

FINDING MOTHERS

I WENDY'S STORY

'Don't go Peter, I know such lots of stories.' He came back, and there was a greedy look in his eyes now which ought to have alarmed her, but did not.'

Airborne on that first flush
she looks down on Neverland
thrilling with eagerness and dread.

Look behind you, Wendy!
The wind is pulling up your nightie
it paws at your soft white skin.

Peter (*in denial*): Oh no it isn't!
John and Michael: (*fearful*): Oh yes it is!
(*Wendy draws her nightie in around her knees while trying to stay airborne.*)

Landfalling, little knowing
that from this point on
everything will be a descent.

To landsliding Neverland,
where the lie of the land she knew
will fall away from beneath her feet.

Landshifting Neverland,
where her body will shapeshift
faster than her mind can follow.

Landcrossing invisible borders
to trade the last days of her childhood
for a Wendy House.

Landfilling, burying her fears
for the sake of make-believe domesticity;
'Peter, what are your exact feelings for me?'

Landfalling, poor Wendy-bird
tumbles from the sky
with an arrow in her breast.

There she lands, on the terra un-firma of puberty. Half conscious, she opens her eyes to the terrified faces of unwashed boys, wishing only to be a nice motherly person in a house with

red walls and a roof of mossy green. There she lies, as they build the little prison around her. There are no other girls in Neverland, only jealous, pouting fairies and budding mermaids who flirt outrageously. Wendy discovers she cannot compete with their magic tricks or synchronised aquatic grace. She is now a sewer of pockets and tucker-in of lost boys; the boy who forgets has thimble a contract she didn't know she had signed.

If two is childhood's end, then twelve,
for a girl, must be end's end.
A thimble. An acorn. A kiss.

It's a wonder she can fly home at all,
being neither innocent nor heartless
after Neverland.

II SHADOWLESS

'Peter had seen many tragedies, but he had forgotten them all.'
(J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan*)

Thief of the unreachable kiss
in the corner of Mrs Darling's lips.

Denier of the future, fearer of the beard,
needy survivor of frightening dreams.

Last minute rescuer, saver of skins
if only to show off his prowess and skills.

Petulant playmate and devotee
of altering boys to fit their trees.

Sinister fixer of unspoken culls
when boys show signs of growing up.

Witness to trauma, deliverer of death,
unmarked because he's sure to forget.

There were always rumours, stories, tales
of laughing children who die unafraid,

of the soundless flight that never betrays
the shadowless boy who takes them halfway.

III FINDING MOTHERS

*'When ladies used to come to me in dreams I used to say 'pretty mother, pretty mother.
But when at last she came, I shot her.'* (J.M Barrie, *Peter Pan*)

How could a Lost Boy possibly know what a mother looks like?
Not one of them remembers her laugh or the colour of her eyes.
All those yearning years and finally, when she appears
out of the setting sun, they see only a great white bird, fear
the mocking tones of the forgetful boy they dare not question.
'If you find your mothers', says Peter darkly, 'I hope you like them.'

It is ten o'clock by the crocodile when they leave Neverland.
An open window smiles them home to Number 14. Morning
finds their feet bound to the bedposts, ankles grazed by ties
that anchor them to the ground. Bystanders now, they learn
not to enter the game when the wind plays snatch-the-hat.
It is time that flies unhindered, say the adults, not children.

So many adventures to forget, first in classrooms then offices.
The Underground tunnels far from their Home-Under-the-Ground.
In place of pirate hats, bowlers, a costume for the pantomime
of grown-up life. Neither Mrs Darling nor their wives
will ever live up to Wendy's make-believe mothering.
Years pass, the crocodile stalks.

IV DEFENDING NEVERLAND

He didn't want to hear about the family I fell out of
but handed me a cross made of sticks,
a sword, he said, so I could fight.

First time, I got the shakes, but Wendy nursed my wounds,
read me the stories of heroes and told me
everything would be fine.

We had to kill the enemy to take the island for ourselves,
for the boy who called himself Great White Father
and never remembered our names.

In a spider-webbed corner of my mind crouched a voice
that said victory was just another story.
I didn't want to hear.

He believed enough for all of us. He knew
we would die for him; we were never sure
if he would do the same for us.