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Opening extract from

Peter Pan and Wendy

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Chapter One

A Strange Appearance

It was No. 14 where the Darling family lived: I can't say in what street; but they knew the street well enough themselves. Mrs Darling, their mother, was the chief person in the house: she was a most lovely lady, and one couldn't look at her without wanting to kiss her. Mr Darling went every day to the City: and what he did there, nobody quite understood, but it was something very important. The three children were Wendy, who was nine; John, who was seven, and Michael, who was only four but tried to keep his age a secret.

Mrs Darling had two servants. Liza was the housekeeper, such a

tiny little midget! – and Nana, the children's nurse, was a big Newfoundland dog. It is very uncommon, of course, to have a dog for a nurse: but Nana was a treasure. She was so fond of children that she could be trusted to look after them in every way – bath, clean clothes,

medicine, tidy nursery, all the rest of it. She did not actually teach them their lessons: no doubt she could have done so, only Mr Darling disapproved of that idea. But she took them to school every day, carrying an umbrella in her mouth if the day looked rainy; and waited there to bring them safely back. She never was forgetful, or cross, nor did she ever get a bone-in-her-leg like some nurses, so that she couldn't romp with the children. They had simply lovely games together in the evenings.

So the Darlings were extremely happy people: and perhaps the children were happiest of all, for whatever they had not really got, they pretended they had it in their make-believe island called the Neverland. This island wasn't a really-truly one, you see, so it changed about a good deal, according to who was thinking about it. John lived there (that is, he pretended he did) in a boat turned bottom-up on the seashore: he had no friends or companions, but he had a lagoon with flamingoes flying over it: they were splendid birds for shooting at and always missing. Michael's make-believe island was quite different, but then he was very small and his mind had not yet quite arranged itself. He had make-believe friends who only visited him by night in his

wigwam, and outside there was a flamingo with lagoons flying over it. As for Wendy, she made up a delicious place for herself. She lived in a little house of leaves stitched together, and kept a pet orphan wolf. It was extremely interesting.

Of course, when the three little Darlings were playing, their three Neverlands got rather mixed and crowded. But that's the good of a make-believe island, you can cram it up with all sorts of things and, although it may become hopelessly jumbled, it will never burst.

Every night, when Mrs Darling put her little ones to bed, she picked up small scraps of information about the Neverland: they were all odds and ends, because no one seemed able to describe it very clearly. But what puzzled her beyond anything, was a name which she heard the children mention more and more often as time went on. This name was Peter. Now she did not know any Peters, nor did any of the children: so at last she asked Wendy, 'But who *is* Peter?'

'Why, Peter Pan, you know, Mother.'

Mrs Darling had to think a lot before she began to remember. Yes, when she was very young she believed there was a little boy named Peter Pan, who had flown out of the window when he was a baby, and

never could come back or grow up. He was supposed to live with the fairies in Kensington Gardens (which is a leafy part of London). She felt sure he was only a story, not a real child. But when she explained to Wendy, 'My love, you must have been dreaming,' Wendy said, 'Oh no, he isn't a dream. He comes through the window in the night, you see, and sits on the end of my bed, and plays to me on his pipes. It's perfectly sweet. So's he.'

'Oh, but that's nonsense!' said Mrs Darling. 'How could anybody get in? The window is three floors up.'

'Well, you see those leaves on the floor, Mother. He left them there last night. They were not there when we went to bed.'

Mrs Darling was so surprised, she could not tell what to say. Certainly there were some strange skeleton leaves on the nursery floor, by the window, and they were not off any English tree that she had ever seen. She peered about on the floor for footmarks, and she felt up the chimney with the poker. Not a sign of anybody. And it was thirty feet from the window to the pavement. Very odd.

When she talked to Mr Darling about it, he put all the blame upon Nana. He said: 'It's just the sort of rubbish a dog would stuff into