



Pan Breaks the Ice

All bois, except one, become grownups. They go to college or work in construction. They sign domestic partnership, civil union, or even marriage certificates. Some bois become artificially inseminated, have top surgery, or work in an office or as PE teachers. They go to law school or work in non-profits. Growing up happens to the best of us, even when we've said it wouldn't.

Wendi thought she wanted to be one of us. She said she wouldn't grow up and swore her allegiance, in blood, to Pan. Then she turned and grew up anyway. Guess I can't blame the grrrrl; it's not like I've done any better.

Before Wendi, it was just Pan and us, his lost bois. Our life was a gritty Disneyland. We made the magic and the rules. No one told us when to go to bed, who to fuck, or where we could or couldn't pierce ourselves. Us bois all had our own pasts we were running away from, but none of that mattered anymore because we were Pan's. He was our Sir,



and we swore ourselves unquestioningly to him. Every day was a new adventure. I loved Pan more than I've ever loved anyone. It was a different love than for a boyfriend or grrrl-friend; it was deeper, more complete. I didn't just love Pan and our Neverland home; my life was consumed by a passion for something much bigger than any of us—this life we built with him, a world without grownups.

When Pan found her, Wendi lived in the Darlings' halfway home. She never knew her parents, having fallen out of her pram and gotten lost or something, ending up in foster care as a baby. When she started high school, Wendi was placed with the Darlings. Before that, she'd had a series of truly unfortunate placements, but she never talked about them to any of us. Pan cracked his knuckles and told us that she'd escaped from the worst kinds of grownups, who had no business being around children, especially grrrls. Wendi said the Darlings were okay as far as grownups were concerned. That wasn't saying much, if you ask me.

The Darlings' home was as loving as it could be, under the circumstance of it also being a business. Mr Darling spent hours late at night downstairs at the kitchen table, counting cheques for each of the kids in his care. He subtracted groceries and shoes, doctors' appointments and school supplies from the meager cheques the government sent to compensate them for the children they took into their home. There was never as much left over as he wanted there to be, and he would ask Mrs Darling to cut costs wherever she could. It



was a complicated arrangement; they wanted to do right by these disadvantaged children, but it was a lot of work, and Mr Darling believed that he and his wife deserved to be justly reimbursed for their civic good deed.

Since her arrival at the Darlings' house at 14 London Street, Wendi had shared a room with John Michael. It was crowded but comfortable, and unlike other places she'd been placed, the Darlings were less concerned about what she was doing, as long as the cheques kept coming. Wendi always considered herself lucky that, unlike John Michael, she could hide her difference behind her long hair and skirts. John Michael never grew out of her tomboy tendencies and was called a dyke and a lezzie in the locker room as she changed out of her softball uniform into baggy jeans and T-shirts. Everyone at school knew John Michael was queer, especially after she had Wendi cut off her hair in the little bathroom across the hall from their room. Everyone at school also thought Wendi and John Michael were dating because they sat together in the cafeteria and were the only out lesbians at school. Wendi never thought of John Michael that way. She revelled in being like a big sister and having a family of her own for the first time. Besides, even if she had been interested, she would never let herself go to that place, knowing that it could ruin everything, that she could be sent away and someone else could be cashing her cheque. In other houses, Wendi'd had to listen to lectures about morality and even get dragged to church services. She'd known enough to stay



quiet about her queerness before, and when she talked of that time, she would always remark that she'd been grateful that the Darlings never seemed to pay attention. Still, she knew better than to push her luck, and she certainly didn't want to ruin things for John Michael, who'd had it worse than her: this was the first time she'd been placed with a family at all. Before the Darlings, it was all big group homes, punctuated by hospitals and juvie.

Wendi was a good student, and by the winter of her senior year, the fat college-acceptance envelopes began to arrive for her. Mr Darling would leave them on her bed. He was proud of the girl. Not many of their wards had such ambitious plans for the future. It pleased him to think that Wendi wouldn't continue to be a burden on taxpayers. He always tried to get the children who passed through his house to understand that they had been quite costly to society and that they needed to make amends as quickly as possible. At night, when Wendi got home from GSA meetings or rehearsals for school plays, she would sit quietly on the corner of the little single bed chewing the ends of her hair, and carefully open the envelopes. There was no question in her mind that, come next September, she would be out of the Darlings' home forever and strolling across manicured lawns in the shadow of ivy-covered buildings. She'd been waiting for that day her whole life, for the day when she would be surrounded by learning, when she would be an adult capable of making her own decisions and having them respected. Wendi dreamed of



growing up, which makes it all the more surprising that she fell so hard for Pan.

When Wendi wasn't studying, she was writing. At first, it was mostly poetry. Pan said that Wendi was the best writer he'd ever heard; that's what first drew him to her. Wendi had always written little stories, and some other students in the GSA introduced her to the weekly open mic at a feminist bookstore downtown. It was not too far from Neverland, though she didn't know that yet. Wendi became a regular, reading stories each week about dykely prince charmings who swept beautiful femmes away to happily-ever-afters. At these events, Pan always stayed near the door at the back of the room. He'd never had much interest in lesbian open mics, so it surprised all us lost bois when he started going, alone, each week to the bookstore. He said there was something about Wendi's stories that he just couldn't resist. When he got home to Neverland, he'd crawl up into my hammock and tell me about this grrrl who told stories about kids like us, the way that she made us shine and sparkle so that everyone understood us. He talked about her pretty brown hair, the way it spilled over her shoulders, and the way her chest heaved and her eyes sometimes filled with tears when she read. Wendi was all feeling. Pan said he knew that what she wrote about was real because the words flew from her glossy pink lips, unsteady yet strong. Us bois were experts at finding the magic and making the hard shit sparkle, but we weren't so good at feeling. Pan was real cocky; he could get any boi



or grrrl he wanted—and he still can. But something was different with Wendi.

I kept saying that he should go up to her after she read. “Sir, you are the bravest and most handsome boi. She wouldn’t say no to you,” I’d tell him again and again. Pan never did get the nerve to approach Wendi; his dog Erebos did it for him.

Erebos was a little pit-bull cross with a deep-bluish-black coat and a white star on her chest. Pan pulled her out of the dumpster where her litter had been thrown by an evil grownup. All the puppies died except for Erebos, whom Pan bottle-fed with a washed-out syringe and some puppy formula he shoplifted from the pet shop by the river. Grownups will cross the street when they see us coming with Erebos, but she only looks mean, like us. Grownups are always making assumptions, thinking they know everything about a dog or a boi before giving any of us a chance. Pan named the dog Erebos after the Greek god of shadows, and she never once left his side, except for when she went after Wendi that night. Pan had been watching Wendi read when Erebos jumped onto the stage, pulled at Wendi’s backpack, and ran off into the crowd. Wendi had been reading a story about a femme princess kneeling before her buxom prince, hands bound behind her back, but she raced off the stage after the strange shadow of a dog. Pan, laughing, ran after her, and together they chased Erebos through the bookstore as she wove in and out of queers sitting on folding chairs then out onto the sidewalk. Pan tried to tackle Erebos, missed, and crashed into



a phone booth. It was then that Erebos came right up to Wendi and dropped the backpack with a wag of her tail. Pan, who had picked himself up off the pavement, was forced to introduce himself. Wendi had, of course, noticed him sitting in the back of the room all those weeks, but she didn't let on.

It was the next morning that Mrs Darling first learned about Pan. She knew, of course, where the children kept their diaries and made a regular practice of reading them. Like all parents, she liked to know what was happening in her children's minds. If she could have, Mrs Darling would have tidied things up, ripped out pages, and burned them in the fire, but she knew the real world was not so simple. Still, she was concerned when she read in Wendi's diary about someone whose gender she could not determine who seemed much older, and yet, as Wendi described in excruciating detail the baggy sweatshirt, work pants, boots, and red hair, this ... this person seemed perhaps to be no older than the children in her care. Mrs Darling was worried that this mysterious—boy? woman?—who lurked at the back of the room at open mics could be just the kind of distraction that her Wendi didn't need.