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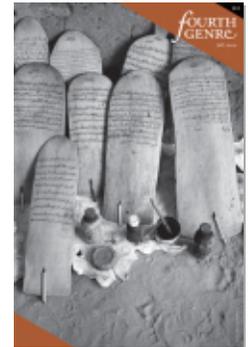
*from not merely because of the unknown that was stalking
towards them*

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JENNY BOULLY

Did you know that the little shells are breaking? It's about that time when the shells start breaking. New birds done hatched, done grown, done flown. They've hardly anything in their newborn food sacs; they're still waiting to grow a belly. Here, too, a gale that will come and kill them. All. Tomorrow, we'll find them all crushed on the Never

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We might, in fact, *die here*, says he. That is the one thing that isn't quite on this island make-believe. Sometimes, you did find a body that you didn't dare go near. Even the Never flies, then, partaking of a real feast. And have you held someone else like this? Like how you're holding me? When the tidewater comes, the girl Wendy will sink. Or the sharks will come; the sharks too are not make-believe. Who among us will live forever? Why then should the kite come? For me? Because you make a great toast, Wendy, and all the world would like to have some of your toast and a bit of jelly. I believe a mother is someone who always contains two things. In your case: a little cat and some water. And already, is it Tuesday? That means it is a day for going into the weather to your office, my dear. And your salary will feed and feed and feed; that is where food and babies come from, come from. Don't you think, Wendy, that it is a strange and demonic thing: in the theatre, grown women play at being *me*? That's disgusting, says Wendy.

ground, and Nibs can calculate how many, how many. Perhaps we'll take to playing doctor and stick a glass thing in. Glass thing will say they're dying. Or about to. Too dark, today even, for the tulips to open. They don't quite believe in spring just yet, just yet. And a new moon tonight and a dark wave there and a Jolly Roger shadow cast here and there and everywhere. And ole Smee there up in the lookout—his mind not quite right; he'll do it; he'll do it so that it won't matter to him a bit. Do we even have a washing board and a basin to wash our clothes in? I suppose, I suppose we'll all just have to go around all stinky until we die. Little cocoons are breaking. Red turnips in my hands have come up too early. The Never badger, the Never mole, I daresay they're trying to dig their way in! Should we, with these sticks, poke them? You ought not to judge anyone; who's to say they're not dreaming a little dream, too? A mushroom head here, a celery stalk there, three new baby-bird graves, a fiddlehead here; places in the earth are breaking.

By the fireplace, Wendy is telling stories. Wendy is a storyteller. Do you think, Peter, that one day, you will get bored with my stories and then send me on home? Send me packing? Tinker Bell's little light dimming now. To think: I've been here the whole of a fairy's life. And you will remember her, only *vaguely, vaguely*. A new game now: no adventures you say. On the toadstool, you are only *sitting, sitting*. *That, you say, is an adventure, Wendy. Are you, dear bird, losing interest, interest?* I will undo a bad hem

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There is nothing at all about this that is *haunting*. The toy goat will, however, *come alive*. But that should not be so terribly *haunting*. That anything at all should *come alive* should be *haunting*. It is a wicked thing, a very wicked thing to think: someone up there scaring us all and all of the time, too. Don't quite give up just now: you see, this is the part that ought to be *easy*.

for you; I will roll out dough and make fresh noodles *for you*; I will nurse the fresh wound *for you*; I will remember the new adventure and later tell it *for you*. And Slightly, poor Slightly, who has been trying so very hard to be just like you—can you, do you think you can just this once *let him*? The poor boy, he can hardly take one more scolding. The babes are all bathed and powdered and snuggled up in their little beds; they're make-believing at being quiet and asleep *for you*. Because when the babes are all put to their beds, well then, the mother and the father can tell each other *stories*. Oh, Wendy, have I got a story for you!

Was there, before this one, a home like mine? How many times have the boys made a house for a girl before? I daresay, they did seem awfully adept *at it*. There must have been a home like mine somewhere permanently now fixed in a photograph—its old ghost bricks somehow haunting here, a certain smell of rot climbing the trellis. Old skins, old skins: which one do you have the mind to try? On? How they hang like nightgowns on the clothesline. Was there, before this one, a hole like mine? How many times have you made your home in a girl before? I daresay, you did seem awfully adept *at it*. There must have been a something like mine somewhere. She too in a locket I'm sure to dig up. Old skins, old skins: which one, Peter, do you have the mind to try? My old nightgown: my oldnight gown once held you.

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It's only a matter of making it *come out*, into *being*. And if you don't like it, if you don't like it then, why then you just put a little shroud on it, bury it, and in a few days, it will pop out all new and naked again. That is one way you can care for babies, if you didn't know how. I complain of Peter who has *buried me*. There is something oh-so-ghostly about this way of loving, don't you think? Let us pretend it is the end, already? Why, the muffins have hardly been in for ten seconds. Or has it been? Minutes? I hardly know anything much about all of that passing and passage now. Oh, Wendy! They've been in for days and days and days: count your peas, count them, count them.

And were you locked out? *Quite* locked out? From eggshell camp to mother to the gardens—none of the birds quite *wanting you*. And will you survive quite narrowly because of the sleeve of your nursery nightgown? I've a hunch, Peter; I've a hunch that you're so forgetful simply because you're so old. Grandpa was that way, too, always calling me by mother's name, just like you. The story, the story that will *make you* remember—shall I, shall I tell it to you? (Peter, I just have to say that I don't know really if any of this is *any good*.) And if I had grown to be more petite, would it have been possible to have easily tricked you into thinking that I *could still*? Oh dear, the kite tail isn't quite long enough; these limbs don't quite curl into the nest just right anymore; and hollow tree to the home underground—even, even if I suck it in. Oh, dear, *perambulator*: they make it sound as if it's a machine, as if something in there is happening—darling baby needs to *perambulate*. Darling chickens, count your chickens. How dare they take? I'd rather keep my little Peter egg here. And which hen am I? And how many did you take?

But that question on a rather sweet subject *has been spoken*. Prior to having vanished to Neverland, our Betwixt-and-Between resided in Kensington Gardens and loved, quite deeply, a girl by the name of Maimie Mannering. It was she that he indeed asked to marry. He wanted her to *teach him* how to be

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You've gone and forgotten all about your muffins, and you'll now make excuses and say well then they were only make-believe, but we all know better: a fire and smoke that's been here for days and days. See, little Michael here has got the black lung. Old Tinker: her wings all singed. Tootles with a mess of burnt knees. Charcoal in Slightly's hair; ashes everywhere. You see what comes, Wendy, from your make-believe?

afraid, how to thimble, how to play. They will love you, says Peter; they will, like me, love you; you're like a bird's nest, and oh, how I do love to stroke the fur on your pelisse, Maimie; he thimble her all the way.

The Maimie girl was wicked, quite wicked. It was a wicked thing of her to do what she did in the dark. To her brother: *Oh, look at it, Tony! It is feeling your bed with its horns—it is boring for you, O Tony, oh!* (Kensington 42). To keep her quite alive, a night light is put in; a saucer is put in; chimney smoke is put in; a scraper and doormat and a door handle are put in; hot and cold are put in; and lastly, quite lastly, the forcing houses are put in. So that in less than five minutes.

Funny that you should have *forgotten* how to read, says Wendy. I am certain that I have heard stories about a certain someone who used to leave you treats, along with letters detailing *how to use them*. And where, just where, have you? Put your goat? The one that *she* gave you? Is it true? Is it true that it's only because? She does, yes, Wendy, remind. Me of you. I meant the reverse; I go that way. Sometimes. You must know that it is because of the island.

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It must be way past spring: the marigolds now at the peak of their *blooming*. And still, and still, he has yet to come. For me. Perhaps he has found already another *leading lady*. Yes, I do believe. And how will you say this line here? Will you, will you put some tears in it? Oh, Peter, oh Peter, darling? Has someone else, so suddenly, become a slave for you? Let you tie her up so that the tying leaves marks that can only mean she's been with you? It was quite erotic, no? You, me, some twine, the totem pole. Something now telling me that with Tiger Lily it's all been done *before*. The rose blooms: already gone. To seed. To seed. And still, you have not come. For me. Who among us will live forever? Certainly not. Certainly not me. In Kensington Gardens, another dead babe, and no Peter goat and no fairies. From this side of the window, I can see how your world looks so bright, so bright.

Who first had the fur? Collar? Can't we just pretend? Can't we just pretend that everything is new and for the first time first? And really now: why get *married* when you can have so many, so many? (You can *choose!*) You can't sleep here anymore; it's really throwing off everything. I know a certain sheep who shan't like to be sheared. Anymore. It quite rightly will sulk into hiding when it sees those shearing scissors criss-crossing. Night now for me like that, too. (I know what you're thinking: which child will you now steal to make your next book quite right?) "*I do wish you would teach me how to be afraid, Maimie,*" he said (Kensington 59). Maimie? asks Wendy. Who is Maimie? Never mind all of that now: your chest cold is a-clanking. It's a real one: Tiger Lily gave it me.

The title of the piece as well as subsequent italicized portions that are followed by a page number are taken from J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1999). The title is excerpted from the following: *Of course she should have roused the children at once; not merely because of the unknown that was stalking toward them, but because it was no longer good for them to sleep on a rock grown chilly* (72). When followed by "Kensington" and a page number, the italicized portion is taken from Barrie's *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

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Shoreline forgets; marauders forget; empty vial forgets; old crocodile—he *never* forgets; clamshell forgets; old spoon forgets; seasons forget; old lilac bloom all gone to seed now forgets; even the fat storm cloud gets so lazy with forgetting and forgets; old bedroom forgets—*forgets to be what it ought to be* (where's the roses all trellising up and the babes peeping in, peeping in?); old bones never forget; old shadow *never forgets*—wants to *go back, go back*; space there between two stars never forgets—wants to swallow you, whole and forever, won't let you ever *go back, go back*.