***Peter Pan and Wendy***

***Chapter 16***

***The Return Home***

***Synopsis:***

The next day [Peter Pan](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Peter_Pan) and the lost boys adopt the role of pirates, at first more in play than in earnest. But the boys quickly realize they cannot predict how far Peter Pan will go as he takes the helm as the ship's new captain. They don't know how much like [Captain Hook](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Captain_Hook) he will become. They are especially frightened when he bends the fingers of his hand as if they were a hook.

Peter Pan sets a course towards the Azores. These are a chain of real islands owned by Portugal in the North Atlantic Ocean. Although they are 1,500 miles away from England, Peter Pan says they need to get there first before it will be safe to fly [Wendy Darling](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Wendy_Darling) and her brothers back to London. [Mrs. Darling](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Mrs._Darling) has kept the nursery ready for them every night, even to the point of leaving the bedroom window open. The only difference is that [Mr. Darling](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Mr._Darling) has moved Nana's kennel to the backyard where he lives in it out of a sense of guilt. He thinks it was his fault the children were taken because he ordered the Newfoundland chained up outside. He even works in the kennel, having it transported by cab every day to his office. Far from being ridiculed for it, Mr. Darling becomes a celebrity. He is interviewed in the newspapers, chased for autographs, and invited to dinner by the cream of society—as long as he arrives in the kennel. Mrs. Darling is worried that he enjoys the notoriety too much, to the point that he has forgotten that living in the kennel is supposed to be a penance.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Darling has been aged by grief over her missing children. She waits for them each night in the nursery chair, her mouth "withered" and her hand rubbing her chest as if her heart pains her. Nana stays by her side, her paw in Mrs. Darling's lap, as Liza the maid helps Mr. Darling back upstairs in his kennel. He shivers and asks for the nursery window to be closed, but Mrs. Darling forbids it. "The window must be left open for them, always, always," she says.

They fall asleep, and that is when Peter Pan and [Tinker Bell](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Tinker_Bell) fly through the open window. He has arrived first with a plan to keep Wendy Darling to himself. "Quick, Tink, close the window. Bar it!" he says. "When Wendy comes she will think her mother has barred her out, and she will have to go back with me." But he relents when he sees how sad Mrs. Darling is. He unlocks the window and flies away, just in time for Wendy and her brothers to arrive home.

Filled with guilt, Wendy decides they cannot just burst in on their mother. It would be too much for her. So she suggests they all just get back into their beds, as if they had never left. When Mrs. Darling sees them, she at first thinks she is still dreaming. Finally she realizes they are home for real. Nana and Mr. Darling rush in, and everyone is filled with joy at the reunion: everyone that is, except Peter Pan. "He was looking through the window at the one joy from which he must be forever barred," the narrator comments.

[Barrie](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/author/) breaks the fourth wall in this chapter, referring to himself explicitly as the "author" as he ridicules [Mrs. Darling](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Mrs._Darling) for her tendency to martyr herself as a mother. He says he wants to spoil the children's surprise homecoming by telling her in advance that her children will return home in 19 days. However, he knows she would chastise him if he did. "Don't be silly, what do I matter?" Barrie has Mrs. Darling say. Although he is the one who put those words in her mouth, he mocks her anyway. "I had meant to say extraordinarily nice things about her," the author writes, "but I despise her, and not one of them will I say now." Yet a few pages later, the author has relented. When he tells readers how sorrow has diminished Mrs. Darling, he writes, "I find I won't be able to say nasty things about her after all."

No one is spared the sardonic jabs of the author in this chapter. [Mr. Darling](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Mr._Darling) is so "simple" that he could have "passed for a boy again if he had been able to take his baldness off." Yet the members of London society are perhaps even sillier. They are the ones who invite him to come to their homes for dinner while still in his kennel. Even the Darling children must endure some ribbing from their creator. When he decides to feel sorry for Mrs. Darling after all, Barrie casts the blame on them, writing, "If she was too fond of her rubbishy children she couldn't help it."

The playful silliness of much of the language in this chapter helps to balance the sentimental drama of the children's return home. It would be easy for a scene like this to tip over the edge and become maudlin. Barrie expertly avoids this via his use of sarcastic humor.

Using the same approach with Peter, however, would not work so well, for in this chapter we see a momentous change in him. Although he will forever be remembered by readers as "The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up," Peter does show some maturity here. When he arrives at the Darlings' house, his original selfish plan is to bar the nursery window, so Wendy will think their mother has forgotten her, as Peter's long-ago mother has forgotten him. With nowhere else to go, Peter hopes Wendy will then return to Neverland with him. But he abandons this plan when he sees the tears in Mrs. Darling's eyes as she sits in the empty nursery, pining for her lost children.

For perhaps the first time in the entire book, Peter demonstrates that he does after all have the capacity for selflessness. As the final chapter of the book will reveal, it is only temporary, and not a lasting change in his eternally boyish personality. For now all readers see is a heart-wrenching final moment when Peter is outside the nursery window and knows he will never have Wendy to mother him again.

***Critical Analysis:***

The lost boys now sail the pirate ship, with Peter as their captain. While the ship is on its way to the Darlings’ house, the narrator assesses how Mrs. Darling will react when her children return. Back at the Darling house, the nursery remains unchanged, except that Mr. Darling has moved Nana’s kennel, believing that his decision to chain Nana up outside led to the children’s disappearance. Mrs. Darling sleeps forlornly in a rocking chair in the night-nursery; unbeknownst to her, the children are on their way home, and only two miles away. As Mr. Darling arrives back home from work, she wakes from a dream in which her children return. While in Nana’s kennel, Mr. Darling asks Mrs. Darling to play a song on the piano for him to fall asleep to; when he asks her to close the window, she reminds him that they always have to leave the window open for when the children return. After Mrs. Darling leaves the night nursery, Peter and Tinker Bell fly through the window. Peter’s plan is to bar the window so that Wendy will believe that her mother has shut them out. Peter “peeps into” the day nursery to see Mrs. Darling playing the piano. As Mrs. Darling begins to cry, Peter first seems frustrated that Wendy’s mother does not understand that Wendy is now his; however, feeling as if “she were inside him, knocking,” he unbars the window. Before flying away, he says to Tinker Bell, “we don’t want any silly mothers.” Wendy, John, and Michael arrive at their home to find the window open. While Michael only vaguely remembers their nursery, Wendy and John excitedly remind him that they are home. The children see the kennel with their father inside of it, and soon after, they hear their mother’s piano in the other room. Rather than startle her with their return, Wendy reasons that they should get into their beds, so that when their mother comes in the morning, it will seem as if they had never left. However, because Mrs. Darling has become so used to seeing the children sleeping in her dreams, she does not react to seeing them in their beds. Alarmed that their mother may have forgotten them, each of the children springs up from bed to address her, but Mrs. Darling still believes she is dreaming when she hears their voices. The children then run to their mother, who ecstatically calls out to Mr. Darling. While the reunited family embraces, Peter watches from outside the window, seeing “the one joy from which he must be for ever barred.”

***Summary and analysis part by part:***

***Summary part 1:***

The next morning, all the boys are dressed as pirates, with [Peter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/peter-pan) as their captain. Peter talks and acts just like [Hook](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/captain-jas-hook), and some of the boys think he intends to become a pirate. [Wendy](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/wendy) makes him an outfit from Hook’s old clothes, and he holds his finger bent like a claw.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Peter’s feelings about Hook are morally neutral: he does not stumble over even the smallest trace of guilt when he becomes him. The battle between the boys and the pirates was not a battle of real good against real evil, or complicated person against complicated person. For Peter, it was a game.

***Summary part 2:***

Now the narrator jumps to [Wendy](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/wendy) and her brother’s old home. The narrator considers telling the Darlings in advance about the children’s return, but he imagines that [Mrs. Darling](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/mrs-darling) would not want him to spoil the children’s surprise. She has kept the children’s room ready for them all this time, though perhaps they do not deserve it.

***Analysis Part 2:***Like Wendy, Mrs. Darling seems permanently suspended on the cusp between childhood and adulthood. On the one hand there is the kiss that never quite disappears, and her utter sympathy with children; on the other hand, her endless love and patience.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Mr. Darling](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/mr-darling), on his end, has felt responsible for the children’s disappearance: he feels they left because he tied up [Nana](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters) in the yard. Because he is quite a dramatic man, he has decided to live in Nana’s kennel until the children return. Nana now lives in the house. Though Mr. Darling is proud and socially conscious, he refuses to leave the kennel; he even goes to work inside it. At first he is something of a laughingstock, but then the neighborhood becomes charmed with his “quixotic” gesture and he becomes famous and beloved.

***Analysis Part 3:***

In the beginning of the story, when the children were still at home, Mr. Darling seemed preoccupied with finances, respectability, and ties. He was focused on surviving and appearing to be adult, and was generally a little tone-deaf when it came to the subtleties of children’s feelings. The children’s absence seems to have sharpened whatever adulthood had dulled.

***Summary Part 4:***[Mrs. Darling](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/mrs-darling) misses the children very much and always seems sad. The mysterious [kiss](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/symbols/the-kiss) in the corner of her mouth “is almost withered up.” The narrator meant to scold her, but he confesses that he loves her best of all the characters in the story. She is sleeping lightly in the nursery, and she dreams that the children are coming back.

***Analysis Part 4:***

If the children’s absence has made Mr. Darling more childlike, it seems to have ‘withered’ the child in Mrs. Darling. Peter Pan can be seen “in the faces of women who have no children,” but there is a different sort of child in Mrs. Darling’s face, and it comes of having had children.

***Summary Part 5:***

[Mr. Darling](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/mr-darling) comes home. He asks Mrs. Darling to play a song on the piano and to close the window, but she insists that the window must always stay open. He falls asleep, but she continues to play in a little room adjoining the nursery. Just then, [Peter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/peter-pan) and [Tinker Bell](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/tinker-bell) fly in. Peter has come to shut the nursery window, so that [Wendy](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/wendy) might feel forgotten and return to Neverland. But when he sees [Mrs. Darling](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/mrs-darling) cry quietly to herself, he feels uncomfortably as though he can feel her “knocking” inside him, and he opens the window back up.

***Analysis Part 5:***

This moment is parallel in many ways to the moment when Hook descends to the boys’ house and watches Peter sleeping. Peter catches Mrs. Darling unawares, just as Hook catches Peter; Peter is almost unwillingly moved by the music and the tears, just as Hook is moved by Peter’s pearly teeth. But in Peter, that feeling affects him morally and he does not go through with his plan to make it seem to Wendy and her brothers that their parents have forgotten them.

***Summary Part 6:***

In a little while the children themselves fly in, slowly remembering their old home. They are surprised to see their father in [Nana](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters)’s kennel. They wonder about [Mrs. Darling](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/mrs-darling), but just then she begins to play the piano again, and they sigh with relief. [Wendy](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/wendy) decides that they should all climb into their beds, so that when she comes in again, everything will look just as it used to.

***Analysis Part 6:***

Peter’s callous indifference to Wendy’s feelings in the previous scene are the inverse of Wendy’s sensitive attention to her mother’s feelings. She wants her mother to feel the greatest possible joy at their return (her own joy does not detract from the gesture’s thoughtfulness).

***Summary Part 7:***

When [Mrs. Darling](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/mrs-darling) comes into the nursery and sees the children in their beds, she thinks she is only dreaming. The children are frightened and call out, but still she thinks she is imagining them. Only when they all run up and hug her does she finally celebrate their homecoming. It is a very happy scene. [Peter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/peter-pan) watches sadly from the windowsill: it is “the one joy from which he must be for ever barred.”

***Analysis Part 7:***

We might think that first that Peter is “barred” from this sort of happy familial scene simply because he has no family. But it is not the circumstances that are barred to him, in the quote – it is the joy itself. One must love a person immensely to experience it, and Peter as a selfish, pure child can never feel that kind of love.