

2024 ADULT ESSAY CONTEST – HONORABLE MENTION

Fist Bump

By Hope Randall

“What’s queerness?” asked my 10-year-old niece. Holding my phone, she’d paused on a photograph of a sticker that said, *Your queerness is divine.*

Where to start? I went with, “It means, like, being gay or lesbian.”

“But that’s not YOU!?”

I froze, feeling my cheeks turn warm. I saw shock in the big, brown eyes fixated on mine. What else? Disgust, horror, judgment?

I had to look away. Staring at the table, I stammered. “I—um. A friend. She gave it to me.”

“Oh.” She continued to scroll. I casually remarked on unrelated travel photos while butterflies churned my stomach and scenarios raced through my mind.

We rarely get this one-on-one time together. This is the right moment.

But it’s late. She’s tired. I missed my chance. If I say something now, it’ll seem like a big thing. Her mom might get upset.

She lost her place in the photos and had to start again from the top. I waited to see if she’d land again on the sticker. She didn’t, but her return to the beginning of the reel felt like an energy shift, an opening to return to the topic in the most nonchalant way I could manage.

“Oh, so, the queer thing.” She stopped scrolling and looked at me, attentive, like she already knew. “I *am* that, actually.”

Before I could even process what to say next: “Oh, that’s OK!” She patted my arm twice, a silent *There, there.*

“Thank you,” I exhaled, releasing the in-breath I’d held for years. But her attention had already returned to the photos.

Astonished, I wondered if she’d actually understood what I said. With Mom, there were tears; with my sister, skepticism. Within myself, heaviness.

I couldn’t trust the ease. Overanalysis kicked in. *Did she say “It’s OK” because she thinks it’s a flaw and loves me in spite of it?*

Desperate to sound unaffected, I told her it was time to turn off the digital devices and get ready for bed. Then, my pounding heart muffled the sound of my voice as I quipped, “Hey, you know that there’s nothing wrong with being gay, right?”

An exasperated head tilt, playful eye roll, impish grin: “Ahh, I know.” She held up her hand, fingers curled into a ball: “Fist bump!”

I laughed. We fist bumped. The breezy, bemused ease of her gesture knocked my doubts aside, decentered my fearful core. With good-natured impatience, she was asking, *Can we move on now?*

One day, I’ll thank her for showing me how.