

CHAPTER 2

Now, Peter! Now!



Children often find even the strangest events rather commonplace. For example, they might casually mention that when they were playing in the woods last Wednesday, they met a ghost and played tag with him on roller skates. It was in just this way that Wendy revealed something quite upsetting to her mother one morning. Mrs. Darling was tidying up the nursery where all of the young Darling children slept and discovered some leaves on the floor.

She asked Wendy about them, but Wendy merely replied, "Oh, Peter must have left those leaves."

"What do you mean?" Mrs. Darling asked nervously.

"He really is quite messy," said Wendy, who was a very tidy child. With a sigh, she explained that Peter often came to the nursery at night and sat at the foot of her bed, playing the flute.

"Sweetheart," Mrs. Darling assured her, "the front door is locked at night. No one can get in."

"He comes in through the window," Wendy insisted.

"He can't possibly. We are three stories up! Why didn't you tell me this before?" her mother cried.

"I got hungry and forgot," said Wendy, who was now feeling rather hungry again.

While Wendy went to look for a snack, Mrs. Darling stayed behind, still frowning about the

leaves. The thing that scared her most was that she was fairly certain they were from a tree that did not even grow in England. She searched the room for other clues, but found none.

"You are making a fuss out of nothing at all," Mr. Darling insisted when she told him. "Now come to bed."

"I suppose you are right," Mrs. Darling said. Only he wasn't. The very next night, she tucked the children in, went downstairs to sit by the warm fire and sew, and fell asleep.

Almost immediately she started to dream. She dreamed that Neverland had drifted too close to the beach, and that a strange boy had jumped into the water and was swimming toward her children. Wendy, John, and Michael were on the shore, happily waving him in.

This might have only been a silly dream were it not for the fact that, upstairs, the window of the children's bedroom had blown open and a

boy really had flown in and dropped onto the floor. With him was a little light, no bigger than a fist, that darted around the room like a mosquito.

Mrs. Darling woke with a start. She knew at once that the swimming boy was Peter Pan. She ran upstairs, threw open the door to the children's bedroom, and—sure enough—there he was.

He was wearing clothes made of leaves—the same strange kind that he had left behind the last time. But the strangest thing about him was that—although he must have been very old now, at least as old as she—he still seemed to have all of his baby teeth.

When Peter saw Mrs. Darling, he bared those pearly little teeth at her and growled.

Mrs. Darling screamed, and in a split second Nana was there. She growled, too, and lunged at Peter. He dodged her and jumped out the window.

Mrs. Darling screamed again. After all, she

didn't want the boy dead! She looked down but saw no broken body. Looking up, she saw what looked like a shooting star speeding away.

When she turned, she saw that Nana had something in her mouth. It was Peter's shadow. Nana had nipped it with her teeth right before Peter jumped, and the shadow had snapped off.

Nana wanted to hang the shadow out the window so Peter could come back and get it without bothering the children. But Mrs. Darling thought that it would look like laundry drying. Mr. Darling would be upset if the neighbors saw that.

Instead, she decided to stuff the shadow into the bottom of a drawer, hidden away like one of her children's unpleasant thoughts.

"That horrid dog," Mr. Darling said when she told him the next day what had happened. "She can't go around snapping off people's shadows left and right. Why, we'll be sued!"

Poor Nana. And poor Mr. Darling, too. He knew he was being awful and unfair, but he couldn't help it. He was frustrated and jealous—about other people doing better in the stock market, and about the children loving Nana so very much—possibly more than him. It didn't help matters that Nana had brushed up against him yesterday, getting white hair all over his coat.

"Go to the doghouse where you belong!" he yelled at her.

"George," Mrs. Darling whispered, "remember what I told you about that boy. What if he comes back and Nana's not here to guard the children?"

But Mr. Darling would not listen. He was determined to show everyone who was the master of the house. And so out Nana went.

That night, as Mrs. Darling was putting the children to bed and lighting their night-lights, they heard Nana downstairs in the yard, barking.

"She is just protesting being chained up," John said.

Wendy was wiser, however. "No, that is how Nana barks when she smells danger," she said.

Mrs. Darling shuddered. Outside, she saw a million stars, some of which seemed to her to be hovering around the house, as if trying to get in.

Oh, how she wished that she and Mr. Darling did not have to go to a dinner party tonight!

"Don't worry, Mama," Michael said. "Nothing can hurt us when our night-lights are lit, isn't that right?"

This was something Mrs. Darling had told the children in the past, so she couldn't very well take it back now. "That's right," she said soothingly. "Night-lights are the eyes a mother leaves behind at night to watch over her babies."

Besides, she told herself, she and Mr. Darling would be so close, only a few houses away. What could possibly happen?

PETER PAN

A few minutes later, Mr. and Mrs. Darling were outside, strolling arm in arm to their dinner party. But they were being observed from above. It was the stars, spying. The old stars were glassy-eyed and bored, but the little ones were curious and full of wonder and winks.

They didn't particularly care for Peter, who liked to sneak up behind them and try to blow them out, but they were generally fond of fun — and Peter was all about fun, so they decided to help him tonight. The instant Mr. and Mrs. Darling were safely inside the neighbor's house, a commotion broke out in the heavens.

A chorus of the smallest stars in the Milky Way cried out, "Now, Peter! Now!"

CH

Acorn Kisses

The night-lights were and Mrs. Darling left the light gets tired sometimes work, as you might imagine and shiny all the time.

Wendy's light went yawns being contagious promptly yawned as well lights could close the out from the resulting

The children's room