

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 nightgown 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