

After Neverland

By the time Wendy went to university she no longer expected him to come back to her, but she still looked for his face every day among those of the strangers she passed. Even the Lost Boys had found their places in the real world. Nibs got a job at a multinational internet corporation, and Tootles was in Law School. Slightly dropped out of school and opened a yoga studio, and the last she heard of The Twins they were working as roadies for a punk rock band. Perhaps Peter, too, had found new adventures, ones that didn't involve pirates and mermaids.

Once in a while someone came along who triggered a memory by the shape of his eyebrow or the crooked tilt of his smile. Then Wendy would forget that she had a chemistry lab or an appointment with her advisor in an hour, and would follow him to explore hiding places in the darkness of the theater and remember how she and Peter stalked the pirates in the cave and tracked wild animals through the forest. But because Wendy wasn't a child anymore the game ended with her lying on a pile of curtains behind a theater backdrop, the boy grazing at her throat with his warm scratchy lips as he fumbled with her bra clasp, and she closed her eyes and thought of what Peter would look like today if he, too, were grown up.

A third-year student reminded her of him as the wind tousled his hair while he stood with his hands in his pockets on the platform of the train station. Wendy let him take her to dinner at a Moroccan restaurant, and then they smoked a joint in his bedroom on campus. He took her to the roof and showed her the stars in the clear frosty sky, and shivering with cold and excitement, Wendy remembered something else. She remembered what it felt like to fly, and how very, very easy it was, and she stepped onto the parapet and spread her arms, and the young man grabbed

her by her sweater and pulled her off the ledge. He stared at her, wide-eyed with alarm, then led her back to his room where Wendy tried to make a fort out of the bedsheets. He hired a car to drive them into the city to dinner, and Wendy rode with her head and shoulders out of the sun roof, her arms in the air and the icy wind freezing the tears on her eyelashes. When she tried to climb onto the roof while the car was in full motion he pulled her inside and closed the roof. He ended the relationship soon after.

“You’re immature,” he said. “And I think perhaps a little crazy.”

In an apartment off campus she gave herself to a boy named William with eyes the same color as Peter’s, green with a ring of gold around the edges. As William slept she gazed at the shadow of his profile, the outline of his sharp pointed nose which looked a great deal like Peter’s, and for the first time in a very long time, felt a soothing comfort in the part of her that had been aching with longing. In the morning she cleaned up the apartment, washed the dishes and hung up his clothes, the way she had for Peter and the Lost Boys. Unlike Peter and the Lost Boys, however, William did not want Wendy to play house with his possessions. He liked his space kept private and he told her so. But like Peter, William enjoyed games. They played darts and billiards in the student center and dropped water balloons on teaching assistants from the windows of the Social Sciences building. One of the games William liked to play was to disappear for hours, sometimes days, while Wendy searched anxiously for him, dissolving into tears when she thought he had abandoned her. Then, when he reappeared with vague explanations for where he had been, he argued with her and told her she was being too controlling.

She saw more of Peter in William the longer they were together. Like Peter, William was easily distracted, always looking into the distance, over her shoulder. Like Peter, he was restless,

and seemed ready in an instant to leave in search of a new adventure. Wendy became ill with fear at the idea that he, too, might fly away.

“There’s a way to stop him from flying,” said her friend Alicia. “Permanently. It’s completely within your control.”

Wendy thought about this for a while. It seemed unsporting. She told herself she would never do such a thing, that traps were for cowards. But accidents can happen, especially when one does nothing to prevent them, and when Wendy was quite certain, she told William that they had a situation on their hands.

They were married quickly and quietly, and six months later Wendy gave birth to a daughter, Jane. William took a job at the same bank where Wendy’s father, Mr. Darling, worked. He wore a suit and tie every day, and on weekends he played golf with the same people that he told Wendy irritated him all week at the office. He and Wendy no longer played games together. Instead they went to dinner with couples who talked about mutual funds and pre-school admissions and gluten-free diets, while Wendy folded her napkin into origami crocodiles in her lap and inwardly screamed with boredom. With every passing day William resembled Peter less, until Wendy could not remember what about him had ever reminded her of Peter.

One night, after reading to Jane, she pulled the covers up around her daughter’s chin, kissed her and turned out the light. She tucked the story book under her arm, and as she turned toward the window to draw the curtains shut, a shadow from outside Jane’s bedroom window fell across the floor. It was the shape of a young boy outlined against the sky, with tousled hair and a sharp pointed nose. Wendy’s knees weakened under her, and she clutched the bed post for balance. She ran to the window and looked outside, but there was no-one there. She hurried down-

stairs to look out of the window of the family room, but stopped in the doorway. William was sitting in the glow of the television, his mouth half-open, a glass of Scotch and soda resting on his steadily increasing paunch. The contrived laughter of a sitcom gurgled from the television and William gave a short laugh, like a bark, and took another sip of his drink. He burped.

Wendy was struck by a vision of her entire future in that chair, getting slowly fatter and stupider, with no hope of escape, and, even though she was only twenty-six years old, she felt indescribably old. She flung the book at William, hitting him in the head, pages flying, his drink crashing to the floor.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” William cried. “Have you gone crazy?”

Wendy rushed up the stairs, into her bedroom and slammed the door. She curled up on the window seat and pressed her forehead to the glass. Behind her, William entered the room and stopped a few feet behind her.

“What was that all about?” he demanded.

“Damn you, you bastard,” she whispered. “Damn you for ruining my life.” She gazed at the stars through her tears and the second star to the right winked, as though it understood that she wasn’t talking about William at all.

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