

NEVERLAND

The Story of PETER PAN

[Adapted For The BrowzerBooks Book Club](#)

from works originally produced

By James M. Barrie

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Thank you.

Lin Stone.. 18 August, 2010, C.E.

NOTE: This is another book that should be read to your children.

Grown-ups with a sense of moral courage believe they are obligated to keep vigilant watch over what goes into and comes out of a child's mind. Therefore if a mother is afraid she hasn't filtered out all the worldly trash a child has stacked up during the day, she will rummage through their minds after her children are asleep, and put things straight for the next morning, repacking stray thoughts into their proper drawers and compartments beside all those many articles that have wandered in uninvited during the day.

If you could keep yourself awake (but of course you can't if you want to go to school the next day) you would see your own mother doing this for you, and you would find it very interesting to watch her. It is almost like tidying up any other kind of drawers in your home.

You would probably see your mother down on her knees, sometimes praying for strength, sometimes lingering over some of your more humorous contents, and often wondering where on earth you have picked this new word up, making sweet discoveries about you and some not so sweet, then pressing this precious experience to her cheek as if it were as nice as a kitten, and hurriedly stowing that thought away, completely out of sight and blessing it with a pleading prayer that it might leave your mind for good during the night.



If your mother is doing this right, when you wake up in the morning, all the naughtiness and evil passions with which you went to bed should have been folded up neat and small then stowed away at the bottom of your mind -- and right out there on the top, beautifully aired out and fluffed gently in the sunshine and wind, are spread out all your prettier thoughts, ready for you to put on.

Have you have ever seen a map of where things go inside your mind? As you know, doctors sometimes draw maps of other parts of you, and the map of your own mind can become intensely interesting to those outside of it, but catch them trying to draw a map of a child's mind, which is not only confused with new thoughts, but it keeps going round and round all the time like a giant Kaleidoscope.

All children save two, will grow up. There's no hurry about it for most of us, but some children just can't wait, hoping that just as soon as they are grown that they can do just as they like without all these silly rules that restrict their going-outs and trip up their coming-ins. Soon after birth they begin to suspect they are growing up, and a few years later they are sure to think they have already.

The way Wendy Darling learned that she was growing up came about like this: One day when she was just a little more than two years old she was playing in a tall flower garden, and she pulled a big blue flower off its stalk and ran with it to her mother.

I suppose Wendy's face was beaming, for Mrs. Darling put her hand over her heart and cried, "Oh Wendy, why can't you remain like this for ever!"

Well yes, why can't I remain like this for ever? Before she could ask, Wendy was swept up in a tender embrace and clutched to her mother's bosom for so long that she almost smothered in the rich, heady perfume that Mrs. Darling wore.

At last Mrs. Darling set her back down and Wendy picked up the flower from the walk way too offer it once more, but Mrs. Darling was already walking back to the house and Wendy had the strangest thought that her mother looked as if she were crying. Wendy watched her until the door closed softly.

Wendy looked around her, examining every part of the scene. Something had happened; Wendy knew that was so. She rubbed the idea back and forth until she had decided it was supposed to mean that she *was* growing up, and the thought frightened her.

This was all that passed between mother and daughter on this subject, but ever after that, when she heard her mother sigh, Wendy knew that she must be growing up some more. "You always know when is happening, after you are two," she told John solemnly. "Two is the beginning of the end."



Wendy and her family lived on Seaboard Lane and her house number was 14. Until Wendy came, Mrs. Darling was the biggest baby there. All the neighbors said with a sigh that she was a lovely lady, then they would shake their heads in pity because it was too bad she had such a romantic mind about everything.

The romantic mind they had spotted in Mrs. Darling was like the tiny boxes that come, one within the other, and are made in the puzzling East, however many you discover there is always one more; and Mrs. Darling's sweet mocking mouth had one kiss on it that Wendy could never get, though there it was right there, perfectly conspicuous in the right-hand corner.

The way Mr. Darling had won Mrs. Darling for his wife was this: the many gentlemen who had been boys when she was a girl were playing snookers one day when they discovered simultaneously that all of them had loved her in their youth. As they compared notes on how sweet she was, everyone - except Mr. Darling - ran a race to her house to propose to her. Mr. Darling knew he would never win that race so he hailed a cab and plunked a whole shilling into the man's hand then bade him make haste to Mrs. Darling's house "and run down any young men that get in our way!"

Thus it was he nipped in first, and so when the breathless winner of the foot race arrived, Mr. Darling had her already in his arms and he flashed them a sign so that they turned around and moped away.

Thus it was that Mr. Darling got all of her, except the innermost box and the kiss. He never knew about the box, and in time he gave up trying for the kiss. Wendy thought Napoleon could have captured it if he had spent all summer in the campaign, but I can picture him trying, and then going off in a huff, slamming the door behind him as was his wont.

Mr. Darling used to boast to Wendy that her mother not only loved him - but respected him, too, but that was just too much to be believed. He was one of those deep ones who know about stocks and shares. Of course no one really knows about stocks and bonds, but he quite seemed to know which way they would slide, and he often said stocks were up and shares were down in a way that would have made any woman respect him.

Mrs. Darling was married in white, and at first she kept the books perfectly, almost gleefully, as if it were a game. Not so much as a Brussels sprout went missing; but by and by, whole cauliflowers began to disappear, and in their places there were pictures of cute little babies popping out of cabbage tops without faces. She drew them when she should have been totting up and keeping all things lined up.

That put Mr. Darling in charge of the family's money. Therefore, for a week or two after Wendy came it was doubtful whether they would be able to keep her, as he pointed out that she was yet another mouth to feed.

Mr. Darling was frightfully proud of her good looks, but he was very honourable in his debts, and he sat on the edge of Mrs. Darling's bed, holding her hand in one of his own, but calculating expenses with the other hand even while she gazed at him imploringly. Her mind was so romantic that she wanted to keep Wendy, no matter how big the risk of bankruptcy might be, but that was not his way; his way of figuring was all laid out in black and white with a pencil and a piece of paper, and if she confused him with suggestions he had to begin at the beginning again.

"Now don't interrupt," he would beg of her. "I have shaved off one pound seventeen here, and two and six at the office; I can cut off my coffee at the office, say ten shillings for that, making two nine and six, with your eighteen and three makes three nine seven, with five naught naught in my cheque-book that makes eight nine seven -- who is that moving around?--eight nine seven, dot and carry seven-- don't speak, my own--and the pound you lent to that man who came to the door--quiet, child--dot and carry child--there, you've done it!-- did I say nine nine seven? Yes, I did, I said nine nine seven; the question is, can we try to keep her on for a year's lease with just nine nine seven to spare?"

"Of course we can, George," she cried in relief. But she had spoken too soon because he knew her romantic mind was always prejudiced in Wendy's favour, but Wendy still thought he was really the grander character of the two because he looked so regal.

"Remember the cost of mumps," he warned her almost threateningly, and off he went again to record the probability figures for mumps down on his piece of paper. "Oh no.. treating mumps will cost us one pound and that's only if we don't need to ask the doctor in. One pound, that is what I have put down, but I daresay it will be more like thirty shillings--don't speak my love – regular measles one five, German measles half a guinea, that makes two fifteen six -- don't waggle your finger like that, it bothers me -- whooping-cough, let's call it fifteen shillings"--and so on it went, and it added up differently each time; but at last he thought they might keep Wendy, if they could just get mumps reduced to twelve six, and the two kinds of measles treated as one.

There was the same nerve-fluttering excitement over John, and Michael had even a narrower squeak before they kept him; but both of them *were* kept, and soon, you might have seen the three Darling children going in a row to Miss Fulsom's Kindergarten school, accompanied by their nurse.

As they were poor, owing to the amount of milk the children drank, they could not really afford a nurse. But, Mrs. Darling loved to have everything just so, and Mr. Darling had a passion for being exactly like his neighbours; so, of course, they had a nurse anyway. The neighbor said that Nana didn't look like a real nurse even with her nurse's cap peaked on her head and tucked behind her ears with four bobby pins. Nana was a prim Newfoundland dog who had belonged to no one in particular until the Darlings engaged her.

Nana had always thought children were important, however, and the Darlings had become acquainted with her in Kensington Gardens, where she spent most of her spare time peeping into perambulators to see if the babies were safe, dry and secure, and was much hated by careless nursemaids, when she followed them to their homes and complained of them to their mistresses.

Nonetheless, Nana proved to be quite a treasure of a nurse. How thorough she was at bath-time, and up at any moment of the night if one of her charges made the slightest cry. Of course her kennel was in the nursery so she could be closer to her special charges.

She had a rare genius for knowing when a cough was a thing to have no patience with and when it just needs a stocking around your throat. She believed in old-fashioned remedies to her last day, and made sounds of contempt over all this new-fangled talk about germs, and so on.

It was a lesson in propriety to see her escorting the Darling children to school, walking sedately by their side when they were well behaved, and butting them back into line if they strayed to the edge of the sidewalk. On John's footer practice days she never once forgot his sweater, and she usually carried an umbrella in a purse slung over her back, in case of rain.

There is a room in the basement of Miss Fulsom's school where the nurses were let to wait. They sat on forms, while Nana lay on the floor, but that was the only difference. They affected to ignore her, as if she were of an inferior social status to themselves, and she despised their light talk.

At home Nana resented any visits to the nursery from Mrs. Darling's friends, but if they did come she first whipped off Michael's pinafore and put him into the one with blue braiding, and smoothed out Wendy's dress and made a dash at parting John's hair with her tongue.

No nursery could possibly have been conducted more correctly, and Mr. Darling knew it, yet he sometimes wondered uneasily whether the neighbours talked about him behind his back, for he had his position in the city to consider.

Nana also troubled him in another way. He sometimes had the strangest feeling that she did not admire him as she should have.

"I know she admires you tremendously, George," Mrs. Darling would assure him, and then she would sign to the children to be specially nice to father at that moment. Lovely dances followed, in which the only other servant, Liza, was sometimes allowed to join. Such a midget she looked in her long skirt and maid's cap, though she had sworn, when engaged, that she would never see the age of ten again.

How wonderful and gay were those romps! And gayest of all was Mrs. Darling, who would pirouette so wildly that all you could see of her was the curling kiss at the edge of her mouth, and then if you had dashed at her you might have got it. There never was a simpler happier family in all of London Town, until the coming of Peter Pan.

For Peter Pan came as a thief in the night and carried off all three of the Darling children. He carried them off to Neverland, and life was never the same again in the Darling home.

They truly had a powerful forewarning. As she was rummaging through Wendy's mind one night after her children were asleep, Mrs. Darling occasionally found things she could not understand, and of these quite the most disturbing was the word "Peter."

The name was disturbing because she knew of no Peter, and yet his name was tucked in here and there everywhere in Wendy's mind and soon it began to be scrawled all over the minds of John and Michael. The name of Peter stood out sharply in in Wendy's mind, chiseled in bolder letters than any of her other words, and as Mrs. Darling pondered that name she felt sure that it had an oddly cocky appearance.

At last she asked Wendy "Is Peter a little cocky?"

"Yes, he is rather too sure of himself," Wendy admitted with regret. "and it often gets him into bad trouble."

"But who is this boy Peter, my pet?"

"Why, he is Peter, Peter Pan. He said that once upon a time he knew you too, but you grew up and went away, mother so now he is come to visit us."

At first Mrs. Darling could not remember any Peter Pan back in her life, but later on the next day as she sat rocking in her chair just before going in for her afternoon nap, and while drifting off to sleep, she just almost remembered a curious little boy named Peter Pan that she had heard rumors of as a mere child.

She felt the strangest sensation as she thought of him, and she quit rocking for a long time as she tried to remember more detail. At last the memory came clear that someone had said that when children died Peter Pan went part of the way to heaven with them, so that they should not be frightened by goblins along the way. That was all, and it worried her -- as if this might be some kind of a sign.

Mrs. Darling drew herself up wide awake with a hearty laugh; sign indeed! Such foolishness must be put aside when one grows up.

Mrs. Darling consulted Mr. Darling, but he smiled and said, "Pooh-pooh. You mark my words, it is some nonsense Nana has been putting into their heads; that's just the sort of idea a dog would have. Leave them alone, and all this Peter Pan business will blow over."

But Peter Pan was a business that did not blow over and quite soon the troublesome boy gave Mrs. Darling yet another shock.

Some leaves of a tree had been found on the nursery floor, which certainly were not there when the children went to bed, and Mrs. Darling was puzzling over them when Wendy said with a tolerant smile: "I do believe it is that Peter Pan again!"

Mrs. Darling caught her breath. "Whatever do you mean, Wendy?"

"It is so naughty of him not to wipe his feet when he comes in," Wendy explained, sighing with regret, for she was such a tidy child.

She went on to explain in quite a matter-of-fact way that she thought Peter sometimes got lonely and came to the nursery in the night then sat on the foot of her bed and played on his pipes for her.

Unfortunately she never woke all the way up, so Wendy didn't know for sure how she knew, she just knew that she was sure.

"What nonsense you talk, precious. No one can get into this house without knocking."

"I think he flies in by the window," Wendy replied.

"My love, that can't be so; the nursery window is three floors up off the ground."

"Were not the leaves found at the foot of the window, mother?"

Mrs. Darling drew herself up short and did not reply. It was quite true; the leaves had been found very near the window. Then she did not know what to think, for it all seemed so natural to Wendy that you could not dismiss it by saying she had been dreaming. Oh, surely she must have been dreaming though; Little boys do not fly.

But, on the other hand, there were the leaves for evidence. Mrs. Darling examined them very carefully. They were skeleton leaves, but she was sure they did not come from any tree that grew in England. So earnest in her investigations was she that Mrs. Darling crawled about on the floor, peering at it with a candle for the shadow marks of a strange foot.

Discovering nothing untoward on the floor, she rattled the poker up the chimney and she tapped the walls. Still puzzled, she let down a tape from the window to the pavement, and found that it was a sheer drop of thirty feet, without so much as a spout to climb up by. Her conclusion was positive; Wendy *must have been dreaming*.

Later they realized that Wendy had not been dreaming, for on the following night, when all the children were once more in bed and drifting off to sleep, it so happened to be Nana's evening off, and Mrs. Darling had bathed them and sung to them till one by one they had let go her hand and slid reluctantly away into the land of deepest sleep. All of them were looking so safe and cosy that she smiled at her fears about Peter Pan and sat down tranquilly by the fire to sew. The garment she was working on was something for Michael, who on his last birthday was at last getting into shirts. The fire was warm in front of her, and the nursery dimly lit by three night-lights, and presently the sewing lay untouched on Mrs. Darling's lap. Then her head nodded, oh, so gracefully and her heavy eyelids dropped down to shut off the night. She had fallen asleep in her chair.

Wendy and Michael were over there, John over here, and Mrs. Darling was drawn up by the fire. While she slept Mrs. Darling had the strangest dream. She dreamt that a place named Neverland had drifted too near and that a strange boy had broken through from it. He did not alarm her at first, for she felt sure that she had seen him before in the faces of many women who have no children. But in her dream he had rent the film that obscures Neverland from human view, and she saw Wendy and John and Michael peeping in at him through the gap while they were asleep.

The dream by itself would have been only a trifle, but while she was dreaming, the window of the nursery blew softly open with a sigh, giving ready access to a boy that did drop in and he stood upon the nursery room floor.

All about him there darted a strange, soft light, no bigger around than your fist. It darted about the room like a living thing and it must have been this light that had wakened Mrs. Darling.

She started up with a cry, then saw the boy, and somehow she knew instantly that he was Peter Pan. He was a lovely boy, clad in skeleton leaves that had been sewn together with the juices that ooze out of trees but the most entrancing thing about him was that he had all his first teeth. When he saw a grown-up was in the room he gnashed the little pearlies at her so defiantly that she dropped back into the chair with her hand clutched at her heart.

Mrs. Darling screamed, and, as if summoned by a bell, the door opened and Nana entered, having returned from her evening out. Immediately she spotted the intruder. She growled and sprang at the boy, who leapt lightly through the window and disappeared.

Again Mrs. Darling screamed, this time though it was in distress for the little boy, for she thought sure he was killed, tumbling out of the window like that. Immediately, she ran down into the street to look for his body, but it was not there; and she looked up, and in the black night she could see nothing but something she thought must have been a shooting star, save it had come shooting out of the nursery window and heading upwards on a slant towards the distant sea.

Mrs. Darling returned to the nursery, and found Nana with something tangled in her mouth, which proved to be the boy's shadow. As he leapt for the open the window Nana had closed it quickly, too late to catch him, but his shadow had not had time to get out; slam went the window and it had snapped off the little boy's shadow.

You may be sure Mrs. Darling examined the shadow carefully, but it was quite the ordinary kind that everyone else has.

Nana had no doubt of what was the best thing to do with this shadow. She took it back and hung it out at the window, meaning "He is sure to come back for it; let us put it where he can get it easily without disturbing the children."

But unfortunately Mrs. Darling could not leave it hanging out at the window because it looked so much like they were hanging out the washing, and it lowered the whole tone of the house. She went downstairs with the thought of showing the shadow to Mr. Darling, but he was totting up the cost of winter great-coats for John and Michael. He had a wet towel wound around his head to keep his clicking brain more clear, and it seemed a shame to trouble him; besides, she knew exactly what he would say: "It all comes of having a Newfoundland dog for a nurse."

In the end, Mrs. Darling decided to roll the shadow up and put it away carefully in a drawer, until a more fitting opportunity came for telling her husband. That opportunity came a week later, on that never-to-be-forgotten Friday. Of course it was a Friday; it was Black Friday.



Black Friday had begun so uneventfully, so precisely like a hundred other evenings, with Nana putting on the water for Michael's bath and carrying him to it on her back.

"I won't go to bed," he had shouted, like one who still believed that he had the last word on the subject, "I won't, I won't. Nana, it isn't even six o'clock yet. Oh dear, oh dear, I shan't love you any more, Nana. I tell you I won't be bathed yet, I won't, I won't!"

Then Mrs. Darling had come in, wearing her white evening-gown. She had dressed early because Wendy so loved to see her mother in her evening-gown, decorated with the necklace George had given her. She was wearing Wendy's bracelet on her arm; she had asked for the loan of it. Wendy loved to lend her bracelet to her mother.

Mrs. Darling found her two older children playing at being herself and their father on the occasion of Wendy's birth, and little John was saying: "I am happy to inform you, Mrs. Darling, that you are now a mother," in just such a tone as Mr. Darling himself may have used on the real occasion.

Wendy had danced with joy, just as the real Mrs. Darling must have done. The excitement died down, then John was born, with the extra pomp that he conceived due to the birth of a healthy male child, and Michael came soaking from his bath and he asked to be born again also as soon as he learned what the game was.

But John brutally responded in his Mr. Darling voice that they did not want any more children. Baby Michael puckered up and nearly cried. "Nobody wants me," he said, and of course the lady in the evening-dress could not stand that.

"I do too," Wendy protested, "Yes, I do want another child."

"Do you want a boy or a girl?" asked Michael, not too hopefully.

"Boy."

"Okay!" Then Michael leapt into her arms, clamoring to be born at once. Such a little thing for Mr. and Mrs. Darling and Nana to recall now, but not so little if that was to be Michael's last night in the nursery.

That night would last forever in memory. "It was then that I rushed in like a tornado to protect them, wasn't it?" Mr. Darling would ask, scorning himself with shame; and yes indeed Mr. Darling had been rushing up those stairs like a tornado.

Perhaps there was some excuse for him. He too, had been dressing for the party, and all had gone well with him until he came to tying his tie. It is an astounding thing to have to tell, but this man, though he knew all about stocks and shares, this man had no real mastery over his tie. Sometimes the thing yielded to him without a contest, but if seconds were tight and precious few left for him there were occasions when it would have been better for the whole house if he had just swallowed his pride and used a made-up tie like those that you simply clipped into place.

This was such an occasion. Mr. Darling came bursting into the nursery with the crumpled little brute of a tie in his hand.

"Why, what is the matter, father dear?" asked Mrs. Darling with a wary eye cast his way.

"Matter!" he had yelled; yes, he reminded them again in deepest shame, he had really yelled. "This tie, this murderous tie will not tie." It was always a bad sign when Mr. Darling became dangerously sarcastic. "Not round my neck it won't tie! Round the bed-post? Oh yes, twenty times have I made it up round the bed-post, but round my neck, no! Oh dear no! There it will not go"

Then when his darling Darling shifted to lift a hand he backed away and begged to be excused. "I merely wanted to vent my spleen and have you listen to my struggles – you know, like a cheerleader!"

But when she dropped her reaching, helping hand and turned to other matters he had thought however, that Mrs. Darling was not sufficiently impressed with the magnitude of his troubles, and he went on sternly, "I warn you of this, mother, that unless this tie goes round my neck properly as it should that we won't go out to dinner to-night, and you know that if I don't go out to dinner to-night, I shall never go to the office again, and we both know that if I don't go to the office again, that you and I shall starve. You know that as well as I do, and you also know that IF that happens that all of our children will be flung hungry into the streets, yes if that happens, they MUST."

Even then Mrs. Darling was a little too placid. "Let me try my hand at it, dear," she had said on that Black Friday night, and indeed that was what he had come to ask her to do in the first place, and with her nice cool hands she tied his tie for him, while the children stood around to see their fate decided. How soon would they be cast into the street hungry?

Some men might have resented her being so able and competent to tie that savage, rebellious tie so easily, but Mr. Darling had far too fine a nature for that; therefore he thanked her carelessly, and at once he forgot his rage, and in another moment he was dancing round the room with Michael securely clasped upon his back.

"I ought to have been specially careful on a Friday," Mrs. Darling said later to her husband, while perhaps Nana was on the other side of her, holding her hand.

"No, no," Mr. Darling always replied, "I am responsible for it all. I, George Darling, did it. MEA CULPA, MEA CULPA, oh yes, MEA CULPA." Thus proving to one and all that he had been tortured in his youth with a classical education.

Thus they sat, night after night recalling that fatal Black Friday, till every detail of it was stamped so deeply on their brains that it came through on the other side like the puckered faces on a bad coinage.

"If only I had not accepted that invitation to dine at 27," Mrs. Darling said.

"Oh, MEA CULPA, MEA CULPA. If only I had not poured all my medicine into Nana's bowl," said Mr. Darling.

Nana glanced up with a piteous yowl.. "If only I had not pretended to like the medicine," was what her wet eyes said.

"My liking for parties is to blame, George."

"My fatal gift of humour is what brought it on, my dearest."

"No, no. It was my touchiness about trifles, dear master and mistress," Nana protested.

Then one or more of them would break down altogether and try to sob their grief away; Nana choked up on the thought, "It's true, it's true, they ought not to have had a dog like me for a nurse." So pure was her grief that many a time it was Mr. Darling himself who put the handkerchief to Nana's eyes.

"That fiend!" Mr. Darling would leap to his feet and cry, and Nana's bark was the echo of it, but Mrs. Darling never upbraided Peter Pan; there was something in the right-hand corner of her mouth that forbade that she should ever call Peter names.

"How wildly we romped that night!" Mrs. Darling said now, recalling it yet again with a soft, silver sigh.

"It was our last romp!" Mr. Darling groaned.

"O George, do you remember what Michael suddenly said to me that night, He said, 'How did you get to know me, mother?'"

"I remember, I remember it well!"

"They were rather sweet, don't you think so, George?"

"Oh YES, they were ever so sweet; all the neighbors said so, and then too, they were our children, ours, you know! and now they are gone. Completely and ever, our children, they are gone."

The fun-splashed romp had ended that night with the appearance of Nana. Most unluckily Mr. Darling had brushed his leg against her, thus covering his trousers with hairs. They were not only new trousers, but

they were the first he had ever had with braid on them, and he had had to bite his lip to prevent the tears coming. Of course Mrs. Darling brushed the hairs off for him, but he began to talk again about its being a mistake to have a dog in their house for a nurse.

"George, Nana is a treasure."

"No doubt, but all the same, I have an uneasy feeling at times that she looks upon our children as her own little puppies."

"Oh no, dear one, I feel sure she knows they have souls."

"I wonder," Mr. Darling said thoughtfully, "I wonder." It was an opportunity, his wife felt, for telling him about the boy. At first he had pooh-poohed the story, but he became more thoughtful when she showed him the shadow.

"It is nobody I know," he said, after examining it carefully, "but it does look as if it belonged to a scoundrel."

"We were still discussing it, you remember," says Mr. Darling, "when Nana came in with Michael's medicine. You will never carry the medicine bottle in your mouth again, Nana, and it is all my fault."

Strong man though he was, there is no doubt that he had behaved rather foolishly over the medicine. If he had a weakness, it was for thinking that all his life he had taken medicine boldly, and so now, when Michael dodged the spoon in Nana's mouth, he had said reprovingly, "**Grow UP! Be a man, Michael.**"

"Won't; won't!" Michael cried naughtily. Mrs. Darling left the room to get a chocolate for him, and Mr. Darling fumed because he thought this showed want of firmness in his wife.

"Mother, don't pamper him," he called after her. "Michael, when I was your age I took medicine without a whimper. I said, 'Thank you, kind parents, for giving me bottles of medicine to make me well.'"

He really thought this was true, and Wendy, who was now in her night-gown, believed it also, and she said, to encourage Michael, "That medicine you sometimes take, father, is much nastier, isn't it?"

"Ever so much nastier," Mr. Darling said bravely, "and I would take it right now as an example to you, Michael, if I hadn't lost the bottle."

He had not exactly lost it; he had climbed in the dead of night to the top of the wardrobe and hidden it there. What he did not know was that the faithful Liza had found it, and put it back on his wash-stand.

"I know where it is, father," Wendy cried, always glad to be of service. "I'll bring it," and she was off before he could stop her. Immediately his spirits sank in the strangest way.

"John," he said, shuddering, "it's some most beastly stuff. It's that nasty, sticky, sweet kind like you get to take."

"It will soon be over, father," John said cheerily, and then in rushed Wendy with the medicine in a glass.

"I have been as quick as I could," she panted.

"You have been wonderfully quick," her father retorted, with a vindictive politeness that was quite thrown away upon her. "Michael first," he said doggedly.

"Father first," said Michael, who was of a suspicious nature.

"I shall be sick, you know," Mr. Darling said threateningly.

"Come on, father," said John.

"Hold your tongue, John," Mr. Darling rapped out.

Wendy was quite puzzled. "I thought you took it quite easily, father."

"That is not the point," he retorted. "The point is, umm, the point is that there is far more in my glass than there is in Michael's spoon."

His proud heart was nearly bursting. "And it isn't fair: I would say it though it were with my last breath; it isn't fair."

"Father, I am waiting," Michael coldly replied.

"It's all very well to say you are waiting; so am I waiting."

"Father's a cowardly custard."

"So are you a cowardly custard."

"I'm not frightened."

"Neither am I frightened."

"Well, then, take it."

"Well, then, you take it."

Wendy had a splendid idea. "Why not both take it at the same time?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Darling. "Are you ready, Michael?"

Wendy gave the count, one, two, three, and Michael took his medicine, but Mr. Darling slipped his behind his back.

There was a yell of rage from Michael, and "O father!" Wendy exclaimed.

"What do you mean by 'O father'?" Mr. Darling demanded. "Stop that row, Michael. I meant to take mine, but I--I missed it somehow."

It was dreadful the way all three of the children were looking at him, just as if they did not admire him. "Look here, all of you," he said entreatingly, as soon as Nana had gone into the bathroom. "I have just thought of a splendid joke. I shall pour my medicine into Nana's bowl, and she will drink it, thinking it is milk!"

It was the colour of milk; but the children did not have their father's sense of humour, and they looked at him reproachfully as he poured the medicine into Nana's bowl. "What fun!" he said doubtfully, and they did not dare expose him when Mrs. Darling and Nana returned.

"Nana, good dog," he said, patting her, "I have put a little milk into your bowl, Nana."

Nana wagged her tail, ran to the medicine, and began lapping it. Then she gave Mr. Darling such a look, not an angry look: she showed him the great red tear that makes us so sorry for noble dogs, and crept away into her kennel.

Mr. Darling was frightfully ashamed of himself, but he would not give in. In a horrid silence Mrs. Darling smelt the bowl. "O George," she said, "that's your medicine!"

"It was only a joke," he roared, while she comforted her boys, and Wendy hugged Nana. "Much good," he said bitterly, "my wearing myself to the bone trying to be funny in this house."

And still Wendy hugged Nana.

"That's right," Mr. Darling shouted. "Coddle her! Nobody cuddles me. Oh dear no! I am just the breadwinner in this house, why should I be coddled--why, why, why?"

"George," Mrs. Darling entreated him, "not so loud; the servants next door will hear you."

"Let them!" he answered recklessly. "Bring in the whole world. But I refuse to allow that dog to lord it in my nursery for an hour longer."

The children wept, and Nana ran to him beseechingly, but he waved her back. He felt he was a strong man again. "In vain, in vain," he cried; "the proper place for you is back out in the yard, and there you go, to be tied up out there this very instant."

"George, George," Mrs. Darling whispered, "remember what I told you about that boy."

Alas, Mr. Darling would not listen. He didn't even ask to be reminded WHAT boy was being referred to because he was so determined to show them who was master in that house, and when his commands would not draw Nana forth from the kennel, he lured her out of it with honeyed words, and then, seizing her roughly, dragged her from the nursery. He was ashamed of himself after it started, and yet he did it. It was all owing to his too affectionate nature, which craved for admiration. When he had tied her up in the back-yard, the wretched father went and sat in the passage, with his knuckles to his eyes.

In the meantime Mrs. Darling had put the children to bed in unwonted silence and lit their night-lights. They could hear Nana barking, and John had whimpered, "Listen to poor Nana. She's barking like that

because he is chaining her up in the yard," but Wendy was wiser. "No. That is not Nana's unhappy bark," she said, little guessing what was about to happen; "that is her bark when she smells danger."

Danger!

"Are you sure, Wendy?"

"Oh, yes." Wendy said. "I'm sure."

Mrs. Darling quivered and went to check the window. It was securely fastened. She looked out, and the night was peppered with stars already. It was her imagination of course but it looked as if the stars were crowding round the house, as if curious to see what kind of danger was to strike the home there. A nameless fear clutched at her heart and made her cry, "Oh, how I wish that I wasn't going to a party to-night!"

Even Michael, already half asleep, knew that she was perturbed, and he asked, "Can anything harm us, mother, after the night-lights are lit?"

Mrs. Darling forgot the tell-tale stars and turned back to reassure him. "Oh no, nothing can harm you here after the night-lights are lit, precious," she said; "they are the eyes a mother leaves behind her to guard her children."

Then she went from bed to bed singing enchantments over them, and little Michael flung his arms round her. "Mother," he cried, "I'm glad of you." They were his last little baby words that she was to remember from him.

The party was to be held in No. 27 – and that was only a few yards distant, but there had been a slight fall of snow, and Father and Mother Darling picked their way over it deftly so as not to soil their shoes. They were already the only persons in the street, and all the stars were watching them. Stars are beautiful, but they are so far distant that may not take an active part in anything, they must just look on for ever. It is a punishment put on them for something they did so long ago that no star now knows what it was. So the older ones have become glassy-eyed and seldom speak. Winking and twinkling is the only star language left to them. So as soon as the door of 27 closed behind Mr. and Mrs. Darling there was a commotion in the firmament, and the smallest of all the stars in the Milky Way screamed out: "Peter, DON'T!"

But Peter only grinned as he flew on his way.

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The night-lights continued to burn clearly for a long time. They were

such cute little night-lights and Peter even admired them when he landed on the window sill. He blew a little kiss at Wendy's night light. It blinked then gave such a yawn that the other two little night lights yawned also, and before they could close their mouths all the way, all three night lights flickered and went out.

All at once there was another light in the room, a thousand times brighter than the night-lights, and in the time we have taken to say this, it had been in all the drawers in the nursery, looking for Peter's shadow. It rummaged through the wardrobe and turned every pocket inside out. Then the light paused in the middle of the nursery and slowly one could see it was not really a light but a little fairy that made this light by flashing about so quickly, but when it came to rest for a second you could see that it was a fairy, no longer than your hand, but still growing. It was a girl fairy for it was exquisitely gowned in a skeleton leaf, cut low and square, through which her figure could be seen to the best advantage. She was slightly inclined to a plump hourglass figure.

A moment after the fairy's entrance Peter tapped on the window and it slid open wide and Peter dropped in. When he straightened up there was no sign of the fairy. "Tinker Bell," he called softly. "Tink, where are you?"

Then he saw her. Tinker Bell was inside an empty jug for the moment, and liking it extremely; she had never been in a jug before. She made funny faces at Peter and floated around and around as she pretended to try getting out.

"Oh, do come out of that jug, and tell me where they have put my shadow?" The loveliest tinkle as from some golden bells answered him. That golden tinkle is the way fairies amongst themselves. Bigger little children can just barely hear the golden bells ring, but if they are ever very, very quiet, they might hear it. And if they did hear the fairy sound of a golden bell ring they might remember that once upon a time they had often heard it ring and that once upon a time the sound of fairy talk had led them to grand adventures, long, long before.

The tiny ringing sound that Tink made told Peter that his shadow was in the big box. "Big box?" Peter asked. He turned slowly around and looked for a big box, then he saw that she meant the chest of drawers that looked like a big box to her, and Peter ran to open the two top drawers. He scattered their contents to the floor with both hands, as English kings might toss handfuls of ha'pence to the crowd.

In a moment Peter had recovered his shadow, but in his delight he shut Tinker Bell up in the drawer. He was so glad that he had his little shadow for when it came near him, it joined to his feet like drops of water, and he had missed his little friend when it did not stretch out behind him. But the shadow had been free for so long that it kept sneaking away from Peter. He tried to stick it on with soap from the bathroom, but that failed. A shudder passed through Peter as his shadow sneaked away and fled out the window. He actually sat down on the floor and cried.

His sobs woke Wendy, and she sat up in bed with her gaze sweeping around the room. She could not see Tinker Bell for Tink was stuck in the drawer; and at first she could not see Peter either because he was

sitting on the nursery floor. She looked at Michael, and she glanced at John, but the crying did not come from them and it continued. Then between the sobs she heard the strident golden tones of Tinker Bell demanding to get out. Wendy then cocked her head to one side as a child does when listening for the fairies to speak and she said. "Little boy, Little Boy, why are you crying?"

Peter raised up his head and when he saw Wendy looking right at him he rose to his feet for he could be exceedingly polite, having learned the grand manners of young princes invited to attend the ceremonies of fairies at midnight.

Wendy was overjoyed to see a prince bowing to her, and she bowed right beautifully back to him from her place in the bed.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Wendy Moira Angela Darling," she replied with snug satisfaction.

"What is your name?"

"Peter Pan."

"Oh." She was already sure that he must be Peter Pan to be in her room, but it did seem a comparatively short name for a prince. "Is that all there is to your name?"

"Yes," he said rather sharply for it was the first time that it had occurred to him that his was a shortish name.

"I'm so sorry," Wendy Moira Angela apologized.

"It doesn't matter," Peter gulped.

She asked where he lived.

"You take the second shadow to the right," said Peter, "and then you go straight on till morning."

"Why, but that's straight out into the ocean," Wendy protested. "What a funny address!"

Peter had another sinking feeling. For the first time he felt that perhaps his home was found with a funny address. "No, it isn't," he replied defensively.

"I mean," Wendy said nicely, remembering that she was hostess, "is that what I would put on my letters if I wrote to you?"

He wished she had not mentioned letters. "I don't get any letters," he said contemptuously. "All my friends come to see me."

"But doesn't your mother gets letters?" Wendy asked.

"I don't have a mother," he said shortly. "And I don't want one either. Mothers never let you have any fun. Mothers are very over-rated people."

Wendy felt at once that she was in the presence of a tragedy. "O Peter, no wonder you were crying," she said, and got out of bed and raced to console him. "You are an orphan."

"I wasn't crying my mother," he said indignantly. "I was crying because I can't get my shadow to stick on. Besides, I *wasn't crying*."

"Has it come off?"

"Yes."

Then Wendy saw the shadow stretched out lean against the floor. It looked so draggled, and she was frightfully sorry for Peter. "How

awful!" she said, but she could not help smiling when she saw that he had been trying to stick it on with soap. Why that proved that Peter might be a prince, but he was still exactly like a boy! "It must be sewn on again or it will float away," she said, just a little patronisingly.

"What do you mean, it must be sewn on again?" he asked.

"You're dreadfully ignorant."

"No, I'm not."

But she was already exulting in his ignorance. "I shall sew it on for you, my little man," she said, though he was tall as herself when he stood up, and she got out her little housewife bag then sat down to sew the shadow back on to Peter's feet. "I daresay it will hurt a little," she warned him.

"Oh, I shan't cry," said Peter, who was already of the opinion that he had never cried in his life. And he clenched his teeth together so that he would not cry, and soon his shadow was behaving properly, though still a little creased.

"Perhaps I should have ironed it," Wendy said thoughtfully, but Peter, boylike, was indifferent to appearances, and he was now jumping about in the wildest glee. Alas, he had already forgotten also that he owed his bliss to Wendy. He thought he had attached the shadow himself. "How clever I am!" he crowed rapturously, "oh, the cleverness of me!"

It is humiliating to have to confess that this conceit of Peter was one of his most fascinating qualities. To put it with brutal frankness, there never was a cockier boy.

But for the moment Wendy was shocked. "You conceited braggart," she exclaimed, with frightful sarcasm; "of course I did nothing!"

"Oh, you did a little bit, I'm sure" Peter said carelessly, Then he continued to dance.

"A little!" she replied with hauteur; "Well! If I am of no use to you then I can at least withdraw," and she sprang in the most dignified way back into her bed and covered her face with the blankets.

To induce her to look up he pretended to be going away, and when this failed he sat on the end of the bed and tapped her gently with his foot. "Wendy," he said, "don't withdraw from me like this. I can't help crowing, Wendy, when I'm so pleased to have my shadow back."

He could tell by the stillness of the blankets that she was listening eagerly. "Wendy," he continued, in a voice that no woman has ever yet been able to resist, "Wendy, I know that one girl is more use than twenty boys."

"Really? Wendy asked unsurely, and she peeped out over the top of the bed-clothes. "Do you really think so, Peter?"

"Yes, I do."

"I think it's perfectly sweet of you to say that," she declared, "and I'll get up again," and she sat with him on the side of the bed. She also said she would give him a kiss if he liked, but Peter did not know what she meant, and he held out his hand expectantly.

"Surely you know what a kiss is?" she asked, aghast at his ignorance.

"I shall know when you give it to me," he replied stiffly, and not to hurt his feeling she gave him a thimble.

"Now," said he, "shall I give you a kiss?" and she replied with a slight primness, "If you please." She made herself rather cheap by inclining her face toward him, but he merely dropped an acorn button into her hand, so she slowly returned her face to where it had been before, and said nicely that she would wear his kiss on the chain around her neck, then she dropped it into her pocket.

When children are first introduced to another child, it is customary for them to ask each other's age, and so Wendy, who always liked to do the proper thing, asked Peter how old he was. It was not really a happy question to ask him; it was like an examination paper that asks for the right grammar, when all you really want to be asked is for a list of Kings of England because that is an easier matter to answer.

"I don't know," he replied uneasily, "but I must be quite young. You see, Wendy, I ran away the day I was born."

She was quite surprised, but interested; and she indicated in the best drawing-room manner that he could sit nearer to her.

"It was because I heard father and mother," he explained in a low voice, "talking about what I was to be when I became a man." In spite of himself he was extraordinarily agitated now. "I don't want ever to be a man," he said with passion. "I want always to be a little boy and to have fun for the rest of my life. So I ran away to Kensington Gardens and I lived a long long time among the fairies."

She gave him a look of the most intense admiration, and he thought it was because he had run away, but it was really because he knew fairies. Wendy had lived such a home life that to know fairies struck her as quite delightful. She poured out questions about them, to his surprise, for they were rather a nuisance to him, getting in his way almost like mothers and so on, and indeed he sometimes had to give them a hiding. Still, he liked them on the whole, and so he told her about the beginning of fairies.

"You see, Wendy, when the first baby laughed for the first time, its laugh broke into a thousand pieces, and they all went skipping about, and that was the beginning of fairies."

This was tedious talk to him, but being a stay-at-home she liked it.

"And so," he went on good-naturedly, "there ought to be one fairy for every boy and girl."

"Ought to be? Isn't there?"

"No. You see children know such a lot now, they soon don't believe in fairies, and every time a child says, 'I don't believe in fairies,' there is a fairy somewhere that, oh, that falls down dead." Really, he thought they had now talked enough about fairies, and it struck him that Tinker Bell was keeping very quiet. "I can't think where Tink has gone to," he said, rising, and he called out "Tink, Tink." Wendy's heart went aflutter with a sudden thrill.

"Oh, Peter," she cried with a grin, "Are you trying to tease me? You don't mean to try telling me that there is a fairy in this room!"

"She was here just now," he said impatiently. "Lean your head over and listen closely. You might hear her. Do you?"

"The only sound I hear," said Wendy, "is a soft sound very much like a tinkle of bells."

"Well, that must be Tink, for that is the way fairies sound when they talk. Oh, I think I hear her too." Peter made a merry face as he sorted out directions and looked about the nursery.

"Wendy," he whispered gleefully, "I do believe that I have shut Tinkerbell up in the drawer!"

He let poor Tink out of the drawer, and she flew about the nursery screaming with fury. "You shouldn't say such things," Peter retorted. "Of course I'm very sorry, but how could I know you were in the drawer?"

Wendy was not listening to him. "O Peter," she cried, "She must look like a real fairy. I wish she would just stand still and let me see her!"



"They hardly ever stand exactly still," he said. "for they are so light that the faintest of breezes can blow them both to and fro.",

For just a single moment Wendy saw the romantic figure come to rest on the cuckoo clock. "O the lovely!" she cried, though Tink's face was still distorted with angry passion at Peter.

"Tink," said Peter amiably, "this lady says she wishes you were her fairy." Tinker Bell answered insolently.

"What does she say, Peter?"

Peter started to answer one way, then he decided on another course. "She is not very polite right now. She says you are a huge ugly girl, and that she is my fairy and no one else's."

Seeing the mournful look on Wendy's Peter tried to argue with Tink. "You know you can't be my fairy, Tink, because I am a gentleman and you are a lady."

In response to this Tinkerbell drew herself up in a huff and disappeared into the bathroom. "She is quite a common fairy but she is always putting on airs," Peter explained apologetically, "She is called Tinker Bell because she mends our pots and kettles."

Wendy went over to the armchair and plied him with more questions.

"If you don't live in Kensington Gardens now--"

"Oh, sometimes I do still."

"But where do you live mostly now?"

"With the other lost boys."

"Who are they?"

"They are the children who fall out of their perambulators when the nurse is looking the other way. If they are not claimed in seven days they are sent to Neverland to defray expenses. I'm the captain over there and we have such great adventures."

"What fun it must be!"

"Yes," said cunning Peter, "but we are rather lonely. You see we have no little girls to show off for."

"You mean there are no girls there?"

"Oh, no!" Peter declared. "Girls, as you know, are much too clever to fall out of their prams."

This flattered Wendy immensely. "I think," she said, "it is perfectly lovely the way you talk about girls; John there just despises us."

For reply Peter rose and kicked John out of bed, blankets and all; one kick. This seemed to Wendy rather forward for a first meeting, and she told him with spirit that he was not the captain in her house.

However, John continued to sleep so placidly on the floor that she allowed him to remain there. "Ah well. I know you meant to be kind," she said, relenting, "so you may give me a kiss."

For the moment she had forgotten his ignorance about kisses. "I was afraid that you would want it back," he said a little bitterly, and he tried to return the thimble to her.

"Oh dear," said the nice Wendy as she thought quickly. "I don't mean a kiss, I mean a thimble."

"What's that?"

"It's like this." She said, and kissed him.

"That feels, um, funny!" said Peter gravely. His face glowed and it tingled. "Now shall I give you a thimble?"

"If you wish to," said Wendy, keeping her head erect this time.

Peter thimbled her, and almost immediately she screeched. "What is it, Wendy?"

"I'm not sure. It felt exactly as if someone were pulling my hair."

"That must have been Tinkerbell. I have never knew her to be so

naughty as that before."

Tink darted away and went to the window where she zoomed from side to side with the sound of bells ringing loudly. "She says she will do that to you, Wendy, every time I give you a thimble."

"But why, exactly?"

"Why, Tink?"

Again Tink spoke so loudly that her bells rattled. Wendy understood then that Tinkerbell was jealous of Peter, and she was just slightly disappointed when he admitted that he came to the nursery window not to see her -- but to listen to night time stories. "You see, I don't know any stories. None of the lost boys knows any stories."

"How perfectly awful," Wendy said.

"Do you know," Peter asked "why swallows build in the eaves of houses? It is so they can listen to the stories that people tell to little children. O Wendy, your mother was telling you such a lovely story."

"Which story was it, do you remember?"

"Let's see, it was the one about the prince who couldn't find the lady who wore the glass slipper."

"Peter," said Wendy excitedly, "that was Cinderella, and he found her, and they lived happily ever after."

Peter was so glad that he rose from the floor, where they had been sitting, and hurried to the window. "Where are you going?" she cried with misgiving.

"To tell the other boys."

"Don't go Peter," she pleaded, "I know such lots of stories."

Those were her precise words, so there can be no denying that it was she who first tempted him and not he that had tempted her. He came back, and there was a greedy look in his eyes now which ought to have alarmed her, but it did not. "Oh, you'd never guess the stories I could tell to the boys!" she cried, and then Peter gripped her arm and began to draw her toward the window.

"Let me go!" she ordered him.

"Wendy, do come with me and tell the other boys."

Of course she was very pleased to be asked, but she said, "Oh dear, I can't. I couldn't think of leaving John or Michael, and besides, I can't just jump out the window with you and fly away."

"I'll teach you," Peter said. He motioned for her to stand up beside him. "Watch me. I'll teach you how to jump on the wind's back, and then away we go."

"Oo!" she exclaimed rapturously. Then she shook her head no. "But I can't. I really can't."

Peter thought for a moment, then his face brightened. "And, Wendy, there are little mermaids playing there too."

"Mermaids! With tails?"

"Oh yes. Such long tails."

"Oh," cried Wendy, "I wish I could go to see a mermaid!"

Peter had become frightfully cunning. "Wendy," he said, "how we should all respect you."

She was wriggling her whole body in distress. It was quite as if she were doing everything she could, trying to remain on the nursery floor. But he had no pity for her.

"Wendy," he said, the sly one, "you could tuck us in at night."

"Oo!"

"Just think, none of us little boys has ever been tucked in at night."

"Oo," and her arms went out to him.

"And we would be so proud to have you darn our clothes, and make pockets for us. Why, did you know that none of us has any pockets?"

How could she resist. "Of course it's awfully fascinating!" she cried.

"Peter, would you teach John and Michael to fly too?"

"If you like," he said indifferently, but she ran to John and Michael and shook them. "Wake up," she cried, "Peter Pan has come and he is going to teach us how to fly."

John rubbed his eyes. "Fly? Then I shall get up," he said. Then he glanced down at his feet and saw that he was on the floor already.

"Hallo," he said, "I am already up!"

Michael was up by this time also, looking as sharp as a knife with six blades and an extra saw on the side, but Peter suddenly signed silence. Their faces assumed the awful craftiness of children listening for sounds from the grown-up world. All was as still as salt. Then everything was right. No, stop! Everything was wrong. Nana, who had been barking distressfully all the evening, was quiet now. It was her silence they had heard.

"Out with the light! Hide! Quick!" cried John, taking command. And thus when Liza entered, holding Nana, the nursery seemed quite its old self, very dark, and you would have sworn you heard its three wicked inmates breathing angelically as they slept, but they were really doing it artfully from behind the window curtains.

Liza was in a bad temper, for she was mixing the Christmas puddings in the kitchen, and had been drawn from them by Nana's absurd suspicions. She still had a raisin stuck on her cheek,. She thought the best way of getting a little quiet was to take Nana to the nursery for a moment, but in custody of course.

"There, you suspicious brute," she said, not sorry that Nana was in disgrace. "They are perfectly safe, aren't they? Every one of the little angels sound asleep in bed. Listen to their gentle breathing."

Here Michael, encouraged by his success, breathed so loudly that they were nearly detected. Nana knew that kind of breathing, and she tried to drag herself out of Liza's clutches.

But Liza was dense. "No more of it, Nana," she said sternly, pulling her out of the room. "I warn you if you bark again I shall go straight for master and missus and bring them home from the party, and then, oh, won't master whip you good, just."

She tied the unhappy dog up again, but do you think Nana ceased to bark? Bring master and missus home from the party! Why, that was just what she wanted. Do you think she cared whether she was whipped so long as her charges were safe?

Unfortunately Liza returned to her puddings, and Nana, seeing that no help would come from her, strained and strained at the chain until at last she broke it. In another moment she had burst into the dining-room at Number 27, and flung up her paws to heaven, her most expressive way of making a communication. Mr. and Mrs. Darling knew at once that something terrible was happening in their nursery, and without even so much as a good-bye to their hostess they rushed out into the street where the snow was still falling.

They could not rush because of the snow.

As they hurried their mincingly safe way through the front gate they naturally looked up at the nursery window; and, yes, it was still shut, but the room was ablaze with light almost as if there were a fire blazing up there. In a tremble they opened the front door. Mr. Darling would have rushed up the stairs, but Mrs. Darling signed him to go softly. She even tried to make her heart quit pounding so they could go softly.

There was not a sound from upstairs and Mrs. Darling stepped back outside so she could glance once more out the window. The snow parted as the window opened and four figures flew out the open window. Surely she was imagining things.

Mr. Darling came back and took her hand. "Come," he cried imperiously and he dragged her up the stairs with Nana racing ahead of them and snarling at the closed door. Liza came out of the kitchen and followed them up, angry at Nana, but now worried as well.

Chapter 4 THE FLIGHT

"Second to the right, and straight on till morning."

That, Peter had told Wendy, was the way to the Neverland; but even birds, carrying maps and consulting them at windy corners, could not have sighted it with these instructions. Peter, you see, just said anything that came into his head.

At first his companions trusted him implicitly, and so great were the delights of flying that they wasted time circling round church spires or any other tall objects on the way that took their fancy.

John and Michael raced, Michael getting a start.

They recalled with contempt that not so long ago they had thought themselves fine fellows for being able to fly round a room.

They were flying over the sea before their thoughts began to disturb Wendy seriously. Sometimes it was dark and sometimes light, and now they were very cold and again too warm. Did they really feel hungry at times, or were they merely pretending, because Peter had such a jolly new way of feeding them? His way was to pursue birds who had food in their mouths suitable for humans and snatch it from them; then the birds would follow and snatch it back; and they would

all go chasing each other gaily for miles, parting at last with mutual expressions of good-will. But Wendy noticed with gentle concern that Peter did not seem to know that this was rather an odd way of getting your bread and butter, nor even that there are other ways.

Certainly they did not pretend to be sleepy, though they were sleepy; and being sleepy was a danger, for the moment they popped off, down they fell. The awful thing was that Peter thought this funny.

"There he goes again!" he would cry gleefully, as Michael suddenly dropped like a stone.

"Save him, save him!" cried Wendy, looking with horror at the cruel sea far below. Eventually Peter would dive through the air, and catch Michael just before he could strike the sea, and it was lovely the way he did it; but he always waited till the last moment, and you felt it was his cleverness that interested him and not the saving of human life. Also he was fond of variety, and the sport that engrossed him one moment would suddenly cease to engage him, so there was always the possibility that the next time you fell, he might just let you go.

He could sleep in the air without falling, by merely lying on his back and floating, but this was, partly at least, because he was so light that if you got behind him and blew he went faster.

"Do be more polite to him," Wendy whispered to John, when they were playing "Follow my Leader."

"Then tell him to stop showing off," said John.

When playing Follow my Leader, Peter would fly close to the water and touch each shark's fin in passing, just as in the street you may run your finger along an iron railing. They could not follow him in this with much success, so perhaps it was rather like showing off, especially as he kept looking behind to see how many fins they had missed.

"You must be nice to him," Wendy impressed on her brothers. "What could we do if he were to leave us now?"

"We could go back," Michael said.

"How could we ever find our way back without him?"

"Well, then, we could go on," said John.

"That is the awful thing, John. We should have to go on, for we surely don't know how to stop."

This was true, Peter had forgotten to show them how to stop.

John said that if the worse came to worst, all they had to do was to go straight on, for the world was round, and so in time they must come back to their own window.

"And who is to get food for us, John? And even though we became good a picking up food, see how we bump against clouds and things if he is not near to give us a hand."

Indeed they were constantly bumping. They could now fly strongly, though they still kicked far too much; but if they saw a cloud in front of them, the more they tried to avoid it, the more certainly did they bump into it. If Nana had been with them, she would have had a bandage round Michael's forehead by this time.

Peter was not with them for the moment, and they felt rather lonely up there by themselves. He could go so much faster than they that he would suddenly shoot out of sight, to have some adventure in which they had no share. He would come down laughing over something fearfully funny he had been saying to a star, but he had already forgotten what it was, or he would come up with mermaid scales still sticking to him, and yet not be able to say for certain what had been happening. It was really rather irritating to children who had never seen a mermaid.

"And if he forgets them so quickly," Wendy argued, "how can we expect that he will go on remembering us?"

Indeed, sometimes when he returned he did not remember them, at least not very well. Wendy was sure of it. She saw recognition come into his eyes as he was about to pass them the time of day and go on; once even she had to call him by name.

"I'm Wendy," she said agitatedly.

He was very sorry. "I say, Wendy," he whispered to her, "always if you see me forgetting you, just keep on saying 'I'm Wendy,' and then maybe I'll remember you."

Of course this was rather unsatisfactory. However, to make amends he showed them how to lie out flat on a strong wind that was going their way, and this was such a pleasant change that they tried it several times and found that they could sleep thus with security. Indeed they would have slept longer, but Peter tired quickly of sleeping, and soon he would cry in his captain voice, "We get off here." So with occasional tiffs, but on the whole rollicking, they drew near to Neverland; for after many moons they did reach it, and, what is more, they had been going pretty straight all the time, not perhaps so much owing to the guidance of Peter or Tink as because the island was looking for them.

Perhaps it is only thus that any one may sight those magic shores of Neverland but Peter acted as if he had expected it all the time for he drew up proudly. "Well, there it is," said Peter calmly.

"Where, where?"

"Where all the arrows are pointing."

Indeed a million golden arrows were pointing it out to the children, all directed by their friend the sun, who wanted them to be sure of their way before leaving them for the night.

Wendy and John and Michael stood on tip-toe in the air to get their first sight of the island. Strange to say, they all recognized it at once, and until fear fell upon them they hailed it, not as something long dreamt of and seen at last, but as if it were a familiar friend to whom they were returning home for the holidays.

"John, there's the lagoon."

"Wendy, look at the turtles burying their eggs in the sand."

"I say, John, I see your flamingo with the broken leg!"

"Look, Michael, there's your cave!"

"John, what's that in the brushwood?"

"It's a wolf with her whelps. Wendy, I do believe that's your little whelp!"

"There's my boat, John, with her sides stove in!"

"No, it isn't. Why, we burned your boat."

"That's her, at any rate. I say, John, I see the smoke of the redskin's camp!"

"Where? Show me, and I'll tell you by the way smoke curls whether they are on the war-path."

"There, just across the Mysterious River."

"I see now. Yes, they are on the war-path right enough."

Peter was a little annoyed with them for already knowing so much that he had looked forward to teaching them, but since he wanted to impress them and his triumph was at hand he pretended to be very, very happy.

As the arrows began to fade for lack of the glinting sun, the island of Neverland began to fade away in gathering gloom.

In the old days at home the Neverland they remembered had always begun to look a little dark and threatening by bedtime. Then unexplored patches arose in it and spread, black shadows moved about in them, the roar of the beasts of prey was quite different now, and above all, you lost the certainty that you would win. You were quite glad that the night-lights were on. You even liked Nana to say that this was just the mantelpiece over here, and that Neverland was all make-believe.

Of course Neverland *really had been make-believe* in those days, but it was real now, and there were no night-lights, and it was getting darker every moment, and -- where was Nana?

They had been flying apart, but they huddled close to Peter now. His careless manner had gone at last. They were now over the fearsome island, flying so low that sometimes a tree grazed their feet. Nothing horrid was visible in the air, yet their progress had become slow and

laboured, exactly as if they were pushing their way through hostile forces. Sometimes they hung in the air until Peter had beaten on it with his fists.

"They don't want us to land," he explained.

"Who are they?" Wendy whispered, shuddering.

But he could not say, or at least he would not say. Tinker Bell had been asleep on his shoulder, but now he wakened her and sent her on forward so she could tell them what was out there, in front.

Sometimes Peter Pan poised himself in the air, listening intently, with his hand to his ear, and again he would stare down with eyes so bright that they seemed to bore two holes to earth. Having done these things, he went on again.

His courage was almost appalling. "Would you like an adventure now," he said casually to John, "or would you like to have your tea first?"

Wendy said "tea first" quickly, and Michael pressed her hand in gratitude, but John hesitated because he was braver.

"What kind of adventure?" he asked cautiously.

"There's a pirate asleep in the pampas just beneath us," Peter told him. "If you like, we'll go down and kill him."

"I don't see him," John said after a long pause.

"I do."

"Suppose," John said, a little huskily, "this pirate were to wake up."

Peter spoke indignantly. "You don't think I would kill him while he was sleeping, do you? Of course I would wake him up first, and then kill him. That's the way I always do."

"I say! Do you kill many?"

"Tons."

John said "How ripping," but then he decided to have tea first. He asked if there were many pirates on the island just now, and Peter said he had never known so many.

"Who is captain now?"

"Hook," answered Peter, and his face became very stern as he said that hated word.

"James Hook?"

"Ay."

Then indeed Michael began to cry, and even John could speak only in gulps, for they knew Hook's reputation.

"He was Blackbeard's bo'sun," John whispered huskily. "He is the worst of them all. He is the only man of whom Barbecue was afraid."

"Yes. That's him," said Peter.

"What is he like? Is he big?"

"He is not so big as he was."

"How do you mean?"

"I cut off a bit of him."

"You!"

"Yes, me," Peter said sharply.

"I wasn't meaning to be disrespectful."

"Oh, all right."

"But, I say, what bit?"

"His right hand."

"Then he can't fight now?"

"Oh, can't he just!"

"Left-hander?"

"He has an iron hook instead of a right hand, and he claws with it."

"Claws!"

"I say, John," said Peter.

"Yes."

"Say, 'Ay, ay, sir when you are talking to me.'"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"There is one thing," Peter continued, "that every boy who serves under me has to promise, and so must you."

John paled.

"It is this, if we meet Hook in open fight, you must leave him to me."

"I promise," John said loyally.

For the moment they were feeling less eerie, because Tink was flying with them, and in her light they could distinguish each other.

Unfortunately she could not fly so slowly as they, and so she had to go round and round them in a circle in which they moved as in a halo.

Wendy quite liked it, until Peter pointed out the drawbacks.

"She tells me," he said, "that the pirates sighted us before the darkness came, and got Long Tom out."

"The big gun?"

"Yes. And of course they must see her light, and if they guess we are near it they are sure to let fly."

"Wendy!"

"John!"

"Michael!"

"Tell her to go away at once, Peter," the three cried simultaneously, but he refused.

"She thinks we have lost the way," he replied stiffly, "and she is rather frightened. You don't think I would send her away all by herself when she is frightened, do you?"

For a moment the circle of light was broken, and something gave Peter a loving little pinch.

"Then tell her," Wendy begged, "to put out her light."

"She can't put it out. That is about the only thing fairies can't do. It just goes out of itself when she falls asleep, same as the stars."

"Then tell her to sleep at once," John almost ordered.

"She can't sleep except when she's sleepy. It is the only other thing fairies can't do."

"Seems to me," growled John, "these are the only two things worth doing."

Here he got a pinch, but not a loving one.

"If only one of us had a pocket," Peter said as he gazed hopefully in turn, "we could carry her in it."

However, they had set off in such a hurry that there was not a pocket between the four of them. Then Peter Pan had a happy idea. "We'll use John's hat!"

It took some convincing, but Tink agreed to travel by hat if it was carried in the hand. John volunteered to carry it, though Tinkerbell had secretly hoped to be carried by Peter. Presently Wendy felt compelled to carry the hat because John said it struck against his knee as he flew.

In the black topper the light was completely hidden, and they flew on in silence. It was the stillest silence they had ever known, broken once by a distant lapping, which Peter explained was the wild beasts drinking at the ford, and again by a rasping sound that might have been the branches of trees rubbing together, but he said it was the redskins sharpening their knives.

Even these noises ceased. To Michael the loneliness was dreadful. "If only something would make a sound!" he cried.

As if in answer to his request, the air was rent by the most tremendous crash he had ever heard. The pirates had fired Long Tom at them.

The roar of it echoed through the mountains, and the echoes seemed to cry savagely, "Where are they, where are they, where are they?"

Thus sharply did the terrified three learn the difference between being on an island of make-believe and being on the same island when it comes true.

When at last the heavens were steady again, John and Michael found themselves alone in the darkness. John was treading the air mechanically, and Michael without knowing how to float was floating.

"Are you shot?" John whispered tremulously.

"I haven't tried [myself out] yet so I could see if I were shot or not," Michael whispered back.

Peter had been so close to the shot as it ripped on by that he was carried by the wind of the shot far out to sea. Wendy was tumbled head over heels and blown upwards with no companion but Tinker Bell and the old hat.

Tink stuck her head out over the rim of the hat for one quick look, then she popped out of the hat and began to lure Wendy to her destruction. Tink was not all bad; or, rather, yes, she was all bad just now, but, on the other hand, sometimes she was all good. Fairies have to be one thing or the other occasionally, because being so small they only have room for one complete feeling only at a time.

On the other hand.. Fairy Law allows them to change as often as they wish, only it must be a complete change. At present Tinker Bell was completely full of jealousy of Wendy and she tried to tell her about it.

What Tinker Bell said in her lovely tinkle Wendy could not even begin to understand, but she thought it sounded kind and sweet,

Then Tink began to fly back and forward, plainly meaning "Follow me, and we will have some wonderful adventures."

"Adventures?" Wendy asked. She shook her head. "No more adventures. I am ready to find a bed and rest." She called out for Peter, then for John and Michael. But all she heard back in the thick darkness was only some mocking echoes in reply. She did not yet know that Tink hated her with the fierce hatred of a fairy woman. And so, bewildered, and now staggering from weariness in her flight, Wendy followed Tink as closely as she could, even though every inch of her journey seemed to bring her another mile closer to her doom.

Chapter 5 THE ISLAND COME TRUE

Neverland had again woke into life. Wakened would be more correct, but woke is better and that was the word Peter always used. In his absence matters tend to be usually quiet on the island. The fairies take an hour longer in the morning to bathe in the sparkling dew, the beasts attend to lapping on their young, the redskins feed heavily for at least six days and nights in a row, and when pirates and lost boys meet on a lonely trail they merely bite their thumbs at each other. But when Peter returns, Neverland brightens and flips over on its side and if you put your ear to the ground now, you would hear the whole island seething with life.

On this evening the chief forces of the island were disposed as follows. The lost boys were out looking for Peter, the pirates were out looking for the lost boys, the redskins were out looking for the pirates, and the beasts were out looking for the redskins. They were going round and round the island, but they did not meet because everyone was going in the same direction and at the same rate.

All wanted blood except the boys, who liked it as a rule, but to-night they were out to greet their captain. The boys on the island vary, of course, in numbers, according as they get killed and so on; and when they seem to be growing up, which is against the rules, Peter thins them out; but at this time there were six of them, counting the twins as two. Let us pretend to lie here among the sugar-cane and watch them as they steal by in single file, each with his hand on his dagger.

They are forbidden by Peter to look in the least like him, and they wear the skins of the bears slain by themselves, in which they are so round and furry that when they fall they roll. They have therefore become very sure-footed.

The first to pass is Tootles, not the least brave but the most unfortunate of all that gallant band. He had been in fewer adventures than any of them, because the big things constantly happened just when he had stepped round the corner; all would be quiet, he would take the opportunity of going off to gather a few sticks for firewood, and then when he returned the others would be sweeping up the blood. This ill-luck had given a gentle melancholy to his countenance, but instead of souring his nature had sweetened it, so that he was quite the humblest of the boys. Poor kind Tootles, there is danger in the air for you to-night. Take care lest an adventure is now offered you, which, if accepted, will plunge you in deepest woe. Tootles, the fairy Tink, who is bent on mischief this night is looking for a tool [for doing her mischief], and she thinks you are the most easily tricked of the boys. 'Ware Tinker Bell.'

Next comes Nibs, the gay and debonair, followed by Slightly, who cuts whistles out of the trees and dances ecstatically to his own tunes. Slightly is the most conceited of the boys. He thinks he remembers the days before he was lost, with their manners and customs, and this has given his nose an offensive tilt. Curly is fourth; he is a pickle, [a person who gets in pickles-predicaments] and so often has he had to deliver up his person when Peter said sternly, "Stand forth the one who did this thing," that now at the command he stands forth

automatically whether he has done it or not. Last come the Twins, who cannot be described because we should be sure to be describing the wrong one. Peter never quite knew what twins were, and his band were not allowed to know anything he did not know, so these two were always vague about themselves, and did their best to give satisfaction by keeping close together in an apologetic sort of way.

The boys vanish in the gloom, and after a pause, but not a long pause, for things go briskly on the island, come the pirates on their track. We hear them before they are seen, and it is always the same dreadful song:

"Avast belay, yo ho, heave to, A-pirating we go, And if we're parted by a shot We're sure to meet below!"

A more villainous-looking lot never hung in a row on Execution dock. Here, a little in advance, ever and again with his head to the ground listening, his great arms bare, pieces of eight in his ears as ornaments, is the handsome Italian Cecco, who cut his name in letters of blood on the back of the governor of the prison at Gaol. That gigantic black behind him has had many names since he dropped the one with which dusky mothers still terrify their children on the banks of the Guadjo-mo. Here is Bill Jukes, every inch of him tattooed, the same Bill Jukes who got six dozen on the WALRUS from Flint before he would drop the bag of moidores [Portuguese gold pieces]; and Cookson, said to be Black Murphy's brother (but this was never proved), and Gentleman Starkey, once an usher in a public school and still dainty in his ways of killing; and Skylights (Morgan's Skylights); and the Irish bo'sun Smee, an oddly genial man who

stabbed, so to speak, without offence, and was the only Non-conformist in Hook's crew; and Noodler, whose hands were fixed on backwards; and Robt. Mullins and Alf Mason and many another ruffian long known and feared on the Spanish Main.

In the midst of them, the blackest and largest in that dark setting, reclined James Hook, or as he wrote himself, Jas. Hook, of whom it is said he was the only man that the Sea-Cook feared. He lay at his ease in a rough chariot drawn and propelled by his men, and instead of a right hand he had the iron hook with which ever and anon he encouraged them to increase their pace. As dogs this terrible man treated and addressed them, and as dogs they obeyed him. In person he was cadaverous [dead looking] and blackavized [dark faced], and his hair was dressed in long curls, which at a little distance looked like black candles, and gave a singularly threatening expression to his handsome countenance. His eyes were of the blue of the forget-me-not, and of a profound melancholy, save when he was plunging his hook into you, at which time two red spots appeared in them and lit them up horribly. In manner, something of the grand seigneur still clung to him, so that he even ripped you up with an air, and I have been told that he was a RACONTEUR [storyteller] of repute. He was never more sinister than when he was most polite, which is probably the truest test of breeding; and the elegance of his diction, even when he was swearing, no less than the distinction of his demeanour, showed him one of a different cast from his crew. A man of indomitable courage, it was said that the only thing he shied at was the sight of his own blood, which was thick and of an unusual colour.

In dress he somewhat aped the attire associated with the name of Charles II, having heard it said in some earlier period of his career that he bore a strange resemblance to the ill-fated Stuarts; and in his mouth he had a holder of his own contrivance which enabled him to smoke two cigars at once. But undoubtedly the grimmest part of him was his iron claw.

Let us now kill a pirate, to show Hook's method. Skylights will do. As they pass, Skylights lurches clumsily against him, ruffling his lace collar; the hook shoots forth, there is a tearing sound and one screech, then the body is kicked aside, and the pirates pass on. He has not even taken the cigars from his mouth.

Such is the terrible man against whom Peter Pan is pitted. Which will win?

On the trail of the pirates, stealing noiselessly down the war-path, which is not visible to inexperienced eyes, come the redskins, every one of them with his eyes peeled. They carry tomahawks and knives, and their naked bodies gleam with paint and oil. Strung around them are scalps, of boys as well as of pirates, for these are the Piccaninny tribe, and not to be confused with the softer-hearted Delawares or the Hurons. In the van, on all fours, is Great Big Little Panther, a brave of so many scalps that in his present position they somewhat impede his progress. Bringing up the rear, the place of greatest danger, comes Tiger Lily, proudly erect, a princess in her own right. She is the most beautiful of dusky Dianas, goddess of the woods, and the belle of the Piccaninnies, flirting, cold and amorous by turns; there is not a brave who would not have the wayward thing to wife, but she brushes them

off the altar with a hatchet. These are true Indians and they pass over fallen twigs without making the slightest noise. The only sound to be heard is their somewhat heavy breathing because so many of them are out of shape.

The redskins disappear as they have come, like shadows, and soon their place is taken by the beasts of the forest, a great and motley procession: lions, tigers, bears, and the innumerable smaller savage things that flee from them, for every kind of beast, and, more particularly, all the man-eaters, live cheek by jowl on the favoured island. Their tongues are hanging out, they are hungry to-night. After they have passed, there comes the last figure of all, a gigantic crocodile. She is last because she is crying and doesn't want anyone to misjudge the reason for her tears, for they are but tears of eagerness.

The crocodile passes, but soon the boys appear again, for the procession must continue indefinitely until one of the parties stops or changes its pace. Then quickly they will be all on top of each other.

For the moment, all of them are keeping a sharp look-out in front, but none suspects that the real danger may be creeping up on them from behind. The first to fall out of the moving circle is the boys. They have flung themselves down on the turf, close to their underground home.

"I do wish Peter would come back," every one of the little fellows said nervously, though they were all larger than their captain in height and still more in breadth. "I am the only one who is not afraid of the pirates," Slightly said, in the tone that prevented his being a general favourite; but perhaps some distant sound disturbed him, for he added hastily, "but I wish he would come back, and tell us whether he has heard anything more about Cinderella."

They talked earnestly of Cinderella, and Tootles was confident that his mother must have been very like her. It was only in Peter's absence that they could speak of mothers, the subject being forbidden by him as silly.

"All I remember about my mother," Nibs told them, "is that she often said to my father, 'Oh, how I wish I had a cheque-book of my own!' I don't know what a cheque-book is, but I should just love to give one to my mother."

While they talked they heard a distant sound. It was the grim song: "Yo ho, yo ho, the pirate life, The flag o' skull and bones, A merry hour, a hempen rope, And hey for Davy Jones."

At once the little boys disappeared into their home under the ground. There are here seven large oaks, each with a hole in its hollow trunk just barely big enough for a little boy. These are the seven entrances to their home under the ground.

As the pirates advanced, the quick eye of Starkey sighted Nibs disappearing through the wood, and at once his pistol flashed out. But an iron claw gripped his shoulder.

"Captain, let go!" he cried, writhing.

It was Captain James T. Hook that stood in the shadows beside him. His deep, black snapped: "Put back that pistol first."

"But, it was one of those boys you hate. I could have shot him dead."

"Ay, and the sound would have brought Tiger Lily's redskins upon us. Do you want to lose your scalp?"

"Shall I run after him, Captain," asked Smee. He brandished his pointed sword.

"I could tickle him with Johnny Corkscrew? Johnny's a silent fellow," he reminded Hook.

"Not now, Smee," Hook said darkly. "He is only one, and I want to do some real mischief to all seven of them. Scatter out and look for some sign of them."

The pirates disappeared among the trees, and in a moment their Captain and Smee were alone. Hook heaved a heavy sigh.

"Most of all," Hook said passionately, "I want their captain, Peter Pan. 'Twas he cut off my arm at the wrist." He brandished the hook threateningly. "I've waited long to shake his hand with this. Oh, I'll tear him from larboard to stern!"

"And yet," said Smee, "I have often heard you say that hook was worth a score of hands, for combing your hair -- and other homely uses."

"Ay," the captain answered, "if I was a mother I would pray to have my children born with this instead of that," and he cast a look of pride

upon his iron hand and one of scorn upon the other.

Then again he frowned. "Peter flung my arm to a crocodile that just happened to be passing by."

"I have often noticed your strange dread of crocodiles."

"Not just of any crocodiles in general," Hook corrected him, "but of that one crocodile that ate my arm." He lowered his voice. "It liked it so much, Smee, that it has followed me ever since, from sea to sea and from land to land, licking its lips for the thought of someday getting the rest of me."

"Why, in a way," said Smee, "That's sort of a compliment."

"I want no such compliments," Hook barked petulantly. "I want to feed Peter Pan to her, piece by piece, for it was he that first gave the brute its taste of me."

He sat down on a large mushroom, and now there was a quiver in his voice. "Smee," he said huskily, "that crocodile would have had me before this, but by a lucky chance it swallowed the ship's clock and when she gets ready to lunge for me there is something inside of her that nudges the ship's clock and it goes 'tick, tock, tick' inside of her. That one warning is all I get, and when I hear that first tick, I look for an escape, and I leap for it." Captain James T. Hook laughed, but in a hollow way.

"Some day," Smee warned, "the clock will run all the way down, and then he'll get you."

Hook wetted his dry lips. "Ay," he said, "that's the fear that haunts me." Then he paused and glanced all around them.

"Since sitting down I have felt curiously warm, Smee," he said, "this seat is hot." He jumped up. "Odds bobs, hammer and tongs, my whole bottom is burning."

Hook stood up and they examined the mushroom, which was of a size and solidity unknown on the mainland; they tried to pull it up, and it came away at once in their hands, for it had no root. Stranger still, smoke began at once to ascend. The pirates looked at each other. "It's a chimney!" they both exclaimed.

They had indeed discovered the chimney of the home under the ground. It was the custom of the boys to stop it with a mushroom when enemies were in the neighbourhood.

Not only smoke came out of it. There came also children's voices, for so safe did the boys feel in their hiding-place that they were gaily chattering. The pirates listened grimly, and then replaced the mushroom. They looked around them and at last they noted the holes in the seven oaks.

"Did I hear them say Peter Pan's from home?" Smee whispered, fidgeting with Johnny Corkscrew.

Hook nodded. He stood for a long time lost in thought, and at last a curdling smile lit up his swarthy face. Smee had been waiting for that happy sign. "Unrip your plan, captain," he cried eagerly.

"It is a simple plan. We shall return to the ship," Hook replied slowly through his teeth, "and cook a large rich cake of a jolly thickness with green sugar on it. There can be but one room below, for there is but one chimney. The silly moles had not the sense to see that they did

not need a door apiece. That shows they have no mother. We will leave the cake on the shore of the Mermaids' Lagoon. These boys are always swimming about there, playing with the mermaids. They will find the cake and they will gobble it up, because, having no mother, they don't know how dangerous 'tis to eat rich damp cake." He burst into laughter, not hollow laughter now, but honest laughter. "Aha, they will die."

Smee had listened with growing admiration.

"It's the wickedest, prettiest policy ever I heard of!" he cried, and in their exultation they danced and sang:

"Avast, belay, when I appear, By fear they're overtook; Nought's left upon your bones when you Have shaken claws with Hook."

They began the verse, but they never finished it, for another sound broke in and stilled them. There was at first such a tiny sound that a leaf might have fallen on it and smothered it, but as it came nearer it was more distinct.

Tick tick tick tick!

Hook stood shuddering with one foot still poised in the air.

"The crocodile!" he gasped, and bounded away, followed by his bo'sun.

It was indeed the crocodile. She had passed up the redskins and now she was intent on waddling down the trail, after Hook.

Once more the boys emerged into the open; but the dangers of the night were not yet over, for presently Nibs rushed breathless into their midst, pursued by a pack of wolves. The tongues of the pursuers were hanging out; the baying of them was horrible.

"Save me, save me!" cried Nibs, falling on the ground.

"But what can we do, what can we do?"

It was a high compliment to Peter that at that dire moment their thoughts turned to him.

"What would Peter do?" they cried simultaneously.

Almost in the same breath they cried, "Peter would look at them through his legs."

And then, "Let us do what Peter would do."

It is quite the most successful way of defying wolves, and as one boy they bent and looked through their legs. The next moment is the long one, but victory came quickly, for as the boys advanced upon them in the terrible attitude, the wolves dropped their tails and fled.

Now Nibs rose from the ground, and the others thought that his staring eyes still saw the wolves. But it was not wolves he saw.

"I have seen a wonderfuller thing," he cried, as they gathered round him eagerly. "A great white bird. It is flying this way."

"What kind of a bird, do you think?"

"I don't know," Nibs said, awestruck, "but it looks so weary, and as it flies it moans, 'Poor Wendy,'"

"Poor Wendy?"

"I remember," said Slightly instantly, "there are birds called Wendies."

"See, here it comes!" cried Curly, pointing to Wendy in the heavens.

Wendy was now almost overhead, and they could hear her plaintive cry. But more distinct came the shrill voice of Tinker Bell. The jealous fairy had now cast off all disguise of friendship, and was darting at her victim from every direction, pinching savagely each time she touched.

"Hullo, Tink," cried the wondering boys.

Tink's reply rang out: "Peter wants you to shoot the Wendy."

It was not in their nature to question when Peter ordered. "Let us do what Peter wishes!" cried the simple boys. "Quick, grab your bows and arrows!"

All but Tootles popped down from their trees. He had a bow and arrow with him, and Tink noted it, and rubbed her little hands.

"Quick, Tootles, quick," she screamed. "Peter will be so pleased."

Tootles excitedly fitted the arrow to his bow. "Out of the way, Tink," he shouted, and then he fired, and Wendy fluttered to the ground with an arrow in her breast.

Chapter 6 THE LITTLE HOUSE

Foolish Tootles was standing like a conqueror over Wendy's body when the other boys sprang, armed, from their trees.

"You are too late," he cried proudly, "I have shot the Wendy. Peter will be so pleased with me."

Overhead Tinker Bell shouted "Silly boys!" and darted into hiding. The others did not hear her. They had crowded round Wendy, and as they looked a terrible silence fell upon the wood. If Wendy's heart had been beating they would all have heard it.

Slightly was the first to speak. "This is no bird," he said in a scared voice. "I think this must be a lady in the making."

"A lady?" said Tootles. "Do you mean, a, do you mean this might be a, girl?" and he fell a-trembling.

"And we have killed her," Nibs said hoarsely.

They all whipped off their caps to show respect for the dearly departed. "Now I see," Curly said: "Peter was bringing her to us, and we have killed her." He threw himself sorrowfully on the ground.

"A lady come to take care of us at last," said one of the twins, "and you have killed her!"

They were sorry for him, but sorrier for themselves, and when he took a step nearer to them they turned their faces away from him.

Tootles' face was very white, but there was a dignity about him now that had never been there before. "I did it," he said, reflecting.

"When ladies used to come to me in dreams, I said, 'Pretty mother, pretty mother.' But when at last she really came, I shot her."

He moved slowly away.

"Don't go," they called in pity.

"I must," he answered, shaking from head to toe; "I am so afraid of Peter." It was at this tragic moment that they heard a sound which made the heart of every one of them rise to his mouth. They heard Peter crow, like a rooster that calls the dawn.

"Peter!" they cried, for it was always thus that he signaled his return.

"Hide her," they whispered, and gathered hastily around Wendy. But Tootles simply stood aloof, silently ready to take his medicine.

Again there came that ringing crow, and Peter dropped into the grass in front of them. "Greetings, boys," he cried, and mechanically they saluted, and then again was silence.

He frowned. "I am back," he said hotly, "why do you not cheer?"

They opened their mouths and tried their best, but the cheers simply would not come.

Peter overlooked it in his haste to tell the glorious tidings. "Great news, boys," he cried, "I have brought at last a mother for you all."

Still no sound at first, then they heard a little thud that came from Tootles as he dropped on his knees and began shaking his head in deepest misery.

"Have you not seen her?" asked Peter, becoming troubled. "She flew this way."

"Ah me!" one voice cried, and another said, "Oh, mournful day."

Tootles rose. "Peter," he said quietly, "I will show her to you," and when the others would still have hidden her he said, "Back, twins, we must let Peter see what I have done."

So they all stood back, and let him see, and after he had looked at Wendy for a little time he did not know what to do next either.

"She must be dead," he said uncomfortably. "Perhaps she is frightened at being dead."

He thought of hopping off in a comic sort of way till he was out of sight of her, and then never going near the spot any more. They would all have been glad to follow if he had done this.

But there was the arrow. He took it from her heart and faced his band. "Whose arrow?" he demanded sternly.

"Mine, Peter," said Tootles on his knees.

"Oh, thine dastard hand," Peter said, and he raised the arrow to use it as a dagger.

Tootles did not flinch. He bared his breast. "Strike, Peter," he said firmly, "strike true."

Twice did Peter raise the arrow, and twice did his hand fall. "I cannot strike," he said with awe, "there is something stays my hand."

All looked at him in wonder, save Nibs, who fortunately looked at Wendy. "It is she," he cried, "the Wendy lady, see, her arm moves!"

Wonderful to tell, Wendy had raised her arm. Nibs bent over her and listened reverently. "I think she just said, 'Poor Tootles,'" he whispered.

"Ah, that is so like a mother. But, she lives and that is joyously wonderful" Peter said briefly.

Slightly cried instantly, "The Wendy lady lives."

Then Peter knelt beside her and found his button. Perhaps you will remember she had put that button on a chain that she wore round her neck. "See," Peter exclaimed, "the arrow struck against this. It is the kiss I gave her. My kiss has saved her life."

"I remember kisses," Slightly interposed quickly, "let me see it. Ay, that's a kiss."

Peter did not hear him. He was begging Wendy to get better quickly, so that he could show her the mermaids. Of course she could not answer yet, being still in a frightful faint; but from overhead came a wailing note.

"Listen to Tink," said Curly, "she is crying because the Wendy lives."

Then they remembered that they had to tell Peter of Tink's crime, and almost never had they seen him look so stern.

"Listen, Tinker Bell," he cried, "I am your friend no more. Begone from me for ever."

She flew on to his shoulder and pleaded, but he brushed her off. Not until Wendy again raised her arm did he relent sufficiently to say, "Well, not for ever, but for a whole week."

But what to do with Wendy in her present delicate state of health?

"Let us carry her down into the house," Curly suggested.

"Ay," said Slightly, "Carry them, that is what one does with ladies."

"No, no," Peter said, "you must not touch her. It would not be sufficiently respectful."

"That," said Slightly, "is what I was thinking."

"But if she lies there," Tootles said, "she will die when it rains."

"Ay, she will die," Slightly admitted, "but there is no way out."

"Yes, there is," cried Peter. "Let us build a little house round her."

They were all delighted. "Quick," he ordered them, "bring me each of you the best of what we have. Gut our house. Be sharp."

In a moment they were as busy as tailors are on the night before a great wedding. They scurried this way and that, down for bedding, up for firewood, and while they were at it, who should appear but John and Michael. As they dragged along the ground they fell asleep standing, stopped, woke up, moved another step and slept again.

"John, John," Michael would cry, "wake up! Where is Nana, John, and, where, oh where is mother?"

And then John would rub his eyes again and mutter, "It is true, we did fly."

You may be sure they were very relieved to find Peter. "Hullo, Peter," they said.

"Hullo," replied Peter amicably, though he had quite forgotten who they were. He was very busy at the moment measuring Wendy with his feet to see how large a house she would need. Of course he meant to leave room for chairs and a table, too and that puzzled him.

John and Michael watched him. "Is Wendy asleep?" they asked.

"Yes."

"John," Michael proposed, "let us wake her up so she can make supper for us," but as he said it some of the other boys rushed on carrying branches for the building of the house. "Look at them!" he cried.

"Curly," said Peter in his most captainy voice, "see that these boys help in the building of the house."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Build a house?" exclaimed John.

"For the Wendy," said Curly.

"For Wendy?" John said, aghast. "Why, she is only a girl!"

"That," explained Curly, "is why we are her servants."

"You? Wendy's servants!"

"Yes," said Peter, "and you also. Away with them."

The astounded brothers were dragged away to hack and hew and carry. "Chairs and a fender to protect the fireplace first," Peter announced. "Then we shall build a house round them."

"Ay," said Slightly, "that is how a house is built; it all comes back to me now."

Peter thought of everything. "Slightly," he cried, "fetch a doctor."

"Ay, ay," said Slightly at once, and disappeared, scratching his head. But he knew Peter must be obeyed, and he returned in a moment, wearing John's hat and looking quite solemn.

"Please, sir," said Peter as he went up to him, "are you a doctor?"

The difference between him and the other boys at such a time was that they knew it was make-believe, while to him make-believe and true were exactly the same thing. This sometimes troubled them, as when they had to make-believe that they had had their dinners.

If they broke down in their make-believe he rapped them on the knuckles.

"Yes, my little man," Slightly anxiously replied, who had chapped knuckles.

"Please, sir," Peter explained, "a lady lies very ill."

She was lying at their feet, but Slightly had the sense not to see her.

"Tut, tut, tut," he said, "where does this lady lie?"

"In yonder glade."

"I will put a glass thing in her mouth," said Slightly, and he made-believe to do it, while Peter waited. It was an anxious moment when the glass thing was withdrawn.

"How is she?" inquired Peter.

"Tut, tut, tut," said Slightly, "this has cured her."

"I am glad!" Peter cried.

"I will call again in the evening," Slightly said; "give her beef tea out of a cup with a spout to it;" but after he had returned the hat to John he blew big breaths, which was his habit on escaping from a difficulty.

In the meantime the wood had been alive with the sound of axes; almost everything needed for a cosy dwelling already lay at Wendy's feet.

"If only we knew," said one, "the kind of house she likes best."

"Peter," shouted another, "she is moving in her sleep."

"Her mouth opens," cried a third, looking respectfully into it. "Oh, lovely!"

"Perhaps she is going to sing in her sleep," said Peter. "Wendy, sing the kind of house you would like to have."

Immediately, without opening her eyes, Wendy began to sing:

"I wish I had a pretty house,
The littlest ever seen,
With funny little red walls
And roof of mossy green."

They gurgled with joy at this, for by the greatest good luck the branches they had brought were sticky with red sap, and all the ground was carpeted with moss. As they rattled up the little house they broke into song themselves:

"We've built the little walls and roof
And made a lovely door,
So tell us, mother Wendy,
What are you wanting more?"

To this she answered greedily:

"Oh, really next I think I'll have
Gay windows all about,
With roses peeping in, you know,
And babies peeping out."

With a blow of their fists they made windows, and large yellow leaves were the blinds. But as for the roses--?

"Roses," cried Peter sternly.

Quickly they made-believe to grow the loveliest roses up the walls.

Babies?

To prevent Peter ordering babies all around they hurriedly broke into song again: "We've made the roses peeping out, The babes are at the door, We cannot make ourselves, you know, 'cos we've been made some time before."

Peter, seeing this to be a good idea, at once pretended that it was his own. The house was quite beautiful, and no doubt Wendy was very cosy within, though, of course, they could no longer see her. Peter strode up and down, ordering finishing touches. Nothing escaped his eagle eyes. Just when it seemed absolutely finished:

"There's no knocker on the door," he said.

They were very ashamed, but Tootles gave up the sole of his shoe, and it made an excellent knocker.

Absolutely finished now, they thought.

"There's no chimney," Peter said; "we must have a chimney."

"It certainly does need a chimney," said John importantly. This gave Peter an idea. He snatched the hat off John's head, knocked out the top and put the hat on the roof. The little house was so pleased to have such a capital chimney that, as if to say thank you, smoke immediately began to come out of the hat.

Now really and truly it was finished. Nothing remained to do but to knock.

"All of you look your best," Peter warned them; "first impressions are awfully important, you know."

He was glad no one asked him what first impressions are; they were all too busy looking their best.

He knocked politely, and now the wood was as still as the children, not a sound to be heard except from Tinker Bell, who was watching from a branch and openly sneering.

What the boys were wondering was, would any one answer the knock? If a lady, what would she be like?

The door opened and a lady came out. It was Wendy. They all whipped off their hats.

She looked properly surprised, and this was just how they had hoped she would look.

"Where am I?" she said.

Of course Slightly was the first to get his word in. "Wendy lady," he said rapidly, "for you we built this house."

"Oh, do say you're pleased with it," cried Nibs.

"What a lovely, darling house," Wendy exclaimed, and those were the very words they had hoped she would say.

"And we are your children," cried the twins.

Then all went on their knees, and holding out their arms cried, "O Wendy lady, do you be our mother."

"Ought I?" Wendy said, all shining and glowing with happiness. "Of course it's frightfully fascinating, but you see I have so little real experience."

"That doesn't matter," said Peter, as if he were the only person present who knew all about it, though he was really the one who knew least. "What we need is just a nice motherly person."

"Oh dear!" Wendy said, "you see, I feel that is exactly what I am."

"It is, it is," they all cried; "we saw it at once."

"Very well," she said, "I will do my best. Come inside at once, you naughty children; I am sure your feet are damp. And before I put you to bed I have just time to finish the story of Cinderella."

In they went, hurrying along for they were anxious to hear the rest of the story of Cinderella; There really wasn't room for all of them, but you can squeeze together very tight when you make believe in Neverland.

Wendy told them the story of Cinderella, and then she told them the story of the 3 little pigs. By the time all 3 pigs were safe again her little children were nodding drowsily and she tucked them up in the great bed in the home under the trees, but she herself slept that night in the little house, and Peter kept watch outside with drawn sword, for the pirates could be heard carousing far away and the wolves were on the prowl. The little house looked so cosy and safe in the darkness, with a bright light showing through its blinds, and the chimney smoking beautifully, and Peter standing on guard. After a time he fell asleep, and some unsteady fairies had to climb over him on their way home from an orgy. Any of the other boys obstructing the fairy path at night they would have mischiefed, but this was Peter and they just tweaked his nose a bit, and passed on.

Chapter 7 THE HOME UNDER THE GROUND

One of the first things Peter did next day was to measure Wendy and John and Michael for hollow trees. Hook, you remember, had sneered at the boys for thinking they needed a tree apiece, but this was ignorance, for unless your tree fitted you it was difficult to go up and down, and no two of the boys were quite the same size. Once you fitted, you drew in [let out] your breath at the top, and down you went at exactly the right speed, while to ascend you drew in and let out alternately, and so wriggled up. Of course, when you have mastered the action you are able to do these things without thinking of them, and nothing can be more graceful.

But you simply must fit, and Peter measures you for your tree as carefully as for a suit of clothes: the only difference being that the clothes are made to fit you, while you have to be made to fit the tree. Usually it is done quite easily, as by your wearing too many garments or too few, but if you are bumpy in awkward places or the only available tree is an odd shape, Peter does some things to you, and after that you fit. Once you fit, great care must be taken to go on fitting, and this, as Wendy was to discover to her delight, keeps a whole family in perfect condition.

Wendy and Michael fitted their trees at the first try, but John had to be altered a little.

After a few days' practice they could go up and down as gaily as buckets in a well. And how ardently they grew to love their home

under the ground; especially Wendy. It consisted of one large room, as all houses should do, with a floor in which you could dig [for worms] if you wanted to go fishing, and in this floor grew stout mushrooms of a charming colour, which were used as stools. A Never tree tried hard to grow in the centre of the room, but every morning they sawed the trunk through, level with the floor. By tea-time it was always about two feet high, and then they put a door on top of it, the whole thus becoming a table; as soon as they cleared away, they sawed off the trunk again, and thus there was more room to play. There was an enormous fireplace which was in almost any part of the room where you cared to light it, and across this Wendy stretched strings, made of fibre, from which she suspended her washing. The bed was tilted against the wall by day, and let down at 6:30, when it filled nearly half the room; and all the boys slept in it, except Michael, lying like sardines in a tin. There was a strict rule against turning round until one gave the signal, when all turned at once. Michael should have used it also, but Wendy would have [desired] a baby, and he was the littlest, and you know what women are, and the short and long of it is that he was hung up in a basket.

It was rough and simple, and not unlike what baby bears would have made of an underground house in the same circumstances. But there was one recess in the wall, no larger than a bird-cage, which was the private apartment of Tinker Bell. It could be shut off from the rest of the house by a tiny curtain, which Tink, who was most fastidious [particular], always kept drawn when dressing or undressing. No woman, however large, could have had a more exquisite boudoir

[dressing room] and bed-chamber combined. The couch, as she always called it, was a genuine Queen Mab, with club legs; and she varied the bedspreads according to what fruit-blossom was in season. Her mirror was a Puss-in-Boots, of which there are now only three, unchipped, known to fairy dealers; the washstand was Pie-crust and reversible, the chest of drawers an authentic Charming the Sixth, and the carpet and rugs the best (the early) period of Margery and Robin. There was a chandelier from Tiddlywinks for the look of the thing, but of course she lit the residence herself. Tink was very contemptuous of the rest of the house, as indeed was perhaps inevitable, and her chamber, though beautiful, looked rather conceited, having the appearance of a nose permanently turned up.

I suppose it was all especially entrancing to Wendy, because those rampagious boys of hers gave her so much to do. Really there were whole weeks when, except perhaps with a stocking in the evening, she was never above ground. The cooking, I can tell you, kept her nose to the pot, and even if there was nothing in it, even if there was no pot, she had to keep watching that it came aboil just the same. You never exactly knew whether there would be a real meal or just a make-believe, it all depended upon Peter's whim: he could eat, really eat, if it was part of a game, but he could not stodge [cram down the food] just to feel stodgy [stuffed with food], which is what most children like better than anything else; the next best thing being to talk about it. Make-believe was so real to him that during a meal of it you could see him getting rounder. Of course it was trying, but you simply had to follow his lead, and if you could prove to him that you

were getting loose for your tree he let you stodge.

Wendy's favourite time for sewing and darning was after they had all gone to bed. Then, as she expressed it, she had a breathing time for herself; and she occupied it in making new things for them, and putting double pieces on the knees, for they were all most frightfully hard on their knees.

When she sat down to a basketful of their stockings, every heel with a hole in it, she would fling up her arms and exclaim, "Oh dear, I am sure I sometimes think spinsters are to be envied!"

Her face beamed when she exclaimed this.

You remember about her pet wolf. Well, it very soon discovered that she had come to the island and it found her out, and they just ran into each other's arms. After that it followed her about everywhere.

As time wore on did she think much about the beloved parents she had left behind her? This is a difficult question, because it is quite impossible to say how time does wear on in the Neverland, where it is calculated by moons and suns, and there are ever so many more of them than on the mainland. But I am afraid that Wendy did not really worry about her father and mother; she was absolutely confident that they would always keep the window open for her to fly back by, and this gave her complete ease of mind. What did disturb her at times was that John remembered his parents vaguely only, as people he had once known, while Michael was quite willing to believe that she was

really his mother. These things scared her a little, and nobly anxious to do her duty, she tried to fix the old life in their minds by setting them examination papers on it, as like as possible to the ones she used to do at school. The other boys thought this awfully interesting, and insisted on joining, and they made slates for themselves, and sat round the table, writing and thinking hard about the questions she had written on another slate and passed round. They were the most ordinary questions--"What was the colour of Mother's eyes? Which was taller, Father or Mother? Was Mother blonde or brunette? Answer all three questions if possible." "(A) Write an essay of not less than 40 words on How I spent my last Holidays, or The Characters of Father and Mother compared. Only one of these to be attempted." Or "(1) Describe Mother's laugh; (2) Describe Father's laugh; (3) Describe Mother's Party Dress; (4) Describe the Kennel and its Inmate."

They were just everyday questions like these, and when you could not answer them you were told to make a cross; and it was really dreadful what a number of crosses even John made. Of course the only boy who replied to every question was Slightly, and no one could have been more hopeful of coming out first, but his answers were perfectly ridiculous, and he really came out last: a melancholy thing.

Peter did not compete. For one thing he despised all mothers except Wendy, and for another he was the only boy on the island who could neither write nor spell; not the smallest word. He was above all that sort of thing.

By the way, the questions were all written in the past tense. What was the colour of Mother's eyes, and so on. Wendy, you see, had been forgetting, too.

Adventures, of course, as we shall see, were of daily occurrence; but about this time Peter invented, with Wendy's help, a new game that fascinated him enormously, until he suddenly had no more interest in it, which, as you have been told, was what always happened with his games. It consisted in pretending not to have adventures, in doing the sort of thing John and Michael had been doing all their lives, sitting on stools flinging balls in the air, pushing each other, going out for walks and coming back without having killed so much as a grizzly. To see Peter doing nothing on a stool was a great sight; he could not help looking solemn at such times, to sit still seemed to him such a comic thing to do. He boasted that he had gone walking for the good of his health. For several suns these were the most novel of all adventures to him; and John and Michael had to pretend to be delighted also; otherwise he would have treated them severely.

He often went out alone, and when he came back you were never absolutely certain whether he had had an adventure or not. He might have forgotten it so completely that he said nothing about it; and then when you went out you found the body; and, on the other hand, he might say a great deal about it, and yet you could not find the body. Sometimes he came home with his head bandaged, and then Wendy cooed over him and bathed it in lukewarm water, while he told a dazzling tale. But she was never quite sure, you know. There were,

however, many adventures which she knew to be true because she was in them herself, and there were still more that were at least partly true, for the other boys were in them and said they were wholly true. To describe them all would require a book as large as an English-Latin, Latin-English Dictionary, and the most we can do is to give one as a specimen of an average hour on the island. The difficulty is which one to choose. Should we take the brush with the redskins at Slightly Gulch? It was a sanguinary [cheerful] affair, and especially interesting as showing one of Peter's peculiarities, which was that in the middle of a fight he would suddenly change sides. At the Gulch, when victory was still in the balance, sometimes leaning this way and sometimes that, he called out, "I'm redskin to-day; what are you, Tootles?" And Tootles answered, "Redskin; what are you, Nibs?" and Nibs said, "Redskin; what are you Twin?" and so on; and they were all redskins; and of course this would have ended the fight had not the real redskins fascinated by Peter's methods, agreed to be lost boys for that once, and so at it they all went again, more fiercely than ever.

The extraordinary upshot of this adventure was--but we have not decided yet that this is the adventure we are to narrate. Perhaps a better one would be the night attack by the redskins on the house under the ground, when several of them stuck in the hollow trees and had to be pulled out like corks. Or we might tell how Peter saved Tiger Lily's life in the Mermaids' Lagoon, and so made her his ally.

Or we could tell of that cake the pirates cooked so that the boys might eat it and perish; and how they placed it in one cunning spot after another; but always Wendy snatched it from the hands of her children, so that in time it lost its succulence, and became as hard as a stone, and was used as a missile, and Hook fell over it in the dark.

Or suppose we tell of the birds that were Peter's friends, particularly of the Never bird that built in a tree overhanging the lagoon, and how the nest fell into the water, and still the bird sat on her eggs, and Peter gave orders that she was not to be disturbed. That is a pretty story, and the end shows how grateful a bird can be; but if we tell it we must also tell the whole adventure of the lagoon, which would of course be telling two adventures rather than just one. A shorter adventure, and quite as exciting, was Tinker Bell's attempt, with the help of some street fairies, to have the sleeping Wendy conveyed on a great floating leaf to the mainland. Fortunately the leaf gave way and Wendy woke, thinking it was bath-time, and swam back. Or again, we might choose Peter's defiance of the lions, when he drew a circle round him on the ground with an arrow and dared them to cross it; and though he waited for hours, with the other boys and Wendy looking on breathlessly from trees, not one of them dared to accept his challenge.

Which of these adventures shall we choose? The best way will be to toss for it.

I have tossed, and the lagoon has won. This almost makes one wish that the gulch or the cake or Tink's leaf had won. Of course I could do it again, and make it best out of three; however, perhaps fairest to stick to the lagoon.

Chapter 8 THE MERMAIDS' LAGOON

If you shut your eyes and are a lucky one, you may see at times a shapeless pool of lovely pale colours suspended in the darkness; then if you squeeze your eyes tighter, the pool begins to take shape, and the colours become so vivid that with another squeeze they must go on fire. But just before they go on fire you see the lagoon. This is the nearest you ever get to it on the mainland, just one heavenly moment; if there could be two moments you might see the surf and hear the mermaids singing.

The children often spent long summer days on this lagoon, swimming or floating most of the time, playing the mermaid games in the water,

and so forth. You must not think from this that the mermaids were on friendly terms with them: on the contrary, it was among Wendy's lasting regrets that all the time she was on the island she never had a civil word from one of them. When she stole softly to the edge of the lagoon she might see them by the score, especially on Marooners' Rock, where they loved to bask, combing out their hair in a lazy way that quite irritated her; or she might even swim, on tiptoe as it were, to within a yard of them, but then they saw her and dived, probably splashing her with their tails, not by accident, but intentionally.

They treated all the boys in the same way, except of course Peter, who chatted with them on Marooners' Rock by the hour, and sat on their tails when they got cheeky. He gave Wendy one of their combs.

The most haunting time at which to see them is at the turn of the moon, when they utter strange wailing cries; but the lagoon is dangerous for mortals then, and until the evening of which we have now to tell, Wendy had never seen the lagoon by moonlight, less from fear, for of course Peter would have accompanied her, than because she had strict rules about every one being in bed by seven. She was often at the lagoon, however, on sunny days after rain, when the mermaids come up in extraordinary numbers to play with their bubbles. The bubbles of many colours made in rainbow water they treat as balls, hitting them gaily from one to another with their tails, and trying to keep them in the rainbow till they burst. The goals are at each end of the rainbow, and the keepers only are allowed to use

their hands. Sometimes a dozen of these games will be going on in the lagoon at a time, and it is quite a pretty sight.

But the moment the children tried to join in they had to play by themselves, for the mermaids immediately disappeared. Nevertheless we have proof that they secretly watched the interlopers, and were not above taking an idea from them; for John introduced a new way of hitting the bubble, with the head instead of the hand, and the mermaids adopted it. This is the one mark that John has left on the Neverland.

It must also have been rather pretty to see the children resting on a rock for half an hour after their mid-day meal. Wendy insisted on their doing this, and it had to be a real rest even though the meal was make-believe. So they lay there in the sun, and their bodies glistened in it, while she sat beside them and looked important.

It was one such day, and they were all on Marooners' Rock. The rock was not much larger than their great bed, but of course they all knew how not to take up much room, and they were dozing, or at least lying with their eyes shut, and pinching occasionally when they thought Wendy was not looking. She was very busy, stitching.

While she stitched a change came to the lagoon. Little shivers ran over it, and the sun went away and shadows stole across the water,

turning it cold. Wendy could no longer see to thread her needle, and when she looked up, the lagoon that had always hitherto been such a laughing place seemed formidable and unfriendly.

It was not, she knew, that night had come, but something as dark as night had come. No, worse than that. It had not come, but it had sent that shiver through the sea to say that it was coming. What was it?

There crowded upon her all the stories she had been told of Marooners' Rock, so called because evil captains put sailors on it and leave them there to drown. They drown when the tide rises, for then it is submerged.

Of course she should have roused the children at once; not merely because of the unknown that was stalking toward them, but because it was no longer good for them to sleep on a rock grown chilly. But she was a young mother and she did not know this; she thought you simply must stick to your rule about half an hour after the mid-day meal. So, though fear was upon her, and she longed to hear male voices, she would not waken them. Even when she heard the sound of muffled oars, though her heart was in her mouth, she did not waken them. She stood over them to let them have their sleep out. Was it not brave of Wendy?

It was well for those boys then that there was one among them who

could sniff danger even in his sleep. Peter sprang erect, as wide awake at once as a dog, and with one warning cry he roused the others.

He stood motionless, one hand to his ear.

"Pirates!" he cried. The others came closer to him. A strange smile was playing about his face, and Wendy saw it and shuddered. While that smile was on his face no one dared address him; all they could do was to stand ready to obey. The order came sharp and incisive.

"Dive!"

There was a gleam of legs, and instantly the lagoon seemed deserted. Marooners' Rock stood alone in the forbidding waters as if it were itself marooned.

The boat drew nearer. It was the pirate dinghy, with three figures in her, Smee and Starkey, and the third a captive, no other than Tiger Lily. Her hands and ankles were tied, and she knew what was to be her fate. She was to be left on the rock to perish, an end to one of her race more terrible than death by fire or torture, for is it not written in the book of the tribe that there is no path through water to the happy hunting-ground? Yet her face was impassive; she was the daughter of

a chief, she must die as a chief's daughter, it is enough.

They had caught her boarding the pirate ship with a knife in her mouth. No watch was kept on the ship, it being Hook's boast that the wind of his name guarded the ship for a mile around. Now her fate would help to guard it also. One more wail would go the round in that wind by night.

In the gloom that they brought with them the two pirates did not see the rock till they crashed into it.

"Luff, you lubber," cried an Irish voice that was Smee's; "here's the rock. Now, then, what we have to do is to hoist the redskin on to it and leave her here to drown."

It was the work of one brutal moment to land the beautiful girl on the rock; she was too proud to offer a vain resistance.

Quite near the rock, but out of sight, two heads were bobbing up and down, Peter's and Wendy's. Wendy was crying, for it was the first tragedy she had seen. Peter had seen many tragedies, but he had forgotten them all. He was less sorry than Wendy for Tiger Lily: it was two against one that angered him, and he meant to save her. An easy way would have been to wait until the pirates had gone, but he was

never one to choose the easy way.

There was almost nothing he could not do, and he now imitated the voice of Hook.

"Ahoy there, you lubbers!" he called. It was a marvellous imitation.

"The captain!" said the pirates, staring at each other in surprise.

"He must be swimming out to us," Starkey said, when they had looked for him in vain.

"We are putting the redskin on the rock," Smee called out.

"Set her free," came the astonishing answer.

"Free!"

"Yes, cut her bonds and let her go."

"But, captain--"

"At once, d'ye hear," cried Peter, "or I'll plunge my hook in you."

"This is queer!" Smee gasped.

"Better do what the captain orders," said Starkey nervously.

"Ay, ay." Smee said, and he cut Tiger Lily's cords. At once like an eel she slid between Starkey's legs into the water.

Of course Wendy was very elated over Peter's cleverness; but she knew that he would be elated also and very likely crow and thus betray himself, so at once her hand went out to cover his mouth. But it was stayed even in the act, for "Boat ahoy!" rang over the lagoon in Hook's voice, and this time it was not Peter who had spoken.

Peter may have been about to crow, but his face puckered in a whistle of surprise instead.

"Boat ahoy!" again came the voice.

Now Wendy understood. The real Hook was also in the water.

He was swimming to the boat, and as his men showed a light to guide

him he had soon reached them. In the light of the lantern Wendy saw his hook grip the boat's side; she saw his evil swarthy face as he rose dripping from the water, and, quaking, she would have liked to swim away, but Peter would not budge. He was tingling with life and also top-heavy with conceit. "Am I not a wonder, oh, I am a wonder!" he whispered to her, and though she thought so also, she was really glad for the sake of his reputation that no one heard him except herself.

He signed to her to listen.

The two pirates were very curious to know what had brought their captain to them, but he sat with his head on his hook in a position of profound melancholy.

"Captain, is all well?" they asked timidly, but he answered with a hollow moan.

"He sighs," said Smee.

"He sighs again," said Starkey.

"And yet a third time he sighs," said Smee.

Then at last he spoke passionately.

"The game's up," he cried, "those boys have found a mother."

Affrighted though she was, Wendy swelled with pride.

"O evil day!" cried Starkey.

"What's a mother?" asked the ignorant Smee.

Wendy was so shocked that she exclaimed. "He doesn't know!" and always after this she felt that if you could have a pet pirate Smee would be her one.

Peter pulled her beneath the water, for Hook had started up, crying, "What was that?"

"I heard nothing," said Starkey, raising the lantern over the waters, and as the pirates looked they saw a strange sight. It was the nest I have told you of, floating on the lagoon, and the Never bird was sitting on it.

"See," said Hook in answer to Smee's question, "that is a mother.

What a lesson! The nest must have fallen into the water, but would the mother desert her eggs? No."

There was a break in his voice, as if for a moment he recalled innocent days when--but he brushed away this weakness with his hook.

Smee, much impressed, gazed at the bird as the nest was borne past, but the more suspicious Starkey said, "If she is a mother, perhaps she is hanging about here to help Peter."

Hook winced. "Ay," he said, "that is the fear that haunts me."

He was roused from this dejection by Smee's eager voice.

"Captain," said Smee, "could we not kidnap these boys' mother and make her our mother?"

"It is a princely scheme," cried Hook, and at once it took practical shape in his great brain. "We will seize the children and carry them to the boat: the boys we will make walk the plank, and Wendy shall be our mother."

Again Wendy forgot herself.

"Never!" she cried, and bobbed.

"What was that?"

But they could see nothing. They thought it must have been a leaf in the wind. "Do you agree, my bullies?" asked Hook.

"There is my hand on it," they both said.

"And there is my hook. Swear."

They all swore. By this time they were on the rock, and suddenly Hook remembered Tiger Lily.

"Where is the redskin?" he demanded abruptly.

He had a playful humour at moments, and they thought this was one of the moments.

"That is all right, captain," Smee answered complacently; "we let her

go."

"Let her go!" cried Hook.

"'Twas your own orders," the bo'sun faltered.

"You called over the water to us to let her go," said Starkey.

"Brimstone and gall," thundered Hook, "what cozening [cheating] is going on here!" His face had gone black with rage, but he saw that they believed their words, and he was startled. "Lads," he said, shaking a little, "I gave no such order."

"It is passing queer," Smee said, and they all fidgeted uncomfortably. Hook raised his voice, but there was a quiver in it.

"Spirit that haunts this dark lagoon to-night," he cried, "dost hear me?"

Of course Peter should have kept quiet, but of course he did not. He immediately answered in Hook's voice:

"Odds, bobs, hammer and tongs, I hear you."

In that supreme moment Hook did not blanch, even at the gills, but Smee and Starkey clung to each other in terror.

"Who are you, stranger? Speak!" Hook demanded.

"I am James Hook," replied the voice, "captain of the JOLLY ROGER."

"You are not; you are not," Hook cried hoarsely.

"Brimstone and gall," the voice retorted, "say that again, and I'll cast anchor in you."

Hook tried a more ingratiating manner. "If you are Hook," he said almost humbly, "come tell me, who am I?"

"A codfish," replied the voice, "only a codfish."

"A codfish!" Hook echoed blankly, and it was then, but not till then, that his proud spirit broke. He saw his men draw back from him.

"Have we been captained all this time by a codfish!" they muttered.

"It is lowering to our pride."

They were his dogs snapping at him, but, tragic figure though he had become, he scarcely heeded them. Against such fearful evidence it was not their belief in him that he needed, it was his own. He felt his ego slipping from him. "Don't desert me, bully," he whispered hoarsely to it.

In his dark nature there was a touch of the feminine, as in all the great pirates, and it sometimes gave him intuitions. Suddenly he tried the guessing game.

"Hook," he called, "have you another voice?"

Now Peter could never resist a game, and he answered blithely in his own voice, "I have."

"And another name?"

"Ay, ay."

"Vegetable?" asked Hook.

"No."

"Mineral?"

"No."

"Animal?"

"Yes."

"Man?"

"No!" This answer rang out scornfully.

"Boy?"

"Yes."

"Ordinary boy?"

"No!"

"Wonderful boy?"

To Wendy's pain the answer that rang out this time was "Yes."

"Are you in England?"

"No."

"Are you here?"

"Yes."

Hook was completely puzzled. "You ask him some questions," he said to the others, wiping his damp brow.

Smee reflected. "I can't think of a thing," he said regretfully.

"Can't guess, can't guess!" crowed Peter. "Do you give it up?"

Of course in his pride he was carrying the game too far, and the miscreants [villains] saw their chance.

"Yes, yes," they answered eagerly.

"Well, then," he cried, "I am Peter Pan."

Pan!

In a moment Hook was himself again, and Smee and Starkey were his faithful henchmen.

"Now we have him," Hook shouted. "Into the water, Smee. Starkey, mind the boat. Take him dead or alive!"

He leaped as he spoke, and simultaneously came the gay voice of Peter.

"Are you ready, boys?"

"Ay, ay," from various parts of the lagoon.

"Then lam into the pirates."

The fight was short and sharp. First to draw blood was John, who

gallantly climbed into the boat and held Starkey. There was fierce struggle, in which the cutlass was torn from the pirate's grasp. He wriggled overboard and John leapt after him. The dinghy drifted away.

Here and there a head bobbed up in the water, and there was a flash of steel followed by a cry or a whoop. In the confusion some struck at their own side. The corkscrew of Smee got Tootles in the fourth rib, but he was himself pinked [nicked] in turn by Curly. Farther from the rock Starkey was pressing Slightly and the twins hard.

Where all this time was Peter? He was seeking bigger game.

The others were all brave boys, and they must not be blamed for backing from the pirate captain. His iron claw made a circle of dead water round him, from which they fled like affrighted fishes.

But there was one who did not fear him: there was one prepared to enter that circle.

Strangely, it was not in the water that they met. Hook rose to the rock to breathe, and at the same moment Peter scaled it on the opposite side. The rock was slippery as a ball, and they had to crawl rather than climb. Neither knew that the other was coming. Each feeling for a grip met the other's arm: in surprise they raised their

heads; their faces were almost touching; so they met.

Some of the greatest heroes have confessed that just before they fell to [began combat] they had a sinking [feeling in the stomach]. Had it been so with Peter at that moment I would admit it. After all, he was the only man that the Sea-Cook had feared. But Peter had no sinking, he had one feeling only, gladness; and he gnashed his pretty teeth with joy. Quick as thought he snatched a knife from Hook's belt and was about to drive it home, when he saw that he was higher up the rock than his foe. It would not have been fighting fair. He gave the pirate a hand to help him up.

It was then that Hook bit him.

Not the pain of this but its unfairness was what dazed Peter. It made him quite helpless. He could only stare, horrified. Every child is affected thus the first time he is treated unfairly. All he thinks he has a right to when he comes to you to be yours is fairness. After you have been unfair to him he will love you again, but will never afterwards be quite the same boy. No one ever gets over the first unfairness; no one except Peter. He often met it, but he always forgot it. I suppose that was the real difference between him and all the rest.

So when he met it now it was like the first time; and he could just

stare, helpless. Twice the iron hand clawed him.

A few moments afterwards the other boys saw Hook in the water striking wildly for the ship; no elation on the pestilent face now, only white fear, for the crocodile was in dogged pursuit of him. On ordinary occasions the boys would have swum alongside cheering; but now they were uneasy, for they had lost both Peter and Wendy, and were scouring the lagoon for them, calling them by name. They found the dinghy and went home in it, shouting "Peter, Wendy" as they went, but no answer came save mocking laughter from the mermaids. "They must be swimming back or flying," the boys concluded. They were not very anxious, because they had such faith in Peter. They chuckled, boylike, because they would be late for bed; and it was all mother Wendy's fault!

When their voices died away there came cold silence over the lagoon, and then a feeble cry.

"Help, help!"

Two small figures were beating against the rock; the girl had fainted and lay on the boy's arm. With a last effort Peter pulled her up the rock and then lay down beside her. Even as he also fainted he saw that the water was rising. He knew that they would soon be drowned, but he could do no more.

As they lay side by side a mermaid caught Wendy by the feet, and began pulling her softly into the water. Peter, feeling her slip from him, woke with a start, and was just in time to draw her back. But he had to tell her the truth.

"We are on the rock, Wendy," he said, "but it is growing smaller. Soon the water will be over it."

She did not understand even now.

"We must go," she said, almost brightly.

"Yes," he answered faintly.

"Shall we swim or fly, Peter?"

He had to tell her.

"Do you think you could swim or fly as far as the island, Wendy, without my help?"

She had to admit that she was too tired.

He moaned.

"What is it?" she asked, anxious about him at once.

"I can't help you, Wendy. Hook wounded me. I can neither fly nor swim."

"Do you mean we shall both be drowned?"

"Look how the water is rising."

They put their hands over their eyes to shut out the sight. They thought they would soon be no more. As they sat thus something brushed against Peter as light as a kiss, and stayed there, as if saying timidly, "Can I be of any use?"

It was the tail of a kite, which Michael had made some days before. It had torn itself out of his hand and floated away.

"Michael's kite," Peter said without interest, but next moment he had seized the tail, and was pulling the kite toward him.

"It lifted Michael off the ground," he cried; "why should it not carry you?"

"Both of us!"

"It can't lift two; Michael and Curly tried."

"Let us draw lots," Wendy said bravely.

"And you a lady; never." Already he had tied the tail round her. She clung to him; she refused to go without him; but with a "Good-bye, Wendy," he pushed her from the rock; and in a few minutes she was borne out of his sight. Peter was alone on the lagoon.

The rock was very small now; soon it would be submerged. Pale rays of light tiptoed across the waters; and by and by there was to be heard a sound at once the most musical and the most melancholy in the world: the mermaids calling to the moon.

Peter was not quite like other boys; but he was afraid at last. A tremour ran through him, like a shudder passing over the sea; but on the sea one shudder follows another till there are hundreds of them, and Peter felt just the one. Next moment he was standing erect on the rock again, with that smile on his face and a drum beating within him. It was saying, "To die will be an awfully big adventure."

Chapter 9 THE NEVER BIRD

The last sound Peter heard before he was quite alone were the mermaids retiring one by one to their bedchambers under the sea. He was too far away to hear their doors shut; but every door in the coral caves where they live rings a tiny bell when it opens or closes (as in all the nicest houses on the mainland), and he heard the bells.

Steadily the waters rose till they were nibbling at his feet; and to pass the time until they made their final gulp, he watched the only thing on the lagoon. He thought it was a piece of floating paper, perhaps part of the kite, and wondered idly how long it would take to drift ashore.

Presently he noticed as an odd thing that it was undoubtedly out upon the lagoon with some definite purpose, for it was fighting the tide, and sometimes winning; and when it won, Peter, always sympathetic to the weaker side, could not help clapping; it was such a gallant piece of paper.

It was not really a piece of paper; it was the Never bird, making desperate efforts to reach Peter on the nest. By working her wings, in a way she had learned since the nest fell into the water, she was able to some extent to guide her strange craft, but by the time Peter recognised her she was very exhausted. She had come to save him, to give him her nest, though there were eggs in it.

I rather wonder at the bird, for though he had been nice to her, he had also sometimes tormented her. I can suppose only that, like Mrs. Darling and the rest of them, she was melted because he had all his first teeth.

She called out to him what she had come for, and he called out to her what she was doing there; but of course neither of them understood the other's language. In fanciful stories people can talk to the birds freely, and I wish for the moment I could pretend that this were such a story, and say that Peter replied intelligently to the Never bird; but truth is best, and I want to tell you only what really happened. Well, not only could they not understand each other, but they forgot their manners.

"I--want--you--to--get--into--the--nest," the bird called, speaking as slowly and distinctly as possible, "and--then--you--can--drift--ashore, but--I--am--too--tired--to--bring--it--any--nearer--so--you--must--try to--swim--to--it."

"What are you quacking about?" Peter answered. "Why don't you let the nest drift as usual?"

"I--want--you--" the bird said, and repeated it all over.

Then Peter tried slow and distinct.

"What--are--you--quacking--about?" and so on.

The Never bird became irritated; they have very short tempers.

"You dunderheaded little jay," she screamed, "Why don't you do as I tell you?"

Peter felt that she was calling him names, and at a venture he retorted hotly:

"So are you!"

Then rather curiously they both snapped out the same remark:

"Shut up!"

"Shut up!"

Nevertheless the bird was determined to save him if she could, and by one last mighty effort she propelled the nest against the rock. Then up she flew; deserting her eggs, so as to make her meaning clear.

Then at last he understood, and clutched the nest and waved his thanks to the bird as she fluttered overhead. It was not to receive his thanks, however, that she hung there in the sky; it was not even to watch him get into the nest; it was to see what he did with her eggs.

There were two large white eggs, and Peter lifted them up and reflected. The bird covered her face with her wings, so as not to see the last of them; but she could not help peeping between the feathers.

I forget whether I have told you that there was a stave on the rock, driven into it by some buccaneers of long ago to mark the site of buried treasure. The children had discovered the glittering hoard, and when in a mischievous mood used to fling showers of moidores, diamonds, pearls and pieces of eight to the gulls, who pounced upon them for food, and then flew away, raging at the scurvy trick that had been played upon them. The stave was still there, and on it Starkey had hung his hat, a deep tarpaulin, watertight, with a broad brim. Peter put the eggs into this hat and set it on the lagoon. It floated beautifully.

The Never bird saw at once what he was up to, and screamed her admiration of him; and, alas, Peter crowed his agreement with her. Then he got into the nest, reared the stave in it as a mast, and hung

up his shirt for a sail. At the same moment the bird fluttered down upon the hat and once more sat snugly on her eggs. She drifted in one direction, and he was borne off in another, both cheering.

Of course when Peter landed he beached his barque [small ship, actually the Never Bird's nest in this particular case in point] in a place where the bird would easily find it; but the hat was such a great success that she abandoned the nest. It drifted about till it went to pieces, and often Starkey came to the shore of the lagoon, and with many bitter feelings watched the bird sitting on his hat. As we shall not see her again, it may be worth mentioning here that all Never birds now build in that shape of nest, with a broad brim on which the youngsters take an airing.

Great were the rejoicings when Peter reached the home under the ground almost as soon as Wendy, who had been carried hither and thither by the kite. Every boy had adventures to tell; but perhaps the biggest adventure of all was that they were several hours late for bed. This so inflated them that they did various dodgy things to get staying up still longer, such as demanding bandages; but Wendy, though glorying in having them all home again safe and sound, was scandalised by the lateness of the hour, and cried, "To bed, to bed," in a voice that had to be obeyed. Next day, however, she was awfully tender, and gave out bandages to every one, and they played till bed-time at limping about and carrying their arms in slings.

Chapter 10 THE HAPPY HOME

One important result of the brush [with the pirates] on the lagoon was that it made the redskins their friends. Peter had saved Tiger Lily from a dreadful fate, and now there was nothing she and her braves would not do for him. All night they sat above, keeping watch over the home under the ground and awaiting the big attack by the pirates which obviously could not be much longer delayed. Even by day they hung about, smoking the pipe of peace, and looking almost as if they wanted tit-bits to eat.

They called Peter the Great White Father, prostrating themselves before him; and he liked this tremendously, so that it was not really good for him.

"The great white father," he would say to them in a very lordly manner, as they grovelled at his feet, "is glad to see the Piccaninny warriors protecting his wigwam from the pirates."

"Me Tiger Lily," that lovely creature would reply. "Peter Pan save me, me his velly nice friend. Me no let pirates hurt him."

She was far too pretty to cringe in this way, but Peter thought it his due, and he would answer condescendingly, "It is good. Peter Pan has spoken."

Always when he said, "Peter Pan has spoken," it meant that they must now shut up, and they accepted it humbly in that spirit; but they were by no means so respectful to the other boys, whom they looked upon as just ordinary braves. They said "How-do?" to them, and things like that; and what annoyed the boys was that Peter seemed to think this all right.

Secretly Wendy sympathised with them a little, but she was far too loyal a housewife to listen to any complaints against father. "Father knows best," she always said, whatever her private opinion must be. Her private opinion was that the redskins should not call her a squaw.

We have now reached the evening that was to be known among them as the Night of Nights, because of its adventures and their upshot. The day, as if quietly gathering its forces, had been almost uneventful, and now the redskins in their blankets were at their posts above, while, below, the children were having their evening meal; all except Peter, who had gone out to get the time. The way you got the time on the island was to find the crocodile, and then stay near him till the clock struck.

The meal happened to be a make-believe tea, and they sat around the board, guzzling in their greed; and really, what with their chatter and recriminations, the noise, as Wendy said, was positively deafening. To be sure, she did not mind noise, but she simply would

not have them grabbing things, and then excusing themselves by saying that Tootles had pushed their elbow. There was a fixed rule that they must never hit back at meals, but should refer the matter of dispute to Wendy by raising the right arm politely and saying, "I complain of so-and-so;" but what usually happened was that they forgot to do this or did it too much.

"Silence," cried Wendy when for the twentieth time she had told them that they were not all to speak at once. "Is your mug empty, Slightly darling?"

"Not quite empty, mummy," Slightly said, after looking into an imaginary mug.

"He hasn't even begun to drink his milk," Nibs interposed.

This was telling, and Slightly seized his chance.

"I complain of Nibs," he cried promptly.

John, however, had held up his hand first.

"Well, John?"

"May I sit in Peter's chair, as he is not here?"

"Sit in father's chair, John!" Wendy was scandalised. "Certainly not."

"He is not really our father," John answered. "He didn't even know how a father does till I showed him."

This was grumbling. "We complain of John," cried the twins.

Tootles held up his hand. He was so much the humblest of them, indeed he was the only humble one, that Wendy was specially gentle with him.

"I don't suppose," Tootles said diffidently [bashfully or timidly], "that I could be father."

"No, Tootles."

Once Tootles began, which was not very often, he had a silly way of going on.

"As I can't be father," he said heavily, "I don't suppose, Michael, you would let me be baby?"

"No, I won't," Michael rapped out. He was already in his basket.

"As I can't be baby," Tootles said, getting heavier and heavier and heavier, "do you think I could be a twin?"

"No, indeed," replied the twins; "it's awfully difficult to be a twin."

"As I can't be anything important," said Tootles, "would any of you like to see me do a trick?"

"No," they all replied.

Then at last he stopped. "I hadn't really any hope," he said.

The hateful telling broke out again.

"Slightly is coughing on the table."

"The twins began with cheese-cakes."

"Curly is taking both butter and honey."

"Nibs is speaking with his mouth full."

"I complain of the twins."

"I complain of Curly."

"I complain of Nibs."

"Oh dear, oh dear," cried Wendy, "I'm sure I sometimes think that spinsters are to be envied."

She told them to clear away, and sat down to her work-basket, a heavy load of stockings and every knee with a hole in it as usual.

"Wendy," scolded Michael, "I'm too big for a cradle."

"I must have somebody in a cradle," she said almost tartly, "and you are the littlest. A cradle is such a nice homely thing to have about a house."

While she sewed, they played around her; such a group of happy faces and dancing limbs lit up by that romantic fire. It had become a very familiar scene, this, in the home under the ground, but I must warn you that we are looking on it for the last time.

There was a step above, and Wendy, you may be sure, was the first to recognize it.

"Children, I hear your father's step. He likes you to meet him at the door."

Above, the redskins crouched before Peter.

"Watch well, braves. I have spoken."

And then, as so often before, the gay children dragged him from his tree. As so often before, but they were never to do so again.

He had brought nuts for the boys as well as the correct time for Wendy.

"Peter, you just spoil them, you know," Wendy exaggerated.

"Ah, you talk like an old lady," said Peter, hanging up his gun.

"It was me told him mothers are called old lady," Michael whispered to Curly.

"I complain of Michael," said Curly instantly.

The first twin came to Peter. "Father, we want to dance."

"Dance away, my little man," said Peter, who was in high good humour.

"But we want you to dance with us."

Peter was really the best dancer among them, but he pretended to be scandalised. "Me! Why, My old bones would rattle!"

"And mummy must dance too."

"What," cried Wendy, "the mother of such an armful, dance!"

"But this is on a Saturday night," Slightly insinuated.

It was not really Saturday night, at least it might not have been, for all they knew; but always if they wanted to do anything special they said this was Saturday night, and then they did it with full purpose of heart.

"Of course it is Saturday night, Peter," Wendy said, relenting.

"Imagine that! People of our figure, Wendy?"

"But it is only among our own children, of course."

"True, true."

So they were told they could dance, but they must put on their nighties first.

"Ah, old lady," Peter said aside to Wendy, warming himself by the fire and looking down at her as she sat turning a heel, "there is nothing more pleasant of an evening for you and me when the day's toil is over than to rest by the fire with the little ones dancing near by."

"It is sweet, Peter, isn't it?" Wendy said, frightfully gratified. "Peter, I think Curly has your nose."

"Well? That is okay, Michael takes after you."

She went to him and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Dear Peter," she said, "with such a large family, of course, I have now passed my best, but you don't want to exchange me, do you?"

"No, Wendy."

Certainly he did not want a change, but he looked at her uncomfortably, blinking, you know, like one does when wondering if he was awake or asleep.

"Peter, what is it?"

"I was just thinking," he said, a little scared. "It is only make-believe, isn't it? We are only pretending that I am their father?"

"Oh yes," Wendy said in a crisp wonder.

"You see," he continued apologetically, "it would make me seem so really old to be their real father."

"But these children are our children, Peter, yours and mine."

"But not really, Right Wendy?" he asked anxiously.

"Well, not if you don't want it to be so," she replied; and she distinctly heard his sigh of relief. "Peter," she asked anxiously. She was trying to speak softly with subtle purpose, "Peter? Do you wish I were someone else? How do you really feel about me?"

"Like a devoted son, Wendy. I want you to be my mother, too."

"I thought so," she said, and went and sat by herself at the extreme end of the room.

"You are so queer tonight," he protested, frankly puzzled, "and Tiger Lily is just the same. There is something else that she wants from me, but she says she does not want to be my mother."

"No, indeed, it is not," Wendy replied with frightful emphasis.

"Then what is it?"

"It isn't for a lady to tell."

"Oh, very well," Peter said, a little nettled. "Perhaps Tinker Bell will tell me."

"Oh yes, Tinker Bell will tell you," Wendy retorted scornfully. "She has been an abandoned little creature lately, what with Tiger Lily and all."

Here Tink, who was in her bedroom, eavesdropping, squeaked out something impudent.

"I think she says she glories in being abandoned," Peter interpreted.

He had a sudden idea. "Perhaps Tink wants to be my mother?"

"You silly ass!" cried Tinker Bell in a passion.

This was something Tinker Bell had said so often that Wendy needed no translation. "I almost agree with her," Wendy snapped.

Then the children came out and they sang and danced in their night-gowns. Such a deliciously creepy song it was, with sweet little repartes in which they pretended to be frightened at their own shadows. So uproariously gay was the dance, and how they buffeted each other on the bed and out of it! It soon turned into a pillow fight rather than a dance, and when it was finished, the pillows insisted on one bout more, like partners who know that they may never meet again. Each of the boys tried to tell a story. Even Slightly tried to tell a story that night, but the beginning was so fearfully dull that it appalled not only the others but himself, and he said happily:

"Yes, it is a dull beginning. But I say, let us pretend that it is the end."

And then at last they all got into bed and snuggled up for Wendy's story, the story they loved best, and the story Peter hated. Usually when she began to tell this story he left the room or put his hands over his ears. But to-night he remained on his stool.

Chapter 11 WENDY'S STORY

"Listen, then," said Wendy, settling down to her story, with Michael at her feet and seven boys in the bed. "There was once upon a time a gay gentleman--"

"I had rather he had been a lady," Curly said.

"I wish he had been a white rat," said Nibs.

"Quiet," their mother admonished them. "There was a lady also, as we shall see and--"

"Oh, mummy," cried the first twin, "you mean that there is a lady also, don't you? She is not dead, is she?"

"Oh, no, she is not dead."

"I am awfully glad she isn't dead," said Tootles. "Are you glad, John?"

"Of course I am."

"Are you glad, Nibs?"

"Rather."

"Are you glad, Twins?"

"We are glad."

"Oh dear," sighed Wendy. She turned her pleading gaze upon Peter.

"Let's have a little less noise there," Peter called out, determined that she should have fair play, however beastly a story it might be in his opinion.

"The gentleman's name," Wendy continued, "was Mr. Darling, and her name was Mrs. Darling."

"I knew them," John said, but he didn't really, and he said it just to annoy the others.

"I think I knew them, too" Michael said rather doubtfully.

"They were married, you know," explained Wendy, "and what do you think they had?"

"White rats," cried Nibs. His face glowed, for he was so inspired.

"No."

"It's awfully puzzling what they might have had," said Tootles, who now knew the story by heart.

"Quiet, Tootles. They had three descendants."

"Descendants? What is descendants?"

"Well, you are one, Twin."

"Did you hear that, John? I am a descendant."

"Descendants is just another word for children," said John.

"Oh dear, oh dear," sighed Wendy. "Now these three children had a faithful nurse called Nana; but Mr. Darling was angry with her and chained her up in the yard, and so all their children flew away and they lived happily ever after."

"It's an awfully good story," said Nibs. He seemed to be examining it from every angle after he spoke.

"They flew away," Wendy continued, "to the Neverland, where the lost children are."

"I just thought they might," Curly broke in excitedly. "I don't know how it is, but I just thought they might!"

"O Wendy," cried Tootles, "was one of the lost children called Tootles?"

"Yes, he was. Nana loved him very much."

"I am in a story. Hurrah, I am in a story, Nibs."

"Hush. Now I want you to consider the feelings of the unhappy parents with all their children flown away."

"Oo!" they all moaned as they pretended to consider the feelings of the unhappy parents.

"Think of the empty beds!"

"Oo!"

"This story doesn't feel like happily ever after after all," the first twin said cheerfully.

"I don't see how it can have a happy ending," said the second twin.

"Do you, Nibs?"

Nibs dabbed at his eyes with one hand. "I'm frightfully anxious."

"If you knew how great a mother's love is," Wendy told them triumphantly, "you would have no fear." She had now come to the part that Peter hated.

"I do like a mother's love," said Tootles, hitting Nibs with a pillow. "Do you like a mother's love, Nibs?"

"I do just," said Nibs, hitting back.

"You see," Wendy said complacently, "our heroine knew that the mother would always leave the window open for her children to fly back by; so they stayed away for years and years and they had such a lovely time."

"Did they ever go back?"

"Did they live happily ever after?"

"Let us now," said Wendy, bracing herself up for her finest effort, "take a peep into the future;" and they all gave themselves the twist that makes peeps into the future so much easier. "Years have rolled by, and who is this elegant lady of uncertain age alighting at London Station?"

"O Wendy, who is she?" cried Nibs, every bit as excited as if he didn't know.

"Can it be--yes--no--it is--the fair Wendy!"

"Oh!"

"And who are the two noble portly figures accompanying her, now grown to man's stature? Can they be John and Michael? Why, yes! they are!"

"Oh, that is just so wonderful! I can see it easily."

"'See, dear brothers,' says Wendy pointing upwards to an imaginary ledge, 'there is the window and it is still standing open. The beds are made and there is a fire in the fireplace. Ah, now they see us lighting on the window sill and they leap to their feet in joy and wonder. We are rewarded for our sublime faith in a mother's love and no pen can hope to describe the happy scene, over which we draw a veil.'"

That was the story, and they were as pleased with it as was the fair narrator herself. Everything just as it should be in a little corner of their heads.

But there was one there who knew better, and when Wendy finished he uttered a hollow groan.

"What is it, Peter?" she cried, running to him, thinking he was ill. She felt him solicitously, lower down than his chest. "Where does it hurt, Peter?"

"It isn't that kind of pain," Peter replied darkly.

"Then what kind is it?"

"Wendy, you are wrong about mothers."

They all gathered round him in affright, so alarming was his agitation; and with a fine candour he told them what he had hitherto concealed.

"Long ago," he said, "I thought like you that my mother would always keep the window open for me, so I stayed away for moons and moons and moons, and then flew back; but the window was barred, for mother had forgotten all about me, and there was another little boy sleeping in my bed."

I am not sure that this was true, but Peter thought it was true; and that was what scared them.

"Are you sure mothers are like that? They don't care? They just pretend that they do?"

"Yes."

So this was the truth about mothers. Mothers were toads!

"Wendy, let's go home," cried John and Michael together.

"Yes," she said, clutching them. "Let's go home."

"Not to-night?" asked the lost boys bewildered. They knew in what they called their hearts that one can get on quite well without a mother, and that it is only the mothers who think you can't.

"At once," Wendy replied resolutely, for the horrible thought had come to her: "Perhaps mother is only in half mourning by this time."

This dread made her forgetful of what must be Peter's feelings, and she said to him rather sharply, "Peter, will you make the necessary arrangements for our trip?"

"If you wish it," he replied, as coolly as if she had asked him to pass the nuts.

Not so much as a sorry-to-lose-you between them! If she did not mind the parting, he was going to show her, Peter was, that neither did he.

But of course he cared very much; and he was so full of wrath against grown-ups, who, as usual, were going about and spoiling everything, that as soon as he got inside his tree he breathed intentionally quick short breaths at the rate of about five to a second. He did this because there is a saying in the Neverland that, every time you breathe, a grown-up dies; and Peter was killing them off vindictively as fast as possible.

Then having given the necessary instructions to the redskins he returned to the home, where an unworthy scene had been enacted in his absence. Panic-stricken at the thought of losing Wendy the lost boys had advanced upon her threateningly.

"It will be worse than before she came," they cried.

"We shan't let her go."

"Let's keep her prisoner."

"Ay, chain her up, that's what I say."

In her extremity an instinct told her to which of them she should turn.

"Tootles," she cried, "I appeal to you."

Was it not strange? She appealed to Tootles, quite the silliest one.

Grandly, however, did Tootles respond. For that one moment he dropped his silliness and spoke with a grand dignity.

"I am just Tootles," he said, "and nobody minds me. But the first who does not behave to Wendy like an English gentleman I will blood him severely."

He drew back his hanger; and for that instant his sun was at noon.

The others held back uneasily. Then Peter returned, and they saw at once that they would get no support from him. He would keep no girl in the Neverland against her will.

"Wendy," he said, striding up and down, "I have asked the redskins to guide you through the wood, as flying tires you so."

"Thank you, Peter."

"Then," he continued, in the short sharp voice of one accustomed to be obeyed, "Tinker Bell will take you across the sea. Wake her, Nibs."

Nibs had to knock twice before he got an answer, though Tink had really been sitting up in bed listening for some time.

"Who are you? How dare you? Go away," she cried.

"You are to get up, Tink," Nibs called, "and take Wendy on a journey."

Of course Tink had been delighted to hear that Wendy was going; but she was jolly well determined not to be her courier, and she said so in still more offensive language. Then she pretended to be asleep again.

"She says she won't!" Nibs exclaimed, aghast at such insubordination, whereupon Peter went sternly toward the young lady's chamber.

"Tink," he rapped out, "if you don't get up and dress at once I will open the curtains, and then we shall all see you in your nightgown."

This made her leap to the floor. "Who said I wasn't getting up?" she cried.

In the meantime the boys were gazing very forlornly at Wendy, now equipped with John and Michael for the journey. By this time they were dejected, not merely because they were about to lose her, but also because they felt that she was going off to something nice to which they had not been invited. Novelty was beckoning to them as usual.

Crediting them with a nobler feeling Wendy melted.

"Dear ones," she said, "if you will all come, fly home with me I feel almost sure I can get my father and mother to adopt you."

This invitation was meant specially for Peter, but each of the boys was thinking exclusively of himself, and at once they jumped with joy.

"But won't they think us rather a handful?" Nibs asked, right in the middle of his highest jump.

"Oh no," said Wendy, rapidly thinking it out, "it will only mean having a few extra beds in the drawing-room; they can be hidden behind the

screens on first Thursdays."

"Peter, can we go?" they all cried imploringly. They took it for granted that if they went he would go also, but really they scarcely cared. Thus children are ever ready, when novelty knocks, to desert their dearest ones.

"All right," Peter replied with a bitter smile, and immediately they rushed to get their things.

"And now, Peter," Wendy said, thinking she had put everything right, "I am going to give you your medicine before you go." She loved to give them medicine, and undoubtedly gave them too much. Of course it was only water, but it was out of a bottle, and she always shook the bottle and counted the drops, which gave it a certain medicinal quality. On this occasion, however, she did not give Peter his portion, for just as she had prepared it, she saw a look on his face that made her heart sink.

"Why, Get your things ready, Peter," she cried, shaking a finger at his imaginary bags.

"No," he answered, pretending indifference, "I am not going with you, Wendy."

"Not going? Yes, Peter. I see"

To show Wendy that her departure would leave him unmoved, he skipped up and down the room, playing gaily on his heartless pipes. She had to run about after him, though it was rather undignified.

"To find your mother," she coaxed.

Now, if Peter had ever quite had a mother, he no longer missed her. He could do very well without one. He had thought them out, and remembered only their bad points. Mothers were TOADS!

"No, no," he told Wendy decisively; "perhaps she would say I was old, and I just want always to be a little boy and to have great adventures, and loads of fun."

"But, Peter--"

"No."

And so the others had to be told that Peter wasn't going, and that truly frightened them. "Peter isn't coming."

Peter not coming! NO! They gazed blankly at him, their sticks over their backs, and on each stick a bundle. Their first thought was that if Peter was not going he had probably changed his mind about letting them go.

But he was far too proud for that. "If you do find your mothers," he said darkly, "I hope you will like them."

The awful cynicism of this wish made an uncomfortable impression, and most of them began to look rather doubtful. After all, their faces said, were they not noodles if they wanted to go?

"Now then," cried Peter, "no fuss, no blubbering; good-bye, Wendy;" and he held out his hand cheerily, quite as if they must really go right that minute for he had something important to do.

She had to take his hand, and there was no indication at all that he would prefer a thimble.

"You will remember about changing your flannels, Peter?" she said, lingering over him. She was always so particular about their flannels.

"Yes."

"And you will take your medicine?"

"Yes."

That seemed to be everything, and an awkward pause followed. Peter, however, was not the kind that breaks down before other people. "Are you ready yet, Tinker Bell?" he called out.

"Ay, ay."

"Then lead them on their way."

Tink darted up the nearest tree; but just at that moment that the pirates made their dreadful attack upon the redskins. Above, where all had been so still, the air was rent with sudden shrieks and the clash of steel. Below, there was dead silence. Mouths opened and remained open. Wendy fell on her knees, but her arms were extended toward Peter. All arms were extended to him, as if suddenly blown in his direction; they were beseeching him mutely not to desert them. As for Peter, he seized his sword, the same he thought he had slain Barbecue with, and the lust of battle was in his eye.

Chapter 12 THE CHILDREN ARE CARRIED OFF

The pirate attack had been a complete surprise: a sure proof that the unscrupulous Captain James T. Hook had conducted it improperly, for to surprise redskins fairly is beyond the wit of any white man that is thinking straight.

By all the unwritten laws of savage warfare it is always the redskin who attacks, and with the wiliness of his race he does it just as the clock is ticking off at the four hour, at which time he knows the courage of the whites to be at its lowest ebb. The white men have in the meantime made a rude stockade on the summit of yonder undulating ground, at the foot of which a stream runs, for it is destruction to be too far from water. There they await the onslaught, the inexperienced ones clutching their revolvers and treading on twigs, but the old hands sleeping tranquilly until just before the dawn. Through the long black night the savage scouts have wriggled, rather snake-like, among the tallest grass stalks without stirring a bruised blade. The brushwood closes behind them, as silently as sand into which a mole has dived. Not a sound is to be heard, save when they give vent to a wonderful imitation of the lonely yip of the hungry coyote. The cry is answered by other braves; and some of them do it even better than the coyotes do. So the chill hours wear on, and the long suspense is horribly trying to the paleface who has to live through it for the first time; but to the trained hand those ghastly calls and still ghastlier silences are but an intimation of how the long night is marching on.

That this was the usual procedure was so well known to Hook that in disregarding it he cannot be excused on the plea of ignorance.

The Piccaninnies, on their part, trusted implicitly to his honour, and their whole action of the night stands out in marked contrast to his. They left nothing undone that was consistent with the reputation of their tribe. With that alertness of the senses which is at once the marvel and despair of civilised peoples, they knew that the pirates were on the island from the moment one of them trod on a dry stick; and in an incredibly short space of time the coyote cries began. Every foot of ground between the spot where Hook had landed his forces and the home under the trees was stealthily examined by braves wearing their moccasins with the heels in front. They found only one hillock with a stream at its base, so that Hook had no choice; here he must establish himself and wait for just before the dawn. Everything being thus mapped out with almost diabolical cunning, the main body of the redskins folded their blankets around them, until it was time to spring into action, the cold moment when they should leap forward and deal out pale death.

Here dreaming, though wide-awake, of the exquisite tortures to which they were to put him at break of day, those confiding savages were found out by the treacherous Captain Hook. What could the bewildered scouts do, masters as they were of every war-like artifice save this one, but trot helplessly after him, exposing themselves fatally to view, while they gave pathetic utterance to the coyote cry.

Around the brave Tiger Lily were a dozen of her stoutest warriors, and they suddenly saw the perfidious pirates bearing down upon them.

Fell then from their startled eyes the film through which they had looked at certain victory. No more would they torture anyone at the stake. For them the happy hunting-grounds was now. They knew it; but even with that knowledge so certain, as their father's sons they drew themselves up straight and tall. They gathered around Tiger Lily in a dense formation that was meant to shield her from every stroke.

It is written that the noble savage must never express surprise in the presence of the white. Thus, terrible as the sudden appearance of the pirates must have been to them, they remained stationary for a moment, not a muscle moving; as if the foe had come by invitation. Then, indeed, the tradition gallantly upheld, they seized their weapons, and the air was torn with the war-cry; but now, now it was far too late.

Thus perished many brave petals of the flower of the Piccaninny tribe. Not all unavenged did they die, for with Lean Wolf fell Alf Mason, to disturb the Spanish Main no more, and among others who bit the dust were Geo. Scourie, Chas. Turley, and the Alsatian. Foggerty. Turley fell to the tomahawk of the terrible Panther, who ultimately cut a way through the pirates with Tiger Lily and a small remnant of the tribe.

The night's work was not yet over for the pirates, for it was not the redskins Captain James T. Hook had come out to destroy. No, they were only the bees that must be smoked out, so that he should get at the honey. It was Pan he wanted, Peter Pan and Wendy and their band, but chiefly he wanted to capture Pan.

Peter Pan had got on Hook's nerves; it made his cast iron claw twitch, and at night it disturbed him like an insect. While Peter lived, the tortured man felt that he was like a mighty lion locked in a cage, into which a sparrow has come and claimed ownership with impunity.

So, the question before him now was how to get his troops down the trees. He ran his greedy eyes over them, searching for the thinnest men. They wriggled uncomfortably, for they knew he would not hesitate to ram them down with poles.

The attack on the redskins above had ceased and now there was only silence. One by one the boys let their gaze dart from one corner of their home to another. They could feel Hook's determination to get at them. Then they heard the shiver in one tree as an axe was aimed at its root. It didn't take much make believe to feel certain they could hear the wails of the tree as it was laid low.

The pirates were listening avidly at the mouths of the trees so they could hear every question put by one of the boys, and alas, they also heard Peter's answer. "If the redskins had won," he said, "they would be beating on the tom-tom; that is always their sign of victory."

When Smee heard that he looked down at the tom-tom in his hands that he had captured. "You will never hear the tom-tom again," he muttered, but inaudibly of course, for strict silence had been urged. Then Hook signed him to beat the tom-tom, and slowly there came to Smee an understanding of the dreadful wickedness of the order. Never, probably, had this simple-minded man admired Captain James T. Hook so much.

Twice Smee beat upon the instrument, and then stopped to listen gleefully. "The tom-tom," the miscreants heard Peter cry; "It was an Indian victory!"

The doomed children answered with a cheer that was music to the black hearts above. Almost immediately Wendy and the boys said their good-byes to Peter again. This puzzled the pirates, but all their other feelings were swallowed up by a base delight that the enemy were about to come up the trees. They smirked at each other and rubbed their hands. Rapidly and silently Hook gave his orders: one man to each tree, and the others to arrange themselves in a line two yards apart.

Chapter 13 DO YOU BELIEVE IN FAIRIES?

The first to emerge from his tree was Curly. He rose out of it and fell right into the arms of Cecco, who flung him to Smee, who flung him to Starkey, who flung him to Bill Jukes, who flung him to Noodler, and so he was tossed from one to another till he fell at the feet of the blackest pirate of them all. One by one all the boys were plucked from their trees in this ruthless manner; and several of them were in the air at a time, like bales of goods flung from hand to hand.

A far different treatment was accorded to Wendy, who came out last. She knew immediately that something had gone amiss. The boys were gone, the pirates were posted everywhere. With ironical politeness Captain Hook raised his hat to her, then, offering her his arm, escorted her to the spot where the others were being gagged.

He did it with such an air that she was too fascinated to cry out. After all, she was only a little girl and just for a few seconds, Captain Hook entranced her. Perhaps, if Wendy had haughtily unhanded him she too would have been hurled through the air like the others.

And the others were being mistreated indeed. In order to prevent their flying away, the pirates doubled the boys up with their knees close to their ears; and for the trussing of them the black pirate had cut a rope into nine equal pieces. All went well until Slightly's turn came, when he was found to be like those irritating parcels that use up all the string in going round and leave no tags [ends] with which to tie a knot. The pirates kicked him in their rage; and strange to say it was Hook who told them to belay their violence. His lip was curled with malicious triumph. While his pirate crew were merely sweating because every time they tried to pack the unhappy lad tight in one part he bulged out in another, Hook's master mind had slipped far beneath Slightly's surface, probing not for effects but for causes; and his exultation showed that he had found them. Slightly, white to the gills, knew that Hook had surprised discovered his secret, which was this, that no boy so blown out could use a tree wherein an average man need stick. Poor Slightly, most wretched of all the children now, for he was in a panic about Peter, bitterly regretted what he had done. Madly addicted to the drinking of water when he was hot, he had swelled in consequence to his present girth, and instead of reducing himself to fit his tree he had, unknown to the others, whittled his tree out to make it fit him.

Sufficient of this Hook guessed to persuade him that Peter at last lay at his mercy, but no word of the dark design that now formed in the subterranean caverns of his mind crossed his lips; he merely signed that the captives were to be conveyed to the ship, and that he would be left on the beach alone.

The pirates wondered and scuffled together how to convey the boys. Hunched up in their ropes they might indeed be rolled down hill like barrels, but most of the way lay through a morass. Again Hook's genius surmounted difficulties. He indicated that the little house must be used as a conveyance. The children were flung into it, then four stout pirates raised it on their shoulders, the others fell in behind, and the whole crew burst into lusty gales of sinful sleights and they began singing the hateful pirate chorus while the strange procession set off through the wood.

The first thing Hook did on finding himself alone in the fast falling night was to tiptoe to Slightly's tree, and make sure that it provided him with a passage. Then for a long moment he remained brooding; his hat of ill omen on the sward, so that any gentle breeze which had arisen might play refreshingly through his hair. Dark as were his thoughts his blue eyes were as soft as the periwinkle. Intently he listened for any sound from the nether world, but all was as silent below as above; the house under the ground seemed to be but one more empty tenement in the void. Was Peter Pan asleep, or did he stand waiting at the foot of Slightly's tree, with his dagger clutched in his stout hand?

There was no way of knowing, save by going down and Captain Hook was not a coward in any way. He let his cloak slip softly to the ground, and then biting his lips till a lewd blood stood on them, he stepped into the tree. He was a brave man, but for a moment he had to stop there and wipe his brow, which was dripping sweat much like a candle drips wax. Then, silently, he let himself drop into the hole.

He arrived unmolested at the foot of the shaft, and stood still again, biting at his breath, which had almost left him. As his eyes became accustomed to the dim light various objects in the home under the trees took shape; but the only one on which his greedy gaze rested, long sought for and found at last, was the great bed. On the bed lay Peter Pan, and he was fast asleep.

Completely unaware of the tragedy that had been acted out up above, Peter had lay down on the bed outside the coverlet and fell asleep in the middle of it. Sometimes, though not often, he had dreams, and they were more painful than the dreams of other boys. For hours he could not be separated from these dreams, though he wailed piteously in them. One arm dropped over the edge of the bed, one leg was arched, and the unfinished part of a laugh was stranded on his mouth, which was open, showing the little pearls.

Thus in an innocent, defenceless sprawl Hook found him. He stood silent at the foot of the tree looking across the chamber at his enemy. Though a light from the one lamp shone dimly on the bed, Hook stood in darkness himself, and at the first stealthy step forward he discovered an obstacle, the door of Slightly's tree.

It did not entirely fill the aperture, and Hook had been looking over it. Feeling for the catch, he found to his fury that it must have been low down, beyond his reach. To his disordered brain it seemed then that the irritating quality in Peter's face and figure visibly increased, and he rattled the door and flung himself against it. Was his enemy to escape him after all?

But what was that? The red reach of his gaze had caught sight of Peter's medicine standing on a ledge within his easy reach. He fathomed what it was straightaway, and immediately knew that the sleeper was now in his power.

Lest he should be taken alive, Hook always carried about his person a dreadful drug, blended by himself of all the death-dealing rings that had come into his possession. These he had boiled down into a yellow liquid quite unknown to science, but which was probably the most virulent poison in existence.

Five drops of this poison he now added to Peter's cup of medicine. Hook's hand shook, but it was in exultation rather than in shame. As he did it he avoided glancing at the sleeper, but not lest pity should unnerve him; merely to avoid spilling. Then one long gloating look he cast upon his victim, and turning, wormed his way with difficulty up the tree. As he emerged at the top he looked the very spirit of evil breaking from its hole. Donning his hat at its most rakish angle, he wound his cloak around him, holding one end in front as if to conceal his person from the night, of which it was the blackest part, and muttering strange dark words to himself he stole away through the trees.

Peter slept on. The light of the lamp guttered and went out, leaving the tenement in darkness; but still he slept. It must have been not less than ten o'clock by the crocodile, when he suddenly sat up in his bed, wakened by he knew not what. As he listened sharply he heard a soft cautious tapping on the door of his tree.

Soft and cautious, but in that stillness it was sinister. Peter felt for his dagger till his hand gripped it. Then he spoke.

"Who is that?"

For long there was no answer: then again the soft knock came.

"Who are you?"

Again, there was no answer.

Peter Pan was not afraid of strange noises in the dark, no, Peter was thrilled by them and Peter Pan loved being thrilled. In two strides he reached the door. Unlike Slightly's door, his door filled the aperture so that he could not see beyond it, nor could the one knocking see him.

"I won't open unless you speak," Peter cried.

Then at last the visitor spoke, in a lovely bell-like voice.

"Let me in, Peter."

It was Tink, and quickly he unbarred to her. She flew in excitedly, her face flushed and her dress stained with mud.

"What is it?"

"Oh, you could never guess!" she cried, and then she offered him three guesses. "Out with it!" he shouted, and in one ungrammatical sentence, as long as the ribbons that magicians pull from their

mouths, she told how the pirates had captured Wendy and the boys. Peter's heart bobbed up and down as he listened. Wendy bound her story up so that everything was neatly packed, and she dwelled longest on state of the pirate ship and the hatch that kept the prisoners caught; she was one fairy who loved everything to be just so!

"Wendy is captured? Great, I'll rescue her!" he cried, leaping at his weapons. As he leapt he wondered if there were something he could do to please her. Then he saw his medicine sitting out on the table and ready to take. Peter Pan laughed exultantly; He could take his medicine. His arm stretched forth and his hand closed on the fatal draught.

"No!" shrieked Tinker Bell, who had heard Hook mutter about his deed as he sped through the forest.

"Why not?"

"It is poisoned."

"Poisoned? Who could have poisoned it?"

"Hook."

"Don't be silly. How could Hook have got down here?"

Alas, Tinker Bell could not explain this, for even she did not know the dark secret of Slightly's tree.

"Besides," said Peter, quite believing himself "I never fell asleep."

However, Hook's words had left no room for doubt in Tink's mind. That cup was poisoned!

As Peter Pan raised the cup to drink the poisoned draught, Tink shot forth in one of her lightning movements and she got between his lips and the draught, and she drained it to the the last dregs in one long, sickening slurp. How brave she was; the poison tasted so awful. Just the taste was enough to make a body sick!

"Why, Tink! how dare you drink my medicine?"

But Tinker Bell did not answer; she could not have done. Already she was reeling in the air and she could no longer focus her eyes.

"What is the matter with you?" cried Peter, suddenly afraid.

"It was poisoned, Peter," she told him softly; "I told you that it was, and now I am going to be dead because you would not listen to me."

"O Tink," Peter cried. "Did you drink my medicine to save me?"

Her silver voice fluttered like a sleigh bell rattling in the snow. "Yes."

"But why, Tink?"

Her wings would scarcely carry her now, but with the last twitch of her energy they carried her, tottering, to her chamber. Tink lay down on the bed and closed her eyes.

Peter's head almost filled the fourth wall of her little room as he knelt in distress near her. Every moment her little light was growing fainter; and he knew that if it ever went out that Tinker Bell would be alive no more.

Her voice was so low that at first he could not make out what she said. Then on the fourth try he made it all out together so that it made sense. Tink said that she thought she could get well again --

if children believed in fairies.

Peter flung out his arms in agony. For all he knew there were no children on the island now, and it was night time as well; but Peter rose to his feet and addressed a petition to all the children who might be dreaming of the Neverland, and who were therefore nearer to him than you might think: little boys and girls in their nighties, and naked papooses in their baskets hung from trees.

"Children, Children, wake up and tell me. Do you believe in fairies?" he cried so earnestly that the whole tree shook.

At first there was no other sound at all. Precious seconds ticked by into long, suffering minutes. Then there was a pause out there in the darkness, a pause so loud it could have been a word if you just listened for it hard enough.

Peter paused too, turning his good right ear first one way, then the other. Then he heard the faintest sound, like a little ocean wave as at first it nibbles on the pebbles of the beach. But instead of fading back out to sea this little wave pulsed higher until it flumed outwards .

Peter thought he could see the frothing of the wave and the wave that he saw was sterling white as the tip curved out over itself in the faint moonlight. Then the wave became the body of sound from a single word as it came tumbling down over itself and the inside of the wave curved and cured the rolling sound so that it boomed a thunderous "YES" in the night just as the wave slapped hard down on the crystal beach and reached far up on the pristine shore. The word became quiet as the wave slipped back into the waiting sea. But in the quiet of the night Peter Pan heard the sighing words that thousands of

children and hundreds of grownups too whispered in reply to Peter's question. "Yes."

Peter was stunned. "Yes what?"

"What did they say?" Tinker Bell whispered as loudly as she could.

"I'm not sure," Peter admitted. Then he turned himself about and shouted at the eaves of the house: "Listen, children, everywhere. If you believe in fairies," he shouted to them, "just clap your hands. Clap your hands and don't let Tinker die."

One hand clapped. They heard it as if from far, far away. One hand clapped, a dismal single clap with no strength to it. "I need your help," Peter cried out, louder still. "If you believe in fairies, Clap your hands."

He heard nine sets of hands clapping then and they were clapping in spite of murderous oaths telling them to be quiet. They kept on clapping. But Tinker Bell looked as if she were slipping away, straight through the bedclothes. Peter's voice cried out, wrenched with an agony that comes only in behalf of another soul: "If you believe in fairies, Clap your hands."

From across the ocean and around the sea there came back the sound of children clapping their hands. Some held back; many more didn't.

The clapping stopped suddenly; as if thousands of mothers had rushed headlong into their nurseries to see what on earth was happening; but already, Tink was saved. First her voice grew strong, then she climbed out of bed so carefully that Peter saw the effort was weakening her.

For a long moment she stood by her bedside. Then Tinker fluttered one wing, then the other. Peter's anxious gaze saw the happy smile crossing her face then Tinker Bell was flashing through the room more merry and impudent than ever.

"And now to rescue Wendy!"

"Wendy?" Peter asked. His gaze clouded over as he tried to remember who Wendy was. "Oh yes, Wendy!"

The moon was riding in a cloudy heaven when Peter rose from his tree, belted with his weapons of war and wearing little else, to set out upon his perilous quest. It was not such a night as he would have chosen. He had hoped to fly, keeping not far from the ground so that nothing unwonted should escape his eyes; but in that fitful light to have flown low would have meant trailing his shadow through the trees, thus disturbing birds and acquainting a watchful foe that Peter Pan was once more astir.

There was no other course but to press forward in redskin fashion, at which happily he was an expert. But in what direction, for he could not really be sure that the children had been taken to the ship? A light fall of snow had obliterated all footmarks; and a deathly silence pervaded the island, as if for a space Nature stood still in horror of the recent carnage. He had taught the children something of the forest lore that he had himself learned from Tiger Lily and Tinker Bell, and knew that in their dire hour they were not likely to forget it. Slightly, if he had any opportunity at all, would blaze a trail in the trees, for instance, Curly would drop seeds, and Wendy would leave her handkerchief at some important place.

The full morning dawn was needed to search for such guidance, and he could not wait. The upper world had called him, but would give no help.

The crocodile passed him, but not another living thing, not a sound, not a movement; and yet he knew well that sudden death might be waiting at the next tree, or even stalking him from behind.

He swore this terrible oath: "It's Hook or me this time."

Now he crawled forward like a snake, and again erect, he darted across a space on which the moonlight played, one finger on his lip and his dagger at the ready. If the truth be known, Peter was frightfully happy.

Chapter 14 THE PIRATE SHIP

One green light squinting over Kidd's Creek, which is near the mouth of the pirate river, marked where the brig, the JOLLY ROGER, lay, low in the water; a rakish-looking craft, foul to the hull, every beam in her detestable, like a patch of ground strewn with mangled feathers. She was the cannibal of the seas, and scarce needed that watchful eye, for she floated immune in the horror of her name.

She was wrapped in the blanket of night, through which no sound from her could have reached the shore. There was little sound, and none agreeable save the whir of the ship's sewing machine at which Smee sat, ever industrious and obliging, the essence of the commonplace, our pathetic Smee.

A few of the pirates leant over the bulwarks, drinking in the dark miasma of the night; others sprawled by barrels over games of dice and cards; and the exhausted four who had carried the little house lay prone on the deck, where even in their sleep they rolled skillfully to this side or that out of Hook's reach, lest he should claw them mechanically in passing.

Hook trod the deck in deepest thought. O man unfathomable. It was his hour of triumph. He knew that Peter had been removed for ever from his path, and all the other boys were in the brig, about to walk the plank. It was his grimmest triumphant deed done since the days when he had brought Barbecue to heel. All was safe, he thought. All was well, he thought, so why was it that he could not sleep, but was so headed up that now he paced the deck unsteadily?

There was no elation in his gait, which kept pace with the churning action of his sombre mind. Hook was profoundly dejected because he was so terribly alone. This inscrutable man never felt more alone than when surrounded by his dogs, the pirately crew. Brave as they were, devoted as they might be, they were still socially inferior to him; They could not be his friends.

James T. Hook was not his true name. To reveal who he really was would even at this date set the country in a blaze; but as those who read between the lines must already have guessed, he had been educated at a famous public school, but he would not listen to his teachers; but its traditions still clung to him like garments. Thus it was offensive to him even now to board a ship in the same dress in which he grappled her, and he still adhered in his walk to the school's

distinguished slouch. But above all he retained the passion for good form. Good form! However much he may have degenerated, he still knew that this is all that really matters.

From far within him he heard a creaking as of rusty portals, and through them came a stern tap-tap-tap, like hammering in the night when one cannot sleep. "Have you been in good form to-day?" was their eternal question.

"Fame, fame, that glittering bauble, it is mine," he cried.

"Is it quite good form to be distinguished at anything?" the tap-tap from his school replied.

"I am the only man whom Barbecue feared," he urged, "and even Flint feared Barbecue."

"Barbecue, Flint--what house is that?" came the cutting retort.

Most disquieting reflection of all, was it not bad form to think about good form?

His vitals were tortured by this problem. It was a claw within him sharper than the iron one; and as it tore him, the perspiration dripped down his waxy countenance and streaked his doublet. Ofttimes he drew his sleeve across his face, but there was no damming that trickle.

Ah, envy not the evil ones; envy not even the most successful Hook.

As the morning fog warped in there came to him a presentiment of his early death. It was as if Peter's terrible oath had boarded the ship.

Hook felt a gloomy desire to make his dying speech, lest presently

there should be no time for making it.

"Better for Hook," he cried out loud, "Better for Captain James T. Hook if he had never had an ounce of ambition!" It was only in his darkest hours only that he referred to himself in the third person.

"There are no little children to love me! When they hear my name they race away in pure terror!"

Strange that he should think of this, which had never troubled him before; perhaps the sewing machine brought it to his mind. For long he muttered to himself, staring at Smee, who was hemming placidly away because he was under the conviction that all children feared the name of Smee!

Feared him! Children feared the name of Smee? Why, there was not a child on board the brig that night who did not already love him. He had said horrid things to them and smacked them with the palm of his hand, but they had only clung to him the more. Michael had even tried on his spectacles.

Ah, it would be such a cruel pleasure to tell poor Smee that children thought him quite lovable! Hook itched to do it, but it seemed too brutal even for him to do. Instead, he revolved this mystery in his mind: why do the children find Smee so lovable? Hook pursued the problem like the sleuth-hound that he was. If Smee was lovable, what was it that made him so? A terrible answer suddenly presented itself--"Good form?"

Had his bo'sun Smee good form without knowing it, which kind is the best kind of form of all?

Hook remembered that you have to prove you don't know you have it before you are eligible for Pop, the most elite social club at Eton.

With a cry of rage he raised his iron hand over Smee's head; but he did not tear. What arrested him was this reflection:

"To claw a man because he is good form, what would that be?"

"Bad form!"

The unhappy Hook was as impotent [powerless] as he was damp, and he fell forward like a cut flower.

His dogs thinking him out of the way for a time, discipline instantly relaxed; and they broke into a wicked dance, which brought him to his feet at once, all traces of human weakness gone, as if a bucket of water had passed over him. "Quiet, you scugs," he cried, "or I'll cast anchor in you;" and at once the din was hushed. "Are all the children chained, so that they cannot fly away?"

"Ay, ay."

"Then hoist them up."

The wretched prisoners were dragged up from the hold, all except Wendy, and ranged in line in front of him. For a time he seemed unconscious of their presence. He lolled at his ease, humming, not unmelodiously, snatches of a rude song, and fingering a pack of cards. Ever and anon the ebb and flow of orange light from his cigar gave a touch of colour to his face.

"Now then, bullies," he said briskly, "six of you walk the plank to-night, but I have room for two cabin boys. Which of you is it to be?"

"Don't irritate him unnecessarily," had been Wendy's instructions in the hold; so Tootles stepped forward politely. Tootles hated the idea of signing under such a man, but an instinct told him that it would be prudent to lay the responsibility on an absent person; and though a somewhat silly boy, he knew that mothers alone are always willing to be the buffer. All children know this about mothers, and despise them for it, but make constant use of it.

So Tootles explained prudently, "You see, sir, I don't think my mother would like me to be a pirate. Would your mother like you to be a pirate, Slightly?"

He winked at Slightly, who said mournfully, "I don't think so," as if he wished things had been otherwise. "Would your mother like you to be a pirate, Twin?"

"I don't think so," said the first twin, as clever as the others. "Nibs, would--"

"Stow this gab," roared Hook, and the spokesmen were dragged back. "You, boy," he said, addressing John, "you look as if you had a little pluck in you. Didst never want to be a pirate, my hearty?"

Now John had sometimes experienced this hankering at maths. prep.; and he was struck by Hook's picking him out.

"Well, yes. I once thought of calling myself Red-handed Jack," he said diffidently.

"And a good name too. We'll call you that here, bully, if you join."

"What do you think, Michael?" asked John.

"What would you call me if I join?" Michael demanded.

"Old Blackbearded Joe."

Michael was naturally impressed. "What do you think, John?" He wanted John to decide, and John wanted him to decide.

"Shall we still be respectful subjects of the Queen?" John inquired.

Through Hook's teeth came the answer: "NO! You would have to swear, 'Down with the King.' and truly mean it."

Perhaps John had not behaved very well so far, but he shone out now.

"Then I refuse," he cried, banging the barrel in front of Hook.

"And I refuse too," cried Michael.

"Rule Britannia!" squeaked Curly.

The infuriated pirates buffeted them in the mouth; and Hook roared out, "That seals your doom. Bring up their mother. Get the plank ready."

They were only boys, and they went white as they saw Jukes and Cecco preparing the fatal plank. But they tried to look brave when Wendy was brought up.

No words of mine can tell you how Wendy despised those pirates. To the boys there was at least some glamour in the pirate calling; but all that she saw was that the ship had not been tidied for years. There was not a clean porthole anywhere on the brig. But as the boys

gathered round her she had no thought, of course, save for them.

"So, my beauty," said Hook, as if he spoke in syrup, "you are to see your children walk the plank."

Fine gentlemen though he was, the intensity of his communings had soiled his ruff, and suddenly he knew that she was gazing at it. With a hasty gesture he tried to hide it, but he was too late.

"Are they to die at your hands?" asked Wendy, with a look of such frightful contempt that Hook nearly fainted.

"They are," he snarled. "Silence all," he called gloatingly, "Let us hear a mother's last words to her children."

At this moment Wendy was grand. "These are my last words, dear boys," she said firmly. "I want you to always feel that I have a special message to you from your real mothers, and it is this: 'We hope our sons will die like true English gentlemen.'

You see men like these raving pirates and you see the worst scum this planet has ever produced. Anyone can sink so low as to be a pirate, but it takes true character to be a good man through and through.

They dips their snuffs and snorts their rum free and low, but they are slave to their filthy habits and ere long their teeth are rotting in their heads and their stomachs will accept nothing only mother's milk.

Look at the mighty Hook and you can see the truth of my words. For all his fine clothes stolen off dead men's backs, he is filthy still. He can not command a man here by love for less he is more murderous than they he could not rule at all. They fear even the sound of his tread so much they need a double tot of rum ere he passes them by."

Even the pirates were awed, and Tootles cried out hysterically, "I am going to do what my mother hopes. What are you to do, Nibs?"

"What my mother hopes. What are you to do, Twin?"

"What my mother hopes. John, what are--"

But Hook had found his voice again. "Tie her up!" he shouted. "We'll see how fast she turns her tune.

But it was Smee who tied her to the mast. "See here, honey," he whispered, "I'll save you if you promise to be my mother."

But not even for Smee would she make such a promise. "I would almost rather have no children at all," she said with a scornful sniff.

It is sad to know that not a boy was looking at her as Smee tied her to the mast; the eyes of all were on the plank: that last little walk they were about to take. They were no longer able to hope that they would walk it manfully, for the capacity to think had gone from them; they could stare and shiver only.

Hook smiled on them with his teeth closed, and took a step toward Wendy. His intention was to turn her face so that she should see the boys walking the plank one by one. But he never reached her, he never heard the cry of anguish he hoped to wring from her. He heard something else instead.

It was the terrible tick-tick tock of the crocodile.

They all heard it--pirates, boys, Wendy; and immediately every head was blown in one direction; not to the water whence the sound proceeded, but toward Hook. All knew that what was about to happen

concerned him alone, and that they were no longer actors in a sad play, but they were suddenly become mere spectators.

"Watch this brave pirate's face!" Wendy called. He has no form at all. He must never have been an Englishman.

Very frightful was it to see the change that came over Captain James T. Hook. It was as if he had been clipped at every joint for he fell in a little heap.

The ticking sound came steadily nearer; and in advance of it came this ghastly thought, "The crocodile is about to board the ship!"

Even the iron claw hung inactive; as if knowing that it was no intrinsic part of what the attacking force wanted. Left so fearfully alone, any other man would have lain with his eyes shut where he fell: but the gigantic brain of Hook was still working, and under its guidance he crawled on his knees along the deck as far from the sound as he could go. The pirates respectfully cleared a passage for him, and it was only when he brought up against the bulwarks that he spoke.

"Hide me!" he cried hoarsely.

They gathered round him, all eyes averted from the ticking sound that was slithering aboard. They had no thought of fighting it. It was Fate.

Only when Hook was hidden from them did curiosity loosen the limbs of the boys so that they could rush to the ship's side to see the crocodile climbing it. Then they got the strangest surprise of the Night of Nights; for it was no crocodile that was coming to their aid. It was Peter Pan.

He signed to them not to give vent to any cry of surprise that might rouse suspicion. Then he went on ticking.

Chapter 15 "IT'S HOOK OR ME, THIS TIME"

Odd things happen to all of us on our way through life without our noticing for a time that they have happened. Thus, to take an instance, we suddenly discover that we have been deaf in one ear for we don't know how long, but, say, half an hour. Now such an experience had come that night to Peter. When last we saw him he was stealing across the island with one finger to his lips and his dagger at the ready. He had seen the crocodile pass by without noticing anything peculiar about it, but by and by he remembered that it had not been ticking. At first he thought this eerie, but soon concluded rightly that the clock had run down.

Without giving a thought to what might be the feelings of a fellow-creature thus abruptly deprived of its closest companion, Peter began to consider how he could turn the catastrophe to his own use; and he decided to tick, so that wild beasts should believe he was the crocodile and let him pass unmolested. He ticked superbly, but with one unforeseen result. The crocodile was among those who heard the sound, and it followed him, though whether with the purpose of regaining what it had lost, or merely as a friend under the belief that it was again ticking itself, will never be certainly known, for, like slaves to a fixed idea, the crocodile was a stupid beast.

Peter reached the shore without mishap, and went straight on, his legs encountering the water as if quite unaware that they had entered a new element. Thus many animals pass from land to water, but no other human of whom I know. As he swam he had but one thought: "It's Hook or me, this time." He had ticked so long that he now went on ticking without knowing that he was doing it. Had he known he would have stopped, for to board the brig by help of the tick, though an ingenious idea, had not occurred to him.

On the contrary, he thought he had scaled her side as noiseless as a mouse; and he was amazed to see the pirates cowering away from him, with Hook in their midst as abject as if he had heard the crocodile.

The crocodile! No sooner did Peter remember it than he heard the ticking. At first he thought the sound did come from the crocodile, and he looked behind him swiftly. Then he realised that he was doing the ticking himself, and in a flash he understood the situation. "How clever of me!" he thought at once, and signed to the boys not to burst into applause.

It was at this moment that Ed Teynte the quartermaster emerged from the forecastle and came along the deck. Now, reader, time what happened by your watch. Peter struck true and deep. John clapped his hands on the ill-fated pirate's mouth to stifle the dying groan. He fell forward. Four boys caught him to prevent the thud. Peter gave the signal, and the carrion was cast overboard. There was a splash, and then silence. How long has it taken?

"One!" (Slightly had begun to count.)

None too soon, Peter, every inch of him on tiptoe, vanished into the cabin; for more than one pirate was screwing up his courage to look round. They could hear each other's distressed breathing now, which showed them that the more terrible sound had passed.

"It's gone, captain," Smee said, wiping off his spectacles. "All's still again."

Slowly Hook let his head emerge from his ruff, and listened so intently that he could have caught the echo of the tick. There was not a sound, and he drew himself up firmly to his full height.

"Then here's to Johnny Plank!" he cried brazenly, hating the boys more than ever because they had seen him unbend. He broke into the villainous ditty: "Yo ho, yo ho, the frisky plank, You walks along it so, Till it goes down and you goes down To Davy Jones below!"

To terrorize the prisoners the more, though with a certain loss of dignity, he danced along an imaginary plank, grimacing at them as he sang; and when he finished he cried, "Do you want a touch of the cat o' nine tails before you walk the plank?"

At that they fell on their knees. "No, no!" they cried so piteously that every pirate smiled.

"Fetch the cat, Jukes," said Hook; "it's in the cabin."

The cabin! Peter was in the cabin! The children gazed at each other.

"Ay, ay," said Jukes blithely, and he strode into the cabin. They followed him with their eyes; they scarce knew that Hook had resumed his song, his dogs joining in with him: "Yo ho, yo ho, the scratching cat, Its tails are nine, you know, And when they're writ upon your back--"

What was the last line will never be known, for of a sudden the song was stayed by a dreadful screech from the cabin. It wailed through the ship, and died away. Then was heard a crowing sound which was well understood by the boys, but to the pirates was almost more eerie than the screech.

"What was that?" cried Hook.

"Two," said Slightly solemnly.

The Italian Cecco hesitated for a moment and then swung into the cabin. He tottered out, haggard.

"What's the matter with Bill Jukes, you dog?" hissed Hook, towering over him.

"The matter wi' him is he's dead, stabbed," replied Cecco in a hollow voice.

"Bill Jukes dead!" cried the startled pirates.

"The cabin's as black as a pit," Cecco said, almost gibbering, "but there is something terrible in there: the thing you heard crowing."

The exultation of the boys, the lowering looks of the pirates, both were seen by Hook.

"Cecco," he said in his most steely voice, "go back and fetch me out that doodle-doo."

Cecco, bravest of the brave, cowered before his captain, crying "No, no"; but Hook was purring to his claw.

"Did you say you would go, Cecco?" he said musingly.

Cecco went, first flinging his arms despairingly. There was no more singing, all listened now; and again came a death-screach and again a crow.

No one spoke except Slightly. "Three," he said.

Hook rallied his dogs with a gesture. "'S'death and odds fish," he thundered, "who is to bring me that doodle-doo?"

"Wait till Cecco comes out," growled Starkey, and the others took up the cry.

"I think I heard you volunteer, Starkey," said Hook, purring again.

"No, by thunder!" Starkey cried.

"My hook thinks you did," said Hook, crossing to him. "I wonder if it would not be advisable, Starkey, to humour the hook?"

"I'll swing before I go in there," replied Starkey doggedly, and again he had the support of the crew.

"Is this mutiny?" asked Hook more pleasantly than ever. "Starkey's ringleader!"

"Captain, mercy!" Starkey whimpered, all of a tremble now.

"Shake hands, Starkey," said Hook, proffering his claw.

Starkey looked round for help, but all deserted him. As he backed up Hook advanced, and now the red spark was in his eye. With a despairing scream the Starkey leapt upon Long Tom and precipitated himself into the sea.

"Four," said Slightly.

"And now," Hook said courteously, "did any other gentlemen say mutiny?" Seizing a lantern and raising his claw with a menacing gesture, "I'll bring out that doodle-doo myself," he said, and sped into the cabin.

"Five." How Slightly longed to say it. He wetted his lips to be ready, but Hook came staggering out, without his lantern.

"Something blew out the light," he said a little unsteadily.

"Something!" echoed Mullins.

"What of Cecco?" demanded Noodler.

"He's as dead as Jukes," said Hook shortly.

His reluctance to return to the cabin impressed them all unfavourably, and the mutinous sounds again broke forth. All pirates are superstitious, and Cookson cried, "They do say the surest sign a ship's accurst is when there's one on board more than can be accounted for."

"I've heard," muttered Mullins, "he always boards the pirate craft last. Had he a tail, captain?"

"They say," said another, looking viciously at Hook, "that when he comes it's in the likeness of the wickedest man aboard."

"Had he a hook, Captain Hook?" asked Cookson insolently; and one after another the pirates took up the cry, "The ship's doomed!" At this the children could not resist raising a cheer. Hook had well-nigh forgotten his prisoners, but as he swung round on them now his face lit up again.

"Lads," he cried to his crew, "now here's a notion. Open the cabin door and drive them in. Let them fight the doodle-doo for their lives. If they kill him, we're so much the better; if he kills them, we're none the worse."

His dogs admired Hook, and devotedly they did his bidding. The boys, pretending to struggle, were pushed into the cabin and the door was closed on them.

"Now, listen!" cried Hook, and all listened. But not one dared to face the door. Yes, one, Wendy, who all this time had been bound to the mast. It was for neither a scream nor a crow that she was watching for, it was for the reappearance of Peter.

She had not long to wait. In the cabin he had found the thing for which he had gone in search: the key that would free the children of their manacles, and now they all stole forth, armed with such weapons as they could find. First signing them to hide, Peter cut Wendy's bonds, and then nothing could have been easier than for them all to fly off together; but one thing barred the way for Peter, an

oath, "It's Hook or me this time." So when he had freed Wendy, he whispered for her to conceal herself with the others, and himself took her place by the mast, her cloak around him so that he should pass for her. Then he took a great breath and crowed.

To the pirates it was a voice crying that all the boys lay slain in the cabin; and they were panic-stricken. Hook tried to hearten them; but like the dogs he had made them be they showed him their fangs, and he knew that if he took his eyes off them now they would leap at him.

"Lads," he said, ready to cajole or strike as need be, but never quailing for an instant, "I've thought it out. There's a Jonah aboard."

"Ay," they snarled, "a man wi' a hook."

"No, lads, no, it's the girl. Never was luck on a pirate ship wi' a woman on board. We'll right the ship when she's gone."

Some of them remembered that this had been a saying of Flint's. "It's worth trying," they said doubtfully.

"Fling the girl overboard," cried Hook; and they made a rush at the figure in the cloak.

"There's none can save you now, missy," Mullins hissed jeeringly.

"There's one," replied the figure.

"Who's that?"

"Peter Pan the avenger!" came the terrible answer; and as he spoke Peter flung off his cloak. Then they all knew who 'twas that had been undoing them in the cabin, and twice Hook essayed to speak and twice he failed. In that frightful moment his fierce heart broke.

At last he cried, "Cleave him to the brisket!" but it was said without conviction.

"Down, boys, and at them!" Peter's voice rang out; and in another moment the clash of arms was resounding through the ship. Had the pirates kept together it is certain that they would have won; but the onset came when they were still unstrung, and they ran hither and thither, striking wildly, each thinking himself the last survivor of the crew. Man to man they were the stronger; but they fought on the defensive only, which enabled the boys to hunt in pairs and choose their quarry. Some of the miscreants leapt into the sea; others hid in dark recesses, where they were found by Slightly, who did not fight, but ran about with a lantern which he flashed in their faces, so that they were half blinded and fell as an easy prey to the reeking swords of the other boys. There was little sound to be heard but the clang of weapons, an occasional screech or splash, and Slightly monotonously counting--five--six--seven eight--nine--ten--eleven.

All were gone when a group of savage boys surrounded Hook, who seemed to have a charmed life, as he kept them at bay in that circle of fire. They had done for his dogs, but this man alone seemed to be a match for them all. Again and again they closed upon him, and again and again he hewed a clear space. He had lifted up one boy with his hook, and was using him as a shield, when another, who had just passed his sword through Mullins, sprang into the fray.

"Put up your swords, boys," cried the newcomer, "this man is mine."

Thus suddenly Hook found himself face to face with Peter. The others drew back and formed a ring around them.

For long, tense moment Hook and Peter Pan looked at one another, Hook shuddering slightly, and Peter with the strange smile upon his face.

"So, Pan," said Hook at last, "this is all your doing."

"Ay, James T. Hook," came the stern answer, "This is all my doing."

"Proud and insolent youth," said Hook, "prepare to meet thy doom."

"Dark and sinister man," Peter answered, "you are your own doom."

Without more words they fell to, and for a space there was no advantage to either blade. Peter was a superb swordsman, and parried with dazzling rapidity; ever and anon he followed up a feint with a lunge that got past his foe's defence, but his shorter reach stood him in ill stead, and he could not drive the steel home. Hook, scarcely his inferior in brilliancy, but not quite so nimble in wrist play, forced him back by the weight of his onset, hoping suddenly to end all with a long, lunging thrust, taught him long ago by Barbecue at Rio; but to his astonishment he found this thrust turned aside again and again. Then he sought to close and give the quietus with his iron hook, which all this time had been pawing the air; but Peter doubled under it and, lunging fiercely, pierced Hook in the ribs. At the sight of his own blood, whose peculiar colour, you remember, was offensive to him, the sword fell from Hook's hand, and he was at Peter's mercy.

"Now!" cried all the boys, but with a magnificent gesture Peter invited his opponent to pick up his sword. Hook did so instantly, but he had a tragic feeling that Peter was showing good form.

Hitherto he had thought it was some fiend fighting him, but darker

suspicious assailed him now.

"Pan, who and what art thou?" he cried huskily.

"I'm youth, I'm joy," Peter answered at a venture, "I'm a little bird that has broken out of the egg."

This, of course, was nonsense; but it was proof to the unhappy Hook that Peter did not know in the least who or what he was, which is the very pinnacle of good form.

"To't again," he cried despairingly.

He fought now like a human flail, and every sweep of that terrible sword would have severed in twain any man or boy who obstructed it; but Peter fluttered round him as if the very wind it made blew him out of the danger zone. And again and again he darted in and pricked.

Hook was fighting now without hope. That passionate breast no longer asked for life; but for one boon it craved: to see Peter show bad form before it was cold forever.

Abandoning the fight he rushed into the powder magazine and fired up a wet fuse. "In two minutes," he cried, "the ship will be blown to pieces."

Now, now, he thought, true form will show. But, to his astonishment, Peter issued from the powder magazine with the shell in his hands and the wet fuse still sputtering. He calmly flung it overboard then motioned for Hook to continue the fight.

That was when Hook began wondering what sort of form he himself was showing? Misguided man though he was, in the end at least he

was true to the traditions of his race. The other boys were flying around him now, flouting, scornful; and he staggered about the deck striking up at them impotently, his mind was no longer with them; it was slouching in the playing fields of long ago, or being sent up to the headmaster for good, or watching the wall-game from a famous wall. And his shoes were right, and his waistcoat was right, and his tie was right, and his socks were right. James Hook, thou art not wholly an unheroic figure, farewell.

Seeing Peter slowly advancing upon him through the air with dagger poised, he sprang upon the bulwarks and cast himself into the sea. As his arm reached for the first stroke that would carry him towards the shore he heard the crocodile ticking behind him.

His heart sank within him and he turned with his steel claw upraised; the point he sank between the eyes of the crocodile. Both man and beast disappeared beneath the waves of the choppy sea.

Thus perished James T. Hook.

"Seventeen," Slightly sang out; but he was not quite correct in his figures. Fifteen paid the penalty for their crimes that night; but two reached the shore: Starkey to be captured by the redskins, who made him be the wet nurse for all their papooses, a melancholy come-down for a pirate; and Smee, who henceforth wandered about the world in his spectacles, making a precarious living by saying he was the only man that James T. Hook had ever feared.

Wendy, of course, had stood by taking no further part in the fight, though watching Peter with glistening eyes; but now that all was over

she became prominent again. She praised them all equally, and shuddered delightfully when Michael showed her the place where he had killed one; and then she took them into Hook's cabin and pointed to his watch which was hanging on a nail. It said "half-past one!"

The lateness of the hour was almost the biggest thing of all. She got them to bed in the pirates' bunks pretty quickly, you may be sure; all but Peter, who strutted up and down on the deck, until at last he fell asleep by the side of Long Tom. He had one of his dreams that night, and cried in his sleep for a long time, and Wendy held him tightly.

Chapter 16 THE RETURN HOME

By three bells that morning they were all stirring their legs; for the choppy sea was now a big sea running; and Tootles, the bo'sun, was among them, with a rope's end in his hand and chewing tobacco. They all donned pirate clothes cut off at the knee, shaved smartly, and tumbled up, with the true nautical roll and hitching their trousers. Nibs and John were first and second mate. There was a woman aboard. The rest were only jolly tars serving before the mast, and they lived in the fo'c'sle. Peter had already lashed himself to the wheel; but he piped all hands and delivered a short address to them; Peter said he hoped they would do their duty like gallant hearties, but that he knew they were the scum of Rio and the Gold Coast, and if they snapped at him he would tear them. The bluff strident words struck the solid note that sailors understood, and they cheered him

lustily. Then a few sharp orders were given, and they turned the ship round, and nosed her for the mainland of Neverland.

Captain Pan calculated, after consulting the ship's chart, that if this weather lasted they should strike the Azores about the 21st of June, after which it would save time just to fly.

Some of them wanted it to be an honest ship and others were in favour of keeping it a pirate; but the captain treated them as dogs, and they dared not express their wishes to him even in a round robin, as they had to Cpt. Hook. Instant obedience was the only safe thing. Slightly got a dozen lashes for looking perplexed when told to take the soundings. The general feeling was that Peter was honest just now to lull Wendy's suspicions, but that there might be a change when the new suit was ready, which, against her will, she was making for him out of some of Hook's wickedest garments. It was afterwards whispered among them that on the first night he wore this suit he sat long in the cabin with Hook's cigar-holder in his mouth and one hand clenched, all but for the forefinger, which he bent and held threateningly aloft like a hook.

Let us return now to that desolate home from which three of our main characters had taken heartless flight from so long ago. Even now we venture into that familiar nursery only because its lawful occupants are on their way home; we are merely hurrying on in advance of them to see that their beds are properly aired and that Mr. and Mrs. Darling do not go out for the evening. We are no more than servants. Why on earth should their beds be properly aired, seeing that they left them in such a thankless hurry?

Would it not serve them jolly well right if they came back and found that their parents were spending the week-end in the country? But no, Mrs. Darling is just waking up and she says: "O Nana, I dreamt my dear ones had come back."

Nana had filmy eyes, but it was all she could do to put her paw gently on her mistress's lap; and they were sitting together thus when Mr. Darling came in to say Good Night. Just as he turned himself about Wendy and John and Michael flew into the room. They alighted on the floor, quite unashamed of themselves, and the youngest one had already forgotten his home.

"John," he said, looking around him doubtfully, "I think I have been here before."

"Of course you have, you silly. There is your old bed."

It was then that Mrs. Darling began playing a sad tune on the piano again. "It's mother!" cried Wendy, peeping.

"So it is!" said John.

"Then are you not really our mother, Wendy?" asked Michael, who was surely sleepy.

"Oh dear, no!" exclaimed Wendy.

"Let us creep in," John suggested, "and put our hands over her eyes."

But Wendy, who saw that they must break the joyous news more gently, had a better plan.

"Let us all slip into our beds, and be there when she comes in, just as if we had never been away."

And so when Mrs. Darling went back to the night-nursery to see if her husband was asleep, all the beds were occupied. The children waited for her cry of joy, but it did not come. She saw them, but she did not believe they were there. You see, she saw them in their beds so often in her dreams that she thought this was just the dream hanging around her still.

She sat down in the chair by the fire, where in the old days she had nursed them. They could not understand this, and a cold fear fell upon all the three of them.

"Mother!" Wendy cried.

"That's Wendy," she said, but still she was sure it was the dream.

"Mother!"

"That's John," she said.

"Mother!" cried Michael as if he really knew her now.

"That's Michael," she said, and she stretched out her arms for the three little selfish children they would never envelop again. Yes, they did, they went round Wendy and John and Michael, who had slipped out of bed and run to her.

"George, George!" she cried when she could speak; and Mr. Darling woke to share her bliss, and Nana came rushing in. There could not have been a lovelier sight; but there was none to see it except a little boy who was staring in at the window. He had had ecstasies innumerable that other children can never know; but he was looking through the window at the one joy from which he must be for ever barred.

Chapter 17 WHEN WENDY GREW UP

The other boys were waiting downstairs to give Wendy time to explain about them; and when they had counted five hundred they went up. They went up by the stair, because they thought this would make a better impression. They stood in a row in front of Mrs. Darling, with their hats off, and wishing they were not wearing their pirate clothes. They said nothing, but their eyes asked her to have them. They ought to have looked at Mr. Darling also, but they forgot about him.

Of course Mrs. Darling said at once that she would have them; but Mr. Darling was curiously depressed, and they saw that he considered six a rather large number.

"I must say," he said to Wendy, "that you don't do things by halves," a grudging remark which the twins thought was pointed at them.

The first twin was the proud one, and he asked, flushing, "Do you think we should be too much of a handful, sir? Because, if so, we can go away."

"Father!" Wendy cried, shocked; but still the cloud was on him. He knew he was behaving unworthily, but he could not help it.

"We could lie doubled up," said Nibs.

"I always cut their hair myself," said Wendy.

"George!" Mrs. Darling exclaimed, pained to see her dear one showing himself in such an unfavourable light.

Then he burst into tears, and the truth came out. He was as glad to have them as she was, he said, but he thought they should have asked his consent as well as hers, instead of treating him as a cypher in his own house.

"I don't think he is a zero," Tootles cried instantly. "Do you think he is a cypher, Curly?"

"No, I don't. Do you think he is a cypher, Slightly?"

"Rather not. Twin, what do you think?"

It turned out that not one of them thought him a cypher; and he was absurdly gratified, and said he would find space for them all in the drawing-room if they fitted in.

"We'll fit in, sir," they assured him.

"Then follow the leader," he cried gaily. "Mind you, I am not sure that we have a drawing-room, but we pretend we have, and it's all the same. Hoop la!"

He went off dancing through the house, and they all cried "Hoop la!" and danced after him, searching for the drawing-room; they may not have found it, but at any rate they found corners, and all the boys fitted in.

As for Peter, he saw Wendy once again before he flew away. He did not exactly come to the window, but he brushed against it in passing so that she could open it if she liked and call to him. That is what she did.

"Hullo, Wendy, good-bye," he said.

"Oh dear, are you going away?"

"Yes."

"You don't feel, Peter," she said falteringly, "that you would like to say anything to my parents about a very sweet subject?"

"No."

"About me, perhaps, Peter?"

"No."

Mrs. Darling came to the window, for at present she was keeping a sharp eye on Wendy. She told Peter that she had adopted all the other boys, and would like to adopt him also.

"Would you send me off to school?" he inquired craftily.

"Yes."

"And then to an office?"

"I suppose so."

"Soon I would be a man?"

"Very soon."

"I don't want to go to school and learn solemn things," he told her passionately. "I don't want to be a man. O Wendy's mother, if I was to wake up and feel there was a beard!"

"Peter," said Wendy the comforter, "I should love you in a beard;" and Mrs. Darling stretched out her arms to him, but he repulsed her.

"Keep back, lady, no one is going to catch me and make me a man."

"But where are you going to live?"

"With Tink in the house we built for Wendy. The fairies are to put it high up among the tree tops where they sleep at nights."

"How lovely," cried Wendy so longingly that Mrs. Darling tightened her grip.

"I thought all the fairies were dead," Mrs. Darling said.

"There are always a lot of young ones," explained Wendy, who was now quite an authority, "because you see when a new baby laughs for the first time a new fairy is born, and as there are always new babies there are always new fairies. They live in nests on the tops of trees; and the mauve ones are boys and the white ones are girls, and the blue ones are just little sillies who are not sure what they are."

"I shall have such fun," said Peter, with his hopeful eye on Wendy.

"It will be rather lonely in the evening," she said, "sitting by the fire."

"I shall have Tink."

"Tink can't go a twentieth part of the way round," she reminded him a little tartly.

"Sneaky tell-tale!" Tink called out from somewhere round the corner.

"It doesn't matter," Peter said.

"O Peter, you know it does too matter."

"Well, then, come with me to the little house."

"May I, mummy?"

"Certainly not. I have got you home again, and I mean to keep you."

"But he does so need a mother."

"So do you, my love."

"Oh, all right," Peter said, as if he had asked her merely for the sake of politeness; but Mrs. Darling saw his mouth twitch, and she made this handsome offer: to let Wendy go to him for a week every year to do his spring cleaning. Wendy would have preferred a more permanent arrangement; and it seemed to her that spring would be long in coming; but this promise sent Peter away quite gay again.

"You won't forget me, Peter, will you, before spring cleaning time comes?"

Of course Peter promised; and then he flew away. He took Mrs. Darling's kiss with him. The kiss that had been for no one else, Peter took quite easily. Funny. But she seemed satisfied.

Of course all the boys went to school; and most of them got into Class III, but Slightly was put first into Class IV and then into Class V. Class I is the top class.

Michael was with Wendy when Peter came for her at the end of the first year. She flew away with Peter in the frock she had woven from leaves and berries in the Neverland, and her one fear was that he might notice how short it had become; but he never noticed, he had so much to say about himself.

Wendy had looked forward to thrilling talks with him about old times, but new adventures had crowded the old ones from his mind.

"Who is Captain Hook?" he asked with interest when she spoke of the arch enemy he had dispatched.

"Don't you remember?" she asked in amazement, "You killed him and saved all our lives?"

"I guess I forget them after I kill them," he replied carelessly.

When she expressed a doubtful hope that Tinker Bell would be glad to see her he said, "Who is Tinker Bell?"

"O Peter," she said, shocked; but even after she explained he could not remember.

"There are such a lot of them," he said. "I expect she is no more."

Wendy was pained most of all to learn that the past year was but as yesterday to Peter; it had seemed such a long year of waiting to her. But he was exactly as fascinating as ever, and they had a lovely time of spring cleaning in the little house on the tree tops.

Next year he did not come for her. She waited in a new frock because the old one simply would not meet; but he never came.

"Perhaps he is ill," Michael said.

"You know he is never ill."

Michael came close to her and whispered, with a shiver, "Perhaps there is no such person, Wendy!" and then Wendy would have cried if Michael had not been crying already.

Peter came next spring cleaning; and the strange thing was that he never knew he had missed a year.

That was the last time the girl Wendy ever saw him. For a little longer she tried for his sake not to have growing pains; and she felt she was

untrue to him when she got a prize for general knowledge. But the years came and went without bringing back the careless boy; and when they met again Wendy was a married woman, and Peter was no more to her than a little dust in the box in which she had kept her toys. Wendy was married in white with a pink sash. It is strange to think that Peter did not alight in the church and forbid the formal announcement of a marriage.

The Years rolled on again, and Wendy had a daughter. Her name was Jane, and she always had an odd inquiring look, as if from the moment she arrived on the mainland she wanted to ask questions. When she was old enough to ask them they were mostly about Peter Pan. She loved to hear the stories of Peter, and Wendy told her all she could remember in the very nursery from which the famous flight had taken place. It was Jane's nursery now, for her father had bought it at the three per cents mortgage rate from Wendy's father, who was no longer fond of stairs. Mrs. Darling was now dead and forgotten.

There were only two beds in the nursery now, Jane's and her nurse's; and there was no kennel, for Nana also had passed away. She died of old age, and at the end she had been rather difficult to get on with; being very firmly convinced that no one knew how to look after children except herself.

Once a week Jane's nurse had her evening off; and then it was Wendy's part to put Jane to bed. That was the time for stories. It was Jane's invention to raise the sheet over her mother's head and her own, this making a tent, and in the awful darkness to whisper:

"What do we see now?"

"I don't think I see anything to-night," says Wendy, with a feeling that if Nana were here she would object to further conversation.

"Yes, you do," says Jane, "you see when you were a little girl."

"That is a long time ago, sweetheart," says Wendy. "Ah me, how time does fly!"

"Does it fly," asks the artful child, "the way you flew when you were a little girl?"

"The way I flew? Do you know, Jane, I sometimes wonder whether I ever did really fly."

"Yes, you did."

"The dear old days when I could fly!"

"Why can't you fly now, mother?"

"Because I am grown up, dearest. When people grow up they forget the way."

"Why do they forget the way?"

"Because they are no longer gay and innocent and heartless. It is only the gay and innocent and heartless who can fly."

"What is gay and innocent and heartless? I do wish I were gay and innocent and heartless."

Or perhaps Wendy admits she does see something.

"I do believe," she says, "that it is this nursery."

"I do believe it is," says Jane. "Go on."

They are now embarked on the great adventure of the night when Peter flew in looking for his shadow.

"The foolish fellow," says Wendy, "tried to stick it on with soap, and when he could not he cried, and that woke me, and I sewed it on for him."

"You have missed a bit," interrupts Jane, who now knows the story better than her mother. "When you saw him sitting on the floor crying, what did you say?"

"I sat up in bed and I said, 'Boy, why are you crying?'"

"Yes, that was it," says Jane, with a big breath.

"And then he flew us all away to the Neverland and the fairies and the pirates and the redskins and the mermaid's lagoon, and the home under the ground, and the little house."

"Yes! which did you like best of all?"

"I think I liked the home under the ground best of all."

"Yes, so do I. What was the last thing Peter ever said to you?"

"The last thing he ever said to me was, 'Just always be waiting for me, and then some night you will hear me crowing like a banshee.'"

"Yes."

"But, alas, he forgot all about me," Wendy said it with a smile. She was as grown up as that.

"What did his crow sound like?" Jane asked one evening.

"It was like this," Wendy said, trying to imitate Peter's crow.

"No, it wasn't," Jane said gravely, "it was like this;" and she did it ever so much better than her mother.

Wendy was a little startled. "My darling, how can you know?"

"I often hear it when I am sleeping," Jane said.

"Ah yes, many girls hear it when they are sleeping, but I was the only one who heard it awake."

"Lucky you," said Jane.

And then one night came the tragedy. It was the spring of the year, and the story had been told for the night, and Jane was now asleep in her bed. Wendy was sitting on the floor, very close to the fire, so as to see to darn, for there was no other light in the nursery; and while she sat darning she heard a crow. Then the window blew open as of old, and Peter dropped in on the floor.

He was exactly the same as ever, and Wendy saw at once that he still had all his first teeth.

He was still a darling little boy, and she was all grown up. She huddled by the fire not daring to move, helpless and guilty, a big woman.

"Hullo, Wendy," he said, not noticing any difference, for he was thinking chiefly of himself; and in the dim light her white dress might have been the nightgown in which he had seen her first.

"Hullo, Peter," she replied faintly, squeezing herself as small as possible. Something inside her was crying "Woman, Woman, let go of me."

"Hullo, where is John?" he asked, suddenly missing the third bed.

"John is not here now," she gasped.

"Is Michael asleep?" he asked, with a careless glance at Jane.

"Yes," she answered; and now she felt that she was untrue to Jane as well as to Peter.

"That is not Michael," she said quickly, lest a judgment should fall on her.

Peter looked. "Hullo, is it a new one?"

"Yes."

"Boy or girl?"

"Girl."

Now surely he would understand; but not a bit of it.

"Peter," she said, faltering, "are you expecting me to fly away with you?"

"Of course; that is why I have come." He added a little sternly, "Have you forgotten that this is spring cleaning time?"

She knew it was useless to say that he had let many spring cleaning times pass.

"I can't come," she said apologetically, "I have forgotten how to fly."

"I'll soon teach you again."

"O Peter, don't waste your fairy dust on me."

She had risen; and now at last a fear assailed him. "What is it?" he cried, shrinking.

"I will turn up the light," she said, "and then you can see for yourself."

For almost the only time in his life, Peter was afraid. "Don't turn up the light," he cried.

She let her hands play in the hair of the tragic boy. She was not a little girl heart-broken about him; she was a grown woman smiling at it all, but nonetheless, they were wet-eyed smiles.

Then she turned up the light, and Peter saw. He gave a cry of pain; and when the tall beautiful creature stooped to lift him in her arms he drew back sharply.

"What is it?" he cried again.

She had to tell him.

"I am old, Peter. I am ever so much more than twenty. I grew up long ago."

"You promised not to!"

"I couldn't help it. I am a married woman, Peter."

"No, you're not."

"Yes, and the little girl in the bed is my baby."

"No, she's not."

But he supposed she was; and he took a step towards the sleeping child with his dagger upraised. Of course he did not strike. He sat down on the floor instead and sobbed; and Wendy did not know how to comfort him, though she could have done it so easily once.

She was only a woman now, and she ran out of the room to try to think. Peter continued to cry, and soon his sobs woke Jane.

She sat up straight in bed. **"Little Boy," she said, "why are you crying?"**

THE END..