

Wendy - Mackenzie, Year 12, VIC

“So come with me, where dreams are born, and time is never planned. Just think of happy things, and your heart will fly on wings, forever, in Never Never Land!”

- Peter Pan, J.M. Barrie

It is a cool night, mid-September. A breeze enters through the open window, sneaking in to ruffle the skirts of my nightgown. My fingers tap out a melody. A drum, a drum. My desk is littered with proposals. Different seals, same spiels, “I would be delighted have you for my wife,” they say. Or worse, taking poetry, claiming it for their own, the “stars never beam, without bringing me dreams,” or “thou art more lovely and more temperate.”

I scoff; am I to assume they think me illiterate? Else they simply do not care enough to write their own proposals. My parents have regaled me of their own love enough I know that this flurry of interest upon a woman’s *debut* is not uncommon, that it is a flattery, a compliment. And yet I remain unconvinced, for all these proposals, poetry, pretty words, I am little more than a prize animal, passed from my father to my husband, bought and sold.

It disgusts me, the commerce of society, hidden behind false promises, counterfeit smiles, the veil of the *blushing bride*. The parties, with drinks and a how do you do. Every question accompanied by an appraising glance, big hips, nice ass. Why ever so blue? All of them, the governors, governors’ wives, lawyers and bankers, circling and surveilling before the purchase. I’m trussed up, hog tied in a corset, my mother’s ‘*quiet!*’, an apple in my perfectly painted mouth.

If only I did not have to join them, I think. Leave these liars to their pyres, remain young forever. I can imagine it, staying here, immortalised in childhood, far from the tittering ladies, snickering lords, their engagements, their balls, accompanied by petty laughter to cover an undercurrent of gossip and lies. Instead I would live in solitude, broken occasionally by my brothers, writing. Unburdened by a husband, children. Oh, how I desire it. *I wish, I wish.*

A window creaks, a simple squeak. It makes me spare a glance, yet my eyes alight upon nothing but the soft gossamer of the muslin that flutters in the breeze. I turn away, intending to greet my bed some time before the sun graces the sky.

“Oh, hello. Could I trouble you for some assistance?” he says. Standing to my left, a boy, dressed in green.

“Whatever for?” I ask, stunned.

“Well, you see, my shadow, he’s a bit of a nuisance, always disappearing on me. Would you be so kind as to help me reattach him?”

“Of course,” was all I could say.

With a needle and dark thread, the bugger was sewn on, with no little amount of protest.

“Thank you,” he said, then “Why, you sure are beautiful. Would be a shame for you to grow old, lose that pretty face.”

I was unsettled, about to protest, to say I cared little for his opinion.

“Would you like to come with me? To a place where you will never, ever grow up?” his eyes twinkled, but I was enticed.

“Why, yes, I would,” I said, seeing only the answer to my earlier wish.

“Then take my hand,” was his response, “and follow the star to Neverland.”

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So, together we went, up to meet the stars, buoyed by ‘faith, trust, and pixie dust’. It was an unsettling feeling, becoming weightless, nightgown flowing around my legs like a sail. White like surrender, it waves, free to his gaze.

When I look up, the sky has changed, and the night has melted away, leaving behind bright, clear sun, so different to the dull clouds that blanket the skies of England. Below us, it appears, Neverland, his ageless paradise, surrounded by sand.

As we alight, the glittering dust releases us from its airy hold, and I am left to stumble, regain my feet. Next to me, the boy, Pan, descends with grace, grin on his face. I am pulled along to ‘meet the girls’ he says ere long. There are many of them, these ‘girls’. He calls them my sisters, now. Tells them to welcome me, show me around. Then he is off, gone to find something new to hold his attention – what a man.

The girls turn to me, faces dull, bored. The latest acquisition, they say, the newest conquest; a roll of their eyes. I stand, confused, there was no conquest. They explain, in short, the curse, the speech rehearsed. All of them, beauties in different shades, taken by his easy charm, a simple promise. To Neverland, he said. Hot damn, what a scam, dropped them off, thank you ma’am. Now all of us, his chicks, imprisoned, we provide his ageless fix.

The days blend, nothing changing in this place beyond time. We survive in this lull, flowing together as though in a current. Weeks of this, before I can stand no more.

So, armed with resolve, I went to him. He was playing, back and forward, with a swashbuckling sword. So I said, Pan, release us, I won’t ask once more. He laughed in my face.

“Let you go? Whyever would you want that? Don’t you love it here, with me? Am I not your saving grace, who protected you from age’s brutal embrace, the time of that place? Now you are here, where I can gaze upon your beauty, your pretty face.”

Disgusted, I scoff. So this was his intention, to have something to look at, as he reveled in his eternal life. So all of us were, pretty things, no more than possessions, little trinkets to decorate his land.

I am tempted, by his egotistical grin, his easy swagger. I want to fight him on this, make him understand, but I know any words will be wasted.

So without a second to guess, I brought up a sword of my own. “Well, please, look upon me, I’m sure it will be a beautiful sight, as you die.”

The sword swings, my heart sings. Chop and chop, blood spills in the dirt, his head plops, no longer with a smirk.

I crow, the beast is beaten, the monster slayed, and I, with blood from head to foot, now wear his selfsame smile, a debt paid. With a kick for good measure, off I skip. Down the lane, over the fence, until I meet them, my sisters, now forged in blood.

“Pan is dead,” I announce, the proclamation met with cheers.

“But how?” one says.

“When?” asks another.

“Never mind that! Let’s get out of this damn place!” a girl cries.

Like a storm, we go, together in a flood to the beach. Pixie dust is sprinkled, a glittery cloud, as we rise into the ever-bright sky, a flock of girls. Gliding and twisting, we impose our rule on the sky, higher and higher, to the second star on the right.

We land as one, an odd procession, giggling as we stumble. We say goodbyes, with hugs dolled out one by one. Then they are gone, home to reality, distancing themselves from the story that has become a fairytale in their minds, complete with monsters and sword wielding saviors.

I will remember.

I will remember, the wish, and the shadow, the boy and the blood. It will stay, a warning, the peril.

Ladies, never trust a boy with a grin like the devil.