Celebrations 2022

University of Mississippi Writing Project
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Every year we celebrate a different theme. The theme of this issue of Celebrations is discovery. Specifically, the Celebration of the discovery we find in seemingly simple objects, conversations, and everyday life.

The magazine features our first, second, and third place winners from the 2022 Celebration of Discovery writing competition. In it, you’ll find a mix of essays, poems, and short stories from middle and high school students along with original student artwork. We hope that you will read this collection of literary works through the eyes of these writers as they discover where their imagination and talent takes them. We couldn’t be more proud of their creativity and vision. Enjoy!
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I have always been called a curious, if not nosy, child. It seemed nearly anything could pique my youthful spirit of inquiry. My father would often find his wildlife magazines half closed and his cabinets half opened.

I was often the stray child behind my class on field trips, the daughter who easily got off-track in her curiosity. Whether it be a weathered copper plaque at the most spectacular museum or a peculiar roadside attraction, almost nothing could escape the enlivened gaze of my youthful eyes. I could be fascinated by the greatest feats of man and feral neighborhood cats alike. At that time, I was in my own world of discovery, an easy-going bubble of my own preoccupied state.

There was always a hint of sardonic irony in my interests. I suppose the cosmos had such dry wit as to make the child with the worst susceptibility to pollen on my side of the Mississippi River enamored with flora. Whether it be the tufted golden-rod of the Delta’s autumn or the ditsy ground cover of evening primrose on the summer highway’s banks, the raw, untampered wild of my home always fascinated me.
I was raised in such a way that I was never too far from a garden or plot. I enjoyed being driven through the countryside of my rural home during the growing season, my younger self loved to guess a crop by its sprouts and watch the endless rows of acreage grow with the seasons.

Many of my earliest days were spent in my maternal grandparents’ backyard. I believe my curiosity and wonder for the natural world started there. My grandfather was a retired farmer with an ever-present green thumb and my grandmother was an adept keeper of plants kept in a near-constant state of efflorescence. Every inch of their home showed this; ginormous tomato plants full of ruby-toned fruit lined their backyard. Vibrant roses of every imaginable color bloomed gently. My muddied hands learned much about the natural world by helping situate vegetable sprouts or by carefully sowing seeds of varicolored blooms. Their yard was constantly abuzz with a great many doves and sparrows and grackles, with gigantic butterflies dancing through to sip on whatever colorful zinnias and lantanas were present. I remember capturing cocoa-colored sphinx moths and inky swallowtails with a net my grandmother gifted me, carefully holding them to try to identify them, and gently letting them back to their freedom. Their delicate uniqueness helped me understand the natural wonders found all around me.

Many books on plants and birds and insects and all sorts of other untamed things line my shelves. Pampered houseplants occupy every open windowsill and table corner. In the occurrence I find an unfamiliar wildflower, a strange moth, an unknown bird, I try my best to determine what they are, and how they fit into the world around me. To this day, I often explore museums of a great many kinds, from art to natural science to obscure history. In the rare event I can survey a botanical garden, or the very often occasion I can peruse a plant shop, I find my heart reverberating to the same passionate rush I felt all those years ago.
I believe my childhood fascinations still live within me, that such a spirit of celebrating discovery still resides in my heart. I often find that intense fascination with the unfamiliar leaves me with a feeling of discontent if I ignore it, as if I am defying a natural tendency to investigate and traverse. The satisfaction of learning, of understanding even the most minuscule details of the world around me, has not only always been with me, but I believe it has made me who I am. The concept of examining every last infinitesimal detail, the idea of scrutinizing all I see as I know, the simple term of discovery, has helped me gain an identity. Whether as a dreamer, a poet, or some scatterbrained adolescent, I have always been, and always will be, a curious, if not nosy, child.

I have always been, and always will be, a curious, if not nosy, child.
To My Other Half

MS POEM | EMERY JONES

Dear other self I wanted to stop by and say hi,
I wanted to say how badly I wanted to shake your hand,
But sadly, I have now missed the chance to say bye,
As my body is has been to rest under a green land.
To my other self that have everything to thrive,
A mother who embraces your warmth more,
And not one seems to take glory as your tears soaked the sheets,
A father who is not a man drunken all on a marriage that has no benefits,
But one that is breathing.

To my other self that lived to their full potential,
Who could get past the mind full of vices,
That eat up terrible lie,
The other self is glad you rest at night unaware of the spies,
To the self that can have nice dreams that do not end in screams.

I love you other self you’re everything I wanted to be,
Other self you laughed more than I could ever dream,
Other self you danced and wrote things I will never see.

Other self you cried tears that have marked me,
Other self you are broken and patched together,
Just like the bowls of Kinstugi,
Other self you stained with cracks in skin,
That only a few will understand,
The tile in our floors other self are the identical twins separated at birth.
To my other self you were me and I were you in a way,
Where one plus one defies logic and makes one not two.
I have already gotten the pleasure to meet you.
The snow covered Brooklyn streets were littered with the footprints of strangers who have come and gone. The wind was harsh and dry, pulling the air out of the lungs of the pedestrians. Eloise ran alongside her twin sister, leaving the schoolyard. Typically, the young girls were told to hurry home since Brooklyn was not the safest place for twelve-year-olds. This morning, though, their mother had given them each $3 to grab a hot chocolate on the way back to the apartment.

“Slow down, Evie!” Eloise yelled from behind. “Mom said you have to wait for me.”

“Learn to breathe better, Ellie,” Evelyn teased as she came to a stop and turned to wait for her panting sister. As she came to a halt, Eloise took out her inhaler and gave it a pump.

For a moment, everything was perfect. It was just the two of them: Evelyn and Eloise, Evie and Ellie, the twins, or whatever you wanted to call them. They were together and they were happy.

“Okay,” Ellie stated after catching her breath. “I’m ready! Tag, you’re it!”

And the pair blasted down the street. Eloise shot past her sister, raced down the sidewalk, and zig-zagged through pedestrians. She could hear Evelyn giggling close behind her and knew she was going to be caught. Eloise spotted an empty crosswalk, took a sharp turn to the right, and sprinted across the street.
“Hey!” Evie yelled. Eloise turned around to see her twin following her across the road. Then, there was a brilliant streak of yellow and black. Sudden screaming followed by the most deafening silence.

---

Eloise sat straight up in her bed, sweating and shaking. *Shit.* She thought as she clutched the damp sheets around her. *Every damn time I close my eyes these days.* She could feel her heart beating three times its average speed.

She dragged her hand across the bedside table. Eloise heard her glasses hit the floor, but that wasn’t what she was wanted. Her hand grasped a pill bottle, and she brought it close to her face to read the label. She looked at three different bottles till she found the Prozac and threw the green pill down her throat without bothering to take a sip of water. Next, she grabbed her inhaler, puffed it, and laid her head back down on the pillow. Eloise stared at the ceiling and focused on her breathing until she felt like she wasn’t about to die.

Finally, she rolled off the bed and grabbed her glasses from under the table. Eloise unplugged her phone and took in all the details of her home screen.

5:12 a.m. December 18, 2018. Reminders: Take medicine, visit mom, do whatever Evie would do, don’t die, happy 15 years as an only child.

She let out a sigh as she read the last three reminders. *Kind of hard to act like Evie and not die.* Eloise wondered if Evelyn would be okay with her making jokes like that. *It’s not like she’ll ever know about them,* Eloise rationalized as she forced her feet to lift her out of bed and carry her to the kitchen.

She began absentmindedly fixing herself a mug of hot chocolate before she got ready for the day, though she hated it. She poured the drink and put in precisely 15 marshmallows, and started towards the window. New Jersey was a lot quieter than New York, and she thought she was finally beginning to find it charming rather than depressing. Eloise knew that Evelyn always loved the countryside, and she was glad that she could spend her twenties somewhere that would’ve made Evie so happy.

Slowly, she began her morning routine. Eloise showered, trying to wash the ever-present nightmare from her mind and body as if forgetting the dream would mean that the actual event never happened. When she finally got out, she was still dirty with the
memories of her sister’s death. She slipped into a black romper, combat boots, and a huge winter jacket. Eloise threw on a simple face of makeup and drew her hair back out of her face to keep it secure against the winter winds. On her way out the door, she grabbed her keys and inhaler, cursing herself for not cranking the car beforehand to let it get warm.

The car’s leather seats were cold enough that the frost seemed to creep through her jacket and into her soul. Ellie couldn’t seem to get warm despite the seat warmers and heaters on full the entire drive to the nursing home.

She felt her breathing get sharp and rapid, and she knew it would be in her best interest to reach over to her purse and get out her inhaler, but she didn’t want to divert her eyes from the icy road, plus she was just stubborn. Ellie could hear her mother’s voice in her ears telling her to use the inhaler when she first started to lose her breath rather than trying to see how long she could last without it.

With that thought, she forced her hand off the wheel and turned to look in her purse to find that small container. Suddenly, she saw a quick movement in the road out of her peripheral vision, and Ellie slammed on her breaks. The tires lost traction, and her car spun around in a semicircle shape, leaving the thing she had swerved to avoid hitting and herself face to face.

Her heartbeat was in her throat, and she thought she was dead. Slowly, the movement came back into her body, and her hand brought the inhaler to her mouth for a single pump, and then dead silence. It was just a plastic bag. A piece of litter that could have crashed her car and finished what fate had started fifteen years ago. Ellie knew she was lucky no other vehicles were traveling this road at 6:30 a.m., yet a part of her was disappointed.

Eloise softly pressed the pedal until she felt the car meet the road below it and began to slowly turn the car back around. She rode in petrified silence until she pulled into the Golden Acres Nursing Home.

Their mother never recovered after Evelyn’s accident. Evie had to grow up quickly, learning how to take care of herself as her father spent most of his time at work, and her mother couldn’t seem to look Evelyn in the eye. The woman spiraled into a pit of denial that she seemed unable to escape. Her mother drifted further and further away until she was a shell of the woman that raised the lighthearted twins. After Evelyn went off to
college at seventeen, her father divorced her mother, leaving the two of them in New York to fend for themselves. It was then that Evie decided to transfer to a smaller school in New Jersey and send her mom to a caregiving facility at the age of fifty-five. Since then, the two of them have visited weekly as the only remaining members of the family of four.

She parked the car as close as she could to the main entrance to try to avoid the cold, but she was still shivering when she entered the building. Ellie went through the usual process of signing in.

“Good morning, Eloise,” Savannah, the receptionist, said brightly. “You’re here awfully early.”

“Morning, Sav,” she replied. “It’s been a rough morning, I’m sure Mom isn’t doing too well either, so I thought I’d come by to see if I can put a better spin on the day.”

“Of course.”

“So, am I right?”

“Pardon?”

“I’m right, mom isn’t doing well.”

“I...” Savannah hesitated. “I suppose so. She couldn’t even recall her personal assistant’s name this morning, so just be patient with her.”

“I know,” Eloise reminded her. She took one of the holiday mints that sat beside Savannah’s nameplate, made her way to room number 38, and took a deep breath to prepare herself for the conversation ahead. She pushed open the door.

“Hey, mom,” Ellie said, trying to put some joy behind her voice.

“Evelyn!” Her mother cried as she sat up in her bed to look at her daughter. Despite her preparation for this moment, Eloise’s heart still dropped. She took her mother’s wrinkled hand and sat in the chair beside her.

“No, mom. It’s me, Eloise. Evelyn...” she swallowed. “Evie died when we were kids. Remember.”

“No.” Her mother’s voice was hollow but certain. “You’re wrong.”

Eloise’s eyes widened a bit in shock. Her mother never remembered Evelyn’s death but always accepted it once Ellie reminded her.

“What do you mean?”
“Evelyn didn’t die. You’re mistaken.”

“No, I’m not, mom. I’m Eloise, her twin sister.”

“That’s impossible, Evie. Eloise died.”

Ellie felt her heart sink even deeper into the ground. As if gravity had somehow increased the pull of her body towards the linoleum floors.

“Mom, please, don’t do this.” She could feel water starting to well up in her eyes despite herself. “I’m Eloise. I’m your daughter. I had a twin sister, Evelyn, who died when we were twelve. We were running home from school when-” Her voice caught on the emotion building up inside her.

“I remember,” her mother said with a sad look. “The twins were running home when, despite my warnings, Ellie left her inhaler at home.”

“I remember,” her mother said with a sad look. “The twins were running home when, despite my warnings, Ellie left her inhaler at home.”

“That’s not what-”

“Quiet, now, Evelyn. She had an asthma attack, and no one knew how to help her without her inhaler, so by the time the paramedics got there, it was too late. I remember. You’re my only daughter now.”

Eloise sat in stunned silence at the false story her mother had conceived about what had happened fifteen years ago. She kept her breathing steady as she whipped tears from her eyes.

“Do you not know who I am?” Eloise asked, touching her mother’s face and looking her in the eyes.

“Of course I do. You’re my brave Evie. You wear dark clothes and hate girl toys. You love silence, the outdoors, and hot chocolate. I know who you are.”

Eloise stared at her mother for what felt like years as she processed her words. Finally interrupting the quiet, Ellie said, “you’re right.”

“I know I am,” her mother confirmed. “Now run along; I want to get to dinner soon.”

It was 7:12 a.m.

Eloise stood up and dropped her mother’s hand.

“You’re right,” she said again, starting to laugh. “I am Evelyn. I tried so hard to remember her that I...” she trailed off. “I have to go.”
Eloise raced out the door of the nursing home before Savannah could ask her how her visit went. She ran to her car, where she took off her black jacket and pulled on a bright pink cardigan that had been in her backseat for years. Evelyn hated pink, but Eloise didn't. She put the car in drive and drove towards the city where she was raised.

Eloise began to laugh; she laughed until her eyes welled up with tears and her tears became sobs. She felt emotion in a way she hadn't in years. The kind of feelings that make you want to scream and fight and tear down the buildings around you. Eloise felt like her tears could finally flood the streets of Brooklyn and wipe the roads clean of her sister’s blood.

Eloise couldn’t remember crying once in the past fifteen years. As kids, Evelyn had never shed a tear. Ellie began to unpack every decision she had made since her twin had died, realizing that she had never lived for herself; instead, she made herself into the person that Evelyn would never get to be. Fifteen years ago, she didn’t die, but a part of her did. The part of her that was more than just Evelyn’s twin.

Eloise drove until she saw the New York City skyline on the horizon. It was time to come home..
Broken,
like the clock that’s been calm for years.
I contorted my being
into one that was unrecognizable.
Was I an unique oddity of nature until I went out of season?
You preached
that love was the answer,
yet, you used it
to keep me still within these pages.

Alive,
like the posies and petunias
that sway in the comfort of daylight.
I scolded myself for forgetting
the earth that birthed me as
I piece together
the petals of this torn fauna you dissected,
in the name of your perception.
I can return to blooming.

Faded,
like the bright sky that turns gray,
my anatomy cannot ignore its longing
I reminisce
the security of your warmth.
The flames of your love
burned me so
I wish to return
to the spirited color
I once was.
But you sent me into nyctinasty,
now, I can flourish
into the blossom I was intended to be.
The Tree of Life

MS POEM | JAMARIUS JACKSON

PAINTING | CLAIRE RIZZO
When the waves came to fracture
My boat, the tree of life there to push
them away…

far into the deep sea.

No one understands me like it does.
The fear, anger, and joy that flows
Through the flesh of my blood can only
Be controlled by it.

When the curved lines meet
to form the heart, a lighting bolt
Suddenly strikes... cracking the perfect shape of it.

It hurts me but the tree of life
Holds my hand to comfort me.

When I fall at its roots, it’s branches
Sway down to scoop me up
Though when its roots began to dry and it’s
Limbs begins to snap I watch... not watering it
For it to soak in my services.

But as the moon and sun rotated,
It became weaker and weaker, seeking for
Help... for its limbs to be back, and its roots
To be strong. But I ignore. Autumn came,
Undressing the leaves that once stuck to it.
By winter it was naked. Undressed.

And I still ignored it.
By spring the tree
Of life was gone. Nowhere to be found.

I was lost, and stuck.
The ocean waves took my boat without
The tree there to protect me.

Fear and anger boiled my skin
Making battles that I couldn’t fight
Without its help.

I tried and tried but nothing worked.

I needed the tree of life back.
I needed to feel comfort, and peace.

I always believed trees stayed forever...
But you didn’t.

Just another myth that I once never
Knew the truth to.
All the knowledge around us astounds me. I can’t help but stare in awe as we discover the world. I learn new things everyday: that perfect word to describe that specific feeling, the name of that bird of prey that perches on the power line near my house, how to solve that math problem that completely stumped me in class, a phrase in Spanish to expand my vocabulary, the story of the new exchange student, Our ancestors created a way to share information by putting written words on pieces of paper and binding them together. Now, when I have questions, I know I can find answers. The tree with the leaves that turn yellow in the late summer has a matching illustration on page 137 of my book; an American Beech A compilation of ancient Greek deities sits on my shelf. The life’s work of Rachel Carson, dog-eared, on my bedside table. By biology textbook containing the details to the human body in my backpack.
We have invented a way to communicate through screens of glass and pixels. How incredible is it that we, humans, Can type in zeros and ones to create whole virtual worlds? That we know the flight route of the Arctic Tern, over 25,000 miles every year?

That we have an easy cure to an illness that has killed thousands a century ago? That we have built telescopes bigger than a car that can see, literally, into other galaxies? That we can manipulate the genetic coding of a being?

My favorite thing about learning is that it brings people together. Wading through a swampy lake’s edge to find Prothonotary Warblers, Spending the night before an exam stressing together, Doctors working together develop medical technology, it bonds people. Sharing information that saves lives, It builds a family, a community, a nation. Learning and discovering is the epitome of human nature

HS POETRY | NORAH BRUCE
LONG LIVE THE QUEEN

HS SHORT STORY | PARKER FORD
1: The Beginning

Chaos. It was the only word that could describe the madness that danced around me as a couple ushered me with them. “What must we do Arthur,” the lioness, who gripped my hand, questioned frantically.

“Keep moving darling. We need to make it to the river, there’s a boat waiting for us. Cassian’s already alerted Andreas and Ciaran; they’re ready for us,” the man spoke with certainty. He believed that whoever these people were, they were going to help us escape from this calamity.

The woman looked down at me with her gentle eyes that held an unfamiliar terror. “Come now my darling, we mustn’t stagger. We don’t have much ti-” she stopped short, whipping me back with the force. The man stationed himself in front of us, sword pointed towards a harrowing shadow.

A chilling voice came from it, a man, “Well, look who I have discovered, fleeing with his tail between his legs. Oh, how the people will riot when they discover what a coward their beloved king truly is.”

“Come now Arowbyn, this fight is between you and I. Let my girls leave in peace. I beg of you.”

“Oh how I have dreamed of hearing the great warrior that is King Arthur beg me for something, but I’m afraid it’s too late,” the man uttered. The king fell to his knees in pain and the woman pushed me behind her legs, shielding me from what was to come. “You always underestimated me, my dear king.” “No. I trusted you,” the king grunted out. The man didn’t speak for a moment, just lingered in the shadows cloaking his face. “What a mistake that was,” he finally spit as the king fell to the ground with a deadly thud. The woman let a sob fall from her lips as she tightened her grip.

The man walked closer but his face remained blurry as the woman began, “Please, Arowbyn, don’t do th-,” she crumpled to the ground as well. I remained frozen as he stepped closer to me. His frigid hand grasped my throat as he lifted me from the ground, moving a few feet to the mountain side that I hadn’t realized was there before now. I couldn’t push any words out.

“Long live the queen,” he whispered as he released me and the wind took hold of me.

I awoke with a start. It was always the same dream. The same familiar people who I don’t recall ever knowing. And it’s always the same fall.
I’ve wondered for years why these dreams continue to plague me every night. What is it about these people, this incident, that is so important that I’ve let it consume me? I don’t get very far into my thoughts before I hear my mom calling me down for breakfast. I race down the stairs, eager to distract myself from the horrors that infest my thoughts.

“Mornin’ sweetheart,” my dad called out to me as I enter the kitchen. “Morning. Smells good in here mom.” “Thank you darlin’. You sleep well last night hun?” I didn’t get to answer before a crash sounded in the living room. “What in the world-,” my dad started as an arrow, of all things, whizzed past me, clipping my ear. “Where is Arya Rafe,” a guttural voice pierced the frigid silence. Thundering footsteps clawed closer, taunting us. I quickly grasped hold of one of the kitchen knives from the counter and held it close as the footsteps fell in line with the kitchen doorway.

I felt nausea rise as the monstrous beasts stopped before me. Their black, misshapen figures filled the entire doorway, with bat-like wings that towered above them. “Let me ask again. Where is Arya Rafe,” the one closest reached his taloned hands out and I stabbed out, hitting the flesh of his hand with a disgusting squelch. He howled, stumbling back, gripping his hand. Fury flashed in his eyes as he advanced again. “You shouldn’t have done that, little girl.” They swarmed me as my father tried to move towards me, “Hey! Stay awa-,” he froze, as did my mother, with a snap of one of the beast’s fingers. I tried to back away, but their reach was longer than I thought as they grabbed hold of my arms.

Fear coursed through my veins.

“What do you want with me,” I squeaked, cursing myself for being so weak. The one I had stabbed spoke, “You’ll find out soon enough.” He snapped his fingers and darkness welcomed me like an old friend.

2: The Truth

Wind rips around me as light finally fills my vision. I stumbled as my feet came into contact with the lush ground. I tried to look around as best I could with the beasts still gripping me in their arms. What seemed to once be palatial land, was now deteriorating in different parts. This place felt familiar, but I couldn’t understand what
until I glanced up at the vehement mountain before me, mocking me.

It was the mountain from my dreams.

“Where are we,” I tried to question the beasts. “What matters is that Arowbyn can now make sure he kills you,” they sneered. Kills. The word set something off in me as I began to fight against their firm grips.

“Stop that,” they growled as they tried to tighten their hold, but I managed to get myself untangled from the labyrinth their bodies created. And I did what any sane person would do, I set off away from them and that glowing mountain.

I didn’t look back, too afraid that it would waste precious seconds. I didn’t make it very far before my face slammed into the sand, claws pinning me down. My breath caught in my throat as they pierced into my back.

“You really thought that you could run from us? My, you must be as stupid as you are weak,” the beast laughed.

Weak. There was that word again. The word that haunted my very soul because I knew how true it was. I knew it was true from the moment that I took off running; I wasn’t strong enough to fight these three beasts off by myself.

I was too deep in my thoughts that I almost missed the screech of one of the beasts as that disgusting squelch filled my ears.

The beast on top of me retaliated to his comrade getting hit by pushing his claws deeper into my back. The pain was antagonizing. It cried out as it was hit, falling off my back.

With the beast no longer holding me down, I scrambled away frantically, pain ripping through me. The beast clawed after me, refusing to let me go. Pure agony blinded me as I felt teeth sink into my ankle. I rolled over to get a better angle to kick the beast off, but a sword stopped my efforts, decapitating the beast in one swish. I sat frozen in my position as I watched the beast’s head fall beside my feet. And it was then that my dinner actually did come up.

I was too busy sputtering the acidic bile out of my mouth to notice the scramble of feet towards me or someone kneeling behind me, placing warm hands on my hunched back or that they had pulled my hair out of my face. It wasn’t until they spoke that I registered that they were there.


Once I had finally stopped, I shifted away from the person and scrambled to a standing position as best I could. I registered that a group of people in exquisite armor were staring at me with a look that seemed almost relieved. I tried not to look at the beasts that now layed dead around us or at the red that
stained many of the group’s weapons.
I opened my mouth and then closed it for a moment, trying to comprehend what had just happened. “Who are you people,” I quipped, my eyes darting among them: a short girl with a dark complexion and eyes to match, a man with the stature of a god and winter hair, a slim girl with freckles painting her skin, and finally the one closest to me, a tall boy who looked as though he had stepped out of the night sky with his raven colored hair and sapphire eyes.

Hurt danced throughout their eyes as soon as the question left my lips. The boy closest to me stepped towards me but halted as I tensed. He wet his lips before speaking to me. “I am Dorian Hardarm, king of the kingdom of Ellieth and this is my crew,” he pointed at the short girl who smiled slightly at me, “That’s Terra, my spymaster. She’s the one who informed me that you were being brought here,” he continued, shifting his hands to point towards the winter god, “That’s Rowan, my high general.” He laughed at my hesitancy towards the soldier. “Don’t let his build scare you, he’s a teddy bear in disguise,” he whispered to me as he pointed to the last girl, “And that’s Lia, my first commander.”

More questions continue to swarm my head, but I decided to ask, “You said my name earlier. How do you know it?” Dorian paused for a moment, contemplating on what to say. He glanced at the others who merely nodded their heads to him. “Arya, there’s a reason those beasts took you. Those are Arowbyn’s beasts, the man who’s after you.”

“Why is he after me? Better yet, who is he?”

Dorian glared at me for my interruption as I muttered a sorry out and he began again.

“Ten years ago, Arowbyn Hark betrayed the king and queen of the kingdom of Eldwood, Queen Diana and King Arthur. Arowbyn led an attack against, using the cruel, vicious beasts that he created, the same beasts that attacked you. He murdered the king and queen with dark magic and many, Arowbyn included, believed that he had killed their only daughter, the rightful heir to the throne. With the royal family gone, Arowbyn took hold of the throne and created a kingdom built on fear rather than respect. But what very few know is that Arowbyn never killed the princess, but rather she survived and Cassian, Arthur’s most trusted friend and head of the King’s Guard, took the princess to the mortal world and had her live as a mortal. Arowbyn never knew of it until the crown of Eldwood would no longer sit upon his head, a crown made for only the true and rightful heir of the throne. He searched for months, trying to find the princess; we believed that he would never find
her until a girl’s dreams called out to him. A girl from the mortal world. Time froze with jagged ends as Dorian’s words raced through me. Could it be? Could I be that princess? No, I am not strong enough to give a presentation at school, much less rule a kingdom. “Arya,” he declared, “don’t you see that you’re that girl. You’re Arya Rafe, daughter of the mighty King Arthur and Queen Diana of Eldwood. You are the rightful heir to the throne and it is you we need to put an end to Arowbyn’s reign and restore peace among the kingdoms of the Ancient Country.”

3:Reunion

Ice clawed its way up my body as my feet dug into the ground, holding me steady. Fragments, of what I believed to be merely dreams, danced around my mind, playing over and over again. I went to speak, but paused, trying to gather my thoughts. I couldn’t possibly be this great queen they believed me to be, I was far too weak to be capable of such strength.

I decided that it would be better to voice my thoughts, rather than skirt around them. “I...I...I’m not this great powerful queen that you believe me to be,” I whispered, my eyes darted to the ground trying to avoid their scrutinizing stares, “I’m not capable of it.” There it was, the truth that I tried so desperately to avoid. One of them scoffed and I noticed two midnight boots step closer to me. Dorian placed his warm hands underneath my chin, lifting it to meet his careful gaze, a gaze I think I once knew.

“Oh Arya, you have no idea how wrong you are,” he muttered, taking a step back and looking from me to the others. “I know you probably don’t remember, but we knew each other before the attack, were great friends actually. Partners in crime.” I tried to think of a reply but Dorian continued on before I could, “Oh you were such a fiery child, with your undying stubbornness and loyalty. Arowbyn liked to pick on me as a child because of his poor relationship with my father. But you never seemed to let him get a word out before you would unleash hell upon him, your tongue lashing out with every foul thing you could think of.” He seemed to be reminiscing the memory as fondness washed over him. He stared back at me, making sure that I held his gaze. “Arya, it is because of you that I was able to face Arowbyn without fear lining my body.

My voice caught in my throat as I recognized the gratefulness that laced his words. He reached his hand out, “Now come on. We need to leave; we don’t have much time with that.” And with that I grasped hold of his hand and he led me to
a beautiful auburn stallion. “This is Torryn,” Dorian pointed out as he stepped behind me to lift me on the majestic creature’s back, quickly getting on after. We set off, wind ripping past us. I gripped hold of the reins before me as Dorian caged me in. “Where are we going,” I called out, trying to be heard over the vicious wind.


It wasn’t until a few hours later around midday that an elaborate castle came into view, concealed by a rich and exuberant forest that seemed home to every plant imaginable. I stared in awe around me as we reached the front of the castle, stopping and dismounting. Dorian helped me off as a man stepped forward. I was wrong earlier when I had said that Rowan looked like a god because this man outweighed him in every sense of the word. His dark locks were pulled back, displaying the scars that spotted his angular face.

He stopped before me, a ghost of a smile appearing on his face before he bowed before me. “My queen,” his crisp voice declared firmly. Words escaped my mind as others began to bow, even Dorian. I’m not this queen they believe me to be. I’ll just disappoint them.

The man rose back up. “M’lady. I am Cassian Blackthorne, your father’s closest friend and leader of his King’s Guard.” Your father. The words sent shards piercing my body, recalling a man I didn’t remember, and perhaps, never would.

Dorian cut off my sorrow-filled thoughts as he addressed us, “Cassian, there is something that we need to discuss now, all of us,” he looked at me softly, gesturing me to follow.

I walked with them through the stone halls that towered around us. We walked deep into the castle before we stopped before two wooden doors with a crest wrought onto them. Dorian ushered us in as we sat around a small, circular, wooden table, with him taking the chair at the head of the table. “What is it,” Cassian urged.

Dorian paused for a long while before he spoke up, his words sharp, “I received a message this morning that Arowbyn plans to attack Ellieth tomorrow at dawn.” “He’ll fail,” Lia sneered. Dorian simply shook his head. “His deteriorating sanity has caused his powers to frenzy” “His collection of beasts doubles our armies,” Rowan proclaimed, silencing them all.

Was this all because of me? Was Arowbyn planning on attacking them because he wanted to be sure I was dead?

My mouth opened and words spewed from it before I could even register what I was doing, “Why don’t we just attack him instead?”
4: The Final Battle

They all gaped at me as I stuttered to explain myself, “Well I mean, you said that Arowbyn is planning on attacking your kingdom at dawn and that his armies over power yours, so why don’t you use the deadliest war tactic there is, the element of surprise. Ambush his kingdom tonight before he has the chance to ambush you.”

Silence filled the room as they all contemplated the idea of attacking Arowbyn first. “It’s possible sir,” Cassian started, “the armies are ready whenever you call, you know that. Besides, we all know the layout of Eldwood by heart. We could attack first and win.”

Dorian contemplated Cassian’s words before he nodded his head. “Okay,” he whispered, “Okay. We will attack first.” He glanced at Cassian, “Go prepare the armies. You too,” he said looking at Rowan as well.

“Terra, I need you to go now and let me know any information on Arowbyn. Understood?” “Yes, your Grace.” Dorian’s eyes moved to Lia next, “Gather a small team of my best assassins and you will leave first. Cut down every guard at every entrance; we don’t want Arowbyn to know we’re coming before we’ve reached Eldwood’s doors. You’re dismissed.” They all left and soon only Dorian and I were the only ones in the room.

It took a moment before Dorian looked over at me, “Come with me Arya.” I followed him out of the room into a series of hallways before we reached two large encrusted doors again. He opened them, leading me into what seemed to be a massive bedroom of sorts.

We stopped before a table that held an object I couldn’t quite see due to Dorian’s figure cutting off my sight. He reached forward and picked the object up and turned around so I could get a closer look at it. A sword.

“This was your father’s sword, Arya,” Dorian spoke softly, “I want you to have it for this battle. Go on, take it,” he urged. I tentatively lifted my hand towards the sword and wrapped around the hilt of it, lifting it before me. The sword felt like it belonged in my hands and better yet, it felt as though I knew what to do with it.

“We will win this war and you will get your throne back, I promise,” Dorian whispered fervently. I simply nodded back.

It was midnight by the time that we had reached Eldwood, and Dorian and I were creeping along a tunnel that led into the castle. Whispers of screams danced around me as my dreams became reality.

“My, my. Look who’s come to visit me,” a chilling voice pierced the silence. We slowly turned, coming
face to face with Arowbyn. “I must say Hardarm, you have more nerve than I gave you credit for.” Arowbyn quickly raised his hands, sending Dorian cowering to the ground in pain. I didn’t know what to do, how to solve this, so I did the first thing that came to my mind: I charged, sword raised. Steel met the shadows that swarmed Arowbyn, quickly grabbing hold of my sword and ripping it from my hands. Pain began to rack my body, making my knees buckle before me. The sense of chains tensed against my body, holding me to the ground as Arowbyn towered over me.

“This seems familiar, doesn’t it,” he laughed. I tugged against the chains, willing them to break. “Please, you really thought that you could defeat me. You’re weak, just like your parents.”

You’re weak. You’re weak. You’re weak. It was the two words that had haunted me for years. But yet, now, they couldn’t feel farther from the truth because I had finally discovered that it wasn’t all the bad things that happened in life that determined my strength but rather my ability to overcome them. And I had.

“You’re right,” I whispered, feeling the invisible chains tense against me. Arowbyn stilled. “I am like my parents, the rightful ruler of the throne,” and with that power erupted from me, breaking the chains and sending Arowbyn to the floor.

I rose and picked up my discarded sword, stalking over to Arowbyn who looked at me with fear in his eyes. “And like you said all those years ago, ‘Long live the Queen,” I spit, plunging my sword into his heart.

“And like you said all those years ago, ‘Long live the Queen,” I spit, plunging my sword into his heart.
I USED TO BUILD FORTS IN FIELDS OF COTTON

HS POEM | AUDREY ROBINSON

We created freedom where there was none.
My cousin’s sticks and stones and my broken bones.
   A hidden place to have our own foolish fun.
   A place to waste our youth until we are left alone.

My cousin’s sticks and stones and my broken bones
we must sacrifice for a chance to grow up.
   A place to waste our youth until we are left alone.
   Drugs and liquor now fill once empty cups.

   We must sacrifice for a chance to grow up.
Selling every last part of us for a college degree.
   Drugs and liquor now fill once empty cups.
   Was losing everything worth feeling free?

Selling every last part of us for a college degree.
   A hidden place to have our own foolish fun.
   Was losing everything worth feeling free?
   We created freedom where there was none.
At precisely 6:47 p.m. on a cold February evening, Jenny Filbert discovered her God-given ability, her talent. She found it in an unassuming way. It crept into being like the shadow of a passing car as it moves across the ceiling of a darkened room. Jenny could count without actually counting. She could tell the exact amount of anything: objects, occurrences, words, anything, and she could do it without thinking. The first time she did it, everyone thought she was just good at guessing, but she knew it wasn’t a guess. She knew the exact answer just like she knew how to breathe. She was sitting on the living room floor of her family’s small apartment watching her brother Tom sort his Legos. He had a lot. There were bags and bags of them. Jenny was reading one of her favorite books, and it was getting to the good part when her dad walked in and started fussing at Tom.

“What in the world!” he exclaimed as he gazed around at the towering piles of Legos.

“Tommy, you better not leave a single Lego on the floor!” he said. “If I step on one more of those things, they’re going in the trash. Whoever invented Legos ought to be on trial for high crimes and misdemeanors. If I had a dollar for each time I’ve stepped on those things and hurt my foot, well, I guess I’d be rich.”

“Fifteen,” Jenny said.
“Fifteen what?” her father asked, looking at her sternly.
“You’ve stepped on them fifteen times.”
“Is that so? Huh, seems like more. Well then, let’s make it ten thousand dollars for each time,” he grumbled as he walked out of the room scratching his head.
“Wow, you sure did calm him down, Jenny. Thanks! How do you know
that it was only 15 times?” Tom asked.

“I don’t know. I just do,” Jenny answered.

“Sweet!” Tom said as he turned back to his Legos.

Jenny had never thought she was particularly unique. She was always a happy girl who made good grades and had lots of friends, but she considered herself to be kind of ordinary. She didn’t really have any talents, and she didn’t do anything that made her stand out like her neighbor Mike who lived across the hall. He was the regional spelling bee champ. Jenny didn’t win any awards. She was just Jenny, and she was okay with that. Her Granny, though, had always told her since she was little that she was special. She said, “Jenny, everybody is special, especially you. You see, each one of us has a God-given ability, but most people never get the chance to find it because they just stop trying, and they don’t recognize that they had it all along. You keep looking, Jenny. You keep seeing. You keep trying. You’ll find it.” She was right. That was Granny’s God-given ability: she was always right.

Jenny didn’t give much thought to the Lego incident. She stored it in the back of her mind like her favorite nursery rhyme from long ago:

“Diddle diddle dumpling, my son John,
Went to bed with his stockings on,
One shoe off, and one shoe on,
Diddle diddle dumpling, my son John.”

But she had an inkling; she had the tiniest of sparks, and the next time it happened, she knew for sure this was it —her God-given ability.

One afternoon, Jenny accompanied her mother to the dime store to pick out ribbon for her little sister Lucy’s hair. Lucy’s talent was doing her hair. It was long and shiny. She had learned how braid it and put it up when she was tiny little thing. She liked ribbons and bows. Everyone loved Lucy’s hair and admired her skills. Sometimes Lucy would do Jenny’s hair too. She was good at it. “Everybody is special, Jenny,” Granny would say. Even Lucy, Jenny thought. While they waited at the checkout counter, the large jar filled to the top with gum balls caught Jenny’s eye. That jar had been sitting there for as long as she could remember, but she hadn’t really paid much attention to it until now. There was a sign on it that read: Guess How Many Gumballs — winner receives $500 shopping spree at Farmer’s Famous Store! In all these years, there had never been a winner. The jar was about two feet tall and almost as
wide. The gumballs must have been really old by now and not very tasty, but they were still brightly colored, and Jenny thought she’d probably be willing to taste one despite their age.

“I’d like to guess, mom,” Jenny said.


Mrs. Dillard, the cashier, leaned over and winked at Jenny. “Whatcha think kiddo?” she asked. She had bright pink lipstick, lavender hair, and long red fingernails. Jenny always wondered how she did anything with those nails. Maybe that was her talent, Jenny thought. Her God-given ability was to tap those cash register buttons and pick up coins without ever breaking a nail or dropping a thing.

“Oh, my good gracious that is the best guess we’ve ever had!” Mrs. Dillard exclaimed. “You’re so close, but no cigar.”

Jenny knew she was right. She just knew it.

“Nice try,” Jenny’s mom said as she gave her a hug. “Let’s get these ribbons home. Lucy can do your hair tonight too.”

Jenny glanced at the jar over her shoulder one more time as they walked out the door. Yep, 632 and a half gumballs. She knew she was right.

“I think they better count, mom,” Jenny said. “That’s exactly how many are in the jar.”

Jenny’s mom always knew how to make everything feel alright. She could soothe an angry tiger and make it curl up at her feet if she wanted to. That was her talent. “Everybody is special, Jenny,” her Granny would say.
By the next afternoon, Jenny had all but forgotten the jar and the gumballs. She was making corrections to her math homework. The instructions said to estimate the number of items in each picture. Jenny’s estimates had been too exact. In fact, they were right on, and her teacher told her to do it again without counting. Jenny hadn’t counted, so she thought instead of making a big deal about it, she’d just round the number up or down. Her math teacher was really nice to all the students, and she made math fun. That must be her God-given ability, Jenny thought as she reworked the problems.

At 5:15 her dad was eating a bowl of butternut squash soup downstairs. Jenny heard him burp loudly exactly 5.63 times as the dishes clattered in the sink. Ewww, how does he even do that, wondered Jenny. Well, I guess that’s dad’s talent, she thought with amusement. He sure is good at it, and Granny says everyone is special after all. Jenny laughed out loud. The phone rang and she heard her dad answer. He talked for a few minutes, but she couldn’t hear what he was discussing, so Jenny went back to work. Suddenly she heard her dad speaking with amazement and then he rushed up the stairs.

“Jenny, did you guess the number of gum-balls at Farmer’s?” her dad asked excitedly.

“Yeah, but I was wrong dad. That’s what they said anyway. Why?”

“Jenny you were right! Mr. Farmer just called. He said that both your mother and Mrs. Dillard let him know how close your guess was, so he thought he better do a re-count to make sure. That jar’s been sitting there for ten years, so you never know.

Took them all night but turns out you were right after all.

There are 632 and a half gumballs in that jar. You see, they started with 634, but apparently Lester Green confessed to eating one and a half of them. He did it about eight years ago and has been keeping this secret the whole time. He never thought anyone would ever be able to guess.
You were right!”

By this time, Jenny’s whole family had come in the room to see what was happening. Lucy and Tom jumped up and down. Jenny’s mom hugged her tight.

“How did you do it? How’d you know?” she asked.

“I’m not sure. I just know.” Jenny replied. “That’s my God-given ability, and everybody’s got one, mom, just like Granny always says.”

“That’s my God-given ability, and everybody’s got one, mom, just like Granny always says.”
A Memory

MS ESSAY | BRIANNA WANG
Swimming since I was three years old, so many memories fill my heart. Wearing my favorite TYR pink and purple goggles, I think of the time I first got in the water, the first state time I achieved when I was nine years old, and all the meets I swam in. This pair of goggles carries moments like when I do bad in a swim meet and when I do good, but there is one memory that I will never forget.

It was around January when the weather was freezing and the heaters in the pool made steam rise above the water. State meet was coming up soon in February and I hadn’t made any qualifying times. There were only two meets left before the state meet. The Winter Invitational meet was in a few weeks and being one second away from the time in the fifty yard freestyle, I was hopeful. Bad news came though, I came down with a terrible cold after one swim practice. Even though I wasn’t fully recovered, I still went to the meet. I was so desperate that I just had to go. Standing behind the blocks about to swim the fifty yard freestyle, my heart was racing nervously. I told myself that I had to give this race all I had. I remember the beep signaling for the swimmers to start, my arms swinging madly through the water, and my legs kicking wildly that they burned so bad. I kept swimming as fast as I could towards the wall and smashed my hand at the finish. Looking up towards the scoreboard anxiously, I saw my time. 31.3 was what the scoreboard said. No! I missed the time by just a millisecond. My heart dropped, I felt so disappointed in myself. Waves of sorrow and misery filled my mind.

Through all the weeks before the Last Chance Meet, I trained diligently on all the days I could. Going to swim practices every week and to the YMCA pool with my mom, I couldn’t have been more ready for the meet. On the day of the meet, I felt confident and afraid at the same time. My mom gave me motivation by saying that I only had to cut a millisecond. She told me to try my best and if I don’t get the time, there will be a next time. Those words stayed with me when I was waiting behind the blocks for the fifty yard freestyle. My mind raced worriedly with thoughts. What if I didn’t make the state time? This was my last chance. I had to make the time and make my family proud. The beep started and I dived into the pool like a mad dog. I kicked my legs fiercely, swung my arms speedily, and accelerated my speed after my quick turn at the wall. I felt like I was racing as if a shark was chasing me.
My whole body burned, but I kept speeding up towards the finish. I banged my hand at the wall and turned my head towards the scoreboard. My heart started beating quickly, but then it stopped when I saw my time. 30.07 was on the scoreboard.

Joyfulness and delightment spread across my face as I saw my time. I had cut over a second from my previous time and I would be going to the state meet this year. All my worries flushed away. I felt triumphant, all my hard work had paid off.

Every time I think about this memory, I remember what I learned throughout it. You may fail many times, but never stop working. It takes perseverance and dedication. The saying no pain, no gain means you have to suffer to achieve something. You can’t achieve any goals if you never work hard. You can only achieve goals if you put all your effort into it and push yourself through pain.
Forgiving My Homeland

MS SHORT STORY | ALI LEJEUNE
“Our country,” the young man said, “was found by legions of warriors many years ago.” He paused to bow his head, commemorating those lost. “Many of our kind of people were left for dead, our past home destroyed by the hate, and greed, of those distasteful human beings. After her city was destroyed,” he lifted his arm to point at a feminine figure on one of the rooftops, “Vanessa searched and searched, and found us a new home!”

Cheers erupted from the crowd. The fans filled my ears with screams of “I love you, Vanessa!” and “I’m your biggest fan, Vanessa!” it was repulsive. “So, in the name of Vanessa,” the young man began to shout again, “let the Founding Festival begin!”

I wandered the streets. The sun was sinking over the horizon. There were many stalls on the edge of the streets. There was exchanging of money for gifts and food. I huffed in frustration. “The people of Drune had tried to kick me years ago, and yet somehow they’re still celebrating my contributions? That’s idiotic!” I bumped into a little girl crossing in front of me. She was maybe 5 or 6 inches shorter than me, but short enough I couldn’t see her when I was looking straight forward.

“Oh, I’m so sorry, lady! Are you oka-” I caught her glancing up at my striking blue hair. I blushed. Hard. “Wow,” she said with no hesitation. No, I thought. She knows I’m Vanessa! Instead, she said, “Wow that’s a really good Vanessa cosplay!” I did nothing other than smile at the compliment.

“So, sweetheart...” I trailed off, not quite sure what to do, “Where are your parents? Are you alone?”

“Yes... I’m alone,” she paused as if just coming to this conclusion. “I guess... anyways, my name’s Lina! What’s yours?”

“Oh, you can just call me Essa.” Essa was a name only my mother and sister had called me. It felt like I was connected to someone again.

“Ok, Ms. Essa!” she nearly yelled. I jumped a little bit but quickly calmed my nerves. There were people all around us shouting names and random things. Some were yelling obscenities after having one too many to drink. She seemed to be blissfully ignorant of any of those things. She was purely focused on me.
“So, Lina, wanna go on a walk? Y’know, get away from the noise of the festival?” she smiled and nodded her head. “Come on I had a couple quiet spots in mind.”

“Ok, Ms. Essa! Lead the way!” I began walking towards one of the exits of the city. The entrances were big grand archways.

The walls and architecture of the city were beautiful, and I had come to hate them because I was the one who made them and I had learned to see only their flaws.

“Are we supposed to be going out after dark?” Lina asked, her voice shaking.

“No,” I responded, “but I have a sword that will protect us if we are to be attacked.” I pulled my sword out of its sheath on my back. It was blue with runes engraved on the hilt. Many had tried to buy my sword for its exquisite beauty, but I had always turned them down. This blade held memories, whether they are good or bad, they do exist, and I wish to remember them.

We stepped outside of the city walls and began walking along the docks. We sat down on the edge of the pier and stared out into the wide-open sea. With the moon just rising over the horizon, it felt perfectly serene.

“So... what happened to your parents?” I treaded lightly over the question. I didn’t want to hurt her. She seemed so delicate and even though I had known her for less than an hour, I felt a connection to her. We had both lost things we love.

“Well,” she hesitated, “I honestly don’t know. One day I went outside of the city to pick flowers, and when I came home after dark, my mother and sister were gone.” She paused again, to remember the day and collect her thoughts. “our house was fine. Nothing had been moved or disrupted, they had just disappeared.”

“Oh, Lina...”

“It’s ok. That’s why Vanessa is such a big inspiration to me.” The reflection in the water was startlingly clear, and I caught a tear slip out of her eye. “We both lost our families for reasons we don’t know.
So she and I are kind of in the same boat.” I nodded. She had to know that I was her hero. She had to.

Now that the moon was directly above us, the tide had begun to rise. She and my feet had already begun to dip in the ocean.

I took a shrill inhale. “Come on, Lina,” I said taking her hand. “The tides are rising. You don’t want your toes to get pruned do you?” her hand was grasped tightly in mine and we began walking back in, towards the city.

“I have one more spot in mind before we get you to bed.”

“But I don’t have a bed, Mrs. Essa.”

“Oh, you can come over to my house for the night. I can cook up a nice warm dinner, or if you’d prefer, you and I can get some food from one of the festival stalls.” I paused the conversation of my plan to look at her, and we made eye contact. “Sound like a plan?”

She nodded, a wide smile creeping across her face. After pausing for Lina to get a rock out of her shoe, we began walking towards my house.

“Where’s this?” Lina said.

“My house. The roof has a particularly beautiful view.” I responded. I unlocked my door and led her inside. The living room was a mess of half-made sword blades, and half-made sword hilts. I had yet to make a combination of hilt and sword that were a good match for each other. We started the trek up the three flights of stairs in my house. After the first flight of stairs, Lina started taking the stairs 2 or 3 at a time to save time. We finally arrived on the roof and I carefully picked her up and placed her on the tiled roof ridge.

“Don’t move until I come out of the window, Ok?” I asked. If she moved, she would fall. Luckily, she was obedient. I climbed out the window and grabbed her hand. We took it step by step up to the top of my roof, and once we reached it, we sat down without a moment’s hesitation. We were both huffing from the effort of walking on such a steep incline.
“What’s your favorite part of the founding festival?” Lina said, starting the conversation this time.

“Y’know, I’m not too keen of this whole festival thing. It makes Vanessa seem like a stuck-up brat. Like she’s entitled. It doesn’t do her justice.” That was the first time I had talked to someone, anyone, about my position with a festival celebrating myself.

“Lina… you should know the truth.” I paused and inhaled deeply. “I’m Vanessa.” Lina just paused and looked at me.

“Ok. Does that mean I don’t get to come to dinner with you anymore?”

“Oh, no absolutely not!”

“Good. Anyways you’re so amazing… but why do you not like the festival?”

“The people of Drune they—... Long before you were born they tried to kick me out of the city.”

“Oh... Ms. Essa I’m so sorry.” Lina started to cry. “Why would they do that to you? You’re such an inspiration to so many people! So why?” And that’s when I let the truth hit me like I brick. “I don’t know.” My breaths began to shake.

“Well, just know that even if the people back then didn’t like you, some people now do. And I always will.” She gave me a big bear hug. Or at least as big a bear hug as a 7-year-old could muster.

People still liked me. Whether or not people in the past did doesn’t matter, it’s in the past anyway. Tears slipped out of my eyes and raced down my cheeks. People still like me, I thought. People still like me! No matter what other people think, some kind people will always trust me to protect our city. And that was something to be proud of. I looked down at the festival stalls below. This festival wasn’t kept to mock me and my achievements, the festival was kept to show people why I’m not.
After tucking Lina into bed that night, I slipped into my bed. I lay there, not a peep from myself, nor the festivities outside. After coming to that discovery, I felt true happiness something I hadn’t felt in so long.

That night, I finally went to sleep happy. I went to sleep with a purpose.
Take As Much Time As You Need
The air had a crispness to it. It was not quite like a winter’s crisp, but a lukewarm one that lightly blew under my sweater every time I lifted my arms. It pulled along dead, brown leaves past my feet and into the door in front of me that I hesitated to open. The door was surrounded by a wall of ivy-covered brick and had a small, golden-rimmed window at the top that let out a soft light into the cloudy outside. It was going to rain.

The doorknob was cold and stung my hand a bit, but I twisted it anyway. The hinges on the wood creaked as the door swung inwards, letting the golden glow fully escape into the chilly overcast. The waiting area had a heavy scent, one I know now to be lavender and sweet orange aromatherapy oils, and the fuzzy sound of bird songs played on the old overhead speakers. There was also a miniature zen garden on a coffee table, along with a mother desperately trying to stop her young son from playing with it. The young boy who had been playing with the zen garden had finally left, and his glaring innocent and curious eyes no longer stared at my constant fidgeting. I decided to get up and grab a drink, as they had a hot water dispenser next to bags of various teas and ciders. I placed a small bag of green tea in one of the styrofoam cups they provided and added a bit of sugar as I waited for the tea leaves to work their magic. Before I could take a sip, however, a chipper voice called my name.

“My mother insisted I arrive around forty-five minutes early because she expected there to be a chance they could “take me in early and get it over with.” She was wrong. So, for forty-five minutes, I sat there while my stomach churned. My heart felt like it was strapped into a seat on a drop tower at an amusement park as I watched the room grow smaller from high above and plummeted back down to the acid in my stomach to burn and drown in a pool of my anxiety. The young boy who had been playing with the zen garden had finally left, and his glaring innocent and curious eyes no longer stared at my constant fidgeting. I decided to get up and grab a drink, as they had a hot water dispenser next to bags of various teas and ciders. I placed a small bag of green tea in one of the styrofoam cups they provided and added a bit of sugar as I waited for the tea leaves to work their magic. Before I could take a sip, however, a chipper voice called my name.

“Ahh,” I said, a tad startled. Glancing back and forth from the woman’s face and my cup of tea and not entirely sure what to do, I responded, “Yeah, that’s me.”
She was quite short and had long, dirty blonde hair. Her face was small, round, and sporting a soft smile. Slightly chuckling, she said, “You can take it in with you, just be sure not to spill it; we just got the carpet cleaned a few days ago.”

“Um, are you my, you know,” I paused before carefully picking up my cup of hot tea, “my therapist?” I asked.

“Yes, I’m Mrs. H!” she beamed. “I’m looking forward to getting to know you.”

“Oh, uh, same here,” I stammered out, not knowing what else to say, and started following her up a flight of wooden stairs.

Her office was decorated with fairy lights and Beatles posters, a few of them bearing illegible signatures. There was another aromatherapy diffuser and a couple of pictures of what I assumed to be of her and her husband on vacation at Disney World. She motioned for me to take a seat on a brown wicker couch and sat down on a matching chair parallel to me.

“I’m going to ask you some questions about yourself, is that okay?” Mrs. H asked, leaning back in her chair. “Take as much time as you need.”

I agreed and began answering some basic questions like what I enjoyed doing, what I liked to study in school, and what I was interested in doing with my future. The questions steadily got more serious; what I was diagnosed with? How was my home life? How have I been managing? My fingernails dug into my skin through the denim of my jeans like swords piercing armor. I knew the answers would help me, but they hit almost like trying to fit a full interrogation in one hour. My heart rate rose to the speed of a clock in fast-forward—the second hand galloped around the face like a racehorse and its hooves were the tick-tocking of my quivering heartbeat.

Her downturned eyebrows and kind eyes looked into mine, and I could feel this sense of comfort deep down. She really was trying her best. I chose to trust her. Once I started talking, I noticed I could not stop. Words flowed out of my mouth like a waterfall once blocked by a dam, and I started spilling everything that had been on my
mind that I could never say. Deep release appeared within me. What I had gone through and what I had done had been released from the flesh prison of my lips and echoed around me, triggering a stream of hot, flowing tears.

I was still terrified, of course, but at the moment I could not feel much, despite somehow also feeling everything at once. The anger, sadness, grief, and shame accumulated into a feeling of intense relief, as I was finally allowing myself to get help and heal—finally allowing myself to let go. Before I knew it, my hour was up, and I had to start getting ready to leave.

“I’m proud of you.” Mrs. H said, handing me a rather large box of tissues. I guess she needed that many for a reason. “That took a lot of courage, and I can’t wait to help you overcome all this.”

“Oh, thank you.” I sniveled, taking a tissue and dabbing my eyes. “Me too, I guess.”

I looked out the window and saw that the sky was clear and the pavement was damp. The rain had come and gone.
Discovering the Deinos Sauros
Dinosaur bones were originally discovered by Robert Plot in 1677 in Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire. He was the first professor of chemistry at Oxford University and an English naturalist. He thought the fossils were the bones of a really big human, so he wasn’t officially recognized for the discovery of dinosaurs until William Buckland, the first geology professor at Oxford, came into the picture. Buckland found some fossils himself in 1819 in Kirkdale, Liverpool and named the bones “Megalosaurus” in 1824. That was when Robert Plot was credited for the first discovery.

The name for these majestic, lizard-like creatures was coined by Richard Owen in 1841. He named them “dinosaurs” because in Greek, “deinos” means terrible and “sauros” means lizard. The name “Megalosaurus” inspired him in a sense because “megas” means great, tall, or big, and “sauros” has the same meaning as in “dinosaur.” Owen chose this name because of the features he observed while studying the fossils, the same as Buckland. He didn’t really see them as terrible, just fearfully great. But he still thought it was the best name.

Although Sir Owen came up with the dinosaurs’ name, he didn’t come up with the names of the other dinosaurs found later on. Their names are usually determined by their features, a person involved in the discovery, or the place they were found. Most dinosaur names end in “saurus”, but the ones that don’t aren’t considered lizards but are still in the dinosaur family. But the Pterodactyls, although, close cousins of dinosaurs, they aren’t scientifically considered the same.

Names are important even if the one with that name isn’t alive anymore. They’re a form of identification important to everyone mentally and scientifically. The reason why I wanted to write about the discovery of dinosaur’s names because they’re a topic people don’t usually look up or come across with interest. Even when I first thought of the topic, I didn’t know that these people existed. But they’re important because geological history wouldn’t be the same without them.
The Discovery of an Automobile Superpower

MS ESSAY | JOSEPH PORTER
very of an

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power
It was rush hour in a California city in the year of 2003 and a man by the name Elon Musk was busy forming an idea in his head that would change the automobile industry forever. The idea that Musk was forming in his head was the idea of Tesla which is now the most valuable automobile manufacturer in the world. Tesla is a company that specializes in making electric cars to help combat global warming and to try to change the automobile industry into a more environmentally friendly business. Yes, when Musk was sitting in the rush hour traffic in the year of 2003 there was probably another form of electric cars besides Tesla. But the cars that Musk was thinking of would have a much longer battery life than the other electric cars. Musk, who was and still is a genius, knew that he could use his powerful mind to make electric cars that would leave the rest of the electric car industry in the dust. And while he watched all of the cars on the road letting out poisonous exhaust that damages our planet, he knew that not only could he make the best electric cars to date, but that he had to make the best electric cars to date to save our planet. So, when he got home that night he went straight to his garage/workshop and started to develop his idea of his groundbreaking electric cars. When he woke up in the morning he went and got the parts he needed to make the first prototype of the car now known as a Tesla and the rest is history.

Now it is the year 2018 and Tesla has had the electric car industry in a choke hold for some time now. Musk is living a very comfortable life at this point because of his company’s huge success in the electric car industry. When I say that he is living comfortably I mean that he is sitting on a fortune estimated at around 20 billion dollars. So, you would think that Musk and Tesla would be okay right where they are with Musk being in the top 50 world’s richest people and Tesla being electric car industry royalty. But as history would soon show, Musk and Tesla were definitely not okay with where they were. It is true that Musk was one of the richest people in the world, but he was ready to chase the title of world’s richest person. And it was also true that Tesla was already the king of the electric car industry, but Tesla was trying to become the king of the whole automobile industry. I think of it like boxing: Tesla already had the middleweight championship, but it was ready to up its game and go for the heavyweight championship, the whole automobile industry. So, Musk and his workers at Tesla gathered the materials they needed to make their electric cars even better than they were, and this time Musk would be doing his work in a state-of-the-art factory instead of a garage.
ow fast forward to the present day, the year 2022. The Covid-19 pandemic is still like a raging fire, and it seems to be coming out with new variants every couple months. The pandemic has been very hard on many people, but the pandemic was in fact very kind to Musk and Tesla. It turns out that hard work in a factory actually does pay off, because as of today, Musk is the richest person on Earth, sitting on a fortune of about 199 billion dollars. And Tesla is the world’s most valuable automobile company in the world. To refer back to boxing, Elon Musk is now the undisputed heavyweight champion of the world and Tesla is the undisputed heavyweight champion of the automobile industry. It is crazy to think that all of these riches and successes came from Elon Musk sitting in traffic while normal cars plagued our planet. Tesla will continue to try to dominate the automobile industry for as long as possible and try to make automobiles safer for this planet.

Musk, for his part, still has huge plans for one of his other mega-companies. SpaceX, as the names implies, specializes in space travel. Eventually Musk and SpaceX may try to set up a civilization for humans to live on Mars. But that is still a distant goal for Musk and SpaceX because SpaceX is still doing fine financially. Even without going to Mars, SpaceX is a billion dollar company. Because SpaceX isn’t yet on top of the space travel industry, however, Musk and his workers gather up the materials they need to make their rockets the best in the world. So Musk now goes back to work on yet another discovery of ideas to make SpaceX the best in the space travel industry. And this time he is doing his work not in a garage, not in a factory, but in a rocket in space. It’s funny how the more time goes by, the richer Musk gets and the cooler his office gets. But that is what happens when your making discoveries that will change the course of the world forever.
A Boy with Mixed Eyes

MS SHORT STORY | AMBER GONZALES
There once was a boy who was born in a special way. A way that many people wouldn't see commonly. You see, Garret Booker was born with a big heart and his parents believed he was a very handsome boy at first sight. But Garret wasn't a common boy. No, he was born with mixed eyes. His eyes were a mixture of white and black, just like the designs of a Ying-Yang symbol, but not perfectly made. They were mixed and they slightly blended into one another. The day the doctors brought Garrett to his mother after giving birth, she did not want him. His eyes scared his mother, and she immediately gave the young boy back to the doctors and refused to believe Garret was her own baby boy.

Unfortunately, Garret didn't live long. During his life, he lived as an orphan. He had no friends except for a cat that came to the orphanage every few days for food. Garret used his time talking to the cat as if it were a real person. He usually tried sneaking food to the cat and allow it to eat so it could survive. Garret also did the same for homeless people he saw sit outside the orphanage. No matter how many people, Garret treated people equally, he would always still was still cruelly different from all the other kids. They would call him mean names like "freak" and "blind eyes."

Sadly, on one dark night, Garret sneaked out and took a walk, secretly, not wanting to be viewed by cops. He made it to a bridge, high over a small waterfall. He stood and heard the water crash against the rocks. It seemed to hit harder every time and it seemed louder. He began to climb over the railing and sat there. He cried silently.

He told himself "I can't deal with being treated like this anymore. I'm equal to all people but all because of my ugly eyes. I'm equal to all, but not all people seem as equal as me..." Then...He jumped. He was only 9 years old.

Eventually, coming across the bridge people claim haunted. They say that a young boy will stand at the end of the bridge. They say when you see him only for his eyes, he haunts you with terrible luck if you decide to judge him. They also say that if you view him for a young boy who needs help, he will be your protector for all eternity. "Bad luck? Haunted? Protector of all eternity?" I thought to myself. People can't be serious with this stuff, can they? I continued to run, I heard his voice right behind me, catcalling me,
whispering, telling me he wants to give me a good time and saying things like “Come here beautiful, come here.” Even though I was currently trying to get away from my own problem, I saw a young boy sitting in a tree. I looked at him, his eyes covered with a mask. I picked him up with no words and continued to run. I ducked behind a tree as the large man who continued to follow me sprinted by. We sat silent for a minute, my finger over my lips in a shooshing manner. The boy and I both sat silently as I looked at the young boy. Once I heard his distant calls of old fashion compliments and begging for me to go home with him, I spoke.

“What is your name and why are you all alone? Do you know where your parents are? Do you know where you live? Are you okay?” I spoke in a panicked manner, placing my own problems away to help a young boy. He smiled and laughed. No words.

“You can see me?”

He said with a quite sad tone in his voice.

“I said nothing for a few seconds although it felt like I wasn’t saying anything for a whole hour. Then, I rose up courage to speak.

“Yes? Why do you seem so sad about it?” I said in quite a displeased tone, thinking that he didn’t want me to notice him or something. I though angrily about it while I waited for him to put his words together in a sentence to tell me why he didn’t want me to notice him or let alone at leave try my best to help him. I’m only a 37-year-old woman but that doesn’t mean I don’t know how to take care of a kid especially with my 3 little boys on my back all the time and the 2 older boys and my husband not being around when you need them most. Maybe... I thought Maybe if I
didn’t get rid of my first little boy... maybe this parenting thing wouldn’t be so hard. Now I’m stuck with needy baby boys and 3 grown men. They are mostly at work all day while I have my hair pulled or the bottom of my skirt. Unfortunately for me when I look at Garret, I can help but see one of my little brothers’ faces. A young boy, lost, no parents or any idea of where he is, helpless and hungry. Suddenly the young boy broke away my thoughts and answered my question.

“Because I can’t see you,” he said sadly “My mommy and daddy didn’t want me nor did the people at my orphanage. They hate me!” He began to cry. I couldn’t watch. It hurt more when I thought this could be one of my younger brothers one unfortunate day and have no idea what terrible things could really hurt him.

“Well maybe it’s because of that mask silly” I laughed as I reached over to his face and went to pull the blindfold off gently. He flinched when I began to tug on his mask, full of curiosity.

“Why do you wear this?” I ask, in a low toned voice, trying not to startle him once again.

“Well, uhm...” He began his sentence slowly then his mask finally came off with one more gentle tug. My eyes widen and I scooted back.

“Garrett...” I couldn’t help but raise in fear as I stared deep into his eyes. “Garrett! My sweet boy! Garrett my son!!” I wrapped my arms around him. “I’m sorry! I’m deeply sorry! I shouldn’t have judged you! My sweet boy you-“I paused in the middle of my sentence. How come my young boy was still so little! It’s been years! He should be about 20-21 at the most?! I was in a panic as I took another look at my son. His face was a mixture of dullness and shock.

“Mommy...?” He began. “Mommy why did you not want me? Why did you and Daddy get rid of me?”

“My son, please understand my mistake,” I frowned at his sentence “You didn’t deserve what I did.”
“I died years ago. If it wasn’t for you dropping me off somewhere and leaving me, I wouldn’t have done what I did. Why, Mommy? Why did you not want me?” He said, slowly, his eyes stuck to me like a pesky piece of fur or small dust ball that will not go away no matter how many times you remove it from your skin.

His words made me tear up. The thoughts of how terrible of a mother I was stuck to my mind. My young boy was dead because of me but little did I know how special he would have been for me. I wanted to hug him tight but when I went to do so, he didn’t want me to touch him. He didn’t even want to look at me.

“If you really do love me,” he began. I waited, not wanting to know what was next. “Then you will experience what I experienced.”

I was so confused and scared but all I could wonder was what he was talking about. My mouth looked for words, but I couldn’t fix the words into a proper sentence.

“What do you mean?” Of course, I loved- love you,” I said, stutteringly.

“Go to the edge of the bridge,” he pointed at the end of the bridge, Where he had stood.

“And jump.”
PAINTING | CLAIRE RIZZO