FLASH FICTION

In Neverland

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"city lights" by Helmi Mubarak

Tint Journal, no. (), www.tintjournal.com

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In Neverland, the kids never grow up. In Neverland, the kids remain young forever. These are the forever kids, as they call themselves. Endless childhood for them is guaranteed. It is as if a secret contract was sealed: They sacrifice their lives and instead receive an ageless childhood.

They are the ones who forget to grow up. And if they find it hard to deal with the adult world around them, then they create their own world. They surge to their Neverland like nymphs in the forest on a night with a full moon. They live inside there. In Neverland there are no responsibilities, no obligations, just endless freedom. They can fly anywhere, they can consume anything they want, but most importantly, they don't care about time. In Neverland, there are no clocks and time doesn't exist. No ticktocks to remind them to grow up, to find a job, or keep up with society's expectations and deadlines. So when they return to a hasty, aged, adult world, they become vulnerable; easily hurt. Sometimes they end up in jail. But that's okay. That's exactly how the Neverland kids are.

The other day, I saw an old man sitting at the corner of a long and lonely urban street. His hands were full of empty bottles of cheap beer and the collection by his side was getting bigger and bigger.

"What's your name?" I knew the answer.

"I am a Neverland kid, a kid who forgot to grow up. Have you heard of Neverland, young lady?" he said with dreamy eyes.

Of course I had.

And I wasn't a lady.

I stood up and walked away.

I think it was a friend of a friend who told it to a friend who told it to me. In any case, the story started like this… Once upon a time, there was a boy who never wanted to grow up. His name was Peter Pan... You could meet Peter at the park; you could find him walking around the train stations, or hiding behind the trees in a not so well-known old square. He was always carrying with him wondrous stuff, like coke, pills, weed, and alcohol. Then, as the story was unwrapping, a Wendy dreaming of flying away appeared. Nobody talked to her of Captain Hook, the man who never let them get away from Neverland once they had set their foot on the island; the same man who kept them prisoner by offering a greater variety of wondrous stuff: opioid pills, ecstasy, heroin. And the kids flew higher and higher, reaching the sun and their return seemed impossible. They forgot that their own wings resembled those of Icarus and as they got closer to the sun, they melted as the substances faded away from their body… and they fell. And they hit the ground like fallen angels. Some

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of them are said to be falling for nine long days. Others disappeared into the abyss of the Aegean and they never made it to the surface… What can one say for those kids? Who could have thought that Peter and Hook were pals, best buddies with wondrous stuff for naïve Wendies…

Walking down that city street, the long one on a lonely night, under the dim light of lamps, I reached the park and saw a bunch of them sitting on a bench. I knew who they were before I got close. The heavy smell of their joints had filled my nostrils so much that I thought the apple tree had just borrowed the scent of weed as its perfume on a Saturday night.

“Hey girl! Want a ride to Neverland?” they said laughing as they offered me a joint.

I closed my eyes, turned my back and left. My world was full of Neverland kids, but I was too grown up to stand it.

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