

ild myself. I have no real

said, although he actually
rs than any of them. "We
ly person. You'll do."

y, and invited all the boys
s they gathered around,
erly thing and told them
" When she was finished,
to their cave and tucked
g before returning to her

CHAPTER 8

Something Worse than the Night



The next morning, the Darling children were measured for their trees. Hook, if you recall, thought it silly to have one tree for each lost boy, but it actually made a great deal of sense. Each different-size boy had a door that fit him as perfectly as a tailored suit. This way, they could all enter the cave at once, without having to wait in line. More important, no other body except each lost boy's exact body could fit in that particular tree. This was especially helpful in case of sneak pirate attacks!

After a few days' practice, the Darling children became very quick and graceful about using their trees. To enter the cave, they sucked their breath in, and down they went at exactly the right speed. To rise, they sucked in and blew out and so wiggled up.

They also grew to love their new underground home. It was simple and sweet, a bit like camping. Even Wendy stayed there now. It was lonely in her own house, and this felt so much more like a real family. The cave was one large, cozy room with a floor made of dirt. The boys used mushrooms as chairs and a sawed-off tree trunk as a table.

There was one big bed, on which all the boys (except Michael) slept, packed in like sardines in a tin. Because space was so tight, there was a strict rule against turning around until one boy gave the signal, and then everyone had to turn at once.

Michael could have slept in the bed, too—there was always room in Neverland for one more—but he was the littlest and Wendy liked to pretend that he was her baby, so she hung him in a basket next to her bed. Her pet wolf, who followed her everywhere, slept on the floor, guarding them both.

Tinker Bell also lived in the cave, in a tiny space carved into the wall, no larger than a bird cage. Over the entrance to her room hung a curtain that she could pull shut when she wanted privacy. Small as it was, Tink's room was the fanciest part of the whole cave, filled with the finest fabrics, soft tiny bedspreads, and delicately carved antique furniture.

"Your house may be bigger," Tinker Bell informed Wendy, "but mine is better."

Still, Wendy had bigger concerns than whether Tink's house was better. The boys kept her so busy, cooking and cleaning and sewing,

that weeks would sometimes go by before she left the cave and saw daylight. *It makes one long for the old single life*, she thought wistfully, as a real grown-up might.

As for her parents, she missed them and worried about them, but there was something about Neverland that made time and those worries blur. Somehow, she was confident that the bedroom window—and her parents' arms—would always remain open for her to fly back into.

What did disturb Wendy, however, was the fact that John was starting to forget their parents—and Michael had already forgotten them entirely. He actually thought she was his real mother!

To fix this, Wendy set up a little school, with their old life as the subject instead of spelling or math.

The other boys wanted to go to school, too, so

she let them sit in. Of course, they always failed the quizzes, especially the ones with hard questions like "What color are Mother's eyes?" "How did we spend last Christmas?" and "Describe Father's laugh."

Peter never came to school or took a quiz. He said it was because he despised mothers and holidays and even, sometimes, laughs—but really it was that he couldn't read or write.

While the other boys were in school, Peter would go off alone. Whether he went on real or imaginary adventures, Wendy could never tell unless she or one of the other boys had also gone—and, with Peter, sometimes not even then. But Wendy had many of her own adventures.

Which such tale would you now like to hear? The night attack by the Indians on the underground cave, when a few of them got stuck in the hollow trees like fat Santas in chimneys? Or

PETER PAN

perhaps the time Peter saved Tiger Lily's life in the mermaid lagoon, and so made her a lifelong friend?

Maybe I should tell you, instead, about the cake the pirates baked and kept leaving around to make the boys sick, but which Wendy kept finding and snatching from the hands of her children until it got stale and they didn't want it anymore and Hook eventually tripped over the hard stale lump in the dark, stubbing his toe.

I could tell you about the birds that were Peter's friends, especially the Never bird who lived in the tree above the lagoon, and how her nest fell in the water once, but she kept sitting on it anyway, to protect her eggs, and Peter gave orders that no one was to disturb her.

A shorter lagoon adventure, and almost as exciting, was Tinker Bell's attempt—with the help of some other fairies—to float a sleeping Wendy back to the mainland on a leaf, until

SOMETHING WORSE THAN THE NIGHT

Wendy woke up and swam back to Neverland, foiling Tink again.

Perhaps the best way to choose is simply to toss a coin. And so the lagoon has won.

If you are lucky, when you close your eyes at night you will sometimes see a lovely lagoon where the mermaids live and sing their beautiful songs. When you are awake, the nearest you can get to this lagoon is the beach, at sunset, in the surf.

The children spent long summer days at the lagoon, swimming or lazily floating. Much to Wendy's disappointment, the mermaids turned out to be as unfriendly as Tinker Bell. When they weren't splashing her with their tails, they ignored her entirely.

The mermaids didn't like the boys, either—except, of course, Peter. Peter spent hours talking to the mermaids or sitting on their tails when they got particularly cheeky.

The lagoon was most beautiful at night, when the moon came up and the mermaids began to sing their strange, wailing songs to lure sailors onto the rocks. But it was not a safe place for humans then.

Wendy knew this, and made sure that she always gathered her children and left before dark. On this day, however, as they were all dozing on Marooners' Rock after lunch, something strange and frightening happened.

It wasn't night yet—at least Wendy didn't think it was—but the lagoon seemed to shift around them. Little shivers ran over the water, and shadows replaced the sun.

It was not night that had come. It was something worse.

CHAPTER 9

The Mermaid Lagoon



Wendy probably should have woken the children at once, but she was a young mother and it had not yet been half an hour since they had eaten. Even when she heard the sound of muffled oars she did not wake them, although she was so scared that her heart seemed to leap into her throat. Instead, she stood guard over them while they digested.

Peter, however—who was snoozing on the rock as well—could smell danger even in his sleep. At the sound of the oars, he jumped to his