

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 heartbroken about him; she was a grown woman smiling at it all, but they were wet 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