***Peter Pan and Wendy***

***Chapter 16***

***When Wendy Grew Up***

***Synopsis:***

The lost boys are waiting downstairs, hats in hand, hoping the Darlings will adopt them as [Wendy Darling](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Wendy_Darling) promised. [Mrs. Darling](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Mrs._Darling) agrees at once, but [Mr. Darling](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Mr._Darling) has to be convinced.

Wendy goes to the window with her mother to say good-bye to [Peter Pan](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Peter_Pan). Mrs. Darling offers to adopt him, too. But he refuses when she says she would send him to school and later off to work. "Keep back, lady," Peter says. "No one is going to catch me and make me a man." He tries to entice Wendy back to Neverland with reminders of how much fun they would have. They could live in the treetops and play with the new fairies. Wendy asks permission to go away again with Peter, but her mother refuses.

Mrs. Darling does make Peter an offer: he can come once every year to take Wendy for a week's worth of spring cleaning. Peter is thrilled, but then he has "no sense of time," and Wendy is filled with foreboding. "You won't forget me, Peter, will you, before spring cleaning time comes?" she asks.

It is the children who forget first. The boys all go to school and are sorry within a week that they didn't stay in Neverland. But gradually they get used to their new lives, and they forget how to fly. "Want of practice, they called it; but what it really meant was that they no longer believed," the narrator says. Michael Darling maintains his belief longer than any of the others, so he is there a year later when Peter Pan returns to fetch Wendy. But things are not the same. Peter remembers nothing of their adventures together— not even [Tinker Bell](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Tinker_Bell) who, because the short lives of fairies, has died in the past year. Wendy is shocked, but she still has fun and waits with eagerness for Peter's return the next year.

He never shows up. He does return one last time the year after, not even realizing he had skipped a year. Meanwhile, Wendy tries her hardest not to grow up but of course she can't—and after a while she starts to like the process. Eventually she gets married and has a daughter of her own, Jane Darling. Jane loves to ask about Peter Pan and Neverland, and Wendy is happy to answer. Although she remembers it all, her feelings for Peter have become just a memory.

Then one night Peter flies back through the nursery window again. He doesn't look a day older than when Wendy first met him, still with all his baby teeth. Peter doesn't notice at first that Wendy is now a woman, although she is suddenly self-conscious of how grown-up she is. Then he notices Jane and asks, "Hullo, is it a new one?" He asks Wendy to fly away with him for spring cleaning he has forgotten for decades. Wendy turns up the nursery light so he can see her clearly. Peter gives a cry of pain when he sees that Wendy is an adult.

Jane awakens and asks, "Boy, why are you crying?" And in that instant Peter seems to forget all about Wendy and focus on Jane as his new mother. She instantly learns to fly and takes off with Peter, Wendy yearning to go with them. But as Jane reminds her, Wendy has forgotten how to fly.

One day Jane, too, forgets how to fly. By then she has a daughter named Margaret Darling who goes with Peter Pan to Neverland. As the book ends, the narrator tells readers, so it shall always be this way. There will always be a new daughter to become Peter's mother, "so long as children are gay and innocent and heartless."

With the phrase "gay and innocent and heartless" repeated at least twice, the story zeroes in on its central theme in the final chapter. For the author, these qualities not only define childhood, they are also what make it superior to adulthood.

Peter sees adulthood as being irksome. He tells [Mrs. Darling](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Mrs._Darling) flat out that he doesn't want to be made into a man. He doesn't want to go to school and "learn solemn things" and then face a life of endless drudgery at a job. But it's not just the responsibilities of being an adult that he loathes, it's the physical changes that come with growing up as well. Peter is appalled by the idea of growing facial hair. Imagine how he might react if he ever lost those baby teeth.

Peter mercilessly erases from his mind any character who has the misfortune of growing up, growing old, and dying. Peter cannot remember the dead [Captain Hook](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Captain_Hook) who once loomed so large in his mind. He has completely forgotten poor [Tinker Bell](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Tinker_Bell), who died of fairy old age the year after Wendy and her brothers returned to London. The narrator even tells us that everyone forgot Mrs. Darling as soon as she died.

Peter's fickle memory extends even to Wendy. He comes twice to take her back to Neverland for spring cleaning, but then forgets her for decades afterward. The narrator lets Peter off the hook for this lapse. But the narrator heaps scorn on the heads of every other character who has the temerity to grow up and forget their childhood belief in the infinite possibility of magic. They have lost their desire for fun itself. John, Michael, and the six former lost boys are all relegated to unimportance after they start acquiring jobs and wives. "It is scarcely worthwhile saying anything more about them," the narrator proclaims.

Wendy does remember, but even so she is judged negatively for growing up. After all, the narrator says, she did it of her own free will, and "a day quicker than other girls." Still, she not only recalls her time in Neverland with Peter, she tells stories about him to her own daughter, Jane. Peter does belatedly return again to the nursery window, expecting a young Wendy to be waiting for him. Then the book issues a harsh indictment of her for the crime of being an adult. When Peter arrives and Wendy sees he is still as young as he ever was, "She huddled by the fire not daring to move, helpless and guilty, a big woman." It is a brutal condemnation.

What is it about this state of being "gay, innocent, and heartless" that is so important to both the characters and their author as well? Within the book, these qualities are valued not just for themselves but also because they are the necessary prerequisites for something even more important—belief. [Barrie](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/author/) never comes out and states directly that this belief is in magic. In fact, the word magic appears only twice in the book. But that appears to be what he means. Belief in the existence of magical beings can save a life, as it did for Tinker Bell. Belief in the possibility that she can do something magical is required in order for Jane to fly. Sadly, growing up means Wendy has lost that belief, and ultimately Jane will lose it as well.

This is reminiscent of what happens to the characters of Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy Pevensie in C.S. Lewis's Narnia chronicles. As each child gets older, they are told by Aslan, the god-emperor of Narnia, that they can no longer return. It happens first to the two eldest children. In a later book it happens to the youngest ones. Although it's unclear whether their expulsion from the magical realm causes their loss of belief or is the result of it. Still, it is a common fantasy trope that belief is necessary in order for magic to work.

***Critical Analysis:***

While the Darlings are reunited, the boys wait outside the house. When the boys meet Mrs. Darling, she agrees to take care of them. Mr. Darling is more hesitant, explaining that he does not want to be treated like “a cypher in his own house.” The boys reassure him that they do not believe he is a cypher, which makes Mr. Darling feel “absurdly gratified.” Wendy approaches Peter as he grazes the window outside, and invites him in. Mrs. Darling introduces herself to Peter and tells him that she has adopted all of the other boys and would like to adopt him too. When she confirms to Peter that he would grow into a man under her care, he stubbornly refuses her offer. Mrs. Darling asks where Peter will go, and he tells her that he will live in Wendy’s house in Neverland with Tinker Bell. He wants Wendy to come with him, but when Wendy asks Mrs. Darling if she can, Mrs. Darling tells her, “I have got you home again, and I mean to keep you.” Mrs. Darling offers a solution, however: Wendy can visit Peter for one week a year to do his “spring cleaning.” Before he leaves, Wendy has Peter promise that he will not forget her before spring comes. Peter arrives in the spring for Wendy’s annual visit to Neverland. Because of Peter’s lapsed perception of time, it feels to him as if no time has passed since he last saw her. When she asks him about Tinker Bell, he claims not to remember her, mentioning that he “expect[s] she is no more,” since fairies do not live long. However, when Peter does not return the next year, Michael suggests that perhaps Peter Pan is not real after all, although Peter does 14 come back the following year—for the final time— without realizing that two years have actually passed. Wendy and the boys grow into adults. Wendy marries and has a daughter named Jane, and Mrs. Darling and Nana have since passed away. Now living in the same house that she grew up in, Wendy tells Jane stories of her adventures with Peter Pan. Jane asks her mother why she can no longer fly, and Wendy responds that it is because she has grown up, and “only the gay and innocent and heartless” are able to fly. Wendy then tells Jane the story of when Peter Pan flew into their window and lost his shadow; Jane, who is already familiar with the story, points out details that her mother misses. As Wendy continues the story, Jane asks her what the last words that Peter spoke to her were. Wendy tells Jane that he told her to “always be waiting for [him]” but that he eventually forgot about her. Soon after, Jane asks Wendy what Peter’s crow sounds like, and after surprising Wendy with her own imitation, she tells her mother that she sometimes hears Peter’s crow in her dreams. Suddenly, Peter flies through the window, startling Wendy. He looks the same as she remembers him, and without fully realizing how much time has passed since he last came to see her, Peter confirms that he is there to fly with her to Neverland for spring cleaning. Wendy tells Peter that she can no longer fly and, to his dismay, turns on the light so that he can see that she is now much older. When Peter cries that she promised not to grow up, Wendy assures him that she could not help it. After Wendy tells him that it is her daughter sleeping in the nearby bed, he sobs inconsolably on the floor, which wakes Jane. Jane and Peter speak, with Peter telling Jane that he has come to take “his mother” with him back to Neverland. When he tells her this, Jane claims that she knows the true reason why he is there and says that she has been waiting for him. Excited by Jane’s resemblance to Wendy, Peter exclaims that Jane is his mother. As Peter says goodbye to Wendy, Jane rises in the air with him toward the window, telling her mother that it is time for her to fly with Peter to Neverland to do his spring cleaning. Wendy allows Jane to go, watching as she and Peter fly away into the starry night sky. As the book comes to a close, the narrator reveals that the generations of Darling children to come after Wendy—including Jane’s daughter, Margaret—continue to visit Peter in Neverland.

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

***Summary part 1:***

The lost boys are waiting downstairs. When [Mrs. Darling](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/mrs-darling) sees them, she resolves to adopt them right away. She wants to adopt [Peter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/peter-pan) too, but he refuses. He will live in Neverland with [Tinker Bell](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/tinker-bell). He asks Wendy to come with him, and she almost says yes, but Mrs. Darling reminds [Wendy](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/wendy) that she needs a mother too. Peter promises to return for Wendy every year so that she can help him with his spring cleaning. Before he flies away he takes Mrs. Darling’s [kiss](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/symbols/the-kiss), “the kiss that had been for no one else.”

***Analysis Part 1:***

Peter is violent, callous, and heartless. He is not quite a child, because he has lived so long, and he is not an adult, because he does not have to love another or fear death. But Mrs. Darling’s kiss is still for him and him only, for Peter is everything we love about childhood that is not true. His other qualities are only side-effects.

***Summary part 2:***

All the boys start going to school and leading ordinary lives. They eventually forget how to fly, because they stop believing in it.

***Analysis Part 2:***The continuity of daily life and demands of adult life dull our belief in flight – which is literally a leap up from time’s horizontal flow.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Peter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/peter-pan) returns for [Wendy](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/wendy) the following year, though she is embarrassed that her old Neverland dress is too short. Peter has forgotten about all their old adventures, even about [Hook](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/captain-jas-hook) and [Tinker Bell](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/tinker-bell). Peter explains that she has probably died, since fairies do not live for very long. Still, Wendy has a wonderful time with him in Neverland.

***Analysis Part 3:***

We are full of memories of people we love, and of places we love in nearly the same way. What would we be otherwise? Imagine a person who has forgotten everyone he has ever loved because he never loved them in any way other than as a child—which is to love in a selfish way. That is Peter Pan.

***Summary Part 4:***[Peter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/peter-pan) does not come the next year, and [Michael](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters) even wonders whether he really exists. He does come the year after that, though he doesn’t realize that he skipped a year. He does not come for a long time afterwards, and [Wendy](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/wendy) grows up and becomes a woman. All the boys become ordinary men, with jobs and beards.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Peter does not forget Wendy quite as quickly as he forgets the others. She was his mother, and she brought into his life a drop of the sort of childhood that does finally turn into adulthood.

***Summary Part 5:***

[Wendy](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/wendy) gets married, and soon she has a daughter named [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters). [Mrs. Darling](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/mrs-darling) is no longer alive. Jane, who now sleeps in the children’s old nursery, loves to talk to her mother about Neverland. She asks Wendy why she can no longer fly, and Wendy explains that only “gay, innocent, and heartless” children can fly. Once again, she tells Jane the old story about [Peter Pan](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/peter-pan). When she tries to imitate Peter’s crowing, Jane herself crows just like Peter: she has heard the sound in her sleep.

***Analysis Part 5:***

Michael, John, and the lost boys love Peter Pan because they want to be him – to be children forever. But Wendy never wanted to stay a child forever. She wants to grow up, not because she is boring or unimaginative or conventional, but because she is not heartless. She does admire Peter, but in her precocious heart she also pities him. That is perhaps the main reason she agreed to come to Neverland in the first place.

***Summary Part 6:***

One night, when [Wendy](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/wendy) is knitting and [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters) is asleep, [Peter Pan](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/peter-pan) flies in through the window. He hasn’t changed at all, and he still has his baby teeth. Wendy is embarrassed to be so grown-up. He thinks it is [Michael](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters) sleeping in the bed, and he is waiting for Wendy to come and do his spring cleaning. She tells him she can’t fly anymore. For once, Peter is afraid. She turns on the light, and runs out of the room.

***Analysis Part 6:***

The drop of real childhood that was Wendy’s gift to Peter has never left him. It is the ‘knocking’ he feels at the sound of Mrs. Darling’s tears, and his fear at the sight of Wendy as a grown woman. That pang of loss is a hair’s breadth away from love.

***Summary Part 7:***

When [Peter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/peter-pan) understands that [Wendy](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/wendy) has grown up, he begins to cry, and his sobs wake [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters). She asks him why he is crying, just as Wendy once asked him, and they become fast friends. When Wendy comes back in, Jane is flying all around the room. Later that night, Jane leaves with Peter to do his spring-cleaning.

***Analysis Part 7:***

But one cannot love someone one does not remember. The closest Peter comes to love is repetition, and so he must love Wendy by loving Jane. Children, like fairies, die young to become adults, but new ones soon replace them.

***Summary Part 8:***[Wendy](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/wendy) becomes old, and now it is [Margaret](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters), [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters)’s daughter, that does [Peter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/peter-pan)’s spring cleaning. It will go on forever that way, “so long as children are gay and innocent and heartless.”

***Analysis Part 8:***

The fairies at Peter’s side replace one other in a never-ending cycle, and the Wendies do too. He comes back for them year after year, flying close to love and away again.