Slightly looked down at his imaginary plate. “Not quite, Mommy.”
“He didn’t take one bite of his carrots,” Nibs said.
John raised his hand. “Since Peter isn’t here, can I sit in his chair?”
“Sit in Father’s chair? No,” replied Wendy, who had taken to referring to
Peter as Father.
“He’s not our real father,” John complained.
Tootles wanted in, too. “Can I be the father?” he asked.
“No,” Wendy said.
“What about the baby?” he asked.
“I’m the baby,” Michael said. He was already settled in his comfortable
basket.
Tootles moped.
“Slightly has his elbows on the table,” someone reported.
“The twins ate their dessert before their vegetables,” someone else
added.
“Curly is eating all the butter and honey.”
“Nibs is speaking with his mouth full.”
Wasn’t this just like normal family life? Later, after the imaginary dishes
were washed, Wendy sat by the fire and sewed socks with very real holes in
them. As her boys played around her, she felt very content with her familiar
little family. Just one thing was missing.
Suddenly she heard a step above them.
“That’s Peter’s step,” Wendy said. “Children, go greet Father at the door.”
Peter entered, dropping down through his own personal tree, and the
children ran to him happily. He had brought nuts and treats for them and—
from the crocodile—the correct time for Wendy. This he obtained by
following the crocodile until he chimed the hour.
“You spoil us, Peter,” Wendy said.
“We want to dance!” the twins cried.

On the night that would come to be known as “the night of all nights,” the
children ate a make-believe dinner. Unfortunately, their hunger was real,
and as a result they were noisy and misbehaving.
“Be quiet!” Wendy yelled finally, for she was hungry and grumpy, too. “Is
your plate empty, Slightly?”

CHAPTER 11

The Happy Family
“Go ahead,” said Peter, who was in a jolly mood.
“You and Mommy, too!”
“Come on, Peter,” Wendy said. “Children, go put your nightgowns on first.”
While the boys ran to do so, Peter and Wendy had a quiet moment alone.
“Life is good, isn’t it?” Peter said, warming his feet by the fire. “You and me, and the little ones?”
“It is,” Wendy agreed. “I think Curly has your nose.”
“Michael takes after you,” Peter said.
But suddenly, Peter looked scared.
“Wendy,” he said. “This is all make-believe, right? I’m not really their father?”
Wendy looked at him for a few seconds.
“It’s make-believe,” she finally said.
“Whew!” Peter cried. “I can’t tell you how relieved I am to hear that! It would make me feel so old to be their real father!”
“And how do you feel about me?” Wendy asked.
Peter just blinked, as if he didn’t quite understand the question.
Wendy sighed and went to sit at the other end of the room, with her back to him. At that moment, the boys came out and sang and danced for Peter and Wendy in their nightgowns. When they had finished dancing, the boys got into bed for Wendy’s good-night story—the story that they loved best, and which Peter hated. Usually when she told this story, he put his hands over his ears or left the room. Tonight, however, he stayed to listen.
“Once upon a time there was a gentleman,” Wendy began.
“I want a lady,” Curly said.
“I want a white rat,” said Nibs.
“Shhh,” Wendy said. “Okay, there was a lady as well. Their names were Mr. and Mrs. Darling.”
On the other side of the room, Peter flinched.
“Hey,” John said, “I know them.”
“Me too,” Michael said, but he didn’t sound sure.
“Mr. and Mrs. Darling were married and had three—”
“White rats?” Nibs cried hopefully.
“Children,” Wendy said. “And they had a nurse called Nana. But one day Mr. Darling got mad at Nana and chained her up in the yard, and so all the children flew away to Neverland.”
“That is a great story,” said Nibs.
“Imagine how sad these parents were after their children left,” Wendy said.
“Poor parents,” the boys moaned, but they were just pretending to feel sorry.
“It’s an awfully sad story,” the first twin said cheerfully.
“If you knew how strong a mother’s love is, you wouldn’t worry,” Wendy said.
And now she came to the part that Peter hated the most.
“You see,” Wendy said, “the mother left the window open so her children could fly back one day.” She closed her eyes. “Can’t you see it? Can’t you picture the happy scene when the children finally fly back home?”
From Peter’s corner came a hollow groan.
“Are you in pain?” Wendy asked.
“No, but you are wrong about mothers.” He took a deep breath. “A long time ago, I thought my mother would also keep the window open for me, so I stayed away and played. But when I flew back, the window was locked. She had forgotten all about me, and another little boy was sleeping in my bed.”
“Is that true or make-believe?” Wendy asked, alarmed.
Peter wasn’t sure, but it scared the children all the same. So that is what mothers are like, they thought.
“Wendy, let’s go home right now!” John cried. “Maybe it’s too late and the window’s already locked!”

“Yes,” she said, clutching her brothers. She was so worried about the closed window that she didn’t even think about Peter’s feelings. “Peter, will you arrange it?”

“If you like,” he replied coolly, as if she had asked him to pass the nuts. After all, if she didn’t care, neither would he!

Upset at the idea of losing their mother, the lost boys surrounded Wendy threateningly.

“We won’t let you go!” they cried. “We’ll keep you prisoner!”

“Tootles, help!” Wendy cried. Somehow, even though he was the silliest boy, she knew he was the right person to ask.

Tootles stepped between her and the rest of the boys. “You’ll have to go through me first,” he said.

Peter spoke up. “We keep no girls here against their will. Since flying makes you so tired, I’ll have the Indians guide you through the woods. Then Tink can take you across the sea.”

“Thank you, Peter,” Wendy said. She turned to the lost boys. “Come with us,” she offered. “I am sure my parents would adopt you.”

This was meant mainly for Peter, but all of the boys jumped with joy.

“Peter, can we go?” they pleaded.

“If you like,” he repeated bitterly, and they rushed to pack. He, however, didn’t move.

“Go pack, Peter,” Wendy said, her voice low.

“I’m not going,” he replied. Then, to show that he didn’t care, he skipped around the room singing.

“But we can find your mother,” Wendy begged.

“No! I don’t like mothers! She would only tell me I have to grow up and stop having fun.”

The other boys watched this exchange nervously. Peter not coming? What would they do? Could they still go? Did they want to?

“Now, then,” Peter said, “I’ll have no fuss, no blubbery good-byes. It was a pleasure to meet you, Wendy.” He held out his hand formally.

“You’ll take good care of yourself?” she asked.

“Yes. Ready, Tinker Bell?”

Tinker Bell groaned from her cave. She resented having to help Wendy, but at least the girl would finally be gone.

“Then off you go.”

At just that moment, however, there was a clashing sound above. The pirates had attacked the Indians. The trip home was off, at least for now.