

2015



Student Anthology

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Tears of the Sky

By Brianna Heath, 7th grade, Murfreesboro

Her face began to glow as the tears of the sky trickled down the window of her bedroom. Bitter air flowed into the room when she opened it, curtains blowing without restraint. She took in a deep breath of air, the intoxicating scent filling her lungs. A sudden burst of wind slammed the glass frame closed and the curtains rested. The wind and water had teamed up against the girl, leaving her drenched and cold, a chilling reminder of the power of nature.

As the air conditioning let out an explosion of frigid air, a shudder traced down her spine. She smirked at the air's mockery of her current state. Throwing on running shorts and a tank top, she sprinted outside.

If you had seen the girl at this moment in time, you would've thought she was insane. But the girl? She was overjoyed. She sprinted, the pin-like pellets of rain stung her skin and the calluses on her feet grew stronger as the coarse concrete created the friction she desired oh so much against her toes. Although her hair was soaked and knotted, it flew proudly behind her like a flag. Her clothes stuck to her body; the water like glue.

She ran faster than she had ever before, her love of the sky shot excitement down her veins and she could almost feel the rain coursing through her figure. But her body could only take so much, and her running slowed and her breaths became loud heaves. She was gasping for air while trying not to ingest the storm itself. Her body slowed to a stop, and she leaned over, her arms dropping to her knees. Her back arched and she slowly caught her breath.

In. Out. In. Out.

Her heartbeat began to slow as it returned to rhythm that her body moved to. If she couldn't run, she could always find a way to keep moving. And that's what she did. The girl sang and danced in the rain without the fear of judgment or being mocked lurking behind her, and felt more alive than she ever had. She was experiencing complete and utter joy that no one could take away.

Now I have a question for you. Are you going to let the storm rip happiness from your hands or are you going to dance in the rain? It's your choice.

mic drop

apologizes to tech guy because that was probably really expensive and I don't have that kind of money

Frodo and Bilbo

By Marlena Jones, 7th grade, Clarksville

They were just two squirrels. Two school squirrels. Frodo and Bilbo were the best of friends. They lived in the small stretch of trees close to the windows of a middle school science classroom. The children in the class adored them, and often spent time watching as they went from tree to tree, doing tricks. Everything seemed to be perfect. They both had an equal amount of trees, and a bountiful supply of nuts to eat. Yes, everything was perfect. That's what any outsider would think. But secretly, each was envious of the other.

"Frodo is the students' favorite!" said an infuriated Bilbo. "All he does is tricks to win their favor. I on the other hand am too fat to flip from tree to tree. Yet, I will be the triumphant one when he is starving this winter. For when he is showing off, I will be gathering nuts for the cold months."

Frodo was envious as well. "I wish I was as good as Bilbo at gathering nuts!" said he. "I shall steal his food supply and territory this winter so that I get the nuts and the spotlight!" he thought while doing a flip for the adoring children watching him from the window. And with that the story begins.

Frodo and Bilbo were sitting on the windowsill of the classroom, wondering why human children had to learn about the parts of plants. To them, there were no xylem and phloem in a plant. There was only the yummy part and the yummiest part. It was interesting to Bilbo though, he was much more intelligent than Frodo, and he appreciated learning more. All Frodo was invested in were tricks and being an immense bother to the English class above the science classroom. For some reason, the children in the English classroom didn't appreciate tricks and fun as much as the children below did, and Frodo found that really amusing. So Frodo left to make trouble.

While he was gone, Bilbo scurried to a branch jutting out from a rather impressive height. He made several large thumping noises to get the children's attention. When they were all looking at him, he leaped for the branch across from the one he was on. Time seemed to slow down as he flew through the air. The students' eyes widened in amazement. "I'm

going to make it!" he thought as he stretched out his little squirrel hands to grab onto the branch. The next thing he knew, he was lying on the ground, with the breath knocked out of him. Loud laughter erupted from the open window. He felt humiliated! He was so close to having Frodo's fame as well as his own superior nut finding skills! Now all the children would do is laugh at him.

Frodo saw the whole thing from above. He made amused chattering noises at his obese friend's failure. That was much more interesting than bothering the English students! After all that, he'd be the most popular squirrel in the entire campus! His eyes shone with anticipation as he leaped over to the branch Bilbo had fallen from. It was time to show the kids how it was done. He looked at the window to find the children chanting something. "Fall! Fall! Fall!" they cheered much to Frodo's horror. They actually enjoyed Bilbo's little show?! Out of nowhere, Bilbo landed on the branch next to him and gave an apologetic chitter. He shoved him off the branch! Frodo felt betrayed, until he landed with a small thump on a comfy pile of leaves. "We're in this together." chattered Bilbo before narrowly missing the other limb and landing next to him.

From then on, their purpose was to entertain the children instead of show off. And when they went foraging for nuts, they did it together. And so, they thrived through the winter months in their cozy stretch of trees outside the classroom.

Untitled

By Sophia Smallman, 7th grade, Murfreesboro

Silence filled the grey shack, and once again I was left to my own devices. It was dark early this evening but the stars were bright enough to shed light on the path outside the window. I didn't worry. I knew Aaron would come home soon. He always did. Still, the night grew later. Light filtered in through the closed curtains and illuminated my necklace that hung in the corner of the room next to the shelf packed with trinkets that Aaron had bought or "found" for me. Its red stone seemingly burned like hellfire. I sat there on my straw bed looking at it and waiting. It was ritual, but as the dark pressed in and my eyes grew weary, I turned in for the night. I told myself nothing could ever change and fell asleep to the distant patter of footsteps.

Something appeared before me. A shadow. My view was blurred but as the image cleared it became evident it was no human figure. Four legs, strong wings and a snake - like body made it more obvious that this was no ordinary picture.

"Anatu," said a whisper as I focused in on the image. The voice, I thought, was female. Her blue scales reflected light that came from all directions not one source in sight.

A knock on the door made my eyes snap open. A Dragon. A Dream.

"Harper?" Aaron calls from the other side of the door.

"I'm coming in now." The door creaked open. I sat up.

"Morning," I said. I wiped the sleep from my eyes.

"Hey Sleeping Beauty. I thought you would never wake up the way you were snoring last night." He replied. My face heated.

"What happened out there?" My eyes focused on his face. His eyes were downcast and he looked suddenly tense.

He cleared his throat, "I ran into some trouble on the way back." I rolled my eyes. Should've known he'd gotten in trouble. Last time, we hid in the forest area behind our house for days on end. A small division of the royal guard had searched the area but never where we had hidden. We had a clear view of anyone who went in and out of the house. After a few days they headed down the road. Whatever they saw inside convinced them we had moved on. In their world they were

falling behind, and like any other person, it was felt necessary to find what you were looking for. Aaron never did tell me what he had done. What he was doing to piss of so many guys. As always he said something about I didn't need to know about such piddly things. I shouldn't worry myself over his concerns. I always took his dung without any thought.

I sighed, "What did you do this time?"

He bit his lip, and looked at me thinking about his words. He chose them carefully.

"I might have stolen something," he said. His voice faded out. It wasn't the first time he had done it. I puzzled over his sentence and rubbed my eyes. He continued, "It's different this time." He reached into his pocket. He pulled out several items: the most beautiful cakes I'd ever seen, papers which he pushed aside, and a necklace. I thought of the other necklace hanging in my room. I looked at this one. Both of them from Aaron, but for this one he had taken a risk. It shone brilliantly like the other stone, but it was white, Crystal, Clear, Pure, but not perfection. The beauty of natural things was their rawness and imperfections. Beautifully flawed like a person. But the trinkets were far too fancy to be anything we could afford.

"Tell me what went on," I demanded. I deserved to know what shit he had so heroic battled this time. "Did you have to fight goblins and dragons," I laughed. He sighed and forced a smile. I stopped cold and remembered my dream from last night. They were real, but who's to say that was true. It was only a dream after all. "Anatu," I whispered. My heart jerked, skipping a beat.

"What did you say?" Aaron said looking up.

I said, "huh?"

"Never mind. The important thing is that we need to move out." He said.

"You never answered my question," I said, "What did you do? I don't see how someone could miss just some cakes."

He stared at me. "Oh my god," he laughed, "you don't get it do you?" He laughed again in disbelief.

"How would I when you never let me leave the damn house?"

He looked at me and said, "The guy I stole from?" I nod. "He is quite the powerful influence in town. Had a good part of the royal guard

sent after me."

"Been there done that," I say thinking of our first encounter with the Guard.

"I mean I lot of them Harper."

"What do they care about a boy thief?" I said.

"Yeah, that bothers me, too, but I'm a repeat offender of the law and repeat offenses don't go over looked by the King when one of your highest advisors in the kingdom says 'oh hey he's like a threat to our kingdom's security and your safety Your Highness.'" I listen to him blabber for a few more minutes before he regains his original topic.

"So do we have a plan?"

He said, "What? Oh. I suggest we leave at dusk so we can get a head start." I nod and breathed deeply, taking in his words. "I have a friend in the next town over that will help us." He continued.

"Are you sure?" I look him in the eye.

He falters, "Uh, yes." I was putting my faith in him again. Dependent. I never change. Nothing in our little house did. "Pack your bag but don't take much. We need to be able to move fast."

I get up and walk around gathering my things: my necklaces, my knife and some clothes. Anything else would heavy my load too much. When I turn to Aaron, he is already gone. I shrug. Preparations have to be made. After all, he had his own concerns.

A clock tower from the nearby town strikes twelve. It's noon already. I exhale. My breath catches in my lungs when I realize. After all these years, I will step out into a world of majesty. The thought hits me: I will step out into this world of formalities and normality. My life of seclusion is over. I sing to myself songs my mother once sang to me before she passed away. I hum little tunes that remind me of Aaron when I first met him, before he became just an overprotective older brother. Nerves have my stomach rattled but I told myself I'll be alright.

I snack on the small cakes Aaron left for me. Sad the amount of effort he puts into retrieving them when they disappear so quickly. Then again some of life's best moments are thrown at you then taken away in just the blink of an eye. Nothing last forever and nothing stays gold.

When the evening bell strikes the tower screams. Nine! Nine! Nine! Nine! Nine! Nine! Nine! Nine! Its screeches slamming to a halt

each time the bell rings. The sound carries past the river and the forest, echoing from ear to ear. With much doubt I discover that Aaron is listening. He walks into my room and I realize that he is ready to go. When I looked out my window, the sun is setting. The sky was orange and blue. From over the hill, people's heads became visible. I turned to Aaron. He was throwing the leftover cakes into his satchel. Out the window a mob drew near with men clad in armor leading. The Guard. Full force with torches and pitchforks in hand.

"Oh my god," I said turning to Aaron.

"What?" He looked up slinging our packs over his shoulder. The blood drained from his face.

I said, "We gotta go." Aaron stood still for a moment. I had given the orders. He nodded and I rushed out of the room with him behind me. As the crowd grew close, I heard shouts. Hateful words aimed at Aaron. I ignored them but he winced each time one more was spoken.

"Let's hurry up and get out of here," he said. He pushed by me and headed out the back door. I looked around the room. I sighed. Home had never been home to me, yet some part of me hated to leave. Something was asking me to stay, but that didn't feel right. I slipped out the door and followed the path. I fell in stride with Aaron, and we walked in silence.

Don't Judge A Book By Its Cover
By Jennie Mae Sprouse, 7th grade, Whites Creek

When you look at me,
What do you see?
Golden hair? Blue eyes?
A broken heart? Dirty lies?
When you look at me,
What do you see?
Perhaps I'll remind you of a memory.

When I look at you,
I see your smile,
I see your kindness,
I see that your wild.

But when YOU look at me...
What do you think?
Do you think of adolescence, innocent, or miniature things

But when I look at you,
I only see kindness and more,
And from one person to another,
Just before you look at someone,
Don't judge their cover.

Dolly Things

By Paige Champlin, 8th grade, Germantown

when I see you my heart stops
and you are the last person I see
every time before I drift
and drift
and drift
and when you leave I return to myself
but you always seem to
take just a little bit of me with you
now I don't know where you get it
I don't know where you always seem to find
just the right parts of me
the ones I keep in my heart
and under my skin, and inside my skull
and you always decide to break them.
clean
off
and I let you
I'm not sure what you do with them
once you ate my courage right in front of me
and licked your fingers when you were done
is it masochistic that I love that about you?
is it wrong that I love you?
is it selfish, is it blind?
(haha, am I losing my mind???)
do you make trinkets from my being?
re weave my heartstrings into friendship bracelets?
or maybe into a new skirt,
to feel my sad soul brush your skin
the only time I will feel you?
do you do it on purpose?
do you hurt me for show?
is this all a game to you?

but I know you can make my fractures beautiful
you were always so crafty
you weld my aspirations into your own
and I won't complain,
I might just fuss a little
and you would comfort me, and coo,
and make me fly like your own little dove
amused at my own pain,
running and jumping and flying with my passion
you are so childlike with my emotions
and I forgive you.
I do the same
because this? this is some young ass love
and it seems like my flaws are your favorite toy

Voices in my Head

By Tattiauna Davis, 8th grade, Hermitage

There are these voices in my head no one else can hear. I tell them to go away but they never disappear. I see these demons that no one else can see. People think I am weird and they all say I'm crazy. I am not delusional. I am not insane. I hear and believe in different things. Yesterday, a voice inside my head told me to call the white house. It told me to ask for President Obama. After that they said if I continued the calls I would be the cause of a whole lot of drama. Occasionally I write on mirrors about Centerstone because every time I step foot inside, it turns really cold. All these delusions that I am writing about come from an illness called schizophrenia. It makes me paranoid but it's something I just can't control. Some people say I am senseless and ludicrous. I don't know what to do with this illness. I just want to be normal like everyone else. I do have enough sense to know that I need HELP before I leave this earth and take my last breath...

Schizophrenia – a poem about my mom. My mom has an illness called schizophrenia. So I decided to write a poem about it. So I put myself in her shoes and said what type of things I would do and say if I had schizophrenia.

Yellow Stained Pages

By Piper Gilbert, 8th grade, Kingsport

I was around twelve when I found my first night cafe; it wasn't a physical place, as Van Gogh's was, but rather a state of mind. It was by yellow tinted, worn down pages of the book that I stumbled upon in some far corner of my public library, in some way this book became a new reality for me, a place I knew I would be able to retreat if I ever needed to. I loved how she would play off characters emotions, one being an especially spiteful and aggressive ghost girl and another being a petrified and timid boy, I felt like I was standing there alongside the characters, observing everything happen. I felt as if I knew the people personally, I knew the story as if it was a part of my own life, like all of the events that occurred in the book were my own memories burned into my brain, as if I had experienced them in reality and the author hadn't created them. After that I couldn't evade the temptation of a fresh world, reborn people. This is my night cafe.

Untitled

By Sadie Holt, 8th grade, Lebanon

I know we have had our tough times.
We've been through every note, every rhyme,
And we'll go through the grit and grime.
We'll make it all work.

Even though I think I'll never be enough,
And I'll try to act way too tough,
But I know you'll get me through the rough.
We'll make it all work.

In your song, you said that I don't know
But maybe baby you're right.
You will guide me through sleet and snow
And you'll hold me through the night.

You make the stars shine so much brighter.
You make me a better fighter
And every night you make the darkness lighter.
We'll make it all work.

From the first time I saw your face
And the first time I saw your bright eyes
Just like Taylor I made a blank space
And dreaded the painful goodbyes.

You said you would make my dreams come true
And there's nothing you wouldn't do.
And now I'm saying the same to you.
We'll make it all work.

Thanks Anyway

By Skyler Laszczewski, 8th grade, Lebanon

You sent me this lovely song
I thought it was terribly wrong
But you just come on too strong
Thanks anyway

You kind of make me creep out
You just want to make me shout
Maybe we should take our own route
Thanks anyway

Sorry but I don't like you back
There is no way that I love you
I will make you turn blue and black
There is nothing you can do

Can you please stop loving me?
Just go and fall out of a tree
You bug me like a little flea
Thanks anyway

Talk about a stalker status
We will never go on a date
And get rid of all that fatness
Even if your name was Tate.

Just please get out of my life
Before I stab you with a knife
And I might as well tell your wife
Thanks anyway

Eyes Held Stationary

By Benjamin Ledford, 8th grade, Signal Mountain

Eyes held stationary

Fixed upon the grey wall that speaks to me more than my Father ever did

It's crazy

How one does not simply stop thinking

I said it's crazy, it's wild

How I can watch my hand move across my word worthy paper canvas

Pen clutched in my miniature wrist limbs

Yet nothing is being written

While everything is in motion, bustling in my conscience like New York at 5 o'clock

God-damn, yes! I know I do not make sense

But sometimes it is a necessary action when my heart, my soul, my cascading emotions are perpetually sitting atop the fence

No, I did not sign up for fencing classes

So please, anyone please, my dear friends please tell me why my heart is always being poked, nabbed, jabbed

Please tell me why my strawberry red heart is so fucking used to being stabbed by the grey, steel tip of others people truly piercing judgement.

Part of me wishes that I was blessed with the gift of ignorance

Unfortunately, I was born into this amazingly intricate world without it

So I suppose I will sit here and sulk

Eyes held stationary

Fixed upon the grey wall that speaks to me more than my Father ever did.

Don't Make Me Laugh

By Keegan McCarthy, 8th grade, Ooltewah

I kept walking even though my legs hurt, the muscles in my thighs and calves straining to support my body weight. My ribs jutted out, large blisters growing along the edge of the bones, pus oozing out and dripping down my bare chest. I was starving and thirsty, my lips peeling and bloody, my throat dry and inflamed, and I could do nothing about it. I had not food or water, and my stomach churned, tying itself into knots as I stumbled blindly across the flat land. My vision was obscured my darkness, yet I continued towards the blotchy light in the distance. It was my only hope to find another person that wasn't infected.

Suicide crossed my mind with every step I took, the blade of a knife and a noose seeming like a bittersweet paradise. I reminded myself that there was more out there, and that one day all this would end, I just needed to have faith. I fell to the ground as my thoughts clouded my eyes, and a shark rock sliced open the palm of my hand, leaving the dirt crimson. It burned, and I clenched my fist and grunted in pain as I pushed myself up with my other hand. The air was thick and smoky, my legs frail and wobbling like jello, yet I still trudged on, the mud sucking in my bare feet. It seemed to be hours before I got to the light, and to no surprise it was another fire raging across our carcass of a country.

A collection of corpses littered the ground, wide grins plastered across their faces, happiness glinting off their eyes. The reflection of smiles drifted into the sky alongside ash and smoke, swirling round and round as it ascended into the darkness. My nostrils burned at the scent of destruction, a putrid smell that covered Earth like a dome. I coughed into the fire, feeling the heat on the insides of my mouth as I sucked in ash.

A chilly night breeze lowered the flames, pushing them side to side in a fiery dance. The inferno was swept to the left by a long current, just enough for me to see past the wall of fire. Beyond it laid a barren landscape, scorched by insanity, the emptiness emphasized by the brightening moonlight. In that moment, I saw there was no hope left, not for them, not for me, and surely not for our planet that sat idly in the midst of darkness. I realized that the world was in ruin, and I couldn't help but laugh.

Untitled

By Linzee Mitchell, 8th grade, Talbott

Around me, time and reality slows to the second. I can't breathe. I *cannot* breathe.

I imagine an indestructible ship with white sails and polished wood. The air smells of salt. Wind carries mist like a messenger, and the horizon holds half the sun. Vibrant streaks of oranges, pinks, and blues color the sky. The sea is smooth. All is peaceful. The course has already been set for the journey and the ship is sturdy on the sea. I am safe.

The thought brings dark, dangerous clouds. The world turns black like a light has been shut off. The only sources of light are flashes of lightning. Violent wind and sheets of rain pour onto me. I wrap my arms around the mast.

My clothes cling to my skin, fearful of the rain. I can't control the ship any longer. The course I had set for myself and it has been destroyed. I am lost.

Another wave looms over before it crashes onto the deck. My arms are ripped from the mast and I'm dragged over the side. Icy water swallows me whole. Numbness spreads through me. I'm surrounded by darkness where the lightning cannot reach. Where my lungs beg for air. Where my lips form a silent scream and burning salt water spills into my mouth. Screaming is useless. No one will hear. No one can help.

In denial, I try to fight the angry sea. It fights back even harder. I reach for the surface. The water sucks me down deeper.

Where is the white light everyone talks about and how can they talk about it if they're dead when it happens? Here, there isn't a white light. There's a black, endless expanse. An airless expanse.

I

Stop

Fighting.

Untitled

By Anwaar Muhsin, 8th grade, Brentwood

he closed his bedroom door - not once, but twice.
he flipped the light switch - not twice, but three times.
he locked the front door - not three times, but four. walking down the pavement, trying not to step on the cracks was quite hard for him. especially with the constant stares aimed his way.
he wanted to yell, "i can't help it!"
but he knew he wouldn't just utter it once because once is never enough.
he entered a coffee shop, and that's when he saw her.
and no, it wasn't love at first sight.
it was more of a bittersweet love at last sight.
for he knew he would never see the stunning, freckled face ever again. *or so he thought.*
normally he'd get weird glances, but the green eyed beauty smiled at him. it was a tiny smile, but nonetheless, it was a smile.
he felt something warm invade his face; he was blushing.
every morning, when he walked in, he noticed her sitting alone.
and every morning, she sent him A crooked smile.
he found himself finding crooked to be another form of perfect.
days had passed, but he had no nerve to walk up to her.
for momma taught him how to not let someone walk over him.
for momma taught him how to fight the urge of repeating the same sentence more than once.
for momma taught him to not murder the flowers growing inside of him for someone who didn't appreciate the way his special flowers tend to bloom.
but momma never taught him how to talk to a pretty girl.
the girl started to notice his constant stares and decided to sit by him for a change. he couldn't help but notice that he didn't mind that one side of her scarf was longer than the other.
and then they started talking.
the flowers bloomed from there.
they made a garden full of conversations, one sprouting a lily, one sprouting a rose.

he even told her about his OCD and she smiled and told him about her chronic asthma problems.
months passed and slowly, he was forgetting about his obsession with perfection.
they'd meet every day at the coffee shop, but one day, she wasn't there.
there was a note placed where they usually sat.
the redhead beauty stated how she was half way across the world with another man chasing her dream.
i guess he made too many flowers grow in her lungs that she was forgetting how to breathe.
with a teary eyed face, he ran back home.
he locked the front door once.
he flipped the light switch off.
and he slept with bedroom door open.

Evelyn Quinn

By Allie Pearce, 8th grade, Signal Mountain

Part 1

Set in the 1920s

My parents want me to be chained to a brick wall for the rest of my life. A tall brick wall made of gold, with brown hair and shaved sideburns, maybe hazel eyes. “You need to get married.” Those were the words my father has spoken to me since I was 15 years of age. “But not one of them dewdroppers, no. you’re going to marry a man with heavy sugar”, my mother would always respond. It seems that a woman is to live up to courtship, marriage, children, and then force their kids to marry.

A baby-grand sits before me , very thick with a robust structure. He carries an odor of live beef and manure. I can hear him grumble under his breath as if about to let out a monstrous belch, which would fill the entire room with the scent of cabbage.

My parents have left us alone, sitting across from each other in the church corridor. His muddy steal toe boots keep running over my dress covered shins. There is nothing but silence and his absent eyes gazing upon me. My stomach starts to twist rapidly, fists clench shut. Train whistles are leaving my ears. I will no longer be stuck in this rut. “I am Evelynn Quinn, and a man will not define me.” At the moment I did not realize I was screaming at the top of my lungs. People flooded the once closed doors, pouring in like sheep for an afternoon meal. All seemed startled. “What is the trouble”, my mother asks with insincerity. I opened my mouth to speak, but nothing was spoken. “Evelynn, simply tell us what the matter is,” mother repeated. Everyone was still. The stares sent chills that crept down my spine, just to stop at the dimples in my lower back. I could almost feel the indentions getting deeper as if a knife was jabbing into them. My face is flushed a light rosy color, my forehead pulsing. A brick was clogging my airways and pushing a deep pain down my throat. I made my way through the mass of what I used to call ‘family’ and what will soon be a memory.

Willa Introduction

By Erika Skelton, 8th grade, Brentwood

Alexa fidgeted on the edge of her seat. The small room meant to seat the fighters felt like it was closing in on her. No matter how many times she did this, she never got used to the adrenaline shooting through her veins. She focused her eyes on the steel sword that she'd called hers since her thirteenth birthday. Her grip tightened around the flaring cross guard, the circles of metal above and below it providing the base of her hand something to rest on. She heard the yells coming from the arena a mere doorway over. Whether they were yelps of pain or cries of victory, she could not tell. She wondered if it would calm her at all to go see. Probably not. Blood wasn't her favorite thing to look at, whether it be from a human or one of the disgusting monsters they released upon the battlers.

She didn't have too long to think about it anyway, for she soon heard the cheers from the crowd that resounded around the arena; cheers that meant the participant that had yelled before was alive. She was glad. Not that she knew whoever it was that had just fought, but Alexa knew that this meant one more person would survive today, and that was good enough for her.

She looked up from the concrete floor to see the fighter walk in the now open doorway. Panting, the girl looked worn out. Of course she would. She had just taken on at least five monsters at once. Brown hair framed her shining face, her hand still clenched tight around her staff. Mage, then, Alexa speculated. "Hey. Good job out there," she complimented even though she hadn't seen a thing.

"Thanks," the mage said as she fell onto one of the chairs sitting across from Alexa.

The announcer called another person out to the arena—an archer that Alexa could tell by the look on their face wouldn't stand a chance. The brunette sitting across from her dropped her staff carelessly to the floor and put her head in long-fingered hands. Alexa's right hand slipped downwards to stroke the sword resting between her legs with her thumb. Feeling the well cared for edges of the blade that she'd memorized long ago gave her a sense of home. She didn't do well in

silence. She knew that the archer who'd just left would soon be screaming, and she didn't want to hear that. "My name's Alexa." She introduced herself to the mage without a thought about whether or not she wanted to speak.

"Willa," the newly dubbed mage breathed out.

"Nice to meet you, Willa."

"You too."

"So... Willa's a nice name."

"Yeah."

Silence fell between the two once more. The archer shrieked. Of course they did. Alexa had seen enough unsure participants to know which ones wouldn't be prepared for what they had to face. Even now, a couple of weeks after the grand opening, some people who had signed up were only just being introduced to the crowd. Some could find it... overwhelming. Her grip on the sword tightened at the sound of it, her leather gloves protecting her from the sword's sharp side. Desperate to cover up the sound, she blurted out, "Do you mind if we talk? Just to take my mind off... things?"

Willa opened her eyes to look at Alexa. "Uh," she paused, "sure. What do you want to talk about?"

Alexa shrugged. "I don't really care. Just. Something."

The mage nodded, thinking about what to say. "So, you're a warrior?"

"Yeah, two handed."

"Cool. I always thought if I didn't have magic I'd be a warrior."

"Huh," she couldn't think of any more to say on the subject, so instead she asked, "Any siblings?"

"Yeah, a sister. Erica. You?"

"Just me."

"Count yourself lucky."

"Why? Does your sister annoy you?"

"God, no. But if you had a sibling, you might end up with one like me."

In ordinary circumstances, she might have giggled, or maybe chuckled. Perhaps it was the adrenaline, or maybe it was simply the purpose of their conversation, but Alexa ended up laughing a good, hearty laugh that covered up the archer's final scream. In the following

moments of silence, she could hear someone—she had never seen who—dragging the body away from the circle in which they had fought. Once they were gone, the announcer shouted, "And now, introducing another brave battler, Alexa Marigold Copperfield!"

Now Willa was laughing. "Good luck, 'Alexa Marigold Copperfield!"

"Yeah, you'd better wish me luck," she mumbled, picking up her polished sword and cradling it in one arm so it stood vertically as she approached the open gate. The hilt, wrapped with leather to prevent slipping, grasped tightly in her dominant hand.

"Seriously, that sword looks really cool. You'll kill out there."

"Well, I certainly hope so." She smiled at her new acquaintance, took a deep breath, and walked out into the blood-splattered arena.

Mikey's Dead, Pete **By Paige Supeck, 8th grade, Oliver Springs**

Mikey's dead, Pete.
It's like he woke up one morning
He went to his bathroom with a knife
He made it his choice to take his life.

The world only cares when you're dead
Some of them overdose on their own meds
The happy boy we all once knew
He just wanted to see something new
Mikey's dead, Pete.

Mikey's dead, Pete.
It's like we all knew he had a problem
And the next day he's gone
Now the world will only know him for this song

The world only cares when you're dead
Some of them overdose on their own meds
The happy boy we all once knew
He just wanted to see something new
Mikey's dead, Pete.

Mikey's dead, Pete.
Loneliness, hopelessness, and fear
Is there any truth in this?
Was it something that they missed?

The world only cares when you're dead
Some of them overdose on their own meds
The happy boy we all once knew
He just wanted to see something new
Mikey's dead, Pete.

Forever

By Arianna Araya-Derosier, 9th grade, Thomspens Station

I stood stiff;
completely spell bound
by the most beautiful man
that is mine.

Every step he took,
the more I fell in love.
The way his body moved with an elegance,
can't cover the way I make him feel about me.

His hand went to my cheek,
Feeling the chilling frost of his palm sends shivers.
He grinned, showing a little of his razor teeth.
He pulled me closer as he leaned into me.

His snowy lips gently touched mine,
cold and heat combining into passion.
My fingers wrap into his soft hair as his hands travel to my waist.

His lips curl up against mine.
He starts to trail his kisses,
corner of the mouth,
cheek,
chin,
and ending at the neck.

You are eternally mine he whispered.
I felt his fangs sink into me,
and I knew,
I would be eternally his.

Tree Hugger

By Piper Chaussee, 9th grade, Harriman

The mattress can't feel me
The way my body lays
But the wood of this bedframe feels my weight

The rain feels the metal it meets
Every rivet, every man made dent
But the metal doesn't feel the rain upon it

The grass feels each sole that steps down
Every name stamped on the bottom of worn shoes
But the shoes don't feel the subtle sharpness
Of each blade

I feel you and you feel me
And nature feels our eternal peace
But things made by man are unaware of
All these things

And then I think is there anything
Anything not connected to you and me
Anything not a descendant of mother nature

Library

By Ben Chumney, 9th grade, Murfreesboro

The clear glass doors reflect the afternoon sun
And streets lined with local shops,
Cafes, and diners.
Once they open, I'm engulfed
In artificially cold air.
I walk in, smile, nod to the lady
At the front desk.
Stairs, third floor, far left corner.
The notorious smell of old manuscripts
Gently greets my nostrils.
I sit at the round mahogany table
And take out my pen and notebook.
I've never written in a library before.
Where worlds old and established
Surround my drafts of prose and poetry,
Intimidate them.
Where writers' names are held
On high display, rightfully,
After a lifetime of work, or three weeks' worth.
I absent-mindedly long to see myself up there,
But then remember who else is in my place.
I realize my dreams are often so big
They remind me of how insignificant I am.
I close my notebook, walk out the glass doors
To get my third caramel latte of the day.

Perfect

By Caitlyn Cook, 9th grade, Cottontown

Twelve bright flowers
Perfectly arranged,
Perfectly placed
Standing out perfectly against the baby blue wall,
A perfect surprise for the new addition to
Our perfect little family.
Everything was perfect.
The yellow and cream vase perfectly
Complimented the olive tinted table.
His room was all set up,
Toys and teddy bears sat neatly in place,
Bed neatly made,
Everything was truly perfect.
Until the storm hit,
Not so perfect,
But doable.

They'd be fine, just fine.
Everything was fine.
The freshly cut lawn was getting all wet,
But that's fine.
The newly cleaned windows were getting splattered,
But that's fine.
The storm wasn't due today. I don't understand.
I checked and rechecked everything
So it would be perfect for his arrival.
That's okay. Everything's fine.

They should've been here an hour ago,
But that's okay. Maybe there was traffic.
Maybe they're waiting out the storm at the hospital.
Wouldn't they have called though?
No, it's okay. It's all okay.

The cabinets were perfectly stocked with formula and bottles,
Bibs and towels, spoons and bowls, perfectly stacked.
The storm is getting worse. I'm worried.

They should've been home two hours ago,
And I'm worried.
They would've called if there was a change,
And I'm worried.
An ambulance just flew by our house,
And I'm worried for that family
That just got ripped apart.

The flowers are wilted,
And I'm not okay.
The teddy bears are collecting dust,
And I'm not okay.
The formula is expired,
And I'm not okay.
They never made it home,
And I'm not okay.
I never got to see my son,
And it's not okay.

Don't Waste Your Time
By Gabby Covington, 9th grade, Oliver Springs

It's been a long time
And I'm not sad to say
That I let our friendship run down the drain
She's a toxic spill
And I mopped the mess
Put a sign up
And warned the rest
Don't waste your time
She's an interesting stranger
With a manipulative mind
She burns at the touch
But she's a magnetic flame
She acts like she's tough
But she's totally lame
I found at times she's leave my side
Fight with the enemy
She'd cross the territorial lines
She uses lies to masquerade her life
To make herself seem cool
Is the ultimate plan

Preach

By Audrey George, 9th grade, Cumberland City

How many breathes do you have left
to right the wrongs,
your past regrets,
to make amends with every one of them?

I convinced myself I'm
better than what I am
Who am I to teach?
I don't practice what I preach.

The never endings battles you face,
seems as hard to find your place.
Stuck out in the crowd
trying to rise up and break out.

I can convinced myself I'm
better than what I am
Who am I to teach?
I don't practice what I preach.

Story About A Girl (Excerpt)

By Kennedy Musgrave, 9th grade, Nashville

These shrubs of grass are my blue, fuzzy blanket I once used to cover up at night, and the soil underneath my legs is the equivalent of my mattress back at home. And just as I began to cry reminiscing over memories of home, it begins to rain. I tilt my head back looking at the dark, blue sky and watch the rain fall.

I watch as the water burst out of the shower head and hits the floor as steam. I sling my head down and let the water run through my hair, down my face, and onto the floor bringing loose strands of hair down with it. I allow the steam to wash away my day. First with my neck, relieving me of the crook in it from hours spent at school studying while you try your hardest to not cuss out the boy that keeps bumping into your desk because he decides to play 2k with the homework assignment. Onto my lips. My sweet lips. Rinsing away any last traces I have of Tony. Finally, to the rest of my body, getting out the sweat from my pores because I refuse to let anyone beat me in dodge ball. I turn the dial all the way to the right, so that it's stupid hot. I crank my music all the way up to drown out my screaming family downstairs. They're always screaming, usually over my sister, who has "turned to the ways of the devil" as my father says. I personally think she's going through a phase, and it'll take some traumatic experience before she changes, but who knows?

I inhale the fresh fragrance of *Stress Relief*, my favorite.

Legends

By Genevieve Rogers, 9th grade, Sewanee

You are the sky;
You've never seen a boring day,
And I'm the cloud to every silver lining.
You're the silver lining.
You would've hung the moon
If it hadn't been done.
Because you?
You bite off more than you can chew,
And swallow it anyway.
Because when you can't handle something
You handle it anyway.
And I,
I slip between homemade ladder rungs and
Dive into toilet bowls for fun.
Because I'm the kind of person who skips rocks
In the bathtub and wonders
Why they go nowhere.
I'm the kind of person who skips jewels
In the ocean and wonders
Why no one can find them,
Why no one thinks they're worth looking for.
But you?
You skip fireworks
Across the world and wonder
Why they blow people's minds.
I hide my love
In burning houses and wonder
Why everyone leaves.
But you?
You chill everyone you meet.
You're ice cold fire,
People only hear of you in legends.

Untitled

By Starla White, 9th grade, Brush Creek

The night was dark and cold, from what I remember. I couldn't see the sky from the back seat window of our van, but I liked to hope it was littered with stars. Where has Mommy gone? She left us in this parked vehicle to find our daddy. Daddy, when will you come back? Beside me, my older sister was restless. My youngest siblings, only infants, had no worry to their minds, but sister and I knew something was wrong. There is mommy. Mommy is upset. She is screaming and yelling. Why is mommy crying? Sister doesn't know. Daddy is yelling back. Daddy, don't hurt mommy. Please, don't hurt mommy. Who is that woman? Who is that little girl? Mommy and daddy keep yelling and screaming. Please stop screaming. You love each other. Mommies and daddies are supposed to love each other. "Starla," sister said. "Mommy and Daddy don't love each other anymore."

Take A Walk

By Addisyn Bryant, 10th grade, Clarksville

The hole in the sidewalk,
An inconvenience for human feet,
An obstacle to outmaneuver
On a rushed trek to class.
To insects this hole
Is an Abyss.
That landmark that mothers warn their young about,
Where hushed bets are made to walk its edge.
Yes, the insects fear
This natural concave of cement.
Ants travel through minuscule catacombs
In the earth,
Directly under the thunder of
Bipedal steps.
All of these tunnels lead to the Abyss-
That place in the dark part of the forest
Where silence screams and
Light takes its leave;
The place where the fox and the hare meet
To say goodnight.
Spiders lurk in his hole of shadows,
Waiting for the naive
To take Curiosity's dare.
Their fangs glisten,
Much like the evening dew not so far
Above this little world.
Grasshoppers sing the myths of their brethren
As they dance round this chasm of fears.

Harbinger

By Corbin Sprouse, 10th grade, Whites Creek

The grotesque display,
Of the dark figure in the fray,
Surrounded by flames,
All the destruction "He is to blame."
Astride his steed,
Heart like a chalice,
Filled with greed.
Horned helmet, gauntlet of steel
His hollow soul does not feel,
The wind whispers the cry of the fallen
Blowing wishes of the dead long forgotten
He simply extinguishes life
Slinging a scythe
A harbinger of strife.
And then he vanishes
His weapon he still brandishes.

Touched by Darkness

By Dylan Belcher, 11th grade, Hartsville

The sound of their footsteps was the only noise in the damp room. The darkness was held at bay by nothing but the light from a flickering candle. The air was stale, and smelled faintly of dust and mold. Spiders scurried across the floor, abandoning their webs as the two children tore through them. It took all of Saedrin's courage to keep from running. She didn't want to find out what lurked down here in the darkness. Her grip on Sylo's hand tightened as she imagined what could be in the shadows, watching them both.

"Don't worry, there's not much down here but cobwebs and dust. None of this can hurt you," Sylo said to help calm her.

Saedrin didn't believe her older brother for a second. She had heard tales of the catacombs, and none of them made the place sound appealing. This maze of stone corridors was said to be filled with bones, and that it once was the lair of an evil witch. It was said that the dead were biding their time down here in the darkness, waiting for a chance to strike back at the humans that trapped them down here.

The eight year old girl tried to pull away from him. She was almost willing to run back through the darkness if it would allow her to get out of this place. "I'm going to tell mother if you don't let me go!! I won't go down there!!"

Her brother laughed. "Those stories are nothing but just that: stories!! They aren't true! There was no witch that imprisoned an army of wraiths down here!!"

Tears began to travel down Saedrin's cheeks. "I don't want to go any further!" The tears of a child are a powerful thing, and Sylo felt a tinge of pity shoot through him. He let go of Saedrin's hand and smiled at her.

"Alright. You wait here with this," he said as he pulled out a second candle from his satchel. He lit it by touching the wicks of both candles together and handed it to his younger sister. "Stay here and wait for me. I'll be back in a little while." He knew that his sister would still be terrified down here, especially if she was alone, but his curiosity was too strong. He wanted to know what was down here, and this would probably be their only chance. The catacombs would be sealed soon, and his parents would never let anyone near them again. He slowly walked off, and forced

himself not to look back at Saedrin. He knew that if he did, then he would be overwhelmed by guilt.

Saedrin sat in the darkness for only a few minutes before she couldn't take it anymore. She couldn't remember the way that they had come, and because of that she just ran down the hallway. Little did she know that she was heading the wrong way. If it hadn't been so dark and if she hadn't been so afraid then she probably wouldn't have made that mistake, but as the cruel thing known as fate would have it, she did.

The hallway was lined with bones on either side, stacked against the wall like bricks. Skulls grinned at her, as if they were welcoming her to her new home. She wanted to call her brother's name and beg him to come find her, but she was afraid to shout down here. If she made any loud noises then they would alert all the creatures that were out there, and it might bring more than just her brother to her. Any monster that lurked in the shadows could be drawn to it, and that thought terrified her.

She continued to wander through the maze in silence, too frightened to even speak. The girl didn't know where she was going, but she prayed that she could find a way out. She turned a corner and found herself staring into a room that was filled with tables and bookshelves. Countless scrolls and books were stacked on the floor, and containers filled the space on the shelves. Jars that contained organs sat alongside bleached human bones, and wooden boxes sat beside bottles of strange liquids she had never seen before. Some of the fluids were purple or red, while others were green or blue. They clearly weren't water, but what they were isn't clear.

In the center of the room sat a black cauldron. Pictures of demonic faces were carved into its surface, and they stared out at the world from that cold metal. They were shown snarling, as though they were hungry beasts that were waiting for prey to arrive. A scary thought entered Saedrin's mind, and she wondered for a moment if the real things were down here. She began praying to every deity that she had ever heard of before, and then she left the room quickly. She began to walk down the hallway again, and prayed that she would find her brother or an exit before something found her.

An icy voice suddenly pierced the silence. "Child, free us from this prison. Release us and we shall serve you."

Saedrin thought that she felt her blood turning into ice.

“Do not be afraid, child. We won’t hurt you. Just set us free, and we will serve you.”

The girl wanted to turn and run, but her body refused to cooperate. She crept towards the source of the voices, shivers going down her spine as she heard each syllable. It was as though a string was attached to her, and some unseen creature was pulling it. Her feet seemed to move on their own accord, and despite the fact that every one of her instincts said to run away, her body did not appear to be able to.

She went down a dark corridor that was filled with more spider webs. The sticky threads stuck to her, and she felt as though she was being ensnared. Her feet carried her further into the darkness, taking her past stone carving of skeletons and figures in robes. The hallway began to slant downward, and she went farther and farther beneath the ground.

She came to an iron door, which had the image of a large skull carved into it. The voices were much louder now, and each word they spoke seemed to make the air grow colder. Her hand disobeyed her common sense, and turned the handle on the door.

The iron door opened to reveal a room that was lit by a glowing gem that had been put into the floor like a tile. Its light was what revealed the horror on the far wall. A row of metal bars stretched from the floor to the ceiling, with only a few inches in between each bar. A small door that was adorned with iron spikes seemed to be the only way in or out of whatever was beyond it.

Then a figure stepped out of the shadows. It reached a gloved hand through the bars and spoke to her. “Free us child. We have been here for centuries, and we will serve whoever lets us out.”

Saedrin stared at it. Her eyes were wide with terror. She wasn’t sure what it was, but she was certain that it wasn’t human. It was dressed entirely in black, with dark robes and gloves covering every inch of its body but its face. But where said face should have been, was nothing but darkness.

The creature laughed. “I can sense your fear child. Don’t be afraid, we won’t hurt you. Besides, you’ll need us to protect you from the guardian of this place.”

A second voice grunted in agreement. “The fool must have gotten use to there being no intruders. But it won’t be long until he starts coming after you. He’ll kill you and continue guarding everything that his mistress ordered him too.”

Saedrin stepped back. She had to get out of there. Even if this guardian wasn't real, she didn't want to be around those creatures, no matter what they were. As she turned to run, she found herself facing a man with eyes that were as white as marble, and had no irises whatsoever. His pale skin was so tight against his bones that it looked like he had almost no muscle at all. His face looked like the skull beneath it, and his grinning mouth was filled with sharp teeth.

"It's so kind of you to come down here," the beast said. "I've been bored for so long."

Saedrin screamed.

Her body was too afraid to even move, and she stood there as the beast's mouth got closer to her neck. It was going to rip out her throat, and she was too scared to stop it. Then a rock slammed into the side of the monster's face, and the sound snapped her out of it. As the beast crashed to the floor, she looked to the right to see her brother standing there. The girl ran before the beast had a chance to get up. She fled back the way she had come, and the force that had pulled her there no longer seemed to have an effect. The two siblings fled back through the darkness, and it wasn't long before they heard the creature chasing after them.

Sylo glanced back over his shoulder to see how close the monster was, and this caused him to trip over one of the bones on the floor. His sister stopped and turned to help him up, but the beast got to him before she did. It ripped the boy's neck open with its teeth, and fatally wounded him. Then the monster's attention went to her, and the girl took a step back. Her foot landed on a group of bones that caused her to lose her footing. She fell to the ground, with her hands on the floor behind her. Her left hand felt suddenly felt a necklace among the dust, and the monster began to charge towards her.

Saedrin would never know why she did what she did next. She took hold of the necklace, and thrust it towards the monster. The green emerald pendant on it gleamed, and the monster howled in agony. It turned and ran from her as though it was fleeing from the grim reaper himself.

Visions of a witch performing magic filled her mind for several seconds. The final vision showed the witch grabbing onto the face of an enemy. "Remierdo," she shouted, and the man's skin began to peel off. His flesh seemed to dissolve until there was nothing but bones left. The witch looked as though someone had knocked the breath out of her, and she suddenly looked exhausted. Almost as suddenly as they came, the visions

disappeared, and Saedrin came back to the present. The young princess crawled over to her brother, and she began to cry.

Saedrin wore a white dress of fine lace and silk. The gardens around her had been decorated with banners and ribbons. Strands of white flowers decorated the trees, and tables covered in food and refreshments were everywhere. The kingdom was showing off its wealth for this wedding, and it was quite obvious why. It was to give people an idea of the combined riches of Seldor and Istar. Silver plates and goblets were available for everyone, and all the eating utensils were also made of genuine silver. The wines and cordials were the best that the cellar had to offer, and the food was all delicious.

This wedding would unite the two kingdoms together. It had been arranged that Saedrin would marry Vroedrick, the prince of (), and this would cement their union firmly. The lands would combine, and pool their territory, riches, and armies together. None of their neighbors would be foolish enough to take them on now.

The marriage may have been arranged, but Saedrin had met the prince before. She had feelings for him, and she felt that maybe they were both meant to be. She liked the prince, and she was confident that they could come to love each other.

Saedrin smiled. 'Today will be a good day,' she thought as she walked towards the platform on which she was to be wed. The couple said their vows, and each gave the other a silver bracelet. These were to symbolize their marriage, and their connection to each other. When it came time for Vroedrick to make a speech, he smiled at the crowd. "Today, the sun is witnessing the birth of a new age. Two great kingdoms have been brought together, and now both of us will share our land, resources, and wealth. Every acre of this new kingdom, from the Elteran forest to the Vengard Mountains, belongs to all of us!! So now, we should celebrate more than just this marriage. Let's celebrate our bright future also!"

Saedrin smiled as the crowds burst into applause. They responded to this speech with shouts of approval and energetic cheers. The boy that was now her husband took her hand in his and intertwined their fingers. The two were wed now, and their kingdoms were one.

The celebrations were amazing. People sang and danced, while others ate and drank until they were full. Saedrin and Vroedrick took part in this, and the princess enjoyed herself immensely. Before the night was

over, she and husband drank wine from each other's glass, Vroedrick held her glass as watched her drink from his, smiling while he did so. "I think that this has been a wonderful day," he said.

The day after the wedding, the princess decided to take a stroll through the gardens. She walked out into the sunlight and breathed in the scent of the flowers. Then she noticed something. There was a female trimming the rosebushes, and Saedrin didn't know her. She was surprised to find a servant she didn't recognize there and she was curious about who this person was. She cleared her throat before speaking. "Who are you exactly?"

The female servant turned around. "I'm Tarah. I was the person who trimmed the roses back in (), and Vroedrick brought me here with him."

Saedrin frowned. "He brought someone who only trims the roses?"

The servant girl smiled at her. "I'm the only one who is trusted with the rosebushes. Everyone says that I have a good eye for that particular flower."

Saedrin couldn't help but agree. She wasn't quite sure what it was, but there seemed to be something about the way the flowers had been cut. "What is it that you do?"

Tarah shrugged. "Each flower is different, as if they had their own personality. They're sort of like people that way. I can sort of understand them and trim them accordingly."

The princess wasn't sure if he was serious or not, so she just kept silent.

Tarah stopped trimming for a moment. "You're a bit like rose milady. Your petals were once white, but the loss of your brother tainted their color a bit. You should be okay though, as long as you don't allow anything to taint you further."

Saedrin frowned at the servants riddles, and wondered what the other girl was trying to say. As she wondered this, Tarah moved on to the next rose bush and began trimming it as well.

Years passed, and it during that time, both Saedrin and Vroedrick's parents all died. Saedrin became queen, and her husband became the king. So five years after the wedding, the married couple became the rulers. Or rather, the groom became the ruler. He became a bit more distant, but Saedrin decided it was just the fact that he had more responsibilities now. She convinced herself of that until one day around three years after her husband's coronation.

She spotted Vroedrick in the courtyard with Halina, the servant. A grin broke out across the queen's face and she was about to go down there and join them. But then she saw her husband take the other girl in his arms. She saw him run his hands over her body. She saw him capture the other girl's lips with his own. Saedrin continued to stare out the window, unable to move a muscle. She had to be seeing things. There was no way that this was real.

"Oh no," a voice said to her right.

She looked to see a boy named Malroe, who looked as though a secret he had been hiding had just been revealed. The queen knew then. She knew that this was not a first time thing. She knew that the servants had been keeping it a secret from her for some time, and she knew that her husband hadn't kept his vows.

"How long?"

"What?"

"How long has he been doing this? How long has he been unfaithful?"

The servant flinched. "Since a few months after your wedding."

Saedrin felt a tear roll down her cheek. She turned her back to the window. "Is Halina the only one?"

The servant shook his head slowly. "No. She's far from the only one."

Saedrin clenched her fists tightly. "That bastard," she whispered before storming back to her chambers.

Weeks passed and Saedrin still felt angry towards her husband. He had broken the vows they made, and he had treated her like a fool. He had committed his infidelity inside the palace, as though his wife was too stupid to ever find out. This just added salt to the injury, and Saedrin had never felt so angry before. But now she had a speck of hope, and it came in the form of something that both she and her husband had made. She smiled down at her stomach and placed a hand over it. Maybe this would make her husband stay faithful she had thought. But only a few hours after she had told him the news, Malroe reported that Vroedrick had taken another woman into a room and locked the door. He also said that the woman came out looking disheveled.

The servant hadn't wanted to tell the queen this, but she had threatened to have him removed from the palace staff if he kept anything about her husband from her again. So Saedrin waited. Maybe once the

child was born he would finally be faithful to her. Maybe he would feel an obligation once he saw the infant.

So after months of waiting, Saedrin gave birth to a young daughter. The queen was disappointed when her husband failed to discontinue his hobbies, so she chose to focus on her child instead. She named the girl Tira, and from that day one, she did her best to take care of her.

Nine months after the baby was born, Vroedrick decided to go to the city of Rieno. He asked Saedrin to come too, and the queen simply agreed. She took her young daughter with her, an action that she would come to regret. She had known that a virus had broken out in a village near the city, but there had only been one death so far, so she hadn't been worried. If she had known what she found out later, then she would have been. After the family returned to the castle, Tira fell ill. It was quickly discovered that she had caught the virus that had been in Rieno, and the best doctor in the kingdom was called to help her.

The princess began to lose the fight against the virus, and one day, the fight ended. On that day, Saedrin was sitting outside the small room that her daughter was in. She was disgusted with herself, and she remembered how a servant had once compared her to a rose. She now realized how right the servant had been. She truly was like a rose. They are held in place by the soil, and are forbidden from going anywhere. If they try to reach outward then they are punished by the gardeners, who trim away every bit of the bush that they consider too long. Any part of the plant that is considered unhealthy is either forced to change or be cut off.

She shouldn't have let her husband take her on that trip. She had heard that there was a virus going around in that city, but she had ignored her instincts. It was because of her that her daughter was sick, all because she had been too weak to make a stand against Vroedrick.

Her train of thought was interrupted as the doctor emerged, and his expression suggested that he didn't have good news. He bowed his head. "I'm sorry my queen. I tried to save her, but the fever was too strong. I've failed in my duties to the royal family, and for that I'm sorry."

The queen stared at the doctor in horror. "Y-you're joking right? It's in poor taste."

The man shook his head. "I wish I were joking. There's nothing that I hate more than telling someone that they've just lost their child."

The woman shook her head. "You must have made a mistake. I want to see her."

The doctor gestured to the doorway. "You have every right to see her. I'm so sorry that this happened. I'm so sorry that I couldn't save her."

The queen entered the room and the doctor followed. Tira was lying on the bed, and her body was motionless.

Saedrin knelt by the body of her daughter. "No. I've lost too many people already... I can't have lost her too." She took the infant's hand and held it tightly. "You-you were-"she broke down and tears began to make their way down the sides of her face. She released the infant's hand and wrapped her arms around the corpse of her daughter. "No," she sobbed. "No."

Saedrin had lost her brother, her father, and her mother: and now her daughter had been added to the list.

Her coffin was made of solid gold, and it was adorned with countless rubies. The insides of it were expensive silk, and upon this fabric, Tira was laid to rest. She was buried in the courtyards and a gravestone of marble was placed over her. The entire kingdom mourned the loss of their princess, and even those who didn't care tried to put on a façade of grief.

Vroedrick was probably the one with the best act. He paid for the funeral and did a very good job of pretending to mourn. He had cried when his daughter was put into the ground, and he pretended to comfort Saedrin. He announced that a large feast would be held, and that this occasion was meant so that they could all cherish the memories of his daughter together.

But his queen was not fooled for a second. She didn't believe he could have suddenly grown a heart, and this is why she confronted him about it when they were alone. Saedrin clenched her fists. "You don't even care that our daughter is dead do you? The only women you seem to be worried about are the ones that you can forget after you spend one night with them!"

Vroedrick narrowed his eyes. "Don't you dare take that tone with me! I'm your husband!!"

"Well I'm your wife, but that never stopped you from using other women to warm your bed! I hoped that you would stop if I got pregnant, but when I finally did, you just kept on as if nothing was different! I still hoped you might change when the child was born, but then you practically

turned your back on it because you found out that she wasn't a boy! You had nearly a year to show some sign of affection towards her but I never saw one!! What makes you think that you can do something for her now that she's dead when you never did anything for her when she was alive?"

Her husband slapped her across the face and then knocked her into the wall. He continued hitting her until he was out of breath. He turned away from her and stormed out of the room.

Saedrin sank lower until she was crouched on the floor. She felt the floodgates of her mind open, and her emotions came pouring forth. She wept over the cold way her husband treated her, over the dreams she had lost, over the bleak future that seemed to stare at her. She had hoped to find love in her marriage, but instead she found misery. The bracelet she wore to symbolize her marriage might as well have been a chain. She would never be able to find true love, and her heart would never feel anything but pain.

She had fancied her husband once, but now she hated him. He hadn't even stayed faithful to her, while Saedrin had never even considered performing acts of unfaithfulness. She had given him her heart, her fidelity, and her trust, yet all these things meant nothing to him. She had been like a frog swimming in boiling water. Just as a frog will swim happily, not even noticing that the water is boiling, she had been in her marriage without realizing what it was doing to her. She cried until she could cry no longer. Her hands wiped away her tears and then clenched into fists.

She thought back to the monster that had taken her brother from her. She remembered its cold marble eyes, and its body that had looked like nothing but skin and bones.

She should have died that day too. Her life should have ended inside that stone maze, and her bones should have rested with the others massed down there.

Surviving had been a mistake. She should have met her death at the guardian's fangs. She shouldn't have walked out of that place alive.

"I can fix that now," she whispered to herself. She pointed at the door's heavy iron lock, and muttered a spell. When it opened, she stepped into the darkness unhesitatingly. She closed the door behind her, and then began walking. The sound of her footsteps was the only noise she heard, and the shadows were kept at bay by nothing but the light of a flickering candle. The place was just as it was seventeen years ago. If she hadn't

known better, she would have thought that nothing was down here. She wandered down the dark hallways, until she heard a faint noise behind her.

The queen grinned lightly. "I know it's you. Don't worry; I swear on my soul that I don't have the pendant. I won't even run away."

She turned and, as she had expected, came to face the monster that had killed her brother. Its skin was still deathly pale, and it still seemed to have almost no muscle.

"I'm glad that you came down here like this," the monster choked out. "Just because I don't need to eat to survive doesn't mean I don't get hungry." He punched the woman and knocked her to the floor.

The beast knelt down beside her. "Death is what you desire, and I shall gladly give it to you. I'll rip out your throat, just like I did to that boy."

This statement filled Saedrin with rage. An incredible surge of anger flowed through her body, and for a moment, all of her plans of suicide were forgotten. She punched the monster as hard as she could and then she pressed her other hand to its face. She remembered the vision that she had seen all those years ago, and she shouted the word that the witch had said. "Remierdo!"

The beast howled in agony, and its skin began to peel off. "What have you done," the creature shouted as more and more of its bones were revealed. It began to gurgle as the muscles in its throat dissolved and then it fell onto its side.

"That's for my brother," Saedrin spat.

That was when the first wave of pain shot through her. It felt like the force of a punch, and if she hadn't already been on the floor then she would have fallen down. Her vision went dark and her breathing stopped. The spell had used up so much of her energy that it had killed her.

She found herself in front of a massive gateway with wide open doors. The gate was in the shape of arch, and the doors inside it were made of dark stone. Two metal bowls were beside it, one on either side. A golden fire burned in each of them, and cast a warm glow over the doorway.

Saedrin realized what it was. This was the entrance to one of the corridors of Mirvildur, the paths between the worlds of the living and the dead. She stared at the gateway for a moment, as other ghosts shuffled by her. She wondered how long it would take for her to find her brother, and how many souls were waiting to greet her on the other side.

“Don’t go in there,” a hoarse voice said.

Saedrin turned to face the soul of an old man. His spirit must have looked like his body had in death, because his throat looked as though it had been torn open and blood seemed to be flowing down his gray robes. The spirit cleared his throat, which wasn’t necessary as he had no real throat to clear. “You defeated my brother, the one who killed me. I wanted to free the wraiths that were in the catacombs, but I failed to get past him. I’ve waited for hundreds of years for someone to defeat him, and I was afraid that whoever succeeded would take a long time to die afterwards. I am thankful you died so quickly.” He coughed, once again, unnecessarily. “I’ve stayed out of the underworld for a reason. I’ve been waiting for whoever manages to kill my brother to come here, and that person is you. I’ve been massing knowledge about magic, getting secrets from the souls of every witch and wizard that I could. I’ve been gathering it all in the hopes that I would meet someone to give it to.”

“You mean you want to give it to me? I’m dead; it won’t do me any good!!!!”

The spirit of the old wizard smiled. “That may be true, but that can be remedied. Your heart may have stopped beating, but it can be started again. If that happened, you would need to create a potion that will get rid of all the emotions that are hurting you. It would do away with your grief, sorrow, and heartbreak.”

Saedrin stared at him in shock. “How did you know...?”

“I have seen everything that has gone on in the catacombs since my death. You didn’t fight back against the beast until the end, which suggests that you wanted to die. The only reason that someone would commit suicide is emotional pain. Guilt, grief, sorrow; it doesn’t matter how different these things are, they are still emotions. You will need to get rid of all those worthless feelings, but it will require you to lose the ability to feel love and sympathy. The potion that will do all this for you is called the elixir of the dark heart, and it will wrap your soul in armor. Misery will become a stranger to you, and it will never bother you again.”

The woman hesitated. “There is nothing for me among the living. In the world of the dead, my parents, brother, and daughter are all waiting for me. Why would I even consider not going beyond that gate?”

The old man’s spirit smiled. “Because you know as well as I do that you haven’t lived yet. The thing you called your life was filled to the brim with pain, and everything that brought relief was taken away from you. The

humans that you lived with contributed to your pain, and they never did anything to stop it. Your husband was a lover only in name, and if you don't return to the world of the living, then you'll never get to punish him for all the things he did to you. It may be a cruel world out there, but rewards can be reaped by those that earn them. If you go back, then you take vengeance on your husband. You'll be able to take everything from him, and then you can claim it for yourself. When you were alive you were only regarded as possession. You've always wanted to have a purpose in life, yet you always lived without one. That can change, and all you have to do, is take my hand."

Saedrin clenched her fists. She thought of the man that she had married, and her soul filled with hate. She had always been something to be owned, but the spirit before her was offering her a chance to change that.

She reached out and took his hand.

Images suddenly shot through her mind, and she saw wizards and witches using magic. She saw them making potions, she saw them casting spells. She saw them commanding ghosts, and she saw them... coming back from the dead.

She suddenly knew things she had never known before. She knew how to perform spells that she had never heard of before. She knew how to create potions that she had never seen made. She knew how to do things that normal humans could only dream of. She knew...

Her eyes snapped open, and her heartbeat resumed. She was back inside her body. The emotions that weighed down her heart hadn't felt so heavy while she was a spirit, and now that she was back, they almost felt overwhelming. She thought back to the ghost that had sent her back, and she remembered what he had told her. He had given her memories from hundreds of wizards and witches, and told her the name of a potion that would get rid of the burden she was carrying. The elixir of the dark heart.

The knowledge the old man had given her contained all the information she needed to make it. It told her everything she needed to know, and much, much more. She stood up and began walking towards the room that held the cauldron. She had a potion to make, and then, she would wreak her vengeance on those that earned it. She reached it quickly, and went over to the black pot in the center. Saedrin put a hand on the cauldron. "Azarde." Fire appeared beneath it, and the air inside the

cauldron seemed to turn into water. It was time to begin. She took a dried human heart out of a box and threw it into the cauldron. Red sparks bounced out of the water, sort of like how embers jump out of a fire when a log is thrown onto it. Saedrin grinned and then she tossed in a handful of white powder that had been made from grinding bones. The water seemed to hiss as the magic reacted inside it.

Several more ingredients followed, and then she began to stir it with the long metal spoon. She chanted the spell as she stirred it, and each syllable seemed to send a current of energy through the air. The water began to turn red as the reaction neared completion. It darkened until it was the same color as blood.

Saedrin spoke the final words of the spell, and the potion glowed crimson. It burned as bright as the sun for a moment, and then the light receded. Saedrin stared at the completed potion. "It's done. The elixir of the dark heart is ready," she muttered to herself. She took a cup and dipped it into the cauldron.

The queen raised it to her lips and drank the liquid inside it. She waited for a few moments, and frowned when nothing happened. A sudden pain shot through her, and it felt like something was trying to rip her heart out of her chest. She fell to her knees as the potion took effect, and all her thoughts were replaced by agony. She knelt there on the floor, enduring more physical pain than she had ever felt before in her life. It was more excruciating than anything she had ever felt before.

After several minutes, the pain finally subsided. When it did, Saedrin immediately realized something. All her grief and sorrow was gone. Her heart was devoid of those useless emotions, which meant that it had worked. A wicked smile slowly spread across her face and then she burst into laughter. Her heart was nothing more than an organ that pumped blood. She didn't have to feel guilt or heartbreak ever again. The sound of her laughter echoed off the walls, and all the spiders began to scurry away, as though they sensed that they needed to flee.

Meanwhile, Vroedrick and the servants were getting ready for the feast, but there was no way that they would be ready for all that was going to happen.

Saedrin followed the whispers just as she had done all those years ago. This time she was not afraid of them. This time she was a true witch, and if the offer still stood, then she would be the master of the wraiths. She

knew now what she hadn't known then. These wraiths were spirits of people who had been entombed in the catacombs, and they had once terrorized the land around them. They were imprisoned by a powerful witch, who made this underground maze her lair. She created a monster to guard the prison, so that the wraiths would never be freed. To further ensure that no one would ever succeed in releasing the wraiths from their prison, the witch cast a spell on the prison so that people would be drawn to it. And that the monster could just wait nearby to slay them before they had a chance to open the door.

But all these efforts had not stopped her. The guardian was dead, but Saedrin was not. She came to the iron door and this time she didn't hesitate to grip the handle. The ancient door opened to reveal the same scene that it had before. The metal bars still stood, spanning the distance between the floor and the ceiling. The white gem still cast its pale light, as it had for centuries.

Saedrin entered the room and walked over to the metal bars. She stopped a few feet from them before speaking. "This room hasn't changed since the last time I was here. So tell me, is the offer you made to me earlier still the same?"

The whispers all ceased. Then a single voice came from the darkness. "You are different now than you were then. Even without light I would be able to see that." A figure stepped out of the shadows, clad in dark robes and armor. "My warriors and I have been trapped down here for hundreds of years, starving for human souls. We want to return to the world above and satisfy our hunger. Free us and we shall serve you and you alone."

Saedrin smiled wickedly. "Then," she said as she shoved the key into the lock, "I'm going to give you freedom. I release you so that you will return to the surface, and do my bidding!"

The lock began to emit orange light, as though it had become an ember. It grew brighter and brighter until Saedrin and the wraiths had to look away. The metal door exploded, sending metal fragments in every direction. Several of the shards grazed the queen's skin, but she didn't even flinch as they did so. She had freed the wraiths that had been trapped beneath the castle for nearly four hundred years, and she was about to release them on the world above.

The feast had already begun when the woman made her entrance. She was dressed in black, with a veil over her face. She walked over to the table at which Vroedrick sat, and bowed her head.

Vroedrick forced himself to smile at his wife. "Why are you so late to arrive here darling? We've been waiting for you nearly half an hour!"

The woman just bowed her head. "I'm sorry," she whispered in a low voice.

The king's eyes widened. "You're not Saedrin!! Her voice doesn't sound like that!!"

The female servant who had poured his wine slapped him across the face. "It's amazing that you know what my voice sounds like, yet you never cared about the things I said with it. I swore to stay faithful to you, and I kept that oath. I told off anyone who made advancements on me, and I told them that I wouldn't cheat on my husband. But you had no such values! You chased after every female with a pretty face, and I despise you for that!!" She clapped her hands. "I used to think that those who did well were rewarded, but all my life I've been given nothing but misery. Now, I know that a heart is nothing but a burden, one that I would rather not bear. After all, if I have to feel guilty about what I'm going to do, then tonight won't be as much fun!" She tore off the necklace she was wearing and her body began to change. A few seconds later, Saedrin stood where the servant had been. She wore a dress of red silk, and a crimson rose was in her hair.

Her husband gaped. "I-impossible! What-""His eyes went back to the women with the veil, who the female began to laugh. "Who the hell are you? What is this witchcraft?!!"

Saedrin snorted. "This necklace is magical. All one has to do is take a single drop of blood from any person and then put it inside the locket. After the blood is inside it, the wearer can take on the form of the person the blood came from." She smiled wickedly. "I've always been a witch, but now I'm taking advantage of that fact. I intend to repay you for everything you did to me."

Vroedrick leapt to his feet. "Guards, kill her!! She's nothing but a monster!!"

Saedrin laughed. "You think your guards will save you?"

The woman who had pretended to be Saedrin threw off her veil... to show that nothing but shadows were under it. "I will not let you hurt our liberator, and none of your soldiers can kill me."

The King stared in complete horror. “A wraith... no, they don’t exist. You’re nothing but an illusion!!”

The wraith drew a knife from the folds of the dress. “I am quite real, as are your ‘guards.’”

“What do you mean-.” He went silent as nearly ten of the guards removed their helmets to reveal that nothing but darkness was there.

Saedrin walked over to her husband and put a hand on his shoulder. “It’s true that light from the sun or moon will kill them if they are exposed to it, but the torchlight in this room will be fine. What it all boils down to is this, I have two hundred wraiths at my command while you have less than twenty human soldiers.” She nodded at one of the wraiths, and it made an inhuman shriek.

Almost everyone who heard it felt terror fill their bodies, and they fell to the ground with their hands covering their ears. Soldiers dropped their weapons as they too tried to block out the wraith’s cry. Saedrin was unaffected by it though. She simply laughed as the doors of the hall were opened and over one hundred wraiths came pouring in. They were starving for human souls, and they did not have a fragile body like the morsels before them. Vroedrick, who apparently was not affected by the wraith’s shriek either, leapt up from his seat and tried to escape. Saedrin pulled out bottle containing an odd purple liquid and threw it at him.

The weak glass shattered against his back, and the bottle’s contents were spilled all over him. Vroedrick suddenly found himself unable to move and he collapsed to the floor. His wife strolled over and knelt down beside him. She seemed to take no notice of the massacre that was taking place around them.

“It’s amazing how fast that particular potion does its work. It paralyzes the body of whoever comes into direct contact with it, even if they don’t ingest it. Right now, you are unable to use your limbs, and are completely helpless.” She pressed her hand to his forehead. “This is a spell that I’ve been dying to use on you. You deserve to die, and I promise that it will not be quick.” She muttered several magic words and then her husband began to scream in agony. “This spell is going to slowly turn your blood into acid. It’s not going to kill you for at least an hour, so please, feel free to scream as your veins are eaten away.” She stood up and began to savor that moment.

“Now I am the ruler,” she said to herself. “I control everything that I stole from my husband. I took back my own fate, and now, no one will take it back.”

The wraith lord bowed. “Long live Saedrin, the Scarlet Queen.”

The title made her smile. It described the blood that had been spilled on her order, and the blood of all who would dare to go against her. Her heart was nearly useless now. It felt no emotion, and its only purpose was to keep blood moving through her veins. She was no longer innocent, for not only had she been touched by darkness, but she had been consumed by it as well.

She walked towards the throne that sat at the head of the room, stepping across corpses as she did so. The queen ascended the stairs that led to it and ran a hand across the golden seat. Saedrin sat down on the throne, and smiled as if she could feel the authority the seat gave her. She gazed at all the bodies strode across the floor, and smiled cruelly. The ruler of the country was dead, and so were hundreds of other nobles. There would be no more councils that made laws and important decisions. There would be no officials that limited the power of the monarch. There would be nothing but Saedrin, the Scarlet Queen.

Seas of Chrystal and Ice

By Alexis deBoer, 11th grade, Knoxville

Nervously I hover next to the bar, glancing over at the balcony and fingering the pair of rings in my pocket. The bartender, Hope, passes two glasses of an electric blue drink my way. "Go get her," she laughs, knowing all too well how close I am to running out the door and grabbing the first ship off of Titan. My glare only makes her laugh harder and shoo me out the door.

Stomach twisted in knots, I step out onto the balcony overlooking the plaza, and there she is. Her eyes are lit and she practically glows as she leans out against the balcony railing, craning her neck to catch a glimpse of the highest fireworks. Her obvious excitement startles a laugh out of me.

"How can you be so excited over these little fireworks, Vanille," I asked, amused, "These are just the test rounds."

"Hide!" She cries, spinning around and wrapping her arms around me, "I thought you'd miss them!"

"Miss our first New Years together?" I reply, my voice incredulous, "Not a chance."

"The bartender told me you were nervous about tonight for some reason," Vanille murmurs into my shoulder, "And what do you mean these are the small ones?"

Sliding out of her embrace I hand Vanille her drink and lead her back to the railing, mentally cursing Hope. I point out past the plaza full of balloons and carnival food to the Shangri La Sea, one of Titan's three major bodies of water covered by a thick layer of crystal like ice, frozen year long and always. The far left corner of the horizon is permanently occupied by mother Saturn, but slightly to the right the sun can be seen setting through the golden haze of our sky.

"Here it comes!" I call as the sun touches the horizon. A cascade of fireworks rockets up from beyond the plaza, illuminating our golden sky with a rainbow of color. Vanille's face is the picture of joy as emerald gives way to violet and crimson and I find that I can't take my eyes off of her.

Together we light a lantern, make a wish, and let it float away to join the others rising from the plaza and I grin up into the golden night and reach into my pocket for the rings.

Amongst the crackle of fireworks and laughter the shatter of a single glass should be barely audible, but instead it echoes off the inside of my skull banishing every other sound to background noise. Slowly, I turn my head to the right in search of Vanille's smiling face. I find it frozen solid.

A strangled scream rips from my throat as I try to pull away, her fingers still wrapped around mine, but now hard as a rock. Her heating implants glow a sickly yellow, casting haunting shadows across her face, the signal for systems failure.

From the bar behind me comes a sudden scrabbling noise and I whirl, pulling my hand free of her icy grasp at last. The bartender sags against the doorway her eyes wide but thankfully still unfrozen.

"Hide..." she barely breathes, "what...what is this?"

That's when I notice that the crack of fireworks has stopped, along with any trace of laughter. I follow her line of sight, and then immediately wish that I hadn't. All across the plaza are flashing yellow lights, Bodies frozen as they munch on cotton candy or gape in awe at an empty sky. The only sound on the icy plane is the wind whistling across the Shangri La Sea, guiding the balloons full of our wishes out across the frozen water.

Untitled

By Andrew Hurst, 11th grade, Murfreesboro

An afternoon haze, a wet summer heat
Ushered in by the setting sun
The waning light calls out mosquitos
Their greedy mouths drive the children inside
Appearance betrays its true content,
Dead, brown leaves mask the mud,
But the sounds made, of tiny feet
A crunch, a squish, a wayward screech,
Songs of cicadas and frogs compete
It's all so alive
The walk to the house, where the cars park
Is loose gravel framed by wood
We'd take the pebbles and throw them to the streets, the Trace
But the driveway's well of stones never runs dry
Our aim was never malicious,
The rocks cast never hit cars,
Nor pets, or bikers
We just wanted to see how far they'd fly
To the right of the house then,
If you were to approach the house,
There's a thicket of bamboo
It's the only place I've ever seen it in the state,
But it was never odd, or out of place
Just there
This was the backyard, where automobiles rested,
Where people played,
Where mothers and cousins, siblings and grandparents gather,
Friends and orange cats and mama raccoons there
In the front were trees, mostly bare with bark and leaves
Sticks and remains scattered atop the moist earth
It was for strangers to get off Coffee Street and walk the worn red brick,
For decaying benches and mailboxes
But it was home
It will always be home.

Untitled

By Rainna Stapelfeldt, 11th grade, Nashville

You can find me
In shades of deep blues and purple
Concealed
Under mountains of records sung
In sweet repetition
Look for pieces of me
In a city of dreams
In a city that never sleeps
Fragments of my soul left
In every pen and
Every book with tattered pages
Dare to dive into the cosmic ocean
Discover the magnitude of what lies below
Below lies where my heart can be found
Under the sand
One with the water
Imagine me in every skyline
Left in every glimpse of light
Slicing the night
With a sword of illumination
Encounter my spirit
As you walk by
A woman who sings sweet melodies
In everything different
Aged
Or new
Find a glimpse of who
I have come to be.

Practice Room B

By Myranda Uselton, 11th grade, Spring Hill

Practice is to look over at the frustrated face
in the room beside mine
or be soothed by the monotonous clicking of metronome time,
to know that music molds us, for one instance,
into a single entity
fed by long tones and sustained with syncopation,
to serve a higher power of sound, hoping
to reach the ears of God
and perhaps graze the gates of heaven,
to leave and know that something was accomplished,
something molded, something learned,
that I am changed and he is changed,
and the world is whole again.

Heterochroma

By Kelsey Bowen, 12th grade, Memphis

My father is a fortified man
With dark verdant eyes
That shame the forest moss
That burn harsh and cold
Seeing through deception
Hones, stern, but fair

My mother is a gentle woman
With soft cerulean eyes
That transcend the clearest sea
That glow bright and warm
Always saying the right thing
Tolerant, caring, but unwavering

And I was born with that azure gaze
Though mine is not the same
On half my left eye
A drop of my father's jade
And so I see the world
As an even balance
Through both my parents' eyes.

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The writing included in this anthology is the result of one week at the Tennessee Young Writers' Workshop and may therefore still be works in progress or excerpts.

The Tennessee Young Writers' Workshop is a seven-day residential writing workshop providing 8th-12th graders the opportunity to explore the craft of creative writing, learning from the region's foremost writers.

The TYWW is a program of Humanities Tennessee. For more information visit www.HumanitiesTennessee.org.