

To Grow Up

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“Don’t grow up, it’s a trap!” I recall someone telling me this quote, having me to go back thinking about what growing up is. According to dictionaries, the phrasal verb “grow up” means to develop and reach maturity, to become larger and change from being a child to being an adult as time passes, or to stop behaving like a child, and become wiser. This left me with a few questions. “What does it mean to grow up?” “Do we need to grow up?” or actually, “am I growing up?”

I realized that at a certain point in life, we know we’re not children anymore. Whether it’s after graduation or becoming twenty years old or after big events in life, people are forced to “grow up” and “stop being a child”. To grow up — it seemed like an act or some stage that everyone expects everyone — expects me — to go through. We all pictured sparkling selves whenever someone asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” But these past few years, from around when I started my teen years, I started to think, wait, is growing up as beautiful as it seemed?

In Disney’s Peter Pan, one of my favorite childhood movies, Peter once says, “Once you’re grown up, you can never come back!” The author of Peter Pan, J. M. Barrie was also quoted as saying, “Growing up is such a barbarous business, full of inconvenience... and pimples.” Though I didn’t understand what these meant when I was much younger, I do now. I believe I started to “grow up” when things started to get complicated between my parents, especially when they divorced. I learnt for the first time that parents aren’t people who stay with you forever. I learnt that “love” could be unstable and that even when they said the vow “until death do us part” they broke each other and me when they broke the promise. These hit me hard, just like when I felt that my childhood-best friend — when I believed in such clichés as “best friends” — was shifting away and started to grow out of me. For neither of these events was I ever able to speak up, because if I do I thought I’d lose

something again. It was also obvious that it is impossible to un-grow-up, just as Peter warned. I started to lose belief in many things, just like “grown ups” do.

Then I got this haunting feeling. If growing up means to understand “grown-up” things such as love affairs between adults or killing your inner self and not being able to express yourself freely, growing out of friends, stop believing in fairies and pixie dust and start believing in heartbreaks and death, I would never want to grow up. What if all the innocence fades away one day and leaves me with hate and guilt and disbelief? I loved the feeling of falling in love all over again with the endless diamond sky, but what if one day I become all numb, blunt and lose sight of these beautiful things?

But that was when I found Peter Pan’s quote, “Peter was not quite like other boys; but he was afraid at last. A tremor ran through him, like a shudder passing over the sea; but on the sea one shudder follows another till there are hundreds of them, and Peter felt just the one.” Then I suddenly felt like I wasn’t alone. I guess I was afraid just like Peter was, to be left alone, to let go of childhood. I am sixteen now, starting to create my world as an adult. However, there are parts of childhood that I wish to and will keep, such as innocence, sense of wonder and the appreciation of my surroundings. I notice grown-ups around me who seem to have lost these important qualities including a spoonful of silliness. Maybe growing up isn’t about letting go of everything, or kissing purity goodbye, but to balance and gather the precious essences of childhood. When packing for the journey of adulthood, make sure to never forget to include your inner Peter Pan, to have a little chat with him once in a while.