

Neverland
By Jonathan Dorf

PROLOGUE

(WENDY, early forties, is on a ledge outside her apartment. PETER, a few months older, pokes his head through a window frame.)

PETER

I'm coming out.

WENDY

It's dangerous out here. You could fall.

PETER

I'll go in if you will.

WENDY

Do you love me?

PETER

Now?

WENDY

Yes.

PETER

I think I'm supposed to.

WENDY

But you don't?

PETER

I should have liked you better when we were eight. Sorry I was mean to you at my ninth birthday party. I had a bad day.

WENDY

Did you love me then?

PETER

I was nine.

WENDY

What about when you were eight, when you told me to give back the hundred dollars and buy a lottery ticket?

PETER

I was eight.

WENDY

And you don't love me now.

PETER

It's complicated. Could you come inside? I'm worried that if I explain it you might get bored and fall off.

(The lights dim, and Peter pushes off the window frame.)

SCENE 1

(A split stage approximately thirty-five years earlier. On one side, a dark classroom with a blackboard upstage. On the other side, Wendy, eight years old, goes through a garbage can. She finds a small brown bag. Enter J.M.—played by the Actress, as are all characters except for Peter and Wendy—wearing an overcoat.)

J.M.

Don't eat from there. Garbage in that can's been sitting there for two weeks. Try this one here.

(J.M. points at a second can, which Wendy opens. Wendy pulls out a fast food bag.)

See? Sealed for freshness.

WENDY

I'm Wendy.

(Wendy offers her hand, but J.M. doesn't take it.)

J.M.

You don't want to do that. Destroys the illusion.

(J.M. walks toward the darkness of the classroom.)

I'll be back later.

(J.M. enters the classroom area, removes her overcoat and becomes a TEACHER who dresses like *La Femme Nikita*. Wendy continues to dig in the garbage can. She finds a wallet. She holds it up and looks through it. Inside are a number of bills—a hundred dollars. Beat. She pockets it. Lights up on the classroom, where the Teacher stands at the blackboard. Peter, almost nine years old, sits in a chair surrounded by empty chairs and nibbles on an apple.)

TEACHER

Some children starve. They starve to death. Little boys and girls just like you starve and die. It happens all the time. Starve and die. Not die and starve. Make a note: that's impossible. You must starve first and die later. Sometimes you'll hear the phrase "dying of starvation," as if they're doing both at the same time. This is inaccurate. It is not possible to die slowly. Really, they are starving slowly, and when they are done, they'll die all at once. In one motion, so to speak. Please make a note.

(Wendy enters the classroom and takes a seat.)

WENDY

Sorry I was late. I had to make my own breakfast.

TEACHER

For today's lesson,

(The Teacher pulls out a large cue card that reads "People change.")

I would like to talk about God. But I can't, because this is public school. Instead, I will talk about Greek gods and expose you to subliminal messages.

(She changes to a cue card reading "Some things never change.")

We're allowed to mention Greek gods because there are so many of them. So they don't violate your constitutional rights. Can anyone name any Greek gods? Peter?

PETER

Petey.

TEACHER

Big boys go by Peter. Petey sounds like someone who limps. Maybe your wrist limps. Do you want everyone to think you're limp, *Petey*?

(The Teacher changes her card to "Remember where you came from.")

PETER

Peter.

TEACHER

Good boy. But—are you eating in class?

PETER

(nods, waves an apple)

I brought one for you too. It's organic.

TEACHER

Thank you, Peter. That's very thoughtful of you.

(She takes the apple and changes her card to "Don't live in the past.")

Toss it.

PETER

But—

TEACHER

But what?

PETER

That's not fair.

TEACHER

Suck it up.

(Peter tosses his half-eaten apple in the trash can as the Teacher switches to "Nurture your inner child.")

Class, that's your first lesson on Greek gods. They are arbitrary. Whimsical. Capricious. Does anyone understand any of the words I've used? Please make a note to look them up tonight.

(A BELL RINGS.)

For tomorrow, please dress as your favorite Greek god.

(The Teacher switches to "You have to grow up sometime.")

PETER

But we don't know any!

TEACHER

Research! This is third grade, not kindergarten!

(Peter sulks out and sits elsewhere on stage, staring into space. Exit the Teacher with the good apple. Beat. Wendy rummages in the garbage and pulls out the half-eaten apple. She wipes it on her shirt and bites into it. She exits as the

lights dim. Wendy, the apple gone, reenters and approaches Peter.)

WENDY

What would you do if you found a hundred dollars?

PETER

Where?

WENDY

What's it matter?

PETER

If I found a hundred dollars at a bank?

WENDY

A hundred dollars all alone.

PETER

It has to be somewhere.

WENDY

In a wallet.

PETER

You found somebody's wallet?

WENDY

I said what if.

PETER

Did you?

WENDY

Yeah. What would you do with it?

PETER

Can I see?

(Wendy pulls out the wallet. They look at it.)

Whose is it?

(Beat.)

I guess I'd tell my Dad. My Mom might spend it. She shops.

WENDY

You'd give it back?

PETER

Except for a dollar. My Dad says you always keep a dollar for luck.

WENDY

How's a dollar lucky?

PETER

You could buy a lottery ticket. That's what my Dad does.

WENDY

What if you only find a dollar?

(Beat. Exit Wendy. Lights dim on Peter, who pulls out another apple and eats.)

SCENE 2

(The next week. Peter has a birthday hat on his head. Enter his MOTHER, played by the Actress. Enter Wendy, who stands at the edge of the stage in a spotlight.)

MOTHER

Your friend is here.

PETER

She's not invited.

MOTHER

That's not nice.

PETER

You said I could only have ten people. She isn't one of the ten people.
(to offstage friends)

It's time to open the presents everybody!

MOTHER

You can have eleven, Peter. It's all right.

PETER

But I don't want eleven. I want ten. It's MY birthday.

MOTHER

Last week she was your best friend.

PETER

She was not. She's a girl.

MOTHER

So am I.

PETER

The guys'll make fun of me. And she's poor.

MOTHER

God punishes mean people, Peter. He dogs them their entire lives, and no matter where they go, he is always dogging them.

PETER

What's "dogs"?

MOTHER

He's in here, Wendy!

(Peter's Mother exits.)

PETER

Mom!

(Wendy walks out of the spot and into the room.)

WENDY

Hi.

PETER

Hi.

WENDY

Happy birthday.

PETER

Thanks.

(Wendy takes out an apple.)

WENDY

I brought you a present.

PETER

Really? What?

(beat)

Thanks.

(He takes it. He smells it and looks about to eat.)

Is it organic?

WENDY

I don't know.

(Peter no longer looks ready to eat it.)

PETER

Oh.

WENDY

I'll get you another present.

PETER

That's OK.

(beat)

I gotta' go open the presents.

WENDY

We won five million dollars in the lottery.

PETER

If you won five million dollars, how come you're wearing the same clothes as all last week?

WENDY

We just won today. We didn't get the money yet.

PETER

I gotta' go open the presents now.

WENDY

Can I watch?

PETER

I already opened yours.

(Lights flicker. Enter the Actress dressed as a MINISTER.)

WENDY

Do you wanna' be my boyfriend?

PETER

No.

MINISTER

With this apple, I thee wed. Do you, Wendy, promise to be eternally grateful,
recognizing Peter as your Lord and Savior, your chosen one, the horse you rode in on,
(She examines an index card, then tosses it.)
your one and only, so long as you both shall live?

WENDY

I do. I really, really do.

MINISTER

(turns to Peter)

Do you, Peter—

PETER

No! Get away from me. You're all icky.

WENDY

I love you, Peter.

MINISTER

She loves you, Peter.

WENDY

I want to marry you, Peter.

MINISTER

She wants to—

WENDY

Choke you!

(Wendy puts her hands around Peter's throat and chokes
Peter.)

PETER

Help!

WENDY

I just wanna' get close to you.

You're . . . chok . . . ing—

PETER

I love you, Peter.

WENDY

Get off!

PETER

I'll always be with you.

WENDY

(Wendy chokes him to the ground. Lights dim as Peter goes limp. Exit Minister. Lights up. Peter and Wendy stand. Wendy peers at Peter, who has his mouth open and stares blankly. Peter snaps out of it.)

My mom said I can only have ten kids over.

PETER

Oh.

WENDY

Sorry.

PETER

We're getting a new house. Maybe you could come over sometime.

WENDY

Maybe. So . . . bye . . .

PETER

(Peter exits, leaving Wendy alone. Beat. Enter the Actress as J.M.)

You came back!

WENDY

I'm not your guardian angel, so don't cling.

J.M.

(beat)

That boy is "the one." Why are you letting him go without a fight?

What's "the one?"

WENDY

J.M.

The one!

WENDY

One what?

J.M.

Will you grow up—or get some foresight? Think like a grown-up for a minute. Here—
(J.M. produces a hat)
put this on. It's a grown-up hat.

(Wendy puts on the hat.)

WENDY

I don't feel any different.

(J.M. grabs Wendy by the collar.)

J.M.

Do you like that boy?

WENDY

I don't know.

J.M.

What!

(She shakes Wendy.)

Don't worry—anybody who sees us'll just think it's a catfight. Do you like him? If they can't see me, they'll think you're having a seizure. You can't lose. So listen up before I shake your head off.

WENDY

Mommy!

(J.M. covers Wendy's mouth.)

J.M.

Do you believe that for every person on this planet there is one other person who is chosen—by God or luck or random urine sample, whatever. Do you? Just nod or shake, girlie. Nod or shake.

(Wendy wags her head diagonally.)

What the hell is this diagonal shit?

(J.M. lets out a howl.)

You licked me!

(She removes her hand from Wendy's mouth.)

You tongued me, you—

WENDY

He doesn't like me.

J.M.

I'm sure that's not true. Why did you lick me?

WENDY

He doesn't like me. He didn't want me at his party.

J.M.

He's shy.

(beat)

Why do you think he was standing there with his mouth open—for an entire minute—right before he left?

(Wendy shrugs.)

He was thinking about you!

WENDY

He doesn't want to be friends with me.

J.M.

Of course he doesn't want to be friends. He wants to be more than friends.

WENDY

He does?

J.M.

Were you there?

WENDY

(beat)

What do I do?

J.M.

Go after him.

WENDY

What if he doesn't like me?

J.M.

Then be somebody else. You're it for him, and he's it for you.

(She picks Wendy off the ground and moves her out of the way—or simply moves her out of the way with authority if the former is physically impossible.)

WENDY

You're strong.

J.M.

So are you. Hold onto him, ride him 'til he breaks—or you'll be alone your whole life.

(She wipes her hand on Wendy's clothing.)

Do whatever you have to do, but don't ever lick me again.

(J.M. starts to leave.)

WENDY

How do I make him like me?

J.M.

I have confidence in you.

WENDY

I don't care what *you* have. What do *I* have?

J.M.

You *know*.

WENDY

I'm eight.

(J.M. exits.)

Will you come back?

(J.M. returns.)

J.M.

Maybe. By the way, the name's J.M. Don't ever call me that.

WENDY

What should I call—

(Exit J.M. again, leaving Wendy alone as the lights fade to black.)

you?

SCENE 3

(Nearly four years later. A suburban neighborhood. Peter, surrounded by boxes, carries as many boxes as he can; he can barely see over them. His Mother carries a tiny box.)

MOTHER

I think you should get a paper route.

PETER

We just moved here.

MOTHER

Never too early. The job market is competitive.

PETER

Can I unpack first?

MOTHER

Most people would say that seventh grade is late.

(beat)

Race you to the door!

(Peter tries to move toward the "door," which is upstage. His Mother is gone before he takes more than a few steps, and he drops the boxes he carries. He picks them up. Enter Wendy, dressed in trendy clothing—she should look very different.)

WENDY

I wondered when you were gonna' move in. I saw the sold sign.

(thinks for a moment)

I'm Barrie. I just moved here too.

PETER

B-A-R-R-Y?

WENDY

No. I-E.

PETER

Oh.

WENDY

Is your name Peter?

PETER

How'd you know?

WENDY

I forget. Is that right?

(Peter nods.)

My Mom and Dad got divorced because they're so rich.

PETER

I gotta' help unpack.

WENDY

I made my Dad buy our house so he could make up for my Mom buying me these clothes. It's bigger than my Mom's house by fifteen square feet. That's the number of years they were married before they got divorced. That was his idea.

PETER

My Mom wants me to get a paper route.

WENDY

That's so weird.

PETER

I know. I feel like a dork.

WENDY

No—*I'm* getting a paper route. That way I'll have my own money, and I don't need to depend on my parents. I'm in seventh grade—not kindergarten.

PETER

How did you get one?

WENDY

I haven't yet. But I'm going to.

PETER

What if there aren't any?

WENDY

Then I'll make my Dad get me one. Do you want him to get you one too?

PETER

I guess.

Do you have a girlfriend? **WENDY**

No. **PETER**

Would you like me to be your girlfriend?
(pause) **WENDY**

Well?

I guess. **PETER**

Don't you think I'm pretty? **WENDY**

Yeah, but— **PETER**

But?
(beat) **WENDY**
I think you look really hot.

Thanks. **PETER**

You can kiss me if you want. I don't care if you put your tongue in my mouth. I want you to. **WENDY**

I should unpack first.
(beat) **PETER**

Don't you want to? **WENDY**

I don't know.
(doesn't) **PETER**

WENDY

(beat)

What do you want to do tonight?

(beat)

I could come over and make you dinner.

PETER

My Mom, uh—

WENDY

I could make your whole family dinner. I'm a really good cook. Or we could order takeout. My Dad'll pay. I told him if he wasn't nicer to me I'd go live with Mom. What kind of food do you like?

(The lights flicker. Enter Peter's Mother with a chair and a whip.)

MOTHER

Do this, Peter!

(She snaps the whip on the ground. Wendy snaps her fingers at Peter.)

WENDY

No! Do *this*!

(Mother snaps the whip again. Wendy snaps her fingers. Mother snaps her fingers. Peter looks back and forth between them as a snapping duel breaks out.)

PETER

Stop it! Stop!

(Wendy pulls out a piece of chalk and draws a hopscotch grid on the ground.)

WENDY

Jump, Peter!

(Mother holds the whip knee-high.)

MOTHER

Jump, Peter!

(Wendy and the Mother each grab one of Peter's arms and engage in a tug of war.)

PETER

Stop it! You're pulling me apart!

WENDY

I love you, Peter. I need you. I'll rubber band newspapers while you throw them.

MOTHER

I'm your mother. I'm entitled to at least the left side of your body.

WENDY

I want his left side.

MOTHER

You take the right. You're already on the right.

WENDY

He has a pimple on his right cheek. I don't want it.

(Mother checks Peter's cheek.)

Not that cheek.

MOTHER

Do you have a chainsaw?

WENDY

I have a knife.

(Wendy pulls out a plastic knife.)

MOTHER

It's plastic.

WENDY

So?

MOTHER

It'll take two hands. You're trying to trick me into letting go.

WENDY

I'll do it then.

MOTHER

You'll stab me and make a run for it. I don't think so.

WENDY

What do you suggest?

(Mother pulls out two pairs of handcuffs.)

MOTHER

Handcuffs!

WENDY

I'll preheat the oven. Or order a pizza.

(Peter screams. Blackout. Lights up. Peter sits, a box on his foot. Enter Mother.)

MOTHER

Are you all right?

PETER

I . . . dropped a box on my foot. And I fell. I was talking to—

MOTHER

Does anything feel broken?

PETER

What does broken feel like?

MOTHER

You can't move it. Howling, screaming pain.

(Peter shakes his head.)

Good. Try to stand on it.

(Peter stands and walks around carefully. Mother starts to exit.)

Don't try to use this to get out of your paper route.

PETER

What's for dinner?

(Mother stops.)

MOTHER

Your new friend is bringing it. Isn't that sweet? Try to be nice to her. I didn't see many other children your age in the neighborhood. She reminds me of . . . who was that girl, the girl from the birthday party?

PETER

Wendy.

MOTHER

She reminds me of Wendy.

(The lights flicker.)

And after dinner she's going to put her tongue in your mouth. Would you mind, sweetheart? People who bring dinner are few and far between.

(Peter pinches himself and lets out a yelp.)

What did you do that for?

PETER

I don't want her tongue in my mouth, I don't want her to bring us dinner, and I don't want a paper route.

MOTHER

Don't be difficult, Peter. Don't be difficult again. It's all your fault we had to move, Peter. Don't go and screw things up again.

(beat)

Now get the boxes inside before I tell your father.

PETER

Did you tell Dad about the tongue?

MOTHER

Your father would be all for it. He likes *my* tongue.

PETER

How do you know? He can't talk.

MOTHER

He blinked twice.

PETER

That means no.

MOTHER

He likes it, Peter.

PETER

It's not fair.

MOTHER

Is it fair we had to pack up and move because of your school record? Do you have any idea how embarrassing that was?

(beat)

I'm waiting for an answer.

PETER

Yes, ma'am.

MOTHER

Yes ma'am what?

PETER

I know how embarrassing it was.

MOTHER

How could you know? Were you in our shoes? Were you us?

PETER

N-no, but—

MOTHER

We had our tails between our legs. Do you know how uncomfortable that is?

PETER

No, but—

MOTHER

Do it!

PETER

What?

MOTHER

Put your tail between your legs!

PETER

(beat)

It already is.

MOTHER

What!

PETER

This
(he points to his butt)
is my tail; it *is* between my legs.

MOTHER

You . . . you . . .
(beat)
Sweetie. We both know that you were an accident, but we can't get bitter. And I don't blame you for your father having a stroke and becoming a vegetable, even if it was your fault. We just have to make the best of it. So for my part, I'm sorry.

PETER

Sorry about what?

MOTHER

Does it matter?

PETER

No.
(beat)
Yes.

MOTHER

What?!

PETER

And I'm not sorry.

MOTHER

No allowance for you.

PETER

I don't get one anyway.

MOTHER

Ever.

PETER

Bite me.

MOTHER

Did you say—

Bite me. You're not my mother.

PETER

Who's your mother then?

MOTHER

Not you.

PETER

Then leave.

MOTHER

My real mother would never let a girl put her tongue in my mouth.

PETER

Still crying about the tongue.

MOTHER

I'm not crying.

PETER

Cry, cry, cry—

MOTHER

I'm not crying!

PETER

Cry, cry, cry—

MOTHER

Where's my stuff?

PETER

What stuff?

MOTHER

My things.

PETER

MOTHER

Your things? What things? You don't have any things. They're all ours. They stay with the house. We own your things. Your stuff. Your clothes, including the ones you're wearing. You can keep those because the thought of you naked is so disgusting that my vomit would be all over the neighborhood.

(beat)

So be a good twelve year old and carry the rest of the boxes into the house. Bring them inside, wash your repulsive little mug, and rinse with mouthwash so your little neighbor girlfriend person doesn't cough up a mess when she sticks her tongue in your mouth, because your father's a vegetable and I don't do vomit.

(beat)

All twelve year olds tongue.

MOTHER (cont'd)

(beat)

Maybe you wouldn't have lost Wendy if you'd let her stick it to you.

(beat)

I want neighbor girl to do it before dinner. But after she's brought dinner. Have to make sure she really delivers. OK?

PETER

No.

(Peter walks away.)

MOTHER

Peter!

(Peter exits.)

I don't care if you run away, but if she doesn't bring dinner, I'll dog you.

(Beat as the lights flicker. Enter Wendy with dinner.)

WENDY

I brought—

MOTHER

(takes dinner)

That smells wonderful. Thank you. If Peter comes back, I'll tell him what a good dinner he missed.

WENDY

Where is he?

MOTHER

This way. That way. We're estranged. What's the difference?

WENDY

What's estranged?

MOTHER

Peter doesn't live here anymore.

WENDY

(beat)

Now I have to make my Dad buy me a house somewhere else!

(Blackout.)

SCENE 4

(A juvenile detention center five years later. A stool with detention center regulation clothing on it is the only furniture. Peter removes his shirt and pants and changes into the prison gear, or he could be changed already. Beat. Enter Wendy, this time with a prim schoolgirl look and carrying a stack of books, escorted by the Actress, dressed as a PRISON GUARD.)

WENDY

Hi.

(beat as the Guard exits)

I'm your reading tutor.

PETER

I don't need a reading tutor.

WENDY

But I thought—

PETER

We can read if you want. It's OK. But I just wanted somebody to talk to.

WENDY

Oh.

PETER

Is that OK?

WENDY

Do you like to read?

PETER

I don't know.

WENDY

Would you like to read one of these books?

PETER

What've you got?

(Wendy juggles the books to look at them.)

WENDY

There's one about dogs, and The Yearling—that's about a boy and a deer—and this looks like a cookbook and—I had to take them from the library here. Sorry.

PETER

The deer one sounds OK.

WENDY

Do you like depressing books?

PETER

Why?

WENDY

He shoots the deer.

PETER

Whatever. Does it bother *you*?

WENDY

Does it bother *you*?

PETER

I robbed a mini-mart. You're staring.

WENDY

Sorry. I—

PETER

When people stare it's 'cause they want to know why I'm here.

(He puts his finger in his shirt and makes it look like a gun.)

Like this. Guy believed me, only when I'm leaving with the money, I forget it's just my hand and not a gun, and I take my hand out of my shirt. Guy figures out it's my hand and not a gun, and he hits me in the back with a bat. I was in the hospital for a week.

WENDY

Are you all right?

PETER

He didn't break my back or anything, just a couple ribs. I'm here for another five months. I've been here for a month. If I had a normal life, I'd be in twelfth grade. Were you gonna' ask that?

WENDY

You're really nice.

PETER

I'm just being nice 'cause I want to bone you.

(beat)

Don't worry. I can control it.

(beat)

My Mom threw me out 'cause I wouldn't let the girl who lived across the street put her tongue in my mouth. Really I left, but she woulda' thrown me out.

(The lights flicker. Enter the Actress dressed as a cross between Peter's Mother and the Guard.)

GUARD/MOTHER

I'm not your real mother.

PETER

But you said I was an accident.

GUARD/MOTHER

You were. I was waiting for the bus—the only time I ever took the bus—and this heavysset woman handed me a baby, said "take this baby" with one of those voices that made me think she had a phlegm problem, then climbed into a dumpster and suffocated herself. The bus was late.

PETER

She didn't say I was an accident.

GUARD/MOTHER

Oh—I forgot. Right after she said "take this baby," she said, "it was an accident." I said "is it a boy or a girl?" She said, "who cares?—I'm suffocating myself in that dumpster across the street." I forgot that part of the conversation.

(The lights flicker as the Guard/Mother exits.)

PETER

Something like that. Every time I think about it, I remember it different.

(beat)

A couple years after I ran away, I tried to come back.

I lost you.

WENDY

What?

PETER

I lost you when you said you tried to come back.

WENDY

(covering)

I tried to go back to my old parents or whatever they were. I even told them it was OK if the girl put her tongue in my mouth, but it was too late. She moved a couple weeks after I ran away. So I left again.

PETER

You could put your tongue in *my* mouth.

WENDY

(beat)

Thanks, but you don't really mean it.

PETER

I do.

WENDY

That's not what I meant. You mean it, 'cause you're all nice and you're trying to be nice to me, but—well, there's a lot of reasons why I could never do that. For starters, the whole room's covered by video cameras.

PETER

How's my hair?

WENDY

What?

PETER

Does it look OK?

WENDY

Yeah.

PETER

If I'm going to be on video, I want to make sure I look good. Do you have any mouthwash or toothpaste or gum?

WENDY

PETER

I'm not tonguing you.

WENDY

Don't you like me?

PETER

You're a nice girl and you're pretty and smart, and I'm sure you're a great reading tutor. And maybe I used to be this nice little kid—I don't think I ever was nice. Maybe when I was really, really little, like a little baby. When I was nine, when I turned nine, I had this birthday party, and there was this girl, Wendy. I told her she couldn't come to my party 'cause she was poor and her clothes smelled. Only I told her it was 'cause—it doesn't matter what I said. My Mom hated me after that.

(beat)

I'm no good for you. You shouldn't come back here.

WENDY

But what about The Yearling?

PETER

What?

WENDY

The deer.

PETER

I already know it died—right? You're too good for me.

WENDY

But I'm—

PETER

Don't say your name. In case I get even meaner and start stalking you after I get out.

(Enter the Guard.)

GUARD

Time's up.

WENDY

I'll leave the books.

PETER

Suit yourself.

(Beat. Wendy leaves the books on the floor and starts to exit.)

I just don't know how I'll turn out.

(The Guard follows Wendy out as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 5

(Nine years later. A college lecture hall.
The Actress plays a PROFESSOR.
Wendy sits near Peter.)

PROFESSOR

(like Charlie Brown's teacher)

Wa, wa, wa, etc., wa!

(There is APPLAUSE. The Professor exits.)

WENDY

She's stunning.

PETER

I didn't really understand the point about the circus midgets.

WENDY

That's from her book.

PETER

She wrote a book about circus midgets?

WENDY

No—she wrote about perception's effect on memory. Her study of circus midgets is the opening chapter. She likes to lead off with it to get people's attention.

PETER

I guess when I read the book it'll make more sense.

WENDY

I still don't understand circus midgets.

PETER

You don't.

WENDY

I understand them in the book. Just not in real life. Why would anyone want to be a circus midget?

PETER

Maybe when you're a midget all you can do is join the circus.

WENDY

I think I'm your section leader.

PETER

Gwendolyn Darling?

WENDY

That's me.

PETER

You a tough grader?

WENDY

Not especially.

PETER

(offers his hand)

Peter.

WENDY

(as they shake hands)

I know.

(beat)

I've met everyone else. You had to be you, so to speak.

PETER

I think I'm the oldest freshman.

WENDY

You might be.

PETER

There's that guy with the beard—

WENDY

He's gotta' be at least sixty.

PETER

But he's graduating in January.

WENDY

It gives you a different perspective than the eighteen year olds. You've been around more. Seen more.

PETER

I have?

WENDY

Haven't you?

(Peter nods.)

What have you been up to?

(beat)

It's just really interesting to be teaching someone who's my age.

PETER

How old are you?

WENDY

I'm twenty-five.

PETER

I'm twenty-six.

WENDY

I turn twenty-six next month. Have you been off tilting at windmills?

PETER

I don't think so. Unless I got really drunk and blacked out. That's possible.

WENDY

What about circus midgets?

PETER

What about them? Do I believe in them?

WENDY

You don't like circus midgets, do you?

PETER

Like them?

Male ones. **WENDY**

No. **PETER**

What if they were taller? **WENDY**

Taller male circus midgets? **PETER**

They're not midgets anymore. **WENDY**

Not midgets. **PETER**

Just male. Do you find that attractive? **WENDY**

No. **PETER**

Good. **WENDY**

(beat)
Who did you really admire when you were seventeen?

Why seventeen? **PETER**

We'll test out Professor's theory. **WENDY**

I was in juvenile hall. **PETER**

I didn't ask that. **WENDY**

PETER
I'm not ashamed of it. Well, I mean I am, but not of telling people.

(beat)
I just wanted to get it out of the way.

WENDY

Did you admire someone?

(beat)

When I was eight, I liked this boy.

PETER

When you were eight.

WENDY

When I was eight.

PETER

Like liked him?

WENDY

I see his face. I see him grow up. Grown up. And every time I see him, I like him a little more when we were eight. Does that make sense?

PETER

I don't know.

WENDY

It's like the image I have of him keeps improving. That's Professor's theory.

PETER

Or it could go the other way. Get worse. Turn into a monster.

WENDY

It could, but it didn't. Do you have a monster?

PETER

He was cool—the boy?

WENDY

He . . . did things for me. Nice little things.

PETER

Like?

WENDY

Not what you think.

PETER

I'm not thinking anything.

WENDY

We weren't having sex.

(beat)

It didn't happen. Maybe if it had, I wouldn't be wondering about it now.

PETER

I just met you.

WENDY

Am I making you uncomfortable?

PETER

I was in prison before I came here.

WENDY

I don't even know if I wish I'd had sex with him. I know it wouldn't matter to me if *he* went to prison.

PETER

I was in prison after juvie. Juvie made me worse.

WENDY

But you're better now.

PETER

I think so. I'm here. It's not a very selective school.

(beat)

I didn't rape a nun.

WENDY

You . . .

PETER

I didn't rape a nun.

WENDY

were accused of raping a nun?

PETER

No. And I wasn't thinking of doing it.

WENDY

Good.

PETER

There was this girl.

You raped—

WENDY

No.

PETER

You didn't—

WENDY

No!

PETER

You said you didn't rape a nun. You didn't say—

WENDY

I didn't rape anybody. I could never rape anybody. This girl—she saved me.

PETER

She wasn't eight.

WENDY

She was my reading tutor. She only came once. When I was seventeen.

PETER

Did you love her?

WENDY

She was so . . . right.

PETER

For you?

WENDY

No—right like the right thing to say. The right outfit. She probably went to the right high school. I never asked.

PETER

Did you want to know?

WENDY

Doesn't matter now.

PETER

Tell *me*. Pretend like I'm her.

WENDY

PETER

I'm not good at stuff like this.

WENDY

I'm your section leader. That's not that different from being a reading tutor.

(The lights flicker. Enter the Actress as J.M.)

J.M.

Tell him.

WENDY

Now?

J.M.

You're not getting any younger.

WENDY

I just found him.

J.M.

Now's your chance not to lose him.

WENDY

What do I say? I can't tell him I've been following him for seventeen years because some creepy woman I met picking through a garbage can told me we're meant for each other.

J.M.

I am not creepy.

WENDY

He's got me on a pedestal.

J.M.

The old you.

WENDY

The new me hasn't even finished her Ph.D. How am I supposed to compete?

J.M.

The old you is an eight year old.

WENDY

She has a head start.

(beat)

He's in my section. I've got all semester.

J.M.

(beat)

OK.

(J.M. kisses Wendy on the forehead and exits. The lights flicker.)

PETER

I should change sections.

WENDY

(beat)

I think that would be a good idea.

PETER

We've talked—

WENDY

A lot. Our relationship . . . it's . . .

PETER

I feel like I could tell you anything. It shouldn't be like that with my teachers.

(beat)

But we could be friends.

WENDY

You're a student.

PETER

Yeah.

WENDY

I have to go.

(Exit Wendy, leaving Peter to sling his bookbag over his shoulder and exit as the lights dim.)

SCENE 6

(Five years later. A diner. Peter sits at a table. Enter Wendy dressed as a waitress. She hands him a menu.)

WENDY

Hi. My name's Mary, and I'll be your serving person. You can call me Belle for short.

PETER

Are you new?

WENDY

That's Mary as in the Virgin and Belle as in Tinkerbell, but with an "E" at the end—and yes, it's my first day. Would you like to hear about the specials?

PETER

Special sandwich: the turkey reuben on rye. Fish of the day: swordfish in drawn butter. Salad is Boston lettuce with fresh apples, and that's it. There's supposed to be a pasta, but they had some kinda' fight with the supplier, and they haven't found a new one yet. That was three months ago. They should just go to the supermarket. I come here a lot.

WENDY

Is it any good? I haven't had a chance to try anything yet.

PETER

It's food.

WENDY

I'll give you a few minutes.

(She starts to leave, then does an about-face.)

Do you need a few minutes?

PETER

Are you really a virgin?

(beat)

Oh shit. Sorry. Shit. I can't believe I just said that. I go to college to better myself, and—

WENDY

It's all right.

PETER

It's not. You go out of your way to tell me you're named for the Virgin Mary, and I—oh shit.

Cursing—

WENDY

Shit. Sorry. I'm not an animal. I went to college.

PETER

And I have a Ph.D.

WENDY

I'm serious. I did.

PETER

I was serious.

WENDY

My graduation didn't work out.

PETER

You didn't graduate?

WENDY

I don't know.

PETER

How can you not know?

WENDY

I bolted.

PETER

How?

WENDY

I got up and ran. I don't know how I did it. I was so scared my legs were shaking.

PETER

Did everyone stare?

WENDY

I don't know. It was like I had this vision, and I couldn't see anything else. I tripped in the middle of the aisle. I fell. I groped this girl. I think she liked it. I'm sorry—I know that makes you uncomfortable. It happened so slowly. I fell. I couldn't see. I hoped I was grabbing the edge of a chair. It was soft.

PETER

Her leg?

WENDY

It was round.

PETER

Her knee.

WENDY

I said it was soft.

PETER

She was fat.

WENDY

She moaned.

PETER

Just inside the knee is a very erotic region.

WENDY

The thigh.

PETER

Did you enjoy groping her? That was very hard for me to ask.
(The lights flicker. Wendy pulls out a knife and fork.)

Time for dinner.

WENDY

But I haven't ordered anything.

PETER

You ordered me . . . and I could eat you right up.

WENDY

You remind me of this girl I knew when I was twelve. She wanted to tongue me.

PETER

But you couldn't get it up.

WENDY

No, that wasn't—

PETER

Do you need to think about your mother for that?

WENDY

PETER

What?

WENDY

If it takes me more than thirty seconds with a guy, there's something wrong with him.

PETER

You shouldn't talk like that. You're not like that. You're named after the Virgin Mary.

WENDY

I told you to call me Belle. Belle is like that. You can't get it up—can you?

PETER

I can.

WENDY

Is it Oedipal?

PETER

You're not the right woman.

WENDY

Your mother would be the right woman.

PETER

You're not the right woman!

(The lights flicker.)

WENDY

You want another waitress?

PETER

What?

WENDY

I'm not sure who else is on. I don't see anyone else, but maybe there's someone in the kitchen or on a break or that quit and could come back or—

PETER

I think I'm messed up.

WENDY

You want a different waitress.

I do? **PETER**

Don't you? **WENDY**

Should I? **PETER**

You said so. **WENDY**

I don't remember. **PETER**

You have a problem. **WENDY**

I *can* get it up. **PETER**

What? **WENDY**

PETER
Sorry. I am so sorry. I gotta' go. I can't—I'm like a—a dog. Hump anything I see.
Figuratively speaking.

(beat as Peter stands)
Figuratively—only word I remember from college. That's a lie.

WENDY
You didn't order anything.

PETER
I don't have any money. Sorry.

WENDY
Sit.

(She grabs his arm.)
Sit down or I'll break your arm. I know karate. Last week I broke one of my students'
arms in the self-defense class I teach. And that was an accident.

(Beat. Peter sits.)
I'm not fragile.

PETER
I don't have any money. You can't go to a restaurant without money.

WENDY

Don't you have a job? Get a job. What do you want to eat?

PETER

I don't have any money.

WENDY

On the house.

PETER

I thought you just started here.

WENDY

You're a regular. Regulars deserve a free meal. Why'd you hate college?

PETER

Didn't hate it. Just screwed it up.

(The lights flicker. Enter the Actress as Peter's Mother. She tosses a cap and gown at Peter. He puts them on. Wendy freezes.)

A DIGNIFIED VOICE

With this ring, I thee wed. Repeat after me. With this ring—shit!

(beat)

Hang on.

(sound of cue cards flipping)

Members of the class of wa, wa, wa, we are gathered here today—shit—

(to itself)

I suppose that *could* work.

(to all)

Faculty, alumni, parents, grandparents, friends, enemies, pets and members of the class of wa, wa, wa, we are gathered here to celebrate the culmination of four—except for those who accelerated their course of study through advanced placement courses—four—or those who took time off—four—or who took a lighter than usual load because of medical problems. For example, chronic fatigue syndrome. But in general, this is the culmination of four years of work, of rigorous study,

(Peter's mother pulls out a straw and a wad of paper. She builds spitballs and begins shooting them at Peter.)

of intense self-examination, scrutiny,

(She hits Peter.)

even personal attack.

PETER

Hi, Mom. Good to see you.

DIGNIFIED VOICE

Physical attack, possibly by other people.

MOTHER

Who do you think had to take out the garbage when you abandoned us?

PETER

Let's talk about it after the ceremony.

DIGNIFIED VOICE

Betrayal.

(Mother continues to launch spitballs.)

PETER

I'm glad you came. I want to talk to you after the ceremony.

DIGNIFIED VOICE

Finding the fifth rib.

MOTHER

And your father pined away after you left.

DIGNIFIED VOICE

And twisting the knife.

PETER

Mom—please!

MOTHER

Not even a chance to stand up and stretch before he became a vegetable. And you almost got away with it. If I hadn't pulled his feeding tube, he'd be alive today and you'd have gotten away with murder.

DIGNIFIED VOICE

Shhh!

PETER

I'm sorry.

(to his Mother)

Mom, let's go outside.

MOTHER

I told you God would dog you, Peter.

PETER

Mom, not here!

MOTHER

God would dog you for what you did to the Wendy when you turned nine.

(Peter gets up and starts to exit.)

And you should have taken that girl's tongue in your mouth. I should have made you. You were only twelve. I was stronger than you.

(Peter falls.)

I'm sorry I didn't make a man out of you.

(Wendy rushes to position herself to be the girl he gropes on his way up. It's as if Peter is blind. He grabs hold of her, groping her breast by accident as he pulls himself up. Wendy sort of moans.)

Stand and grope like a man. How dare you cop a cheap feel and run!

(as Peter exits)

Your real parents must've had all sorts of screwy recessive genes.

(Peter exits. To the Dignified Voice)

Continue.

(The lights flicker, and Mother exits. Wendy is alone in the restaurant.)

WENDY

Did I blink? Sir?! I must've blinked.

(She clears the table. The lights dim to indicate the passage of time, then up as Peter reenters as a homeless man, almost three years later. Wendy takes a plate from the table and puts it on the ground in front of Peter. She throws some change into it and exits with the rest of the table setting. Peter curls up and goes to sleep, using the plate of change for a pillow. Wendy returns carrying sandwiches. Beat)

Excuse me.

(beat)

Excuse me. Are you awake?

(Peter sits up suddenly.)

PETER

Ow!

WENDY

Are you all right?

PETER
You try sleeping on a fucking plate.

WENDY
Would you like a sandwich?

PETER
What kind you got?

(Wendy checks the three sandwiches she carries.)

WENDY
Tongue.

PETER
Tongue?

WENDY
A kosher deli made a donation.

PETER
That's all?

WENDY
I didn't want to wake you. I ran out of chicken salad and corned beef.

PETER
You did wake me.

WENDY
I didn't want you to starve. Why do you sleep on top of a plate?

PETER
So nobody steals it. Buy me a sandwich?

WENDY
I'll *give* you a sandwich.

PETER
I hate tongue.

(beat)
Fine—I'll scrape it off and eat the bread.

(Wendy holds out the sandwich.)

WENDY

I'm sorry I didn't wake you before I ran out of the other sandwiches.

(Before Peter can take the sandwich, Wendy begins to unwrap it.)

PETER

What are you doing?

WENDY

Unwrapping it for you—

PETER

Don't.

WENDY

I thought—

PETER

Unwrapping is between me and the sandwich.

WENDY

(beat)

Would you like me to turn around?

PETER

What are you gonna' do with the other two sandwiches?

WENDY

Would you like them?

PETER

No.

WENDY

(beat)

You look cold.

PETER

I am.

WENDY

I have a blanket in my car.

PETER

I'd really like a better sandwich.

Get up. **WENDY**

What? **PETER**

Get up. **WENDY**
(She pulls him up. He resists. She grabs his ear.)
I am not going to let you wallow.

Ow! You're harassing me! **PETER**

Somebody should've harassed you years ago. **WENDY**

I'll piss on you. **PETER**

You'll get more water pressure standing up. **WENDY**

I'll do it. **PETER**
(He unzips his fly.)
I mean it.

I dare you to pull it out. **WENDY**

I will. **PETER**

Do it! Let's see that penis! **WENDY**

I've infected you. **PETER**
(beat as Wendy lets go of him)

No, I— **WENDY**

PETER

It's *me*. It's always me. My mother hated me.

(beat)

I saw a man on the next block wearing a bra and going from can to can, sampling everybody's garbage. He didn't have a tongue. If he's not full, he might want those tongue sandwiches. I think his name is Bob. I think it's Bob because I called him Jesus once and he didn't answer. I have to go. The police come around at ten and chase everybody out. They'll hit you with a baton if you don't leave fast enough. I got a leg cramp once, so I couldn't get up as fast as they wanted me to. Thwack. Guy was late for watching pro wrestling at the bar around the corner. Thwack. Hurt like a bitch for a month. I'm thirty-four. My body feels like it's seventy-four. What time is it?

WENDY

Nine-thirty.

(Peter gathers his stuff, such as it is.)

PETER

Sometimes they come early.

(Wendy picks up the plate for him.)

Hey—hands off. There's big money in there.

WENDY

There's nothing in there.

PETER

Damn! Somebody ripped me off. Turn out your pockets.

WENDY

What?

PETER

You see anybody else around? Turn out your pockets and prove you didn't nail my stuff.

WENDY

I didn't take—

PETER

Prove it, Mrs. Save the World with Shitty Tongue Sandwiches! I bet they were all tongue. Probably wasn't any chicken salad or corned beef—ever—you just made them up—

WENDY

That's not true—

While you were cleaning me out. **PETER**

Peter, stop it! **WENDY**

Who? **PETER**
(beat)

Your name is Peter. **WENDY**

(Peter checks his pockets.)

Where's my wallet? **PETER**

Peter! **WENDY**

Gimme back my wallet. I'll have to cancel my credit cards. **PETER**

Did you hear what I said? **WENDY**

I knew a guy that stole a Visa. Charged a fortune on it before they caught him. Oh—
sorry. That was me. I was nineteen. Who's Peter? **PETER**

You are. **WENDY**

My name's not Peter. **PETER**

It was. **WENDY**

I wouldn't know about that. **PETER**

It was *your name*. **WENDY**

PETER

And who were you?

WENDY

Who did you want me to be?

(Peter gives her back the tongue sandwich.)

PETER

Keep the sandwich. There's other people need it more.

WENDY

Who?

PETER

People that don't hate tongue. Keep my wallet. Nothing worth anything in it.

(Peter starts to walk away.)

WENDY

Where are you going?

PETER

I told you. Gotta' beat the cops before they beat me. No wonder you can't remember who you are.

WENDY

Come home with me.

PETER

Lady, you already cleaned me out.

WENDY

I'll stick my tongue in your mouth.

PETER

Don't say that. Don't ever say that.

(beat)

You're that waitress. You're that Mary. Why are you following me?

WENDY

I'm not following you.

PETER

I know you're that waitress.

So I was a waitress.

WENDY

Help! Stalker! Help!

PETER

I'm not stalking you!

WENDY

I haven't been to that diner in three years. Help!

PETER

I'm not—

WENDY

Where's my wallet? Help!

PETER

I didn't take your wallet.

WENDY

Right—maybe I shoved it up my ass to keep it safe and forgot I put it there. Somebody help!

PETER

(Wendy covers Peter's mouth with her hand.)

Calm down—you don't understand.

WENDY

I understand.

PETER
(hard to understand)

What?

WENDY

I understand!

PETER

Please don't yell when I move my hand.

WENDY

(She takes her hand off his mouth.)

PETER

Here's what I understand: you've been followin' me around for three years and one month, and you left me here.

(Wendy lets go of Peter completely. As he exits)

You left me here.

(He is gone. Enter the Actress, carrying a pointer and looking vaguely like a RELIGIOUS FIGURE.)

RELIGIOUS FIGURE

The Wendy first appeared to a small boy named Peter in suburban Los Angeles nearly twenty-five years ago. While there have been numerous alleged sightings since then, the most credible being an appearance not quite four years after the original sighting to the same young boy, then twelve years old, the sexual nature of the alleged second encounter has raised questions about its authenticity. In the words of one anonymous but highly-placed source close to the Lost Boys, an underground band whose meteoric rise to prominence came upon the heels of the tenth anniversary of the original sighting, "The Wendy wouldn't do that. She wouldn't grow up like that."

(The Actress transforms into a COP.)

COP

Move along.

WENDY

What?

COP

You can't stay here.

WENDY

Why? I'm giving out tongue sandwiches.

COP

And I've got pro wrestling to watch. Move.

WENDY

Where?

COP

At the bar.

WENDY

Move where?

COP

Move in place.

WENDY

How?

COP

Jog in place.

(beat)

Go ahead. Jog.

(Wendy does so. Beat)

That looks like fun.

(The Cop jogs with Wendy.)

Be right back.

(as the Cop jogs off)

Keep moving, or I'll beat the crap out of you.

(The Cop exits, jogging. Wendy keeps jogging. Beat. The Actress, now dressed as J.M., jogs on with Peter.)

J.M.

Look who I found.

PETER

Am I jogging?

WENDY

I'm thirsty. And tired.

J.M.

Drink?

(J.M. offers Wendy a plastic bottle filled with clear liquid—one of those see-through bottles designed specifically for sports.)

I don't get much opportunity to exercise.

WENDY

I said I'm tired.

(J.M. puts away the bottle and offers Wendy a packet of pills.)

J.M.

Pick me up?

WENDY

(beat)

I think I'd rather have the bottle.

J.M.

I'd rather you have the pills.

(beat)

We'll compromise—have both.

WENDY

That seems fair.

(J.M. gives Wendy the bottle and the pills.)

J.M.

We can't go on like this.

WENDY

I thought you liked jogging.

J.M.

I do. It relaxes me. You should try it.

WENDY

I am.

J.M.

All this almost talking to Peter. And near-talking to Peter. And non-talking. You'll have a breakdown. Like the one you're having now.

WENDY

I'm not having a breakdown. I'm jogging.

J.M.

You're jogging on the outside.

WENDY

Peter!

PETER

I feel really great.

(Peter jogs off.)

WENDY

I'm going after him.

J.M.

Nonsense.

WENDY

I will. Just one more drink and—

J.M.

You'll fall over.

(Wendy makes a good dent in the contents of the bottle.)

WENDY

There's something funny about this drink.

J.M.

I thought you knew that. You should try the pills.

WENDY

I'm going to talk to him. Now.

(beat)

Soon.

(J.M. pulls out another bottle and gives it to Wendy.
Wendy drinks as fast as she can.)

J.M.

Tell you what—take ten years, fall to pieces, and if you can un-Humpty Dumpty yourself, I'll give you one more shot at him. But that's it.

(J.M. starts to exit.)

WENDY

Where are you going?

J.M.

Jogging.

WENDY

But I need your help.

(beat)

You can't go jogging. You're not even real.

J.M.

So how much help did you think I'd be? See you in ten.

(J.M. exits.)

WENDY

Come back!

(Blackout and a good place for an intermission, if there's going to be one.)

Neverland is a two act play, of which this is the first act. To receive a complete reading copy, and for other contact information, please return to the "Neverland" information page (click your browser's "Back" button or visit <http://www.singlelane.com/proplay/neverland>).