

Like every child, my world was one of milestones. Losing my last tooth, my last day of elementary school, they all worked together to make me who I am today. But where many people remember these events with joy, for me, these are memories of anxiety. I grit my teeth, close my eyes, and try to ignore the looming presence of my future. I look at my bedroom walls, the stuffed animals around me, and feel dread as I ponder what is to come. Some day, I will grow up, and all of this will be gone.

I was told that I could change the world. I was also told, "Never change," by my parents as they smiled upon me. These two ideas formed the foundation of my existence, and I knew that both were impossible. While opportunities appeared to be endless, I knew that I would have a job, a family, and my world would be limited by what would benefit them. I was also aware that I was growing up, and no matter how much I tried, I would inevitably be much different from the pigtailed little girl who made her parents proud. I was bound to disappoint them.

I looked upon this paradox of uncertainty and inevitability and laughed the laugh of a coward. In an attempt to control the uncontrollable, I picked up a pen, ordered a planner, and got to work. I scheduled my days, my months, and over time, I felt a sense of relief. I would still grow up, but I could control what that process would look like. I felt confident in my palace of paper. I felt at ease within my delirium. I whispered these lies to myself every night like prayers on a deathbed. As long as I told myself that they were true, I could fool myself into believing them.

This was how I spent my life. Whenever I reached a milestone, reality would tear away the illusion. I would face the march of the inevitable, and I would spend the night in anguish. Then I would repeat the cycle once more. Middle school flew by, then highschool, and then it was the summer before senior year. My school takes all highschoolers on a three day retreat, and

on the last night, seniors are allowed to stay up and swim. Everyone was laughing and smiling, and so was I. I knew my future was near, but that day I paid it no mind.

Then came the waterslide. My parents had volunteered on the retreat, and I convinced them to go down with me. Before we knew it, we were rocketed through the air and thrust into the water, and as I stood, I couldn't help but cry. For the first time in years, I realized that my future was just around the corner, that I was no longer the pigtailed little girl that I yearned to be. I was someone else entirely, someone who even I didn't recognize. I had no choice but to acknowledge this reality.

In Thomas C. Forrester's *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*, there is a chapter dedicated to baptism. In it, Forrester explains that whenever water is mentioned in literature, it represents transformation, a revival of spirit. As I stood in the water, hugging my mother and crying into her shoulder, I couldn't help but think that water represented baptism in real life, too. I could no longer ignore the uncertainty of my future, but I could make friends with it. Childhood is fast, wild, and imaginative, and the impact of the water will always be there. But when I plunge into my future, not only will I be okay, but my parents will be there to jump in with me.