



The Lewis Carroll Writing Competition 2021

Discovering Time

By Mardra Sikora

Mardra Sikora is a CEO, an author, speaker and advocate who believes in the power of words and is obsessed with making the most of our time. She uses both fiction and non-fiction to advocate for and with her adult son, Marcus. Her works include [The Parent's Guide to Down Syndrome: Advice, Information, Inspiration, and Support for Raising Your Child from Diagnosis through Adulthood](#) (Simon & Schuster) as well as "[Essay: Arguing Eugenics](#)," and [The Future and Other Twists](#): A collection of short and super-short stories. Plus, short stories and essays in anthologies and international websites including [The Huffington Post](#). If you'd like to know more about her obsession with time and how to make the most of it, check out her thoughts and tips on the [Medium publication: Speaking of Time](#). (<https://medium.com/speaking-of-time>)

This chapter is placed directly following Chapter 10, 'The Lobster-Quadrille' in 'Alice in Wonderland'

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Alice quickly discovered that a Gryphon holding her hand was not such a pleasant sensation. Then, when she protested at his digging talons, he growled a grumbling that sounded like a lion though it came through a beak. They began the incline to a steep hill, he let go of her hand and opened his wings, leapt up, and took her by the shoulders. In a moment they were both in the air.

"Oh dear, I shouldn't want to offend him now," thought Alice as she rubbed her wrist and watched the ground move away. Yesterday she would have been afraid, but today she'd fallen so far already, and she wasn't entirely convinced that gravity worked the same here as at home. "Everything else is so curious, why not gravity too?" Alice thought. Plus, they weren't flying awfully high. "Why, just this afternoon I was taller than this."

Quite a distance ahead she saw creatures of all sorts streaming toward a garden gate. "That must be the trial," she thought, then noticed, directly below them, the Dodo in a heated argument. The Dodo banged his stick and looked red in the face in as much as one could tell behind all that beak. The something he contended with phased in and out of sight and changed shape upon each incarnation.

"Is it the Cheshire Cat?" Alice asked herself. "This figure is taller and there's an arm and hand. No, it's definitely not a cat."

She called up to the Gryphon, "Sir, who or what is that with the Dodo?"

"Aye, that's Time. Would you like to meet him?" The Gryphon placed Alice upon the ground, then stretched his hind legs to land behind her.

"So, the Hatter was right; Time is a he," Alice mused.

“I should say so, as there he is.” And he grumbled under his breath, “Extra courses indeed!”
“So, the Hatter is not mad after all?” She pressed on despite the Gryphon’s arbitrary tone.

“Oh no, or rather yes,” he answered. “The Hatter is most certainly mad. Just because someone speaks with truth, doesn’t mean they aren’t also mad. Hjkrrh.”

As they approached the Dodo, his flickering companion continued, “I stop for no man, child, beast, or bird. . . Or any combination thereof.” Although he wasn’t entirely visible, Time seemed to have turned his attention to Alice and the Gryphon. Then, the voice turned back to the bird, “Though I am sorry, Dodo.”

The Dodo’s shoulders bent, so the Gryphon put his wing over him and escorted him with soothing words down the path. “But, what about the Hatter?” asked Alice.

“What about him?”

“You stopped for the Hatter.” Alice stated sternly as fact what she had heard.

“Dear child, the Hatter broke his watch and fosters a penchant for excuses.” Alice squirmed a bit, having been so forthright without considering the Hatter’s statement may be a fib, or at least a mistake. Time continued, “The clock and I, we are not the same thing, you know. . . wheels and gears, a machine to track me. . .” his voice faded, then snapped sharply back, “but gears and bells are no match for my march.”

“But you did quarrel then?” Alice asked, more timidly than her last accusation.

He let out a sigh, “It’s true. We did quarrel. The problem is Hatter has plenty of imagination but no discipline and less confidence, so he blames me for all.”

“He claims you keep him at teatime. Is that why he’s considered mad?” Alice thought better the Hatter is mad than a liar.

“Just another excuse, that is all. Every single moment he tells himself, ‘After my tea I will pick up my quill!’ Now I ask you, why care what the clock bell chimes? If you have a word, a song, a job, then do it! Do not squander on excuses over me. Until you start, you will never be done.” Time’s form flickered in and out as he spoke. Appearing both fat and full, then reappearing thin as a rail. His hands often showed first and left last, and he moved them around as he spoke, never still. “He’s not the only one quick to blame me. Men of business or laziness and artists of all sorts are known to do the same the worlds over. They can slander me all they like. My brother, Truth, is also there all along.”

“Why do you fade in and out so? Grow fat and thin as we speak?” Alice asked.

“Ah, I’m often wasted away, you know.”

“What do you mean?”

“You see that sloth?” Time pointed to a circle of sloths in flat caps. The tallest looked very much like an older boy she knew from school. He grinned at the other two sloths, rubbed his paws,

then threw dice into their circle. “They waste me away on dice and bets. I am lost to them, and they will miss me when I’m gone.” Time sighed before his figure nearly disappeared, then filled in again like a balloon.

“Whereas a man reads a book, finishes a project, or awakens his soul on an adventure, and I fill up, full and satisfied like from a favorite meal that was cooked with love.” Time looked taller and fatter than ever, then he dissolved again. The shifts were no longer startling to Alice, and she had learned from speaking with the Cheshire to continue facing the place he was until he appeared in whatever place he is to be. His voice from the empty place further explained, “I break up and divide, too, you know. When a mother sings a lullaby, she stretches time for her and her babe. I expand, then fraction into all the futures. I’m more than time then. I’m a warm blanket that rocks with each heartbeat and I fill the space between breaths in the darkness.”

“Sir, are these riddles or the truth?” Though she had once craved the nonsense, Alice now felt tired of the constant confusion this day presented.

“Oh, do you know Truth?” Time appeared suddenly and quite close, causing Alice to jump.

“I think so, but today I’ve been so muddled that I’m not sure.”

“Good. Those fully sure they know Truth have seldom met him. He should be on his way by here soon. As there’s a trial, you know. Unfortunately, he’s so prone to be betrayed, lost, or disguised, he rarely makes it into courtrooms. Barristers the world over lay traps in his way. Pity. Of course, here the Queen demonstrates no desire to see Truth, so I doubt he was even invited.”

“I’ve noticed that too,” said Alice, feeling an agreement as good as knowledge. “But the Queen cares for you.”

“Does she? What makes you think so?”

“Well, she was concerned for your murder. You know, when the Hatter sang.” Alice felt quite smart to continue pressing Time on his ways with the Hatter.

“Pish posh. Murdering time doesn’t happen in a song. It’s easier to kill time than anything else, my true destruction comes when dreams are ignored and passions buried. But,” Time appeared fully before her and pointed to her directly, “the Hatter was right about one thing—no need to beat time, just move with the rhythm and I’ll join you. Sing as you walk, and you’ll see what I mean.”

Yet again Alice was commanded, so she took a deep breath and sang with each step,

*“Twinkle, twinkle, chimed the clock.
Get up! get up! no time to gawk.*

*Twinkle, twinkling, each raindrop.
Look up, lean in, no time to stop.*

*Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
each adventure more bizarre.”*

She watched her feet and felt the hand of Time upon her shoulder as she sang, until she bumped right into the Dodo.

“I say, young lady, *do* watch your step!” he exclaimed, and Alice quickly jumped back.

“That’s just what I was doing. Watching my steps,” Alice explained.

“I should think a child like yourself, the winner of a thimble if I’m not mistaken, would be more careful,” puffed the Dodo, adding, “and courteous.”

“I do apologize. It’s been such a long day and I—” she looked about her, “I seem to have lost track of Time.”

“You too? I’m afraid he’s abandoned me altogether.” The Dodo choked back a small sob.

Suddenly overwhelmed with compassion for this silly looking creature, she wanted to reassure him. “Stiff upper lip, Dodo.” Her father’s words were the only answer she thought of, and then of course, she immediately regretted it as the Dodo clearly had no upper lip to stiffen. Yet he nodded anyway, pulled out his handkerchief, and gave a loud blow of a nose that didn’t exist either.

“Ah, very wise words my dear.” Alice smiled that someone finally recognized her effort. “Let us proceed,” he continued, then with his right claw on his stick, he put out his left wing and Alice laid her hand upon it. He escorted her past the gates and into the courtyard where the trial was soon to begin.
