

The Pirate Ship

by J.M. Barrie from Peter Pan

As the story of Peter Pan continues, Wendy Darling and her younger brothers, John and Michael, have gone with the magical boy Peter Pan to his home in Neverland. There they meet Peter's friends, the Lost Boys. Wendy becomes the pretend mother to all of the boys. Life in Neverland is very nice except for one thing: Peter's enemies, the wicked pirates lead by Captain Hook. Hook hates Peter for cutting off his hand, which was eaten by a crocodile. Now Hook wears an iron hook which he uses instead of that hand. The crocodile continues to search for the captain. However, the crocodile swallowed a ticking clock, and the clock ticks very loudly. Hook is able to hear the clock and run away from the hungry animal.

In this scene, Hook has captured all of the children except Peter. Hook believes he has poisoned Peter, and he is dead. The captain has taken the children to his ship where he plans to make them "walk the plank," or walk out on a wooden board where they will fall into the sea and die. Smee is part of the pirate crew.

No words of mine can tell you how Wendy despised those pirates. To the boys there was at least some glamour in the pirate calling; but all that she saw was that the ship had not been tidied for years. There was not a porthole on the grimy glass of which you might not have written with your finger "Dirty pig"; and she had already written it on several. But as the boys gathered round her she had no thought, of course, save for them.

"So, my beauty," said Hook, as if he spoke in syrup, "you are to see your children walk the plank."

Fine gentlemen though he was, the intensity of his communings had soiled his ruff, and suddenly he knew that she was gazing at it. With a hasty gesture he tried to hide it, but he was too late.

"Are they to die?" asked Wendy, with a look of such frightful contempt that he nearly fainted.

"They are," he snarled. "Silence all," he called gloatingly, "for a mother's last words to her children."

At this moment Wendy was grand. "These are my last words, dear boys," she said firmly. "I feel that I have a message to you from your real mothers, and it is this: 'We hope our sons will die like English gentlemen.'"

Even the pirates were awed, and Tootles cried out hysterically, "I am going to do what my mother hopes. What are you to do, Nibs?"

"What my mother hopes. What are you to do, Twin?"

“What my mother hopes. John, what are—”

But Hook had found his voice again.

“Tie her up!” he shouted.

It was Smee who tied her to the mast. “See here, honey,” he whispered, “I’ll save you if you promise to be my mother.”

But not even for Smee would she make such a promise. “I would almost rather have no children at all,” she said disdainfully.

It is sad to know that not a boy was looking at her as Smee tied her to the mast; the eyes of all were on the plank: that last little walk they were about to take. They were no longer able to hope that they would walk it manfully, for the capacity to think had gone from them; they could stare and shiver only.

Hook smiled on them with his teeth closed, and took a step toward Wendy. His intention was to turn her face so that she should see the boys walking the plank one by one. But he never reached her, he never heard the cry of anguish he hoped to wring from her. He heard something else instead.

It was the terrible tick-tick of the crocodile.

They all heard it—pirates, boys, Wendy; and immediately every head was blown in one direction; not to the water whence the sound proceeded, but toward Hook. All knew that what was about to happen concerned him alone, and that from being actors they were suddenly become spectators.

Very frightful was it to see the change that came over him. It was as if he had been clipped at every joint. He fell in a little heap.

The sound came steadily nearer; and in advance of it came this ghastly thought, “The crocodile is about to board the ship!”

Even the iron claw hung inactive; as if knowing that it was no intrinsic part of what the attacking force wanted. Left so fearfully alone, any other man would have lain with his eyes shut where he fell: but the gigantic brain of Hook was still working, and under its guidance he crawled on the knees along the deck as far from the sound as he could go. The pirates respectfully cleared a passage for him, and it was only when he brought up against the bulwarks that he spoke.

“Hide me!” he cried hoarsely.

They gathered round him, all eyes averted from the thing that was coming aboard. They had no thought of fighting it. It was Fate.

Only when Hook was hidden from them did curiosity loosen the limbs of the boys so that they could rush to the ship’s side to see the crocodile climbing it. Then they got the strangest surprise of the Night of Nights;

for it was no crocodile that was coming to their aid. It was Peter.

He signed to them not to give vent to any cry of admiration that might rouse suspicion. Then he went on ticking.

Questions

1. What is a character trait that Wendy displays in this scene? Give a quotation from the passage to support your claim.

2. Why does Wendy refuse Smee's offer to save her?

3. What is a character trait that Captain Hook displays in this scene? Give a quotation from the passage to support your claim.

4. Why did everyone look at Hook and not toward the crocodile when they first heard the ticking?

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. despised
2. tidied
3. hasty
4. intention
5. gigantic
6. hoarsely
7. rouse

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) “No words of mine can tell you how Wendy **despised** those pirates.”

- a. loved b. hated c. scolded d. honored

2) “To the boys there was at least some glamour in the pirate calling; but all that she saw was that the ship had not been **tidied** for years.”

- a. fixed b. painted c. cleaned d. renovated

3) “With a **hasty** gesture he tried to hide it, but he was too late.”

- a. quick b. rude c. hand d. subtle

4) “His **intention** was to turn her face so that she should see the boys walking the plank one by one.”

- a. prayer b. belief c. purpose d. reason

5) “Left so fearfully alone, any other man would have lain with his eyes shut where he fell: but the **gigantic** brain of Hook was still working...”

- a. small b. normal c. active d. oversized

6) “Hide me!” he cried **hoarsely**.

- a. quietly b. roughly c. loudly d. quickly

7) “He signed to them not to give vent to any cry of admiration that might **rouse** suspicion.”

- a. awaken b. open c. deny d. downplay