

THE BLUE TORCH



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LEAVING NEVERLAND

You wake up each morning and what is the first thing you do? You press the snooze button of your alarm clock; you roll over and resume dreaming or snoring. That is, if you remembered to set said alarm clock before hauling your carcass to bed at 2:37am.

Time keeps ticking, no matter how many times you hit the snooze.

Before, you wore nappies or even cloth held together by safety pins. You wore booties and mittens. People coo at the sight of you, no matter whether you dribble some of your drool down frilly bibs, staring at your adoring audience in blank confusion. They laugh because you did something precious.

Now, you make sure that you're garbed in the latest fashion, fresh from the racks of your favourite clothing store. You choose to suffer the pain caused by new shoes. People no longer coo, but they scrutinize the way you carry yourself – every single detail, no matter how small, is never trivial. You're all too familiar with the predatory sneers shot in your direction as you trudge through your routine, day in and day out. They laugh now because you did something that was right up their entertainment alley.

You find that your head is no longer filled with happy thoughts, but you're prematurely graying because you continuously fret over school work, people and other things. Still, sometimes you do turn to your brand of pixie dust to make you soar, after a day that is reminiscent to that of walking off a plank and plunging into the sea. You no longer have the rosy flushes of your cheeks, but the dark circles under your eyes are becoming a bit too prominent, much to your frustration.

All this indicates one not-so-simple fact: you've been deported from the happy, innocent world of Neverland, visa



stamped "EXPIRED!" and shoved straight into the flying ship, leaving for the infamous viper nest also known as college. Welcome!

And to think Wendy had issues when she was told she was to have her own room.

REMINISCING

Whatever happened to those happy, carefree days when I brought sweet little gifts for the kindergarten teacher and instantly earn a smile and a compliment, maybe a gold star? Questions like this, your mind couldn't help but wail, as you cower under the pressure of your teacher's withering glare. You continue to splutter reasons for not doing something you were expected to – like handing in homework, turning up for class, or taking the exam on time.

Am I still the same person who earned awe-struck stares from my classmates when I was in grade school because I get the answers right? Again, you

are unable to resist thinking of those moments as you try and not think too much that your classmates are sniggering at you while you helplessly try to keep up with the lessons.

Why is everything not going my way? This question, coming from a former Mr. or Ms. Popularity of High School, now embarrassed as people abruptly huff away as you shyly shuffle near them. In fact, don't be surprised if some people think you're alien.

It is unsurprising if one day you pause and stare glumly at things that reminded you of the past years, wistfully reminiscing about the good times and wishing you were still there, instead of being here and now.

This is not uncommon.

But the fact remains that you *are* here and now and those good times are no more. In short: history.

Some people consider college equivalent to the phrase "fresh start". You enter a campus where the people you

know are little in number, if not nonexistent. Some think this is a good thing; nobody here has seen you undergo the awkward stages of adolescence. You are automatically considered an adult when you've set foot on college territory. Do not think that judgment has been passed on to you, no matter how much it may feel like it. Each of your upperclassmen had undergone the same uncomfortable chapter in which you presently find yourself in. Each student, and even teacher, can sympathize with the struggles you face as you try to find your niche at the new school.

The question remains: how do you fit in?

THE SHARK TANK

Despite the question, there are no steps outlined for freshmen as to how they will fit in, or how they will find their classes easier, or how to find their peers more likeable (or agreeable, at the very least). As far as survival goes, intuition will just kick in. At moments, that tiny voice inside your head will assess the current situation, coming up with choices. You will be faced with a lot of things; school work, exams, course work assignments, teachers, upperclassmen, classmates. Stress is a killer. Granted, your perceptions may turn out to be misconceptions, but you'll be amazed with the number of surprises out there. Come time, you will respond to things more naturally and less self-consciously.

That, however, does not mean you do not think before you act. You may have choices, but you will not be declared blame-free should consequences arise from your actions. That is where college differs from the school you grew up in: here, things will not be handed to you on a silver platter. No, your teachers are not joking when they tell you this. What makes you think they are?

Essentially, you are left to fend for yourself

SINK OR SWIM

Casting your mind back, what were you expecting when you graduated from high school? There may have been periods when your confidence is telling you that you are ready to take on whatever it is they throw at you. A common belief of the average college freshman is that he expects a more liberated environment in college. In a sense, that is exactly what it means to enter college. However, the definition of freedom in the context of being a college student is often a misconception.

On the contrary, freedom is given to college students, assuming that they are responsible enough to handle what they are really in for. The best tools a student can be armed with are not nice designer clothes or attitudes, but responsibility, courtesy and common sense. However, you would be taken aback by how rare common sense really is; people get carried away by overconfidence.

It's not all fun and games. Freedom is not synonymous to doing anything you want and getting away with it. In fact, there are often high prices as consequences. For example, a certain number of absences could mean an automatic failing grade. Excuses will not make your transcript look better if it is marred with a dismal 5.0. A prospective employer will not think highly of the words FDA (failure due to absences); but he will be left with the impression that you're nothing but lazy.

The eye-ful of attractive seniors is less agreeable than you would've thought. Despite trying to be the helpful upperclassmen, be wary of them as they had been attending the school longer than you have been – they are more familiar with the rules and the way things are run. Careless mistakes can be overlooked once, but never for the second time without consequences. Unlike in high school wherein you interact mostly with other students within the same age bracket, you will undoubtedly encounter those who are younger and older than yourself. Although pretty awkward at first, you will learn to treat all of them as peers, all equally deserving of respect. Courtesy is essential if you wish to fit in anywhere. As expected to that of a school, it couldn't be helped if there are certain cliques in the student body. Peer pressure is inevitable, as far as influences go. Ditching classes, going to parties, asking for deadline extensions are common temptations; you'd think students would've learned by now. Don't get carried away; you are old enough to know what is right from wrong. Try very hard to predict the consequences looming over each course of action you take. It is never a mistake to be cautious, no matter how comfortable you might fit in with a certain circle of friends. Also, don't expect to be able to please everybody; an impossibility. But it's best to stay on everybody's good side, nonetheless.

The supposedly more lenient teachers of your initial beliefs may care or not care if you attend their classes; after all, it's your grade, not theirs. Being a student for as long as you can remember, you should already know that it is you who is responsible for the marks you earn in class. It is a given that a teacher is to expect a college student to know this, at the very least. As members of the faculty, they are to be respected. Common courtesy is expected of you, nothing less. Never take their kindness and leniency for granted, lest you would rather have a terror for a lecturer. And most of the time, your most compassionate teachers can be the worst terrors out there. Attend your classes, unless you had grown fond of failing marks, repeating classes and having your brain bled dry during an exam. The school work set for you is not for your teachers' benefits; do you think teachers enjoy correcting your work? They can contest to that. Although... you do make it easier if you leave the paper quite clean by having no answers.

Tough-guy attitude? Attitude will get you nowhere, but smack in the middle of trouble. Nobody is going to applaud you, should you land yourself in a seat in the Dean's office, if you've been pretty rash and foolish. As mentioned earlier: be responsible. Think before you act. Being cool and popular is not synonymous to stupidity or carelessness. Famous and infamous; there is a difference – look it up.

You must treat all commitments with the same level of importance. Extracurricular activities are just as important as the academics; school is a balance of the two, after all. And sadly, past surveys indicate that an alarming majority of students prefer to maintain mediocre performance in school than strive to excel. A lot of students are shockingly content with getting marks of 3.0's or scraping a mere passing grade. Maybe you'd like to consider the effort your teachers are making to teach you things. Then what about the effort your parents are giving, to ensure you have money for tuition, just so you can complete your education? Think about that. As far as extracurricular activities are concerned, why not join a few organizations? You are looking to fit in, aren't you, and not to live as a hermit, isolated and estranged from the rest?

What of rules? Rules are set for a reason, and not there for the sake of display. Rules should be obeyed – from proper dress codes to reminders about littering or destruction of school property. Don't wait for the threat of punishment. Don't be just another sheep, eager to join the flock; this is the one thing you should never attempt to adapt just so you can fit in with the others. Just because nobody is following the rules does not mean that you shouldn't either.

Common sense, dig?

The next time somebody snaps at you with the overly-familiar phrase, sit down and think about it; maybe you had overstayed your welcome in Neverland and it is time to do what they told you to: grow up.