretch only to suddenly return with a group of children. Children. The ultimate source of belief. Exactly what Pan & Dionysus needed to keep their existence, and that of the island, going.

Yet everything comes to an end. This end came when Pan made the mistake of challenging the wrong man. James Barrie, a sailor who would move heaven and earth to save his son, Peter. It was a calculated risk on Pan's part, but clearly math was not his strong suit. With the help of Hermes, James awakened his true nature, the sun god Apollo, and after a difficult battle, finally managed to defeat both Dionysus and Pan.

Still, this victory did not come without a heavy toll. The souls of both Peter and James were mingled with Pan's. The blood-lust turned James into a murderous pirate who went through life as Captain Hook, while Peter was left with a rather mischievous shadow that guided him in the wrong direction. And yet the island found a way to handle the new status quo, and an uneasy balance soon followed.

It took centuries for that balance to be upset again. This time

it was because of the arrival of Wendy, a distant descendant of Peter's mother, who for the first time in years brought change to the boy who did not want to grow up. Captain Hook exchanged the temporal for the eternal when the crocodile finally caught up with him. Wendy and her brothers left to return home, not knowing the irrevocable damage they had done.

The uneasy balance between the two sides of Pan had long been the only thing keeping the island going. Slowly but surely, its magic began to weaken. Peter Pan lost himself as the island began to develop a will of its own.

Whether the island can still be saved? That fate will depend on a group of unlikely heroes.



PROLOGUE

‘Did you feel it too?’

The figure, cloaked in shadows and a tattered red mantle, nodded. Concerned, the figure placed a hand on the trunk of the living tree that had just asked that question. A worried wooden look could clearly be discerned from Hedone, the mother of all fairies.

‘She is waking up... Time is starting to flow normally again,’ said the figure.

Hedone heaved a sigh. It was exactly as she had feared. For centuries she had been kept alive by the magical energy freely bestowed upon her by the roots scattered across the island. But in recent years, that river of power had slowly turned into a measly stream that had now finally dried up completely.

The mother of fairies reached out with her mind and scoured the entire island. It soon became clear that she was by no means the only victim. Neverland was no longer recognizable. Not a single ship was left in the harbour. Only a handful of natives remained. And even the laughter of children had completely disappeared.

A deep rot had irrevocably damaged the island.

‘Everything is dying..’

‘Exactly,’ replied the spectre wearily.

‘How much time do we have left?’

‘Even I don't know that. There are too many possibilities at the moment.’

‘So we can still stop it?’

‘Perhaps.’

‘That's good enough for me. What has to be done?’

‘There is something only you can do.’

‘Only I?’ Hedone asked pensively.

The figure looked up. There, in the now bare branches, hung a single cocoon. She had once been surrounded by hundreds of enveloped sisters, but one by one they died as Hedone weakened. That made that little unborn creature the very last fairy.

‘How can one fairy make a difference?’

‘By gathering the right allies.’

Hedone hesitated. Previously, it had hardly cost her any effort to breathe life into her daughters. Now that one child would cost her her divinity.

‘Ah... Perhaps it's time for one more adventure.’

Hedone closed her eyes. Her mind reached out across the island, searching for every last ounce of power she could muster. Colourful energy flowed visibly over the bark of Hedone's tree straight to that small cocoon. There it wrapped itself around the shell. Unlike the other fairies, she would have no father. Hedone's last daughter would be a product of her love of life.

Like a budding water lily, the cocoon opened. The fairy's insect-like wings unfurled as she struggled to open her purple eyes. A personal touch that Hedone had lovingly bestowed.

The little creature descended slowly. The world was new to her. Even before the collapse of this island, it was a big scary place for someone like her. The branches of Hedone lovingly reached out to receive her. The few petals of some remaining violets were carefully wrapped around her child.

‘Daughter of mine. I gave you everything I had. My power, my knowledge and even my love of life. I do not have much time left. The fate of this island is now in your hands... and hers.’

One of the branches pointed in the direction of the figure that had been silently admiring the spectacle. The fairy looked back and hesitated.

‘Now go. I promise you that we will see each other again.’

That gave some hope to the little creature. It took some effort, but eventually she got her wings working. Hedone grinned softly. She had forgotten how much she had missed the fairy dust that was fluttering about.

The apparition reached out its hand for the little fairy to land on. Then she brought the new-born creature right up to her face. Even from that distance, her face could not be seen. She whispered the instructions softly to the fairy, so quietly that it seemed she feared the rot that was eating away at Hedone's roots was listening in. For once, Hedone herself was not so curious. Whatever was told didn't matter, as long as it made a difference.

After whispering her instruction, the figure raised her hand high into the air. The fairy rose up and looked back one last time.

'Find them. Only they can stop her now.'



I

THE FINAL DAUGHTER

After hours of crying, there were hardly any tears left.

The few that still hung from Moira's eyelashes were wiped away with her sleeve. She blew her nose in her handkerchief and scrambled to her feet. Her mother would not have wanted it any other way. A Darling does not sit idly by.

Moira had a lot of work ahead of her. As the last member of her line, it was up to her to get her mother's flat ready for the next tenant. Unfortunately, she could not count on any help. After the early death of her husband, Hilda, Moira's mother, had almost completely isolated herself from society. That explained why there were hardly any people present for the funeral. Sometimes Moira felt that she was the only contact her mother had left with the outside world. Thus death was possibly a salvation for her mother. At best, she was now back together with her beloved husband. In the worst case, she was now finally free from her pain. However, this did not bring much consolation to Moira.

Again she looked around the messy room her mother had left behind. She had no idea where to start on her own. At her wits' end, she just took an empty box and started throwing stuff into it. She had no intention of keeping any of this anyway. So why go to the trouble of sorting it all out?

Towards the end of her life, Hilda had clearly given up all hope. Empty soda cans and half-eaten takeaway meals quickly disappeared into a rubbish bag in the corridor while Moira tried not to gag.

While cleaning up, a considerable cloud of dust had gathered in the musty attic room. Despite the cold evening air, Moira decided to open the window anyway. She had been sneezing

enough today without her allergies. She took a deep breath in through her nose. It was unusually quiet in the street. There was not a cloud to be seen. All the stars twinkled brightly in the sky. For a moment, Moira thought it was a tribute to her mother, but quickly dismissed the idea as ridiculous. She was right. If she knew anything about the stars, she would have known immediately that they were warning her.

With some reluctance, Moira decided not to linger any longer. It was late and she had no desire to spend the night in the room where her mother had died. If she had kept watching a moment longer, she might have noticed the point of light that rushed through the heavens like a shooting star.

By now, much of the mess had been cleared away. Moira could already move about the room safely without worrying about slipping on a piece of clothing lying around. It was time to start on the books.

Moira knew only too well that her mother had been an avid reader. Her earliest memories were of the evenings when her mother read fairy tales to her at bedtime. Moira hoped to find that book among all the others. That way she would at least have something beautiful to remember her mother by. She did not care about the other books. After the unexpected heart attack of her father, reading changed from escapism to escaping for her mother. No more fairy tales. Welcome to harsh reality.

Yet Moira could not help but read the back of every book she got her hands on. To her, they were absurd books that spoke of mythology, alternate histories and ... her family?

When Moira held the book in her hands, she immediately recognised her mother's handwriting on the cover. Calligraphy had once been a passion of hers. It had clearly come in handy while working on this family history.

'The Darling family...' Moira read aloud.

She could not help but grin. It was one of the few things she liked about her family. A tradition that started with her great-great-grandmother Wendy. She resolutely refused to change

her surname when she married. According to her, their family's guardian angel would not be able to find her otherwise. When eventually her own daughter Jane came up with the same idea, it soon became clear that every Darling daughter would follow the same path. So it was with some pride that Moira bore her surname.

Carefully she began to leaf through the hand-bound book. It was obvious that this was not just her mother's work. The front pages were much too worn and frayed for that. As Moira flipped through the pages, she recognised the names of her foremothers. Wendy, Jane, Margaret and finally Hilda. At the very end there were blank pages. In those graceful calligraphic letters was Moira's own name. A chapter for her own adventure in this heirloom.

Heirloom.

Moira sighed at the idea. She would have to disappoint her mother. The line of Darling women would end with her. From an early age, Moira knew she never wanted to have children. The fact that she realised some years later that she had a preference for women was the final nail in that coffin. Moira didn't worry about it, but it was clear that her mother thought otherwise to the bitter end.

To suppress the idea of her mother's misplaced disappointment, Moira quickly flipped back to the beginning of the book. In large letters it read "Peter & Wendy".

She remembered that fairy tale all too well. It was the one story her mother never kept a book for. How she had enjoyed stories of her great-great-grandmother's adventures on a magical island full of pirates, natives and scary beasts! Her mother had even tried to make her believe that Peter Pan had visited her in her childhood, although at the time she felt he was a mere shadow of his former self. A confused and frightened boy who was looking for friends that had long since disappeared.

There had even been an evening when her mother had promised that Peter Pan would visit her one night. As far as

Moira could remember, that was the first time she had been disappointed in her mother. Because in the end Peter Pan never came for her.

After staring for a moment, Moira closed the book. The memories it carried with it were not all pleasant. Yet she could not bring herself to throw it away with the rejected books. With mixed feelings, she placed it on the corner of the neighbouring table that held the few things she would take home with her. For now, it consisted of a pile of old photo books, kitchen utensils that she herself lacked and a silly statue that her father had bought on their very last trip to Greece. For Moira, that was the last time they were happy together. Now only she remained.

Meanwhile, she searched the bookcase for her beloved storybook. It had to be here somewhere. Her mother hardly ever threw anything away. She would not leave until she found it. Even if that meant she would have to spend the night here with her mother's ghost.

The fact that Moira heard a loud bang behind her at that moment startled her immensely.

'M...mom?' she asked timidly as she slowly turned around.

Nothing.

Moira became angry with herself. How could she have been so superstitious? The only ghosts here were the ones she herself conjured up. But that still didn't explain where the Book of Darlings had gone.

The otherwise brave Moira took a few steps forward and soon noticed the book lying on the floor with its back facing upwards. She was about to pick it up when the book began to shake. This time Moira did not think she was dealing with a disgruntled ghost. No, in this mess she rather suspected a dirty rat!

Carefully, she reached for the nearby broom. It was not her intention to strike, but she had to have something with which to scare it away. In one swift movement, Moira placed the brush under the book and tipped it over. She was ready to sweep the rat away, but stopped in surprise when a tiny glowing girl

with transparent wings and fear in her eyes held her hands out defensively.

‘What... what are you?’

The fairy took a cautious step forward in an attempt to lift off.

‘This can't be. I... I'm hallucinating from grief... It has to be.’

Moira closed her eyes and gave them a good rub. When she opened them again, everything would be normal again.

Right in front of her flew the little fey. She smiled softly, hoping Moira would do the same. Moira held on to her disbelief for a moment longer, until she just couldn't deny it anymore. At that moment the stories of her mother came back to her mind. Didn't Wendy have to deal with a creature just like this?

Moira avoided the creature and crouched down to pick up the book. As the fairy watched, she placed the book back on the table and looked for a roughly sketched map that Jane had made.

‘Here!’ she cried, planting her finger firmly on the page, ‘Is this your home?’

The fairy approached and wanted to land on Moira's shoulder, but Moira was clearly not ready for that. She decided to hover just above the page. Almost immediately she recognised her birthplace. With wild nods she confirmed Moira's suspicion.

‘Neverland... You... you're from Neverland.’

The fairy grinned with a mouth full of tiny teeth. She had not expected it to be so easy.

‘But why you? Why now?! I am no longer a child! Peter should have come when I was young. That ... that's what my mother promised me.’

The little fairy had to think for a moment. After all, she could not talk. So she would have to be creative. With gestures she made it clear to Moira that she would like to turn a few pages. The knowledge about humanity that Hedone had given her, came in handy very quickly. Otherwise the fairy would never have been able to read the words.

With some surprise, Moira began to do what was asked of her. The fairy carefully scanned each page and signalled when

Moira should stop. At those moments, she would descend on the word she wanted to convey. Moira read them aloud each time.

Awake. Danger. Help. Family. Peter. Hook.

'That does not bode well ...' Moira eventually muttered.

The fairy nodded softly and gently placed her hand on Moira's.

'Do you expect me to do this alone?'

The fairy shook her head.

'So we' re looking for someone who can help?'

This time, she nodded in agreement.

'Then who?'

The fairy hesitated. She did not expect to find the right word in the stories of the Darling family. She looked around, hoping to find something that would help her get her message across. What she had not counted on was the statue!

Enthusiastically, she flew towards it. In her eyes, it was perfect. There was no other way she could have described it better. With wild gestures she drew Moira's attention to the statue.

'What? Are you sure?'

Judging by her behaviour, Moira knew immediately that the fairy was confident. She took the statue in her hands and stared at it questioningly. The wooden Satyr with his pan flute stared at her, smirking.

What could she mean by that?

III

THE FINAL SON

The heart of London was a place Moira rarely visited.

A sea of people surrounded her at the moment. This is exactly why someone as people-shy as her avoided this place like the plague. Normally, she was used to the suburbs. Still crowded, but at least you could get around without constantly dodging hurried businessmen and -women.

It had taken her a while to get here with the Tube. Fortunately, there was little difference between her and the average madman as she talked to the vest pocket in which she hid the fairy. When she finally found a quiet spot, she had let the fairy fly off again. Stranger things had been seen in the skies of London. No one would believe it anyway.

Moira did her best not to lose sight of the fairy, but the moment she looked up, a businesswoman bumped into her shoulder. Moira looked back. The 'lady' didn't care and just walked on. Moira realised that she could have been like that too. A while back she had a real job in an office. Then she wore neat grey clothes and dyed her otherwise red hair plain black. She had studied hard to get this far. Her mother had been so proud of her daughter. But a mouthy and rather obnoxious manager had soon put an end to that. Fortunately for him, dental care was included in his health insurance.

After something like that, Moira obviously couldn't count on a good reference, but that didn't bother her. To spend her whole life locked in a concrete cage, glued to a screen? That was not the life she wanted.

Unwittingly, Moira grinned. She was the only one standing still in a crowd of worker ants. None of them were as free as

her. She had no job. No partner. Not even a family anymore... Unlike them, she could choose her own direction. And yet... yet she felt aimless until fate finally gave her a chance to live her own adventure. It felt like she was born for it.

That moment of self-reflection, however, was short-lived. Stand idle for a moment too long in a herd like this and the most creative curse words are quickly hurled at you. Moira immediately started looking for the fairy again. Soon she caught her near an expensive-looking apartment building. This was clearly the place to be.

After a while, Moira managed to escape from the crowd with some necessary shoulder bumps. She took out her smartphone so as not to be conspicuous. The doorman had noticed her and clearly had no intention of letting in riff-raff like her. With her blue-dyed hair, white faux-leather jacket, black top, ripped jeans and Nike trainers, she wasn't really the kind of person who would hang out in places like this.

Here? Are we going to find help here?

Impatiently, the little fairy floated towards Moira. Moira turned around quickly so that no one would notice the mythological creature between her and decorative bushes. It was obvious from her behaviour that the fairy was waiting for Moira to go inside.

'It is not so easy. See that guy? I am sure he will not let me in.'

The fairy flew up a little higher, looked at the doorman and nodded to Moira before she flew in his direction. Moira tried to stop her, but she was much too fast for her. She could only watch in horror as the fae went full speed ahead.

What is she up to?

At that speed, it was not strange to think that you were dealing with a dragonfly. That was also the first thought of the doorman who tried to swat away the annoying insect that flew around him. He was also immediately concerned about all the dust swirling around him. With his allergies, it was bound to bother him. His nose was already tingling. Here came the first sneeze!

'ACHOO!'

The sneeze catapulted him straight into the air! In his fright, the man started screaming out loud. Dozens of Londoners spontaneously grabbed their smartphones to film the spectacle. A free performance by a street magician like this always did well online.

Moira, however, resisted the temptation to go viral and ran now that the door was unguarded. With the doorman already a few metres up, the fairy decided to follow Moira too. The person at the counter had no regard for the girl who had just come in. She too was staring out of the window at the unexpected magic trick of her colleague. That gave Moira the chance to walk on to the lifts undisturbed.

Looking around anxiously, she pressed the button several times to bring the lift down. The longer it took, the greater the chance that they would be noticed.

Ting!

The lift doors slid open for the pair. Moira rushed in and ducked to the side. As soon as the fairy was next to her, she began to wildly push the button that would close the doors. Seconds seemed like hours at that moment, but soon they were standing comfortably and safely behind closed doors.

‘Okay, which floor is it?’ Moira asked the fairy.

The little fairy, who was now resting on her shoulder, looked at her questioningly. Floors were clearly a concept she was not yet used to. Moira suspected that the fairy could roughly sense where the person she was looking for was, but other than that she would have to figure it out for herself.

‘Then let's check them all out.’

In one fluid movement, Moira ticked all the floors. She had always wanted to do that. But by the third floor she realised why people frowned upon it. The short ride up, followed by the sudden jolt and the doors that opened for nothing, soon annoyed her.

It was only on the 11th floor that the fairy shot back into action. As soon as the doors were open just a crack, she flew

forward. A frustrated Moira stayed behind, waiting for the doors to open wide enough for her. Once they were, she ran. Where could that damn fairy be?

There!

She was already halfway down the left corridor by the time Moira could spring into action. Moira finally ran to the end of the corridor. There she found the fey, pushing against the wooden door with all her might.

There was no doubt about it. This had to be the right address.

Moira couldn't help but sigh. Before they had come here, she had done research on Fauns and Satyrs. What she read was contradictory to say the least. She could deal with merry and mischievous, but the love of lust and rapture? Those were different things. And she was certainly no fan of an ithyphallos!

With these thoughts in mind, she clenched her fist and started banging loudly on the door.



On the other side of the door, there was a bustle. Dozens of ghostly hands were floating through the room. In the kitchen, they were preparing a sumptuous meal. Another pair was rearranging the bookcase for the umpteenth time. Other hands were vacuuming, washing the windows, doing the dishes, folding laundry and cleaning the toilet.

All this while an old buck was staring blankly at a laptop screen while lying in a comfortable sofa. He was wearing a white shirt, a blue blazer and a red tie, but had clearly forgotten his trousers, socks and shoes. Not that they would have fitted over his hooves.

The figure was deep in thought, searching for that one word that would not come. He was in his own little world and nothing would take him out of it. Certainly not the knocking on the door.



Moira, however, had no intention of stopping. She clearly heard noise on the other side of the door. Why didn't anyone open the door? Would she really have to resort to more serious measures?

Just as Moira was about to put her shoulder to the door, she heard a voice to her left.

'What are you doing here?' asked the smaller of the two. She stared at Moira sternly with her blue-grey eyes. Her braided light brown hair was hidden under the cowl of a green hoodie. Yet Moira could still make out a silver feather that was woven into it.

The woman at her side remained silent. Although she was wary, Moira also noticed that she was clearly studying her. Her skin was a lot paler than that of her companion and despite the cold and wetness of the season she was dressed in a long summer dress that swayed with every movement as if it were rolling waves. The only thing they had in common was that they each carried a brown bag full of groceries.

'Uh...'

Moira stammered. Her brain was running at full speed. She tried to hide the fairy behind her back while coming up with a good excuse.

'I... I am looking for the person who lives here,' was the best she could come up with.

'*We* live here' replied the formerly silent woman.

Had the fairy sent her in the wrong direction after all? She took a good look at their legs. As far as she could see, they were not buck-legged. Otherwise they must have been very well shaven.

'Well...then...er...'

Even the fairy couldn't listen to this any longer. Despite Moira's resistance, she managed to escape and flew straight at the two women. They were both startled, but not for the reason Moira had anticipated.

'A Psychai?!'

'I haven't seen one in ages!'

The little fairy started talking enthusiastically to them. To Moira it sounded like chimes, but the two women seemed to