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Peter Pan

[PETER AND WENDY]

by J. M. Barrie [James Matthew Barrie]

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Chapter I.

PETER BREAKS THROUGH

All children, except one, grow up. They soon know that they will grow

up, and the way Wendy knew was this. One day when she was two years old

she was playing in a garden, and she plucked another flower and ran

with it to her mother. I suppose she must have looked rather

delightful, for Mrs. Darling put her hand to her heart and cried, “Oh,

why can’t you remain like this for ever!” This was all that passed

between them on the subject, but henceforth Wendy knew that she must

grow up. You always know after you are two. Two is the beginning of the

end.

Of course they lived at 14, and until Wendy came her mother was the

chief one. She was a lovely lady, with a romantic mind and such a sweet

mocking mouth. Her romantic mind was like the tiny boxes, one within

the other, that come from the puzzling East, however many you discover

there is always one more; and her sweet mocking mouth had one kiss on

it that Wendy could never get, though there it was, perfectly

conspicuous in the right-hand corner.

The way Mr. Darling won her was this: the many gentlemen who had been

boys when she was a girl discovered simultaneously that they loved her,

and they all ran to her house to propose to her except Mr. Darling, who

took a cab and nipped in first, and so he got her. He 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 got it, but I can picture him trying, and then going off in a

passion, slamming the door.

Mr. Darling used to boast to Wendy that her mother not only loved him

but respected him. He was one of those deep ones who know about stocks

and shares. Of course no one really knows, but he quite seemed to know,

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 was missing; but by and by whole cauliflowers dropped

out, and instead of them there were pictures of babies without faces.

She drew them when she should have been totting up. They were Mrs.

Darling’s guesses.

Wendy came first, then John, then Michael.

For a week or two after Wendy came it was doubtful whether they would

be able to keep her, as she was another mouth to feed. Mr. Darling was

frightfully proud of her, but he was very honourable, and he sat on the

edge of Mrs. Darling’s bed, holding her hand and calculating expenses,

while she looked at him imploringly. She wanted to risk it, come what

might, but that was not his way; his way was 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 one pound seventeen here, and two and six at the office; I can

cut off my coffee at the office, say ten shillings, making two nine and

six, with your eighteen and three makes three nine seven, with five

naught naught in my cheque-book makes eight nine seven—who is that

moving?—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 said nine nine seven; the question is, can we try it for a year on

nine nine seven?”

“Of course we can, George,” she cried. But she was prejudiced in

Wendy’s favour, and he was really the grander character of the two.

“Remember mumps,” he warned her almost threateningly, and off he went

again. “Mumps one pound, that is what I have put down, but I daresay it

will be more like thirty shillings—don’t speak—measles one five, German

measles half a guinea, makes two fifteen six—don’t waggle your

finger—whooping-cough, say fifteen shillings”—and so on it went, and it

added up differently each time; but at last Wendy just got through,

with mumps reduced to twelve six, and the two kinds of measles treated

as one.

There was the same excitement over John, and Michael had even a

narrower squeak; but both were kept, and soon, you might have seen the

three of them going in a row to Miss Fulsom’s Kindergarten school,

accompanied by their nurse.

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. As they were poor, owing to the amount of milk the children

drank, this nurse was a prim Newfoundland dog, called Nana, who had

belonged to no one in particular until the Darlings engaged her. She

had always thought children important, however, and the Darlings had

become acquainted with her in Kensington Gardens, where she spent most

of her spare time peeping into perambulators, and was much hated by

careless nursemaids, whom she followed to their homes and complained of

to their mistresses. She 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. She had a genius for knowing when a cough is a thing to have

no patience with and when it needs stocking around your throat. She

believed to her last day in old-fashioned remedies like rhubarb leaf,

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

children to school, walking sedately by their side when they were well

behaved, and butting them back into line if they strayed. On John’s

footer days she never once forgot his sweater, and she usually carried

an umbrella in her mouth in case of rain. There is a room in the

basement of Miss Fulsom’s school where the nurses wait. They sat on

forms, while Nana lay on the floor, but that was the only difference.

They affected to ignore her as of an inferior social status to

themselves, and she despised their light talk. She resented 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 and made a dash at John’s hair.

No nursery could possibly have been conducted more correctly, and Mr.

Darling knew it, yet he sometimes wondered uneasily whether the

neighbours talked.

He had his position in the city to consider.

Nana also troubled him in another way. He had sometimes a feeling that

she did not admire him. “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. 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 ten again. The gaiety of those romps!

And gayest of all was Mrs. Darling, who would pirouette so wildly that

all you could see of her was the kiss, and then if you had dashed at

her you might have got it. There never was a simpler happier family

until the coming of Peter Pan.

Mrs. Darling first heard of Peter when she was tidying up her

children’s minds. It is the nightly custom of every good mother after

her children are asleep to rummage in their minds and put things

straight for next morning, repacking into their proper places the many

articles that have wandered during the day. If you could keep awake

(but of course you can’t) you would see your own mother doing this, and

you would find it very interesting to watch her. It is quite like

tidying up drawers. You would see her on her knees, I expect, lingering

humorously over some of your contents, wondering where on earth you had

picked this thing up, making discoveries sweet and not so sweet,

pressing this to her cheek as if it were as nice as a kitten, and

hurriedly stowing that out of sight. When you wake in the morning, the

naughtiness and evil passions with which you went to bed have been

folded up small and placed at the bottom of your mind and on the top,

beautifully aired, are spread out your prettier thoughts, ready for you

to put on.

I don’t know whether you have ever seen a map of a person’s mind.

Doctors sometimes draw maps of other parts of you, and your own map can

become intensely interesting, but catch them trying to draw a map of a

child’s mind, which is not only confused, but keeps going round all the

time. There are zigzag lines on it, just like your temperature on a

card, and these are probably roads in the island, for the Neverland is

always more or less an island, with astonishing splashes of colour here

and there, and coral reefs and rakish-looking craft in the offing, and

savages and lonely lairs, and gnomes who are mostly tailors, and caves

through which a river runs, and princes with six elder brothers, and a

hut fast going to decay, and one very small old lady with a hooked

nose. It would be an easy map if that were all, but there is also first

day at school, religion, fathers, the round pond, needle-work, murders,

hangings, verbs that take the dative, chocolate pudding day, getting

into braces, say ninety-nine, three-pence for pulling out your tooth

yourself, and so on, and either these are part of the island or they

are another map showing through, and it is all rather confusing,

especially as nothing will stand still.

Of course the Neverlands vary a good deal. John’s, for instance, had a

lagoon with flamingoes flying over it at which John was shooting, while

Michael, who was very small, had a flamingo with lagoons flying over

it. John lived in a boat turned upside down on the sands, Michael in a

wigwam, Wendy in a house of leaves deftly sewn together. John had no

friends, Michael had friends at night, Wendy had a pet wolf forsaken by

its parents, but on the whole the Neverlands have a family resemblance,

and if they stood still in a row you could say of them that they have

each other’s nose, and so forth. On these magic shores children at play

are for ever beaching their coracles. We too have been there; we can

still hear the sound of the surf, though we shall land no more.

Of all delectable islands the Neverland is the snuggest and most

compact, not large and sprawly, you know, with tedious distances

between one adventure and another, but nicely crammed. When you play at

it by day with the chairs and table-cloth, it is not in the least

alarming, but in the two minutes before you go to sleep it becomes very

real. That is why there are night-lights.

Occasionally in her travels through her children’s minds Mrs. Darling

found things she could not understand, and of these quite the most

perplexing was the word Peter. She knew of no Peter, and yet he was

here and there in John and Michael’s minds, while Wendy’s began to be

scrawled all over with him. The name stood out in bolder letters than

any of the other words, and as Mrs. Darling gazed she felt that it had

an oddly cocky appearance.

“Yes, he is rather cocky,” Wendy admitted with regret. Her mother had

been questioning her.

“But who is he, my pet?”

“He is Peter Pan, you know, mother.”

At first Mrs. Darling did not know, but after thinking back into her

childhood she just remembered a Peter Pan who was said to live with the

fairies. There were odd stories about him, as that when children died

he went part of the way with them, so that they should not be

frightened. She had believed in him at the time, but now that she was

married and full of sense she quite doubted whether there was any such

person.

“Besides,” she said to Wendy, “he would be grown up by this time.”

“Oh no, he isn’t grown up,” Wendy assured her confidently, “and he is

just my size.” She meant that he was her size in both mind and body;

she didn’t know how she knew, she just knew it.

Mrs. Darling consulted Mr. Darling, but he smiled pooh-pooh. “Mark my

words,” he said, “it is some nonsense Nana has been putting into their

heads; just the sort of idea a dog would have. Leave it alone, and it

will blow over.”

But it would not blow over and soon the troublesome boy gave Mrs.

Darling quite a shock.

Children have the strangest adventures without being troubled by them.

For instance, they may remember to mention, a week after the event

happened, that when they were in the wood they had met their dead

father and had a game with him. It was in this casual way that Wendy

one morning made a disquieting revelation. 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 again!”

“Whatever do you mean, Wendy?”

“It is so naughty of him not to wipe his feet,” Wendy said, sighing.

She was a tidy child.

She explained in quite a matter-of-fact way that she thought Peter

sometimes came to the nursery in the night and sat on the foot of her

bed and played on his pipes to her. Unfortunately she never woke, so

she didn’t know how she knew, she just knew.

“What nonsense you talk, precious. No one can get into the house

without knocking.”

“I think he comes in by the window,” she said.

“My love, it is three floors up.”

“Were not the leaves at the foot of the window, mother?”

It was quite true; the leaves had been found very near the window.

Mrs. Darling 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.

“My child,” the mother cried, “why did you not tell me of this before?”

“I forgot,” said Wendy lightly. She was in a hurry to get her

breakfast.

Oh, surely she must have been dreaming.

But, on the other hand, there were the leaves. 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. She crawled about the

floor, peering at it with a candle for marks of a strange foot. She

rattled the poker up the chimney and tapped the walls. She let down a

tape from the window to the pavement, and it was a sheer drop of thirty

feet, without so much as a spout to climb up by.

Certainly Wendy had been dreaming.

But Wendy had not been dreaming, as the very next night showed, the

night on which the extraordinary adventures of these children may be

said to have begun.

On the night we speak of all the children were once more in bed. It

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 away

into the land of sleep.

All were looking so safe and cosy that she smiled at her fears now and

sat down tranquilly by the fire to sew.

It was something for Michael, who on his birthday was getting into

shirts. The fire was warm, however, and the nursery dimly lit by three

night-lights, and presently the sewing lay on Mrs. Darling’s lap. Then

her head nodded, oh, so gracefully. She was asleep. Look at the four of

them, Wendy and Michael over there, John here, and Mrs. Darling by the

fire. There should have been a fourth night-light.

While she slept she had a dream. She dreamt that the Neverland had come

too near and that a strange boy had broken through from it. He did not

alarm her, for she thought she had seen him before in the faces of many

women who have no children. Perhaps he is to be found in the faces of

some mothers also. But in her dream he had rent the film that obscures

the Neverland, and she saw Wendy and John and Michael peeping through

the gap.

The dream by itself would have been a trifle, but while she was

dreaming the window of the nursery blew open, and a boy did drop on the

floor. He was accompanied by a strange light, no bigger than your fist,

which darted about the room like a living thing and I think it must

have been this light that wakened Mrs. Darling.

She started up with a cry, and saw the boy, and somehow she knew at

once that he was Peter Pan. If you or I or Wendy had been there we

should have seen that he was very like Mrs. Darling’s kiss. He was a

lovely boy, clad in skeleton leaves and 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 she was a grown-up, he gnashed the little

pearls at her.

Chapter II.

THE SHADOW

Mrs. Darling screamed, and, as if in answer to a bell, the door opened,

and Nana entered, returned from her evening out. She growled and sprang

at the boy, who leapt lightly through the window. Again Mrs. Darling

screamed, this time in distress for him, for she thought he was killed,

and she ran down into the street to look for his little body, but it

was not there; and she looked up, and in the black night she could see

nothing but what she thought was a shooting star.

She returned to the nursery, and found Nana with something in her

mouth, which proved to be the boy’s shadow. As he leapt at 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 snapped it off.

You may be sure Mrs. Darling examined the shadow carefully, but it was

quite the ordinary kind.

Nana had no doubt of what was the best thing to do with this shadow.

She 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, it looked so like the washing and lowered the whole tone of the

house. She thought of showing it to Mr. Darling, but he was totting up

winter great-coats for John and Michael, with a wet towel around his

head to keep his brain clear, and it seemed a shame to trouble him;

besides, she knew exactly what he would say: “It all comes of having a

dog for a nurse.”

She decided to roll the shadow up and put it away carefully in a

drawer, until a fitting opportunity came for telling her husband. Ah

me!

The opportunity came a week later, on that never-to-be-forgotten

Friday. Of course it was a Friday.

“I ought to have been specially careful on a Friday,” she used to say

afterwards to her husband, while perhaps Nana was on the other side of

her, holding her hand.

“No, no,” Mr. Darling always said, “I am responsible for it all. I,

George Darling, did it. \_Mea culpa, mea culpa\_.” He had had a classical

education.

They sat thus night after night recalling that fatal Friday, till every

detail of it was stamped on their brains and came through on the other

side like the faces on a bad coinage.

“If only I had not accepted that invitation to dine at 27,” Mrs.

Darling said.

“If only I had not poured my medicine into Nana’s bowl,” said Mr.

Darling.

“If only I had pretended to like the medicine,” was what Nana’s wet

eyes said.

“My liking for parties, George.”

“My fatal gift of humour, dearest.”

“My touchiness about trifles, dear master and mistress.”

Then one or more of them would break down altogether; Nana at the

thought, “It’s true, it’s true, they ought not to have had a dog for a

nurse.” Many a time it was Mr. Darling who put the handkerchief to

Nana’s eyes.

“That fiend!” Mr. Darling would cry, and Nana’s bark was the echo of

it, but Mrs. Darling never upbraided Peter; there was something in the

right-hand corner of her mouth that wanted her not to call Peter names.

They would sit there in the empty nursery, recalling fondly every

smallest detail of that dreadful evening. It 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

six o’clock yet. Oh dear, oh dear, I shan’t love you any more, Nana. I

tell you I won’t be bathed, 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 in her evening-gown,

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.

She had found her two older children playing at being herself and

father on the occasion of Wendy’s birth, and 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.

Then John was born, with the extra pomp that he conceived due to the

birth of a male, and Michael came from his bath to ask to be born also,

but John said brutally that they did not want any more.

Michael had nearly cried. “Nobody wants me,” he said, and of course the

lady in the evening-dress could not stand that.

“I do,” she said, “I so want a third child.”

“Boy or girl?” asked Michael, not too hopefully.

“Boy.”

Then he had leapt into her arms. 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.

They go on with their recollections.

“It was then that I rushed in like a tornado, wasn’t it?” Mr. Darling

would say, scorning himself; and indeed he had been 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 his tie. It

is an astounding thing to have to tell, but this man, though he knew

about stocks and shares, had no real mastery of his tie. Sometimes the

thing yielded to him without a contest, but there were occasions when

it would have been better for the house if he had swallowed his pride

and used a made-up tie.

This was such an occasion. He came rushing into the nursery with the

crumpled little brute of a tie in his hand.

“Why, what is the matter, father dear?”

“Matter!” he yelled; he really yelled. “This tie, it will not tie.” He

became dangerously sarcastic. “Not round my neck! 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! begs to be excused!”

He thought Mrs. Darling was not sufficiently impressed, and he went on

sternly, “I warn you of this, mother, that unless this tie is round my

neck we don’t go out to dinner to-night, and if I don’t go out to

dinner to-night, I never go to the office again, and if I don’t go to

the office again, you and I starve, and our children will be flung into

the streets.”

Even then Mrs. Darling was placid. “Let me try, dear,” she said, and

indeed that was what he had come to ask her to do, and with her nice

cool hands she tied his tie for him, while the children stood around to

see their fate decided. Some men would have resented her being able to

do it so easily, but Mr. Darling had far too fine a nature for that; he

thanked her carelessly, at once forgot his rage, and in another moment

was dancing round the room with Michael on his back.

“How wildly we romped!” says Mrs. Darling now, recalling it.

“Our last romp!” Mr. Darling groaned.

“O George, do you remember Michael suddenly said to me, ‘How did you

get to know me, mother?’”

“I remember!”

“They were rather sweet, don’t you think, George?”

“And they were ours, ours! and now they are gone.”

The romp had ended with the appearance of Nana, and most unluckily Mr.

Darling collided against her, 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 him, but he began to talk again

about its being a mistake to have a dog for a nurse.

“George, Nana is a treasure.”

“No doubt, but I have an uneasy feeling at times that she looks upon

the children as 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

pooh-poohed the story, but he became thoughtful when she showed him the

shadow.

“It is nobody I know,” he said, examining it carefully, “but it does

look 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 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, “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 thought this showed want of

firmness.

“Mother, don’t pamper him,” he called after her. “Michael, when I was

your age I took medicine without a murmur. I said, ‘Thank you, kind

parents, for giving me bottles 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

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 most beastly stuff. It’s that nasty,

sticky, sweet kind.”

“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,” his father rapped out.

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

“That is not the point,” he retorted. “The point is, that there is more

in my glass than 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,” said Michael coldly.

“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 words, 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.”

It was dreadful the way all the three 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 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, “it’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,” he shouted. “Coddle her!

Nobody coddles me. Oh dear no! I am only the breadwinner, why should I

be coddled—why, why, why!”

“George,” Mrs. Darling entreated him, “not so loud; the servants will

hear you.” Somehow they had got into the way of calling Liza the

servants.

“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 the yard, and there you go to be tied up

this instant.”

“George, George,” Mrs. Darling whispered, “remember what I told you

about that boy.”

Alas, he would not listen. He was determined to show who was master in

that house, and when commands would not draw Nana from the kennel, he

lured her out of it with honeyed words, and seizing her roughly,

dragged her from the nursery. He was ashamed of himself, 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 whimpered, “It is because he is chaining her up in the yard,” but

Wendy was wiser.

“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.”

Mrs. Darling quivered and went to the window. It was securely fastened.

She looked out, and the night was peppered with stars. They were

crowding round the house, as if curious to see what was to take place

there, but she did not notice this, nor that one or two of the smaller

ones winked at her. Yet 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?”

“Nothing, precious,” she said; “they are the eyes a mother leaves

behind her to guard her children.”

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 the last words she was to hear from him for a long

time.

No. 27 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

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 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 is the star language), but the

little ones still wonder. They are not really friendly to Peter, who

had a mischievous way of stealing up behind them and trying to blow

them out; but they are so fond of fun that they were on his side

to-night, and anxious to get the grown-ups out of the way. So as soon

as the door of 27 closed on Mr. and Mrs. Darling there was a commotion

in the firmament, and the smallest of all the stars in the Milky Way

screamed out:

“Now, Peter!”

Chapter III.

COME AWAY, COME AWAY!

For a moment after Mr. and Mrs. Darling left the house the night-lights

by the beds of the three children continued to burn clearly. They were

awfully nice little night-lights, and one cannot help wishing that they

could have kept awake to see Peter; but Wendy’s light blinked and gave

such a yawn that the other two yawned also, and before they could close

their mouths all the three went out.

There was another light in the room now, 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,

rummaged the wardrobe and turned every pocket inside out. It was not

really a light; it made this light by flashing about so quickly, but

when it came to rest for a second you saw it was a fairy, no longer

than your hand, but still growing. It was a girl called Tinker Bell

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 \_embonpoint\_.

A moment after the fairy’s entrance the window was blown open by the

breathing of the little stars, and Peter dropped in. He had carried

Tinker Bell part of the way, and his hand was still messy with the

fairy dust.

“Tinker Bell,” he called softly, after making sure that the children

were asleep, “Tink, where are you?” She was in a jug for the moment,

and liking it extremely; she had never been in a jug before.

“Oh, do come out of that jug, and tell me, do you know where they put

my shadow?”

The loveliest tinkle as of golden bells answered him. It is the fairy

language. You ordinary children can never hear it, but if you were to

hear it you would know that you had heard it once before.

Tink said that the shadow was in the big box. She meant the chest of

drawers, and Peter jumped at the drawers, scattering their contents to

the floor with both hands, as kings toss ha’pence to the crowd. In a

moment he had recovered his shadow, and in his delight he forgot that

he had shut Tinker Bell up in the drawer.

If he thought at all, but I don’t believe he ever thought, it was that

he and his shadow, when brought near each other, would join like drops

of water, and when they did not he was appalled. He tried to stick it

on with soap from the bathroom, but that also failed. A shudder passed

through Peter, and he sat on the floor and cried.

His sobs woke Wendy, and she sat up in bed. She was not alarmed to see

a stranger crying on the nursery floor; she was only pleasantly

interested.

“Boy,” she said courteously, “why are you crying?”

Peter could be exceeding polite also, having learned the grand manner

at fairy ceremonies, and he rose and bowed to her beautifully. She was

much pleased, and bowed beautifully to him from the bed.

“What’s your name?” he asked.

“Wendy Moira Angela Darling,” she replied with some satisfaction. “What

is your name?”

“Peter Pan.”

She was already sure that he must be Peter, but it did seem a

comparatively short name.

“Is that all?”

“Yes,” he said rather sharply. He felt for the first time that it was a

shortish name.

“I’m so sorry,” said Wendy Moira Angela.

“It doesn’t matter,” Peter gulped.

She asked where he lived.

“Second to the right,” said Peter, “and then straight on till morning.”

“What a funny address!”

Peter had a sinking. For the first time he felt that perhaps it was a

funny address.

“No, it isn’t,” he said.

“I mean,” Wendy said nicely, remembering that she was hostess, “is that

what they put on the letters?”

He wished she had not mentioned letters.

“Don’t get any letters,” he said contemptuously.

“But your mother gets letters?”

“Don’t have a mother,” he said. Not only had he no mother, but he had

not the slightest desire to have one. He thought them very over-rated

persons. Wendy, however, 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

ran to him.

“I wasn’t crying about mothers,” he said rather indignantly. “I was

crying because I can’t get my shadow to stick on. Besides, I wasn’t

crying.”

“It has come off?”

“Yes.”

Then Wendy saw the shadow on the floor, looking 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. How exactly like a boy!

Fortunately she knew at once what to do. “It must be sewn on,” she

said, just a little patronisingly.

“What’s sewn?” he asked.

“You’re dreadfully ignorant.”

“No, I’m not.”

But she was exulting in his ignorance. “I shall sew it on for you, my

little man,” she said, though he was tall as herself, and she got out

her housewife, and sewed the shadow on to Peter’s foot.

“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 and did 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 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 conceit,” she exclaimed,

with frightful sarcasm; “of course I did nothing!”

“You did a little,” Peter said carelessly, and continued to dance.

“A little!” she replied with hauteur; “if I am no use I can at least

withdraw,” and she sprang in the most dignified way into 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. I can’t help crowing, Wendy,

when I’m pleased with myself.” Still she would not look up, though she

was listening eagerly. “Wendy,” he continued, in a voice that no woman

has ever yet been able to resist, “Wendy, one girl is more use than

twenty boys.”

Now Wendy was every inch a woman, though there were not very many

inches, and she peeped out of the bed-clothes.

“Do you really think so, Peter?”

“Yes, I do.”

“I think it’s perfectly sweet of you,” 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.

“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. It was lucky that she did put it on that chain, for it

was afterwards to save her life.

When people in our set are introduced, it is customary for them to ask

each other’s age, and so Wendy, who always liked to do the correct

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 grammar, when

what you want to be asked is Kings of England.

“I don’t know,” he replied uneasily, “but I am quite young.” He really

knew nothing about it, he had merely suspicions, but he said at a

venture, “Wendy, I ran away the day I was born.”

Wendy was quite surprised, but interested; and she indicated in the

charming drawing-room manner, by a touch on her night-gown, that he

could sit nearer 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.” 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. So I

ran away to Kensington Gardens and 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 and so on,

and indeed he sometimes had to give them a hiding. Still, he liked them

on the whole, and 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.”

Tedious talk this, 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 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 she has gone to,” he said, rising, and he called Tink by name.

Wendy’s heart went flutter with a sudden thrill.

“Peter,” she cried, clutching him, “you don’t mean to tell me that

there is a fairy in this room!”

“She was here just now,” he said a little impatiently. “You don’t hear

her, do you?” and they both listened.

“The only sound I hear,” said Wendy, “is like a tinkle of bells.”

“Well, that’s Tink, that’s the fairy language. I think I hear her too.”

The sound came from the chest of drawers, and Peter made a merry face.

No one could ever look quite so merry as Peter, and the loveliest of

gurgles was his laugh. He had his first laugh still.

“Wendy,” he whispered gleefully, “I do believe I shut her 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, “if she would

only stand still and let me see her!”

“They hardly ever stand still,” he said, but for one 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 passion.

“Tink,” said Peter amiably, “this lady says she wishes you were her

fairy.”

Tinker Bell answered insolently.

“What does she say, Peter?”

He had to translate. “She is not very polite. She says you are a great

ugly girl, and that she is my fairy.”

He tried to argue with Tink. “You know you can’t be my fairy, Tink,

because I am an gentleman and you are a lady.”

To this Tink replied in these words, “You silly ass,” and disappeared

into the bathroom. “She is quite a common fairy,” Peter explained

apologetically, “she is called Tinker Bell because she mends the pots

and kettles.”

They were together in the armchair by this time, and Wendy plied him

with more questions.

“If you don’t live in Kensington Gardens now—”

“Sometimes I do still.”

“But where do you live mostly now?”

“With the 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 far away to the Neverland to defray expenses. I’m

captain.”

“What fun it must be!”

“Yes,” said cunning Peter, “but we are rather lonely. You see we have

no female companionship.”

“Are none of the others girls?”

“Oh, no; girls, 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 captain in her house. However,

John continued to sleep so placidly on the floor that she allowed him

to remain there. “And 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 thought

you would want it back,” he said a little bitterly, and offered to

return her the thimble.

“Oh dear,” said the nice Wendy, “I don’t mean a kiss, I mean a

thimble.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s like this.” She kissed him.

“Funny!” said Peter gravely. “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?”

“It was exactly as if someone were pulling my hair.”

“That must have been Tink. I never knew her so naughty before.”

And indeed Tink was darting about again, using offensive language.

“She says she will do that to you, Wendy, every time I give you a

thimble.”

“But why?”

“Why, Tink?”

Again Tink replied, “You silly ass.” Peter could not understand why,

but Wendy understood, and she was just slightly disappointed when he

admitted that he came to the nursery window not to see her but to

listen to 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 to listen to the stories. O Wendy, your mother was telling you

such a lovely story.”

“Which story was it?”

“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 entreated, “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.

He came back, and there was a greedy look in his eyes now which ought

to have alarmed her, but did not.

“Oh, the stories I could tell to the boys!” she cried, and then Peter

gripped her 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. Think of mummy! Besides, I can’t fly.”

“I’ll teach you.”

“Oh, how lovely to fly.”

“I’ll teach you how to jump on the wind’s back, and then away we go.”

“Oo!” she exclaimed rapturously.

“Wendy, Wendy, when you are sleeping in your silly bed you might be

flying about with me saying funny things to the stars.”

“Oo!”

“And, Wendy, there are mermaids.”

“Mermaids! With tails?”

“Such long tails.”

“Oh,” cried Wendy, “to see a mermaid!”

He had become frightfully cunning. “Wendy,” he said, “how we should all

respect you.”

She was wriggling her body in distress. It was quite as if she were

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!”

“None of us has ever been tucked in at night.”

“Oo,” and her arms went out to him.

“And you could darn our clothes, and make pockets for us. 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, and she ran to John and Michael

and shook them. “Wake up,” she cried, “Peter Pan has come and he is to

teach us to fly.”

John rubbed his eyes. “Then I shall get up,” he said. Of course he was

on the floor already. “Hallo,” he said, “I am up!”

Michael was up by this time also, looking as sharp as a knife with six

blades and a saw, 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 for the

only time throughout the whole adventure. 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. 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, with a raisin still on her

cheek, by Nana’s absurd suspicions. 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, 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 of 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 a good-bye to their hostess they rushed into the street.

But it was now ten minutes since three scoundrels had been breathing

behind the curtains, and Peter Pan can do a great deal in ten minutes.

We now return to the nursery.

“It’s all right,” John announced, emerging from his hiding-place. “I

say, Peter, can you really fly?”

Instead of troubling to answer him Peter flew around the room, taking

the mantelpiece on the way.

“How topping!” said John and Michael.

“How sweet!” cried Wendy.

“Yes, I’m sweet, oh, I am sweet!” said Peter, forgetting his manners

again.

It looked delightfully easy, and they tried it first from the floor and

then from the beds, but they always went down instead of up.

“I say, how do you do it?” asked John, rubbing his knee. He was quite a

practical boy.

“You just think lovely wonderful thoughts,” Peter explained, “and they

lift you up in the air.”

He showed them again.

“You’re so nippy at it,” John said, “couldn’t you do it very slowly

once?”

Peter did it both slowly and quickly. “I’ve got it now, Wendy!” cried

John, but soon he found he had not. Not one of them could fly an inch,

though even Michael was in words of two syllables, and Peter did not

know A from Z.

Of course Peter had been trifling with them, for no one can fly unless

the fairy dust has been blown on him. Fortunately, as we have

mentioned, one of his hands was messy with it, and he blew some on each

of them, with the most superb results.

“Now just wiggle your shoulders this way,” he said, “and let go.”

They were all on their beds, and gallant Michael let go first. He did

not quite mean to let go, but he did it, and immediately he was borne

across the room.

“I flewed!” he screamed while still in mid-air.

John let go and met Wendy near the bathroom.

“Oh, lovely!”

“Oh, ripping!”

“Look at me!”

“Look at me!”

“Look at me!”

They were not nearly so elegant as Peter, they could not help kicking a

little, but their heads were bobbing against the ceiling, and there is

almost nothing so delicious as that. Peter gave Wendy a hand at first,

but had to desist, Tink was so indignant.

Up and down they went, and round and round. Heavenly was Wendy’s word.

“I say,” cried John, “why shouldn’t we all go out?”

Of course it was to this that Peter had been luring them.

Michael was ready: he wanted to see how long it took him to do a

billion miles. But Wendy hesitated.

“Mermaids!” said Peter again.

“Oo!”

“And there are pirates.”

“Pirates,” cried John, seizing his Sunday hat, “let us go at once.”

It was just at this moment that Mr. and Mrs. Darling hurried with Nana

out of 27. They ran into the middle of the street to look up at the

nursery window; and, yes, it was still shut, but the room was ablaze

with light, and most heart-gripping sight of all, they could see in

shadow on the curtain three little figures in night attire circling

round and round, not on the floor but in the air.

Not three figures, four!

In a tremble they opened the street door. Mr. Darling would have rushed

upstairs, but Mrs. Darling signed him to go softly. She even tried to

make her heart go softly.

Will they reach the nursery in time? If so, how delightful for them,

and we shall all breathe a sigh of relief, but there will be no story.

On the other hand, if they are not in time, I solemnly promise that it

will all come right in the end.

They would have reached the nursery in time had it not been that the

little stars were watching them. Once again the stars blew the window

open, and that smallest star of all called out:

“Cave, Peter!”

Then Peter knew that there was not a moment to lose. “Come,” he cried

imperiously, and soared out at once into the night, followed by John

and Michael and Wendy.

Mr. and Mrs. Darling and Nana rushed into the nursery too late. The

birds were flown.

Chapter IV.

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.

Not long ago. But how long ago? They were flying over the sea before

this thought began to disturb Wendy seriously. John thought it was

their second sea and their third night.

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, they were sleepy; and that

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 would 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 tail 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 tails they missed.

“You must be nice to him,” Wendy impressed on her brothers. “What could

we do if he were to leave us!”

“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 don’t

know how to stop.”

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

John said that if the worst came to the 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?”

“I nipped a bit out of that eagle’s mouth pretty neatly, Wendy.”

“After the twentieth try,” Wendy reminded him. “And even though we

became good at 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 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 I’ll

remember.”

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 the

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. It is only thus that any one may sight those magic

shores.

“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 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

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 knowing so much, but if he

wanted to lord it over them his triumph was at hand, for have I not

told you that anon fear fell upon them?

It came as the arrows went, leaving the island in gloom.

In the old days at home the Neverland 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 the Neverland was all make-believe.

Of course the Neverland 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, his eyes were sparkling, and a tingle

went through them every time they touched his body. 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 or would not say. Tinker Bell had been asleep on his

shoulder, but now he wakened her and sent her on in front.

Sometimes he 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 the braver John hesitated.

“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, “he were to wake up.”

Peter spoke indignantly. “You don’t think I would kill him while he was

sleeping! I would wake him first, and then kill him. That’s the way I

always do.”

“I say! Do you kill many?”

“Tons.”

John said “How ripping,” but 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.

“Jas. Hook?”

“Ay.”

Then indeed Michael began to cry, and even John could speak in gulps

only, 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.”

“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,” said Peter 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.’”

“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!”

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, “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.

He had a happy idea. John’s hat!

Tink agreed to travel by hat if it was carried in the hand. John

carried it, though she had hoped to be carried by Peter. Presently

Wendy took the hat, because John said it struck against his knee as he

flew; and this, as we shall see, led to mischief, for Tinker Bell hated

to be under an obligation to Wendy.

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 an

island of make-believe and the same island come 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 yet,” Michael whispered back.

We know now that no one had been hit. Peter, however, had been carried

by the wind of the shot far out to sea, while Wendy was blown upwards

with no companion but Tinker Bell.

It would have been well for Wendy if at that moment she had dropped the

hat.

I don’t know whether the idea came suddenly to Tink, or whether she had

planned it on the way, but she at once popped out of the hat and began

to lure Wendy to her destruction.

Tink was not all bad; or, rather, 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, because being so small they unfortunately have room for one

feeling only at a time. They are, however, allowed to change, only it

must be a complete change. At present she was full of jealousy of

Wendy. What she said in her lovely tinkle Wendy could not of course

understand, and I believe some of it was bad words, but it sounded

kind, and she flew back and forward, plainly meaning “Follow me, and

all will be well.”

What else could poor Wendy do? She called to Peter and John and

Michael, and got only mocking echoes in reply. She did not yet know

that Tink hated her with the fierce hatred of a very woman. And so,

bewildered, and now staggering in her flight, she followed Tink to her

doom.

Chapter V.

THE ISLAND COME TRUE

Feeling that Peter was on his way back, the Neverland had again woke

into life. We ought to use the pluperfect and say wakened, but woke is

better and was always used by Peter.

In his absence things are usually quiet on the island. The fairies take

an hour longer in the morning, the beasts attend to their young, the

redskins feed heavily for six days and nights, and when pirates and

lost boys meet they merely bite their thumbs at each other. But with

the coming of Peter, who hates lethargy, they are under way again: 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 all

were going at the same rate.

All wanted blood except the boys, who liked it as a rule, but to-night

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, and she thinks

you are the most easily tricked of the boys. ’Ware Tinker Bell.

Would that he could hear us, but we are not really on the island, and

he passes by, biting his knuckles.

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, 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 Gao. 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; 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 and blackavized, 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\_ 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 and the belle of the Piccaninnies,

coquettish, cold and amorous by turns; there is not a brave who would

not have the wayward thing to wife, but she staves off the altar with a

hatchet. Observe how they pass over fallen twigs without making the

slightest noise. The only sound to be heard is their somewhat heavy

breathing. The fact is that they are all a little fat just now after

the heavy gorging, but in time they will work this off. For the moment,

however, it constitutes their chief danger.

The redskins disappear as they have come like shadows, and soon their

place is taken by the beasts, 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.

When they have passed, comes the last figure of all, a gigantic

crocodile. We shall see for whom she is looking presently.

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 on top of each other.

All are keeping a sharp look-out in front, but none suspects that the

danger may be creeping up from behind. This shows how real the island

was.

The first to fall out of the moving circle was the boys. They flung

themselves down on the sward, close to their underground home.

“I do wish Peter would come back,” every one of them said nervously,

though in height and still more in breadth they were all larger than

their captain.

“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 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 my

mother one.”

While they talked they heard a distant sound. You or I, not being wild

things of the woods, would have heard nothing, but they heard it, and

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 lost boys—but where are they? They are no longer there.

Rabbits could not have disappeared more quickly.

I will tell you where they are. With the exception of Nibs, who has

darted away to reconnoitre, they are already in their home under the

ground, a very delightful residence of which we shall see a good deal

presently. But how have they reached it? for there is no entrance to be

seen, not so much as a large stone, which if rolled away, would

disclose the mouth of a cave. Look closely, however, and you may note

that there are here seven large trees, each with a hole in its hollow

trunk as large as a boy. These are the seven entrances to the home

under the ground, for which Hook has been searching in vain these many

moons. Will he find it tonight?

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.

Now for the first time we hear the voice of Hook. It was a black voice.

“Put back that pistol first,” it said threateningly.

“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 after him, Captain,” asked pathetic Smee, “and tickle him with

Johnny Corkscrew?” Smee had pleasant names for everything, and his

cutlass was Johnny Corkscrew, because he wiggled it in the wound. One

could mention many lovable traits in Smee. For instance, after killing,

it was his spectacles he wiped instead of his weapon.

“Johnny’s a silent fellow,” he reminded Hook.

“Not now, Smee,” Hook said darkly. “He is only one, and I want to

mischief all the seven. Scatter and look for them.”

The pirates disappeared among the trees, and in a moment their Captain

and Smee were alone. Hook heaved a heavy sigh, and I know not why it

was, perhaps it was because of the soft beauty of the evening, but

there came over him a desire to confide to his faithful bo’sun the

story of his life. He spoke long and earnestly, but what it was all

about Smee, who was rather stupid, did not know in the least.

Anon he caught the word Peter.

“Most of all,” Hook was saying passionately, “I want their captain,

Peter Pan. ’Twas he cut off my arm.” He brandished the hook

threateningly. “I’ve waited long to shake his hand with this. Oh, I’ll

tear him!”

“And yet,” said Smee, “I have often heard you say that hook was worth a

score of hands, for combing the 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,” he said, wincing, “to a crocodile that happened

to be passing by.”

“I have often,” said Smee, “noticed your strange dread of crocodiles.”

“Not of crocodiles,” Hook corrected him, “but of that one crocodile.”

He lowered his voice. “It liked my arm so much, Smee, that it has

followed me ever since, from sea to sea and from land to land, licking

its lips for the rest of me.”

“In a way,” said Smee, “it’s sort of a compliment.”

“I want no such compliments,” Hook barked petulantly. “I want Peter

Pan, who first gave the brute its taste for 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 a clock which goes tick

tick inside it, and so before it can reach me I hear the tick and

bolt.” He laughed, but in a hollow way.

“Some day,” said Smee, “the clock will run down, and then he’ll get

you.”

Hook wetted his dry lips. “Ay,” he said, “that’s the fear that haunts

me.”

Since sitting down he had felt curiously warm. “Smee,” he said, “this

seat is hot.” He jumped up. “Odds bobs, hammer and tongs I’m burning.”

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. “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 noted the holes in the seven

trees.

“Did you 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 it.

“Unrip your plan, captain,” he cried eagerly.

“To 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, one foot in the air.

“The crocodile!” he gasped, and bounded away, followed by his bo’sun.

It was indeed the crocodile. It had passed the redskins, who were now

on the trail of the other pirates. It oozed on 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, 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, bows and arrows!”

All but Tootles popped down 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 VI.

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 ass!” 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.”

“A lady?” said Tootles, and fell a-trembling.

“And we have killed her,” Nibs said hoarsely.

They all whipped off their caps.

“Now I see,” Curly said: “Peter was bringing her to us.” He threw

himself sorrowfully on the ground.

“A lady 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 them they turned 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; “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.

“Peter!” they cried, for it was always thus that he signalled his

return.

“Hide her,” they whispered, and gathered hastily around Wendy. But

Tootles stood aloof.

Again came that ringing crow, and Peter dropped 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, but the cheers would not come. He 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, except a little thud from Tootles as he dropped on his

knees.

“Have you not seen her?” asked Peter, becoming troubled. “She flew this

way.”

“Ah me!” one voice said, 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, let

Peter see.”

So they all stood back, and let him see, and after he had looked for a

little time he did not know what to do next.

“She is 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, 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!”

Wonderful to relate, Wendy had raised her arm. Nibs bent over her and

listened reverently. “I think she said, ‘Poor Tootles,’” he whispered.

“She lives,” Peter said briefly.

Slightly cried instantly, “The Wendy lady lives.”

Then Peter knelt beside her and found his button. You remember she had

put it on a chain that she wore round her neck.

“See,” he said, “the arrow struck against this. It is the kiss I gave

her. It 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 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.”

Do you think Tinker Bell was grateful to Wendy for raising her arm? Oh

dear no, never wanted to pinch her so much. Fairies indeed are strange,

and Peter, who understood them best, often cuffed them.

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, “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.”

“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 the night before a wedding.

They skurried 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

mother?”

And then John would rub his eyes 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 them. 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. John and Michael watched him.

“Is Wendy asleep?” they asked.

“Yes.”

“John,” Michael proposed, “let us wake her and get her to 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 first,” Peter ordered. “Then we shall build a

house round them.”

“Ay,” said Slightly, “that is how a house is built; it all comes back

to me.”

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 solemn.

“Please, sir,” said Peter, going 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 she 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 roses—?

“Roses,” cried Peter sternly.

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

Babies?

To prevent Peter ordering babies they hurried 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 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 the sole of his shoe, and it

made an excellent knocker.

Absolutely finished now, they thought.

Not of bit of it. “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

bottom, 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 look your best,” Peter warned them; “first impressions are awfully

important.”

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, say you’re pleased,” cried Nibs.

“Lovely, darling house,” Wendy said, and they 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, be our mother.”

“Ought I?” Wendy said, all shining. “Of course it’s frightfully

fascinating, but you see I am only a little girl. I have no 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; I don’t know how there was room for them, but you can

squeeze very tight in the Neverland. And that was the first of the many

joyous evenings they had with Wendy. By and by 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 they just tweaked

Peter’s nose and passed on.

Chapter VII.

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 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 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 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, always

kept drawn when dressing or undressing. No woman, however large, could

have had a more exquisite boudoir 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 just to feel stodgy, 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 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 VIII.

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 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 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 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 they had a sinking. 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 IX.

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 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 X.

THE HAPPY HOME

One important result of the brush 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, “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,” remonstrated 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 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 never again.

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

“Peter, you just spoil them, you know,” Wendy simpered.

“Ah, 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.”

Peter was really the best dancer among them, but he pretended to be

scandalised.

“Me! My old bones would rattle!”

“And mummy too.”

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

“But on a Saturday night,” Slightly insinuated.

It was not really Saturday night, at least it may have been, for they

had long lost count of the days; but always if they wanted to do

anything special they said this was Saturday night, and then they did

it.

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

“People of our figure, Wendy!”

“But it is only among our own progeny.”

“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 near by.”

“It is sweet, Peter, isn’t it?” Wendy said, frightfully gratified.

“Peter, I think Curly has your nose.”

“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 change me, do you?”

“No, Wendy.”

Certainly he did not want a change, but he looked at her uncomfortably,

blinking, you know, like one not sure whether 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, that I am their father?”

“Oh yes,” Wendy said primly.

“You see,” he continued apologetically, “it would make me seem so old

to be their real father.”

“But they are ours, Peter, yours and mine.”

“But not really, Wendy?” he asked anxiously.

“Not if you don’t wish it,” she replied; and she distinctly heard his

sigh of relief. “Peter,” she asked, trying to speak firmly, “what are

your exact feelings to me?”

“Those of a devoted son, Wendy.”

“I thought so,” she said, and went and sat by herself at the extreme

end of the room.

“You are so queer,” he said, frankly puzzled, “and Tiger Lily is just

the same. There is something she wants to be to me, but she says it is

not my mother.”

“No, indeed, it is not,” Wendy replied with frightful emphasis. Now we

know why she was prejudiced against the redskins.

“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 is

an abandoned little creature.”

Here Tink, who was in her bedroom, eavesdropping, squeaked out

something impudent.

“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.

She had said it so often that Wendy needed no translation.

“I almost agree with her,” Wendy snapped. Fancy Wendy snapping! But she

had been much tried, and she little knew what was to happen before the

night was out. If she had known she would not have snapped.

None of them knew. Perhaps it was best not to know. Their ignorance

gave them one more glad hour; and as it was to be their last hour on

the island, let us rejoice that there were sixty glad minutes in it.

They sang and danced in their night-gowns. Such a deliciously creepy

song it was, in which they pretended to be frightened at their own

shadows, little witting that so soon shadows would close in upon them,

from whom they would shrink in real fear. So uproariously gay was the

dance, and how they buffeted each other on the bed and out of it! It

was 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. The stories they told, before it was time for Wendy’s

good-night 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 gloomily:

“Yes, it is a dull beginning. I say, let us pretend that it is the

end.”

And then at last they all got into bed for Wendy’s story, the story

they loved best, the story Peter hated. Usually when she began to tell

this story he left the room or put his hands over his ears; and

possibly if he had done either of those things this time they might all

still be on the island. But to-night he remained on his stool; and we

shall see what happened.

Chapter XI.

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 a 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, 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.”

“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.

“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, to annoy the others.

“I think I knew them,” said Michael rather doubtfully.

“They were married, you know,” explained Wendy, “and what do you think

they had?”

“White rats,” cried Nibs, inspired.

“No.”

“It’s awfully puzzling,” said Tootles, who knew the story by heart.

“Quiet, Tootles. They had three descendants.”

“What is descendants?”

“Well, you are one, Twin.”

“Did you hear that, John? I am a descendant.”

“Descendants are only 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 the children flew away.”

“It’s an awfully good story,” said Nibs.

“They flew away,” Wendy continued, “to the Neverland, where the lost

children are.”

“I just thought they did,” Curly broke in excitedly. “I don’t know how

it is, but I just thought they did!”

“O Wendy,” cried Tootles, “was one of the lost children called

Tootles?”

“Yes, he was.”

“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, though they were not really considering the

feelings of the unhappy parents one jot.

“Think of the empty beds!”

“Oo!”

“It’s awfully sad,” the first twin said cheerfully.

“I don’t see how it can have a happy ending,” said the second twin. “Do

you, Nibs?”

“I’m frightfully anxious.”

“If you knew how great is a mother’s love,” 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 had a lovely time.”

“Did they ever go back?”

“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 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 estate? Can they be John and Michael? They are!”

“Oh!”

“‘See, dear brothers,’ says Wendy pointing upwards, ‘there is the

window still standing open. Ah, now we are rewarded for our sublime

faith in a mother’s love.’ So up they flew to their mummy and daddy,

and pen cannot describe the happy scene, over which we draw a veil.”

That was the story, and they were as pleased with it as the fair

narrator herself. Everything just as it should be, you see. Off we skip

like the most heartless things in the world, which is what children

are, but so attractive; and we have an entirely selfish time, and then

when we have need of special attention we nobly return for it,

confident that we shall be rewarded instead of smacked.

So great indeed was their faith in a mother’s love that they felt they

could afford to be callous for a bit longer.

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 is it,

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 it

scared them.

“Are you sure mothers are like that?”

“Yes.”

So this was the truth about mothers. The toads!

Still it is best to be careful; and no one knows so quickly as a child

when he should give in. “Wendy, let us go home,” cried John and Michael

together.

“Yes,” she said, clutching them.

“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 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?”

“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, was Peter, 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 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.”

In her extremity an instinct told her to which of them to 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 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 \_negligée\_.”

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 with me I feel almost sure

I can get my father and mother to adopt you.”

The 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 in the middle of

his jump.

“Oh no,” said Wendy, rapidly thinking it out, “it will only mean having

a few 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 draught, for just as

she had prepared it, she saw a look on his face that made her heart

sink.

“Get your things, Peter,” she cried, shaking.

“No,” he answered, pretending indifference, “I am not going with you,

Wendy.”

“Yes, Peter.”

“No.”

To show 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.

“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 fun.”

“But, Peter—”

“No.”

And so the others had to be told.

“Peter isn’t coming.”

Peter not coming! 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 find your mothers,” he said

darkly, “I hope you will like them.”

The awful cynicism of this made an uncomfortable impression, and most

of them began to look rather doubtful. After all, their faces said,

were they not noodles to want 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 now, for

he had something important to do.

She had to take his hand, and there was no indication 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, Tinker Bell?” he called out.

“Ay, ay.”

“Then lead the way.”

Tink darted up the nearest tree; but no one followed her, for it was at

this moment that the pirates made their dreadful attack upon the

redskins. Above, where all had been so still, the air was rent with

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 XII.

THE CHILDREN ARE CARRIED OFF

The pirate attack had been a complete surprise: a sure proof that the

unscrupulous Hook had conducted it improperly, for to surprise redskins

fairly is beyond the wit of the white man.

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 before

the dawn, 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

wriggle, snake-like, among the grass without stirring a 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 call of the coyote. The cry is

answered by other braves; and some of them do it even better than the

coyotes, who are not very good at it. 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

night is marching.

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

mocassins 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, and in the phlegmatic manner that is

to them, the pearl of manhood squatted above the children’s home,

awaiting the cold moment when they should deal 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 by the treacherous Hook. From the accounts afterwards supplied by

such of the scouts as escaped the carnage, he does not seem even to

have paused at the rising ground, though it is certain that in that

grey light he must have seen it: no thought of waiting to be attacked

appears from first to last to have visited his subtle mind; he would

not even hold off till the night was nearly spent; on he pounded with

no policy but to fall to. 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

from their eyes then the film through which they had looked at victory.

No more would they torture at the stake. For them the happy

hunting-grounds was now. They knew it; but as their father’s sons they

acquitted themselves. Even then they had time to gather in a phalanx

that would have been hard to break had they risen quickly, but this

they were forbidden to do by the traditions of their race. 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 it was now too late.

It is no part of ours to describe what was a massacre rather than a

fight. Thus perished many 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.

To what extent Hook is to blame for his tactics on this occasion is for

the historian to decide. Had he waited on the rising ground till the

proper hour he and his men would probably have been butchered; and in

judging him it is only fair to take this into account. What he should

perhaps have done was to acquaint his opponents that he proposed to

follow a new method. On the other hand, this, as destroying the element

of surprise, would have made his strategy of no avail, so that the

whole question is beset with difficulties. One cannot at least withhold

a reluctant admiration for the wit that had conceived so bold a scheme,

and the fell genius with which it was carried out.

What were his own feelings about himself at that triumphant moment?

Fain would his dogs have known, as breathing heavily and wiping their

cutlasses, they gathered at a discreet distance from his hook, and

squinted through their ferret eyes at this extraordinary man. Elation

must have been in his heart, but his face did not reflect it: ever a

dark and solitary enigma, he stood aloof from his followers in spirit

as in substance.

The night’s work was not yet over, for it was not the redskins he had

come out to destroy; they were but the bees to be smoked, so that he

should get at the honey. It was Pan he wanted, Pan and Wendy and their

band, but chiefly Pan.

Peter was such a small boy that one tends to wonder at the man’s hatred

of him. True he had flung Hook’s arm to the crocodile, but even this

and the increased insecurity of life to which it led, owing to the

crocodile’s pertinacity, hardly account for a vindictiveness so

relentless and malignant. The truth is that there was a something about

Peter which goaded the pirate captain to frenzy. It was not his

courage, it was not his engaging appearance, it was not—. There is no

beating about the bush, for we know quite well what it was, and have

got to tell. It was Peter’s cockiness.

This had got on Hook’s nerves; it made his iron claw twitch, and at

night it disturbed him like an insect. While Peter lived, the tortured

man felt that he was a lion in a cage into which a sparrow had come.

The question now was how to get down the trees, or how to get his dogs

down? He ran his greedy eyes over them, searching for the thinnest

ones. They wriggled uncomfortably, for they knew he would not scruple

to ram them down with poles.

In the meantime, what of the boys? We have seen them at the first clang

of the weapons, turned as it were into stone figures, open-mouthed, all

appealing with outstretched arms to Peter; and we return to them as

their mouths close, and their arms fall to their sides. The pandemonium

above has ceased almost as suddenly as it arose, passed like a fierce

gust of wind; but they know that in the passing it has determined their

fate.

Which side had won?

The pirates, listening avidly at the mouths of the trees, heard the

question put by every boy, and alas, they also heard Peter’s answer.

“If the redskins have won,” he said, “they will beat the tom-tom; it is

always their sign of victory.”

Now Smee had found the tom-tom, and was at that moment sitting on it.

“You will never hear the tom-tom again,” he muttered, but inaudibly of

course, for strict silence had been enjoined. To his amazement 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 man admired Hook so much.

Twice Smee beat upon the instrument, and then stopped to listen

gleefully.

“The tom-tom,” the miscreants heard Peter cry; “an Indian victory!”

The doomed children answered with a cheer that was music to the black

hearts above, and almost immediately they repeated their good-byes to

Peter. This puzzled the pirates, but all their other feelings were

swallowed 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 XIII.

DO YOU BELIEVE IN FAIRIES?

The more quickly this horror is disposed of the better. The first to

emerge from his tree was Curly. He rose out of it 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 black pirate. 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 different treatment was accorded to Wendy, who came last. With

ironical politeness Hook raised his hat to her, and, offering her his

arm, escorted her to the spot where the others were being gagged. He

did it with such an air, he was so frightfully \_distingué\_, that she

was too fascinated to cry out. She was only a little girl.

Perhaps it is tell-tale to divulge that for a moment Hook entranced

her, and we tell on her only because her slip led to strange results.

Had she haughtily unhanded him (and we should have loved to write it of

her), she would have been hurled through the air like the others, and

then Hook would probably not have been present at the tying of the

children; and had he not been at the tying he would not have discovered

Slightly’s secret, and without the secret he could not presently have

made his foul attempt on Peter’s life.

They were tied to prevent their flying away, doubled 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

with which to tie a knot. The pirates kicked him in their rage, just as

you kick the parcel (though in fairness you should kick the string);

and strange to say it was Hook who told them to belay their violence.

His lip was curled with malicious triumph. While his dogs 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 gone 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 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 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

alone.

How to convey them? 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, four stout pirates raised it on their shoulders, the others

fell in behind, and singing the hateful pirate chorus the strange

procession set off through the wood. I don’t know whether any of the

children were crying; if so, the singing drowned the sound; but as the

little house disappeared in the forest, a brave though tiny jet of

smoke issued from its chimney as if defying Hook.

Hook saw it, and it did Peter a bad service. It dried up any trickle of

pity for him that may have remained in the pirate’s infuriated breast.

The first thing he 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 long 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 that boy asleep, or did he stand waiting at the foot of Slightly’s

tree, with his dagger in his hand?

There was no way of knowing, save by going down. Hook 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 like

a candle. Then, silently, he let himself go into the unknown.

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

fast asleep.

Unaware of the tragedy being enacted above, Peter had continued, for a

little time after the children left, to play gaily on his pipes: no

doubt rather a forlorn attempt to prove to himself that he did not

care. Then he decided not to take his medicine, so as to grieve Wendy.

Then he lay down on the bed outside the coverlet, to vex her still

more; for she had always tucked them inside it, because you never know

that you may not grow chilly at the turn of the night. Then he nearly

cried; but it struck him how indignant she would be if he laughed

instead; so he laughed a haughty laugh 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. They had to do, I

think, with the riddle of his existence. At such times it had been

Wendy’s custom to take him out of bed and sit with him on her lap,

soothing him in dear ways of her own invention, and when he grew calmer

to put him back to bed before he quite woke up, so that he should not

know of the indignity to which she had subjected him. But on this

occasion he had fallen at once into a dreamless sleep. One arm dropped

over the edge of the bed, one leg was arched, and the unfinished part

of his laugh was stranded on his mouth, which was open, showing the

little pearls.

Thus defenceless Hook found him. He stood silent at the foot of the

tree looking across the chamber at his enemy. Did no feeling of

compassion disturb his sombre breast? The man was not wholly evil; he

loved flowers (I have been told) and sweet music (he was himself no

mean performer on the harpsichord); and, let it be frankly admitted,

the idyllic nature of the scene stirred him profoundly. Mastered by his

better self he would have returned reluctantly up the tree, but for one

thing.

What stayed him was Peter’s impertinent appearance as he slept. The

open mouth, the drooping arm, the arched knee: they were such a

personification of cockiness as, taken together, will never again, one

may hope, be presented to eyes so sensitive to their offensiveness.

They steeled Hook’s heart. If his rage had broken him into a hundred

pieces every one of them would have disregarded the incident, and leapt

at the sleeper.

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 he had been looking over it. Feeling for the catch, he

found to his fury that it was 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 in his eye had caught sight of Peter’s

medicine standing on a ledge within easy reach. He fathomed what it was

straightaway, and immediately knew that the sleeper was 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, which was probably the most virulent

poison in existence.

Five drops of this he now added to Peter’s cup. His 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 strangely to

himself, stole away through the trees.

Peter slept on. The light 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. It was 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 knock.

“Who are you?”

No answer.

He was thrilled, and he loved being thrilled. In two strides he reached

the door. Unlike Slightly’s door, it 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 offered him three guesses.

“Out with it!” he shouted, and in one ungrammatical sentence, as long

as the ribbons that conjurers pull from their mouths, she told of the

capture of Wendy and the boys.

Peter’s heart bobbed up and down as he listened. Wendy bound, and on

the pirate ship; she who loved everything to be just so!

“I’ll rescue her!” he cried, leaping at his weapons. As he leapt he

thought of something he could do to please her. He could take his

medicine.

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. Nevertheless Hook’s words had left no

room for doubt. The cup was poisoned.

“Besides,” said Peter, quite believing himself, “I never fell asleep.”

He raised the cup. No time for words now; time for deeds; and with one

of her lightning movements Tink got between his lips and the draught,

and drained it to the dregs.

“Why, Tink, how dare you drink my medicine?”

But she did not answer. Already she was reeling in the air.

“What is the matter with you?” cried Peter, suddenly afraid.

“It was poisoned, Peter,” she told him softly; “and now I am going to

be dead.”

“O Tink, did you drink it to save me?”

“Yes.”

“But why, Tink?”

Her wings would scarcely carry her now, but in reply she alighted on

his shoulder and gave his nose a loving bite. She whispered in his ear

“You silly ass,” and then, tottering to her chamber, lay down on the

bed.

His head almost filled the fourth wall of her little room as he knelt

near her in distress. Every moment her light was growing fainter; and

he knew that if it went out she would be no more. She liked his tears

so much that she put out her beautiful finger and let them run over it.

Her voice was so low that at first he could not make out what she said.

Then he made it out. She was saying that she thought she could get well

again if children believed in fairies.

Peter flung out his arms. There were no children there, and it was

night time; but he addressed all who might be dreaming of the

Neverland, and who were therefore nearer to him than you think: boys

and girls in their nighties, and naked papooses in their baskets hung

from trees.

“Do you believe?” he cried.

Tink sat up in bed almost briskly to listen to her fate.

She fancied she heard answers in the affirmative, and then again she

wasn’t sure.

“What do you think?” she asked Peter.

“If you believe,” he shouted to them, “clap your hands; don’t let Tink

die.”

Many clapped.

Some didn’t.

A few beasts hissed.

The clapping stopped suddenly; as if countless mothers had rushed to

their nurseries to see what on earth was happening; but already Tink

was saved. First her voice grew strong, then she popped out of bed,

then she was flashing through the room more merry and impudent than

ever. She never thought of thanking those who believed, but she would

have liked to get at the ones who had hissed.

“And now to rescue Wendy!”

The moon was riding in a cloudy heaven when Peter rose from his tree,

begirt with weapons 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 he was astir.

He regretted now that he had given the birds of the island such strange

names that they are very wild and difficult of approach.

There was no other course but to press forward in redskin fashion, at

which happily he was an adept. But in what direction, for he could not

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 an opportunity, would blaze the trees, for instance, Curly would

drop seeds, and Wendy would leave her handkerchief at some important

place. The morning 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 at the

next tree, or stalking him from behind.

He swore this terrible oath: “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. He was frightfully happy.

Chapter XIV.

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 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, pathetic

Smee. I know not why he was so infinitely pathetic, unless it were

because he was so pathetically unaware of it; but even strong men had

to turn hastily from looking at him, and more than once on summer

evenings he had touched the fount of Hook’s tears and made it flow. Of

this, as of almost everything else, Smee was quite unconscious.

A few of the pirates leant over the bulwarks, drinking in the 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 thought. O man unfathomable. It was his hour of

triumph. 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 deed since the days when he had brought Barbecue to heel; and

knowing as we do how vain a tabernacle is man, could we be surprised

had he now paced the deck unsteadily, bellied out by the winds of his

success?

But there was no elation in his gait, which kept pace with the action

of his sombre mind. Hook was profoundly dejected.

He was often thus when communing with himself on board ship in the

quietude of the night. It was because he was so terribly alone. This

inscrutable man never felt more alone than when surrounded by his dogs.

They were socially inferior to him.

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 at a famous public school;

and its traditions still clung to him like garments, with which indeed

they are largely concerned. 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 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 Flint feared

Barbecue.”

“Barbecue, Flint—what house?” 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 tallow countenance and streaked his doublet. Ofttimes he drew

his sleeve across his face, but there was no damming that trickle.

Ah, envy not Hook.

There came to him a presentiment of his early dissolution. 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

it.

“Better for Hook,” he cried, “if he had had less ambition!” It was in

his darkest hours only that he referred to himself in the third person.

“No little children to love me!”

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, under

the conviction that all children feared him.

Feared him! Feared Smee! 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 hit them with the palm of his hand, because he could not hit with

his fist, but they had only clung to him the more. Michael had tried on

his spectacles.

To tell poor Smee that they thought him lovable! Hook itched to do it,

but it seemed too brutal. Instead, he revolved this mystery in his

mind: why do they find Smee lovable? He 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 the bo’sun good form without knowing it, which is the best form of

all?

He remembered that you have to prove you don’t know you have it before

you are eligible for Pop.

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 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 bacchanalian 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 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 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.

“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.

“Blackbeard 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 King?” John inquired.

Through Hook’s teeth came the answer: “You would have to swear, ‘Down

with the King.’”

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,” 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 porthole on the grimy glass of which you might not have written

with your finger “Dirty pig”; and she had already written it on

several. 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?” asked Wendy, with a look of such frightful contempt

that he nearly fainted.

“They are,” he snarled. “Silence all,” he called gloatingly, “for 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 feel that I have a message to you from your real

mothers, and it is this: ‘We hope our sons will die like English

gentlemen.’”

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.

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 disdainfully.

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 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 from being actors they were suddenly become spectators.

Very frightful was it to see the change that came over him. It was as

if he had been clipped at every joint. He fell in a little heap.

The 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 the 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 thing that was

coming 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.

He signed to them not to give vent to any cry of admiration that might

rouse suspicion. Then he went on ticking.

Chapter XV.

“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, it 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: “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 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 it

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 terrorise 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

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-screech 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 pirate 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?” asked Cookson insolently; and one after

another 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.”

For the last time 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, 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, an oath, “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 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 I think his fierce heart broke.

At last he cried, “Cleave him to the brisket!” but 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.

I think 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 buckler, 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 the two enemies 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 Hook,” came the stern answer, “it is all my doing.”

“Proud and insolent youth,” said Hook, “prepare to meet thy doom.”

“Dark and sinister man,” Peter answered, “have at thee.”

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

favourite 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 him 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 with a

tragic feeling that Peter was showing good form.

Hitherto he had thought it was some fiend fighting him, but darker

suspicions 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 it.

“In two minutes,” he cried, “the ship will be blown to pieces.”

Now, now, he thought, true form will show.

But Peter issued from the powder magazine with the shell in his hands,

and calmly flung it overboard.

What sort of form was Hook himself showing? Misguided man though he

was, we may be glad, without sympathising with him, that in the end 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 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 not wholly unheroic figure, farewell.

For we have come to his last moment.

Seeing Peter slowly advancing upon him through the air with dagger

poised, he sprang upon the bulwarks to cast himself into the sea. He

did not know that the crocodile was waiting for him; for we purposely

stopped the clock that this knowledge might be spared him: a little

mark of respect from us at the end.

He had one last triumph, which I think we need not grudge him. As he

stood on the bulwark looking over his shoulder at Peter gliding through

the air, he invited him with a gesture to use his foot. It made Peter

kick instead of stab.

At last Hook had got the boon for which he craved.

“Bad form,” he cried jeeringly, and went content to the crocodile.

Thus perished James 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

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 Jas. Hook had

feared.

Wendy, of course, had stood by taking no part in the fight, though

watching Peter with glistening eyes; but now that all was over she

became prominent again. She praised them 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 XVI.

THE RETURN HOME

By three bells that morning they were all stirring their stumps; for

there was 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.

It need not be said who was the captain. Nibs and John were first and

second mate. There was a woman aboard. The rest were tars before the

mast, and 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; 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

note 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.

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 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. Instant

obedience was the only safe thing. Slightly got a dozen for looking

perplexed when told to take 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.

Instead of watching the ship, however, we must now return to that

desolate home from which three of our characters had taken heartless

flight so long ago. It seems a shame to have neglected No. 14 all this

time; and yet we may be sure that Mrs. Darling does not blame us. If we

had returned sooner to look with sorrowful sympathy at her, she would

probably have cried, “Don’t be silly; what do I matter? Do go back and

keep an eye on the children.” So long as mothers are like this their

children will take advantage of them; and they may lay to that.

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? It would be the moral lesson they have been in

need of ever since we met them; but if we contrived things in this way

Mrs. Darling would never forgive us.

One thing I should like to do immensely, and that is to tell her, in

the way authors have, that the children are coming back, that indeed

they will be here on Thursday week. This would spoil so completely the

surprise to which Wendy and John and Michael are looking forward. They

have been planning it out on the ship: mother’s rapture, father’s shout

of joy, Nana’s leap through the air to embrace them first, when what

they ought to be prepared for is a good hiding. How delicious to spoil

it all by breaking the news in advance; so that when they enter grandly

Mrs. Darling may not even offer Wendy her mouth, and Mr. Darling may

exclaim pettishly, “Dash it all, here are those boys again.” However,

we should get no thanks even for this. We are beginning to know Mrs.

Darling by this time, and may be sure that she would upbraid us for

depriving the children of their little pleasure.

“But, my dear madam, it is ten days till Thursday week; so that by

telling you what’s what, we can save you ten days of unhappiness.”

“Yes, but at what a cost! By depriving the children of ten minutes of

delight.”

“Oh, if you look at it in that way!”

“What other way is there in which to look at it?”

You see, the woman had no proper spirit. I had meant to say

extraordinarily nice things about her; but I despise her, and not one

of them will I say now. She does not really need to be told to have

things ready, for they are ready. All the beds are aired, and she never

leaves the house, and observe, the window is open. For all the use we

are to her, we might well go back to the ship. However, as we are here

we may as well stay and look on. That is all we are, lookers-on. Nobody

really wants us. So let us watch and say jaggy things, in the hope that

some of them will hurt.

The only change to be seen in the night-nursery is that between nine

and six the kennel is no longer there. When the children flew away, Mr.

Darling felt in his bones that all the blame was his for having chained

Nana up, and that from first to last she had been wiser than he. Of

course, as we have seen, he was quite a simple man; indeed he might

have passed for a boy again if he had been able to take his baldness

off; but he had also a noble sense of justice and a lion’s courage to

do what seemed right to him; and having thought the matter out with

anxious care after the flight of the children, he went down on all

fours and crawled into the kennel. To all Mrs. Darling’s dear

invitations to him to come out he replied sadly but firmly:

“No, my own one, this is the place for me.”

In the bitterness of his remorse he swore that he would never leave the

kennel until his children came back. Of course this was a pity; but

whatever Mr. Darling did he had to do in excess, otherwise he soon gave

up doing it. And there never was a more humble man than the once proud

George Darling, as he sat in the kennel of an evening talking with his

wife of their children and all their pretty ways.

Very touching was his deference to Nana. He would not let her come into

the kennel, but on all other matters he followed her wishes implicitly.

Every morning the kennel was carried with Mr. Darling in it to a cab,

which conveyed him to his office, and he returned home in the same way

at six. Something of the strength of character of the man will be seen

if we remember how sensitive he was to the opinion of neighbours: this

man whose every movement now attracted surprised attention. Inwardly he

must have suffered torture; but he preserved a calm exterior even when

the young criticised his little home, and he always lifted his hat

courteously to any lady who looked inside.

It may have been Quixotic, but it was magnificent. Soon the inward

meaning of it leaked out, and the great heart of the public was

touched. Crowds followed the cab, cheering it lustily; charming girls

scaled it to get his autograph; interviews appeared in the better class

of papers, and society invited him to dinner and added, “Do come in the

kennel.”

On that eventful Thursday week, Mrs. Darling was in the night-nursery

awaiting George’s return home; a very sad-eyed woman. Now that we look

at her closely and remember the gaiety of her in the old days, all gone

now just because she has lost her babes, I find I won’t be able to say

nasty things about her after all. If she was too fond of her rubbishy

children, she couldn’t help it. Look at her in her chair, where she has

fallen asleep. The corner of her mouth, where one looks first, is

almost withered up. Her hand moves restlessly on her breast as if she

had a pain there. Some like Peter best, and some like Wendy best, but I

like her best. Suppose, to make her happy, we whisper to her in her

sleep that the brats are coming back. They are really within two miles

of the window now, and flying strong, but all we need whisper is that

they are on the way. Let’s.

It is a pity we did it, for she has started up, calling their names;

and there is no one in the room but Nana.

“O Nana, I dreamt my dear ones had come back.”

Nana had filmy eyes, but all she could do was put her paw gently on her

mistress’s lap; and they were sitting together thus when the kennel was

brought back. As Mr. Darling puts his head out to kiss his wife, we see

that his face is more worn than of yore, but has a softer expression.

He gave his hat to Liza, who took it scornfully; for she had no

imagination, and was quite incapable of understanding the motives of

such a man. Outside, the crowd who had accompanied the cab home were

still cheering, and he was naturally not unmoved.

“Listen to them,” he said; “it is very gratifying.”

“Lots of little boys,” sneered Liza.

“There were several adults to-day,” he assured her with a faint flush;

but when she tossed her head he had not a word of reproof for her.

Social success had not spoilt him; it had made him sweeter. For some

time he sat with his head out of the kennel, talking with Mrs. Darling

of this success, and pressing her hand reassuringly when she said she

hoped his head would not be turned by it.

“But if I had been a weak man,” he said. “Good heavens, if I had been a

weak man!”

“And, George,” she said timidly, “you are as full of remorse as ever,

aren’t you?”

“Full of remorse as ever, dearest! See my punishment: living in a

kennel.”

“But it is punishment, isn’t it, George? You are sure you are not

enjoying it?”

“My love!”

You may be sure she begged his pardon; and then, feeling drowsy, he

curled round in the kennel.

“Won’t you play me to sleep,” he asked, “on the nursery piano?” and as

she was crossing to the day-nursery he added thoughtlessly, “And shut

that window. I feel a draught.”

“O George, never ask me to do that. The window must always be left open

for them, always, always.”

Now it was his turn to beg her pardon; and she went into the

day-nursery and played, and soon he was asleep; and while he slept,

Wendy and John and Michael flew into the room.

Oh no. We have written it so, because that was the charming arrangement

planned by them before we left the ship; but something must have

happened since then, for it is not they who have flown in, it is Peter

and Tinker Bell.

Peter’s first words tell all.

“Quick Tink,” he whispered, “close the window; bar it! That’s right.

Now you and I must get away by the door; and when Wendy comes she will

think her mother has barred her out; and she will have to go back with

me.”

Now I understand what had hitherto puzzled me, why when Peter had

exterminated the pirates he did not return to the island and leave Tink

to escort the children to the mainland. This trick had been in his head

all the time.

Instead of feeling that he was behaving badly he danced with glee; then

he peeped into the day-nursery to see who was playing. He whispered to

Tink, “It’s Wendy’s mother! She is a pretty lady, but not so pretty as

my mother. Her mouth is full of thimbles, but not so full as my

mother’s was.”

Of course he knew nothing whatever about his mother; but he sometimes

bragged about her.

He did not know the tune, which was “Home, Sweet Home,” but he knew it

was saying, “Come back, Wendy, Wendy, Wendy”; and he cried exultantly,

“You will never see Wendy again, lady, for the window is barred!”

He peeped in again to see why the music had stopped, and now he saw

that Mrs. Darling had laid her head on the box, and that two tears were

sitting on her eyes.

“She wants me to unbar the window,” thought Peter, “but I won’t, not

I!”

He peeped again, and the tears were still there, or another two had

taken their place.

“She’s awfully fond of Wendy,” he said to himself. He was angry with

her now for not seeing why she could not have Wendy.

The reason was so simple: “I’m fond of her too. We can’t both have her,

lady.”

But the lady would not make the best of it, and he was unhappy. He

ceased to look at her, but even then she would not let go of him. He

skipped about and made funny faces, but when he stopped it was just as

if she were inside him, knocking.

“Oh, all right,” he said at last, and gulped. Then he unbarred the

window. “Come on, Tink,” he cried, with a frightful sneer at the laws

of nature; “we don’t want any silly mothers;” and he flew away.

Thus Wendy and John and Michael found the window open for them after

all, which of course was more than they deserved. 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.”

“So it is,” Michael said, but not with much conviction.

“I say,” cried John, “the kennel!” and he dashed across to look into

it.

“Perhaps Nana is inside it,” Wendy said.

But John whistled. “Hullo,” he said, “there’s a man inside it.”

“It’s father!” exclaimed Wendy.

“Let me see father,” Michael begged eagerly, and he took a good look.

“He is not so big as the pirate I killed,” he said with such frank

disappointment that I am glad Mr. Darling was asleep; it would have

been sad if those had been the first words he heard his little Michael

say.

Wendy and John had been taken aback somewhat at finding their father in

the kennel.

“Surely,” said John, like one who had lost faith in his memory, “he

used not to sleep in the kennel?”

“John,” Wendy said falteringly, “perhaps we don’t remember the old life

as well as we thought we did.”

A chill fell upon them; and serve them right.

“It is very careless of mother,” said that young scoundrel John, “not

to be here when we come back.”

It was then that Mrs. Darling began playing 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!” exclaimed Wendy, with her first real twinge of remorse, “it

was quite time we came back.”

“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. He 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 XVII.

WHEN WENDY GREW UP

I hope you want to know what became of the other boys. They were

waiting below 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 cypher,” 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; and I forget

whether they found it, but at any rate they found corners, and they all

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, 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 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 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 matters.”

“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 from politeness

merely; 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. He had no sense of

time, and was so full of adventures that all I have told you about him

is only a halfpenny-worth of them. I suppose it was because Wendy knew

this that her last words to him were these rather plaintive ones:

“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. Before they had attended school a week they

saw what goats they had been not to remain on the island; but it was

too late now, and soon they settled down to being as ordinary as you or

me or Jenkins minor. It is sad to have to say that the power to fly

gradually left them. At first Nana tied their feet to the bed-posts so

that they should not fly away in the night; and one of their diversions

by day was to pretend to fall off buses; but by and by they ceased to

tug at their bonds in bed, and found that they hurt themselves when

they let go of the bus. In time they could not even fly after their

hats. Want of practice, they called it; but what it really meant was

that they no longer believed.

Michael believed longer than the other boys, though they jeered at him;

so he 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.

She 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.

“Don’t you remember,” she asked, amazed, “how you killed him and saved

all our lives?”

“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 when she explained he could not

remember.

“There are such a lot of them,” he said. “I expect she is no more.”

I expect he was right, for fairies don’t live long, but they are so

little that a short time seems a good while to them.

Wendy was pained too to find 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 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.

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 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 grown

up. You need not be sorry for her. She was one of the kind that likes

to grow up. In the end she grew up of her own free will a day quicker

than other girls.

All the boys were grown up and done for by this time; so it is scarcely

worth while saying anything more about them. You may see the twins and

Nibs and Curly any day going to an office, each carrying a little bag

and an umbrella. Michael is an engine-driver. Slightly married a lady

of title, and so he became a lord. You see that judge in a wig coming

out at the iron door? That used to be Tootles. The bearded man who

doesn’t know any story to tell his children was once John.

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 banns.

Years rolled on again, and Wendy had a daughter. This ought not to be

written in ink but in a golden splash.

She was called Jane, and 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 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 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, thus

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

flies!”

“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 mermaids’ 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.’”

“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 a little boy, and she was 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 the 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 that I know of, 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 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 in bed,

and was interested at once.

“Boy,” she said, “why are you crying?”

Peter rose and bowed to her, and she bowed to him from the bed.

“Hullo,” he said.

“Hullo,” said Jane.

“My name is Peter Pan,” he told her.

“Yes, I know.”

“I came back for my mother,” he explained, “to take her to the

Neverland.”

“Yes, I know,” Jane said, “I have been waiting for you.”

When Wendy returned diffidently she found Peter sitting on the bed-post

crowing gloriously, while Jane in her nighty was flying round the room

in solemn ecstasy.

“She is my mother,” Peter explained; and Jane descended and stood by

his side, with the look in her face that he liked to see on ladies when

they gazed at him.

“He does so need a mother,” Jane said.

“Yes, I know,” Wendy admitted rather forlornly; “no one knows it so

well as I.”

“Good-bye,” said Peter to Wendy; and he rose in the air, and the

shameless Jane rose with him; it was already her easiest way of moving

about.

Wendy rushed to the window.

“No, no,” she cried.

“It is just for spring cleaning time,” Jane said, “he wants me always

to do his spring cleaning.”

“If only I could go with you,” Wendy sighed.

“You see you can’t fly,” said Jane.

Of course in the end Wendy let them fly away together. Our last glimpse

of her shows her at the window, watching them receding into the sky

until they were as small as stars.

As you look at Wendy, you may see her hair becoming white, and her

figure little again, for all this happened long ago. Jane is now a

common grown-up, with a daughter called Margaret; and every spring

cleaning time, except when he forgets, Peter comes for Margaret and

takes her to the Neverland, where she tells him stories about himself,

to which he listens eagerly. When Margaret grows up she will have a

daughter, who is to be Peter’s mother in turn; and thus it will go on,

so long as children are gay and innocent and heartless.

THE END

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PETER PAN \*\*\*