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2nd Place in the ESU Chile Creative Writing Competition
2023
Senior Category

This document contains two texts. First one is the Round 1 Finished Work Entry on the theme of "Family". Second one was done on the day of the in-person final 10th June 2023, as a Freewrite/First Draft activity with the following prompt: "Write about the friendship that inspired your favourite song."

ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION
discovering voices

First Text: Round 1 Entry

Rocks and Shells

Mother always said, “Be good and nice things will happen.” I don't necessarily believe she meant it. It was one of those things one says when you have a screaming child who refuses to behave.

You eat your vegetables and as a reward you get to play outside for a bit before bedtime. And how could I not follow through with her wishes when that was the best reward there was? We used to live right next to the ocean. The sky was always at least a tiny bit tainted by the oranges and yellows of the sun and the sea itself was so dark that you couldn't even see your own feet when you were standing inside it.

It was a very dry zone; freezing nights and very little vegetation, a couple of thorny bushes here and there, and the occasional tree. We lived secluded from everyone and everything. The only kind of contact we had with others was when once every couple of months we ran out of essential supplies. The nearest town was a very long walk away. It took us a complete day to reach it and get back.

Regardless of our situation, my childhood was a happy one. I mostly spent my days walking by the shore picking up shells and rocks. I used to leave them in a pile outside my window, a window that gave me a front-row view to the dry land and the tall bushes. I began to notice how the little treasures I left outside every night before bed were no longer there when I awoke. No matter how many shiny shells and colorful rocks I collected, they would all eventually disappear.

At first, I felt really frustrated with the situation, but persisted nevertheless. I went to sleep that night and moments before closing my window begged for my riches to be there in the morning.

That wasn't the case though, the next day my pile of knick-knacks was gone. However, in its place I found a handful of buttons. They were all different colors and sizes. One was dark

blue, and shaped like a star. I put that one in my pocket and placed the rest in a tiny wooden box that was already full with rocks and shells. That day, I decided that the exchange had been fair and offered a different pile of little things I'd found while walking among the bushes. I was so excited that it took me a while to fall asleep. I was startled awake many times during the night by the slightest of noises, always briefly gazing at my window before drifting off again.

That's when I first saw it. Its eyes were shining, ever so slightly. It was close, so very close to my window. I think it may have been possible for its skin to have been touching the glass. That first glimpse wasn't enough for me to notice anything besides its eyes, but it was sufficient to strike my curiosity rewarding the creature. It seemed startled when it noticed me staring, so I cordially turned around and went back to sleep so it wouldn't feel uncomfortable. After all, it appeared to be that this creature had been the one to give me the buttons. It was the polite thing to do not to disturb it.

The next morning, I ran to my window to be met with a pile of puzzle pieces. Excitedly, I grabbed them and ran inside to start placing them together. Much to my disappointment, there seemed to be only half of the pieces I needed. I stood up and put them in my box with the rest of my trinkets. In hopes to get the rest of the puzzle pieces I needed, I decided to assemble the best offering I could find. I started by going into the kitchen and stealing one of our finest mugs. It had a golden handle and hand-painted flowers on it. I dedicated the rest of my day to filling it up with things I deemed worthy enough; a slightly heart shaped rock, a silver bottle cap, a piece of shed skin left behind by a snake, among so many other treasures.

When the moon was high in the sky, I left the mug outside my window and tried my best to fall asleep. Turns out, all the searching for objects had left me exhausted, so, before I knew it, the first sun rays were making their way into my room.

I sprinted for my window, wishful as ever, standing on my tiptoes so I could reach the frame. I shrieked in fear as I fell and hit the back of my head. My mother came running to my rescue, pale as a paper sheet. Her eyes were very wide, scanning every inch of the room, as if she were looking for something in particular.

She asked me what had happened and I confessed that the dead rat currently on display on my window frame had made me react like that. She took a look at it, and then looked outside. Whatever she saw was enough to make her pack everything we had and leave immediately as far away from our house as we could.

We never came back after that, and as time went by, that memory in particular began to fade from my mind. All that was left when I thought of my old home was the fondness I had for the sea and the bushes, and the shells, and the rocks.

When my daughter was born, I decided to revisit my old childhood home, in hopes to maybe raise my baby the same I had been. My husband couldn't accompany me on my trip, so I brought our dog along as company and protection. Once we arrived, I was back at being five years old. Everything was exactly the same, the views I was in love with were even more beautiful. I held my child a little closer and allowed myself to take it all in. I had missed the smell of the ocean breeze.

Walking farther along, I stepped on something that made me stop. A couple of beer bottles were splattered around behind one of the bushes. Among them were uncountable pictures of a little girl in various settings. Running around, chasing lizards, sleeping, bathing in the sea, picking up rocks and shells. I recognized myself in the pictures just as my dog ran away barking at something in the distance. I chased after her, calling her name multiple times. She did not listen, running until she was standing right outside of what had once been my room. I looked down at her and noticed what I can only assume was what freaked my mom out enough to get us to move all those years ago.

Footprints, big human footprints. Some old, some new. And whatever my dog was barking at, it was currently inside my old house.

Second Text: Free Write/First Draft 10th June 2023

"SILVER LIGHT"

I'd been alone for so long, the only light being the one that came from within.
I couldn't say every day was the same, because there was no such thing as days. There was only me, perpetually floating around in space. I'd heard the other planets talking about how dark the rest of the universe was, but in my mind that had always been a foreign concept I couldn't wrap my head around. An impossibility.

I suppose part of my loneliness was my fault, I can't say I'm absolved of responsibility. The other celestial beings around me had tried relentlessly to figure me out, to find a way for me to finally open up. But their intentions never seemed genuine enough for me to care about interacting with them. Afterall, they were bound to circle around me for infinity due to their gravitational fields.
Nevertheless, I still liked to dwell in self pity and complain about how miserable I was.

That was until she happened.
I'd been watching the Earth for a while now. Witnessing the birth of a planet wasn't the least interesting thing one could do around here.
First it was hot, then it cooled down, then it was hot again.
I stared absentmindedly until I caught a glimpse of her for the first time. She looked young, because she was. She was tiny and dull, full of craters and irregular cracks, but still, there was something so magnificent about Earth's moon. She didn't compare to Jupiter's seemingly endless ones. So small and ugly, yet so captivating.

She befriended the stars, all of them but me. I couldn't say my pride wasn't hurt, but then again, I was an ancient being. Who would want to associate with me?
I stared at her from afar, feeling like a creep. I was scared she would notice and feel uncomfortable, but her eyes never seemed to be on me. Perhaps that's what called me to her. The fact that she seemed so unbothered by my presence, even if my presence was all there was. She had to know I was here, there was no way she did not.

Everytime I tried to get closer, she moved farther away. I came to think she had grown tired of my attempts to get to know her, so I backed away… for the most part.

I asked a nearby star if she knew why Earth's moon seemed so repelled by my existence. She explained that as long as I was nearby, she would never be able to exist fully. The closer I got, the harder it was for her to breathe, the brighter I shone, the harder it was for her to continue to live.

Appalled, I backed away as much as I managed to, feeling terrible as ever. I spent years thinking about what to do. If my rays hurt her so much, what was I to do? Extinguishing my light seemed like the logical path to follow. But I couldn't simply cease to exist in order to guarantee someone else's survival. I was essential to our system. The reason why so many others were able to exist.

One day, quietly and without notice, I decided to stop shining. Just for a while, just to see what would happen. As my own light extinguished, hers grew brighter. I hadn't even realized she shone too. It was a silver light, not even a fraction of what mine was. If our system had depended on her alone to illuminate others, we would have been doomed. However, it was enough to sustain life on her planet, at least for a bit.

She immediately turned to me, and so did the others, but in my eyes she was the only one that mattered. I think I saw a smile forming on her face, it was hard to say among so much darkness.

Darkness.

This was the so-called darkness that had been described to me multiple times. For the first time I understood how it felt to be an expectator instead of the source of light. I no longer shone so egotistically bright.

After a couple of hours, an idea came to mind. I slowly began to make my way towards her, watching very carefully for any possible reaction of uncomfort or pain from her part. But she didn't look like she was in pain. She was in her element, looking as beautiful as ever. When I was close enough for her to see me, she turned around.

“You’re the Sun, right?” I was taken aback by her baldness, never expecting her to make the first move.

“The one and only.”

She laughed.

“Well, that’s a bit debatable, wouldn’t you agree?”

I frowned.

“How come?”

“This system is full of stars,” she replied.

“I suppose so, but I’m not a mere star. I am bigger and shine brighter than all of them, I am different and better.”

“So, just because you are big and shiny you think you are above others?”

“Aren’t I? This system gravitates around me. I am the center of everything.”

She stared, almost in disbelief.

“Not everything,” she corrected me, “I don’t gravitate around you, I gravitate my Earth.”

“But who does your Earth circle around?” I asked, my tone full of cockiness.

“I follow my planet, it’s not my fault Earth likes to follow around giant jerks.” She turned around, not sparing me a second glanze.

I took it as my cue to leave, returning to my rightful place. She was annoying, but regardless, I came back a second time. Every day I turned off my rays to be able to approach her. It was

just for a couple of hours, but it's the reason why I no longer spend my days weeping and pitying myself.

The others weren't so on board at first. They didn't like the idea of me disappearing for hours on end, but I reminded them who was the one in charge and Earth's moon scolded me for being so haughty.

At first, we spent our time together bickering back and forth. She said I needed to work on myself and I told her she ought to stop being so uptight.

I don't recall the exact moment we became as inseparable as we are now. I just know that not being friends feels distant and unnatural.

One night spent together she whispered into my ear a wish she had, "we could drift away, alight for 13 billion years."

"You don't like it here?" I asked.

"I want to live somewhere where you are not the Sun and I am not the Moon. I want to be able to coexist. Not have one of us having to sacrifice their light to guarantee the comfort of the other. I want you to be more than an arrogant star and for me to be more than a plain moon. I want so many things for us, things that are so far away, things that could never come true."

"Wouldn't you miss your Earth?"

"I would, so very much. Which is why I know this is only a wish. We both have duties and others to care for. It just feels so stupid to stay here forever knowing infinity awaits us out there."

After a long pause, I spoke up.

"Just for now, know that the view is beautiful and ours alone tonight. You are what matters most to me, and I'm okay spending forever by your side."